

The Villager

wherever you are

- INSIDE -



Museveni's first son Muhoozi: clear signals of a succession plan in Uganda

PAGE 8



Mozambique insurgency: Why 24 countries have sent troops

PAGE 15



Erik Ten Hag says taking Manchester United job is not a risk to his reputation

PAGE 22

Nam MSMEs Ecosystem Horror Story

Nghiinomenwa Erastus

The country's SME report by the Investment Board is one of the saddest novels one can read as it has documented the SMEs ecosystem in the country and the potential that lies untapped.

It was a mouthful for The Villager Business Desk to dissect the challenges documented by the Namibia Investment Promotion Development Board (NIPDB) on the country's SMEs ecosystem.

However, significant similar challenges were observed in all the major towns assessed by the board.

There is limited support for local products and services, no secure uptake for local products, access to capital, lack of skills, legislation gaps, unnecessary foreign competition, inadequate soft and physical infrastructures, no marketing and outdated technology and inconsiderate taxes.

The board's findings are mostly similar in all the regions even though they differ for Khomas, which is a further ahead than others without various initiatives being run.

As a result, MSMEs find it hard to grow and graduate, with the board calling for an urgent need to coordinate MSME and incubation interventions while the formalisation of the economy is long overdue.

The board indicated that local companies face challenges with accessing funding and market access in almost every region- as local products fail to get space in the retailers

operating in such areas and beyond.

This is despite the country's Retail Charter, which calls for retailers to procure a certain percentage from local manufacturers and producers. However, the Charter is a voluntary document, and compliance is a choice. The board wrote that there is a need to protect the domestic market as they face competition from imported products, while policies need to be looked at and reformed to benefit the locals.

In regions like Kunene, they face long distances to get certification for their work as authorising bodies of minerals certification and products are all situated in Windhoek.

It would be beneficial to bring services closer to the people, the report suggested. Many town councils were found not to have an economic strategy to guide economic development for their towns and detail how they will facilitate growth, with a critical focus on MSME development.

As a result, most economic activities around some regions focus on small businesses such as brick manufacturing, car wash, bars and restaurants.

MSME hurdles extend to lack of start-up capital, general business management skills, and operating in a severely underdeveloped small market with limited or no formal business and financial management skills to better manage their operations.

Continued on P2



Namibia Is Ready For Monkeypox - Shangula

Ludorf Iyambo

Health minister Kalumbi Shangula says Namibia is ready and prepared should the country report any case of monkeypox.

This comes after the World Health Organisation (WHO) said it is expected to identify more cases of monkeypox as it expands surveillance in countries where the disease is not typically found.

According to Shangula, the ministry is not sleeping and is following the events of the monkeypox virus.

"We have ever been ready for any

emergency. That is why we have been able to contain all the diseases that have been falling in Namibia. We are not sleeping, we are following events, and we put measures in place to make sure that we are prepared," said Shangula

Shangula said Namibia is not safe in terms of the monkeypox virus, as people travel worldwide.

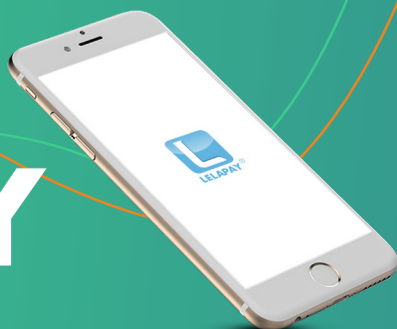
However, he said Namibia has so far not reported any case of monkeypox and never had a case of it before.

Continued on P2

"We are not sleeping, we are following events, and we put measures in place to make sure that we are prepared."



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MSMEs

The board attributes limited access to start-up capital because MSME owners typically do not have any assets in their name to pledge as collateral.

This, while lengthy paperwork and approval process rob their chances of capitalising on real-time business opportunities.

Furthermore, commercial banks are unsure about their repayment capabilities.

Support from the private sector and banks, in particular, has been lacking in many of the towns assessed. In some towns, attempts to engage local banks at public-private forums have been discouraging, the report read.

Capacity building for MSMEs is limited to theoretical training because of the lack of opportunities to gain much needed practical experience.

For this reason, it is believed that the creation of a light industrial park would be of great benefit to MSMEs, the board advised.

The report highlighted that the main contributor to the locals' lack of formal business activity is the limited access to general information on how to access these resources, while it attributed limited market access to two reasons.

First, the board explained the lack of formal training and knowledge of market trends, consumer preferences, and access to advanced technology has acted as a bottleneck in developing MSMEs and the informal sector.

Apart from this, ineffective marketing strategies, the absence of market analysis, and the target audience identification also challenge MSMEs in various regions.

The board also found that the management of public tender application processes in some regions and the specific provisions of the Public Procurement Act pose challenges for MSMEs.

It has been found that there is a good uptake of vocational graduates into the MSME activities, but there is a need to include business skills development at the vocational training level.

Constraints on expansion and modernisation, improper product development, and poor product promotion pull MSMEs from the competition.

A region such as Zambezi has enough supply of fresh produce, but producers face challenges concerning harvesting techniques, storage and the subsequent offtake of production.

This leads to rot and waste of crops in high volumes. In addition, many starting

businesses lack the mentorship capacity to run a business sustainably due to a lack of business management skills which hinders their scalability.

A skilled workforce is the backbone of any successful business. Unfortunately, MSMEs face a lot of inconsistencies when it comes to the skilled workforce and labour law compliances, NIPDB found.

Moreover, the non-availability of a skilled workforce at an affordable cost is adding to the woes of the MSMEs sector.

The MSMEs sector is also quite behind in the race regarding technology, the board revealed.

Limited access to IT education, knowledge, and information is restricting the growth of this sector.

"This challenge has created a massive backlog of unfilled returns, payments, and orders," the team stated.

The board's team stated that lack of education could also be blamed for this issue. Moreover, MSME owners cannot afford to buy and use expensive technical equipment.

It has also noted there is a high presence of informal businesses in the country; however, their lack of registration means that they often are excluded from government interventions and assistance along with Progress has been hindered in the absence of manufacturer incentives and support for skilled labour.

MSME support has primarily consisted of constructing MSME parks and open market stalls and other initiatives such as Covid-19 relief assistance and capacity building workshops.

According to the board, though commendable, these efforts have given rise to grave concerns about the duplication of programs by various public entities and the underutilisation of NIDA and MIT's physical infrastructure.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

The NIPDB report offered some solutions emphasising improving and making it easy for locals to participate in entrepreneurship with limited hurdles in every aspect.

Support of MSME firms through Industrial policies (Ease of Doing Business)- ease of doing business is crucial for the MSME sector, leading to Namibia's economic growth.

The government needs to continue to work toward the ease of doing business in

Namibia by streamlining regulations and processes and issuing clear directives on future regulatory requirements.

The report adds that these policies' alignment and changes rebalance economic growth toward manufacturing to reap productivity improvements and entry into global value chains.

The promotion of MSME cooperatives across economic sectors should be emphasised as it can help MSMEs benefit from economies of scale by lowering their costs of inputs or hiring services, for example, storage and transport.

The board stated that the cooperative system enables MSMEs to improve product and service quality, thus reducing risks.

The use of and embracing technology is also encouraged within the MSMEs sector. NIPDB explained that technology is increasingly seen as a business enabler and a vital tool for bringing in process efficiencies and a higher degree of standardisation.

The team added that for MSMEs to develop a competitive advantage to operate in the global market, a strong focus on implementing new-age technology.

Access to tailor-made seed capital in the form of blended financing has also been highlighted as a critical need. Many MSMEs and upcoming entrepreneurs are only accustomed to commercial banks and DBN financing.

Only a few are branching out to knock on the doors of angel investors and asset managers in the form of equities.

The NIPDB team explained that the ability of MSMEs to spur growth and foster job creation is limited by their ability to find adequate tailor-made finance.

The board indicated that with appropriate policy interventions and support to the MSME sector, the government can provide the necessary support and institutional finance and has been specifically targeted toward the MSME sector.

Moreover, there is a need to coordinate significant investment opportunities, collaboration, incubation and capacity building initiatives.

Opportunities to collaborate with private sector players in the manufacturing space are also needed.

Additionally, collaboration in capacity-building interventions is crucial to providing market access to information, training, funding and financial literacy. Email: erastus@thevillager.com.na

Monkeypox

Meanwhile, WHO on Saturday reported 92 confirmed cases and 28 suspected cases of monkeypox. These cases were reported from 12 member states that are not endemic to the virus.

WHO said it would provide further guidance and recommendations in the coming days for countries on how to mitigate the spread of monkeypox.

"The situation is evolving, and WHO expects there will be more cases of monkeypox identified as surveillance expands in non-endemic countries. Immediate actions focus on informing those who may be most at risk for monkeypox infection with accurate information, to stop the further spread," stated WHO.

WHO further reported that available evidence suggests that those who are most at risk have had close physical contact with someone with monkeypox while they are symptomatic.

Speaking to The Villager on Monday, a specialised physician at Ongwediva Medipark, Norbert Muramila, defines monkeypox as a virus transmitted to humans from animals with symptoms very similar to those seen in patients of the less severe smallpox.

According to Muramila monkeypox virus is transmitted from one person to another by close contact with lesions, body fluids, respiratory droplets and contaminated

materials such as bedding.

He narrated that the incubation period of monkeypox is usually from six to 13 days but can range from five to 21 days.

He further stated that Namibia is not safe from getting the virus with the open borders. "Monkeypox is now becoming widespread, so as usually if it gets someone in Namibia, that means we shall also get a case. It also depends on who gets it and how severe it is," said Muramila.

Information shared stated that historically, vaccination against smallpox was protective against monkeypox.

Monkeypox is a viral disease first discovered in 1958 when two outbreaks of a pox-like disease occurred in colonies of monkeys kept for research, hence the name 'monkeypox.'

The first human case of monkeypox was recorded in 1970 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) during a period of intensified effort to eliminate smallpox.

Recently monkeypox has been confirmed in the UK, Spain, Portugal, Germany, Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Italy and Sweden as the virus continues to spread.

Monkeypox is endemic in countries where such as Benin, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Ghana, identified in animals only, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Nigeria, the Republic of the Congo, and Sierra Leone.



Southern Farmers Urged To Keep Livestock Warm

...as Namibia expects a Harsh Winter Season

Hertha Ekandjo

Namibia Meteorological Services weather forecaster Odillo Gobetsi urges farmers in the southern part of the country to ensure that their livestock is kept in a warm environment this winter as Namibia expects a freezing winter.

Gobetsi said this during an interview with The Villager on Friday.

"Farmers farming with livestock should make sure that they keep them in a closed space or at least a warm environment," said Gobetsi.

He added that if livestock is exposed to this severe coldness, it can result in farmers losing their livestock.

He said that this does apply to not only livestock but also plants.

According to Gobetsi, if plants are exposed to such harsh cold weather, especially overnight and early morning, they will be exposed to the dangers of being damaged.

"They end up dying out, especially when temperatures hit below zero degrees celsius," he stated.

Gobetsi further said frontal systems cause

this cold weather, and these systems are persistent during winter seasons.

He added that these onsets are causing rainfall in some parts of Africa alongside some snowfall.

"Weather does not have any boundaries depending on the airflow. As these frontal systems cross over southern parts of the continent, Namibia should expect some clouds in the southern and central parts of the country," said Gobetsi.

Additionally, during winter, he said cloud cover serves as a warm blanket keeping the air warm and the frontal in place.

"The moment the clouds move, we experience radiation," he said.

This, according to him, causes temperatures to drop during the night and early mornings. This comes as earlier this month, the South African Weather Service reported a cold front that was expected to hit parts of the Western Cape and the western Northern Cape.

"A cold front has expected to bring light rain and thunderstorms along the coast, causing temperatures to plummet. With a 30 per cent chance of rain in the Western Cape, temperatures in Cape Town will drop

to a chilly 13°, with a maximum of 17°C forecasts," it said.

However, widespread rainfall was experienced over the southern and central parts of South Africa this past weekend, with light snowfalls over the mountain.

“ Weather does not have any boundaries depending on the airflow. As these frontal systems cross over southern parts of the continent, Namibia should expect some clouds in the southern and central parts of the country. ”



Shikomba To Approach Courts Over Nekongo SPYL Endorsement

Nujoma Says He Never Denounced Vote-Buying in Swapo



Justicia Shipena

Swapo Party Youth League (SPYL) member Fillemon Shikomba says he is in the process of instituting legal action against the endorsement of the youth wing's secretary Ephraim Nekongo and deputy Christine Haindaka-Sikongo. Shikomba claims the endorsements were a voice of the minority and that his right to contest was taken away. "Professionally being a lawyer, I'm working on several submissions. I have been talking to Kadila Amoomo, I'm waiting for his advice on that, but he has given me positive feedback," he said. He also told The Villager that he is engaging various stakeholders in the legal profession. "My friend Bianca is advising me, and we are working on the submissions, but we are going for it for sure," he said. Shikomba said he hopes to take the matter to the highest court. "It is not a general minor violation like what you would take to the magistrate court. It's a national concern," he said. He had written a letter to the Swapo president (Hage Geingob) and secretary-general (Sophia Shaningwa) against the youth league's endorsements. He thus threatens to take the youth league to court should they not respond in two days. In this vein, Shikomba said he did not receive any response from Nekongo nor the president and secretary-general of the party. "I did not get any response from Nekongo. I have seen a response from him in the media where he referred to my letter as a love letter. Both the SG and the president have not responded too. She has not given me her response yet." Speaking on his letter being labelled as a 'love letter' by Nekongo, Shikomba said his comments are disturbing. "Nekongo's comments are very disturbing

and undemocratic because it only enforces that he is a political project," he said. Adding that, Nekongo wants to undermine a democratic process. He said the SPYL secretary is playing a dangerous game. "He is undermining the power of the law by reducing my letter to a love letter. He is undermining the implications of what the Namibian and Swapo constitutions say," he stressed. Hence he said Nekongo does not take the law seriously. He also said Nekongo has been cited as a beneficiary in the fishrot case. "Why would someone who is tainted with corruption be imposed on people with no room for competition at all. He has been cited in fishrot, and that is my main course. Everybody knows that. How does this contribute to the public's perspective on Swapo?" he questioned. According to reports, Nekongo allegedly received N\$65 000 in 2017 linked to fishrot; however, he has previously denied receiving the money. Last week, he said the SPYL endorsements had not broken any party rules. "If a comrade has written a letter, it is in his rights. But we want to clarify that we did not contravene any of the provisions of our constitution. The comrade should state where we contravene the constitution," Nekongo had said. He had said Shikomba only cited an article about the hosting of congress. Nekongo claimed that Shikomba is seeking attention and that they cannot entertain love letters. "I think the comrade wants maybe to seek attention. We cannot entertain love letters. We are not here to entertain. He can write love letters to his boyfriend and girlfriend, not us," he had said. On 30 April 2022, SPYL hosted its fourth

ordinary central committee meeting, which the party president Hage Geingob officially opened. At this meeting, Nekongo and his deputy Christine Haindaka-Sikongo were endorsed as the sole candidates for SPYL's secretary and deputy secretary. Shikomba's letter came a week after Nekongo was announced that he would take former state-owned enterprises minister Leon Jooste's spot in parliament. In the letter released last week, Shikomba stated not all members received the endorsements of Nekongo and Haindaka-Sikongo well. He had said that the endorsements do not reflect the authentic voice of the people. "Nor do they espouse the values of our party," the letter reads. He added that it is not appropriate for the central committee to issue a statement of endorsement when the regions are not done with restructuring and renewal of the mandate. "It is not procedurally acceptable for a central committee that is up for elections to decide for the next central committee and thus defeats the essence of congress." "What is the purpose of congress? What is the role of the people?" questioned Shikomba in the letter. Additionally, in his letter, he states that the endorsements are a voice of the minority and are a deliberate attempt to influence congress and remove democracy. In the same letter, Shikomba said he made his intention to run for SPYL secretary public and said his right was taken away. He had also said the SPYL constitution does not give the central committee the absolute right to endorse and nominate candidates. He lauded that young Namibians want a way out of Nekongo's five years of poor leadership that lacks the political will.

