

with Mail & Guardian

# The Continent



**The church's  
African future**

Photo: Tiziana Fabi/AFP



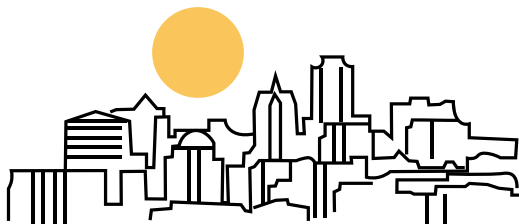
**Cover:** For a pope in need of a quick morale boost, there is no better place to visit than Kinshasa. More than a million people turned up in the Congolese capital to receive blessings from Pope Francis, and he is expected to receive a similarly enthusiastic welcome in Juba at the weekend. These extraordinary scenes highlight what the church's own statistics are saying: the future of Catholicism is African. But what does this mean for an ancient institution in the middle of a messy reform process? (p10)

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- **Today in empire:** Americans kill Somali militant (p7)
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## EQUATORIAL GUINEA

### Hail Roka Botey, first of her name

Manuela Roka Botey has become Equatorial Guinea's first female prime minister after she was promoted from minister of education by President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo. The former vice-dean at the National University of Equatorial Guinea replaces Francisco Pascual Obama Asue in the premiership. Vice President Teodoro Nguema Obiang Mangue said the appointment confirms the leadership's commitment to gender equality. But in a country led by father and son, and where the only former president was also a Nguema, equality is a tenuous claim.

## CAPITALISM

### Shell's two very different records

Fossil fuel giant Shell declared record profits of \$40-billion for January to September 2022. As if to illustrate the real cost at which such mind-boggling profits come, a record number of claimants – more than 11,000 Nigerians – sued the company in the London high court, asking it to clean up the pollution that has resulted from its 86 years of operations in the Niger Delta and compensate them for lost livelihoods. They are mostly farmers from Ogale and fishers from Bille. By driving the climate crisis, Shell is also destroying livelihoods everywhere.

**MALAWI**

## **President Chakwera links cholera deaths to climate change**

More than a thousand Malawians have died of cholera in the past 11 months. It's the worst outbreak in more than a decade. This week, President Lazarus Chakwera said more research was needed on the link between climate change and the outbreak. Last year, flooding across southern Malawi led to unprecedented levels of water-borne diseases, with Chakwera pointing to the widespread use of pit latrines, which were then flooded, as a key problem.

**ZAMBIA**

## **China plays hardball on debt relief deals**

Pointing out that multilateral institutions and private lenders hold the bulk of Zambia's national debt, a spokesperson for China's foreign ministry this week urged them to consider participating in the debt relief Lusaka needs. Multilateral lenders like the World Bank hold 24% of Zambia's debt and 46% was borrowed from private creditors. In efforts to restructure Zambia's huge debt, only sovereign lenders, among whom China is the biggest, have been asked to forgive or ease the terms of their loans.

**SAHEL**

## **Bad drugs on top of everything else**

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has warned that as many as half the medicines available to people in the Sahel region are either substandard or expired. The most affected countries are Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. The "inferior" medicines often come from Europe and through the seaports of Benin, Ghana, Guinea and Nigeria, and the by road inland. "In the Sahel, studies indicate a percentage of substandard or falsified medicines on the market ranging from 19 to 50%," the office said.



## MADAGASCAR

## Cyclone Cheneso death toll rises to 30

The death toll from the cyclone that blew through Madagascar between 19 and 23 January has increased to 30 and might rise further since 20 people were still unaccounted for, a week after the storm passed. Malagasy authorities say that thousands of people were displaced as a result of Cyclone Cheneso. It flooded several districts in the island nation's north west, cutting them off from the capital Antananarivo, which complicated search and rescue operations. On



**Submerged:** The cyclone flooded much of Madagascar . Photo: Elie Sergio/AFP

average, the island nation is hit by three tropical storms every two years.

## SOMALIA

## Al-Shabaab attack on high-level summit hardens resolve

On Wednesday, just before a security summit attended by presidents William Ruto of Kenya, Omar Guelleh of Djibouti and Hassan Sheikh Mohamud of Somalia, plus Ethiopian prime minister Abiy Ahmed, Al-Shabaab fired mortar shells into the venue – the presidential palace in Mogadishu. No one was hurt and the summit went ahead. Afterwards, the leaders pledged a joint “search and destroy” operation against the militants, who have lost territory over the past year but also ramped up attacks on Somali targets.

## COLONIALISM

## French Parliament to vote on returning stolen artefacts

A historical drum from Côte d'Ivoire may be returned by France, to be kept at Abidjan's Museum of Civilisation – if the French Parliament votes in favour of its repatriation. Before the French army confiscated it from the Ébrié community in 1916, the 3m-long, 430kg drum – known as Djidji Ayokwe – was used to send warnings between villages. When it was still structurally intact, the drum's thundrous percussive messages could be heard up to 30km away. Côte d'Ivoire wants at least 147 other items back from France.

