

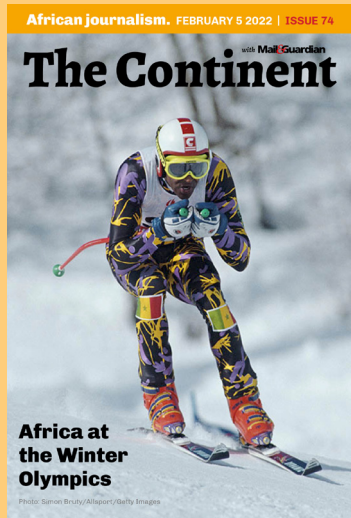
with Mail & Guardian

The Continent



Africa at the Winter Olympics

Photo: Simon Bruty/Allsport/Getty Images



COVER: In the late 1960s, Senegal's Lamine Guèye, then an 8-year-old boy living in Switzerland, saw snow for the first time and fell in love. He took up skiing and, in 1984, became the first black African to compete at the Winter Olympics (p11)

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NIGERIA - UK

Government demands return of stolen property

Nigeria has formally asked the city of Glasgow in Scotland in the UK, to return

eight Benin bronzes. This is part of a wider effort to demand the repatriation of about 4,000 bronze and ivory artefacts that were looted when the British sacked Benin City in 1897. They include sacred items that, in the culture from which they were stolen, would have been at ancestral altars. Glasgow city has the eight bronzes on display as part of its “civic collection”.



Photo: Gerard Julien/AFP

BOTSWANA

Lucrative diamonds re-muster lost lustre

In 2020, due to Covid restrictions, rough diamond sales by Debswana Diamond Company fell 30%, but then rose by 67% last year. Debswana is owned in equal parts by the Botswana government and De Beers. Last year, it exported diamonds worth \$3,466-billion. Diamonds are at the heart of Botswana's economy, which contracted by 8.5% in 2020 but improved by 9.7% in 2021.

ZAMBIA

Army hero delivers a Ray of sunshine

Soldier Humphrey Mangisani has been promoted to full corporal after helping a woman give birth last week. Answering a call for help, Mangisani arranged for a taxi to take her to hospital, and he followed behind. Her labour progressed quickly, forcing them to abandon the trip and deliver in a field by the road. The woman asked Mangisani to name the child. He chose “Raymond”.

COVID

Malawi there yet? Looks like maybe

Research by Kondwani Jambo, a Malawian immunologist, shows that the vast majority of people in Malawi have already been infected with the coronavirus, gaining some immunity that will make new waves less fatal. The findings were reached after testing plasma donated to the national blood bank. The picture is expected to be similar in other African countries. Covid case numbers have been undercounted because testing is often done only on symptomatic patients and travelers.

UNITED KINGDOM

Church beseeched to unengrave enslaver

Cambridge University College wants to move a plaque honouring one of its early donors who was involved in slave trade. But first, it must convince a Church of England court because the plaque is on a college chapel, and therefore on church property. The ornate marble plaque honours Tobias Rustat and claims he earned a fortune “by God’s blessing, the King’s Valour, and his industry.” Rustat’s fortune came from a company which transported more than 150,000 human beings from West Africa into slavery.



Bumpy at best: A representative of Burkina Faso's military junta greets a joint Ecowas-UN delegation to Ouagadougou on January 31.

Photo: ECOWAS_CEDEAO/Twitter

AFRICAN UNION

Burkina Faso made to walk AU's plank

The AU has suspended Burkina Faso from all its activities until the restoration of constitutional order. Last week, a military junta overthrew the civilian-elected president, Roch Kaboré, following months of army disgruntlement over how he was managing the fight against militants in the Sahel areas of Burkina Faso. Ecowas, the regional bloc, also suspended the country following the coup. Mali, Guinea and Sudan have also been suspended from the AU for their own unconstitutional coup-related capers.

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AFCON

Early whistleblower plays the death card

He was literally dying. At least that's what Afcon referee Janny Sikazwe told reporters upon returning to his home country Zambia. Sikazwe gained widespread notoriety after prematurely blowing the final whistle on Tunisia and Mali's group stage matchup. Twice. He said doctors told him he was suffering from dehydration and heatstroke. "It would have been just a little time before [I would have gone] into a coma, and that would have been the end."

KENYA

Cock-a-hoop on the roach to riches

Farmer Lusius Kawogo says he has built a home for his family with money made by farming cockroaches, according to BBC Swahili. Roaches are said to be high in protein, fats and some vitamins, though to say people are hesitant would be something of an understatement.

SOUTHERN AFRICA

Climate crisis fuels southern cyclones

Storm Ana, which left 80 people dead in southern Africa last week, also destroyed about 778 schools in Mozambique, according to the country's education ministry. This week another storm, cyclone Batsirai, hit the region, reaching Madagascar as a category 4 storm – equivalent to a hurricane. Extreme weather events are becoming more common because of climate change. Since 1911, only 12 category 4 cyclones have hit Madagascar. Eight have been since 2000.

