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a Happy New Year

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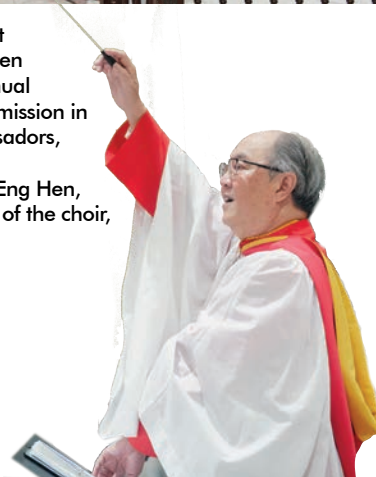
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COVER STORY

The Search for Peace Unites Diplomats at 50th Annual Xmas Concert



THE resplendent Cathedral of the Good Shepherd at Queen Street resonated with the angelic voices of the Cathedral Choir of the Risen Christ on 3rd December 2023. The ensemble marked its 50th annual diplomatic Christmas concert which was attended by 40 heads of mission in Singapore, a distinguished audience comprising ministers, ambassadors, high commissioners, defence attaches, and the Apostolic Nuncio, representing the Pope. The guest of honour, Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen, was the first to light up the Tree of Peace with the founder director of the choir, Sir Dr Peter Low and his wife, Linda. The heads of foreign delegations next followed in the ceremony, placing ornaments adorned with their respective countries' flags on the symbolic Tree of Peace.



Read also the interview with
Sir Dr Peter Low at indiplomacy.com

Presentation of Credentials Egypt, Kuwait and Slovak Republic

The following diplomats presented to President Tharman Shanmugaratnam their letters of credentials on 12th December 2023 at the Istana



Ambassador of the
Arab Republic of Egypt
H.E. Ahmed Mostafa Abdelaal
Mohamed



Ambassador of the
State of Kuwait
H.E. Ahmad Abdulrahman
Naser Al Shuraim



Ambassador of the
Slovak Republic
H.E. Tomáš Ferko

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VISITS

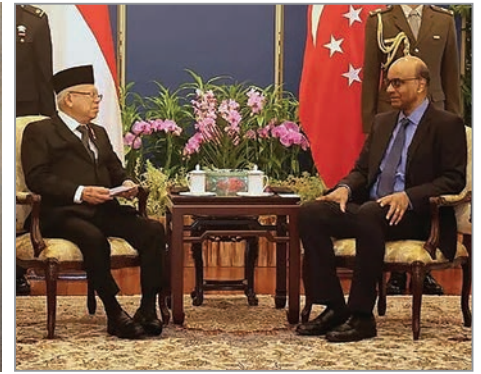
FACETIME IN DECEMBER 2023



South Africa Deputy President Paul Mashatile made an Official Visit to Singapore from 10th to 12th Dec 2023. The visit also coincided with the 30th anniversary of diplomatic ties. Highlights include calling on Singaporean leaders, visit to the Marina Barrage, ITE College Central, Singapore Botanic Gardens and delivering a public lecture at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy on the subject of relations between South Africa and Singapore.



Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR), Saleumxay Kommasith, conducted a series of engagements with Singaporean leaders on 7th December 2023. The purpose of his visit was to deliver the 24th ASEAN Lecture on Laos' ASEAN Chairmanship 2024 at the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute. Singapore pledged its support for Laos' ASEAN Chairmanship in 2024, including assistance through the Singapore-Laos Enhanced Cooperation Package (SLECP). PM Lee commended Lao officials' participation in the Singapore Cooperation Programme's courses.



Indonesia Vice President Ma'ruf Amin met with Singapore President Tharman Shanmugaratnam in Singapore on 11th Dec 2023 to discuss the strengthening of bilateral cooperation in the economic and health sectors. VP Ma'ruf Amin hoped economic ties can be strengthened in areas such as *sharia* economic and *halal* product cooperation; other areas touched upon include investment in the Sanur Health Special Economic Zone in Bali, ongoing bilateral cooperation in education and tourism.



Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong visited Tokyo for the ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit and met Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio on 16th Dec 2023. They reaffirmed the excellent relations between Singapore and Japan. They also welcomed the signing of a MoU between the Singapore's Ministry of Transport and Japan's Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism on the establishment of a Green and Digital Shipping Corridor between ports in Singapore and Japan. The Commemorative Summit celebrated 50 years of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation.



H.M. Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Sultan of Oman, led a high-level delegation on a State Visit here from 13th to 15th Dec 2023 at the invitation of the Singapore President. The visit marks a significant milestone in the Oman-Singapore relationship and culminated in the signing of MoU in the fields of culture and youth and in the field of economic development. Both countries also seek to enhance trade in areas like aquaculture, food security, and transport, logistics and upgrading the Gulf Cooperation Council – Singapore Free Trade Agreement.



Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance Lawrence Wong was on an Official Visit to Negara Brunei Darussalam from 11th to 14th Dec 2023 and participated in the 9th Singapore-Brunei Young Leaders' Programme. The Singapore delegation had an audience with H.M. Sultan Haji Has-sanal Bolkiah. DPM Wong also delivered a special lecture where he said Singapore look forward to building on the foundations of Singapore-Brunei's "special relationship" by working together in food security, Green transition, regional and global fora and people-to-people ties.

EVENTS

MERCOSUR-Singapore FTA Signed

FOREIGN Affairs Minister, Dr Vivian Balakrishnan and Ministers from four MERCOSUR member states (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay) signed the MERCOSUR-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (MCSFTA) on 7th December 2023 at the 63rd Summit of Heads of State of MERCOSUR and Associate States in Brazil. Also present at the Summit was Minister of State, Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth & Ministry of Trade and Industry Alvin Tan. The signing follows the announcement by Singapore and MERCOSUR of the substantial conclusion of negotiations in July 2022.

There are currently more than 100 Singapore companies in MERCOSUR markets, in sectors like oil and gas, agri-business, digital solutions, manufacturing, hospitality, logistics and infrastructure. Examples of Singapore companies include

Ascott, Changi Airports International, Grupo Kaybee, PSA International, SEA Group, Olam International, Wilmar International Ltd and Sakura Tech. In 2022, merchandise trade between Singapore and MERCOSUR accounted for 45% (\$13.8 billion) of Singapore's total trade with the 33 independent economies in the Latin American region, while trade in services in 2021 accounted for 40% (\$7.6 billion).



Dr Balakrishnan signed the MERCOSUR-Singapore FTA (Photo: Ricardo Stuckert)

MERCOSUR Note: This Latin American bloc comprise of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay and represents the 8th largest economy in the world (combined GDP of US\$2.7 trillion and population 272 million).

COP28 Concludes with Call for Transition Away from Fossil Fuels

UN Chief António Guterres said of the final outcome document that mention of the world's leading contributor to climate change comes after many years in which the discussion of this issue was blocked and he also stressed that the era of fossil fuels must end with justice and equity. "To those who opposed a clear reference to a phaseout of fossil fuels in the COP28 text, I want to say that a fossil fuel phase out is inevitable whether they like it or not. Let's hope it doesn't come too late," added the Secretary-General.

Singapore @ COP28

The Singapore Pavilion at the 28th Conference was themed "Accelerating Collective Climate Action", and

the programmes at the Pavilion showcased Singapore's commitment to global climate goals, emphasised the city-state's vision to achieve net zero by 2050, and highlighted innovative and collaborative solutions backed by a strong ecosystem of partners across the private and people sectors, international organisations, and governments. Minister Grace Fu (pictured right): "It is not about making a once-off splash, but a sustained commitment with follow-through actions."



Indonesia's Investment Outlook 2024 and Opportunities in the Green Economy



Indonesia's Investment Outlook 2024 & Green Economy Opportunities was jointly organized by the Ministry of Investment, Singapore Embassy in Jakarta, Ministry of Commerce and

supported by Enterprise Singapore, the Representative Office of the Bank of Indonesia in Singapore, Bank Indiri, and the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia on 8th December 2023 in Singapore. The investment forum brought together a distinguished



gathering of stakeholders to delve into Indonesia's investment outlook for 2024 and the promising opportunities within the green economy. Among the esteemed guests were Ambassador Suryo Pratomo, Minister of Investment Bahlil Lahadalia (pictured left), and representatives from significant entities such as Bank Mandiri and Bloomberg.

World Arabic Language Day by Royal Embassy of KSA

The Royal Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in Singapore hosted a celebration in honour of World Arabic Language Day. Recognized by the United Nations as its sixth official language in 1973, Arabic holds cultural significance globally.

The Mandarin Oriental Hotel Singapore served as the venue for the festivities, featuring an Arabic tent and a costume booth where attendees, including diplomats, engaged in dressing up with traditional Arabic attire. The event aimed to promote cross-cultural understanding, allowing Singaporeans to experience firsthand the richness of Arabic culture. Apart from cultural displays, the celebration also touched upon recent diplomatic developments. The ease of visa processes for Arab visitors to Singapore and the reciprocal opening of Saudi Arabia were highlighted, reflecting efforts to strengthen bilateral ties and encourage tourism.



