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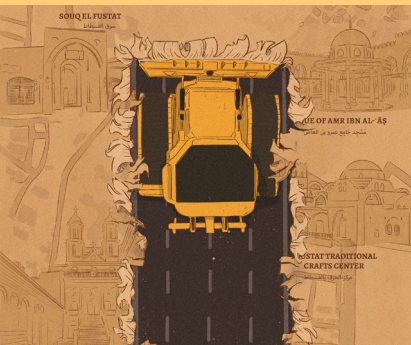
الكنيسة المعلقة

## A new road through Old Cairo

Illustration:  
Wynona Mutisi

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## THIS WEEK'S COVER STORY:

*The Continent* is in Cairo this week to witness the construction of a shiny new motorway that promises to relieve the Egyptian capital's chronic congestion. Only problem? The new road runs straight through the middle of the city's historic old town, and will destroy centuries of priceless history (p12)

## WE'RE BACK!

Welcome to Season 14. We had a break, shared food, planned the path towards world domination, and caught up on some emails. Expect more journalism about life on our ever-spectacular continent. It's also our fourth birthday next week. [Send money](#) not cake.

# Inside:

- **Togo:** Tough crowd for president's 'constitutional coup' (p7)
- **Mo money mo problems:** Zimbabwe's new currency (p8)
- **Malawi:** Farms devastated by unpredictable climate (p10)
- **Cannot compute:** Nigerian students are set up to fail (p16)
- **Photos:** Backstage at a Nairobi heavy metal festival (p18)
- **Review:** Tyla finds her sweet spot (p23)
- **Analysis:** Senegal's new government leaves women behind (p27)

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## MALI

## Political party activities suspended

As calls for elections grow louder, Mali's military junta suspended political party activities, claiming it is in the interest of maintaining public order. The country has been under military rule since August 2020, when Colonel Assimi Goïta headed a coup to remove former president Ibrahim Boubacar Keita. Goïta headed yet another coup in 2021 to name himself president, after his comrades went back on promises to hold elections citing "technical difficulties".



**Democracy denied: Assimi Goïta took power after coup leaders failed to hold elections. He too has failed to do so.**

Photo: Olympia De Maismont/AFP

## MOROCCO

## Activist jailed for Facebook post about relations with Israel

In the final weeks of his presidency, Donald Trump convinced Morocco to normalise relations with Israel, in return for US acceptance of Morocco's claim on the long-disputed Western Sahara region. Now, activist Abdul Rahman Zankad will spend the next five years in prison for criticising the move on Facebook. On Monday, a court convicted him of insulting a constitutional institution and incitement. Zankad will also pay a \$5,000 fine, even as thousands of Moroccans join protests against Israel's war on Palestinians in Gaza.

## GENOCIDE

## Strange bedfellows bring diplomatic cringe to Kwibuka

Israel's President Isaac Herzog and South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa, whose government has accused Israel of genocide, joined Rwanda's President Paul Kagame in Kigali over the weekend – to commemorate 30 years since the genocide in Rwanda. Herzog infamously said "an entire nation" was responsible for the 7 October Hamas attack, a statement that South Africa used at the International Court of Justice as evidence that Israeli leaders condone a genocide of Palestinians. Herzog called that case "blood libel" against Jewish people.

## NIGERIA

**'Sextortion' brothers plead guilty in US**

On Wednesday, two Nigerian brothers, Samuel and Samson Ogoshi, pleaded guilty to extorting money from teenage boys and young men, after manipulating them into sending explicit material that was then used for blackmail. One of their victims, a 17-year-old boy, took his own life as a result. The Ogoshi brothers allegedly posed as women online to solicit the images. They were extradited from Nigeria to stand trial.

## DJIBOUTI

**Migrants drown as boat capsizes**

At least 38 people drowned when their boat capsized off the coast of Djibouti. The UN's International Organisation for Migration said 22 others were rescued. Many migrants and refugees have died in the Gulf of Aden while trying to reach Saudi Arabia through Yemen. The threat of human traffickers, arrest and being press-ganged into war, particularly in Yemen, has made the route especially dangerous.



## VIETNAM

**Death sentence for corruption**

Truong My Lan, a Vietnamese property tycoon, has been sentenced to death for a corrupt scheme in which she arranged for

shell companies she owned to take 90% ownership of Saigon Commercial Bank. She then pushed the bank managers to give loans to those shells. At its height, 93% of the bank's lending was going to her firms and \$4-billion of its cash was sitting in her basement. Prosecutors said the scheme brought her \$44-billion in total.





