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Fuel Stations Divided Over Strike Action



■ Staff Writer

The Fuel and Franchise Association of Namibia (FAFA) is now divided as to whether they should forge ahead with the planned strike by shutting down their services or wait for the outcome of negotiations currently rolling out with the ministry of mines and energy.

The association has, however, in the interim, shelved a strike which was meant to hit the economy Monday, the 18th of July 2022.

This is at the back of some filling stations over the weekend, having circulated a communique urging motorists to fuel up their cars in the face of uncertainty.

However, mines minister Tom Alweendo expressed on Monday afternoon that he was yet to be officially informed on the way forward regarding the FAFA strike.

"As I speak to you now, I have not received any official communication from retailers. What I have heard is only what I have heard from other people and on social media. We have not had any notification officially from the retailers to say this is what we intend to do," he said.

A meeting with the minister was expected Monday to forge an accord on the question of the dealer margins, concerns of tight competition in the sector, and the role banks are playing in the fuel business.

But Alweendo is not ready to add another dollar to the fuel price to satisfy the association's demands for fear that it would exert more pressure on the consumer.

Negotiations are said to have hit a brick wall. "We have been having discussions for some time now with the retailers of fuel arguing that because of the high prices, the volume has gone down, and people aren't buying as much fuel as they used to buy any longer. Also, people are more and more smuggling fuel from Angola, and therefore they have been saying that we should agree to increase their dealer margin."

"The margin currently stands at N$1.13 per litre of fuel sold, and that dealer margin becomes a part of the prices. Therefore if we agree to increase as they are saying, it can only mean that apart from the natural increase that we get because of the international oil prices, on top of that, now we have to add that dealer margin to be part of the price." "We have been saying that look, we all need to tighten our belts, and we know the volumes have gone down. The consumers are not able to afford this high price, and that is why we have gone to as far as even reducing some of the levies that are levied on the fuel price," he said.

The minister remains convinced that fuel station owners can manage to tighten their belts in the interim, hoping for price stabilization.

Continued on P2

It Is Hard To Find Employees With Right Skills in Namibia - Local Companies



■ Nghiinomenwa Erastus

A number of local companies that were interviewed by the industrialisation and trade ministry in 2021 have indicated that it is difficult to find an employee with the right skills in Namibia.

The respondent companies revealed that the difficulty emanates from a lack of skills required by their operation, and secondly, those qualifications do not have the minimum experience.

The Private Sector Development Survey (PSDS) 2021/22 Report has revealed.

The report shed some light on the quality of graduates and also the aligning of the content being taught in training institutions to the economic needs.

Currently, the country has a huge supply of labour/ (willing individuals to work); however, they are struggling to get jobs. What has not been documented critically is the why.

According to the report on the assessment, 37.9 per cent of respondents (398) were of the opinion that it is difficult to very difficult to find employees who fit into their operations. The response is close to the previous year when 38.9 per cent were of the same opinion.

The ministry explained that the creation of employment is, among others, dependent on the availability of the skills required in an enterprise.

The ministry rated the ease of finding the right employee on a scale from minus 2 (very difficult) to plus 2 (very easy), and for 2021 it has only marginally moved from 0.0 to 0.1.

Female entrepreneurs were more positive (0.3) in findings employees than male respondents (0.0).

The PSDS findings indicate that business people operating micro companies were the only ones providing a positive rating (0.3) on average, while respondents from medium-sized firms gave it the most negative rating of 0.3.

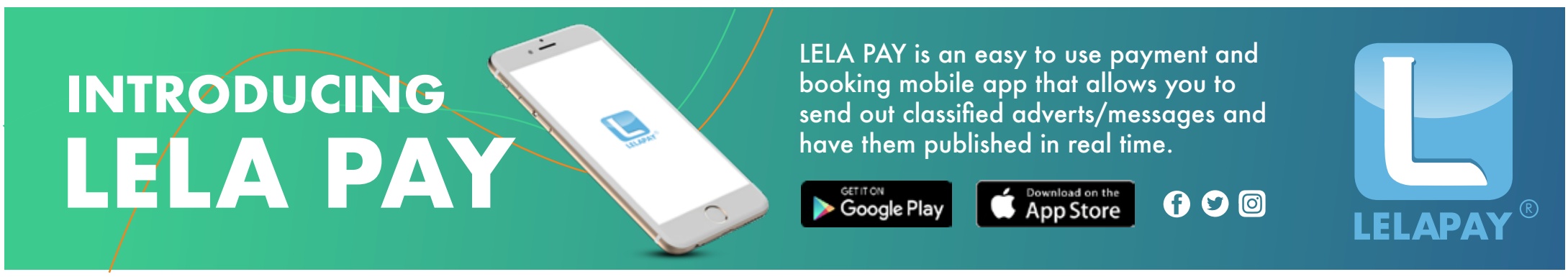
Large corporations struggle slightly to get the right skills (minus 0.1) than small enterprises (minus 0.2).

While newly-formed companies provided the best evaluation of 0.6 in terms of easiness of finding the right employee, overall, there was no clear correlation between the time in the operation of a company and its rating of the ease of finding employees.

Companies in operation for more than 10 years were slightly positive (+0.1), while respondents from businesses operating between three and ten years provided, on average, a neutral assessment (0.0). Similar trends were observed in 2020.

Businesses in the financial services sector faced the least challenges filling vacancies (plus 0.6), followed by the transport and retail trade sectors (plus 0.4).

Continued on P2



Fuel

Alweendo said the association has persistently submitted that they are not able to survive under the circumstances, and this is where the negotiations have hit a cul de sac.

Pressed on how concerned he was about the possibility of a strike, he said,

"obviously, I am concerned. If you find yourself in a situation where you are not able to have fuel, that's going to be a problem, but the solution is not to add more cost on the pump price".

Employees

On the other hand, mining companies appear to struggle most (minus 0.5), followed by agricultural firms (minus 0.3).

Respondents from other economic sectors provided, on average, relatively neutral ratings.

Respondents identified the main reason for not finding the right employee being required skills not available and no formal qualifications are offered.

However, the importance of this factor has dropped since 2020, when 47.6 per cent of respondents mentioned it, to 34.0 per cent in 2021.

The lack of experience despite formal qualifications ranked second, mentioned by 26.2 per cent of respondents compared to 31.0 per cent in 2020.

More relevant, according to the assessment, are now factors such as an unattractive working environment (16.8 per cent) and an unattractive location (14.8 per cent).

The PSDS has indicated that some employers struggle to meet the salary expectations of potential employees and find it therefore difficult to get the right employees.

Others require very specialised skills that are not easily available in the domestic labour market.

The report indicated more respondents from micro businesses identified the unattractive working environment and unattractive location as a challenge (33.9 per cent).

These two factors were mentioned by 31.3 per cent of respondents from large corporations.

Lack of work experience and the unattractive working environment shared the second rank for large firms.

Businesses who started operations less than three years ago indicated that they cannot offer the right working environment (25.0 per cent), as well as the location (16.7 per cent), which matters much more than for any other businesses.

A the same time, the lack of qualifications topped their concerns (50.0 per cent).

The ministry has also indicated that it is not surprising that the working environment tops the list for agricultural businesses, while the location and the lack of experience shared the second spot (16.7 per cent) as the reason for not getting the right employees.

The working environment and location are also challenges for the hospitality sector (22.9 per cent each) that were surpassed by the lack of qualifications (28.6 per cent).

The construction sector faces similar challenges: the working environment shared the second rank with the lack of qualification (23.4 per cent each) and location the fourth with 19.1 per cent.

The lack of experience is the main challenge for respondents from the construction (29.8 per cent) and real estate (38.1 per cent) sectors.

