

with Mail & Guardian

# The Continent



**"Our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians."**



**Cover:** This statue of Nelson Mandela is in Ramallah, Palestine. Mandela had strong feelings about Palestine. He repeatedly linked that struggle for self-determination with South Africa's own struggle against a racist, colonial government. On a visit to Gaza in 1999, he said that he felt "at home amongst compatriots". Those compatriots are now being subjected to the most intense aerial bombardment in history. South Africa – as a country with recent experience of peacefully dismantling structures of oppression and segregation – has a plan to put a stop to it. (p11)

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## SAHEL

## Militants seek coastal foothold

The Associated Press reports that “attacks by jihadis against civilians in Benin nearly tripled from last year, from more than 30 to approximately 80”, in its analysis of data from the Armed Conflict Location and Data Project. This is potentially early evidence for what has long been speculated: that the militant groups active in the Sahel parts of West Africa were fighting to advance southward and establish corridors of control. Such corridors would be important trade routes for these groups to import arms and export goods to fund their operations.

## CLIMATE

## American military bases are bad for the environment

The United States military, which has bases in about 80 countries, has emitted more greenhouse gases in the past eight years than the whole of South Africa (Africa’s biggest carbon polluter) emits annually. The Climate and Community Project and Common Wealth researchers estimate that the damage caused by these carbon emissions is at least \$106-billion. They think all their numbers are conservative.



**What, me, worry? President Yoweri Museveni has put on a brave face after Uganda's expulsion from the Agoa gang.** Photo: Sumy Sadruni/AFP

## UGANDA

## M7 says getting the boot is no great loss

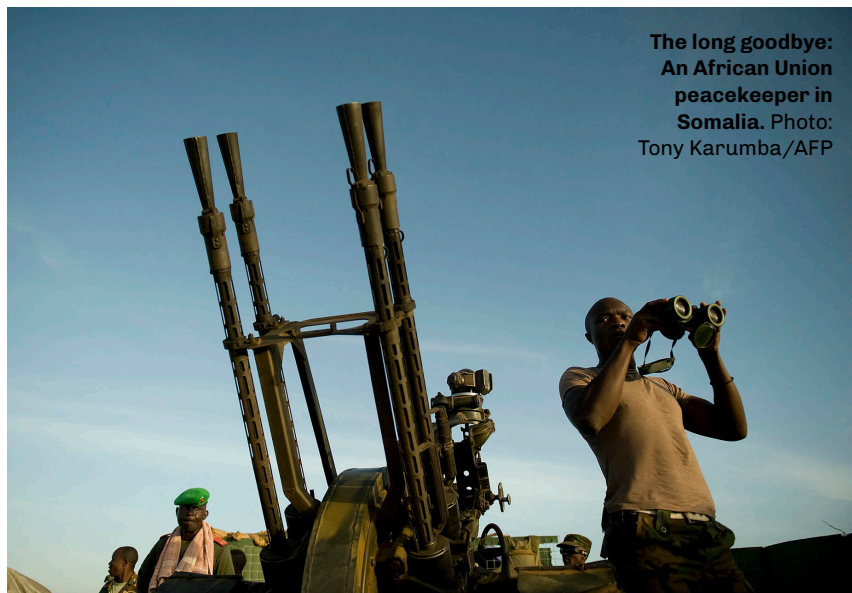
Uganda’s president, Yoweri Museveni, is so completely unbothered by his country’s expulsion from the African Growth and Opportunity Act (Agoa) last week, that he wrote and posted a long letter to Ex-Twitter about it. In his epistle, Museveni said “some of these actors in the Western world overestimate themselves and underestimate the freedom fighters of Africa” but offered to let the US continue to fund HIV treatment in his country. The US booted Uganda, Gabon, Niger and the Central African Republic out of its duty-free imports programme over human rights violations and military takeovers.

**BURUNDI**

## Former power player faces life sentence in attempted coup trial

Alain-Guillaume Bunyoni, a military strongman who held enormous power until September 2022, is now facing life in prison for allegedly threatening

the life of the president, among other charges. He was sacked from his position as prime minister last year amid suspicion that he had been plotting a coup against President Évariste Ndayishimiye. The powerful Bunyoni had also been security minister in 2015 when state forces killed more than 1,700 civilians perceived to be opposed to the third term ambitions of then-president Pierre Nkurunziza.



**The long goodbye:  
An African Union  
peacekeeper in  
Somalia.** Photo:  
Tony Karumba/AFP

**SOMALIA**

## AU peacekeepers' withdrawal delayed

At Somalia's request, the United Nations Security Council have extended the stay of African Union peacekeepers in

the country by 90 days. The 19,000 AU troops have been in Somalia for the last 15 years and were scheduled to have completely withdrawn and handed over to the country's own army by the end of 2024. However, as it has withdrawn and handed over some bases, bold attacks by al-Shabaab militants have spiked.



**Dare he is: Moussa Camara made a daring escape from jail, but it didn't last long.** Photo: Seyllou Diallo/AFP

## GUINEA

### Strongman does not like the strongroom

Guinea's former military ruler Moussa Dadis Camara was extracted from prison on Saturday by armed commandos. But he was recaptured and back in the big house by the end of the day. Camara and 10 others are on trial for a massacre of opposition supporters who were gathered at a stadium in Conakry in September 2009. Guinean authorities have offered a reward of more than \$50,000 for information that might lead to the recapture of Claude Pivi, one of Camara's henchmen who remains at large.

