

BLUE LINES

*Democracy Day, on 12 June in Nigeria, might be better named 'two cheers for democracy' day. It marks the election in 1993 that was supposed to end a decade of military rule. When it became clear that Moshood Abiola, a millionaire businessman, was about to win, the junta under Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha annulled the vote and tipped the country into turmoil.*

*Over 100 people were killed in the ensuing protests. Babangida was forced out, handing over to an 'interim government' headed by businessman Ernest Shonekan. Within months, Abacha seized power, then ran the most corrupt and repressive junta in Nigeria to date. His sudden demise in 1998, shrouded in mystery, was celebrated in Nigeria as a 'coup from heaven'. But he was more a symptom than a cause of Nigeria's recurring political crises.*

*In February, Babangida published his memoir, which heaped the blame for the 1993 crisis onto Abacha. A top table of generals and veteran politicians crowded into the launch of Babangida's book. Guest of honour was President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, who built his political career on opposition to Abacha, campaigning against his brutality and greed. Now Tinubu has taken on Gilbert Chagoury, a Franco-Lebanese billionaire, as his financial advisor. Chagoury is best known to Nigerians as the man who managed Abacha's finances and fled the country after his death.*

UNITED NATIONS/AFRICA

As Trump turns off the tap, Guterres wields the knife

The UN Secretary-General hopes radical restructuring and austerity can rescue the organisation as multilateralism starts to split at the seams

Instead of celebrating its 80th birthday, there is a serious chance that the UN headquarters will have to declare a form of institutional bankruptcy at its General Assembly in September. The unprecedented cashflow crisis caused by funding cuts means the budgetary shortfalls are so serious that many of the system's operations and offices will have to be shuttered or merged into each other.

This funding crisis comes as the international system, riven by geopolitical and economic rivalries, risks splitting at the seams, unable to reach a working consensus on any of the key economic, security and environmental threats. UN Secretary-General António Guterres appointed a Task Force in March to propose radical reforms as the UN marks its 80th anniversary. Its goal is to map out a plan for a smaller UN to do less, more efficiently, and in lower cost locations: less New York, more Nairobi.

The UN80 Initiative, led by Under-Secretary-General for Policy Guy Ryder, a Briton and former director-general of the International Labour Organization, has delivered plans to streamline a sprawling bureaucracy. UN top brass wanted to keep a lid on the proposals but a six-page document setting out its main ideas and the rationale behind them was leaked within weeks. On the menu for the high-level panel from UN offices in New York, Geneva and Nairobi are major cuts and consolidating dozens of agencies and programmes into a handful of departments. The reforms would be the UN's deepest overhaul in decades. The

high-level panel have until July to agree on a set of clear budgetary proposals to present to the 194 member states of the UN. These would take centre-stage in the General Assembly debate about the UN's future in September.

RACE TO REFORM

This is the second attempt by Guterres, who talked of a UN 2.0 revamp in 2023 using data and digital technology to improve efficiency. But that was before funding aid and multilateral institutions came under attack, primarily from United States President Donald Trump but also from European governments. Faced with that prospect, Guterres and his team are planning wide-ranging reforms to save cash and restore some US backing.

'The progressive proliferation of agencies, funds, and programmes has led to a fragmented development system, with overlapping mandates, inefficient use of resources, and inconsistent delivery of services,' the Task Force notes in a *mea culpa* memo.

At the core is a plan to consolidate operations into four pillars: Peace and Security, Humanitarian Affairs, Sustainable Development and Human Rights. This entails, for example, combining the World Food Programme (WFP), the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine (UNRWA) and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) into one organisation.

UN Climate Change, the secretariat of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, could be integrated

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into the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), while the annual COP summit, which produced the landmark 2015 Paris agreement, 'should be discontinued' in its current form. Peacekeeping, counter-narcotics and development agencies may merge into a unified peace and security entity. The Task Force also suggests folding UNAIDS into the World Health Organization (WHO) and combining UN Women and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA).

The aim is to reduce the overall UN headcount by a fifth. The WFP, which received about half its 2024 budget from the US, could lose almost a third of its staff; internal documents show that the UN Children's Fund (Unicef) is bracing for a 20% budget cut. OCHA has already laid off 2,600 employees, while the UN High Commissioner for Refugees has reported more than 200 recent layoffs with more expected at the end of June.

Reforms were under way before Trump's election last year but have been given urgency by the latest cuts, including the US suspending contributions to the WHO, which faces a US\$2.5 billion shortfall between mid-2025 and December 2027.

Rich western economies, even those who dislike Trump's America First agenda, support change. Citing budgetary pressures, many of them are sharply cutting UN contributions, both mandated and voluntary. Recent appeals for aid to Yemen, Sudan and the Sahel are badly under-subscribed. It's a longer-term trend: a 2017 pledging conference which the UN had hoped would raise \$8bn to support refugees from South Sudan in Uganda raised only a \$358m. More UN members are simply not paying their annual dues. As of 20 April, only 101 of 193 Member States had paid up for 2025, a decrease from 152 in 2024, though most of the remainder are still expected to stump up the cash by the end of the year.

The European Union, a top funder, is 'steadfastly committed' to the UN system and will remain a 'reliable' partner of the organisation, but it will not cover any of the deficit created by US cuts, according to a European

**THE DIPLOMATS AND BUREAUCRATS ANSWER BACK****Vasily Nebenzya, UN Permanent Representative of Russia**

'The United Nations has witnessed the adoption of many documents that were not implemented. There is concern that the Pact of the Future may face a similar fate, as it was a non-negotiated document. Many countries like ours were dissatisfied with the content of the text.'

'We have repeatedly stated that the west is over-represented on the SC and developing countries, primarily in Africa, are under-represented. Africa has 54 states, but only three seats, while the EU, with 27 states, has four seats and sometimes five. This is unfair.'

'We believe that the Council should not be expanded to a format that will make its work ineffective. When some suggest increasing the number to 25, we are 15 today and already face difficulties in dealing with issues at this size. We propose a smaller increase to the low 20s.'

**Tareq Albanai, UN Permanent Representative of Kuwait**

'We wanted concrete action, and a greater commitment to Security Council reform. This is a starting point that we can build on but is by no means a blueprint for the future.'

'If there is not sovereign equality of status, there is absolutely no point in increasing the number of permanent members because it defies the purpose of the SC.'

**Sophia Tesfamariam, UN Permanent Representative of Eritrea**

'There was an overwhelming push back from the West on anything that the Global South was trying on the reform of the financial infrastructure, the non-happening reform of the Security Council, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It's unfortunate that at a time where the world needs each other, the Summit of the Future turned out to be empty slogans.'

'The promise for the African group was that if we would increase the seats, we would also have a veto power, because without the veto, increasing the number, even to 26...is going to make the system even worse. I think that there will be no real commitment to change the system.'

**Cheick Niang, UN Permanent Representative of Senegal**

'Africa wants two permanent seats. We would like to see the permanent membership expanded and the non-permanent membership expanded. This will benefit not only Africa, but also other regions of the world. What is important for us is that the Americans, for the first time, accept the principle not only of representation for Africa, but also of two permanent seats.'

'Two years ago, [US President] Biden announced that Africa should be granted a seat. However, the Americans clarified that two seats were OK, but without veto power. If we can ensure Africa's permanence at the SC level, that is a positive development. We must take the two seats and continue to fight for the veto power to be granted to us.'

'Our multilateral system is broken. We continue to see a policy of double standards when it comes to dealing with crises around the world. Take the Sahel, where I come from; we see that the investments made in the area of peace and security and in the humanitarian field are well below what we see in other crisis zones. We want a form of the Council that is fair for all. If Africa is not to have a permanent member seat with veto power, this measure must be extended to the other permanent members of the Security Council. We must have the same prerogatives, the same privileges as everyone else, otherwise it is absolutely pointless, just to make a small reform to satisfy an Africa that has been asking, for at least sixty years, to have the same rights, especially since most of the crises before the Council develop on the African continent.' ●

Commission official.

Donor fatigue has resulted in several major UN agencies facing short-term cashflow crises. The WFP has warned that food rations for an estimated 720,000 refugees, most of them based at the Kakuma camp in northern Kenya, will be cut to cover just 28% of them – the lowest level recorded – and

cash assistance cut entirely unless new funding is available in June.

On 5 June, Belio Kipsang, Principal Secretary for Immigration and Citizen Services, told the National Assembly in Nairobi that funding from the US and Germany for refugee camps in Kenya has been scrapped. There is a similar story in neighbouring Uganda, which

hosts around 1.8m refugees, most of them fleeing war in Congo-Kinshasa and Sudan.

June is the last month for which Uganda will receive money to support refugees, according to General Duties Minister **Justine Lumumba**. Disaster Preparedness Minister **Hilary Onek**, meanwhile, has said that \$10m per month is needed to provide food and essential supplies to refugees. Without that funding, which President **Yoweri Museveni's** government is highly unlikely to cover itself, Onek has warned that Uganda may have to close its borders to refugees.

One significant demand from Ryder's Task Force is for all secretariat operations in New York and Geneva 'to identify as many functions as possible that could be relocated to existing lower-cost locations, brought closer to mandate implementation or clients/stakeholders in the field, or otherwise

reduced or abolished if they are duplicative or no longer viable'.

One likely beneficiary of this is UNON in Nairobi, a regional hub for diplomats, aid agencies and the UN, including WFP and UNEP. The Kenyan capital has already seen new arrivals take on houses vacated by staffers from the disbanded USAID (Dispatches 28/1/25).

Rwanda's government is also looking to capitalise. In a 15 May letter to Guterres from Prime Minister **Edouard Ngirente** seen by *Africa Confidential*, Kigali says that it would offer 'office facilities and essential services, while actively partnering on the development of a long-term UN campus', urging Guterres to send a 'technical mission at the earliest opportunity to discuss this proposal further.' As ever, the Kigali government is moving quickly and strategically: hosting UN organisations generates revenue but also provides some

political insulation for governments that face international critics.

Many diplomats in New York tell us that the UN will not exist in its current form in a decade. In what is an expedited schedule by UN standards, the Task Force is due after extensive consultations to produce its final recommendations to the 2026 UN General Assembly, the final one Guterres will preside over.

