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The Villager
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South Africa is in search of a fairer electoral system. But what's been tabled is flawed

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The five factors behind Kiwis' Test transformation

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Domestic Laws Serve Women And Not Men - Nudo's Kauandenge





■ Uakutura Kambaekua

NUDO's secretary-general Joseph Kauandenge says that Namibian domestic laws are directed at serving women, while there are hardly any laws to protect men.

He said that men are "on their own."

Kauandenge made these remarks while delivering his contribution to the amendment of combating domestic violence act in the National Assembly this week. The combating of domestic violence amendment Bill was introduced in parliament on 24 February 2022 by justice minister Yvonne Dausab to improve the government's response to gender-based violence and the protection of GBV victims from intimidation by perpetrators.

The Nudo SG said that it is a fact that many men are also in abusive relationships but often, when heard of, it becomes a question of how can a woman abuse a man.

"However, the reality tells us a different story that this is happening in our households on a daily basis, and the man folks are too ashamed even to approach the police station as he will be stereotyped as well," said Kauandenge.

Kauandenge also reiterated that physical and emotional abuse perpetrated by women against men is evident, adding that the justice minister should also introduce laws that will protect men from emotional abuse as well. "Any self-respecting man will take this emotional abuse for a very long time. However, one day he will expose, and when that happens, our laws and court systems will only look at the physical act of the man but hardly goes into detail about what led him to become physical in the first place. I respect our women folks that God gave them certain strength and abilities that he did not give us the man folks, but equally, he gave the man folks strength and abilities that only they possess as well," he said.

Kauandenge called for the society's reformation, including laws that will protect women and men alike that are "non-discriminatory to both sexes."

"I'm not making an excuse for those men who intentionally abuse their wives or girlfriends at home. They should be arrested, prosecuted and sentenced, that much we agree," said Kauandenge.

He added that the ministers bringing these amendments to the August house must cast the net far

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NEFF Gives Ombudsman Five Days To Investigate Geingob



■ Ludorf Iyambo

The Namibia Economic Freedom Fighters (NEFF) has given the Ombudsman Basilius Dyakugha until Wednesday, 15 June 2022, to respond to what he will do regarding allegations that President Hage Geingob assisted South African President Cyril Ramaphosa cover up a N$60 million heist.

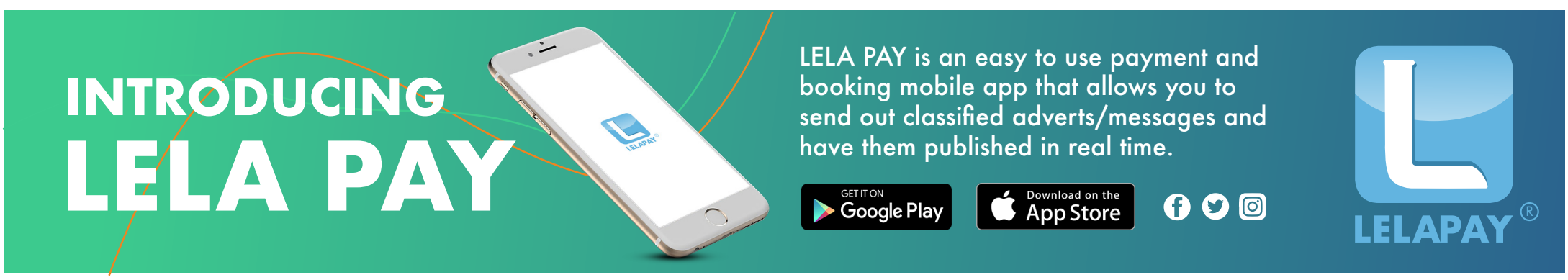
NEFF approached the office of the Ombudsman on Thursday,

requesting that the office institute investigations to confirm or validate these serious allegations.

"We have there requested the Ombudsman to execute article 92, which grants powers of investigation to that office in line with the Namibian Constitution to investigate Geingob," said NEFF deputy leader Kalimbo Iipumbu.

Upon submitting its investigation call, Iipumbu said only the Ombudsman has the duty to investigate complaints concerning practices and actions by persons, enterprises, and private institutions regarding the briding of rights. He said such complaints could be allegations of rights and freedom violations under the constitutions. He added that Geingob allegedly illegally and secretly worked with Ramaphosa to conceal a crime of theft, money laundering, and bribery in South Africa in 2020.

Continued on P2



Domestic Laws

and wide and "decolonise" their minds as well, to not only protect one gender while leaving one at the mercy of the other.

Kauandenge's remarks were refuted by advisor to the First Lady and gender and child protection specialist Dr Veronica Theron. She said the laws protecting survivors of sexual and gender-based violence in Namibia are all gender-neutral to a point where the rape act definition was changed.

"The old definition before 2000 was rape is an act without the consent of a woman, where there was reference made to female. My experience before 2000 was boys and men were treated differently when they reported and disclosed rape. After 2000 it was totally done away with because you don't have to prove it's against a woman," said Theron.

Theron further told the Villager that there is no reference made to a male or female but to a survivor or complaint, adding that people are struggling with the attitude and the insensitivity of first responders, including gender harmful norms and practices. She said the GBV Act has nothing to do with the legislation but with "our own perception, ideas, values and norms."

"The old definition before 2000 was rape is an act without the consent of a woman, where there was reference made to female."

NEFF

Iipumbu said it is further alleged that the duo conspired in the illegal interrogation, abduction and deportation of Immanuwela David, who was one of the suspected thieves that stole the money at Phala Phala farm.

Iipumbu said Geingob did that without following due process under the Namibia extradition Act, 1996 and the criminal procedure Act, 1977.

"It is, therefore, our considered views that such alleged acts by the President are tantamount to the violations of the oath of his office," said Iipumbu

Furthermore, the party stated that if the allegations are true, then Geingob would have conspired with the officials from the immigration and border, airport control department and officials from the police department to ensure that criminal laws are not complied with.

"Ombudsman shall be independent and subject to the constitution and the law."

They further called on cabinet members and legislature not to interfere with the Ombudsman's investigations.

Earlier this week, media reports had shown that South African president Cyril Ramaphosa roped in Geingob to trace part of the N$60 million stolen from his farm.

Geingob has since responded, saying he is confused about reports of him assisting Ramaphosa to conceal a robbery at his Phala Phala game farm in February 2020.

The news came rocking after former South African spy Arthur Fraser accused Geingob and Ramaphosa of a cover-up in the theft of millions.

Meanwhile, the EFF in South Africa wants President Cyril Ramaphosa to answer a list of questions in Parliament regarding money stolen from his farm in February 2020.

EFF leader Julius Malema on Tuesday said his party had submitted questions regarding rule 145 of the National Assembly.

Malema made a string of allegations against Ramaphosa, accusing the President of money laundering and tax evasion.

The EFF further wants Ramaphosa to answer questions regarding how much money was stored at the farm and in what currency, whether it was all proceeds of the game auction or there was additional money that came from elsewhere?

"Did he call the President of Namibia to arrange for the illegal extradition of the people who took the money from the farm?" Malema asked.

Malema alleged, without providing evidence, that he believed Ramaphosa was involved in a money-laundering scheme.

The EFF leader singled out Geingob, saying he had aided Ramaphosa by allowing his private security to kidnap the people involved in the robbery, which led to them being tortured.

Maltahohe HR Manager Locks Self In Office … Claims Threats From Acting CEO

■ **Kelvin Chiringa**

A Maltahohe Village Council human resource manager claims that she has become the victim of intimidation and threats of arrests for standing in the way of the Acting chief executive officer, whom she claims is hellbent on cancelling the advertisement of the CEO's position.

Mariana Afrikaner told The Villager that the Maltahohe police threatened to break down the door of her office on Thursday morning.

She said this is after accusations were made that she has been leaking information to the media. She has also been accused of using a fellow workmate's phone to lodge complaints with the line ministry concerning what she alleges to be a deliberate delay by the council in putting in place a full-time CEO.

In another development, the wife of the unnamed colleague reported to the police that Afrikaner was using her spouse's phone to contact the ministry with complaints concerning the CEO's recruitment.

A video in which the HR manager shut herself in her office as the police attempted to pick her up to answer to the case has also been made available to this publication.

"I am being threatened. Two weeks ago, we wrote a concern letter to the ministry for its intervention (in the hint for) a substantive CEO. I am part of the employees who signed that letter to make sure that the ministry makes sure the recruitment process is completed. Currently, as we are speaking, the advertisement for the CEO's position has been done, shortlisting, only the interview process is due," she said.

Afrikaner, in documents seen by The Villager, had advised the council to be fair and professional in the process of getting a full-time accounting officer.

She has also claimed that the acting CEO, Gerson Tjitaura, wants to break the rule of confidentiality by insisting on getting his hands on the list of shortlisted candidates.

But Tjitaura has, in the meantime, rejected Afrikaner's accusations saying that the police made a turn at the Village Council's office for a charge in which a colleague's wife had opened against the HR manager.

He has also put it on record that there was nothing amiss about his request to get hold of the list of shortlisted candidates.

"I really don't know where this is coming from. Since Friday last week, Mariana and I have not spoken. She is at the office every time I am at the office, so I don't know where she is getting this from."

"Since we returned from Windhoek, we have been discussing other developmental issues. We have never spoken to Mariana. I come to work to do my work. I am a very professional person with all my staff. I don't have any other personal issues with Mariana," he said.

In the meantime, the Maltahohe Police denied that they had intentions to arrest Afrikaner and that there were threats to break down her office door on Thursday mid-afternoon.

"No, no, she is not about to be locked up. We received a complaint from one of the Village Council workers' wife, and we are bringing both parties together so that we can hear both of them out. Let her not give you false information. That is false information that she is providing to you," said the Maltahohe station commander.

Afrikaner is said to have also opened a case of victimisation from other councillors, the police said.

The Villager last week reported that the Maltahohe Village Council found itself in a difficult position in connection with a recruitment drive for a substantive CEO as it is failing to get money to advertise for the position.

Documents disclosed that the Village Council is running against time to secure a CEO at the back of complaints lodged with the urban and rural development ministry that the process is being delayed.

The Village Council then resorted to sending a begging bowl to the minister of urban and rural development, asking for funds to place an advert.

But Tjitaura later denied this, saying the Village Council was in a sound financial state and that there was no attempt to scuttle the CEO's hunting process.

He also said there was nothing amiss about asking the ministry for assistance.

"I am being threatened. Two weeks ago, we wrote a concern letter to the ministry for its intervention (in the hint for) a substantive CEO.





Submitting Extradition Request Could Force Iceland To Act - IPPR's Hopwood



■ Justicia Shipena

Although Icelandic laws indicate that it does not extradite its citizens, Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) executive director Graham Hopwood says Namibia submitting an extradition request for fishrot suspects in the country could force it to act.

This comes after the research agency and Transparency International Iceland has called on Iceland and Namibia to do more to ensure fishrot suspects are held accountable.

According to Hopwood, international laws show Namibia can submit its extradition request.

"Then, if the Icelandic authorities turn it down, they have an obligation under the UN Convention against corruption to charge the people in their own country," he said.

He expressed that it is suitable for Namibia to send the extradition, which will have much evidence attached.

"Then the Icelandic authorities will be forced to react. They say they can't be extradited, but if they do that, they are obliged to prosecute them in their country," he said.

He stressed that is the process that is expected to happen. However, he said it is taking a long time.

Hopwood said Iceland has suspects who were involved in driving the corruption scheme but has not arrested anybody.

"But here we are more than two years after the fishrot exposé, and Iceland hasn't moved to arrest the main suspects," he said.

Last year, Icelandic authorities said they would not hand over Samherji executives to appear in the Namibian courts on allegations of bribery and corruption.

At that time, Namibia had indicated it wanted the officials extradited to appear in Namibian courts. At the back of it, the Iceland deputy prosecutor said according to Icelandic laws, the country does not extradite its citizens. Iceland's Extradition of Criminals and Other Assistance in Criminal Proceedings Act states, "Icelandic citizens may not be extradited unless the request stems from Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden."

Touching on the matter of lawyer Maren de Klerk, accused of being a paymaster in the fishrot scandal, Hopwood said Namibia requested the South African authorities to arrest him.

De Klerk is said to have fled to South Africa in January 2020 and has not returned.

"So he will be extradited, and he is among those charged, but I understand that the South African authorities are dragging their feet in this," he said.

He added that the South African authorities are not acting on it, and it is partly because they say his whereabouts are not known.

He emphasised that there is a need for action to be taken on this.

During the bail hearing of the six men accused in the fishrot case, it was revealed that Maren De Klerk also benefited from his capacity totalling N$332 250.

"Being involved in the matter through Celax Investments number one Pty Ltd, Maren received N$7 679 549, and Moyo Estate CC (N$2 300 475) as well as De Klerk, Horn & Coetzee (DHC) (N$3 645 579)." De Klerk then benefited N$13 957 853 in the end, and N$4 681 518 was held in the trust account of DHC.

CALL FOR ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE MILLIONS

Moreover, Hopwood said although the suspects in Namibia have been charged, more people are involved in the corruption case who should not be excluded.

"And they can't just be excluded from the investigation no matter who they are in terms of their position," stressed Hopwood.

He stamped that everybody involved in the corruption scandal should be held accountable.

In a joint statement issued by IPPR Namibia and Transparency International Iceland seeking international accountability for the fishrot corruption scandal, the two said they welcome the ongoing visit of Namibian investigators and prosecutors to Iceland to discuss cooperation regarding prosecutions in the Fishrot corruption scandal.

"We are also encouraged by the simultaneous visit of a delegation led by Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, Namibia's minister of international relations, to Iceland this week," it reads.

The statement further reads that Transparency International Iceland and IPPR hope the visit of the international relations minister can be used as an opportunity for the two governments to boost cooperation in tackling corruption in both countries.

They add that it should boost the need to seek accountability in the fishrot case.

It further states that reports that prosecutor-general Martha Imalwa and deputy director-general of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) Erna van der Merwe are in Iceland, meeting with Icelandic investigators and prosecutors, show sign of possible cooperation in this transnational criminal investigation.

