AFRICA CONFIDENTIAL

www.africa-confidential.com 10 October 2025 - Vol 66 - N° 20 - online edition

BLUE LINES

Governments, even optimistic ones, had been preparing for the expiry of the United States's trade preference programme on 30 September – the African Growth and Opportunity Act. A former senior White House official told Africa Confidential that AGOA was unlikely to be resurrected because there wasn't the 'focus or interest in the US Congress' to stop it lapsing. What may replace AGOA could be a series of bilateral trade treaties with countries in which the US has special interests.

Forseeing this, African trade officials have been trying to tie up new deals with other big economies such as China, the European Union, Turkey, the Gulf States and Brazil. And African farmers are finding new markets for their produce helped by the trade dispute between China, Europe and the US. China, which offered tariff- and quota-free trade to African states in June, is increasing food imports from the continent. Last month, Beijing approved imports of blueberries from Zimbabwe. Other products including Gambian groundnuts and cashews, Ethiopian soybean meal, and coffee and cocoa exports from a raft of African countries are also increasing.

Multi-polar economic ties beyond the US and Europe are growing. Brazil, hit by hefty US tariffs, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar have announced multi-billion-dollar agriculture projects in Angola and Ghana, as they diversify their food supplies and eye Africa's 60% share of the world's arable land.

CONGO-KINSHASA/RWANDA/UNITED STATES

Peace talks falter as M23 tightens its grip on the Kivus

Kinshasa balks at signing economic framework as Kigali-backed rebels consolidate territorial gains and set up proto-state

The pressure is mounting on **Massad Boulos**, senior Africa advisor to United States President **Donald Trump**, after the latest setback to his efforts to corral Congo-Kinshasa and Rwanda into a peace and security agreement underwritten by a mining accord. The signing of an economic cooperation deal due on 3 October was called off, with both Kinshasa and Kigali blaming each other for violating earlier commitments. Both parties are stalling in the three-track negotiations – in Addis Ababa, Doha and Washington DC – that Boulos has been trying to broker since he brought the foreign ministers of Congo-Kinshasa and Rwanda to sign an accord on 27 June at the US State Department (**AC Vol 66 No 14**). The plan was to expedite negotiations for the mineral-security accord then Congo-Kinshasa President **Félix Tshisekedi** and his Rwandan counterpart **Paul Kagame** would sign a peace treaty in the White House within a month. It would have been promoted by President Trump's supporters as another reason for him to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

That didn't happen as disputes multiplied between Congo-K and Rwanda together with the Kigali-backed *Mouvement du 23 Mars* (M23). The biggest obstacles are M23's continuing offensive in the Kivu provinces, as reported by UN experts, combined with Kinshasa's failure to pull back its *Forces armées de la république démocratique du Congo* (FARDC) together with the *Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda* (FDLR) and the sundry militias making up the *Wazalendo* (patriots) coalition from the very jagged frontlines in the Kivus.

Now the latest date suggested for a Kagame-Tshisekedi signing at the White House is 23 October, followed the next day by a Congo-Rwanda investment summit in the US capital. But that looks problematic in every way. First there was the cancellation of the signing of the Regional Economic Integration Framework (REIF) between Congolese and Rwandan negotiators on 3 October. President Tshisekedi's office told its team in the US led by **Patrick Luabeya**, the director of the *Autorité de Régulation et de Contrôle des Marchés de Substances Minérales*, not to sign because of intensified fighting led by M23 in the Kivus.

WAR ZONE

Three days earlier, **Binta Keïta**, the head of *Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en République démocratique du Congo* (MONUSCO), had told the UN Security Council that the M23 were expanding the territory under their control in the Kivus, having seized the two provincial capitals, Goma and Bukavu, earlier this year.

Keïta added that the M23 had added another 7,000 trained fighters to their force and were barring UN peacekeepers from entering areas under their control and reporting abuses. UN officials reported that over 1,000 civilians had been killed in Kivu-Nord and Ituri provinces during June. The war zone was spreading despite the negotiations between Congolese officials and M23 representatives in Doha, she explained to the council. A team of **Qatari** facilitators in Doha has been trying

AFRICA CONFIDENTIAL
3rd Floor, 45 Albemarle Street
London, W1S 4JL, UK
Tel: +44 20 7831 3511
Editor: Patrick Smith
Deputy Editor: Andrew Weir
Website Editor: Juliet Amissah
Published fortnightly since 1960
25 issues per year
www.africa-confidential.com
Proprietors: Asempa Ltd. ISSN 0044-6483

to broker a military agreement between Congolese officials and the M23 and its political wing, the *Alliance du Fleuve Congo* (AFC), led by **Corneille Nangaa**, the former chair of the national electoral commission in Kinshasa.

Nnangaa's involvement has escalated the conflict. He insists his mission is to topple Tshisekedi, and boosted his standing by recruiting the former Congo-K president **Joseph Kabila** to his ranks. That prompted the courts in Kinshasa to try Kabila for treason *in absentia* – he appears to be based in territory controlled by M23/AFC – and hand down a death sentence. Kagame has been more circumspect about his government's war aims: he refuses to discuss how many Rwandan Defence Force (RDF) soldiers crossed into Congo (US intelligence sources reckon there are still at least 8,000 there) and insists the M23's mission is to defend the political and land rights of Congolese Tutsi. None of that looks credible given the ferocity of the M23's attacks and the rapid extension of territory under its control (most of the Kivu provinces), together with the logistical and military backing coming from the RDF.

In late August, the AFC/M23 coalition sent a small delegation to Doha – comprising only **René Abandi** and Colonel **Dieudonné Padiri** – with a narrow mandate to negotiate a ceasefire and the immediate release of imprisoned fighters. Kinshasa has refused to consider unilateral releases, insisting that prisoner issues be resolved only as part of a comprehensive accord. On 14 October, the Congo-M23 talks are due to resume in Doha.

But there is no agreement on the core issue: whether Kivu-Nord and Kivu-Sud return to Kinshasa's control or whether the M23/AFC continues to build an independent state. The two aspirations are irreconcilable. A possible compromise would be for Kinshasa to concede autonomy to the territory under M23 control in exchange for the latter agreeing to end its quest for sovereignty and independence. But the prospects for that are near zero.

Since independence, the Congolese state has faced various provinces of the country seceding and proclaiming independence; sometimes for several years. But Kinshasa has never agreed to these or to plans for a compromise allowing for greater federalism.

Instead, it has sent its forces to fight secessionists until the rebel provinces return to Kinshasa's fold. Even if President Tshisekedi was willing to cede some control in the east to the M23/AFC, it would amount to political suicide. His legitimacy is heavily invested in his defence of Congolese sovereignty and fiery opposition to what he regards as Kagame's expansionism.

STATELET

The M23/AFC are consolidating their nascent state in the Kivus. In late August they announced the formation of the Justice Revival Commission. Led by **Délion Kimbulungu**, it is naming judges and aims to restore functioning courts and tribunals across rebel-held territory. They are appointing administrative officials across the territory and are intervening in chiefdom-level succession disputes. Massive challenges remain. No commercial banks are open, forcing the few who can to use Rwandan banks instead, and causing endless difficulties with the supply of both Congolese francs and US dollars. The administration is not paying salaries to most of those working for it – combatants are being prioritised, even they are not getting much, and there appears to be very little left for anyone else. ●

ENTER REFORMIST MINISTERS, EXIT PRESIDENTIAL RIVAL KAMERHE

The new Congo-Kinshasa cabinet in place since August comprises 54 members – down one from the previous – and now includes six vice-prime ministers, up from four. **Judith Suminwa** remains prime minister. The Presidency called the reshuffle 'inclusive'. **Adolphe Muzito** – a former prime minister under **Joseph Kabila** and long-time protégé of **Antoine Gizenga** – returns as Minister of Budget. A senior figure in the Unified Lumumbist Party, Muzito now oversees one of the most strategic portfolios, including the civil service payroll.

Another 'inclusive' appointee is **Floribert Anzuluni**, the new Minister of Regional Integration. Anzuluni is a former *Filimbi* ('whistle') activist – *Filimbi* being one of the country's most prominent youth-led civil society activist organisations. The new Minister of Justice, **Guillaume Ngefa-Atondoko**, is also a veteran human rights advocate. He founded the *Association Africaine de Défense des Droits de l'Homme* during the Mobutu era – one of the first independent rights organisations in the country.

A widely welcomed appointment is **Louis Watum Kabamba** as Minister of Mines. Watum previously served as Minister of Industry and is a trusted technocrat. From 2010 to 2014, he headed Randgold's Kibali gold mine in Haut-Uélé, before becoming managing director of Kamoa-Kakula – a vast copper mine jointly owned by **Robert Friedland's** Ivanhoe and **China's** Zijin Mining Group. In April 2024, Watum was re-elected president of Congo's Chamber of Mines.

But Senator **Jean Bamanisa**, former governor of Orientale Province, has announced his intention to revive the stalled debate on constitutional reform. Many fear the debate could reopen the door to presidential term limit revisions although cabinet ministers strongly reject this. Tshisekedi's hopes of constitutional reform were dashed earlier this year by M23's blitzkrieg advances in North and South Kivu. But with frontlines now largely stabilised – except around Uvira and Fizi, where clashes continue – the President may see Bamanisa's initiative as a chance to reassert his agenda.

A major opponent to date of such a change has been **Vital Kamerhe**, who was the president of the *Assemblée Nationale*. Kamerhe is from South Kivu, where he has built a political powerbase that secured his *Union pour la Nation Congolaise* 36 seats in the *Assemblée Nationale*, making it one of the largest components of Tshisekedi's coalition. He and Tshisekedi had made an agreement that Tshisekedi would serve one term as President, and then Kamerhe would become the presidential candidate in his place. Tshisekedi reneged on that promise and won the 2023 presidential election. But the President's *Union pour la Démocratie et le Progrès Social* (UDPS), at Tshisekedi's behest, supported Kamerhe's candidacy as president of the *Assemblée Nationale*.

But then the UDPS turned on Kamerhe and petitioned for his removal. Kamerhe resigned on 22 September and will be in no doubt that it was Tshisekedi who engineered his departure. So far, Kamerhe has diplomatically explained that he resigned in the interest of national unity. Yet if Tshisekedi resumes the drive for a third term, Kamerhe may be induced to take a firmer position. ●

CONGO-KINSHASA/UNITED STATES

First family politics casts shadow over mining industry

Kinshasa gets tough on cobalt quotas and mining leases under industry veteran and new mines minister Watum Kabamba

Congo-Kinshasa's new Minister of Mines of **Louis Watum Kabamba** has inherited an ever more complex web of mining and trading relationships in a country that produces over 70% of the world's cobalt and is trying to boost export prices and national revenues.

As the first person this century with a strong professional history in the mining industry to take the portfolio, Watum stands a better chance than his predecessors of reaching agreement with the traders and the big cobalt and copper refineries, mainly in **China**.

The government in Kinshasa imposed a ban on cobalt exports from the country in February 2025, to shore up prices, after Chinese producers in Congo had ramped up production so much that it caused a glut and the price crashed.

On September 20, Watum announced that the ban would be replaced by export quotas, allowing a further 18,000 metric tons to be exported this year, and 96,600 tons to be exported each year in 2026 and 2027 – roughly half the amount exported during 2024.

But a few days later, striking a fashionably transactional tone, Watum told Bloomberg News that he would be open to 'reviewing' these quotas for companies that were able to offer Congo special benefits, such as refining more cobalt locally. The risk, as with US President **Donald Trump's** tariffs, is that the Congolese government and affected companies come to negotiate opaque deals with under the counter benefits for both sides, which would worsen already chronic corruption (AC Vol 66 No 4).

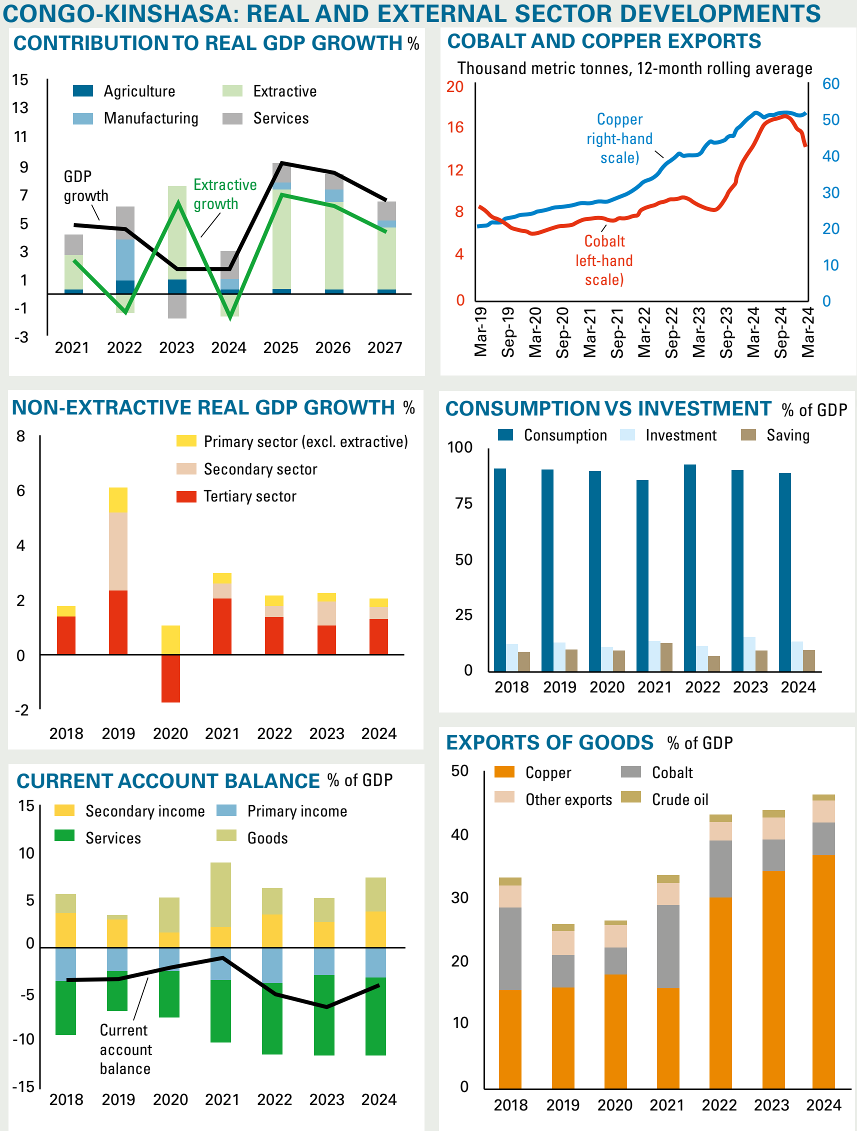
The Trump administration has continued with his predecessor **Joe Biden's** policy of pressuring the Congolese government not to allow any further mining asset sales to Chinese companies. The problem with this policy for both Biden and Trump, is US companies do not seem to want to acquire most Congolese mining assets. Chemaf Resources, a copper and cobalt miner in Katanga backed by the **Swiss**-based trader Trafigura Group, put itself up for sale two years ago, and swiftly attracted an offer from a unit of China's state-owned arms manufacturer Norinco. Majority owned by **Shiraz Virji**, Chemaf secured a lease from Congo's state miner, Gécamines, – for its Mutoshi projects but holds several other mining leases in the area.

