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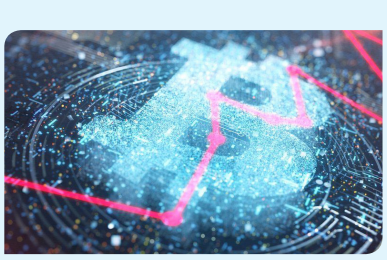
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Covid Scuttles NYC Meeting After Request for Forced Vaccination

■ **Kelvin Chiringa**

The 7th Representative Council (RC) meeting of the National Youth Council (NYC), which was supposed to have convened from 15 to 16 December 2021, has been postponed, following positive results for COVID-19 among delegates.

This comes after the NYC circulated a memo informing that everyone that was attending was supposed to have been vaccinated first.

The request has been met with resistance by some within the NYC who have accused NYC executive chairperson, Sharonice Busch, of enforcing an illegal order.

"NYC was looking forward to a congregation of some 80 youth leaders from – as provided for by the National Youth Council Act – Namibia's Regional Youth Forums and NYC's National Affiliates and Board Council. These delegates were to congregate in Swakopmund, Erongo Region," said Busch.

She said that prior to boarding the

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Covid-19's Forgotten Children



Stuck in Stadiums for Two Years and Counting

■ **Justicia Shipena**

The homeless people staying in Katutura Youth Complex and Khomasdal Stadium in Windhoek say the government has forgotten them.

When the Covid-19 hit Namibia in 2019, there was a need to decongest some informal areas in the City of Windhoek due to the high risk of infections.

They have since been staying in the stadiums - forgotten and left to hustle for themselves.

They told The Villager that a few of them living in the decongestion camps do not have a family.

One of them said he lost his twin children at Khomasdal stadium due to the current living conditions they found themselves in.

"Food is the only thing they bring for us sometimes; at least they should give a

Continued on P2

Gustavo Walks for Now But on a Tight Leash

We'll study the reasons for bail, says Martha Imalwa

■ **Andrew Kathindi**

Prosecutor General Martha Imalwa says that she will have to study the reasons behind Judge Herman Oosthuizen's decision to grant fishrot accused Ricardo Gustavo bail before making her next move.

She said that she could not comment on whether she intends to appeal the decision until she has had a chance to look at the reasons in detail.

Gustavo was granted bail of N$800 000 in the High Court on Wednesday morning after being incarcerated for nearly two years.

"The reasons for the granting of bail are not available at the moment. As you have heard, the matter has been postponed to 21 December for the reasons to be made available. What came out was the court order, and the state is not in a position to indicate whether the decision was right or wrong," she told the Villager.

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Remain Sexy, Don't Grow a Tummy When Elected - Shaningwa

■ **Annakleta Haikera at Rundu**

Swapo Party secretary-general Sophia Shaningwa said councillors should remain sexy and not grow a tummy, and they should work hard when a task is given.

Shaningwa made these remarks on Tuesday while campaigning for the ruling party ahead of the Ncamagoro Constituency by-elections set for Friday.

"Councillors should not change after being elected. They should remain sexy and not grow a tummy, and they should work hard when a task is given. When you get elected, you should not sit in the office but go out in the community and give your people the service they want," said Shaningwa.

The Swapo SG further said she noticed that many elderly people in the Ncamagoro Constituency do not have identity cards during her visitation in the area.

"It is important for all citizens of the country, through the right procedures and with the assistance of the councillor, traditional authorities and officials, to make sure that the elderly people get IDs."

She also stated, "In the Mamono area, there are no functioning boreholes, and water is fetched in containers. The boreholes became inoperable and could not provide water. For this, I have conveyed to Windhoek that Mamono's boreholes should be rectified with immediate effect.

"Money that the government is providing should not be wasted. The Swapo manifesto is very clear, is to calculate documents done between the community and party."

She called on the voters to turn their numbers and cast their votes early on Friday.

A vacancy occurred in the constituency after the sitting councillor, Johannes Kahonzo Sikondo, passed on.

Swapo's candidate is Rengi Thomas Kavau, while Chimbango Domingo Frans is for PDM.

There are two independent candidates Nyundu Moses and Shindimba Ladislaus Poroto and Tjiwawa Andreas Kambinda of IPC.



Counting

piece of land, so we put our shacks on and then we know we have a responsibility to look after," he said, adding that he has been living the stadium for nearly two years.

Some said they don't feel secure and safe because infrastructure is falling apart.

"The tents are no more closing, and they are broken. Tents are for camping, but we are using them as houses."

Recently, Windhoek received rain showers, and the residents say they face many challenges as the tents get flooded.

"Once the rain has stopped, we have to hang our mattress in the sun so that it can get dry."

Their main concern is the uncertainty of where to go should they be removed from the facility.

"Here, there is also a lot of violence and drug users. These are people who come from outside and cause a commotion. We do not feel safe here."

"When this type of stuff happens, no one helps us, not even the security officer, because they are also afraid of these people."

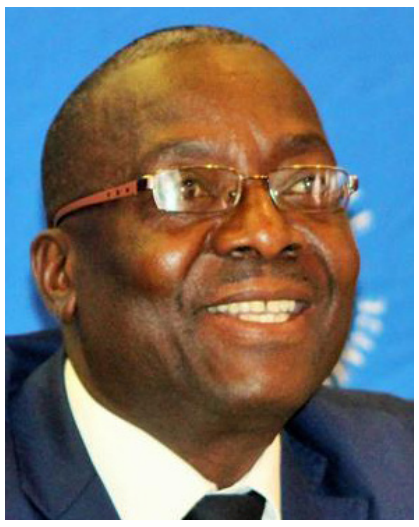
They say the threat of contracting COVID-19 lies within the facility in terms of health.

"People here are don't comply with the rules. We do not wear a mask. We do not have hand sanitisers anymore, and social distancing is rarely applied."

At the beginning of the pandemic, they say there were a lot of volunteers and members of the health ministry. However, that has come to an end.

"But now we are only left with four volunteers who help us from their own pockets and two security officers."

"They told me to come to Khomasdal



stadium since I can't be on the streets and most of the things are catered for, but these services have stopped," said another.

City of Windhoek spokesperson Harold Akwenye told The Villager that it was not in the town's ownership to take care of them.

"We gave our facilities to the health ministry for people to be placed there," he said.

When asked about the facility's management, health executive director Ben Nangombe said that it was handed over to the rural and urban ministry.

"The facility management is now entrusted to the ministry of urban and rural development," said Nangombe.

Urban and rural development minister Erastus Uutoni was not reachable after several attempts. He sent a message stating that he was in a meeting and again at State House.

Meanwhile, in Walvis Bay in the Erongo region, those placed in a clubhouse in a Rugby stadium in the town said they had been taken well care of; however, the conditions in which they are living continues to be a challenge.

"The mayor helps us with water, electricity and when they food parcels they bring for us."

The group claims that the governor of the Erongo region has left them hanging.

"But now he does not come here anymore, back then when he came here; he took photos and videos. He is not coming to hear our situation."

According to them, the Clubhouse is occupied by 24 adults with many children. The Clubhouse setup looks like a dining hall with beds and mattresses.

"We all sleep in one hall, and we have a lady and a gentlemen toilet."

Additionally, they questioned when they would get land.

The Villager reached out to the Erongo governor Neville Itope to find out about the matter and said it is a municipality issue.

"They are under the care of the municipality because I would not know what exactly is the status of those people," he said.

Walvis Bay mayor Trevino Forbes told The Villager that the municipality is still working on a plan to relocate them.

"The council has not even decided. We are still looking at ways to assist them," said Forbes.

He added that he is in contact with them frequently.

"We discussed their future. We always go there and give them food. The initial plan I had for them did not work out, so I'm looking at an alert native plan so they can bear with us while looking at ways to assist them."

Imalwa

She further said that in terms of the law, the state has the power to take necessary action should it not be satisfied with the outcome of a court's decision.

"We cannot express what the state should do currently, given the fact that we are not in possession of the reasons to see how the court reasoned by granting bail to the accused person. When we get the reasons and study them, we'll be able to express our position," the PG said.

"If you followed the proceedings when the prosecutors gave their testimony, we have indicated our grounds for objecting for him to be granted bail. If bail is granted, it was granted by the court. The court is not the prosecution."

"The court exercised its discretion."

The Anti-corruption commission agreed with the PG's sentiments, with deputy director-general Erna van der Merwe stating that they too would only know their next move regarding Gustavo once they peruse the reasons behind the judge Oosthuizen's order.

Quizzed on whether this was an indication towards an appeal against the high court's decision, van der Merwe said, "if there are reasons. It is going to be problematic if the reasons are not given in the judgement, in my view. We cannot request the reasons, which mean there will be a delay. Should the state wish to appeal, the PG's office would be better to approach for her stance."

Judge Oosthuizen stated that the complete judgement will be released on 21 December 2021 at 15h00 in the afternoon as it is still being typed and edited.

The judge handed Gustavo some stringent conditions granting his bail.

He will have to report twice daily at the Kappsfarm police station between 07h00 – 08h00 and 12h00 – 13h00 and sign any attendance register provided by and with the officer on duty before leaving the station.

"The accused shall report every Monday, Wednesday and Friday between the hours 08h00 and 11h00 with one of the investigating officers at the head office of the ACC," he further ordered.

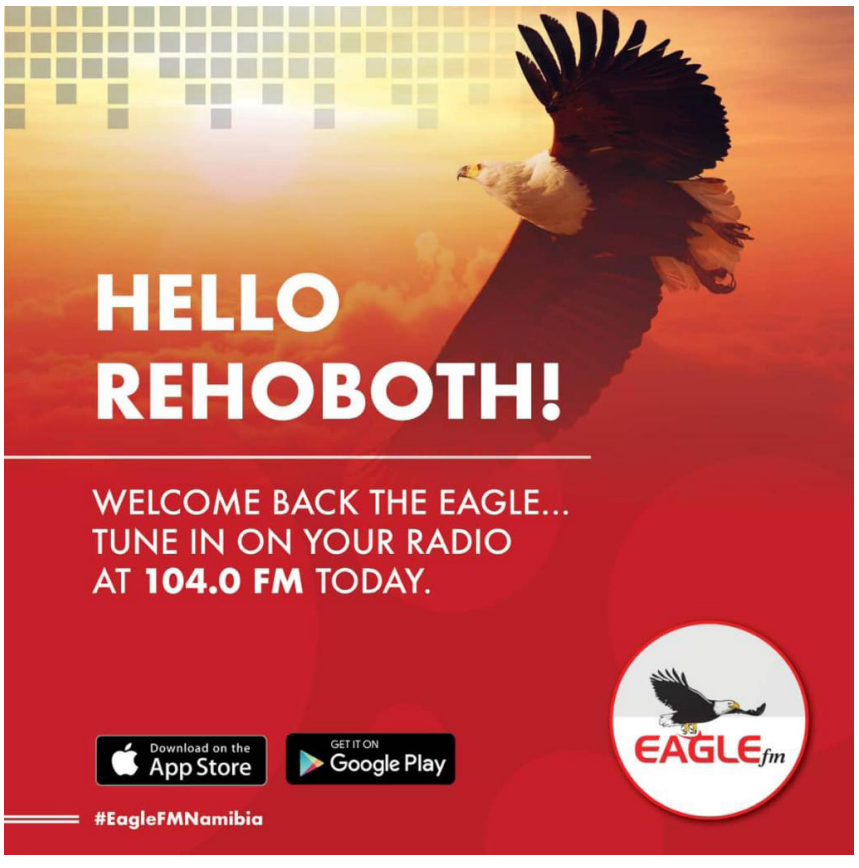
Gustavo, who resides in the upmarket Finkenstein Estate, 12 km east of Windhoek, will not be permitted to leave it between 14h00 and 07h00 the next day and will be on house arrest in the evenings.

He will also not be permitted any travel documents or travel 22km beyond the city of Windhoek head office or 25km near the Hosea Kutako international airport or 1km near the Eros Airport in Windhoek.

Gustavo is accused of having used fisheries agreements between Namibia and Angola to get access to fishing quotas to benefit him and the other fishrot accused, which include former fisheries minister Bernard Esau, former justice minister Sacky Shanghala and his former colleague at Investec James Hatuikulipi.

Esau is alleged to have allocated 50 000 metric tonnes of horse mackerel quotas to Namgomar Pesca Namibia, of which Gustavo was the director, from 2014 to 2019.

