

The Continent

A photograph of a soldier in camouflage gear standing on a rooftop in Goma. The soldier is holding a rifle and looking towards the camera. In the foreground, another soldier in camouflage gear and a headwrap is visible, looking towards the soldier on the rooftop. The background shows a building with a green roof and a stone wall.

INSIDE GOMA



Cover: After years of back and forth, on Monday the M23 rebel group suddenly burst into Goma, the most important city in the east of the DRC. Peacekeeping missions are in disarray. South African soldiers have died. Few people predicted this. M23 soldiers, backed by Rwanda, are pushing south to seize Bukavu and threaten to remake the political boundaries of this area with its abundance of minerals (p12). They have threatened to head for Kinshasa. As tank treads bite up Goma's streets, *The Continent* went to talk to the people who always pay the price (p15).

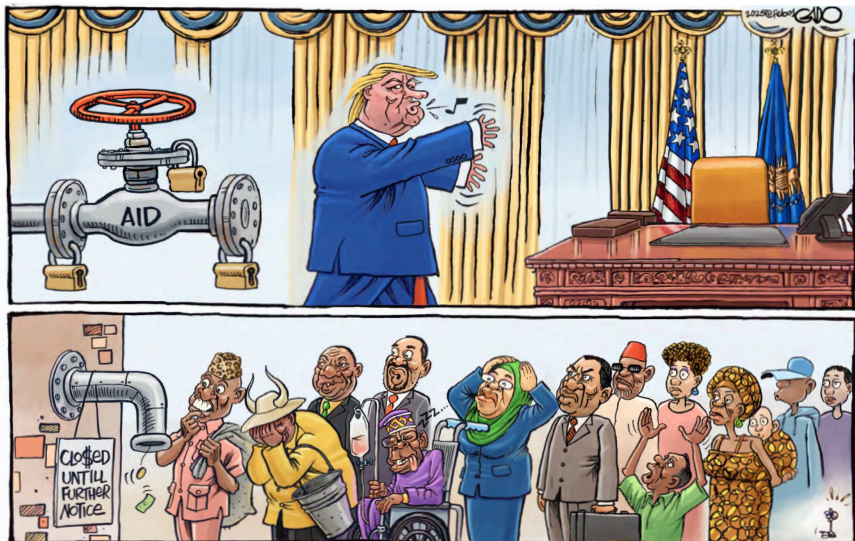
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ORGANISED CRIME

Drug cartels pushing into West Africa

Over the past three months, Interpol seized cocaine worth more than \$50-million in Cabo Verde and 10 tonnes of amphetamines in Burkina Faso, *Reuters* reports. As cartels are pushed out of South and Central America, organised crime is looking at other parts of the world to move drugs into Europe and the United States. With less enforcement, West African maritime routes have become a major drug-trafficking belt in recent years. Some of this trade is driven by, and finances, fighting groups that have destabilised the Sahel region.

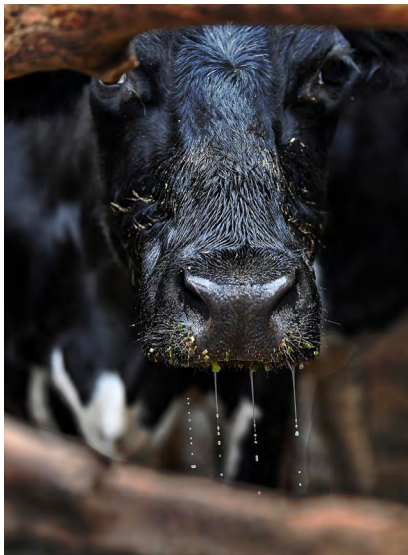
ORGANISED CRIME

Thailand returns Tanzanian tortoises

Thai authorities gave their Tanzanian counterparts 116 dead and live tortoises to serve as evidence in court. The reptiles, which include protected species like pancake tortoises, radiated tortoises, and Aldabra giant tortoises, were recovered two years ago from a woman at the Bangkok airport. She and 14 others are now being prosecuted for smuggling them. “Many of the tortoises died after being found in the smuggler’s luggage, despite urgent care provided by Thai authorities. All 116 were nevertheless repatriated as evidence,” Interpol said in a statement.

KENYA**Fake moos: Misinfo targets farmers**

The corners of the internet that believe that billionaire Bill Gates puts chips in vaccines to monitor people now believe he is targeting cows. The misinformation has spread to farmers in rural Kenya, who are now resisting a government drive to vaccinate their livestock for foot and mouth disease. The *BBC* reports that “extremely online people are helping spread the panic”. Vaccines allow cows to survive disease. Gates has other things to do with his life. And this is what happens when billionaire Mark Zuckerberg gets richer by allowing anything to go on his lucrative platforms.



A load of bull: Misinfo about Bill Gates' involvement in a cattle vaccine drive is spreading. Photo: Tony Karumba/AFP

CAMEROON**IMF gives Yaoundé the greenback light**

The West African country has unlocked another \$118-million of the \$689-million in funding the International Monetary Fund (IMF) promised it in 2021. To get that money, the government in Yaoundé needed to show that it's changing how it manages the economy and what it prioritises – to mirror what the fund thinks is important. Cameroon's economy grew 3.9% last year and inflation fell from 7.5% to 4.6%.

