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The Continent

**Too close
to call in
Sierra Leone**



Photo: John Wessels/AFP
via Getty Images



Cover: Sierra Leone's election, which begins on Saturday morning, is too close to call. We speak to President Julius Maada Bio, who would really like to spend another five years in the plush presidential villa in Freetown; and his main rival, Samura Kamara, who would very much like to occupy the plush presidential villa in Freetown (p10). For voters looking for any meaningful change, this election is going to be yet another democratic disappointment, argues novelist Ishmael Beah (p13).

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They went
looking for
the past.



They went
looking for
a future.



Carlos M&G 23.6.23

GEOPOLITICS

China fetes SA chief of defence-sitting

General Rudzani Maphwanya, the chief of the South African army, was in Beijing this week to meet China's defence minister Li Shangfu. The trip was publicised by Chinese state media but barely acknowledged by the South African side. Maphwanya reportedly pledged to improve co-operation between the South African and Chinese militaries to "contribute to a fairer, safer and better world". South Africa has a history of doing exercises with everyone, in its non-aligned attempts to pick no side in almost any fight.

COLONIALISM

Dutch kings' bounty from slaver faves

A new study has found that three Dutch kings who reigned from 1689 to 1806 made the equivalent of nearly \$600-million in today's money from the Dutch East India Company, the baroque megacorp that enslaved at least 600,000 Africans and a million Asians. This money made by Willems III, IV and V is only a fraction of the wealth the Netherlands made from the slave trade between 1621 and 1863 – which, according to one estimate, was bringing in about 5% of the country's GDP by the 1770s.

GEOPOLITICS**Russia and Africa truncate their tryst**

Next month's rendezvous between Russia's Vladimir Putin and the leaders of African countries will be a speedier date than previously anticipated. The 2023 Russia-Africa summit was originally intended to take place over four days, but will now happen over just two. The abridged version of the summit was announced just days after four African presidents journeyed to Moscow to try to engage Putin on negotiating for peace in Ukraine. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov told journalists the summit's programme has been "streamlined".

SUDAN**Embassies and homes looted in urban warfare**

The Khartoum embassies of Mauritania and Pakistan, and the homes of the ambassadors of Zimbabwe and Algeria, were raided and looted this week. Harare says it was "criminality taking advantage of the war" but Sudan's foreign ministry blamed fighters of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), calling it a violation of the ceasefire and of diplomatic laws. Civilians have long reported their homes being invaded and taken over by fighters, often blaming the RSF, too.



Name rings: Isabel dos Santos, once known as Africa's richest woman.

ANGOLA**Damned if you do, Amsterdamned if you're Dos Santos**

The trials and tribulations of Isabel dos Santos, who amassed vast wealth during her father's 38-year rule of Angola, continued this week. The Amsterdam Court of Appeal confirmed a 2021 ruling that she illegally diverted over \$57-million from Angola's state oil company, Sonangol, in 2006. It found that company directors used forged documents to help Dos Santos and her husband take 40% of the shares in one of Sonangol's financial vehicles.

UGANDA

Dozens of children killed in school attack

Forty-one people, including 37 students, died over the weekend in an attack on a school in Kasese town, on Uganda's

border with the DRC. Armed men hacked students at Lhubiriha secondary school with machetes and set a boy's dormitory on fire. Some victims were as young as 12. Uganda's security forces blamed an armed group operating in eastern Congo – the Allied Democratic Forces. The group has not claimed responsibility.



Bereft:
Mourners at
the funeral of
relatives killed
by militia in
Uganda. Photo:
Getty Images

KENYA

Nairobi wins EU boon after EAC ghosting

Kenya signed a duty-free and quota-free deal with the European Union for its farm produce, getting itself out of the lurch that other East African Community countries left it in, when they failed to ratify a similar deal in 2014. Most countries from the bloc are classified among the least developed and have “duty-free and quota-free” access to the union. This led them to snub the EU-EAC deal, leaving Kenya, a middle-income country, out in the cold.

INTERNATIONAL

Lost at sea? Try to be wealthier next time

This week in the north Atlantic, major western navies mounted a multimillion-dollar search for five very rich men whose submersible boat disappeared during a tour to the ruins of the Titanic. Also this week, at least 30 migrating people died with little remark in the northeast Atlantic when their boat sank off the coast of Western Sahara. Last week, a boat sank near Greece in the Mediterranean and received little help, with 600 people on board.

Lesotho

Quick arrests in journalist's murder case, but violence is ever-present

Police claim to have solved Leqhashasha's murder in record time. But they still have an epidemic of violence to deal with.

Majara Molupe in Maseru

In the early hours of Wednesday morning, Lesotho police apprehended five people it suspects were involved in the killing of Ralikonelo Joki, the journalist best known as Leqhashasha. Police spokesperson Mpiti Mopeli told *The Continent* the suspects were arrested as they re-entered the country from hiding in neighbouring South Africa.

