

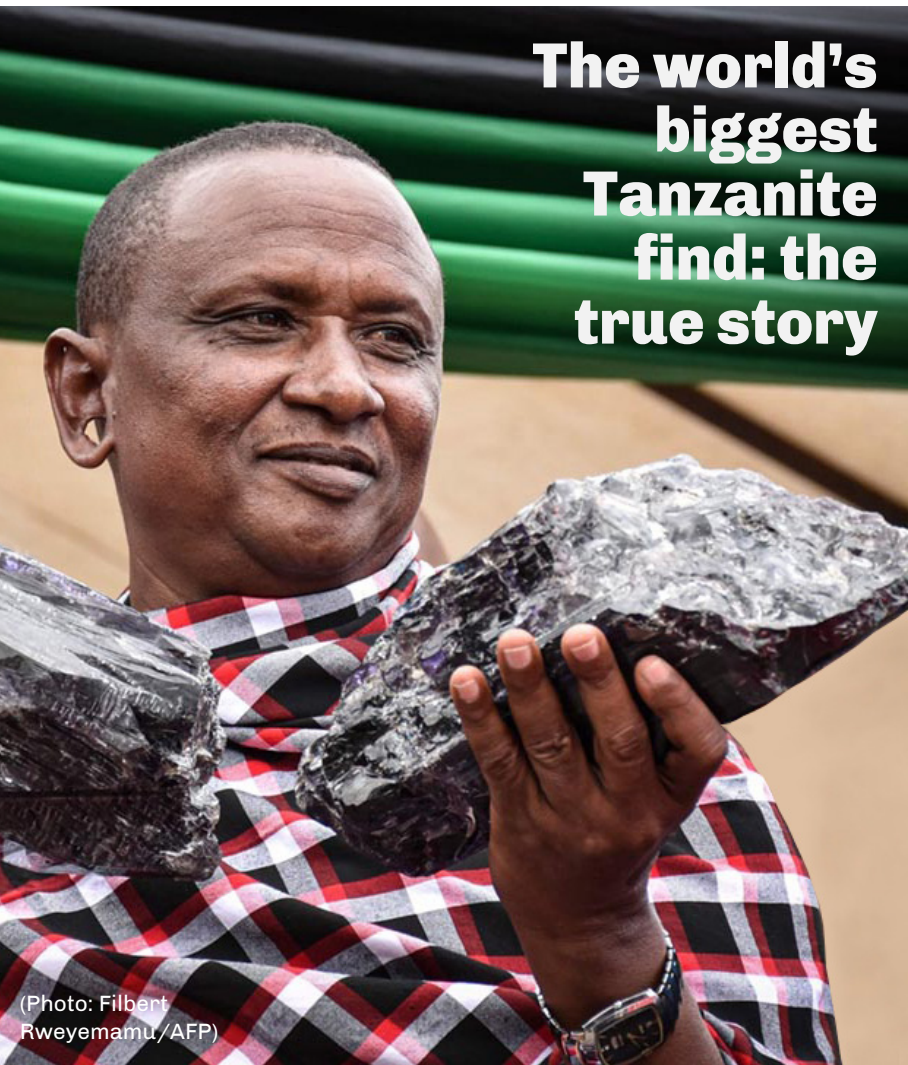
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The Continent

with Mail & Guardian

The world's
biggest
Tanzanite
find: the
true story



(Photo: Filbert
Rweyemamu/AFP)

How little does South Africa value women?

How do you know the government really cares about an issue? It puts money behind its decisions.

Since South Africa locked the country down to tackle the pandemic, it has conducted nearly 3.6-million Covid-19 tests. It built an entirely new testing system to cope, and conducts up 30,000 tests every day.

At the same time, the country's laboratories are sitting on a backlog of more than 30,000 DNA specimens. These are all needed to prosecute people for rape and other gender-based attacks. The government blames contracts and all sorts of administrative problems for the failure to clear this backlog.

This means thousands of gender-based violence cases will not progress. Thousands of rapists and murderers will continue to walk in the streets because DNA results are still not available.

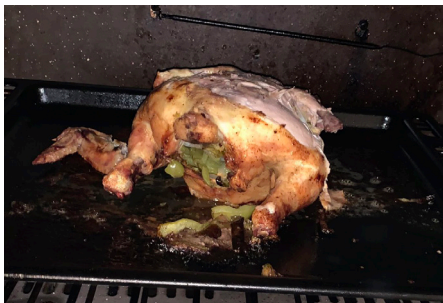
Every woman and child is affected by this. When you look at these basic failures, you get insight into how little the system cares about gender-based violence.

In South Africa, August is women's month. Another month of speeches and promises. Yet the basic tools needed to put murderers and rapists behind bars have not been given to the justice system. Mothers want answers as to why their daughters were found butchered in bushes. Toddlers are scarred for life because they have been violated by men. Women cannot walk at night for fear of being raped and murdered. Few ever get closure, or justice (see p22).

What chance is there of tackling the deeper psychological and societal problems in the country that drive violence against women if South Africa cannot even get the basics right? ■

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Do not try this at home

Tito Mboweni's hit-and-miss culinary exploits have attracted a cult following on social media. The South African finance minister, whose fondness for garlic is legendary, tried to roast a chicken last weekend and ... well, you can see the results for yourself. Let's hope he leaves the economy in slightly better shape than his supper.

Inside:

- **COVER STORY:** In just three weeks, Saniniu Laizer discovered the three largest Tanzanite gemstones in history. We visit his village to find out how he did it (p16)
- **Finally, a good news story:** Africa beats wild polio (p11)
- **Kenya:** With schools closed, some children turn to gangs (p12)
- **Special report:** South Africa's war on women (p22)
- **Obituary:** The Zimbabwean activist who never stopped searching for his brother (p33)



In the headlines this week

Samira Sawlani

How do our presidents sleep at night? Not very well, we suspect. If only because of all those pesky protesters and human rights activists who keep interrupting their hard-earned rest.

The struggle to defend people from democracy is exhausting, after all – which may be why we often see our dearest leaders nodding off at conferences and public events.

In these moments of repose, they seem so serene. Do they dream, do you suppose? Of a calm, quiet life unencumbered by term limits – or of unlimited supplies of teargas? Protesters can shout as loudly as they like about breaking the chains of oppression, just as long as the *supply* chains of oppression remain intact.

Maybe presidents dream of hope. Daring to imagine the electoral commission naming them victor – without having to spend months inquiring after the health and whereabouts of the commission's families, or coming up with the perfect gift to convey appreciation for their impartiality.

Côte d'Ivoire

In the case of one Alassane Ouattara, it wouldn't surprise us if his dreams encompassed all of the above.

This week Côte d'Ivoire's ruling

party officially nominated him to run for a third term. Critics say this is quite unconstitutional, but then what is a constitution but a dream brought to life? And what is life but what you make of it?

Afterwards, as demonstrators poured into the avenues of Abidjan and criticism turned to protest, Ouattara turned to teargas; any dreams of a peaceful perpetuation of power turning to ash. Alas, it looks like he's going to have to do this the hard way.

That said, his dreams do seem less dashed than those of fellow Ivorian Didier Drogba. Everyone's favourite former footballer woke up this week to find his candidature for the presidency of the football association had been rejected, for reasons, it is said, that are as political as they are nebulous.

Liberia

Footballers are accustomed to their dreams coming true. Consider George Weah of Liberia: He dreamed of playing for Arsenal, and it came to pass. He dreamed of becoming president, and president he became.

And then he must have had one of those crazy dreams you get when you eat too much cheese, because he woke up one day to discover to his amazement



Zzz for Zimbabwe: The late Robert Mugabe was infamous for nodding off during long speeches

– and ours! – that he'd made himself the country's "feminist-in-chief".