Some diplomats, particularly those from African states, warn that the Secretary-General's reforms look more like an elaborate management consultants' report than a vision of a UN system for the future. Nor is that the proposed UN austerity plan, will be enough to persuade the Trump administration – whose antipathy to the UN is more about ideological opposition to multilateralism than concerns over red tape – to resume its funding of a UN that will claim to be leaner and probably meaner. ●

## UNITED NATIONS

# Amid the turmoil, some room at the top

**Questions about the UN Secretary-General's future are intensifying as debate rages over his reform and restructuring plans**

For over two years, the UN Secretariat in New York has been buzzing with rumours about the mooted early departure of Secretary-General **António Guterres**. Part of the reason is that relations between **United States President Donald Trump** and Guterres during the president's first term were near poisonous.

Shortly before Trump's re-election last November, some diplomats claimed that Guterres had said that he would leave before his scheduled 2026 departure should Trump win. Other theories have emerged. One was that Guterres was considering running for president of **Portugal** and was discreetly campaigning. But Iberian politics seem to have militated against that option.

Another version of the Guterres exit story is that Trump's foreign policy team see Guterres as obstructing their agenda and they would like a more pliable substitute. That means trying to push out Guterres before the end of his term by assembling a coalition against him. Finding a consensus candidate to replace him may be even more difficult than mustering the votes to sack him. Washington pulled together a coalition to block a second term for **Egypt's Boutros Boutros Ghali** as Secretary-General after he

opposed the US invasion of **Iraq**. Since then, the international system has splintered further and US soft power has weakened with it.

### EXITEERS

There are a range of ideologically diverse diplomats at the UN HQ who argue for an early exit for Guterres, but they would struggle to agree on a plan, let alone fall in meekly behind the US. Some UN diplomats complain about still empty offices with most UN staffers coming only two days a week after they had asked Guterres to ensure a minimum of four days a week was standard.

Other grumbles relate to the Secretary-General's schedule. 'He travels a lot but never to places where he should have been meeting the protagonists of the countries in conflict to play his role as mediator. Look how long it took for him to get to **Ukraine**. For **Gaza**, it's worse. All he does is to deplore or be deeply concerned by the massacres and human rights violations,' argues a South American diplomat.

Guterres's efforts to restructure the UN system are the latest target for his foes. Many doubt that the plans to merge some of the major agencies are the optimal solution; others question that the plans will be seen through.

In 2018, sweeping reforms of the UN system were announced but they didn't see the light of day.

Some of his opponents seek to scapegoat him as the author of an unworkable reorganisation plan; others characterise him as a puppet for faceless bureaucrats wanting to remake the UN according to principles learned at a US business school. The fever pitch in the UN reflect grave worries among staffers about their future: some of the agencies are facing merger or dissolution; all of them facing sharp cuts in staffing and budgets.

Senior diplomats debate whether the proposal, by Guterres's high-level panel, to sack a fifth of the UN's staff is to appease the Trump administration, save money, or both. From our informal soundings, Guterres may struggle to convince the regional blocs of the wisdom of the restructuring plan. 'When you read his proposals for changing the UN, what's missing is any vision,' an African ambassador told us.

### CALL FOR RETHINK

Instead of backing Guterres's last-ditch efforts to restructure the UN along new managerial lines, many diplomats argue for a more holistic approach to rethink the entire system: what should be publicly funded and what could be privately funded.

'It's time for another Bretton Woods moment,' a West African diplomat told *Africa Confidential*. 'We have to make the same sort of leap we did in 1945 – to go from the era of League of Nations with its fading empires to the era of the United Nations with its institutions to manage decolonisation and the creation

## THE DIPLOMATS AND BUREAUCRATS ANSWER BACK

**Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General, Department of Peace Operations**

'What is interesting to see is that the agreement on the summit of the future [last year] was made thanks to the Africans. The moment when there was a risk of slippage was when the Russians wanted to introduce amendments. It is clear that the Russians did not understand that many of the issues in the draft were important for Africans – for the South in general – but more specifically for Africans. The fact is that the Africans united and demanded that the Russian amendments not be examined.

'It's easy to be cynical and say that nothing will happen. But what could the Secretary-General have done? He said it, he has the power of speech and the power to persuade; he brought together member states, and he managed to obtain a document conveying some rather innovative messages on these issues, in a context where everyone was saying there was not the slightest chance of seeing this document come to fruition.'

### A Western diplomat

'If there is no reform, everyone is beginning to agree – well, maybe not all states, but a vast majority – that the UN has an acceptability problem. Clearly, this hurts us. Opening the Council to more permanent members does not mean that the Council will be more united and that there will be fewer divisions. Opening up to more permanent members will not create more consensus. Those who say so are wrong. The question to ask is this: do we want a system perceived by states as more representative of today's world, or are we going to let the Security Council deteriorate? In the long run, the system can still survive as it is now; however, if this continues for another 10, 30, or 50 years without any change, something else will be put in place or... nothing at all, which will be even worse. The two issues are Africa, which, as we know, has a problem of representation within the Council. The other is India, whose economic growth is phenomenal. What does it mean for a country like India to accept or continue to accept an outdated system, which does not take into account this enormous power?'

*[Some say there are too many seats allocated to Europeans and that there should be only one rotating European seat. Is that realistic?]*

'It's impossible. Reforming the Council is already complicated. For countries with permanent member status to agree to give it up... it would be more likely that a consensual alternative scenario would be put in place, but I don't think the necessary conditions are in place today for such a consensual alternative system.

'Not all the permanent members are on board yet. Russia and China are conservative on the subject. They know that Africa is vying for two permanent seats, but they also know that Japan and India are in the running.' ●

of over 50 states'. Many sympathise with that argument but fear the rising hostility to multilateralism would reject any imaginative proposals.

There is a type of third way position, shared by some senior UN officials in New York, which argues that the Guterres reform proposals could kick start a gradualist transformation of the UN. 'The UN should be rethought... it would be a good idea to review the UN system as a whole and refocus on what is done at headquarters and to review the way agencies operate. The UNDP [UN Development Programme], for example, [often] only works with consultants, whose costs are much higher than if they were full-time employees,' says a senior UN staffer.

Sounding alarms about the effects of the reform ideas, another UN staffer warned that mass redundancies in a short timeframe would be extremely costly and the cost benefits of moving agencies from New York and Geneva, two of the world's most expensive cities, would take years to work through the system.

Some of those predicting radical change argue that several agencies and mandates will wither on the vine because of the lack of states willing to fund them. It is clear that the European Union will pick up only a limited amount of slack as the US turns off the funding tap. The intentions of fast-rising funders – China and the Gulf States – are less clear: they see the value of a strong multilateral system to pursue national interests but they are also used to nurturing bilateral relations.

Some see the prospect of a big multilateral institution – which attempts to manage economic, security and diplomatic disputes – as an inevitable feature of an international system, even one as dysfunctional as the one we currently have.

### VETOING REFORM

Serious reform of the UN will mean the old world states giving up power but none look ready to accept that: 'The structure provided by the Charter corresponds to any governance structure. The problem, as we know, is the veto. But how do we get rid of it? How do we build a UN in which there is a Security Council without a veto? If we do, we won't have the Americans or the Chinese... It's not possible,' says a European diplomat.

Behind the scenes, others are strategising for an early departure by Guterres. Nigeria's Amina Mohamed, his deputy, would expect to become an interim leader, but that is far from certain. According to the UN legal office, the Security Council chooses another Secretary-General as soon as the position

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is vacant. And that selection would then have to be endorsed by the General

Assembly. Given what's at stake for the future of the UN, that might take a lot of

lobbying by Nigeria's activist mission to the UN Headquarters in New York. ●

## UGANDA

# Muhoozi attacks regime insiders

**As the president seeks to build bridges ahead of 2026 elections, his son is throwing online bombs at powerful figures**

**S**ocial media attacks on rivals by General Muhoozi Kainerugaba, the president's son and head of Uganda's military, are widening divisions in the ruling family. Over the past few years, Muhoozi has used Twitter/X to intimidate opposition critics, but more recently he has been attacking members of the first family and their allies. This is deepening divisions at the palace and in the ruling party, undermining 80-year-old President Yoweri Museveni's hold on power ahead of elections next year.

While the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) has not confirmed Museveni as its flagbearer, senior figures in the party decided on that strategy last year to end speculation that his outspoken son was going to succeed him. Since the beginning of the year, Museveni has been traversing the country, canvassing support. The tour has been disguised as an evaluation of a poverty alleviation programme known as the Parish Development Model.

Museveni is physically more frail but his handlers try to ensure he keeps ahead of the opposition. A plan has been hatched to amend the constitution so the president is no longer directly elected but instead chosen, like a prime minister, by the party with a parliamentary majority. The NRM has consistently secured a large majority in polls and there is no indication it will be any different in 2026. Museveni would thus be saved a bruising campaign in which his competitors would hope to take advantage of widespread anger at regime corruption and its brutal repression of young dissidents.

Museveni's main challenger during the last polls, **Kyagulanyi Sentamu**, the popular 43-year-old singer known as **Bob Wine**, will be running again. The security establishment led by Muhoozi has vandalised his party headquarters and detained and assaulted key members of his team, but that has not forced him out of the race. Given that many victims of this brutality are from Buganda, the heartland of opposition support, Muhoozi's boasting about his repression of his rivals has only increased opposition to Museveni in the region.

On 25 May at Kololo grounds in Kampala, Museveni and his wife apologised to the people of Buganda, and Uganda at large. Most of the family is busy mending fences and trying to bring onboard different constituencies ahead of the elections, Muhoozi's X activity has continued to be divisive.

On the same day as the Kololo apology, he took to X and threatened ex-spy chief **David Pulkol**, who is close to the president's brother, **Kaleb Akandwanaho**, known as General **Salim Saleh**, an influential advisor to Museveni. 'There is a habitual traitor called Pulkol who dared to speak against me the other day. That betrayer of our late big brother Brig. **Noble Mayombo** will have nowhere to hide,' he tweeted.

That troubled many. Mayombo rose through the ranks to head Uganda's military intelligence and serve as Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Defence before he suddenly died of acute pancreatitis in May 2007 at the age of 42, sparking speculation he had been poisoned. Since then, his death has remained a major political issue. It appeared odd that Muhoozi was using it to target Saleh's ally. The threat was in response to comments made by Pulkol at a meeting in Gulu on 21 May between ambassadors of European Union states and Saleh and his staff. 'Even if it is our struggle, we have no right to oppress our people or to torture them,' Pulkol said in reference to Muhoozi, who has bragged about torturing NUP members in his basement.

