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The Continent



WHO'S NEXT?



Cover: In the early hours of Wednesday morning, Gabon's electoral commission announced that Ali Bongo had "won" yet another presidential election. By that evening, he had lost the country that his family has ruled for 56 years – overthrown by senior army officers (p8) in what is just the latest in a spate of military coups in west and central Africa (p9). The events in Gabon mean columnist Samira Sawlani's *Keeping Up With the Coupdashians* has a new cast member (p33).

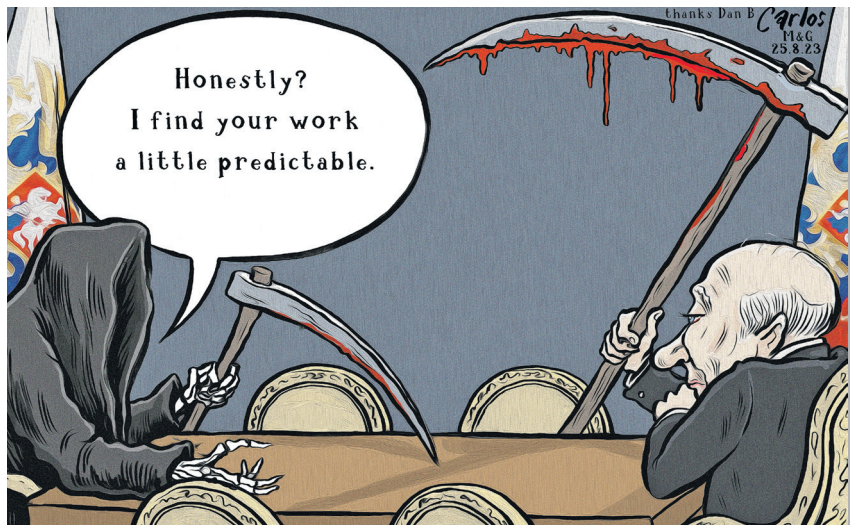
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GEOPOLITICS

Russia blocks renewal of UN sanctions in Mali

United Nations sanctions in Mali ended this week after Russia vetoed a move by France and the United Arab Emirates to renew them. They were first announced in 2017 and renewed annually. At the time of their termination, the sanctions – which targeted people involved in violating or obstructing the country's 2015 peace deal, obstructing aid, human rights abuses or the recruitment of child soldiers – were being imposed on only eight people. Since 1966, the UN Security Council has imposed 31 sanction regimes, with 16 of them in Africa.

INTERNATIONAL

Ecuador votes to keep the oil in the ground

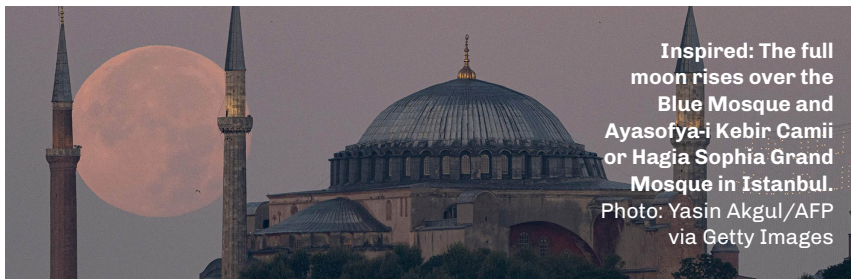
Ecuadorians voted to stop oil drilling in Yasuni National Park in the Amazon rainforest, and to ban mining in Choco Andino forest. Its lush rainforests, combined with the Galapagos archipelago, is why Ecuador is lauded as a biodiversity hotspot. Ecuador's national oil company has a year to stop its operations in Yasuni, leaving 1.67-billion barrels of oil underground. It isn't yet clear how the state, where drug traffickers recently killed a presidential candidate, will balance the will of the people against big oil and mining interests.

CELESTIAL INFLUENCERS

Saturn and a super blue moon run rings around skywatchers

On Wednesday and Thursday, both our moon and the planet Saturn were the closest they will be to Earth this year. The

Wednesday moon was also the second full moon this month, making it what is known as a Blue Moon, a phenomenon that is unlikely to happen again in the next 13 to 14 years. Stargazers across the world outdid themselves taking pictures of this rare celestial spectacle, while coastal communities reportedly saw unusually high tides.



Inspired: The full moon rises over the Blue Mosque and Ayasofya-i Kebir Camii or Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque in Istanbul. Photo: Yasin Akgul/AFP via Getty Images

HUMAN RIGHTS

Cruelty accelerates

Nigerian police raided a hotel in Warri city in Delta State and arrested dozens of people for attending what it called a “gay wedding”. Later, 67 detained people were paraded before the media. Nigeria passed a law banning same-sex marriage in 2014. In Uganda, authorities this week charged a man with so-called “aggravated homosexuality”, the gravest crime in its new and extreme anti-homosexuality law. The man faces the death penalty. Uganda has also jailed one of the promoters of its anti-homosexuality law, who had earlier told parliament that he was “ex-gay”.

DRC

Police kill dozens in crackdown on peacekeeper protest

Security forces in Goma, in the east of the country, shot and killed dozens of protesters on Wednesday. Scores more were wounded, and others were arrested, according to Human Rights Watch. The protest was organised by a religious sect called the Natural Judaic and Messianic Faith Towards the Nations, and was calling on peacekeepers from the United Nations and the East African Community to leave the country. The demonstration had been banned by local authorities.



Familiar refrain: Salif Keita speaks fondly of friendly despots. Photo: Parkin/Redferns via Getty Images

MALI

Musician's crush on autocracy flares up

Globally renowned Malian musician Salif Keïta is the newest advisor to junta leader Colonel Assimi Goïta, after resigning from Mali's interim parliament. Loved globally for his genius combination of west African percussions with jazz and Western world sounds, Keïta has previously said that what Africa needs is a benevolent dictator, not democracy. One of the singer's most enduring songs is *Mandjou*, written in praise of Guinea's first president, Ahmed Sékou Touré, at a time when he had become an iron-handed autocrat – albeit one with a soft spot for Keïta.

