



STEVE LOWE of Eagle Crest Energy Co. wants to build a \$2-billion hydropower project in a former mine next to Joshua Tree National Park. Supporters and foes are debating whether it's good for the environment.

A decades-old land battle flares anew

What happens when a national monument loses federal protections? An ugly example is in the California desert

By **BETTINA BOXALL**

DESERT CENTER, Calif. — Just beyond the southeast corner of Joshua Tree National Park, rows of boarded-up houses, gouged mountainsides and concrete ruins are an ugly reminder of the never-ending battle over the West's public lands.

This scarred piece of California desert is what's left of one of the country's largest open-pit mining operations and the little company town that Kaiser Steel Corp. built after World War II. More than three decades after the Eagle Mountain iron mine closed, it still haunts the park that borders it on three sides.

Plans to turn the site into a huge landfill and dump as much as 20,000 tons a day of Southland garbage into

the gaping mine pits died in 2013 after years of court battles. Now, a private company wants to use the pits for a \$2-billion hydropower project.

The plant, proponents say, would help boost renewable energy use in Southern California and lower greenhouse gas emissions. But park officials fear the hydropower project could draw down local groundwater levels and harm wildlife.

The Eagle Mountain tract, shaped like a handgun aimed at the park's interior, offers a lesson in what can happen when federal monument protections are stripped from public lands — as President Trump's administration is considering doing at a number of national monuments in the West.

"It's been a sordid history," said Mark Butler, a former Joshua Tree su-

perintendent who is retired from the National Park Service.

In 1936, President Franklin D. Roosevelt established Joshua Tree National Monument on roughly 825,000 acres of federal and railroad holdings northeast of Palm Springs, capping a hard-fought campaign to conserve a singular desert landscape of Joshua trees, massive boulders and spectacular vistas.

But the monument's ban on new mining claims infuriated gold and silver prospectors who'd long mined the area. In the 1940s, Kaiser Steel bought old patented claims to iron deposits in the Eagle Mountains and started digging them up.

In 1950, Congress shrank the monument by more than a third, chopping

Pence shuts down 2020 speculation

VP falls in line with a White House that's touchy at any hint that Trump might not be the GOP nominee.

By **LAURA KING**

WASHINGTON — For months, President Trump's White House has been prone to veering off message, sometimes wildly so. But it was crystal clear on one point Sunday: No one except Trump should put up a hand for the 2020 GOP presidential nod.

Vice President Mike Pence denied that he was considering a run for the presidency the next time around, issuing a statement, the vehemence of which underscored how sensitive the White House is to any questioning of whether Trump will seek a second term.

In what appeared to be a coordinated message, the White House also hit back Sunday at a report in the New York Times that described steps Pence and some GOP lawmakers have taken that could position them for presidential bids.

Pence went so far as to call the newspaper's report "disgraceful and offensive."

"The American people know that I could not be more honored to be working side by side with a president who is making America great again," the vice president said, invoking Trump's 2016 campaign slogan.

"Whatever fake news may come our way," he said, repeating another favored presidential phrase, "my entire team will continue to focus all our efforts to advance the president's agenda and see him reelected in 2020."

Trump began fundraising for a 2020 campaign almost immediately upon taking office, but a reelection bid would face several

potential obstacles:

He was 70 when he took office, the oldest first-term president to be inaugurated, has since turned 71, and would be the oldest second-term chief executive were he to run again and win the 2020 election.

If age is not enough of an issue, his approval ratings are at a low that is unprecedented at this point in a presidential term.

Moreover, an increasingly complex special counsel investigation, looking at whether Trump's campaign cooperated with Kremlin [See Pence, A7]



FRANCINE ORR Los Angeles Times

THE OLYMPIC torch at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum. The fabled stadium opened in 1923.

ANALYSIS

Shaping up L.A. for the Games

As it did when it hosted in 1932 and '84, the city can use 2028 as a civic barometer.

By **THOMAS CURWEN**

When asked to explain the secret of Los Angeles on the eve of the 1984 Summer Olympics, the late poet, novelist and fantasist Ray Bradbury broke it down, capturing the ingenious advantage the city enjoyed as it was coming of age.