### TORTURE TWEET

Early this year, security operatives detained **Eddie Mutwe**, a bodyguard of Wine's. Amid concerns Mutwe had been disappeared, Muhoozi tweeted that Mutwe was being tortured in his basement before adding in a series of other tweets that the singer would receive even worse treatment. Diplomats travelled to meet Saleh to discuss these concerns.

Key members of Muhoozi's pressure group, the Patriotic League of Uganda (PLU) – including Director of External Affairs **Michael Katungi**, Director

of Mobilisation **Michael Mawanda**, and Minister of State for Youth and Children's Affairs and Vice Chairman of PLU Western Uganda **Balaam Barugahara Ateenyi** – jumped on his tweet and hurled more insults and threats at Pulkol.

But some of Muhoozi's supporters also called on him to retract his statements, noting that Pulkol wasn't at the meeting on his own behalf but in service of Saleh. Others felt that Pulkol had voiced what Saleh couldn't say himself – that Muhoozi's behaviour was unacceptable. At the same meeting, *Africa Confidential* heard, Saleh revealed that other members of the first family including his brother-in-law, **German national Hilmar Froelich**, husband to their only sister, **Violet Kajubiri**, had also repeatedly complained about Muhoozi's online outbursts.

While his official designation is chief coordinator of Operation Wealth Creation (OWC), Saleh is considered the de facto number two and a contender to succeed his brother. Saleh is President Museveni's chief political mobiliser.

Pulkol, who is Principal Technical Advisor to Saleh, is part of a group who previously worked for key security institutions and are influential in their communities. Another officer at the Gulu meeting was Lieutenant General **Philip Idro**, Principal Advisor to Saleh. Both are prominent figures in northern Uganda, an important voting block for the ruling party.

Facing growing opposition in central Uganda, the ruling party has been keen to co-opt northern elites like Pulkol, Idro and **Norbert Mao**, the president of the Democratic Party, who was appointed Justice Minister in 2022, as part of a campaign to corral support in the north in 2026 and beyond. Saleh has campaigned in this region for this same purpose.

Others believe Muhoozi attacked Pulkol to project his growing power. They believe that while Museveni may prefer to be succeeded by his son, he must be careful not to sideline Saleh, who is known to enjoy the respect of different constituencies including veterans, sections of the army and ethnic leaders such as Pulkol.

Days after the 25 May tweet, Muhoozi apologised to Saleh and halted his attacks against his allies. But Saleh is not the only member of the first family at the centre of tensions with Muhoozi. He has also been bickering with his brother-in-law, **Odrek Rwabwogo**, who also wants the job and is building

## EUROPEAN DIPLOMATS CAUGHT IN POLITICAL CROSSFIRE

It took an apology from President **Yoweri Museveni's** brother **Kaleb Akandwanaho** aka General **Salim Saleh** and intervention by State House and the Foreign Affairs Ministry to defuse a spat between General **Muhoozi Kainerugaba** and European diplomats in May. The incident started following a visit by diplomats to the offices of the National Unity Platform (NUP), which Muhoozi described as an 'abomination'. Muhoozi threatened to expel one of the diplomats and leaders of his pressure group, the Patriotic League of Uganda (PLU), threatened to hold a procession at the **Germany** Embassy in Kampala in protest against Ambassador **Mathias Schauer**. 'We are having some issues with the current German Ambassador to Uganda... He is wholly unqualified to be in Uganda,' Muhoozi posted on X on 25 May.

Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) Spokesperson **Chris Magezi** then posted that it had cancelled military cooperation with Germany. *Africa Confidential* confirmed that he was bluffing as there isn't any such cooperation.

Schauer's 'crime' was calling on Saleh speak up against Muhoozi. 'We are worried about the reputational damage that this is causing this country,' said Schauer at a 21 May meeting of ambassadors at Saleh's home in Gulu city. While Saleh admitted that others had raised concerns about Muhoozi, he said he couldn't control his nephew's X activity. But one of Saleh's advisors, **David Pulkol**, said what Muhoozi was doing was unacceptable. Muhoozi attacked him online later that week.

The only person in Muhoozi's corner was **Andrew Mwenda**, the PLU spokesperson, who accused the diplomats of interfering in Uganda's internal affairs and wondered why they didn't believe that Africans could struggle for these values. 'Even if it is our struggle, we have no right to oppress our people or to torture them,' Pulkol responded, referencing Muhoozi's abuses.

His violations had been the cause of the fiasco. Concerned about Muhoozi's revelations NUP members were tortured in his basement, EU diplomats visited the party's offices to express solidarity. Muhoozi responded in a post on 15 May: 'This is an Abomination! @EuinUG is really playing with fire'.

It's not the first time Muhoozi has targeted diplomats. Last year, he accused **United States** Ambassador **William Popp** of undiplomatic behaviour and threatened to expel him. The situation forced US Foreign Relations Committee chair **Ben Cardin** to state that 'any further confrontation will be very problematic and met with a serious response'. ●

a constituency. Together with his wife, **Patience Rwabwogo**, they mobilised religious leaders and hundreds of followers for national prayers at Kololo from 19–24 May. On the first day, the Presidential Advisory Committee on Exports and Industrial Development, which is led by Rwabwogo, held a men-only day to discuss issues affecting men

at home, in business and in leadership.

'If salvation was the medicine that you found in the home, do not reintroduce Bachwezi,' said Rwabwogo in what many interpreted as a veiled attack against Muhoozi, who regularly claims to be a descendant of the Bachwezi, said to be ancestors of certain ethnic groups that spread across the

Great Lakes region. 'Any attack on the Bachwezi is a direct attack on God and on us,' immediately responded an account named after Muhoozi, the Muhoozi Kainerugaba Parody, which usually issues the same tweets as his main account. As usual, other Muhoozi supporters then started hurling insults against his latest target. ●

## MALI

# Jihadists hit harder as junta loses focus

## A surge in attacks on army bases leaves security forces overstretched and civilians more vulnerable

**G**rim casualty figures from recent insurgent attacks on army garrisons across central and northern Mali have exposed the cost of junta leader, General **Assimi Goïta's** decision to reject the 2015 Algiers peace accord and to redirect military efforts towards fighting secular Tuareg separatists of the *Front de libération de l'Azawad* (FLA) (AC Vol 56 No 13 & Vol 64 No 4).

The junta's strategic decision in 2023 to restart the northern war – settled a decade earlier – has diverted resources from defending against Islamist militants such as *Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimeen* (JNIM) and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS). Military positions and civilian communities across central Mali have been left desperately vulnerable.

After killing around 40 soldiers in a 23 May raid on the Dioura armed forces base, JNIM claims to have killed more than 100 in an attack on Boulikessi on 1 June, capturing 22 more. The next day, militants launched another raid on Timbuktu, targeting the airport and military outposts.

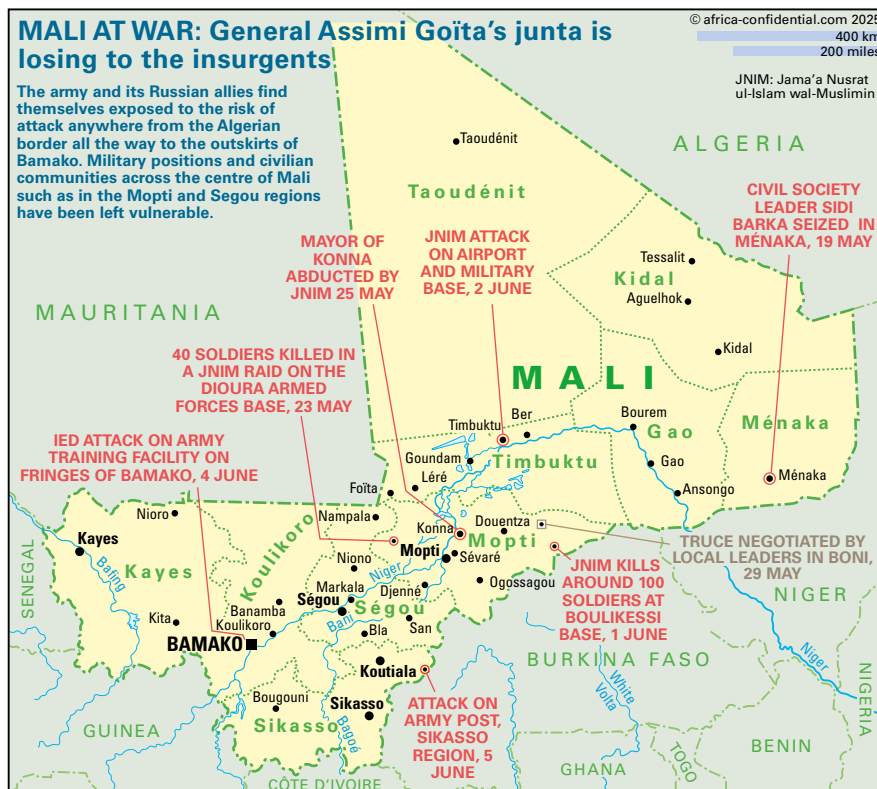
Communities without army protection, particularly in Mopti and Ségou regions, have little choice but to accept JNIM's terms in exchange for security. These include sharia (Islamic law), strict Islamic dress codes, taxation, and the closure of schools – frequently with the unspoken consent of army commanders unable or unwilling to intervene. Senior government figures are believed to have approved a 29 May truce negotiated by local leaders in Boni, to protect their town from persecution

by both jihadists and state security forces.

Communities that defy jihadist demands face intimidation, assassinations and abductions of local leaders. Even areas with army or **Russian** garrisons are not spared: **Sidi Barka**, leader of civil society groups in Ménaka, was kidnapped after mosque prayers on 19 May, while the mayor of Konna, east of Mopti, was abducted on 25 May. We hear this is due to JNIM's dissatisfaction with a local truce agreed last year.

Villagers are attacked from both sides. Peulh (Fulani) communities are targeted by the army and Russian forces; JNIM enforces blockades at gunpoint to force compliance. Russia's Wagner Group, founded by **Yevgeny Prigozhin** and now run by his son **Pavel**, says it's leaving Mali; its claims to have secured all regional centres is widely disputed. It hasn't specified what equipment and materiel it might leave in Mali.