HORN OF AFRICA

The rains have failed, to devastating cost

Drought continues to threaten the horn of Africa, with herders and animals alike either starving or being forced to leave their homes. Some Ethiopian regions have suffered three consecutive failed rainy seasons. "[It's] devastating. Children and their families are struggling to survive due to loss of livelihoods and livestock and it is projected that more than 6.8-million people will be in need of urgent humanitarian assistance by mid-March 2022," said Unicef Ethiopia Representative Gianfranco Rotigliano.

UK

Hey Britain, can you spell C-O-R-R-U-P-T?

ANALYSIS

Kiri Rupiah

The United Kingdom excels at labelling bad things in a way that makes them go away. And, while it's usually quite easy for the British media to spot and call out malfeasance on the African continent, the same does not hold for internal scrutiny.

Words like corruption, gross negligence and theft are instead reserved for people in other countries.

Last year, the UK cut its overseas aid budget by between \$5- and \$7-billion a year. Half of this budget goes to Africa, mostly in bilateral aid. Its right-of-centre government said it had no money for programmes such as the UN children's fund. Yet now its finance minister says nearly \$5-billion is being written off thanks to corruption around Britain's Covid-19 response. Except nobody's actually using the word "corruption".

Instead, the country's spending watchdog, the National Audit Office, found that ministers set up a "VIP fast-lane" early in the pandemic to offer

preferential treatment to private sector suppliers with links to politicians and government officials. Last month a high court judge ruled that the operation of the "VIP fast lane" was illegal.

Britain was built to favour those with wealth, a model that inspired leaders around the world. The \$5-billion was stolen by people who are part of an elite class well used to drip-feeding ill-gotten gains into politics and the curious network of patronage that makes up British media. And, so, the money has been written off.

It didn't hurt that attention was being taken up by the lies of the prime minister, Boris Johnson. Elected on promises to solve very complicated problems with an easily digestible and repeatable slogan – "Get Brexit Done" – Johnson lied to parliament about parties at his home during Covid lockdowns while ordinary citizens were forbidden from visiting relatives or attending their funerals. And his inner circle has been accused of threatening other members of the ruling Conservative party to bring them to heel.

While this "partygate" scandal has dented the Tory government's cosy relationship with the country's media, it has also done a fine job of laying bare its willingness to lie to its constituents

If all this was happening in an African country, what do you suppose it would be called? ■

Guinea-Bissau

Curious case of the coup that wasn't

This time, the civilian government managed to hang on to power

On Tuesday afternoon, heavily armed men surrounded the Palace of Government complex in Bissau, the capital. Inside, President Umaro Sissoco Embaló was midway through a cabinet meeting. The meeting was abruptly halted when gunshots rang out.

For the next five hours, the gunmen – dressed in civilian clothes – fought a pitched battle with the presidential security team. According to the government, 11 people died, including seven soldiers, although it did not clarify whether they were attackers or defenders.

Unlike recent coups in Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso, this attempt to overthrow a civilian government did not succeed: Looking a bit shaken but otherwise unharmed, Embaló addressed the nation that evening. “Everything is under control,” he said.

So far, there are precious few details about who instigated the coup attempt, or



Still here: Guinea-Bissau's President Umaro Sissoco Embaló is seen in the immediate aftermath of the attack.

Photo: Guinea-Bissau presidency

why. Embaló said the attack was linked to his policies “to fight drug trafficking and corruption”, and that it was “an isolated coup attempt”.

Guinea-Bissau is a major hub in the drug trafficking network that links South America and Europe. It has experienced four successful coups d'état since independence in 1974.

Analysts have pointed to other potential motives, including disputes within the ruling elite and tensions between the civilian government and the army.

The president has promised to launch a major investigation. ■

Ethiopia

Abiy roadshow heads to UAE to pay homage

Just three months ago, Addis Ababa looked set to be captured by Tigrayan forces. Now, Ethiopia's prime minister feels secure enough to venture out of the country, dropping in on friends, allies and patrons of the state, who helped turn the war in the government's favour.

Last week it was a visit to the United Arab Emirates, where Abiy Ahmed was received by Abu Dhabi's crown prince, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. The Emirates News Agency noted that Abiy thanked his counterpart for "the UAE's stances and its initiatives that support peace and security" in Ethiopia.

A BBC investigation published this week revealed what that support looks

like. It found evidence of 119 cargo flights over five months last year between UAE military airports and the Harar Meda airbase near Addis Ababa, as well as Bole, the main international airport in the capital.

The broadcaster analysed satellite images and footage of the remnants of a missile used in a 16 December attack on Alamata marketplace in southern Tigray.

It found that Ethiopia had been using a type of Chinese-made drone and missile – models that are stockpiled by the UAE.

The attack killed at least 28 civilians.

The introduction of drones appears to have changed the entire balance of the war. By last October, Tigrayan forces were routing the national army. Then the drones arrived, allowing the government to destroy their armoured vehicles, artillery and other supporting equipment.

The rebels have since been forced back.

