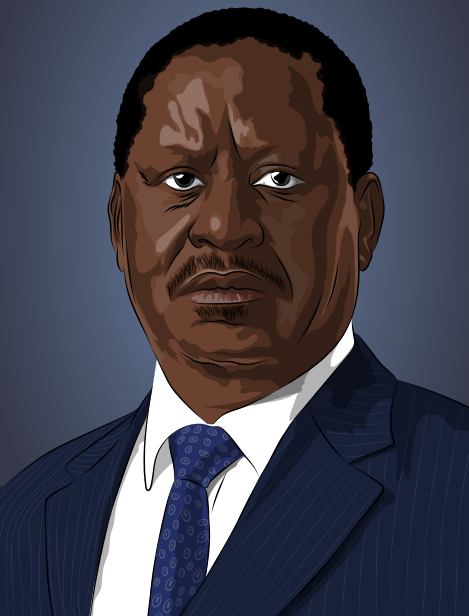


The Continent

**Kenya's man
of mystery
bows out**



ILLUSTRATION: CAPU TOONS/DEBUNK



COVER Raila Odinga was nicknamed Agwambo, the “mystery man”.

Over and over again, through crisis after crisis – and handshake after handshake – Odinga would live up to that moniker. He vied for the presidency five times, and never won – yet could not be described simply as an “opposition leader”. He transcended such labels and was indispensable to Kenya’s political settlement. Now, after Odinga’s death on Wednesday, Kenyans must navigate the messy politics of wheeling and dealing, inherited from their most enigmatic figure, and without Jakom (chairman) to set the tone. (p14)

Inside

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Welcome to Season 20.

We’re back! We spent many minutes eating good pastry, hours glaring at admin, days in our new *The Continent* t-shirts, and weeks launching the pilot edition of our South African sibling, *The Friday Paper*. But we didn’t solve the climate crisis, obscene wealth hoarding, or AI trashing truth. Maybe in December, after we publish our Africans of the Year special.

A NOTE ON LANGUAGE:

In *The Continent*’s reporting on the ceasefire in Gaza, we have used the term “captives” to refer both to the Palestinians who were (and remain) held in Israeli jails and the Israelis who were captured by Hamas on 7 October 2023. This is to avoid the value judgments inherent in the terms “prisoners” and “hostages”.

THE WEEK IN BRIEF

SENEGAL

New details emerge on colonial-era massacre

Researchers in Senegal have released a long-awaited report on the 1944 Thiaroye massacre, when French colonial troops killed African soldiers demanding unpaid wages after World War II. France claimed 35 deaths at the time but new excavations at the Thiaroye military camp since May uncovered evidence of many more. Researchers now estimate the true toll may have reached 400. The findings could reignite calls for justice and reparations, *RFI* reports.

SEYCHELLES

The last resort: Leader cancels luxury build

Seychellois president-elect Patrick Herminie says he will stop construction of a controversial Qatar-funded luxury resort on Assumption Island when he's sworn in later this month. He told the *BBC* that the deal leasing the island to Qataris for 70 years with a \$20-million down payment was "unacceptable". It was negotiated by former president Wavel Ramkalawan. Environmentalists say the project threatens the nearby Aldabra Atoll, a fragile ecosystem that hosts 400 species found nowhere else.



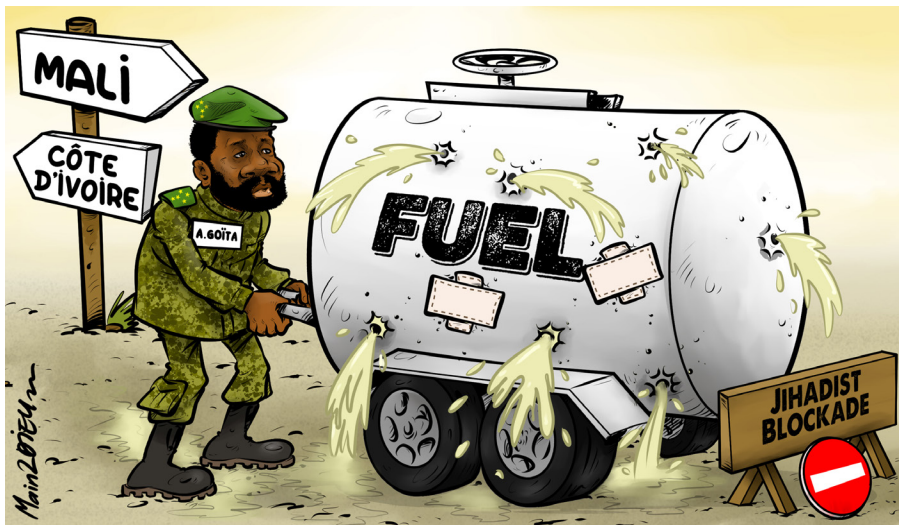
PHOTO: NAO MUKADI/AFP

Family ties: Brice Oligui Nguema will be his cousin Ali Bongo's successor.

GABON

C'est fini mais pas fini for Bongo dynasty

President Brice Oligui Nguema's Democratic Union of Builders has secured a parliamentary majority, winning 102 of 145 seats in two rounds of voting. Nguema ousted his cousin Ali Bongo in a coup in August 2023 before running for the presidency in an election this April. The Bongo family had ruled Gabon for 55 years before 2023. The party of former president Ali Bongo won only three seats in the first round, in an election that observers said was calm but drew little public enthusiasm.



Running on empty: Fuel is short in Mali as militants target tankers.

MIGRATION

Macron and Merkel in ICC's naughty corner

Human rights lawyers have filed a case at the International Criminal Court naming 120 European leaders for alleged crimes against humanity tied to the European Union's migration policies in Libya. French President Emmanuel Macron and former German chancellor Angela Merkel are named. The brief by lawyers Omer Shatz and Juan Branco argues that EU actions led to the torture, detention, and drowning of tens of thousands of migrants in the Mediterranean, the *Associated Press* reports. It draws on six years of investigation and more than 70 high-level interviews.

