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BLUE LINES

A more assertive and united Africa is being promised ahead of the UN Climate Change Conference COP30 from 10-21 November in the Brazilian port city of Belém. 'We are not here to negotiate our survival. We are here to design the world's next climate economy,' declared Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed at the opening of September's African Climate Summit, which set out the continent's stall for the COP talks.

That is just as well, since little progress is expected on climate financing from wealthy emitters, whether for adaptation or loss and damage. Global climate adaptation finance fell from US$28 billion to $26bn in 2023, though both figures are tiny compared with the $365bn per year the UN Environment Programme warns developing countries will need by 2035 to cope with climate impacts.

Green debt swaps and other alternative financial mechanisms are likely to feature prominently on the agenda. These have been launched successfully by Caribbean nations in recent years to convert debt into climate and environmental protection. We can also expect African negotiators to press the case for green industrialisation, as international powers compete for access to the continent's critical minerals and rare earths. With substantial mineral reserves, hydropower dams and geothermal energy, that plays to the strengths of countries such as Congo-Kinshasa, Ethiopia and Kenya.

TANZANIA

Cloud of blood and doubt hangs over Hassan's victory

Marked by eerie calm and deadly force, the vote unfolded under an internet shutdown – amid fear and fraud

'Hundreds' of Tanzanians were killed by security forces during the presidential election on 29 October and in the days that followed, as President **Samia Suluhu Hassan** was declared the winner with 97.66% of the vote. The opposition *Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo* (Chadema) party claimed 700 deaths; some activists put the toll at well over 2,000. It was the most disputed and violent election in Tanzania's recent history, with many blaming the government (**AC Vol 66 No 21**).

Tanzania is no stranger to electoral manipulation but the ruling party had never gone to such extreme lengths to crush the opposition. *Africa Confidential's* correspondents took the temperature on polling day from the ground. As dawn broke on 29 October, polling booths across Tanzania were quiet. At 6am, when they formally opened, they remained so, according to multiple reports seen by *Africa Confidential*. There was none of the usual bustle of voters queuing in anticipation.

Instead, polling clerks, party agents, opposition party members and police officers waited in near silence for citizens who seemed reluctant to come. In major cities such as Dar es Salaam, Arusha, Mbeya and Mwanza, the morning began sluggishly. By 7am, voters began to trickle in – in small, hesitant groups.

Some polling stations went an hour without a single ballot cast. By 11am, news and social media posts about unrest and isolated scuffles began to circulate, and such crowds as had gathered quickly dispersed. Any momentum that had built up was soon lost. A picture of low enthusiasm and minimal turnout was mirrored in small towns and villages throughout the day.

SILENCED

Local and international observers and media described the atmosphere as 'muted' and 'discouraged', attributing it variously to political fatigue and disillusionment with a process many saw as predetermined. Organisationally, the operation ran smoothly. Ballot papers, boxes, ink and other materials were sufficient across most regions. There were no major complaints of shortages or delays. Everything was in place – except the voters.

By evening, even before polling stations closed, it was clear the day would be remembered not for the drama of competition but for the lack of it. Silence spoke louder than slogans, and the absence of voters became the day's most powerful statement.

Reports and general observations suggest the poll was a carefully choreographed manipulation of the ballot box – executed with precision, fear and financial inducement.

According to preliminary reports from several regions, fewer than 35% of registered voters had cast their ballots by 10.30am – far below Tanzania's 2015 turnout of 67% and even below the disputed 2020 figure of 50%. It was around this time, insiders and confidential sources told us, that what they called 'the work' began. Especially in polling stations in

AFRICA CONFIDENTIAL
3rd Floor, 45 Albemarle Street
London, W1S 4JL, UK
Tel: +44 20 7831 3511
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Deputy Editor: Andrew Weir
Website Editor: Juliet Amissah
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coastal and central regions, returning officers, ruling *Chama Cha Mapinduzi* (CCM) agents and uniformed security officers convened behind closed doors and, instead of counting ballots, began filling them out.

Eyewitnesses and leaked videos circulated on WhatsApp and X showed stacks of unused ballot papers being distributed among the group. They began systematically marking the box next to Samia's name in an operation one witness in Mbeya described as 'industrial in scale'. 'They sat down and divided the ballots,' he said. 'Each person was given a batch – fifty papers each – to tick for President Samia.' Other witnesses said that for every 50 ballot papers filled out for the President, about five were ticked for **Salum Mwalimu**, the little-known presidential candidate from the *Chama cha Ukombozi wa Umma* (Chaumma) party, to create an illusion of multiparty participation.

There have also been claims that opposition polling agents were co-opted into the exercise. Two opposition party representatives in Tanga and Mbeya told *Africa Confidential* that agents from minor parties were approached with small cash payments – around 30,000 shillings each (US$12) – to induce cooperation. Human rights organisations such as the Legal and Human Rights Centre (LHRC) have long documented intimidation, arrests and disappearances of opposition polling agents over the past decade.

According to LHRC's 2020 report, more than 200 opposition monitors were detained or harassed during voting and counting processes nationwide. In this year's election, though fewer incidents were formally reported, activists suggest that 'softer coercion' replaced outright violence – quiet bribes, administrative manipulation and the chilling presence of armed officers within polling compounds.

Multiple short video clips, some barely 20 seconds long, surfaced online on polling day, appearing to show election officials stamping ballot papers and ticking boxes in favour of President Samia. NetBlocks, a global internet observatory, confirmed that these clips were uploaded before widespread social media restrictions began later in the day. By evening, the Tanzanian Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA) had throttled mobile data speeds, blocked access to X, Facebook, and WhatsApp, and effectively silenced the digital conversation.

The blackout lasted over five days, making independent verification of the footage nearly impossible in real time. Digital communications began to be restored in the afternoon of 3 November. For many Tanzanians, the main impact was on their trust in the system. A young woman in Dar es Salaam asked, 'Why should we vote, if they will do the ticking for us?' Her question echoed across social media.

JOURNALISTS KILLED

After polling closed, curfews were imposed and the army patrolled city streets. The silence grew thicker. It fell on the media too. *Africa Confidential* has confirmed the deaths of three journalists during the election period – all shot by state security forces.

The first was a young reporter from Baraka FM in Mbeya City, **Kelvin Lameck**. On the morning of the vote, as citizens queued to cast their ballots, he was interviewing people about their hopes and fears for the future. Witnesses say security officers opened fire near a crowd; one bullet struck him in the chest, killing him.

A day later, violence escalated in Dar es Salaam, where **Master Tindwa**, a respected journalist with Clouds Media Group – owners of Clouds TV and Clouds Radio – was shot dead while sitting on the veranda of his home in Temeke. Neighbours recall hearing a single shot, then silence. Tindwa was best known as a sports reporter and presenter. That evening, **Maneno Selanyika**, a freelance correspondent for several local outlets, was gunned down outside his home in Tegeta, Dar es Salaam. These deaths have been taken very hard by Tanzanian journalists.

As the polls closed, the government

'FREE AND FAIR' OR 'FRIGHT AND FEAR'

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) stuck to its line that allegations of electoral fraud were 'social media propaganda' and that the voting process had been 'free, fair and transparent'. No observers from the European Union or the Carter Center were present – only regional bodies such as the African Union (AU), which remained cautiously diplomatic.

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) delegation, however, described the polls as marred by violence, repression and a systematic erosion of democratic principles, citing the arrests and prosecution of opposition figures **Tundu Lissu** of *Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo* (Chadema) and **Luhaga Mpina** of ACT Wazalendo in the lead-up to the polls (**AC Vol 66 No 3**, **Dispatches 14/4/25** & **13/10/25**).

Disqualifications of candidates, harassment of activists, and widespread fear created what observers called a 'manufactured calm' – the silence of intimidation rather than the peace of democracy. SADC highlighted deep structural flaws. Tanzania's constitution bars courts from reviewing presidential election results or the actions of INEC, making electoral justice virtually impossible.

With commissioners appointed directly by the President – who serves as both the ruling party chair and candidate – the independence of the body was, in the words of SADC observers, 'compromised from inception'. Adding to the opacity was a complete information blackout. On election day, internet access was cut across the country – paralysing communication and obstructing observers' ability to report incidents in real time. Some SADC officials were detained, questioned by security agents and forced to delete photographs from polling stations – a stark reminder of the climate of fear surrounding the vote.

Media freedom fared no better. State broadcasters devoted nearly all coverage to the ruling party, while private outlets self-censored to avoid government reprisal. Journalists said they were allegedly harassed or threatened. Heavy police deployment – often outnumbering voters – and gunfire in several regions deepened the sense of coercion. Civil society groups and voter education organisations were sidelined, denied accreditation or stripped of funding.

The SADC mission's conclusion was blunt: Tanzanians were denied a genuine opportunity to express their democratic will. The election, it said, fell far short of SADC's own Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections. Led by **Richard Msowoya**, former Speaker of **Malawi's** Parliament, the observation team's report exposes a troubling truth – that beneath Tanzania's image of stability lies a democracy suffocated by fear, secrecy and the heavy hand of the state. ●

projected calm. Officials insisted the nation had voted peacefully, that order prevailed, and that talk of bloodshed was 'foreign propaganda'. But reports of shootings were already rippling through communities – stories that would soon pierce even the government's carefully constructed blackout.

While Tanzania was cut off from the world for five days, eyewitnesses and early reports suggest violence erupted in several regions as security forces clashed with voters and opposition supporters.

Despite anecdotal reports of shootings and anonymous briefings to foreign reporters, Dar es Salaam Regional Commissioner **Albert Chalamila**, dismissed claims of any killings. 'No one has been killed, and my region is safe,' he insisted at a press briefing on 30 October. His counterparts in Mwanza and Mbeya echoed the same line. Yet by nightfall, international broadcasters, led by *Al Jazeera* television, aired footage showing bodies, wounded civilians, and chaotic scenes near polling stations. The images contradicted every official statement.

On day three following the vote, access to independent reporting remained severely restricted. While *Al Jazeera* continued to publish coverage online, local broadcast channels did not carry its footage, and journalists faced mounting pressure. Foreign Minister **Mahmoud Thabit Kombo** struggled to navigate questions from international journalists. He neither confirmed nor denied the casualties, resorting to vague assurances. 'We should wait for the official statement to understand how many people have lost their lives,' he repeated, visibly uncomfortable.

During her inaugural speech at the Tanzania People's Defence Force parade ground in Dodoma on 3 November, President Samia did not mention the deaths at all – let alone offering condolences to the bereaved – underlining a sense of unease about the future of Tanzanian democracy. For families mourning their dead, it felt as if their pain had been erased from the nation's official memory. ●

SUDAN

Burhan's leadership in question after Darfur retreat

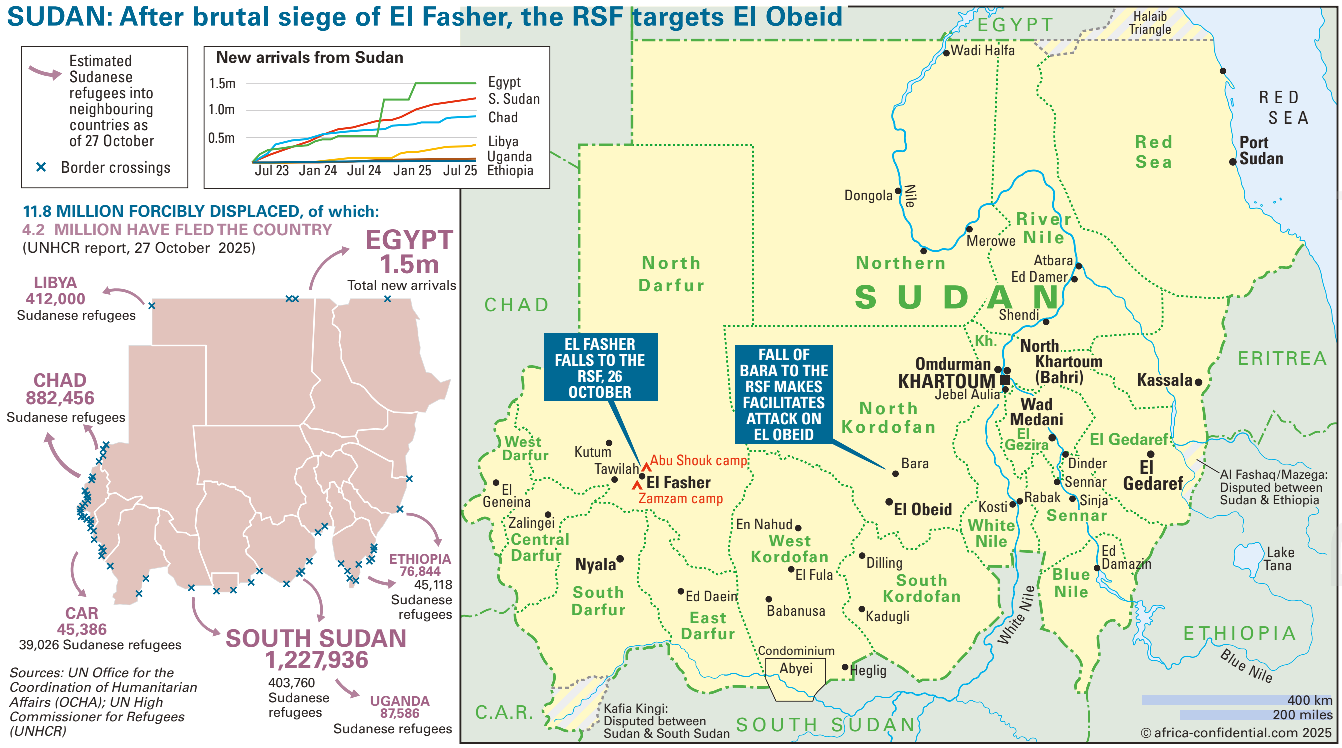
The fall of El Fasher exposes international failures as the RSF kills thousands of civilians with impunity

The Rapid Support Forces' seizure of El Fasher on 26 October after a brutal 16 month siege, gives it control over much of western Sudan and has strengthened its negotiating position – claiming territory larger than France. Yet mass killings and brutal reprisals against civilians, including arbitrary executions and rape, have hardened international hostility towards the RSF and its leader General **Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo 'Hemeti'**.

