



Africa Monitor #1, Vol. 1, No. 1

April 2024



The FGM Debate in Africa Anti-LGBTQ bill in Ghana

The elections in South Africa and Senegal | The AU Summit

About NIAS Global Politics

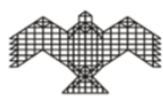
The Science, Technology and International Relations (STIR) programme at NIAS has a specific focus on Global Politics, discussing contemporary world Affairs. There are four area studies under the programme on Europe, China, East Asia and the Pacific (CEAP), Pakistan and Africa. Apart from these, the programme publishes The World This Week looking at global developments across the regions from East Asia to Latin America on a weekly basis.

About NIAS Africa Studies

As a part of the area studies initiatives, the Institute started a focused study on Pakistan in 2020. In 2021, it expanded the area studies to include Europe Studies, China Reader, and Maritime Studies. In 2022, the Science, Technology and International Relations (STIR) programme at the Institute is further expanding its area studies, to include Africa.

The primary focus of NIAS Africa studies would be on the following five verticals: peace and conflict, contemporary political issues, colonial legacies, problems of governance, civil-military equations, and the rise of radical Islamic groups. The primary objective is to study Africa from an internal prism.

NIAS Africa Studies would include a series of expert lectures, workshops, publications and a monthly exclusively focussed on Africa. The initiative also aims to create a network of young scholars studying Africa and African scholars studying in various Indian institutions.



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About Africa Monitor

Africa Monitor is an academic initiative under the area studies programme of STIR. It is an advanced form of Africa Weekly that used to be published earlier. The monthly publication includes commentaries, short notes and daily developments on a monthly basis.

<https://globalpolitics.in/africa/>

AFRICA MONITOR

Africa Monitor #1, Vol.01, N0.01

April 2024



Image Source: The Washington Post

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EDITORIAL

Introducing NIAS Africa Monitor

As a part of the Area Studies initiative within the NIAS Global Politics research, the Science Technology and International Relations (STIR) Programme started “Africa Studies” in 2023.

NIAS Africa Studies looks at the following verticals: First, issues relating to contemporary conflicts in Africa. No other region in the world has faced as many conflicts as Africa. These conflicts cover different geographies and issues in Africa. From the ongoing violent exchanges between two military/para-military groups in Sudan to the kidnapping of school students in Nigeria, the conflicts in Africa are over different issues and cover most of the continent’s physical geography.

Second, issues of governance in Africa. The number of coups in the Sahel region during recent years and political upheavals from Tunisia to South Africa underline problems of democracy and complexities in the governance process. Tunisia and South Africa, despite being projected as democracies in Africa, face their own issues.

Third, long-standing problems of Africa. From the genocide in Rwanda to continuing social inequality in South Africa, the continent’s problems are long-standing.

Fourth, the role of external powers in Europe. Parts of Africa were colonized by different powers, especially from Europe. The UK, France, and Belgium had colonies in Africa, leaving a trail of complex political dependencies and problems between the two continents. The US, Russia, and China are new external actors, with their own agendas in Africa. The presence/absence of external interests of the above external actors influences internal political developments within Africa, ranging from coups to misgovernance and resource exploitation.

Fifth, issues of demography and migration. Despite the problems/issues mentioned above, Africa remains one of the youngest continents with a youth bulge. While the states in Africa are facing a complex situation to convert its demography into a dividend, Europe is facing a flux of migration from the continent across the Mediterranean.

NIAS Africa Studies aims to study the above five verticals with the following objectives. First, it aims to complement the NIAS Area Studies initiative and build a research base at the Institute on this important continent. Second, the NIAS Area Studies aims to build of a policy resource base for India on Africa. Third, it aims to build capacity amongst young Indian scholars; *NIAS Africa Monitor* will become of one the vehicle of publications for young Indian scholars. Fourth, NIAS Africa Studies aims to build a network of scholars and institutions working on Africa in India. Fifth, NIAS Africa Studies, in the long run will also build a global network on Africa, with institutions and individuals working in/on Africa.

The inaugural issue (*Africa Monitor*, April 2024, Vol.1, No.1) features commentaries by young scholars on various issues. The articles cover the female genital mutilation debate in the Gambia, the anti-LGBTQ bill in Ghana, elections in Senegal, and the 37th African Union summit.

I sincerely hope that *NIAS Africa Monitor* becomes a vehicle for young scholars to publish their preliminary findings and become a vehicle for their research. At the Institute, we also sincerely hope that, during the next few years, *NIAS Africa Monitor* will develop into a research journal.

D Suba Chandran

Coordinator, NIAS Africa Studies & Editor, *NIAS Africa Monitor*

COMMENTARY

The Gambia: The genital cutting and the return of the FGM debate

Anu Maria Joseph

On 18 March, a bill aiming to decriminalise Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in The Gambia proceeded to the second reading in the parliament. The lawmakers of the country voted 42 to four, advancing the bill. The bill was introduced on 5 March by an independent lawmaker, Almameh Gibba. He argued that the ban on genital cutting violated the rights to “practice their culture and religion” in the Muslim country and that “the bill seeks to uphold religious loyalty and safeguard cultural norms and values.”

On 18 March, on the day of voting, speaking to the Washington Post in front of the national assembly, Jaha Dukureh, a Gambian activist, said: “It is a rollback on women’s rights and bodily autonomy. It is a rollback in terms of telling women what to do with their own bodies. This is all this is. You are denying [us] as women who have been through FGM. You are telling us that what we are saying is a lie.” Dukureh was a victim of the cutting when she was a child and found it out on her wedding night when she was 15. Her younger sister died after the procedure.

Outside the national assembly, women and men held placards that read: “Girls need love, not knives.” Since the introduction of the bill, several popular religious leaders have increased their campaign demanding for revoking FGM. Followers of a popular Muslim cleric, Abdoulie Fatty, are rallying support by chanting: “Female circumcision is my religious belief, Gambia is not for sale.”

On 6 March, the UN called The Gambia to withdraw the bill, describing it as “an abhorrent violation of human rights.” UN rights office spokesperson Seif Magango

stated: “We are alarmed by the tabling of a bill in The Gambian parliament seeking to repeal the Women's Amendment Act of 2015 that prohibits female genital mutilation.”

The female genital mutilation (FGM) debate in The Gambia

UNICEF defines FGM as “the partial or total removal of the female external genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.” The cutting procedure differs among societies that are engaged in FGM. At the extreme level, the clitoris, which is a sensitive part of the female reproductive system, is removed, and the genitals are cut and stitched back to control women’s sexuality. According to a UNICEF report in 2021, 76 per cent of females in the Gambia, aged between 15 and 49, have undergone genital cutting. The report represents a timeline after FGM was banned in 2015. The ban was imposed by former President Yahya Jammeh who claimed that the practice is not required in Islam. Jammeh said that after 21 years of studying the Quran, he realised that cutting is based on “no traditional facts.” He banned the practice as “it endangers the lives of women and girls.” It is carried out by traditional women practitioners supported by the mother of the victim, without sterile equipment. Often, the same equipment is used on multiple victims who are under the age of eight. FGM is an inhumane practice that leads to serious physical and psychological issues including infections, bleeding, infertility, depression, trauma and at times death. The ban was met with strong criticism from those who supported it. The narratives on revoking the ban began right after Jammeh was out of power. Under the

ban, an individual convicted of performing the cutting faces three years in prison or a fine or both. The latest debate began in August 2023 when three women were convicted for carrying out the cutting, and an Islamic cleric paid the fine, saying that the practice was taught by the prophet Muhammad. Further, they began the campaign to reverse the ban, which led to the bill.

The excuse of history, traditions, religion and patriarchy on the FGM

Contemporary historians claim the practice began in Egypt during the reign of Pharaohs, to prevent the slaves from unwanted pregnancies. However, over time FGM spread across ethnicities and religions, especially in Africa and the Middle East. A practice that then had no religious backing and has been inherently patriarchal, a deep-rooted inequality characterised by male dominance.

