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BURUNDI :

RWANDA :

RDC CONGO :

Elections en RDC: sept dirigeants de la majorité jugent "suicidaire" le jeu du pouvoir
Belga/mardi 15 septembre 2015

International

Sept dirigeants de la majorité en République démocratique du Congo (RDC) dénoncent dans une lettre au président Joseph Kabila publiée lundi la "stratégie suicidaire" suivie selon eux par le pouvoir en entretenant la "confusion" sur la "tenue des prochaines élections". "La stratégie actuelle nous paraît suicidaire", écrivent ces responsables de formations politiques alliées au Parti du Peuple pour la Reconstruction et la Démocratie (PPRD) de M. Kabila, qui avaient déjà interpellé le chef de l'État en février par voie épistolaire.

L'évolution politique des dernières semaines a "conduit l'écrasante majorité des Congolais à la

conviction qu'il y a des intentions inavouées de ne pas respecter la Constitution", ajoutent les membres de ce groupe, surnommé G7, dans ce texte publié à la veille de la rentrée parlementaire.

"Quant à la tenue des prochaines élections tant attendues par le Peuple congolais, chaque jour qui passe apporte plus de confusion que de clarté", ajoute la lettre, transmise à l'AFP par le cabinet de l'un de ses auteurs, Gabriel Kyungu wa Kumwanza, chef de l'Union nationale des fédéralistes du Congo (Unafec) et président sortant de l'assemblée provinciale du Katanga (sud-est) avant la scission de la province. L'agence Belga en a également obtenu une copie.

La lettre est signée par des poids lourds de la Majorité présidentielle (MP, soutenant l'action de M. Kabila), dont le vice-président du Mouvement social pour le Renouveau (MSR, le second parti de la coalition gouvernementale après le PPRD), Yves Mobando-Yogo, par Olivier Kamitatu Etsu, président de l'Alliance pour le Renouveau du Congo (ARC) et ministre du Plan, et par le président de l'Union nationale de démocrates fédéralistes (UNADEF), l'ancien ministre de la Défense Charles Mwando Nsimba.

Sa publication intervient alors que le parti d'opposition historique, l'Union pour la Démocratie et le Progrès social (UDPS), eut annoncé dans la nuit de dimanche à lundi avoir rompu ses pourparlers avec le pouvoir destinés à préparer le "dialogue national" proposé par M. Kabila en vue de la tenue d'"élections apaisées".

Dans un communiqué daté de Bruxelles et signé de son président, Étienne Tshisekedi Wa Mulumba, rival malheureux de M. Kabila à la présidentielle de 2011, l'UDPS a appelé "toutes les forces politiques et sociales acquises au changement" à "l'organisation d'un processus électoral crédible", dans un "climat apaisé", et tenant "compte des délais constitutionnels".

Le climat politique est tendu en RDC à l'approche d'un cycle d'élections censé s'ouvrir fin octobre pour mener à la présidentielle de novembre 2016, à laquelle la Constitution interdit à M. Kabila, au pouvoir depuis 2001, de se présenter.

Depuis des mois, l'opposition accuse le chef de l'État de manoeuvrer pour se maintenir au pouvoir au-delà de la fin de son mandat.

Le mécontentement gronde aussi au sein de la majorité depuis le début de l'année, jusqu'au sein même du PPRD, alors que le chef de l'État entretient le doute sur ses intentions et son avenir politique.

Jusqu'à présent, rares sont ceux, au sein de son camp, qui ont osé interpellé M. Kabila aussi ouvertement que le fait le G7 en plaidant pour une "alternance politique" au sein de la majorité.

Entachées d'irrégularités massives, les élections de 2011 sont à l'origine de la crise actuelle. Depuis cette date, aucun des scrutins qui devaient avoir lieu en RDC n'a été organisé.

Pour l'opposition, l'insistance du gouvernement et de la Commission électorale nationale indépendante (Céni) à vouloir tenir avant la présidentielle et les législatives de novembre 2016 des élections locales jamais organisées depuis l'indépendance du pays en 1960 est le signe d'une volonté manifeste de faire "glisser" le calendrier électoral.

"Afin d'épargner" à la RDC "une crise politique inutile [...] aux conséquences imprévisibles", le G7 appelle M. Kabila et la Majorité présidentielle à prendre "des initiatives courageuses".