Leqhashasha's murder in May prompted the government to put the whole country under a two-week curfew, with police saying violent murders had become way too frequent in the mountain

kingdom of about two million. In the preceding three weeks, police said, 40 murders had been recorded.

Lesotho journalists agree that their gravest risk comes from simply being citizens, not from their work.

“Lesotho has a high homicide rate. Being part of this community, they could not be immune to the rampant killings,” says Kananelo Boloetse, who chairs the Lesotho chapter of Misa – the Media Institute of Southern Africa. And that presents a problem that media support structures are not made for. “Misa Lesotho has no capacity to protect journalists against threats such as killings.”

And it's of course a problem that affects them beyond the workplace.

Mohau Kobile, the owner of Ts'eno FM and Leqhashasha's employer, is happy about the arrest made in connection to the murder of his colleague. But he is still in the dark about who killed his own brother.

He urged Lesotho police to go beyond showing its abilities only in prominent murder cases like Leqhashasha's and to apply itself for “all people in the country”.

For now though, at least one family has found some catharsis. “We are still in shock and pain over our brother's death,” Leqhashasha's brother, Motseki Joki, told *The Continent*. But he commended the police for apprehending the suspects barely 40 days after the murder. ■

Nigeria

Tinubu's shock and awe style: Shocking, or merely awful?

The new president hit the ground running, but the earth isn't exactly shaking beneath his feet just yet

Adebayo Abdulrahman in Ibadan

On the campaign trail, Nigeria's new president often promised to "hit the ground running" and to "continue running" on the days that follow. True to his word, in his first month in office, Bola Tinubu has made major moves that sent shockwaves across various streams of Nigerian life. This week, he shook up the country's security leadership.

On Monday, the president ordered the immediate retirement of all military chiefs, the national police chief and the customs comptroller. Their replacements were named in the same breath.

Nigeria is heaving under multiple security crises. Boko Haram continues to terrorise the north, along with unaffiliated bandits. In the southeast, secessionists are

nearly as powerful as the state. In various states, kidnapping and violent clashes between farming communities and nomadic herders are the order of the day.

During Muhammadu Buhari's eight-year tenure most of these issues were simply left to fester and violent incidents and mass abductions skyrocketed. According to local media outlet *The Cable*, in 2022 alone 4,545 people were killed and 4,611 kidnapped by non-state actors – an average of 12 deaths and 13 kidnap victims every day.

Tinubu's shake-up meant those heads presiding over the dire status quo were sent rolling for their failure. Or were they?

In fact, it's fairly standard for new Nigerian presidents to kick off their terms with very public firings and hirings – the more sensitive the position, the better.

But fixing Nigeria's complex security crises, "requires more than just changing security chiefs or even buying more equipment," says Murtala Abdullahi, a reporter with *HumAngle*, a local publication that focuses on security and climate. Murtala says real reforms would need to run across the entire sector: retraining rank and file, countering corruption in military management, and ensuring prompt and professional responses when rural communities report violent incidents or the threat of them.

That's boring, long-haul work that does not make for quick-win headlines. ■

Kenya

Government imposes steep tax hikes

Maureen Kasuku in Nairobi

"Tunataka order, rais akisema yes, wote tunasema yes, akisema jump, tunauliza, Your Excellency, how high can we jump?"

These were the words of Nandi senator Samson Cheragei of the ruling political alliance, as he voted in favour of Kenya's new tax bill.

In other words: If the president says jump, we ask how high.

This public declaration of loyalty comes despite widespread public opposition to the controversial bill, which imposes steep increases on fuel levies and income tax.

The bill is designed to fund President William Ruto's proposed \$26-billion budget, so the country does not have to borrow more money from abroad – even though, last month, Kenya reached a \$1-billion deal with the International Monetary Fund to do exactly that.

Under the new bill, the fuel levy will double from 8% to 16%, while a new 1.5% housing tax will be imposed on income.

The bill also introduces a new 15% tax

on digital content creators and online influencers, in order to broaden the tax base by including emerging industries such as online work.

"This is punitive to young people who are self-employed in a country where opportunities are scarce and the government isn't doing enough to address unemployment," said Oliver Masafu, an influencer who goes by Nash Reloaded.

Civil society groups have promised to mobilise against the implementation of the bill.

Under the new bill, the fuel levy will double from 8% to 16%, while a new 1.5% housing tax will be imposed on income

Meanwhile, Ruto has called for the establishment of a new international "Green Bank" to replace multilateral lenders like the IMF and the World Bank, who he said are being held "hostage" to the interests of rich countries.

