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The Villager
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Monte Christo Vendors Evicted From Market After 44 Years







■ Ludorf Iyambo

More than 45 street vendors in Monte Christo in Windhoek woke up to a shocking surprise when the mini-market, where they had been selling their goods, some for decades, was cordoned off with police tape.

They were evicted on Wednesday by the City of Windhoek at an open market, where they had been doing business for decades.

The street vendors told The Villager that some officials from the municipality came and instructed them to leave the premises as the Engine service station owner, known as Quinton, was putting pressure on them.

"This is municipality land, and we were permitted to sell here by Fransina Kahungu, the former mayor. We have been selling our things here since 1978. They should at least provide us with the blueprint to see if it's the white people's place," said Angala Fredinand, one of the aggrieved street vendors.

Fredinand said the service owner is putting pressure on the Windhoek municipality to chase them because he thinks they are taking up his customers. He added that their clients come from the next mall but not from the service.

"The white man used to come and harass us, but he doesn't come anymore because he and I almost fought when he pushed my braai stand. I am selling kapana, and I have eight kids to feed. How am I going to survive with my family?" said Fredinand.

Meanwhile, Mukawe Victoria, a 51-year street vendor, said they were given a place to operate by Shoprite, but the Engine service station owner approached the Shoprite management and allegedly threatened them with opening a case if they did not chase away the vendors.

Another vendor, Fransina Tomas, 47 years, said their products are rotting as they are not doing business. She added that the municipality, last year, suggested moving them to a particular place, but they said it's far for them. "The place they told us to go is in the valley, and there are no customers there. There is no shelter and no water or toilet. The area is also under Nampower lines. Since when does the municipality allow people to reside or operate under electricity lines?"

Continued on P2

Turbulent Year for Small Entreprises



■ Nghiinomenwa Erastus

The latest Private Sector Development Report 2021/22 has indicated that micro-enterprises continue to be hardest hit by the economic conditions in terms of turnover.

As a result, this has affected the level of employment, the report found.

The survey captures business and private sector perceptions on important tools for detecting business hurdles, investment bottlenecks and getting insight into the efficacy of previous and present policies.

The report revealed that 67.4 per cent of micro firms experienced a decline in their turnover in 2021 compared to 15.0 per cent of large corporations.

Furthermore, 35.2 per cent of micro-businesses had to cope with a drop in turnover by at least 50 per cent compared to the large companies.

Only 27.5 per cent of micro-enterprises achieved growth in turnover compared to 65.0 per cent of large businesses.

Moreover, the micro-enterprises that experienced turnover growth of only 2.9 per cent saw a rise in turnover by 50 per cent or more compared to 20 per cent of large entities.

The survey indicated that half of the micro-businesses had to reduce their workforce (48.3 per cent), and 30.4 per cent of micro-businesses were reduced by at least 50 per cent.

5.3 per cent of large companies shed labour, but none of them by 25 per cent or more.

The report indicated that about 11.7 per cent of micro-enterprises added jobs and 1.7 per cent by 50 per cent or more, while 52.6 per cent of large companies created jobs and 21.1 per cent by at least 50 per cent.

THE CHALLENGES

According to the report, the feedback from the business is that there has been a shift in the ranking of the main challenges business people face in Namibia.

The lack of demand for goods and services has replaced the distance to markets on the first spot as the main challenge faced by entrepreneurs.

Access to and cost of finance and utilities followed at number two and three from place three and five respectively in 2020.

Concerns regarding the public procurement process have increased and moved the factor to fourth-ranking, followed by the quality of service delivery by public servants (place five), the report revealed.

The ease of business registration with Bipa has recovered from a deterioration in 2020 (+0.3) to +0.7 in 2021, indicating relative improvement in the process.

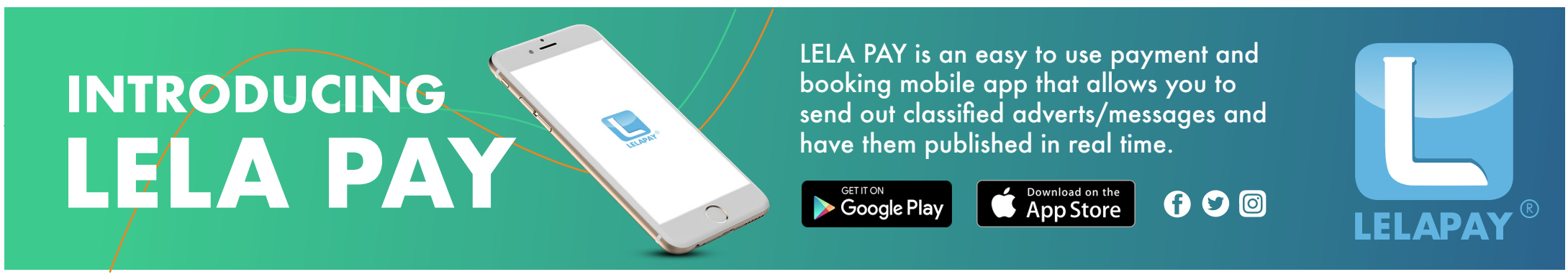
The time and complexity of registering a business also received a more favourable rating of plus +0.8 compared to the +0.6 allocated in 2020.

The cost of registration is not of concern to respondents, with a rating of +1.3 in 2021 compared to +0.9 in 2020.

A rating of +1 implies that the cost of registration is hardly an obstacle for businesses.

Two out of three business people (66.2 per cent) consider the public procurement process as not supportive for local businesses, and less than one out of five (18.6 per cent) view it as supportive or very supportive.

Continued on P2



Monte Cristo

she questioned. When approached for comment, the City of Windhoek spokesperson, Harold Akwenye, said he was not aware of the authorisation by the former mayor, Kahungu. He said they were illegally operating in the area and hence, should be removed. He added that it is not only the city of Windhoek but the service station is also demanding that there are crimes happening within the vicinity caused by the vendors.

"There's no such a record or a proof that they were authorised. If the former mayor permitted them to sell there, it was not communicated to us. Whether they have been there for decades or a week, the facts remain that they are illegal," said Akwenye.
Akwenye, however, said he does not know whether the place where these vendors were operating from belongs to the service station or it belongs to the municipality.
Akwenye said in addition to all illegal vendors, from now on, the city will take a stand to clean the city.
City police chief Abraham Kanime said his officers were merely sent as law enforcement to remove the vendors.
"We are just law enforcement, assisting the custodians of trading policies to execute what he wants to do."

> **There's no such a record or a proof that they were authorised. If the former mayor permitted them to sell there, it was not communicated to us.**

Small Enterprises

The assessment is almost on par with the rating in 2020 (67.8 per cent and 17.6 per cent, respectively).
The score of -0.8 remains unchanged from 2020 and is well in the negative territory.
The ease of participation in the public tender process has improved somewhat from -1.0 (2020) to -0.7 in 2021.
The trust in the procurement process received a similar negative rating of minus 0.8, like in 2020.

ACCESS TO SERVICED LAND
The survey has also revealed that more companies needed serviced land (35.6 per cent) and or un-serviced land (10.1 per cent) in 2021 compared to 24.5 per cent and 2.6 per cent, respectively, in 2020.
However, 95.5 per cent of respondents who need serviced land rated the process of obtaining land as difficult or very difficult, with a clear trend towards very difficult (64.4 per cent).
The rating of -1.6 for the ease of obtaining serviced land suggests it remains a mission impossible and reflects a deterioration from 2020 (minus 1.4).
Micro-enterprises drove the demand for land for entrepreneurial purposes. 43.7 per cent required serviced land, compared to 16.0 per cent of large corporations.



The report indicated that about one out of five small and medium-sized businesses were seeking access to land.
In addition, 13.4 per cent of micro firms were in need of unserviced land, more than three times the share of large operations (4 per cent) and almost double the share of small businesses (7.3 per cent).
The survey shows that hardly any medium-sized companies showed interest in un-serviced land (1.7 per cent).
The cost of land (51.0 per cent) tops the list of factors mentioned by the participants as reasons for the challenge of obtaining land.
Bureaucratic procedures (39.5 per cent) take the second spot.
The responses in 2021 reflect the responses of 2020, with the cost of land increasing its relevance slightly from 48.9 per cent, while the relevance of bureaucratic procedures dropped marginally from 41.4 per cent.
About half of micro and small enterprises views the cost factor as decisive compared to two-thirds of medium-sized firms.
Slightly more small enterprises (43.8 per cent) regard bureaucratic procedures as the second most relevant factor than micro-businesses (38.9 per cent) or medium companies (35.7 per cent).
Only large corporations view bureaucratic procedures (44.4 per cent) as the main obstacle, followed by the cost of land (33.3 per cent).
Based on the years in operations, all respondents identified costs as the leading factor followed by the procedures, but to varying degrees, the report revealed.
The survey was done with funding from the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit through the project Promotion of Business Advisory and Economic Transformation Services (ProBATS). Email: erastus@thevillager.com.na

Incomplete Investigations, Delayed Prosecutions Lead To Opuwo Prison Overcrowding



■ **Uakutura Kambaekua, Justicia Shipena**

Kunene Namibian police's regional commander, commissioner James Nderura has expressed discontent on the overcrowding at the Opuwo prison, stating that incomplete investigations and delayed prosecutions contribute to the growing prison population.
He said this is a scenario he said is also being experienced all over the country. Nderura told The Villager in an interview that the overcrowdedness of the cells is becoming a national concern, one that requires swift and bold interventions to safeguard the country's prison system's stability.
According to the regional commander, Opuwo prison accommodates more than 50 per cent of the required capacity. "The overcrowdedness of the cells is a national concern and not just in Kunene. The cell capacity of Opuwo is made for 30 people, but now we have more than 85. It is over with 53 inmates, but it's a national concern; national problem, not only in Opuwo," stated Nderura.
Furthermore, Nderura refuted assertions in the media, in which Basilius Dyakugha stated that the inmates are living in poor conditions coupled with a lack of adequate water, adding that inmates are forced to collect water in plastic bottles from outside taps.
However, Nderura said that even though the situation at the prison is worsening, no inmates collect water outside the premises.
"Those are unfounded stories. We have enough water, water is running in the cells, and food is also enough. We don't have a problem on any of these at the moment," said Nderura.
He further said that the overcrowdedness is not entirely a matter of the police but the justice ministry as well in terms of case handling, prosecution and bail hearings, including delays of lawyers.
"These matters are not in our hands. The matter before the court is a matter of justice. It's not up to the police to finalise these cases. We arrest, investigate and take them to court. Some people are still sitting in prison for more than seven years without being prosecuted. Sometimes this is the delay from their lawyers," added Nderura.
Kunene region has a total of six holding cells in Kamanjab, Okangwati, Outjo, and Khorixas. Nderura also said that the Opuwo holding cell accommodates inmates from various police stations in the region, thus resulting in overcrowding.
"You have to know that the holding cell at Opuwo is a sitting cell to all police stations like the one at Sesfontein, Otjondeka, Werda, Omuramba and Omakange. All these people have to be transported to Opuwo because there are no holding cells at these police stations," he said.
Moreover, Nderura mentioned that one of the main reasons for the overcrowdedness is the insufficient holding cells for minors as they can not be accommodated with adults.
He said this results in more inmates sharing one cell to make room for minors and female inmates. "We cannot put the minors amongst adults. Most of the time, when there are, for example, two minors or three, we have to reserve one cell for the female and one for male minor offenders," noted Nderura.
Kunene will soon get new regional police to headquarters, according to Nderura, which will, in turn, help curb the overcrowdedness at the region's holding cells.
When approached for comment, the executive director of the judiciary Bernhardt Kukuri said many actors play different roles and that their part as the judiciary is to work on the cases brought before them.
"Prosecutors and prosecutions make sure that the police investigate the cases; when they are ready for trial, they are brought before the magistrate to adjudicate on the matter and make a decision whether the person is guilty or not," he said.
He said it is always tricky to pinpoint the leading cause of delay in the prosecution or the processing of justice in court.
"If a person comes without legal aid, the case is referred to a lawyer. Some have private lawyers, and they are not available that hour; a lot of contributing factors are adding to the developing story," said Kukuri.
Kukuri stated that there needs to be further study to understand the number of cases, the delays and why they were postponed.
"It will be difficult for me to give you an answer out of the blue unless we validate on the ground and talk to the colleagues and the magistrate."



"This Doesn't Mean Debt-Forgiveness," Says Kandume As NSFAF Amnesty Starts This Friday



■ Hertha Ekandjo

Namibia student financial assistance fund (NSFAF) acting CEO Kennedy Kandume says the amnesty period for students, which will commence on Friday, does not mean debt forgiveness.

Kandume said this during the launch of the NSFAF amnesty campaign earlier today in Windhoek.

The NSFAF amnesty period was announced in April this year by President Hage Geingob during his state of the nation address (SONA). It will last for 12 months, from 1 July 2022 to 31 June 2023.

"Waiving of interest doesn't mean deb-forgiveness. It certainly doesn't mean debt write-off!" Kandume exclaimed.

Kandume explained that waiving interest has made NSFAF loans cheaper and more affordable.

He emphasised that the repayment of funds is significant for NSFAF to continue functioning as a revolving fund.

"All debts that are due and payable, present and historical, will be waivered 100 per cent. This means that all interest accumulated will be written off affectively as of 1 July 2022," said the CEO.

"All debts paid up to an amount equivalent to the principal amount should be considered as having been redeemed. This applies irrespective of whether paid up was before or during the amnesty," he said as directed by the President.

According to the CEO, the institution is currently owed N$7.8 billion from beneficiaries. Of this amount, he says N$5.1 billion is the principal amount, while the interest rate is N$2.6 billion.

"Please note that amount due for payment is N$7.8 billion, th+at's now the principal and the interest," he said.

He further explained that the principal amount is N$5.1 billion, while the interest rate is N$2.6 billion.

Moreover, he said that the amount to be waivered is a public fund and that NSFAF would not have gone the path of waiving without consulting the ministry responsible for the public purse, which is the ministry of finance.

"NSFAF sought authorisation from the ministry of finance for waiving interest, and I am happy to announce the authorisation was granted," he explained.

The CEO narrated that the principal amount remains due and payable. Thus NSFAF urged all debtors who are employed or have a source of income to make use of this opportunity to come forth and settle their debts.

During SONA, Geingob said that the government was aware that many NSFAF beneficiaries are finding it hard to pay back their loans to economic problems and other challenges.

"In this regard, to provide some relief, I announce an amnesty for the NSFAF debt repayment for 12 months," said the President.

In October last year, NSFAF said about 52 000 student loan defaulters would see their names in local newspapers countrywide, as NSFAF had vowed to come for what it is owed.

NSFAF then said in a statement on its social media platforms that the publishing of names was to be followed by appropriate legal action.

After struggling for over a decade to get loan holders to pay back the money, NSFAF during that time decided to go public with all the names of those who owed the fund money and the first 2 000 names were set to be published in the same month.

At that time, Kandume said the defaulters left them no choice but to go public.

In less than a week in October 2021, about 228 defaulters reported to the NSFAF to repay their debts as the fund threatened to obtain court orders to go after defaulters' assets.

