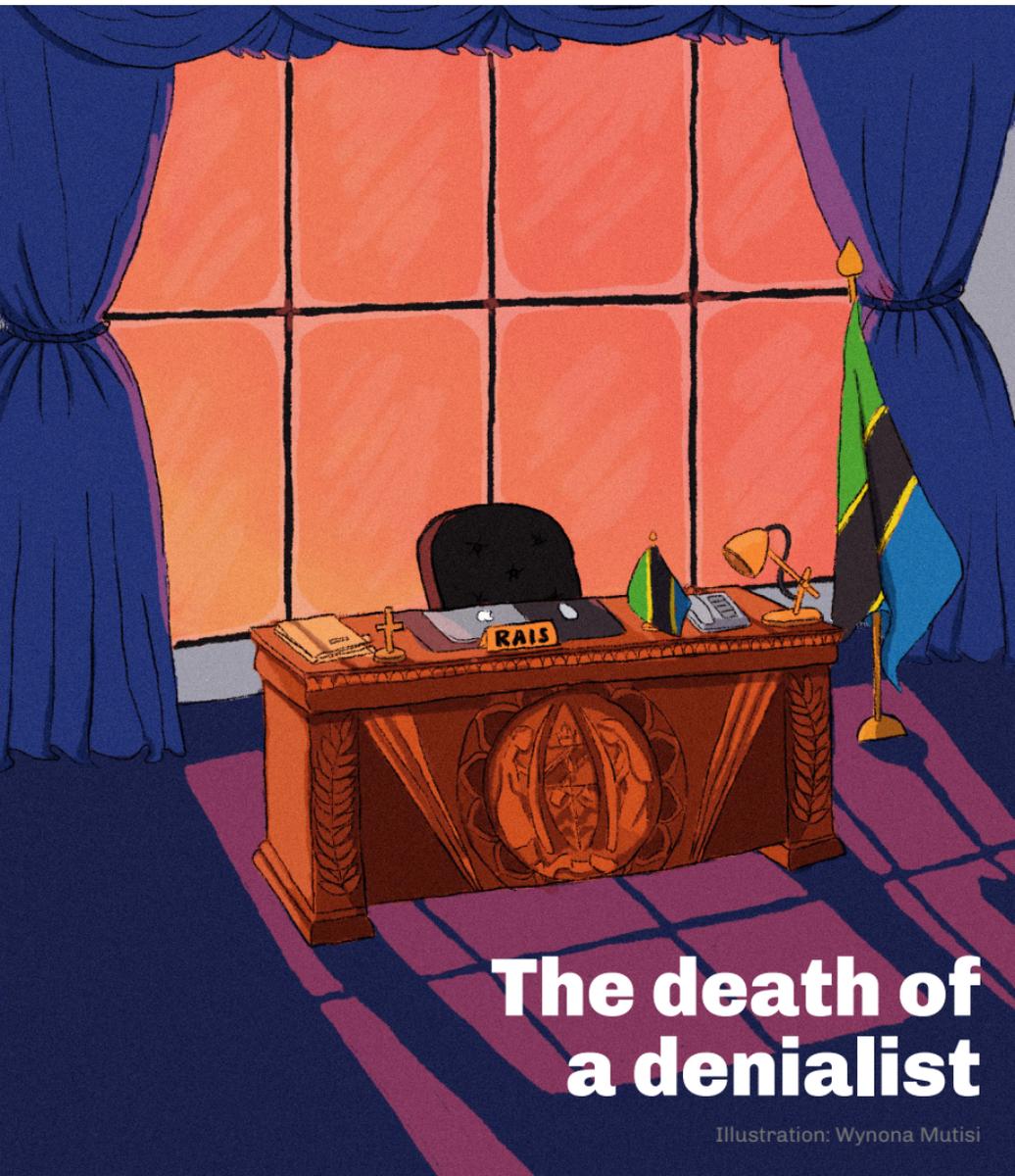


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The death of a denialist

Illustration: Wynona Mutisi



UNFIT FOR OFFICE:

John 'The Bulldozer' Magufuli officially moved on to the Great Presidential Palace in the Sky on Wednesday, although question marks surround the official account (p5). Occupying his desk will be his former deputy, Samia Suluhu Hassan, who was sworn in as president on Friday (p13). Weeks of rumour and confusion about Magufuli's health made life difficult for journalists, but we've been here before: see Mugabe, Robert; Mutharika, Bingu wa; and Buhari, Muhammadu (p16). Not to mention the Burundians, who saw eerily similar scenes play out nine months ago (p20).

EXCLUSIVE: Shepherd Bushiri is one of Africa's richest religious figures. He is also a serial rapist, alleged South African prosecutors. Court documents seen by *The Continent* accuse the self-proclaimed prophet – who fled South Africa last year in an effort to avoid prosecution – of raping women and girls as young as 16, including two sisters; drugging women and bribing them into silence; and threatening others with murder over the course of six years of jaw-dropping sexual violence (p22).

Inside:

- **Inside:** An alien species is taking over Cameroon's largest natural lake (p7)
- **Report:** Poison poisson in Lake Nakuru (p9)
- **Comment:** Benin's president is rolling back democracy (p25)
- **Sport:** African football's new boss inherits a big mess (p27)

Correction: Last week, we mistakenly referred to Raila Odinga as Kenya's Vice-President. As much as he might aspire to such a position – he even “inaugurated” himself as president after the last election – the current deputy president is, of course, William Ruto. Apologies to the many (!) readers who pointed out this error, and thanks for paying attention.

The Week in Numbers

100,000 km²

The size of maritime boundaries being disputed by Somalia and Kenya, roughly the size of Iceland. Proceedings are under way at the International Court of Justice at the Hague to settle the dispute over the contested area, which could determine which country gets to exploit the oil and gas resources in the region.

28,850

The number of giraffes Kenya is home to. Recently, however, there have been "high giraffe mortalities" in the Wajir region. The country's tourism ministry announced an investigation will be launched into the increasing deaths. "[The Meru Mobile Vet unit] will work with local vets to locate the giraffes and conduct medical examinations," said tourism cabinet secretary Najib Balala.