Interestingly, location is no issue for mining companies. However, they are mainly operating in remote areas, as no respondent mentioned this factor as a reason for not getting the right employees.

The lack of qualification and experience is clearly their primary concern (both 42.9 per cent).

The report has also acknowledged that an increase in job losses across the country due to the recession and the pandemic leads to more experienced and skilled job seekers being available, improving the prospect of finding a qualified candidate with some experience.

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RDP's Kandy Nehova Takes Fight To Supreme Court

...Labels Judge President Petrus Damaseb "Incompetent"



■ **Justicia Shipena**

Lawyer Amanda Titus, representing the applicants in this matter, says the applicants in the RDP vs ECN were denied the right to be heard and participate in future elections.

This follows as RDP's Kandy Nehova and others, through Titus, launched an appeal appealing against the whole judgment of the Electoral Court on the RDP vs ECN matter.

According to the notice of appeal, on 27 June 2022, the panel dismissed the matter, ruling on the case's merits and disregarding the applicant's submissions in totality.

"They are appealing to the Supreme Court that their right to be heard was denied, and the judgment was made on things the electoral court thought of themselves, and it was not facts that were argued before them," said Titus.

Titus said the appeal has launched the appeal on an urgent basis, adding that the judge president Petrus Damaseb wrote a letter in April this year, stating that he is conflicted.

"He wrote a letter that he did not serve on the applicant. The letter was hidden in the court file, and the applicants only found out now recently. He wrote a letter that he is conflicted in the matter, but he does not explain how he is conflicted," she said.

She stressed that the applicants were held in limbo until June on a matter that was supposed to be heard in February.

"Every time the matter heard to be postponed because the judge president could not constitute the electoral court and the applicants' court was left hanging."

In this light, the applicants painted Damaseb as 'incompetent'.

"We also filed to the judiciary commission that he must be removed as judge president because he is not competent to be a judge president, and he does not deserve that title. He is messing with constitutional rights," said Titus.

In the notice of appeal, the applicants request an appeal on the grounds that the Electoral Court was constituted contrary to the provisions of sections 167 (3) and (4). It stated that the judge president had no legal competence to assign a chairman for the electoral panel.

Another ground is that the self-declared 'conflicted' judge-president had already assigned an electoral panel on 31 April 2021.

According to court documents, the assigned panel heard an issue in limine on the jurisdiction of the Electoral Court to hear the matter on 20 June 2022. This resulted in the panel dismissing the matter, ruling on the case's merits.

However, the applicants now argue that the judgment was a nullity and that the entire procedure impacted adversely on the decorum of the Electoral Court.

"The judge president was derelict in his legal duties and professional obligations; the matter was heard two years after it was launched. The foundational principles of judicial independence were flouted, and the court's dignity was disregarded and violated," the notice reads.

Furthermore, it states that the entire procedure negated the purport of the electoral act to give substance to the right of freedom of association and democratic political rights.

In an open letter from Nehova to the judge president dated 12 July 2022, the judge president makes the allegations without any explanation or documentary proof.

"In terms of the law, you have become functus officio (your jurisdiction has expired). So far as that case is concerned and indeed the Electoral Court as a whole and further the High Court in general, you could not have made appointments of judges Tomassi, Coleman, and Miller to the panel of the Electoral Court."

In April this year, a full electoral court bench consisting of judges Marlene Tomasi, Kobus Miller and George Coleman was assigned to preside over a matter in which RDP member Kandy Nehova is claiming he is the rightful president of the party.

"We note that judge miller was your in-house consultant in your still operating legal firm Conradie and Damaseb. The mere fact that you appointed the panel of the Electoral Court vitiated the proceedings and rendered the judgment handed down by the panel null and void and of no legal effect," said Nehova.

He claims that the judge president does not have the legal power to appoint a chairman for the Electoral Court.

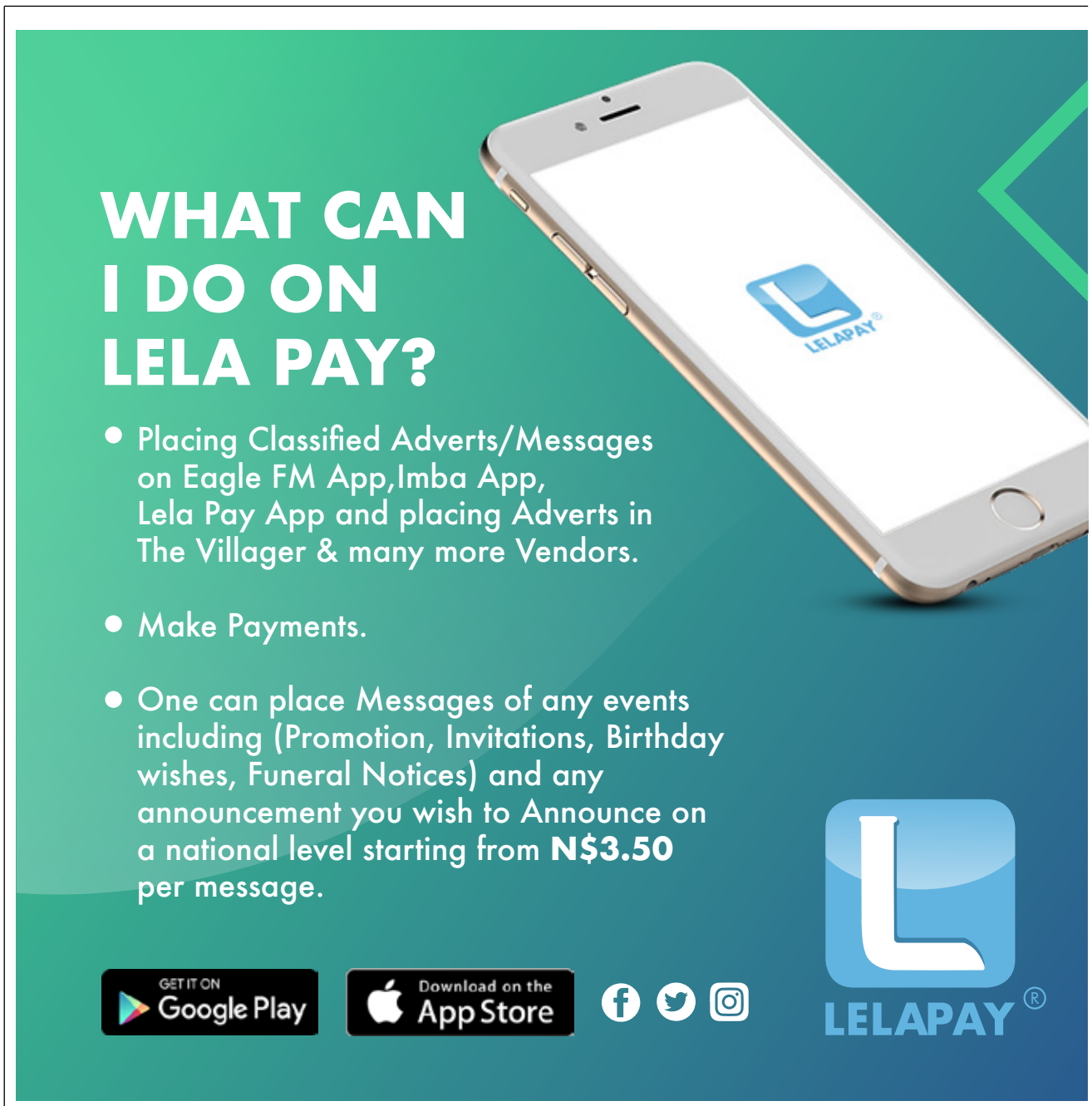
According to him, the events constitute an absolute annulment of law and justice in which the RDP's foundational.