Namgomar Pesca Namibia then sold those quotas to Samherji. During the bail hearing and cross-examination, the state alleges that payments were dished out amongst the fishrot accused.



Vaccination

bus which transported the delegates to Swakopmund from Windhoek, the following regions Khomas, Hardap, Omahake, Karas all delegates were required to undergo a COVID-19 PCR test and present negative results thereof.

She said the rest of the delegates from the other regions who did not test were required to test upon arrival.

"This was done to ensure that all delegates are protected from COVID-19, particularly during the RC meeting. Nonetheless, after the arrival, quite a number of the delegates tests from the other regions returned as positive.

"As a consequence, all delegates who may have – directly or indirectly – came into contact with the delegates whose results recently returned will be quarantined as per the Ministry of Health and Social Services guidelines," she said.

Busch is now encouraging young people across the country to minimise transmission by following the national health guidelines.

However, Eagle FM has gleaned into a document in which some within NYC have slammed Busch for making an illegal request for forced vaccinations of delegates.

"The testing of delegates that was done was not constitutional in any way. The testing company that was used to test in Swakopmund is unknown to the delegates. The testers did not have any form of identification on their person

"The test results that were conducted have not been communicated with the tested individuals but somehow ended up in the hands of the board. This greatly contravenes the right to privacy of the tested individual as per Chapter 3 article 13 of the Namibian Constitution.

"The Board Members are not health practitioners nor are they trained in receiving health information on behalf of any individual. This leads to untrusted and unreliable figures as those figures did not come from a trusted institution but a board that has no right to health information of individuals," said some aggrieved delegates.

They further demanded that the Representative Council Meeting convene on the 16th December 2021.

"There was a communication sent on the 14th December 2021, from your good office on the WhatsApp group of Delegates. This communication stated that should there be delegates found to be positive to the COVID-19 virus, the meeting will continue with the said delegates joining virtually to the meeting," they said.

They said the power to then postpone the meeting can be made by the rightful members of the Representative Council as per the National Youth Council Act No. 3 of 2009.

"They further said, "On point number 3 of your communique, you stated that Khomas, Omaheke, Hardap and !Kharas delegates were tested using the COVID-19 PCR test. This is a battened misrepresentation of the truth. Only a handful of those delegates were tested and using the COVID-19 Rapid test.

"Based on all the above-mentioned, we do not believe that the figures that were mentioned in your communique are true. We take them to be BASELESS, FABRICATED AND MISLEADING to the delegates," they said.

Crowdfunding attracting scammers

■ Nghiinomenwa Erastus

The country's financial watchdog has found a growing tendency of various crowdfunding methods being abused to defraud innocent members of the public.

The country Financial Intelligence Center (FIC) stated in one of its reports released at the beginning of last month, warning economic agents to "verify the truth of the claimed need and put emotions aside when it comes to charity campaigns".

Crowdfunding is a new way of financing which has emerged in recent years.

The FIC explained that it is not a scam, "there is nothing wrong with starting a crowdfunding campaign or donating to one. However, plenty of scams are associated with it".

The report highlights that scammers can set up crowdfunding accounts to post bogus pictures and details of people with severe illnesses or people involved in fatal accidents to prey on kind-hearted donors.

Crowdfunding is a funding method that refers to raising capital through the collective effort of members of the public, community members or individual investors for a project that may have social, welfare or even profit-driven objectives.

This approach taps into the collective efforts of a large pool of individuals' funds.

By tapping into a wider pool of investors' funds, one can generate resources or capital needed for specific causes.

However, the FIC found a growing tendency of such methods being abused to defraud innocent members of the public.

Adding not only do these scams result in huge financial losses for investors or donors, but they also divert much-needed support away from legitimate charities and causes as legitimate donors become sceptical.

The financial watchdog stated in the report that trends show that scams are primarily conducted online via social media or crowdfunding platforms through different methods.

The FIC, in its duty to enhance public awareness around potentially fraudulent schemes, presented the communication to the public.

To attract public members as potential investors, the scammers often use various advertisement platforms such as social media, newspapers, radios, home meetings, seminars, and online crowdfunding platforms like Kickstarter, Indiegogo GoFundMe.

"To enhance credibility, they usually produce illicit referrals, testimonials and information to lure their victims," the communication read.

The scammers ask for a certain amount of money from numerous potential investors or those wanting to donate to worthy social or welfare causes.

With most business-driven crowdfunding activities, the scammers promise rewards to investors, which can be products, services or shares in an entity.

However, when the scammers receive the investors' money, they do not produce any product, support any project, or offer any reward in return- they take the proceeds for themselves.

The FIC advises that it is advisable to support campaigns where one knows the people involved.

This will help in assessing whether the beneficiary's need is legitimate and that the organiser is trustworthy to use the funds for what they are intended for

Moreover, donate to a recognised charity organisation with a proven track record of working with a particular cause.

Economic agents who are willing to fund noble causes or invest through crowdfunding are encouraged to do some research on the campaign before offering support to examine the legality of the organisation.

They must also verify that such organisation or cause is registered, recognised and authorised by relevant authorities.

Locally, for example, welfare organisations need to be registered with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare.

Moreover, one has to ensure that the project they are supporting is realistic, it makes sense, and there is a chance of the project succeeding. Donation-Based crowdfunding is one form of crowdfunding: this is a campaign in which there is no financial return to the investors or contributors.

Such could be for disaster relief, charities, non-profit organisations, medical bills etc.

Reward-Based crowdfunding: refers to individuals contributing to a business in exchange for a reward, typically a form of the product or service offered by the company.

While Equity-Based Crowdfunding: allows a contributor to become part-owners of a company by trading capital for equity shares.

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Passenger Transport Sector Welcomes Covid-19 Regulations

■ Ludorf Iyambo

The passenger transport sector has welcomed the latest COVID-19 measures announced by President Hage Geingob on Tuesday afternoon.

Namibia Bus and Taxi Association (NABTA) president Pendapala Nakathingo was particularly grateful that the president did not enforce a full lockdown and curfew during the festive season as speculated due to the rising number of COVID-19 cases.

Nakathingo stated that transport businesses would be able to operate compared to the previous year's festive season when the country was under lockdown and curfew, which, he says, affected transport business severely.

"Last year was a very difficult time for us because public transport was limited to carry a specific number of people per bus or taxi", he stated. He said they're pleased that the government is not limiting the capacity of the vehicles, particularly buses that go a long distance.

Nakathingo further said that the industry was grateful to the health ministry for donating one million masks that will be made available to public transports through the works and transport ministry.

He stressed that the public transport owners and operators should put the lives of their passengers before profit by complying with all the relevant road regulations about the roadworthiness of vehicles and speeding.

The NABTA president urged the transport owners and operators to adhere to the country's road safety laws and regulations at all times to help reduce the carnage on the national roads this festive season.

"We are appealing to our drivers, make sure that their vehicles are up to standard, and they're fit to carry the passengers."

He urged public transport business owners and operators to refrain from focusing too much on maximising profits instead of concentrating on getting passengers to their destinations safely over the holidays.

Nakathingo also said all transport users should adhere to the rules and regulations set up regulating public transport.

"Passengers must not order the driver to drive fast. They should not demand that they want to go in a vehicle that is already full. They are the ones who have to put the public transport drivers in order and in a good spirit to gain their conscious when they are driving them through such long-distance," he stressed.

Meanwhile, transport minister John Mutorwa said investigations are still ongoing to identify those who burned in the two accidents between Okahandja and Otjiwarongo and Okahandja and Five Rand Suburb, respectively, claimed 19 lives appropriate details would be released as they become available.

"Available information has it that five vehicles were involved in the horrific crashes that could have been avoided. As more businesses close for the festive season, more people are expected to travel to various destinations across the country. More traffic on the road does not and must not necessarily mean more collisions and accidents if all applicable rules of the roads are observed," said Mutorwa.

"We should be mindful of the fact that all our roads are designed at a sight distance of 120 meters, meaning: when driving at the permissible speed limit of 120km per hour, you should be able to stop your vehicle safely and in time, should something suddenly be in your way."

Parents Clash with PPS Admin over N$500 Voluntary Payments

■ Kelvin Chiringa

The question of how free is Namibia's free education regime got its answers this week at the People's Primary School.

Parents were pushed into the corner to either fork out money as voluntary parent contributions or risk not getting their children's reports.

Several parents on Wednesday failed to collect the reports of their Grade 7 children because of failure to pay N$500.

The parents have lamented that Covid-19 has left them financially challenged and accused the school administration of forcing them to pay a sum that is meant to be voluntary.

The parents were served with letters to make good of their payments either once-off or in instalments.

“I am unemployed because of Covid-19. So I do not know what to do now. They are just telling me that they can show me the report, whether the child passed or not. And what they can do is… for us to pay. That's all they want. This report is closing all the doors for my child to move forward," narrated a mother who identified herself only as Bertha.

Others who spoke on anonymity expressed that the dream of free education is being questioned as the school pressures parents to pay.

The school heads of departments (HOD) and the acting principal have expressed that the parents only pay $N500 for one year needed for printing reports and school refurbishment.

HOD Uavangua Mbuzuva said, "Education is free in the government's mind but not accessible because the contribution we got when this country got independent is not what we are getting right now from the government's side.

"There is no free life at all! We have 1 500 learners, and for that, you get N$150 000. What is that? Or less than that for six months. And you have to run a school on that? So, please, parents, this is our school."

The administrators also told Eagle FM that schools in town were not having issues because parents pay with little to no questions, as much as N$1 000.

Martha Eliphas, an HOD, said that some of the teachers and parents in the school's structures are behind the complaints against APP's request for parents to pay their dues or risk not getting their children's reports.

Why then is the administration forcing for a voluntary payment?

"My dearest, that means you are willing to pay. You can afford to pay. But what if all the parents all of a sudden claim that they are unable to pay? How are we going to run the administration of the school?

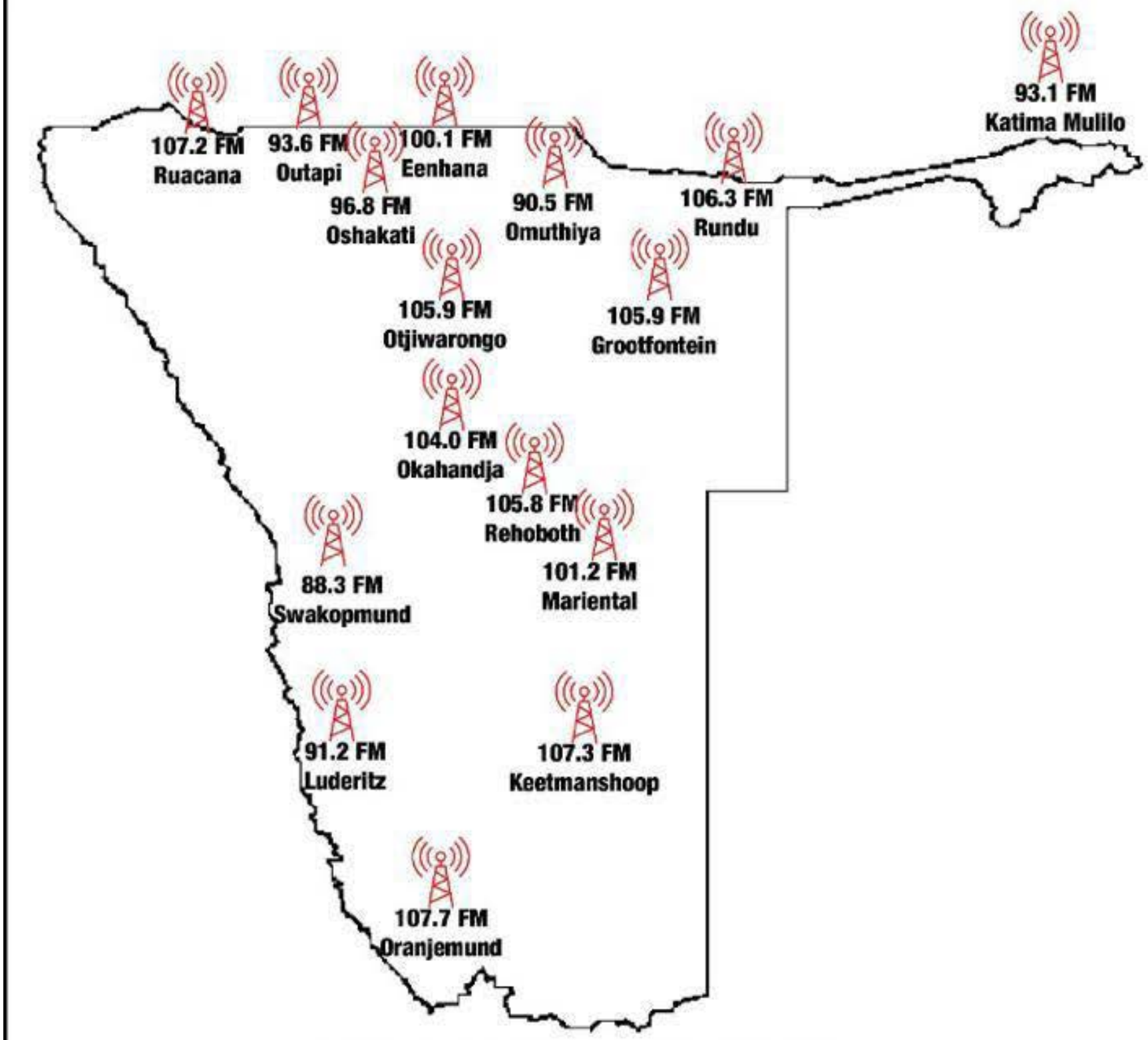
"For instance, if none of the parents paid, how do they expect to be issued with these report cards they need now? Yesterday we were running up and down busy making some copies, printing these report cards," she said.