7

The number of African women who have taken on the role of head of state since 2015 (either as president, acting president or prime minister). With her swearing-in, Samia Suluhu Hassan becomes the seventh.

33%

The unemployment rate in Nigeria, according to the Nigerian bureau of statistics. Unemployment in Africa's largest economy rose from 27% last December, making it second, globally, behind Namibia.



1

The number of Grammy Awards Nigerian star Burna Boy was nominated for and won at the ceremony last week. His album *Twice as Tall* won the best global music award. His previous album *African Giant* was nominated last year for best world music album.

(Photo: Burna Boy Publicity)

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Tanzania

The death of a president

John Pombe Magufuli
29 October, 1959 –
17 March, 2021

After weeks of fevered speculation, a somber Vice-President Samia Suluhu Hassan made the announcement on national TV on Wednesday evening. The president, she said, was dead.

According to the official account, John Magufuli had died from heart complications in Dar es Salaam that day. But other accounts, as suggested by opposition leaders and journalists close to the story, suggest that Magufuli may have died a full six days earlier – and that these “heart complications” were caused by Covid-19.

Kenya’s *Daily Nation* carried the most authoritative report. It claimed that a critically-ill Magufuli was flown into Kenya for treatment on March 9, and booked into Nairobi Hospital under a fake name. When he failed to respond to treatment, he was flown back to Dar es Salaam, where he died on March 11 in Mzena Hospital.

Magufuli’s government has consistently denied or downplayed the threat from



(Photo: Michele Spatari/AFP)

Covid-19, claiming on several occasions to have eliminated it entirely from the country. Magufuli himself claimed that three days of national prayer last year had been enough to beat the disease.

His funeral will take place in his home village of Chato on 25 March.

On Friday, Samia Suluhu Hassan was sworn in as Tanzania’s new president. ■

More in *The Continent* on this developing story:

- Meet ‘Mama Samia’, Tanzania’s new president (p13)
- The perils of reporting on dead or missing presidents (p15)
- View from Burundi: Another Covid denier felled by a ‘heart complication’ (p20)

Zimbabwe

Opposition weakened further in parliament

Tendai Biti among MPs who have been recalled

Kudzai Mashininga

Six opposition parliamentarians were recalled from Zimbabwe's parliament on Wednesday, including the former finance minister, Tendai Biti.

The recalls are the latest chapter in the acrimonious break-up of the main opposition coalition, the MDC-Alliance.

The coalition is an amalgamation of seven political parties formed in the wake of former prime minister Morgan Tsvangirai's death in February 2018. The parties ran in that year's general election under the banner of MDC-Alliance.

Since then, however, opposition unity has been tested by bitter power struggles over who gets to lead the alliance and its smaller constituent parties.

The ruling Zanu-PF has managed to work with elements sympathetic to President Emmerson Mnangagwa, such as Tsvangirai's former deputy, Thokozani

Khupe, to recall members who are fierce critics of the ruling party's leader. Forty-eight of the MDC-Alliance's 88 elected MPs have since been recalled.

Mnangagwa has rewarded his supporters in the opposition, making Khupe, who came a distant third in the 2018 presidential elections, the leader of the opposition in parliament, and forming the Political Actors Dialogue, constituted by opposition leaders who praise him.

Biti and the five others were recalled this week by their former political party, the People's Democratic Party, which is supposedly part of the opposition coalition. But party leader Jacob Mudenda said that the six MPs were no longer members of his party and should therefore be removed. The others expelled with Biti are Willias Madzimore, Settlement Chikwinya, Kucaca Phulu, Sichelesile Mahlangu and Regai Tsunga.

Opposition unity has been tested by bitter power struggles over who gets to lead the Alliance

Biti was not immediately available for comment but he told local media soon after the recall that he had participated in the elections under the MDC-Alliance ticket and not the PDP. He said Mnangagwa was behind the recalls. ■

Cameroon

Fighting an alien invasion

The invasive salvinia fern is taking over the nation's largest lake; now all hope rests with a tiny alien bug

Daniel Ekonde in Lake Ossa

Jonathan Ndjana, a lean man in his early forties, is among a group of fishermen and women who have gathered on the banks of Lake Ossa to clear the lake's entry point of weeds. "This plant you see has covered the area," he tells *The Continent*, stretching his hand to point out to the broad swathe of salvinia fern on the lake. "It's not easy to fish here, anymore."

Ndjana is one of around 400 people who fish on Cameroon's Lake Ossa: a wildlife reserve area which is home to a wide range of aquatic life – not just fish, but West African manatees, dwarf crocodiles and soft shell turtles. The lake has come under threat, however, from a giant, floating fern that originates in Brazil and Argentina. Bounded by the country's longest river, the Sanaga, the 4,000 hectare lake has experienced a significant growth of the invasive salvinia fern, which now covers 40% of the lake's surface.



"We do this exercise to at least clear this point of embarking, so that we can get access to the areas that are not affected," Ndjana explains.

But the effort is almost futile: "We weed out tonnes of the salvinia plant regularly, but within days it will be as if we did not do any work here."

Ndjana, who has fished on the lake for 22 years, admits the salvinia invasion is an even bigger issue than the rising water levels they now face regularly.

It is a problem shared by all the fishers in the Dizangué community, which comprises about 2 000 people. Fishing and subsistence farming are their main economic activities.



FronD or foe: The salvinia fern covers more than 40% of the lake's surface. (Photo: African Marine Mammal Conservation Organisation)

Martin Betote, 52, has fished here for nearly two decades. He says the salvinia has also attacked his earnings. "I earn much less now. A fisherman used to get about 100,000 francs [\$200] – now even to send our children to school is difficult," Betote tells *The Continent*.

He has turned to farming snails, and has joined a community group through which he and his neighbours collect savings and put together loans. "At the moment, we are preparing 500,000 francs [\$900] to help two members," he says.

Biological control

One solution to the salvinia invasion may lie in nature, though a nature just as alien as the salvinia itself.