The NSFAF has for years been struggling to collect the funds they have lent to over 52 000 former students, which is why they opted to expose defaulters in the media.

Reports show that the fund is owed N$5,2 billion by former students. NSFAF spent N$7,5 billion on loans and grants from 1997 to 2019.

> **All debts that are due and payable, present and historical, will be waivered 100 per cent. This means that all interest accumulated will be written off affectively as of 1 July 2022.**

Paragon Takes Over Ground Handling Services At HKIA

…Menzies told to pack and Leaves



■ Kelvin Chiringa

Menzies Aviation, which has been doing ground handling services at the Hosea Kutako International Airport, has until Thursday, the end of business day, to vacate the airport premises or face forced eviction, according to a High Court ruling delivered this Wednesday.

The United Kingdom-based company whose contract ends this Thursday has lost out on the airport deal to a Namibian company, Paragon Investment Holdings, co-owned by Desmond Amunyela.

Paragon has partnered with Ethiopian Airlines. Menzies says on its website that it started operating in Edinburgh way back in 1833.

However, Paragon's arrival at Hosea Kutako International Airport has divided public opinion, with a section of the Windhoek business community expressing that they do not have aviation experience.

Another section expressed relief with the fact that the tender has now been passed on to a company run by locals and partnering with an African top-of-range brand, Ethiopian Airlines.

The Namibia Airports Company (NAC) gave Paragon the tender last year in a process in which Menzies Aviation came out complaining, alleging that the tender itself was irregularly and unlawfully processed.

The company then brought an application before the High Court for the tender to be set aside, which is now dead in the water.

High Court Judge Orben Sibeya ruled that the company must vacate the airport premises, failure of which may see the deputy sheriff marching them out.

In the meantime, Amunyela has expressed that those questioning why and how Paragon has got the tender are clouded by "self-doubt which is what has kept us where we are".

He said, "apartheid in nature was designed to be in perpetuation. It was designed to doubt yourself."

He has asked those criticising the deal to come to his office so they can observe how Paragon is working.

"The Nuyomas and the Ya Toivos must be smiling broadly because this is exactly the exemplification of what it means when we say the economic struggle is now. It's pointless for us to continue believing in others if we fought to self-determine in every regard."

"Paragon is committed to bringing about a fundamental change so that Namibia belongs to Namibia and Namibians are responsible for all and sundry. We are 32 years old; we cannot be having excuses on why we are not capable of handling aircraft, landing and departing. It's laughable for a country that is 32 years old that you still have to depend on other people for these services," Amunyela said.

He added, "If you look at all these foreign (companies) that have operated here, in most cases their staff complement will be 95 per cent if not more Namibians and they will have one person from outside doing the coordination or in most cases leading, and then they take all the money out, lost to Namibia".



No Foreigners Will Own Land Under A Freehold Title in Communal Land- Schlettwein

■ Eba Kandovazu

Land reform minister Calle Schlettwein says that no one, foreigners included, can own land under a freehold title in communal land, but that freehold title and ownership in towns and cities is allowed.

He said towns and cities within communal land are demarcated, surveyed and no longer, after proclamation, form part of communal land. Schlettwein said that Green-schemes are still part of communal land, so freehold title ownership is not possible.

Schlettwein took issue with Popular Democratic Movement (PDM) president McHenry Venaani saying that giving away communal land to foreigners is not a solution but rather a disappointment to the black community. Venaani was quoted saying his party rejects the notion of ownership of communal land by foreigners.

Schlettwein also said his response follows his ministry's consultation on the AR petition with the parliamentary committee on Natural Resources. "The consultation was necessary as the ministry is moving towards finalising the land Bill, which we intend to table before parliament later this year," he said.

"There are different rights that can be granted for different land uses in Namibia. Among others, these are Right of Leaseholds, Customary Land Rights and Occupational Land Rights in case of institutions which offer public service. This is provided for under Section 19 and 36 A of the Communal Land Reform Act, Act No 5 of 2002 and the Communal Land Reform Amendment Act, No 13 of 2013, respectively," Shchletwein stated.

According to the land reform minister, investors have transformed the traditionally underutilised state land in Aussenkehr into immense production.

"This Aussenkehr example is self-outstanding, especially in the agriculture sector, and it is good if it can be replicated in other unproductive lands in the country. It is for the same purpose the land bill is promoting to unleash the economic potential of the communal areas. It is protecting the land owners, the investment and financiers."

Explaining the land allocation process in communal areas, the minister said any leasehold below 10 years with a land size below 100 hectares can be approved by a particular Communal Land Board in the regions. However, he said, leases which exceed 10 years and the land size involved is above 100 hectares are recommended by the Boards to the minister for approval.

"I must, however, emphasise here that it is not and has never been the practice of government to impose leaseholds and foreign investors upon local communities on communal land. In all cases, Traditional Authorities are the main drivers by exercising their power of primary land allocation," he stressed.

He said non-Namibians are allowed by law to lease land for investment purposes only, for up to 25 years with an option to renew, further bearing in mind the social responsibility of such an investor to the community.

"A lease agreement as per our common law shall be for 99 years which is a maximum and a ceiling for a contractual agreement. However, every decision-making body, for example, the Communal Land Board and the minister of agriculture, water and land reform,



may arrive at a different lease period for different investment projects. Therefore one would need substantial business information to make a reasonable decision for a given lease period. In Namibia currently, it's only native Namibians who enjoy the prestige that comes with the 99 years lease, either to establish a crop field, a shop or a house in communal area," Schlettwein stated.

According to the minister, the current land Bill is trying to ensure that foreigners can partner with citizens to exploit potential in the communal areas.

"At times we are puzzled when government is bringing development to the people and giving its citizen an opportunity to find partners or investors and access to finances some people are blocking it by spreading rumours that are unfounded," Schlettwein lamented.

Oshikoto Invests N$4.7 Million in SME Development

■ Eba Kandovazu

Oshikoto governor Penda ya Ndakolo says that various stakeholders provided over N$ 4.7 million to uplift SMEs in the region and bring about economic advancement.

He was speaking at the state of the region address on Wednesday when he said agricultural-based enterprises and start-ups provide, not only jobs, but also food for the community.

He said part of the money was used at the the Okashana Rural Development Center, which focuses on assisting rural SMEs and has worked hard during the period under review to improve the quality of life and economic well-being of the region's farmers and SMEs.

"The centre has conducted different community outreach services, including training 228 farmers in various areas to contribute to food security, income generation and employment creation. In addition, the centre also manufactured and sold appropriate technology products at an affordable price to boost the region's economic activity. Similarly, the Income Generating Activity program under the ministry of gender equality, poverty eradication and social welfare provided materials worth N$98,602 to four rural projects," ya Ndakolo stated.

He said the beneficiaries are in tailoring, brickmaking, and milling businesses, respectively. The program, he stressed, was established to contribute to the socio-economic empowerment of the less privileged by encouraging community members, particularly women, to create self-employment and employment for others.

He added that the National Youth Council provided N$150,000 in equipment aid grants to six entrepreneurs from Oshikoto region, intended to assist youth in business to expand their businesses and generate additional employment opportunities. He said the Oniipa Town Council has constructed a hawking shelter valued at N$200 000 at the Onandjokwe open market.

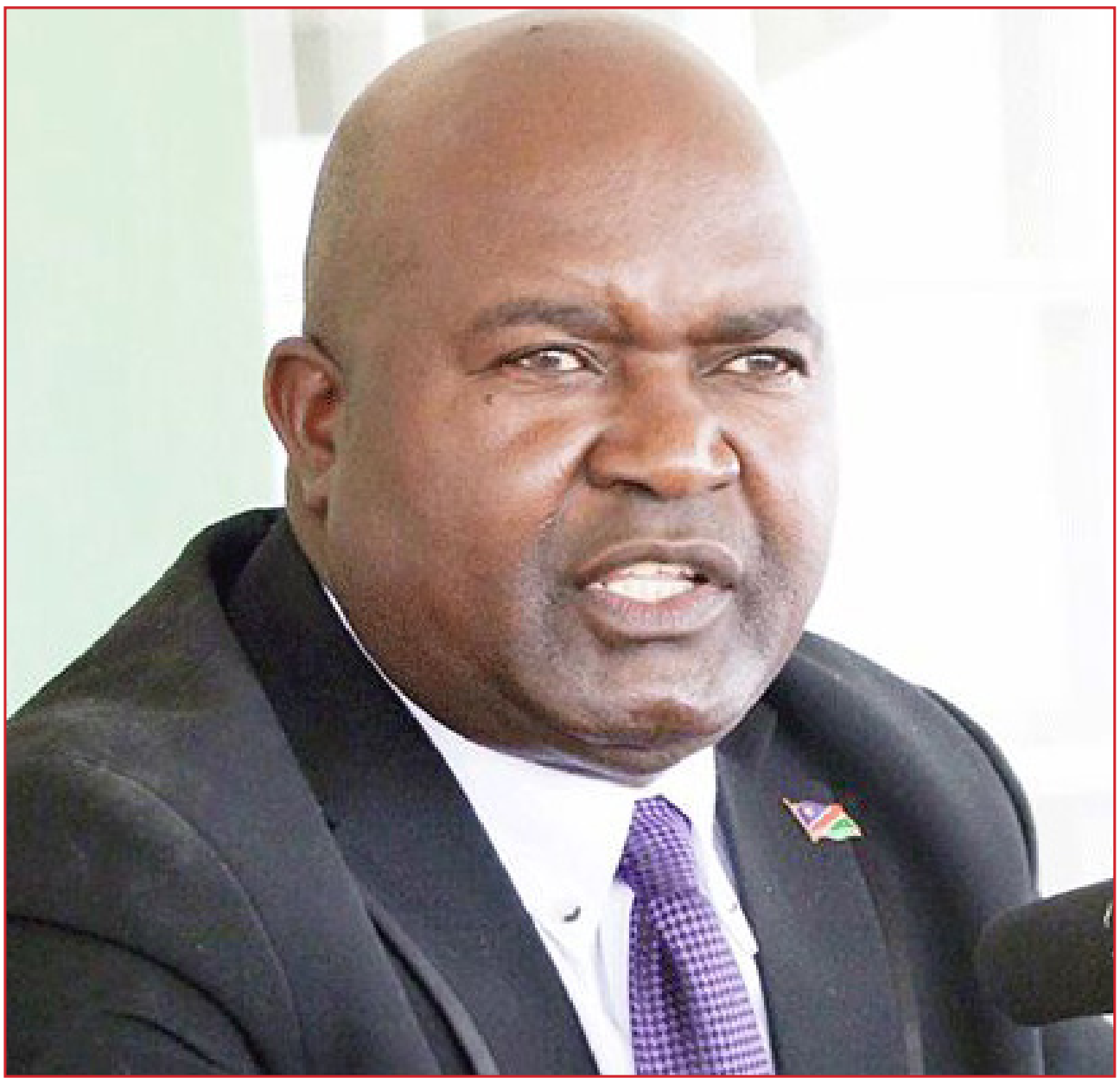
He says the shelter will allow former street vendors to sell their products in a safe and clean environment.

"Furthermore, Omuthiya Town Council has also set aside N$3 million for the construction of phase two of the open market, which will commence this financial year," he added.

According to ya Ndakolo, the industrialisation, trade, and SME development ministry is busy building the Tsumeb Industrial Park, which will be used for light industrial activities, including joinery, carpentry, and tailoring. 12 units for SMEs will be available. A total of N$19 million has been spent so far.

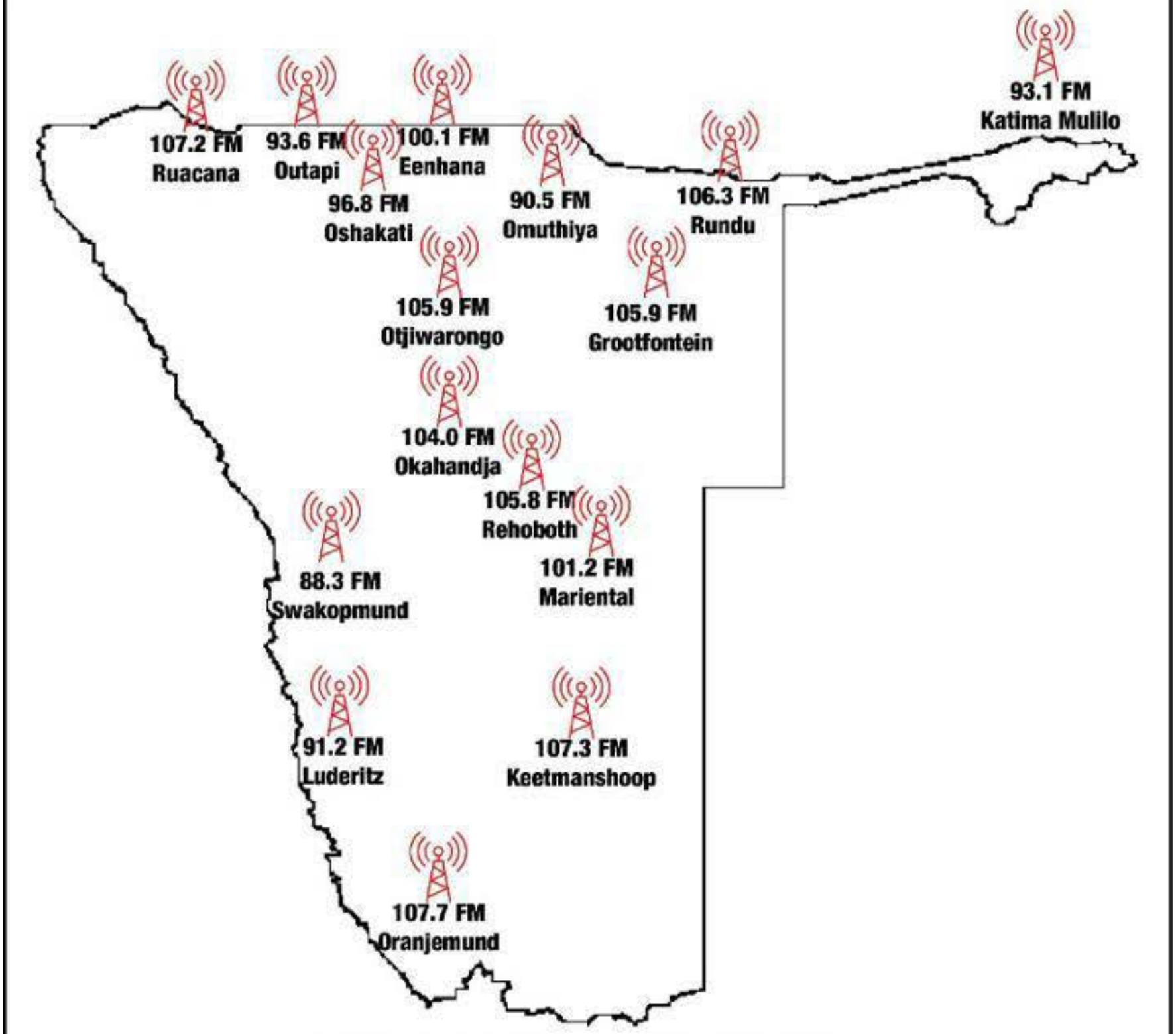
He maintained that Dundee precious metals in collaboration with the Tsumeb municipality, constructed air gyms, the museum and the SME Park in Tsumeb Central Business District.