COVID-19 STATISTICS LATEST

Cumulative confirmed cases	132 271
Newly confirmed	1 041
Recoveries	125 889
Recovery rate	95.2%
Active cases	2 793
Cumulative COVID-19 vaccine 1st doses	387 102
Cumulative COVID-19 vaccine 2nd doses	232 483
Cumulative COVID-19 vaccine completed	325 896
COVID-19 Deaths	3 277
COVID-19 Related Deaths	300
Total Deaths	3 577
Total samples tested	814 176
Active contacts	920
Cumulative number of people quarantined	83 185
Number of quarantined people discharged	82 926
Number of people in quarantines	259

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Big Lips

How Do We Build a Country With Backward Mindsets?

There is one thing that confuses and exasperates me - the youth! They are everywhere on social media, yet they are blind to opportunities. They can complain and rant at Ricardo Gustavo getting bail, but they cannot lift their bums to do a decent job.

They made a lot of noise when the president said the youth must create jobs. They called him names but never provided any meaningful solution to the problem.

Some of them laughed at the government for having no plan to use the Neckartal Dam water. They also spoke carelessly about AgriBusDev.

What exasperates me is that when the government opens up gaps for the youth to come in and contribute meaningfully to the country's development, none of them opens their mouth.

Empowerment is not fed to the people, but those who seek to be empowered should take the initiative. It has become tiring to hear some youth claim their ideas are stolen. How can someone steal an idea that does not exist?

It has also become tiring to hear people talking about lack of money even before they know what they want to do with the money. If you ask the youth today about business or any venture, they will tell you that they do not have money.

Of course, money is needed to kickstart businesses. But should one not have a business idea first and then work out the figures later?

I was just wondering if the green schemes cannot be an opportunity for the graduates who want the government to spoon-feed them. Instead of demanding money from the government to go and drop off CVs, the government can work with them to produce food.

The money they want - which some might even buy alcohol with - can be given in the form of inputs, and for once, the youth can be productive.

When there was no plan for Neckartal Dam water, I heard several people talking about how the government was useless. Now that the government says they have acquired 3 800ha, those talking loudest are quiet.

How can we build a country with such people and under such circumstances? The discussion is always meant to find fault and apportion blame. If the youth are not finding fault, they are busy tribalising every aspect of life.

How can we develop a country with negative mindsets that always seek to pull down everything? And can these be tomorrow's leaders? Leaders, who have nothing to suggest but demands for being pampered and looked after?

The government blunders and has blundered, but the citizens must step in and redirect the government. Alone, the government cannot make it. The youth, too alone, cannot make it. Together and armed with ideas, it is possible to move mountains and win every battle.

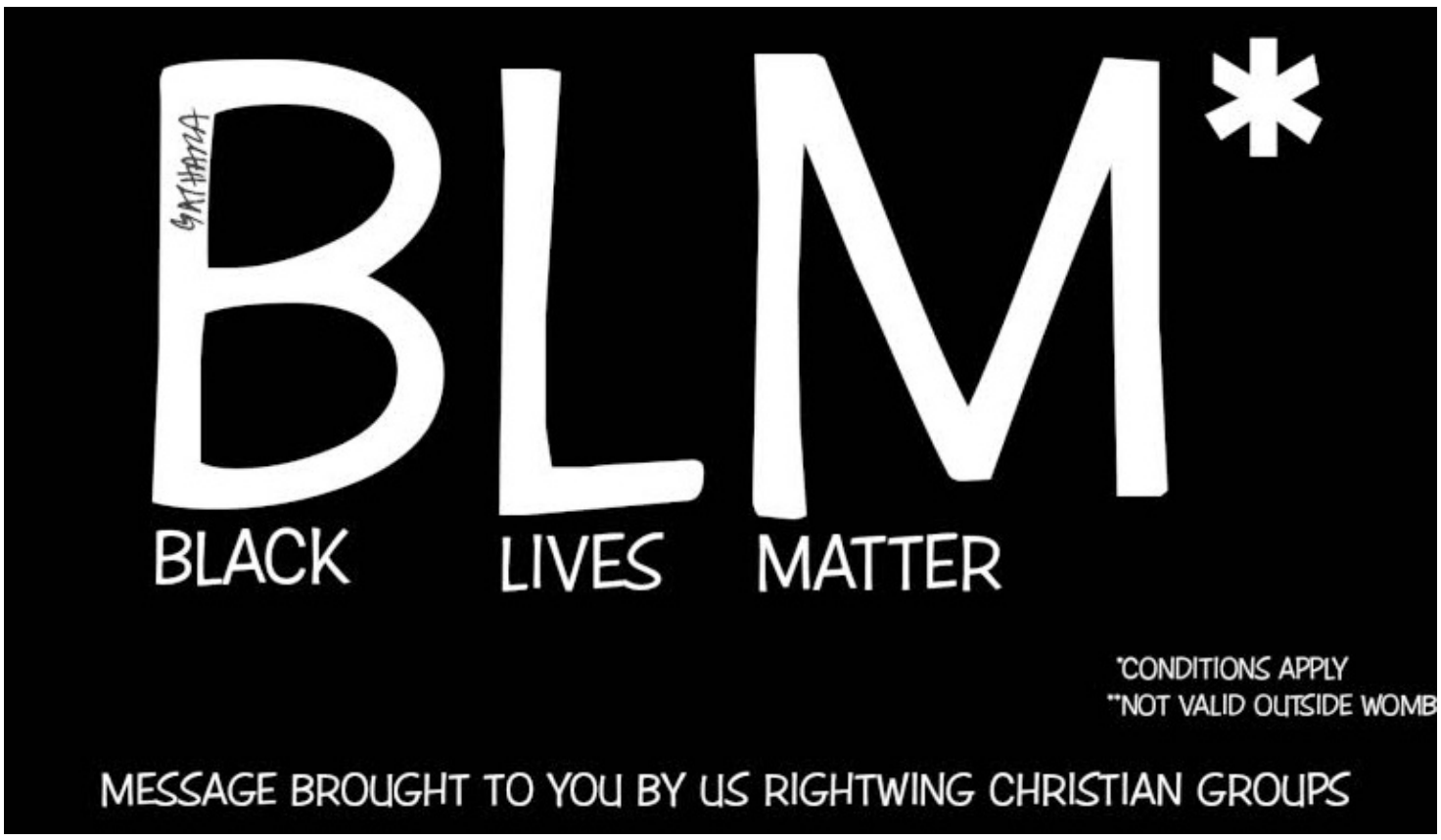
For this to happen, the youth need to see the opportunities scattered around them. To know such opportunities, one needs to be tuned in and be awake to what the country offers.

It has not helped or paid off to complain about foreigners when they are invited to grab the opportunities and then turn Namibians into lowly paid slaves.

It will also not help to shout about being sidelined when opportunities come, and the youth fail to see them. The truth is that it does not matter how loud the youth will shout; as long as they do not have any work ethics, they can never pull anything off.

If, for example, the youth cannot work as hard as the Chinese do, the youth can hate, despise and deride the Chinese still nothing will change.

The worst part is that if what the Chinese are doing today is handed over to the youth, I bet that they will fail because of a lack of direction.



The US war on abortion rights will harm women everywhere

■ **Patrick Gathara**

If Roe v Wade is overturned, US Christian right-wing groups will be emboldened to double their efforts to spread abortion restrictions across the globe, especially in Africa.

The US Supreme Court could be on the verge of one of the greatest rollbacks of abortion rights in the country in a generation. The court is considering whether to overturn its 50-year-old ruling which recognised a woman's constitutional right to procure an abortion before the fetus gained "viability" at 24 weeks. Many US states are standing by with so-called "trigger laws" to ban abortion already on the books. However, the effect of the court's ruling, when it comes next year, will probably be felt hardest outside the country.

Within the US itself, overturning the iconic 1973 Roe v Wade case would not end legal abortions – it would just leave it up to states to decide when abortions can occur. At least 17 states have already passed laws guaranteeing a woman's right to abortion meaning access to such would be largely determined by where one lives. While such unequal access would undoubtedly harm women's health, even there the effect might not be as severe. Even prior to Roe v Wade, official deaths from illegal abortions in the US had been falling, from 2,700 in 1930 to just under 200 by 1965, according to the Guttmacher Institute, a pro-abortion think-tank. While these are just the official figures and the real numbers may be much higher, the trend is still undeniable.

Outside the US, the picture is significantly worse. Ninety-seven percent of unsafe abortions and related deaths occur in Africa, Latin America and southern and western Asia, according to Doctors Without Borders. In Kenya, unsafe abortions continue to be a leading cause of maternal morbidity and mortality with a 2002 study showing that 20,000 women annually sought medical care for abortion-related complications in public sector hospitals alone, with nearly 3,000 dying each year.

What, one may ask, does this have to do with the US Supreme Court ruling? The battle over abortion rights in the US is but one of the issues in the country's so-called "culture wars". The arena for those wars has been gradually widening to include much of the globe as both sides seek to impose their particular ideas on the rest of the world. An investigation by openDemocracy last year revealed that US Christian right-wing groups had spent at least $280m in "dark money" heightening campaigns against abortion and LGBTQ people across the world.



In Africa alone, more than 20 of these groups, which are known for fighting against access to safe abortion, contraceptives and comprehensive sexuality education, have spent at least $54m since 2007, making Africa only second to Europe as a focus of these groups expenditure abroad. The pernicious effect of these groups was made evident in Uganda's infamous "Kill the Gays" bill – which prescribed the death penalty for homosexuality, and prison terms for "promotion of homosexuality" and knowing a gay person and failing to report them. According to David Bahati, the Ugandan MP who sponsored it, the bill was the brainchild of a group of influential social conservatives, including politicians, known as The Fellowship, who directed it at Uganda because it was "too late" to propose such legislation in America. Tellingly, Bahati hoped for a Republican victory in 2016 to rescue his bill, and though he got his wish, the bill was unpalatable even to the Trump administration. (Earlier this year Uganda did pass legislation further criminalising same-sex relationships and sex work, arguing that Ugandans were not sufficiently "grown-up" to appreciate gay rights.)

The harmful effects of exporting US domestic culture wars can be seen in the disaster that is the so-called "war on drugs". The US has been the primary driving force behind global prohibition efforts and has essentially sought to use international conventions to impose its own drug puritanism on the globe. The cost in lives has been paid by poor people in the Global South while the number of people using drugs appears largely unaffected. Similarly, studies around the globe have shown that criminalising abortion does not reduce the number of procedures – it does not save the unborn. A survey of 197 countries carried out by the Guttmacher Institute found that abortion occurs at roughly equal rates in regions where it is legal and regions where it is highly restricted. That means the main effect of abortion bans is to kill and maim women and girls by reducing the proportion of safe abortions.