Aristide Takoukam Kamla is a marine biologist who has been working in the reserve area since 2014. Through his

African Marine Mammal Conservation Organisation, the 36-year-old scientist is rearing about 5,000 *Cyrtobagous salviniae* weevils – a non-indigenous species – to introduce them into the lake as a biological weapon against the plant.

"These weevils are very powerful in fighting against the salvinia plant, which is very terrible to this environment," he tells *The Continent*. "It will destroy the plant at two stages: the larvae will feed on the buds [of salvinia] where new leaves of the plant grow and where nitrogen, the food of the plant, is concentrated; while the adults will feed on the leaves, causing the whole plant to collapse," Kamla explains.

South Africa, Senegal and Mauritania have all notably employed the use of weevils for similar purposes over the past few decades.

Kamla's weevils were supplied by the University of Louisiana where, he says, researchers have done comprehensive studies and determined that the bugs will not compound the threat further: this biological control method is safe for the lake, he says.

"The weevils only feed on the salvinia; when there is none left, they die."

Kamla still needs the go-ahead from Cameroon's government before introducing the weevils into the lake, however.

Until then, Ndjana will continue joining other fishermen in the back-breaking exercise of weeding out the stubborn fern. "We can deal with high-water levels caused by the River Sanaga but the salvinia invasion doesn't help our fishing at all," he laments. ■

Kenya

A fishy affair: Illegal fishing continues in Lake Nakuru despite ban



Pierra Nyaruai in Nakuru county

It's 6am on a chilly morning when a boda-boda rider arrives at Grace's* house in Mwariki, Nakuru county, west-central Kenya. He offloads a blue crate covered with a white sack and discreetly hands it over to her. Money quickly

changes hands and he rides his boda-boda into the dawn.

The crate contains fresh fish from Lake Nakuru, a sewage-infested body of water in Nakuru county. The reason the fish are being delivered so discreetly is that amid a thriving business, the Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute issued a warning on the high levels of metals contained in the fish that led the government to ban fishing from the lake. The fish have to be gutted and deep-fried quickly since there have been reports of them rotting within three hours.

"I get a variety of fish, like tilapia and catfish. Gutting some of the fish is a nightmare because they literally have small sewage pits in their stomachs, especially the catfish," Grace says.

"But once I properly clean them and they join the other fish from places like Kisumu on the market, no one can tell where they are from. I sell the fish depending on the size, and they range anything from 50 to 400 shillings. I would like to take heed of the warning, but since Corona, I have been out of work and this is how I feed my family."

With Kenya's economy contracting for the first time in 12 years due to the pandemic, many people in the region have turned to fishing as a means of sustenance. There is now a micro-economy involved in the trade. From the fishermen, some who have moved here from across the country,

to the boda-boda riders who transfer the haul to awaiting sellers, there is serious money flowing around. But what may have started as a blessing has become a health hazard that is being ignored by the locals. And unsuspecting customers are being sold tainted fish mixed with healthy fish from other regions.

Anne Nyaga, chief administrative secretary in the ministry of agriculture, has called on the government to introduce measures to stop the harmful fish from leaving the lake.

Unlike other lakes in Kenya like Lakes Victoria, Turkana, and Naivasha where fishing is a major economic activity, Lake Nakuru is only just starting to blossom as a fishing hub. The county lacks established regulations on fishing, and anyone with a hook and line can join the party.

In addition to the poor, arguably toxic quality of the fish, there have been several cases of fishermen drowning in the lake.

Dickson Ritan of the Kenya Wildlife Service says the agency is “concerned about these illegal activities, and we call upon other state agencies to partner with us to end this menace.”

But the warnings have not stopped fishermen from as far away as western Kenya from pitching tents in Mwariki, where they're catching bountiful hauls.

Wafula*, a fisherman from Kisumu says he is laughing all the way to the bank.

“I truly feel like divine intervention led me here,” he says. “At Lake Victoria I could go all night and come up with only a handful of fish – in these waters, I haul up nets and nets of fish each night. I can even afford to send money back to my



Toxic stocks: Freshly gutted fish are left to dry before being sold. (Photo: Pierra Nyaruai/*The Continent*)

family. How can something this blessed be a curse? I have not seen anyone even fall ill, let alone die from eating the fish.”

Since 2019, the lakes of the Rift Valley basin have been increasing in size. Parts of Lake Nakuru have gobbled up acres of land in areas like Mwariki and Baruti.

Some Mwariki residents see the bountiful fishing hauls as heavenly compensation after the lake's swelling took away their lands. They claim the warnings and reports issued by the organisations are bogus, since they have not seen any negative health effects from the fish they have been eating for months.

Nevertheless, with a blossoming town discharging more sewage by the day, the future looks hazardous for fish and fishermen alike. And without any serious government intervention to curb fishing activities, the health of ordinary fish-fancying Kenyans around the country may also be on the line. ■

* Names have been changed to protect the identity of those who spoke to *The Continent*

For Lake Chad's displaced, Covid is not a top priority



Displaced: A community meeting in Amma camp (Photo: Mahamat Ali Mouta/The Continent)

Mahamat Ali Mouta

For the tens of thousands of people forced from their homes in and around Lake Chad, there is a clear hierarchy of needs – and Covid-19 is just not a priority.

In Amma, a barren camp far from the lake shore that is host to more than 30,000 internally displaced people, hunger, education and basic healthcare come first. When *The Continent* visited earlier this year, there were thousands of young men and women standing around

– unemployed, bored and waiting for humanitarian assistance to arrive.

They are idle neither by nature nor incapacity, but because their current conditions make it difficult if not impossible to find work. Amma camp is relatively remote, with few employment opportunities in the area.

Because it is so far from the lake itself, fishing is not an option. And efforts to grow crops and raise livestock were largely ruined by flooding during last year's rainy season.

Things were different at home, say

people in the camp. On the dozens of tiny islands that dot the lake where they come from, the land was fertile and the fishing was good.

