

# The Continent

## The Goma blues



ILLUSTRATION: EDIZON MUSAVULI



**COVER** Eastern DRC is so far away from the seat of Congolese political power, Kinshasa, that the state always seemed to be absent, leaving more than 100 armed groups to run it. Eventually, one of the groups, M23, took the region's biggest city, Goma. Yet now, with the state incontrovertibly absent from Goma, the city is stuck. It is a purgatory that leaves its residents bereft of words. Cash is low because local banks are locked out of the national system but prices for essential goods like food and water rise by the day. Criminal gangs rule the streets. There is no war but no peace either. Not even progress, since peace talks keep getting called off. Using illustrations instead, an artist living in the city shows what life there has been like. *Page 13.*

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## The Museum of Memory:

Some monuments rewrite history. Others celebrate it. This week, we visit Luena, Angola, to see a monument commemorating the end of a 27-year civil war that was also a front line of the Cold War. *Page 26.*

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# THE WEEK IN BRIEF

## NILE BASIN

### Egypt pours cold water on Ethiopian dam project

Ethiopia claims Egypt is “scrambling to create obstacles” ahead of the inauguration of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam in September, the *Addis Standard* reports. Africa’s largest hydroelectric dam is built across the Blue Nile, but it has caused jitters downstream in Sudan and Egypt, which worry about its effects on their access to the vital Nile waters. Earlier this month, Egyptian foreign minister Badr Abdelatty met Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni



PHOTO: AMANUEL SILESH/AFP

**Nile-ism:** The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam has sent tensions with Egypt soaring.

to reiterate Egypt’s “existential concerns” over water security.

## UGANDA

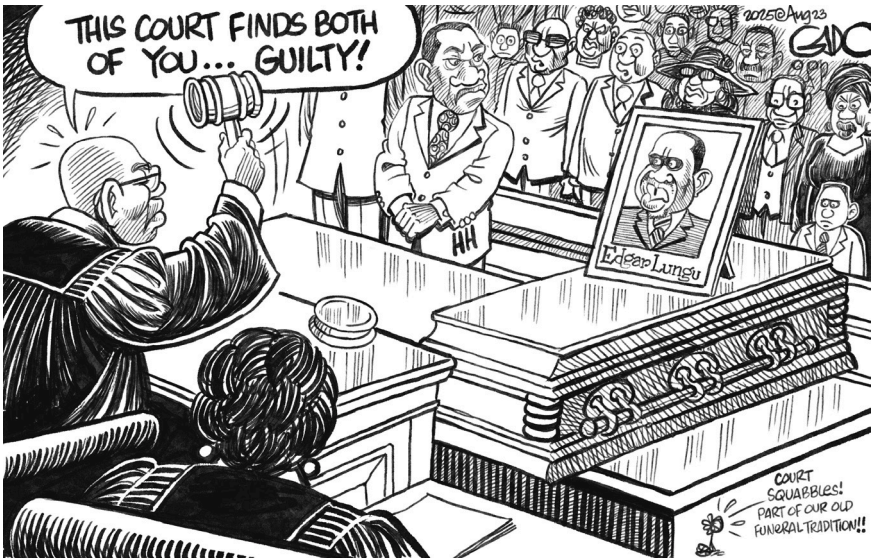
### Scandal over alleged arms dealer

The ministry of internal affairs has received a local petition urging the government to extradite one of its nationals, Michael Katungi, who has been indicted in the United States for allegedly conspiring to supply military-grade weapons worth \$58-million to a Mexican drug cartel. Katungi remains at large in Uganda, *Nile Post* reports. US prosecutors say he sought to arm the cartel with machine guns, rocket launchers, sniper rifles, night-vision gear, mines, and anti-aircraft weapons.

## ZAMBIA

### Israel reopens embassy in bid to renew influence

Israel has reopened its embassy in Lusaka after more than five decades. As part of a wider retreat from Africa, Israel shut down its Zambian embassy in the 1970s. The reopening is part of Jerusalem’s push to renew its influence on the continent amid criticism from African countries over its war in Gaza. In addition to South Africa’s genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice, African countries have repeatedly voted to support Palestine at the UN in resolutions related to the war.



**SOUTH AFRICA**

**Rhino champ charged in horn-smuggling racket**

Renowned conservationist John Hume, 83, and five others appeared in court on Tuesday, accused of running a rhino horn smuggling syndicate. The group faces 55 charges, including fraud, and money laundering. These charges relate to trafficking nearly 1,000 rhino horns, worth R250-million (about \$14-million), since 2017. The group allegedly misused legal trade permits to smuggle horns to Southeast Asia. All six accused were granted bail but had to surrender their passports, *News24* reports. Hume owned the largest rhino farm in the world before it was bought by the NGO African Parks in 2023.

**CRYPTO**

**Stablecoin slithers into more African pockets**

African use of stablecoins – digital currencies pegged to the US dollar – is spreading into remittances, savings, insurance, and even payroll. So says cryptocurrency company Yellow Card which operates in 20 African countries and has processed \$6-billion in transactions since 2019. About 70% of the people in Africa who used the company's services were sending or receiving remittances and savings, but stablecoins are also used for crop insurance and hedging against inflation. The global stablecoin industry has grown from \$5-billion in early 2020 to \$230-billion in 2025.





**Think fast:** Musician Shatta Wale's Lamborghini has landed him in hot water.

## GHANA

### Shatta Wale detained in car-crime probe

Ghanaian dancehall artist Shatta Wale, born Charles Nii Armah Mensah, was detained by Ghana's Economic and Organised Crime Office, the *BBC* reports. This was after authorities seized his Lamborghini Urus in a joint investigation with the FBI. They suspect the car is linked to a \$4.7-million criminal enterprise involving Nana Kwabena Amuah, a Ghanaian jailed in the US for financial crimes. Responding on TikTok Live, Shatta Wale denied buying the car from the jailed Ghanaian.