The Africa Corps – created by the Russian defence ministry and answerable to military intelligence GRU and largely composed of former Wagner fighters – is staying put and may expand operations, given the insurgents are in the ascendant at the moment.



powerful echoes. A jihadist assault on that same base in September 2019 killed dozens of soldiers, triggering a wave of raids on Malian and Nigérien garrisons in the following months. France also lost 13 troops in one incident. Amid heavy casualties, Sahelian governments and France were forced to rethink strategy and increase troop deployments.

Almost six years on, the crisis has intensified.

To the Bamako regime, which maintains a sovereigntist stance, the situation has improved in one crucial respect: it has reasserted central government control over Kidal, effectively sweeping aside the Azawad Tuareg separatist cause. But the cost has been high. The army and its Russian allies are exposed to attack from the Algerian border to the outskirts of Bamako.

For civilians, the toll is equally severe. Many northern Tuareg have been alienated, with Azawad sympathisers often fleeing to Algeria or Mauritania. Widespread insecurity continues to paralyse daily life across the more densely populated central regions.

Village leaders warn that militant intimidation is preventing them from preparing their fields for the crucial rainy planting season about to begin. If this farming window is missed, there will be no main food crop to harvest between September and November, leaving villagers without sustenance for the year.

However, the *Collectif pour la défense des droits du peuple de l'Azawad/Nord-Mali* (CD-DPA) claims most human rights abuses are committed not by militants, but by the army, the *Forces Armées Maliennes* and its Russian allies.

Although not a neutral source – CD-DPA leader Boubacar Ould Hamadi previously chaired the Timbuktu regional authority under the Algiers

Both Wagner and the Africa Corps in Africa are under the purview of General Yunus-Bek Bamatgireyevich Yevkurov, a veteran GRU officer who is seen as Russian President Vladimir Putin's point man on military affairs in Africa (AC Vol 66 No 1).

Few would claim the security situation has improved compared with the conditions when Wagner first arrived, in late 2021. ISGS forces concentrate operations in Ménaka but JNIM is expanding its reach. Probing into the once-peaceful west, JNIM attacked Bamako airport and a gendarmerie training school last September (AC Vol 66 No 3). This month it raided a military position in Mamaribougou, on the

capital's outskirts, and launched another attack near Sikasso, in the far south.

Wagner's claim of retaking provincial capitals is a euphemistic reference to its role in re-establishing central government control over Kidal, in the desert north – previously the headquarters of the Cadre, the northern armed groups that had signed up to the 2015 Algiers accord.

But the government's disavowal of the peace deal has driven many Cadre fighters into the desert, while their movement has rebranded as the FLA and resumed its armed struggle for an independent Azawad.

The death toll from JNIM's attack on Bouliekessi military base carries

## JUNTA CRUSHES POLITICAL BUT NOT ARMED OPPONENTS

Violence and fragmentation across central and northern Mali coincide with renewed political tensions in Bamako, triggered by General Assimi Goïta's 13 May ban on political parties – supposedly in preparation for a future electoral process strictly on the regime's terms (Dispatches 12/5/25).

The ban sparked a brief mass protest, swiftly curbed by extra-judicial detentions. Discontent with the junta's rule is growing, Goïta speaks out less, and turnout at pro-regime rallies is declining. On 19 May, prominent intellectuals, academics, former officials and technocrats issued a public appeal to defend the republic, freedoms and rights.

Exiled in Algiers, Imam Mahmoud Dicko – the regime's most charismatic opponent – has deepened government mistrust of Mali's northern neighbour, already accused of sheltering jihadist and separatist fighters near its Saharan border. When rumours spread of Dicko's possible return, authorities deployed 1,000 security personnel across Bamako.

The regime's repeated detentions of political figures – Alassane Abba and Abdoul Karim Traoré of the Codem party and Jigiya Kura movement, and El Bachir Thiam of the Yelema party – alongside the trial of former finance minister Bouaré Fily Sissoko over an 11-year-old corruption charge, despite her poor health, suggest growing insecurity within the leadership (AC Vol 60 No 18 & Vol 56 No 20).

The crackdown deters dissent. Former prime minister Moussa Mara keeps a low profile, avoiding controversy. More outspoken is Hosseini Amion Guindo, leader of Codem and Jigiya Kura, calling for hiding for a 'third way' to free Mali from military rule and extremist Islamism. ●

accord – its critique concurs with some reports from Human Rights Watch and the now-disbanded UN peacekeeping force Minusma (AC Vol 58 No 7).

Regime abuses help JNIM position itself as a defender of the people. And it seems to be gaining support and moving towards a partnership with the FLA. The FLA demands jihadists sever ties with

*Al Qaida*, just as Syria's *Hay'at Tahrir al Sham* (HTS) did after taking power. This shift appears under way – JNIM communiqués are no longer signed by *Al Qaida*, and in a recent interview with France24 journalist **Wassim Nasr**, the group's ideological leader **Amadou Koufa** dodged related questions.

Under pressure from French and

West African forces, Tuareg separatists abandoned jihadist allies and joined the peace process, leading to the 2015 Algiers accord. By rejecting the agreement and allowing army and Wagner abuses, Goïta has given separatists grounds to accuse government forces of terrorism and helped JNIM rebrand itself as a patriotic Malian equivalent of HTS. ●

MALAWI

## Chakwera in trouble as election looms

**The IMF cancelled its programme in May, topping a bad news week for the president as the opposition looks confidently at September's poll**

The breach between the International Monetary Fund and the government over the ending of the US\$175 million Extended Credit Facility (ECF) halfway through its economic reform programme could work against President **Lazarus Chakwera's** chances of success in the general election in September.

The government has played the breach as a 'necessary decision' of its own rather than blame the condition of the economy on the IMF, despite the unpopularity of the austerity measures and high inflation.

While Lilongwe claimed authorship of the breach on 15 May, the Fund insisted that all ECF programmes come

to an automatic end if there has been no economic review in 18 months, which there hasn't.

The Fund added that the administration's failure to make progress on rescheduling its external debt and 'lack of fiscal discipline' were responsible.

In media interviews Finance Minister **Simplex Chithyola Banda** complained about the inability to build reserves, as required by the IMF, when fuel prices were so high and other 'social demands' prevented it from reducing public spending.

The ECF programme began in November 2023 and was supposed to last three years. So far, the kwacha has devalued by 44% and prices have quadrupled. Only one disbursement of \$35m had been made in the life of the programme.

President Chakwera earlier said he was 'a doctor working in surgery' to cure economic stagnation, but there has been no sign of an economic turnaround.

The loss of the ECF is disastrous for credit and investment as the IMF imprimatur is vital to unlock funds and loans to the government.

### PUBLIC CHEERS US VISA DENIALS TO OFFICIALS

The **United States** government garnered some unexpected kudos with the Malawian public when it denied 39 of the 43 visa applications it had received from government officials to travel to the US for the World Bank spring meetings in April. The officials were as angry as the general public was happy.

Extensive travel abroad, and at home, by members of the government in huge motorcades and delegations to foreign meetings often seen as unnecessary by the public have long been a bugbear with the citizenry and it reacted joyfully to the US move (AC Vol 63 No 12).

US officials, breaking a tradition of discretion, openly questioned the rights of visa applicants to attend the World Bank meetings, the main reason cited on their applications. What business did traditional leaders, spouses of delegates and relations of senior government officials have at the meetings, they suggested?

The US ambassador in Lilongwe, **Amy Diaz**, said about 10% of Malawi diplomatic passport holders and visa holders overstay. Some of them had previously unsuccessfully applied for asylum or worked illegally in the US.

The government reacted angrily, expressing 'deep concerns' over rejection rates, but insiders in the foreign ministry told *Africa Confidential* it was only high-ranking politicians who were upset.

The only four visas that were issued went to Minister of Finance **Simplex Chithyola Banda**, Secretary to the Treasury **Betchani Tchereni**, Reserve Bank Governor **Mafuta Mwale**, and Malawi Revenue Authority Commissioner-General **Daniel Daka**.

Earlier in the year, the US had placed Malawi on its 'yellow list' over concerns about passport security.

It emerged two years ago that **Nigerian** businessman **Dozy Mmobuosi**, who was reportedly convicted of fraud in the US, had been issued a Malawian diplomatic passport hours after applying. He had just pledged to help finance a housing project for people made homeless by Cyclone Freddy.

In April this year the passport was revoked, with the ministry claiming 'administrative error'. Insiders say that Malawi had no intention of revoking the passport until it was put on the 'yellow list'.

The case infuriated the public, many of whom experience lengthy delays applying for passports and claim they have to bribe passport officials to get them in time. ●

### POLITICAL VIOLENCE

The main opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) leapt on the failure of the ECF, and its leader, ex-President **Peter Mutharika**, said Chakwera 'hears and knows nothing', as he also complained about the state using violence against the opposition.

DPP Vice-President **Alfred Gangata's** convoy was ambushed by thugs suspected of belonging to the ruling Malawi Congress Party on 11 May at Mponela, 60 kilometres north of Lilongwe, and one vehicle was set on fire, the party said.

The DPP claims the police were alerted but did nothing in what they say is a pattern of police standing by while machete-wielding youths attack anti-government protestors. So far, the president has not responded to the accusations.

Pundits say MCP violence, once notorious under the rule of President **Hastings Banda**, used only to be meted on opposition figures addressing rallies in areas the ruling party considered its own strongholds in the Central

Region, but now it is rearing its head during the primaries, where MCP members compete for the right to stand as candidates for parliament and local councils.

Violence of this type has broken out in at least 14 constituencies. The most high-profile of them is in the Mzimba Central parliamentary constituency where President Chakwera's advisor **Adamson Mkandawire** is vying for the MCP candidacy with the popular youthful Trade Minister **Vitumbiko Mumba**.

In Dowa Ngala constituency, the president's brother **Elias Chakwera**, the party's Director of Elections, is contesting the party nomination with **Arthur Sungitsa**, who beat him in 2019.

#### QUICK TOUR

Elected on a wave of enthusiasm for a new broom in June 2020, President Chakwera and his Vice-President **Michael Usi** now prefer to travel in their convoy at high speed with heavy security, in sharp contrast to presidential candidates **Mutharika** and ex-President **Joyce Banda**, both of whose convoys move slowly as adoring supporters mob

their cars.

