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Current Affairs in the Horn of Africa (*Autumn 2016*)

by Run Doon

South-Central Somalia

Grindingly slow progress towards federal elections forces fresh delays

In early April, after extended negotiations between the Puntland administration and Somali PM, Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke, Puntland accepted the 4.5 formula for the scheduled August federal election, with the terms of their agreement set out in an 18-article memorandum. Puntland President Abdiweli 'Gaas' then joined a National Leadership Forum in Mogadishu on 10th April, with other federal state leaders, to hammer out the details. Over two days, they agreed to establish a committee at the federal and another at the state level, to establish specific procedures for election of both the lower house of parliament and a new 54-seat upper house. The lower house was to be elected by clan representatives under the old 4.5 formula, while the upper house was to be selected by representatives of the Regional Federal States; a measure specifically designed to appease Puntland.

These terms riled some federal MPs, with one claiming that the agreement was 'unconstitutional', vowing that he and fellow law-makers would resist the deal as it showed favouritism to Puntland. However, Puntland's acceptance represented a significant milestone and as the Leadership Forum was convened, the 8th session of the Federal Parliament also opened, with an agenda that included confirmation of the agreed electoral arrangements.

On 19th April, President Hassan Sheikh announced at a meeting of the UN Security Council that an electoral college of 14,000 would be formed to elect the new government. Hailing the arrangement as more democratic than that employed in 2012, when 135 elders were entitled to vote, the President also noted that there would be a 30% quota for women, and promised that voting would take place "throughout Somalia". He claimed that this would establish the foundation for universal suffrage in 2020. Parliamentary elections were to be held on 20th August, followed by the presidential vote a couple of weeks later.

International representatives were quick to endorse the procedure, and the UN Security Council announced that their envoys would visit Mogadishu in May for meetings and to demonstrate their support.

The Prime Minister duly presented the necessary legislation in Parliament on 1st May, but also requested that the election date itself be delayed by two months to allow time for preparations. The House immediately rejected the request for a delay, before moving to debate the legislation. However, divisions amongst MPs prevented progress. International bodies expressed serious concern, urging MPs to endorse the plans swiftly, but to no avail.

With pressure mounting to find a way to break the parliamentary impasse, President Hassan Sheikh announced on 22nd May that he had decided to impose the arrangements by decree, and that elections would go ahead as scheduled in August. While that decision was greeted with predictable outrage from many MPs, it nevertheless achieved the desired breakthrough, and in mid-June, MPs passed crucial constitutional amendments. This enabled the President to move quickly to appoint a Federal Electoral Commission, which he also did by decree.

But once again, the process ground to a halt as the new commissioners attempted to build agreement amongst stakeholders on critical issues. Throughout the closing days of June and all of July, progress was excruciatingly slow, and by the end of July it was clear that an August election was impossible. In an attempt to revive the stalled process, a new National Leadership Forum was convened on 3rd August in Mogadishu. Surprising many, Jubaland President Ahmed 'Madoobe', not hitherto known for his democratic credentials, spoke out strongly in support of the electoral timetable, urging fellow politicians to "demonstrate leadership" and set aside differences.

After days of intense international and domestic pressure, the Forum agreed the terms for lower house elections to be held between 24th September and 10th October, voting for the new upper house to take place on 25th September, and election of the president on 30th October 2016. This new deal was again hailed by many, but rejected by opposition presidential

candidates, including ex-President of Puntland, Abdirahman Mohamed Faroole, who argued that the extension to the President's term was unconstitutional.

At the time of writing, that electoral schedule remains in place, with the electoral commission (now named the Federal Indirect Electoral Implementation Team) confirming that 135 elders would select 14,025 members of the Electoral Colleges, who would in turn elect 275 members of the lower house of the federal Parliament, while regional governments would select the upper house. Both houses then vote for the president.

But difficulties remain over the allocation of seats in the upper house, and most particularly over the number of seats allocated to Puntland and Somaliland. On 8th September, the reconvened National Leadership Forum failed to agree a formula, with both Puntland and Galmudug rejecting the allocation of seats to representatives from Sool and Sanaag. As this edition was being completed, fresh crisis hit as Puntland President Abdiweli 'Gaas' and his Jubaland counterpart, Ahmed 'Madoobe' walked out of the forum on Sunday 11th September.

