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## BLUE LINES

***Ahead of the signing of a peace deal on 27 June between Congo-Kinshasa and Rwanda, mediated by Washington and premised on joint mining and processing operations, the US-Africa business summit in Luanda this week has been a shop window for commercial diplomacy under the Trump administration.***

***African officials criticised the precipitate cuts in development aid and climate finance, along with higher tariffs and new visa restrictions. But others argue that a more transactional strategy could encourage more US capital to flow into Africa to secure critical minerals, set up regional processing and invest in the nascent tech sector.***

***US officials used the summit to show Washington's commitment to the Lobito Corridor, which links the copper fields of Congo-K and Zambia to Angola's coast. US investor Hydro-Link is building a 1,150-kilometre electricity transmission line, and other companies plan telecommunications and farming projects along the route. 'It is time to replace the logic of aid with the logic of investment and trade,' Angola's President João Lourenço told delegates. He urged US companies to look beyond oil and mining and instead invest in manufacturing, shipbuilding, cement and steel production. Can Lobito break the mould? So far European and US investors in the project have been more concerned about extracting critical minerals than developing facilities to refine and process them.***

EAST AFRICA

# As protests mount, state repression goes regional

**Economic hardship and youth mobilisation are driving a new opposition movement online and on the streets**

A year after 'Gen Z' activists stormed parliament in Nairobi shaking the foundations of President **William Ruto's** legitimacy, a new round of protests on 25 June were greeted with lethal force, tear gas and water cannons. By mid-evening, Amnesty International was reporting that 16 had died in clashes between protestors and the police. The Kenyan National Commission for Human Rights (KNCHR) reported eight deaths across the country all 'allegedly from gunshot wounds.' It added that 400 people had been seriously injured including protestors, police and journalists.

Over the last year, the list of those abducted, detained, disappeared and murdered has grown relentlessly (AC Vol 65 No 14). Despite the president's pledges of reform, activists say his government's defining relationship with citizens has become one of targeted surveillance, systematic abductions and police killings.

Two weeks after the 7 June death in police custody of schoolteacher and blogger **Albert Ojwang**, Director of Public Prosecutions **Renson Ingonga** charged six suspects with murder (Dispatches 16/6/25). They include Nairobi Central Police Station boss **Samson Talaam** and police constables **Peter Kimani** and **James Mukhwana**. Three detainees – allegedly coerced into attacking Ojwang in his cell – were also charged. The DPP appears to have relied heavily on Mukhwana's confession to the Independent Police Oversight Authority (IPOA).

There is considerable public scepticism over who was not charged. Deputy Inspector General of Police **Eliud Lagat**, who had filed a complaint on 4 June about an online slander campaign targeting him, and who had 'stepped aside' to allow investigations to proceed, had been regarded as a person of interest. He now appears to have been absolved.

Ojwang's death, IPOA reports, has since been followed by those of 20 others, all of whom died in police custody. Anti-police protests on 17 June led to the point-blank shooting of **Boniface Mwangi Kariuki.** Two riot police were promptly arrested and charged. The protests were met by a contingent of armed thugs on motorbikes who, chaperoned by police, terrorised demonstrators across downtown Nairobi. Media investigations revealed that the thugs were sponsored and provisioned by *Kenya Kwanza* politicians, having allegedly been procured earlier by security aides to Nairobi governor, **Johnson Sakaja**. The governor has since issued a public statement emphatically denying any role in sponsoring violence.

### TROUBLED TIMES

Ahead of anniversary protests on 25 June, a group of western ambassadors, including the **United States**, European Union and **United Kingdom**, warned that they were 'troubled by the use of hired goons to infiltrate peaceful gatherings'.

Yet state violence against Gen Z dominates the region's politics. With elections looming in **Tanzania** and **Uganda** in the next six months – and in Kenya in 2027 – limiting dissent appears to be a major regime preoccupation. And

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with the three states facing a combined US$23 billion in debt service repayments in the next fiscal year – representing 36%, 32% and 25% of total 2025/26 budget spending for Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania respectively – the pressures on the cost of living and service delivery will fall overwhelming on the people.

Despite a recent diplomatic charm offensive, Tanzania's **Samia Suluhu Hassan** is struggling to shrug off international condemnation and the digital salvos from her Kenyan critics, as well as Tanzanians in the opposition, in exile in Nairobi and, perhaps most worryingly for her, a growing chorus within her own party denouncing her administration for reviving a culture of abductions, disappearances and murder.

With elections in January, Uganda's **Yoweri Museveni's** unexpected public apology to 'Uganda and especially the people of Buganda' last month appeared to be a tacit acknowledgment that the social media excesses of his son, **Muhoozi Kainerugaba**, could no longer be managed as minor diplomatic incidents – and were now a threat to traditional ethnic constituencies once the bedrock of his support.

Ignoring a growing international chorus for the release of his perennial rival, **Kizza Besigye** – who once again faces treason charges, allegedly for plotting the violent overthrow of the government – Museveni's apology seems to have been triggered by his son's social media vigilantism. A late-night boast in early May by Muhoozi on X – he is also the Chief of Defence Forces – that he was holding opposition leader **Bobi Wine's** chief of security, **Edward Ssebufu** (aka **Eddie Mutwe**), in his basement confirmed that the aide, who had been abducted on the outskirts of Kampala, was being tortured by the army (AC Vol 66 No 12). A new law once again allowing military courts to try civilians accused of weapons-related offences appears designed with Besigye in mind – and will likely keep him behind bars to prevent him from running for the presidency. ●

## TANZANIA – A REGIONAL FOCUS FOR ACTIVISTS

Tanzanian President **Samia Suluhu Hassan's** rough treatment of regional activists and opposition figures en route to opposition leader **Tundu Lissu's** treason trial in May brought East Africa's simmering Gen Z crisis to a boil. Acutely sensitive to the international spectacle created earlier in the year by Kenyan opposition figure **Martha Karua** joining **Kizza Besigye's** defence team, Suluhu Hassan swiftly turned back Karua, two retired Chief Justices and a group of activists at the airport on their way to observe the Lissu trial (AC Vol 66 No 9).

The arrest, beatings and sexual assault of activists **Agather Atuhaire** and **Boniface Mwangi**, detailed on social media, shone a spotlight on the ruling *Chama Cha Mapinduzi* (CCM) party's culture of political violence, forcing President Hassan's campaign team into precisely the kind of diplomatic back-pedalling they had hoped to avoid when the authorities turned the activists away from Lissu's trial in April (Dispatches 27/5/25).

On 13 June, Hassan's United Nations envoy in Geneva, **Abdallah Possi**, was at pains to defend his government's record at the Human Rights Council where, on account of Atuhaire and Mwangi's allegations, Tanzania's human rights record was laid bare. It makes for grim reading: 200 enforced disappearances since 2019 and a pattern of harassment and intimidation of human rights defenders and opposition politicians – particularly in opposition strongholds (AC Vol 66 No 1).

In January, the failed abduction of social media activist and vocal Samia critic **Maria Sarungi Tsehai** from Nairobi – where she has been living in exile – deepened Gen Z activists' suspicions that Kenyan security was cooperating with its neighbours in the abduction of meddlesome foreigners. A month earlier, Besigye had been kidnapped and renditioned from Nairobi by Ugandan security. With mainstream media gagged and Tanzania-based social media platforms on the state's radar, it is the likes of Tsehai and others in the diaspora, such as the Los Angeles-based regime-influencer-turned-critic, **Mange Kimambi**, who are blowing the whistle. In 2023, Kimambi alleges, the president's son, **Abdul**, flew to Los Angeles to hire her as a social media influencer to support the DP World port deal, which was generating a storm of public protest. When she refused, the government froze her Tanzanian bank accounts, charged her with money laundering, and unsuccessfully engineered her extradition.

The return and growing influence of former Kikwete crony **Rostam Aziz**, 64, his alleged role in the DP World scandal and closeness to the president's son have entrenched perceptions of sleaze and cronyism at the top. Increasingly distrustful of the Magufuli-era securocrats who facilitated her accession – she has replaced intelligence chiefs four times since 2021 – Samia now relies on a network of Zanzibari enforcers on the one hand, and *Magufulista* ultras on the other, to neutralise her opponents, real and perceived. Although senior opposition figures allege that the ruling party's militia, the Green Guards, is behind the abductions – and operates as a law unto itself – the claims remain difficult to prove.

Having seen off a trio of prominent rivals last year – ex-foreign minister **January Makamba** and ex-information minister **Nape Nnauye** (both sacked for plotting against her), and accepting the resignation of party vice-chair, **Abdurahman Kinana**, long regarded as part of the CCM aristocracy – Samia's nomination as the party's presidential contender at January's special National Congress in Dodoma was a formality.

While East African civil society agitations may have little impact on her re-election campaign, ruling party insiders are turning abductions into a political hot potato. In late May, **Josephat Gwajima** – MP for Kawe and founder of the Church of Resurrection and Life – delivered a sermon denouncing the abductions. His church, which has 2,000 branches nationwide and an estimated 70,000 congregants, was promptly deregistered. Seeking to isolate him, Samia warned against the 'Gwajimisation' of the ruling party. Samia insiders worry that the opposition Chadema party's election boycott campaign could suppress turnout and undermine her legitimacy. Behind bars and facing the hangman's noose if convicted, Lissu – who survived a 2017 assassination attempt and still carries some of the 16 bullets fired at him – continues to cast an almost spectral shadow over Samia.

Lissu's lawyers argue that the treason case is intended to block his candidacy in October's elections, though they doubt the charges can credibly hold. Even so, Chadema faces a financial crisis if it fails to field candidates. Deeply divided between Lissu's boycott faction and supporters of former chair **Freeman Mbowe**, whose 'G-55' bloc formally left the party last month, the party may have won the legitimacy battle but lost the political war. ●

# Ministers pin their faith on tax collectors

**Squeezed by creditors and angry citizens, the region's finance chiefs are looking for ways to boost public spending**

Political opposition is rising across the region, much of it fuelled by government austerity policies and there is no let-up in sight. Last year's mass protests in **Kenya** forced President **William Ruto** to drop tax hikes and shake up his ministerial team, as ratings agencies downgraded Kenya's debt (AC Vol 65 No 14).