"We have paid for our registration under the Electoral Acts of this country. Our constituency has been denied basic democratic rights to be represented by their party, and you have been the engineer to disable the legal operation of our party as part of the lawmakers," Nehova expressed.

The fraction of the party now demands that the judge president leave and vacate the position as a judge, judge-president, and deputy chief justice.

They further advised that the RDP requires his permanent absence from the court.

"You have denied the Namibian People the benefit of a just and dignified High Court of Namibia. You have done us immeasurable harm, but more so, you deny the entire Nation a fair and competent court of law."



Niilo Taapopi SS Learners Sent Back Home For Not Paying N$150 Hostel Fee





■ **Hertha Ekandjo**

Several learners at Niilo Taapopi Senior Secondary School in Okahao in the Omusati region were allegedly sent back home on Sunday for not taking along N$150 hostel fees.

A concerned community member, Thomas Shilumbu from Okahao, said he saw learners walking out of the school with their belongings.

The learners were then later seen hanging in and around the school area, at cuca shops and other places.

"I saw a group of learners gathered outside the school, so I went there to observe. I left and went to town. To my surprise, when I came back, I found learners carrying their belongings and leaving the school," said Shilumbu.

He further said that he then approached the security guard at the school, who told him that he was instructed not to allow learners into the school without the N$150 hostel fees.

"I asked them where the learners were going at that time as it was almost 19h00. I then decided to go to the nearby and speak to the pastor for him to accommodate the learners who might not reach their houses for the night," he said.

Moreover, Shilumbu explained that he reached out to the education inspector of the Okahao circuit, Eliamkim Kamati.

He stated that the inspector later informed him that she spoke to the school, and they have admitted to it and have acknowledged the students being sent back.

"This Monday morning, the learners are still outside the school. When I met with some learners, they told me they slept at a friend's place, which is very dangerous," Shilumbu expressed.

The Niilo Taapopi SS school principal, Shivute Mbekele, confirmed to The Villager the development, stating that this was done because the N$150 was needed to buy cleaning materials and detergents for the school.

Mbekele blames the government for not providing the school with cleaning materials.

"As we know, the hostel is not a right. Learners were not denied the right to education," said Mbekele.

An agitated Mbeleke clarified that learners could still attend classes but not get into the hostel, adding that the hostel was a privilege to the learners and an advantage.

"The N$65 of N$150 hostel fee is used to buy detergents and cleaning materials and other equipment to be used in the Hostel!" he exclaimed.

"If they come here without the fees as far as the media is concerned, the government doesn't provide the detergents and cleaning materials."

He questioned who would be held accountable should a disease break out in the hostel.

He further questioned how they would maintain learners if they didn't pay their hostel fees, saying that learners would just be roaming around the hostel without paying.

"Learners who went back home were those who felt like doing so. Others were spoken to, and parents were informed, and an agreement was met between the school and parents," he said.

He added that the school had to buy detergents and cleaning materials for the hostel the last term because most of the learners did not pay their hostel fees.

"We don't have phone allowance to call parents and inform them about the fees. How do we call a thousand parents here?" he questioned.

"I not moved by this and didn't care about it either."

Meanwhile, education executive Sanet Steenkamp says that parents should stop pointing fingers at schools. However, she also stated that she stands against the steps taken by the school principal.

"It is wrong to send children back home who didn't bring the development fund money, and it is wrong for parents to send children to school without the fees and to take things for granted and for sending their children to school without toiletries, without cleaning materials if they could not provide them with school development fund," she explained.

Steenkamp said it was unacceptable for a principal to send away learners for not contributing to the hostel fees.

"We are living in tough times. While I urge parents to bring their part, I cannot condone this," said Steenkamp.

The executive director said it was important for parents to understand what the hostel development fund is used for, emphasising that it is vital for learners to pay their hostel fees.

"I think there must be a sense of engagement and signs of a commitment from the parent's side. How can parents expect to send the children without hostel fees back to school? We must understand that the hostel catering is a major cost in the ministry of education," she said.

Steenkamp mentioned that parents already do not pay for hostel food; thus, it is a costly activity to be carried out by the ministry.

According to her, the ministry feeds more than 65 000 learners who are accommodated in the hostels.

"It is the right thing for parents to do by ensuring their children's hostel fees are paid."

She added that it is time to speak the truth into power and debate as a nation about what is a priority to them.

"We had five weeks of holiday, had we not had time to prepare our children to return to the hostels, what are our expectations of the matrons, cleaners and our children when they are in the hostels if we do not pay?" she questioned.

Steenkamp continued saying that the government does provide enough funds for all schools and funding for cleaning, which she said was minimal.

"The major cost driver in hostels is catering 'food', it is the utility, there must be constant water, and there must be constant electricity those must be paid," she emphasised.

She concluded that it was time for parents and guardians to show appreciation and not take things for granted.

Kavango East Youth Question If Governor Is Serious About Their Empowerment







■ **Annakleta Haikera**

Youth activists in the Kavango East region have challenged the region's governor Bonifatius Wakudumo to come up with solutions to address youth unemployment and not merely offer them rhetoric without actions.

This comes after, last week, Wakudumo said the youth need economic empowerment and land to enable them to do horticulture and animal husbandry. He said this during the induction workshop of the National Youth Policy that was held at Rundu.

The project aims to contribute toward the reduction of unemployment among the youth through the creation of employment opportunities in a number of areas.

Wakudumo further stated that the policy framework should allow the youth to address their needs and empower them in the aspects of education, health and economics.

"Everything in this region goes through the regional council, which is the governor's office, and he should be able to provide us with land and also empower us economically. Maybe then many youth will stop going to bars and start something for themselves," Mwengu Shiyave from the Kavango Concerned Group told The Villager.

Meanwhile, youth activist and entrepreneur in the region, Frans Moyo, challenged the governor to stand up and represent us from the highest office.

"We don't want land or economic development only. We want a lot of things. The governor should act, not only speak. We have heard these things already, and we want to see our leaders act on what they say or promise us.

Moyo questioned who would avail funds for the youth to start up with a structure if land were made available.

"If we look at the agricultural sector in our region, it's owned by outsiders. How are we going to benefit from horticulture?"

Another youth activist and teacher in Rundu, Frans Kandjilu, said that it is important that the governor and other leaders in the region are trying to come up with activists for the youth to lean on and take up the economy, but also questioned where the support will come from if the youth get the land.

"Many youths are willing to do something, but there's no initial support. Land is truly needed."

Kandjilu also questioned if there truly is land available for the youth.

"Sometimes it's important when such information is given we need to see the framework of how the availing of land is going to happen and who will be responsible. And what are the resources involved for the youth to get hold of this land?

Last week, Wakudumo said there is land in Rundu town, Diyona settlement and in Divundu Village Council, which can be some of the land that can be given for agricultural use.

"Local authorities need to do a land survey, to allow young people to apply for the land they need, let them avail some piece of land where they can put up a formal structure, which the youth can call home," said Wakudumo.

Wakudumo further stated he wants to see a conducive environment for the young created for the purposes of economic activities.

"Time has come for us leaders to do what we preach. When we talk about it, we also need to act on it. We need to empower our youth with the necessary skills and knowledge."

According to him, money can come afterwards. "It's one way to give money but does the person given the money know how to use the money given to them?" Wakudumo questioned.

"Some people don't have the technical capacity on how to run a business. We need to first look at the youth's capacity to provide them with the necessary technical skills so that when they are given the skills to run their businesses, they can run it successfully."

He also said sports activities in the region should be taken seriously and that he wants to put the necessary structures in place to ensure that we train people from this region."

"We should invest in sports and put up a lot of infrastructures so that our people can compete on national, regional and international levels. I happen to see a lot of talented youth at Linus Shashimpapo."