Kelvin Chiringa

The Namibian Sun editor, Toivo Ndjebela, says they have taken note and are currently studying a letter of demand from the founding President, Sam Nujoma. Nujoma accused the daily of defamation due to an article in which he is quoted denouncing vote-buying in Swapo. Nujoma has distanced himself from the said article carried by the daily, which states that he denounced "monetised inter-party factionalism" within the Swapo party at a Central Committee meeting held over the weekend. This is contained in a letter to The Namibian Sun via his lawyer, Sisa Namandje. The said article reads: "The Founding President Sam Nujoma has denounced monetised inter-party factionalism driven by monied campaigns, saying the needs of the party and country must come first". Nujoma also refused ever saying that he "denounced monetised" inter-party factionalism driven by monied campaigns... as mentioned in the article. He has demanded a retraction of the article failure, of which he will drag the paper to court. "Our instructions are that our client never uttered such statements at the Swapo Party's Central Committee meeting held over the weekend. As a fact, our client never denounced anyone, nor did he suggest "vote buying" in the party's inter-party campaigns," said Namandje. However, Ndjebela said they took the speech from a document bearing the Founding President's letterhead. The newspaper stable is now studying further the authenticity of the said document said the editor. "We are never shy to admit if we are at fault. The story is based on a document that we have in our possession bearing the letterhead

of the Sam Nujoma Foundation. But if it's a fake document, we do not know as of yet. We are busy verifying the authenticity of that document. If it happens to come out that it's not an authentic speech, we are ready to take corrective measures," he said. Namandje has watered down the article as "palpably false and defamatory" of Nujoma and that it appears to be motivated by a "malice induced urge". He also said the article is further meant to use Nujoma's position to divide the Swapo party and advance the ill goals of unnamed sources. "Our instructions are therefore to demand, as we hereby do, that you immediately, (today) make a retraction of the statements identified above and tender an unconditional apology to our client by close of business today, failing which we regret to inform you that the court will be approached, as early as next week, for an order to compel you to retract the afore-stated statements and a declaratory order that the content of your article is false," he said.

Nujoma has distanced himself from the said article carried by the daily.

City Of Windhoek Launches Havana Prepaid Water Meter

Hertha Ekandjo

City of Windhoek Mayor Sade Gawanas said that the City of Windhoek council aims to implement quality water control measures. Gawanas said this during an official launch of the prepaid water meter at the Moses Garoeb Constituency in Havana. "Over the years, our residents, especially those living in the informal areas, have had to depend on communal facilities to access potable water," said Gawanas. She stated that due to the high unemployment rate, residents often fall into debt as they cannot pay their water bills. According to Gawanas, this situation had brought disputes amongst community members, attributed to the payment of the municipal bill for the water they consumed. She told the Moses Garoeb community that City of Windhoek has heard their plea concerning the escalated water bills that you receive monthly. "The City of Windhoek as a responsible and learning organisation attaches a high premium on innovation and improvement of municipal service delivery to its residents, including water," she said. Gawanas said that to ensure the sustainable delivery of high-quality municipal services, the council aims to implement quality control measures that will provide cost control and convenience to its residents. According to her, the Windhoek council had, over time, been writing-off municipal debts owed to it by pensioners and other vulnerable residents. She added the council made the write-off debt off debt approval conditional and that the existing conventional meters are

converted to prepaid water meters. According to her, this ensures control over consumption and that residents do not fall back into debt. In this regard, the City intends to transfer the water management responsibility to meter owners. The responsibility will thus include ownership and control of their water consumption. This will ensure that water is distributed equitably and fairly amongst the residents, according to the mayor. "Introduction of the prepaid meters will increase the city's business efficiency to deliver the most value at the least possible cost," said Gawanas. The prepaid water meters operate on the same principle as the prepaid electricity meters offered by the City. Even though prepaid meters services require one to pay for their water upfront, they will be in control of how much and how often they top up. She told the community that they would not have to worry about building up debt as they would be able to purchase water before they use it. This, she said, makes them aware of their water consumption costs. "The prepayment, however, excludes the rates and taxes bills, which you will continue to receive a municipal bill," said Gawanas. She said, due to economic challenges, the City will allow residents to choose between the monthly Prepaid Water Meter Repayment as an option that applies to the customers who cannot afford to pay upfront for the Prepaid Water Meter Service Connection Fee over a repayment period of 5 years. Moreover, the prepaid water meter product service is available for every resident.



Shack Dwellers Federation Benefits Oshakati Residents

Eba Kandovazu

On Sunday, the Minister of Urban and Rural Development, Erastus Utoni, handed over 195 houses to Onawa residents in Oshakati, built by the Shack Dwellers Federation of Namibia. At the same time, the groundbreaking ceremony of 100 houses to be built by the Build Together programme was also done. Utoni revealed to The Villager that on Friday, he is returning to Oshakati for another handing over of over 200 plots. "Our ministry is also mandated by the Harambee Prosperity Plan to build about 20 000 houses. We have entrusted people from various organisations to build houses for us annually. First, the citizens. We service land for them and then tell them to build their houses through the Build Together initiative. What happens is that money is put there for loan purposes. "When someone is given land, they then take money from there and build their



people who took loans were then given their houses. Another group is the Shack Dwellers Federation of Namibia. The government gives money to this organisation," he said. According to the minister, the organisation

started off by receiving N\$ 1 million, then N\$ 5 million.

"As we speak, we gave them N\$ 10 million in this financial year. You see us running up and down handing over houses because we are checking to see if the money we gave was really used to ensure that low-income earners are really receiving their houses. Shack Dwellers Federation organised people, and people were given information. They also ensure that land is serviced. That is why we go to these events and make sure that houses are delivered. This month we started in the Kharas region, specifically in Aussenker. We handed over about 300 houses. The intention is for those in grape production also to be able to buy houses," he said.

He also added that they would be going to Aus this month to hand over houses. He said he is impressed with how serious and invested everyone is in the process. Utoni also maintained that they were also in the

Zambezi region, where they handed over more than 134.

"I have noticed that most people buying and building houses are women. They are building beautiful houses. Some are extending their houses. A house valued at N\$ 50 000 will now be valued at N\$ 1 million. People are serious. Our ministry is also not playing. Our citizens are getting houses. Those saying criticising should stop. Criticism should perhaps be towards those not building quality and standard houses," he stressed.

Last week, a grievance letter signed by the management of the Namibia Housing Enterprise said the company was concerned about its future as it does not receive adequate attention. They claim that priority in getting land approvals from local authorities and town councils is only given to the shack dwellers federation and private entities. Utoni, responding to this, said that he is not disputing the management's claim but that they equally receive the same treatment.

"However, sometimes it is difficult to acquire land if another entity already received land at a particular place."

"It could be that that problem is there, but let me just plead with local authorities to ensure that NHE also receives land and build houses," he explained.

The letter also claims that their financial reports have not been made in the last five years. Queried on this, Utoni says he is not in a position to comment.

He also thanked Oshakati Mayor Leonard Hango, adding that his leadership was successful.

"You can tell that in the next five years, he would have made a big change. I have seen that They engage with the public and the public is well informed. When they relocate to informal settlements like Sky location, it is not easy, but people live happily. All the people that were relocated to Onawa are doing good as we speak. The roads are big, the houses are built, women are ululating, and it is beautiful to watch," he said.



LAW IN ACTION

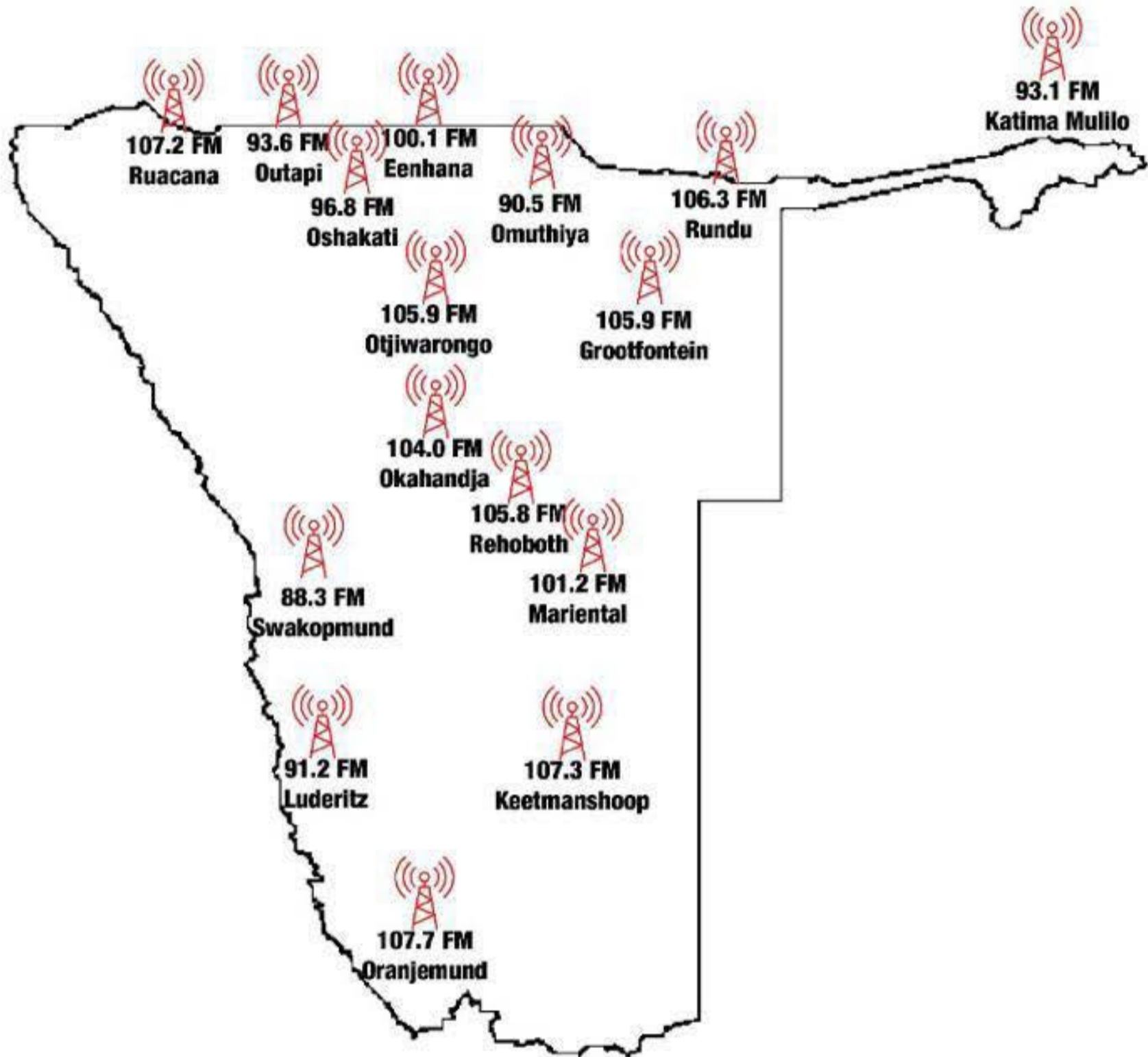
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Stranger Things 4 cranks everything up way past eleven



Charles Pulliam-Moore

Stranger Things 4 is like the seasons that came before it in how it draws inspiration from the pop cultural canon of the '80s, making its individual chapters feel like studied homages to the genre cinema of the era. In this fourth installment though, Stranger Things embraces a newfound sense of itself as something more than a stylized tribute to the creature features and coming-of-age classics that packed theaters decades ago. Stranger Things 4 is bigger, bloodier, and much more intense than the seasons that came before it, but it also feels like a natural evolution of the sprawling epic the Duffer Brothers have been telling from the very beginning.

Time has always been a somewhat tricky thing in Stranger Things' fictional town of Hawkins, Indiana, where slimy portals to nightmarish parallel dimensions are known to occasionally open up, but it takes on a new significance as Stranger Things 4 catches up with its teen heroes. Set about six months after the events of its season 3 finale, Stranger Things' newest batch of chapters opens on Mike (Finn Wolfhard), Will (Noah Schnapp), Lucas (Caleb McLaughlin), Max (Sadie Sink), Dustin (Gaten Matarazzo), and

Eleven (Millie Bobby Brown) all doing their best to find some sense of normalcy after their last battle with a being from the Upside Down.

"Normal" for Eleven, Will, Will's older brother Jonathan (Charlie Heaton), and the boys' mother Joyce Byers (Winona Ryder) means settling into a new life as a seemingly average family in California where they believe "Jane" — Eleven's birth name — can get a fresh start. With Eleven's powers on the fritz and her adoptive father Jim Hopper (David Harbour) still missing, learning how to simply exist as a regular teenager is both a challenge and thrill for her. But Eleven's genuine excitement and the Upside Down going all but dormant following their departure from Hawkins makes the Byers' journey out West feel like something that's right for them all. Stranger Things 4 finds the rest of the gang back in Hawkins also mostly thriving as the town's kids gear up for their impending spring break. With Lucas dedicating more time to Hawkins High's basketball team and Max still coping with the death of her brother, Mike and Dustin find new friends in the Hellfire Club — a group of Dungeons & Dragons-playing outcasts led by outgoing senior Eddie Munson (Joseph

Quinn).