Impressive, considering that in Liberia this week women took to the streets armed with a petition and recommendations over what they describe as a "rape pandemic" in the country.

Was having them assaulted by police part of the dream, Mr President? If so, then that's yet another of your dreams come true.

Mali

Hoping to wake up from his nightmare is the now former president of Mali, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita. At least he can sleep in his own bed again, after the soldiers behind the coup sent him home.

His plight was very much on the minds of ECOWAS leaders, who held a virtual summit on the subject this week past. Among the presidents in attendance were Mr Fourth Term himself, Faure Gnassingbe of Togo, as well as Guinea's Alpha Condé, who just saw through a constitution change setting up a third term at home. And of course our friend

Ouattara, still sporting that post-third-term-nomination glow.

Meanwhile, former Nigerian president Goodluck Jonathan has continued to represent ECOWAS in talks with Mali's military leaders about what happens next. "We agreed on some things," Jonathan said. "We did not agree on some things."

Some things never change.

DRC, Togo and the continent

And some things do change. This week the Democratic Republic of the Congo revealed that its measles epidemic – in which 7,000 children have died – is officially over. At last. And Togo has become the first country in Africa to eliminate "sleeping sickness", after not seeing any cases over the past years.

Perhaps the best news of all though was the announcement that Africa – our entire continent – has officially eradicated wild polio once and for all.

Amid the politics, the fighting, and the fear, maybe this news will help us all sleep a little better at night, whatever dreams may come. ■

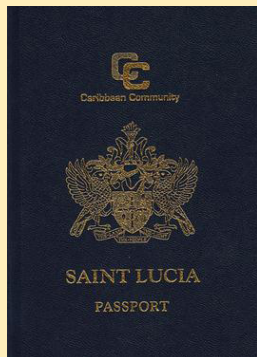
The Week in Numbers

\$330-million

The amount that the United States is demanding from Sudan in order to remove the country from its list of states that sponsor terrorism. The money is intended to compensate American victims of Al Qaeda. Osama bin Laden lived in Sudan from 1991 to 1996, but critics say that the new reformist government should not be made to pay for the mistakes of the previous regime.

25 months

The length of a devastating measles epidemic in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which killed more than 7,000 children under the age of five. The epidemic was officially declared over on Tuesday this week.



\$100,000

The price of obtaining citizenship for the Caribbean island nation of St Lucia. According to Quartz Africa, at least 60 wealthy Nigerians – frustrated by how difficult it is to travel on a Nigerian passport – have acquired St Lucian passports in the past few months. Other Caribbean nations where it is possible to purchase a passport include St Kitts & Nevis and Dominica.

3 years

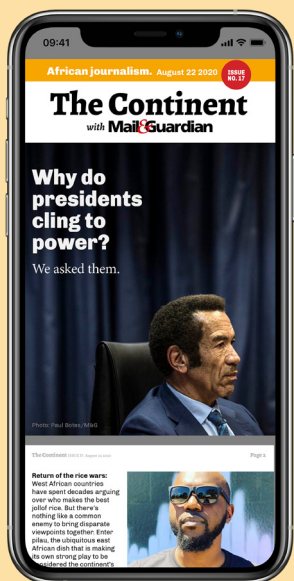
The transition period envisaged by the leaders of Mali's military coup – despite initially saying they were not interested in power. A regional mediation team led by former Nigerian president Goodluck Jonathan has said that any interim government ought to last for a year at most.

95.5%

The proportion of its annual budget already spent by Mozambique's ministry of defence, according to *Carta de Moçambique*. Although the ministry has not accounted for the overspend, it is likely that the intensifying insurgency in Cabo Delgado province is to blame.

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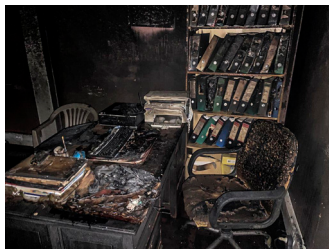
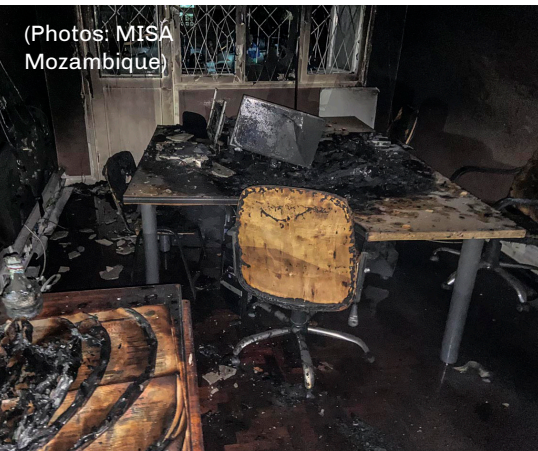
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with Mail & Guardian

Mozambique

(Photos: MISA
Mozambique)



Free press under fire

Terrorism against freedom of expression and freedom of the press.” That’s how Matias Guente, executive editor of *Canal De Mozambique*, described the arson attack on the publication’s newsroom on Sunday night.

At about 8pm unidentified individuals broke into the office. They poured gasoline over everything they could find, and then set it ablaze – destroying not just the office, but also all the equipment used to produce the influential daily digital newspaper, which has recently run a series of stinging exposes about government corruption.

Not that the publication’s journalists were deterred: they set up a makeshift newsroom in a gazebo outside, and kept publishing.

Mozambique’s President Filipe Nyusi condemned the attack and has promised to launch an investigation.

“The attack on *Canal de Moçambique*’s office is the latest chapter in an ever-worsening environment for the independent press in Mozambique, and a blatant assault on democracy and the public’s right to know,” said Angela Quintal, the Africa coordinator for the Committee to Protect Journalists. ■

Zimbabwe

The currency no one wants to spend

Kudzai Mashininga

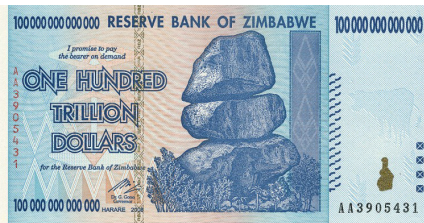
Most people and businesses in Zimbabwe transact in foreign currency, rejecting Zimbabwe dollar notes and coins.

In response, police have launched an operation prosaically codenamed “Accept Zimbabwe Currency” to give the local coin some life. Last month, more than 100 people were arrested for rejecting the local currency.

The ministry of industry and commerce has also said it will withdraw operating licences for businesses rejecting the local currency.

Last year, the government banned the use of forex and reintroduced the Zimbabwe dollar. The initial exchange rate was 1:1. That didn't last long. The official exchange rate is currently about 82.56 Zimbabwean dollars to one United States dollar. Unofficially, it's even higher.

Authorities have repeatedly said the Zimbabwe dollar is here to stay. However, after the country's first case of Covid-19 was reported in March, the government said it would allow the use of both the



More money, more problems: Hyperinflation killed the old Zimbabwean Dollar (pictured)

Zimbabwean dollar and forex to cushion people from hardships. This was just nine months after forex had been banned, marking yet another policy inconsistency.

The new regulation to use both the Zimbabwe dollar and forex came when people were already largely using foreign currencies to transact, even though the government and most businesses pay salaries in the local currency.

The nurses association, currently on strike, said it would not resume work if salaries were not paid in US dollars.

Economist and professor Gift Mugano said it was doubtful that the Zimbabwean dollar would still be in use by Christmas.