(Above & right): Saudi Arabia Ambassador Abdullah Mohammed A. Almadhi (above pic 2nd from right) welcoming guests at the World Arabic Language Day

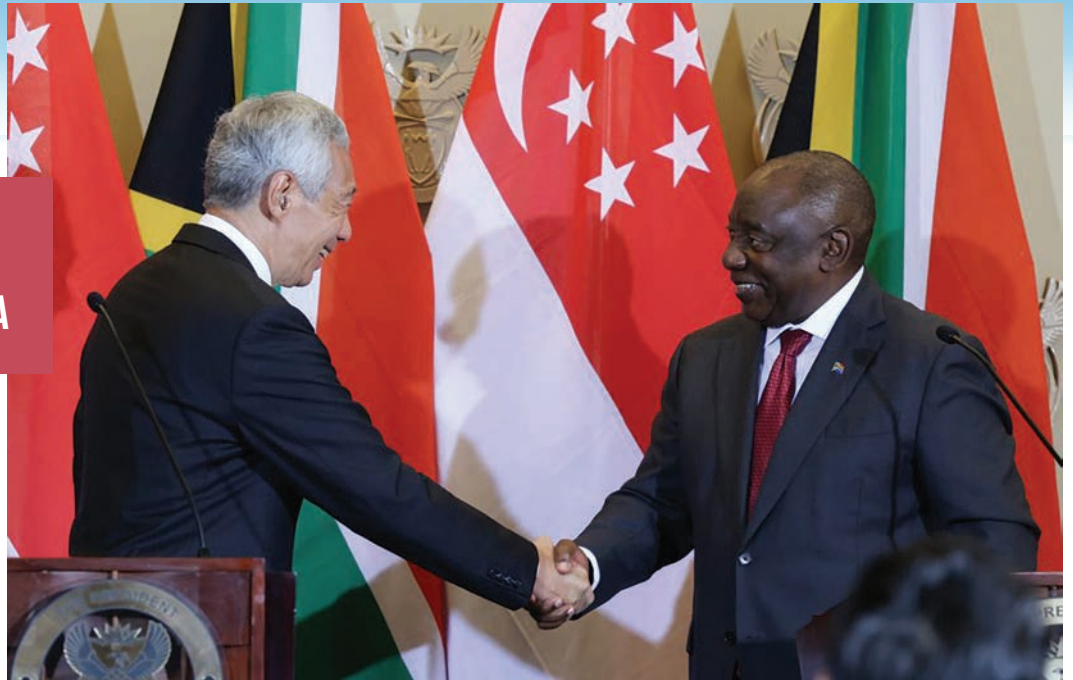


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ONE AFRICA

AFRICA RICH IN RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES

PRIME MINISTER
LEE HSIEN LOONG
VISIT TO SOUTH AFRICA



ASBF 2023
ENHANCING ECONOMIC
COLLABORATION BETWEEN
AFRICA AND SINGAPORE



AFRICA UPDATES:

■ GHANA ■ KENYA
■ RWANDA ■ SOUTH AFRICA

IN THE SPOTLIGHT:

H.E. CHARLOTTE LOBE

THE GROWING PAINS OF E-COMMERCE
BUSINESS IN AFRICA ■ CAN SINGAPORE
HELP UNLOCK AFRICA'S GREEN HYDROGEN
POTENTIAL

AFRICA-SINGAPORE: BOLD AND BOUNTIFUL MEASURES FOR MUTUAL PROSPERITY

It is with growing satisfaction that I look back on the building blocks that have shaped Africa-Singapore relations and how inspirational this will be in brightening our prospects as mindful allies.

This heartening outlook of our decades-long ties has been further underpinned by two important events that took place in the last two years. The first of these was the Africa-Singapore Business Forum and the other was Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's official visit in the past year to Rwanda, South Africa and Kenya. Interfaces of this nature will always provide fresh insights into how we can open up new avenues of dialogue, cooperation, collaboration, and people-to-people connectivity.

The success of the seventh edition of the Africa-Singapore Business Forum reflects the importance of this platform as a means to provide businesses in Africa, Singapore, and Southeast Asia new opportunities to connect with potential partners to attract investment and grow their businesses exponentially. Notably, the five agreements designed to boost business ties Singapore signed with Kenya and South Africa signal the willingness of signatories to scale their ties to greater heights.

While bilateral trade in goods between Africa and Singapore hit \$19.4 billion in 2022, the latter is in the process of negotiating new pacts to improve connectivity with African nations – both on a bilateral basis and with the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) – and the trade value poised to grow even bigger going forward.

Around the mid-way of 2023, Prime Minister Lee made his maiden visit to South Africa and followed up the South Africa leg of his tour with his first official visit to Kenya, where in Nairobi he met with Kenyan President William Samoei Ruto. The discussions of the two leaders touched upon matters of bilateral cooperation which also included climate change, information and communications technology (ICT), and human resource development.

Equally, the announcement of the Singapore-Africa Partnership Package by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong during his official visit to Rwanda in June 2022 reaffirmed Singapore's unwavering commitment to strengthening strategic ties and sharing its expertise in economic development, human resource development and capacity building with the African continent.

What is very interesting is that quite recently Nanyang Technological University-Singapore Business Federation (NTU-SBF) launched "Back to Growth: Priority Agenda for the Economic Revival of Nigeria," a 150-page report on Nigeria. This is the first time that a Singapore-based think tank has delivered a policy recommendation report for an African state. It was authored by Amit Jain, director of NTU-SBF Centre for African Studies.

The growing interest in Singapore serving as a critical bridge for deepening connectivity between the regions continues to add fresh impetus to the efforts of the leaders of these nations to fuel better mutual understanding and boost trade and investment between Africa-Singapore and Africa-Asia. I look forward to an even greater momentum in the coming years for the fructification of many new initiatives we are together now putting in place for future generations of our nations.

Message from

H.E. Jean de Dieu Uwihanganye

Ambassador of Rwanda and Dean of the African Group representing the African resident embassies in Singapore



Other Heads of Mission of African Embassies & High Commissions Resident in Singapore

His Excellency
Ahmad Mostafa Abdelaal Mohamed
Ambassador
ARAB REPUBLIC OF EGYPT

Her Excellency
Madipetsane Charlotte Lobe
High Commissioner
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Honorable
Adam Umar Bako
Charge d'Affaires en titre
FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA



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Michael Ozaki



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AFRICA-SINGAPORE BUSINESS FORUM 2023

BUILDING ON DECADES-OLD TIES FOR FUTURE GAINS

The excellent turnout for the Forum bodes well for the future cooperation on bilaterals and trade alliances between Africa and Southeast Asia



OVER 500 participants from Asia, Africa, and around the world came together to Singapore to attend AFRICA-SINGAPORE BUSINESS FORUM 2023. The forum served as an excellent platform for attendees to learn, connect, and explore partnerships in Africa. The forum, which helps businesses to find partners, and connects two fast-growing regions: Africa and Southeast Asia, witnessed the arrival of participants largely drawn from Singapore and Africa. The 3-day event was wrapped up on 31 August 2023.

Held under the aegis of Enterprise Singapore ASBF returned as its seventh edition, after a two-year gap because of the pandemic, in a real-time physical format. This year's forum was themed "Driving Africa's Growth through Digitalisation, Manufacturing and Sustainability". The spotlight on the African market emphasizes how it presents strong potential for businesses, arising from a growing consumer market and the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA). Africa, comprising 54 nations has a total population of 1.4 billion people.

The borders now being unsealed provide a greater impetus for more companies to suss out further opportunities for business, investment, and growth in digitalization, manufacturing, and sustainability.

Gan Kim Yong, Minister for Trade and Industry of Singapore was the keynote speaker at the forum, which also featured other distinguished speakers such as Alvin Tan, Minister of State for Trade and Industry and Community, Culture, and Youth of Singapore, and several eminent panellists who shared their insights on the African growth story.

The conversations in the insightful panel discussions, held in an enabling environment of the ASBF for networking for potential partnerships, also took cognizance of critical issues such as geopolitical conflicts, pandemics, growing protectionism, and the climate crisis. Gan Kim Yong, Minister of Trade and Industry noted that the best response to such challenges "is to deepen our cooperation with one another – not just within our regions but across regions."

In his keynote address Gan Kim Yong, Minister of Trade and Industry gave a rallying call to "To go far, go together", thus kicking off the agenda for developing deeper partnerships, open connectivity, and regionalism, for Singapore and Africa. While pointing out the excellent potential for cooperation and collaboration on this front the Minister said: "We should, therefore, strive for closer ties between Southeast Asia and Africa, a process that Singapore could help catalyse as a node in Africa-Asia trade. Singapore trades with almost



The Minister also announced that Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Trade and Industry will soon offer a capacity-building course in trade negotiations as part of the Singapore Cooperation Programme's Singapore – Africa Partnership Package. The course is designed to meet the needs of African trade negotiators, even as it helps to foster stronger relations between our governments and officials.

every country in Africa. In the past 12 months, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong has made official visits to Rwanda, South Africa, and Kenya to strengthen bilateral ties, including business linkages."

Sharing his observations on the important issue of sustainability Minister Gan Kim Yong, pointed out that last year, Singapore and Ghana substantially concluded negotiations on an Implementation Agreement on carbon credits cooperation. The Singapore company GenZero, he elaborated, signed an MOU with carbon project developer AJA Climate Solutions to invest in a US\$30 million landscape restoration project in Ghana. The project will restore degraded and deforested landscapes in the Kwahu area and generate high-quality carbon credits in the process, he said.

Insightful Learnings

The event provided a platform for excellent insights from the likes of the Secretary General of the African Continental Free Trade Area Secretariat, Wamkele Mene, as well as African business leaders Samaila Zubairu (President and CEO of Africa Finance Corporation), James Mwangi (Group Managing Director and CEO of Equity Group Holdings), Iyinoluwa Aboyeji (Founder of Future Africa), Kuseni Dlamini (Chairman, Massmart & Aspen Pharmacare), Karim S. Anjarwalla (Senior Partner, ALN Kenya), and Sophia Alj (Co-Founder, Chari).

MoUs Underpin the New Resolve

As shared by Minister Gan Kim Yong there are about 100 Singapore companies present in 40 countries in Africa

today. Five commercial Memoranda of Understanding and Agreements were inked at ASBF. All five were aimed at expanding the grounds for greater partnerships between African and Singapore companies; the MoUs were related to fresh developments in the fields of manufacturing, digitalization and technology, sustainable development, transport, and logistics.

One MoU was inked between three Singaporean firms – Robust International, Adatos, and Trames – to collaborate on projects in Africa. Robust is a home-grown global commodities trader. It will work in tandem with Adatos to deploy its partner's AI solutions to provide agricultural know-how in Nigeria. Trames will provide bespoke logistics management solutions for Robust's supply chain in Africa and globally. A Memorandum of Association (MOA) appoints PE Energy as DFINITI Technologies' sales agent in Nigeria for industrial thermal and electric solutions. An MoU was also inked between Singaporean engineering firm NivéSal and Ghana's SKY 40-40, to set up manufacturing operations in Takoradi, Ghana, to produce polymer-based sustainable building material products.

"Helping to form such partnerships between global traders and SMEs is part of Enterprise Singapore's Trade 2030 strategy to expand Singapore's trade and networks to Africa, as well as other parts of the world," said Minister Gan Kim Yong.

Furthermore, to ensure better access to trade financing, Enterprise Singapore is expanding the pool of participating financial institutions in the Enterprise Financing Scheme to include selected foreign-based financial institutions and multilateral development banks with strong expertise and willingness to finance Singapore enterprises venturing into Africa and other emerging markets, the Minister said.

Bilateral Trade

As reflected by the records of Enterprise Singapore (EnterpriseSG), Singapore's bilateral trade in goods with Africa has stepped up by about 15 percent every year between 2019 and 2022, to the tune of \$19.4 billion in 2022. Investments in the African continent by Singapore firms as at 2021 cumulatively stood at \$32.1 billion as at 2021. Singapore is presently looking to negotiate new deals to improve connectivity with African nations – bilaterally as well as with the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Earlier on, in August this year, the Kenya-Singapore Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement also came into force.

