

The Christian Voice

Thursday, 30 July, 2020

BULAWAYO STILL EPICENTRE, RECORDS HUGE RECOVERIES >pg3

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COVID-19 WATCH **2879** cases | **887** recoveries | **41** deaths

Cities and towns sealed ahead of protests

Police and soldiers closed most of the cities and towns business centres ahead of the July 31 protests.

Harare was closed early with most of the people being turned back and blocked from entering the Central Business Centre. Bulawayo closed just before lunch first with shops that were downtown and later all shops were closed including malls in other suburbs.

The Christian Voice spoke to Pastors in different parts of the country to get a scan of what was transpiring.

In Bulawayo, pastors said that police officers on horse backs and soldiers were instructing people in the Central Business District (CBD) to go back home or they will be arrested. They also did rounds ordering shop owners to close shops and go back home.

Abigail Khumalo who was in town when this was happening said the security agents were no longer asking for the exemption letters all they wanted was people to vacate from town. She said those who were resisting the directive were risking being assaulted.

"The soldiers were shouting that they do not care whether you have an exemption letter or not. One of them said go back home and come back into town after 31 July," she said.

The Zimbabwe Christian Alliance board Chairman, Reverend Obert Shatai said the situation was bad in Harare as the city was on complete lockdown. He said the security agents manned at the roadblocks were signalling people to go back home.

"The whole of Harare city was locked the whole day. The security agents don't even want to talk



Police and soldiers (inset) patrol in Bulawayo

to anyone, rather they are instructing motorists to do a u-turn," he said.

In Gweru, the hub coordinator, Pastor Tavengwa Makore said most shops were closed and all they could hear were police sirens in the CBD.

"I understand that the police had ordered the closure of shops in town and were warning people to stay at home and not come into town tomorrow as they will not be allowed," he said.

From yesterday, residents of Kwekwe and Redcliff were not being allowed to go to town despite having exemption letters. Apostle Sinqobile Mkhweli, the Kwekwe hub chairman said today there were a few Zupco buses and people were no longer keen to go into the city centre.

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Cities and towns sealed ahead of protests

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"Nurses, the army and the police were the only people who were allowed into town yesterday hence today many people did not attempt to go to town in fear of being turned back. Zupco buses that were on the road were almost empty as people stayed at homes," he said.

Reverend Reben Dirikwe from Masvingo hub said soldiers were seen today patrolling in the CBD as well as high density suburbs. Rev Dirikwe said it is difficult for one to get into town and the sight of soldiers carrying guns was intimidating.

This prompted the church leaders to engage with strategic departments within the police to gain understanding and of what was happening and expectations from the police.

However, in some of the areas the situation was normal. The Binga hub coordinator, Angela Mudenda said everything was normal and people are going on with their daily activities. She said shops were open and the police officers were maintaining the usual order.

The situation was the same for Hwange and Victoria Falls although some shops in Hwange were advised not to open tomorrow. Pastor

Stanfordias Ndlovu, the Victoria Falls hub chairman said due to the developments the churches will not distribute food this Friday while waiting for things to normalise.

"Everything is normal, but we are stopping our feeding scheme tomorrow. We will resume when we see that the environment is allowing. Not that we are anticipating anything, but it is better to be the safe side," he said.

Pastor Tafadzwa Mafukidze said in Chinhoyi it was business as usual, but the police and soldiers had been deployed into the city centre.

"Police checkpoints are there asking motorists for their licenses, checking motor vehicle licenses and what they are getting into town for. Residents are walking freely into town and doing their business and back home. Zupco is overwhelmed and hence people are resorting to walking," he said.

The Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission issued a statement ahead of the protests and called upon both the security agencies and the public to exercise restraint when exercising their constitutional rights and mandates.

Nkayi Frontliners risk being homeless

It never rains but pours for frontline workers in the health sector in Nkayi district as their landlords are charging exorbitant rental fees as a way of getting rid of them.

The frontliners are faced with a serious accommodation challenge. The landlords are asking for high prices for rentals that workers cannot afford. Due to the rise of Covid-19 cases within our frontline workers in the health sector the community is living in fear.

Most landlords who have nurses as their tenants are taking advantage of the situation by hiking rentals as a way of getting rid of them, as it would be unethical and inhumane to evict them without a valid reason.

Government recently revised salaries to range between ZWL 3 500 for the lowest paid, whilst the highest paid is taking home ZWL 6 000. The government also recently cushioned civil servants with an allowance of USD\$75. Most of the workers received this amount as ZWL at the going intermarket rate of the day.

"Covid-19 is surely a curse. I wake up each day to risk my life, saving the lives of patients only to be treated this way. On the other hand, we do not have the personal protective equipment as we attend patients," said Nyaradzo Chiurayi a frontline health worker

Landlords are charging USD10-15 for a room without electricity and other basic amenities. Those with electricity and are spruced up, charge between USD\$25-\$40. The amount being charged is 50 percent plus the average salary of a health worker.

"Soon we will find many of us homeless as we cannot afford the high rentals. We are being treated like outcasts in our communities. Whilst I understand the concerns of most people, the anxiety to contract the virus is real," said Anesu Sibanda, a local health worker.