Following US intervention, Congo-K President **Félix Tshisekedi's** government and Gécamines rejected Norinco's bid. One option is that Gécamines, which has preferential rights, would buy back the lease from Chemaf. But the other option, which could prove more diplomatically helpful, is that a consortium of New York-based Orion Resource partners and **Canada**-based Virtus Minerals, take over the asset.

Virtus, whose ROK Mining affiliate in Congo refines small volumes of copper and cobalt, has triggered interest due to the US military and intelligence background of its top executives: its president, **Gregory Roberts**, served in the US Special Forces for three decades and was a staffer on the House of Representatives Committee on Intelligence; managing director, **Phil Braun**, has two decades of military service and is now serving as a Green Beret with the 20th Special Forces Group in the National Guard.

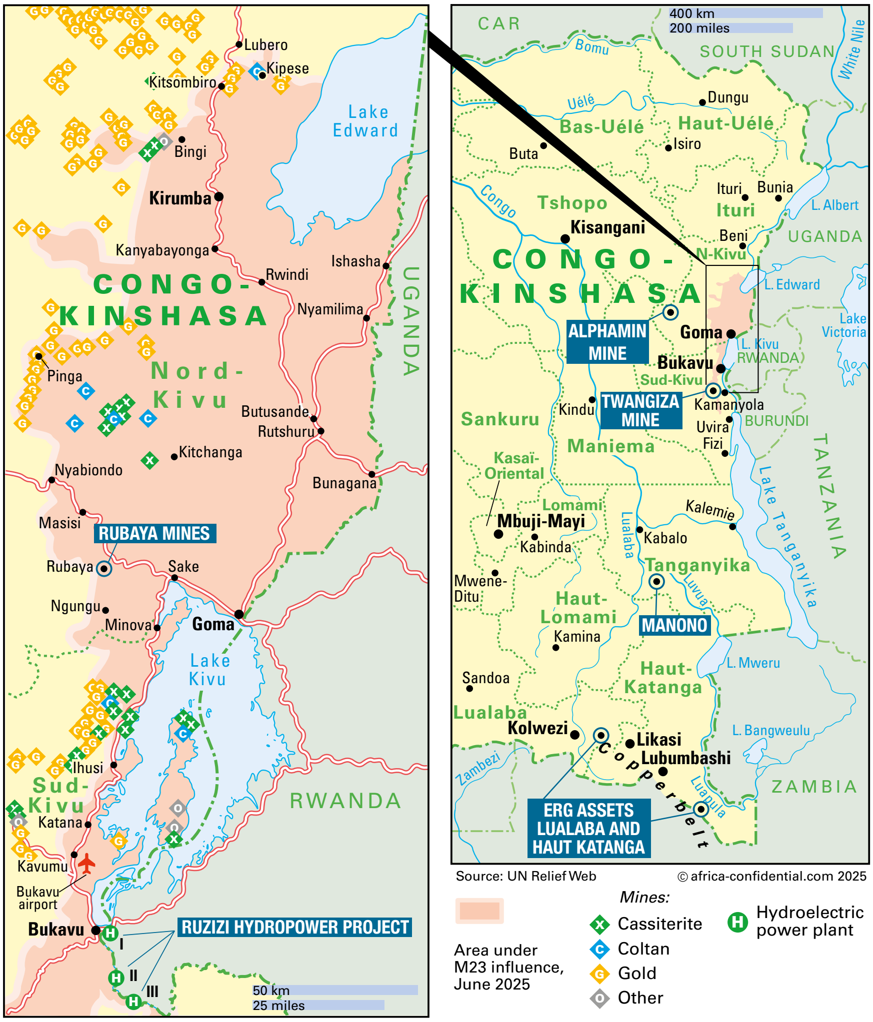
We hear their background has

CONGO-KINSHASA: REAL AND EXTERNAL SECTOR DEVELOPMENTS



Source: International Monetary Fund

© africa-confidential.com 2025



impressed some of their Congolese interlocutors who have been looking for arrangements in which they trade the country's mineral assets in exchange for military assistance from the US as try to wrest back control of the eastern Kivu provinces from the Rwandan-backed *Mouvement du 23 Mars* (M23). The matter is getting urgent as Chemaf said it would stop production in November if no-one bought its assets. Complicating the matter, Chemaf owes Trafigura US$500 million, a loan that will not be serviced if there is no sale.

Another major mining asset that has come up for sale recently is Glencore's Kamoto Copper Mine (KCC). Glencore has been fighting with the Congolese government over royalties for several years provoking much animosity. Here again, Orion Resources, this time backed by **United Arab Emirates** funding, was interested but its offer of just over $2.8 billion for the asset was judged too far from Glencore's asking price of $5.7bn for serious negotiations to start. There is plenty of market interest including from the **Anglo-Australian** Rio Tinto.

COLTAN SANCTIONS

On 12 August, the US Treasury Department imposed sanctions on the *Coalition des Patriotes Résistants Congolais-Forces de Frappe*, the *Coopérative des Artisanaux Miniers du Congo*, and two Hong Kong-based export companies – East Rise Corporation and Star Dragon Corporation. The sanctions relate to their involvement in the trade of coltan from the Bibatama mine near Rubaya, in Masisi territory in North Kivu.

The mine is currently under M23 control but from April 2023 to April 2024 was held by PARECO-FF, a predominantly Hutu armed group. The *Cooperative des Artisanaux Miniers du Congo* (CDMC) the title holder at the time, is accused by the US of having continued to buy ore and sell it to East Rise and Star Dragon – both linked to traders **Chris Huber** and **John Crawley** (**AC Vol 65 No 15**). This is the first time any state authority has targeted the business interests of Huber and Crawley, who have been buying coltan from Rwandan-linked entities since 2000.

CDMC's CEO **Serge Mulumba** has denounced the sanctions as unfair, claiming the company stopped buying from Bibatama artisanals once PARECO-FF took over. He also alleged a 'coordinated bid' to undermine CDMC's legal hold on Permit 76 – orchestrated, he said, by actors within the Congolese administration and supported by diplomatic and financial interests. Last month, Mulumba and CMDC secured a ruling from Congo's top administrative court that it is the legitimate permit holder at Bibatama after it challenged the claims of state-owned *Societe Aurifere du Kivu et Maniema* (SAKIMA). Mulumba insists that his company, Congo Fair Mining, partnering with CMDC, has the sole legal rights to the Rubaya mine.

This dispute could prove critical for the wider Congo-K-Rwanda security-mineral negotiations. Kigali's allies in the M23 have been occupying the Rubaya tantalum mine since April 2024 And it has become a key source of revenue for the militia which oversees the trucking of the tantalum over the border to Rwanda for refining.

A key principle of the US-backed peace plan, drawn up by Trump advisor **Massad Boulos**, was that Congo would bring in US investors to develop the Rubaya mine and Rwanda would order the M23 to relinquish control of it. The Boulos logic was that Congo would earn much more revenue from an industrialised operation, said to be the world's biggest tantalum mine and by striking a deal to supply Rwanda's refinery would create a common interest in security in the region (**AC Vol 66 No 14**).

CONSIDERATIONS

But notably absent from the US Treasury's sanctions list were M23, Bibatama and Rubaya, and SAKIMA. On the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, Mines Minister Watum told Bloomberg News that he regarded SAKIMA as the legitimate owner of the Rubaya permit but conceded that all sides would have to get 'around the table and then discuss.' SAKIMA's exclusion from US sanctions may reflect broader strategic interests in Congolese mining.

The degree of coordination between different government departments in the Trump administration is unclear but it is plausible that M23 was excluded from the Treasury sanctions list to help the security negotiations in **Qatar** between the M23 and Kinshasa government.

Another reason that SAKIMA was excluded may be that any US investors will need to be in a joint venture with the company if it ever manages to take control of Bibatama and Rubaya from the M23. We hear that the consortium led by US hedge fund manager **Gentry Beach's** America First Global and Switzerland's Mercuria is still in the running for the asset. After *Africa Confidential* reported Beach's Congolese projects in June, he has given a lengthy interview to the *Wall Street Journal*, describing his close ties with presidential scion **Donald Trump Jnr** and their 'mutual destruction' pact (**AC Vol 66 No 14**).

Another US-based entity is said to be lobbying **Michael Boulos**, son of Massad and husband of President Trump's daughter **Tiffany**, on the matter. These developments suggest to Congolese officials that the future financing of the Rubaya mine may hinge on the interests of one or another branch of the first family in Washington DC. It is an intersection of the personal, political and commercial in a manner that is familiar to many politicians in Kinshasa. ●

ZIMBABWE

ZANU-PF succession fight goes public

Published online 7 October

Vice-President Chiwenga accuses President Mnangagwa's allies of looting US$3.2 billion from party coffers and demands arrests

The annual conference of the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), which veers between sycophantic theatre and high-stakes factional drama, is set to host a fiery confrontation when this year's meeting opens on 13 October. At a politburo meeting on 17 September, Vice-President **Constantino Chiwenga**, the party's Second Secretary, presented a dossier charging the closest allies of President **Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa** with grand corruption. And it accused Mnangagwa of collusion, a charge he is yet to answer publicly.

Chiwenga's dossier claims that energy mogul **Kudakwashe Tagwirei** diverted at least US$3.2 billion from ZANU-PF's treasury. It said the party had acquired a 45% share in Tagwirei's company Sakunda Holdings during President **Robert Mugabe's** tenure, but the profits were never passed on. The shares were meant to be held in trust by Mnangagwa, Vice-President **Kembo Mohadi** and the then Secretary for Legal Affairs, **Patrick Chinamasa** (Minister of Finance under Mugabe), but Chiwenga accuses Tagwirei of keeping the money.

Chiwenga – a retired army general who led the 2017 revolt that ousted Mugabe – accuses Tagwirei of buying loyalty within ZANU-PF for himself and Mnangagwa, naming key benefactors: **Wicknell Chivayo**, **Pedzai 'Scott' Sakupwanya** and **Dilesh Nguwaya**. Chivayo, a flamboyant businessman, has been implicated in multiple scandals, including a $173 million solar tender for which his company Intratrek built only a shed, and a contract to purchase ballot papers for the 2023 elections from **South African** firm Ren-Form (**AC Vol 65 No 12** & **Dispatches 29/10/24**).

His whistle-blowing partners **Mike Chimombe** and **Obert Moses Mpofu**, now in custody without bail over a tenuous goat-supply scheme, have accused Chivayo of corruption and political favouritism. Meanwhile, Chivayo plasters his social media with photos of wads of cash and piles of designer shoes, and regularly 'gifts' luxury cars to senior ZANU-PF officials or ZANU-supporting pastors, musicians and businesspeople. He is close to the President, frequently travelling or attending meetings with him.

Sakupwanya, a gold dealer, has made millions trading gold through Dubai. He lost his 2023 parliamentary bid to Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) candidate **Munyaradzi Kufahakutizwi**, who was however recalled in **Sengezo Tshabangu's** ZANU-PF-sponsored internal coup (**AC Vol 64 Nos 18** & **23**). Sakupwanya then ran a violent by-election campaign, culminating in the abduction and murder of a senior opposition organiser.

Nguwaya, a close associate of the president's son **Collins Mnangagwa**, has faced charges including impersonating police officers and fraud. He was Zimbabwe's representative for Drax, an international company that won a $60m Covid-19 procurement tender for supplies that were not delivered. After being arrested and charged, Nguwaya was eventually acquitted. He now heads Geo Pomona, a waste management firm controversially imposed on the City of Harare by the Ministry of Local Government. Under this contract, Harare pays at least $2.7m monthly, including $40 per delivery to its own Pomona dumpsite.