Ever since it was established in 2010 the Africa Singapore Business Forum (ASBF) has been recognised as the premier biennial plank for business exchange and fostering trade between Africa and Asia. Bolstering its

ASBF 2023 Business Agreements and Collaborations

1. Robust International Pte Ltd – Tramés Pte Ltd – Adatos Pte Ltd

The companies have signed an MOU to collaborate on deploying AI solutions for agricultural insights and logistics management in Nigeria.

2. NivéSal Pte Ltd – Sky 40-40 Company Ltd

The partnership aims to establish manufacturing operations in Ghana for sustainable building materials

3. NivéSal Pte Ltd – Kenyan Investment Authority (KenInvest)

The MOU aims to develop a Manufacturing-in-a-Box solution to support SMEs in Kenya with manufacturing operations

4. NivéSal Pte Ltd – Jasco Investments Ltd

The collaboration involves establishing a cement manufacturing unit in Sierra Leone.

5. DFINITI Technologies – PE Energy Limited:

This MOA appoints PE Energy as DFINITI Technologies' sales agent in Nigeria for industrial thermal and electric solutions.

6. GreenA Consultants Pte Ltd – Conseil National de l'Ordre des Architectes de Côte d'Ivoire (CNOA)

The MOU formalizes a partnership to collaborate in green buildings, city development, and infrastructure projects.

7. CrimsonLogic Pte Ltd – Government of Malawi:

The contract aims to implement the National Single Window system to streamline import and export processes.

8. DP Architects Pte Ltd – Centum Real Estate:

DP Architects will provide design consultancy services for an office tower development in Kenya.

9. The Ascott Ltd – Salaam Properties:

The contract involves Ascott's management of serviced apartments in Djibouti under the Citadines brand.

10. Olam Agri – Agrimax:

The collaboration involves a trial of the Agrimax biostimulant in Cote d'Ivoire to improve cotton farming.

11. April Pearl Pte Ltd – Caracal Oil & Gas Services

Limited: The contract enables the charter of a liftboat to support offshore operations.

12. WhatIF Foods – Pond Foundation: This partnership tests the use of biochar in Ghana to improve crop yields and soil quality.

primary aim for this purpose-built platform for dialogue and opportunity has been the incredible support of 5,000 business and government leaders from 40 countries questing for lucrative partnerships and growth opportunities between these two dynamic regions.

This year's event was of deeper significance for having coincided with the 10th anniversary of the Africa Southeast Asia Chamber of Commerce, commemorating a decade of ongoing dialogue and collaboration.

RETURN TO HEALTH AND ACTIVE LIFESTYLE

Made in Singapore but formulated by Nigerian Dr Jonathan Obaje whose URAH Micellar Glucosamine Cream won over a Singaporean end-user who ended up buying shares in the company and marketing the product himself!



Dedicated Urah research staff with Dr. Obaje and William Chua (2nd & 3rd from right resp)

URAH was 'introduced' to retiree Mr William Chua by his traditional chinese medicine practitioner or *sinseh* to use the Urah cream to provide relief for his wife's aching elbow joint. Then William who also had joint pains started to use the cream and in two weeks – all the pain was gone. They were so impressed with the results that when they wanted to buy more they could not get it from mainstream pharmacists at that time in the 2008.

This was the start of a 14-year journey that saw the former marketing manager of an engineering firm track down to the company - Urah Transdermal Pte Ltd – and in partnership with Dr Jonathan Obaje, the founder and inventor of Urah technology. William wondered why one could not find Urah products at any health store or pharmacy at that time.

The product was not the problem. As Dr Obaje explained "You see as we age we start losing the glucosamine in our bodies and this leads to the weakening of our joints and experiencing joint pains. The Urah cream formulation has been clinically proven through a patented process to deliver glucosamine through the skin into the body - something no other glucosamine products can do topically or orally."

The real challenge was to introduce the product and market it more effectively in Singapore and in Southeast Asian region. This required more specialised expertise and experience. Fortuitously William was previously a marketing manager covering Southeast Asia. He felt the product could travel beyond the region and go international and asked Dr Obaje if he can be part of Urah.

William wanted Urah products to be available everywhere and starting from small neighbourhood shops, then on to the famous Mustafa shopping centre, he promoted the products. Soon Urah became available in all the leading pharmacists and health-wellness chains in Singapore. The business then took off. Urah Micellar cream is now available in all the major hospital groups in Singapore. In the last few years, the company has also been exporting in significant quantities to markets like Japan and through online platforms across the globe.

As we age we start losing the glucosamine in our bodies and this leads to the weakening of our joints and experiencing joint pains. The Urah cream formulation has been clinically proven through a patented process to deliver glucosamine through the skin into the body - something no other glucosamine products can do topically or orally.

Dr Jonathan Obaje

It helped also that Singapore has the reputation for being an established centre for pharmaceutical R&D. William said "All the big boys in pharma are here. We have many scientific publications on Urah products, and our products are manufactured in Singapore under a comprehensive system of quality assurance, that conforms with the Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) standards set by the WHO (World Health Organisation).

William said he feels a tremendous sense of satisfaction and achievement. He also credits Urah for his own graceful aging process: "I'm now 73 years old and I have no joint pain. I think the reason is because I've been using Urah Micellar cream for many years. So maintenance of joint health is very important."

The last word belonged to Dr Jonathan Obaje who said "No matter what is your age, I think you can find inspiration in the story of our former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo. You can see a YouTube* video where he credits URAH Micellar cream in helping him to remain active and continuing to play soccer at age 85 years!"

*<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mYYvZOdos3A>

About URAH

URAH is a Singapore Life-Science Research company that develops technologies for the delivery of active molecules through the skin barriers to biological targets. URAH Research Lab is based at the Innovation Centre of Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.



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TWO NEW AGREEMENTS UNDERPIN SINGAPORE-SOUTH AFRICA COMMITMENT TO BETTER TIES



On his maiden visit to South Africa Singapore's Prime Minister Lee was accorded a warm welcome by South African President Cyril Ramaphosa. The business delegation accompanying Prime Minister Lee represented a number of sectors, including ports, logistics, healthcare, and biomedical, food manufacturing, and engineering.

THE two leaders were proud witnesses to the signing of two bilateral cooperation MoUs which will serve to expand cooperation in the information and communications technology (ICT) space, and also work more closely in human capital development.

The ICT agreement signed between the Republic's Ministry of Communications and Information, and South Africa's Department of Communications and Digital Technologies aims to provide a greater impetus to the cooperation between the two governments' digital agencies. The Skills Development MOU will deepen Singapore's tradition of sharing experiences and best practices in education and in training.

Sharing his views on the new development at a joint press conference with President Ramaphosa, PM Lee described the bilateral relationship as Singapore's most broad-based one in sub-Saharan Africa. "So we had a

good discussion of our bilateral cooperation, and within the context of the global situation and the regional opportunities in Asia and in Africa," he said. Furthermore, he directed attention to how Singaporean firms in South Africa represent a range of sectors that include agribusiness, urban solutions, hospitality, manufacturing, ports and logistics, and innovation and technology.

Trade between the two nations, which have enjoyed 30 years of diplomatic ties, has continued to grow since 2018 and, and amounted to over S\$2.7 billion in 2022.

President Ramaphosa said: "It was a pleasure to discuss areas of mutual interest and explore ways to strengthen our bilateral relations, cooperation and partnership." He spoke of how the two countries share a common interest in promoting economic growth, social development, and prosperity for their citizens.



“It is in this spirit that we have worked together to strengthen our ties,” he said. He also shared how productive the discussion had been while touching upon areas of cooperation in digitalisation, communications and technology, water and sanitation, and skills development, among others.

PM Lee also pointed out how important the people-to-people ties are for both nations. Elaborating further on this he said:

“We have direct flight services between the two countries. We support each other to develop our human capital. Over 1,000 South African officials have participated in capacity-building programs under the Singapore Cooperation Programme (SCP). And last year, we also launched the Singapore-Africa Partnership, which includes priority placement, customised courses, and postgraduate scholarships in Singapore. We hope our friends in Africa – including in South Africa – will find it relevant and we benefit from it.

Lee Hsien Loong
Prime Minister of Singapore

He was of the belief that the two nations can do much more to strengthen connectivity between them, which includes more flight services, more trade and investment, more digital links, and more people-to-people ties.

The duo also discussed South Africa’s application to become a Sectoral Dialogue Partner with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN “Further deepening the cooperation between South Africa and ASEAN would open up opportunities in various fields, such trade, infrastructure development, technology transfer, education, science, innovation and tourism,” the President pointed out.

Separately, PM Lee pledged Singapore’s full support of South Africa’s presidency of the Group of 20 (G20) economies in 2025 and said the Republic hopes to contribute to it.

PM Lee’s visit has also provided an opportunity to discuss regional and international issues of common interest and concern. President Ramaphosa was able to also brief Prime Minister Lee on South Africa’s position on the Russia-Ukraine conflict. He also announced that Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky had agreed to meet a group of African leaders in their capitals to discuss a potential peace plan for the conflict. “My discussions with the two leaders demonstrated that they are both ready to receive the African leaders and to have discussion on how this conflict can be brought to an end,” he said.

PM Lee also shared Singapore’s position on the war, which is that the Republic saw it as a fundamental principle that the United Nations charter must be upheld and borders be sacrosanct. “One country cannot invade another with impunity, (and) when it happens, it cannot be something which is acquiesced in or approved of, but a clear disapproval has to be given,” he said. “Which is why Singapore has taken such a stance on Russia’s invasion of Ukraine: to oppose and to condemn it, at the United Nations as well as internationally,” he elaborated further.

Both leaders shared their appreciation of the outcomes of the discussion. Prime Minister Lee also took the opportunity to invite President Ramaphosa to visit Singapore again, which the South African President accepted.



AFRICA - SINGAPORE CONNECTIONS IN 2023

Apart from the Africa-Singapore Business Forum (ASBF) 2023 and visits by PM Lee Hsien Loong to South Africa and Kenya, 2023 has been a busy year for engagements by African nations with Singapore. Following are highlights of events and activities that have reinforced diplomatic, people-to-people and trade ties that augur well for closer cooperation and collaborations in the future



PAN AFRICA

SBF Africa Overseas Market Workshop

The Singapore Business Federation (SBF) had organised an SBF Africa Overseas Market Workshop in May 2023 in conjunction with Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's 5-day visit to South Africa and Kenya. It was led by Mr Teo Seng Siong, Vice Chairman of SBF Africa Business Group and Executive Chairman of Pacific International Lines, along with Mr. Venkataramani Srivathsan, Vice Chairman of SBF Africa Business Group and Managing Director of Olam Agri, the delegation of 21 executives from 17 organizations actively participated in a series of briefings, company visits, and networking sessions with local executives.

