

with Mail & Guardian

# The Continent

## Egypt wants the Nile to flow faster

*But South Sudan  
is not so sure*

Photo: Arsenie  
Coseac

# Inside:

- **Britain:** Their queen is dead. Do you care? (p7)
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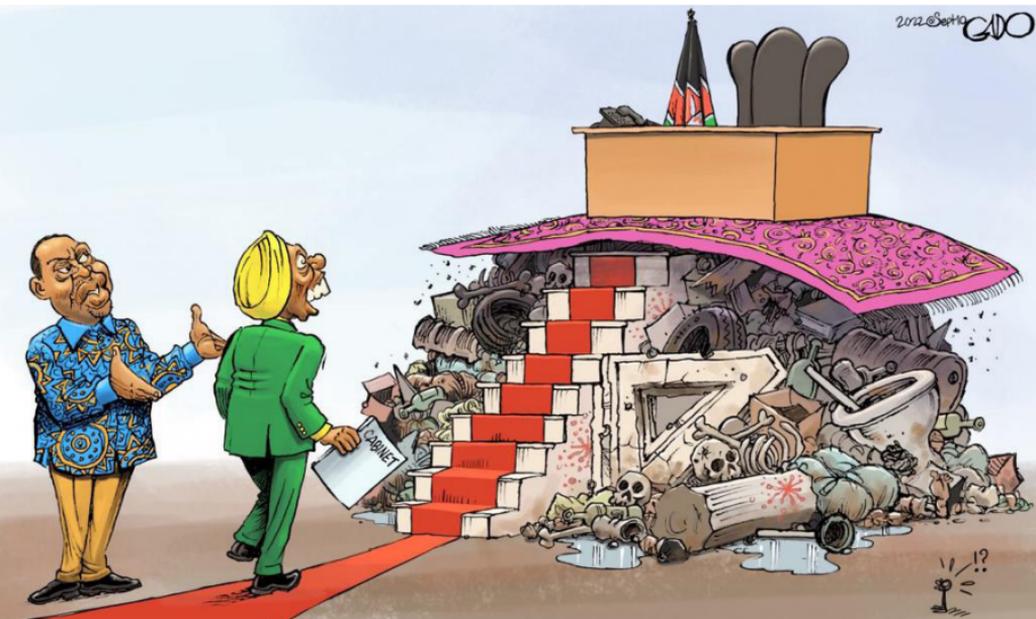


**Cover:** The fate of Africa's largest freshwater wetland – and one of the world's most important ecosystems – hangs in the balance. The White Nile flows through the Sudd Wetland, in South Sudan, but some people don't think that it flows fast enough. A plan to dredge the river and its tributaries, sponsored by Egypt, has been halted for now. But the wetland, and the people, animals and plants that depend on it, are far from safe (p12)



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## NIGERIA

### ‘Sister Act’ caught trafficking children

Fifteen children in Rivers State, Nigeria have been rescued from a woman masquerading as a nun, who is alleged to be involved in child trafficking. “On 3 September 2022, Operation Restore Peace Personnel of the Command, acting on credible information regarding hideout of child traffickers, stormed Omuigwe Abuja Phase II, Aluu, in Ikwerre Local Government Area where a lady, who claimed to be a Reverend Sister Maureen Wechinwu, age 44, was arrested,” said the state’s police commissioner. Wechinwu insists that she really is a nun, and denies the allegations.

## ZANZIBAR

### A new silicon dream! (This time on a beach)

This week, Wasoko – a tech firm touted as Africa’s fastest-growing company – moved to Zanzibar in the launch of yet another African attempt to replicate America’s Silicon Valley tech hub. Silicon Zanzibar is a partnership between the government and private companies to attract and relocate technology workers and firms from across Africa to the archipelago, currently best loved for its sandy beaches, but historically an Indian Ocean trade hub between eastern Africa and the Middle East. Kenya’s similar ambition for a Silicon Savannah has so far not really managed to materialise.

**UNITED KINGDOM****Woman hired to clean man's mess**

In the same week that it lost its queen, the United Kingdom bagged itself its fourth prime minister since 2016. Liz Truss is only the third woman to be prime minister in that country's history. She inherits a country in decline from Boris Johnson, who was pushed out of the position after one of his many lies prompted his cabinet to mutiny. Britain is struggling with a skyrocketing cost of living, with many unable to pay electricity bills as they head into winter. One of Truss's first actions was to announce tax breaks for the very rich. So that'll fix it, we guess.



**Truss issues: Liz Truss gives her first speech as Prime Minister at 10 Downing Street.** Photo: Carl Court/Getty Images

**SOMALIA****Time is running out, famine is imminent**

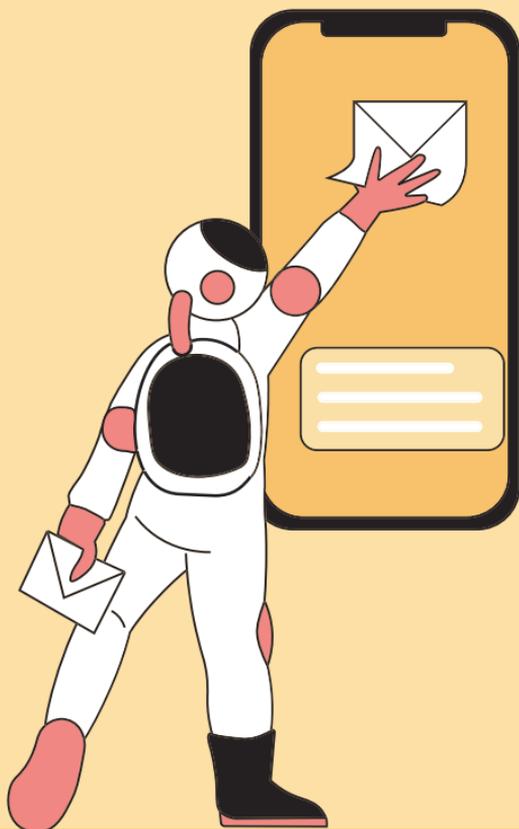
By the end of this year, the Baidoa and Burhakaba districts of Somalia will likely have entered a state of famine, the UN and other aid agencies are warning. The famine will last until March 2023, putting hundreds of thousands, including internally displaced people, at risk of starvation and death. The aid agencies are asking for more funding to enable them to distribute food in this "narrow window" before the famine happens. In 2011, more than 250,000 died of starvation in the country.

