

BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

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Summary of Report

Elections & Governance

Madagascar armed forces step back from interfering

Madagascar's armed forces have rowed back on an ultimatum given last month to the Indian Ocean island's leader Andry Rajoelina and said they have no place to influence the make up of a new government.

Zambia dismisses private top prosecutors

Zambia has fired private lawyers who appealed against a court decision that acquitted former President Frederick Chiluba of stealing millions of dollars from public treasury.

ZIMBABWE: Opposition infighting raises spectre of violence

A public disagreement between Zimbabwe's Prime Minister, Morgan Tsvangirai, and Finance Minister Tendai Biti over pay increases in public servants' salaries is being seen as evidence of greater divisions between two of the most senior leaders of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).

Zimbabwe Media Reforms Unlikely, Says Analyst

A Zimbabwean political analyst says, despite repeated promises, embattled President Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF party is unlikely to implement the much-anticipated wide-ranging media reforms.

Mauritius ruling party wins landslide election

Mauritian Prime Minister Navinchandra Ramgoolam looked set for a second term after the opposition conceded victory to an alliance led by his Labour Party in a parliamentary election on the Indian Ocean island.

Zambia accuses Netherlands of funding opposition

Zambia's ruling party has accused the Netherlands of financing the main opposition party, a charge that threatens to raise tensions with donors who froze funding for AIDS and other health programmes last year amid concerns about corruption.

Zambia Opposition Leader Denies Outside Funding Allegations

The leader of Zambia's main opposition Patriotic Front (PF) is denying accusations that his party is funded by the Netherlands ahead of next year's general elections.

Broken Promises on Zimbabwe Press Freedom

Fourteen months after Zimbabwe's government of national unity was formed, harassment, arbitrary arrest and general intimidation of journalists remains common.

Politics

US Senators Push for Greater Flexibility on Zimbabwe Sanctions

Three U.S. senators have introduced a bill, Zimbabwe Transition to Democracy and Economic Recovery Act (DEERA), to bring a more flexible approach to sanctions against Zimbabwe.

Madagascar's leader hints at 'neutral' government

Madagascar's leader said on Monday he could form a politically "neutral" government after last-ditch power-sharing talks failed over the weekend, and said he expected to retain the military's support.

Economy & Energy

Five leaders invited to join G20 at Toronto summit

The leaders of Ethiopia, Malawi, the Netherlands, Spain and Vietnam have been invited to attend the G20 summit in Toronto next month, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper said on Saturday.

S. Africa's stocks tumble, rand recoups big losses

South African stocks booked their biggest one-day fall in almost 13 months as panicked investors dumped everything from banks to resource firms on concern about the fall-out from Greece's debt crisis. Government bonds succumbed to global fears over sovereign debt but the rand bucked the trend, rebounding from a late Thursday plunge that sent it to a six-month low against the dollar, a move that had been seen as overdone.

Namibia to go ahead with \$1.1 bln dam with Angola

Namibia and Angola are moving ahead with a \$1.1 billion hydropower plant on a river that runs along their common border in a bid to end power disruptions that have plagued their economies for decades.

World Cup ticket cash sales running out of steam

More than half of the 500,000 World Cup tickets offered for cash sales were still available, organizers said Wednesday, just over a month before the tournament starts.

FEATURE-Zimbabwe slowly returning to normality

Just over a year ago, Zimbabwe had the world's worst modern-day hyperinflation and the national currency was worthless. Streets in central Harare were lined with black-market traders exchanging huge wads of Zimbabwean dollars for U.S. dollars or South Africa rand. But now the situation have improved to some extent and the hordes of black-market currency traders in Zimbabwe's capital Harare have gone out of business.

Human Rights, Social Issues & Developments***South Africa offered one million rand per World Cup goal***

South Africa's goal-shy team have been offered one million rand (\$132,200) to share for every time they find the net at next month's World Cup on home soil, a senior official said Wednesday.

AFRICA: MPs push for continent-wide FGM/C ban

Parliamentarians from all over Africa are pushing for a continent-wide ban on female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) and are calling on the UN to pass a General Assembly resolution appealing for a global FGM/C ban, as it violates human rights, they say.

Shakira World Cup Song Sparks Controversy

International Latin super star Shakira has set off a controversy in South Africa over the official World Cup song. Many have expressed disappointment that a non-South African artist was chosen to record the song, though others do not seem to mind.

S. African police break up extremist bomb plot

South African police have broken up a plot by white supremacists to plant explosives in black townships, the police minister said on Thursday, just a month after the murder of a prominent white separatist.

South Africa: No band-aid solution for racial problems

Lifting the economic and skills level of the poorest is one of the surest ways to boost black confidence – and reconciliation, the author says; and given the more than 300 years of colonialism and apartheid, racist attitudes deeply embedded in South African society racial incidents are not isolated events. Reconciliation across racial divides remains a difficult, intentional struggle for justice. "We should not hide behind racial solidarity to support often very undemocratic practice."

Food Security & Health Issues

ZIMBABWE: Bad roads lead to malaria outbreak

Decaying road infrastructure in Binga district, in Zimbabwe's province of Matabeleland North, prevented anti-malaria spraying teams from reaching the area, and is being blamed for an outbreak of the mosquito-borne disease.

Zimbabwe allotted \$5.6 million in UN emergency funds to fight measles epidemic

\$ 5.6 Million have been allocated under United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) for Zimbabwe to fight against measles epidemic. Under this fund about 5 million children in Zimbabwe will receive urgently needed protection from a growing spread of measles.

MALAWI: PMTCT battles missing drugs, missing moms

Services to prevent the mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) of HIV are gaining ground in Malawi but the country continues to battle drug shortages and mothers and infants that disappear to follow-up and treatment.

Militancy

Pirates seize Taiwanese fishing vessel off Seychelles

Suspected Somali pirates have seized a Taiwanese fishing vessel off the waters of Seychelles, the second incident off Somalia in two days, a regional maritime body said on Saturday.

Seychelles to launch UN-backed courts to combat piracy

The remoteness of the Indian Ocean nation of Seychelles has made it a prime target for pirates and the country is fighting back by setting up a United Nations-supported centre to prosecute piracy. With naval activity around the Horn of Africa – including Somalia – becoming increasingly secure, pirates are moving south towards Seychelles, attacking ships based in or operating around the archipelago.

Refugees/IDPs & Migration

Botswana: Hard line refugee policy

Botswana has obligations to observe international best practice regarding the status and handling of refugees; however, under its hard line refugee policy asylum seekers have different rights from those outside. They must have an official pass to leave the camp and are not allowed to work or to access Botswana's antiretroviral treatment programme.

Detailed Report

Elections & Governance

Madagascar armed forces step back from interfering

(Reuters)

07 May 2010

The army's chief, General Andre Ndriarijoana, who backed Rajoelina's power grab last year, had given Africa's youngest leader until the end of April to produce an acceptable road map to end a crisis that has hurt foreign investment.

"It is not our job to define whether this road map is clear ... and if it will allow the country to exit the crisis. We are only observers," Ndriarijoana told reporters late on Thursday.

Analysts say that while some military commanders are frustrated at Rajoelina's failure to end the crisis and restore constitutional order, a military takeover risked deepening divisions within the armed forces and triggering infighting.

Earlier this week, Rajoelina said he could form a politically "neutral" government after last-ditch power-sharing talks with ousted leader Marc Ravalomanana and former Presidents Didier Ratsiraka and Albert Zafy failed.

He did not elaborate on what he meant by neutral but there had been speculation Rajoelina could include technocrats and military officials or simply members of rival political parties prepared to work with him.

The army refused to comment on whether its reversal was an endorsement of Rajoelina's proposal but it appeared to rule out the threat of a military takeover.

Some opposition leaders dismissed Rajoelina's talk of neutrality and said it would be impossible to organize elections before installing a legitimate, consensus government.

"For us, once again, this is another unilateral initiative which has no legitimate basis," Emmanuel Rakotovahiny told Reuters.

Former disc-jockey Rajoelina has said elections should be held by the end of the year but the constitution must be amended first if he is to run for president. Under the old charter, the 35-year-old is five years too young to be head of state.

"We think it would be best to organize a constitutional referendum on August 12, 2010," Hery Rakatomanana, president of the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI), told reporters on Thursday.

International mediators last year brokered a string of power-sharing deals, but the bitter political rivals could not agree how to divide up the main posts and each accord collapsed.

Zambia dismisses private top prosecutors

(Reuters)

08 May 2010

LUSAKA (Reuters) - Zambia has fired private lawyers who appealed against a court decision that acquitted former President Frederick Chiluba of stealing millions of dollars from public coffers, local media reported on Saturday.

The lawyers were appointed in 2002 by Chiluba's successor Levy Manawasa to investigate corruption allegations against senior government officials because he felt state prosecutors lacked the capacity to deal with high profile cases.

But their appeal against a lower court's decision in August to acquit Chiluba, who was accused of stealing \$500,000 of public funds during his tenure, set the private prosecutors on a collision course with the state. The state's chief prosecutor subsequently withdrew the appeal.

Zambian officials have denied the dismissals were linked to the lawyers' objection to Chiluba's acquittal.

Acting government spokesman Mike Mulongoti said the state had terminated their contracts because the chief prosecutor no longer needed their services, the Times of Zambia reported on Saturday.