UGANDA**Ebola patient dies in Kampala**

The health ministry has confirmed that a patient at the country's biggest hospital, Mulago in the capital Kampala, died of Ebola on Wednesday. Uganda's public-health management has come a long way from its first Ebola outbreak in 2000, which killed more than 550 people, to the most recent in 2022, which ended with 55 dead. But this is a big city with lots of people. The World Health Organisation has sent the country \$1-million to respond speedily.

CHAD

France hands over last Sahel base

President Mahamat Idriss Déby has followed through on his demand last year that France end its military presence in Chad. On Thursday, France handed over Adji Koussei airbase in N'Djamena, its last military base in the country and the Sahel region. With Senegal also negotiating the exit of French soldiers, France is building a new Djibouti base that can host 1,500 troops, a fraction of the 5,000 it previously had in the Sahel.

INDIA

Dozens die at religious festival

At least 30 people died in a stampede at the Kumbh Mela festival in northern India, officials say. The incident happened early on Wednesday in Prayagraj during a sacred Hindu cleansing ritual. Another 60 people were reportedly injured. It took hours for the authorities to confirm the number of casualties and many people are still trying to find information about their missing relatives.

People gather to celebrate Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso's exit from Ecowas. Photo: Boureima Hama/AFP



ECOWAS

AES members finally leave bloc chat

Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso's exit from the Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas), first announced last January, took effect on Wednesday. The three junta-led countries have

formed an alternative regional bloc, the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), which – according to Nigerien Defence Minister Salifou Mody – now has a joint force of 5,000 fighters to take on insurgents in the central Sahel region. The AES countries gained some concessions in their Ecowas withdrawal, including continued free movement for their residents within the Ecowas bloc.

ITALY

Meloni investigated over Najim release

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni is being investigated for embezzlement, as well as aiding and abetting in a crime. The crime in question is the release of Osama “Almasri” Najim, a Libyan police chief who was arrested in Turin on an International Criminal Court (ICC) warrant, only to be released shortly afterwards by a court in Rome on a technicality. Najim, who is wanted for crimes against humanity, including murder, torture, and rape, was flown home on an Italian secret service plane, without the ICC being informed.

GUINEA

Sleeping sickness put to bed

Sleeping sickness, a deadly parasitic disease spread through the bite of an infected tsetse fly, has been eliminated as a public health concern in Guinea. Efforts to eradicate the disease were delayed by Ebola and Covid-19 but the World Health Organisation says mass screenings, vector control, and community involvement have finally dropped the number of reported cases in the country significantly enough. The disease is also considered eliminated in Togo, Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, Uganda, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, and Chad.



All atwitter: Duduzile Zuma-Sambudla says her social media posts have been misconstrued. Photo: Rajesh Jantilal/AFP

SOUTH AFRICA

Jacob Zuma’s daughter charged over 2021 riots

MK Party member of Parliament Duduzile Zuma-Sambudla, the daughter of former South African president Jacob Zuma, appeared in court on Thursday for her alleged role in the riots that shook the country in July 2021. She faces charges of inciting terrorism and public violence with her social media posts at the time. The riots followed her father’s arrest for contempt of court. Zuma-Sambudla claims her posts were misconstrued and that prosecutors are trying to settle scores with her father. She will be back in court in March.

Mozambique

Momentum remains with Mondlane

Opposition leader draws massive crowds – even as the government gets on with business as usual.

Luis Nhachote in Maputo

Since returning from his self-imposed exile on 9 January, opposition leader Venâncio Mondlane has left his makeshift headquarters in the Maputo City Lodge just three times.

First, he went to a neighbourhood on the outskirts of Maputo to visit the families of people who were killed or injured in the state security forces' brutal response to widespread post-election protests. Mondlane's supporters allege that the election was rigged, and that he should now be president – rather than the ruling party's Daniel Chapo, who was inaugurated earlier this month.

Second, Mondlane visited the country's largest hospital, also in Maputo, to hug and commiserate with people who had been injured during the demonstrations.

On Thursday, Mondlane went further

afield, travelling to the far northern city of Tete. Videos on social media show chaotic scenes as the 51-year-old politician was mobbed by thousands of euphoric supporters. Even on his journey there, Mondlane's vehicle was surrounded by fans, showing that his popularity extends far beyond the capital city.

Meanwhile, Chapo spent the week receiving official congratulations from French President Emmanuel Macron and meeting the chief executive of TotalEnergies to discuss the progress of several energy projects worth potentially tens of billions of dollars – projects that Mondlane says have been mired in corruption.

The 51-year-old politician was mobbed by thousands of euphoric supporters.

Chapo also attended an emergency summit of the Southern African Development Community to discuss the fighting in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, which could be a major diplomatic headache for his new administration. Mozambique has previously relied on troops from both Rwanda and South Africa – who accuse each other of stoking conflict in the DRC – to contain the long-running insurgency in Cabo Delgado province. ■

Artificial Intelligence



After DeepSeek, a Chinese artificial intelligence (AI) programme, drove down the stock prices of Silicon Valley AI companies, they have accused it of being all the things they are. OpenAI says DeepSeek developers stole its work. Critics say it is riddled with its makers' biases and won't answer pesky questions about Tibet. In other words: it is artificial intelligence.