"We are busy privatizing the Green Schemes. As government, I think we're sitting with a lot of graduates who have nothing to do at home with the necessary skills in agriculture. The youth need to be given certain opportunities to venture into the Green Schemes. It's only then when we can say we are serious in addressing the issues of the youth as far as the youth development."

Schools To Determine Their Own Covid-19 Approach After Regulations Scrapped

...As 97-Day Term Starts

■ Dolly Menas
& Hilma Tuukondjele

Schools have resumed for their second semester today, and Sanet Steenkamp, the executive director of education, said the second semester would end on 9 December, and there is no time to waste.

"This is the semester where everybody has a chance to bring their quality into the classroom by ensuring that they are well prepared, mentally, physically, psychologically, present in the classroom and that the syllabus is broken down in daily lessons," Steenkamp said.

Steenkamp added that they want to release the national external examination results in January.

"Early October, we'll already start with oral examinations. All the schools have already received the dates for examinations to start," she said She added that education is most forward and not lenient but messy and requires tears and sacrifices.

President Hage Geingob scrapped all Covid-19 restrictions on Friday, which included the wearing of masks and social distancing, however, Steenkamp said schools would study how to continue fighting the spread of the virus.

"The school management will see what works based on the context, and of course, it is not mandatory to wear masks anymore however, we also know the conditions in our schools," she said.

She mentioned that it is up to the school management to see and discuss the Covid-19 regulations and see how they operate.

Tadeus Mirjam, an Oshana region teacher, said she is ready to start the second part of the academic year and describes that the learners are happy to be back after a month-long winter holiday.

"The first day of school is always rough since learners came from the holiday from which they were not used to school work, but they were excited to see their friends, their engagement was very good," Tadeus said.

She added that she is ready for the second semester, and it's her duty as a teacher to make it interesting to the learners.

She advised other teachers who would be facing the second semester in teaching knowledge to the learners.

"Be lenient to the learners because they're trying to change from the way they were on holiday, so they catch up with you before pressuring things to them," she advised

Angula Olivia, a parent, said she is excited and is looking forward to a great semester.

She believes teachers and parents should still take Covid-19 seriously, and children should wear their masks, sanitize at all costs, and keep a distance if possible.

"I'm looking forward to the new studies that would bring a lot of improvement in our children's lives since it's the journey that we are going to take up as parents", she said.

She also said that parents should always take extra care of their children since, after the holiday, the learners tend to forget or ignore the rules, and it is up to them to motivate them and help them with their school work whenever it is needed.



5GB Data Insufficient For Students - NASA

■ Annakleta Haikera

National African Student Association (NASA) president Paulus Vihemba says the association is not happy with only 5GB of data being allocated for general use for students.

Paulus argued that the data is insufficient because some students are using only e-learning, especially law students.

This comes as the University of Namibia (Unam) student representative council (SRC) president Malcolm Kambanzera announced on Friday that the new MTC connectivity data package would be issued to students after the university received numerous complaints from students across all 12 campuses.

According to Vihemba, Kambanzera did not communicate with the other campuses' SRCs on the agreement that was reached on 5GB only that should be allocated for general use only.

"This is too little why should the data usage be restricted? These students are matured, and they know what to do with their data, be it given to them with no restrictions," he demands.

Meanwhile, the Rundu campus SRC vice president Vernet Mukoya told The Villager that he demands that students be provided with 15GB of data with no restrictions.

"If we look back to TN mobile data usage, they gave us 10GB without any restrictions. The way MTC data are structured, you find that 40GB is for Unam websites only, and 15 is divided into many things. If they want to take something, let them take the 40GB for Unam websites and give us 15GB without any restrictions on it. It is both sides. If it's costly, let them give us what they can, which is 15GB with no limits," he said Mukoya.





Mukoya narrated that the restrictions are not speaking to the reality of the current status quo.

A law student at the campus, Johannes Kasera, says he does not understand why distance students have to be on their own in their studies.

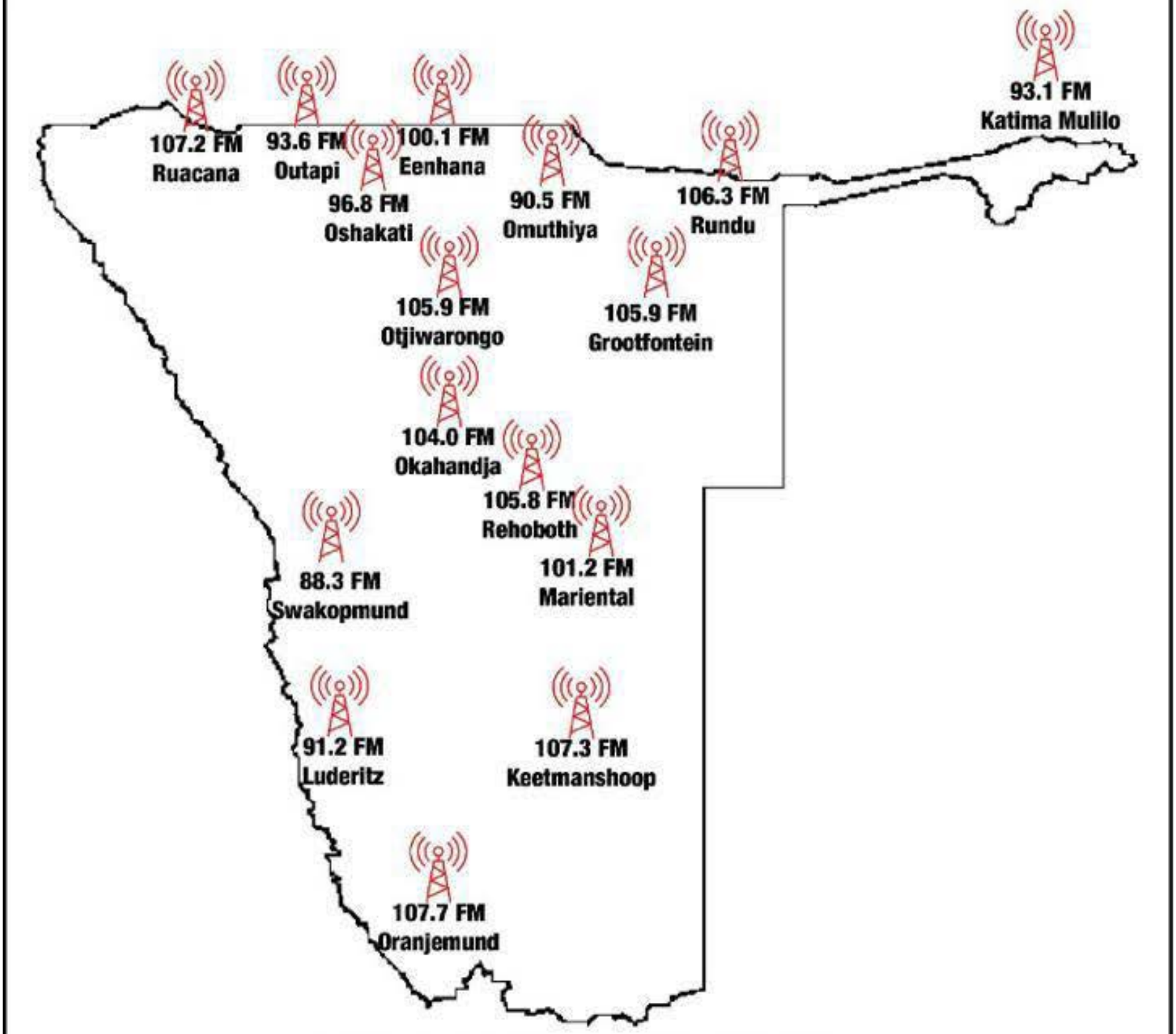
"Mathematics students have a lot to use data on YouTube. What's there on the Unam portal or e-learning that requires 37.5GB of data? Education makes proper reasoning, but this time around, it has become a mind terror to decision makers. What students will use data for is up to themselves. TN mobile didn't have such restrictions because they knew students were mature enough to be responsible."

