

The Continent

Tanzania's darkest week





COVER Everyone in Tanzania, including the government, was caught off guard when protests broke out on election day – 29 October. The polls had long been engineered to shoo President Samia Suluhu Hassan back into office. With the surprise protests, Tanzania quickly pulled the plug on internet connectivity, declared a curfew and – according to witnesses – throttled telecom network calls. Then, with deadly force, they responded to protesters, bystanders, and even residents in their own homes. When connectivity returned on Tuesday afternoon, we asked our readers what happened during the blackout. Thirty-seven wrote in. Their stories are harrowing and differ sharply from the government's nonchalant posture. (p13)

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Compliments and apologies to Daumier:

Our cover cartoon by Tanzanian satirist Gado was prompted by the brutality of Tanzania's recent election season. It is inspired by Honoré Daumier's 1831 *Gargantua* caricature of King Louis-Philippe of France, for which the artist was sentenced to six months in prison. Gado hopes – against available evidence – that his country's president-elect has thicker skin.

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THE WEEK IN BRIEF

CLIMATE

Unicorn wannabe offers to save world with glitter

An American-Israeli startup called Stardust is lobbying United States legislators to fund its controversial solar geoengineering technology, which involves spraying reflective particles into the atmosphere to reduce global heat. But many scientists warn the untested technology is far too dangerous to even study, *ClimateWire* reports. It could disrupt weather patterns, trigger food shortages, and distract from real climate solutions like



PHOTO: SWEDISH SPACE CORP

Shiny! Fixing the Earth by throwing lots of stuff into the sky is maybe not our best-ever idea, tbh.

cutting fossil fuels – the main cause of climate change.

SOMALIA

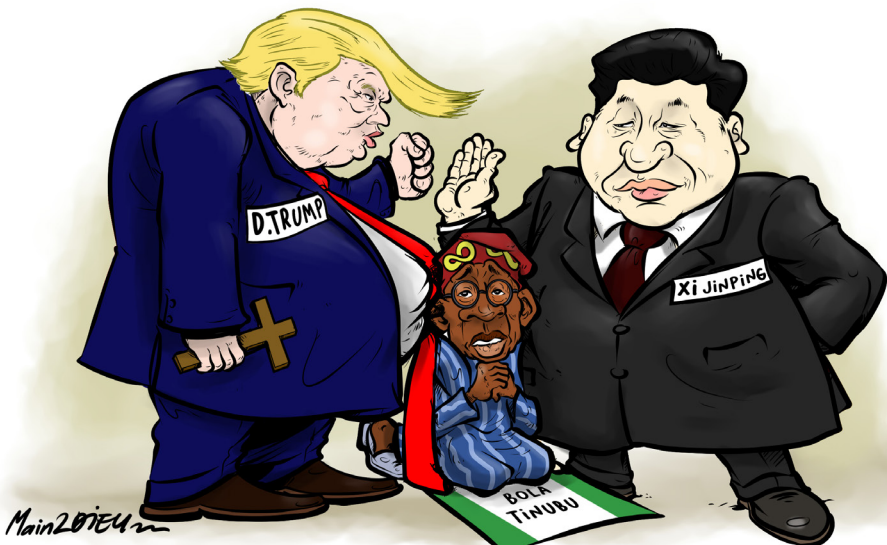
Drone strikes ramp up, al-Shabaab leader killed

More than 220 precision airstrikes have been carried out in Somalia since late 2024, killing 52 senior militia leaders, the country's defence minister told parliament this week. Security forces have ramped up raids in recent months in the south, central, and northeastern Bari regions with help from international allies. Last month Somalia said it killed Mohamud Abdi Hamud, known as Jacfar Gurey – a founding al-Shabaab member and former “intelligence chief”.

SOUTH SUDAN

Blind soccer team wins ticket to LA Paralympics

South Sudan's blind soccer team, formed five years ago with two players and a borrowed ball, have won their first international tournament, *Reuters* reports. Their victory in Kampala, Uganda has earned them a spot at the 2028 Paralympics in Los Angeles. Blind soccer is played with a jingling ball, allowing players to track its movement as they simultaneously listen to each other's voices. Guides also tap the goal posts and verbally call out plays to orient them on the pitch.



After Donald Trump accused Nigeria of a 'Christian genocide' in the country and warned of potential US military action, China's foreign ministry expressed solidarity with its West African Belt and Road partner.

LIBYA

'Torture' cop re-nabbed after Italian debacle

Libya has arrested senior police officer Osama Almasri Njeem, who is accused by the International Criminal Court of overseeing the torture, rape, and murder of detainees at Tripoli's Mitiga Prison since 2015, *Arab Weekly* reports. Almasri Njeem was also arrested on 19 January, for the same crimes and on the same ICC warrant, after watching a Juventus football match in Italy. But the Italian government, which has significant oil interests in Libya, released him 48 hours later and the country's parliament later shut down a probe into the dubious release.

