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- INSIDE -



What Lesotho can teach Eswatini and South Africa about key political reforms

PAGE

8



Algeria plays balancing act as Europe tries cut Russian gas

PAGE

15

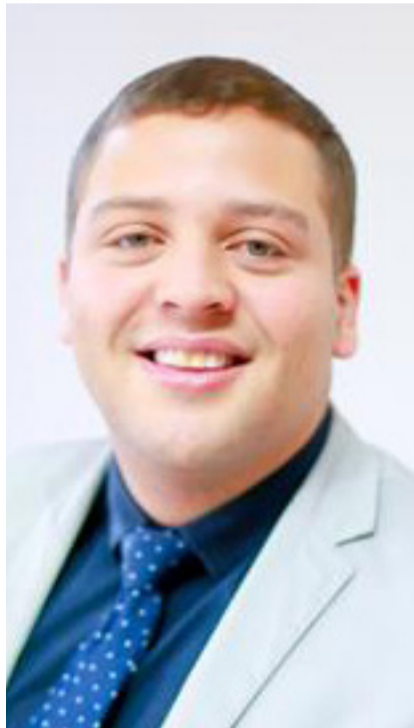


The 'sleepy' girl who changed Indian cricket forever

PAGE

22

Prices of bread have doubled since 2021



Staff Writer

With the prices of basic consumer goods standing at 5.9% currently as of April 2022 from 4.7% in March 2022, the prices in the consumer basket have been further pushed up. Economists at Agribank has observed that the spike continues to be driven by the prices oils and fats that increased to 23.4% in April 2022 from 15.6% recorded in the prior month. Sugar inflation significantly jumped to 6.9% in April 2022, from 0.5% in the prior year. Prices for bread and cereals have doubled since 2021, recording an inflation of 5.9% in April 2022, from 2.8% in the same period last year. Hot beverage inflation grew to 6.7% in April 2022, from -0.5% in 2021. The situation is expected to continue due to the ongoing global dynamics in Europe which are beyond the country of Namibia, unless drastic action is to be taken on the continent. In the meantime, the beef subsector marketed 72,968 cattle from January 2022 to April 2022, a 19% increase from 61,433 marketed in the same period last year. Experts have observed that, as things stand, the Namibian beef market is set to benefit from increased European demand and high global beef prices; however, farmer profit margins erode as high



input costs persist. The uptick in numbers is driven by live cattle exports that have increased to 39,067 for the first 4 months of 2022, 30% more from the 33,901 recorded in 2021. According to the Meat Board of Namibia, from January to April 2022 beef exports doubled, recording a 149% increase to 2,987,896 kg's, compared to the 1,199,247 kg's recorded in 2021. The top beef export destinations are the EU with 29% of total beef exports, Norway with 25% and South Africa with 24%. Namibia is set to benefit from the strengthened world beef prices, however given the significant increase input costs farmers profitability in real terms and profit margins are likely to drop. Small Stock Marketed Sheep marketing stood at 174,349 from January to April 2022, a 33% increase from 131,413 recorded in the same period last year. Relatively, Goat marketing increased by 25% to 32,271 from 25,788 in 2021. The continuous spike in small stock marketed results from live exports to South Africa, where farmers get better value for their stock, in April/May 2022. Namibian Mutton prices averaged at N\$59.18/kg, while South African prices averaged at N\$97.94/kg.

Continued on P2

Nam education slow in catching up with tech changes- Geingob

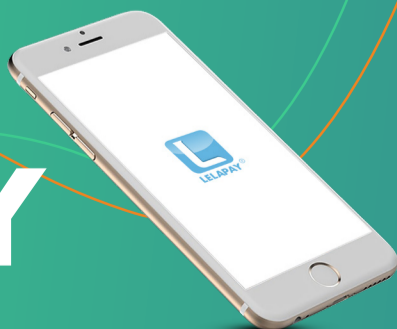


Nghiinomenwa Erastus

The biggest beneficiary of the country's national budget, education, couldn't keep the country's labour force abreast with technological changes resulting in low transition. As a result, President Hage Geingob has called for a fundamental shift in how the learners are taught in the country. Geingob made these remarks during his keynote address at the opening of the Namibia Fourth Industrial Revolution Conference, on Wednesday in Windhoek. According to the president and his team the country's education system and industry have a relatively low capacity to react to the rapid technological changes and the impact is visible through the low transition into the labour market. "Sustainable and inclusive industrialisation can be achieved through a fundamental shift in how we are educating our children," suggested the President. Despite the president's call on the quality of the country's education and its ability to react to technological advancement, under the president's leadership; the government has been pumping money to fund the same education systems. For the past three years under President Geingob's leadership, the cabinet has approved funding to the tune of N\$52 billion in the country's education system. The investment is divided among the two education ministries. The higher education ministry received around N\$9.9 billion

Continued on P2

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Nam Education

for the past three financial years, receiving around N\$3.3 billion each financial year. According to the President one leverage point is equipping primary and secondary learners with a combination of verbal and written communication. These are logical and numerical skills, to nurture the ability to code and think computationally and by so doing, develop holistic problem-solving skills. He said it has become increasingly important to deliver multi-disciplinary training in the country's institutions of higher learning,

through blended curricula. "This is our opportunity to drive inclusive economic growth, through education reskilling and leveraging information, with the communication technologies as a tool to leapfrog innovation," said Geingob. The president has also acknowledged that achieving reskilling and fundamental shifts in the education system will require investments into Research and Development (R&D). According to the president, R & D investment must be prioritized. Geingob also suggested that a stronger

compact is required between industry and institutions of higher learning, to identify priority areas for R&D and innovation.

The African Union Champion and the Committee of Ten Heads of State on Education, Science and Technology, have made a commitment for AU Member States to channel no less than 0.1 percent of GDP, respectively, towards R&D. The President told the conference that it has become ever more important for Namibians and Africans to become owners and developers of technology. This is because the development of any

technology embeds the norms, standards, values, stereotypes and cultural innuendos and idiosyncrasies of its developers. Thus, when Namibians are not designing and creating their own digital technologies or fail to have a critical mass of specialists, they risk inadvertently adopting a different culture through the technologies that they consume, said the President. "The solution lies in us increasing our technological skills and national capacity to co-design and co-create contextually relevant technologies, across the various dimensions of our development," stated Geingob. Geingob added that although the country may

not yet own and develop the technologies at a massive scale, it does own a very important aspect – the data. Open Data has become a sought-after capital resource with its own innate value. This results into unlocking Information Management Systems and Inter-Operability within the public and private sectors that will inform smart and intelligence driven development and governance. According to Geingob, this is what the country under his leadership is striving towards. Email: erastus@thevillager.com.na

Namibia caught up in food crisis situation as global hunger looms



Staff Writer


The Namibian economy is sailing through troubled waters as the global economy is at the risk of suffering a recession with the threat of global hunger looming large. According to a latest Agribank market watch, the outlook for global acute food insecurity in 2022 is expected to deteriorate further relative to 2021. Experts at Agribank has said, "Food availability and accessibility continues to deteriorate as a result of high food prices and long-term drought effects. This suggests the need for Namibia to embark on climate resilient farming practices and increase local production of food to substitute high imports." In particular, the unfolding war in Ukraine is likely to exacerbate the already severe 2022 acute food insecurity forecasts given that the repercussions of the war on global food, energy and fertilizer prices and supplies have not yet been factored into most country-level projections. Russia is said to be blocking the release of grains in Ukraine while Putin has in the meantime told the African Union (AU) that the ball is in the court of the western alliance to soften its stance on the war and sanctions against his country. The bank said the prevailing drought, high energy prices and the Covid-19 pandemic, worsened the availability and accessibility of food in Namibia. In December 2021, nearly a million people across Namibia experienced food insecurity, this is according to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC). Crop producers and livestock farmers succumbed to longterm effects of the 2019 drought, while the agricultural sector experienced significant contractions from 2Q2019.

The contraction emanated from high levels of livestock losses due to drought and low stock herd levels. The sector is slowly recovering as a result of normal to average rainfall received in 2021 and 2022 rain seasons, which has relatively improved rangeland condition and food production in the country. Although the improvement is not broad-based, it provides farmers an opportunity to re-set their farming practices and redirect investments towards climate smart production practices. Agribank has highlighted that global soft commodity prices have been the highest since 2008, the situation worsened from the Russian-Ukrainian disputes. "Namibia is not farfetched from this, in April 2022 the annual inflation spiked to 5.6% from 3.9% recorded in the prior year. Food prices have averaged at 5.5% for the first 4 months of 2022. The price increment is triggered by shortages of oil supply from Ukraine and the rise in other food sub-categories, thus reducing people's purchasing power and access to food. High unemployment aggravates poverty levels and food insecurity," said the bank.


Agribank has highlighted that global soft commodity prices have been the highest since 2008.

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Namfisa Agri-Index Gaining Traction as World Bank visits Nam



Staff Writer

A four-member delegation from the World Bank is visiting Namibia to provide technical support on the first-ever envisaged Agri-Index Insurance for Namibia, coordinated by NAMFISA.

The objective of the World Bank mission is to advise Namibian Government stakeholders on the design and implementation of an index-based agriculture insurance program targeting small-scale farmers especially in rural and communal areas.

The World Bank technical assistance focuses on three areas, namely:

- Understanding the areas and cost of major disasters and public sector support to mitigate the impact of these disasters,
- Identifying data and other infrastructure investment required to support an effective the program, and
- Understanding how to effectively work with the private sector, learning from past pilots in Namibia.

The technical assistance from the World Bank is expected to advise the Namibian Government's legal, regulatory and policy actions towards strengthening the financial resilience of small-scale farmers in Namibia to disaster risk.

Additionally, the team that is hosted by NAMFISA is expected to enhance the knowledge and understanding of agriculture risk financing solutions among key stakeholders, thereby enabling them to make informed policy and investment decisions. NAMFISA's CEO Kenneth Matomola explains, "The objective of Agri-index Insurance is to benefit small scale farmers

in Namibia to mitigate potential losses of agriculture produce due to increased effects of climate change and promote financial inclusion as well as help government reduce the financial burden borne".

Matomola stressed it will assist vulnerable small-scale and communal farmers to become resilient to the effects of climate change on crops and livestock by aiding the development of Agri-Index Insurance products and services that are easily accessible and affordable.

Responding to a question as to the make-up of the delegation and what the visiting World Bank team is expected to achieve, the head of the World Bank delegation to Namibia, Ajai Nair, Senior Financial Sector Specialist, had this to say.

"My team includes Qhelile Ndlovu, Disaster Risk Finance Specialist; Andrea Stoppa, Agriculture Insurance Specialist; and Chris Hoveka, Country Engagement Coordinator. The team had productive engagements with a wide range of stakeholders over the past week and we expect to provide useful recommendations to the Namibian government, through NAMFISA to help develop national Agri-Index Insurance program."

NAMFISA has to date identified relevant key stakeholders and continues to coordinate the efforts in the development of the platform where both private and public sector players come together to discuss and share ideas on the possible solutions towards the development and custom design of Agri-Index Insurance products and services.

The Authority that has been creating awareness on the envisaged Agri-Index Insurance, has advised the Ministry of Finance and related key ministries on the role

they can play in supporting and facilitating the drive towards national agriculture policy change and implementation.

The Authority continues to engage stakeholders and create awareness for the need of the financial and social protection for vulnerable small-scale famers by ensuring access to financial services and products as advocated by the Namibia Financial Sector Strategy's (NFSS) objective of financial inclusion; and in return promote social and economic sustainability.

NAMFISA has to date identified relevant key stakeholders and continues to coordinate the efforts in the development of the platform where both private and public sector players.

Consumers slow down on vehicle purchases- Experts



Staff Writer

New vehicle sales during May 2022 slowed from a spike in sales seen in the prior month to below its 6- month moving average, according to Simonis Storm.

The latest data show new vehicle sales of 767 units in May 2022, compared to 905 in the prior month (↓ 15.2% m/m) and 790 in May 2021 (↓ 2.9% y/y) according to the National Association of Automobile Manufacturers of South Africa (NAAMSA).

Passenger and light commercial vehicles continue to be the bulk of new vehicle sales, accounting for 52.4% and 40.3% of total sales respectively in May 2022.

On an annual basis, passenger vehicle sales increased by 12.3% y/y, light commercial (↓ 16.7% y/y), medium commercial (↓ 40.0% y/y), heavy commercial (↓ 33.3% y/y) and extra-heavy commercial (↑ 3.0% y/y) in May 2022.