On 18 June, the students' council held a press conference at five Unam campuses that were dissatisfied with the restrictions of the provided sim cards for data to students at Unam and the distribution of devices.



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Why Bollywood's big films are flopping at the box office



■ **Nikhil Inamdar**

Bollywood, the world's biggest film industry by the number of movies produced globally every year, is struggling to make a comeback following two washout years of the pandemic.

Expectations that pent-up demand from movie-hungry audiences would lead to packed cinema halls have been belied by millions of dollars in lost revenue, as moviegoers become more discerning about where they spend their money.

Of the 20 odd notable Hindi films released in the first half of 2022, 15 have tanked at the box office, trade figures show.

These include projects helmed by some of the country's biggest superstars; Ranveer Singh's 83 and Jayeshbhai Jordaar, Akshay Kumar's Samrat Prithviraj and Bachchhan Paandey and Kangana Ranaut's Dhaakad.

"About $90m - $100m (£75.82m - £84.24m) has been lost between these films," says trade expert Joginder Tuteja. "The recovery would have been all the more difficult if not for satellite and digital rights."

Given this setback, overall theatrical revenues this year will not exceed $450m at best, reckons Mr Tuteja. That is a $100m short of the approximately $550m Hindi films made at the box office in 2019.

What ails the box office?

Weak content could be one of the reasons for this poor performance.

"Historically, Bollywood films have seen decent collections even when the content was weak, given the strong fan following of superstars. That seems to have changed with time, with content now being the primary driver," a report by Emkay Global Financial Services said.

But what's confounding producers is that mid-budget, content-heavy films that were the flavour of the box office pre-Covid haven't done great business either.

"Audiences are now demanding both - great content and big scale," says Bhushan Kumar, who runs one of the country's leading movie studios T-Series, in the financial capital Mumbai.

Bhool Bhulaiyaa 2, a horror comedy produced by Mr Kumar's T Series, has been one of the biggest grossers of 2022. Still, he admits there's "great confusion" among producers about what will and will not work, following the recent spate of failures.

As makers like him grapple with changing audience tastes, and the fragmentation of viewership between theatres and streaming platforms, greenlighting a film has become trickier than ever.

To make matters worse, Covid related delays, cancellations and protocols have led to average cost-overruns of 10% -15% on film budgets, Mr Kumar reckons.

And while costs have gone up, tickets have become more expensive, theatre capacity has shrunk, with many screens closing permanently during the pandemic.

While difficult to quantify, growing calls for boycotts and anti-Bollywood social media campaigns on a range of issues - from nepotism to allegations of hurting religious sentiments - have also hurt the industry's performance, according to Emkay Global.

Southern Indian films save the day

The redeeming factor amid this turbulence has been the outperformance of high-octane, action-oriented films such as RRR, K.G.F: Chapter 2 and Pushpa from film industries in the south of the country.

Traditionally, films made in the south have done well in their own geographies. But increasingly, their dubbed versions have performed well in the Hindi heartland, with collections eclipsing those of their Bollywood counterparts.

The unique syntax of the South blockbusters - larger-than-life sets, catchy songs and slow-motion sequences - is missing in the quintessential Hindi film churned out by studios in Mumbai, experts say.

"If I'm going to a movie theatre now, I want an out-of-body experience, I want the rollercoaster," says Sucharita Tyagi, a film critic, about the growing pan-India appeal of the southern Indian film. "In the pandemic, a lot of people discovered these non-Hindi, south Indian films, because when you're sitting at home flipping through streaming platforms, you'll run out of Hindi films to watch after a point."

But analysts caution against banking on this trend to steer a turnaround in Bollywood's fortunes.

"Performance of regional movies (southern and non-southern) beyond their core markets is generally sporadic in nature," says the report from Emkay Global.

And with no major film release scheduled from the region in the second half of this year, Hindi films will have to do the heavy lifting without assistance.

What next?

Bollywood is now betting on a string of highly anticipated releases like Laal Singh Chaddha, the Hindi remake of Forrest Gump, and the action drama Shamshera, helmed by popular star Ranbir Kapoor, to mark a reversal in its fortunes in the second half of 2022.

With more films lined up for release than in the first half of the year, the gross box office collections are expected to grow to mid-high single digits, similar to pre-Covid levels. No one is willing to write an obituary of the big screen, cinema hall experience yet, but analysts admit that changing viewing habits, including the shift to streaming will undoubtedly have an impact on the business.

"There will be cases where audiences will opt to postpone their trip to the cinemas and wait for the movies to come out on the OTT platform, particularly where the content is sub-par," says the report by Emkay Global.

The number of direct to streaming releases are also likely to go up, with some concept films skipping the theatrical route altogether.

According to Emkay Global, the $500m invested by OTT platforms in Indian original content is disproportionately high given the inadequate subscriber additions right now.

But the secular shift towards digital is here to stay in a price-sensitive market like India.

While that's positive news for the industry, as it will expand revenue streams, it will put pressure on makers to give movie goers a more compelling reason than ever before to fork out money for a ticket at the cinema hall.

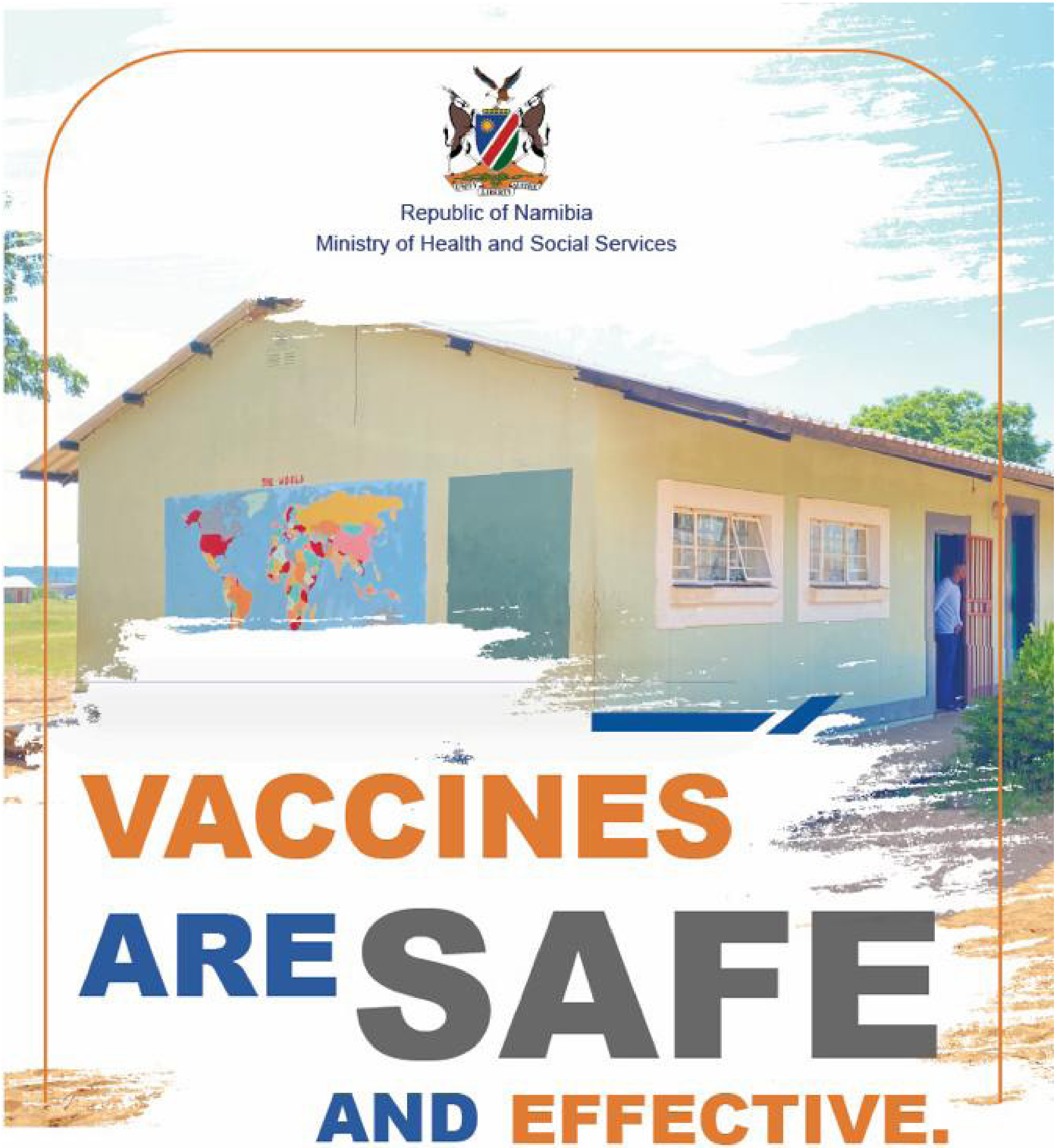
"When you are spending $20 - $30 with every movie outing, you want more return for your buck. Because you can spend that money and get a full year subscription of streaming services that are rolling out new discounts every day," says Ms Tyagi. "Why would people not opt for that? I see that happening more and more."