ESWATINI

Royal pardon and tight leash for unlucky Dube

After more than four years behind bars for his role in the 2021 pro-democracy protest in Eswatini, Mthandeni Dube has been released from a high-security prison, Matsapha Correctional Centre, near Mbabane, *TRT Afrika* reports. The former legislator received a royal pardon but will remain under supervision and is barred from public speeches or protests. He was sentenced to 25 years in prison – alongside fellow MP Mduduzi Bacede Mabuza – for "inciting unrest" during protests calling for democratic reforms.



PHOTO: EBRAHIM HAMID/AFP

War crimes: Sudanese students protest against atrocities committed by RSF against the people of El Fasher in North Darfur State.

SUDAN

RSF agrees to humanitarian ceasefire

Sudan's paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) agreed to a humanitarian ceasefire proposal from the United States and Arab powers. A statement on Thursday from the paramilitary group, which is fighting the Sudanese Armed Forces for control of Sudan, says that it is open to talks on ceasing hostilities. The announcement comes less than two weeks after the RSF seized the city of El Fasher. This consolidated its control over Darfur, continuing a genocidal campaign that began in the early 2000s.

SOUTH AFRICA

How did SA men end up on Russia's front line?

President Cyril Ramaphosa has launched an investigation into the recruitment of 17 South Africans who joined mercenary groups fighting in the Russia-Ukraine war. They are stranded in Ukraine's Donbas region, and South Africa is working diplomatic channels to bring them home. The men, aged 20 to 39, ended up on the front lines after being recruited by Russian-linked intermediaries, including a drone-manufacturing factory, according to *Bloomberg*. Earlier media reports revealed that Russia has been enlisting Africans – including from Zambia, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, and South Africa – to bolster its war efforts.

MAURITANIA

Aziz runs out of road in race to stay out of jail

The Supreme Court has upheld a 15-year prison sentence against former president Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz for illicit enrichment and abuse of power, *North Africa Post* reports. The ruling finalises his conviction and ends all avenues of appeal. Abdel Aziz, 69, who was accused of using his decade-long presidency to amass personal wealth, has been in custody since January 2023. When he appealed his initial five-year sentence, it was instead increased to 15 years.

ETHIOPIA

Boeing settles ‘wrongful death’ plane crash suits

More than six years after a plane crash in Ethiopia killed 157 people, Boeing has reached settlements in three lawsuits brought by the victims’ families. This week, a jury had already been selected in Chicago to hear one of the cases, before the company reached an agreement with victims, *Reuters* reports. The details of the deal were not made public, but the company has already settled 90% of the civil cases emerging from the Ethiopian Airlines flight and a similar crash in Indonesia just months before.

MALI

Insurgents’ blockade fuels economic fire

A weeks-long blockade by the al-Qaeda-linked JNIM insurgent group continues to severely limit fuel supply to Mali’s capital Bamako. Militants have been attacking fuel convoys from Senegal and Côte d’Ivoire since September. The attacks began after the government introduced restrictions on selling petrol and diesel away from regulated stations, throttling the militants’ fuel supplies. Fuel is now rationed, grinding daily life and business down, as its prices soar on the black market. Western countries are urging their citizens to leave Mali.



PHOTO: PATRICK MEINHARDT / AFP

Leg it: A referendum on 21 September paved the way for junta leaders to run for president.

GUINEA

Just vote junta

Guinea’s junta leader, General Mamadi Doumbouya, has officially filed his candidacy for December’s presidential election. This breaks his 2021 pledge not to seek power after leading a coup, the *BBC* reports. A recent referendum passed a new Guinean constitution, which extended the presidential term from five to seven years and allowed military figures to contest elections. The election should go well for Doumbouya. Major opposition politicians Cellou Dalein Diallo and Sidya Touré have fled into exile and the president appoints officials of Guinea’s new electoral body.

NEWS

KENYA

Mudslides bury dozens in the Rift Valley

Kenya's emergency-response system appears to remain dysfunctional, with politicians gaining access to the area ahead of emergency workers.

ROBERT AMALEMBA IN NAIROBI

AT LEAST 36 people have died and 17 others are still missing after massive mudslides swept through the hilly Chesongoch area of Elgeyo-Marakwet East in Kenya's Rift Valley.

The disaster has displaced hundreds of people and destroyed their homes as heavy rains continue in the area.

Flooding and unstable ground slowed down rescue operations by a joint team from the army, police, and Red Cross over the past week.

"New mudslides buried the paths we had cleared for evacuation," said Oscar Okumo of the Kenya Red Cross.

Satellite imagery shows about 150 structures destroyed across Chesongoch and neighbouring Kipkenda.

Hundreds of survivors are sheltering

in rescue centres. Others are being treated at Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital in Eldoret, about 80km away.

Medical responders are frustrated that the official response prioritised ferrying politicians ahead of emergency-response teams to the disaster site.

"[Politicians] might be useful in calming crowds but not in saving lives like a doctor or other emergency worker would," Dr Richard Mogeni, who was part of the first responders' team, told *The Continent*.

He also called for better co-ordination between national and county emergency services.

Kenya's emergency-response system appears to remain dysfunctional despite new climate policies and billions allocated for disaster management. In Baringo – also in the Rift Valley – 2020 flood victims are suing the state for alleged negligence in a case still pending judgment.