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South Africa

Trump signs a piece of paper – and a vital Johannesburg clinic shuts its doors

This is just one example of how the US government’s ‘stop work’ order is devastating healthcare around the globe.

Kiri Rupiah in Johannesburg

For hundreds of transgender people, the small clinic tucked away on a side street in Hillbrow, central Johannesburg was a lifeline: a place where they could receive healthcare and medication without fear of discrimination or violence.

On Tuesday morning, the clinic – run by the University of the Witwatersrand’s Reproductive Health Institute (RHI) – sent an urgent message to patients. It said the clinic was closed until further notice and patients should hurry to collect their medication. By the time *The Continent* visited on Tuesday afternoon, the doors were already locked. Security guards stationed outside had no advice for patients about what to do next.

The clinic was funded by the Wits RHI Key Populations Programme, which, in turn, received its funding from USAID, the United States government agency that administers foreign aid. Last Friday,

recently re-inaugurated US President Donald Trump issued an executive order that forced USAID and its grantees to stop work with immediate effect, pending a 90-day review of all foreign-aid spending.

Theo, a transgender man, told *The Continent* the clinic made him feel safe. “There’s just a place for you, you know?” He got blood tests, refilled his hormone-therapy prescriptions, and was able to see a psychologist when needed. Theo is trying to get access to his patient file, so he can try to find a private doctor, but is worried for people who will have to turn to public clinics, which are understaffed and often run out of medication.

Catastrophic consequences

For decades, the US has been one of the world’s biggest funders of global healthcare initiatives. The implications of its sudden decision to suspend that funding are not yet fully understood, but are potentially catastrophic.



**Exempt of sense:
No one is sure
what Rubio's
latest exemption
to Trump's
foreign aid
freeze means.**

Photo: Andrew
Caballero-
Reynolds/AFP

One of the country's most successful healthcare interventions is the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (Pepfar), which supports more than 20-million people, mostly in Africa, with access to antiretrovirals (ARVs). For every day the stop work order is in effect, more than 200,000 people are unable to pick up new supplies of ARVs, the Andelson Institute of Public Policy estimates.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio has subsequently issued several exemptions, including military aid to Egypt and Israel, as well as emergency food aid. This week, he said programmes that provide lifesaving humanitarian assistance are also exempt. But no one is sure what this latest exemption means. Sources told development industry publication *Devex* that Pepfar staff have no idea whether it applies to their work.

"From a public-health perspective, this is a small step forward, but there are still many exclusions and it's extremely concerning," Fatima Hassan of the Health Justice Initiative told *The Continent*. "It's a partial waiver. You can't respond to HIV,

TB, and other diseases in a piecemeal manner. Unfortunately, the waiver is just a reflection of the ideological position of the new administration."

Rubio's letter explicitly said that the exempted healthcare does not include abortion; family planning; transgender surgery; gender programmes; diversity, equity, and inclusion programmes; or other assistance that is not life-saving – which means that the doors of the Hillbrow clinic will stay closed, for now.

African and international civil society organisations have widely criticised Trump's sudden suspension of foreign aid. "We will not bow down to the Trump administration's patriarchal directives," said Marie-Evelyne Petrus-Barry, the Africa director at the International Planned Parenthood Federation.

The federation said it was "repulsed by these policies that have a clear and obvious aim of eradicating bodily autonomy, promoting white supremacy through the rewriting of history, and putting in real danger the lives of historically marginalised people". ■

M23 is calling the shots

After seizing Goma, can anyone stop the rebel militia from consolidating its control?

Lydia Namubiru

A lightning advance on Goma by March 23 Movement (M23) fighters ended with the rebels declaring the “liberation” of the Congolese city on Monday – allegedly with help from Rwandan armed forces. On Tuesday afternoon – as diplomatic statements condemning their action flew in from around the world – the rebels took control of its airport. By Wednesday they were setting up a parallel administration in Goma, as they have done in other areas of North Kivu province, and expelling pro-Kinshasa mercenaries.

M23 did not stop there. The group continued to advance towards Bukavu, the capital of the neighbouring province, South Kivu. By Thursday morning they had seized the towns of Kiniezire and Mukwidja without resistance – and had come within 65km of Bukavu.

The only man willing to publicly own M23’s actions, Corneille Nangaa, told *Reuters* on Monday: “Our objective is neither Goma nor Bukavu but Kinshasa, the source of all the problems.” Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where President Félix Tshisekedi and his cabinet sit, is 2,531km away from Goma on poor roads.

Nangaa reiterated his intention to capture Kinshasa in a Thursday press



conference attended by *The Continent* in Goma. Nangaa told *Reuters* that state weakness or absence has caused the proliferation of more than 100 armed groups in the eastern DRC. His stated goal is to “recreate the state”.