-BBC



Republic of Namibia

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Big Lips

How Does Tate Kandy Nehova Want to Be Remembered?

Kandy Nehova - Member of National Assembly (2010-2015); Former Chairman of National Council of Namibia (1993-2004); Former President of Commonwealth Parliament Association from 2001 -2002; Former Regional Councillor of Ongwediva Constituency (1992-2004).

Member of SWAPO from 1967-2007; Member of People Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) from 1974-1980; SWAPO representative in the International Committee Against Apartheid, Racism and Colonialism in Southern Africa – ICSA, which was based in London from 1981 – 1984; SWAPO Deputy Secretary for Information and Publicity and Director of Voice of Namibia (SWAPO Radio Services from 1984-1991); Member of SWAPO Central Committee 1991-2007; Member of RDP Central Committee and National Executive Committee from 2008; RDP Secretary for Housing and Human Settlements. (From www.parliament.na).

One would say that Kandy Nehova has had it all, and at 76, he should rest and enjoy and be content for having done so much for Namibia. But it seems as if Kandy Nehova is not done. He still has some fight left in him and some scores to settle.

Kandy Nehova was the first to challenge the late Hidipo Hamutenya when he announced that he would contest form the RDP presidency way back in 2013. In 2015, however, Kandy Nehova lost the RDP presidency to Jeremiah Nambinga, who took over the reins at RDP when Hidipo Hamutenya resigned.

In a race where Heiko Lucks, Libolly Haufiku, and Chris Nguherimo also contested, Jeremiah Nambinga received 201 votes compared to Kandy Nehova's 198.

In 2017, the then RDP vice president Steve Bezuidenhout said the party had resolved to remove Jeremiah Nambinga by moving a vote of no confidence. The reason was that under Jeremiah Nambinga's watch, the RDP had lost its glitter and glamour.

Jeremiah Nambinga was removed, and he approached the courts charging that the decision to pass a vote of no confidence was taken without having been an item on the agenda of the National Executive Committee meeting on 12 August 2017.

He also argued that when the RDP decided to remove him, they did not give him adequate notice to prepare for and adequately address the issue. Jeremiah Nambinga further contended that he was thus not given a hearing before the decision was taken.

The High Court granted Jeremiah Nambinga his wish to declare that a decision of the RDP's national executive committee to adopt a vote of no confidence in him as party president was null and void. Among those cited as respondents by Jeremiah Nambinga were Kandy Nehova and Mike Kavekotora.

In 2018, Jeremiah Nambinga resigned from the RDP because of the divisions that had become deep-rooted. In his statement, Jeremiah Nambinga said he had resigned because of a feud between the then RDP secretary-general Mike Kavekotora and other senior party members.

Jeremiah Nambinga pointed out in his resignation letter that the RDP he took over from Hidipo Hamutenya was fractious and experienced endless 'internecine war and feuds and factions'.

In August 2018, when Jeremiah Nambinga resigned, Mike Kavekotora announced that the RDP vice president Steve Bezuidenhout would take over in an acting capacity until the elective congress set for November 2018.

Three contenders for the RDP presidency were Kandy Nehova, Mike Kavekotora and Miriam Hamutenya. Mike Kavekotora received 243 votes, Kandy Nehova got 133, while Miriam Hamutenya had 100 votes.

Although Mike Kavekotora is on record saying that Miriam Hamutenya conceded defeat, and Kandy Nehova congratulated him, the storm was beginning - Kandy Nehova teamed up with 20 others to charge that Mike Kavekotora's election was irregular.

Kandy Nehova and others claimed that Mike Kavekotora had received 49,5 per cent of the votes, and the convention did not yield a candidate. They further argued that there were rules that said the candidate who received the most votes should be declared a winner.

It is now three years after the RDP convention, and still, Kandy Nehova is fighting to be the president. He has taken on the Electoral Commission of Namibia and has gone to the Supreme Court.

When will he rest, seeing that he has made an immensurable contribution to the country? How exactly does he want to be remembered? As the man who never rested just to be the president of RDP? Neh Mahn.

Nigeria's large, youthful population could be an asset or a burden



With a population estimated at 206 million in 2020, Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and seventh in the world.

The country's population is growing at 2.6% a year, one of the fastest rates globally. At this rate, Nigeria's population could double within the next 25 to 30 years.

Nigeria's population structure is potentially an economic asset. The country has the largest population of youth in the world, with a median age of 18.1 years. About 70% of the population are under 30, and 42% are under the age of 15.

The size and youthfulness of the population offer great potential to expand Nigeria's capacity as the regional economic hub of Africa and globally. A young, large population could be an economic asset because population growth and urbanisation go together and economic development is closely correlated with urbanisation. Population growth increases density and, together with rural-urban migration, creates higher urban agglomeration. This can help companies in producing goods in larger numbers and more cheaply, serving a larger number of low-income customers.

But the potential needs to be properly harnessed. Leaders must invest (through health and education) and adopt strong policies to create an environment where this human resource is used optimally. Such was the case among the Asian Tiger countries, which invested massively in technology, infrastructure and education.

Nigeria is, by every measure of socioeconomic progress, failing to develop its endowment of young people. Millions of young people have a poor quality of life, including a lack of education, low living standards and poor health outcomes.

Nigeria is not reaping the benefits of its current population structure and must do more to mitigate the negatives. A large population of unskilled, economically unproductive, unhealthy and poorly educated young people is also a burden to society.

Poor human development

Nigeria was ranked 158 of 185 countries in the 2019 Human Development Index. A 2022 World Bank report also says about 40% of Nigerians live below the national poverty line of U$1.90 per day and about 95.2 million are in poverty. About 19.4 million Nigerians are likely to face food insecurity in 2022.

According to UNICEF, Nigeria accounts for 20% of the world's children who are out of school. In absolute terms, about 10.5 million children, the majority of whom are girls, do not have access to education in Nigeria.