New vehicle sales have averaged 863 units per month YTD, which is above the monthly averages of 810 and 550 in recorded in the same period during 2021 and 2020 respectively.

The Year-To-Date (YTD) monthly average is very close to the pre-pandemic monthly average of 869 recorded in 2019.

"Namibia's peak tourist season is approaching and as indicated in our previous reports, numerous establishments allude to bookings being full in the upcoming months," said Simonis Storm.

Local rental companies had a fleet of about 8,500 vehicles prior to the pandemic outbreak and currently have about 2,000.

Sourcing new vehicles in order to rebuild their fleet in response to rising self-drive demand has proven challenging due to shortages in stock in recent weeks.

Rental companies typically increase the size of their fleet during the peak tourist season, typically between May and July of each year.

However, May 2022's data point shows an exception to this trend.

"We believe that vehicle sales to rental

companies might undershoot previous peak tourist seasons as a result of ongoing supply constraints," said the brokerage firm.

Instalment and leasing credit growth has grown sluggishly amongst households, averaging growth of 1.2% YTD and 0.9% in the last 12-months.

This is indicative of a number of local dealerships who point out that there are numerous declines in vehicle loans amongst their clients from local banks.

As a result, the proportion of cash sales have increased compared to credit sales.

On the other hand, instalment and leasing credit amongst corporates has increased by double digits in March and April 2022 and averages monthly growth of 9.2% YTD and 1.4% in the last 12-months.

There are signs of the global shortage in semiconductors (electronic chips) easing, albeit short lived as expected by the market. Mercedes Benz AG, Daimler Truck Holding AG and BMW AG include some of the global brands now receiving sufficient high-tech components to produce at full capacity following critical shortages in the last two years.

Global passenger car production remains far below pre-pandemic levels and while some auto manufacturers are concerned about future consumer demand amidst rising inflation and interest rates, German carmakers are confident that they can pass on rising raw material costs onto consumer prices according to an Ifo Institute for Economic Research survey.

"Taking the above global developments into account, we believe that local dealerships selling German brands might be able to source vehicle imports more easily compared to other brands. However, given the small size of the Namibian auto market in the global context, it could also be that improved car production levels are sold off to bigger markets globally to address major backlogs. This will likely keep vehicle price inflation elevated in Namibia and limit vehicle sales as supply remains artificially constrained," said Simonis Storm.

Sports Galore for the Weekend

... Desert jewels hit Cosana Tri-Nations



Uakutura Kambaekua

The Namibia national netball team Desert Jewels travels to Blantyre, Malawi, on Friday for the Confederation of Southern Africa Netball Association (Cosana) Tri-nations tournament at Kamuzu University of Health Sciences Sports Complex.

The long-awaited tournament will be contested amongst three nations from the 12th to the 16th of June.

Namibia will take on host nation Malawi on Sunday before battling it out against Zimbabwe on Monday.

The tournament will also consist of the under 19 teams will take on their counterparts in preparation for the upcoming Region 5 games set for Malawi later in September.

The Cosana tri-nations tourney will also provide an opportunity for the Debmarine Desert Jewels to prepare for the upcoming African World Cup qualifiers set for August in Cape Town, South Africa.

The Desert Jewels recently received a boost of more than N\$ 3.2 million in sponsorship from Demarine to assist the team in hosting friendly games, amongst other activities.

The senior team head coach, Sunette Burden, has called up a group of 13 players mainly from the national netball league.

The team's captain, Anna Casper, will be leading the team in Blantyre.

Other players are Berne Nell, Cornelia Mupenda, Ivondia Tjiposa, Loide Kanana Hanyanya, Louise Dreamy Kauehue, Monique Basson, Mwale Mulenamaswe, Nelandre Mostert, Rochelle Roetz, Tjeripo Kambiringo, TusneldeFillemon and Zante Farmer.

The team will be under the stewardship of Burden as coach to be deputized by Antoinette Wentworth, Malan Elago as team manager and Maria Muunga as the team doctor while Marvellous Khaebes-Ochar is Technical Director for both teams.

The under 19 team is under the guidance of

former Desert Jewels captain Jatjinda Tjithero as the head coach, Jones Kangu Musambani as her assistant, and Isador Nell as the team manager.

KASU Winter Cup Concludes this Sunday

The 10th edition of the annual Katutura Sports Union (KASU) winter cup is set to conclude this weekend at the Khomasdal Stadium in Windhoek following the final netball fixtures which concluded last weekend.

KASU's chairperson Kuveri Tjonga told The Villager that the annual grassroots tourney concluded the netball fixtures last Sunday after Tom and Jerry's netball club was crowned champions by beating Epukiro-based outfit Otjijere club by 34 points to 30. As champions, Tom and Jerry walked away with N\$ 2 500 while Otjijere received N\$ 1 500.

The quarter-final fixtures are set for Saturday as Inter Dee will be taking on Najota Eleven to be followed by Omaruru-based outfit

Duko Warriors against Legends.

MPS will then take on Jitas FC while Okovakuejuva City will close off the quarter-final fixtures against Rangers FC.

For the football category, the winning team will pocket N\$ 10 000 plus a trophy and 20 gold medals, the runner-up will get N\$ 5 000 while the semi-final losers will each settle for N\$ 2 500 for their efforts.

Top Horses Clash at Okondjatu

All roads lead to Okahatjipara on the outskirts of Okondjatu in the Otjozondjupa region this coming weekend for the fourth edition of the annual MTC horse racing event.

The Namibia Horse Racing Association in conjunction with giant telecommunication company MTC has penned a contract in 2020 worth over N\$ 1.5 million for hosting horse races across the country.

The first-ever MTC/NHRA event was hosted at Okahandja, followed by the Rehoboth and Tsjaka in the Omaheke region.

The fourth edition of the renowned racing event is scheduled at the Okahatjipara turf club on Saturday where more than 90 horses are set to battle it for N\$ 250 000 over 17 races.

In an interview with The Villager, NHRA treasurer Sweetzy Zamuee hailed MTC for coming on board in reviving horse racing in the country, adding that the aim is to grow the event to greater heights in the coming future.

She also called on more sponsors to come on board, saying that the event will only be able to grow and attract international interest if there is more money involved.

According to Zamuee, Nam-bred horses will register with N\$ 250 while the Thoroughbred category will register with N\$ 300.

Zamuee said that an amount of N\$ 30 000 is up for grabs during the final race with the winner walking away with N\$ 15 000.



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'Jurassic World: Dominion' combines old and new DNA in an XL-sized mediocrity

■ Brian Lowry

There's something unfortunately symbolic about "Jurassic World: Dominion," which combines old and new DNA from the near-three-decade-old franchise and generates a pretty mindless mess. The nostalgia factor gives the movie an initial jolt, and there are, of course, some dino-sized thrills, but not enough to lift this XL-sized mediocrity out of the gene pool's shallow end.

Even the marketing campaign comes across as a rather conspicuous fib, billing this as the saga's "epic conclusion," which is questionable in terms of the first half and hard to swallow in the latter, since, like dinosaur DNA, while the blueprint might be altered, these kind of box-office attractions are too enticing to leave dormant for long.

With Colin Trevorrow back in the director's chair (having also kicked off this trio of "Jurassic World" movies) and sharing script credit with Emily Carmichael, the story brings back Chris Pratt and Bryce Dallas Howard, picking up where "Fallen Kingdom" left off in terms of their oversight of Maisie (Isabella Sermon), now a restless teenager.

Yet the emotional core comes from reuniting the stars of the 1993 original -- Sam Neill, Laura Dern and Jeff Goldblum -- with the years having been kind to them, even if the writing hasn't.

Indeed, the convoluted plot operates on parallel tracks that only gradually begin to intersect, with giant prehistoric locusts sweeping across the land, creating an existential threat to the food chain. All signs rather transparently point to a classic corporate villain, Biosyn Genetics, whose bespectacled CEO (Campbell Scott) seems to have been unceremoniously plucked from one of the later Bond movies.

"Jurassic Park" (both Michael Crichton's book and the movie) contained an underlying "Don't fool with Mother Nature" warning, and "Dominion" overtly incorporates what anyone paying attention will recognize as an environmental message.

Still, any more serious themes and ideas are overshadowed not just by the size of the supporting characters, but the absurdity necessary to eventually assemble everyone in the same place. As for some of the nail-biting escapes, let's just say checking one's brain at the door, reptilian or otherwise, certainly helps.

The two existing groups pick up a few key additions, perhaps most significantly DeWanda Wise (Netflix's "She's Gotta Have It") as a fearless pilot somewhat reluctantly drawn into the adventure. But other than a kinetic chase with Pratt keeping his motorcycle one step ahead of

rampaging raptors, the action proves too scattered and repetitive to deliver much sense of jeopardy, despite the customary technical wizardry at work.

The most pleasing elements thus reside in the occasional quieter moments, from unexpected interactions to snippets of John Williams' original theme to Goldblum's chaos-theory-spouting Ian Malcolm's "Life finds a way" snideness, reminding those around him that what they're doing is dangerous and stupid. He's right, but to the extent that the second critique often applies to the script, his admonitions come with a heavy side of irony.

Given that this is the sixth "Jurassic" movie -- with a 14-year gap in the middle -- it's not like Universal Pictures has thoroughly exhausted the title (although there have been other offshoots, such as an animated series). Based on past performance, it's hard to see "Dominion" as the end of anything, particularly if the movie can tap into the renewed jet-propelled life that movie-going is exhibiting this summer, currently fueled by another sequel.

Like many a monstrosity concocted in the lab, "Jurassic World: Dominion" falls short of its potential, which doesn't mean it won't be a success. Because just as life finds a way, when it comes to a title with this level of built-in name recognition, sequels somehow find a way, too.

-CNN



Star Trek: Strange New Worlds reminds you filler TV is fantastic

■ Alex Cranz

In the age of thunderingly loud blockbusters and hyper-serial prestige television, Star Trek has struggled. The J.J. Abrams films tried to reinvent Star Trek for the mega action film era, and Star Trek: Discovery tried to reinvent it for serial TV. And others, like Picard and Lower Decks, have just tried to play to the fans with intense nostalgia and in-jokes. They've all been Star Trek, but they haven't had quite the same impact as the original series or the Star Trek series of the '90s. Watching Star Trek: Strange New Worlds feels like watching The Next Generation or Voyager or even The Original Series. It's Star Trek updated pitch perfectly for 2022, and that's in large part because it knows what we want: filler episodes.

The franchise is enormous at this point -- as big as Star Wars or Doctor Who, but it often feels like it has been at odds with itself and kind of embarrassed by its own existence in a way those other franchises aren't. It's like a petulant teenager who really wants to go trick or treating with the family but doesn't want to run into any friends in case they get made fun of.

Strange New Worlds isn't like that. This show understands that you can be earnest and you can be goofy and you can still tell really good and entertaining stories. It's not embarrassed to exist. And, yes, a lot of that is down to a terrific cast -- helmed by Anson Mount as Christopher Pike and Rebecca Romijn as his second in command, Una Chin-Riley (or Number One if you're familiar with the original Star Trek show). But beyond a great cast appearing in a great-looking show, what's really captivated me is how Strange New Worlds is happy to embrace the filler episode.

Filler episodes are defined as the ones not pertaining to the overarching stories in a series. They're often episodes about downtime, or they're the weird, funny episode in a typically dramatic show. They exist because, until streaming caught on, most TV series had 20-plus episode



orders. In the same amount of time many series now turn out six to 10 episodes, writer's rooms would typically have to turn out something closer to 22 scripts. That meant things could get weird. A lot of those 20 episodes could have serial plots: Mulder and Scully and their war against the Cigarette Smoking Man and the Consortium or the myriad "beloved doctor gets sick" plotlines on ER. But the shows would also have episodes that got experimental or silly or just plain content to not raise the stakes to "the end of the world as we know it." Part of the reason Picard getting Borg-ified had so much impact on Star Trek: The Next Generation was because we knew this was also the

nerd who liked to play a private eye on the holodeck.

As short episode orders and highly serialized plotlines became the du jour in TV, the filler episode fell out of fashion. The cast of Star Trek: Discovery is not accidentally acting out a fairy tale for the amusement of a fourth-dimensional being anytime soon. But I'd argue that the filler episode was also what distinguished TV from movies as an art form. Highly serialized shows like Obi-Wan Kenobi airing on Disney Plus feel like films, carefully partitioned out over several weeks. One of the biggest complaints about many new shows on Netflix is that they feel like overlong movies. The plot is

always hustling, and we never have time to just sit with a character and get to know them.