This isn't the first tragedy in Chesongoch: deadly landslides hit in 2010 and 2012 and, in 2020, floods washed away an entire shopping centre. Experts are urging long-term measures like reforestation and terracing to stabilise the fragile slopes.

Kenya's interior cabinet secretary Kipchumba Murkomen has promised that the government will relocate survivors to safer ground. ■

SOUTH AFRICA

Judge eviscerates xenophobic vigilantes

In the ruling against Operation Dudula, the court also required police to stop asking people for their papers without cause.

KIRI RUPIAH

THE HIGH court in Johannesburg has ordered an anti-migrant vigilante group to stop blocking foreigners from entering government health facilities and schools, actions it said were unconstitutional.

The group, named Operation Dudula from the Zulu for “force out”, was founded in 2021. Its self-described mandate is to remove African migrants – by force, if necessary – from the country. It blames them for South Africa’s rampant crime, inequality and unemployment.

Some politicians have capitalised on and stoked xenophobia in the country, which has a history of extreme violence towards black African foreigners.

Judge Leicester Adams ruled that Dudula must stop spreading hate speech and stop evicting foreign nationals from their homes or stalls. He also said the police cannot search foreigners’ homes without a warrant, and must have a clear reason to believe someone is in the country illegally before asking for identification.

In two of South Africa’s provinces,

Dudula members stopped people they suspected of being foreign nationals from accessing hospitals, demanding they produce identification.

In response, rights groups including Kopanang Africa Against Xenophobia and Abahlali baseMjondolo took the group to court in 2023.

The national immigration and police departments, who have been accused of aiding Operation Dudula, were also named as respondents. Dudula did not oppose the court application. The judge noted that “they were aware of it and decided to ignore the court proceedings”.

Abahlali’s Mqapheli Bonono told *The Continent* what Dudula was doing was clearly illegal. But they weren’t stopped by police, private security or hospital management, who Bonono said were complicit. Kopanang’s media organiser Mike Ndlovu said the ruling “sets a crucial precedent that the rule of law, not mob justice, protects everyone in South Africa regardless of nationality”.

Operation Dudula had not responded to *The Continent*’s requests for comment at the time of publishing. ■

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ZAMBIA

The sinister alchemy that puts lead into children's veins

A court appeal with 140,000 claimants heard this week from people living in one of the world's most polluted towns. **Mukanzi Musanga** spoke to some of the mothers in that case. Their children are among the 95% of children in the area who have dangerously high levels of lead in their blood.

KABWE in Zambia's Central Province used to be one of the continent's leading sources of lead and zinc. The mining has died away. Now the town is known for the extreme pollution that mining brought with it.

As many as 200,000 people in Kabwe have been affected by lead contamination. Half of the children have levels that the World Health Organisation says require "urgent treatment with special medication". That's according to a report released last month by the Zambian NGO Environment Africa and the UK-based charity Action for Southern Africa.

The mine responsible began life in 1906, when the area was under British control. They called the town Broken Hill. The tower of mining waste left behind is now called "Black Mountain".

Over the years, the mine changed hands several times, with owners including Anglo American South



PHOTO: LAWRENCE THOMPSON

Broken hill: Waste from mining operations has been polluting the Kabwe area since 1906.

Africa. When that company gave up control in 1974, local records showed a town engulfed in toxic levels of lead. This seeped through the soil, poisoned vegetation, and contaminated the water and air in the nearby townships.

A class action lawsuit was filed against Anglo in 2020 at the South African high court to hold the company responsible



Follow the lead: Mine waste contaminates water, air and vegetation in the area. PHOTO: LAWRENCE THOMPSON

for the pollution, the effects of which continued long after the mine closed in 1994. Anglo has denied its role and argued that the state-owned company Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines, which took over the mine, is responsible for the ongoing lead pollution.

The 140,000 claimants want compensation for their “injuries, the costs of monitoring their blood lead levels, and the costs of cleaning up their environment”. The suit was initially dismissed, but an appeal was heard this week, with a decision expected next year.

Bertha Sabuni, a mother of five from Makululu township in Kabwe, is one of the people suing Anglo American. She told *The Continent* that her last pregnancy was complicated by the high levels of lead in the environment, which left her anaemic.

Her youngest also has abnormally low blood capacity, a persistent cough, and keeps having to miss school. “His behaviour has changed and he has a bad temper, and the specialists say it’s from

the effects of lead poisoning.”

Dorothy Tembo has lived in the area for four decades. She said her children were also sick, and in similar ways. They can’t manage at school and their quality of life keeps getting worse.

Namo Chuma, a director of Environment Africa, told *The Continent* that beyond bringing justice to those affected, it would set a precedent that polluters must pay – that “corporations are accountable for pollution”.

The report his organisation released last month found 95% of the children in Kabwe have elevated levels of lead in their blood. Of the nearly 11,000 children who recently tested positive for high levels of lead in their blood, a quarter were anaemic and a quarter were stunted.

