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# **The Continent**

*with* **Mail & Guardian**

## **How Mauritius beat the pandemic**

But island life may never  
be the same again



# Learning from the best

When most people think of Mauritius, they think of little more than gorgeous, sun-kissed tropical beaches. Our cover photo this week leans in to this preconception (we couldn't help ourselves – who doesn't need a beach holiday right now?).

But there is so much more to this Indian Ocean island nation. It is no accident that it is the first African country to reverse the spread of the pandemic. As of this Saturday, it has gone 27 days without any new cases of Covid-19. The number of current known infections on the island is zero.

In our reporting on how they did it (see page 15), two other 'firsts' stand out.

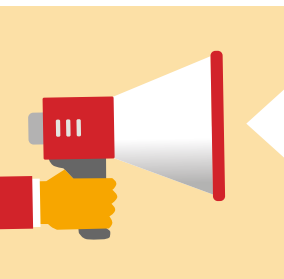
In the Ibrahim Index of African Governance, which measures how well African countries are governed, Mauritius is number one, and has been for the last decade at least. This incredible feat is too often dismissed.

Yes, it is an island, but so is the Comoros (ranked 34th); and Madagascar (31st).

Yes, it has a small population, but countries with similar populations include Eswatini (32nd), Equatorial Guinea (48th) and Guinea-Bissau (42nd). It is this entrenched habit of good governance that has allowed Mauritius to respond so decisively and successfully to the pandemic.

Mauritius also tops the list of African countries when it comes to testing for Covid-19. It has tested more than 7% of its total population. This works out to more than 70,000 tests per million people. Compare and contrast: in Nigeria, that figure is 165 tests per million. For the continent as a whole, according to Reuters, the figure stands at 685 tests per million.

Not everything that Mauritius has done is applicable elsewhere. But the lessons that do apply, we need to learn – and fast. ■



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**In the dock:** This courtroom sketch shows Félicien Kabuga; who, after 26 years on the run appeared on Wednesday in a court in France. He has been indicted on charges of genocide, relating to his alleged role in bankrolling the militia groups which carried out much of the killing during the 1994 Rwanda genocide. At least 800,000 are estimated to have died in just three months of bloodshed. Kabuga, who made his fortune in the tea and coffee industry, is expected to be handed over to the International Criminal Court for prosecution. (Illustration: Benoit Peyrucq for AFP)

## Inside:

- **COVER:** How Mauritius got to zero Covid cases (p15)
- **Zitto Kabwe:** Magufuli is bungling Tanzania's response (p10)
- **Why Nigerian gamers** cannot be world-beaters (p13)
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- **PLUS** reporting from Zimbabwe, Guinea, Uganda, Lesotho, South Africa and more

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# In the headlines this week

Samira Sawlani

## Cameroon

There was a rare sighting on the continent this week. No, it wasn't a black leopard, or a presidential convoy respectfully stopping for passing traffic: it was an in-person appearance from Cameroon's long-standing leader Paul Biya.

President Biya is often found in his natural habitat at the Intercontinental Hotel in Geneva, which is often mistaken for his primary residence, or holidaying in the South of France. Occasionally he does like to spend some time in the country that he has governed for over 36 years.

This week, he decided to address the nation for the first time in over two months, explaining that the fight against Covid-19 was "complex". Having put in a hard day's work, we should not expect to see the president in public for another couple of months. Considering that the pandemic is keeping him away from his five-star hotel suite for the foreseeable future, he could probably use a nice long rest.

## Burundi

While Biya may not be ready to leave office, President Pierre Nkurunziza's presidency is coming to an end in Burundi. On Wednesday, the country



**In the balance: the results of Burundi's election are yet to be announced. Supporters of opposition candidate Agathon Rwaso (pictured here) have reported intimidation and harassment (Photo: AFP)**

held elections: in the absence of regional observers; and marred by claims of intimidation and harassment from the opposition. Social media was reportedly blocked on the day of the vote.

Although results are not in yet, Nkurunziza's future is settled. He will retire with a hefty pension and a new title: Paramount Leader, Champion of Patriotism and Leadership Core. Good luck to whoever has to design those business cards.

## Uganda and DRC

The pandemic may have brought much

of life as we know it to a screeching halt, but some things remain unchanged: police brutality continues apace, as does the targeting of activists and opposition groups by state actors.

On Monday, Ugandan activist and academic Dr Stella Nyanzi was arrested in Kampala alongside some of her colleagues (see page 9), while they were protesting against economic hardship caused by Uganda's lockdown restrictions. The group has since been released.

Across the border in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Freddy Kambale, a 22-year-old member of activist group Lucha RDC, was fatally shot by police. Ironically, Kambale was participating in a protest against insecurity and killings in the north-eastern town of Beni. Two police officers have been arrested in connection with his death.

## **Kenya and Tanzania**

There is speculation that coronadivorces will soon become a thing as the novel coronavirus strains all sorts of relationships, including those between countries.

