

Kenya launches Africa’s biggest wind farm

● The turbines went up quicker than one a day, with the last raised in March 2017, ahead of schedule

● Difficulties in financing the transmission line, and problems acquiring land delayed the project

● The EU’s lending facility loaned \$200 million for the project

Kenya

Kenya yesterday inaugurated Africa’s biggest wind power plant, a mammoth project in a gusty stretch of remote wilderness that now provides nearly a fifth of the country’s energy needs. The \$680-million (600 million euro) project, a sprawling 365-turbine wind farm on the eastern shores of Lake Turkana, is delivering 310 megawatts of renewable power to the national grid

The \$680 million project, a sprawling 365-turbine wind farm on the eastern shores of Lake Turkana, is delivering 310 megawatts of renewable power to the national grid of East Africa’s most dynamic economy.

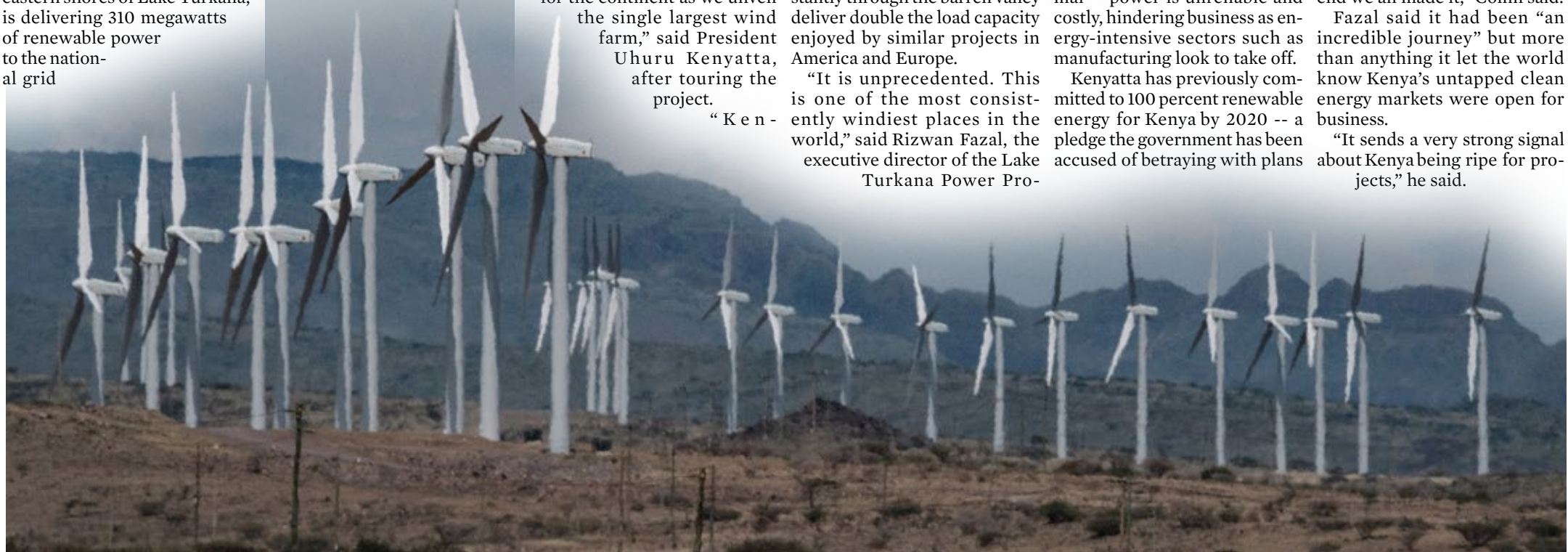


of East Africa’s most dynamic economy. The largest private investment in Kenya’s history, the Lake Turkana Wind Power project was beset with delays and took nearly a decade to rise from the arid landscape 600 kilometres (372 miles) north of Nairobi. Today the windmills -- scattered across Turkana’s stark lunar landscape and rocky hills -- deliver 15 percent of Kenya’s entire installed capacity, connected to the national grid through a 428-kilometre power line. “Today, we again raise the bar for the continent as we unveil the single largest wind farm,” said President Uhuru Kenyatta, after touring the project. “Kenya is without a doubt on course to become a world leader in renewable energy.”