GHANA

More US deportees arrive, as does a lawsuit

The United States deported 14 more West Africans to Ghana this week, bringing the total number of deportees under a bilateral deal to 42. Civil society organisation Democracy Hub, led by lawyer Oliver Barker-Vormawor, has filed a lawsuit arguing the deal is unconstitutional since it was never approved by Ghana's parliament, *TRT Africa* reports, and that it may violate international law that bans deportations to countries in which people risk persecution. Government spokesperson Felix Kwakye Ofori said the attorney-general would defend the agreement in court.



PHOTO: PAVEL BEDNYAKOV/AFP

Hardball: The 2021 coup during which Assimi Goïta take power saw a pivot towards Russia.

MALI

Tit-for-tat spat with US about visas

Mali will now require United States visa applicants to post bonds of up to \$10,000, the foreign ministry said, mirroring a new US measure targeting Malian visitors. The US says its bond rule, taking effect later this month, addresses visa overstays and screening challenges – prompting Mali’s reciprocal move. The policy marks another strain in relations since Mali’s 2021 coup, after which the junta pivoted toward Russia. Still, US officials visited Bamako in July to discuss counterterrorism co-operation and potential access to Mali’s gold and lithium reserves.

NIGERIA

‘No work, no pay’ for striking lecturers

Exams were disrupted at several Nigerian universities on Monday as a two-week warning strike by the Academic Staff Union of Universities began. *Premium Times* reports the union is protesting unpaid salaries, unfulfilled agreements, and other grievances. At least three agreements, in 1992, 2009, and 2013, have not been honoured, prompting industrial action. In response to the latest strike, the government ordered universities to enforce a “no work, no pay” policy and conduct headcounts of academic staff. Talks between the union and the government remain deadlocked.

DRC

Kabila to the rescue against ‘dictatorship’

Former Congolese president Joseph Kabila has announced a movement to “save” his country, after a meeting other opposition leaders in Nairobi, *BBC* reports. Kabila had been missing since May, until this week, when images of him in Nairobi surfaced on social media. He was recently sentenced to death for war crimes and treason, but rejected the charges as “arbitrary” and did not appear in court to defend himself. Kabila said the new political movement aimed to end the “dictatorship” of President Félix Tshisekedi.

HEALTHCARE

‘Game-changing’ drug roll-out set for 2026

South Africa will provide lenacapavir, the new twice-a-year HIV prevention injection, in April 2026, Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi said. He hailed the drug as “groundbreaking”, but warned supply would be limited: initially enough for only 500,000 people – in a country with the world’s highest HIV rate. Manufacturer Gilead had priced the drug at \$28,000 a person a year, before cutting the cost to \$40 after licensing deals with generic drug makers and global organisations.

ZIMBABWE

Mnangagwa-Chiwenga feuding frenzy deepens

Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa has accused his deputy, Constantino Chiwenga, of incitement and treason after Chiwenga presented a dossier alleging corruption in Zanu-PF. Mnangagwa dismissed it as “fundamentally flawed” and ignorant of party procedures. The document opposed extending Mnangagwa’s rule beyond two terms, warning it would breach the constitution. The incident signals an intensifying succession battle in the ruling party.

MOROCCO

Youth call for Saturday sit-in for health, education

Gen Z 212, a leaderless youth collective behind protests in Morocco, has called for “peaceful sit-ins” on Saturday, coming after more than two weeks of protests in Rabat, Casablanca, and Tangier. Public anger over the conditions at healthcare facilities turned to street protests in late September, when eight women died during Caesarean sections at a hospital in Agadir. Protesters have called on King Mohammed VI to steer government priorities towards healthcare and education, instead of building stadiums for the 2030 football World Cup, which Morocco



PHOTO: ABDEL MAJID BZIOUNT/AFP

Sit down: Gen Z 212 derives its name from Morocco’s international dialling code.

is hosting with Spain and Portugal.

NEWS

CAMEROON

Biya may have to jail another opponent soon

A former ally of the president declared he won Sunday's election, fuelling sporadic demonstrations.

AMINDEH BLAISE ATABONG IN YAOUNDÉ

UNTIL June, Issa Tchiroma Bakary was a mouthpiece for the government of President Paul Biya. Then he resigned to run against him in Sunday's presidential election. Less than 48 hours after the vote, he declared victory on Facebook.

Tchiroma, 79, urged the 92-year-old Biya to choose "greatness" over chaos by accepting defeat. Biya has not commented but government spokesperson René Emmanuel Sadi issued a statement urging Cameroonians to "show proof of maturity, responsibility and calm" while waiting for the Constitutional Council's results.

Many people didn't heed Sadi's call.

In Tchiroma's hometown of Garoua, clashes between protests and police began on election day. Demonstrations have since spread to Bafoussam, Douala, and Kousséri. Protesters accused



PHOTO: DANIEL BELOUMOU OLONO/AFP

Self-styled: Issa Tchiroma Bakary (above) ran against incumbent Paul Biya in the election.

electoral authorities of falsifying results. They erected barricades and burned tyres. Security forces responded with tear gas and water cannons.

In Dschang, protesters set a court building ablaze and burned municipal vehicles. The office of Biya's party, the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement, was also torched.

In response, many civil administrators have banned public assemblies until after the inauguration of the election winner, expected early next month.

But this has done little to silence dissent. "I align with many Cameroonians who are clamouring for change. The fruits of the current regime are not so convincing," said Yaoundé resident Angabu Noel Umekai.

In the 2018 election opposition leader Maurice Kamto declared himself victor. He was arrested, imprisoned, and barred from this year's election. ■

DRC

M23 rebels are issuing their own 'AFC-M23' passports now

Fears of the country's balkanisation are becoming increasingly tangible.

PROSPER HERI NGORORA IN NEW YORK

MARCH 23 Movement (M23) rebels are locked in a military and diplomatic stalemate with the Congolese government; meanwhile, they have opened a new front: visas and mobility.

"Any foreign national wishing to enter the liberated areas must be in possession of a visa issued by the competent authorities of the AFC-M23," the group announced early this month. "Liberated area" is how M23 leaders refer to the parts of eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) that they are militarily occupying. AFC-M23 is the name of the politico-military vehicle through which they engage the world.

The M23 justifies the measure on the grounds of "reciprocity". In February 2025, after the fall of Goma, the Kinshasa government disowned all

travel authorisations issued from M23-controlled areas.