## CHAD-ISRAEL

## Brick and mortar vs a roaming ambassador

Mahamat Déby, the president of Chad, opened a Chadian embassy in Israel on Thursday. In 2019, at a ceremony in N'Djamena, the two countries restored their diplomatic relations, which had

been severed in 1972 under the influence of Libya's Muammar Gaddafi. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said thawing relations are “part of Israel's return to Africa, and Africa's return to Israel”. Israel is however currently represented in Chad by a non-resident ambassador, Benjamin Bourgel, who also covers Cape Verde, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, The Gambia and Senegal.



Photo: Twitter/  
(GmahamatIdi)

## TUNISIA

## Kais Saied is no ghostbuster

A second attempt at general elections in Tunisia fell as nearly flat as the first, with only 11% of voters turning up. It was the run-off for the first round in December, which saw a voter turnout of only 8.8%. The “ghost” elections are largely seen as an indictment of President Kais Saied, who in mid-2021 dissolved parliament and granted himself nearly unlimited powers. He proposed a new Constitution, which was passed by a 2022 referendum in which only 30% of voters participated.

## MOROCCO

## The campaign to kick Western Sahara out

A meeting of African politicians in Marrakech last weekend collected three more signatures for Morocco's “Tangier Appeal”, a campaign to kick the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic out of the African Union. The union maintains that Morocco is occupying its neighbour. The three new signatories – from Lesotho, Madagascar and The Gambia – are former ministers who no longer represent their home countries (as are the 16 other signatories).

# Somalia

## The empire strikes again, and again

**US special forces killed an Islamic State leader in Somalia, just weeks after a drone strike killed 30 people in the country**

**I**n the early hours of Thursday 26 January, a United States military helicopter landed in northern Somalia. Heavily-armed soldiers jumped out. They were hunting Bilal al-Sudani, said to be the leader of the Islamic State in Somalia.

A little while later, al-Sudani was dead, along with 10 others. The first details about this foreign military operation on African soil were made public when a statement was released later that day by US defence secretary Lloyd J Austin III.

A week earlier, about 260km northeast of Mogadishu, the US carried out a drone strike that killed 30 people. According to the US military's Africa Command, the strike took place at the request of the Somali government, and all fatalities were of the Al-Shabaab militant group. It said "no civilians were injured or killed".

The US military's Africa Command rarely acknowledges civilian deaths, admitting responsibility for just five civilian deaths between April 2018 and January 2021. Researchers suggest the civilian death toll is far higher. "[Africa Command] appears not to know who its air strikes are actually killing and maiming in its secretive war in Somalia," said Abdullahi Hassan of Amnesty International in a 2019 report.

The US has conducted more than 300 drone strikes in Somalia in the last decade, with 281 taking place during the Donald Trump administration. It maintains an extensive military footprint across Africa.

In addition to its major military base in Djibouti, a 2020 investigation published by *The Continent* found that the US secretly operates at least 27 military outposts across the continent. ■



**Heads up: American soldiers deployed in 'psychological operations' address civilians in Somalia in the early 1980s.**

# East Africa

## KLM travel alert provokes regional ire

**The airline warned its passengers about 'civil unrest' in Kenya and Tanzania – but this was news to their respective governments**

**Kiri Rupiah**

**T**he governments of Kenya and Tanzania have expressed disappointment with KLM for spreading “unfounded” claims after the Dutch airline published an advisory warning of travel disruptions due to purported “civil unrest” in the two countries.

On 25 January the United States embassy in Dar es Salaam issued a warning of possible terror threats in areas frequented by US citizens and other westerners in Dar es Salaam and elsewhere in Tanzania, saying they continued to be attractive targets to terrorists planning to conduct attacks.

Later that day, KLM issued a travel warning indicating some flights may be cancelled citing “civil unrest” in Kenya

and Tanzania between Friday 27 January and Monday 30 January – prompting backlash from citizens of the two countries. KLM issued a clarification and apology, stating that the advisory was only meant for customers in Tanzania and had been mistakenly sent to customers in Kenya as well.

Kipchumba Murkomen, Kenya’s transport minister, called the advisory “false, insensitive, and misleading” on Twitter. The Tanzanian government also dismissed the claims as baseless and alarmist.

The alert was deleted on 29 January. In a letter to Tanzania’s Transport Minister Makame Mbarawa, KLM’s country manager for Tanzania Alexander van de Wint apologised, saying the “use of the phrase civil unrest was wrong”.

**Kipchumba Murkomen,  
Kenya’s transport minister,  
called the advisory ‘false,  
insensitive, and misleading’**

According to research by Dr Wafula Okumu, the executive director of the Borders Institute, travel alerts and advisories can have a detrimental effect when issued improperly. Okumu noted that travel alerts on African countries usually exaggerate the security threat, are inconsistent or unreasonable, and seem to be politically motivated. ■



# Sierra Leone

## Women are now officially a tiny bit more equal to men

**Sierra Leone passed a law legitimising women's roles in public life. As long as they still do 'womanly' things.**

**Francis Kokutse**

**W**hen *The Continent* sat down with Sierra Leone's gender minister Manty Tarawalli after the country signed its much heralded gender bill, she admitted that the law had been long in coming: "Until now, the climate wasn't right in terms of women's readiness and men accommodating this sort of growth."