The president has abandoned rallies and has been busing hundreds of chiefs, religious leaders and market traders to State House where cash ranging from 50,000 to 200,000 kwacha (\$29-\$114) is disbursed to the attendees in an attempt to swing voters.

**Mutharika** has experienced a strong revival in his fortunes since the dark days when his narrow victory over Chakwera in 2019 was annulled by the High Court and a new election held in 2020 in which Chakwera triumphed (AC Vol 60 No 11 & Vol 61 No 3).

Although he will be 85 by polling day, **Mutharika** is scoring well in opinion polls and campaigning confidently under the slogan 'return to proven leadership' (AC Vol 64 No 12). People's Party leader **Joyce Banda** is also campaigning on her reputation as a former president, while the United Transformation Movement candidate, former Reserve Bank of Malawi Governor **Dalitso Kabambe**, is claiming personal credit for what is seen as a period of economic stability under **Mutharika** (AC Vol 65 No 19).

All the presidents have suffered reputational damage from corruption,

but Chakwera seems to be the one most associated with graft because it is so recent. Talking to the BBC, **Chithyola Banda** admitted, 'Many people have been involved in corruption. But I would assure you that not all politicians are corrupt.'

The president needs 50%+1 of those voting to win on the first ballot. So far at least 7.2 million voters have registered, according to the initial data from the Malawi Electoral Commission.

The Tonse Alliance, which allied the MCP with the UTM to beat the DPP in the 2020 election, broke up after the death of Vice-President **Saulos Chilima** in a plane crash when both the UTM and Banda's PP pulled out (AC Vol 65 No 19). It is unlikely the MCP can find another major coalition partner for September.

Opinion polls put the MCP at around 25% of the vote and the DPP at 43%, with the UTM on 11% and the PP at 6%.

The opposition is still opposing the use of Smartmatic Electoral Management Devices by the MEC, insisting that they can be used to rig the poll in the MCP's favour, which both the commission and Smartmatic deny (AC Vol 66 No 1). ●

## MALAWI/UNITED KINGDOM

# \$50m corruption trial rocks Lilongwe

**Zuneth Sattar goes to court in London accused of bribing Malawi's top officials, but neither they nor he face prosecution back home**

**P**reliminary hearings have begun in the trial for bribery of Malawian/British business owner and Malawi government contractor **Zuneth Sattar**, 44, who is charged with 18 counts of bribing officials from the Vice-President to the bosses of the army, the police, public procurement, and state prosecutors to win contracts worth over US\$50 million between December 2020 and September 2021.

Yet neither Sattar nor the Malawians he is accused of bribing face any prospect of prosecution in Malawi itself. Evidence and items seized by the state in previous investigations in Malawi have been returned, sources in Lilongwe told *Africa Confidential*.

The Sattar investigation started as a joint enterprise between Malawi's crusading Anti-Corruption Bureau Director **Martha Chizuma** and the International Corruption Unit of the UK's National Crime Agency, which first arrested him in October 2021 and raided his premises in the English city of Leicester while the ACB raided his

premises in Malawi.

Much of the evidence that the Crown Prosecution Service will present consists of transcripts of audio surveillance devices placed in Sattar's offices in 2020 and 2021 and documents secretly examined when they planted the bugs.

In 2022 Sattar and his Malawian associates and the alleged bribe-takers were accused, arrested, and indicted in Malawi over dozens of allegedly corrupt contracts predating the ones in the British charges, but Sattar has faced no legal action there since Chizuma's term of office ended in May 2024 (AC Vol 65 No 13).

Chizuma experienced a fierce backlash from the ruling elite after arresting prominent figures, including Vice-President **Saulos Chilima**, and bribery prosecutions tailed off after the government starved her office of funds.

The charges against **Chilima**, who had been accused of receiving \$280,000 from Sattar, were dropped in Malawi in May 2024 (AC Vol 65 No 10). He died

with nine others in a plane crash a month later (AC Vol 65 No 19).

Many more bribes for contracts worth tens of millions of dollars more are believed to have been paid, according to investigative journalists in Malawi and *Africa Confidential's* reports over the past three years (AC Vol 63 No 3).

In April last year, most of the alleged bribe-takers were banned from entry into the United States because they 'abused their public positions by accepting bribes and other articles of value', a statement from the State Department said.

The officials named in the charges against Sattar and by the US State Department as recipients of the bribes include: **Chilima**, President **Lazarus Chakwera's** chief of staff **Prince Harvey Kapondamgaga** (still serving), the Inspector-General of Police **George Kainja**, lawyer for the Malawi police **Mwambi Kaluba**, Chizuma's predecessor at the ACB **Reyneck Matemba**, public procurement boss **John Suzi Banda**, **Dan Kuwali**, head of legal at the Malawi Defence Force (still serving) and three others.

The British anti-corruption lobbying group Spotlight on Corruption, partnering with the Malawi human rights NGO Youth and Society, estimated that the total value of the contracts awarded to Sattar's companies in the period covered by the charges exceeds \$79m and that Sattar incurred \$25m in costs,

making a gross profit of \$53m.

The price he charged the Malawi government was often three times higher than what he paid the supplier. The items included ration-packs and water cannon for the police, and 32 United Arab Emirates-made armoured cars for the army.

If Sattar is convicted and the Crown seeks to recover funds from him under the Proceeds of Crime Act, ways should be found to use the money for the benefit of the people of Malawi, the NGOs said.

Sattar has previously denied all the charges. He was given conditional bail at a hearing in London on 31 May with a surety of £2m and ordered not to leave the country or visit any place where

international travel is possible.

#### SON OF CASHGATE

Sattar's name came up in the investigation of the notorious Cashgate scandal in a report by auditors Baker-Tilly covering six months in 2013. Over \$30m in public funds were stolen by civil servants and politicians in a long-running scam over several presidential administrations (AC Vol 62 No 25).

The companies Sattar was then linked with, Top Prima and Rummage Pace, were listed in the report as the largest beneficiaries of corrupt contracts but he was not prosecuted (AC Vol 54 No 24).

The prosecution in the current case,

which put Sattar's estimated personal net at 'several tens of millions of pounds', said that in most cases involving wealthy individuals who frequently travel, being remanded to prison until the trial is over would have been the normal course.

But Sattar fell down a staircase at his Leicester home in January 2023 and suffered a serious brain injury, which has made it difficult, but not impossible, for him to follow court proceedings without help, according to doctors hired by both defence and prosecution.

This is believed to have influenced the judge to allow him to stay at home while on remand. The CPS did not object. Hearings are set to resume at Southwark Crown Court on 26 June. ●

## ZIMBABWE/WORLD BANK/IMF

# Talks on \$21 billion debt could inch ahead

**IMF officials are due to rule on programme this month opening the prospect of serious negotiations with creditors**

**F**inance Minister Mthuli Ncube may be about to notch up the first tangible success for six years in his quest to restructure Zimbabwe's US\$21 billion debt – persuading the International Monetary Fund to run a Staff Monitored Programme in the country despite rumbling criticism of grand corruption and brutal repression of dissidents.

The programme doesn't come with money, but it could persuade some rich creditor economies of the Harare government's seriousness on economic reform although it does nothing to change the politics. It may also boost Ncube's campaign to persuade 10 countries\* to offer some \$2.6bn in bridging finance which Harare could use to pay arrears to multilateral institutions, such as the World Bank and the African Development Bank (AfDB), and kickstart substantive debt restructuring negotiations.

Wojciech Maliszewski, who is leading an IMF mission in Zimbabwe in the week-ending 14 June, is mulling whether the country would qualify for the programme and will make a recommendation by the end of the month. After seeing President Emmerson Mnangagwa on 9 June, Maliszewski said the IMF ideally would like to see a merger of the official and parallel exchange rates for the local Zimbabwe Gold (ZiG) currency.

The gap between the two rates has narrowed sharply since the 43% of the ZiG last September. As Maliszewski was

speaking, the official ZiG rate was 29.9 to the US dollar; and the parallel rate hovered between 32/35 to the US dollar.

A bigger problem for Ncube is persuading more Zimbabweans to use the ZiG. About 80% of transactions are still in US dollars. Changing that is essential to establishing the ZiG as a sustainable currency and allowing price discovery.

Even if the IMF restarts a programme with Zimbabwe – the last one was suspended for governance reasons in 2019 – it's unlikely to trigger debt restructuring negotiations immediately. But it would build support for them, along with backing from the AfDB and Mozambique's former President Joaquim Chissano, if Zimbabwe gets the imprimatur from the fund.

Ncube is also promising compensation for white farmers who lost land during the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) in the early 2000s as proof of the Mnangagwa government's commitment to reform.

In April he announced that the government had paid US\$3.1 million in cash and issued \$307.9m in treasury bonds to the farmers. State-backed groups of war veterans and ruling-party loyalists had forcibly evicted mostly white farmers, railing against historical inequities in land ownership (AC Vol 61 No 8 & Vol 62 No 13).

State media is promoting the payments as proof of the government's commitment to compensation – one of the three key pillars of the AfDB-

led High-Level Structured Dialogue Platform on Arrears Clearance and Debt Resolution. Its three groups focus on economic growth and stability, governance, and land tenure and compensation.

The Compensation Steering Committee (CSC), which works in consultation with the Commercial Farmers' Union (CFU), has challenged the latest payments (AC Vol 58 No 23). On 15 April, the CSC argued the payments don't align with the Global Compensation Deed (GCD) signed in 2020, which committed \$3.5bn in compensation – half in cash that year, with the rest in annual instalments over four years.

Some 3,100 former landowners approved the GCD. But apart from \$20m paid to foreign landowners protected by pre-2000 Bilateral Investment Protection and Promotion Agreements, no payments were made.

In 2023, the government proposed 10-year Treasury Bills as compensation, but only 782 farmers accepted, and payments again failed to materialise. The April 2025 cash payments, which the government claims were legitimate, were not agreed with the new leadership of the CSC and reached just about 378 farmers.

The boards of the CSC and CFU (under chairman Andrew Pascoe) were sacked by members last year, accused of failing to represent farmers' interests in negotiations.

