

The Continent

Chad pays for Déby's Sudan gamble





COVER: Chad has officially closed its 1,400km border with Sudan. But drawing that feeble line in the sand will not stop the devastating civil war next door from spilling over. For months, the United Nations and rights groups have accused N'Djamena of acting as a rear base for the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), allegedly coordinating Emirati logistical support. This puts Chad's president, Mahamat Déby, in a highly volatile position. By allegedly aiding the RSF, he is breaking with the legacy of his father, the late Idriss Déby Itno, who backed Darfuri groups against the RSF's predecessors, the Janjaweed. Worse still, the RSF's current offensive in Darfur is targeting non-Arab communities like the Zaghawa. The Zaghawa historically dominate Chad's own military and share deep familial ties across the border. The blowback from Sudan is already tearing at the fabric of Chad's security forces, and threatens to destabilise the nation from the inside out (p13).

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THE WEEK IN BRIEF

MIGRATION

A dangerous year – and poor data – for migrants

The United Nations' International Organisation for Migration estimates nearly 8,000 people died or went missing on migration routes worldwide in 2025 – lower than the 9,200 deaths recorded in 2024. The agency says the decline may be partly because less data was collected as organisations that document migration lost funding. Sea crossings were especially deadly: at least 2,185 people died or went missing in the



PHOTO: SAMEER AL-DOUNY/AFP

Mediterranean and over 1,200 on the Atlantic route from West Africa toward the Canary Islands.

HEALTH

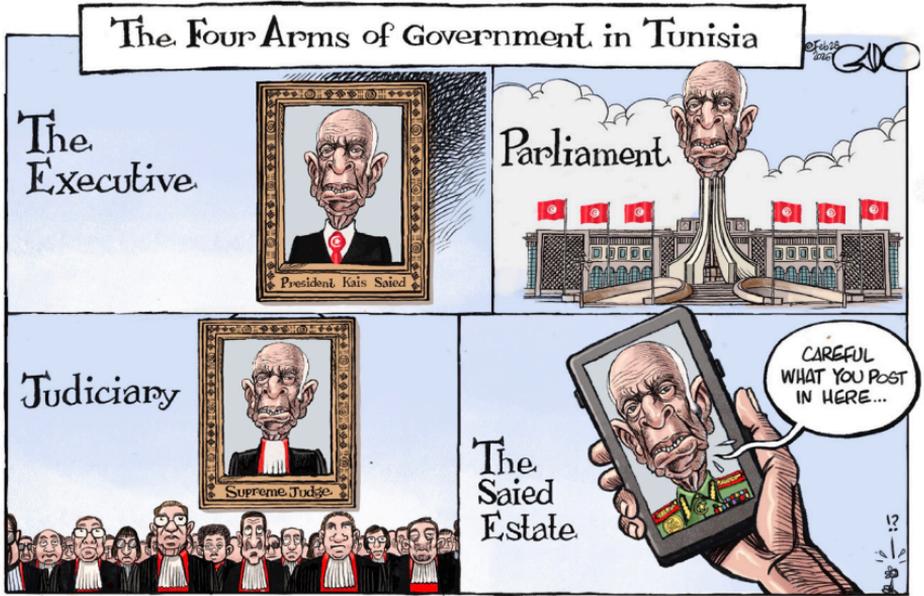
US deal? Zim, Zam: 'No thank you, man'

Zimbabwe has rejected a \$350-million US health-funding deal and Zambia has halted a \$1-billion agreement. This aid was meant to fight HIV, malaria, TB, and improve maternal care. The US wanted them to share health data and give it access to mineral resources. Both declined owing to sovereignty concerns, data-privacy risks, and terms linking health money to mining. The US has pursued health deals with at least 16 African countries. Some, like Uganda, Kenya, and Rwanda, have signed up.

TUNISIA

Toxic verdict for Gabès proves hard to swallow

A Tunisian court has rejected demands to suspend operations at a controversial fertiliser factory in Gabès, ruling there was “no sufficient proof of harm”. The local bar association says it will appeal the ruling after the judge claimed pollution allegations lacked scientific evidence. The judgment contradicts previous findings – reported by *The Continent* – that held that the plant was dumping as much as 15,000 tonnes of toxic phosphogypsum waste into the sea each day.



MALAWI

Third time the charm for plane-crash probe?

The Malawian government has ordered a new investigation into the military plane crash that killed former vice-president Saulos Klaus Chilima and eight more people in June 2024, the *Nyasa Times* reports. This will be the third investigation into the crash. Justice Minister Charles Mhango said earlier probes, including one by Germany's Federal Bureau of Aircraft Accident Investigation, failed to provide "clear and conclusive" explanations. Mhango said the new inquiry would be conducted by a commission comprising MPs and international experts.

ZAMBIA

Politician arrested for premature coffining

Zambian police have arrested National Democratic Congress secretary-general Mambwe Zimba in Lusaka for a Facebook post depicting President Hakainde Hichilema lying in a casket, the *Lusaka Times* reports. Authorities said Zimba was among administrators of the page being investigated and described the digitally altered image as misleading and intended to cause public alarm. In a similar case in Kenya, student David Mokaya was recently acquitted by a magistrate's court after sharing AI-generated images of President William Ruto in a casket.