On 19 January, President Julius Maada Bio signed a law guaranteeing that going forward, at least 30% of parliamentarians and public appointees like ambassadors will be women. Currently, only 12% of parliamentarians and 17% of cabinet ministers are women, according to *Reuters* news agency. The law extends to private workplaces and those that are non-compliant will face stiff fines.

Despite men still being allowed to hold twice as many public offices as women, there was stiff opposition to the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act. Tarawalli said the initial argument – that women had the right to be meaningfully represented – didn't work,

so the proponents of the bill needed to come up with another argument, based on economic growth. They pointed out that growth cannot happen when 52% of Sierra Leone's population is kept out of the formal economy and leadership positions.

Signing the bill, President Bio called it a licence for the country's girls to "get quality education, work hard and aspire beyond their wildest imagination to be the best at anything they do."

His message landed with 21-year-old Pamela Cole, who has just completed high school in Freetown and wants to study law at university. "Finally, with this law, my dreams of becoming a politician will really come to fruition," she told *The Continent*.

But women's full equality is still a hard sell in Sierra Leone and so public messaging about the law will walk a delicate and fraught line. Tarawalli said it will reassure men that empowered women "contribute to the community and Sierra Leone" and remind women that "economic empowerment does not mean neglecting their duties as mothers and wives at home." ■



## ANALYSIS

# The future of the Catholic Church is being forged in Africa

*When Pope Francis arrived in Kinshasa, at least 100,000 people lined the road to greet him. The next day, over a million people crowded into an old airfield to celebrate mass with the pontiff, underscoring the weight African Catholicism carries in the church. While this may be good for the Vatican, it is less so for the pope's ambitious reform agenda.*

**Russell Pollitt** is a Jesuit priest and the director of the Jesuit Institute South Africa.

**P**ope Francis, the head of the Catholic Church, visited the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan this week. His visit renewed focus on the growing role of African Catholics within the church more broadly.

Africa is home to nearly 20% of the world's Catholics – 236-million of the 1.36-billion Catholics worldwide. And the church is growing faster here than anywhere else in the world. Recent statistics show that a 2.1% growth occurred between 2019-2020, compared to just 0.3% in Europe.

A large proportion of Catholics in

Africa are young people — the continent's median age is around 19. This is in contrast to the trend in many other parts of the world, where young people leave the church because they think it is too staid and conservative.

The pope will want, especially, to encourage African youth to take more of a role in shaping the future of the church and society in their respective nations – and perhaps encourage them to support his own reform agenda, which is not especially popular on the continent.

Although large, enthusiastic crowds greeted Francis in Kinshasa and Juba, many Catholics will hold views contrary to his more progressive vision. Many Catholic dioceses and institutions in Africa embrace a more conservative style

**Papal trail:** People gather at the roadside to get a glimpse of Pope Francis in Kinshasa. Photo: Guerchom Ndebo/AFP



**Blurred vision: Catholicism in Africa is more conservative than Pope Francis might like.** Photo: AFP



of Catholicism in their doctrines and rituals.

African bishops will agree with Francis on several issues he often addresses – poverty, care of the environment, social injustice, corruption, and war. However, many of these prelates will also push back and stand firm against Francis's more progressive stance on divorce and remarriage, for example.

It is no secret that many African Catholic leaders have not embraced Pope Francis's style, vision, and reform agenda. This is especially clear when it comes to issues like homosexuality, clerical privilege, church structure and the role of women in the church.

Some leaders, like Archbishop Alek Banda of Lusaka, Zambia, recently supported the ongoing criminalisation of his country's LGBTIQ community. Many young priests being ordained from African seminaries would hold to a much

more conservative theology. They would be suspicious of the "liberation theology" that is closely identified with Francis's papacy.

### **Listening to those on the margins**

The decline in young men entering seminaries in the northern hemisphere means that many of the world's Catholic priests will soon be of African descent. This fact alone is changing the face of global Catholicism: from a church of the north with European missionaries to a church of the south made up mainly of missionaries from regions like Africa.

This will not only shape global Catholicism in the years to come, but it will also give African Catholics a considerable influence to shape the church's future.

Francis has often spoken about the African church being given more of a voice in the church and the world. He is visiting





**Bless the reigns:  
Pope John Paul II  
blesses Ugandans  
near Kampala in  
1993. He is said  
to have gotten on  
well with President  
Yoweri Museveni.**  
Photo: AFP

the continent at an important moment in the history of global Catholicism when he seeks to listen more closely to those on the margins.

In 2021 he embarked upon an ambitious global consultation in the Catholic Church called “The Synod on Synodality”. Francis is asking the whole church to enter dialogue and speak about anything that needs to be addressed. He has reiterated that anything can be spoken about in the process that is expected to end in 2024. He is hoping to dialogue with African Catholics specifically, even though several issues that have already been put on the table globally – like women in ministry, compulsory celibacy for clergy and homosexuality – have been frowned upon by African Catholics.