**UGANDA****Parliament's war on dancing thwarted**

Parliamentarians have tried to ban Uganda's Nyege Nyege festival, one of East Africa's most popular music festivals, saying it involves "sexual immorality". The speaker of parliament accused it of "promoting gays". They were overruled by ministers, however, with the prime minister saying the festival would go ahead next week "with strict guidelines". The festival, whose name is derived from the Luganda word for the urge to dance, will see over 200 acts staged on the banks of the Nile.

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## KENYA

## African time? Nah, it's George o'clock now

George Natembeya, the newly elected governor of Kenya's Trans-Nzoia county, has received public praise for his strict rules on meeting times. When some officials on his executive team arrived late for a meeting, Natembeya did not permit them to enter. "When I say we meet at 9am sharp I mean 9am sharp and not 9.01am. I personally arrived here five minutes earlier so everyone should learn to keep time," he said. "Past the said time, if you are out, remain there."

## ETHIOPIA

## 'Unwinnable war' resumes in Tigray

Renewed fighting in Ethiopia sets back a fragile peace process and efforts to get help to the people in Tigray, think-tank Crisis Group has warned. Fighting resumed on August 24 after a nine-month truce. Tigrayan rebels have pushed into neighbouring Amhara while government forces and allied Eritrean soldiers re-entered Tigray. Crisis Group called on the government to address the issues that stalled the peace process, rather than go back into what it calls an "unwinnable war".



**Hold me closer: DRC dignitaries cling to each other as the bridge fails.** Image: Still from video

## DRC

## Whoa, yeah these bridges ain't loyal

A footbridge in the Democratic Republic of Congo's capital Kinshasa collapsed just as the ribbon launching it was being snipped, sending dignitaries tumbling and onlookers bursting into laughter. One of the VIPs involved in the kerfuffle was Hurlaine Badila, whose charity supported the construction of the bridge. Onlookers did help the VIPs off the broken edifice, and fortunately no one was injured. Hours after the collapse, reconstruction work on the bridge had started, with assurance that they will meet safety standards this time.

# Empire



**Empirical evidence: Queen Elizabeth II tours newly-independent Ghana in 1961.**

## The sun sets on the queen's long, long reign

**Crowds in Britain are mourning the queen's death. Everywhere else, however, her legacy is bitterly contested.**

**B**ritain used to rule much of this continent, and the world. Such was the empire that a young Queen Elizabeth II inherited when she assumed the throne in 1952. By her death on Thursday, that empire had all but disappeared.

In Africa, the British presence has been reduced to just one tiny archipelago in the Indian Ocean. The Chagos Islands actually belong to Mauritius, but Britain continues to occupy them illegally, with the late queen's explicit blessing.

In office and in life, she outlasted almost all of the liberation leaders who forced the British Empire to relinquish its colonies.

On the continent, reactions to her death have included praise and sympathy. "The queen was a great friend of Africa," said Gabon's President Ali Bongo Ondimba.

And they have encompassed angry critiques of the enduringly destructive legacy of British colonialism. "She never once acknowledged the atrocities that her family inflicted on native people that Britain invaded across the world," said the Economic Freedom Fighters, an opposition party in South Africa. "The British royal family stands on the shoulders of millions of slaves." ■



**Tell us what you think:** How should Queen Elizabeth II be remembered? What is her legacy in your country? Send a letter to the editor (no more than 100 words) to [letters@thecontinent.org](mailto:letters@thecontinent.org), or on our WhatsApp/Signal/Telegram lines. We'll publish a selection next week. The best letter, as chosen by the editorial team, will receive a \$100 honorarium.

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# World

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## **‘Prosecute the parents of dead migrants’, says top UNHCR official**

**Vincent Cochelet’s comments have earned widespread condemnation, but the agency is covering for him**

**Simon Allison**

**O**n Tuesday, a group of grieving mothers gathered in Zarzis, Tunisia. They were mourning the disappearance of their children – asylum seekers who had embarked on the dangerous journey across the Mediterranean to Europe, and who had not been heard from again.

At least 875 asylum seekers have died making this journey so far this year.

In response, Vincent Cochetel – the special envoy for the Western and Central Mediterranean situation for the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) – called for these mothers to be prosecuted for the apparent crime of “encouraging” their children to risk death.

“The same mothers had no problem encouraging or funding their children to embark on those journeys,” he said on Twitter, offering no evidence to support his claim. “Like in Senegal, symbolically prosecuting parents for putting at risk their children could trigger serious

attitudinal change on death journeys.”

Cochetel did not respond to a request for comment from *The Continent*. After an online backlash, Cochetel later acknowledged that “my comments were inappropriate” – but notably did not retract his views.

UNHCR told *The Continent* that this is not an official position. “We do not support prosecuting family members. The only exception would be if they were involved in criminal or trafficking activities.” The refugee agency said that although “we fully understand the reactions to the tweet”, Cochetel would remain in his position.

In 2020, three men in Senegal were charged and convicted to two years in prison for putting their children’s lives at risk.

No evidence was offered by either Cochetel or UNHCR to support the contention that this has had any impact on the decisions of potential asylum seekers.



**Victim blaming:**  
At least 875  
asylum seekers  
have died in the  
Mediterranean  
so far this year.  
Photo: AFP

## A moral vacuum

Cochetel's comments attracted widespread condemnation. Jo Vearey, the director of the African Centre for Migration and Society, described his views as disconcerting and disappointing. "The suggestion that people – of any age – are to blame for finding themselves forced to travel under dangerous conditions is irresponsible. We know that this is about a much bigger issue: we should be asking why these journeys are so dangerous and what is needed to ensure people can travel safely," she told *The Continent*.

Rasna Warah, a Kenyan journalist whose latest book *Lords of Impunity* examines the culture of impunity at the United Nations, said: "I find this strange coming from a UNHCR official because the organisation he represents is supposed to be helping refugees and those in need, not vilifying them. I doubt he would have said the same about a

Ukrainian fleeing his or her country."