"L.A. is a conglomerate of small towns striving toward immensity and never making it, thank God," he wrote. "We have no kings, queens, or courts, no real pecking order, no hierarchies to prevent those of us who care to lean into creativity from running loose in the big yard."

With that creativity and freedom, he continued, "we have conquered the world and don't have enough sense to know it. Maybe it's just as well. With such knowledge comes arrogance. We are not arrogant yet, although I detect signs of it."

More than 30 years later, it is hard to imagine what Bradbury would make of last week's announcement that Los Angeles will host the Olympics in 2028. The city today is approaching the immensity that he seemed wary of.

Downtown, once stagnant and overlooked, is thriving, its skyline ever-evolving. The Dodgers and Dudamel are on a roll. George Lucas is breaking ground on a museum in Exposition Park. Two football teams compete in the city's backyard, and a subway system is tunneling its way toward the sea.

What once was a blank slate is now crowded with — if not inhibited by — expectations.

Add the Olympics to the mix, and it is perhaps understandable that the reaction has been slightly fuzzy. Los Angeles is no longer pow- [See Games, A10]

CHINA IN AFRICA

Beaming into Kenya homes

A Beijing satellite TV company gets the Chinese message across

By **JONATHAN KAIMAN**

KAJIADO, Kenya — It took the StarTimes satellite TV salesman about 30 minutes to install a pipeline for Chinese propaganda into Francis Gitonga's squat, cinder-block home here in southern Kenya, near Africa's Great Rift Valley.

First, he climbed onto Gitonga's roof, drilled a satellite dish onto the chimney, and dangled some wires through the door frame. He plugged it all into a StarTimes set-top box, and turned it on.

Gitonga, 43, flipped through the channels, and Chinese programs filled the screen: an old kung fu movie, a Chinese news broadcast, a

Chinese documentary about Japan's wartime atrocities, most dubbed into English.

Gitonga was elated. His new digital TV package gave him better reception than he'd once thought possible in Kajiado, a small town on the savannah where Masai tribesmen wander past rickety storefronts and goats cluster in the shade.

"I didn't know about China before," he said. "I can say it's good. They have changed this country in a big way, very fast."

Although StarTimes — a privately owned, Beijing-based media and telecommunications firm — is virtually unknown in the West, it has been sweeping across Africa since 2002. [See Kenya, A4]



JERRY YOUNG, 68, inspects a blue sapphire at Inta Gems & Diamonds. His shop is the first to be owned by Cambodians in the jewelry district of downtown L.A.

A legacy of Cambodian genocide: Jewelry shops

Precious gems helped refugees build Southland businesses, but it's not all glitter.

By **FRANK SHYONG**

On a spring day in 1975, as Khmer Rouge forces launched a coup that would unleash four years of genocide in Cambodia, Jerry Young grabbed a fistful of jewels from his store and fled for his life.

He walked and hitched

rides to the border of Thailand, where he waited days before reuniting with his family in a camp.

"I was so scared. I ran," said Young, 68. "I was so lucky."

When they moved to the U.S., those jewels — a few cut rubies and sapphires — became the seed funding for a business that has become common in Cambodian American communities: the jewelry store.

There are now hundreds of Cambodian-owned jewelry stores across Southern California, home to more than 50,000 people of Cam-

bodian descent, the largest such population outside the Southeast Asian nation.

The stores are one of the legacies of the Cambodian genocide and the economic upheaval that came with it.

About two dozen stores are packed into a Chinatown strip mall, and about 30 more crowd the downtown jewelry district. Cambodian jewelry stores line Anaheim Street of Long Beach's Cambodia town, cluster in a Fullerton strip mall and dot Orange County's Little Saigon.