The workshop not only focused on formal business events but also provided an opportunity for the Singapore delegation to engage in a casual fireside chat on Doing Business in Africa. Moderated by Amit Jain of the NTU-SBF Center for African Studies, this session aimed to create awareness among young adults about the development potential of Africa and inspire them to build businesses in the region.



The inclusion of a student intern in the delegation was a testament to the joint efforts made by the Center and SBF-AFBG Vice Chair Thomas Lim of Wilmar International.

Africa Day 2023

Africa Day was celebrated on 25th May 2023 by the African Diplomatic Missions in Singapore and the occasion was shared with fellow Africans and friends of Africa with a joint message from the heads of missions here: H.E. Daniel Antonio Rosa (Angola), H.E. Mahmoud Assem Mahmoud ElMaghraby (Egypt), Mr. Adam Umar Bako (Nigeria), H.E. Jean de Dieu Uwihanganye (Rwanda), and H.E. Ms Madiepetsane Charlotte Lobe (South Africa). They reflected on the achievements and potential of the African continent.



They highlighted how The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is among the tools that could help unlock this potential

They also put on record their appreciation by commending on the relations that many African countries enjoy with Singapore: "The recent visit of H.E. Lee Hsien Loong, Prime Minister of the Republic of Singapore, to South Africa and Kenya, as well as his visit to Rwanda last year, attest the strategic importance that Singapore accords to the African continent."

29th African Regional Organization for Standardization (ARSO) General Assembly

In a bid to foster cross-continental partnerships and knowledge exchange, EnterpriseSG participated in the 29th African Regional Organization for Standardization (ARSO) General Assembly from 3rd to 7th July 2023 which was held in Kinshasa. The event served as a platform for reconnection and collaboration with counterparts from various African National Standards Bodies (NSBs).

The assembly saw enthusiastic engagement from both sides, as discussions centered around advancing standards and promoting sustainable development practices across diverse sectors. Key representatives from EnterpriseSG engaged in productive dialogues with their African counterparts, reaffirming the commitment to mutual growth and cooperation.

A notable highlight of this collaborative effort is the upcoming capacity-building workshop. In conjunction with the Africa Singapore Business Forum, EnterpriseSG is set to organize an insightful workshop. This gathering aims to provide African NSBs with a deep understanding of Singapore's cutting-edge sustainability building standards.

These standards are poised to play a pivotal role in supporting ongoing urbanization efforts and addressing sustainability priorities across the African continent.

4th Singapore Sub-Saharan Africa High-level Ministerial Exchange

SINGAPORE hosted the 4th Singapore Sub-Saharan Africa High-level Ministerial Exchange (AHLMEV) to foster closer collaboration on digitalization and sustainability from 29th to 31st August 2023. This biennial event is a crucial platform for enhancing ties and sharing development experiences between Singapore and countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. This year's theme was "Singapore and Africa: Partners in Digitalisation and Sustainability."

Eight Ministers and Deputy Ministers from prominent Sub-Saharan African nations, including Botswana, Ghana, Mauritius, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa, and Uganda, participated in the AHLMEV. The distinguished delegates engaged high-ranking Singaporean officials, including Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance Lawrence Wong, and Minister for Foreign Affairs Dr Vivian Balakrishnan. The visit formed part of the 7th ASBF that started at the end of the AHLMEV programme.

GHANA

EnterpriseSG-Africa Road Trip to Ghana's Volta Region

The EnterpriseSG-Africa Road Trip to Ghana's Volta Region was undertaken by EnterpriseSG staff with Rahul Ghosh and Clement Gyan-Mensah to to expand their knowledge of the region and pave the way for a collaborative approach between businesses from Singapore and Ghana in the realms of sustainability and carbon credits.

One of the focal points of their exploration was coffee cultivation, a long-forgotten cash crop in



Ghana that had been overshadowed by higher-paying alternatives like cocoa. However, with the rising number of conscious consumers, the team saw an opportunity for coffee growers to showcase this untapped resource and adopt sustainable practices. Their ultimate goal is to develop carbon credits through these processes, aligning with the growing global emphasis on environmental preservation.

KENYA

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong Official Visit to Nairobi



Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong visited Nairobi, Kenya from 17th to 19th May 2023 where he met Kenyan President William Samoei Ruto. They discussed ways to support growing trade and investment ties as well as welcomed the expansion of bilateral cooperation to include climate change, information and communications technology (ICT), and human resource development.

They also witnessed the signing of three MoUs on Carbon Credits, ICT, and Skills Development. The MOU on carbon credits will promote collaboration under Article 6 of the Paris Agreement, including not only the exchange of best practices but collaboration on projects to reduce and remove greenhouse gas emissions for mutual benefit. The MOU on ICT cooperation will expand bilateral cooperation to new areas such as cybersecurity and the digitalisation of government services. The MOU on Skills Development focuses on skills development in areas such as leadership and governance, climate change, and urban development.

In a joint press conference with President Ruto, in answer to a question on trade between both countries PM Lee stressed “I think our focus should be to grow the trade and to do it in a way which Kenyan companies can benefit and Kenyan consumers can benefit. And likewise in Singapore, Singapore companies see new business opportunities, and Singapore consumers see new sources of fruit, vegetables, tourism, flowers, so many things which Kenya provides.



RWANDA

Inclusive FinTech Forum

The Inclusive FinTech Forum, a collaboration between the Kigali International Financial Centre (KIFC) and Elevandi - a company set up by the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS), is a global platform championing Financial Inclusion and FinTech for Good. It is gearing up to revolutionize the African landscape by empowering students and young professionals. It offers free online learning, career opportunities for those interested in pursuing a future in finance and technology. It was held in Kigali Rwanda from the 20th to 22nd of June 2023, it brought together policymakers, entrepreneurs, investors, and corporates from around the world.

Rwandan President Paul Kagame speaking at the Inclusive FinTech Forum thanked the MAS for partnering with Rwanda and acknowledged how “Singapore partners with Rwanda in many other fields and this time it is to bring businesses in Rwanda and Singapore closer together. This is a practical demonstration of the good relations between our two countries.”

SOUTH AFRICA

Visit of South Africa’s Minister of Public Enterprises, Mr Pravin Gordhan

On 5th May 2023, Singapore’s Minister of State and Member of Parliament, Mr Alvin Tan, along with the Minister of Trade and Industry, Mr Gan Kim Yong, had the honour of receiving the visit of South Africa’s Minister of Public Enterprises, Mr Pravin Gordhan, at the Ministry of Trade & Industry in Singapore. They explored various economic opportunities and possibilities that exist between Singapore and South Africa, and to strengthen connectivity and build economic and people-to-people ties.

During the meeting, they discussed potential opportunities in areas such as green energy, ports, innovation, and manufacturing, while sharing valuable

insights and information about Singapore's energy ecosystem. Both Singapore and South Africa are significant gateways to their respective regions, and the ministers emphasized the importance of building stronger connectivity and fostering more robust economic ties between the two countries.

Minister Tan also took the opportunity to share with Minister Gordhan a sentimental item that has been in his office for almost two decades- a poster of Nelson Mandela. He received this gift from a former South African High Commissioner to Singapore who had visited an after-school care center for kids from vulnerable homes and told stories about Madiba. The gift holds a special place in Minister Tan's heart and serves as a reminder of the deep connection between Singapore and South Africa.



Northern Cape Premier and Delegation Visit

Singapore has the potential to benefit significantly from the recent visit of Dr. Zamani Saul, Premier of South Africa's Northern Cape Province, and his delegation to the city-state. The three-day visit, which took place from 24th to 26th April 2023, aimed to promote the Northern Cape in South East Asia and learn best practices from Singapore's fast-growing economy.

During the visit, the delegation was accompanied by four Members of Executive Council (MECs) and senior government officials within the economic development cluster. The South African High Commissioner in Singapore, HE Madijetsane Charlotte Lobe, facilitated several engagements with the delegation and strategic stakeholders in Singapore.

The visit showcased the untapped potential of the Northern Cape and introduced it as a "hidden treasure". Singapore can benefit from engaging in trade and investment with a region that has yet to be fully explored by other countries.



South Africa Focus Week 30th Anniversary of South Africa - Singapore Ties

As part of the 30th Anniversary celebrations commemorating diplomatic ties between South Africa and Singapore, the High Commission of the Republic of South Africa organised the South Africa Focus Week from the 25th to 30th of September 2023. The series of events brought together several government institutions as well as organisations from a diverse range of sectors that included manufacturing, agriculture, food production and processing, wines, tourism, property, gold and diamond trade, fashion and creative industries.



During South Africa Focus Week at the South Africa-Singapore Women's Roundtable: (From left): South African Deputy Minister in the Presidency for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, Pinky Kekana; Singapore's Senior Minister of State for National Development and for Foreign Affairs, Sim Ann, and High Commissioner Charlotte M. Lobe. (Below left): Some of the distinguish guests at the Roundtable. (Below right): Closing Ceremony where South African cultures, music, fashion and wines were sampled by Singaporeans and first steps in fostering cultural exchange and artist collaboration took place

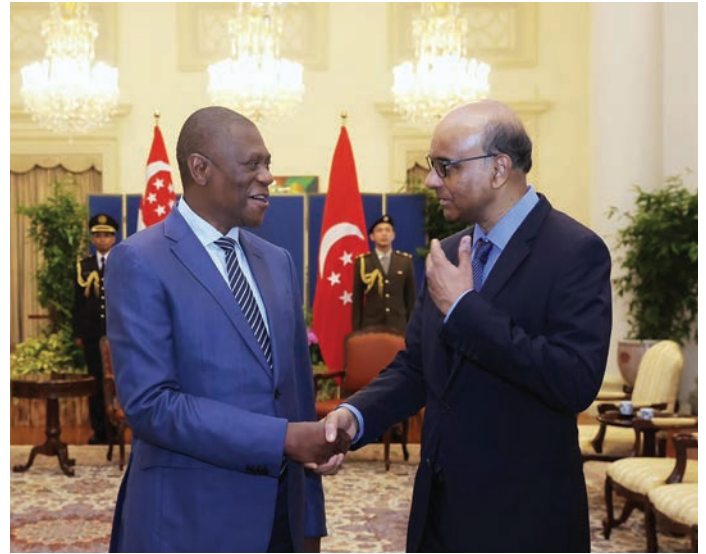


(Above left): The South Africa Focus Week includes an all inclusive Business Forum preceded by B2B, B2G and G2G meetings. Guests included (rom left): High Commissioner Charlotte Lobe, Ms Nomita Dhar of Sun Media Pte Ltd and Ms Keridun Heatlie of South African Chamber of Commerce Singapore. (Above right): A young 14-year old talented South African also showcased her own handcrafted jewelry in Singapore

South Africa Vice President Official Visit to Singapore



The Deputy President of the Republic of South Africa, HE Paul Mashatile arrived in Singapore for an Official Visit from 10th to 12th December 2023. The visit is undertaken at the invitation of the Deputy Prime Minister and Coordinating Minister for Economic Policies, Mr Heng Swee Keat. This is his first official visit to Singapore in his current capacity. Singapore and South Africa enjoy a broad-based partnership, with bilateral cooperation in a wide range of areas including trade and investment, air connectivity, information and communications technology, and skills development. Deputy President Mashatile met Singapore's



President Tarman Shanmugaratnam and Prime Minister Lee Hsien Long. The high level engagements focused on how the 30th anniversary of the diplomatic ties between Singapore and South Africa can be used as the springboard to build new frontiers in the bilateral trade, investment, tourism and people-to-people relations. During the visit the Deputy President and his delegation visited the Marina Barrage and ITE College Central, and received a briefing on Singapore's SkillsFuture movement. Deputy President Mashatile also delivered a public lecture at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy.