## HEALTH

### Diphtheria is deadly but preventable, yet it's spreading again

South Africa reported this week that a 19-year-old man had died after catching diphtheria in one of its prisons. The man was an inmate at Pollsmoor Maximum Security Prison in Cape Town. Ten other people in the prison have tested positive or shown symptoms of the bacterial disease. These typically include breathing difficulties, swollen glands in the neck and can cause organ damage and eventual death. The outbreak follows one in Nigeria which started in December 2022 and has killed at least 600 people so far.

## DRC

### UN fields Springbok side in Goma defence

The September call by President Félix Tshisekedi for the United Nations to accelerate the withdrawal of its peacekeepers from the DRC appears to have been a wake-up call. This week the UN launched "Operation Springbok" to secure the city of Goma alongside the DRC army. The UN's Force commander, Otávio Rodrigues de Miranda Filho, said his troops are "outside our bases because they are ready to die, if necessary, to protect the population". They are typically sequestered in a lakeside fortress in Goma.



## MADAGASCAR

## Rinse-and-repeat exes add chaos to electoral spin cycle

The run-up to Madagascar's 16 November presidential election has been chaotic. Last month two candidates, including ex-president Marc Ravalomanana, were injured during opposition protests. This week, another candidate, Jean Jacques Ratsietison, was arrested at a protest in the capital Antananarivo. Incumbent Andry Rajoelina is running for re-election against two ex-presidents: Ravalomanana (whom he ousted in a 2009 coup and beat in a 2019 election) and Hery Rajaonarimampianina. Also in the



**Street feud: Protests have rocked the streets of Madagascar ahead of next week's elections.** Photo: Rijasolo/AFP

running is Siteny Randrianasoloniaiko, a former judo champion and head of the African Judo Union.

## CAMEROON

## Anglophone rebels accused of killing civilians in Mamfe

At least 20 people were killed on Monday by gunmen who set homes on fire in a neighbourhood in Mamfe town. The area is part of Anglophone Cameroon, where President Paul Biya's regime is fighting separatists who took to arms after the government violently repressed 2016 protests by English speakers who felt marginalised by the Francophone government. So far 6,000 have died in the war. Local officials blame separatists for the attack but they have not claimed responsibility.

## ANGOLA

## IMF, World Bank wishes drown out will of the people

By the end of 2025, Angola will have scrapped fuel subsidies, finance minister Vera de Sousa told Reuters. It currently spends \$3.4-billion a year making petrol and diesel cheaper for consumers. This is even after their partial removal in May led petrol prices to nearly double, which in turn triggered protests in which at least five people have been killed. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund have strongly and repeatedly advocated for the removal of the subsidy.

# Sudan

## Civilians trapped and massacred as RSF takes over Darfur

Atrocities against civilians have escalated in recent weeks despite peace talks continuing in Jeddah

Kiri Rupiah

Far from global attention, Sudan's civil war has ground on. In Darfur in the country's west, hundreds of people are being killed – after being trapped between the belligerents. Aid organisations have called on the international community to insist on safe passage for these civilians.

But that community is distracted. And the interest from large nations has waned since foreign nationals were extracted from Sudan in April. A peace process in Jeddah has done little to stop the violence.

Videos and photos of mass atrocities against civilians in Darfur again circulated on social media this week. In one video, people said to be from the Masalit

community are seen being rounded up and whipped by men in light coloured fatigues.

Racial slurs are hurled at the captured men as they are beaten, before they are ordered to run – with their captors then shooting at them. CNN geolocated the footage to Ardamata, a camp for displaced people in the west of Darfur. Some reports say as many as 800 civilians have been killed in such massacres.

In recent weeks, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a paramilitary group led by General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo and backed by the United Arab Emirates, has overrun the Sudanese Armed Forces in the area, capturing towns including Ardamata.

Once known as the Janjaweed militia and implicated in genocidal violence in Darfur 20 years ago, the RSF is again being pointed to as the perpetrator of these massacres. In another video, the RSF logo can be seen on the uniforms of some of the men who are controlling civilians.

As the Jeddah talks continue, the United Nations estimates that the war has caused an estimated 5.5-million people to flee, both within Sudan and across borders. Aid groups believe the death toll, which has been estimated to be around 10,000 lives, could be far higher.

Efforts to secure a ceasefire have so far failed. ■

# Somalia/Kenya

## Thousands caught in Horn of Africa flooding

Kiri Rupiah

**S**omalia has yet to recover from the devastation wrought by the worst drought in over four decades that pushed the country to the brink of famine.

Now, at least 29 people are dead and more than 100,000 have been displaced following days of torrential rain and flash flooding, Somalia's National Disaster Management Agency said on Wednesday.

The federal government declared a state of emergency after 25 people were killed and homes, roads and bridges were destroyed. Rescue workers are battling to reach residents trapped by floodwaters in the Luuq district of Jubaland State in the country's south.

Speaking to Reuters, the International Crisis Group attributed the extreme rain to two phenomena: El Niño and the Indian Ocean Dipole. These both change the surface temperatures of large swathes of ocean – El Niño in the eastern Pacific and the Dipole across the Indian Ocean – and drive heavy rainfall across the world.