Buoyed by a victory in the US Supreme Court, it is more than likely that US groups would redouble their efforts to spread abortion restrictions across the globe, with deadly consequences for women and girls everywhere. In Kenya, where nearly half of all pregnancies are unwanted, a further tightening of abortion restrictions, despite the ambiguous language in the constitution – which allows abortion to safeguard the life and health of the mother and when "permitted by any other written law" – could be catastrophic. – AL Jazeera

**Patrick Gathara is a Communications consultant, writer, and award-winning political cartoonist based in Nairobi.*

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‘I’ve had 3,200 bookings cancelled at my pubs’

■ **Beth Timmins**

As the hospitality industry reels from the impact of new Covid curbs, pubs and restaurants have reported a wave of Christmas cancellations.

The Bar 44 chain, which has four outlets, told the BBC 3,200 people had scrapped bookings for December.

Natalie Isaac, its operations director, said only a "handful" of people would have cancelled before the pandemic.

Others say that although they face no new rules, public caution is causing lower footfall and a loss of trade.

The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) has called for the government to provide financial support for businesses affected, but the Treasury has not unveiled any new measures.



'People are worried'

Bar 44, which has restaurants in Bristol and Cardiff, says 1,000 of the 3,200 lost bookings were down to the knock-on effects of cancelled concerts by Tom Jones and the Stereophonics.

"Having to stay open but not getting the business is our big worry," Ms Isaac explained.

"This should be our bumper two weeks before Christmas, but the diary is worryingly empty. We're significantly impacted and without furlough, we won't be able to protect our staff."

Ms Isaac was unable to give a figure for the loss of trade across the month, as the venues are not operating at full pre-pandemic capacity.

They have also been opening just five days a week, because of staff shortages that started before the new Plan B restrictions.

"We're slightly refilling with small groups, but people are worried to go out again as they don't want to catch Covid during Christmas."

The CBI said hospitality businesses and shops were facing a "double whammy" of collapsing demand and no financial help because of the government's Plan B, aimed at fighting the spread of the Omicron variant.

CBI director general Tony Danker said the restrictions were "balanced", but ministers needed to clarify that they were temporary.

"Whilst we have measures to keep the economy open, we have messages that have ended up closing much of it down," he told the BBC.

"We saved these businesses in the last 18 months. We kept them flourishing," he said.

"We can't lose that now, to essentially if unintentionally close down the restaurant sector at this time of year. That's a huge cashflow hit," he added.

"We need to revisit cashflow measures to support those businesses. We can't pretend that the economy is still open when demand has been so suppressed for understandable reasons."

A Treasury spokesperson said that the government had "acted early" to help control the virus's spread while "avoiding damaging economic and social restrictions by allowing businesses to remain open".

"To continue to protect the NHS, as well as jobs and livelihoods across the country, our priority is to ensure everyone who is eligible gets their booster jabs as quickly as possible.

"Our £400bn Covid-19 support package will continue to help businesses into spring next year and we will continue to respond proportionately to the changing path of the virus, as we have done since the start of the pandemic," the spokesperson added.

'Partial lockdown' with no support

Clive Watson, boss of pub chain, City Pub Group, said every kind of booking was now in decline since the Plan B announcement.

"In an nutshell, the big corporate parties have really started to be cancelled, which were really lucrative," he explained.

"To a certain extent, these were being compensated by smaller groups still booking, but now they're starting to cancel as well.

"What we're facing is a partial lockdown, but with no government assistance this time round."

Mr Watson said it was still worth staying open, but added that the impact would be sizeable if no further financial assistance came from the government.

Data for Monday to Sunday of last week from the trade body UKHospitality, for example, showed a 13% drop in business and a 15% increase in cancellations, compared with pre-pandemic levels.

Corporate events 'next to none'

As people revise their Christmas plans, Marc Hornby, co-founder of the Caviar and Chips catering and hospitality group, says corporate event inquiries are now "next to none".

The country-wide external catering firm based in Birmingham has had to pivot to focusing on wedding events for 2022 and 2023 because of the impact of the current restrictions.

"It's been a significant drop - we're seeing 25% of the business we'd usually see," Mr Hornby told the BBC.

"The biggest challenge has been the mixed messaging and the government not realising how much it costs to cancel events."

Recruitment has also been difficult for 18 months, but Mr Hornby said they had anticipated fresh restrictions, so had planned more small events.

The group owns a pub in Kenilworth, opened in March 2020, a week before lockdown. After moving to takeaways during lockdown, it has reopened, but has also seen very few corporate bookings.

Christmas trading 'destroyed'

Emma McClarkin, chief executive of the British Beer & Pub Association, said that Plan B restrictions had "destroyed" the crucial Christmas trading time for pubs.

"Further restrictions such as limits on group sizes, or even closing pubs, would be disastrous," she explained.

"Pubs need all the trade they can get this Christmas to make it through the quiet winter months ahead.

"Without it, they will need a full financial package from the government, including support on VAT, business rates and a return of the local authority grants.

"The chancellor needs to come to our rescue once more."

A spokesperson from restaurants operator Mitchells & Butlers, which runs brands such as All Bar One, O'Neill's, Harvester and Toby Carvery, said: "We are deeply disappointed by the announcement of Plan B and the knock-on effect this will have on our industry as we continue to try to rebuild our businesses during the pandemic.

"We will, of course, comply with the Plan B regulations. Very few of our businesses will be affected by the Covid pass provisions, and face masks are not required in our pubs and restaurants under the new guidance.

"We have no plans to introduce any additional restrictions unless required to do so." **- BBC**

Watchdog bans seven ads in crypto 'red alert'

■ Chris Vallance



Seven cryptocurrency adverts have been banned by the UK's advertising watchdog.

The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) says monitoring cryptoassets, like Bitcoin, is a "red-alert priority" following concerns that many ads fail to fully convey the risks of investing.

The banned ads included a promotion by a pizza chain and Facebook ads for a large cryptocurrency exchange.

The ASA says it hopes to produce new guidance on cryptocurrency advertising.

All seven ads or promotions were "banned for irresponsibly taking advantage of consumers' inexperience and for failing to illustrate the risk of the investment", it said.

The companies whose ads were found to have broken the rules were:

Coinburp: A Twitter page for Coinburp, a cryptocurrency trading platform.

eToro (UK): A paid-for display ad for eToro, a stocks and cryptocurrency trading platform.

Payward: A digital poster for Kraken, an online cryptocurrency exchange.

Exmo Exchange: A YouTube video promoting cryptocurrency exchange Exmo

Luno Money: An in-app ad for Luno, a cryptocurrency exchange service.

Coinbase Europe: A paid-for Facebook ad for Coinbase, a cryptocurrency exchange platform.

Papa John's GB: A promotion on the Papa John's pizza restaurant chain's website and in a Twitter post.

The banned Papa John's website promotion offered consumers "free Bitcoin worth £10", as well as telling customers: "Save £15 when you spend £30 or more & get £10 worth of Bitcoin from Luno!"

The firm said it was part of their annual celebration of "Bitcoin pizza day", which is said to mark the trading of two Papa John's pizzas for 10,000 bitcoins in May 2010. Ten thousand bitcoins would today be worth more than £350m ($462m).

The company argued that the promotion did not make any comment on cryptocurrency or its suitability for investment.

The chain said the "free" Bitcoin offer was entirely different from a scenario where a consumer was given the opportunity to invest their own money in a financial product.

But the ASA found the offer "trivialised what was a serious and potentially costly financial decision, especially in the context of the intended audience who were likely to have limited knowledge of cryptocurrency".

Crypto platforms

The ad for Kraken, which led to a complaint to the ASA, was seen at London Bridge station on a digital poster.

Although it contained a lengthy disclaimer, the ASA considered that "consumers would not have had the time to comprehend the relevant information in the disclaimer, if seen at all, and that it therefore was not clear".

The decision comes as some politicians question whether any cryptocurrency adverts should run on London's trains and buses.

In November, the ASA announced that it was investigating adverts that appeared on the underground for cryptocurrency Floki Inu - a so-called "meme coin" named after billionaire Elon Musk's dog.

That investigation continues, the ASA says, although Floki Inu insists that their adverts abide by the rules.

'Red alert'

The bans form part of a broader project that will result in updated guidance for the advertising of cryptoassets next year.

Miles Lockwood, the watchdog's director of complaints and investigations, said: "Cryptoassets are a red-alert priority issue for us.

"Consumers need to know about the risks of investing in cryptoassets and companies should make sure that their ads aren't misleading or socially irresponsible by taking advantage of consumers' lack of awareness around these complex and volatile products," he said.

The ASA said it would continue to review cryptoasset ads over the next few months, not just for cryptocurrencies but also for NFTs and fan tokens.

- BBC



‘Hopeless’:

Australia’s restaurants, cafes struggle to fill jobs

■ Wing Kuang



As residents in Australia’s second largest city flock to restaurants for dinner and drinks, Sarah Dennithorne is considering closing some of her pizzerias over the busy Christmas period.

Since Melbourne exited one of the world’s longest lockdowns in October, Dennithorne, who manages several branches of Sal’s Authentic New York Pizza, has struggled to fill vacancies in the kitchen and front of house.

Before the pandemic, she could easily receive 100 to 150 applications for every job. These days, she is lucky to get five.

“I’ve managed hospitality businesses in Melbourne for 20 years, and I’ve never seen anything like this,” Dennithorne told Al Jazeera.

As Australia emerges from nearly two years of lockdowns and border closures, many small businesses, especially in hospitality and retail, are struggling to find qualified staff, in large part due to the absence of backpackers and international students during the pandemic.

On Wednesday, Australia opened the borders to vaccinated students and migrants for the first time since March 2020 as part of a bid to kick-start the economy and live with COVID-19.

Employment website Seek earlier this month reported that job advertisements in the hospitality and tourism sector rose 76 percent in November compared with the same period last year, while applications per job hit a record low.

The website put the shortage down to “increasing job ad numbers, a smaller talent pool and a nation of workers more conscious of job ad security than ever before”.

In Sydney’s famous Bondi beach, Andrew Anthony, who owns the butchery-turned-restaurant Macelleria Bondi, has been posting job advertisements online for weeks, only to receive few responses – or see those he has managed to recruit fail to show at work.

With the help of his university-aged daughter, Anthony eventually succeeded in recruiting several students as part-timers, yet remains unable to fill all the vacancies.

“It’s been terrible and hopeless,” he said.

Sean Edwards, managing director of industry magazine Cafe Culture International, told Al Jazeera that hospitality businesses were finding that many people had left the industry for good to “go find another job” during the pandemic.

Paul Zahra, CEO of the Australian Retailers Association, told Al Jazeera the retail sector had also been severely hit.

“Many businesses struggled to retain their existing staff through the Delta lockdowns when they couldn’t trade from their physical stores, which left them short-staffed for the reopening and it remains an ongoing challenge two months on,” Zahra said.

Michael Coelli, an economics professor at the University of Melbourne, told Al Jazeera the retail and hospitality sectors, in particular, had become reliant on temporary visa holders.

“There are just not enough workers to do that kind of work,” Coelli said. “The industries that are reasonably large in Australia require a lot of semi-skilled or unskilled people and we just haven’t necessarily had that. Huge numbers of migrants to fill the demand, that’s been going on for a long time.”

Australia lost more than 375,000 migrants due to border closures in the year up to March 2021 alone, according to figures compiled by accounting firm Ernst & Young, with government projections estimating a shortfall of 830,000 people by 2024.

The Treasury has estimated population growth will slow to 0.2 per cent in 2020–21 and 0.4 per cent the following year – the weakest growth in more than 100 years. Fitch Ratings estimated in October that the slowdown in population growth would result in 2 percent smaller gross domestic product by 2026.

‘Burn out’

Coelli said the recent border reopening was unlikely to alleviate the staff shortages for some time.

“It might take a while for people to be confident of coming to Australia, given why the borders have been shut on very little notice for a while,” he said.

“The industry is just not creating and training enough new workers, and not having enough apprenticeships in those areas.”

Sandy Chong, CEO of the Australian Hairdressing Council, told Al Jazeera that while her industry relied heavily on foreign labour, there was a lack of pathways for migrant workers to stay in Australia permanently.