**Road tripping: Pelumi Nubi drove from London to Lagos to inspire Africans to travel the continent more.**

## NIGERIA

### Woman drives from London to Lagos

Pelumi Nubi cruised into Lagos on Sunday, completing a 68-day solo drive from London, through France, Spain, Morocco, Mauritania, Senegal, the Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Mali, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, and Benin Republic, before reaching Nigeria. The 28-year-old traveller said she wanted to reshape the narrative that you can't travel through Africa because of insecurity, and to inspire more Africans to explore their own continent. She donated her Peugeot 107 Hatchback to the John Randle Center for Yoruba Culture and History in Lagos – and then got a brand-new SUV and an apartment in Lagos from governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu.

## MALAWI

### Journalist jailed for doing journalism

Malawian police arrested local journalist Macmillan Mhone on Monday in the commercial capital Blantyre, drove him 200km away to the political capital Lilongwe, and then charged him with “publication of news likely to cause fear or public harm”. He has since been released on bail. The charges related to a story he published last August that alleged that businessman Abdul Karim Batatawala, who is facing corruption allegations and is barred from getting state contracts, was bidding for them through shell companies he controlled.

## SUDAN

### Darfuri war victims have food – for now

For the first time in months, the UN's World Food Programme is distributing rations to the war-besieged people of Darfur. A couple of aid convoys managed to cross the Chad border last week, after intense negotiations with the warring groups to re-open a humanitarian corridor they closed in February. The 37 trucks carried enough to feed 250,000 for a month. It's now a year since the rift between General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and Mohamad Hamdan “Hemedti” Dagalo escalated into a brutal war.

## MOZAMBIQUE

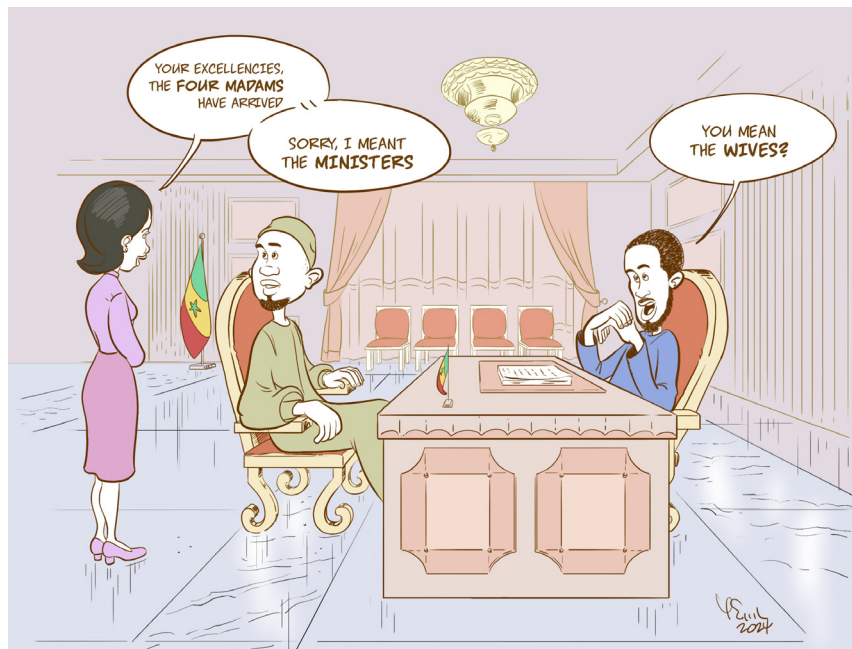
**Boat tragedy kills over 100 people**

A hundred people drowned after their ferry sank on the way to Mozambique Island, a trading town that dates back to the 10th century. Officials say they were trying to escape the mainland after false information created a panic about a cholera outbreak. A three-day period of national mourning ended Friday.

## SOUTH AFRICA

**Zuma cleared for a possible third term**

Former president Jacob Zuma has been cleared to run in the May election, after a court overturned a ruling that barred him from standing. The 81-year-old was released from prison in 2021 after a doctor said he was terminally ill. He has left the ruling ANC and will run on the ticket of new party uMkhonto we Sizwe.



**More representation somewhere: Senegal's new president, Bassirou Diomaye Faye, and his prime minister, Ousmane Sonko, have appointed only four women ministers to their cabinet – the same number their predecessors had in theirs. But they have outdone their predecessors in one respect: each has two wives.**

# Togo

## Gnassingbé's 'constitutional coup' attempt faces proper resistance

**P**resident Faure Gnassingbé's latest attempt to change the Constitution has stirred up tensions in his country of eight million people. Gnassingbé's government wants to scrap universal suffrage for presidential elections. Instead, the president would be elected by the party that wins the highest number of parliamentary seats.