In neighbouring Kenya the Red Cross said the death toll had risen to 15 since heavy rains began a week ago, with Mombasa, a port city, being one of the worst affected areas.

The country could have been better prepared. In August, the east Africa-based Intergovernmental Authority on Development warned of “wetter-than-usual conditions across most parts of the Greater Horn of Africa” in the last three months of the year.

In October, the Kenya Meteorological Department echoed this warning, but it was contradicted – or muddied – by President William Ruto on 22 October, when he said there would be rains but they wouldn't be destructive: “You heard the news that we would experience El Niño, which will destroy places and property. But who is God? You've heard they have said we won't have El Niño.” ■



**It rains: An ever-warming planet will mean more extreme weather phenomena.** Photo: Simon Maina/AFP



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# Human rights

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## Silicon Valley exploits the savannah

**Sexual abuse allegations have ripped the mask off a carbon credit project that boasts about how it is 'developing communities'**

**Sipho Kings**

**H**ow can you keep profiting from pollution, but pretend you're working to keep the future habitable? If you stop a tree from being chopped down, you can claim you've reduced carbon emissions because the tree soaks up carbon – even if your own business continues to pump greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. The tree gave your business carbon credits – a licence to keep polluting elsewhere but say the overall effect is zero extra carbon in the atmosphere.

With such accounting tricks, corporations have stayed profitable and launched a new industry dedicated to finding projects to generate these credits. That market is now worth \$2-billion a year. And massive chunks of Africa are being taken over by their projects.

Part of the spin is that communities are supposedly benefiting. Kasigau in Kenya's south-east was one of these, run by California-based Wildlife Works and with companies like Shell and Netflix buying credits. The company claims Kasigau is "an inspiring example of how conservation, collaboration and community can effectively come together to create sustainable change".

Except that isn't the reality.

An investigation by the Kenyan Human Rights Commission and the Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations found extensive abuse of power at the project. Investigators talked to 31 former and current employees, as well as community members.

In their report, titled "Offsetting Human Rights", they found that: "Senior men in the company used their positions of power to demand sex in return for promotions and being better treated at work." When people refused, they were met with "retribution, including being bullied, intimidated, and refused promotions or other work-related benefits".

One employee is quoted as saying: "Women are treated as sex objects but nothing happens because [the perpetrators] intimidate everyone."

In a statement, Wildlife Works said it had suspended three people and did not think the problem was widespread. ■

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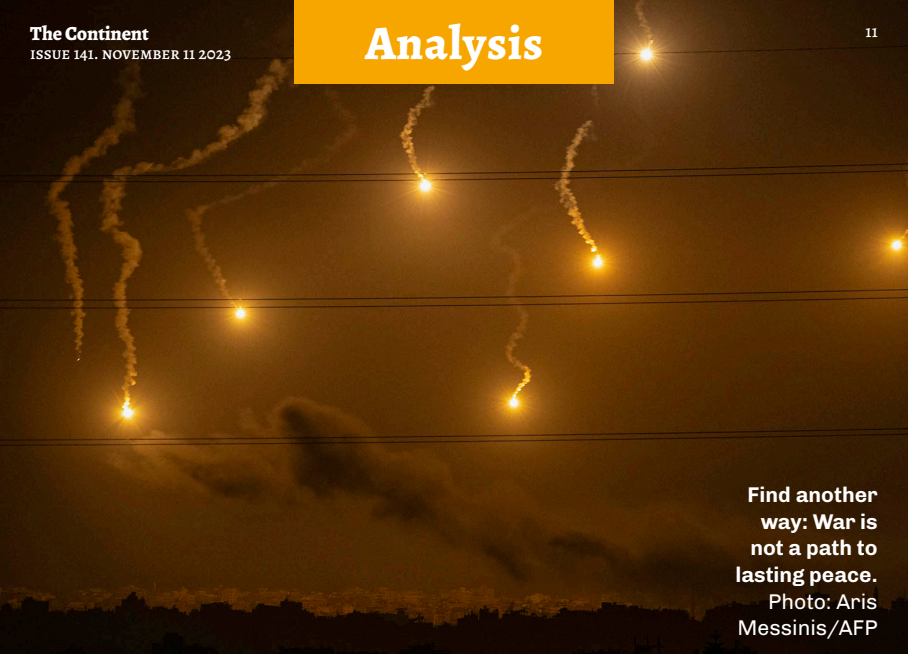
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Find another way: War is not a path to lasting peace.  
Photo: Aris Messinis/AFP

# Peace must start somewhere

**South Africa's leaders know how hard it is to dismantle segregation and oppression. But they did it. And they did it in peace. Listen to them.**

**Simon Allison**

**I**n its severity and its brutality, the month-long war in Gaza is already among the worst conflicts in human history. Inside the Gaza Strip, two million people live in an area that is just 41km long and 12km wide. That area is being subjected to the most intensive aerial bombardment ever conducted.

More than 10,000 people in Gaza have already died (in addition to the 1,400 people who were killed during the Hamas

attack on Israel on 7 October). Of these, at least 4,401 are children.

No one is safe there. It is already among the deadliest wars ever for journalists, with 39 killed in the first month. Hospitals and refugee camps have been repeatedly targeted by airstrikes. And 92 United Nations staff have been killed: the body says no other conflict has ever claimed so many UN lives in such a short time.