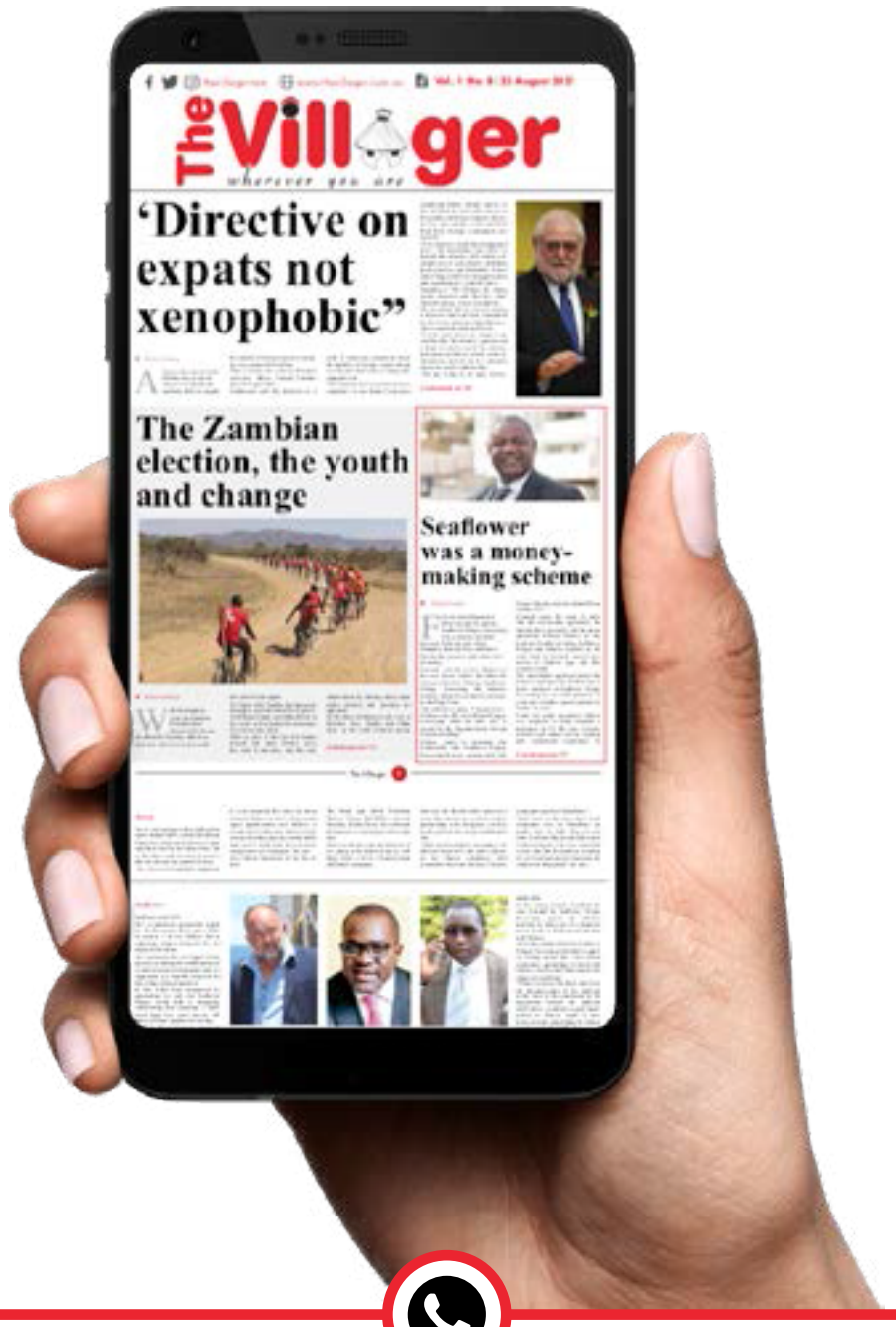
Chong said there were also not enough apprentices in the industry, even before the pandemic, as many would quit even before finishing their training.

For Dennithorne, the pizzeria owner in Melbourne, it is uncertain whether she will be able to find staff to keep her restaurants open over Christmas. But she is hopeful that workers will come back to the industry after taking some time to recover from the strain of the pandemic.

“I’m hearing from my younger team that people are leaving as they just burnt out over a really hectic past 18 months,” she said.

“I’m hoping that people are just going to take some time off over Christmas, and relax and sort of debrief and have time with family, and then come back to work in the New Year,” she said. – **Al Jazeera**





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Unpacking the Day with Wonder
09h00-10h00
Free Your Mind
10h00-12h00
Tech Eagle with Frans
12h00-13h00
Brand Conversation with Sally
13h00-14h30
On the Radar with Dwight
14h30-16h30
Ookundana Dhingi with Helen
16h30-18h30
The Home Run with Frans/ Fanus
18h30-20h00
Business Segment with Gabriel
20h00-23h00
Omutumwa pamuee naTate Fly
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French forces leave Mali's Timbuktu after nearly nine years

French army says 'will be present in a different way' as former colonial power draws down its military presence in Mali.

French forces have left the city of Timbuktu, the latest sign the former colonial power is scaling down its presence in northern Mali nearly nine years after a military intervention that helped push back fighters that have overrun parts of the country.

It was in Timbuktu on February 2, 2013, that former French President Francois Hollande declared the start of France's military offensive in Mali. On Tuesday, the French flag was lowered and the Malian flag raised in its place at a military base, where a force of about 150 soldiers had remained after France began withdrawing troops.

General Etienne du Peyroux, head of France's Operation Barkhane military campaign in Mali, shook hands with the new camp commander and offered him a large wooden key as a French military plane made a low flyover.

France "will be present in a different way", said du Peyroux. "This is ultimately the aim of Operation Barkhane: To allow Mali to take its destiny into its own hands … but always in partnership."

The new Malian commander did not make any comments.

In a statement, the French military emphasised that the Malian military maintains "a strong garrison in Timbuktu", in addition to nearly 2,200 United Nations peacekeepers who are permanently deployed there.



Mali has been plagued by a conflict that began as a separatist movement in the north of the country in 2012, but devolved into a multitude of armed groups jockeying for control in the central and northern regions. Fighting has spread to neighbouring countries, including Burkina Faso and Niger, with the deteriorating security situation in the region unleashing an acute humanitarian crisis.

France announced earlier this year that it would be withdrawing more than 2,000 troops from the Sahel region by early 2022, refocusing its military efforts on neutralising rebel operations, and strengthening and training local armies.

The decision came amid mounting political instability in Mali, where Colonel Assimi Goita carried out two coups in less than a year before being sworn in as the country's interim president.

In recent months, the reports of a possible deployment of mercenaries hired by the controversial Wagner Group in Mali further strained already tense ties between the French government and the coup makers. The rising tensions have also come at a time when anti-French sentiment has become widely popular among Malians who accuse Paris of failing to contain the escalating violence and pursuing a hidden agenda.

The French military already has shut down its bases further north in Kidal and Tessalit but is maintaining its presence in Gao near a volatile border region where operations have been concentrated in recent years.

The international community has set a deadline for new democratic elections to be held in Mali by the end of February, though there are growing signs that will not happen.

On Sunday, the regional bloc known as Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) warned that Mali could face additional sanctions if more "concrete progress" is not made by January 1 towards preparing for elections.

ECOWAS has already suspended Mali, and it slapped travel bans and asset freezes on members of the transitional government.

The army leaders have cited mounting insecurity throughout Mali as a reason why February's deadline is not attainable.

– Al Jazeera





How PM Abiy led fight-back against rebel advance

■ Farouk Chothia

Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed evoked memories of the country's kings and emperors by going to the front lines to lead a dramatic fightback against Tigrayan rebels who had threatened to overthrow him.

In extraordinary scenes for a man who was declared the 100th winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2019, Mr Abiy was videoed and photographed in military fatigues, walking through bushy and mountainous terrain, scanning the horizon with a binoculars and addressing soldiers under a clump of trees.

"Those who want to be among the Ethiopian children, who will be hailed by history, rise up for your country today. Let's meet at the front," he said.

Kjetil Tronvoll, a professor in conflict studies at the Oslo New University College in Norway, said there was no doubt that Mr Abiy's decision helped turn the tide against the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF).

"Though the photos suggest that he was close to the front lines and not on the actual battlefield fighting, his decision paid off, " he said.

"It boosted the morale of his generals, led to a surge in Ethiopian nationalism, saw national heroes like Haile Gebrselassie come out in support of the war effort, and thousands of people lined up to join the army and the Amhara [ethnic group's] militias."

Drone attacks

The setbacks the TPLF faced were huge. Its fighters had been around Debre Birhan town, about 130km (80 miles) from the capital, Addis Ababa, before being forced to go back about 400km to Weldiya. This means the rebels lost key towns on the A2 highway that links their stronghold of Tigray to the federal government's seat of power.

Prof Tronvoll said that while Mr Abiy rallied his troops on the ground, drones - reportedly obtained from China, Turkey and Iran - played a far greater role in forcing the TPLF to retreat: "China's Wing Loong II allegedly



proved to be the drone with the highest military capacity to take out tanks, heavy artillery and to drop bombs against foot-soldiers in open terrain."

At the same time, the government resisted US and European Union (EU) pressure to negotiate a ceasefire, and portrayed Western powers as TPLF allies - a view also expressed by Mr Gebrselassie, an Ethiopian running legend.

"We have seen how Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Libya have been destroyed or disintegrated. But Ethiopia is a country with more than 120 million people. So any attempt to destabilise this country could backfire on them," he told state media.

"I know our African brothers and sisters are supporting us and we have been fighting colonialism together for centuries."

Prof Tronvoll said Mr Abiy had set the tone for such rhetoric to win the support of African governments, as well as other countries that were rivals of the West: "At the start of the war, Mr Abiy called the TPLF a junta against whom he was waging a law-enforcement operation.

"But he then embraced the pan-African narrative by calling the TPLF a proxy for imperialist forces, and he was fighting for Ethiopia's glory, like the emperors of the past."

Popularity boosted

In November, Mr Abiy drew parallels between the TPLF's attempt to overthrow his government to the Italian invaders who were defeated in the famous Battle of Adwa in 1896 by the army of Emperor Menelik II, the founder of modern-day Ethiopia who came from the Amhara ethnic group.

"My fellow Ethiopians here and in the diaspora, your role in telling the world the truth is commendable. In unity, we can overcome the existential threat this ancient nation is confronted with by forces far and near. As children of #Adwa, we will carry #Ethiopia #ResilientlyOnwards," he tweeted.

The TPLF was a guerrilla movement which gained power in Ethiopia in 1991. It dominated the government until 2018, when Mr Abiy took office following huge demonstrations against its repressive rule. It then retreated to its stronghold of Tigray, from where it launched a rebellion last year following a massive fall-out with Mr Abiy over his reforms.

UK-based Horn of Africa analyst Abdurahman Sayed said Mr Abiy earned the respect of many Ethiopians by going to the front lines to spearhead the resistance as his popularity had been faltering as the rebels advanced.

"By abandoning his official residence and joining his army, Mr Abiy sent the message that he was prepared to die for Ethiopia, if necessary," he said.

"He is quite obsessed with the history of Ethiopia's kings, and he once told his audience that his mother predicted he will rise to become the seventh king. The kings used to lead their armies into battle, and he has done something similar."

Prof Tronvoll said Mr Abiy's actions were unprecedented for a Nobel Peace laureate - an honour bestowed on him in 2019 for ending hostilities with Eritrea and introducing political reforms in Ethiopia after decades of state repression.

"Barack Obama won the prize after he became US president, and waged a drone war in Afghanistan, but he sat in the war room of the White House. Mr Abiy is the first one to go close to the front lines," he said.

Battle for key road

Mr Abiy initially went in late November to the eastern front, where special forces and militias from Ethiopia's Afar region had already inflicted heavy losses on the TPLF.

"The Afars are the next-door neighbours of the Tigrayans. Traditionally, they are considered to be warriors. Almost every Afar man would have a gun from the age of 15. They mounted a strong resistance against the TPLF, and for the first time Afar women took part in fighting," said Mr Abdurahman.

"It showed the depth of anger towards the TPLF because of the atrocities its fighters had committed in Afar when they first tried to break out of Tigray about six months ago."

Mr Abdurahman regards this as a turning-point in the war, as it thwarted the TPLF's attempts to reach the border with Djibouti: "Ethiopia is landlocked, and the port in Djibouti is its economic lifeline.

"If the TPLF took control of the road leading to the border, Ethiopia's economy would have been brought to its knees, no goods would have reached Addis Ababa, and the chances of the capital falling to the Tigrayans would have been greater."

Mr Abiy returned from the front lines after about two weeks, only for his office to announce this week that he has gone back to lead the military in capturing more territory in the Amhara region. For its part the TPLF said it had retaken the region's historic church town of Lalibela.