"Through the Micro-grant pilot program, Dundee Precious Metals, in cooperation with SME Compete, provided micro-grants to 20 enterprises. A total of N$ 200 000 has been awarded. In addition, Dundee and the Community of Tsumeb signed a three-year partnership agreement to the value of N$ 3 million. The agreement is intended to benefit the community's most disadvantaged people, with agricultural projects receiving priority funding. The annual investment will be N$1 million," the governor said.



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CONTACT DETAILS
Eagle Media House
33B John Ludwig Street
Klein Windhoek
Office Tel: +264 832888400
Studio Tel: +264 832888 401
Email: news@eaglefm.com.na

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Sherwood: TV drama hailed by critics after final episode

Crime drama Sherwood drew to a close on Tuesday, with one critic describing it as "the best BBC drama of the year".

The show, starring Lesley Manville and David Morrissey, centres around the hunt for a killer tormenting a fractured Nottinghamshire community.

It has had glowing reviews, and the BBC announced on Wednesday that a second series has been commissioned.

The Telegraph's five-star review of the finale said the show was "authentic, devastating and perfectly cast".

The paper's critic Alex Diggins wrote: "2022 has been a purple patch for grown-up, serious drama on the BBC.

"The Tourist, The Responder and This is Going to Hurt were all excellent. But in the clarity of its storytelling, and the authenticity of its atmosphere, Sherwood split the bullseye: the best BBC drama of the year so far, and I'd hazard some time to come.

"No wonder it's just been recommissioned for a second series."

Two murders and the toxic legacy of a dispute that drove families apart lie at the heart of the drama, which was inspired by real-life events in writer James Graham's home town.

It follows two police officers in a mining village still scarred by the divisions laid down during the miners' strike decades earlier.

Diggins added that Nottinghamshire-born Graham's "story of murder, scabs and old wounds has proved to be so much more than a simple crime drama".

The show, he said, contains "ringing echoes" of the mythology of Robin Hood, and, moreover, "believable people, in a believable world, broken on the rack of history and their own mistakes".

The Guardian seemed to agree, also offering five-stars. Lucy Mangan wrote that the "gloriously directed, superbly written ending was quietly devastating".

She said: "The entire cast has been rightly and unanimously lauded.

"Sherwood has been stuffed with the unquestionable best of a generation of British acting talent in Manville, Morrissey, Lorraine Ashbourne (who gets all the work she deserves but not always the glory - despite never failing to convince absolutely every moment she's on screen) and those filling every other main role.

"They all had a fine script to work with and glorious direction that made it even more than the sum of its parts. Every arrow found its mark."

Reviewing the penultimate episode of the BBC One show the previous evening, however, the Daily Mail was less impressed, offering only two-stars.

"Sherwood has been a disappointment, with storylines as flat as the beer," wrote Christopher Stephens, referencing the working men's club in the show.

"The cast is outstanding, crammed with more top actors than a Harry Potter movie. But even the talents of Lorraine Ashbourne, Mark Addy, Pip Torrens, Adeel Akhtar, David Morrissey and Robert Glenister can't cover up the yawning illogicalities in the plot."

His paper had previously described the show as "utterly compelling".

As the BBC announced that filming for series two would commence next year, Graham said he wrote the show as "a warning" that "when communities are divided, the pain endures".

"Our history shows how the forces of polarisation have been weaponised to achieve political ends," he wrote in the Guardian. "It was this, rather than any desire to create a traditional crime show, that drove me to write Sherwood."

Morrissey said it had been "a wonderful ride".

-BBC



US singer faces decades in jail at sex trafficking sentencing

Singer R. Kelly could face decades in prison when he is sentenced on Wednesday, nine months after being found guilty of running a scheme to sexually abuse women and children.

In September, a New York jury convicted the disgraced pop star of racketeering and eight counts of sex trafficking.

The 55-year-old R&B singer will spend at least 10 years in prison, with the maximum possible sentence being life.

Prosecutors have said he should spend at least 25 years behind bars.

His legal team have argued that he deserves no more than the minimum sentence of a decade because he is "not currently a risk to the public".

The singer - known for the hit songs I Believe I Can Fly and Ignition (Remix) - was found to have been the ringleader of a violent and coercive scheme to lure women and children for him to sexually abuse.

The six-week trial heard how he trafficked women between different US states, assisted by managers, security guards and other entourage members, over two decades.

Prosecutors said R. Kelly - whose real name is Robert Sylvester Kelly - showed a "callous disregard" for his victims and no remorse.

"Indeed, the defendant's decades of crime appear to have been fuelled by narcissism and a belief that his musical talent absolved him of any need to conform his conduct - no matter how predatory, harmful, humiliating or abusive to others - to the strictures of the law," they said.

The court also heard how Kelly had illegally obtained paperwork to marry singer Aaliyah when she was 15 in 1994, seven years before the singer died in a plane crash.

The certificate, leaked at the time, listed Aaliyah's age as 18. The marriage was annulled months later.

After several delays, he will be sentenced at the US District Court in New York on Wednesday.

Kelly is separately facing a trial in Chicago on child sex images and obstruction charges. He is also due to face sex abuse charges in Illinois and Minnesota.

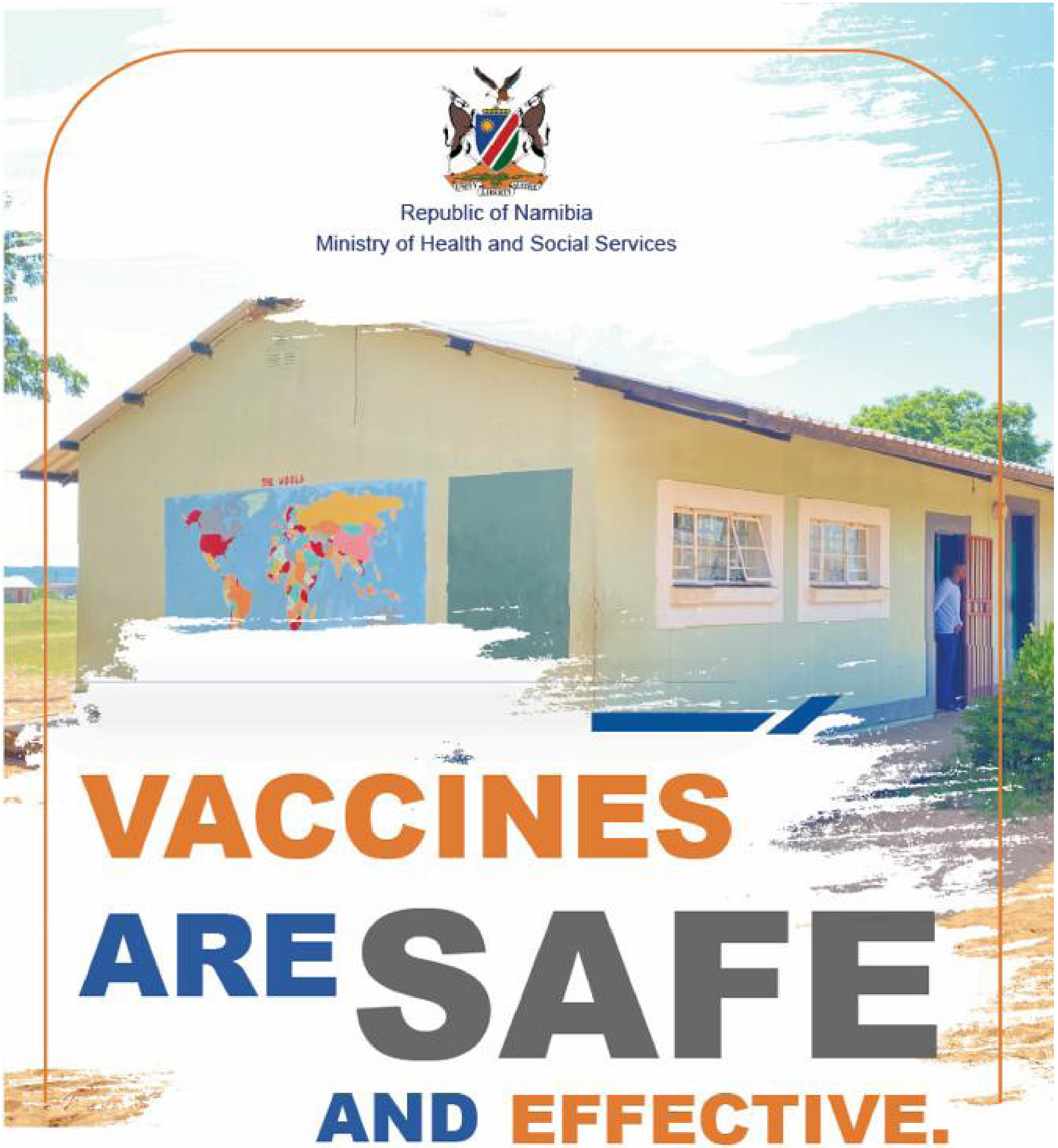
-BBC

> **The six-week trial heard how he trafficked women between different US states, assisted by managers, security guards and other entourage members, over two decades.**



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Big Lips

The Pan African Parliament as Useless as an Ox in Reproduction Matters

I am watching what is happening at the Pan African Parliament in South Africa with much trepidation.

The Pan-African Parliament exercises oversight on governance and development issues on the continent. It discusses or expresses an opinion on any matter, either on its initiative or at the request of the African Union Assembly.

The Pan-African Parliament (PAP) is supposed to ensure the full participation of African peoples in the economic development and integration of the continent.

The PAP is also supposed to be a platform for people from all African states to participate in discussions and decision-making on the continent's problems and challenges.

But here is one of the problems with the Pan African Parliament. It is divided according to regions based on the former colonisers' languages. Hence the former British colonies are under the Anglophones; former French colonies are grouped as Francophone and Lusophone for the former Portuguese colonies.

The leadership problems within the Pan African Parliament stem from these linguistic differences among the Africans. So, when they vote, their choices are not based on leadership qualities but on linguistic regionalism.

Most people in Midrand, South Africa, where the Pan African Parliament is ongoing, do not know each other intimately. The only common aspect is the language and the fact that they come from the same region.

For example, the Anglophone linguistic region wants a Chief called Charumbira from Zimbabwe. This chief is a member of the senate in his country. Those lobbying for his election are doing so because he speaks English and is from Zimbabwe.

Other than that, I am not sure if they know anything about his knowledge of the concept of Pan-Africanism and what comes with the Pn African Parliament. I tried to Google Fortune Charumbira, and here is what I found.

It is from a story published on May 7 2022, by the Mirror, a regional newspaper from Charumbira's home region.

Chief Fortune Charumbira is Bogus

President of the Chief's Council, Fortune Charumbira's chieftainship is shrouded in legitimacy controversy amid reports that the traditional leader violated traditional norms of succession when he ascended to the throne.

According to reports, Chief Charumbira, who is also the deputy president of the Pan African Parliament, blocked an intended review of his chieftainship after he produced a court interdict, saying the matter was subjudiced and could not be discussed.

According to a report in the regional Mirror newspaper, the traditional leadership in Masvingo Province is riddled with governance issues, with 28 out of the 49 chiefs in the province having either fraudulently ascended into the office or their legitimacy being challenged in courts.

I also found the report below published in the Newsday newspaper on November 9 2021:

Chief Charumbira in trouble again

The Election Resource Centre (ERC) has asked Local Government minister July Moyo to censure Chiefs Council president Fortune Charumbira for allegedly violating the country's Constitution while addressing a Zanu PF national conference in Bindura last month.

At the conference, Charumbira declared that chiefs and all traditional leaders owned Zanu PF and, therefore, could not be separated from the ruling party by the Constitution.

The ERC filed a complaint with Moyo on November 3, saying Charumbira's utterances were out of order.

While it is understood that linguistic regions can back up their candidate, someone should consider this and think again. It is not about backing up a regional neighbour's citizen but about doing the right thing to benefit all the people.

Of course, only Zambia has come forward to say that Charumbira must not be elected to represent the region because of his ties to Zanu-PF and its human rights abuses.

But who listens because we are blind when it comes to doing the right thing. We turn blind eyes because of regionalism and other such tendencies that make our minds stop thinking.

But who am I to agonise over the Pan African Parliament that is just child's play? Isn't it why opposition parties are allowed to participate because it is as useless as an ox regarding reproduction?

The art of bribery: a closeup look at how traffic officers operate on Kenya's roads



A first-time driver on Kenyan roads is likely to think that commercial and passenger service vehicles are highly regulated. Drivers are frequently stopped by police officers, who are ubiquitous along Kenya's highways.

Is this evidence that the police are keeping road users safe?

Not necessarily. As my research on police corruption at traffic checkpoints and roadblocks in Kenya shows, other factors are at play. One of them is securing bribes.

A number of reports on police corruption in Kenya have been drawn up. However, first-hand data on corrupt transactions at police checkpoints and roadblocks are not easy to come by.

I examined the techniques, rationales and legal gaps that allow for corrupt practices and policing misconduct on Kenyan roads.

My research describes how corruption's logic, practices and coded languages are developed, how actors are recruited and regulated, the inventing and concealing of evidence, establishment of players or networks, and the forming of norms and normalising of corrupt practices.

I call this process the art of bribery.

My findings into how government institutions work can provide insights into implementing policies that address corruption.

Partners in crime

In Kenya's traffic stops, bribery is a means to cope and fit within the elaborate network in the police hierarchy. It is an outcome of indoctrination by older timers. There are set rules of the game, some of which are not clearly defined or are loosely regulated.

Motorists pay bribes to circumvent traffic regulations, while the police maximise illicit incomes for personal and institutional gains. Dissidence is rare and may come at a great cost, especially within the police service. But even if dissent occurs in the form of whistleblowing, no significant punishment is meted out on the culprits.

Even though this state of affairs paints a grim image of the police, motorists are equal partners in this corruption racket, especially when they fail to comply with traffic regulations on issues like vehicle loads or speed limits.

Kenya's unstructured public transport sector and confusing traffic regulations exacerbate bribery at checkpoints, creating a corruption complex that draws in the police and motorists.

My research was based on an ethnographic study involving police officers and operatives of passenger service vehicles (called matatus) on selected busy routes: Nairobi-Nakuru, Nakuru-Kisumu and Kisumu-Migori. A documentary analysis of secondary data, like Afrobarometer survey findings and statutory and media reports, complemented the primary data.

When asked how bribes are distributed or divided among the police, one police respondent stated: "Hiyo inaenda mbali na hukuliwa na watu wengi, hata wakubwa." Translated, this means that collected bribes move along the hierarchy to high-ranking beneficiaries at police headquarters.

This suggests that police corruption in Kenya flows within personal and corporate networks that uniquely bring together lower cadre and major players in the police service. These networks are loosely latched onto a well-established and institutionalised culture of corruption.

In interviews, one officer painted a hopeless picture regarding the application of oversight mechanisms in Kenya's capital, Nairobi, when he mentioned that they sometimes 'eat' (share bribes) with some Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission officials.