"We need a new financial mechanism to deal with climate change that is not controlled by a shareholder or is not subjected to the interest of any country," he told the *Financial Times*, adding that it could be funded through a global tax on fossil fuel industries. ■

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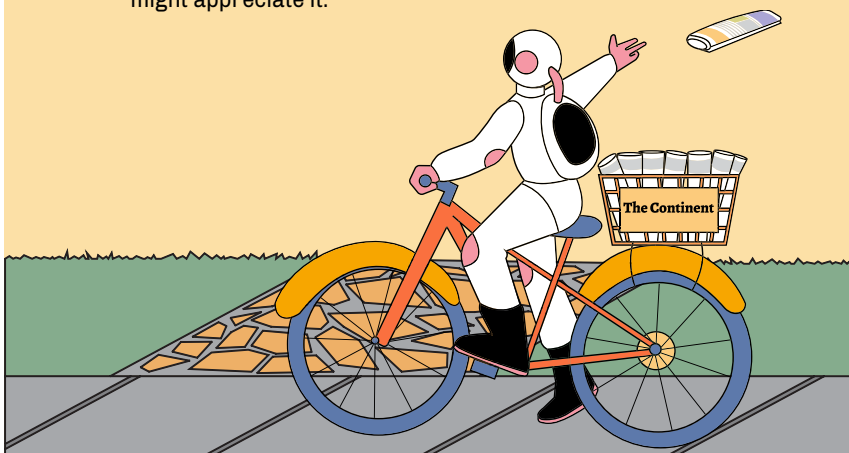
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Sierra Leone

A fractious election defined by economic crisis

Ahead of Saturday's election, *The Continent* speaks to both the country's president and the man who would replace him. Both candidates agree on one thing: this vote will be determined by the cost-of-living struggle.



Slings & barrows: In Freetown a free man is far from free from hardship.

Abdul Brima in Freetown

In the comfort of his vast presidential villa in Freetown, President Julius Maada Bio is on the defensive. The villa is crowded with vehicles, gun-toting security and hundreds of boxes containing

campaign materials for the ruling SLPP – the Sierra Leone People's Party.

As Sierra Leoneans prepare to cast their vote on Saturday, the 59-year-old president's hold on power is looking precarious.

The election is too close to call, and

many voters are blaming Bio for a huge increase in the cost of living in the West African nation. The price of basic goods like rice has nearly tripled in recent years, while year-on-year inflation is up by a staggering 43% as of April.

This is not his fault, Bio tells *The Continent*. Nor is there much he can do about it: “The prices are already high from the countries where these commodities are coming from ... It’s been difficult for any country to escape this global economic crisis because of the nature of the problem itself.”

Bio is right that the cost-of-living crisis is not just a Sierra Leonean problem, with global inflation fueled first by the Covid-19 pandemic and then exacerbated by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Nevertheless, he will be judged on his administration’s response.

“We have been supporting the most vulnerable in the country through our social protection safety programmes since Covid,” he said. “And millions of dollars have gone into that just so that they’re able to cope during and after Covid.”

Unfortunately for the president, most Sierra Leoneans do not share his perspective. According to the most recent data from Afrobarometer, released earlier this month, during their survey this time last year only 8% of the population think that the government was doing enough to stabilise prices, and just 32% agreed that it is effectively managing the economy.

And that was before economic hardships sparked nationwide protests last August, which were met with a brutal police response in which 21 civilians and

six police officers were killed.

Bio, however, remains optimistic that he will secure a second term as the democratically elected president of Sierra Leone.

Should he be successful, it will be his third stint as head of state: in 1996, in the midst of a civil war, Bio led a palace coup that unseated the junta of President Valentine Strasser, who had himself seized power in a military coup.

Bio held power for two months, overseeing the transition to a civilian-led democratic government. During this time, he appointed an economist named Samura Kamara as his secretary of state for finance – the very same Samura Kamara who now leads the main opposition.

“There is enough data to justify the fact that my re-election will lead to the consolidation of the foundation that we are laying for sustainable development in this country,” Bio concluded. “I have worked quite hard in the past couple of years to not be the people’s favourite choice.”

The opposition’s golden chance

Samura Kamara is not so sure about that. The 72-year-old opposition leader is at home in a leafy compound in a quiet suburb of the capital city. A huge poster of his face hangs on the outside wall. His gate is painted red and white, the colours of the APC – the All People’s Congress, which Kamara has led since 2018.

Although Kamara narrowly lost the presidential election that year after a run-off, his party did secure a majority



**Re-runner:
President
Julius Maada
Bio on the
campaign
trail. Photo:
AFP/Getty
Images**

in Parliament (63 of 132 seats, versus the SLPP's 48). But he lays the blame for the stuttering economy squarely at the president's door.

He also accuses Bio of abusing his office to pursue political vendettas, noting that Bio began his term by firing civil servants suspected of supporting the previous administration.

"If I was president, I would never have started the way they did. The economy can never grow with the decisions they have made," Kamara said.

He himself is one of dozens of officials who served former president Ernest Bai Koroma and are now being investigated for corruption, but strongly denies all the allegations against him.

Kamara is one of the country's most prominent economists, having worked for the World Bank and led the country's ministries of finance and foreign affairs. For him and his party, the stuttering economy is an opportunity, and he has made it the focus of his campaign.