Unfortunately, in some places on the continent, there has been little done by

local leadership to engage in this process. They disagree with the pope’s dialogical approach.

Francis is also visiting a church divided by cultures, languages and ethnicities. A tragic example of this is the ongoing conflict in Cameroon between the mostly French-speaking government and rebels in the English-speaking areas, which has claimed thousands of lives. Catholic church leaders are divided and unable to speak with one voice as they, too, are rooted in the country’s colonial history.

### **A force for change**

Francis hopes that young people can play an increasingly active role in addressing many of the conflicts and widespread poverty on the continent. In the DRC this week, the pope told Catholics to be a “conscience for peace” and to “break the



cycle of violence”.

The church often plays an essential role in addressing societal issues. For example, the Catholic bishops in the DRC and Nigeria organised a successful protest against violence. In addition, the Rome-based Catholic organisation, Sant'Egidio, brokered the peace in Mozambique, ending the civil war in 1992.

In many countries, the church also fills in for the state where dysfunctional and corrupt governments have failed to provide for their people. For example, the highest number of Catholic health facilities on the continent (2185) is in the DRC. This is followed by Kenya (1092) and Nigeria (524).

Francis also urged young people in

the DRC to resist greed and corruption, critiquing politicians who have embezzled millions and personally profited from several countries' natural resources. He encouraged young people to choose a future different from the past.

In Kinshasa, this call was immediately picked up by the listening crowd, who started to call for an end to the rule of President Felix Tshisekedi – a president whose contested election victory was not recognised by the Church.

This is the pope's fifth visit to Africa in 10 years, underscoring how important he views the continent. Given the exponential growth of African Catholicism, it is not much of a stretch to wonder: could the next pope be African? ■

**Mass appeal: Pope Francis arrives at Lubaga Cathedral in Kampala this week.**  
Photo: AFP



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**Conflicted:**  
Amhara militias  
are adding new  
fuel to Ethiopia's  
fires. Photo: AFP

## Ethiopia's other war

**The civil war in Ethiopia is supposed to be over. A much-lauded peace deal was signed last year between the government and Tigrayan politicians. But for others caught in the middle of the conflict – such as the Qemant, a minority ethnic group – there is little choice but to keep fighting.**

**Claire Wilmot in Gedarif**

**B**erhane escaped one massacre only to find herself in the middle of another one. The first was in Metema Yohannes, her hometown in Ethiopia's Amhara region. Bodies were scattered along the road and people wandered among them, searching for their loved ones in the faces of the dead.

Eventually she recognised a neighbour,

his face marred by early signs of decay. "At night I could not forget his face", she says.

Berhane and her family are Qemant, a minority nationality targeted in Metema Yohannes in 2019. They fled to a town called Mai Kadra in the Tigray region, a refuge until war broke out in November 2020. Then, it became the site of violence in which at least 700 residents were killed.

"What I saw in Metema Yohannes I saw again in Mai Kadra", she says. "I knew

I had to leave Ethiopia.”

Berhane, who like others in this story was given a pseudonym due to safety concerns, is one of many Qemant refugees who now support the goals of the Qemant Liberation Army (QLA), an armed group fighting for a “regional state” in Ethiopia.

## Selective peace

In November, a peace deal was signed between the federal government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), ending a civil war that claimed hundreds of thousands of lives. Implementation has begun, but many issues remain unresolved, particularly for ethnic minorities.

In the shadow of the Tigray war, smaller wars are being fought over land, identity, and representation in a country that has long struggled to reconcile its wealth of languages and ethnic groups with a cohesive national project.

For minorities such as the Qemant, political autonomy is becoming associated with security – and failing to address their grievances could pose a long-term threat to Ethiopia's stability.

Teshome, a shopkeeper who now fights for the QLA, also survived the massacre in Metema Yohannes. In 2019 he relocated to Shinfa, which was attacked in 2021.

Before the war he wasn't very political. His mother spoke Qemanti and Teshome identified as Qemant, but he didn't feel his ethnicity divided him from Amhara friends and family.

In the mid-2000s, a cultural committee sought to restore the Qemant language and religion, which was nearing extinction due to assimilationist politics and a lack

of official recognition. Tensions rose in 2017 when a referendum was held on Qemant self-administration (in seven out of eight districts with a significant Qemant population, voters chose to remain part of Amhara – although these results have been contested).

In Ethiopia, ethnic groups have the constitutional right to self-determination, but Amhara politicians, who have a political rivalry with Tigray's leaders, saw this as a TPLF-led plot to destabilise Amhara. Qemant land claims may have been encouraged by Tigray's leaders in response to 2015 Amhara claims to Wolkait, in Western Tigray, but Qemant political questions pre-date these disputes, according to two Ethiopian researchers who requested anonymity due to fears of professional reprisal.

**For minorities such as the Qemant, political autonomy is becoming associated with security – and failing to address their grievances could pose a long-term threat to Ethiopia's stability**

Amnesty International found state security forces complicit in violence against Qemant from 2018 to 2020. Amhara civilians were also killed and displaced then, though reporting suggests not at the same scale (in regions where they are the minority, Amhara civilians have suffered similar atrocities).