Finance ministers for Kenya, **Tanzania** and **Uganda** – **John Mbadi, Mwigulu Lameck Nchemba** and **Matia Kasaija** – face common challenges: increasing revenues, targeting spending more effectively and reducing debt burdens (AC Vol 65 No 13).

The African Development Bank (AfDB) projects East Africa's GDP will grow by nearly 6% this year and next – helped by investment in agriculture and infrastructure – while Central and West Africa experience slowdowns.

Officials in Nairobi, Dodoma and Kampala are adapting to the withdrawal of aid from the **United States**. But they may also have to contend with rising fuel import costs if the **Israel-Iran** conflict escalates further – a risk to inflation, currently under 5%, and a potential trigger for calls to reinstate energy subsidies.

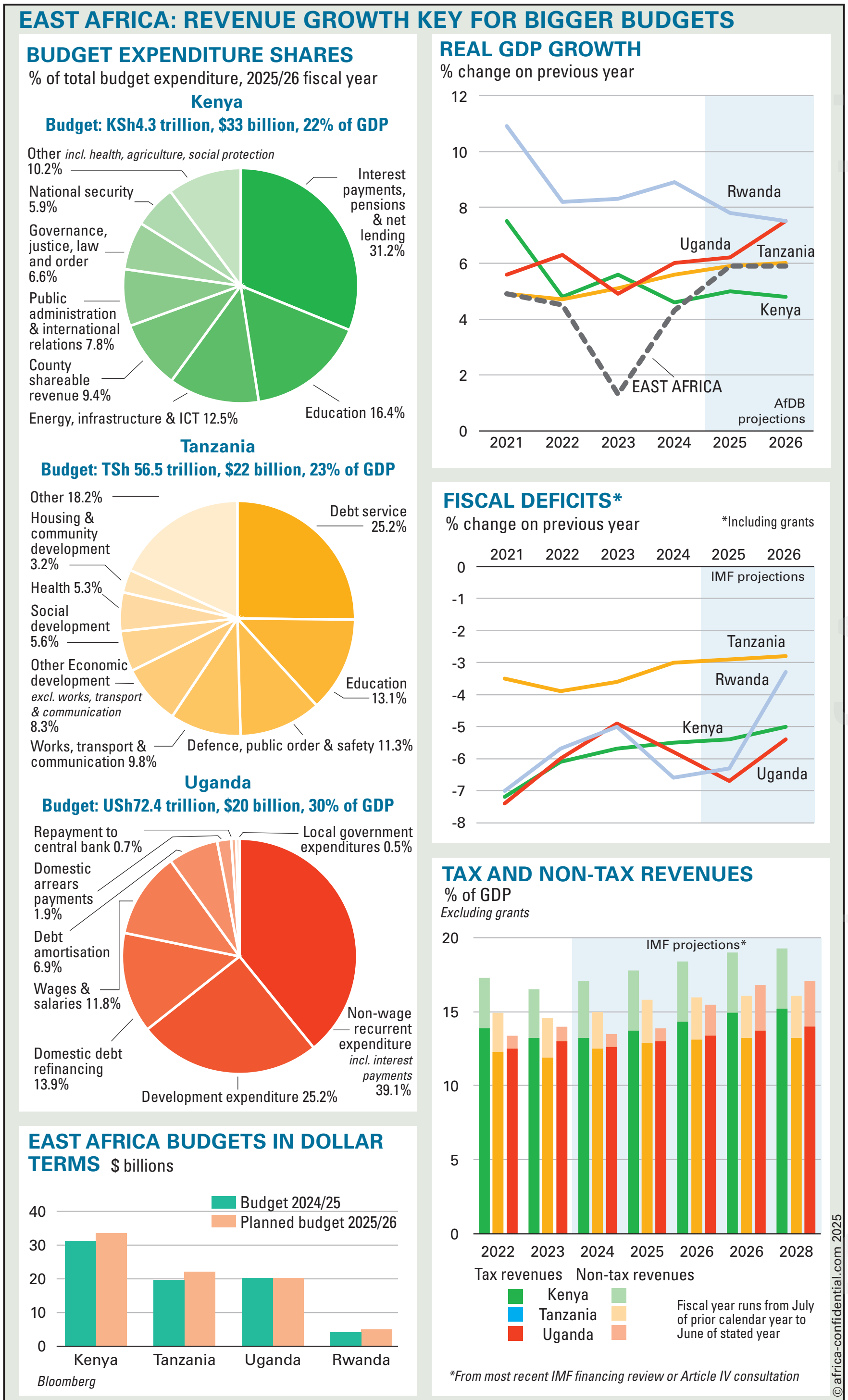
Spending plans across the region – even before the 'supplementary budgets' usually announced mid-fiscal year – are set to exceed projections.

Kenya's 4.29 trillion-shilling budget (US$33 billion, 22% of GDP) has cut revenue expectations after the Treasury admitted previous targets were unrealistic. Uganda's 2025/26 budget of USh72.4trn ($20bn, 30% of GDP) is sharply higher than the USh57.4trn package proposed last September. And while slightly below prior expectations, Tanzania's TSh56.5trn budget ($22bn, 23% of GDP) still represents a double-digit percentage increase on 2024/25 and relies on more external borrowing.

In fast-growing **Rwanda**, finance minister **Yusuf Murangwa** has proposed a budget over 20% larger than last year's, with 30% financed by external borrowing. The International Monetary Fund and World Bank consider Rwanda at moderate risk of debt distress, while Kenya is assessed as high risk. Yet Spring Meetings projections indicate Rwanda's debt-to-GDP ratio could rise by 10% (to 77.6%) this year, driven by a fiscal deficit above 6%.

Responding to last year's backlash against the Finance Bill, Kenya's Mbadi has avoided proposing new taxes or raising rates. Instead, he aims to increase collections, which are projected to fund over three-quarters of the budget (Dispatches 12/5/25).

Measures include reducing




Sources: African Development Bank Group, International Monetary Fund, Kenya National Treasury, Tanzania Ministry of Finance, Uganda Ministry of Finance, Planning & Economic Development, Bloomberg, Grant Thornton exemptions worth over 3% of GDP, improving tax compliance through better administration and digital tools, and expanding the tax base in an economy dominated by informal employment.

Whether Kenyans will accept this as 'easing the tax burden' remains to be seen. Critics say the government risks greater interference in personal finances and breaches of privacy. The National Assembly's finance committee recently labelled some proposals as 'potentially unconstitutional'. Successive administrations have promised better revenue collection while granting the Kenya Revenue Authority broader enforcement powers.

World Bank economists warn Kenya is at a crossroads after years of unsustainable growth. Excessive borrowing for unproductive infrastructure, weak service delivery, inefficient spending and a narrowing tax base have undercut the social contract and public finances alike.

This erosion stems from over-reliance on agricultural and informal services, falling real incomes, and weaker exports – alongside mounting tax liabilities, debt, interest costs and debt service payments. Significant arrears, labelled 'pending bills' by the government, add to the strain (AC Vol 66 No 8).

If revenue again falls short in 2025/26, and if planned wage bill controls fail to free resources for social spending, the Treasury could miss its deficit target of 4.8%. That figure is already 0.5% higher than forecast in February's Budget Policy Statement.

Kenya plans to meet two-thirds of the deficit through domestic borrowing – understandable for a country still facing annual external debt repayments of $2.5-3.5bn for the next five years, according to Moody's. But heavier reliance on domestic debt may raise interest rates and crowd out private sector lending.

The government's decision to end its IMF programme, pending a renegotiation, was helped by a $1.5bn loan from the **United Arab Emirates** at 8.25% interest – cheaper than the almost 10% on Kenya's $1.5bn Eurobond issued earlier this year.

**UGANDA REVENUE GAP**

In Kampala, Kasaija's sharply increased budget – even after factoring in a weaker Uganda shilling – will be financed from domestic revenue by only 60%. Opposition parties are unconvinced foreign lenders will cover the rest. The government and the IMF are banking on higher oil revenues and tax reforms to push Uganda's revenue-to-GDP ratio up by over 3% to 17% by 2028. But much of that depends on the delayed Tanzania-East African export pipeline. Significant undershoot in this year's revenue take could leave up to half the budget to be covered by borrowing.

Some brighter spots include Uganda's coffee exports – which Kasaija says could soon hit $2bn annually (more than half the country's $3.8bn in gold exports) – expanding tourism, and modest gains from 'agro-industrialisation' and domestic manufacturing.

Kasaija's June Budget Statement, however, omits the potential impact of the European Union's anti-deforestation regulations that could dent coffee export earnings across Africa.

Ratings agencies warn that Uganda's interest payments as a share of revenue are rising, and that limited access to foreign credit will push it further towards costly domestic borrowing. While Uganda's debt level – roughly 50% of GDP – remains moderate, risks are mounting.

Even before the budget increase, Fitch downgraded Uganda's foreign currency rating, citing weaker fiscal consolidation, rising borrowing costs and declining reserves. Moody's reached a similar verdict four months earlier. The IMF now estimates Uganda's fiscal deficit at 6% or more.

Tanzania, by contrast, has drawn less concern. Nchemba's 2025/26 budget raises spending in local currency terms by 12%, with just over a quarter funded by borrowing. Net external debt will rise more than domestic debt.

Nchemba expects revenues to rise by nearly 1% of GDP to 16.7%, narrowing the deficit to 3%. Tax and non-tax amendments, including higher duties, are meant to support that goal. Debt servicing will absorb 25% of spending, with key allocations to education (13%), defence (11%) and transport infrastructure (10%).

Despite rising costs and declining reserves, Fitch maintained Tanzania's credit rating after the budget, buoyed by improved GDP growth, infrastructure investment and projected gas revenue dividends. ●

GHANA

# Will anti-corruption politics work for John Mahama?

**Top officials from the former NPP government are being investigated, as the new administration tries to sharpen its political lead**

In Ghana, 'non-aggression pacts' – informal understandings between senior figures in the two main political parties not to pursue grand corruption cases after a change in government – have long undermined public trust in anti-graft efforts.