"We have prospects in the mining sector, but this requires proper

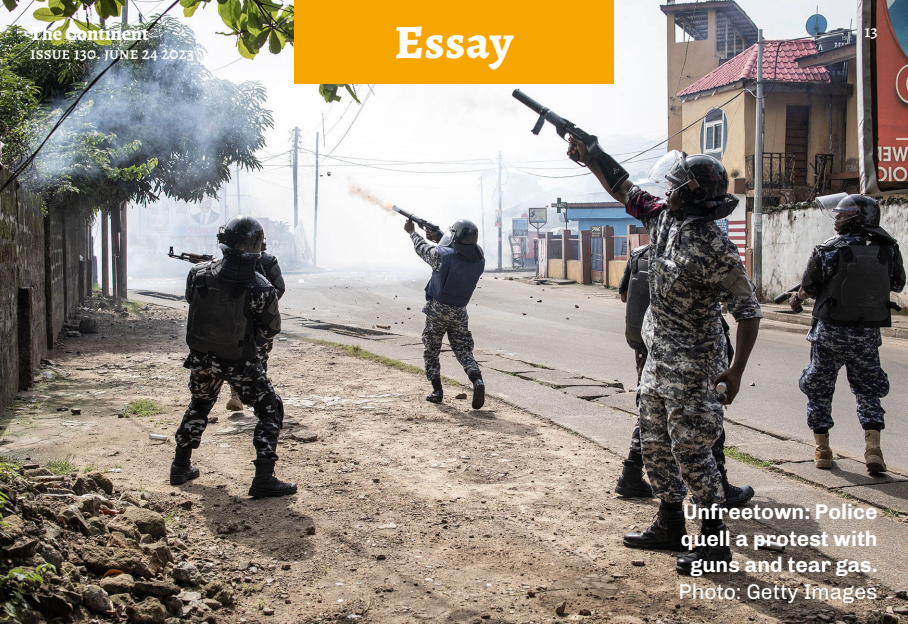
management and huge investments," he said. "We need to put enough emphasis on iron ore and gold."

Before he gets the chance to implement his vision, Kamara needs to win the election – but he has been vocal about what he describes as attempts to subvert Sierra Leone's democratic processes, including allegations of bias within the electoral commission and state security forces.

As if to highlight this point, security forces responded violently on Wednesday to an opposition protest outside the opposition's party office in Freetown.

The Continent was there, and witnessed police fire tear gas to disperse the protest. According to the APC, one of its supporters was killed and over 70 were arrested.

"My supporters and I have been attacked many times, but we have not retaliated," said Kamara. "To defeat an incumbent is not easy, but we allowed a smooth transition of power in 2018. Why is the SLPP making the election process so very troubling for the opposition?" ■



Unfreetown: Police quell a protest with guns and tear gas. Photo: Getty Images

Sierra Leone's democratic delusions

Yes, there's an election. No, nothing will change, writes novelist **Ishmael Beah**

12 June 2023. Freetown. In the early hours of the morning, a gathering of intoxicated supporters of the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party dances along Kissy road in the east of the capital. Their free t-shirts – in the party's green and white colours, emblazoned with party slogans – are already drenched with sweat. This is what campaigning looks like in Sierra Leone: just enough free t-shirts and cash to get people drunk and dancing.

No debates or serious discussions about how to make life better in one of the world's poorest countries.

As rain begins to fall, a few young men remove their tops to reveal another free t-shirt underneath – this one in the red and white colours of the opposition. Some in the crowd frown, but the young men quickly explain that this is not supposed to be a provocation. We dae with all man, we na multi party man dem – We are everyone, we are multi-party people.

And the dancing continues, because everyone knows it doesn't really matter. We vote for a new president on Saturday, but the candidates are hard to distinguish in any meaningful way. The incumbent

parades a masquerade of success even as the economy disintegrates, while the opponent promises to fix everything without a clear plan.

Usually, in the run-up to a competitive election, basic services improve: the power stays on; the water keeps running; the government pays its workers on time. But none of this is happening. We go for days without electricity we have already paid for, and that is in the nicer parts of the city. Water is scarce everywhere thanks to poor infrastructure that is negligently maintained. Salaries are stagnant and often unpaid, even as prices of food and transport increase each day.

When the government talks up its “amazing” record, it is like they are talking about a different country. Now they want another five years in power to keep pursuing their invisible gains.

Dignity and desperation

6 November 2021. A Friday. A fuel tanker crashes into a truck at a busy intersection in Wellington, Freetown’s industrial district. A crowd gathers to syphon leaking petrol, and then the tanker explodes. No less than 154 people die. The president visits the site and expresses his condolences, but he wants to make another point, too. “We must be law-abiding,” he says, emphasising that this was “a moment to come together and avoid the blame game”.

In pursuit of national unity, the government conveniently diverts attention from any inquiry into why this disaster happened, or how it can be prevented from happening again. It



Rocking a hard place: APC supporters in Freetown. Photo: Getty Images

avoids having to answer the question of why citizens felt the need to run on to the streets and risk their lives for a few litres of fuel; of why, if life is so much better under this administration, people are so desperate that rushing towards grave danger becomes a viable economic solution. It is an affront to human dignity.