A blockade on goods into and out of the territory means that food, water, fuel and medical supplies are running



**Mourners pray near the bodies of a family killed in airstrikes in Gaza.**

Photo: Mohammed Abed/AFP

desperately short, leading to fears of widespread hunger and disease.

Israel claims that its military assault is targeting members of Hamas, the political party and militant group that executed the horrific 7 October assault on Israel that killed 1,400 people – mostly civilians. Hamas also kidnapped 240 people and is holding them hostage in Gaza.

Hamas's actions are war crimes. They must be condemned as such.

But Israel's response has been so disproportionate, and so indiscriminate, that some observers fear that a genocide is unfolding.

One of those observers is Naledi Pandor, South Africa's minister of international relations and cooperation. The South African government has been an outspoken critic of the Israeli government's actions over the past month, going so far as to recall its diplomats from Israel in protest. It has also condemned the Hamas attack.

"We join the world in expressing

horror at the war crimes being committed in Palestine through targeting civilians, civilian infrastructure, UN premises and other vulnerable targets," Pandor told South Africa's Parliament on Tuesday, before outlining a seven-point plan to resolve the conflict. She went on to describe the assault on Gaza as a "genocide in the making".

"These experiences remind us of our experiences as black South Africans living under apartheid," she said.

### **The bitter lessons of history**

South Africa's post-apartheid leaders have long seen their own struggle reflected in the plight of the Palestinians. "We know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians," said Nelson Mandela in 1997.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, another Nobel Peace Prize laureate, was even more blunt. Speaking about his own visits to Israel and Palestine, he said: "I know first-hand that Israel has created an apartheid

reality within its borders and through its occupation,” he said in 2014. “The parallels to my own beloved South Africa are painfully stark indeed.”

Given these parallels, South Africa’s leaders are perhaps better qualified than most to weigh in on how to resolve this particular conflict. They are some of the few people on the planet with first-hand experience in dismantling the structures of violent segregation.

The country peacefully transitioned to democracy in 1994, after centuries of brutal colonial and racist rule. It did so with internal and international observers fearing and even expecting civil war. This peace was only possible thanks to the enlightened direction of its new governors. They repeatedly chose to pursue forgiveness and reconciliation rather than justice and vengeance. The country’s subsequent governments have made plenty of mistakes since then, but on this particular subject they have a right to comment – and to be heard.

Pandor’s peace plan calls for an immediate ceasefire and the opening of a humanitarian aid corridor into Gaza – something that has been repeatedly blocked by Israel and Gaza’s neighbour, Egypt. She called for the release of all civilian hostages. She said that the entire area must be declared a nuclear weapons-free zone, and called on other countries to refrain from “fuelling” the conflict.

In the longer term, she called for the resumption of dialogue between the two sides – “led and owned by the Palestinians and Israelis and facilitated by the United Nations” – with the goal of creating two



**Break the circle: In one month, more than 10,000 people have been killed in the war in Palestine, survived only by grieving family and an endless cycle of vengeance.** Photo above: Aris Messinis/AFP. Photo below: Fadel Senna/AFP

parallel states.

As the bombs continue to rain down, and Israeli troops lay siege to Gaza City, the prospect of two parallel states feels further away than ever before.

But South Africa’s existence as a democratic, inclusive nation is proof that such miracles are not impossible.

In this context, Pandor’s peace plan is a tangible and responsible starting point – especially given the reluctance of other, more powerful nations to stand up for basic human rights and demand an end to the devastating violence. ■



# The Sahel

## Russia cajoles solar powers into turning backs on sun

**Burkina Faso and Mali may pay Rosatom to build nuclear plants. But why indenture yourself when energy emancipation is staring you in the face?**

**Nancy-Wangue Moussissa**

**M**ali and Burkina Faso recently signed nuclear power deals with Russia. But building nuclear plants might mean they may have to borrow money for an energy source they don't have expertise for, to produce electricity that can't be efficiently distributed. And both have the potential for vast solar industries.

Details on the nuclear deals are scarce and it isn't clear if the move is more a political one than a practical step towards construction. The two countries have been alienated since their recent coups. Russia is similarly isolated and looking for partners. Local news outlet *Mali Jet* has reported that Mali expects to build

two to four small power plants, with a capacity of 55-megawatts each, over the next seven years. Half of the country's 23-million people don't have access to electricity. That number is highest in rural areas. And Abdoulaye Gackou, a Malian energy engineer, argues that communities in the Sahel are too isolated for centralised generation to make sense.

"A nuclear station provides power galore in a concentrated area. But sometimes, between the first electric pole and the next village, there are a hundred kilometres. Running a cable over that distance to supply just 20 houses is not cost-effective."

Gackou co-founded Bamako-based startup Yeelen Solar and argues that "solar energy can help overcome this problem" with the construction of small grids that can supply just one village.

The African Development Bank, which intends to find nearly \$1-billion for a solar power initiative across the 12 countries of the Sahel, appears to concur. The bank's "Desert to Power" initiative is initially focusing on the G5 Sahel – Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger – where it intends to connect 6.3-million households to decentralised energy solutions.

But the gap to be met is quite wide. Of the five, Mali has the highest access to electricity and even there, over a million households don't have it. In Burkina Faso



**See the light: Choosing nuclear would put Sahel countries at risk of losing their moment in the sun.**

Photo: Ahmed Ouoba/AFP

and Chad, where power reaches less than 20% and 13% of the people respectively, the need is even more dire.