"If the DPP (Director of Public Prosecutions) feels he does not need any of these officials he informs them and that is what has happened," Mulongoti said.

Mulongoti said dismissing the prosecutors would not impede Zambia's efforts to fight corruption.

University of Zambia economics professor Oliver Saasa said the dismissal of the private prosecutors would undermine the fight against corruption.

"The removal of the private prosecutors after the disbanding of the taskforce on corruption without any clear picture of the replacement shows that the war against corruption is getting more fragile," Saasa told Reuters.

Despite the charges against him being dropped in Zambia, Chiluba has not been fully exonerated of corruption.

Zambia's supreme court in February rejected an appeal by Chiluba against the enforcement of a London ruling that found he had defrauded his country while in power.

In 2007, British judge Peter Smith ordered Chiluba to pay \$58 million to the Zambian Treasury to compensate it for defrauding his country during his tenure which ended in 2001. Chiluba was accused of using state funds for private purchases in Europe.

ZIMBABWE: Opposition infighting raises spectre of violence

(IRIN)

07 May 2010

HARARE, 7 May 2010 (IRIN) - A public disagreement between Zimbabwe's Prime Minister, Morgan Tsvangirai, and Finance Minister Tendai Biti over pay increases in public servants' salaries is being seen as evidence of greater divisions between two of the most senior leaders of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).

Biti said salaries had been frozen, while Tsvangirai, leader of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), told a May Day rally that public servants, including medical staff and teachers, would be in line for salary adjustments that currently range from US\$165 to US\$250 a month.

Although the salaries are low by international standards, they were used to entice public servants back to the workplace when hyperinflation had reduced their pay to less than a dollar a month.

Replacing the Zimbabwe dollar with a basket of foreign currencies - including the US dollar, the South African rand and the Botswana pula - eliminated hyperinflation, but fuel and electricity remain scarce, and although food is available, many cannot afford it.

The MDC became the first party to seriously challenge Mugabe's rule since he came to power after independence from Britain in 1980 by winning a parliamentary majority during the violence-plagued 2008 elections.

The Global Political Agreement - brokered by the Southern African Development Community, a regional body - was signed in September 2008, paving the way for the formation of the unity government in February 2009 - a fragile coalition between President Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF, Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai's MDC, and an MDC splinter party led by Deputy Prime Minister Arthur Mutambara.

However, the performance of the unity government has not greatly altered the living conditions of most Zimbabweans. Political violence has picked up in recent months and has been largely attributed to Mugabe's ZANU-PF party attempting to reclaim political support and punish those seen as supporting the MDC, particularly in rural areas.

Infighting

However, Tsvangirai supporters were recently held responsible for an attack on the MDC's national director, Toendepi Shone, who is seen to be aligned with Biti, who is also secretary general of the MDC.

Shone's car was "impounded" at Tsvangirai residence and he was accused of touring the provinces to campaign for Biti in a bid to challenge Tsvangirai's position at the party's 2011 elective congress.

Tsvangirai supporters have also barred the MDC's director for security, Chris Dlamini, from the party headquarters as he was also seen as a Biti supporter. Biti still has access to the party's headquarters, but his security detail has been increased.

"We have always said that Tsvangirai has some violent bodyguards and young followers around him, but nobody has believed us," a former senior MDC official who declined to be identified, told IRIN.

The politics of division

"It would be in the interests of ZANU-PF to have a weaker MDC in the next elections in order to avoid the defeat that it experienced in 2008. ZANU-PF would want an MDC candidate who does not have national appeal, such as Morgan Tsvangirai, and they would happily fund destabilization processes within the MDC," political analyst and academic Eldred Masunungure told IRIN.

"Tsvangirai is the face of opposition politics ... and has national appeal; anybody coming out to oppose or disturb his programmes would be shunned by the people, who are thirsty for change in the country."

Another election is expected in 2011 or 2012, ratcheting up the political temperature and raising the spectre of violence between competing parties and factions that often lies just beneath the surface.

Tsvangirai has admitted to tension within the MDC but downplayed it. "The secretary general [Biti] and myself have been comrades in this struggle for many years and have stood together throughout this time, and we will not allow the enemies of real change to succeed in derailing the people's cause," he said.

"The attempt to divide us has been expressed through violence and disturbances, dubious teams sent to provinces, preaching gospels of division, and baseless and defamatory documents being manufactured and distributed to the press."

Zimbabwe Media Reforms Unlikely, Says Analyst

(Voice of America)

03 May 2010

A Zimbabwean political analyst says, despite repeated promises, embattled President Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF party is unlikely to implement the much-anticipated wide-ranging media reforms.

Rejoice Ngwenya described the latest promise to overhaul the government media policies as "pandering and pontificating for the sake of it."

"When it comes to independent institutions of governance and democracy, ZANU-PF is going to pontificate and issue propaganda statements that look credible on paper, but they don't follow them up. So, we are kind of used to this idea. This things needs political will, but ZANU-PF cannot deliver that," he said.

Zimbabwe's information minister, Webster Shamu, said Monday that the administration will soon implement wide-ranging media reforms that could result in independent media outlets breaking the government's hold on the flow of information.

But, Zimbabwe's last independent newspaper was shut down in 2003 after being accused of criticizing President Robert Mugabe's government.

Analyst Ngwenya said ZANU-PF is only interested in furthering its interest. "I don't think that this time is going to be different. Regulations and laws that have to do with self-enrichment and self-empowerment like indigenisation (law that forces white-owned companies to sell a majority stake to local blacks) are going to be cobbled overnight with a string of propaganda and paranoia around these things by the state media...I agree with those who say that this is not any different," Ngwenya said.

Recently, Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai came up with what has been described as an ambitious plan that might see the government relax draconian media and security laws by the end of the year. But, some analysts express skepticism saying hardliners from President Mugabe's ZANU-PF will undermine Tsvangirai's efforts to maintain the status quo.

The Media Alliance of Zimbabwe (MAZ) - a coalition of groups that includes the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (ZUJ), and others - have often said that the country's media laws were being used selectively to muzzle the independent media - a charge supporters of the ZANU-PF deny.

Ngwenya said ZANU-PF propaganda will suffer if the party embarks on media reforms. "What that means basically is that ZANU-PF has signed its death warrant. There is no way ZANU-PF can survive politically when the citizens of this country have access to information and are free to get independent political opinion, and are free to chose," Ngwenya said.

Mauritius ruling party wins landslide election

(IRIN)

06 May 2010

PORT LOUIS, May 6 (Reuters) - Mauritian Prime Minister Navinchandra Ramgoolam looked set for a second term after the opposition conceded victory to an alliance led by his Labour Party in a parliamentary election on the Indian Ocean island.

Government supporters took to the streets waving flags and honking car horns after opposition leader Paul Berenger accepted that an alliance led by the Labour Party had won the vote.

"The results of the poll are clear. Since 1991 no government has obtained a second term after an election," Ramgoolam said from his constituency after final results came through.

"Work starts now. I appealed to one and all to respect our opponents because in a democracy we have winners and losers."

The Labour Party has been in power since 2005. Some analysts said Labour's alliance with the Militant Socialist Movement (MSM) would see a strengthening of the welfare state. Reforms to diversify the economy away from the sugar, textiles and tourism sectors are expected to continue.

The man widely credited with the reforms, former Finance Minister Ramakrishna Sithanen will not return to the cabinet.

Sithanen, who unveiled a \$340 million stimulus package in December 2008, was denied a ticket to contest the elections.

There has been speculation that the MSM's support came on the understanding its leader, Pravind Jugnauth, would become finance minister if they won.

"This government is a government of continuity. With the MSM on board, there will be a human dimension to the economic strategy and an acceleration of the process to democratise the economy," economic professor Chandan Jankee told Reuters.

Ramgoolam has overseen sustained growth since he was elected in 2005, slashing red tape to lure foreign investors and weathering the financial crisis better than expected thanks to economic policies praised by donors.

He pledged to continue with economic reforms, and has pledged tax reforms. "We will abolish the national residential property tax and tax on interest," Ramgoolam told a news conference late on Thursday.

Confirmed results read out by returning officers at polling stations gave the Labour alliance 41 parliamentary seats, 18 to the leading opposition Mauritian Militant Movement (MMM) party and one to the Mauritian Solidarity Front (FSM).

A party from the island of Rodrigues won its two seats in the national assembly. A further 8 seats are allocated to the best losers to ensure all ethnic communities are fairly represented.

Ramgoolam said he will wait for the electoral supervisory commission to officially designate the best losers before naming a new government -- expected in the next few days.

GAME OF ETHNICITY

"We concede defeat at a national level," opposition leader Berenger told supporters in his constituency.

Analysts said that Berenger, who is of French descent, drew most of his support from Mauritius' ethnic minorities.

Mauritius is a melting pot of Hindu, Muslim, Christian and Chinese communities but the majority Hindus have dominated the political scene since independence from Britain in 1968.

"The game of alliance and ethnicity has played in favour of Navinchandra Ramgoolam in this election. Ramgoolam has obtained a majority of votes in rural areas because he reassures the majority group," local analyst Jocelyn Low said.

"Another factor that has favoured the Labour Party and its allies is the sound economic management during the last five years," Low said.