The **United Arab Emirates** – the RSF's principal backer – has come under increasing scrutiny for its role in supplying the group over the past two and a half years (**Dispatches 11/08/25**). The information war is intensifying on social media, and Abu Dhabi's reputation is increasingly under fire.

In the months leading up to the fall, the surrounding Abu Shouk and ZamZam displacement camps were partially destroyed and then occupied by the RSF. Local civilians had little choice but to flee either to El Fasher or to Tawilah – a town nearly 70 kilometres east and under the control of neutral Darfuri armed groups. In both cases, the risks were high and the consequences severe.

The RSF's victory in North Darfur may pave the way for another in Kordofan. RSF operations in northern Kordofan suggest a push to seize El Obeid, the regional capital, is imminent.



BURHAN ON A TIGHTROPE

In the wake of several critical meetings, General **Abdel Fattah al Burhan's** survival depends on balancing relations with rival powers – **Saudi Arabia** against **Iran** and **Russia**, **Egypt** against Sudanese Islamists. On 15 October, Burhan had a difficult encounter Egypt's President **Abdel Fattah el Sisi** in Cairo as the Sudan Armed Forces' military position continued to deteriorate, especially in the west.

Burhan's meeting with **United States** Senior Africa Advisor **Massad Boulos** in Zurich on 11 August had laid the groundwork for a purge at Washington's behest. He dismissed 26 major-generals and 53 brigadier-generals, many linked to Islamist networks (**AC Vol 66 No 17**). Then Burhan decided to reassert himself.

He then moved closer to Tehran, citing the need for advanced weaponry and countermeasures. After sending a delegation to the US, Burhan ordered them to leave indirect talks early after Boulos refused to include a stipulation in the draft ceasefire agreement that the SAF were Sudan's sole legitimate armed force and the current government its only legal interlocutor.

He expelled two officials from the World Food Programme, declaring them *persona non grata* for failing to uphold these terms. But the decision was reversed after El Fasher take-over as government did not want to remind diplomats that the SAF doesn't care much about humanitarian access.

And then on 4 November Burhan rejected the US ceasefire plan until the Rapid Support Forces evacuated and Washington designated it a terrorist organisation. Sudan's embassy in Nairobi made these conditions clear, along with chilling videos of claimed RSF atrocities, at a press briefing on 5 November.

Given this track further negotiations between Burhan and Boulos seem unlikely. This follows the inconclusive end of the last meeting of the Quad in Washington. Boulos had hoped to bring SAF and RSF delegates together to negotiate a ceasefire and secure humanitarian access – but this did not happen (**AC Vol 66 Nos 14**, **17** & **19**). Some in the Quad had argued that the RSF's takeover of El Fasher would be seen as a turning point, simplifying the map and making a ceasefire more feasible. That looks unlikely with SAF now fired up to find ways to push back the RSF.

Two conclusions emerged from Washington. First, Trump Administration officials still want to secure a ceasefire and are willing to invest political capital in it. Second, their vision does not extend beyond that. Beyond the small group around Boulos, few seem to understand Boulos's strategy and how he intends to build support within Sudan and across the region.

Boulos has yet to engage much with his diplomatic counterparts outside the US. No European diplomat appears to understand the US strategy or tactics; the same is true for African and Arab envoys. But they are expected to endorse a mediation process without knowing its substance. Sudanese civilian groups also remain in the dark.

Hopes that after the fall of El Fasher that diplomats from the **United Arab Emirates** might play a more constructive role in securing a ceasefire and enabling humanitarian access look ill-founded.

Given the volume of military supplies delivered to the RSF ahead of the final assault on El Fasher, it seems that UAE was betting heavily on this changing the military balance in Sudan. And it could, should the RSF press into North Kordofan and take the capital, El Obeid. Military experts say the sophistication of the RSF's offensive in Darfur and Kordofan reflects direct planning by senior UAE officers, following a series of earlier failures.

Some Sudanese activists argue that media coverage of the RSF's brutal seizure of El Fasher will further damage the UAE's global reputation and prompt action from the US Congress. Six senators have already issued a bipartisan statement calling for the RSF to be designated a terrorist organisation and highlighting the UAE's role in supporting it.

A speech by **Anwar Gargash**, foreign policy advisor to UAE President **Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan**, on 2 November admitting to mistakes in Sudan policy was heralded by some as a prelude to a substantive policy shift. But with the RSF, well supplied, back on the offensive and heading eastwards, there is little on the ground to support that view. ●

That would extend RSF influence across all of western Sudan.

Pockets of territory in Darfur and Kordofan remain under the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) or loosely aligned armed movements. Even RSF allies may be uneasy about the group's escalating violence against civilians.

The SAF's retreat from El Fasher could reshape relations among Gen **Abdel Fattah al Burhan's** military allies. The trends point towards greater radicalisation and more fighting. The defeat in Darfur offers Islamists a chance reassert themselves politically alongside the SAF, while Darfuri armed movements may seek revenge for their humiliation and the killing of their civilian kin.

The armed groups in Darfur are among the biggest losers – along with the communities they represent, especially the Zaghawa. **Minni Arkou Minnawi**, Darfur's governor and leader of the main group that backed the SAF's 6th Infantry Division in El Fasher, faces pressure from his own movement and the SAF. For months, he had lobbied Port Sudan and Burhan for funds, ammunition and vehicles to defend the city. He also pressed Prime Minister **Kamil Idris** to retain cabinet posts secured under the Juba Peace Agreement of October 2020. In media interviews, he repeatedly called on the SAF to liberate El Fasher – as if the aid he received was not contingent on military action from his own forces.

Two days before the final RSF assault, the 6th Infantry Division negotiated a safe exit from El Fasher without informing key Darfuri allies. Some joined the withdrawal, but others were ambushed later that day. In the aftermath, the SAF blamed Minnawi for the city's fall, accusing him of hoarding funds in Port Sudan. Darfuri activists close to Minnawi levelled similar accusations against the SAF. Since El Fasher airport ceased operations earlier in the year, limited supplies from Port Sudan were directed to SAF units rather than Darfuri fighters on the front line.

TURNING POINT

The bitterness of this dispute runs deep. Darfuri field commanders now face a dilemma: act on growing mistrust between the SAF and Zaghawa groups, or maintain ties with the SAF to secure supplies and support. The SAF blames Minnawi entirely. Other Darfuri factions may follow suit, having lost mid-level commanders in the final battle.

Jibril Ibrahim, the Minister of Finance and leader of the Justice and Equality Movement, gave an emotional speech calling for general mobilisation – echoing the Islamists of the National Congress Party (NCP). JEM has few fighters left in Darfur, as many defected to form new groups after four senior leaders – **Suleiman Sandal**, **Ahmed Tugud**, **Issa Adam Hasabo** and **Mohamed Sharaf** – were demoted in late August 2023 for engaging with Hemeti's team in **Ethiopia** (**AC Vol 64 No 25**). Jibril is using this defeat to realign with Islamists who remain wary of his role due to his resistance against the **Omer**

Hassan Ahmed el Bashir National Congress Party regime after 2000.

In the 48 hours before El Fasher fell, Islamist leaders met in Port Sudan to assess the situation. They were alarmed by the RSF's capture of Al Bara in North Kordofan – which makes El Obeid more vulnerable – and expected El Fasher's imminent fall. They saw both defeats as a chance to expand their influence in Sudanese politics.

Their call for mobilisation stems from this analysis. Islamists understand the SAF's military position is deteriorating, and see that the RSF could soon capture key cities in Kordofan. In Central, East and North Sudan, public despair may drive support for Islamist mobilisation; especially as RSF atrocities against women and children fuel nationalist and sectarian sentiment.

The Islamists' goal is more strategic. Since Burhan's meeting with **Massad Boulos** – **United States** President **Donald Trump's** Senior Africa Advisor – in Zurich on 11 August, they have known that the SAF was offered a safe exit from the war. The offer came with conditions: Islamists must be expelled from the army and political sphere, and no strategic alliance formed with **Russia** or **Iran** (though arms purchases may continue). Mobilisation is a way to test SAF loyalty and identify officers willing to comply with US demands. It also allows them to monitor Burhan, whom they see as unreliable and has expressed interest in becoming a civilian president. ●

NIGERIA/SAHEL

Tinubu courts juntas as Ecowas resets security ties

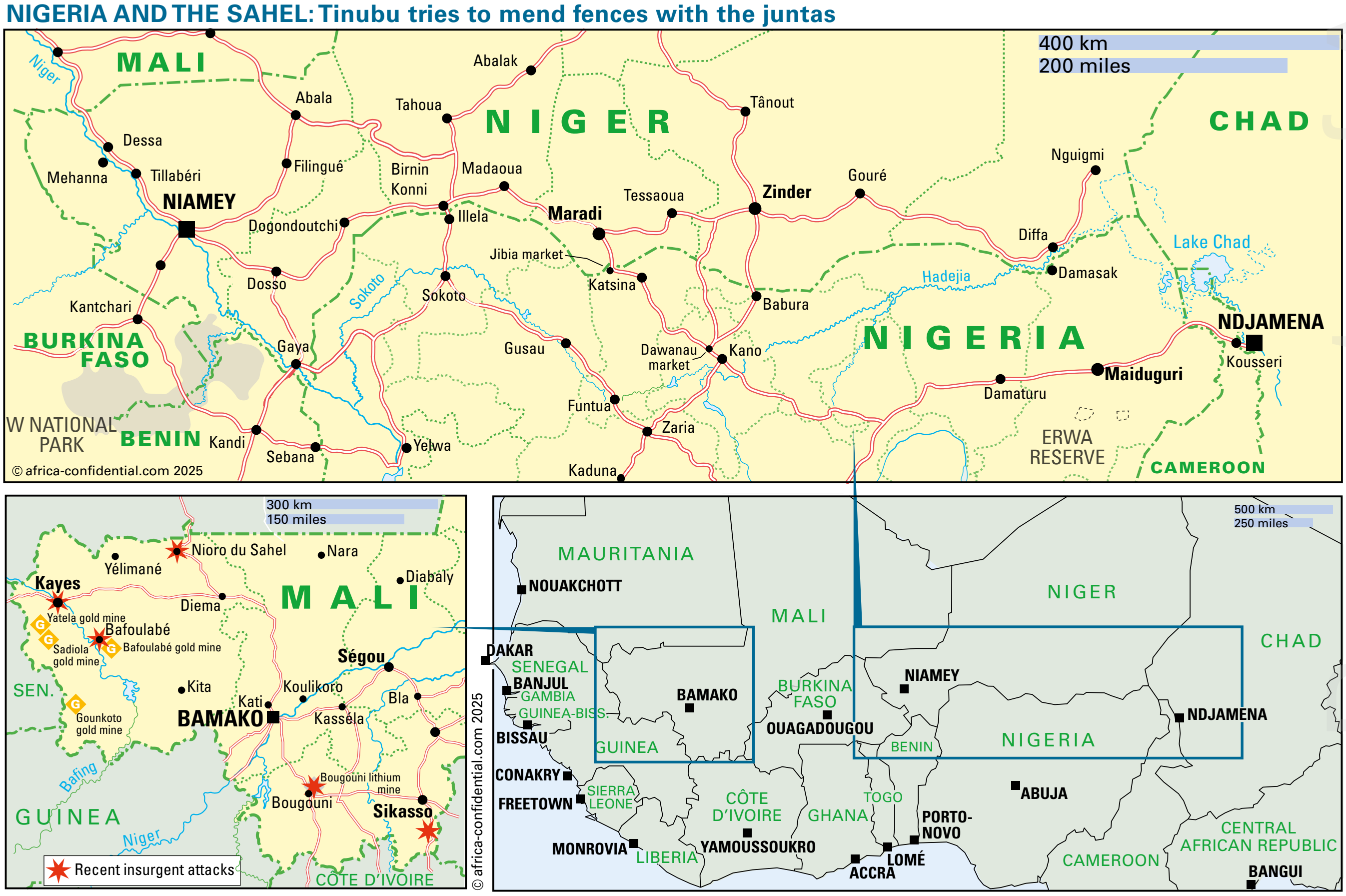
Abuja is forging fresh partnerships as jihadist violence spreads and trust frays in the wake of military rule

With security collapsing across the Sahel and imperilling West Africa, Nigeria is pushing to rebuild military partnerships with the ruling juntas in **Niger**, **Burkina Faso** and **Mali** – despite the bruises left by their walkout from the Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas) in January. Islamist militants are gaining ground: Nigeria's northern states remain afflicted by banditry, Bamako is under jihadist blockade, and 70% of Burkina Faso's territory lies outside government control. This is driving President **Bola Ahmed Tinubu** to intensify outreach to the Sahelian regimes.