And the appeal of TV for so long -- the reason it often inspires enormous online fandoms -- is because you spend so much time with these characters that you know them better than the ones you spend two hours in a theater with.

Six episodes in, Strange New Worlds hasn't been afraid to take a breath and let us just enjoy these characters -- just like Trek fans used to do with previous series. So we can have an episode where Captain Pike, who learned his own tragic future on Star Trek: Discovery, tries to come to terms with it, and we can have an episode that makes the supremely goofy Gorn Kirk

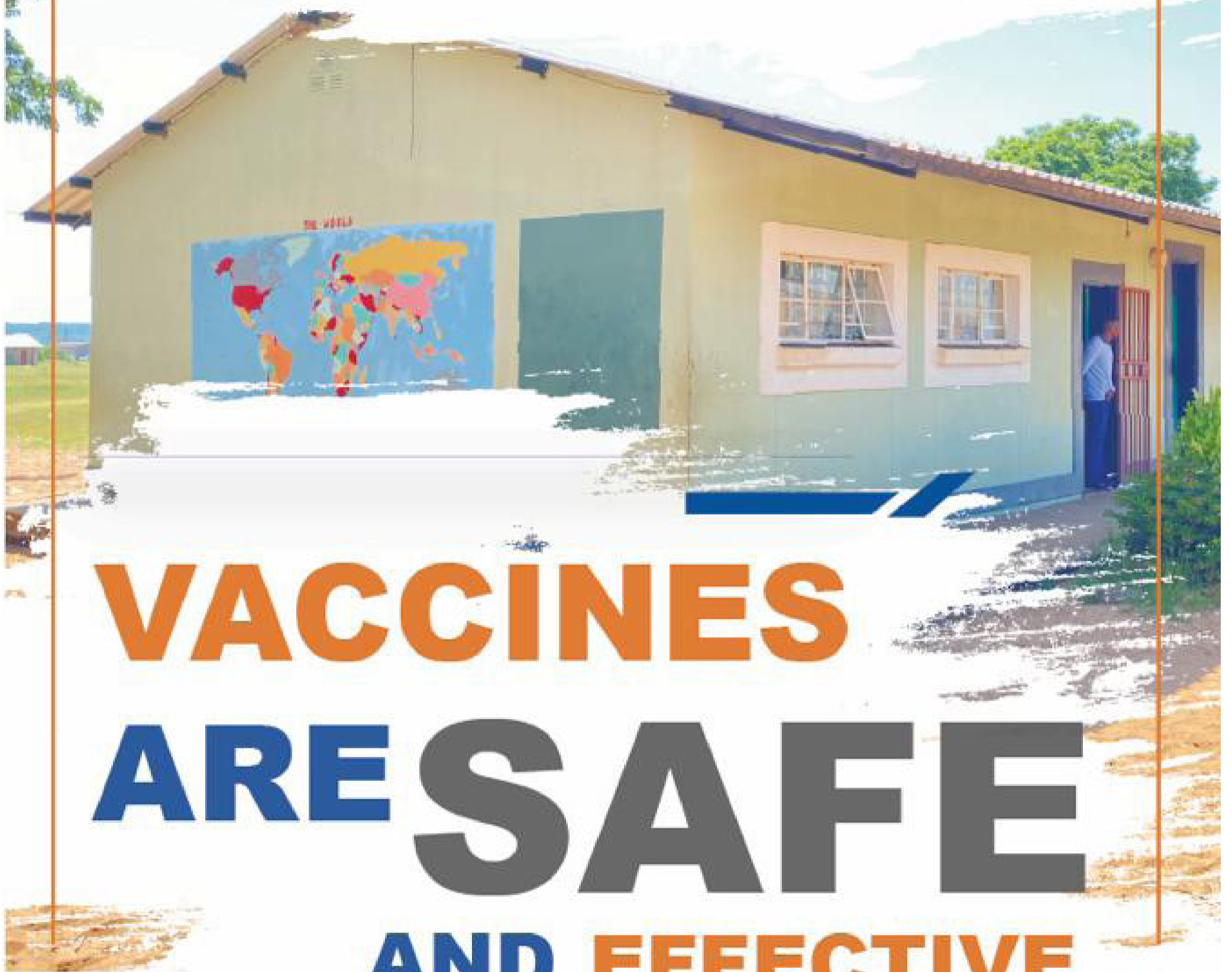
once wrestled a legitimately spooky threat. But we can also have an episode where everyone enjoys their day off and two characters accidentally switch bodies and negotiate some diplomatic treaties.

The show is comfortable developing the characters in a wide variety of ways while not feeling the need to always check in on some looming threat. Shows like Stranger Things could learn a lot from the more gentle plotting. Sometimes we don't need seven episodes racing toward the end of the world. Sometimes we just need one or two -- you know, so we can have time for that body-switching or "Groundhog Day" episode.

-The Verge



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Hosting Afcon is a good idea but let's be honest

So, I am here at one of my favourite joints, a bar in the very heart of Katutura, enjoying this generous measure of the very cold, crispy Tafel lite.

We are here with a few of what I may call my central committee, a closely-knit inner circle of fellow beer guzzlers who, over the years, have taken it upon themselves to be armchair critics of national issues.

We love it, after all.

For it is here from the fringe that we flaunt our raw intellectual prowess on everything worth reading about, worth drowning our often-dull moments into some kind of erudite noise.

It's been cold this week, and even the bar tender has pulled out of his dirty pillow case, an intricately woven jersey with broken wool by the elbows.

He doesn't mind us.

Outside, taxi drivers play cat and mouse with the police, and the smell of braaied meat is not far away.

Just about that moment, Fikameni, my neighbour's son staggers in, waving his phone, "The deal's been sealed in Botswana, Afcon. It's on the news."

Immediately the entire bar drowns into a raucous talk and arguments about Namibian football and what the chance are of hosting Afcon 2027.

I am not much a follower of sporting events but I have been around long enough to be part of the pedestrian noise around how we needed to prioritize our sport.

My arguments had always been sociological more than anything, and right up to this time, I still hold firmly to the idea that investing in our sporting sector is a sure way of rescuing our young generation from the clutches of crime and delinquency.

And as I look around bar trying to follow the winging pendulum of the banal arguments that have now excited the crowd on this small corner of the location, I can help but wonder how we got here.

How we have given ourselves to the foolishness of building our house from the roof, and seek to pocket the economic and touristic benefits of Afcon 2027 by riding at the back of Botswana.

The more I scrolled on my phone, the more I met up with more stunning news: That we were contributing 40% to Botswana's 60%, that we will host the opening and give the final over to the Tswana.

It is the deal of compromise of course, but much clearly, the deal is telling us that the Tswana have been better than us at capacitating their own sports sector and as such it is clear that they negotiated from a position of strength.

But what draws my mind into the cesspit of confusion is what exactly that 40% meant, what was it in real terms and do we have it?

This 40%, does it speak of the many stadia we have, or does it represent the many hotels that would host Africa, does it speak to our airports and their vicinity to our fields, what exactly is it that we are bringing to the table?

In the momentary vexation of my thoughts, I lift my beer bottle up to my lips, but I bring it up, up and its base come to my very nose as I stare into the brown bottle.

Then from the very bottom of it, a thought sprang up to surface and lit a luminous spark in my mind. The 40% speaks to a failure over the years to play catch up with the Tswana, it speaks to the many investments we ought to have prioritized but chose not to, but now it is the many things that needs to be done between now and 2027.

And that is, we need to have our league running, we need to have a solid team, we need to spruce up our stadia and if possible build new ones, and we need to get our sporting ministry in order but also, we need to fund our sports better than before.

Hosting Afcon is a good idea but...

Outside, a wind blows a few dirty newspapers and picks them up into the highway.

A taxi blurs its horn past a red robot and a little cheerily chubby boy passes through kicking a plastic ball about.

What Lesotho can teach Eswatini and South Africa about key political reforms



Two southern African countries, South Africa and Eswatini, are undergoing important reforms. South Africa is reviewing its electoral system while Eswatini is revisiting the powers of the monarch through a national dialogue.

South Africa and Eswatini can look to Lesotho for lessons. It's a fellow member of the Southern African Development Community and has grappled with these issues for decades. The three countries share geographic, historical and economic ties.

The kingdom of Lesotho returned to electoral politics in 1993, after a long haul of dictatorship capped by a military junta. Since then, it has experienced mutinies, coups and electoral violence.

The advent of tumultuous coalition politics in 2012 laid bare the longstanding problems associated with the prime minister's excessive powers. He compromised the security forces, the judiciary, civil service and even parliament, thereby fuelling instability.

The Southern African Development Community has intervened in Lesotho in almost every electoral cycle. Its interventions have ranged from diplomatic to military. The country is now effectively under the trusteeship of the regional bloc as it sails through a turbulent reform programme.

Nevertheless, there are certain aspects that Lesotho has handled quite well. Its successes offer lessons for other states that are undergoing reforms in similar areas.

First, it has made its electoral system more inclusive. Second, it has curbed the powers of the monarch in a constitutional democracy.

South Africa's electoral system

South Africa faces a critical period in its electoral history. The country is reviewing its electoral system in the light of a debate that has raged since pre-constitution negotiations in the 1990s. The contest is between the proponents of proportional representation, and those favouring a constituency-based electoral system.

Under proportional representation, candidates contest elections as party candidates – not as individuals. In parliament, the representatives occupy proportional seats allocated to parties.

The constituency-based electoral system divides a country into relatively equal territorial units called constituencies. The system is often credited with increased accountability to the voters by their representatives.

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

But arguments over it have never been settled. Occasionally, the Constitutional Court is asked to intervene.

Its first major intervention was in 2002. The court had to decide whether floor-crossing – MPs switching parties – was in keeping with a proportional representation system. It found that floor-crossing at national, provincial and local government levels was consistent with the constitution.

The second time was in 2020. Independent candidates had not been seen as having a place in an electoral system based on proportional representation of political parties. Then the court was asked to decide whether excluding independent candidates from contesting national and provincial elections was constitutional.

It decided that excluding independents was unconstitutional.

This partly invalidated the 1998 Electoral Act. The decision triggered a search for an electoral system that would allow independents to stand for election in an essentially proportional electoral system.

Lesotho grappled with the same questions following its controversial 1998 elections. In 2001, it adopted a "mixed member proportional" system, the first country in Africa to do so.

It remains a species of proportional electoral system, but permits individuals to stand in constituencies, either as independents or sponsored by political parties. As a result, some MPs are elected as constituency representatives, others as proportional representatives of political parties. The system has performed relatively well.

The fourth amendment to the constitution of Lesotho of 2001 can come in handy for the conversation under way in the South African parliament regarding electoral reform.

The lesson is that independent candidates can be allowed to stand for elections in a system that results, by and large, in proportional representation as required by section 46 of the constitution.

Eswatini's monarchy

The most recent wave of discontent in Eswatini reignited calls to reduce the powers of the only remaining absolute monarch in Africa. The king's place in Eswatini's democracy has been an issue since independence from Britain in 1968. At independence, the constitution provided for a constitutional monarch along the lines of Lesotho's.

The independence constitutions of both countries were cast in classical Westminster moulds. But, hardly five years into independence, in 1973, King Sobhuza II of Swaziland (now Eswatini) suspended the constitution and claimed absolute powers. This is still the position despite the new constitution of 2005. The king has unlimited executive powers and political parties are prohibited.

Discontent over the king's powers has been growing. There is now agreement in Eswatini that there must be candid dialogue about the king's powers, and greater democratisation. The Southern African Development Community is facilitating the dialogue.

Lesotho has been grappling with the question of the king's powers since pre-independence negotiations. Temptations to have an executive monarch have occasionally thrown the country into turmoil. But it is now generally accepted that executive powers must vest in the democratically elected prime minister. The monarchy is ceremonial.

Politicians have run Lesotho into many constitutional problems, but at least voters can replace them periodically. The monarch is cherished but within a democratic system based on multi-partyism. The people of Eswatini do not have this under an absolute monarchy.

The usual tendency to look to Europe and elsewhere to solve problems in Africa is not always helpful. This may be an opportune moment to find African solutions to African problems.