As succession tensions mount, corruption has become a central issue. War veteran **Blessed 'Bombshell' Geza** – who has called for Mnangagwa's removal since January in increasingly strident YouTube videos – published a list of '*zviganananda*' (those who have fattened themselves on corruption), naming Tagwirei, Chivayo and Sakupwanya as the top three (**AC Vol 66 No 14**). Although Chiwenga has not publicly aligned himself with Geza, he has repeatedly condemned the *zviganananda* tendency

MNANGAGWA UPS THE PATRONAGE STAKES

Ahead of ZANU-PF's annual conference from 13-18 October, President **Emmerson Mnangagwa's** camp is mobilising support for Resolution Number One – or ED2030 – a plan to postpone the 2028 elections to 2030, ostensibly to allow him to complete his development agenda (**Dispatches 6/11/24** & **AC Vol 66 No 1**). Provincial committees are now rallying behind the resolution, first adopted at last year's annual conference. **Owen 'Mudha' Ncube**, Minister of Provincial Affairs for Midlands Province (demoted from State Security after the 2019 protests), has declared Midlands's support. **Daniel Garwe**, Minister of Local Government and ZANU-PF Chair for Mashonaland East, has also been vocal. But ZANU-PF Mashonaland East Secretary for Land, **Tinashe Muzama**, was abducted and beaten for opposing the mobilisation by Garwe. Reports suggest Garwe's activists have been intimidating villagers to build support for ED2030.

At the Munhumutapa Day celebrations on 15 September, marking Mnangagwa's birthday, **Wicknell Chivayo** gave each of the 10 provincial chairs a 2025 Toyota Land Cruiser and $100,000 in cash. On 19 September, Mnangagwa distributed vehicles to three Central Committee members per province 'to carry out party activities' in support of ED2030.

On 29 September, Mnangagwa donated 102 vehicles to senior military commanders, announcing that it was the first tranche of 700 vehicles that would be donated to army officers in the coming months. This gesture is widely interpreted as a desperate attempt to shore up the security services' loyalty as the schisms worsen within ZANU-PF.

Vice-President General **Constantino Chiwenga**, as former Commander of the Defence Forces, was reckoned to have retained significant support in the security services. But this year, several of his allies in key positions have been replaced by the President, such as: the Police Commissioner-General, the Director-General of the Central Intelligence Organisation and the Commander of the Zimbabwe National Army.

This battle for loyalty between Mnangagwa and Chiwenga is being fought between historic factions within the security services and the armed forces. Judgements about Mnangagwa's integrity, his competence and the increasing involvement of his family in institutions of state also a play a role. From his use of patronage, gifts of vehicles and land, it's clear that Mnangagwa believes material benefits can swing the battle against Chiwenga. And those are benefits that Chiwenga appears to be unable to match. ●

in speeches this year, culminating in his dramatic politburo presentation. He called for the arrests of Tagwirei, Chivayo, Sakupwanya and Nguwaya, and directly linked Mnangagwa to the corruption, accusing him of being the ultimate beneficiary of the political gifts distributed by his henchmen.

Following the presentation, Minister of State for Security **Lovemore Matuke** accused Chiwenga of plotting a coup. Chiwenga retorted that he had helped Mnangagwa flee Zimbabwe after his 2017 sacking and reinstated him as President – a pointed reminder of his king-making role.

To placate Chiwenga, Mnangagwa promised to form a committee to investigate the allegations, comprising Secretary for Administration **Obert Mpofu**, Party Chair and Defence Minister **Oppah Muchinguri**, and Chinamasa. The next day, Mnangagwa told the Central Committee that 'corruption of any kind and excesses that alienate us from the people can never be condoned'.

Yet Mnangagwa was visibly angry, striding past Chiwenga without their usual pre-committee exchange. His allies quickly moved to dismiss the accusations. **Temba Mliswa**, a Mnangagwa uber-loyalist, released a video accusing Chiwenga of disrespecting the President and claiming the military had no authority over him, since the 2017 ousting of Mugabe was not a coup. Mliswa, once a rising ZANU-PF youth leader, never rejoined the party after being fired by Mugabe. He served as an independent MP until 2023 and is now a *sabhuku* (traditional leader), but he remains close to Mnangagwa.

Mliswa then continued to post dramatic accusations on social media, including alleging that Chivayo had in fact paid for Chiwenga's wedding to Colonel **Miniyothabo Baloyi** in 2022, so should be implicated in the corruption dossier himself. On 1 October, one of the buildings at Mliswa's rural homestead in Shurugwi appears to have been burned down, in what is speculated to be either a violent warning to Mliswa or a self-inflicted act of arson, intended to increase the political temperature. This follows another incident in Murambinda, when a hotel belonging to presidential advisor **Paul Tungwarara** caught fire.

Christopher Mutsvangwa, now ZANU-PF's Secretary for Information and a key Mnangagwa ally in the 2017 coup, also weighed in. He claimed that criticism of Mnangagwa or 'persistent efforts from detractors' were pushing a colonial economic agenda, and that Tagwirei and Sakupwanya are in fact empowering youth. It marked a sharp reversal from a press conference in

July when Mutsvangwa denounced corruption and warned Tagwirei that ZANU-PF was 'a party of structure and could not be bought'. This change of view has been attributed by his foes to financial inducement or coercion but Mutsvangwa is yet to offer an explanation.

Then, on Tuesday 23 September, Mutsvangwa announced that Mpofu would be demoted from Secretary-General of ZANU-PF to Secretary for Information and Communications Technology. Mpofu is an influential politician and businessman who was close to the Mugabe family and resisted Mnangagwa's ascendance to the presidency in 2017. His replacement, **Jacob Mudenda**, is the Speaker of the National Assembly and a reliable ally of the President. However, both Mudenda and Mpofu are now issuing party orders in letters they sign and stamp as Secretary-General, meaning that Mpofu has not accepted the demotion. ●

ZIMBABWE

State capture threatens mining reforms

A long-delayed bill aims to modernise the mining industry but may entrench elite control due to legal ambiguities and weak oversight

Zimbabwe's parliament is mulling a plan to modernise one of Africa's most mineral-rich economies – but the long-delayed Mines and Minerals Bill may consolidate rather than challenge the discretionary power that has defined the sector for decades. The bill, gazetted in June 2025 after a fraught decade of drafts and rejections, seeks to replace the outdated Mines and Minerals Act of 1961 with a digital cadastre system, clearer prospecting rules, and expanded representation for small-scale miners.

Yet behind the modernisation rhetoric, the bill strengthens ministerial discretion with its vague provisions on 'strategic minerals' such as diamonds and lithium but it also includes weak accountability mechanisms that allow the political elite to entrench its control of the industry. President **Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa** insists the new rules will lay the foundation for what he wants to become the country's US$12 billion mining economy.

The new rules are being debated when some bright new prospects are opening up for Zimbabwe's mining sector, which accounts for approximately 12% of GDP and over 80% of national exports, with platinum, gold, lithium and chrome driving recent investment surges.

Nearly eight years after he seized power in the November 2017 coup, Mnangagwa's government has delivered a version of 'contained and constrained' stability (**AC Vol 58 No 23** & **Vol 64 No 16**). Opposition politics has been sidelined, reduced to a sideshow, while the promised inclusive recovery has failed to materialise. Instead, Zimbabweans remain trapped in a cycle of survival and opportunism – with little prospect of meaningful economic or social transformation.

The most ruthless figures in the political and business elite are flourishing but economic conditions for most Zimbabweans are getting increasingly precarious. Over three million citizens, many with qualifications gained from the country's formerly excellent education system, have left for neighbouring countries and beyond, accelerating the erosion of Zimbabwe's skills base.

Now the political economy is defined by opacity, selective enforcement and institutional drift – evident from the Auditor General's 2024 report in August. It shows the fundamentals are weak despite some upbeat messaging from the World Bank and the African Development Bank. The state has been undermined by administrative incompetence, poor compliance and inadequate oversight.

The Mines and Minerals Bill has a fraught history. First drafted in 2015, it was rejected by Mnangagwa in 2018 and has since been redrafted and tabled repeatedly – most recently in 2022 – with little substantive change. Many of

MINES MINISTER CHITANDO – STEWARD OR SHAREHOLDER?

The new legislation boosts the powers of the Minister of Mines and Mining Development, **Winston Chitando**, whose tenure has been marked by controversy. Appointed after the 2017 coup, Chitando had previously chaired platinum miner Mimosa Holdings and Hwange Colliery, following a long career in the private mining sector. His appointment was initially praised – placing an experienced technocrat at the helm of a key ministry (**AC Vol 55 No 3**, **Vol 58 No 25** & **Vol 59 No 15**). Elected MP for Gutu Central in 2018 and again in 2023, Chitando was briefly moved to the Ministry of Local Government and replaced by **Soda Zhemu**. In April 2024, President **Emmerson Mnangagwa** reinstated him at the Ministry of Mines, according to *Africa Confidential* sources, following industry complaints about Zhemu's performance.

Chitando's record has been dogged by legal disputes. In February 2020, he was sentenced to 90 days in prison for failing to comply with court orders in a dispute between RioZim and North Rand Private Limited. But the sentence was never enforced. In 2022, **Yakub Mahomed** of Anesu Gold filed a High Court application accusing Chitando of reissuing eight gold claims to Golden Reef Mining, a company in which he holds shares.

In July 2023, the High Court ruled that Barrington Resources – owned by Chitando – had no claim to the Good Days lithium fields in Mutoko. Judge **Munamato Mutevedzi** noted that the opaque acquisition process was precisely why ministry officials are barred from holding mining interests. Yet under the new bill, such interests would be permitted if disclosed.

These legal disputes remain unresolved, and the absence of credible enforcement mechanisms raises concerns about selective application of the law. Even if the new mining code introduces policy improvements, there are no guarantees of fair and equitable implementation.

Chitando also has longstanding ties to Mnangagwa. During the introduction of the Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Act in 2008 – which mandated 51% local ownership – Chitando was Vice-President of the Chamber of Mines and Managing Director of Mimosa Mining Company. At the time, Mnangagwa was Minister of Defence and played a key role in mining negotiations, particularly with **Chinese** and **Russian** investors interested in the diamond fields in Manicaland. We hear that Chitando persuaded Mnangagwa to block Youth Minister **Saviour Kasukuwere's** attempts to enforce the Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Act. ●

the concerns from workers and industry haven't been addressed.

Among its most contentious provisions are the expanded discretionary powers granted to the Ministry of Mines and the Mining Affairs Board (MAB). While the new MAB improves geographical and gender representation and creates space for small-scale miners, its expanded mandate and limited oversight risk delaying key processes. The bill also introduces new administrative burdens, including a requirement for miners to obtain a Social Responsibility Certificate – compounding the already onerous Environmental Management Agency obligations. Failure to comply risks forfeiture under the 'use it or lose it' clause, but this is open to selective enforcement.

Red flags abound. The Minister of Mines has wide discretionary latitude, including the power to impose undefined 'ministerial conditions'. The bill allows any mineral to be designated 'strategic', requiring joint ventures with government. Currently, only diamonds are designated as such, with the Zimbabwe Consolidated Diamond Company the sole permitted operator. The bill is vague on future state roles in strategic mineral ventures, raising concerns about transparency and investor confidence. There is a strong push to make lithium a strategic mineral, given Zimbabwe has the largest reserves of it in Africa and is the world's fifth biggest producer.

Unlike the previous rules, civil servants may now hold mineral rights if their interests are disclosed. That might expose conflicts of interest. But in a system marked by politically charged accountability, how would such conflicts be managed? The absence of credible dispute resolution mechanisms compounds the risk of shakedowns and selective hustles.

The mining bill increases administrative liabilities. Geologists must now be certified. That could be constructive but the professional bodies are not yet equipped to implement it effectively. These cumulative compliance demands heighten the risk of arbitrary penalties, especially where enforcement is uneven and politicised.

The bill introduces the long-awaited digital cadastre system for mining rights. Welcomed by companies as essential for improving transparency and efficiency, the digital system has exposed several unresolved concerns. These include provisions for executive override; legal ambiguities between certified digital coordinates and Zimbabwe's old, established system of physical beacons, the traditional method of marking and defining mining claim boundaries using concrete or wooden markers on the ground. There are also concerns about how provincial mining registers will be integrated into the national digital cadastre.

The government invested $5.5 million in the system in 2022, aiming for a 2024 launch. But a lack of full data verification and limited information and communications technology has stalled implementation. So far only the pilot province, Manicaland, has started digitalisation. The delays prompted concerns about inadequate transitional safeguards for existing title holders. Prospecting rules have been overhauled.

Previously based on a first-come-first-served model, claims may now be auctioned – a revenue-raising measure accompanied by a new regime of taxes and royalty charges. Intended to formalise access and boost state income, the auction system risks deterring exploration and long-term investment. Foreign investment thresholds are now limited to Special Mining Leases requiring a minimum of $100m – a move framed as promoting domestic participation. Yet without broader access to capital, this provision is likely to benefit only an already well-connected few. ●

TANZANIA

Offering economic upswing, Hassan cracks down on opposition

Bans on opposition parties make the ruling party's victory a formality but there are questions on jobs and revenues

President **Samia Suluhu Hassan** and the ruling *Chama Cha Mapinduzi* (CCM) party are approaching presidential and parliamentary elections on 29 October, from which the leading opposition party Chadema and its presidential candidate have been banned, with less pressure to loosen the public purse than governments facing competitive elections.

But as Hassan prepares for her first full presidential term, the government's manifesto promises (such as 7% and above growth) and ambitious 'Vision 50' objectives for the next quarter century only partially reflect current realities. On the plus side, real GDP growth is projected at more than 6% during the next five years, inflation is in low single digits, and Tanzania's official debt/GDP ratio of 50% is modest by African and world standards.

But Tanzania is extremely unequal. Poverty levels exceed continental averages, there are shortages of good jobs for a fast-growing population, and major structural reforms and investments are needed to generate growth.

