

The Villager

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Two New Columns

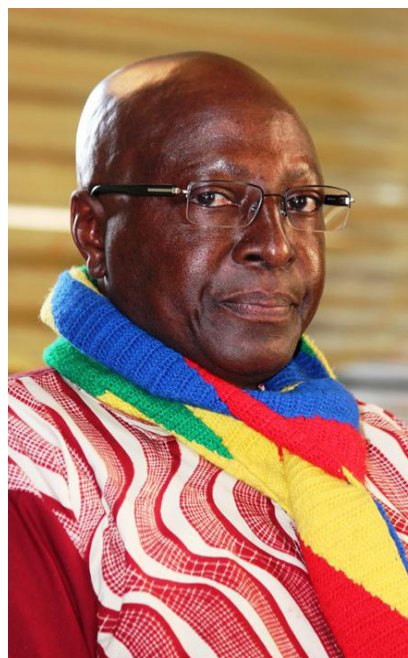
We have introduced
two new columns on
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for Saturday editions
only.

Parliamentarians Want Retirement Age Pushed Beyond 60

■ **Frans Sinengela**

Swanu president Tangeni Iiyambo and PDM leader McHenry Venaani last week called for the retirement age to be pushed beyond 60 years for academic and vocational trainers. According to the two MPs, academic and vocational trainers who reach the age of 60 should continue to hold public office until they can no longer serve. Motivating his motion in parliament last week, Iiyambo called on members of parliament to consider the ravaged past circumstances Namibia has gone through and reflect on both the past, present and the future, and cautiously review the country's retirement policy. Tangeni further argued that those who managed to graduate and can pass on their "hard-earned" knowledge academically should be given opportunities to impart their "diverse wealth" of knowledge to future generations.

"Our level of loss or developmental insufficiency does not warrant us to let go of our intellectuals early," said Iiyambo. Iiyambo argued that many developed countries' higher education systems had abolished mandatory retirement in recent decades, while mandatory/early retirements are still entrenched in Africa. "Formerly colonised entities, because of their dependency syndrome, inherit colonial laws and continue practising them even way long after independence, and these laws are retrogressive," said Iiyambo. "It is the prerogative power of the government of the day to systematically keep the intellectuals in institutions for a relatively longer period of time as opposed to a conservative if not a retrogressive policy of early retirement of 60 years at the Unam and 65 at Nust," he said.



Continued on P2

Two men Arrested for Offering to Buy Albino Body Parts

■ **Ludorf Iyambo**

The Katutura Magistrate's Court denied Fred Simasiku and Obrine Liwelu bail on Tuesday. The two were arrested on 18 February 2022 in Windhoek after approaching a person living with albinism asking him to sell them his hair. The unnamed person with albinism then reached out to the Namibia Albinism Association, which then tipped off the police about the offer. The police then set up a sting operation that led to the men's arrest. Magistrate Dawid Mukuyu postponed the matter to 29 June 2022 for further investigation. Namibia Albinism Association leader Joseph Ndinomupya said that the incident reached their office, and it was shocking news. Ndinomupya said this is the first case they have heard in Namibia.



Continued on P2

Two men

"We only used to hear this from other countries such as Malawi and Tanzania. We always hear that our albinism brothers and sisters are being killed in other countries, and their body parts are being cut off for ritual and some witchcraft practices," said Ndinomupya.

Walde Kambabi, the vice president of the Namibia Albinism Association, claimed that the people living with albinism want to know who is behind such a business and the kind of business they do.

According to Kambabi, the two men offered to buy the albino hair for N\$1 million.

Kambabi said their members want the judiciary to know that there are such people who buy albinism hair and toes.

He also said that the culprits should be punished harshly as an example to others.

"We are happy these people were denied bail. We want the judiciary to be harsh on them until they reveal what they do with our body parts. We don't want to live in a society with fear," he said.

A member of the association, Hileni Mathew, said that the incident affected her and she is not comfortable being approached by unknown people.

Mathew narrated that her father told her to be careful with people out in the world when she was young.

She said the environment is not safe for people living with albinism anymore.

"I was approached by many men, telling me that I will be lucky to get a job if I sleep with you. I don't know what the future hold for us. This is so scary. Imagine now everyone is approaching you to be their girlfriend,

but maybe they don't love you, they want something from you. I feel like if I accept such a person's proposal, they might cut off my nails or shave off my hair while I am sleeping," said Mathew.

Kuku Nashani, from the traditional healers association, said that no true healer would ask anybody to go and kill someone for a ritual.

Nashani added that the people who practice such things are not part of their associations.

"I was approached by many men, telling me that I will be lucky to get a job if I sleep with you."

Parliamentarians

Venaani praised Iiyambo for what he called a "well-thought motion". He gave an example of the late lead negotiator and special envoy on the Nama-Herero genocide in Germany, Zedekia Ngavirue, who died at the age of 86.

According to Venaani, the Ngavirue's mind was still sharp such that he could still articulate well the geopolitical history from the happenings in the Indochina, Namibia and South African economic situations.

Venaani further argued that a person's mind is not limited by how old they have become, but it should all depend on one's health status.

"Go to European universities, you will find an 82-year-old lecturer, while in Africa, at 60, one must already go," he said.

However, a labour expert, Herbert Jauch, said that given the labour market and high unemployment rate among young people in the country, raising the bar for retirement to

even five years will mean more scarce employment opportunities for young people.

"It will be counter-productive to increase the retirement age," he told The Villager.

Jauch said there is a need to keep the young people in the labour market instead of having old people hanging on to jobs.

"Skills can be transferred to young people while on the job. Education is an ongoing thing. The labour market needs younger than old people."

Jauch further argued that skills could be refined and developed as a continuous process. According to him, when that is done, there will be no need to return retired people to a labour market because the market has a well and able young labour force.

Battle For The Soul of NUST Rages On

■ Kelvin Chiringa

The battle for the soul of the NUST yesterday played out in the High Court, as Professor Ferdinand Gideon insists that the appointment of Dr Eroid Naomab as Vice-Chancellor was unlawful, unfair, irrational and unreasonable.

Prof Gideon, represented yesterday by lawyer, Sisa Namandje, launched the application for an order, essentially reviewing and setting aside the appointment of Dr Naomab. The application itself has been opposed by various university bodies and by Dr Naomab.

The NUST Vice-Chancellor position became vacant in 2018.

However, Naomab's appointment created an outcry when leaked documents suggested that Gideon had scored the highest amongst the shortlisted candidates.

Professor Gideon is pitted against the chairperson of the council of NUST, chairperson of the joint search committee of the council senate, and the higher education minister.

He decries in his court papers that he has not been appointed NUST Vice-Chancellor despite being a professor, which according to him, is an advantage.

He told the court that he came out top with 58.30%, while Dr Naomab was ranked third with 54.70%.

According to Prof. Gideon, "Had NUST appointed its Vice-Chancellor during that round of recruitment, the applicant would thus have been appointed."

"The NUST council decided to re-advertise the position at that point. It was after that first recruitment process which was abandoned and in which the applicant was the best-performing candidate, that NUST re-advertised the vacancy for the position of Vice-Chancellor in the media on 21 January 2020."

Dr Naomab and Prof Gideon (and others) applied for the vacancy of the Vice-Chancellor, and they were the only shortlisted candidates.

They went through a battery of processes, including public interviews, psychometric tests and background checks.

At the end of the process, the university's council appointed Dr Naomab as the Vice-Chancellor.

Aggrieved by that appointment, Prof Gideon launched this application on an urgent basis for an interdict, which was dismissed, and persisted with the review application, which has now ripened for hearing.

Was Naomab lawfully appointed?



According to Prof. Gideon, "The 1st Respondent's council, prior to the position's advertisement, decided that it would be an advantage for a candidate to have a professorial rank. It is common cause that the 5th Respondent does not have that advantage (professorial rank). Yet, despite him losing out to the applicant in both the quantitative and qualitative selection process, he was nevertheless bizarrely appointed."

For his part, Dr Naomab submitted that the crux of the issue hinges on what the council considered or did not consider in deciding to appoint him.

He said, "At the outset, it should be mentioned that Prof Gideon, in his extensive affidavits filed for record, does not say that Dr Naomab is incompetent to be appointed as Vice-Chancellor of the university, or that the attributes of Dr Naomab make him otherwise unfit for the position. Prof Gideon simply states that he has out-performed Dr Naomab during the selection process, and he should thus have been appointed as the Vice-Chancellor."

Chiefly, as per Naomab's argument, a court does not ordinarily interfere in the decision of an administrative body or person.

He said that the university council was presented with the Joint Search Committee of the Council Senate (JSCCS) report, carefully considered all the information at its disposal, and decided to appoint him.

He submitted that what is incumbent is that the council must carefully consider the information at its disposal and then make a decision, as per section (1)(b) of Part Five of the NUST Statutes.

"That is what a reasonable and fair admin-



istrative body would do. The NUST Statutes do not require the council to simply rubberstamp the report of the JSCCS, as it seems to be suggested by Prof Gideon. It is required that the JSCCS consider the report and appoint the Vice-Chancellor after that consideration.

"The council and the JSCCS (which recommended Dr Naomab as its preferred candidate) had two candidates to choose from. Both candidates were otherwise competent to be appointed – with the exception of Prof Gideon's unsupported claims that he supervised a humANELY impossible number of PhD and Master's Degree candidates and other concerns on his background checks – and therefore, the administrative repository of the relevant powers and functions reached a conclusion that a reasonable person could have come to".

He said that there was more than one possible conclusion (in other words, Prof Gideon could also have been the chosen candidate) or that the court would have come to another decision, is irrelevant.

Naomab concluded by saying that Prof Gideon has not presented an iota of evidence that the appointment of Dr Naomab was irrational insofar as the university is concerned.

"In other words, it has not been suggested in Prof Gideon's various affidavits filed of record that the appointment of Dr Naomab would not achieve the stated statutory objectives of the university as set out in section 5 or that of the office of the Vice-Chancellor as contemplated in section 13(1) of the NUST Act," he said.

Kavango East Police Gun Down Two Suspected Robbers



■ Annakleta Haikera

Police in the Kavango East region shot dead two members of a gang of armed robbers that was said to have been planning a robbery.

The shooting occurred at Ngarama-teya in Rundu Rural Constituency on Monday around 22h45.

Police also arrested two other suspects.

Deputy commissioner Bonifatius Kanyetu confirmed the shooting.

Kanyetu said the gang members were "trying to be fun with the guns", and the police retaliated.

"On Monday, police, acting on a tip-off, managed to intercept a group of four men suspected to commit robbery at Mashare irrigation schemes. These suspects are habitual robbers who are known to the police.

The four suspects had firearms and were equipped with tools related to robbery incidents at various sites," Kanyetu said.

He said the suspects were stopped at a mini roadblock, but they did not comply and produced firearms in retaliation instead.

Kanyetu added that the gang had cases of murder and conspiracy to commit armed robbery, possession of unlicensed firearms and possession of ammunition.

The police also found housebreaking implements in possession of the suspects.

According to Kanyetu, the police confiscated the tools.

The deceased details are withheld as the next-of-kin are still to be informed.

Police are still searching for the suspect's associates while the investigation is ongoing.



A Clean Town with Hungry People Frustrates Street Vendors



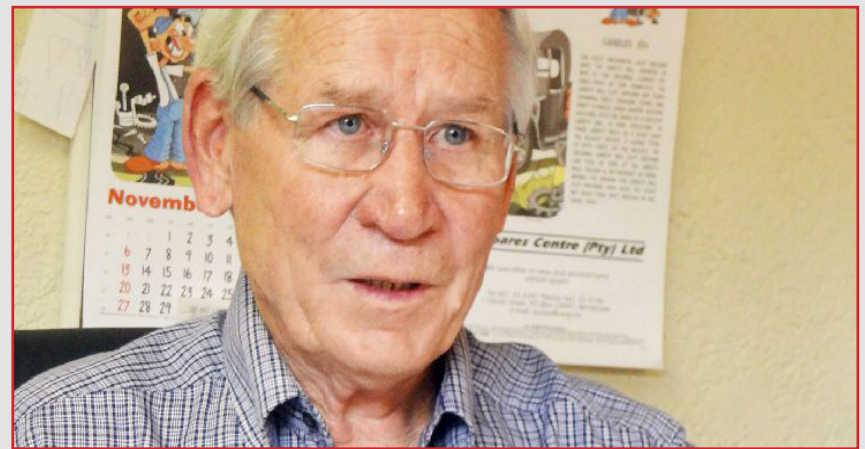
Julia Heita

Angry vendors from Oluno in Ondangwa told The Villager that they've been told to vacate their place of trade with immediate effect as the town council is busy renovating the area with interlocks. The street vendors say they do not want fancy built omatalas (open markets) but instead just serviced land to set up their equipment to sell their goods. One of the vendors, Felesmina Mwandingi, who has been a vendor since 2000, said that the town council never consults them regardless of the letters they write to them. Mwandingi said they've been fighting for land space to build an open market for their businesses since 2017, and when the council built an open market, they never came back to consult them. "We had to go through a draw so we get selected as to who will get space in the open market, only four people from us street vendors this side got space there," she said. Eveline Phillipus, a member of the street vendors committee, said the municipality requested them to move because the council claims they want to clean the area. "How can you have a clean area with hungry

people, people who have kids at home that need to be fed, and people who need to pay school fees and take food home," she questioned. Phillipus said the council sent security guards to move them and their things. "They should come and arrest us. We no longer have the strength in us. Some of us have pending cases for past arrests because of the same incident." Phillipus said the leaders should come out of their offices and talk to the same people who voted for them to come up with a permanent solution. "They are sending security guards while they are just in offices, turning their chairs around while we are fighting each other here. They should come to us, so we talk like normal people and find a solution to the problem." Ondangwa Public Relations Officer town council Petrina Mutikisa said the council builds open markets, but currently, two are partially empty, and only a few places are occupied. Mutikisa said all the street vendors could occupy the current capacity of the open markets. "The street vendors have been notified before moving to the open markets, but they

refuse." When questioned about the high walls of the open market, Mutikisa said that the walls are not an excuse because if all the vendors move there, all the customers will know where to go to get the goods. Mutikisa said they are moving all the street vendors out of the streets. "All the newly open markets are next to the road, which makes it better for the vendors, the market has proper parking, it's safer, and it has toilets," she explained. Ondangwa town council Mayor Paavo Amwele said that the vendors are sitting on the interlocks immediately when they are being fixed, causing damage. "If they sit on the interlocks immediately, they will get damaged, which will defeat the purpose. We told them in advance to move to give space to these people to work," he explained. He said he would meet up with the vendors by next week to explain the process and situation adequately. "I will go talk to them again to ask where they want to be re-located to apart from the streets."