The proposed reform triggered activists and opposition politicians to call for massive protests, including a three-day push this week. In response, over the past two weeks, Togolese authorities have arrested nine activists and reinforced a 2022 ban on street demonstrations.

In 2019, Gnassingbé's government unilaterally enacted a constitutional reform that extended his presidency by two terms. Earlier this month, he sought to delay the election of a new Parliament indefinitely but has since rescheduled it to happen on 29 April. In

March he appeared to prevaricate on the plan to remove universal suffrage – after Parliament approved the plans, he sent the proposal to the law reform commission for revision. Perhaps the public pressure is getting to him.

The opposition has little representation in the current Parliament: it largely boycotted the 2018 polls that voted it in. The year after the polls, the ruling party-dominated Parliament changed the Constitution to introduce a two-term limit that would not apply retrospectively. It is this manoeuvre that allowed Gnassingbé, who first came to power in 2005, to run for two more terms.

He succeeded his father Gnassingbé Eyadéma, who died in office after 38 years in charge. ■



**Ow let go: President Faure Gnassingbé has a powerful grip thanks to years of clinging to power no matter what.**  
Photo: Pius Utomi Ekpej/AFP

# Zimbabwe

## The multi-billion (Zim) dollar question

The government has launched yet another new currency, but is anyone buying it?

Jeffrey Moyo in Harare

First, there was the Zimbabwean dollar. Then came bearer cheques, and bond notes, and the little-loved and unimaginatively-named Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS) dollar. These were all attempts by the government to revive its local currency – and, in the process, restore some measure of control over the country’s monetary policy.

The central bank’s latest attempt is the ZiG, which stands for Zimbabwe Gold, a currency pegged to the country’s gold reserves. It was announced this week and will go into circulation on 30 April.

Few Zimbabweans – some of whom have already lost their life savings to failed currency experiments – are convinced. “The ZiG, like lightning, will just zig-zag and vanish, but the US dollar will remain standing,” said Mendis Bhebhe, who works as a money changer in Harare.



**ZiG-a-zig, argh:** Reserve Bank Governor John Mushayavanhu announces the launch of Zimbabwe’s new wannabe currency. Photo: Jekesai Njikizana/AFP

US dollars are considered legal tender, and remain the most widely-used currency – although the government would much prefer that citizens used local currency. These are, however, subject to potentially devastating inflation (according to *Reuters*, the RTGS dollar – which includes bond notes – has lost 80% of its value this year).

“Police are arresting people who refuse to accept the bond notes, but when we bribe them using the same notes, they demand the US dollar instead,” said Simba Mugano, a taxi driver in central Harare.

The ZiG began trading this week at 13.56 to \$1. ■



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# Malawi

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## The climate crisis is pushing food farmers into starvation

**Malawian farmers barely have a carbon footprint. But they are starving because a heated globe has delivered them one catastrophe after another.**

**Jack McBrams in Lilongwe**

**I**n Mujiwa Village in Mulanje, on Malawi's southern border with Mozambique, Bigborn Juwawo's once thriving maize field is littered with rocks dropped by Cyclone Freddy last year. Dry patches of sandy soil dominate the rest of the field. The April harvests from Juwawo's three fields used to be enough to feed his

family for a year. Now, they barely get by.

"With six children to care for, life is very hard," said the 44-year-old farmer. "This year, things are even worse because the dry spells go on and on. After the cyclone, we got some supplies donated, but now it's every person for themselves."

Such hardship now affects nearly two million Malawian farmers, said Malawian president Lazarus Chakwera, who



**Broken dreams:** Bigborn Juwawo inspects his failing crop in Nanchidwa in the town of Mulanje in southern Malawi. Photo: Jack McBrams

declared a state of disaster for the fourth time in as many years.

The latest devastation is largely because of the El Niño weather phenomenon which has cast dry spells over some countries while raining unusually heavy torrents in others. Chakwera said 749,000 hectares of maize – over 44% of the national crop area – have been damaged by the effects of El Niño.

“This situation is devastating,” Chakwera said. “It would have been catastrophic even if this were the first disaster in recent years. Unfortunately, this marks the fourth time in four years that I have declared a state of disaster.”

The president has appealed for \$200-million in food aid for the affected people in 23 of the country’s 28 districts.

A deadly combination of raging cyclones made stronger by climate change, and local environmental devastation driven by deforestation, has driven Malawi to the verge of famine. As much as 40% of Malawi’s population is facing hunger, according to a statement from the World Food Programme released last week to echo the president’s appeal.