The IMF, which continues to provide funds under Tanzania's Extended Credit Facility (ECF) and climate adaptation and mitigation-focused Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF), with the latest US$448 million disbursed in June, recently warned of election-related fiscal pressures and the need for decisive measures from the government to reach fiscal targets that the government has requested be amended. The official fiscal deficit remains around 3% of GDP, and the primary balance (excluding interest payments on debt) below 1%, but this does not obscure the longer-term challenge facing a nation with major investment needs and generating lower tax revenues than other East African Community (EAC) economies.

Under the government's recently launched medium-term revenue strategy, overall revenues are projected to improve only modestly, from the current 16% of GDP, in the coming years. Government measures to broaden the tax base, reduce costly tax exemptions and improve tax collection with the assistance of new technology should have impact, but the significant (currently over 5% of GDP) shortfall to what the Fund believes is Tanzania's 'tax potential' is likely to persist.

The government has increased health and education spending, to cover declining receipts of foreign aid. But, according to IMF economists, the just over 4% of GDP Tanzania currently spends on these priorities, combined, is less than half that needed for health and education sustainable development goals (SDGs) to be met by 2030.

The government increased allocations for health, education, and social spending in the 2025/26 national Budget presented in June but Tanzania still falls short – even when compared with EAC peers (**AC Vol 66 No 13**). And, partly because of this lag in human capital development, labour productivity remains low compared with peer African economies.

Yet Hassan and the CCM have boosted Tanzania's exports and overall trade – which could benefit from big infrastructure projects facilitated by government borrowing, foreign investment, multilateral financing and the backing from foreign governments including **China**. Statistics from the Bank of Tanzania suggest that exports in the 12 months through July 2025 are, at circa $9.5 billion, 20% higher than during the 12 months prior, albeit assisted by a considerable boost to now near-peak gold prices. Tobacco earnings declined but Tanzania's coffee, horticultural, agriculture and manufactured exports all rose in US dollar terms, as did tourism receipts in a country now welcoming over 2 million visitors annually.

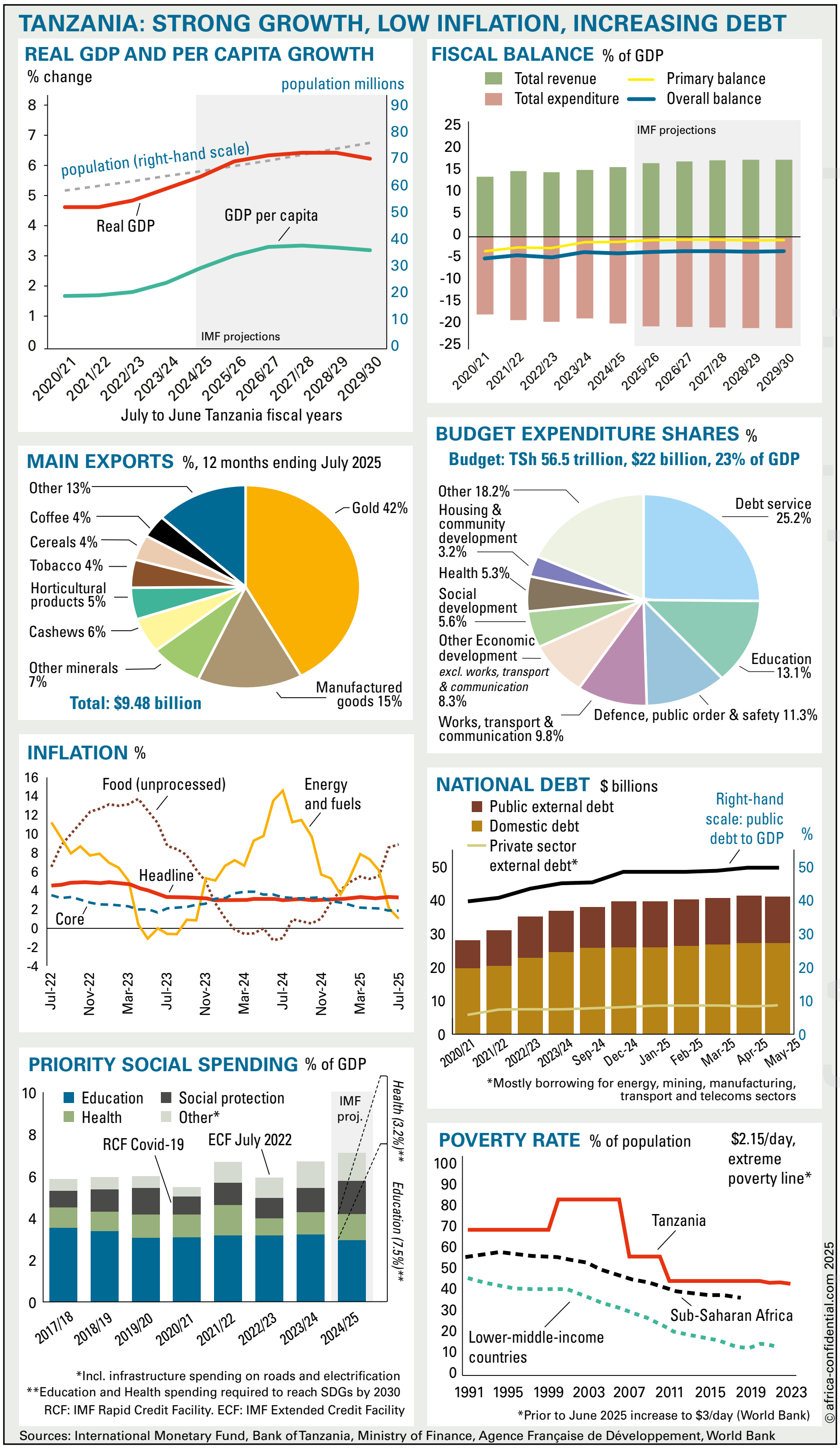
Gold exports will remain vulnerable to price downturns, much as the significant gold component – accumulated via Tanzania's domestic gold purchase programme – of $6.2bn in gross reserves, which currently equates to a respectable five months of imports. Should gold prices plummet, a hit to reserves and thus liquidity would coincide with the hit to export earnings.

On the gold front, April's final investment decision by Perseus Mining on the Nyanzaga gold mine could, following development, boost domestic gold output and exports during the latter part of Hassan's next presidential term, while government moves to require major gold miners to refine and sell within Tanzania 20%, or more, of domestically mined gold could bring wider benefits to the economy.

RATE CUT

Central bank governor **Emmanuel Tutuba** has to oversee recent changes to the monetary policy framework, including last year's move to an interest-rate-based policy, and greater flexibility of the shilling against the dollar and other major currencies. After holding the policy interest rate at four successive monetary policy committee meetings, the MPC's July decision to cut interest rates by 0.25% to 5.75% reflects its confidence that inflation will remain low, likely assisted by a productive harvest season that could keep food price inflation under control.

Tanzania's relatively robust food reserves and low reliance on food imports reduce its vulnerability to the shortages that have hit other African economies in recent years.



Domestic lending rates faced by Tanzania's businesses remain high at over 15%, despite a relatively low policy interest rate. Credit extended to Tanzanian companies is much less, as a percentage of GDP, than in neighbouring **Kenya** and **Rwanda**, and Africa generally.

Low private sector credit must be tackled if Tanzania is to move from largely state-driven growth to economic expansion driven primarily by the private sector. To this can be added the government's plans to boost domestic power output and the reliability not only of generation, but of transmission and distribution to families and businesses.

Tanzania has made progress in power generation during Hassan's tenure and predecessor **John Magufuli's** last full presidential term. Domestic generation stands to benefit from the landmark, state-owned Tanesco's Julius Nyerere hydropower plant in eastern

Tanzania, which started operating last year, increasing its output and capacity. Ministers are dissatisfied at delays to the Chalinze-Dodoma power transmission line – being constructed by China's TBEA – to assist transport of Nyerere hydropower, along with another in-development transmission line.

Projects to improve Tanzania's transport network, and facilitate intra-Tanzania and regional trade, include September's deal by China, Tanzania and **Zambia** for the $1.4bn refurbishment of the TAZARA railway that was constructed during the era of former President **Julius Nyerere** and Zambia counterpart **Kenneth Kaunda**.

This sequel to the 2024 memorandum of understanding for TAZARA's refurbishment coincides with movement on the **United States**-backed Lobito corridor project that could boost regional copper transport to Angola's Lobito port on the Atlantic. TAZARA runs to Dar es Salaam on the Indian Ocean. It follows January's agreement between Tanzania, **Burundi** and China railway engineering companies for a railway primarily intended for metals transport, for which the African Development Bank is to provide financing. The government hopes that it will be followed by progress on negotiations with international oil companies and investors, on the development of a proposed $42bn LNG plant in Tanzania's Lindi region.

Supposedly on schedule for commissioning next year, after strong domestic opposition and delays to financing, is the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) project, intended to take oil from Ugandan oil fields to a new terminal at Tanzania's Tanga port (**AC Vol 65 No 6**). The Tanzania Petroleum Development Corporation is a 15% stakeholder.

Several smaller infrastructure projects are promised in Hassan and the CCM's manifesto, including rail, roads and ports. And, in the longer term, the government's Vision 50 development plan envisages a $1 trillion economy with GDP per capita of $7,000 (compared to less than $1,300 currently), average electricity consumption of 3,000KWh per capita or more (compared to around 130KWh currently), and at least 50% of the population with 'decent jobs in the formal sector'. ●

AFRICA/ISLAMISM/INSURGENCY

Jihadist fighters advance as governments stall

Al Shabaab tries to regain the initiative in Somalia, Mozambique's Cabo Delgado is jolted by fresh attacks and the Sahel is the most lethal region

The global spotlight has shifted away from Africa's jihadist wars, but the violence has not. As western military forces disengage and attention shifts to **Ukraine** and Gaza, militant groups across the Sahel, Lake Chad Basin and East Africa remain on the offensive, responsible for more than 22,000 fatalities over the past year – nearly 99% of all jihadist-related deaths worldwide. From *Al Shabaab's* 4 October assault on high-security Godka Jilow prison in **Somalia's** capital to the Islamic State's expanding financial networks and the growing cross-border mobility of its fighters, jihadist operations are evolving not diminishing.

Since the **United States'** withdrawal from **Afghanistan** in August 2021, western governments have viewed African jihadist movements as distant, containable problems rather than movements requiring comprehensive engagement. This shift reflects distracted western militaries, failed state-building policies, and domestic political pressures that began even before US President **Donald Trump's** administration sharply cut budgets for aid and diplomacy. The UN, **France**, and the US have sharply cut their involvement in **Niger** and **Chad** – decisions driven more by local political tensions than by any accurate assessment of the militants' capabilities.

Al Shabaab, which started operations in 2005, launched a counter-offensive in February to reclaim territory lost in the 2022 Somali government offensive, showing its determination despite setbacks from anti-money laundering measures and military pressure (**AC Vol 66 No 5** & **Vol 63 No 23**).

The group continues operations across northern **Kenya** and **Ethiopia** while maintaining sophisticated taxation and extortion systems that generated over $150 million in 2023. And the Islamic State in Somalia – long dismissed as marginal – has transformed into a critical financial hub for IS groups across Africa, recruiting migrants from the Horn and facilitating money flows through **South African** networks to insurgents in **Mozambique** and **Congo-Kinshasa**.

Jihadist fighters and expertise are moving between conflict zones, as East African recruits defect from *Al Shabaab* to IS branches in **Tanzania**, Mozambique and eastern Congo-K, evading Kenyan surveillance networks and exploiting security gaps.

Both *Al Shabaab* and IS have sustained robust funding despite government counter-measures. *Al Shabaab* is storing cash reserves in Middle Juba, exploiting cross-border smuggling between Kenya and Jubaland, and may be using **Yemeni**-linked cryptocurrency expertise to move money safely. The states under attack and their allies have failed to respond effectively.

The probability of these movements expanding beyond their current operating country or region and launching terror attacks in the West is low, despite some failed attempts to train militants to do so. Their internationalist agenda appears to be essentially rhetorical, for now.

Militant movements are still active and often on the offensive, and, according to the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, they are responsible for more than 22,000 fatalities – in the Sahel, Lake Chad Basin and Somalia over the last year, nearly 99% of the total. The US is trying to catch up with its European counterparts by easing the rules of engagement for drones and engaging with authoritarian and military regimes to maintain or regain military facilities in the Sahel and Somalia.

SURVIVE AND ATTACK

Conditions in Eastern Africa also show the changing pattern of jihadi movements' survival and resilience. Jihadi groups have proven their ability to cope with repeated defeats, to maintain a low profile, and yet plan ambitious future operations. The recent attack on Mocímboa da Praia in Northern Mozambique after a series of victories by pro-government forces was a case in point.

In Somalia, *Al Shabaab* exploited anger at Ethiopia's military intervention in 2006 to emerge as a strong jihadi movement. Since 2007, its power has fluctuated. In July 2022, Somalia's

SERIOUS ATTACKS BY JIHADIST INSURGENTS IN AFRICA IN 2025

JANUARY

● **8 Jan –** N'Djamena, **Chad**: Boko Haram militants attacked the vicinity of the presidential palace, killing two security personnel and injuring five others, while 18 attackers were killed.

● **8 Jan –** Point Triple, Alibori Department, **Benin**: JNIM gunmen attacked the border zone with Niger and Burkina Faso, killing 28-30 soldiers.

● **11 Jan –** Agadez, **Niger**: Islamic State-Sahel Province abducted Austrian aid worker Eva Gretzmacher from her home.