For the sick, healthcare is provided by the government, with free treatment for people affected by lead poisoning. But locals told *The Continent* the clinic has been running out of medication, with longer waits between each restock. ■

TANZANIA

Beneath Suluhu's blackout, a blanket of violence



PHOTO: AFP

SAMIA Suluhu Hassan ran all but unopposed in Tanzania's presidential elections on 29 October. Her would-be main challenger, Tindu Lissu, was in prison on treason charges and his party was barred from the ballot.

And so it came to pass that the incumbent, Suluhu, received nearly 98% of the vote, according to the official results. The only surprise came from the streets when protests broke out

on election day. Under the cover of an internet blockade, security forces met the protesters with force. Official statements now claim it was all nothing but a few skirmishes with "foreign" rioters.

We asked our readers in Tanzania what happened where they were. Thirty-seven responded. The people's side of the story is very different from the government's.

Here are a few of their responses – in their own words.

DAR ES SALAAM

TABATA

Protests began around 2pm on election day. About 50 protesters were involved in our neighbourhood and some were on boda-bodas. At that time, there were no injuries.

We could see smoke from car tyres. We heard our local government office – where the polling station was – had been invaded and ballot boxes destroyed. We saw a burning building from afar. The internet was shut down, then a curfew was declared.

In the evening, police started shooting bullets and teargas canisters. Many police cars arrived and people scurried to safety. In the night, and the following days, we continued to hear gunshots

and heard stories of people shot while buying food in the streets.

The curfew did not just start at 6pm: we were scared to leave the house all day. Shops would open only briefly as shopkeepers weighed the risk to sell basics like water and flour. Calls were not coming in or going out.

The majority of the people would have also wanted to go to the streets. We need reforms badly but the situation turned violent. It's unfortunate that people died. We salute those young people who sacrificed their lives for the sake of change.

Daily activities are now slowly resuming but schools have not [as of Tuesday]. (Woman, 35-44 years)



Smoke rising: Burning buildings and barricades in Dar es Salaam on 29 October.

PHOTO: AFP

KARIAKOO

I live in Kariakoo which is one of the spots where intense protests happened. It was really not a beautiful sight to see – the officers really let loose on these protesters. My sister and I were very shocked to see the ruthlessness. I saw a lifeless body on the ground.

Some schools, supermarkets, and gyms have reopened [as of Wednesday]. People are buying food and other supplies in bulk. Cooking gas is going for 15,000Tsh (about \$6) on the black market instead of the usual 3,000Tsh (*Resident, 18-24*)

BAGAMOYO ROAD

I was afraid and stressed because I couldn't access the internet. I also heard a lot of shootings. I saw pictures of a shop owner who was shot dead trying to close his shop. My friend was nearly shot but hid with other people. After a silence the men who were shooting – said to be secret service and sent by the president's son – must have thought they were dead.

Many fuel stations were burned, especially Lake Oil stations which allegedly belong to the son of the former president Jakaya Kikwete. A bus allegedly owned by Finance Minister Mwiguli Mchumba, was burned and people stole cooking-gas cases from a business owned by Rostam Aziz, a businessman and politician.

A shop belonging to rapper Billnas was burned. So too was a restaurant belonging to musician Shilole. Both celebrities had praised the government before the election. I heard police

stations and local government offices were burned in the city centre, Mabibi, Ubungu, Mabibo, Sokoni and Mwisho. We were supposed to go back to college on Monday but we didn't go and there has been no news on when we can. (*An engineering student*)

A HOSPITAL

There was anger and despair at my workplace – one of the hospitals in Dar es Salaam – where I was trapped for days. I saw about 80 bodies and hundreds of casualties, mostly due to gunshots. Even children as young as four weren't spared. Normal life has started resuming but in my neighbourhood families are grieving the dead and looking for missed ones. There was no election in Tanzania. We are used to unfair elections in this country but this time even that was snatched away. (*Man, 25-34*)



PHOTO: AFP

Viral violence: Protesters attack a polling station in Dar es Salaam on 29 October.

ARUSHA

ARUSHA TOWN

In Arusha alone, more than 500 people may have been killed. We are in a state of mourning, filled with rage and a great deal of uncertainty. We are afraid to stand out in case we are perceived as a threat. We believe that our daily activities are closely monitored and anything can trigger a devastating response.

There is also an overwhelming amount of information coming out – lies from the government and sobering truths from the few people who are brave enough to speak and share.

The protests started peacefully in Sakina. Then the police began to shoot live bullets towards the protesters to separate them. The protesters retaliated

by burning police stations, government buildings, and businesses linked to the government, including hotels and petrol stations allegedly owned by the president's son and the former president's family.

The retaliating masses overpowered the violent police and this was when a new force came into the mix: soldiers allegedly from Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda, and Zimbabwe. They entered the scene with white cruisers or vans and killed people en masse, whether they were protesting or not. This was mainly true at night when the government imposed a curfew. By this time, the internet was shut down and information was not easily accessible,



Wet work: Police use a water canon to force protesters to disperse in Kigoma on 30 October.

PHOTO: AFP

so a lot of people died from not knowing about the curfew. Influencers did their best to inform those who still had internet access about the situation on the ground.