By splitting the kids up into smaller units and introducing other new characters, like basketball team captain Jason Carver (Mason Dye) and pizza-delivering stoner Argyle (Eduardo Franco) into their arcs, Stranger Things 4 establishes change as one of its defining themes this season. Stranger Things' core group of childhood friends aren't breaking up or falling out exactly, but they are growing up and apart as kids tend to do as they get older. Leaning into that reality is part of the way that Stranger Things 4 tries to skirt around the fact that essentially all of its young actors have already visibly out-aged their characters. The distraction works, especially as Stranger Things' central mystery pulls its protagonists closer together in the face of the supernatural once again. But when the kids are dealing with more grounded everyday challenges in normal settings, like getting a grasp on the social dynamics of their high schools, it's occasionally hard to buy them as unpopular high school freshmen.

What's much easier to believe and more interesting to dig into is the psychological baggage Stranger Things 4 highlights in each of its protagonists. Though Stranger Things has always and

very much continues to revolve around Eleven and her connection to the Upside Down, this season plays with the idea of Hawkins being a cursed place that has an uncanny way of changing people who know about its secrets. While most everyone's busy going through puberty and staying on top of schoolwork, they're also dealing with the weight of knowing what kinds of horrors the Hawkins National Laboratory has unleashed upon the world.

Though this season introduces yet another Dungeons & Dragons-inspired creature from another world — this time a Nightmare on Elm Street-like ghoul — the monster plays an important role in how Stranger Things 4 begins to flesh out and answer some of the series' bigger mysteries. For characters like Nancy (Natalia Dyer), Steve (Joe Keery), and Robin (Maya Hawke), Stranger Things 4 is a story about knowing themselves and embracing responsibility at a time when the adults in their lives aren't equipped to. What's impressive is how effectively Stranger Things organically pulls their threads together to tell a story that feels like it's gaining momentum in the buildup to the series' not-too-distant finale.

As Stranger Things 4 evokes the real-

world satanic panic that gripped pearl-clutching '80s parents who didn't understand why people would want to fight make-believe dragons in dungeons, you get the sense that this is the direction the Duffer Brothers always planned to take the show. There's a thoughtfulness to both Stranger Things 4's central monster and to the obstacles it throws at Eleven and co. that keeps this season mostly crackling with a vibrant energy. But that energy falters whenever Stranger Things slows down for one of its many quippy exposition dumps that pop up with increasing frequency as the season progresses. These caches of plot detail — always delivered in breathless exchanges of almost rhetorical questions — are also partially why some of this season's episodes run (unnecessarily) long.

One reason Stranger Things 4 sometimes feels the need to overexplain itself may be because there's quite a bit going on this season that's all meant to fit together like a satisfying puzzle once enough of the pieces are laid out. That impulse may be justified given how far this story's come in the six years since Stranger Things first began airing, but it only serves to underline how straightforward most of the show's twists are when you step back to consider them.

Unlikely as Stranger Things 4 is to confound you, it has a much better chance of disturbing you with its unusually gruesome and graphic way of sending off this season's victims. There is a logic behind and significance to the amount of gore Stranger Things 4 puts on display, and the way those things are revealed really works to emphasize what level of threat Eleven and her friends are facing.

What's curious about the episodes of Stranger Things 4 that were provided to press is how the show already feels like it's in the series' imminent endgame territory. It's not that season 4 answers every burning question that you might have had. But it does manage to stand on its own in a way, instead of simply feeling like set-up for the finale. It's bold, bloody, and a little too big — but it's also a good reminder of what made Hawkins such a hit in the first place.

-The Verge





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Have you ever wondered what will happen to the Harambee Prosperity Plan post-2024? Have you ever asked whether the next president will continue pushing for the Harambee Prosperity Plan?

Does it not worry that the Harambee Prosperity Plan will probably go with the founder? Is it not a problem that most economic activities are linked to the Harambee Prosperity Plan that might not exist post-2024?

Without taking away anything from the Harambee Prosperity Plan, is this not the time for Namibia to look at Vision 2030 and the National Development Plans to see how far Namibia has gone to meet the targets?

Is it not Vision 2030's desire that Namibians would live a life like their counterparts in the developed world in eight years? Does Vision 2030 not define a clear framework of how Namibia can be prosperous as a nation? Is Vision 2030 not supposed to be a national vision, a perception for the future? According to Vision 2030, the future is about the people, but do we still hold up to that commitment? Does Vision 2030 not say that at the centre of the visioning exercise is a concern for the population in relation to their social (mainly health), economic and overall well-being?

What happened to the questions about how well Namibians live and where they live, and what do they do for a living? Are we still on course to transform Namibia into a healthy and food-secure nation where all preventable, infectious and parasitic diseases are under secure control?

Do our people enjoy high living standards, good quality of life and have access to quality education, health and other vital services?

With just eight years to go, have we built enough capacity to create an enabling environment to foster political stability, freedom, and a sound legal and economic system?

How far have we gone with strengthening human resource information management systems to balance the supply and demand in the labour market to achieve enjoyment in the economy?

As Vision 2030 suggests, are we on course to create an integrated system that offers quality education and training that prepares Namibians to take advantage of a changing world? How much have we done to ensure equal access to excellent educational and vocational training institutions and quality sports services/facilities?

Do we honestly believe that our public education is anywhere close to covering every area of life and is free and open to everyone in Namibia?

Looking at the time left, can we transform Namibia into a knowledge-based society where information technology will revolutionise all aspects of the manufacturing process?

Are we going to live long enough to see reduced inequalities and an end to a pervasive atmosphere of intolerance in matters relating to culture, religious practices, political preference, ethnic affiliation and differences in the social background?

Have we done enough to ensure that by 2030 Namibia will be a moral, tolerant and safe society with legislative, economic and social structures to eliminate marginalisation? A country where peace and equity between women and men, diverse ethnic groups, and people of different ages, interests and abilities are guaranteed?

When Founding President Sam Nujoma signed the Vision 2030 framework, he said the challenge was to make it a reality. That was in 2004, and we are in 2022. With all the fragments of policy and activities, can Sam Nujoma's fears be seen as genuine?

Sam Nujoma also pointed out that Vision 2030 would be monitored through the National Developmental Plans. When did we last review the National Development Plans to check whether we are still on course with Vision 2030?

Does it mean that Vision 2030 was a Sam Nujoma vision that has not been taken up by his successor Hifikepunye Pohamba and now Hage Geingob?

While Hifikepunye Pohamba seemed to have floated developmental policy, Hage Geingob created the Harambee Prosperity Plan taking all the credit.

But will the Harambee Prosperity Plan outlive Geingob?

Museveni's first son Muhoozi: clear signals of a succession plan in Uganda

On 8 March 2022, Ugandan politics was sent into a spin by 49 words tweeted by President Yoweri Museveni's only son, Lt Gen Muhoozi Kainerugaba.

The tweet announced Muhoozi's retirement from the Ugandan People's Defence Forces (UPDF), which he had formally served in since 1999. Since his most recent promotion in June 2021, he has served as the commander of the land forces. The position made him the third-highest ranking officer in the defence forces. Muhoozi's resignation would clear his legal path to formally enter electoral politics. Serving members of the armed forces are banned from political activity under Uganda's constitution.

The tweet seemed to catch everyone by surprise, including senior security officials. They later put out a statement saying Muhoozi had not resigned.

While Muhoozi clarified hours later that his retirement would not come for eight years, the post fits a recent pattern that has fuelled growing public perception that he is declaring his political intentions.

The most stark example of this occurred weeks after the tweet. This was in the form of a nationwide series of public events to mark Muhoozi's 48th birthday.

These included sports tournaments, public rallies, a party for supporters, and a state dinner. Public roads were shut for the events, and state-owned broadcasters aired some of them live. Rwandan President Paul Kagame attended the State Dinner.

At one of the birthday rallies held in the southwestern town of Masaka on April 20, supporters wore T-shirts with slogans such as 'Muhoozi K is our next president' and 'MK Project. Team Chairman. Secure Your Tomorrow.'

In subsequent tweets in early May, Muhoozi dropped any remaining reticence.

He later added:

At the state dinner, Museveni, who has always denied grooming his son to succeed him, made comments implying that his Muhoozi would soon be in charge. Whether or not Muhoozi makes it to State House – and a great deal still stands in the way of this happening – it is undoubtedly clear that the possibility of replacing Museveni with his son has dramatically shifted from rumour to reality in recent months.

Heir apparent, apparently

Muhoozi was 11 years old when his father's National Resistance Army took Uganda's capital Kampala in 1986. In 1999, he formally joined the Ugandan defence forces while a student at the city's Makerere University.

He has been subsequently trained at elite military academies in the UK and US, and continually promoted ahead of more experienced peers.

After Muhoozi's most recent promotion to commander of the land forces, he has featured in a number of Uganda's military deployments. These include those in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia where Uganda is part of the African Union peacekeeping force, and the Karamoja region in Uganda's northeast. Muhoozi's fast-tracked rise into a position of power within the military has long produced accusations that he is being groomed by Museveni for succession. Yet, despite this 'heir apparent' accusation, Muhoozi's public profile had previously remained relatively small. He is still perceived as something of 'an unknown quantity' among broad swathes of the Ugandan public. He has rarely given interviews to traditional media outlets. For most of his adult life, the average citizen would probably not have known very much about him. The reasons for this relatively subdued profile were related to the inner workings of the National Resistance Movement (NRM) regime that Museveni has led since 1986.

Museveni's play book

At every point in his now 36 years at the helm, the president has maintained a posture of impending retirement. Museveni consistently suggests that the next election will be his last and that he dreams of the simple life of cattle keeping.

Being constantly about to step down in this way has allowed Museveni to play off the factions of the NRM against each other. He has dangled the possibility of succession before them.

In Uganda, this ploy has been referred to as the succession 'queue' within the ruling party.

In recent years, however, this act has worn thin.

This is mainly because Museveni has successfully marginalised several powerful National Resistance Movement figures who had developed partially autonomous political bases. They include former Vice President Gilbert Bukenya, former Parliamentary Speaker Rebecca Kadaga, former Inspector General of Police Kale Kayihura, and most spectacularly former Prime Minister and Party Secretary General Amama Mbabazi.

The decline of these figures – all rumoured to be in the metaphorical 'queue' for the top job – has made even the most naive party elites incredulous to the idea that Museveni will ever hand over power to one of them.

Enter Muhoozi

This change has coincided with the political emergence of Muhoozi in recent years.

His public profile has been growing both domestically and internationally. As a presidential advisor on special operations, a post he was appointed to in 2017 alongside his military roles, Muhoozi has held summits with the leaders of Egypt, Kenya and Somalia.

He has also held regional engagements with Rwanda's Kagame, whom he refers to as his 'uncle'. Following a meeting between the two men in Kigali in January, Rwanda finally agreed to reopen its border with Uganda. It had been closed for three years following Kigali's accusations that Uganda had been harbouring members of the opposition Rwandan National Congress.

The perception that Muhoozi's intervention has been key in mending the frosty relationship between the two countries was reinforced by a further meeting, again in Kigali, in March. After this, Muhoozi and Kagame announced a broader bi-lateral agreement to stop supporting dissidents in each other's countries.

Shortly afterwards, Rwandan opposition blogger, and former journalist, Robert Mukombozi, who had been living in Kampala, was pictured boarding a plane at Uganda's Entebbe International Airport.

Muhoozi confirmed on Twitter that Mukombozi had been expelled, describing him as an "enemy of Rwanda and Uganda". It was not clear where Mukombozi was going, although it was possibly to Australia, with which he has ties.

No longer a quiet figure in the background, the First Son has recently become vocal on social media about many aspects of Ugandan politics and its foreign affairs.

In many cases, his stances appear to have contradicted some of the official positions of the Ugandan government. These include his tweets in support of Tigrayan rebels in Ethiopia's civil war, and Russian President Vladimir Putin in his invasion of Ukraine.

Alarming to many is not just the positions Muhoozi has taken, but the bombastic and egotistic tone of his discourse.

He frequently states that he will destroy Uganda's enemies, and likens himself to military and revolutionary figures throughout history. These are discursive traits that have long been components of his father's rhetoric.

Yet, across the country and online, multiple 'Team MK' or 'MK 2026' groups are popping up to support his future presidential run.

What's coming?

The most likely explanation for Muhoozi's recent emergence is that his once low profile is being raised to position him to succeed his father. If this is indeed the regime's wish, it would be unwise to bet against it. However, the pathway for Muhoozi to reach State House is far from guaranteed. The Ugandan public would expect him to win an election to legitimise his leadership, and in so doing he would potentially face 2021 candidate Bobi Wine in fierce competition for the nation's increasingly young electorate.

Sam Wilkins

Lecturer, RMIT University

Richard Vokes

Associate Professor of Anthropology, The University of Western Australia

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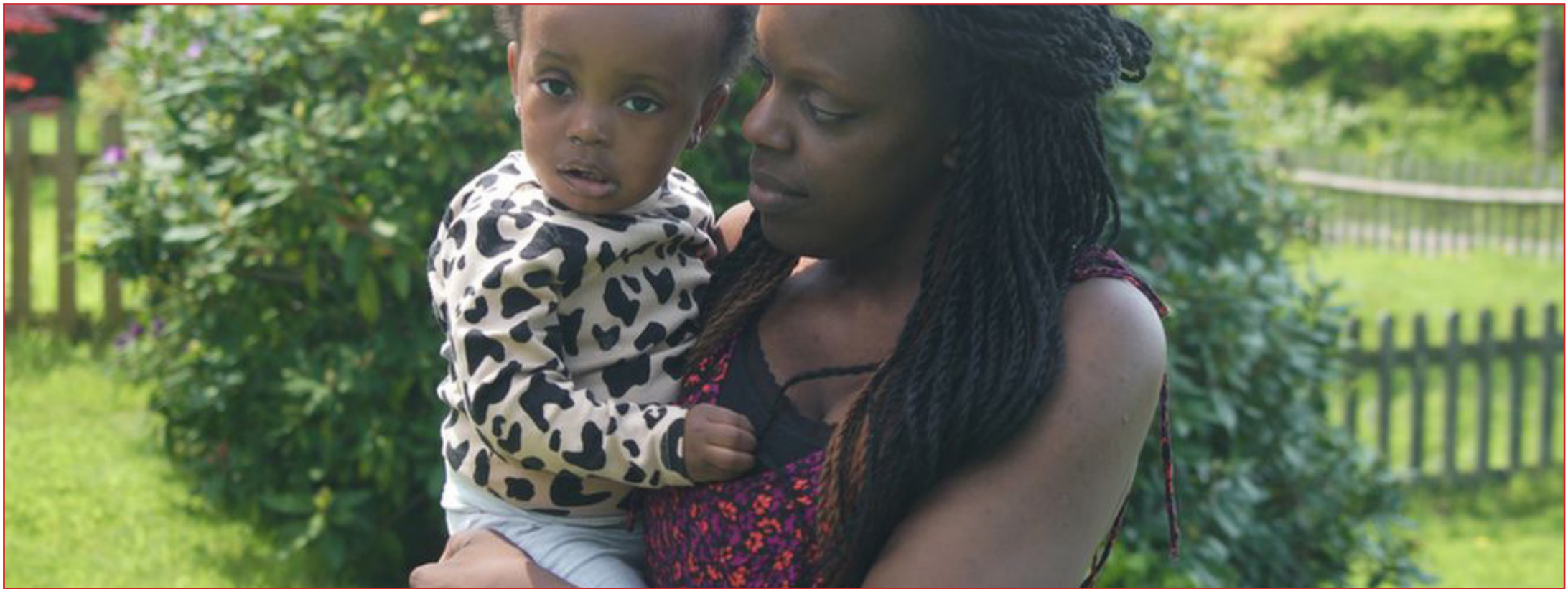
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'I was repeatedly ignored' - report finds maternity racism



Divya Talwar

Black and Asian women are being harmed by racial discrimination in maternity care, according to an inquiry.