“No government on earth would want to use foreign currency. This is an acceptance that the Zimbabwe dollar is on the way out. The position we have now is that the Zimbabwe dollar is in the graveyard,” he said. “Right now, we are digging the grave.” ■

Africa

Finally, some good news

Simon Allison

In 1996, Nelson Mandela launched the Kick Polio Out of Africa campaign. By the year 2000, he said, the continent should be able to declare itself polio-free. It took a little longer than that – but finally, as of Wednesday this week, that goal has been realised.

Polio is a virus that attacks the nervous system, usually of children. It is highly infectious and usually spreads through contaminated water. When Mandela made his announcement, some 75,000 African children were contracting the disease every year.

The strategy to combat it centred on a mass immunisation campaign, designed to reach even the remotest regions. At that time, administering the vaccine was far from routine in most African countries.

“This is a momentous milestone for Africa,” said Matshidiso Moeti, the World Health Organisation’s Africa director. “It marks only the second eradication of a virus from the surface of the continent since smallpox.”

The last case of smallpox in the world was recorded in Somalia in 1977. And

it was Moeti’s father who led smallpox eradication efforts in Southern Africa.

The last case of wild polio detected was in Nigeria’s Borno State on August 21 2016. The ongoing conflict in northern Nigeria made it especially difficult to roll out vaccination programmes and to monitor the spread of the disease.

Several healthcare workers involved in polio eradication efforts were killed in the violence.

As of Wednesday this week, the continent has been declared free of wild polio, the second virus to be eradicated since smallpox in 1977

Polio has not been totally eradicated in Africa. There are still cases of the vaccine-derived poliovirus, a rare form of the virus that can occur because of mutations in the oral polio vaccine.

These cases have been identified in Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic and Angola. But vaccine-derived polio is considered to be much less of a threat to public health than wild polio.

“Now, we will celebrate,” said Rose Leke, head of the certification committee. “But we have to be really careful.” ■

USA



(Photo: Getty Images)

The Bucks stop here

The game horn sounded and referees stood on the court ready to officiate the NBA playoff game. But where were the Milwaukee Bucks? At first it just seemed like an unassuming delay, hardly unheard of. But as the seconds turned into minutes, it became clear that the Bucks weren't coming out to play. Instead, the team were staying put in their locker room, in protest against the shooting of yet another

black man (29-year-old Jacob Blake), shot and injured by police in the team's home state of Wisconsin. Inside the locker room, they held a conference call with the state attorney general and lieutenant general. Their strike spilled over to other NBA teams and even other major sports leagues. Even if only for a few hours, they reminded onlookers that human lives are more important than anything else. ■

Kenya

With school suspended, children have become students of gang culture

Pierra Nyaruai

"I have been earning at least 500 Kenyan shillings (\$5) through the scams," says 13-year-old Brian*. "Why do I need to go to school if I can already make what my mother makes in a day?"

This year Brian was supposed to complete class eight and proceed to secondary school. However, he does not see it happening even when school reopens because, according to him, he has already achieved what school would give him.

Criminal activity among children has increased in areas such as Kivumbini, Flamingo and Kwa Rhonda in Nakuru. These low-income estates have become hotspots for CONFIRM, a gang made up of young people who specialise in mobile crime and phone- and bag-snatching.

One popular scam is to send false

messages — ostensibly from M-Pesa, the mobile money service — to unsuspecting members of the public. The messages are designed to look like a genuine confirmation of receipt of funds.

A gang member will then call the number and ask the unsuspecting victims to send back the "money", claiming it was sent in error. Not everyone falls for the scam, but enough people do to make it a profitable endeavour.

The gang also snatches phones and bags from people in Nakuru and nearby neighbourhoods.

Low-income estates have become hotspots for a gang of youngsters that specialises in phone and bag snatching

Members of the gangs use bodabodas (motorcycle taxis) to carry out the snatchings. One person drives the boda-boda while another sits at the back and relieves the mark of the prize. They mostly grab mobile phones that they then resell to other people for next to nothing. One gang member says a phone that costs 20,000 shillings (\$200) in a shop would be sold for as low as 4,000 shillings (\$40).

Christopher* is one of the gang's more recent recruits. One of the 14-year-old's

first tasks was spying. He rode his bike around, spotted where the police had camped and alerted his bosses. He was tipped about 100 shillings (\$1). He says he does not feel any guilt because, unlike some gang members, he does not harm anyone. "I don't hold a knife or a gun to anyone. I do not snatch from them."

The Kenyan Constitution spares children aged eight or younger from prosecution. Children between eight and 12 must be questioned to establish whether they understand the repercussions and consequences of their contributions to crime.

Some parents even know of their children's involvement in the gang, but turn a blind eye because it helps them meet their family's needs, they told the *Mail & Guardian*. In areas where crime is rampant, some parents actually prefer that their children conduct telephonic crimes,

because that means they stay at home.

Some parents know of their children's involvement in the gang, but turn a blind eye as it helps them meet the family's needs

But the consequences for the children involved are potentially very high. Since schools will only reopen in 2021, the next four months might be too long to wait for some of the schoolgoing gang members.

Some might not make it back — a catastrophic end to a snatching incident might find them holed up in juvenile detention. Or worse. ■

**Names changed*

The lost generation

When it announced its Covid-19 containment measures in the middle of March, Kenya's government said that schools would be closed with immediate effect. Learners were told to study from home, with the help of virtual learning tools – where available – and pupils' caregivers.

In July, the government went a step further, announcing that the entire 2020 school year would be cancelled and that formal education would only resume in January 2021. But as Kenya's infections curve flattens, this position is being reassessed.

"You're aware the virus is starting to look like it is going to stagnate," said education secretary George Magoha. "We're saying that, should the situation change, we shall be ready and willing to look at the scenario once again, in the interest of our children."

The World Health Organisation has urged governments to re-open schools as soon as it is safe to do so. "We must not be blindsided by our efforts to contain Covid-19 and end up with a lost generation," said its Africa director, Matshidiso Moeti.



Rudderless: President Biya's administration has failed to provide transparent leadership during this emergency
(Photo: Marco Longari/AFP)

Cameroon: How not to handle a crisis

Amindeh Blaise Atabong

One might suppose the coronavirus pandemic has given African leaders an opportunity to rethink their approach to governance. Particularly for Cameroon, which appears to have suffered the brunt of the virus in Central Africa, registering close to half of all 1,025 fatalities in Central Africa as of Monday. By this same date, the country had 18,762 confirmed cases, surpassing its neighbours Chad, Congo, the Central African Republic and Gabon combined.

But with the coronavirus, the more things seem to have changed, the more they seem to have remained the same.

For any response to a crisis of the magnitude and complexity of the coronavirus to succeed, it will largely depend on the contribution and collaboration of the masses. President Paul Biya, 87, presumably understands this — which is why, when he managed to address his compatriots on the coronavirus for the first time on May 19, he called on them to remain united, supportive and disciplined.

“I, therefore, call on Cameroonians to have trust in public authorities,” Biya said. But he himself has not earned the trust he is requiring of citizens; because of that, the country’s citizens have not made “a lot of effort” to fight Covid-19, as he implored them to.

As part of measures to contain the coronavirus in Cameroon, the government made the wearing of face masks in public mandatory; limited gatherings to 50 people; and closed all land, air and sea borders.

But the president has, on several occasions, appeared in public without a mask. Other public authorities, such as MPs, have flouted the restriction on gatherings, and the country’s airspace was opened to Air France to run commercial passenger flights from France – a high-risk country at the time.

The president has, on several occasions, appeared in public without a mask. Other authorities have also flouted the restrictions

Such behaviour by public authorities during a pandemic nips public trust in the bud. It means people are far less likely to give up their own rights and privileges for the sake of the nation.

It is not surprising, therefore, to see Cameroonians ignoring the preventive measures put in place by public authorities.

Many citizens have become carefree.