"I think that shows that they are starting to cooperate and share evidence. We hope it will lead to the prosecution in Iceland being speeded up. So there is some sign of hope here," Hopwood told The Villager.

According to them, the mutual cooperation aligns with Namibia's and Iceland's commitments under the UN Convention against corruption.

"We note that as of 7 June 2022, Namibia has not yet formally delivered its request for the extradition of three Icelandic suspects wanted in Namibia in relation to fishrot," it read.

Additionally, they urged justice minister Yvonne Dausab to make her decision regarding extradition as soon as possible.

"Citizens of both countries had expressed, through public protests, news investigations and civil society efforts, that it cannot be right that only Namibian citizens are held legally accountable for fishrot when the corruption scandal involved individuals in Iceland."

10 SUSPECTS ARRESTED THUS FAR

In January this year, Namibia failed to submit extradition requests to force suspects in Iceland to face criminal charges in Namibia relating to the fishrot case. During this time, the justice ministry, which the ACC has accused of failing to do its job, has refused to provide clarity, claiming that the case is sensitive.

While Imalwa, in February last year, announced that the fishrot-linked Icelandic executives would face criminal charges.

However, little appears to have been done to hold Icelandic officials accountable for their role in the N$2,5 billion case.

In this light, the justice ministry was accused of dragging out the process.

In February this year, the justice ministry's acting executive director, Simataa Limbo, had labelled it as a sensitive matter.

In September 2021, it was reported that the delay in the extradition process caused friction between the justice ministry and the ACC, with the ACC accusing the justice ministry of failing to ensure the three Icelandic nationals have their day in court.

The fishrot corruption scandal involves allegations that Icelandic fishing company, Samherji, paid millions of dollars in bribes to a group of Namibian politicians and businessmen in return for fishing quotas. This allegedly occurred over seven years, from 2012 to 2019.

At the moment, ten suspects, including two Namibian former cabinet ministers, have been arrested in connection to the scheme and are awaiting trial.

At least eight suspects are under investigation in Iceland.

However, no Icelandic citizens have been charged in Iceland concerning the case, while Namibia has named three Icelandic suspects, senior figures in Samherji.

The Namibian government is reported to be in the process of finalising its extradition request for the three Icelandic suspects.

"…Shortcuts Are Always Dangerous..."

Says Police As Woman's Body Is Discovered



■ Hertha Ekandjo

Khomas police commander commissioner Ismael Basson has warned the public from using shortcuts and bushy areas.

This came after a woman's body was discovered next to ELCIN Hosianna Parish near the Swapo headquarters in the early morning hours of Thursday, covered in blood.

"We always advise people that shortcuts are always where all danger is laying. Shortcuts are mostly bushy areas where criminals are laying," He advised that people should always be in open areas and encouraged the police to patrol regularly.

"It is suspected that it must have happened at 06h00 or 07h00 in the morning. It is suspected that she was stabbed. She was killed somewhere close to the independence arena and walked some kilometres before she eventually fell and died," he told The Villager.

According to the commissioner, the deceased is an older woman, but the police could not yet determine her age.

Basson said this was a murder, but no suspects were currently arrested. Police investigations continue.

Namibia, Botswana Officially Sign Afcon Co-Host Bid Agreement



■ Ludorf Iyambo

On Thursday, sports minister Agnes Tjongarero said Botswana would contribute 60 per cent and Namibia 40 per cent of the resources needed after the two countries officially signed a deal to bid for the Afcon 2027 collectively.

The deal will facilitate establishing the technical bid committee and producing the bid document for submission to CAF in line with the set timelines.

"The same principle shall apply in sharing proceeds and benefits of hosting Afcon 2027. In the likely event we are successful in securing the rights to host the Afcon finals, Namibia will host the opening ceremony, and Botswana will host the closing ceremony and both the third-place playoff and final match."

The deal also entails lobbying for support from various international structures and developing a robust and appealing strategy that will secure the involvement of the private sector and other key stakeholders at the project's bid stage to complement the two governments' resource contributions.

Additionally, working through the formal bidding process for Botswana and Namibia to secure the rights for the two countries is also part of the agreement.

"In this arrangement, Botswana will host 24 of the 36 group stage matches, whilst Namibia will host 12. Botswana will host five of the eight rounds of 16 matches, whilst Namibia hosts three matches. She said that the quarter-finals and the semi-finals will be shared equally between the two countries," she said.

The minister added that there would be a bid technical committee established by both countries, with the chairperson coming from Botswana and the vice-chairperson from Namibia.

She further said the committee would also be responsible for lobbying for support from various CAF affiliated structures.

"This will be conducted with the full support of the political leadership of the two countries. I want to take this opportunity to pledge this unconditional support from all levels of the political leadership of Botswana and Namibia." Said Tjongarero.

Meanwhile, Tjongarero's counterpart, Botswana sports minister Tumiso Rakgare said this opportunity would help arrest the volatile unemployment situation.

"We need to arrest social and economic ills through sport. Our dream is centred on a developmental ambition more than a mere 90-minute spectacle. It must be the footballers and its ancillary stakeholders who benefit from the Afcon. But the legacy must be unquestionable," said Rakgare.

Domestic Slaughters Still Trails Live Export

■ Nghiinomenwa Erastus



For the first four months of the year, producers have sold more of their cattle as live export compared to the throughput at slaughtering abattoirs and butchers for a bit of value addition.

The Villager Business Desk's analysis of the latest cattle marketing statistics from the Meat Board of Namibia revealed this.

For the four months, local producers sold/exported 5 167 more live head of cattle than it sold to local slaughterhouses (for beef export and local consumption).

The April 2022 statistics show that domestic slaughtering (for export and consumption) received 33 901 head of cattle in the space of four months, while live export received 39 067 head of cattle for the period.

As the country battles the value addition issues, the producers search for better pricing for their cattle. The choice also involves the cost of raising a ready-to-slaughter animal and a weaner, which mostly influences live export for mostly weaners and selling ready to slaughter.

Month on month observation shows that every month the country exports 500- 2 445 live head of cattle, mostly to stock up the South African market.

However, for April, live export reduced substantially, as the difference between what was offered to domestic slaughterhouses and sold live to SA was just 175 head of cattle.

The reduction in live export has also come when the Weaner/B2 ratio went down from 81.73 per cent to 66.17 per cent edging closer to the national industry balance of 64 per cent.

The ratio indicates if it is profitable to venture into ready-to-slaughter cattle or if one will just sell weaners.

For producers to consider raising slaughter-ready animals, the gap/price difference between wearner and slaughter-ready cattle must be at least 36 per cent or more.

Regarding local slaughtering, the 9 921 head of cattle that were supplied were divided among export abattoirs (8 432) and local butchers (1 489).

Within export abattoirs, Meatco received 5 832 of the head of cattle. Of this, 2 144 were sold to Beefcor, while Hartlief received 248 of the ready-to-slaughter animals. These are all abattoirs on the south of the redline.

On the northern side of the redline, the only exporting abattoir there, Zamco did not slaughter for the first three months of the year. However, in April 2022, it slaughtered 207 head of cattle.

Slaughtering at export abattoirs is up by 76.74 per cent (23 679 cattle slaughtered by A-class abattoirs) for the four months observed,

As a result, April 2022 recorded 944 tons of beef exports, bringing the year-to-date exports to 2 988 tons.

However, Meat Board analysis shows that export abattoirs are still operating way below capacity but are 67.81 per cent better off than in 2021 (Jan-Apr).

The distribution of head of cattle supplied to local butchers is also skewed more to the south of the redline, as out of 1 489 head of cattle butchered for the local formal market, only 345 were slaughtered north of the redline in April 2022.

Overall, total cattle marketing increased by 18.95 per cent from 61 344 cattle during the first four months of 2021 to 72 968 cattle from January to April 2022.

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The Poor Becoming Victims to Churches - Rundu Activist

■ Annakleta Hikera

Patrick Shiyemo Kashera, a Tumweneni resident in Rundu and youth activist, says that churches operating illegally in the Kavango East region continue deceiving the poor people.

According to Kashera, this is happening in informal settlements, rural and urban areas, especially at Rundu in the two Kavango regions, where the poor become victims of many churches.

Last year, a self-proclaimed prophet of the Victory Church allegedly prescribed a concoction that killed three people in the Kavango West. He was later arrested after police found him at Karukuvisa Village, approximately 150 km south of Rundu, where he was treating people for various ailments in villages.

"I am not discouraging people from joining new churches roaming in our country, especially in Rundu. I believe that our government must do more to regulate these churches. Seriously, a group of thugs is doing all they can to collect money from the people. Mostly, 95 per cent of women in those churches are brainwashed."

In another incident this year, two women accused a self-proclaimed prophet, Sebarius Muronga, of impregnating and assaulting them. His church at Satotwa, Rundu, was ordered to close down.

"People are just walking around the churches as if they are sowing seed in the field during prayer. One might think that maybe they are insane, whilst these are normal people. Some of these churches conduct services seven days a week. It's the whole month with no resting time. People are asked to run to the altar to give their offerings as if competing in a 100m race."

Kashera says that he witnessed a woman who fell yet still managed to stand and continue running in order to offer her thanksgiving.

"I fear this exercise might cause a very serious stampede one day. The pastor is forever threatening people not to spy on them, otherwise, he will curse anyone doing so. Why should you curse someone if you are a man of God and you know that what you are doing is for God unless you are fake?"

He said many churches in his town use big speakers at an open kambashu.

"The noise is too much, since sometimes they go beyond 10 pm, even if they should finish earlier than 10 pm. Who told them everyone wants to listen to this terrifying noise in the community?"

He accused pastors of not allowing people to take videos with a phone during services, while the pastors and ushers can do so with their phones.

"Does it mean the moment you enter that church, you have to authorise yourself to be recorded while you are not allowed to record yourself with your own phone or camera? What secrets are they hiding?"

He recommends that state security investigate churches and advise the government correctly on how to regulate these churches.

"As much as they are men of God and ready to help people, they must stop threatening people. We are living in a democratic country. A theology degree or diploma is a must. We need professional people to run churches, not thugs.

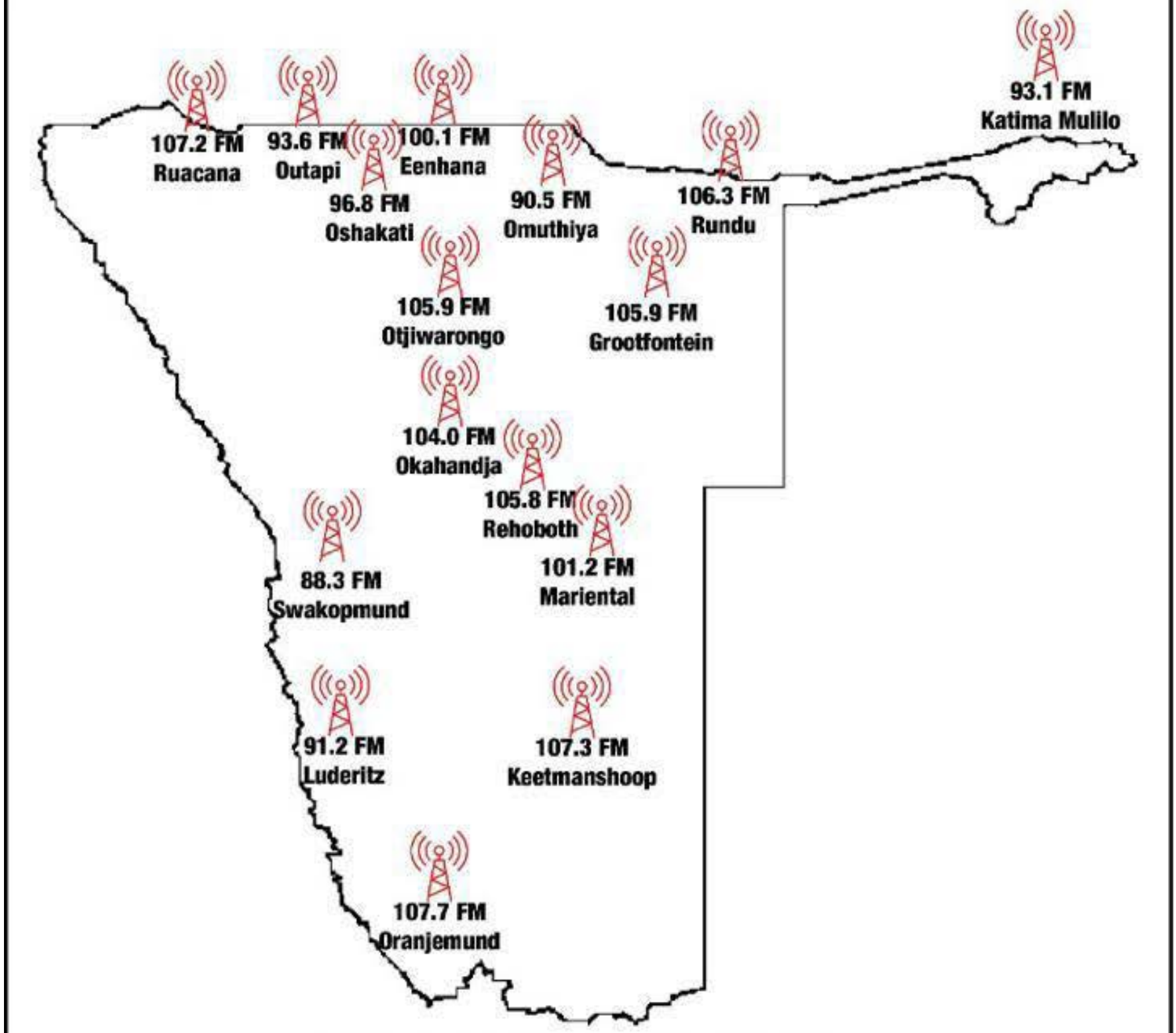
They must minimise their sound system, and services must have timeframes and limitations. You can't keep people seven days, 52 weeks and 365 days busy with this kind of behaviour. When are they going to work or look for jobs?"