The year-long investigation into "racial injustice" was conducted by the charity Birthrights.

Women reported feeling unsafe, being denied pain relief, facing racial stereotyping about their pain tolerance, and microaggressions.

The government has set up a taskforce to tackle racial disparities in maternity care. Hiral Varsani says she was traumatised by her treatment during the birth of her first child.

The 31-year-old from north London developed sepsis - a potentially life-threatening reaction to an infection - after her labour was induced, which she says was only spotted after a long delay.

"I was shivering, my whole body was aching, my heart was beating really fast and I felt terrible. But everyone kept saying everything was normal," she says.

"It was almost 24 hours later before a doctor took my bloods for the first time and realised I was seriously ill."

Hiral had an emergency C-section and

her daughter was taken into intensive care after also contracting sepsis.

She believes her race played a role in her care: "I experienced microaggressions and was stereotyped because of the colour of my skin.

"The staff would say 'hello princess', and while I was having contractions in a corridor a midwife walked past and said, 'Oh, you're definitely going to need an epidural'. I had never even met her before.

"I was repeatedly ignored, they just thought I was a weak little Indian girl, who was unable to take pain."

'Bleed to death'

While death in pregnancy or childbirth is very rare in the UK, there are stark racial disparities in maternal mortality rates.

Black women are more than four times more likely to die in pregnancy or childbirth than white women in the UK, while women from Asian backgrounds face almost twice the risk.

Tinu Alikor was terrified she would become one of those statistics when she gave birth to her daughter 14 months ago.

The mother-of-three from Kent says she was "mistreated and unheard" during her maternity care each time, but says her most recent experience was perhaps the worst.

During Tinu's second trimester, she had heavy, unexplained bleeding, and said she begged for an examination.

"The blood was getting worse, I was scared, I thought I was losing my baby. I've have had two miscarriages before.

"The doctors refused to examine me and just said I had a UTI. I was told I still had four days till the end of my antibiotics course, and I remember saying, 'four days to what - till I bleed to death?'"

When Tinu was eventually examined, she was immediately taken to hospital because of a serious bleed coming from her bladder, and she needed several blood transfusions.

"If I had not have been hospitalised, I don't think I'd be sitting here right now. And I don't think my daughter would be. I've met some amazing midwives and doctors but I think all my experiences in my pregnancies and labour have been tainted by my race.

"With all three of my labours, I wasn't given any pain relief. I had to beg for it during my first two births, and even then, I was only ever given gas and air.

"Racial stereotyping has got a lot to do with it. There is an assumption that black women have a higher pain tolerance. I don't know where this comes from. It doesn't hurt any less because I'm black."

Immense challenges

The Birthrights investigation - supported by the law firm Leigh Day - found common themes across the testimony it heard. These included:

- Black and brown women reported feeling physically and psychologically unsafe during their care

- Health care professionals failed to recognise serious medical conditions such as jaundice in black babies because "white bodies" were considered the norm

- Women described racial stereotyping, microaggressions and assumptions - leading to distress and trauma. One of the most common experiences was that of black, brown and mixed ethnicity women reporting pain relief being denied or delayed because of racist stereotypes, including black women's perceived ability to tolerate pain and Asian women's perceived inability to cope with pain

- There were many accounts of women and staff hearing Asian women being referred to as "princesses" or "precious" and black women as "aggressive" or "angry"

- Some women and health care professionals shared examples of overt

racism, such as hearing staff saying that black women and babies have "thick, tough skin", that the ward "smells of curry" when south Asian families were being cared for, and that Chinese people are "dirty"

Melissa Brown, a midwife and officer for Birthrights, said maternity services were facing immense challenges.

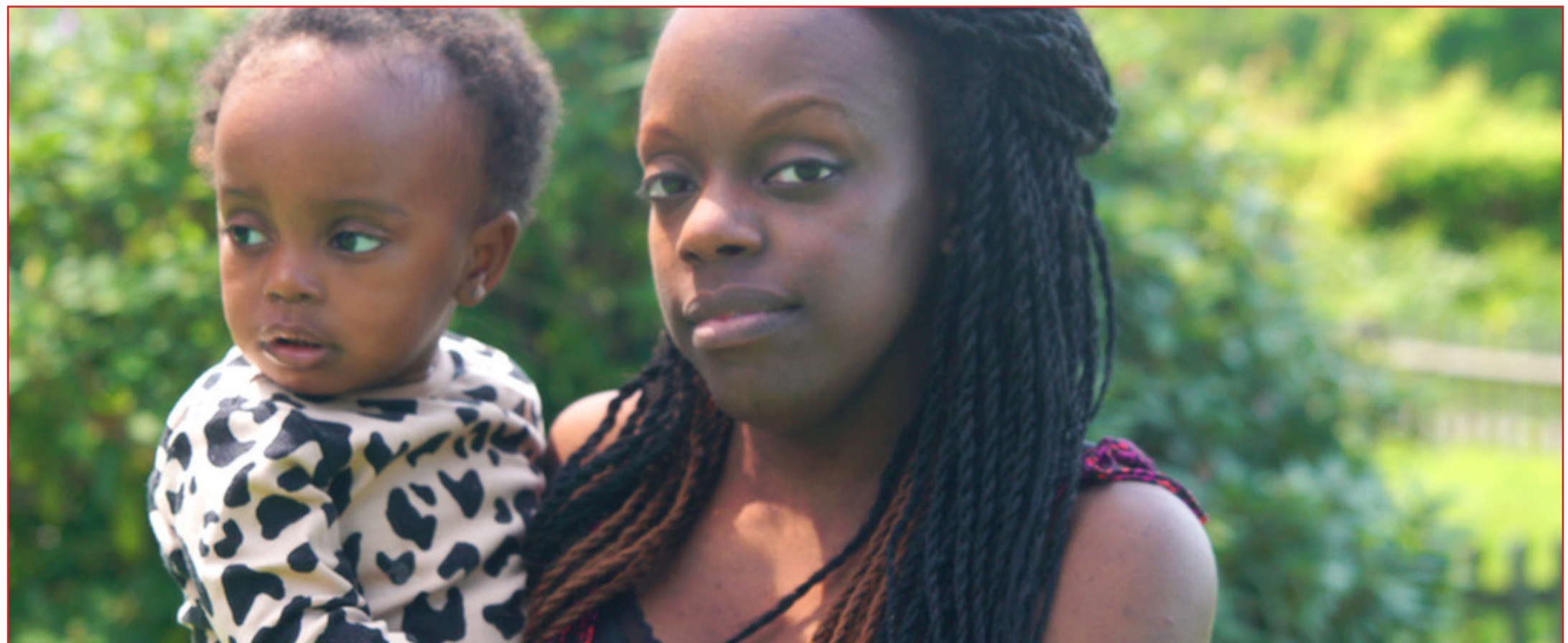
"We did hear positive examples of maternity care, but there is racism and racial discrimination at a structural and individual level which is putting black, brown and mixed ethnicity women at harm. There are many complex reasons for poorer health outcomes for ethnic minorities, and racism and discrimination is definitely playing a role."

The Birthrights report - which will be sent to MPs - highlights the need for urgent action, including training for health care professionals which highlights diversity.

A Department of Health and Social Care spokesperson said the Maternity Disparities Taskforce would "level up maternity care for all women".

"It will address factors linked to unacceptable disparities in quality of care, experiences and outcomes."

-BBC



HSBC suspends banker over 'nut job' climate comments, say reports

HSBC has reportedly suspended a senior executive who accused central bankers and other officials of exaggerating the financial risks of climate change.

Last week, Stuart Kirk, a leader in the bank's responsible investing team, said: "There's always some nut telling me about the end of the world."

At the weekend, HSBC's boss Noel Quinn posted on social media that he did not agree "at all" with the comments.

The firm declined to comment on reports that Mr Kirk has been suspended.

Mr Kirk, who is global head of responsible investing at the bank's asset management division, was suspended pending an investigation into a speech he made at an event last week, according to the Financial Times, which first reported the story.

His role, which is based in London, involves considering the impact of investments on environmental, social and governance issues.

HSBC came under pressure to sack Mr Kirk after he gave the presentation entitled "Why investors need not worry about climate risk" at a conference on Thursday. In the address he made light of the risks of major floods and said that he had to spend his time "looking at something that's going to happen in 20 or 30 years".

During the 15-minute address at the FT Moral Money Summit, Mr Kirk said "Climate change is not a financial risk that we need to worry about."

"Unsubstantiated, shrill, partisan, self-serving, apocalyptic warnings are

ALWAYS wrong," a slide shown as part of the presentation said.

Later in the presentation, he said: "Who cares if Miami is six metres underwater in 100 years? Amsterdam has been six metres underwater for ages and that's a really nice place."

Mr Kirk did not immediately respond to a BBC request for comment.

Since the speech, senior HSBC executives have spoken out about the comments.

In a LinkedIn post on Saturday, the bank's group chief executive Noel Quinn said he did not agree "at all" with Mr Kirk's remarks.

"They are inconsistent with HSBC's strategy and do not reflect the views of the senior leadership of HSBC or HSBC Asset Management," he said.

Nuno Matos, chief executive of wealth and personal banking at HSBC, said that he was "in complete agreement" with Mr Quinn and that "the transition to net zero is of utmost importance to us".

On Monday, HSBC declined to comment to the BBC on reports that Mr Kirk had been suspended.

Instead, a spokesperson shared a statement by HSBC Asset Management chief executive Nicolas Moreau referring to climate change as "one of the most serious emergencies facing the planet".

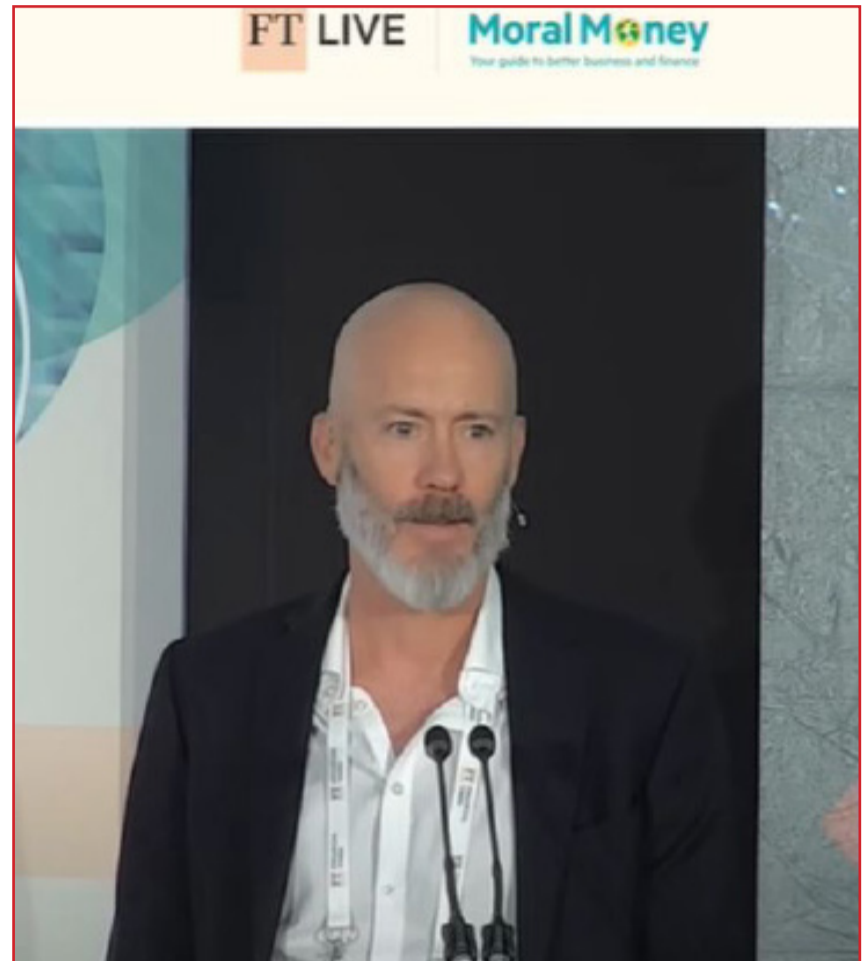
"HSBC Asset Management is committed to driving the transition to a sustainable global economy and has a fiduciary responsibility to ensure its clients' monies are managed for positive long-term

environmental and social outcomes," Mr Moreau added.

However, both the theme and content of the presentation had been approved within the company, according to the FT.

-BBC

“ **HSBC came under pressure to sack Mr Kirk after he gave the presentation entitled "Why investors need not worry about climate risk" at a conference on Thursday.** ”





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AirAsia faces backlash over delayed pandemic refunds



■ Ushar Daniele

Malaysia's AirAsia is facing a wave of complaints from customers who say they have still not been refunded for flights that were cancelled or rescheduled during the pandemic.

AirAsia and its subsidiary AirAsia X (AAX), both owned by Capital A Berhad, grounded thousands of flights in 2020 and 2021 after the Malaysian government shut state and international borders to curb the spread of COVID-19.

But months after the low-cost carrier resumed flights following the lifting of interstate and international border restrictions for Malaysians in October, hundreds of customers have taken to social media to complain of poor customer service and long waits for refunds.

Rohana Betak, 60, said she requested a refund of 4,000 Malaysian ringgit (\$911) after the airline cancelled her flights between Senai and Kota Kinabalu, the capital of Sabah state, following the introduction of a nationwide lockdown in March 2020.

Betak, who planned to visit the area around Mount Kinabalu, Southeast Asia's highest peak, with her family in October 2021, said the airline's automated online customer service only offered her the option of travelling on different dates. Betak decided against accepting the offer

due to uncertainty over when restrictions would be lifted and concerns about catching COVID-19. Two years later, she says she is still waiting for her money back.