Additionally, seasoned players indoctrinate newcomers. As in most conventional corruption situations, unequal power relations and coercion are the primary drivers.

There are also police officers, mainly base commanders, on retainer payments. Here, owners of vehicle fleets pay bribes in exchange for 'protection' or to maintain good relations. The bribery network also involves court officials and magistrates. This turns court corridors into corruption negotiation spaces.

The rules of the game

The rules are clear: don't involve oversight institutions or lawyers when dealing with the police. Police officers are averse to matatu owners and operatives who think they're connected and know the law.

The same applies to acts of dissent within the service. The police officers I interviewed mentioned professional witchhunts and victimisation as outcomes of whistleblowing.

For motorists, the legal landscape is too time-consuming and costly to effect their agency against police corruption. Matatu owners reported that their vehicles were targeted or their drivers frustrated after a court process, resulting in a difficult, if not impossible, environment to run a business.

Police recruits are advised or socialised on 'how things are done here'. In this way, institutional structures and culture reinforce corrupt practices.

When a motorist stopped at a roadblock, a lot could happen. The police officer may decide to impound the vehicle and confine it to a station. This is a route many motorists detest because it shifts the grounds of negotiation in favour of the police.

This is because, first, the police are in custody of the vehicle. Second, it involves a bigger fish, such as a base commander, and the issue could end up in court. Third, one's offences may change or take a different dimension by the time the case gets to court.

Considering the punitive nature of Kenya's traffic legislation, many motorists make the choice to bribe at the roadblock.

Essentially, bribery incomes have become a source of livelihood for many police officers. As one police respondent in my research stated:

Ukiangalia vile tunaishi (If you consider how we live), we live in shacks around here. There is no water sometimes and the rooms are suffocating … to make it worse, the salary is not adequate given the Kenya of today. What do you expect me to do?

The way forward

My research found that corrupt exchanges are regulated by the taken-for-granted rules of the game. These legitimise police misconduct, curtail detection and define the scales of bribery.

Likewise, there are socialisation and rationalisation processes among motorists and police officers that lead to non-responsiveness in reporting police misconduct. Furthermore, stricter traffic laws and costly penalties could perpetuate rather than reduce police corruption.

Tackling police corruption, therefore, lies in addressing the broader deficits that hamper the rule of law in Kenya. Corruption is a function of a lack of adequate legislation, and poor quality of police service personnel and public leadership.

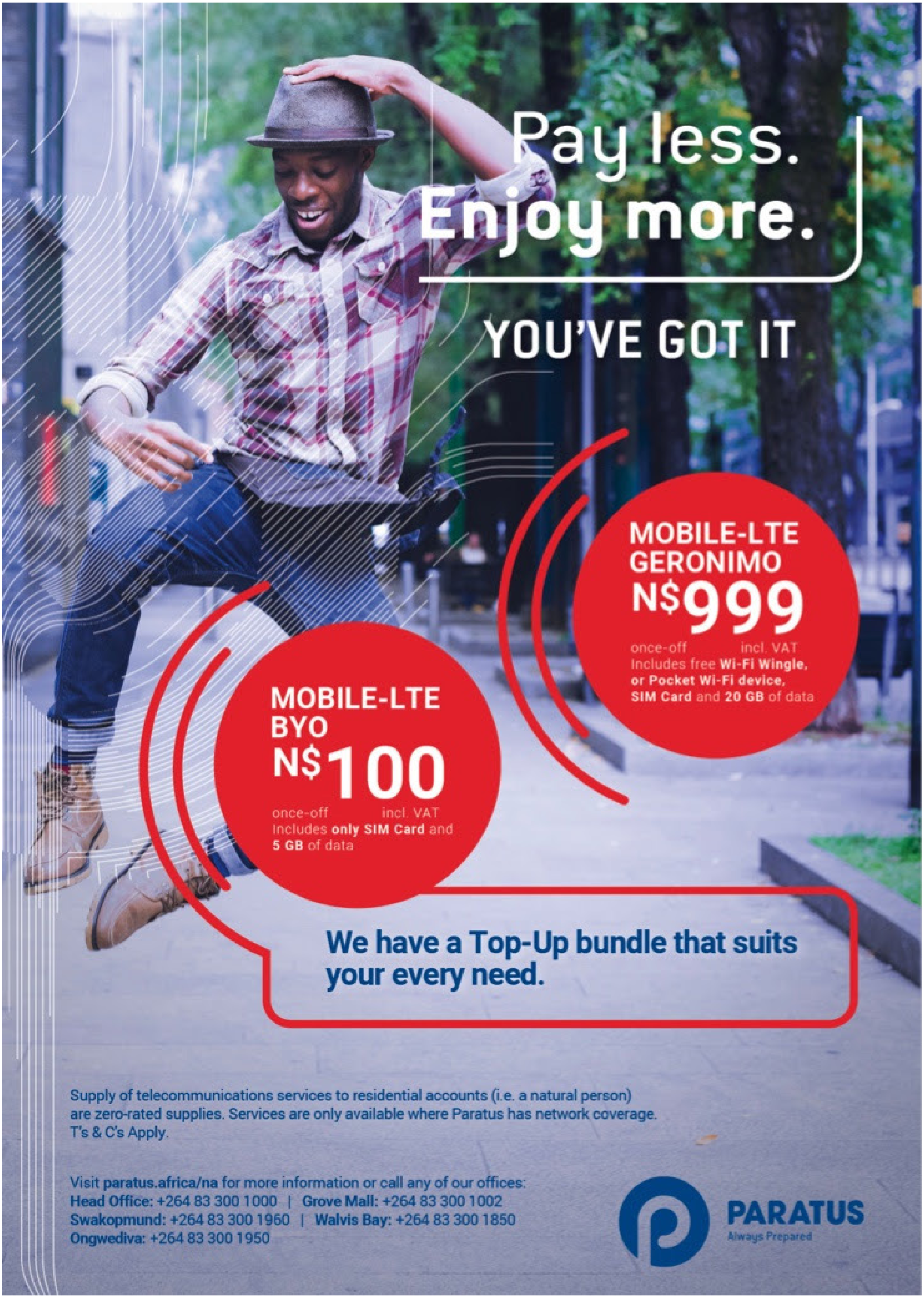
The professionalisation of the police should begin by recruiting and attracting highly qualified and educated individuals. This will change the current narrative that portrays the police service as a den of academic underperformers only known for dispensing brute force on the citizenry as in colonial days.

Raising the academic competency of the service will steer it toward becoming an intelligent organisation and transform its image. It will also be able to address current political neglect in the forms of under-remuneration and poor living conditions for police officers.

Finally, professionalising the force will create an enabling environment for the ongoing police reforms, which seek to improve the institution's effectiveness.

The government must ensure intensive training of the police on the rule of law and citizen rights, conduct public awareness campaigns, and create a less costly and burdensome justice system. This calls for effective collaboration and coordination among state agencies, including oversight agencies and the judiciary.

Gedion Onyango
Senior Lecturer, University of Nairobi


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HEALTH

El Salvador's abortion ban: 'I was sent to prison for suffering a miscarriage'



■ **Will Grant**

The news from the US that women face tighter restrictions on abortion has been felt in El Salvador, which itself has very strict laws preventing access.

In February, four women sat down before the full glare of El Salvador's press. Between them, they had served nearly 50 years in prison.

Their crime was to have the misfortune of suffering a miscarriage - in a country with one of the strictest abortion laws in the world.

Among them was Elsy.

In June 2011, Elsy was pregnant and working as a domestic worker in her hometown. She remembers going to the toilet at work, where she apparently passed out.

When she came to a little later, she was surrounded by police officers. Her baby was gone. Her boss had reported her for terminating the pregnancy.

At her trial, Elsy was sentenced to 30 years for aggravated homicide. She served 10 before campaigners managed to get her sentence shortened.

"I felt terrible in prison, all I could think of was the 30 years," Elsy told the BBC. "I thought I'd never see my mother or any of my family again."

Elsy tried to distract herself in jail. She got her high school diploma, participated in workshops and volunteered at the prison church.

Yet it wasn't enough to stop her from entering a dark place in her head.

"I just kept thinking, 'Why? Why did those who testified against me do this?'"

Now back living with her family, Elsy says her sentence was simply an "injustice which happens" in El Salvador. She points out there are many still going through what she did.

As recently as May, a woman identified as "Esme" was sentenced to 30 years, also for aggravated homicide following a miscarriage.

But protests have been difficult since the country's controversial president, Nayib Bukele, imposed a state of exception giving the police wide-ranging powers of arrest.

Mariana Moisa is one of the leading women's rights activists in El Salvador. She is part of the "green wave" abortion rights movement sweeping across Latin America.

Ms Moisa says their battle isn't just to free the women or even change the law, but to shift attitudes in society.

"We have to keep working, it depends on us and not the political parties", she says at her organisation's headquarters in San Salvador. "We have to face up to our reality and promote real cultural changes."

Over in the United States, the US Supreme Court has overturned a ruling that made abortion a constitutional right.

Campaigners like Ms Moisa fear this will strengthen the hand of conservatives across Central America.

The US would do well to look south, she warns, to see how an outright ban can lead to "denying women their freedom in these circumstances".

Changing attitudes in El Salvador won't come easily, though.

Padre Vito Guarato is a home for abandoned children in San Salvador, many of whom have some form of disability.

Five-year-old resident Ana Lucia has microcephaly, where children are born with significantly smaller heads, possibly due to infection with the Zika virus.

Lying in her cot, surrounded by donated teddy bears, Ana Lucia needs round-the-clock attention. Her carers do everything they can to provide her with a comfortable and dignified life.

But in truth, with no option to abort in El Salvador, some parents see little choice but to abandon.

"I think the mothers should assume their responsibility", says Rosa Evelyn, one of the managers at the church-run children's home.

"If God bestowed upon you the virtue of becoming a mother, then you must be one for as long as God allows it," she says.

It's a view shared by many in this traditionally Catholic nation.

What's more, the fastest-growing religion in Central America today is evangelical Christianity.

As its reach grows, so too does its political clout, with evangelical values and views increasingly present inside parliament.

Guillermo Gallegos, one of the vice presidents of the national assembly, is staunchly anti-abortion.

He insists decriminalisation would never pass the first legislative hurdle, "even where the mother's life is at risk".

"In any case where that little creature still has life," he tells me, "then I lean towards saving it over saving the mother".

In a national address on the anniversary of his third year in office, President Bukele applauded a plan, led by his wife, to make childbirth safer in El Salvador's public hospitals.

Abortion, though, remains strictly off limits, even in cases of incest or rape - an entrenched view now bolstered by the ruling of the US Supreme Court.

-BBC

> **"I felt terrible in prison, all I could think of was the 30 years."**



Why business is still optimistic about Hong Kong

■ Suranjana Tewari

On a cloudy June day, the Jumbo Floating Restaurant was towed out of Hong Kong's Aberdeen harbour.
The giant six-storey structure - in the shape of a Chinese imperial palace - crept past yachts a fraction of its size earlier this month before a foghorn signalled its entry into the open sea.
The mega restaurant, which could house 2,300 diners at a time, had spent nearly a half a century in Hong Kong's waters. It drew visitors like the Queen, Richard Branson and Tom Cruise, and featured in multiple Cantonese and Hollywood films.
But for years, losses had been mounting, and the pandemic dealt a fatal blow.
For some, the restaurant's departure was symbolic of what was happening in Hong Kong. Both had faced a difficult few years and now Jumbo, much like the appeal of Hong Kong as a great place to do business, was floating away.

An unyielding zero Covid policy, which Hong Kong shares with mainland China, has battered an economy reliant on global business, finance and trade. Stringent travel regulations and intermittent lockdowns have kept tourists away, decimated small and medium businesses, and isolated "Asia's world city" from the rest of the globe.
This follows several years of disruption - massive pro-democracy protests in 2019, a National Security Law that critics said spelled the "end of Hong Kong" as they knew it, and a crackdown on free speech.
Business owners say these events have transformed the city's population.
"It [business] was very highly oriented towards the expat market. Hong Kong to New York, New York to Hong Kong, London," says Vinny Lauria, who runs a number of Hong Kong restaurants.
But, he adds, the restaurant business has "wisened up" with the increased arrival of wealthy mainland Chinese in the city.
"Strategy has changed immensely over the last 10 years," he says.
This is also not the first time that Hong Kong's future as a rich yet edgy business hub has been doubted.
The last 25 years
Hong Kong had long flourished as a financial powerhouse. And since Britain returned the former colony to China in 1997, the city had become a gateway for foreign companies to do business with China.

It had major advantages over regional competitors because of its sophisticated financial system, a transparent rule of law, English-speaking workers and links around the world.
But ahead of the handover in 1997, Fortune magazine published a cover story - "The death of Hong Kong" - lamenting that "the naked truth about Hong Kong's future can be summed up in two words: It's over."
Both foreign observers and many locals feared that Beijing's influence would increase immediately, and that Chinese soldiers would soon be roaming the city's streets, arresting people. Western newspapers also predicted that annual commemorations of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre - a taboo topic in China - would be banned.
But it would be another 20 years before Hongkongers' freedoms were threatened - several pro-democracy leaders and activists, and even a media tycoon are behind bars now. And events marking the Tiananmen Square anniversary are no longer permitted.
But those working in business and finance are still bullish about the city. In fact, Hong Kong's economy has doubled since 1997.
"When you're talking about Asian markets from an integrity standpoint, Hong Kong is ahead of China," says Drew Bernstein, an accountant who has been auditing Chinese companies for decades.
"If you have a financial market without integrity, it's more like a casino."
Financial markets opening up in mainland China did prompt some Fortune 500 companies to move to Shanghai, but Hong Kong remains one of the world's top 10 stock exchanges by market capitalisation.
And the city continues to rank highly among global financial centres for business environment, human capital, infrastructure and overall reputation.

"I've been through this movie many, many times, the ending is always the same," says property tycoon Allan Zeman.
While people left Hong Kong in 1997 thinking it was the end of the city's prospects, he says what they forget is that China is part of Hong Kong's appeal and what it offers to the business world.
"People are in Hong Kong because of China. One or two businesses might leave. I've been here for 50 years, I'm not going anywhere."
The next 25 years
But data shows that people are indeed leaving Hong Kong in record numbers.
Mid-2021 saw the largest number of people relocating since mid-1966, according to figures from the city's census and statistics department.
Mercer's chief executive in Hong Kong, Vicky Fan, says a high turnover isn't uncommon for a market like Hong Kong, especially in the wake of Covid, but she admits that a lot of people are moving.
Ms Fan points to international schools as proof - formerly competitive campuses are now opening up spots for local students.
There were also capital outflows of more than $100 billion last year, for only the second time since 1997. And investments into Hong Kong dipped significantly in 2021.