GHANA

Name-dropping tests the limits of legacy

Ghana is dropping the name of putschist Emmanuel Kwasi Kotoka from its main international gateway. The airport, currently called Kotoka International Airport, will be renamed Accra International Airport, *Semafor* reports. Kotoka, who helped to overthrow Ghana's first president Kwame Nkrumah in 1966, was killed at the airport in a failed counter-coup a year later. Supporters say the change is more in line with the country's democratic values, while critics – including Kotoka's family – argue that it erases his legacy and role in ending what they characterised as Nkrumah's authoritarian rule.

BORDERS

Troops detained in renewed border dispute

Guinea is holding 16 Sierra Leonean security officers, in the latest clash over their shared border, *Reuters* reports. Guinea said Sierra Leonean soldiers crossed into its territory without permission on Sunday. Sierra Leone's information ministry said the men were building a border post when Guinean troops arrived. The dispute dates back to Sierra Leone's 1991-2002 civil war: Freetown invited Guinea troops to help defend the eastern border from rebels, but they didn't completely withdraw after the war.

ZIMBABWE

Export ban on tech's treasured minerals

Zimbabwean authorities have imposed an immediate freeze on exports of all raw minerals. This includes lithium concentrate, which is sought after by clean energy and defence industries around the world. Mines Minister Polite Kambamura said the measure was taken "in the national interest". A ban on exporting lithium concentrates – to encourage local processing – had previously been set for January 2027. Zimbabwe holds Africa's largest lithium reserves and much of its output is sent to China for refining. Mining accounts for 14.3% of the country's GDP.

SUDAN

Four RSF commanders hit with UN sanctions

The United Nations Security Council has imposed new sanctions on four senior figures from Sudan's Rapid Support Forces (RSF) for atrocities in El Fasher. Those targeted include RSF deputy-commander Abdul Rahim Hamdan Dagalo, the brother of RSF chief Hemedti; brigadier-general Al-Fateh Abdullah Idris, known as "Abu Lulu" and dubbed the "Butcher of El Fasher", as well as commanders Gedo Hamdan Ahmed and Tijani Ibrahim. The RSF's capture of the city in October was one of the bloodiest episodes of Sudan's nearly three-year civil war.

SOMALILAND

Say our name and what's mined is yours

Seeking international recognition as a sovereign country rather than a region of Somalia, Somaliland says it is willing to grant the United States land for military use and access to minerals, including unverified deposits of lithium and coltan. In an interview with *AFP*, Somaliland's minister in the presidency, Khadar Hussein Abdi, said that the territory would "agree on something with the United States". President Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi has made similar suggestions about Israel, which recognised Somaliland in December.

AFCON

Sonko slams Morocco for jailing Senegalese fans

Senegal's Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko has criticised Morocco for jailing 18 Senegalese fans after January's Africa Cup of Nations final in Rabat, *Al Jazeera* reports. The fans were arrested after trying to enter the pitch when the match was suspended after a late penalty awarded to Morocco. They were convicted of "hooliganism" and violence against security officials, receiving sentences of three months to a year and fines of up to 5,000 dirhams (\$545). "It seems



PHOTO: FRANK FIFE / AFP

Displeased: Senegal fans clash with security at the Africa Cup of Nations final in Rabat.

this matter goes beyond the realm of sport," Sonko told Parliament.

NEWS

DRC

Kinshasa goes on the offensive in M23 zones

A prominent rebel commander is among the dead in renewed battles for the Kivu provinces.

AJABU ADOLPHE IN GOMA

A SENIOR figure in the March 23 Movement (M23) was killed this week when government forces carried out drone strikes on the mining town of Rubaya, 50km from Goma in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Lieutenant-colonel Willy Ngoma, the M23 military spokesperson, is believed to have died at about 1am on Tuesday in a strike on a farm in the area.

Ngoma joined M23 in 2012 and played a prominent role in the January 2025 capture of Goma, the commercial hub of the eastern DRC.

M23 has not officially confirmed his death, but on Tuesday, Benjamin Mbonimpa of Alliance Fleuve Congo (AFC)-M23, wrote on X: “Heroes never die. They are our beloved. Brave and enthusiastic officer, we’ll still keep you in our heart,” without naming Ngoma.

Fighting has escalated over the past week, particularly in Masisi territory in North Kivu and now in Rubaya, where a landslide killed hundreds of people at an M23-controlled mine in late January.

Bertrand Bisimwa, deputy coordinator of the AFC-M23 coalition, blamed renewed government offensives on security guarantees from the United States, secured by Kinshasa after signing a minerals-access agreement.

Security analyst Jean-Jacques Wondo said the events were “a major psychological shock” for the rebels and their Rwandan ally, while boosting momentum in Kinshasa.

Earlier this month, Angola, a mediator in the Qatar-led peace process, proposed a ceasefire from 18 February. That plan now appears moot, despite ongoing UN efforts to establish a ceasefire-monitoring mechanism in the region. ■



PHOTO: MOSES SAMWAMA/AP

Or won't he: M23 official Willy Ngoma (centre) is believed to have been killed by DRC forces this week.