Cyclone Freddy in March 2023 was the worst in Malawi’s recorded history. Its heavy rains caused multiple floods and landslides in the south of the country, killing 679 people, and 537 people are missing. At least 2,186 were injured and more than 659,278 were displaced. A post-disaster assessment found that it wiped \$36-million from Malawi’s economy in production losses. Forty-five percent of that loss was from crops devastated by floods – 60,000 hectares, equivalent to



**Shattered lives: Flooded shops and houses in Dwangwa, after floods last month.** Photo: Creative Image Malawi

27% of the planted acreage that year, were flooded.

But even before that disaster, 20% of Malawians were expected to struggle with food. Freddy came after Storm Ana and Cyclone Gombe in 2022, which destroyed sanitation infrastructure, setting off one of Malawi’s worst cholera outbreaks.

As national maize stocks run low because local farmers were producing much less, the country was forced to import staples like maize, rice, soya beans, cowpeas, and groundnuts.

But import costs and scarcity have driven maize prices to nearly double in just one year. Today’s prices are triple the five-year average.

Unable to produce food on their farms, unable to afford food from the shops, and bereft of aid, farmers like Juwawo face an unyielding future of endless starvation. ■



## New roads, old problems

Efforts to modernise Cairo's infrastructure are running up against – and sometimes through – the city's long history.



## Mariam Ehab in Cairo

**F**or a millennium, people have been living in the city that today is called Cairo or, in Arabic, Al-Qahira: The Victorious.

The evidence of this continuous habitation is everywhere, but especially in the narrow, cramped, winding roads of the old town, which follow paths first laid down centuries ago. Lining these roads are historic mosques and markets, and the tombs of the venerable inhabitants who once wandered them. It is now one of the poorest and most densely populated areas in the city.

The road that Egypt's government wants to build – is building – could not be more different. The new motorway will be wide and straight and modern, and it will run through the heart of Old Cairo. It will not curve around sites of historical or cultural significance, but go directly through them.

The bulldozing has begun.

On 6 January, Moataz Nasreldin woke up to a nightmare. The internationally acclaimed sculptor had spent 15 years turning Darb 1718, in the heart of Old Cairo, into Cairo's foremost hub for arts and culture. The word “darb” in Arabic is a play on words meaning both “a path” or “a beating”. And 1718 is a reference to Egypt's January 17-18 bread riots of 1977, during which Nasreldin was shot in the leg by police.

It took just one day for government contractors to flatten the institution – along with hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of art inside.



**Razed: A cultural hub run by famed Egyptian sculptor Moataz Nasreldin, was bulldozed – with valuable art inside.**

“It all started in August 2023,” Nasreldin said. “Some government employees offered me a 35m<sup>2</sup> space to compensate for my 800m<sup>2</sup> premises to expand the road.” Nasreldin refused this offer, and launched a petition to save Darb 1718. Despite 16,000 signatures, the demolition went ahead.

Nasreldin has taken legal action against the government. To keep Darb alive and to continue paying his staff of 25, he offers arts and crafts workshops in a small space he rents nearby.

### Phantom cemetery

Meanwhile, the road-building continues apace, increasing anxiety over the future of Old Cairo, whose cultural heritage is under constant threat from the government's wrecking ball. Citing Cairo's chronic congestion, the government has justified tearing down mausoleums, shrines and tombs of significant cultural and religious value, some dating back hundreds of years.

These actions have jeopardised the district's Unesco-designated World Heritage Site status, threatening to move it to the endangered heritage list.

At particular risk are the mausoleums in the area's historic necropolis, housing the tombs of prominent politicians, poets, Islamic figures, and their families.

The demolitions here began as far back as 2020. A public outcry against this reached a head with the destruction of the tomb of iconic novelist Yehia Haqqi. His remains were moved to Tenth of Ramadan City, some 35km away, in mid-2023.

A threat to destroy the grave of Taha Hussein, one of the 20th century's most influential public intellectuals in the

Arab-speaking world, was met with fierce criticism, forcing the government to leave it intact. In response to this public pressure, the government announced the establishment of "The Cemetery of the Immortals" in late 2023 – a new graveyard to which prominent tombs would be relocated. According to the ministry of antiquities, no action has yet been taken to implement this decision.

Powerless to stop the construction, civil society groups are instead doing what they can to save the area's history. Researcher Hossam Abd El Azeem, who founded Shawahed Masr in 2021, said that his non-profit was initially concerned with cleaning and conserving heritage sites, but has now shifted their focus to saving the facades of as many of them as possible.