"In my request, I said it was fine to refund me credits for the booking but instead I was reminded in June 2020 that I must board the flight to Sabah on a different date and there would be no refunds," Betak told Al Jazeera.

"It was not helpful because instead of offering me at least credit in refunds, it told me I had no other choice but to travel on different dates

Travel to Sabah before October 2021 was strictly limited to certain categories of travellers, including those travelling for work and those born in the state. Rohana and her family did not fall under any exempted category.

"When it demanded I get on another flight, I asked if they wanted to send me and my family to our deaths?" Betak said. "It's so frustrating and I am so tired of trying to get my money back so I've accepted that I might not get my money back at all."

Many of the complaints have been directed towards AVA, AirAsia's online chatbot, which is the only line of communication between customers and the airline for issues involving bookings or flights.

In particular, some have questioned why it is so difficult to reach customer service to

request a refund, even for flights booked since the lifting of pandemic restrictions. Customer Aulia Chaerisa Salleh said she is waiting for a refund for a flight between Batam and Jakarta that was booked earlier this month after she was informed no seat was available.

"I paid for my ticket and it did not register in the system so I tried to get my refund for my tickets. I tried the AVA live chat but it is not helpful at all. It has been days, I haven't heard from them," she said.

Under AirAsia's current refund policy, the airline offers customers a refund, credit or a new travel date whenever a flight is cancelled or postponed.

AirAsia told Al Jazeera the airline is engaged in ongoing dialogue with consumer regulators across the region to ensure compliance with all local regulations.

"AirAsia Group's policies are in line with many low-cost operators in the travel industry worldwide and are fully compliant with all regulatory requirements and as a customer-centric airline, we have focused on resolving all customer queries during the pandemic as soon as possible," a spokesperson said.

The airline group said it has resolved more than 90 percent of refund requests and is committed to resolving a small number of outstanding claims as soon as possible.

"In Malaysia for example, our current

refund progress is only left with 0.03 percent of the refund requests we received and we are looking forward to completing the refunds exercise for all outstanding queries within the next few months," the spokesperson said, adding that the past two years had been the most challenging in the history of commercial aviation.

The spokesperson added that "our passengers remain our number one priority" and the airline will "continue to enhance our services to deliver the very best in terms of safe, affordable and reliable air travel".

'Problem child'

Tan Kok Liang, president of the Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agents (MATTA), said the refunds backlog is a short-term issue and its 3,100 members will continue to book with AirAsia as long as requested by customers.

"The problem child is AAX and while air connectivity is crucial for tourism recovery, based on media reports, AirAsia should be held more accountable to all stakeholders," Tan told Al Jazeera.

The hefty compensation paid out to airline co-founders Tony Fernandez and Kamarudin Maranun, who took home close to 30 million ringgit (\$6.8m) combined last year, has also raised eyebrows.

Following the release of Capital A's Annual Report 2021 last month, some social media users vented their frustrations on

Fernandez's personal Instagram accounts, with one comment slamming AirAsia as "the one and only airline that does not have a customer service phone number."

Despite the generous executive compensation, AAX, the group's long-haul carrier, was last year forced to undergo debt restructuring to save itself from liquidation after racking up huge debts during the pandemic.

In March, AAX announced it had completed its debt restructuring after creditors earlier agreed to a deal under which the airline would pay just 0.5 percent of outstanding debt and terminate existing contracts to restructure RM33.65 billion (US\$8.1 billion) of liabilities.

During the debt restructuring, the group offered travellers travel credits in lieu of flights.

The Malaysian Aviation Commission (MAVCOM), however, urged the airline to reimburse customers for tickets purchased while threatening to exercise its powers under the Malaysian Aviation Commission Act 2015.

Capital A posted revenue of 1.7 billion ringgit (\$387m) in the 2021 financial year, down 47 percent from the previous year, as capacity sank to just 36 percent of 2020 levels.

-Al Jazeera





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SADC and European partners launch new digital system to speed up cross-border truck movements

Chad Williams

The East and Southern African Trade and Transport Facilitation System was launched on Friday at Tlokweng Border Post in Botswana.

Part of the Team Europe's Global Gateway initiative and response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Corridor Trip Monitoring System (CTMS) was funded by a €1.6 million (about R26.8m) grant from the EU and more than €500 000 from the Federal Republic of Germany, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) said in a statement.

The CTMS has now been installed at major commercial border posts in Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe, along sections of three regional transport corridors, and will soon be installed in other Eastern and Southern African countries. The CTMS is spearheaded by SADC on behalf of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (Comesa), the East African Community (EAC) and SADC.

Once fully operational, the system will minimise the need for paperwork and speed up border procedures, reduce waiting and transit times and allow trucks to deliver essential goods more quickly, while ensuring health



Thulaganyo Merafe Segokgo, Minister of Communications, Knowledge and Technology for Botswana, underscored that the CTMS has proven to be a highly effective and efficient digital solution in the management of safe cross-border road transport and compliance to Covid-19 requirements by operators and drivers, and most importantly, enhancing trade facilitation and movement of goods across the Southern African region and beyond. Dr Thembinkosi Mhlongo, SADC

deputy executive secretary for Regional Integration, said that that the CTMS further enhances collaboration among and between the Tripartite members of Comesa, the EAC and SADC through increased information and data sharing and standardisation of procedures, including for testing, vaccination and for mutual recognition of Covid-19 test results and vaccination certificates, using a common monitoring and surveillance tool at all points of entry and in-country check

points. "The system we are showcasing at Tlokweng will boost transport efficiency from Cairo to Cape Town," said Jan Sadek, the EU's ambassador to SADC and Botswana, at the launch. "Economic integration is in the EU's DNA, and we are delighted to help build a transit system that will ultimately streamline trade and travel between all parts of Africa." The system equips border agents with hand-held devices to check, validate and

register the Covid-19 health status of truck drivers and their crews, as well as the compliance of their vehicles with cross-border regulations and road safety rules.

Transport operators will use a custom-made app to upload vehicle and driver health information onto the CTMS website. This information can then be instantly accessed by authorised border and law enforcement officials in the country of destination and transit by scanning QR codes shown by drivers.

The CTMS also allows authorities and operators to monitor driver trip progression and deviations against pre-approved routes and designated rest areas, said a statement. Aside from the truck drivers' health status and road transport modules, many more functionalities could eventually be added to the system, including cargo and vehicle advance customs clearance, visa and passport information, and a security module to improve responses and support to drivers and vehicles involved in accidents and other incidents.

The Tripartite Transport and Transit Facilitation Programme has developed harmonised road transport norms (multilateral agreements, laws, regulations, standards, IT systems) for the 25 continental beneficiary member/partner states of SADC, the EAC and Comesa. -IOL

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Mozambique insurgency: Why 24 countries have sent troops



Joseph Hanlon

At least 24 countries have sent soldiers to support Mozambique in its fight against insurgents in northern Cabo Delgado province.

The discovery of 7,000 "ghost soldiers" in the ranks of a poorly paid and badly trained army underline why Mozambique needs help.

The Carta de Moçambique daily newspaper discovered many of the salaries of fake soldiers were paid to senior defence officials, and that there are a growing number of children of former officers and politicians who receive salaries without ever having been in military training, let alone setting foot in a military unit.

More than 2,000 well trained Rwandan troops were sufficient to largely take control of the two coastal districts, Palma and Mocimboa da Praia, near giant gas fields. Despite their successes, Mozambique's civil war rumbles on.

The big struggles now are political - about money, the causes of the war, who can fight, and if the gas project can resume. Cabo Delgado is Mozambique's resource-

curse province, with gas, rubies, graphite, gold and other natural resources.

Protests were growing that the profits were all going to an elite in the ruling party, Frelimo, and that few local jobs were being created.

The coastal zone is historically Muslim. Local fundamentalist preachers said Sharia, or Islamic law, would bring equality and a fair sharing of wealth - effectively, a socialist message.

The war started in 2017 when young people in Mocimboa da Praia attacked the local police station and army post, capturing weapons.

Since then, more than 4,000 people have been killed and 800,000 forced from their homes.

The first struggle is over the roots of the war. President Filipe Nyusi and Frelimo say it is entirely an external aggression and thus not their fault.

The European Union (EU) and the World Bank want to contribute hundreds of millions of dollars to try to stop the war, partly by creating jobs and resolving the grievances, but Frelimo has for six months refused to put an EU-World Bank proposal

to the cabinet.

Civil wars always attract outsiders, and there has been some involvement from Islamic State (IS) and jihadists from other wars, as well as finance from some Middle Eastern states.

Most Mozambican researchers say local issues remain dominant. But both the US and IS want this to be seen not as a local civil war, but as a clash between two global powers.

In March 2021, the US labelled the insurgents as Isis-Mozambique and "global terrorists".

This was widely rejected by those researching the war, and the US refused to release its evidence.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on 14 July 2021 stressed that the main US interest in Mozambique was "countering Isis".

And on 4 April 2022 the US named Mozambique as one of five countries under the Global Fragility Act, which would involve substantially increased US involvement in Mozambique.

Meanwhile, apparently pleased with the growing publicity for such a small

investment, IS began to call the insurgents IS Mozambique.

The fear is that IS and the US seem to be aiming for a proxy war in Mozambique.

This stirs unhappy memories because in the 1980s, before the end of the Cold War, the US waged a proxy war against the then Soviet Union that killed one million Mozambicans.

So Mozambique is trying to keep the US at arm's length. It has been allowed a small military training mission, but no more.

Two other countries have pushed to send in their soldiers - Portugal and South Africa. Portugal is the former colonial power which was defeated in the 1965-1975 independence war, and has been trying to regain a military presence ever since. It has sent its troops through a European Union training mission - most soldiers are Portuguese but 10 other countries, including Greece, Spain, and Italy, have also contributed.

South Africa sees itself as the regional power and Mozambique as its back yard. It pushed to create a Southern African Development Community (Sade) military force. Mozambique stalled.

President Nyusi met Rwanda's President Paul Kagame and France's President Emmanuel Macron last year.

Rwanda has a professional army heavily involved in peacekeeping operations, and the lead company in the suspended gas project is French, TotalEnergies.

The first 1,000 Rwandan troops arrived on 9 July 2021 and in three weeks cleared insurgents from key areas.

The Sade Mission in Mozambique (Samim) had been created earlier in 2021 but Mozambique only allowed the first South African troops to arrive on 19 July, after the Rwandans were already in operation.

Most Samim troops are South African but nine other Sade states have also contributed personnel. They include Angola, Botswana and Zimbabwe.

Samim has been assigned to less important zones far from the gas, and has not proved effective in fighting the insurgents.

President Nyusi visited Uganda in late April and met President Yoweri Museveni, who had received military training from Frelimo in Cabo Delgado in the 1970s when he was waging a guerrilla war against the then-Ugandan government.

Mr Museveni revealed he was already supporting the Mozambican military and suggested sending a troop contingent.

Thus the Rwanda-Uganda-France axis is helping to keep South Africa, Portugal and the US at bay.

Two other struggles continue. The first is that Frelimo and the military want to keep tight control of the war zone, restricting journalists and aid workers.

The government and military want to control the distribution of aid. Special humanitarian visas must be individually approved by the National Disaster Agency, and are restricted to working for a named agency.

TotalEnergies head Patrick Pouyanné told investors on 28 April that there could be no return to Mozambique until the people had returned to Mocimboa da Praia district and were living in peace with a normal life. He said a simple security zone was not acceptable.

But, so far, Mozambican authorities are not allowing displaced people to return to most of Mocimboa da Praia. They say conditions are not suitable yet, and they fear that many displaced people still support the insurgents.

So there is a stand-off. Will the government allow people to return and allow aid agencies in, or are they hoping that TotalEnergies will eventually accept a security zone without population?

-BBC



AMD's Ryzen 7000 CPUs will break the 5GHz barrier — and require a new motherboard

■ Sean Hollister

This fall, AMD is planning a clean break with the past, and it thinks your need for speed might convince you to do the same. Today at Computex 2022, the company revealed the key facets of its next-generation Ryzen 7000 desktop CPUs, their Zen 4 architecture, and — for the first time in five years — a brand-new kind of motherboard you'll need to buy. While even some of the company's oldest AM4 motherboards can be updated to support its latest Ryzen 5000-series desktop CPUs, the upcoming Ryzen 7000 requires AM5. As the company told us in January, the Ryzen 7000 are the first PC chips based on a 5nm process, and the AM5 motherboard platform is designed to support DDR5 and PCIe 5.0 out of the box.

But there's a fifth "five" in the mix: AMD says Ryzen 7000 chips will be able to boost north of 5GHz, the first desktop chips from the company to do so. AMD showed off a 5.5GHz clockspeed during its Computex presentation while playing Ghostwire: Tokyo, matching the 5.5GHz turbo of Intel's Core i9-12900KS. Not that megahertz mean much for performance in isolation — both Intel and AMD have

many laptop chips that can turbo to 5GHz too, and that doesn't necessarily mean they're faster at tasks than a lower-clocked desktop CPU.

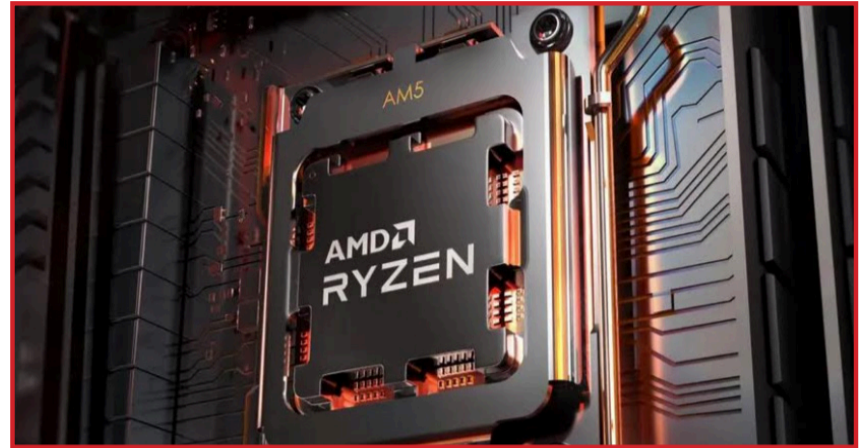
What should actually make a difference: between increased clockspeed and generation-on-generation process improvements, Zen 4 will also have "greater than 15 percent" faster single-threaded performance than Zen 3 (single-thread still being the most important metric for many apps, particularly games). The new chips might also have higher power consumption, though: the new AM5 motherboards can now give the chips up to 170W of power, up from a reported 142W previously.