Abiy will have more countries to thank, as Iranian and Turkish drones have reportedly been used in the war, too. ■

Harar Meda air base, December 30, 2021



Hot wings: A satellite image appears to show Chinese-made drones at Harar Meda airbase near Addis Ababa.
Image: planet.com

Afcon

Finally, a final for the ages

**Egypt versus Senegal.
Salah versus Mané.
It doesn't get much
better than this.**

Njie Enow

On Sunday, in Yaoundé's Olembe Stadium, this year's Africa Cup of Nations will be decided by a single football match between the two best teams on the continent.

For Senegal, their two-decade wait for glory at the Afcon could come to an end if they maintain their unbeaten slate. The West Africans qualified for their second consecutive Afcon final and third in their history by overpowering Burkina Faso 3-1, with Liverpool's Sadio Mané (who else?) stealing the headlines with his heroics.

Despite the constellation of stars Senegal is blessed with, one man best comprehends the angst that drives this team and its fans: former player and now manager Aliou Cissé.

As a player, after captaining Senegal to the final in 2002, it was Cissé's missed penalty that saw the team lose out to Cameroon. As coach, Cissé had to watch



Photo: Anadolu Agency via AFP

from the sidelines as Cameroon once again won on penalties in the quarter-final in 2015; and then lost to Algeria in the final in 2019.

It's about time that Cissé – and Senegal – break their jinx. Except...

Standing in Senegal's way are Egypt, the seven-time African champions, captained by Mo Salah (one of *The Continent's* Africans of the Year for 2021, among other accolades).

Salah is by far the biggest name on the Egyptian squad, which is coached by Carlos Quieroz, who honed his craft managing Real Madrid, Portugal and South Africa. Not that Quieroz will be on the sidelines for this one: he received a red card during Egypt's semifinal win over hosts Cameroon.

Salah and Mané might be teammates in the English Premier League, but only one of them will return to Liverpool clutching a winner's medal.

Game on. ■

Sport

Bullies boycott bullies at the Winter Game of Thrones

Organised sport has always been political. This year's Winter Olympics is no different. The mostly northern hemisphere event and its summer sibling have often been used as proxies for wider battles. Where countries don't want to resort to tanks on a battlefield, they can hurt each other with boycotts.

The Olympics are, after all, an incredibly expensive enterprise to host. Beijing claims the cost of this year's games cost will be \$3.9-billion. And they command the attention of a massive global audience, so they have long and often been the stage for protest from athletes and nations.

But the organiser, the International Olympic Committee, does not mark would-be host cities on their human rights record. Consequently, it has happily ignored corruption in the United Kingdom, dictatorships in Korea, aggressive territory creep by the Soviet Union, the systemic discrimination against black people in the United States, and a multitude of other national sins.

A city, or its host country, just needs to be able to stump up the cash needed to put on a good show. Beijing satisfies such criteria. It is hosting the winter games despite China's genocide of the majority Muslim Uighur population in its north-west; despite its increasingly provocative approach to Taiwan, a country it is still bullying the rest of the world into not recognising; and despite its unabashed crushing of civil rights in Hong Kong.

These actions have seen five majority white and English-speaking countries engaging in a "diplomatic boycott" of the games: their athletes will still compete, but diplomats will not attend.

Led by the United States, these countries are also trying to stop China competing with them over parts of the world they consider to be in their realm.

These actions have seen five majority white and English-speaking countries engaging in a "diplomatic boycott" of the games (their athletes can still compete).

In December, Olympic committee chief Thomas Bach told a meeting: "If we start to take political sides one way or the other, we would never get all 206 Olympic committees to the Olympic Games."

The games must go on. ■



Snow wonder: Senegal's Lamine Guèye was the first black African to compete in the Winter Olympics.
Photo: Getty Images

Skiing while African: First, there was Lamine Guèye

It doesn't snow in Senegal, but a tiny detail like that was not enough to stop him from strapping two planks to his feet and hurtling down a slippery mountain.

Lamine Guèye was eight years old when in 1968 he was sent from his home in Dakar to live in Switzerland. He was, in his own words, a “turbulent” child. Switzerland was meant to calm him down.

But all he could think about was snow. He had heard of this magical phenomenon yet could not imagine what it looked or felt

like. Alas, when he first arrived in Europe, the boy was bitterly disappointed – it was the middle of summer, and the landscape was lush and green. So he waited.

“And finally, one morning shortly after Christmas, an unusual silence reigns outside,” he wrote in an article for *Paris Match*. “I open my windows

and the whiteness burns my retinas: an immaculate and brilliant panorama saturates the horizon! I am eight years old and the moment is magical. I rush outside and stroke this legendary powder for the first time. I immediately catch the bug.”

Guèye started skiing and playing ice hockey, and dreamed of one day competing in the Olympics. He knew he would have to make it happen for himself.