"We saved 24 artefacts just as they were about to be demolished," said Abd El Azeem. These include, among many others, parts of the 122-year-old mausoleum of the freed slaves of Prince Ibrahim Helmy, son of Khedive Ismail.

### **A heritage too rich to save?**

President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's mission to reshape Egypt extends well beyond Old Cairo. The former field marshal came to power in 2013 following three years of political instability that started with a popular uprising in 2011. Since then, his administration has embarked on a massive infrastructure-building spree. Over the past nine years, it has built 934 bridges and 5,800km of new roads. In Cairo, it has completed a third metro line with 29 stations. A new capital city,



**Broken tombs: Cairo's historic Ein al-Sera cemetery lies in rubble, demolished to make way for the new roads of Egypt's massive infrastructure drive.** Photo: Khaled Desouki/AFP

45km southeast of Cairo, is currently under construction, with an estimated price tag of \$58-billion.

The president says that all this new infrastructure stimulates the economy, and is necessary to accommodate the country's population of 106-million (22-million of whom live in the Greater Cairo area).

He has a point: "Most of Egypt's population is concentrated in 6% of its area, while the rest of Egypt is sparsely populated and lacks services. Significant infrastructure projects are necessary to encourage people to relocate to new areas and to alleviate congestion and pressure on services, facilities, and transportation," Hassan El-Mahdy, transportation and roads professor at Ain Shams University, said.

And President Sisi's infrastructural ambition is applauded outside Egypt too. During his tenure, the country has gone from 118th to 28th place in the infrastructure category of the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report.

But critics observe that such large-scale construction projects risk destroying Egypt's priceless heritage in pursuit of modernity.

In theory, Egypt's laws protect heritage sites from being demolished to make way for all this new infrastructure. But loopholes in these laws mean that most heritage sites are not formally registered as such, including many in the path of the new motorway through Old Cairo.

That is the trouble with having so much history in one place, explained



**Age-old dilemma: Those in favour of the infrastructure upgrades point out that if the usual criteria for heritage status were applied, all of Egypt would effectively become a museum.**

Magdy Shaker, the chief archaeologist at the Ministry of Antiquities. He said that it is not enough for buildings just to be old – to be registered, they must also have some connection to a historical event; bear a specific architectural style; and be completely intact.

"Registering every piece of heritage is a challenge. Half of Egypt's buildings would be registered as heritage structures if the 100-year standard was the only one applied," Shaker said. "There are entire cities with buildings over 100 years old." ■

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*This article was produced in collaboration with Egab.*



Starting to click:  
Young Nigerians  
learn how to  
navigate college  
entrance exams.

## How do you pass a test on a computer if you've never used a computer before?

*To get into university, Nigerian students must take an entrance test. Since 2015, this test has been computer-based – locking out hundreds of thousands of rural and urban students who have never used computers in school or at home. A group of volunteers is trying to bring some of those candidates back.*

**Abdullahi D. Hassan in Bauchi**

**A**t Sarkin Yamma Community College in the Toro area of Bauchi state in Northeast Nigeria, 233 students from 12 area schools gather around 11

computers. Each one will get a 15-minute session during which a volunteer will show them how to enter their exam registration number, open the university entrance test, and move and control the mouse to choose their answers. For now,



that's all they will learn about operating computers, but it may be all they need to pursue their real dreams.

“Frankly, this is my first experience using a computer in my life. I feel delighted,” says 24-year-old Abdulfatah Khalil, one of the students gathered. Hamza Muhammad Usama, an 18-year-old son of a herdsman who dreams of becoming a veterinary doctor, hopes the training “will reduce the panic I have over computer-based exams”.

It doesn't work for everyone – not immediately. Khadija Tasiu, 16, sat for the computer-based test last year but didn't score enough to get into university. She plans to retake the exam this month and is at Yamma Community College for the volunteers' training, hoping it will cure her computer anxiety and allow her to study for a nursing degree.

Pass rates have plummeted in the years since the national test became computer-based. Initially, the board offered to bridge the gap with a mock exam – for an extra 1,500 naira (\$1.21) out of their own pocket.

Many do pay: 260,000 candidates did the mock test this year. Still, pass rates have remained so low that the registrar, Ishaq Oleyede, lowered the cut-off mark for admission to 140 for universities, 100 for technical schools and 80 for other colleges, of the 400 total points possible.

The volunteers, who work under a local organisation called My Makranata, are taking a more hands-on approach to bridging the gap.

