Africa Briefs

Russia Invites BRICS To Create Joint Hydrocarbons Processing Plants

Russian Industry and Trade Minister Denis Manturov invited BRICS member countries to create joint ventures for advanced oil refining and gas processing without the participation of external, "unreliable partners." He spoke at a Moscow meeting of BRICS ministers of industry on May 23.

South African Mineral Resources and Energy Minister Gwede Mantashe said May 27 that South Africa would respond to a proposal from Russia.

Manturov also invited the BRICS ministers of industry to the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum in June.

Meanwhile, the BRICS association is considering expanding its membership. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said May 26 that Saudi Arabia and Argentina wished to join.

The foreign ministers' virtual meeting of the BRICS on May 19 also included foreign ministers and other high officials of Saudi Arabia, Argentina, Nigeria, Senegal, Egypt, the UAE, Kazakhstan, and Thailand under the "BRICS Plus" initiative.

The BRICS New Development Bank has already added Bangladesh, the UAE, Egypt, and Uruguay to its membership.

A possible Russian shift away from green axioms has been raised by Dmitry Trenin, a member of Russia's Foreign and Defense Policy Council and until recently the director of the Carnegie Moscow Center. Trenin's policy paper, "How Russia Must Reinvent Itself To Defeat the West's 'Hybrid War'," published by *RT* May 23, stated, "A separate task is to revise the Russian approach and policy position on climate change issues under the changed conditions." The paper is based on his presentation to the 30th Assembly of the Council for Foreign and Defense Policy on May 14.

AU Chairman Sall Accepts Invitation To Visit Moscow

Having received a mandate from the membership, African Union chairman Macky Sall, the President of Senegal, said May 22 that he would accept an invitation from Russia to visit Moscow on behalf of the body, after which he will make another such stop in Ukraine. The chairman of the African Union is its ceremonial head.

Africa May Challenge 'Just Transition' Narrative with a 'Different Path'

On at least two occasions in May, African leaders raised road blocks against London's "Just Transition" to green deindustrialization. It is becoming clear that Africans realize they must determine their own vision of Africa's future.

Speaking May 12 at the Infrastructure Solutions Summit organized by the Africa Finance Corporation (AFC), Nigerian vice president and presidential candidate Yemi Osinbajo directly challenged the Just Transition framework—specifically the 2030 deadline for carbon neutrality. "Africa needs to come in very forcefully to chart a different path," Osinbajo said. "We are not just challenged in terms of global warming, but for us, it is also the existential challenge of just survival ... Africa first needs to come together to put out a vision that is ours for climate change or carbon neutrality *by 2050, 2070 or whenever it is convenient.*"

Pointing to COP27 in Egypt next year, Osinbajo indicated there may be a resistance movement building. "I don't think that Africa has articulated the vision yet, but there are ongoing efforts towards that. We think that at Egypt COP27 *we will begin to articulate an African vision and initiative,* because all of the decisions were initiated and taken by wealthier countries where they defined practically everything about how we respond to climate change. But our own peculiarities and challenges are different."

In South Africa, Presidential Climate Finance Task Team head Daniel Mminele invoked a "different paradigm" in speaking at the Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection (MISTRA), a Johannesburg think tank, on May 9. Mminele is a recently retired deputy governor of the South African Reserve Bank who was appointed by President Ramaphosa in February to lead negotiations with western bankers after the $8.5 billion deal for accelerated exit from coal was agreed in principle at the time of COP 26.

He noted that the $8.5 billion should be viewed only as a starting point, given the scale of investment that would be required over the coming three decades. "The offer is not the magical pot at the end of the rainbow. At best, it is an initial contribution to a national effort."

The package, he said, would have to support South Africa in its ambition to raise gross fixed capital formation from about 15% of gross domestic product to 30%, in line with the country's National Development Plan.

Any debt, he told his listeners, should be extended on terms that were more attractive than could be secured in the capital markets, and without "unduly onerous reporting requirements."

Mminele's address seems to reflect certain seeds of national resistance to the intended deindustrialization.

