

## International

# The toxic cocktail that fuels South Africa's xenophobia

## A witch's brew of unemployment, inequality and poverty

**JOHANNESBURG:** A witch's brew of unemployment, inequality and poverty, mixed with South Africa's violent past, are to blame for attacks on foreigners that so tarnished the country's image last month, experts say. The deadly assaults rocked South Africa's relations with its neighbors but especially with Nigeria, whose president, Muhammadu Buhari, begins a state visit here today.

At least 10 South Africans and two foreigners were killed after mobs descended on foreign-owned stores in poor districts in and around Johannesburg. Analysts told AFP that the violence - the latest in a rash of such attacks over the past decade - is mainly rooted in a sickly economy and faltering politics, stirring rivalry for jobs, especially in manual labor. South Africa is a magnet for poor migrants from neighboring Mozambique, Lesotho and Zimbabwe, but even further afield, including Nigeria and even South Asia.

"South Africa has a terrible combination of extremely high unemployment... and the highest inequality rate in the world," said Nicolas Pons-Vignon, economic researcher at Johannesburg's Wits University. Competition for jobs, social services and housing "create a fertile terrain for mobilization along identity lines,"

he said. Reliable figures are sketchy, but the last census in 2011 counted just over 2.1 million "international migrants", around four percent of South Africa's population at the time. Joblessness hit a record 29 percent this year, reaching above 50 percent for youth.

### Political rhetoric

Loren Landau, a researcher for the African Centre for Migration & Society, said the country's politicians were also indirectly to blame for stoking the mood. "It's anti-immigrant but it's not an immigrant issue," Landau said. Rhetoric tinged with xenophobia ran high in the runup to elections this year. Both the ruling African National Congress (ANC) and rival Democratic Alliance (DA) pledged to crack down on irregular migrants.

Politicians are failing to create jobs, and "when you don't have things to offer, you turn to blaming others," Landau said. Human rights lawyer Sharon Ekambaram pointed out that most tensions played out in densely populated, poorly serviced townships. "We cannot understand the xenophobia of today without locating it in deep, deep poverty" and the government's failure to "transform society" after apartheid, she told AFP.

### Violent history

Another factor is South Africa's own troubled past, whose trauma is felt today, said Verne Harris, head of the Nelson Mandela Foundation. "In 1994 we inherited a deeply wounded society," Harris said. "Old patterns of power, property and wealth haven't been fundamentally transformed. That translates into deep-seated anger and high levels of violence." That brutality is also a legacy of the anti-apartheid struggle. "Townships were deeply politicized and organized by groups that used violence as part of their anti-apartheid campaign," said Landau.

Those people remained and "didn't give up their violent ways." But researcher Savo Heleta also noted the irony of xenophobia in a country that was helped by other African states during the struggle. Many gave the ANC arms, money and political support, allowing it to topple the regime and win every election since. The liberation movement was an illustration of "African unity", said Seleta, who works for the Nelson Mandela University in Port Elizabeth. "There is a failure to speak about this solidarity."

### 'Failure of the state'

Successive governments have since failed to fill

the gaps in social provision created by white supremacy. "In many of our communities, failures of the state have led people to rely on informal systems of power," said Harris. With rampant crime levels and a thin police force, those who cannot afford to live in privately secured areas are confronted with thugs and mob justice. Gang leaders use the hardship of townships to stoke anti-foreigner sentiment and "reinforce their authority at the local level," said Landau. "And they get away with it," he added. Amnesty International has condemned the government's failure to prosecute suspected perpetrators of xenophobic crimes.

The attacks are "a direct consequence of years of impunity and failures in the criminal justice system," it said in a statement earlier this month. Former president Jacob Zuma has been charged with 16 counts of corruption during his time in office. The accusations prompted his resignation last year, although prosecution has been sluggish. "South Africa is a very bad example of people doing terrible things and getting a get-out-of-jail-free card," said Heleta. "When no one gets arrested, that's when people start to realise that they can do terrible things." —AFP

## What's that sound? 'Marsquake' heard

**WASHINGTON:** NASA on Tuesday released two audio clips of seismic activity on Mars after an "exquisitely sensitive" detector was set down on the planet's surface late last year. The quakes, far too quiet to be picked up by the human ear, were recorded by the Seismic Experiment for Interior Structure (SEIS) in May and July. Scientists hope that studying how seis-

mic waves move through the planet's interior will reveal the deep inner structure of Mars for the first time. About 20 so-called "marsquakes" have been detected so far by the dome-shaped SEIS, which is carried by NASA's InSight lander that arrived on Mars in November.