She added: "The migrant and refugee crisis we are facing in Africa is partly the result of draconian, and frankly racist, policies of Western countries that have made it almost impossible for Africans to legally enter Europe or the United States, and created conditions of extreme hardship."

Yvonne Owuor, a Kenyan author and essayist, said that Cochetel's comments reflect a fundamental lack of compassion and empathy. "To read the lack of these values in the words of an official entrusted by the world, mind you, to be a custodian of such hopes; to read a text that reduces egregious cases of human failures that have led to unspeakable tragedy as caused by, in effect, simply bad mothering is not merely stupid but also suggests that there are new and shocking nadirs into moral vacuity into which our humanity is quite willing to descend." ■

# Pakistan



Troubled waters:  
Displaced people  
wade down a  
street in Peshawar,  
Pakistan. Photo:  
Getty Images

## A third of Pakistan is under water

This is not normal.

**M**onths of torrential rains, coupled with run-off from the melting glaciers in the Himalayas, have caused flooding in Pakistan on a scale that has never been seen before.

The numbers speak for themselves: The south-west province of Sindh has experienced more than four times as much rainfall as usual. Ninety percent of

its crops are ruined. More than 50-million of Pakistan's 220-million population have been displaced. Lake Manchar, the largest lake, has burst its banks. At least 1,391 people have died, with more still to be counted, and the economic damage is estimated to be at least \$30-billion.

"There is no doubt that a generation will be cast backwards as already meagre education and health services are violently disrupted," wrote author Fatima Bhutto in the *Guardian*. "This is a tragedy of nightmarish proportions."

It is also, Bhutto argued, a vision of all of our futures in a world where global heating is not contained. "This epic humanitarian crisis is a peek into the apocalyptic future that awaits us all." ■

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# Burkina Faso

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## Dozens killed in latest Sahel militant attack

The January coup was supposed to improve the security situation, but little has changed

Amélie David in Ouagadougou

**O**n Sunday, Burkina Faso's leader addressed the nation to reassure Burkinabés that his security measures were working.

Less than 24 hours later, a convoy of civilian vehicles hit an improvised explosive device (IED). Thirty-five people died on the spot and 37 were evacuated to the capital Ouagadougou with injuries. The defence minister, Barthélémy Simporé, told journalists on Wednesday that the bomb was triggered remotely and hit a vehicle carrying women and children.

The incident, which happened on the road between the northern town of Djibo and Ouagadougou, was the fourth in two months. On 1 July, 4 civilians were killed when their tricycle hit an IED along the same road. Two subsequent attacks – on the Djibo-Bourzanga road and the Dori-

Sebba road, both near the border with Niger – killed 17 soldiers.

The government says that in the same period it killed 84 militants.

“This is proof that we don't have control of this route,” said Mahamadou Savadogo, a former police officer and now security expert, after the Monday attack.

The continued violence puts military leader Paul Henri Sandaogo Damiba in an awkward position. He led the January coup that removed the country's elected president Roch Kaboré, and justified it by saying that the civilian government had failed to pacify the country. “Terrorists aren't reduced like we would have thought and they keep their ability to be harmful,” Siaka Coulibaly, a political commentator, told *The Continent*.

**Thirty-five people died on the spot and 37 were injured and evacuated to the capital.**

Even Damiba appears to have a slight change in tone. He said, after the Monday attack, that the security situation is everyone's responsibility.

While agreeing that everyone had a role to play, Savadogo points out that this responsibility is not equally shared. “The government has the responsibility to restore peace,” he said, adding that Burkina Faso is struggling to see results because the army is still not united. ■

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# South Sudan

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## **Some say the White Nile is flowing too slowly. Not everyone agrees**

**A plan to dredge the Sudd Wetland has caused chaos within South Sudan's government – and highlighted major geopolitical fault lines.**



Photo: Julien Behal/PA  
Images via Getty Images

## David Monodanga in Juba

**O**n its long, lazy journey from its source in Uganda to the delta in lower Egypt, the White Nile passes through the Sudd Wetland in South Sudan. This is Africa's largest freshwater wetland.

Here, the river widens, and its flow slows dramatically. Water can take a year to pass through the wetland's swamps and grassland, and up to half of it evaporates in the process.

As it flows, the water sustains the million people who live there, as well as an extraordinary abundance of animal and plant life. The surrounding area is otherwise dry and inhospitable. The water that evaporates is carried by winds to other parts of the country, where it falls as rain and sustains forests and crops.

Earlier this year, however, something happened that could forever change the delicate balance of this ecosystem – among the largest freshwater ecosystems in the world.

In June, Unity State's public works minister Lam Tungwar announced that the Republic of Egypt had donated dredging equipment, including an excavator, to the state. The equipment was intended to dredge the Naam River, a Nile tributary that feeds into the wetland. Tungwar said the plan had been approved by the national ministry of irrigation and water resources.

Dredging the Naam and other tributaries, along with the White Nile itself, would mean clearing the rivers of all the accumulated silt, mud, weeds and rubbish that slows the water down. Once



**Liquid asset: Egypt's prosperity is entirely dependent the Nile river, pictured here flowing through the capital Cairo.**

dredged, the waters will move much faster through wetland. The Unity State government argues that this will reduce the risk of flooding, while the benefit for Egypt – which relies on the Nile for 90% of its water – is clear: faster-flowing waters means less time for evaporation, which means more water will eventually end up in Egypt.

In the national ministry of environment and forestry in the capital Juba, the unveiling of the dredging equipment was met with shock and outrage. Minister Josephine Napwon said that she had no prior knowledge of the agreement with Egypt, and had no idea how the equipment had been transported into South Sudan. She said without approval from the national government, no one must dare dredge the Nile and its tributaries:

“We are here to protect the environment and anything that endangers



**Unfinished business: Work on the Jonglei Canal was abandoned in 1984.** Photo: Michel Laplace-Toulouse/Biosphoto via AFP

our environment we will not accept,” she said.

Even the presidency had no idea, said a spokesperson for Salva Kiir, adding that no dredging projects had been approved.

For now, the rivers that flow through the Sudd remain undredged. But the wetland is far from safe.