New Ambassadors for US & Djibouti

On 9th August, the first US ambassador to Somali in 25 years, Stephen Schwartz, presented his credentials to Foreign Minister Abdisalam Omar Hadliye, while a few days later the Federal President Hassan Sheikh farewelled the Djiboutian ambassador, Dayib Dubbad Rooble. Ambassador Rooble had been in post for an unusually long seven years, and his replacement, Aden Hassan Aden, presented his credentials in Mogadishu on 8th September.

Mogadishu hosts IGAD Heads of State meeting

In a meeting in Addis Ababa on 5th August, IGAD announced that their annual leaders' meeting would be held in Mogadishu. This would be the first major, high-level international meeting to be held in the city for some three decades, and is intended to underline regional support for Somalia's continued stabilisation. The leaders of Uganda, Kenya, Sudan, Djibouti, South Sudan, and Ethiopia are all expected to attend.

Scheduled initially for 10th September, that was later pushed back to 13th September, with security a major concern. Indeed, the week prior to the event saw mortar shells fired at the airport venue. They missed, injuring several people, but underlined the priority al-Shabaab would likely place on attempting an attack on the gathering, given the chance. In the days preceding

the event, many Mogadishu roads were closed to traffic, and heavy security was in place.

At the time of writing, the meeting had not taken place, but its success is vital if Somalia's message of hope for a more stable future is to be maintained.

Australian, French navies seize Somali-bound arms shipments

In mid-March, an Australian warship stopped and seized a fishing vessel bound for Somalia, and found to be carrying a large shipment of weapons. The Federal government quickly declared the arms to have been intended for al-Shabaab. A fortnight later, on 29th March, French naval forces spotted a fishing dhow, apparently with no national registration. Stopping the boat, they too discovered it to be full of weapons - several hundred AK47 assault rifles, machine guns and anti-tank weapons.

The shipments were seized under the UN-imposed Somali arms embargo, which remains in place - at this stage, until 15th November 2016 - but is very unpopular with the federal government. They maintain that it prevents them from adequately arming their own security forces. Those objections didn't stop President Hassan Sheikh from declaring his delight at the seizures, though.

AMISOM faces funding crisis, but continues

In January 2016, the EU announced that they would cut their contribution to AMISOM by 20% - a decision that has reverberated in the months since. In early March, the troop-contributing countries urged the creation of "an effective Amisom Command and Control [structure] in order to achieve synergy", noting their "serious concern" at the funding cut. The assurances of the EU Ambassador to Somalia, Michele Cervone d'Urso, that the cut reflected EU priorities rather than indicating "bad relations" with Somalia or contributing nations did nothing to placate AMISOM leaders. A late-March suggestion that the EU might cut funding altogether for the 5,400-person Burundi contingent, in an effort to force President Nkurunziza to avoid ethnic conflict at home, only exacerbated the situation.

With increasingly urgent pleas to EU and UN representatives failing to achieve a reversal of the decision, rumours surfaced that Uganda, the largest contributor apart from Ethiopia, would withdraw from the force. A Ugandan spokesperson denied the story in early May, but the sense of crisis was apparent.

Faced with such uncertainty, the UN Security Council met on 29th May and endorsed an extension to the AMISOM mandate of only two months, to give time to resolve funding issues. Ugandan President Museveni then stepped in personally, saying that he would reconsider withdrawal “if we move in the right direction”. He didn’t elaborate.

Negotiations didn’t achieve a reversal in the EU’s decision, though sufficient compromise was found within the AMISOM arrangement to allow continuation, albeit with considerable residual ill-feeling. The AU launched a Peace Fund at a summit in Kigali in May in an attempt to locate some additional funds, though it was not clear when they would become available. However, this was sufficient for the Security Council to agree unanimously in early July to extend the mandate to 31st May 2017.

With the immediate crisis resolved at least for the time being, Uganda announced in mid-July that they were deploying a new ‘battle group’, and a new AMISOM Force Commander assumed control at the same time.