However, the justifications differ among societies. Some claim it is an important part of their culture. For some, it is a practice out of fear of being socially stigmatized. For many, it is a religious requirement: especially among Christians, Muslims and Animists. Several Muslim leaders of extreme patriarchal societies claim that women experience more sexuality than men and the Quran includes genital cutting to balance it. At the extreme level, many societies claim that cutting transforms a girl into a woman “marriageable”; a family honour and more sexual pleasure for the husband. It is carried out by traditional women practitioners supported by the mother of the victim, without sterile equipment. Often, the same equipment is used on multiple victims who are under the age of eight. FGM is an inhumane practice that leads to serious physical and psychological issues including infections, bleeding, infertility, depression, trauma and at times death. Most importantly, it is a brutal practice that compromises women’s right to freedom, health, security and physical

integrity- an extreme form of discrimination against women.

The global challenge of the FGM

On 8 March, on the occasion of Women’s Day, UNICEF released a report that the number of women across the world who have undergone FGM has increased from 200 million to 230 million in eight years. The majority are from African countries, with more than 144 million cases, followed by 80 million in Asia and six million in the Middle East. FGM is practised in 30 countries across Africa and the Middle East. Only Iraq and Oman in the Middle East have provisions against cutting. It is widely carried out in Africa, although banned in 23 countries. In total, FGM is practised in 90 countries across the world, and only 51 countries have laws against FGM. In 2017, Sahiyo, an Indian-based non-governmental organization that calls for the eradication of FGM, released a report highlighting the practice in India among the Dawoodi Bohra community, a sub-sect of Shia Muslims in the country. FGM practices among isolated religious societies are an open secret in India, however, the government never officially recognised it and there are no laws against it.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, genital cutting is a gross form of discrimination against women and children. It is a brutal practice that compromises women’s right to freedom, health, security and physical integrity- an extreme form of discrimination against women and inhumane. The justification is not mentioned in any of the religious doctrines.

Two-thirds of the total population in Africa and the Middle East want to end the cutting practice, says UNICEF. Women have the right to ownership of their bodies and it is cruel that there are instances of mothers imposing these beliefs on their daughters. Deep-rooted religious and

patriarchal leadership, superstitions and the fear of stigmatization are not easy to cut through. Fundamental rights are

compromised under religious beliefs. The genital cutting cannot be justified under any circumstances. The only answer to the FGM is to stop the practice.

COMMENTARY

Ghana: The anti-LGBTQ bill threatens a liberal democracy in West Africa

Anu Maria Joseph

On 28 February, Ghana's parliament passed an anti-LGBTQ bill. The new bill imposes a three-year sentence for those who identify as LGBTQ, a five-year sentence for forming or funding LGBTQ groups and a ten-year sentence for anyone involved in LGBTQ campaigns aimed at children. The bill received majority support from lawmakers. It would come into effect once President Nana Akufo-Addo signs it.

Big18, a human rights coalition in Ghana, condemned the bill. A member of the coalition, Takyiwaa Manuh, stated: "You cannot criminalize a person's identity and that's what the bill is doing and it's absolutely wrong; We want to impress on the president not to assent to the bill, it totally violates the human rights of the LGBT community."

The bill was sponsored by Christian, Muslim and traditional leaders (leaders of pre-colonial communities who continue to enjoy political power and influence on identity, language, customs and beliefs) with the support of several lawmakers. Opposition lawmaker Sam George, who supports the bill, stated: "There is nothing that deals with LGBTQ better than this bill that has been passed by parliament. We expect the president to walk his talk and be a man of his words."

In response, the United Nations human rights chief Volker Türk described the bill

as "profoundly disturbing" and called the government not to sign it into law. He stated: "The bill broadens the scope of criminal sanctions against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transexual and queer people – simply for being who they are – and threatens criminal penalties against perceived allies of LGBTQ+ people."

On 29 February, the US stated that it is "deeply troubled" by the anti-LGBTQ+ bill, which threatens constitutional freedoms. The US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller stated: "The bill would also undermine Ghana's valuable public health, media and civic spaces, and economy."

The anti-LGBTQ stance in Ghana

After 2000, Ghana emerged as a leading example of liberal democracy in West Africa, where political instability and coups are familiar. However, since 2021, the country has taken several illiberal shifts, one of them being the anti-LGBTQ stance. In 2018, Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that the queer community in the country "suffer widespread discrimination and abuse both in public and family settings." The anti-LGBTQ bill was drafted in 2021 against the opening of Ghana's first LGBTQ community centre, which sparked protests.

The government, church and society play a significant role in the anti-LGBTQ bill. The ruling government and the opposition

support the anti-LGBTQ stance without debates. They openly reject same-sex marriage, citing the cultural values of the country. Ghanaian President Nana Akufo-Addo recently stated that same-sex marriage will "never" be legalized during his term in office. Besides, the church has a significant say in Ghanaian society. The Christian Council of Ghana describes homosexuality as an "affront to human dignity" and "not a human right." The Christian Council of Ghana and the Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council narrate being LGBTQ+ as "alien to the Ghanaian culture and family value system and, as such, the citizens of this nation cannot accept it." The government has gained popularity for its anti-LGBTQ stance as the majority of the population, which is highly religious, supports the anti-LGBTQ narrative.

The bill comes ahead of Ghana's presidential elections scheduled this year. While the human rights of the LGBTQ+ community are being compromised, Akufo-Addo's government has gained widespread popularity ahead of the election. This marks an illiberal democratic shift in the country with popular support. If the bill becomes a law, it would imply a likely increase in violence against the queer community under a

supposedly democratic leadership infiltrated by unjust religious and traditional rationale.

The LGBTQ debate in Africa

Ghana is not the only country that recently adopted an extreme LGBTQ stance. Uganda and Kenya, two other African democracies, have joined Ghana recently. In March 2023, Uganda passed its Anti-LGBTQ Act, imposing severe punishments, including the death penalty for identifying as LGBTQ. The Ugandan anti-LGBTQ act is regarded as one of the most brutal in the world.

Meanwhile, Kenyan lawmakers are campaigning for anti-LGBTQ laws. According to Amnesty International, nearly 30 African countries have currently banned same-sex relations. Additionally, homophobic attitudes, behaviours and rhetoric have surged in the continent in recent years.

Ghana's bill adds to the latest wave of anti-LGBTQ+ narratives in Africa. It would likely encourage other African countries to adopt a similar stance. Additionally, regional organizations, including the AU and ECOWAS, have opted not to respond to the development, implying probable ignorance or support for the issue.

COMMENTARY

South Africa Elections 2024: Five questions

Jerry Franklin A

On 29 May 2024, South Africa is scheduled to conduct its seventh presidential election. In 2024, the country marks 30 years of democracy and independence. The country's first democratic elections took place in April 1994, following the overthrow of the apartheid regime. The 1994 elections saw a historic turnout; around 19 million South

Africans which is 87 percent of eligible voters took part in the election. Following this historic election, Nelson Mandela, a stalwart of the ANC, was sworn in as South Africa's first president on 9 May 1994. Since then, the ANC has been in power. However, there is an increasing narrative that the ANC would lose elections this year, implying a potential

change in South Africa's political dynamics.

What is the electoral system of South Africa?

Every five years, national elections are held where registered voters over eighteen can vote. Provincial legislature elections are held on the same day. To elect representatives for the National Assembly, South Africa uses a proportional representation electoral system. The National Assembly has a total of 400 seats, divided into two categories. Out of these, 200 seats are reserved for national party lists and can only be contested by political parties running on closed lists. The remaining 200 seats are up for grabs by parties and independent candidates, distributed among the nine provinces. Following the election, the National Assembly of South Africa elects the country's president.

Which are the major political parties contesting elections?

The following are the political parties which are contesting against ANC to claim its decades-long hegemony.

The Democratic Alliance (DA) is the main opposition to the ANC and currently holds power in Cape Town and the Western Cape province. The party is moderate and has traditionally been popular among white South African people. Although the DA received 20 per cent of votes in 2019, opinion polls suggest that the Democratic Alliance (DA) has gradually gained support from the public. According to the Social Research Foundation, there was a seven per cent increase in support for the party. However, to gain more support, the party must address the perception that it is controlled by white people.

The Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), is the third-largest political party in South Africa. Julius Malema, the former leader of the ANC youth, is now the leader of

EFF. The party was established in 2013 by two former members of the ANC. The party draws inspiration from Marxist-Leninist ideology and positions itself as a radical and militant movement for economic liberation. It also claims to be an anti-imperialist and leftist movement. The EFF positions itself as the genuine defender of the principles that the ANC upheld during the anti-apartheid era. The party claims that the ANC has subsequently abandoned its actual value and purpose. This allows the black South African voters to shift from ANC to EFF without compromising their actual political orientation.