Or careless. They no longer put on face masks in public, nor observe the hygiene and physical distancing measures set out by the government.

As a result, the contagion keeps rising and there are no indications when the curve will flatten. Manaouda Malachie, the minister of public health, recently warned of a second wave of the coronavirus in Cameroon if strong action is not taken.

In future, this lack of public trust is going to frustrate responses to potential crises, should the tide not be reversed. People who mistrust their leaders in ordinary times won’t trust them any more in extraordinary times.

In addition, the government has done little to shine any light on the management of resources contributed by the public to help fight the coronavirus — and the lack of transparency leaves its ability to handle the pandemic very much in question.

Jean-Michel Nintcheu of the opposition Social Democratic Front has expressed concerns that about 21-billion CFA francs (\$38-million) – contributed by the public through a national solidarity fund — had been subject to corruption, citing overbilling and conflicts of interests within the public health ministry and among its officials.

During an emergency, even perceptions of corruption, mismanagement and hypocrisy can undermine public trust.

In this context, Cameroon’s public officials are giving a masterclass in how not to handle a crisis. ■

Amindeh Blaise Atabong is an award-winning Cameroonian investigative journalist



(Photo: Filbert Rweyemamu/AFP)

Africa's luckiest miner

In just a few weeks, Saniniu Laizer uncovered the three largest tanzanite gemstones in history – earning himself more than \$5-million. Who is he and how did he do it?

Simon Mkina in Naisinyai

Lazaro Lasimi and his colleagues descended hundreds of metres into the earth underneath the Mererani Hills, in Manyara in northern Tanzania. At the bottom of the mine, they dug 57 small holes, carefully placing dynamite into each. Only when they were all safely on the surface did they press the trigger.

The explosion was designed to break the hard rock which protects one of the world's most unique natural resources: Tanzanite, the rare, shimmering, violet-blue gem stone found only in the East African country, and mostly in the Mererani Hills.

Usually, it takes 15 minutes for the dust to settle. That day, Lasimi remembers, something was different: it took half an hour, even with

oxygen pipes lowered into the depths to speed up the process.

Once the staff geologist had given the go-ahead, Lasimi and the team eventually made it back down.

In the rubble, he saw small and medium-sized rocks which he knew – from seven years of experience in the mines here – were likely to contain Tanzanite. He started to collect them.

One of his colleagues spotted a huge black rock that had somehow survived the blast intact.

With a hammer, he started bashing it, trying to break it into smaller pieces. But this rock was stronger than the hammer.

Suddenly he realised this wasn't ordinary rock: the whole thing was Tanzanite.

"Jamani, njooni muone maajabu, tumepata!" he shouted. *Hurry, come and take a look.*

The miners quickly crowded around him. The gemstone weighed an astonishing 9.27 kilograms. Nobody in the mine that day had ever seen anything like it. Nobody anywhere had.

It was, by some margin, the largest Tanzanite stone ever discovered. And its owner, Saniniu Laizer – who was not there that day, and was only informed later by his eldest son Joseph – was about to become a US dollar millionaire, and a Tanzanian shilling billionaire, several times over.

"It was a surprise to all of us who were there that day. It was one of the happiest days in my life," Lasimi told *The Continent*.

Riches-to-riches

Saniniu Laizer, 52, lives in a large compound in the village of Naisinyai. It's in the foothills of Mount Kilimanjaro, not far from the Mererani mines, with a population of about 10,000 people.

There are six large houses within the compound, which he shares with his four wives and 32 children.

Laizer is, by some distance, the richest man in the village – even before his record-breaking find. His family operates farms, and owns real estate and hotels in nearby Arusha. They own more than 2,000 head of cattle,





Steady hand:
Saniniu Laizer
started out by
finding small
stones, which
he traded in for
the tools needed
to go after the
bigger gems

(Photo: Patrick
Aventurier/
Gamma-Rapho/
Getty)

and too many sheep and goats to count.

Laizer also runs an extensive and relatively sophisticated Tanzanite mining operation, employing hundreds of young men.

So this is not a rags-to-riches story, as was reported by some international media outlets. It is a riches-to-riches story.

According to his accountant and brother, Isaya Laizer, Saniniu Laizer started his mining business 17 years ago with the proceeds from his cattle keeping. He began by finding small stones, which allowed him to invest in the machines necessary to find bigger gems.

The Laizers' obvious prosperity is in stark contrast to the poverty of the village that surrounds their compound. Whereas the Laizers get water from their private borehole, the rest of the village relies on a few communal wells. In the dry season, when these run dry, people pay 1,000 shillings (50 US cents) for a bucket brought in by water tankers from Arusha.

There are two secondary and seven primary schools in the village, all government-run. According to Valentine Tesha, Naisinyai's Ward Executive Officer, these are not nearly enough to cater for the huge numbers of children in Naisinyai and surrounding rural communities. This means that, with the exception of the mines, employment opportunities are few and far between.

Laizer himself has little formal education, and cannot read or write – not that this has held him back. His success has made him something of a role model for youth in the village. The young men who spoke to *The Continent* said he is jovial and kind-hearted, and always available to chat. Or he used to be. With all the media attention since the big find, he's been

a little more difficult to pin down.

The big cheque

June 24 was a day that no one in Naisinyai will ever forget. The minister of mines, Dotto Biteko, arrived, along with his cavalcade. Journalists and cameras recorded everything. A makeshift stage was hastily erected, draped in the colours of Tanzania's flag: green, yellow, black and blue.

The minister brought along an oversized cheque for the sum of 7.7-billion shillings (\$3.3-million). In exchange, Laizer handed over his record-breaking 9.27 kg Tanzanite stone, along with another 5.1 kg monster – at that time the second-biggest ever discovered – which had been found on the same day.

In a stilted address, Laizer – wrapped in his Maasai shuka – said: “I thank God for this achievement because it's the first time to get this size. When I found these, I notified government officials who evaluated the stones and today they called me for payment.”

He said he plans to use the money to build a school and a clinic near his home, and a mall in Arusha. He will also give 10% to his employees.

With one eye on the upcoming general election, Minister Biteko used the opportunity to praise Tanzania's mining policies. “We Tanzanians have decided that minerals should first benefit us as a country,” he said.

(Photo: Filbert
Rweyemamu/AFP)



BANK OF TANZANIA

DATE: 24/6/2020

PAY SANINIU KURIAN LAIZER

TZS 7,744,152,703.82

SHILLINGS Seven Billion Seven Hundred Forty Four
Million One Hundred Fifty Two Thousands Seven
Hundred and Three, Eighty Two Cents only.

FOR & ON BEHALF OF BOT

AUTHORISED SIGNATORY

PLEASE DO NOT WRITE, SIGN OR STAMP BELOW THIS LINE

⑆12801 ⑆⑆⑆70⑆⑆ 160108⑆⑆00707100012⑆⑆02

“We have had enough of selling our gems to others who benefit while our communities remain poor.”

Even President John Magufuli called in to offer his congratulations. “This is the benefit of small-scale miners and this proves that Tanzania is rich,” the president said.

As soon as the scale of Laizer’s windfall was made public, hundreds of people gathered outside his family’s compound, laying down their red and blue blankets on the ground outside. No one was invited, said Pakasi Mollel, Laizer’s brother-in-law, but since the Maasai are such a tight knit community most of the visitors were treated as relatives.

It was a festive, celebratory atmosphere. Over the course of more than a week, one hundred cows were slaughtered to feed the guests. “I have been here for days, chewing beef and meeting new and old friends, also rubbing shoulders with journalists holding their big cameras. I’m really enjoying it here, although I don’t have anything in my pocket – I’m hoping our big brother will open up and give me some money,” said Kalesi Lazaro, who claimed to be Laizer’s neighbour.