## BURKINA FASO

### Save the children? No, shoot the messenger

Burkina Faso's junta has declared United Nations resident co-ordinator Carol Flore-Smrecznik persona non grata after she produced a report accusing both insurgent groups and government forces of child-rights abuses. The April report documented over 2,000 abuses that took place from July 2022 to June 2024, including recruitment, sexual abuse, and attacks on schools. The government said the report "lacked evidence", *AP* reports. Flore-Smrecznik was appointed as UN resident and humanitarian co-ordinator in Burkina Faso last year, with the government's approval.

## TRAVEL

### Exclusive resorts, inclusive exploitation

Luxury tourism in Africa often harms local communities more than it helps them. That's despite governments promoting resorts that cater to the rich as "high-value, low-impact". Research from the University of Manchester found that all-inclusive resorts mean tourists aren't spending money in local communities. The study, published in *African Studies Review* this month, found that resorts don't hire many locals and their profits flow overseas – deepening inequality rather than spreading economic benefits.

## NIGERIA

## Do me I do you, man no go vex

Nigeria might mirror a new US visa rule requiring applicants to disclose all social media accounts used in the past five years. The US embassy in Abuja said the rule applied to all applicants, warning that false or incomplete details could mean visa denial or a permanent ban. Nigeria's foreign ministry confirmed it is "weighing a reciprocal action", suggesting US citizens applying for Nigerian visas could face the same scrutiny. Nigerian officials quoted in the *Heritage Times* noted that reciprocity is a key principle of visa policies.

## TANZANIA

## Public to be kept in the dark about treason trial

A Tanzanian court has banned live coverage of treason proceedings against opposition leader Tundu Lissu, citing the need to protect witness identities. Lissu says the ban will shroud the trial in "darkness," *Reuters* reports. The Chadema leader has been in prison since April. He was runner-up in the 2020 elections. If he wasn't behind bars, he would have contested presidential elections in October – the first popular test of the legitimacy of President Samia Suluhu Hassan, who assumed office in 2021 after the death of former president John Magufuli.



PHOTO: REUTERS/FISAL OMAR

**Shots fired:** A nurse in Mogadishu, Somalia, prepares to treat a diphtheria patient.

## SOMALIA

## Diphtheria doubles as US aid cuts bite

Reported cases of diphtheria in Somalia have nearly doubled this year to 1,600 from 838 last year, Hussein Abukar Muhidin, director of the National Institute of Health, told *Reuters*. Deaths have reportedly risen to 87 from 56. The country is suffering a shortage of vaccines after the United States cut its health-sector aid. The bacterial disease, which is preventable with a vaccine, mostly affects children. It causes swollen glands, fever, and breathing problems.

## NEWS

## MALAWI

# Lilongwe hits the jackpot

**Rare-earth mining operations at the Kangankunde deposit are set to reshape Malawi's economy – and invite trouble.**

**JACK MCBRAMS IN LILONGWE**

JUST a year after a feasibility study confirmed that a Malawian rare-earth minerals deposit is one of the world's best and largest, an Australian company has raised \$59-million to begin mining. The first output is expected in late 2026.

Lindian Resources offered shares to entities willing to fund startup operations in Kangankunde – about 90km north of Malawi's commercial capital of Blantyre.

The company received more subscriptions than it needed – for good reason. Kangankunde is “set to become one of the most significant such operations outside China”, according to Lindian's executive chair, Robert Martin.

Rare earths – a group of 17 metals – are essential for cellphones and clean-energy technologies like electric vehicles and wind turbines. China currently controls more than 90% of the global supply, and often uses export restrictions to reinforce its dominance.

Kangankunde is “a game-changer for Malawi”, former mining minister Grain Malunga told *The Continent*. “It puts us

in the global supply chain for minerals driving climate-change mitigation.”

The find has not gone unnoticed in China. In April, Malawian authorities detained two Chinese nationals, accusing them of unauthorised geological sampling at Kangankunde.

The deposits in Kangankunde were long known to be large and high grade. Last year's study confirmed the actual quantity – about 261-million tonnes, which puts it among the top five in the world, according to Malunga.

Crucially, the study also found that the site contains little radioactive thorium, which makes extraction simpler and cheaper as it presents lower environmental risks and fewer regulatory hurdles.

The mine has an estimated lifespan of 45 years. It could deliver about 15,300 tonnes of concentrate a year, ramping up to 50,000 tonnes as it expands.

Malunga said Kangankunde could reshape the Malawian economy within a decade. With Western markets seeking alternatives to Chinese supply, Malawi's chances are good. But so are the odds of getting caught in a geopolitical brawl. ■

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# ESWATINI

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## Rights lawyers challenge odious US deportation scheme in court

Activists are suing Eswatini for accepting deportees as Uganda becomes the latest country to bend the knee.

LYDIA NAMUBIRU

Human-rights defenders are suing the Eswatini government for accepting deportees from the United States, arguing it is both irrational and unlawful.

The arrangement, reportedly struck between US President Donald Trump and Eswatini Prime Minister Russell Mmiso Dlamini, saw five deportees – described as “convicted criminals” – flown in and held in a maximum security prison in Eswatini.

