WEEKLY POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC HIGHLIGHTS

FRONTLINE AFRICA ADVISORY

17 July 2026

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS WATCH

- On 10 July, the Electoral Commission (IEC) gazetted its updated list of political parties registered between 18 March and 7 July 2026, showing an uptick of 17 parties from the previous gazette;
- On 11 July, Build One South Africa (BOSA) announced Nongelo Chiume as its mayoral candidate for the City of Ekurhuleni;
- On 11 July, The Democratic Alliance (DA) announced Chris Pappas as its mayoral candidate for uMngeni Municipality, where he will seek a second term ;
- ActionSA announced several mayoral candidates for muncipalities in Limpopo which included, Dr Mike Ramothwala for Greater Tzaneen Municipality, Ponani Makhubele for Greater Giyani Municipality, Maripe Mangena for Mopani District Municipality, Reuben Mosila for Greater Letaba Municipality, and Erick Mafanedza for Makhado Local Municipality.

ECONOMIC UPDATES

STATSSA RELEASES MAY MINING DATA

- On 14 July, Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) released its latest Mining Production and Sales report, showing that mining production declined by 5.4% year-on-year in May 2026, reversing the gains recorded in previous months;
- The contraction was largely driven by lower output in iron ore, coal and platinum group metals (PGMs), while seasonally adjusted production fell 5.2% month-on-month;
- Despite weaker production, mineral sales increased by 13.9% year-on-year, supported primarily by strong growth in PGM sales as well as gains in gold and coal;
- However, iron ore sales declined by 37.1%, partially offsetting the overall increase, while seasonally adjusted mineral sales fell 4.4% month-on-month, indicating softer momentum;
- The latest figures point to a divergence between production volumes and export earnings, with elevated commodity prices, particularly for PGMs and gold, continuing to support mining revenues despite lower physical output. Concurrently, declining production across several key commodities reflects persistent operational and logistical constraints facing the sector;
- The data suggest that while the mining sector continues to benefit from favourable international commodity prices, sustained declines in production could weigh on South Africa's economic growth, export performance and fiscal revenues if output fails to recover;
- The release also highlights the sector's continued vulnerability to operational disruptions, underscoring the importance of improving production capacity and infrastructure to sustain the mining industry's contribution to the economy.

DE BEERS PAUSES PRODUCTION

- On 13 July, De Beers announced that it will pause production at its Venetia Mine in Limpopo for two years, as part of a broader business streamlining strategy aimed at reducing costs, strengthening operational resilience and enhancing long-term competitiveness amid continued weakness in the global rough diamond market;
- The company will also rephase capital expenditure on the Venetia underground project while continuing critical infrastructure investments to improve the mine's capacity and efficiency;
- The decision forms part of De Beers' ongoing Origins strategy, under which the company has reduced annual overhead costs by more than US$100 million, divested non-core assets and reprioritised capital expenditure;
- De Beers indicated that, despite signs of recovering consumer demand, particularly in the United States, and declining global rough diamond supply, trading conditions are expected to remain challenging in the near term due to cyclical and structural industry factors;

- De Beers stated that it will engage affected stakeholders in accordance with applicable labour requirements and the company's values, while continuing to support impacted employees and honour its community investment and Social and Labour Plan commitments;
- The company further confirmed that production levels at its other operations will remain unchanged and that its overall production guidance has not been revised;
- The temporary suspension of production at South Africa's largest diamond mine underscores the continuing structural pressures facing the global natural diamond industry;
- While the measure is intended to improve operational efficiency and preserve long-term value, the pause is likely to weigh on South Africa's diamond production and export earnings in the short term, while highlighting the need for continued industry adaptation as global market conditions evolve.