Five months into the Tigray war, Teshome survived another attack – this



**A deal was struck to end the Tigray conflict but tensions are still sky high.**

Photo: AFP

time by federal forces and an Amhara militia called the Fano. He saw two of his neighbours get shot as they ran from a burning house.

“I didn’t understand. Qemant were not part of that war”, Teshome says.

### **A self-fulfilling prophecy**

But the Qemant were soon drawn into the conflict. After Qemant leaders declined to fight for Amhara, the government accused Qemant politicians (and increasingly civilians) of working for the TPLF. These claims were used to justify attacks in Qemant civilian areas. Large-scale attacks lasted from April to late September 2021, but violence against civilians has continued.

The QLA says it was recruiting from April 2021 onwards, though some analysts believe a less organised armed element likely existed before. In November 2021 Qemant politicians aligned with a TPLF-

led coalition, which they said was their best bet for achieving regional statehood. Statehood brings many benefits in Ethiopia’s federal system, including economic resources and the right to a security force – an attractive proposition for minorities targeted by state security.

After his shop was destroyed in Shinfa, Teshome hid in the countryside hoping the violence would subside. It didn’t. Two months later, he joined the QLA (Qemant Liberation Army).

Prior to the peace deal, the QLA was coordinating with the Tigray Defense Forces (TDF), though members of both groups say they were fighting in separate locations. The peace deal means the QLA no longer has its powerful ally, but they said they have no choice but to continue to fight.

“Where can we return to?” asks Yonas, another QLA fighter, reciting a long list of Qemant towns and villages that are still



occupied by Fano.

Refugees receive regular reports of extrajudicial killings by Fano militia in their former neighbourhoods, and all said they cannot return home if Fano remains active.

But Fano have been empowered during this war, and despite some crackdowns they show no signs of disarming. Refugees believe that Qemant farmland has been given to wealthy investors close to the regional government. The situation, they say, is similar to Western Tigray where land remains occupied by armed forces aligned with the government, despite the peace deal.

“What happened in Western Tigray was tested on the Qemant”, says a rights researcher who documented pre-war violence in the region, who asked to remain anonymous because they were not authorised to speak on the record.

Genet, a woman in her 20s, fled to Sudan from Shinsa town in July 2021. “[Federal forces] searched us and burned houses”, she says. “They said Qemant were TPLF”.

Her sister Hirut decided to hide in the countryside, optimistic that the violence wouldn't last long. “She said I can't leave my business, everything I've done.”

When Hirut returned in August, Genet says, she was raped by four federal soldiers. “After, she was afraid to leave [for Sudan]. She believed she would be killed along the way”.

The last time the sisters spoke, over a year ago, Hirut said she was being threatened by a Fano man occupying a displaced neighbour's home. He told her



**State forces and militias are said to be targeting minorities and seizing their land in Amhara.** Photo: AFP

he wanted to “make her his wife”.

Hirut warned her not to call again, as people were being arrested for receiving calls from Sudanese phone numbers, she said. This fear was echoed by other refugees.

An untold number of Qemant have been kidnapped by Amhara security forces and conscripted to fight, according to six sources who either witnessed a kidnapping or lost a loved one.

### **Qemant consider their future**

Eshetie Tarekegn, a Qemant diaspora organiser, believes an armed struggle was not inevitable. Among Qemant political actors, it remains controversial.

“If there was equality and justice in Amhara region there would be no need for a regional state”, he says, noting how Amhara and Qemant now share a language and have a long history of living together peacefully.

As the Qemant and others push for

statehood, analysts worry there could be violence and reversals of political gains as the government tries to halt fragmentation.

“The government thinks they have been too lenient on the Qemant question,” says an Addis Ababa-based political analyst, requesting anonymity. “Civilians, who have borne the brunt of atrocities, might see things get worse before they get better.”

In December, more than 400 politically-involved Qemant surrendered themselves to the Amhara regional government. They say they were promised political amnesty. Qemant leaders who still believed in a peaceful struggle encouraged others to surrender and negotiate, according to sources close to the Qemant Democratic Party.

Instead, they were arrested and their

phones were seized. Sources believe officials are searching for digital evidence linking them with the QLA.

“They were deceived”, says an exiled Qemant academic, noting that 134 people are still being held without charge in what he calls a concentration camp near Seraba, a military base.

Government officials have not responded to requests for comment.

A QLA member told *The Continent* that they have not surrendered, pledging to continue fighting for “equality and justice”.

How this conflict is resolved may have implications beyond the Qemant community. Across the country, insecurity and land disputes are driving support for political autonomy, raising difficult questions about the durability of Ethiopia's peace. ■



**Relative safety:** Qemant refugees queue for food in Basinga, a village in the Basunda district of Sudan's eastern Gedaref region. Photo: AFP

# Chicken for school – and goats for a ride

**To escape the volatility of their local currency, urban Zimbabweans were able to turn to the US dollar. Their rural counterparts have to barter instead.**

**Now we're cooking:**  
With inflation at  
244%, Zimbabweans  
have resurrected  
the barter economy.  
Photo: AFP



## Jeffrey Moyo in Maranda

**I**n Maranda, a small trading town on the edge of Mwenezi district in southern Zimbabwe, three barefoot children in school uniforms cross an unpaved road

and enter Zvanaka Secondary School with a clucking chicken under each armpit.