The audio - a low, rumbling noise - has been speeded up and processed to be audible through headphones. One quake was magnitude 3.7 and the other was magnitude 3.3. "Both suggest that the Martian crust is like a mix of the Earth's crust and the Moon's," NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory said. "Mars, with its cratered surface, is slightly more Moon-like, with seismic waves ringing for a minute or so, whereas quakes on Earth can come and go in seconds." The SEIS was developed by the French space agency CNES and partners. —AFP

## Finland sword attacker acted alone, motive still unknown

**HELSINKI:** The man suspected of carrying out a deadly sword attack at a Finnish vocational college acted alone, police said yesterday, as they continued to search for a motive behind the rampage. One woman died and 10 people were injured, including the suspect, on Tuesday when a student at Savo Vocational College in Kuopio, east-central Finland, attacked his teacher and classmates with a "sabre-type bladed weapon", according to police and eyewitnesses. Officers shot the suspect twice, injuring him seriously. A woman was found dead at the scene, police said.

"The police's current view is that the suspect acted alone with no organized crime involvement, for instance," detective chief inspector Olli Toyras of the National Bureau of Investigation said in a statement. Police have yet to question the suspect, who remains in intensive care. "It's our main priority to interview him," deputy chief inspector Jarkko Timonen said. A search of the suspect's residence on Tuesday revealed equipment for making incendiary devices, police said.

Although Finnish law forbids police from identifying a suspect before trial, media outlets named the man as 25-year-old Joel Otto Aukusti Marin. Public broadcaster Yle said a



**KUOPIO:** Police enter a student dormitory in Sarkiniemi in Kuopio, Finland in order to search a suspect's home, a day after he perpetrated a deadly attack in which one person died and 10 people were injured. — AFP

police source confirmed that Marin was the suspect. Neighbors at Marin's student residence described him as a "quiet and closed" man with long, blonde hair, according to newspaper Helsingin Sanomat. "I asked him if we have a problem, as we never speak," one unnamed neighbor told the paper. "He replied that he's a very shy person," the neighbor said.

### Victims mainly women

Kuopio University Hospital said most of the injured were women. The victims were aged 15-50. Six patients remained in hospital yesterday, two in intensive care in a serious but

stable condition, authorities said. Meanwhile more witness reports emerged of the attack, with an unnamed female classmate describing the attacker as a "smart nerd".

On Tuesday he entered class carrying a long bag, she told the newspaper Iltalehki. "He pulled a sword out of it, which didn't even look real. He lifted it up and hit the teacher," injuring her hand. The teacher ran into the back room with the attacker chasing her, as the students began to panic. "Some just fled. But the situation didn't sink in for everyone," she said. "Then he started swinging the sword at the students too." — AFP



**SPACE:** In this handout picture provided by NASA, clouds drift over the dome-covered seismometer, known as SEIS, belonging to NASA's InSight lander, on Mars. NASA released two audio clips of seismic activity on Mars after an 'exquisitely sensitive' detector was set down on the planet's surface late last year. — AFP

## Inmate with rare medical condition executed in US

**WASHINGTON:** A convicted murderer with a rare medical condition was executed Tuesday in Missouri despite his assertion that lethal injection would cause him terrible suffering. Russell Bucklew - who was found guilty of killing his ex-girlfriend's new boyfriend in 1996, then abducting and raping her - was pronounced dead at 6:23 pm. Bucklew, 51, suffered from cavernous hemangioma, a blood vessel condition that hindered his breathing. For the past year, he had been using a tracheotomy tube.

His lawyers had said his execution could be horrific if done by lethal injection. "His face is swollen by the bulging, blood-filled tumors in his face, head and throat," the lawyers wrote in a petition asking Missouri's governor to commute the sentence and have Bucklew serve a life term instead. "These unstable tumors are highly likely to hemorrhage during the stress of the execution, causing Russell to

cough and choke on his own blood."

Governor Mike Parson, a Republican who supports the death penalty, turned down the request Tuesday morning. Bucklew was the 17th inmate put to death in the US this year. "We mourn the unnecessary, unlawful execution of Russell Bucklew tonight," Cassandra Stubbs, the director of the Capital Punishment Project at the American Civil Liberties Union, said in a statement. Authorities in Missouri had twice set dates for his execution, in 2014 and 2018.