KENYA

Activist rescue takes us a step closer to justice without borders

If the kidnap suspects are convicted, it would set a landmark precedent for transnational law and order.

ROBERT AMALEMBA IN NAIROBI

A KENYAN court has given police until early next month to complete investigations and consider charges against three suspects arrested over the attempted abduction and extradition of Tanzanian activist Mshabaha Hamza.

The suspects – two Kenyans and one Tanzanian – were detained last week. If charged and convicted, they face seven to 10 years in prison. Activists say the case could set a landmark precedent in East Africa, where governments have often downplayed cross-border harassment of dissidents and human-rights defenders.

According to a senior officer in the Directorate of Criminal Investigations, who spoke to *The Continent* on condition of anonymity, Hamza believed he was

meeting a friend for lunch when the ordeal began. The “friend” arrived with three people, one of whom offered to drive. In Mlolongo, on the outskirts of Nairobi, his friend left the vehicle. Moments later, the three men allegedly told Hamza he was being “returned to Tanzania”.

Police say Hamza forced the car door open and jumped out of the moving vehicle. A boda-boda rider who witnessed the incident alerted police, who then mounted a roadblock and intercepted the vehicle, arresting the three suspects.

Amnesty International Kenya and the Law Society of Kenya welcomed the swift police action in a joint statement. The groups called for a full, transparent investigation to identify people who may have been positioned to receive Hamza at the Kenya-Tanzania border, suggesting a co-ordinated handover plan.

It is not the first time an East African activist is facing an abduction in Nairobi. Ugandan opposition-leader Kizza Besigye, who remains jailed in Uganda on treason charges, was abducted from Nairobi in November 2024. In January 2025, Tanzanian activist Maria Sarungi Tsehai was almost kidnapped too, but her screams for help attracted the attention of nearby bystanders, who came to her aid. ■



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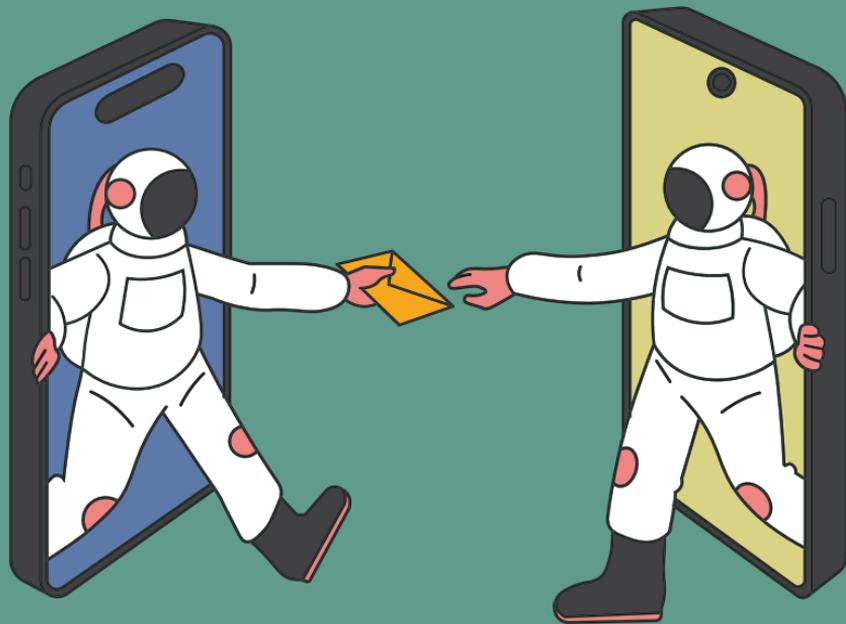
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SOUTH AFRICA

Art at the heart of Mzansi's identity crisis

The censorship by a right-wing cabinet minister of a work of art selected for the Venice Biennale lays bare the internal dissonance of South Africa's new governing order.

HEIDI THEMBEKA SINCUBA

A PRETORIA court has dismissed a case brought by South African artists to challenge their minister's withdrawal of an artwork from the country's pavilion at the Venice Biennale. The North Gauteng high court's ruling on 18 February did not give reasons for the decision and ordered that costs be paid by the artists' side. But the withdrawal of the work was because of its references to Gaza.

Elegy is an art project South African artist Gabrielle Goliath has developed over more than a decade. It's a spare performance conceived as a lamentation ritual: vocalists stand on an illuminated dais and sustain a single note, breath passing from one body to another.

For the 2026 Venice biennale, the artist and curator Ingrid Masondo proposed a three-suite exhibition. One suite would mourn Ipeleng Christine Moholane, a 19-year-old South African journalism student who was raped and murdered in Johannesburg in 2015. Another would



PHOTO: GABRIELLE GOLIAATH

honour Nama women killed during the German colonial genocide in Namibia in the early 20th century. The third would grieve Palestinian poet Hiba Abunada, killed in an Israeli airstrike on her home in Khan Younis in October 2023.

An independent committee to select South Africa's representative at the Venice Biennale pavilion unanimously voted for *Elegy* in December. The committee comprised art historian Nomusa Makhubu; Molemo Moilola, who represented South Africa at the 2022 Venice Biennale; curator Tumelo

Mosaka; scholar Greer Valley; and Sean O'Toole, a prominent art critic.

