

Hello, again. I'm Jim Tedder in Washington. Thank you for spending some time with VOA. Today, we have two stories from Africa. There is disturbing news about migrants in the Horn of Africa. Then we hear from Burundi, where press freedom seems to be under attack. But first, new dangers have been discovered for those who choose to face the “final frontier.”

United States Army researchers say even short trips into space can weaken the body's natural defenses for fighting disease. The researchers found that this can increase the risk of serious infection.

The findings come from researchers at Fort Detrick in the state of Maryland. They studied information from a medical experiment performed on the final flight of the space shuttle Atlantis. The experiment was designed to show how the human immune system reacts to stress and disease in the microgravity conditions of Earth orbit. Microgravity is a nearly weightless condition in which there is very little gravity.

The experiment involved living human cells. They were placed in a clean, temperature-controlled container. The experiment was easy for astronauts traveling on the shuttle Atlantis. All they had to do was push a button to infect the cells with a common bacterial toxin.

The container was in space for two weeks. Researchers with the Army Medical Command have spent the past two years studying the information it provided. They compared those findings with information from a similar

experiment done on Earth at the same time, under normal gravity conditions.

Marti Jett directs the Integrative Systems Biology Program at the Medical Command. She says the cells were so busy dealing with microgravity that they could hardly fight against infections.

“We saw a rather similar thing there that these young men were so stressed from reduced sleep, their heavy exercise, their activities that their immune cells simply did not respond very well.”

The research on the human immune response in microgravity was reported at the Experimental Biology 2013 conference in Boston, Massachusetts.

Humanitarian agencies say thousands of migrants from the Horn of Africa are living in terrible conditions along the Yemeni-Saudi Arabian border. Many have been robbed and tortured by criminals. Migrant workers from Africa below the Sahara Desert often believe that they can find jobs in Saudi Arabia. But getting there can mean traveling to and through Yemen, where they become targets of smugglers and people who deal in human traffic. Caty Weaver takes the story from there.

The routes to Yemen include long and dangerous boat trips from Somalia over the Gulf of Aden – and the much shorter trip from Djibouti across the

Red Sea. But there the people also are threatened by smugglers, who may rob or even kill them.

The International Organization for Migration – the IOM -- estimates that there are at least 25,000 migrants along the Yemen-Saudi border. Nicoletta Giordano is chief of mission in Yemen for the IOM. She described the groups who are making the trip to the border.

“The majority are Ethiopian migrants, who undertake this really quite dangerous journey. There’s also a number of refugees who come across. They’re mostly Somalis, who are recognized as refugees automatically here in Yemen because Yemen is a signatory to the refugee convention. But three-quarters of the flows coming across from the Horn of Africa are indeed Ethiopian migrants.”

Yemen does not recognize the Ethiopians as refugees. Here again is Ms.Giordano:

“They find themselves destitute and quite exhausted by the journey by the time they get to the border with Saudi. And that’s where they fall prey smugglers and traffickers with respect to the final leg of the journey over to Saudi Arabia.”

Some are held in camps by the smugglers. Recently, Yemeni forces rescued almost 2000 migrants being held against their will. But even after they gain

freedom there is little assistance available for the migrants. Aid agencies say their finances are low. The IOM is appealing for 1.2 million dollars to help Yemen provide shelter, food and health care. I'm Caty Weaver.

Reporters in the African nation of Burundi are opposing a bill that they believe will limit press freedoms. Rights groups have been urging Burundi's president to reject the measure, as Kelly Jean Kelly reports.

Earlier this month, Burundi's senate approved a media bill that would force reporters to identify sources. Reporters would be required to say who supplied the information used in their stories. The bill also would bar the press from reporting on issues like public security, defense and the economy. Reporters and news agencies that violate the law could be required to pay thousands of dollars in fines.

Bob Rugurika is editor-in-chief of Radio Publique Africaine in Burundi. He told VOA reporter Gabe Joselow the proposed restrictions are unacceptable.

“There are many, many restrictions, he says. The law prevents us from working on news about security, the economy, the currency - imagine that.”

Rights groups including The Committee to Protect Journalists and Amnesty International have urged President Pierre Nkurunziza to reject the bill. A large majority of members in both the national assembly and the senate voted for the measure. The ruling party has controlled both houses of

parliament since the opposition boycotted elections in 2010. Lawmakers said the bill would protect Burundi's citizens and leaders.

Burundi's government has a recent history of being firm with reporters. Police detained Mr. Rugurika several times over the past few years. In 2011 he was questioned for 10 hours after a broadcast report suggested that state security forces were responsible for killing 40 people.

In March, officials released reporter Hassan Ruvakuki. He was arrested in 2011 on terrorism charges after he met with rebels in Tanzania. The reporter said he was only doing his job at the time. The charges were reduced during his appeal. I'm Kelly Jean Kelly.

And I'm Jim Tedder in Washington. Thank you for spending some time with us on this Thursday, the second day of May. On this date in 1903, America's "Baby Doctor" Benjamin Spock was born in New Haven, Connecticut. His famous book on baby and child care sold over 30 million copies.

Also on this date in 1946, Lesley Gore was born. At the age of 16 she recorded the rock and roll hit. VOA world news follows at the beginning of each hour.