Hoolo Nyane

Head of Department, Public and Environmental Law Department, University of Limpopo

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The woman changing Australia's rape laws



Tiffanie Turnull

Saxon Mullins says she once had romantic dreams of what her 'first time' would be like.

In none was she paralysed by fear in a Sydney alleyway, aged 18, with a man she had met only minutes earlier.

Ms Mullins has always maintained this incident - in 2013 - was rape.

It spurred her to push for legal reform in Australia, after a long court battle ended with a judge finding the man involved did not realise she hadn't consented to sex.

Last week - five years after she walked out of a court feeling defeated and powerless - her state introduced a law that would have jailed the man had it existed at the time.

"It is a little bit of justice for a lot of people," Ms Mullins, now 27, tells the BBC.

"It's recognition: 'What happened to you was bad, and we're changing because of it.'"

Under the new "affirmative consent" laws in New South Wales (NSW), a person must say or do something to communicate their consent for sex.

Previously defendants could argue they reasonably believed they had consent - even if the alleged victim did nothing to convey it.

Essentially, consent now relies on a person

saying yes to sex, rather than the absence of them saying no.

Five-year court nightmare

In court, Ms Mullins had felt like the onus was on her to prove she'd said no or asked the man to stop.

She told a jury the man had become "frustrated" and "aggressive" after she informed him she wanted to go back inside a nightclub to her friend.

She said she froze - a common response to sexual assault.

"I was just scared I guess. I didn't know what to do so I just did what he said," Ms Mullins told a trial.

He was convicted by a jury and sentenced to five years in jail. For her, it was a "horrible" combination of surprise, relief, and guilt. She felt like she'd ruined his life. But he successfully appealed against the verdict, forcing a second trial - this time before a judge alone.

Hearing the second verdict - not guilty - was even worse for Ms Mullins.

She was seated a mere three chairs away from the man, silently crying as he exhaled in relief and hugged his mother.

"It felt really personal. It wasn't 'Oh, we didn't meet this threshold'. It felt like it was me that wasn't believed," she says.

The prosecutors would later make headway with an appeal, but the courts ultimately found another re-trial would be too oppressive on the accused - it would be

his third, he had already served 10 months in prison, and five years had passed since the night in question.

With no sense of justice from the criminal process, Ms Mullins felt she had to speak out.

"I could've washed my hands of it, but someone else then has to get their hands dirty," she says.

"And mine were already filthy, so I thought I may as well keep going."

In 2018 she waived her right to anonymity and told her story to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's Four Corners programme.

It sent shockwaves across Australia.

Reforms could be 'revolutionary' NSW - Australia's most populous state - pushed through its affirmative consent bill in November.

Since then, the Australian Capital Territory has passed its own law and Victoria has promised to do the same. Tasmania changed its legislation almost 20 years ago.

But Australia was already "ahead of the curve" when it comes to rape laws, says Amnesty International spokeswoman Nikita White.

Internationally, a lot of jurisdictions - including France, Japan and some US states like New York - still define rape as sex with violence or the threat of violence. Few other places are legislating affirmative

consent laws, according to Ms White.

"It really is revolutionary what's happening in NSW," she says.

"There'll be a domino effect, at least around Australia, but other countries would definitely be looking towards us as well."

Critics' concerns

Some argue the reforms set a dangerous precedent.

The new laws clarify that consent can be withdrawn at any time, and that consenting to one sexual activity is not consent for another.

The state's bar association says the changes will criminalise a range of "unproblematic intimate activity, particularly within established respectful relationships".

Other commentators have claimed the law could be abused by disgruntled ex-partners seeking revenge, or that it could have impacts on an already strained criminal justice system.

Prominent lawyer Margaret Cunneen has argued the laws will delay what she calls "the real cases with merit".

"[It will] be very unfair on genuine victims and anyone wrongly accused will have to wait longer to have his or her name to be cleared," says the barrister, who is currently defending a high-profile former rugby league and NFL player, Jarryd Hayne, ahead of his rape trial.

Ms Mullins describes many critics of the

laws as barristers who are "upset they now have to work a little bit harder". Many of their arguments are "absurd", she says. "In reality this law has been in place in Tasmania for many years... because it works."

Consensual sexual activity does not end up before the courts because it is consensual, Ms Mullins says.

She adds it is "unbelievably offensive" to suggest some victims are less deserving of court time than others, and points out that false claims make up only a tiny fraction of sexual assault reports.

Statistics show one in six women and one in 25 men have experienced sexual assault. But according to Australian authorities, most do not report it to police. Of those who do, about 10% of cases lead to a conviction.

"If the people making those claims had gone through the criminal justice system as a survivor, they would never think anybody would do that unless they absolutely had to," she says.

The law will be reviewed after three years, as is standard, according to NSW attorney general Mark Speakman.

A senior barrister himself, Mr Speakman has rubbished criticism of the laws, calling the reforms "common sense" and "simple". "They're not about some kind of woke lawyer view of the world, they are about fundamental decency," he said.

Law reform only the beginning After her long fight for change alongside survivors and experts, Ms Mullins says watching the laws come into effect last week was hugely emotional for her.

"I can't change anything that happened to me. But if [this] stops any of that from happening to somebody else, then, of course, it's all been worth it. I feel proud," she says.

But her advocacy has come at a high personal cost - a rollercoaster of progress, disappointments, praise and often vile abuse.

And throughout it all Ms Mullins has continued retelling - and often reliving - her story.

"Sometimes I do think maybe I'll wash my hands of this. Maybe that is enough," she says. "But I don't think I could do that."

She says there's still much work to do - advocating for affirmative consent laws nationwide, reforming how victims are treated in the justice system, and reducing the shocking prevalence of sexual assault in Australia.

"Survivors finding justice is great... but they were still assaulted," she says.

"And that's what we're trying to stop."

-BBC



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Refineries cash in as petrol prices soar

■ **Ben King**

Oil refineries are making nearly five times as much money from refining petrol as they did year ago, data show.

A lack of capacity to refine petrol and diesel from crude oil has helped to push fuel prices to record levels, and increased profits for refinery owners.

Petrol prices are at an all-time high though the oil price remains well below record levels.

The loss of Russian supplies has stretched an industry which was already at full capacity.

Wednesday saw the fastest rise in petrol prices for seventeen years, and on Thursday the cost of filling a typical family car passed £100 for the first time, piling costs on motorists.

Part of the increase is down to the high price of crude oil, which is currently above \$120 per barrel, driven up by fears the war in Ukraine would cut access to supplies from Russia.

That has led to billions of pounds of extra profit for oil producers, and led the UK government to impose a £5bn windfall tax on North Sea oil producers.

But oil refiners - the companies which turn crude oil into diesel, petrol and other products - are seeing their profits rise substantially too.

"The refiners are printing money at the moment," says Neil Crosby, senior analyst at the data firm OilX. "More than they have ever witnessed."

There's a shortage of refining capacity, which has led to substantial increase in the "refining margin" - the difference between what they pay for crude oil and what they can make selling the refined products.



"This is a real crunch in terms of the industry's ability to produce these fuels. That very much turns up in the wholesale price of diesel and petrol," says Mr Crosby. And that's contributed to the fact that although oil prices are still some way off record highs, petrol and diesel have been setting new records day after day.

How much have margins increased? Figures from the data company Refinitiv show how the business of refining oil has become so profitable in the past year. On the 8 June 2021, refiners were making \$9.26 per barrel from refining petrol, and \$6.84 per barrel refining diesel.

On Wednesday, they were making \$43.11 on petrol, up 366%, and \$51.13 on diesel,

up 648%. Figures published by BP, which owns a number of refineries in Europe and the US, shows its own measure of refining profits, the 'Refining Marker Margin', up from \$7.7 dollars per barrel to \$35.7 over the past year.

US oil giant ExxonMobil owns a number of refineries, including Fawley in Hampshire, the UK's largest. Last month the Financial Times quoted its chief executive Darren Woods as saying he did not think that the "very, very high margin environment" was "good for economies around the world."

A source close to a major refinery owner argued that the refiners don't set the margins themselves. Prices for crude oil,

petrol and diesel are determined by the market - what supplies are available, and how much buyers will pay.

Why are refinery margins so high?

Before the invasion of Ukraine, much of Europe's petrol and diesel supply was made in Russian refineries and imported in tankers. In 2020 the UK received 18% of its diesel supply from Russia.

Though that supply has not been cut off completely, the volumes coming from Russia are significantly lower as buyers shun Russian exports even before sanctions fully kick in.

Fuel stocks were low before the invasion and there was already a global shortage of refining capacity. The sector has not

been highly profitable in recent years and attracted little investment.

So there was no slack to make up for lost Russian refining capacity.

The worldwide lack of refining capability has contributed to high fuel prices in other countries, including the US.

In addition, China has cut its exports of refined fuels. And although the UK doesn't import directly from China, this has a knock-on effect on the entire global market, Mr Crosby says.

ExxonMobil did not respond to request for comment. BP declined to comment.

-BBC



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US SEC chief unveils plans to overhaul Wall Street stock trading



Daniel Thomas

The top United States securities regulator has unveiled a planned overhaul of Wall Street retail stock trading rules, aiming to boost competition for handling orders by commission-free brokerages to ensure mom-and-pop investors get the best price for trades.

On Wednesday, US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) Chair Gary Gensler told an industry audience he wants to require trading firms to directly compete to execute trades from retail investors. The move is aimed at making the \$45 trillion US equities market more transparent and fair.

The Wall Street watchdog plans to scrutinize growth in recent years of the payment for order flow (PFOF) practice – banned in Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia – and under which brokers get paid to send customers' stock orders to market makers.

Some brokers, such as TD Ameritrade, Robinhood Markets and E*Trade, accept these payments from wholesale market makers for orders. In December 2020,

Robinhood actually paid a fine related to the practice, which the SEC said raised costs for investors using the online brokerage.

A ban on the PFOF practice is not off the table, Gensler has said. On Wednesday, he said the practice has "inherent conflicts" while noting some zero-commission brokerages operate without PFOF.

"I asked staff to take a holistic, cross-market view of how we could update our rules and drive greater efficiencies in our equity markets, particularly for retail investors," Gensler said.

Investor advocates vs industry executives
Investor advocates praised the SEC's plan, which would be the biggest shake-up of US equity market rules in more than a decade. But financial industry executives quickly blasted the plans, saying they could hinder commission-free brokerages from serving more investors.

"Too many in the financial industry today get rich from anti-competitive and predatory practices in highly fragmented markets that result in retail investors being mistreated if not ripped off," said Dennis Kelleher, the chief executive of

Washington-based advocacy group Better Markets, who supports the SEC's plans.

Joseph Mecane, head of execution services at Citadel Securities, warned against broad plans to revamp the market.

"We talk about how our markets are the envy of the world," said Mecane. "We need to be very careful about... unintentionally taking us back to a period that looks worse than how it looks today."

"Let's keep our eye on the retail investor who has never had it better as far as liquidity and low cost trading," said Kirsten Wegner, who leads the Modern Markets Initiative, a Washington-based group that represents high-speed trading platforms.

Gensler said if PFOF is still allowed, the SEC wants rules to mandate market makers disclose more data about fees these firms earn and the timing of trades.

Gensler's announcement would generate any formal proposals in the US fall season. The public could then weigh before the SEC votes on whether to adopt them.

Dan Gallagher, Robinhood's chief legal, compliance and corporate affairs

officer, said his firm "looks forward to reviewing the Commission's eventual rule proposal and engaging with the SEC during a meaningful notice and comment rulemaking process".

"Open and transparent" auctions
The intended changes would fundamentally alter the business model of wholesalers. They could also affect brokers' ability to offer commission-free trading to retail investors.

PFOF came under regulatory scrutiny last year when an army of retail investors went on a buying spree of "meme stocks" like GameStop and AMC, squeezing hedge funds that had shorted the shares. Many investors purchased shares using commission-free brokers such as Robinhood.

To enhance order-by-order competition, the new rules would call for "open and transparent" auctions aimed at providing investors with better prices. They would also require dealers executing trades to ensure the best price for investors and to improve transparency around the procedural standards brokers must meet

when handling and executing orders.

They would also require broker-dealers and market centres to disclose more data, including a monthly summary of price improvement and other statistics, Gensler said.

The rules would seek to shrink the minimum pricing increment or so-called tick size to ensure all trading occurs in the minimum increment.

Currently, retail brokerages can send customer orders directly to a wholesale broker to be executed, as long as the broker is matching or bettering the best price available on US exchanges. Large market makers typically improve on the best price by a fraction of a cent. Gensler has criticized this model as limiting competition for retail orders.