Emphasising continued dissatisfaction, though, Kenya’s Cabinet Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Amina Mohamed, used an open debate at the UN Security Council in New York on 28th July to further urge the international community to find extra funding for the force.

Somaliland-Somalia Talks

Turkey offer to mediate, but talks remain hypothetical possibility

Talks between Somalia and Somaliland continue to be suggested, agreed, promised and abandoned. Since the last edition of Run Doon, Turkey declared their intention towards the end of March 2016 to resume their role in hosting the talks and appointed an envoy specifically to facilitate. However, they incurred Somaliland’s ire when they described themselves as mediators rather than just hosts, as in the past.

There was an announcement at the start of June that the talks were on again, but Somaliland’s Kulmiye party candidate for the presidency, Musse Bihi, declared Turkey “a partial moderator”, and therefore unacceptable. On 28th August, Somaliland’s Foreign Minister declared in Cairo that his Egyptian counterpart had agreed that Egypt would mediate, while Turkey hosted, but it is not clear that that arrangement has the support of either of the other two parties. At the start of September, Mogadishu’s former mayor, Mohamud Ahmed ‘Tarzan’ weighed in with an accusation that Somalia were responsible for the failure of earlier talks, because they had not taken

sufficient account of Somaliland sensitivities.

While the talks are still much talked about, it is not at all clear if, when or in what form they might resume.

Severe drought in Somaliland & Puntland, then spreads south

Areas of Puntland and Somaliland were the first to enter a period of severe drought, after four seasons of failed rains. The rainfall deficit was exacerbated this year by the El Niño weather cycle. By March, the Puntland Drought Response Committee was trucking emergency water the worst-affected areas and similar efforts were underway in Somaliland. The UAE-based Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan Foundation was one of many private organisations distributing relief aid, disbursing 2,500 food parcels in Somaliland’s Booraame area.

In April, farmers along the Shabelle River saw their crops fail as the river dried completely for long stretches, and the UN estimated that a million people were at risk.

Reciprocating an earlier donation from Somaliland to drought-hit southern areas a year or so back, the federal government donated US\$1 million to Somaliland and UNICEF and the World Food Programme increased their relief efforts both there and in Puntland. They revised their earlier estimates upwards, calculating that 385,000 people required urgent assistance, while 1.3 million were at risk of suffering a food crisis if the drought continued.

As the drought worsened, increasing numbers of diaspora groups, private foundations and multi- and bi-lateral agencies raised funds to support relief activities.

New rains did start to fall in some areas from mid-April, with flash floods in Togdheer and Maroodi Jeex regions of Somaliland causing damage, and in Arabsiyo a Noah vehicle was swept away, killing one person while a number of others narrowly escaped.

Even while flooding was causing trouble in parts of Somaliland, the situation further south was still worsening, and by the end of April, humanitarian agencies were warning of looming crisis there. On 26th April, 23 agencies released a joint statement after a meeting in Geneva, urging rapid action to avoid further calamity. Areas of Puntland and some parts of Somaliland were also still to see the rains that had arrived elsewhere.

It was not until May that widespread rainfall arrived, with the almost inevitable destruction that caused. In

the middle of May, the rain had been so heavy that the Shabelle River burst its banks in Beledweyne, displacing a significant number.

Al-Shabaab

Increasing numbers from al-Shabaab split to join Islamic State

On 25th April, a group formally affiliated with Islamic State celebrated their first attack in Somalia. They detonated a car bomb targeting a group of AMISOM forces outside Mogadishu. It didn't seem to dampen their glee that the attack failed to cause casualties.

IS affiliates were then reported to be shifting from the Juba area, where they were under pressure from AMISOM forces, to Mogadishu, where they believed they could more easily blend into the city crowds. There were also reports at about the same time of a group of about 20 IS-affiliated fighters moving around in Puntland's Bari region, and the Somali army reported a raid on an IS training camp outside Merka town on 3rd May. The claimed to have killed 12 fighters, including a foreigner, and captured a number of others. In August, an IGAD report cited evidence dating back to early 2015 of two IS recruiting cells who were seeking individuals willing to travel to Syria to fight, presumably with the opportunity to return later to Somalia to continue to mount attacks.