In 1977, aged just 17, he started the Senegalese Ski Federation. He wrote its charter in three languages, and had it endorsed by Senegal’s President Léopold Senghor, who was surprisingly knowledgeable about skiing. It helped that Guèye came from political nobility: his grandfather, Amadou Lamine-Guèye, represented Senegal alongside Senghor in the French National Assembly prior to independence; and successfully fought to obtain French citizenship for all inhabitants of France’s overseas colonies.

When Guèye first contacted international ski federations to let them know about his new organisation, they thought he was joking. He exaggerated a little – maybe a lot – saying there were 47 Senegalese skiers when really there was just him. But it worked. Eventually.

By 1984, the Olympic Committee had authorised Guèye to participate in the Winter Olympics in Sarajevo.

In his own words: “In the Olympic Village, I stroll like a kid in Disneyland. Everything seems like a magical nebula where I wander alone, without a coach. In the aisles, lots of athletes come spontaneously to me. Solidarity, respect, Olympism in all its glory! In the past, I

have come across a few dismissive looks, but none in Sarajevo.

“When I enter the arena, sandwiched between the Americans and the Soviets, I clutch the flag of Senegal with all my might. At my sight, alone on the snow, the stadium stands up and shouts: ‘Senegal, Senegal!’ I burst into tears. It is the culmination of a dream. I would have liked my father and my grandfather to see me. I think of Senegal and suddenly grasp the symbolic significance of my presence, never before has a skier from black Africa taken part in the Winter Games!”

“The stadium stands up and shouts: ‘Senegal, Senegal!’ I burst into tears, I cry like a kid. It is the culmination of a dream.”

Guèye would complete the course faultlessly, coming in ahead of 15 other skiers, and would go on to compete in two more Winter Olympics and several world championships. He remains president of the (mostly dormant) Senegalese Ski Federation, and is a vocal advocate for the rights of smaller nations to compete in the Olympic Games, which have been compromised in recent years by stringent qualification rules.

“The more athletes there are, the more nations there are, the more diversity there is, the better it is for the sport, even more so for skiing,” he said in a 2016 interview. “It turns out that today, we are not at all treated the same way when we run for Senegal as for Austria. We don’t have the same consideration.” ■



Photo: Courtesy
of Akwasi
Frimpong

‘We moved mountains to get here’

Tolu Olasoji

Akwasí Frimpong is not in Beijing. Ghana and Africa’s leading skeleton athlete missed out at this year’s Winter Olympics after a four-year-long preparation was sabotaged by a positive Covid-19 result, along with a controversial decision to scrap the continental representation quota in 2019 – meaning that Africa received no guaranteed spots. The quota had been designed for inclusion of underrepresented continents in winter sports, a white-dominated terrain.

At the last Winter Olympics in PyeongChang in 2018, the sight of a black man sliding down the ice at breakneck speed was one of the iconic moments of the event. But this will not be repeated, thanks to the rule changes.

His coaches sent letters to the

International Olympic Committee and the sport’s governing federation to appeal the policy change, but that proved futile.

Frimpong is back at home in Utah, in the company of his wife and two daughters, cheering on the six African athletes in Beijing. *The Continent* caught up with the Black Panther to relive the thrills of PyeongChang 2018 – and the hurdles he has experienced since.

What does it feel like being at the Olympic Village? What was your experience there, especially in a sport like skeleton racing, where you don’t have teammates?

It’s wonderful being in that atmosphere with such wonderful athletes. And to see other flags of different countries but very especially seeing African flags; Ghana flags, Nigeria flags, Eritrea flags. So I think

it really makes it extra special when you feel like you are there, but your brothers and sisters are also there.

The opening ceremony was very emotional. Before we entered the stadium, we were outside in the dark, holding our flags up high, and then we enter and all the lights go on, like you see on TV. People just gracefully shouting, cheering, applauding, lights shining...

What advice would you give the athletes representing Africa in Beijing, especially how they might go about navigating an essentially white-dominated event?

I think that the best advice I have for them is to go out there and to enjoy the experience. They have worked hard for it. They have been moving mountains and as I know, as an African athlete, the uphill battle to be able to just qualify, to participate is very hard. Yes, we are 50 to a 100 years behind some of these European countries and Western countries [in terms of sports and athletic development and infrastructure], but that doesn't diminish the talent we have – and we continue to give our best efforts.

Sometimes it's a little bit tough for the African athlete when there's pressure coming at you to, "Go and win Gold! Don't come back home without Gold" – and then when a result comes through, then right away it's, like, "What has he won? What has he done? He went there, he came last. Why is the government spending lots of money on him?"

You get a lot of these kinds of things but you have to look past that. People

don't always understand how far we've come to even just make it. [If they did] they would be praising us.

What do you make of the decision to scrap continental quotas?

Last time, I was 99th in the world rankings and I was able to go. I'm so much better than four years ago, I'm 63rd in the rankings, and now I can't go. I was disappointed that I wasn't able to qualify outright due to the Covid situation, but on top of that, it's sad that I didn't have another route through continental representation as I had in 2018. I feel very broken up about the situation. I think they missed an opportunity to showcase African athletes.