Critics point out that international law prohibits deportation to countries in which returnees may face oppression. Deportees are also entitled to contest their removal in court, but there is no evidence that the US is allowing them to do so. Worse yet, the US is sending people to countries in which they have

no family, ancestral, or social ties – and stranding them there with no clear path to legal status or protection.

The five men deported to Eswatini were from Cuba, Jamaica, Laos, Vietnam, and Yemen. US authorities claimed the men were criminals whose home countries had refused to take them back. But, as *The Africa Report* notes, Jamaica disputes ever being contacted.

Days earlier, eight men were also deported to South Sudan under similar circumstances. Rwanda and Uganda have recently confirmed deals.

What these African governments are receiving in return is not clear. But if Rwanda's 2022 deal with the UK is anything to go by, they could be getting money, trade deals or other diplomatic sweeteners.

Uganda's foreign minister Henry Okello Oryem has hinted that the country was negotiating with the US on visa restrictions, tariffs, and sanctions.

In an opinion sent to *The Continent*, the director of the Southern Africa Litigation Centre, Anneke Meerkotter, questioned how deporting foreigners to countries with which they have no connection could be considered lawful.

Highlighting the wholesale labelling of deportees as dangerous criminals, she said: “Labels that dehumanise do not justify the acceptance of foreign nationals who were illegally deported.” ■

# DEVELOPMENT

## Cash injections bolster clinical interventions

**Straight-up handing money to struggling families shown to save the lives of their children.**

**KIRI RUPIAH**

WHEN pregnant women in western Kenya received \$1,000 from a charity, they spent it on better food and healthcare, and took time off work, which led to healthier and safer births.

In a randomised control trial, researchers from the University of California at Berkeley and Oxford University examined 100,000 births in the area, comparing households that received a cash gift to those that didn't.

GiveDirectly, a charity that champions unconditional cash gifts as an alternative approach to aid, sent the funds between 2014 and 2017. The findings show infant mortality reduced by 48% and under-5 mortality by 45%. "Around 90 children survived who otherwise might not have," said Dr Miriam Laker-Oketta, a senior research adviser at GiveDirectly.

GiveDirectly said the cash "saved as many children's lives as some of the

most effective tools in global health", citing mosquito nets and vaccinations as less effective than cash. That claim raised the eyebrows of some health experts. One who spoke anonymously called it "a marketing strategy".

Cash transfers should complement, not replace health services, said Dr Harsha Thirumurthy of the University of Pennsylvania. "We need both."

Laker-Oketta agreed: "Cash is fuel; clinics, the engine. Both are essential."

The study's finding also reignites a long-standing debate on the cost and benefit of randomised control trials. The methodology is the gold standard for evidence on aid effectiveness. But such trials are very expensive – a \$60,000 budget is considered shoestring.

The anonymous critic questioned why such expensive research was conducted to re-establish accepted knowledge: that health improves with income.



**Cents prevail:** An expensive study has confirmed common sense: health prospects rise with income.



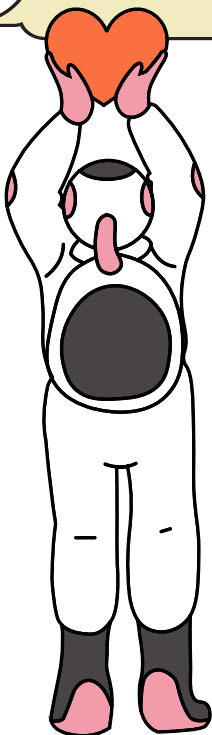
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## FEATURE

## 2 Fast 2 Furious 2 Female

Hanan Isah is drifting above gender stereotypes as she campaigns for more women to join motorsport.

**AISHA KABIRU MOHAMED IN ABUJA**

THE FIRST time Hanan Isah got behind the wheel, she was with her brother's friends, who couldn't understand why she wanted to try out a "male" sport.

"I remember gripping the wheel, hearing the engine, and thinking, 'This is it. This is where I belong,'" she says.

That was five years ago. Isah, known as "The Smoke Queen" in the Nigerian motorsport community, is a car drifter. She was the first woman drifter in the country and is still one of only a few.

"My first drift was unforgettable," Isah says. "It wasn't on a racetrack. It was during a random session with a few guys who didn't even expect me to try."

On that rough track, she knew she had the goods when she managed to control the spin as the car's rear tires slid. "I felt unstoppable. I could see the joy and respect in their faces," she adds.

Isah describes drifting as "controlled chaos" that requires "precision, courage, and a deep connection with your machine".

When Isah is behind the wheel, tyres spinning and crowd cheering, nothing else matters. But the wider significance is what drives her. "Every drift is resistance – resistance to gender roles, societal expectations, and limitations."



PHOTO: SMOKEQUEEN\_HANAN/INSTAGRAM

**Smoke Queen:** Hanan Isah is blazing new trails while motorsport misogynists spin their wheels.

Isah grew up in Arewa, northern Nigeria, where women face strong cultural restrictions. "Some people just couldn't accept a woman driving cars, especially from Arewa," she says.

Being a woman from northern Nigeria in what many still consider a "man's world", Isah has been a magnet for bullies, on and offline. "I was called all sorts of names, misunderstood, mocked – even threatened."

Being the first female drifter means there is no roadmap or guidance from women who came before. "I've had to figure it all out from scratch," Isah says.

She has felt particularly alone when she's suffered setbacks, like the accident that badly damaged her drift car last



**Making tracks:**  
Sogo Oladele's photos elsewhere show the sport is growing for women.

**Clockwise from left:**  
Nene, a biker from Bayelsa State.

Isiokpo community members watch bikers.

Riders attend a bikers event in Port Harcourt.