Some of the blame for IS activity is directed at an ex-British imaam, Sheikh Abdulqadir Mumin, who relocated to the Galgala area and, in 2015, switched allegiance to IS. Al-Shabaab responded by purging his followers, but with IS offering a more attractive jihadi proposition than al-Qaeda, the gradual shift from one to the other seems set to continue.

Kenyan, US air bombardments increase, al-Shabaab leadership targeted

Both US drones and Kenyan forces continued to use air bombardment as a means of attacking al-Shabaab forces, particularly around Kismayo. April proved a heavy month for bombing raids in that area, with attacks destroying bases in the Juba valley on several occasions, with significant loss of life amongst Shabaab fighters.

The first, and one of the most successful of these air raids occurred on 31st March, when an American drone killed senior al-Shabaab leader, Hassan Ali Dhoore. Another top AS leader, Abdirashid Buqdube, was killed along with a group of his fighters just two days later in a ground attack on

Janaale town, south of Mogadishu, while a further six AS commanders were killed in fighting in Lower Shabelle in the same week.

A few weeks later, on 10th June, al-Shabaab fighters attacked an Ethiopian military base in Halgan, in Hiraaan Region. Fierce fighting ensued, but Ethiopian forces were able to repel the attack, with heavy loss of life amongst the AS contingent. Estimates of fatalities range from 150 to 240 AS fighters.

Finally, in this series of al-Shabaab set-backs, an operation in August saw other key leaders arrested. A joint raid between Somali special forces, the national army and Puntland forces in North Galkayo saw the arrest of several al-Shabaab members, including several foreigners, amongst whom was Said Abdallah Abubakar al-Sudani, a senior explosives expert.

The most recently reported and highest profile casualty, though, maybe the al-Shabaab leader himself, Ahmed Omer Abu Ubeidah, who was reportedly killed in a combined US/Somali raid in Saakow town of the Middle Juba area in mid-August. He was apparently meeting with al-Shabaab's command group, the *shura* council, which also lost a number of other members in the attack. The US have acknowledged that the attack took place, but denied direct involvement. However, other reports suggest that Somali special forces were delivered in a US gunship. At the time of writing, rumours of his death continue to circulate, though some doubt remains as to whether they are true.

Attacks continue in Mogadishu

For all the setbacks al-Shabaab seemed to suffer between March and August, their ability to mount attacks on civilian targets in Mogadishu seemed to remain fairly much undiminished.

An attack on the Raajo restaurant in Shibis District on 9th April was timed to take place when the restaurant was busy serving lunch. A car bomb was detonated outside the restaurant, killing three. A car bomb was used again in a similar attack on 11th April on al-Hindi restaurant near the Benaadir Region District offices in Hamar Weyne. Again, the detonation was timed to coincide with lunch, and five people were killed.

These two attacks were sufficient to drive President Hassan Sheikh to describe al-Shabaab as "resurgent" in a speech following the al-Hindi attack.

There was also an increase in the number of drive-by shootings, and hand grenade and mortar attacks during April, while on 29th April, a vehicle laden with explosives was identified before it was detonated outside the Royal restaurant in Hodan District.

May was also relatively quiet, save for a complex attack on the Fisho Traafiko police headquarters in Shangaani District on 9th May. A vehicle-borne device was driven at the HQ and detonated, followed by an attack by a number of gunmen. They succeeded in entering the compound before being overpowered. Five people, mostly civilians, were killed in the attack.

Unfortunately, the scale of attacks picked up significantly in the lead-up to and during Ramadan. The first was a major raid on the Ambassador Hotel on 2nd June. The attack started with a suicide car bomb, driven into the gate of the hotel. That was followed by a group of between four and six gunmen who forced their way into the hotel compound. Once inside, they were able to occupy the premises, holding dozens of hostages. Hundreds of security forces converged on the hotel, and many hostages were released. However, the siege continued through the night. By the time Somali forces had reoccupied the hotel, at least fifteen people had been killed, including MPs Mohamed Mohamud Gure and Abdullahi Jama.