There was never any shortage of water – even if it had to be boiled before drinking – and it was mostly peaceful. Or at least it used to be: the rise of Islamist militant group Boko Haram, coupled with the state's military response, has made the area very dangerous for ordinary people.

In late March last year, Chad's government launched a huge offensive against the militants, following a Boko Haram attack on an army base. By the time the operation ended in April, the state claimed to have killed 1,000 Boko Haram fighters and destroyed 50 canoes.

An army spokesperson said at the time: “The defence and security forces, with courage and determination, routed the Boko Haram terrorists from the islands of Lake Chad. The terrorists are driven out of all the islands of the lake.”

In Amma, a barren camp far from the lake shore that is host to more than 30,000 internally displaced people, hunger, education and basic healthcare come first

But thousands of civilians were driven out too – many of them ending up at the internally displaced camp in Amma. Others found themselves in similar camps in Diameron and Foulkouroum. Now they are trying to make new lives for



(Graphic: John McCain)

themselves in an unfamiliar areas, with little in the way of support.

Several local and international non-governmental organisations have offered some assistance: Oxfam built toilets and water wells, but not enough for the entire population of the camp; Help Tchad and Action Contre La Faim have provided occasional food parcels.

Food is the most immediate challenge. When one NGO distributed hand sanitiser and face masks to protect against Covid, most of these materials were put up for trade at a local market the next day, in exchange for food or blankets.

The message is clear: even in the midst of a global pandemic, sometimes there are even more important things to worry about. ■

'Mama Samia' – Tanzania's new president has work to do

Samia Hassan takes power amid tragedy, hardship and a very real pandemic

Simon Mkina in Dar es Salaam

When Tanzanian authorities announced the passing of President John Magufuli on Wednesday, Vice President Samia Suluhu Hassan delivered the grim news. The 61-year-old was sworn in as her country's first woman president two days later, propelling her from the relative obscurity of her number two role to centre stage.

Samia [referred to by her first name, as per local convention] entered politics as a member of the Zanzibar House of Representatives in 2000. She served in various capacities in the autonomous region's government, including as tourism minister, before moving to the mainland.

In 2010, she shot to national prominence, winning a seat in the Tanzanian Parliament where she served until Magufuli handpicked her as his running mate during his successful first term campaign in 2015. She is now set to



Zen-zibar: President Samia Suluhu Hassan is said to be contemplative and calm – unlike her predecessor

complete Magufuli's second term of five years, which was secured in a contentious election just months ago, in October 2020.

Samia is considered an introvert and contemplative thinker, the opposite of her more off-the-cuff predecessor, Magufuli, who craved the limelight and was fond of cracking jokes.

With her ascension to her first executive position, it remains to be seen how Mama Samia, as she is affectionately known, will rule over the country of 60-million at this critical period. Lenny Kasoga, a Dar es Salaam-based political analyst, told *The Continent* she is a calm and rational politician who does not

get flustered easily, a character trait that should serve her well in the top job.

“I have been following her since she was tasked with drafting the country’s new constitution [in 2014], she did very well, so I hope she will do the same,” Kasoga said.

Samia, who worked as a team member on a project funded by the World Food Programme before beginning her political career, takes the reins at a time when Covid-19 is threatening to overwhelm Tanzania’s medical capacities.

Magufuli took Covid-19 denialism to an extreme, famously saying “Coronavirus, which is a devil, cannot survive in the body of Christ. It will burn instantly.” In that spirit, Tanzania stopped recording official Covid-19 figures last April, but an investigation in *The Continent* last month found that hospitals were recording an increasing number of infections related to the pandemic.

Padre Privatus Karugendo, an analyst and philosopher, told *The Continent* that many Tanzanians want Samia to champion a new constitution, an independent electoral commission and strengthen patriotism, unity and solidarity. Last year’s election was marked by violence and irregularities, and Magufuli’s tenure saw the erosion of democratic and press freedoms. Journalists were arrested and independent media muzzled.

It’s unclear whether Samia will seek to usher in a more democratic society, but the signs are not promising. On the campaign trail last year, she made a number of concerning statements. At a campaign stop in Chunya, southern

Tanzania, Samia asked people to vote for the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) party but warned that even if they did not, the CCM would still win the elections. She compared voting for other parties to pouring sugar into Lake Victoria in a doomed attempt to sweeten the water.

Magufuli’s tenure saw the erosion of democratic and press freedoms. According to Karugendo, many Tanzanians want Samia to champion a new constitution, an independent electoral commission, unity and solidarity

And, while campaigning in the port city of Tanga last September, she argued that allegations that police officers were involved in the 2017 assassination attempt on opposition candidate Tundu Lissu could not be true — because had it been the police, they would have succeeded in killing him. Lissu was shot 16 times at his residence in Dodoma. “Our police officers are well trained, there was no way they could have missed him,” she said.

The offhand remark was poorly received by Tanzanians, particularly on social media. Samia did not deign to apologise. She was, however, the only high-ranking government official to visit Lissu in Nairobi, Kenya, where he was recovering after the attack. Perhaps, then, the benefit of the doubt is hers to lose. ■



(Photo: AFP)

Unfit for office: The perils of reporting on a president's health

The announcement of John Magufuli's death came after weeks of obfuscation and denial. Business as usual, in other words.

Aanu Adeoye, Simon Allison and Kudzai Mashininga

Robert Mugabe died at least once a year. It usually happened in January, when he was on his annual leave, and the news travelled via whispers and rumour.

The Zimbabwean president, who ended up becoming Africa's oldest head of state, was pronounced dead so frequently that he was moved to comment on it himself.

"I have died many times," he said in 2012. "That's where I have beaten Christ. Christ died once and resurrected once. I have died and resurrected and I don't know how many times I will die and resurrect."



Stiff upper lip: Zimbabwean president Robert was reported to have many times before he truly passed on 6 September 2019. (Photo: Zinyange Auntony/AFP)

Dumisani Muleya, the former editor of the *Zimbabwe Independent*, wasn't buying the gossip. He was always sceptical about the reports of Mugabe's death – which often originated in anonymous reports on websites – because Mugabe had a funny way of turning up shortly afterwards looking very much alive.