It gets worse: there are not enough hospital beds for the 300-plus wounded. Despite the government’s boasts of data collection through innovation and technology, some of the victims have no records, so there is no way to identify them. They remain nameless, unrecorded; their families unable to collect any compensation.

Waiting in line

10 August 2022. Protests break out in Freetown and other parts of the country, due to mounting frustration over the cost of living. It is legal to protest in Sierra Leone. The protesters are unarmed.

State security forces meet the protests



Free Tee Town: A woman in a t-shirt showing President Julius Maada Bio dances like nobody's watching. They are watching – they just don't care. Photo: Getty Images

with bullets and tear gas. Twenty-one civilians are killed. Six police officers also die in the unrest, and they receive state funerals. The bodies of the civilians are not returned to their families, but are quietly buried in sealed caskets.

Yes, there is a global economic crisis caused by the pandemic and the war in Ukraine. But these global realities are used as an excuse to continue to neglect the needs of the people. And they do not affect everyone equally. While the masses suffer, the ruling elite continue to live their opulent lifestyles. Waiting for long hours in a queue to get petrol, young men on motorcycles, in kekehs and vans for public transport are denied fuel, even as government officials fill their tanks and drive off in the opposite direction of work.

Where do we go from here? It isn't clear. On the one hand, we have an incumbent party that is corrupt and misrepresents its successes. Just this month, the *New York Times* published an opinion piece titled "On the frontline of Sierra Leone's

education revolution". The piece is actually very critical of the state of public education in the country, and includes examples of students being flogged for unpaid school fees. But government officials are pinning the article to their social media pages, hailing it as a ringing endorsement of their policies – they know that most citizens cannot afford to bypass the *New York Times* paywall, and so will never get beyond the misleading headline.

On the other hand, we have an opposition party that has offered nothing but the same old promises we have all heard before. There are no new ideas. All we can do is keep asking for our rights to be upheld, for our voices to be included, and for our leaders to tell us the truth – whoever they happen to be at the end of this election. ■

Ishmael Beah is an acclaimed novelist and human rights activist. He is the author of A Long Way Gone, Radiance of Tomorrow and Little Family

South Africans are looking for progress on power

Between 1994 and 2018, South Africa connected more than 7.4-million households to the national power grid, giving the country one of the highest electrification rates on the continent.

It's a proud achievement, and maybe a useful reminder – at a time of daily load-shedding – that progress is possible.

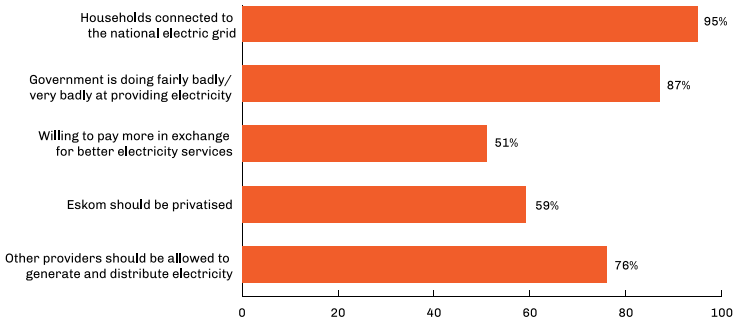
South Africans are ready for progress. Afrobarometer found that while 95% of survey respondents say their household is connected to the national grid, almost as many – 87% – say the government is doing a poor job of supplying them with power. Dissatisfaction with the government's performance on electricity has climbed by

24 percentage points compared to 2021.

Things are so bad that more than half (51%) are willing to pay more for electricity in exchange for better services, while only 32% would be opposed. Higher rates are less popular among poor citizens (41%) and residents of the Eastern Cape (37%). In KwaZulu-Natal, two thirds (66%) would pay more.

Looking for other solutions, six in 10 South Africans (59%) are ready to privatise the country's power utility, Eskom, and three quarters (76%) say that the market for electricity generation and distribution should be opened up to other providers. ■

Perspectives on electricity | South Africa | 2022



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



Photo: Pape Emir/NBAE
via Getty Images

North Africa are the undisputed kings of our basketball courts – but why?

Dominance doesn't just happen. You need good money, good management. And you need to taste blood.

Refiloe Seiboko

The third season of the Basketball Africa League (BAL) has recently wrapped in its now established playoff home of BK Arena in Rwanda's capital, Kigali. Three seasons, three different teams hoisting the trophy – but one common thread. In 2021's inaugural season Zamalek won. In 2022, US Monastir won. This year, Al Ahly. That's Egypt, Tunisia and Egypt again. Three

teams, two countries, one region.

The multimillion-dollar endeavour – a collaboration between the National Basketball Association and the International Basketball Federation – is touted as Africa's premier men's basketball league and has aspirations of exhibiting world-class talent from the continent and a high-quality entertainment product.