There was a diplomatic spat this week between Kenya and Tanzania after Kenya said that 19 Tanzanian truck drivers had tested positive for Covid-19. Tanzania said that they tested those same drivers, and all the tests came back negative.

There are lingering questions over the efficacy of Tanzania's testing, especially after President John Magufuli claimed that both a goat and a papaya had tested positive.

Magufuli intervened to defuse the crisis. He's had a busy week: he has announced the reopening of colleges and the resumption of sporting events from June 1. He also declared three days of national prayer to give thanks for the progress made in the fight against Covid-19.

There is no way to assess this progress, however, given that the country has refused to release any recent statistics.

## **Mauritius**

A country which is doing well on the Covid-19 front is Mauritius, which currently has zero active cases and has now gone more than three weeks without a reported new infection (see page 15). The island had a strict lockdown in place, and while this has been loosened, most measures will remain in place until June 1. Some — such as wearing a face mask and social distancing — will be legislated and become the country's new normal. Now that's worth three days of giving thanks.

## **Zimbabwe**

To celebrate Zimbabwe's Culture Week, Google Doodle featured a homage to the mbira, the storied musical instrument that is central to much of the folklore and melodies which have made Zimbabwean music famous. It's nice, for once, to see prominent coverage of Zimbabwe that is not about politics, and does not mention the name Robert Gabriel Mugabe or any jokes about the Zim dollar (if you are looking for hard-hitting political coverage, see page 7). ■



# The Week in Numbers

## \$300-million

The amount of money waged by gamblers in Kenya in May 2019, according to an investigation by *Daily Nation and Finance Uncovered*. Extrapolating from this figure, it means that Kenyans bet more last year than what it cost to build the Standard Gauge Railway between Mombasa and Nairobi.

## 23

The number of countries across East Africa, the Middle East and South Asia that have been affected by swarms of desert locusts in the last year. The swarms – the largest seen in 70 years – are wreaking havoc on crops and food supply.

## 10

The number of cabinet ministers in South Sudan who have tested positive for the coronavirus. All were members of the country's coronavirus task force. Vice President Riek Machar has also tested positive. The president is healthy, said a spokesperson.

## 1%

The amount of a new tax that the Egyptian government will levy on all workers' salaries (barring the very poorest). The money raised will contribute to the country's fight against Covid-19.



(Photo: Reuters)

## 12 000 +

The number of Covid-19 cases in Cape Town alone. The picturesque South African city has become the main African hotspot for the pandemic, accounting for 10% of the continent's cases, according to Associated Press.

## 186

The number of sensitive buildings in Africa that have been renovated or constructed by Chinese companies. This includes presidential residences, parliamentary offices and the African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa (pictured above). The number was compiled by the Heritage Foundation, a US think tank, which claims that China is likely to have installed surveillance equipment in each of these buildings.

# Zimbabwe

## Women leaders targeted in brutal attack

Kudzai Mashininga

**A**fter attending an anti-government demonstration in Harare last Wednesday, three women youth leaders from Zimbabwe's main opposition party disappeared.

When questioned, police said that they had been arrested. Later, the story changed, and police said that they had never been in custody.

A day later, the three women were found. They had been dumped by the roadside in Bindura South, a small town about an hour's drive from the capital. They had been tortured and sexually assaulted.

All three women are members of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change. Joanna Mamombe, 27, is Zimbabwe's youngest member of Parliament (she represents Harare West). Cecilia Chimhiri, 33, is the youth assembly vice-chairperson. Netsai

Marowa, 25, is the youth assembly deputy organising secretary.

Violent attacks on opposition and civil society leaders have become routine during President Emmerson Mnangagwa's tenure. The Human Rights NGO Forum says that since he came to power in November 2017, they have recorded 24 extrajudicial killings, 23 cases of sexual assault, and 92 abductions and beatings, among other human rights violations.

Denford Ngadzire, an MDC councillor in Harare, is visiting the three youth leaders in hospital every day. "They are breathing with difficulty... Mamombe was dropped head first when the car was moving," he said. Police are stationed outside their ward.

In an open letter to President Mnangagwa, prominent human rights lawyer Beatrice Mtetwa said the attacks on the three women were designed to dissuade young women from engaging in politics outside of the ruling party.

Home Affairs Minister Kazembe Kazembe has ordered police to investigate the incident. The president has not addressed the issue directly, but said that there should be no political demonstrations during the lockdown period. ■

# Guinea

## Civil unrest turns deadly in Guinea

Aanu Adeoye

**M**ouctar Bah had just left the scene of the protests in Coyah, Guinea, when he got a call telling him his brother had been shot. Bah told Al Jazeera that by the time he got to the hospital, his younger brother was dead.

