

LETTERS

STAR LETTER



Mr. President, I appreciate your vigorous effort to improve our road network, but there are too many potholes in the city

I find it very intriguing that while President Koroma is frantically stepping up efforts to construct new roads or improve on existing ones across the country ahead of 2012, roads in the capital, Freetown are inundated with potholes, some of them measuring the depth of a fish pond.

It is a painful experience while driving along major roads in the city. The physical condition of roads such as Pademba Road, Circular Road, Sanda Street, Gloucester Street/Lightfoot Boston Street intersection, Abacha Street, Goderich Street, Krootown Road, Jomokenyatta Road and a host of others mainly in the centre of the city is total embarrassment.

Even the recently expanded Congo Cross Road west end of Freetown is now full of potholes, not to talk of Wilkinson Road. One can also notice this state of neglect on the stretch of road from Blackhall Road, Kissy down to Calaba Town, known as the 'Old Road'. This road has long been abandoned by this government. SLRA commenced rehabilitation work on it in 2005 and by 2007 work had gone as far as Braima Lane in Wellington but work never progressed beyond that point following the election of this government in 2007. In fact, the condition of that road has fast deteriorated.

Fourah Bay Road is now a death trap for motorists just as Kissy Road while Ross Road is almost a graveled road. Bai Bureh Road especially from the Calaba Town axis has become an eyesore after years of neglect.

People have been asking the whereabouts of the Sierra Leone Roads Authority, the body in charge of roads maintenance. From my personal enquiry, I'm told that the Road Fund meant for the maintenance of roads in the country has been depleted due to persistent requests from government officials including ministers who always demand from the SLRA management gallons of fuel or per diem each time they want to travel to the provinces, the reason SLRA has not been able to patch up the numerous potholes in the city for lack of money. In fact my information is that by the end of 2011, the authority's activities would grind to a halt due to lack of funds.

Mr. President, you have just celebrated four years in office and many of us believe you have good intention for this country but it is no credit that while you want to improve our roads countrywide you have neglected those in the capital. Even the thirty roads you once promised to rehabilitate only few have so far been completed, namely Dundas Street, Mends Street and Caulker Street in Wellington. Please hurry up, time is no longer on your side.

**Albert Kargbo
Mountain Cut (Freetown)**



YOUR LETTER

President Koroma, you have scored high marks in certain areas, but the lack of adequate transportation in the city could one day lead to violent street protest

It is no exaggeration to suggest that the vast majority of residents of Freetown are suffering from inadequate availability of public transport. They are suffering but in deep silence and the severity of their suffering would soon reach a breaking point if measures are not put in place to remedy a potentially explosive situation.

Editor, you will agree with me that from the east end of the city to the west commuters spend hours in queues waiting to board vehicles to reach their respective destinations. Those who cannot endure the long wait prefer to trek to and from their place of work or businesses on a daily basis. They are not happy walking long distances when they can afford the cost, but they have no better option but to endure the walk. Their frustration is clearly visible on their faces as they walk, groaning and cursing under their breath.

They must have voted to power the government of their choice, but they are gravely disappointed in the area of transportation. There is no limitation to the inconveniences they go through seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day.

If I could recall, it was the former Western Area Themneh tribal head, the late Chief Abu Black Kamara who once said at the National Stadium during the infamous AFRC junta that Sierra Leoneans should learn to walk as there would come a time when they would be forced to walk from Freetown to Lunsar (his birth place, probably). He made these comments at the height of the transport crisis in the city occasioned by the acute shortage of fuel during the junta period. Those were ominous predictions at the time but years on they are

coming to pass. Evidently, every passing day, hundreds if not thousands of city residents troop down to Freetown on foot and return home in like manner. It is not of their choice but the truth is there are no readily available means of transportation. So, as predicted by the late chief, every day people walk long distances, distances as far as Wellington in the east to make their way down town Freetown.

Some people have argued that there are enough vehicles to transport people from one destination to another. The problem, according to these people, is that Freetown is unprecedentedly populated and that the congestion clearly affects the movement of people within the city. They argue that no amount of vehicles will adequately address the crisis in the transport sector.

Indeed, it is true that Freetown is overpopulated but there should be adequate transport system to address the congestion. It is no excuse blaming overpopulation as a cause while ordinary people continue to suffer.

President Koroma needs to do more in this area otherwise people's patience would soon run out and then resort to violent street protest which has the potential to unsettle our fragile peace.

**Thaimu S. Conteh
Bottlefield, Calaba Town
Freetown**



YOUR LETTER

August/November 2011 edition is exceptionally revealing.

Your August/November 2011 cover story titled "GST: A field day for business crooks?" vividly captures the imagination of many of your readers. It is colourful, attractive and informative.

The graphic presentation of a rich but crooked businessman sitting on top of a bundle of Leones pressed on the back of a poor, helpless man clearly depicts the growing economic reality facing ordinary Sierra Leoneans today who are being exploited or fleeced almost to death by business crooks in the name of GST (Goods and Services Tax).

What I find particularly disturbing is the issue of customers who transact business with commercial banks who now have to pay GST on foreign exchange transfers as well as cheque books for cash withdrawals, etc. If I understand it correctly, money

received from abroad is now subjected to a GST. By the way, what is the GST threshold for money transfers? How much does one have to pay for a cheque book of 25 leaves, for instance? Like one commentator puts it, this is daylight robbery, indeed I agree with you that the controversy around the implementation of the GST is largely due to the lack of adequate information. Dishonest business people therefore capitalize on this gap in information to inflate prices of goods and services which in turn is causing extreme hardship to the common man.

NRA says GST, once it is registered, is very difficult to evade unlike other local taxes. I want to differ. In this country, dishonest business people will always circumvent the law to evade tax. This is easy especially when done in connivance with NRA officials.

Frankly, GST has increased the economic burden on poor Sierra Leoneans as depicted on your cover story photo (July-November 2011) with the crooked businessman sitting on the shoulders of an innocent consumer who carries the brunt of economic hardship, due to the senseless and callous increase in the prices of basic commodities. During their campaign, NRA said GST would not be charged on basic food items such as rice, flour, sugar, etc. But take a stock of the prices of these commodities and say whether GST has not influenced their increase.

So, like you said in your cover story, the introduction of the GST is a cause for concern and in the present circumstances, if such increase continues, the outcome may not be a pleasant one.

Thank you for that colourful and exciting edition.

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