The US Department of Justice has applied to seize a US$2.8m Miami penthouse overlooking Biscayne Bay. Sassou-Nguesso bought it in 2012, using a misspelling of his name – ‘Denis Christelle’ – in an apparent attempt to hide his involvement. He later transferred the property to his wife, Nathalie Bumba-Pembe.

The criminal complaint says the property is “traceable to an international conspiracy to launder money embezzled from” the SNPC. It says that from 2011 to 2014 Sassou-Nguesso “funneled the misappropriated funds into accounts in the names of his various shell companies... at the Congo subsidiary of BGFI Bank Group S.A.”

The complaint also says that Sassou-Nguesso “accepted bribes worth over $1.5m in exchange for awarding lucrative oil licence contracts on behalf of SNPC from approximately 2014-2016”.

(Africa Confidential 24/6)

CORONAVIRUS

Third Wave Looms

Vaccination rates remain sluggish with less than two percent of Africans fully vaccinated.

Coronavirus cases have been rising in Africa since the start of the third wave on the continent in May. Sixteen African countries are now seeing a resurgence of the virus, with the more contagious Delta strain detected in 10 of them.

Vaccination rates remain sluggish, with only 16m people, 2% of the African population, fully vaccinated. But, said Dr Matshidiso Moeti, the World Health Organisation (WHO)'s regional director for Africa, there was some room for optimism because vaccine deliveries were picking up after grinding to a near halt in May and early June.

In the previous two weeks up to July 8th, more than 1.6m doses were delivered to Africa through the Covax scheme, which was set up to ensure equitable distribution of vaccines to poorer countries. A US shipment of 20m Johnson & Johnson and Pfizer-BioNTech is due to arrive soon, to be distributed to 49 countries. Donations from Norway and Sweden are due to follow.

Africa has so far received 66m doses and has administered 50m of them. Moeti urged governments to expand vaccination sites and take other measures to take advantage of the vaccine deliveries when they come. (© AFP 8/7 2021)

Strive Masiyiwa, the Zimbabwean telecoms tycoon and one of the lead figures in the African Union (AU)'s effort to speed up vaccine delivery told Bloomberg News: “Now is the time for Europe to open up its production facilities so we can buy vaccines... not a single dose, not one vial has left a European factory for Africa.”

He added, “... when we’ve gone to talk to their manufacturers they tell us they are completely maxed out meeting the needs of Europe”.

However, in what looks like a case of vaccine diplomacy, Rwanda has signed a $3.5m partnership with the European Union (EU) to upgrade its laboratory capacity to attract investors to manufacture Covid-19 vaccines. Rwanda is the first country to get EU funding for vaccine production. The main hurdle now is getting private investors on board, although President Paul Kagame told the Qatar Economic Forum in late June that negotiations with private sector firms to manufacture vaccines have advanced and that the production process would start “in a few months”.

(Africa Confidential 2/7)

Developing African Vaccines

Prof. Godwin Bazuyu, Chief Medical Director at Nigeria’s privately-run Igebinedin University Teaching Hospital (IUHT), said the risk of new strains arising from increased human interactions remained a threat until Africa creates its own vaccine.

“The environment in Africa which is closer to the Equator has played a major role in the low number of caseload fatalities reported in Africa. We also have the relatively good health enjoyed by the population as well as our genetic make-up which combined have played a key role in these low caseloads,” said Prof. Bazuyu.

Dr Philip Onyebuojoh, a disease surveillance expert, said the development of a vaccine would help generate crucial data bank on genes.

“We have the greatest genetic diversity in Africa. We need to capture this genetic data in order to come up with at least three different vaccine candidates which could make it easier to develop our own African vaccines,” said Dr Onyebuojoh. (PANA 21/6)

Africa currently imports 99% of its vaccine needs.

Egypt has recently launched the production process for manufacturing vaccines. Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouli has said that the country will increase the domestic production of the Chinese Sinovac vaccine to reach 80m doses before the end of 2021. At a press conference on July 5th, Madbouli stressed that such an increase will allow the government to inoculate 40m citizens before the end of 2021, adding that the state will also receive millions of other jabs from several international companies.