"Hong Kong will continue to be a very rich city even if foreign executives move out, or refuse to locate there because there are enormous numbers of very wealthy Chinese and powerful Chinese companies who are enthusiastic to move there," said William H Overholt, a senior research fellow at the John F Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.
Experts also point to Hong Kong's role as a financial hub in the Greater Bay area - a project that is connecting 11 cities in southern China with Hong Kong at the centre. The zone's combined GDP already matches that of South Korea.
"The future of Hong Kong is the Greater Bay Area. You can get from Hong Kong to Shenzhen in 14 minutes. The joke is that it's faster to go to Shenzhen than other people's houses in Hong Kong," Mr Zeman said.
While Hong Kong is expected to become more integrated with China, experts say it still won't lose its unique place in the financial world.
"For many Westerners, it's going to feel like another Chinese city. For the Chinese - individuals and companies - Hong Kong is still this wonderful airlock to the world from outside the mainland. It's where the legal system is predictable, political pressures on business are a lot less than they are on the mainland," Mr Overholt said.
And as the US increasingly turns away Chinese companies from its stock markets, Hong Kong will benefit. Around 100 mainland firms are at risk of delisting in the US.
Mr Bernstein believes they will attract more investor interest in Hong Kong than in London or New York.
"There aren't a lot of places for them to go," he said.
"It's still a market that companies can go to that has deep sources of capital. Markets like Hong Kong offer advantages that Asian companies can't get in the US," he adds.

"Asian markets understand the risk of a company not run by supply and demand but by governments. Today the reality is the largest companies in the world are run by governments."
That change is already visible: Of the 2,500 companies currently listed on the Hong Kong stock exchange, more than 40% are China-based and account for over three-quarters of the exchange's capitalisation.
"The strength of Hong Kong is being part of China… the first 25 years was an experiment, in the next 25 years we will reap the benefits. Hong Kong will continue to be one of the world's great cities," Mr Zeman told the BBC.
Experts argue that China doesn't need another Shanghai or Shenzhen, successful business hubs - so far from becoming another Chinese city, Hong Kong, they say, is likely to be the capital of a Chinese-led global economic empire.
It continues to be a gateway to China, and its role as China's gateway to the world is also under way.
-BBC



Philippines' infrastructure woes in focus as Marcos takes reins



■ **Steven Borowiec**

As a young engineer in the early 1980s, Edgardo Perea worked on a project that he hoped would bring a reliable supply of clean water to households throughout Metro Manila. Forty years later, he is still waiting.

Perea worked at Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System, a government body, as part of a team that carried out preliminary work on a dam that he and his colleagues hoped would take advantage of the area's vast resources of freshwater.

"All the feasibility studies were done, all it needed was implementation," Perea told Al Jazeera.

But politics got in the way. In 1986, the Philippines People Power revolution led to the removal of dictator Ferdinand Marcos. Under the new government, many projects that had been approved under the previous regime languished or were cancelled altogether.

Perea has been thinking about his experiences a lot these days as his country prepares for another transfer of power, while many of the old problems linger. Besides being deeply personal, they are emblematic of the struggles to improve infrastructure in the Philippines, an archipelago of about 110 million people, where many people still live without basic amenities. In an added layer of irony, the incoming president is the son of the ruler who was pushed out 40 years ago.

New President Ferdinand Marcos Jr, known commonly by the nickname Bongbong, will take office on June 30. His predecessor, Rodrigo Duterte, made infrastructure a key policy as part of an initiative he called Build, Build, Build. Duterte promised that the programme would create jobs and improve the quality of life for many Filipinos for whom severe traffic jams and other inconveniences are a fact of life.

Duterte, who described spotty infrastructure as the "Achilles' heel" of Philippine economic development, pledged to allocate between 8 and 9 trillion Philippine pesos to the programme he said would usher in a "golden age of infrastructure," adding bridges and railways while expanding a major airport north of Manila.

Filipino voters and political analysts are not sure how Marcos Jr will govern. Throughout his election campaign, he invoked nostalgia for what some Filipinos, accurately or otherwise, think of as a happy time under his father's rule. But he has been short on policy specifics, leaving unanswered the question of whether he will continue Duterte's infrastructure drive as he gets set to start his term.

Duterte has called on the new president to continue with Build, Build, Build and the Asian Development Bank has pledged to continue supporting the initiative even with the change of administration.

The programme has a mixed record, with some analysts arguing that it made helpful improvements to under-served parts of the country, while others contend that it fell far short of its objectives.

Ronald U Mendoza, dean of the School of Government at Ateneo de Manila University, said Philippine politicians use public infrastructure to show voters that they have "brought home the bacon," though the longer-term desirability of such projects is questionable.

"During an infrastructure boom – not just Marcos's but also Duterte's – the effect on various parts of the country is stimulative and job-creating … Hence it is much welcomed by citizens and quite palpable and visible," Mendoza told Al Jazeera.

"It is easy to be nostalgic about an infrastructure boom when you fail to appreciate the crisis and difficulty that is associated with the bad decisions and corruption during the spending part of that debt-fuelled experience. If there's bad governance and bad decisions, then the party has to end at some point."

Flawed execution

The execution of the ambitious initiative was also flawed, according to Jan Carlo B Punongbayan, an assistant professor at the University of the Philippines School of Economics.

"Good, though its intention was, Build, Build, Build unfortunately failed to live up to expectations," Punongbayan told Al Jazeera. "Spending plans that were not well thought out led to repeated changes in the initiative's project master list. Only a portion of the promised projects was executed."

The Marcos dynasty also has a reputation for corruption. Observers of Philippine politics worry that such corruption could cloud the next administration.

"Marcos Jr comes from a known kleptocratic family that flourished during the martial law years through crony capitalism," Punongbayan said. "Hence, he is not expected to do much work to stop corruption and in fact, he may very well worsen it."

The Philippines ranks poorly on global corruption assessments, coming in 117th out of 180 countries on the most recent ranking by Transparency International. Parts of the Philippine electorate appear to have accepted the stubborn presence of corruption in government and business.

Though Duterte took office depicting himself as a swashbuckling outsider who would pull the plug on corruption, the same elite has retained control of Philippine business, according to analysts.

"Duterte never really intended to root out the old power networks, and I think there is a degree of resignation now," Josh Kurlantzick, a senior fellow for Southeast Asia at the Council on Foreign Relations, told Al Jazeera.

Meanwhile, the basic needs of much of the population go unmet. According to the Sustainable Development Goals Fund, "substantial numbers" of people suffer water scarcity and access to basic sanitation, putting them at risk of water-borne disease.

A report by the World Health Organization and UNICEF found that just 47 percent of Filipinos had access to safely managed drinking water in 2020, a slight improvement from 46 percent in 2015.

The country's infrastructure challenges are connected to large-scale rural-to-urban migration, as many Filipinos leave the countryside to seek jobs in large cities, particularly Metro Manila, causing severe traffic gridlock that results in exorbitant commuting times and delays in the transport of goods to points of sale.

Perea, the former waterworks engineer, recalls needing to go through a process of getting signatures from government officials in various departments before a project could go ahead.

"That's where corruption sets in," he said.

Stung by the failure of the water project he worked on, Perea quickly became disillusioned with the politics of public infrastructure.

"I saw how the system really worked … When the project stopped, I was criticising everything. I said too much and I had to eat my words," he said. "Some older colleagues took me aside and told me, you cannot fight the system by continually hating it. You have to play the game, get to the top, and then you can make some changes."

Instead, Perea resigned. After unsuccessful efforts to cross over into private engineering firms, he ran a few small businesses, including a martial arts academy.

He eventually settled, in the late 1980s, on a less confrontational form of business – a bookstore in a busy commercial area near Manila's Guadalupe elevated train station. He named the bookstore JERVS, a combination of his five children's first initials, and found peace running his own shop.

In that pre-internet era, when reading was a more common form of entertainment, Perea found a profitable model renting out novels and magazines. He ran the bookstore until the COVID-19 pandemic, when the Philippine government implemented strict lockdowns that froze much of the country's street-level commerce.

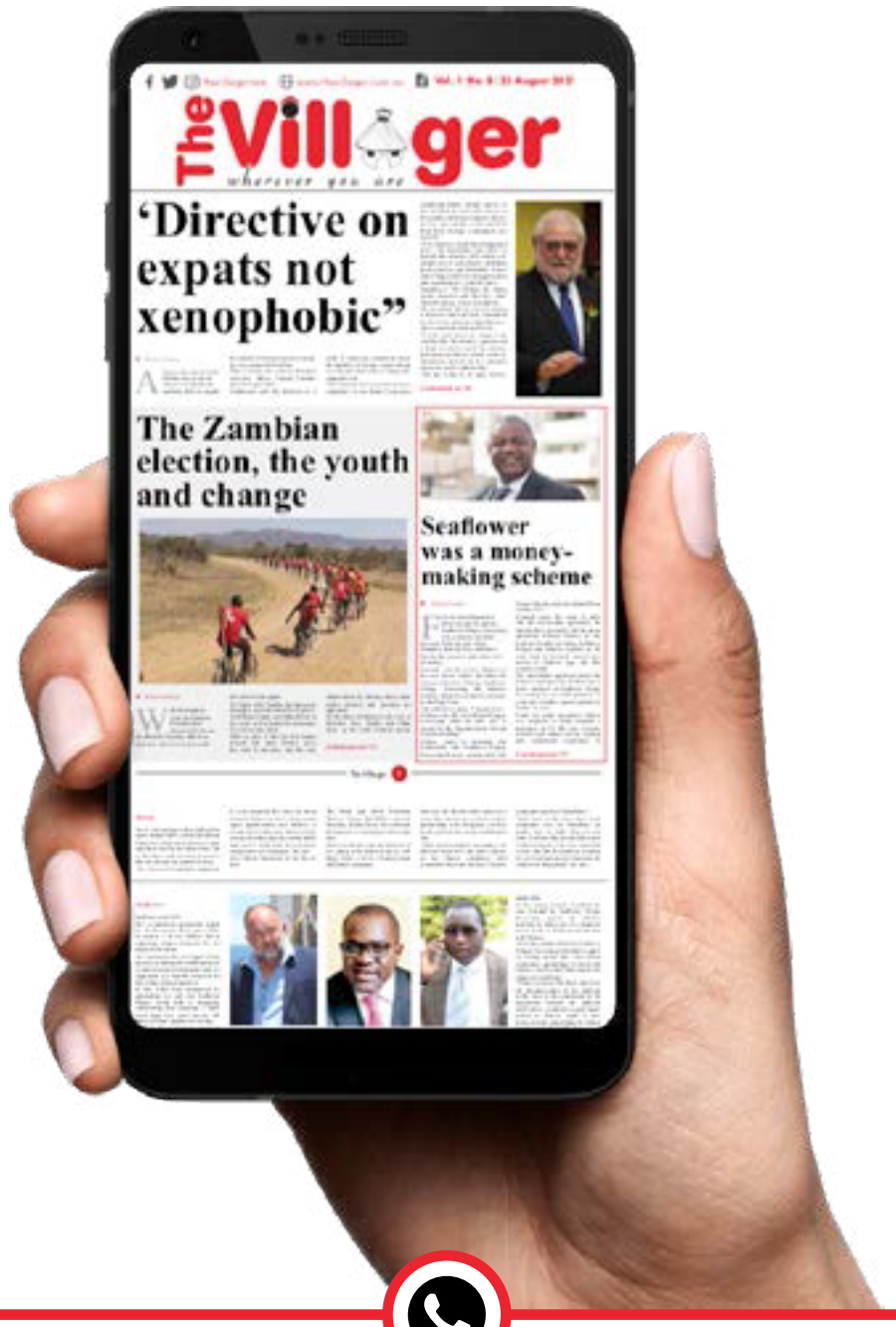
Over those years, and throughout the hiatus imposed by the pandemic, Perea had time to ponder his country's political history, including the current moment where the son of a dictator overthrown by a people-power revolution is about to move into the presidential palace.

He does not consider himself a Marcos supporter but hopes the new government will continue to invest in infrastructure as the Duterte administration did. He also understands how the dynasty appealed to voters in a country where many governments have fallen short of solving the same old problems.

"The 1960s and 70s do seem like a golden era for people who lived through war and everything that came before that," he said. "These urban legends survive through the generations, and sometimes, they get exaggerated."

-Al Jazeera





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

Outcry in Egypt as iconic Nile houseboats are destroyed

■ Yolande Knell & Wael Hussein



For many locals and foreign tourists, the brightly painted wooden houseboats dotted along the River Nile are an iconic part of Cairo's rich cultural and architectural heritage.

But starting this week, the last of those remaining - about 30 in total - are set to be destroyed or removed by the Egyptian authorities as part of what they describe as an effort to beautify the waterfront.

Some of the floating houses, permanently moored on the riverbank, are inhabited by poor residents, while others have been expensively restored. A few have been turned into restaurants, offices and gyms.

"It's a different lifestyle, you are completely immersed in nature. The river is just one metre below you," says the celebrated Egyptian novelist Ahdaf Soueif, whose family home has been slated for destruction.

"The idea of the houseboat has always been connected to something a little bit out of the ordinary," she goes on. "They feel romantic to generations of Egyptians and Arabs."

From her veranda, tugs and cranes can be seen circling properties in the centre of the capital. Three homes - two-storey buildings attached to rafts - were removed on Tuesday and towed away. Earlier in the week, others were removed and one of those was smashed up in the process.

On social media, there has been condemnation from ordinary Egyptians of the action against the houseboats, known as "awamat" (Arabic for "floating").

"Not only are these houseboats homes to people who have lived there for decades, but some of them are historic monuments. They are part of our heritage which cannot be erased," wrote Nora Zeid on Twitter.

"Who said it is not part of the beautiful history of Cairo?" tweeted Dakhel Hafy. "When we stand on the Nile and look at the awamat, we should tell stories, novels and legends about them."

Only a few dispute their aesthetic value. Mostafa el-Gafy tweeted that they were "ugly".

The Egyptian government has defended its decision to issue demolition orders, stating that the houseboats were built decades ago without its consent and that their owners failed to obtain the correct permits and licences.

The irrigation ministry says it will continue the campaign to remove homes moored along the river "in clear violation of the law". The minister, Mohammed Abdel Ati, says it is "a clear message to those who transgress on the Nile".

Many residents own their homes but say they have recently made legal challenges over large hikes in official fees for parking the boats and access to the riverbank.

No compensation is being given to people losing their houses.

"I swear to God, I don't know where to go," says Ekhlas Helmy, 87, in despair as she packs up her belongings.

"My sister has got some of my stuff, my brother too, although they are both unhappy with the situation. They told me to throw away my things."

Madame Helmy, as she is called, was born on a houseboat and says she was raised on fish. Later, after her husband died young, she built her own home on the water, living on it for three decades with her dogs, cat and geese.

The history of houseboats on the Nile is long and colourful. The oldest ones dated back to the time of the pharaohs and were designed for long river trips.

Over time, a technique developed of building homes on floating metal containers held together by wooden or metal beams. These were not meant for sailing but to give a panoramic river view.

During Ottoman times, rich Egyptian pashas often took houseboats as fancy second residences using them to entertain guests with music and belly dancers. During World War Two, British forces lived in them.

The awamat have often been associated with secret liaisons and illicit behaviour.

They are featured in many classic Egyptian films and in the work of the Nobel Prize-winning author, Naguib Mahfouz. His 1966 novel, Adrift on the Nile, follows the lives of young intellectuals who gather at night on a houseboat to chat and smoke drugs.