Additionally, seven opposition parties in South Africa have allied to form the Multi-Party Charter or moonshot. They have agreed on a shared vision for how South Africa would be run if they secure most seats.

Is support for the African National Congress (ANC) declining?

The African National Congress (ANC) has consistently won every election since 1994 with a majority of votes and seats in the National Assembly. The ANC was nearly unbeatable in South African politics in all the previous elections, winning 70 per cent of the vote. However, many people now find its reputation insufficient due to the socioeconomic issues plaguing the country. However, in the 2019 elections, their share of votes decreased to 57.5 per cent; the lowest since the 1994 election. The ANC is predicted to struggle to maintain its absolute majority this year. The consensus is that, in its three decades in power, the ANC has not succeeded in uplifting the conditions of millions of South Africa's poor Black majority. Additionally, many political leaders have quit the party and formed new parties which poses a major challenge to ANC.

Based on early opinion surveys, the ANC might not win more than 50 per cent of the

votes in the upcoming election. According to data from South Africa's Social Research Foundation, the percentage of support for ANC dropped by seven. Meanwhile, the Democratic Alliance and Economic Freedom Fighters parties experienced a surge in popularity. The party holding power for so long is an additional factor in its declining support.

What are the major issues debated pre-election?

First, inequality and unemployment. South Africa is ranked as the top country out of 164 countries in the World Bank's global poverty database. According to the database, inequality has increased since the end of apartheid in 1994, but also acknowledges that the legacy of apartheid has played a significant role in driving inequality. According to the World Bank, South Africa has the highest rate of unemployment in the world. As of the third quarter of 2023, the jobless rate stood at 32 per cent. A survey conducted by the Social Research Foundation revealed that eight out of ten registered voters believe that the country's labour regulations make it harder to create jobs. Around 60 per cent of people aged between 15 and 24 are currently unemployed.

Second, corruption. According to Transparency International, South Africa is ranked 72 out of 180 countries in terms of perceptions of corruption. The organization has reported several corruption scandals involving both the current and previous presidents. Public sector corruption is a significant issue in the country. Former President Jacob Zuma resigned in February 2018 after facing

many accusations of corruption, and he was succeeded by Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa.

Third, electricity blackouts. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has stated that Eskom, which is a state-owned utility in South Africa, has been poorly managed for years resulting in extended power outages and rolling blackouts. These outages have adversely affected the country's economic performance. The prolonged power outages disrupt essential services, businesses, and educational institutions. Energy issues in South Africa have been exacerbated by acts of sabotage, looting, and criminal activity.

What does it mean?

The probability of ANC winning the elections is below 50 per cent. Besides, another opposition party gaining a majority is unlikely. It would imply a first coalition government for South Africa, a significant political shift in South Africa. Another actor in South African politics would potentially reframe the region's agenda and alter South Africa's foreign policy. For instance, South Africa's neutrality in Russia's conflict with Ukraine may be reevaluated after the 2024 elections. The ANC losing power could alter South Africa's stand against Israel, which it has accused of genocide. The ANC has publicly backed the Palestinian cause, which has been considered radical by many countries. There may be a review of ties with China, Russia, and the US. For 30 years, the ANC has had exclusive control over the foreign policy of South Africa.

COMMENTARY

Elections in Senegal: A democratic victory in Africa

Anu Maria Joseph

On 29 March, Senegal's Constitutional Council confirmed the provisional election results declared on 26 March. Opposition leader Diomaye Faye won the elections, securing 54.28 per cent of the votes against Amadou Ba, who secured 35.79 per cent. The voter turnout was 61 per cent.

On 26 March, President-elect Faye pledged to govern Senegal "with humility and transparency." He stated: "By electing me, the Senegalese people have chosen to break with the past."

The same day, outgoing President Macky Sall congratulated Faye describing the results as "a victory for Senegalese democracy." Opposition candidate Amadou Ba stated: "In light of presidential election result trends and while we await the official proclamation, I congratulate ... Faye for his victory in the first round."

On 29 March, the AU welcomed the "unanimous acceptance of the results." The AU Commission Chairperson, Moussa Faki Mahamat, congratulated Faye on his victory and wished him "full success in his weighty and noble charge."

On the same day, French President, Emmanuel Macron, conveyed his greetings to Faye and asserted that France wanted to "continue and intensify the partnership" between the countries.

A background to Senegal elections

Senegal, a former French colony, is referred to as a symbol of democracy in West Africa; a region where a series of coups have been unfolding. Senegal never witnessed a coup. Since 2000, it had five consecutive successive democratic power transfers. Outgoing president Sall was elected in 2012 and secured a second term

in 2019. He hinted at a third term through his increasingly authoritarian policies and widespread crackdown on the opposition; however, it failed.

This year, 19 candidates ran for the elections. The main competition was between Diomaye Faye and Amadou Ba. Faye belongs to the Patriots of Senegal (PATSEF) party, however, ran independently as his party got banned in July 2023. Amadou Ba ran for the ruling Alliance of the Republic party and as Sall's successor. He vied for the political continuity of his government. Faye is a political newcomer. He has become the country's youngest president. Faye campaigned to fight corruption and prioritise economic interests, including monetary reforms and the renegotiation of mining and energy contracts. Faye ran with the support of Ousmane Sonko, a young leader who gained popularity for his anti-corruption stance. Faye and Sonko were in jail until 15 March under the charges of provoking insurrection, conspiracy, corrupting the youth and endangering state security. Faye replaced Sonko as the presidential candidate after Sonko was barred from running in the elections. They campaigned together under a popular slogan "Diomaye is Sonko." The only female candidate was Anta Babacar Ngom, a political newcomer who runs Senegal's largest poultry company.

Senegal has witnessed a series of violent protests since 2021 against Macky Sall, corruption and authoritarian shift. Sall's administration resorted to a violent crackdown on the opposition to break down the protests. In June 2023, the leader of the protests, Ousmane Sonko, and his supporters were arrested, and his party, PASTEF, was banned. In July 2023, Sall announced that he would not run for a third term. Later, in February this year,

another wave of protests erupted after Sall announced a postponement of elections to December 2024, citing a dispute between the constitutional court and the National Assembly over the eligibility of the candidates. However, the Constitutional Council annulled the postponement and demanded to hold an election before 2 April, when Sall's term in office ends.

What does this mean?

The previous week, the global media were discussing Senegal's democracy in peril with the postponement of elections. The latest elections and the results came as a surprise. Although the elections did not gain media attention outside Africa, the intervention of the judiciary against Sall's postponement of elections was an exceptional development that changed the country's political course.

Since 2020, the region has gone through seven military coups- two each in Mali, and Burkina Faso, and one in Niger, Chad and Guinea. The election in Senegal is an isolated event in West Africa, a region known to be Africa's coup-belt. The elections were also the outcome of the mass protests. The protests that coerced the change in government imply the victory of democracy in Senegal and a lesson for Africa and beyond.

Now, the bigger challenge for Faye and his government would be the unemployment rate which has reached 20 per cent. Faye has promised larger economic and monetary reforms which are relatively unfavourable to foreign investors including its former colonial leader France. The change in the government is likely to bring a major shift in the country's foreign policy. How the new government would address these challenges is to be anticipated.

COMMENTARY

The 37th African Union Summit: Five takeaways

Vetriselvi Baskaran

On 17 and 18 February, the 37th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union (AU) was conducted in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa. The summit was themed "Educate an African Fit for the 21st Century: Building Resilient Education Systems for Increased Access to Inclusive, Lifelong, Quality, and Relevant Learning in Africa." During the summit, the President of Mauritania, Mohamed Ould Cheikh Ghazouani, was elected as the chairperson of the AU for 2024. The two-day event focused on gender equality and women empowerment, education, science and technology, agriculture, rural development, water, and environment; transport, regional infrastructure, and energy; and justice and legal affairs. The

meeting further approved Agenda 2063's second ten-year (2024–2033) implementation plan.

The following are the five takeaways of the summit.

1. Larger focus on education. The major focus of the summit was on education. It is intended to fill the gap in attaining Sustainable Development Goal 4 on education (SDG4). The summit adopted a road map in which national, continental, and global activities would be implemented throughout the year to reaffirm the political commitment of African governments to education. Despite efforts, pre-COVID-19 pandemic, sub-Saharan Africa had the lowest literacy rate with 86 per cent. Following the

pandemic, it increased to 90 per cent. Besides poor infrastructure, inadequate training, and vast inequalities, the AU has identified that political instability and tensions are additional challenges to education. Coups-caused displacements affected schooling in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Guinea. Lack of funding is another issue. An additional USD 40 billion is required to finance education to accomplish the Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals for Education.