Tesha, the ward executive, said the village was full of visitors from nearby rural areas who wanted to meet Laizer and ask for his financial assistance. “It was terrible here, almost all wanted money from him.

Few understood that the big cheque was just for show, and the cash was not yet in Laizer’s account. Eventually, they left empty-handed, but with their stomachs full of smoked beef.

Hard work pays

In the context of Naisinyai, Saniniu Laizer is unimaginably wealthy. Even so, he may well have been short-changed.

“While the \$3-million paid to the miner has undoubtedly changed his life forever, it is only a twentieth of the potential retail value of the gemstones he discovered,” said Eddie LeVian, the chief executive of Le Vian jewellers, in a statement. The company deals extensively in Tanzanite.

Publicly, at least, Laizer does not appear to mind. “Selling to the government means there are no shortcuts ... they are transparent,” he said, speaking in early August, on the occasion of another major find.

This time, the Tanzanite stone his team had found weighed 6.3 kg, and he sold it to the government for another oversized cheque, worth \$2-million. This means that the three largest Tanzanite gemstones on record have all been discovered by Laizer’s company.

“I have nothing to complain about at all,” he said. “Hard work pays.” ■

(Photo:
SafariFrank)

SO, YOU THINK YOU'RE A REAL PAN-AFRICAN?

Take this quiz to find out how well
you really know our continent

1. Which country connects northeastern Africa and the Middle East?
2. Who served as the first lady of Zimbabwe from 1996 until 2017?
3. Juba is the capital of which country?
4. What is Mozambique's currency?
5. The Gambia gained its independence from which empire in 1965?
6. Who is Africa's longest-serving president?
7. Which country is known as the "land of a thousand hills"?
8. True or false: The Masai giraffe is the national animal of Tanzania.
9. Afro-pop band Sauti Sol is from which country?
10. Which Senegalese artist famously sang the 1994 hit song *7 Seconds*, which featured Neneh Cherry?
11. The Sossusvlei Dunes (pictured) are found in which country?
12. "Nants' ingonyama bakithi baba" is the opening line of the song which opens which classic 1994 film?

How did I do?

WhatsApp 'ANSWERS'
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we will send you the
answers immediately.

0-4

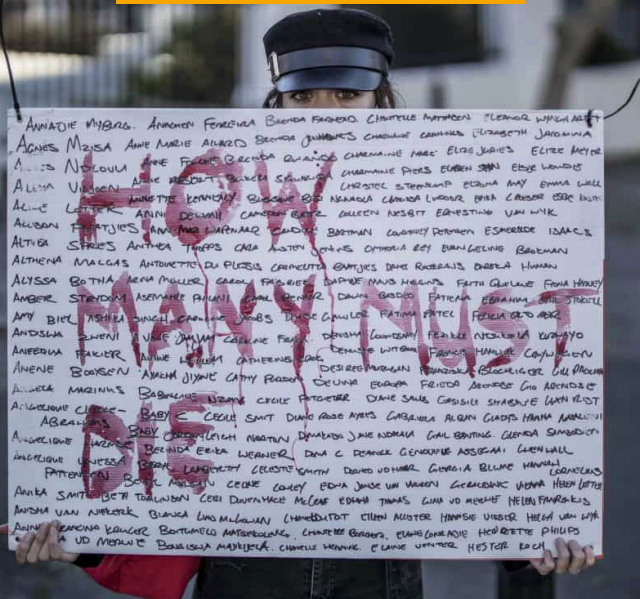
"I think I need to
start reading more
newspapers."

5-8

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

9-12

"Wakanda was
based on my
village."



(Photo: Marco Longari/AFP)

South Africa's war on women

A pandemic of gender-based violence is silently killing women all over the country. **Athandiwe Saba, Sarah Smit and the Mail & Guardian Data Desk** delve into the stories of women and children who have been murdered, raped and broken by men — and why the state is doing little more than talk

Nearly a year ago, Portia* had to leave her little girl with a neighbour so she could run to the communal toilet. When she returned, her five-year-old was no longer with the neighbour but sitting inside their one-room house crying. She was traumatised. And she was naked from the waist down. Her pants were

covered in semen. Portia asked her child what happened. She wouldn't speak.

"I asked her over and over again, what happened. Finally, she said that our neighbour umchamele [ejaculated on her]. I could see semen all over her clothes," said Portia. "She wouldn't stop crying."

She does not want the man to be named, even though he has appeared in court for sexual assault, because this might prompt an attack on her and her daughter.

The alleged perpetrator was released on bail a few days after his arrest in October last year. According to Portia, the magistrate said that they could not keep him behind bars unless the forensic laboratory returned a DNA match.

In the year since, there has been no progress in the case.

Portia's story is far from unique.

The police forensic science laboratory has a backlog of more than 35,000 specimens. This means that thousands of victims of gender-based violence, alive or dead, are waiting for justice.

According to police spokesperson Colonel Brenda Muridili, the forensic laboratory receives an average of 1,463 specimens related to gender-based violence every week, for analysis. This equates to more than 200 cases a day.

Lirandzu Themba, the spokesperson for Police Minister Bheki Cele, said that the delay is due to supply chain contracts that have yet to be finalised. There has also been a management overhaul, and a DNA management system has been established to monitor and address the backlogs.

Themba said that since the start of the year, more than 300 life sentences have been handed down. "This is as a result of extensive detective work that puts together water-tight cases."

There has been no water-tight case brought against the killer of Aviwe



(Photos: David Harrison/M&G)

Wellem, a 21-year-old from Dutywa who was raped and murdered in her aunt's house last year. Her body was found sprawled over a bloody duvet cover on her bed.

Wellem's aunt, Nokhanyiso Mbokoma, told the *M&G* she needs closure. "The



Fighting back: The murder of Uyinene Mrwetyana sparked massive protests in 2019
(Photo: David Harrison/M&G)

police can't tell us anything about the case because they can't get the DNA results either. It's a year now and I can't understand why this is not a priority."

Police spokesperson Captain Jackson Manatha told the *M&G* this week that they have still not made any arrests and are waiting for DNA evidence.

"The DNA results are still outstanding," he said. "The investigating officer will go himself to the Cape Town lab to find out what is the delay."

For Portia and her little girl, the trauma continues. Standing in the yard where her daughter was sexually assaulted, she says she can't afford to live anywhere else.

A few doors down live the parents of the perpetrator, who she says has fled to another province. The little girl has attended three counselling sessions. "We just attended our last session, and she just broke down and wouldn't stop crying. She has become extremely violent and doesn't want any man near her," said Portia.

On her phone, she shows the *M&G* a picture of her daughter wearing a pink jersey lying in bed, staring at the door with a knife in her hand.

"I had just gone out to fetch water from the tap outside, and when I came back, she was lying on the bed facing the door with that knife in her hand. I need the DNA results so we can get closure and my daughter can try to be a child again."

The statistics show that during South Africa's national lockdown, introduced to contain the Covid-19 pandemic, the pattern of gender-based violence changed. Statistics presented to the Parliament's portfolio committee on police on Wednesday revealed a 7.8% increase in reported contact crimes against women — from 24,723 in the first quarter of 2019-20 to 26,658 in the first quarter of 2020-21.

Between April and June this year, there were 65 femicides, 122 attempted femicides, 2,413 assaults with the intention of causing grievous bodily harm

and 6,214 common assaults on women that were reported to the police. These crimes were all attributed to domestic violence. And these are just the reported crimes.

The recent annual crime statistics reveal that there were more than 50,000

reported sexual offences last year; the majority (42,289) were rapes. But in the first quarter of this year, there were 5,805 reported rape cases, down from 9,737 in the same period last year.

