

Analysis

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Mauritanians face US deportation, jail

Mo had nothing but a set of jail clothes and the name of a distant cousin when he boarded the deportation flight from the United States to Mauritania, the African country he had fled. After more than 20 years he was returning to the scene of childhood trauma - an Islamic republic on the edge of the Sahara where members of black ethnic groups, like him, have suffered decades of slavery and persecution under a light-skinned elite.

The plane descended over desert, and his fears were realized. Upon arrival in the capital, Nouakchott, he was arrested and taken to jail, where he remained for two weeks until his family paid a bribe to free him. "I never thought I would come back to this life," said the 45-year-old, identified here by a nickname for his protection, from his cousin's house, where he hid for five months before fleeing the country again.

Mo had a good job in Ohio and had recently bought a house with his American wife where their children played basketball in the backyard. Now he sat in a dark room every day on his cell phone, afraid to go outside for fear of arrest. Thousands like Mo sought refuge in the United States after a 1989 conflict in which black Mauritanians were stripped of their citizenship and expelled. Longstanding U.S. policy held that even those denied refugee status could remain.

Now they are being deported as part of an immigration crackdown under President Donald Trump. Because Mauritania does not recognize their citizenship, interviews suggest dozens have been interrogated, detained and forced to hide. Mauritanian authorities and US immigration officials declined to respond to questions for this story. "I have not heard of any person deported who was not at least initially detained," said Lynn Tramont, director of the Ohio Immigrant Alliance, who has been following the cases.

Ohio is home to the United States' largest Mauritanian community, about 3,000-strong. The United States deported 98 Mauritanians in the year to October, compared to just eight in the previous 12 months, according to US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). The Thomson Reuters Foundation spoke with six of them, all of whom were arrested and detained immediately upon arrival and five of whom have since fled to neighboring countries in fear. Hundreds more are at risk, say lawyers and advocates, with about 25 men detained in the United States and awaiting deportation now.

Laissez-passer

Mauritania expelled up to 50,000 black citizens after clashes with Senegal over border land in 1989, forcing them to surrender ID cards and nationality documents, according to Human Rights Watch. Thousands more fled on their own. Many have since returned, but race relations are far from smooth. The country's white Moors dominate politics and business and although it is illegal, the Global Slavery Index estimates 90,000 black Mauritanians are still enslaved.