Typically, a few mid-level officials face trial, but cases against high-ranking individuals stall or drag on indefinitely. President **John Dramani Mahama** – criticised for weak financial oversight during his 2012-2017 term – said in January that corruption under the previous New Patriotic Party (NPP) administration warranted full investigation. But is he truly willing to dismantle these tacit protections – and will his government support anti-corruption agencies with the resources and political backing to pursue wrongdoing within his own ranks as well as past administrations?

Just after taking office on 7 January, Mahama launched Operation Recover All Loot (ORAL) to prosecute corrupt officials and recover stolen public funds (AC Vol 65 No 25 & 66 No 1). The Office of the Special Prosecutor (OSP) – led by **Kissi Agyebeng** – and Attorney-General **Dominic Ayine's** team are acting on this mandate, targeting senior figures from the former NPP government.

Former Finance Minister **Ken Ofori-Atta** is under investigation alongside other former officials for multiple corruption-related offences. The OSP first declared him a fugitive in February after he repeatedly failed to appear for questioning.

He is being pursued over a series of controversial deals – including revenue assurance contracts between Strategic Mobilisation Ghana Limited and the Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA); the cancelled agreement between the Electricity Company of Ghana and Beijing Xiao Cheng Technology; and procurement irregularities surrounding the much-criticised National Cathedral project (AC Vol 63 No 16 & 64 No 11).

The OSP also seeks to question him about a Ministry of Health contract for 307 ambulances with Service Ghana Auto Group Limited – and alleged mismanagement of the GRA's Tax Policy Fund.

Although temporarily removed from the wanted list in mid-February after pledging to return by May, Ofori-Atta missed the 2 June deadline. The OSP again declared him a fugitive on 5 June and triggered an Interpol Red Notice. He is currently in the **United States**, with correspondence from his lawyers suggesting he may have undergone prostate cancer surgery. The Red Notice restricts travel across 196 countries and raises the prospect of extradition.

His legal team has condemned the move as political persecution and accused the OSP of violating his due process rights. In another case raising serious concerns about oversight at Ghana's top security levels, the Attorney-General filed 11 charges in April against former National Signals Bureau (NSB) Director-General, **Kwabena Adu-Boahen**, and his wife, **Angela Adjei-Boateng**, for allegedly siphoning state funds under a bogus cybersecurity contract.

Adu-Boahen, 44, is accused of defrauding the state after a US$7 million deal with **Israeli** firm RLC Holdings for cyber defence software – intended to bolster Ghana's national security (AC Vol 66 No 10). Days after the January 2020 signing, he allegedly diverted 27.1m cedi from NSB coffers to his private company, falsely claiming it was a legitimate payment. Adu-Boahen and Adjei-Boateng face charges including stealing, fraud, conspiracy to commit money laundering and abuse of public office. Attorney-General Ayine announced on 13 June that his office will soon file criminal charges against 12 former officials linked to a major payroll fraud scandal at the National Service Scheme, which cost the state over 548m cedi. An investigation by The Fourth Estate uncovered widespread corruption, revealing thousands of ghost names – including pensioners, foreign nationals, non-service personnel and even names of the deceased – fraudulently added to the payroll. Among those expected to face prosecution are senior former officials **Mustapha Ussif, Gifty Oware-Mensah** and **Osei Assibey Antwi**. Analysts say corruption prosecutions led by the OSP and the Attorney-General have gained broad public support, especially after repeated scandals under the previous administration. Trust in the process has grown with Mahama's explicit pledge to tackle graft. In February, he directed Ayine to act on findings from the ORAL Committee – signalling renewed political commitment to hold former officials accountable and recover stolen public funds.

### 'GAME CHANGER'

The Attorney-General's office says it is no longer focused solely on convictions but is now prioritising the recovery of looted state funds. Deputy Attorney-General **Srem Sai** describes a new plea-bargaining framework – backed by a sophisticated asset-tracing system – as a 'game-changer', warning that the era of jail time without financial recovery is over.

Criminal prosecutions under the ORAL campaign risk stalling for years, as judicial inefficiencies and defence counsel tactics slow proceedings. Legal insiders warn the recovery drive could drag on for five years or more – unless there is strong political will and swift judicial action to break the bottlenecks.The ORAL drive also serves as a political weapon, with serious consequences for the NPP. The global arrest alert for Ofori-Atta and the prosecution of a senior national security official have revived damaging narratives of corruption and economic mismanagement under President **Nana Akufo-Addo** – deepening the party's post-2024 election crisis.

While the public may welcome high-profile targets, any sign of delay or bias by the National Democratic Congress could backfire, fuelling claims of political persecution and galvanising sympathy for the NPP.

Leading Ghanaian policy analyst **Bright Simons** commented: 'Whilst the ORAL initiative is popular with voters the framing can be problematic.... the problems of graft in Ghana are often wound up within the fabric of a dysfunctional policy environment, the solutions must involve elaborate reforms rather than the quick-and-easy raid-and-retrieve impression created by ORAL's devoted followers.'

Despite pursuing several major corruption cases, the OSP has yet to secure a single conviction. Its December 2024 half-yearly report confirmed that none of its pending cases had resulted in convictions or acquittals, with only three substantive matters before the courts.

With its credibility under strain, the OSP sees the ORAL initiative as an opportunity to restore public confidence in the independence and effectiveness of anti-corruption prosecutions.

In August 2024, the OSP cleared Mahama of wrongdoing in the long-running Airbus scandal, finding no evidence linking him to procurement or agency dealings between Airbus SE and local intermediaries (AC Vol 62 No 7). While acknowledging that courts in the **United Kingdom** and **United States** had established Airbus's liability for bribery in Ghana's purchase of C-295 military aircraft between 2009 and 2015, the OSP stressed the need for Ghanaian-led investigations, arguing that foreign rulings were based on legal frameworks not necessarily applicable in Ghana and did not implicate any Ghanaian officials. ●

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ZIMBABWE/ IMF/BRITAIN

# London's long march back to Harare

**Eyeing minerals and markets, western governments are softening their stance on rights abuses and grand corruption**

A quarter of a century after Britain under Prime Minister **Tony Blair** led the charge against Zimbabwe President **Robert Mugabe's** land resettlement plan, the two governments – both under new leaders – are reconciling, brought together by commercial interests.

In 2000, the Labour government under Blair lambasted Mugabe for ripping up property rights under its farm seizures and land redistribution. A veteran bruiser, Mugabe hit back at Blair and his Development Minister **Clare Short** (who is of Irish Catholic descent), lambasting them as petty colonialists.

At the time, Mugabe's Foreign Minister **Nathan Shamuyarira** told *Africa Confidential* that his colleagues had preferred working with Britain's Conservative Party, which they found 'less duplicitous'. Top officials in the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front may revise that view if Britain's current Labour government, under Prime Minister **Keir Starmer** and Foreign Secretary **David Lammy**, follows through on its 180- degree turn

## DIPLOMATIC WARMING WON'T BUY A DEBT DEAL

At the core of Zimbabwe's diplomatic effort is its bid to restructure its debt – for which IMF backing is critical. On 18 June, an IMF staff team, led by **Wojciech Maliszewski**, concluded its two-week Article IV Consultation in Zimbabwe, assessing the country's readiness for a Staff Monitored Programme (SMP) (AC Vol 66 No 12). While the team noted 'a degree of macroeconomic stability' and signs of recovery following the 2024 drought, the conclusion was stark: 'The IMF is currently precluded from providing financial support to Zimbabwe due to its unsustainable debt situation.'

Not only did the IMF decline to approve an SMP, it concluded the current assessment was complete. Discussions would only resume 'once decisive steps have been taken by authorities to address the key policy issues highlighted by the mission'.

These include closing the fiscal financing gap, improving transparency in the 'willing-buyer willing-seller' exchange rate system, and – most critically – strengthening the governance framework of the Mutapa Investment Fund, established in 2023 under President **Emmerson Mnangagwa's** purview. It controls the assets of most big state-owned enterprises but operates without parliamentary oversight or public procurement regulations. Maliszewski emphasised that international re-engagement will be essential for debt restructuring and arrears clearance, but that the onus is on Mnangagwa's government. ●

on policy towards President **Emmerson Mnangagwa's** regime in Harare.

The rationale is Lammy's 'progressive realism' doctrine, which aims to set up Britain to compete more effectively with Asian and Gulf State economies buying into markets in developing economies. Faced with the failure of sanctions to change the Mnangagwa regime's political repression and state capture, many western governments have softened restrictions but Britain has outflanked most of its European counterparts. The move reverses the British government's position in December when Lammy vetoed Zimbabwe's re-admission to the Commonwealth on the grounds that it had 'not done enough' to improve democracy and human rights (AC Vol 65 No 25).

On 15 June Minister for Africa, Lord **Collins** of Highbury, flew out to meet President Mnangagwa and key officials, receiving the warmest of welcomes. It was the first British ministerial visit since **Rory Stewart**, then Minister for Africa, rushed to Harare in the aftermath of the putsch in November 2017 that ousted Mugabe and installed Mnangagwa. Collins attended the British Embassy's King's Birthday Party on 16 June, highlighting re-engagement and cooperation with Harare.

Britain's new Approach to Africa, developed by Lammy and his team, emphasises 'listening, respect and equality as values underpinning [their] approach to partnerships' (AC Vol 65 No 14). Collins complimented Mnangagwa's government, talking up future business partnerships, and special links between two countries. But there was no public reference to human rights concerns in the wake of Mnangagwa's latest crackdown on dissidents.

In May, Britain lifted sanctions on four top securocrats at the heart of state repression: former Minister of State Security **Owen Ncube**; former Director-General of the notorious Central Intelligence Organisation, **Isaac Moyo**; former Police Commissioner-General **Godwin Matanga**; and **Anselem Sanyatwe**, former Commander of the Zimbabwe National Army and now Minister of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture. It also lifted sanctions on Zimbabwe's state-owned military industry.

In keeping with the new line, Britain's Ambassador, **Pete Vowles**, has led public diplomacy to reach Zimbabweans: he joined a local cooking competition, peppering his speeches and tweets with Shona, and donning Zimbabwean and British colours at the England-Zimbabwe cricket Test match in May. Vowles never publicly criticises the regime, soft-pedalling Britain's response to the Private Voluntary Organisations (PVO) Bill passed in April, tweeting that 'the regulation of CSOs is effective where there is confidence the law will protect rights & be implemented transparently, efficiently & impartially.'