It might be prudent, then, to see three North African teams winning the league in its first three years as a statement, or at

least a suggestion, of dominance – even if it's just for the time being. So far it doesn't appear that challenges from outside the region have done enough to inspire fear.

In 2021 Egypt's Zamalek went undefeated in its six playoff games and won the league, beating Tunisia's US Monastir in the final. Zamalek again went undefeated in the group phase games for the 2022 season, ultimately finishing third. That season, Monastir only lost one game on its way to the championship. This year, Al Ahly also lost only one game out of eight on its way to the top. These statistics certainly don't paint a picture of gritty, gutted-out wins.

The league is still in its infancy. And every sports ministry across Africa that dares to pay attention to basketball does so at its own peril, knowing that in popular priorities it comes second (or third or fourth) to the continent's year-round first choice of football – although it is worth noting that North African teams are dominant in football too, having won the last seven editions of the CAF Champions League.

It's easy to point to financial muscle when trying to pinpoint North African teams' supposed superiority. But Le Matin's Mohamed Amine El Amri doesn't believe it's that simple.

"It's not only financial," he tells *The Continent*. "The competitiveness of the leagues in general in the north – although in Morocco this hasn't been the case – for Tunisia and Egypt the level is just very good in the national league. So when those teams go outside of their respective countries they already have this level of

good competitiveness."

Other regions looking to improve their showings could benefit from stirring up the competition within their own borders, and tighten up their hunger for victory.

"Watching basketball for the last two decades, the competition coming from the south has loosened," El Amri notes. "For example, the clubs from Angola who were dominating are now below the podium almost every time."

Indeed, Angola's only BAL representative thus far, Petro de Luanda, is still trying to get back to its former glory. The team finished third in 2021, second in 2022 and this year, particularly disappointingly, fourth.

As ever, pinning down one reason why basketball remains in its developing stage, or is thriving in one region and not as much in another, is difficult to do. Africa is large, layered and complex, and each region, each club, has its own challenges.

A lot has to go right for teams to excel. Some regions have an abundance of raw talent – but even the most talented seven-foot teenagers need the training and experience to develop competitively in well-organised structures. And sometimes, it's simply a matter of funding.

"The approach is really different regarding every side of the continent," El Amri says. "You've got the north who is very competitive and their aim is the cup, the title, the trophy ... Western Africa you have this tendency to promote young players and maybe cash in when they go. Southern Africa, especially Lusophone countries like Mozambique and Angola, this drop in their level will have even more



Feed the lead: Omar Hesham of Zamalek celebrates a win during the 2021 BAL playoffs in Rwanda. Photo: Nicole Sweet/BAL/Basketball Africa League via Getty Images

impact in the coming years.”

Countries like Nigeria, Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire and the Congo, meanwhile, have had perplexing showings thus far, despite the wealth of talent they supply internationally: “They could easily have great basketball clubs but on a managerial level – federations and clubs are not run very well compared to other parts of the continent,” El Amri speculates.

North Africa’s big, historic clubs also have the prestige and proximity to Europe that attracts and holds on to good players. Whereas players from further south might be more tempted to pack their bags and seek their fortunes elsewhere.

Still, Sub-Saharan African teams *are* closing the competitive gap, however slowly. “Countries like South Sudan and even South Africa have that potential,” says El Amri. But he underscores that

potential can only be tapped into when there is solid internal competition within their borders. And, again, money is needed to make this happen. “They need the means to not just have single club representation. They need to have five, six, even 10 clubs in each country ... to gather money [to do that] in football is very hard, let alone basketball.”

Funding and market attractiveness can only do so much, and passion from fans shouldn’t be overlooked. The game’s popularity on the continent is still warming up, rather than on the boil.

It’s a long game. For now, northern African teams have the components to create a perfect storm of success, and if their regional peers want a seat at the top table, they’re going to have to consolidate their bases. And maybe fight among themselves just a little more. ■

What if women ...?

Electric charges change societal systems and the dynamics of power in this provocative series



Wilfred Okiche

Consider this radical concept: A world where a random quirk of biology gives superpowers – the ability to shoot lightning bolts from fingertips – to all women and girls on the planet, making them the dominant sex all of a sudden. What kind of world would that be and who would be afraid of such a world? This is the central concept of Naomi Alderman's 2016 bestselling novel *The Power*, which went on to win the Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction.

Alderman is involved in the team that has adapted the speculative fiction saga to a sprawling (if formal) nine-episode Amazon Prime series. With a diverse cast of performers, led by Toni Collette as a politician trying to balance career and family, *The Power* is often provocative. And sometimes it creeps into sensational territory. But only when the creators

release themselves from the pressure to create something in the genre of Hollywood-style television. This doesn't happen as much as it should.

Each storyline is shot in a different palate, lending the show the authority of a truly international behemoth. It often feels like watching different shows in one. Although this is a good thing, it does have its drawbacks.