So, countries keep seeking solutions.

For Delwendé Nabayaogo, a safety expert at Burkina Faso's national authority for radiation protection and nuclear safety, talk of building nuclear power plants in the near future implies looming technical and economic dependency. In his experience, these countries don't have trained technicians, engineers, and scientists to set up and run nuclear plants.

"If we're totally dependent on Russian human resources, it's not an attractive option for the countries," Nabayaogo says. He predicts that the countries in question will be dependent on Russian experts as they train their own people.

Moreover, these countries will likely have to borrow from Russia to pay the Russians who will set up and run these plants. In Egypt, Russia's state

energy company Rosatom is building a \$28.75-billion nuclear power plant with a capacity to produce 4,800 MW. Russia will loan Egypt \$25-billion of that, to be paid over 22 years at an annual interest of 3%.

These complexities make investing further in solar energy development seem all the more sensible for Sahel countries.

The region, which stretches from northern Senegal in the west to the east coast of Sudan, is seen as the best in the world to get solar energy because the sun shines directly for most of the year.

The Desert to Power initiative alone has the potential to produce enough solar power to provide clean energy for 250-million people, according to the Africa Development Bank. And with the right infrastructure solar could be further harnessed for export. Solar energy can be to the Sahel what nuclear energy is for Russia: a niche that positions it as a global energy supplier. ■

Photo: Marco Longari/AFP



## I am Caster Semenya

**The story of Caster Semenya's life has often been told by others. Now, for the first time, the South African double Olympic champion is telling her own story. This is an extract from her new book, published last month: *Caster Semenya: The Race to be Myself*.**

**I** am Mokgadi Caster Semenya. I am one of the greatest track and field athletes to ever run the 800-metre distance. I've won two Olympic gold medals and three world championships, along with dozens of Diamond League meets, and went unbeaten for almost four years. Unfortunately, it is not what I have achieved on the track that has likely brought me to your attention.

Much has been written about me in

virtually every major international outlet in the world since I came into the public's eye in 2009, and most of it is outright lies or half-truths. I have waited a long time to tell my story. For more than a decade I have preferred to let my running do the talking. After what has happened to me, it felt easier that way.

In 2019, the International Association of Athletics Federation (now World Athletics) banned me from running my

favoured 800-metre event, along with the 400m and the 1,500m distances. My last IAAF-sanctioned 800-metre race was on 30 June 2019, when I won the Diamond League Prefontaine Classic at Stanford University. I was not banned because I was caught doping or cheating. Rather, I am no longer allowed to run those distances because of a biological condition I was born with and that I refuse to take unnecessary drugs to change.

**I am no longer allowed to run those distances because of a biological condition I was born with and that I refuse to take unnecessary drugs to change.**

I have what is called a difference in sex development (DSD), an umbrella term that refers to the varying genetic conditions where an embryo responds in a different way to the hormones that spark the development of internal and external sexual organs. To put it simply, on the outside I am female, I have a vagina, but I do not have a uterus. I do not menstruate, and my body produces an elevated amount of testosterone, which gives me more typically masculine characteristics than other women, such as a deeper voice and fewer curves. I cannot carry a child because I don't have a womb but, contrary to what many people think, I do not produce sperm. I can't biologically



**How dare you: Caster Semenya has challenged athletics authorities who gave themselves the 'right' to govern women's bodies. Photo: Harold Cunningham/AFP**



Photo: Jewel Samad/AFP

contribute to making new life.

I did not know any of this about my body until soon after August 2009, when I won the gold medal in the 800-metre race at the World Championships in Berlin, Germany.

I was only 18 years old and had been subjected to invasive and humiliating gender confirmation tests without my consent just prior to the race. What followed was a media firestorm that continues to this day.

People believed all sorts of insanity about me: That I was a boy who managed to hide his penis all the way to the world championships; that I was paid to have my penis removed so South Africa could bring home a medal in the women's category; that I was a hermaphrodite

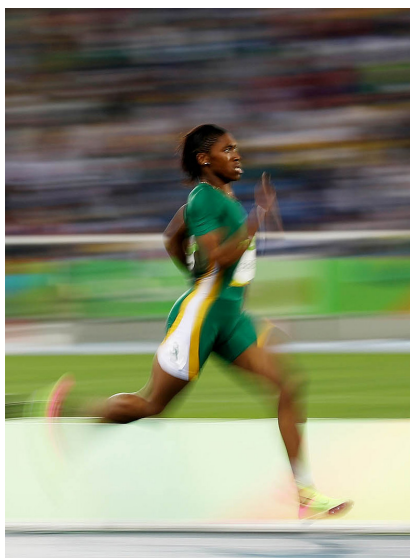


Photo: Patrick Smith/Getty Images



forced to run as a girl for political gain.

Journalists descended into my village and every school I'd ever attended. My parents and siblings, friends, and teachers, were harassed with calls and by visitors, day and night. I can still hear my mother wailing desperately as she tried to explain to perfect strangers that I was born a girl, and that I was her little girl, and why was all of this happening?

I have never spoken in detail about what happened during this time of my life, but I am now ready to do so.