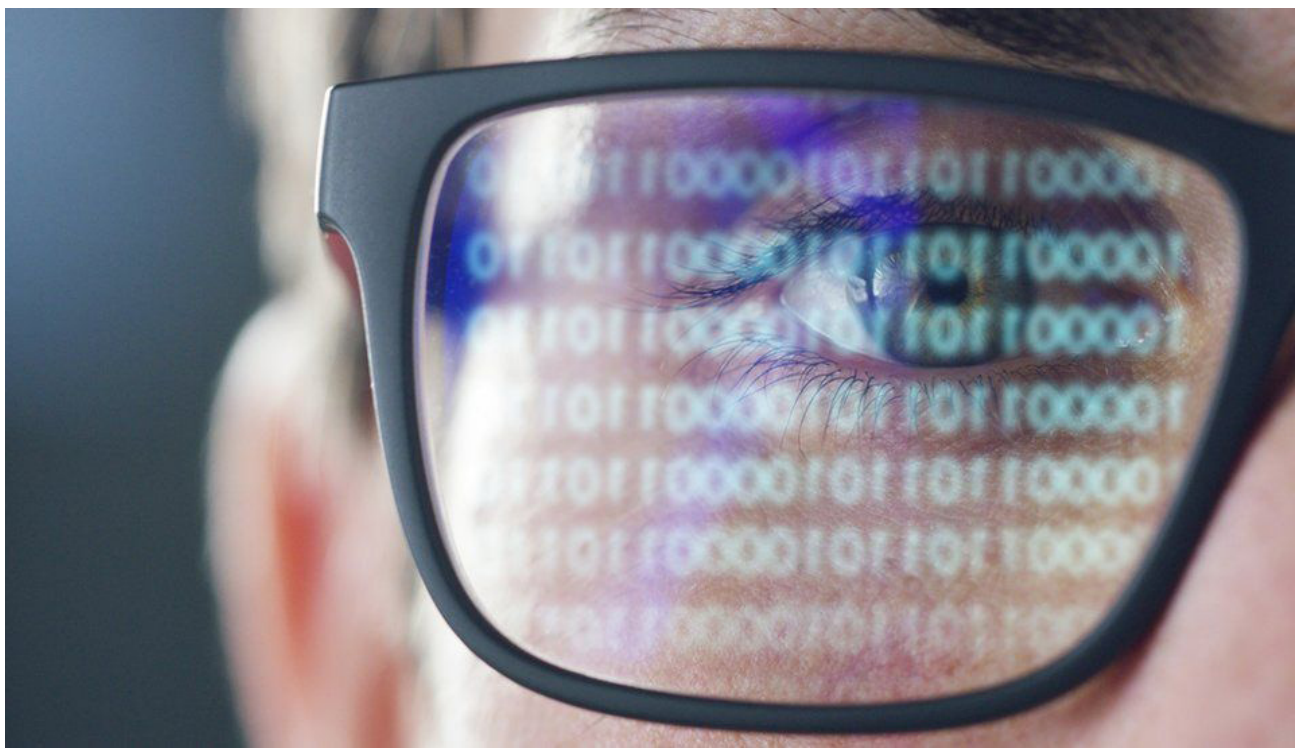
Exploring the churches carved from rock

For Prof Tronvoll, the Ethiopian leader may have managed to hold on to power, but he has tarnished his global image: "The ultimate objective of a Nobel Peace laureate should be peace, but Mr Abiy has repeatedly rejected calls for a ceasefire, and his troops have committed widespread atrocities."

But Mr Abdurrahman said Mr Abiy had no choice but to fight as the TPLF had been determined to regain power through force.

"We don't know for how long this war will carry on and how it will end, but Mr Abiy has shown that he is no pushover." **- BBC**

Flaw prompts 100 hack attacks a minute, security company says



A flaw in widely used computer code is prompting 100 new hacking attempts every minute, a security company says.
Check Point said it had seen attempts to exploit the vulnerability on over 40% of corporate networks globally.
One US official said the security flaw, Log4shell, posed a "severe risk", with companies warning it was being actively used by criminal groups.
Fixes have been issued but need to be implemented. Popular applications and cloud services have been affected.

'Specific address'

Written in the programming language Java, Log4J, the code containing the flaw, is used by millions of computers running online services.
In the last four months it had been downloaded 84 million times from the largest public repository of open-source Java components, Brian Fox of security company Sonatype, said.
And the ease with which hackers could exploit the vulnerability was, "akin to someone figuring out that mailing a letter into your postbox, with a specific address written on it, allows them to open all your doors in your house".
Words such as "critical" and "emergency" are often bandied around by cyber-security people when a major flaw is discovered.
But in this crisis, another word has stuck out - "trivial".
According to Crowdstrike, the weakness everyone is trying to fix is "trivial" to exploit.
Often when a vulnerability is found in a computer system, there is a little bit of time to fix it.
The cyber-criminals have to work out a way to attack and usually only the smartest crews can do so in the first few hours.
But in this case, it is, apparently, very easy.
We do not yet know how many of these attempted attacks are successful - but this incident has the potential to be extremely costly for corporations that become victims.
For the average person, there is not a lot we can do.
Make sure your apps and software are up to date - and send thoughts, prayers and hugs to the IT teams around the world trying to fix this problem.
Researchers at Chinese technology company Alibaba discovered the flaw last month.
But it gained widespread public attention after being found affecting some sites hosting versions of Minecraft using Java.
Before the flaw was made public, the Apache Software Foundation, which oversees the Log4j code, issued a fix for the problem, rating the problem a "10" - the highest level of seriousness.
Cloudflare chief technology officer John Graham-Cumming said, "This is the third really serious flaw that's affected a wide range of Internet services: Heartbleed in 2012, ShellShock in 2014 and Log4Shell in 2021".

'Urgent challenge'

US Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency director Jen Easterly also stressed the urgency of the situation.
"To be clear, this vulnerability poses a severe risk," she wrote.
It was being widely exploited by hackers and "presents an urgent challenge to network defenders given its broad use".
The UK National Cyber Security Centre said, "This is a significant vulnerability" and called on organisations to urgently follow advice on mitigating the problem.
Microsoft researchers said they had seen hackers using Log4shell to:
install malicious software that mined crypto-currency steal passwords and log-ins extract data from compromised systems - **BBC**

Apple launches Android app to address AirTags tracker fears

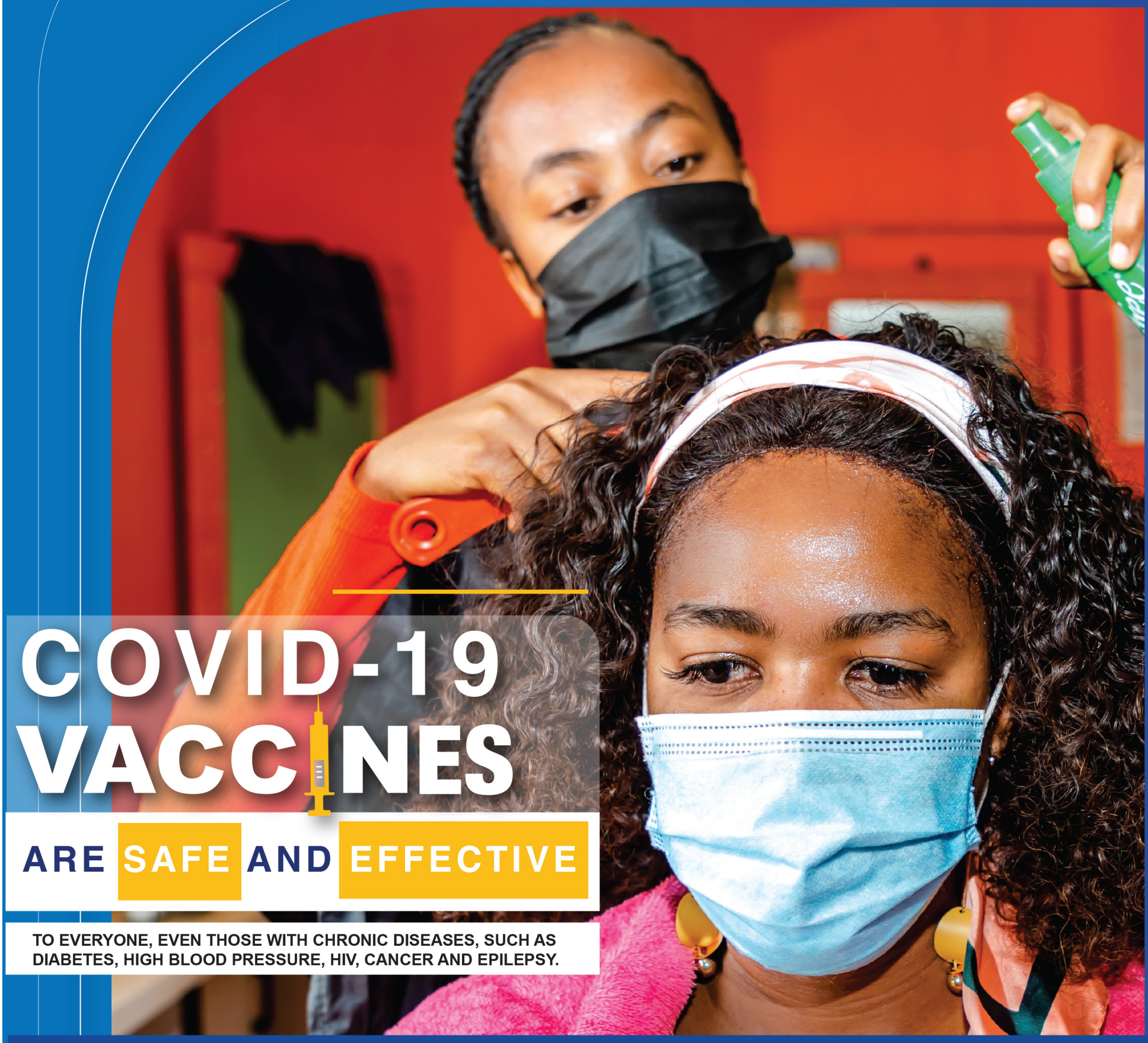


Apple has launched an app for competitor Android's smartphones, which will inform users if there is a tracking device nearby.
Apple's AirTags are small location trackers that can be attached to items such as keys or bags in case they are lost.
But they could also be used with malicious intent, such as being planted on people without their knowledge.
The new app allows Android users to detect nearby trackers they do not own.
AirTags work by leveraging millions of Apple devices, each of which can detect nearby tags, to create a powerful tracking network.
"These small inexpensive tags can potentially make it very easy for a stalker to hide one in the victim's car or personal possessions and then be able to track their victim's whereabouts," Rachel Horman-Brown, who chairs anti-stalking advocacy service Paladin, told BBC News:
Two months after their release, amid concerns over abuse, Apple introduced a feature where iPhones would notify users if an "unknown AirTag" or other compatible third-party device was detected "moving with you over time".
And the new Android Tracker Detect app attempts to give Android users some of the safety features Apple has built into its own devices. The app "looks for item trackers within Bluetooth range that are separated from their owner", Apple says in its support documentation.
"If you think someone is using an AirTag or another item tracker to track your location, you can scan to try to find it," it says.
The app also allows users to play a sound on an AirTag to help locate it, if it has been nearby for at least 10 minutes.
AirTags are also made to beep if they are away from the iPhone they are registered to - at a random interval between eight and 24 hours - which can help unaware victims find any intrusive trackers.
The new app also contains instructions on how to remove the battery and disable an AirTag if one is found.
Early reviews for the Android app are mixed, with some users criticising the fact scans have to be initiated manually, rather than automatically detecting nearby tags, so victims have to already suspect they are being tracked.
Others, however, applauded Apple for introducing privacy tools on a rival platform.
- BBC

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US set to avert default as Congress approves debt limit hike

The $2.5 trillion increase comes just days before experts say the US would not be able to service its debt commitments.

The United States Congress has moved to avert a debt default that experts and officials have said would have had a catastrophic effect on the country's economy.

In the early hours of Wednesday, the House of Representatives passed a $2.5 trillion increase to the federal debt limit. That came hours after the Senate also passed the measure, which likely staves off the next showdown over lifting limits on how much money the government can borrow until at least 2023.

"No brinksmanship, no default on the debt, no risk of another recession: responsible governing has won on this exceedingly important issue," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said on the floor ahead of the votes. "The American people can breathe easy and rest assured there will not be a default."

The legislation passed in both chambers along party lines, with just one Republican in the House voting in favour. It is expected to be signed into law by President Joe Biden on Wednesday.