ALL PHOTOS: SOGO OLADELE/  
THE CONTINENT



year. "People who cheered before disappeared. It tested my resilience."

To ease the path for others, Isah founded an organisation that supports women in motorsports: SmokeQueen Motorsport Initiative. It supports both bikers and car enthusiasts like herself.

She describes it as "a home for fearless dreamers". Members include Aysha B, a mother of three from Kogi State, who began riding motorcycles in secondary school; Mandu, a 41-year-old biker and roller-skating instructor; and Amirah, a powerbike rider who grew up in Cotonou in Benin.

For all of them, the thrill of the sport

is worth the resistance they encounter.

"The best part of the sport is that it keeps us fit and makes us look younger than our age," laughs Aysha B.

Isah would like to see drifting become a regulated sport taking place in government-approved arenas that meet mandated safety standards.

In the meantime, Isah advocates for events to be held in designated safe zones and closed lots – never on public roads. She insists on drivers wearing the correct gear, like helmets, gloves, and reinforced suits, as well as pre-event car inspections to avoid technical problems that might lead to serious accidents. ■

# BARAKA AND THE UNPREDICTABLE LIFE OF GOMA/DRC

BY EDIZON MUSAVULTI

GOMA, EARLY MORNINGS. A STRANGE MIST COVERS THE CITY. EVEN MOUNT GOMA IN THE DISTANCE SEEMS TIRED. BARAKA WAKES UP WITHOUT HAVING SLEPT AGAIN. THE NEIGHBORHOOD RADIO CRACKLES WITH DARK NEWS. AGAIN.

BARAKA RIDES ON THE BACK OF A MOTO THROUGH THE DUSTY STREETS OF KATINDO. THE DRIVER SPEAKS WITHOUT BEING ASKED.

HE USED TO DREAM OF BECOMING AN ENGINEER. HE WANTED TO REBUILD. BUT HOW DO YOU REBUILD A DREAM THAT KEEPS CRUMBLING DAY AFTER DAY?

YOU KNOW, KID, EVEN I'M THINKING OF LEAVING... FEELS LIKE THE FUTURE HERE IS JUST A RUMOUR.

IN A PHONE CREDIT SHOP.

BECAUSE OF THE INSECURITY THAT HAS TAKEN HOLD, SOME STREETS HAVE BECOME UNSAFE.

DID YOU HEAR? THEY'RE MOVING FORWARD. THEY SAY THEY WANT TO TAKE ALL OF THE EAST.

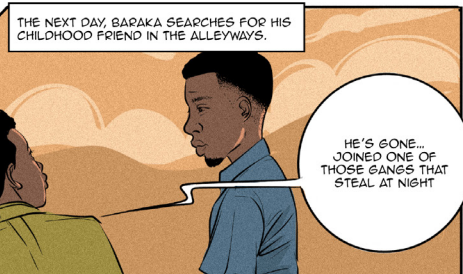
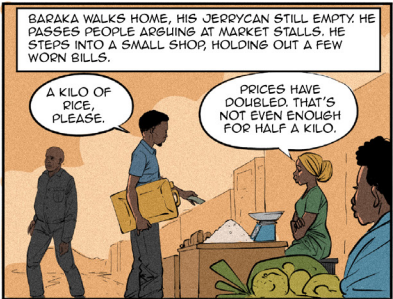
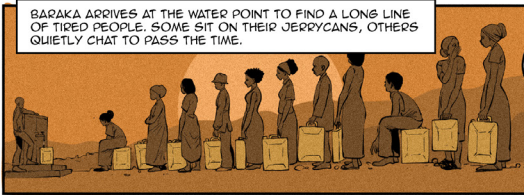
AT HOME, IT'S THE SILENCE THAT MAKES THE MOST NOISE. HIS FATHER KEEPS SWITCHING CHANNELS. HIS MOTHER COUNTS BAGS OF FLOUR. NO ONE SAYS IT WILL BE OKAY. NO ONE DARES TO LIE.

AWAY, I FORGOT TO AVOID THAT STREET. THE BANDITS ARE EXTORTING EVERYONE NOW.

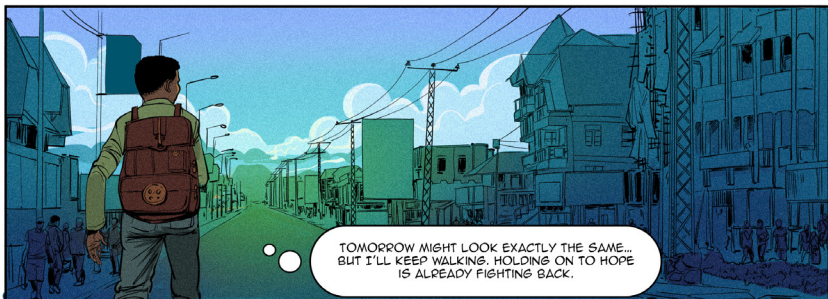
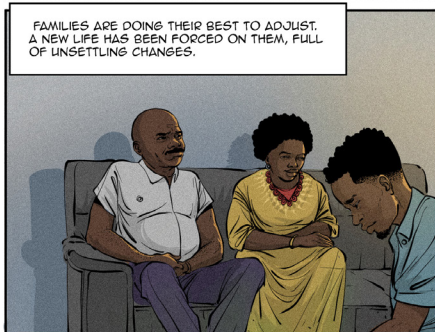
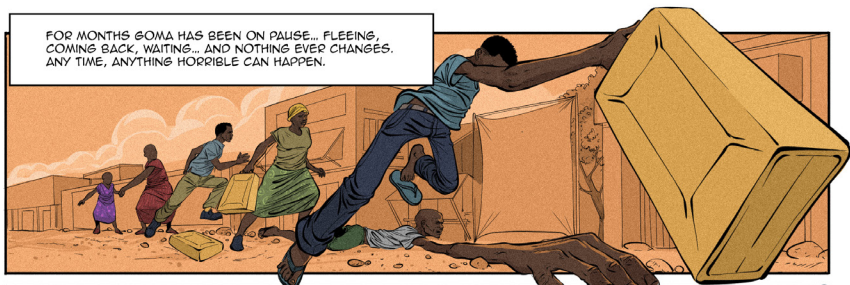
BARAKA SITS ALONE BY THE SHORES OF LAKE KIVU. THE WATER IS CALM. HE LOOKS TOWARDS BUKAVU, THEN RWANDA. EVEN THERE, THERE ARE NO ANSWERS. JUST OTHER WALLS, OTHER QUESTIONS. HE'S TOO YOUNG TO CARRY ALL THIS.