But the Palestinian section of the exhibition drew ire from South Africa's minister of sport, arts, and culture, Gayton McKenzie. He called the work "highly divisive" and raised political and diplomatic concerns before withdrawing official support for *Elegy*. This was after Goliath declined his request in late December to change the piece to provide a "more positive" image of South Africa.

Winner takes nought

Two days after the pro-minister ruling, the department of sports, art, and culture announced South Africa's pavilion at the Venice Biennale would stand empty. According to *The Art Newspaper*, McKenzie's department abandoned a last-minute collaboration with a 30-artist collective to restart planning for the biennale, which opens in May.

Goliath said she felt isolated by the ministerial decision but also profoundly supported by South Africa's art world. Artists sent messages and flowers to her doorstep to express their solidarity. A collective emerged to challenge the minister in court. Amid the court dispute, the work was performed and filmed at the Homecoming Centre in Cape Town's District Six. Masondo described the showing as "a much-needed sacred week of gathering, creating, mourning, and healing together".

Artists who backed *Elegy* in court said they were "profoundly disappointed" and would appeal last week's ruling. They called the costs order "punitive"

and a dangerous precedent that "will certainly discourage others in the arts community from attempting to defend their constitutional rights in court".

Goalith told *Art Newspaper* that she "absolutely" would still consider showing *Elegy* in Venice if a different platform were to be convened for it.

Shifts in political order

The dispute highlights the tensions within South Africa's post-2024 political landscape. "I don't think any of us expected this kind of pushback upfront, certainly not in the South African context. But on reflection, it's really not surprising at all," Goliath said.

The country's political order shifted significantly when its long-governing liberation party, the Africa National Congress (ANC), lost its parliamentary majority in the 2024 elections and negotiated a coalition government.

Governing alone, the ANC held a firm pro-Palestine position and brought a genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ). But the coalition gave executive power to new political actors, with competing ideological positions. These include McKenzie, who leads the Patriotic Alliance, a pro-Israel and far-right party.

Adila Hassim, who was part of the legal team on South Africa's ICJ case against Israel, led the lawyers who represented the artists against McKenzie in the recent case in Pretoria. ■

ANALYSIS



Caught in the middle: A Chadian soldier monitors refugees on the border with Sudan in Koufroun.

PHOTO: ZOHRA BENSEMRA/REUTERS

Déby's risky wager in Sudan's war comes due

The inherent danger of the Chadian president's decision to pick a side is now playing out on his eastern border.

BEVERLY OCHIENG

CHAD CLOSED ITS 1,400km border with Sudan indefinitely on Monday. But the decision is unlikely to spare it from further effects of the war in Sudan.

Reports by the United Nations, rights groups in Darfur, and investigative journalists have frequently said Chad serves as a rear base for the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), the paramilitary group fighting the Sudanese Armed Forces

(SAF) for control of Sudan. N'Djamena was reportedly co-ordinating logistical support for the paramilitaries on behalf of the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Chad and the UAE deny these claims, but many commentators don't put much stock in the denials – including some in Chad's own military.

Part of President Mahamat Déby's problem is that the direct (and indirect) participation he is accused of breaks sharply with the legacy of his predecessor

and father, Idriss Déby Itno.

During previous conflicts in Sudan's west, Déby Itno supported Darfuri armed groups against RSF's predecessor, Janjaweed. Departing from that was always risky for the current president's legitimacy, since he is in office only because of his family connections. Déby was installed in April 2021 after the sudden death of his father, a warrior president who died on a rebel front line.

Déby's second problem is the nature of the RSF's campaign. The UN says RSF warfare in Darfur bears "the hallmarks of genocide" and has disproportionately targeted members of non-Arab communities, including the Zaghawa.

In Chad, the Zaghawa have historically dominated political and military life and their Sudanese communities continue to have strong familial links in the eastern regions. As a result, credible accounts now report Chadian soldiers of various ranks are defecting from intelligence agencies, the army, and other influential

armed groups to enter Sudan to fight the RSF. Déby's own cousin, Ousmane Dillo, the brother of the late politician Yaya Dillo, has reportedly been fighting alongside the SAF in Kordofan.

Chadian authorities dismiss reports of defections, but a memo attributed to the army restricted leave and travel requests for soldiers in December.

Some Chadian soldiers have also reportedly fought alongside the RSF. On 19 February, former defence minister Mahamat Nour Abdelkerim accused Déby and senior military officials of forcefully conscripting more than 1,000 youth to fight alongside the RSF. Chadian authorities dismissed the claims, calling Abdelkarim "lonely and disgruntled." The RSF also denied the allegation.

Despite the denials, the stirrings in the army and his cousin's presence on the Sudanese front line erode confidence in Déby. He has fallen out with dozens of regime elites since being installed and become increasingly isolated.



Family business:
The late Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno, president at the time, with RSF's Mahamat Hamdane Dagalo in 2022.

Spillover from Sudan

These strains have been aggravated by Sudan front-line spillovers in recent weeks. Over the past few months, several Chadian fighters have been killed in clashes or attacks involving the RSF, which is violently consolidating territory in western Sudan, the region bordering Chad. A drone strike launched in Sudan killed two Chadian soldiers in January. Last weekend, on 21 February, five others were killed when RSF fighters repulsed by the SAF in the North Darfur town of Tiné fled into Chadian territory and clashed with Chadian forces.

