

O PINION

EDITORIAL

IT'S TIME TO PUT THE NPA ON TRIAL

THE recent acquittal of Timothy Omotoso on charges of racketeering, trafficking in persons, rape, and sexual assault marks yet another disappointing chapter in South Africa's struggle for justice.

The Omotoso case is not an isolated incident; it is emblematic of a troubling pattern of failures by the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA), which has repeatedly faltered in high-profile cases that should have been pillars of accountability.

The NPA's shortcomings have not only allowed criminals to evade justice but have also sent a message to the public: that the very institutions designed to protect them are crumbling under pressure.

High-profile cases, including those linked to state capture, have been dismissed due to the NPA's incompetent handling.

For instance, the case against former Eskom boss Matshele Koko was removed from the court roll due to unreasonable delays – an alarming revelation that exposes systemic failures and a lack of urgency in pursuing justice.

These failures have dire implications for democracy and the rule of law. When citizens lose faith in the justice system, it creates an environment where the powerful feel untouchable, and corruption flourishes.

Politicians and influential figures might begin to perceive themselves as above the law, knowing that they can exploit the NPA's ineptitude to evade accountability.

This creeping impunity endangers the fabric of society and stifles the aspirations of a nation striving for equality before the law.

The NPA must undergo a critical overhaul to restore its integrity and functionality.

This transformation should focus on improving operational efficiency, ensuring that cases are handled with the seriousness they deserve, and adopting a proactive stance in pursuing justice.

It is essential to invest in training and resources for prosecutors, as well as to establish stringent performance metrics that hold them accountable for their roles in upholding justice.

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MONDAY IMAGE



A BOY looks at a damaged wall as Palestinians inspect the site of an Israeli air strike on an UNRWA-run clinic where displaced people shelter, in Jabalia in the northern Gaza Strip. | REUTERS

US tariffs, Agoa threats limit Ramaphosa's options

For the continent and South Africa, the stakes are very high

RIGHT ON THE MONEY



MUSHTAK PARKER

WHEN future generations look back, most of them in anger, at the once-in-a-century "US unilateral declaration of trade, economic and financial independence" from the rest of the world on April 2, will their ire be confined to its hubristic architect, President Donald Trump, or will their opprobrium also be directed at the rest of the world leaders for their responses to the president's attempt to disrupt the old world order by precipitating a pernicious tariff and trade war in which there will be no winners?

They have the most invested in this unfolding debacle entirely not of their making, for their generations will have to foot the corrective bill of righting the wrongs of the highly flawed Trump Doctrine of Governance, "Drool Babies Drool", which seemingly empowers his salivating cabinet and unelected Doge apparatchiks with scant regard for democratic niceties, due process and the rule of law, in their pursuit of their hollow goal of economic "liberation" at any cost and putting America "First". With over two months in office, Trump's second term has already descended into disorganised chaos, even more pronounced than in his first term.

He has doubled down in his disruptive policy madness threatening to annex neighbours such as Canada and nearby Greenland, imposing punitive tariffs on most of the world economies excluding Russia, North Korea and Belarus, and additionally targeting South Africa over its land reforms to the cheers of his far-right acolytes which include a coterie of disaffected white Afrikaners still reeling from the loss of their apartheid privileges and feigning discrimination under majority rule, and revelling in seeking attention as a precocious geriatrician.

With some \$4 to \$6 trillion wiped off US, European and global stocks in the two days after his declaration,

Trump and his cabal of MAGA (Make America Great Again) manic ideologues, have dismissed any disruption in the financial markets as a price worth paying and an opportunity to make money, promising economic nirvana down the line.

The response to Trump's new tariff playbook, like in most global issues, has been fragmented, disunited, and self-serving, with countries oozing with unabashed self-interest scurrying around to talk down the effects in the futile hope of getting them reduced or rescinded.

Thus far the response has centred on tit-for-tat retaliation to the credit of China and Canada, de-escalation aka the UK with a tepid threat of sanctions should negotiations for a wider bilateral trade deal fail, procrastination based on a wait-and-see policy and dialogue for "a new bilateral and mutually beneficial trade agreement" as with the EU and South Africa, and capitulation by some of the poorest states some of which have been hardest such as Lesotho.