“His close security unit was my first port of call,” Muleya told *The Continent*. “I knew a lot of guys who were in his security and I would call and they were more than willing to speak off the record. I would call and say, I have heard ABC and the guy would say, ‘Unfortunately it's not true. I am on duty and we are with him.’”

Muleya, who now runs the investigative news platform *News Hawks*, said that his publication never carried stories that referenced the rumours directly. Instead, they would write stories about what Mugabe had actually been doing, so that readers would know the truth.

It was much trickier dealing with the reports of Mugabe's ill health. He regularly sought treatment in Singapore for an undisclosed medical condition, but journalists were under huge pressure not to report on his health problems. “

“There was a lot of pressure, there were endless reactions. They never wanted transparency,” Muleya said.



Politics of dying: The death of Malawi's Bingu wa Mutharika was kept secret in a bid to keep the vice president from taking power. (Photo: Amos Gumulira/AFP)

'The casket is coming'

The reports of Malawian president Bingu wa Mutharika's death were also greatly exaggerated – at least at first. In an interview with the *Guardian* in February 2012, Mutharika commented on the persistent rumours of his demise.

“Someone said Bingu is dead: government officials are going there to bring his coffin. So when I came here, I apologised and said, ‘In my haste to come to Malawi I forgot my casket at the airport; the casket is coming,’” the president joked.

But just two months later, the president really was dead. He keeled over in a meeting with a member of parliament, and was gone by the time he hit the floor.

The ruling party went to extraordinary lengths to conceal the president's death from the rest of the country. This was to prevent the vice-president, Joyce Banda, from taking power – she was only meant to be a placeholder. So they strapped the president's corpse into a hospital bed, stuck an IV drip in his arm and then flew the dead body to South Africa to receive “medical treatment”.

For those few days, between Mutharika's actual death on 5 April and

the official announcement of his death on 7 April, there was chaos in the capital Lilongwe. In an interview with *The Continent* last year, Joyce Banda recalled: “You can imagine what was going through my mind...I didn’t know until the body was already in South Africa.” Eventually she called the army commander to tell her exactly what was going on, and to demand that he enforce the constitutional handover of power.

It was just as difficult for the journalists trying to cover the story. “The president’s death was announced officially on the third day, but our sources had told us the moment he died that we had lost the president. But which editor could dare pronounce him dead? So for two days, we published about illness when we knew better,” remembers Golden Matonga, a correspondent for *The Continent*.

Matonga added: “Looking back, part of the reason why the media was so hesitant to reveal the president’s death was that there had been many purported demises before, which turned out to be false. So, naturally, editors grew to be cautious.”

Seeing double

In 2015, Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari campaigned on ending medical tourism, the practice of Nigerian politicians travelling abroad for medical care. But instead of making good on his own promise, he became known for spending long periods of time in Britain, being treated for undisclosed ailments.

Since becoming president in 2015, Buhari has visited the UK on at least five medical trips, including a lengthy stay of more than five months in 2017. The president’s aides insisted their boss was doing just fine even as images of a rail-thin Buhari receiving visitors emerged. In the absence of concrete evidence, speculation grew, and an outlandish story about a body double – “Jubril from Sudan” – replacing Buhari became widely believed in many circles around the country. The rumour became mainstream enough that Buhari himself had to dispel them.



No Sudan moves: Nigeria’s President Buhari was said to have been replaced by a body double

Buhari's case was not Nigeria's first or worst rodeo with a president's failing health being shrouded in secrecy. That dubious honour belongs to President Umaru Yar'Adua.

Before he died in May 2010, Yar'Adua had not been seen in public since a trip to Saudi Arabia the previous November, to receive treatment for acute pericarditis, a swelling of the heart membrane. He left the country without transferring presidential powers to his deputy, Goodluck Jonathan, plunging Nigeria into a constitutional. With demonstrations in Nigeria and the diaspora and court cases arguing in favour of Jonathan's elevation to the seat of power, Yar'Adua gave a curious radio interview to BBC Hausa in January 2010, saying he would return soon.

It was impossible to determine whether he was actually the one who gave the interview, and local media speculated wildly about his demise.

The owners of Nigeria's most prominent media outlets called for his resignation or impeachment weeks after the interview. By March he had returned to Nigeria, but no-one saw him, not even Jonathan, who had become acting president by this time. On May 5, the presidency finally announced Yar'Adua's passing, to no-one's surprise. The only debate was whether he had died hours before the announcement was made, or weeks.

State secrets

African journalists have had to deal with a number of other heads of state who have lied about, covered up or otherwise misled their populations about their fitness for office.

Algeria's president Abdelmadjid Tebboune, who contracted Covid-19 earlier this year and disappeared to receive treatment in Europe. Gabon's President Ali Bongo, who has spent months shuttling between hospitals in Saudi Arabia and Morocco, and looks more fragile every time he makes a public appearance.

Former Angolan president Eduardo Dos Santos, who was absent for nearly a month before the government confirmed he was receiving medical treatment in Spain. And of course the late Michael Sata, the Zambian president who suggested reports of his poor health were treasonous, before dying in office in a London hospital in 2014.

This list is not exhaustive, but to it can now be added the name of John Pombe Magufuli, the Tanzanian leader who disappeared from public view several weeks ago amid widespread rumours of his illness or death, before his passing was officially confirmed on Wednesday evening.

It turns out that even in a heavily restricted media environment like Tanzania, the death of a president can only be kept secret for so long. ■

Of Covid deniers and heart failures

Thierry Uwamahoro

Burundi's President Evariste Ndayishimiye comes from a long line of Africa's greatest Covid-19 deniers. He calls his predecessor Pierre Nkurunziza *Sogo*, Kirundi for grandfather. During his first foreign trip as head of state last September, he proclaimed the late president John Magufuli of Tanzania to be his *Baba*, or father, both dismaying and bemusing international relations experts.