A SINGAPORE-CONSTRUCTED ROADMAP FOR THE ECONOMIC REVIVAL OF NIGERIA

By Amit Jain



Introduction to the new report *'Back to Growth: Priority Agenda for the Economic Revival of Nigeria'* by its author Amit Jain, Director of the NTU-SBF Centre for African Studies (CAS) at the Nanyang Business School

THE 'fuel subsidy is gone' proclaimed President Bola Tinubu in his inaugural address as he formally took power in Nigeria in May. It was a bold and politically difficult decision, but long overdue. Nigeria is a leading oil producer and yet its citizens struggle to fill gas in their tanks. It exports crude but imports refined fuel. For years the government capped the price on gasoline and paid importers the difference between the landed cost of oil and the price of fuel at the pump.

This fuel subsidy cost the country US\$600 million a month. But it did not benefit the everyday man on the street. The price distortion resulted in fuel shortage and created a smuggling racket that made a cabal of politicians and petrol traders very rich. But it was a financial burden that Nigeria could no longer afford to bear. So, when the subsidy was finally scrapped the market cheered. The NGX All Share Index jumped to levels last seen in 2008. The stock

market has risen more than 20 percent since President Tinubu was inaugurated into office. But this is a small step on a long road ahead for Nigeria as it tries to climb out of the economic foxhole it finds itself in.

Africa's largest economy is confronting a perfect storm of slow growth, population explosion, shrinking revenues, endemic corruption, and breakdown of security. More Nigerians are slipping into poverty than escaping it. Manufacturing has all but sputtered to a halt, and the kinds of jobs that do exist are not enough to provide meaningful employment to the millions entering the workforce every day. Gas prices have more than tripled and the pace of annual Nigerian food inflation is running above 25%. Business confidence has been hit badly. If that was not all, borrowing from the international market has become costlier.

Back to Growth: Priority Agenda for the Economic Revival of Nigeria comes at a time when a new administration has taken office in Abuja. It is arguably the most comprehensive policy recommendation report produced by a Singapore-based think tank for any African state. It identifies the most serious problems facing the Nigerian economy and presents a 10-year roadmap that could put it back on a path of sustained growth.

The Nigerian economy has been sputtering at an average growth of 2.1 percent since 2015. The biggest challenge confronting President Tinubu is excessive reliance on fossil fuel. Oil and gas accounts for just 5 percent of Nigeria's GDP, but makes up more than 80 percent of government revenue. Dependence on crude oil exports has left the country vulnerable to cycles of booms and bust. It has also corroded governance by creating ample rent-seeking opportunities for those in power. Meanwhile, inflation is chipping away the income of the everyday Nigerian. This is driving up poverty at an alarming pace. Ninety-five million Nigerians are now considered 'extremely poor'. It is a cruel irony that despite its remarkable natural wealth, Nigeria remains one of the poorest countries in the world. Unemployment is at a record high. It has multiplied four-folds since 2015 and now stands at 33 percent. The multiple exchange rate regime is hurting



business and inadvertently created a thriving black market for foreign currency. The US Dollar trades at almost twice the official rate in the black market and the national currency – naira - has fallen almost 40 percent against the greenback since June. As reserves shrink access to hard currency has become difficult. Only one in ten local firms have access to finance. Poor infrastructure has rendered manufacturing uncompetitive. Street-side vendors in Lagos run diesel generators pretty much all day long. On a good day the grid provides power for no more than five hours. Erratic power supply costs Nigeria US\$28 billion a year. Large parts of the countryside are inaccessible because there are few motorable roads and armed gangs have made kidnapping-for-ransom a cottage industry. That results in 40 percent of agricultural produce going waste. Productivity at the workplace is hit because workers are caught in traffic jams on gridlocked roads. Ships remain idle for days because ports are congested, ill-equipped and inefficient. Faith in public institutions has been eroded due to years of corruption and mismanagement. To put it bluntly, Nigeria is in a dire strait.

It was not always like this. In the early years of independence Nigeria invested heavily in health, education, and infrastructure. The founding fathers adopted an industrial policy that prioritised manufacturing and provided incentives for entrepreneurs to start new ventures and create jobs. Then came the discovery of oil and with that a rush of easy money. Petrodollars made importing finished goods cheap. Agriculture and manufacturing were neglected, and jobs disappeared. In 1960, the per capital GDP of Nigeria was almost as much as that of Malaysia. Today it is less than a fifth. The population of Nigeria in 1960 was 45 million. Today it is over 200 million. At 5.4 children per woman the fertility rate of Nigeria is among the highest in the world. But economic growth is simply not keeping pace with the rate of population expansion. If nothing is done to reverse this trend Nigeria faces an imminent catastrophe.

What we have presented in *Back to Growth* are a set of progressive reforms that if carried out sequentially could put Nigeria back on the path to sustained growth. Here is

Economy Current State



Source: IMF, World Bank

\$438 bn GDP	\$100.7 bn Outstanding Debt
\$2,330 GDP per Capita (Current Prices)	22.97% Debt to GDP
3.2% GDP Growth (Annual)	102.3% Debt Servicing to Revenue
2.5% Population Growth (Annual)	33% Unemployment Rate



the summary. Over the next two years the Tinubu administration could achieve stability by ending fuel subsidy, migrating to a flexible unified exchange rate regime, and curb oil theft. That should stop the bad financial condition from getting worse. It has started out by taking the right steps but what matters is not to lose momentum. Once

stabilisation is achieved, priority should shift towards structural transformation. The objective should be to revive growth. This means reducing dependence on oil and diversifying the economy by enhancing the competitiveness of agriculture, manufacturing, and service sectors. That would require dismantling the many barriers that hobbles private enterprise. Priority should be given to ending the power shortage. The fiscal space acquired in the first two years of reforms should provide adequate capital to crowd in private investments in fixing the power infrastructure. The annual budget of the government is approximately US\$50 billion, but most of it is taken up by administrative expenses. Over the next five years, Nigeria should reign in wasteful public spending and re-prioritise expenditure on health, education, and social protection as more reforms kick in.

Once growth is revived policy priorities will need to shift towards ensuring that growth is sustained. If the recommendations made in this report are carried out, it is probable that the country could achieve an annual GDP growth rate of 7 percent or more. But sustaining such growth will be subject to three essential conditions. The first is the state of international trade and the financial markets. If these remain favourable to Nigeria, then it would be able to borrow at concessional rates. Next comes human capital. Demographic dividend will not flow unless the working age population has the right skills to exploit opportunities in a changing world. Third, and perhaps most important, is governance. Good governance is critical to ensuring durable economic growth. It would help improve the business climate and repair the social contract between citizens and state that has been damaged over the years. This report is our attempt to show the direction that Nigeria should take if it wants to become one of the top 20 economies in the world over the next decade.

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www.ntu.edu.sg/business*

KEEPING UP WITH AFRICA

BY JOHAN BURGER



For quick topical updates our Africa Specialist Johan Burger keeps his finger on the pulse of the African continent through our ONE Africa Podcast series. The latest buzz relates to how Africa is attracting a legion of new investors



AFRICA has a myriad of opportunities waiting to be unlocked. Of that, there can be no doubt. With a population of 1.3 billion, a growing urbanising population, and a growing consumer class, the continent has been increasingly attracting investments abroad. We are seeing traditional investor

countries such as China, India, the USA, EU countries, Japan, Russia, and South Korea, but other “new” investors include the likes of the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. Of these, the UAE has become one of Africa’s top four FDI investors, with Turkey becoming prominent as well.

Africa is suffering from a low level of intra-African trade. It has addressed this challenge in the past by developing various regional economic communities, such as the East African Community (EAC), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the Community of East and Southern African States (COMESA).

Despite these initiatives, intra-African trade has remained low. Subsequently, the African Union (AU) launched the Continental African Free Trade Area in January 2021. It promises to grow intra-African trade by more than 50%, with huge benefits for the continent and its investors.

Which Sector?

Africa has riches in every sector imaginable. From a retail perspective, there are many opportunities in the formal sector and huge potential in e-commerce. Its manufacturing sector is still significantly underdeveloped, but it has huge potential. Opportunities are abundant in pharmaceutical

production, motor vehicle manufacturing, textile production, affordable mobile phone production, and value addition in general, especially in food production and oil products. The energy sector is also an area of huge interest, given the large number of people who do not have access to electricity. Renewable energy has become very important, with a significant and growing demand for solar panels, inverters, and solar batteries.

Green hydrogen is a developing sector, with various African countries demonstrating huge potential. In construction, challenges in infrastructure (energy, water, roads, rail, ports, airports) have given rise to large investments. Education and health are additional sectors that also await eager investors.

Investing in Africa requires all interested parties to do their homework well. This is necessary to avoid the pitfalls awaiting the uninitiated and ignorant who rush in without understanding where and how to invest. While the rewards are there, the risks also need to be understood, which is the case globally. Security is a challenge, as are currency devaluations, foreign currency scarcity, high inflation, and crime in some areas.

These are all issues, however, that can be mitigated and properly addressed by doing one’s homework in advance. This is evident from the success of foreign countries such as Singapore, with Tolaram, Olam, Wilmar, PIL, Indorama, and Top International active on the continent. Africa is not just the last investment frontier globally but has immense investment potential. Those who hesitate, do so at their own detriment.