● **26 Jan –** Malam Fatori, Borno State, **Nigeria**: Islamic State-West Africa Province suicide bomber attacked a Nigerian Armed Forces convoy, killing 27 people including the bomber.

FEBRUARY

● **7 Feb –** Kobé, Gao Region, **Mali**: Islamic State-Sahel Province attacked a convoy carrying mostly foreigners, killing 54 people including 20 Malian soldiers and 19 attackers, with 34 others injured.

● **12 Feb –** Kasanga/Mayba, Lubero Territory, North Kivu, **Congo-K**: Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) militants abducted and beheaded at least 70 civilians.

● **20 Feb –** Middle Shabelle region, **Somalia**: Al-Shabaab launched counter-offensive attacking multiple villages, killing at least seven Somali National Army members.

MARCH

● **11 Mar –** Beledweyne, Hiiraan, **Somalia**: Al-Shabaab stormed the Cairo Hotel with car bombs and gunfire, killing 15 people including clan elders and security guards, while 6 militants were killed.

● **18 Mar –** Mogadishu, **Somalia**: Al-Shabaab roadside bomb targeted President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's convoy near Villa Somalia, killing 10 people and injuring 20.

● **21 Mar –** Fambita, Tillabéri Region, **Niger**: Islamic State-Sahel Province militants carried out armed assault and set a mosque ablaze, killing 44 people and injuring 13.

● **22 Mar –** Near Mogadishu, **Somalia**: Al-Shabaab briefly captured villages including Xaawo Cabdi, Lafoole, and Ceelasha Biyaha, and ambushed an SNA convoy, killing 16 soldiers.

● **28 Mar –** Diapaga, Est Region, **Burkina Faso**: JNIM attacked Burkinabe forces, killing at least 60 soldiers in revenge for the March 11 massacre of over 58 civilians at Solenzo.

APRIL

● **13 Apr –** Agadez, **Niger**: Islamic State-Sahel Province abducted Swiss aid worker Claudia Abbt from her home.

AFRICA: MAJOR JIHADIST ATTACKS 2025

Sources: UN Security Council and peacekeeping missions, ACLED, Institute of Security Studies, Reuters, Al Jazeera and Africa Confidential reporters

MAY

● **15 May –** Mallamaram and Kwatashi villages, Borno State, **Nigeria**: Boko Haram executed brutal attack killing nearly 100 people targeting residents perceived as loyal to rival ISWAP.

● **18 May –** Hodan District, Mogadishu, **Somalia**: Al-Shabaab suicide bomber attacked Damaanyo military base where recruits were enlisting, killing 20 people (15 recruits, 5 civilians) and injuring 15.

JUNE

● **1 Jun –** Boulkessi, **Mali**: JNIM stormed Malian military base near Burkina Faso border, killing approximately 100 troops and capturing 20 soldiers.

● **2 Jun –** Timbuktu, **Mali**: JNIM militants struck multiple military sites including a base hosting Russian personnel.

● **19 Jun –** Banibangou, Tillabéri, **Niger**: Islamic State attacked Niger Armed Forces base with over 200 gunmen, killing at least 34 soldiers and 24 militants, with 14 soldiers injured.

JULY

● **1 Jul –** Kayes and Ségou regions, **Mali**: JNIM coordinated attacks on security installations, with authorities claiming 80 militants were killed in response.

● **1 Jul –** Kwallajiya, Sokoto State, **Nigeria**: Lakurawa militants (ISSP faction) raided village during afternoon prayers, killing 15-17 people.

● **9 Jul –** Jaalle Siyaad military academy, Mogadishu, **Somalia**: Al-Shabaab suicide bomber attacked followed by gunfire, killing at least 4 soldiers and injuring several others.[1]

● **26-27 Jul –** Komanda, Ituri Province, **Congo-K**: ADF attacked a Catholic church during night vigil, killing 43-50 worshippers with firearms and machetes, also burning stores and houses and kidnapping children.

AUGUST

● **9-16 Aug –** Beni and Lubero territories, North Kivu, **Congo-K**: Allied Democratic Forces attacks claimed at least 52 civilian lives, including 8 women and 2 children.

● **19 Aug –** Malumfashi, Katsina State, **Nigeria**: Armed bandits attacked a mosque, killing 50 people and injuring multiple others, with more than 60 people kidnapped.

SEPTEMBER

● **5 Sep –** Darul Jamal village, Borno State, **Nigeria**: Boko Haram attacked near military installation on Nigeria-Cameroon border, killing over 60 civilians and at least five soldiers.

● **7 Sep –** Mocímboa da Praia, Cabo Delgado, **Mozambique**: Islamic State-Mozambique attacked town going door to door to identify victims, marking second such incursion since September 2021

● **8-9 Sep –** Ntoyo village near Lubero, **Congo-K**: ADF attack killed 72 people.

● **Mid-Sep through month-end –** Chiure District, Cabo Delgado, **Mozambique**: Islamic State-Mozambique killed at least 11 Christians, with four believers dying in Chiure and four church buildings burned.

OCTOBER

● **4 Oct –** Mogadishu, **Somalia**: Al-Shabaab stormed Godka Jilow high-security underground prison operated by NISA, using suicide car bomb disguised as NISA vehicle, freeing dozens of prisoners in hours-long siege. ●

president, **Hassan Sheikh Mahamud**, launched the first real offensive against *Al Shabaab* in over a decade. Despite losing ground in several regions north of Mogadishu and being affected by anti-money laundering policies in Mogadishu, *Al Shabaab* limited its losses and launched a counter-offensive in February.

The Islamic State in Somalia (ISIS) was long considered a marginal group of militants based near Qandala in the Bari region of Puntland. Formed as a splinter group of *Al Shabaab* in 2015, it took two years to be officially recognised as a *Da'esh* associate. It wasn't taken very seriously initially because it had under 1000 fighters but it has set up an extortion system in the economically vibrant city of Bosaso, and to a lesser extent in Mogadishu, over the last three years.

In the 2020s, it became notorious as a financial hub for *Da'esh* groups in Africa. Then its membership increased thanks to the recruitment of migrants who had reached Puntland, as well as the arrival of IS fighters from the other side of the Red Sea. In early 2025, the Puntland Administration, supported by the **United Arab Emirates** and the US AFRICOM, launched a massive offensive that is still ongoing. Sources close to the Puntland security forces are confident that ISIS has been largely dismantled and is unable to resume operations, at least for the next few years. Yet *Al-Naba*, IS's global magazine, claims that ISIS is still capable of carrying out complex operations in Puntland (**AC Vol 65 No 14**).

The rivalry between the two groups in Somalia may create opportunities for individuals seeking to transition between groups and continue their commitment to jihad. The main foreign groups in *Al Shabaab* and ISIS are East Africans (Kenyans, **Ugandans**, and Tanzanians), as well as Ethiopians. They number in the few thousands (perhaps fewer than 2,000) but differ significantly according to the group they joined. For example, ISIS has developed relatively sophisticated propaganda tools in Amharic and has recruited Gurage and Amhara people, often migrants who get to Bosaso to cross the Red Sea.

Al Shabaab has focused its recruitment on Somali and Oromo people (including Somali Abo – Oromo people who speak Somali), especially in the Bale and Afdheer regions. Initially, East Africans went to *Al Shabaab* for training, often staying within the group for months or a few years afterwards. *Al Shabaab* and *Al Qaeda* leaders in East Africa developed relations over several decades with radical Islamists in Kenya such as **Aboud Rogo Mohamed**, **Abubaker Sharif Makaburi** and **Samir Khan**, and *Al Shabaab* has been able to establish a Swahili branch of its *al-Kataib* media outlet to increase its support, particularly in northern Kenya and along the coast to Zanzibar. *Al Shabaab* can still carry out operations in the border area and beyond, in the Boni Forest and the Lamu District. It mobilises several units made up of Somalis or Swahili-speaking fighters, but always under Somalian control.

The Ethiopian invasion in 2006 prompted many Kenyan Somalis and coastal people to join *Al Shabaab*, thanks to propaganda disseminated by religious figures such as Sheikh Aboud Rogo in his Masjid Musa mosque in Mombasa. Another wave of recruits joined during the Lind Nchi operation, when Kenyan troops entered Lower Juba in 2011.

After a few years, many recruits escaped back to Kenya to benefit from an amnesty offer. Following the brutal Ussalama Watch operation in 2014, Kenyan security forces reformed some of their procedures and recruited many Somali and coastal people from areas where *Al Shabaab* was operating. Consequently, *Al Shabaab's* recruitment fell drastically, with many returnees arrested and monitored.

The Dusit Hotel attack in January 2019 showed how the Kenyan security forces changed operations after the Westgate mall massacre in September 2013. Special units of the police and military acted in coordination, and intelligence allowed for a quick response. While it took three days to secure the Westgate mall, resulting in many civilian and police casualties (often due to friendly fire), the Dusit attackers were killed within a few hours, and their logistical support was dismantled the following day (**AC Vol 54 No 20**).

The *Al Shabaab* East African recruits can evade surveillance when crossing back into Kenya to visit relatives or establish underground cells. Some of these jihadis join IS while in Kenya and escape scrutiny. Most recruits eventually move to Tanzania and then end up in northern Mozambique. Some also travel to eastern Congo-Kinshasa and join Islamic State–Central Africa Province (ISCAP), a faction within the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF).

Somali security experts offer three reasons for this change of allegiance. The first is the fear of arrest if they remain within *Al Shabaab* networks in Kenya, which are said to have been infiltrated by Kenyan security forces with the support of American intelligence, **Israel's** Mossad and **Britain's** Secret Intelligence Service, which are heavily involved in tracking jihadists.

Al Shabaab has shown a real sense of republicanism among Somalis (which is one reason why it is popular in areas such as Lower and Middle Shabeelle and Lower and Middle Juba). But it is also true that clichés and stereotypes about East African Bantus are widespread in Somali society and may extend to local recruits to jihadi organisations.

Al Shabaab pays a regular stipend to its members but IS appears to be more generous, and many Kenyans have joined *Al Shabaab* in the hope of fighting the 'right' war and being able to support their families. Many of those who benefited from the 2015 amnesty complained that they were used as cannon fodder and never received financial compensation for the risks they had taken.

MONEY MEN

This financial dimension is important given both organisations move and launder money. Both have set up impressive systems of taxation and extortion but face the challenge of keeping and moving money safely.

According to UN experts and others, *Al Shabaab's* budget exceeded $150 million in 2023. Its war chest has grown significantly despite the new expense of training tax collectors and civil administrators. Mobile money provided a good way to store cash for years, but this solution collapsed when the Somali federal government launched its offensive in 2022. Many accounts were seized or frozen and extorting businesspeople in Mogadishu became much more difficult.

Somali observers believe that *Al Shabaab* has been forced to store large sums of cash underground in secure locations in Middle Juba, beyond investing in various economic sectors in Somalia and Somaliland, as they had been doing for years.

Kenya had been an ideal financial hub in *Al Shabaab's* early years but the October 2011 military intervention and the Westgate attack changed the landscape. Anti-money laundering procedures were put in place, and thanks to western and Israeli intelligence agencies, they were effective. Better intelligence gathering after the Ussalama operation, and cooperation with NISA over the past three years, have enabled the Kenyan police to act more decisively.

Yet many Kenyan and western experts are raising questions about the quality of intelligence, which can be difficult to verify, and corruption and embezzlement among senior Kenyan officials and their business associates. Many observers believe that these money launderers may straddle different realms given the amount of money they are making. It is likely that some of these businesspeople are laundering money for *Al Shabaab*.

There is also the thriving cross-border smuggling trade between Jubaland and Kenya. Commodities from Mogadishu and Kismayo, which are controlled by the Kenyan Defence Forces, cross into Kenya at various border checkpoints. These convoys are subject to *Al Shabaab* taxes, which allow them to pass safely, even though *Al Shabaab* may be running military operations nearby. The businesspeople and senior military officers managing such smuggling networks have connections at the highest levels of the Kenyan state.

The ISIS financial hub operates differently. It seems to rely on mostly Horn migrants in South Africa. As far as Somali recruits are concerned, ISIS has developed a strong following among the Majeerteen/Ali Saleebaan clan (its leader, **Abdulqaadir Muumin**, belongs to this clan), as well as among coastal clans such as the Dishiishle.

These clans are involved in regional trade. Some migrated to Southern Africa, joining an already sizeable community of Somali migrants who are often settled as shopkeepers and wholesalers in townships and rural areas, thus escaping the attention of the state apparatus.

Although hard evidence is scarce, many experts believe that money is sent from Puntland or Mogadishu to South Africa for laundering before being sent back to Kenya, where it is allocated to different branches, including *Al Shabaab* in Mozambique (which has no link to the Somali group of the same name) and ADF in eastern Congo-Kinshasa. If true, this system will remain in place for as long as Abdulqaadir Muumin remains responsible for *Da'esh's* African operations.

Yet to be investigated is the use of cryptocurrencies and collusion with economic operators linked to Yemen who have survived years of war and under different regimes of sanctions. Thanks to their **Iranian** connections, they have developed expertise in using cryptocurrencies and can provide a new business model for insurgent groups who want to move money discreetly. *Al Shabaab* is keen to learn these techniques as their war is not over. ●

UGANDA

Marshalling anger over Museveni's record

Opposition activists want the government's record on schools and healthcare to be central in the 2026 election campaign

New research exposing systematic government failures across health, education, and infrastructure reveals why Uganda ranks 157th out of 193 countries in the UN's Human Development Index in 2024-25, with stark spending disparities favouring politicians over essential services as President **Yoweri Museveni** prepares to seek a seventh term in January 2026 (**AC Vol 66 No 12**). The figures, based on an analysis of Auditor-General reports, show Parliament budgeting 20 billion Ugandan shillings (US$5.6 million) for regional sittings in 2020/21 – more than double the USh8bn allocated to the entire education sector in Abim District, which has a population of 143,000. Opposition activists hope these revelations will shift pre-election debate from human rights repression towards the government's disastrous development record, particularly its failure to deliver basic services to the 70% of Ugandans living in rural areas (**Dispatches 5/2/25** & **23/7/24**). They also want to persuade voters and opposition parties that the country's disastrous health and education outcomes – among the worst in the world – can be reversed.