I have a vision of seeing more African athletes in winter sports. It's something I carry in my heart. For me, it's very important to be able to turn on the TV and see my brothers and sisters that look like me compete in winter sports, and I was really hoping to see more African athletes at the 2022 Olympics. But we are half of what we had in 2018.

We're overlooked. We don't have a seat at the table. Who is sitting at the table to represent Africa? Nobody.

So, I can't stay silent anymore – there's nobody else speaking up. I don't think I'll do myself any honour if I continue to represent the continent without standing up for the continent. ■

This interview has been edited for length and clarity. Black Ice, a short film about Akwasi Frimpong's remarkable career, is available to watch on YouTube.

Meet the Africans at Beijing 2022

15 African nations have participated in the Winter Olympics – but the continent is still waiting for its first medal. These are the African athletes who will be competing for gold and glory at this year's games, writes **Kiri Rupiah**



Carlos Maeder

After the show-stopping debut of 'Snow Leopard' Kwame Nkrumah-Acheampong in 2010, and skeleton racer Akwasi Frimpong in 2018, Carlos Maeder is the third-ever Ghanaian to qualify for the Winter Olympics. The former footballer, who will be lining up in giant slalom, made it his goal to become an Olympian back in 2017.



Mathieu Neumuller

The third Malagasy to compete at the Winter Games, 18-year-old Mathieu Neumuller will have Olympic gold in his sights as he competes in Alpine skiing, slalom and giant slalom in particular. He will be Madagascar's flag-bearer in Beijing. His father, a ski instructor, has been coaching him since he was just three years old.

Photo: Martin Bernetti/AFP
via Getty Images



Shannon-Ogbnai Abeda

Returning to the Olympic slopes as Eritrea's first winter Olympian, Shannon-Ogbnai Abeda settled in Canada with his parents after fleeing war in Eritrea in the 1980s – and he's been ice-skating since he was three. He actually wanted to be an ice hockey player, but his parents said it was too dangerous. In 2011, he chose to compete for his parents' country of birth in skiing and got the nod for the 2012 Youth Olympic Games. A coder and weightlifter, Abeda had announced his retirement from alpine skiing just after PyeongChang in 2018 and even considered switching to bobsleigh. But in September 2021, he started skiing again in the hopes of qualifying. Three months later he'd booked a spot at the Beijing Olympics.

Mialitiana Clerc

After making her debut at 16 in PyeongChang in 2018, Mialitiana Clerc from Madagascar will be competing in the Alpine skiing events. Clerc, 20, is Madagascar's first female Olympic skier and the only African woman competing in Beijing.



Photo: Joe Klamar/AFP
via Getty Images

Samuel Ikpefan

In 2018, Nigeria made headlines when its athletes qualified in skeleton and bobsleigh. The country's flag will fly again as Samuel Ikpefan represents his nation in cross country skiing. French-born Ikpefan nearly quit the sport when he found that he couldn't represent his country of birth. He then opted to represent Nigeria. Growing up in the French Alps, Ikpefan began competing at top level just one year ago, when he took part in his first World Cup in Falun, Sweden.



Yassine Aouich

Hailing from Ifrane, a city in Morocco's Atlas Mountains, Yassine Aouich will become the eighth athlete from Morocco to compete at the Winter Olympics. The Alpine skier, who also competes in giant slalom, is making good on a promise to his son, that he would one day ski in the Olympics.

The world's longest school shutdown is over at last – but nothing is back to normal

After two years away, Ugandan children are finally making their way back at school. Some of them, anyway. But it's not just pupils who haven't returned. Schools are missing, too.

Betty Ndagire in Kampala

On 10 January, students returned to classrooms in Uganda. It was the first time pupils had been allowed to go to school in person in nearly two years, thanks to President Yoweri Museveni's decision to shut schools down during the pandemic – the longest Covid-related school shutdown in the world.

Two days later, some parents received a notice. "I regret to inform you that business at East High School, Ntinda has been put to a halt."

The toll of losing two years of income had crippled this private school in north-east Kampala. The last straw, the notice said, was low pupil turnout upon re-opening.

East High School was not alone. Uganda's national planning authority has estimated that more than 4,300 private schools for low income students entered financial distress during the shutdown. As many as 30% of their pupils might

not return, the authority said. Some, it said, had gone into child labour; others became pregnant. And many parents, themselves impoverished by pandemic work restrictions, could no longer afford school fees.

These private schools all face closure unless the government comes to the rescue. And although public schools remain open, the pandemic shutdown has exacted a heavy toll.

Uganda has about 13,400 tuition-free public schools but their academic standards are considered to be abysmal at best. Many parents, even of modest means, choose to pay out of pocket and send their children to the better-managed private schools. According to the planning authority, about 1.92-million of Uganda's 15-million schoolchildren were attending low-income private schools when the pandemic hit.

At the government-run Bushenyi Primary School, in south-western Uganda, *The Continent* got a peek into



Back to reality: Schools are back, but 30% of children are not. Photos: Baidru Katumba/AFP

why parents choose to scrape together tuition fees they can barely afford to give their children a private education.

