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The Continent

with Mail & Guardian



**Death,
darkness
and despair**

*The cost of South Africa's
power collapse*

Photo: Guillem
Sartorio/AFP

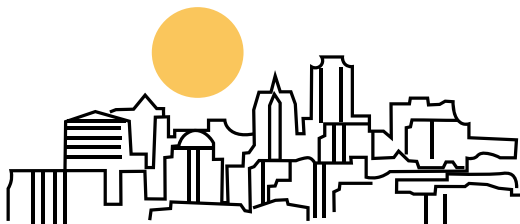


Cover: Africa's most industrialised economy is in the dark. Literally. In the middle of winter, the electricity supply to South African neighbourhoods is being switched off for hours, sometimes days, the climax of a crisis 15 years in the making. It was made inevitable by theft and corruption that ran all the way into the presidential office. The future continues to look dark, cold and deadly (p10).

Inside:

- **Ethiopia:** US Supreme Court justices should have learnt from Addis before their abortion ruling (p7)
- **Morocco:** The massacre of migrants and its tragic historical echoes (p9)
- **Canada:** Why Trudeau's government has been mute on atrocities in Tigray (p16)
- **Inclusive cities:** A cafe in Nairobi puts neurodivergent people front and centre (p17)
- **Zimbabwe:** Did anyone hear the nurses' cry for better wages? (p19)

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Photo: Twitter/temsbaby

CULTURE

BET on Tems

Nigerian singer Tems won the best international act award at this year's Black Entertainment Television Awards, an American awards show that celebrates black culture. Tems, who dedicated the award to Africa and Nigeria, is the first Nigerian and African woman to win the award. She beat out her countryman Fireboy DML, the DRC's Fally Ipupa and South Africa's Major League DJs as well as artists from Brazil and Europe. She also accepted the award for best collaboration for the remix of Wizkid's Essence, which also features Justin Bieber.

CAMEROON

Germany to return stolen artefacts

Germany's Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation will return a sacred Cameroon statue known as Ngonnso to the north-west region of the country. It was taken from Cameroon by a colonial officer and given to Berlin's Ethnological Museum in 1903. The foundation will return an additional 23 works to Namibia and others to Tanzania. Mbinglo Gilles Yumo Nyuydzewira, a prince of the Nso community whom Ngonnso was taken from, said that the return "after more than 120 years" will help his people come closer to their ancestral links.

DRC

Patrice Lumumba at rest – at last

The DRC's first post colonial prime minister, Patrice Lumumba, was finally buried on Thursday, in the capital Kinshasa. The ceremony coincided with his country's 62nd anniversary of independence from Belgium. The country's current president, Felix Tshisekedi, wished Lumumba eternal peace. He said: "May the land of our ancestors be sweet and mild to you." The buried remains were but one gold-tipped tooth that was pried out of Lumumba's mouth in 1961 by a Belgian soldier, who dissolved the rest of his body in acid.



Photo: Twitter/MaropengSA

SOUTH AFRICA

The oldest ancestors

Researchers tested fossilised remains from South African caves, including those of ancient cave woman Mrs Ples, and found them to be at least 3.4-million

years old. That is a million years older than they were initially thought to be. The area where they were found, outside the modern city of Johannesburg, can keep its label as the Cradle of Humankind. The label was previously contested because the fossils were thought too recent for that species to have evolved into humankind.

ZIMBABWE

Runaway inflation slams the economy

On Monday Zimbabwe's central bank said it was raising its interest rate to 200% — making it the highest in the entire world. "Rising inflation has depressed demand and consumer confidence and if left unchecked will wipe out the significant economic gains made over the past two years," said central bank governor John Mangudya. In just two months, Zimbabwe's annual inflation has doubled, reaching 191% in June. In April, the rate was raised from 60% to 80%.

LIBYA

Migrant deaths on land and sea

Libyan rescuers found 20 bodies of people who are believed to have died of thirst after their vehicle broke down in the desert. Thought to have died two weeks earlier, the people likely were migrants from Chad, heading for the Mediterranean crossing to Europe. Separately, a rubber dinghy carrying 30 migrants sank in the Mediterranean off the coast of Libya. Some of the people on the boat were rescued but five women and eight children were not, and are presumed dead.

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SUDAN-ETHIOPIA**Violence in disputed border area**

After the killing of seven of their soldiers, the Sudanese army shelled areas near its disputed border with Ethiopia and captured the border area of Jabal Kala al-Laban. Fearing a further escalation of violence, the African Union issued a statement urging the two countries to negotiate their disputes and refrain from further attacks. Sudan says it has filed a formal complaint about the killings to the United Nations Security Council. Ethiopia denies responsibility, blaming the killings on a local fighter group.

INTERNATIONAL**G7 answers China's trillions with billions**

To counter China's multi-trillion dollar Belt and Road initiative that supports mega infrastructure projects, the western Group of Seven plans to raise \$600-billion for their own Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment. The US is on the hook for \$200-billion and the EU for \$300-billion. They plan to fund a \$2-billion solar farm in Angola, a vaccine facility in Senegal, an undersea cable from Singapore to France via Egypt and the Horn of Africa, and a \$320-million hospital in Cote d'Ivoire.

FASHION**London finds the fits**

London's Victoria and Albert Museum will host an exhibition called "Africa Fashion" beginning on Saturday. Billed as the United Kingdom's most extensive exhibition of African fashion ever, it is part of the museum's effort to carry more works from African designers and African diaspora designers. Curator Christine Checinska said it was "actually vital to have this exhibition right now because we see it is the African creatives that are shifting the landscape of global fashion. That's how important their impact is right now."



Photo: Twitter/V_and_A

Ethiopia

US Supreme Court missed a lesson from Addis Ababa

In 2005, Ethiopia liberalised its abortion law – a change that helped to halve the number of pregnancy-related deaths

Lydia Namubiru

The latest data from Ethiopia shows that 412 people die from pregnancy-related complications, per 100,000 live births. That is fewer than half of the 871 recorded in the country's 2000 demographic and health survey.

