

# Comment

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

President Museveni speaking at the 49th St Janani Luwum Day commemoration: "Amin's first mistake was to impose himself on us. Who did he think he was? Leaders should not impose themselves on the people. Both the Bible and political strategy guides show that persuading people is better than imposing yourself on them."



### EDITORIAL

## Govt must pore over question on fuel tax

A proposal by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in its February Post-Financing Assessment Discussion Staff Report to introduce Value Added Tax (VAT) on fuel products has prompted a mixture of derision and alarm. The lender opines that slapping VAT on fuel, whilst at the same time reducing Excise Duty will have the positive effect of boosting domestic revenue mobilisation and improving fiscal sustainability.

The jury is, however, still out. Despite cracking open the possibility of widening the country's tax base, the deepest fears of many are that any such move risks drawing the public's ire due to the high sensitivity in fuel prices.

This might appear to fit the bill of being the quintessential act of political expediency since fuel exemptions, as the IMF notes in its report, are politically popular. But that is only half of the story. Fuel-related taxes can have potentially devastating effects on low-income earners who heavily rely on products like kerosene. The knock-on impact on transport and food costs can be just as brutal. If not more. Pump prices, as it is, are already punishingly high, with the price of a litre of petrol well above the Sh5,000 barrier.

### The Issue:

Fuel tax

### Our view:

We continue to call for an evidence-based discussion that will stop the country from, excuse the pun, running on fumes.

The price of a litre of diesel is also menacingly close to breaching the aforementioned barrier. While it is indeed true that increasing costs for motorists is politically difficult, what is rarely discussed and, perhaps, poorly understood is that Uganda's budget policy wonks cannot lay claim to taxes collected from car drivers being used to fund public transport.

This is because there is no semblance of public transport in Uganda. The poor state of roads in the country also invites pertinent questions as to where the Sh1,650 and Sh1,380 fuel duties the government levies on each litre of petrol and diesel, respectively, go.

We believe it is healthy for people in Uganda to have a sober conversation on this subject. The aforesaid people should also interest themselves in whether there are relative merits for the government to import refined fuel through its deal with Vitol Bahrain. The State-owned Uganda National Oil Company (Unoc) runs point on the deal that put Kenyan oil marketing companies out of business when it was green-lighted by Nairobi in early 2024. Before pulling the rug from under the feet of the Kenyan middlemen, the price of a litre of petrol was Sh4,700.

Currently it is north of Sh5,000. While Unoc has previously blamed the failure to, as promised, bring down pump prices on a range of geopolitical factors, could there be more than meets the eye?

We continue to call for an evidence-based discussion that will stop the country from, excuse the pun, running on fumes. The question of public transport, or lack thereof, has to be decisively addressed.

Only then can the government justify increasing the cost of motoring in the name of addressing the more and longer traffic jams that so impoverish the country. Short of that, people in Uganda will continue to face a double whammy of paying higher taxes on fuel products and spending longer in traffic. It morphs into a triple whammy if the attendant effects of high fuel costs on food prices are to be considered, as, indeed, they should.

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Cartoon. IGG Justice Aisha Naluzze Bataala has issued a warning to public officers and political leaders to declare their wealth by March 31 or face prosecution.



## How resources and rival powers are remaking Africa's security landscape

Africa's conflicts are too often narrated as separate emergencies: Sudan as a Red Sea-Horn of Africa catastrophe, and the Sahel as a West African counter-terrorism theatre. That framing is increasingly misleading. A connected "fracture belt" is emerging, a widening arc in which civil war, insurgency, displacement, illicit finance, and external competition reinforce one another across borders. In strategic terms, these crises are converging into a single regional security system with continent-wide consequences.

Sudan illustrates how an internal war can rapidly acquire geopolitical gravity. As State authority erodes, violence fractures market, degrades public services, and forces displacement. Over time, displacement becomes more than a humanitarian statistic; it becomes a driver of regional politics, border securitisation, and fiscal stress for neighbours. When that pressure persists, governments are pushed into crisis budgeting, host communities absorb long-term service demands, and political attention shifts from development to survival.

Further west, the Sahel shows how violence has evolved into political economy. Armed groups do not only raid; they tax roads and livestock routes, regulate local trade, and police smuggling corridors. This is why battlefield pressure alone rarely delivers strategic results because as long as these revenue streams and permissive spaces remain, insurgency can regenerate.

Natural resources are the connective tissue that makes the belt geopolitically sticky. Critical minerals function as both prize and fuel, but gold is the most destabilising because it is easily portable, and hard to trace. In weakly governed zones, resource extraction becomes a parallel financial system financing armed actors, distorting local authority, and incentivising control of territory and transport routes. Resources also pull in external actors. The Red Sea and wider Horn have become a theatre of competitive Statecraft: Gulf States seek leverage over ports, logistics hubs, and food-security supply chains, while offering investment, mediation, or security cooperation. Such engagement can stabilise when it strengthens institutions, but it can also entrench spoilers when local factions treat foreign backing as insurance against compromise.

In the Sahel and adjacent zones, a different marketplace has emerged: "regime security" assistance. Russia-linked contractors, regional military partners, and Western security programmes all compete to provide training, intelligence, equipment, or battlefield support. When security cooperation becomes transactional, accountability often declines, civilian protection weakens, and armed groups gain propaganda oxygen.

### A response that meets international standards must redefine security.

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Geoeconomics



China and the European Union shape the fracture belt less through force than through geoeconomics finance for infrastructure, access to markets, and investment in extractives. These tools can strengthen States when they create jobs, improve connectivity, and reinforce transparency. Yet in brittle environments, mega-projects can become magnets for predation, corruption, and attacks; investment does not automatically produce stability when legitimacy is falling.

Political fragmentation inside the belt compounds the risk. Coups, shrinking civic space, and diplomatic ruptures weaken regional organisations' ability to coordinate mediation, share intelligence, and apply collective pressure. When regional blocs fragment, crisis management becomes bilateral and ad hoc rather than rule-based and multilateral, raising the leverage of external actors and reducing Africa's bargaining power on debt, climate finance, and the terms of resource extraction.

For East Africa and Uganda in particular this is not a distant drama. The fracture belt exports three pressures: sustained demand on schools, clinics, water systems, and local administration; networked insecurity through arms flows, document fraud, and human smuggling; and geoeconomics volatility that disrupts corridors, raises insurance costs, and deters investment. The region pays a conflict tax whether or not it is a combatant.

A response that meets international standards must redefine security. Civilian protection should be treated as a strategic imperative, and policy must follow the war economy through financial intelligence, commodity trading, anti-corruption enforcement, and coordinated disruption of transnational logistics. Frontier governance is decisive too: functioning courts, dispute resolution, and accountable policing in peripheral areas as are how armed actors are outcompeted over time.

Africa's fracture belt should be read for what it is: an emerging geopolitical system where war economies, strategic commodities, and rival patrons converge on weak institutions. Left unmanaged, it will not burn out; it will normalise permanent emergency and reorder regional stability. The choice is strategic: coordinate to contain the conflict economy or accept a future in which armed actors and outside patrons set the terms of security.

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