Pour respecter la lettre et l'esprit de la Constitution, les frondeurs estiment qu'il n'y a pas d'autre

choix aujourd'hui que de reporter les élections locales à une date ultérieure à la présidentielle de novembre 2016 afin de permettre à celle-ci de se tenir dans les temps prescrits.

UGANDA :

SOUTH AFRICA :

Senators press South Africa to get US chicken back on the market
thehill.com/09/14/15

A bipartisan pair of senators is calling on South Africa to move quickly so the U.S. can resume exports of poultry after a 15-year trade dispute.

Sens. Johnny Isakson (R-Ga.) and Chris Coons (D-Del.) are urging South African President Jacob Zuma to fulfill their commitment made in an agreement reached this summer in Paris that will restart the chicken trade.

In a letter to Zuma on Friday, Isakson and Coons point to a number of unresolved issues that are hindering the successful implementation of the Paris deal.

"Our understanding is that there are two processes that need to be completed in South Africa to implement the Paris agreement," the senators wrote.

They said that a rebate system must be created to legally exempt the annual quota amount from antidumping duties and there must be a transparent process for making the rules for determining the quota.

"Without these issues being addressed and in place, U.S. companies cannot ship product, regardless of the other terms of the Paris agreement being reached," the senators wrote.

The agreement ends a 100 percent tariff on U.S. chicken that South Africa implemented in 2000, which essentially shut the U.S. poultry industry out of that market.

Isakson and Coons, who are the co-chairmen of the Senate Chicken Caucus and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, have pressured the South African government for more than a year to end the antidumping duties.

Most recently, the senators secured language in the reauthorization of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) — which President Obama signed in June — requiring the USTR to conduct a review of South Africa's trade practices, specifically antidumping duties on U.S. poultry.

The review is underway, they said.

"You also know that it is crucially important to both of us that there be a successful and expeditious resolution of this issue so that the U.S. poultry industry can begin again to participate in the South African market," they wrote.

Under the current agreement, if not further delayed, U.S. poultry products are expected to enter the South African market before the end of this year.

Sri Lanka to set up a South Africa-style truth and reconciliation commission

Reuters/Tuesday 15 September

South Africa will advise country on the setting up of commission, which follows the release of a long-delayed report into human rights violations during the 26-year long civil war

Sri Lanka's new government said on Monday it was setting up a South Africa-style truth and reconciliation commission to look into atrocities during its civil war, as it came under renewed pressure to prosecute perpetrators.

South Africa, which confronted its own apartheid-era crimes through such a body, would advise the nation on how to use the commission to provide remedy to victims and to track down missing people, the foreign minister, Mangala Samaraweera, said.

He outlined the plan, and other proposals to set up a criminal justice mechanism and compensate victims, to the UN human rights council, hours after the world body announced it would release a long-delayed report on Wednesday calling for accountability for Sri Lankan war crimes.

Successive governments have promised to look into crimes committed by both sides during the 26-year conflict between government forces and separatist Tamil Tiger rebels.

According to an earlier UN report, around 40,000 ethnic minority Tamils were killed in a final offensive ordered by former president Mahinda Rajapaksa in 2009. But world organisations have been frustrated by a string of failed plans and a lack of criminal indictments.

Samaraweera said the government planned an independent and credible commission for truth, justice, reconciliation and non-recurrence.

"The reputation of the vast majority of armed forces was tarnished because of the system and culture created by a few people in positions of responsibility," he said, without elaborating.

Rights groups say Sri Lanka has failed to address continuing incidents of torture by the police and military against minority Tamils, whose leaders call for an international investigation.

"We will judge the government by the actions they take, not the promises they make," Fred Carver, director of the Sri Lanka Campaign, told Reuters on Monday.

Human Rights Watch urged the council to set out concrete benchmarks for an effective justice and accountability mechanism, including a majority of international judges in an independent system and an independent international prosecutor.

"The families of Sri Lanka's dead and disappeared have waited years and in some cases decades for justice. This council must not fail them," said John Fisher of the New York-based group.

Within the commission, leaders from the island's main religions would form a "compassionate council" to help victims "discover the truth, understand what happened and help remedy any sense of injustice", Samaraweera said.