"The fear of our country's balkanisation is becoming increasingly tangible," warns Dieumerici Munguakonkwa of Action for Democracy and Development, an opposition political party in the DRC. He describes the Kinshasa government's response to M23 occupation as "lethargic and indecisive".

The rebel group has begun issuing passport substitutes to DRC citizens in Goma. Resident Prince Ajabu got one. He says it cost him \$45 and Ugandan authorities accepted it when he travelled to Kampala, showing tacit acceptance of DRC balkanisation in the region.

The United Nations also appears resigned to the new status quo. "Our humanitarian colleagues and our peacekeeping colleagues deal with the M23 as de facto authorities," Stéphane Dujarric, spokesperson of the UN secretary-general, told *The Continent* in New York this week. He said UN workers in other parts of the world under disputed administrations do the same.

M23 authorities told *The Continent* that UN personnel with service or official passports or courtesy visas will continue to enjoy free and unrestricted access to areas they control, for the purpose of protecting and assisting civilian populations. ■

OBITUARY

Jane Goodall

3 April 1934 – 1 October 2025

RISHIKA PARDIKAR

JANE GOODALL, the English conservationist renowned for her work with chimpanzees in Gombe National Park in Tanzania, died on 1 October, aged 91. Global obituaries praised her work, but also carried silences. There is much to question about Goodall.

She fed primates and habituated them to human presence, methods that undermine the claim Goodall studied chimpanzee behaviour in the wild. “It was not science and it wouldn’t pass peer review today,” says Mordecai Ogada, a Kenyan conservation scientist and author of *The Big Conservation Lie*.

Goodall’s fame partly stemmed from being a lone (white) woman working in African forests. She was considered bold for flying to another continent. Yet even today, the majority of African scientists don’t have the privilege of research travel.

Her career embodied privilege in many other ways. In 1960 when Goodall began her work, Tanzania was under British colonial rule. She didn’t have a degree but paleoanthropologist Louis Leakey recruited her for research. She went on to enter Cambridge University as a PhD candidate without having completed undergraduate studies. And for five years, during which she set up her Jane Goodall



PHOTO: APIC/GETTY IMAGES

Institute, she was married to Tanzania’s national parks director, Derek Bryceson.

Goodall’s research did not acknowledge African oral histories and anecdotes about wildlife, positioning her as the original discoverer of common primate behaviour like the use of tools and organised warfare.

What Goodall acknowledged instead was the fictional Tarzan, a white nobleman who fights for animals as black people poach them. Such racist myths continue to shape conservation efforts. “We are protecting ‘white spaces’ and some species, but this is not conservation. We are not protecting ecosystems and we are excluding people and livelihoods,” Ogada says.

Jane Goodall was one of the last symbols of “conservation” that was politically, socially, and financially unsustainable, and colonial in its ethos. ■

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The Continent has received support from the following institutions: 11th Hour Project, African Climate Foundation, Africa No Filter, African Union, Amplify SA, Ford Foundation, Fred Foundation, GiZ, Luminate, National Endowment for Democracy, Mott Foundation, Open Society Foundations and the Pulitzer Centre.

MADAGASCAR

Military wins, Rajoelina flees

Madagascar's president has fled, alleging a coup by the same army unit that brought him to power in 2009.

RIANA RAYMONDE RANDRIANARISOA IN ANTANANARIVO

WEEKS OF protests by Malagasy youth have culminated in the dissolution of the government and the impeachment of the president, Andry Rajoelina.

On Monday, the 51-year-old former DJ and coup leader announced in a live Facebook broadcast that he was sheltering in a "safe location" after an attempt on his life. Rajoelina did not disclose his whereabouts, but claimed "a group of armed forces threatened to take control of the state-owned media". Local media believe he was flown out on a French military aircraft, first fleeing to Mauritius and, ultimately, to the United Arab Emirates.

Before the military takeover, Rajoelina's office tried to assert that he was still in control. "The president of the republic remains fully in office and ensures the maintenance of constitutional order and national



PHOTO: LUIS TATO/AFP

Gen Z: *The arrest of two municipal councillors sparked a youth-led protest movement.*

stability," it said. "The presence of armed military forces in front of the presidential palace constitutes a clear act of attempted coup d'état."

Within hours of the broadcast, a specialised army unit, which was instrumental in bringing Rajoelina to power in a 2009 coup, said it had taken control of the military. On Saturday, members of the Corps d'administration des personnels et des services administratifs et techniques, or Capsat, accompanied demonstrators into the iconic 13 May Square in the

capital, Antananarivo, defying official orders to shoot protesters. That Capsat soldiers backed the protesters marked a significant shift in the protests.

Capsat head Colonel Michael Randrianirina publicly declared the military's refusal to follow orders. "We refuse to be a means of repression," he said. "We are against the violence and the ban [on] free speech."

Capsat then appointed General Démosthène Pikulas as the new chief of defence staff, and Mamelisoa Mbina Nonos as commander-in-chief of the gendarmerie. Without the backing of the police and the army, Rajoelina was out of options and the mutiny was complete.

A loss of power

Madagascar's youth-led protests mirror a global trend of Gen-Z protest movements, including in Kenya, Morocco, and Nepal.

The Malagasy protests were sparked by the arrest of two municipal councillors for trying to stage a symbolic protest against water and electricity cuts. Bàbà Rakotoarisoa, Clémence Raharinirina, and Lily Rafaralahy took water cans from Antananarivo city hall to the Senate in Anosy on 18 September.

Two of the three councillors were arrested the next day as they headed to Antananarivo's police headquarters to seek permission for a gathering on 25 September. The arrests fuelled public



Anti-government: The protesters rejected Rajoelina's attempts at conciliation.

PHOTO: LUIS TATO/AFP

outrage and galvanised youth into action. Mass protests erupted across the country, led by social media influencers and activists.

In response to mounting pressure, Rajoelina dismissed the energy minister on 26 September. Days later, the president dissolved the government. Before the army announced it was taking power, the National Assembly voted to impeach Rajoelina. All but one member voted for the impeachment. That includes his own party.

Protesters were not satisfied, escalating their demands to include the president's resignation.

The security forces, including the gendarmerie, police, and army, cracked down on protesters, using tear gas and rubber bullets. The United Nations reported 22 deaths and more than 400 injuries on the first day of mass demonstrations. The government disputed the death toll.