Bah's brother was one of five killed last week in Coyah, a town about 50km from the capital Conakry. This was the scene of angry anti-government protests. Rocks were thrown and police vehicles were set alight as protesters demonstrated against lockdown measures designed to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

Trouble began after the government put Conakry into total isolation, preventing people from Coyah and Dubreka – both neighbouring towns – from entering the capital city. For many who earn a daily living in Conakry, staying at home was not an option.

There were further protests in the towns of Kouroussa and Kamsar on the same day, both sparked by chronic electricity shortages.

President Alpha Condé has mourned the deaths across the country, and



**Dark days: Guinea's civil unrest shows no sign of letting up**

(Photo: Cellou Binani for AFP)

urged the justice ministry to “draw all legal consequences from them”. But opposition leaders say that he is part of the problem. “It is total impunity,” said Cellou Dalein Diallo, a prominent opposition leader and former prime minister, in an interview with the *Mail & Guardian*.

Guinea has recorded 2 863 cases of the coronavirus (as of May 21), making it the third most-affected nation in West Africa. Condé declared a state of emergency on March 27, five days after a highly controversial referendum that now allows him to run for a third term in office. Opposition leaders say the elections, held 10 days after the first case was detected, may have been responsible for spreading the virus in the country. ■

*Additional reporting by Amindeh Blaise Atabong. Adeoye and Atabong are media fellows with Germany's Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.*



# Uganda



## Photo Story

Simon Allison

“It all happened quite fast,” recalls photographer Sumy Sadurni, who took the photograph above. It was Monday in central Kampala, and she was covering a demonstration being led by Stella Nyanzi: the academic, poet, activist and virulent government critic. This time, Nyanzi was protesting against Uganda’s coronavirus containment measures, which she says are inflicting disproportionate suffering on the country’s poorest and most vulnerable people.

“She got dragged by police almost as soon as she started her demonstration, with around 10 supporters that were with her,” said Kampala-based Sadurni, a Women Photograph member and stringer for AFP. “With that specific picture I was just running along with

police as they dragged her. They stopped for a second as they were opening the police van so I kneeled down and I wanted to get her face close up, but wanted to include her pulling away from police - so that was the fast thinking behind the framing.”

The police said that Nyanzi was arrested for inciting violence. She has subsequently been released.

The image has already received widespread acclaim. “Iconic,” declared writer Rosebell Kagumire. “What a photo, what a fighter!”

“I think the impact is because she’s representing how many, many Ugandans are feeling right now,” said Sadurni. “She’s angry, so are many Ugandans. She’s frustrated, so are Ugandans and she’s desperate, as everyone else is.” ■



## **‘Bumbling, irrational, deadly’**

**The Tanzanian president is getting the Covid-19 response all wrong. Zitto Kabwe**

**T**anzania’s President John Magufuli has chosen not to deal with the Covid-19 crisis as a serious healthcare issue that poses a significant threat to the lives of Tanzanians. Instead, he has sought to deal with it as a national security issue, threatening the media and healthcare officials about sharing information with the public.

This is both irrational and dangerous. Flying in the face of both regional and international best practice, President Magufuli has taken minimal measures to confront the coronavirus, and is not trusting scientific and expert medical advice. Two weeks ago, he even questioned the efficacy of Covid-19 tests at Tanzania’s National Health Laboratory, claiming ludicrously that a goat and a papaya had tested positive for the virus.

At the same time, he has sought a way to bring the questionable herbal remedy from Madagascar to Tanzania, and urged citizens to use prayer to fight off the virus. This past Sunday, he declared that Tanzania is winning the battle against the pandemic and accordingly would be reopening schools, universities and reinstating sports fixtures. This statement

was made without any publication of official or verifiable statistics about the rate of infection and deaths due to Covid-19. The last publication of such figures was made on 29 April.

His declaration of victory comes at a time when numerous other reports indicate that infections and death rates are rising rapidly. Citizens have been wondering about mysterious burials that have been seen to take place in the dead of night.

Last week, the US Embassy in Dar es Salaam issued a communique stating that the “risk of contracting Covid-19 in Dar es Salaam is extremely high,” and that “all evidence points to exponential growth of the epidemic in Dar es Salaam and other locations in Tanzania”.

In the past few days, both Kenya and Zambia have sealed their borders with Tanzania due to concerns about rising infection rates in the country.

Confusion reigns among Tanzanians about what exactly is going on, and people quite rightly fear that things are about to become much worse. Certainly, the President’s bumbling approach to this pandemic is exposing Tanzania to even greater healthcare and economic



**A woman walks past posters for ruling party Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) presidential candidate John Magufuli and parliamentary candidate Hassan Zungu on October 20, 2015 in Dar es Salaam. (Photo: Daniel Hayduk for AFP)**

challenges. One conclusion is clear – that the government has decided on a herd immunity approach. They are prepared to allow some deaths hoping that the majority of the population will build up an immunity. This is a dangerous approach as Covid-19 is a new disease. Its mutation isn't known and hence immunity isn't assured.