The first night was a massacre – we heard bullets and bombs throughout. After a few days, the Tanzanian army began patrolling the town. It is the first time we have seen that many guns on the street. Small groups of protesters were still demonstrating and we were told other regions were also rioting.

We have now been told to go about our usual business and that there were a few Tanzanian deaths. The government says foreigners came into the country to riot and is even deporting some Kenyans and others to prove the point. They say influencers organised by Kenyans, Malawians, and other neighbours rallied us into rioting but they have sorted this out and they are all gone now.

The opposition party, Chadema, has declared a seven-day mourning period. The ruling party and its supporters – nicknamed Chawa (“lice” in KiSwahili) – are posting celebratory and other out-of-touch messages on social media.

The government is rumoured to be collecting the dead from hospitals to keep the death count unknown and small. (*Woman, 25-34*)

KISONGO

I am not sure we have collectively ever felt the anguish and helplessness as brought by the events of 29 October and ensuing days. I live in a suburban area of Arusha, the safari capital of Tanzania.

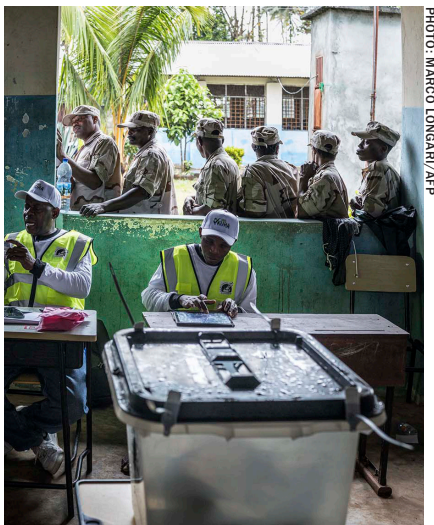


PHOTO: MARCO LONGARI/AFP

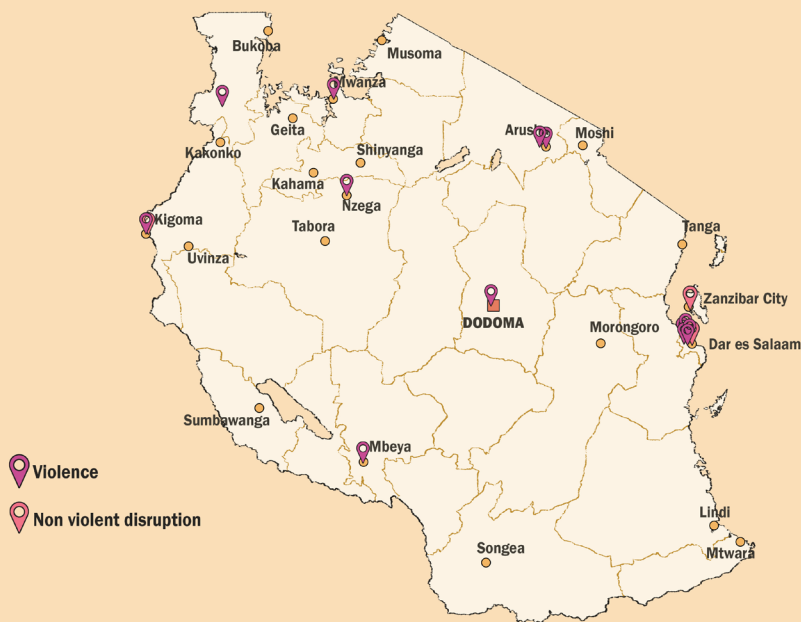
Lined up: Security forces queue to cast their ballot at an early voting centre in Langoni on 28 October.

All was quiet here but tourists are scarce now because most airlines chose to avoid our destination.

My family in Dar es Salaam did not leave the house for six whole days. When we spoke to check in, I could hear bullet sounds in the background. For four days, day and night, bullets and tear gas were going non-stop. On one call, my three-year-old niece asked “na huko kuna bunduki” – are there guns there too? It felt like my family was in the midst of a bleak civil war and there was nothing I could do to help.

Now people are getting back to business but with limited internet access, long lines at fuel stations, and soldiers everywhere. It will be a while, I feel, before Arusha’s tourism sector fully bounces back. (*Woman, 25-34*)

LAKE ZONE



A HOSPITAL

I work as a surgeon. The amount of death I witnessed at my public hospital was unbearable. The mortuary had more than 300 dead bodies, some as young as six and eight years old. We operated for three straight days without rest and ran out of blood products. I don't know what to say. The worst part is that police lorries took the bodies away a few days ago. People will search for their relatives without finding them. I don't know how to move on from this trauma. (Man, 35-44)

MWANZA

It's been a weirdly sad experience. The so-called protesters caused massive destruction robbing businesses and financial institutions, and looting. Some were shot dead, others injured or arrested. I saw six bodies. Life has now returned to normal but the violence was deeply unsettling. What was meant to be an expression of frustration became criminal chaos. The right to protest and freedom of speech were violated by those pretending to stand for them. (Athuman Bagura, 25-34)

ELSEWHERE

MBEYA

A bullet landed just outside my front door. For five days, my house echoed with the relentless sounds of gunfire and explosions. We couldn't sleep: fear gripped us in ways words can hardly describe. Death and injury have swept through our community, and as I write this, countless families are mourning their loved ones. (*Man, 35-44*)

ZANZIBAR

We are in disbelief, sadness, and shock. In Zanzibar there were no protests. The election process here went smoothly although, as expected, it was way more blatantly rigged than usual. Armed groups called Mazombis were rumoured to be beating up people in poorer areas.