In the intervening years, Ethiopia changed the law that outlawed abortion, introducing exceptions in the case of rape, incest and foetal anomalies. It then permitted legal abortion services to operate more freely.

Before that 2005 change, "the methods women used to try and terminate an unwanted pregnancy were desperate, causing uterine perforation and organ

injury," said Abebe Shibru, the country director of MSI Ethiopia, which provides abortion services. "In an average week, around two or three women died".

As a result, about 31% of the country's maternal deaths were due to abortion related complications, a 2014 systematic review of studies from that period found.

Today, estimates for how much abortion still contributes to maternal mortality in Ethiopia vary but all show a significant decline. One 2016 study by Columbia University and the Ethiopian health ministry found that "less than 1 percent of all maternal deaths were attributable to complications from abortion". A 2019 study by independent Ethiopian scientists put it at 19.6%.

Earlier this month, the United States Supreme Court took that country in the opposite direction. It overturned *Roe v Wade*, the ruling that protected American women's access to legal abortions.

Banchiamlack Dessalegn, an Ethiopian-American who works for MSI Reproductive Choices, said she watched in disbelief.

"I am so proud of the steps the government in Ethiopia has taken to expand access to abortion over the last two decades; action that has saved countless lives," she said.

She believes the decision of the US Supreme Court will do the opposite. ■

Morocco



Photo: Daniel
Beloumou
Olomo/AFP

The 2022 TotalEnergies Women's Africa Cup of Nations – or Wafcon, as we're apparently still calling it – kicks off this weekend in Morocco. The African tournament functions as a double selector – crowning the queens of the continent and also deciding which teams will represent Africa on the world stage.

The teams that finish in the top four slots will automatically secure themselves a spot in the 2023 Fifa Women's World Cup, which will be held in Australia and New Zealand. The 12 teams battling it out are: Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal,

South Africa, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda and Zambia. The tournament has taken place since 1991.

The most successful team in this competition is Nigeria's Super Falcons, who are favourites again. They have been crowned champions an astonishing 11 times. To put this in perspective: the tournament has only been played 13 times. The other winner was Equatorial Guinea in 2012.

This time around, however, Nigeria are expected to face stiff competition from the Indomitable Lionesses of Cameroon and South Africa's Banyana Banyana. ■

Spain

Storming Europe's walls

The massacre in Melilla last week has tragic historical echoes

In the far north of Morocco, a massive, menacing chain-link fence rises from the ground. This is one of just two land borders between Africa and Europe. On one side is the Moroccan province of Oriental; on the other is a tiny city called Melilla, which has been ruled by Spain since Castilian pirates occupied it in 1497.

There have been several attempts to remove Spain from the territory.

The town was besieged in the 1680s and 1690s by the Alouite sultan Ismail Ibn Sharif, who seized the outer fortifications but failed to conquer the fort at the heart of the city.

In 1893, some 6,000 warriors from the Rif tribes of northern Morocco launched a full-frontal assault. They were repelled by Spanish soldiers, who used semi-automatic pistols for the first time, leaving piles of dead bodies at the foot of the city walls.

Last Friday, there was a modern iteration of these grim scenes as around 2,000 people – mostly young, mostly men – stormed Melilla's walls again. They were

trying to reach Spanish territory where they could claim asylum.

The times may be different, but the response was the same.

"Video and photographs show bodies strewn on the ground in pools of blood, Moroccan security forces kicking and beating people, and Spanish Guardia Civil launching tear-gas at men clinging to fences," said Human Rights Watch's Judith Sunderland.

At least 23 people were killed, but local NGOs believe the death toll was even higher. Many of the dead were Sudanese, fleeing a brutal regime led by generals in Khartoum. The European Union – of which Spain is a prominent member – has put hundreds of millions of euros into the coffers of the Sudanese government over the past decade, in a cynical effort to prevent further migration.

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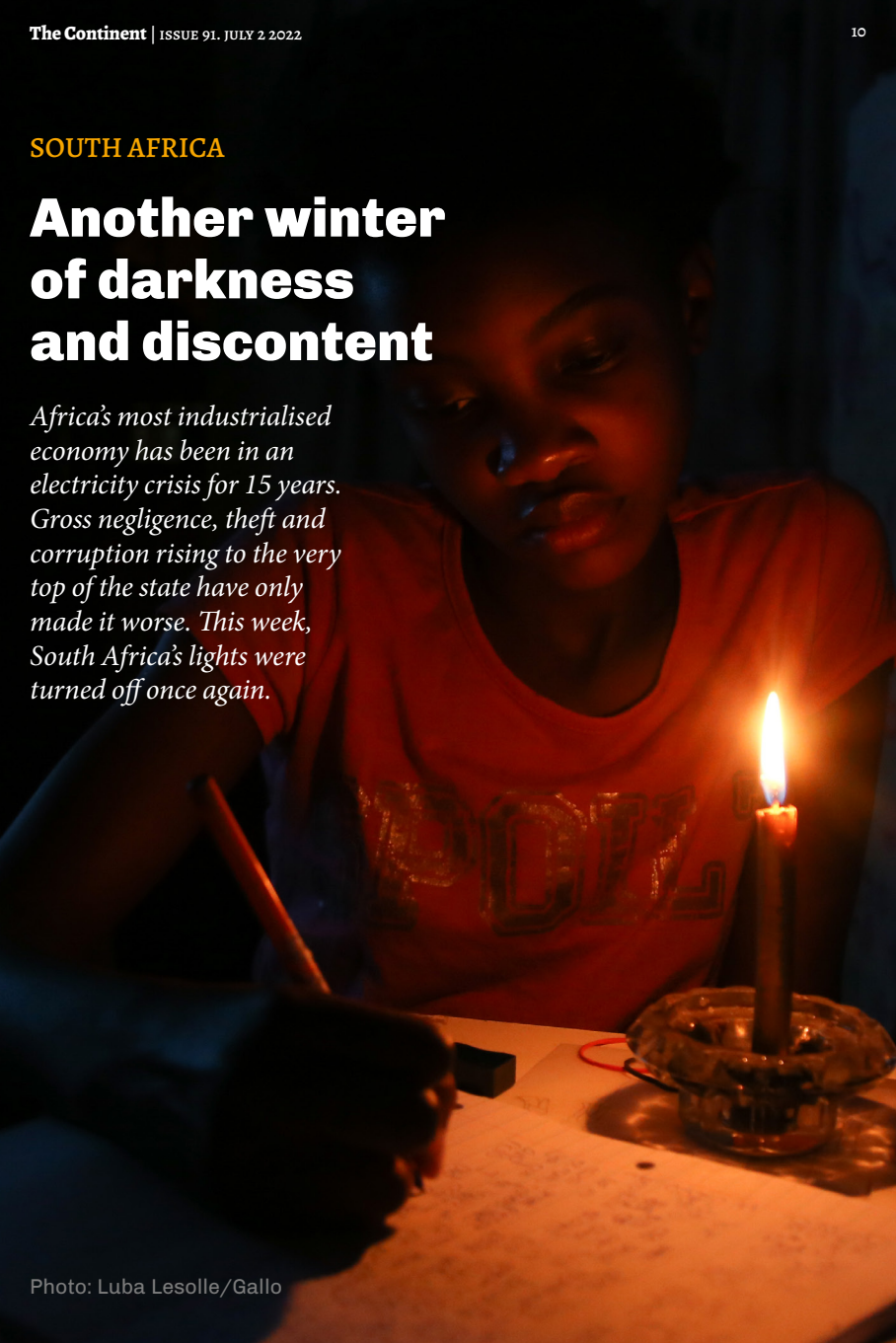
That is a continuation of the union's work to keep Africans in Africa.