Our government cannot afford to continue to play with lives of our people and the future of our nation. As a matter of urgency, we need full and complete transparency. Detailed statistics, broken down by region, must be released immediately. Government briefings – allowing questions from the media – should take place on a daily basis. Depending on the relevant statistics and modelling, measures need

to be taken to save lives and prevent the health system from becoming even more overwhelmed. It is also paramount that the government should allow for independent international verification of tests as soon as possible, to allow for reliable scientific evidence about the state of Covid-19 in Tanzania.

Finally, political parties, civil society and religious groupings stand ready to work together to defeat this pandemic. President Magufuli must stop ignoring the calls of patriotic Tanzanians who want to serve and do whatever it takes to navigate our country through this turbulent time. Tanzania needs leadership. Time is running out. ■

*Zitto Kabwe is a member of parliament in Tanzania, and leads the opposition Alliance for Change and Transparency-Wazalendo party*

# Inside Facebook's big bet on Africa

**New undersea cables will massively increase bandwidth to the continent. Matthew du Plessis**

Last week Facebook unveiled its 2Africa undersea cable project, which will circle the continent, connecting it to Europe and the Middle East. When it is operational in 2023 it will increase bandwidth to the continent by a massive 180 terabits per second.

The 2Africa consortium sees Facebook partnering with established carriers such as MTN, Vodafone, China Mobile, Orange and others, who will bring the cable's connectivity to 16 countries in Africa, some of which have not had direct access to international bandwidth before.

With other projects such as Google's Equiano cable in the pipeline, this capacity boost should also lead to higher speeds and lower prices, and expand coverage beyond major cities.

According to Ibrahima Ba, the emerging markets lead at Facebook's Network Investments, the 2Africa

cable will triple existing capacity. "And in terms of resilience, the cable will in certain areas be buried 50% deeper than other cables, which will help ensure there aren't too many cuts in connectivity."

When the first undersea cables connected Africa to the rest of the world nearly 20 years ago, they were driven by investments by governments or telecommunications, but now companies like Google and Facebook are in the driver's seat, and there are concerns that this may lead to anti-competitive behaviour. If a country is served only by Facebook's 2Africa cable, will this mean that videos on Facebook will load very quickly there, but Youtube videos or Netflix will be very slow, if they load at all?

Ba said that this is not in Facebook's interest. "This cable is not about making Facebook products or videos faster than the competitors. Obviously we want to improve the profile of our product but anyone else can access the capacity and the speed and improve their own products and services."

"On the face of it this appears to be exactly what is needed to drive down costs," said Phares Kariuki, the CEO of Node Africa in Nairobi. "For the countries that have not had the luxury of proper connectivity, this cable will solve that problem. It's what Google, Microsoft or Amazon should have done years ago." ■

# 'Every millisecond counts'

**Slow internet speeds stand between Nigerian gamers and esports dominance. Tolu Olasoji**

**B**amboye Ayodele, 27, dreamt of being a professional gamer. He holds down a regular job as a software developer at a financial institution, but when he's at home in Yaba, Lagos he can usually be found in his pyjamas in front of his PlayStation or Xbox consoles.

Ayodele is good. He can compete with the very best in professional esports tournaments, but there is one thing holding him back: Nigeria's notoriously sluggish internet speeds.

"Gaming in Nigeria is difficult," Ayodele told the *Mail & Guardian*. Sometimes, between 1am and 4am, the connections are good enough to attempt to compete with players based in Europe, Asia and the Americas. But even then his connection speeds are slower than his competitors - which means that sometimes his character gets shot before he has even had the chance to notice the danger.

Ayodele believes that, when it comes to gaming, Nigeria's talent pool is unmatched. But, like many other potential pros, he has gone into early retirement, unwilling to invest too much of his time and energy when technical factors prevent him from competing with the very best in the world.

Ping. Lag. Latency. Every Nigerian gamer knows these words, and what they mean for what should be a thriving local industry.

Latency, or ping, is the delay between when information is sent and when it manifests on screen. Lag occurs when there is a high ping/latency or slow internet. These are all measured in milliseconds.

**Ping. Lag. Latency.  
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"There is no other way to go around it for now. So we have to make do with what we have," Emmanuel Oyelakin, the president of Esports Nigeria, told the *M&G*.

Every millisecond counts. Oyelakin explains: "It's actually quite tangible when you're playing. Let's say you're playing a shooting game and you see an enemy coming ahead of you and want to pull your gun to shoot, that



**The finest of margins: Nigerian gamers have the potential to win on the world stage but are hampered by unstable power and slow speeds** (Photo: supplied)

enemy shot you before you pulled your gun. But because of your own latency, you're seeing that he wants to shoot, not knowing it's shot already."


This puts Nigerian competitors at an instant disadvantage on the global gaming scene. Even now, with esports surging in popularity due to the coronavirus-induced restrictions on other live sport, Nigeria is being left behind. A persistent issue with unstable power supply does not help.