ANGOLA

Luanda's big box of glitter is starting to lose its shine

State news agency Angop reports that Angola is sitting on more than a million carats of unsold diamonds – just waiting for a buyer with the right price. The country expects to produce 12.4-million carats by the end of 2023, and has already sold 4.6-million carats this year. That's a lot of diamonds. Nonetheless, more than half of Angolans can expect to continue living in poverty, while its mineral wealth enriches a small sliver of people at home and abroad.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Medics mark wild polio milestone

This month African health officials marked a year of no confirmed cases of wild polio, the most common form of the poliovirus. The last cases were detected in southern Africa, prompting a five-country regional effort in which 45-million children were immunised. In a Wednesday press statement, the World Health Organisation urged countries to continue pushing for wider immunisation. It said that 187 cases of rarer variants of the poliovirus have been detected this year, spread across 21 African countries.

WILDLIFE**The elephant belt**

At least half of Africa's population of savannah elephants are in the Okavango-Zambezi region of Angola, Namibia, Botswana, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Last August, conservationists repeatedly flew a plane over a 300,000km² area to count them. The results of the survey were released this week at a ceremony in Livingstone, Zambia. It puts the total population in southern Africa at 227,900 elephants. Comparing the results to a similar survey in 2016, South African conservationist Darren Potgieter said that elephant populations in the area have remained stable.



Tusk till dawn. Photo: Pitamitz/VWPics/Universal Images Group via Getty Images

SAHEL**Food supplies cut off as conflicts mount**

In Niger, food supplies meant for vulnerable people are stuck at the borders. This follows indiscriminate sanctions imposed by regional body Ecowas and neighbouring countries, intended to pressure the military into restoring civilian rule. Niger's democratically-elected president was toppled in a military coup in late July. Meanwhile, in neighbouring Mali's ancient city of Timbuktu, militants have blockaded the roads – meaning food aid cannot reach 35,000 people who are already impoverished by years of conflict

NIGER**Algeria proposes six-month transition**

According to a proposal from Algeria, soldiers who recently overthrew the elected president of Niger should be given six months to return their country to civilian rule. That is a lot less than the three years that the putschists say they want, but more than what the West African regional bloc Ecowas is calling for. Foreign minister Ahmed Attaf reaffirmed Algeria's opposition to a planned Ecowas military intervention, and said that his own country, which shares a 1,000km border with Niger, would not allow its airspace to be used for any such operation.

South Africa

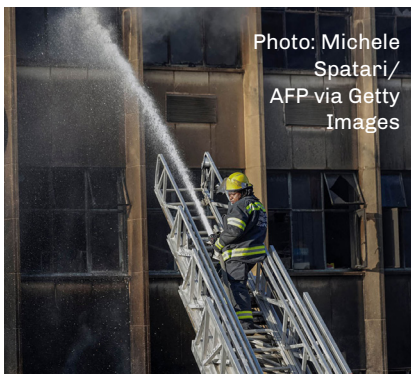


Photo: Michele Spatari/
AFP via Getty Images

Deadly Jo'burg blaze fuelled by neglect and dereliction

Simon Allison in Johannesburg

Omar Arafat was woken up by screams in the middle of the night. “Fire, fire!” It was around 1am, and the air was full of smoke. He opened the door but the flames were already in the corridor. He heard the sound of breaking glass, and he realised that people were breaking windows and jumping to safety – or their deaths.

So that’s what he did. He survived the three-storey fall, but was knocked out for

three hours. It was only when he regained consciousness that he realised the scale of the disaster: there were dozens of bodies scattered on the road around him, and ambulances and fire trucks everywhere.

At least 74 people were killed in the fire that engulfed a five-storey building in central Johannesburg in the early hours of Thursday morning. It is one of South Africa’s worst-ever disasters.

The cause of the fire is unknown, but the tragedy came as no surprise. The building, 80 Albert Street, is one of hundreds of neglected and derelict buildings in inner-city Johannesburg. Conditions in these buildings are often conducive to fire, thanks to illegal electricity connections, scarce water supply, and the absence of emergency exits.

Although Arafat survived, he does not know the whereabouts of his sister, Joyce Adam, who also lived in the building. She saved her two-year-old by throwing the child into the arms of someone on the street below, but has not been seen since. Talking on Thursday morning, Arafat was still hopeful that she is among the dozens of injured that are being treated in hospitals around Johannesburg.

Adam, from Mangochi in Malawi, was in South Africa for work. It was her first trip here. “She was going to go home next month. I bought her transport already,” said Arafat. “My heart is paining.” ■

Gabon

Unhappy families

The Bongo family ruled Gabon for 56 years. Until, suddenly, they didn't.

Désiré Nimubona

The celebrations for Ali Bongo Ondimba's electoral victory did not last long. In the very early hours of Wednesday, the country's electoral commission announced that the incumbent had won the presidential election with a majority of 64%. These results were not verified by any independent observers, who were not allowed in, and were contested by the opposition.

By the time the sun rose, soldiers had invaded the presidency. Shortly afterwards, they announced on national television that the 56-year rule of the Bongo family – Ali Bongo took over from his father Omar in 2009 – was over.

Bongo was detained in his palatial residence. His son, Nouredin Bongo Valentin, and six other key allies were arrested and charged with high treason and corruption.

Not everyone in the Bongo family was unhappy with the dramatic developments. His daughter, Malika Bongo Ondimba,

was among the first to congratulate the coup leaders. “My congratulations to the new President of the Transition...his Excellency Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema,” she wrote in a post on social media.

Bongo had a stroke in 2018 but did not relinquish power, despite spending months outside Gabon for treatment. “After the stroke, he was locked away by a group of his family members, of which his daughter was not part,” said a Gabonese journalist who spoke to *The Continent* on condition of anonymity, given the sensitivity of the current political situation.

Bongo had a stroke in 2018 but did not relinquish power, despite spending months outside Gabon for treatment

These complicated family dynamics may influence the nature of the political arrangement that follows the coup.

The new strongman, General Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema, has long had a quasi-parental relationship with the Bongos. He was aide-de-camp to Bongo senior, and then became head of Bongo junior's Republican Guard. His close relationship with some members of the Bongo family may mean that it is too soon to declare a total end to their infamously corrupt and incompetent rule. ■

Gabon

When regime change is the only change on offer

NEWS ANALYSIS

Ah, yes. The awkward camera angle. The low-resolution graphics. The army officer standing in front of a makeshift lectern, live on national television, surrounded by other army officers, all looking suitably grim. The mumbled promise to restore democracy.

It can only mean one thing: another military coup. This time, it's Gabon's longtime ruling family that has been ousted, in the seventh unconstitutional transfer of power in Africa in the last three years (both Mali and Burkina Faso have the dubious distinction of having suffered through two coups d'état in that period).