Nangaa is a former Congolese elections chief who previously confessed to rigging the 2018 election in favour of Tshisekedi. The two men have since fallen out badly. Nangaa created a political party to rival Tshisekedi in the subsequent 2023 election



Military clothing and equipment strews the streets of Goma after DRC troops fled as the city fell.
Photo: Moses Sawasawa/
The Continent

but didn't run. Instead, he fled the country and assembled an anti-Tshisekedi alliance – the Alliance Fleuve Congo. In December 2023, M23 was welcomed into this alliance, which also claims to include more than a dozen other parties and fighting forces.

The governor of North Kivu was killed on the frontline during M23's march to Goma. Nangaa appears to be the most likely candidate to succeed him – but he will head M23's parallel government, rather than report to Kinshasa.

Before this week, Nangaa was rarely reported to be a significant player in the region. But his threat was not lost on Tshisekedi: a Kinshasa court sentenced him to death in absentia last August and, just days before Goma was seized, the justice ministry announced that it would auction off his properties, including two villas, a hotel, and an apartment block. The

Tshisekedi government views Nangaa as a smokescreen, behind which sits Rwandan President Paul Kagame (Rwanda has been accused by the United Nations, among others, of arming and financing M23). Nangaa's political alliance is sanctioned by the European Union and the United States, Belgian, and Swiss governments because of its armed members, including M23.

War of words

The week's developments stunned political leaders around the continent – nobody saw it coming.

Angolan President João Lourenço, whose peacemaking efforts stalled in December, issued a strong statement demanding the immediate exit of Rwandan forces from Goma.

Even stronger was the statement from South Africa, which lost 13 soldiers

during the M23 advance (South African troops have been present in the region for more than 20 years, under the auspices of various peacekeeping missions).

President Cyril Ramaphosa publicly blamed Rwanda for instigating the dramatic escalation. In return, Kagame accused Ramaphosa of lying and said that the South African soldiers were part of a “belligerent force” helping the Congolese army to wage war on its own people.

The developments in Goma are not entirely unprecedented. M23 previously seized the city in 2012. But UN peacekeepers pushed the rebels out within a year, and South Africa then negotiated a multinational peace agreement that saw M23 retreat from the fight for nine years.

This time might be different, however. UN peacekeepers are present in the city, but they are receiving surrendering

government troops rather than rallying a counteroffensive. And M23 rebels have already proven themselves superior on the battlefield to the poorly equipped and underfunded South African soldiers who make up the bulk of the southern African peacekeeping mission also present in Goma.

For now, few people would bet against M23 taking control of Bukavu too – although, on Thursday, Congolese troops and allied militia put up fierce resistance in Nyabibwe, a mining town about 65km north of the South Kivu capital. Should they seize the city, the rebel group could consolidate the north and south into a single breakaway Kivu.

Incidentally – or otherwise – that would mean that Kagame’s Rwanda would no longer share a border with the parts of the DRC still controlled by Kinshasa. ■



Civilians flee Goma after M23 and Rwandan forces took the city. Photo: Moses Sawasawa/The Continent



People fleeing war in Goma have limited options, since camps for displaced people have also been targeted.

Photos: Moses Sawasawa/
The Continent

Goma's war-displaced people turn to locals for aid

The camps are already full, stretched, or unsafe – and that's before cuts in aid budgets.

Ajabu Adolphe in Goma

Patience Uwezo is a teacher and mother of three living in Goma. Since 18 January her family has taken in two more families, adding seven people, including a pregnant woman, to their household. "It's a delicate situation. It's not easy to feed a bunch of people when there's no money in circulation because of the war," she admits.

But because some of her own family

members died in a bombing at a camp for displaced people, she can't bring herself to tell her guests to leave. In peacetime, Uwezo used to supplement her teaching income of less than \$100 a month by farming half a hectare in Masisi, outside Goma. That area fell to the March 23 Movement (M23) a few weeks ago and she was cut off from it.

Before soldiers from the armed group marched in and seized the city on Monday,



Long and winding road: Civilians have been leaving Goma since the city was captured on Monday.

Goma's camps for people displaced by the wars in eastern Congo were overflowing. International aid agencies were pushing beyond their funded capacity. On Tuesday, M23 closed the city's airport, obstructing international aid further. In the chaotic capture, the World Food Programme's warehouses were ransacked and looted.

As the institutions meant to help falter, locals are picking up the load to help – even though they barely have the means to do so.

Mercidieu Ishara, a 30-year-old social activist, has been sheltering four members of a displaced family since 23 January. All five are crammed into his three-roomed house. "If we have food, we eat together. If we have nothing to eat, we go hungry together," he tells *The Continent*.

In the city's outskirts, nearly 50 people have pitched tents on Alice Byenda's 20m by 15m yard in the Ndosho area. Most of them fled from the Lushagala camp after it was shelled in May as Congolese government soldiers and M23 fighters

exchanged artillery fire. "I saw how a whole family was decimated by the bombardments," says Luanda Baeni, a father of six who had fled to the camp from Minova in South Kivu province. "It affected me a lot."

Byenda's family of six used to get by for several weeks on a 25kg bag of rice. Now she needs one every two days to feed the people she is hosting. "It's a heavy burden."