Set up to be an all inclusive school, about 40% of its pupil have disabilities like hearing and visual impairments, learning challenges and bodily impairments.

The school buildings were not maintained during the shutdown, and are not fit for use. Lessons are instead taken under the shade of trees: when it rains, class is over.

But the school's challenges pre-date the pandemic. The school struggled to retain staff: many teachers assigned to the school would abscond, either going to other schools or into personal projects outside teaching altogether.

Brian Sunday, a sign language teacher at the school, said the school had also suffered shortages of instructional materials for pupils with special needs

and equipment, including wheelchairs.

He said there were also too few special attendants for children who required more personal attention and support. "Accessibility is hard," he said. "These classrooms were designed for able-bodied children."

A month later, Bushenyi Primary is open again, but nearly a third of its pupils have not returned. Of the 150 children enrolled before the pandemic only 104 have returned.

One of those who will not be returning to school this academic year is... let's call her Sarah. She is 16. When schools closed, she began working in a restaurant. A customer of that restaurant raped her. Now she is pregnant.

"I can't go back," she says. "I feel ashamed... weak. And I sleep all the time. Maybe I will return to school some day. After I give birth." ■

Sex ed is headed back to Uganda's classrooms

But quite what that education will look like is a point of contestation in a country that tends to put a higher premium on the opinions of religious leaders than on the best interests of its students.

ANALYSIS

Amy Fallon and Andrew Arinaitwe

After two years away, Ugandan students and teachers have a lot of things to catch up on. Sexual health advocates hope that among those things will be the birds and the bees.

In November, following a five-year court battle led by civil society, the high court lifted a 2016 ban on sex education. It also ordered the government to develop a policy on comprehensive sexuality education within two years.

Two years after parliamentarians banned sex education, the education ministry wrote what it had hoped would be a more palatable framework based on Christian tenets. A “values-based” version, it said, as opposed to the human rights-based version that had

been banned. It covered sensitive topics including menstrual hygiene, puberty and HIV/Aids. But it never got to actually implement the policy, because religious leaders didn't approve of the lawmakers' version either.

Activists from the local non-profit Center for Health, Human Rights and Development successfully sued the ministry for this failure, and said the recent court ruling had arrived not a moment too soon, given the “epidemic” of teenage pregnancies that has swept the country during the pandemic.

“We have never faced something like this as a country,” Rose Wakikona, an officer at the centre, told *The Continent*.

According to a report from the national planning authority, pregnancy rose by 26% among girls aged 15 and 19 in the first three months of school closure due to the pandemic. Schools remained closed for another 17 months. Wakikona said that during this long lockdown, men



Unlockdown: Schools have finally reopened after a two-year shutdown sparked by the pandemic.



Cock-a-doodle-do: While schools were closed during lockdown (or turned into chicken coops) teenage pregnancy rates shot up by 26%.

and boys impregnated 17,000 girls in northern Uganda alone.

Evelyn, a 16-year-old pupil at private secondary school in Kampala, told *The Continent* that talking about sex properly – and making it less taboo to do so – would help many vulnerable girls. “Some girls in villages do not know about sex,” she said. “Some can’t explain their problems to their parents. They share (them) with someone else ... who in turn makes them pregnant.”

It remains to be seen whether the government will comply with the court’s order. It tends to put a higher premium on the opinions of religious leaders than those of students like Evelyn.

Explaining why the ministry has been reticent about guiding schools on sex education, Uganda’s director of basic and secondary education, Ismael Mulindwa, said there were concerns from faith leaders that the government was “promoting the bazungu [white] agenda”.

Constitutionally, Uganda is a secular state – but Joshua Kitakule, the secretary general of the powerful Inter-Religious Council of Uganda, insists that religious leaders “have the mandate to guide the public on a wide range of issues”.

Before the ban, the council held talks with the education ministry about sex education. Kitakule said that religious leaders were concerned about the “age appropriateness” of its content and said “basic religious and cultural values need to be preserved and protected”.

Developed in 2003 by Dutch NGO Butterfly Works and the World Population Foundation, in collaboration with local NGO SchoolNet Uganda, the banned version was a computer-based programme aimed at children aged 12 to 19. It included lessons on safe sex, including in same-sex encounters.

To understand why unelected faith leaders hold sway on the curriculum, one has to look at who the minister of education is: Janet Museveni, who happens to be an evangelical Christian – and the wife of Uganda’s president.

“Having her in that particular position acts as a disservice to us who are trying to promote a more diverse way of looking at sexuality,” said Wakikona.

Without formal guidance, most schools have simply abandoned sex education, but Wakikona hopes the ministry will eventually have to bring the matter out of limbo by complying with the ruling. The judge ordered the country’s attorney general to report to court every six months demonstrating their progress in implementing the order. ■



Welcome to **Diani**

Photo: The sands at Nomad

Voted Africa's leading beach destination more than five times in a row, a trip to this beautiful Kenyan town will leave you wanting more of its white sandy beaches and diverse cuisine.