It's hard to find any sympathy for deposed president Ali Bongo, who lived a life of wanton luxury, even as he oppressed and persecuted his own people. The Bongo family has ruled Gabon for 56 years, and the country has almost nothing to show for it. (Except for a surprisingly good funk album produced in 1978 by James Brown's songwriter Charles Bobbit, with a

young Ali Bongo on vocals. "*Baby, I wanna stay with you,*" he sings on one song. A sentiment evidently not reciprocated.)

But if Bongo was the problem, there is no evidence to suggest a military coup is the answer. Like Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, Gabon now faces a long and difficult transition period almost certain to be marked by economic hardship and political instability. That's the best case scenario. In the worst case scenario – see Sudan – such power struggles devolve into all-out war.

That being said, citizens of countries ruled by corrupt elites are being offered no other path out of their predicament. Elections don't work when regional bodies and the African Union routinely endorse polls perceived to have been rigged – isn't that right, Emmerson Mnangagwa?

Afrobarometer data shows that 53% of Africans would endorse a military takeover if elected leaders were abusing their power. That number rises to 82% in Mali and 66% in Burkina Faso.

That data comes from a survey of 36 countries in 2021 and 2022. In such countries, citizens are demanding change – and, so far, the military is the only institution offering it, even if that change is merely superficial. Until *that* changes, leaders like Cameroon's Paul Biya and Congo-Brazzaville's Denis Sassou Nguesso will worry, with good reason, that they might be next. ■

ZIMBABWE

A box-ticking exercise

Controversy is now synonymous with Zimbabwean elections and the general elections on 23 August were no different. In the run-up to the polls, opposition figures were arrested and many dubiously disqualified from running. The ruling party was accused of using free food to bribe voters whom its policies have impoverished. And the law reforms meant to ensure the independence of the heavily politicised election commission didn't happen. On Election Day, many voters were also disenfranchised by last-minute changes to electoral boundaries. The ruling, Zanu-PF was declared winner in most of the contests. The opposition rejected the result and more than 100 court cases challenging the process have been filed.

Photos: John Wessels/AFP



Kept in opposition, by any means

Supporters of Nelson Chamisa, the leader of Zimbabwean opposition party Citizens' Coalition for Change (CCC) at his final campaign rally in Harare on 21 August.



Swing vote

Followers of the Zion Church of God in Mbare, a suburb of the capital Harare, sing and dance during a service on 20 August.



Civic duty

Voters queue to cast their vote in Mbare on 23 August. Voting day was largely peaceful, with reports of a few isolated skirmishes.



Dressed to vote

A man walks to a polling station on the first day of the election.



I'm here somewhere

A man looks for his name on the voters' roll.



Long day for democracy

Election officials wait for polling to close at the end of the first day during Zimbabwe's presidential and legislative elections. Voting extended into the next day amidst delayed delivery of polling materials and legal challenges filed by some of the candidates at local council level.



Framed

A portrait of the former president of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, hangs on a wall at the Zanu-PF conference hall in Harare. Much of the dysfunction and malpractices that plague Zimbabwean elections date back to his 37-year rule, which ended when he was ousted by incumbent Emmerson Mnangagwa in a bloodless coup.

Mozambique

The end of Cabo Delgado's most wanted man

Bonomade Machude may be dead, but the roots of the insurgency that he led run deep

Luis Nhachote in Maputo

His parents named him Bonomade Machude Omar. His comrades called him Ibn Omar or Abu Sulayfa Muhammad. Many called him a terrorist – especially the Mozambican and American governments, and their allies in the Cabo Delgado conflict.

Now, according to Mozambican authorities, he is dead.

A source in the Mozambican military told *The Continent* that the insurgent leader's last battle was fought in the dense Kathupa Forest in Macomia district.

There, the insurgents launched a daring offensive in mid-August on government troops and soldiers from the Southern African Development Community.

The offensive is believed to have been targeting the chief-of-staff of the Mozambican army, Joaquim Ribas Mangrassa.

Intelligence analysts concluded that only one rebel commander had the authority to go after such a major target: Bonomade Machude. An intense manhunt

ensued, and about a week later the army said that he was dead.

Authorities have been hunting Bonomade since at least August 2020, when insurgents occupied his hometown of Mocimboa da Praia. This was three years into the Cabo Delgado insurgency, which has sought to impose Islamic law in the north of the country.

During the six-day offensive on Mocimboa da Praia, fighters claiming to be from the Islamic State Central Africa Province (Iscap) attacked several villages and two military bases; killed or wounded at least 50 government soldiers; seized dozens of guns; and eventually occupied the town of 30,000 people.

It remained under the fighters' control for the next year.

Bonomade was believed to be one of the fighters' top leaders, if not the leader.

The occupation of Mocimboa da Praia was a major victory for the insurgents and as big an embarrassment for the Mozambican government. On 6 August 2021, the US state department designated Bonomade a member of the

Islamic State and a global terrorist, saying he headed Isis-Mozambique's military and external affairs department and acted as senior commander and main co-ordinator of all the group's attacks in northern Mozambique.

Isicap was eventually forced out of Mocimboa da Praia, with help from Rwandan troops acting in support of the Mozambican armed forces. But it remained in control of other territory, including two bases – Siri I and Siri II – in the dense forest on the banks of the Messalo River.

They continued to raid villages in the districts of Macomia, Muidumbe and Metuge, on the other side of Pemba Bay. Bonomade personally led another raid on the Amarula Hotel in Palma in 2022, which left dozens dead and displaced thousands.

Shortly after that, the head of Mozambique's military, Cristóvão Chume, now the country's defence minister, promised that Bonomade "will be captured dead or alive".

With support from Rwanda and SADC, the state went on the offensive, forcing the insurgents on to the back foot and to retreat into the bushes between Macomia and Mocimboa da Praia.

By the time of his killing, Bonomade was thought to have been commanding far fewer fighters than he did during the occupation of Mocimboa da Praia.

It is easy to gloss over Bonomade's campaign against the Mozambican state with the broad brush of "Islamist terrorism".

He did study Islam in several countries



'Dead or alive': Bonomade Machude Omar, on the far left, as illustrated by Mozambican artist Dionisio Matavele.

after completing his 12th grade at the Escola Secundária Januário Pedro in Mocimboa da Praia. And, on his return, he joined the ranks of Africa Muslim Agency, a charity, in the city of Pemba.

But he also had other influences, including his personal experiences as a marine in the Mozambican navy between 2006 and 2008.