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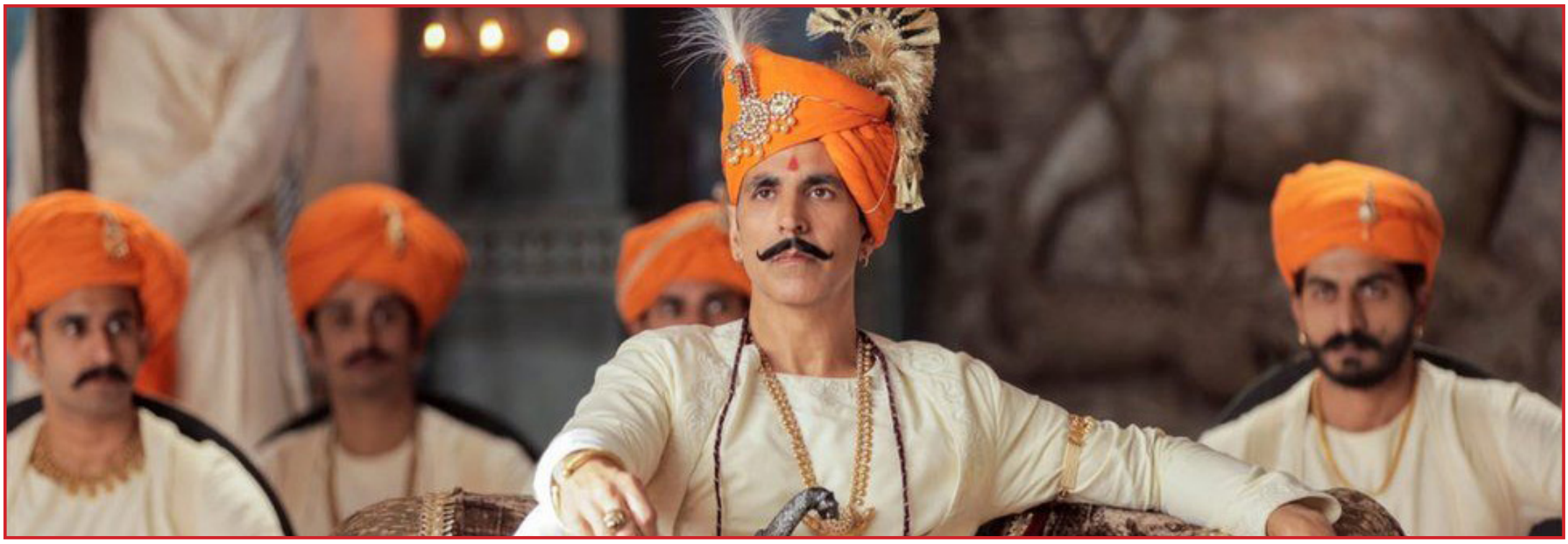
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Why did a Bollywood film on a popular Hindu king fail?



■ Geeta Pandey

It was a film that was expected to set the box office on fire.

The story of Prithviraj Chauhan - a handsome king who stole a beautiful princess, who had professed her love for him, from right under her treacherous father's nose and fought valiantly in sweeping battles involving elephants, horses and larger-than-life men - has resonated with Indians for hundreds of years.

Often described as "the last great Hindu emperor", Chauhan ruled over present-day Rajasthan and Delhi in the 12th Century. And the timeless love story of the king and his beautiful queen Sanyogita and the battles he won - and finally lost - against Muhammad of Ghor figure prominently in history textbooks.

Bollywood star Akshay Kumar, who plays the titular historical role in the film and is one of India's most bankable actors with legions of fans at home and abroad, recently said that playing the warrior king was "a matter of pride" for him and that if his mother was alive, she too would have been very proud of him.

But on Sunday, when I took my seat in a cinema hall in the Indian capital, Delhi, to watch Samrat (emperor) Prithviraj, the much-hyped celluloid version, my expectations were already tempered.

Just two days since the film's release, there were plenty of tickets available, and the auditorium was at least one-third empty. Reviewers had trashed the film, calling it "soulless", "tedious" and "dreary". Shubhra Gupta, film critic for the Indian Express newspaper, described it as "simplistic, shorn-of-nuance, a film that is loud and lurid".

By Monday morning, reports said, cinema halls were cancelling shows due to a lack of ticket sales and the film was deemed a spectacular failure.

So how did that happen?

Samrat Prithviraj was wrapped in controversy from the start.

In the run-up to its release last Friday, it had created a huge buzz on social media with Kumar's controversial comment that "history textbooks are filled with information on Mughal invaders, but have little on the glory and valour of Hindu kings such as Prithviraj Chauhan".

Kumar has made news in recent years not just for his films but for his growing proximity with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government, even earning the moniker of "poster boy for Hindu nationalism". Three years back, he had attracted much ridicule for a TV interview where he'd asked the prime minister whether he ate mangoes and whether he chopped them up or sucked on them while standing over a sink.

No surprises then that the film got a big leg up from the government. Three BJP ruled states made it tax free - to bring ticket prices down and make it more appealing to audiences. And Home Minister Amit Shah, after watching it with Kumar at a special screening, described it as an important part "in the journey of India's cultural revival which will take the country back to its glory days".

But the film, historians say, is riddled with inaccuracies, based as it is on Prithivaj Raso - a poem by Chand Bardai who was said to be the king's court poet. They say it was a fake account, written in the 16th Century, 350 years after Prithviraj's death.

And critics say the film is the latest in a long list of movies being made under the BJP government to paint India's Muslim minorities as "outsiders" and "cruel invaders".

Historian Arup Banerji says these accounts were not written to meet historical accuracy. "You can't judge historical writings by the standards of our time. These writings were mostly panegyrics, written to glorify the leaders and rulers."

And films, he says, are being made for a particular audience and they have a certain purpose - "a politically-conscienctising role" - and the audience that goes to see Bollywood films such as Prithviraj or Jodha Akbar or Padmavat is not looking for historical accuracy.

But, Prof Banerji says, complexities of history cannot be reduced to the Hindu-Muslim binary.

"Prithviraj was fighting a war concerned with protecting his territory, he was not fighting Muslim invaders. To get to Delhi, the Turks from the west had to come via Rajasthan, his territory, so resistance was unavoidable for him, it was an accident of history. So he cannot be recruited into a camp now to serve the interests of the current ruling party."

But with muscular nationalism at its peak now, "is it any surprise that a Hindutva-inclined Bollywood filmmaker finds Prithviraj an attractive personality to bring to the cinema screen?" he asks.

"They are co-opting figures from history and it's a part of BJP's ever-advancing campaign to colonise people's cultural beliefs. The aim of this film is to capture people's imagination, so they want to show Hindus who were victorious over Muslims."

Shubhra Gupta says many films are made "to buttress the glories of the past".

"The idea is to make them so shiny and formidable that the audience shut their eyes to all that's happening in the present. It's happening in many parts of the world, not just in India, where figures from history are being co-opted by the governments for their benefit."

But the big question for Akshay Kumar, she says, is - "why has your general audience turned their back on you?"

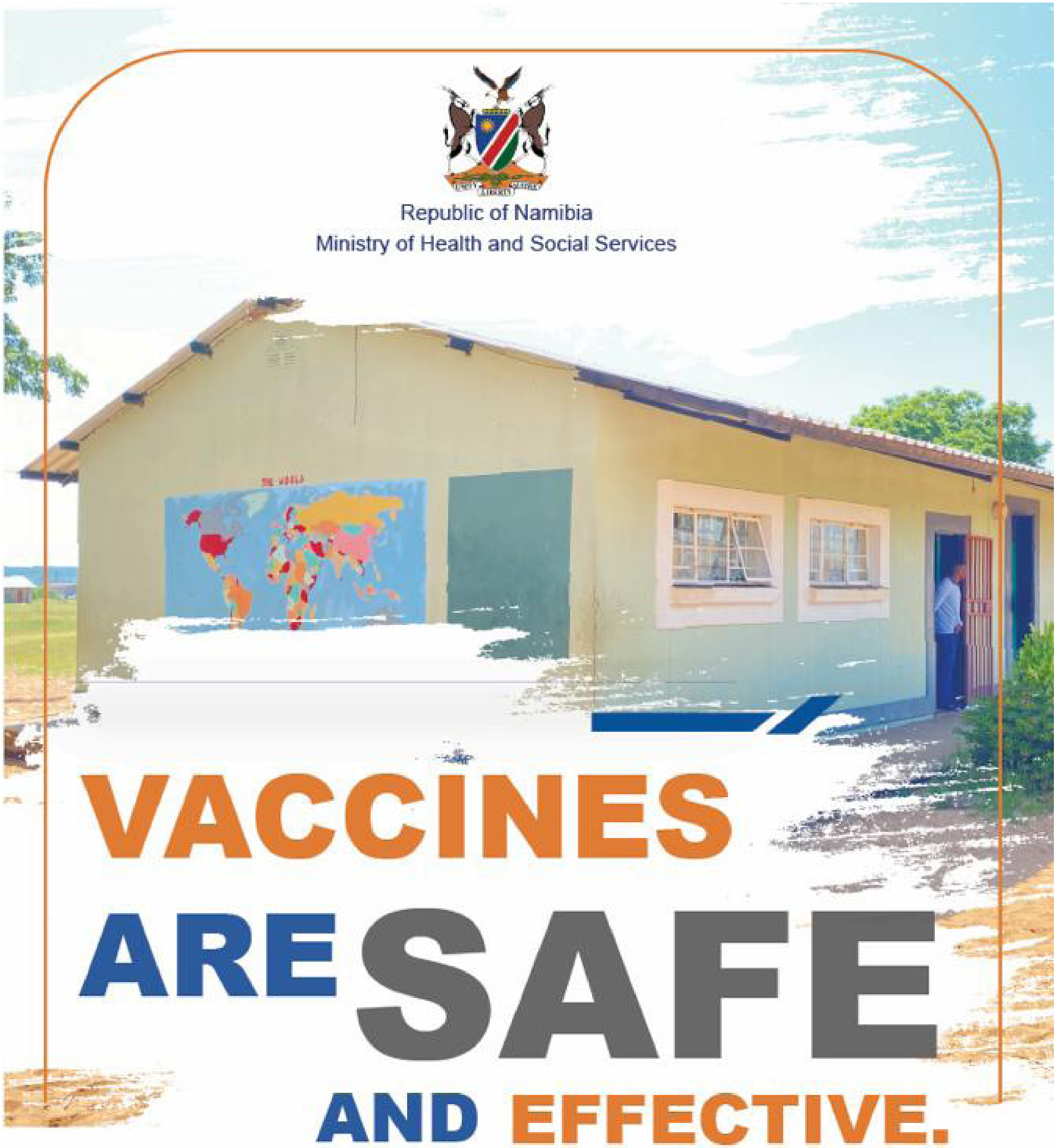
"And to my mind, it seems that it's not just because of the kind of film it is, but also that the narrative hasn't got anything that leaps off the screen at me. Except for a few moments, this two-and-a-half-hour film is so dreary."

-BBC



Republic of Namibia

Ministry of Health and Social Services



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Big Lips

Be Careful Gentlemen, Self-Praise is a Disease

There is one perfect example of setting your examination, invigilating yourself while you are writing, marking your paper and then announcing yourself the best student.

And that example is what comedian Lazarus Jacobs did with Namibia's Best Brands. This time comedian Lazarus Jacobs also did not forget his friend Tim Ekandjo.

Needless to say, comedian Lazarus Jacobs is the Namibia Broadcasting Corporation board chairperson, while Tim Ekandjo is the deputy chairperson.

The comedian is also Brand Africa's Namibia chairman and TBWA Paragon Executive Director.

These not so-gentle gentlemen awarded themselves 'the Africa Brand Leadership awards for their sustained exceptional and inspired leadership in business, industry and public sector, respectively, that has contributed to the success of Made in Namibia brands and initiatives'.

The awards recognise comedian Lazarus Jacobs and Tim Ekandjo's sustained exceptional and inspired leadership in business, industry and the public sector. Comedian Lazarus Jacobs co-owns TBWA, which runs the awards.

Does it surprise then that Namibia's Best Brands listed MTC as the best brand and NBC has the best media something? I am sure that this is another comedy act at play here.

There is no doubt that MTC has subscribers, but ignoring other brands that have emerged lately is like playing the game alone. For all the current problems the Namibia Broadcasting Corporation has, and the challenges from other emerging broadcasters, comedian Lazarus Jacobs and Tim Ekandjo want the nation to believe this puerile act.

Just imagine that James Mnyupe has also been listed as a brand! A brand for talking about green hydrogen? Talking about hydrogen as a success now is like talking about Jesus' return. Of course, green hydrogen could be a reality for other countries. For Namibia, it should be tested, and until we see it taking off the ground, we can praise and award James Mnyupe. This does not mean that James Mnyupe is not doing a good job, but awarding him now for something he did not invent makes the whole concept of Africa Brands just another self-serving adventure.

I am not so sure what Tim Ekandjo has done for Namibia? Is it about giving out shoes to school children? Or is it about growing the MTC brand? Since the Portuguese left, the truth is that MTC has not been that innovative. The emerging telecommunications companies have done much better when it comes to innovation and creativity. MTC had those phones from China. It appears no one can think about anything better. MTC's 081Everybody fell flat with some of their towers toppling over untouched.

The comedian Lazarus Jacobs cannot boast about pushing the concept of Brand Africa in Namibia. The problem is that the whole idea of Brand Africa does not seem to make much sense to many Namibians.

For example, the awards were given on 7 June, and today the media has not picked up anything. If at all the Best Brand idea meant something, Namibia could by now be talking about how great the men who awarded themselves have contributed immensely to the country's well-being.

Maybe I am in the dark; what business is Lazarus Jacobs in again? Media? Hospitality? Fishing? Advertising? What again?

While this is laughable, it is sad the say the least because it cheapens well-deserving Namibian brands and business people who have made and are making a genuine difference in the lives of the majority.

It is a good thing to boost one's self-esteem, but if done excessively, those praising themselves will suffer depression if the majority ignores the efforts of those self-praisers.

The American Psychology Association found that 'people who try to boost their self-esteem by telling themselves they've done a great job when they haven't could end up feeling dejected instead'.

According to the association, 'high and low performers felt fine when they assessed themselves accurately, probably because the high performers recognised their strengths and low performers acknowledged their weaknesses and could try to improve their future performance'.