Recently a media report published by the Chronicle indicated that hospitals and Prisons are some of the leading institutions with cases of Covid-19.



A health worker carries firewood from work



A vendor sells food stuffs from the boot of his car

Curfew dilemma for night markets, car boot sales vendors

The closure of city centre markets and afternoon deadline for closure of conventional shops and businesses has led to the advent of night markets and car boot sales.

Shops and businesses are now supposed to close at 3pm.

With the surge in coronavirus cases and the subsequent curfew lockdown restrictions many families had to bear the brunt of hunger and starvation. The lockdown restrictions meant that families had to look for alternative means of making ends meet. However in an unprecedented manner defiant residents have set up impromptu night markets and car boot sales.

These night markets have been a source of hope for many families. Popular vending sites include 7turn in Nketa, Hawkflight in Cowdray Park, KoTilus in Emganwini, Mawunga and Sekusile market in Nkulumane.

Vendors can be seen selling all manner of goods from mealie meal, macimbi; kapenta; fresh farm vegetables to juice cards, cellphone spares and cream lightening cream. Other vendors have gone an echelon higher by selling second hand clothes, braids, picture frames and even alcoholic beer.

Adjacent to the vendors a swarms of cars with car boots open and occasionally a blast of local music. The razzmatazz of cars hoping for customers ranges from BMWs, Isuzu trucks, Harriers to the common Honda fit. Vendors herein can be seen selling fresh farm products, washing powder and beverages. Available wares would be displayed on top of the car as a signal to attract the customers. For those selling alcoholic beverages an empty beer calabash

is put on top as a gesture to customers.

The chatter and banter at these markets continues unabated until an alert vendor shouts 'Police'. Within a flash the whole neatly arranged market resembles a dumpsite with littered smashed tomatoes, torn washing powder as vendors scurry for cover as they flee from policemen. The ensuing melee also sucks in motorists as they haphazardly drive away from the rendezvous place all in an attempt to flee the arm of the law.

Within a short period of time the place will be empty with no vendor in sight. Inadvertently moments later after the police have passed, in droves, vendors quickly move back seamlessly to their positions. Cars en masse also snake back to their places. This routine could go on at times up to 9pm.

This has been the order of the night until recently when President Emerson Mnangagwa announced the 6pm to 6am curfew. The curfew restrictions meant that vendors had to now adjust their vending time to suit the 6pm cut off time. Intensified police raids have also been seen with many vendors getting their goods confiscated by the security forces. The adjusted times have also affected customers as they no longer frequent the markets as they fear the 6pm deadline. As a mitigation measure, some vendors have decided to hawk their wares door to door than to frequent these markets. All in a bid to avoid arrest. For an unlucky vendor who gets caught by the Police, a minimal hefty fine of 500rtgs has to be paid. This therein compounding more woes to the already struggling vendors.

Bulawayo still epicentre, records huge recoveries

Bulawayo still remains as Zimbabwe Covid-19 epidemic epicentre but the city has also recorded some of the country's largest recovery cases.

So far 450 have recovered from Covid-19, the city has a total number of 786 cases, followed by Hare which has 932.

The Bulawayo City council has released a map indicating areas that have been affected by Covid-19. Cowdray Park and Mpilo, although not a suburb, recorded the largest number of Covid-19 cases.

Entumbane has recorded three Covid-19 deaths, making it one of the hotspots together with Montrose and Suburbs.

The Christian Voice interviewed people who reside at some of the hotspots areas to get their opinion on the statistics.

Collen Ngwenya, a resident of Magwegwe North praised the Bulawayo City Council for sharing this information as it gives the citizens a view of what is happening around the city in terms of Covid-19.

Ngwenya went on to say that the provided information will also help the health department with coming up with strategies that will help curb the spread of the pandemic.

"The next step would be to investigate the cause of the spread in hotspots areas and then define measures to control further spread. For instance, a quarantine centre in Cowdray Park which is decently equipped is an absolute necessity," he said.

Esther Moyo, a teacher who stays in Entumbane said there was a need for the Ministry of Health and Child Care (MoHCC) to urgently relook at the lockdown regulations and introduce localised shutdowns.

"There is a need for localised shutdowns. If they leave it to the people, we know some have no common sense and are not taking this seriously. If those who have access to the best health care are we to be so negligent. People will perish," she said.

Cynthia Dube from Cowdray Park shared the same sentiments with Moyo and mentioned that people should also take it upon themselves to adhere to the World Health Organisation (WHO) health standards and avoid unnecessary movement.

"I think everyone who stays in the most affected areas should be tested and the responsible authorities should also make sure that movement is minimised at those places. We hear so many stories of people dying and testing positive but there are no health measures that are being implemented to stop the spread," she said.

Municipalities mull rolling out USD bills payment systems

Several municipalities in Zimbabwe are contemplating billing residents in forex following the recently gazetted Statutory Instrument 85 of 2020 by the government. The municipalities are expecting the residents to pay in United States dollars.