TO VIEW PAST ONE AFRICA PODCASTS

- <https://youtu.be/muOzRA9rAFs>
- <https://youtu.be/ILba4cTf1wA>
- <https://youtu.be/-ZP9oQjdqt8>

H.E. CHARLOTTE LOBE: BOLD IN SPIRIT & LEADERSHIP

High Commissioner of South Africa to Singapore, H.E. Charlotte Lobe, has made a lasting impression and lasting impact raising the country's and Africa's profiles in Singapore. Interview by **ONE Africa** Editor-in-Chief Ms Nomita Dhar

MANY have described her literally like a force of nature whose hurricane-like energy can be so focused that you have no doubt she will accomplish any task that she has set her mind on. And it has come to pass that since presenting her credentials last July there has been a slew of programmes and activities that have contributed to strengthening Singapore's ties with South Africa and Africa as a whole.

You have been involved in a large number of events and set targets never attempted before. They have been very well received and successful in strengthening ties between Singapore and South Africa. Please share the highlights of these bilateral engagements.

2023 has been a phenomenal year for South Africa and Singapore. And it has been phenomenal in all areas of our work as I had been saying at all of our events. We have five tasks here in Singapore: The first one is for the Singapore Government to continue to cooperate with us and strengthen bilateral ties as well as cooperate with us in institutions of multilateralism like the WTO, WHO, and UN Human Rights Council in Geneva and the UN headquarters in New York.

The second one is we are asking Singapore and Singaporeans to trade with South Africa and the African continent. We are asking to invest in South Africa and in the African continent. We are asking Singaporeans to visit South Africa as a destination of choice, but also to visit other African countries because of our diverse geography.

Lastly, we are asking Singaporeans to have relations with South Africans that can assist us in achieving the other parts of the work that I'm doing in Singapore on Science Diplomacy. With respect to this, we're linking universities, scientific institutions in South Africa and universities here.

We are also promoting Cultural Diplomacy. We are really trying to link both our people to share their cultures through music, fine arts, and fashion. And the reason for this is for us to appreciate that even though we are far apart, we are one people and there's a lot that we can achieve as one people.

South Africa is formed on a foundation of Ubuntu. We say - I am because you are. South Africa is what it is today because of other countries and what South Africa wants for its citizens is what it wants for citizens of the world.

This has also been expressed through the work we have been doing through the different pillars such as the Women's Roundtable meeting that you were part of. We are really trying to look at ways of connecting the women in Singapore and South Africa. And the

reason for this - and why I am passionate about it - is because women are innovators and creators of wealth. There is nowhere in the world that does not have the hand of a woman involved; this goes right up to the fact that all of us are born of a woman.



We've had other roundtable meetings that included trying to link young people. We were fortunate during this year that we've had a few exchange programmes, even though they were not that huge between young people in Singapore and South Africa. It's something that I'm really proud of. Early in December we had children coming from South African schools who are competing in sports with children in Singapore and those little things are things that really warm my heart.

The bigger events we've had is the South Africa Focus Week here. The Week had different elements including B2B engagements where we created platforms for South African businesses meet up with Singaporean businesses. And, we were successful in business matching during the Week. We created a platform for the

government, departments, agencies, and our provinces to meet with the government agencies in Singapore.

When you first arrived you said you had various plans to commemorate the 30th Anniversary of South Africa-Singapore Diplomatic Ties. Have they all gone according to plan?

As part of the 30th, I promised you that there would be high-level visits. We delivered the first one where Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong visited South Africa. There was a huge business delegation accompanying him who included people who are already present in South Africa and those who are new looking for opportunities to expand there. Now we are closing the year with our Deputy President Paul Mashatile who will not only be pursuing the five elements I talked about earlier but particularly looking at your skills economy and how Singapore has evolved over the years to be where it is today. Of course, we've worked and collaborated with you and we regard you as one of our partners right from the beginning of my tenure.

I remembered there was some skepticism about the launch of the roundtables etc but we managed to pull it off. For example, we had a wonderful discussion at the Women's Roundtable and I am thankful to partners like yourself, She Brilliance, Character, and Leadership Academy for embracing me and my madness when I came to Singapore because I believe that I had a lot of ideas that I had said to you may be that bit crazy, but let's try and see which ones are implementable!

CAN SINGAPORE UNLOCK AFRICA'S GREEN HYDROGEN POTENTIAL?

*Extract from NTU-SBF Centre for African Studies
by Prof Michael Tanchum*

The acquisition of ENEO by a British energy firm investing in Mauritania is a good start



AFRICA has an estimated potential to produce US\$1.06 trillion worth of green hydrogen by 2035. Viewed as a premier energy carrier that will facilitate the global transition to renewable energy sources, European and Asian firms are turning their attention to developing Africa's enormous green hydrogen potential. While the North African nations of Morocco and Egypt have emerged as green hydrogen leaders, the Sahelian nation of Mauritania is a key to unlocking hydrogen potential of sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). With several international consortia competing to develop Mauritania's green hydrogen production infrastructure, the consortium led by British energy firm Chariot has developed a unique edge through its acquisition of Singaporean water desalination technology.

Global Rush for Green Hydrogen and Green Ammonia

An energy carrier produced from renewable energy sources, green hydrogen can be used directly as a fuel, an input for manufacturing processes (such as 'green steel' production) or as an energy storage and transportation system. While all three uses are critical for climate-friendly commerce and industry, it is particularly the function as a storage system for renewable power that makes green hydrogen vital to energy transition. The electricity produced by solar and wind power is intermittent and variable, depending on hours of daylight or wind availability. **Green hydrogen stands as an alternative technology to utility scale batteries – which require toxic and difficult to obtain minerals – for storing energy produced from renewable sources and then deploying on demand.**

Different from natural gas-derived hydrogen produced in a process that releases considerable volumes of CO₂ into the atmosphere (and therefore called "gray" hydrogen), green hydrogen is produced by using electricity generated from renewable sources to split

water into its hydrogen and oxygen components, creating a versatile, carbon-free (hence, "green") energy carrier. Reversing the electrolysis process in a fuel cell by recombining green hydrogen and oxygen back into water generates electric current, providing on-demand, climate-smart power. The further advantage of green hydrogen is that the most cost-effective way to store and transport green hydrogen is in the form of its derivative green ammonia. Since ammonia is one of the basic inputs for fertilizer manufacturing – currently accounting for about 70% of global ammonia consumption – there is already offtake demand for green ammonia, which can easily use existing ammonia storage and transportation infrastructure.

The pressing need for green ammonia to make agriculture sustainable and resilient against natural gas price shocks is also driving the rush to develop green hydrogen.

European firms from the leading food exporting countries have been at the forefront driving the development of green hydrogen and green ammonia production in North Africa – particularly in Morocco and Egypt, which also have their own significant fertilizer industries. For its part, Morocco's state-owned fertilizer manufacturing giant OCP (Office Chérifien des Phosphates) – the world's fourth largest fertilizer exporter – announced in July 2023 that it would construct its own US\$7 billion green ammonia plant in the Kingdom. The plant is intended to help the company replace its annual import of US\$2bn worth of gray ammonia with domestically produced green ammonia.

Mauritania: A Rising Star in Green Hydrogen

Neighbouring Mauritania is similarly awash with solar energy resources. Three-quarters of the country is covered by the Sahara

Desert whose direct normal irradiation (DNI) levels reach or exceed 2,200 kWh/m². While possessing solar and wind energy resources at the level of North Africa green hydrogen leaders Morocco and Egypt, Mauritania's population is seven times smaller than the former and 20 times smaller than the latter. Sparsely inhabited with a population of about five million, Mauritania can more easily serve export markets while using the same renewable energy infrastructure to provide for the needs of its own population.

The region surrounding the northern coastal city of Nouadhibou, slated to be a center of green hydrogen production receives a DNI of about 2,074 kWh/m². The region also possesses rich wind energy resources, with onshore wind speeds of seven meters per second and even faster speeds offshore. The region already hosts a 30MW wind power generation complex. The country's capital Nouakchott, on the southern portion of Mauritania's coast, receives a DNI of about 1,600 kWh/m². Mauritania's total wind energy resources are estimated to be 175 GW. Of the five Sahel nations, Mauritania is the only one with a coastline and so can easily provide offtake for export markets. Mauritania's coast is also an essential factor for green hydrogen production itself, the process requires nine kilograms of water for every kilogram of hydrogen produced. Like water-depleted Morocco and Egypt, Mauritania's green hydrogen production will have to rely on freshwater provided by dedicated renewable energy-powered seawater desalination plants.

Despite becoming natural gas player with through the joint development with Senegal of their shared offshore reserves, Mauritania has adopted a national energy transition strategy to increase renewable energy sources to 60% of its energy supply mix by 2030. Mauritania seeks to use its solar and wind energy resources to become a major green hydrogen/green ammonia exporter. As Mauritanian Minister of Petroleum, Energy, and Mines Abdesslem Ould Mohamed Saleh declared, "Our country is determined to play a leading position on the global map of the green hydrogen economy in the coming decades."

Mauritania has not been lacking for international partners to help Nouakchott attain its green hydrogen objectives. An early entrant to Mauritania's green hydrogen sector is Australia's CWP, which has been implementing its 2021 MOU with government of Mauritania to develop a US\$40bn green hydrogen/green ammonia complex known as the AMAN project. The AMAN project will include an installed capacity of 30 GW with 18 GW from wind power and 12GW from solar. The AMAN project, massive in scale, is expected to produce annually 1.7 million tons of green hydrogen or 10 million tons of green ammonia for local use and export. CWP's efforts are facing competition in Mauritania's green hydrogen market from a consortium of companies from Germany, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Egypt.

Against the background of these massive infrastructure projects, the British energy firm Chariot is leading a consortium to develop yet another green hydrogen/green ammonia project. In September 2021, Chariot signed an MOU with the Mauritanian government to advance the development "Project Nour", a green hydrogen facility of up to 10 GW, using solar and wind resources in the Nouadhibou region. On the occasion of the signing of the agreement, energy minister Saleh reiterated Mauritania's ambitions to be a central player in the global green hydrogen economy. "We have the potential, and desire,"

Minister Saleh declared, "to be a world leader in the field of hydrogen production from renewable energy sources."

Mauritania's green hydrogen export ambitions took one step closer to realization in April 2022, when Chariot signed an MOU with the Port of Rotterdam in the Netherlands for the import of up to 600,000 tons of green hydrogen per year produced by Project Nour. Chariot regards as the Rotterdam agreement as "a first step in establishing supply chains to enable the sale of green hydrogen and its derivative products (notably ammonia) into Europe."