Cambodian jewelers have become well known in [See Jewelers, A12]

Transgender girl sues school

The case of 8-year-old Nikki Brar could change the way gender identity is addressed in the classroom. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

Weather
Low clouds, then sun.
L.A. Basin: 83/67. **B6**

Kenya braces for election violence

As a presidential vote looms, memories of past bloodshed set an ominous tone. **WORLD, A3**



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Better TV signal, clearly from China

[Kenya, from A1] overhauling the continent's broadcast infrastructure and beaming Chinese content into millions of homes. It has subsidiaries in 30 African countries, including such war-torn states as the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic.

"Our aim is to enable every African household to afford digital TV, watch good digital TV and enjoy the digital life," StarTimes Vice Chairman Guo Ziqi told China's official New China News Agency in December.

But there's a catch. StarTimes has substantial backing from the Chinese state — and an explicit political mandate.

China's relationship with Africa — for decades defined by resource-for-infrastructure deals — is evolving, as Africa becomes wealthier and China's foreign policy objectives grow more ambitious.

Beijing has invested billions of dollars into "soft power" campaigns aimed at convincing the world that China is a cultural and political success story. Yet beyond China's borders, its heavily censored state media broadcasts go mostly unwatched; its newspapers go unread; and outsiders often continue to associate China with pollution, opacity and repression.

StarTimes signals a change in tack, one that highlights the depth and complexity of Beijing's efforts to win hearts and minds — with much of that effort now being directed at Africa, one of the world's great emerging media markets.

As a digital infrastructure provider, StarTimes is helping African states transition from analog television — a technology akin to FM radio, rife with snow, static and dropped signals — to digital, which ensures high-quality image and sound. As a pay-TV company, it is stacking its networks with pro-China broadcasts.

As both, it is materially improving the lives of countless Africans, then making China's role in those improvements impossible to ignore.

"There's a huge ideological element" to StarTimes' African operations, said Dani Madrid-Morales, a doctoral fellow at the City University of Hong Kong who has researched the company. "It's a huge effort to get Africans to understand China. Even the selection of TV shows is very carefully done. It's very specific shows that showcase an urban China, a growing China, a noncontroversial view of China."

Pang Xinxing, StarTimes' chief executive, who could not be reached for comment, has told Chinese state media that he expanded to Africa to counter "exaggerated and biased re-



IMMANUEL MUASYA For The Times
DAVID MUGITA sells StarTimes satellite TV service in Kajiado, Kenya. StarTimes, a privately owned, Beijing-based firm, has been sweeping across Africa since 2002, beaming Chinese content into millions of homes.

About this series

This is the second in a series of reports on a massive program of Chinese investment that is reshaping Africa. Times staff writer Jonathan Kaiman and visual journalist Noah Fowler traveled to Ethiopia, Djibouti, Kenya and Ghana with support from the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting. More online, including 360-degree videos, at latimes.com/chinainfrica

ports" about China in the Western media.

"There's a mindfulness among China's leadership that China doesn't get fair treatment overseas, and something needs to be done about it," Madrid-Morales said.

StarTimes established its Kenyan subsidiary in 2012; now, it has 1.4 million subscribers, accounting for nearly half of Kenya's pay-TV subscriptions. Its cheapest package, called "Novo," costs about \$4 per month. Novo features a mix of Kenyan and Chinese channels, including several belonging to the Chinese state-run broadcaster, the China Global Television Network, or CGTN.

Access to other international channels, such as Al Jazeera, France 24 and BBC — which are more inclined to portray China in a negative light — costs more than most Kenyans can afford.

In December 2016, StarTimes launched a "pilot program" in Kajiado "as part of its long-term agenda" to bring digital television to rural Kenyans, according to the state-run China Daily. The company gave free StarTimes set-top boxes and subscriptions to 120 households. Sun Zhijun, a Chinese vice minister overseeing propaganda and media cen-

sorship, traveled to Kajiado for the inaugural celebration.

By January, StarTimes was everywhere in town — bright orange StarTimes advertisements glowed on schoolhouse walls, and StarTimes satellite dishes sprouted like carnations from corrugated sheet-metal roofs.

The Kajiado project "is being subsidized by the Chinese government," Mark Lisboa, StarTimes Kenya's vice president of marketing, acknowledged, without giving an amount.