Sharon Tonui

Getting around

The most common means of transportation is the Tuk Tuk, Boda Boda are also available, which cost around 50 Kenyan shillings (about half a US dollar) depending on where you are going within the beach area. There is no traffic in Diani so you can most certainly get to your destination with ease. With most villas and hotels near the ocean, you can get to the beach just by walking.



Eating and drinking around

There is much to choose from, from international fare to the local cuisine, which infuses traditional Kenyan food with Arab tastes that together deliver Diani's signature mouthwatering dishes, ranging from seafood sourced directly from the ocean to more simple foods. Must-tries include mahamri (they look like little doughnuts), vitumbua (made from rice flour), mandazis (made with coconut) and also mbaazi (beans cooked in coconut milk) – all for around 50 US cents apiece. These are usually sold at the roadside by local women.

For breakfast, check out Kokko's Café for a range of international meals, if you must. The average price for a full breakfast goes from \$12 - \$15, but if you are on a budget or are eager to stray a little further from the traditional tourist's path, try out the local kadandas



– local food stalls – where you can get a cup of tea for 20c, and a chapati for the same price. You might also find fried eggs for 40c or even a plate of spiced deep fried potatoes called bhajia for as little as 30c.

For dinner, consider dropping by the Chill Spot Café at the Watatu Watano beach. Sometimes there's live music to accompany the splendid views. Try their chicken-stuffed chapati – this meal gets a chef's kiss from me, and it will only set you back about \$2.50.

Nightlife

Since it's a tourist hotspot, Diani has a vibrant nightlife and the festive season is when it's most active. Tandoori is one of the clubs that's worth checking out. It offers both an outdoor bar and an indoor one. Get there before 9pm if you don't want to pay \$6 to enter. The music is good and diverse, and should appeal both to locals and to foreigners.

Places to stay

Diani is famous for having beautiful beach villas and hotels, from high-end five-star hotels to Airbnb homes. If you are on a budget, check out Diani backpackers. But if you're looking for a villa with a pool that's just a 10-minute stroll from the beach, try Taraji Suites (left), which offers one-bedroom suites with gorgeous views and good security. A night here costs between \$70 and \$120 a night, depending on the season.

Activities

Diani is not short on water activities: yacht trips; Wasini Island excursions; sundowners on a dhow – at around \$14 per person for a dolphin-watching ride; or you could seek out marine life on a glass-bottomed boat. The more adventurous could skydive while others might content themselves with a canoe ride with the local fishermen on the Congo River, or simply enjoy a walk on the spectacular beaches.

Best time of the year

Visit in December – the weather is sunny and more people are there. As they say: the more the merrier!

Song that represents the feel

Seaside by Rita Ora. It captures the chill vibes this amazing city has, and the friendly people who live there. ■



Do you want to show us around your town or city?

Send an email to thecontinent@mg.co.za and we'll be in touch!



Wahala or no wahala?

Jacqueline Nyathi

Three Nigerian-British friends – Ronke, Boo and Simi – are busy living their complicated lives. Simi, happily married to Martin (but keeping a secret from him) enjoys her job in fashion, although she is struggling to make her mark. Boo is unhappy with her life: a sweet husband, a precocious daughter and part-time work as a bioinformation and genetics policy analyst. Ronke, a foodie dentist, is dating

a Nigerian man who her friends don't rate at all. She's eager to make things more permanent with him, but remains unsure.

Then Isobel arrives.

Isobel, an old friend of Simi's, is rich, glamorous, intimidating and domineering. She manoeuvres herself into the centre of the group, and into each of their lives, sowing chaos, and widening the fissures she finds. Is she a good and empowering friend, or are her motives truly malevolent?

I found myself rooting for Ronke in particular, and getting very exasperated with her friends, but you might prefer one of the other characters, who are written just as well. There are laughs, relationship tensions and high levels of drama.

There has been some criticism of the book's supposed anti-Nigerian sentiment. It's true that there appears to be a certain bias – the three friends are half Nigerian, half British, while Isobel is half Nigerian and half Russian – so “race” and culture are a large part of what this book is about, with the usual stereotypes playing out. However, it is not done in a ham-fisted way: there is enough nuance to make of them points of discussion, rather than lightning rods for diaspora wars (admittedly, this is the view of someone who is neither Nigerian nor British).

The descriptions of Nigerian-British cultural life, from food to parties, mean most readers will enjoy this book for the celebration that it is.

Read also for the *wahala* the story is about, which will leave you shocked. ■

THE QUIZ

0-3

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

4-7

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

8-10

"If my country had a quiz ambassador it would be me. Obviously."



1_ Which country hosted and won the Rugby World Cup of 1995?

2_ Is the dirham the currency of Morocco or Tunisia?

3_ True or false: Kinshasa is the capital of the Republic of Congo.

4_ True or false: Moeketsi Majoro is the president of Lesotho.

5_ Dodoma is the capital of which country?

6_ Which country's official language is Amharic?

7_ Naomi Campbell

served as the tourism ambassador for which country?