Alongside this shift, the European Union has remained more publicly critical. It delisted Zimbabwe Defence Industries in February – removing the final entity from its sanctions list – the EU arms embargo and broader restrictive measures will remain in place until at least February 2026. EU Ambassador **Jobst von Kirchmann** has continued to criticise Zimbabwe's government. When Mnangagwa signed the PVO Amendment Bill into law in April, Von Kirchmann tweeted: 'It is disappointing to see that Zimbabwe has not upheld its own commitments under [the IMF process], particularly regarding the expansion of civic space. The enactment of the PVO Amendment Bill… has further reinforced negative trends in governance.'

Then the EU suspended its governance funding under the Structured Dialogue Platform. Yet this amounted to just US$5 million to the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, allowing some to see it as little more than a symbolic rebuke. We hear some of the EU national embassies differed with Von Kirchmann's assessment.

Mnangagwa seized upon the return of **Donald Trump** to the **United States** Presidency and its proclaimed 'transactional diplomacy' to push for more concessions.

In March 2024, US President **Joe Biden's** government lifted national economic sanctions on Zimbabwe. Yet it simultaneously designated 11 individuals and three entities under the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act (AC Vol 65 No 9 & 64 No 19). These include Mnangagwa, Vice-President **Constantino Chiwenga**, businessman **Kudakwashe Tagwirei**, his wife **Sandra Mpunga** and business partner **Obey Chimuka**, along with several senior security officials. The designated entities were Tagwirei's companies: Sakunda Holdings, Fossil Agro and Fossil Contracting.

At the 2024 Independence Day celebrations, US Ambassador **Pamela Tremont** criticised the Mnangagwa government's crackdown on opposition activists. At this year's event, she warned that 'a strong stance against corruption is imperative, as it is corrosive to an investment environment'.

President Mnangagwa is nearing the end of his term as Chairman of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), which he assumed last August. He has come under fire from rights activists for failing to act decisively on two regional crises – the war in Congo-Kinshasa and the repressive crackdown on opposition and civil society ahead of Tanzania's upcoming elections (Dispatches 27/5/25 & AC Vol 66 No 11).

But Mnangagwa has faced no rebuke from his political counterparts in the region. South Africa's new Government of National Unity, apart from individuals within the centre-right Democratic Alliance, has been largely silent on Zimbabwe.

South Africa's President **Cyril Ramaphosa** has tightened immigration controls under domestic pressure, aimed to deter thousands of Zimbabweans from crossing the border. Yet *Botswana's* new president, **Duma Boko**, announced in 2024 that he would legalise undocumented Zimbabweans by issuing temporary work and residence permits and minimising economic disruption. ●

MAURITANIA

# Aziz falls – while his closest ally thrives

**Jailed for corruption, the ex-president has lost his battle with his former right-hand man and the political elite continues to consolidate power**

In Nouakchott's cafés, where political debates simmer beneath the whir of ceiling fans, the sentencing of former President **Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz** to 15 years for corruption barely raised an eyebrow. The capital – sprawling, sunbaked, and ever-pragmatic – has seen its share of coups, scandals, and abrupt political shifts. But the patterns of Mauritania's power politics have changed little over time.

President **Mohamed Ould Cheikh el Ghazouani**, having solidified his hegemonic rule over the ruling *El Insaf* (*Parti de l'équité*), is making calculated steps to further Mauritania's cooperation with the European Union. But this is only part of a broader strategy. Mauritania, ever the strategic player, has chosen its friends wisely. While Brussels focuses on migration management, Middle Eastern investors see opportunities in its emerging markets, and Washington praises its counterterrorism efforts. Ghazouani, balancing these partnerships, has ensured that his consolidation of power remains largely unchallenged.

Although the possibility remains that Aziz will appeal to the Supreme Court, the sentencing appears to be the final word in a dispute that stretches back to 2019, when Aziz chose then-ally Ghazouani as his successor.

Born just two weeks apart in 1956, Aziz and Ghazouani's relationship dates back to the late 1970s, when they both studied at **Morocco's** Meknes Royal Military Academy. In 2008, Ghazouani served as Aziz's right-hand man in the coup that brought Aziz – then head of the Presidential Guard – to power (AC Vol 49 No 17). During Aziz's presidency, Ghazouani held key military positions, first as Chief of Army Staff and later as Minister of Defence.

Tensions between the two men emerged after Aziz refused to take mandatory gardening leave following Ghazouani's presidential inauguration in August 2019. Matters escalated later that year when Aziz attempted,

## GEOPOLITICS AT THE GRASSROOTS

The anti-western rhetoric that has accompanied the coups d'état in **Burkina Faso**, **Mali** and **Niger** holds little sway within Mauritania's pragmatic and transactional ruling class. Since January, soldiers from the **Czech Republic** have been deployed to Mauritania to support the country's special operations and border-security capacity, underscoring Europe's expanding strategic footprint in the Sahel. That may have encouraged **Ukraine** to enter the fray, following its ill-fated dalliance with nationalist Tuareg groups fighting the Malian junta's soldiers, backed by **Russia's** Wagner Group.

The Czech government strongly opposes Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as does Mauritania, but less vociferously. That may change now with activities ramping up at Kyiv's embassy in Nouakchott, established in the 1960s. Ukraine opened another eight embassies in Africa in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022

Ukraine's top Africa envoy **Maksym Subkh** told Reuters news agency that Kyiv was read to continue training Mauritanian officers and sharing military technology that it has developed on the battlefield. Regional security experts interpret this to mean the manufacture of armed and surveillance drones for which Ukraine has established itself as one of the world's biggest producers.

This has geopolitical significance on two levels. In the region, Mauritania has a prickly relationship with neighbouring junta in Mali over border security and the flow of migrants. Several states in the region – including **Algeria**, Mali, Mauritania and **Morocco** – have stepped up their usage of drones, sometimes shooting each other's drones down in proxy clashes

And internationally, Mali's junta is strongly allied to Russia's President **Vladimir Putin**: Mauritania, broadly aligned to the European Union and hostile to Moscow, is now developing closer ties with Ukraine.

Having abandoned the West African franc as early as 1973, Mauritania has kept its distance from **France**, the former colonial power. Yet anti-French sentiment has limited resonance in a society where such debates are largely consigned to the past. In their place ruling party politicians look for diplomatic openings that might yield revenues.

Rising migration from Mauritanian shores towards the Canary Islands, ongoing security crises in the Sahel, and the EU's efforts to maintain relevance in a rapidly shifting regional landscape have created plenty of opportunities for Nouakchott.

Unperturbed by the presence of several hundred thousand migrants within its borders, many intent on continuing their journey to Europe, Nouakchott treats them less as a challenge and more as a strategic asset.

In March 2024, the EU, pursuing a policy of border externalisation, allocated €210 million (US$243m) to Mauritania for migration management – €100m of which was later specified as direct budgetary support. No clear breakdown has been forthcoming on how these funds will be spent. Many in Nouakchott view the allocation as little more than a gift to the country's political elites. This has come alongside €47m in military assistance, allocated since 2022 under the European Peace Facility, making the EU Mauritania's biggest military donor.

In comparison with its more repressive neighbours in **Tunisia** and **Libya**, Mauritania has been regarded as pragmatic rather than heavy-handed. It presents itself as a 'terror-free zone' – a rare success story in a region battling Islamist militancy. The government attributes its stability to its deradicalisation strategy, in which moderate imams engage imprisoned jihadists in theological debates. Less diplomatic methods may also play a role.

Earlier this year, Mauritania launched a short-lived deportation campaign targeting undocumented African migrants in the capital, with an unspecified number expelled to Senegal and Mali. Taken as a token gesture towards Brussels, the EU Delegation to Mauritania insisted the campaign had not been part of its agenda. In March, Nouakchott officials stressed that the migration pact does not 'address Mauritania's migration policy towards third-country nationals'. ●

unsuccessfully, to assert leadership over the ruling party, then known as the *Union pour la République* (UPR) (AC Vol 60 Nos 12 & 13).

In January 2020, the UPR-dominated parliament launched an investigation into corruption under Aziz's rule, ultimately leading to his original five-year sentence in December 2023 – later increased to 15 years following his appeal (Dispatches 6/12/23).

Aziz, widely viewed as corrupt, was charged with embezzling US$90 million. Yet back in Nouakchott's cafes, the case is seen less as a matter of justice and more as a personal feud between former allies.

Corruption was deeply embedded in Aziz's administration but only Aziz and his son-in-law bore the consequences. Many who facilitated his enrichment remain within Ghazouani's inner circle; Aziz's former Minister of Economy and Finance, **Mokhtar Ould Djay**, now serves as Prime Minister.

In other respects, little has changed. Aziz has fallen but Mauritania's patronage system is proving resilient. Political influence works as a currency; wealth is concentrated among a select few families, the award of lucrative contracts is tightly controlled. The faces at the top may change but the mechanisms for elevation endure.

The state, dominated by a handful of powerful Beidane families, is a well-oiled machine: distributing resources among those within an entrenched network of political and economic power. Access is dictated by political and personal allegiance; that sustains the system.

The case of **Mohamed Zine El Abidine Ould Cheikh Ahmed** illustrates this continuity. A close ally of Aziz, Zine El Abidine secured lucrative public contracts under the previous administration – including the construction of a conference centre for the African Union's 2018 summit in Nouakchott, reportedly awarded without a tender. Under Ghazouani, his influence has only grown – he is now widely regarded as one of Mauritania's most prominent state contractors.

Mauritania has tried hard to sanitise its image, pushing through several anti-corruption laws in the *Assemblée nationale* in May. The proposed laws cover the declaration of assets and interests. On 24 May, some opposition MPs criticised the laws for entrenching political influence and giving top officials 'undeserved protection'.