While the country's armed forces and the government are celebrating Bonomade's death, they would be wise to remember that the root causes of insurgency don't disappear upon the death of the leader; and that much more needs to be done to understand and address – not simply belittle – the animus that fueled his war on Mozambique. ■

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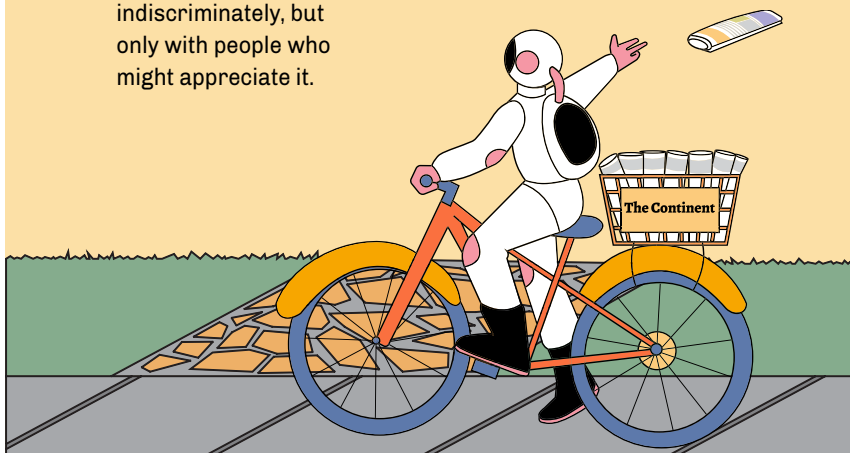
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Shooting to kill

The Saudi Arabian government has murdered hundreds of defenceless Ethiopian migrants, according to a Human Rights Watch Report. This brutality mocks a long history of open and safe migration between two Gulf of Aden regions. And it's being painted over by a concerted sportswashing campaign, with tens of millions of dollars paid to lure football stars to the Saudi league.



Dividing line: Saudi Arabian guards patrol the Yemen border. Photo: Carolyn Cole/LA Times via Getty Images

Kiri Rupiah

Fourteen centuries ago, in the land known now as Saudi Arabia, the earliest followers of the prophet Muhammad were in trouble. They were being tortured and persecuted by the ruling Quraysh tribe, and they needed to find refuge.

Muhammad advised the group, which included his own daughter, to cross the Red Sea and seek protection in the Kingdom of Aksum, which stretched across parts of modern-day Ethiopia and Eritrea. He sent them with a letter for the Negus, the Christian monarch, who was reputed to be just and fair.

When they arrived in Aksum, the refugees pleaded their case before the Negus, who responded positively: “Go, for you are safe in my country.”

This proved to be a seminal moment in the history of Islam, and is known as the First Hijra or the Migration to Abyssinia.

Saudi Arabia’s current rulers are not reciprocating this generosity.

Instead of providing refuge, the country’s border force has been brutally murdering Ethiopian refugees, according to a Human Rights Watch report released last month. The rights group documented the killing of hundreds of Ethiopian migrants and asylum seekers who tried to cross the Yemen-Saudi border between March 2022 and June 2023.

Saudi Arabia denies any wrongdoing, describing the allegations as “unfounded and not based on reliable sources”. The embassy of Saudi Arabia in South Africa did not respond to multiple requests for

comment from *The Continent*.

The first-hand testimonies collected by researchers are harrowing. One survivor said: “When the firing stopped the Saudi border guards took us. In my group there were seven people, five men and two girls. The border guards made us remove our clothes and told us to rape the girls. The girls were 15 years old. One of the men refused. The border guards killed him on the spot. I participated in the rape, yes. To survive I did it. The girls survived because they didn’t refuse. This happened at the same spot where the killings took place.”

Instead of providing refuge, the country’s border force has been brutally murdering Ethiopian refugees

Another interviewee described going to the border to collect the remains of a girl from his village. “Her body was piled up on top of 20 bodies ... it is really impossible to count the number. It is beyond the imagination.”

Saudi Arabia is not a signatory to the United Nations Refugee Convention.

Dangerous journeys

Over the last few years, conflict in Ethiopia – especially in Tigray – has displaced more than a million people from their homes. For Ethiopians trying to leave the country, one of the main routes to safety is known as the “Eastern Route” or “Yemeni Route”. Refugees travel by boat across the Gulf of Aden and then on foot through Yemen to



Saudi Arabia.

Crossing Yemen, which is in the midst of its own war, is extremely hazardous. Vulnerable refugees must contend with a network of smugglers, traffickers and authorities who routinely kidnap, detain and beat Ethiopian migrants and extort them or their family for money. Some are press-ganged into joining one of the warring groups.

Should refugees survive all of this, they usually try to cross into Saudi Arabia – one of the richest countries in the world – in the mountainous border area between Yemen's Saada Province and Saudi Arabia's Jizan province.

This is where the majority of the killings documented by Human Rights Watch, and verified using photographic evidence and satellite imagery, occurred.

There are an estimated 750,000 Ethiopians in Saudi Arabia, according to the International Organisation for Migration. Most are there legally, for economic reasons. In April, the Ethiopian government began a highly-publicised drive to recruit 500,000 Ethiopian women to work as domestic workers in Saudi Arabia, despite concerns over how they would be treated.

In separate research in 2020, the human rights organisation documented



Sportswashing: Vast sums have been spent to attract players, like Senegalese star Sadio Mané. Photo: Al Nassr FC

how Saudi Arabia's notorious kafala employment system, in which the legal status of migrants is tied to their employers, facilitates "abuse and exploitation including forced labour, trafficking, and slavery-like conditions".

Sportswashing

While hundreds of Africans are murdered or dehumanised at the border and in Saudi homes, Saudis are pouring billions into a different set of Africans: football stars like Sadio Mané, Édouard Mendy, Kalidou Koulibaly and Hakim Ziyech.

This is part of an orchestrated campaign.

Saudi Arabia would rather the world did not dwell on its human rights record. In recent years, under the leadership of crown prince Mohammed bin Salman, the

country has spent billions of dollars in an effort to improve its global reputation. Much of this has been channelled into "sportswashing": sponsoring major sporting, entertainment and cultural events in an effort to sanitise its dire human rights record.

Jeddah hosts a Formula 1 Grand Prix. Golf has an entirely new, Saudi-sponsored tour. Newcastle United, in the English Premier League, is owned by the country's sovereign wealth fund. That same fund has pumped outlandish amounts of money into the Saudi Professional League, which has recruited global stars such as Cristiano Ronaldo, Karim Benzema and Mané.