Zambia accuses Netherlands of funding opposition

(IRIN)

05 May 2010

LUSAKA, May 5 (Reuters) - Zambia's ruling party has accused the Netherlands of financing the main opposition party, a charge that threatens to raise tensions with donors who froze funding for AIDS and other health programmes last year amid concerns about corruption.

Katele Kalumba, national secretary of the ruling MMD party, said the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) was bankrolling the Patriotic Front (PF), whose leader, Michael Sata, poses a major threat to President Rupiah Banda in an election due next year.

"There is information that they have special funding dedicated to the agenda of our colleagues, the PF," Kalumba told Reuters.

The Dutch embassy in Lusaka denied the accusations, saying the NIMD funded all parties in parliament through the Zambia Centre for Interparty Dialogue (ZCID).

"The NIMD does not favour any party over the other and works with all parties in Zambia on an equal basis through the platform of the ZCID," embassy spokesman Joost van Ettro said.

Sata, a gruff populist with strong support among the jobless youth and the poor, narrowly lost the 2008 presidential election to Banda and has since forged an alliance with the United Party for National Development (UPND), the third group in parliament.

In a by-election last week, the MMD lost one of two seats up for grabs to the alliance.
[ID:nLDE64003P]

Since mid-2009, the alliance has won three seats in by-elections after the deaths of legislators in MMD strongholds.

Last year, the Netherlands and Sweden froze \$33 million in aid for Zambia's fight against HIV/AIDS and other health programmes after it emerged senior officials had stolen \$5 million.

Zambia Opposition Leader Denies Outside Funding Allegations

(Voice of America)

05 May 2010

The leader of Zambia's main opposition Patriotic Front (PF) is denying accusations that his party is funded by the Netherlands ahead of next year's general elections.

Michael Sata said it was a shame and disingenuous for President Rupiah Banda and his ruling Movement for Multi-party Democracy (MMD) to accuse a sovereign country with no shred of evidence.

"It's most unfortunate, uncalled for and unwarranted for a ruling party to accuse another state of funding us, because by accusing the Netherlands government of funding us, there is something behind it. Because we are members of the Zambia Inter-Party Dialogue, which is being sponsored and we are very grateful by the Netherlands government," he said.

The national secretary of the ruling MMD, Katela Kalumba reportedly said the Netherlands' Institute for Multiparty Democracy has "special" funding that supports the activities of Michael Sata's main opposition Patriotic Front Party.

But officials of the Netherlands embassy in Zambia's capital, Lusaka denied the accusations saying its agency funds all political parties in parliament. Opposition leader Sata said the ruling party's accusations are baseless.

“There is nothing, there is no iota of truth for Rupiah Banda the president to come out in the open and say he has been informed. How can a president survive on rumors? Because when they are pointing a finger at another sovereign state, they must have evidence,” Sata said.

He said his opposition party is supported and funded by individuals as well as big corporations who believe in the policies, programs, ideals, prospects and “truthfulness” of the Patriotic Front Party.

Sata denied his party is funded by some international institutions to challenge President Banda’s ruling MMD party in next year’s general elections.

“The answer is I have not been funded. The Dutch government through Zambia’s Inter-Party Dialogue has funded all the political parties in Zambia. They have not singled out PF. The rumor came from a relative of one of the deputy minister’s in government. But we have challenged them to produce evidence,” Sata said.

Sata, a long time opposition leader recently formed an alliance with businessman Hakainda Hichilema, leader of the United Party for National Development (UPND) ahead of next year’s general elections.

Broken Promises on Zimbabwe Press Freedom

(IPS)

03 May 2010

BULAWAYO, May 3 (IPS) - Fourteen months after Zimbabwe's government of national unity was formed, harassment, arbitrary arrest and general intimidation of journalists remains common.

In a statement issued on May 3, World Press Freedom Day, the Zimbabwe chapter of the press watchdog Media Institute of South Africa deplored repressive legislation constraining journalists.

These include the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, which prevents media organisations from hiring unaccredited journalists; the Public Order and Security Act which has been widely used to prosecute critics of the president, his government and policies; and the Broadcasting Services Act, which sets such complex requirements for registering broadcast media that the government-controlled Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation remains the only station on the airwaves.

"These laws are unnecessary and unjustified in a democratic society and should therefore be repealed in line with the principles of the African Charter on Human Rights, Banjul Declaration on the Principles of Freedom of Expression in Africa, [and the] SADC Protocol on Information, Sports and Culture and African Charter on Broadcasting," the statement read.

"The changes to the restricted media space have been cosmetic to say the least," MISA-Zimbabwe chair, Loughty Dube told IPS. "Journalists still face the same harassment and intimidation that was common before the GNU."

In January this year, freelance journalist and IPS contributor Stanley Kwenda fled into exile after a senior police officer allegedly threatened him with death over a story.

A correspondent for the government owned Chronicle working in the border town of Beitbridge, Mashudu Netsianda, was arrested for reporting on police officers fleeing gunfire. In March, a Mexican journalist was arrested in Masvingo gathering footage for a World Cup documentary.

Photo journalist Anderson Manyere has become a regular guest in police holding cells and has been arrested for doing his job at least than three times since the start of the year.

Five journalists from the Standard newspaper have been summoned to appear in court in connection with a story about a land scandal involving prominent businessmen Phillip Chiyangwa and the Minister of local government, Ignatius Chombo.

Radio journalist and documentary maker Zenzele Ndebele has also been threatened for his documentary on the "Gukurahundi" atrocities committed by Zimbabwean security services in Matabeleland in the early 1980s.

"Press freedom in Zimbabwe is guaranteed by whoever is in power and that is clear in the manner journalists have to constantly watch their backs each time they write a story or make a broadcast," said Ndebele.

"Radio Dialogue has been waiting for 10 years for a community radio broadcasting licence and we cannot fully operate as a radio station," he said.

The announcement by the Zimbabwe Media Commission at the end of April of greatly reduced fees for media registration and calling for media houses and journalists to renew their registration by Jun. 4 has been welcomed by journalists as a small sign of change.

"A free and unfettered media plays a critical role in advancing citizens' universal right to access to information held by both public and private bodies," said MISA-Zimbabwe in its statement, "and is a panacea to socio-economic development, accountable governance and political stability."

Human Rights Watch, which published a critical report on failure on the Zimbabwean government's failure to protect press freedom in April, warns that credible elections - which President Robert Mugabe has suggested will take place in 2011 - cannot be held in the absence of a free media.

Politics

US Senators Push for Greater Flexibility on Zimbabwe Sanctions

(Voice of America)

04 May 2010

Three U.S. senators have introduced a bill to bring a more flexible approach to sanctions against Zimbabwe. Africa Action Executive Director Gerald LeMelle says the Zimbabwe Transition to Democracy and Economic Recovery Act (DEERA), sponsored by Senators Russ Feingold (D-Wisconsin), Johnny Isakson (R-Georgia), and John Kerry (D-Massachusetts), is needed to counter the excesses of what he calls Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe's lifelong, hardened critics.

"There are very powerful interests who have never liked Robert Mugabe, and this is an obsession to the point where they want to defeat or ignore anything that may benefit Zimbabwe if it means that Zimbabwe will be seen in a successful light," he said.

The Senate bill was introduced one day before African leaders begin meeting in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania at the 20th World Economic Forum on Africa. With this year's theme of the Geneva-based organization focusing on "Rethinking Africa's Growth," investors are expected to engage President Mugabe, Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai, and Indigenization Minister Saviour Kasukuwere on Mr. Mugabe's plan to transfer majority control of large firms to black indigenous investors.

Gerald LeMelle said a U.S. revision of a 2001 sanctions law approved by former President George W. Bush, the Zimbabwe Economic and Democracy Recovery Act (ZEDERA), is warranted because the tough penalties imposed by President Mugabe's foreign opponents have inflicted hardships on the country. He said they are counterproductive to the goals of promoting democracy and relieving enormous economic strains endured by the general population.

"That's the kind of attitude that helps contribute to the poverty and the failed states and all of the problems that we see in the national security state we are in right now. We at Africa Action have spent an enormous amount of time and energy trying to educate people as to what is really going on. The key is whether the power of the forces who have a deep-seated hatred for Mugabe are going to win," argued LeMelle.

By pursuing a U.S. policy that helps rehabilitate the fledgling unity government by helping poor and middle-class citizens make an economic recovery, LeMelle said Washington's new legislation is adapting to the new realities of Zimbabwe's transformation that will help pave the way for more representative government under a new constitution. In any case, he notes, Mugabe allies have demonstrated the futility of pursuing a stringent sanctions policy by their skills at evading many of the restrictions.

“The DEERA does continue with the targeted sanctions on Mugabe and his closest people. It gives us a little more flexibility in constantly monitoring who on his team we are actually targeting the sanctions towards and how that is being monitored. In the past, several people around President Mugabe have been able to get around sanctions,” he noted.

Provisions of the new Senate bill include providing technical assistance to reformist government ministries, the promotion of agricultural development with policies consistent with reestablishing the security of land tenure, and curbing illegal diamond activities by pushing for Zimbabwe’s suspension from the Kimberley Process. The legislation also seeks regional and international cooperation in preparing for future elections whose conduct can avoid a resort to violence and other abuses.