PDM's Smit Unhappy With Parliament Postponement



Eba Kandovazu

PDM parliamentarian Nico Smit says that parliament's work has been put on hold as a result of parliamentarians "taking another holiday", a day after Independence Day celebrations. Smit was responding to the cancellation of Tuesday's parliament session to allow MPs to travel back from Swakopmund, where they attended Independence Day celebrations on Monday. "There are things on the house's agenda, motions that need to be discussed and other discussions on the agenda, but we think it's good to take another holiday and not sit and do our work. Independence celebrations were on Monday. It didn't last the whole day. Why couldn't they travel back last night? They were told not to come back because the cabinet is sitting this morning in Swakopmund. Cabinet with all its staff moved to Swakopmund for the weekend to have cabinet seating there today. For me, this is not good governance because we are wasting money. If you look at the celebrations, what we saw there was not worth N\$2.5 million. I don't know whether the bulk of that money was used. This is

how we squander money, which is why our budget looks the way it looks. It is an embarrassment. The backlog is just building up because about 15 or 20 motions will lapse. We have to re-introduce those motions with the next sitting," Smit said. Smit, however, defended PDM president McHenry Venaani's attendance, saying he was merely an invited guest. "He is not part of the problem. He was invited to attend celebrations. If you are invited to a meeting, you are not responsible for what is happening at that meeting, and you can't be held responsible because you didn't set the agenda or program," Smit stated, adding that Venaani is not part of the cabinet meeting held today. Parliament Spokesperson David Nahogandja said that the communication to host a cabinet meeting in Swakopmund was already sent out last week and that it should not come as a shock. "The decision was made because MPs went to attend the celebrations, and that is why today's session was postponed to tomorrow. No one complained or objected at the time that they are not happy with the postponement of parliament," Nahogandja stated.

Police Regional Commanders Impressed With Low Weekend Crime

Eba Kandovazu

Various Namibian Police regional commanders are impressed with the low rate of crimes reported over the past weekend, saying that locals were on their best behaviour. Oshana regional commander Commissioner Rauha Amwele said that no accidents were reported in her region, nor did they report any serious crime. "During that long weekend, my officers also did not report any shebeen owners who contravened the liquor Act. We also did not confiscate any alcohol. We didn't also receive a lot of visitors in the region. We didn't notice an influx of many vehicles. Friday was payday, so we saw a lot of locals going to



banks and shopping centres. I would love to encourage members of the public to behave in an orderly manner and continue reporting suspicious behaviour," she said. Meanwhile, Khomas Regional Commander

Ishmael Basson said that two shebeen owners were fined yesterday for operating illegally. According to him, the two were arrested. "There was a slight increase in terms of the crimes reported because it was payday weekend and there was money in circulation, so obviously crime tends to pick up and become more prevalent. We also had a murder case where a woman stabbed to death her boyfriend. In terms of visiting travellers, we had more people going out between Thursday and Friday and more people coming back into the region on Monday. Generally speaking, the crime over the weekend was not out of hand. It was relatively quiet," Basson said. Erongo region reported a housebreaking

incident. According to Inspector Ileni Shapumba, bar owners in the region were allowed to operate normally. "People are allowed to sell. Their licenses authorize them to sell. We haven't really paid much attention to shebeens because the law permits people to sell. It is different from region to region. We are responsible for our region specifically. We didn't report major cases apart from the house raking and theft in Omaruru. We also reported an illegal hunting incident," he said. Shapumba also said that a severe accident was reported between Usakos and Karibib last night in which four people reportedly died. Shapumba stated that a double cab Toyota from the Karibib direction towards Usakos collided head-on with a Polo, which

was driving from Usakos. "The driver and three passengers in a polo car died at the scene," Shapumba said. The deceased persons have been identified as Ihuhwa Kamilo, 37, Sheekuli Andreas age (not confirmed), Festus Chris, age (not confirmed) (driver) and Johanna Hamutenya age (not confirmed). They were all residents of Karibib. Oshikoto Regional Head of Operations, Deputy Commissioner Petrus Shigwedha, said no serious crimes were reported in the region. "It was under control. No serious accidents were also reported. We have observed bar owners operating illegally in Omuthiya town, but they closed down after we intervened. I've also been told by our colleagues in Tsumeb that everything was smooth," he said.

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Mining Requirements Throw Out 746 EPL Holders - LPM

Justicia Shipena

The mines ministry and local financial institutions left out Namibians who are part of 746 Exclusive Prospecting Licences (EPL) holders.

LPM spokesperson Eneas Emvula said this on Tuesday in an interview with The Villager. According to Emvula, the mines minister Tom Alweendo's speech at the inauguration of the Debmarine vessel in Walvis Bay over the weekend was discriminatory in terms of EPLs.

"The minister saying EPLs should only be awarded to those with the capability to invest is a sign of absolute economic discrimination and disregard of the role Namibian business fraternity," he said.

Thus he said: "For our mining sector to flourish, the ruling party government should show seriousness in how it deals with managing natural resources for this country to retain ownership still."

Emvula said at instances, EPL holders wanting to secure financial instruments from local financial institutions did not succeed due to them being inaccessible because of discriminatory requirements.

"If financial instruments were more responsive to the local empowerment policies, the minister of mines would have uttered successes reached by locals in the mining sector."

Speaking on Tuesday, he further said financial instruments from local financial institutions failed because they were inaccessible and had discriminatory requirements.

"If the financial instrument were more responsive to the local empowerment policies, the minister of mines would have uttered successes reached by locals in the mining sector."

He further said it is evident that the government has little consideration of the effort by local business people in the mining sector.

He also touched on the foreign direct investment policy, saying it has failed people.

"JinPeng Mining, a majority Chinese shareholding company whose majority shareholders have evaded Namibia to Hong Kong, was awarded an EPL and a prospecting license for copper at Swartmodder mine of Rehoboth Urban West Constituency."

Emvula said this mine has drummed up over N\$16million in debt in rates and taxes and thus still owe the town's council.

He said no exploration license could be established during the investigation on the mine.

"Contrary to minister Alweendo's statement, the conduct of many foreign capitalised mining companies is not concurrent with the genuine economic empowerment," he expressed.

In his speech, Alweendo had said there are

two critical success factors to attain the upliftment of Namibia.

"We must provide greater opportunities to the most marginal members of our society. These opportunities must include educational opportunities, but also work opportunities," he said.

He stated that employed people make a difference to their families and communities.

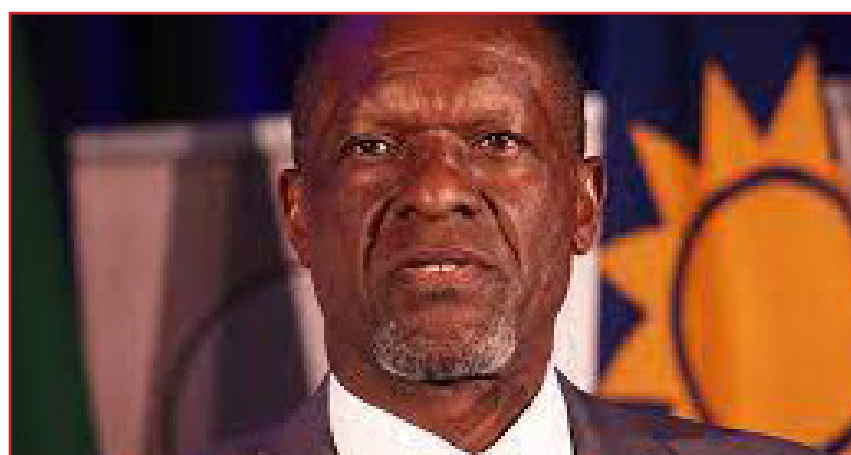
"Government social grants are essential, but these grants will never be able to address the inequality challenge we have as a country," said Alweendo.

Alweendo expressed that Namibia can no longer afford to sit for decades on EPLs.

"If you don't have the means or the capital to develop EPLs, let's find the people who have the means. The truth is that the world is moving forward so rapidly - potential minerals that are used and can make an economic return, may not be in demand in the next few years."

Hence, he added it is vital to develop EPLs as soon as possible for the country to benefit from the economic spin-offs.

"We need to up our game on all fronts, more significantly, environmental considerations and working conditions for employees. We also need to become more vigorous advocates collectively as Namibians and our investors for the good that comes from these investments. We need the revenue to fulfil our development agendas," he concluded.



Developed and developing economies and decarbonisation challenge ...carbon price and implementations

Nghiinomenwa Erastus

International Monetary Fund's climate researchers highlighted that current policies are insufficient to stop the projected increase in global emissions, let alone meet the temperature.

The researchers indicated concerns about the compatibility of decarbonisation with continued robust growth, fairness of international burden sharing, and risks of competitiveness losses as the main obstacles in global climate action.

In their departmental paper titled Economic and Environmental Benefits from International Cooperation on Climate Policies published last week- the researchers discussed and analysed various international mechanisms to scale up global action on climate mitigation and address the policy gap.

Despite the new commitments made at COP 26, there is still an ambition and a policy gap at the global level to keep temperature increases below the two degrees Celcius agreed in Paris.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) researchers explained that avoiding the worst outcomes of climate change requires an urgent scaling up of climate policies.

Recent policy proposals include the idea of common minimum carbon prices, which underlie the IMF's international carbon price proposal.

While global carbon prices are not a new idea, the new elements are the use of carbon price floors—which allow countries to do more if they wish and the differentiation of carbon price floors by the level of development.

The High-Level Commission on Carbon

Prices (2017) found that staying below the two degrees Celcius increase would require policies equivalent to a global carbon price between \$50 and \$100 by 2030. Still, the explicit global average carbon price is currently only \$3.

The IMF assessment shows that emissions are expected to increase enormously without climate action, driven by robust GDP growth. Although such a correlation has been identified, multiple obstacles have hindered international coordination on climate policies.

The researchers found that Low- and Middle-income Countries (LICs and MICs) are concerned that decarbonisation would compromise their development prospects.

The LICs and MICs ask that high-income countries (HICs) bear a larger burden of the global mitigation effort (including through climate finance), given their responsibility for historical greenhouse gas emissions.

In contrast, HICs are concerned that ambitious climate policies on their part would put their producers at a competitive disadvantage in both domestic and international markets.

This could lead to a reallocation of emission-intensive economic activity to other countries with laxer policies and negate part of their emissions reductions.

For low-income countries (LICs) and middle-income countries (MICs), the resistance to more climate action is rooted in the concern that decarbonisation would compromise their development prospects by making energy more expensive, given their fast-growing energy needs.

Increasing the consumer price of fossil fuels might also increase energy poverty and slow down increasing energy access for poorer

households.

IMF researchers indicated that LICs and MICs also highlight those high-income countries (HICs) should bear a larger burden of the global mitigation effort.

This includes providing climate finance to LICs, given their responsibility for the large majority of historical greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions which have caused the problem of global warming.

In contrast, high-income countries want to move ahead with ambitious climate policies. Still, they are concerned about competitiveness losses for their energy-intensive and trade-exposed (EITE) industries and carbon leakage if they adopt more stringent carbon-pricing policies than their partners.

DECARBONISATION OPTIONS

The IMF paper compares various international mechanisms proposed to enhance global climate action, discussing their emission, economic, burden-sharing, and competitiveness impacts.

The paper assessed five main policy scenarios going up to 2030.

The first policy scenario is an international carbon price floor in which high-middle- and low-income countries introduce carbon price floors of \$75, \$50, and \$25, respectively.

The researchers explained that price minima allow the arrangement to complement the Paris Agreement—countries can still set higher prices than the floor price if this is needed to help meet their Paris pledge.

In this scenario, carbon price floors are applied worldwide and not just to a subset of large emitters in the spirit of global minimum carbon prices and to minimise competitiveness concerns.

The second scenario calculates the uniform global carbon price, which delivers cumulative emissions reductions similar to the international carbon price floor arrangement (the carbon price in 2030 is about \$56, close to the midpoint of the carbon price floors).

The third and fourth scenarios consider the case of fragmented action, in which only high-income countries implement ambitious climate policies, and examine the impacts both without and with border carbon adjustment of various designs.

This study uses a newly developed dynamic computable general equilibrium model for analysing significant and simultaneous policy changes across the global economy by integrating trade impact and induced changes in global energy prices and providing a broader assessment of the economic effects on GDP, employment, investment, competitiveness, and burden-sharing.

In the case of unilateral action by high-income countries, border carbon adjustment mechanisms address issues related to carbon leakage and loss of competitiveness in energy-intensive and trade-exposed sectors of acting countries.

However, they are not a game-changer regarding global emissions reductions.