It is said that silence will not protect us. From the moment I stepped on to the track for the final meet in Berlin on 19 August 2009, I have been vilified and persecuted.

My accomplishments since have been celebrated, yes, but it is hard to think of another athlete at the elite level who has endured as much scrutiny and psychological abuse from sports governing bodies, other competitors, and the media as I have.

It has affected me in ways I cannot describe, although I will try. And while I have faced significant hardships throughout my life, I want to make clear that my story is not one of pain and torment, but rather about hope, self-confidence, and resilience.

I am still standing; I am still here. What has been said about me in the media is not who I really am. I've heard myself described as "surly", "rude", "shy", "stoic", "dignified", and "superhuman". All those things may seem true, at times. I'm also quite charming and funny, and I've been said to have a biting wit.

Like every human, I am many things – a proud Black woman from Limpopo, [...] a daughter, a sister, a wife and now I am a mother to two baby girls: Oratile, who was born in 2019, and Oarabile, who was born in 2021. I feel and I hurt just like a regular person, although I am not considered by science or some people to be a regular woman.

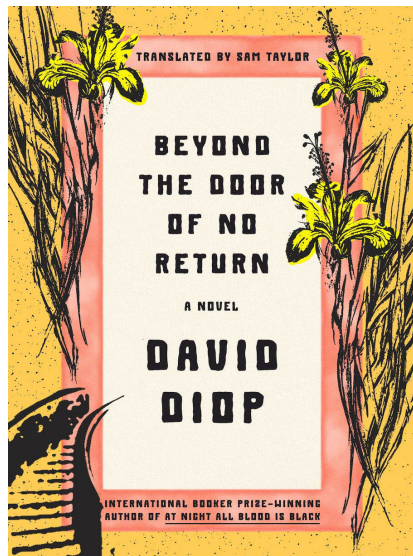
**It is hard to think of another athlete at the elite level who has endured as much scrutiny and psychological abuse from sports governing bodies, other competitors, and the media as I have.**

The scientific community has labelled my biological makeup as "intersex", and I am now one of, if not the, most recognisable intersex person in the world ... I don't think of myself that way. I want everyone to understand despite my condition, even though I am built differently than other women, I am a woman.

Of course, growing up I knew I looked and behaved differently from many of my peers, but my family, my community, and my country accepted me as I was and never made me feel like an outsider. The beauty of my childhood was that I never felt othered or unwanted – this is the source of my strength. I have never questioned who I am. ■

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Caster Semenya: *The Race to be Myself* is published by Jonathan Ball Publishers. First published in the Mail & Guardian.



## Passion and possession

Lofty language and vivid imagery elevate a bleak tale of proprietary desire

Jacqueline Nyathi

**D**avid Diop's latest is a story about slavery in the 18th century from an unexpected angle. He introduces us to an acclaimed French botanist through his relationship with his daughter.

Michel Adanson has been distant for much of his daughter's life, completely immersed in his grand project of

creating the encyclopaedia to end all encyclopaedias; but when he dies, he leaves her a hidden folder in which he has recorded an account of his past in Senegal.

In that country, we find a younger Adanson enchanted by all of the exotic flora around him, and somewhat detached from the goings-on of the French rulers and Senegalese kings, except in relation to his travels into the interior. This changes when, on one of his trips, he encounters a chief who tells him the story of a revenant – his niece – who was taken by unknown men overseas, but who mysteriously came back. Her warning to her family to never try to find her proves irresistible for Adanson. But when he goes looking for this woman, Maram, his adventure leads to terrible consequences.

*Beyond the Door of No Return* explores one white man's curiosity and destructive passion for a Black woman, heaping the weight of his colonial heritage against her position as an object, as colonial property.

It's barely a love story. He is driven by an overwhelming desire to possess her, which is an interesting juxtaposition against the French colonial belief in its own right to possession. Maram's voice in this story is conspicuously silent, itself an important commentary.

The novel is richly evocative of Senegalese life at the time and gives the reader much to think about. Written in elevated and formal literary language, it is heady and vivid. It would be an unmitigated pleasure if not for the bleak story at its heart. ■

# Colonial crimes are not ancient history and must be acknowledged

**Those who reject even the notion of an apology for colonial atrocities see it as an act of humiliation, rather than an expression of humility. But learning from your past is admirable. And critical.**

**Tomi Oladipo**

Over the past few weeks, as is customary this time of year, Britons have been pinning red poppies to their lapels as a symbol of remembrance to pay tribute to and reflect upon the service and sacrifice of the United Kingdom's uniformed fighters, both past and present.

This practice also happens in other countries, and is rooted in a deep reverence for history.

In visiting Kenya, a former colony, Britain's king, Charles, retraced the path of some of the British soldiers being remembered. There, he expressed his "greatest sorrow and deepest regret" for the atrocities inflicted upon Kenyans under British colonial rule.

Coincidentally, Germany's President Frank-Walter Steinmeier was also in neighbouring Tanzania, where he more directly apologised and sought forgiveness from the descendants of the victims of German colonisation.

His country killed at least 300,000 Tanzanians.

The popular narratives in the West have been so sanitised as to gloss over this and imply that colonial rule primarily involved governance and the establishment of law as we recognise it today. However, the crimes committed were manifold across the colonies – encompassing mass killings, torture, rape, starvation, forced labour, and large-scale land seizures, to name just a few.

