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SUDAN

IS SUDAN'S ARMY ON THE VERGE OF RECAPTURING KHARTOUM?

Sudan's army launched a major assault on Khartoum in a bid to recapture the capital from the Rapid Support Forces.

In the early morning of September 26, Sudan's army launched a major offensive to capture the capital Khartoum from the rival paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

Local outlets reported that the army sent in several infantry formations that crossed vital bridges that connect Omdurman to Khartoum, backed by air power and artillery fire.

The army captured at least one important bridge and took control of Souk al-Araby – a market in the heart of Khartoum, Al Jazeera's Hiba Morgan reported on Friday. Several residents in the city told Al Jazeera the army had taken control of three major crossings in total.

The assault could be one of the army's most significant operations since the Sudan war erupted in April 2023.

Since then, the RSF has been in firm control of most of the city and has been accused of committing abuses against the civilian

population, such as looting markets and hospitals, uprooting residents and confiscating their homes and subjecting women and girls to extreme forms of sexual violence.

Reports of the army's recent advances have brought some hope to civilians still living under RSF control in Khartoum, according to Augreis,*a human-rights activist who has been procuring aid and food for beleaguered civilians living under RSF rule.

"People are fed up with the militia," she said, referring to the RSF. However, she added that civilians were also frightened amid the continuing fighting.

"We have been nervous since 2:00am [00:00 GMT]. We heard all the sounds from all the types of heavy artillery [being used] at the same time. [All the sounds and attacks are] coming from all directions along with the [sound of] fighter jets and drones," she told Al Jazeera on Thursday.

TURNING THE TIDE?

Prior to the army's recent advance in the capital, there were growing concerns among its supporters that it may not be equipped or able to defeat the paramilitary.

The lack of faith compelled thousands of Sudanese men to pick up weapons to protect

their villages and communities from the RSF.

But now, with news that the army is fiercely battling to recapture the capital, there appears to be a growing belief among supporters of the army that the RSF could be defeated.

"There is a bond between the army and the Sudanese people. It is our soldiers and people that are in the army," said Badawi, an activist in Omdurman, a city that forms part of the wider state of Khartoum.

Badawi added that there is "joy" among people living under the army in areas in Omdurman and that people view this recent operation as an "important step forward" to win the war.

Hajooj Kuka, the external communications

VYING FOR LEGITIMACY?

Sudan's army chief, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, recently spoke at the UN General Assembly in New York as the de facto authority in the country, where he said that a number of countries are sending weapons and supplies to the RSF.

He also said that the army is open to "peace" after the RSF ends its occupation. Regaining Khartoum could be a major step towards that goal, as well as signaling to the global community that the army is gradually regaining control over Sudan.

"The assault to retake the capital has begun by the [army]. [It is] coinciding with Burhan's speech to the UN today. Feels like a coordinated approach to signal who the real authority in Sudan is," tweeted Cameron Hudson, an expert on Sudan for the Centre for Strategic

officer for the Khartoum State Emergency Response Rooms (ERRs), which is a network of local activists providing life-saving aid to civilians in RSF- and army-controlled areas, cautioned that it was too early to determine the balance of power in the city.

"The general feeling is that [the army] won't take [Khartoum] over," he told Al Jazeera. "All I know is that in areas where our ERR members are, the control didn't change much.

and International Studies, a think tank in Washington, DC.

Augreis, the human rights activist, said that many of her peers were indifferent about who ultimately controls Khartoum, and referred to accusations that the army has also committed human rights abuses, such as cracking down on aid volunteers and activists.

"Most of the ... activists are neutral," she said. "We know neither [the RSF or army] is going to do us any good."

Source; <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/9/27/is-sudans-army-on-the-verge-of-recapturing-khartoum>.

A BOY COLLECTS STRAW AT ADRE, A REFUGEE CAMP ON THE BORDER OF SUDAN AND CHAD, TO WHICH TENS OF THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE HAVE FLED FROM WEST DARFUR TO ESCAPE VIOLENCE BY ARMED GROUPS ALLIED WITH SUDAN'S RAPID SUPPORT FORCES (RSF). THE PEOPLE THERE ARE MOSTLY ETHNIC MASALIT WHO FEAR A CAMPAIGN OF ETHNIC CLEANSING.

22ND SEPTEMBER 2024

Gravelines, France - On a windy, rainy February day in Gravelines on France's northern coast, two Sudanese men in a parking lot are struggling to read a bus schedule. Today, the two men are trying to find the next bus to Calais, 21km (13 miles) to the west.

The United Kingdom is just 32km (20 miles) across the sea. But in weather like today, dinghies full of refugees are unlikely to cross the English Channel.

The day before, the sky was clear and 249 people seeking a new life in the UK had made it across on five boats. It's a common endeavour - in 2023, some 30,000 migrants successfully crossed the Channel on the "small boats" which continue to drive headlines in the UK. One of them asks for help.

"We've been in the region for 10 days," Hashim*, a tall man in his 20s, tells me. "We need time to know what we'll do next. So, we're moving from Sudanese camp to Sudanese camp, trying to get information."

Last night, he and his friend, Yusuf*, a loud, bearded man in his 40s, slept in a camp in Dunkirk. Hashim is certain they will find room in a tent in Calais tonight. Yusuf appears less optimistic.

Hashim has fled here from West Darfur, which

has endured repeated bloody massacres for 30 years. Yusuf is from Blue Nile, another war-torn province in the east of Sudan.

They followed similar routes from Sudan to Europe but only met in France. They decided to try to cross together to the UK, but the small boats are too expensive for them. It's 1,500 euros (\$1,655) for a Sudanese passenger, or as much as 2,000 or 3,000 euros for supposedly "richer" nationalities such as Syrians, Afghans or Vietnamese.

The money is paid to the gangs of people smugglers - some of whom are migrants themselves. As they are talking, a bus pulls up and they get on, following a crowd of refugees and migrants who are wet from a failed boarding attempt on a nearby beach.

I check with the driver to ensure he is heading to Calais, and they head off. Later that day I'll see them again, warmed, in the hangar in Calais where the charity Caritas-France welcomes migrants on the near-island that forms the heart of the port city.

WORST DISPLACEMENT SINCE THE PARTITION OF INDIA

Sudan's displacement crisis has been called the world's worst since the partition of India in 1947 displaced at least 15 million people. Since war broke out in Sudan in April 2023, more than 10 million Sudanese have been displaced.

Some have taken to the roads towards the Mediterranean and Europe, joining uncounted millions from the world's disaster zones. Like generations of Sudanese people fleeing past conflict, they have often been smuggled in the backs of trucks.

But their journeys are getting quicker, taking weeks rather than, as in the past, months or years for those who went before them and usually stopped along the way to earn money in North African countries.

In the not-so-distant past, most Sudanese in Libya would work to send remittances home - a key part of the journey. But a recent United Nations survey found that 75 percent of Sudanese in Libya intend to move on because of the violence, detention and racism they, like other Black Africans, suffer in the country. Sudanese are also among the nationalities most commonly intercepted at sea by the Libyan Coast Guard or pushed back into Libya by the Tunisian National Guard at the land border - often followed by detention in Libya.

From mid-2023 to mid-2024, some 10,000 sub-Saharan Africans were reportedly deported from Tunisia to Libya. In May this year, hundreds of mostly Sudanese refugees and migrants camping in front of UN offices in downtown Tunis were rounded up and reportedly expelled to the Algerian border. In response to refugee inflows, the European Union continues funding border guards across Africa while offering minimal aid to refugee camps, hoping these measures will suffice

to deter Sudanese and other sub-Saharan Africans from moving northwards. In February, the UN noted how the Sudan conflict had worsened Europe's migration fears and called for more support for refugees in the form of aid.