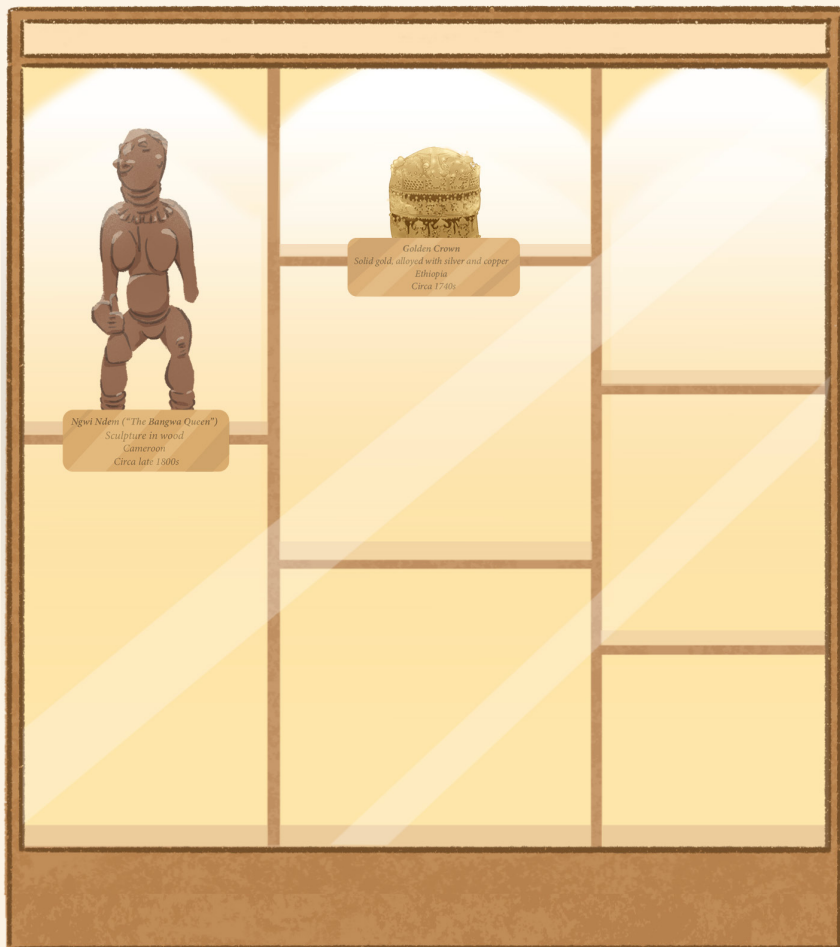
Furaha Mwamimi, a war-displaced woman who, together with her three children, is living with a single man in Goma, is all too aware that she is a "burden". But she says she doesn't have much choice. "I came from Bweremana during the fighting. A good Samaritan brought me here to Goma. I couldn't go to the camps because I didn't want to lose my life there."

As early as Tuesday, even though the security situation was still dicey, some of the displaced people staying with host families in Goma were already trying to return to their places of origin. ■

The Museum of Stolen History

Things can be taken. Their stories must still be told.

Curated by Shola Lawal | Art direction by Wynona Mutisi



Ngwé Ndem ("The Bangwa Queen")
Sculpture in wood
Cameroon
Circa late 1800s

Golden Crown
Solid gold, alloyed with silver and copper
Ethiopia
Circa 1740s



This gold crown with stunningly delicate filigree belonged to Emperor Tewodros II, the King of Kings of Abyssinia. It was the most remarkable artefact looted during the British Army's 1868 siege of Maqdala, the king's hilltop fortress capital.

The crown, made of three ornamented tiers, has been on "permanent" display at London's Victoria and Albert Museum since 1872. Its topmost tier is a domed cylinder embossed with depictions of the Biblical disciples Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Depictions of the 12 apostles are also woven in intricate lattice.

Tewodros was a powerful monarch who conquered many parts of Ethiopia and aimed to unite warring lords into a

modern state. He too seized treasures on his many conquests. The Golden Crown was likely taken from the Church of Our Lady of Qwesqwam in northern Gondar. The Church had been given the crown from a former ruler.

Tewodros' collection in Maqdala was, in a sense, Ethiopia's first national museum, according to Alula Pankhurst, a member of Ethiopia's National Heritage Restitution Committee.

Historians described the king as graceful and courteous to nobles and paupers alike, but Tewodros also had a terrible rage. After his first wife, Tewabech Ali, died in 1858, more of that ferocious nature emerged. The king, for example, ordered a massacre after John Bell, his

European friend and trusted adviser, was killed during a military campaign.

Around the same time, Tewodros' kingdom increasingly came under threat from invading Ottoman Turks and internal rivals. His rule and army shrank. In 1863, Tewodros wrote to England's Queen Victoria, seeking help against the Muslim Turks from a fellow Christian monarch. But his letter, sent through the British Consul in Ethiopia, was ignored because England had allied with the Ottomans. Insulted, Tewodros imprisoned the consul and several other Europeans. When the British Foreign Office sent a diplomatic mission to plead for their release, Tewodros seized them too.