South Africa is in search of a fairer electoral system. But what's been tabled is flawed



South Africa is amending its electoral law to make it fairer by enabling citizens to contest provincial and national elections without being forced to join political parties.

The follows a 2020 Constitutional Court judgment that found that excluding citizens from being elected as independent individuals was unconstitutional. The court gave parliament 24 months to amend the 1998 Electoral Act accordingly.

South Africa's constitution prescribes an electoral system "that results, in general, in proportional representation". The country has used this system for national and provincial elections since 1994.

But, in 2020, the New Nation Movement, a civil society body, challenged the electoral system for unfairly excluding independent candidates. In their view, the act made it impossible for voters to have a direct link to national and provincial representatives who can be directly accountable to them.

A new Electoral Amendment Bill has been tabled before parliament. It allows for two categories of individual candidates: those who run purely as independents as well as those nominated by political parties.

The proposed new system is similar to the country's local government electoral system. Under this system an equal number of proportional party representatives and individual ward councillors are elected. It is also similar to Lesotho's mixed member proportional system. This combines individually elected parliamentarians with proportionally elected party members.

In my view this arrangement would undermine the intention of the court judgement.

Firstly, they won't meet the requirements of making the electoral system more responsive to local voters because party nominated candidates, who will still be able to run, will have an unfair advantage over independents. And, as the current system clearly shows, candidates who are part of party lists aren't directly accountable to the electorate.

Flaws

There are flaws in the bill related to broader rights as set out in the constitution.

One relates to the right to belong to a political party.

The constitution guarantees every citizen the right to be a member of a party. But clause 31B(3)(f) in the bill determines that one of the requirements for an independent candidate is that they should not have been a member of a political party for at least three months before their nomination date. This seemingly violates section 19(1)(b) of the constitution, which guarantees the right for everyone

to participate in the activities of … a political party.

The right to be a member of a party can't be denied, even temporarily.

The phrasing of this clause in the bill seems to be missing the point. From the public's point of view, the emphasis is very much on seeking alternatives to candidates who are the products of internal party nomination processes. The minimum requirements for such an independent should, therefore, be that a candidate is not nominated by a party, and their nomination and campaign are not funded by a party.

Membership of a party – or any other organisation – cannot be restricted by legislation.

Another area of concern is what impact independent representatives will have on the proportional representation in the National Assembly and provincial legislatures.

Section 19 of the constitution has to be read together with section 46(1)(d), which states that the electoral system must "result, in general, in proportional representation". It implies that the overall effect of the electoral system (allocation of seats) has to be proportional in terms of the votes received by all the parties.

The question, therefore, is what the impact of independent representatives on this proportionality is.

The proposed electoral system will meet this constitutional requirement only if the number of independent representatives among the 200 regional seat representatives is as low as possible, and the number of party-nominated individual representatives as high as possible. The table below shows how the level or percentage of proportionality declines in direct correlation to an increase in the number of independents.

It means that if all 200 regional seat representatives are independents, then the level of proportionality in the National Assembly will only be 50%.

The bill allows for what it calls compensatory seat representatives. These are designed to compensate for the difference that might exist between the number of individual seats a party gets and its proportion of the total votes in the election.

But the concept only has limited use. Only the PR compensatory seats plus each party's regional seats will contribute to the proportionality of parties. It does not include the independents amongst the regional seats.

This will certainly not meet the minimum constitutional requirement of proportionality.

It is inconceivable that such a constitutional threshold could be lower than 75%, and therefore more than 100 independents. The implication is that allocating 50% of the National Assembly seats to the regional seats category is too high.

There is a solution: The 50/50% allocation should be reconsidered in favour of the proportional representation "compensatory" seats to meet the general PR requirement.

Another flaw in the bill is the system proposed when it comes to provincial lists. As currently set out, this has a built-in bias in favour of party-nominated individual candidates who can rely on their party's financing and campaign infrastructure.

Here's why.

The National Assembly is currently made up of 400 members – 200 from national lists and the other 200 from provincial proportional representation lists. The bill proposes replacing current provincial lists with regional seat members.

The implication of this approach is that South Africa will be demarcated into nine huge National Assembly constituencies (which are identical to the provinces). In contrast, most of the proposals made recently to the Ministerial Advisory Panel on the Electoral System, and by the Van Zyl Slabbert Task Team on electoral reform in 2003, included more constituencies.

Using such large constituencies will make it very difficult for both categories of regional seat candidates to campaign effectively. They're unlikely to have enough financial and other resources.

There's another argument to be made against large constituencies – or, as the bill envisages, multi-member constituencies.

The whole idea behind independent candidates is the hope that their inclusion might improve the accountability of parliamentarians to the voters. And make them more accessible to the public.

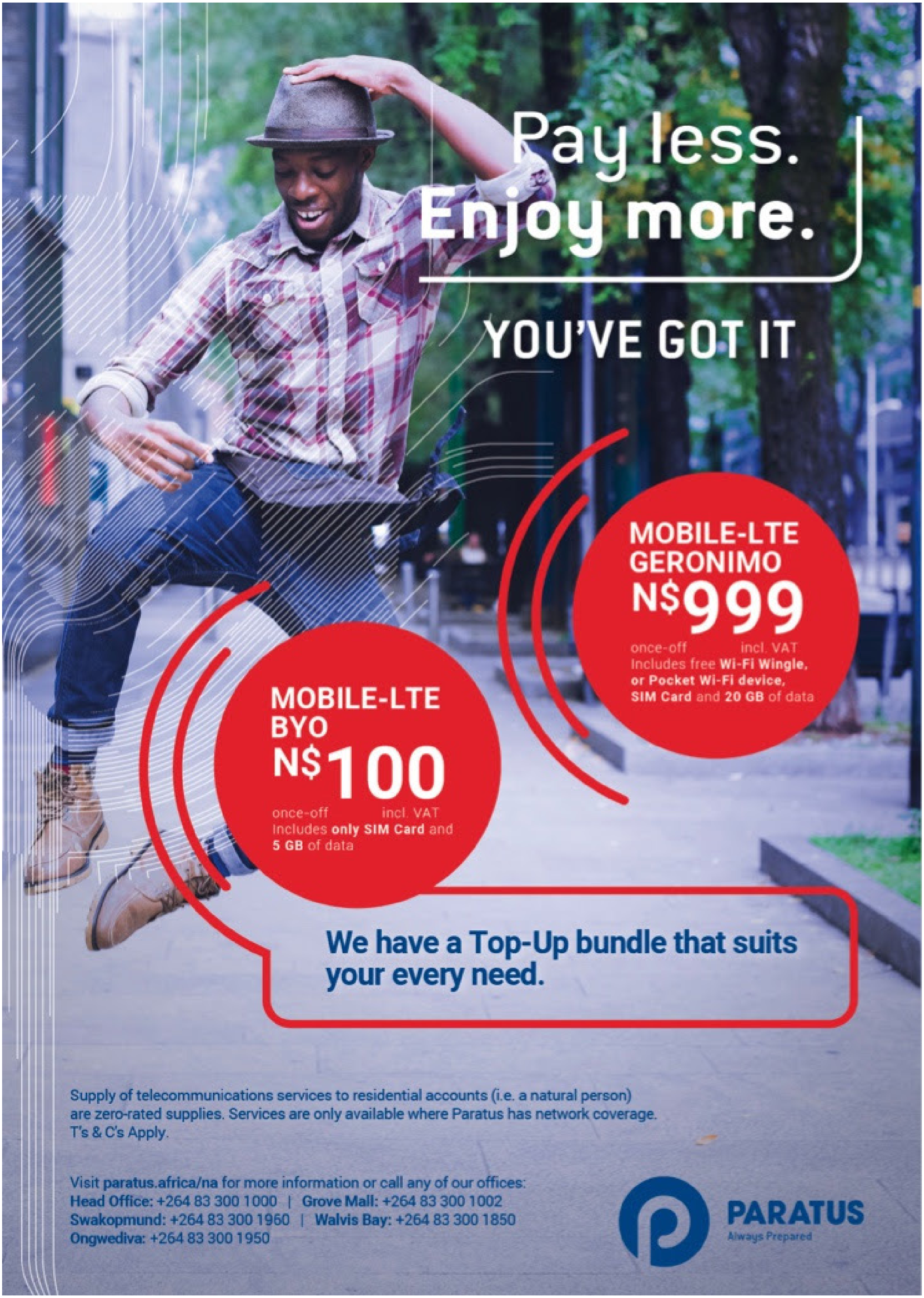
But large constituencies cannot meet these expectations. If that was indeed possible, then the current provincial legislatures would have done it already.

A second implication of the envisaged multi-member constituencies is that their representatives will come from different parties and some may be independents. If a voter wants to approach a public representative with a problem, to whom will they go? Who'll take responsibility for that issue and who'll accountable for it?

Radical changes, but not enough

This amendment proposes radical changes in the electoral system, but whether it meets the main expectations of the Constitutional Court, is unlikely. The public will still not gain direct access to public representatives, who can individually be accountable for parliamentary decisions.

Dirk Kotze
Professor in Political Science, University of South Africa


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HEALTH

Biden administration lays out its plan for Covid-19 vaccinations for children under 5



■ **Donald Judd**

The White House has announced a highly anticipated Covid-19 vaccine rollout plan for children under 5.

The administration "has made 10 million vaccine doses available for states, Tribes, territories, community health centers, federal pharmacy partners, and others to pre-order," according to a White House fact sheet shared with CNN Wednesday. It is partnering with those entities to ship and distribute vaccines across the country following next week's meeting of the FDA's vaccine advisers -- who will review data on these vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna -- and expected authorization from the full FDA.

The first vaccinations could start "as early as the week of June 20th —with the program ramping up over time as more doses are delivered and more appointments become available," according to the fact sheet. CNN previously reported Covid-19 vaccination shots for the youngest Americans could begin as soon as June 21.

FDA vaccine advisers are scheduled to meet next week to discuss authorizing emergency use of Moderna's Covid-19 vaccine for children 6 months through 5 years of age and Pfizer's Covid-19 vaccine for children 6 months through 4 years of age, and pending those decisions, the CDC will make final recommendations about the vaccines.

The administration estimates that 85% of children under the age of 5 live within five miles of a potential vaccination site at this time, though they're anticipating most parents seeking a vaccination for young children will do so at their pediatrician's or primary care provider's office.

Per a senior administration official, however, additional vaccine clinics and sites will be set up at easy-to-access locations for parents, including pharmacies, schools, children's hospitals, diaper banks, community health centers, clinics, museums, libraries and organizations serving minority communities across the country.

Jurisdictions across the country have been able to pre-order Covid-19 vaccine doses for children under 5 since last week -- in that time, of the initial 5 million doses available for pre-order pending FDA authorization, the administration has received requests for 2.3 million vaccine doses, including 1.45 million doses of Pfizer and 850,000 doses of Moderna.

Still, the official suggested they anticipate an uptick in orders from jurisdictions over time.

"Our experience has been that people are slow to order, and this has been true across each of the times we've opened up ordering, so I wouldn't focus on those early numbers," the official told reporters on a call Wednesday. "Our experience is that the longer the ordering stays open, the more likely the states come forward, so some of this is a matter of letting them know the ordering is available, and that they can begin that process."

To spread awareness, the administration will partner with the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program, which it estimates serves over 6 million people in the US, including almost half of all infants; with Head Start Programs through the Administration for Children and Families at the Department of Health and Human Services, which it estimates services approximately 1 million families; with Department of Housing and Urban Development programs, which it estimates serves more than 800,000 children under 5; and with Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), which serves millions of children under 5, among others.

They'll also partner with community organizations, including "What to Expect," a platform serving mothers and expectant mothers, to author a series of blog posts to dispel vaccine misinformation.

-CNN

> **"The first vaccinations could start "as early as the week of June 20th —with the program ramping up over time.**

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New Zealand's plan to tax cow and sheep burps

■ Peter Hoskins

New Zealand has unveiled a plan to tax sheep and cattle burps in a bid to tackle one of the country's biggest sources of greenhouse gases.

It would make it the first nation to charge farmers for the methane emissions from the animals they keep.

New Zealand is home to just over five million people, along with around 10 million cattle and 26 million sheep.

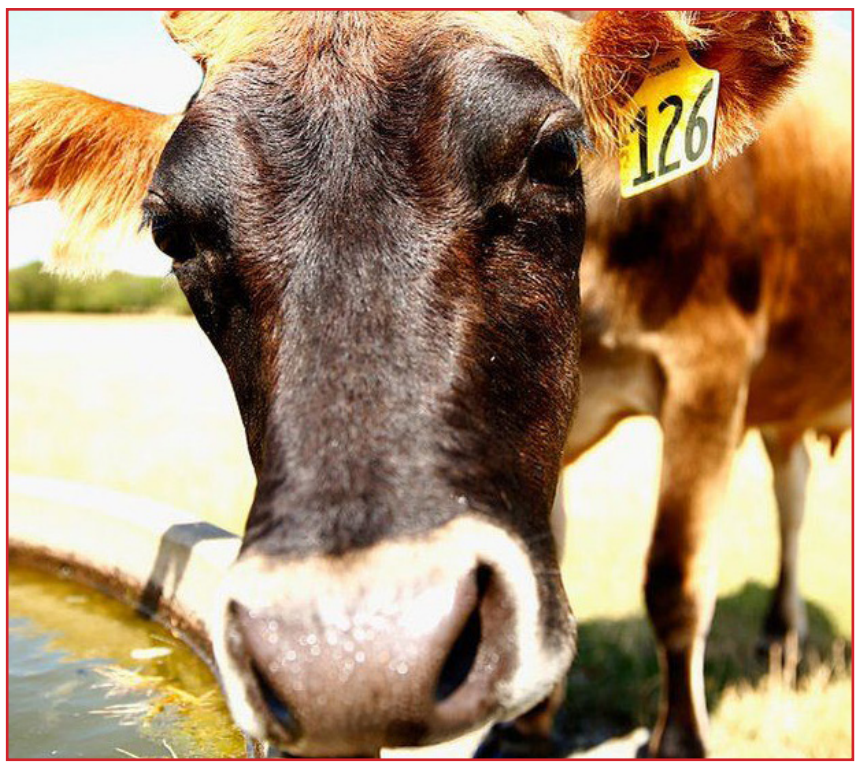
Almost half the country's total greenhouse gas emissions come from agriculture, mainly methane.