In the following month, Chariot completed Project Nour's pre-feasibility study in May 2022 and signed a framework agreement with the Mauritania government for the next development phases. With potential export offtake mechanism in place and the pre-feasibility study completed, Chariot's position in the race to develop Mauritania's green hydrogen sector was advanced in September 2022 when Total Eren, now a wholly-owned subsidiary of French energy giant TotalEnergies, entered into a 50-50 partnership for the development of the Nour project, bringing its considerable experience and expertise in the renewable energy sector.

Singapore Water Tech Edge

In 2023, Chariot developed a further edge over its rivals in Mauritania's green hydrogen sector through the acquisition of a water desalination technology pioneered in Singapore. On 30th January 2023, Chariot announced its purchase of Singapore-headquartered ENEO Water Pte Ltd, which focuses on water treatment for arid regions. Green hydrogen production at Chariot's Project Nour complex will use fresh water from a coastal desalination plant powered by solar and wind energy, raising the challenge for the company to provide sufficient freshwater as a production input while contributing to the politically important task of making sure Mauritania's renewable energy is also used to provide sufficient freshwater to the its population. ENEO's technology will help Chariot meet the challenge. The company's core specialisation involves the solar-powered reverse osmosis desalination systems that are modular and scalable, making ENEO's systems easily deployable in less accessible parts of Africa. One ENEO system has already been deployed in a brackish water treatment project in Djibouti powered by the 60 MW Ghoubet wind farm. Chariot views ENEO's Djibouti project as a proof-of-concept for coupling renewable energy and desalination to achieve sustainable water management.

Concerned to balance the water requirements for green hydrogen production with the needs local communities, Chariot intends to originate, invest in, and own decentralised water supply projects, where the water is produced through renewable energy and can be sold to off takers under long-term agreements. Noting that "Water is a precious commodity with cleanliness, scarcity and sustainability of supply becoming growing themes throughout Africa," Chariot executive Benoit Garrivier observed that the ENEO "technology we use is both modular and scalable we look forward to expanding this offering, in line with our mission of creating value whilst delivering a range of positive impacts." The executive noted ENEO's technology was a "strong strategic fit" for Chariot's green hydrogen production as well as its stated aim to also provide local communities with affordable water access, in line with its commitment to socially responsible development.

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THE GROWING PAINS OF E-COMMERCE BUSINESS IN AFRICA

Extract from NTU-SBF Centre for African Studies
by Ronak Gopaldas

High cost of logistics is making it difficult for online platforms to survive

E-COMMERCE has long been touted as Africa's next high-growth market. Several reasons are cited for the optimism, among them the continent's large, relatively young, and tech-savvy population, increasing mobile internet penetration, a fast-growing middle-class and rising disposable income.

The burgeoning industry has seen the birth of homegrown e-commerce platforms such as **Jumia** (Nigeria), **Takealot** (South Africa) and **Kilimall** (Kenya), and the market's potential has not gone unnoticed by bigger international players like Amazon, Alibaba, Shein and even Facebook, all of whom are positioning themselves for a piece of the e-commerce pie.

Africa, however, is a truly unique operating environment and presents its own challenges, from logistical constraints, underdeveloped infrastructure and limited payment gateways to security, access to capital and a customer trust deficit. The playing field, which is becoming increasingly crowded and putting pressure on margins and profitability, is ripe for both consolidation and disruption.

Of the continent's e-commerce markets, South Africa, Nigeria, and Kenya are among the most advanced and offer valuable lessons to potential entrants and upstarts about how to overcome Africa's idiosyncrasies, and what happens when you don't.

E-Commerce in Africa

Africa's e-commerce journey began when South African platforms - Kalahari.com and Bidorbuy.com - started out in 1998 and 1999 respectively at the height of the dotcom boom. Since those early days, e-commerce on the continent has grown exponentially. There are over 264 active e-commerce sites across 23 countries in Africa. South Africa alone boasts over 105 e-commerce platforms, while Kenya and Nigeria have 60 and 58 respectively.

E-commerce sites have sprung up to cater to almost every consumer need - from food delivery services to everyday groceries. Data shows that in Africa fashion, electronics, and media are the biggest online spend categories. This is followed by toys, hobbies and DIY furniture.

Africa's biggest e-commerce website is Nigeria-based Jumia which attracts an average of over 32 million visitors a month, followed by South Africa's Takealot and Egypt's Souq with 10 million unique visitors per month each. The e-commerce penetration rate in Africa is expected to breach the half-a-billion user mark by 2025 (40%), up from just 139 million users (13%) in 2017. That represents a compounded annual growth rate of 17%

Notably, most of the e-commerce traffic comes from mobile devices - more than 70%. It is expected to be almost exclusively mobile by

2040. The 281 million currently active online shoppers in Africa are forecast to drive revenue to US\$49bn in 2023 and to US\$82bn in 2027.

From a growth perspective, Africa's e-commerce story is a compelling one. But from the profitability point of view it is still a long way from maturity. Despite the double-digit revenue advance since 2017, Africa makes up less than 1% of the US\$6.3tn global e-commerce economy. While the expansion of mobile telecommunication networks, uptake of smart devices, rising

disposable income and large population are big drivers of online commerce growth, they don't tell the full story. A 2017 report by Disrupt Africa found that less than 30% of Africa's e-commerce start-ups were profitable. The lack of profitability is not limited to start-ups, however. Many of the biggest e-commerce companies on the continent have not yet turned a profit after more than a decade of trading, surviving only on capital injections from venture funders or parent companies. Nigeria's Jumia, South Africa's Takealot and Kenya's Kilimall, all leaders in their respective countries, offer valuable insight into the challenges of turning an e-commerce profit in Africa.



Logistics & Fulfillment Issues

Operational and management issues aside, Africa is a difficult place to do business. Jumia's 2019 annual report shows that the company's fulfilment expenses (cost to ship and deliver orders) were US\$1.6m higher than its gross profit. Managing logistics in Africa is particularly challenging. Informal spatial and suburban planning in many areas make precise delivery addresses difficult to identify. That can result in failed deliveries, order cancellations and returns, which for Jumia, are as high as 20%. The remoteness of some delivery areas as well as underdeveloped road infrastructure have meant that the company has had to adapt its delivery methods, which include bicycles, roller-skates, and more recently, drones. This creates additional layers of complexity and adds costs to what is already an expensive business model that works on thin margins. South Africa's Takealot is another example of an African e-commerce leader yet to make a profit.

Despite accounting for half of South Africa's online purchases, Takealot incurred a US\$13m trading loss in the six months to June 2022 on sales of US\$384m. Like Jumia, rising logistical costs and complexity are one of the reasons the company has yet to turn a corner. A weaker exchange rate, higher inflation, rising interest rates and pressure on disposable income have been a blow to both sales and operating expenses. The country's biggest retailers, Checkers (Sixty60), Woolworths (Woolies Dash), Pick 'n Pay (PnP Express), Makro / Walmart and Mr Price among many others have all launched e-commerce platforms that leverage their existing store infrastructure across the country, allowing same-day delivery.

To compete, Takealot has had to invest substantially in additional warehousing, inventory, and distribution centres, pushing out its breakeven timeframe.

Nairobi based Kilimall has styled itself as a marketplace rather than a true e-commerce retailer. It offers small businesses a way to sell their products to Kenya's growing digital shopping market. It has since grown to over 10,000 sellers from both Africa and China, and exports Kenyan products to Chinese buyers. The firm's strong connection with the world's biggest manufacturing hub is seen as a distinct competitive advantage. The company has faced a wave of complaints about the poor customer service, quality of its products or orders not being delivered at all. The experiences of Jumia, Takealot and Kilimall highlight the challenges faced by e-commerce players in Africa, but also the industry more broadly. There is a multitude of challenges to navigate just to complete a sale, let alone fulfil the order and make a profit in the process.

Internet Connectivity and the Cost of Data

Poor internet connectivity and the high cost of data are less of an issue than they have been in the past but are nevertheless an inhibitor to faster and broader adoption of mobile browsing and conversion to sale. While data costs have eased over the past 5 years, Africans still spend a disproportionately high amount of their average monthly income on connectivity. E-commerce sites in Africa (as with the rest of the world) have been optimised for mobile browsing and low data consumption but true progress will only be achieved through regulatory reform that force data costs lower and the wider roll-out of free wi-fi in public areas.

Payments and the Trust Deficit

Given Africa's large unbanked population, many consumers either operate on a cash basis (often outside the formal economy) or rely on mobile money and digital wallets. At just 31.5%, Africa has the lowest proportion of adults with a bank account anywhere in the world. The continent does, however, have the highest proportion of its adult population with a mobile money account globally (22.5%).

E-commerce sites in Africa have been quick to integrate mobile payments into their platforms which has brought about the inclusion of many buyers that would otherwise have been excluded from e-commerce participation. Several e-commerce companies have gone further by allowing payment by cash on delivery. While this has been an important strategy to broaden access to their platforms, it was also critical to addressing a trust deficit. Cash payments introduce their own challenges, however, particularly as far as security is concerned. Nevertheless, e-commerce companies have had to adapt to consumer demands for cash payments, particularly in Egypt, Kenya, and Morocco.

Despite the many challenges that come with operating an e-commerce platform in Africa, the continent should not be seen as an impossible place to do business. The pandemic accelerated the adoption of online shopping around the world, but even more so in Africa given it was still in the early phases of gaining traction. Perhaps most important to remember is that the retail pie hasn't grown with the onset of e-commerce. Instead, there are simply more competitors fighting for the pie, and growing market share fundamentally comes down to price and convenience. For those that dare to brave the long game in Africa and can ride out marginal (at best) profits, the continent holds the potential to deliver extraordinary returns for serious disruptors.

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Africa-Asia Green Hydrogen Cooperation on the Horizon

The regions of Africa that enjoy extraordinary green hydrogen potential, simultaneously suffer from acute water stress, witnessing increasing periods of drought driven by climate change. Approaches to developing green hydrogen production like that being carried out by Chariot in Mauritania – using climate-smart, Singaporean desalination technology to provide freshwater supplies for both the green hydrogen industry and the local population – will need to be replicated across Africa. In August 2023, Chariot signed an agreement[47] with Morocco's Mohamed IV Polytechnic University to build a pilot green hydrogen/green ammonia as a proof-of-concept pilot project intended for future large-scale production.