A massive British Army unit dispatched from India descended on Maqdala on 9 April 1868. The force comprised 13,000 troops, supported by an auxiliary force of almost 40,000 more, and was armed with a barrage of modern weaponry drawn by 44 elephants. Regional warlords aided the long march into the Ethiopian highlands.

Many of Tewodros' 4,000 soldiers were massacred as the British approached the fortress. In a final act of defiance, Tewodros shot himself with a pistol that had been a gift from Queen Victoria herself. Contemporary accounts say that a ghost of a smile lingered on his face when his body was found.

The Brits plundered Maqdala, taking much of Tewodros' collection, even locks of his hair and the robe he wore. Then they burned the fortress compound, which consisted of about 3,000 buildings. A government archaeologist embedded in the army took possession of the crown, a gold chalice, and hundreds of treasures like manuscripts, crosses and tabots (wooden tablets bearing replicas of the Ark of the Covenant, allowed to be seen only by priests). Those items ended up in several British museums and castles.

Tewodros' wife, Empress Tiruwork Wube, and their son, Prince Alemayehu, were captured. The empress died before reaching England. Queen Victoria is said to have liked the prince and sent him to prestigious schools. However, he grew unhappy and sick and passed away in 1879 at age 19. The British royal family refuses to return his remains, because exhuming him would "disturb" others buried at St George's Chapel in Windsor Castle.

Britain rejected a formal request from Ethiopia to return all the loot but has "gifted" back a few items, including a silver crown in 1925 and a lock of Tewodros' hair in 2019. As for the Golden Crown, the Victoria and Albert Museum says it could consider a long-term "loan" to Ethiopia, because British law restricts the permanent return of historical artefacts.

Illustration note, by Ethiopian illustrator Yemsrach Yetneberk: *The Golden Crown is most famously associated with Emperor Tewodros II, but this artefact also had a previous life, existing for nearly a century before he seized it. It's that life which I chose to reimagine. This illustration (next page) conjures up the occasion on which the nobles who commissioned the crown – Empress Mentewab and her son, King Iyyasu II – gave it to the priests of the Church of Our Lady of Qwesqwan. Mentewab had recently lost a son and the crown, adorned with important biblical figures, was given to the priests to remind them to diligently pray for the prince's departed soul.*



Illustration: Yemsrach Yetneberk

Yemsrach

How I was fooled by 400-year-old fake news

Rumours about the ‘tyrant’ who built Togo’s wall of Notsé were grossly exaggerated.

Maxime Koami Domegni

One night, about a year ago, I sat down to tell my children about our people. I am Ewe. We are a West African people who straddle several countries: an estimated 6-million in Ghana, 3-million in Togo, 600,000 in Benin, and a smaller group in Nigeria. When I sat the kids down, I told them a maliciously revised version of Ewe history. At 40 years old, even as a curious journalist, what I knew of my own people’s history was what German missionaries and colonisers had popularised.

I told my children that our ancestor Agokoli was a wicked, bloodthirsty king who built a wall with the blood of his subjects. I said that he forced them to knead clay mixed with thorns and other sharp objects with their bare feet and hands, and that the blood from their wounds is embedded in his most remarkable undertaking: the Agbogbo.

The Agbogbo was a 17th century perimeter wall in Notsé, a pre-colonial Togolese city-state about 100km north of the Atlantic coast. Part of the wall still stands today. In Togo, Ghana, or Benin, people tell a similarly cruel narrative about the wall’s construction. It is an account that was written, taught, and propagated for more than a century.

But modern research contests and complicates that account – as I have subsequently discovered. The details are explored in *Les Ewe (Togo, Ghana, Bénin), Histoire et Civilisation*, a study by leading Togolese historians edited by Nicoué Lodjou Gayibor.

In the early 17th century, Agokoli, a charismatic man, succeeded his father Ago as leader of the city-state of Notsé, and set out to build Agbogbo. It was “on the model of Romulus founding Rome by creating a ‘pomerium’ [boundary]”, states *Les Ewe*.

The 15.5km wall’s thickness varied between 6m and 8m, and it rose to heights of 2m to 2.5m, according to a 1980s archaeological study. It was an overwhelming undertaking given the technical capabilities of the time – and not necessarily a popular one.

The workers mobilised to build it became hostile. The friction was worsened by the fact that Agokoli’s advisors were already in open rebellion because the king – sometimes described as a revolutionary – was going well beyond the ceremonial role played by previous monarchs.

Political opposition arose in the kingdom, and disgruntled leaders led their

followers to new lands, mainly towards the west. Begrudging their sovereign, the self-exiled dissidents began to speak of a tyrannical king they left behind, a one-sided account that modern historians now regard as an exaggeration.

Jesus enters the chat

The migration of dissident groups from Notsé came to be known as the “exodus of the Ewe”. Separately, some of our oral tradition says we came from Babylon, in Mesopotamia, after the break-up of the Babylonian empire several centuries before the birth of Jesus Christ.

Babylon, exodus ...? Notice anything? The Ewe story became Christianised.

At the beginning of the 19th century, German missionaries landed among Ewe groups that had settled closer to the West African coast. This contact even preceded the start of the formal German colonisation of Togo. The men from Bremen were the first to write down Ewe history, and their accounts went on to become popular history. The 1,042-page *Die Ewe-Stämme* (The Ewe Communities), published in 1906 by a German pastor, is billed by Togolese historian Komla Etu as “the most voluminous study ever ... of a people under German colonial rule”.