Toheeb Jimoh of *Ted Lasso* fame is Tunde Ojo, a Nigerian journalist who crisscrosses the globe documenting this strange new phenomenon. While Jimoh remains an appealing screen presence, the show does not really get Nigeria right. The sets aren't convincing, and the choice of actors are dodgy as they mostly speak with unconvincing accents – including Jimoh himself. Casting a Nigerian man as a globetrotting journalist makes for a refreshing change, though.

The core characters are specifically curated to highlight a broad range of experiences. The show is interested in the numerous and complicated ways in which women, and men, respond to this newfound power. Can women dare to imagine a better, more humane world driven by justice and equity? Should they even try? Or is it payback time for several millennia of abuse and domination? ■



TRAVEL

Welcome to Arusha

Sitting at the foot of Mount Meru in Tanzania is the city of Arusha. Home to the headquarters of the East African Community, it is a city of many foreigners. It has cool, even chilly, weather and a very relaxed energy. Friendly locals will greet you with a 'Shikamoo'.

Sharon Tonui

Cityvibe check

Arusha is slow and chill. The local motto is “Haraka haraka haina baraka” a Swahili saying meaning “Hurry hurry has no blessing”. People take their time and go about their lives at a relaxed pace.

Getting around

If you are feeling adventurous and want to experience the local life, take the minivans called daladala. For more convenience and

a bit of privacy, taxis are available and there are also plenty of tuk-tuks, the battery-powered three-wheelers. If you want a faster ride, hop on the back of a boda boda motorcycle taxi for about 1,000 Tanzanian shillings (\$0.45) for short distances.

Eating and drinking

Arusha has an abundance of fresh food, vegetables and fruits. Eating is affordable and everything comes in bigger sizes – expect huge oranges and mangoes. Don't forget to try the street food. Chips mayai



or zege (made by adding French fries to a bowl of eggs with onions, bell pepper, and other spices, then frying again) cost about \$1 per plate and may come with a side of kachumbari (salsa) and tomato sauce.

You are also bound to spot women frying vitumbua – coconut rice pancakes. They're about \$0.30 – make sure the mamas give you a big one! Also try the Via Via restaurant near the German Boma for intercontinental and African cuisine. If you're lucky you might catch some live music or poetry. Prices range from \$3-20 with a cold beer or glass of wine.

Sightseeing

Arusha has many activity options: fresh food markets, gardens for chill afternoons, and a thriving cultural centre.

Visit Themis Living Garden, a beautiful lush green space right in the middle of

the city with a stream flowing through its centre, or the Cultural Heritage Centre (pictured), which will steal your heart with its majestic architectural beauty – and entry is free. Spend a few hours in the centre learning about the tribes of Tanzania through carvings, gemstones, artefacts and paintings. The centre spans over past and present histories of various cultures from Tanzania and Africa at large. It's certainly a worthwhile visit.

Song that represents the city

Little comes closer to capturing the laid-back groove of Arusha than Diamond Platnumz and Rayvanny's song *Salome*.

Best time of the year to visit

Between December and April is the ideal time to visit – before the onset of rains when Arusha gets really cold. ■

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

Send an email to read@thecontinent.org and we'll be in touch!

THE QUIZ

0-3

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

4-7

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

8-10

"I got a discount this week: Two answers for the price of one!"



- 1_ Name the dormant stratovolcano located 70km west of Mount Kilimanjaro.
- 2_ From Arusha, which mountain is prominent in the city's skyline? (It is Tanzania's second-highest.)
- 3_ In which city is the Sierra Leone Peace and Cultural Monument (pictured) found?
- 4_ Which team won this year's Basketball Africa League?
- 5_ What currency is used in Somalia?
- 6_ What is the smallest country in mainland Africa?
- 7_ The capital of the Central African Republic is Banjul. True or false?
- 8_ What is the country of Chad named after?
- 9_ Al Bayda and Khoms are cities in which country?
- 10_ Bioko is an island off the coast of which country?

HOW DID I DO? WhatsApp 'ANSWERS' to +27 73 805 6068 and we'll send the answers to you!

Exhausted by global events we at Drift have been indulging in a little escapism by tuning into Bollywood movies. Yes, that's right, we have spent days on end watching some of India's Hindi film industry's finest offerings from actors like Amitabh Bachchan, Madhuri Dixit, Kajol, Deepika Padukone and – of course! – Shahrukh Khan himself, the master of the Mumbai Mambo. (Not to be confused with the Bangladesh Bhangra dash of Shakib Khan, or the Karachi cha-cha of beleaguered cricketer-turned-deposed-prime-minister Imran Khan – but let us not digress.)

There is a rich history of Bollywood appreciation on the African continent, after all, and in spite of our determination to switch off reality for a bit, we couldn't stop our thoughts from drifting to our faves, and wondering what roles our dear leaders would play should they ever be cast in an Indian film.