"The Europeans are always so worried about people coming across the Mediterranean," said UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) head Filippo Grandi. "I have a warning for them ... if they don't support refugees coming out of Sudan, even displaced people inside Sudan, we will see onward movements of people towards Libya, Tunisia and across the Mediterranean. There is no doubt." To the people we met who were fleeing the Sudanese war, the European response is baffling.

That is especially so for those who succeed in crossing the Mediterranean to Italy and then make it via the Alps to France in hopes of reaching the UK. To them, it is the peak of absurdity that the same French authorities who try to prevent them from entering France then try to prevent them from leaving.

With UK funding since 2003 - some 543 million euros (\$606m) has been set aside for 2023-2026 - the French authorities systematically stop migrants and refugees from boarding the "small boats" from France, with some officers reportedly stabbing the dinghies and slashing tents under which migrants sleep, then leaving those who do not manage the crossing with little support in France other than from a handful of NGOs.

TEA, TOWELS AND SURVIVAL BLANKETS

On that same cold, grey morning when I met Hashim and Yusuf, 12 wet, freezing Vietnamese people were walking down a coastal road south of Calais. Their boat had capsized.

On their way back from this misadventure, they met a team from the French association Utopia 56, which formed after the tragic death of a Syrian toddler named Aylan, whose body was washed to shore in Turkey in 2015.

It has some 200 volunteers who provide food, shelter and legal advice to migrants across France. On clear nights, when dinghies may be able to cross the English Channel, it "marauds" (French for patrols) the roughly 150km (93 miles) of coastal roads to provide assistance to those who don't make it.

When we arrive at this spot on our way to Calais, Utopia 56 volunteers are providing hot tea, towels and survival blankets to the Vietnamese, then waiting with them for the fire brigade. The mayor of the nearby town of Wimereux turns up and agrees to make a room available so they can warm up. The firemen offer to take them there. According to the Utopia 56 volunteers we speak to, such empathy is "not that common".

After visiting this spot, the Utopia 56 team drives to the nearby Plage des Escardines and scans the shore for possible shipwrecked migrants. There are police officers on the beach, and some follow us.

One of them asks the team about a potentially missing boat with 69 people on board. The activists' distrust of the policeman is visible. "You know, we've been trained to rescue," the policeman says, trying to reassure them. "We're here for that. If they succeed crossing, I don't give a f***!"

Later we learn that at around noon, a French Navy vessel rescued a boat with 56 migrants,

and that three passengers (reportedly Iranian Kurds) had been reported missing. The official record states that after the rescue took place, the passengers said three people had fallen overboard. One body was found, but the two others could not be located.

Over in Calais, which we reach in the early afternoon, groups of migrants are leaving their muddy campgrounds on the outskirts of the city to head to town. They flock to the hall where Caritas volunteers' welcome migrants in the afternoons, providing food, warmth and advice about their rights in both France and the UK.

In 2016, the French authorities dismantled the encampment, which had become known as the "jungle", essentially a collection of slums with about 9,000 migrants. Since then, dozens of smaller "jungles" of tents, provided by local charities, have been forming again on the outskirts of Calais. Despite regular and often violent evictions by police, the camps continue to reform.

According to Juliette Dela place, Caritas's manager in Calais, the town permanently hosts "more than 1,000 migrants in different jungles, divided by communities - there are Sudanese, Eritrean, Afghan jungles. At least 60 percent of the migrants are Sudanese, it is the first nationality."

This afternoon, it is closer to 90 percent of the 720 migrants who have come to the Caritas centre today - some new arrivals, and others from the jungles looking for a meal and some warmth.

This is not new, Dela place adds - the Sudanese have been present for at least 10 years. But more have come since the onset of the latest war in Sudan last year. And with less money to pay smugglers than refugees and migrants from some other countries, "they stay longer than others and are more dependent on NGOs", she says.

Despite the seemingly large numbers of Sudanese here, Calais is actually only hosting a small share of the 1.5 million new Sudanese refugees (since the war began), most of whom are being received and hosted by much poorer

countries bordering Sudan. Since 2023, 600,000 people have fled to Chad and another 500,000 to Egypt, joining a diaspora there estimated at 4 million.

By June 2023, overwhelmed Egyptian authorities had suspended the visa exemption policy - first for Sudanese men, then for children, women and elderly people as well - despite a 2004 agreement on free movement. Refugees were forced to pay higher fees to smugglers or more in bribes at the border to get across.

'ANYTHING OF VALUE, THEY TOOK'

Issa, a tall man who looks older than his 20 years, is sitting at a table in a corner with a small group of other young Sudanese, all visibly exhausted. They gather here, where there are electric wall sockets to charge their phones - a lifeline for information on crossing opportunities, the weather and news from those who have already left Calais about whether or not they made it. Issa entrusts his phone to a friend and moves to a quieter corner for a chat.

He is from the Fur tribe, who gave the region its name: "Dar" means "home" in Arabic, making Darfur "home of the Fur". The Fur are the region's biggest non-Arab tribe.

Last year, Issa was in Sudan's capital, Khartoum, where he was going to university and working at a bakery to support his parents and siblings. In April, like many out-of-town students, he left the capital to spend Ramadan in his hometown of Kabkabiya, North Darfur.

That was when war broke out between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

Although the rivals have been vying for power over Khartoum, Darfur wasn't any safer. The battle quickly reignited old ethnic divisions and engulfed Kabkabiya, a historical stronghold of the Arab tribal militias known as the "Janjaweed", some of whom were repackaged into the RSF by former

President Omar al-Bashir.

They quickly took the town, according to Issa. Some SAF soldiers were killed; the others fled.

The next day, the RSF entered houses and farms, shooting at civilians, and targeting the non-Arabs. Issa lost many friends.

He wipes away tears and continues: "Anything of value, they took. They also targeted women, they raped many. And they tried to enlist young men. My father forbade me to go out to avoid running into the RSF."

Issa had already been thinking of leaving Sudan to work abroad and help his family. "The war precipitated my decision," he explains. His father gave him money for the journey and his plan was to head straight to Europe - no particular country in mind.

In June, Issa left in the back of a pickup truck filled with 45 passengers, all non-Arab young men leaving Sudan. It was packed because the drivers were trying to make as much money as possible - the passengers who had money paid for the others.

The first payment they had to make was to the RSF, just to be allowed out of the town.

Then, they followed routes established by gold miners who have criss-crossed the Sahara over the past decade, moving from mine to mine. Issa wound his way, first to Jebel Amer in North Darfur, then Tibesti in northern Chad, then Djado in northern Niger, then Tchibarakaten at the Niger-Algeria border.

There, he had to dig for gold for two weeks, the time it took to find enough grammes to pay a people smuggler to get him over the border and on

NO-MAN'S LAND

In early July 2023, Sfax had witnessed a wave of violence against Black Africans, followed by the arrest and deportation of 1,200 of them to the Libyan border.

At least 28 people died in the no-man's land between the two countries, some of thirst, and 80 more were reported missing. But Sfax had quietened down a bit by the time Issa and his friends arrived, so they scrounged up some cardboard to sleep on close to a downtown market.

Tunisia was becoming a popular embarkation point, with 84 percent of the Sudanese people who crossed to Italy in 2023 leaving from there while the previous year, 2022, some 98 percent had left from Libya.

The switch is largely down to money. In El Amra, a main departure hub just north of Sfax, Issa was quoted 1,500 Tunisian dinars (\$500) for a spot on a boat going to Italy - roughly half the price charged in Libya.

to the next leg of his journey. It is a route Sudanese refugees have used for years, but it has become much busier since the war.

He crossed the Algeria-Tunisia border in the summer of last year, amid a campaign of pushbacks by Tunisian authorities to Libya and Algeria. Taking his chances, he walked the two days it took to cross the border, was robbed along the way by bandits who took his money and phone, and then Tunisian forces spotted him.