The new leadership of farmers' organisations – Liam Philp is the new CFU president – doesn't accept the latest offer. But government officials are still talking to Pascoe and members of the deposed board who say they accept the latest – despite losing the mandate of their members.

The use of treasury bonds for compensation worries economists and farmers. With Zimbabwe's vertiginous

debt, issuing more bonds risks further instability. The the bonds are US dollar-denominated but farmers who lost land 25 years ago say a long-term bond offers little benefit, given Zimbabwe's many defaults.

For the first time since FTLRP, the resettled farmers can now access formal title deeds. For 25 years, new farmers have held land under offer letters or 99-year leases, which provided no security of tenure or rights to transfer or sell land.

In October 2024, cabinet announced that land held under 99-year leases, offer letters, and permits will now be converted into bankable, transferable tenure documents. Land transfers will be restricted to indigenous Zimbabweans, with war veterans, women, and youth given priority. Farmers can process documents and payments at a one-stop centre in Harare.

Offering bankable tenure documents addresses some of the demands from the resettled farmers. Farmers with official land titles should, in theory, be less vulnerable to forced evictions or politicised land grabs.

The bankability of these documents may allow farmers to get investment. Banks should also have greater security on loans, as land can now serve as collateral. Previously, with no enforceable repayment mechanism, only about 20% of government-guaranteed loans were repaid.

Bankable documents improve loan repayment prospects but there are no safeguards to stop banks from exploiting subsistence farmers with unmanageable debt. The Land Tenure Implementation Committee claims the policy limits ownership to one farm per family but with no enforcement. The one-stop centre is selling land relatively cheaply – \$100-\$500 per hectare, depending on the region. This raises fears that wealthy or politically connected individuals could acquire large tracts, leaving resettled farmers without land.

## TAGWIREI ADDS LAND TO HIS GROWING PORTFOLIO

One of the greatest threats to the credibility of the **Emmerson Mnangagwa** government's land tenure plan is its politicisation. The Land Tenure Implementation Committee is chaired by **Kudakwashe Tagwirei**, an oligarch known as 'Queen Bee' for his influence across mining, fuel, and business sectors (AC Vol 66 No 7).

Tagwirei is seen by many to be Mnangagwa's choice as successor should he be unable to persuade the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front to grant him a third term. Last month, **Christopher Mutsvangwa**, spokesperson for ZANU-PF, warned the party would not tolerate businesspeople using it to pursue 'hidden agendas'.

Speaking in the wake of Tagwirei's nomination by ZANU-PF's Harare province branch to serve on the party's national Central Committee, it was evident who Mutsvangwa was targeting with his remarks.

Confirmation as a ZANU-PF Central Committee member would position Tagwirei, who is believed to handle much of the Mnangagwa family's fortune, strongly for the country's top job if he won the outgoing president's backing.

Last month, Tagwirei was the lead speaker at a youth empowerment event in Masvingo, entitled the Land Tenure Implementation Leadership Success Series Programme. Masvingo has been one of Mnangagwa's few political strongholds. Many saw the meeting as a political launch for Tagwirei, using land reform and tenure as his platform.

His role chairing the Implementation Committee is meant to ensure that the land allocated to the resettled farmers is backed by secure, bankable deeds. Its declared aim is 'to empower farmers' and unlock the value of farmland. That carries huge scope for patronage across the rural hinterland, the key voter base for ZANU-PF.

The first title deed handover took place in December at Mnangagwa's Precabe Farm in Kwekwe. The government insists the benefits are filtering through, but others are sceptical.

Five liberation war veterans, led by **Joseph Chinguwa** and represented by former finance minister, opposition leader, and human rights lawyer **Tendai Biti**, have filed a High Court challenge against the 2020 compensation deal. They argue that, since the Global Compensation Deed was privately negotiated and never passed by parliament, it is unconstitutional and cannot be enforced. At best, they say it is a cynical charade to convince creditors that Mnangagwa is pushing reforms and at worst its provisions for title deeds will exacerbate inequality, concentrating power in narrow land-owning class. The veterans add that there has been no credible explanation of how the compensation figure was determined. Chinguwa and his supporters state, 'Land was at the epicentre of our struggle... we are particularly concerned that \$3.5bn is being paid to farmers when we war veterans are dying and languishing in deep poverty.' ●

Concerns persist over the legal strength of the Zimbabwean title deeds amid politicised land takeovers. Others doubt the legitimacy of tenure guarantees for land which hasn't been acquired in conformity with regional

and international legal standards. ●

*\* The countries included Algeria, Brazil, Britain, China, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, South Africa and the United Arab Emirates.*

## AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK/AFRICAN UNION

# Ould Tah faces brutal realities

**The Bank's new leader will have to bridge the widening gap between the continent's ambitious goals and international economic turbulence**

**M**auritanian Sidi Ould Tah's strongest qualification for the African Development Bank (AfDB) presidency was not his nationality – though that may have helped secure votes from North

African shareholders, the bank's biggest borrowers – but his decade-long leadership of the *Banque Arabe pour le Développement Économique en Afrique* (BADEA) in Khartoum. His election on 26 May, winning 76.18% of votes in the

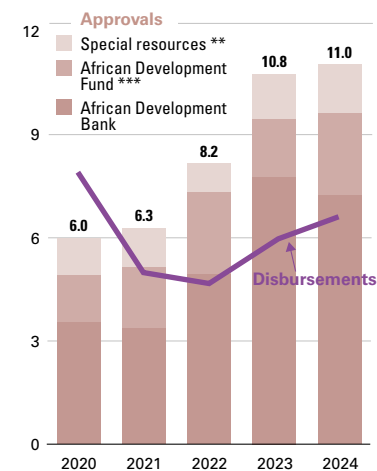
third round in Abidjan, aligned with the geopolitical moment.

Under Ould Tah, BADEA's assets grew by 75% to US\$7 billion, while non-performing loans fell from over 10% to just 0.5% of disbursements. His closest rival, Zambia's Samuel Maimbo, had a stronger quantitative record at the World Bank but was perceived as the 'western candidate' despite his efforts to highlight his Southern African credentials. For many of the AfDB shareholders, Ould Tah's greatest strength was his ability to foster financial ties between Africa and the Middle East.

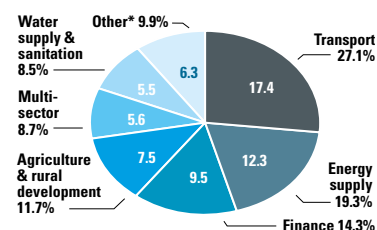
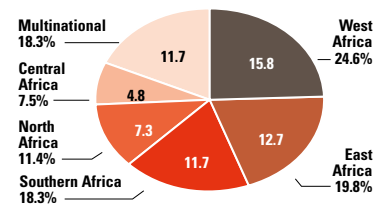
BADEA, owned by 18 Arab League

**AFDB: MORE CAPITAL SOUGHT TO BOOST FIREPOWER****AFDB FINANCING APPROVALS AND DISBURSEMENTS** \$ billions\*

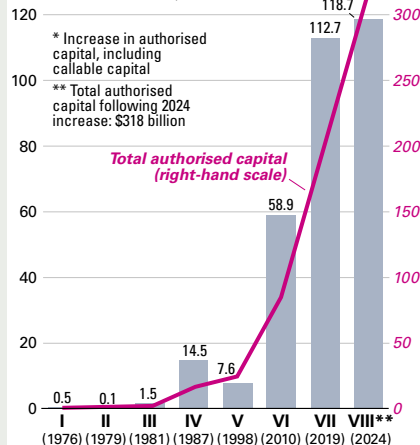
Including loans, grants, guarantees, other instruments

**FINANCIAL COMMITMENTS**

\$ billions\*\* (as at 31 December 2024)

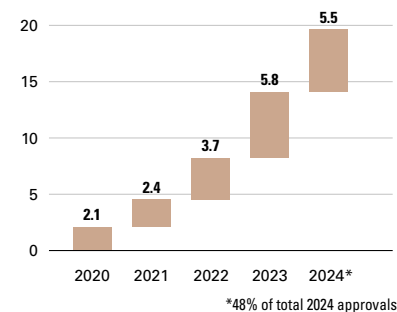
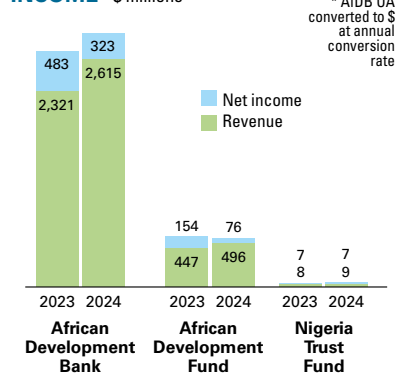
**By Sector****By Region**

Sources: African Development Bank Group

**AfDB'S GENERAL CAPITAL INCREASES\*** \$ billions**AFDB CLIMATE FINANCE PROGRESS**

Towards \$25 billion 2020-25 target

Financing approvals, \$ billions

**AFDB GROUP REVENUE AND NET INCOME** \$ millions\*

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food security, industrialisation, trade and transport integration and healthcare – is now set to be accelerated and scaled up (AC Vol 65 No 12).

Adesina asserts that over 400m Africans have benefited from AfDB initiatives during his tenure. However, critics argue that the 'High 5' agenda prioritises public relations over substantive impact (AC Vol 65 No 12).

The bank's final annual report under Adesina's presidency makes bold claims, including an over \$100bn capital increase approved by its Board of Governors, its 10-year strategy and major financing for wind power and transport projects in Egypt and South Africa. It also highlights its role in securing International Monetary Fund approval for the use of special drawing rights by the AfDB and other multilaterals to boost lending capacity.

Adesina's successor, Ould Tah, will oversee the proposed African Financial Stability Mechanism – modelled on the European Stability Mechanism – to lower borrowing costs through debt refinancing and potentially guarantees. However, many African treasuries, already under severe fiscal strain, may struggle to raise the billions needed to give the AFSM real impact.

Even if the bank's 'High 5' claims hold, its 2024 figures – under 1m people connected to electricity, 29m made food-secure, 3m benefiting from improved transport, and over 14m gaining better healthcare access – barely scratch the surface of Africa's needs. With the continent's population nearing 1.5bn, the AfDB estimates 60% face food insecurity, including 120m in acute crisis, while 600m lack reliable electricity.