“That is their school fees,” a teacher at the school tells *The Continent*. “The school accepts grains and livestock as fees if parents or guardians don’t have money.”



**Carter barter: A man offering transport services to shoppers sits on his Scotch cart at market near Harare. Photo: AFP**

In 2017, former education minister Lazarus Dokora urged schools to accept livestock and labour as payment from struggling parents and guardians. Taurai Murambi, a resident of Maranda, says that this is common practice in the area. His two grandchildren go to Chengwe Primary School, a stone's throw away from Zvanaka Secondary School. Murambi says he has paid for their tuition with chicken since 2018.

It's not just schools that barter.

In the trading centre, Tracy Muyeni sells second-hand clothes. She says she barterers, too. "If I don't accept chickens, grains or goats, my business will not last."

Josphat Mudhunde, a farmer in the area, says he recently bartered two cows for a Scotch cart – a two-wheeled cart often drawn by oxen or donkeys – which he now hires out to other villagers. He says they too pay for using the cart with real goods "like maize and chickens and at times goats if I transport sick people."

Inflation in Zimbabwe stands at 244%,

according to the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency. With the Zimbabwean currency dropping in value by the day, people in the cities gravitated towards trading in US dollars. But in rural places like Mwenezi, barter quickly became the preferred basis of trade.

Preferred, but unpredictable. While urban people know that one US dollar currently trades for 650 Zimbabwean dollars officially, and 1,100 on the black market, there is no standard for what a chicken or sack of maize is worth in other real goods.

Menziwe Gwande, who trades between Maranda and Beitbridge, a town on the border with South Africa, says that at her small shop in the remote village of Dhengeny, some villagers bring as much as 20kg of maize to buy two bags of sugar. Four kilograms of rice are bartered for 40kg of maize. She sells the goods on later, in fiat currency, for a tidy profit.

Critics of the ruling party say the turn to barter trade is a sign of its policy failures. "The Zimbabwean dollar is not working and the only option is dollarisation and political change," says Elvis Mugari, a political activist with Zimbabwe's opposition Citizens Coalition for Change. "It's embarrassing to see people resorting to barter trade in the 21st century. This is clear testimony that Zanu-PF is an antiquated 1963 political party with 1963 solutions to the 2023 problems."

Rashweat Mukundu, a Harare-based researcher, says: "Economic policy in Zimbabwe has been politicised to enable resource looting by the elite and the poor are left to their own devices." ■

## Are Africa's 'leading' democracies in trouble?

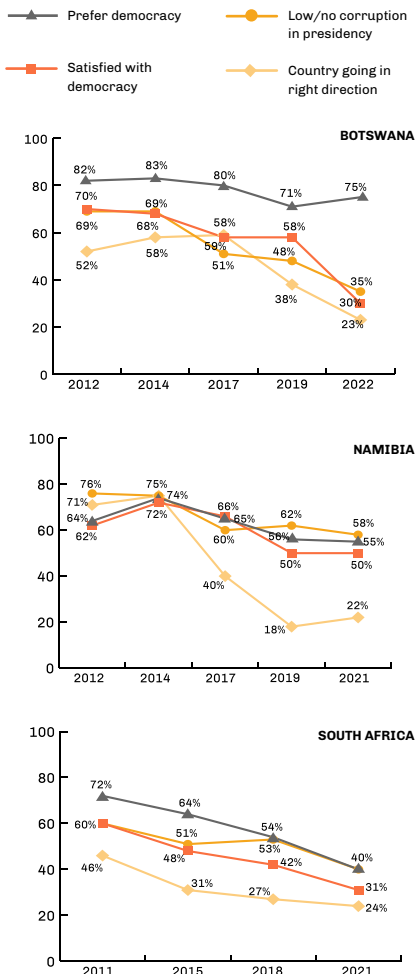
Last week we saw that Africans' demand for democratic governance is mostly strong and steady. But heartening news at the continental level can obscure problems in individual countries, including three that have anchored democracy in Southern Africa for decades: Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa.

In all three, four important indicators have declined sharply over the past decade: support for democracy, satisfaction with democracy, the perception that there is little or no corruption in the office of the presidency, and the belief that the country is going in the right direction.

In Botswana, satisfaction with democracy, perceptions of presidential honesty, and approval of the country's direction are down 29 to 40 percentage points. Namibia has seen an 18-point loss of confidence in the integrity of the presidency and a 49-point collapse in agreement with the country's direction.

In South Africa, all four indicators have dropped by 20 to 32 points, signalling the potential for democratic disaster – with support for democracy now at just 40%, one of the lowest levels we've recorded across Africa. ■

### Key democracy indicators | Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa | 2011-2022



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





## You must be Jo'King

**More is sometimes less when you don't trust your audience to keep up**

**Wilfred Okiche**

**I**t took all of two seasons for *Kings of Jo'Burg* to go from a scrappy but often earnest show about organised crime in the city of gold to full-blown, undistinguished filler content on Netflix.