Another provision, which Gerald LeMelle’s Africa Action advocacy group pushed for would encourage the start of deliberations on the restructuring, rescheduling, and perhaps even the cancellation of Harare’s debt to international and private financial institutions.

Madagascar's leader hints at 'neutral' government

(IRIN)

03 May 2010

ANTANANARIVO, May 3 (Reuters) - Madagascar's leader said on Monday he could form a politically "neutral" government after last-ditch power-sharing talks failed over the weekend, and said he expected to retain the military's support.

President Andry Rajoelina has been at the centre of a bitter leadership battle since he overthrew former leader Marc Ravalomanana with the help of dissident troops in March 2009 following weeks of violent protests.

Last month, the military gave Africa's youngest leader until the end of April to find a solution after the African Union slapped sanctions on Rajoelina and more than 100 of his allies.

"We have decided -... when politicians can't get on with one another, directing government affairs and the main political institutions must be left to neutral personalities," he told reporters in the capital Antananarivo.

He gave no details but there has been speculation that the new government could be an all-inclusive entity representing technocrats, civil society as well as the armed forces.

Under the old constitution, Rajoelina, 35, would be too young to lead Madagascar, where foreign investment had skyrocketed as companies like Rio Tinto <RIO.L> and Sherritt International <S.TO> moved in to tap oil and mineral deposits.

But the political turmoil has hammered the island's tourism sector and analysts expect foreign investment to slow sharply.

Rajoelina did not say if he would sack his prime minister, a senior military officer, but declared the time for talks was over. He said however he was open to proposals from his rivals.

Hours after laying out his roadmap to ending the more than 14-month crisis on the Indian Ocean island before the military top-brass, Rajoelina said: "I believe we are on the same wave length as the armed forces."

"We have to move forward, we must build the Fourth Republic. The transition must end this year," Rajoelina said. A final decision on how to take the former French colony forward would be made within 48 hours, he said.

There was no immediate comment from opposition or military leaders. Last week, Rajoelina, Ravalomanana and former Presidents Didier Ratsiraka and Albert Zafy attended three days of talks in Pretoria, organised by mediators from France, South Africa and the South African Development Community.

SADC mediator and former Mozambican President Joaquim Chissano said the sticking points at the negotiations were the timing of elections and an amnesty for alleged crimes during the run-up to Ravalomanana's downfall.

International mediators brokered a string of deals last year that paved the way for a unity government, only for them to collapse on Rajoelina's return to the island. Rajoelina said he would "take measures" against anyone trying to obstruct the path to elections on the world's fourth largest island. Foreign donors have warned that unilaterally organised elections would lack legitimacy and transparency.

Economy & Energy

Five leaders invited to join G20 at Toronto summit

(Reuters)

08 May 2010

TORONTO (Reuters) - The leaders of Ethiopia, Malawi, the Netherlands, Spain and Vietnam have been invited to attend the G20 summit in Toronto next month, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper said on Saturday.

The five will join leaders of the permanent members of the Group of 20 industrialized and developing countries at the June 26-27 summit.

Canada, as host of the summit, announced the special invitees in a statement issued while Harper was traveling in Europe to consult with leaders about the G20 agenda.

The G20 meeting will follow a June 25-26 summit of the Group of Eight leading industrialized countries to be held in Muskoka, Ontario, north of Toronto.

S. Africa's stocks tumble, rand recoups big losses

(Reuters)

08 May 2010

JOHANNESBURG (Reuters) - South African stocks booked their biggest one-day fall in almost 13 months as panicked investors dumped everything from banks to resource firms on concern about the fall-out from Greece's debt crisis.

Government bonds succumbed to global fears over sovereign debt but the rand bucked the trend, rebounding from a late Thursday plunge that sent it to a six-month low against the dollar, a move that had been seen as overdone.

Only one of Johannesburg's 40 blue-chip stocks managed to finish the session in positive territory. Financial firms such as Old Mutual Plc and Standard Bank were among the hardest hit as investors worried that Greek debt problems could spark another credit meltdown in Europe.

"People are bailing," said Garth Mackenzie, a trader at Imara SP Reid. "They're so unsure about what the extent of this euro zone debt situation is going to be. It's pandemonium."

The blue-chip Top-40 index dropped 3.76 percent, to 23,598.02, its biggest one-day fall since late April 2009. The index lost 7.9 percent this week, its worst weekly performance since December 2008.

The All-Share index slid 3.6 percent to 26,515.07.

Insurer Old Mutual dropped 7.8 percent to 12.65 rand, while Standard Bank, South Africa's largest bank by assets, fell 6.3 percent to 104 rand.

Traders said concerns about overseas markets hit sentiment, especially late in the day as eyes turned toward Wall Street.

"The whole market sentiment has turned pretty foul here," said Ferdi Heyneke, a portfolio manager at Afrifocus Securities.

The rand was trading at 7.64 against the dollar at 1600 GMT, 1.7 percent stronger than its previous close in New York and well off the 7.95 it hit overnight on Thursday.

Traders said the move to a six-month low may have been excessive.

"On a relative basis, it is actually doing quite well," a Johannesburg-based trader said. "It's just contagion, it is not anything South Africa specific."

The euro, the currency of a key South African trading partner that often impacts the rand, remains under pressure on worries about the Greek crisis spreading.

Germany's approval of a 110 billion euro rescue for Greece did little to help euro sentiment. Finance officials from the Group of Seven nations convened a conference call Friday to discuss the Greek situation.

Data showing the U.S. economy added 290,000 jobs last months, more than expected, also helped lift the dollar.

Central bank figures showed South Africa's gold and foreign exchange reserves rose slightly in April, partly on a higher gold price.

Government bonds, particularly shorter-dated paper, continued their two-week slide as investors dumped sovereign debt.

A weaker rand this week -- it is down 4 percent against the dollar despite Friday's gains -- may also have hit bonds by removing lingering chances of a rate cut next week.

The vast majority of economists polled by Reuters this week expects rates on hold.

The yield, which moves inversely to the price, on the 2015 bond was up 12.5 basis points for the session at 8.275 percent, while the 2036 yield was 3.5 basis points higher at 9.055 percent.

On the bourse, shares of MTN Group dropped 2.3 percent to 102.60 rand, hurt by concern the company may not be able to buy assets from Egypt's Orascom Telecom due to opposition from the Algeria government.

MTN's shares hit a 13-month low earlier in the session.

Technical factors signalled that stocks may be ready for a rebound, however. The Top-40's 14-day relative strength index, or RSI, hit 26.7. An RSI of 30 or below is usually seen as a sign of overselling.

The index has also passed through its lower Bollinger band, another sign that it is oversold.

Namibia to go ahead with \$1.1 bln dam with Angola

(Reuters)

07 May 2010

LUANDA (Reuters) - Namibia and Angola are moving ahead with a \$1.1 billion hydropower plant on a river that runs along their common border in a bid to end power disruptions that have plagued their economies for decades.

After a series of delays, the project, which includes a hydropower station and a storage dam in the Kunene river, is expected to be ready by 2017, the head of Namibia's state-utility firm NamPower told Reuters.

"That project is going well. It's a joint venture project between the two governments and 50 percent of the cost is covered by Angola and the other 50 percent by Namibia," said Paulinus Shilamba, on the sidelines of an investment conference in Luanda late on Thursday.

Shilamba said private investors could also be invited to participate in the Baynes Project.

"There are no private parties but I don't exclude the possibility of private companies coming in."

Environmental and feasibility studies of the 400-megawatt (MW) Baynes hydroelectric project should be ready before the end of the year, he said. Both nations will then look for contractors to build the power station.

Marred by delays, the huge dam is seen as a milestone for both African nations in their bid to end power disruptions that have plagued their economies for decades.

Plans to build the dam 15 years ago at the picturesque Epupa falls, about 40 kilometres north of Baynes, were scrapped after protesters raised fears it would threaten the environment and the nomadic Ovahimba community who lived nearby.

But in 2008 both nations agreed to move forward with it.

"Come December, if the business study report is positive we have to start with next phase of the project which is basically financial packaging, design and then writing of the contractors," said Shilamba.

"I'd say by 2013 we start building the project and then in 2017 power will start being generated," he said, adding the cost of the dam was estimated at \$1.1 billion.

Namibia's demand for power is expected to more than triple by 2030 as new mining operations come on stream. The southern African nation produces 10 percent of the world's uranium.

Angola, which rivals Nigeria as Africa's biggest oil producer, relies heavily on hydroelectric power for its energy needs and is investing billions of dollars in rebuilding dams wrecked by a 27-year civil war that ended in 2002.

Only 5 percent of an estimated 18,000 MW of hydroelectric power is being used in Angola, according to officials at Angola's Energy Ministry.

World Cup ticket cash sales running out of steam

(Reuters)

05 May 2010

Initial brisk business when the fifth and final phase of sales opened in South Africa on April 15, sparking long queues, appears to have cooled.

Greg Fredericks, head World Cup local organizing committee CEO Danny Jordaan's office, told Johannesburg city councilors less than 300,000 tickets remained for the June 11-July 11 tournament.

"We are approaching 90 percent ticket sales for the World Cup," he said.