The formula for calculating the tariffs is bizarre, with several economists and trade bodies stressing that the algorithm used has an in-built bias against low-and-medium-income countries (LMICs).

Lesotho has been slapped with a 50% tariff for its exports to the US, making the most of its membership of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (Agoa) Programme. US data shows that in 2024 local firms exported a mere \$2.8m of goods to the Kingdom, compared with \$237.3m of textiles and diamond exports from Lesotho to the US. The trade deficit differential is high, but the base is very low, which makes a mockery of the tariff calculation methodology and the US rationale that the tariffs would help reduce the US trade deficit which runs into trillions with the world per se.

The quest for a New World Order is neither new nor American. It was the victors of World War II who fashioned the post-war order based on its Bretton Woods institutions and an economic orthodoxy alternating between the Liberal Consensus – in the UK based on Keynesian state-intervention to stabilise the economy, and in the US on a free market partnership using economic growth to steadily expand the middle class and to solve issues of social welfare – and the Neo-Liberal Consensus which sees a minimalist role

for the state and the transfer of economic control to the private sector as during the Reagan and Thatcher eras.

In the last two decades, emerging nations and LMICs have led the chorus from the Global South for a new world order based on an urgent reform of the UN and the Bretton Woods institutions in which developing states are fairly represented in global structures and have fair access to finance, vaccines and decision making.

These calls have largely been ignored with developed states paying lip service and holding on to their privileged positions in the UN Security Council, the IMF, and the World Bank. Trump's playbook is another attempt at a new order, this time based on isolationism, narrow nationalism and policy narcissism, which will never work in a world clamouring for better managed multilateralism and globalisation, which do not leave any group behind especially the middle and working classes, whether in the developed or emerging countries.

It is this chronic failure of the post-war consensus and its lack of urgency and complacency, the fallout of retreat from empire and post-colonial independence outcomes, and the inability of LMICs to extricate from debt traps and a range of inequalities, and a bevy of internal governance deficits that have also contributed to the rise of the white supremacist far right in western democracies, which in turn has nurtured a dangerous Trumpian political and civic culture in which due process, the rule of law and governance conventions are marginalised.

For the continent and South Africa, the stakes are very high. Even Jerome Powell, the head of the Federal Reserve in the US, said it was too soon to know how to respond to the tariff hikes. On Thursday he maintained US base rates unchanged in the last quarter to contain inflationary concerns, only to be cajoled by his president for refusing to cut interest rates and calling for an independent central bank.

The African response has been muted partly because of the uncertainties and the sheer shock of the new tariff onslaught. There has been no AU level emergency summit, and there is already fragmentation since the US is courting the DRC separately for a critical minerals deal which is being negotiated by envoy Massad Boulous, the father-in-law of one of the Trump

sprogs and who has business interests in the DRC.

For Pretoria, negotiations are held hostage to the fallout of the diplomatic row which saw South African ambassador to the US Ebrahim Rasool deported as persona non grata, and the political row over the misinformation of the so-called marginalisation of the white Afrikaner minority and their land rights.

The response of Ramaphosa has been unimpressive, albeit he is not alone in this respect. He lacks the moral authority of Madiba, who for instance decisively defended South Africa's relations with countries considered as pariahs by the US and the West.

The 30% tariff on South African exports to the US effectively cancels out the benefits of the tariff-free Agoa, and with the funding cut on aid through USAID partly because according to Trump "they have got some bad things going on in South Africa", Ramaphosa's options are limited.

A delegation led by Zane Dangor, director-general of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation, to the US last week, returned home with hardly any movement on US-SA relations. In 2023, two-way trade under Agoa, according to US data, totalled \$47.5 billion, with the US exporting \$18.2bn worth of goods and imports amounting to \$29.3bn. The US is South Africa's third-largest trading partner and a major destination for South African investment. South Africa is the US's largest trading partner in Africa overtaking China in 2024.