Some of the reason for this has to be the loss of actor and series creator Shona Ferguson, who passed away in 2021. The series soldiered on with his wife and creative partner, Connie, taking on the reins via their Ferguson Films alongside partners Samad Davis Production.

The influx of streaming money is

obvious enough in the new season. The show loses the gritty texture that gave it some edge as a gangster drama, and embraces the sleek, generic look that has since become a Netflix signature. The scale is bigger – not necessarily better – with action set pieces and ambitious stunt work taking the place of meaningful story development.

The ending of the first season was almost prescient, leaving viewers with the impression that Simon Masire, the imposing kingpin character played by Ferguson, was murdered by his younger brother, Mo (Zolisa Xaluva). Ferguson's passing is written into the show with noble intentions obviously, but the execution leaves plenty to be desired.

In Simon's absence, Mo struggles to get anyone to take him seriously as heir to their criminal enterprise. There is an interesting succession story to be told somewhere within *Kings of Jo'Burg's* ghastly pivot to vulgar genre schlock.

But the show does not trust the audience to stick around for anything that isn't blood or gore. Whenever the writers are in doubt – which is always – they pull out more guns and set up yet another showdown.

It gets tiring fast.

Xaluva strives valiantly to inject a sense of groundedness in the role of the de facto leader of the Masire clan. But he is quickly defeated by the bombast and overstimulation of the production. *Kings of Jo'Burg* is proof that more resources do not always yield better outcomes. ■

# Netflix border crosser leaves us crosser too

Dika Ofoma

**W**e are accustomed to dancing to each other's beats. Amapiano is all the rage in Nigerian clubs; Afrobeats has taken the world by storm; and Congolese rhythms are infectious, no matter what passport you hold.

In recent years, there have been plenty of successful collaborations that fuse these sounds and genres, and go some way towards creating a genuinely pan-African sound. Partnerships between South African and Nigerian superstars have proved both critically and commercially successful, from AKA featuring Burna Boy on his hit single *All Eyes on Me*, to Naira Marley teaming up with Busiswa for *Coming*.

This magic has been harder to recreate on the silver screen. Nollywood films might dominate on the continent, but successful cross-border collaborations have been vanishingly rare.

Now Netflix, making a big play for African audiences, is trying to solve that puzzle. *Disconnect: The Wedding Planner*, released last month, is a sequel to the 2016 Kenyan romantic comedy *Disconnect*. The Kenyan stars reprise their roles, but this time they are joined by Nigerian stars



Meg Otanwa, Tope Tedela and Wale Ojo, inspired by LowlaDee's Kenyan-Nigerian romcoms *This Is It* and *Plan B*.

A recipe for success, you might think. Problem is, despite the simple premise, the storytelling loses focus. Punchlines don't hit the mark, and characters are entirely too preoccupied with their love and sex lives. And despite its pretensions, the film resorts to xenophobic clichés like portraying Nigerians as scammers, never really landing the message about African unity it's supposedly building towards.

Instead, its cross-continental efforts feel like a cynical ploy to attract Nigerian audiences to the film.

Has it worked? It debuted at number two on Nigeria's top 10 Netflix films and has stayed on the chart since. It did much better in Nigeria than *Country Queen*, Netflix's first Kenyan original, which was released last year; but worse than *The Wait*, the Nollywood film that had its Netflix debut on the same day as *Disconnect: The Wedding Planner*.

And maybe that's the real disconnect. ■

# THE QUIZ

0-3

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

4-7

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

8-10

"I would tithe digitally but I don't have a papal account."



- 1\_ In which country is the town of Sidi Bou Said (pictured)?
- 2\_ What is the main river of the Nairobi River Basin?
- 3\_ Which country gained its first female prime minister this week?
- 4\_ Which two countries did the pope visit this week?
- 5\_ What is the name of the capital city of Angola?
- 6\_ What is Mozambique's largest city?
- 7\_ True or false: Chad is a coastal country.
- 8\_ What is one hundredth of a Zambian kwacha?
- 9\_ Who is Sierra Leone's president?
- 10\_ In which year did Niger gain independence?

## HOW DID I DO?

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

# Thoughts and prayers



## Continental Drift

Samira Sawlani

It's been a big week for the more religious among us as Pope Francis began his trip to two African countries – the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan.

Huge crowds gathered in Kinshasa awaiting his arrival, while an unprecedented number of people attended the open-air mass he led on Wednesday morning.

The man himself also delivered a stern sermon – is that a sternum or stermon? – where he spoke out against “economic colonialism”.

This country and this continent deserve to be respected and listened to,” he said. “Hands off the Democratic Republic of the Congo! Hands off Africa! Stop choking Africa: Africa is not a mine to be stripped or a terrain to be plundered.”

He also acknowledged the conflict and bloodshed taking place in the DRC, adding: “We cannot grow accustomed to the bloodshed that has marked this country for decades, causing millions of deaths that remain mostly unknown elsewhere.”