### Channeling frustration

In 1978, construction began on the Jonglei Canal – an extraordinarily ambitious project to make the Nile almost entirely bypass the Sudd Wetland. This project was conceived decades earlier by British colonialists, but was eventually implemented by the Sudanese government in Khartoum, and funded by Egypt. This was before South Sudan won its independence from the north.

Construction continued until 1984, when separatist rebels kidnapped some of the workers on the project. “The rebels saw the canal as a theft of water by Egypt that would deprive the Sudd’s nomadic Dinka,

Nuer, and Shilluk communities of fisheries and the huge seasonally flooded pastures essential for their livestock,” reported Fred Pearce for *YaleEnvironment360*.

Those rebels belonged to the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement, the same party that won independence and now governs South Sudan. Yet the Jonglei Canal is suddenly back on the agenda.

In February, the vice-president for infrastructure Taban Deng Gai said that the canal should be completed. He said that doing so would help prevent flooding in the area, which forced nearly half a million people from their homes last year. “For our land not to be submerged by flood, let’s allow this water to flow to those who need it in Egypt,” he said.

This put him at odds with the environment ministry, which said it would refuse to approve the resumption of work on the canal “because of the ecosystem services that Sudd provides to our nation, the region, and the world at large,” in the words of Minister Napwon.

**Rising tensions:  
Authorities have  
already begun filling  
the Grand Ethiopian  
Renaissance Dam.**  
Photo: Getty Images



The environment ministry's undersecretary Joseph Africano told *The Continent* that neither the Jonglei Canal nor river dredging would be an effective solution to the flooding problem. The cost of either plan would be catastrophic for the wetland, he said. "When you drain and dredge those rivers and take the water into the main Nile, you're simply draining most of the basin and in a matter of a year or two, we'll lose all the water in that area."

## Water wars

In recent years, the subject of who controls the waters of the Nile – and which countries get how much water – has been hotly contested. By virtue of a colonial-era treaty, Egypt and Sudan have historically been guaranteed the lion's share of the water. But this has been challenged in recent years, principally by Ethiopia, which has partially completed construction of the massive Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, over Egypt's strenuous objections. The dam will greatly increase Ethiopia's ability to produce power, but also gives

it the ability to influence how and when water flows further downstream – a potential catastrophe for Egypt in times of drought.

Talks between Ethiopia and Egypt have stalled, with Egypt's ambassador to the United States reiterating recently that Egypt will "have to look into all its options" to resolve the dispute. The country's President Abdel Fatah Al-Sisi has previously warned of the potential for conflict if the situation is not resolved.

This, perhaps, explains Egypt's enthusiasm for the Sudd dredging project. The Jonglei Canal project, if it were to go ahead, would also be in Egypt's national interest. It is less clear, however, whether it would be in the national interest of South Sudan.

"Whenever the canal is dug, there will be a drought, the area will be dry and it will affect our ecosystem mostly. In addition to that, it will affect us as human beings, because we depend on water," said Winnie Rufas, a member of the Geological Society of South Sudan. ■

# Nigeria

## Nearly eight months later, all the public universities are still shut

Students are battling depression, anguish and anxiety as professors strike for better pay

Adebayo Abdulrahman in Ibadan

**M**uiz Oyekolam, a student of the University of Ibadan, simply couldn't muster the will to get out of bed – even though he was already a few minutes late for a trip scheduled for that day. For the next three hours, his eyes remained fixed on his room's ceiling.

Since that Tuesday morning in May, these gloomy episodes have descended upon him at least four times a week. When he eventually leaves the bed, he struggles to engage in any productive activity.

"I am emotionally depressed," he tells *The Continent*. He believes the source of his agony is the closure of his university – nearly eight months ago, and counting

– and the cloud of uncertainty it has cast over his future.

It's not just Ibadan. The strike, by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (Asuu), has forced all of Nigeria's public universities to close, affecting more than 70 institutions. On August 30, the strike was extended "indefinitely" and is set to equal the nine-month walkout of 2020.

Over the past two decades, Asuu has called 16 strikes, which have closed Nigeria's public universities for more than four and half years in total. The demands of these strikes have varied but largely been about funding. Nigeria spends between 6-8% of its national budget on education, substantially less than the 15-20% that is recommended by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco).

In the latest strike, according to Asuu president Emmanuel Osodoke, the union wants the government to revitalise university infrastructure, review the salary scale for lecturers and pay allowances, among other demands.

By late August, it seemed like some progress had been made in negotiating with the federal government. The education minister said all the demands had been resolved, except a demand by Asuu that its members be paid for the months they have been on strike. But the union dismissed these comments as misinformation and misrepresentation,



**Bad education:** Strikers gather in Abuja to protest against low salaries, university closures and lack of state funding. Photo: Adam Abu-bashal/Anadolu Agency/AFP

and announced the strike's extension.

### **Anguish, depression, anxiety**

The union says successive governments have neglected Nigeria's higher education and that the strike is necessary to save public universities from complete collapse. "The students are not being punished – what we are doing is fighting for the future of the Nigerian university system," Osodoke told journalists in February when the strike started.

But students affected don't share Osodoke's perspective.

"I wake up in the middle of the night and ask myself, 'Why?' – only to go back to bed without an answer," says Abiodun Jamiu, a final year student of political science at the Usmanu Danfodiyo University in Sokoto. He initially dealt with the disruption of his studies, due to be completed in June 2022, by volunteering at a charity in his hometown.

Then, one morning, he just left. "I left because I felt I had no direction," he says.

He later withdrew his application for

a fellowship opportunity because, if the strike ended, he would not be able to resume studies and travel for it. "And that's all this strike has brought me: unnecessary anguish and lack of direction."

Jibril Abdulmalik, a lecturer and consultant psychiatrist at the Ibadan College of Medicine is seeing such despondence in many students. He says that in addition to losing interest in their studies, students are developing anxiety disorders and adds that "depression is also a common consequence, with associated suicidal behaviours".

Abdulmalik, who is part of the strike, says these are not problems only for students and their families but potentially a national problem too. He fears students may turn to self-prescribed and recreational drugs to deal with these mental health issues.

