

# Congo faces rising instability as key vote date approaches

THE DEMOCRATIC Republic of the Congo faces an increasing likelihood of larger protests as the country approaches election deadlines, even after the main opposition alliance led a national strike on Tuesday that drew mixed support.

The opposition called on students and workers to stay home after it withdrew from planned talks on the organisation of elections and demanded the removal of an African Union-appointed facilitator, Edem Kodjo. The streets of the capital, Kinshasa, were quiet on Tuesday morning with many shops closed and fewer cars on the streets.

Etienne Tshisekedi, the leader of the opposition alliance, announced plans for more protests in Africa's biggest copper producer in the run-up to September 19, when, according to the constitution, President Joseph Kabila would normally have to call the election, 90 days before

the end of his term.

"We are set to see a significant escalation in tensions as we approach a number of key political deadlines," said Ronak Gopaldas, head of country risk at Joburg-based Rand Merchant Bank. The strike "can be seen as a possible precursor of what to expect as the country begins to navigate a very complex and potentially messy political situation", he said.

The presidential vote was set for November, but is facing delays because of a voter-registration process, which the opposition says is a deliberate attempt by Kabila to extend his 15-year rule. Opposition leaders claimed success in Tuesday's strike. However, the government and the opposition seem to have lost the ability to mobilise and control protesters, making the outlook for future demonstrations more dangerous. – Washington Post