

# The Continent



**The country that's run out of fuel**



**COVER** It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone, rich or poor, to get a full tank of petrol in Burundi. Severe fuel shortages started in 2018 and have not let up since. The root cause likely dates further back: the 2015 political crisis sparked by yet another president seeking yet another third term. Because empty tanks mean empty stomachs for workers in almost all sectors of the economy, Burundians are taking extraordinary steps to get fuel in — at the risk of bullets, crocodiles and imprisonment. *Page 13.*

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**CORRECTION:** On page 14 of Issue 209, in a story titled Foreign interests drive local dynamics, we stated that 100% of Sudan's declared gold exports in 2024 went to Egypt, relying on data from the International Trade Center of the World Trade Organisation and the United Nations. Provisional data from the Central Bank of Sudan shows otherwise: gold worth over \$1.52-billion (nearly 97% of all exports) went to the UAE. The ITC database didn't record this, nor exports to Oman, Türkiye and Qatar. We regret our error.

# THE WEEK IN BRIEF

## GAMBIA

### Torturer's time is up

A US court has sentenced Gambian national Michael Sang Correa to more than 67 years in prison for torture carried out under former dictator Yahya Jammeh. *Reuters* reports that a Colorado jury convicted Correa, 46, for targeting people in 2006 after a coup plot against Jammeh. His case marks the first criminal conviction related to the “Junglers”, Jammeh’s feared paramilitary unit. Correa was arrested in 2020 under a law which makes it a crime for anyone in the US to commit torture abroad.

## CLIMATE

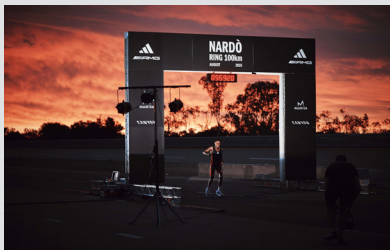
### Don Coyote's windmill tilt

United States President Donald Trump isn't just dismantling clean energy at home – he's also leaning on other countries to ditch climate pledges and burn more coal, oil and gas, the *New York Times* reports. Trump has gutted US support for electric vehicles, solar and wind power and is now wielding tariffs and trade pressure to get other countries to do the same. His primary beef is with wind power, which he says is “destroying” countries. In his words, he hopes the world “gets back to fossil fuels” – and we all die in the bonfire.

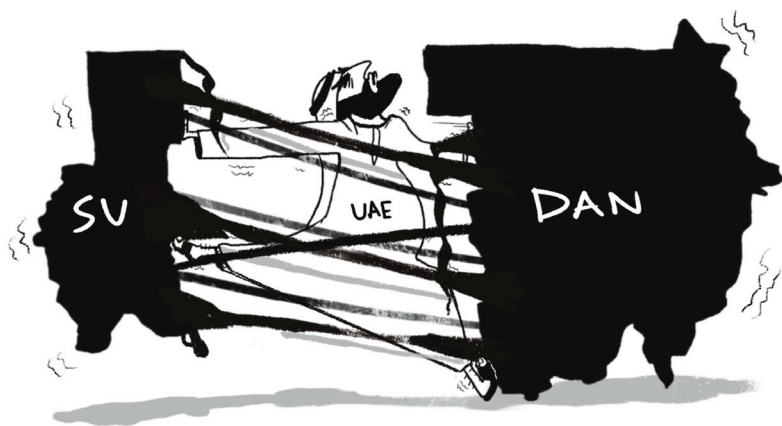
## SOUTH AFRICA

### How long would it take you to run 100km?

South African ultramarathon runner Sibusiso Kubheka has set a new world record: he is the first person to run 100km in less than six hours. In the Adidas “Chasing 100” event, run on Italy's Nardò Ring test track, the 27-year-old outlasted four rivals, two of whom also ran faster than the previous record. Kubheka's achievement is not an official record because runners accepted technology support, including bespoke Adidas



shoes and apparel, which helped with their speed, body cooling, sweat evaporation, and endurance.



@khalidalbath

#### EQUATORIAL GUINEA

### Baby Obiang flies too close to the sun

A court has convicted Ruslan Obiang Nsue, son of President Teodoro Obiang, for illegally selling a plane belonging to the national airline. He faces six years in prison unless he repays \$255,000 plus fines, *The Nation* reports. His half-brother, Vice-President Teodoro Nguema Obiang Mangue, placed him under house arrest in 2023, sparking speculation about a succession struggle as their father nears 43 years in power. Meanwhile, anti-graft chief Baltasar Ebang Engonga was also sentenced to eight years and fined \$220,000 for embezzlement – but not for his sex tapes that went viral last year.

#### JAPAN

### Relax, Africans are not hiding under the bed

Japanese authorities are scrambling after a wave of misinformation sparked panic that four towns in the country were being handed over to Africans. The rumours stemmed from a cultural project by the Japan International Cooperation Agency “pairing” four Japanese municipalities with African partners. Online discourse twisted this into claims of mass immigration and land transfers. Japan has since stressed there are no special visa schemes for Africans. A senior official noted the uproar reflects how Japanese society is becoming “increasingly sensitive” to words like “immigration” and “foreigners”.