Debate within the opposition National Unity Platform and its allies has been lively, with detractors decrying this campaign strategy as overly intellectual. But some civil society and opposition activists argue that sensitising voters to the government's failings on health, education and infrastructure could give the opposition a better chance of defeating the governing National Resistance Movement (NRM) in the general election, in which Museveni will be standing for a record seventh term (**AC Vol 66 No 3** & **Vol 63 No 25**).

Seventy per cent of Uganda's population lives in hard-to-reach rural areas. These are governed by decentralised district administrations, which are officially mandated to establish a 'sound financial base with reliable sources of revenue', as the AG's reports state. Poor health, nutrition and access to water affect school attendance, so programmes to promote education generally also touch on health.

The mean length of schooling of Ugandans is six years but the achievement level in that time is only equivalent to four years in comparable nations. The barriers to quality education range from overcrowding and lack of desks to distance from schools, a dearth of teachers and poor provision of toilets.

Some comparisons of the government's spending priorities

PERISHING IN THE PARISHES

The Parish Development Model (PDM) is the government's main strategy for improving incomes and welfare at household level. The PDM is expected to lift 39% of households in Uganda from operating at subsistence level to the 'money economy'.

The plan is to provide capital to viable community-led, income-generating schemes. But the PDM is chronically short of money, up to 500 million Ugandan shillings (US$140,000) in some districts. For instance, the PDM budget for Amolatar District in the north was cut by USh541m. Consequently, each of the district's 85 savings and credit unions received additional capital of USh6m, rather than the USh17m initially planned.

The under-funding pattern repeats across districts and so do the administrative shortcomings. It does not augur well for the PDM.

A recent example of what the researchers call twisted priorities is the new phenomenon of 'service awards', incentives paid to salaried public servants to clear backlogs. An opposition MP recently commented that the USh500m and USh400m awards were not enough to 'solve Uganda's problems', but many believe it is madness in the first place to pay officials financial incentives to do jobs for which they are already responsible.

Instead, they say, those monies should have been spent directly in the community. Omoro District in the northern Acholi sub-region needed USh1bn to repair over 200 broken boreholes during the Covid pandemic but received a budget allocation of only USh230m for its entire water sector, which was exhausted by March. The situation was made worse by budget guidelines that permit only 15% of water grants to be allocated to borehole repairs. ●

ADMIN AT SCHOOLS' AND HEALTH'S EXPENSE

There was widespread shock when it was revealed in a national NTV news report on 7 June that Timu Sub-County in Kaabong District, Karamoja sub-region (population: 1,452,838) has only one primary school. And it is not even a government school.

Timu Primary School was founded in 2014 as a community initiative and is not supported by the government with teachers, equipment or supplies. The lower-year classrooms are made out of tree branches and reeds strung together. Classrooms for Years 5 to 7 have been constructed by international NGOs. It will have its first primary-leaving cohort this year.

Government policy says there should be a primary school in every one of Uganda's 10,700 parishes, most of which are built around villages. But there are only 33 government primary schools for the 84 parishes of Kaabong District, 12 community schools and 356 teachers for the district's 34,000 enrolled pupils. The drop-out rate is high and most adults have not gone beyond four years of formal education.

When it comes to choices about development, however, the central government is more concerned with increasing the number of administrative units, rather than health and education facilities.

In the 2020/21 financial year, in the lead-up to the last general election, the government created 332 new sub-counties, 46 constituencies, 10 municipalities and 10 cities. The resulting financial constraints made it necessary to drop the policy of ensuring that every sub-county has a secondary school and a category III health centre (a clinic with admissions facilities).

Meanwhile, the number of administrators increases because of multiplying administrative units which have to be financed. ●

underpinning this social deprivation make for stark reading. MPs spent USh6bn on attending the 2021 East African Community (EAC) Inter-Parliamentary Games in Arusha, **Tanzania**, while schools lack sports facilities. Only USh7.5bn was allocated to secondary school sports in 2025, in addition to which the schools themselves were obliged to raise USh4bn. Building and equipping a 'seed' secondary school (the first one in a defined area) costs between USh1bn and USh2bn, according to the AG's report on Abim's local government finances for the year ending 30 June 2020.

The opposition also points to problems exacerbated by poor infrastructure. There was a shortfall of USh192m (just over $55,000) on the 2021/22 road fund grant for the western Kabarole District, and so 71 kilometres of road were not maintained. The funding gap had heavy consequences for the communities served by those roads.

HEALTH MATTERS

Access to healthcare in Uganda is poor. There is no universal health insurance, despite a national project from 2010 to 2017, which aimed to deliver the 'Uganda National Minimum Health Care Package' (UNMHCP), financed with a World Bank loan of $126m and a Ugandan government contribution of $14m. The government contribution did not materialise and the UNMHCP programme is non-existent, but the World Bank loan remains repayable. Critics blame both the Bank and the government.

Over 50% of funding for the health sector comes from donors. Under-funding for health is common across districts, limiting critical work such as immunisation, treatment of tuberculosis and management of HIV.

The government spends meagre sums on maintaining healthcare facilities. For instance, category II health centres (dispensaries/outpatient clinics), as well as HC III (clinics which offer admission) and HC IV establishments (with surgical capacity), receive annual maintenance grants. But in 2021/22, the latest period for which details of local expenditure in the western Kamwenge District were available at the time of writing, Rukunyu Hospital (an HC IV in Kamwenge) received only USh436m ($122,000). A similar sum went towards a 'service award' to parliamentary commissioners for carrying out work for which they were already responsible.

HC III establishments in Kamwenge, such as the one in Bwizi, received USh14m ($4,000), while HCIIs (Ntonwa and Busiriba) got USh7m. The physical condition of many rural healthcare facilities is so poor that during the period of study for the UNMHCP, the target population was found to be migrating away from government facilities.

The full human impact of failings in development programmes can only be imagined but the financial data is challenging enough. The East Africa Public Health Laboratory Network was a project to build facilities for the diagnosis and surveillance of TB and other communicable diseases. The original cost was $48.65m. Currently the cost stands at $63.66m in loan funds, with a grant of $15m.

The original project ran 10 years (to March 2021) but ended without the network being completed. Uganda failed to inject agreed counterpart funding of USh233m ($66,000), resulting in a budget shortfall. Worse than the money wasted, the loan – even if concessional – must be repaid.

Mismanagement was also rampant with Covid-19 programmes, according to the AG's reports. Investigators found some 5.6 million expired Covid-19 vaccines (worth USh28.15bn/$8.2m) in the National Medical Stores in January 2024. An estimated further USh300bn ($84m) worth of Covid vaccines was still in district medical stores spread across the country.

In its recent report on the performance of externally funded projects, the Ministry of Finance omitted certain important health schemes that had performed poorly. Some projects had kept insufficient records. In some instances there were no performance outputs and targets, especially for grants, as well as inconsistencies between the implementing agencies and the Ministry of Finance on loans.

LOW EXPECTATIONS

The government's own guide to project performance ranks 51% of output achieved as 'good' or 'fair', with 30% in the 'good' category. Yet in a recent report, the Ministry of Finance conceded that performance in education was poor.

The scorecard is as follows: 40% completion, with 58 schools (66%) behind schedule. Only 12 schools (13.6% of the total targeted) were on schedule, and 18 (20.4%) were ahead of schedule. Students who lack schools within walking distance are not beneficiaries of the 20% of schools ahead of schedule – they are simply deprived of a service.

Analyses of public expenditure expose marked biases in favour of politicians and civil servants at the expense of grass-roots development. For example, the cost of administration – leaders' earnings, their allowances and consumption – can now easily be compared with the cost of immunisation, water for consumption and irrigation, maternity wards, classroom desks and other types of public good most would regard as more important.

Reviewing audit reports for local governments, researchers found districts that were unable to immunise up to 40% of immunisable children, because donors had not provided the means. Certain health centre upgrades were abandoned and the upgrade programme was suspended for 2023/24. Medication and supplies shortages persist. At the same time, pupils continue to sit on the floor in unfinished or decrepit school buildings.

For 2022/23, 'integrated transport infrastructure and services' and 'human capital development' were in the top three underperforming thematic areas, whereas 'legislation, oversight and representation' (in other words, Parliament) was the only fully funded area.

The question of whether Parliament is allocating resources to itself at the expense of human development is especially sharp for members of the opposition because many of them, as elected representatives, benefit from this bias (**AC Vol 64 No 18**).

WATER FOR LIFE

Fourteen million Ugandans have no access to clean water. In the growing urban areas, use of unclean ('unimproved') water sources more than doubled between 2006 and 2014.

A key programme for safe water is the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Programme (RWSSP). The beneficiaries are 140,000 people in 600 villages across 20 districts. It is financed by loans worth $119m from EXIM Bank of **India** and the *Agence française de développement* (AFD), with counterpart funding from the Government of Uganda of USh68bn (roughly $19.6m). Actual disbursements towards the total RWSSP cost of USh520.2bn ($150m) amounted to a quarter of the budget – USh132.09.

Only 11% of the loan funds were disbursed, owing to the government's failure to provide required performance and advance payment guarantees. Like cancelled loans, unspent loans carry a cost, including arrangement fees. Uganda has USh1.8 trillion ($500m) in unused loans. Meanwhile, the AG reports that the RWSSP scheme is 128% over its allocated expenditure 17% of its outputs have been delivered.

Inequalities in water provision are widespread. In the central Kassanda District access to clean water ranges from 4% in Manyogaseka Sub-County (population: 13,000) to 79% of Myanzi Sub-County's population of over 40,000.

Many Ugandans have to fetch water from distant boreholes, protected springs and shallow wells. The official acceptable distance for access to water is 200 metres in urban areas and 1.5 kilometres in rural areas. Yet official figures show that 25% carry water beyond that distance, and there are deep regional differences.

The general conclusion is that programmes prioritising administrative and political development, which broadly benefit the urban middle class and white-collar public sector, perform better in funding, while rural programmes promoting basic education and health are less common and less well administered.

At present, there is no opportunity for voters to require candidates in elections to present district-specific plans for providing essential services to an acceptable standard. That is what the human development researchers hope to change.

Election campaigns are typically rushed, with non-government candidates dodging the armed forces across the country. Even so, the researchers hope that producing such statistics can further animate the opposition and motivate voters to defeat the NRM. ●

CAMEROON

Oppositionists struggle to unite

Published online 8 October

As his rivals bicker on the eve of the election, the President took a holiday in Geneva and promoted some generals

The campaign by Cameroon's opposition coalition has been picking up speed but too slowly to unite and present a serious challenge to 92-year-old President **Paul Biya** in elections on 12 October. With the main challenger at the last election in 2018, **Maurice Kamto**, now barred (**AC Vol 66 No 16**), **Bello Bouba Maïgari** and **Issa Tchiroma Bakary**, northern politicians who recently broke with the government (**AC Vol 66 No 14**), have come to the fore.

Yet the opposition has spent most of the past month bickering over which of its 11 candidates should lead a coalition, exposing their divisions. Part of this has been caused by suspicions born of the government's strategy of co-opting opponents and creating parties to weaken credible challengers. For example, the *Front social démocrate's* **Joshua Osih**, who came in fourth in 2018, has vowed not to join a coalition that includes Bakary or Bello Bouba, accusing them of being too closely associated with the failures of the government they recently left.

The third-placed candidate in 2018, **Cabral Libii** of *Parti camerounais pour la réconciliation nationale*, is known for his longstanding opposition to Kamto. Many political observers suspect Osih and Libii are working with the government to disrupt opposition efforts. Both have refused to sympathise with Kamto over his 2018 arrest, the regular detention of his party's top brass since 2020, or him being barred from this year's race. Critics say that Libii, who is 45, was introduced in 2018 as a government ploy to take some of the youth vote away from Kamto.

With time running out, Kamto has woken up after being stunned into a month of inaction by the Constitutional Council's decision, publicly shunning the kingmaker role the public has ascribed to him. Regardless, opposition candidates have taken turns to visit his home in Yaoundé to court his support and lament their disunity.

He is now willing to support a coalition but has called for the two 'northern brothers' Bakary and Maïgari to unite. Bakary is unwilling to relinquish the title of consensus candidate, granted to him by a group of fringe associations and minor parties on 13 September, for the more reputable Maïgari.

A second coalition with some promise is building around Maïgari, which could see veteran Anglophone lawyer and presidential candidate **Akere Muna** rally beside him as prime minister-in-waiting. Should the deal materialise, other opposition candidates could align with them as the pair would look like relatively safe hands for a transition away from Biya, who has ruled Cameroon since 1982. Kamto may then also join, as he has a clear preference for Maïgari. At that point, Biya and his men would hope Bakary continues his charismatic campaign and splits the opposition vote.

NONCHALANT

The President, Africa's second-longest-serving leader after **Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo** of **Equatorial Guinea**, has generally seemed unconcerned, however, by such opposition politicking. Curiously, Biya flew to his favourite city, Geneva, six days before the opening of the two-week campaign period, leaving stalwarts of the ruling *Rassemblement démocratique du peuple camerounais*

(RDPC) to compete for his loyalty across the country. Biya has not spoken in public since announcing that he was running via his social media handler **Oswald Baboké**, a close ally of First Lady **Chantal Biya** and Presidency Secretary-General **Ferdinand Ngoh Ngoh**, the de facto vice-president.