During the mid-20th Century, there were several hundred houseboats in Cairo. However, many were gradually cleared away by the authorities or fell into disrepair.

The houseboats now under threat are clustered in an area known as Kit Kat.

On one side, across the river, are the high-rise tower blocks and costly hotels on the island of Zamalek. On the other side, lies the less well-off neighbourhood of Imbaba. There has previously been pressure to commercialise this section of waterfront.

In the evening, the edge of the Nile bustles with restaurants, cafes and private sports clubs located along its banks.

Egypt's government recently opened the first section of a new 5km-long (3-mile) walkway along the Cairo corniche, clearing away many small businesses such as felucca sailboat operators.

Development along the riverbanks has opened debates about the future of the city's most popular public space and what defines the unique charms of the capital.

-BBC

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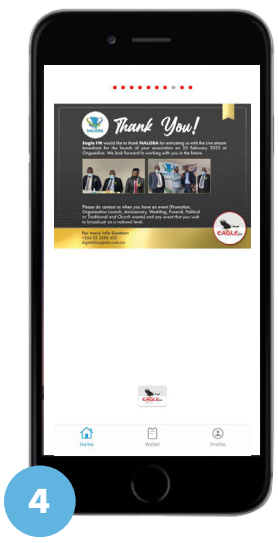
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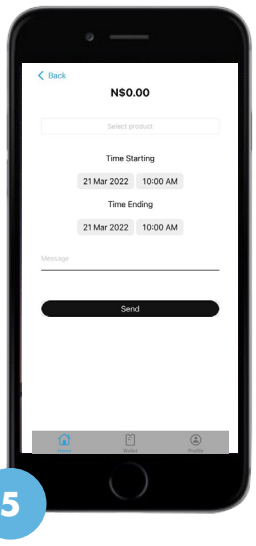
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Why ex-French colonies are joining the Commonwealth



Gabon and Togo have moved to strengthen their diplomatic armoury in a bid to ease their reliance on France.

They have been admitted to what was originally founded as a club of former British colonies but has been steadily diversifying its composition. These two small francophone African nations are now the Commonwealth's 55th and 56th members.

Rwanda joined in 2009 and Mozambique came into the group in 1995. None of these states had particular past historical ties to the UK.

The fact that they have opted to join the Commonwealth suggests that they see the organisation as a useful network of diplomatic and cultural influence, and for exercising "soft power" on the world stage.

It also testifies to the importance of English as a language of business, science and international politics and the necessity of building a range of connections to support economic development and get diplomatic messages heard.

For Gabon and Togo, Rwanda offers an encouraging precedent: just 13 years after joining, it has now hosted the organisation's summit meeting, attended by heads of state and government from all over the world, though there were some notable absentees, including South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa.

Youth appeal

Gabon and Togo's entry to the Commonwealth also comes at a time when the relationship between Africa and France has become so contentious.

A growing number of younger urban citizens demand an end to the CFA franc currency which is pegged to the euro under an arrangement guaranteed by the government in Paris. The French military presence in the Sahel is also controversial.

So joining the world's largest anglophone bloc is likely be popular among many young Togolese and Gabonese.

That helps to modernise the image of two regimes that were for many years perceived as particularly emblematic of the traditionally close relationships between leaders in Africa and in France - "la françafrique".

There was a time when such a development would have provoked angst among Paris policymakers fearing an erosion of influence south of the Sahara. But today's French governments take a much more relaxed view of such trends.

For the same arguments about diversifying contacts and building up new vehicles of international connection have also fuelled the steady expansion of the Commonwealth's francophone sister, the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF).

It actually claims 88 member states and governments - including Rwanda, whose former Foreign Minister Louis Mushikiwabo is its secretary general. Its regional offices for West and central Africa are in fact hosted by Togo and Gabon, and it too is growing.

In March Ghana's Foreign Minister Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey announced that her country, a former British colony which has been an associate member of the OIF since 2006, would complete the transition to full membership of the organisation.

Ghana, with strong democratic institutions and a dynamic economy, will be one of a growing number of countries that are full and active members of both the Commonwealth and the Francophonie - for solid diplomatic and practical reasons.

Most of its neighbours in West Africa are French-speaking and the government has been taking steps to equip its young people to make the most of this economic, cultural and political reality - for example, there are now 50 bilingual schools.

Nor should one forget the significant development of the small but still influential Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP) - most of whose members are African.

Democracy tests

But all three groupings - the CPLP, the Francophonie and the Commonwealth - face the delicate challenge of how to promote good governance, democracy and human rights - an issue with which the African Union and some of the continent's regional blocs, notably the Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas), are also wrestling.

Both the Commonwealth and the OIF send experts to help member states improve their electoral systems, but when it comes to membership conditions they tend to opt for inclusion and gentle encouragement rather than the assertion of a strict line.

Togo was ruled by the notoriously brutal dictator President Gnassingbé Eyadéma from 1967 to 2005, and has since then been led by his son, Faure Gnassingbé.

Gabon's President, Ali Ben Bongo Ondimba, is the son of Omar Bongo, head of state from 1967 to 2009, who swam with the trend towards multi-party politics in the 1990s but took care to maintain the predominance of his ruling party and the role of his family in government. Before succeeding to the presidency, Ali Bongo was defence minister.

The Commonwealth's official press release announcing the admission of Togo and Gabon stated: "The eligibility criteria for Commonwealth membership, amongst other things, state that an applicant country should demonstrate commitment to democracy and democratic processes, including free and fair elections and representative legislatures."

Yet Rwanda's President Paul Kagame, although lauded for overseeing undoubted social and economic development progress, is accused by rights groups of being uncompromisingly authoritarian in the exercise of power. Critics say the opposition is cowed and marginalised.

Mr Kagame claims his government upholds human rights, and there is "nobody in Rwanda who is in prison that should not be there".

Gabon will face a key barometer of governance with next year's presidential elections. But for Togo, there is a fairly immediate test.

The very day of the Commonwealth announcement, the authorities banned a planned demonstration by the opposition Dynamique Monseigneur Kpodzro (DMK) movement to protest against the rising cost of living, and what it called bad governance and injustice.

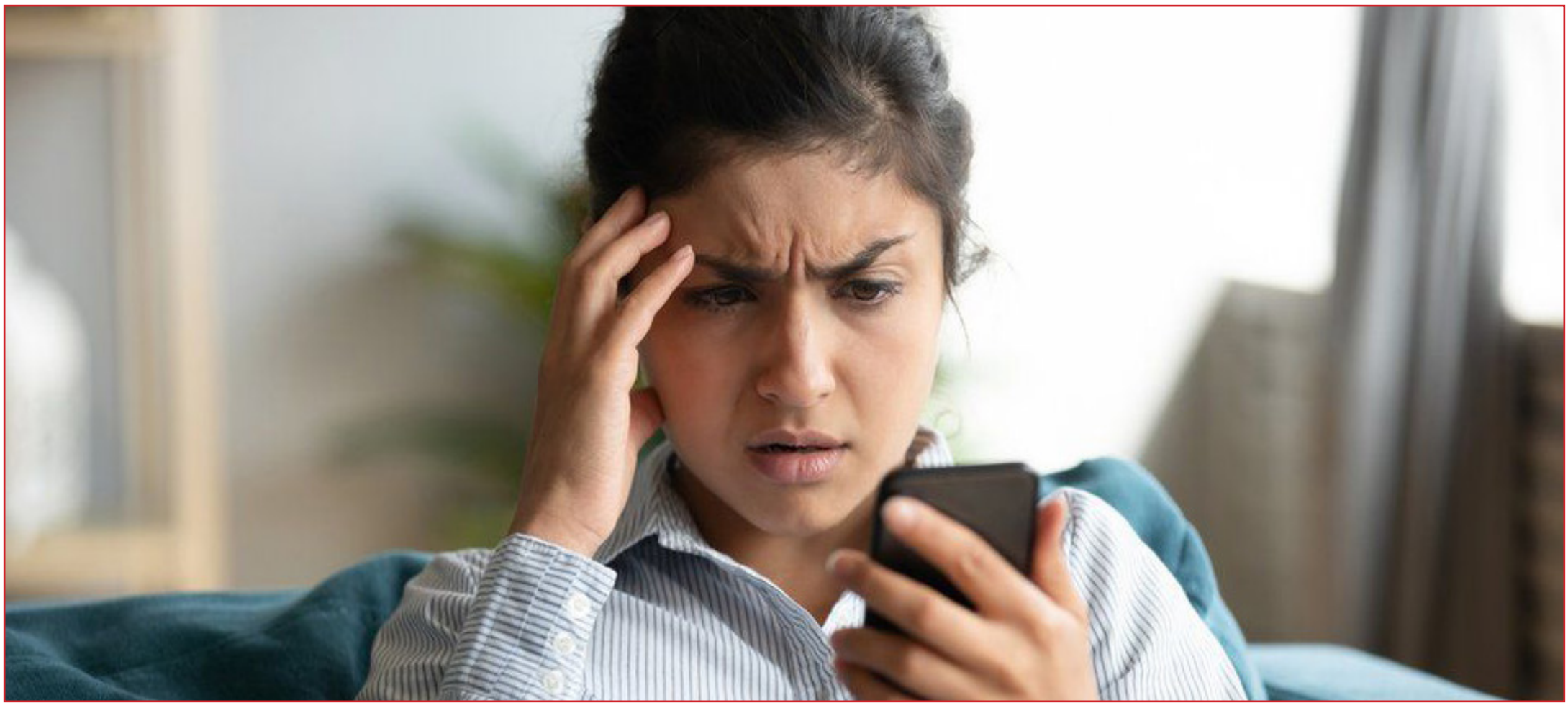
The DMK has rescheduled the protest for 16 July. It will be interesting to see whether Togo's new status as a Commonwealth member prods the government into taking a more lenient line.

-BBC



TECHNOLOGY

Fraudsters target under-35s on WhatsApp



■ Michael Race

People under 35 are becoming the "prime target" for scammers tricking them into transferring money through social media platforms including WhatsApp.

A banking industry body said intelligence suggested younger people were particularly hit by scams that played on their trust.

UK Finance also warned that energy bill deal and tax scams were becoming more common as the cost of living rises.

Criminals were "building on people's fears" of rising prices, it said.

The banking industry body said that while people of all age groups are falling victim to scams, "it is younger age groups that are often the prime target".

"Our research found that people under 35 are more likely than older age groups to have been targeted in an impersonation scam and be swayed to provide personal or financial information," it said.

Data from Barclays this month also showed people aged 21-30 were the most likely age group to fall victim to scams, due to the the majority taking place on social media, shopping sites and dating apps.

UK Finance added that con artists were targeting all age groups by exploiting "weaknesses outside of the banking system", through online and social media platforms.

If you've had money taken from your account, or your bank details stolen and payments made, then you're protected by law.

Ultimately your bank should refund that money so they have a big incentive to crack down on that type of crime.

It's working, with a fall in the number of unauthorised transactions, and record amounts of theft prevented.

The bad news for customers is that the area that is most difficult to police and prevent is the area of fraud that's growing fastest.

If you are conned into making a payment, an investment, or a transfer, then you've not got the same legal financial protections.

You should still get in touch with your bank immediately, they may be able to chase the payment, possibly return it, and some will make good-will money back gestures, but they are not obliged to.

With younger people being targeted more by these types of scams, and often more likely to fall for them, it's worth repeating the advice to just think for an extra second. Pause those speedy fingers, and don't give your details straight away.

The type of scams criminals were using against people was evolving, the industry body said. Fake delivery texts asking for payment or NHS Covid-19 pass scams during the height of the pandemic were now being replaced by schemes focusing on cost-of-living challenges, it said.

Criminals were now posing as different organisations ranging from the NHS, to banks and government departments via phone calls, text messages, emails, fake websites and social media posts.

A type of fraud where people were duped into sending money and personal details surged 39% in 2021 compared with 2020 to £583m, UK finance said.

This kind of fraud, known as Authorised Push Payment fraud (APP) - when victims think they are paying a genuine organisation - is on the rise, and outstripped fraud losses on bank and credit cards, which fell by 7% in 2021, for the first time.

However, less than half (47%) of the £246.8m worth of losses were returned to victims of APP fraud.

The banking trade body said impersonation scams, along with investment and so-called "romance" scams were the "most pernicious and prevalent".

Investment fraud cases surged by 57% and impersonation scams rose 36% on 2020.

Investment scams, where a criminal convinces their victim to move their money to a fictitious fund or to pay for a fake investment, accounted for the largest proportion of losses APP crime in 2021, with losses increasing by 60% to £166.2m.

Meanwhile, money lost through so-called romance scams, where the victim is persuaded to make a payment to a person they have met, often through social media or dating websites, and with whom they believe they are in a relationship, more than doubled in 2021 to £30.6m.

Payment service providers were only able to return £12.6m - 41% - of the losses from romance scams, mainly because payments were made over an extended period of time and criminals had moved money by the time the crime was reported.

Overall, £1.3bn, the most on record, was stolen through fraud in 2021, an 8% increase from the year before.

'Shocking'

Rocio Concha, Which? director of policy and advocacy, said the scale at which people were experiencing authorised push payment scams was "shocking".

"Yet all too often victims face a reimbursement lottery depending on who they bank with," she said.

"The government has announced its intention to enable mandatory reimbursement for bank transfer victims who are not at fault and this needs to be brought in as soon as possible."

TSB told the BBC it refunded 98% of its fraud cases in 2021, compared to 47% across all banks. Paul Davis, director of fraud prevention at TSB, said it was "disappointing that the industry's fraud refund rate has barely increased with over half the money stolen by fraudsters still not refunded to victims - at a time when people's finances are already squeezed by a cost-of-living crisis".

Katy Worobec, managing director of economic crime at UK Finance, said there had also been a hike in investment scams where criminals set up fake cryptocurrency websites featuring celebrities supposedly endorsing them on social media.

She said upcoming legislation - the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill - provided an opportunity for the government "to give new powers on information sharing and tracking stolen money".

"These are things we have long called for and will support efforts to work together and stop the fraud happening in the first place," she added.