Nor does the reluctance of big game publishers to install local servers in Nigeria, which may allow gamers to minimise the lag - although this may

be changing. Recently, Tencent Gaming - publisher of PUBG Mobile, the most popular 'battle royale' game on mobile - built a local server for sub-Saharan Africa. "It's an awakening, it's a sign of things to come in Nigeria," said Oyelakin.

Even Nigeria's government is starting to take esports seriously. In a webinar to discuss the revival of sport in the post-coronavirus era, sports minister Sunday Dare said: "We are on the verge of launching e-gaming sports in Nigeria. It is the most suitable for the post Covid-19 era. Globally, it is a \$138-billion business." ■





# How Mauritius beat the pandemic — for now

Simon Allison and Abdul Brima

**The new normal: Mauritius may have halted the spread of Covid-19, but it will be a while before the country's beaches are reopened**

(Photo: Franco Origlia for Getty)

**O**n March 18, a Wednesday, Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth announced that three people in Mauritius had contracted Covid-19. Two cases were from a cruise ship, and one was a person who had flown in from the United Kingdom. Grimly, the prime minister told the country: “We are in a state of emergency.”

Exactly eight weeks later – on May 13, another Wednesday – Jugnauth’s administration made a very different announcement. After a total of 332 cases and 10 deaths, Mauritius was now Covid-19 free. “Mauritius now has zero active cases,” said the country’s health minister. “We have won the battle ... but we have not yet won the war.”

This is how they did it.

## ‘It’s the opposite to Burundi’

When the scale of the pandemic became clear, the World Health Organisation (WHO) designated Mauritius as a high-risk country. Not only did the island have extensive links with hotspots in Europe and Asia — tourism is the foundation of its economy — but it is also the 10th most densely-populated country in the world. These are fertile conditions for the spread of the virus.

As early as late January, Mauritius had begun to restrict flights coming in from China. Flights from Europe were soon added to that list, and screening at airports became mandatory for all incoming passengers. Covid-19 arrived anyway.

**From as early as late January, Mauritius began restricting flights from China. Europe was soon added to that list**

On the day that the first three cases were confirmed, Jugnauth set up a high-level ministerial coronavirus committee. This was the driving force behind the country's response, and included the ministers of health, finance, tourism, infrastructure and commerce, among others. It was chaired personally by the prime minister. The committee met every day, including weekends, and sometimes meetings would go on for three hours. Initially the meetings were face to face — later, when one of the committee members became infected, they started meeting online.

“Having a prime minister meeting and chairing the meeting every day, it's a commitment that I have never seen in any other country,” said Dr Laurent Musango, who sat on the committee.

Musango, a Rwandan physician with extensive public health experience, is the World Health Organisation's representative in Mauritius. He played a key role in advising the prime minister. Almost every day, the prime minister would call him or send him WhatsApp messages, asking for WHO guidelines on specific issues. “It's the opposite to what you had in Burundi,” said Musango, referring to Burundi's recent expulsion of the WHO's advisory team there.

The committee quickly took some difficult decisions. The most significant was to immediately implement a national lockdown. All flights and ships were locked down. So were schools, offices and public transport. A strict curfew was imposed. Mass gatherings, such as funerals and weddings, were banned. Police were deployed in force to implement these measures, and handed out hefty fines to anyone in contravention. Many of these measures are still in place, to prevent another outbreak.

At the same time, the government ramped up the healthcare system. Hotels were turned into quarantine facilities; five dedicated Covid-19 testing centres were set up outside major hospitals; 18 doctors were appointed to answer calls at a special coronavirus hotline; hundreds of hospital beds were identified and isolated for Covid-19 patients; and Air Mauritius planes were repurposed to bring in ventilators and personal equipment from all over the world instead of sun-hungry tourists.



**Hands on:  
Prime Minister  
Pravind  
Jugnauth  
personally  
chaired the  
coronavirus  
task force**

(Photo: Beekash  
Roopun for  
L'Express  
Maurice / AFP)

And then Mauritius started testing. Testing, testing, testing. All healthcare workers. Anyone who had been in contact with someone in quarantine, including hotel staff. Anyone identified as a contact of someone who had been infected. As of May 19, Mauritius had conducted 92,764 tests. This works out to a little over 7% of the 1.265-million population — the highest testing ratio in any African country, says the WHO.

With accurate, transparent statistics — released daily in public briefings — Mauritians knew exactly what the coronavirus was doing, and could shape their response accordingly.

### **Lessons for others**

Dr Deoraj Caussy is a Mauritian epidemiologist who has worked all around the world on major public health issues: HIV vaccines, polio eradication, arsenic contamination. He returned to Mauritius about 10 years ago, to teach at a university and advise on public health.

Earlier this year, as reports about the spread of Covid-19 around the world started coming in, Caussy realised that something was seriously wrong — and that Mauritius would have to act decisively to prevent a major outbreak. He began writing in newspapers and appearing on radios to raise awareness.