A sectoral international carbon price floor arrangement for energy-intensive and trade-exposed sectors is suggested to be a better alternative to border carbon adjustments.

GOING FORWARD

International carbon price floors are essential for scaling up climate mitigation in line with the temperature target of the Paris Agreement.

The carbon price floors are considered

to reduce global carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions by 29 per cent below the baseline and about 13 per cent from current (2019) levels, consistent with keeping temperature increases below two degrees Celcius (for all GHG emissions, the corresponding reductions are 26,6 per cent and 9 per cent).

The IMF researchers found that international carbon price floors scale up climate mitigation at relatively small macro-economic costs and are compatible with continued economic development, provided needed energy investments materialise.

Assuming that carbon-pricing revenues are used productively (for example, to reduce labour income taxes), GDP growth remains robust under the international carbon price floors. It is only slightly lower than under the baseline.

Differentiated carbon prices under the international carbon price floor arrangement also allow for more inter-national burden-sharing than a uniform carbon price, at a small efficiency cost.

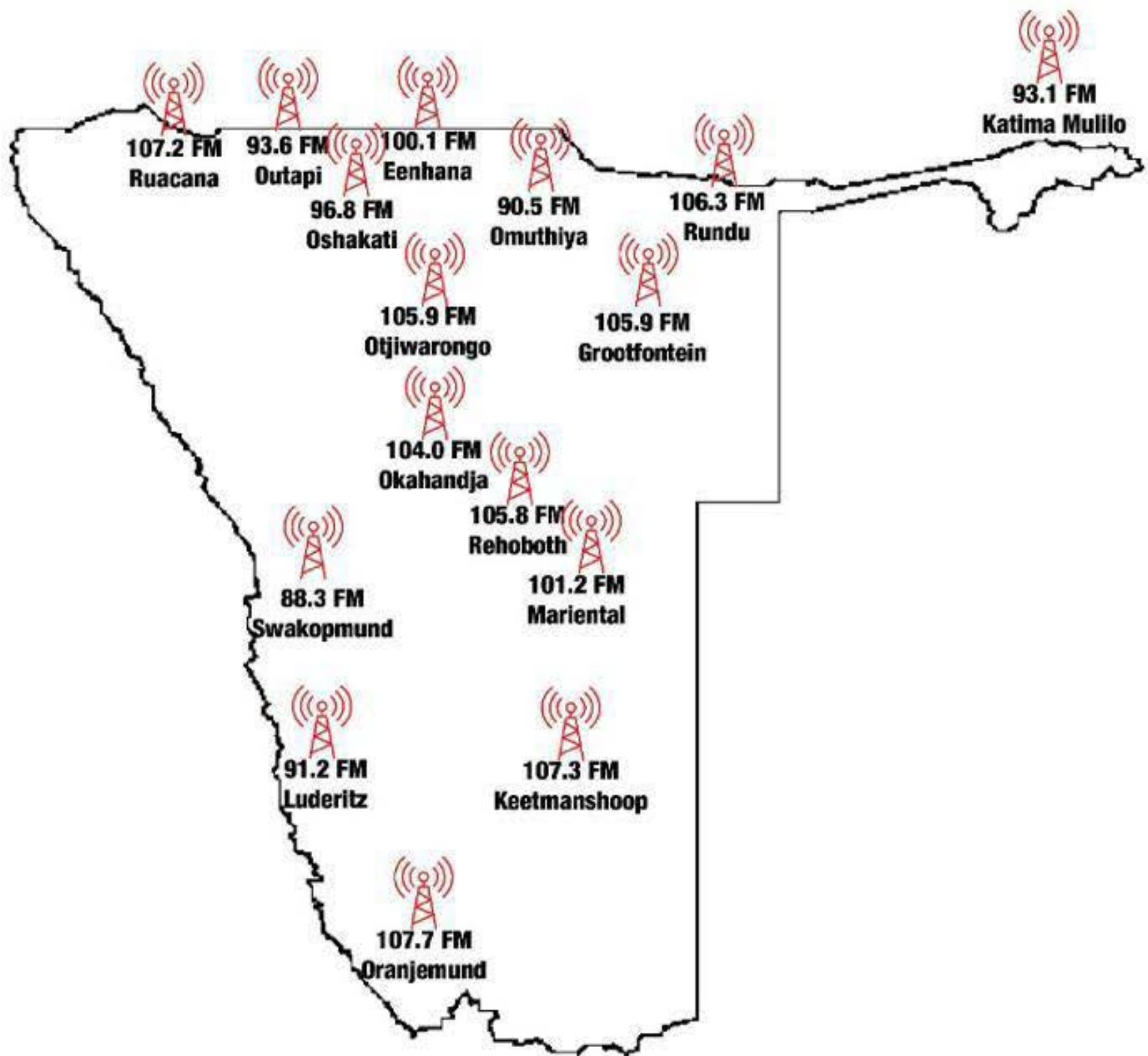
The researchers indicated that border carbon adjustments would be useful if middle- and low-income countries do not initially participate in an international carbon price floor arrangement.

By protecting domestic industries from carbon leakage and competitiveness losses, they do not deliver substantial additional reductions in global emissions.

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Bridgerton: South Asian faces on TV 'makes me happy'

■ **Paige Neal-Holder and Steffan Powell**

Hit period drama Bridgerton returns for a second series on Friday - with two of its lead characters portrayed by actresses of South Asian heritage. Young actors from the same background tell BBC News why on-screen representation is so important to them.

"If you've not seen yourself on screen before, why would you ever want to go for that role?" Laraib Waheed tells us. She wants to make a living in musical theatre one day, but for now she's sitting in the kitchen of her student house - taking a break from her training to chat. The lack of South Asian actors in prominent television roles, she says, makes people like her worry their dream career is "not realistic". But the 19-year-old is optimistic that things are beginning to change.

"I think it's quite ground-breaking," says the student, who's living in Brighton. Born in London, her family is originally from Pakistan.

"You've suddenly got representation from not one, but two South Asian



women and it's a period drama which traditionally you'd only see white cast members in."

What's rare about this, according to Laraib, is that usually when South Asian actors do get on screen they tend "to be in a supporting role or playing a stereotype".

"When I see any person of colour on screen, especially if they are South Asian, it lights something up in me because you just don't see it."

Bridgerton's first series is second only to Squid Game in the list of Netflix's most-viewed TV series.

Some critics have described the show as shallow, preposterous and cliché ridden, but the diversity of its cast was widely praised and audiences lapped it up in their millions.

Bridgerton has adopted a variation of colour-blind casting, where a person's skin colour plays no part in the decision to give them a role.

Show boss Chris Van Dusen describes it as colour-conscious casting, with freedom to give people from diverse backgrounds a role but where a character's race can still play a part in their story.

Television critic Ellen E Jones tells us that seeing such a variety of ethnic backgrounds on screen is a positive step, especially since "period drama is such a massive part of the British film and TV industry, and if you exclude people of colour you're excluding them from a lot of the industry".

"The consequences of that is you've had generations of black and brown actors who are British being forced to go to America to find interesting roles like Idris Elba, Riz Ahmed and Thandiwe Newton have done," she says.

Giving actors access to a historically white-only world is a good thing, Ellen says, but she adds: "It doesn't solve the issues of race and racism as it doesn't engage with those subjects at all."

"People want to escape into a fantasy and that's what Bridgerton does, and importantly it offers that to people of colour as well as to white people and I think that is important. If you understand it in those terms, it is to be celebrated, but it's not about racism or race, it's not challenging any of those very embedded notions in our society."

"I don't think Bridgerton is doing anything wrong and I'm glad it exists, but there's room for so much more."

Sixteen-year-old Gia Lal has just finished an exam at college when she sits down to chat to us about her dream of being a soap actor.

"I'd love to be in something like Ackley Bridge, Coronation Street or EastEnders," she explains, saying that they're "enjoyable and inspiring".

Gia, who lives near Birmingham, says seeing South Asian faces on major releases "makes me happy that these actors are getting recognised a lot more".

However, having prominent roles in series like Bridgerton is more than just inspiration for aspiring performers. Gia thinks it carries a message to the broader South Asian community in the UK as well.

She suggests South Asian parents and families "want their kids to be doctors or scientists", but with more people from these communities making a success of acting, Gia thinks it'll inspire more

to be open about chasing futures in the performing arts.

"For kids and teenagers who want to go into acting and are really passionate about it, it'll make them feel like they're not alone, they won't feel like the odd one out, they'll have somebody to look up to."

Laraib agrees.

She's had to hide the truth of her studies to go into acting, pretending instead to be studying criminology.

Laraib is aware that, by speaking to us, they might learn the reality. "I think this is a discussion that is to do with community," she says.

"In the South Asian community it's typical to be pushed towards academic degrees, for example being a doctor, an engineer or a dentist and if you aren't one of these things it's not accepted."

"A lot of my family members don't know I'm an actor and it sounds ridiculous because I am. But if the South Asian community as a whole sees two main characters representing us, it reinforces the idea that it's possible [to have a successful career in acting]."

Charithra Chandran, who plays Edwina Sharma in the new series of Bridgerton, told the Radio Times the show has changed attitudes towards diverse casting, but there is a pressure that comes with it.

"Minorities are often alluded to as being there to tick boxes, to fill a quota. I cannot tell you how unbelievably invalidating that is. It penetrates our minds and makes us feel like we're not worthy of success," the actress said.

"I had people at university tell me, 'You only got the lead in that show because they needed to have a person of colour in it'. It makes you doubt everything. When you are a minority you invariably feel the weight of representing your entire community. That's not imposed by anyone - but it's something I feel."

Reuben Jordan Virdee is sitting on his white leather sofa taking his time to consider the question of what these two roles mean for up-and-coming South Asian actors.

The 23-year-old is studying at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire and is hoping to work in theatre one day.

After a pause, he says: "These are people that have done everything that their white counterparts have done to get into this position."

"They've got their roles because they deserve it, and that in turn will lead to more roles for people like me and I think that'll just help people in the South Asian community."

"They're going to see that and think, well, if it's on TV, if my children are saying it's something they want to get into, then why not try?"

Reuben is supportive of programmes that use colour-blind casting to fill the roles in their programmes, however, like Ellen, he also strikes a note of caution.

If it gets to a point where the industry thinks it is the only way to go, he says, then it's not servicing the stories of people as well as it should.

"I think that there need to be writers and directors from different backgrounds also writing stories unique to different cultures, so we can all see them."

-BBC



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How Will Anti-Independence Opposition Parties Commemorate the Day if They Rule?

I have much praise for the PDM leader McHenry Venaani. I am also proud of Nudo leader Ester Muinjangué. Add UDF's president Apius Auchab for attending the independence celebrations.

President Hage Geingob too did well to extend invitations to these leaders. They are leaders because they were voted into parliament.

Unfortunately, African politics is so toxic that such maturity is misconceived as bootlicking but those who would want to cast the nation in a bad light.

It means that whichever party will snatch the administrative role from Swapo will also remember and honour 21 March.

Venaani did very well to attend because that is how mature politicians behave. Those leaders who saw it fit not to attend the celebrations lack foresight. Some of them are expiring, and their concerns may not matter much. Others are still sweltering in the heat of bitterness and can stomach being led.

Since Venaani is the one who has come under heavy fire, I will limit this conversation to him and make it about him.

I believe that when Venaani accepted the invitation, he did not do so for personal reasons but as a leader voted into parliament by a segment of the society.

Second, most opposition party leaders are divisive in their approach to national issues. The Swapo Party fought for Namibia's independence.

Swapo is the ruling party. Yes, their votes may have been taken away in 2019, but they remain for now the ruling party. They have the prerogative to host the independence celebrations.

When any opposition party removes Swapo from power, they still have the prerogative of organising independence celebrations. They cannot come in and cancel 21 March just because they are in opposition right now.

Ghana is among the first African countries to attain independence. Over the years, Ghana has suffered coups and democratically elected governments overthrown.

But even the military regimes that ruled Ghana respected Independence Day despite their concerns with Kwame Nkrumah, who was overthrown in a coup.

Kwame Nkrumah led the Convention of the People's Party to win Ghana's independence from the British in 1957 until the February 1966 coup.

Even the National Liberation Council leaders who carried out a coup on 24 February 1966 until 1969 observed Ghana's Independence Day celebrations.

The Progressive Party that assumed power from August 1969 until 1972 remembered Ghana's Independence Day. And the coup leaders who belonged to the National Redemption Council that governed Ghana from 13 January 1972 until 9 October 1975 never forgot 6 March 1957.

The People's National Party followed the tradition between 1979 and 1981.

In short, on 6 March 2022, the New Patriotic Party in power currently led the 65th independence of Ghana's independence. President Nana Akufo addressed the people and spoke about issues affecting the nation.

There could be issues of money and the poor performing economy, but there is always a reason to celebrate independence. There could be serious concerns about how the Swapo-led government handled the celebrations, but that does take away that 21 March is Namibia's Independence Day.

I noticed that some of the vocal leaders regarding the event have been struggling to be in parliament. There are no chances that they will be sitting in the National Assembly after 2024.

But for those who have their eyes set on the presidency, attending the national event means looking into the future. As Venaani said, he does not see why he should not attend independence celebrations for a country he could run one day.

One day Swapo will be shunted out, and another party comes in. Will they shun independence day simply because Swapo has been organising the event ever since?

Namibian politicians must be mature and wise. Dividing people does not harm Swapo but the nation. It may work for them now, but the backlash will be tremendous when such a culture is entrenched.

The Economics of Before and After Independence Namibian Economy



■ Josef Kefas Sheehama

The historical foundation laid by colonialism should be taken into consideration to understand the present and forecast the future political and economic condition of Namibia economy.