FIFA spokeswoman Delia Fischer confirmed that 230,000 of the allotted 500,000 phase five tickets -- the first to be sold over the counter -- had been sold.

Soccer's world governing body moved to cash sales after widespread criticism that its Internet-based system was too complicated and effectively excluded millions of poor black fans in the host country who do not have access to computers or credit cards.

Supporters initially rushed to buy those seats, with 130,000 tickets sold in the first three days.

Fredericks said matches in Johannesburg -- which will host the opening and final matches -- and Pretoria were sold out but there were still many tickets available for matches in Polokwane, Port Elizabeth and Nelspruit.

He also said the government would soon release a transportation timetable for planes, buses and other public transport for the month-long soccer spectacular.

FEATURE-Zimbabwe slowly returning to normality

(IRIN)

04 May 2010

HARARE, May 4 (Reuters) - The hordes of black-market currency traders in Zimbabwe's capital Harare have gone out of business.

Just over a year ago, Zimbabwe had the world's worst modern-day hyperinflation and the national currency was worthless.

Streets in central Harare were lined with black-market traders exchanging huge wads of Zimbabwean dollars for U.S. dollars or South Africa rand.

One trader, who did so well illegally dealing in foreign exchange he could afford to take a second wife, has taken up his old job as a taxi driver.

"Life has become so difficult and there is no meaningful business to sustain my life. In the past, no matter how difficult it was, you could always get some money, but not now. Raising a dollar has become hard labour," said Derick Chiwapura who traded foreign exchange at a Harare shopping mall.

Today, shops in the capital are fully stocked with goods which anyone can buy as long as they pay in U.S. dollars. Zimbabwe's government allowed the use of multiple currencies in early 2009, effectively making the dollar the official currency.

Harare's streets are markedly cleaner than they were six months ago, grocery shops have sprung up all over the capital -- offering goods at prices comparable to neighbouring South Africa -- and there are more new vehicles on the roads.

But much-needed investment from abroad remains absent and the country's stock exchange has seen foreign investors retreat after the introduction of regulations calling for foreign-owned companies to transfer a majority stake to Zimbabweans.

Zimbabwe moved to implement the Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Act that requires foreign firms to sell a 51 percent stake to local blacks at the end of January.

"The foreigners are sniffing around. You can see that from the full hotels but nothing will happen until the economy picks up," said one banker in Harare.

BILLIONS NEEDED

Zimbabwe's power-sharing government, set up by President Robert Mugabe and his rival Morgan Tsvangirai, now the country's prime minister, has estimated around \$10 billion is needed to repair the economy.

Foreign investors are also reluctant to pledge funds without faster political reform. Mugabe's ZANU-PF party and Tsvangirai's MDC continue to bicker over the pace of reforms and appointments of senior state officials.

One area where change is yet to happen is the country's state media. State-owned Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation recently ran Mugabe's speech on the occasion of the country's 30th independence anniversary as the main news item -- for four days in a row.

And every reference to him on state television is prefixed with: "His Excellency, The President, Head of Government and Commander-in-chief of the Zimbabwe Defence Force".

Bankers and the country's stock exchange say the economy can only recover if there is significant foreign investment but the controversial empowerment regulations have spooked investors.

"We are hearing that the regulations are going to be reviewed but the unfortunate thing is, investors don't wait for you. They will go elsewhere," said Zimbabwe Stock Exchange Chief Executive Officer Emmanuel Munyukwi.

At the height of Zimbabwe's economic crisis in 2008, the ZSE experienced a boom as many Zimbabweans saw the exchange as their only hedge against runaway inflation.

Munyukwi said this was a nightmare for the exchange. "When you start seeing vendors in the street playing the stock market, you know something is wrong. We were seeing guys selling bananas in the stock market foyer checking stock prices".

For many Zimbabweans, not much has changed in the past year. Unemployment remains above 80 percent, state employees are paid no more than \$150 a month and electricity cuts occur daily.

"Don't worry gentlemen, we will start the generator and set you up quickly," a Harare restaurant owner told a group of customers who arrived during a power cut.

Human Rights, Social Issues & Developments

South Africa offered one million rand per World Cup goal

(Reuters)

05 May 2010

"We want our team to play with pride and passion, we want to inspire them," Football Association chief executive officer Leslie Sedibe told South African television Wednesday.

Sedibe, though, said the FA still had to conclude negotiations over a general payment and bonus structure for the finals.

He plans talks with a six-man players' committee headed by captain Aaron Mokoena before finalizing details by May 31.

"It won't be a blank check," said Sedibe.

The issue of player payments is traditionally contentious in South Africa where there have often been threatened strikes by squad members not happy with monies offered.

South Africa average just over 1.1 goals per game in 250 internationals since returning to world competition in 1992. They have netted just 32 times in 34 matches in the last two years.

AFRICA: MPs push for continent-wide FGM/C ban

(IRIN)

5 May 2010

DAKAR, 5 May 2010 (IRIN) - Parliamentarians from all over Africa are pushing for a continent-wide ban on female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) and are calling on the UN to pass a General Assembly resolution appealing for a global FGM/C ban, as it violates human rights, they say.

Some 17 African states have banned FGM/C, among them Burkina Faso, Togo, Senegal and Uganda.

Members of parliament (MPs) from African nations met in Dakar 3-4 May to exchange lessons learned and actions to take to achieve the ban and resolution. While national human rights laws, and regional treaties such as the 2003 Africa Union Maputo Declaration refer directly or indirectly to FGM/C, separate laws must be passed to address it head-on, said delegates.

Morissanda Kouyaté, representative of the NGO Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices, told delegates: “There is a lot of disparity here. Some countries have passed laws, others have none; and some have laws that are not applied.”

Some governments are fully engaged and ready for change, but others, like Sierra Leone, which has high prevalence rates, will take years to shift, said Chris Baryomunsi, an MP from Kanungu in western Uganda.

Decades, not years

Ugandan MP Baryomunsi told IRIN governments should not under-estimate how long it takes to change people’s minds on FGM/C: in Uganda it took two decades to get communities on board, he said.

“People have to want the law, otherwise you can’t enforce it,” he told IRIN.

Uganda passed a law banning FGM/C on 17 March 2010. Baryomunsi has been advocating change since 1990, in what was then a tough climate with several local authorities trying to pass laws to make FGM/C mandatory.

Over many years their views shifted and several of them switched sides to become strong advocates for a nationwide ban, he said.

“Then MPs who wanted to ban FGM/C were voted out of parliament, but now it’s the reverse.”

Senegal and Togo which banned FGM/C in 1999 and 1998 respectively, were some of the earliest African countries to do so. They have seen what works and what does not, and shared their lessons with others.

N'Deye Soukeye Gueye, head of the Ministry of the Family and advocate of the FGM/C ban in Senegal, told IRIN getting the head of state involved was vital to win over powerful religious leaders.

Advocacy to bring them on board continued before, during and after legislation, she stressed. "Passing the law is just the middle step in a much longer process."

Of 5,000 Senegalese villages targeted by the two national NGOs Tostan and COSEPRAT, 71 percent had abandoned the practice by 2005, according to a government evaluation.

NGOs and UN agencies are instrumental in changing people's attitudes to FGM/C, but ultimately the government has to lead the fight, agreed Baryomunsi. "Many countries leave the struggle to NGOs and UN agencies - but it is governments who sign treaties and enforce the law, and they must lead," he told IRIN.

The Ugandan government puts US\$50 million a year towards implementing the ban, with the UN Population Fund and other agencies providing significant supplementary funds "to make the law bite", he said.

International legislation needed

However, no matter how strong national legislation is, if neighbouring countries do not also pass a ban, people will simply cross borders to undergo the procedure, Togo MP Christine Mensah Atoemne, told IRIN.

In Togo girls travel to Benin, Ghana and Burkina Faso to undergo FGM/C, she pointed out. "We have to develop cross-border strategies to eradicate the phenomenon," she said, adding that FGM/C rates are 6 percent in central Togo and 15 percent in border areas.

In Senegal rates are highest in Podor and Matam on the Mauritania border, and Tambacounda in the eastern-central part of the country, according to Gueye.

Meanwhile, in Dakar delegates put the final touches to the draft resolution they plan to push at the UN General Assembly and pass this year, as well as a list of actions for African heads of state to take to ban the practice when they meet for the African Union summit in Kampala, Uganda, in July.

"We think a GA [General Assembly] resolution will be passed," said Gueye, "There is unanimity in this room. It is ambitious but we need to think on a grand scale."

Shakira World Cup Song Sparks Controversy

(Voice of America)

05 May 2010

International Latin super star Shakira has set off a controversy in South Africa over the official World Cup song. Many have expressed disappointment that a non-South African artist was chosen to record the song, though others do not seem to mind.

The new song is called "Waka Waka," meaning "This Time for Africa" It was unveiled on radio stations a few days ago and immediately produced mixed feelings in South Africa, the host country for this year's World Cup. It is supposed to be the official song for the 2010 event, but according to talk radio host (Talk Radio 702) Jenny Crwys-Williams, many have called in to voice their disappointment.

"I love it that South Africans are just coming together as South Africans and saying 'Damn it, we've got our own people and it's an African World Cup, it's ours, it belongs to us' so why don't we use some of the magnificent talent that we've actually got? That's my reading of the calls we got," Crwys-Williams explained.