Since its independence in 1960, the former French colony has weathered political upheaval. By 2009, it was on its third coup – after ones in 1971 and 1975. The bloodless coup that deposed Marc Ravalomanana made the then 34-year-old opposition leader Rajoelina the world's youngest leader. Rajoelina stepped down in 2013, but returned after the 2018 elections.

What happens now?

Several organisations and African states have called for calm, respect for constitutional order, and dialogue.

African Union chair Mahmoud

Ali Youssouf expressed his “deep concern” and condemned “any attempt at unconstitutional changes of government in the country”. The AU has since suspended the island nation from its membership.

Rajoelina was holding the rotating presidency for the Southern African Development Community. SADC said it was following the developments in Madagascar “with grave concern” and had “profound solidarity with the people” of the country.

Capsat has suspended all democratic institutions – the senate, the electoral commission, and the constitutional court – except for the lower house of parliament, which had voted to impeach Rajoelina.

The unit said it would form a ruling commission comprising leaders from the army, police, and security forces. On Friday, Randrianirina was sworn in as president. ■



PHOTO: LUIS TATO/AFP

That's fire: Protesters used a metal container as a barricade against Malagasy security forces.

OBITUARY

Raila Odinga

7 January 1945 – 15 October 2025

For decades, Odinga's political flexibility held Kenya together through crisis after crisis. But his capacity for deal-making also stalled Kenya's democratic reckoning. In death, as in life, he leaves the country suspended between gratitude and bewilderment.



ROBERT AMALEMBA AND CHRISTINE MUNGAI IN NAIROBI

KENYA LOOKS democratic on paper but the internal workings of its politics often border on the absurd. Raila Amolo Odinga somehow had the temperament to stand at its political centre for more than three decades, riding each wave of turbulence to his advantage.

Across five election cycles, Kenya's political elite have struck cynical bargains, shifting alliances like players in a game of musical chairs. Political parties are often little more than special-purpose vehicles cobbled together for the sole purpose of winning a particular election. They are dismantled just as quickly as they are born.

Yet, in a sense, it is improbable handshakes – elite bargaining and compromise – that have kept the peace in Kenya, giving it a fragile stability.

Raila Odinga was at the heart of every deal.

Even in his final years, he was mediator-in-chief, most recently backing President William Ruto during the 2024 Gen Z protests that nearly toppled his administration.

Reactions to Odinga's death on Wednesday at age 80 speak to a shared sense that he helped to hold the nation together through sheer force of personality. In a national address on Wednesday, Ruto described Odinga as “a once-in-a-generation leader, whose legacy will shape the country for years to come.” The president has declared seven days of mourning and ordered flags to

fly at half-mast. Odinga will get a state funeral with full military rites, a rare honour typically reserved for presidents. Although he ran five times for the job, Odinga never made it to the top spot.

Family legacy

His political pedigree, however, was unmatched. His father, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, was a prominent freedom fighter in the struggle against colonialism, a legacy his son carried even further and more than matched.

In the 1980s, Odinga abrasively fought to end Daniel arap Moi's one-party rule and was detained without trial for nearly nine years: 1982 to 1988 and 1989 to 1991. It's the longest detention any Kenyan politician has endured. With the transition to multiparty democracy,



Peas in a pod: Both Raila Odinga and his father Jaramogi Oginga Odinga were political activists.

Odinga supported his father's only, and unsuccessful, bid for president in 1992.

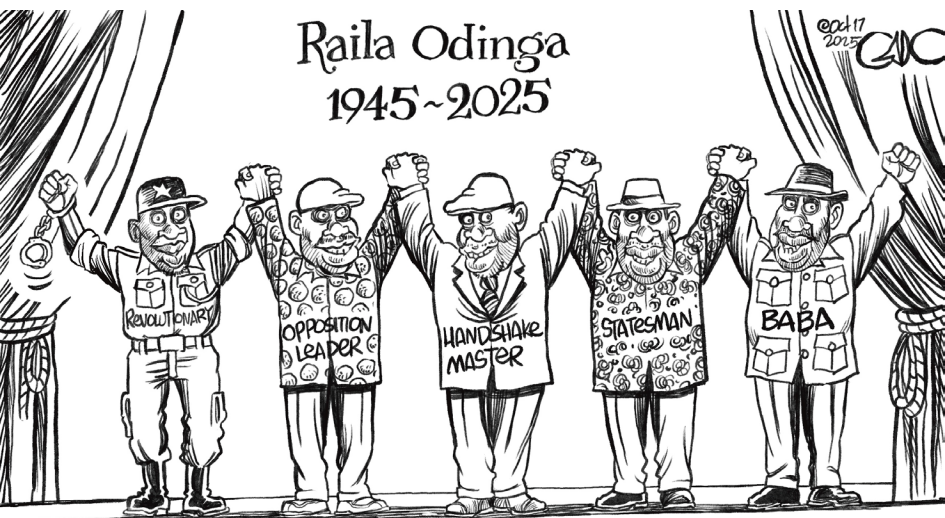
When his father died two years later, Odinga left his Ford-Kenya party to form the National Development Party. It's here that he proved himself as a politician: getting into parliament and later demonstrating unmatched talent as a nationwide mobiliser. The party's tractor symbol – *tinga* in Kiswahili – is the origin of many of Odinga's nicknames. Other nicknames he earned over the years were "Baba" (father), "Jakom" (chairman), and "Njamba" (brave warrior).

"He is to Kenya's politics what Franco [Luambo Makiadi] was to rumba – abrasive, daring, and capable of taking both popular and unpopular stands without losing support. That's the stuff of genius. Such people are hard to replace," said political analyst Gitile Naituli.

In the early 2000s, Odinga merged his party with the governing Kenya African National Union (Kanu), led by Daniel Arap Moi, the very man who had imprisoned him for nearly a decade. This earned him a new nickname: Agwambo, the mystery man.

Kaleidoscopic factions

Odinga looked like a sellout but when Moi appointed him as Kanu secretary-general, Agwambo was in position for a coup from within. When Moi bypassed his long-time loyalists to anoint a political novice, Uhuru Kenyatta, as his successor, Odinga led an exodus from Kanu. He united this motley crew of former regime insiders and opposition figures behind Mwai Kibaki. He traversed the country to campaign for Kibaki, who had been injured after a car crash just before the elections and



was now in a wheelchair. That election ended Moi's 24-year rule.