"If they arrest you, they hand you over to the Algerian military," Issa said. "With six others, I managed to run and hide in a farm." After a week of walking, they made it to the Tunisian port city of Sfax in July - barely five weeks after leaving Sudan. "We met locals who gave us water, no more," he recalls.

But the smuggler ran off with the cash, leaving a desperate Issa who, instead, headed to Tunis to register with UNHCR, the United Nations' refugee's agency. While he waited for his appointment there - a month away - he found a job in construction paying just \$7 a day.

By September, Issa had saved enough money to go back to Sfax and, this time, he was one of 35 Sudanese people on board a crude, locally assembled metal boat - and one of some 10,000 people to reach the Italian island of Lampedusa, 188km (117 miles) away, that week.

In 2023, nearly 6,000 Sudanese people reached Italy, making them the ninth-most-common nationality among arrivals.

On Lampedusa, the Italian authorities seemed

overwhelmed: Issa had to wait two days to get food, was told there were no more dry clothes, and was then transferred to Bologna, in northern Italy, in the same football shirt and shorts he had worn on the boat trip across the Mediterranean.

He didn't get any new clothes on the mainland, either. He walked 40km (25 miles) - two days - across the Alps to reach Briançon in southeast France. This route has become favoured by migrants seeking to avoid the authorities who are actively checking coastal routes.

Next, Issa took a train to Paris, where he spent two nights under a bridge before deciding to head on to Calais and, from there, try to get to the UK.

Many have heard rumours from others on the road that it is easier to claim asylum on the other side of the English Channel, where 98 percent of Sudanese asylum seekers were

successful in 2023, according to government figures. Those who fled previous wars in Sudan were mostly poor people, but the new war has affected the whole population, including university graduates like Issa. Many of them speak English.

Some mention that Sudan was a British colony. Others just believe life is better across the Channel, without knowing why exactly.

Issa just wants to leave Calais; his main fear is being arrested and sent back to Italy or, worse, to Sudan. The night before we met, the police seized some refugee and migrant tents, including the one he was sharing with another Sudanese man. Caritas gave him a new one.

"In France, we're in the jungle, in the cold, under the rain. I heard in the UK, refugees are not left in the street but are taken care of as soon as they land," Issa says.

MAYBE THEY CROSSED ... MAYBE THEY DIED'

Regardless of which country they are headed for, most Sudanese making the long journey north agree on one thing: Europe, in their minds, is a safe haven.

"I heard that the European Union and member states are now highly welcoming Sudanese because of the war," Muntasir told me when I met him travelling through Chad in October.

"But how to go there? I don't have anything in my hands, not even one pound. Yet whenever I find a chance, I'll travel to Europe, whether it's legal or not.

"I really hope to travel out of Africa," Muntasir said. "In Europe, there's safety, you can live freely, people treat you as human, they believe not any civilian should suffer bombings and live a terrified life."

It's a widely held belief. As I drove along

the Chad-Sudan border in late 2023, I saw refugees in newly made makeshift shelters at all the main crossings. Several months into the conflict in Sudan, the most populous was a camp in Adre, which was housing more than 120,000 mostly ethnic Masalit who fled West Darfur's capital, el-Geneina, 32km (20 miles) away and where armed groups allied with the RSF had violently targeted them, sparking fears of ethnic cleansing.

Further north, refugees from North Darfur only had to cross the dry riverbed separating the twin border towns of Tina (in Chad) and Tine (in Sudan) to find smugglers ready to drive them to Libya. Further south in Chad's

Sila region, another 50,000 mostly Masalit refugees were waiting to be moved to camps.

The transit site in Sila's main city, Goz Beida, was a fenced area with UN tents and trees under which the newcomers could sleep and cook.

Muntasir, a slim 28-year-old, had arrived the day before us, alone, carrying nothing but his surprisingly clean white jalabiya. He was the first refugee I met when entering the site, as, without a shelter of his own, he was sharing the benches in an unused guard hut at the gate with an old man who had arrived earlier.

Muntasir told me he had already tried to get to Europe once, in mid-2021.

At that time, he said, he was living in Nyala, South Darfur, and could not find a job despite having a university degree, resorting instead to welding to make ends meet.

Darfur had been decimated by 20 years of war, which had displaced hundreds of thousands to huge camps around Nyala - now the suburbs of Sudan's second-largest city - dependent on

scarcer and scarcer humanitarian aid.

And so, Muntasir had headed out to try to secure some sort of future or livelihood, ending up in Benghazi, eastern Libya's main city, where he worked in construction for six months, earning 3,000 Libyan dinars (\$630) to pay for passage on a smuggler's boat. The smuggler put him in a seaside flat with some other people. "I was so excited, I started to build my dreams," he said. But as the hours passed, he started to suspect he was being cheated and decided to escape. As for the others, "maybe they crossed, maybe they died - everything can happen in Libya".

Later, he heard about a safer, legal way to go - through resettlement via the UNHCR. When he called to register, he was given an appointment for a month later in Tripoli, 1,000km (620 miles) away - but he did not have the money for the trip there.

After a year and a half of working sporadically and sending what money he could back home, Muntasir returned to Sudan in February 2023, "empty-handed" and "sorrowful".

SELLING A PHONE TO PAY FOR A LORRY TRIP

The war began two months after Muntasir's return to Sudan, in April 2023. As he ate iftar with neighbors during a street gathering, the shelling started.

The next day, the RSF took the neighborhood, he said. Armed men drove around, lashing bystanders with horsewhips, entering houses, beating up young men, harassing women and stealing. "They were doing strange things, like lining up looted refrigerators in the street, we didn't know why," Muntasir said. He started going out without any money or his phone for fear he would be robbed. On a day in July - the hardest day Muntasir says he can recall - a

bomb fell right next to the family house. With no idea who had dropped it, they left to shelter in a school in another neighborhood. The next day, shelling hit the house.

In the school, the family (Muntasir, his two unmarried sisters and two brothers, their wives and 15 children) started to run out of food. In August, they decided to leave Nyala. "We just escaped to save our lives," he said.

They found shelter again in schools in Dir, a village inhabited by the Bani Halba Arab tribe, who had mostly stayed out of the conflict.

They didn't have enough money to continue their journey towards Chad, but Muntasir sold his smartphone to pay \$30 for his solo lorry trip to the border.

Here too, part of the money was spent on bribes or "taxes" by the lorry driver at checkpoints manned by RSF or allied armed groups. Muntasir crossed the border on foot and, on the other side, was forced to sell his other, basic mobile phone to continue his journey to Goz Beida, 150km (93 miles) inside Chad.

GREATER PROTECTIONS - BUT NO WAY TO ACCESS THEM

Illegal, dangerous routes far outpace resettlement slots from Chad, Libya or Tunisia. Only 1,100 refugees were resettled from Libya in 2023, out of some 60,000 registered by the UNHCR. Sudanese people still have to pay smugglers to cross the Sahara and the Mediterranean. In February 2024, a boat with 42 Sudanese passengers sank off Tunisia. Two were rescued, and the others were reported dead or missing.

According to one of the survivors who spoke by phone to Al Jazeera, 38 passengers, including him, were Masalit from West Darfur, fleeing mass killings, and who ought to have qualified for asylum if they had managed to reach Europe.

In the Global North, some countries, like the United States or France, have shown more openness to granting Sudanese applicants' asylum or at least temporary protection status. Since July, the French asylum court qualified large parts of Sudan, including Khartoum and most of Darfur, as suffering "a situation of blind violence of exceptional intensity", giving applicants from those regions the right to immediate protection in France. Similar decisions have been taken in Belgium and the United Kingdom.

But European countries are still throwing resources at preventing the boat crossings.

Since 2017, European support for the Libyan

When I met him, his plan was to wait for UNHCR registration and resettlement in a third country. But the old man who had welcomed him in his hut was not optimistic. "Five months I stayed here, no registration," he grumbled. Still, Muntasir was adamant he would rather wait than go back to Libya.