On 25th June, al-Shabaab fighters mounted another attack on a hotel, this time called Nasa Hablood after the Hargeisa hills of that name. The attack followed a similar pattern to that on the Ambassador: a car bomb was used to force entry through the main gates, followed by a group of gunmen who barricaded themselves into the top floor. By the time security forces had regained control of the hotel, twenty people had been killed, including State Minister for the Environment, Buri Mohamed Hamza.

A further attack was mounted on the Halane military base at Mogadishu airport on 25th July. Suicide bombers drove two explosives-laden vehicles at the base before detonating them, and killing a further 20 people. After the attack, it turned out that one of the attackers was an ex-MP from the Federal Parliament. Salah Badbaado had represented Sanaag Region between 2000 and 2004 and had defected to al-Shabaab in 2010. The airport was closed for much of that day as a result of the attack.

Less than a week later, 11 people were killed when AS fighters detonated two bombs at the CID headquarters.

On 26th August, AS resumed their attacks on restaurants, this time targeting Benaadir Beach restaurant at 6.30pm. The model for the attack was similar to those used for the recent hotel assaults: a car bomb was followed by gunmen. In this case, security guards fired on the suicide driver's vehicle, forcing him to detonate the bomb earlier than he had intended. However, the gunmen were still able to battle their way into the restaurant, and once again, the siege lasted some hours. On this occasion, ten people died.

At the time of writing, the most recent attack once again targeted a hotel, on 30th August. This time it was the SYL Hotel, which had been attacked before, presumably because of its proximity to Villa Somalia and its popularity with government officials. The attack was this time limited to a single truck-borne suicide bomber, but the vehicle was packed with so much explosive that the devastation was huge. 26 people were killed even though guards had again been able to open fire on the driver before he detonated his bomb.

While there is no question that al-Shabaab has suffered serious setbacks in many areas, they remain capable of mounting regular attacks in Mogadishu.

Book fairs in Hargeisa, Mogadishu and Garoowe

The Hargeysa International Book Fair, now in its ninth year has now been joined by younger siblings in Mogadishu and Garoowe. Running from 23rd to 28th July, the Hargeysa event once again drew huge crowds and boasted a packed programme, built this year around a theme of 'leadership'. This year, the fair hosted a lively group from guest country, Ghana, as well as a host of international and local guests, both Somali and non-Somali. The fair was estimated to have attracted about 12,000 people over its course.

The Mogadishu equivalent started in 2015, and ran this year from 17th to 19th August. Following a programme similar to that in Hargeysa, the Mogadishu version also promotes reading through readers' clubs.

Garoowe this year hosted their first book fair, organised by the Somali Institute for Development and Research Analysis (SIDRA) with SCANSOM Publishers. It took place on the Garoowe campus of the East Africa University from 29th July over three days.

Puntland & Galmudug

Al-Shabaab battles Puntland forces then flees to Galmudug

The last edition of Run Doon reported on a movement of al-Shabaab forces in boats up the coast from Harardhere into Puntland. At the time of writing last, Puntland forces were mobilising to confront the AS groups, who were consolidating their positions on the coast and inland. At that stage, it was clear that a major fight was imminent, and so it transpired.

About 600 AS fighters had eventually made their way into Puntland, splitting into two groups. The largest of about 400 individuals established bases in and around Garacad in Mudug Region on 14th March, while the remainder established positions in the Suuj valley of Bari Region.

Puntland forces were mobilised for a campaign entitled ‘Hawlgalkii Danab’ (Operation Thunder), and on 17th March mounted their first attacks on the AS positions near Garacad. Over the next five days, they attacked both locations, engaging in sustained and heavy fighting. Both sides sustained casualties, though numbers have not been confirmed. Puntland claims to have killed more than 250 AS fighters, though that number cannot be verified.

Many AS fighters also surrendered, with one of the alarming aspects of the engagement being the high number of child-soldiers amongst those surrendering. Puntland paraded some of the captured fighters in public, and claimed to hold over 100 children amongst them. Some of those presented to the public appeared to be as young as 10 years old.

By 24th March, al-Shabaab fighters fleeing the Puntland attacks arrived in Af-Barwaaqo village, where Galmudug forces caught up with them. Attempting to move back towards the AS stronghold of Harardhere, rural communities turned against the AS fighters, informing Galmudug forces of their whereabouts. A similar pattern occurred in Puntland, where AS fighters were located as they scattered as a result of proactive local intelligence.