That coalition soon fractured. Odinga regrouped – this time with William Ruto (the same one), Charity Ngilu, Najib Balala, Joseph Nyagah, and Musalia Mudavadi – to form the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM). They challenged Kibaki in the famously disputed 2007 elections that triggered violence, which left 1,200 people dead and more than half a million displaced. To ease the crisis, former UN secretary-general Kofi Annan brokered a power-sharing deal, making Kibaki president and Odinga prime minister. The deal was sealed with a handshake.

More uneasy handshakes would follow.

In 2013, Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto – once on opposite sides of the 2007 violence – joined forces, bound by their shared indictment at the International Criminal Court. Odinga was their challenger. He lost to the duo then – and again in 2017. The Supreme Court annulled the 2017 results in a landmark decision but Odinga boycotted the repeat poll, insisting it would still not be free or fair.

That left the field open for Kenyatta to win comfortably. Then, on 30 January 2018, Odinga swore himself in as the “people’s president”. Armed police stood by, watching what was, technically, open treason in Uhuru Park. Fred Biketi, a political writer who was there that day, remembers bracing for the worst – police had brutally dispersed smaller political gatherings at the park

many times before. Instead, Biketi witnessed a roaring and untouched crowd. It was classic Agwambo: reckless and calculated all at once, leaving the country suspended in his wake.

A singular politician

“I feel Uhuru knew what going hard on Raila meant – anarchy,” Biketi tells *The Continent*. “He was a man who could turn the nation against you in a single statement. Uhuru let Raila swear himself in as the people’s president, and no other politician will ever be allowed such leeway. There will only ever be one Raila.”

Just weeks later, Odinga reconciled with Kenyatta, giving Kenya yet another “handshake” on the steps of Harambee House. It helped to cool political tempers after years of bitter division, and Kenyatta backed Odinga against Ruto in the next elections in 2022. Odinga lost narrowly, in what had clearly been his last shot at the presidency.

Last year, when young people filled the streets demanding jobs and justice, many expected Odinga to side with the Gen Z protestors. Instead, he defended Ruto’s embattled government, arguing that Kenya could not afford chaos. His decision helped to de-escalate tensions, once again preserving Kenya’s fragile peace – and Odinga secured Ruto’s backing for his bid to be elected chairperson of the African Union Commission, which ultimately failed.

Now he rests, but Agwambo exits as he lived: leaving the country at a loss, still trying to decode what it all meant. ■

REPORT

Inside the fragile first week of the Israel-Hamas ceasefire

Trump has touted the latest ceasefire as the beginning of peace in the Middle East. Few Israelis or Palestinians believe it will last.



PHOTO: OMAR AL-QATTAA/AFP

DAVID SCHUTZ IN JERUSALEM

MEVASERET Zion, west of Jerusalem, ground to a halt on Monday morning. Cars idled on the side of the road, drivers smoking or scrolling through phones, as a reconnaissance helicopter circled low overhead. The town's highway to

the capital was sealed for United States President Donald Trump's journey to address the Knesset – Israel's parliament – in Givat Ram, Jerusalem.

Trump had announced the ceasefire the previous Wednesday after marathon talks that included Qatar, Egypt, and Türkiye. Israel's security

cabinet approved a phased truce and troop drawback, agreeing to release 250 Palestinians on death row in its prisons; 1,700 Palestinian captives (of 11,000 detained since October 2023); and hundreds of the bodies of those killed. Aid to Gaza would also resume. In exchange, Hamas would release all remaining Israeli captives – living and dead.

Addressing the Knesset, Trump said his 20-point peace plan is “a new architecture for peace”. The current truce is supposedly only a first phase. The plan foresees Israel eventually fully withdrawing from Gaza and Palestinian factions disarming – steps yet to be agreed to by either side.

That day, Hamas handed over the last 20 living Israeli captives to the Red Cross and Israel began bus transfers from the Megiddo and Damon prisons in the West Bank. Israeli soldiers fired gunshots and warned residents via loudspeakers not to hold public celebrations for released Palestinians, calling them “incitement”. At a checkpoint outside Ramallah, soldiers tore down posters of the newly released detainees.

Yellow lapel pins calling for the release of Israeli captives still dotted the streets as Israel shifted its wartime slogan from “Together we will win” to “The victory is thanks to you”. Yet a recent poll found only a minority of Israelis considered themselves victors against Hamas. Most said no one had won.

Outside the Knesset, the protest tent that has stood since November 2023 was filled with relatives of Israeli



PHOTO: KHALED DESOUKI/AFP

Peace 2025: In Sharm el-Sheikh, Trump proposed placing Gaza under Palestinian committee control.

captives. Many celebrated – but not for the government.

“This wasn’t the government’s achievement. It was pressure – from the demonstrations, from the families – that forced them to act. That’s the only reason anyone is coming home,” said former lawmaker Anat Maor.

Maor, a “liberal Zionist”, said the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative remained the best path to lasting peace. Under that plan, Arab states would normalise ties with Israel if it withdrew from occupied territories and allowed land swaps for a viable Palestinian state.

From exile, Palestinian activist Naji El Khatib sees Trump’s truce as a performance – a tactical pause to let Netanyahu retreat from a war that is now hurting Israel’s image. Khatib, who co-founded the One Democratic State Initiative, rejects the two-state model and advocates for a single, secular administration over the entire area now legally and illegally occupied by Israel, under which all residents would have equal rights as citizens.

Meanwhile, regional leaders at Sharm el-Sheikh are going a third way, backing Trump's plan to place Gaza under a Palestinian technocratic committee. The intention is to later transfer control of Gaza to the Palestinian Authority – which currently administers the West Bank – with Hamas excluded.

By Tuesday, the ceasefire was already fraying. Crowds in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv's "hostage squares" kept celebrating, but Israel and Hamas were at odds over the bodies of Israeli captives presumed dead in Gaza. Hamas has said it couldn't find them and Israel threatened to halt aid convoys until it did. Trump acknowledged that much of Gaza was now rubble, so locating every single body would be difficult. But he still threatened that the war would resume if Hamas failed to deliver.

