

National News

Ms Alupo thanked India for the donation of 100,000 doses of AstraZeneca vaccines in March last year at a time of global shortage.

BY STEPHEN OTAGE

The government has commended the Indian government and its community in Uganda for supporting the country during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Vice President Jessica Alupo said India's solidarity stood out when it offered Uganda 100,000 doses of AstraZeneca vaccines in March last year at a time of global shortage.

"We thank you for standing with us during Covid-19 by donating the first doses of the Astrazeneca vaccines. The regular interventions [by the Indian community] in [our] communities such as blood donations, heart treatment, free medical camps, cannot go unmentioned," Ms Alupo said in a speech read by Ms Diana Rutasingwa, the State Minister in the Vice President's office.

The Vice President made the remarks during the 75th anniversary of India's independence in Kampala on Saturday.

Ms Alupo described President Idi Amin's decision to expel Indians in 1972 as "the worst mistake" as it sparked an economic meltdown, yet India has transformed to a king in tourism, information technology, pharmaceuticals as well as trade, and Uganda stands to benefit.

Mr Ajay Kumar, the Indian High Commissioner to Uganda, said New Delhi had directed all Indians at home and in the Diaspora to organise activities for 75 weeks to observe the independence.

"India has become [a large] military power in the world, and [a large] economy... During the Covid-19 pandemic, India and USA... had their Covid-19 vaccines, and therefore, we have every reason to celebrate the 75th anniversary

Govt lauds India on Covid support



State ministers Diana Rutasingwa (Vice President's office, 4th right) and Ms Harriet Nabatazi (Trade) with representatives of Indian association during celebrations to mark India's 75 independence in Kampala on Saturday. PHOTO/STEPHEN OTAGE

for 75 weeks," he said.

Mr Rao Mohan, the chairman of the Indian Association in Uganda, said the organisation was formed in 1922 to cater for needs of Indians and improve relations between India and Uganda.

Today, they have expanded their engagement to medical camps, blood donations, education, and environmental conservation.

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INDIAN COMMUNITY SUPPORT DURING PANDEMIC

The Indian Association of Uganda and the Indian Women Association, lauded Shia Ismaili Muslim Council for Uganda, Kerala Association, Tamil Sangam Uganda, Patidar Samaj, and Uga-Sewa for fighting the pandemic in communities. Dr Rosalind Parkes Ratanshi, the vice president of Shia Ismaili Muslim Council for Uganda, said at the height of

the pandemic, they constructed an ambulance disinfecting bay at Naguru Hospital, renovated a Covid-19 ward, and equipped it with oxygen cylinders. They also provided ventilators at Kibuli Hospital in Kampala and trained the staff. She added that they also provided food and clean water to patients at Mulago National Referral Hospital.

CAA explains delay in stopping mandatory Covid testing

BY TONNY ABET

KAMPALA. The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has said the directive of suspending mandatory Covid-19 testing at Entebbe International Airport delayed to be effected because formal communication from the Ministry of Health came in late.

The mandatory Covid-19 testing, which was costing each traveller \$30 (Shs105,304), was supposed to stop last Wednesday according to the Ministry of Health.

But some travellers who arrived on that day said they were still subjected to the tests.

Mr Vianney Lugya, the CAA spokesperson, told this newspaper yesterday that the mandatory testing instead ended last Thursday.

"The formal communication to the implementers was shared by the Ministry of Health director-general (Dr Henry Mwebesa) on Wednesday - that was a public holiday. As of Wednesday, the testing was going on," he said.

He added: "It is only after the formal communication was passed on to the implementing agency - that is the staff of Ministry of Health as well as those conducting the tests [at the airport], that the testing stopped. There is no more testing [now]."

The suspension, according to a February 16 statement by Dr Mwebesa followed a February 14 Cabinet decision that noted that few new Covid-19 cases were being recorded at the airport and that the threat of new coronavirus variants and community transmissions had reduced.

Reason. "The formal communication to the implementers was shared by the Ministry of Health director-general (Dr Henry Mwebesa) on Wednesday - that was a public holiday. As of Wednesday, the testing was going on," Vianney Lugya, CAA spokesperson

Civil society asks govt to account for Covid funds

BY ISMAIL MUSA LADU

KAMPALA. A section of civil society policy and governance analysts have called for government to account for Covid-19 resources.

In their analysis titled: 'Accountability for Public Resources: Lessons from Covid-19 Resources Management in the Health Sector in Uganda', Ms Christine Byiringiro, a policy and governance expert, and Ms Hilda Tumuh, researcher, said review of government reports on Covid-19 accountability indicates a "number of accountability issues".

"In May 2020, Ministry of Health bought 108,863 megaphones at a unit price of Shs230,000 and 43,450 pieces of dry cells at Shs10,000 each. The records showed that these were delivered to districts on June 22, 2020. However, Gomba, Butambala, Oyam, Omoro, Apac, Agago districts visited by the Budget Monitoring Committee in July, August and September 2020 had not received these items," Ms Christine Byiringiro, said at the Uganda Debt Network headquarters in Kampala yesterday.

She added: "A study conducted by Uganda Debt Network in October 2021

revealed that some of the transactions relating to Covid-19 resources were not adequately supported. There were cases where signatories were reportedly absent on duty. This led to delays in accountability."

Ms Byiringiro also cited inefficiency in the utilisation of Covid-19 funds by regional referral hospitals in terms of variations in the unit costs for food served to Covid-19 patients, mischarges, duplicated activity reports, doubtful burials of Covid-19 cases and domestic arrears for hospitals in Gulu and Arua districts.

For example, by August 17, Arua Hospital had accumulated a Shs278m arrears on food, refreshments, allowances and accommodation for the health workers or staff.

"Given loopholes in the process, government must clarify by giving full accountability or else there will always be doubts "in our minds and that breeds mistrust," Ms Byiringiro said.

According to Ms Tumuh, government should investigate and prosecute all people involved in the mismanagement of Covid-19 funds.

She recommended that all public in-

stitutions be streamlined and facilitated to build stronger internal control systems to manage emergencies with strict adherence to and compliance with financial management and procurement regulations.

The Uganda Debt Network researcher

AUDITOR GENERAL REPORT ON COVID

The Auditor General's special audit report on expenditure relating to Covid-19 for FY 2020/2021 showed that Shs253.5b was released and received by the Ministry of Health to procure medical supplies, 282 vehicles, pay allowances to health workers, buy masks, intensive care equipment and build modular houses at six border points.

However, there was diversion of funds totalling Shs7.9b and a delay in the installation of intensive care equipment in Gulu, Mbarara, Bombo, and Lacor hospitals.

recommends that Parliament enacts a law to guide the country on emergency accountability and reporting mechanisms during pandemics to prevent haphazard expenditure.

This should be comprehensive enough to prevent, detect and correct irregularities in raising, utilising and accountability for funds.

When contacted yesterday, the Deputy Secretary to the Treasury, Mr Patrick Ocailap, said the Ministry of Finance is not responsible for mismanagement of the Covid-19 resources.

"Our work is to disburse the funds and once we do that we hope that it will be used for the intended purpose," Mr Ocailap said.

"However, we will ensure that ministries, departments and agencies of government are held accountable, especially if it turned out that the funds were misused or squandered or diverted for anything outside the agreed plan. Once the Auditor General finishes this financial year's audit, we will step into action," he added.

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