"It's great to see the SEC taking a holistic approach to this problem – there's not a single answer, we need changes to different parts of the market," said Dave Lauer, CEO of financial platform Urvin Finance.

-Al Jazeera





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Elephant tusk ivory sold on eBay a decade after self-imposed ban

Victoria Gill

Sellers are flouting eBay's self-imposed ban on the sale of elephant ivory by listing it under pseudonyms.

An investigation by the BBC and legal experts found ivory objects were often listed as "bovine bone".

We bought three such items on eBay UK and tested them in an independent lab. Two were confirmed to be made of ivory.

An analysis by ivory trade experts also indicated that thousands of elephant ivory objects have been sold on the site since the company banned its sale.

The investigation was started by Dr Caroline Cox at the University of Portsmouth. She and other ivory trade experts are concerned that online trade could continue, potentially undermining a new UK-wide ban on the sale of ivory, which came into force on 6 June.

It is more than 10 years since eBay announced its own complete, worldwide ban on ivory sales. An online post stated that the global ban would "protect buyers and sellers, as well as animals in danger of extinction".

In 2018 Dr Cox and her team carried out a three month online study, tracking "bovine bone" as a sale category on eBay's

UK site. The team tracked 632 pieces of bovine bone that were sold on eBay UK; more than 500 of those were determined to be ivory.

For this online forensic study, Dr Cox explained, she was able to use pictures and information in listings that provide buyers - and investigators - with clear evidence of what the objects are actually made of.

"Ivory has a distinct, creamy colour," she explained. "And a listing will often mention the weight of the item being sold - very accurately and specifically - because that's the measure of ivory's value."

The key piece of evidence is in the image of an object. Carved ivory has distinct and visible growth lines called Schreger lines, which you can think of as tree rings, but for teeth and tusks. "These are unique to ivory," said Dr Cox.

Investigators and law enforcement officers have long employed these visual techniques to identify illegal ivory, both in seizures of the material and when they are investigating the online trade.

The ivory act BBC News bought three objects listed on eBay as bovine bone to have tested in an independent lab in 2019.

Of three items we bought, a small, carved African head ornament, a bracelet and a set of figurines, two were chemically

confirmed by scientists in the Oxford University School of Archaeology to be made of elephant tusk.

In a statement responding to the BBC's findings, eBay said that it had been working to tackle the illegal trade in elephant ivory for nearly a decade.

"We blocked or removed over 265,000 listings prohibited under our animal products policy in a recent two-year period," a spokesperson told BBC News in an email.

"Our proactive approach means that illicit ivory sellers are forced to use obscure 'code words' [for items] which very rarely - if at all - get sold, because buyers can't find them."

The ivory trade experts who started this investigation pointed out that they tracked 500 eBay sales of ivory to completion over just three months in 2018. And the same code words or pseudonyms, primarily "bovine bone" were used repeatedly.

Laws on the ivory trade differ from country to country. On Monday, the UK brought into force what it called "one of the toughest bans on elephant ivory sales in the world". From 6 June, trade in elephant teeth and tusks is illegal in the UK, punishable by fines of up to £250,000 or up to five years in prison.

Scrolling for wildlife

EBay is not the only online platform that wildlife traders have exploited. During our investigation of the pet trade in endangered apes back in 2017, we found animals being advertised on Instagram, in posts that the company subsequently removed.

And in April of this year, researchers from a conservation campaign group called Avaaz published a report citing "129 pieces of potentially harmful wildlife trafficking content" posted on Facebook, including posts selling or seeking cheetahs, monkeys, pangolins and pangolin scales, lion cubs, elephant tusks, and rhino horn.

In response to the report, Facebook's parent company Meta said: "We prohibit the trading of endangered wildlife or their parts. Meta is a dedicated member of the Coalition to End Wildlife Trafficking Online."

John Scanlon, CEO of the Elephant Protection Initiative Foundation said that these online platforms had "enormous reach and impact".

"If they are not carefully policed, they are an efficient vehicle for criminals to sell illicit goods in any country," he said. "So it's deeply troubling when an online platform makes big commitments about policing trade, but then fails to deliver."

"The international community has made great progress at closing down legal ivory

markets in recent years, of which the new UK legislation is just the latest example. But this progress risks being seriously undermined by leakages online."

Conservationists point out though that threats to Africa's elephants are changing.

"Organised ivory poaching remains a threat in some regions, especially in central Africa, but has been much reduced in parts of eastern and southern Africa," said Mr Scanlon. "We believe that the biggest emerging threat comes from the increasing competition between growing human populations and elephants for land and resources, especially as the impact of climate change is beginning to be felt."

Dr Cox and other wildlife trade experts are concerned though that, as national legislation is tightened, more products like ivory could move online, especially if platforms are not policed.

"Sites like eBay operate by allowing millions of sellers all around the world to advertise across international borders," Dr Cox pointed out.

She added that the company's failure to enforce its ban on the trade in ivory provided a safe space for a trade that threatened wildlife.

-BBC

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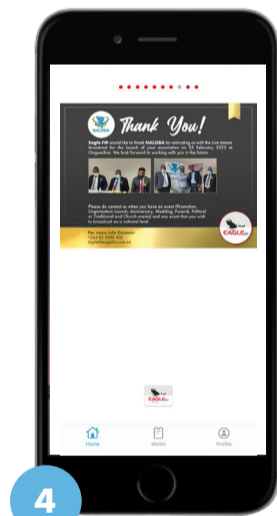
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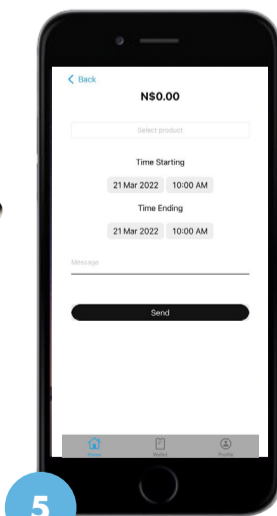
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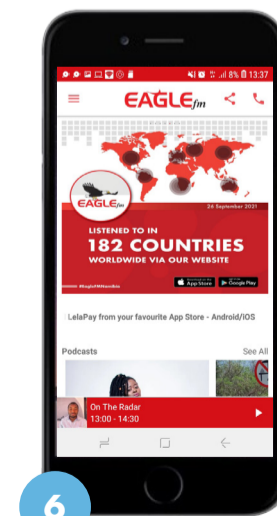
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Algeria plays balancing act as Europe tries cut Russian gas



■ **Giorgio Cafiero**

As the Russia-Ukraine war rages on, European Union members are facing a slew of energy security dilemmas. Dependent on Russia for 40 percent of its gas imports, Italy is looking to reduce this reliance – and quickly – by turning to other countries while accelerating its move towards renewables.

Prime Minister Mario Draghi and the head of the Italian multinational oil and gas company ENI travelled to Algeria in April to sign a preliminary energy deal. Then, last month, Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune visited Rome to finalise ENI's agreement with Algeria's state-owned Sonatrach. Under the agreement, Algeria is to gradually increase gas flows to Italy via the Transmed pipeline. While Algeria can ultimately play a useful role in helping Italy reduce its dependence on Russian gas, Italian policymakers have several obstacles to overcome.

In 2010, Algeria was Italy's top gas supplier but as the North African country had to meet growing domestic demand, exports to Italy have since dropped.

In 2013, Russia became Italy's number one gas supplier, providing Italy with twice as much gas as Algeria did.

Last year, Russia supplied Italy with 28.988 billion cubic metres (bcm) of gas, compared with Algeria's 22.584bcm.

Algeria could reroute exports to support Italy and other European countries wishing to wean themselves off Russian gas, a move made simpler given Tunisian imports of Algerian gas have decreased with Algiers making exports to Italy a higher priority.

Yet Riccardo Fabiani, North Africa project director for the International Crisis Group, told Al Jazeera that technical, rather than political, hurdles mean Algeria can probably, at most, reroute only 5-10bcm to Italy and the rest of Europe.

"Domestic demand for gas continues to rise very quickly and there are no significant new projects coming online in

the next years that could boost [Algeria's] production. If anything, total gas production is likely to slightly decrease as pressure at old fields diminishes," said Fabiani.

The dynamics resulting from increased East-West bifurcation could put more pressure on Algeria to navigate the Ukrainian conflict carefully, against the backdrop of the Algiers-Moscow partnership.

There could be growing concerns in Europe about future gas imports from Algeria benefitting Moscow, considering the North African nation's significant military purchases from Russia.

Ultimately, Algeria, a country which prioritises foreign policy independence, is attempting to strike a delicate balance in boosting energy exports to EU countries while maintaining its defence relationship and strategic partnership with Moscow.

Since February 24, Algerian officials have sought to keep a degree of equidistance between the West and Russia.

For example, in early May, Russia's chief diplomat Sergey Lavrov travelled to Algeria just before Lieutenant General Hans Werner Wiermann, head of the NATO International Military Staff, paid a visit.

As a regional heavyweight and former colony, Algeria does not take well to orders from other capitals.

"The roots of this balancing act must be found in the non-alignment movement, where Algeria was at the forefront, which also seems a safe foreign policy choice for many countries in the Maghreb and the developing world – a third way to escape the spiralling and polarisation stemming from the conflict in Ukraine," Umberto Profazio, an associate fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies and Maghreb analyst at the NATO Defence College Foundation, told Al Jazeera.

The fight for Africa's last colony A stronger Algerian-Italian energy relationship has ramifications for the Maghreb and Southern Europe. Last year, President Tebboune halted

gas flows from his country to Spain via Morocco amid an intense row.

On June 8, Algeria suspended its 2002 treaty of friendship and cooperation with Spain in response to Madrid endorsing Morocco's 2007 autonomy plan for Western Sahara in March. That had been a move Spain made to mend fences with Morocco after bilateral relations suffered when the Polisario's Brahim Ghali received COVID-19 treatment in a Spanish hospital in April 2021, and the subsequent Ceuta crisis.

Will Algeria try to use energy to pressure European governments into adopting increasingly Algeria-aligned positions on Western Sahara?

"Algeria wants to be heard and taken into consideration by its European counterparts, which have been under increasing pressure from Morocco to renegotiate their relations and review their positions on Western Sahara," said Fabiani.

"Energy is definitely a source of leverage for Algeria and Moroccan diplomats recognise that they cannot expect all Algerian gas-dependent countries in Europe to adopt [Rabat's] stance on this conflict, which is why there is little pressure on Italy, for example, to change its position on Western Sahara."

Nonetheless, Algeria's leverage over European countries vis-à-vis Western Sahara has limits.

If Algiers would attempt to "blackmail" its buyers to change positions on Western Sahara, it would risk jeopardising its role as a reliable energy provider, according to Fabiani.

