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SOUTH AFRICA POISED TO DEPORT THOUSANDS OF ZIMBABWEANS

Many Zimbabweans now in South Africa on work permits are unsure whether they will be able to remain in the country for much longer. The South African government announced last year that it will not be extending the work permits for some 160,000 Zimbabweans once they expire in June 2023, and has yet to revise its decision. The situation has left the Zimbabwean work migrants on the horns of a serious dilemma, with many now facing the possibility of deportation back to a country that many of them "know nothing about." These Zimbabweans originally came to South Africa years ago under the Exemption Permit Holders Association (ZEPHA) "in search of better opportunities due to economic woes in [Zimbabwe]," and, after years of residency, are settled into lives in South Africa. The decision has galvanized segments of the South African opposition, as well as human rights activists, who are now challenging the government's decision. (News24, April 10, 2023)

ZAMBIA IN TROUBLE OVER CHINESE DEBT

In the wake of defaulting on its multi-billion dollar loan to China back in 2020, Zambia is seeking a restructuring agreement with Beijing. The country's Minister of Finance, Situmbeko Musokotwane, has argued that the financial hardship comes from unfair conditions, saying that the current situation "is no fault of ours, it is the fault of those we engaged with." Zambia's central bank representatives traveled to China earlier this month to hold negotiations with bondholders and settle on a new repayment deal, but no compromise has yet been struck. (Reuters, April 6, 2023)

SEEKING PRESS FREEDOM IN THE SAHEL

French journalist Olivier Dubois was recently released from a Malian prison after being held hostage for over a year. Following his release, other local journalists spoke out against the suppression of journalists that takes place in the region, emphasizing that the Sahel continues to be a perilous place for reporters. In the past five years, the Sahel has seen five journalists killed, six kidnapped, and many others disappeared.

These perilous conditions, in turn, are being exacerbated by local instability. The new governments in Mali and Burkina Faso, which assumed power as a result of coups, are now manipulating the media to better serve their political interests, says Sadibou Marong, the sub-Saharan Africa director at Reporters Without Borders. Meanwhile, governmental restrictions and safety concerns represent challenges for local reporters, who "fear armed groups" and the situation turning "into a nightmare when [they] come across the defense and security forces." These reporters, in turn, are resorting to covering the Sahel from outside the region, something which limits the depth and probing nature of their reporting. (VOA News, April 8, 2023)

AMERICANS EYE THE EXITS AS SUDAN'S CIVIL WAR WORSENS

Rival generals in Sudan continue to escalate tensions in the country, even as thousands of Americans remain trapped there. Khartoum has been completely "captured by the militias" over the past couple of weeks, as rival factions loyal to either Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, head of the Sudanese military, or Gen. Mohammed Hamed Dagalo, who leads the country's "rapid reaction forces," jockey for political power and position. The Biden administration began pulling out its diplomats from Khartoum, but thousands of other Americans have been left to fend for themselves. According to the World Health Organization, over 420 people have been killed this month, including two Americans, as a result of the violence. The civil crisis is also creating a refugee problem, as Sudanese civilians flee to neighboring countries. Exacerbating the situation, the country's airport has been closed and routes to neighboring nations are proving treacherous. (NBC News, April 25, 2023)

STILL HOPE FOR AMERICA IN AFRICA

It is now conventional wisdom that America is being hopelessly outplayed by China in Africa. But new polling data suggests that this might not be the case after all. The latest polling carried out by Afrobarometer, an Africa-focused survey company, suggests that Washington and Beijing are neck-and-neck in terms of public perceptions on the continent – although neither is winning overwhelming support. Overall, the 28-country average in the Afrobarometer data reveals that "the U.S. and China are at about 49% favorability in their economic and political influence on the continent." The findings are noteworthy, insofar as they suggest that China's continental strategy – entailing massive economic investments and involvement in regional infrastructure – has failed to net overwhelming approval from local populations. That, in turn, suggests that the United States, which has had a much more modest presence and investment in the continent, might be in a position to improve on popular disenchantment with the PRC. (News24, April 26, 2023)