2. Pan-African financial institutions are still a dream. African leaders have long been pressing for greater African participation and voting rights in global financial organizations including the World Bank and the IMF. Besides other initiatives on enhancing the Global South's access and quality of financing, a few points were summarised at the summit. Ghana's President Nana Akufo-Addo emphasized the importance of giving African MDBs and financial institutions more authority. He suggested giving African multilateral financial institutions 30 per cent access to African reserves, which are currently held by non-African banks. Additionally, he proposed that these establishments be named "AU agencies" to convey a unified "badge of approval" from all AU members. Apart from this, the African Multilateral Financial Institutions have come together to establish the Alliance of African Multilateral Financial Institutions (AAMFI), or the Africa Club - which is Africa-owned and controlled, to provide innovative solutions to economic challenges.

The summit also discussed the establishment of three financial institutions: the African Monetary Union (AMU), the African Central Bank (ACB), and the African Investment Bank (AIB). Despite planned benefits, hurdles like insufficient finance pose a significant hindrance to AMU's operationalization,

which is a prerequisite for the establishment of the ACB. Furthermore, AMU and AIB legislation was passed in 2014 and 2009. However, neither of the financial organizations has received the necessary ratifications to come into effect.

3. Beyond discussions, continental integration is unlikely. The tensions between Ethiopia and Somalia over the port deal, the DRC-Rwanda conflict over the M23 rebels, the GERD conflict in East Africa, the conflict in the Lake Chad Basin, and the series of coups were discussed during the summit under the theme of continental integration. However, beyond statements, counter statements and proposals, the bloc is equipped to strengthen the idea of continental integration.

The "continental integration" has been falling since its adoption. The bloc tends to spend its power on protecting the elites which is known to be the "elitist club." For instance, in Burkina Faso, the junta was supposed to hold an election in July 2024 to restore civilian rule, however, was indefinitely postponed. Likewise, in Senegal, President Macky Sall postponed the elections and sparked "constitutional coup" accusations. The bloc fails to take action against their undemocratic developments in the continent.

4. New initiative against AU's weakening circumstances amidst coups. One of the outcomes of the summit was the "Africa Facility." A body to monitor developments in the countries that went through military coups since 2020. The AU's policy of suspending countries after unconstitutional takeovers seems to be failing. The Lomé Convention, the AU's tool for dealing with coups, was once effective. However, the situation has changed. Juntas use increased geopolitical rivalry to pit foreign players against one another; one such example is Mali, which has improved its relations with Russia. Moreover, the AU's efforts

are undermined by countries like China and Saudi Arabia, which invite coup leaders to summits.

In its role as Africa's defender of democratic values, the AU is falling short. The AU's inability to strike a balance between these conflicting forces makes it more difficult for them to defend democracy.

5. The AU plans to be a global actor. The AU plans to assert itself on the world stage. It is calling for a significant increase in their influence within two major international organizations: the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and the G20. At the UNSC, the AU is demanding at least two permanent seats along with

five non-permanent seats. Additionally, it is pushing for the right to choose their representatives to ensure these officials act in the AU's best interests. A range of factors combine to propel the development and also bring obstacles. For example, the AU's autonomy is restricted by the race between external countries for resources and influence, and the weight of external debt. The bloc seeks a high priority on independence, to find African answers to African problems. Despite obstacles including the members' lack of cooperation, the agenda 2063 aims to make Africa a major participant in the world. However, whether the AU would take a stand on global politics is still up for question.

SHORT NOTES

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Vetriselvi Baskaran and Narmatha S

In the news

On 3 March, at least 200 internally displaced people (IDP), predominantly women and children, were taken hostage by suspected Boko Haram from the Babban Sansani, Zulum, and Arabic IDP camps in Borno state.

On 7 March, armed men, locally known as bandits, attacked the Local Government Education Authority School in Kuriga town. According to the Chikun Local Government, quoted by BBC, more than 280 students were abducted by the gunmen. The kidnappers have demanded a ransom of NGN one billion within 20 days.

On 10 March, Al Jazeera reported on the abduction of 15 students from a boarding school in northwestern Nigeria. They were kidnapped from the hostel in Sokoto state.

On 8 March, Nigerian President Bola Tinubu commissioned the security and intelligence agencies to review the rescue process, stating that he would ensure “justice is served against the perpetrators of these abominable acts.”

On the same day, UNICEF condemned the attack. UNICEF Nigeria’s director, Christian Munduate, stated: “Schools are supposed to be sanctuaries of learning and growth, not sites of fear and violence,” and urged the government for immediate action.

He added: “This latest abduction, as any previously, is highly condemnable and part of a worrying trend of attacks on educational institutions in Nigeria, particularly in the northwest, where armed groups have intensified their campaign of violence and kidnappings.”

Issues at large

First, the abductors and abductees. Across Nigeria’s six geographical zones, ransom kidnappings are increasingly common. The

hotspots are the states of Zamfara, Kaduna, Borno and Niger. These regions are isolated from government control and most of them are under the control of either local chiefdoms or insurgent groups. Groups, including Boko Haram and the Islamic State in West Africa Provinces (ISWAP), active in the Northwest and Northeast of Nigeria, began the kidnapping culture in 2014. Currently, it is adopted by the bandits who come in motorcycles and carry out mass abductions for ransom. The abductees are predominantly vulnerable sections of society, including the IDPs staying in camps, women, and school girls.

Second, a brief note of abductions in Nigeria during the last decade. The first major incident took place in 2014 when 276 girls were abducted from the Government Girls Secondary School in Chibok, Borno state, by Islamic militants belonging to the Boko Haram. Their objective was to institute an Islamic Caliphate in Nigeria. Later, 57 students escaped, some were rescued by Nigeria's security forces, and some returned two years later. In 2021, in a series of abductions, the bandits kidnapped nearly 500 children from different schools and colleges in the states of Zamfara, Kaduna, and Borno. Many of the abductees escaped from the trucks and camps, a few were killed, some were released once the ransom was paid, some were rescued through government negotiations, and several of them remain missing to date. From July 2022 to July 2023, around 3620 people were abducted, with a demand of USD 6.4 million.

Third, the state response. About 4,500 people have been kidnapped since President Tinubu took office in May 2023. Nigeria has criminalised paying ransoms in 2022 to not encourage further abductions. However, the effectiveness of the law is debated as the Nigerian military forces struggle to fight the kidnappings.

Additionally, there are several cases of abductees being released but no cases of abductors being arrested. In terms of local response, the military forces are backed up by the local policemen and the state's vigilance services. Amnesty International claims that the inefficacy of the Nigerian authorities in preventing the perpetrators through security lapses is the main reason for the rise in abductions. The economic recession, which is accompanied by poverty, the increasing cost of living and unemployment, are additional causes of an increase in the number of bandits and abductions. According to BBC, the annual average inflation rate has reached 30 per cent. The cost of food has risen by 35 per cent.

In perspective

First, the government's inability to address the issue. The government has failed to address and tackle the situation due to corruption and inadequate law enforcement. It is unequipped to provide military training.

Second, the abductions in Nigeria have become a trend since 2014. This trend is being picked up by neighbouring countries, implying a spillover effect. In neighbouring Cameroon, during the first week of March, separatist fighters abducted and killed four government workers. In December 2023, eight boys were kidnapped by separatists from a school in the conflict-hit northwest region. On 8 March, in Chad, a Polish doctor was kidnapped and rescued later. In Mali, on 27 February, three Italian citizens, who were kidnapped in 2022 by an Islamic militant group affiliated with Al-Qaeda, Jama'at al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), were released.

Increasing violence in South Sudan

Anu Maria Joseph

On 19 March, the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) released a report indicating a 35 per cent increase in the number of people affected by violence. It documented 233 violent incidents. 86 per cent of civilians are affected by inter-communal violence carried out by militias or civil defence groups. The head of UNMISS, Nicholas Haysom, stated: “Intercommunal conflict continues to cause immense harm to communities.”