The problem he and others like him face now is that no safe and legal pathway exists to reach Europe besides resettlement, which is extremely limited. Even if you have good reason to claim asylum in Europe, you still need to get there first in order to do so.

Coast Guard has enabled the interception of up to 32,000 refugees and migrants a year.

Each time new routes have opened up; the EU has been quick to negotiate partnerships with transit countries to block them.

In July last year, for example, immediately after the violence in Sfax and the beginning of the ensuing pushbacks, the European Commission and some member states struck a \$112m deal with Tunisia.

In March, Egypt was promised \$215m in funding. Those who do make it as far as northern France can expect long delays once they get there.

Calais is a real bottleneck on the route: many Sudanese reach the town one or two months after leaving their country, then spend many more months on daily unsuccessful attempts to cross to the UK.

The morning before we met, as on every morning since he had arrived five months before, Issa attempted to board a truck to the UK. He jumped onto the moving vehicle at a roundabout, managed to climb onto the roof, opened the tarpaulin and slipped into the load.

The lorry boarded a ferry, but once it was on board, British police dogs located him. He was handed over to the French police, who detained him in Calais port's police station for four hours.

Since 2020, tighter checks on the trucks have made the boats option more popular, but the Sudanese are said to seldom take the sea route just because they can't afford the rates, which are much higher than on the Mediterranean.

"We don't pay, no Sudanese pays," Issa says.

Source; <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/longform/2024/9/22/refugee-chronicles-the-long-and-lonely-road-from-sudan-to-northern-france>.

Some pretend to have paid, beg a place, agree to take the helm even if it means risking prison in the UK, where prosecutions often focus on the people identified as "captains" of the boats, or threaten to stab the boat with a knife if they're not taken.

That night, Issa crept onto the beach and tried to smuggle himself onto a "plastic" (a dinghy). He had only tried the small boats five or six times before. "Sometimes we have to fight with the Afghans to board, but last night there was no violence," he says. The 25 mostly Afghan paying passengers allowed 15 Sudanese to join them. But the police intervened and stabbed the boat. "We ran away," says Issa. "Many others left last night, but we don't know if they arrived." **Names have been changed to protect individuals' anonymity.*

RWANDA

MARBURG VIRUS OUTBREAK KILLS SIX IN RWANDA

29TH SEPTEMBER 2024

Six people have died from an outbreak of Marburg virus in Rwanda, the health minister has announced.

Sabin Nsanzimana said most of the victims were healthcare workers in a hospital intensive care unit. Twenty cases have been identified since the outbreak was confirmed on Friday. Marburg, with a fatality rate of up to 88%, is from the same virus family as Ebola. It spreads to humans from fruit bats and then through contact with bodily fluids of infected individuals. Symptoms include fever, muscle pains, diarrhoea, vomiting and, in some cases, death through extreme blood loss. There are no specific treatments or a vaccine for the virus but a range of blood products, drug and immune therapies are being developed, according to the World Health Organization. Rwanda says it is intensifying contact tracing, surveillance and testing to help contain the spread.

The health minister said officials were tracking about 300 people who had come into contact with individuals affected by the Marburg virus. He urged people to avoid physical contact, to help curb the spread. Authorities have previously advised the public to stay vigilant, wash their hands with clean water and soap or sanitizer and report all suspected cases. Most of the reported cases have been in the capital, Kigali. The US embassy in the city has advised its employees to work remotely for the next week. This is the first time Marburg has been confirmed in Rwanda. Neighboring Tanzania reported an outbreak in 2023, while three people died in Uganda in 2017.

WHAT IS THE MARBURG VIRUS AND HOW DANGEROUS IS IT?

An outbreak of Marburg virus has killed at least eight people in Rwanda. The highly-infectious disease is similar to Ebola, with symptoms including fever, muscle pains, diarrhea, vomiting and, in some cases, death through extreme blood loss. Hundreds of people have died from the virus in recent years, almost all in Africa.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), on average, the Marburg virus kills half of the people it infects, with previous outbreaks killing between 24% and 88% of patients. The virus was first identified in 1967 after 31 people were infected and seven died in simultaneous outbreaks in Marburg and Frankfurt in Germany, and Belgrade in Serbia. The outbreak was traced to African green monkeys imported from Uganda. But the virus

has since been linked to other animals. Among humans, it is spread mostly by people who have spent long periods in caves and mines populated by bats. In recent years, there have also been outbreaks of the Marburg virus in:

- Equatorial Guinea
- Ghana
- the Democratic Republic of the Congo

- Kenya
- South Africa
- Uganda
- Zimbabwe

A 2005 outbreak in Angola killed more than

300 people.

However, in the rest of the world, only two people have died from the Marburg virus in the past 40 years - one person in Europe and one in the US. Both had been on expeditions to caves in Uganda.

WHERE HAVE MOST CASES BEEN RECORDED?

Health experts say the outbreak in Rwanda was confirmed in late September 2024. This is the first time the virus has been found in Rwanda and the source has not yet been found. Rwanda's neighbors Uganda and Tanzania reported Marburg outbreaks in 2017 and 2023, respectively. Around 300 people in Rwanda who are known to have been in contact with confirmed cases are being monitored. Some of those who have tested positive for the disease are healthcare workers. The WHO is sending experts, testing kits and personal protective equipment to support Rwanda's efforts to tackle the outbreak.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF THE MARBURG VIRUS?

The virus begins abruptly with:

- a fever
- severe headache
- muscle pains

This is often followed, three days later, by:

- watery diarrhoea
- stomach pain
- nausea
- vomiting

According to [the WHO](#), "the appearance of patients at this phase has been described as showing 'ghost-like' drawn features, deep-set eyes, expressionless faces and extreme lethargy." Many people go on to bleed from various parts of the body, and some die eight to nine days after first falling ill, because of extreme loss of blood and shock.

HOW IS THE MARBURG VIRUS SPREAD?

African green monkeys and pigs can carry it. The Egyptian rosette fruit bat often also harbors the virus. Among humans, it spreads through bodily fluids and contact with contaminated bedding. Even after people have recovered, their blood or semen can remain infectious for many months afterwards.

HOW CAN IT BE TREATED?

There are no specific treatments or a vaccine for the virus, although trials are happening. But a range of blood products, drug and immune therapies are being developed, the WHO says. Doctors may be able to alleviate the symptoms by giving hospital patients plenty of fluids and using transfusions to replace lost blood.

HOW CAN IT BE CONTAINED?

People in Africa should avoid eating or handling bushmeat, according to Gavi, an international

health organization. People should also avoid contact with pigs in areas with an outbreak, says the WHO.

Men who have had the virus should use condoms for a year after the onset of symptoms

Source; <https://www.bbc.com/news/topics/cw1w3xz0zdet>.

or until their semen tests negative for the virus twice. Those who bury people who have died from the virus should also avoid touching the body.

RWANDA SCHOOLS JOIN ISLANDERS FOR CHARITY WALK

21ST SEPTEMBER 2024

Schools in Rwanda will join islanders in Jersey on a virtual 19-mile (30.6km) walk to raise money for girls' education in east Africa. The Virtual North Coast Challenge is set to take place on Sunday from St Catherine's to Grosnez. The walk is partnered with Hands Around The World Jersey, a charity which helps vulnerable people in five different countries.

Nine schools in Bugarama in Rwanda will join people in Jersey to walk a similar distance to "show their appreciation" after 12 Jersey teachers provided a summer school for 400 marginalized children earlier this year.

Hands Around The World Jersey has visited Bugarama in south west Rwanda for the past 15 years and carried out school improvement projects, such as building and renovating classrooms, toilets, school kitchens and sports facilities. The charity is currently working on a project to help girls in Rwanda with

'SHOW SOLIDARITY'

They also wanted to provide sanitary products and set up training programmes for school matrons.