8_ Which country's president is nicknamed "M7"?

9_ What is the continent's second longest river? (pictured)

10_ What is the world's deepest river?

HOW DID I DO?

WhatsApp 'ANSWERS' to +27 73 805 6068 and we'll send the answers to you!

Would you like to send us some quiz questions or even curate your own quiz? Let us know at TheContinent@mg.co.za

Don't go breaking our hearts



Continental Drift

Samira Sawlani

February is here, beloved reader. For some of us, January was just a warm-up, so now it's the official start of the new year. For others, of course, it is the month of love! And then there are those of us who for whom it's a time to keep checking our bank account in the hope that the universe has decided to romance us, and bestow blessings of wealth upon us so that we in turn can romance our crushes. Or, you know, just pay the rent.

But wait, what's this? It seems that there's a new brand of Februarian in town. The sort that has been spending a lot of time on Instagram reading quotes by relationship gurus saying things like "remember you never lost anybody, they lost you", and so, instead of beginning new relationships or cherishing their beloved, they are breaking up with them.

Take the government of Mali, for example, who this week kicked France's ambassador the curb. Expelled, no less! No French kisses for the baes of Bamako this year, after the country gave ambassador Joel Meyer 72 hours to leave the country "following hostile and outrageous comments by the French

foreign affairs minister", who had branded Mali's ruling junta "illegitimate".

Pulling the classic "You can't dump me, I'm dumping you!" break-up move, France then said, "Whatever. Actually we're recalling our envoy, so there."

Not their actual words, of course. We're translating from French here but we're pretty sure we got the gist of it.

Of course, like any good break up, there has to be a third party involved. In this case it's none other than Russia, whose schmoozy wooing of the Sahel has had the French positively seething in jealousy. For good reason, maybe. Keep an eye on Mali's social media: if they follow the usual break-up script we should be seeing photos of the generals looking amazing, possibly in bikinis, arms draped around blinged-up Russian oligarchs, with captions like "Who needs champagne when you have vodka!"

"It's not you, it's me – and my inability to accept your obsession with tear gas"

Break-ups are always tough. And normally it really helps if all parties are as forthright about it as possible. No beating around the bush or prolonging the agony, thank you! But what happens if you want to break up with your government?

Would a face-to-face approach be best? It's a bit clichéd, but perhaps the old, "It's



Un-couped: Guinea Bissau leader Umaro Sissoco Embaló. Photo: Umaro Sissoco Embaló/Twitter

not you, it's me and my inability to accept your obsession with tear gas" line would work. Or a text simply saying, "Welcome to dumpsville – population: you ... and the army, the judiciary, the police and your cronies"? Or how about quoting a little Kanye, instead?

How could you Bissau heartless?

It seems a little group in Guinea-Bissau took inspiration from the cast of "Keeping up With The Coup-dashions" and decided that orchestrating a coup was the best way to end things with the country's president, Umaro Sissoco Embaló.

Gunshots were heard around the country's presidential palace where Embaló was holding a cabinet meeting, and whispers of the word "coup" were soon heard in the wind. Regional bloc Ecowas – or the bits of itself it hasn't suspended, anyway – quickly released a statement condemning what it underscored was an "attempted" coup.

Then, just as leaders from across the continent were reaching for their phones to set up another emergency group therapy session as they heal from

the serial knocks from Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso, news came that everything was more or less under control.

Embaló himself appeared on TV to announce that this hadn't been a garden-variety coup, it was an attempt to assassinate him, the prime minister and the entire cabinet. And it wasn't orchestrated by the military, but by brazen neêrdowells linked to drug trafficking.

While that break-up may have been averted, there is much heartbreak elsewhere. Too much. This week more than 50 people were killed at the Plaine Savo camp for displaced people in Ituri, in the Democratic Republic of Congo when a militia armed with guns and machetes attacked the camp, which is home to over 24,000 people. In Kenya, at least 10 people were killed in Mandera in a roadside bomb attack, days later four people died in another IED attack in Wajir. Meanwhile Unicef has warned that severe drought in Ethiopia is pushing families to the brink, and more than 6.8-million people will be in need of urgent humanitarian assistance by mid-March.

Whether you're suffering through break-ups, make-ups or heartbreak, just remember that the continent has a lot to offer in terms of distractions. The Africa Cup of Nations final is certain to be a close one, but if sport is not your thing, then we highly recommend checking out the Kenyan film scene. The anthology film *The More Things Change* from the Nest Collective had us completely gripped – it should be at the top of your watch list! And, just between us, the short fiction feature *Jua Kali*, is utterly mesmerising. ■

THE BIG PICTURE

Rein man: A jockey engages in a difference of opinion with his horse in Ouagadougou. Horses play an important role in Burkinabé lives – from raising and training horses for racing or dressage, to the Sunday races that preoccupy many in the country. The jockeys, who glory in being known as 'cowboys', are local celebrities, winning millions of francs in the races – and secretly training horses in dressage or 'horse ballet' at night. Photo: John Wessels/AFP



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