Both times, the US Supreme Court ordered last minute stays. Some former prison wardens came out in favor of Bucklew's request, saying they wanted to spare their colleagues the risk of a messy, botched execution.

"Participating in executions places a tremendous weight on the shoulders of the execution team," they said in a court brief. "When as here, an execution is unlikely to go smoothly, and is likely to result in unnecessary pain and suffering, the burden of participation becomes unbearable."

In April, the US Supreme Court rejected arguments over how cruel it would be to execute Bucklew by lethal injection. "The Eighth Amendment does not guarantee a prisoner a painless death," the majority judges said in a 5-4 ruling. The amendment outlaws "cruel and unusual punishments." — AFP

## White US ex-cop guilty of murder for shooting black neighbor

**WASHINGTON:** A former Texas policewoman was convicted of murder Tuesday for shooting dead a neighbor in his own home in what her lawyer said was a "tragic mistake." The case sparked outrage as it became a flashpoint over police violence and racial bias because Amber Guyger is white, while her victim was black. Guyger, who worked in Dallas, claimed that she believed she had returned to her own apartment on September 6, 2018 and that she thought Botham Jean, 26, was an intruder. In fact, the 31-year-old had entered Jean's unlocked apartment, located in the same building but one floor above hers.

"We the jury unanimously find the defendant, Amber Guyger, guilty of murder as charged in the indictment," the jury foreman announced. After the verdict was read, Jean's mother, Allison Jean, stood and looked upward as she celebrated the decision, raising her arms high and wide. "I cannot sleep, I cannot eat, it's just been the most terrible time for me," she later told the jury that will decide on Guyger's sentence. "I try to busy myself to try to get this out of my head. It is very difficult."

The jury, which retired on Monday, deliberated for five hours before delivering its guilty verdict. Guyger, who was off duty after a nearly 14-hour shift, lived in apartment 1378 on the third floor, while Jean lived in apartment 1478 directly above her. "She knows she's made a tragic mistake, but it's not out of evil," Guyger's lawyer, Robert Rogers,



**Dallas Police Department officer Amber Guyger**

told the court when the trial opened, describing it as human error and an act of self-defense. Guyger-a police officer for four years until her sacking following the shooting-sobbed when she took the stand last week.

### Appeals for justice

"I ask God for forgiveness, and I hate myself every single day," she said, voice trembling. "I wish he was the one with the gun who had killed me. I never wanted to take an innocent person's life." After hearing the verdict, Guyger stood as the jury filed out of the courtroom and then sank into her chair. Prosecutor Jason Hermus said Jean, a native of the Caribbean island of St Lucia who worked for an accounting firm, "paid the ultimate price" for Guyger's errors. "She walks past 16 different apartments and fails to register the number four on any one of them," Hermus said during the testimony phase of the trial last week. Prosecutors played Guyger's frantic 911 call, in which she repeatedly tells a dispatcher she is in the wrong apartment. — AFP

## 10-fold surge in South Africa teens treated for HIV

**PARIS:** The number of young people in South Africa receiving treatment for HIV has increased 10-fold within a decade, a major new study has found. South Africa has the largest number of HIV-positive people in the world, with around 7.2 million carrying the virus, which causes AIDS. Researchers studied more than 700,000 young people receiving treatment for the infection and found 10 times the number of adolescents aged between 15-19 being treated compared with 2010.

Authors of the study, published in The Lancet HIV journal attributed the rise partly due to the success of AIDS prevention programs that result in better detection and treatment rates. However they found that fewer than 50 percent of young South Africans who present for HIV care go on to initiate antiretroviral therapy, which can prevent transmission and stops a patient developing AIDS.

"Despite the upswing in numbers initiating therapy, barriers persist that prevent many adolescents from starting treatment," said Mhairi Maskew from the University of Witwatersrand and the report's lead author. These include concerns about stigma, a pervasive sense that clinics cannot guarantee patient confidentiality and increased domestic responsibilities for young people, especially in families where children have lost parents to HIV and AIDS.

The study found that while those diagnosed with HIV were roughly split by gender, nine in 10 people actively receiving treatment were girls. The authors said this was consistent with far higher rates of sexually-transmitted HIV infection in young women compared to young men. AIDS deaths have declined globally since the peak of the epidemic in the early 2000s, but an international AIDS commission warned last year of a resurgence if the world's booming adolescent population weren't protected. — AFP