MURDERS AND RAPE CASES DURING WOMEN'S MONTH

August is Women's Month in South Africa, but there is little to celebrate

Hlengiwe Msimango was shot and killed in her Ekurhuleni home on August 3 by her fiancé, Mosa Ntsibande, who claimed he thought Msimango was an intruder. Her family reportedly believes it was an intentional act of violence.

Shenice Jonathan was found murdered on the morning of August 7 in an open bushy area in Schauderville, Port Elizabeth. Jonathan reportedly suffered multiple stab wounds. The next week, hundreds of people attended a protest in support of her family.

Zama Chiliza's body was found on August 12 at Mthwalume, in south KwaZulu-Natal. The 38-year-old's body was the fifth found in the area since March. Chiliza, Neliswe Dube, Nosipho Gumede, Akhone Gumede and another unidentified woman are all suspected to have been victims of a serial killer.

Moipone Khoele's body was found on August 13 in Bultfontein in the Free

State. The 10-year-old's hands and legs were tied with wire. Her mother, Motekoa Mailane, told *The Daily Sun* that when she last saw her daughter she was arguing with her (Mailane's) boyfriend.

Dorcas Jane "Nurse" Rathokana was admitted to Tembisa Hospital after her boyfriend allegedly doused her with paraffin and set her on fire. She died on August 16. According to *Voice of Tembisa FM*, the suspect was arrested and charged with murder.

An unidentified woman was shot at a school in Mthatha in the Eastern Cape, where she worked as a cleaner. The man who allegedly shot her on Monday is believed to have been in a relationship with the woman. The suspect was arrested on Tuesday.

Tshilidzi Masase was allegedly raped and beaten to death after she attended a party in Ivory Park on Monday.

Community members reportedly beat a man suspected of the crime.

Mudzunga Muvhulawa (90) and her daughter, **Caroline Muvhulawa** (54), were both found dead in their home in Lunungwi Village, outside Thohoyandou in Limpopo, on August 16. *The Daily Sun* reported that the pair were found lying in a pool of blood with multiple stab wounds. The motive for their murders is unknown.

Asithandile “Kwasa” Zozo was allegedly stabbed to death by her ex-boyfriend on August 17 in Dutywa in the Eastern Cape. The man, Viwe Rulumeni, was arrested and charged. He was allegedly seen chasing Zozo before she was killed. Zozo reportedly organised protests in Dutywa in response to the murder of University of Cape Town student Uyinene Mrwetyana last year.

Nomvuso Atoli's body was found at a dumping site in Siyanyanzela informal settlement in Philippi on August 20. She sustained injuries to her head. No arrests have been made. Atoli's sister, Landiswa, told EWN that the 22-year-old was saving up to study at the University of Cape Town.

Luis Simone was stabbed to death, allegedly by her daughter's former boyfriend. The daughter of the 55-year-old, Nkateko, told *The Daily Sun* that her ex was abusive and, when she left him, he blamed her mother. He allegedly stabbed Simone to death on August 20. The suspect reportedly handed himself over to the police.

Matsie Dhladhla and her two children were found murdered in her home in Protea Glen, Soweto, on Monday.



(Photo: David Harrison/M&G)

She was found with stab wounds to her stomach and neck, *The Daily Sun* reported. Her two children's throats were cut.

Matsie Dhladhla and her two children were found murdered in her home in Protea Glen, Soweto, on Monday. She was found with stab wounds to her stomach and neck, *The Daily Sun* reported. Her two children's throats were cut.

Ayanda Mnyaka was also found dead on Monday. Her body was found in her bed in her home in Marikana, Port Elizabeth. According to *The Daily Sun*, Mnyaka's boyfriend woke her mother in the early hours of the morning and confessed to the murder. Police confirmed that a suspect was arrested on murder charges.

Two unidentified women, a 21-year-old woman and her 43-year-old mother were shot and killed, allegedly by a man identified as the younger woman's boyfriend. The pair were killed in their home in Vosloorus on Tuesday.

The fine art of counting presidential terms, and the power of limits

Gilles Olakounlé Yabi

Presidential term limits are under attack. Already removed in countries such as Rwanda and Uganda, they have recently been undermined in Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and Zambia – and Tanzania may well be next on the list.

But how have leaders attempted to legitimise turning themselves into “presidents for life”?

Removing term limits is free of neither risk nor cost. In Côte d'Ivoire, President Alassane Ouattara's decision to run for a third term triggered bloody protests.

Ouattara has justified his candidacy on the basis that his party and country needs unity following the untimely death of his designated successor.

But like his counterparts in Guinea and Zambia, he has also deployed some dubious political mathematics in a bid to legalise and legitimise his decision.

As with President Alpha Condé in Guinea, Ouattara's supporters have gone

to great lengths to explain that it is not fair to speak of a quest for a third term.

If Ouattara wins, they argue, it would be his first term in office given the adoption of the new constitution, which was voted in in 2016.

Both the previous and the 2016 constitutions say a president can only serve two five-year terms, but his supporters claim the clock was effectively reset each time.

This argument is as worn out as it is seemingly unstoppable.

The temptation to seek a third term is only one of the manifestations and consequences of a non-democratic political culture that is deeply entrenched among the political elite.

If presidents have a strong desire to stay in office, and are scared to death of becoming almost ordinary citizens, it is because they have few limits to their power.

The president, by decree or even verbal instruction, can change or ruin a life.

It takes brave individuals and organisations to oppose a president's will – and it is this everyday reality of fear and intimidation that enables leaders to get away with their third-term fictions. ■

Gilles Olakounlé Yabi is an economist and political analyst and the founder and director of WATHI, a citizen think tank in West Africa. This analysis is published in partnership with Democracy in Africa



Not everyone is happy about Sudan snuggling up to Israel

Once Tel Aviv's sworn enemy, Khartoum is apparently ready to end hostilities, but Sudanese refugees fear they may be deported.

Ayin Media House

In October 2012, Omar al-Bashir, then the Sudanese president, referred to Israel as the “Zionist enemy that will remain the enemy”. Sudan’s steadfast enmity towards Tel Aviv is long-standing, having declared war on Israel in 1967. But this might be changing.

“There is no reason to continue hostility between Sudan and Israel,” remarked Haider Badawi, the spokesman for the foreign affairs ministry in a recent interview with Sky News Arabia. “We don’t deny that there are communications with Israel,” Badawi added, describing the United Arab Emirates’ recent move to sign a peace agreement with Israel as a courageous move.

The spokesman’s remarks even drew a pledge from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to “do all that’s needed” to wrap up the deal.

But Sudan’s newly appointed foreign minister, Omar Ismail, sacked his spokesman the next day, claiming no such deal had been reached. His denial of such a relationship may not mean that

others in the government are not actively pursuing closer ties between Sudan and Israel, says analyst Cameron Hudson.

Hudson, a senior fellow at the United States-based foreign policy think-tank the Atlantic Council and long-time former chief of staff for the office of the US special envoy to Sudan, believes Israel is attempting rapprochement through intelligence and military channels rather than diplomatic and civilian ones.

“Civilians have not been involved in this conversation [between Sudan and Israel] – remember, it was [General Abdel-fatah] Burhan who met Netanyahu. [Sudanese] Prime Minister [Abdalla] Hamdok was seemingly unaware at the time,” said Hudson.

It is telling that Israel’s intelligence minister, Eli Cohen, told Israeli broadcasters that “the prime minister [Netanyahu] held a historic meeting with the ruler of Sudan”, in reference to Burhan and not Hamdok. The meeting illustrates the uncertainty over who is in charge of foreign relations – the military or civilians. It is the Sovereign Council leader, for instance, who met Chad’s



Strained relationship: An anti-Israel protest in Khartoum in 2014 (Photo: Ebrahim Hamid/AFP)

President Idriss Déby recently to discuss border security and trade issues.