The United Nations was meant to release its report on Sri Lanka in March, but agreed to hold off for six months to let the new government look into why suspects had not been prosecuted.

President Maithripala Sirisena, who defeated Rajapaksa's bid for a third term in January, has made tentative steps towards reconciliation at the head of a broad reform coalition.

The UN high commissioner for human rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al-Hussein, praised the government's efforts but said it was time to publish the report whose findings were "of the most serious nature".

TANZANIA :

Kenyan albino attacked as Tanzania elections approach

AFP / 15.9.2015

Attackers in Kenya tried to hack off body parts from a man with albinism to sell for witchcraft, reports said yesterday, increasing fears of cross-border attacks from neighbouring Tanzania.

"Three people stormed my house and demanded money," 56-year old Enock Jamenya, from Kenya's western Vihiga district, told the Daily Nation newspaper.

"When I told them I had no money, they asked for ear or hand to sell in Tanzania." The attackers sliced his ear, arm, neck and fingers, the newspaper reported, but then were apparently disturbed and fled, leaving Jamenya wounded and unconscious. "One of his sons came in the morning to check on him, he found him lying in a pool of blood," his brother Nixon Muhole told The Standard newspaper.

In Tanzania, some politicians have been accused of buying albino body parts for witchcraft and lucky charms. Rights groups have warned of the risk of a rise in attacks against albinos in Tanzania amid campaigning for general and presidential elections on October 25.

Kenyan lawmaker Isaac Mwaura, who has albinism, has repeatedly warned that gangs have carried attacks in Kenya for the trade in Tanzania. At least 76 albinos in Tanzania have been murdered since 2000, with their dismembered body parts selling for around \$600 (R8 208) and entire bodies fetching \$75 000, according to United Nations experts.

Dozens more have survived having parts of their bodies hacked off. Albino rights groups said they feared attackers could target Kenya after Tanzania's government made strong public statements vowing to stem the practice. "We want the government to take a decisive decision on this issue, because it is a threat to our lives," Martin Wanyonyi, from the Albinism Empowerment Network group, told The Standard.

KENYA :

ANGOLA :

Africa: Angola Worried About International Terrorism

14 September 2015/Angola Press Agency (Luanda)

Luanda — The spread of international terrorism that reached Africa with stress to the countries like Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad is a concern for Angolan authorities, said Monday in Luanda the Defence minister, João Lourenço.

The Angolan official expressed the concern at the opening of official talks between the delegations of Angola and Italy, the latter led by her country's defence minister, Roberta Pinotti.

The Italian delegation has been in Luanda since Sunday for a three-day visit to Angola, as part of strengthening of bilateral relations.

"To this reason, Angola, supported by the international community, amongst Italy, will arrange next month an international conference on Maritime Security in Golf of Guinea", said João Lourenço, who hopes that every one can contribute to ensure security in the sea and the Golf of Guinea region.

The minister recalled that Angola, an independent country since 11 November, 1975, has experienced a situation of conflict until 2002.

Now, he stressed, the country is committed to the consolidation of its democracy as well as economic and social development.

As for the investment, the minister said that this requires to ensure safety and stability in the country. Angola has been making effort over the last years despite financial constraints amid the fall in the prices of the oil at international market.

According to him, Angola that chairs the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) has been working on solution of peace in the region, where the situation in the countries like those of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Central African Republic (CAR) and Burundi is still a cause for concern.

Expressing the country's optimism, the minister said that with the engagement of the international community, the peace will be achieved in this troubled region of the African continent.

AU/AFRICA :

Osinbajo Calls for Closer Ties Between AU And Recs

15 Sep 2015/thisdaylive.com

Jaiyeola Andrews in Abuja

Vice-President Yemi Osinbajo monday said if the African Union (AU) must deliver on the goals set out in the Constitutive Act, closer cooperation and synergy must be established with Regional Economic Communities (RECs).

According to him, it is one requirement that is absolutely imperative.

Osinbajo noted that Nigeria had always advocated for the proper conception and implementation of closer cooperation and collaboration between the AU and the RECs.

“With about the most successful example of regional cooperation in ECOWAS, we have always believed that the position of the RECs as the basis of our future development is long assured and no chance should be missed to further strengthen it.