Before touching down on the tarmac at Nsimalen International Airport on 21 September, the President had made just three televised appearances since announcing the poll. The previous one was with Commander of the US Africa Command General **Dagvin Anderson** on 19 September. Biya did not show up at Unity Palace to receive the endorsement of delegates who included politicians, traditional rulers and Catholic bishops. Instead, Ngoh Ngoh deputised. It seems perhaps Biya is confident the Constitutional Council will declare him winner whatever happens on Sunday.

For the President, the key concern instead appears to be security (**AC Vol 66 No 9**). Voting will take care of itself. His small delegation to Geneva included Vice-Admiral **Joseph Fouda**, who was sacked as the head of presidential security in late 2024 after he clashed with Chantal Biya. Biya then appointed Brigadier General **Emmanuel Amougou** as his new security chief. Yet Biya is keeping Fouda on side, valuing his counsel at a time of tension and intrigue in Yaoundé over the succession (**AC Vol 66 No 10**). Fouda was among eight generals Biya granted an additional star in strategic promotions on 15 July. In a separate decree, Biya elevated the vice-admiral to become one of the three special advisors at the presidency. But Biya's clan leaders resisted a proposal to promote Colonel **Jean Charles Raymond Beko'o Abondo** to general in that round, a step that would have implied moving him from commanding the presidential guard.

The situation in Cameroon's English-speaking areas has stood in stark contrast to the Francophone zone during the election period. Southern Cameroon's pro-independence groups are enforcing a violent lockdown of the North-West and South-West regions, a periodic feature in the nine-year dispute that Biya's government has failed to resolve (**AC Vol 66 No 5**). Militias are obliging residents to stay at home from 8 September to 14 October to disrupt the poll.

Between 5 and 6 September, rebels killed nine soldiers in 24 hours, triggering a wave of fear and confusion. Schools, banks and businesses have been closed and transportation limited, functioning at the weekend only. Hundreds of thousands of Anglophones will be unable to vote and many have sought temporary refuge in Francophone areas. The long-running conflict has damaged support for Biya. Finding a resolution to it is the promise of opposition candidates, but those pledges look unlikely to be enough to cause an upset at the ballot box. ●

MALAWI

Mutharika's octogenarian comeback

Published online 3 October

Landslide election victory reflects mass frustration with failed promises of the Chakwera government

After their comfortable election win and swearing-in on 4 October, 85-year-old former president **Peter Mutharika** and his running mate **Jane Ansah** are expected to move quickly with an economic stabilisation plan. Their victory reflects widespread frustration at Malawi's descent into dysfunction and economic chaos under President **Lazarus Chakwera** over the past five years, during which his Malawi Congress Party (MCP) was seen as arrogant, corrupt and prone to ethnic favouritism (**AC Vol 66 No 12**).

Mutharika is set to push for a return to an IMF programme, restoring budgetary discipline and rebuilding foreign exchange reserves, which crashed to US$118 million this year – less than a month's worth of imports. He is returning to power after winning a record 3.1m votes in the 16 September elections: that is 57% of the total, against Chakwera's 1.7m. Malawians, desperate for relief from daily price increases with annual inflation running at around 30%, have handed a decisive mandate to Mutharika, who gained a law degree at Yale University in the 1960s before more than 90% of the country's people were born.

But Mutharika inherits a shaky economy and will have to cut state spending sharply to win IMF and World Bank funding despite his campaign's promises to boost social provision.

His immediate difficulty will be political. As the biggest party with 81 seats, Mutharika's Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) will need allies to push votes through the 229-seat parliament. Some independent MPs will see this as a great bargaining opportunity for jobs and special interests.

Malawi's transition will be helped by former pastor Chakwera's relatively speedy concession. Initially, he had claimed there were irregularities in 13 districts, but the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) dismissed the allegations for want of evidence. His running mate **Vitumbiko Mumba** tried to rally supporters, accusing the DPP of fraud. Many Malawians watched in amusement as Mumba held press conferences that were seen as increasingly desperate (**AC Vol 66 No 18**).

Chakwera joins President **Joyce Banda** who also served only one term after taking office following the death of **Bingu wa Mutharika**, Peter's elder brother, in 2012. Peter Mutharika, who was president from 2014 to 2020, was pronounced winner of the 2019 election but that was later nullified when the court ordered a rerun.

ECONOMIC HOLE

Now Mutharika will have to contend with a national debt at 16 trillion kwacha (US$9.2 billion), choking public spending. The IMF cancelled its lending programme in May, citing uncontrolled budget deficits and the lack of progress on the drawn-out debt restructuring.

The agriculture-based economy is heading into the main farming season amid a critical shortage of foreign exchange. This has made fertilisers, primarily distributed through a government subsidy programme, hard to come by. Fuel and other essential goods also remain scarce.

Mutharika identified these issues as priorities but he is trying to lower public expectations that his 'freebies manifesto' will be rolled out immediately. Key among his campaign promises were free secondary education, a K5bn allocation for every parliamentary constituency and K100m for women and youth initiatives in each electoral district also (**AC Vol 64 No 12**).

Beyond stabilisation, top of Mutharika's economic priority list will be energy, delivering on a promise to boost electricity production by 1,000 megawatts, using solar and coal imported from **Mozambique**. Also on his agenda are vast irrigation schemes to help Malawi move from its current status as food-insecure back to being a net maize exporter.

Business and political corruption remain a key issue after Chakwera's government failed either to fix the problem or to retrieve the billion US dollars that it claimed was stolen during Mutharika's last government. Many judge that corruption, and certainly bureaucratic dysfunction, worsened under Chakwera. But the new government will face heavy scrutiny on this, especially if it's trying to push austerity measures through parliament. It is also expected to launch legal investigations into close aides of Chakwera, linked to financial scandals.

The inquiry into the death of Chakwera's deputy, **Saulos Chilima**, has also prompted public interest. Mutharika says he will consult the Ministry of Justice on the matter. Chilima died in a plane crash in June 2024, and his widow, **Mary**, said Chakwera's inquiry had failed to answer her concerns.

After a vitriolic election campaign, Mutharika is appealing to his followers not to antagonise rivals, particularly MCP loyalists at the state-run Malawi Broadcasting Corporation. The state broadcaster had lambasted him as 'senile and incapable of ruling again'.

New Vice-President Ansah, the former MEC Chair who oversaw the 2019 elections, says her family was traumatised by protests and social media attacks in the political fight around those elections. Now in government, Ansah is calling for forgiveness and reconciliation. ●

ANGOLA/MOZAMBIQUE/US

Trump-linked lobbyists tried to sway corruption probes

Published online 1 October

Washington-based BGR Group hired ex-Paris CIA station chief to aid defendants in sovereign wealth fund and hidden loans scandals

More questions are being raised about the accountability of lobbying companies after it has emerged in filings lodged with the United States government that veteran CIA agent **Dale Britt Bendler**, convicted in April for mishandling classified material, was working clandestinely for Washington-based BGR Group to help the defendants in two of Africa's biggest corruption scandals. BGR's clients included businesspeople implicated in the loss of over US$3 billion of public funds from Angola's Sovereign Wealth Fund and conspiring with state officials to defraud Mozambique of over $2bn in the hidden loans scandal.

Bendler spent more than three decades as a US intelligence officer and served as the CIA's station chief in Paris from 2011 to 2014, after which he retired from the Agency. But he was then he re-hired as a full-time CIA contractor from 2014 to 2020. According to the court documents leading to his conviction, Bendler was working as an unauthorised lobbyist for foreign clients – in Angola, **Congo-Kinshasa** and Mozambique – between July 2017 and July 2020. US federal prosecutors said he had searched CIA classified systems for information on his clients, treating CIA systems 'like his own personal Google'.

Bendler was hired by BGR Group, one of the most prominent lobby shops in Washington DC and particularly close to US President **Donald Trump's** administration. US Transportation Secretary **Sean Duffy**, a former television presenter and lumberjack, had worked for BGR as a lobbyist and advisory board member before joining Trump's team in November 2024. BGR managing director **David Urban** served as an advisor to Trump's 2016 campaign and is seen as a leading pro-Trump political strategist in Washington.

This year, its proximity to the Trump administration has helped BGR land a $170,000 a month lobbying contract with Angola and a $50,000 a month contract with **Somalia**.

But Bendler's work for BGR in Angola dates back to 2017 when Quantum Global chief executive **Jean-Claude Bastos de Morais** was accused with **José Filomeno 'Zenú' dos Santos**, son of the former President **José Eduardo dos Santos**, of stealing state funds after they had been appointed to run the *Fundo Soberano de Angola* (FSDEA, Angola's Sovereign Wealth Fund).

Bendler was hired to lobby President **João Lourenço**, who came to power in September 2017, on behalf of Bastos de Morais, whose firm Quantum Global had been hired to run the FSDEA from its launch in 2012 (**AC Vol 53 No 22**).

MANAGING THE PRESIDENT

Morais 'needed help managing the new president' and expected to continue managing the fund, reported Bendler. But Quantum Global was sacked and Morais charged with embezzlement and detained for six months (**AC Vol 61 No 3**). Bendler said that 'BGR and I attempted to persuade the government of Angola to go easy on him.'

The charges against Bastos De Morais were dropped in 2019 and a settlement paid by the Luanda government. Zenú was convicted of fraud, embezzlement and influence peddling and handed a five-year prison sentence in 2020, though this was quashed by the constitutional court in 2024.

Bendler's most lucrative work appears to have on behalf of **Iskandar Safa**, the chief executive of Privinvest, the shipbuilding company at the centre of the hidden loans scandal in Mozambique. Safa was accused of paying over $100 million in bribes to officials in Mozambique and to Credit Suisse employees in exchange for shipping contracts and arranging loans with Credit Suisse and **Russia's** VTB worth over $2.2bn.

In his filing under the US Foreign Agents Registration Act on Safa, Bendler states that 'my job was to travel to Mozambique (did so twice) and confirm first hand whether the sale of the Privinvest boats had in fact taken place and if in fact they provided untility [sic] to the government of Mozambique'.

Safa died in January 2024 but in July, the High Court in London found Privinvest and Safa guilty of bribery and ordered the company and Safa's heirs to pay $825m to the Mozambique government and indemnities for further losses that could amount to $2bn.

Bendler reports that he was paid a monthly fee of $20,000 between March 2019 and May 2020 and made two trips to Mozambique, as well as trips to **Portugal**, **France** and **Britain**.

And in Congo-Kinshasa Bendler was paid $6,000 by BGR to 'restore' the US visa of **Ibrahim Issaoui**, chief executive of Socimex Group, a conglomerate based in Kinshasa working on construction, transportation, and food processing. Issaoui was suspected by the US authorities of terrorist financing ties to the **Lebanese**-based Shia militia, *Hezbollah*.

In April, Bendler pleaded guilty to acting as a Foreign Agent and mishandling classified materials. The US Justice Department reported that

Bendler earned some $360,000 in private client fees while also working as a full-time CIA contractor. He faces a prison sentence of up to seven years and is set to be sentenced in the coming days. The Lourenço government claims to have recovered just over $3bn from funds controlled by de Morais and Zenú in the name of the FSDEA. ●

DISPATCHES

AU/DEBT

Akufo-Addo's 'painful' debt memories boost calls for new relief programme

6 October

Ghana's former President's experience adds to pressure for global credit reforms

Former **Ghanaian** President **Nana Akufo-Addo** described the debt restructuring that dominated his second term as 'one of the darkest and most painful episodes' of his presidency as he made a pitch for a new debt relief programme in Brussels last week.

African leaders are set to put debt relief high on the agenda at a European Union-African Union summit in **Angola** in November.

In a speech at a thinktank in Brussels on 1 October, Akufo-Addo called for European support for 'a new global debt relief initiative – ambitious, equitable and tailored to our realities', adding that a debt forgiveness programme should be targeted 'to unlock resources for development'.

That should be 'a programme of "Debt Relief for Green Investment and Resilience" – linking debt cancellation directly to investments in climate adaptation and sustainable growth,' he said.

A handful of EU countries, including **Italy** and **Spain**, have signalled their support for debt swaps where debt can be written off in exchange for investment in climate and environmental protection.

Akufo-Addo, who stood down as Ghana's president last December, piloted his country through a US$13 billion debt restructuring as part of the G20 Common Framework in 2023, that also secured $10.5bn in external debt service relief through 2026. The deal reduced Ghana's debt-to-GDP ratio from around 85% to 70.5% and secured a loan from the International Monetary Fund.

But Akufo-Addo said that the debt deal had 'shattered' the lives and livelihoods of millions of Ghanaians, particularly young people, pensioners and small investors (**AC Vol 66 No 7**).

'Every dollar diverted to creditors is a dollar taken from a hospital, from a child's vaccination, from a community's future. This is not economics, it is inequity,' said Akufo-Addo, pointing out that more than 30 African countries currently spend more on debt interest than healthcare (**AC Vol 66 No 15**).

The remarks reflect the growing frustration among African leaders that they are treated unfairly by credit rating agencies and the bond markets, making the cost of servicing their debts far higher than wealthy states. The African Union – at the behest of the continent's leaders – is hoping to establish an in-house credit rating agency, in part to expose the risk premiums offered by the likes of Standard & Poor's, Moody's and Fitch.

Debt-to-GDP ratios across African countries average around 60-70%, significantly lower than the 111% average among the G7 group of wealthy countries. But the interest rates on African debt are far more punitive.