## BOTSWANA

## Boko sends in army to oversee health crisis

President Duma Boko has announced a \$18.3-million emergency plan with military oversight after declaring a public health emergency due to a shortage of drugs and equipment. The health ministry says it has more than 1-billion pula (about \$74-million) in debts and has suspended non-urgent care. It listed shortages in HIV, cancer, and tuberculosis treatments. The United Nations has warned of growing malnutrition in parts of the country. The *BBC* reports that aid cuts and a slump in diamond revenues contributed to the crisis in Botswana's medical supply chain.

## STOLEN HISTORY

## France returns pillaged Malagasy king's remains

France has formally returned the skull of King Toera, a Malagasy monarch killed by colonial troops in 1897, to Madagascar. His head, and two others, were kept at the Museum of Natural History in Paris for more than a century, the *BBC* reports. The return is the first under a new French law easing the repatriation of human remains stolen during colonial rule. A Sakalava spirit medium confirmed the skull's identity, although DNA tests were inconclusive. Madagascar's culture minister called the return a vital step in healing a long-standing national wound.

## ZIMBABWE

## Rain gain prompts return of maize import ban

In a significant recovery, Zimbabwe is enjoying a bumper harvest that is enough to supply local millers, agriculture ministry official Obert Jiri told *Reuters* on Monday. The government has, therefore, reinstituted a ban on imports to protect local farmers. Zimbabwe usually restricts food imports and opened them up last year only because El-Niño-induced drought cut local production to 800,000 tonnes short of consumption needs. More rainfall and state

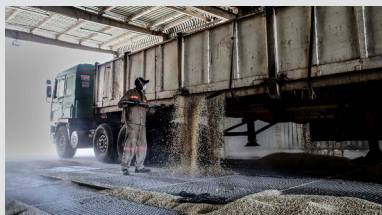


PHOTO: AFP

**Soft-pour corn:** A worker offloads maize at a processing and packaging company in Harare.

support has brought production back up, although experts warn that agriculture remains vulnerable to climate change.



PHOTO: AFP

**Self-harm:** Migrants trying to get to Europe are being subjected to human rights abuses.

## MAURITANIA

### Africa abusing its own to appease Europe

According to a new report by Human Rights Watch, Mauritanian security forces committed widespread abuses from 2020 to 2025. The abuses cited include acts of torture, rape, and mass expulsions against migrants. These violations were enabled by funding from the European Union and Spain, which paid Mauritania to push back more than 28,000 West and Central African migrants in early 2025 alone. Mauritania has denied the systematic abuses. The rights group has urged EU partners to prioritise human rights over border security.

## LIBYA

### Coast guard attacks ship rescuing migrants

Libya's coast guard opened fire on a humanitarian rescue ship in international waters as it searched for migrants in distress. The Ocean Viking, operated by SOS Méditerranée and the Red Cross, was significantly damaged but no one was reported injured. The attack appears to be one of the most violent involving a European rescue ship, *AP* reports. The Libyan coast guard receives training, equipment, and funding from the European Union. SOS Méditerranée condemned the attack as part of a pattern of violent behaviour by the coast guard.

## SUDAN

### All protocol observed in Khartoum once more

Sudan's cabinet held its first meeting in Khartoum since fighting with the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) began in April 2023, *TRT* reports. The session was chaired by Prime Minister Kamal Idris and marked a symbolic return of state institutions to the capital. The meeting focused on security, reconstruction, and the return of displaced people. The Sudanese army recently regained full control of Khartoum from the RSF. The conflict has killed tens of thousands of people and displaced more than 12-million.

## NEWS

## DRC

# What would Jesus do?

**Catholic schools defy state's ruling on pregnant pupils' rights to an education, citing 'morality' and 'discipline'.**

**PROSPER HERI NGORORA IN GOMA**

FROM the beginning of the new school year on 1 September, pregnant girls will no longer be excluded from school in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. All schools except Catholic ones, if men of the cloth have their way.

Reactions to the decision – announced in July by the education ministry – range from praise to resistance and dismissal. They also divide along gender lines.

“The decision is good, but there must also be measures to enable pregnant students to study in suitable conditions,” said Rose Mathe, a parent in Goma.

“We must not encourage debauchery,” said Benjamin Kalonda, a father of five, adding that girls should “choose between school and sexual misconduct”.

One in every 1,000 Congolese girls aged 10 to 14 has been pregnant, according to a survey concluded last year. That statistic shoots up to 91 in every 1,000 for girls aged 15 to 19. The



PHOTO: YASUYOSHI CHIBA/AFP

**System failure:** Pregnant girls and women stand in line to receive birth kits in Kibati, Goma.

rates double for rural girls. By age 18, 30% of girls have already had at least one pregnancy. Until now, they were simply expelled from school. “That’s how I gave birth to my little girl, who is five now,” said Rosalie Neema, now 22. She was expelled from school (and home) in her third year of secondary school.