Then, the country would have "a restive youthful population that is frustrated, bored and blunted by psychoactive drug abuse," he says. "It is simply a ticking time bomb for the nation." ■

# No justice for survivors of attacks against people with albinism

**Authorities are not taking this seriously, say activists working to protect those who are being targeted**

**Tafadzwa Mwanengurenani in Lusaka**

**O**ne night in May last year Kabwe Musonda, her two children, and her mother had just gone to bed when she heard a knock. Male voices claimed to be Zambian police searching for drugs.

When she opened the door to their modest home in Mbala, on the outskirts of Zambia's capital, Lusaka, she encountered three men dressed in black coats, masks, and hats. With guns pointed at her, they warned her to remain calm.

The other two entered the room where Musonda's mother and her two-year-old daughter, Jamimah, were sleeping. Shortly after, she heard her son screaming: "Mama, they're cutting off her hand!"

In a flash, the attackers chopped off Jamimah's hand and fled into the night, leaving the family traumatised and Jamimah mutilated. The child survived, but bears permanent scars from the attack.

Jamimah's mother and the police believe her attackers targeted her because her albinism – a genetic condition that prevents the body from making enough

colour, or melanin, to protect the skin from the sun.

Two months after Jamimah's attack, unknown men assaulted nine-year-old Sinya Lwanja in the Chasefu district in Eastern Province. They have never been caught. The boy is also lucky to be alive: most victims of such attacks don't survive.

Although crimes against people with albinism are underreported, the high values attached to the illicit trade of their organs make these crimes one of the most lucrative and harmful. Some communities believe that the body parts of people with albinism are imbued with the ability to cure myriad diseases and bring good luck, success and wealth.

Human rights activists are also concerned that the economic depression from Covid-19 and the growing cost-of-living crisis has led to an increased willingness to engage in such attacks.

No arrests have been made in Lwanja's case. Four suspects were arrested in connection with the attack on Jamimah, with the help of her grandmother who told the police she recognised a T-shirt worn by one of the attackers.

During the investigations, the police took suspects to the hospital where Musonda had been admitted, and she identified the voice of one of them.

However, the police released the suspects a few days later, claiming there was insufficient evidence to prosecute.

Keita Coumba Makalou, co-founder and executive director of the Salif Keita Global Foundation, an international organisation that advocates for the rights of people with albinism, described the treatment of Jamimah's case as a "whitewash of justice".

"In cases involving ritual crimes, especially in villages, most people know the possible suspects," Makalou told *The Continent*. "The local authorities need to take these investigations seriously, and incentivise people to come forward with information."

Zambia has nearly 30,000 people living with albinism.

John Chiti – a musician, human rights activist and member of the civilian Zambia Police Service Commission which oversees police appointments and disciplinary issues – who has albinism, termed the failure to secure prosecutions in both cases as "worrisome".

"We are not sure if the suspects were released because the evidence was insufficient, or maybe they were clever enough to cover up the evidence," he said. "We understand that everyone is innocent until proven guilty, and the authorities may not want to prosecute wrong people. But we worry that the cases will likely go cold like many others."

Moreover, he blamed shoddy police



**Targeted: People with albinism face stigma and discrimination and are attacked out of ignorant fear and grim avarice.** Photo: Fredrik Lerneryd/AFP

investigations for failing to bring suspects to book. "Such cases would require a lot of forensic evidence, and/or DNA, but it seems like our country is poorly equipped in this area," Chiti said.

Makalou said the UN Human Rights Council had failed to implement measures to protect people with albinism, especially in Africa, even after appointing Nigeria's Ikponwosa Ero in 2015 as the first independent expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism.

"The plight of people with albinism in Africa is the main reason for the global attention albinism has generated. The UN appointed an expert from Nigeria because it wanted to change the situation for people living with the condition in Africa, but little has changed so far," Makalou said. ■

## East African federation: Is progress outpacing the people?

**I**ntegration of the seven member states of the East African Community (EAC) has come a long way. A customs union and common market have been in place since 2005 and 2010, respectively. Two more major steps are looming on the horizon – a political confederation in 2023 and a common currency in 2024.

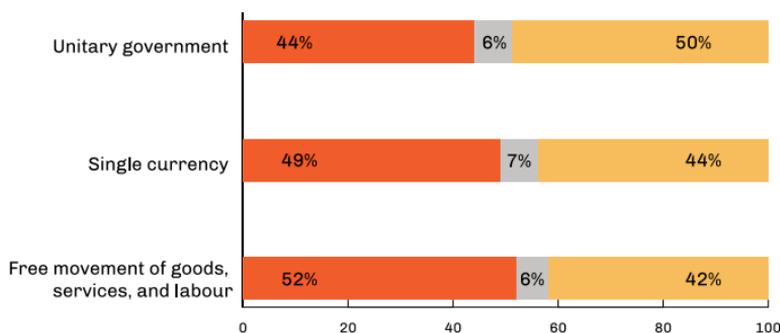
But is progress outpacing the people?

In Kenya, Afrobarometer found in November 2021 that only a third of citizens had heard “some” (21%) or “a great deal” (13%) about the proposed East African Federation. And popular support for key aspects of integration is shaky.

Only a narrow majority (52%) of Kenyans approve of free movement of goods, services and labour across national borders. Even fewer support a monetary union (49%) and the formation of a unitary government for East Africa (44%).

Making regional integration work will require the engagement of its agents and beneficiaries – the people of Kenya as well as of Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda. If our Kenya findings are any indication, national governments and the EAC Secretariat still face the challenge of building public awareness and support.

**Kenyans' views on aspects of East African integration | 2021**



Approve/Strongly approve    Neither/Don't know    Disapprove/Strongly disapprove

**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.

# Migrants are entitled to healthcare in South Africa

**A top South African health official has gone viral for accusing foreign patients of burdening the country's health system. This attack ignores law and decades of foreign policy.**

**Laura López González**

**I**n a recent viral video, a member of the executive council of South Africa's Limpopo province is seen telling a Zimbabwean in-patient at a local hospital, "You are killing my health system."

Phophi Ramathuba, the official in the video, is leaning into the trope of the "migrant burden" that is not uncommon in the country.