Turkana Corridor

The project lies in a natural corridor dubbed “the windiest place on earth” and promises to harness this endless power at low cost. The nearly-50 metre turbines were engineered to handle the fierce gusts that tear through the “Turkana Corridor”, a wind tunnel that generates optimal conditions, year round. The winds howling near constantly through the barren valley deliver double the load capacity enjoyed by similar projects in America and Europe. “It is unprecedented. This is one of the most consistently windiest places in the world,” said Rizwan Fazal, the executive director of the Lake Turkana Power Pro-

ject. A Herculean effort was needed to construct the behemoth wind farm in Kenya’s farthest extremes. The windmills, manufactured by Danish company Vestas, had to be brought overland from the Kenyan port of Mombasa, some 1,200 kilometres away. More than 2,000 trips were needed to bring all the materials from port to plant. Some 200 kilometres of road leading to the site had to be upgraded to allow trucks through, shaving a journey that used to take days to several hours. Another 100 kilometres of internal roads linking the turbines dotting the hot, desert horizons were also constructed. ‘Incredible journey’ The project, far more ambitious in scale than rivals elsewhere on the continent, has been closely watched as a case study of investing in renewables in Africa, where demand for energy is soaring as economies grow and populations swell. In Kenya -- which relies heavily on hydropower and geothermal -- power is unreliable and costly, hindering business as energy-intensive sectors such as manufacturing look to take off. Kenyatta has previously committed to 100 percent renewable energy for Kenya by 2020 -- a pledge the government has been accused of betraying with plans to build a coal-fired power plant off the coast in Lamu. That project -- deemed unnecessary by experts -- has been stalled by legal challenges. The Turkana wind farm involved years of planning and construction but the turbines went up quicker than one a day, with the last raised in March 2017, ahead of schedule. But difficulties in financing the transmission line, being laid by state-owned power company Ketraco, and problems acquiring land, meant this landmark project didn’t connect to the grid for another 18 months -- in September 2018. “The farm was built on time. But the project can only operate if you can bring power to the client,” said Catherine Collin, East Africa head of the European Investment Bank. The EU’s lending facility loaned \$200 million for the project, which received other finance from a consortium of European and African companies. “There was a delay, there was a few difficult moments, I have to say, for everybody, but in the end we all made it,” Collin said. Fazal said it had been “an incredible journey” but more than anything it let the world know Kenya’s untapped clean energy markets were open for business. “It sends a very strong signal about Kenya being ripe for projects,” he said.



Israel spyware firm can mine data from social media: FT

● The London paper wrote that NSO group had “told buyers its technology can surreptitiously scrape all of an individual’s data from the servers of Apple, Google, Facebook, Amazon and Microsoft

Jerusalem, Undefined

An Israeli spyware firm thought to have hacked WhatsApp in the past has told clients it can scoop user data from the world’s top social media, the *Financial Times* reported Friday. The London paper wrote that NSO group had “told buyers its technology can surreptitiously scrape all of an individual’s data from the servers of Apple, Google, Facebook, Amazon and Microsoft, according to people familiar with its sales pitch”. An NSO spokesperson, responding in a written statement to AFP’s request for comment, denied the allegation. “There is a fundamental misunderstanding of NSO, its services and technology,” it said. “NSO’s products do not provide the type of collection capabilities and access to cloud applications, services, or infrastructure as listed and suggested in today’s FT article.”



Pegasus is a highly invasive tool that can reportedly switch on a target’s cell phone camera and microphone, and access data on it, effectively turning the phone into a pocket spy.

In May, Facebook-owned WhatsApp said it had released an update to plug a security hole in its messaging app that allowed insertion of sophisticated spyware that could be used to spy on journalists, activists and others. It said the attack bore “all the hallmarks of a private company that works with a number of governments around the world”. It did not name a suspect but Washington-based analyst Joseph Hall, chief technologist at the Center for Democracy and Technology, said at the time that the hack appeared related to the NSO’s Pegasus software. It is normally sold to law enforcement and intelligence services. Friday’s *FT* report, citing documents it had viewed and descriptions of a product demonstration, said the programme had “evolved to capture the much greater trove of information stored beyond the phone in the cloud, such as a full history of a target’s location data, archived messages or photos”. NSO says it does not operate the Pegasus system, only licensing it to closely vetted government users “for the sole purpose of preventing or investigating serious crime including terrorism”. The group came under the spotlight in 2016 when researchers accused it of helping spy on an activist in the United Arab Emirates. NSO is based in the Israeli seaside hi-tech hub of Herzliya, near Tel Aviv. It says it employs 600 people in Israel and around the world. Pegasus is a highly invasive tool that can reportedly switch on a target’s cell phone camera and microphone, and access data on it, effectively turning the phone into a pocket spy. “Increasingly sophisticated terrorists and criminals are taking advantage of encrypted technologies to plan and conceal their crimes, leaving intelligence and law enforcement agencies in the dark and putting public safety and national security at risk,” the company statement said.