“We steadied shaky hands as we



### Laptop of luxury: Computer-based entrance exams are locking thousands of Nigerians out of tertiary education.

Photos: Abdullahi D. Hassan

encouraged them, emphasising that technology was nothing to be scared about and they could finish up on their own,” says Chima Begotten, the programme manager at My Makranata, after the day's sessions at Yamma Community College. “I am overjoyed seeing that we were able to add value to the lives of students in the area. We have the privilege of teaching a plethora of students how to use the mouse for the first time.”

The students shared her assessment.

“It was amazing because throughout my life and school days, I never touched a computer,” says 17-year-old Rachel Peter, who dreams of studying pharmacy at university. But she wishes it was not a one-off opportunity. “When we ask our teachers about computers, they say they will work on it. Imagine if we had computers in my class. Even five computers would let us to learn to operate it. Then the test would be easy.” ■

## PHOTO ESSAY

# Heavy mettle

*Metalheads in Nairobi gather every three months at The Undertow, a heavy metal festival that showcases local performers. The most recent iteration was held in March at Shelter in Westlands, and featured Autometal, Crystal Axis, DjZontor, and the Kenyan shamanic black metal band Chovu. Photographer **Patrick Meinhart** was there for AFP.*



In a country where R&B and Afrobeats dominate, The Undertow brings together black metal, punk and hard rock bands allowing them to perform in front of their fans. Above, Autometal gets the mosh pit moving.



Many in the crowd are here for Chovu's *Undertow* debut. Anyone who doubts the seriousness of African metal should seek them out on Spotify or YouTube. Their 2022 single *Mwikali* is scary dark, but 2023's *Death Trap* is lethal.





**Top:** Who is that masked man? It is Geekspeak Radio's Kenneth Mwatha, acceding to portraiture from Shelter's shadows.

**Bottom:** Chovu guitarist Brian Saibore broods backstage, holding court in the midst of a multiplying metal entourage.





**Top: Chovu's vocalist – the mysterious Preston Rot – channels the myths of the shamanic metal band that was born in the slums of Shauri Ya Moyo. Bottom: As Saido shreds and Rot growls, Chovu rips apart any casual assumptions about what goes on in Nairobi under the cover of darkness.**

## Healthcare for anyone, anywhere?

**W**orld Health Day 2024 on 7 April challenged us to make health services “available, accessible, acceptable and of good quality for everyone, everywhere”.

One challenge was “everyone, everywhere”. Afrobarometer survey findings from 39 countries show that two thirds (66%) of Africans say a family member went without healthcare at least once during the previous year, including 25% who say this happened “many times” or “always”. Worse, in most surveyed countries, the experience of going without needed care has become more common over the past decade.

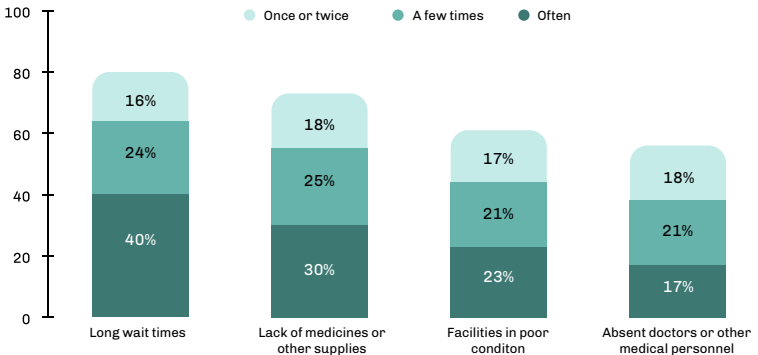
A second challenge is “of good quality”.

Among the 58% of respondents who had contact with a public health clinic or hospital during the past year, more than half say it was easy to obtain care (55%) and they were treated with “some” or “a lot” of respect (63%).

But one in five (20%) report having to pay a bribe, and most say they encountered a variety of problems – long wait times (80%), a lack of medicines or supplies (73%), facilities in poor condition (61%), and absent medical personnel (56%).

No surprise, approval of the government’s performance on health is far lower among people who ran into several of these problems (21%) than those who didn’t (65%). ■

### Problems encountered at public health facilities | 39 African countries | 2021/2023



Includes only respondents who had contact with a public health clinic or hospital during the previous year

**Source:** Afrobarometer is 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.



## Tyla steps up, tunes in with toned-down aquabatics

The 22-year-old's first full album is a star-studded extension of her verve.

**Wilfred Okiche**

**T**yla went from promising starlet to inaugural winner of the Grammy Award for Best African Music Performance in an incredibly short space of time, thanks to her world-conquering major label debut, with the single *Water*. Anticipation for the South African sensation's first album was sky high.