The ferry shut down because of the chaos in Dar es Salaam, affecting us economically, especially with our growing tourism industry. We depend on mainland Tanzania for produce like vegetables and meat. With the internet shut down, ATMs barely worked and card-payment systems were down. We are getting back to business with a slow and throttled internet. Many websites are barely usable and even the use of a VPN doesn't always help.

As a woman, I cannot believe we have come to this with our first female president. The abductions and torture of foreign and local activists is completely disheartening. We need



PHOTO: MARCO LONGARI/AFP

Sea-list security: *Navy men practice marching ahead of the Zanzibar presidential inauguration.*

the [International Criminal Court or International Court of Justice] to look into all these horrific events. (*Woman, 35-44*)

NZEGA

Most people are not happy but won't say it because they fear their lives will be in danger. In some areas, relatives are being denied the right to take the bodies of loved ones who were shot during the chaos. In Kahama town, they were forced to sign a document declaring their relatives lost their lives to natural causes.

Normal activity is slowly resuming but people are in disbelief that the president-elect can remorselessly resume office. (*Man, 35-44*) ■

For their safety, most people who responded asked not to be named

FEATURE



PHOTO: ANYMA

The cracks are showing in Egypt's latest pyramid scheme

The Giza Plateau is set to be turned into a giant concert venue again. Entertainers are thrilled, but archeologists are aghast.

MAHMOUD ABDURHMAN IN CAIRO

EGYPT plans to host a Grammy House pop-up show at the foot of the Great Pyramids of Giza in October next year – a multi-day event with live music and industry panels. A court case filed last month could scuttle that plan.

The Centre for Economic and Social

Rights, an Egyptian civic group, opened the case to demand an end to what it called “archaeological tampering” at the site. The minister of tourism and antiquities, the secretary-general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, and the governor of Giza are all named in the suit. The centre accused the authorities of “failing to perform their duty to

safeguard the monument”, knowing that concerts involve heavy equipment, temporary structures, and nighttime noise within the protected zone.

The suit came days after a sold-out concert by electronic music group Anyma drew more than 15,000 revellers to the Giza Plateau. Event organiser Rabie Mokbel says the show generated \$20-million in accommodation revenue for Egyptian businesses. Hotel rooms went for up to \$500 per night and ticket prices started at about \$216 (10,000 Egyptian pounds).

But the concertgoers’ excitement was in stark contrast with growing alarm, as Egyptians watched loud speakers vibrate and lasers light up the venue.

“The area around the pyramids contains thousands of tombs carved into fragile limestone,” says Magdy Shaker, chief archaeologist at the antiquities ministry. “The stone is porous and easily affected by vibrations from loud music and large crowds.” He adds that the groundwater beneath the Sphinx makes it especially vulnerable to tremors.

Tour guide Hoda Radi says large events require support infrastructure – restaurants, toilets, and drainage systems could leak used and untreated water into the aquifer below the plateau.

Invisible cracks

“Some concerts exceed 90 decibels. Continuous vibrations cause micro-stresses that can eventually form cracks invisible to the eye,” says former antiquities restorer Farouk Sharaf, who once worked on the Sphinx. Intense

lighting and heat from spotlights can add to that stress by causing uneven thermal expansion in the limestone, producing micro-fractures.

Sharaf warns that the limestone statue is particularly vulnerable. “The Sphinx’s neck is a weak point. It supports a head that weighs several tonnes and can be destabilised even by tiny cracks.

Egypt has some rules for hosting events at heritage sites. Hosts must make no physical or visual alterations to monuments and guarantee site safety in writing, according to 2016 regulations by the Supreme Council of Antiquities. But these are not always enforced, Radi says. During the Anyma concert, “a laser device was mounted on one of the pyramids – a serious breach of protocol.”

In January 2023, Egypt’s parliament debated two motions objecting to leasing parts of the pyramids area for private events and weddings, stressing that, “The site is a world heritage monument, not an entertainment venue.”

But not everyone would choose historical preservation over today’s livelihoods. “These concerts help revitalise tourism,” says Hossam Hezaz of the Egyptian Federation of Tourist Chambers.

Egypt’s tourism revenue nosedived in 2020 because of the Covid pandemic but has been steadily recovering for a couple of years and exceeded pre-pandemic income last year. ■

This article is published in collaboration with Egab

PHOTO ESSAY

The museum of unstolen history

The Grand Egyptian Museum finally opened its doors to the public this week. It spans 500,000m² – about the size of 70 football pitches – and is home to over 100,000 artefacts. A colossal 3,200-year-old statue of Ramses II, weighing

83 tonnes, stands at the entrance. Construction began 20 years ago and weathered several national storms, including 2011's Arab Spring. Over this time, the museum's budget ballooned from \$500,000 to more than \$1-billion. ■

PHOTOS: FATMA FAHMY/THE CONTINENT











FEATURE

My freedom dies with him

A Beninese man is not dead if he is survived by a widow. But *she* might as well be.