Mike Haden, chair of Hands Around the World said the idea of the challenge was to "show solidarity" between the walkers in Jersey and those in Rwanda. He said: "Our friends

education, and money raised from the walk will go towards the project.

The charity said at least 20% of schoolgirls in Rwanda, particularly in rural areas, miss up to 50 days of school per year as they faced barriers due to menstruation.

Teams wanted to build a girls' hygiene room in nine of the schools they covered, which would provide a counselling area, bedroom with bunk beds, shower and toilet.

and partners in Bugarama want to show their appreciation for the assistance they have received to improve teaching and learning conditions in their schools by joining in with us on the same day."

Source; <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c62mznx11j6o>.

GERMAN OFFICIAL SUGGESTS RWANDA SCHEME USING UK FACILITIES

Germany could make use of facilities funded by the UK to process some asylum seekers in Rwanda, the country's migration agreements commissioner has suggested. Joachim Stamp, from the Free Democratic Party, which is a junior partner in the governing coalition, suggested accommodation originally intended for people deported from the UK could be utilized by Germany. However, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has previously expressed scepticism about processing asylum applications abroad and the idea is unlikely to be taken forward.

The new UK government scrapped the Rwanda plan, which originated under the Conservatives and would have seen some asylum seekers sent to the country. It aimed to deter people from crossing the Channel in small boats to reach the UK. German ambassador to the UK Miguel Berger drew a distinction between the UK's now axed plan and discussions in Germany. "Let's be clear, there is no plan of the German government to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda," he said. "The discussion is about processing asylum applications in third countries under international humanitarian law and with support of the United Nations." Under the UK's original plan, asylum seekers sent to Rwanda would not have been allowed to return to the UK.

If their claim was accepted in Rwanda they could be allowed to stay there, and if not, they could apply to settle in the country on other grounds or seek asylum in another country. Like the UK, the German government is under pressure to tackle illegal migration, particularly after the recent success of the far-right, anti-immigration Alternative for Deutschland (AfD) party in state elections.

Speaking to the Table Briefings podcast on Thursday, Mr Stamp suggested a scheme could target people crossing the EU's eastern borders and be overseen by the UN Refugee Agency, the UNHCR. He added: "We currently have [no third country] who has come forward, with the exception of Rwanda." In November, Mr Scholz promised to examine whether asylum

applications could be processed abroad. But the German chancellor cautioned that there were legal questions over how such a scheme would work. Asked about Mr Stamp's remarks, a Downing Street spokesperson said they would not comment on discussions between other nations. "Policies pursued by other countries are a matter for them. Our position with regard to Rwanda is well known," they added. Labour has branded the previous government's Rwanda scheme an expensive "gimmick" and scrapped it when the party won power. Conservative shadow home secretary James Cleverly said: "Labour's first move in government was to scrap the Rwanda plan. "Now Germany want to use the facilities we built. "The only people who benefit from Labour's reckless immigration policies are people smugglers and the EU." The plan was stalled by legal challenges and no migrants were deported to Rwanda under the scheme.

However, accommodation for migrants, funded by the UK, had already been built in the capital Kigali, with the manager of one hostel telling the BBC in April it was ready to start housing people. The UK government has previously said it is looking at whether it can recoup some of the £220m paid to Rwanda as part of the scheme.

However, the Rwandan government has said it is under no obligation to pay back the money.

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cly15p2zd50o>.

KENYA

TOILING ON A KENYAN FLOWER FARM TO SEND FRESH ROSES TO EUROPE

26TH SEPTEMBER 2024

On a moonless night in the Kenyan lakeside town of Naivasha, Anne sits inside a makeshift, two-room house, exhausted after a gruelling shift picking and sorting roses. Anne (not her real name) is a single mother and one of thousands of the predominantly female workers in Kenya's flower industry, harvesting and categorising blooms in one of the many greenhouse complexes around the edge of the picturesque Lake Naivasha, about 90km (56 miles) north-west of the capital, Nairobi.

Inside endless rows of the temperature-controlled greenhouses the size of tennis courts, workers like Anne harvest a huge variety of flowers that grow profusely in the rich Kenyan soil. There are carnations, chrysanthemums, and an abundance of roses in almost every hue. The majority of these blooms are destined for Europe. Anne has spent over 15 years working in Kenya's burgeoning flower industry, one of the largest employers in the country.

Estimates suggest it employs more than 150,000 people and earns the country around \$1bn (£760m) annually in foreign exchange. Despite dedicating her working life to the industry, she says her monthly pay of just over \$100 has barely changed in years. It is not enough to contend with the worsening cost-of-living crisis in Kenya, which has pushed up the prices of essential household goods such as maize, wheat, rice and sugar.

At the end of each month, Anne does not have enough to eat and often has to skip meals. "You have to enter into debt to survive," she says, pointing out that she had to take out a loan to help her 23-year-old son attend university in Nairobi. Each sunrise Anne queues with hundreds of other workers to catch one of the

company buses that takes them to the farms, as the gentle fog lingers over the hills before being evaporated by the blazing mid-morning sun. Anne starts work at 07:30, six days a week. On Sunday, she goes to church.

The working day at her flower farm is meant to be eight hours, but she explains that she often feels obliged to work an extra three hours, for which she does not receive overtime pay. She used to work inside the pack house, where the flowers were cleaned, bunched, and sorted into stems. She recounts that the conditions there were harsh. The flower company gave her stringent daily targets, which the managers pressured the workers to meet.

"We had to grade 3,700 stems a day," she says. Anne feels these targets were unrealistic, but she says workers like her had no choice but to deliver, or the farm managers would sanction them. If she missed her daily target, she had to write a statement to her manager explaining the reasons for falling short. "If you don't achieve it, maybe you can be thrown out," she says. In early 2023, Anne fell ill with a blood condition, which, if untreated, could be deadly. She felt weak and suffered shortness of breath, which made working extremely difficult.

She went to see a nurse at the farm who gave her medicine and allowed her to rest for a few hours, after which he told her to return to work. "I told him: 'You know, I'm too sick to work,'" Anne recounts.

Anne says it was tough to convince the nurse she was genuinely ill, but he eventually agreed to refer her to an off-farm doctor. She was allowed only one day off, despite still feeling weak and being treated for a serious illness. "It felt bad because I was still sick," she says. To make matters worse, she had to write a letter to her manager explaining why she could not meet her target that day. Anne worries about other ways in which her work on the flower farm may harm her health - for example, the unfamiliar chemicals she was asked to use to spray the roses. It is a concern shared by many other workers.

Margaret, another flower picker on a nearby farm, says workers are routinely forced to spray chemicals on flowers without being given protective gear. Margaret (not her real name) insisted we meet her at the home of a colleague after dark, in their tiny dwelling not far from the shores of Lake Naivasha.

She is afraid to speak out for fear of retribution from the flower industry, and says their influence is everywhere in Naivasha. "Nobody cares," she adds.

A report in September 2023 by the Nairobi-based NGO, Route to Food Initiative, showed that highly hazardous pesticides are routinely used in Kenyan farming, some known to cause cancer. Margaret says she has repeatedly approached her bosses about her concerns. "They shout to the men, they shout to the women," she says. "They shout to everybody. They don't care, and they are Kenyans."

She says women can also face sexual harassment from male workers - the industry has been

marred with complaints. We put the allegations of sexual harassment, unpaid overtime, harsh working conditions, and lack of protective gear on some flower farms in Naivasha to both the Kenya Flower Council and the Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Service (KEPHIS), the government agency responsible for monitoring the industry, but neither got back to us. Kenya's flower business also has a significant cost for the environment at large.