Sudan's government knows this, threatening Europe with mass immigration if it falls. ■

SOUTH AFRICA

Another winter of darkness and discontent

Africa's most industrialised economy has been in an electricity crisis for 15 years. Gross negligence, theft and corruption rising to the very top of the state have only made it worse. This week, South Africa's lights were turned off once again.



Sipho Kings

Last weekend, 22 people – mostly minors – died in a tavern in South Africa's Eastern Cape province. At first alcohol and a stampede were blamed. Now, toxic fumes from a petrol generator are being linked to the deaths.

Despite having the continent's biggest power-generating capacity, with a vast fleet of coal-fired power plants, the country this week was once again subjected to rolling blackouts.

The monopoly power utility, Eskom, calls this "load shedding". It has been doing this since 2007, at which time a panicked government signed off on the construction of two of the world's biggest power plants. Fired and fuelled by polluting coal, these received funding from organisations such as the African Development Bank and the World Bank – despite serious concerns about their effect on the climate crisis.

Like the apartheid government before it, senior members of the ruling African National Congress (ANC) understood that big power projects provide an excellent opportunity for theft, fraud and corruption in general. What followed has been documented in exhaustive detail by journalists. In the past two years, it has also been detailed in minutiae by a commission set up to investigate what South Africans call "state capture" – when corruption instead of public good determines government decisions.

The final report into state capture was handed over last week. It identified former president Jacob Zuma as the

figurehead of this capture: a useful and dangerous puppet for those who would support his lifestyle along with their interests.

In the energy sector, this has meant that now, on any given day, less than half of the country's supply is working.

South Africans who can afford it have invested in generators. In a country with at least 40% unemployment and stagnant economic growth, this is a very small pool of people. And without the electricity to power the economy, that pool cannot grow to include more South Africans.

Under the various stages of load-shedding, entire neighbourhoods are turned off in rotation. This week the power utility, Eskom, shifted the country to "Stage 6", a level only seen once before.

Theft and mismanagement, coupled with constant struggles over who is in charge as ANC power wanes, mean little investment in operations and maintenance.

At this level, it means three separate slots each day without electricity, for up to four hours at a time – in theory. In practice it means far more hours and even days, as substations shortcircuit or fail to come online after their scheduled slot.

The economic toll has been profound. Even South Africa's biggest municipalities, like Johannesburg, are effectively bankrupt. Theft and mismanagement, coupled with constant struggles over who is in charge as ANC

Heartless darkness:
Thanks to state
capture, millions of
South Africans are
unable to stay warm
in freezing winters.



power wanes, mean little investment in operations and maintenance is taking place. Local energy infrastructure – the substations that supply communities and the pumps that move water – crave stability. When they're switched on and off, they break. Some explode. This week angry communities attacked the people sent out to fix breaks.

A manufactured crisis

This could have been avoided. Eskom is about \$25-billion in debt because it has spent so much on new generating capacity that has failed to live up to its promise or potential. Together, the two new coal plants signed off on in 2007, Medupi and Kusile, ought to be generating as much as Nigeria's entire grid. These behemoths rise 200m into the sky above the bushveld, sucking in

coal from hundreds of kilometres away. When they work.

But their boilers were built too small, so they can't burn coal and turn that into steam and then electricity properly. The ANC itself owned part of the company set up to make those. Myriad other problems mean that these boilers are being haphazardly rebuilt.

South Africa once led the world in its renewable energy programme.

The dozen older coal plants that form the core of the country's power grid were built in the 1960s, 70s and 80s. These are so inefficient that South Africa uses far more energy to create a unit of gross domestic product than any other country in the G20 of biggest economies. They are slated to close down in this decade and the next.

That provided an opportunity to



**Smoke & mirrors:
Corrupt elements
forced South
Africa to abandon
its ambitious
renewable energy
programme.**

Photo: Delwyn
Verasamy/M&G

rethink the entire system, just as the price of wind and solar was plummeting into actual affordability.

In 2013, the national energy planners came up with a blueprint that would change South Africa from the world's 13th largest polluter to a renewable energy powerhouse. This would save thousands of lives each year from pollution, create a local industry providing jobs in areas of the country without industrialisation, and stimulate the economy.