Although European firms have been at the forefront of the effort to develop Africa's green hydrogen potential, an Africa-Asia green hydrogen future seems to be on the horizon, as the coal-burning regions of Asia move toward 'co-firing', using both ammonia and coal as fuel in hitherto coal-fired power plants. Japan's JERA, the nation's largest power generation company, will be conducting a test run[48] of co-firing at its coal plant in Aichi, employing a fuel mix of 20 per cent ammonia and 80 per cent coal. JERA aims to move the fuel mix to 50-50 during the 2030s and then phase out coal entirely in favor of ammonia by the 2050s. Japan also eyes exporting the technology across Asia with Mitsubishi Heavy Industries developing[49] boilers and gas turbines for ammonia co-firing.

To achieve the desired carbon-neutral outcome, Japan and other Asia nations using co-firing as an intermediate step will need to import African-produced green ammonia. Japan is also endeavoring to develop[50] a prototype 100% ammonia-fired powerplant by 2030. In parallel, Japanese energy diplomacy has been seeking to develop a wider East Asian fuel ammonia ecosystem. On 10 January 2022, Japan signed a Memorandum of Cooperation[51] (MOC) Indonesia, 62.5%[52] of whose power is generated from burning coal, to cooperate in the development of fuel ammonia technology. Two days later, Japan signed an MOC[53] with Singapore to establish ammonia supply chains to "serve both Japan and Singapore markets, and broader demand in Asia-Pacific markets," with the expressed objective to "explore Singapore's potential to become a regional trading hub for hydrogen and hydrogen-based energy carriers." On 13 January 2022, Japan also signed an MOC[54] with Thailand to assist in Thailand's decarbonization efforts, including the use of fuel ammonia.

All three of Japan's MOCs with its Southeast Asian partners envision cooperation on fuel ammonia and other climate-smart technologies as the means to achieve their respective climate commitments under the Paris agreement. So the path to a low carbon future for Asia goes is likely to go through Africa. With Africa-to-Asia green ammonia supply chains looming on the horizon, Asian companies like Singapore's ENEO have a big part to play in unlocking Africa's green hydrogen potential.

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MANGANESE: AFRICA'S ECONOMIC CATALYST



Manganese mining in South Africa surrounded by excavators

A mineral of the future, manganese is playing a key role in industry evolution and sustainability and South Africa is the world's largest exporter of manganese ore

IN the heart of Africa lies a treasure trove that fuels global industries and economic growth - the rich reserves of manganese. At the forefront stands South Africa, a titan in the mining realm renowned for its gold and diamonds, but notably, a dominant force in the manganese industry. With over 70 minerals under its belt, the country has solidified its position as a key mining force, boasting the largest proven manganese reserves on the planet.

Despite challenges in logistics, South Africa and other African nations have seen an upward trajectory in their manganese exports, contributing significantly to the global supply chain. The sector beckons international logistics players to join hands, presenting an avenue ripe for innovation and creative solutions. Companies adept at constructing rail corridors, managing ports, and enhancing infrastructure find themselves pivotal in optimizing the manganese supply chain, riding the wave of Africa's growth.

Dominance

Manganese isn't just a mineral; it's the beacon of future industries. Its demand surges, especially with the global shift towards electric vehicles, it is critical component in the production of lithium-ion batteries and various green power alternatives. The Northern Cape emerges as the global epicenter of manganese production, marking its dominance on the world stage.

Yet, amidst this prosperity, leaders like Mr Saki Macozoma, the Chairman of Ntsimbintle Holdings, the founder and largest investor in the Tshipi é Ntle mine (*pictured above right*), stress the importance of nurturing skilled manpower to meet escalating demands and maintain industry leadership. Mining companies are not solely harnessing natural resources; they invest extensively in human resource development and their communities to secure Africa's foothold in this lucrative sector.



Africa's narrative in the global mining domain is evolving. It's not just about extraction; it's about sustainable growth, innovation, and harnessing the potential of its resources to shape a thriving future.

In his address to the Fastmarkets Conference held in Singapore in April this year, the Chairman of Ntsimbintle Holdings Mr Saki Macozoma said that beyond logistics, he anticipated the following improvements will take place in the mining environment in South Africa and the African continent:

- Improvement of the mining policy environment in most jurisdictions of the continent.
- Focus on secure and affordable energy for mining complexes
- The intelligent use of renewables as technologies and costs improve.

The Chairman of Ntsimbintle Holdings with an extensive manganese portfolio expressed his confidence at the Conference and concluded that South Africa is prepared, despite any current constraints, to supply the world with manganese ores and products, sustainably and at reasonable cost for many years to come.

Exports Continue to Grow

While manganese ore output is declining in many parts of the world, exports from Africa have grown relative to the rest of the world. In 2021 South Africa exported 21.3 million tons (Mt), Gabon 7.6Mt and Ghana 2.9Mt. Africa accounting for 73% of 45 Mt exported globally. South Africa and Gabon supply approximately 65% of the world's manganese.



Two of South Africa's largest manganese mines: (From left): Tshipi Borwa Manganese Mine workers care for the environment and the Mokala Manganese Mine

In 2022, growth from Gabon and South Africa has been quite significant. South African exports grew from 16.3Mt in 2019 to 21.6Mt in 2022.

Logistics Innovation Has Driven Export Growth

Despite the challenges and constraints presented by current logistical bottlenecks relatively speaking the country's logistics costs are still less compared to major competitors such as Australia and Gabon.

To meet the logistical challenges faced by the industry in South Africa, companies like Tshipi have, since 2012, created innovative logistics solutions such as:

- Using skiptainers that can be put on flat bed train wagons, thus utilizing idle Transnet infrastructure.
- Using rotary spreaders to increase vessel loading times.
- Opening up new channels with Transnet: Newcon and Bloemfontein rail channels, and Cape Town as an export port option.

Structural Changes Supporting Exports

Looking beyond the innovations, there are structural changes taking place to support the exports of manganese ore and products from South Africa and the Continent.

Mr Keith Saffy, the CEO of Ntsimbintle Marketing and Trading (pictured above right), the Singapore-based arm of South Africa's top mining company, said there are several other developments in the pipeline to boost exports to meet the rising demand of manganese to the world.

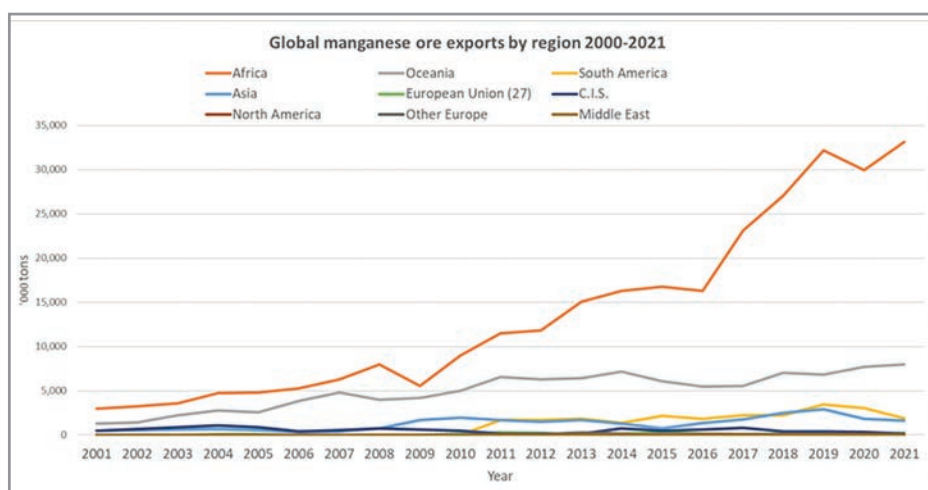
He said, "The first and most obvious things that are being done are the investments in the rehabilitation of rail corridors so that they can



sustain this export growth." He also revealed that new export channels are also being created and used and a good example of this is the Lüderitz channel in Namibia. In addition, he said "In South Africa, new capacity on rail and ports is also possible as the export of other bulk commodities such as iron ore and coal decline."

Mr Saffy also added, "Other factors are the increases and improvements in port efficiency e.g. improved shore loading infrastructure to allow the use of larger vessels. This includes new infrastructure being built using public and private capital such as the proposed new terminal to be built at the port of Ngqura with private capital."

The manganese story in Africa is not merely in the earth but in the ambition and determination of its people, forging a path towards economic prosperity while embracing sustainability and progress.



IT'S TIME FOR AFRICA

Singapore's African community unites to celebrate Africa's promise

SINGAPORE'S African community came together on 4th November 2023 to commemorate their shared heritage and envision a brighter future for the continent while having a good time. The event, held under the theme "It's Time for Africa," echoed to Afrobeats music that sounded with the optimism and determination that Africa is poised to become a global powerhouse!

The organisers, led by Titiyalo Ameh, CEO of Divine Holistic Health, and Ellerinns Cook, Events Manager, expressed their gratitude to 1880, a Singapore-based members' club that embodies the spirit of collaboration and innovation. The club's philosophy, "where diverse minds gather, great ideas bloom," resonated with the event's theme and provided a fitting backdrop for the celebration.

Throughout the day, the rich tapestry of African culture unfolded, showcasing the continent's profound influence on science, sport, art, music, and fashion. The celebration coincided with South Africa's triumph in the Rugby World Cup, adding to the jubilant atmosphere.

The event also honored the contributions of Africans in ASEAN, who showcased their talents in culinary arts, dance, music, fashion, and jewelry making. Their creativity and artistry served as a testament to the continent's boundless potential.

Recognizing Africa's demographic shift, with a projected quarter of the world's population by 2050 and one in three by 2100, the event emphasized the need to reimagine the continent. The conversation with Africa's Heads of Missions accredited to Singapore, led by High Commissioner of South Africa, HE Madiepetsane Charlotte Lobe, and High Commissioner of Rwanda, HE Jean De Deu Uwinhanganye, explored opportunities and partnerships that can propel Africa's development trajectory. The talk was moderated by the Host of the event Ms Jean Low the CEO of 1880 Club.

The audience engaged in lively discussions, sharing their perspectives on how Africans in the diaspora can contribute to building the "Africa we want," as envisioned in the Africa Agenda 2063.



Photos courtesy of the High Commission of the Republic of South Africa



The day culminated in an electrifying Afrobeats music performance that united everyone, leaving the dance floor pulsating with energy. The Jerusalem song, with its universal message of unity and hope, perfectly encapsulated the spirit of the celebration.

As the event drew to a close, the lingering energy reflected the unwavering belief that Africa's time has come. The continent's rich heritage, vibrant culture, and resilient spirit pave the way for a future filled with promise and prosperity.

The event was supported by 1880 in partnership with Devine Holistic Health and the South African Chamber of Commerce, Singapore, URAH Micellar, the Nigerians in Diaspora Organization in Singapore and Goodwins.

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