In January, liquefied natural gas (LNG) production began at the Greater Tortue Ahmeyim offshore gas field, a joint venture between Mauritania and **Senegal**, with British Petroleum (BP) and the **United States**-based Kosmos Energy as the main investors. The field, expected to produce 2.3m tonnes of liquefied gas annually, is projected to significantly boost Mauritania's state revenues.

Mauritania holds far greater LNG reserves in the BirAllah gas field, discovered recently within its territorial waters. But the project has struggled to attract investors. In 2024, BP allowed its licence for the project to expire, and Nouakchott has yet to find new investors.

Even if Mauritania succeeds in converting these offshore assets into productive operations generating substantial revenues, activists are sceptical about government's ability to manage the bonanza – such is the overbearing influence of a small but powerful class of resource-based oligarchs and loyalist supporters of President Ghazouani. ●

SENEGAL

# Pressure mounts on President Faye

**The trial of five ex-ministers for misuse of public funds will test government's pledge of an independent judiciary**

The youngish government of President **Bassirou Diomaye Faye**, 45, and Prime Minister **Ousmane Sonko**, 50, is at a crossroads seven months after winning a super-majority in the parliament. Their core supporters want them to implement the political reforms agreed at the national dialogue launched on 28 May. Some are unhappy that earlier proposals to make the judicial system politically independent appear to be gathering dust.

But Diomaye Faye and Sonko face a daunting list of demands on the priority list. The IMF has suspended its US$1.8 billion economic adjustment programme after a financial review in Dakar uncovered a $7bn fiscal hole created by the predecessor government of President **Macky Sall** deliberately under-stating the level of the country's indebtedness.

Senegal's dollar bonds started tumbling after the IMF insisted it wants to see a 'full audit outcome' as a condition of restarting the programme and disbursing funds. The stand-off over the debt figures is holding up other funds, limiting access to the money markets and delaying a push for an $1.7bn investment in Senegal's digital economy.

With the start-up of oil and gas exports set to boost growth, these economic glitches are mostly short term but they are limiting the government's wide-ranging reform plans. Alongside constraints on cashflow, officials worry about growing risks of jihadist fighters from **Mali** moving into Senegal in search of sea access.

Compared with those priorities, Diomaye Faye and Sonko see strengthening the electoral commission and establishing a constitutional court as less urgent.

Yet activists are holding Diomaye Faye and Sonko to their promises of democratic reform. A test case is coming up with the corruption indictments of five former ministers from Macky Sall's administration – including Macky Sall's brother-in-law, **Amadou Mansour Faye**. The government's handling of the case so far has prompted claims of political bias, criticisms that Diomaye Faye and Sonko had levelled at Macky Sall.

Amadou Mansour Faye, mayor of St Louis and former minister for community development, was charged on 26 May over excessive payments for Covid-19-era rice supplies to poor households. Figures of 2.7bn CFA (€41 million) have circulated. He is on remand, despite his lawyers insisting he had no role in procurement decisions.

If the cases proceed to trial, the former ministers will face the High Court of Justice, created to prosecute government officials for crimes committed in office. The legislation establishing the court dates back to 2002 but it began operating only this year. Its political ties to the governing majority and its non-appealable verdicts have come under fire by activists for undermining judicial independence.

Macky Sall's supporters may dismiss the conviction of the ex-ministers as politically motivated. The indictments have also been criticised by independent parliamentarian and transparency advocate **Thierno Alassane Sall**, a long-time critic of the former head of state, now residing in Marrakech.

At the national dialogue, **Amadou Ba** – Diomaye Faye's main opponent in last year's election – called for the composition of the court to be depoliticised. Former mayor of Dakar **Khalifa Sall** urged a calmer more considered approach to accountability.

He was a victim of a political prosecution; he was jailed for a financial misdemeanour under the previous administration (AC Vol 58 No 9 & Vol 59 No 2).

Ba and Khalifa Sall joined in the national dialogue but the talks were boycotted by Thierno Alassane Sall and **Aissata Tall Sall**, the former foreign and justice minister who now leads Macky Sall's allies in parliament.

Many are saying that Diomaye Faye should quickly implement the first tier of governance reforms, many of which are less contentious, to underline his commitment.

One way to bolster public confidence would be to ensure the electoral commission's independence and upgrading the *Conseil constitutionnel* – the body that upheld democracy last year by ruling that Macky Sall's term had ended and a new president had to be elected (AC Vol 65 No 7 & Vol 65 No 5).

The council would be transformed into a full-status constitutional court, with judges not appointed by the president – an idea first proposed at last year's justice-focused dialogue. Implementing the 2024 proposal to limit public prosecutors' powers could further boost trust in judicial independence.

The national dialogue also recommended allowing prisoners to vote and replacing individual ballots for each candidate with a single ballot paper, reducing paper and printing costs.

But delegates couldn't agree on automatic voter registration for young people upon turning 18, nor on abolishing the offence of 'offending the president'. Once in power, Diomaye Faye and Sonko seem less enthusiastic about abolishing laws that could intimidate critics. ●

EUROPEAN UNION/UNITED NATIONS/AFRICAN UNION

# Development finance implodes

**Ahead of the UN summit in Seville, delegates are preparing to battle over radical reforms to aid as western states cut funds and cooperation plans**

The civic activists, businesspeople, former and serving top UN and government officials agreed on one headline at the Mo Ibrahim Foundation conference in Marrakech at the beginning of the month – 'Official Development Assistance is over' and its demise will trigger competing calls for radical reform. That sentiment will be echoed by many of the 10,000 activists, officials and heads of government descending on the UN Financing for Development conference in Seville on 30 June-3 July.

The UN summit is meant to assess progress towards the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, including targets on health, education and the environment, to be achieved by 2030. It is set to be a grim reckoning. Research for the Mo Ibrahim Conference reckoned that only 6% of the SDGs are on track in Africa. The **United States** has already pulled out of the SDG agreement which was meant to offer some accountability on aid funds.

The great divide is between rich economies and big companies arguing for changing policies to bring in more private investment and activists and developing country governments calling for sweeping changes to the international system, more accountability on tax and cutting the cost of capital and debt restructurings.

This year's gloom on aid follows the pattern last year. In April, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the club of rich economies that provide most of the concessional development funds, reported that aid in 2024 had fallen by 7.1% in real terms compared with 2023 (Dispatches 22/4/25).

Activist warn the cuts will deepen this year, after the shuttering of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and a three-month freeze on other aid imposed by President **Donald Trump** – accompanied by sharp cuts to aid budgets by many European governments (AC Vol 66 No 5). The OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) forecasts a 17% cut in spending for 2025, and more to come next year.

## TRENDING DOWN

Western aid budgets have been falling – in real terms – for years. Miscounting of aid, coupled with rules allowing donor countries to classify migration control, private sector lending, and in-country refugee costs as Official Development Assistance (ODA), has undermined the UN-agreed target for rich economies to allocate at least 0.7% of gross national income to ODA.

In 2021, 13.1% of ODA was diverted to pay for hosting refugees in western states, redefining what counted as aid. Some of these diverted aid funds were cut but are now repurposed to support **Ukrainian** refugees (AC Vol 64 No 10).

In Europe, the push to increase defence budgets in response to the US administration's threats to withdraw NATO support for its eastern flank has led the European Commission to suspend its rules on government debt and budget deficits. It has introduced an €800 billion (US$921bn) 'ReArm' programme of subsidies, grants and joint procurement schemes.

Development budgets have been sacrificed in the process. **France's** 18.6% cut to its development spending in 2025 is Europe's largest, followed by a 10.5% cut by **Germany** (losing about €3bn). **Britain's** decision to partially fund military spending by cutting its development budget from 0.5% to 0.3% triggered little criticism. But International Development Minister **Anneliese Dodds** resigned in protest.

EU delegates are to push private sector funds as best response to aid cuts in Seville. These will be channelled mainly via the EU's Global Gateway programme promising to invest €150bn in infrastructure. The US, which cut aid by 38% over the 2024-2025 financial year is also reviewing its pro-business initiatives. In April, US President Trump's administration said it was planning to close the Millennium Challenge Corporation, founded in 2004, which aimed aims to create conditions for private investment (AC Vol 64 No 2). But State Department officials say the programme might yet be rescued.

DAC chair **Carsten Staur** has called for aid to the 26 poorest countries, 23 in Africa, to be 'ringfenced' by donors. In these countries, where private sector investment is minimal, development aid provides over 60% of external finance, he added. 'If ODA was stopped, it would have a dramatic, cataclysmic effect,' he warned.

ODA to Saharan Africa dropped by 2% to $36bn last year, while funding for Least Developed Countries (LDC) dropped to $35bn – a 3% decline in real terms compared with 2023. That looks part of a long-term trend: Africa's share of ODA fell from 37.6% in 2013 to 26.7% in 2023. Six of its top 10 funders were multilaterals – the World Bank, European Union, Global Fund, UN, IMF and the African Development Bank – according to the Mo Ibrahim Foundation.

Activists are set to lambast the OECD's DAC at the UN's Seville summit

## CREDITOR COUNTRIES BLOCK REFORMS TO DEBT RESTRUCTURING

A behind-the-scenes push by **Britain** and the European Union removed pledges on debt reform from the UN Financing for Development summit document, *Africa Confidential* was told.

Ahead of the summit in Seville, Small Island Developing States (SIDS), members of the Africa Group, and **Pakistan** and **Brazil** had called for the creation of a UN Framework Convention on Debt, 'with a view to closing gaps in the debt architecture and exploring options to address debt sustainability'.

African diplomats in New York say they are grossly under-represented in the multilateral organisations that shape debt policy (AC Vol 64 No 8,). But EU officials are blocking any substantive reforms to the system. This further erodes the EU's claim of a constructive partnership with Africa. Embarrassingly for Brussels, the row surfaces just days after an expert panel commissioned by the late Pope **Francis** and chaired by Nobel prize-winning economist **Joseph Stiglitz** called for a new round of debt relief for African countries to prevent a 'perfect storm' of rising financing costs (Dispatches 23/6/25).

To some scepticism, **Italy's** Prime Minister **Giorgia Meloni** used a 'Mattei Plan' summit, co-hosted with European Commission President **Ursula von der Leyen** in Rome to promise to halve the debts of low-middle income African nations. She offered few specifics beyond a modest commitment to convert US$270.67 million of debt into development projects. Failure on debt reform risked 'undermining all other efforts', said Meloni.