The US currently has about $29 trillion in debt. The borrowing cap approved on Wednesday will be $31.5 trillion.

Can the economy recover from coronavirus?

The passage followed an 11th-hour deal between Republican and Democratic brass that saw legislators create a special mechanism that allowed the debt limit increase to pass with a simple majority in each chamber, enabling Democrats to pass the legislation and Republicans to remain in opposition.

Some 80 years ago, lawmakers introduced a limit on how much federal debt could be accrued. That limit is regularly lifted, often with little fanfare.

While both parties see raising the debt ceiling, which kicks the can down the line in terms of the US addressing its ballooning debt, as politically toxic, Republicans are particularly expected to use the issue to attack what they call Democratic "overspending" in the upcoming 2022 midterm elections.

The Bipartisan Policy Center, an independent Washington-based think-tank, had predicted the US would no longer be able to service its debts sometime after December 21.

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, meanwhile, set the deadline at the start of the business day on Wednesday.

A default was projected to cost an estimated six million jobs and $15 trillion in household wealth, as well as increase the costs for mortgages and other borrowings.

The US spends more money than it collects through taxation, so it borrows via the issuing of Treasury bonds, which are government securities available for purchase by individuals, institutions and countries.

lay "Addressing the debt limit is a basic responsibility of the federal government," the White House said in a statement following approval by Congress.

"Passage of this legislation will allow the Treasury to finance spending and tax cuts Congress has already authorised and to keep its commitments without causing disruption or harm to our economy and American families." – **Al Jazeera**



Haiti fuel tanker blast kills dozens in Cap-Haïtien

More than 60 people have been killed after a fuel tanker exploded in northern Haiti, officials say.

Reports say the vehicle was involved in an accident in the city of Cap-Haïtien, and the victims had been trying to gather leaking fuel when it ignited.

Local hospitals have been overwhelmed by those injured in the blast.

Prime Minister Ariel Henry said the entire Caribbean nation was grieving after the accident, as he declared three days of mourning.

"I learned, with desolation and emotion, the sad news of the explosion last night in Cap-Haïtien," he wrote on Twitter on Tuesday.

Pictures posted on social media show an intense blaze at the scene of the accident in Haiti's second-largest city. One witness described the blast site as "hell".

The BBC is not responsible for the content of external sites.View original tweet on Twitter

Dozens of people were injured in the explosion and local medics said they feared the death toll would rise.

"We don't have the ability to treat the number of seriously burned people," a nurse at the Justinien University Hospital told AFP news agency. "I'm afraid we won't be able to save them all."

"We are overwhelmed," a local doctor told Haiti's Le Nouvelliste newspaper.

"We need human resources, and also material resources, namely serum, gauze, and anything that can be used in case of serious burns," Mayor Yvrose Pierre said.

The government announced that it was setting up field hospitals in the area to help those affected, and Prime Minister Henry travelled to the scene on Tuesday accompanied by doctors and health workers.

"It is with a torn heart that I see the critical condition of some of our compatriots," he said after visiting a local hospital.

Deputy Mayor Patrick Almonor earlier told reporters the victims he saw when he visited the site of the blast had been so badly burned they were impossible to identify.

He added that about 20 houses in the area had also been set on fire by the explosion.

The incident comes as Haiti is experiencing a severe fuel shortage as powerful gangs have seized control of much of the fuel distribution around the country. Haiti is also in the grip of a major economic and political crisis in the wake of President Jovenel Moise's assassination earlier this year. **- BBC**



Malta becomes first EU nation to legalise cannabis



Malta has become the first EU country to legalise the cultivation and personal use of cannabis.

Adults will be allowed to carry up to seven grams of cannabis, and grow no more than four plants at home.

But smoking it in public or in front of children will be illegal.

Several other nations have similar plans, such as Germany, Luxembourg and Switzerland. Countries like the Netherlands tolerate cannabis use in certain circumstances.

Malta's parliament voted in favour of the reform on Tuesday afternoon, with the bill winning 36 votes in favour and 27 against.

Equality Minister, Owen Bonnici, said the "historic" move would stop small-time cannabis users from facing the criminal justice system, and would "curb drug trafficking by making sure that [users] now have a safe and regularised way from where they can obtain cannabis".

However, Malta's opposition Nationalist Party voted against the change.

In October, its leader Bernard Grech - who initially supported the new law - warned it would "only lead to the strengthening of the illegal market, with organised crime taking advantage," according to The Times.

Opponents have called on Malta's president, George Vella, not to sign it into law, which is the final, ceremonial stage.

Under the changes, anyone carrying more than seven grams, but less than 28g could be fined up to €100 (£85; $112).

The punishment for smoking in public will be a €235 fine, and those smoking cannabis in front of anyone younger than 18 could be fined up to €500.

Associations will be set up to distribute the drug or seeds to cultivate cannabis, therefore regulating how much someone buys - and a person can only be a member of one association.

There is also support for minors who are found with cannabis. They will be recommended a care plan or treatment as opposed to facing arrest or criminal charges.

Cannabis laws around the world

The move by Malta, the EU's smallest member state, is likely to be the first of a number of nations changing their cannabis laws after the UN last year reclassified cannabis to recognise its therapeutic uses.

The governments of Luxembourg, Germany and Switzerland have all announced plans to establish a legally regulated market.

Cannabis is still technically illegal in the Netherlands, which is famous for its cannabis cafes. However there is a tolerance for the drug when it is sold in the coffee shops.

Italy will hold a referendum on the issue next year, while South Africa, Mexico, Jamaica, Portugal and a number of US states already have similar legislation in place.

Uruguay was the first country in the world to legalise cannabis for personal use in 2013, followed by Canada in 2018. **- BBC**

Ex-Japan PM Abe:

Chinese military 'adventure' could be 'suicidal'



Former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has urged China not to provoke its neighbours or seek territorial expansion, saying that any Chinese military adventure could be "suicidal".

Abe, who stepped down as premier last year but is still influential as head of the largest faction of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, made the comment in a video message at a security forum.

"An adventure in military affairs, if pursued by such a huge economy like China's, could be suicidal to say the least," Abe said on Tuesday.

"We must urge them not to pursue territorial expansion and restrain from provoking, often bullying, their neighbours because it should harm their own interests."

China claims almost all the energy-rich waters of the South China Sea, where it has established military outposts on artificial islands.

That claim has been declared as without legal basis by the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague – a ruling that China has refused to recognise.

Taiwan tensions likely to dominate Biden-Xi virtual talks

Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam also have claims to parts of the sea.

In the East China Sea, China claims a group of uninhabited Japanese-administered islets. The dispute has plagued bilateral relations for years and fueled more tensions between neighbouring countries.

Abe's remarks follow a comment this month that any emergency over Taiwan would mean an emergency for Japan as well as for its security alliance with the United States, and Chinese President Xi Jinping should not misunderstand that.

Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister Hua Chunying called that earlier remark, made on December 1, "erroneous" and a violation of basic norms of bilateral relations.

China also summoned Japan's ambassador to Beijing following that remark.

Abe's comments "openly challenged China's sovereignty and gave brazen support to Taiwan independence forces", Hua was quoted by news reports as saying.

Tension over Chinese-claimed Taiwan has risen as Xi seeks to assert his country's sovereignty claim over the democratically ruled island. Its government says it wants peace but will defend itself if needed.

In recent months, Taipei has also accused Beijing of repeated incursions of its air defence zone, prompting Taiwan to scramble its jets and warn China against more violations.

Support for Taiwan

In his message on Tuesday, Abe expressed his support for Taiwan's participation in a regional trade pact called the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

"The United States, Japan and other like-minded countries should work hard to bring Taiwan to international organisations of universal relevance. WHO comes on top of the list," Abe said.

Taiwan is one of China's most sensitive issues. Beijing has never renounced the use of force to bring it under its rule.

China considers the island one of its provinces with no right to the trappings of a sovereign state.

Taiwan says only its elected government can represent its people on the world stage. **- Al Jazeera**



How to save fuel – and save money

■ **Gavin Braithwaite-Smith**

As the UK's petrol stations continue to witness shortages and long queues, the need to save fuel has come sharply into focus. Suddenly, every drop counts.

Thankfully, using less fuel isn't difficult. Our easy-to-follow advice could keep you going – and save you hundreds of pounds.

Check your tyre pressures

Admit it, it's been a while since you checked your car's tyre pressures. Michelin recommends you should check them at least once month and before long journeys.

Ignoring this advice could damage your tyres, and have a negative effect on the way your car handles or stops in an emergency. It will also impact your fuel consumption.

Tyres under-inflated by 15psi (1 bar) will lead to around six percent greater fuel use. That's the equivalent of 47mpg instead of 50mpg. Most petrol stations will have a tyre inflator and some are free to use. Alternatively, you could invest in a good quality tyre pump, allowing you to check your pressures at home.

Remember, the correct tyre pressures will be listed in your car's handbook, as well as somewhere on the car itself – often inside the fuel filler cap.

Turn off the air conditioning

At low speeds, using the air conditioning can increase fuel consumption by between five and seven percent. That's according to Anthony Sale of the Millbrook Proving Ground. At higher speeds, air conditioning has less of an impact.

If possible, turn off the air-con when driving through town or when stuck in traffic, opening the car windows instead. When travelling on faster roads, close the windows and switch on the air conditioning, as driving with the sunroof or windows open will increase drag and thus fuel use.

Remember to use your air conditioning at least once a month to maintain its efficiency and avoid problems with the system.

Reduce weight

The more your car is carrying, the harder the engine is having to work, which uses more fuel. In simple terms, if you don't need it, don't carry it.

This doesn't mean you can dump your mother-in-law at the bus stop and tell her to walk, but it does mean you can remove all the rubbish piled up in the footwells and the garden waste you've been hauling about for the past few weeks.

You should also remove your set of golf clubs from the boot, unless of course you're intending to bowl a few overs after work. Or whatever it is you do on a golf course.

Reduce drag

Roof racks and roof boxes will seriously damage your car's aerodynamic properties, rendering the hours that engineers spent in the wind tunnel well and truly wasted.

Now, we're not saying you should leave your mountain bikes at home when heading off for a cycling holiday. And we're also not suggesting emptying the contents of your roof box into the boot and leaving the dog at home.

However, once you've arrived at your destination, you should remove the roof box or anything else you plonked on the roof rack. Oh, and if possible, remove the roof rack as well.

Change up earlier

Develop a smooth driving style, accelerating gently and reading the road ahead to avoid any unnecessary braking.

Don't let the engine labour, but aim to change up a gear at around 2,500rpm in a petrol-engined car or 2,000rpm in a diesel. If your car has a gear-shift indicator to aid economy, use it.

When possible, change up into fifth or sixth gear, which should see fuel consumption drop to its lowest level. But don't speed, because that's illegal *and* it could hurt your wallet. More on this shortly.

Stop braking. No, really…

Strange as it may sound, we urge you to stop braking. Don't worry, we haven't taken leave of our senses, it's just that using your brakes is seriously bad for your wealth.

However, wait, before you go careering off into a wall or the back of that Honda Jazz, hear us out…

If you can keep the car moving all the time, you'll use less fuel. This is because the act of stopping then starting again uses more fuel than simply rolling along. Read the road ahead and anticipate the flow of traffic, especially when approaching roundabouts. Maintain a steady speed without stopping and you'll save money over time.

Reduce your speed

Speeding is the big no-no, but not only from a legal perspective. A car travelling at 80mph will consume 10 percent more fuel than the same car travelling at 70mph. If you spend most of your time on on motorways, this could turn out to be a significant chunk of money.

Of course, it's not a simple case of the slower you drive, the less fuel you'll consume; there is a happy medium to be achieved. Driving at speeds of between 50mph and 60mph in fifth or sixth gear will maximise your returns. But we do appreciate you need to reach your destination at some point.

Whatever, don't speed – a flash from a camera could result in a fine totalling the cost of a tank of fuel, or much more after penalty points and insurance are taken into account.

Service your car

A serviced engine is a happy engine. Well, that's according to an oil-stained poster we saw hanging up in a garage, once upon a time.

The fact is that a well-maintained engine will run more efficiently and use less fuel. So you should really think about giving your car a long-overdue service.

Leave earlier

Sounds obvious, but you should think about leaving earlier for that very important meeting. If you've got a deadline to meet, leave home or the office with plenty of time to spare.

Not only will you avoid speeding, you may arrive an hour early, giving you time to relax and prepare for that awfully important meeting.