**Narratives are sanitised and imply that colonial rule primarily involved governance and the establishment of law. But the crimes committed were manifold.**

There are diverse opinions on how former colonial powers should address their past transgressions. Many advocate for formal processes towards justice, including reparations. Some argue

that a heartfelt apology is a significant step towards healing old wounds. Still, there are those who dismiss the issue as inconsequential.

On a Sky News Australia programme, presenter Andrew Bolt and GB News counterpart Patrick Christys concurred that the “grovelling” King Charles should not have embarked on an “apology tour” – even though the monarch’s speech fell short of a formal apology. In an attempt to place Britain’s rule in Africa in a remote historical context where atrocities were not all that unusual, Christys suggested that apologising for colonialism would imply a similar gesture for the Norman conquest of 1066. This is where Britain was colonised by a claimant to that country’s crown, in a process that came with mass murder and rule through a French-speaking elite.

To provide perspective, Zimbabwe gained its independence in 1980. Unlike the victims of the Norman conquest, in Kenya, some of those who suffered under Britain’s brutal suppression of the Mau Mau rebellion are still alive. In Tanzania today, the grandchildren of community leaders executed by German colonialists still seek the return of their loved ones’ remains for a dignified burial.

Neither proposed a suitable cutoff point for seeking justice. The September 11 attacks occurred 22 years ago. The London bombings, 18 years ago. When should we tell the families of the victims of those events that it is time to move on?

What Bolt, Christys, and many others fail to grasp is that when one demonstrates a reverence for history

through statues, memorials, and the wearing of poppies, you also open up the reality that not all aspects of this history evoke pleasant memories – particularly, not for their victims.

**In Tanzania today, the grandchildren of community leaders executed by German colonialists still seek the return of their loved ones’ remains for a dignified burial.**

One can debate what form justice should take for crimes of the colonial era, but the overt efforts to trivialise and dismiss these atrocities are cynical.

Those who reject even the notion of an apology see it as an act of humiliation, rather than an expression of humility. They see a plea for forgiveness as an admission of guilt, and so their response to inconvenient historical truths is often to deflect, diminish their significance, or deny their occurrence.

Importantly, they recognise that admitting guilt could potentially unleash a torrent of legal challenges. Given the vastness of the empire, this is indeed a sobering thought.

But acknowledging past wrongdoings should not be seen as a sign of weakness. In fact, learning from them is admirable. History profoundly influences the present and shapes the future. ■

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*Tomi Oladipo is a journalist and political analyst.*

# Africa has a disinformation crisis

**At least 20 elections will be held on the continent next year. It's critical to help people avoid being manipulated by disinformation, especially now that artificial intelligence has joined the party, write **Guy Berger** and **Herman Wasserman**.**

**I**n Sudan, fake clips of ousted leader Omar al-Bashir with his voice cloned have been shared on social media, adding fuel to the factional war. In Zambia, a fake video of the president saying he won't run for office in 2026 has been spreading.

Recognising that they can't completely suppress or intimidate online expression, African authoritarians, and powerful political forces outside the continent, are "flooding the zone" with an overwhelming amount of fake information.

AI applications have dramatically reduced the cost of producing lies and hate, and targeting them at specific people. They not only make problematic messages, but automate their distribution.

This puts the spotlight on platforms

like WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok and Twitter/X but research shows that, especially in Africa, these companies have failed to invest in the human and algorithmic systems needed for monitoring and moderating rights-harming content. In 2023, these companies also butchered their "trust and safety" teams.

And while companies like OpenAI are belatedly attempting to build in guardrails to protect applications from being misused, it remains unclear if the same standards will be applied in Africa.

Africans need to recognise and be vigilant about the mounting risks in the consumption and sharing of messages that threaten democracy. This is why Stellenbosch University in partnership with the Namibia Media Trust is offering a [free online course](#) about the coming cocktail of extreme content disorder.

Norms proposed by the Windhoek+30 Declaration in 2021 call for media and information literacy as one of the antidotes to the impact of disinformation.

The continent needs a sustained campaign to educate the public about navigating Africa's digital content universe. ■

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*Guy Berger is Professor Emeritus, Rhodes University; a Distinguished Fellow at Research ICT Africa and former UNESCO director for freedom of expression. Prof Herman Wasserman heads the Department of Journalism at Stellenbosch University, and is a member of the International Panel on the Information Environment.*





Making tracks:  
Likeleli Masitise  
mountain bikes in the  
mountain kingdom.

## Lesotho women put their mettle to the pedal

*Lesotho's majestic terrain makes it perfect for off-road cycling. For the past two decades, it has mainly been men that representing the country on the world stage. But women bikers are paving the way for a more inclusive future.*

**Lee Nxumalo**

**M**ountain biking has steadily grown into one of the most prominent sport codes in Lesotho, a small country with a rich cycling culture. Starting in the early 2000s, local racers began participating in tournaments in South Africa. This exposure to competitive cycling laid the foundation for the sport's development in Lesotho.

For a long time, it was seen as a sport dominated by men, with women's

participation at a minimum.

Then, in 2014, Likeleli Masitise shifted the paradigm when she became the first black African woman to compete in a UCI team and earn a podium in an accredited race. UCI – the Union Cycliste International – is the world governing body for cycling.

Her accomplishments contributed to the overall growth and diversity of the cycling community in the country.