However, the umbrella organisation of Catholic schools – which comprise about 25% of all schools – wrote to school heads saying the directive didn’t apply to them. Emphasising “morality” and “discipline”, the letter said: “If a pupil becomes pregnant, please kindly refer her to [other] schools.”

Such positions anger advocates for the rights of women and girls, like Angelique Nyirasafari. She noted that boys continue with school even when they cause pregnancies. Many girls, particularly in the eastern DRC, become pregnant after rape, making expulsion a double tragedy. ■

# SOLAR

## Africa soaks up the sun as solar energy surges

CHRISTINE MUNGAI IN NAIROBI

AFRICAN countries are importing solar panels from China at record rates. Energy thinktank Ember says imports rose 60% in the 12 months to June 2025, as Africa's power needs converge with China's overproduction and low prices.

Sierra Leone's imports, if installed, would generate electricity equivalent to 61% of its entire 2023 power output. Algeria, which is using solar to free up gas for export, recorded the highest import surge: 33 times more than the previous year. Algeria plans 11 solar projects, with work already under way on a 300MW plant in Biskra province.

Prices of solar panels have fallen 40% to 50% in just 18 months. Solar now costs as little as three US cents per kilowatt hour – cheaper than diesel and lower than many African electricity tariffs.

Europe used to be the leading market for Chinese solar panels. But, as the *Financial Times* reports, there is such a glut there now that people in Germany and the Netherlands use solar panels as garden fencing. The US has restricted

imports of solar panels from China. These realities are forcing China – which makes 80% of the globe's solar panels – to aggressively seek new markets.

The import boom is also driven by growing demand in Africa, says Ted Ongamo, a Nairobi-based energy consultant. "Companies are raising capital to grow their market shares of solar home systems. Commercial and industrial demand is strong too."

South Africa alone is working towards at least 6GW of solar capacity by 2030. Zambia, where drought has disrupted hydroelectricity generation in recent years, is turning to solar. Botswana aims for 50% of its energy to come from renewable sources by 2036.

Nigeria's demand is driven by its chronic electricity crisis, with diesel generators still outproducing the grid. Here, Ember notes, savings on diesel are so high that a solar panel pays for itself in six months. Elsewhere, Sudan's conflict has destroyed critical grid infrastructure, pushing people towards solar. ■



PHOTO: PAUL BOTES/THE CONTINENT



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# SUDAN

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## Pay up or starve: RSF monetises its hunger siege

**Paramilitary group lets people escape El Fasher, then shakes them down for all they have.**

**KHALID ELWALID IN KHARTOUM**

BESIEGED people in El Fasher say that leaving the city costs more than 600,000 Sudanese pounds (\$300 on the black market), with much of it going to the paramilitary group behind the siege.

The Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have besieged the North Darfur capital for more than a year. The nearest safe town, Tawila, is about 60km away and now shelters 379,000 displaced people from El Fasher and Zamzam camp, according to the Norwegian Refugee Council.

“Leaving El Fasher for Tawila was one of the hardest experiences of my life,” says Hikma\*, who fled with her four young children. She spent over 1.5-million Sudanese pounds on the journey, some of it paid to RSF. “They control the main road between El Fasher and Tawila; [we’re] forced to pay heavy crossing fees,” Hikma told *The Continent*.

Donkey carts along the way charge

hefty fees to carry people, but it’s usually for only part of the journey. Families have to walk most or all of the 60km.

The road is also targeted by drones, including an attack last week that destroyed three trucks carrying food aid near Al Mellit in North Darfur, the United Nations said. A similar attack in June on another UN convoy killed five people and injured several others.

When Hikma and her family reached Tawila, there were no houses waiting for them, “only fragile shelters of straw”. With the rainy season approaching, the displaced people face hunger, homelessness and disease. Cholera is spreading in the town, killing children, women, and elderly people, according to aid workers. “We lost everything – yet we must still fight to survive,” Hikma said.

Many who can’t afford the escape fees now shelter in Abu Shouk camp near El Fasher, which fighters attacked on 11 August, killing dozens of people. Local responders said the camp has no food or clean water.

“For a long time, families here survived because of the Abu Shouk Emergency Room, where I work,” says Mohamed Adam. “But funding has dried up. The communal kitchens and all the mutual-aid groups have stopped.” ■

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\*Name has been changed to protect identity

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## KENYA

# Shakahola cult horror reawakens

**Fresh bodies have been found in Kilifi, near the mass graves that were discovered in 2023.**

**MUKANZI MUSANGA IN KILIFI**

TWO YEARS ago, more than 400 bodies were unearthed in Shakahola Forest near the Kenyan coast, linked to a doomsday sect that coerced its members to starve themselves to “meet Jesus” before the world ends. Now, more than a dozen more bodies have been uncovered in Kwa Binzaro village in the same county, Kilifi.

Speaking to *The Continent* at the exhumation site earlier this week, human rights activist Walid Sketty said 14 bodies were exhumed on Monday from unmarked graves, some containing multiple bodies. Most of the dead were buried naked in shallow pits hidden in thickets. The bodies were taken to a local morgue where hundreds more bodies from the 2023 Shakahola cult massacre still remain unclaimed. Responders continue to search for more graves and bodies in the area.