“This is the source of the very first written version of the famous legend of Agokoli, the ruler of Notsé deemed autocratic, bloodthirsty, and tyrannical,” Etu says. That’s how a 17th-century fake-news story made its way to my children in the 2020s.

I am not the only person who regrets perpetuating the grotesque exaggeration.



Another brick in the wall: Stories of how the Notsé wall was built have changed over time. Photo: Éric Valenne

Today, a multinational association called Eweto works to reunite the Ewe. Formed in the early 1960s, after Ewe leaders met in Notsé, it organises a cultural gathering every September. The gathering is called Agbogbozan – festival of Agbogbo – and is the climax of several other Ewe festivals. Four hundred years later, the wall Agokoli built is bringing his people together.

In September 2014, community leaders delivered a mea culpa at that year’s Agbogbozan. “Chiefs went in delegation to the foot of the remains of the wall to officially ask forgiveness from Agokoli in the name of their ancestors who had abandoned Notsé, and in their personal names, for having slandered its memory for decades,” says Etu. This is the story I now tell my children. ■

Maxime Koami Domegni is the Francophone Africa editor for the Global Investigative Journalism Network

We can't get no satisfaction: Voters show their displeasure at the polls

Last year was a big year for African democracy, with 15 countries on the continent holding national elections. For nine of those countries, Afrobarometer has survey data from 2011-13 to 2021-23. What insights can long-term trends reveal about electoral outcomes?

Over the past decade, six countries saw striking declines in popular satisfaction with democracy (up to 40 percentage points), approval of the country's overall direction (up to 49 percentage points), and assessments of the previous national election as largely free and fair (up to 37 percentage points).

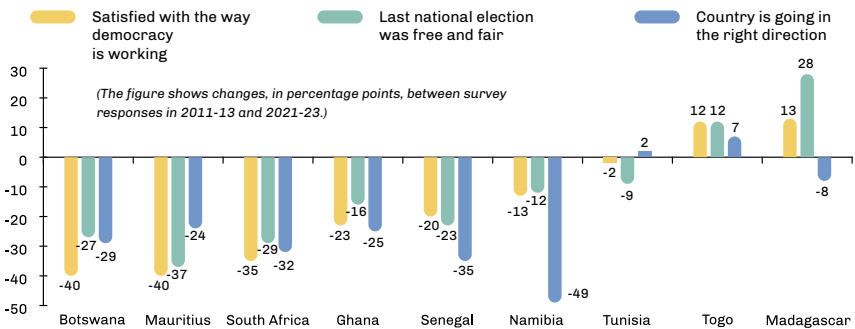
And how did voters react? In Botswana, Mauritius, Ghana, and Senegal, the ruling

parties were booted out. In South Africa, the African National Congress had to enter a coalition government to cling to power. And in Namibia, the South West Africa People's Organisation had its weakest-ever showing, nearly losing its parliamentary majority.

Meanwhile, in Togo, Tunisia, and Madagascar, changes in these indicators were less negative, or even positive, and incumbent leaders held on, although a mixture of electoral repression and fraud may have played a role, too.

Were these outcomes predictable from our data? Perhaps, for they suggest that if elections are free and fair, voters will voice their dissatisfaction at the ballot box. ■

**Change in key indicators (percentage points) |
Nine African countries with elections in 2024 | 2011-23**



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



Music Review

Wilfred Okiche

Wizkid's on cruise control

The world has developed an appetite for his sound. Now we crave it even when he is on autopilot.

When he became an instant superstar with the release of his catchy single *Holla at Your Boy*, Wizkid was a fresh-faced teen. Now all of 34, over the past 15 years he has built one of the most consequential careers in Nigerian music history, becoming a veteran of the game. These days the reliable hitmaker is a cultural icon, whose dominance is conclusive enough that he need not beg for our attention.

His sixth studio album, *Morayo*, sounds like something delivered on autopilot, as Wizkid continues to cruise the rarefied altitudes of global pop. He knows he has competition, but he also knows they aren't touching him just yet.

Morayo is the middle name of Wizkid's mother, who died in 2023 at age 66. A photo of her adorns the album cover. But with just a scattering of nods towards her, the album isn't an overt tribute to his late mum. Only the closing track, the feel-good



Pray, touches on her life directly.

The bulk of *Morayo* is produced by Wizkid's regular collaborator P2J, with some assists by P.Priime. It is drenched in a subtle melancholia, a direction Wizkid has embraced since his international breakthrough with 2020's *Made in Lagos*. But it also shifts between genre and tempo – without inducing whiplash – an elegant melding of these collaborators' influences.

The album's launch was preceded by two singles: the party-starter *Kese (Dance)* and the more relaxed vibe of *Piece of My Heart* (with American singer Brent Faiyaz). Both songs are a fitting representation of *Morayo* as the album moves deftly from bops (*Karamo*, *Bend*, *Soji*) that seem crafted for day-one fans to more chilled-out, sensual reflections on *Slow*, *Time*, and opener *Troubled Mind*.