The production of flowers requires a great deal of water, and to feed the European appetite for cheap cut flowers, the blooms are transported refrigerated in long-haul, gas-guzzling jets, wrapped in single-use plastic, and are usually arranged in toxic floral foam to keep them fresh. Kenya supplies more than 40% of the flower market in Europe, with the vast majority of blooms destined for the Netherlands, the hub for the European cut flower industry. Flowers arrive daily by plane and are taken to the huge, frenetic flower market in the picturesque town of Aalsmeer, where they are bought and distributed to suppliers across Europe.

Here lorries arrive by the minute and tourists gaze down from walkways as huge trolleys of flowers of all colours are moved around at speed, as far as the eye can see. In supermarkets and florists across Europe, consumers buy the cheap flowers to mark important events like marriages and birthdays, with no way of tracing their provenance or hearing the experiences of those like Anne and Margaret that have toiled, thousands of kilometres away, to produce them. As a single mother with a son who needs her support, Anne feels she has no choice but to continue to work in the flower industry. There are few other opportunities in Naivasha and she is afraid to be left with no income at all. "If God helps me," Anne says, "I will move on."

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4glydv8qlgo>.

KENYA TO SEND 600 MORE POLICE OFFICERS TO HAITI

22ND SEPTEMBER 2024

Kenya has pledged to send 600 more police officers to Haiti in the coming weeks to help fight gangs controlling much of the capital, Port-au-Prince, and nearby areas.

This would bring the Kenyan contingent, deployed incrementally since June to help the Caribbean nation's beleaguered police force, up to 1,000. During a visit to the country, Kenya's President William Ruto also said he supported turning the current Kenya-led security mission into a full United Nations peacekeeping operation.

A handful of other countries have together pledged at least 1,900 more troops. Violence in Haiti is still rife and a UN human rights expert has warned that gangs are targeting new areas, causing further displacement.

The UN Security Council is due to meet by the end of the month to decide whether to renew Kenya's current mandate for another 12 months, paving the way for a full UN mission in 2025.

This would lead to increased funding and resources for the operation, which has been hampered by a lack of equipment.

- Kenyan police taunted as they square up to Haiti's gangs
- Haiti vows to restore order with Kenya-led force's help

Addressing the Kenyan police officers at their base in Port-au-Prince, President Ruto commended the force for their successes over the last few months. "There are many people who thought Haiti was mission impossible, but today they have changed their minds because of the progress you have made." He said they would succeed against the gangs and he promised to try to get them better

equipment. The nearly 400 Kenyan officers on the ground were going out on patrol "working hand-in-hand with Haitian forces to protect the people and restore security", Ruto said. "Our next batch, an additional 600, is undergoing redeployment training. We will be mission-ready in a few weeks' time and look forward to the requisite support to enable their deployment," he added. But there has been some criticism in Haiti at the lack of a decisive move against the gangs.

A UN human rights expert who has just been there said the mission was inadequately equipped and needed helicopters, as well as night vision goggles and drones.

"The Multinational Security Support Mission (MSS), authorized by the UN Security Council in October 2023, has so far deployed less than a quarter of its planned contingent," William O'Neil said on Friday. Despite an international embargo, arms and ammunition continued to be smuggled into the country, allowing the gangs to extend their control to new territories, he said. The UN expert had visited the south-east of the country, where he said the police lacked the logistical and technical capacity to counter the gangs. He quoted a policeman in Jérémie as saying: "The situation borders on the impossible. We have to learn to walk on water."

Sexual violence had drastically increased and more than 700,000 people were now displaced, Mr O'Neil said.

"This enduring agony must stop. It is a race

against time." He said the solutions already existed, but efforts had to be "redoubled immediately".

"It is crucial to stifle the gangs by giving the MSS Mission the means to be effective in supporting the operations of the Haitian

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c30lmpgvvvqo>.

National Police, as well as to implement the other measures provided for by the United Nations Security Council, including the sanctions regime and the targeted arms embargo."

'I CAN'T SLEEP': WHAT AN ATHLETE'S MURDER TELLS US ABOUT WOMEN'S SAFETY IN KENYA

19TH SEPTEMBER 2024

The murder of Olympic runner Rebecca Cheptegei by her former partner has reignited calls for stronger action against femicide in Kenya. The 33-year-old Ugandan died days after being doused in petrol and set alight by her ex-boyfriend at her home in Trans Nzoia county in western Kenya. This is not an isolated incident. Kenya has one of the highest rates of violence against women in Africa. Media reports say that in January alone more than 10 women in the country were victims of femicide, defined by the UN as the killing of women because of their gender. Jane, not her real name, tells the BBC she has been in hiding for the better part of the year.

She says she is unable to go back to work due to life-changing injuries inflicted by her ex-partner during a brutal stabbing. "His intention was to kill me. He stabbed me and left me for dead. Were it not for the neighbours, I would be dead," Jane recalls. She says she endured decades of worsening abuse before she left. Her breaking-point was when he started his aggression towards the children, she says.

"It was hell living with him. I don't know how I persevered for those many years," Jane adds.

Her estranged husband continues to harass her. "I live in fear. He says he wants to finish me off. I can't sleep at night. I'm now on medication to help with my mental health. I'm not the perpetrator but I'm living like I'm in jail." A 2018 World Health Organization (WHO) report suggested that 38% of women in Kenya aged between 15 and 49 had experienced violence from an intimate partner. Groups that offer support to survivors of gender-based

violence say there has been a year-on-year increase in the number of cases.

"On average, we receive up to 50 calls and sometimes 20 walk-ins in a day," Njeri Migwi tells the BBC.

She is the head of Usikimye - Swahili for "don't be silent". In 2021, then President Uhuru Kenyatta declared gender-based violence "a national crisis".

A year later, a government report found 41% of married women had experienced physical violence.

A survey by Africa Data Hub found that between 2016 and 2023, there were more than 500 reported cases of women being killed in Kenya. «In 75% of cases, killings were committed by a person who knew the murdered woman - an intimate partner, relative or friend,» the report says.

Sunita Caminha, UN Women specialist on ending violence against women and girls in East and southern Africa, says that women and girls of diverse backgrounds have been victims of femicide in a world marred by widespread gender discrimination and inequality.

In the latest UN report on violence against women and girls, Africa accounts for the largest share, with 20,000 women murdered. Long-distance runner Joan Chelimo says the killing of Cheptegei has left her traumatised.

"I can't sleep, imagining that someone was just burnt alive," she adds.

Cheptegei's ex-partner subsequently also died of burn wounds that he sustained in the attack on her. Ms Chelimo is a co-founder of Tirop's Angels, an organisation formed after the killing of another athlete, Agnes Tirop. She says that Cheptegei reported the abuse she faced to police, but "nothing happened". "So the perpetrators are not held accountable," Ms Chelimo adds. Police have denied claims that Cheptegei reported her life was in danger. Kenya has passed laws to address gender-based violence, but critics say few concrete measures are in place to tackle the scourge. Judy Gitau, the Africa regional director for campaign group Equality Now, says that "unfortunately, governments often feel that once they have a law, that's it - not understanding that laws don't execute themselves and they don't enforce themselves". Jane says that over the years her reports of abuse were dismissed. "Many times, the police say these are domestic quarrels. In fact, one policewoman I spoke to said: 'We cannot arrest him until he does something.' I asked her: 'Do you want him to kill me?' "The next day is when he stabbed me," Jane recalls. In 2004, police gender desks were introduced in Kenya to make it easier for women to report cases of gender-based violence, and for investigations to be sped up. However, only half of police stations have them. Police say this is because of a lack of resources.

In Trans Nzoia, where Cheptegei lived, there are five police stations, but none has gender desks - the only one is at the county headquarters, says Kennedy Apindi, the head of criminal investigations in the county.

"So reporting of these cases is a problem. They are reported late, or they are unreported until you hear about them in the media and that's when the police come into action," he adds. Cheptegei was the third female athlete to die in Kenya allegedly at the hands of an intimate partner in the last three years.

In 2021, merely five weeks after Agnes Tirop broke a 10km road-running world record in Germany, she was found killed in her home.