Even as Ecowas and the breakaway *Association des États du Sahel* (AES) begin early negotiations over a post-divorce framework for trade and migration, Nigerian foreign minister **Yusuf Tuggar** argues that West Africa must revive its once-strong culture of collective security action. But Abuja's policymakers and military brass now acknowledge that force alone will not suffice. They point to poverty, climate change, and the exclusion of young people – not just ideological jihadism – as drivers of violence.

Officials also recognise how regional opinion, especially among youth, is shaped by social media – a vehicle for rumour, alternative narratives and disinformation. Like other Ecowas and western governments, they struggle to

NIGERIA AND THE SAHEL: Tinubu tries to mend fences with the juntas



PUTTING WEST AFRICA BACK TOGETHER AGAIN

Thoughts are now turning to what practical steps might contain the worsening crisis. That task is eased by the *Association des États du Sahel* (AES) juntas' withdrawal from the Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas). That freed the bloc's political leaders and senior officials from the obligation to coax the generals into restoring constitutional government under the 2001 Ecowas Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance. Instead, they can focus on pragmatic security and economic cooperation. At the end of 2024, the AES announced it would permanently uphold West Africa's open market, customs union and free-movement migration framework.

Ecowas agreed to maintain the arrangement for now – but reserved its long-term position. Given the crucial importance of open movement rules for millions of citizens, and the reality that trade and people will cross porous borders regardless, it seems unlikely that new barriers will be erected. Yet by withholding final agreement, Ecowas retains a potent bargaining chip to secure concessions from the Sahelian regimes.

Nigeria and fellow Ecowas governments appear to favour constructive engagement. They are likely to be encouraged by the African Union, which has appointed President **Évariste Ndayishimiye** of **Burundi** as special envoy for the Sahel and the former **Gambian** foreign minister **Mamadou Tangara** as its Bamako-based special representative, heading the new AU Mission for Mali and the Sahel (MISAHEL).

The June 2025 selection of **Sierra Leone's** President **Julius Maada Bio** as Ecowas chair – after **Togolese** efforts to block his reformist **Senegalese** counterpart **Bassirou Diomaye Faye** – was seen as a setback for the bloc's democratic agenda. Yet in dealings with the AES, Maada Bio is a curious choice: he led a coup in 1996 before overseeing a return to democracy and stepping down, only re-entering politics years later as a civilian. On 16 September, he briefly visited Ouagadougou for talks with **Burkina Faso's** military leader, Captain **Ibrahim Traoré.**

Ghana is now considering reviving the Accra Initiative – a coastal-Sahel security partnership with Burkina that has become largely defunct due to technical complications. The plan would be expanded and rebranded under a less politically loaded name. Originally grouping **Côte d'Ivoire**, **Ghana**, Togo, **Benin** and Burkina Faso, there is speculation that **Nigeria** could be brought in. This could evolve into a new framework for the broader military collaboration between Ecowas and AES member states; one that is now urgently needed, as Abuja has been pointing out. ●

counter its impact and communicate their own messages. For Abuja, a top priority is rebuilding a functional relationship with Niger: Nigeria's neighbour across a 1,608-kilometre border. Tuggar regrets Niamey's withdrawal from the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), which had made progress in curbing *Boko Haram* and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), a breakaway jihadist faction active around Lake Chad and northeastern Nigeria.

The Tinubu government faces major internal challenges in tackling criminal, jihadist and inter-communal violence. Appearing before the Senate in October, newly appointed chief of defence staff Lieutenant-General **Olufemi Oluyede** admitted to operational shortcomings, low morale, and the urgent need to strengthen policing alongside military efforts.

Officials in Abuja see a risk of contagion due to Niger's fragility. General **Abdourahamane Tiani's** regime has pulled troops back from Diffa region, Lake Chad and Nigeria's Borno state to reinforce Niamey's defence – risking a reversal of security gains in the borderlands.

Conditions have deteriorated in the once-stable farming belt between Maradi – a key Nigérien trading hub – and rural areas of Katsina and Kano states. Further west, jihadists are attacking both sides of the border between Niger's Dosso region and Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara states.

The socio-economic fallout is severe. Much of the border region is densely populated and vital for cereal production. In the Komadougou valley, red pepper farming – a lucrative trade – is under threat. The Dawanau grain market near Kano is one of West Africa's largest, and key livestock corridors to Lagos and other cities pass through hubs such as Birnin Kebbi and Ilela. This vibrant commerce is now imperilled.

Rebuilding an effective security partnership between Abuja and Niamey will require restoring trust; a slow process after the rupture caused by President **Mohamed Bazoum's** overthrow in July 2023, Ecowas's brief threat of military intervention under Tinubu's leadership, and Tiani's refusal to compromise in the name of national self-reliance (**AC Vol 64 Nos 16** & **17**). Nigerian delegations have struggled to gain access in Niamey – in one case, they were confined to the airport.

Political relations have slightly eased. In April, Tuggar visited Niamey for talks with his Nigérien counterpart, Bakary Sangaré. They signed a communiqué to revitalise economic ties, including the Nigeria-Niger Joint Commission and projects such as the Kano-Maradi railway, Trans-Saharan Gas Pipeline, fibre-optic link, and highway. But tensions remain. Some senior AES officials are convinced Ecowas is a poodle of **France**; their regimes' chosen 'imperialist' bogeyman (**AC Vol 65 No 25**).

FRENCH QUESTION

Abuja is acutely aware of the Sahelian distrust stirred by Tinubu's warm ties with France's President **Emmanuel Macron**. Yet the relationship reflects Nigeria's status as a growing economic and diplomatic power and France's largest African trading partner: €5 billion in 2023 (US$5.75bn), compared with €3.3bn for Franco-**South African** trade and €2.4bn for **Côte d'Ivoire**.

AES concerns are not entirely unfounded. Paris was the most vocal supporter of Ecowas's aborted intervention in Niger, and some Abuja sources claim France pushed for Niger's MNJTF withdrawal – a counterproductive move, regardless of who was responsible. Nigerian officials reject Niamey's repeated claims that **Benin** harbours a large French force preparing to invade Niger and supporting jihadist attacks. (A small French training contingent assisting Benin's defence against cross-border raids is confirmed.)

Despite the persistent climate of rumour and suspicion that hampers efforts to rebuild ties with the Tiani regime and its Malian and Burkinabè allies, Nigeria's fundamental connections with Niger remain deep and largely intact. At human, commercial and bureaucratic levels, cross-border ties remain strong; reflecting deep family, cultural and economic bonds between Hausa and Kanuri populations on both sides. In late 2023, powerful voices in northern Nigeria helped persuade Tinubu to abandon the risky plan to invade what they regard as their Nigérien brother nation.

The Nigeria-Niger Joint Commission, headquartered in Niamey, continues to function. Most strikingly, after Ecowas lifted sanctions in February 2024, the Tiani regime reopened border crossings with Nigeria – while still refusing to reopen the economically vital Gaya/Malanville frontier with Benin, in a pointed snub to President **Patrice Talon** (AC Vol 65 No 5).

Across the region, key technical cooperation structures continue to operate normally between both AES and Ecowas states. Among the most important are the *Union Économique et Monétaire Ouest-Africaine* (UEMOA) – with its central bank in Dakar, commission in Ouagadougou, shared stock exchange and French-backed CFA peg – and the *Comité permanent Inter-États de Lutte contre la Sécheresse au Sahel* (CILSS), which coordinates and independently monitors national drought and food security strategies.

Financial regulators across the region continue to collaborate on cross-border financial surveillance and anti-money laundering efforts. Among the bilateral ties that have survived the diplomatic chill is Côte d'Ivoire's electricity export to Mali – despite payment arrears and the fallout from Bamako's six-month detention of 46 Ivorian troops in 2022 (AC Vol 64 No 15 & Vol 63 No 19).

Where political relations allow, the worsening security crisis has prompted some coastal states to forge new military partnerships with AES neighbours. **Senegal** and **Ghana**, for instance, have developed active border security collaborations with Mali and Burkina respectively. The coups, and the Sahelian regimes' belligerent rhetoric towards Ecowas and Europe, have left bruises among Nigerian and other bloc policymakers, as well as in intellectual and research circles.

Anger at the AES diplomatic barrage is real. The relentless social media offensive – especially from Ouagadougou – is seen not just as provocative, but as deliberate aggression. The sovereigntist posture of the Sahelian juntas, and their dismantling of constitutional structures and flawed democracies, has few supporters in Abuja. But in Abuja and across Ecowas, there is little appetite for isolating the beleaguered AES regimes. Sympathy lies with their populations: fellow West Africans caught in a crisis that could yet ripple further across the region. ●

NIGERIA

Tinubu's policy paradox

Food prices, shrinking purchasing power and insecurity underscore the disconnect between praise for reforms and everyday hardship

Abuja's Debt Management Office ploughed on with a US$2.25 billion Eurobond launch on 5 November, despite market ructions triggered by **United States** President **Donald Trump's** threats of military action against Nigeria. On 2 November, Trump warned he would deploy military forces 'guns-a-blazing' against Islamist militants in Nigeria, accusing the government of failing to protect Christians from systematic killings (AC Vol 66 No 17). He also threatened to end all US aid – already cut by more than half to around $400 million – for health programmes this year.

The threats rattled Nigerian markets, with dollar bonds suffering the biggest losses among emerging markets on 3 November. The naira fell 1.2% to 1,442.80 against the US dollar – its steepest decline since June. The 2051 bond dropped approximately 0.5 cents before recovering, while yields on the longest-dated debt rose to 9.14%. Undeterred, Abuja launched the Eurobond sale, with expected yields of around 9%, via Chapel Hill Denham – founded by Finance Minister **Wale Edun** two decades ago. Joint lead managers include JPMorgan, Standard Chartered, Citigroup, and Goldman Sachs.

The Eurobond is part of a much larger borrowing programme, partly to refinance old loans and bridge budget deficits. Nigeria is following **Kenya** and **Angola** in tapping easier market conditions, with African sovereign debt spreads over US Treasuries falling by almost half.

Abuja was encouraged by rating agency Moody's upgrade of Nigerian debt from Caa1 to B3, premised mainly on President **Bola Ahmed Tinubu's** reforms – such as floating the naira, eliminating the fuel subsidy and boosting tax revenues through a tougher centralised collection regime (AC Vol 66 No 5). Investors are showing more interest in the Nigerian Stock Exchange, which has gained over 60% in dollar terms this year, helped by major listings including **Aliko Dangote's** 650,000 barrel-a-day oil refinery, petrochemical plant, cement companies and agricultural projects (AC Vol 65 No 17).