Unemployment is high at 33.3%. Most of those who are unemployed are women and young people. Of those with jobs, over 20% are underemployed as they don't earn enough.

Health indicators

Most of the health indicators in Nigeria are disturbing. Health is key for human development and this means that Nigeria is lagging behind in development.

Health facilities are at sub-optimal levels. Nigerians currently have a lower life expectancy (54 years) than many of their neighbours. The country's burden of chronic and infectious diseases is high. While infectious diseases remain the primary causes of death in the country, non-communicable diseases account for 3 out of every 10 deaths.

While Nigeria is failing to develop her human capital, Nigerians are making more babies, adding to the potential burden.

Fertility

The national fertility rate stands at about 5 children per woman. There are regional variations. It is also lower in urban areas (4.5) than in rural areas (5.9); lower in the Southwest (3.9) than in the Northwest (6.6). In other words, poorer households are worse off, particularly those in the rural areas. Also, poor women and those with no or low education are disproportionately affected.

There were 20 adolescent mothers (aged 15-19) among every 100 adolescent girls in Nigeria, with wide variations across states and regions. This is among the highest in the world and is associated with high risk births, adverse social-economic consequences, limited opportunities and a likely pathway to intergenerational poverty.

The unmet need for modern contraception has been estimated at over 20%. Modern contraceptives help to prevent unwanted pregnancy. This is imperative for improving maternal and child health. A lack of access to contraception perpetuates the high maternal and infant mortality, and high fertility in the country.

Currently, the infant mortality is 72 deaths per 1,000 live births. Maternal mortality is estimated at 512 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births. The national target is to reduce maternal mortality to 72 per 100,000 live births and zero deaths by 2030.

High dependency

Nigeria has a relatively high and growing population of dependants. This could put a strain on those who provide for them. Young people account for a bigger share of the dependants, a situation which will get worse unless there is a deliberate public policy to address high fertility.

The age structure of the population suggests that for every 100 people in the economically active age group (15-64), there are 86 dependants (under 15 and over 64). This compares with the 78.1 average for the African continent, 52 for South Africa.

There are about 6 million people aged over 65. Though this equates to only 3% of population, it is numerically larger than the population of some states in Nigeria. In 2020, the elderly dependency ratio in Nigeria stood at 5.1. This means that there were about five people aged 65 years and older that depend on every 100 people of working age (15 to 64 years). This number of dependants, in addition to children, can reduce the capacity of the working age population to save and invest.

Other groups with high dependency in Nigeria are those with disabilities and the displaced.

The percentage of disabled Nigerians stands at about 2.3%, comparable to Ghana's 3%, but far less than South Africa's 7.5%. But Nigeria doesn't have plans for addressing the needs of its disabled.

The country is also home to over 3 million internally displaced people and over 82,000 international refugees, mostly from neighbouring countries.

Demographic dividend

Nigeria needs to balance population growth with economic prosperity. This makes it possible to achieve a demographic dividend – faster economic growth arising from a favourable population age structure and favourable social and economic policies.

Some countries in Asia including China, Hong Kong, South Korea and Singapore have benefited substantially from this. Nigeria should aim to make a transition to low birth and death rates. Government at all levels must invest towards addressing high fertility and mortality.

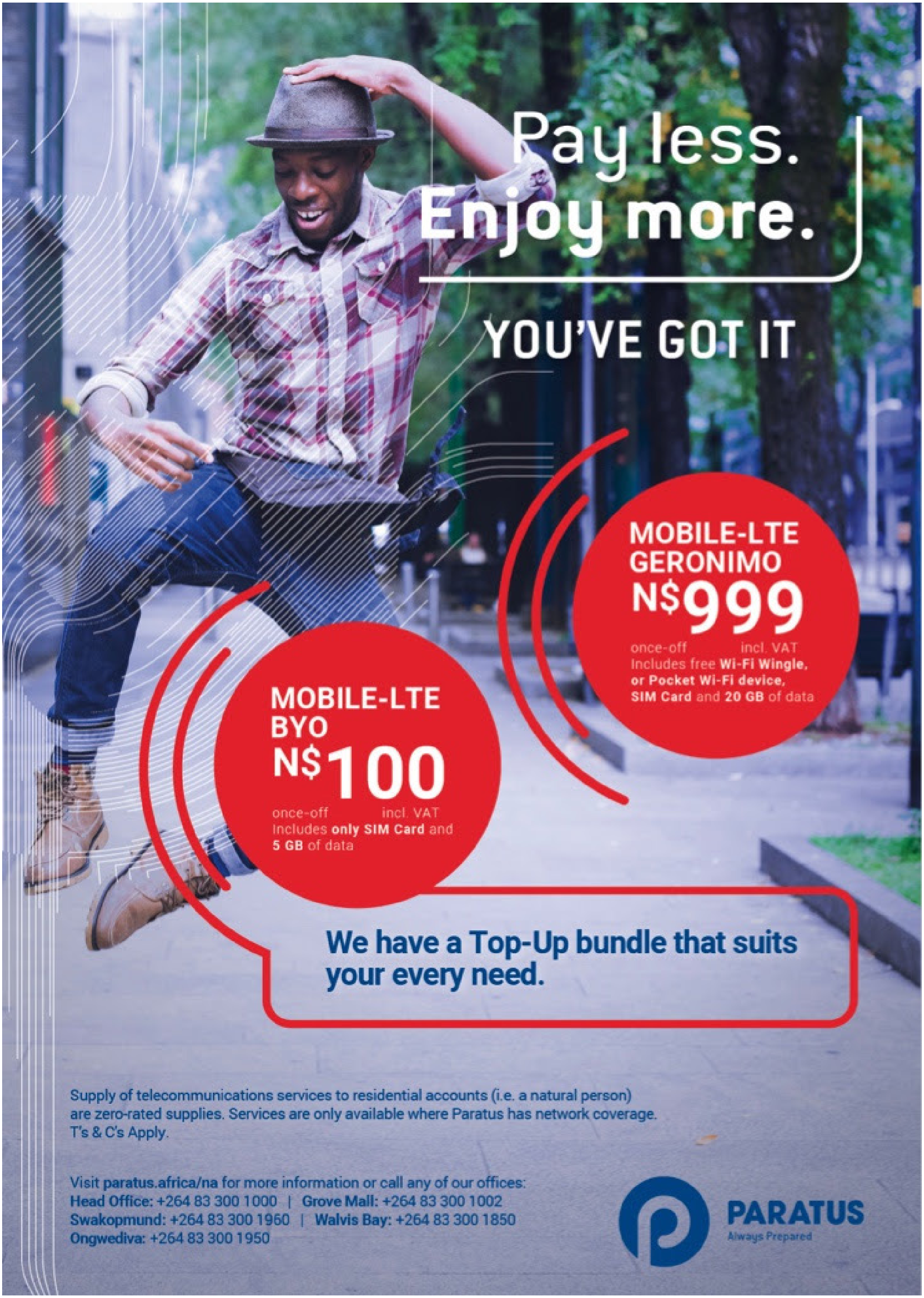
Nigerians need to embrace family planning and address some of the root causes of high fertility, including sociocultural factors. A reduction in fertility by one child per childbearing woman would lead to a 13% increase in Nigeria's GDP per capita in 20 years or a 25% increase over 50 years.

As stated in the population policy document, Nigeria should aim to reduce fertility from the current 5.3% to 4.3% by 2030. Family planning should be available to all and there should be no maternal deaths by 2030.

Education is key to good health, empowerment, employment and peaceful societies. It offers the best return on investment. Graduates in sub-Saharan Africa earn 21% more than those without tertiary education.

Nigeria must prioritise investment in education, health and infrastructure to harness the opportunities of its huge population. But Nigerians have a role to play too. They must make rational decisions and choices. These include choices about investment in quality of life, healthy living, fertility reduction and the empowerment of young people.