In order to achieve this significant increase in the production of vaccines, Madbouli said that the manufacturing capacity of the Egyptian Holding Company for Biological Products and Vaccines (Vacsera) would be increased from 300,000 to 600,000 jabs per day. The PM noted that Vacsera has locally produced about 1m doses of the Sinovac vaccine so far.

Moroccan media lauded an agreement signed between the government and Chinese firm Sinopharm which will see the kingdom producing 5m vaccines per month, gradually increasing over time. Privately owned website Hespress called the decision “historic”, saying that it put Morocco “at the cross-roads of south-south cooperation”, providing vaccines not only for its own citizens but for all of Africa.
**Ethiopia**

**Economic Woes**

**Covid, conflict and debt hinder reforms.**

 Shortly after taking office, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed promised a spectacular overhaul of Ethiopia’s tightly controlled economy: reforms to spur growth, unshackle the country’s potential, and lift millions out of poverty. But three years on, Abiy’s agenda remains largely unrealised, and the country burdened with debt, the economic pain of the coronavirus, and a costly war in Tigray.

“Things are worse now... The country is broke and on the verge of defaulting,” said one European diplomat, who asked not to be named.

One of Africa’s fastest-growing economies, Ethiopia took massive loans to fund some of its flashiest infrastructure projects. But paying back its external debt – some US$30bn, mostly to China – has proven difficult. In 2021 alone, Ethiopia owes about $2bn to its creditors and has sought unsuccessfully to defer payment.

“We are not now in a position to pay,” said Alemayehu Geda, a professor of economics at Addis Ababa University. Alemayehu said the problem is not the amount of borrowing – Ethiopia’s external debt to GDP ratio has fallen under 30% – however, agriculture – third of GDP – resisted the downturn, and the IMF forecasts that growth will rebound to 8% in 2022.

Abiy has acknowledged the unexpected cost of the pandemic to his reforms. But he also blames other factors – a record locust invasion, serious floods, and above all, the occurrence of widespread conflict.

Nevertheless, Ethiopia’s economy has begun opening under Abiy. Less than 10% of the various economic sectors were open to foreign investment when Abiy was appointed prime minister in 2018, said Olivier Poujade, founder of East Africa Gate, a consulting firm. “Now, the opposition is true,” he said, praising a “very different mentality” under the new administration.

In June, the government started the process to partially privatise Ethio Telecom, and earlier awarded a telecom licence to a consortium led by Kenya’s Safaricom, marking the historic end of a state monopoly over the key sector. (© AFP 16/6 2021)

**Costly War**

The human toll of the war has also been devastating, with the United Nations (UN) reporting that 5.2m people in Tigray need urgent food assistance and an emerging famine threatening some hundreds of thousands of people. Senior UN officials appealed on July 2nd for immediate and unrestricted humanitarian access to Tigray – and for an end to deadly attacks on aid workers – as the Security Council held its first open meeting on the conflict.

Painting a grim picture, Ramesh Rajasingha, acting under-secretary-general for humanitarian affairs and emergency relief coordinator, said that 400,000 people have “crossed the threshold into famine” – with another 1.8m on the brink of following them.

Some 1.7m people have been displaced by fighting between Ethiopian troops and the Tigray Defence Force, with 60,000 refugees crossing the border into neighbouring Sudan, added Rosemary DiCarlo, under-secretary-general for political and peacebuilding affairs.

“The lives of many of these people (in Tigray) depend on our ability to reach them with food, medicine, nutrition supplies and other humanitarian assistance,” the acting relief chief told the 15-member Council.

Both officials strongly condemned targeted attacks which have taken the lives of at least 12 humanitarian workers, including three from Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) staff in late June. (© AFP 16/6 2021)

**Addis Standard** on July 7th reported the UN as saying that humanitarian access within Tigray had improved. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) said...