Separately, on 20 March, BBC reported that at least 15 people were killed in a surprise attack by a rival community in the Boma county in South Sudan. Although the 2018 peace deal ended the civil war in South Sudan, the ethnic violence continues. Often, cattle raids are acts of revenge by ethnic groups including Murle, Anyuak, Nuer, and Dinkas. They have been fighting for land, resources and cattle for the past three years. The majority of the violence is part of the clashes between the two factions of the Dinka ethnic group, Twics and the Ngoks, in the Abeiy region bordering Sudan. Claim over the region is an unresolved issue between Sudan and South Sudan. According to BBC, more than 100 people including the UN peacekeepers have been killed in the violence this year. Besides, the region remains isolated from the governance apparatus.

Humanitarian crisis in Sudan, and insurgency in Burkina Faso and Nigeria

Anu Maria Joseph

In Africa, the major development this week is the humanitarian crisis ravaging Sudan amidst the conflict. While the war has crossed ten months, the World Food Programme has warned of a hunger crisis, the largest ever Sudan has faced. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights,

Volker Turk, has described the deliberate attempt to disrupt access to humanitarian agencies in the war-torn Sudan would imply a war crime. According to the UN, 25 million people need food and medical aid. The current conditions are- that aid supplies are being looted, humanitarian workers are attacked and humanitarian agencies complain about bureaucratic challenges to reach out to the conflict-hit regions. The humanitarian crisis is not only limited to Sudan but also to neighbouring countries of Chad and South Sudan where the conflict victims have fled.

Meanwhile, the military government has demanded a revival of full membership to the AU before agreeing to any mediation under the AU. While the UN is pushing for a Ramadan ceasefire, empty responses from the warring parties say that the conflict would continue and the humanitarian crisis would likely worsen.

In Burkina Faso, the jihadist insurgency is escalating. This week witnessed a series of attacks that killed more than 170 people in the northern part of the country. The insurgent groups have been increasingly targeting religious buildings. Attack on a mosque in Natiaboani and a church in Essakane killed dozens. While the military governments in West Africa are trying to strengthen the Sahel Alliance and its fight against insurgency through a joint military force, it is uncertain how the developments will unfold.

Elsewhere in West Africa, there is a new wave of kidnappings. Dozens of displaced people, the majority women and children, who went in search of firewood were abducted by armed men in the Borno state. Separately, armed men attacked a school in Kuriga town and are suspected to have abducted nearly 280 students. Recently, there has been a lull in ransom kidnappings in the country. However, the

new developments increase the fear of its return.

New wave of kidnappings in Nigeria and Libya's step towards unifying rival governments

Anu Maria Joseph

1. Nigeria: New wave of kidnappings.

Followed by the abduction of Internally Displaced People (IDPs) in Borno state on 3 March, bandits attacked a school and abducted 280 students in Kaduna state on 7 March. On 10 March, 15 students were abducted from a boarding school in Sokoto state.

On 8 March, Nigerian President Bola Tinubu stated that his government would ensure “justice is served against the perpetrators of these abominable acts.” Meanwhile, UNICEF's Nigeria's director, Christian Munduate, stated: “Schools are supposed to be sanctuaries of learning and growth, not sites of fear and violence.” He added: “This latest abduction, as any previously, is highly condemnable and part of a worrying trend of attacks on educational institutions in Nigeria, particularly in the northwest, where armed groups have intensified their campaign of violence and kidnappings.”

The new wave of kidnappings has raised concerns across the country of a potential resurgence of the bandits, a local group of armed men who carry out ransom kidnapping in Nigeria. Recently there were reports of separatists in neighboring Cameroon adopting similar tactics. On 8 March, separatist fighters abducted and killed four government workers in

Cameroon. The incident has alarmed a spillover effect of the kidnapping trend.

2. Libya: Steps towards unifying rival governments. In Libya, on 11 March, the President of the Libyan Presidential Council and the leader of the Benghazi-based administration had agreed to form a new unified government to supervise the long-delayed elections and “unify sovereign positions.” The talks between these rival governments were held under the leadership of the Secretary of the Arab League, General Ahmed Aboul Gheit, in Cairo. Libya was engulfed by a civil war in 2014 after the fall of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011. The civil war split the country between the internationally recognised government in the west, led by interim Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibah in Tripoli, and the administration in the east backed by military strongman Khalifa Haftar in Benghazi. The new developments imply positive steps toward the unification of Libyan rival authorities.

3. Sudan: UN's call for a ceasefire ahead of Ramadan. In Sudan, the UN had demanded a ceasefire ahead of Ramadan. However, on the contrary, the fighting between the rival factions has taken a new turn with the Sudanese Armed Forces recapturing the state broadcaster in Omdurman, which was under the control of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Besides, the humanitarian crisis is deteriorating with the UN warning of a hunger crisis that Sudan has never seen and sexual atrocities against women and girls in Darfur states.

AFRICA IN BRIEF

1 March-31 March

By Anu Maria Joseph, Narmatha S, and Vetriselvi Baskaran

EGYPT

Migration agreement with the EU

On 18 March, according to the BBC, the EU and Egypt signed an agreement worth EUR 7.4 billion. It focuses on boosting cooperation in trade and security and preventing the flow of migration to Europe. Grants, loans, and several funds are in line to address the sluggish Egypt's economy which is the major reason for people moving to Europe. Egypt's President Abdul Fattah al-Sisi stated: "This shall encompass tackling the root-causes through development-focused solutions and improving regular migration routes." ("EU and Egypt sign \$8bn deal to curb migration," *BBC*, 18 March 2024)

Declining population

On 29 March, Egypt's Ministry of Planning announced that the population growth of the country decreased by 1.4 per cent. According to Egyptian statistics, Egypt is the most populous country in the Arab world with 106 million. Although the ministry did not mention any cause behind it, the development is perceived as advantageous. 60 per cent of the population lives in poverty and the country faces challenges in terms of schools and hospitals alongside the growing debt. ("Egypt: population growth declines to 1.4%," *Africanews*, 29 March 2024)

ALGERIA

Extends aid to Mozambique's fight against Jihadists

On 4 March, in the light of Mozambique President Filipe Nyusi's four-day visit, the Algerian government vowed to extend its support to Mozambique's fight against Jihadist insurgency in the northern province of Cabo Delgado. Nyusi stated

that Algeria has "promised immediate support for the Local Force, the one that is fighting terrorism." ("Algeria pledges to help Mozambique fight jihadists," *BBC*, 4 March 2024)

To boost renewable energy sources

On 14 March, Algeria, a major oil and gas exporter, signed contracts with local and international companies in a bid to develop two solar energy projects with a capacity of 3,000 MW. The country aims to reach a renewable energy capacity of 15,000 MW by 2035 by producing 27 per cent of its energy requirements from wind, solar and hydro. The major objective is to reduce reliance on oil and gas. Currently, only three per cent of the country's energy production depends on renewable sources. ("Algeria to boost energy production with new solar plants," *BBC*, 14 March 2024)

President reschedules election

On 22 March, BBC reported that Algerian President, Abdelmadjid Tebboune, preponed the presidential election by three months, rescheduling it to 7 September. The election was previously scheduled for December. Tebboune, who won 58 per cent of the vote in 2019 elections is yet to announce his candidacy. ("Algerian leader announces early presidential election," *BBC*, 22 March 2024)

LIBYA

Rival parties agree on a unified government

On 11 March, BBC reported that the President of the Libyan Presidential Council and the leader of the Benghazi-based administration had agreed to form a new unified government to supervise the long-delayed elections and "unify sovereign positions." The talks between these rival governments were held

under the leadership of the Secretary of the Arab League, General Ahmed Aboul Gheit, in Cairo. Libya was engulfed by a civil war in 2014 after the fall of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011. The civil war split the country between the internationally recognised government in the west, led by interim Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibah in Tripoli, and the administration in the east backed by military strongman Khalifa Haftar in Benghazi. (“Rival Libyan leaders agree to form unified government,” *BBC*, 11 March 2024)

65 migrant bodies found in graveyard

On 22 March, the International Organisation for Migration (IMO) reported the discovery of 65 bodies of migrant people who were found in a Libyan graveyard. The identity and cause of death remains unknown. It is suspected that they were smuggled through the Libyan desert and died while crossing it. Libya has been the main departure point for migrants to enter Europe through the Mediterranean Sea. (“At least 65 migrant bodies found in Libya mass grave, says UN,” *BBC*, 22 March 2024)