On the streets of Johannesburg, reactions have been mixed. Some strongly disapprove.

"It sucks. 'Waka Waka?' Shakira must not even come through and sing that song. I am serious. She must not. It sucks," said Lindi Munonde.

Nomaswazi Thomo agrees. "Yeah, it has to be South African," she said. "I mean, we've got so many talented South African singers who can actually pull it off. And really, I mean, how is Shakira going to sing the African part of it?"

Others say the World Cup is not just about South Africa, it's about South Africa hosting it and bringing it to the world.

Sechaba Sebusho states, "I don't have a problem with it being sung by a non-South African in the sense that it might be an African World Cup or a South African World Cup, but it is for everyone to enjoy."

Olebogeng Ntsime agrees, "For the fact that it has Freshlyground [band], they are people who originate from South Africa. I think it's ok. Whether it's Shakira or Beyonce, I think it's OK."

Heidi Botes says, "I think what's great about the fact that there are a lot of artists, it unites the world. The soccer World Cup is not just about South Africa, it's about South Africa hosting it and bringing the world."

The song is a collaboration between Shakira and the South African band Freshlyground. It is scheduled to be performed at the World Cup kickoff concert in Soweto on June 10.

S. African police break up extremist bomb plot

(IRIN)

06 May 2010

CAPE TOWN, May 6 (Reuters) - South African police have broken up a plot by white supremacists to plant explosives in black townships, the police minister said on Thursday, just a month after the murder of a prominent white separatist.

Minister Nathi Mthethwa also promised that extremists would not be allowed to disrupt the soccer World Cup, which is due to start in June and expected to draw 300,000 foreign visitors.

Sixteen years after the end of apartheid, Africa's largest economy still struggles to overcome racial divisions, especially in rural communities.

Tensions rose again last month when separatist leader Eugene Terre'blanche was murdered on his farm over an apparent wage dispute with workers. Members of his Afrikaner Resistance Movement initially made threats of revenge that they later retracted. [ID:nLDE6381KO]

"Police swept in a number of areas and some of the people had caches of arms and ammunition, paraphernalia," Mthethwa told reporters about raids last month.

"In Pretoria, for instance, some of the people that were arrested were planning to...go test some of that explosives in any black township," Mthethwa said.

Mthethwa, who declined to provide details of how many people were arrested or their intended targets, said some were believers in a whites-only "volkstaat", or republic.

In 2002, then president Thabo Mbeki blamed extremists for 10 bomb blasts that killed a woman and wounded two others. Nine of the bombs exploded in Soweto, South Africa's biggest black township.

Mthethwa said the extremists were not a threat to the state and there would be no disruptions to the World Cup.

"Nobody will disrupt the World Cup, they won't do that because we are monitoring everything in the country."

South Africa: No band-aid solution for racial problems

(Africa Files)

6 May 2010

Given South Africa's long and bitter history of racial oppression and its continued legacy, it is astonishing that the country is yet to have an open and transparent public discussion about race. In fact the only people who talk publicly about race are the extremists on both ends of the colour line, which in the end does not make rational debate possible; but without it, we cannot cobble together lasting solutions. Neither will we be able to agree on basic elements of policies to redress issues, be it in sport or in the workplace.

Of course, we should not be imprisoned by the past, but we cannot simply argue to let bygones be bygones, or say 'I did not benefit from apartheid', or did not know, as if 1994 was simply Year Zero, when we all started from the same slate in terms of education, property and social capital. Because South Africans do not talk about the past, white South Africans will remain trapped in fear about the future and guilt about the past. Black South Africans will continue to be resentful and angry.

There has been no unequivocal apology for apartheid from former apartheid era leaders such as the former President FW De Klerk. South Africa had a Truth and Reconciliation Commission which dealt with racial abuses during the last three decades of the apartheid, but the process, for all its success to at least lift the lid on apartheid atrocities, was ultimately limited. For example, it only concentrated on gross human rights abuses over a very limited period.

The fact that poverty still runs along racial lines, with blacks mostly poor and whites mostly better-off, is a real obstacle to reconciliation. Racial reconciliation is unlikely to take place, unless it is accompanied with social justice. Although former President Nelson Mandela initiated a far-reaching policy of reconciliation, and former President Thabo Mbeki in a more limited manner also, this has not been accompanied by economic reparations for those who still suffer most from the apartheid legacy of limited education, the repossession of land and property and broken families. The fact that economic inequalities run along racial lines, helps perpetuate racism.

South Africa's economic downturn will increase racial tensions. Naturally, many whites who fall into economic difficulties will be tempted to blame a black-dominated ANC government for being 'against' them. Poorer black South Africans may also be seduced to turn their anger solely on whites in general, rather than seeing it as a combination of the legacy of apartheid inequities and misguided policies by black-dominated democratic governments. Black economic empowerment for the few, as currently practiced, is only likely to increase the wealth gap between a small group of well-off blacks and the majority – and increase the latter's resentment.

What is often under-estimated is that centuries of racism often also have an impact on its recipients. Some blacks often overcompensate for white prejudice. Mbeki often responded in an exaggerated manner to perceived white racism. For example, Mbeki's

adopted his ineffective quiet diplomacy towards Zimbabwe, partly because some South African whites unfairly compared neighbouring Zimbabwe's Zanu PF's disgusting reign to what could happen to whites under the ANC, and mostly focused on the plight of white Zimbabweans. In the end, the very people who suffered the brunt of Mugabe's autocratic rule, black Zimbabweans, suffered even more with Mugabe's continued tyranny, a reign which Mbeki's quiet diplomacy ironically has helped to prolong.

We should not hide behind racial solidarity to support often very undemocratic practices. For example, should the appointment of a black judge be applauded just because he is or she is black, even though they for example act untransformed? A case in point is the fact that in many rape judgements, many black judges' values were as conservative as some of their old-style white colleagues. Many black and white judges and magistrates still astonishingly blame the victims of rapes for being responsible for being raped. Surely, in such these cases, a black magistrate and judge cannot be supported merely on the basis of his or her blackness, even if their judgements are blatantly against the letter of the constitution.

Furthermore, to deal with racism we must also be able to point out when an unskilled or inexperienced black person is put in a position where they are not performing – rather than keep silent, because at least 'he or she is black'. Of course, competence is not a white preserve, either. Black excellence must be acknowledged. When blacks do well, it should not be dismissed as because of their 'political connections', and so on. White instances of incompetence cannot be ignored, either. The poor ultimately pay the price for incompetence, whether it is white or black incompetence.

The American scholar of race, Cornel West, warns against the pitfalls of what he calls a resort to black 'authenticity' politics, whereby everything issue is reduced to 'racial reasoning'. He argues rightly we must 'replace racial reasoning with moral reasoning, to understand the black-freedom struggle not as an affair of skin pigmentation and racial phenotype but rather as a matter of ethical principles and wise politics'.

Shouting 'racism' to sideline rivals, for self-enrichment at the expense of the public good, or to deflect attention from our own wrongdoing is simply wrong – and will only increase racial tension. There appears to be increasing incidents of 'crying wolf' cases of racism, which are clearly for purely opportunistic reasons. White South Africans – for example those who call for the protection of Afrikaans – will have to do this not on the basis of racial exclusivity, but must genuinely include black Afrikaans speakers, and fight for the right of other indigenous languages, such as isiZulu, Venda or Shangaan to be protected too.

Poorer black South Africans bear the brunt of racism, but don't have the power to respond to it. If you are poor and black, it is unlikely that one will know how to access institutions, neither will one have the money to do so, that can help seek redress against racism. But one way to deal with racism is for victims to be able to seek more redress against racial discrimination through courts, watchdog institutions and other formal institutions. This will mean that such institutions must become more accessible and

supportive to the poorest who suffer from racism most – which they are not at the moment.

To breakdown racial stereotypes, there has to be greater integration, whether in clubs, social events or community organisations. Joint action on all levels, whether in government or the school committees, can do much to break down racial misunderstanding. Children will have to be taught in schools about the negative effects of racial discrimination. But adults, especially in the workplace, must also be educated about it. Whites will have to show a deeper understanding for the still very deep legacy of racial discrimination. Blacks will have to understand that whites have legitimate fears.

In the long-term, lifting the economic and skills level of the poorest will be one of the surest ways to boost black confidence – and reconciliation. In the short-term, government must base the criteria for recipients of poverty-alleviation measures on the extent of their poverty, rather than on race. Because the majority of blacks are in absolute poverty, they would naturally be the largest recipients of poverty alleviation measures. As a social justice measure, we must introduce a basic income grant to all families – black or white – that are desperately poor.

Recipients of a basic income could in turn be required to work in the community for a minimum period. Affirmative action must be honestly implemented – in both the public and private sectors, and targeted to advance those who are genuinely poor. It should be suspended in sectors in the economy identified as high-growth areas, those areas critical to service delivery, and where there is a scarcity of skills. We should have a clear timeframe for when the policy should be dropped.

Furthermore, we should abandon black economic empowerment (BEE) as a policy, and reward predominantly white companies for how much they invest in job creation, education, skills transfer, housing, and uplifting the physical and social infrastructure of townships and rural areas; and for supporting the 5 million odd (mostly black) entrepreneurs in the informal sector. But we must also demand the beneficiaries of the current narrow BEE to plough back their political capital in the same way into economic development, and eschew the ‘bling’ culture and conspicuous consumption.