GOVERNMENT UPDATES

RAMAPHOSA UNDERTAKES OFFICIAL WORKING VISIT TO FRANCE

- On 10 July, President Cyril Ramaphosa commenced a three-day official working visit to France, during which the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Ronald Lamola, and his French counterpart signed a Memorandum of Understanding establishing a Joint Ministerial Commission (JMC);
- The agreement elevates the existing South Africa–France Forum for Political Dialogue and institutionalises annual bilateral consultations at the level of foreign ministers;
- During the visit, President Ramaphosa welcomed the approximately R20.7 billion (€1.11 billion) in investment commitments made by 30 French companies at the sixth South Africa Investment Conference in March 2026 and invited further French participation in South Africa's infrastructure programme;
- President Ramaphosa noted that negotiations are under way on several sectoral agreements, including cooperation on transport, the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and mobility;
- South Africa and France also agreed to convene the 13th Defence Strategic Dialogue, which is expected to be held in South Africa in October 2026, to review progress in implementing the existing Memorandum of Understanding on Defence Cooperation;
- In addition to the bilateral programme, President Ramaphosa co-chaired the UNESCO High-Level Steering Committee on Sustainable Development Goal 4, participated in the Transforming Education Summit +4, and presided over the 110th commemoration of the Battle of Delville Wood in Longueval;
- The visit reflected continued efforts by South Africa and France to deepen their strategic partnership through stronger institutional mechanisms and expanded cooperation across political, economic, defence and scientific fields;
- The establishment of the Joint Ministerial Commission provides a structured framework to advance bilateral cooperation and monitor the implementation of agreed priorities, while ongoing negotiations on sector-specific agreements point to the potential for further collaboration in areas of mutual interest.

SA-UN COOPERATION FRAMEWORK

- On 10 July, the Minister in the Presidency for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, Maropene Ramokgopa, and the United Nations Resident Coordinator in South Africa, Nelson Muffuh, signed the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2026–2030 in Pretoria, establishing a five-year partnership to support the implementation of South Africa's National Development Plan: Vision 2030 and the Medium-Term Development Plan (2024–2029) through coordinated assistance from the UN development system;
- The Framework is structured around three strategic priorities: promoting inclusive economic growth, decent work and social inclusion; strengthening accountable governance, human rights, justice and safety; and enhancing resilience through climate action, environmental sustainability and disaster risk reduction. These priorities are aligned with the objectives of the National Development Plan and the Medium-Term Development Plan, reinforcing national development priorities;
- Developed through consultations between the UN, government departments, organised business and labour, civil society, academia and development partners, the Framework commits the UN to supporting South Africa through policy advice, technical expertise, institutional capacity-building, innovation, data and evidence, and resource mobilisation. Implementation will be coordinated through existing national governance mechanisms and jointly led government–UN Results Groups, with Minister Ramokgopa highlighting the Framework's contribution to South Africa's G20 Presidency priorities and ongoing structural reforms under Operation Vulindlela;
- The signing of the Framework provides a structured mechanism for continued cooperation between South Africa and the United Nations over the next five years, strengthening coordination on national development priorities while reinforcing collaboration across government, the UN system and a broad range of domestic stakeholders.

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POLITICAL UPDATES

ZANDILE GUMEDE JOINS MKP

- On 13 July, the uMkhonto weSizwe Party (MKP) announced the appointment of former African National Congress (ANC) member and former eThekwini Mayor Zandile Gumede as the party's Deputy Convenor in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN);
- Gumede was unveiled alongside former eThekwini Head of Durban Tourism Phillip Sithole, former African Transformation Movement provincial chairperson and 11 other new recruits;
- MKP Secretary-General Sibonelo Nomvalo described Gumede as a leader with "unquestionable political credentials", adding that her appointment represents a positive shift for the party in the province;
- Gumede's appointment is likely to strengthen the MKP's organisational capacity and electoral appeal in KwaZulu-Natal, particularly among former ANC supporters, ahead of the 4 November Local Government Elections;
- Reacting to the announcement, ANC Secretary-General Fikile Mbalula downplayed Gumede's decision to join the MKP. However, her victory at the 2022 ANC eThekwini Regional Conference before stepping aside under the ANC's step-aside rule suggests she continues to command a measure of political support within eThekwini;
- The development adds further pressure on the ANC in a province where electoral support has continued to weaken, reinforcing eThekwini's position as one of the most closely contested battlegrounds in the upcoming local government elections.