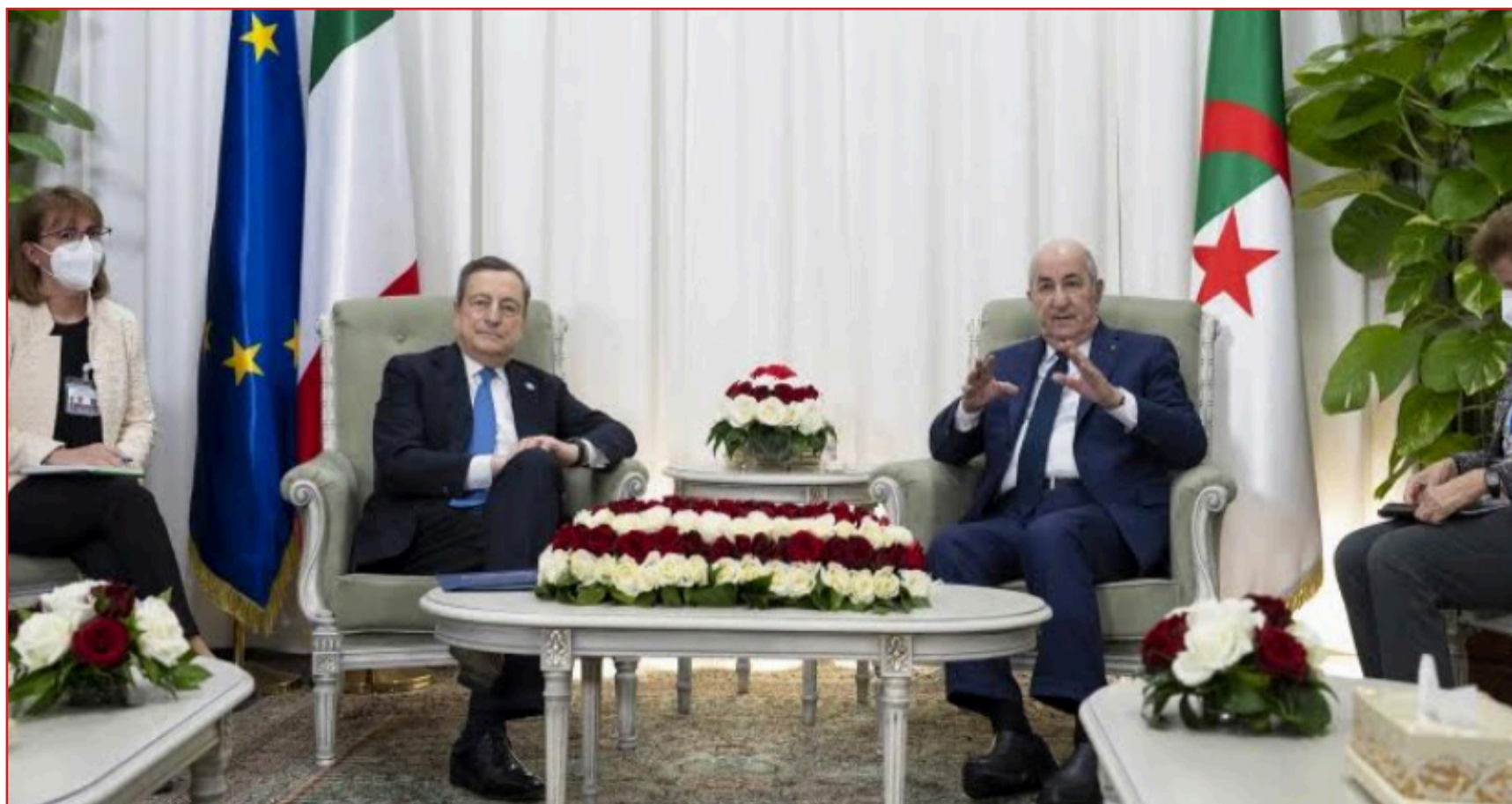
"European governments need dependable energy exporters and are unlikely to tolerate any blatant exploitation of energy ties for political purposes."

While turning to Algeria for a strengthened energy relationship, Rome will likely have to pay more attention to Western Sahara, being careful not to upset neither Algiers nor Rabat.

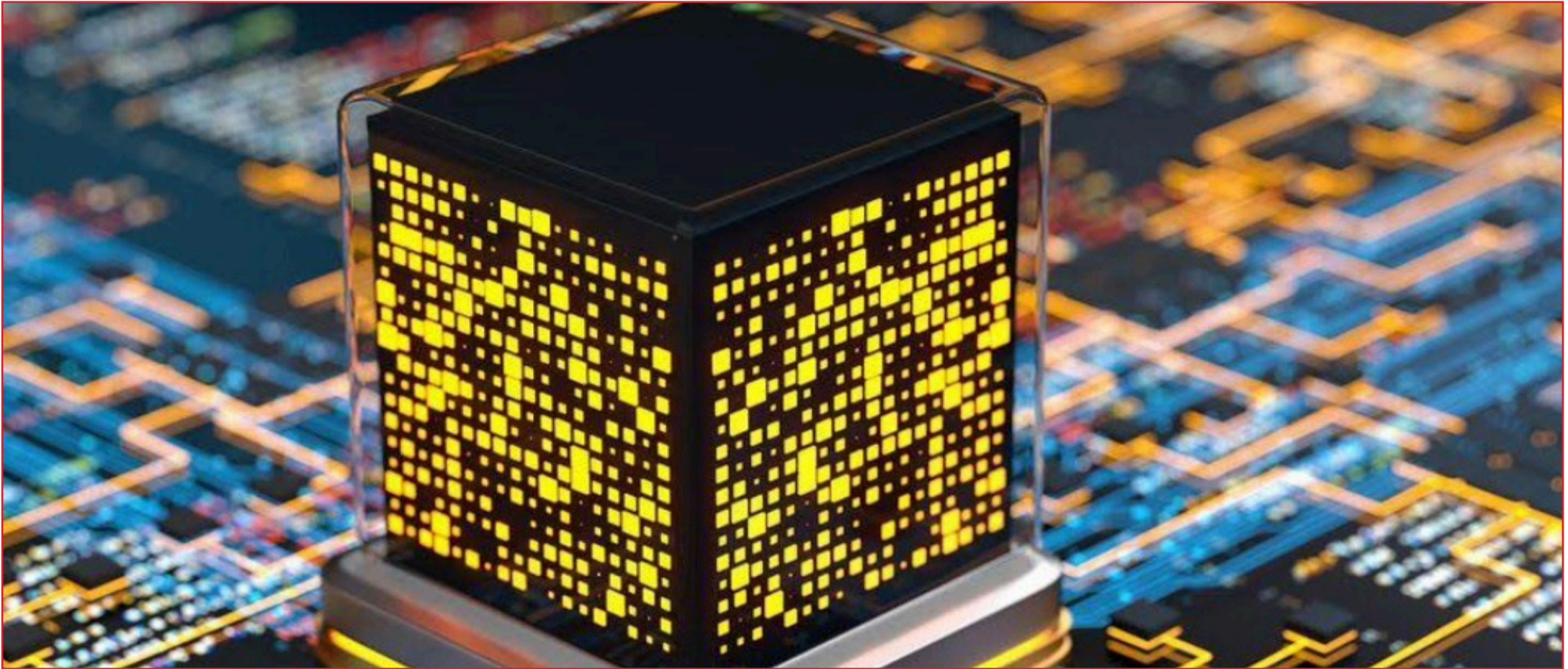
"Italy has not taken a definitive position on the Western Sahara dossier so as to be able to move more freely than Spain in relations with Morocco and Algeria," said Giuseppe Dentice, the head of the MENA Desk at the Center for International Studies and teaching assistant at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan.

Supporting the Polisario is a cornerstone of Algeria's foreign policy while Morocco views the Western Sahara conflict as its existential issue. But for Italy, this dispute will probably become a diplomatic headache more than anything else.

-AL Jazeera



YouTube accused of failing to tackle fake Elon Musk livestream scams



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■ **Joe Tidy**

YouTube is being criticised for failing to tackle a network of cyber-criminals streaming fake Elon Musk videos to scam viewers. The criminals are hijacking YouTube accounts and using the videos to promote bogus cryptocurrency giveaways. BBC News found dozens of these streams being watched by tens of thousands of people over four days this month. On Tuesday, Elon Musk said YouTube was not tackling "scam ads". YouTube says it removes channels that are reported. For many months, the streams have been fooling thousands of people into sending cryptocurrency to criminals, thinking they will receive a prize from Mr Musk.

One of the most common links to website <https://elon-x2.live/>, which invites people to double their money by sending Bitcoin or Ethereum to the digital-wallet addresses advertised. Wallet transaction history shows the scammers made \$243,000 (£194,000) in just over a week:

- 23 transfers of bitcoin totalling 7.68923261 coins worth \$234,000
 - 18 transfers of ethereum totalling 5.016 coins worth \$9,000
- Analysts at Whale Alert say giveaway scammer wallets they track show profits of:
- \$98m in 2021
 - \$30m so far this year

Every few days, the hackers change the name and picture of dozens of YouTube channels to make them look like official Tesla channels, the electric-car manufacturer of which Mr Musk is chief executive. They are thought to buy email-and-password pairs from previous data breaches online - or simply try common passwords with known email addresses. Chilean urban-music artist Aisack had YouTube channel hacked and hijacked two weeks ago. "My followers on other social networks started asking me what is going on with the name of my channel and were very confused about why I was streaming Tesla content," he said.

"It is very frustrating that your YouTube channel is hacked after dedicating so many years of work to it. "I feel completely violated and insecure."The hacking of my channel has hurt me a lot, since I am a few days away from releasing a new music video and now I am creating a second channel as a back-up and re-uploading more than 10 years of work on YouTube.

"YouTube is not doing enough on security issues to prevent hacker attacks, since many users are in the same situation as me."

YouTube said it had removed one of the channels BBC News had alerted it to, adding: "We have strict Community Guidelines prohibiting scams, including Impersonation and hacking." Last year, one man hoping to double his money sent scammers \$400,000 worth of bitcoins, after seeing a fake advert on Twitter. So far this year, scammers are having less success, Whale Alert founder Frank van Weert said, but still making millions and set for a boost if the price of Bitcoin rises.

"The numbers are going down compared to 2021 - but there are still plenty of victims falling for it, as they evolve their tactics," Mr Van Weert said."Right now, they have been overfishing the sea a bit, especially with Bitcoin prices going down, but that will change as not enough is being done to stop them." The scammers could be stopped if cryptocurrency exchanges blocked their wallets to prevent them cashing out their stolen coins, he added.

The vast majority of the fake livestreams show financial firm ARK Invest's July panel with Musk and then Twitter chief executive Jack Dorsey. An spokeswoman told BBC News ARK "is aware of hacked third-party YouTube channels fraudulently posing as ARK". "These accounts are impersonators and not affiliated with ARK Invest in any way," she said. "ARK Invest will never use YouTube or other social media to solicit money, including cryptocurrency." -BBC



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 11h00-12h00
Brand Conversation with Dwight
 12h00-13h00
On the Radar with Justicia
 13h00-14h30

Ookundana Dhangi 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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Liz Truss to discuss captured Britons' death sentences with Ukraine

Christy Cooney

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss will speak with her Ukrainian counterpart about two Britons handed death sentences by a Russian proxy court in eastern Ukraine.

Aiden Aslin and Shaun Pinner were captured fighting with the Ukrainian army, but were tried as mercenaries.

Both the British government and Ukraine's top prosecutor have said the sentences breach the Geneva Convention.

Ms Truss is expected to discuss the situation with Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba by phone later.

Mr Aslin, 28, from Newark, in Nottinghamshire, and Mr Pinner, 48, from Bedfordshire, both of whom were already living in Ukraine at the time of the Russian invasion, were captured in April while defending the besieged city of Mariupol.

They were sentenced alongside a third man, Moroccan national Saoudun Brahim, by a Russian proxy court in the so-called Donetsk People's Republic, a pro-Russian breakaway region in eastern Ukraine.

All three men were charged with being mercenaries, the violent seizure of power, and undergoing training to carry out terrorist activities, according to Russia state news agency RIA Novosti.

The men's lawyer said they all wished to appeal against the sentence, Russia's Tass news agency reported.

Downing Street said the government was "deeply concerned" by the sentences given to Mr Aslin and Mr Pinner, adding that prisoners of war are granted "combatant immunity" by the Geneva Convention and should not be "exploited for political purposes".

Ms Truss said the outcome of the trial was a "sham judgement with absolutely no legitimacy" and that the government was doing "everything we can" to support the men's families.

Ukraine's Foreign Ministry described the "so-called trial" of all three men as "miserable" and said the Ukrainian government would "continue to make every effort to release all defenders of Ukraine".

"Such public trials place the interests of propaganda above law and morality, and undermine the exchange mechanisms of war prisoners," a spokesperson told the BBC.

In a statement, Ukrainian Prosecutor General Irina Venediktova said that, as prisoners of war, the three men "cannot be prosecuted for taking a direct part in hostilities" and that "their detention

should only aim to prevent their further participation in the conflict".

"[The sentencing] is nothing else but a violation and mockery of international humanitarian law and international human rights law obligations of Russia as an occupying power via proxies," she said.

"Russia once again displays its alienation from the rules-based system and a blatant disregard of the very core of the rule of law.

"Ukraine has already initiated pre-trial investigation into this matter and will take all appropriate steps to ensure that everyone that was involved in this illegal action is held responsible for their actions." Speaking to BBC Two's Newsnight, American former soldier Brennan Phillips, who previously worked with Mr Aslin in Ukraine, discussed how he thought the outcome of the trial would be received by those still fighting Russian forces in Ukraine.

"Whatever effect they thought they would have... I don't think it's going to be well-received," he said.

Mr Phillips said he believed the death sentence handed to the men was a deliberate "provocation" by Russia and that he was hopeful it would not ultimately be carried out.