**French** President **Emmanuel Macron** and Von der Leyen, have also called for debt reform – but their public stance is belied by their officials' discreet efforts to keep the system as it is.

That means the UN outcome document will 'request' that the UN Secretary-General convene a working group, with the IMF and the World Bank. The body's mandate was diluted to make recommendations on a 'set of voluntary guiding principles on responsible sovereign borrowing and lending, and proposals for their implementation'. This means it will submit a report to the General Assembly but has no decision-making power.

'The EU is more interested in holding onto power within the creditor-dominated debt architecture,' said Eurodad's **Iolanda Fresnillo**. Conspicuously absent from the row over debt have been Beijing and Washington. US negotiators were focused on blocking ambitious language on tackling climate change and gender.

**China** was 'very quiet' on debt, one insider told *Africa Confidential* but indicated that it would not oppose the African Group's plan. As a founding member of the Group 77, China makes diplomatic use of its 'developing country status' – despite being the world's second biggest economy, and its biggest in purchasing power parity terms. Apart from China, rich economies, as members of the Paris Club and with more voting rights in the IMF, fear that moving decisions on debt to the UN would undermine their interests. ●

for changing the rules that define aid.

The European Network of Debt and Development calls the OECD's DAC 'exclusive and undemocratic' – and 'simply incapable' of holding rich economies accountable. Along with other activist groups, Eurodad wants the UN to take on the governance of aid. The model would be the UN tax convention, which formally began operations in January. They this could be achieved by repurposing the United Nations Development Cooperation Forum.

Similar arguments informed the push for the UN – via a mandate from the General Assembly – to create an international tax convention to take over from the OECD role. The OECD, which makes policy on beneficial ownership and corporate tax, represents 32 rich states; developing economies don't get a vote.

The Group of 77 developing countries at the UN is pushing to reform aid governance, defining aid and monitoring how it is spent. But little progress is expected at Seville. In 2015, at the UN Development Finance Conference in Addis Ababa, the proposal for a UN tax convention was dismissed as a pipedream and a distraction by the OECD (AC Vol 56 No 22). Yet in November 2023, the Africa Group at the UN, led by **Nigeria**, won a big majority of votes in the UN General Assembly, but was opposed by the US and Europe. ●

AFRICA ECONOMY/BANKS

# Rulebook under pressure as Afreximbank slips a notch

**Fitch's downgrade raises questions about risk perception and preferred creditor status – and has reignited calls for an African-owned rating agency**

Fitch Ratings downgraded the African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank) one notch to BBB- on 4 June, leaving the Cairo-based lender just above non-investment grade. The principal reason was a rise in the proportion of loans with delayed repayments to 7.1% of total lending – above Fitch's 6% threshold. The increase reflects Fitch's assessment that Afreximbank's sovereign loans to **Ghana**, **South Sudan** and **Zambia** may be included in debt restructurings. Afreximbank, however, excludes these three exposures from its own calculations, reporting a non-performing loan ratio of just 2.3% at the end of 2024.

Fitch's report assumes that the ratio will fall below 6% by 2028, citing continued strong loan growth and the expectation that some borrowers currently in arrears will resume repayments. If that does not materialise – and the bank is downgraded further into junk territory – it could fall off the radar of certain investors, particularly in the Middle East and among private banks.

Like other multilateral development banks (MDBs), Afreximbank has historically benefited from preferred creditor status, shielding it from sovereign debt restructurings. That protection is now under threat. Zambia's government has indicated it will not service Afreximbank loans outside a formal restructuring process. Ghana – the largest of the three borrowers – has signalled a similar stance.

There was a similar situation at the *Banque Ouest-Africaine de Développement*, owned by eight West African states that share the CFA franc and a central bank. The government of **Guinea-Bissau**, which accounts for 5.4% of BOAD's loan portfolio, fell behind on repayments but resumed payments following a restructuring in March. The agreement prompted Fitch to revise BOAD's outlook on its BBB rating from negative to stable in mid-April. The restructuring involved an extension of maturities rather than a haircut. Fitch, however, viewed it as a breach of preferred creditor status.

Unlike the African Development Bank (AfDB) and most other MDBs, Afreximbank's principal activities are trade finance and export development. It frequently co-finances with commercial banks and its interest rates are non-concessional. Its loans are typically shorter than those of other multilateral lenders and its borrowers are overwhelmingly from the private sector.

Afreximbank's mandate is to boost intra-African trade and, more recently, to facilitate the full implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area. The bank has expanded rapidly under the presidency of **Benedict Oramah**, who has served two terms and is due to step down at the end of this month. Its risk appetite, evident in gold-backed lending to Zimbabwe, remains robust and underpins a healthy net interest margin of 4.1%.

This sets it – and Bujumbura-based Trade and Development Bank, formerly the PTA Bank – apart from most multilaterals, which typically lend over 25-year terms and at highly concessionary rates. TDB holds speculative-grade ratings from both Moody's and Fitch. Curiously, GCR Ratings – fully owned by Moody's since last year – assigned TDB a comfortable investment-grade rating of BBB+ as recently as October 2024.

The prevailing assumption is that all MDBs, regardless of their mandate or ownership structure, are treated alike. This could reasonably be challenged on the grounds that Afreximbank has private shareholders, albeit that they are in the minority. Following a capital increase in 2021, the bank disclosed that its Category A shareholders – African governments, central banks and institutions such as the AfDB – held 61.3% of its capital.

Fitch has moved ahead of its peers in acting on Afreximbank. Moody's affirmed its Baa1 rating in February 2024 – two notches above Fitch – but revised its outlook from stable to negative. GCR Ratings affirmed its international, long-term A rating in July 2024 – four notches above Fitch – citing 'continued evidence of preferential creditor treatment'.

Fitch's downgrade has fuelled the perception by some African treasuries that the 'big three' credit ratings agencies – the others are Moody's and S&P Global – apply an unwarranted 'African risk premium' (Dispatches 15/8/23,16/4/24 & AC Vol 66 No 4). Critics include the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), an autonomous African Union body, as well as **Kenya's** President **William Ruto** and **Akinwumi Adesina**, who stepped down as AfDB president last month. The agencies are accused of opaque assessments and placing disproportionate weight on factors such as government budgets, economic plans and institutional strength.

Criticism of the big three has built over several years and helped drive momentum towards the launch of the African Credit Rating Agency (AfCRA). Its first rating is expected in late 2025 or early 2026, according to a source at the APRM, with a chief executive due to be appointed in the third quarter of 2025.

MCB Capital Markets, the investment arm of Mauritius's largest banking group, has been appointed transactions advisor to the agency, *Africa Confidential* has learned. The ownership structure of AfCRA remains unclear, although the APRM insists that shareholders will not include states – instead, they will be drawn largely from African private sector bodies.

There is a clear gap in the ratings market in Africa, not least because more than 20 sovereigns on the continent are not rated by any of the big three. One proposal is that AfCRA will focus on national ratings, primarily for companies, which are sometimes lower risk than their international equivalents. For example, GCR Ratings assigns A and AAA to Afreximbank on its international and national scales, respectively. AfCRA could provide national ratings for sovereigns – likely higher than those issued by the big three – which would then serve as benchmarks for companies and other operators in the jurisdiction. Sovereigns are typically rated above corporates, although exceptions may arise, such as Kenya's Safaricom.

Several players, including African foundations, have begun to fill the gap – a trend highlighted at an African Union-UN conference on ratings in Cape Town in late May. Agusto & Co, founded in **Nigeria** in 1992, now holds licences to operate in three other jurisdictions and has rated more than 3,000 bodies to date. Thousands more remain unrated. Metropol Corporation in Kenya and the ICRA Ratings Agency in **Tanzania** were among the conference participants.

There is little expectation of strong competition from the big three, which often avoid deploying staff to African capitals for cost reasons. This absence reinforces perceptions of double standards: the same agency might describe comparable protests as democratic expression in eastern Europe and as insurrection in eastern Africa. They may rate a sovereign such as Kenya – and perhaps a large company such as Safaricom – after a fleeting visit but lack the local expertise to assess smaller firms at scale. ●

# Gavi vaccine summit seeks a shot in the arm

**A pledging conference in Brussels will test rich countries' willingness to plug the gaps left after the USAID shutdown**

Public health systems in Africa and Asia could face more pressure on their budgets on 25 June when Gavi, the global vaccine alliance, holds its five-year donor pledging summit in Brussels (Dispatches 3/3/25). Governments across Africa have been searching for alternative funding for critical health programmes after the shuttering of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in February.

Initially planned for March, the summit was delayed after serial cuts were announced by the **United States** and other western government. President **Donald Trump's** administration has proposed a budget for 2026 that would cut funding for the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) by 34% and NIH funding by 36%, for a combined total of over US$5.5 billion. It also plans to scrap the Global Division of HIV and Tuberculosis (DGHT) at the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and to end funding for Gavi's global vaccine procurement.

In 2023, US President **Joe Biden's** administration committed at least $1.58bn toward the new cycle, and the US has been contributing $300 million per year since then. Annual congressional appropriations are required to fulfil the pledge. The Kaiser Family Foundation, a US-based health think-tank, reports that of 770 global health awards identified, 80% are listed as terminated, including the main Gavi contract.

Also at risk is Gavi's donor liquidity partnership with the US government. The International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), which gives the vaccine organisation rapid access up to $1bn from a 'Rapid Financing Facility' to support routine immunisation and pandemic response. Gavi might be able to cope without the US money. Washington currently accounts for 13% of Gavi's funding following the previous replenishment, for 2021-2025, which generated $10.5bn.

Five years ago, **Britain** offered $2bn which was the largest single donation followed by $1.6bn from the Gates Foundation and $1bn each from **Norway** and the US. **Germany** with $600m; **France** with $500m and $300m from the European Commission were the other main donations.

Gavi is targeting $9bn in donations for 2026-2030 which, it says, would protect 500 million children and save over eight million lives between 2026 and 2030. It is also eyeing new donors from business and has signed agreements with multilateral development banks, including the European Investment Bank, Development Finance Corporation and the Asian Development Bank.