MADAGASCAR

Rajoelina is 'ready to listen' as opposition calls for his exit

6 October

No sign of end to unrest after protests began over woeful public services

President **Andry Rajoelina** says that he is 'ready to listen, ready to extend a helping hand, and above all, ready to bring solutions to Madagascar'. He is, however, not ready to resign, amid youth-led protests demanding basic services.

Rajoelina sacked his Prime Minister and disbanded the government on 29 September in an attempt to quell public anger. But the move has done little to address grievances that initially erupted in the capital on 25 September over worsening water shortages and power outages.

The United Nations says at least 22 people have been killed and more than 100 injured in the first few days of the protests, though the government has rejected these figures.

The protest movement started when two local councillors in the capital city Antananarivo were arrested after attempting to organise a peaceful protest over water shortages and electricity blackouts. Their trials have since been postponed to 11 November (**AC Vol 62 No 25**).

Peaceful demonstrations were met with tear gas, rubber bullets and arrests. Then, amid escalating tensions, looting broke out across Antananarivo.

Rajoelina, whose own rise to power began with a coup in 2009, has promised a 'new chapter' and a tougher stance on corruption. Civil society activists say that the protest movement is a major challenge to Madagascar's political elites. Failure to listen could result in more violence and a hardening of public opinion, they warn (**AC Vol 59 No 9**).

SOUTH AFRICA

AGOA expiry set to become painful reality

6 October

African efforts to lobby at UN meeting for extension of US trade deal were unsuccessful

The expiry of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) at the end of September is another headache for African states already counting the costs of the **United States'** new import duties on their goods.

A handful of African leaders, including **Kenya's** President **William Ruto**, lobbied, unsuccessfully, for AGOA to be extended on the margins of the UN General Assembly last month. World Trade Organization Director-General **Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala** has played down the effects, pointing to the low levels of trade between eligible African nations and the US. Fossil fuels and textiles have been two of the main African exports under AGOA.

Meanwhile, still hoping to secure concessions from the Trump administration to avoid a 30% basic tariff line, South Africa has secured much-needed investment in its vehicle industry from **Chinese** firm Beijing Auto Industrial Corporation, which operates an assembly line in Gqeberha, and from **India's** Mahindra & Mahindra, which makes pick-up trucks at its facility in Durban.

The Trump tariffs have hammered car exports to the US across the board. The European Commission has reported that while transatlantic trade held up in the second quarter of 2025, car exports slumped. The commission reckons that once tariffs are above 15%, trade flows suffer (**AC Vol 66 No 16**).

In Pretoria, meanwhile, the government reports that US-bound car exports dropped 90% in the second quarter compared to the previous year. That has prompted warnings that the tariffs could cost up to 100,000 jobs in South Africa.

Trade Minister **Parks Tau** has been in talks with major car brands from **Japan**, Europe and the US on long-term investment plans. South Africa has been overtaken by **Morocco** as the main automotive producer in Africa (**AC Vol 66 No 19**).

LIBYA/FRANCE

Sarkozy's jailing exposes the rot at Françafrique's heart

29 September

Former president sought funds from Gadaffi in return for support

The conviction of former French President **Nicolas Sarkozy** of criminal conspiracy is an indictment of the murky operations at the heart of *Françafrique*, the French government's influence-peddling in countries it once controlled.

Judge **Nathalie Gavarino** said Sarkozy had 'allowed his close collaborators and political supporters over whom he had authority and who acted in his name' to approach former Libyan leader Colonel **Moammar el Gadaffi's** officials 'in order to obtain or attempt to obtain financial support'.

Sarkozy, who served one term as president between 2007 and 2012, was accused of making a deal with Gadaffi in 2005, when he was interior minister, to obtain campaign financing in exchange for supporting the then-isolated Libyan government on the international stage (**Dispatches 31/3/25**).

That included a promise to lift the arrest warrant against Gadaffi's brother-in-law and intelligence chief **Abdullah el Senussi**.

In December 2007, months after Sarkozy's May presidential election win over **Ségolène Royal**, France agreed to sell Libya 21 Airbus aircraft and the two countries signed a nuclear cooperation agreement.

Sarkozy was acquitted on more serious charges of illegal campaign financing and passive corruption but still faces a five-year prison sentence, regardless of whether he appeals the verdict, which he described as an 'attack on the image of France'.

In 2012, the French investigative outlet *Mediapart* published what it said was a Libyan intelligence memo referencing a €50 million campaign funding agreement. But Gadaffi did not get much for his money. In 2011, Sarkozy joined the **United Kingdom** and **United States'** military operation in Libya that led to Gadaffi's ousting and execution during the Arab Spring.

SOMALIA/UN/AU

Slim pickings for Somalia security fund

29 September

African leaders are warning that Somalia's security is at risk due to a funding shortfall

African leaders have warned international partners that Somalia's security situation in its battle with the *Al Shabaab* terror group could regress if they don't cough up extra cash to plug a US$180 million funding gap facing the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission (AUSSOM).

Ahead of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), **Kenya's** Foreign Affairs Cabinet Secretary **Musalia Mudavadi** warned that Somalia could 'relapse' if the European Union and broader international community pulled its support.

That message was repeated in New York by African Union Commission chair **Mahmoud Ali Youssouf** at a summit designed to raise money for AUSSOM on 25 September.

But the pledging conference on the sidelines of the General Assembly, chaired by Somali President **Hassan Sheikh Mohamud** and co-convened by the AU, UN and the **United Kingdom**, delivered plenty of rhetorical support for AUSSOM, particularly from troop-contributing neighbouring countries **Ethiopia** and Kenya, but little in the way of cash (**Dispatches 7/1/25**).

While the AU has doubled the contribution from its Peace Fund to $20m, and the UK pledged $30m, the bulk of the burden is almost certain to fall on the EU and **United States**.

The funding shortage is, in large part, the result of an impasse after US President **Donald Trump's** administration vetoed UN Security Council Resolution 2719, which would have allowed it to cover up to 75% of costs for AU-led peacekeeping operations, with the remaining 25% coming from voluntary contributions such as the EU (**AC Vol 66 No 14**). The UNGA did not deliver a breakthrough on this.

The AU has sought to raise money from **Saudi Arabia**, **Qatar** and the **United Arab Emirates** but so far without success.

ETHIOPIA/RUSSIA

Abiy goes nuclear

29 September

In addition to plans for reactors in Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali, Rosatom has agreed to plan and build a nuclear plant in Ethiopia

Prime Minister **Abiy Ahmed's** decision to sign a deal with Russia to plan and build a nuclear power plant in Ethiopia was one of several diplomatic coups for Moscow at a nuclear forum hosted by state-run energy firm Rosatom on 25 September.

Niger's Mines Minister **Ousmane Abarchi** also revealed his country's plans to build two 2,000-megawatt nuclear reactors in partnership with Rosatom. The military junta in Niamey already has close links with the Kremlin and its Africa Corps mercenary group.

Rosatom has been at the heart of Russia's foreign policy offer to African states this year. In July, Russian Energy Minister **Sergei Tsivilev** and Rosatom promised to construct solar and nuclear power plants in **Burkina Faso** and **Mali** and to train local technicians (**AC Vol 66 No 18**). The prospect of training has also been offered to Ethiopia.

In addition to the nuclear plant, Abiy and President **Vladimir Putin** promised deeper cooperation on agriculture and healthcare, and while a nuclear plant would be at least a decade away, the agreement secures extra influence for Moscow in Addis Ababa.

As two BRICS members, Abiy's tilt to Moscow makes diplomatic sense, but it is unlikely to have been welcomed in Brussels and elsewhere.

At the Africa Climate Summit earlier in September, Abiy was happy to accept over US$150 million in pledged finance from the European Union to expand its electricity grid and to supply its neighbours with electricity from the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, one of the world's largest hydroelectric dams (**AC Vol 66 No 19**). But the EU is reluctant to work with and invest in countries with close links to Russia. **India's** purchase of Russian oil and joint military exercises are a major obstacle to a trade pact between the EU and India. ●

POINTERS

Sudan

FROM RESISTANCE TO REBUILDING

For the second year in a row, they are nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, but on the ground their work is getting ever more difficult. After the civil war in Sudan started in April 2023, it took just days for people to set up Emergency Response Rooms (ERRs). Every neighbourhood had a structure, in which aid for those in need was organised – soup kitchens, first aid or safe passage for those who had to flee.

'First of all, it is a war against the revolution,' says **Hind Al-Taif**. She has been an active member of the Resistance Committees and in the ERR Khartoum since the revolution. She travels to speak at conferences and meetings to lobby for more direct donations to the local aid effort, but mostly to raise awareness.

'It is the international attention that gives our members on the ground security,' says a member of the ERR for Bahri, in the Khartoum conurbation. He is managing support services at local hospitals and health centres. Civilian infrastructure has been targeted in the war, and now cholera, malaria and dengue fever are raging.

Several dozen volunteers were killed by the Rapid Support Forces. With the capital back in the hands of the Sudan Armed Forces, the ERRs are required to register their activities with the SAF regime, and several members have been arrested or disappeared.

In Khartoum, the work of the ERRs is shifting. They are still running the soup kitchens, but as fighting has ceased in the capital, they are now part of the efforts to rebuild and support displaced people (**AC Vol 66 No 19**). Some 2 million are likely to return to Khartoum this year.

EU/Morocco

NEW DEAL, OLD QUESTIONS

The EU signed off on a new trade agreement with Morocco on 4 October that will include goods from the disputed Western Sahara region. The deal has been fast-tracked by the European Commission, having first been discussed at ambassador level in September. However, the Commission has made it clear that the parties have not obtained the consent of the Sahrawi people, and it is not clear how the pact addresses legal demands made by the European Court of Justice.

Any trade deal involving the territory must demonstrate 'substantial and tangible benefits' for Western Sahara, the **Luxembourg**-based court said in October when it declared the EU's trade and fisheries agreement with Rabat invalid, concluding that Western Sahara is a territory 'separate and distinct' from Morocco. The EU and Morocco were given one year to renegotiate the agreement and bring it into line with international law.

A Commission spokesperson told journalists on 2 October that the new accord 'addresses all issues identified by the European Court of Justice' but did not go into detail.

The deal offers tariff- and quota-free trade to Moroccan products. It also promises new EU funding for infrastructure projects in Western Sahara, along with an increase in EU humanitarian aid to Sahrawi refugee camps. That is likely to prompt yet another legal challenge to the new agreement, say legal experts.

Many Commission officials see Morocco as the EU's most reliable partner in North Africa on trade, migration and counterterrorism (**Dispatches 21/7/25**). But Foreign Minister **Nasser Bourita** has repeatedly expressed frustration – shared by his counterparts in Brussels – at the ECJ rulings. Officially, the EU continues to support the United Nations position of reaching an agreed settlement based on a referendum in Western Sahara. However, a growing number of EU countries, including France and Spain, now support Morocco's plan for the territory to have semi-autonomous status but remain controlled by Rabat (**AC Vol 65 No 16**).

NEWSMAKERS: KENYAN YOUTHS IN COURT

The trials of over 50 activists charged with treason for offences linked to the 25 June protests against police killings and the 7 July *Saba Saba* ('Seven Seven') protests opened in courts in Naivasha and Baricho on 8 October. The cases, in which the defendants stand charged under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), are among over 70 confirmed cases involving terror charges (**AC Vol 66 Nos 13** & **14**).

Most of the defendants are under 25 and face terrorism and other serious charges, including murder, arson, sexual assault and robbery with violence. Some of the charges stem from arson attacks on two police stations, a courthouse and other government buildings in Matuu (Machakos County) and Kikuyu (Kiambu County) – both bordering Nairobi and sites of intensified protest after its Central Business District was sealed off by police. Others charged include the activist **Boniface Mwangi**, accused of illegal arms possession.

The International Press Association of East Africa also reports that several foreign journalists have had visa renewals or applications rejected without reason.

The 2014 POTA, passed after the Westgate terror attack, was designed to counter *Al Shabaab* insurgents, not suppress domestic protest (**AC Vol 54 No 20** & **Vol 55 No 19**). Rights groups and senior lawyers, including **Willy Mutunga**, a former Supreme Court president, have warned that the law could be unconstitutional and its sweeping powers used to silence critics.

The Gen Z movement continues to fund-raise, as do others such as the citizen group 50+ Million Kenyans, while former chief justice **David Maraga** is among prominent lawyers on the defence teams for defendants. But the dice are heavily loaded in the state's favour.

Under POTA, detainees may be detained without trial for up to 90 days and be subjected to harsh bail conditions and seizure of assets. Defendants typically have faced bail fees of KSh200,000 ($1,450), a large sum for most Kenyans, particularly the young. And while the state's clampdown on youth activists is unyielding, one of the few olive branches held out by President **William Ruto** is on the brink of breaking.

The President's Panel of Experts on Compensation of Victims of Demonstrations and Public Protests suspended operations following a September court ruling. The suspension prompted Law Society of Kenya president **Faith Odhiambo** to resign as vice-chair of the panel on 6 October. Odhiambo said she had little choice, as the panel had only a four-month mandate and is unlikely to resume work before the court cases are resolved.

'Victims continue to reach out to me in total frustration over when their requests for an audience with the panel will be honoured,' she said.

Chaired by Professor **Makau Mutua**, the panel was tasked with reviewing how the state compensates victims and delivering a report within 120 days. Odhiambo's stock among young Kenyans – high after she emerged as one of the most powerful critics of the Ruto government's violent responses to the Gen Z protests – was damaged by her decision to join the panel, with many complaining that it compromised her impartiality and that of the LSK. ●