In the wake of the video, Health Minister Joe Phaahla spent part of last week negotiating with vigilantes at a public hospital near the capital Pretoria, who for weeks have been demanding that patients show proof of documentation before they can enter. The group has managed to turn away at least one pregnant woman with a life-threatening condition, according to Doctors Without Borders.

For centuries, South African mines relied on migrant workers from Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) countries. Men left nearby countries healthy but often returned home from the mines sick with tuberculosis or silicosis,

a degenerative lung disease caused by inhaling silica dust while mining for gold.

South Africa's mines had among the world's highest rates of tuberculosis by 2012. People living with HIV are at an increased risk of developing tuberculosis. Conditions in the mines didn't help – cramped living, other mining-related lung diseases and poor access to healthcare.

## **Vigilantes have been demanding that patients show proof of documentation**

"If tuberculosis was a snake, its head would be in South Africa," Aaron Motsoaledi, the country's health minister at the time, was fond of saying.

Motsoaledi agreed with other SADC health ministers that South Africa reaped the rewards of migrant miners' labour but did not pay the costs of caring for them. In 2012, health ministers released a SADC declaration on tuberculosis in the mines calling for, in part, the harmonisation of national HIV and tuberculosis treatment

to enable cross-border care.

With this policy, Motsoaledi carried on a decades-old SADC tradition of recognising that health in the region was interconnected. Yet he, too, often attacked foreign patients for allegedly straining the country's health system, only ever citing data from a handful of Johannesburg maternity wards.

Nonetheless, his run as health minister left completely intact a set of national laws and directives that to this day enshrine the right to healthcare in South Africa for migrants, mainly from the region.

SADC meanwhile continues to explore ways of collaborating on healthcare by, for instance possibly pooling medicine procurement between countries to ensure better prices – and improving cross-border billing mechanisms dating back to at least 1995. In the era of Covid-19, regional

co-operation on health is expected to increase.

South African laws guarantee free healthcare for young children, pregnant and breastfeeding people, or those seeking abortions or HIV or tuberculosis treatment regardless of immigration status. For other services, SADC migrants, regardless of documentation, should legally be treated just like South Africans.

Despite these migrant friendly policies and laws, South Africa's politicians can't seem to resist the myth of the migrant burden and this affects South Africans too.

"It's not just foreigners caught in the crossfire," a South African woman recently told the news website *TimesLive* after she was accused of being an immigrant outside a public hospital because of, she believes, her darker skin colour. "Next time, [it will be because of] how you are dressed." ■

## What does SA law say about migrants and healthcare?

- The 2003 National Health Act provides certain types of free care to anyone, regardless of documentation.
- Everyone is entitled to free healthcare at clinics, free abortions and no one can be refused emergency care.
- A 2007 national health department directive guarantees free HIV and tuberculosis care for all, regardless of immigration

status.

- At hospitals, refugees, asylum seekers and SADC migrants should, like South African citizens, undergo a means test to determine what they will pay for hospital care.
- Undocumented people from outside SADC at hospitals – except pregnant or breastfeeding people, those seeking an abortion or children under six – are expected to pay the full fees as laid out in the national schedule. Provincial health departments can impose additional procedures and fees.

# In Nigeria, the written word comes at too high a cost

The country's literary scene is under threat if ordinary people simply can't afford to read

**Bolu Akindele in Lagos**

**W**hen publishing house Masobe Books opened its doors in 2018, there were already signs that the Nigerian economy was broken. Inflation was high, the naira was weakening against the dollar, and the petrol price was rising. Nevertheless, the newcomer in Nigeria's active literary scene hoped to transform publishing by providing stronger support for writers and encouraging more people to read.

Since then, the economy has worsened significantly – and the country's literary scene has not been spared.

On 22 May this year, the naira hit a new record low. In June, Nigeria's annual inflation rate increased again, to 18.6%, amid a global cost-of-living crisis.

“Our costs of production have nearly tripled across the board and it has become more and more difficult to bring



**The books stop here: Inflation has led to a cost-of-reading crisis in Nigeria.**

Photo: KC Nwakalor/Getty Images

you the products you have trusted us to deliver,” said Masobe Books in May, as it announced drastic cuts to its operations.

The company promised not to increase the price of its books, but it is in the minority. The worsening economy is affecting every aspect of Nigeria's literary scene. Bookshops in particular have been badly hit, as they have to deal with everything from increases in freight costs (in some cases up 50% from last year) to a dramatic rise in the price of fuel for their generators, themselves an additional but necessary cost in a country whose national grid has already collapsed seven times this year.

The economic hardships are all too



**Shelf defence: Traders in Nigeria are having to think outside of the books to keep their businesses – and the educational and literary health of the nation – afloat.**

Photo: Bolu Akindele

real for Tobi Eyinade, co-founder of Roving Heights bookstore. “Monthly bills and service charges at our major outlets in Lagos and Abuja reflected this harsh reality,” he tells *The Continent*, adding that they had reduced opening hours and increased prices to try to cope.

In September 2020, for example, Roving Heights sold Bolu Babalola’s bestseller *Love in Colour* for 4,000 naira (about \$10.40 at the time). The same book now retails for 5,500 naira (\$13).

Chinonso Nzeh, a Lagos-based creative writer and law student, laments: “Two years ago, if I went to the bookstore with 20,000 naira, I would come home with eight books. Now, I don’t think 20,000 naira can get even five. It’s sad.”

### **A difficult chapter**

“When the economy is this bad, people buy fewer books,” says Uchenna Emelife of Book O’ Clock in Sokoto. He worries about the consequences for Nigeria’s educational and cultural landscape if

ordinary people can’t afford to read.

Even the most dedicated of readers are looking for cheaper options – which often means they spend their money outside of Nigeria on digital subscription services that cost less than \$10 per month.

“My book club members like buying physical copies of books, but many have switched to subscription services like Scribd or Kobo,” says Aryn Bawa-Allah, a book reviewer and podcaster.

Bookstores are having to get creative. For Roving Heights, this means more promotions and events, and an option to pay in instalments. For Book Nook, a relatively new children’s reading club in Lagos, it means prioritising locally-published books which are cheaper than foreign titles and less vulnerable to the uncertainty of foreign exchange fluctuations.