BARAKA NO LONGER ASKS FOR PROMISES. HE WAITS FOR THE NIGHT TO FALL, HOPING IT FORGETS TO COME BACK TOMORROW.











LIMITED SERIES

# The Museum of Memory

HOW WE CHOOSE TO REMEMBER

CURATED BY SHOLA LAWAL  
ART DIRECTION BY WYNONA MUTISI





PHOTO: MICHAEL RUNKEL/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

# Monumento da Paz

LUENA, ANGOLA

TWO GIANT HANDS, representing a once-divided country, release a white dove into the sky. Monumento da Paz is meant to evoke Angola's striving for peace and healing after a brutal 27-year civil war. The 30m-tall structure, made of copper and iron, is located in Luena, the capital of the eastern province of Moxico.

Two construction companies – North Korea's Mansudae Group and China's SinoHydro Corporation – jointly developed the monument, as well as the gardens and complex surrounding it. Work began in 2009 and then-president José Eduardo dos Santos unveiled the monument on 4 April 2012.

This date marked the 10th anniversary of the end of the civil war.

During the rainy season, trees and

flowers in the large garden that wraps around the monument bloom in bright colours. The buildings flanking the garden house a library and reading room, a restaurant, an amphitheatre, and bookstores. Some areas have fallen into disrepair but authorities say they are planning a large renovation project.

For 13 years, between 1961 and 1974, the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and the National Union for the Total Liberation of Angola (Unita) fought a guerrilla war against the Portuguese colonial army. However, even as the two movements fought for Angola's independence, they turned on each other in a parallel war. Each group wanted to position itself as the dominant force in the post-

independence country. It didn't help that support for each split along ethnic lines. Unita, led by Jonas Savimbi, was stronger among the Ovimbundu and Bakongo. Support for the MPLA, led by Agostinho Neto, mainly came from the Ambundu and mestiço (mixed race) people.

When Portugal left the country, power was handed to a fragile transitional government comprising Unita, the MPLA and the National Liberation Front of Angola. The Alvor Agreement, named for the Portuguese city in which it was signed, came into effect on 15 January 1975. However, fighting between Unita and the MPLA resumed within months.

Foreign interference dramatically escalated the war, which was playing out during the Cold War between the communist Soviet Union and the United States. In Angola, the Soviet Union and Cuba backed the MPLA, sending thousands of troops and weapons. Unita received military support from apartheid South Africa, which was channelling it from the US. Eventually, the foreign armies withdrew because funding this proxy war proved too costly.

Fragile peace deals between the domestic parties frequently broke down over the years. Both sides massacred civilians as the war descended into its bloodiest phase in the 1990s. It was

during this time that Unita's Savimbi reportedly descended into dictatorship.

People who knew Savimbi described him as skilled in warfare and an excellent orator who spoke multiple languages, including English, although he'd never lived in an anglophone country. Initially, he was something of a peacemaker who pushed for talks and spoke about the need for elections. But then he reportedly began ordering the deaths of his trusted advisers and their families when they expressed dissent.

As officials were either killed off or defected, the Unita army grew weak. In February 2002, Savimbi was killed in battle in Lucusse, Moxico and Unita forces immediately surrendered, ending the war. About 800,000 people were dead, and more than a million were displaced. Angola's economy was in shambles.

Luena, where the peace accords of 4 April 2002 were signed, was the ideal point to build the peace monument. About 12,000 tourists visit the Monumento da Paz each year. Visitors say that if you stand about 100m to the side of the monument and raise your hands, it will look as if you're releasing the huge white dove into the sky yourself.

The MPLA continues to dominate the Angolan government – but the country's politics is still deeply divided along ethno-political lines. ■

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**Illustration note by Angolan illustrator Sérgio Piçarra:** Angola celebrates the end of its civil war in 2002 with, among other things, a monument to peace among Angolans.

However, 23 years later, the peace achieved is not reflected on Angolans' plates or in their daily lives. Instead, poverty and hunger are increasing at the same rate as corruption and poor governance.



# MONUMENTO DA PAZ

ILLUSTRATION: SÉRGIO PIÇARRA



## TRAVEL

# A leap of broken faith

What does the incautious fate of an orphaned baboon tell us about the extraordinary bridging of the Victoria Falls?



**Net work:** A 1905 photo shows the temporary safety net below Victoria Falls Bridge as it was being built.

## CHRISTINE MUNGAI IN LIVINGSTONE

AS WE RUMBLED along the tracks on a train that felt ancient – right down to the Rhodesia Railways logo on its windows – the view opened up to that dramatic sheet of water: Mosi-oa-Tunya, the smoke that thunders. It really does.