However, agricultural emissions have previously not been included in New Zealand's emissions trading scheme, which has been criticised by those calling for the government to do more to stop global warming.

"There is no question that we need to cut the amount of methane we are putting into the atmosphere, and an effective emissions pricing system for agriculture will play a key part in how we achieve that," New Zealand's climate change minister James Shaw said.

Under the proposal farmers will have to pay for their gas emissions from 2025.

The plan also includes incentives for farmers who reduce emissions through feed additives, while planting trees on farms could be used to offset emissions.



Andrew Hoggard - who is a dairy farmer and the national president of Federated Farmers of New Zealand - told the BBC that he broadly approved of the proposals.

"We've been working with the government and other organisations on this for years to get an approach that won't shut down farming in New Zealand, so we've signed off on a lot of stuff we're happy with."

"But you know, like all of these types of agreements with many parties involved, there's always going to be a couple of dead rats you have to swallow," he added.

Mr Hoggard also highlighted that the fine details of the plan's rollout have not yet been agreed.

"There are still the nuts and bolts to be hammered out, like who actually implements the scheme, so there's still stuff to work through with the government."

The money raised from the scheme will be invested in research, development and advisory services for farmers, the country's environment ministry said.

Last month, New Zealand's finance minister committed NZ$2.9bn (£1.5bn; $1.9bn) for initiatives to tackle climate change, which would be funded by an emissions trading system that taxed polluters.

Meanwhile on Thursday, investors managing $14tn of assets urged the United Nations to create a global plan to make the agriculture sector sustainable.

In a letter to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation's director-general - which was first reported by the Reuters news agency - the FAIRR Initiative said the agency was best-placed to take the lead on creating a road-map to curb one of the biggest sources of climate damaging emissions.

Methane is the second most common greenhouse gas after carbon dioxide (CO_2).

It is one of the most potent and responsible for a third of current warming from human activities. Individual methane molecules have a more powerful warming effect on the atmosphere than single CO_2 molecules.

At last year's COP26 environmental conference in Glasgow the US and the EU agreed to cut emissions of the gas by 30% by 2030. More than 100 countries, including New Zealand, have also signed up to the initiative.

How is methane emitted?

Around 40% of CH_4 comes from natural sources such as wetlands but the bigger share now comes from a range of human activities, ranging from agriculture, such as cattle and rice production, to rubbish dumps.

One of the biggest sources is from the production, transport and use of natural gas and since 2008 there has been a big spike in methane emissions, which researchers believe is linked to the boom in fracking for gas in parts of the US.

In 2019, methane in the atmosphere reached record levels, around two-and-a-half times above what they were in the pre-industrial era.

What worries scientists is that methane has real muscle when it comes to heating the planet. Over a 100-year period it is 28-34 times as warming as CO_2.

Over a 20-year period it is around 84 times as powerful per unit of mass as carbon dioxide.

However, there is much more CO_2 than methane in the atmosphere and individual molecules of it can remain there for hundreds of years.

-BBC



Calls for more help as cost to fill a tank hits £100



■ **Daniel Thomas**

Driving groups have called for more support to help drivers after the cost of filling an average family car with petrol hit £100 for the first time.

The RAC motoring group called it "a truly dark day" as the cost of filling a 55-litre tank reached £100.27 for petrol and £103.43 for diesel.

The RAC and its rival the AA urged the chancellor to cut VAT on fuel or to reduce fuel duty further.

The Treasury said it had provided £37bn to ease the cost of living already.

Rising petrol prices are putting pressure on household budgets, with energy bills and food prices also now at multi-year highs.

Pump prices began to soar after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February led to oil supply fears. However, there are concerns that petrol retailers are not passing on a recent 5p cut in fuel duty to consumers.

According to the RAC, the average pump price of a litre of unleaded petrol is now 182.31p while for diesel it is 188.05p. However, the motoring group has warned this could rise to over £2 a litre soon.

RAC fuel spokesman Simon Williams said: "While fuel prices have been setting new records on a daily basis, households up and down the country may never have expected to see the cost of filling an average-sized family car reach three figures.

"A further duty cut or a temporary reduction in VAT would go a long way towards helping drivers, especially those on lower incomes who have no choice other than to drive."

The AA called on the government to cut fuel duty by 10p per litre immediately and introduce a "fuel price stabiliser", which would reduce fuel duty when petrol prices go up and increase it when they drop.

The wholesale price of petrol - the price at which supermarkets and independent forecourts buy it at - has actually dropped by 5p since 1 June, when it was £1.55 a litre, to £1.50 on Wednesday.

But motoring groups say it takes time for changes in the wholesale price to feed through to the pumps due to the way retailers buy fuel in advance.

Some UK forecourts are already selling petrol above £2 a litre, according to price comparison website PetrolPrices.

On Wednesday, the highest price was found to be 202.9p a litre at BP sites on the A1 near Sunderland, the M4 near Chippenham in Wiltshire and the M6 near Burton-in-Kendal, Cumbria.

Ewan, 31, told the BBC he needed a car to get to work in centre of Aberdeen, otherwise it was one and a half hour bus journey. But he said he was now paying up to £90 to fill a tank and the petrol expenses he could claim through work no longer covered it.

The civil servant, who lives alone, said it was just one more thing pushing up the cost of living and he was now "barely" getting by.

"I used to be able to save about £200 a month but now I am dipping into savings," he said. "It makes me quite stressed out."

The RAC argues the Treasury could afford to offer more help, as the higher fuel prices rise, the more it collects in VAT receipts - currently around 30p per litre.

The motoring group added that despite March's fuel duty cut, the government still collects 53p in duty on every litre sold.

The government has so far ruled out cutting VAT, arguing that any increases in receipts it gets from higher fuel prices will be largely offset by reduced household spending and VAT on other items. It has no plans to cut fuel duty further either.

Instead, Downing Street indicated on Wednesday that fuel retailers failing to pass on the 5p duty cut could be named and shamed.

The Prime Minister's official spokesman said: "Transparency may have an important role to play.

"It is important the public understand what actions each of the fuel retailers are taking and so we are considering what further options we can take in this area."

'Not profiteering'

Lisa Stevenson, who owns Tolladine service station near Worcester, told the BBC her prices per litre - at 197.9p for unleaded and 194.9p for diesel - were purely the result of volatile wholesale fuel prices driven by the Ukraine war.

She added that customers were now buying less fuel because of the soaring costs: "A delivery of fuel would previously have lasted me a week to 10 days, now its 2-3 weeks."

Alasdair Locke, chairman of Motor Fuel Group, the UK's largest independent forecourt operator, told the BBC's Today programme that his business had passed on the 5p duty cut to consumers "immediately".

"It would be easy if there was evidence we're just profiteering but there is no evidence of that, in fact rather the opposite. Our margins are under pressure, along with everyone else's."

Commenting on the rising pump prices, a government spokesperson said: "We understand that people are struggling with rising prices which is why we have acted to protect the eight million most vulnerable British families through at least £1,200 of direct payments this year with additional support for pensioners and those claiming disability benefits."

They added that the typical employee would save more than £330 a year through a tax cut in July, while the 5p cut to fuel duty would save a typical family £100.

-BBC





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Tech Eagle with Frans
11h00-12h00
Brand Conversation with Dwight
12h00-13h00
On the Radar with Justicia
13h00-14h30
Ookundana Dhingi pamwe na Eba
14h30-16h30
The Home Run with Frans/ Fanus
16h30-18h30
Business Segment with Dwight
18h30-19h30
Pulling Heart Strings with Elizabeth
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Off the Hook
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DRC accuses Rwanda of sending disguised soldiers across border

The armed forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have accused Rwanda of sending special forces in disguise into the country's territory, marking the latest flashpoint in an escalating dispute between the two neighbours over resurgent violence in its east.

DRC's military alleged that 500 Rwandan soldiers had been deployed in the Tshanzu area in North Kivu province, which borders Rwanda, in a statement issued on Thursday.

It said the soldiers were wearing a green-black uniform different from the regular Rwandan apparel. The statement also called on the local population to exercise caution as well as denounce anyone seen in such clothing.

It added that M23 rebels, allegedly backed by Kigali, had attacked a group of United Nations peacekeeping forces in the Rutshuru area, also in North Kivu, injuring three Tanzanian peacekeepers.

The Reuters news agency quoted a spokesman for Rwanda's army as saying the claims were false. Meanwhile, a government spokeswoman told Reuters that Kigali would not respond to baseless accusations.

Souring relations

Kinshasa has accused Kigali of actively supporting the M23 rebel group, which in recent weeks has been waging its most sustained offensive in eastern DRC since capturing vast swaths of territory there in 2012-13.

"Today, it's clear, there is no doubt, Rwanda has supported the M23 to come and attack the DRC", President Felix Tshisekedi said on Sunday on state television.

The M23 is the latest in a series of ethnic Tutsi-led rebel groups to rise up against DRC forces, claiming to defend Tutsi interests against ethnic Hutu armed groups. Rwanda has denied this and in turn accused DRC's army of firing into its own territory and of fighting alongside the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), an armed group run by ethnic Hutus who fled Rwanda and are alleged to have been involved in the country's 1994 genocide.

The simmering dispute has caused relations between the two states to sour. At the end of May, hundreds of Congolese attended an anti-Rwanda protest in Kinshasa.

Meanwhile, the latest fighting in eastern DRC has forced tens of thousands to flee their homes in a region that has had little respite from war since Rwanda and Uganda invaded in 1996, citing threats from local rebel groups.

-Al jazeera

"Today, it's clear, there is no doubt, Rwanda has supported the M23 to come and attack the DRC".



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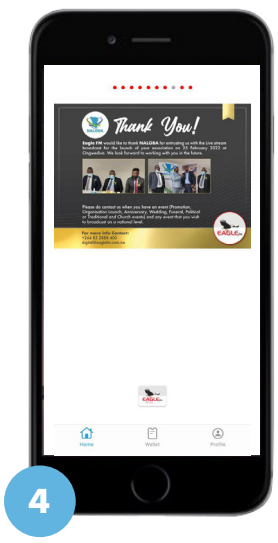
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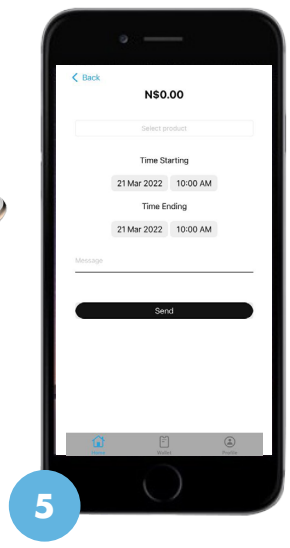
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Belgian king expresses 'deepest regrets' for abuses in DR Congo



Belgium's King Philippe has reaffirmed his "deepest regrets" for his nation's colonial-era abuses in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, but stopped short of formally apologising, again.

The king, who was in the DRC on his first official trip to the country, told its legislature on Wednesday that Belgian colonial rule was unjustifiable and racist.

"Even though many Belgians invested themselves sincerely, loving Congo and its people deeply, the colonial regime itself was based on exploitation and domination," he told a joint session of parliament in the capital, Kinshasa.

"This regime was one of unequal relations, unjustifiable in itself, marked by paternalism, discrimination and racism," he said.

"It led to violent acts and humiliations. On the occasion of my first trip to Congo, right here, in front of the Congolese people and those who still suffer today, I wish to reaffirm my deepest regrets for those wounds of the past."

His speech comes two years after he made similar comments on the 60th anniversary of Congo's independence, when he went further than any of his predecessors in condemning "acts of violence and cruelty" during Belgian colonial rule.

By some estimates, killings, famine and disease killed up to 10 million Congolese during the first 23 years of Belgium's rule from 1885 to 1960, when King Leopold II ruled the Congo Free State as a personal fiefdom.

Villages that missed rubber collection quotas were notoriously made to provide severed hands instead.

'Regrets are not enough'

While some Congolese praised the Belgian king's remarks as brave, others were disappointed by the absence of an apology.

"I salute the speech by the Belgian king. However, in the face of the crimes committed by Belgium, regrets are not enough," Congolese opposition Senator Francine Muyumba Nkanga wrote on Twitter.

"We expect an apology and a promise of reparations from him. That is the price to definitively turn the page," she said.

Nadia Nsayi, a political scientist specialised in the Congo, said she sensed "a lot of nervousness in Belgium regarding a formal apology as Congo might use it to demand financial reparations".

Others called it a "distraction".

"Belgium must ask for forgiveness from the Congolese people but also compensate them," said Francis Kambale, a 26-year-old student living in Goma in the country's east. "Our grandparents were beaten like animals, others were killed. But also many minerals and cultural goods were stolen by Belgium. This visit by the Belgian king is a distraction. Congo does not benefit in any way nor does it improve the economic conditions of the Congolese."

Philippe arrived on Tuesday with his wife, Queen Mathilde, and Prime Minister Alexander De Croo for a week-long visit.

DRC President Felix Tshisekedi and many politicians have enthusiastically welcomed Philippe's visit. As the king addressed legislators, large numbers of ruling party supporters waved Belgian flags, and a banner hanging from parliament read: "A common history."

Tshisekedi said during a brief news conference with De Croo that he was focused on boosting cooperation with Belgium to attract investment and improve healthcare in Congo.

Relations had soured under Tshisekedi's predecessor, Joseph Kabila, whom Brussels criticised for suppressing dissent and extending his time in power beyond legal limits.

"We have not dwelled on the past, which is the past and which is not to be reconsidered, but we need to look to the future," Tshisekedi said.

Philippe earlier offered a traditional mask of the Suku people to Congo's national museum as an "indefinite loan". The mask has been held for decades by Belgium's Royal Museum for Central Africa.

Belgium has traditionally said little about colonialism, and the subject has not been extensively taught in Belgian schools.