Eyinade is hopeful. “We’re coming up with ways to mitigate and forestall the challenges,” he says. “We’re innovating.”



# Wole Soyinka: 'Where is the last rational place in the world?'

Everything is getting to be a bit too much for the Nigerian playwright and author – and we can relate

Lebohang Mojabelo

Reflecting on *Chronicles From the Land of the Happiest People on Earth*, his third novel (and first in nearly 50 years), I spent a comfortable hour on Zoom speaking to renowned author Wole Soyinka for the Johannesburg Review of Books as we unpacked his career and motivations behind this latest work.

As he himself admits, Soyinka is not particularly drawn to being a novelist, preferring to be a poet and a playwright. But having spent a lifetime speaking truth to power and fighting injustices that never seem to end, he is weary – and that motivated this particular novel.

Although it might not have happened at all. Published last year, the book was written before America's disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan, an event that only reinforced Soyinka's world-weariness. "If Afghanistan had happened before I wrote this, I probably would not have written it. I think I would just have said, 'I am tired.'"

The Afghanistan débâcle reinforced a feeling that there was nowhere to escape



Photo: Nobel Foundation Archive

the pressures of the modern world. "Where is the last rational place left in the world for heaven's sake?" he said. "Where does one go?"

For Soyinka, corruption now seems to have larger international links; interpersonal violence is seemingly just

as significant as political oppression; and he is incredibly stirred by the sheer magnitude of death caused by human sacrifice and groups like Fulani herdsmen and Boko Haram.

He is especially critical of the nexus between religion and politics, which is at the heart of his latest novel. “You used to hear of a military industrial complex, now you have a secular religious complex which is spelling the doom of Nigerians and African societies,” he said.

*Chronicles of the Happiest People on Earth* is centred on a secret society that sources and sells body parts, mainly for human sacrifice. It is led by respected people, including religious and political leaders. Four good friends find themselves at the centre of uncovering this criminal enterprise, putting their own lives at risk.

The novel begins with the staged journey of religious guru Papa Davina, who has a penchant for displays of “miracles”, recognising spirituality as the quickest way to achieve power and control. Working with one of the main political leaders in the country, Sir Goodie, Papa Davina represents the new face of politics in Nigeria and across the world – one in which religion and politics are theatrically intertwined.

It is a satirical novel – suspiciously pointing to Nigeria as the “happiest nation on Earth”. As Papa Davina puts it: “If the world produces dung, the dung must pile up somewhere. So, if our nation is indeed the dung heap of the world, it means we are performing a service to humanity. Now that is ... perspective.”

When he accepted the Nobel prize for

literature in 1986, Soyinka says, it seemed simple enough that Africa was fighting the last frontier of oppression: Apartheid South Africa. There was hope. A hope that has clearly worn him down and which left him unable to write the book in his home country. Instead, he wrote it somewhere else – he does not say where – choosing to create some distance for him to adequately capture this intersection between old hope and continued disappointment.

In his latest offering, and in conversation, Soyinka reminds us of the place African literature has in providing an intervention and analysis on the African project. Literature provides an essential form of critique on current cultural and political institutions. This is a position that Soyinka as a writer has intentionally occupied, leading to stints in jail under dictatorships as well as exile.

Soyinka displays the centrality of this moment, reminding us how the search for liberation from colonisation happened on many fronts, with African literature being a voice in creating new identities, and affirming old ones through writing back. It is a tradition kept up by contemporary Nigerian writers and cultural practitioners who create new worlds, question old traditions, and form new identities and platforms for African literature.

*Chronicles of the Happiest People on Earth* is a novel that displays Soyinka’s adeptness with a pen and ability to capture horror and humour in a similar capacity. However, it is also a moment, a representation of a life’s work that is committed to human rights and intellectual rigorousness. ■

# 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

"To thine own self be true, unless thine own self owes you money."



**1\_** Impalila Island (pictured) is located off the coast of which country?

**2\_** Léopoldville is the former name of which country's capital city?

**3\_** Tennis star Frances Tiafoe was born to parents from which country?

**4\_** Which tennis player represented Tunisia in the recent US Open tournament?

**5\_** Which country's women's national football team is nicknamed the 'Black Queens'?

**6\_** Who wrote the novel *Chronicles of the Happiest People on Earth*?

**7\_** What is Nigeria's currency?

**8\_** Which ocean does the Nile river flow into?

**9\_** What does SADC stand for?

**10\_** True or false: Camels are only found in the Horn of Africa.

## HOW DID I DO?

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

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



## Sins of the dad bedevil the lad

Wilfred Okiche

**D**aan Ludik is the type of figure that is considered a pillar of the community. As embodied by Arnold Vosloo (*The Mummy*) in the new Afrikaans series, *Ludik*, Daan is a successful businessman whose stern face appears on billboards across the city.

At home, he is a devoted if emotionally distant husband and a protective father to his two children. As the most successful of the surviving Ludik clan, Daan is also the centre of gravity for his extended family,

the one who can be trusted to clean up after everyone else.

But nothing is ever as it appears. Ludik's successful furniture and carpet business is also a front for a diamond smuggling enterprise. This lucrative side-hustle has drawn the interest of Arend Brown (Sean Cameron Michael), a crime lord looking to introduce Ludik as the local middleman for a global weapons-smuggling ring. To get Ludik to play ball, Brown kidnaps Ludik's troubled brother-in-law, Swys de Villiers (Rob van Vuuren, playing against type) setting up a cascade of events that must end in violence.

As Netflix series go, *Ludik* is both hit and miss. Created by Paul Buys and Annemarie van Basten, it has a couple of things going for it: the actors are stellar, the violence is suitably graphic, themes are familiar and often interesting, and some of the episodes – the finale for instance – are executed with plenty of style. The fun stuff is marred by uneven pacing, a saggy midsection and writing that consistently defaults to tropes.

Vosloo walks the talk as the titular hero but his character, despite some back story presented in flashbacks, is not particularly interesting and remains at a remove throughout. The roughly hour-length episodes play with the idea of brotherhood and toxic masculinity while considering the lengths boys will go to, to become men.