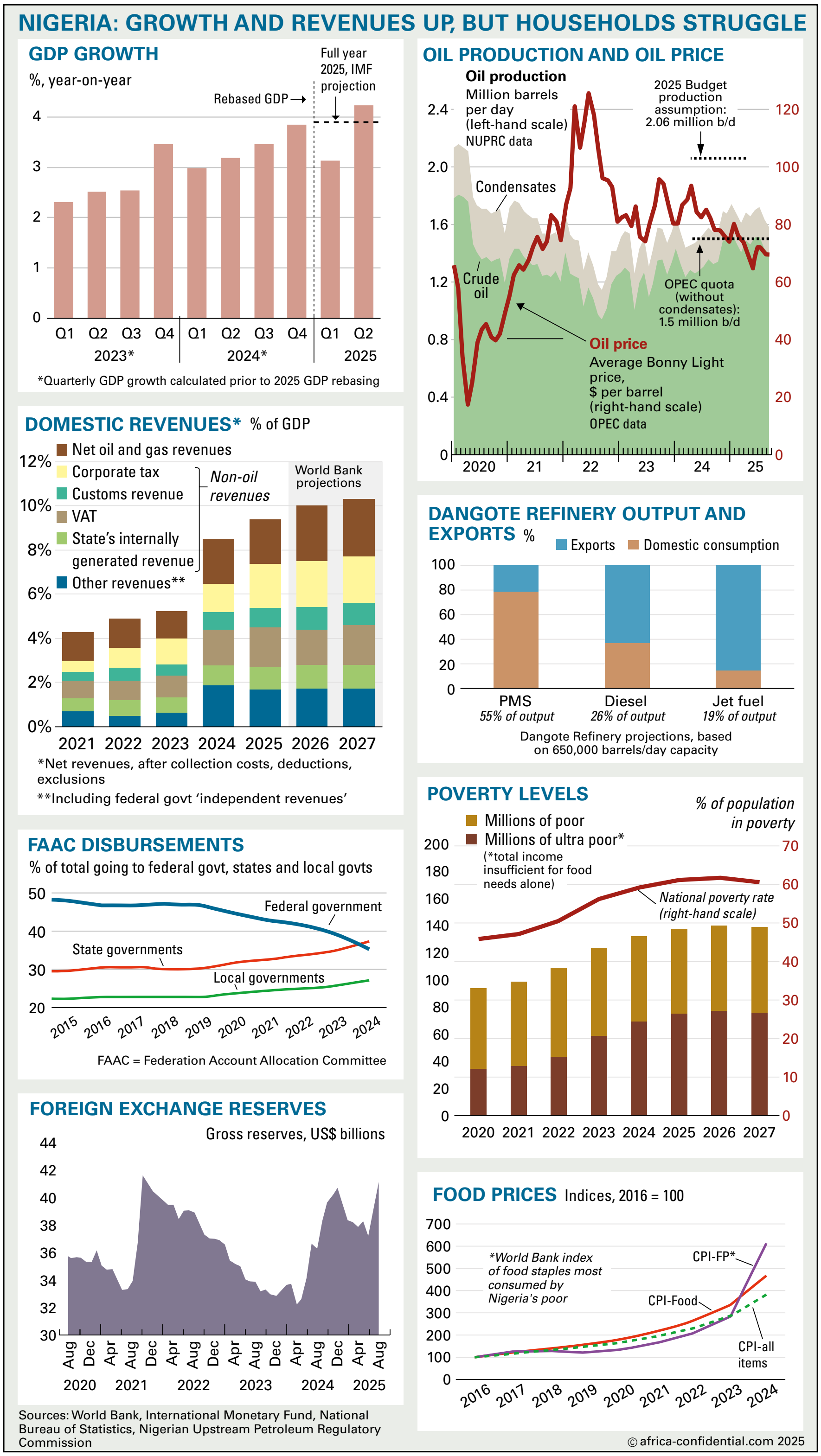
Nigeria's removal on 24 October from the international Financial Action Task Force grey list – along with **South Africa**, **Burkina Faso** and **Mozambique** – was seen as another vote of confidence in Tinubu's reform agenda. But the overall economic picture is much more variegated: faster headline growth and lower inflation figures are yet to translate into better living conditions for most Nigerians – with the official and unofficial (sometimes criminal) operating costs of the political system still diverting a hefty chunk of federal revenues.

Last month, the International Monetary Fund raised its Nigeria GDP growth projections for this year and next by 0.5% (to 3.9%) and 0.9% (to 4.2%) respectively. IMF economists commended the exchange rate reforms launched by Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) Governor **Olayemi Cardoso**, downplayed the impact of US tariffs on Nigeria's relatively unexposed economy, and attributed higher oil production to 'improved security'.

After warning that Nigeria faces the greatest job creation challenge of any African economy, the World Bank also raised its growth projections, noting easier business conditions and that the current account remains strongly in surplus. Nigeria's economic growth – no longer lagging the continental average – remains modest in per capita terms. With the highest number of people in extreme poverty, more than India whose population is six times larger, Nigeria is making little progress in reducing inequality and poverty despite – or say critics, because of – the Tinubu government's reforms.

Inflation, despite successive months of decline to 18% in September, is unlikely to return to single digits next year. Prices of key items in household budgets, such as food and fuel, are much higher than when Tinubu took office in May 2023. Food inflation for key staples has hit poor Nigerians the hardest, despite serial promises of targeted relief programmes. This prompted the IMF to call for more social and development spending. The Fund argues that the government's macroeconomic stabilisation policies should be followed by stronger measures to cut food inflation and bolster the social safety net.

Some of Nigeria's growth acceleration can be explained by this year's GDP rebasing: it boosted the official size of the economy by more than 30%. Updating the methodology and scope of Nigeria's growth calculation



should help policymakers – it more accurately reflects the size of sectors such as oil (decreased) and agriculture (increased), and incorporates more comprehensive data, including on the informal economy.

REVENUE DRIVE

But this changing of the growth picture – reducing the debt/GDP ratio and the fiscal deficit (as a percentage of GDP), while raising per capita incomes – does not by itself signify an improvement in debt sustainability, national finances or living standards. State revenue at around 10% of GDP is still far too low – under the average for Africa and the global economy. Tinubu and Edun want to change this fast, backing a relentless tax collection drive and an institutional reorganisation to boost non-oil revenues.

Government forecasts habitually overestimate revenue outcomes, according to an IMF report in July. It found that between 2011 and 2023, Nigeria's forecasts were on average a third higher than realised revenues – and that oil revenues were significantly overestimated due to unrealistic production forecasts. This 'optimism bias' has skewed forecasts of tax revenues, and the IMF report argues that Nigeria's debt service payment projections are usually underestimated. Together, these help explain why the capital spending targets needed for longer-term growth are repeatedly missed. The Fund's latest Article IV report argued the federal budget 'needs to be recalibrated to lower oil prices'.

The government's fiscal position worsened in the first half of this year due to rising wages and interest expenditures, and allocations of relief funds to state governments despite higher national revenues, according to a just-released World Bank analysis of the economy. This shows the complexity of Nigeria's domestic accounting still undermines transparency and the unpredictability of government finances. This also helps explain why Tinubu wants to increase the federal government's share of Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation revenues by slashing the share of oil revenues the NNPC retains for running costs and for oil exploration in northern states (**AC Vol 66 No 18**).

Since NNPC Limited was incorporated in accordance with the Petroleum Industry Act (PIA), federal government revenues as a share of national oil exports have sharply declined. The finances of Nigeria's 36 states have, on average, improved since Tinubu came to power – but the structure has changed, with state governors reaping some of the federation's savings after the fuel subsidies were abolished. However, the pool of oil revenues at the centre has shrunk because so much oil has been sold forward.

REWARDS

Citi's chief Africa economist **David Cowan** argues that Nigeria is now reaping clear benefits from initially painful reforms, adding that several state governments are now 'awash with cash' due to improved revenue collection and a boost to VAT revenues – of which the states keep 50%, local governments 35%, and the federal government only 15%. The higher VAT revenues stem from the higher domestic prices following the naira's devaluation and rising inflation. For the first time since it became a major oil producer, Nigeria's total non-oil revenues significantly exceed revenues from oil, adds Cowan.

Concern is growing about Nigeria's ambitious borrowing plans announced by Tinubu in May (AC Vol 66 No 11). The ratings agencies Moody's and Fitch acknowledge Nigeria's higher foreign exchange reserves, but point out that the external debt service has increased this year, that the fiscal deficit will 'widen', and that Nigeria's heavy interest payments/revenue ratio will decline only modestly during 2026 and beyond.

Much more important to sustaining growth than the portfolio inflows will be longer-term direct investment. Yet foreign direct investment remains miniscule – under 1% of GDP – compared with Nigeria's counterparts in Asia and Latin America. Another priority is boosting domestic power output and investing more in transmission. Nigeria's power output capacity greatly exceeds current generation levels due to inefficient transmission. In August, Edun announced that a plan to refinance up to 4 trillion naira of power sector debts – owed mostly to Nigeria's generation companies – had been approved.

Cardoso, Governor of a CBN whose Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) on 23 September cut the policy rate for the first time since 2020 (by 0.5% to 27%), must balance between cutting rates to boost growth and keeping them high to contain inflation. With price stability now the central bank's core mandate, monetary policy is no longer distorted to support the naira – and the days of CBN-led development financing – outside the bounds of typical central bank policy appear to be over.

With just five months until a 31 March 2026 deadline, 14 of Nigeria's numerous deposit money banks have, according to the MPC, 'fully met' the new minimum capital requirements announced by the CBN in March 2024. This means that several banks still need to raise capital – whether via rights issues or by mergers. Some foreign-owned banks may review their operations in Nigeria. The end result will be a leaner and meaner commercial sector, even if it is doing far too little to help local companies develop manufacturing and processing operations, creating jobs and growth (AC Vol 66 No 15). ●

OIL OUTPUT FALLS SHORT OF TARGET AGAIN

Rising oil production this year – helped by improved security in the Niger Delta – is boosting state revenues, but the benefits are limited by the volume of oil sold forward via traders such as Vitol and Trafigura to cover budget shortfalls.

The Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission (NUPRC) says 15% fewer barrels were lost from January to June this year than in the first half of 2024. After peaking at 1.71 million barrels a day in July – when Nigeria narrowly exceeded its 1.5m b/d OPEC quota excluding condensates – production has since declined by over 100,000 b/d. Oil prices for Bonny Light have softened to less than US$70 per barrel and output could be hit by oil union strikes. When oil and gas union PENGASSAN began a strike on 28 September – following workforce cuts at the Dangote fuel refinery in Lekki, Lagos State – output fell by over 200,000 b/d.

Industry experts question whether local oil companies – having acquired onshore assets from oil majors – will be able to boost production in those fields. There are also doubts about when major offshore projects, such as the Shell-backed 110,000 b/d Bonga North project, will come on stream (AC Vol 66 Nos 1 & 21). Production is expected to rise over the next five years as new investment takes effect but the 2m b/d quota that Petroleum Minister of State **Heineken Lokpobiri** says Nigeria will request from OPEC, looks ambitious. Nigeria's domestic gas production is expanding: liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports are increasing, and an offshore gas project approved by Shell last month could boost supply to the facility at Bonny Island, Rivers State.

Opinion is divided on how much the Dangote Refinery will improve the country's finances but the Tinubu government's recently approved 15% tax on imported fuel suggests the company's lobbying of Abuja has paid off. Dangote claims its refinery output has already exceeded local demand. Corporate rivals accuse the company of trying to build a monopoly in petroleum products – similar to its dominance in cement. IMF economists recently predicted the refinery could boost Nigeria's current account by 2.6% of GDP by moving value-added onshore. They argued it could also increase non-oil GDP by 1.5% – attracting investment and creating jobs. However, its tax and duty exemptions – negotiated with the Tinubu government – will reduce its contribution to state finances. ●

SOUTH AFRICA

Warning lights as G20 looms

Business leaders sound the alarm over the country's economic drift, despite signs of fiscal recovery

South Africa is caught in a classic debt trap, with the economy growing more slowly than the interest the government pays on its rapidly expanding debt. In recent weeks, leading bankers – historically supportive of the African National Congress (ANC) and the Government of National Unity (GNU) – have broken ranks to warn that a toxic mix of corruption, policy uncertainty, capital outflow and collapsing investment is threatening stability.

The private sector holds itself up as the country's best hope to restore growth but is sitting on a record 1.8 trillion rand (US$96 billion) in uninvested cash. But the big companies are reluctant to plough in their funds claiming concerns over political succession, endemic corruption and the GNU's future. Economists say that while the National Treasury's fiscal consolidation is bearing fruit, the stagnant economy is holding back financial recovery. GDP growth hovering around 1% is far too meagre to lift the country out of decline.

'South Africa is spiralling dangerously in the direction of a mafia state by failing to uphold the law amid unemployment and inability to grow the economy,' said **Colin Coleman**, former chief executive of Goldman Sachs in Africa, and a long-time supporter of the ANC under Presidents **Nelson Mandela**, **Thabo Mbeki** and **Jacob Zuma**. Unless urgent measures were taken to accelerate growth, he warned the situation would worsen – describing it as a 'slow systemic meltdown'.

A few weeks earlier, **Hendrik du Toit** – the London-based chief executive of Ninety One, a global asset manager formerly part of Investec Bank – issued a similar warning. 'South Africa is shooting itself in the head and the foot as criminals infiltrate state institutions and assassinations go unpunished,' he said in a rare rebuke. Du Toit urged citizens and businesses to demand accountability, fix law enforcement and seize global opportunities before lawlessness destroyed them.

Government and business welcomed South Africa's removal in October from the 'grey list' – a designation for countries with strategic deficiencies in anti-money laundering compliance, monitored by the independent Financial Action Task Force (FATF). The country has also received welcome support from the European Union in countering punitive cuts by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and selective 30% trade tariffs (**Dispatches 14/7/25** & **22/9/25**).

The US African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) has expired and is unlikely to be renewed, despite optimistic remarks by Trade and Industry Minister **Parks Tau** and **Ronald Lamola**, Minister of International Relations and Co-operation (**Dispatches 6/10/25** & **AC Vol 66 No 19**). We understand that South Africa's AGOA benefits are more likely to be replaced by a bilateral trade deal; one that, although transactional, hinges on political factors opposed by President **Donald Trump's** administration, including Black Economic Empowerment and land expropriation without compensation (**Dispatches 5/2/25**, **AC Vol 66 Nos 11** & **16**).

Behind the scenes, the GNU is pushing ahead with infrastructural reform to restore reliable electricity supply, dysfunctional rail and port services, and a failing water system. **Busisiwe Mavuso**, chief executive of Business Leadership South Africa (BLSA), says that current metrics of the South African economy in international circulation do not reflect these improvements – which, she argues, will bear fruit in the medium to long term.