Under the unusual rook-shaped lid of a Ryzen 7000, you'll still see three chiplets: two 5nm Zen 4 CPU modules, and also a new 6nm I/O die that has now integrated RDNA 2 graphics, DDR5 and PCIe 5.0 controllers, and built-in power management. Intriguingly, AMD marketing director Robert Hallock says every single Ryzen 7000 chip will have some amount of those integrated graphics, so you'll only need a video card if you need the additional muscle for work or gaming. Integrated graphics aren't exactly

rare on either Intel or AMD desktop CPUs, but it hasn't been a guarantee.

Another guarantee: at least one speedy PCIe 5.0 NVMe storage slot will be standard on every AM5 motherboard tier that AMD's announcing today, including the new X670 Extreme, X670 and even the more affordable B650 (note we don't have any actual prices yet). AMD says it's already seeing 60 percent faster improvements in sequential read speed, the kind of thing that might give us the mythical 1-second game load times that Microsoft's DirectStorage promises (but won't necessarily deliver on day one).

PCIe Gen 5 graphics support isn't guaranteed, it depends on the tier: you're sure to get it with an X670 Extreme motherboard, it's optional for OEMs to include it on an X670, and you definitely won't get it with a B650, where your long x16 PCIe slot will be PCIe Gen 4 instead. Regardless of tier, AM5 is offering 24 lanes of PCIe 5.0 bandwidth, and says these motherboards will have up to 14 USB 3.x ports (I suspect AMD doesn't specify which standard because the official naming is a mess), some of which will support 20Gbps and USB-C. You also get up to four display outputs on your motherboard



itself, and manufacturers can outfit them with HDMI 2.1 and DisplayPort 2.

Will also this be enough to tempt enthusiasts and gamers away from AMD's existing AM4 platform, which was so successful at luring so many of them away from Intel? Hard to say, but it's also hard to fault AMD for moving on. The company made five different CPU architectures fit into the AM4 socket over the past five years, instead of asking all those CPU buyers to add a new motherboard, and even now it's pledging to continue support. "We want to

keep AM4 going into the future so people can continue to benefit from this amazing platform," says Hallock.

And you won't have to give away all your AM4 gear if you're upgrading to an AM5 desktop PC: AMD designed the new socket and chip to work just fine with existing AM4 CPU coolers.

AMD's not talking about specific chips you can buy today, but says it'll be trickling out more details over the summer ahead of the fall release.

-The Verge

Boeing's Starliner successfully docks to the International Space Station for the

■ Loren Grush

This evening, Boeing's new passenger spacecraft, the CST-100 Starliner, successfully docked itself to the International Space Station — demonstrating that the vehicle can potentially bring humans to the ISS in the future. It's a crucial capability that Starliner has finally validated in space after years of delays and failures.

Starliner is in the midst of a key test flight for NASA called OFT-2, for Orbital Flight Test-2. The capsule, developed by Boeing for NASA's Commercial Crew Program, was made to transport NASA's astronauts to and from the space station. But before anyone climbs on board, NASA tasked Boeing with conducting an uncrewed flight demonstration of Starliner to show that the capsule can hit all of the major milestones it'll need to hit when it is carrying passengers.

Boeing has struggled to showcase Starliner's ability until now. This mission is called OFT-2 since it's technically a do-over of a mission that Boeing attempted back in 2019, called OFT. During that flight, Starliner launched to space as planned, but a software glitch prevented the capsule from getting in the right orbit it needed to reach to rendezvous with the ISS. Boeing had to bring the vehicle home early, and the company never demonstrated Starliner's ability to dock with the ISS.

Now, roughly two and a half years later, Starliner has finally shown what it was designed to do. Using a series of sensors, the capsule autonomously guided itself onto an open docking port on the space station. "Boeing Starliner spacecraft completes its historic first docking to the International Space Station opening

a new avenue of access for crews to the orbiting laboratory," Steve Siceloff, a communications representative for Boeing, said during the livestream of the docking. Docking occurred a little over an hour behind schedule, due to some issues with Starliner's graphics and docking ring, which were resolved ahead of the docking. There was some concern about Starliner's ability to dock with the space station after Boeing revealed some issues with the capsule's thrusters yesterday. At 6:54PM ET, Starliner successfully launched to space on top of an Atlas V rocket, built and operated by the United Launch Alliance. Once Starliner separated from the Atlas V, it had to fire its own thrusters to insert itself into the proper orbit for reaching the space station. However, after that maneuver took place, Boeing and NASA revealed that two of the 12 thrusters Starliner uses for the procedure failed and cut off too early. The capsule's flight control system was able to kick in and rerouted to a working thruster, which helped get Starliner into a stable orbit.

Ultimately, NASA and Boeing claimed that the issue should not impact the rest of Starliner's mission. "There's really no need to resolve them," Steve Stich, NASA's program manager for the Commercial Crew Program, said in a press conference after the flight. "But I know what the teams will do, and what we always do is we'll go look at the data, try to understand what happened." Today, Boeing revealed that a drop in chamber pressure had caused the early cutoff of the thruster, but that system behaved normally during follow-up burns of the thrusters. And with redundancies on the spacecraft, the issue "does not pose a risk to the rest of the flight test," according to Boeing.

Boeing also noted today that the Starliner

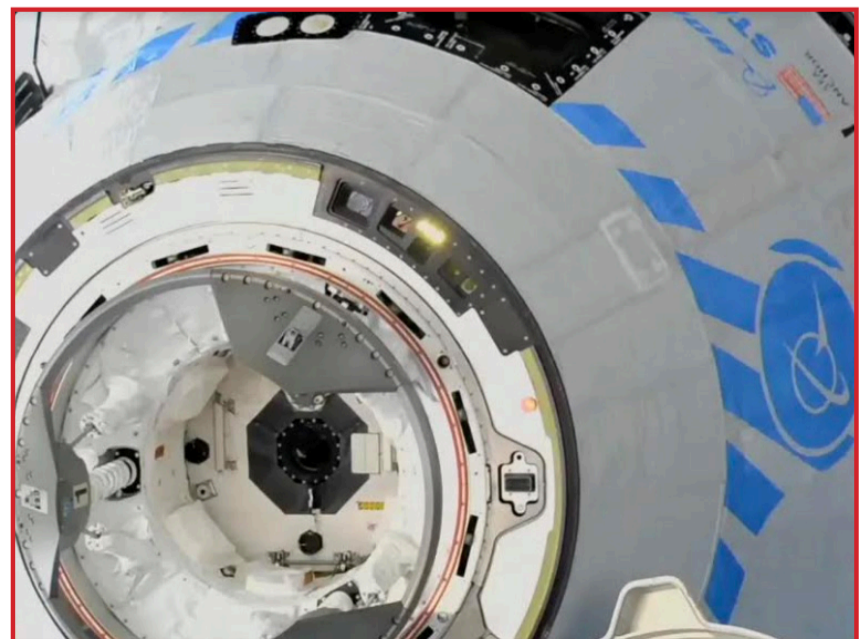
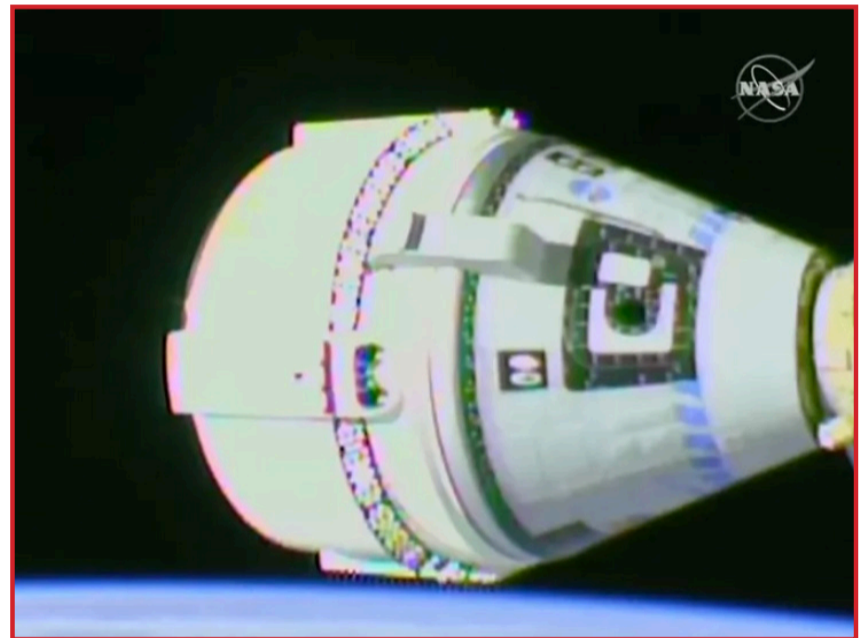
team is investigating some weird behavior of a "thermal cooling loop" but said that temperatures are stable on the spacecraft.

Now, with Starliner docked to the space station, it'll stick around for the next four to five days. Tomorrow morning, the astronauts already on board the ISS will open the hatch to the vehicle and retrieve some cargo that's packed inside. Also inside Starliner is a mannequin called Rosie the Rocketeer, simulating what it would be like for a human to ride inside the vehicle.

After its brief stay on the ISS, Starliner will detach from the ISS and distance itself from the station for its return home. The capsule will use its thrusters to take itself out of orbit and put it on course for Earth. The two thrusters that failed are the same kind used for this deorbit maneuver, but NASA and Boeing did not seem concerned. "We'll just have to see if we can recover the thrusters," Stich said. He also noted that the working thrusters could be used and that Boeing has the option to use a different set of thrusters to perform the task if needed. "So there's plenty of redundancy in the spacecraft."

For now, the Starliner team is celebrating their big milestone. "Today marks a great milestone towards providing additional commercial access to low Earth orbit, sustaining the ISS and enabling NASA's goal of returning humans to the Moon and eventually to Mars," NASA astronaut Bob Hines, currently on board the space station, said after the docking. "Great accomplishments in human spaceflight are long remembered by history. Today will be no different."

-The Verge





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

14h30-16h30
Ookundana Dhangi with Helen
 16h30-18h30
The Home Run with Frans/ Fanus
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Business Segment with Gabriel
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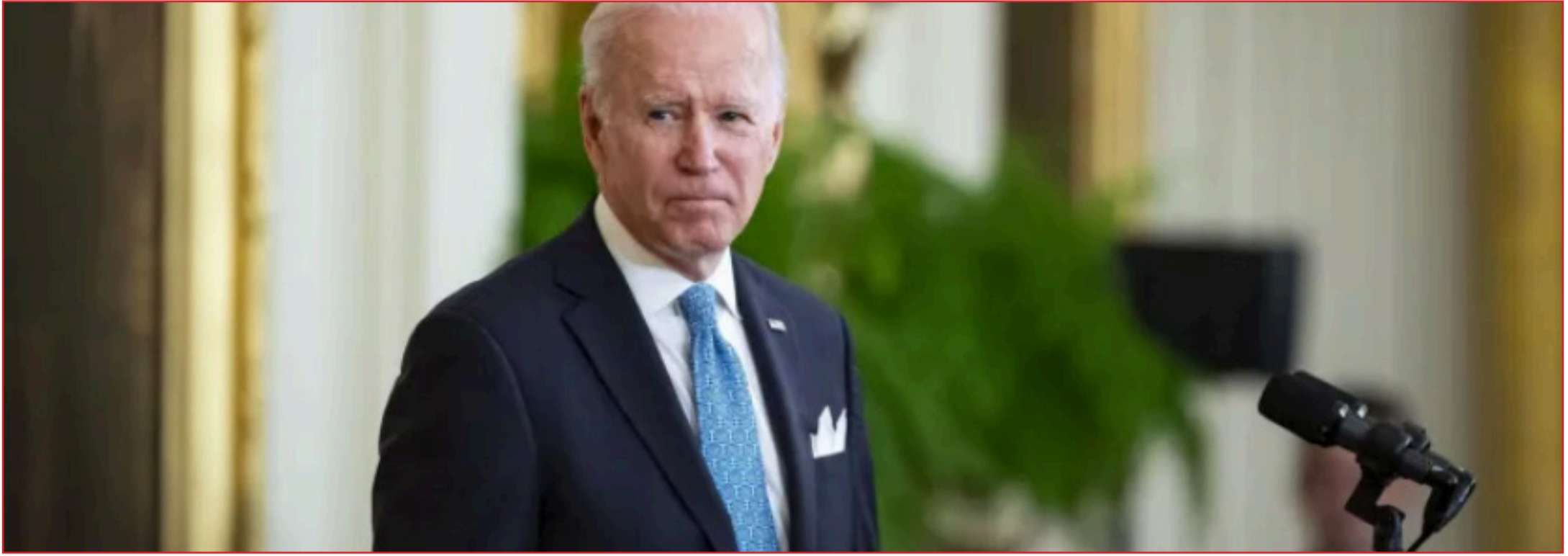
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Biden says US would defend Taiwan if attacked by China



Erin Hale

US President Joe Biden says he would use force to defend Taiwan if it was attacked by China, appearing to signal a shift away from Washington's decades-long policy of so-called strategic ambiguity towards the East Asian democracy.

Biden made the remarks on Monday while visiting Japan, where he is on the second leg of his first trip to East Asia since taking office last year.

Responding to a reporter's questions about Taiwan at a press conference with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, Biden said defending Taiwan was a "commitment we made".

He said while the US agrees with the "one China policy" – which states there is a single China but does not define it – the idea that "Taiwan can be taken by force" is "not appropriate".

He warned Beijing was already "flirting with danger right now by flying so close and all the manoeuvres undertaken" – referring to a growing number of Chinese sorties, naval exercises and other power projection in the Taiwan Straits.

Beijing still claims Taiwan, whose formal

name is the Republic of China, as a province and has not ruled out unifying the two sides by force.

China responded immediately to Biden's comments saying "no one should underestimate the firm resolve, staunch will and strong ability of the Chinese people in defending national sovereignty and territorial integrity".

"China has no room for compromise or concession," foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said.

'Aroused great concern'

Taiwan's foreign affairs ministry said it welcomed Biden's comments for "reaffirming" Washington's "firm commitment to Taiwan" and would deepen cooperation with countries including the US and Japan.

"The challenges China poses to the security of the Taiwan Strait have aroused great concern to the international community," a spokesperson said. "Our government's firm determination to defend Taiwan's freedom, democracy and security has never changed."

The comments mark the third time that Biden, 79, has made such a statement only for it to be quickly walked back by White

House staff.

Shortly after Biden's remarks on Monday, an unnamed White House official told reporters there is "no change in US policy towards Taiwan", according to Reuters news agency.

Matthew Kroenig, deputy director of the Atlantic Council's Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security, said while it is debatable whether or not Biden misspoke, the president's remarks clarify his thinking on Taiwan.