This year, I saw Victoria Falls for the first time. We were on an excursion on the last day of a journalism conference in Livingstone, Zambia.

We stopped briefly on the bridge across the Zambezi – an engineering

marvel built from both sides of the gorge to connect in the middle. Completed in 1905, it was the highest bridge in the world at the time.

Standing on it 120 years later, I tried to imagine the level of ambition and audacity it took to look at that raging river with its huge gorge and think, “Yes, we will put a bridge here.”

The British surveyors arrived on horseback all the way from Walvis Bay in Namibia. The structure itself was designed and prefabricated in England, shipped as parts to Beira in

Mozambique, then brought inland by railway and assembled over the course of a year. It cost £72,000 – an astronomical sum in 1905. In September that year, the bridge was completed. The work had progressed exactly on schedule.

During our stop, Thulani, our tour guide, fought mightily to reel off all these facts in a speech he has given a million times before. His audience seemed far more interested in the free drinks on the train – paid for by our conference hosts – than in the facts being mic-dropped in this moment. So, when everyone got off the train to take photos against that majestic backdrop, I asked him to tell me a true story about the bridge, one I wouldn't find on Wikipedia.

Thulani told me that a baboon gave birth near the bridge construction site and died soon afterwards. A British engineer raised the orphaned infant like a pet. It became a companion to workers on the site, wandering about freely and sleeping in the camp at night.

Now, for safety during construction, the engineers had installed a huge net under the bridge, to catch anyone who might fall. A drop from the bridge takes you more than 100m down to the raging water and rocks below. When the net was first installed, a British engineer volunteered to jump and test it. He survived. Having watched the man drop and bounce safely, the young baboon figured this was a game. Every day, he'd leap off the bridge onto the net, tumbling and shrieking with joy.

Then, not long after the work was completed, the net was removed.

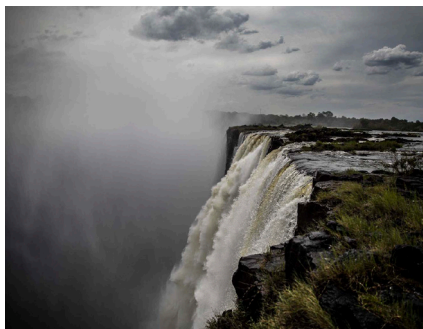


PHOTO: GUILLEM SARTORIO/AFP

**Thunderous smoke:** Mist rises from Mosi-oa-Tunya – Victoria Falls – in Livingstone, Zambia.

But no one told the baboon.

The next morning, as was his routine, the little one leapt. There was nothing there. It plunged into the gorge and was gone. Thulani said that the British engineers cried for a long time about the baboon's death.

I don't know why, of all the local stories, Thulani chose to tell me this one. Is it a metaphor for the unintended casualties of the colonial impulse to dominate and control? Does it matter, as Thulani said, that it was a British engineer – and not one of the estimated 200 to 400 local workers – who turned the baboon into a pet? Why – and on whose authority – does one take a wild animal and domesticate it into a pet, helper, or mascot? Does that act mirror the logic of empire – to capture, tame, and claim authority over nature and people? And what do we do with the fact that the baboon died straight after the project was declared a success?

What I'm left with is that image: the net gone, the trusting leap made anyway. ■

## PHOTO ESSAY

# The fading forests of sensual ylang-ylang

PHOTOS: MARCO LONGARI/AFP

ABOUT 60% of the world's ylang-ylang, a prized perfume oil extracted from a yellow, star-shaped flower, comes from the tiny volcanic islands of Comoros. Thousands of women spend their days under the sun harvesting flowers to sell to distillers by the kilogramme. For sunscreen, they wear a traditional msindanu mask, obtained by rubbing sandalwood on coral. Distillers typically extract ylang-ylang oil using decades-

old stills technology that takes up to 300kg of wood to fuel the extraction of a single kilogramme of oil. The trade sustains about 10,000 producers, which is significant in a country with a population of less than a million. But it also drives deforestation. Comoros lost 80% of its natural forests between 1995 and 2014 and demographic pressure on the islands means farmers continue to require more arable land. ■



**Sun on sandalwood:** Sitti Fatima Mohamed, her face covered with a traditional msindanu mask, picks ylang-ylang flowers in Mbambao Mtsanga, Comoros.





**Solar spice:** Cloves, another key Comoran crop, are left to dry on blankets beside a power array in Lingoni, on the archipelago's Anjouan island.



**Unwilding:** A minibus taxi lumbers along a winding road through increasingly deforested mountains in Tsembehou, the third-largest town on Anjouan island.



**Canopy harvest:** A worker plucks ylang-ylang flowers from the treetops in Mbambao Mtsanga.



**Bloomboxing:** Flower field workers fill a jute sack with ylang-ylang blossoms destined for distillation.





**Logging in:** Alihadhur Said, 70, sources and sells timber to the wood-fuelled steam distillation plants that extract the precious oil of the ylang ylang flowers.



**Petal to the metal:** Ylang-ylang field workers remove flower residue from a rough alembic at the end of the oil extraction process at their still in Mbambao Mtsanga.

DATA

# Matters of faith

IT’S OFTEN said that religion is the biggest business in Africa. That should not come as much of a surprise when more than nine out of 10 people identify with one religion or another.