Saudi Arabia was also offered a path to membership of the Brics group of countries at last month's summit in South Africa – as was Ethiopia. ■



Left in the lurch: Kenyans camp outside their consulate in Lebanon, awaiting repatriation. Photo: Elsie Haddad/Getty Images

The trouble with sending jobs overseas

Unable to create jobs, African states are encouraging citizens to seek work abroad – but this may well end up costing more than it brings in, writes **Waihiga Mwaura**

Sam (not his real name), a waiter at a leading fast-food restaurant in Nairobi, might be fortunate to have a job – unlike millions of unemployed Kenyans. But, while his body is physically in Nairobi, his mind is all at sea, as he dreams about the kitchens of cruise ships in the Caribbean.

He has friends who work in the hospitality sector of major cruise lines.

The wages paid out – in dollars – are very tempting, especially for someone who has a family to support in rural areas.

Sam is one of more than 60,000 Kenyans who have applied for a passport at Kenya's immigration department this year. The passport backlog is as high as 300,000 applications, according to *Business Daily* newspaper, showing just how many Kenyans are eager to travel abroad – most

of them for work opportunities. Little wonder given that three million Kenyans are unemployed, according to the national statistics agency, while reports abound of job vacancies in high-income countries being at historically high levels.

Standard wisdom says the loss of workers will hurt the Kenyan economy but President William Ruto's administration has a different perspective, arguing that Kenya has enough labour for its needs, and that the remittances sent home by migrating skilled workers serve to boost the country's economy. "So as we cry back home that we have no jobs, opportunities are found out there," said Moses Wetang'ula, the speaker of the national assembly, in a speech to graduates of Mount Kenya University in August.

Since coming to power in 2022, Ruto's government has actively sought to export Kenyan labour, announcing nearly 400,000 job opportunities for Kenyans in various other countries in recent months.

Kenya is not alone in encouraging citizens to find work abroad. Ethiopia aims to recruit 500,000 women for domestic work in Saudi Arabia, for instance. But can a nation cure unemployment by sending all its workers overseas?

Not if the workers are migrating for "just any job", says Victor Agolla, an expert on the digital economy and start-ups at Nairobi County. He is concerned that exporting labour without high-quality skills means the economic return to the individual and the country does not justify the loss at home.

He argues that Kenya should first overhaul its education system and equip



Work (far) from home: Remote work is different if your collar's blue. Photo: W Swiegers/Bloomberg via Getty Images

young Kenyans with market-ready skills in fields like software engineering, animation, and others that offer good pay, growth, and the chance to work on innovative projects abroad.

But whatever opportunities may be available for Kenyans abroad, the authorities' failure to protect their rights and wellbeing abroad is glaring.

Over the past three years, 283 Kenyans – predominantly domestic workers – lost their lives in Saudi Arabia alone. Kenya's labour minister recently admitted that Saudi Arabia is the deadliest place in the world for Kenyan migrant workers. This should concern all stakeholders in the labour export market beyond merely making note of it. ■

Waihiga Mwaura is a Kenyan journalist and presenter of the BBC News' Focus on Africa Programme.

'Do something! All of you!'

As the planet broils and floods, policy makers, business leaders, and activists are gathering in Nairobi this coming week (4-8 September) for Africa Climate Week and the Africa Climate Summit, building steam for the UN's annual climate change conference, held in Dubai late next month.

The theme is: "Driving green growth and climate finance solutions for Africa and the world."

Maybe it should be re-themed to something like "Do something! All of you!" That's closer to the public mood measured in Afrobarometer surveys across 37 African countries in late 2021 and 2022.

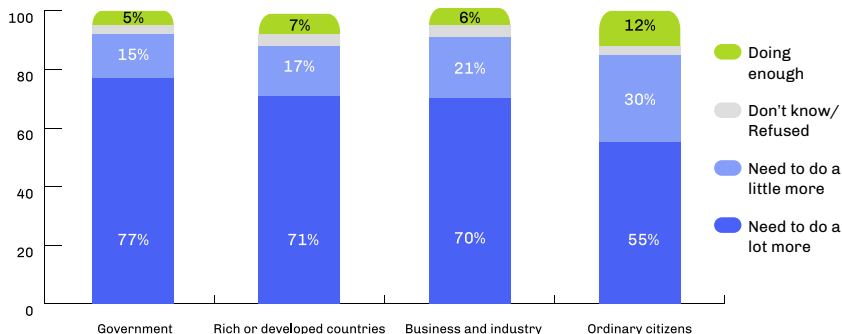
Among people who were familiar with the concept of climate change, around

nine out of 10 – a level of near-unanimity we don't see very often – said governments (92%), business and industry (91%), rich or developed countries (88%), and ordinary citizens (85%) need to do more to limit climate change.

In fact, majorities ranging from 55% to 77% called for "a lot more" climate action from these stakeholders. Only between 5% (for governments) and 12% (for citizens) said they were doing enough.

The survey didn't ask about the news media, social media, civil society, schools, churches, and word of mouth. But clearly they aren't doing enough, either, since almost half (46%) of Africans – ranging from 17% of Seychellois to 68% of Tunisians and Nigerians – still haven't heard of climate change. ■

Do more or less to limit climate change? | 37 African countries | 2021/2022



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

In praise of mrenda

Daisy Chukunzira

Like most Kenyan city kids in the 1990s, every December holiday we would go to shags – our home village. The highlight of this trip was watching Kadenge, my grandmother, prepare mrenda from jute mallow leaves. When the dish was ready, we would have our own candlelit dinner – by the light of the homemade koroboi lamp, because there was no electricity; or, if we were lucky, we would eat outside under the moonlight.

To this day, whenever I eat or prepare mrenda, I think of Kadenge. She wasn't just feeding us. She was instilling a love of food and family that endures even in her absence.

Mrenda is so delicious. The leafy green delicacy is eaten mostly by the Luhya of western Kenya, where it also goes by mtere and murere. In the Yoruba parts of Nigeria, it's called ewedu. When cooked, it has a slippery texture that makes it easy to swallow and savour all its flavours.

I can only make it Kadenge's way. Add water to a large pan along with two tablespoons of musherekha, a traditional salt that is used as a tenderiser. When the water boils, add the mrenda and it will start bubbling. Keep stirring until it



becomes dark green, then remove from the heat and drain excess water. In the same pan, fry some onions in oil. The mrenda goes back in when the onions are soft, along with salt to taste. Serve it hot with ugali – our take on maize meal.