“The Abuja retreat is timely as it is being convened in a season of conflicts on the continent. Today on an embarrassingly regular basis there is a fresh conflict situation, or a re-lapse of post-conflict situations.

“At the same time terrorism and violent extremism present fresh problems, including large numbers of IDPs and refugees going across the borders of neighboring countries.

“The sheer variety and complexity of these challenges oblige the the PSC and the RECs to more effectively coordinate and harmonise their efforts in a complementary manner in order to address them more effectively,” the vice-president said.

Osinbajo spoke at the opening of the African Union Peace and Security Retreat held at the Sheraton Hotel, Abuja.

He added that the retreat was important because of its theme which addresses strengthening cooperation between the council and RECs in the promotion of peace, security and stability in Africa.

The vice-president added that PSC had come a long way since its operationalisation in 2004 in providing Africa with an effective mechanism for the management of peace and security issues.

“Indeed, the PSC has been a novel African initiative in many respects, one that has proven an effective tool in conflict management.

“The achievements of the council in its 11 years of existence have set it out as an outstanding best practice, worthy of emulation by other regions in the world.

‘I congratulate you Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of the council for this remarkable African achievement.

“The PSC has among other achievements, provided Africa with a standing structure for the implementation of the ideals set out in the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA).

“In this respect, the council has been our union’s lead response agency in tackling numerous conflicts and other security challenges in all respects, ranging from political crisis, armed conflicts to humanitarian crisis as exemplified in the council’s handling of the recent Ebola Virus Disease in some of our countries through the establishment of the African Union’s Support to Ebola Outbreak in West Africa known as (ASE-OWA).

“As we would recall, the Regional Economic Communities are conceived to be the pillars of our continental integration as provided in the Constitutive Act of the AU.

“The envisaged relationship between the AU and the RECs covers all aspect of the activities of the Union including Peace and Security.

“Thus while the PSC as an organ of the union exercises continental oversight on all issues of peace and security in respective member-states, it is the RECs that often exercise initial management responsibilities on all crisis whenever they occur.

“Thus, the importance of the two having stronger coordination and synergy of functions can never be overemphasised.

“In wishing you every success in these collective efforts for peace and security in Africa, I would like to remind you that attention should be focused on how the PSC and the RECs can enhance effectiveness and efficiency using their comparative advantages and various capacities within the context of subsidiarity and complementarity in the areas of early warning and early action, conflict prevention, peacemaking, post-conflict peace-building, reconstruction and development, strengthening of democratic practices and good governance, as well as in combating terrorism and violent extremism.

“It is if and when all of these are comprehensively addressed that all the weak linkages and gaps that often pose the risk of parallel initiatives will be eliminated thereby achieving our delineated objectives under APSA,” the vice-president stressed.

Former President Olusegun Obasanjo who was represented at the event by Gen. Martins Luther Agwai (rtd), challenge AU to be proactive in the challenges facing the African continent.

Obasanjo observed that countries with high rate of poverty and low level of education, are brewing ground for extremism.

He therefore called for collective efforts and more funding in addressing insecurity in the continent. Also, former Chairman, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Prof. Attahiru Jega said Africa needed good governance to ensure peace and security. According to him, to ensure this, there must be free, fair and peaceful elections.

He noted that the 2015 elections in Nigeria was peaceful, in spite of challenges. Jega thanked AU for its supportive roles in the success of the 2015 elections in Nigeria.

In his remarks, Chairman of the opening ceremony, Ambassador Ibrahim Gambari charged Africans to take their security and economic challenges in their hands.

He said the retreat was timely, because African continent had been facing challenges.

UN/AFRICA :

US/AFRICA :

CANADA/AFRICA :

AUSTRALIA/AFRICA :

EU/AFRICA :

EU asylum talks end in weak compromise

euobserver.com/15/09/2015

Ministers in Brussels on Monday (14 September) failed to reach a unanimous decision on whether to back a European Commission plan to relocate 120,000 asylum seekers.

Instead they opted for a weakened political agreement following stern opposition from Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Romania.

An EU source said Poland was lukewarm. Latvia, which did not send a minister to the round table meeting, is also said to be against.

“We were hoping for something stronger”, said the source.