But the ambitious programme – which has since been copied by most other countries embarking on a renewable build – was *too* transparent: the state said how much energy of each type it wanted, companies bid, winners were chosen by the lowest price, and how much they could produce locally. They then got a 20-year contract to supply power to Eskom.

Against all odds, things were looking up.

State capture

And then President Zuma throttled the programme. From 2015, no new contracts were signed. Wind turbine and solar panel factories closed. Jobs were lost. His government then forced through a plan to build new nuclear power plants. Media reports made it clear that a secret \$60-billion deal had been done with Russia's state nuclear company, Rosatom, to make and run the plants. Zuma was said to have made many clandestine trips to Sochi and elsewhere in that country, although both he and Russia denied the claims.

Various South African ministers were shuffled in and out of key positions, depending on their support of corrupt plans. Some of these have testified at the

just-concluded commission into state capture. They sketched out how one set of well-connected brothers in particular – Atul and Rajesh Gupta – acted as puppeteers, dictating the actions of the president. Their interests included coal mines, which were awarded lucrative contracts to supply substandard coal to the power utility.

Some of the load-shedding in the past 15 years has been due to coal of such poor quality that it looks like slush, especially if it gets wet – winter rainfall is a feature of the country's coal belt.

The family deny culpability but the brothers have been arrested in the United Arab Emirates and are being extradited back to South Africa to face criminal charges.

Darkness

When Cyril Ramaphosa replaced Zuma as president in 2017, he promised change. Powering the country's economy was meant to be part of this. Five years later, however, little has changed. The giant plants at Kusile and Medupi are still unable work at their intended capacity. New renewable projects are only now starting to be approved. The old coal fleet, meanwhile, is creaking and cracking, with entire units breaking without notice.

As usual, it is the impoverished majority that bears the brunt.

Rich homeowners have generators. Gated communities are moving themselves off the grid. And big industrial users are building their own renewable power.



Junk status:
A lot of municipal
energy infrastructure
is already well past
its sell-by date. Photo:
Delwyn Verasamy/M&G

Consequently, that means Eskom has fewer paying customers, and so has even less hope of servicing its debt, let alone of investing in more capacity or even in maintaining its current theoretical capacity. And because its staggering debt is backed by the government, South Africa's credit rating has fallen to junk status.

It already has little in the way of a working business model, with tens of billions of dollars in bailouts from the country's treasury.

This week the energy minister, Gwede Mantashe, said it was "unfair" to blame him, or the government, for the power crisis. However, Mantashe appears to have gone out of his way to block attempts to build new renewables. Journalists have tied his family to profits from the coal industry and linked him to profiteering from a deal to supply emergency electricity from "powerships", which would anchor in harbours and supply very expensive electricity.

Despite this, he remains in his position because he is a key ally to the president in party factional battles.

Later this year, the ANC will decide if it is keeping Ramaphosa or choose one of those vying to replace him. That leader will contest the 2024 elections in part with funds raised from the party's allegedly corrupt networks.

South Africa's power system might survive until then. ■

SA's energy breakdown

A well-run power utility has 15% more supply than the maximum demand to allow for maintenance downtime. South Africa's grid, however, needs more electricity than is available. Eskom, the state power utility, has 42,000 megawatts of capacity across its fleet. Renewable energy feeds in a few thousand megawatts more, but far less than was initially planned.

On any given day, at least 15,000MW of coal generation is undergoing maintenance. A further 600MW from the Cahora Bassa hydroelectric scheme in Mozambique is also unavailable after pylons fell down. This week another 6,000MW of coal generation shut down, with Eskom blaming workers who had embarked on "illegal" wage strikes.

An emergency backup exists in the form of eight massive oil and gas generators. At one point even these generators switched off last year as they waited for fuel. The price spike after Russia's invasion of Ukraine means Eskom may spend nearly a billion dollars on diesel this year.

Average peak demand is 33,000MW but at present the grid can only provide 27,000MW. Without meddling, this demand could have been met, at far lower cost, with a mix of clean energy sources.

Canada's gilt-edged excuse for ignoring atrocities in Tigray

Trudeau's boy scout image belied Canada's greed for gold

James Jeffrey

Canada's silence on the horrors of Ethiopia's 18-month war has led to accusations that gold deposits and other precious minerals in the northern Tigray region at the centre of conflict are behind why Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has not spoken out.

One report by researchers at the University of Ghent in Belgium estimates that 500,000 people have died through the conflict. Atrocities have been committed by all sides involved: extrajudicial killings, massacres in churches, rape used as a psychological weapon of war, deliberately starving Tigrayans through a humanitarian blockade, while millions have been displaced from their homes.

But Trudeau has said nothing about this, despite his pledge that Canada stands for "democracy, peace, and security at home and around the world".

When Trudeau or the Canadian government has spoken out, Tigray has not actually been mentioned, while the overall message is supportive of the Ethiopian government. Unlike the United States, Canada has not placed any economic sanctions on the Ethiopian government. This may have something to do with Canada's economic interests in the region.

One journalist, Fitsum Areguy, wrote last year that the current mineral deposits in Tigray could be worth \$4-billion. Currently the largest exploration licence areas in Tigray are held by Canadian mining companies, including East Africa Metals and Parallel Mining.

Unlike the United States, Canada has not placed any economic sanctions on the Ethiopian government.

According to a leaked government-funded report criticising the Canadian government's silence on human rights abuses in Tigray, Canada's developmental assistance to Ethiopia has failed to follow its proclaimed standards for gender equity, environmental protection and responsible business practices. Local women have not been consulted and Tigrayan communities risk being displaced by new roads, rail beds and power lines serving the mining sector. ■

James Jeffrey is a freelance journalist.

A safe and fun public space for the neurodiverse in Nairobi

A mother with a neurodiverse child started a cafe that is gently undoing the social isolation of other families with children like hers

Vivianne Wandera

At 73 Westlands road in Nairobi lies a restaurant whose owner set out to make visible what is often hidden in Kenyan and many other cultures: neurodiversity. Diana Ayoo named the cafe, Ayira's Neuro-Soul, after her five-year-old daughter, who is neurodiverse.