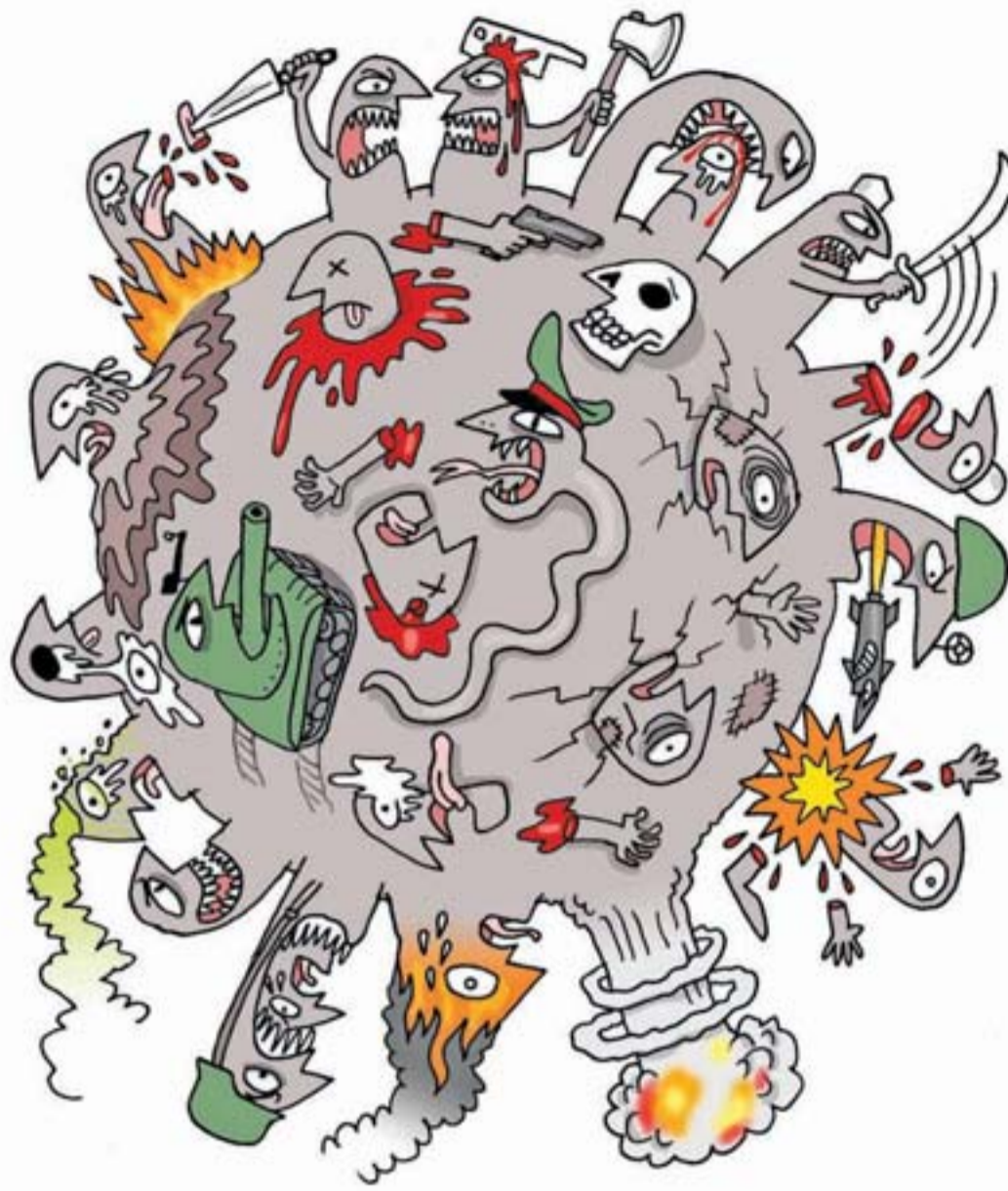
People like Mo relied on translators to file their asylum applications in the United States, and many were denied for lack of credibility or documents, lawyers said. They were allowed to stay and simply monitored by ICE - until late last year. "I knew it was coming. They were getting everybody," said Mo in October, wearing the same clothes he had put on for work the morning ICE picked him up outside his house in May.

Under pressure from the Trump administration, the Mauritanian embassy started issuing travel permits, "laissez-passeurs", so its citizens could be sent back, lawyers said. But when Mo presented his in Mauritania, he was told it was not proof of citizenship and that he had no legal rights there, he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "They (the authorities) said anyone can make this," said Mo, waving the flimsy document typed up on printing paper. Mauritania's dusty streets are full of checkpoints and police, and not having papers puts one at constant risk of arrest, locals said. Stressed and afraid, in November Mo paid someone to smuggle him out.

Interrogated upon arrival, the deportees were all asked why they had gone to the United States. "When they know you applied for asylum in USA, that's a big problem, you don't want to say that," said one deportee, who made up a story about migrating for economic reasons instead. Mauritania's government says slavery and discrimination are in the past and has jailed and tortured people who challenge this narrative. The country denied entry to a group of U.S. civil rights leaders invited by anti-slavery groups last year.

Ahmed, a Mauritanian living in Nouakchott, was contacted by a family member to help a deportee get out of jail. For two weeks he negotiated with police every day. "They said we can't let him go, these people go to the US to denigrate the country, humiliate the country, things like that," Ahmed said. "There's a police officer who told me that." He eventually found the man, who had lived in the United States for 18 years, locked up with 40 people in one room. "He was in very difficult conditions," said Ahmed, whose name has been changed for his safety. "From then on, every day it was I who brought him food."

Three deportees who spoke to the Thomson Reuters Foundation said they were released after one day because they called on an influential connection. Others were held for up to two weeks and released after payment of \$200-300. — Reuters



Cartoon for the Soul



GCC march will not cease to exist

By Naif Al-Zufairi

The GCC summit held in Riyadh on Dec 9, 2018 proved that the bloc is still standing on solid ground. Leaders of the GCC are more determined than any time before to maintain, support and continue the march of the unity of the GCC. H.H. the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, out of his keenness and circumspection, asserted on the importance of stopping and banning the malicious media campaigns which aim at sowing the seeds of sedition and discord and drive a wedge into the ranks of the GCC.