In less than a year, Ndayishimiye's immediate "ancestors" have officially been failed by their hearts — "cardiac arrest" for Nkurunziza and "heart complications" for Magufuli. Technically (and medically) speaking, dying of cardiac arrest might as well be a tautology. As a public relations tidbit, however, it feeds conspiracies and speculation.

That's what happened in Burundi once the government announced that "cardiac arrest" had claimed the life of Nkurunziza on June 9, 2020. His passing followed a three-day silence from official communicators on his whereabouts. In Burundi WhatsApp groups, everyone knew the newly-minted "Eternal Supreme Guide" was no more, long before the formal communiqué.

Just days before, Kenyan media had confirmed reports that Denise Nkurunziza, then first lady, had been airlifted to Nairobi for Covid-19 treatment, though the government did not officially acknowledge her illness. Videos of Nkurunziza mocking mask-wearing and social distancing measures made the rounds.

The long suspense that preceded the announcement of Magufuli's death felt like a replay of "Keeping up with the Nkurunzizas" in May/June 2020. Kenyan media scooped that an unnamed African leader had been admitted to a Nairobi hospital for Covid-19 treatment. In Dar, it was silence, punctuated by the occasional incredulous denial. Meanwhile, Janet Magufuli, the First Lady, had been ill, "experiencing respiratory difficulties," days before her husband disappeared from public view. Another illness that went unacknowledged.

Will Tanzanians ever know the real cause of their late president's demise? In Burundi, the cause of the presidential "cardiac arrest" remains a state secret. But a great many more masks have been worn and hands washed ever since.

Hopefully, Tanzania will begin to take Covid-19 as seriously as Ndayishimiye did once his "grandfather" trundled off to meet his maker. It would save lives. ■

Thierry Uwamahoro is a Burundian democracy activist, with a background in democracy-related projects for the National Democratic Institute and the International Republican Institute.

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

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been paying to the
news



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we will send you the
answers immediately.

1. The Serengeti ecosystem spans the northern region of which country?
2. What is the name of Cameroon's largest natural lake?
3. Which artist won the Best Global Music Award at this year's Grammy Awards?
4. Who is the new president of the Confederation of African Football?
5. The Britam Tower (pictured) is the tallest building in Kenya and the third tallest in Africa. True or false?
6. Which country's currency is called the metical?
7. Muammar Gaddafi

8. What colour is the star in the middle of Senegal's national flag?
9. Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari is the successor to whom?
10. Lilongwe is Malawi's capital and largest city. What is the country's second largest city (also its commercial, financial and judicial centre)?
11. *Let Us All Unite and Celebrate Together* is the anthem of which continental union?
12. What is the demonym for people from The Comoros?

0-4

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

5-8

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

9-12

"I'm living the pan-African dream"

EXCLUSIVE

Shepherd Bushiri is a serial rapist, court records allege

One of Africa's richest 'prophets' has previously denied rape allegations, but refused to speak to *The Continent* for this story

WARNING: This article contains graphic descriptions of rape



On the lamb: Shepherd Bushiri faces charges of money-laundering, fraud ... and rape. (Photo: ECG)

Golden Matonga in Lilongwe

Controversial Malawi-born “prophet” Shepherd Bushiri raped women and girls as young as 16, including two sisters; some he drugged, and bribed them into silence; others he threatened with murder over the course of six years of jaw-dropping sexual violence, South African prosecutors have alleged.

The Continent has exclusively sourced

court records of the extradition request South Africa has sent to Malawi. These detail the crimes allegedly committed by Bushiri – leader of one of the most popular and richest churches on the continent, Enlightened Christian Gathering (ECG) – and by his wife, Mary.

Eight counts of rape, dating back to 2016, have been added to charges of fraud, money-laundering, jumping bail and contravention of the foreign currency

act that Bushiri was already facing before his dramatic flight from South Africa in November last year.

Bushiri has rejected past allegations of rape, accusing prosecutors of “intimidating women” to make the accusations. He also accuses prosecutors of extortion.

This week Bushiri agreed to meet *The Continent*, but did not pitch. His spokesperson, Ephraim Nyondo, who later apologised for the “mishap”, directed all questions relating to the rape allegations to the lawyer handling the extradition case, Wapona Kita. Kita declined to comment because the matter is before the courts.

Church as recruiter

All the cases in the court records allegedly took place in and around Pretoria – particularly at the South African capital city’s Sheraton Hotel – and involve women who allege Bushiri lured them into hotels rooms after befriending them and their families at church, enticing them with offers of special prayers and gifts of cash.

Some of the women later were involved in what could appear to be consensual sexual relations, after Bushiri promised to marry at least one of them. But the majority, particularly those who were very young, were threatened with death by Bushiri or his bodyguards, the victims claim. One of the victims allegedly fell pregnant by Bushiri but was forced to terminate the pregnancy.

The indictment paints a picture of how the ECG church was used as a recruitment service for Bushiri through his network

of “sons” and “prophets”. They would allegedly eavesdrop, record and engage in subtle conversations with churchgoers to collect private information that Bushiri would peddle as “divine revelations” to dazzle admirers – and lure women into sexual relations.

According to the dozens of pages *The Continent* has seen, targets included girls and young women between the ages of 16 and their mid-20s.

“Many of them believe he received visions from God, not knowing that he obtained information beforehand. Because of the ‘prophecies’, victims sought his advice or counselling. This counselling would escalate to communications between Mr Bushiri and the victims via social media,” the records say.

Luring women in

The accounts of the youngest of the victims – two sisters – are among the most harrowing. The girls say they had sung in Bushiri’s church, and he befriended their parents before starting to text them on WhatsApp. Bushiri allegedly sent his “sons” to fetch the sisters and their brother to meet him under the pretence that they were going to choir rehearsals, and gave them money. During a second visit, Bushiri handed them huge amounts of cash and told them not to tell anyone.

Then came the hotels, they allege. And then rape.

“After two weeks, my family and I met prophet Bushiri in his church after the evening service that ended at 11pm,” one of the young women says in the evidence submitted.