And then he watched as the government took decisive action. One day, a government health worker even knocked on his door to administer a free vaccine against influenza — a measure rolled out to all of the country's elderly population.

There are several factors unique to Mauritius that made it easier to contain the virus, Caussy said. A big one is its geography: islands can

shut their border in a way that mainland countries just cannot. Mauritius also has a small, highly literate and largely co-operative population. It helps too that the country has a history of good governance: on the Mo Ibrahim Foundation's African governance index, Mauritius has been ranked number one for the last decade.

But there are still plenty of things that other countries can learn from Mauritius, said Caussy. One is the importance of a free press, and reliable information. It means that government actions are closely scrutinised, and that government officials are forced to be accountable to their citizens. It also means that citizens are more inclined to believe what they read in the media, and take it seriously.

Another is political will, said the WHO's Musango. The government acted early and decisively, which allowed it to get on top of the pandemic before it got out of control. It relied on accurate data and scientific advice, and took action accordingly — even when it came at a considerable cost.

The economic hit was massive and immediate. Initial estimates suggest that GDP will contract by 3% - 6% in 2020. An established welfare state will help cushion the blow to the country's poorest, as will a \$300-million emergency relief package for businesses and workers, but the future prospects for the economy are bleak.

"Yes, the country is indeed going to have to rethink its economic model. At least in the short term the country will need to look at generating growth internally and rely less on its export-oriented growth strategy," said Harshana Kasseeah, an associate economics professor at the University of Mauritius.

14 days after the last coronavirus case was recorded, the Mauritian Parliament passed the Covid-19 bill which turns some of its emergency measures into semi-permanent legislation. This is a glimpse into what our post-Covid world might look like: social distancing and the wearing of masks enshrined in law; temperature checks outside every building; and reduced capacity on most forms of public transport.

Normal life will only return gradually. "It's like going to the beach. Getting your feet wet slowly, and not getting cold all at once...that's the best we can hope for," said Caussy. With beaches still closed, that simile is about as close to the water as he will be getting for the foreseeable future. ■

**The government acted early and decisively, allowing it to get on top of the pandemic before it got out of control**

# QUIZ: THE FLAG EDITION

Name the country or institution associated with each flag and find out how well you really know our continent!



1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9



10



11



12

## How did I do?

WhatsApp 'ANSWERS' to +27 73 805 6068 and we will send you the answers immediately.

0-4

"I think I need to start reading more newspapers."

5-8

"I can't wait to explore more of this continent."

9-12

"I'm a proud, flag-waving pan-African."

**Correction:** Last week, in our early answers to the quiz, we said that the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights is in Banjul. It's not. The court is in Arusha. It's the African *Commission* on Human and Peoples' Rights that is in Banjul. Sorry for the mix-up, and to make it up to you we are going to give you all a bonus point in this week's quiz!

# Is religion hurting Africa's fight against Covid-19?

Zac Chiliswa

**A**s the Covid-19 global pandemic has spread across Africa, religious organisations have played a crucial role in delivering healthcare services, filling in the gaps left by weak states.

But religious groups have also played a role in the spread of the disease. In the early months of the outbreak, some American televangelists encouraged defiance of public health directives.

Closer to home, Tanzanian President John Magufuli – a man with a doctorate in chemistry – is reported to have likened the Covid-19 pandemic to Satan and urged people to fight it through prayer. So is religion helping or hurting Africa's fight against coronavirus?

In public emergencies ways of worshipping can undermine individual or community wellbeing. First, there are religious groups that reach god through altered states of consciousness, spells and trances. Because such groups remove themselves from everyday experiences, they may ignore public health policies and so become incubators of coronavirus. This is what happened with the South Korean religious sect, the Shincheonji Church of Jesus.

Second, there are religious groups who seek to access the divine through

specific events and processes, for example prophecies about the end of the world. These groups may ignore practices such as washing hands because this is irrelevant if the virus is really driven by deeper religious powers, and instead focus on “plague protection kits”, as sold by one London-based church.

Finally, there are religious groups that seek to access the divine through specific things or objects such as churches and mosques. Here the biggest issue is that bans on mass gatherings may be interpreted as an attack on religious freedom, and so leaders such as Magufuli may feel the need to make dangerous exemptions.

While most religious groups are a force for good and have complied with health restrictions it is critical that we understand the dangers posed by those that do not. This is important not only for the health of the individuals in these groups, but also for the survival of our broader societies. ■

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**Game over: Former prime minister of Lesotho Thomas Thabane leaves behind a rather jagged legacy in the country's history (Photo: Alexander Joe)**

# Down and out in the Mountain Kingdom

**A political obituary for Lesotho's Prime Minister after a tumultuous and scandal-prone career**

**Charles Fogelman and John Aerni-Flessner**

**L**esotho's Prime Minister Thomas Thabane departed State House in Maseru on Wednesday, seemingly for the last time.

The party he founded, the All Basotho Convention (ABC), has reached a deal with other parties to remove him and elevate Finance Minister Moeketsi Majoro to the top office. This signals the end - not just for the 80-year-old prime minister, but for his generation of leaders in this mountainous, landlocked

southern African country.