"Some say it's a carefully coordinated campaign of ambiguity. Others say that Biden is senile and misspoke. I would argue that at this point the reason doesn't really matter," Kroenig told Al Jazeera. "In the event of a war, it would always be up to the president to decide whether to intervene or not regardless of the formal policy. We now have a clear window on what Biden's decision would be."

Analysts say the US appears to have been moving away from strategic ambiguity in favour of "strategic clarity" for some time. "This is both a useful 'slip of tongue' and a revealing reflection of a widely shared assumption within the US government. Biden has done this multiple times before, be it at the CNN Townhall in early 2021,

or his statement about the non-existent 'Taiwan agreement,'" Wen-ti Sung, a political scientist who teaches at Australian National University's Taiwan Studies Program, told Al Jazeera.

"This time Biden's statement itself seems illogical but the sentiment and signal it sends are politically very useful," Sung added.

Under Biden's predecessor, Donald Trump, Washington launched a sweeping trade war against China and boosted ties with Taipei through arms sales and diplomatic visits.

The US has long promised to help Taiwan defend itself under the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act, but it has stopped short of pledging to send troops or directly participate in any conflict.

The Act says only that the "United States will make available to Taiwan such defence articles and defence services in such quantity as may be necessary to enable Taiwan to maintain a sufficient self-defence capability."

The commitment was made as an assurance the US would not abandon Taiwan after Washington officially severed ties with Taipei in favour of Beijing that same year.

Taipei at the time claimed to represent the legitimate government of China but has in practice largely stopped asserting its claim since democratisation in the 1990s

China has aggressively pursued brands, private companies and international organisations over the years to support its claim that Taiwan is an integral part of China, and blocked the island from attending meetings at the UN and World Health Assembly.

John Blaxland, a professor of International Security and Intelligence Studies at ANU, said Biden is taking a page from Beijing's book by ratcheting up his rhetoric.

"My sense is that Biden sees the combative [Chinese] rhetoric over Taiwan as warranting presidential pushback," Blaxland told Al Jazeera. "That confidence in pushing back appears to have been bolstered by the Ukraine experience, which undoubtedly has rattled China's exuberance over martial plans for conquest." Beijing's growing assertiveness in Asia, including the strategically important Taiwan Strait and South China Sea, has raised concern among many of its neighbours in the region.

Taiwan also occupies a critical place in the US's "first island chain" defence strategy aimed at keeping China from expanding its reach in the Pacific.

The self-ruled island's strategic position has brought it to the attention of the EU and NATO, as well as security alliances like AUKUS – uniting Australia, the UK, and the US – and the Quad, comprising Australia, India, Japan, and the US.

"For years, US strategists argued the ambiguity was a good thing. It kept Beijing guessing but was not an explicit threat to intervene in what the CCP would see as its internal affairs," Kroenig said, referring to the Chinese Communist Party.

"As the US-China relationship has deteriorated, and the military balance in the Taiwan Strait shifted, many US strategists have called for the US to clarify its commitment."

Ross Feingold, an Asia political risk analyst based in Taipei, said American officials will probably emphasise over the coming hours that Biden's comments meant the US would "provide military equipment" in the event of China's invasion of Taiwan.

"If he can have a do-over he'd probably change the way he replied to that question," Feingold told Al Jazeera. "Unfortunately, it causes a lot of confusion not just here in Taiwan, but in the United States as well as with China."

-Al Jazeera



UN: More than 100 million people forcibly displaced in the world

More than 100 million people have been driven from their homes around the world, the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) says, citing new data about those escaping violence, conflict, persecution and human rights violations.

The war in Ukraine has been one of the factors propelling millions of people to flee, UNHCR said on Monday, adding protracted conflict in places such as Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) were also behind the high numbers.

"It's a record that should never have been set," said UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi in a statement. "This must serve as a wake-up call to resolve and prevent destructive conflicts, end persecution, and address the underlying causes that force innocent people to flee their homes."

The 100 million figure amounts to more than 1 percent of the global population. Only 13 countries have a bigger population than the number of forcibly displaced people in the world.

In 2012, the figure stood at 41 million while in 2019 it reached 79.5 million.

In 2020, more than 82 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced with the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbating some pre-existing drivers.

The UNHCR data includes refugees, asylum seekers, and those displaced within their own countries. Last week, a humanitarian body said internally displaced people reached a record of nearly 60 million people by the end of last year.

The number of forcibly displaced people rose towards 90 million by the end of 2021, spurred by violence in Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, DRC, Ethiopia, Myanmar, and Nigeria, UNHCR said.

Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24 and since then more than eight million people have been displaced within the country, while more than six million refugees fled across the borders.

Grandi urged action to address the causes of displacement, saying humanitarian aid was only treating the consequences.

"To reverse this trend, the only answer is peace and stability so that innocent people are not forced to gamble between acute danger at home or precarious flight and exile," he added.

UNHCR will provide the full data on forced displacement in 2021 in its annual Global Trends Report, due for release on June 16.

'Unprecedented human suffering'

A joint report last week by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) and the Norwegian Refugee Council

(NRC) said about 38 million new internal displacements were reported in 2021. Some of those were by people forced to flee multiple times during the year.

The figure marks the second-highest annual number of new internal displacements in a decade after 2020, which saw record-breaking movement because of a string of natural disasters.

Last year, new internal displacements specifically from conflict surged to 14.4 million – marking a 50-percent jump from 2020, the report showed.

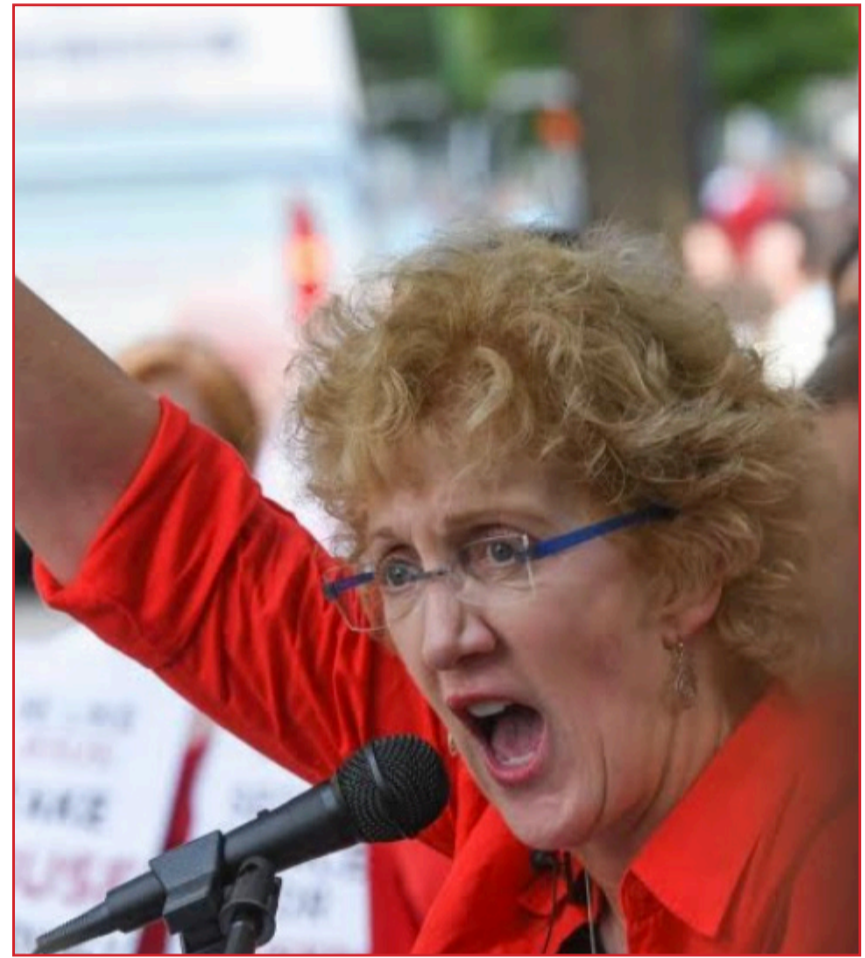
"Today's sobering 100 million displacement figure is indisputable proof that global leaders are failing the world's most vulnerable people on a scale never before seen," NRC Secretary-General Jan Egeland said in a statement.

"We are witnessing an unprecedented plague of human suffering." He said the aid system would not be able to support 100 million people in need without more resources.

"It is twice the number of people compared to a decade ago, without a doubling of funding to match it," Egeland said.

Natural disasters continued to account for most new internal displacement, spurring 23.7 million such movements in 2021.

-Al Jazeera



US Southern Baptists ignored, covered up sex abuse claims: Report

Leaders of the United States' largest Protestant denomination – Southern Baptists – for decades ignored or covered up sexual abuse allegations against top clergy, according to a new report.

Survivors repeatedly shared allegations with the executive committee of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), only to be met with "resistance, stonewalling, and even outright hostility", according to the report released on Sunday by Guidepost Solutions, an independent firm contracted by the SBC following an outcry over the allegations and the prospect of the executive committee investigating its own conduct.

The report said the executive committee, which largely controlled the denomination's response to any allegations, "were singularly focused on avoiding liability".

"In service of this goal, survivors and others who reported abuse were ignored, disbelieved, or met with the constant refrain that the SBC could take no action due to its polity regarding church autonomy – even if it meant that convicted molesters continued in ministry with no notice or warning to their current church or congregation," it said.

Those abused varied in age and included children, according to the report. Interviewed survivors "spoke of trauma from the initial abuse, but also told us of the debilitating effects that come from the response of the churches and institutions like the SBC that did not believe them, ignored them, mistreated them, and failed to help them," the report said.

Meanwhile, lawsuits against the church were denigrated as "opportunistic" and not having merit, according to the report.



The scandal echoed that of the Roman Catholic Church, which has been rocked by a deluge of allegations of sexual abuse, spurred by a 2002 report by the Boston Globe newspaper that documented a decades-long campaign of coverups. The US Catholic Church has since paid an estimated \$3.2bn to settle clergy abuse cases, according to BishopAccountability.org, which tracks the issue.

'An apocalypse'

The SBC claims 13 million members in the US and 40 million worldwide.

In its report, Guidepost Solutions said staffers on the executive committee of the SBC maintained a list of Baptist ministers accused of abuse, but there is no indication

they "took any action to ensure that the accused ministers were no longer in positions of power at SBC churches".

The alleged abuses and institutional inaction gained national attention in 2019 when a landmark report from the Houston Chronicle and San Antonio Express-News documented hundreds of cases, including several in which the alleged perpetrators remained in ministry.

Russell Moore, the former head of the SBC's public policy wing who left the denomination after accusing the leadership of stalling efforts to address the sex abuse crisis, described the findings as "an apocalypse".

"As dark a view as I had of the SBC Executive Committee, the investigation uncovers a reality far more evil and systemic than I imagined it could be," Moore wrote in Christianity Today.

Survivor Christa Brown, who said she was sexually abused as a teen by the youth and education minister at her SBC church, said the report "fundamentally confirms what Southern Baptist clergy sex abuse survivors have been saying for decades".

"I view this investigative report as a beginning, not an end. The work will continue," she told the Associated Press news agency. "But no one should ever forget the human cost of what it has taken to even get the SBC to approach this

starting line of beginning to deal with clergy sex abuse."

SBC President Ed Litton, in a statement on Sunday, said he is "grieved to my core" for the victims.

He called on Southern Baptists to lament and prepare to change the denomination's culture and implement reforms.

"I pray Southern Baptists will begin preparing today to take deliberate action to address these failures and chart a new course when we meet together in Anaheim," Litton said, referring to the California city that will host the SBC's national meeting on June 14 to 15.

-Al Jazeera

2022 Toyota 4Runner TRD Sport First Test: Style With Limited Appeal

■ **Monica Gonderman**

We loved the Lunar Rock color of our 2022 Toyota 4Runner TRD Sport. It was absolutely the main talking point with observers and other editors during our time testing the 4Runner, but is a lovely color enough to justify a mid-trim mid-sizer? Maybe if you're rolling in dough like that dude that just bought Twitter, but for most customers, color is far from the determining factor. They want to discuss features, value, power, up-to-date technology, driving manners, and more. That also includes reliability, and at least Toyotas, for better or worse, have a strong reputation for going and going on- and off-road, backed by generations of vehicles including many wearing the long-running and long-trusted 4Runner badge. But does this latest 4Runner deliver on those other customer wants? For the Street—Let's Check the Numbers

The 4Runner is of course famous for its off-road chops but, quizzically, the TRD Sport we tested here is actually more aimed at the street and increased curb appeal, with more body-color trim pieces, 20-inch wheels snagged from the Limited, street tires, the sport-tuned X-REAS (Cross-Linked Relative Absorber System) suspension also from the Limited, and a TRD Sport hood scoop, among other bits. That's not to say it isn't capable off the beaten path, and we spent plenty of enjoyable time in the dirt. Even with the TRD Sport goodies—and without dedicated off-road tires—the 4Runner's baked-in off-road goodness and puckish personality shine through, as it tackled some medium-level obstacles and trails largely in rear-drive mode and with absolute confidence. But we knew that about the 4Runner. With the TRD Sport trying to straddle two worlds, it also needs to stand up as a modern SUV.

When it comes to acceleration, let's compare the 2022 Toyota 4Runner TRD Sport and its 270-hp, 278-lb-ft 4.0-liter V-6/five-speed-automatic combo to a few other vehicles we've tested: the 2021 Ford Bronco (275-hp, 315-lb-ft 2.3-liter turbo I-4; seven-speed manual), the 2019 Toyota Tacoma TRD Pro (278-hp, 265-lb-ft 3.5-liter V-6; six-speed automatic), the 2022 Lexus GX460 (301-hp, 329-lb-ft 4.6-liter V-8; six-speed automatic), and the 2017 Toyota 4Runner TRD Pro (270-hp, 278-lb-ft 4.0-liter, five-speed automatic). Why these vehicles? The Bronco is a body-on-frame competitor. The Tacoma shows data for the V-6 powertrain the 4Runner never received. The GX460 is the upscale V-8 Lexus cousin of the 4Runner. And the 4Runner TRD Pro shows how the street TRD Sport trim fared against the ultimate TRD Pro off-road trim. Lastly, they're all in the same ballpark in terms of output and curb weight, all falling between 4,631 and 4,785 pounds save for the luxury-lined, 5,303-pound GX.