Luxembourg's foreign minister Jean Asselborn, who presided the meeting, told reporters, “not everyone is on board.”

'Willingness'

To add to the confusion, the Luxembourg EU presidency conclusion states “all member states confirm their willingness to participate” in the relocation scheme.

A second EU source said the French had convinced others that “willingness” is the equivalent to “voluntary”.

The source said the statement was not misleading because it is a EU presidency conclusion, which carries much less weight than standard Council conclusions.

The weakened pact follows the drowning deaths of some 15 children and babies off the Greek island of Farmakonisi on Sunday.

But Asselborn said it was “too early for a decision to be taken today” on how to help the thousands of people risking their lives to enter the EU.

He said the Commission's plan is “a basis for an agreement” to be adopted in October.

“Procedures must be respected”, he added.

The next step is to start discussions at the working group level in the Council, representing member states.

The plan is to have the details sorted so a formal decision can be made at a justice and home affairs meeting in Luxembourg on 8 October.

But another meeting of ministers may be called before the end of the month following a flurry of moves to clamp down on borders by a handful of member states.

Majority

Germany on Sunday imposed border controls with Austria, sparking similar moves by Austria, Slovakia, and Poland. The Netherlands said it would not follow Germany's lead but would step up border police checks.

"This council allowed to make progress, a qualified majority emerged on the main principles that we wanted to apply," French interior minister Bernard Cazeneuve said after the meeting.

But EU officials are hoping to avoid a qualified majority vote to push the commission relocation proposal through the deadlock. Forcing a member state to accept people it does not want could create a host of other problems, noted one EU official.

Meanwhile, they adopted an initial commission plan to relocate 40,000 from Greece and Italy over a two-year period. Ministers in July came up short with around 32,000 but agreed to fulfill the remainder pledges before the end of the year.

The long debate on relocation was underpinned by other agreements to toughen external border controls and set in motion a stronger return policy to expel anyone with no rights to reside in the EU.

"We need to make sure our external borders are better protected", said EU commission vice-president Frans Timmermans.

Camps

Special centres to quarantine new arrivals will be set up in Greece where people will be fingerprinted, identified, and registered. Anyone who doesn't meet requirements for international protection could be detained until sent home.

The EU border agency, Frontex, will have a more active role in removing people.

The plan also includes setting up a so-called EU country of safe origin list. The list, set to include Western Balkan countries, would allow member states to more quickly dispatch rejected asylum seekers.

Asselborn said Turkey would not be on the list.

They also agreed to step up funding for Syrian refugee camps run by United Nations high commissioner for refugees (UNCHR).

Some 4 million Syrians live in the camps. More than half are in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon. Turkey hosts 1.9 million Syrians and another 24,000 are registered in North Africa.

The extra funding will come from the EU budget and member states.

"The crisis will last as long as our neighbourhood is on fire", said EU commissioner for migration

Dimitris Avramopoulos.

CHINA/AFRICA :

INDIA/AFRICA :

BRAZIL/AFRICA :

BRICS Bloc Faces Cloudy Future

Sept. 15, 2015/usnews.com

The group of emerging economies is unmistakably stalling, thanks in part to China.

Once hailed as the building blocks of global growth, the BRICS nations' economic momentum is now crumbling.

The concerted efforts made by Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa to intertwine their emerging economies are looking like increasingly risky ventures, given the scope of China's economic slowdown. The Asian giant is expected to post its worst annual growth rate in decades this year, and its recent stock volatility and currency devaluations have wreaked havoc on international markets.

For the BRICS countries, exposure to China was a good thing for most of the past two decades, when the country was posting year after year of exceptional economic growth. But the proximity that helped drive group members forward is now dragging them down, with Chinese weakness throwing a wrench into commodity prices and international trade.

"It's a complex global economic situation," Nouriel Roubini, a professor at New York University's Stern School of Business and chairman of consultancy firm Roubini Global Economics, said earlier this month while attending an international economic conference in Italy. "Certainly, China is slowing down. Emerging markets are slowing down. This has led to global financial market volatility – a tightening of financial conditions."