By the entrance is a shelf of books about neurodiversity and neurological conditions, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia and Tourette's syndrome. One each table is a book on the subject, and a leaflet explaining that your waiter may have a neurological disability.

When Ayoo opened the cafe last December, her primary goal was to



Neuro-hero: Diana Ayoo named her cafe after her neurodiverse daughter.

provide employment to neurodiverse adults. "I always thought about parents with special-needs children. We struggle to take them to school, therapy and pay ten times more than other parents so we can't try to make them independent. But after all these, there are no employment opportunities for them," Ayoo explains.

Four of the cafe's six waiters are neurodiverse.

Nairobi families have embraced the venue as something even more special than she expected: a safe place to bring their neurodiverse relatives to wine, dine and enjoy a public space. Ayoo has found this warm reception "overwhelming" – in a good way – and she hopes "it can become a movement of some sort."

According to Kenya's 2019 census, about 900,000 citizens lived with some form of disability. But neurological disability is often obscured, even in this



Welcoming: Kenyans have embraced the cafe as a safe space for their families.

data, because it is not always accompanied by the physical disabilities that the census questions probe for. Nonetheless, the data showed that over 200,000 Kenyans were living with a cognitive disability, and nearly 100,000 struggled with self-care.

Beyond the limitations they place on people living with them, these disabilities can be isolating for their family members, says Sylvia Moraa Mochabo, who founded Andy Speaks 4 Special Needs, after dealing with discrimination regarding her own neurodiverse son. “We get calls from parents who are overwhelmed and just need someone to talk to. Creating safe spaces where members of this community can meet and talk, share and give each other support is important.”

In isolation and without community support and affirmation, caregivers even risk becoming an added danger to people living with disabilities. “We have seen

children being hurt by the people trusted to care for them,” Mochabo says.

But ultimately, these disabilities and the people who live with them have to be seen not just in fun spaces like Neuro-Soul cafe, but also in the dry and serious policy spaces where public investment in people is decided. Mochabo points out that, currently, social support programmes are “bundled up as women, children and disability” but in practice this is exclusionary. “When you go to the counties you will find that the funds for women and children are being used appropriately, but when it comes to disability they just don’t care.”

Mochabo adds that even when disability support is implemented, it falls short. “Everyone just thinks of physical disability but intellectual disability is like an automated disqualification from any benefit.” ■

Zimbabwe

Government-employed doctors and nurses want to be paid in dollars

A five-day strike by medical staff froze the country's ailing hospitals, but though the government was forced to pay attention, it's refusing to pay it in US currency.

Jeffrey Moyo in Harare

Few moments paint the picture of present day Zimbabwe quite like one that happened at Parirenyatwa hospital, the biggest government hospital in the capital Harare, on the second day of a countrywide strike by nurses and doctors.

On the hospital grounds, patients lay stranded in flower beds, on pavements and along passageways as nurses and doctors marched outside demanding improved wages. Then, one of the hospital's top management staff attempted to drive past the chanting nurses and doctors in a posh Land Rover. All hell broke loose. "My money, my money, I want my money!" screamed the nurses and doctors as they blocked the government provided luxury vehicle.

In Zimbabwe, government nurses earn about 20,000 Zimbabwean dollars – or 52 United States dollars – each month. Doctors employed in government

hospitals earn the equivalent of about \$322 a month. Because they are paid with Zimbabwean dollars, and the country has failed to control runaway inflation, their pay buys less each month. In 2018, prior to the second collapse of the Zimbabwean dollar, the doctors' pay was worth \$540 a month, for example.

Recently, when the Zimbabwean government offered the health workers a 100% increase in pay, they rejected it arguing that it did not mean anything against inflation, which stood at 131.7% in May and now hovers around 192%. They want to be paid with a more stable currency: the US dollar. The government ignored the demand. On June 20, the nurse and doctors put their tools down.

The Continent visited some of the country's hospitals to observe the situation.

On June 20, the first day of the strike, at Sally Mugabe hospital, Zimbabwe's second-largest hospital, patients crowded



The buck starts here: Doctors and nurses in Zimbabwe are campaigning to be paid in US dollars.

the waiting area, some critically ill, waiting for help that would not come. A 67-year-old male patient with hypertension lay on a stretcher bed, unconscious. Next to him lying in the middle of the hospital passageway, coughing and spitting restlessly, was a 32-year-old female HIV patient. Her mother and caretaker said that the patient had stopped taking their antiretrovirals for a while, “after visiting prophets who told her she no longer needed the pills”. Now she was willing to restart the hospital treatment but had not been attended to for over 24 hours.

Outside the hospital stood nurses and doctors waving placards that read, “we want the USD.” But they want more than just the dollar, as one nurse who only identified herself as Irene said at another hospital.

“We also demand drugs in hospitals. We don’t even have paracetamol for our patients and we are expected to help

them,” said Irene at Parirenyatwa hospital.

The Continent reported in May that many sick Zimbabweans were turning to herbalists because the government hospital gives them diagnoses (when doctors are not on strike) but no medication.

For five days, June 20-25, nurses and doctors marched and were confined, barricaded and beaten by armed police, but in the end they called off their industrial action without getting any concessions from the government, except being invited to a meeting with the Health Services Board.

Dr Tapiwanashe Kusotera, leader of Health Apex, a health sector union, said even that was an achievement because no such meeting has taken place in over a year. The union also said it would call another industry action if the government does not offer them any meaningful pay rise in the 14 days after June 25. ■

Do Africans want free trade?