The company "embarked on a massive sales drive" following Kenya's switch to digital TV infrastructure in 2014, he said; it now employs 1,100 people, most of them Kenyan. He added that StarTimes will begin building an Africa headquarters, a dubbing center and production facilities within the year. "This is just the beginning, I'll put it that way," he said.

China's footprint across Kenya spreads far beyond access to the airwaves. As in the rest of Africa, China has been investing heavily in infrastructure. But as China's impact deepens, Kenyans have often reacted with suspicion. They blame China for stealing local jobs. They fear that China — Kenya's largest creditor — is saddling the country with unmanageable debt, and that Chinese infrastructure projects are endangering the country's pristine national parks, some of the world's most biodiverse.

In late May, a Kenyan delegation signed a \$2-billion deal with a Chinese firm for a 1,050-megawatt coal-fired power plant about 13 miles north of Lamu Old Town, a UNESCO World Heritage site and the oldest Swahili settlement in East Africa. Critics say the project could pollute the air, damage fishing grounds and push hundreds of residents off their land. Locals were outraged that the Chinese company, China Power Global, would import 40% of workers on the project from China.

Lamu residents have staged silent protests, marching through the town bearing anti-coal placards, and though the Kenya National Environment Management Authority signed off on the project last year, the plant's fate remains undecided.

To get a sense of what's at stake for China in Kenya, visit Nairobi National Park, a pristine nature preserve in the capital city's shadow, where zebras graze against a backdrop of skyscrapers.

China provided most of the funding, in loans and investment, for a \$3.8-billion railway joining Nairobi and the Kenyan port city Mombasa, 380 miles away — part of which will cut through the park. The line opened in June; its high concrete pillars rise like a mirage from the dry, yellow savannah.

The new train will travel at an average of 74 mph, cutting transportation time between the two cities from about 10 hours to five; it will transport 22 million tons of cargo per year. Ultimately, it could anchor a Chinese-backed rail network stretching into South Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi, where transportation networks are now rudimentary, consisting mainly of dilapidated roads and remote airstrips. Improved access

to ports could improve trade and open markets.

But critics in Kenya say the railway is overpriced, costing a fifth of the national budget, and could put Kenya in debt for generations — 90% of the project was funded through loans from the Export-Import Bank of China, often known simply as China ExIm Bank.

Some of the deliberations with government officials over the project happened behind closed doors, drawing accusations of corruption — though no one has offered much beyond suspicion.

"In my opinion, the [rail] project is one of the biggest scandals ever witnessed in Kenya," Kenyan politician Joshua Odongo Onono wrote in a commentary last year. "May God have mercy on us."

Environmentalists have raised a loud alarm about the rail line's effect on wildlife. The flurry of initial construction is thought to have led to the deaths of 10 elephants. Several lions escaped from the park — one of which died — and some have blamed that, too, on the construction activity, though that's less clear.

Protesters gathered outside the Chinese Embassy in Nairobi, chanting, "ExIm China, respect our laws!"

"It's heartbreaking," said Paula Kahumbu, the Nairobi-based CEO of the conservationist organization WildlifeDirect. "We're concerned that if they can get away with this in the capital city, God knows what could happen elsewhere."

The controversies were barely reported by Chinese news outlets in Kenya.

Those reports have tended to focus on the rail line's efficiency, economic benefits and ambition. "The line is expected to speed up the transformation of the

Eastern African region as a whole," reported CGTN in September.

Kevin Otiende, a former employee in CGTN's Nairobi bureau, said that its Kenyan journalists had little say over what ultimately went on air. "I felt personally, there was no freedom of expression," he said. "Everything had to be nice. And anything that was not perceived to be correct was immediately killed."

Chinese business advocates paint Beijing's media investments as a win-win for Chinese investors and African consumers — and an important prerequisite to China's ongoing ambitions on the continent.

Huang Hongxiang, the Nairobi-based founder of China House Kenya, which provides consulting services to Chinese companies in the country, said that if China does not take steps to improve its image in Africa, "there will be conflicts sooner or later resulting from misunderstandings."