At that stage, Puntland declared that the AS groups had been routed and that the operation was complete. Galmudug authorities made a similar declaration four days later, claiming to have killed 115 and captured another 110.

If the numbers of dead and captured AS fighters are to be believed, 365 of the original 600 were killed, and at least another 210 captured, which would leave barely a couple of dozen survivors who perhaps made it back to Harardhere.

It was noted in the last edition of this column that AS motives for this operation were hard to understand. They are no easier to fathom after the fact. It’s possible that it was intended either as an ill-conceived effort to connect with colleagues in Galgaala, or else to establish new positions along the coast. How they imagined either might work in practice, given Puntland’s military capability in the areas in which they were operating, remains a mystery. At any rate, they took cataclysmic casualties which must surely have set them back considerably.

It took almost a week for al-Shabaab to acknowledge what had happened when, on 2nd April, a spokesperson confirmed that AS forces had been defeated. His speech was framed as a morale-booster, accepting that sometimes even the righteous suffer defeat, but vowing to fight on.

Spillover from al-Shabaab’s Puntland attacks

Puntland President was in the US when the AS operation began, and one of his first thoughts was to declare emphatically that Puntland could handle the situation without AMISOM assistance. Nevertheless, he did accept a consignment of weapons donated jointly by the Somali Federal and UAE governments, which arrived on 18th March in two cargo planes.

President Abdiweli ‘Gaas’ also took the opportunity on the same day to lambast the international naval forces for failing to prevent the AS fighters moving up the coast in boats. Speaking after his regular cabinet meeting, on his return to Garoowe, the President complained that the lack of commitment displayed by the international force.

As the operation ended, Somaliland authorities grew concerned that AS fighters might flee into their territory. Army and police forces combined on 23rd March to set up checkpoints in Laas Caanood, and by 30th March, they had extended the road blocks to Burco.

Puntland celebrates 18th anniversary

On 1st August, Puntland celebrated the 18th anniversary of the 1998 creation of Puntland State as an autonomous region of Somalia.

State formation in Hiraan & Middle Shebelle stalls

The regional state formation process in Hiraan and Middle Shebelle has been beset by disagreement from the start. In mid-March, a delegation from Mogadishu visited Beledweyne hoping to encourage Hiraan elders to join the process. They had been boycotting it over concerns that the distribution of delegates was unfair. They refused even to meet the delegation, who returned to Mogadishu empty-handed, instead issuing a statement repeating complaints that the region had been subject to “a conspiracy” against them. In a confusing series of statements, they complained both that they had been “ignored” and that they were upset because there had been “too much interference from the government”.

One of the key complaints was that the state formation meetings should take place in Beledweyne town, while the government was insisting on holding them in Jowhar.

With the stalemate persisting, PM Omar Abdirashid Sharmaarke visited the town on 22nd March, and a few days later, President Hassan Sheikh also travelled there. However, after weeks of delegation visits from increasingly senior ministers, the issue remained unresolved. When the second phase in the state formation process got underway in Jowhar on 12th April, some elders from Beledweyne were still boycotting the talks.

On 7th August, the Federal Interior Minister, Mohamed Hussein Odowa, was still insisting that the state formation process would be complete before the federal elections, by then scheduled for September and October. However, the government was eventually forced to concede temporary defeat, and it was announced that the process had collapsed but would resume in September.

Somaliland

Somaliland, Khaatumo clashes then talks

Throughout March, Khaatumo forces mounted periodic if small-scale attacks against Somaliland forces, mostly in Buuhoodle District. Khaatumo President Ali Khalif Gulayr was also in the area, visiting towns and villages to shore up support for his administration, and railing against both Puntland and Somaliland influence in Sool.

In April, the mood began to change, with a demonstration in Buuhoodle organised on 9th April to denounce the adoption of the 4.5 formula for the forthcoming federal elections. Dhulbahante leaders felt excluded by the format, and objected strongly to its use. Later in the month, a statement was released expressing similar sentiments.

Pro-Puntland militias then organised a demonstration in Buuhoodle against Khaatumo, firing into the air and demanding that the president leave town.