Similarly, if you can combine numerous trips into one journey, you'll save fuel. Clearly that's not possible if you have to be in Skipton one day and St Ives the next, but with some basic planning, you could be able to cut down on there number of trips you make in a single month.

Avoid driving at peak times

Nobody likes getting stuck in a jam. A congested morning commute can set you off on the wrong foot, while a stop-start journey home means added stress before you reach your front door. So, why not avoid driving during peak times?

Setting off for work 30 minutes earlier could result in you missing the jams altogether, giving you time to go for a stroll or have a relaxing coffee before you face the working day. In fact, the money you save on fuel could mean you can afford a few extra lattes every month.

Shop around for fuel

The cost of fuel can vary from retailer to retailer and it's not uncommon to find a different set of prices in two outlets next door to each other. So it pays to shop around, although we wouldn't recommend taking a 20-mile journey to save 1p on a litre of fuel.

A general rule is that supermarket filling stations are cheaper than branded stops such as Shell, BP, Esso and so on. And stay well away from motorway service stations – they can be hugely more expensive.

If you have a new car with a built-in SIM card and modern infotainment system – an Audi equipped with Audi Connect, for instance – you may not even need an app. The Audi system offers a 'Refuel for the best price' option, directing you the relevant petrol station via the sat-nav.

Finally, consider signing up to a supermarket or petrol station loyalty card. Points you earn can be converted into money-off vouchers.

Buy a more economical car

Work out how many miles you drive in a year and how much you're currently spending on motoring. Then work out how much it would cost with a new car and go from there. Don't be lured into a false economy.

If it won't save you money, stick with what you've got and look at ways of driving more economically.

- www.motoringresearch.com

Jacob Ramsey said he wants to emulate Steven Gerrard

Jacob Ramsey said he wants to emulate Steven Gerrard in becoming "one of the best goalscoring midfielders" after a magnificent solo effort helped Aston Villa win 2-0 at Norwich.

The 20-year-old ran at the Canaries defence from inside his own half before thumping the ball past Tim Krul to break the deadlock at Carrow Road.

Ollie Watkins sidefooted home Carney Chukwuemeka's low delivery to complete the scoring and deepen Norwich's relegation fears.

"I've been watching clips of the gaffer," Ramsey told BT Sport. "He was one of the best goalscoring midfielders and that's what I want to be.

"I saw Ollie [Watkins] knock it off, there was no-one there, so I thought 'why not?'"

Gerrard has now won four of his six games as Villa boss since replacing Dean Smith - now in charge at Norwich - last month.

And the former England captain was thrilled with Ramsey's effort.

"As a midfielder, you can only applaud that kind of play," Gerrard said. "To then unleash a shot like that - it should be in the running for goal of the month."

The victory lifts the visitors into the top half of the Premier League before Wednesday's fixtures - proving the perfect response to Saturday's 1-0 defeat at Liverpool - while Norwich remain rooted to the foot of the table.

"It's a big win, an important win," Gerrard told BBC Match of the Day. "The first half was outstanding. It comes off a very challenging week. The application [from the players] at Anfield - they maxed out there.

"It's a bright start, but it's my job to keep pushing the standards."

Dominant Villa win comfortably

Since replacing Smith at Villa in November, Gerrard has set about making them more difficult to beat.

They delivered a resilient display as they were beaten at Liverpool - but at Carrow Road, the onus was on Gerrard's team to set the tone against a side with the worst defensive record in the division.

John McGinn almost opened the scoring with the kind of swerving, long-range effort his manager would have been proud of in his heyday, only for Norwich goalkeeper Krul to tip the ball over the crossbar.

But it was Ramsey - one of the players promoted to the Villa first team by Smith - who gave the visitors the lead their intricate play deserved. The 20-year-old was allowed to run unchallenged from inside his own half to open the scoring with a powerful finish.

Watkins was denied by Krul early in the second half, but the Dutchman was powerless to stop the 25-year-old's close-range effort three minutes from time. Second-half substitute Chukwuemeka showed skill and composure to pick out the former Brentford forward at the far post, leaving him with a simple finish.

Norwich 0-2 Aston Villa: Norwich 'wasn't good enough' - Dean Smith

Plenty to ponder for Smith



Smith praised the performance and spirit of his Norwich players following Saturday's narrow defeat by Manchester United, but there was little to get the home supporters off their seats at Carrow Road on Tuesday.

Villa goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez barely had to break sweat, with the hosts managing just three tame efforts on target all evening.

Todd Cantwell was restored to the starting line-up but struggled to make an impact, registering only 24 touches before being replaced early in the second half by Adam Idah. The midfielder headed straight down the tunnel after leaving the field.

To add injury to insult for the Canaries, Ozan Kabak was forced off with an apparent ankle problem in the first half, joining several first-team regulars - including the likes of club captain Grant Hanley, Milot Rashica and Mathias Normann - already on the sidelines.

After the game, Smith said he "doesn't know" if he will have enough players to face West Ham on Saturday.

- BBC

Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang stripped of Arsenal captaincy

Arsenal stripped Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang of the captaincy to "defend the interests" of the club, says manager Mikel Arteta.

Aubameyang, 32, was removed as skipper after his "latest disciplinary breach".

The Gabon striker, who was dropped for Saturday's 3-0 Premier League win over Southampton, will not be considered for Wednesday's game against West Ham.

"We have made this decision that unfortunately is a really tough one," said Arteta.

"If I had to choose I wouldn't like to be sitting here talking about it, but we had to do it.

"When we have to make that decision, it's because it's the right one to defend the interests of the football club."

Arteta has not disclosed how Aubameyang broke the rules, but The Athletic reported that he returned late from an authorised trip abroad.

Aubameyang was dropped for disciplinary reasons in March, missing the win over rivals Tottenham for a "breach of pre-match protocol".

Asked when Aubameyang might return to the squad, Arteta said: "For now, it's been a lot to digest and a really difficult decision to make, so we need a bit of time.

"It was really hurting and he needs a bit of time to heal."

On his relationship with Aubameyang, Arteta said: "Since I have been here, really good - that's what is painful."

Who will replace Aubameyang as Arsenal captain?

Aubameyang took over as captain in November 2019 after midfielder Granit Xhaka was relieved of the job by then boss Unai Emery.

In a statement Arsenal said: "We expect all our players, particularly our captain, to work to the rules and standards we have all set and agreed."



Aubameyang, who joined Arsenal for £56m from Borussia Dortmund in 2018, signed a new three-year contract last year.

This season he has scored only four goals in 14 league games and none since 22 October.

Arsenal are sixth in the table, 12 points behind leaders Manchester City.

Arteta said he told Aubameyang "face-to-face" about the decision, but the Spaniard did not say who would replace him.

"We have the leadership group and the different players nominated to be captain - we will follow that," he said.

"It is a really unpleasant situation and it is not the moment to make any rash decision.

"They (the dressing room) have accepted the decision. They know because they have committed to it and they have demanded that we want to take our culture, our demands, who we want to be as a club and how we want to represent this football club, to a different level.

"When those standards are not met you know that you cannot participate in our daily basics."

Analysis

This is very a big call from Arteta. He has always talked of "non-negotiables" and he must feel Aubameyang has crossed the line turning up late twice in a year.

Last Thursday Arteta said there was no desire to sell Aubameyang in January: "We have never discussed something like this. When players are having difficult periods what we have to give is support."

Since then, Aubameyang has been stripped of the captaincy and dropped from two Premier League matches. Having lost the captaincy and his place in the starting XI, there's every chance Aubameyang might want to leave and Arteta will not stand in his way next month.

As for replacements, Alexandre Lacazette will probably be captain against West Ham. Xhaka is a leader at the club but I'm not sure that would go down well with the Arsenal fans after he was stripped of the captaincy. Kieran Tierney and Gabriel would be the fans' favourites. **- BBC**

Edouard Mendy:



How Chelsea goalkeeper became Africa's number one

■ Victoire Eyoum

Wherever he goes in Africa, Senegal's Edouard Mendy - the continent's only Premier League goalkeeper - says he is hugely inspired by those he meets.

The Chelsea star, 29, has had an unforgettable year since joining in September 2020 on the insistence of the club's legendary former goalkeeper Petr Cech.

Now boasting Champions League and Uefa Super Cup medals, Mendy is starting to emulate the Czech's trophy-laden spell with the Blues after a string of largely-flawless performances.

"It's incredible because I've made people proud across the continent," he told BBC Sport Africa. "Everywhere in Africa, when I walk in the street, people stop to congratulate me.

"It's something exceptional because when you go to South Africa, Congo or Togo, say, you have all these people saying they're proud of you, they're backing you and telling you to continue what you're doing.

"That gives me enormous pleasure and makes me want to keep on winning."

The latter is something he's getting used to. His debut Champions League season was remarkable - as he lifted the trophy, became the first goalkeeper to keep nine clean sheets (a joint-record) in his first year and was later named Uefa's Goalkeeper of 2020-21.

Little surprise then that it's his highlight of the year.

"It's the most difficult competition in Europe," he said.

"We were very good in the group stages, knock-out stages and the final. For my first year in the Champions League, it was a good debut."

His favourite save of 2021 came in the tournament too, when keeping out Real Madrid's Karim Benzema in the second leg of a semi-final Chelsea won 2-0 to book their place in May's final against Manchester City.



In Porto, Mendy became the first African goalkeeper to play a Champions League final, even if Zimbabwe's Bruce Grobbelaar had twice done so in the tournament's forerunner, the European Cup (winning in 1984, but losing in 1985).

"It's real pride for me and my family," he said.

Grobbelaar and Mendy form precisely half the total tally of African Premier League goalkeepers since its launch in 1992, with Nigeria's Carl Ikeme and Ghanaian Richard Kingson the only others.

"I know it's a responsibility and I've always said I'll do my best to make people proud and show there could be lots more African goalkeepers in the Premier League."

The man known as 'Edou' at Chelsea is certainly doing that - registering an impressive 36 clean sheets in his first 65 Blues games, and conceding just 42 goals.

Cech mate

BBC ASPOTY 2021: Edouard Mendy

Mendy owes his Premier League chance to Cech, whose own journey from Rennes to Stamford Bridge resulted in one Champions League win and four championships among other triumphs.

"Petr pushed hard to recruit me so when I arrived, I really wanted to be the best on the pitch - to show him he had made the best choice," said Mendy.

He started as he meant to go on, keeping clean sheets in six of his first seven games, with one of these a goalless draw away to Manchester United - a game he still savours.

"I think of the match against Manchester United - one of my first in the Premier League and at Old Trafford, which is well-known in football as being one of the most beautiful places to play."

Mendy says he was able to hit the ground running in England because he knew and "loved" the country already, having visited many times previously since his sister lived here.

Asked about the biggest changes he had to adapt to, Mendy points to the level of intensity in the English top flight and its packed Christmas schedule.

Rags to riches

While reflecting on his rise, Mendy credits his father and brother for enabling him to overcome serious setbacks.

"My dad told me to work hard if I wanted something, while my brother took me to a stadium to practice, so it's my family who've always supported me and pushed me to reach my goals."

Although he signed his first professional contract back in 2011 with third-tier side Cherbourg in France, where he grew up, he entered a footballing desert when that deal ended in 2014.

Misled by an agent, he spent a year with no club and thus no income, so forcing the then 22-year-old to register with France's unemployment agency as he seriously considered his future.

But after a former team-mate recommended Mendy to a friend at Marseille, the Senegalese joined as a fourth-choice goalkeeper before his performances for the reserves found him drawing interest from elsewhere.

Mendy chose Ligue 2 side Reims, who he helped win promotion, and after a fine first season in the French top-flight prompted his 2019 move to Rennes, his continued good form found big-spending Chelsea chasing the once cash-strapped Mendy.

"My story can symbolise hope for a lot of people, because there are a lot of young players who can find themselves in my situation," he says.

"It's a mixture of faith, patience and work - lots of work. You need to believe in yourself, and always work harder than others."

Mendy's impressive feats saw him named Senegal's footballer of the year, so ending a run of six straight crowns for Liverpool's Sadio Mane.

Last month, he was also recognised as one of the world's best - finishing runner-up in the Yashin Trophy, which is awarded to Europe's greatest goalkeeper by France Football during the Ballon d'Or gala.

"A few years ago, I was unemployed, without a club, and today I find myself named among the world's best goalkeepers. It shows me I'm on the right track, and in the right place to win titles and be the best in the world." **- BBC**