The record's sound is hardly original – indeed, the building blocks are Afrobeats, R&B, and dancehall, with a smidgen of reggae and fùjì. But Wizkid has elevated all these influences by breathing his own laid-back personality into the record. ■

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

"I'm more than abdel to tell my African presidents apart."

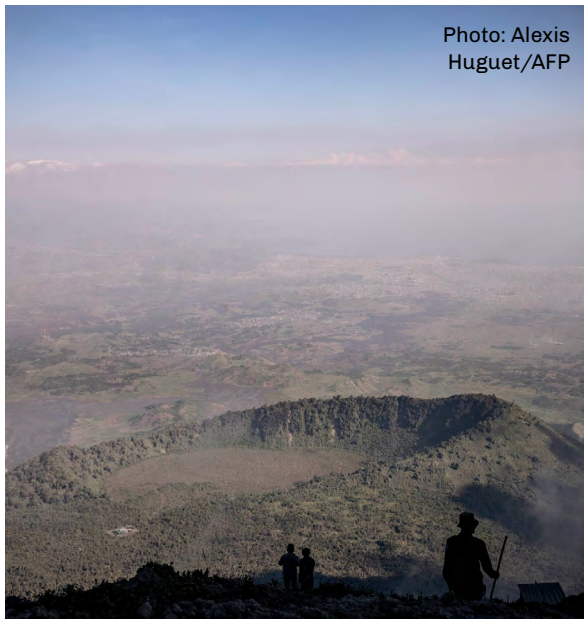


Photo: Alexis Huguet/AFP

1_ Near which Congolese city is Mount Nyiragongo (pictured) located?

2_ True or false: Abdel Fattah al-Burhan is the president of Egypt.

3_ Abdel Fattah El-Sisi is the president of which country?

4_ How many times has US President Donald Trump visited Africa?

5_ "Abyssinia" once referred to which two present-day countries?

6_ Who was the first

African woman to have multiple songs on the Billboard Hot 100?

7_ Grégoire Kayibanda was the first elected president of which country?

8_ In which country are the sacred walls of Notsé located?

9_ In which country was the 2015 film *Beasts of No Nation* shot?

10_ Which country is militia leader Joseph Kony from?

HOW DID I DO? WhatsApp 'ANSWERS' to [+27 73 805 6068](tel:+27738056068) and we'll send the answers to you!



Kem Kem performs her DJ set at the Egwù Vinyl Festival. All Photos: Sogo Oladele/The Continent

Play it again: Vinyl is making a comeback in Nigeria

Most people may stream music now, but the recent Egwù Vinyl Festival shows old-school is still cool.

Samuel Banjoko

Lagos was buzzing with the energy of *Detty December*. Booming Afrobeats clubs and house and techno music raves dominated the city's soundscape. But tucked in the frenzy was a different kind of musical celebration: the Egwù Vinyl Festival, a rare ode to analogue sound and Nigerian music history.

Sir Shina Peters, a jùjú music legend, was the festival headliner. Dressed in a tracksuit and gold chain, reminiscent of his earlier years, Peters delivered an

absolutely electrifying set that bridged generations. Classics like *Ijo Shina* and *Shinamania* captivated the festival-goers, underscoring the enduring power of old Nigerian music. The festival wasn't just about nostalgia. Vinyl-lovers were also treated to contemporary acts by The Hause, Dibs, Kem Kem, Majid, Kikelomo, Yinka Bernie, and Baddestdjeverliveth.

The festival energy – savouring music in its most tactile form and reconnecting with history – was a reminder of the beauty in slowing down.

In a city that is eager to embrace the



Yinka Bernie, one of the founders of Egwù Records, DJing at the Egwù Vinyl Festival.

new, it was a celebration of the old-school.

But it was also the coming-out party of a new community.

Over the past three or four years, a community of vinyl enthusiasts and old-school Nigerian music lovers in Lagos and London has built around Egwù Records, an online vinyl record shop. Egwù Records was founded in 2021 – the year global vinyl album sales hit a 30-year high. The founders – Yinka Bernie, Orry Shenjobi, and Kayo – wanted to offer what today’s streaming can’t.

Decades ago, in the ’70s and ’80s when vinyl was king, collecting records was easier. Today, scarcity has turned it into an art. Running the store is “like treasure hunting”, says Kayo.

“We all collect – that’s the common factor. And we all love music, or work in music, or are creatives. So we just turned a passion into a community and now



Treasure hunt: A volunteer examines albums at the Egwù Vinyl Festival.

it’s a festival,” says Bernie, an artist and producer. ■



Shinamania: The performance of headliner and jùjú music legend Shina Peters at the Egwù Vinyl Festival bridged generations.

Electrifying set: A new community of music lovers has formed around the magic of old vinyl





Collections and reflections: (top to bottom) Vinyls on display at the Egwù Vinyl Festival; a festival-goer poses with an Egwù-branded bag.

THE BIG PICTURE

On the ball: A women's football team training in Hargeisa, Somaliland. The country is characterised by traditional and religious values, but determined women are challenging these norms.

Photo: Luis Tato/AFP



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