Business readily praises the Treasury's fiscal consolidation, which has improved financial health despite weak growth. The Treasury is set to post a wider primary surplus than forecast in the current financial year, and economists say this could lead to investment upgrades by the rating agencies next year – reversing capital outflows and attracting domestic and foreign investment.

DISILLUSIONED

But economists warn that debt servicing costs are compounding faster than the economy is growing – an unsustainable trajectory. Captains of industry point to endemic corruption, a dysfunctional criminal justice system and political succession as major concerns.

Business, once supportive of President **Cyril Ramaphosa**, has grown disillusioned with his failure to honour promises of zero tolerance for corruption and economic reform. Former President Mbeki, who still commands respect in ANC ranks, has joined a chorus calling for a national reset to address the country's many 'crises'.

Without naming Ramaphosa, he called for reform of the presidential election process. 'The manner in which we elect the President is wrong,' Mbeki said. 'The question is never asked whether he/she is capable and a fit and proper person.' Recent revelations of corruption in the justice system – and collusion between underworld figures, police and senior government officials – have deepened the paralysis in government and led to intense infighting, currently being played out daily in the Madlanga Commission and a parliamentary committee (**AC Vol 66 No 15**).

Drive-by and point-blank assassinations of police investigators and forensic accountants suspected of corruption have reached epidemic levels and are carried out with impunity. The scale of procurement fraud under investigation runs into billions of rands (hundreds of millions of dollars). How the GNU handles the commission's recommendations – expected early next year – will help determine whether the country evolves into a progressive autocracy that delivers, or a destructive populist government, argues political analyst **Graeme Addison**.

The current fear in business circles is that the latter is more likely if ANC heir apparent Deputy President **Paul Mashatile** takes over the leadership at the ANC's elective conference in December 2027. Mashatile is seen by captains of industry as the prelude to a populist government that will pursue unfettered redistribution and punitive taxation of the big corporates.

Duncan Wanblad, chief executive of Anglo American – which is leading the 108-year-old company's disinvestment from South Africa – put a brave face on the corporate withdrawal and move to **Canada** via a merger with Teck Resources, damning his country with faint praise. 'South Africa has its challenges but I would never put it in the category of completely and utterly broken,' he told the Financial Times Africa Summit in London last month.

South Africa was one of the most underemployed mining destinations in the world, and its critical minerals were becoming increasingly important in a geopolitically fractured world, said Wanblad. 'I hope Anglo will continue in South Africa for another 108 years,' he said referring to its continued presence in mining iron ore via its Kumba franchise. Anglo has shed its coal, gold and platinum mining interests, and De Beers diamonds – which it owns – is up for sale. ●

KENYA

Ruto goes west

Published online 5 November

While the Orange Democratic Movement works out its future, the president is shoring up his support in its heartlands

The death of **Raila Odinga** has left Nairobi's political class with a compelling question: how much longer before his Orange Democratic Movement splits? At stake is a key parliamentary alliance for President **William Ruto** and the outcome of the 2027 elections. For now, it is business as usual. ODM held its first central committee meeting on 27 October, with Raila's elder brother **Oburu Oginga** – the party's interim leader – calling for unity.

No deadline has been set to elect a long-term successor to Raila (**AC Vol 66 No 21**). But Oburu is struggling to keep ODM's warring factions together. His family name is beyond question, but Oburu has never risen higher than MP or Senator and does not command authority. Most see him as a caretaker leader.

Party Secretary-General **Edwin Sifuna** insists that ODM will run its own candidate against Ruto in 2027. That could be himself, Oburu or party deputy leader **Abdulswamad Shariff Nassir**, he said at a rally on 1 November. Sifuna has also cautioned politicians against chanting '*tutam*' – 'two terms' for Ruto – while campaigning for ODM candidates ahead of by-elections on 27 November.

That stance cuts across the ODM establishment. Kisii Governor **Simba Arati**, another of ODM's three deputy leaders, has said that Ruto should rejoin ODM, having been one of its founders and a party member when he was an MP for Eldoret from 2005 to 2011. Busia Governor **Paul Otuoma** has also urged Ruto to join ODM. Wild though this idea might sound, it's not entirely fanciful – it would settle the ODM battle to select a presidential candidate. Oburu says Ruto will attend ODM's national delegates' conference starting on 14 November.

Kenya's political parties are notoriously fluid. Many of the country's most senior politicians – including Ruto – were early members of ODM, which emerged in 2005 in opposition to then President **Mwai Kibaki's** plans to change the constitution (**AC Vol 46 No 18**). Some, like Odinga's former running mate **Kalonzo Musyoka** and **Musalia Mudavadi**, later left to form their own parties when it became clear they could not break Odinga's grip on ODM. Musyoka has declined an invitation to attend the ODM conference as a founder member.

ORANGE DYNASTY

On 2 November, Oburu said on television that ODM would only back Ruto in 2027 if one of its members was the president's running mate. He also backed Sifuna, despite calls for his dismissal from the party's old guard (**AC Vol 66 No 16**). 'Whatever Sifuna said is the correct position of the matter; he is not isolated,' said Oburu. Odinga could hold the factions together because rivals owed their jobs to him. His brother Oburu can't wield the same influence – at least for now.

Oburu and the ODM establishment want the family dynasty to continue. That could mean a bigger role for Raila's wife, **Ida**. Insiders say an imminent government reshuffle could bring her into Ruto's cabinet. **Winnie Odinga**, the couple's fourth child, gave an impressive speech at her father's funeral and wants to enter domestic politics. She is currently a member of the East African Community's parliament.

Ruto has been stepping up appearances in Western Kenya, making a four-day tour of the region in late October and announcing hefty investment promises. In Vihiga County, where 61% voted for Odinga in 2022, Ruto pledged more than 7 billion shillings (US$50 million) for roads, student housing and new electricity connections. Similar promises were made in neighbouring Bungoma and Kakamega counties, totalling KSh21bn ($150m) in development projects.

Having supported Odinga in the previous three elections, the Luhya community split in 2022 after Mudavadi and **Moses Wetang'ula** switched to Ruto's camp and were appointed Prime Cabinet Secretary and National Assembly Speaker respectively (**AC Vol 63 No 17**). Odinga still secured around 60% of the community's vote. Even before Raila's death, western leaders were manoeuvring to gain more power in a second Ruto term.

Ruto is expanding his 'kingpin' strategy of co-opting ethnic group leaders into government. The latest to join the tent is **Gideon Moi**, leader of his father, **Daniel arap Moi's** Kenya African National Union. Reduced to leading a rump party that won just five National Assembly seats in 2022 – having governed Kenya for the first 40 years of independence – KANU under Gideon Moi had challenged Ruto's leadership of the Kalenjin in the Rift Valley. He still commands a small bloc of votes in the region (**AC Vol 64 No 6**).

After meeting with Ruto in State House in early October, Moi announced he would not stand in the by-election to be Baringo Senator on 27 November – a seat Ruto wants for his United Democratic Alliance (UDA). His reward is likely to be a cabinet post, perhaps as deputy to Prime Cabinet Secretary Mudavadi. With Central Province deeply divided since Ruto ditched his Deputy President **Rigathi Gachagua** last year, winning Western Kenya plus the Rift Valley would likely be enough to carry Ruto to a second term. There are parallels with the 1997 election, won by Daniel arap Moi with 40% when Kibaki and Odinga split the opposition vote.

Musyoka is almost certain to stand, regardless of whether he is picked by the 'Anyone But Ruto' clique of leaders, including Gachagua, **Martha Karua** and **Fred Matiang'i**. They have been quiet since Odinga's death but their performance in the more than 20 by-elections on 27 November will offer a measure of their political weight ahead of 2027. Central Kenya is also likely to produce a presidential contender or two.

In 2027, a win by plurality will no longer be enough. The 2011 constitution requires a run-off and 50% plus one for a president to be elected. So far, the numbers are still on Ruto's side. ●

CAMEROON

The contest reaches flashpoint

Published online 3 November

The President and his challenger marshal their forces while the loyalty of the security forces remains in the balance

The contest for power in Cameroon looks set to reach a climax this week, as opposition leader **Issa Tchiroma Bakary**, who claims victory in the 12 October presidential election, has called for nationwide 'ghost town' protests and the isolation of the administrative capital, Yaoundé.

For over a week, most schools and businesses have already been closed. A second week of economic paralysis could tip the balance in Tchiroma's favour. President **Paul Biya's** regime has been contemplating a massive crackdown, branding the civic actions and their promoters as terrorists – but hesitates, uncertain of the loyalty of the security forces, particularly the army.

Meanwhile, Biya's rival has stolen a march on him. On 31 October, Tchiroma claimed loyal forces had safely extracted him from his home to a new secret location.

The regime has been desperate to arrest him but breaking through the human shield surrounding his home would have caused many casualties and could have backfired on Biya. Yet Biya's inauguration must constitutionally take place before 11 November, and the government feels it must assert its authority by then.

So far, Biya's victory claim – formally backed by the Constitutional Council, which he appointed – is supported by evidence few consider credible (**AC Vol 66 No 21**).

Turnout in Tchiroma's stronghold in the north was supposedly low. In Anglophone regions, the authorities claimed to have recorded an unusually high turnout despite a boycott harshly enforced by militant separatists, where businesses, markets and schools had been shut for weeks and farmers had not dared enter their fields.

Anglophones supposedly voted in droves for the man many regard as their longtime tormentor.

The official version of Biya's victory was further undermined by videos on social media showing crude manipulations of the tallies by officials of the ruling *Rassemblement démocratique du peuple camerounais* (RDPC).

Biya's circle and his party underestimated the 'anyone-but-Biya' factor and Tchiroma's appeal to voters who might otherwise have supported the banned **Maurice Kamto** or the Social Democratic Front, if it had been more credible (**AC Vol 66 No 20**).

Seven more years of Biya felt like torture to many – and they have risen up to prevent it. Demonstrators vented their anger in dozens of towns and brought the economic capital, Douala, to a standstill in unrest not seen for decades.

In the Far North, week-long protests were marked by arson in Kousseri, Mora, Mokolo, Kai-Kai and Maroua. Demonstrations erupted in Manjo, and Bertoua in the East Region, where Biya supposedly won comfortably. Two protestors died in clashes with police, and violent unrest broke out in Dschang, Bafoussam, Bafang and Bandja, in the West Region.

PARTISAN ARMY

All sides sense the army will be instrumental in settling the issue. The regime has not unleashed its full force on protestors because it is widely believed it cannot rely on the army to massacre civilians over an election outcome few believe in. If it insists, it could lose the army – and if it does not, the opposition could be further emboldened. Tchiroma openly calls on the army to side with civilians.

Fraternisation between soldiers and demonstrators, especially in Douala, has unsettled officials in Yaoundé, who are monitoring units for signs of disloyalty. In Maroua and Mokolo, police and gendarmes who had led much of the violent crackdown, backed off and appealed to the crowds for mercy, which was granted.

As Douala descends into chaos, with looting spreading, some believe the army could intervene to restore order, if not to keep Biya in office. With a question mark hanging over the army, the regime must rely on the police, gendarmes and the *Direction Générale de la Recherche Extérieure* intelligence service to keep the crowds at bay – and some analysts believe they may not be able to do so for much longer.

In Bertoua and Garoua, police accused the army of standing by while an angry mob circled their station, threatening to ransack it.

But the government has few options other than a crackdown – especially with Tchiroma still at large.

Over 100 lower-profile opposition figures have been swept up by operatives in plain clothes to face military tribunals. They include **Anicet Ekane** and **Djeukam Tchameni**, who lead the Union of Change movement backing Tchiroma; **Aba'a Oyono**, credited for helping Tchiroma make inroads into Biya's ethnic South Region; and **Fabrice Lena**, a young politician who publicly accepted that Biya had lost the election.

The regime in Yaoundé has been contingency-planning for Biya's inauguration between 5 and 6 November, having apparently aborted a plan to land helicopter-borne commandos near Tchiroma's home and whisk him away. In previous conflicts – including the unrest surrounding the 2018 polls – they would not have hesitated.

But it is not all up to Biya himself. Regime insiders such as RDPC Secretary-General and presidential chief of staff **Ferdinand Ngoh Ngoh** and his followers will have nowhere to go if Biya reaches a historic compromise with Tchiroma. Nor would they be likely to reach a compromise with him.

In a statement on 31 October, Tchiroma promised punishment for Biya's election-riggers. He also implied that his offer to approve the regime's gentle retirement had lapsed after protestors were shot and a video emerged of **Clement Atangana**, head of the Constitutional Council, at a champagne party celebrating Biya's victory at the judge's home.

KEEPING DISTANCE

Western governments stand aloof from the conflict, possibly even embarrassed by their previous enthusiastic support for the incumbent.

Although Yaoundé has received felicitations from Moscow – with which it has various agreements and understandings – few messages of support or congratulations have been forthcoming, even from the region's dictatorships, as they sense the issue is still in contention. ●

EGYPT/LIBYA/TURKEY/GREECE

Athens offers Benghazi a deal to end Mediterranean feud

Published online 31 October 2025

Premier Mitsotakis wants to defuse rival blocs and stop a Libyan-Turkish pact scooping up oil rights in the Mediterranean

A regional cooperation plan with Libya, Egypt, Cyprus and Turkey outlined by Greece's Prime Minister **Kyriakos Mitsotakis** in parliament in Athens on 17 October could help resolve the bitter dispute over rival oil claims in the Eastern Mediterranean. The Mitsotakis plan would launch a cooperation framework on migration, marine environment protection, maritime borders, connectivity and civil protection for the five Mediterranean neighbours.