The 2022 Toyota 4Runner TRD Sport we tested accelerated to 60 mph in 8.0 seconds. The manual Bronco sprinted to 60 mph in as quick

as 7.7 seconds. The Tacoma clocked 7.7, too, while the porkier GX460 took 7.5. The 4Runner TRD Pro came in at 8.0 seconds. As for quarter-mile times? The 4Runner TRD Sport registered 16.1 seconds at 87.0 mph, a tad better than the 4Runner TRD Pro's 16.1 at 85.8. The Bronco turned in a 15.8-second time, the Tacoma 16.0, and the Lexus 15.8. The 4Runner is again the slowest, but not by much. Still, that it falls to the back of the pack in terms of acceleration isn't surprising: Blame the antiquated five-speed transmission in an era when most vehicles have six, eight, or more forward gears. In addition, one of our testers noted the "gear ratios seem a bit wide, and shifts are a tad slow," and we've previously gone on record that the 4Runner really should be zipper given its torquy V-6. It tends to make a lot of noise without the attendant thrust you'd expect, and the body-on-frame architecture that makes it so tough translates to a rough, bounding on-road ride and more body roll in corners that in most competitors.

The 4Runner TRD Sport's fuel economy of 16/19/17 mpg city/highway/combined is also no great shakes. As is, it equates to the worst of all worlds: V-8 economy to go with sluggish performance. From a stop, our TRD Sport test vehicle was labored and slow to rev its engine, lugging itself around in a way that makes it feel slower than it is. Manual shifting barely improves the situation. On the bright side, on our figure-eight course—which evaluates acceleration, handling, braking and the transitions in between those elements—the 2022 Toyota 4Runner was a better performer than expected. Road test editor Chis Walton commented, "I'm surprised ESC can be shut off completely, and there's a lot more grip and outright balance on the skidpad than I imagined from this off-roader. With the transmission in Sport, it was reasonably intelligent about holding a gear and then kicking down for the exit. It has surprisingly effective brakes with a very talkative pedal. The steering, too, is remarkably alive and communicative. Overall, it's not at all the embarrassment I thought it would be, or fish out of water." At least in this sense, the "off-road SUV for the street" thing made more sense than we thought.

Old and Familiar, But Is That a Good Thing?

Still, there's just no escaping the 4Runner is old, with this generation dating all the way back to 2010. In addition to its wheezy-feeling acceleration and antiquated transmission, the 4Runner's age is reinforced by a cabin that feels out of date and a bit chintzy. The chunky knobs and materials may lend a sense of toughness (and the knobs can be more easily operated while, say, wearing winter gloves), but the infotainment screen is small by modern standards, the plastics and design start to feel downright cheap once you move deep into this version's price range, and its architecture doesn't support some of the newest safety technologies. Indeed, it has a relatively short list of such features by Toyota

standards: just adaptive cruise control, lane departure alert, automatic high beams, and a pre-collision system with pedestrian detection. The 4Runner is a sensible choice as a proven, tough-as-nails SUV for frequent off-roading (of course, the large-wheeled TRD Sport trim probably isn't the best option there), and we also suppose longtime 4Runner owners may find comfort in its familiarity. But the Toyota falls short in several key areas valued by today's consumers, and it continues to only grow older in a large, rapidly evolving marketplace where even hardcore off-road competitors like the Bronco and Jeep Wrangler offer better, more modern technologies (although the Toyota did add Apple CarPlay and Android Auto for 2020). It's also pricier than any number of more comfortable mid-size crossover SUVs. These days, the 4Runner is a merely alright choice with narrow appeal, and the TRD Sport doesn't really change that calculus—even if it does look spectacular in Lunar Gray.

—Motor trend



Max Verstappen profits from Charles Leclerc misery but positives remain for Ferrari



■ Andrew Benson

It was the sort of race on which championships often turn.

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc was running away with the Spanish Grand Prix, and looking at extending his lead in the title race back to the margin of a clear race victory. But then his engine failed and the race fell into rival Max Verstappen's lap.

Well, it was a bit harder than that for Verstappen, who endured a spin into the gravel and 20 laps stuck behind George Russell's Mercedes before he and his Red Bull team managed to work their way back to the front.

But the upshot was that instead of falling back further adrift of Leclerc, Verstappen now has a six-point lead at the top of the standings, which he tops for the first time this season.

Not only that, but the statistics look grim for Leclerc and Ferrari.

Verstappen has retired twice this year, but has won every race he has finished. This was his third victory in a row. And whereas before reliability had been the big question mark over Red Bull - and still is to some extent - now Ferrari face their own questions.

Meanwhile, there is a complicating factor in what had until Barcelona been a private fight between the two men. Mercedes look like they are back - or at the very least heading very quickly in that direction.

After a difficult start to the season with a recalcitrant car, suddenly both Russell and

Lewis Hamilton look like they could start making life difficult for Verstappen and Leclerc.

Leclerc's retirement, with an unspecified engine problem, came shortly before half-distance in a race that appeared long before to have surrendered to him.

He and the Ferrari were in blistering form all weekend. The team took their first major upgrade of the season to Spain, and it worked exactly as expected. Leclerc spun on his first lap in final qualifying but, cool as a cucumber, nailed it with his second and took his fourth pole of the season.

After holding off Verstappen on the run to the first corner, he was two seconds in front of the Red Bull when the world champion made a most uncharacteristic mistake and spun at Turn Four - two laps after Leclerc's team-mate Carlos Sainz had done the same. That looked like game over, and it would have been.

While Verstappen struggled with a faulty DRS overtaking aid to pass Russell's Mercedes, Leclerc did a very impressive 21-lap stint on the soft tyres before his pit stop - eight further than Russell and Verstappen - and was building his lead again when he cried into the radio: "Oh, no," letting the team know the engine had gone.

It was brutal for Leclerc. And while Verstappen has retired twice this season, the difference is that his failures came in races in which he was already well beaten by Leclerc. This cost the Ferrari driver a

victory. From looking like equalling the win score at three-three, it is now four-two to Verstappen.

Considering that, Leclerc was remarkably phlegmatic after the race.

"Let's say that I feel better after this weekend than I felt after the last two weekends," he said.

"Of course, there is this issue we had on the car and I am very disappointed, but on the other hand there were plenty of positive signs other than that throughout the whole weekend.

"Our qualifying pace; the new package worked as expected which is not always a given, and everything was working well; and our race pace and tyre management, which in the last two races we have been struggling quite a bit compared to Red Bull and today it was strong.

"So, in those situations, it is good to also look at the positives and there are plenty." Among them was his driving. The Ferrari is not an easy car. It's quite "pointy" and the rear needs careful treatment, characteristics which are at the root of the difficulties his team-mate Sainz is having this year, but Leclerc - more at ease with oversteer - is revelling in it.

As the two men sat with team boss Mattia Binotto in Ferrari's post-race news conference, Sainz said: "Charles is doing an excellent job with this car.

"He is driving at a very high level, he is putting together super-impressive lap times, an impressive way of driving, and I can only admire and try in some ways

to copy and try to put it a bit more to my liking to be faster."

The Ferrari excelled in the medium- and low-speed corners at Barcelona, which is normally a sign that a car will be strong in Monaco, where F1 reconvenes this coming weekend.

It is Leclerc's home race. He was on pole there last year but has never finished the grand prix in three attempts in F1. He badly needs to break that streak with a win on Sunday.

A bit of needle appearing at the front Verstappen's spin made life difficult for him, but once Leclerc was out the race looked like his to lose.

Although his DRS problems meant he could not pass Russell, Red Bull had two cars against Mercedes' one, and switching Verstappen on to a different strategy was always likely to work.

Once Verstappen was in clear air, he could use his car's pace, and when Russell emerged from his second stop, he did so behind Verstappen. Red Bull now just needed to order his team-mate Sergio Perez out of the way after Verstappen's third stop, and the one-two was in the bag. Still, Verstappen had his own concerns after the race.

"We have to be realistic," he said. "Without Charles' retirement, he probably would have won the race so we have to keep on working to make sure we try and improve the car."

Meanwhile, there is a bit of needle appearing in the fight between Red Bull and Ferrari.

Two weeks ago in Miami, Ferrari team boss Binotto questioned how Red Bull were able to make so many updates to their car while staying within the \$140m budget cap.

This time, Binotto noted with interest Red Bull managing to get Verstappen out of the garage only 20 seconds before the pit lane closed before the race.

Red Bull said this was "some last-minute tests on the DRS". But they were also seen heating up their fuel in the garage.

Binotto admitted he did not know what was happening, but he did say: "I can imagine it was down to the fuel temperature in the tank, which needs to be a maximum 10C below ambient.

"Per regulations, it should be at all times during the event, so not only when the car

is going out but in the garage itself.

"For me, it is difficult to understand that they were maybe heating up the fuel through a fire. But I can only trust the FIA and I am pretty sure they are comfortable and they checked and maybe that is not the right explanation as well."

Red Bull said there was "no issue", and the FIA said: "We monitor fuel temperatures, so if Red Bull were allowed to leave their garage, it means that their fuel temperatures were legal."

A spokesman added that it was all right for the fuel temperature to be lower than permitted in the garage, as long as when the car left the garage it was legal.

Recovering Mercedes still harbour title hopes

The race marked a breakthrough for Mercedes, following the introduction of new parts aimed at solving their biggest problem this year - the excessive 'porpoising' or bouncing they have been suffering on the straights.

The parts worked, the porpoising was much reduced, and Russell produced the team's best qualifying performance of the year in fourth.

His Mercedes lacked the pace of the Red Bulls and Leclerc, but he was highly impressive in his defence against Verstappen, especially a moment when the lead appeared to be lost as Verstappen dived for the inside at Turn One, only for Russell to keep the position by braving it out around the outside, and then ushering him to the edge of the track around Turn Three.

Russell said: "We have probably halved the gap to the front-runners, compared to the rest of the season. And I think we know there's probably more performance to find. "It's been a season of problem solving, as opposed to trying to find more performance. I think we've now finally solved our issue. And we can now focus on bringing more performance. So yeah, we're six races behind but there's no reason why we can't claw this back."

Hamilton, meanwhile, sixth in qualifying, had yet more bad luck when he was hit by Kevin Magnussen's Haas on the first lap and suffered a puncture. But his race after that was outstanding.

He emerged from the pits after a change of tyres 54 seconds off the lead. That gap was down to 40 before he had to back off in the last couple of laps to protect an engine which had lost all its coolant. It was arguably the drive of the race.

Hamilton, who two races ago was writing off the season, has now set his sights on winning before too long.

"Definitely," he said. "This is a great sign we are going in the right direction. If I hadn't had that [issue at the start], I would have been fighting with the Red Bulls."

Team principal Toto Wolff went one step further.

"I've seen a race car that reminded me of the race cars of previous season when you are 30-plus seconds behind the whole field and come all the way to the front and get a podium," he said.

"It is very encouraging and shows we've made another stop.

"Can we fight for the world championship? We bet we can, but we just need a car that can finish first and second and we have reasons to believe we can get there.

"The odds are against us but motor racing is a different ball game. We saw Ferrari didn't score a lot of points although they should. We are absolutely pushing flat out to bring us back into the game."

-BBC



Erik Ten Hag says taking Manchester United job is not a risk to his reputation



Erik ten Hag says he is not risking his managerial reputation by taking the Manchester United job.

The Dutchman, 52, is United's fifth permanent boss since Sir Alex Ferguson retired in 2013.

"I don't see it as a risk," he said. "I think this club has a great history, and now let's make a future."

Ten Hag also suggested Cristiano Ronaldo would not be leaving, adding he expected there to be goals from the Portugal forward next season.

The former Ajax boss was speaking to reporters at his official unveiling as United manager 24 hours after watching his new club lose 1-0 at Crystal Palace on the final day of the season.

Their points tally of 58, though good enough to secure sixth and a place in the Europa League, is their poorest return since 1989-1990 and comes just a year after they finished second behind Manchester City.

Ten Hag did not say how many players he felt the club needed to bring in over the summer, instead answering that he was still "in the process of analysing" his squad.

"The plan is huge and we only have a short time," he added.

"I'm looking forward to working with these players. The season before, this squad was second in the league, so there is huge potential. I think if we improve, if we work with them, I think we can get out more than what was the result from this season."

Ten Hag also did not give any guarantees over Harry Maguire remaining as captain.

"Next season is a different season but he did a great job," he said of the England international. "He's a great player he achieved already a lot so I'm looking forward to working with him."

Asked if 37-year-old Ronaldo, who finished as United's top scorer with 24 goals, was part of his plans, he replied "of course".

Klopp-Guardiola era 'can come to an end' It is now nine years since Manchester United last lifted the Premier League, with the title race now dominated by Pep Guardiola's Manchester City and Jurgen Klopp's Liverpool, who have won the last five titles between them.

Ten Hag, though, is hopeful he can break their stranglehold on the trophy.

"In this moment I admire them both," he said. "They play fantastic football but you will always see an era can come to an end. "I look forward to a battle with them and I'm sure other clubs will want to do that."

The Dutchman also revealed he sought the advice of compatriot and former Red Devils boss Louis van Gaal, who had previously suggested Ten Hag should consider his options carefully before accepting the job.

Van Gaal, who won the FA Cup during his spell in charge at Old Trafford between 2014 and 2016, said Ten Hag needed to join a "a football club not a commercial club".

"I have heard [Van Gaal's comments] but I will draw my own line. I'm convinced it won't be the case," he said.

"I spoke with the directors about it. Football is one, two and three at this club and every club these days is commercial. Every club needs it, needs the revenues to be at the top, to do it is necessary but football is one, two, three at this club."

"Ten Hag has some breathing space - for now"

Erik ten Hag made a point of shaking hands

with most members of the media present at his unveiling press conference and telling them he was pleased to meet them.

Little details like that are important and do not go unnoticed.

Clearly, it won't save him from criticism if results don't go the right way but it removes the 'us and them' mentality that can be an unnecessary negative at the start of a new job.

Ten Hag's English is not brilliant but it is decent enough. And, whilst it may not be great for the media, he has evidently learned enough at Ajax to hide behind wide-ranging statements.

So, in saying he would take a couple of weeks to assess United's squad, Ten Hag was able to refer back to that when asked specific questions, about how many new players he would need and whether Harry Maguire would remain as captain.

The one certainty is that he wants Cristiano Ronaldo. When asked what the Portugal superstar can bring, a question designed to elicit an expansive response about Ronaldo's overall contribution, which has been called into question, Ten Hag instead offered a brief 'goals'.

It remains to be seen whether he offers any detail as he gets used to his new role. Some managers do, others don't.

For now, he points us to his Ajax side as an example of what he wants.

He also said he thinks United can be successful, that the current dominance of Manchester City and Liverpool can be brought to an end without the departure of either Pep Guardiola, Jurgen Klopp or both. He also insisted he is not risking his reputation by taking the Old Trafford job - which has proved too difficult for David Moyes, Louis van Gaal, Jose Mourinho and Ole Gunnar Solskjaer since Sir Alex Ferguson retired.

But there is nothing unusual in that and it would have been strange if he said otherwise.

For now, Ten Hag has some breathing space. The next time he speaks to the media will be in Bangkok before United's first pre-season game on 12 July.

The opponent? Liverpool. No-one could accuse United of giving Ten Hag an easy introduction.

-BBC