The AfDB/World Bank 'Mission 300' aims to connect 300m Africans to electricity by 2030, backed by an \$18bn AfDB commitment, \$30bn-40bn pledged by the World Bank and hoped-for private sector investment. The plan prioritises renewable energy, including wind and solar, to expand Africa's energy mix.

Reflecting Adesina's assertive communication style, the AfDB's latest Development Effectiveness Review – released before this year's Annual Meetings – claims near-universal improvement over baselines, with the vast majority of key performance indicators meeting or exceeding targets. However, the bank is largely assessing its own progress. Only four areas officially fell short among more than 50 'High 5' indicators: power transmission losses, food insecurity, agricultural value-added, and intra-African trade.

The bank also reports a record \$11bn in lending approvals in 2024, nearly half of which is climate finance distributed through the AfDB and Climate

member states, was founded to channel oil wealth from the Middle East into African development projects. Shareholders now hope Ould Tah can scale up this model at the AfDB, attracting capital from Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

Akinwumi Adesina's second term as AfDB President ends in August, leaving \$318bn in authorised capital, an expanded loan portfolio, and moves towards innovative financing such as hybrid capital – first raised at \$750 million in January 2024 with a

5.75% coupon (AC Vol 66 No 11). Despite concerns that hybrid instruments could weaken the AfDB's triple-A rating, Fitch has maintained the AfDB's AAA rating and treated its hybrid capital issuance as equity.

Between 2016 and 2024, the bank claims to have approved over 60bn AfDB units of account in lending – approximately \$80bn – across five key areas outlined in its 2024-2033 10-year strategy, which sets the stage for Ould Tah's presidency. Adesina's 'High 5' agenda – focusing on electricity access,

Investment Funds. Of this, \$2.4bn is concessional lending via the African Development Fund (ADF), benefiting 37 low-income economies. Total disbursements for 2024 – both climate and non-climate – stand at \$6.6bn, around 60% of headline approvals.

The AfDB claims its \$25bn climate finance target for 2020-2025 was 78% met by the end of 2024, yet a significant funding gap for Africa's overall climate financing needs remains despite financing also made available from the IMF, World Bank and bilateral sources. Adesina has acknowledged the need for greater private sector investment, though concerns persist over the role of private capital in natural resources and climate financing.

The AfDB's innovations aim to have a multiplier effect, with a \$25bn replenishment target for the ADF, which is about a quarter of the World Bank's latest \$100bn replenishment, most of which comes from borrowing rather than direct World Bank member contributions.

Even if the AfDB meets its soft-loan fund target – almost three times the ADF's \$8.9bn replenishment announced in December 2022 – its strategic relations remain a challenge. A key priority is persuading the United States to reverse its planned \$555m funding cut to the ADF and AfDB, or to replace this loss – along with \$200m in likely reductions from other western shareholders – with funding from alternative sovereign sources (Dispatches 12/5/25). On this front, Ould Tah is well placed to tap Middle East financing, particularly from Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia.

Adesina has criticised high borrowing costs for African sovereigns and supports the African Credit Rating Agency (AfcRA), set to launch by the end of September and announce its first chief executive. It will be owned by commercial entities, with MCB Capital Markets in Mauritius coordinating key

## BATTLE IS JOINED FOR AFREXIMBANK

The fight over the status of Cairo-based African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank) – whether as a multilateral institution and preferred creditor or merely a commercial lender – is concentrating minds at the African Development Bank (AfDB), one of its lead investors.

Battle lines were drawn after **Ghana** and **Zambia**, both renegotiating their domestic and foreign debts, refused to recognise Afreximbank as a preferred creditor and announced plans to restructure their obligations to the institution (AC Vol 65 Nos 12 & 13). Ghana owes Afreximbank over US\$768 million, while Zambia owes \$45m. Zambia is applying the same treatment to its obligations to the Eastern and Southern African Trade and Development Bank (TDB). Officials in Accra and Lusaka overseeing the debt restructuring processes are insisting that Afreximbank and TDB accept haircuts alongside wholly commercial institutions.

This has now prompted Fitch Ratings to downgrade Afreximbank's debt to BBB-, one notch above junk status, on 4 June. The downgrade could affect the bank's operations and its ability to raise capital at competitive rates, while also raising questions for its backer. Around 64% of Afreximbank's capital is sourced from African governments and regional institutions such as the AfDB. However, Afreximbank does not disclose the breakdown of its shareholding structure.

The row carries both political and financial implications, with some at Afreximbank and TDB suggesting that western creditors have encouraged Ghanaian and Zambian officials to classify them as commercial lenders, thereby spreading the cost of debt restructuring.

Officials at the African Peer Review Mechanism, an affiliate of the African Union, have strongly rejected Fitch's downgrade of Afreximbank, arguing that it misclassified the bank's loans to Ghana and Zambia as 'non-performing'. According to AU officials, member states with equity in the bank have specific legal obligations to it – obligations that exceed those applied to market-based commercial loans. For now, Fitch, along with the governments of Ghana and Zambia, is holding its position. The dispute could further raise the cost of capital across Africa until it is resolved.

Afreximbank was established under the auspices of the AfDB in 1993, but relations between the two institutions have periodically come under strain. Three years ago, AfDB President **Akinwumi Adesina** rejected a proposal for Afreximbank to manage some of the 100 billion Special Drawing Rights (the equivalent of US\$146bn) – the IMF's reserve currency – that had been allocated to African institutions to counter the financial losses of the coronavirus pandemic on the continent.

But on the question of Afreximbank's preferred creditor status, the bank appears to have strong support from both the AfDB and the AU, given their stake in the institution. One of his first diplomatic assignments for new AfDB President **Sidi Ould Tah** may be to persuade the governments of Ghana and Zambia to reconsider their position on Afreximbank. ●

investors (AC Vol 66 No 4).

AfcRA's backers in the African Union in Addis Ababa insist it will be independent of governments to counter

concerns that it might inflate ratings for African economies. Initially, it will focus on local currency debt ratings, with its first reports due early next year. ●

## DISPATCHES

### NIGERIA

## Fortress Nigeria promises to buy local

9 June

### The government wants to build a border fence to keep out insurgents

Defence chiefs are preparing the ground for major changes on border security and domestic procurement. At a security

conference in Abuja in the week-ending 7 June, Chief of Staff General **Christopher Musa** became the first top official to propose the government should put up a border fence to protect it against Islamist militants and other insurgents attacking from neighbouring countries (AC Vol 65 No 24).

'Border management is very critical,' said Musa, adding that 'other countries, because of the level of insecurity they have, had to fence their borders'. He cited **Pakistan's** 1,350-kilometre (839 miles) fence with **Afghanistan** and

**Saudi Arabia's** 1,400km barrier with **Iraq** as successful precedents.

Nigeria borders **Niger**, **Cameroon**, **Benin** and **Chad**, which are all grappling with escalating militant campaigns across the Sahel. In 2024, the Sahel suffered 3,885 terrorism-related deaths, more than half of the world total, according to the Global Terrorism Index produced by the Australia-based Institute for Economics and Peace (AC Vol 66 No 6).

At the same time, Minister of Defence **Mohammed Badaru Abubakar**

revealed that Nigeria is steadily moving from dependence on foreign military equipment to local production, as part of efforts to 'boost efficiency and reduce reliance on imported hardware'. The Defence Industries Corporation of Nigeria Bill, which has just come into force, is also intended to transform Nigeria's defence capabilities.

## AFRICA

# China is seen as more reliable than the US in first Africa poll after Trump returns to Presidency

9 June

**Interviewees are frustrated with civilian governments but majority still favour democracy over military juntas**

Support for democracy across Africa appears to be ebbing due to falling governance standards, according to a new annual survey covering 39 African states by the Accra-based think tank Afrobarometer.

Among the 66% of Africans who told interviewers they prefer democracy to any other system, there is growing frustration with government performance in specific jurisdictions. Support for democracy has dropped by 29 points in **South Africa**, now a year into its first coalition government since the end of apartheid; and it fell 23 points in **Mali** which has been ruled by an increasingly repressive junta since 2020.

The polling also suggests that opposition to military rule has softened, particularly in **Mali** and **Burkina Faso** (by 40 and 36 points, respectively); but it is unclear how much that changed can be explained by the growing state repression in **Bamako** and **Ouagadougou** and relentless social media campaigns.

Across the continent, 45% of Africans think their countries are mostly or completely democratic. But only 37% say they are satisfied with the way democracy works in their nations.

The survey also assesses attitudes towards international actors in Africa. **China** has the best reputation, with 60% saying it has a positive influence, higher than African sub-regional organisations, 56%, with the African Union on 54% (AC Vol 65 No 19).

The Trump administration's suspension of aid and withdrawal of

support for multilateral institutions may partly explain the fall in the **United States'** standing in Africa. But it is still more popular than its European counterparts: 53% told Afrobarometer that the US has a positive political and economic influence on African countries (AC Vol 66 No 9).

Some 49% of Africans have a positive view of the European Union, though that is significantly higher than former colonial rulers, such as the **Britain** and **France**, which are on 41% and 36% respectively.

## SUDAN

# General Burhan's premier tries to build new civilian government in Khartoum

9 June

**Questions are multiplying about the role of military-appointed prime minister Kamil Idris and his ties with Islamist activists vying for control of the government in the east**

New Prime Minister Kamil Idris's decision to dissolve the government in preparation to form a new cabinet breaches the 2020 peace agreement, according to some political parties, including the Justice and Equality Movement.

Appointed on 31 May, Idris is the first civilian prime minister since **Abdalla Hamdok** resigned in 2022, and the collapse of the Transitional Government that took office as a result of the Juba peace accord (AC Vol 63 No 19). Hamdok told *Africa Confidential* in Marrakech that he totally rejects Idris's appointment, adding that most states in the African Union would vote against the readmission of Sudan to the AU as long as it stays under military rule.

JEM's political secretary **Mutasim Ahmed Saleh** warned that dissolving the government 'threatens the credibility of commitments to peace parties and weakens trust in the political transition process'.

Under the Juba deal, JEM was assigned the finance and social welfare ministries, as well as several government bodies, including the Social Security Fund and the Tax Authority.

A former civil servant with the UN at the World Intellectual Property Organization, Idris's career has been

peppered with disputes. Some have accused him of corruption. His bid to run against former President **Omer Ahmed Hassan el Bashir** as an independent candidate in 2010 was widely seen as a ploy on behalf of the Islamists to make the highly orchestrated elections look more credible.