Can we get an amen?

The papal visit has put us in a



**Papa do preach: Pope Francis has embarked on a multi-nation tour of Africa.** Photo: Simon Maina/AFP

contemplative mood, reflecting upon our lives, our beliefs and the world around us. So we've been running a modest prayer or two up the flagpole, just in case.

God, grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change. Like, oh I don't know... heads of state?

What does a president pray for, we wonder. For a world without opposition parties, perhaps. And no activists! Or to be left alone by pesky journalists who keep mentioning their predilection for tear gas in their columns, when everyone knows they have that particular addiction relatively under control. Mostly.

Our footy friend in Liberia, aka George Weah, the Dora the Explorer of African presidents, might not need a Hail Mary just yet (wrong type of football, anyway)

but he's likely in a praying frame of mind now that he's confirmed he'll be vying for a second term when the country holds its elections in October.

Delivering his state of the nation address, our Georgie said: "Let me assure you that the state of our nation is strong. The state of our nation is stable. The state of our nation is peaceful and secure. We intend to keep it this way."

## **What do our leaders pray for, we wonder. A world without opposition parties?**

His critics however say he has failed to address corruption and the rising cost of living. Maybe it's time to start praying for the courage to stay home and explore getting some work done?

Also potentially saying a prayer are executives at Shell, after the United Kingdom-based law firm Leigh Day announced that it had filed a case against the fossil fuel giant in London, on behalf of 11,317 people from the Ogale community in Nigeria.

This is in addition to the claims issued in 2015 on behalf of 2,335 members of the Bille community, both for devastating oil spills.

According to the law firm, the majority of residents in Ogale do not have access to clean water – while in the case of the Bille community, oil has killed most of the fish and shellfish in their water, leaving them without a source of income.

We'll be keeping a close eye on this one.

## **Daddy's issues**

There are those among us who are "doing the Lord's work" – and then there are those doing, well, dad's work.

Take Chad's President Mahamat Déby, who took office in April 2021 following the death of his father, Idriss Déby. In 2018 Déby Senior announced the resumption of diplomatic ties with Israel, travelling there to meet up with Prime Minister Benjamin "Bibi" Netanyahu.

Relations between the countries had been severed in 1972 amid Israel's occupation of Palestine.

Déby Junior travelled to Israel this week where he and Bibi officially inaugurated Chad's new embassy in the country, a move Israel said is a way to strengthen "our friendship and our common interest in pursuing peace, security, and prosperity." Of course, the "our" does not include the Palestinians.

We are no authority on matters of God and religion, and we do believe that ultimately it is up to us mortals to strive for justice and fix the many wrongs that occur around us.

That said, every so often we can't help but wish for some divine intervention, like in Burkina Faso where 28 people were killed in two separate attacks.

Or in the Sahel region, where the unending conflict has created a grievous humanitarian crisis, leaving thousands of children with no access to schools and where the insecurity and displacement of war competes with the extreme weather conditions caused by climate change.

Let us pray that our continent does not stay in crisis forever and ever. Amen. ■



# Critical ruling shakes Sierra Leone ahead of elections

**The government's victory on the electoral system calls the independence of the courts into question**

**Ibrahim Barrie**

**L**ess than five months before the general election on 24 June, Sierra Leone's Supreme Court has issued a landmark judgement, declaring that President Julius Maada Bio's proposal to change the country's electoral system is legal.

The legislative polls will now be held under a system of proportional representation rather than the first-past-the-post "Westminster model" in which members of parliament are elected on the basis of constituencies. The ruling has frustrated many opposition and civil society groups, not least because it generates major political and logistical challenges so close to the election, but what does it mean for the credibility of the polls and the freedom of the judiciary?

Critics claim that this change will make it easier for the ruling party to obscure rigging – the government counters that

the 1991 Constitution already contains these provisions. Either way, the controversy is unlikely to abate, and so there is a heightened risk that the elections will generate fresh unrest. Where the judiciary is concerned, the ruling is a reminder that Sierra Leone enjoys the separation of powers in principle, but not always in practice. The politicisation of the process for the appointment of judges and the chief justice is a case in point.

Concerns about the political manipulation of the rule of law have strong foundations. On the first day of the current Parliament, during an important vote for the influential position of speaker, 10 lawmakers from the opposition were removed from the chamber on the basis of a historical order from a high court judge. This enabled the ruling party to capture the speakership, after which the restraining order was lifted. A year later, further judicial decisions led to the 10 opposition MPs being removed and replaced by candidates from the ruling party who had lost in the elections.

This episode, and similar ones under governments of different political stripes, mean that all leaders know that whoever is in power will seek to bend the rule of law to their own advantage. ■



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# The Big Picture

Photo: Muhamadou Bittaye/AFP

Beyond beleaf: A man dressed in traditional attire heads to the Kankurang Festival in Janjanbureh, The Gambia on Saturday. The festival, now in its sixth year, celebrates the whole Kankurang look, perhaps the most distinctive aspect of a system of complex traditions linked to initiation rituals, duty to society and custodianship of the environment.



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