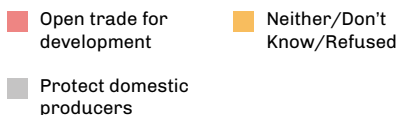
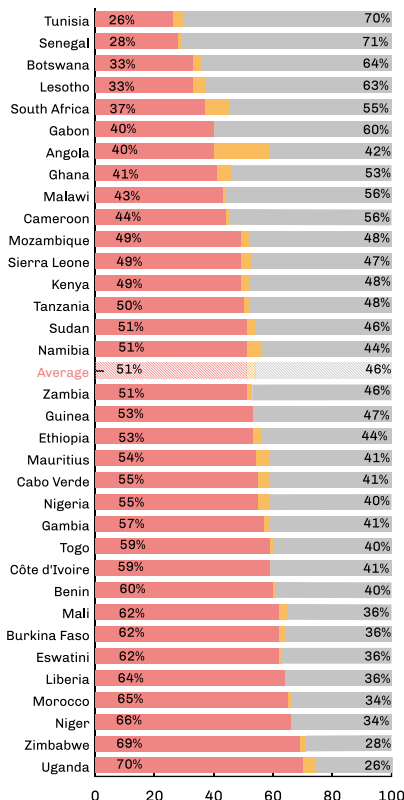
The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) aims to increase cross-border trade, investment, technology transfers, and income levels across the continent, lifting millions of Africans out of poverty.

But do Africans want free trade?

Findings from Afrobarometer surveys across 34 countries in 2019/2021 show a deeply divided continent. About half (51%) of respondents say their country must open its borders to imports in order to develop, but almost as many (46%) favour limiting international trade for the sake of protecting domestic producers.

Support for free trade is highest in Uganda (70%), Zimbabwe (69%), and Niger (66%). But equally large majorities support protectionism in Senegal (71%) and Tunisia (70%). In the economic powerhouse of South Africa, only 37% favour free trade.

Africans are somewhat supportive of open borders for people seeking to trade or work in other countries: 59% endorse free cross-border movement; 38% are opposed. But 66% say that, in practice, it's difficult to cross borders; only 22% find it easy. To prove itself to ordinary citizens, the AfCFTA clearly has work left to do.



Open trade vs. protection of domestic producers | 34 African countries | 2019/2021

Source: Afrobarometer, a non-partisan African research network that conducts nationally representative surveys on democracy, governance, and quality of life. Face-to-face interviews with 1,200-2,400 people in each country yield results with a margin of error of +/- two to three percentage points.



Photo: Kola Sulaimon/AFP

Searching for Nigeria's missing soldiers

The Nigerian army does not like to admit it when its soldiers are killed in action. Instead, a growing number of soldiers are declared 'missing in action', with families kept waiting indefinitely to learn their true fate.

Socrates Mbamalu

Two years ago, on 22 March 2020, Lieutenant Ojeaga Unuigbo's artillery unit was travelling in a military convoy near Gonori village, in Yobe State in northern Nigeria. Suddenly, the convoy was struck by a rocket-propelled grenade, allegedly fired by Boko Haram militants. The munitions carried by the artillery unit exploded, as did a fuel tanker that was part of the convoy.

The ambush was one of the deadliest ever on Nigerian troops, with estimates of the death toll ranging from 50 to 75. According to reports in local media, Lieutenant Unuigbo's entire artillery unit was wiped out. But the army has refused to disclose casualty figures – or even identify the dead.

Lieutenant Unuigbo's family have not heard from him since.

A week after the ambush, the lieutenant's older brother, Ohi Unuigbo,

set out to find him. He travelled from Abuja, where he works as a lawyer, to Yobe State. This is a front-line state in the Nigerian Army's years-long war against Boko Haram, and he had to navigate through a bewildering series of security checkpoints to get to the base where his brother was stationed.

At each checkpoint, he had to explain his mission: he was searching for his brother, he said. He needed to know if he was dead or alive.

Ohi Unuigbe's visit to Yobe State yielded no further information. "I got there and what I saw was hopeless. I couldn't even get to talk with the commanding officer," he told *The Continent*. He managed to speak to some soldiers, who said that they had searched for their colleagues who were missing in action (MIA) but had not found any of them. He was told that the insurgents often kidnapped soldiers and held them as prisoners of war.

Back in Abuja, Ohi Unuigbe wrote letters to the army's highest-ranking

officers, the chief of defence staff and the chief of army staff. He received the same response from both. "Lt Ojeaga Unuigbe's current status is still MIA while efforts are being made to rescue the missing personnel."

In the decade-long battle with insurgent groups like Boko Haram and the Islamic State for West Africa Province, this has been the army's official line when its soldiers disappear.

The army told him that if Lieutenant Unuigbe was not found after one year, they would put together a board of inquiry to investigate the circumstances of his disappearance. This is as per the guidelines in the revised *Nigerian Army Administrative Policies and Procedures* handbook, a restricted document seen by *The Continent*.

It has now been more than two years since the Gonori ambush, and no such board has been established. The last time any board of inquiry met to investigate any disappeared soldiers was in 2016,



Grief: Families of a soldier killed in battle mourn at his funeral in Abuja. Photo: Kola Sulaimon / AFP

according to military sources.

Without a board of inquiry to establish the circumstances of Lieutenant Unuigbe's disappearance and presume him dead, a presumption of death certificate cannot be prepared. Without the certificate, his family is unable to claim compensation or life insurance, and his will cannot be executed. Nor can they go ahead with any funeral rites.

A culture of silence

The Nigerian Army is notoriously reluctant to disclose accurate casualty figures. It is quick to talk up its victories on the battlefield, but tends to keep quiet about defeats. So as the war drags on and on, more and more soldiers have "gone MIA", leaving families in limbo, searching for closure and unable to bury their dead.

In 2019, the *Wall Street Journal* reported on the existence of a secret graveyard in Maiduguri, in Borno State, where the bodies of as many as 1,000 dead soldiers were allegedly dumped in unmarked mass graves by the military. Many of these soldiers had been designated as "MIA". An army spokesperson later denied these allegations.

But a high-ranking officer said that it was standard practice for the army to keep quiet on deaths of soldiers, in order to protect morale and maintain the confidence of the civilian population. His identity is being withheld as he is not authorised to speak to the media. "The army has a responsibility to condole the families, but instead, it has been burying soldiers without telling families," said the source.