Khatib believes the delay might even be deliberate – a way for Hamas to expose what he called "the racism at the heart of the settler-colonial mentality" – a state that halts aid convoys for a few missing Israeli bodies while tens of thousands of Palestinian bodies lie uncounted, unnamed, and unrecovered.

In Jenin in the West Bank, raids under the Iron Wall operation continue. A woman said that her nephew had been released four days earlier after two years in detention without charge. His release was unrelated to the ceasefire, but he too was warned against celebrating. "If they see even just a family celebration, they come back for all of us," she said. ■

This story was published in collaboration with Egab



PHOTO: EYAD BABA/AFP

Back to basics: Palestinians returning to their homes after the ceasefire may be returning to rubble.

ANALYSIS



PHOTO: ABBAS MOMANI/AFP

The ‘Palestinian Mandela’ remains in an Israeli prison

Marwan al-Barghouthi, often called the ‘Mandela of Palestine’, was imprisoned 23 years ago. His release could unify Palestinian political factions. So Israel won’t countenance it.

ASEEL MAFARJEH IN THE WEST BANK

AS PART of last week’s ceasefire deal, Israel agreed to free 1,950 Palestinian captives, including 250 on death row. Some of them have already been bussed to Gaza and the West Bank. But it ignored the captive at the top of the Palestinian demand list: Marwan al-Barghouthi.

“They fear he could become the next

Palestinian leader,” says Sari Orabi, a Ramallah-based political analyst who has followed the recent negotiations.

Barghouthi, 66, has been in prison for 23 years, serving five life sentences. His name is more divisive in Israel-Palestine politics than questions of military withdrawal or reconstruction aid. The Israeli government calls his release an absolute red line.

Barghouthi was born in 1959 in Kobar, a village northwest of Ramallah, and joined Fatah, the dominant Palestinian nationalist movement, at age 15. By 1977, Israel had arrested him for the first time. He would be arrested again and again throughout the 1980s, spending years in administrative detention.

In the bloody Second Intifada of 2000, Barghouthi led Fatah's armed wing in the West Bank. Israeli forces captured him in 2002 and he was sentenced to five life terms plus 40 years. He refused to recognise the Israeli court's jurisdiction, calling it a tribunal of an occupying power. He has been in prison ever since.

Barghouthi's long imprisonment has made him a symbol larger than the

political positions he actually holds. Palestinians and international observers labelled him the "Palestinian Mandela". Like Nelson Mandela, he maintains that armed struggle is justified against occupation, but is also open to an eventual negotiated peace.

What his freedom could threaten

In the latest captive-swap talks, far-right Israeli ministers Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich – partners in Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's governing coalition – extracted a commitment from Netanyahu that Barghouthi would not be released under any circumstances. They cited "security concerns", but their real fear is political.



'Mandela of Palestine': Both activists were celebrated in Ramallah in 2017.

PHOTO: ABBAS MOMANI/AFP

Internal Palestinian politics is currently paralysed. The Palestinian Authority in Ramallah in the West Bank, which is reliant on foreign funding and Israeli security coordination, has lost popular legitimacy over the years. Its president, 89-year-old Mahmoud Abbas, who has led the Fatah political party since 2004, cancelled elections scheduled for 2021, fearing Hamas might win.

Hamas, which ran Gaza, had local legitimacy. But it is currently hobbled: the war dismantled its leadership and global powers now want it excluded from any post-war governance.

While other political figures calculated, compromised (or failed to), and damaged their reputations, Barghouti was locked away. He doesn't have their baggage. Opinion polls consistently show him as the most popular Palestinian political figure across all factions and territories. His release would insert a wildcard into the Palestinian political scene: a unifying figure to bridge the deep divide between Gaza and the West Bank; between supporters of Hamas and Fatah, the main political party backing the Palestinian Authority.

That unification would end the Palestinian political fragmentation that benefits Israel.

But it could also come at the expense of Palestinian leaders who've accommodated themselves to the current stalemate. Barghouti could eclipse Abbas and fracture Fatah, splitting those loyal to the Palestinian Authority establishment from those demanding renewal.



PHOTO: YOAV LEMMER/AFP

Barred: A 2003 photograph shows Barghouti at the beginning of his decades-long incarceration.

Even Hamas' hold might be eroded. Barghouti has credibility with supporters of armed resistance and his advocacy for diplomatic engagement might allow him to build coalitions that Hamas leaders cannot.

No one – not Israel, not the Palestinian Authority, not Hamas – can predict or control what would happen if Barghouti were to walk free tomorrow.

Most of the likely scenarios would unsettle one or all of them. But keeping him locked away keeps an idea alive at home and abroad: that unity – and perhaps real peace – may depend on the Palestinian Mandela who has yet to walk free. ■

Aseel Mafarjeh is a West Bank-focused journalist, focusing on Palestinian youth. This article was produced in collaboration with Egab

For Gaza, for Palestine, for our people

A LETTER FROM FADWA AL-BARGHOUTHİ AFTER SHE LEARNED HER HUSBAND WON'T BE RELEASED.

IT'S TRUE, Marwan, that it's hard and it hurts. Our children grew up with this pain. The six grandchildren who have never met you always ask about you. But I know you and I know what eases your pain is stopping the destruction, devastation, and crimes against our people in Gaza.

I see you in solitary confinement, in a dark cell without food, air, or sun for two years. And now you rejoice – even alone – at the end of the massacre. You imagine the returnees on Al-Rasheed Street and ask yourself how to ease their unbearable pain and suffering as they face loss, rubble, and many great dangers. You bid farewell to the freed captives, console them, pat the shoulders of those still trapped in this hell, and think – even if only to yourself, on behalf of a people yearning for freedom and struggling for it – how to pave the way towards freedom and a dignified life.

You take the initiative to protect our people's rights and the cause, searching for how to lighten the

weight and difficulty of these days. You insist on the unity of the people and the land. You plan to give every child space for life and hope. You remember your comrades and converse with the living and the martyrs in your mind.

As for your life companion, I remember your words from 41 years ago well. You told me: "Palestine has priority until liberation, and our share of life comes after". You were right. I replied then: "Is Palestine yours alone?" And I'm still trying to keep that covenant despite all the pain it carries. Ordinary life still awaits our people's appointment with freedom. Despite immense pain, we keep the promise. Despite all the torment, the mother's heart inside me feels great relief and carries the dream of a new dawn for mothers.