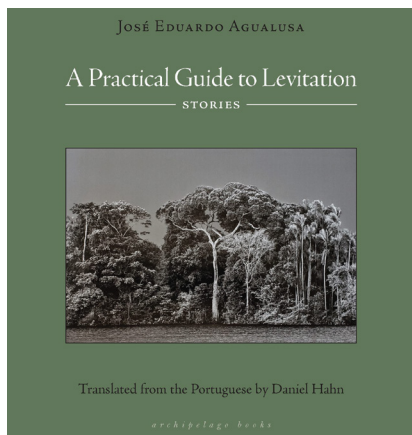
What sets mrenda apart is its simplicity (and the musherekha that enhances the flavours). When I became a mother, I knew that it would be part of our family's menu too, and we have it every Monday with ugali. My son absolutely loves it – and I love that he loves it. Each bit is a celebration of the universal language of food – and of my grandmother. ■



Last season we journeyed through the continent's delicacies and comfort foods, this week we continue with mrenda from Kenya. We want to hear about your favourite food and what makes it so special. Let us know at letters@thecontinent.org. \$100 for the winning letter.

Levitation and levity in tales of the surreal

If you need an escape from reality, the stories of Agualusa are outside with the engine running: Get in!



Jacqueline Nyathi

Mozambique-based writer José Eduardo Agualusa and his wonderful translator, Daniel Hahn, have a way with words, the fantastical and the surreal. They bring ghosts to life with dry humour, and immerse us in alternate cosmologies, showing us other ways the world might be.

Agualusa's treatment of Angola's

history is always slightly farcical, very humorous, and also quite sad, which seems appropriate to histories of liberation movements in Africa.

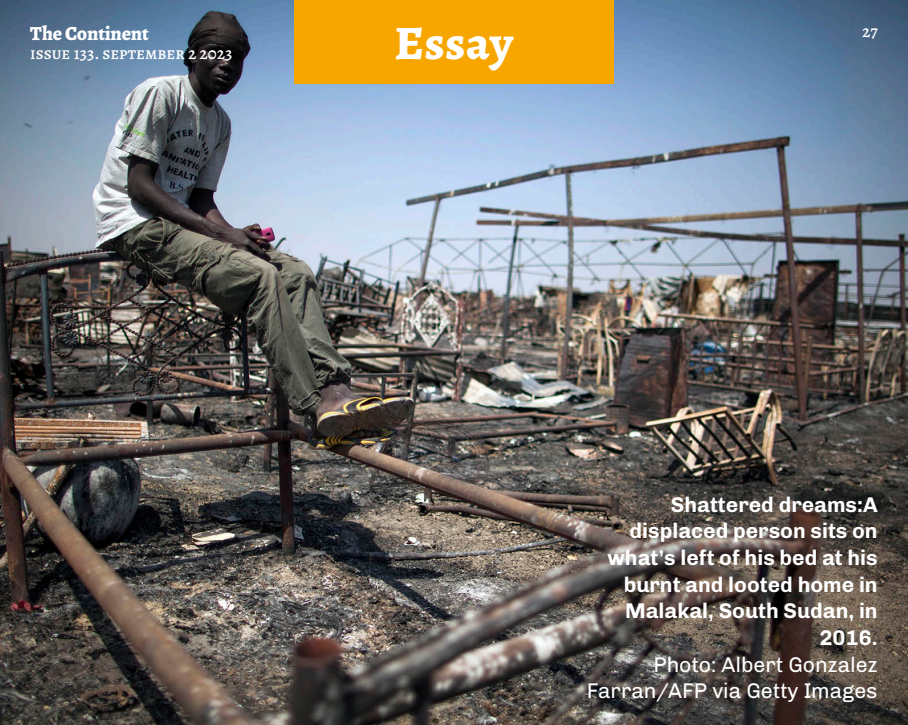
Agualusa's boundless imagination and distinctive style are on full display in his wonderful collection: *A Practical Guide to Levitation*.

In the opening story Borges wakes up in an endless banana plantation – has he died and gone to heaven – or hell? In another, a man offers to teach a party guest how to float off the ground. Levitation is also the theme in a later story about a potential Angolan political leader. Old liberation war heroes and famous authors are a frequent theme, as we see when a pensive despot muses on how he got to where he is.

Also richly present is Agualusa's particular brand of the surreal. A dog-charmer trains dogs to help him swindle people; a bird-charmer first uses his skills in a war; a baobab offends the sensibilities of a modest public; and laughing lizards are offered for sale at the side of a highway.

Open To The Breeze is a beautiful and evocative story about a place that's trapped in time. There's a delightful story about butterflies and Queen Nzinga. Finally, in a thoughtful, although light, examination of Jonas Savimbi's myth and legacy, we meet Savimbi's daughter.

All of the stories are quite short, making this the perfect book to read whenever you want to take a break from the ordinary – real and boring life – to escape into the fantastical. ■



Shattered dreams:A displaced person sits on what's left of his bed at his burnt and looted home in Malakal, South Sudan, in 2016.

Photo: Albert Gonzalez Farran/AFP via Getty Images

The past is not a good place to live

I am a young refugee living in Kakuma refugee camp Kenya. My memories of South Sudan are still raw and haunting.

The troubles in my hometown of Malakal, on the outskirts of the Upper Nile in South Sudan, began on 24 December 2013. War broke out – our peace and calm shattered by shouting and screams all over the neighbourhood.

I remember helicopters raining bullets down on the villages. People fled in all directions, dodging bullets by the grace of God, with bombs and gunshots- a

terrible background music to our terror. My father was shot dead before my eyes. It was the genesis of my trauma. In the name of parliamentary rivalries my home became a filthy slaughterhouse.

Truly, when two beasts fight, the grass suffers the most. Pregnant women had their bellies ripped open, fetuses dangling by their umbilical cords. People were shot on the banks of the Nile while others drowned when overloaded boats capsized. Their bodies floated and cascaded down the great, majestic river.

Killings were the order of the day. Physical and sexual abuses became so common to us, screams were so ordinary, that eventually we slept right through them. You only wake up to confirm that you are not dead.

Many walked on foot from Juba to Nadapal in Uganda, more than 350km away. There the United Nations Refugee Agency took them by bus across the Kenya-South Sudan border. That is how I found myself in Kakuma.

Life in the camp was abysmal but that was not new to us – we were used to difficult and traumatising scenes. I recall losing my childhood friend Nyasirit to cholera just a few weeks after arriving in Kakuma.