She says her parents were for happy to meet Bushiri; they trusted him. The Bushiris exchanged contact details with the two sisters and their brother. A week later, the sisters and brother began communicating with the Bushiris, and claim to have met him in July 2016 at the Southern Sun Hotel in Arcadia, Pretoria.

Brutal rapes

At the hotel, Bushiri kept the sisters in separate rooms, where he later prayed for them and gave them cash. He allegedly gave one of the sisters and the brother R5,000 (\$340) each. The other sister told prosecutors she was paid double that.

A second meeting took place at the Sheraton Hotel, where Bushiri allegedly gave the siblings R20 000 in January 2017. Bushiri invited one of the sisters to the Sheraton. She was taken to an upper floor by “Aubrey”, who left promptly.

“Usually, Aubrey and one or two bodyguards are always in the suite, but that day they were not there,” she says. “Prophet Bushiri came from the bathroom. He greeted me and asked me how everything was. I told him everything was fine. He told me he would pray for me to get distinctions and open doors of blessings in my life.”

“When praying for me ... he started to touch my body and private parts. I started to push his hand away. He continued to touch me. I asked him to stop. I screamed. I was wearing a long dress. He used force to pull me to the bed. He pulled my underwear and threw it away ... I was screaming all the time. He put his hand over my mouth and nose. I was fighting



Phoney: Bushiri allegedly groomed young girls who joined his church. (Photo: ECG)

back. He overpowered me. He put his penis inside my vagina and... raped me.”

The young woman, who was 18 at the time, alleges that Bushiri threatened to kill her if she reported the incident or told anyone about it, and gave her R10 000.

In June 2018, her sister told her that Bushiri had raped her too, and that’s when the two sisters agreed to report the incidents to their parents.

Extradition?

The Bushiris’ extradition trial is expected to start in earnest in Malawi courts next week after chief resident magistrate Patrick Chirwa declined to recuse himself. Bushiri’s lawyers had objected to his handling of the case, citing possible bias because of the magistrate’s involvement in issuing the warrant of arrest police used to arrest the Bushiris.

The couple fled South Africa in November while on bail for various crimes, including fraud and money-laundering, which caused a diplomatic rift between Lilongwe and Pretoria after Bushiri timed his escape to coincide with newly elected Malawian President Lazarus Chakwera’s visit to South Africa. ■

The beacon is lit: We call for justice for Benin

Ahead of elections, the president has rolled back decades of democratic progress, argues former foreign minister **Rogatien Biaou**

You'd be forgiven for not knowing Benin is holding a presidential election next month. How could you? As I write this, the first result when searching "Benin Election" on Google News is about a French artist transforming a playground in Benin as part of their "Beyond Walls" project. You'd have to scroll down a bit to learn that Reckya Madougou, our country's first ever woman presidential candidate, was arrested and charged with terrorism.

So here sits Benin, a sliver of a country sandwiched between smaller still Togo and Nigeria, the most populous country on the continent.

We're mere days from the most consequential election in our country's democratic history, yet the brazen arrest of an opposition candidate has barely registered in the international press.

Betting this trend will continue, President Patrice Talon is rolling back years of democratic progress in Benin, transforming our country from democratic standard-bearer to democracy's pallbearer.

I had the honour of representing

Benin as a foreign diplomat from 2003 to 2006. During my time in government, Benin was recognised as one of only a handful of countries in all of Africa consistently rated "free" by the global watchdog group Freedom House. We received this recognition every year I was in government. Because of Talon's failed leadership, that is no longer the case.

When he was elected in 2016, Talon seemed committed to serving only one term. He claimed he'd need only five years in office to "miraculously change Benin." Fast forward to today and Talon certainly has changed Benin: in just five short years, he has destabilised the very foundations of our democracy.

This disturbing pattern began in earnest in April 2019 when opposition candidates were barred from running in parliamentary elections.

When our citizens flooded the streets in protest, police opened fire. The government shut down our internet attempting to quell dissent and kill the story. Step into our National Assembly today and you will find it composed entirely of ruling party supporters.

Talon's political opponents have been consistently targeted during his time in power. Before Madougou's arrest and terrorism charge, Lionel Zinsou, runner-up in the 2016 presidential election, was swiftly barred from standing for office due to alleged "campaign violations". Former president Thomas Boni Yayi was forced to flee the country after being held under de facto house arrest for weeks following the 2019 elections. The assault on the opposition is widespread and enduring.

Earlier this year, Benin's media commission enacted repressive policies meant to silence the political opposition and stifle our legitimate campaign activities. A directive issued in January forbids local media from broadcasting "any element of the electoral campaign relating to the presidential election of 2021".

Conveniently, this new rule went into effect just after Talon and his ruling twin parties wrapped up a nationwide media tour. The ruling party's monopoly over state media is unfair, unconstitutional, and unacceptable. And yet for most everyone not living in Benin, it occurred entirely unnoticed.

The warning signs have been flashing in Benin for years now and, so far, the international community has done little to address them. Benin may not register prominently among the foreign policy priorities of countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, or even South Africa, but any country — and indeed anyone — concerned with the state of democracy worldwide should steady their eyes on Benin come April.



No saint: The writer charges that President Patrice Talon has ruined Benin's reputation as a democratic standard-bearer.

Our own deteriorating democracy reflects a troubling pattern in West Africa. Heads of state in Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire, for example, have extended their stays in power despite protests and deaths in the streets.

In Togo, the Gnassingbé family dynasty, in power since the late 1960s, rigged yet another election in their favour early last year.

The international community must not let these ongoing assaults on democracy, state institutions, and our individual human rights, to remain unchecked.

As the late Dr Martin Luther King Jr said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." Do not let this election become another example of injustice overlooked in Benin. ■

Rogatien Biaoou is the president of the Alliance Patriotique Nouvel Espoir (New Hope Patriotic Alliance), an opposition party in Benin. He is a veteran diplomat and a former foreign affairs and African integration minister of Benin (2003-2006).

Can Motsepe fix football on the continent?