Generally speaking, the end result of colonial rule on Namibian economy was the creation of mono-economic system leaving the colonies behind dependent on one principal agricultural or mineral export. However, it should not be by-passed that rural economy was highly neglected and industrial development remained rudimentary. Most of the technical and skilled labour was made up by certain group of minority people. The same goes for access to education, water, electricity, health and transport routes. All leading to a very skew distribution of income and quality of life in Namibia. Colonial economic policies undermined the economic future of the Namibian economy.

Significant progress is being made on our developmental journey since the advent of democracy in 1990. Namibia has prioritized access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all, particularly for the poor. We need to pay sustained and comprehensive attention to managing our dependence, and transitioning to an economy that relies less and less on foreign aid. Despite progress in Namibia's development, the country still faces major challenges inter alia high unemployment and poverty levels; high inequality; inadequate economic growth, due to various structural constraints. Critical interventions towards Vision 2030 to stimulating the economy; raising investment and employment levels, especially youth employment, strengthen capacity of the state and strengthen partnerships. Combatting inequality has been backed by the Constitution, and the adoption of NDPs and HPP's. Namibia is poised to become the renewable energy hub of Africa. Namibia has made great progress in respect of some goals, but is confronted by major challenges on many fronts.

As the saying goes, Rome wasn't built in a day. Every citizen holds Namibia's economic potential in their hands. Namibia has performed well on other fronts such as institutional and infrastructure development as well as the preservation of peace and stability. These continue to be important pillars of support for creating a predictable business environment. Delivering the best economic performance possible for Namibia within the current constitutional constraints. It takes decisive steps towards the creation of a wellbeing economy, and drives a green economic recovery to meet our climate and nature targets while ensuring we maximise the benefits as part of a transition. But with the full powers of an independent Namibia we can, of course, deliver more. At present, macro-economic, fiscal, migration and other levers lie with the Namibia Government. The task of transforming our economy requires an equally radical transformation in the way we deliver results. Government will provide clear and decisive leadership, but it can't and shouldn't do everything. We must be a country in which the public and private sectors respect each other's strengths, draw on each other's talents and work together to create and sustain an economy that works for all.

Our NDP's and HPP's is for Namibia to be successful. Success means a strong economy where good, secure and well-paid jobs and growing businesses have driven a significant reduction in poverty and, in particular, child poverty. It means a nation of entrepreneurs and innovators, with resilient supply chains and competitive advantages in the new industries generated by technological change, scientific advance and our response to the climate and nature crises. It means a society in which everyone can participate in economic success, in every community and in every region. Namibia V2030 is to create a wellbeing economy, a society that is thriving across economic, social and environmental dimensions, and that delivers prosperity for all Namibian's people and places. Ensure that people have the skills they need at every stage of life to have rewarding careers and meet the demands of an ever-changing economy and society, and that employers invest in the skilled employees they need to grow their businesses.

We can only succeed and achieve our goals if we pull together as the nation of Namibia. This economic strategy calls for a national endeavour, drawing on the talents, resources and commitment of every citizen. The benefits of our success will be shared, and so must be the actions we undertake to deliver that success. We will draw on the strengths of people and organisations from all sectors of the economy. In doing so, we recognise that the Government must continue to play a direct role in the economy, taking an entrepreneurial approach itself to drive forward innovation across the economy and to ensure more of the nation's wealth and services are managed for the collective good. We recognise that it is us who will actively transform the economy through work, innovation, and investment. Namibians are not blind to the immediate and long-term structural challenges facing the Namibia economy, and this strategy is upfront in grappling with these. Neither do we ignore Namibia's fundamental economic strengths which we must build on.

Furthermore, a just transition must focus on protecting jobs and diversifying our economy whilst contributing significantly to sustainable growth and meeting our commitments and can also make a meaningful contribution to reducing poverty. In other words, it should create new jobs, businesses and open up markets in new sectors as well as supporting the transition of existing sectors, in a way that has fairness and equality built in.

In conclusion, I am of the view that the future look promising for Namibia, provided that there is willingness for a shift of our mindset and collective ability to learn from stories of successes, and to avoid past costly mistakes. We all want Namibia to be successful. Success means a strong economy. Namibia's economy is in a prolonged low-growth path, poverty is prevalent, and levels of unemployment are high, especially among the youth. These challenges are being addressed, plans and initiatives are underway to attract investment, stimulate the economy, create jobs, and promote skills development, especially among youth. We can only succeed and achieve our goals if we pull together as one.

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Hong Kong eases quarantine amid angst over ‘zero COVID’ isolation

Hong Kong will scrap flight bans and reduce quarantine for arrivals, amid mounting frustration with a strict “zero COVID” policy that has turned the financial centre into one of the world’s most isolated cities.

Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam said on Monday authorities will lift flight bans on nine countries including the United Kingdom and the United States and cut hotel quarantine for incoming travellers with a negative COVID-19 test result from 14 days to seven.

The new measures will come into effect from April 1, Lam said.

Schools will also resume face-to-face classes from April 19, while public venues, including sports facilities, will reopen from April 21, she said.

Other social distancing measures, including a limit on the number of diners in restaurants and the closure of bars, gyms and massage parlours will be eased in stages from April 21, Lam said.

Lam also said plans for compulsory COVID-19 testing for the entire city will be put on hold.

The announcement comes days after Lam acknowledged that tolerance for the city’s pandemic strategy was “fading” among the general public and businesses.

Under an elimination policy designed to align with mainland China, Hong Kong has implemented some of the strictest pandemic rules on Earth at the same time other governments are lifting restrictions and returning to normal life.

Hong Kong, a major financial hub that brands itself “Asia’s World City,” has seen an exodus of foreign businesses and talent after more than two years of tough border controls

with no clear end in sight.

About 71,000 people left the city in February, with some 54,000 people departing in March so far, according to government statistics. Despite keeping COVID-19 cases low throughout most of the pandemic, the city’s death rate has smashed global records in recent weeks as the Omicron coronavirus variant sweeps through the elderly population, which has one of the lowest vaccination rates in the developed world.

Wolfgang Ehmman, chief representative at German Industry and Commerce, Hong Kong, described the easing of the quarantine rules as “long overdue”.

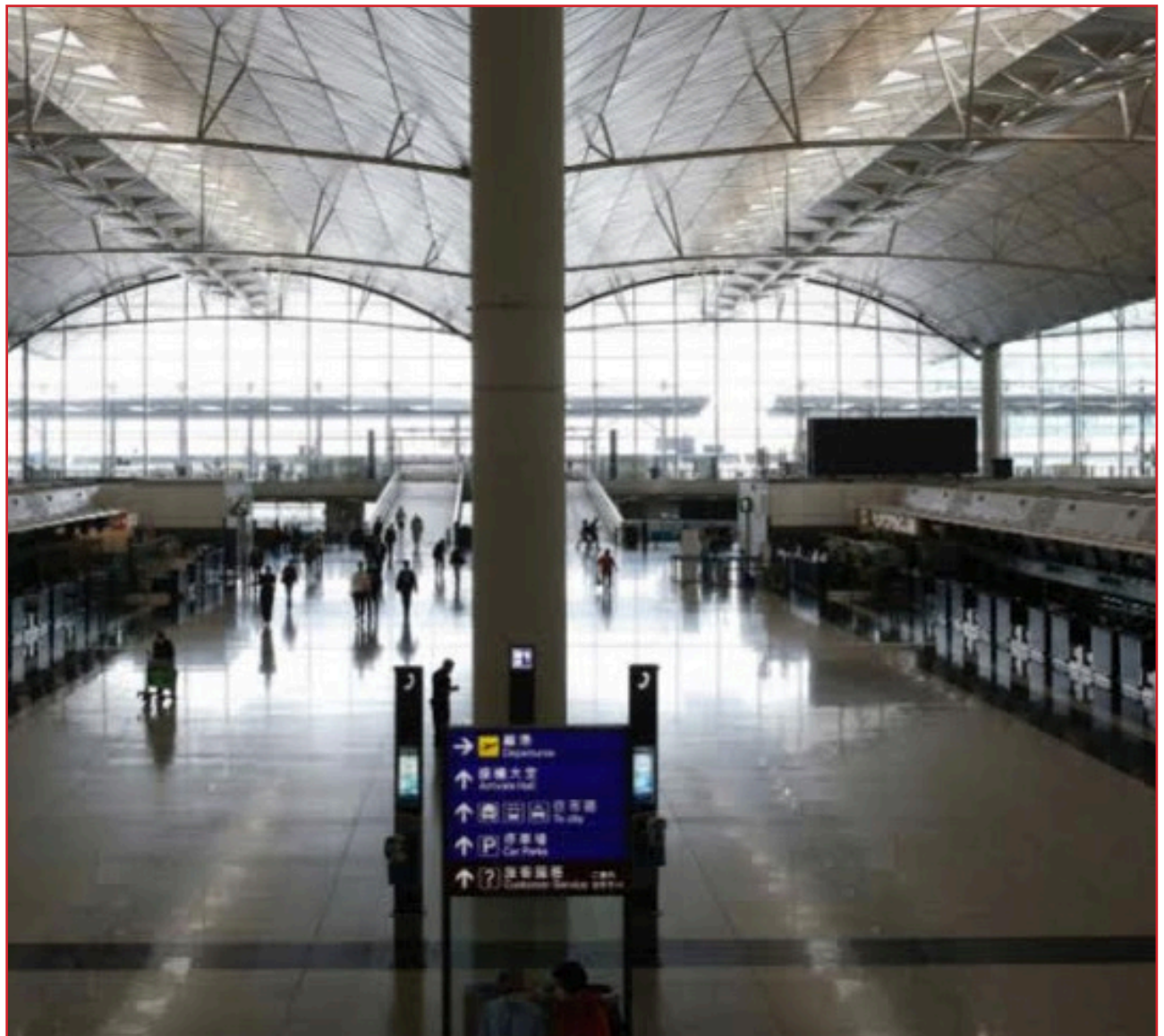
“Now we are looking forward to further lifting of restrictions as we go along,” Ehmman told Al Jazeera.

Under the eased measures, Hong Kong will still have the toughest travel restrictions in Asia outside China. South Korea and Malaysia, two of the last countries in the region with border restrictions, have announced the end of quarantine for vaccinated arrivals from April 1.

“The pace of reopening in Hong Kong is still relatively slower than the rest of Asia, such as Singapore and Australia,” Gary Ng, an economist at Natixis in Hong Kong, told Al Jazeera.

“The roadmap is a relief for confirming the reopening path, but the pace is still a big question mark. If Hong Kong does not find a way to close the gap with other competitors, the current reopening pace may not stop the outflows of talent. The most important comparable advantage of Hong Kong is on its free flows of capital and people. Without it, it is for sure that Hong Kong will lose its competitiveness.”

-Al Jazeera



Millions in China’s northeast placed under COVID-19 lockdown

China has imposed stay-at-home orders on millions more people in the country’s northeast, as it tries to tackle its biggest coronavirus outbreak in two years.

The country has largely kept the virus at bay since it brought to heel its initial outbreak in 2020 using targeted lockdowns, mass testing and travel restrictions.

However, the Omicron strain of COVID-19 has taken hold in multiple cities across China.

Jilin, the second-biggest city in Jilin province, will lock down about 4.5 million inhabitants for three days from Monday night, local authorities announced.

More than 4,000 new infections were reported across China on Sunday, with two-thirds in Jilin province, which borders Russia and North Korea.

Changchun, Jilin province’s capital, said Saturday it would also tighten restrictions for three days.

On Saturday, China reported its first two COVID-19 deaths in more than a year. The deaths, both in Jilin province, bring the country’s coronavirus death toll to 4,638 since the start of the pandemic.

Both fatalities occurred in elderly patients and were the result of their underlying conditions, Jiao Yahui, an official with the National Health Commission, told a news briefing on Saturday.

One of them had not been vaccinated for COVID-19, she said.

Since March 11, Changchun’s nine million

people have only been allowed out once every two days to buy food.

The new measures mean only medical personnel and other anti-epidemic workers will be authorised to leave their homes.

Situation in Shenzhen

Meanwhile, restrictions are being eased in the southern tech hub of Shenzhen, which locked down its 17.5 million residents a week ago.

Public transport will resume fully from Monday, alongside some administrative and business activities, local health authorities said on Sunday.

Non-essential businesses will remain closed and the downtown Futian business district is still under strict anti-COVID measures.

Shenzhen is home to some of China’s biggest tech firms, meaning any curbs on businesses come at a significant economic cost.

Tens of millions of people are currently in lockdown in other regions and authorities are rushing to create hospital beds, fearing the outbreak could put the healthcare system under strain.

East of the capital Beijing, the city of Tangshan banned traffic for 24 hours on Sunday in an effort to slow the virus’ spread, and will test all its 7.7 million people.

President Xi Jinping earlier this week urged tighter virus controls at ports of entry and stressed the need to “swiftly control local clustered outbreaks”.

-Al Jazeera



Boeing jets under 'surveillance' after China crash

■ Annabelle Liang

India's aviation regulator has placed the country's fleet of Boeing 737 planes under "enhanced surveillance" after a jet crashed in China.

It said it has sent out teams "to monitor flight procedures, air worthiness and operations".

On Monday, a China Eastern Airlines Boeing 737-800 crashed in southern China with 132 people onboard.

Rescue teams are working at the site but it is not yet known what caused the incident. The flight was travelling from Kunming to Guangzhou when it plunged to the ground and caught fire. China Eastern Airlines has grounded all its 737-800s.

"Flight safety is serious business and we are closely studying the situation," said Arun Kumar, chief of India's Directorate General of Civil Aviation.