LEGISLATIVE/REGULATORY UPDATES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE CALLS FOR COMMENTS

- On 10 July, Parliament's Standing Committee on Finance called for public comments on the General Laws (Anti-Money Laundering and Combating Terrorism Financing) Amendment Bill, with submissions closing on 10 August;
- The Bill proposes amendments to several pieces of legislation, including the Nonprofit Organisations Act, the Companies Act and the Financial Sector Regulation Act among others, with the aim of strengthening South Africa's anti-money laundering and combating the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) framework;
- The proposed amendments form part of government's efforts to consolidate reforms following South Africa's removal from the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) grey list and to ensure continued compliance with international AML/CFT standards;
- The amendments will also support South Africa's preparations for future FATF follow-up processes, including the next Mutual Evaluation cycle, by strengthening the country's institutional and legislative framework against financial crime.

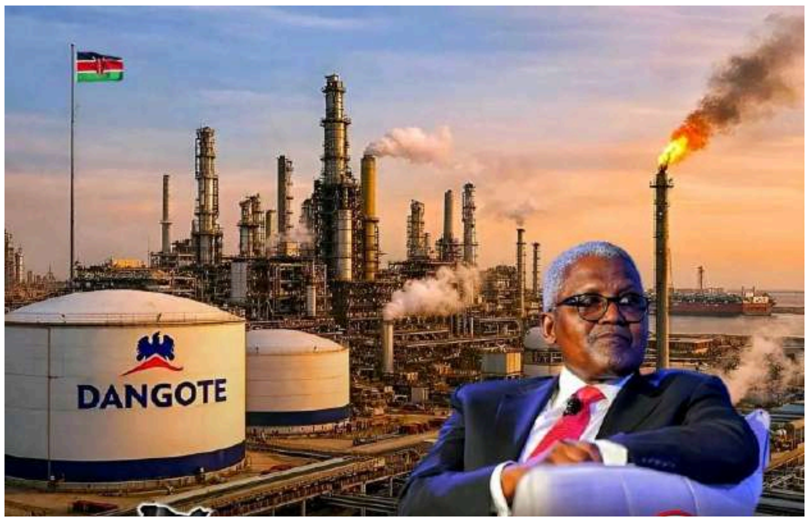
AFRICA WATCH

AU COMMISSION CHAIRPERSON UNDERTAKES OFFICIAL VISIT TO MALI

- On 12 July, the Chairperson of the African Union (AU) Commission, Mahmoud Ali Youssouf, commenced a two-day official visit to Mali, where he met the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Abdoulaye Diop, and Transitional President General Assimi Goïta to discuss peace, security and cooperation between Mali and the AU;
- During the visit, Chairperson Youssouf reaffirmed the AU's commitment to supporting Mali's efforts to address terrorism, humanitarian and development challenges, while reiterating the importance of strengthening national cohesion and returning to constitutional order;
- Youssouf paid tribute to the resilience of the Malian people and commended President Goïta's commitment to fostering good-neighbourly relations and regional cooperation;

- He also visited the offices of the AU Mission for Mali and the Sahel (MISAHEL) in Bamako, the Union's standing presence in the country, where he expressed appreciation to AU High Representative Mamadou Tangara for the Mission's work in the region. President Goïta described the visit as a strong demonstration of the AU's solidarity with the government and people of Mali;
- The engagement did not stand alone. The visit followed a call by the AU Peace and Security Council for strengthened political dialogue with Mali and a credible transition timetable.
- Youssouf then travelled to Burkina Faso, where he was received by senior government leadership on 15-16 July, pointing to a deliberate outreach effort across the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) - the regional bloc formed by Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, which formally withdrew from the Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS) in January 2025;
- The engagements signal that the AU Commission is opting for direct dialogue with the Sahel's military-led governments at a time when ECOWAS's leverage over the region has collapsed following the AES states' withdrawal. The ongoing engagements underscored the Commission's commitment to supporting peace, stability and development in the Sahel through dialogue and cooperation.