Tyla recognises the attention that has come her way since the song found mainstream success. *They never had a pretty girl from Jo'burg/See me now, and that's what they prefer*, she proclaims on *Jump* (featuring Gunna and Skillibeng), a bouncy dancehall-inflected tune off her self-titled debut.

To her credit, save for a Travis Scott-assisted remix that showcases her fun personality and sleek vocal game, Tyla doesn't chase after *Water* on the album, – which is a fine if undistinguished curation of 13 tracks. The production is sound and the finish shiny. Tyla's moods shift from flirty to confident depending on the needs of the song, and her sweet spot is a confluence of Afrobeats, amapiano log-drums, pop and R&B melodies, sometimes all in the same song.

Album opener *Safer* is a straight dive into the slick world of Afrobeats, complete with multilayered chorus. Ditto the previously released *Truth or Dare*. Nigerian singer Tems gives a brief jolt of energy to *No.1* but the song itself is too flighty to make any lasting impression. American performer Becky G makes *On My Body* more memorable than it has a right to be.

The album was never going to match the hype of Tyla's industry-anointed era. The sexy, shrewd alchemy captured and bottled on *Water* was one of those major pop events that simply cannot be replicated – at least not so soon.

In the meantime, Tyla's first album still makes for a good time. ■

# 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**

"In my village we call the place where desert meets ocean 'the beach'."



Photo: Hoberman/  
Universal Images Group  
via Getty Images

- 1\_** Which country is the easternmost country in continental Africa?
- 2\_** What is Ghana's currency called?
- 3\_** From 2012 to 2024 who was the president of Senegal?
- 4\_** Who became Senegal's president last week?
- 5\_** The 30th anniversary of which Rwandan historical event was commemorated on 7 April?
- 6\_** What is Togo's official name?
- 7\_** Goma is the capital of the North Kivu province in which country?
- 8\_** Freetown Peninsula is a principal division of which country?
- 9\_** King Farouk was the tenth ruler of which country?
- 10\_** Which ocean does the Namib Desert meet with? (pictured)?

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

**A**rare event took place this week as a total solar eclipse cast America into darkness during daylight hours. Of course a rarer event would be for the United States to stop giving Israel the weapons it uses to carry out genocide in Gaza – but we like to be realistic.

The eclipse got us thinking about our lovely leaders, and how their policies, taxes and general demeanour somehow manage to eclipse our joy (and bank balances) – and for so much longer than just four minutes at a time.

But rather than dwell on their shadowy actions, let us instead celebrate: there is a new member of the gang! The revolving door of African leaders coming in and out of office has been spun in Senegal, and after the drama of the past few months which saw Macky Sall attempt to postpone the election to December, the country finally took itself to the polling station, voted him out and chose Bassirou Diomaye Faye to replace him.

The 44-year-old received 54.28% of the vote and was sworn in last week. An array of congratulatory messages flooded in including those from the likes of Cameroon's long-serving President

Paul Biya. (A little fun fact here, President Faye would have been two and a half years old when Biya came into office.) Faye has appointed opposition politician Ousmane Sonko as prime minister. The Beyoncé to his Solange. The Kim to his Kourtney. Or perhaps the Putin to his Medvedev?

Sonko himself was barred from running by the courts, thanks to the criminal convictions that he insists were politically motivated. Over the past two years Sonko faced accusations of rape, corrupting youth, undermining state security and plotting insurrection.

His stand-off with the state often ignited deadly protests, but that all changes now that he *is* the state. He appeared next to Faye this week wearing a matching

suit which led to Kenyans unearthing photos of the Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto bromance era in which the terrible two were seen wearing the same outfit and even taking trips to the International Criminal Court – only for the “friendship” to end in tears.

Sonko and Faye announced their cabinet appointees, and of the 25 ministers and five secretaries of state, only four

## Total eclipse of the state



### CONTINENTAL DRIFT

Samira Sawlani





**Two for one: Senegal's new president, Bassirou Faye, appointed BFF Ousmane Sonko as prime minister. So let's see how that plays out.** Photo: Annika Hammerschlag/Bloomberg via Getty

are women. A move that has dismayed organisations like Réseau des Femnistes du Sénégal, who pointed out that women make up half of the population and that the cabinet needed to reflect this. It remains to be seen how Faye and Sonko will deal with criticism – whether it be from civil society, the media or the regional or international community. Let's hope they don't get carried away when they find the stash of tear gas and batons their predecessors may have left behind in their haste to get to the airport.

The latest episode of *Keeping Up With The Coupdashians* comes to us from Mali. At least we think it's the latest episode but perhaps it's a re-run: the junta has announced a ban on all political activities “for reasons of public order”. This comes as criticism against the military government has been rising with civil society groups coming together calling for a return to

constitutional rule. And if there is one thing, we know about our Coupdashians, its that they despise criticism!