SUDAN

UN human rights chief warns of war crimes

On 1 March, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Turk, stated that a deliberate attempt to disrupt access to humanitarian agencies in the war-torn Sudan would imply a war crime. He stated: “Sudan has become a living nightmare. Almost half of the population – 25 million people – are in urgent need of food and medical aid. Some 80 per cent of hospitals have been put out of service.” The development came after aid supplies were looted, humanitarian workers were attacked and humanitarian agencies complained about bureaucratic challenges to reach out to the conflict-hit regions. According to the UN, the fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the

Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has killed at least 14,600 people and injured 26,000. (“UN official warns of possible war crimes, rape as a weapon in Sudan,” *Al Jazeera*, 1 March 2024)

Demand to reinstate AU membership before mediation

On 4 March, Sudan’s military leader Abdel Fattah al-Burhan demanded reinstatement of the country’s AU membership to consider the AU-led mediation to end the conflict. Al Burhan stated: “Sudan’s confidence in the AU and the potential solutions it can provide to end the war, but only if the state regains its full membership and the organisation treats it as such.” Sudan was suspended from the AU following the military takeover on 25 October 2021. Later, in April 2023, the AU formed a special three-member panel to resolve the conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). (“Sudan demands reinstatement before accepting AU mediation,” *BBC*, 4 March 2024)

The government agrees to aid via borders

On 6 March, the military-led government in Sudan agreed to humanitarian aid via Chad and South Sudan. Previously, it banned the routes, claiming that the UAE had used the route to supply weapons to the Rapid Support Force (RSF). Clementine Nkweta-Salami, the UN humanitarian coordinator in Sudan, welcomed the decision stating that people in dire need will get assistance. (“Sudan agrees for aid to come via Chad and South Sudan,” *BBC*, 6 March 2024)

WFP warns on largest-ever hunger crisis

On 6 March, the World Food Program (WFP) warned that the conflict in Sudan would trigger the largest-ever hunger crisis in Sudan. The conflict between the rival forces has crossed ten months. It has killed more than 14,000 people and displaced

over eight million. Head of the World Food Program (WFP) Cindy McCain, during her visit to a camp in South Sudan, stated: “The victims of the war had been forgotten.” (“Sudan war may spark world's largest hunger crisis - WFP,” *BBC*, 6 March 2024)

UNSC demands ceasefire during Ramadan

On 8 March, while the delegates to the UN Security Council were debating a British-drafted resolution, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres pleaded with the parties at odds to put an end to hostilities ahead of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. He asserted that this move would bring a road to peace. In addition, he cautioned about the spiralling humanitarian crisis in Sudan. (“UN chief calls for Ramadan ceasefire in Sudan,” *BBC*, 8 March 2024)

US special envoy kicked off his diplomatic tour

On 11 March, BBC reported that the newly appointed US special envoy to Sudan, Tom Perriello, began his diplomatic tour to East Africa and the Gulf. He would visit Ethiopia, Djibouti, Kenya, Uganda, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The development came ahead of the one-year completion of the civil war in Sudan and the UN's proposal for a ceasefire during Ramadan. (“US Sudan envoy to meet alleged RSF backers,” *BBC*, 11 March 2024)

SAF regains state headquarters in Omdurman

On 12 March, BBC reported on the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) regaining the headquarters of the state broadcaster in Omdurman. Since the war broke out, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) had the upper hand in Omdurman. Despite the UN's calls for a ceasefire ahead of the holy month of Ramadan, fighting continues. (“Sudan conflict: Army retakes state broadcaster's headquarters from RSF,” *BBC*, 12 March

2024)

Darfur women are the rape victims, reports Guardian

On 14 March, the BBC quoted a report by UK's Guardian that Darfur women are rape victims. According to the report, in Geneina, women are sexually exploited by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). The most targeted victims are the women of the Masalit community. They identify the perpetrators as dark-skinned ethnic African tribes alleged to be Arab fighters. The war, which is nearly a year, has caused large humanitarian crises and the world's largest displacement crisis. (“Darfur women allege being victims of targeted rape - report,” *BBC*, 14 March)

Worst humanitarian disaster in recent years, says UN

On 20 March, the UN warned of the worst humanitarian tragedy in Sudan since the war. The director of operations at the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Edem Wosornu, stated that Sudan remains in the worst condition in meeting humanitarian needs, displaced people, and hunger crises. The UN's Ramadan ceasefire proposal was rejected by the warring parties. UN World Food Program (WFP) deputy executive director, Carl Skau, warned of a high risk of increased famine levels in May due to changing agricultural seasons. The power struggle between the rival forces, the RSF and the SAF, has led to eight million people being displaced, with 18 million facing acute food insecurity. (“Sudan one of the ‘worst humanitarian disasters in recent memory’, UN warns,” *Al Jazeera*, 20 March 2024)

Technocrats to run the government until elections

On 26 March, BBC reported that Sudan's ruling Sovereign Council member, General Ibrahim Jabir Ibrahim, stated that the military would form a non-political “technocratic government” until the

elections are held. He added that the "technocratic government will manage the affairs of the Sudanese people and prepare for elections." General Ibrahim's announcement came days after Sovereign Council member, Lt Gen Yasir al-Atta, asserted that the military would not cede power to civilians until elections are held in the country. ("Technocrats to run Sudan until elections - official," *BBC*, 26 March 2024)

SOUTH SUDAN

Extreme heatwave hits the country

On 18 March, the BBC reported on the chaotic weather conditions in South Sudan that led to the closure of schools. South Sudan has been hit by extreme heat waves as the temperature is expected to rise to 45C. Due to the El-Nino weather phenomenon, rains are expected after the heatwave that may cause flooding in the southern region. ("South Sudan heatwave: Extreme weather shuts schools and cuts power," *BBC*, 18 March 2024)

35 per cent increase in people affected by violence, UNMISS report

On 19 March, the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) released a report indicating a 35 per cent increase in the number of people affected by violence. It documented 233 violent incidents. 86 per cent of civilians are affected by inter-communal violence carried out by militias or civil defence groups. The head of UNMISS, Nicholas Haysom, stated: "Intercommunal conflict continues to cause immense harm to communities." The majority of them are part of the clashes between the two factions of the Dinka ethnic group, Twics and the Ngoks, in the Abeiy region. ("UN reports 35 percent increase in people affected by South Sudan violence," *Al Jazeera*, 19 March 2024)

Ethnic ambush kills at least 15

On 20 March, BBC reported that at least

15 people were killed in a surprise attack by a rival community in the Boma county in South Sudan. Although the 2018 peace deal ended the civil war in South Sudan, the ethnic violence continues. Often, cattle raids are acts of revenge by ethnic groups including Murle, Anyuak, Nuer, and Dinkas. ("At least 15 people killed in South Sudan ambush," *BBC*, 20 March 2024)

SOMALIA

Joins EAC as the eighth member

On 4 March, Somalia joined as a full-time member of the East African Community (EAC) after the successful completion of requirements. The EAC secretariat stated that Somalia gained membership in the bloc "after depositing her Instrument of Ratification with the Secretary General." In November, Somalia requested to join the bloc to boost the country's economic growth. However, other members were sceptical of granting the membership due to the flaring insurgency and poverty in the country. ("Somalia becomes full member of East African Community," *BBC*, 4 March 2024)

Cargo ship hijacked at the coast of Somalia

On 12 March, the armed pirates attacked a cargo ship in the Indian Ocean, which is 600 nautical miles off the Somalian coast. The cargo travelling from Mozambique to the UAE was attacked by nearly 20 armed men. No group has taken responsibility. The Gulf of Aden and Somali Basin have become hotspots of piracy, where nearly 20 hijackings have taken place since November 2023. ("Pirates hijack cargo ship off the coast of Somalia," *BBC*, 12 March)

ETHIOPIA

Discussion over ending Tigray conflict's peace agreement delayed

On 11 March, the federal government and the Tigrayan regional state initiated talks to end the Pretoria peace agreement which

was brokered in November 2022. The delay in implementation escalated further tensions in the country. The agreement tries to look at power-sharing, regional autonomy and resource control. (“Talks open between Ethiopia and Tigray authorities,” *BBC*, 11 March 2024)

UGANDA

Alert as ADF militants cross the border from DRC

On 19 March, BBC reported that security officials in Uganda alerted as fighters from the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), an IS-linked group, entered the country from DR Congo. The militants are suspected of targeting urban areas, holy places, schools, and public events and insisted the public remain cautious. The group conducts attacks, especially in schools, despite Ugandan Prime Minister Yoweri Museveni claiming the destruction of the group. (“Uganda on alert as IS-linked ADF militants cross border from DR Congo,” *BBC*, 19 March 2024)