We're waiting for you: me, your family, and your people – who love you and whom you love. You were and still are from the people and for the people, my love.

And we will meet again soon...



REVIEW

BY WILFRED OKICHE

How to keep a promise

Photos from a different time still need their space in today's world. A commitment to archiving allows us to experience the stories behind them.

IN 2002, Ntare Guma Mbaho Mwine, an actor and filmmaker (currently seen in Apple TV+'s *Smoke*) was passing through the small Ugandan town of Mbirizi when his car sputtered to a stop. While waiting for repairs, he wandered off with his camera and stumbled on a modest studio run by Ssalongo Kibaate Aloysius, a local photographer. This chance encounter would blossom into a friendship, and also a 22-year odyssey

to bring Kibaate's work to wider public attention.

"Kibaate showed me thousands of negatives he had in a burlap sack and I was blown away," Mwine tells *The Continent*. "He wasn't a city guy photographing elites. He was shooting the common man – weddings, birthdays, family events. What was special was how he captured intimacy."

Kibaate had no ambitions for fame or



ILFORD FP4 SAFETY FILM



Reel life: Ugandan photographer Ssalongo Kibaate Aloysius' talent was capturing intimacy.

wealth: his photography was a service to his community, driven by what Mwine calls “the pure artist’s love of his work”. Mwine, who was born in the United States to Ugandan parents, has often wondered what his own life would have been like had he been born in Uganda. “I look at Kibaate and his life could have been mine,” he says.

Kibaate passed away in 2006 at the age of 67, leaving Mwine tortured by a promise to make his work more accessible. “I don’t know if you’ve ever made a promise to someone who died – it sort of haunted me,” he says. “I have

his negatives, and promised to make a book. But could not afford to digitise all his work as I was self-financing.”

Mwine’s debut feature documentary *Memories of Love Returned* chronicles his efforts to keep that promise. The film premiered at the Silicon Valley African Film Festival, showed at Fespaco, and won an award at the Zanzibar International Film Festival. The documentary is structured in a way that melds Kibaate’s story with Mwine’s personal reflections. In the process, it offers clear-eyed commentary on history, legacy, and patriarchy.



In memoriam: Mwine has made a documentary of his attempts to preserve Kibaate's images.



***Two tone:** Kibaate's medium was tender images of working class people.*

The film's title is taken from the roadside exhibition of about 5,000 of Kibaate's photographs, which Mwine mounted in Mbirizi in 2021 during the Covid pandemic. Mwine put his first paycheck from the Showtime hit series *The Chi* towards preserving Kibaate's archive and funded the exhibition with a donation from director Steven Soderbergh, with whom he had worked on 2014's *The Knick*. His small team collected the stories of attendees as they identified their friends and relatives among the photos.

Kibaate's photography is striking in its tenderness. "We celebrate Malick Sidibé, as we should," Ntare says of the

renowned Malian photographer, "but he often photographed elites. Kibaate's work was working-class people. His photos didn't feel staged. He captured love and affection so simple, but that spoke volumes."

These images also reveal Uganda's shift to more conservative values. Men holding hands, common in earlier decades, now evokes speculation. "We don't know their stories, whether [they were] gay or straight, but that is besides the point. People don't hold hands like that anymore because they do not want to be stigmatised," Mwine says. "Kibaate's work shows us a time that was more open."



Memories of Love Returned: Actor Ntare Mwine held a roadside exhibition by this name in 2021.



Mores: Some photos exhibit how gender and social norms have changed over time.

Other photos complicate gender and morality narratives. One woman, frequently pictured with different men, is revealed to have been a sex worker. “She owned a bar. She was enterprising and people looked at her like a hero,” says Mwine, cautioning against easy judgment. “Our biases shape how we interpret these images.”

Mwine also wants the film to open discussions about archiving, particularly in the digital age. He has come to fear the loss of digital memory even more

than the decay of analogue negatives. “Modern photographers shoot digital, print for clients, then delete their cards as they don’t have the storage facility to keep all of the work they shoot. That’s scary.”

He is still working on the second part of his promise to Kibaate: publishing a book of selected photographs. He hopes that as his labour of love continues to travel and reach new audiences, the project’s revenues can help to support the large family Kibaate left behind. ■



Preserving memories: Some of the negatives were already damaged by age.

DATA

Failing Africa’s girls

AFRICAN girls face many gender-specific barriers to education, including patriarchal norms, sexual harassment, teen pregnancy, and child marriage. In recognition of International Day of the Girl Child last week (11 October), we explore these issues across 37 countries we’ve surveyed since the start of last year.

In our sample, women are more likely than men to lack formal schooling (18% vs. 13%) and less likely to have a secondary (38% vs. 42%) or post-secondary education (16% vs. 21%).

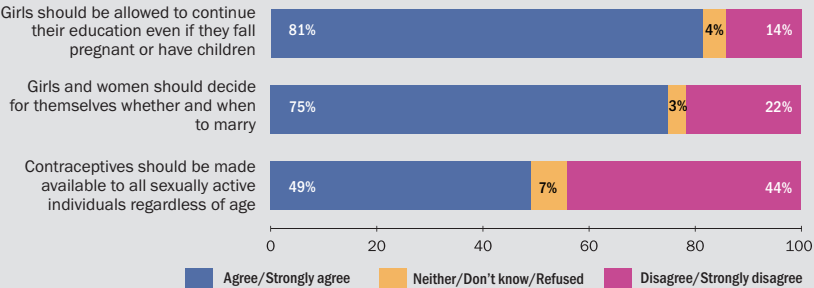
While two-thirds (66%) of respondents say girls are never kept out of school because families prioritise boys’ education, 12% say it’s a common

occurrence. Not that schools are necessarily safe learning spaces: 27% of citizens say girls “often” or “always” face discrimination, harassment, or unwanted sexual advances from teachers.

Eight in 10 people (81%) say girls should be allowed to continue their schooling if they fall pregnant or give birth, but 14% disagree. Preventing teen pregnancy faces opposition, too: 44% oppose making contraceptives available irrespective of age.

Meanwhile, 22% don’t think girls should decide for themselves whether and when to marry, leaving them vulnerable to becoming child brides. ■

Views on pregnant pupils, contraceptives, and marriage autonomy | 37 African countries | 2024/2025



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.