Brigadier-General Onyema Nwachukwu, the current Nigerian army spokesperson, said that a strict procedure is always followed when soldiers die.

"There is a procedure for reaching out to the families of our troops who paid the supreme price," he said. "We don't just run to the media to go and announce it. We are talking about the front line; information has to go from the front line first to the headquarters of the theatre of operations, then from the theatre of operations, it goes to the unit because a soldier has a unit. So it is a process that we must follow, and then from there when it gets to the unit, then the unit is the one that writes to the next of kin, not just anybody. We are guided by these procedures."

Nwachukwu said that he was not aware of any boards of inquiry into missing soldiers currently underway, but that "it could take a year to decide if the person who is missing in action was actually killed in action".

None of this is any comfort to the family of Lieutenant Unuigbe, who still have no official confirmation of what happened to him.

Ohi Unuigbe remembers the last time he saw his brother alive. It was in a park in Abuja, just before he left for the front line. He was instructed not to wear his uniform, for security purposes. "He went with a Ghana-Must-Go bag, so they don't know he is military personnel," Ohi said, his voice cracking as he relives trauma of the past two years – the sleepless nights, the constant wandering about what happened to his brother. "It is extremely painful that my brother would die for this country." ■

A resurgent pink tide in South America

Decades of right-wing ruin have given way to a wave of left-leaning leadership

Sipho Kings

South America's "pink tide" – a series of victories in the 2000s by left-wing parties – gave way to right-wing wins in the 2010s. Countries like Brazil snapped back to leaders who promised much for everyone with slogans, but delivered for elites. This has been changing.

In March, a left-wing government took power in Chile, headed by 35-year-old Gabriel Boric. He defeated a billionaire. Victory came with the promise of overturning an economic model built up during the two decades of dictatorship under Augusto Pinochet – a model trialled in Chile in the 1970s by what were then thoroughly Western institutions like the World Bank.

The lens of Cold War politics meant that any policies that care about people were seen as an enemy to the United States, and its allies. Chile dutifully stripped away state and social services, while giving tax breaks to the wealthy, all wrapped in the lie that trickle-down economics would mean everyone benefited. It did not work.

But a template had been created.

In Colombia, similar policies were followed by right-wing leaders. This week, these were rejected with the first-ever victory for a left-wing and progressive candidate. Gustavo Petro promises change, and a tax on the 4,000 wealthiest families. His incoming vice-president, environmental activist Francia Márquez, will be the first black woman in that role. She has spoken about representing the so-called "nobodies" – people whose skin is too dark, who came from Africa or were in South America when whites came with violence, or who aren't heterosexual.

They have promised to cut back on fossil fuels, and build a cleaner economy where wealth is distributed more fairly.

In Ecuador, protests spearheaded by the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities ended this week, after nearly three weeks of violence. The government promised to curb its model of mining and extracting wealth in ecologically sensitive areas, and in communities.

In South America, the seeds of change are being sewn. And revolutions have a way of crossing oceans. ■



Hope: New Colombian leaders Gustavo Petro and Francia Márquez. Photo: AFP



Rebooty call kicks filmcraft to the kerb

Wilfred Okiche

The original *Glamour Girls*, released in 1994 to an unsuspecting audience, was a shock to the Nollywood film ecosystem. Its parade of women protagonists behaved just as badly as the men, savoured their independence, took their pleasures and had no use for shame. An instantly iconic bathtub scene launched a new template for the depiction of sexuality and tasteful nudity on screen that has remained nearly unmatched in Nigerian film history.

This notoriety has been useful for the film's legacy as it has largely overshadowed the fact that it isn't a particularly good film. As early Nollywood films go, *Glamour Girls* suffers from primordial

production values, amateurish acting and a moralistic plot crafted to ultimately shame women thriving outside the control of the patriarchal net.

Glamour Girls (2022) may boast updated technical equipment, crisp pictures, big stars (Nse Ikpe-Etim, Joselyn Dumas) and the obvious backing of Netflix but it is almost impossible to argue that this version is an improvement on the original.

Existing in the space between a reboot and a liberal reimagination, the Bunmi Ajakaiye flick suffers from a desperate lack of directorial control or imagination. Somewhere within the incoherence is a potentially exciting tale about the link between sex for pay and modern women reclaiming their agency. Only nobody seems to be sure what story they are telling or how to go about making a proper film.

Instead, *Glamour Girls* is cast in the image of its executive producer, Charles Okpaleke, who also manages a thriving nightlife business in Abuja. All of the trappings that the film embraces so wholeheartedly – the fast cars, exotic locations, club scenes, pretty women, great gowns, ostentatious lifestyles – are more suited to big budget music videos than any disciplined narrative. But even music videos are usually in service of something else. Music promotion, publicity, artistic vanity, even pure commercialism.

Glamour Girls muddles its presentation so thoroughly and mixes up its messaging such that it is unclear why the film was greenlit in the first place. ■

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

"Even the skeptics among us wrap knowledge in heritage"



- 1_ What is Africa's most forested country?
- 2_ On what day is Patrice Lumumba thought to have been assassinated?
- 3_ Which five animals appear on the South African currency notes?
- 4_ When grouped together, what is that collective of animals called?
- 5_ Which British rapper has been recognised as the chief or Amuludun of Odo-Aje in Nigeria?
- 6_ The legend of serpentine river god Nyaminyami says he was separated from his wife with the construction of which dam?
- 7_ The Democratic Republic of Congo gained independence on the 30th of June in which year?
- 8_ The Seychelles celebrate independence on 29 June. Which empire did they gain independence from?
- 9_ What is the largest city in Guinea? [Hint: it is also the capital city.]
- 10_ Which Nigerian singer won the BET Award for Best International Act last week? [Hint: she was on the 2020 hit record *Essence*.]

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**

Brace for turbulence



Continental Drift

Samira Sawlani

After a month of catching feelings in Nairobi we at Drift are back to catching flights. Amid airport queues, wasting money at duty free, waking up on flights covered in snack crumbs and regret, we have been thinking about what it must be like to fly with our favourite leaders.