Two days after the Tiné spillover, Chad's government spokesperson, Gassim Cherif Mahamat, announced the border closure. In the meantime, at least 15,000 Chadian troops have been deployed along the border, raising the likelihood that periodic confrontations with Sudanese groups will continue.

Ironically, Chad is in this position partly because Déby's alleged side in the Sudan war has had recent triumphs. The fall of El Fasher to the RSF in October shifted the balance of power in western Sudan. It also pushed Darfuri militants closer to the Chadian border, increasing the risk of spillover: RSF was bound to pursue them there and they were likely to launch attacks from the borderlands.

It doesn't help Chad that RSF discipline cannot be counted on. The RSF's leadership struggles to control its fighters, as seen in its handling of Brigadier-General Al-Fateh Abdullah Idris (better known by his nom de guerre, "Abu Lulu"), a fighter who bragged on



PHOTO: RAPID SUPPORT FORCES /RSF /AFP

Keep it brief: RSF detain Brigadier General Al-Fateh Abdullah Idris in El-Fasher in October 2025.

social media about killing more than 2,000 people after the group seized El Fasher. Although RSF reported it had arrested him in October, insiders said he was released days later and is unlikely to face further consequences internally.

The case was the clearest example of the group's chronic indiscipline and poor chain of command. The Tiné spillover is another example. It occurred despite a January visit to N'Djamena by RSF's sanctioned deputy-leader Abdel Rahim Dagalo in an effort to avoid alienating Chad, which the paramilitaries rely on for weapons transfers.

It is unlikely rogue RSF fighters will be deterred by the border closure.

Darfur will remain a challenge for Chad and the political implications will extend to N'Djamena. Front-line spending is likely to undermine Déby's capacity to sustain the patronage systems that are crucial to cohesion in the army and his own political longevity. ■

Beverly Ochieng is a Sahel and Francophone Africa analyst based in Dakar

FEATURE

Well done to rare: The future of Botswana's beef is at stake

It used to be said that there were more cows than people in Botswana. Not any more.



ALL PHOTOS: MONIRUL BHUIYAN/AFP

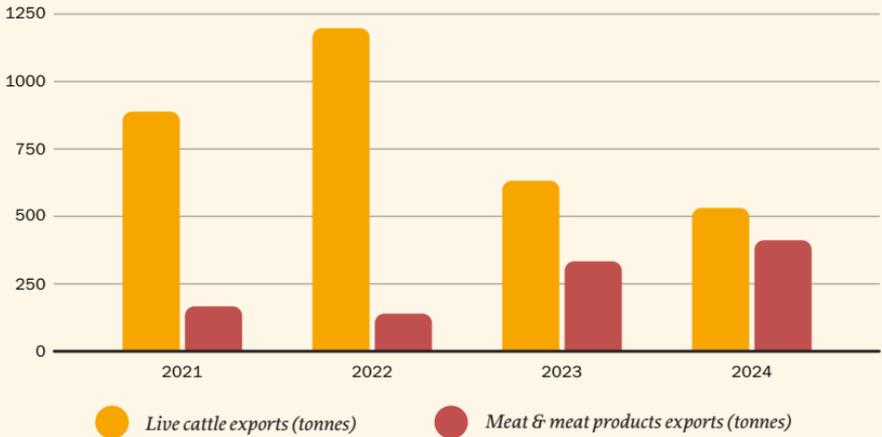
KELETSO THOBEGA IN GABORONE

THE UNITED KINGDOM banned beef imports from Botswana earlier this month, after an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease. Gaborone was already responding to the outbreak with quarantine measures and enhanced

surveillance. The UK's move cuts to the heart of the already unsteady second pillar of Botswana's economy: beef exports.

Live cattle and meat products make up 80% of Botswana's agricultural exports. Its beef is marketed internationally as premium grade,

Live cattle and meat exports, Botswana



organic, and free range. But, like its diamond exports, Botswana's beef sector has been in decline for some years.

Countrywide, the cattle herd has shrunk dramatically over the past decades – from about 3-million in the 1980s to roughly 1.1-million in 2025, according to the ministry of agriculture. It is no longer true that there are more cows than people in the country of 2.5-million humans.

The shrinking herd has left the beef sector in an “alarming state,” President Duma Boko said last year. He warned that if the decline continues, Botswana could be forced to import beef within three years. To be safe, he estimated the national herd needs not just to recover, but also to grow to five million.

Data from Botswana's national statistics agency appears to back Boko's concerns. Recorded live cattle exports have declined sharply since 2022. But

some of that decline can be explained by a marked increase in meat and processed meat exports in 2023-24. Producers appear to be moving away from live exports toward value-added meat products.

The roots of the problem run deeper than disease outbreaks. Decades of drought, poor genetics, fragmented value chains, and repeated animal-health crises are now colliding with climate change.

People who fear the herd is shrinking unnaturally point to droughts and loss of grazing lands because of degradation and infrastructure development. Diseases such as foot-and-mouth are also occurring more frequently because cattle and wildlife are in closer proximity than before.