Because of Agoa, over US\$3bn of South African exports to the US entered duty free last year. Agoa accession is up for review in September 2025 when Pretoria's membership expires. If Agoa is abolished, it would be a bitter blow for SSA acceding countries. Trump has dubbed South Africa as "one of the worst offenders" and together with his other uninformed diatribes, it would be a miracle if its Agoa membership is not cancelled.

With the Government of National Unity potentially poised for internal internecine conflict over differences regarding the 2025 budget provisions, what hope is there for a much-needed economic recovery and feelgood factor, save a miracle?

Parker is an economist and writer based in London.

COMMENT



LIZEL LLOYD

Improving neonatal health in Africa

EVERY child deserves the best possible start in life. A healthy beginning paves the way for a hopeful future, yet survival remains uncertain for many newborns across sub-Saharan Africa. Neonatal health challenges in these regions are significant, but with the right focus and action, we can create lasting improvements.

The period surrounding birth is one of the most vulnerable yet critical windows in a person's life. This World Health Day on April 7, we must reflect on the advances we have made while also addressing the challenges that continue to threaten the health of mothers and newborns worldwide. It is, therefore, fitting that this year's theme "Healthy beginnings, hopeful futures" emphasises maternal and newborn health.

Newborn deaths account for nearly half of all deaths in children under 5 years of age.

Many of these deaths occur in sub-Saharan Africa. Many of these deaths are due to preventable causes such as prematurity, infections and birth complications.

Limited access to high-quality maternal and newborn care, especially in rural and underserved areas, exacerbates the problem.

If we are to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly the target of reducing neonatal mortality to at least 12 per 1 000 live births, we must prioritise maternal and newborn health with renewed urgency by addressing the following pressing challenges:

- Infections: Sepsis, pneumonia, and meningitis remain major threats to newborns. Poor hygiene during delivery, lack of robust infection prevention measures, overcrowding, and delays in medical interventions increase the risk.

- Limited access to quality healthcare: Many regions in sub-Saharan Africa face shortages of skilled healthcare workers, inadequate neonatal intensive- and high-care facilities, and unreliable access to essential medicines and medical equipment.

- Anti-microbial resistance: Overuse and misuse of antibiotics have led to growing resistance, making it more difficult to treat infections effectively.

- Healthcare inequities: Socio-economic disparities, rural-urban healthcare gaps, and systemic barriers prevent many mothers and newborns from receiving the care they need.

Prevention remains the cornerstone of maternal and newborn health. A multifaceted approach involving healthcare providers, policymakers, and communities is needed to tackle the major drivers of neonatal infections by:

- Enhancing antenatal care: Antenatal care is a critical touchpoint for infection prevention. Screening for maternal infections such as syphilis, HIV, and Group B Streptococcus (a bacterium found in the gastrointestinal and genital tracts that can cause serious illness in newborns and pregnant women) should be standard practice in all healthcare settings.

- Improving clean and safe birth practices: Training midwives and healthcare workers, ensuring clean delivery environments, and promoting hygiene practices can significantly reduce infections.

- Improving access to essential newborn care: Strengthening healthcare infrastructure by increasing trained professionals, improving neonatal intensive care units, and ensuring the availability of life-saving medicines is crucial.

- Using antibiotics responsibly: Developing clear antibiotic guidelines, improving diagnostics, and educating healthcare workers (and the public) on proper antibiotic use can help combat resistance.

- Empowering mothers through education: Maternal education plays a crucial role in reducing neonatal infections and improving overall child health. Simple interventions such as promoting early and exclusive breastfeeding, educating families on recognising danger signs of infection, and ensuring postnatal follow-up can empower mothers to advocate for their newborns' health.

Healthy beginnings lead to hopeful futures. Let us act now to make this a reality for all.

Dr Lloyd is a neonatologist in the Department of Paediatrics and Child Health at Stellenbosch University.

MADAM & EVE

Stephen Francis and Rico Schacherl



TREKNET

Gavin Thomson and Dave Gomersall