In July, Somaliland organised a clan meeting to discuss the future of Sool and Sanaag, and in early August, President Ali Khalif Gulayr himself announced that he was entering talks with Somaliland. He declared that after years of conflict, his administration wanted to find a way of coexisting with his neighbour, with the hope that a similar agreement could be reached with Puntland in the future.

Those talks continued through August and into September, with a major cabinet reshuffle in Somaliland, making way for a large number of new Dhulbahante ministers (see below).

While the talks have not yet concluded, there is significant conjecture in Somaliland that a deal might be forthcoming, and that Ali Khalif might be offered a position in the Somaliland government. Whether that eventuates remains to be seen, but a major clan conference is scheduled for mid-October in Somaliland, and there are firm hopes that that conference will include Dhulbahante delegations.

Cabinet reshuffle linked to hoped-for Khaatumo deal

On 15th August, Somaliland President Ahmed Mohamed Mohamoud 'Siilaanyo' announced a major reshuffle. Nine new Dhulbahante appointments were made, amongst them being new ministers, directors-general, regional governors, security chiefs, diplomatic representatives, senior civil servants and presidential advisors. One of the new positions was of a representative to the African Union; the first time Somaliland has made such an appointment.

The reshuffle is widely seen as an attempt to reassure Dhulbahante that Somaliland is prepared to include them in government positions in significant numbers and at senior levels. An enticement that Somaliland hopes will facilitate a deal with Khaatumo in the ongoing talks.

The Gadabuursi, already disgruntled as they feel they have been marginalised by the current Somaliland administration, are likely to feel they have lost out further under the new arrangements. They have already threatened to boycott the March 2017 election if they are not offered sufficient positions in government. Time will tell how they react to the latest turn of events.

Voter registration continues, suspended, continues

Voter Registration proceeded relatively smoothly for the most part throughout the period covered by this column. The process was completed in Saahil in March at a time when the drought described above was at its worst. When that region was complete, registration was suspended for a month to allow for drought relief.

Opposition parties did protest the suspension, but eventually accepted it and registration resumed in Maroodi Jeex Region at the end of April. With each

region allocated a month of registration, by the time Maroodi Jeex was complete at the end of May, the process was again suspended for Ramadan. It then restarted in Sanaag in July once the Ramadan period was finished, concluding in Sool in August.

The most serious disturbance occurred in mid-July when Puntland and Somaliland forces clashed in the Bodda-Cadde, Sanaag in the Dhahar area. Fighting did not last long, but Puntland made the point that they were unhappy with registration taking place in an area in part controlled by, and largely sympathetic to them.

Registrations in Sool were higher than has been the case in the past, perhaps a sign that residents of the region see some value in participating in Somaliland politics, however tentatively, given the talks between Somaliland and Khaatumo.

Somaliland celebrates 25th anniversary

On 18th May, Somaliland celebrated 25 years since their 1991 declaration of independence. A military parade took place without incident in Hargeisa, and events were also held in other towns. Pro-Khaatumo demonstrators in Widhwidh, Buuhoodle District, protested the celebrations, and similar demonstrations were held in Laas Caanood. Puntland also issued a statement saying they were “running out of patience” with Somaliland, complaining particularly about the death of a protestor in Laas Caanood who was killed when police used live rounds to disperse the crowd.

Senior Kenyans support recognition; government denies it

In a bizarre sequence of events, the governor of the miraa-producing county of Meru, Peter Munya, said on 23rd July that his government would find a way to recognise Somaliland if they promised to reduce the tax on Kenyan miraa (qaad). Kenya’s opposition leader, Raila Odinga, weighed in on 31st July in a speech at Chatham House in London, saying that he too supported the recognition of Somaliland.

These announcements produced a furious, if strangely delayed response from the federal government in Mogadishu. On 5th September, the federal government announced that they were suspending all qaad/miraa flights from Kenya. Initially, the Minister of Civil Aviation, Ali Ahmed Jama, would not explain why they had taken the action, but two days later, the government released a statement connecting the ban with Governor Munya’s statement, accusing him of using “business to campaign for the breakup of the country”.