Thabane's long and complex political path began in the ranks of the civil service, from which he graduated to ministerial roles in successive governments, culminating in his election as prime minister from 2012 to 2015; and then again in 2017. A consummate insider, his career dates back to independence in 1966 and tracks the coups, coalitions and cul-de-sacs that have characterised Mountain Kingdom politics since then.

The changes he engineered paved the way for coalition governments and even peaceful transfers of power after elections, but they also led to legislative gridlock and frequent elections prompted less by shifting popular opinion than the petty squabbles of putative allies turning on one another.

The other side of Thabane's longevity and success, however, is a long trail of rivals looking to unseat him. This was seen most clearly at the end of his first stint as prime minister. Thabane's coalition had narrowly bested long-term incumbent prime minister Pakalitha Mosisili's Democratic Congress in 2012, but Thabane's coalition fell apart when acrid recriminations in August 2014 prompted an attempted coup led by army allies of his junior partner.

After a time in exile, he was escorted back under the guard of South African police and a regional peace-keeping mission, but promptly lost a general election in 2015, with Mosisili regaining power. Thabane regrouped and in the 2017 election the ABC garnered a larger share of the vote than the main two opposition parties combined.

He leaves now, however, under a cloud, without the support of the party he founded, and stalked by allegations he was involved in the murder of his second wife.

It came out in December 2019 and January 2020 that the police planned to charge first Thabane's wife, Maesaiah, and then Thabane himself with the murder of Thabane's second wife, Lipolelo, in 2017.

The reaction in Lesotho was less surprise that these two had been involved, and more shock that the police were actually pursuing the case. Wrangling over this case has led to many delays in the "retirement" of Thabane, and it is still not clear if Thabane and Maesaiah will stand trial for Lipolelo's death or whether an agreement has been reached that will protect them from prosecution.

Thabane's career and fall are not merely salacious. In many ways they encapsulate Lesotho's depressing transition from a flawed, sometimes noble, anti-apartheid enclave to a post-Cold War and post-apartheid client state.

After more than five decades of independence, half of them surrounded by a now-free South Africa, Lesotho has little to show for its years of political contestations other than a class of elite politicians who jostle for power while presiding over a country of vulnerable people whose economic and social needs are rarely addressed, and half of whom live on less than the national poverty line of about \$36 a month.

There is hope, however, that a new era is beginning in Lesotho politics. One in which a new generation of leaders may finally have the gumption to focus on national leadership and eradicating poverty for all the kingdom's citizens, rather than just a privileged, well-connected few. ■

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# Dancing awkwardly around Michael Jordan's legacy

***The Last Dance*, Netflix's 10-episode documentary, is a generous homage to Michael Jordan the basketball player. But whether he wanted it or not, Jordan's ascent was inextricably linked to the politics of race and America — and his story cannot be complete without this context. Kwanele Sosibo**

**T**he grandeur of Michael Jordan. Those seemingly eternal, seconds-long flights into the ether; the superlative grace of his choreography; the take-no-prisoners work ethic — all these are part of how the man has been mythologised on the court.

A seemingly apolitical figure off it, the ascendance of Jordan to cultural icon and capitalist machine, is anything but.

From the mid-1980s and through most of the 1990s — a period in which he wins six league championships and retires more than once — the spectre of Jordan is ever present.

His signature, Nike-backed shoe, the Air Jordan, coincides with “the summer of crack”, with the shoe instantly becoming a companion piece to crack sales and the blighted ghettos the drug ushers in. Hip-hop enters its golden age in the late 1980s, commanding global attention, and Jordan hovers over much of Spike Lee's output as Lee emerges as a black voice in



**Nothing but net: *The Last Dance* focuses almost exclusively on Jordan's playing career (Photo: supplied)**

Hollywood. There is the Jordan-wearing Mars Blackmon character in *She's Gotta Have It* (later reprised in an Air Jordan ad). There is the furious Buggin' Out in *Do The Right Thing*, who wants to start a race war over someone scuffing his pair of Jordans. Then there is Jordan himself, posing with Magic Johnson in an X cap in that weird documentary segment at the end of *Malcolm X*, adding fuel to the flames of "X mania".

**The footage feels like a backdoor pass but it's not. What we glean feels like a mere extension of Jordan's on-the-court persona**

As the 1990s take flight, Jordan stands at the nexus of race, consumerism and the cultural currency signified by the widening global footprint of the NBA. He makes his first championship run in the year that Rodney King is beaten by the Los Angeles Police Department. He repeats the feat in 1992 and wins his second Olympic gold medal as Los Angeles burns in the aftermath of the unpunished beatings. He "threepeats" — winning the NBA championship for three consecutive years — for the first time as Bill Clinton takes office, but is in early retirement as American television stations interrupt the 1994 NBA finals to beam images of OJ Simpson's low-speed highway chase.