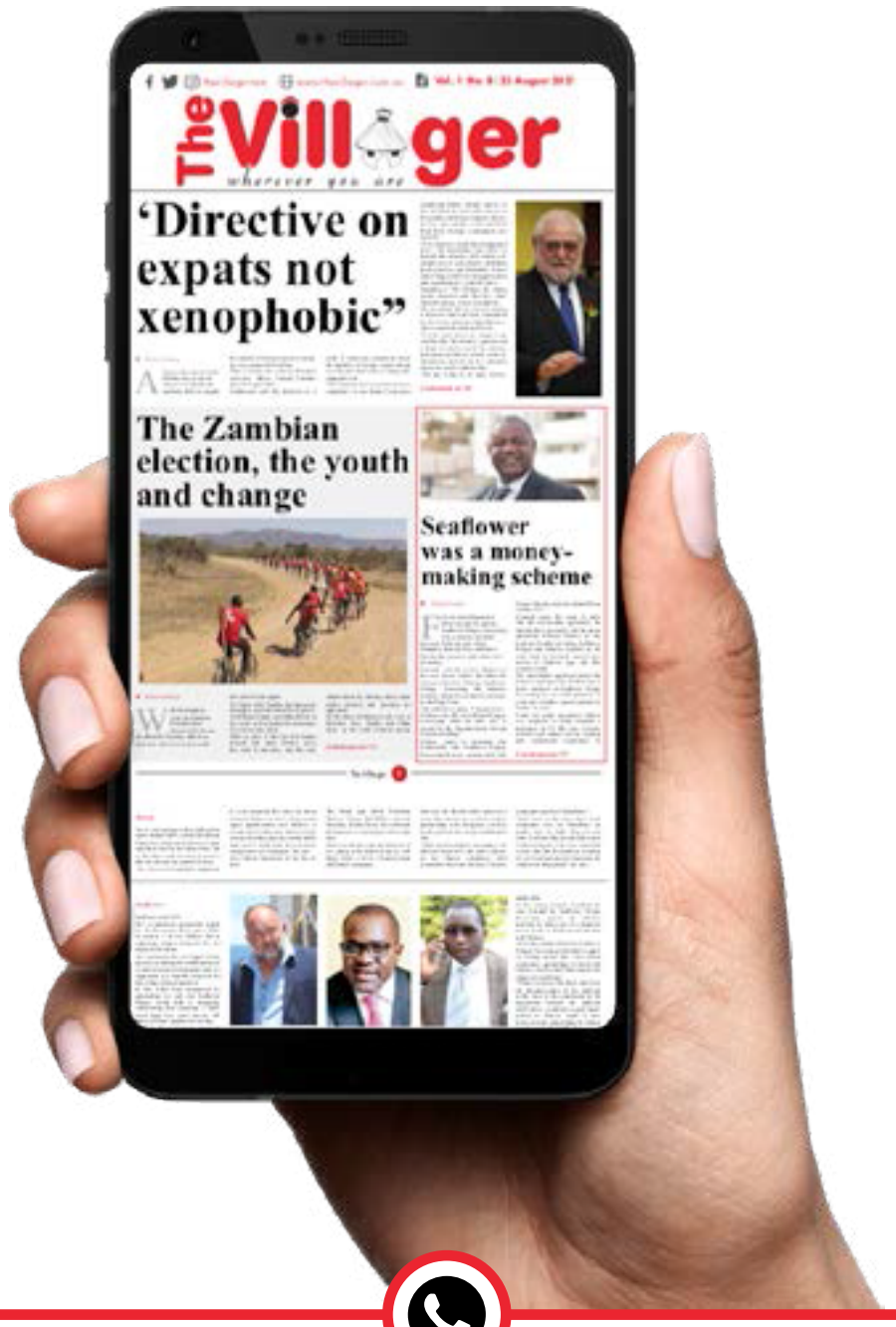
The Dedicated Card and Payment Crime Unit, a specialist police unit that targets the organised criminal gangs behind fraud, prevented £101m of fraud in 2021 - the largest amount in the unit's 20-year history, UK Finance said.

The industry body is urging customers to follow the advice of the Take Five to Stop Fraud campaign, and remember that criminals are experts at impersonating people, organisations and the police.

People should contact their bank immediately if they think they have been conned and report it to Action Fraud.

-BBC





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INTERNATIONAL

Finland, Sweden on path to NATO membership as Turkey drops veto



NAMIBIA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
Alumni and NUST Foundation

Public Lecture

Petroleum Activities in Namibia

Theme: Oil and Gas Exploration - *A Namibian Perspective*

About the Topic

The Republic of Namibia, can be considered as an unexplored frontier that has recently been the subject of interest to oil companies of all sizes. To date the country has seen the drilling of 24 exploration (18) and appraisal (6) wells, offshore Namibia.

Onshore Namibia has also been seeing oil and gas exploration activities with drilling of stratigraphic wells and the acquisition of 2D seismic.

Namibia is lauded internationally for its very attractive fiscal regime as well as the firm regulatory and legal framework that regulates the industry, through. Instruments such as the Petroleum (Exploration and Development) Act No. 2 of 1991

Although the Ministry of Mines and Energy is considered the leading line ministry, other Ministries such as the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform; Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism; Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources, all contribute to the regulation of the industry.

This conversation seeks to give an insight into the Namibian oil and gas exploration industry. Our panel consists of industry experts who will all contribute greatly towards understanding oil and gas - a Namibian perspective.

The demand for oil exploration in Namibia has immensely increased in the past 15 years and a lot of petroleum activities - exploration and licensing - have been taking place onshore and offshore. The recent discovery of oil has fuelled debate at various levels - governmental, investors, industry and among the general public. Therefore, it is imperative to begin with a conversation that would uncover and unpack the development on oil exploration in Namibia. As part of this conversation, the Alumni and NUST Foundation, in collaboration with Recon Namibia, are embarking on a full year project of hosting public lectures and seminars on petroleum activities in Namibia. The purpose of the lectures is to provide a platform where people can learn and share experience about oil and gas development in the country. Topical issues within the Petroleum industry will be discussed including on how petroleum can contribute and bring about economic development and prosperity in Namibia.

Speakers



Hon Mr Tom Alweendo
Minister of Mines and Energy

Hon. Mr Tom Alweendo is the Minister of Mines and Energy. Prior to his appointment, Alweendo was the Director-General of the National Planning Commission (NPC).



Mr Robert Mwanachilenga
General Manager: Reconnaissance Energy Namibia

Robert Mwanachilenga, is a Petroleum Engineer with specialisations in Drilling and Production Engineering, Project Management, Mining, Renewable Energy; and Cost Engineering.

He has about 30 years' experience in the on- and offshore oil, gas and energy sectors.



Ms Bridget Venner
NAMPOA Vice Chair
Vice President and General Manager Exxonmobil Exploration and Production Namibia Limited

Bridget Venner is the Vice President & General Manager of ExxonMobil Exploration and Production Namibia Limited (EMEPNL), a subsidiary of ExxonMobil.

In her role as GM, Ms. Venner oversees all operations and business activities associated with exploration licenses the company holds in offshore Namibia.



Mr Immanuel Mulunga
Managing Director: NAMCOR

Mr Immanuel Mulunga is the Managing Director of NAMCOR, the national oil company of Namibia.

Mulunga's experience in the oil and gas industry spans over 20 years.



Ms Nilliann Mulemi
Chief Executive Officer: Petrofund

Md Nilliann Mulemi is the Chief Executive Officer of the Petrofund.

Mulemi has managed Namibia's oil and gas capacity building programme for the petroleum industry for 20 years.



Date: Monday, 04 July 2022 | **Time:** 17:00 - 20:30
Venue: Auditorium 1, NUST Lower Campus

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NATO ally Turkey has lifted its veto over Finland and Sweden's bid to join the Western alliance after the three nations agreed to protect each other's security, ending a weeks-long drama that tested allied unity against Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The breakthrough came on Tuesday after four hours of talks just before a NATO summit began in Madrid, averting an embarrassing impasse at the gathering of 30 leaders that aimed to show resolve against Russia.

The lifting of the veto means that Helsinki and Stockholm can proceed with their application to join the military alliance, cementing what is set to be the biggest shift in European security in decades, as the two, long neutral Nordic countries seek NATO protection.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg and Turkey's presidency confirmed the accord in separate statements, after talks between the NATO chief, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson, and Finnish President Sauli Niinisto.

Terms of the deal

Stoltenberg said the terms of the deal involved Sweden intensifying work on Turkish extradition requests and amending Swedish and Finnish law to toughen their approach to those seen as threats by Ankara.

Stoltenberg also said Sweden and Finland would lift their restrictions on selling weapons to Turkey.

Turkey has raised serious concerns that Sweden has been harbouring members of the banned Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which took up arms against the Turkish state in 1984. Stockholm has denied the accusation.

The Turkish presidency statement on Tuesday said the four-way agreement meant: "Full cooperation with Turkey in the fight against the PKK and its affiliates". It also said Sweden and Finland were "demonstrating solidarity with Turkey in the fight against terrorism in all its forms and manifestations".

Stoltenberg said NATO's 30 leaders would now invite Finland, which shares a 1,300km (810-mile) border with Russia, and Sweden to join NATO and that they would become official "invitees".

The resolution of the deadlock marked a triumph for intense diplomacy as NATO allies try to seal the Nordic accession in record time as a way of solidifying their response to Russia – particularly in the Baltic Sea, where Finnish and Swedish membership would give the alliance military superiority.

Al Jazeera's Jonah Hull said NATO chief Stoltenberg stated that the alliance had "resolved its differences".

"This allows NATO to put forward a united front in the face of Russian aggression, and that is absolutely core and central to the aims of this summit – not just a united front but an expanded front with two new members," Hull said, speaking from Madrid.

Turkey's concerns

Ankara had objected to Sweden and Finland's bid to join NATO based on what it considers to be the Nordic pair's lax approach towards groups Turkey has deemed national security threats.

Erdogan had accused Finland, and more particularly Sweden, of offering safe haven to Kurdish rebels who have been waging a decades-long armed uprising against the Turkish state.

Ankara could have prevented Finland and Sweden from joining NATO since all members of the military bloc must agree to accept new members.

Other NATO allies, including France and Spain, had indirectly urged Turkey to yield on its block of the two potential new Nordic members.

Speaking at the Group of Seven (G7) summit in Germany, French President Emmanuel Macron had called for a message of "unity and of force" from NATO in Madrid.

On Monday, Erdogan said he wanted to see the results of preparatory talks held in Brussels before deciding whether Sweden and Finland had done enough to lift his objections to their membership of NATO.

"We will see what point they [Finland and Sweden] have reached," he said on Monday before flying to Madrid for the summit.

"We do not want empty words. We want results."

'Interest of the alliance'

In addition to Finland and Sweden's membership bids in the 30-member military alliance, the three-day NATO summit in Madrid will also discuss the Ukraine-Russia war and NATO's new strategic concept.

Erdogan is expected to meet Biden on Wednesday on the sidelines of the gathering focused on responding to the Kremlin's invasion of its pro-Western neighbour.

The two leaders have had a chilly relationship since Biden's election because of US concerns about human rights under Erdogan.

Biden and Erdogan last met briefly in October on the sidelines of a Group of 20 (G20) summit in Rome.

-Al Jazeera

The UK Hongkongers living with handover's legacy



"Looking back, 1997 is a lie," says Thomas Fung, a Hong Kong-born accountant who now lives in Oxford.

That was the year Hong Kong, a former British colony, was handed back to China as a special administrative region (SAR).

The city, both sides agreed, would continue to enjoy a high degree of autonomy until 2047 when it would become a fully integrated part of China.

"China broke most of the promises or agreements they signed," says 31-year-old Mr Fung, who first came to the UK a decade ago as a student.

Beijing's increasing influence, and the implementation of a controversial national security law (NSL) two years ago, has set off uncertainty among Hongkongers over the future of their city and their freedoms.

Thousands have left - and are still leaving. One of their most popular destinations? The UK.

The UK has for decades given those with a British National Overseas (BNO) status - created as a way of allowing Hongkongers to retain a link with the UK - the right to visit the UK for six months without a visa.

But in 2021, after the imposition of the NSL, the UK introduced a new visa system for those with BNO status. This gave those eligible - 5.4 million people, 70% of Hong Kong's population - the right to live, work and study in the UK with a route to citizenship.

Britain had expected some 300,000 people to take up the offer over five years - more than 100,000 visas have already been granted since January 2021.

And as the city is set to mark 25 years since Hong Kong was returned to China, many of these Hongkongers - like the ones who came before them - are still conflicted about the handover.

'Hongkongers didn't have a choice'

Mr Fung was just six years old in 1997 when his family tried to leave Hong Kong. But they decided to stay put despite many of their relatives moving to the US and Canada.

"I was too small to feel the fear myself but I remember that no-one said a positive thing about the handover," he says.

Mr Fung, who believes the city was "well-run" under the British, considers the handover a mistake, and a result of the UK handling the situation poorly.

Former UK PM Margaret Thatcher, who had negotiated the agreement with China's then president Deng Xiaoping in the 1980s, later revealed in her memoirs that he had threatened to "walk in and take the whole lot this afternoon".

It was such "threatening actions" that led to the agreement, Mr Fung says.

"Hongkongers didn't have any choice in deciding our own future like other colonies, we were forced to be handed over to China."

Now, Mr Fung is wary of China's narrative: "They are already trying to rewrite the history about colonisation."

His words come amid reports that new school textbooks in Hong Kong will state the city was never a British colony.

This is the latest in a slew of measures that has sparked fear and suspicion among many Hongkongers, both at home and abroad - it has also stirred nostalgia for a city they feel no longer fully belongs to them.

'Home Kong'

In recent years #HomeKong has become a popular hashtag - a fond nickname for the city that can be found on thousands of social media posts.

*Ko, who wanted his name changed, uses the hashtag frequently. Like the SAR, he turns 25 this year. He moved to the UK with his family last year under the new visa scheme.

"My family took it [the visa] without hesitation, even though none of us had been to the UK before," he said. "We felt so insecure at that time after a year of unrest."

The handover was a big moment for his family.

"My mother felt a bit betrayed and abandoned by the British when she saw the last governor, Chris Patten, leave on his ship."

The image of the city's last governor-general departing on the royal yacht Britannia on a rainy July night is an iconic moment in Hong Kong's history.

"She was not a fan of the colonial era, but the Chinese government didn't give her much hope either."

He says she had been afraid of what life would be like after the handover, after the events of 1989 when Chinese security forces opened fire and used tanks to crush peaceful protests at in the capital Beijing.

The Tiananmen Square Massacre is taboo in China and no references to it are made in the country's history books or on its highly censored internet platforms.

Even the true death toll is unknown, with unofficial estimates putting numbers as high as the hundreds or thousands - far higher than the official count of 200 civilians and several security personnel.

In 2017, previously unreleased UK documents revealed a diplomatic cable from the then British ambassador to China that said that 10,000 people had died.

Then in 2020, Hong Kong introduced the National Security Law (NSL), which Beijing says was needed to bring stability to the city, but critics say is designed to quash dissent.

Ko says the clampdown on free speech and his loss of hope in Hong Kong politics are the main reasons he and his family decided to leave.

He describes London as the "older version of Hong Kong" and that he can sense its historical connection to his home city.

He says he was told in school that he was a Chinese citizen first and then a Hongkonger - and that the British colonial era was "bad".

But, he says many still struggle with the question of nationality: "What should we call ourselves - Hongkongers, British, or Chinese?" An uncertain future

But the handover is not such an existential moment for every Hongkonger in the UK.

Ed*, who moved to the UK in 2015 to study, says it's an important event in the city's history that led to "positive and negative changes".

He was hesitant to elaborate but he mentioned the city's recent political instability, which he fears could lead to regional competitors eclipsing its status as a financial powerhouse.

But either way, he insists: "Hong Kong will remain my home."

Jamie Wong, a 33-year-old graphic designer who moved to London in January, a year after her brother and his family, is less optimistic: "I feel hopeless, immigration seems to be the only choice now for the younger generation."

In fact, she sees the UK as her future home: "If there are Hongkongers in the UK, and the community becomes bigger and bigger, of course we will consider the UK as the new Home Kong."