Britain's contribution is set to be radically cut back. In January, then International Development minister **Anneliese Dodds** told the House of Commons parliament that the government was in talks with Gavi to 'broaden the donor base'. 'I cannot pretend that the spending review does not exist,' Dodds added, weeks before resigning from Prime Minister **Keir Starmer's** government in protest at its plans to cut the Britain's aid budget to 0.3% of GNI per year, reducing spending from £13.3bn in 2024 to less than £8bn (AC Vol 66 No 5).

## NEW DONORS

Gavi's Chief Executive **Sania Nishtar** says that **India** and **Indonesia**, which had previously been supported by Gavi, are now contributing as donors. Nishtar also visited **Morocco** in early June to encourage its government to become a donor.

Aside from using the funds to buy vaccines for diseases from measles to cholera, Gavi's new funding round will include a new financing instrument – the African Vaccine Manufacturing Accelerator (AVMA) – which aims to make up to $1.2bn available over 10 years to build up vaccine manufacturing capacity on the continent.

It is central to a plan led by the African Union, approved by the AU summit in Addis Ababa last year, to manufacture 60% of the routine vaccines required by 2040.

During a visit to the Marblo vaccine manufacturing facility near Casablanca under development, Nishtar said that Morocco stood 'a good chance' of benefiting from the AVMA, a hint, perhaps, that Rabat should become a donor.

Gavi officials concede that besides the expected US and British cuts, the EU27 and the European Commission won't substitute for this lost funding. 'It's a very challenging time for multilateral organisations in general... people don't want to be paying for immunisation forever,' says a senior Gavi official, though he maintains that there is still 'cautious optimism' ahead of 25 June.

## NEW VACCINES

The need for vaccines, particularly for Mpox and cholera, remains critical. At least 57 countries use Gavi, many of them in Africa, and outbreaks are increasing. The Africa Centres for Disease Control, reports that while Mpox cases have declined across much of Africa, numbers are up in **Congo-Kinshasa**, the epicentre of the disease, which has seen a near 20% spike in recent weeks.

As with the Covid-19 vaccines, there are bottlenecks and delays in getting Mpox vaccines to patients (AC Vol 61 No 20). Though more than 5.3m Mpox doses have been promised, only 2.95m vaccines have been shipped to 11 African countries, of which around 2.5m have been assigned for Congo-K. That includes the 1.5m doses given by **Japan** to Congo-K, the largest single donation.

Yet only 664,000 people have been vaccinated, according to Africa CDC data on 12 June. This, and the 2.9m vaccines, fall way short of the 6.4m doses that were needed between March and August this year, say Africa CDC officials. Only 568,000 additional doses are available, and there is still a shortfall (Dispatches 27/8/24).

'Tireless intensification of community-based surveillance' is needed to curb Mpox cases, says the Africa CDC, noting that testing rates in Congo-K remain low. Dr **Ngashi Ngongo**, chief of staff at Africa CDC, says that there are serious shortages of Mpox vaccines in **Uganda** and **Sierra Leone**.

Africa CDC officials have also been alarmed by a sharp year-on-year increase in cholera cases. 104,220 cases across the continent, and 2,375 deaths in 2022, rose to 254,075 cases and 4,725 deaths in 2024, according to Africa CDC data. The first five months suggest increases to both this year. 60% of all cases and 93.5% of deaths from cholera are in Africa.

Gavi officials say the low vaccination

figure is partly because the Japanese doses require bifurcated needles and are just starting to be rolled out. They add that the 500,000 Mpox vaccines bought by Gavi have all been allocated and will be given to patients in the coming weeks.

Africa CDC and Gavi officials say that there has been progress towards manufacturing Mpox and cholera vaccines in Africa. On Mpox, there are 'very high-level negotiations' on technology transfer between Bavarian Nordic, the main producer of Mpox vaccines, and Africa CDC to allow for African production of generic vaccines (AC Vol 65 No 19).

Talks are 'much more advanced' on cholera, meanwhile. An agreement on technology transfer has been approved by at least two manufacturers to have African production in 2026 and 2027 respectively.

Gavi signed partnerships with three pharmaceutical firms on technology transfer to produce vaccines in Africa. Officials say that **Egypt**, **Ghana** and Morocco are among a group of African countries that are rapidly expanded their manufacturing capacity. They point to India, where the number of vaccine suppliers has grown from four to 18 over the past 20 years, as a model for Africa. ●

## DISPATCHES

AFRICA/MIGRATION

# AU lawmakers draw up model migration law

23 June

**The Pan-African Parliament hopes its example will encourage governments to protect migrants' rights**

The Pan-African Parliament (PAP) has moved closer to agreeing a model law to harmonise the treatment of migrants across the continent following three days of meetings in Nairobi last week.

'The draft law addresses the liberties that migrants should enjoy when they move from their countries of origin to the destination countries. So, issues of xenophobia and abuse of the rights of migrant workers are going to be dealt with,' said **John Bideri**, chair of PAP's Committee on Trade, Customs and Immigration Matters (AC Vol 66 No 8).

However, the proposal by PAP, which is the legislative arm of the African Union, depends on implementation by national governments and is reliant on political will. 'We are looking at the model law as a communication tool rather than a law for enforcement on member states,' Bideri said.

Though Europe's media and political leaders focus on the numbers of African migrants arriving, intra-African migration is actually far higher. Between 1.5 million and 2m Africans move each year for work, most of them within the continent.

PAP officials say that the model law could reduce human trafficking and address exploitation of migration workers. The number of African labour migrants living in other African countries has increased by 25% over the past decade, reaching 15m in 2024, according to the International Organisation for Migration (Dispatches 19/5/25).

Despite upward projections of labour migration within and from Africa, the continent faces major challenges such as fragmented legal and policy frameworks and weak institutions, with some countries lacking agencies to deal with the issue.

AFRICA/DEBT

# Stiglitz panel calls for debt relief, as wealthy states block African UN plan

23 June

**US aid cuts and tariffs increase need of African states to get a fairer deal on debt**

An expert panel chaired by Nobel prize-winning economist **Joseph Stiglitz** has called for a new round of debt relief for African countries to prevent a 'perfect storm' of rising financing costs making it harder for them to fund healthcare and education (Vol 66 No 7).

The Jubilee Report, commissioned by the late Pope **Francis**, warns that market pressures are already pushing African governments to 'prioritise timely debt payments over essential development spending. This is not a path to sustainable development. Rather, it is a roadblock to development and leads to increasing inequality and discontent'.

The last major round of debt relief was the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative two decades ago which wrote off over US$100 billion in sovereign debt.

On top of the tariffs threatened by **United States** President **Donald Trump**, most African states are weighing up how to plug budget holes in education and, in particular, healthcare spending created by the suspension of most US aid.

The report is timely given that sovereign debt is set to be one of the main dividing lines at the Financing for Development conference in Seville that starts on 30 June. Wealthy states, led by European Union members and the **United Kingdom**, have successfully blocked a proposal by the Africa group to shift global rulemaking on debt from the G20, Paris Club and International Monetary Fund to United Nations institutions (Vol 66 No 12). The US and **China** have stayed quiet in the debate, though insiders in New York tell *Africa Confidential* that they are likely to abstain if the issue is pushed to a vote in Seville.

One of the complaints raised by African diplomats in the talks ahead of the summit is that they have almost no representation in the multilateral organisations that make debt policy, leaving them at the mercy of creditors.

The debate mirrors a dispute over the creation of a UN tax convention, which started work in January after the Africa group in the UN secured a hefty majority, despite the opposition of the US, UK, **Japan** and the EU.

SOUTH AFRICA/US

# Ramaphosa hopes to relaunch trade talks in Luanda

23 June

**Despite Trump's bullying, South Africa may receive positive US response after generous offer**

Despite leaving the G7 summit in **Canada** without a meeting with United States President **Donald Trump**, South Africa's President **Cyril Ramaphosa** is hoping to kickstart trade talks with Washington at next week's US-Africa Business Forum in **Angola**.

Without an agreement by 9 July, three months after Trump announced his so-called 'Liberation Day' tariffs, South Africa would face crippling 30%

duties on its goods exports, one of the highest rates threatened by the US.

Though Trump attempted to humiliate Ramaphosa at a meeting in the Oval Office in May by confronting him with false claims of 'genocide' against South Africa's white farmers, the South African president left with the promise of renewed diplomatic and economic engagement after months of being targeted by Trump (Vol 66 No 7).

Pretoria has made a generous offer to Washington as part of a proposed framework agreement, which includes ramping up liquid natural gas imports, a joint fund for the exploration of critical minerals and duty-free US quotas for the auto and steel industries.

However, only a handful of countries have successfully concluded trade deals with the Trump administration and those that have agreed, such as the **United Kingdom**, have only secured piecemeal arrangements. South Africa, like the EU, is increasingly hoping that Trump will, again, back down in the tariff war.

The gathering in Angola is the first in a series of US-Africa summits over the coming months, primarily based around commercial transactions. But it is also likely to see a queue of African countries seeking to avoid their own 'Liberation Day' tariffs.

CHINA/AFRICA

# China's new trade offer exploits Washington's tariffs on African economies

16 June

**Officials in Washington are mulling changes to the tariff policy ahead of a US-Africa business summit in September**

China continues to position itself as Africa's most important economic partner after offering tariff-free trade to all 54 African countries, other than **Eswatini**, which recognises **Taiwan's** sovereignty.

The move, along with some jibes at **United States** policy, was announced at a ministerial meeting on China-Africa Cooperation in central China on 11 June that was attended by dozens of African ministers. It came alongside a ten-article declaration urging the international community to embrace 'true multilateralism' and stressing that development aid 'should be effectively increased, not unilaterally slashed'.

Last September, Beijing announced that it would offer tariff- and quota-free trade to the 33 poorest African countries (AC Vol 65 No 19).

The recent declaration also referred to the damage caused to African economies by 'unilateralism, protectionism and economic bullying', an obvious dig at the Trump administration, whose 'liberation day' tariffs mean that African states now face a 10% levy on their exports to the US (Dispatches 31/3/25).