The 25-year-old had multiple stab wounds on her neck and abdomen. Her partner Ibrahim Rotich was arrested by police 640km (400 miles) away in Changanwe, on Kenya's coast. Three years after she was killed, the case is still in court, with Mr Rotich out on bond. He has pleaded not guilty to a charge of murder.

Other cases also run for years. Ms Gitau, who sits on a judiciary committee set up to review the timelines for cases involving gender-based violence, says the delays are unacceptable. "There must be prioritisation of GBV [gender-based violence]," she says. Just six months after Tirop's killing, Kenyan-born Bahrain runner Damaris Muthee Mutua was found dead in her home in Iten, a running hub in Kenya's Rift Valley. A police autopsy revealed that the 28-year-old had been strangled. Nobody has been convicted of her killing. Police said they were looking for her boyfriend in connection with the death. Just like Cheptegei, both athletes allegedly reported quarrels over money and property with their partners before meeting their deaths.

In many East African communities, gender-based violence is driven by patriarchal

beliefs, placing women in subordinate roles. Their independence is limited, and violence is normalised as a form of control.

Ms Gitau is calling for more safe houses for survivors. "Deep down, our attitudes, the norms that we hold as a country, still view women in a certain light," she says. Expressing a similar view, Ms Chelimo says the substantial amount of money that female athletes make, or stand to earn, leaves them vulnerable.

"They go against traditional gender norms... Female athletes are now becoming more independent, financially independent, and the other gender is really upset about it," Ms

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cy4y9pw7vqjo>.

Chelimo adds.

The government says it is running sensitisation programmes, while reviewing legislation to tackle gender-based violence. "We don't want this to happen to any other woman, whether an athlete, or from the village, or a young girl. We need to make sure that the gender police officers are doing their work," Rachel Kamweru from Kenya's State Gender Department tells the BBC. Jane says her life rests in the government's hands, and she hopes that it will do more to protect women like her from their ex-partners. "As long as he is free, I'll never have peace," she says.

TANZANIA

TANZANIAN POLICE CRACKDOWN ON PLANNED OPPOSITION RALLY

23RD SEP 2024

Leaders arrested following police chief's warning of tough measures to block protest.

Police have cracked down on a planned protest against the government organised by Tanzania's main opposition party.

The leaders of Chadema were arrested on Monday, the party said. Further arrests were made on the streets of the Magomeni area of the capital Dar-es-Salaam where protesters were gathering for a rally against alleged killings and abductions of government critics.

The crackdown extends fears of renewed political repression in the East African country ahead of upcoming local elections and next year's national vote.

Video footage posted on X by Chadema showed police arresting the party chairman, Freeman Mbowe, as he arrived "to lead a peaceful protest".

A separate post showed police outside the home of deputy chairman Tundu Lissu before he was taken into custody.

Police said they had arrested 14 people, including Mbowe and Lissu, for defying a prohibition on the protests.

In advance of these arrests, the police were seen blockading the homes of both party leaders.

Lissu, who survived an assassination attempt in 2016 despite being shot 16 times, earlier wrote on social media platform X that three police vehicles full of officers in riot gear were

outside his house.

"They've informed me I'm directed to be taken to the Regional Crimes Officer. I'm getting ready to go," he said.

Over the weekend, Dar-es-Salaam police chief Jumanne Muliro had warned that the planned rally would breach the peace and that his officers with water cannon have been deployed across key areas of the city since Saturday. Muliro would take strict action to prevent it.

Chadema has accused the government of President Samia Suluhu Hassan of returning Tanzania to the repressive tactics of her predecessor, John Magufuli.

Hassan took over in March 2021 following Magufuli's sudden death and initially appeared to signal a more open democracy, reversing restrictions on opposition rallies and the media.

But Chadema now accuses security forces of being behind the disappearance of several members and the killing of Ali Mohamed Kibao, a senior party official who authorities said was doused with acid and beaten to death last month.

In a speech broadcast on X on Sunday, Mbowe

insisted that the planned protest would be peaceful.

"We are neither carrying any weapons nor planning to violate the peace as some people allege," he said. "We have seen the deployment of armed police officers in the city but we are ready to face them."

Source: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/9/23/tanzanian-police-crack-down-on-planned-opposition-rally>.

When Chadema last tried to hold a rally in August, police arrested hundreds.

Rights groups and Western governments, including the United States, have criticised the crackdowns as "antidemocratic".

SLAIN TANZANIAN OPPOSITION FIGURE BEATEN, DOUSED WITH ACID: PARTY

Body of Ali Mohamed Kibao, who was removed from a bus by armed men, found with signs he had been beaten, Chadema says.

9TH SEP 2024

An initial investigation into the killing of a senior opposition official in Tanzania has found that he was beaten and doused with acid, according to his party.

The body of Ali Mohamed Kibao, a member of the secretariat of the main opposition Chadema party, was found on Saturday, a day after two armed men forced him off a bus heading from Dar-es-Salaam to the northeastern port city of Tanga, party chairman Freeman Mbowe said on Sunday.

"The [preliminary] post-mortem has been done and it is obvious that Ali Kibao has been killed after being severely beaten and even having acid poured on his face," Mbowe told journalists, adding that a full autopsy report was expected on Monday.

"We cannot allow our people to continue disappearing or being killed like this," he said. He added that several other party officials had also gone missing, without giving details.

Tanzanian President Samia Suluhu Hassan said she had ordered an investigation into Kibao's "assassination". "Our country is democratic and every citizen has the right to live. The government I lead does not tolerate such brutal acts," she wrote on X, offering her condolences to his family, friends and party leaders.

Police said they were investigating the "tragic incident". Mbowe urged the president to form a judicial commission to investigate abductions and the killing of Kibao, adding that police were among the suspects in the case.

Kibao's death comes a month after police arrested and briefly detained more than 500 Chadema supporters and senior leaders during a gathering.

Global rights group Amnesty International had described the mass arrests in August as a “deeply worrying sign” in the run-up to local government elections in December and general elections due next year.

Hassan has taken some steps to ease restrictions on the media and opposition since

coming to power in 2021.

But rights groups and government opponents have raised fears the recent crackdown on the opposition could signal a return to the oppressive policies of Hassan’s predecessor, the late President John Magufuli.

Source: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/9/9/slain-tanzanian-opposition-figure-beaten-doused-with-acid-party>.

ETHIOPIA

ETHIOPIA FESTIVAL FIRES BURN BRIGHT DESPITE DOWNPOUR

27TH SEPTEMBER 2024

Thousands in Ethiopia's capital city defied a downpour to celebrate Meskel, the first big festival of the religious year. It marks the discovery of the cross Jesus was crucified on, according to Ethiopian Orthodox Christian tradition.

On Thursday, believers gathered in a large public plaza in Addis Ababa for rituals, speeches and even a spot of theatre. But the highlight was the lighting of a bonfire in the centre of the square. There was heavy security presence at this year's celebration - personnel numbers have been beefed up at many major events in Ethiopia amid sporadic fighting in regions such as Amhara and Oromia. Traditional instruments play a significant role in Meskel proceedings. Heavy rain fell at one point during the evening, prompting musicians playing the 10-stringed begena to cover their instruments. Vocalists also put on a show. This all-female choir adorned themselves with mock versions of adey abeba, an indigenous flower that symbolises the Ethiopian New

Year, which was marked earlier this month.

As is customary, a huge pyre was lit at the centre of the square. The bonfire signifies the efforts made by St Helena, the mother of the Emperor Constantine, to find Jesus' cross while in Jerusalem in the 4th Century.

Sunday school students portrayed this scene for Thursday's crowds, with one young woman donning a huge crown and red cape: During the celebration Abune Mathias, the patriarch of Ethiopia's Orthodox Church, called on Ethiopians to unite and play a part in bringing peace to the country.