"In the interim, we are focusing on enhanced surveillance of our 737 fleet." India's SpiceJet, Vistara and Air India Express all have Boeing 737 aircraft in their fleets.

The BBC has approached regulators in the US, Europe and China for comment.

US plane-maker Boeing said it was assisting investigations in China and communicating with the US National Transportation Safety Board.

Boeing's chief executive David Calhoun said: "We have been in close



communication with our customer and regulatory authorities since the accident, and have offered the full support of our technical experts to the investigation led by the Civil Aviation Administration of China."

He added that the company would do "everything we can to support our customer and the accident investigation during this difficult time, guided by our commitment to safety, transparency, and integrity at every step".

There are 4,208 Boeing 737-800 passenger

planes in service, according to aviation analytics firm Cirium, with over a quarter of them based in China.

Boeing 737-800s, which were first produced in the late 1990s, have a strong safety record. The plane involved in Monday's incident was less than seven years old.

Investigators are still determining the reason for the crash in a wooded area of the Guangxi hills and will be searching for the plane's "black box" flight recorders for information.

Boeing has been attempting to recover from two fatal crashes involving its 737 MAX aircraft which claimed the lives of 346 passengers and crew.

Cai von Rumohr, an analyst at investment bank Cowen, said: "Given Boeing's problems with the 737 MAX, there is some chance that consumers may not want to fly on a 737 until the cause of the China Eastern crash is determined not to be a design or manufacturing issue.

"Hence, isolating the cause of the crash

will be critical."

Boeing's share price fell by 3.5% in New York on Monday.

China Eastern Airlines has set up a hotline for people seeking information about those on board. It expressed "its deep condolences for the passengers and crew members who died". The company's share price fell by more than 6% in Shanghai on Tuesday.

-BBC



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Not smart but clever? The return of 'dumbphones'



■ **Suzzane Bearne**

Seventeen-year-old Robin West is an anomaly among her peers - she doesn't have a smartphone. Instead of scrolling through apps like TikTok and Instagram all day, she uses a so-called "dumbphone". These are basic handsets, or feature phones, with very limited functionality compared to say an iPhone. You can typically only make and receive calls and SMS text messages. And, if you are lucky - listen to radio and take very basic photos, but definitely not connect to the internet or apps. These devices are similar to some of the first handsets that people bought back in the late 1990s. Ms West's decision to ditch her former smartphone two years ago was a spur of the moment thing. While looking for a replacement handset in a second-hand shop she was lured by the low price of a "brick phone". Her current handset, from French firm MobiWire, cost her just £8. And because it has no smartphone functionality she doesn't have an expensive monthly data bill to worry about. "I didn't notice until I bought a brick phone how much a smartphone was taking over my life," she says. "I had a lot of social

media apps on it, and I didn't get as much work done as I was always on my phone." The Londoner adds that she doesn't think she'll ever buy another smartphone. "I'm happy with my brick - I don't think it limits me. I'm definitely more proactive." Dumbphones are continuing to enjoy a revival. Google searches for them jumped by 89% between 2018 and 2021, according to a report by software firm SEMrush. And while sales figures are hard to come by, one report said that global purchases of dumbphones were due to hit one billion units last year, up from 400 million in 2019. This compares to worldwide sales of 1.4 billion smart phones last year, following a 12.5% decline in 2020. Meanwhile, a 2021 study by accountancy group Deloitte said that one in 10 mobile phone users in the UK had a dumbphone. "It appears fashion, nostalgia, and them appearing in TikTok videos, have a part to play in the dumbphone revival," says Ernest Doku, mobiles expert at price comparison site Uswitch.com. "Many of us had a dumbphone as our first mobile phone, so it's natural that we feel a sense of nostalgia towards these classic handsets." Mr Doku says it was the 2017 relaunch of Nokia's 3310 handset - first released in 2000, and one of the biggest-selling mobiles of all time - that really sparked the revival. "Nokia pushed the 3310 as

an affordable alternative in a world full of high-spec mobiles." He adds that while it's true that dumbphones can't compete with the latest premium Apple and Samsung models when it comes to performance or functionality, "they can outshine them in equally important areas such as battery life and durability". Five years ago, Przemek Olejniczak, a psychologist, swapped his smartphone for a Nokia 3310, initially because of the longer-lasting battery. However, he soon realised that there were other benefits.

"Before I would always be stuck to the phone, checking anything and everything, browsing Facebook or the news, or other facts I didn't need to know," he says. "Now I have more time for my family and me. A huge benefit is that I'm not addicted to liking, sharing, commenting, or describing my life to other people. Now I have more privacy." However, Mr Olejniczak, who lives in the Polish city of Lodz, admits that initially the switch was challenging. "Before I'd be checking everything, such as buses and restaurants, on my smartphone [when travelling]. Now that is impossible, so I have learned to do all those things beforehand at home. I got used to it." One maker of dumbphones is New York company Light Phone. Slightly more

clever that the norm for such products, its handsets do allow users to listen to music and podcasts, and link by Bluetooth to headphones. Yet the firm pledges that its phones "will never have social media, clickbait news, email, an internet browser, or any other anxiety-inducing infinite feed". The company says it recorded its strongest year for financial performance in 2021, with sales up 150% compared with 2020. This is despite its handsets being expensive for dumbphones - prices start at \$99 (£75). Light Phone co-founder, Kaiwei Tang, says the device was initially created to use as a secondary phone for people wanting to take a break from their smartphone for a weekend for example, but now half the firm's customers use it as their primary device. "If aliens came to earth they'd think that mobile phones are the superior species controlling human beings," he says. "And it's not going to stop, it's only going to get worse. Consumers are realising that something is wrong, and we want to offer an alternative." Mr Tang adds that, surprisingly, the firm's main customers are aged between 25 and 35. He says he was expecting buyers to be much older. Tech expert, Prof Sandra Wachter, a senior research fellow in artificial

intelligence at Oxford University, says it is understandable that some of us are looking for simpler mobile phones. "One can reasonably say that nowadays a smart phone's ability to connect calls and send short messages is almost a side feature," she explains. "Your smart phone is your entertainment centre, your news generator, your navigation system, your diary, your dictionary, and your wallet." She adds that smartphones always "want to grab your attention" with notifications, updates, and breaking news constantly disrupting your day. "This can keep you on edge, might even be agitating. It can be overwhelming." Prof Wachter adds: "It makes sense that some of us are now looking for simpler technologies and think that dumbphones might offer a return to simpler times. It might leave more time to fully concentrate on a single task and engage with it more purposefully. It might even calm people down. Studies have shown that too much choice can create unhappiness and agitation." Yet back in London, Robin West says that many people are bewildered by her choice of mobile. "Everyone thinks it's just a temporary thing. They're like: 'So when are you getting a smartphone? Are you getting one this week?'" -BBC





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

14h30-16h30
Ookundana Dhangi with Helen
16h30-18h30
The Home Run with Frans/ Fanus
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Business Segment with Gabriel
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Terror of African students in Russian-occupied Kherson

■ **Nomsa Maseko**

About 100 African students are pleading for help to leave the Ukrainian port city of Kherson, more than two weeks after it was captured by Russian forces.

They have been sheltering for days in underground bunkers on campus in bitterly cold temperatures, with no heating or supplies of medicines. They say they are traumatised and desperate to leave the southern city.

One student told the BBC that they could still hear the "terrifying" continuous sound of gunfire, explosions and military aircraft. This could be the sound of clashes as the Russian forces push north-west towards Mykolaiv. Russian soldiers have also fired shots at people protesting against their occupation.

The Nigerian students among them have appealed to their government to help evacuate them before it is too late. They have told the BBC that they are among the last foreigners left in the city.

"We are begging, we really need to leave this place, things are not easy for us," one student told the BBC by phone. We're not naming them for their own safety.

Nigeria's government says it is working relentlessly to help them get out. Last week, its ambassador to Moscow was told by a Russian official that plans were being put in place to get the students out through Russia.

But that has not happened yet and in any case the students say they are wary of being taken to Russia.

In the meantime, the students, some of whom are from other countries including Cameroon, Ghana, Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco, said there was still some food

available at the university but that most supermarkets had run out of supplies.

Those that are open are selling basic food supplies at double or even triple the normal price.

"Those of us who are staying on campus are the lucky ones because there's still food being offered at the cafeteria," said one student.

A second student said that Russian troops who control the city had been dropping off basic foods such as vegetables, rice, pasta and water outside government buildings and near train and bus stations around the city. But they said they had been urged not to take them in case they were seen as collaborators by Ukrainians.

"How can we accept Russia's humanitarian support when Ukrainians are trying to reclaim their country? Anyone who dares to suggest that we take the food is sending us to death," he said.

Water for cleaning is still available but there has not been enough drinking water. Aid groups have been delivering some water and food but it is not clear how long that will go on for.

Kherson was among the first major cities to be taken over by Russia in the first week of the invasion and in the aftermath residents have been holding regular anti-Russia protests.

"We came to this country for education and now we're stuck in the middle of a war, at the frontline."

"Even though we have not seen fighting ourselves, the Ukrainians we have interacted with have told us that they're not giving up. They want to take back their city and by extension their country."

The student also said that Russian soldiers had not been allowing food supplies to be brought to Kherson from other parts of the

country, in case Ukrainian forces used this as a way of getting back into Kherson to fight.

One student said they were worried about their parents back home.

"My parents have been calling me every day and I'm scared to take some of their calls because I have nothing new or positive to tell them.

"We're still stranded here and it doesn't look like help is coming anytime soon." They said their mother had not stopped crying and praying for their safe return since the war began.

'Ordered to shoot'

The university has advised them to only venture outside in groups, and to wrap white scarves around the left upper arm so the Russians can see that they are civilians. One said they had been told by Russian soldiers that their orders "are to shoot anyone who misbehaves - to shoot them immediately".

Tens of thousands of students from Africa and South Asia were studying at Ukrainian universities before the Russian invasion began but many have managed to leave. Some are trying to pursue their studies in neighbouring countries, while others have safely returned back home.

But for those in Kherson, it is considered dangerous for them to attempt to make their own way, although some are making their own plans to hire taxi drivers to get them out of the city.

"Those who've tried to leave Kherson are risking their lives," one student said.

"On some days Russian forces are in a good mood and they tell you nicely to go back where you came from.

"Others are aggressive - they fire their guns in the air as a way of telling you to make a U-turn."

-BBC



US issues sanctions on Sudan's police over protest crackdown

The United States has imposed sanctions on Sudan's Central Reserve Police, accusing it of using excessive force against peaceful protesters demonstrating against last October's military coup.

The US Department of the Treasury said in a statement on Monday the Central Reserve Police, a heavily armed division of Sudan's police force, has been at the forefront of the "violent response" of Sudanese security forces to peaceful protests in Khartoum.

Pointing to a single day in January, it accused the group of firing live ammunition and, along with anti-riot police and regular police, chasing protesters trying to flee, arresting and beating some, and fatally shooting two and injuring others.

"Since the October 25 military takeover, Sudan's Central Reserve Police has used excessive force and violence intended to silence civilian activists and protesters," the Treasury's under-secretary for terrorism and financial intelligence, Brian Nelson, said in the statement.

"We condemn Sudan's security services for killing, harassing, and intimidating Sudanese citizens."

Regular protests calling for civilian rule

have taken place since a military coup led by army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan on October 25, with heavy-handed crackdowns leaving 87 dead, according to medics, the AFP news agency reported.

The October coup derailed a fragile power-sharing agreement between the army and civilians that had been painstakingly negotiated after the 2019 overthrow of longtime ruler Omar al-Bashir.

A police spokesman could not be reached for comment. Military leaders have said peaceful protests are allowed and that protest-related casualties will be investigated.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in a separate statement called for an immediate end to violence against peaceful protesters. "We remain poised to use all tools at our disposal to support the Sudanese people in their pursuit of a democratic, human rights-respecting, and prosperous Sudan," Blinken said.

Monday's so-called "Global Magnitsky sanctions", which target those accused of corruption, human rights abuses and anti-democratic actions around the world, freeze any US assets of the Central Reserve Police and bar Americans from dealing with them.

Western countries and international financing institutions suspended billions of dollars in foreign aid after the coup and military commanders have yet to appoint a prime minister to tackle the economic crisis.

The Central Reserve Police, was used during the early 2000s Darfur war, during which the Khartoum government put down a rebellion in the western region. An estimated 300,000 people were killed in the war, and then-President Omar al-Bashir and aides face war crimes charges from the International Criminal Court.

The force, known locally as "Abu Tayra", referring to the bird that forms a part of their recognisable logo, have been deployed frequently, along with other security forces, in recent months following the coup.

Members of the forces could be seen among a heavy deployment in central Khartoum during protests on Monday, Reuters reported. Protesters faced tear gas, stun grenades, and red water sprays as they attempted to march towards the presidential palace.

-Al Jazeera



Egyptian pound drops as Ukraine war prompts dollar flight



Egypt's pound has depreciated by almost 14 percent after weeks of pressure on the currency as foreign investors pulled out billions of dollars from Egyptian treasury markets following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The pound dropped to 18.17-18.27 against the dollar on Monday, Refinitiv data showed, after having traded at approximately 15.7 pounds to the dollar since November 2020. That is likely to have a heavy toll on poor and middle-class Egyptians.

The central bank also increased overnight interest rates by 100 basis points in a surprise monetary policy meeting, citing the invasion and the coronavirus pandemic – which drove oil prices to new records.

The central bank cited global inflationary pressures amplified by the war in Ukraine for its rise in rates, which lifted the overnight lending rate to 10.25 percent and its overnight deposit rate to 9.25 percent.

Egypt has been in discussions with the International Monetary Fund about

possible assistance, people close to the negotiations have said, but it has not announced any formal request.