By contrast, Germany last year apologised to Namibia for its role in the slaughter of Herero and Nama tribespeople more than a century ago, officially described it as genocide for the first time and agreed to fund projects worth over a billion euros.

There have been the beginnings of a historical reckoning in Belgium in recent years. During anti-racism protests sparked in 2020 by the police killing in the United States of George Floyd, demonstrators targeted statues of King Leopold II.

But there have been the beginnings of a historical reckoning in recent years. During anti-racism protests in 2020 following the killing of George Floyd by police in the United States, demonstrators targeted statues of King Leopold II.

Belgium's parliament established a commission soon after to examine the historical record. A preliminary report published last year called for a more accurate understanding of the colonial period, and the final report is expected this year.

De Croo said Belgium was committed to an honest accounting of its past.

"We all know that, in that long relationship between the countries, there was a period that was painful, painful for the Congolese population," he said. "I think it's important to look at that straight in the eyes."

Belgium will also hand over a tooth, suspected to be the only remains of Congo's first prime minister Patrice Lumumba, to his family this month.

The Belgian government took partial responsibility in 2002 for the death of Lumumba, who was assassinated by Belgian-backed secessionists in 1961.

-Al Jazeera



Can crypto help Afghans? Some think so

■ Ali M Latifi

The first time Sulaiman Bin Shah used crypto was as a Fulbright scholar in California. He had been hearing about the decentralised coins for some time and wanted to try them out.

As a student of international trade and economic diplomacy he was fascinated by the idea of blockchain and decentralised banking, so in 2017 he bought some Ethereum and Litecoin. By the time he returned to Afghanistan the following year, he tried to explain cryptocurrency to his friends, but found them looking at him in wonderment. "They all thought I was crazy, buying invisible coins."

Bin Shah, who would go on to be a deputy at Afghanistan's Ministry of Commerce and Industry in late 2021, said he had to start at the beginning, explaining what a ledger was and how it could be handled without a brick-and-mortar bank.

"I had to explain what it meant for everyone on the system to have access to these currencies without needing a centralised bank or financial institutions. They all just laughed at me," he told Al Jazeera.

As cryptocurrencies started to gain international attention, more Afghans became fascinated with them and small groups of people found ways to begin trading in them, especially as at least one crypto commodity exchange had been started in Kabul by 2019. But it did not really take off until last year when the Taliban takeover of the country shut Afghanistan out of the traditional global economy, forcing more than 30 million Afghans to come up with new ways to access cash for their daily expenses.

Some have turned to the age-old practice of hawala, a method of moving money across borders that dates back centuries in South Asia and the Middle East. But because hawala relies heavily on an honour system, it has faced scrutiny for its lack of transparency and proper paper trails.

Others await the arrival of assistance and remittances from relatives abroad, but Afghans outside the country say over the last nine months they have faced many hurdles trying to send money through services like Western Union and MoneyGram including a lack of clarity on how to send money, how much can be sent and when it can be sent. Power of crypto One possible solution that is being touted repeatedly in recent months is cryptocurrency with enthusiasts saying it is the only viable solution to the cash crunch that they say was created by the former Western-backed government's reliance on old and outdated economic models. As in so many other parts of the globe, it is mainly social media-savvy youth in their 20s and 30s who are pushing for more widespread adoption of crypto in their cash-strapped country.

"If we could have introduced people to crypto earlier, then the banking system could have been saved," says Sayed Mansoor, one of the founders of the Falcon Investing Company, which trades crypto and runs a crypto-to-cash exchange while also offering training courses to anyone interested.

He believes that conventional banking systems are too beholden to long, time-consuming processes. To him, the power of crypto is in its speed, "When people see that transfers happen in under a minute, that automatically builds their trust."

Another attractive factor of crypto exchanges is low fees compared with the hawala system. Hawala transfers generally charge 4.5 percent per transaction, but there are crypto offices in one of Kabul's new shopping complexes and small shops in the west of the city that will transfer your money without charge.

One Afghan businessman who travels frequently between Turkey and Afghanistan said he transferred money between the two nations because of the low, or no, fees and because some exchangers would even offer three percent extra for converting crypto to cash.

Though it accounts for only a small portion of their business, the team at Falcon says that the speed of turning cryptocurrencies bought on the popular trading app Binance into cash is the best way they can convince other Afghans to see the coins as a viable way of trading and investing.

"It's the first step, once they see how easy it is to get cash, then they start asking more questions," said Mansoor.

To win over critics and fence-sitters, Falcon has started running special classes that cover the basics of buying, selling and using cryptocurrencies. The courses cost $100 and run several weeks, with the aim of turning attendees into crypto evangelists.

Nasratullah Salehi, a co-founder of Falcon, says the courses are essential to their vision to bring crypto to all of Afghanistan. "We want to increase our own team and find enthusiastic people who can educate others" and eventually help people across the nation's 34 provinces to invest.

Challenges ahead But it is a lofty goal. Formalised banking in Afghanistan has always had a low adoption rate, with Afghans preferring to keep cash at home or relying on the traditional hawala system. The 2010 collapse of Kabul Bank, then the nation's largest private bank, required an internationally funded bailout that amounted to six percent of Afghanistan's gross domestic product (GDP) at the time. That scandal greatly shook the people's trust in official banking structures.

Last August, as the Taliban rapidly advanced towards Kabul, ATMs began to shut down and thousands of nervous Afghans lined up outside banks in the capital each day in a mad dash to empty their accounts. By the morning of August 16, a day after former President Ashraf Ghani fled and the Taliban walked into Kabul, banks across the country had shut down in fear of large-scale runs. By the time they reopened, more than a week later, there were strict limits on withdrawals. Those limits remain in place to this day.

Sceptics say that if Afghans had a hard time adopting traditional financial institutions, getting them to embrace digital currencies will be especially difficult and time-consuming. Hassib Habibi, Deputy Director of Economic Cooperation at the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, says Afghans should not rush to turn towards new, untested systems. "If the most advanced societies haven't fully accepted it yet, how can a developing nation like Afghanistan suddenly turn to crypto?" Habibi told Al Jazeera. Though he admits he still has a lot to learn about crypto, Habibi says that at the moment, the better approach would be to encourage international donors and foreign investors to bring their money and businesses to Afghanistan. "In all of our meetings with investors outside the country, our message is the same, 'Come to Afghanistan, invest here and we will make sure you are protected and encouraged,'" Habibi said.

Sabir Momand, a spokesman at Da Afghanistan Bank, went further, telling Al Jazeera that the nation's central bank does not yet recognise crypto as a valid, official currency.

The businessman who travels between Afghanistan and Turkey says there is a very specific reason why so many other nations have been slow to adopt crypto.

"The only reason that cryptocurrencies haven't been adopted by the West is because of its trustless system. Governments are constantly looking for ways to tax citizens on their realised and unrealised gains on their investments and crypto transactions are nearly impossible to trace."

But he says Afghanistan is at an advantage, because the nation does not have capital gains taxes or properly implemented sales and income taxes, "so we would have no problem implementing some type of central bank digital currencies. It would even allow Taliban to avoid economic sanctions and would put relief on the economy."

The Falcon team acknowledges the Islamic emirate's hesitancy towards crypto, but says that such reluctance is the result of a lack of information. "When we first went to the Central Bank, they didn't know what crypto even was, so we realised we have to create a thorough, detailed proposal that starts from zero," said Salehi.

Mansoor says members of the Taliban have sat in on their classes.

"They were part of the Ministry of Defence and they sat in on our courses, taking notes and asking questions until they were sent off to Nimroz," a province in the southwest of the country. Both he and Salehi say that other members of the Taliban have expressed interest and asked them questions about crypto.

Limitations of paper currency One point they hope to impress upon the people and the government is the limitations of paper currency. The afghani itself is printed in Europe and the last shipment came months before the Taliban's August 15 arrival in Kabul, which means the same notes have been circulating in the country for nearly a year. In November, as the afghani continued to depreciate in value and the government's stock of foreign currency dwindled, the Taliban ordered all Afghans to deal solely in afghanis. Salehi says both of these issues could have been avoided if more people had embraced crypto from the start. "Afghanis tear and rip so easily and if you hand over a dollar or a euro with even a slip rip or tear, a currency exchanger will refuse to take it," said Salehi.

The Falcon team wants to show how easy it is to spend digital currencies, especially at a time when high-quality notes are so hard to find. They recently partnered with a restaurant located in the same multi-storey apartment building as their own office to be Afghanistan's first establishment to accept crypto in exchange for physical goods. Despite the young men's enthusiasm, financial experts suggest caution at a time when the Afghan economy is still reeling from the US Federal Reserve seizing billions of assets belonging to the Afghan central bank and international donors cutting back aid after the Taliban takeover.

Richard Coffin, host of The Plain Bagel, a YouTube channel focusing on personal finance, investment and global economics with more than 500,000 subscribers, says Afghanistan seems like a perfect example for crypto-enthusiasts, but that any support for its adoption could lead Afghans "cycling through different risks".

Coffin says the biggest risk for Afghans buying into crypto is the speculative nature of its value. He fears that if Afghans were to switch over to crypto for their daily expenses, they would be "adding investment risk to their daily day-to-day expenses".

Basically, Coffin worries that in a volatile economy like Afghanistan's relying on a currency that has no other backing or specific intrinsic value could leave millions of people in one of the world's poorest nations subject to extremely high risk and little, if any, regulation.

But the Falcon team, whose office features posters of Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos and Mark Zuckerberg, say Afghanistan must embrace what they see as the future. Their 15-person team – which is now teaching the Afghan public about Metaverse and the use of NFTs – and other crypto enthusiasts are an example of just how much urban youth in the country have embraced the internet and digital life, they say.

"We want to take a big step for Afghanistan and move it in the direction of other developed nations," said Mansoor.

A continued reliance on an old-school banking system will keep the Afghan economy hobbling on and in constant need of foreign aid, Falcon says. "There are young, educated people in this country who have become digital natives, it's time the Afghan people listen to them and look forward, rather than backward," said Mansoor.

-Al Jazeera

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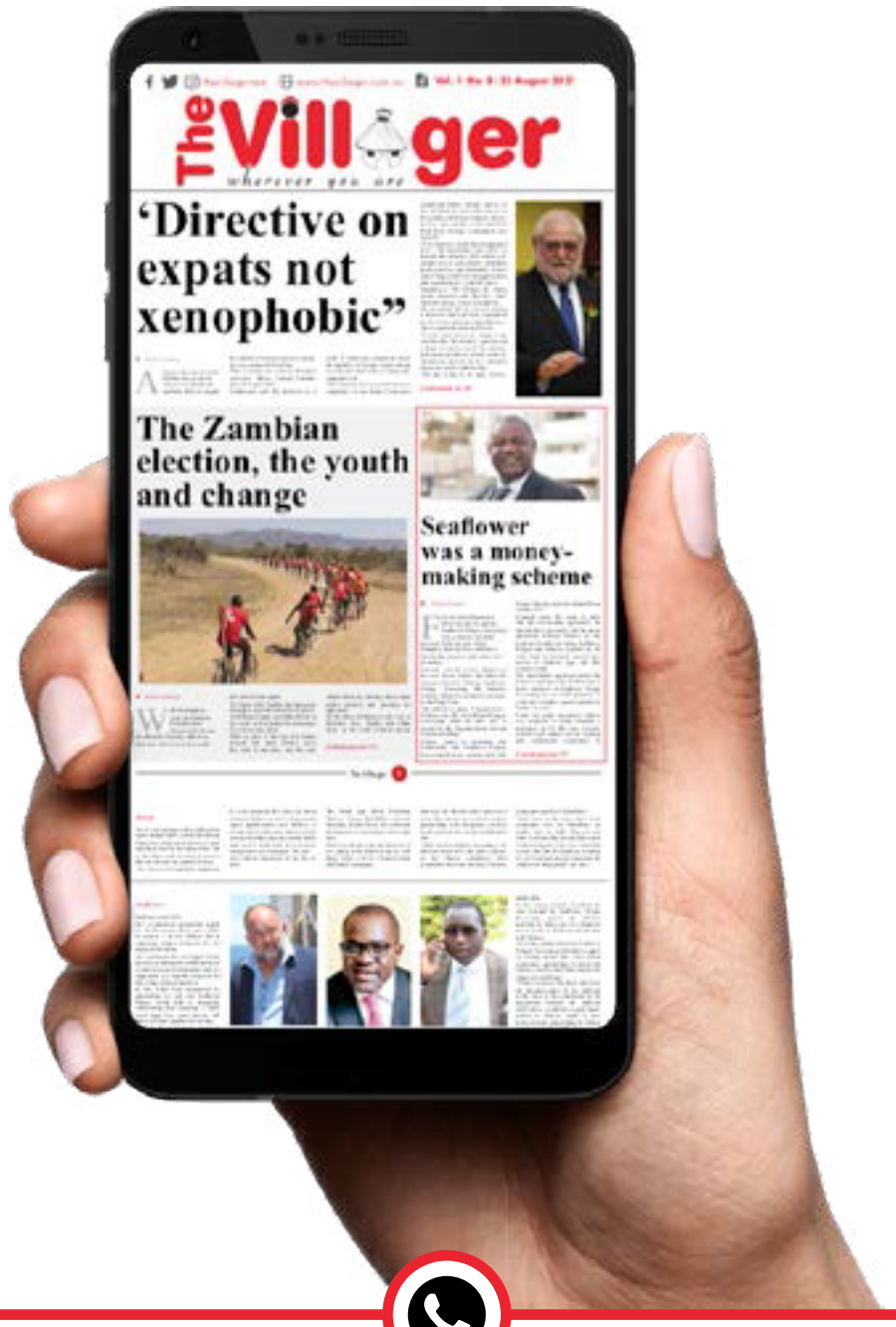
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Tech Eagle with Frans
11h00-12h00
Brand Conversation with Dwight
12h00-13h00
On the Radar with Justicia
13h00-14h30
Ookundana Dhingi pamwe na Eba
14h30-16h30
The Home Run with Frans/ Fanus
16h30-18h30
Business Segment with Dwight
18h30-19h30
Pulling Heart Strings with Elizabeth
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INTERNATIONAL

FBI investigates former US general over Qatar lobbying role



The FBI has seized the electronic data of a retired four-star general who authorities say withheld "incriminating" documents and lied about his role in an illegal foreign lobbying campaign on behalf of Qatar.