The GCC, since the 39 years of its foundation, has man-

Bowing out, Kabila raises prospect of a return act

A month before his scheduled departure after nearly two decades as Congo's president, Joseph Kabila received a procession of foreign reporters at his heavily guarded riverside palace for a rare series of interviews. If the timing suggested a valedictory, the 47-year-old leader's words indicated otherwise. He vowed to remain in politics and, in one interview after another, left open the possibility of running again in 2023 when the clock resets on presidential term limits.

"My role will be to make sure that we don't go back to square one, square one meaning where we found the Congo 22 years ago," he told Reuters inside an ornate reception room with high ceilings and sweeping views of the churning Congo River. "In politics, in life, you shouldn't rule out anything," he said when asked about a potential return. "There are still other chapters to write."

In the 18 years since a youthful, clean-shaven Kabila succeeded his slain father, Laurent, the now bulked-up president sporting a billowy grey beard has traced an unlikely trajectory from accidental and apparently reluctant leader to the defining Congolese figure of his time. Whether the vote due on Dec. 23 brings down the curtain on the tumultuous Kabila era, which began when Laurent seized power in 1997, or triggers a new phase in which Joseph becomes the power behind the throne of his preferred successor, Emmanuel Ramazani Shadary, remains unclear.

It depends in part on how the Congolese reflect on his rule. There were early accomplishments - ending a regional war and holding the first open presidential elections - but also incessant conflict, lethal crackdowns on pro-democracy protesters and corruption that the government acknowledges siphoned off billions of dollars of potential revenue. Foreign investment has propelled Democratic Republic of Congo to the status of Africa's top copper producer and the world's leading miner of cobalt, a crucial component of electric car batteries, but militia violence has persisted in the east.

Denis Mukwege, the Congolese doctor who shared this year's Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to end the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war, said Kabila had a right to remain in politics but hoped voters would remember his broken promises. "None of the elements needed to install a real democracy have been made during his time in power," he told Reuters.

Pulling the Strings

Kabila's critics and some analysts say concerns about his personal security - his assassinated father's mausoleum stands below the presidential palace - and the fortune reportedly amassed by his family could account for a seeming reluctance to cede power. A report last year by a research group at New York University found his family's businesses are likely worth tens of millions of dollars. Kabila has called such reports "stupidity".

He did not specifically respond to a Reuters investigation that showed nearly a third of the purchase price of Congolese passports goes to a company in the United Arab Emirates whose owner is believed to be a close relative of the president. Even if Shadary, a former interior minister who many analysts say was chosen for his loyalty and lack of an independent political base, beats his two

aged to live up to most of the GCC peoples' aspirations and ambitions, which were manifested by the following:

- Consolidation of social cohesion and fraternity as well as economic integration and strategic cooperation to counter the looming regional and international challenges that lie ahead.

- Facilitation of product transshipments and transactions, which contributed to financial prosperity.

- Free movement of GCC people within GCC countries without lengthy passport formalities.

- Right of ownership of real estate by GCC citizens within the GCC region.

- Establishment of a unified and highly coordinated

military command headquarters "Peninsula Shield" to defend the GCC's territorial integrity.

GCC countries are working seriously to issue a unified GCC currency, which will surely boost the GCC countries' monetary system. The people of the GCC honestly and seriously appeal to their leaders to be more cognizant of the enormity of the challenges that lie ahead, chief among them the lingering diplomatic crisis, which behooves on them to contain and tackle it seriously to remain united and work as a cohesive unit. We all pray to the Almighty God to guide our GCC leaders to the right path of achieving their peoples' desired objectives of peace, stability and economic prosperity.



In this photo taken on Dec 10, 2018, President of the Democratic Republic of Congo Joseph Kabila sits in the garden of his personal ranch in Kinshasa. — AFP

main rivals, Kabila has reason to worry about his ability to pull the strings.