A report released over the weekend by the Bank for International Settlements also found that Brazil and China may soon face "serious banking strains" as credit concerns drag on the two BRICS members. The bank examined economic trends related to countries' debt issuance and concluded that Brazil, China and Turkey have abnormally large credit-to-gross domestic product gaps, meaning credit ratios in the nations' respective private sectors are expanding at an unhealthy clip compared to longer-term trends.

Steep credit-to-GDP gaps are among a group of "early warning indicators for domestic banking crisis," the report said.

"Credit-to-GDP gaps ... were well above 10 percent in Brazil and China," the report said. "In the past, two-thirds of all readings above this threshold were followed by serious banking strains in the subsequent three years."

Bank crises in Brazil and China are particularly concerning for international investors, considering Brazil is the second-largest economy in the Western Hemisphere and China is the second-largest economy in the world. And while significant investment has flowed into BRICS nations in recent years, Sunday's report comes on the heels of Standard & Poor's downgrading Brazil's sovereign credit rating to "junk" status.

That move effectively strips the country of its investment-grade standing, joining it with junk-rated Russia. India and South Africa are only a step away from a similar fate.

"We now expect the contraction in [Brazil's real GDP] to be deeper and longer, with another revision to our growth outlook," S&P said in a statement. "It now appears that Brazil is further away from a shift to positive growth until some of the political uncertainties settle."

All indications suggest the union of nations will stick together to weather current international volatility and that Brazil, Russia, India and South Africa have no immediate plans to part ways with China's titanic economy. The BRICS countries recently launched a \$100 billion development bank to rival Western-dominated institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, while Russian President Vladimir Putin, Chinese President Xi Jinping and high-ranking members of the other countries' political leadership have rubbed elbows and emphasized the nations' combined economic potential.

"President Xi Jinping vividly pointed out that the BRICS countries are just like the five fingers, each having its own strengths, and together forming a clenched fist," said a statement released by China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs earlier this year.

But even though BRICS members' combined economies dwarf that of the United States, their collective fist seems a little less intimidating given the shaky economic foundations upon which they currently stand. The strong dollar is at least in part weighing on emerging economies, especially those who borrowed against the dollar while interest rates were still low and have yet to pay back their debts.

"We've seen over and over around the world people borrowing money in foreign currencies, because interest rates are lower. And it was a presumption that they would be able to [repay] them with the existing currency," says Brad McMillan, a senior vice president and chief investment officer at Commonwealth Financial Network. "The problem is, when your currency gets cheaper and the currency you borrowed in gets more expensive, you have to come up with a lot more of your own local currency to pay back that debt. And that's what we're seeing systemically across the emerging markets."

When interest rates go up – as appears imminent in the U.S., with the Federal Reserve weighing the country's first rate hike in roughly a decade – the risk of default or unforeseen financial strain tend to rise as well. And that's problematic for economies that are at best slowing and at worst submerged in recession.

Like Brazil, Russia finds itself entangled in a deep recession, as its economy contracted 4.6 percent in the second quarter for its biggest annual slump since the financial crisis of 2009. Russia's consumer-driven economy has sputtered in recent months as price inflation has skyrocketed, leading to a 9.2 percent year-over-year drop in July retail sales following a 9.4 percent decline in

June. It's expected that Russia's economy will ultimately contract at an annual rate of 3 percent by the end of 2015.

Western sanctions on Russia related to its involvement in last year's Ukrainian crisis also have dragged on economic growth. The IMF estimated in a report last month that initial sanctions and counter-sanctions shaved up to 1.5 percent off of Russia's real GDP, but that the cumulative output of long-term sanctions could amount to 9 percent of GDP over the medium term.

"These developments essentially restricted Russian firms' access to international markets, with a negative effect on investment," a summary of the full report said. "While countries around the world have suffered a drop in growth relative to their pre-crisis performance, Russia's reversal of fortunes stands out as being particularly pronounced."

South Africa saw GDP shrink 1.3 percent in April, May and June and could potentially plunge into a recession without a third-quarter rebound. President Jacob Zuma has called his country's economy "sick" and said the onus for turning GDP growth around ultimately falls on the private sector, not the government, since "the business sector must run the economy."

"Things are becoming much more difficult than they were before," Rob Davies, South Africa's Minister of Trade and Industry, said earlier this month at a press conference in Cape Town, South Africa. "The energy situation, though we are not completely out of the woods yet, is more stable than it was at the beginning of the year. We are facing a challenge, and we do have to increase the impact of our interventions."