It marks a shift in Greece's strategy from the building of rival blocs – Athens, Cairo and Nicosia versus Ankara and Tripoli/Benghazi – to a direct engagement between the adversaries. Mitsotakis's aim is to stop the government in Eastern Libya from signing a maritime deal which would give Turkey rights over substantial oil reserves in the Mediterranean.

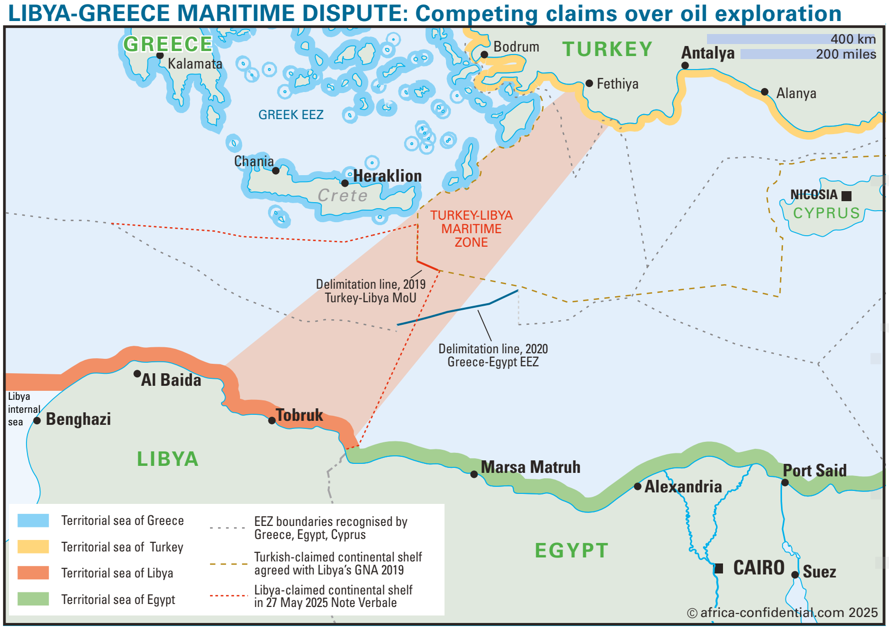
Three months earlier as tempers rose in the dispute with Athens, **Khalifa Haftar**, the Benghazi-based military leader in Eastern Libya had sent a flotilla of boats carrying migrants onto the shores of Crete to assert maritime territorial claims in the Eastern Mediterranean. Crete's reception services were buckling under the strain, threatening to unpick the previously cooperative relations between the two countries. The Mitsotakis government was prepared to send frigates to block the flotilla.

After tense exchanges via the UN on 17 September, Greece's Foreign Minister **Giorgos Gerapetritis** hosted a delegation from the Tripoli-based Government of National Unity (GNU) led by Libya's Foreign Minister **Taher al Baour**. They started working on the delimitation of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) between Greece and Libya. Both sides wanted to ratchet down the crisis.

The bone of contention has been the Maritime Memorandum of Understanding between the Tripoli's GNU and Turkey. The initial agreement was signed in back in 2019 but neither Eastern Libya's government nor military leader Haftar have co-signed it (**Dispatches 25/8/25**).

The MoU proposed a maritime corridor across the Eastern Mediterranean from the north-east Libya to the south-west Turkey. It would create an avenue for Turkey and Libya to conduct joint gas exploration and drilling operations.

LIBYA-GREECE MARITIME DISPUTE: Competing claims over oil exploration



Athens ignores this corridor ignores the oil and gas exploration licenses based on Greek sovereignty over waters surrounding the island of Crete and more its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

Greece is made up of islands. And its EEZ extends beyond Crete giving it jurisdiction over natural resources including fishing, as well as oil and gas. An official recognition of Greece's EEZ from the Libyan side would nullify the Turkey-Libya agreement and would infuriate Ankara.

Greece and Turkey have a long-standing dispute over territorial waters around some of the Aegean islands.

Libya's recent complaints over maritime sovereignty and EEZs began with a note verbale filed with the UN on 27 May asserting an expansion of Libya's maritime territory. It was accompanied by a map outlining its 'outer limits' of the continental shelf in the Mediterranean Sea as extending to Crete, an historic claim going back to Roman times when this stretch of water was called the Libyan Sea.

Greece rejected Libya's new claims. The Mitsotakis government wrote to the Eastern Libyan authorities calling for renewed talks to discuss the imposition by Libya of a 'median' line bisecting the territory and encroaching on what it says are Greek waters.

Both Greece and Turkey are trying to exploit the rivalries between the GNU under Prime Minister **Abdel Hamid Dubaiba** and the Tobruk-based House of Representatives (HoR) government in Eastern Libya which Haftar largely controls. An established ally of Tripoli's GNU, Turkey began wooing Eastern Libya with offers of business and investment. The Libyan National Oil Company (NOC) which governs the oil industry both east and west signed an MoU with Turkey's state-owned Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO) on 26 June.

For this deal to go ahead, Turkey needs the Tobruk-based HoR to ratify the 2019 Maritime MoU which was signed by Ankara and Tripoli's GNU under Debeiba. This would link Libyan and Turkish waters, giving Ankara access to the seabed and its hydrocarbon riches.

Until recently the HoR had held off from signing the activation of this MoU but now it is leaning towards Ankara. And, should this happen, it would mean that TPAO would be drilling right off the Cretan coast, further straining relations between Greece and Turkey.

BUST UP

A high-level meeting between the Haftar clan and the Greece's Foreign Minister **Giorgos Gerapetritis** on 6 July covered diplomatic relations and cooperation on migration but erupted into a fiery argument with Haftar's son, **Saddam**, threatening to flood Crete with migrants.

A few days later a delegation including the Greek Migration Minister, **Thanos Plevris**, his **Maltese** and **Italian** counterparts and the European Union's migration commissioner **Magnus Brunner** were expelled on arrival – a piece of political theatre. It was meant to send a message to Greece and the EU: they have threatened sanctions against Libya over the border dispute.

It went beyond a war of words. Greece was close to sending frigates to the stretch of water between Libya and Crete to push back against the flotillas of migrant boats to Crete allowed through by Haftar and sailing towards Crete.

Greece imposed a three-month moratorium on registering asylum seekers, hoping to deter migrants from getting boats to Crete. The Cretan coastguard reported 8,000 arrivals between January and the end of June with a surge in late June/early July. It detained 1,200 migrants.

The Libyan-Turkish MoU also encroaches on Egypt's EEZ according to sources in Cairo. We hear that President Abdel Fattah el Sisi had asked Haftar not to sign the MoU with Turkey and to appease Greece with some investment opportunities.

Egypt has its own disagreement with Greece. Its 2020 MoU on partially defined maritime borders and now Egypt asserts Greece's Spatial Planning Plan overlaps with Egypt's EEZ.

On 7 October, Greece's deputy foreign minister **Alexandra Papadopoulou** met Egypt's deputy Prime Minister

Kamel al Wazir to discuss the Eastern Mediterranean and Libya.

The long-standing alliance between Eastern Libya and Egypt is under strain due to Haftar's support of the **United Arab Emirates**-backed Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in **Sudan's** civil war. Egypt backs the Sudan Armed Forces regime in Khartoum fighting the RSF for the last two years in a war that has created the world's worst humanitarian disaster (**AC Vol 66 No 14**). ●

EU/AU/CLIMATE CHANGE

Brussels backs down on forest laws again

Published online 29 October

The EU's anti-deforestation laws show how badly drafted climate policy can alienate everyone – farmers, traders and consumers

Chaos surrounds the European Union's anti-deforestation regulation. Following a series of U-turns and carve-outs, the law will not affect African farmers until June 2026, 18 months later than the initial start date. By then, many farmers may have given up on the European market.

African farmers are also set to be exempted from filing due diligence forms to Brussels but the main requirements – traceability and proof of compliance – will still apply to them, indirectly. The burden of proof of compliance will fall on the commodity trading companies selling into the EU market. And they will not risk buying commodities from African farmers who may not have met the anti-deforestation requirements.

The European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) was drawn up to require businesses trading cocoa, coffee, timber, palm oil and rubber to ensure that their products were not linked to deforestation anywhere in their supply chain. Adopted in 2022 by wide majorities by the EU institutions and with the support of big business, Brussels officials claimed it showcased sustainable business practice.

It was supposed to start in December 2024 but the European Commission delayed the EUDR for a year amid fears that many firms and farmers would not be ready (**AC Vol 65 No 24**). In September, the Commission proposed another a year's delay due to overload of its in-house IT system needed to declare compliance (**AC Vol 66 No 17**).

Initially estimating that 100 million due-diligence statements (DDS) would be lodged each year, EU officials now expect up to 1 billion to be made by hundreds of thousands of registered operators.

Chocolate giants such as Nestlé, Mars and Ferrero reacted angrily having invested millions of dollars in compliance. Four weeks later the Commission executed a U-turn on the one-year delay but offered several exemptions to cut the administrative burden on reporting.

To protect its IT system from overload, the latest proposal filed by the Commission on 21 October would require only one submission in the EUDR IT system for the entire supply chain. The onus would fall on importers in the EU market to prove the products they're bringing in meet the rules.

The EUDR will now apply to large firms on 30 December, but with a six-month grace period for checks and enforcement of the due diligence requirements. For small businesses and farmers it will be delayed until December 2026. The Commission explains these changes as supporting small businesses and smallholder farmers.

Yet the difference is largely semantic. Farmers will not have to file compliance certificates but importers will only source commodities from farmers that they know are compliant. European buyers risk penalties of up to 4% of their global turnover. Officials in **Ethiopia** have reported that some major European coffee buyers have already stopped buying coffee produced by Ethiopian smallholder farmers (**Dispatches 7/3/24**).

That will impose a burden on farmers to provide proof of traceability and geolocation even if they are exempted from having to use the EU's IT system.

Some countries have been quick to adjust. **Ghana** and **Côte d'Ivoire** are already experimenting with national traceability schemes; **Kenya** has advanced digital tools for its coffee cooperatives – its National Coffee Co-operative Union has signed an agreement with IT firm Dimitra's AI-driven Connected Coffee platform that allows farmers to digitally register their farms, map land using GPS, and its government has promised to cover the full costs of compliance. **Tanzania** is piloting satellite-based land registries.

But others are struggling. The EU Commission has provided funding to a handful of African countries, including Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, **Uganda** and Ethiopia to fund compliance measures, but with mixed success. Ethiopia and Uganda, who account for 12% of global coffee production, were slower to react.

Industry representatives in Ethiopia worry that their supply chain is highly fragmented, and that most coffee producers lack the digital tools and finance required to collect geolocation data, the cost of which ranges between US$5-10 per farmer. The EUDR still demands digital traceability systems in regions where internet coverage is limited.

The European Chamber in Ethiopia (EuroCham) has been among those putting pressure on the EU to delay implementation, organising trips for EU officials to some of Ethiopia's coffee-growing areas. EuroCham states that the proposed EUDR compliance rules 'risk undermining Ethiopia's coffee value chain, which supports over five million smallholder farmers and whose exports to Europe account for roughly 35% of Ethiopia's total coffee trade.'

Some Ethiopian officials say that they could increase domestic consumption or increase exports to alternative markets such as **China** but it's a key economic sector. Coffee exports account for nearly 30% of Addis Ababa's foreign exchange earnings.

Ghana has signalled that it will split its cocoa market to charge more for 'sustainable' cocoa. Its Cocoa Marketing Company says that it will charge an additional $200 per tonne and that European buyers will happily pay that to avoid EU fines. The EU accounts for more than 60% of Africa's cocoa exports.

Such surcharges will likely result in higher prices for cocoa and chocolate. Whether it would work for coffee is less clear. Cocoa production is highly concentrated with Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire controlling close to 70% between them.

Amid the chaos and confusion, it is easy to miss the longer-term benefits of the EUDR to African countries. **Nigeria** has one of the highest rates of deforestation in the world, losing about 3.7% of its forests each year. **Congo-Kinshasa**, meanwhile, loses close to half a million hectares each year. These losses threaten biodiversity, increase vulnerability to dangerous climate change, and hurt rural communities.

That the EU Commission's latest blueprint will be rubber-stamped by the European Parliament and EU governments is not guaranteed. The Commission proposal has re-opened the regulation. Conservative MEPs have already said that they will introduce a 'no risk' listing that would exempt entire countries from the law's scope, as well as other exemptions for European firms. That could lead to the EUDR simply being abandoned. ●

ZIMBABWE

ZANU-PF backs Mnangagwa's 2030 bid amid rising tensions

Published online 28 October

Protests grow at nepotism and corruption in the ruling clique as the economy staggers on despite the mining upturn

Hours before opposition leaders were set to launch their campaign on 28 October against President **Emmerson Mnangagwa's** plan for a third term, arsonists gutted the SAPES Trust conference hall in Harare, abducting a security guard and padlocking the gates behind them. This latest attack is one of several on buildings linked to dissident politicians and activists. From bitter experience, they argue that Mnangagwa's domination of the ruling party will depend on intimidation as much as courtrooms and parliamentary votes.