To slay racism, whether from within South Africa or outside, the ANC government must govern better. Finally, to tackle racism effectively demands honesty, courage, social justice and pragmatism. There should be no place for easy stereotyping, generalisations and prejudices – from either blacks or whites.

Food Security & Health Issues

ZIMBABWE: Bad roads lead to malaria outbreak

(IRIN)

3 May 2010

BULAWAYO, 3 May 2010 (IRIN) - Decaying road infrastructure in Binga district, in Zimbabwe's province of Matabeleland North, prevented anti-malaria spraying teams from reaching the area, and is being blamed for an outbreak of the mosquito-borne disease.

Health officials told IRIN that hospitals and clinics in the remote and humid district in the Zambezi valley on the border with Zambia, have recorded 90 percent of the province's malaria cases this year: 4,500 cases in the past four months, resulting in 14 fatalities.

Zimbabwe's economic malaise has put paid to upgrading or maintenance of much of its existing road infrastructure, while rivers in flood have limited the ability of health ministry teams to carry out preventative spraying of dwellings and mosquito breeding grounds, such as stagnant water, particularly in rural areas.

"At one time I spent four hours waiting for the river to subside from a low bridge before we were able to get to the other side," said acting provincial medical director Dr Paul Hazangue after a recent visit to the area.

"We received more malaria cases from Binga largely due to intermittent rains experienced in that district - mosquitoes breed and mature faster in such weather conditions."

Hazangue said the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare had set up malaria management courses for nurses at rural clinics, and had established satellite clinics in the districts of Lupane, Hwange, Tsholotsho and Nkayi.

Distribution of drugs

He hoped the ministry's distribution of medical equipment and drugs to hospitals and remote clinics in Binga would help to contain the outbreak, although bad roads remained an impediment, especially during rains.

The low-lying regions of the Zambezi valley are particularly vulnerable to malaria, and the Zimbabwe Red Cross Society has targeted these areas with distributions of insecticide-treated mosquito nets.

In Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second city, the council has been spraying waterways and residences to control mosquito activity since March. Depending on the size of the dwelling, spraying costs between US\$17 and US\$51; about half the homes in the city's working-class suburbs have been treated.

Zimbabwe allotted \$5.6 million in UN emergency funds to fight measles epidemic

(UN News Service)

5 May 2010

5 May 2010 – Some 5 million children in Zimbabwe will receive urgently needed protection from a growing spread of measles thanks to \$5.6 million from the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF).

Despite an initial vaccination of more than 148,000 children in 23 districts since the beginning of the outbreak in September, the disease has been on the rise with more than 6,200 cumulative cases, including 384 deaths, reported in 57 of the 62 districts across the impoverished southern African country.

“The CERF contribution will allow for urgent programmes to immunize children against this deadly disease,” UN Emergency Relief Coordinator John Holmes said today. “Halting the spread of measles now should avert a number of preventable deaths.”

In conjunction with Zimbabwe’s Health and Child Welfare Ministry, the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and UN World Health Organization (WHO) plan to immunize 95 per cent of children between the ages of six months and 14 years during a 10-day campaign. The two UN agencies will provide further technical assistance in planning, coordinating, implementing and monitoring the measles outbreak response.

Some \$3.5 million in CERF funding will allow UNICEF to provide logistical support to the nationwide campaign, including ensuring that all measles vaccines, and the equipment to keep them cold, are delivered quickly to all 62 districts. CERF funds will also help UNICEF to produce and distribute educational materials ahead of the campaign, to inform the population.

WHO will use \$2.1 million to support critical micro-planning activities and refresher training of some 14,000 people including health workers needed to carry out a campaign of this scale.

In March the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that aid agencies in Zimbabwe were appealing to donors to support a \$378 million appeal launched in December to support humanitarian and early recovery efforts in a country has been plagued by widespread humanitarian suffering in recent years, driven in part by long-running political strife.

At the time the appeal was launched, some 6 million people lacked access to safe water and sanitation due to the erosion of basic services, while livelihoods were threatened by the prolonged economic downturn.

CERF was established in 2006 to make funding for humanitarian emergencies faster and more equitable. Since then, more than 115 Member States and several private sector donors have contributed \$1.9 billion to the Fund, which is managed by OCHA. Humanitarian agencies in Zimbabwe have received \$57.3 million since 2006.

MALAWI: PMTCT battles missing drugs, missing moms

(IRIN)

07 May 2010

LILONGWE, 6 May 2010 (IRIN) - Services to prevent the mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) of HIV are gaining ground in Malawi but the country continues to battle drug shortages and mothers and infants that disappear to follow-up and treatment.

In 2005 only three percent of HIV-positive mothers were using PMTCT services, and mother-to-child transmission of HIV accounted for 30 percent of all new infections nationally [<http://www.plusnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=62687>].

Today, 45 percent of HIV-positive pregnant women are accessing PMTCT services, and paediatric HIV testing and treatment have improved substantially, putting Malawi on track to meet the Millennium Development Goal of reduced infant mortality by 2015, according to a new report by the International Treatment Preparedness Coalition, a support group for people living with HIV and AIDS.

About a year ago the country changed its PMTCT from single-dose nevirapine to combination therapy, which is more effective and also less likely to lead to drug resistance, and issued treatment guidelines that made all HIV-positive infants eligible for antiretroviral (ARV) treatment [http://www.aidstar-one.com/guidelines_use_antiretroviral_therapy_malawi].

"PMTCT has improved in the last two to three years, especially with the decentralisation of services and integration within antenatal services," said Marielle Bemelmans, Head of Mission at Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), the international medical charity, in Thyolo, southern Malawi, an area hit hard by HIV [<http://www.plosone.org/article/info:doi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0010452>].

She said more than 95 percent of pregnant women were opting to test for HIV, and that there were more sites to cater for those who tested positive. In 2007 just four sites offered PMTCT services in Thyolo; three years later there are 32.

Malawi's national HIV prevalence rate is about 12 percent, but this masks large differences in regional infection levels - Thyolo, for example, has an estimated HIV rate of about 21 percent.

Providing ARVs like nevirapine, as part of PMTCT services can lower her baby's chances of being infected by more than 40 percent, according to UNAIDS [<http://www.unaids.org/en/PolicyAndPractice/Prevention/PMTCT/default.asp>].

Changing regimes, needed drugs

In Malawi the difference between a rural clinic and its urban counterpart can be just a 40-minute drive, but that can make all the difference to drug access. At Natenge, about 60km outside the capital, Lilongwe, Kondwani Tambuli, midwife and nurse, was trained on administering combination therapy almost a month ago but still does not have the drugs he needs to put his training into practice.

The country's report to the 2009/10 UN General Assembly's Special Session on HIV/AIDS (UNGASS) showed that drug stock-outs were a major challenge in scaling up PMTCT services. An assessment of 253 PMTCT sites in October 2009 found almost half had no PMTCT drugs.

As of late March, Tambuli was left with no choice but to continue administering less-effective, single-dose therapy. In a country where many women only access antenatal care once and deliver at home, Tambuli often gives the women he sees a the single dose of nevirapine to take with them, and tells them to take it when labour sets in. Although deliveries at the clinic have increased in the last three years, more than 40 percent of women have their babies at home.

Around 93 percent of pregnant women make the first of what should be at least four visits to an antenatal clinic, but Dr Kondwani Ng'oma, a PMTCT and Paediatric HIV Care Specialist for the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), estimated that about a third of them never make the second.

"We advise them to deliver in the hospitals but there are still some that say [no] because they live far from the facility," said Tambuli. Parents sometimes pressure women into using traditional birth attendants, but home birth means that some mothers and infants will not get the ARVs they need to complete PMTCT treatment.

Now you see them, now you don't

In Kawale, a high-density neighbourhood in the capital, the local clinic has rolled out combination therapy as well as physical patient tracking, a key factor in cutting the number of patients who simply disappear and are not followed up, said Elson Bowa, Lilongwe district PMTCT coordinator and clinical officer.

The Baylor International Paediatric AIDS Initiative has sponsored outreach workers on bicycles to find the missing patients, and HIV-positive pregnant women and new mothers are followed up to make sure they access PMTCT services and early infant dried blood spot (DBS) testing.

DBS tests for HIV, which are ideal in resource-constrained settings, allow a blood sample to be collected and dried on filter paper, and then transported from the clinic to the health facility – in this case via motorbike – without refrigeration [www.pathfind.org/site/DocServer/Kenya_EID.pdf?docID=10201]. The health facility must be able to perform the sensitive polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test, which accurately tests HIV-exposed infants for the virus.

The bulk this and other HIV testing in Malawi is carried out by health surveillance assistants (HSAs), or community health workers, which allows Malawi's scarce nurses to perform other duties, including examining patients, post-test counselling and dispensing drugs.

Zephi Kuchona, a community health worker for the Baylor International Paediatric AIDS Initiative, who also does HIV testing, said the combination therapy and measures to track missing moms meant that only about one out of every 50 babies born at the clinic was HIV-positive when DBS tests were conducted at six weeks.