This discovery came after reports that several children had disappeared, sparking fear that the apocalyptic cult behind the 2023 tragedy is still active. Shakahola cult leader Paul Mackenzie, who is in prison on charges of manslaughter, terrorism, and torture, is suspected to be behind the Kwa Binzaro deaths as well.

Kenya’s cabinet secretary for interior, Kipchumba Murkomen, said earlier this month that Mackenzie had been communicating with his followers from prison. Some of the recently exhumed bodies are relatives of Mackenzie’s own associates, like Smart Mwakalama and Mary Kadzo, a husband and wife who were part of the Shakahola cult at the time of his 2024 arrest.

Kadzo’s sister Betty Kahindi said DNA tests had confirmed that two of the recently exhumed bodies were her family members. The family has long been haunted by the disappearance of Kadzo’s children – four girls and two boys, aged between two and 15 years. Kahindi lived side by side with her sister Kadzo in nearby Malindi before Kadzo and her husband moved into the Shakahola commune.

“I’m so saddened by this news. We have been pleading with my sister to tell us what happened to the children but she refuses to speak. She doesn’t regret joining the cult and still believes



**Massacre:** Markers flag the locations of bodies exhumed at the mass grave site in Shakahola, outside the coastal town of Malindi.

PHOTO: YASUYOSHI CHIBA/AFP

in Mackenzie's extreme teachings," Kahindi said.

Kahindi, who is disillusioned with Christianity, converted to Islam in 2024 "in search of peace".

Kadzo joined Mackenzie's church, Good News International, years before his doctrine hardened. Although the church was founded in 2003, members say he began shifting toward "end time" sermons in about 2010. He then began discouraging his followers from working, sending their children to school, or seeking medical care, branding these things as "evil". Some members abandoned the group as its practices became more extreme but Kadzo stayed, standing by her husband who rose to become Mackenzie's deputy.

The cult's deadly reality only came to public light in March 2023, when a former follower alerted authorities. Soon after, the country watched in horror as hundreds of bodies were exhumed from the 800-acre forest – more than 190 of them children.

Vespus Chenja, the psychologist who

counselled children rescued from the cult, told *The Continent* that Mackenzie had ordered his followers to starve to death in a sequence: children first, then unmarried adults, women, men and, lastly, church leaders.

Some of the dead may have been killed by other means. Dr Job Gayo, a pathologist who examined bodies at Malindi Sub-County Hospital, told *The Continent*: "Some of the victims were violently killed by physical force."

"Around 30% to 40% of the bodies have been identified but most of them remain unclaimed due to the stigma associated with the cult," Gayo added.

As exhumations continue, activists are calling on the government to secure Shakahola forest as a crime scene, install surveillance technology, and raise awareness against extremism.

Mackenzie's arrest in 2024 was not his first run-in with the law. In 2017, he and his second wife were charged with running an unregistered school and radicalisation. He was fined for the first charge and acquitted of the second. ■



# BURUNDI

## The dangerous business of keeping the country moving

As legal fuel imports collapse, citizens risk their lives to keep the country running: the black market is booming, with a litre of fuel now costing almost \$7.

### DÉSIRÉ NIMUBONA

One night in April, Bujumbura taxi driver Jerome Kabwana dodged bullets as he tried to cross the Ruzizi River, which separates Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. A friend he was with didn't survive.

"He was shot in the head and sank into the river," says Kabwana. Despite that experience, Kabwana still makes the trip, smuggling fuel to Burundi. "We go in a group. If two are killed or arrested, the rest can reach Burundi with fuel."

In January, clashes between smugglers and security forces in Cibitoke province left several people injured, according to local outlet *Isanganiro*. If arrested, smugglers face up to two years in prison. The smugglers don't only face arrest or bullets – the river itself is teeming with crocodiles.

"We don't understand why the government fails to provide fuel and then punishes those who bring it," says Bahati Etienne, a 39-year-old from

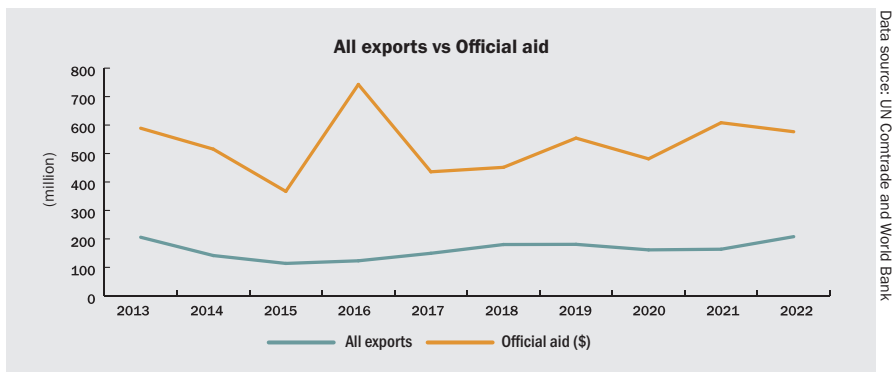


Bubanza who has participated in the risky hustle.