Someone who knows a little bit about the sun and the moon is Kenya's President Ruto, who spends a fair amount of time in the sky. Billy has told striking doctors that the country must live within its means, a rule that seems not to apply to his travel, and crib-redecorating budgets.

Medics in the country are standing firm as they say they will continue with industrial action until the government meet their demands including the implementation of a collective bargaining agreement in 2017. Despite living through an entire pandemic, its clear that so many of our governments have learnt nothing about valuing medics.

We end this week's column on a sombre note; the conflict in Sudan approaches its one year mark on 15 April. One year of unbridled violence and of the collapse of their entire world. Communities torn apart and forced to flee their homes, losing livelihoods and loved ones to death and destruction.

For months civilians, civil society and international observers have screamed themselves hoarse trying to bring attention to the numbers; over eight million people displaced, 19-million children unable to attend school, almost 18-million facing food insecurity.

One day Sudan's children will ask where everyone was when their country was being battered by this war and they needed help. What will we say? That we were too busy looking at the moon. ■

# New president, new cabinet, same limits on women

**Between them, President Bassirou Diomaye Faye and Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko have as many wives as there are women ministers in their new cabinet.**

**Borso Tall**

**S**enegal provided democracy in Africa with a much-needed shot in the arm when opposition leader Bassirou Diomaye Faye defeated Amadou Ba, the ruling party's candidate, winning 54% in the first round of voting on 24 March. Faye won despite having been imprisoned just weeks before the polls by a government that seemed determined to use intimidation to retain power.

But after the celebration comes the hard task of governing, and for many of the country's women, euphoria is turning into concern.

The cabinet selected by President Faye and Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko – who was the main opposition leader but supported Faye's candidacy after he himself was barred from running – includes only four women out of 25 ministers. This is similar to previous governments, but Faye and Sonko campaigned on a change agenda. Women expected an improvement in their access to decision-making bodies.

If the absence of women ministers is worrying, so too is the deletion of the

words “women” and “child protection” from the name of the “ministry of women, family and child protection”. It has become the “ministry of family and children”.

This “sends a strong signal regarding the priorities of this new regime for the next five years,” says Maïmouna Astou Yade, a gender specialist and the executive director of JGEN Sénégal.

Aby Sène, a Senegalese public scholar working at Clemson University in South Carolina, believes the new government has taken a step backwards in terms of women's equality and political power. “You cannot tell me that they couldn't find more women qualified to serve in the government,” she says. “Especially for their very first cabinet of ministers.”

Underpinning this trepidation is the knowledge that, for the first time, Senegal has a polygamous president. Both President Faye and his Prime Minister Sonko have two wives.

In the build-up to the election things looked much more positive. In the last hours of the presidential campaign, the Caroline Faye Stadium was filled with young men and women awaiting the arrival of Sonko and Faye.



**World-wary:**  
Senegalese women leave a voting booth in Ziguinchor during the presidential elections on 24 March. Photo: Muhamadou Bittaye/AFP

The choice of this stadium suggested an encouraging symbolism, as it bears the name of a female politician from the 1950s, who was the first female minister following independence. Caroline Faye – no relation to the new president – was also the only woman to have been appointed to the commission that contributed to the country’s Family Code. The code allowed women to emancipate themselves in significant ways but is in dire need of reform many years after its inception.

Today, in Senegal, men are the supreme heads of the family by law, including in family financial matters, despite the fact that the majority of women use their earnings to provide for their children and for themselves.

According to Jaly Badiane, a women’s rights activist, the law also stipulates that “when the woman who has contributed all her life to her retirement dies, nothing is paid to her spouse or minor children”.

Article 196 of the Family Code also renders women vulnerable by giving men the choice of whether to legally recognise the children they fathered.

Diodo, a 25-year-old tea-seller, argues that “it is a little too early to denigrate a government that is not established”. But she believes that women must fight to maintain the few rights they have acquired over generations.

On social media, there is considerable solidarity for women’s frustration. Given the mounting frustrations among young women, and the high stakes in a country that remains politically divided, the nation is watching for what the youngest democratically elected president in Africa will do next. ■



*Borso Tall is a freelance journalist based in Dakar. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa*

# THE BIG PICTURE

Conflicted: At Lake Kivu in Goma, where the DRC borders Rwanda, Rachel Sematumba and her father Onesphore reflect on 30 years of violence in the region. 'From my birth during the genocide to M23 now, there's been only conflict,' she says. 'I am a child of war.'

Photo: Alexis Huguet/AFP



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