Guided by an unrelenting determination to succeed, Masitise kept

training and learning to become better. By the time she was 21, she was competing on the world stage.

“I didn’t have the self-confidence because I thought cycling is for white people. In the starting line [during competitions], you may find that I was the only black woman and that made me feel isolated but I eventually got used to it,” Masitise recalls of her first international competition.

In 2015, she had a setback and took a five-year break.

Reflecting on her career and the missed opportunities from her hiatus, Masitise says cycling is an expensive sport “and you only get money when you are competing”.

So if someone misses races, through injuries or other reasons, “no one is going to take care of you and you need to make money to sustain your life.”

She adds: “The problem with cycling [in Lesotho] is that if you focus on the sport, in the end, you are going to suffer.”

Like many veteran cyclists approaching the end of their careers, she is focused on supporting new entrants to the sport.

This commitment is reflected in the Lesotho Cycling Federation’s initiative to identify and mentor developing talents. Four custom built tracks have become a fun and new way to introduce cycling to young girls.

Among the emerging talents is Khothlang Leuta, notably competing in the 2021 Red Bull UCI World Championships. She was among the first girls to join the custom track, although she was intimidated at first.

Maryke Zietsman, from the company



**Braking news: Khothlang Leuta tackles the track in the UCI Pump Track World Championships in Lisbon, Portugal in 2021.** Photos: Dan Griffiths/Red Bull



**Upcycling : More women are taking to the trails, but the sport has a way to go.**

Photos: Wayne Reiche

that built the custom tracks, says of this: “Initially, we really struggled to get the girls on the track. They were completely intimidated by the boys. And it wasn’t a situation where the boys discouraged them or anything like that. But from a cultural point of view, it was just not done. We had to beg her [Leuta] to race.”

The increased participation of girls is encouraging but still faces serious obstacles.

Tšepiso Lerata, another biker, says their dreams need unwavering support. That means investment. Their bikes “are not good enough to be racing”, they need personal trainers, and they need to travel to races. “I would like to be exposed to different races outside the country and get used to that because it can be quite scary,” says Lerata.

But the story of Lesotho’s cycling is one of unity, inclusion and triumph.



From the dusty trails to the grand stages of international competitions, this small nation has defied the odds. And the accomplishments of its cyclists means anyone knows they could be part of this journey. ■

# 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

"Knew a guy, called himself 2-Buck Tim 'cos 3-Bob Mali was already taken."



- 1\_ Which African country's name means "Land of Honest Men"?
- 2\_ As of this week, how many years has Paul Biya been president of Cameroon?
- 3\_ True or false: Paul Biya was also Cameroon's first prime minister.
- 4\_ 'Rock-cut monolithic churches' are famous in Lalibela (pictured). Which country is the town in?
- 5\_ Libya is Africa's northernmost country. True or false?
- 6\_ What is Africa's southernmost country?
- 7\_ Nana Akufo-Addo is which country's president?
- 8\_ What is the alternate spelling of the Malian city Tombouctou?
- 9\_ Benguela, Lobito and Lubango are all located in what country?
- 10\_ What is the capital of the Seychelles?

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



# Debt disorder has democracy by the throat

The IMF loan was meant to stop the spiral, but Ghana's woes now threaten to cut into its constitutional core.

Felix Kumah-Abiwu and  
Jeffrey Haynes

Government debt can be beneficial to countries if loans are invested well. Unfortunately, the benefits of credit have rarely been seen in Africa, where unproductive use of borrowed funds and difficult global conditions have led to high debt repayment costs that threaten public services and ultimately democracy itself.

Many African countries are among the countries listed by the International Monetary Fund as being in “debt-distress” in 2023 – they have not necessarily borrowed more than other countries but are struggling to repay their debt.

In Ghana, whose national debt reached \$63.3-billion by the end of 2022, and impending bankruptcy forced President Nana Akufo-Addo to turn to the IMF for a \$3-billion rescue deal, the impact of national indebtedness has been dramatic. The government lacks funds to offset the rising cost of living or deliver jobs. This has undermined the ruling party's popularity and raised serious questions about the wider political system.

The country has seen a sharp increase in protests from groups such as Arise

Ghana and #OccupyBoG. Among other things, protesters have demanded the removal of the governor of the Bank of Ghana and his two deputies.

**Among other things, protesters have demanded the removal of the governor of the Bank of Ghana and his two deputies.**

The political environment is so heated that Brigadier Joseph Nunoo-Mensah, a former chief of defence staff of the Ghana Armed Forces, warned Ghana was at risk of a “big explosion”, suggesting the country was ripe for a coup. This is unlikely at the moment, but complacency would be a mistake. The people are not happy with the status quo. The government needs to start delivering economic hope in order to restore public trust before it is too late. ■

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*Felix Kumah-Abiwu is an associate professor and director of the Center for African Studies at Kent State University in Ohio. Jeffrey Haynes is emeritus professor*



*of politics at London Metropolitan University. This analysis was published in collaboration with Democracy in Africa.*

# THE BIG PICTURE

Folksy: The original VW Beetle's heyday is long past – but not in Addis Ababa, where the iconic auto was introduced during the time of Haile Selassie. Nostalgia plays a part in keeping them on the road – as do the exorbitant import taxes that make buying new cars impossible for many.

Photo: Michele Spatari/AFP



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