Noah Gakiza, a 25-year-old gas station worker, is also baffled. "There is no fuel in the country," he says. "Even the officials who shoot and jail the smugglers buy from the black market."

Across Burundi, petrol stations are wrapped in plastic, "No Fuel" signs adorn empty pumps, and vehicles languish in kilometre-long queues. Some wait three weeks to refuel.

Across the river in the DRC, Burundian smugglers buy the fuel from



traders like Amina Zitu. Every weekend, she hauls 20 to 50 jerrycans of fuel to the river, paying bribes to soldiers at DRC checkpoints since a July 2024 ban on fuel trafficking. “It’s dangerous,” Zitu says. “But it’s harder for those waiting for fuel on the other side.”

### It started with bad politics

Burundi imports all its fuel and needs foreign currency to do so. Its forex largely comes from aid and exports, especially tea and coffee. Flows from both sources have been erratic over the past decade. In contrast, inflation has soared, hitting 41.6% in June. The Burundian franc has also nosedived against the dollar, making fuel imports more expensive.

Burundian analysts trace the disruption of foreign-currency flows and export revenue back to the 2015 political crisis, when former president Pierre Nkurunziza sought a third term. Civil society and opposition supporters revolted, accusing Nkurunziza of violating the Constitution and the 2000 Arusha Accords that ended the

Burundian civil war. The government’s harsh response to protests and a coup attempt pushed activists, journalists, and many other Burundians into exile.

Amid the political unrest, Burundi’s donors pulled back. Foreign aid fell sharply in 2015 and has flowed unevenly since, according to figures from the World Bank. Exports also fell and didn’t recover to pre-crisis levels until 2022, United Nations Comtrade data shows.

By early 2023, the central bank’s foreign reserves could cover only one or two weeks of imports, down from three months before the crisis, Faustin Ndikumana, a Burundian economist, told *Agence France-Presse*. The forex problems were the trigger for the fuel shortages.

However, government officials continue to blame the fuel deficits on “hoarders”. “There are those who hide fuel to sell it to the rich in lavish Toyota Jeep cars,” President Évariste Ndayishimiye told a crowd in Bujumbura on 12 August. He said combatting fuel hoarders was the top

priority for Bujumbura's new provincial governor.

### Monopoly and price fixing

The government has accused private importers of speculative hoarding and created a national oil company, Société Pétrolière du Burundi (Sopebu), to take control. The Sopebu X account publishes lists of fuel stations it has supplied but these updates are not provided daily and the shortages remain severe.

The prices on the black market running parallel to Sopebu are staggering. A 20-litre can of gasoline now sells for up to 400,000 Burundian francs (\$134) on the black market – more than many families earn in a month.

It is five times higher than prices set by the government, which wants to enforce price fixing to control the situation.

Public transport has shrunk and become costlier. People wait hours for a ride at bus stations. Fares had tripled by May 2024.

The government capped the rates private transporters can charge and steeply fines operators caught charging more, which led to a drivers' strike across major towns in late July.

The shortages have battered other sectors too. In December, tea factories – vital exporters for foreign-currency inflows – reported receiving less than half their diesel needs, delaying production.

### Borrow more?

Some activists are calling on the government to resolve the crisis by



**Fuel throttle:** Civilians are queuing at some petrol stations for weeks at a time.

borrowing more money. With a debt-to-GDP ratio of 35%, Burundi has been one of East Africa's more conservative borrowers. Gabriel Rufyiri, from the anti-corruption organisation Olucome, suggests that a \$30-million loan would stabilise supplies.

Ndikumana argues for wider reform: "Burundi must increase exports, maintain good relations with donors to end sanctions imposed in 2015, and strictly manage what remains of the central bank's hard currency," he says.

Other experts call for negotiations with neighbouring countries to secure stable imports.

As shortages persist and enforcement intensifies, Ndayishimiye's dream of turning Burundi into an "emerging country" by 2040 grows more distant.

Meanwhile, people like Kabwana continue to see potential death on the Ruzizi River as a risk worth taking to keep their families – and country – moving. ■

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This story was published in collaboration with Egab

# ALGERIA

## Some food for thought, and little else

As Sahrawi hunger grows and their cause shrinks, a library tries to lend more than books.

MAXINE BETTERIDGE-MOES

THE Sahrawi people living in the Tindouf camps of southwest Algeria are facing their worst nutrition crisis since 2010. The timing couldn't be worse: humanitarian support is shrinking and global politicians are increasingly abandoning the Sahrawi independence cause, which the refugees see as key to ending their 50-year exile.

One in 10 of the Sahrawi children living in the camps are acutely malnourished, seven in 10 women are anaemic and nearly nine in every 10 people are food insecure, according to a survey by University College London.

"Mothers cannot breastfeed because they are so anaemic," says Najla Mohamed-Lamin, an activist living in the camps. The mother of two spends most of her income on vegetables and fruit but at a recent health check doctors were shocked by how anaemic she was.