ILLUSTRATION: WYNONA MUTISI

COMMENT

INTERNATIONAL “aid” for Africa is shrinking – hastened this year by chaos and renewed insularity in the United States. Africa’s trade with the world is shrinking too. For heavily indebted countries, a perfect storm has made landfall.

At home, governments drain and oppress rather than support their residents. With social contracts in tatters, talk of seeing off the storm through more taxation is a farce.

The path out begins with a pivot in leadership.

African leaders must abandon domestic contempt and international supplication to build a progressive, ethical, coherent, and communal politic that’s loved at home and respected abroad. Only then can they constructively engage an erratic world and repair (or create) social contracts at home.

In this new series, Kenyan political scientist **L. Muthoni Wanyeki** elaborates on the depth of our crises. Drawing from black progressive traditions, she charts the first steps away from imminent ruin – ours and the world’s.

The end of ‘aid’

The heyday is over. We can’t just cry about it.



L. MUTHONI WANYEKI

TOWARDS the end of July, two related stories broke about Kenya and Nigeria: a “starvation alert” in Kakuma refugee camp (home to 300,000 people) and a warning that the 1.4-million internally displaced people in Borno State would be pushed into the arms of Boko Haram. The *BBC* journalist responsible for both stories linked them to the end of US government funding for food rations and cash transfers, respectively.

The stories – which many other international and African media picked up – carried a clear subtext: the demise of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is a catastrophe for development.

Soon after retaking office, US President Donald Trump closed the agency and rolled up its remains into the State Department. Elon Musk, who at the time was Trump’s sidekick in the chaotic reorganisation of the US federal government, labelled the agency a “viper’s nest of radical left Marxists who hate America”. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said all “aid” was being reviewed for consistency with Trump’s “America First” agenda. Trump said the US would no longer “blindly dole out money with no return to the American people”.

Cynics would argue US “aid” has always been about “America

First”. Grants were often tied to US “implementing partners” and food “aid” subsidised US farmers.

The new nakedly transactional approach in the US – placing “aid” in the State Department to explicitly link it with foreign policy – is not unprecedented. By 2013, almost half of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) donor countries had merged their aid and foreign affairs offices. They include Australia, Canada, Iceland, New Zealand, and, most recently, the United Kingdom.

With these mergers, “aid” shrank. In 2024, funds from these countries to “sub-Saharan” Africa declined 28%. Only Norway, Luxembourg, Sweden, and Denmark met the United Nations target: giving 0.7% of their national budget – a benchmark long derided as “supply driven”. The US never reached that target: in 2024, it gave 0.22% of its budget. However, its total contribution of \$63.3-billion made the US the largest donor by volume.

China, which is not a member of the OECD, blurs distinctions between grants, loans, and investments, which makes comparisons tricky. Still, the China Global Development Dashboard shows its global development finance fell from a peak of \$125-billion in 2016 to \$42-billion in 2021. In Africa, that figure dropped from \$36-billion in 2016

to \$7-billion in 2021. The China Africa Research Initiative says Chinese lending to Africa dropped to less than \$5-billion in 2023 and totalled \$3.4-billion in 2024.

In short, the heyday of “aid” is over. Talk of “aid effectiveness” can rest in peace. The only surviving aid buzzword is “3D”: aligning development with the giver’s diplomatic and defence priorities.

The party is over too for the UN. By May, the UN had received only \$1.8-billion of its \$3.7-billion budget. The US – its largest debtor – was \$1.5-billion in arrears, followed by China at \$597-million. Its separate peacekeeping budget was in similar dire straits. The arrears are not going to be settled – this US administration is as vitriolic about the UN as it was about its own “aid” agency. By September when Trump gave his chastising speech at the UN General Assembly, US arrears had reportedly ballooned to \$3-billion. The UN now plans to cut staff up to 20%, shrink budgets, and merge agencies.

The UN cuts are visible on the ground. Sudan received only 13% of the \$4.2-billion the Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs had called for. From Kenya’s Kakuma camp to Niger, Libya, and beyond, refugees are starving and protesting. There is no money for cash transfers and food for internally displaced people in Nigeria’s Borno State.

So, what is an appropriate African response? Surely not the lamentation that followed the funding cuts. “Aid” created perverse incentives for African countries to abdicate responsibility.



PHOTO: THOMAS MUKOYA/REUTERS

***Time to rethink ‘aid’:** Starvation was reported at the Kakuma refugee camp in Turkana, Kenya.*

Displaced people’s hunger is a problem for their host country. The insecurity that displaced them is a problem for their country of origin, whose territory is so inhospitable that its citizens have to escape and live (for generations) across borders, waiting interminably for third-country relocation.

Yet, in the stories on Kenya and Nigeria, the journalist didn’t ask what the African countries were doing. Development journalism rarely asks anything of them – except for sound bites lamenting that the end of “aid” might kill not only humanitarian efforts, but also critical domestic sectors like health.

If the current US administration is the unicorn that tossed the toys out of the cot, it also created an opportunity for us to extricate ourselves from the perverse incentives of “aid”. The refugees in Kakuma, and the internally displaced people in Borno, deserve nothing less. ■

Dr. L. Muthoni Wanyeki is a Kenyan political scientist

The Quiz

- 1 In which city is Cameroon's Reunification Monument located?
- 2 Andry Rajoelina was which country's president?
- 3 What is Eritrea's most populous city?
- 4 Who was the first person to hold the office of prime minister in Kenya?
- 5 Who was the last person to hold the office of prime minister in Kenya?
- 6 Bafana Bafana is the name of which country's men's national football team?
- 7 Assimi Goïta is which country's president?
- 8 Which Ghanaian fabric recently gained protection rights?
- 9 *Coffin for Head of State* is a 1981 song by Africa 70 and which Nigerian artist?
- 10 How many presidents has Cameroon had?



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

"Agwambo might be a mystery man, but you've cracked the case."

Big Pic

Building up: The annual replastering of the Djinguereber Mosque, also known as Djingareyber, in Timbuktu. It was erected in the 14th century during the reign of Mansa Kankou Moussa and is 700 years old.

PHOTO:HAMEYE CAPII/AFP



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