He need only look next door to Angola, where President Joao Lourenco quickly marginalized Jose Eduardo dos Santos, his powerful predecessor who ruled for 38 years, by accusing family members of corruption. "Kabila saw what happened in Angola. That's why he chose the person who is the most loyal and, above all, the least threatening to his personal power," said Manya Riche, who advised Kabila from 2008 to 2011. Referring to an arrangement in which Vladimir Putin remained Russia's dominant leader as prime minister until he could run for president again, she said: "This isn't Russia. At a certain point here, it's the chief who's in the chair who is the chief."

Coming to power

Kabila was born in 1971 in eastern Congo in the bush headquarters of his father's rebellion against long-time dictator Mobutu Sese Seko but spent most of his early years in neighboring Tanzania. He returned to Congo to take part in Laurent's Rwandan and Ugandan-backed successful march on the capital Kinshasa. A period of military training in China followed and Joseph was back as army chief when a bodyguard shot his father in 2001.

The country he inherited at 29 was in disarray, fragmented between government and rebel territories, with tens of thousands of people dying each month from conflict, hunger and disease. A former US official who met Kabila during his first trip to Washington that year described the shy, awkward leader as a "deer in the headlights". With his halting French and virtually non-existent Lingala - the language of the capital and the army - he struggled to connect with many Congolese. But his political instincts were surprisingly good.

He courted Western powers such as the United States and France, which his father's anti-colonial rhetoric had alienated. He passed a liberalized mining code that attracted foreign investment. He revived a stalled peace process, leading to a 2003 power-sharing deal that kept him in the presidency even though rebels remained active in the east. "He managed to run the country, more or less," said Azarias Ruberwa, a rebel leader who joined the power-sharing administration and is now a government minister. Kabila won both rounds of voting in elections held in 2006, which were generally viewed as fair, as well as the bouts of fighting that erupted after results were announced.

Those victories, followed by another vote in 2011 marred by widespread allegations of fraud, led to changes in his leadership style, according to people close to him. "The president became less tolerant of the West," a former advisor said on condition of anonymity. "He saw them as imposing their ideas on him." — Reuters

Japan electronics firms look to re-engineer their design mojo

Akihiro Adachi, a 31-year-old audiovisual equipment designer at Panasonic Corp, longed for some personal space during his lengthy train rides from Osaka to Tokyo. So when his company set out to encourage innovation, he joined with some colleagues and came up with "Wear Space," a headset that limits noise and peripheral vision. Many at Panasonic were puzzled. "Someone said the office full of people wearing this would look weird," said Kang Hwayoung, another member of the 10-person design team.

But the prototype unexpectedly won a global design award and received positive feedback from unexpected quarters, such as sake tasters who wanted to limit sensory input. The project is among a range of efforts in the Japanese electronics industry to reinvent industrial design. After years of losing ground to design-first rivals such as Apple and Dyson, Japanese companies are now trying to recover the processes and creative flair that produced iconic products such as the Walkman.

Panasonic, Sony and Mitsubishi Electric are among those implementing practices that have been routine at many US and European companies, such as engaging designers at every step and treating packaging as part of the product. "We used to have designers involved only in final stages of our product development process, just for an aesthetic fix," Yoshiyuki Miyabe, Panasonic's technology and manufacturing chief, told reporters. "We are revamping the process so that designers can join us from the planning phase."

The Japanese government is promoting the efforts: a report in May urged corporate executives to pursue "design-driven management, whereby a company leverages design as a primary driver of competitiveness". It also called for tax incentives for design-related investments and new laws to better protect intellectual property. The government is set to revise such laws next year. "Of course, we had an argument over how much the government can do and should do with private-sector issues like this," said Daisuke Kubota, director at the government's design registration system planning office, who was involved in the panel.

"But a lot of design experts asked us for government initiatives, saying that this is really the last chance and Japan would never be able to catch up with global rivals if this opportunity is missed." Another member of the panel, Kinya Tagawa, visiting professor at the Royal College of Art and co-founder of design firm Takram, says there has been a sharp increase in major companies requesting design lectures for their executives. "I'm seeing a sign of change," he said.

All agree there is a long way to go. C-suite designers remain a rarity at most electronics companies while technologists reign supreme, company officials and industrial designers say. Japan last year received 31,961 applications for design registrations, only a fraction of China's 628,658 and half of South Korea's 67,374. In the heyday of the Japanese electronics industry in the early 1980s, Japan had nearly 60,000 applications every year. — Reuters