At home, the elders fought so much about our perceived differences yet in the camp, people from different ethnic

backgrounds and nationalities lived together in destitution.

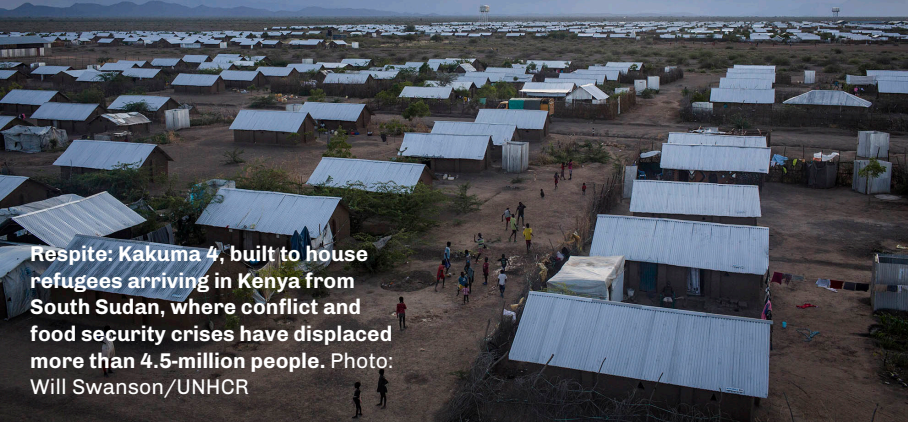
My family was allocated a place to build, materials, and a 200-litre water-storage tank. New arrivals are typically allocated tents. You know those who have stayed for long by their iron-roofed or mud-walled houses.

The camp is partitioned into four: Kakuma 1, Kakuma 2, Kakuma 3 and Kakuma 4. My siblings and I enrolled in Malakal Primary School, in Kakuma 3. “So they named the school after my home town of Malakal, South Sudan?” I asked myself.

The school was quite crowded with many learners from South Sudan. My proficiency in oratory and my writing skills were noticed. I recall being the best student in English all the way through my final exams for the Kenya Certificate



Teaching hope:
UN-supported schools offer a rare glimmer of hope to displaced children in the Kakuma refugee camps in Kenya. Photo: Samuel Otero/UNHCR



Respite: Kakuma 4, built to house refugees arriving in Kenya from South Sudan, where conflict and food security crises have displaced more than 4.5-million people. Photo: Will Swanson/UNHCR

of Primary Education.

After my primary education, I applied for a scholarship at a prestigious girls boarding school, the Morneau Shepell Secondary School, which is now called the Life Works Tumaini Girls Secondary School. It was the only refugee boarding secondary school in the camp.

The number of applicants was exceedingly large but I managed to get through and got a slot among the 90 girls who joined the school in 2020. The Covid-19 pandemic struck but I stayed healthy and am happy to be in my final year of study.

Today, I feel enlightened and encouraged to be one of the young women who aspire to bring positive

change in my home country and Africa at large. For this I have great appreciation for my mentor and teacher, Mr Enock Mong'are, who has inspired most of us in the writers club to utilise our talents to the brim.

I have a wild dream, a dream of one day saying, "This is my home, and I don't have to fear it. For this is where I belong."

A dream that we will go back to our country someday and mend the torn parts. We shall pick up the broken pieces and let the past be the past, for us to move forward.

The sun shall set with the pain and sorrows as new hopes of healing arise. For the past is not a good place to live. It is a better place to visit. ■

This essay, first published in The Continent, won the second Christopher Allen Prize for Writing. Christopher Allen was a journalist who was killed in 2017 while reporting on the conflict in South Sudan. The prize was established in his honour by his parents, and is open to all secondary school students of South Sudanese descent living in Africa. The author's identity is known to The Continent, but has been withheld due to the sensitive nature of her story.

THE QUIZ

0-3

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

4-7

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

8-10

"Knocked out? We were robbed! British Museum strikes again."



Photo: Issouf Sanogo/
AFP via Getty Images

- 1_** Name the five current members of Brics.
- 2_** Cnaan Banana was which country's first head of state after independence?
- 3_** Ali Bongo Ondimba is Gabon's prime minister. True or false?
- 4_** Agadez, Dosso and Zinder are cities in which country?
- 5_** What currency is used in Angola?
- 6_** What are the three colours on Algeria's flag?
- 7_** What is Libya's second most populous city?
- 8_** "Saint Thomas and Prince" is the English translation of which country's name?
- 9_** Which African country was knocked out by France in the Women's World Cup last month?
- 10_** Which African country was knocked out by England in the Women's World Cup last month?

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

Too many Brics in the wall

After the summit, co-ordinating the newly extended bloc is only going to get harder

Obert Hodzi

At the recently ended Brics IV Summit in South Africa, members pledged to enhance solidarity and co-operation on the basis of consensus. Yet with the addition of Argentina, Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia and the United Arab Emirates, that consensus-based cooperation seems preposterous – it was difficult enough with just the five.

First, the Brics members' economic and political capabilities are not aligned – which means the members function not as allies but as individual states. Their styles of government vary, and so do their interests. Cracks between the democracies, South Africa and Brazil, on one side, and the authoritarians, China and Russia, on the other, will likely widen with the admission of Iran, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the UAE, which rank low on human rights.

Second, pledges to co-ordinate actions among Brics members are not binding. Member states of Brics speak multilaterally but act bilaterally. This is partly because as of 2018, China contributes more than two thirds of Brics's global GDP contribution. Unlike the other Brics countries, China can achieve its geoeconomic and geopolitical objectives on its own.

Third, the same asymmetries influence perceptions and risk when it comes to

their engagement with each other, and with other countries or regions. All have their own ambitions in Africa. This makes it difficult for these five countries to work together in Brics to harness the diplomatic leverage of countries on the continent.

Fourth, it is not always clear what Brics is for and, importantly, whom it is for. Its reformist agenda has at times seemed to challenge Western hegemony, but without clearly articulating how it intends to represent the non-Western world.

The effect of all of these challenges is that Brics plays second fiddle to the individual interests and foreign policy objectives of its most powerful members.