Two weeks earlier, the annual conference of the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) in Mutare had been a triumph for Mnangagwa. His plan to cancel the 2028 elections and stay in power at least until 2030 was endorsed by the party. He also sidelined Vice-President General **Constantino Chiwenga**, his most serious challenger in the senior party hierarchy.

After the fire burned down the conference hall and another building at the offices of the SAPES Trust, run by **Ibbo Mandaza**, police and soldiers cordoned off the compound and blocked any further meetings on the premises. The activists led by **Job Sikhala**, ex-finance minister **Tendai Biti** and **Jameson Timba**, say they are determined to continue with their campaign against Mnangagwa's '2030 agenda'.

Questions, mainly outside ZANU-PF, are multiplying about the legality of the Mnangagwa's prolongation of his presidency. Chiwenga and his allies, in the party and the military, have failed to organise a coherent challenge to Mnangagwa's dominance of ZANU-PF.

With elaborate orchestration and the financial backing of business allies such as **Kudakwashe Tagwirei** and **Wicknell Chivayo**, Mnangagwa's political fixers ensured the (ZANU-PF) conference overwhelmingly endorsed the President's '2030 Agenda', leaving him free to pick a successor at a time of his choosing.

Mnangagwa's cheerleaders said the decision was 'in recognition of the extensive developmental milestones and the significant socio-economic progress achieved under [his] leadership'. Party and government were instructed to 'initiate the requisite legislative amendments' to implement the extension.

This resolution directly contradicts Zimbabwe's constitution, which in 2013 introduced a two-term limit (of a maximum five years each) to attempt to contain President Mnangagwa's long-serving predecessor **Robert Mugabe**.

Constitutional experts such as **Lovemore Madhuku** have argued that the only way to extend Mnangagwa's term would be through a constitutional referendum. ZANU-PF wants to effect the extension through Parliament. The party has a super-majority in the legislature, holding nearly 70% of the seats, thanks to the recall of opposition Citizens' Coalition for Change representatives by the CCC's self-appointed Secretary General, **Sengezo Tshabangu** (**AC Vol 65 No 12** & **Vol 64 No 23**).

BREAK FROM DEMOCRACY

Some suggest Mnangagwa's group is planning a much longer extension. A leaked document – *Breaking Barriers Initiative* – outlines a plan whereby Tshabangu, backed by a ZANU-PF representative, suggests to Parliament that all elections be suspended until 2035, arguing that elections create divisions and encourage polarised politics. Some of the document was adapted from papers by **Jonathan Moyo**, Mugabe's talented spin-doctor Minister of Information and the brains behind the G40 group that opposed Mnangagwa's ascension in Zimbabwe's 2017 coup (**AC Vol 58 No 25**).

The big loser is Vice-President Chiwenga (**AC Vol 66 No 20**). In September, he presented an explosive dossier to the ZANU-PF Politburo accusing Mnangagwa's supporters of grand corruption and the President of collusion. Chiwenga called for the arrest of the '*zvigananda*' – people benefiting from state corruption – and in particular the energy mogul Tagwirei (**AC Vol 66 No 14**), Chivayo and **Dilesh Nguwaya** as well as the gold trader **Pedzai 'Scott' Sakupwanya**.

Then it was reported that Mnangagwa offered to resign but he has strengthened his position appreciably.

Blessed 'Bombshell' Geza, the war veteran who has been calling for Mnangagwa's removal on charges of corruption, announced a mass protest in Harare during the ZANU-PF conference, backed by National Youth Service graduates. There were unverified reports of anti-Mnangagwa graffiti in the barracks, as well as a number of arson attacks on homesteads and businesses belonging to key figures.

The Mnangagwa cabal had months of preparation and consolidation on its side, as well as the lion's share of funds. Mnangagwa has promoted loyalists into most of the top security positions over the past year (**AC Vol 66 No 20**). The past few cabinet shuffles have consolidated power and wealth within a small group, many of whom are related to the President.

In the months leading up to the conference, pro-Mnangagwa activists whipped up support for the 2030 project within ZANU structures and the President made loyalist **Jacob Mudenda** the party's Secretary General, in charge of proceedings at conference. The day before Geza's threatened protest, Mnangagwa promised a $150 bonus for all civil servants. On the day of the protest, thousands of police spread out across Harare. The few war veterans who showed up to demonstrate were arrested.

At the conference Politburo meeting on 14 October, ZANU secretary for legal affairs and Minister of Justice **Ziyambi Ziyambi** delivered a sharp rebuttal to Chiwenga, declaring that calling for 'the removal of a constitutionally elected president' was 'palpably treasonous'. It was also suggested, humiliatingly, that Chiwenga and fellow detractors ought to attend a reorientation course at the Chitepo School of Ideology, the institute used to 'educate' junior civil servants and party members on ZANU doctrine.

Chiwenga has been contained and chastened by Mnangagwa but his speech to conference did not concede defeat. Speaking of the sacrifices made in the 1970s during the liberation struggle,

WHO IS LEADING THE CHARGE FOR MNANGAGWA IN ZANU-PF?

Propelled by substantial financing and the removal of sceptical officials in key party structures, the faction backing President **Emmerson Mnangagwa** consolidated its dominance over the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) at the 12-18 October conference in Mutare. The faction pushing for Mnangagwa to leave in 2028, if not earlier, to make way for Vice-President General **Constantino Chiwenga** has lost much of its institutional and grassroots support.

The pro-Mnangagwa 2030 faction

Ziyambi Ziyambi, the Justice Minister and ZANU-PF Secretary for Legal Affairs, has emerged as the most vocal architect of the 2030 agenda, publicly attacking Chiwenga as 'ignorant' and accusing him of 'reason'. At the Mutare conference, Ziyambi read the resolution extending Mnangagwa's term to 2030 and cancelling the 2028 elections.

Christopher Mutsvangwa, formerly the ZANU-PF spokesman and Minister of Information, had voiced scepticism towards the plan to extend Mnangagwa's tenure and promote his billionaire business ally **Kudakwashe Tagwirei** within the party. But ahead of the Mutare conference Mutsvangwa swung around, giving wholehearted backing to the Mnangagwa-2030 campaign and publicly embracing Tagwirei.

Oppah Muchinguri-Kashiri, the National Chairwoman and Defence Minister, is close to Mnangagwa, joining other senior officials condemning Vice-President Chiwenga at the politburo meeting before the party conference.

Other Mnangagwa loyalists include ex-finance minister **Patrick Chinamasa** (who endorsed the expulsion of Chiwenga allies from ZANU-PF), **Fredrick Shava** (Foreign Minister), **Tino Machakaire**, **Daniel Garwe**, and **Owen 'Mudha' Ncube**.

Tagwirei, accused by Chiwenga of looting state resources, is rapidly ascending the ZANU-PF hierarchy. As a member of the Central Committee, he declared support for 'Resolution #1 – 2030 NdeyaEmmerson'. Tagwirei leads his own faction of businesspeople, close to the Mnangagwa family, who are taking over the structures of ZANU-PF and ensure no punitive action can be taken against their commercial operations and control of state assets. For now, Tagwirei is said to have Mnangagwa's support to succeed him as party president. But believe Mnangagwa has plans to leave office soon.

How the provinces aligned

Three provinces led the Mnangagwa 2030 campaign: Midlands, Masvingo, and Mashonaland West. Delegates from these provinces wrote new slogans and songs for the campaign. Harare province has also backed Mnangagwa 2030. Leaders from Mashonaland West, especially Mutsvangwa and Ziyambi, took the lead in pushing for the extension at the conference.

The pro-Chiwenga faction has been weakened through expulsions and suspensions. In March 2025, ZANU-PF expelled five key Chiwenga allies, including **Blessed Geza** (a war veteran and Central Committee member who has become the public face of opposition to the 2030 agenda), **Gifford Gomwe**, **Kudakwashe Gopo**, **Godwin Gomwe** and **Victor Manungo**. Three other allies – **Calisto Bangu**, **Kudakwashe Damson**, and **Blessing Kambumu** – were suspended and banned from party positions.

Chiwenga's base in the military has also been eroded and is not currently regarded as strong enough to mount a coup with a strong chance of success against Mnangagwa. It was Chiwenga's authority in the military that enabled him to persuade other senior officers to overthrow **Robert Mugabe** in October 2017.

At that time Chiwenga backed Mnangagwa to take over the Presidency of ZANU-PF and the country for a single four-year term. It was Mnangagwa's abrogation of that agreement that led to the falling out between the two men. Since then, Chiwenga has relied primarily on releasing intelligence leaks and corruption dossiers through online campaigns rather than direct confrontation with Mnangagwa's backers.

At the Mutare conference, despite the bitter divisions, the presidium – comprising Mnangagwa, Chiwenga, Vice-President **Kembo Mohadi**, Muchinguri-Kashiri, and Secretary General **Jacob Mudenda** – tried hard to project unity, holding hands during the opening prayer.

The Mnangagwa faction controls the ZANU-PF Legal Affairs Department, the Politburo majority, parliamentary leadership, and the party spokesman's office. They have used this institutional dominance to push ZANU-PF legislators and ministers to prioritise constitutional amendment efforts over other parliamentary duties. ●

he warned the *zvigananda* (people benefiting from state corruption) insisting that Zimbabwe's hard-won wealth must benefit all and 'not just the privileged few'. It was a not so coded snub to the Mnangagwa family and their business allies, whose wealth is expanding on the back of the country's gold and lithium mining boom. ●

NIGERIA/US

Tinubu pushes back as Trump threatens military action over 'killing of Christians'

3 November

US President says any attack would be 'fast, vicious and sweet' after Abuja officials claim separatist lobbyists are misleading Washington

Rejecting Washington's 31 October designation of Nigeria as a country which violates religious freedom, President **Bola Ahmed Tinubu** said it did 'not reflect our national reality'. He added that his government was prepared to work with the United States on the 'protection of communities of all faiths'.

Abuja officials said the designation would have serious implications for US-Nigeria security, economic and political cooperation, pointing out that Christians make up almost half of Nigeria's 230 million people and are well represented in government. US aid to Nigeria, running at over US$1 billion in 2023, has been reduced sharply this year to less than $400m, with most of the cuts in the health sector.

On 1 November, President **Donald Trump** escalated the rhetoric, posting on social media that he would send the US military into Nigeria 'all guns blazing' unless Tinubu's government acted more forcefully to protect Christians against attacks from Islamist insurgents. Independent monitoring groups say that more Muslims than Christians have been killed by the insurgents who focus their operations in northern states.

The Trump administration's designation of Nigeria as a 'Country of Particular Concern' for violations of religious freedom follows years of advocacy by Republican senator **Ted Cruz** of Texas. Backed by evangelical groups, Cruz has claimed that Nigerian officials allow and possibly facilitate the jihadist murder of Christians.

Behind the diplomatic exchanges, officials in Abuja are angered by what they see as the influence in Washington of Nigerian activist groups. These include **Nnamdi Kanu's** separatist Indigenous People of Biafra, the Biafra Government in Exile and its US lobbyists Moran Global Strategies, as well as other opposition groups that have won support among US evangelicals.

Last month, Abuja's information minister **Mohammed Idris** told *Africa Confidential* that Abuja rejected Cruz's claim that 50,000 Christians had been killed in Nigeria since 2009. He added that Cruz had received campaign donations from **Elias Gerasoulis**, Vice-President of Moran Global Strategies, the Biafran lobbyists (**AC Vol 66 No 17**).

According to Idris, New Jersey Congressman **Chris Smith**, chair of the Africa sub-committee in the US House of Representatives and a supporter of the Biafran cause, had used flawed data documenting Christian persecution from Open Doors, an evangelical advocacy group, which calls Nigeria the 'world's deadliest country for Christians'.

This clash between Abuja and the US follows Tinubu's reshuffling of the military high command and an attack on Kwara State by *Jama'at Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin*, which has gaining control of territory across the Sahel (**AC Vol 66 No 21**). This adds to the attacks in northern states by other insurgent militia such as *Boko Haram* and Islamic State West African Province (**AC Vol 65 No 24**).

MOROCCO/W. SAHARA

UNSC changes tack, backs Morocco's semi-autonomy plan

3 November

Algeria was the only council member to reject the scheme, reflecting growing international support for Rabat over Western Sahara

The international community's stance on Western Sahara's future has been decisively altered by a United Nations Security Council vote on 31 October that endorsed Morocco's plan for semi-autonomy for the territory.

The resolution, sponsored by the United States, got the support it needed after permanent Security Council members **China** and **Russia** abstained (**Dispatches 14/4/25**). The text makes no mention of a referendum on self-determination that includes independence as an option, the main demand of the Polisario Front, the political representative of the Sahrawi people, and the basis of the UN's mandate until recently.