Bicycles and outreach workers for such intensive follow-up were expensive, said HSA McDonald Maleta, who worried that Baylor's funding would one day dry up, leaving health workers like him without the means of reaching new moms and their babies with the treatment they need.

Militancy

Pirates seize Taiwanese fishing vessel off Seychelles

(Reuters)

08 May 2010

NAIROBI (Reuters) - Suspected Somali pirates have seized a Taiwanese fishing vessel off the waters of Seychelles, the second incident off Somalia in two days, a regional maritime body said on Saturday.

Andrew Mwangura of the Kenya-based East African Seafarers' Assistance Programme said that Taiyuan 227 has a crew comprising Chinese, Mozambicans, Kenyan and Taiwanese.

"The Taiwanese fishing vessel with 26 crew is taken, said to be north of Seychelles," Mwangura told Reuters by phone.

Mwangura did not say when exactly the vessel was taken.

Focus Taiwan News Channel reported on its website, citing a Taiwan Ministry of Foreign Affairs statement, that the vessel had lost contact with authorities on Thursday.

Focus Taiwan also reported that the vessel's owner had managed to make contact using a satellite phone and the pirates on board asked for a ransom.

The hijacking of ships near the coast of Somalia, where an Islamist insurgency and general anarchy have helped pirates to flourish, has cost the shipping industry tens of millions of dollars in ransoms for vessels and their crews.

On Friday, Somali pirates seized a Yemeni fishing boat off Yemen's coast, taking its crew of seven fishermen with them.

Seychelles to launch UN-backed courts to combat piracy

(UN News Service)

5 May 2010

5 May 2010 – The remoteness of the Indian Ocean nation of Seychelles has made it a prime target for pirates, and the country is fighting back by setting up a United Nations-supported centre to prosecute piracy.

With naval activity around the Horn of Africa – including Somalia – becoming increasingly secure, pirates are moving south towards Seychelles, attacking ships based in or operating around the archipelago.

The Seychelles' regional centre will be the second of its kind, the first having been established in Kenya, and it will try piracy suspects apprehended by the European Union Naval Force Somalia – Operation (EU NAVFOR).

The country's Government has been working with the new joint Counter-Piracy Programme of the EU and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to ensure that its criminal justice system is ready for such trials.

The scheme aims to assist the police, coastguard, prosecutors, courts and prisons in dealing with the challenges posed by piracy cases.

In March, the trial of 11 pirates arrested by Seychelles' coastguard, with the aid of EU NAVFOR, began, held under a recently-amended provision in the country's criminal code allowing for piracy prosecution under universal jurisdiction. Professional Somali interpreters, provided by the EU and UNODC, are ensuring that the accused can properly take part in their trial.

Also in March, 11 additional alleged pirates were transferred to Seychelles authorities' custody after having been captured by the French Navy off the Somali coast.

The EU and UNODC have established a mentorship programme at the only prison in the country where suspected and convicted pirates are being held.

Last week, the Security Council put forward the possibility of setting up international tribunals to try pirates, as its members called for tougher legislation aimed at prosecuting and jailing suspects caught off the coast of Somalia.

In a unanimously-adopted resolution, the 15-member body appealed to all States “to criminalize piracy under their domestic law and favourably consider the prosecution of suspected, and imprisonment of convicted, pirates apprehended off the coast of Somalia, consistent with applicable international human rights law.”

The Council noted efforts by UNODC and other international organization and donors, including the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS), “to enhance the capacity of the judicial and the corrections systems in Somalia, Kenya, Seychelles and other States in the region.”

Refugees/IDPs & Migration

Botswana: Hard line refugee policy

(Africa Files)

7 May 2010

Were it not for the police men in blue tunics with a Botswana coat of arms patrolling the cordoned off area, most visitors to the Dukwi refugee camp would barely realize that they are in Botswana. The camp, which is synonymous with Botswana’s hard line policy towards refugees, is a grim hovel where those inside have different rights from those outside. Residents can not move out of the camp without an official pass. They are not allowed to work and have been closed out of Botswana antiretroviral treatment programme. They survive on food rations from the United Nations and hand me down clothes from the Lutheran Federation of Churches that keep them from destitution.

As refugees, they have no country to protect them and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) seems well out of his depth: Shana Kaninda, Head of Mission of the UNHCR in Botswana, says, “In terms of the extent of our authority in ensuring states’ compliance with international statutes, we can only remind affected governments, in this case Botswana, of the conventions they have ratified under the auspices of the United Nations General Assembly.” Kaninda is trying to show how far the 1951 Convention on the right of refugees falls short of protecting refugees. He explains that the role of the UNHCR office in Botswana is to support the Government in its work with refugees and facilitate the realization of the three durable solutions recommended by the UNHCR.

These include repatriation to country of origin, integration into the local community and resettlement to a third country. “Only rarely, does it happen that we find ourselves looking out for a country that would accept an asylum seeker, following rejection of their request for recognition as refugees, while we held a divergent view,” added Madoda Nasha, Protection Assistant at the UNHCR. “When Botswana appended its signature to

the convention relating to the status of refugees in Geneva, she expressed reservations with some of the provisions of the convention, and as you would be aware, states have that latitude when signing international agreements or conventions to accept or express reservations in all or some aspects of the conventions,” Kaninda added.

The UNHCR head of Mission pointed out that it was on that basis that Botswana’s decision to keep refugees at Dukwi Camp should be understood. Botswana has lagged behind in updating its Recognition and Control of Refugees’ Act, 1967 to align it with relevant international statutory provisions relating to the protection of asylum seekers and refugees, and asylum seekers in the country are having the worst of it. The 2010 Regional Operations Profile-Southern Africa to acknowledge the challenge thus, “UNHCR's focus in Southern Africa will be on helping governments to uphold asylum and enhance their protection capacities, including by updating existing laws and improving refugee status determination (RSD) and registration procedures.”

Botswana has, however, maintained a hard line, and cites national security as a key factor inhibiting the country from updating existing refugee laws. Botswana’s policy of encampment of refugees, non-mandatory provision of ARV treatment and denial of employment for refugees is informed by the outdated piece of legislation.

The exclusion of refugees from the recently adopted 2010-2015 national strategic plan for HIV and AIDS intervention has been cited as testimony of Botswana’s exclusivist policy regarding alien populations, in particular refugees.

A joint UNHCR-University of Botswana (UB) workshop in June 2009 observed that the composition of the Refugees Advisory Committee (RAC, which is responsible for determining the eligibility of asylum seekers for refugee status (RSD), was not constituted with members appointed for their expertise or specialist knowledge on refugee law. Even the powers conferred upon the Minister by the RAC as the final arbiter in approving or rejecting asylum seekers application for RSD was criticized as likely to compromise deserving applicants, because it is not guided by clear-cut and definite criteria. The RAC currently comprises the District Commissioner in the Francistown area as it encompasses Dukwi Refugee Camp, all the Security Agencies including Directorate of Intelligence and Security Services (DIS) and Immigration Officials as well as person appointed from the public arena.

Augustine Makgonatsotlhe, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Defence, Justice and Security, speaking on behalf of Government in a press briefing after a joint UNHCR-Government sponsored Media training workshop in Francistown this week, justified present refugee policy saying that it was premised on existing conditions at the time of ratifying the 1951 convention. “It was both in the interest of national security and for the protection of the refugees themselves that Government opted to control refugee movement by way of encampment, although by all means they are assisted in every possible way to live a normal human life,” explained Makgonatsotlhe.

He explained that Government was in constant contact with the UNHCR with a view to determining how best to improve on existing measures, adding that his government was constrained by resources and can not manage the free movement of refugees.

Dikeledi Dingake, Legal Officer at Botswana Network for Ethics and Law on HIV and AIDS expressed the view that Botswana's policy not to provide refugees with ARV was unjustified and inhumane in that it discriminated on the basis of one's nationality, which is being used as a green card to access vital and life saving ARV. "By granting asylum status to an individual as a Government, you are acknowledging that these people are in your country not by choice but they left their country of origin due to circumstances which posed a threat to their lives. In addition, by so doing, Botswana was committing as a country, to protect the right to life so that by denying refugees' access to ARV, not only is Botswana condemning these poor souls to premature and otherwise avoidable death," argued Dingake

She added that some of the refugees have been in Botswana for more than 10 years. Some are living with HIV and are expectant mothers. Their unborn babies cannot be saved by prevention of mother to child treatment. Given that the pandemic knows no nationality, the present refugee policy was slammed for adversely impacting on the potential to deliver on the country's national preventative initiatives as provided for under the national strategic plan's theme of "zero infections by 2016". The southward movement of refugees and asylum-seekers from the Horn of Africa within mixed migratory flows seems to have placed severe strains on national asylum systems, and this has led to the UNHCR to observe that Botswana has adopted strict RSD procedures for asylum seekers coming from beyond its immediate borders.

With only a few weeks left before the world commemorates on June 20th 2010, the International day of the Refugee, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office in Botswana still hasn't succeeded in persuading the country that it has obligations to observe international best practice relating to the status and handling of refugees. As such, in Botswana, for aliens seeking asylum as for those already recognized as refugees, they are like a people with one eye focused on the firmament of the heavens while the other envisions the seemingly improbable prospect of permanent escape from fear, uncertainty and persecution.