Jordan's singular on-the-court antics

are the pillars his cult was built on. But what *The Last Dance* achieves over 10 episodes — wittingly or otherwise — is simply a romantic reframing of this halcyon period. The footage corals us into the gym, the locker room and the routine of NBA season life. The access feels like a backdoor pass but it's not, with what we glean feeling like a mere extension of Jordan's on-the-court persona.

Although *The Last Dance* stretches this world out in panorama with the hope of keeping us intrigued by Jordan's single-mindedness, the end result is tedium. There is banality even as we watch reams of mesmerising, grainy footage of Jordan's immediate effect on the league and the floodgate of post-season heroics unleashed by breaking through the imposing wall that was the Detroit Pistons in 1991.

The milieu of the arena — its psychology, its primordial import — constitutes the theatre of Jordan's expression, but what cannot be contained by *The Last Dance* — and is, therefore, left out — is the soul of the protagonist's performance.

Jordan's talents were greatly enhanced by his work ethic; so too were his economic feats enabled by his unthreatening image.

In *The Last Dance*, perhaps the most important segment is when Barack Obama observes: "Many times America is quick to embrace a Michael Jordan, or an Oprah Winfrey, or a Barack Obama so long as it's understood that you don't get too controversial around broader issues of social justice." It is a forgiving and



**Off the court: Whether he liked it or not, Michael Jordan was as influential off the court as he was on it (Photo: Vincent Laforet/AFP)**

Although the sport can now claim to bask in progressiveness, allowing players the freedom to voice their thoughts on the issues of the day without apparent ramifications, it might be useful to remember that this wasn't always the case.

In March 1996, during Jordan's second threepeat run with the Bulls, Denver Nuggets guard Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf decided not to stand for the American national anthem before games, citing the history of the flag as an emblem of oppression. He was duly suspended at the cost of more than \$30 000 per game, forcing him to capitulate after a few days.

No one can dictate what kind of athlete and cultural figure Jordan ought to have been during his career — and hell, who knows to which causes his billions of dollars are donated — but these questions of race and politics were nonetheless an inescapable backdrop to his career. With *The Last Dance* — so narrow in its focus — the ultimate awkwardness lies in attempting to unsee these elephants in the room for 10 solid hours, even as the semiotics of American power stare us in the face. ■

*Kwanele Sosibo is the Mail & Guardian's Arts Editor*

experiential analysis of the permanence of racism.

Indeed, the analogies between slavery and sports are never absent for the entirety of the few hours one might donate to watching a game. In fact, in a sport that is as overwhelmingly black as American basketball is, the paternalism at the heart of the infrastructure of organised sports can often be too unsettling to sit through were it not neutered by the transformative power of black genius that transformed basketball — a geeky, oddball invention — into the self-contained cultural behemoth that it is today.

# Thanks to Covid-19, South Africa's daily carbon emissions are down by 20%

Sipho Kings

**Dirty fuel: South Africa is burning much less coal during its national lockdown**  
(Photo: Ann Hermes/The Christian Science Monitor via Getty Images)

**S**outh Africa's carbon emissions dropped by a quarter of a million tonnes each day when its national lockdown came into effect. The country is the largest carbon polluter on the continent. Its residents have, per person, the 12th highest carbon footprint on earth thanks to a coal-intensive energy sector and energy inefficient industries.

Emissions have, however, increased again with a lowering of lockdown levels.

This is according to data collected by the University of East Anglia in the United Kingdom and published in the journal *Nature Climate Change* on Tuesday. The research is titled Temporary Reduction in Daily Global CO<sub>2</sub> Emissions During the Covid-19 Forced Confinement.

The research found that, on April 7, the day when the most number of

people globally were under some form of lockdown, daily global carbon emissions dropped 17%. Nearly half of the drop (43%) comes from people travelling on land — in cars, trains and buses — and a similar drop comes from fewer emissions from industry and energy production. A full 10% of the drop comes from flights, which normally account for 3% of global carbon emissions.

With economies recovering, people going back to work and industries firing up, the researchers expect global carbon emissions to drop by 7.5% across the whole year. The United Nations' climate body — the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change — said in a seminal 2018 report that carbon emissions need to drop by about 7.5% every single year to keep the increase in heating below 1.5°C. ■





## The Big Picture

**Ocean jewels: An aerial view shows fishing boats at the harbour in Sal Rei at Boa Vista island in Cape Verde. Despite its remote location in the Atlantic Ocean off the west coast of Africa, this string of islands has not been spared by the Covid-19 pandemic, recording 328 cases and two deaths. Normal life is resuming slowly, however, and last week most inter-island connections were restored. (Photo: Ina Fassbender for AFP)**

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