PHOTO: PATRICK WALTY

*Iron will: Najla Mohamed-Lamin*

Since 1975, nearly 200,000 Sahrawis have lived in the camps, dependent on aid as they wait for a resolution of the Western Sahara conflict. It began when Spain ended its colonisation of the territory and it was annexed by Morocco, sparking a 16-year war with the Polisario Front independence movement. A United Nations-brokered ceasefire in 1991 promised a referendum on self-determination that has never happened.

Now, ultra-processed foods dominate stalls in the camp markets, fuelling both undernutrition in children and obesity and diabetes in adults. A local library co-founded by Mohamed-Lamin is trying to respond by expanding beyond books.





**Helping hand:** The Almasar Library Centre.

PHOTO: MAXINE BETTERIDGE-MOES

The Almasar Library Centre in Smara camp started a seed bank, giving families seedlings and training them to create home gardens. “We need some agency over what we eat, even though we are in a refugee camp,” says Mohamed-Lamin. “If we don’t have any alternatives to humanitarian aid, it will be catastrophic.”

Malnutrition among women means they have trouble breastfeeding, which leads to wasting in infants – a 2017 study found that up to 22% of Sahrawi refugee infants are breastfed for less than six months. To encourage breastfeeding, the Almasar library gives young mothers breast pumps but, vital as such community initiatives are, they are no substitute for a political solution.

The UN referendum proposal appears to have fallen by the wayside. Instead, several countries have publicly backed Morocco’s “autonomy plan” – a proposal to give the Sahrawis self-governance under Moroccan sovereignty instead

of full independence. It includes the United States, whose president backed the plan in 2020 in return for Morocco normalising relations with Israel. Spain, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Kenya have also supported Morocco.

But Sahrawi leaders insist that the UN referendum is still the best solution. “We find it very unfortunate that respected countries who speak about rules-based international order rally [behind] the aggressor and find no shame in doing that,” Mohamed Yeslem Beisat, the Sahrawi minister for foreign and African affairs, told *The Continent*.

The African Union continues to recognise Western Sahara as an independent member state. But in 2018, the year after Morocco returned to the union after a 33-year absence, the AU decided to stop actively trying to resolve the disagreement between Morocco and the Polisario Front, deferring to the stalled UN process instead. ■



## PHOTO ESSAY

## Pamoja! Does '24 Chan favour the brave?

WORDS AND PHOTOS: BADRU KATUMBA/*THE CONTINENT*

AUGUST HAS been nothing short of extraordinary as Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania hosted the delayed 2024 African Nations Championship, commonly known as Chan.

The men's football tournament is an opportunity for local league players to get in on the international action by forming a national side to compete with peers from other African local leagues. (You are welcome, Afrobasket fans.)

The Chan 2024 tournament was

initially scheduled for earlier in the year, but the delay has given fans more time to prepare kits and stunts to meet the moment. Ugandan fans took advantage of – and delight in – this opportunity.

The Uganda Cranes' journey has been a remarkable rollercoaster of a ride. The team made it to the quarterfinals for the very first time, to play Senegal, the defending champions.

Not even the exuberant Uganda fans who had roared in the stands of

Nelson Mandela Stadium throughout the tournament were optimistic about beating Senegal's Lions of Teranga.

On the day of the quarterfinal, the streets were alive with vendors selling knock-off jerseys and national flags, street children looking up at a giant screen at the old taxi park waiting for the game, and artists offering to paint bodies in the national colours. But even with this activity, the streets felt calmer than they had in the weeks.

At the stadium, the crowd seemed smaller than warranted at this stage of the tournament. As fans trickled in, some paused to pray on the grass, a peaceful contrast to the chaotic activity

outside. One fan's costume suggested that they had skipped their wedding for the game.

As kick-off approached, the energy shifted dramatically. Fans belted out the national anthem and the air crackled with excitement. On several occasions, fans rose to their feet, fervently cheering the Cranes. But the goalpost remained elusive. Each missed opportunity amplified the anxiety.

Senegal's Oumar Ba scored in the 62nd minute, sending chills down spines as a drizzle began to fall.

As the game approached its final minutes, the Cranes' captain had a golden opportunity to equalise.



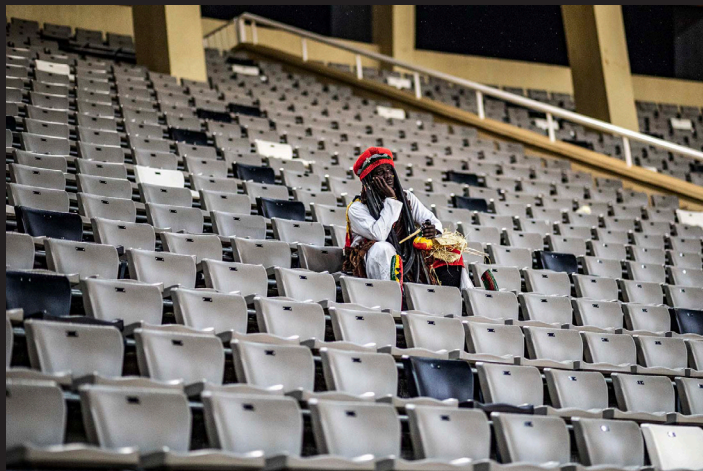


The crowd roared in hope, only for the moment to slip away. Agony filled the stands as the clock ticked down and the final whistle blew.