That also positioned Idris as a useful apparatchik for Beshir and his Islamist supporters. Given the growing political and military influence of Islamist groups over the current regime in Port Sudan and Khartoum, this raises alarms about Idris's credibility.

Idris's appointment is widely seen as an attempt by Sudan Armed Forces leader General **Abdel Fattah el Burhan** to legitimise a SAF-dominated government in Khartoum. Idris has announced the launch of a comprehensive national dialogue, and has held talks with **Shamsaldin al Kabbashi**, a member of the Transitional Sovereign Council and Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Army (AC Vol 64 No 2).

## BURKINA FASO

# Pros and cons of a gold rush

2 June

**Traore's regime is eyeing increased revenues but its Islamist opponents also see opportunity**

Burkina Faso's military government says that industrial gold production will increase by 4% this year on the back of projects led by **Mauritian** and **Australian** firms. That extra output, combined with record gold prices, could help provide the funds for President **Ibrahim Traoré** to fight an Islamist insurgency that is growing stronger.

Traore has identified gold as the country's most important export, re-writing the mining code in 2023 to allow the government to obtain larger royalty payments from companies. His government also plans to nationalise more foreign-owned industrial mines (AC Vol 66 No 9).

But the US has warned that Islamist militants are getting closer to the West African coast, with Africa Command leader General **Michael Langley** noting that the insurgents would 'love to be able to get to the coastline to connect those revenue streams.' That could include gold smuggling.

Langley added that 'extremist organisations are starting to make their way further to the west and really starting to coalesce in Burkina Faso'.

UNITED STATES/AFRICA

## Washington asks for African views on Africom's future

2 June

**The US is considering merging Africom into its Europe command as its commitment to the continent wavers**

African leaders should make their positions on the future of the United States' military command in Africa known in the coming months, Africom commander General Michael Langley told journalists in Nairobi ahead of a conference of African defence chiefs in the Kenyan capital on 27 May.

President Donald Trump's administration has mooted merging Africom with the US military command in Europe in a cost-cutting measure that would also be seen as a sign of Washington's diminishing interest in Africa (AC Vol 66 No 6).

Alongside Europe's, the US military presence in the Sahel has largely disappeared following the military coups across the region. Washington's base in Niger was closed last year at the behest of the junta, leaving the US camp in Djibouti to run Africom (AC Vol 65 No 7). Langley said in Nairobi that the US had maintained some intelligence sharing with Sahelian juntas and was looking for 'other ways to continue to stay engaged'.

Trump's predecessor Joe Biden agreed a military deal with Kenyan President William Ruto that designated Kenya as a major non-NATO ally, and

opened talks with several West African states on military cooperation. Trump appears to be far more ambivalent, though an operation against *Al Shabaab* Islamist militants in Somalia was the first military mission of his second term (AC Vol 65 No 12). ●

CONGO-KINSHASA/US

## US lawmakers demand 'clarity' on minerals' role in peace talks

2 June

**The Trump administration is taking a transactional approach to diplomacy in Africa**

Five Democratic Congress members have sent a letter to President Donald Trump's Africa advisor Massad Boulos demanding details of the administration's deal on critical minerals that has accompanied its peacemaking between Congo-Kinshasa and Rwanda.

The letter refers to the 25 April declaration April between Kinshasa and Kigali, brokered by Qatar and Washington, which has pointed the way towards a ceasefire and peace talks.

The Congress members express concern that Trump's officials 'have not articulated the terms and conditions under negotiation for expanded U.S. access to the DRC's critical minerals (if any), and how these resources will be managed transparently and equitably.' The letter calls for clarity on the 'specific terms and conditions' and asks how they will be made public.

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The Trump administration's handling of the war in eastern Congo-K looks more like a business deal than diplomacy. Its focus is on minerals access for US firms and potential US investment rather than, for example, the humanitarian crisis in the Kivu region (AC Vol 66 No 8).

In response, the lawmakers state that Washington must 'resume U.S. humanitarian and global health assistance to conflict-affected regions in the DRC'. Yet Trump's advisors appear keen to instead replicate the transactional model that has characterised its Africa policy so far (Dispatches 6/5/25).

We hear that in South Sudan – which had a US visa ban on its nationals imposed after Secretary of State Marco Rubio accused Juba of 'taking advantage' of the US – a potential deal giving US companies access to oil and minerals could also be on the cards, with Boulos once again involved. ●

## POINTERS

## Africa/migration

## ACCESS DENIED

■ Africans lost an estimated €60 million (US\$67.5m) in 2024 alone due to rejected applications for Schengen visas to visit the European Union, according to data published by the European Commission.

The cost of Schengen visa rejections has risen steadily in recent years, driven by higher rejection rates and an increase in the visa application fee. From June 2024, the fee for adults applying to travel to the EU rose from €80 to €90. A total of 10 African states recorded rejection rates between 36% and 63%, with **Comoros** facing the highest. In **Nigeria** and **Ghana**, 46% of applications were refused.

An April 2025 report by the Centre for European Reform, a London-based think-tank, concluded that the EU's high rejection rate of visa applications from African countries is 'discriminatory' and causing 'considerable damage to the EU's image among Africa's intellectual, cultural and business elites'.

While EU officials reject accusations of discrimination, the fact that visa rejection rate data – released annually in late May – has gone viral across African media and social platforms for the past two years suggests that these concerns have merit.

The question is whether African leaders will use the upcoming EU-African Union summit later this year to challenge Europe on the issue. People, migration and mobility are among the topics on the agenda.

While the EU has promised to include legal pathways, student and work exchange programmes, and other mechanisms in its trade agreements with African states, recent economic support agreements with **Tunisia**, **Mauritania** and **Egypt** have focused on paying these governments to tighten migration control.

## Zambia

## AFTER DEATH, STILL BITTERNESS

■ President **Hakainde Hichilema** is under fire for his laggardly response to ex-President **Edgar Lungu's** death, following claims by the opposition that he prevented his predecessor from travelling abroad for cancer treatment. Lungu, who died aged 68 in **South Africa** on 5 June following surgery and treatment for lung cancer, presided over an economic collapse and widespread corruption, for which he was under investigation. The row about

## NGŪGĨ WA THIONG'O – THE PAN-AFRICANIST BARD

A champion of African literature and the rejection of colonial languages as a means to convey it, **Kenya's Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o**, who died on 28 May, was often accused of 'bringing politics into art' – a charge he would have regarded as the highest praise.

Born **James Ngũgĩ** in 1938 in Limuru, home to some of Kenya's most fertile farmland seized by **British** colonialists, wa Thiong'o's family was forced out by the British during his first term as a boarder at the nearby Alliance High School – still one of the most prestigious seats of learning for Kenya's elite. He returned home to find that both his house and village had been razed to the ground.

If that sparked his radicalisation, wa Thiong'o's studies at Makerere University College – host of the 1962 Conference of African Writers of English Expression, the first major pan-African literary gathering – helped it flourish. His second novel, *The River Between*, published in 1965, became the seventh title in the Heinemann African Writers Series, cementing his status as a leading postcolonial literary figure.

Alongside **Chinua Achebe** and **Wole Soyinka**, he was part of a literary movement that flourished in the 1950s and 1960s as colonialism waned. If Achebe was the first giant of African literature, wa Thiong'o was its political leader. He argued that true African literature could only be written in African languages.

While a professor at the University of Nairobi in the late 1960s, wa Thiong'o led the push to abolish the English department. He argued that, following the end of colonial rule, African universities had to prioritise African literature. Eventually, the university dropped its English Literature course, replacing it with one that positioned African Literatures – both oral and written – at the centre.

A decade later, he abandoned his English name and ceased writing his novels in English, instead embracing Gikuyu, the language he had grown up speaking.

Influenced by **Karl Marx** and **Frantz Fanon**, wa Thiong'o contended that class was more significant than race. In 1974, he became a member of the December 12th Movement formed at a conference of Marxist-Leninists held in Nairobi in 1974. Having excoriated colonialism, wa Thiong'o clashed with Kenya's post-independence governments which he saw as irredeemably neo-colonial. His 1977 novel *Petals of Blood* addressed the failures of post-independence, while the play *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (I Will Marry When I Want), co-written with **Ngũgĩ wa Mirii**, was deemed subversive, leading to his imprisonment in 1977 for a year before his release early in **Daniel arap Moi's** presidency.

Tipped to win the Nobel Prize for Literature multiple times, critics argue that his decision to write in Gikuyu and the nationalist politics embedded in wa Thiong'o's work cost him the award, which he never received.

Warned he would be killed if he returned to Kenya after the 1982 attempted coup against **Moi**, wa Thiong'o went into exile in the UK, later holding professorships in the **United States**. On his first visit back in 2004, his family was attacked, and his wife raped – an assault he believed was politically motivated.

Banned in Kenya for more than 40 years, *Ngaahika Ndeenda* was finally performed at Kenya's National Theatre in 2024. But literature remains a subversive force among many of Kenya's political elite. Earlier this year, performances of the Gen Z-inspired play *Echoes of War*, written by former Kakamega Senator **Cleophas Malala**, were also banned by President **William Ruto's** government. ●

Lungu's funeral is pitting the ruling United Party for National Development under Hichilema against Lungu's family and his party the Patriotic Front.

Hichilema was slow to react to his death, eventually posting a short message on X offering 'heartfelt condolences' to Lungu's family and friends, falling short of the national tribute that the former President's supporters had wanted. A letter dated 23 September 2023 from the President's office denied permission for Lungu to travel to South Africa for a 'medical review'.

Lungu managed to travel in January but the airport official who allowed him through security was sacked; he

is now suing the Zambia Airports Corporation for wrongful dismissal. As *Africa Confidential* went to press, flags at government buildings were still flying at full mast, while ministers had yet to provide details on Lungu's funeral as a former Head of State.

Hichilema's enmity towards Lungu is well documented: he was jailed for four months in 2017 on treason charges after his motorcade was accused of obstructing Lungu's (AC Vol 58 No 9). Hichilema later claimed he had been tortured. His imprisonment, months after narrowly losing the 2016 presidential elections, was followed by Lungu declaring a state of emergency (AC Vol 58 No 14).