

Daily Graphic

TUESDAY, AUGUST 3, 2010

THIS IS REFRESHING

'E is good news in the air. The Volta Aluminium Company (VALCO), which was shut down some two years ago due to power problems, is bounce back.

According to Alhaji Inusah Fuseini, a deputy Minister of Energy, stakeholders in the company had early met to consider critical issues and work out the technical details to bring the company back stream.

Among the issues, we are told, are either or not the current level of electricity supply in the country can support VALCO, as well as the tariff time to ensure that the company can make profit should it start operations.

It is no doubt that after nearly 40 years of combined operations in the country, VALCO continues to maintain industrial, as well as state, sector aspirations.

Recalling that when the Trade and Industry Minister, Ms Hannah Anteh, appeared before Parliament few months ago to respond to a question on the closure of VALCO, she hit the nail right on the head when she said, "A properly positioned VALCO holds a significant place in Ghana's economic transformation agenda."

The DAILY GRAPHIC is particularly delighted that the re-opening of VALCO will bring the smiles back on the faces of the more than 500 workers of the company who, through no fault of theirs, had had to stay at home for the past two years due to inadequate supply of power.

20's history of shutdowns — the first since the establishment of the company in 1964 — is nothing to write home about. As we are aware, the smelting of alumina into aluminium consumes a huge amount of energy, for which reason attempts are made all over the world to undertake the process via hydroelectric power, as opposed to thermal.

Therefore, unfortunate that lack of rainfall had rendered the Volta River Authority (VRA) incapable of supplying the required amount of power to VALCO, resulting in the plant being temporarily shut down, however, with the upcoming gas line

Ghana via Nigeria, Togo and Benin and the build up of water in the catchment area of the Kosombo Dam, things should turn it for the better in due course.

20 is a world-class entity with good corporate governance practices — engineering, management, occupational health and safety, medical facility, training, infrastructure, logistics, work ethics, quality assurance, discipline, security and performance measures.

That Ghana owns 90 per cent shares in the company, the DAILY GRAPHIC expects those who will be required to maintain the high standards in place and create an integrated aluminium industry in the country.

It also hopes the new investors, the Russian giant, RUSAL, and ALCOA, will go back to the drawing board on the whole project and exploit the large bauxite deposits in the Akyem area, not only to create employment for the people but also provide an economic backbone for the company.

Scientific Renaissance in Africa

By Dr Lawrence D. Abbey & Augustine Andoh

FOR the past 21 years, Ghana has observed the Day of Scientific Renaissance of Africa (DSRA). This day was set aside by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), now the African Union (AU), to remind all African governments and people about the critical role that Science and Technology (S&T) play in national development.

A resolution was passed for all member-states at the 45th ordinary session of the OAU held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in 1987 to celebrate June 30, every year as the DSRA. The event was in remembrance of the continent's great contribution to the rise and development of modern S&T.

This calls for a renaissance of the re-birth of Africa. Many Africans have championed the cause of a renaissance in all sectors. It is also calling for the input of Africans or peoples of African descent in the Diaspora to put in resources, knowledge and finance to rebuild Africa.

A careful study of the European renaissance of the 12th century, for example, shows that it borrowed a lot from other cultures and embraced geometry from the pyramids of Africa, silk and spices from the regeneration of India and martial arts from the Chinese and the Japanese. Europe experienced an intellectual revitalisation and great advances occurred in Geography, Astronomy, Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics, manufacturing and Engineering.

Africa is regarded as the cradle of civilisation that gave birth to literacy and numeracy. Scientific renaissance is the hope that after the trans-Atlantic slave trade and colonialism, Africa can regenerate and claim a place in the globalised society of today.

By the time Europeans set foot on the shores of West Africa, there was a huge S&T gap. Their knowledge of naval engineering, astronomy and geography was being adventurously applied to the promotion of their trading interests. As the historian Walter Rodney put it, "The African entered colonialism with a hoe and came out with a hoe. The hoe the African entered with was locally produced; the hoe he came out with was imported."

Will the 21st century, often touted as the African century, become one? Perhaps the premier hosting of the football World Cup in South Africa is one of the indices.

Africans do not need to re-invent the proverbial wheel. The relative underdevelopment raises questions about what African countries have done or could have done during almost half a century of our independence and what we should determine for ourselves and do in the future. Many natural resources such as oil abound in Africa. How do we develop capacities and capabilities to exploit these resources and add value to them?

For a renaissance in Africa, it is now widely accepted that we need social cohesion, democracy and the rule of law, economic rebuilding and growth and the re-establishment of Africa as a significant player in geo-political affairs.

The African renaissance must work to make Africa a better place through such renaissance priorities as culture and education, economic transformation and development, science and technology, transport and energy, moral regeneration and African values, the advancement of media and telecommunications and human rights.