Brics members' economic and political capabilities are not aligned – members function not as allies but as individual states

It is this competition among Brics countries, and the difficult question of how to respond to the growing focus of the United States on containing the rise of China, that is likely to determine the success of the initiative – and whether further expansion will strengthen the group or sink it. ■



The world order is overdue for an overhaul

Expanding the Brics club is a necessary first step

Tim Murithi

The recent Brics Summit in South Africa established a foundation for the group to play a growing role in shaping the emerging multipolar world order. African countries have been arguing and agitating for a transformation of the multilateral system to reflect the realities of the 21st century. The same is true in many parts of the world, which helps to explain why 42 countries officially expressed an interest in joining the Brics grouping. So what were the key points to take away from the Summit, and what does it mean for the West?

The newly expanded Brics formation will have a GDP greater than that of the G7 group of rich countries. It will be home to half of the world's population. And it will control a 43% share of the world's oil production. In this sense, it promises to be a geopolitical and geoeconomic powerhouse which, through its New Development Bank, can provide lines of credit to its members as well as to non-members from the Global South.

This progressive emergence of Brics is a direct consequence of the intransigence and inertia of the West, which has failed to genuinely pursue the reform of the multilateral system because the status quo



**Despots and democracies:
Within Brics, authoritarian
states sit awkwardly alongside
progressive democracies.**

Photo: Delwyn Verasamy/M&G

is beneficial to its societies. The extractive relationship that former European colonial powers have had with African countries, notably France's continuing manipulative and extractive relationship with 14 West and Central African countries, is now facing a backlash evident in the recent military coups in Gabon and Niger. The IMF, World Bank and WTO maintained this colonial, paternalistic hegemonic and unequal relationship with the Global South with harsh conditionalities and heavy interest rates on debt. This subjected countries

to the "debt trap" from which many African countries are struggling to extract themselves.

Against this backdrop, Brics is viewed by many countries from the Global South as an initial soothing ointment for the bacterial infection that is the world's broken geopolitical system. So if Brics is growing and will foster a truly multipolar world order, how should the West respond?

The only effective response to Brics is therefore the fundamental transformation of the global economic system. ■



Obert Hodzi is a senior lecturer in politics at the University of Liverpool. Tim Murithi is the head of Peacebuilding Interventions at the Institution for Justice and Reconciliation in Cape Town, and a professor of African Studies at the University of Free State and Stellenbosch University. These analyses were produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa.

Dear readers, we are absolutely bursting with things to tell you, because so much has happened! Kind of like when you have not seen your therapist in a while and have been causing and witnessing all sorts of chaos and you are counting down the days to share it all in therapy!

Our lovely leaders can probably relate to this because its likely that they could do with a little counselling now themselves, the way things are looking.

Come to think of it, the African Union could probably even get a group discount. The room would of course need to be a safe space for the poor, anxious dears. Some aromatherapy would not go amiss: the familiar fragrance of tear gas would no doubt do wonders to soothe and reassure their troubled minds.

But no doubt they will need to vent, and that is what safe spaces are for. The tears will flow, tantrums will be thrown, and pictures of opposition leaders and military officers will be torn up as part of the anger management techniques.

That's right, let it all out. No, Ecowas! Your feelings, not your armies! Oh dear.

Reader, I'm afraid we may have fallen into a sense of complacency after all the

drama of the first season of *Keeping Up With The Coupdashians*, starring our coup leaders in Guinea, Mali and Burkina Faso. How much more drama could there possibly be, we thought.

Little did we know! Now, the second season has dropped, and our jaws along with it, as the OG cast is joined by new stars from Niger and Gabon. Why even the vein on President Manny Macron's forehead looks poised to pop right off his noggin and declare itself the new king of France.

Scripts are being flipped left and right, with some of our regional faves – some of whom who have hitherto been all, “Democracy? I don't know her!” – have been calling for a return to constitutional rule, and emotions have been running higher

than the new taxes implemented by Billy Ruto in Kenya.

While Niger got the sophomore season rolling, over the past week it's been Gabon hogging the limelight, first with its *sotto voce* elections in which Ali Bongo, who has been in office since 2009, was vying for a third term and hoping to extend his family's 56-year rule. Like any good leader, Baby AB blocked the internet,

Gabon but not forgotten



CONTINENTAL DRIFT

Samira Sawlani



Baby AB: Ali Bongo's third-term dream has been thwarted by circumstance and some men with guns

foreign observers and foreign journalists were largely kept out, French media broadcasters Radio France International, France24, and TV5 Monde were suspended, and a number of opposition figures were arrested.

Few were surprised when AB was declared winner, but then came the plot twist! To the tune (in our heads, rights and royalties notwithstanding) of Destiny's Child's *"I know some soldiers in here, where they at, where they at?"* military officers appeared on TV saying that the election results had been cancelled, state institutions dissolved, and borders closed.

Coup blimey. And cue a big old barney. Celebrations might have erupted on the streets of Libreville, but the African Union, who probably have a template of this statement saved on Google Docs, condemned the putsch, and called on the army to "guarantee the physical integrity of the president of the republic".

As for Ali Bongo, should he never return to politics, there are promising signs of a career in DJ-ing. He appeared

in a video in which he urged friends all over the world "to make some noise" (DJ Bongo in the house!) which must have been confusing to dethroner-in-chief Brice Oligui Nguema, who had *just* told *him* to "put your hands up in the air!"

Meanwhile, a month after taking over, the junta in Niger are in no mood to give up the spotlight. After Ecowas stormed out of its therapy session, threatening military intervention, the Coupdashians from Mali and Burkina Faso came together and said an attack on Niger would be an attack on them (how sweet).

The junta itself has plunged into a war (of words, for now) with France. Last week they gave the French ambassador, Sylvain Itté, 48 hours to leave the country, and Paris responded with the equivalent of "Oh yeah? Make me."

So the junta ordered Itté's expulsion and revoked his diplomatic immunity, making him a Frenchman staying in a country he's not wanted in. Talk about colonial *déjà coup*, non?

While some were being ousted, others remain firmly in power. Emmerson Mnangagwa was declared winner of Zimbabwe's election. The polls were so marred by challenges that even SADC observers said aspects of the election failed to meet the basic minimum requirements of the constitution and regional standards.

As President Macron's throbbing forehead vein might say: *"Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose."*

Which rather nicely sums up round two of *Keeping up with the Coupdashians*: New season, same story! ■

THE BIG PICTURE

Postcard from the edge: In Libreville, a torn campaign billboard of ousted Gabon President Ali Bongo Ondimba lays bare the sudden unravelling of his rule of more than 14 years. He was toppled by army officers this week, following elections in which he vied for a third term in office.

Photo: AFP via Getty Images



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