"This is a good move to make as the devaluation of the pound moves it roughly in line with its fair value and it could pave the way for a new IMF deal," said James Swanston of Capital Economics.

"However, it will be key whether policymakers now allow the pound to float more freely or continue to manage it and allow external imbalances to build up once more, possibly resulting in future step devaluations like today's in the future."

Swanston also said the increases in interest rates and a devaluation of the Egyptian pound "could be precursors" to securing a new financing package from the IMF.

"Fresh financial assistance from the IMF would certainly help to reassure investors over Egypt's commitment to orthodox macroeconomic policymaking," he said. The IMF made no immediate comment.

Monday's weakening of the pound could catalyse inflows of foreign currency,

while investors who already had money in Egyptian treasuries would be unlikely to sell now, said Farouk Soussa, senior economist at Goldman Sachs.

"The move is designed to trap liquidity in the market and bring in investors who might be sitting on the sidelines waiting for the pound to bottom out," he said.

But it would also likely add to inflation and possible local dollarisation.

"The big question is whether this is enough, or if more might be needed to entice portfolio investors," Soussa said.

Higher wheat prices

Meanwhile, headline inflation has accelerated to its highest level in nearly three years, registering 8.8 percent last month and touching the upper limit of the central bank's 5-9 percent target range.

According to a study last week by the International Food Policy Research Institute, higher wheat prices could nearly double annual state spending on wheat imports to \$5.7bn, straining government finances and fuelling inflation pressure.

Egypt is the world's largest importer of wheat, mainly from Russia and Ukraine, which together account for nearly a third of the world's wheat and barley exports.

Prime Minister Moustafa Madbouly set the price of unsubsidised bread on Monday at 11.5 Egyptian pounds (\$0.66) per kilogramme, according to a statement from his office. Prices had jumped as much as 25 percent because of disruption to wheat imports caused by Russia's offensive in Ukraine.

Ukraine is also a major supplier of corn and the global leader in sunflower oil, used in food processing. Russia and Ukraine are also significant sources of visitors to Egypt, where tourism is a main source of foreign currency.

Credit rating agency Fitch said last week that the war in Ukraine would add to Egypt's economic strains, including "reduced tourism inflows, higher food prices and greater financing challenges".

-Al Jazeera

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The big question is whether this is enough, or if more might be needed to entice portfolio investors.

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Russian government bars its scientists from international conferences

■ Nicole Wetsman

Russian scientists will not participate in international conferences this year, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation said via its Telegram channel. The decision comes as Russia's invasion of Ukraine has strained the relationships between Russian scientists and the international research community.

Minister Valery Falkov also said during a meeting with universities that scientific schools should no longer emphasize when publications are indexed through the two major international scientific databases, according to a recap sent through the Ministry's Telegram channel.

Scientists aren't banned from publishing research in international journals indexed in the two databases, Web of Science and Scopus, but will not lean on them as indicators of the quality of the work. The two databases are major sources of scientific information and have metrics that are widely used to evaluate the relative importance of scientific research.

The moves are a reversal of nearly a decade of efforts to make Russian research institutions more internationally competitive. The country actively recruited international scholars and pushed for Russian scientific organizations to vet their researchers' work based on metrics in the Web of Science and Scopus. International rankings organizations can use data from those databases to develop their lists of the world's best universities. Publications

from Russian scientists in international journals went up between 2013 and 2016 after that push, according to one analysis.

Two weeks ago, the Russian government decided to stop rating scientific research more highly if it was published in Web of Science- and Scopus-indexed journals. The government also said it would no longer require research done with grants from government research programs to be published in indexed journals.

Clarivate, which runs Web of Science, had already closed its Russian office and said it would not evaluate new journals from Russia and Belarus (which supports Russia in its invasion of Ukraine).

Other research organizations have also cut ties with Russian research organizations. The European Organization for Nuclear Research, or CERN, said that it would not collaborate with the Russian Federation. The International Congress of Mathematicians will be held virtually in July rather than in Russia as scheduled.

Many Ukrainian scientists have spent the past few weeks calling on journals to bar research from Russian scientists, but prominent journals like Nature have pushed back against a publishing boycott, saying that it does not want to block scholarly exchange. At least a handful of journals, including the Journal of Molecular Structure, have said they will not accept work from Russian institutions. Ukrainian researchers have also said Russian scientists should not be invited to international conferences.

-The Verge



Tesla officially opens Berlin Gigafactory

■ Jon Porter

Tesla's fourth Gigafactory, and its first in Europe, is officially being opened today by the company's CEO Elon Musk, Reuters reports. The milestone was reached around two and a half years after Tesla initially announced its plans to build a factory on the site, which is located just outside the German capital of Berlin, and is officially called Giga Berlin-Brandenburg.

As part of the opening ceremony, Tesla is handing over the first production cars made at the factory to customers: 30 Model Y compact SUVs. Reuters reports that these are the performance configuration of the vehicle, which have a range of 320 miles and sell for €63,990.

Tesla was given provisional approval to begin commercial production at the factory earlier this month, CNBC reported at the time, allowing it to produce up to 500,000 vehicles at the site per year. The company had originally hoped to start production at the factory in summer 2021, but a combination of the pandemic, supply chain disruptions, and environmental concerns delayed its opening.

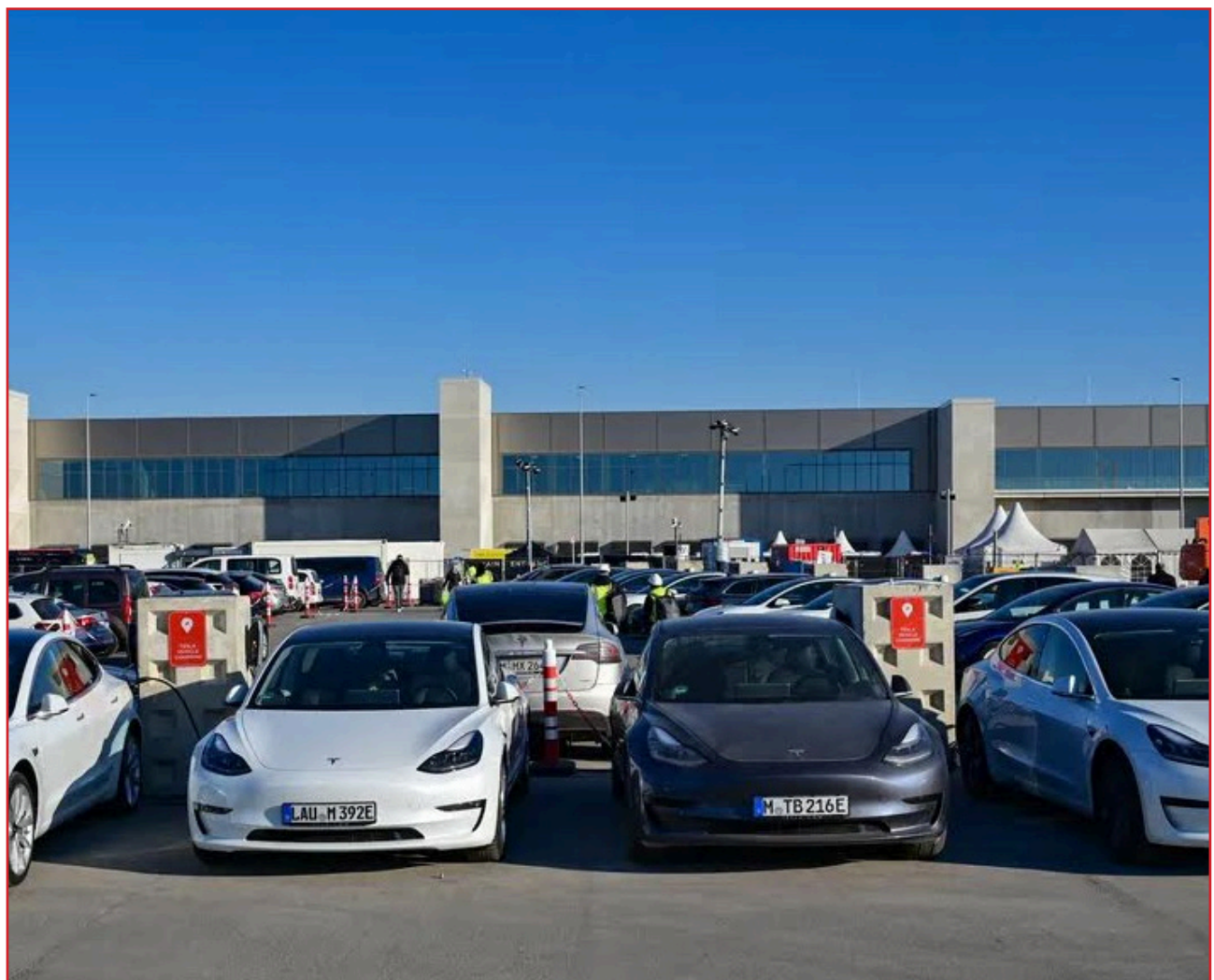
Environmental concerns have surrounded the factory since its early preparation stages, dating back to February 2020 when Tesla was forced to temporarily halt its work on the factory's site. But Tesla and its CEO have consistently defended the factory's impact on the environment.

Musk argued that the Gigafactory will use "relatively little" water and that the forest that needed to be cleared prior to its construction wasn't natural (it had been planted to supply a cardboard factory). In a letter sent to a local court, Tesla argued that Germany's regulatory framework "directly contradicts the urgency to plan and realize such projects that is necessary to battle climate change," Reuters reported in April 2021.

Although the factory is now up and running, Musk has previously warned that ramping up production is the real challenge. Germany publication Automobilwoche previously reported that Tesla hopes to ramp up production to around 1,000 units a week in January, and that the factory could contribute a maximum of 30,000 vehicles over the first half of 2022. Eventually, Tesla has said it aims to produce as many as 500,000 cars and 50GWh of battery capacity annually at the location. Reuters reports that the company has hired over 3,000 of the 12,000 workers eventually expected to staff the factory.

Creating a European manufacturing hub will be an important logistical victory for Tesla, which currently imports European cars from its factories elsewhere in the world. The Berlin Gigafactory follows locations in Nevada, New York, and Shanghai, China. A fifth factory is currently under construction in Texas, where the company will also have its headquarters.

-The Verge





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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 Dhangi with Helen
 16h30-18h30
The Home Run with Frans/ Fanus
 18h30-20h00
Business Segment with Gabriel
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France’s presidential elections: All you need to know



■ **Stephane Faure**

Next month, about 48 million eligible French voters will be asked to choose who will govern the nation for the next five years. Never before in the history of the Fifth Republic – founded by Charles de Gaulle in 1958 – a presidential election has been held in such a dramatic and volatile context. After two years of a once-in-a-century pandemic, the climate emergency and now the Ukraine war – the first invasion on European soil since the end of World War II – voters will have to decide whether they give President Emmanuel Macron a second chance or change course in a more radical way. Here are some of the main things to know: When are the elections? Elections in France are held on Sundays. The first round of this year’s presidential elections will be held on April 10. The top two candidates will face each other off in a second round on April 24. What are the main issues? Until the invasion of Ukraine by Russia on February 24, there was a general feeling among voters that candidates were not talking about the issues they cared about the most – purchasing power and the high cost of living, healthcare, and the fight against climate change. Instead, most debates focused on the divisions within the left, the levels of the inheritance tax (less than 25 percent of the French taxpayers owe it) and the names people should be giving to their children. “The war in Ukraine has put at the centre of the debates what the candidates propose when it comes to vital issues,” said Laure Cometti, a seasoned political journalist. “They’ve had to talk about how they would cut France’s and the European Union’s reliance on Russian energy and food supplies – which bears the question of how to decarbonize the economy – as well as how to protect the country, potentially via an EU army.” What are the polls saying? For months now, every single poll has predicted Macron will face far-right Marine Le Pen off in the second round on April 24. The latest salvo says no different. Cevipof – the centre for political research of Sciences Po Paris – has been conducting

the most thorough rolling study of the electorate thanks to a 13,749 strong sample group. In previous elections, its margins of error have proven to be very small, less than 1 percent, hence its reliability. The latest opinion poll, conducted between March 10 and 14, predicted the following distribution of votes:

- Emmanuel Macron – 29 percent
- Marine Le Pen – 16 percent
- Eric Zemmour – 13 percent
- Jean-Luc Mélenchon – 12 percent
- Valérie Pécresse – 10.5 percent
- Yannick Jadot – 7 percent
- Fabien Roussel – 4 percent
- Anne Hidalgo – 2.5 percent
- Jean Lassalle – 2 percent
- Nicolas Dupont-Aignan – 2 percent
- Philippe Poutou – 1.5 percent
- Nathalie Arthaud – 0.5 percent

In the likely event of a second round between Macron and Le Pen, the sitting president would defeat her far-right challenger 59 percent to 41 percent, which is a much thinner margin than in 2017 when he beat her 66 percent to 34 percent. Macron on the rise

Macron has been leading the polls for years now, with a steady base of 24-25 percent of the electorate planning to vote for him in the first round. An unusually high score for a sitting French president. “Emmanuel Macron, thanks to his pro-European and progressive message has managed to secure voters from the centre-left who used to vote for the Socialist Party. Economically, he’s implemented pro-business policies to seduce voters from the right,” said Hugo Drochon, professor of political theory at the University of Nottingham. “Consequently, a new divide has emerged between the centre and the extremes. That’s hurt traditional parties both on the left and on the right,” he said. Hence the historically low polling of conservative Pécresse and socialist Hidalgo, who struggle to reinvent their parties’ messages in light of climate change, digitalisation and globalisation. The French president, who has also been presiding the European Council since January, is benefitting politically from the war in Ukraine: the famous “rally-round-