Worried about the impact on Kenya’s lucrative trade, President Uhuru Kenyatta wasted no time in contacting the Somali president personally to assure him that “Governors have no influence on international issues ... between Kenya and other nations”. Kenyatta urged President Hassan Sheikh to end the ban.

Peter Munya, meanwhile, complained that he now feared for his life as angry miraa growers, who he had been trying to help, blamed him for the loss of business from the cancelled flights into Somalia.

DP World signs development deal for Berbera port

At the end of May, DP World of Dubai signed a US\$442 million agreement with the Somaliland government to redevelop Berbera port. The deal has been a controversial one, with local clan groups feeling that it disadvantages them. Negotiation has been long and punctuated by protests and heated debate.

In 2006, DP World established a joint venture with the Djibouti government to establish the Doraleh Container Terminal, so the Berbera agreement gains them port facilities in what may prove in the long term the two most important ports for Ethiopia. Certainly from Somaliland’s perspective, the deal is enormously important, with the investment involved dwarfing any other foreign investment in place.

Warsangeli group declares new ‘North-East State of Somalia’ in Sanaag

On 15th May, a prominent Warsangeli elder, Ahmed Mohamed Mohamud ‘Jebiye’, announced that his clan had formed a new federal state, to be called North-East State of Somalia. He maintained that the new state would consist of Sool, Sanaag and Buuhoodle, and that the regional capital would be in Erigavo. In the interim (in other words, given that Somaliland have full control of Erigavo), the capital would be based in Badhan. Ahmed Jebiye announced that he would be the Speaker of the new state and that Ali Ahmed Fatah would be its President.

Reports suggest that other leading Warsangeli elders, including the most senior of them, Suldaan Said, are opposed to the announcement.

Djibouti

Guelleh wins election as expected

Djibouti held presidential elections on Friday 8th April, as they have done every six years since the end of civil war in 1994. Six candidates stood for election, including the incumbent, Ismail Omar Guelleh. President Guelleh has been in office since 1999 and was expected to win.

Turnout was low on the day, and some opposition parties boycotted the poll, but Guelleh duly won by a landslide, with the electoral commission declaring his victory even before votes had been fully counted.

President Guelleh's inauguration was held on 8th May, attended by numerous African and other leaders, including Somali President Hassan Sheikh.

Kenya

Dadaab Camp closure

On 6th May, Kenya's Ministry of the Interior announced that Dadaab, the world's largest refugee camp, would be closed along with Kakuma camp. Dadaab is home to 343,043 refugees, of whom 326,611 are Somalis. Kenya maintains that the burden of hosting refugees has grown too large for them, and inhabitants of the camps are to be repatriated to Somalia.

This unsurprisingly sparked alarm amongst agencies working in the camps, and UNHCR along with numerous others, as well as Kenyan opposition group, CORD, called on the government to reconsider its decision. UNHCR reported that the voluntary repatriation programme they had been running since December 2014 had seen 13,400 inhabitants repatriated, and urged the government to ensure that any repatriations that do occur remain fully voluntary.

On 6th June, President Hassan Sheikh visited the camp, urging the Kenyan government not to close it, and on 12th July, Nobel laureate, Malala Yousafzai spent her 19th birthday in the camp to draw attention to the plight of inhabitants, should the camp be closed.

After visiting the camp, the Somali president had continued to Nairobi, where he met with President Uhuru Kenyatta. During the meeting, he apparently experienced a remarkably reversal of opinion, afterwards thanking Kenya for hosting the refugees and declaring that Somalia was in fact ready to receive the returning refugees, who would then help to rebuild the country. He maintained that the residents had

already selected their repatriation destinations.

In spite of the Somali president's apparent change of heart, international pressure for Kenya to keep the camps open remained intense. On 21st August, Kenyan Interior Minister, Joseph Nkaissery, announced that his government would delay closure of the camp "until peace in Somalia is restored". This announcement was greeted with relief by many, though it remains unclear who will judge when peace has been restored, or on what basis that assessment will be made.

On 9th September, a UNHCR assessment indicated that about 25% of inhabitants in the camp were willing to return to Somalia by the end of 2016, but repatriation of even this number can only proceed at a rate dictated by available resources and the security situation in southern Somalia.