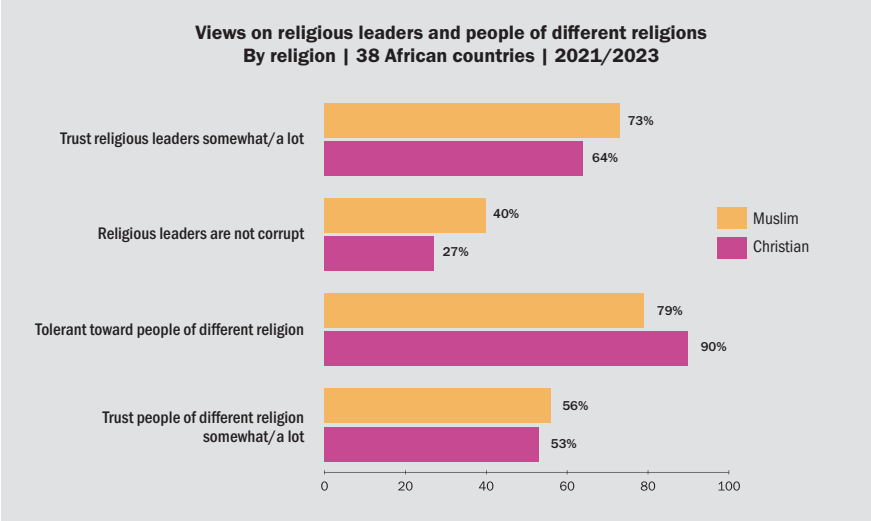
Across our sample of 38 African countries surveyed between late 2021 and mid-2023, 58% of adults identify as Christian, almost twice the share of Muslims (32%). One in 20 citizens (5%) profess no religion, while smaller minorities follow Hinduism, a traditional religion, or another creed.

Comparing the two major faiths in

Africa, we find that adherents of Islam are more trusting of religious leaders (73% vs 64%) and more likely to view “none of them” as corrupt (40% vs 27%).

Christians are 11 percentage points more likely than Muslims to say that they would not mind living next door to someone who follows a different religion (90% vs 79%).

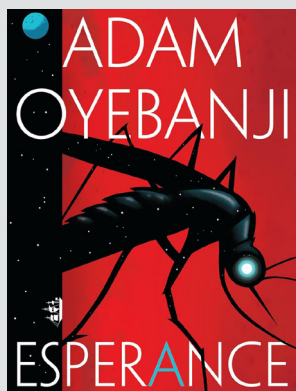
But greater tolerance does not equal greater trust: Muslims are slightly more likely than Christians to have faith in people who practice different religions (56% vs 53%). ■





# REVIEW

JACQUELINE NYATHI



## Water, water everywhere, and no one cares to think

Genres tumble into the deep as the supernatural consequences of slavery rise on a vengeful tide.

DETECTIVE Ethan Krol is called to the scene of a crime after a father and son drown in an apartment in Chicago. But the water that killed them isn't fresh

water, it's from the sea. When other police departments in the US and in Nigeria contact Krol about similar baffling cases, he becomes even more intrigued. He sets off on the suspect's trail, but it takes him far too long to realise he's not dealing with something – or someone – ordinary.

Should you figure out what is going on in *Esperance* before Krol himself, be assured that its central concept and twists and turns will keep you hooked.

Other speculative fiction works have dealt with supernatural vengeance for the trans-Atlantic slave trade: *Lost Ark Dreaming* by Suyi Davies Okungbowa and *The Deep* by Rivers Solomon come to mind. In these stories, revenants emerge from the deep to wreak their vengeance on the living. Sometimes they concern themselves not with revenge, but instead re-imagine how people thrown overboard could have survived (or come back to life). *Esperance* does a bit of both.

In *Esperance* Adam OyeBanji infuses the classic police procedural with sci-fi elements and the satisfying prospect of vengeance. His tongue-in-cheek humour about oyinbos (white people) lands exactly right and his plotting and character development are excellent.

In fact, *Esperance* is a very smart novel indeed: if you start it with merely high expectations then prepare to have them exceeded. ■

# The Quiz

- 1 What is the alternate name of Mosi-oa-Tunya waterfall?
- 2 Which country has the highest number of rhinos?
- 3 The Sahara desert spans which region of the continent?
- 4 Which country is Africa's largest by area?
- 5 In which city is the Monument de l'Indépendance (pictured) located?
- 6 How many official languages does Burundi have?
- 7 Which country's capital is Brazzaville?
- 8 The twin brothers who make up influential music act P-Square are from which country?
- 9 From which country did Comoros gain independence in 1975?
- 10 What is the colour of the star in the middle of Senegal's flag?



## HOW DID I DO?

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

### 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

"I'm pretty sure I'm the star in the middle of the flag."

PHOTO: FLORENT VERGNES/AFP



## DEBATE

# A path to peace in Sudan

International actors must drop their false equivalences and take legal and diplomatic action to counter the architecture of the UAE's support for regional proxies.



**Car tomb:** The war has turned catastrophe into a revenue stream for armed entrepreneurs.

PHOTO: AFP

## AMGAD FAREID ELTAYEB

THE war in Sudan should not be seen only as a battle inside one country. As a laboratory for modern patronage warfare, Sudan is creating a template for subcontracting the pursuit of foreign interests to local warriors. It is potentially an incubator of wider instability.

Sudan's political actors have failed in

two intertwined ways: they abandoned disciplined statecraft for factional survival and, in so doing, enabled external players to turn the country into an arena for proxy warfare.

The most destructive example of this is the predatory apparatus forged by the United Arab Emirates when it subcontracted the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) militia to pursue or protect

its interests in Sudan's minerals and arable land.

The seeds for this war were sown long before the first gunshot in April 2023. After the 2019 popular revolution ended Omar al-Bashir's three-decade dictatorship, elite political actors in Sudan squandered the transition by descending into a myopic struggle for advantage. Foreign interests and remnants of al-Bashir's regime were eager to exploit this dysfunction.