One wreath-wearing attendee had a similar message. Correction 30 September: The reference to the person who went to Jerusalem to find the cross has been updated to make it clear it was 4th Century St Helena, and not medieval Ethiopian Empress Eleni.

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cd6qgyg5343o>.

EGYPTIAN SHIP DELIVERS WEAPONS TO SOMALIA

24TH SEPTEMBER 2024

An Egyptian ship has delivered a significant consignment of military equipment to Somalia, security officials in the capital, Mogadishu, are quoted as saying. Somali Defence Minister Abdulkadir Mohamed Nur thanked Egypt in a social media post without specifically mentioning the weapons. This is the second such delivery from Egypt in a month as relations deteriorate between Somalia and its neighbour and former close ally Ethiopia.

Egypt, a long-time rival of Ethiopia, has taken the opportunity to move closer to Somalia, stoking concerns about rising tensions in the Horn of Africa. The military cargo, carried on a warship that arrived on Sunday, included anti-aircraft guns and artillery, the Reuters news agency reports citing security and port officials.

- Why Ethiopia is so alarmed by an Egypt-Somalia alliance

A BBC reporter in Mogadishu himself saw weapons being transported through the streets of the city. In his post on X, Mr Nur is pictured with his back to the camera looking at a docked naval vessel. "Somalia has passed the stage where they were dictated to and awaited the affirmation of others on who it will engage with," he wrote.

"We know our own interests, and we will choose between our allies and our enemies. Thank you, Egypt." This sentiment is a result of shifting alliances in the Horn of Africa. Ethiopia has for years been a staunch backer of the government in Mogadishu in its fight against al-Qaeda-linked militant group al-Shabab.

But Somalia is furious that landlocked Ethiopia signed a preliminary deal at the beginning of this year with the self-declared republic of Somaliland to lease a section of its coastline. Somalia sees Somaliland as part of its territory. Meanwhile, Addis Ababa and Cairo have been at loggerheads for more than a decade over Ethiopia's construction of a vast hydroelectric dam on the River Nile. Egypt sees this as a possible threat to the volume of water flowing down the river, which it relies on. Ethiopia has expressed its concern at the arrival of the weapons in Mogadishu, saying it could exacerbate the security situation in Somalia. Speaking on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York, Ethiopia's Foreign Minister Taye Atske-Selasie said they could fall into the hands of militants. Somaliland,

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cglk038p1d3o>.

which is not recognised internationally, had a similar message on Monday saying it was "deeply alarmed" by the shipment.

"The unchecked proliferation of arms in an already fragile environment heightens the risk of an arms race, with various factions likely seeking to acquire their own stockpiles in order to safeguard their interests," Somaliland's ministry of foreign affairs said in a statement. At the weekend, in a further sign of the strains in the region, Egypt called on its citizens living in Somaliland to leave for security reasons.

This is not the first time weapons have arrived in Somalia from Egypt. In August, two Egyptian military planes delivered arms and ammunition to Mogadishu. That delivery came after a deal signed earlier in August during a state visit to Cairo by Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud.

Ethiopia said at the time that it could not "stand idle while other actors take measures to destabilize the region".

Somalia's defense minister hit back, saying Ethiopia should stop "wailing" as everyone "will reap what they sowed" - a reference to their worsening diplomatic relations. Ethiopia currently has 3,000 troops in Somalia as part of an African Union force supporting the government. There is now a plan for up to 5,000 Egyptian soldiers to join a new-look AU force at the end of the year, with another 5,000 reportedly to be deployed separately.

Ethiopia also currently has between 5,000 and 7,000 soldiers stationed in several regions under separate bilateral agreements. Somalia's prime minister has warned Ethiopia that they would have to withdraw unless it pulled out from the port deal with Somaliland.

Additional reporting by Teklemariam Bekit in Nairobi and Hanna Temuari in Addis Ababa

HOW AN ETHIOPIAN EMPEROR ENDED UP LIVING IN BATH

10TH SEPTEMBER 2024

It has been 50 years since an emperor, described by many as the "Father of Africa", was overthrown by security forces known as the Derg in a "creeping coup". His Imperial Majesty Emperor Haile Selassie I was hailed around the world as a hero against fascist forces. But unbeknown to many is that the popular sovereign spent many years campaigning against Italian dictator Benito Mussolini from his West Country home in Bath, between 1936 to 1940.

University of the West of England professor Shawn Naphtali Sobers has been sharing the story of the emperor's exile in England in a new programme for the BBC World Service. The Ethiopian leader arrived in London's Paddington Station to huge crowds. However, his passionate speeches against Mussolini, who had invaded Emperor Selassie's home country, were an "embarrassment" to the UK government, which were seen as "keeping Mussolini cosy". Emperor Selassie was ordered to "go out to the provinces", so he soon settled in Bath. All of his family and staff moved to Fairfield House and quickly became the talk of the city.

Despite how "noticeable" they had been, the emperor had become "engrained" in the community, said Prof Sobers. "He was really a people person," he said, explaining Emperor Selassie had once refused to skip the queue for Weston-super-Mare's Tropicana resort.

The professor, a trustee of Emperor Selassie's former house, said the ruler had not wanted to leave his country after the Italian dictator had invaded. "But he realized the Ethiopians with their spears just wouldn't be able to combat that force. "So, he had to come to the West, basically to rally for liberation," Prof Sobers added.

Emperor Selassie addressed the League of Nations - the precursor of the United Nations - "and gave a very passionate speech saying essentially that if it's us today, it will be you tomorrow", continued Prof Sobers.

He said at that point, the UK had been "keeping Mussolini cozy". "When the emperor originally came to England, the crowds came out at Paddington Station. "He was really popular and he was basically an embarrassment to the British government," Prof Sobers said. He was told to "keep his head down" and "go out to the provinces". One of the reasons the emperor chose Bath was to have access to the city's "healing waters" to treat the mustard gas burns on his hands and arms from the chemical warfare being used in Ethiopia.

He bought Fairfield House and moved in his children, as well as servants, government ministers and Ethiopian priests. "It was a big entourage that lived in Bath, so they were very noticeable," said the professor.

But the group became of part of the community, with Emperor Selassie's children playing with the neighborhood kids and inviting them round for dinner. Prof Sobers remembered speaking to a Mrs King, who used to play with the emperor's children, but had been "really, really embarrassed" when she had eaten dinner at their house as they had dined on gold plates and her knife would make a loud scraping sound. Others remembered the emperor as "a man of timing". "Someone said that they knew if they were late for work or early for work by how far the emperor was walking down the road every morning," said the professor.

Emperor Selassie would often be seen walking his dog Lulu on the streets of Bath, though Prof Sobers said rumors he had had pet lions in his

basement of Fairfield House were not true.

The local paper ran daily updates on the emperor's schedule and dispelled other rumours like his beard "having turned white with anguish". Emperor Selassie also made a point of indulging in local amusements, including Weston's iconic Tropicana outdoor swimming pool. Locals remembered this trip because he had refused to skip the queue when offered. "He was like, 'no, no, I want to queue with everyone else'," added Prof Sobers.

The emperor did not forget about what was happening back home.

The house's nanny Ruth Haskins once recalled someone putting a record on the radiogram, which played the sounds of war in Ethiopia. "There were bombs and gunfire, people

screaming and crying. She said when she looked at the emperor, he had tears running down his face," explained Prof Sobers, saying the nanny had remembered the tears hitting the burns on his hands and splashing off them. "She said that's the memory that will always haunt her," he added. In 1939, Mussolini officially allied with Hitler.

Emperor Selassie returned to Ethiopia in 1940 after the British helped remove the dictator. He never forgot his time in Bath and renamed one of his palaces Fairfield in tribute to the British city. Fairfield House in Bath regularly hosts events and guided tours to preserve his legacy.

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c8j1218p3k1o>.

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