KENYA

President signs controversial housing levy bill into law

On 19 March, Kenyan President William Ruto signed a controversial bill into law where people have to pay 1.5 per cent of their monthly income as a housing levy. Through the law, President Ruto aims to provide affordable houses for poorer Kenyans. However, a larger section of the Kenyan population is against the law as it pressures and burdens them to pay high taxes. Previously, the levy was only for people in the formal sector who got a regular monthly wage. However, the new law includes levies for non-salary Kenyans in the informal sector as well. The government argues that increased taxation would develop the country and reduce the budget deficit. (“Kenya housing levy: President Ruto signs controversial law paving way for monthly deductions,” *BBC*, 19 March 2024)

RWANDA

Refuge granted to 91 Libyans

On 22 March, Rwanda granted refuge to 91 asylum seekers from Libya under a programme backed by the UN’s refugee agency, the EU, and the AU. The refugees are from South Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, and Eritrea. Since 2019, more than 2,150 refugees have arrived in Rwanda under the program, with over 1,600 resettled abroad. (“Rwanda receives dozens of refugees from Libya,” *BBC*, 22 March 2024)

GHANA

Finance Ministry warns against anti-LGBTQ law

On 4 March, Ghana’s Ministry of Finance cautioned the government against signing the new anti-LGBTQ bill that would cause a loss of USD 3.8 billion in World Bank funding over the next five years. The ministry suggested President Nana Akufo-Addo not sign the bill until the Supreme Court’s ruling regarding the constitutionality of the bill. The bill was approved by the Ghanaian parliament the previous week. It imposes a three-year sentence for those who identify as LGBTQ and a five-year sentence for supporting or funding LGBTQ groups. (“Ghana’s finance ministry warns against anti-LGBT bill,” *BBC*, 4 March 2024)

Speaker condemns delayed signing of anti-LGBTQ+ bill

On 21 March, BBC reported that Ghana’s speaker disapproved of the intake of new ministers amidst President Akufo-Addo’s delay in signing the anti-LGBTQ bill. He condemned the president’s delay in signing the bill as “contemptuous.” The presidency asked the bill to the table after resolving the issues. The bill, which was introduced in February, criminalises identifying as LGBTQ+ and groups or individuals supporting the LGBTQ community. (“Ghana’s anti-LGBTQ+ bill: Parliament speaker halts approval of cabinet nominees,” *BBC*, 21 March 2024)

MOZAMBIQUE

70 children missing after jihadist attack

On 5 March, BBC reported that 70 children went missing after a jihadist attack in Mozambique's northern Cabo Delgado province. It is feared that the children were abducted by armed fighters linked to the Islamic State (IS). Chiùre, south of Cabo Delgado, was considered a safe haven for displaced people in the region. However, President Filipe Nyusi recently stated that the jihadists deliberately targeted Chiùre to abduct children. The regional military has been trying to tackle the jihadist insurgency that began in 2017. ("Mozambique jihadist attacks: Fears for 70 missing children," *BBC*, 5 March 2024)

UN out of funds to help terror victims

On 8 March, the UNHCR Chief, Filippo Grandi, appealed to the World Bank and other partners to aid Mozambique in development and the humanitarian crisis. The UN provides only 17 per cent of the funding in relief to Mozambique. Cabo Delgado, a mineral-rich province of Mozambique is plunged into frequent Islamist attacks that destroy its peace and stability. Grandi stated: "As a United Nations organisation, [we] are committed to providing a large-scale response to the humanitarian drama in Cabo Delgado, but unfortunately, without sufficient resources, we will have no alternative but to do less of what we should do." ("UN running out of money to help Mozambique terror victims," *BBC*, 8 March 2024)

Storm Filipo kills four people

On 12 March, the BBC reported on the storm Filipo that hit the Inhambane province in southern Mozambique. Four people were killed and one was injured in the violent storm. The roads, schools and houses have been reportedly damaged. The storm hit the tourist spots of Tofo and Barra, where several tourist boats were damaged. The communication lines,

electricity, and internet facilities have been adversely affected by the storm. ("Four dead as Storm Filipo batters Mozambique," *BBC*, 12 March 2024)

MADAGASCAR

11 dies in cyclone Gamane

On 28 March, Al Jazeera reported that at least 11 people were killed in Cyclone Gamane which hit northern Madagascar. More than 7,000 people have been affected by the cyclone. The cyclone moved with an average speed of 150 kilometres per hour and heavy rainfall. ("Eleven dead, thousands affected as Cyclone Gamane batters Madagascar," *Al Jazeera*, 28 March 2024)

SOUTH AFRICA

Builds concrete wall to block

Mozambicans

On 8 March, BBC reported that South Africa has allocated USD 2.7 million to build a concrete wall along its border with Mozambique to prevent people from crossing to steal and smuggle vehicles. The barriers are being set up in three sectors. An eight-kilometre barrier near Tembe Elephant Park which is under construction; an eight-kilometre long stretch near iSimangaliso Wetland Park; a nine-kilometre wall from the western boundary of Tembe Elephant Park towards Pongolo River. The project received positive responses from the people and the South African National Defense Force. ("South Africa builds concrete wall to keep out Mozambicans," *BBC*, 8 March 2024)

Jacob Zuma barred from elections

On 28 March, the electoral commission of South Africa barred former President Jacob Zuma from running for the elections in May. Zuma announced a run under his newly formed party, uMkhonto WeSizwe (MK), after dissenting from the African National Congress (ANC). The electoral commission claimed that "any person who was convicted of an offence and sentenced

to more than 12 months imprisonment without the option of a fine” cannot stand in an election. In 2021, Zuma was sentenced to 15 months in jail over corruption charges. (“South Africa’s ex-President Jacob Zuma barred from May elections,” *Al Jazeera*, 28 March 2024)

THE GAMBIA

Bill to scrap the ban on FGM

On 5 March, a bill was presented before the Gambia's parliament by an independent lawmaker to abolish the ban on Female genital mutilation (FGM) in the country. In 2015, the FGM was outlawed by former President Yahya Jammeh, who stated that FGM is not a part of Islam. Regardless, the Muslim clerics pushed to lift the ban on FGM stating: “Female circumcision is my religious belief, Gambia is not for sale.” According to the UN, a three-quarter of Gambian women, aged between 15- 45, undergo FGM. (“FGM in The Gambia: Lawmaker tables bill in parliament to lift ban,” *BBC*, 5 March 2024)

ZIMBABWE

US imposes sanctions over corruption

On 4 March, The US imposed sanctions on several Zimbabwe’s officials including President Emmerson Mnangagwa for allegedly drawing off money for personal purposes. The US Department of State stated: “With this action, the 2003 executive sanction order is repealed and 11 people and three businesses are added to the worldwide Magnitsky sanctions program's list.” (“US sanctions Zimbabwe president for corruption,” *BBC*, 4 March 2024)

US imposes sanctions on President Mnangagwa for corruption and human rights allegations

On 5 March, the US imposed sanctions on Zimbabwe’s President Emmerson Mnangagwa under allegations of corruption and human rights abuses. The White House stated: “We continue to

witness gross abuses of political, economic, and human rights. The targeting of civil society and severe restrictions on political activity have stifled fundamental freedoms, while key actors, including government leaders, have syphoned off public resources for personal gains.” First Lady Auxillia Mnangagwa, Vice President Constantino Chiwenga and Defence Minister Oppah Muchinguri are additionally placed under sanctions for similar allegations. (“Zimbabwe: US slaps fresh sanctions on President Mnangagwa and other leaders,” *BBC*, 5 March 2024)

Free grain from Russia

On 20 March, Zimbabwe received 250,000 tonnes of wheat and 23,000 tonnes of fertilizer from the Russian government and the Uralchem-Uralkali group of Russian companies. The donation is part of the free grain transfer program initiated by Russia in 2023. The programme supports drought-affected countries including Burkina Faso, Mali, Eritrea, Somalia, and the Central African Republic. Russia's ambassador to Zimbabwe, Nikolai Krasilnikov, described it as "humanitarian assistance." He added: "Both deliveries were carried out in line with the implementation of the initiative of the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin to assist African countries." (“Russia donates wheat and fertilizer to Zimbabwe,” *BBC*, 20 March 2024)