We had lost. The heartbreak was palpable. Many fans remained motionless in their seats.

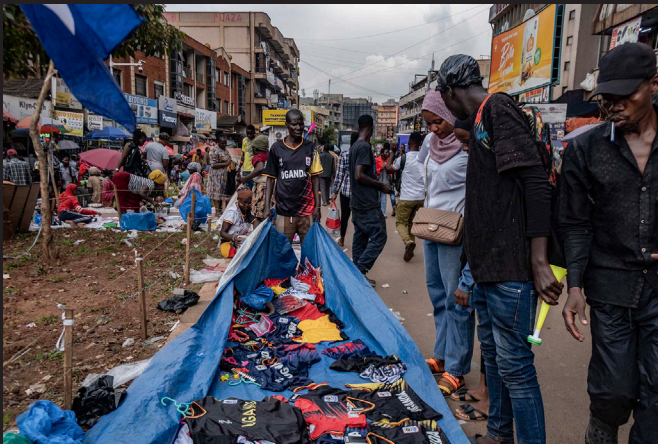
But Ugandan fans will remember Chan 2024 for years to come, knowing that it was the energy of a home crowd – the 12th man – that fuelled the Cranes' best Chan performance so far.

Pamoja (as one), as this year's Kiswahili tagline for Chan goes. ■













LIMITED SERIES

# The Museum of Memory

HOW WE CHOOSE TO REMEMBER

CURATED BY SHOLA LAWAL  
ART DIRECTION BY WYNONA MUTISI



# Mparo Royal Tombs

HOIMA, UGANDA

THE MPARO Royal Tombs are the sacred resting place of Chwa II Kabalega and his descendants from the once-powerful Bunyoro Kingdom in what is now western Uganda. The tombs, around 50, are spread across four acres in Mparo village in the Hoima district. The site was originally Kabalega's palace.

Each tomb is a rounded hut with a heavy thatch roof and raffia doors. Vaults inside hold the remains of the deceased royals, as well as special objects like their royal attire and crowns, spears, utensils, and other belongings. The tombs are guarded by Bunyoro's royal guards.

Of all the tombs, the biggest is Kabalega's. The king, or omukama, is regarded as Bunyoro's greatest leader because of his resistance to British rule. Several institutions in Hoima are named after him, including Kabalega Secondary School, Kabalega Resorts, and the Kabalega Bridge. These names are a testament to the reverence accorded the late omukama, according to kingdom spokesperson Kyomugisa Frankline.

Kabalega's son and later king Tito Winyi IV, and several other princes and princesses, are also buried here.

Kabalega took the throne between 1869 and 1870, when he was about 17, after a long succession war with his sibling.

He had big plans to restore the glory of Bunyoro by reforming the military, or Abarusura; developing weapons; and reconquering breakaway territories. His efforts led to the Kitara kingdom being annexed and today the empire is also called Bunyoro-Kitara. Kabalega also focused on trade, particularly of salt from the village of Kibiro. Bunyoro's location near Lake Mwitanzige (now Lake Albert) made it a prime trade outpost.

However, just as the omukama was crowned, a pressing problem reared its head: the British. The empire was consolidating and expanding its African territories. Shortly after Kabalega's ascent, in about 1876, the colonial authorities sent Mehmet Emin Pasha, then governor of the British Egyptian Equatoria province (present-day South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo), to ask Kabalega nicely to bend the knee. Kabalega refused.

In 1894, Britain declared war on Bunyoro. British forces, armed with machine guns and backed by the rival Buganda Kingdom, set out to capture Kabalega and dismantle his empire.

Bunyoro was devastated by the war, even as Kabalega sustained an armed resistance by launching guerrilla attacks on the invaders. He was captured in April 1899 after he was injured in battle. Parts of Bunyoro were transferred to Buganda.

The British exiled Kabalega to the Seychelles. They let him return only in April 1923. He never made it, dying en route just hours from home. In 2009, Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni declared Kabalega a national hero.

About 500 people a day visit the tombs to learn about Kabalega's legacy. Entering the well-guarded tombs requires a lot of preparation.

Anyone who has had sexual intercourse the night before is not allowed in and conservative dress is advised. Women who are menstruating are also forbidden from entry.

Christopher Serugwa of the African Rock Safaris tour company says most tourists are unaware of the tombs and are often surprised when guides suggest visiting them. It's best to tie the trip in with a visit to the nearby Murchison Falls National Park or the pretty, lush city of Fort Portal, as the tombs sit between these two better-known tourist attractions.