Years have always mattered in Hong Kong - and 1997 and 2047 are the two dates that loom large in the consciousness of every Hongkonger. But now, no one is certain what will happen in 2047.

Many young Hongkongers talk of the future with the same trepidation their parents felt in the years leading up to the handover.

"One country, two systems is dead," said Ms Wong who believes the handover is responsible for Hong Kong's recent troubles, setting the local population on an inevitable collision course with the pro-Beijing local government.

"2047 is meaningless now."

-BBC





2023 Mazda CX-50 Yearlong Test Arrival: The Subaru-iest Mazda Enters Our Garage

■ Zach Gale

The CX-50 drives a Mazda-sized hole in the theory that weekend-adventure crossover SUVs must look like the chunky Subaru Outback. With the sleek 2023 Mazda CX-50, you can almost hear the automaker whispering, "To each, their own." The CX-50 represents a more subtle approach to a segment led by the well-rounded Outback—a Subaru I drove for a year. Mazda's first challenge is educating consumers on the difference between the CX-5, a long-time MotorTrend favorite, and the new CX-50. As we discovered on our First Drive, there's so much more to the CX-50 than just a "0" on the end of a CX-5 badge. What will a year behind the wheel reveal?

Meeting Our CX-50 2.5 Turbo Premium Plus

Let's break that down. Every CX-50 includes standard AWD. Most CX-50s will get a 187-hp 2.5-liter inline-four engine, the same powerplant we've seen in everything from the Mazda 3 to the CX-30, and CX-5. Like all of those Mazdas, the CX-50 offers an upgrade to a turbocharged 2.5-liter inline-four powerplant good for 227 hp and 310 lb-ft on 87-octane or 256 hp and 320 lb-ft on 93. That's the engine we picked.

Within the CX-50's 2.5 Turbo trims, we went all-out with the Premium Plus model so we could test as many of the CX-50's features as possible, from its new panoramic moonroof to a 360-degree camera system. Going turbo is also the only way to get an interior color other than black. With the available Terracotta medium-brown leather seats and stitching accents, the CX-50 feels more premium and interesting than your average compact or midsize SUV.

Like almost every CX-50, our top-of-the-line trim includes a 10.3-inch infotainment screen that can function as a touchscreen when you're stopped. Otherwise, a rotating knob controls things regardless of whether you're in the standard wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto functionality, or in the native Mazda operating system. Blind-spot monitoring, automatic emergency front braking, and adaptive cruise control are also standard on every CX-50. Our CX-50 rolls on 20-inch wheels with polished and shiny black finishes; most CX-50s have black 17-inch wheels with more off-road-friendly tires. Like other compact and midsize SUVs, you'll have to upgrade a couple trims to get a power liftgate. Otherwise, the CX-50 offers a generous standard equipment package at the base and loaded trim levels.

So It's Not a CX-5?

In person, the CX-50's positioning against the CX-5 becomes clear. The longer, lower, and wider CX-50 wears dark cladding over the wheel wells and grille detailing that's unique to this SUV. The CX-50 won't strike as many buyers as classically beautiful like the CX-5. But that's the point; the CX-50, which is actually based on the smaller CX-30, expresses a more outdoors-ready appeal.

What makes the CX-50 so interesting is how it attempts to mix the best of Mazda's current ambitions with a target buyer that's new to the brand. Over the course of a year, we'll see how well the CX-50 can deliver the core Mazda trait of entertaining dynamics while matching the appeal of the Outback, a long-time leader for projecting an outdoorsy appeal. . We can't wait.

-Motor Trend









Maori All Blacks 32-17 Ireland: Visitors well beaten in tour opener

■ Michael Morrow

Ireland's tour of New Zealand got off to a losing start as they were well beaten by a sharper, smarter Maori All Blacks in Hamilton.

The hosts dazzled in a one-sided first half in which they scored four tries to Ireland's one to open up a 22-point advantage.

Gavin Coombes crossed after the break as Ireland improved but it was too late to seriously threaten the Maori lead.

The visitors also lost James Hume and Cian Healy to second-half injuries.

When the three-Test series against New Zealand begins in Auckland on Saturday it is expected that head coach Andy Farrell will field a completely different starting XV, with his senior players mostly rested on Wednesday.

Still the midweek defeat will go down as a major opportunity missed for a team filled with players that had caught the eye for their provinces during the season and were hoping to translate that form onto the international stage.

Their assignment was admittedly a difficult one against a Maori side who served an emphatic reminder of the enduring depth of rugby talent in New Zealand.

Ireland's mainly inexperienced yet hugely exciting playing group were hoping to put their hand up on the international stage, but all of the fearless, eye-catching displays were delivered by those in black jerseys as the Maori played with an adventure and freedom that left Ireland reeling in a chastening first half which effectively ended their hopes of a win.

Blues full-back Zarn Sullivan was electric on a cold and wet night in Hamilton and a constant thorn in Ireland's side in the air, in open space and with his left boot, which he used to launch a perfect 50:22 kick to give his side a six-metre line-out after 15 minutes.

From the set-piece the Maori moved the ball quickly and Sullivan was found again where his right-footed step created enough space for the game's opening try.

There was brief reprieve for Ireland through skipper Bundee Aki on his return to Hamilton - where he won the 2013 Super Rugby title with the Chiefs - as a slick strike play saw Coombes send the centre through a gap and over the line.

That was as good as it got for the visitors however as from that moment on the Maori took over, with Shaun Stevenson finishing Josh Ioane's scintillating break to put them back in control.

Constant Irish indiscipline at the breakdown did nothing to stem the tide as the hosts set up field position at will, with their lightning-quick ruck speed giving Ireland no time to set.

Co-captain Brad Weber sniped over on 35 minutes to extend the lead before Cullen Grace finished the try of the match with the last act of the half, touching down after Stevenson had slalomed through the middle of a broken field.

One can assume that the words exchanged in the Irish dressing room at half-time between coaches and players were neither kind nor flattering.

Whatever was said sparked a response as Ireland returned to the field with far more poise, driving themselves into Maori territory and working through the phases to find quick ball of their own.

An early second-half score could well have sparked hopes of a revival but they were repelled by a terrific Maori tryline defence that held Cian Prendergast and Nick Timoney up over the line in quick succession to preserve their lead.

Centre Hume, so impressive for Ulster in the 2021-22 season, had to be assisted as he hobbled off midway through the half before Test centurion Healy was carted off with what appeared to be a leg injury.

Ireland can at least take heart from a second half in which they kept the Maori scoreless and eventually broke their defensive resistance with Coombes driving over from close range to reduce the arrears, although with just 13 minutes left there was no feeling that the try would be the catalyst for late drama.

-BBC



Nelson Piquet apologises for 'ill-thought-out' racially abusive language about British driver

■ Andrew Benson



Nelson Piquet says his racially abusive remark about Lewis Hamilton was "ill thought out".

Piquet used a racially offensive term in referring to Hamilton on a Brazilian podcast that came to light this week.

The 69-year-old said he "strongly condemned any suggestion the word was used by me with the aim of belittling a driver because of his skin colour".

"I apologise wholeheartedly to anyone that was affected, including Lewis," three-time world champion Piquet said.

Hamilton responded on Tuesday by saying that "archaic mindsets need to change", adding: "It's more than language.

"I've been surrounded by these attitudes and targeted my whole life. There has been plenty of time to learn. Time has come for action."

Piquet said he "made no defence" of the remarks, but added that the term he used "is one that has widely and historically been used colloquially in Brazilian Portuguese as a synonym for 'guy' or 'person' and was never intended to offend".

"I would never use the word I have been accused of in some translations."

He added: "The translation in some media that is now circulating on social media is not correct. Discrimination has no place in F1 or society and I am happy to clarify my thoughts in that respect."

Sources in F1 have said that Piquet, who won the 1981, 1983 and 1987 world titles, will not be allowed back into an F1 paddock following his comments.

He has long been a controversial character renowned for making provocative and insulting remarks about rivals.

Last year, he courted further controversy when he chauffeured Brazil's far-right President Jair Bolsonaro on the country's Independence Day.

And on Tuesday Brazilian novelist and lyricist Paulo Coelho condemned Piquet on social media.

"Dear Lewis Hamilton," Coelho wrote. "Piquet is currently the driver of the worst president in our history. His racist remarks shows the desperate need to return to the spotlight.

"I apologise in the name of the Brazilian people, who respect and love you."

The sport has rallied for Hamilton since Piquet's remarks, which were condemned by F1, governing body the FIA and Hamilton's Mercedes team, while rivals Ferrari and McLaren also offered their support.

Red Bull, whose driver Max Verstappen is the partner of Piquet's daughter Kelly Piquet, have not commented.

On Tuesday a number of drivers also came to Hamilton's support.

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc wrote: "Knowing Lewis since I arrived in F1, he has always been extremely respectful to me and everyone that he meets.

"Those values should be the standard towards anybody around the world.

"The comments made towards Lewis should not be tolerated. We should continue to push for a more diverse and inclusive sport.

"We need to remove discriminatory behaviour and racist language in any form, from not just our sport, but our society as well."

Hamilton's team-mate George Russell, a director of the Grand Prix Drivers' Association, said: "Huge respect to LH. He has done more for the sport than any driver in history, not just on track but off it.

"The fact that he and so many others are still having to deal with this behaviour is unacceptable. We all need to stand together against discrimination of any kind."

-BBC

What should England fans look out for in three-Test series?



■ **Chris Jones**

When England last toured Australia in 2016, head coach Eddie Jones had just steered his side to a first Grand Slam in 13 years, re-energising a group of players who had crashed out of the Rugby World Cup at the pool stages a few months earlier.

Promising an uncompromising 'Bodyline' approach, England recovered from a first-quarter Wallaby barrage in Brisbane to win the series 3-0 and make history.

On the pitch, Jones was decisive. Off it, he was full of mischief, running rings around opposite number Michael Cheika.

With his players, the media and the English rugby public, Jones was walking on water. Six years on, the landscape looks very different.

There have been highs since 2016 - most notably the run to the 2019 World Cup final - but twice in recent seasons Jones' position has been questioned after poor Six Nations campaigns.

Since the 2019 Rugby World Cup, England have played nine away matches, losing five.

So what can England supporters expect from their three-Test tour? What kind of Australia lie in wait? Are the Wallabies on the up, or will Jones improve on his perfect 8-0 win record against his homeland?

Jones v Rennie

Jones' sparring with former Randwick team-mate Cheika was an entertaining sub-plot of the 2016 tour. Jones took every opportunity to foster a siege mentality, take the pressure off his players, and get under the skin of the gregarious Cheika.

Jones' antics on that tour are the stuff of legend: walking out of a referee's meeting after one minute, railing against the Australia media for their coverage, and inviting NRL great Andrew Johns to England training among his many tricks.

"I think what Eddie in 2016 was a masterstroke," former Australia wing Drew Mitchell told the Rugby Union Weekly podcast.

"From where England were post-2015, what he did was deflect all the attention from the players and where they were at, and put it on him versus Michael Cheika."

Fittingly it was Jones and England who ushered in the end of Cheika's reign with a 40-16 hammering of the Wallabies in the 2019 World Cup quarter-final in Oita.

Cheika's replacement - the less volatile Kiwi Dave Rennie - is unlikely to engage as willingly with the mind games.

Captaincy conundrum

Owen Farrell has been Jones' go-to man as captain since replacing Dylan Hartley in 2018, and did a brilliant job at the World Cup a year later.

However, the Saracens man has struggled to make his customary mark on the Test arena of late, not helped by injuries which curtailed his 2021 autumn campaign and ruled him out of the Six Nations the following spring.

When fit, Farrell has been Jones' choice, and was backed to retain the captaincy as recently as January.

Now the noises are that Farrell is set for a return to the ranks, with Courtney Lawes likely to retain the armband he took at the back end of the Six Nations.

Former England wing Ugo Monye says that could get more out of Farrell - as as well as fly-half Marcus Smith.

"I want the very best of Owen Farrell, because when we get the very best of Owen Farrell he is one of the best in the world," Monye told Rugby Union Weekly.

"If we do get a fully firing Owen Farrell with Marcus Smith, who is on fire at the moment, I am so confident about what this side can achieve not just this summer but over the next year and a half."

But who will lead England at the World Cup in France next year, when Lawes will be 34? Will one of Ellis Genge, Tom Curry or Maro Itoje emerge as a long-term skipper?

Back to the future at 10

While Smith is set to start at fly-half for England, with Farrell alongside him at inside centre, Rennie's options at 10 boil down to two familiar figures.

Quade Cooper, 34, and James O'Connor, 31, made their debuts in 2008, when England full-back Freddie Steward was seven.

Both have had chequered careers and have done superbly to force their way back into international contention. Mitchell expects O'Connor to start, and says he is a vastly different player to the one who struggled against the British and Irish Lions in 2013.

"Even though James played 10 against the British and Irish Lions in 2013, I don't think he was a 10," Mitchell added.

"I think that was probably indicative of where he was at off the field as a player and a person - he was looking for himself first then trying to serve others, and as a 10 it's got to be the other way around.

"It's been remarkable seeing James and the journey he has been on. He speaks about it a lot and quite openly. The change he has had off the field we have seen transfer onto the field, which is why I believe now he is a bona-fide 10.

"But there needs to be that next generation of 10s coming through. They are there, but I just don't know if they are necessarily ready to be thrown in against England just yet.

"I think we could probably get away with Quade and James for next year's World Cup, but certainly by 2027 we need that younger generation to really step up."

Whoever starts at fly-half, the return of the outstanding centre Samu Kerevi from Japan is a major boost to the Wallabies.

Australian rugby - doom or hope?

Always accustomed to scrapping for its place in the crowded Australian sporting landscape, rugby union has endured a torrid time down under in recent years, both on and off the pitch.

After a turbulent period, there are signs of hope, with Australia set to host the British and Irish Lions in 2025 followed by two Rugby World Cups; precious lifelines that could revive the flagging rugby nation.

According to Mitchell, Rennie has gone some way to reconnecting the Wallabies with the public.

"We are in a pretty tough market with rugby league, AFL and cricket, and there has been some disenfranchised supporters for a little while now," he added.

"I think Dave Rennie has done a really good job in connecting the playing group with the grassroots. He is a really calm and settled kind of character, he has the buy-in from the players and there is a real sense of togetherness and belief in the squad.

"But while we have plenty of support around the Wallabies at the moment, that can change with a series loss."

Development or delivery?

"Judge me on the World Cup" was a familiar refrain from Clive Woodward when he was coaching England in the 1990s - suggesting a long-standing focus with the showpiece every four years.

But it seems more than ever that coaches - especially those struggling for results - are talking about "building" and "developing" for France 2023, despite the fact a World Cup is riddled with variables and can only be won by one team.

The World Cup was certainly the furthest thing from French supporters' minds as they danced the night away in St Denis following the Grand Slam triumph.

After the meek 2022 Six Nations, the Rugby Football Union spoke in glowing terms about the team's "solid progress" in a statement much derided by fans and pundits alike.

With this in mind, it is time for England to deliver consistent results. A series win in Australia would go a long way to convincing a sceptical English rugby public that 'Project 2023' remains firmly on track.

-BBC