The text, which states that 'genuine autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty could constitute a most feasible solution,' also extends the UN's peacekeeping mission in Western Sahara by another year.

The autonomy plan – first presented by Morocco to the UN in 2007 – would establish a local legislative, executive and judicial authority for Western Sahara elected by its residents, while Rabat would control defence, foreign affairs and religious affairs.

The only vote against the resolution came from **Algeria**, the main ally of the Polisario Front, which is currently serving a two-year term on the Security Council.

It will be seen as a diplomatic triumph in Rabat. King **Mohammed** VI said the resolution was 'opening a new and victorious chapter in the process of enshrining the Moroccan character of the Sahara, which is intended to bring this issue to a definitive close'.

Morocco has steadily gained international support for its autonomy plan. The main breakthrough came with its deal with the US during President **Donald Trump's** first administration that it made in exchange for recognising **Israel** (**AC Vol 61 No 25**).

Last week, **Belgium** became the latest country to endorse Morocco's plan for semi-autonomous status for Western Sahara, joining a growing list led by the US, **France**, **Spain**, and the **United Kingdom**, as well as a growing number of African countries, including **Ghana** and **Kenya** (**AC Vol 65 No 16**).

LIBERIA

Mining minister sacked as Boakai cosies up to Washington

3 November

Reports suggested Wilmot Paye advised the president against deals with US firms

The dismissal of Mining Minister **Wilmot Paye** has raised eyebrows in Monrovia as the government intensifies talks with the United States aimed at obtaining investment in critical minerals.

A former leader of the Unity Party, who swung behind President **Joseph Boakai's** successful campaign against former President **George Weah**, Paye has gone quietly, describing his government office as a 'borrowed coat'. He has been replaced by **R Matenokay Tingban**, Deputy Mining Minister during **Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's** presidency. State House said his removal was part of moves to improve efficiency (**Dispatches 22/11/23**).

Though that suggests Paye's removal was not controversial, it has been reported that he advised Boakai against signing recent agreements with Oranto Oil and Ivanhoe Atlantic-HPX, a US mining company.

The Boakai administration is in talks with US firms who are keen to access the country's deposits of critical minerals, including lithium, manganese, cobalt and nickel. At the US-Africa energy forum in August, Liberian officials offered a series of incentives to US firms to invest in mining and infrastructure, including tax holidays, a corporate tax rate of 25% and the right to repatriate 100% of profits.

The Trump administration has made access to critical minerals one of its African priorities. In mid-October, Secretary of State **Marco Rubio** hosted Liberia's Foreign Minister **Sara Beysolow Nyanti** in Washington for talks that focused on minerals deals.

KENYA

Ruto uses Odinga's funeral to adopt cybercrimes laws

27 October

The act hands the state sweeping online censorship and surveillance powers

Veteran oppositionist **Raila Odinga's** death appears to have offered President **William Ruto** an opportunity to bury bad news. Hours before the opposition leader's passing was officially announced, the president signed into law eight new bills on 15 October, several of which expand the state's powers to delete online content and block and shut down websites (**AC Vol 66 No 20**).

The Computer Misuse and

Cybercrimes Act forbids the use of electronic media to support extremist religious and cult activities. It also includes sanctions against false information posted online and expands the legal categories of phishing, cyber harassment and identity theft.

These provisions, say ministers, will allow the government to track down, freeze and retrieve the proceeds of cybercrime. Meanwhile, activities that target networks or data are now considered cybercrimes.

As the bill hands sweeping powers to the government to close websites and apps, civil society groups fear that its legal definitions are open to abuse and facilitate state surveillance (**AC Vol 66 No 13**).

There are also concerns that the legislation will be used to target the Gen Z protest movement, which has coordinated a series of well-attended protests and campaign events, relying heavily on social media to organise.

Busia Senator **Okiya Omtatah**, one of the lawmakers closest to the Gen Z movement, has vowed to legally challenge to the act, which he says contains 'vague and overly broad provisions that threaten freedom of expression and access to information'.

The government's Privatisation Bill, designed to make it easier to sell stakes in state-owned enterprises, has also been signed into law. It has been challenged in the courts over the new powers it gives ministers and claims that it will reduce parliamentary scrutiny.

SENEGAL

Hidden loans ramp up debt servicing costs

27 October

Finance Ministry say payments will be US$1 billion higher than expected in 2026

Senegal's debt servicing bill for next year will be almost US$1 billion higher than expected, partly on the back of hidden liabilities accrued by former President **Macky Sall**.

Finance Ministry figures revealed that debt servicing costs are expected to reach 5.49 trillion CFA francs ($9.7bn) in 2026.

Senegal's debt increased to 132% of GDP at the end of 2024 after a financial review uncovered around $13bn in spending by Sall's government that was kept off the balance sheet. The scandal meant that sovereign debt in 2023, before the defeat of Sall's coalition and the election of President **Bassirou Diomaye Faye**, was 111% of GDP rather than the 74.4% announced (**AC Vol 65 No 7**).

The issue has already partly derailed President Faye's economic planning, prompting the IMF to suspend its $1.8bn support program for Senegal, while Standard & Poors and Moody's ratings agencies have both downgraded their credit ratings, making it more expensive for the government to borrow.

Faye and Prime Minister **Ousmane Sonko** have so far remained popular but they have to find nearly $10bn by 2028. That means increasing taxes, cutting spending and renegotiating energy contracts and could alienate some of their supporters (**AC Vol 66 No 13**). It will be easier for them to rid that out if Senegal's GDP growth hits the 7.8% projected this year.

GUINEA

Minerals exports surge in volatile market

27 October

Bauxite sales up but tariffs on Chinese metal shipments create uncertainty

Although increasing global protectionism is adding to market uncertainty, the regime is for now set to continue reaping the benefits of growing **Chinese** demand for steel and aluminium. Exports of bauxite ore, from which aluminium is extracted, were up 23% in the third quarter of 2025, primarily due to China.

China sources around half its bauxite from Guinea, chiefly through the Société Minière de Boké (SMB). Chinese companies based in Guinea accounted for 55% of exports in the third quarter, with SMB shipping 17.5 million tonnes of bauxite.

SMB holds the concession to the giant Simandou iron ore deposit in the south-eastern Guinée Forestière region (**AC Vol 63 No 1** & **Vol 62 No 20**). Ministers in Conakry say that they will inaugurate rail and port facilities for the Simandou project on 11 November – the 650-kilometre 'Transguinean' railway that crosses the country – as part of efforts to speed up production. Simandou is yet to produce significant amounts of ore.

China's steel and aluminium exports are threatened by 50% tariffs imposed by the European Union and the **United States**, which have cited Chinese production as existential threats to their industries.

Consultants Wood Mackenzie estimate China's share of global steel demand will fall from 49% to 31% up to 2050, which would amount to a five to seven million tonnes annual reduction over the next decade. ●

POINTERS

East Africa

FIELDS OF EXPENSIVE DREAMS

When **Kenya**, **Tanzania** and **Uganda** were appointed co-hosts of the 2027 Africa Cup of Nations, the move was hailed as a welcome shot in the arm for three of Africa's unlikely football minnows – none of whom are regular qualifiers. Co-hosting should have meant lower costs for the three countries. Instead, they are splashing out more than US$700 million on four new stadiums. One of these – the Samia Suluhu Hassan Stadium in Arusha, expected to seat 30,000 – appears little more than a $112m vanity project. The government is also committing an estimated $136m to a stadium in Dodoma.

There was no obvious need for a new facility in Kenya's capital Nairobi, which already has the 48,000-seat Kasarani Stadium and Nyayo Stadium, with a capacity of 15,000. The 60,000-seat Talanta Stadium, on the Ngong Road in suburban Nairobi, is modelled on the Bird's Nest – which hosted athletics and ceremonies at the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Though visually striking, Talanta lacks an athletics track and tenants after 2027. Nyayo hosts AFC Leopards of the Kenyan Premier League, while Gor Mahia – long the dominant force and best-supported team in the KPL – have announced plans to construct a 60,000-seat stadium in Machakos County, east of Nairobi.

Estimates for the cost of Talanta vary. The Treasury puts it at $344m, though reports of major overruns suggest the final bill could approach $1 billion. By comparison, Tanzania's Benjamin Mkapa Stadium – also with a 60,000-seat capacity – was built by **Chinese** contractors in 2007 for $56m. **South Africa's** 90,000-seat FNB Stadium in Johannesburg cost around $370m. The legacy of previous Afcons has often been white elephants – stadiums quietly mothballed once the competition ends (**AC Vol 58 No 4**).

Côte d'Ivoire

OPPOSITION SPLIT AFTER OUATTARA WIN

After the Constitutional Court confirmed President **Alassane Ouattara's** win with 89.77% of the vote, opposition parties are focusing on the legislative elections due on 27 December. First to move was **Tidjane Thiam's** *Parti démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire* (PDCI), part of the *Front commun* with former president **Laurent Gbagbo's** *Parti des peuples africains – Côte d'Ivoire* (PPA-CI). But the front is split on whether to participate in December's elections.

Thiam says yes; Gbagbo, so far, has said nothing. He is focusing on positioning his new wife, **Nady Gbagbo** (née Bamba), to lead party business – sending her to Nahio in the west to boost the PPA-CI in a community hit by violence on election day, in which three people died.

Thiam wants to save the PDCI from political oblivion. From exile in Paris on 31 October, he told the faithful that the times of 'indiscipline' and 'betrayal' are over – referring to ex-PDCI heavyweight **Jean-Louis Billon**, who ran as an independent and who was expelled by Thiam (**AC Vol 66 No 21**). Others are likely to follow, including Billon allies Valérie Yapo, who sued the party over Thiam's accession to the leadership and political bureau member **Pascal Koffi Brou**, who endorsed Billon's presidential bid (**AC Vol 66 No 9**).

Thiam is reshuffling the executive secretariat, now headed by **Calice Yapo Yapo**, replacing **Emmou Sylvestre**, who is now special advisor to Thiam. Sylvestre became executive secretary shortly after Thiam's December 2023 election as PDCI president – a contest he had engineered as Thiam's campaign manager. He replaced **Maurice Kakou Guikahué**, who was not enamoured with Thiam's rapid ascent.

The PDCI's Baoulé-dominated heartland is also contested by the RHDP. Ouattara visited founding father **Félix Houphouët-Boigny's** grave and met Baoulé royalty. An electoral wipeout of the PDCI in December would mark the end of the country's oldest party as a national force.

IMPROBABLE DISSIDENT: ISSA TCHIROMA BAKARY

Having served 20 years as a senior minister and spokesman for **Cameroon** President **Paul Biya**, **Issa Tchiroma Bakary** is an unlikely insurrectionist. Of his ten-year stint as Biya's Communications Minister, Tchiroma asked for voters' forgiveness. 'In my capacity as minister, I did something which distorted, which hurt your mind,' he said on the campaign trail. Tchiroma insists that he won the 12 October polls, pointing to returns from several stations. The 53.7% given to Biya is suspiciously close to the 53% that electoral commission sources told *Africa Confidential* Biya would get, and there is little question that the government was guilty of serious electoral fraud (**AC Vol 66 No 21**).

Tchiroma was not always the consummate insider. A construction engineer by training, his political career began when he was arrested and accused of being part of an attempted military coup against Biya in 1984. He was jailed for more than six years. Then he became part of the Biya system until this June when he quit the government and launched his campaign against the nonagenarian president. Now he seems implacable, having rejected an offer by Biya's camp to return to the fold as prime minister and end the electoral challenge.

That would have been a near repeat of the circumstances that saw him enter government for the first time as Transport Minister following the 1992 presidential election – the first after the introduction of multi-party democracy – and widely believed to have been won by Anglophone leader **John Fru Ndi**. Then secretary-general of the north-based *Union Nationale pour la Démocratie et le Progrès*, Tchiroma accepted the ministry without the approval of his party president **Bello Bouba Maïgari**, who had polled 20%. Maïgari, though staying on as Tourism Minister, also abandoned support for Biya in June (**AC Vol 66 No 14**).

Tchiroma rode the crest of crumbling support for Biya among regime insiders and an increasingly confident opposition. He also picked up votes from supporters of opposition leader **Maurice Kamto**, who was banned from standing by the electoral commission (**AC Vol 66 No 16**). After Kamto's disqualification in July, Biya's re-election looked like a foregone conclusion.

Part of Tchiroma's popular appeal was the agreement struck with the *Union pour le Changement* – a collection of opposition parties and civil society groups who conditioned their support on the promise that the 76-year-old would serve as a transitional leader, embarking on a deep-clean of state institutions.

Had the opposition been quicker to unite – they only really rallied behind Tchiroma in the campaign's final weeks – he could have scored a decisive victory (**AC Vol 66 No 20**). From Francophone Cameroon, he also promised a national reconciliation that would include amnesty for political prisoners and Anglophone separatist leaders.

Tchiroma's first task is to avoid arrest and prosecution; that is why he's moved across the border to Adamawa State in **Nigeria**. Biya's Interior Minister **Paul Atanga Nji** has accused him of inciting violence and wants to extradite him from Nigeria, but Abuja is carefully assessing conditions on the ground before it responds. ●