At the gate of the Royal Tombs is a cone-like, stepped monument, painted white and black. It marks the spot where Kabalega received British envoy Mehmet Emin Pasha. The palaces of the queens lie just outside the site. In the Bunyoro Kingdom, even after the king's death, it is customary that his wives and descendants continue to live nearby. ■

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**Illustration note by Ugandan illustrator Sarah Ijangolet:** *A century after his death, Omukama Kabalega continues to hold a proud place in Uganda's history from the Mparo tombs. The monument is a reminder of his fight against colonial rule – and that embers of defiance are often what ignite the flames of freedom. This is a burial ground that seems to infuse the air with resilience through its mere existence.*





# MPARO ROYAL TOMBS

ILLUSTRATION: SARAH IJANGOLET

DATA

# Cry foul or cry me a river?

EVER HEAR complaints of corruption and wonder why no one does anything about it? Maybe they think it's futile – and dangerous.

We asked citizens in 34 countries across two survey rounds whether action would be taken if they were to personally report corruption to the authorities.

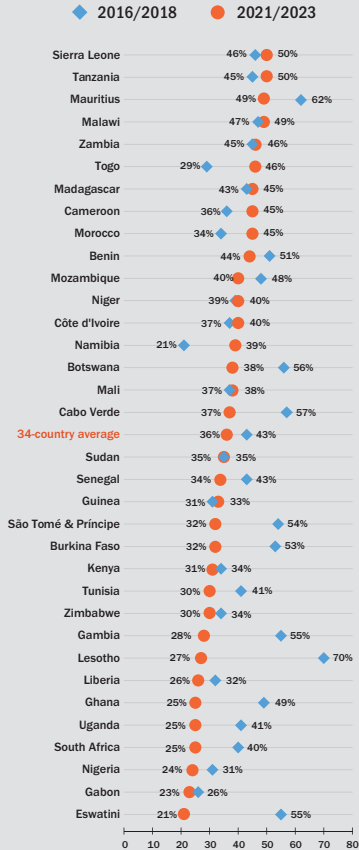
In 2016/2018, fewer than half (43%) thought a response was “somewhat likely” or “very likely.” By 2021/2023, the share of confident would-be whistleblowers was down by seven percentage points, to 36%.

Two Southern African nations saw enormous declines: Lesotho went from continental leader to well below average (from 70% to 27%), while Eswatini's share of optimists fell from more than half to last in class (55% vs 21%).

Perhaps officials in those countries can take lessons from one of their regional peers: Namibia rose the fastest of all, from the bottom of the pile to above average (21% vs 39%).

Not that any country has it all figured out. There isn't a majority anywhere who think officials will heed their call. And citizens are unlikely to come forward: 72% say ordinary people risk retaliation if they do. ■

Likelihood of getting official action for reporting corruption | 34 African countries | 2016/2018 vs 2021/2023





## FILM REVIEW

BY WILFRED OKICHE



### Sins, sons, synecdoche and survival

**Zimbabwe's traumatic history finds purchase in the present through a flawed, haunted survivor.**

FROM 1983 to 1987, Robert Mugabe orchestrated the massacre of tens of thousands in Matabeleland. Decades later, Zimbabwe is still grappling with the late dictator's violent legacy.

Chris Nyathi, the lead participant of *Matabeleland*, is the son of one of the victims. His father's remains were

abandoned in one of the many unmarked graves scattered across the countryside. Tracing his chronic problems to this root cause, Nyathi and his family try to find a final resting place for their patriarch.

Nyathi is a long-distance truck driver, struggling to make ends meet. Steady income is hard to come by, he has 17 children he cannot quite care for, and is unable to commit to an exclusive relationship with Dumi, his long-suffering girlfriend. But because he is a 60-year-old man, he expects to reserve the rights to reap whatever benefits his patriarchal society will allow.

Placing Nyathi's problems against the historical backdrop, *Matabeleland* underlines the generational trauma embedded in its protagonist's struggles while gently suggesting that perhaps some of these troubles are self-inflicted.

If this realisation creeps up stealthily, it is mostly because of the sensitive touch director Nyasha Kadandara brings.

From its title, *Matabeleland* suggests a kind of sweeping encounter of a diverse region and its storied history.

But Kadandara understands that often the most effective way to tell an epic story is to zero it down to the minutiae and work from the personal. In this way, Nyathi's story becomes a stand-in for a collective, unresolved trauma that still haunts so many – both within and beyond Zimbabwe's borders. ■

# The Quiz

- 1 In which country is the Valley of the Kings (pictured) located?
- 2 Bujumbura is the economic capital of which country?
- 3 What is the second-largest city in the Democratic Republic of the Congo?
- 4 How many colours are there in Morocco's flag?
- 5 Matabeleland is a region in which Southern African country?
- 6 Which three countries recently hosted the Chan tournament?
- 7 Uganda was a protectorate of which empire from 1894 to 1962?
- 8 How many African Great Lakes are there?
- 9 True or false: French is the official language of Mauritania.
- 10 What is Liberia's currency called?



## 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

You can't honk your car horn in the Valley of the Kings, but if you park outside you can just toot 'n come in.

PHOTO:AMIR MAKAR/AFP



# Big Pic

**A whole new world:** Jasmine harvests have sustained thousands of families in Egypt's Nile Delta over many generations, but rising temperatures, long dry spells and climate-driven pests have left that legacy in peril.

PHOTO: KHALED DESOUKI/AFP



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