Imagine a multi-starrer featuring the *Coupdashians* from Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso, attacked by a group of 50 men, our three heroes are able to defeat them all and walk off into the sunset without so much as a scratch, casually

putting on their sunglasses while the whole world explodes behind them.

Can you not just picture Kenya's Billy Ruto as our poor, unemployed and lovestruck hero? He hustles hard and gets the house, the car, the job and then decides to, uh, raise taxes? Quite the plot twist there, Billy! This week his controversial finance bill cruised through its third reading in Parliament.

One of the bill's highlights is a dance number featuring a whopping jump in VAT on petrol, from 8% to 16%, and we all know once fuel prices go up, everything else goes up – including my paycheck for writing this column! (*Uh, including what now, exactly?* - Ed)

Surprise! Now, all Bollywood fans know that an integral part of a

good film involves songs shot in different countries – the streets of Paris, the tulip gardens of Amsterdam, the pyramids of Giza – and it seems President Ruto is not just keen, he's ready, able and William.

Quoting data from the boss of budgets, local media reported that Billy and his government bro squad have already outdone the previous administration on travel and hospitality. Or outspent,

For he's a Bollywood fellow



CONTINENTAL DRIFT
Samira Sawlani

anyway. It's a good thing he's taxing citizens so much more otherwise he'd run out of pocket money for the duty-free shops at Dubai airport in no time at all.

One common trait of Bollywood villains is a very fragile ego, from Mugambo in *Mr India* to Gabbar in *Sholay* – it really does not take a lot to set off their apoplexy. This is perhaps why so many of our leaders would likely do well in the role of a villain, especially those from countries with laws related to “insulting the president”.

The latest member of the gang to be butt hurt – a scientific term, don't worry – is Tunisian President Kaïs Saïed. Journalist Zied el-Heni was arrested this week after he reportedly criticised the “insulting the head of state” part of the penal code. He has since been released, but his arrest is part of a pattern of the Saïed government, which has seen the media and activists being targeted.

Now, we know *Keeping Up With The Coupdashians* is squarely in the domain of reality TV, but we do feel it has much in common with Bollywood classics. Like, for example, the fact that the drama *simply never ends*. Mali, fresh off the back of a referendum whose results were mysteriously kept secret until five minutes before this column's deadline, has demanded that the United Nations withdraw its peacekeepers. Addressing the UN Security Council, Malian Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop said that MINUSMA – the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali – has “become part of



Et tu, Gluté? Tunisia's President Kaïs Saïed is not amused, and he has the draconian penal code to prove it.

the problem, by fuelling inter-community tensions”. Which we must admit does make sense – for multidimensional missions you'd be better off sending in the Avengers – even if they're just puppets of decadent Western imperialism.

Sadly, even Bollywood films do eventually come to an end, and reality returns, as it always must. And so we mourn the loss of those lives lost in peril on the sea when a boat carrying hundreds of refugees capsized off the coast of Greece, with over 80 people confirmed dead and hundreds still missing.

And we remember Sudan, where the war is entering yet another week as its shaky ceasefire crumbles. Already, the fighting has displaced 2.5-million people, more than a thousand people have been killed – among them at least 330 children.

If all things truly must end, let this war be first. ■

The lessons we learnt from Nigeria's election

Nearly 70-million voters... didn't. The electoral body fumbled the job. And yet politics is proliferating.

Tererai Obey Sithole

Ruling party candidate Bola Tinubu won this year's general election – in a vote considered controversial due to the poor performance of the electoral commission, the failure of digital technology to safeguard the polls, and accusations of electoral fraud. But beyond the quality of the process, what lessons can we learn from the elections?

Nigerian politics are competitive

The presidential vote was split three ways between Tinubu and two strong opposition candidates: Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party and Peter Obi of the Labour Party. A fourth candidate also won over a million votes. This disrupted the traditional two-party system, and while future coalitions may re-concentrate power, the Nigerian political scene is currently more extensive than at any time in the past two decades.

Gaining popularity is one thing, getting people to vote is another

Obi did well in opinion polls, but appears to have struggled to translate this into votes, in part because he had a weaker set

of personal and political networks at his disposal. This is an important reminder that elections are not won by individuals and identities but by carefully cultivated power structures.

The real winner was voter apathy

Obi was not alone in struggling with turnout. In 2023 Nigeria had a record of 93-million registered voters but only 27% voted, the lowest figure since 1999. Tens of millions of citizens went to the effort of registering to vote, collecting their voter's card and then did not go to the polls.

There may be a number of reasons for this, but none of them are good. Citizens may have been too scared of political violence, too disbelieving that the election would be credible, or simply unconvinced that it would make a difference on who won. Whichever factor was the most important, it suggests that the crisis of legitimacy facing the political system is deepening. ■



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THE BIG PICTURE

In the dark: Officials in Bamako count ballots in Mali's referendum. On Friday, the electoral body announced that Malians voted 'overwhelmingly' in favour of changes to the Constitution proposed by its military-led interim government.

Photo: Ousmane Makaveli/AFP via Getty Images



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