The chaotic war that followed has stripped the state of its capacity to serve its citizens. Infrastructure was destroyed as the world's largest displacement crisis unfolded. Sovereignty itself risks falling into the hands of armed entrepreneurs, who pursue their ends with scorched-earth campaigns, sieges that manufacture famine, massacres, genocide, and sexual violence.

**After the 2019 popular revolution ... elite political actors squandered the transition by descending into a myopic struggle for advantage.**

The RSF militia(s) have converted insecurity into resources: looting and checkpoints are revenue streams; displaced people are labour pools; and humanitarian aid is an asset to be seized. This perverse marketplace of violence rewards predatory behaviour and punishes restraint. Now the armed forces of an internationally recognised

government – the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) – and a militia that no one will admit to backing, are fighting it out. Their goal is not simply to win territory but to acquire the legitimacy to control state authority, markets, resources, and borders. The RSF even proclaimed a parallel government.

**False equivalence**

International discourse is not helping this absurd situation by insisting on a false equivalence between the SAF and the RSF, as if both were simply two symmetrical factions in a civil war. The SAF, for all its historic politicisation and abuses, remains Sudan's national army.

It is embedded in the national legal and institutional framework and, at least in theory, subject to reform and public accountability. The RSF, by contrast, is a paramilitary born out of the Janjaweed militia responsible for the Darfur genocide. It operates as a commercial mercenary enterprise with only one mandate: to serve the ambitions of its leaders and backers.

To judge the distinctions between the two belligerents, civilian behaviour in this war offers a compelling testament. Millions of people have fled RSF-controlled areas for refuge in places under SAF control. The RSF's advance into Gezira state in October 2024 displaced more than 393,000 people in a month. These people fled to SAF-controlled eastern states like Gedaref, Kassala, and River Nile.

In Sennar state in June 2024, RSF advances triggered displacements





**Paranalysis:** Amgad Fareid Eltayeb warns against legitimising RSF and giving the UAE political cover.

PHOTO: RAPID SUPPORT FORCES/AFF

to Gedaref. In South Kordofan, RSF takeovers in February and June 2024 displaced more than 40,000 people from Habila and 60% to 70% of Al-Fula's population to SAF-controlled areas.

The 3.7-million people who fled greater Khartoum during the December 2024 clashes largely ended up in SAF-held states.

Data shows why civilians have chosen to flee to SAF-controlled areas. By the end of 2024, Acled – the Armed Conflict Location & Event Database – attributed 77% of all recorded incidents of violence targeting civilians to the RSF.

A July 2025 report by Insights, an independent civil-society organisation

and data centre, recorded 765 civilian fatalities that month, attributing 88% of them to the RSF.

Equating the SAF and the RSF misdiagnoses and prolongs the conflict by legitimising a militia's bid for power.

Just as corrosive is giving the UAE political cover.

In June 2024 media reports revealed that United Kingdom government officials had attempted to suppress criticism of the UAE for its role in supplying arms to the RSF.

Yet, Emirati support – material, financial and logistical – officially denied but widely documented by investigative journalists, the United Nations, leaked

intelligence, and official United States government reports – has dramatically extended the RSF's operational lifespan, making Abu Dhabi an active participant in Sudan's unraveling.

## **Equating the SAF and the RSF misdiagnoses and prolongs the conflict by legitimising a militia's bid for power.**

From these fallacious positions, the international community's response in Sudan has been paradoxical: lofty rhetorical concern paired with practical paralysis. Appeals for donor support flood inboxes but coherent civilian protection can't happen when there is a refusal to definitively answer the question, "Protect them from whom?"

### **A way forward**

What would an effective response look like? First, real pressure must be applied to hold those actors who endanger the civilians at bay. This would create room for humanitarian protection that goes beyond sporadic aid deliveries and instead supports local production and credible, locally trusted actors.

Legal action, including taking cases to international forums, should not be a late-stage exercise in outrage but a forward-looking deterrent that raises the cost of waging or enabling violence. In this case, it could change UAE actions in the war.

Sudan is not the only place where the UAE is meddling – it has also intervened

in Libya, Yemen, and Somalia. Therefore, Sudan's plan to legally challenge the systems the Emirates uses to support its proxies deserves support.

Legal pressure should be matched with diplomatic steps such as sanctions and travel bans on anyone who materially enables the war, no matter their international standing.

Regional diplomacy also needs to shift from its current position of being tied up in transactional deals with the UAE. Governments in the region must reclaim credibility and focus on restoring accountable governance within Sudan.

### **Peace has a deeper demand: humility**

To help, international actors will have to admit that they have been complicit – through neutrality or false equivalencies, as well as transactional politics – in giving the UAE political cover.

For Sudanese political actors too, the path is painful. They must admit that they squandered a revolutionary opportunity in pursuit of zero-sum power and a monopoly on violence that they still don't have. They must work with – not sideline or manipulate – Sudanese civil society, which carried the resistance before the war and has led relief efforts since. ■

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Dr Amgad Fareid Eltayeb is a Sudanese political researcher and writer. He was a key figure in Sudan's pro-democracy movement, who co-founded Girifna and Sudan Change Now; served as assistant chief of staff to the civilian prime minister; and later acted as a political adviser to the United Nations mission in Sudan

# Big Pic

**Andabluesian:** An elder descends through the distinctive alleys of the Medina of the northwestern Moroccan city of Chefchaouen, where the blue hues of its buildings are complemented by ornate mosaics.

PHOTO: ABDEL MAJID BZIOUAT/AFP



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