New federal court filings obtained Tuesday outlined a potential criminal case against former Marine General John R Allen, who led United States and NATO forces in Afghanistan before being tapped in 2017 to lead the influential Brookings Institution think-tank.

It's part of an expanding investigation that has ensnared Richard G Olson, a former ambassador to the United Arab Emirates and Pakistan, who pleaded guilty to federal charges last week, and Imaad Zuberi, a prolific political donor now serving a 12-year prison sentence on corruption charges. Several members of the US Congress have been interviewed as part of the investigation.

The court filings detail Allen's alleged behind-the-scenes efforts to help Qatar influence US policy in 2017 when a diplomatic crisis erupted between the gas-rich Persian Gulf monarchy and its neighbours.

According to the documents, Zuberi "viewed the diplomatic crisis as a business opportunity" and began working on selling lobbying services to Qatar. He contacted Olson, who in turn brought in Allen.

"If we can do this, we will own half of Qatar," Zuberi wrote to Olson in a WhatsApp message cited in the filing.

US federal law stipulates that an individual lobbying for a foreign government must register with the Department of Justice.

"There is substantial evidence that these FARA violations were willful," FBI agent Babak Adib wrote in a search warrant application, referring to the Foreign Agents Registration Act.

Allen also misrepresented his role in the lobbying campaign to US officials, Adib wrote, and failed to disclose "that he was simultaneously pursuing multimillion-dollar business deals with the government of Qatar".

The FBI said Allen gave a "false version of events" about his work for Qatar during a 2020 interview with law enforcement officials and failed to produce relevant email messages in response to an earlier grand jury subpoena.

Allen declined to comment on the new filings. He has previously denied ever working as a Qatari agent and said his efforts on Qatar in 2017 were motivated to prevent a war from breaking out in the Gulf that would put US troops at risk.

Allen's spokesperson Beau Phillips told The Associated Press last week that Allen "voluntarily cooperated with the government's investigation into this matter" and that he had "not received a fee for his efforts".

Financial incentives

In June 2017, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and other Gulf countries announced a diplomatic and economic blockade of Qatar over what they claimed were ties to "terror" groups and other issues.

Shortly after the blockade was announced, then-President Donald Trump appeared to side against Qatar.

The court papers said Allen played an important role in shifting the US's response.

Specifically, authorities said Allen lobbied then-National Security Adviser HR McMaster to have the Trump administration adopt a more Qatar-friendly tone.

In an email to McMaster, Allen said the Qataris wanted the White House or US Department of State to issue a statement with language calling on all sides of the Gulf diplomatic crisis to "act with restraint".

Federal law enforcement officials have said then-Secretary of State Rex Tillerson did just that two days later, issuing a statement that called on other Gulf countries to "ease the blockade against Qatar" and asked "that there be no further escalation by the parties in the region".

The Qatari foreign ministry and the Qatari embassy in Washington, DC have not commented on the matter.

As part of the lobbying campaign, federal law enforcement authorities said Olson and Allen travelled to Qatar to meet with the country's emir and other top officials.

Before they went to Doha, Allen wanted to "have a chat" with Olson and Zuberi about his compensation, the affidavit said.

Allen suggested in an email that he be paid a $20,000 "speaker's fee" for the weekend trip – even though he wasn't giving a speech – and then later "work out a fuller arrangement of a longer-term relationship," the affidavit said.

Zuberi paid Allen's first-class airfare to Qatar, the affidavit said, but there is no indication the speaker's fee was paid.

Allen also had other financial incentives for helping the Qataris and maintaining strong ties to its top leaders, the FBI said.

"At the same time he was lobbying US government officials on behalf of Qatar, Allen pursued at least one multimillion-dollar business deal with the Qatari government on behalf of a company on whose board of directors he served," the affidavit said.

-Al Jazeera

> **"The FBI said Allen gave a "false version of events" about his work for Qatar during a 2020 interview."**



Americas Summit: Biden pledges economic help, 'ambitious actions'



■ **Ruchi Kumar**

Joe Biden, the president of the United States, has kicked off a regional summit marred by discord over the guest list by announcing a proposed new economic partnership with Latin America and the Caribbean aimed at countering China's growing clout.

Hosting the Summit of the Americas in Los Angeles on Wednesday, Biden sought to assure the assembled leaders about his administration's commitment to the region despite nagging concerns that the US, at times, is still trying to dictate to its poorer southern neighbours.

The lineup of visiting heads of state and government in attendance was thinned down to 21 after Biden excluded Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua, prompting Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador and several other leaders to stay away in protest.

Speaking at a gala opening ceremony, Biden said countries in the Americas have "to invest in making sure our trade is sustainable and responsible in creating supply chains that are more resilient, more secure and more sustainable".

The Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity "will help economies grow from the bottom up and the middle out, not the top down," he said. "What's true in the United States is true in every country. Trickle down economics does not work."

Biden is seeking to present Latin American and Caribbean countries with an alternative to China that calls for increased US economic engagement, including more investment and building on existing trade deals.

Data shows that China has widened the gap with the US in trade terms in large parts of Latin America since Biden came into office in January 2021. A Reuters news agency analysis of UN trade data from 2015-2021 shows that outside of Mexico, the top US trade partner, China has overtaken Washington in Latin America and increased its advantage last year.

"The best antidote to China's inroads in the region is to ensure that we are forwarding our own affirmative vision for the region economically," a senior US official said ahead of the summit.

However, Biden's partnership, which still appears to be a work in progress, stops short of offering tariff relief and, according to the official, will initially focus on "like-minded partners" that already have US trade accords.

Negotiations are expected to begin in early northern fall, the official added.

Diplomatic snubs

The Summit of the Americas in Los Angeles is the first in the US since the inaugural edition in 1994, and was conceived as a platform to showcase Washington's leadership in reviving Latin American and Caribbean economies, and tackling record levels of irregular migration at the US-Mexico border.

But Biden's agenda has been undermined by the partial boycott by leaders upset at Washington's decision not to invite the three countries it says violate human rights and democratic values – Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua. As a result, Biden found himself welcoming a larger-than-normal contingent of foreign ministers sitting in for their national leaders as the arriving dignitaries walked one-by-one up a red carpet flanked by a military honour guard.

Instead of Guatemala's president, Biden shook hands with the foreign minister. He next greeted the minister of public affairs for El Salvador, the foreign minister for Honduras and then Mexico's secretary of foreign affairs. His administration, however, insists the summit can be successful despite the absence of several key leaders.

"Our region is large and diverse. We don't always agree on everything," Biden said in his speech. "But because we're democracies, we work through our disagreements with mutual respect and dialogue."

The gathering, he promised, would involve "bold ideas, ambitious actions" that would "demonstrate to our people the incredible power of democracies to deliver concrete benefits and make life better for everyone".

The US president went on to preview a summit declaration on migration to be rolled out on Friday, calling it "a ground-breaking, integrated new approach" with shared responsibility across the hemisphere.

He provided few specifics, however, but said "we will enforce our borders through innovative, coordinated action with our regional partners".

"Safe and orderly migration is good for all of our economies, including the United States. It can be a catalyst for sustainable growth. But all unlawful migration is not acceptable," he added.

The US has been the most popular destination for asylum seekers since 2017, posing a challenge that has stumped Biden and his immediate predecessors, Donald Trump and Barack Obama.

But the US is far from alone. Colombia and neighbouring South American countries host millions who have fled Venezuela. Mexico fielded more than 130,000 asylum applications last year, many of them Haitians, which was triple from 2020.

Many Nicaraguans escape to Costa Rica, while displaced Venezuelans account for about one-sixth of the population of tiny Aruba.

"Countries are already having to do this, so rather than each country trying to sort this out and figure it out for themselves, what we're doing is saying, 'Let's come together in a coherent way and construct a framework so we can all work together to make this situation more humane and more manageable,'" said Brian Nichols, assistant US secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs.

Some concrete measures may be announced to tackle the crisis during the Los Angeles summit, such as possible funding for development banks. Nichols said that discussing any specific initiatives would be premature, but officials have made clear that the "Los Angeles Declaration" will be largely aspirational.

There is widespread agreement that relief must target growth and stability for entire communities in which refugees and migrants live, not just refugees and migrants. The agreement may also call for more pathways to legal status, mechanisms to reunite families, more efficient and humane border controls and improved information sharing, according to experts who have seen early drafts.

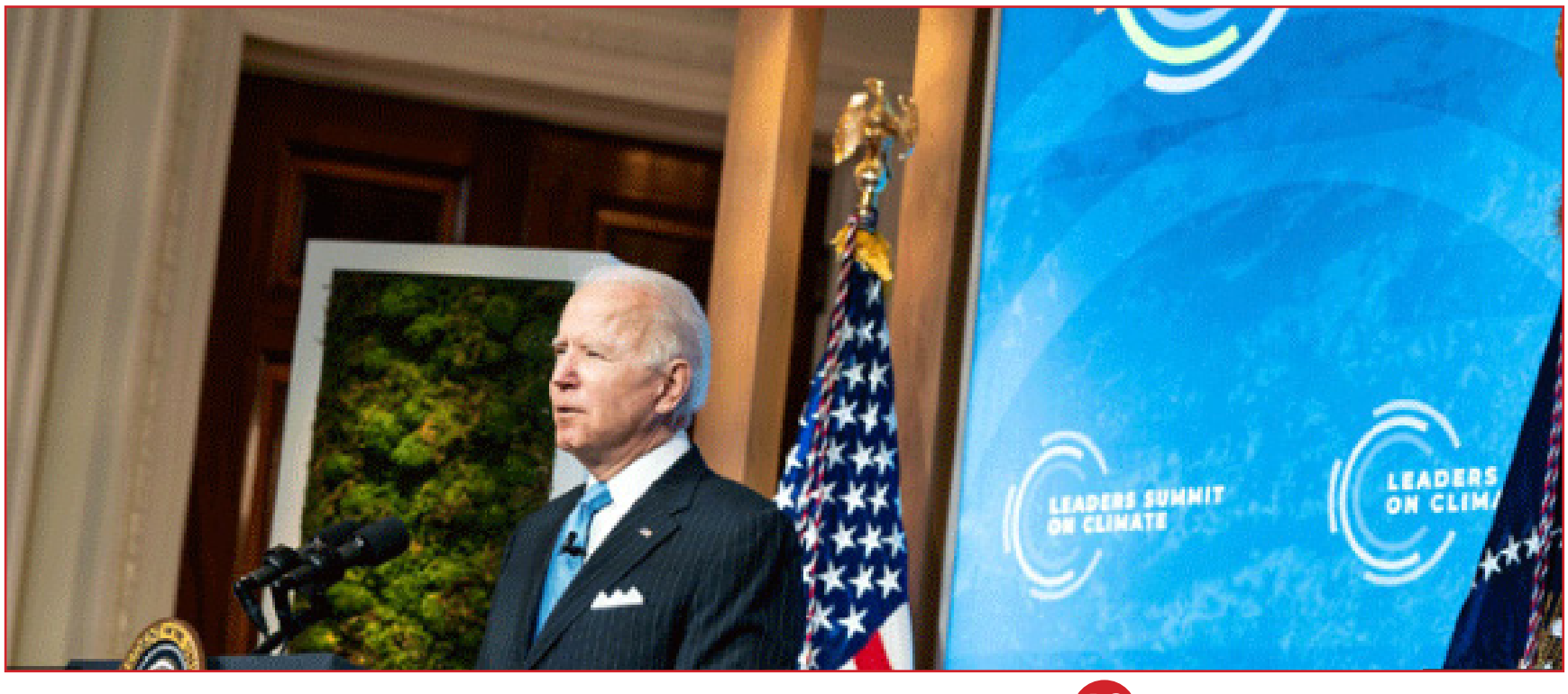
Other programmes Biden is expected to unveil in the coming days are a $300m food security financing initiative, a new Caribbean climate partnership that will help Caribbean countries access low-carbon energy sources, and a programme to train 500,000 health workers in the Americas over the next five years.

White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan told reporters ahead of the summit that the choice by some leaders not to attend reflected their own "idiosyncratic decisions" and that substantive work would still be accomplished.

He said the White House "will be putting specific dollars into producing tangible results".

"When you tally all that up and look at the practical impact of what the summit deliverables from the United States will mean for the public sphere, it is significantly more impactful on the actual lives and livelihoods of the people of this region than the kinds of extractive projects that China has been invested in," he added.

-Al Jazeera





2023 Nissan Altima First Look: Fresher Styling, Altimately the Same Sedan

■ Justin Banner

If you were hoping drastic changes would hit the 2023 Nissan Altima, well, that's a curious thing to stand on pins and needles for. Also, while there are a few mid-cycle changes meant to carry the Altima a few more years until its next full redesign, there aren't any major mechanical upgrades. What changes have been made improve the sedan's looks, its interior, and gives it some updated standard safety features. Nissan hasn't mentioned any improvements in its handling with its AWD system and it's lackluster CVT used in the 2.0 liter VC Turbo I-4.

While it is essentially the same Altima that has been around since 2019, the 2023 model does away with the nose's chrome trim, adopting a new grille design on the SR model and Nissan's new minimal logo. Gone is the chrome flying "V" as that is now all "black chrome" trim that contrasts against the body, grille, and ends where the lower headlights terminate. The side ducts have also changed, so what once looked like smalls opening are now larger and encompassed by more expansive black trim for a bolder look. Also missing from those lower ducts are any lights, including fog lights in the photos that Nissan sent us. The lack of this lower signal is reflected in a change to the headlights with a new bulb where only a reflector was and LED lights being standard, but the overall shape remains the same from 2021.