The reference to development aid, currently being cut by the US and much of Europe, is disingenuous since China's 2024 aid budget of US$3.5 billion was dwarfed by the $63.3bn formerly provided by Washington.

What China is offering is a replica of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), the US law which has offered tariff- and quota-free trade to around 40 African states since 2000.

AGOA does not formally expire until September but it has been undermined by the Trump tariffs. Negotiations about an alternative set of measures are due to be discussed in a series of high-level US-Africa economic consultations due to be held between June and September.

Many in Washington expect that a revised version of AGOA will emerge after a US-Africa business leaders' summit due to be held in New York after the UN General Assembly meeting in September (Dispatches 7/4/25).

KENYA

# As protests grow, President Ruto admits police killed dissident blogger

16 June

**Police moves to arrest an officer for human rights abuses shows government nervousness in face of popular anger**

The murder of **Albert Ojwang**, a teacher and blogger, and attempts by the police to cover it up, have brought Kenyans back to the streets. On 12 June, police in Nairobi used tear gas to disperse crowds gathered close to the National Assembly and several buildings were set alight.

Protests intensified after the police claimed that Ojwang died from 'hitting his head against a cell wall', implying that he had died by suicide. On 11 June, President **William Ruto** confirmed that the 31-year-old had been killed 'at the hands of the police', describing the killing as 'heartbreaking and unacceptable'.

Also that day, Inspector General **Douglas Kanja** apologised to the National Assembly for saying that Ojwang's injuries were self-inflicted (Dispatches 31/12/24).

Ojwang was arrested on 6 June in Homa Bay, western Kenya, for supposedly defaming the country's deputy police chief **Eliud Lagat**. Ojwang posted online about Lagat's alleged role in a 'bribery scandal' on which *The Standard* newspaper had already published an investigation. A police officer is now in custody in relation to Ojwang's murder.

Ruto's decision to not shield the police shows his anxiety about more protests. It cuts across the impunity his government has allowed Kenya's law enforcement apparatus. On 12 June, the Independent Policing Oversight Authority chairman **Ahmed Issack Hassan** told a National Assembly committee that there had been '20 deaths in police custody in the last four months'.

The past 12 months have seen a wave of abductions and deaths of dozens of activists involved in last year's Gen Z protests against the 2024 Finance Bill and political corruption (AC Vol 65 No 23). Finance Minister **John Mbadi's** budget for 2025/26 is days from being finalised and is expected to focus on increasing tax revenue via higher compliance rather than imposing new taxes.

RWANDA/CONGO-K/US

# Washington wants security-mining deal finalised by end of June

16 June

**Demands by Washington and Kinshasa for Rwanda to withdraw its troops are the key sticking point**

The United States is stepping up the pressure on Kigali and Kinshasa to conclude a security-minerals access deal by the end of June. Both Washington and Kinshasa insist that Rwanda withdraw all its troops from Congo-Kinshasa as a prerequisite.

**Troy Fitrell**, the top official in the US State Department's Africa bureau, told an online conference that officials were 'shooting for a June or July peace agreement'. Technical teams would hold further talks in the coming days, he said on 12 June. Fitrell is due to leave the State Department in mid-July.

President **Donald Trump's** senior Africa advisor **Massad Fares Boulos** wants a peace and security deal signed in June, alongside US minerals-access agreements with both Rwanda and Congo-K (AC Vol 66 No 8).

The requirement for a Rwandan army exit is at the heart of a draft accord produced by Washington and is a key sticking points to an agreement. Officials in Congo-K President **Félix Tshisekedi's** office have accused Rwanda of dragging its feet in negotiations. Tshisekedi's office says that there will be 'no compromise' on a full Rwandan withdrawal of troops and equipment.

A planned meeting in Washington between the two countries' foreign ministers was shelved in May (Dispatches 6/5/25). The **Qatari** government is hosting its own mediation talks on the conflict, with US support.

A new report by the New York-based Human Rights Watch is likely to amp up the diplomatic pressure on Kigali. Published earlier this month, HRW concludes that M23 executed at least 21 civilians over two days in February in Goma, the main city in Kivu Nord, which the Kigali-backed insurgents had captured in January. ●

# POINTERS

## Kenya

THE SHINE COMES OFF M-KOPA

Founded by the Vodafone team behind M-Pesa, M-Kopa has seen similar commercial success and political backing. At a 2015 entrepreneurship summit with President **Barack Obama**, then-President **Uhuru Kenyatta** name-checked M-Kopa – a fledgling start-up offering pay-as-you-go solar kits, now a booming model (AC Vol 56 No 25).

In May, it was again listed as one of Africa's fastest-growing companies and is projected to hit US$500 million in annual revenue by 2025.

But that golden image has faded. In September, the Tax Appeals Tribunal ruled M-Kopa must pay $6.8m in taxes for 2017–2019 – a decision expected to benefit the Kenya Revenue Authority. The firm had claimed it was domiciled in the **United Kingdom**, though its CEO and senior staff are based at its headquarters in Nairobi.

More damaging is a lawsuit filed against M-Kopa at the Employment and Labour Relations Court, which claims that the firm's executives restructured its employee shareholding scheme in 2019 – resulting in the dilution of shares held by local employees.

The petition, filed on behalf of M-Kopa employee **Elizabeth Njoki**, accuses the firm of racial discrimination and includes details of 2019 board meeting minutes in which executives discussed how to ensure that its 'preferred shareholders' would not have their share values diluted. 'Ordinary Shareholders' – most of whom were local Kenyan employees – saw their stake in the company shrink from 27% to just 7% without their knowledge or consent. Among the beneficiaries of the new share scheme are the UK government's development finance arm British International Investment and Generation Investment Management, co-founded and chaired by former **United States** Vice-President **Al Gore**.

## São Tomé and Príncipe

POWER PLAY

São Tomé's Audit Office (*Tribunal de Contas*) released a report on 19 May examining the implementation of a 25-year PPP agreement signed by **Patrice Trovoada's** government in October 2023 with Tesla STP, the local subsidiary of the **Turkish** EB Group. The deal involved installing and operating five Cummins C2500 diesel-powered thermal generators with 10-megawatt capacity, an investment reportedly worth €10.85 million (US$12.4m).

In March 2024, then Prime Minister Trovoada and FB Group CEO **Fatih Bora** inaugurated the thermal power plant – part of an agreement to boost electricity generation, as public utility *Empresa de Água e Eletricidade* (EMAE) had long struggled to ensure reliable supply (AC Vol 65 No 13). Under the agreement, the government supplies free fuel for the generators and purchases the energy produced, while Tesla installs and maintains diesel generators. However, auditors found the generators failed to produce a continuous 10MW output.

Between December 2023 and December 2024, EMAE supplied Tesla with 13,320,198 litres of fuel, worth €15.17m, free of charge. Tesla complained that poor fuel quality caused generator breakdowns.

Auditors state that Tesla charged EMAE based on the plant's full capacity, rather than the actual output of around 4MW. Tesla claims it was 5.82MW, but auditors found that Tesla invoiced EMAE for 88,371,823 kilowatts, while supplying only 51,625,550kW. The shortfall equates to €2,662,438.60 in overcharges.

Despite invoicing over €6.4m, of which EMAE has paid just €683,570, no action has been taken. Tesla threatened to halt electricity production but backed down, agreeing to negotiate debt and contract terms with ministers – though the dispute now threatens phases two and three, which require a further €86m for 30MW of dual-fuel engines and a 15MW solar plant.

## EMMANUEL GYIMAH-BOADI – DEMOCRACY CHAMPION

'The men in green are back, and prospects for democratic consolidation have dimmed significantly,' warned Afrobarometer's **Emmanuel Gyimah-Boadi** in a Brookings Institution essay in June. 'Africa's democratic project is facing its toughest challenge yet,' he added. Gyimah-Boadi, who founded Afrobarometer more than 20 years ago and served as its chief executive until 2021, knows that better than most. He has moved into quasi-retirement after standing down as Afrobarometer's chair in May and has been succeeded by **Nigerian** business leader and civil society advocate **Amina Oyagbola**.

An academic and think-tank man par excellence, Gyimah-Boadi founded Afrobarometer and the Ghana Center for Democratic Development in 1999 as a means of shifting the continent's decision-making away from a handful of elites. One success of Afrobarometer, he says, is that it 'demonstrates that ordinary Africans have the agency and ability to voice their opinions, regardless of the narratives pushed by experts, pundits, and assorted elites'.

If the quality of political opinion polling across much of Africa remains patchy, Afrobarometer has been a pioneer of 'research as a tool for advocacy'.

The return of military juntas to a handful of African states – combined with corruption and poor governance in many others – has undoubtedly strained public support for democratic institutions and multi-party elections.

Even so, Afrobarometer's research suggests that most Africans still support democracy. Its May poll of over 55,000 people in 39 African countries found that 66% prefer democracy – yet only 45% see their countries as democratic and just 37% are satisfied with how it works in their nation.

If the polling data suggests that most Africans want democracy, it also points to a public need for governments that work. Afrobarometer's May survey found that in **Mali** and **Burkina Faso**, two of the most recent states to fall to military juntas, opposition to military rule has dropped by 40 and 36 points, respectively (AC Vol 62 No 11 & Vol 63 No 3). The failure of elected governments to address crime and insecurity, widespread corruption, official impunity, and to improve inadequate infrastructure and basic services has been seized upon by military rulers, 'rhetoric that clearly resonates with citizens'.

More problematic, perhaps, is that young Africans are far less deferential towards political elites than their parents – evidenced in the Gen Z mass protest movements in **Kenya**, Nigeria and elsewhere (AC Vol 65 No 15). Though they also want democracy, data suggests that – by a margin of 10 points – they are more likely to tolerate military regimes if they deliver.

Even before the latest wave of military takeovers – which intensified in 2022 – Afrobarometer officials had already been warning of 'great disillusionment between the youth and those who govern them'.

But Gyimah-Boadi maintains that the growing tolerance of autocrats is 'more a reaction to the failure of elected leaders to meet citizens' democratic aspirations than an attraction to the military rule per se'. He argues that the juntas' equally poor records on public policy will erode public support – a typically optimistic view from one of Africa's staunchest champions of democracy. ●