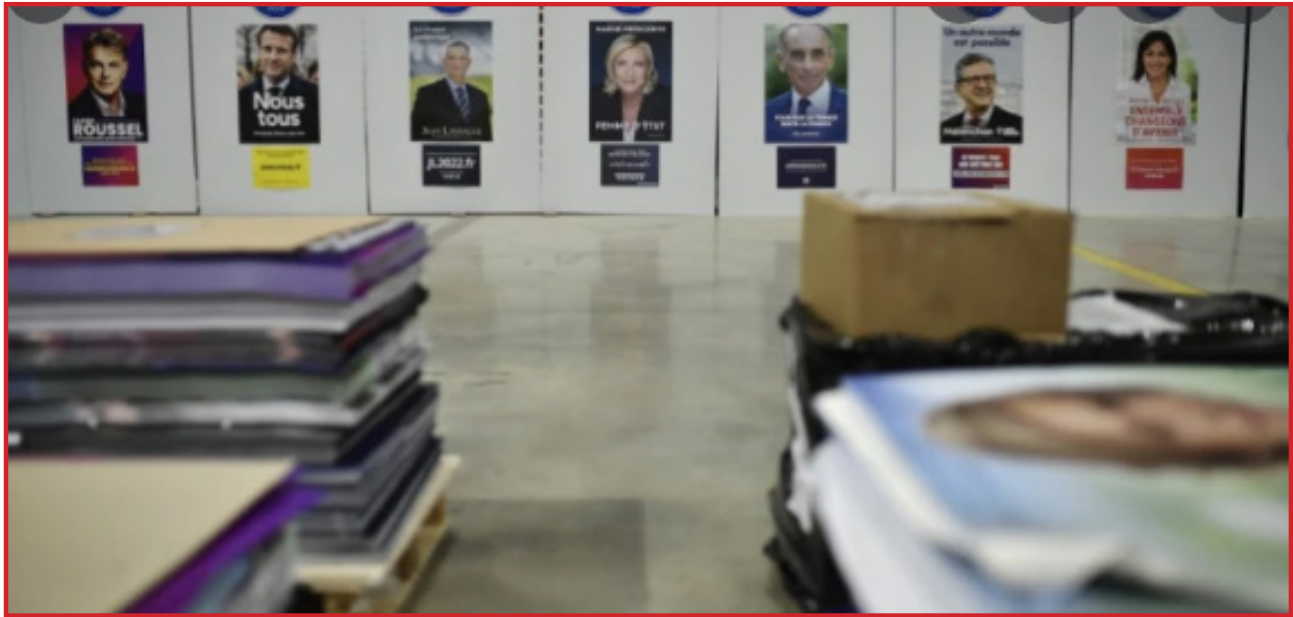
the-flag effect”. He now polls at 29 percent, a five-point jump in about a month. None of the other candidates is deemed qualified enough to do a better job than him, with 61 percent of the voters trusting the 44-year-old leader to make the right decisions when it comes to the Ukraine war. He is increasingly seen as a protecting figure in uncertain times and his longstanding pro-EU message resonates even louder these days as 32 percent of voters say the war in Ukraine will have an effect on their choice. “The current context plays in favour of Macron,” said Cometti. “People have credited him for his handling of the pandemic and all the money he poured into the economy to keep it afloat ‘whatever the cost’. He benefits from being already in charge and people know he can manage a crisis.” Shifting dynamics

Le Pen, the historic far-right figure running for a third time, appears once again to be Macron’s most serious challenger. Although polls have repeatedly shown over the years that French people do not want to see a rematch of the 2017 elections, it is the menu they will likely be served with. Her persistent message on purchasing power – the number one concern for voters this year, made even more significant by the consequences of the war in Ukraine –

seems to be working, especially among the working class. She also now benefits from the candidacy of populist Eric Zemmour, after he posed a very serious threat to her last year when polls had him ahead of her last November. But Zemmour’s rage against Muslims, women and immigrants has made her look like a more reasonable candidate, even though they share similar views and ideas. And the former journalist’s long-established admiration for Russia’s Vladimir Putin has also cost him lately. “Dramatic events like wars weaken candidacies that have small political capitals. Zemmour is a newcomer in politics and he’s made a terrible mistake by saying he would not take in Ukrainian refugees. That made him look heartless,” said Bruno Cautrès, a political researcher at Sciences Po Paris. The last hope of the left

Seen by many as the last hope of the left-wing camp, Jean-Luc Mélenchon defines himself as an “electoral turtle”. Currently polling about 12 percent, he has seen a rise in the polls lately and hopes to pull the same move as in 2017, when he went from 14 percent to 19 percent in the last few weeks of the campaign. But this time around, he is facing multiple left-wing candidacies that will likely prevent him from qualifying for the second round. Hence the message he has been hammering:

“I am the efficient vote on the Left.” On March 20, he gathered tens of thousands of his supporters in Paris’s Bastille Square for a “march for the 6th Republic”, one of his key proposals to change the political system. It was the biggest rally of the campaign so far. But will it be enough to convince enough green, socialist and communist voters? “Voting intentions have almost crystallised. However, the threshold to qualify for the second round is unusually low this year, around 16 percent. That means candidates like Zemmour, Mélenchon or Pécresse still have a chance,” said Bruno Cautrès, who conducted the Cevipof study. “But only one of them has momentum in the final phase of the campaign, and it’s Jean-Luc Mélenchon,” he said. One element could disrupt predictions though: abstention. It appears it will be stronger this year than in all previous elections. “There’s a widely shared sentiment of horror with what is happening in Ukraine. After the Yellow Vest crisis in 2018-2019, two years of pandemic, the climate emergency and now a war in Europe, people are tired and feel like it all fades into one big endless crisis. This could explain why abstention will likely be higher this time around ... and potentially make room for a surprise,” said Cautrès. -Al Jazeera



Russia-Ukraine war shows cracks in US ties to Middle East allies



■ Ali Harb

With Russia's invasion of Ukraine dominating discussions around the world, the Biden administration has been promoting global unity against what it calls Russian President Vladimir Putin's "war of choice".

But despite those efforts, the conflict has highlighted cracks in some of the United States' most prominent alliances in the Middle East, notably with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia. The latest manifestation of this apparent rift came last week when the UAE hosted Syrian President Bashar al-Assad despite repeated warnings from Washington against normalising ties with the government in Damascus. It was al-Assad's first visit to an Arab country since the Syrian war broke out in 2011, and it came weeks after the Syrian president expressed full support for the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

"Al-Assad coming to the UAE, shortly after the Gulf Arab country voted to abstain from a UN Security Council resolution condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine last month, tells us that the Emiratis are very serious about asserting their autonomy from the United States," said Giorgio Cafiero, CEO of Gulf State Analytics, a Washington, DC-based geopolitical risk consultancy.

Abu Dhabi's abstention last month from the US-backed United Nations Security Council proposal on Ukraine was followed by anonymously-sourced media reports alleging that Saudi and Emirati leaders rebuffed calls from US President Joe Biden. And last week, the Wall Street Journal reported that Saudi Arabia is in talks with China to ditch the US dollar in favour of the yuan to conduct oil transactions with Beijing.

The UAE and Saudi Arabia appear to be sending a message to the US, Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, a Middle East fellow at Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy, told Al Jazeera: "We're going to act upon our interests and not what you think our interests are."

Mounting tensions

The Wall Street Journal reported this month that Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman – as well as Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al

Nahyan – had rejected calls from Biden. But the White House dismissed that report as "inaccurate" while the US has repeatedly stressed the importance of its relationships with Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Cafiero noted that the UAE is not walking away from its relationship with the US, as Washington remains Abu Dhabi's "security guarantor". He added that the UAE enjoys a "very strong position in Washington", especially after leading a push by Arab states to normalise ties with Israel via the so-called "Abraham Accords".

"The leadership in Abu Dhabi is very confident that it can take steps that upset Washington, such as welcoming Bashar al-Assad to Dubai and Abu Dhabi, without having to pay a big price in terms of its relationship with the US," Cafiero told Al Jazeera.

Washington issued rare public criticism of Abu Dhabi over al-Assad's visit, however. US Department of State Spokesman Ned Price told the Reuters news agency on the weekend that the US was "profoundly disappointed", calling the Syrian president's trip an "apparent attempt to legitimise" his government.

Abu Dhabi's push to normalise ties with al-Assad has been going on for years despite Washington's protests. But the UAE's main grievances with the US appear to be over Yemen, not Syria.

Missile and drone attacks by Yemen's Houthi rebels on the UAE and Saudi Arabia intensified in January and February – and the Wall Street Journal, in its article on the allegedly rebuffed calls, reported that the Gulf nations had concerns about what they view as a "restrained US response".

The US sent fighter jets and a guided-missile destroyer to help bolster Emirati defences in the aftermath of the attacks, while US forces in the UAE also said they helped intercept Houthi missiles aimed at an airbase where they are stationed in the country.

But the Emirati leadership has pushed the Biden administration to designate the Houthis as a "terrorist" group, a move that rights organisations have warned would worsen the country's humanitarian crisis. A Saudi-led, US-backed coalition that included the UAE intervened in Yemen in 2015 to push back the rebels, who had taken over large swathes of territory, including the capital, Sanaa.

Annela Sheline, a research fellow at

the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, a US think-tank, said that despite the purported frustration from the Gulf countries, the Biden administration has backed Riyadh and Abu Dhabi against the Houthis, both in rhetoric and practice. "From my perspective, this notion that the US isn't doing enough to support what the Saudis and Emiratis are doing in Yemen just seems somewhat absurd," she told Al Jazeera last week. "But I know that in particular, the UAE wants the US to redesignate the Houthis as a terrorist organisation."

Global oil supplies

Despite these contentious issues, the Biden administration has said it intends to maintain and improve ties with its Gulf partners. White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki noted on March 10 that Biden spoke to Saudi Arabia's King Salman in February and said "the president's focus is really on our relationship moving forward".

The Biden administration is almost entirely focused on the crisis in Ukraine, as the US and its allies have unleashed a flood of sanctions against the Russian economy, including the country's energy sector. On March 8, Biden announced a ban on oil and gas imports from Russia, and several European countries have pledged to decrease their dependence on Russian energy supplies. The turmoil has sent petrol prices soaring across the US and the world.

The US has been calling for increased oil production to lower prices since last year – a push that became more urgent after Russia launched its all-out invasion of Ukraine on February 24. But the OPEC+ oil cartel, which includes Russia, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, said in early March that it would stick to its current production plans, touting a "well-balanced market" experiencing "volatility" due to "current geopolitical developments".

On March 9, Abu Dhabi's embassy in Washington expressed support for pumping more oil, but hours later the UAE's energy minister wrote on Twitter that the country would abide by the existing OPEC+ agreement.

Ulrichsen said the UAE and Saudi Arabia appear to be acting as though they have leverage over Biden, given the domestic political implications of rising petrol prices in the US. He added that the US president's troubled tenure so far – marred by low approval ratings, the chaotic exit

from Afghanistan and an inability to pass major legislation – could be hardening the posture of Abu Dhabi and Riyadh.

"They may sense weakness," said Ulrichsen. "And they may think that playing hard could get them more concessions. That could be part of the calculation."

Cafiero said Biden is trying to avoid a hostile confrontation with Gulf partners as he prioritises uniting the US's allies against Russia.

"The US is trying to bring more Arab states against Putin, and the US is trying to cooperate with oil-producing countries such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia, as the US and other Western countries deal with the impact of the war in Ukraine on energy markets," he said. "Within this context, the Biden administration is not wanting a fight with either Abu Dhabi or Riyadh right now."

Human rights

Beyond oil production and the crisis in Ukraine, the Biden administration, which pledged to put human rights at the centre of US foreign policy when it came into office in January 2021, has faced calls to pressure Saudi Arabia and the UAE to improve their rights record and end the Yemen war.

Democrats in Washington had been increasingly critical of ties with Riyadh, especially following the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018.

But last Wednesday, Price, the US State Department spokesperson, declined to condemn the mass execution of 81 people in Saudi Arabia in a single day. Instead, he said repeatedly that the administration is "continuing to raise concerns about fair trial guarantees" with the kingdom.

Meanwhile, the UAE's bin Zayed held a phone call with Putin last week. According to a Kremlin readout of the call, conveyed by Russian media, the Emirati leader "reaffirmed that Russia has a right to ensure national security". In a separate statement, the UAE said bin Zayed told Putin his country would continue to coordinate with "concerned parties" to "help find a sustainable political solution to the ongoing crisis" in Ukraine.

Ultimately, the war in Ukraine has highlighted the fact that Washington's Gulf allies are pursuing their own interests in a world where the US is no longer the sole superpower, said Sheline of the Quincy

Institute.

"It makes rational sense for other countries to not rely so much on the US anymore," she told Al Jazeera. "But then it's irrational for the US to sort of unconditionally support these countries, especially when at crucial UN Security Council votes, they vote against what the US is trying to do."

For his part, Cafiero said the US does not want to see its Gulf partners turn to Russia and China for support. "In a world that is becoming increasingly multipolar, these Gulf Arab countries have much potential to turn to other powers such as China and Russia to gain greater autonomy from the United States," he said.

"Officials in Washington realise that trying to put too much pressure on some of these GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council] countries could result in them finding their partnerships with Beijing or Moscow to be more appealing."

-Al Jazeera

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The US has been calling for increased oil production to lower prices since last year – a push that became more urgent after Russia launched its all-out invasion of Ukraine on February 24.