China, as one of the world's largest consumers of commodities, also has played a role in recent energy price fluctuations. The country's devalued yuan has made imports more expensive for Chinese consumers, softening the demand for commodity imports. Stock market fluctuations have compounded the problem by spooking investors and damaging consumer sentiment.

That process, in effect, has crippled fellow commodity-exporting BRICS nations, particularly Brazil and Russia, who have relied heavily on favorable prices and Chinese demand in recent years. Declining Chinese demand weighs on prices, which makes it harder for exporters to turn a profit.

Iron ore and crude petroleum make up more than 21 percent of Brazil's total exports alone, according to the Observatory of Economic Complexity. And considering 17 percent of the country's exports go straight to China, a slowdown in Chinese demand could ultimately hinder exports and cripple Brazil's overall GDP.

The same can be said for Russia, whose top exports include crude petroleum, refined petroleum, petroleum gas, coal briquettes and semifinished iron. Those five categories alone account for more than two-thirds of Russia's total exports, 8 percent of which go to China.

India, meanwhile, currently represents a silver lining for the BRICS countries and is welcoming lower commodity prices with open arms. Though the country's top exports include refined petroleum and jewelry, crude petroleum and petroleum gas account for roughly a third of all Indian imports. Getting these imports at a cheaper price, then, is good news.

"As an importer of oil and other raw materials, India is a big beneficiary [of a drop in commodity prices]," said an analysis earlier this year from IHS. "At the other extreme, as commodity exporters, Brazil and Russia (as well as other countries in Latin America, Central Asia, the Middle East and Africa) are seeing much weaker growth or recessions."

Still, India's economic growth hasn't been sterling. The country's GDP expanded at an annual rate of 7 percent in the second quarter, tying China and down from the 7.5 percent annualized rate of growth from the previous quarter.

Time will tell if India and China will be able to pull their BRICS brethren out of their respective ruts. At least in the short term, the nations seem content in generating momentum as a group. The five countries collectively account for about 40 percent of the world's population and substantial natural resource reserves, so leaders are counting on improved international ties as a way to more efficiently tap into the global marketplace.

"We are clearly aware of the difficulties we face, in both the economy and international politics," Putin said at a BRICS meeting in Ufa, Russia, earlier this year. "But by combining our efforts, we will surely overcome all challenges before us."

EDITORIAL: A lesson for SA from Brazil

septembre 15 2015/bdlive.co.za

IF THERE is one lesson to be learnt from the downgrade of Brazil's credit rating to "junk status" by Standard and Poor's (S&P), it is that politics and policy implementation matter — a great deal.

In announcing its decision, S&P made it clear that the main reason was the failure of the government to meet its own budget targets, revising them for the second time this year. The embattled president, Dilma Rousseff, has not managed to broker consensus to reduce the budget deficit despite a recession.

Her Workers Party is embroiled in a series of corruption scandals linked to the national petroleum champion, Petrobras. Senior party figures including Ms Rousseff's predecessor, Luiz Inacio da Silva, have been the subject of police investigations, with some suffering the indignity of arrest.

This has left the party in apparent disarray and the public intensely disgruntled with the government's lax approach to corruption.

While a credit rating downgrade for SA is not expected, the economic contraction in the second quarter should be a cause for great concern. This is in light of the government's propensity to produce policies that hamper the economy. The tourist visa imbroglio is a case in point coming when the sector stood to benefit from a weaker rand and cheaper oil prices.

Lower economic growth bodes ill for revenue growth and makes it imperative that the government's spending cuts, in particular on its wage bill, are implemented as promised. Fortunately Finance Minister Nhlanhla Nene reiterated to Business Day recently that he would stick to his guns on the issue. But with an election on the horizon there simply is no telling what political pressures may make the government do.

The government's actions are being watched carefully. President Jacob Zuma's admission that the economy is "sick" is but a first step. Decisive action on cutting the wage bill must follow.

That, together with better performance from Eskom and the reversal of the visa regulations will hopefully change the picture. The question is whether Mr Zuma and his Cabinet are able to implement the solutions with the speed and resolve that will help us avoid being in the same place as Brazil.

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