The Municipality of Chinhoyi, the Bulawayo City Council and the Municipality of Harare are some of the local authorities that are planning to collect rates in United States currency following the recently gazetted SI.

However the move by the authorities to bill in United States dollars is likely to receive widespread resistance from the already struggling ratepayers. The Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown curfews have added more woes to many ratepayers who are now resorting to menial subsistence activities like vending. The pandemic also saw some companies scaling down operations with some workers having to be retrenched.

The Bulawayo City Council (BCC), in their latest council report, indicated that it was no longer sustainable to use local currency as it was losing value and affecting service delivery, hence this consideration to bill residents in United States dollars.

The local authority further stated that it is also considering rebasing its 2020 budget in foreign currency so that it retains value. Furthermore the council says in billing residents using foreign currency, those paying in local currency will pay at the agreed United States dollar: Zimbabwe dollar

rate for the day.

Deliberate steps, council insists, were needed to be taken towards generating foreign currency for the city to remain afloat including pricing miscellaneous revenue streams in US dollars.

The council in their report also stated that further stated that stands shall also be billed in United States dollars with those with outstanding balances that were in local currency having had to pay in the greenback.

"Council should price stands in foreign currency. Those who have not paid off their purchase prices for stands will have the balances converted to foreign currency. That council should rebase the 2020 budget and its tariffs to US dollars. Billing will be based on the US dollar tariff converted to Zimbabwe dollars. Payment by customers can be in US dollars or Zimbabwe dollars at alternative foreign currency market rates," read part of the BCC statement.

Quoted in local publications, the Bulawayo Progressive Residents Association (BPRA) coordinator Mr Emmanuel Ndlovu said payment of rates in forex could prove to be a challenge for most residents as they are not earning hard currency. He said the local authority should consider gradually introducing rates in foreign currency starting with those leasing council's properties and those buying residential stands as an initial move.

"We are aware that development of some residential stands stalled after the reintroduction of the local currency. Most property developers were still demanding foreign currency to complete

the development projects," he said.

Meanwhile the City of Harare has also proposed the collection of revenue in the USD\$ currency with immediate effect. This was revealed in a statement by the authorities who state that "Harare City Council is now empowered to collect rates and charges in United State Dollars (USD) as directed by Statutory Instrument 85 of 2020".

"This means all our customers now have an option to pay either in local currency or United States dollars. The issued receipts will show the prevailing interbank rate conversion", it said.

Also in a related matter, the Municipality of Chinhoyi released a statement informing its residents that the council was mulling rating bills in USD\$ after the publication of the same SI.

"Council wishes to advise all its residents and stakeholders that it now accepts payments in United States Dollars (USD) as provided by Statutory Instrument 85 of 2020", read part of the statement

However the municipality further informed the residents that the local currency platform was still open albeit using the prevailing Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) conversion rate for the day.

"The conversion rate applied upon payment will be based on the prevailing weighted foreign exchange rate as announced by the reserve bank of Zimbabwe from time to time", read the Municipality's statement.

With the dissipating economic challenges currently bedeviling Zimbabwe, that have compelled residents to unending dares, it is prudent to note how the residents will react to this.

MASVINGO: Soldiers and police were patrolling in town as well as the high density areas. This has instilled fear among residents as many expected to continue with their normal day to day activities.

CHINHOYI: People are going on with their normal business whilst the police and a few soldiers are deployed in the city centre. Police checkpoints are there asking motorists for their licenses, checking motor vehicle licenses etc and also what they are getting into town for. We have not heard of any car that has been denied access into town. Residents are walking freely into town and doing their business and back home. Zupco is overwhelmed and hence people are resorting to walking.

KWEKWE/REDCLIFF: Yesterday people were turned back while going to work despite carrying their exemption letters. Only the Army, Nurses and Police were allowed entry into Kwekwe. People

Cities and Towns Update

spent the whole day waiting in their bus stops . Today there were soldiers and police manning the city on every street . There were a few Zupco buses moving and most of them were empty as a few people were going into town following what happened yesterday.

BEITBRIDGE: Soldiers were patrolling as well as police officers. People were seen doing last minute shopping as they are not sure of what will happen tomorrow.

HWANGE: Shops were open and they closed at 3pm. But tomorrow shops have been advised to be closed.

BINGA: Shops were open and police were operating as usual. At roadblock people with letters from police were passing without problem.

HURUNGWE: Government has launched a farming program called Pfumbudza conservation

farming in wards 10 ,11,12 and 13 through Arex. Farmers have already started preparations. Soldiers with guns are still patrolling in Magunje. Shops owners now have a tendency of not giving change customers and they are demanding customers to buy something instead of giving change

NKAYI: Frontline workers in the Health sector are faced with serious accommodation challenges. Due to the rise of Covid-19 cases within our frontline workers in the health sector the community is living in fear especially the landlords who have nurses as their tenants. They are now hiking rentals as a way of getting rid of them. A serious conflict is emerging.

MVUMA: It has been difficult for people to travel into town since Monday. Police officers at roadblocks were searching people and requesting for exemption letters. Those who did not have letters were turned back.