With almost daily protests across Sudan, the timing to ease relations with Israel seems circumspect – especially given that many Sudanese may oppose such a diplomatic shift.

“If Sudan recognises Israel – this shows how much the government has changed, not just civilian but also military wings – it’s a break from the past and a powerful Islamist minority,” Hudson told Ayin. A partnership between the two countries could also encourage the US to lift Sudan from the state sponsor of terrorism list, encouraging greater international access to much-needed aid, he added.

But not everyone is convinced closer relations with Israel will benefit the country, and some fear it may trigger a broader public backlash against the

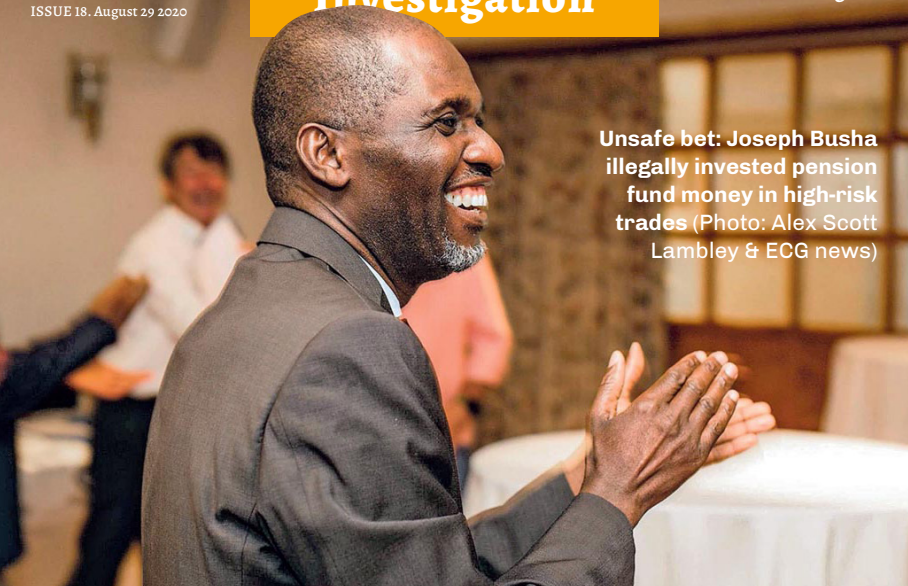
transitional government.

Sudan’s public both in and outside of the country are wary of a diplomatic deal with Tel Aviv – not least the roughly 6,500 Sudanese refugees in Israel. Of these, 4,500 have submitted requests for political asylum but are still awaiting a decision, according to the United Nations.

Many Sudanese worry that improved diplomatic relations will lead to their forced return.

“You always have the fear that one day some politician will want to get more votes at your expense and will send you and your children to a dangerous country, and everything you try to build will be destroyed,” one asylum seeker told the progressive Israeli daily *Haaretz*. ■

This report is published in collaboration with Ayin, an independent Sudanese media house. For their safety, journalists write anonymously



Unsafe bet: Joseph Busha illegally invested pension fund money in high-risk trades (Photo: Alex Scott Lambley & ECG news)

The politician, the pastor and the stolen pension funds

Two years ago, Joseph Makamba Busha ran for president of Zimbabwe. He received just 17,540 votes. Voters may have dodged a bullet.

Sabelo Skiti

\$28-million of South African workers' pension funds has been stolen and invested in risky initiatives, including that of controversial evangelist Shepherd Bushiri's investment company.

The *Mail & Guardian* has for the past six months been reporting and following developments in the case of Joseph Busha, a smooth-talking politician who runs JM Busha Asset Management, JM

Investment Group and JM Busha Life out of his offices in Dunkeld, Johannesburg.

Busha ran for president in Zimbabwe two years ago, and frequently comments and gives investment advice on various broadcast and print media outlets.

Between them, five pension funds entrusted Busha with R3.8-billion (\$225-million). Of that, some R480-million (\$28-million) ended up in at least three risky investments – so risky that they violated South African regulations.



Murky depths: The SBI Group's Sparkling Waters Hotel in Rustenburg, South Africa

The money is from the pensions of more than two million municipal workers and people in the electrical, metals and engineering sectors.

This was done in breach of Busha's mandate and was hidden from the pension funds, and led to the suspension of JM Busha Asset Management's financial service provider licence in February,

Yet the South Africa's Financial Sector Conduct Authority (FSCA) has handed Busha his licence back with the hope that he will return what he owes to the funds. "It's asking the thief to be part of recovering what he stole in the first place", said one source in the investment industry.

When asked for a comment, Busha simply said: "We have our licence. Please check with the FSCA."

Investing in Bushiri

One of the major risky investments involved Malawi-born Shepherd Bushiri,

said to be the wealthiest pastor in Africa. Busha ploughed R200-million of workers' pension funds into Shepherd Bushiri Investments (SBI), which operates a chain of hotels in Africa and Europe.

The millions invested in SBI allegedly contributed to the construction of its first hotel on South African soil, the Sparkling Waters Hotel and Spa near Rustenburg. The *M&G* has learned that this investment, along with other unauthorised investments, has fallen into arrears.

Bushiri, who has not responded to the *M&G*'s questions, has an estimated net worth of \$150-million. This is not his first brush with financial impropriety: Bushiri and his wife, Mary, who is a director at SBI, were arrested in South Africa last year for fraud, money laundering and infringement of the Immigration Act. They appeared in the high court in Pretoria last month for pre-trial, but the matter was postponed until October.

Bushiri and his wife Mary were arrested in South Africa last year for fraud, money laundering and infringement of the Immigration Act

Busha invested another R150-million in an eSwatini-based construction company, Inyatsi Construction. According to eSwatini media, King



**Beneficiary:
Shepherd
Bushiri is
believed to be
Africa's richest
pastor**

Mswati III owns shares in the company. A subsidiary of the company based in South Africa recently shut down its operations and retrenched staff.

Busha's modus operandi

Busha took relatively small amounts from pension funds he was managing and used this money to invest in private equity transactions under the name of his businesses instead of under the fund.

Busha moved client money to his businesses for investment purposes without permission. This amounts to theft

He then tells clients that the investments are in money markets instruments, which are similar to notice savings accounts.

Investing the funds without permission is a material breach of contract, and moving client money to his businesses for investment purposes without permission amounts to theft and contravenes the Pension Funds Act.

Brandon Topham, the FSCA's head of investigation and enforcement, said there was no time limit as to when the funds should be returned, but the individual funds should be able to pursue recovery in their own right.

"We are monitoring his [Busha's] actions on a monthly basis and will be in contact with the pension funds to ensure that the best possible alternatives are pursued by the pension funds to recover the invested monies. Busha's ongoing licence will be monitored, and monthly consideration is done to ensure that the public is not in danger," Topham said. ■

This investigation first appeared in the Mail & Guardian, and has been edited for length.

Remembering the activist who never stopped searching for his brother

Patson Dzamara

April 6 1986 — August 26 2020

Zoe Flood

“Where is my brother Itai?” This was the painful, burning question that drove Patson Dzamara for the last five years of his life.

But the 34-year-old Zimbabwean activist, who died this week while struggling to get the urgent treatment he needed for colon cancer, did not live to get an answer.

Patson’s brother was abducted in March 2015 after co-ordinating months of small but relentless daily sit-ins in downtown Harare, where he would fearlessly hold up a sign that read “Failed Mugabe Must Step Down”.

Such public criticism of the ageing autocrat was almost unthinkable, and Itai and his small group of fellow protesters were frequently targeted by the police.