On the rear of the 2023 Altima not much has changed. The only thing missing is the "VC Turbo" badge that was found on the trunk of models equipped with that turbo engine, but overall, everything else is the same. Wheel sizes will also remain the same starting with a 16-inch steel wheel with a plastic cover and a P215/60R16 all-seasons all around on the 2.5 S. Stepping up to the 2.5 SV will get you a set of 17-inch wheels on P25/55R17 all-season tires. Finally, jumping into the 2.5 SR, 2.0 VC Turbo SR, or the 2.5 SL jumps you up into the 19-inch wheel with a 235/40R19 all-season tire. The wheel designs are also new for 2023 and each wheel is unique for the trim level, meaning there are now four different wheel designs overall for the Altima. Finally for the exterior, there will be two new colors joining in for customers to choose from: Gray Sky Pearl and Garnett Pearl Metallic along with a single panel moonroof option.

While the interior was hardly class-leading in the 2022 model, the 2023 version steps things up with a 12.3-inch touchscreen similar to the one used in the new Nissan Armada SUV. Underneath it and just forward of the shifter is an available wireless phone charging pad, which is also where the USB C, USB, and power outlets are located. Unfortunately, the 12.3-inch screen and the wireless charging are optional on the SV trim and only become standard when you jump up to the pricier SL and SR trims.

Another huge step forward is the inclusion of ProPilot Assist in the 2.5 SL and 2.0 SR VC Turbo trims, though it is not available on the 2.5 SR trim and is only an option on the 2.5 SV trim. We do have to point out, again, that adaptive cruise control and lane-keep assist features are standard on all trims of the Honda Accord, Toyota Camry, Subaru Legacy, Hyundai Sonata.

We now get to the power and drivetrains, which go unchanged for 2023. That lineup is topped by Nissan's boundary-pushing 2.0-liter VC Turbo I-4, which delivers decent performance for a small-displacement four-cylinder engine while introducing a novel variable compression system to the market. Both it and the entry-level 2.5-liter I-4 are adequate engines, albeit hampered by their exclusive pairing with Nissan's Xtronic continuously variable automatic transmission (CVT). In the 2022 Altima SR VC Turbo we last reviewed, it was the CVT that held us back from enjoying the experience. It was fun, quick, and handled very well on track and on the road, but the sluggish tuning of the CVT in conjunction with the variable compression and turbo boost mapping meant that power delivery is nonlinear and has a "rubber-band" effect where acceleration ramps up unnaturally.

Unless the programming between the engine and CVT has been drastically improved, we expect the experience to be to before. The same is likely true about the Altima's "Intelligent AWD" on trims that have it. As before, it's more of a traction enhancer for poor weather drives than a performance upgrade. The 2.5 SV, 2.5 SR, and 2.5 SL trims offer all-wheel drive as an option—a relative rarity in the midsize sedan segment—while the 2.5 S and the 2.0 SR VC Turbo don't.

Overall, the Altima looks better in pictures, but on paper, it remains mostly the same. We'll know more, including its pricing, when it gets closer to its on sale date in fall of 2022.

-Motor Trend

"The 2.5 SV, 2.5 SR, and 2.5 SL trims offer all-wheel drive as an option."







Weghorst's late Dutch winner dampens Wales spirits



■ **Phillip Marsh**

The Netherlands dampened Wales' World Cup qualification party with a late Nations League victory in Cardiff.

Still riding the wave of celebrations after Sunday's play-off final win over Ukraine, Rob Page's much-changed side started brightly as they searched for a first win in the Nations League top tier.

Dutch boss Louis van Gaal named a completely different starting XI to their 4-1 thumping of Belgium last time out, but Teun Koopmeiners' strike gave them the lead early in the second half.

Rhys Norrington-Davies thought he had earned Wales a point when his injury-time header made it 1-1, but 100 seconds later Burnley's Wout Weghorst nodded home to silence the Welsh crowd.

Victory for Netherlands moves them top of Group A4 in the Nations League, while Wales remain bottom of the four teams after back-to-back defeats in the competition.

Sunday's World Cup play-off final match against Ukraine was always the priority for Wales going into this extended international break.

The seven changes made by Page highlighted that, with influential figures Aaron Ramsey, Joe Allen and Sunday's goalkeeper hero Wayne Hennessey all left out of the matchday squad, with Gareth Bale coming on as a late substitute.

Despite that, and much like last week's loss against Poland, Wales again went toe-to-toe against one of the world's football heavyweights.

Wales' first real chance came after 13 minutes, the ever-busy Norrington-Davies and Harry Wilson combined well to win a corner and from the resulting cross the Fulham man nodded just wide at the back post.

Centre back Chris Mepham almost provided an unlikely assist when his deep cross was floated perfectly for Norrington-Davies, who rose above Jordan Teze but put his header over the bar.

Netherlands goalkeeper Mark Flekken was almost left red-faced when he hesitated over a clearance and was charged down by Dan James, but the Leeds winger's deflected attempt sailed behind for a goal-kick.

Norrington-Davies continued to cause problems and picked up a loose ball outside the Dutch penalty area before drawing a foul in a dangerous position.

Dead-ball specialist Wilson claimed the ball immediately and forced a diving save out of Freiburg stopper Flekken, who pushed the ball safely away.

Koopmeiners turns on Dutch style

After James forced another comfortable save the Dutch got a foothold in the game.

A few half-chances came and went, before a deep run from Koopmeiners was not tracked by the Welsh defence, but Ben Davies - who made countless blocks against Ukraine on Sunday - stretched to make a goal-saving tackle.

Seconds before half-time the Netherlands had the best chance of the opening period, when Cody Gakpo took advantage of a misread defensive header to race clear of Davies and Mepham.

The PSV striker cut back well onto his right foot, but his goal-bound effort was blocked by Mepham and bounced narrowly wide of the left post.

The Netherlands started the second half as they ended the first and opened the scoring five minutes after the restart.

Debutant Jerdy Schouten and Koopmeiners were afforded too much space on the edge of the Wales box and the Atalanta midfielder's low driving shot beat Adam Davies - who had replaced Danny Ward in the Welsh goal at the break.

Wales responded to going behind well, Rubin Colwill and Matt Smith coming on, but they failed to test Flekken as they did in the first half.

That was until Connor Roberts broke down the Wales right and crossed to the back post, where Norrington-Davies rose highest.

The wing-back's goal looked to have sealed a draw for Wales and ensure World Cup qualification celebrations continued, but Netherlands had other plans.

Burnley striker Weghorst's diving header less than two minutes after Wales' equaliser beat a full-stretch Davies to send the 600-strong contingent of travelling fans back into full voice.

Wales manager Rob Page said: "I feel the same as I did after Poland, I'm disappointed we didn't get at least a draw.

"We showed a little bit of naivety in seeing the game out but that's a valuable lesson to learn, so we're learning from those mistake and the younger players will learn from that.

"That's the only disappointment from tonight, but I can't fault the effort of the players, I'm proud of the level of performance against a good Dutch team."

Netherlands head coach Louis van Gaal told BBC Sport Wales: "We have a marvellous group, this is not the first time and it will not be the last time [we score late].

"Wales also had the spirit to win the match, I have to give a compliment to them but they didn't create chances, their goal is a mistake from our defender.

"But still we had the spirit and the quality of player in Frankie de Jong to create a half-chance for Wout Weghorst, and his header is fantastic."

-BBC



The five factors behind Kiwis' Test transformation



■ **Tim Wigmore & Stefan Szymanski**

New Zealand were the inspiration for England to transform their limited-overs cricket after the 2015 men's World Cup. Now, in an attempt to reinvigorate their Test team, England are trying to borrow from them again.

That can be seen in the appointment as England's new Test head coach of Brendon McCullum, who captained New Zealand from 2012 to 2016. During those four years, McCullum helped his home country rise from eighth in the world rankings. Under his successor Kane Williamson, they reached number one for the first time in 2021, when they also won the inaugural World Test Championship.

New Zealand have thrived in the limited-overs game as well, reaching the finals of the past two one-day international World Cups and last year's T20 World Cup.

They have managed it all with a population of just five million - the smallest of any of the 12 Test sides - and with an annual revenue lower than the richest English counties, such as Surrey.

So what's the formula? And what might England learn from it? Here are five factors that have underpinned New Zealand's transformation from a team languishing among the lower echelons of Test nations into a side who excel in all three international formats of the game.

1. Governance that puts cricket first

In 1995, three prominent New Zealand cricketers admitted to smoking marijuana on their tour of South Africa. One of those, Stephen Fleming, later said "more than half the squad were involved".

The turmoil that followed led to something that seldom promises major change: a governance review.

The old New Zealand Cricket (NZC) board comprised 13 members, all drawn from the country's six provincial associations and all unpaid. The Hood Report recommended a trimmer board of paid administrators, who would be the best people for the job, rather than part-timers selected by provincial associations. Remarkably, the old board effectively voted themselves out of existence.

NZC was now empowered to take decisions based on the best interests of the game in New Zealand, not the parochial interests of the provincial associations. The new board swiftly innovated to popularise cricket, developing shorter formats at grassroots level aimed at increasing participation. In 1996, they launched the short-format game Cricket Max - in many ways the precursor to Twenty20, which was first played in 2003.

The All Blacks were among those to emulate NZC's structure. But it remains largely an outlier in cricket. Cricket West Indies has rejected a series of reports calling for independent governance. In England, major changes need to be approved by an unwieldy vote of the England and Wales Cricket Board's 41 members - comprising the chairs of the 18 first-class counties, the 21 national counties, the Marylebone Cricket Club and the chair of the National Counties Cricket Association.

2. Professionalising the domestic game

In 2000, domestic players in New Zealand were all semi-professional. The only professionals were the members of the national squad, who'd become so in 1995. It damaged standards; many players left the sport early because they weren't paid enough.

The New Zealand Cricket Players Association (NZCPA), formed in 2001, negotiated a fixed pool of money to be distributed from the board's revenue to players. It marked the beginning of the fully professional domestic cricket era in the country.

Today, 116 cricketers in New Zealand - 16 in each of the provinces and another 20 with central contracts - are professional, contributing to the country's unprecedented depth. They have so many options that Matt Henry, who took 7-23 against South Africa in February and was player of the match in two of his last three Tests, wasn't picked against England at Lord's.

And the professionalisation of the domestic game also extended to coaching. Before 2001, domestic coaches worked only in the summer, rather than being full-time professionals.

"The characters you could pick were pretty much people who were in jobs that could afford to take two or three months off, so clearly you weren't always getting the best people," says Mike Hesson, who worked in various coaching roles for Otago from 1996, and was national coach from 2012 to 2018.

Now, coaching is treated like a serious career, helping players to maximise their talents.

3. Improving domestic infrastructure - and pitches

As well as improving pay for players and coaches, NZC has upgraded the sport's infrastructure.

In 2002-03, domestic matches were played at 24 different grounds, with the six provinces criss-crossing the country, playing games at small venues in small towns.

"Many of the venues just didn't have practice or playing facilities that were going to help develop players," Hesson recalls.

In 2005, the NZCPA pressed NZC to introduce a 'warrant of fitness' - essentially, criteria for playing and practice facilities that any ground hosting domestic cricket had to meet. This has been the catalyst for a surge in the quality of training and practice facilities.

It has also transformed the quality of pitches in New Zealand, which were traditionally green seamers - giving batters little experience of building long innings and bowlers little experience on flat pitches.

These have now become far more conducive to batting, replicating the conditions normally found in Test cricket. Since 2010, averages in New Zealand domestic cricket have been higher than anywhere else in the world, and the closest of anywhere in the world to the average in Test cricket.

4. An enlightened attitude towards T20

The launch of the Indian Premier League (IPL) in 2008 meant that players - especially those from outside Australia, England and India - could now earn more from foreign T20 leagues than the international game.

Many countries long failed to recognise this reality. England were scornful of the IPL until 2015. West Indies mandated that players had to play in their domestic 50-over tournament to be eligible for the national one-day team, even though it clashed with major T20 leagues. It was a self-defeating policy, which meant that West Indies often picked weakened sides.

In 2018, South Africa's superstar AB de Villiers retired from international cricket. He wanted to play a combination of lucrative T20 tournaments and major internationals, but was unable to "pick and choose", as he termed it.

Of all leading nations, New Zealand have perhaps dealt with the new reality most shrewdly. Their flexible policy has allowed players to miss low-key internationals to play in T20 leagues, ensuring that, barring injuries, they have been at full strength for the games that matter most. Had they tried to limit players' participation in leagues, "you would end up with players retiring earlier, potentially prioritising IPL over international cricket," Hesson says.

NZC's pragmatism has extended to their own T20 competition. Other mid-sized countries have tried to generate their own mini-versions of the IPL, often with disastrous results. Cricket South Africa lost £11m on the Global T20 League, which was cancelled before its launch in 2017.

Of the 12 ICC full members, New Zealand is the only one that has not tried to create a glitzy T20 tournament built around new teams; instead, its T20 competition uses the same sides that compete in domestic first-class cricket. This means that the board has avoided overextending themselves in pursuit of a market that isn't there.

5. A culture that puts the national team first

Before he walked out at number three at Lord's, Ollie Pope had never batted in the top three in any first-class match. Surrey would have been open to batting him at three at the start of this season - but England didn't think to ask, emblematic of how counties and the international side do not always work in synergy.

New Zealand have benefited from an altogether more collaborative approach between the national side and domestic teams. As New Zealand head coach, Hesson occasionally influenced domestic selection for the good of the national team. Soon after taking over, he called up the Northern Districts head coach to ask if BJ Watling - who played as a specialist opener - could instead keep wicket and bat in the middle order. Watling would become arguably New Zealand's best Test wicketkeeper.

Similarly, Hesson requested that Canterbury move opener Tom Latham to bat in the middle order and keep wicket in one-day cricket - the same role that he would play in New Zealand's run to the 2019 World Cup final.

A combination of history and geography - the relative lack of regional divides and ease of travel - has created a culture in which the six districts are tasked with furthering the interests of the national team first, mirroring the system in New Zealand Rugby.

A portion of each domestic head coach's salary is directly paid by NZC, and developing international players is part of each coach's key performance indicators. Players who live in one major association but play in another can also get full access to local training facilities during the off-season.

Domestic sides have also accepted their fixture list being pared back for the greater good. In 2018, NZC reduced their domestic first-class programme from 10 rounds to eight to fund increasing investment in their A-team programme - a decision made possible by this collective understanding of the need to prioritise the national team.

Culture is perhaps New Zealand's greatest advantage. It might also be the hardest to replicate.

-BBC