Egypt Signs with Siemens To Build 2,000 km Fast Red-Med Rail Line

Egypt and Siemens signed a deal May 28 for a fast rail system of 2,000 km running (1) from Ain Sokna on the Red Sea to Alexandria and Marsa Matrouh, (2) from Cairo to Aswan's Abu Simbel, and (3) from Luxor to Hurghada on the Red Sea. Highest speed will be about 230 km/h, not quite the "high-speed" minimum of 250 km/h. It will be "the beginning of a new era for the rail system in Egypt, Africa and the Middle East," according to Egyptian President Abdel Fatah el-Sisi at the signing. The contract also includes 41 trains, 94 regional trains, 41 freight trains, and eight depots and freight stations.

New Steel Mill in Kenya

Jumbo Steel Mills' new $17 billion steel plant will go into operation on June 5. It will produce rebar, mild steel sections, wire products, and hollow sections for the construction industry. Strategically located at Kisumu port on Lake Victoria, it will be able to make shipments via the lake to Tanzania, Uganda, and DR Congo. It will connect with Nairobi and Mombasa by rail, meter gauge and standard gauge.

Africa a Juicy Target For Nation-Busting Crypto Speculators

The Central African Republic (CAR) on April 28 became the first African nation—and second in the world, after El Salvador—to adopt the crypto-currency Bitcoin as legal tender. It will function alongside the neo-colonial CFA franc controlled by France. Under the new law, all transactions in crypto-currencies will be tax-exempt. The CAR plans to launch an official crypto hub called Sango, "to attract crypto enthusiasts worldwide."

Beyond CAR, the African continent at large has become a major target of crypto-currency speculators who—with some support from large western banks such as Bank of America, Chase, Goldman Sachs, and Morgan Stanley—are looking to get rich quick while achieving their sponsors' vision of a world in which governments will soon have no control over national monetary policy. Such control is a major pillar of national sovereignty, without which industrialization cannot succeed. In the unipolar U.S.-dollar system, that pillar has been a weak one. Now states are being tricked into jumping from the frying pan into the fire.

Many establishment economists—whose risk avoidance standards are notoriously low—consider that Bitcoin is so speculative that it is dangerous, but recognize its value for criminals.

In response to the CAR, the Banking Commission of Central Africa (COBAC, representing six nations including CAR) issued a memo on May 13, emphasizing its standing ban on crypto-currencies and that it is the bank's responsibility to maintain financial stability. Opposition leaders in CAR have warned the law could facilitate money laundering, tax evasion, and fraud. A crypto-currency system is also a useful adjunct to anonymous darknet sales and purchase of illegal drugs, weapons, sex slaves, and wholesale stolen credit card information.

The CAR's website for the planned crypto hub—called Sango—states that, "The state will fully support access to the country's natural resources such as gold, diamonds, uranium, iron ore, copper, coltan, cobalt, nickel, lithium and petroleum.... As the government is the principal landowner, it will be facilitating land acquisition in Bitcoin for worldwide investors.... Sango will be the first island in the Metaverse that is backed by reality."

The legal framework for Sango is described tersely as having these features: "e-residency program, citizenship by investment, online business registration, income tax 0%, corporate tax 0%, ... crypto crowdfunding for PPP infrastructure programs, tokenization framework for assets and national resources, and creation of the Digital National Bank."

It doesn't take a forensics expert to detect the ugly truth mixed with the fantasy being perpetrated here—against one of the poorest, most desperate countries in the world.

The CAR government hired Mara (CoinMara Inc.), a Kenyan "crypto exchange platform," as consultant for its venture into crypto on May 6. Mara was started only a year ago by Nigerian media producer and techno-whiz Chi Nnadi, along with Dearg OBartuin and Lucas Llinás Múnera. On May 11, it announced a $23 million cash infusion from venture capitalists.

Kenya and Nigeria are Mara's other initial targets in its plan to spread its crypto operations across Africa. Kenya is already a hotbed of crypto expansion, being rated number 5 in last year's Global Crypto Adoption Index, "and Kenyans are already directly trading crypto-currencies with each other more than elsewhere in the world," according to *Capital Business* (Nairobi) May 9.

The World Economic Forum reports estimates that show crypto adoption had grown by $106 billion in Africa in the year ending June 2021.