Do any of them try to sneak on a can of tear gas to hug as they sleep? Does President Museveni's hat feature as part of his "airport look"? Will we even fit on a flight with President Biya of Cameroon considering the size of his wife Chantal's designer wardrobe?

Alas these are questions we are likely to never know the answer to, considering many of them jet around in private planes – while we squeeze ourselves into economy after failing to flirt our way into an upgrade.

At least the revered Ngonnso statue will be skipping the queues for its long overdue return to Cameroon, after being held in Germany's Ethnological Museum since 1903.

According to a statement from the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, which oversees museums in Berlin, the figurine



Going Ngonnso: It wasn't looted okay? It was 'strategically commandeered'.

had not been removed from the Kingdom of Nso through garden-variety looting. It had been taken by colonial officer Kurt von Pavel and his soldiers, they said, to intimidate the Nso. Which is a different kind of looting altogether, apparently?

It's still a guy from Europe taking what he wants by force. But sure, let's call a spade a shovel. Huge credit goes to individuals and civil society groups in Cameroon who have been campaigning for its return. The German museum group also announced that 23 other artefacts stolen during the colonial period, which they had temporarily sent back to Namibia in May would now remain there, and items stolen during the Maji Maji rebellion would return to Tanzania.

What's that we hear? Everyone from the British museum getting on a plane before we can ask them some uncomfortable questions about when they're going to do the same?

Chicken or beef

If you're a parent and find travelling with children challenging as they run up and down the plane then you may want to travel with the *Keeping Up With The Coupdashions* cast from Mali. This week the United Nations voted to extend Minusma, its peacekeeping operation in the country, for 12 months. In response the post-post-coup government said it rejected the mandate that allows peacekeepers to investigate human rights abuses, and would neither be co-operating nor fastening its seatbelts. Furthermore, it added that it wouldn't be able to guarantee freedom of movement for Minusma's inquiries, no matter how much they insisted that they had booked a window seat.

Could be worse. They could have been sat next to Sudan and Ethiopia, whose passive-aggressive fight over the shared elbow-rest is on the verge of boiling over into an inflight incident. Sudan has accused Ethiopia of executing seven of its soldiers, a claim the latter denies, insisting they died in clashes between the Sudanese army and local militia. Ethiopia "rejects the misrepresentation of these facts by the Sudanese Army" and says the incident was concocted to undermine the deep-rooted relations between the people of Sudan and Ethiopia.

The last thing we need is more tensions between neighbouring countries, something which we are already seeing between the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda. As Kinshasa accuses Kigali of backing the M23 rebel group, a claim Rwanda denies, reports are

emerging of rising xenophobia in the DRC against Rwandan nationals.

Meanwhile, the UN envoy to the DRC Bintou Keita, told the security council that ongoing activities by M23 and other armed groups pose a threat to hard-won progress in security in the country. At the same session, renowned Congolese human rights activist Julienne Lusenge left us speechless as he told the horrific story of a woman who was abducted by two rebel groups on separate occasions, repeatedly raped and forced to cook and eat human flesh.

Flights of desperation

We at Drift are very much aware of our privilege of being able to move through the world with relative ease. There are many for whom this is not so easy, and for whom travel ends in dehumanisation, incarceration and even death.

Thirty seven people were killed last week when up to 2,000 would-be asylum-seekers tried to enter Spain's North African enclave of Melilla. Footage shows Moroccan security forces violently attacking the crowds, while Human Rights Watch says Spanish authorities teargassed men who were clinging to fences.

Investigations have been called for, but to what end? Will they lead to better governance and economic, physical, food and water security, so people don't feel the need to leave? Will they stop the dehumanisation of refugees and migrants? Will they temper policies towards those that try to cross those borders?

Or will we again be left with no choice but to brace for even more turbulence? ■

Rising costs fuel political instability in Sierra Leone

Ibrahim Barrie

The rising cost of fuel is making life unbearable for the people of Sierra Leone. It currently stands at \$1.70, up from \$0.46 in 2018 when the new government was elected. This represents an increase of approximately 367%.

The price of everything that relies on fuel – from transport companies to food – has also gone up as a result. The volatility of the petroleum sector further exacerbates what is already a dangerous situation.

Sierra Leone needs to import 1.3-million litres of fuel a day, but only has storage for around 40% of what is required, which makes it particularly vulnerable to short-term fluctuations in shipping costs and global prices. So how will the government respond?

It attributes the current rise in fuel due to the Russia-Ukraine war and the after effects of Covid-19. However, some civil society groups and political opponents have accused the government of mismanagement and corruption. Partly as a result, Sierra Leoneans are now calling for the president to take

urgent measures such as reducing fuel allocation to government employees, cutting down on overseas government travel, and reducing waste in order to subsidise fuel and so ease the burden on ordinary people.

It was against this combustible backdrop that members of parliament learned from the minister of finance on 24 June that government expenditure for 2022 has surged beyond 13.2-trillion leones (25% of the country's GDP) due to recurrent and capital costs.

Rising government expenditure has placed tighter economic constraints on the government than might normally have been the case, undermining its ability to respond to growing public anger.

In the midst of the fuel crisis, the Bank of Sierra Leone is pushing ahead with plans to remove three zeros (LE,000) from the leone on 1 July, in a redenomination scheme that is taking place in a context of considerable citizen distrust.

If the government does not manage these processes effectively, economic instability is likely to morph into political instability. ■

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The Big Picture

Photo: Tony Karumba/AFP

Vroom to manoeuvre: Belgian driver Thierry Neuville steers his Hyundai i20 N with Belgian co-driver Martijn Wydaeghe during the Super Special Stage of Safari Rally Kenya 2022, the sixth round of the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile World Rally Championship in Nairobi. The race takes place on gravel and starts at Kasarani in Nairobi and ends at Hell's Gate National Park in Naivasha.



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