RACHELLE SOKPEGANDE IN COTONOU

WHEN A Beninese man dies, he often takes his wife's freedom with him. In many communities, mourning a man is a communal exercise in taking a widow's autonomy.

"You don't go out, you barely talk to anyone. Every morning, I saw the sun through the window but I wasn't allowed to step outside," Mariam from Porto-Novo says of the first days after her husband died. "They said it was to show respect for the deceased."

Other Beninese cultures justify this period of seclusion differently. They say it is necessary to separate the woman from the world of the living until the bond with the dead is broken. The seclusion ends with a cleansing ceremony a few days after the burial. Incense is burnt and ancestors are invoked to sever the invisible tie between the widow and her late husband.

But the restrictions do not end with the burial. The widow continues to live under the constant gaze of the community. They may judge her for attending joyful ceremonies or wearing colourful clothes. Remarriage, when permitted, follows strict codes. It may occur only after several months, is often

to a relative of the deceased, and only if the elders approve. "These rules are not made to punish the widow, but to protect the lineage and the memory of the deceased," claims Signon Oba Adékilouman, a traditional chief from the Ouémé region.

The widow continues to live under the constant gaze of the community. They may judge her for attending joyful ceremonies or wearing colourful clothes.

Protecting the deceased man's memory and lineage can stretch as far as compelling women to marry his relatives.

"I respected the mourning and the ceremonies but when they asked me to marry my husband's brother, I refused," says Philomène from Cotonou. "When I disobeyed, my husband's family took my children away. It's been eight years since he died and I haven't seen them."

More and more voices in Benin are calling for these customs to be re-examined. Some women's associations advocate for symbolic, less intrusive rituals; others for psychological support instead of social confinement. ■

DATA

Changing policies for a changing climate

ON 10 NOVEMBER, the 30th annual United Nations Climate Change Conference – COP30 – will kick off in the Amazon in Brazil. We’re looking at citizen support in Africa for policies that respond to the changing climate.

Across 38 countries surveyed by Afrobarometer in 2024/2025, roughly eight in 10 respondents believe their governments should invest in climate-resilient infrastructure (81%) and pressure developed nations to provide climate-related aid (78%).

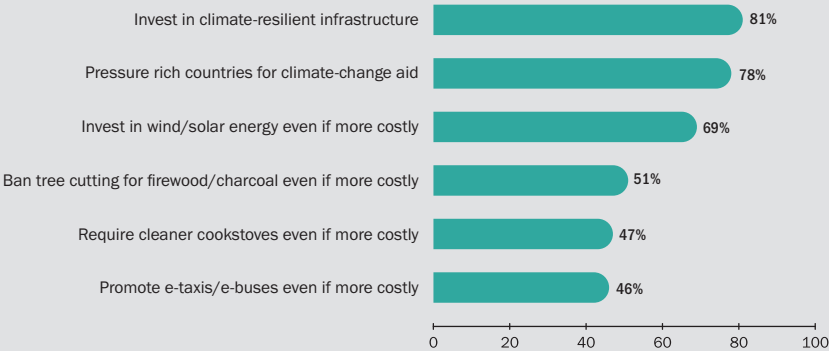
Support drops if policies hit wallets:

A slim majority (51%) back bans on logging for firewood and charcoal, while fewer than half (47%) favour legislating for less-polluting cookstoves if those policies would raise prices. A similar proportion (46%) endorse the promotion of e-taxis and e-buses in 22 countries where the question was asked.

But across 33 countries, more than two thirds (69%) would like to see greater investment in wind and solar energy.

Africans are evidently eager to pursue climate-friendly policies – if they think they can afford them. ■

Support for climate-change policies | 38* African countries | 2024/2025



*33 countries for the question on wind/solar energy; 22 countries for the question about e-taxis/e-buses



TC BOOK REVIEW

BY JACQUELINE NYATHI



Marvels, mental mayhem, and meaning

A young woman loses her mind and finds herself.

From the start, *Shamiso* roots itself in Zimbabwean life and culture. Zimbabwe is in the way children start fights by kicking little mounds of soil while taunting, “your mother’s breast”. It is in Brian Chikwava’s use of the pronoun “they” for elders, and in naming your dog “to fight with your neighbours”.

The novel’s central character, Shamiso, is a young woman from Chimanimani

in eastern Zimbabwe who wins a scholarship to art school in the United Kingdom. There, she finds care and attention from a charitable couple, love, and a sense of freedom. But she is also haunted by childhood trauma.

Back home, her friend and confidant was Jimson, her father’s cousin or babamukuru – and the novel’s tragic figure. They killed someone in their youth and fled to Mozambique where they travelled “through worlds in which you have to sleep very fast because somebody else needs the pillow”. They “never married, never reproduced” and are “destined to be buried with a maize cob” as wifeless men are. Babamukuru Jimson ushers our protagonist into the spiritual realm when they buy her a Nyami Nyami pendant – a connection that carries her through a breakthrough – or, as Western medicine might have it, a breakdown.