"Why would China want to do the railway? Of course it's because it's beneficial to China's economy and Chinese companies, and to China-Africa relations," he said. "Between China and Africa you have a lot of material exchange — the railway, and so on. But people-to-people exchange really isn't enough."

How much impact China is achieving through its media investments remains unclear. Experts questioned whether Kenya's StarTimes subscribers, while benefiting from StarTimes' signal quality, were actually watching Chinese shows.

Linus Kaikai, chairman of the Kenya Editors Guild and a manager at the Nairobi-based National Media Group, said Kenyan audiences have been shifting away from foreign content for years, as local shows grow more popular. To most Kenyans, he added, Chinese culture carries little cachet.

"Kenyans have been separating and placing — if I can put it this way — a Chinese wall between infrastructure and culture," he said. "Kenyans don't see [China] as a model in the space of democratic or political processes. But they see it as a very, very good model when it comes to economic growth."

David Mwangi, owner of a small shop in Kajiado, said he has learned to appreciate Chinese news reports. "BBC is shallow. But [CGTN] has more, a lot of African stuff," he said. "I thought China was a small country, but now I know it's a big country with a lot of technology and infrastructure."

"China is improving a lot," he continued, glancing at his TV. He paused, briefly. "China has conquered Kenya," he said.

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Tourists arrested for Nazi salute

Two Chinese men are the latest visitors to learn the gesture is verboten in Germany.

BY ERIK KIRSCHBAUM

BERLIN — Two Chinese tourists discovered the hard way that giving the outlawed "Hitlergruss" — or Nazi salute — in front of the Reichstag building in Berlin

FOR THE RECORD

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is no laughing matter in Germany.

The two men, ages 49 and 36, were quickly detained after police spotted them taking pictures of each other in front of the country's most popular tourist spot Saturday while giving the stiff-armed "Heil Hitler" greeting that is illegal in Germany and punishable by up to three years in jail.

The tourists, who were released after posting a total of \$1,200 in bail set by a local judge, were the latest in a long line of foreigners to run afoul of the strict laws outlawing not only the Hitler salute but all Nazi symbols.

The Nazi Party is banned in Germany. Its symbols, such as the Hitler salute and swastika, and imagery can be used only for teaching, in films or historical research, or in documentaries or films satirizing the Nazis.

Two British tourists were detained last year for the same offense as the Chinese tourists near the Reichstag, and a 30-year-old Canadian tourist from Quebec had to post \$170 bail for performing the Hitler salute for a picture of himself taken by a German woman at the same lo-

cale in 2011. Scores of police and countless security cameras monitor the Reichstag building around the clock.

"We definitely treat this and all similar such cases as a serious violation of the law," said Patricia Braemer, a spokeswoman for the Berlin police. "The law banning the use of symbols that violate the constitution applies not only to Germans but to everyone in Germany. Anyone coming here ought to know and respect the country's customs."

Although Germans learn extensively about the horrors of Nazi leader Adolf Hitler, the Third Reich and the Holocaust in school and through the media, some Germans also get into trouble for flashing the Hitler salute in public — thinking at first it is just for a laugh or a lighthearted provocation.

Two high school students from the northern city of Rostock were charged with displaying Nazi symbols for giving the Hitler salute on a class trip to a history museum in Berlin this year.

They took pictures of each other giving the salute while standing in front of posters at the museum

showing Hitler and his propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels. When their teachers discovered the pictures, they made the students delete them from their phones. But the school's principal later turned the students over to police.

"There are surely a lot more people around who give the Hitler salute than the police see," Braemer said. "But the penal code is valid for everyone, and when we see it, we respond accordingly."

Some German police officers have also shown they are also not immune to trying to make inappropriate Nazi jokes.

One Berlin police officer assigned to guard the British Embassy was suspended in 2004 after he gave a fellow officer the salute at the start of his shift and shouted, "Heil Hitler."

In 2007, a Berlin man who taught his dog Adolf to give the "Hitlergruss" on command — the German shepherd raised its right paw — was sentenced by a local court to five months in jail.

Kirschbaum is a special correspondent.

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