ZAMBIA

Debt restructuring deal

On 26 March, Zambia signed a deal with its creditors to restructure its foreign debt of USD 3.5 billion. The deal entails a forgiveness of USD 840 million by private investors. The agreement came after months of disagreements about the restructuring terms between China and other creditors. President Hakainde Hichilema welcomed the deal as "a historic milestone." The deal is part of the G20 Common Framework, launched in 2020, to provide debt relief to low-income

countries. Zambia has become the first country to receive debt restructuring under this framework. ("Zambia strikes debt restructuring deal with creditors," *BBC*, 26 March 2024)

CHAD

Military leader to run for election

On 2 March, Chad's military leader, Mahamat Idriss Deby Itno, announced that he would run for the presidential election which is scheduled for May. Deby stated: "I, Mahamat Idriss Deby Itno, am a candidate for the 2024 presidential election under the banner of the For a United Chad coalition." The elections are expected to end three years of transition after Mahamat Deby took over the power post-death of his father Idriss Deby. ("Chad interim leader Deby confirms plan to run for president in May," *Al Jazeera*, 3 March 2024)

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

M23 rebels advanced in the town of Nyanzale

On 6 March, the BBC reported that the military lost the town of Nyanzale, which is 80 miles north of Goma, to the M23 rebels. Rebel spokesperson, Willy Ngoma, stated: "We are now in Nyanzale, the enemy has fled." Army commander, Jerome Chico Tshitambwe, confirmed the capture. ("M23 rebels seize town in eastern DR Congo," *BBC*, 6 March 2024)

NIGERIA

87 people abducted in Kaduna

On 18 March, the BBC reported that at least 87 people were abducted in the Kajuru region of Kaduna state. The abductees included women and children. According to the residents, the gunmen were dressed like military personnel. The report commented that authorities are incapable of addressing the daily abductions and mounts pressure on President Bola Tinubu. ("Gunmen in Nigeria kidnap at least 87 people in new

attack," *Al Jazeera*, 18 March 2024)

Mega Solar plant commenced

On 20 March, BBC reported that Nigeria launched the Mega solar plant as part of its plan for transition to clean and renewable energy. It would be jointly built by the privately owned North South Power (NSP) company and the state-run Nigeria Sovereign Investment Authority (NSIA) in Shiroro region in the Niger state. While signing the agreement, Nigeria's Vice-President, Kashim Shettima, stated: "This is a pioneering project in terms of hybridizing power in solar and hydro." ("Nigeria launches mega solar plant to boost national grid," *BBC*, 20 March 2024)

NIGER

Suspends military cooperation with the US

On 17 March, Niger's military spokesperson Colonel Amadou Abdramane announced the suspension of the military agreement with the US which allowed the latter to install military bases to operate in Niger. This immediate call-off came after the recent US delegates' visit. Abdramane stated: "Niger regrets the intention of the American delegation to deny the sovereign Nigerien people the right to choose their partners and types of partnerships capable of truly helping them fight against terrorism." During the visit, the US delegates warned Niger of its increasing ties with Iran and Russia. ("Niger suspends military cooperation with US: Spokesman," *Al Jazeera*, 17 March 2024)

MALI

Russian Wagner group accused of carrying out killings, HRW report

On 28 March, Human Rights Watch (HRW) in its recent report accused the Russian mercenary group, Wagner, of assisting the Malian forces in carrying out raids and drone strikes. A senior researcher at HRW, Ilaria Allegrozzi, stated: "Mali's

Russia-backed transitional military government is not only committing horrific abuses, but it is working to eliminate scrutiny into its human rights situation.” The group documented that the Wagner Group along with the junta has been carrying out attacks on civilians in northern Mali. (“HRW accuses Wagner of killing civilians with Malian army,” *Africanews*, 28 March 2024)

BURKINA FASO

Series of attacks kill hundreds

On 3 March, Al Jazeera reported that at least 170 people were killed in a series of attacks in three villages in northern Burkina Faso. The attacks are separate from the attacks on a mosque in Natiaboani and a church in Essakane that killed dozens. Currently, nearly half of the country is under the control of several armed groups. (“About 170 people killed in Burkina Faso attacks, regional official says,” *Al Jazeera*, 3 March 2024)

SENEGAL

Opposition leader Ousame Sonko released

On 15 March, Al Jazeera reported that Senegal’s main opposition leader, Ousmane Sonko, was released from prison following the political crisis triggered by President Macky Sall’s announcement of election postponement. Macky Sall’s government abruptly passed a bill postponing the elections scheduled for 24 February to December. The postponement sparked violent protests. Later, the Constitutional Council annulled the postponement and is now due to take place on 24 March. The arrest of Sonko in June 2023 sparked similar violent protests. He was arrested on the charges of misleading the youth. Sonko’s release ahead of the elections was celebrated by the youth who supported his anti-corruption stance. (“Senegal’s top opposition leaders released from prison as elections loom,” *Al Jazeera*, 15 March 2024)

Foreign investors on alert ahead of elections

On 20 March, Al Jazeera reported that foreign investors in Senegal are on alert and keeping a close eye on Senegal’s election due to prevailing political uncertainties and the unknown direction of the country’s economy if the opposition wins. Opposition candidates Amadou Ba and Bassirou Diomaye Faye have proposed economic changes including the creation of new currencies and the renegotiation of mining and energy contracts. For foreign investors, Senegal has been the safest country in West Africa due to the peaceful transitions of power. Since the announcement of delayed elections, violent protests and the crackdown on the opposition, investors have been cautious. (“Foreign investors on alert as Senegal nears election marred by uncertainty,” *Al Jazeera*, 20 March 2024)

New President-elect vows reform

On 26 March, BBC reported on Senegal’s President-elect Bassirou Diomaye Faye’s first address. Bassirou Diomaye Faye, the incoming president of Senegal, pledged “humility and transparency” in his first speech after the election on 24 March. With his primary competitor conceding defeat, 44-year-old political beginner Faye is set to become the country’s youngest president. In light of the current disturbances, Faye stressed a “break with the past” and prioritized “national reconciliation.” He promised to tackle the cost-of-living crisis, fortify institutions, and fight corruption. Though official results are still pending, Faye has a substantial lead, and nationwide celebrations have begun. Only two weeks after his release from prison, he had achieved this feat. (“I will govern with humility - Senegal’s Faye,” *BBC*, 26 March 2024)

REGIONAL

Three West African states form joint force to counter Jihadists

On 7 March, Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso announced the formation of a joint force to fight Jihadists. During the talks in the Nigerian capital Niamey, Niger's army chief Moussa Salaou Barmou stated that it would be operational without giving further information about the joint force. The region has undergone massive attacks that killed more than thousands of people in 2023 by groups linked to both Islamic State and al-Qaeda. ("Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso to form joint force to fight jihadists," *BBC*, 8 March 2024)

60 migrants die in the Mediterranean Sea

On 15 March, BBC reported that at least 60 migrants died after a rubber dinghy broke down in the Mediterranean Sea. The survivors claimed that they had departed from Zawiya, near the Libyan coast. The engine of the dinghy broke and was deserted in the sea for three days without food and water. Several of the migrants died of dehydration and hunger and not of drowning. ("60 migrants die in dinghy in Mediterranean, survivors say," *BBC*, 15 March)

Eritrea and Somalia hold bilateral talks

On 18 March, BBC reported on the bilateral talks between the leaders of Eritrea and Somalia. Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki and Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud discussed the regional issues during the bilateral talks in the Eritrean capital Asmara. Eritrean Information Minister Yemane Meskel stated that the meeting included discussions on issues including militant problems in Somalia. ("Somali president holds security talks with Eritrean leader," *BBC*, 18 March 2024)

INTERNATIONAL

Indian Navy rescues cargo vessels from pirates

On 16 March, the Indian Navy rescued a Maltese-flagged bulk carrier, MV Ruen, which was hijacked three months before. The merchant vessel was hijacked in December by the Somali pirates with 17 crew members. According to the Navy, all the 35 pirates on board were forced to surrender and raided for the possession of illegal arms, ammunition and contraband. The hijacking of MV Ruen by Somali pirates in December marked their first successful operation since 2017. ("Indian navy captures ship from Somali pirates, rescuing 17 crew members," *BBC*, 16 March)

NIAS AFRICA TEAM



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