-BBC



Ukrainian casualties: Kyiv losing up to 200 troops a day - Zelensky aide

Christy Cooney

A senior Ukrainian presidential aide has told the BBC that between 100 and 200 Ukrainian troops are being killed on the front line every day.

Mykhaylo Podolyak said Ukraine needed hundreds of Western artillery systems to level the playing field with Russia in the eastern Donbas region.

He also said Kyiv is not ready to resume peace talks with Moscow.

Ukrainian troops are under relentless bombardment as Russian forces attempt to take control of the whole of Donbas.

"The Russian forces have thrown pretty much everything non-nuclear at the front and that includes heavy artillery, multiple rocket launch systems and aviation," Mr Podolyak said.

He repeated Ukraine's appeal for more weapons from the West, saying that the "complete lack of parity" between the Russian and Ukrainian armies was the reason for Ukraine's heavy casualty rate.

"Our demands for artillery are not just some kind of whim... but an objective need when it comes to the situation on the battlefield," he said, adding that Ukraine needs 150 to 300 rocket launch systems to match Russia - a much higher number than it has received so far.

Mr Podolyak also said peace talks could only resume if Russia surrendered the territory it had gained since it invaded on 24 February.

Mr Podolyak's suggestion that 100 to 200 Ukrainian soldiers are dying each

day is higher than previous estimates. On Thursday, Ukraine's Defence Minister, Oleksii Reznikov, said Ukraine was losing 100 soldiers a day, and 500 more were injured.

The differing casualty figures are a sign of how difficult it is to get precise information from the battlefield.

Despite the heavy losses, Mr Reznikov claimed that a high number of Russian soldiers are also being killed.

"The Kremlin continues to press by sheer mass, stumbles, faces strong rebuffs and suffers huge casualties," Mr Reznikov said. "But yet still has forces to advance in some parts of the front."

Similarly, Luhansk regional governor Sergei Gaidai said Russians were "dying like flies" but echoed Mr Podolyak's claim that Ukraine is facing difficulties with a "catastrophic" lack of artillery.

Russian forces have concentrated their assault on the city of Severodonetsk. On Wednesday Mr Zelensky said "the fate of the Donbas is being decided there" and officials said it has been reduced to rubble by intense Russian artillery and missile barrages.

In addition to the frontline fighting, two Britons and a Moroccan man who fought for Ukraine's armed forces were sentenced to death on Thursday by an unrecognised court in the so-called Donetsk People's Republic.

They were found guilty of being mercenaries and of "taking action towards the violent seizure of power".

-BBC



Left unites to threaten Macron in parliamentary vote



■ **Lucy Williamson**

Having beaten the far right to retain the presidency in April, France's leader Emmanuel Macron is facing an unexpected challenge from a former Marxist on the far left. A new five-party alliance led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon is expected to make sweeping gains in legislative elections here on Sunday, possibly even blocking the government's majority in France's 577-seat National Assembly. And, with the directness that he's known for, Mr Mélenchon, who leads the far-left La France Insoumise (France Unbowed) party, has chosen a simple slogan for his campaign posters: "Mélenchon: prime minister." "The threat is clearly there. If we look at the polls, we are very close," government candidate Paul Midy told me, as he chatted to voters at a market in Essonne, south of Paris.

Mr Midy is running as a candidate for President Macron's centrist alliance Ensemble! (Together). While purchasing power remains the core concern at a national level, voters here in Essonne were very concerned about green issues, he told me, especially the opening of a new science research institute next to fertile farmlands. "We [host] Paris Saclay, one of the major innovation clusters in the world, with thousands of researchers; it's our French Silicon Valley," Mr Midy explained. "We need to develop it, but we also need to protect all the farmlands around it." Mr Mélenchon's alliance, known as NUPES (the New Ecological and Social Popular Union), includes France's main green party, along with the Socialists, the Communists, and France Insoumise. The NUPES candidate running against Paul Midy in Essonne is Cédric Villani. He turns up at the market on his bicycle, his basket stuffed with campaign leaflets.

"There are some huge differences [within NUPES] that are well known, especially on international policy," Mr Villani said. But we agree on the ecology and solidarity programme, which is very strong. When there's a vote about Europe, we'll be free to vote however we feel is best." I ask Mr Villani, a committed fan of the EU, whether he would want the Eurosceptic, Nato-sceptic Mr Mélenchon as prime minister. "Let's do things in the right order," he smiles. "The little bit of political experience I have now has taught me there are some questions that need to be postponed." The campaign in Essonne is more awkward than most, because Mr Villani - who came into politics with Mr Macron's party in 2017 - swapped political allegiance two years ago to the greens. "I'm spending this whole campaign explaining that I'm the candidate of Macron, and [my opponent] is the candidate of Jean-Luc Mélenchon," Paul

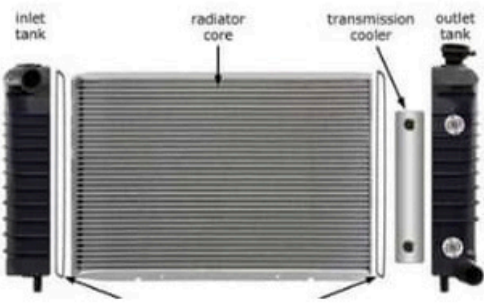
Midy told me. "In France, if you want to be able to pass reform, you need to have a clear majority in parliament. So this election is to get a clear majority for Mr Macron." A few weeks ago, analysts say, it was unthinkable that Mr Mélenchon's new alliance would seriously threaten the government's majority. Mr Macron and his allies currently have 345 seats in parliament - far more than the 289 they need for a majority. But the range of results expected by pollsters here has shifted, with the lowest projections for Ensemble! dipping below that magic number of 289. NUPES, some say, could tip 200. France Insoumise itself currently has fewer than 20 MPs. That's quite a turnaround for the political left in France, all but forgotten in the battle between Mr Macron and the right. "It's because all the parties on the left have united for the legislative elections,"

political scientist Olivier Costa explained. By contrast, he says, the far-right parties couldn't agree on joining forces, which has left the National Rally party of Marine Le Pen isolated. And, he says, some voters who backed President Macron in the presidential run-off simply to block Ms Le Pen, now want to limit his power. "There's a strong feeling that, OK, we elected Macron because it was him or Marine Le Pen, but we're going to try and put him in a challenging situation," he said. "I think Mélenchon has no chance of winning a majority, but what he can do is make a pretty good score and then constrain Macron to be in a sort of permanent negotiation." It's enough of a threat that President Macron himself has suddenly appeared on the campaign trail, in support of his MPs, after weeks of noted absence. After his first term was derailed by protests, Covid and the war in Ukraine, Mr Macron is keen to get a good run at the second, and "permanent negotiation" with parliament isn't part of the plan. But some voters say more negotiation might be good for a president who's widely seen as arrogant. "It will slow them down a bit, but it won't stop them from succeeding," public-sector worker Charlotte said as she left the market in Essonne. "For me, it's not a bad thing to have different parties." Perhaps the possibility of real debate will encourage voters to turn up for the election on Sunday - and for the run-off vote on 19 June. But for now, predictions are that turnout will be lower than ever. "French people know that the power lies in the Elysée," Prof Olivier Costa said. "And Emmanuel Macron has a very centralised approach. So people have the feeling that the National Assembly doesn't weigh very much in the decision-making process." It's all part of what he calls the "French madness" in politics. "It's just a competition between a limited number of leaders with a giant ego." So is France's parliamentary election just another round in the presidential race? Jean-Luc Mélenchon likes to say so. Remember his campaign literature, emblazoned with the words "prime minister"? Back in the market in Essonne, Paul Midy accepts that there's truth in it. "It's a long road to power in France," he sighs.

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But some voters say more negotiation might be good for a president who's widely seen as arrogant. "It will slow them down a bit, but it won't stop them from succeeding," public-sector worker Charlotte said as she left the market in Essonne. "For me, it's not a bad thing to have different parties." Perhaps the possibility of real debate will encourage voters to turn up for the election on Sunday - and for the run-off vote on 19 June. But for now, predictions are that turnout will be lower than ever. "French people know that the power lies in the Elysée," Prof Olivier Costa said. "And Emmanuel Macron has a very centralised approach. So people have the feeling that the National Assembly doesn't weigh very much in the decision-making process." It's all part of what he calls the "French madness" in politics. "It's just a competition between a limited number of leaders with a giant ego." So is France's parliamentary election just another round in the presidential race? Jean-Luc Mélenchon likes to say so. Remember his campaign literature, emblazoned with the words "prime minister"? Back in the market in Essonne, Paul Midy accepts that there's truth in it. "It's a long road to power in France," he sighs. -BBC



2022 Volkswagen Arteon 2.0T SEL Premium R-Line First Test: Noticeable, But Notable?

■ **Billy Rehbock**

It's easy to be cynical about the 2022 Volkswagen Arteon. This is a full-size sedan in an era when the general public favors SUVs, and VW hasn't put a lot of marketing muscle behind its flagship four-door. So you might be surprised to hear Arteon sales have increased annually in the three years since its introduction, with VW moving more than 5,500 examples in 2021. Sure, those are still tiny sales by industry standards, but Volkswagen has worked to make the Arteon better and better. The company has refreshed the flagship twice since it made its debut, first for 2021 with stunning new exterior styling and tech equipment, then again for 2022. VW collapsed the model's trim structures to just three choices, all of which now wear sporty-looking R-Line styling. VW also overhauled the drivetrain, adding power and an upgraded transmission. Things finally look promising for the once ill-fated four-door. We put a 2022 Volkswagen Arteon 2.0T SEL Premium R-Line through our testing protocols to gauge the improvements.

How Does It Drive?

Dynamic Chassis Control is standard, so we began our test by sampling the Arteon's various drive modes. Tapping the button next to the shifter allows the driver to pick profiles. Comfort, for example, softens up the steering, drivetrain responsiveness, and suspension. It gives the Arteon a much more relaxed character and allows it to float down the road, ideal for longer drives.

The car comes alive when you crank things up to Sport mode. The damping becomes significantly stiffer, reminiscent of the way a VW GTI's suspension is tuned. Sport mode also firms up the steering and drivetrain responsiveness, making this the ideal setting for tackling a canyon road, as we did during our test drive. Slinging the 2022 Volkswagen Arteon down a winding ribbon of asphalt revealed a surprisingly playful chassis. VW told us it poached the steering setup from the GTI during an earlier update to the Arteon, and the progressive rack is ideal for threading through corners ranging from big sweepers to tight hairpins. The Arteon still isn't fully positioned as a sport sedan, as indicated by its R-Line badging, but it's certainly sportier than it ever was.

That's in part due to the new engine. VW plucked the EA888 Evo4 from the Golf R, a 2.0-liter turbocharged inline-four that cranks out 300 hp and 295 lb-ft of torque in this application, up from 268 hp and 258 lb-ft. With all-wheel drive and the help of launch control, which kicks in at 4,000 rpm, we found the 2022 model is much quicker than the previous year's car. In our testing it sprinted from 0 to 60 mph in 5.0 seconds, topping the 2021 Arteon AWD by 1.1 seconds. That's a massive gain.

Whether set to automatic or manual shift mode, Volkswagen's DSG seven-speed dual-clutch

automatic transmission is willing to play. It reacts quickly when called upon for downshifts and under hard acceleration. We also noted the all-wheel-drive system allows the Arteon to put the power down well and early when exiting corners.

The 2022 VW Arteon's acceleration impressed us in the quarter mile, too. It completed the run in 13.6 seconds at 100.4 mph. Braking, however, is simply adequate for a full-size car. The best 60-0-mph stop we managed was 126 feet, which trails the most recent Kia Stinger and Toyota Avalon variants we've tested. Although pedal feel is good, we noted some slight lateral skid under hard braking. It's worth noting our test car used all-season tires, so despite being fun to toss into a corner, its lap time and lateral acceleration around our figure-eight "racetrack in a bottle" test track—26.9 seconds at an average of 0.63 g—was just shy of sportier sedans. We did the same in a 2022 Kia Stinger GT Line with RWD in 26.7 at 0.68 g.

Although the Arteon isn't a true sport sedan, it is assuredly sporty and fun to drive. It represents a massive step forward from previous versions of the Arteon we criticized for a lackadaisical drivetrain and sloppy chassis tuning. The 2022 VW Arteon has the chops to tackle the tribulations of daily driver duty, and serious drivers can slap on a set of summer tires to expand the sportback's ultimate capability.

Does It Have a Nice Interior?