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2022 Kia EV6 AWD GT-Line First Test: Getting Sideways in Kia's SUV-ish EV

■ Zach Gale

Hey," we said to the MotorTrend test team as it pulled its instruments off the 2022 Kia EV6. "You guys all have something on your face. Something really odd-looking. Goodness gracious, are those ... smiles?"

Sure enough, the EV6 had elicited that rare sign of positive emotion among our jaded testers, and for much the same reason its platform mate, the Hyundai Ioniq 5, earned that same infrequent accolade. Given free rein from its electronic nannies, it turns out the Kia EV6 likes to go sideways—earlier and even more so than the Hyundai does.

Unexpected Results at the Test Track

"Wow, I was not expecting this," road test editor Chris Walton said. "Well, I was halfway expecting it because we noticed the rear weight bias [49/51 front/rear]. But I wasn't expecting entry and midcorner oversteer." While the Ioniq 5 showed signs of a willingness to rotate as it careened around the skidpad, the EV6, with its 4-inch-shorter wheelbase, proved to be even friskier than the Hyundai. Walton was so intrigued that he attempted to drift the all-wheel-drive EV6 all the way around the circle, but its front motor kept straightening the car out. "I tried to do the entire skidpad sideways, but I only got about a third of the way around." (The Hyundai, which began to straighten later, drifted through two-thirds.)

We noticed the same tail-happy behavior = on our public-road test loop: Push the EV6 hard into a corner, and it leads from the back. Which is not to imply you should avoid following Kia EV6s for fear that one will suddenly spin out in front of you—the EV6 has decent grip, generating 0.89 g on the skidpad before Walton decided to do his pro drifter impersonation. Its stability control system will prevent tail-wagging when fully on and curtail it before it gets out of hand in partial-off mode. Nothing dangerous here—just good old-fashioned unleash-the-teenager-within fun.

"It's a back-to-basics car, surprisingly," Walton said. "You have to get all the braking done before starting the turn-in. It hates trail-braking. The steering is a little lifeless, but it's very precise and intuitive. It doesn't feel like the heavy car [4,693 pounds on our scales] that it is." The EV6's figure-eight time of 25.9 seconds at 0.71 g further highlighted its dynamic bona fides, a number just 0.2 second behind that of the Hyundai.

How Quick Is the 2022 Kia EV6?

For our acceleration test, we were curious to see how the EV6 stacks up against both the Ioniq 5 and the Tesla Model Y, the current benchmark by which dual-motor E-crossovers are measured. With 320 hp and 446 lb-ft of torque to motivate itself, the EV6 sprinted to 60 mph in 4.5 seconds, a tenth slower than the slightly lighter Hyundai but with similar acceleration characteristics. Even with traction control off, the test team reported that the EV6's launch was drama-free with no wheelspin. While its acceleration didn't feel quite as dramatic as

the 2020 Model Y Dual Motor Long Range we tested at 4.1 seconds to 60, unlike many other EVs, the EV6's power doesn't feel as though it trails off at higher speeds. That said, the quarter-mile came up in 13.3 seconds at 101.2 mph, again a tenth of a second (and 1.5 mph) slower than the Ioniq 5 and almost a second behind the Model Y.

Braking performance was a mixed bag. The EV6's best 60-0-mph stop of 117 feet was fine—better than the Hyundai and the Model Y. But our first hard stop elicited a worrying bang accompanied by a very long stopping distance. The second run gave us the 117-foot figure, but on subsequent stops the performance notably deteriorated. Although the Kia felt more stable under panic braking overall than the Hyundai, we felt the pedal should offer more feedback, and we wish the brakes were more robust in general.

"The brakes definitely won't last long when driving it like a hot hatch," road test analyst Alan Lau said. "Powerful powertrain but not enough stopping power."

A Sporty SUV in a Strangely Shaped Package While the EV6's driving characteristics elicited grins, other aspects of this vehicle seemed to elicit an itching in our scalps—yes, this Kia had us scratching our heads. For starters, there's the price. The as-tested MSRP for our top-of-the-range AWD GT-Line model just crested \$58K, a long way from the base model's \$42,115 starting price. Even after incentives, that seems like a lot of money given the EV6's price and packaging. The packaging itself was another puzzler. Kia advertises the EV6 as an all-electric SUV, yet its limited headroom—thanks to a rakishly low roof combined with a high floor under which the battery pack resides—make it feel like more of a hot station wagon. Even our shorter staffers noted with some alarm how close their noggins were to the EV6's headliner. That, and the EV6's half-pane sunroof effectively turns the back seat into a cave.

Some of the ergonomic choices are really baffling, as well, such as the combination stereo and climate controls. We don't mean that they're combined on one panel; rather, a capacitive-touch LCD screen and a pair of dials switch between these two functions—the left-hand dial, for example, serves as either power/volume or driver-side temperature control, depending on which mode the panel is in. Therein lies the trouble: If, when reaching for said dial with the intention of changing the volume, your finger happens to come close to the auto climate touch-pane next to it, the volume stays the same but the temperature changes. Hopefully you weren't planning to turn the volume down in a hurry, because you're now unable to change it (or press it to turn the stereo off) until you press another section of the screen to change the panel back to the stereo controls. This didn't happen to us just once or twice—it happened repeatedly, even after we knew to look out for it. It's hard to imagine Kia coming up with a worse idea short of mounting the horn inside the cabin.

Speaking of inappropriate noises, while all EVs

are required to have an external noisemaker at low speeds (to warn the sight-impaired of their otherwise-silent approach), the Kia pipes in a droning faux engine note at all speeds, not unlike what Audi does in the E-Tron GT. Except in the E-Tron GT it sounds cool. In the EV6, it just grated on our nerves.

Kia EV6 May Not Be a Great SUV, but It's Pretty Great

So yes, the EV6 has some challenges. Perhaps if Kia marketed the EV6 as a hot hatchback rather than an SUV, we might be a little less baffled. As a sporty electric car, though, we're as pleased as can be with the Kia EV6's test-track results and their real-world implications. We've known for a while now that the speed and smooth power of electric cars can make them a lot of fun to drive, but the Kia's tail-first antics were not the sort of fun we were expecting from an EV—and we call that a very pleasant surprise, indeed. Hey, Kia, how long before we can get a rear-drive version of the EV6 in for testing? Walton's eager to drift it all the way around the skidpad.

—Motor Trend



RFU's England progress claim is 'dishonest', says Ugo Monye



The Rugby Football Union's claim that England made "solid progress" during the Six Nations is "dishonest", says former wing Ugo Monye.

England won just two matches for the second successive championship and scored fewer tries than in 2021.

"I want to know who in the RFU thinks that signifies progress and are happy with how things are going," Monye told the Rugby Union Daily podcast.

"Fundamentally it's just dishonest. There isn't progress."

Head coach Eddie Jones, 62, has faced calls to resign after England finished in third place following a 25-13 defeat by Grand Slam champions France.

An unnamed RFU spokesperson said the Australian "is building a new England team against a clear strategy" and it "continues to fully support Eddie".

The spokesperson went on to say that "a full review" would be conducted "as is normal after each tournament".

"The RFU are trying to get the press off Eddie Jones' back," said former Wales captain Sam Warburton.

"It's not honest. No-one apart from Italy will see two wins as progress. This is definitely not progress for England."

Monye said someone in power at the RFU should have put their name to the statement and taken responsibility for England's "unacceptable" Six Nations.

He also said he "felt sad for some of the players" because they were not getting the right direction.

"With the financial backing, the player pool and the coaching staff they have you cannot be winning two out of five games two years in a row. It's appalling, unimaginable, unacceptable," he said.

"England talk about showing great spirit and fight against Ireland and France but you expect that as a baseline. They were miles behind where France were."

'England disrespecting the Six Nations' Jones has regularly stated that he sees

England's losses as learning experiences for younger players with the World Cup in France in 2023 in mind, but Warburton said England had not placed enough emphasis on the Six Nations.

"It's not about the World Cup right now, it's about the Six Nations," he said on BBC Two's Rugby Union Special.

"It's an amazing tournament and it's disrespectful to say 'we're building to the World Cup next year'. It's about winning the Six Nations at all costs. I don't like this 'buying time' talk."

The former British and Irish Lions captain said he was baffled by England's decline given the talent they have.

"The World Cup semi-final win against New Zealand in 2019 was arguably the best performance England have ever produced but I don't know how they are so far away from that now," he added.

"They should be physically dominating teams and be strong in the set-piece. They have amazing players like Marcus Smith

and Harry Randall and should be a brilliant team, but I don't know why they have regressed so far.

"They are way behind where they were for the 2019 World Cup."

Former Scotland captain John Barclay questioned England's strategy and whether the return of injured players such as captain Owen Farrell, Jonny May, Anthony Watson and Manu Tuilagi would solve the team's problems.

"Eddie Jones said he wanted to unleash an expansive and attacking brand of rugby," he said. "They should be playing an amazing brand of rugby but what will these players add to the team if the system is not there?"

"England are chopping and changing, they are changing their style of play and it's not clicking at the moment."

-BBC

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The World Cup semi-final win against New Zealand in 2019 was arguably the best performance England have ever produced but I don't know how they are so far away from that now.
”



Scottish teenager rejected Bayern Munich for Serie A stardom



Jordan Elgott

There are not many footballers - far less 18-year-old Scottish ones - who turn down a European superpower when they come calling.

Yet Aaron Hickey did just that, opting to join Serie A club Bologna instead of Bayern Munich from Hearts in 2022, when the likes of Aston Villa and boyhood club Celtic were also reportedly keen.

A key factor in his decision was that the Italian side wanted him as an immediate part of their first-team squad, after just 33 senior games for the Tynecastle outfit.

Having surpassed that total for his new club by nailing down a regular first-team place in the Serie A team, the 19-year-old has earned a first Scotland call-up for Thursday's friendly against Poland.

How has Hickey become "one of the standout young players in Europe"? BBC Sport Scotland asked the man who gave him his debut, Craig Levein, as well as others he made an impression on at Hearts. 'No worries about throwing him in'

Hickey started his football journey at Hearts then joined Celtic aged 12 and spent four years playing in their academy teams

before deciding he had a better chance of first-team minutes elsewhere.

That prompted a move back to Tynecastle in 2018. And, in the penultimate Scottish Premiership game of the 2018-19 season, the 16-year-old was given his senior debut in a 2-1 defeat at Aberdeen.

He started the following match, a 2-1 loss at Celtic, then a week later made history when the sides met again, becoming the youngest player to start a Scottish Cup final in the modern era as Hearts were beaten 2-1 at Hampden.

"I had absolutely no worries about putting him in against Aberdeen," says Levein.

"He played because he was training so well. I watched all the youth games and he steadily improved from the period where he came back to us from Celtic.

"I had a little bit of doubt about throwing him in at Celtic Park but he proved he was more than capable of doing the job."

Taking Serie A by storm Graeme Souness. Joe Jordan. Denis Law. It's quite the exclusive club Hickey has joined in making Serie A history.

When the teenager thumped home a 20-yard strike in a 2-2 draw with Genoa in September, he became just the fourth Scot to score in Italy's top flight.

No-one had done it since Souness 35 years previously. "It's crazy" is how Hickey described his feat, adding: "To be with names like Souness and Joe Jordan is a great achievement for myself. I'm really proud."

Three further league goals have followed for Hickey, who has thrived as a marauding left-back under coach Sinisa Mihajlovic.

The Scot did his due diligence in weighing up where his career would be best served. He visited Bologna's facilities, as well as Bayern's, and cited the "family feel" as one of the reasons for choosing the Italian side. Another aspect to tip the balance was Bologna's pledge to include him in their first-team squad, while Bayern - European champions at the time - would have put him in their second team, which plays in the German third tier.

Hickey has certainly made the decision look a good one; after 12 appearances in an injury-interrupted debut season, he has been a near ever-present this term, starting the large majority of Bologna's games. Plenty of young footballers have an ego to match their talent, but Levein believes Hickey's temperament will help him stay grounded.

"He never speaks, he just smiles," Levein

says. "He's a bit shy but it helped him going into big matches, because he never seems to get flustered about anything."

Versatility enhances Scotland prospects Hickey's form simply couldn't be ignored. Steve Clarke admitted as much last week after handing the teenager a first senior call-up by saying: "If you look at the way Aaron has played for Bologna over the course of the season, he is one of the stand-out young players in European football." There is little doubt his call-up is merited, even if bypassing the traditional age-group trajectory has not been without controversy.

Having been capped by Scotland Under-17s, Hickey did not play for Scot Gemmill's Under-21s after pulling out of squads three times. His most recent withdrawal was last November and the reason - a need to rest - raised questions over his commitment.

However, he has now been elevated into Clarke's set-up, and finds himself in a stacked queue for the left-back berth, the natural position for Andy Robertson, Kieran Tierney and Greg Taylor.

That's where Hickey's versatility could be handy. Despite spending the majority of his short senior career at left-back, he has also featured on the opposite flank.

What's more, when he returned to Hearts, it was as a central midfielder.

"He's got really good defensive qualities but I don't know if he'll end up being a full-back, he might end up going back into midfield," Levein adds.

"He could be a fantastic holding midfielder with his great awareness of danger and his ability to get out of tight situations with the ball at his feet."

Former Hearts captain and striker Steven Naismith, now the club's football development manager, was also impressed with Hickey's game intelligence.

"His understanding of the game, without thinking about it, is very good," he said.

"All the small, quick decisions that need to be made on a pitch, Aaron predominantly makes them right and on top of that he's got a good attitude."

Hearts manager Robbie Neilson, meanwhile, says Hickey's on-field maturity shines through.

"He's like a 24 or 25-year-old in a teenager's body," he says. "He understands the game already. He has massive potential. I've been really impressed with him. He's very mature for his age, he's composed, has good physique, ticks all the boxes."

-BBC