Two years ago in Harare, Patson told me he hadn’t been very political prior to the abduction of his journalist-turned-activist brother, who was seized by unidentified men many – including Patson – believe to have been state

agents (the state denies involvement, and maintains that it has no knowledge of Itai’s whereabouts).

But Itai’s disappearance, and the near-total void of information about his whereabouts that continues to this day, catapulted Patson into action – and also made him a target.

In his famous solo protest at Zimbabwe’s Independence Day celebrations in 2016, Patson walked out in front of many ruling party officials, including then-president Robert Mugabe, holding a banner spelling out his still-unanswered question: “Where is my brother Itai?”

The banner also read: “Independent but not free”, referring to Zimbabwe itself.

He was bundled away by state security agents, and afterwards described how he had been assaulted and interrogated.

“This path was not his intention, but he became so enraged when his brother was disappeared,” said Rufaro Kaseke, an activist and film producer who travelled with Patson in the US in 2016. “We would talk late into the night, and every

**Determination:
Patson Dzamara
in Africa Unity
Square in
Harare, the site
of his brother's
protests, in 2018**
(Photo: Nichole
Sobecki/VII)



conversation would somehow come around to Itai.”

While continuing to push the Zimbabwean state for answers about the fate of his brother, Patson became known as a powerful voice of dissent, fighting for democratic reforms and against the abuse of human rights.

“When Itai was abducted, Patson stepped up and became the representative of the family. But he didn’t remain just the family representative, he became an activist in his own right,” said Dirk Frey, who protested alongside Itai.

This activism came at a great cost.

When we met, Patson narrated ordeal after ordeal – arrests, detentions, physical assaults. He also described being surveilled – nervously looking around even as we sat in a hotel café – and an incident in which he was sure his car had been tampered with.

Given the apparent threats against him and the grinding challenges of daily life in the country, his determination – his certainty of the possibility of a better Zimbabwe – was particularly striking.

Patson narrated ordeal after ordeal - arrests, detentions, physical assaults and surveillance

In an outpouring of sorrow on social media and beyond, Zimbabweans have remembered Patson’s humour and passion – and bravery in standing up for the rights of ordinary Zimbabweans.

Nelson Chamisa, leader of the MDC Alliance opposition party, of which Patson was a member of the national executive, said he was “devastated” by Patson’s death.



Abducted: Itai Dzamara was a vocal critic of Zimbabwe's government

(Photo: supplied)

One of five children, of whom Itai was the eldest, Patson grew up between Harare's high-density suburbs and their rural home of Mutoko. As an adult, he wrote several books about leadership and was a motivational speaker and a committed Christian.

"He was a very loving and passionate person," said Dr Rutendo Mudzamiri, also a leadership coach. "He was extremely resourceful, funny, adventurous, loved music and simply loved all people."

Patson also stepped in as a caregiver and guardian for Itai's two young children. When we first met, he arrived directly from their school prizegiving, joking that the keynote speaker had talked for so long that "he sounded like Mugabe".

"Him being in their lives as their uncle did a lot – emotionally as well as materially," said Frey.

"He was a smart person – intellectually – but he was also a quality guy. He was

very modern," recalled Kaseke. "I remember walking around Bryant Park [in New York] with him, as he marvelled at the architecture. He'd say, 'What is stopping us from having an intersection like this?' Patson had an idea, a vision for a modern Zimbabwe."

Many hoped that the ouster of Mugabe in November 2017 by his deputy Emmerson Mnangagwa would herald positive progress for the country.

Patson seized upon the moment to again press for answers about his brother and call for an independent inquiry into his abduction. But Patson also warned in an opinion piece for the *Mail & Guardian* that while the country had a different administration, "it is not new leadership".

Nearly three years on, little of that hope remains as Zimbabweans battle serious crises on multiple fronts.

Patson's own experience intersected with the country's ongoing healthcare crisis – public healthcare has effectively collapsed and private treatment is unaffordable for the majority.

A crowdfunder raised over \$14,000 in the days after Patson's diagnosis was publicly announced last week, but he died before enough was raised to cover the huge projected treatment bill of \$28,000.

"Everything is broken down, and these are the results. We are struggling with healthcare, with mismanagement of healthcare funds, and Patson dies right at the peak of that," said Kaseke. "This struggle has eaten him, literally." ■

Flood and Sobecki's reporting in Zimbabwe was supported by the International Women's Media Foundation.

A creative off-season for Nigerian athletes

Tolu Olasoji

In March, Austin Akpejiori had prepared for a memorable comeback to the court after a long injury layoff. The inaugural, much-anticipated Basketball African League (BAL) was due to tip off in a few days. After several practices, he was finally raring to go with Rivers Hoopers, Nigeria's champions and continental representative. Then the coronavirus plot twist hit.

"When it came, I felt really terrible," Akpejiori told the *Mail & Guardian*. "You know when you prepare for a tournament and you know you are in shape? Like, 'let them just bring what they have to'. I could feel I was fit. I was in the right frame of mind. Those things take time – especially when you're coming back from an injury ... and then all of a sudden you're hit with postponement. It demoralises you."

But he's turned the negative circumstances around, finding solace in interior and exterior designing. "The lockdown was an opportunity. It was like, 'Thank God basketball is not happening right now,'" he said. "It gave me focus and



Home game: Rivers Hoopers' Austin Akpejiori renovates houses when he is not on the court (Photo: supplied)

more time for my other craft. It was an opportunity for me to now have time for that other side of me."

Akpejiori's basketball career may have been brought to an abrupt halt, but his craft, once a mere off-season indulgence, was in high demand. After founding his design business, Quinta Essentia, he now moonlights as an entrepreneur. Along with other skilled people he calls "teammates", they get the job done, redecorating and renovating houses.

He's not the only one who has used lockdown to explore new opportunities.

Thanks to social media, Ukamaka Ukoh has had success in her off-season, non-sporting exploits.

“Basketball is my life, making quality shoes is a deep passion,” she wrote in a Twitter thread. Her tweets caught fire, with one of her videos racking up well over 70,000 views.

Ukoh, who plays for Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries Queens Basketball (MFM Queens), a Lagos-based team, told the *M&G* that “Instead of doing what every other girl is doing”, she had learned shoemaking as an extra source of income and a plan for life after sport. But it came in handy when Covid-19 struck.

“It felt bad to have to stop playing. When they tell you to stop what you love doing, you know how you’d feel,” she said.

The shooting guard was with MFM Queens in Edo State, preparing for the 2020 National Sports Festival. The event was called off just five days before it was due to start, thanks to the pandemic.

Since returning to Lagos – the epicentre of the virus in Nigeria – she has taken to her off-season activity with vigour; making shoes under the name Foot’Maka, a portmanteau of footwear and Ukamaka, has brought in a good number of sales.

‘The lockdown was an opportunity. Like, thank God basketball isn’t happening right now.’

Yet nothing, not even their crafts, can match their love for basketball. “I can’t



Extraordinary feat: Ukamaka Ukoh wants to continue making shoes after her athletic career (Photo: supplied)

wait for it to come back,” Ukoh said. “I’m hungry for it.”

In Lagos, most courts are closed, so she’s restricted to simple fitness routines. Akpejori, on the other hand, has access to his team’s court where he occasionally plays with friends and teammates.

For Ukamaka, salvation is nigh: the National Sports Festival is expected to start in October. The BAL is also still hoping to launch this year and so is Akpejori, itching to get his 2.08-metre frame back to work.

Until then, they’ll continue to be creative in lockdown. ■



The Big Picture

Field of dreams: Guests gather between rows of corn at a traditional wedding celebration in Shaama, a village in the province of Menoufia in Egypt's northern Nile Delta. (Photo: Mohamed el-Shahed / AFP)

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