“You find cattle and buffaloes at the Ramokgwebana and Shashe rivers along the border with Zimbabwe using the

same water sources, [increasing] the risk of infections,” Alfred Pilane, secretary-general of the Botswana National Beef Producers Union and a cattle farmer, told *The Continent*.

He added that heavy cross-border traffic between Botswana and Zimbabwe makes it easy for the disease to be unknowingly carried across regions.

A disappearing way of life

Well before the diamond boom, cattle farming was the cornerstone of Botswana’s rural economy. The moraka (cattle post) was the heartbeat of many communities and cattle became a status symbol. Weddings and funerals without a slaughtered cow are seen as lacking Setswana tradition and social dignity.

Outbreaks of foot-and-mouth-disease can strip even daily life of that perceived dignity. The current outbreak has

doubled beef prices, pushing consumers towards chicken and fish, whose prices have also risen sharply. Mopane worms and cabbage are increasingly common side dishes in the beef-loving nation.

But the real risk to the cattle-loving way of life may be generational.

Cattle remain associated with social dignity, status and wealth, but urbanisation, climate shocks, and harsh market realities are redirecting young people away from the sector.

“The reality is that farming is not easy. It is expensive and stressful. It is also risky nowadays because of poor security and ever-changing climatic conditions,” said young farmer Karabo Ontlogetse. “You can keep cattle and tomorrow they are stolen or die in a hailstorm, flood, drought, or disease outbreak.”

Few young people in Botswana now dream of a life spent at the moraka. ■



Carrion, regardless: Vultures feed on a cow carcass in Lake Ngami near Maun, Botswana.

INVESTIGATION

Russian operatives intervened in Bolivia – and failed

Internal documents detail how former Wagner agents tried to prop up a president who then lost power and went to jail. They still asked for medals for their work.



WITH EXTENSIVE wildfires, more than 500 protests, severe fuel shortages, economic difficulties and an attempted coup, 2024 was a hard year for Bolivia.

It was this maelstrom that drew in a seven-member team of former Wagner operatives.

After the Wagner Group collapsed the year before, it had reformed under the patronage of Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service. The details of that switch to more formal state oversight have long been whispered. Then, late last year, a trove of more than 1,400 documents was leaked to *The Continent*. They detailed the new group's 2024 strategy, budgets, and other inner workings.

An investigative consortium in Russia, France, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Latin America have been digging into the documents. For the first time, these reveal that propagandists were sent across South America.

The seven-member team arrived in La Paz in July 2024 aiming to “stabilise” the government of then president, Luis Arce.

Locally, a narrative had begun to build that Arce had staged an attempted coup – against himself. It didn't help that the coup leader said the same, claiming it was a bid to boost the president's ratings.

The operatives' internal documents claim they met with Arce to try to contain the situation, drafted speeches for him and set up a rapid-response communication unit within the government. They list a series of paid articles that accused the US and Argentina of instigating the coup. The messaging also targeted former president Evo Morales.

Morales and Arce were both close allies of Moscow. They repeatedly visited Russia and signed agreements in sectors like gas and lithium, which Bolivia owns in large amounts. The two belonged to the same party, the Movement to



Road bloc: Police face off against Evo Morales supporters in Paratoni, November 2024. PHOTO: JUAN KARITA/AP

Socialism, which had dominated local politics since 2006. But at the time they were in a bitter dispute. Morales was openly challenging Arce to be president again. The dispute divided the party and the social movements at its base.

In one of the documents, Russian operatives claim that a “high representative” of Arce, Hugo Moldiz, met them on 5 November 2024. He sought their support to “neutralise the political influence of Morales”. Moldiz, a leftist political analyst who served as a minister under Morales, said this mischaracterised his engagement with them. In written responses to this investigation, he admitted to speaking with “Russian sociologists and political scientists” who came to Bolivia after the attempted coup. But “it was obvious that

they were unfamiliar with the country’s political history”. Their suggestions “were of a general nature”.

Writing in Spanish, Moldiz said he often took unofficial meetings with international and national academics and analysts. He added that: “It could be said that I have been a kind of source of consultation, without the capacity nor intention to structure teams and make decisions.”

That same November, the Russian operatives were planning an even more aggressive campaign against Morales, labelling him a “rapist”. They also planted fake “Evistas” – supporters of Morales – who demanded the decriminalisation of sexual violence, a move aimed at discrediting the Morales movement. The goal was the arrest of

Morales. One document noted: “The arrest of Morales will show the strength of Arce, primarily to the country’s elites and party leadership, who will no longer need to choose a side.”

Last January, a judge issued an arrest warrant for Morales. He remains free, protected by a community of his supporters – coca growers in the central Bolivian province of Chapare.

In May, Arce announced that he would not seek re-election. And in October, the centre-right Rodrigo Paz

won the election, ending two decades of socialist rule. By the year’s end, Arce himself was jailed on embezzlement charges. His lawyer refused to answer questions for this investigation, saying he began representing his client only in December.

Despite this failure, three of the Russian operatives working on Bolivia sent letters to their government requesting decorations for their “contribution to the stabilisation” of Arce’s government. ■



PHOTO: ERNESTO BENAVIDES/AFP

Target acquired: A mural of former Bolivian president Evo Morales in Shinaota, Bolivia.