CAF boss enters labyrinth of loyalty and expectation

Tolu Olasoji

The election to choose the next president of the Confederation of African Football (CAF) was supposed to be a tense affair on March 12 in Morocco. Instead, days before the vote, one after the other, three top candidates dropped out, and threw their weight behind South African billionaire Patrice Motsepe, who then had a clear run at the throne.

For their trouble, the three dropouts were rewarded with plum posts. Augustin Senghor of Senegal and Ahmed Yahya of Mauritania became vice-presidents, and Côte d'Ivoire's Jacques Anouma was named chief adviser to the new boss.

Fifa president Gianni Infantino played a crucial role in the machinations. "I am happy that Fifa could contribute, even if only a little, to this decisive moment for football on this great continent," Infantino said, tactfully downplaying the obvious.

Motsepe owns Mamelodi Sundowns in South Africa. As CAF president, he has to cut links with the club. Tlhopie, his eldest son, is taking over those reins

as Motsepe wades into the mess left by his predecessor, Madagascar's Ahmad Ahmad. (Anouma, the newly-installed special adviser, described the state of the governing body as "sick".)

With that in mind, Motsepe has unveiled a 10-point manifesto that prioritises good governance, investment in Africa's sporting infrastructure, and statutory reforms.

His business acumen and connection in the corporate world is expected to help with raising sponsorships and solving the African football broadcasting rights conundrum, while restoring confidence in CAF leadership, its structures, and its flagship competitions: above all, stability is now expected.

Infantino's ideas are also expected to come to life. It's no shock that his plans for a controversial African Super League are under way, according to Simba SC CEO Barbara Gonzalez, who revealed as



St Patrice's Day: Hopes are high that the new saint of African football will drive the snakes from the continent.

much after the post-election CAF general assembly.

Expectations – as well as doubts – are incredibly high for the ninth-richest man in Africa on the home front, and at Fifa – or more precisely from Infantino, upon whose coattails he rode into power.

In fact, Infantino's role in Motsepe's coronation deserves to be unpacked.

The year may be different but this election bears an eerie resemblance to the 2017 poll, when Infantino, then a greenhorn crusading with a “forward” political ethos, rallied relatively new African football administrators to back his agenda. Together, they succeeded in unseating Issa Hayatou, the longtime CAF chief of 29 years. Ahmad Ahmad, a largely unknown administrator from Madagascar, won the election with this support and in the process also became a Fifa vice-president.

This election bears an eerie resemblance to the 2017 poll when Infantino rallied administrators to back his agenda

But Ahmad's tenure quickly turned sour after a series of high-profile controversies. In November last year, Fifa banned him for five years after being found guilty of ethics violations, automatically barring him from running for re-election.

Fifa ethics judges had found that he'd “breached his duty of loyalty, offered gifts and other benefits, mismanaged

funds, and abused his position as CAF president.”

Appeals at the Court of Arbitration for Sport saw Ahmad temporarily reinstated as president and, days before the election, his ban was reduced to two years.

Ahmad's downfall left a vacancy atop Africa's football hierarchy and an almighty scramble to replace him began. It was in this vacuum that Infantino campaigned aggressively for Motsepe, his preferred candidate. In the weeks leading up to the vote (and amid the pandemic), the Swiss-Italian toured Mauritania, Senegal, the Central African Republic, Rwanda, Sudan, Morocco, Mali and Benin, meeting heads of state along the way. In Cape Town, Infantino met South African president Cyril Ramaphosa, who just happens to be Motsepe's brother-in-law.

Money-related promises were made to federations on these trips, reminiscent of tactics Infantino allegedly deployed to secure Ahmad's victory in 2017. He was investigated by Fifa's ethics committee for his meddling in that election.

Infantino's quest for a united Africa would mean guaranteed support for him from a 54-member confederation, more than a quarter of Fifa's member nations. Motsepe, unsurprisingly, is on board with the calls for unity.

“Africa needs collective wisdom, but also the exceptional talent and work of every (national football association) president and member nation,” he said after his election. “When we all work together, football in Africa will experience success and growth that it has not enjoyed in the past.” ■

With suitors at our door, we must team up to determine our destiny

Philani Mthembu

In recent years, Africa has been courted by a growing list of countries. As international players such as China, the European Union, the United States, Turkey, South Korea, Japan, Russia, and India have set up their own co-operation mechanisms, the debate over a co-ordinated approach towards Africa's strategic partnerships has continued to gain traction, with the African Union embracing this policy debate as part of its own reform processes. So how can Africa assert its own agency so that it engages with the wider world on its own terms?

It is arguably China that has been the most proactive and visible. My recent book – *Africa-China Cooperation: Towards an African Policy on China?* – argues that the answer is to combine Africa's market power through the African Continental Free Trade Area while leveraging its voting power in multilateral forums. The call for greater co-ordination has thus persistently featured in academic and policy debates. This is one reason that the AU has set up

an office in Beijing – to better co-ordinate relations with China.

Amid the heightened geopolitical rivalry between the US and China that has played out in tech and trade wars displaying mutual distrust, Africa should avoid getting caught in the middle of great power competition and instead chart a development path that works towards meeting its own priorities by strategically engaging a broad range of partners.

African governments and civil society groups will have to continue examining China's evolving domestic and external needs, while strengthening institutional capacities to boost regional value chains, intra-Africa trade, and cross-border infrastructure projects. This will enhance African agency by enabling greater co-ordination between individual nations, regional economic communities and the AU – giving the continent more power in an increasingly complex world order.

Drawing lessons from Africa's coordinated response to Covid-19, a clear consensus is emerging that only greater co-ordination will enhance African agency, ensuring that important international players focus their attention on the continent's own development priorities. ■

Philani Mthembu is Executive Director at the Institute for Global Dialogue, an independent foreign policy think tank based in Tshwane (Pretoria), South Africa. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa.





The Big Picture

Ships of the desert: A man leads a train of camels loaded with plates of salt through a salt lake in the Danakil depression in Ethiopia . The region is one of the hottest places in the world, and salt has been collected there for centuries.
(Photo: Michael Runkel/Robert Harding Heritage/robertharding via AFP)

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