To begin with, Africa must not be isolated from itself. It must open dialogue to all levels of society and within families, communities, the continent and the Diaspora.

Today's West African scientists and scholars have access to Information and Communications Technology and an unparalleled treasure trove of the scientific and technological achievements of many centuries of thinking and invention. It is interesting that tele-density in Ghana has tremendously improved.

According to the National Communications Authority, telephone penetration is 52.4 per cent. This is to say there are about 12 million mobile phones and about 150,000 fixed lines. By many definitions, this indicates a growing scientific culture in Ghana. Ghana may reflect the general African tele-density situation.

We are entering a time when we can readily access more technological and

scientific information than any pre-scientific society has been able to do in the history of mankind. Ghanaian and the African society should begin to ensure that every individual shares in the culture of science as a way of living, thinking and behaving. The cutlass and hoe will never support a middle income economic status.

Ghana has a long-standing vision for harnessing science and technology for national development. This is evidenced by its S & T infrastructure that include the universities, research institutions such as those of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Ghana Atomic Energy Commission (GAEC), the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences (GAAS) and regulatory agencies such as the Ghana Standards Board (GSB) and Food and Drugs Board (FDB) and agencies such as the Ghana Appropriate Technology Information Services (GRATIS).

Indeed, S&T cuts across many ministries and agencies. We can use it in many fields of human endeavour — education, health, agriculture. An interesting development in Ghana is that we have a Ministry of Environment, Science and Technology (MEST) and a science and innovations policy that seeks to promote MEST as an apex agency.

This year's commemoration brought some important food for thought. It was held under the auspices of the MEST at the CSIR - Food Research Institute. The theme was, "S&T for Post-harvest Loss Reduction - The Key to Food Security". Indeed, agriculture plays a key role in sustainable development and poverty reduction for a vast majority of developing countries.

The keynote address, delivered by the Minister of Environment, Science and Technology, Ms Sherry Ayittey, provides a menu of ideas. A scientific renaissance should rest on collaboration between all relevant institutions, universities, ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) find a solution to the challenges of post harvest losses and to ensure food security. Ghanaians need to adopt a positive change in consumer attitudes towards made in Ghana products.

Ghanaians need to patronise made-in-Ghana products. We import a lot of things that we can produce ourselves to create jobs for farmers. We consume foreign brands that we do not know the contents of. Certainly one of the pillars of science is education.

The minister also supported the adoption of solar drying technologies by farmers. The GAEC made proposals for the adoption of food irradiation to help stem post harvest losses in food estimated at about 50 per cent.

Ghana would soon become headquarters of a West African Centre on Climate Change and Adapted Land Use. This centre, a collaboration between some West African countries, in partnership with the German government, will generate knowledge and disseminate scientific information for agriculture and post harvest losses.

Ghana is still grappling to rescue post-harvest losses of about 20-50 per cent of fruits, vegetables, roots and tubers and about 20-30 per cent of cereals and legumes.

The Food Research Institute of the CSIR has, over the 50 years of its existence, not only developed expertise in food processing and engineering, but post harvest technologies such as mechanical and solar



Ms Sherry Ayittey, Minister of Environment, Science and Technology

dryers to facilitate drying of agricultural produce and extend their shelf lives. It has also developed food processing technologies and a number of shelf stable products from highly perishable produce such as cassava fruits and vegetables. Several training programmes have been conducted by the institute in fruit processing.

After 15 years of successful operation, a full-scale commercial radiation processing plant is expected to begin operation this year. The GAEC has upgraded Radiation Technology Centre that has been irradiating food products and medical supplies since 1994.

Scientific renaissance is a process. It embraces so many things. Commemoration of scientific renaissance day is a fitting reminder of the commitment to science and technology.

It is suggested that Ghana needs to develop more competencies in certain critical areas, such as Information and Communications Technology (ICT), petroleum and solar energy technology, biotechnology, water quality management and environmental sanitation.

Science and Technology policy needs to be reviewed from time to time its position on the issue of science education at the primary, secondary, polytechnic and university levels to raise the quality of education.

Political, social, economic and institutional factors influence the successful generation and transfer of the results of scientific research and new technologies to farmers and other users.

The promotion of S&T for development calls for commitment from political leaders (central and local government bodies, district assemblies and communities) and social partners (non-governmental organisations (NGOs), scientists, individuals, schools, teachers and students and the media to realise the dreams of S&T and development for Ghana.

There is a need for sustained and continuous support from government, civil and social and political development institutions and/or the development partners or donor agencies in order to realise the fruits of scientific research.

There is a need to increase government funding for S&T from the current 0.05 to at least one per cent of GDP as advocated for by 1980 Lagos Plan of Action and NEPAD. This is certainly budgetary advice.