STORY TEAM:

Diana Cariboni
Youri van der Weide
Sofía Álvarez Jurado

INVESTIGATIVE TEAM:

Lydia Namubiru
Youri van der Weide
Sabrina Slipchenko
Emmanuel Freudenthal
Kiri Rupiah
Ira Dolinina

Léa Peruchon
Édouard Perrin
Katya Hakim
Diana Cariboni
Eloïse Layan
Sofía Álvarez

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FEATURE



ALL PHOTOS: QUEILA FERNANDES/THE CONTINENT

Cabo Verde's labour of love

The annual carnival in Mindelo looks like an effortless spectacle. It is anything but.

HANNAH UGURU IN MINDELO

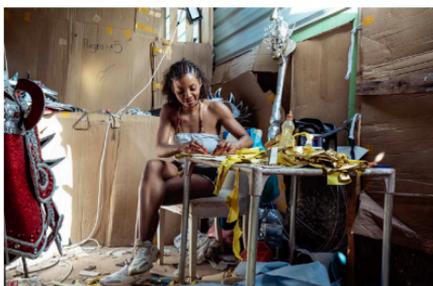
IN THE DAYS leading up to carnival week (from 15 to 22 February), the city of Mindelo feels like a workshop with a coastline.

Dancers rehearse until their bodies give out; costume makers haul materials through narrow streets; technicians map sound and power distribution; and welders shape large-scale structures

that will be used for only a few hours.

The build-up is “stress, no sleep, exhaustion”, says Edson, a welder working in a derelict warehouse on the edge of the city’s centre. He has worked on carnival structures for a decade and described the labour as a duty. “We do this for the community,” he says. “The goal is to please people. To make them feel satisfied.”

After the carnival, months of work



are dismantled within days. The impermanence of all this creative output disturbs Edson. “I would like to create a carnival museum for tourists,” he says. “To preserve the pieces. Not just my work – everyone’s work.”

Building the spectacle of Mindelo carnival within the tight constraints of a small island economy often requires Cabo Verdeans to donate to their labour and savings.

Marco António Brito Flores, who placed first for his carnival costume

last year, says competing for king or queen can cost nearly \$6,000. The prize money sits closer to \$1,200. “It’s not about making money,” Flores says. “It’s just to enjoy.”

When participants are paid, the wages are quite modest. “Sometimes we can pay people 4,000 or 5,000 escudos [\$53],” says choreographer Marco Silva, stage-named Maky Ogan.

That payment is to dancers who commit to 15 days of practice for the carnival. Silva works the carnival

every year simply because he enjoys it. He makes his bread and butter from hip-hop dancing, fashion, and stage production for other artists.

These donations from personal savings and time are no small gift: they often come from workers who have little to spare. In Cabo Verde's formal private sector, the minimum wage is about 17,000 escudos (\$186) a month.

In the informal sector, average earnings can be as low as \$128. But renting an apartment in Mindelo might cost \$236, one resident said. Many households rely on remittances, which account for 12.3% of the national GDP, according to World Bank data.

And still they give – on a logic that is cultural, not economic. “I would like people to know about our values, our

principles, our emotions, our costumes, our art itself,” says comissão de frente dancer Taynara Lopes.

“People live carnival the way Brazilians do,” adds the parade's sound engineer and technical lead, Jair. “For them, it's life. As soon as carnival ends, they immediately begin preparing for the next year.”

What multicultural looks like

Jair was born in Angola, raised in Portugal, and now works across Cabo Verde's music and festival circuits, including engineering sound for morna and coladeira artist Tito Paris, both locally and internationally.

His biography mirrors the layered histories of Cabo Verde that produces cultural productions like the Mindelo





carnival.

Cabo Verde's diaspora is almost double the archipelago's resident population. In a 2025 study of more than 9,100 secondary-school graduates, 83% said they wanted to go to Portugal for university. This outward push is economic but also customary. "They were one of the first people from Africa to emigrate," Jair says.

Decades of this migration and exchange with Atlantic cultures have painted Cabo Verdean culture in technicolour. "Cabo Verdeans go to Holland, the United States, Belgium, and they bring the music from these regions back home with them to make fusions," says Jair, linking the archipelago's morna, coladeira, kizomba, and electronic music to migration. "They have the biggest music

culture in all of Africa."

The career of Salisa Rocha Ramos Monteiro, a Cabo Verdean stylist based in Milan, demonstrates that this cultural borrowing is a two-way street. In a rhythm that's familiar in her country of highly mobile people, she has shuttled between Cabo Verde and Europe for the past 25 years, designing handmade costumes on multiple carnival circuits, including The Netherlands' summer parade. "Cabo Verdeans are spread all over the world, but this is something we carry everywhere," she says. "It is a tradition we never abandon." ■

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DATA

Foreign workers spark fervour

IMMIGRATION is a touchy subject, as we found when we asked Africans across 38 countries whether their government should allow more or fewer foreign job seekers to live and work in their country.