Unfortunately, this central theme introduces what appears to be a misstep on Chikwava’s part. This snake/fish deity belongs to the Tonga in western Zimbabwe, not Shamiso’s eastern people – and Zimbabwean cosmologies are not typically portable across nations.

The end of the novel isn’t the end of Shamiso’s journey. It’s hard to know where her life will go from there.

But we’ve seen her through to yet another beginning. ■

The Quiz

- 1 The island of Arguin (pictured) belongs to which country?
 - 2 Idi Amin was once the leader of which country?
 - 3 Mbabane is one of two capitals of which country?
 - 4 True or false: Somalian is an official language of Somalia.
 - 5 Who was the first leader of Chama
- 6 In which country is Lake Abaya?
 - 7 In which region of Africa is Namibia situated?
 - 8 True or false: Malawi is a coastal country.
 - 9 Which African country does Akon's family come from?
 - 10 In which city was Zohran Mamdani born?



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

"That's barely more than a sand bank. Not sure what the point of a sand bank is. Probably won't even give you a sand credit card."

PHOTO: THIBAUD MORITZ/AFP

COMMENT

Global loan sharks just love our hungry, hungry hippos

Gobble, gobble, gobble – it's undignified, but who cares, say the gluttonous functionaries.



L. MUTHONI WANYEKI

AS “AID” dwindled, international trade disappointed, and tax earnings underwhelmed, African governments went on a borrowing spree. Our external debt has tripled since 2009, according to the Mo Ibrahim Foundation’s 2024 *Financing Africa* report.

Typically, governments issue bonds, mostly bought by private creditors in China, the United Kingdom, and Israel. Private creditors, known for high interest rates and no appetite for debt relief, have held the largest share of Africa’s sovereign debt since 2023.

Next is multilateral debt, mainly from the World Bank and the African Development Bank (which we don’t control, despite its name).

Bilateral debt follows, led by China.

By 2023, African countries owed external creditors \$685.5-billion and paid \$88.7-billion to service that debt – more than a quarter of the continent’s GDP.

The African Forum and Network on Debt and Development reports that 24 of our 54 states (55 if we count the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, which we

do) are either in debt distress or at high risk of it. Twenty-five spend more on external debt servicing than on health.

It was about time the African Union held its first debt conference. Yet, the May summit in Lomé, Togo, ended with anaemic recommendations.

Delegates called for a pan-African credit rating agency to counter the (imperialist and racist) bias of existing agencies and make borrowing more affordable. They also urged reforms to the G20 Common Framework for Debt Treatments – the forum for renegotiating sovereign debt – like including private creditors and making its decisions enforceable.

But why would creditors implement reforms to kill their cash cow?

The European Union and the UK recently blocked progress for a United Nations Framework Convention on Sovereign Debt, which sought enforceable global rules for prioritising human rights and basic services over debt servicing. Its derailment says everything about creditors’ interests.

Still, our debt mess isn’t only external.

We would not be here without our government’s complicity and our



Tighten-belt road: The N6 in Mozambique, rebuilt in days by China State Construction after being destroyed by a cyclone. Outsourced infrastructure projects greatly increase sovereign debt while lining the pockets of an elite few.

PHOTO: YASUYOSHI CHIBA/AFP

leaders' greed. African leaders were not naive about sovereign debt.

Debt restructuring has been done before: in the 1970s and '80s through the Paris Club; in 1996 through the International Monetary Fund and World Bank; and again in 2001 through the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative.

Yet governments plunged into the latest borrowing cycle as if money grows on trees. It does – but only for the officials who contract the loans. Kenya's first Eurobond money vanished into private pockets, leaving citizens on the hook. A treadmill of Eurobonds to repay that missing first one followed. Mozambique's \$1.5-billion "tuna bond" was just as scandalous. Yet the Lomé summit offered only a token fix: "better legislative oversight". Ha!

It is hard to take African calls for debt relief seriously when calls for domestic accountability are nowhere near as loud. We love an imperial or neocolonial villain, but it is unproductive to isolate the external sharks from their internal

enablers. Debt relief activism must confront domestic grand corruption.

As the book *Anatomy of State Capture* shows, we must confront the shadow state and its key actors: elites with executive power or proximity to it, who can corrupt others; internal bureaucrats, technocrats, and dealers who know how to bend rules, process bribes, and launder money; external fixers who bring racketeering vision and sniff out public money to siphon; and middlemen, who move the cash.

If we don't confront them, they gobble, gobble, gobble while we squeeze, squeeze, squeeze.

Governments keep saying there is "no money" for healthcare, schools, or jobs – yet highways, trains, and airports appear at triple their real cost.

We celebrate these shiny projects while basic services crumble and average people struggle to get by. ■

Dr. L. Muthoni Wanyeki is a Kenyan political scientist

Big Pic

Just us: A dog and his companion share a moment of almost sacred stillness and solitude on the shores of Lake Abaya, Ethiopia, in an image that was recognised at the recent Uganda Press Photo Awards.

PHOTO: LUCAS OYUGI



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