The 2022 VW Arteon's exterior is one of Volkswagen's strongest designs in recent years, and its interior is no letdown, either. A long, horizontal line spans the entire dash, with plenty of vents for air flow; it gives the cabin a mature and upscale look. Three-zone climate control is standard with every Arteon, so rear passengers get their own vents and HVAC sliders. Midrange and range-topping models like the car we tested receive translucent trim panels that give way to configurable ambient lighting accents. Our test Arteon also had ventilated seats, a massaging driver's seat, and a heated steering wheel; heated seats are standard across the whole range. Our biggest criticism with the interior is that VW uses enough plastic to erode the Arteon's otherwise excellent impersonation of a luxury car.

The cabin feels spacious, however, especially with the panoramic sunroof open. Legroom is plentiful with 41.2 inches up front and a limolike 40.2 inches in the rear. Adults were more than happy to be shuttled around in our test car. Cargo space is enormous: Opening the trunk gives way to 27.2 cubic feet of volume. That figure more than doubles with the rear seats flipped down, offering 56.2 cubic feet.

VW also equips the Arteon with an array of high-tech gear. An 8.0-inch infotainment touchscreen and a 10.3-inch fully digital infotainment display are standard on every model. So too are wireless Android Auto and Apple CarPlay and

wireless device charging.

Our only other quibble with the cabin remains with VW's capacitive touch controls on the steering wheel and for the climate control. The climate control responds accurately, but the steering wheel sliders aren't quite as responsive. Fortunately, the wheel also offers actual buttons to control various functions, but some folks will still struggle with this setup. All told, the Arteon's technology suite is comprehensive, even at the base level, so we think most buyers will be satisfied with its near-luxury cabin.

Is It Safe?

VW equips every Arteon with its IQ.Drive driver assistance tech, which includes semi-autonomous driving capability, adaptive cruise control, lane keeping assist, emergency assist, forward collision warning, automatic emergency braking with pedestrian monitoring, blind-spot monitoring, and rear traffic alert. Parking sensors are standard, too. Our test car was also equipped with automatic parking assist, road sign assistance, high-beam assist, and a 360-degree camera. VW does a great job integrating its safety technology features in a way that feels natural, though we'd like to see the 360-degree camera displayed with higher resolution imagery.

Is the 2022 Volkswagen Arteon a Good Buy?

This was a more difficult question to answer three years ago. However, our test data demonstrates Volkswagen has empirically improved its flagship sedan. The 2022 Arteon is a fantastic choice for folks in need of a large vehicle with a ton of cargo capacity and a big back seat but who don't need the badge prestige of a luxury brand. Think of the 2022 VW Arteon as an undercover Audi A7 if you must—and you might need to do so because it's still pricier than you probably expect from VW. That said, even the front-wheel-drive base model has a ton of features (even Dynamic Chassis Control), and our test car was so loaded we'd really have to reach to demand more equipment. Buyers who find themselves in the driver's seat will likely be more than satisfied with this sleeper hit.

—Motor Trend



Dina Asher-Smith third as Shericka Jackson wins Diamond League 200m in Rome

Britain's Dina Asher-Smith finished third in the 200m at the Rome Diamond League as Jamaica's Shericka Jackson won ahead of Elaine Thompson-Herah.

Jackson won in a season's-best 21.91 seconds, with Olympic champion Thompson-Herah finishing in 22.25.

Asher-Smith, who will defend her world title in the United States next month, was close behind in 22.27 - her best time this season. American Allyson Felix, in her final season before retirement, was seventh.

Bahamian Shaunae Miller-Uibo was fourth in a field stacked with Olympic champions, with Britain's Beth Dobbin ninth in 23.36 at the Stadio Olimpico. Asher-Smith told BBC Sport she was "quite happy" with her performance, adding: "I was hoping for maybe a bit of a quicker time but it was quite a good run."

"It was a really good field so I finished very highly in that. You always want to go out and win but sometimes it's about the journey and you have to have your eye on the championships."

In the 1500m, Olympic silver medallist Laura Muir, continuing her return from a back injury, finished third in four minutes 4.93 seconds. Muir kept pace with winner Hirut Meshesha and Axumawit Embaye, who finished second, but did not have the speed to overtake the Ethiopians on the final straight as they crossed the line in 4:03.79 and 4:04.53 respectively. In the pole vault, Team GB Olympic bronze medallist Holly Bradshaw, who missed the 2022 indoor season, was joint-second with a season's best jump of 4.60m as American Sandi Morris won with 4.81m.

Briton Lina Nielsen finished fourth in the 400m hurdles in a personal-best 54.73 seconds, while Lawrence Okoye was fifth in the discus with 64.72m.

Jemma Reekie's 2:00.28 was enough for ninth in an 800m race won by American Olympic champion Athing Mu in 1:57.01 - a world-leading time this season.

Jazmin Sawyers was seventh in the long jump with 6.61m as Ukraine's Maryna Bekh-Romanchuk won with 6.85m.

In a non-Diamond League event at the same stadium, Nethaneel Mitchell-Blake came fifth in a season's-best 20.59 seconds as American Kenneth Bednarek won in 20.01, also his best of the season.

Jacobs confident despite injury

The sixth meeting of the season takes place in Oslo on 16 June, with two others after that leading up to the World Championships, which begin in Eugene on 14 July. Italian Olympic 100m champion Marcell Jacobs attended the Rome meeting but was unable to race because of a hamstring injury. Having won 60m gold at the World Indoor Championships in March, Jacobs hopes to return in time to add a world 100m title to the shock gold he won in Tokyo. "I know we can do really well in the World Championships," he told BBC Sport. "Of course [I am confident]. My head is really strong. It is not the first time I've had an injury but I'm really determined and concentrated on this World Championship." Jacobs said he would have to run faster than the personal best of 9.80 seconds achieved in Tokyo to win in Eugene, and when asked if he could do this so soon after an injury he replied: "I can."

-BBC



Premier League transfer window opens - who could be on move this summer?

The Premier League transfer window opened on Friday, with clubs able to register summer signings officially.

Several top-flight teams have already announced arrivals this summer, which will go through either now or on 1 July, when most players' contracts at their old clubs run out.

The transfer window will close at 23:00 on Thursday, 1 September.

Scotland's transfer window, like that of the Premier League, opened on Friday.

English Football League clubs have been allowed to sign players since their final game of the season.

What has happened already?

Aston Villa got plenty of transfer business finalised before the window opened - in Marseille midfielder Boubacar Kamara (free), Barcelona forward Philippe Coutinho (£17m), Sevilla defender Diego Carlos (reported £26m) and Roma keeper Robin Olsen (reported £3m).

Villa defender Matt Targett has joined Newcastle for £15m after a successful loan spell.

Leeds have recruited Red Bull Salzburg pair Brenden Aaronson and Rasmus Kristensen and Liverpool have signed Fulham youngster Fabio Carvalho for £5m.

Croatia winger Ivan Perisic and England goalkeeper Fraser Forster will join Tottenham Hotspur on free transfers.

Manchester City have reached an agreement to sign Norway striker Erling Haaland from Borussia Dortmund for

£51.2m - although personal terms have yet to be confirmed.

Chelsea defender Antonio Rudiger is joining Real Madrid and Alexandre Lacazette has left Arsenal for Lyon - both as free agents.

What could happen this summer?

One of this summer's big transfer sagas could involve Liverpool forward Sadio Mane. The Senegal star is being strongly linked with a move to Bayern Munich.

Bayern could need a new forward because their star Robert Lewandowski has told the club he wants to leave, with Barcelona interested.

Paul Pogba and Jesse Lingard will also be on the move after leaving Manchester United as free agents. Former Real Madrid forward Gareth Bale is available too.

Barcelona winger Ousmane Dembele will be on the move once his contract expires.

Manchester United, Liverpool, Arsenal and Newcastle United have all been linked with Benfica forward Darwin Nunez. RB Leipzig forward Christopher Nkunku is interesting many of Europe's top teams as well.

Eddie Howe's Magpies could be big players in the market this summer with their new riches, having avoided relegation. They are in talks to sign Stade de Reims striker Hugo Ekitike.

Burnley defender James Tarkowski is in talks with Everton.

Manchester United manager Erik ten Hag is likely to want to reshape his team too.

-BBC



The 'sleepy' girl who changed Indian cricket forever



Deepti Patwardhan

When legendary India batter Mithali Raj announced her retirement on Wednesday, it not only brought an end to one of the most decorated careers in Indian cricket but also one of the most influential stints in the sport.

In a career spanning 23 years, Raj represented India 333 times across all formats, scored a world record 10,868 runs and became the first Indian captain to lead the country to two World Cup finals.

But the legacy she leaves behind goes well beyond mere numbers. The first woman to make it big in a predominantly male sport, she helped girls across the country nurture a dream.

"I set out as a little girl on the journey to wear the India blues as representing your country is the highest honour," the 39-year-old Raj wrote on social media as she announced her retirement.

"The journey was full of highs and some lows. Each event taught me something unique and the last 23 years have been the most fulfilling, challenging and enjoyable years of my life."

Discipline has been the bedrock of her

longevity and it is strange to learn that Raj was introduced to the sport because she was too lazy.

To make sure she didn't develop the habit of sleeping in till late, Dorai Raj, who was in the Indian Air Force, would make his daughter accompany her brother to cricket training at the John's Cricket Academy, Secunderabad.

While she would spend most of her time sitting by the boundary and completing her homework, Raj would at times pick up a bat and start knocking around.

A coach at the Academy, Jyothi Prasad, was impressed by her technique and referred her to Sampath Kumar.

A positive appraisal from Kumar, who coached two women's teams in Secunderabad then, set the wheels in motion. Even though her passion was Indian classical dance, Raj started on a journey her parents chose for her.

Her cricket training began at four in the morning and could sometimes consume six hours of her day. A batting purist, Kumar would make Raj practice batting in the narrow corridors of her school and make her bat with a stump to make sure she was middling the ball.

"Sir used to hit me with a stick if the ball touched the walls," she explained in an interview to Cricket Monthly in September 2016. She didn't have time to attend family functions and was discouraged by her grandparents for pursuing what was a "boys' sport" back then.

Those hours of focussed, intense training laid the foundation of one of the most technically proficient batters India has ever produced. Raj has not only scored runs by the bucket-loads, she has done so with a 'correct' technique.

A special talent, Raj was fast-tracked through the ranks. She was selected for the Andhra Pradesh team when she was just 13 and won her first India cap at the age of 16 in 1999. Raj announced her arrival with an unbeaten 114 against Ireland in her India ODI debut at Milton Keynes, England.

The Indian went on to become the most prolific scorer in ODIs, with a record 7,805 runs at an average of 50.68. She has also scored seven consecutive 50s, which is a record in women's cricket.

A lynchpin of the Indian batting line-up, Raj was handed captaincy in 2005. Later that year, she led India to their first-ever World Cup final.

Raj's achievement is even more impressive given that women's cricket was still an amateur pursuit when she first made her mark.

Women's cricket languished in neglect and obscurity, while their male counterparts reaped in riches and fame. India's female cricketers did not have access to facilities, coaching structure or even proper domestic structure. Players would have to graduate straight from pitch mats to international wickets.

With Raj at the forefront, Indian female cricketers constantly waged a battle on the system while fighting better-funded, better-trained rivals.

A reminder of that is Raj has played only 12 Test matches in her 23-year career. She scored 214, then the highest score in women's cricket, in 2002 to guide India to victory over England in Taunton. After that, she played five Test matches in the next four years, and none in the next eight. Raj was once asked to name her favourite male cricketer. She shot back with, "Do you ask male cricketers who their favourite female cricketer is?"

For more than 20 years, Raj was the face and voice of Indian women's cricket.

Most of the players in the current team grew up watching her, idolising her. Not only for her batting exploits, but also for her gumption.

During her tenure, the sport has taken significant strides. The Board of Control for Cricket in India, the richest cricket federation in the world, brought women's cricket under its flag only in 2005. It wasn't until 2016 that female cricketers were given central contracts.

But it wasn't until 2017, when India made another World Cup final under Raj's captaincy that the country truly woke up to the exploits of its women's cricket team. The matches were televised and India was hooked onto its favourite pastime all over again. India lost to England by nine runs at Lord's in the 2017 final, but they won over hearts.

"It was an honour to have led the team for so many years," Raj wrote on Wednesday. "It definitely shaped me as a person and hopefully helped shape Indian women's cricket as well."

She changed the game forever.

-BBC