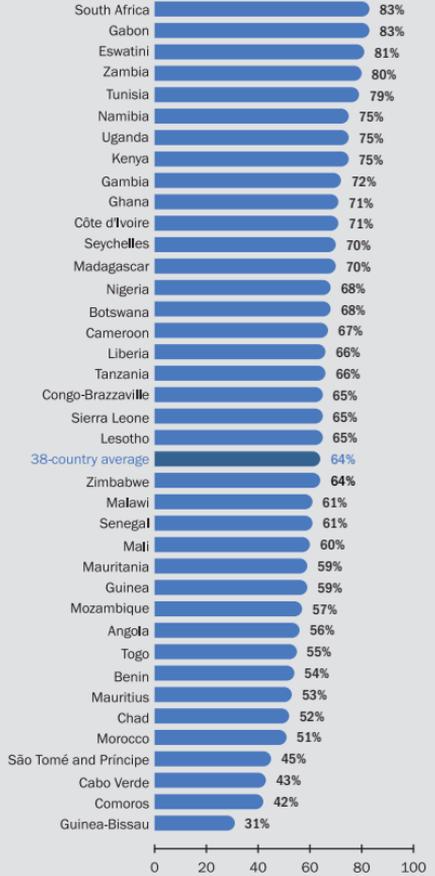
On average, nearly two thirds say “fewer job seekers” (49%) or “no job seekers at all” (15%) should be allowed in. Majorities want less labour immigration in 34 countries. At least eight in 10 respondents want fewer or no migrant workers in South Africa (83%), Gabon (83%), Eswatini (81%), and Zambia (80%).

As the continent’s leading host of international migrants, South Africa’s opposition to foreign job seekers has major consequences. The country has already seen significant xenophobic riots – in 2008, 2015, and 2021.

By contrast, reduced immigration is favoured by fewer than half of the population in São Tomé and Príncipe (45%), Cabo Verde (43%), Comoros (42%), and Guinea-Bissau (31%).

Are small island populations especially likely to value foreign labour? About two thirds of São Toméans (68%) and Cabo Verdeans (65%) say the economic impact of foreign workers is positive, behind only Ivoirians (69%) on the continent. ■

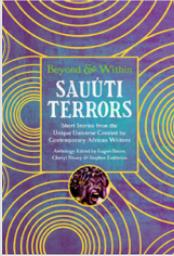
Country should allow fewer/no job seekers to enter | 38 African countries | 2024/2025





TC BOOK REVIEW

BY JACQUELINE NYATHI



How safe is sound?

If you haven't explored the Sauútiiverse yet, you're missing out on a fascinating project from an African collective.

THE SAUÚTIVERSE is Afrocentric fantasy centred on sound. This universe is held together by the mysterious Mothersound, its magic mediated through song, instruments, and words.

Sauúti Terrors, the second short-story collection (after *Mothersound*) expands the Sauútiiverse in dark directions. It brings welcome depth.

The editors of the latest anthology – Cheryl Ntumu, Eugen Bacon, and Stephen Embleton – wanted to bring realism to this imaginary African future

by showing readers that “everything is not perfect in the federation of planets”. In *Sauúti Terrors*, sound magic is perverted through human failing, through its sheer power, or because good, life-giving sound must have its antithesis in destructive anti-sound (or silence). The collection’s authors – including Shingai Njeri Kagunda, Wole Talabi, T.L. Huchu, Moustapha Mbacké Diop, J. Umeh, and more – show us what could go wrong.

In Umeh’s excellent *The Sounding*, a healer learns of ancient, evil beings when she becomes inhabited by one. A similarly chilling exploration occurs in Kofi Nyameye’s *The Unspoken*, which unpacks clandestine government experiments at secret military bases.

Ntumu’s *Where Daylight Bows to Darkness* gives us an alternate view of 2024’s *Song for the Shadows* in which we meet the mysterious Shad-Dari for the second time. A spacecraft in Wole Talabi’s *The Final Flight of the Ungu-ugnu* is powered by humans singing in chorus. Xan van Rooyen’s unsettling *Kyi’yaji* features anti-music recorded in scars – which can be played back.

Like our own world, the Sauútiiverse is a place with nations, cultures and traditions; laws and governments; forms of dress, trades, and languages. On the lattermost, *Sauúti Terrors* invites us to reflect: how profoundly are we shaped by our words, and by their sound? ■

The Quiz

- 1 Which lake in East Africa is also known as the Jade Sea?
- 2 The Kalahari Desert spans how many countries?
- 3 Which country do the Turtle Islands (pictured) belong to?
- 4 What is the largest city in Somaliland?
- 5 How many times have Zimbabwe's men's team lost to Australia in T20 cricket World Cups?
- 6 Which Senegalese author wrote the novel *God's Bits of Wood* in 1960?
- 7 Which two countries does the Kazungula Bridge join?
- 8 In which ocean is the island country of Cabo Verde located?
- 9 In 1960 Fulbert Youlou became the first president of which newly independent country?
- 10 "The Dead Heart of Africa" is a nickname for which country?



HOW DID I DO?

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

0-3

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

4-7

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

8-10

"Of course I know which country these islands belong to. I have turtle recall."

Big Pic

Back to Batik: A model wearing a creation by Togolese fashion brand Keviane Couture walks the catwalk during the International Festival of Fashion (Fimo) at the Institut Français in Lomé on 26 February.

PHOTO: OLYMPIA DE MAISMONT/AFP



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