Come to *Ludik* for the action and stay for a lesson on how unresolved trauma is passed from one generation to the next. ■

# New throne, who dis?



## Continental Drift

Samira Sawlani

Children grow up so fast, don't you find? One minute they're safely tucked away at boarding school while you and your husband are off touring the colonies, the next minute they're suddenly calling themselves "King of England", after you've had to dash off to attend to pressing matters elsewhere.

Growing up is in a child's nature, we suppose. The whole point of them, really. But those early years can really be bit of a bother, especially when the children in question aren't even yours, and you've been saddled with babysitting duties.

The tantrums, the spitting up of their food, the refusing to do what they are told and getting cranky when they don't get what they want. The sneaking suspicion that this behaviour means they're destined to become some sort of state president.

It's never too late to start instilling in these babies the virtues we'd like to one day see. Why, even Uhuru Kenyatta could do with a kind but firm lesson in the importance of playing nice, and how sulking in the corner is not going to earn anyone an extra scoop of ice cream.

Young Uhuru had wanted to give his

BFF Raila the biggest and bestest present, you see. But the grown-ups made him give it to someone else so he locked himself in his room and has refused to come out.

It all came to a head, though, when Kenya's Supreme Court delivered its ruling on the petition challenging the election result that saw William Ruto declared president. The legal team of his main opponent, presidential bestie Raila Odinga, had called for the election to be nullified, because of... \*checks notes\* ... reasons?

In her ruling, Chief Justice Martha Koome called some of these reasons "hot air" and "a wild goose chase", and said that like it or not Ruto won and that was that.

Finally, after stewing in silence since the election results were announced, Uhuru Kenyatta came out of his room to address to the country. "I want to wish well all who have won as they guide our country into the future," he grumbled, without mentioning Ruto by name.

Later in the week, he said he would hand over power smiling, as it is his constitutional duty, but that "my leader is Baba (Raila Odinga)". No sign of that smile yet, though, it must be said. So no sign of any ice cream either, mister!

Meanwhile, Ruto admitted that Kenyatta "has not seen it fit to congratulate me" but simply dismissed it as "the nature of politics". (The nature of playground politics, maybe.)



**Tricky Gervais: Burundi's president replaced Gervais Ndirakobuca's security blanket with a plum prime minister post.**

Likely to be skipping around the African Union playground is Angola's President João Lourenço, whose second term has been confirmed after the country's Constitutional Court dismissed a petition by runners-up Unita, who challenged last month's election results.

We're not sure Lourenço should be having *too* much fun on the see-saw though, seeing as his party's been on the slide and he only won 51% of the vote. Which is a roundabout way of saying it may easily swing the other way next time.

### **Prime property**

Often when kids start bickering, though, the smart thing to do is separate them for a bit. But Burundi's President Evariste Ndayishimiye took it one step further after telling government officials that there was a coup being plotted against him, adding "in the name of God I will defeat him" without alluding to who the

him is. Days later he sacked his prime minister Alain-Guillaume Bunyoni and replaced him with security minister Gervais Ndirakobuca.

While some government leaders act like kids, others treat their populace like children. In Uganda, the popular Nyege Nyege music festival was scheduled to take place next week. This week, however, some of the country's lawmakers decided it should be banned, saying the event was a "breeding ground for sexual immorality" with the speaker of parliament, Anita Among, saying: "We are talking about morality of this country; we are talking about our children." But the next day the prime minister said the festival would, in fact, go ahead – only with strict guidelines in place to ensure that only those who behaved got their scoop of ice cream.

Meanwhile, as young Chucky III was trying his mum's hat on, one Liz Truss was settling into her new job as boss of Britain, becoming the struggling island nation's fourth PM in six years. Her first act was to announce an "ethnically diverse" cabinet, leading some to suggest that this is a moment of celebration for women, People of Colour and Immigrants. Never mind that as Home Secretary she oversaw a cruel policy targeting refugees and asylum seekers, and once said that schools focused too much on teaching about "sexism and racism".

Dare we suggest that a woman becoming leader is not a moment of celebration when they partake in the oppression of others?

We do dare! And if one disagrees, we humbly suggest one grows tf up. ■

# Media bias let Kenyans down

## Coverage of the election results exposed the fourth estate's weaknesses

Nyakawa Billie

**T**he Supreme Court has spoken. William Ruto will be the next president of Kenya. Following a controversial process, the court ruled there was no evidence of widespread manipulation.

That suggests the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) did indeed deliver a credible election under the greatest of pressure.

The legacy of 2022 will be important not just for the IEBC and the Supreme Court, but also for the media – which has so far received far less attention.

Educating and informing citizens is particularly important to democratic resilience. Though it is often said that the best argument against democracy is a five-minute conversation with the average voter, democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice do so wisely. The real safeguard of democracy is therefore education. This means that the role of the traditional media, key purveyors of information even in the social media age, is key.

Unfortunately, the 2022 elections

suggest the media are not currently fulfilling this role.

Most of the main newspapers and television stations leaned heavily towards the “establishment” candidate, Raila Odinga, including publishing dubious opinion polls in his favour, abandoning their “independent” tallying of the vote when it became clear Ruto had won, and failing to report critically on the outlandish accusations of election rigging made by Odinga’s allies.

It is hardly surprising that in his first speech after the court verdict president-elect Ruto mockingly asked, “Where are my friends from *Citizen?*” – a station that gave him significantly less airtime.

**Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice do so wisely. The real safeguard of democracy is therefore education.**

After the post-election violence of 2007/8 there was an inquest over the role played by the media.

Following the election controversy of 2022 there may well be a similar inquest over the failure of the fourth estate to uphold democratic values. ■

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Nyakawa Billie is a law student at the University of Nairobi and host of *The Good, The Bad and The Buserian* podcast. This analysis was produced in collaboration with *Democracy in Africa*



# The Big Picture

Photo: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP

Devastation: An emaciated cow stands in a desiccated water pan, completely dry for four months already, in Iresteno – a Kenyan town on the border with Ethiopia. The drought in the Horn of Africa is set to get even worse with a fifth consecutive failed rainy season, leading the United Nations to warn of the likelihood of an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe in the region.



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