DANGOTE INDUSTRIES TO DEVELOP OIL REFINERY IN KENYA



- On 10 July, at the launch of the second phase of the National Youth Opportunities Towards Advancement (NYOTA) programme in Nairobi, Kenyan President William Ruto announced that the planned Lamu oil refinery, to be developed in partnership with Dangote Industries Limited, is expected to create at least 60,000 jobs and position Kenya as a regional energy hub serving Ethiopia, South Sudan, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC);
- The announcement followed Dangote Industries' confirmation that Lamu had been selected as the site for a planned 700,000-barrel-per-day refinery, which will become the company's largest refining project outside Nigeria;
- Site preparation is under way, with construction expected to take approximately 30 months, while the Kenyan Government has established an implementation committee chaired by the Deputy President and earmarked KSh 21.5 billion in seed capital through its new National Infrastructure Fund, with the balance to be raised under a public-private partnership arrangement;
- The project represents one of the largest planned energy investments in East Africa. If implemented as planned, it could reduce regional dependence on imported refined petroleum products while strengthening Kenya's position as a regional energy, logistics and industrial hub.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS UPDATES

UN FORUM REVIEWS SDGS

- On 15 July, the United Nations (UN) High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) concluded its review of progress towards the 2030 Agenda, with in-depth assessments of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and 17 (Partnerships for the Goals);
- According to the Sustainable Development Goals Report 2026, which was launched by theUnited Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs earlier in the month, only 36% of assessable SDG targets are either on track or making moderate progress, highlighting the widening implementation gap ahead of the 2030 deadline;
- The Report further noted that reductions in Official Development Assistance (ODA) by major donors, including the United States, Germany, France and the United Kingdom, are placing additional pressure on global development financing. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development OECD estimates indicate that these four countries account for approximately two-thirds of the projected decline in ODA between 2025 and 2027;

- Despite notable gains since 2015, including the decline in the global unemployment rate to 4.9%, the UN cautioned that progress remains uneven across most development indicators, with many targets unlikely to be achieved by 2030 under current trajectories;
- The findings reinforce expectations that challenges relating to poverty, food security, education and infrastructure development will remain significant medium to long-term risks, particularly for developing economies.

EU STRENGTHENS SANCTIONS ON SUDAN

- On 13 July, the Council of the European Union (EU) strengthened its sanctions regime against Sudan by prohibiting the import of Sudanese gold into the EU and restricting the export of mercury and cyanide to Sudan, citing the role of gold revenues in financing the ongoing conflict;
- The measures build on the EU's sanctions framework adopted in October 2023, which imposed restrictive measures on individuals and entities responsible for undermining Sudan's stability and political transition, with additional listings introduced through January 2026;
- However, the continuation of the conflict highlighted the limitations of targeting individuals and entities alone, with both the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) continuing to generate revenue through extensive commercial networks, particularly in the gold sector, prompting the EU to expand its sanctions to target elements of Sudan's wider war economy;
- The amended measures also include humanitarian exemptions for mercury and cyanide where required for public health, humanitarian assistance and disaster-response activities;
- The sanctions are intended to constrain revenue streams available to both the SAF and the RSF, although their effectiveness will largely depend on enforcement, broader international coordination, and the extent to which external commercial and financial networks linked to the conflict are also disrupted;
- Continued geopolitical competition over Sudan's strategic resources, particularly gold, is likely to complicate efforts to end the conflict, suggesting that financial restrictions alone are unlikely to secure a lasting resolution without complementary diplomatic engagement and broader targeted measures against the conflict's supporting economic networks.

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