Akanni Ibukun Akinyemi
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HEALTH

India becomes second country to cross two billion Covid jabs





■ **Sandee LaMotte**

India has administered more than two billion Covid vaccination doses, becoming the second country to hit the milestone after China.

"This has strengthened the global fight against Covid-19," Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted on Sunday.

India's achievement comes amid a rise in Covid cases in many states.

The government has asked states to step up surveillance of infections. It has also been trying to expand the booster dose programme across the country.

Last week, India began a drive to give free booster doses - or precaution doses, as the government calls it - to all adults for 75 days. The time period is to mark the 75th anniversary of the country's independence on 15 August.

Until now, only frontline workers, health workers and people above 60 years were eligible for free booster doses. Others had to pay for it.

The move came days after the country cut the gap between the second and third doses of the vaccine to six months from nine.

The Hindustan Times newspaper reported last week that 92% of Indians who were eligible for a booster dose haven't taken it yet. Over 55 million booster doses have been administered so far since the programme began in January. The drive was initially open to healthcare and frontline workers, and those above 60 years with comorbidities. It was later expanded to all adults.

A vaccine programme for 15- to 18-year-olds began in January, and for 12- to -14-year-olds in March.

According to India's health ministry, 98% of adults have received at least one dose of the Covid vaccine, while 90% have been fully vaccinated.

China has administered around 3.4 billion doses of the vaccine so far, according to the Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center.

So far, India has reported around 43.5 million Covid cases, second only to the US, and around 525,242 deaths - behind the US and Brazil.

On Monday, the country reported 20,528 daily cases for the past 24 hours, a four-month high.

States such as Maharashtra, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal have seen a jump in daily active cases over the past few weeks.

The rollout

India had a slow start when vaccinations were opened for some 960 million eligible adults in January 2021.

Logistical problems, supply bottlenecks, vaccine hesitancy and a debilitating second wave of Covid-19 during this period made the rollout harder.

But as the situation eased, it managed to ramp up coverage, with tens of thousands of public and private health facilities offering the jab.

The country delivered vaccines by drone to far-flung villages in north-east India's mountainous regions.

Drones were also used to ferry doses to the eastern archipelago of Andamans and Nicobar where "transportation by boat" was taking a long time.

Though the programme missed its first, over-ambitious deadline of universal adult vaccination by 31 December 2021, it has hit some milestones like the recent one.

On 17 September, India administered more than 20 million doses in a day in a record-breaking effort to mark Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 71st birthday.

In October, it crossed the one billion mark, becoming the second country after China to do so.

Which vaccines is India using?

India is currently using four vaccines - the Oxford-AstraZeneca jab, known locally as Covishield; Covaxin by Indian firm Bharat Biotech; Russian-made Sputnik V and Corbevax.

Covishield has accounted for around 80% of the doses given to adults so far.

Corbevax, which is a protein-based vaccine manufactured by Biological E, got emergency use authorisation from India's drug regulator in February 2022 for the age group of 12-18 years.

In June, Covovax - made by the Serum Institute Of India - received approval for restricted emergency use in children aged between seven and 12 years.

The government had also authorised Indian pharma company Cipla to import Moderna's vaccine, which has shown nearly 95% efficacy against Covid-19. But doses of these are yet to be made available to India.

In February, it also approved a new single-dose vaccine, Sputnik Light, a component of Sputnik V.

Have there been 'adverse events' after vaccination?

People can experience side effects from vaccines.

India has a three-decade-old surveillance programme for monitoring "adverse events" following immunisation. Experts say a failure to transparently report such incidents could lead to fear-mongering around vaccines.

The government told the Supreme Court that the country reported more than 772,000 "adverse events" after vaccination as of 13 March 2022. This included "minor, serious and severe events".

The serious cases were "minuscule in number; where vaccines may or may not be the cause of death".

The government has previously said adverse effects may not necessarily be caused by the vaccines, adding that "the risk of dying following vaccination is negligible compared to the known risk of dying due to Covid-19 disease".

-BBC

> **So far, India has reported around 43.5 million Covid cases, second only to the US, and around 525,242 deaths - behind the US and Brazil.**



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Ukraine war prevents formal communique at G20 finance talks



A two-day meeting of finance ministers from the Group of 20 in Indonesia has ended without a joint communique after Russia's invasion of Ukraine divided the global forum.

During talks on the Indonesian resort island Bali, finance chiefs pledged to address global food insecurity, rising debt, and the energy crises but made few policy breakthroughs.

In place of a formal communique would be a 14-paragraph statement issued by Indonesia, the G20 chair's Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati said in closing remarks on Saturday.

Indrawati said most topics were agreed by all members except for particular statements about the war in Ukraine. She described it as the "best result" the group could have achieved at this meeting.

Some used the forum as an opportunity to accuse Russian technocrats of exacerbating the problems.

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, Australian Treasurer Jim Chalmers and Canadian Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland on Friday blamed the invasion of Ukraine for sending a shockwave through the global economy.

No place at talks

At the beginning of the second day of talks, Indonesian central bank governor Perry Warjiyo called on ministers and global finance leaders to concentrate on recovery in a world economy reeling from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The meeting took place after the International Monetary Fund slashed its global growth forecast, with another downgrade expected this month as US inflation stokes fears of a recession.

But the talks have been overshadowed by the Ukraine war after it roiled global markets, caused rising food prices and added to breakneck inflation.

The Kremlin has called the war a "special military operation" and has blamed retaliatory Western sanctions for blocking food shipments and rising energy prices.

Russian Finance Minister Anton Siluanov and Ukrainian Finance Minister Serhiy Marchenko participated virtually in the meeting.

Russian Deputy Finance Minister Timur Maksimov attended the talks in person a week after Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov walked out of a G20 meeting over Western criticism of the invasion.

Maksimov was in the room as Western officials expressed their condemnation, according to a source present. Marchenko called for "more severe targeted sanctions" against Moscow.

'Uncharted waters'

Indonesia has refrained from uninviting Russia from G20 meetings, including a leaders' summit in November, even as Western nations repeated their calls for Moscow to be frozen out of the group.

Both Yellen and Freeland, who has Ukrainian heritage, said representatives of Russian President Vladimir Putin's government had no place at talks.

Observers said the failure to agree on a joint communique would hinder coordinated efforts to solve rising inflation and food shortages.

"The lack of a G20 finance ministers' communique means it will be more difficult for the G20 to forge a consensus on vital issues in the fall," Eric LeCompte, executive director of Jubilee USA Network, an NGO that lobbies for developing-nation debt relief, told the AFP news agency.

"Internal divisions hinder the G20's ability to act decisively and leaves the world in uncharted waters."

Yellen held bilateral meetings with counterparts from Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Australia, Singapore and Turkey, the US Treasury said, lobbying their support for a price cap on Russian oil to cut off Putin's war chest.

In response to the food crisis, the IMF, World Bank, World Food Programme, Food and Agriculture Organisation and the World Trade Organisation also called for action in four areas.

"Support the vulnerable, facilitate trade, boost food production & invest in climate-resilient agriculture," IMF news chief Kristalina Georgieva tweeted late on Friday, summarising the call to action.

Members also discussed sustainable finance, cryptocurrencies and international taxation on Saturday.

Mulyani said "progress" was made on international tax rule changes that will set a global minimum corporate tax rate of 15 percent by 2024.

-Al Jazeera



BUSINESS

In Japan, push to shatter glass ceiling spurs hope, doubts



■ David McElhinney

When Nami Sakai returned to Tokyo in 2016 after 15 years working in the United States, she struggled to acclimatise to Japanese corporate culture.

As a woman and self-described "outsider", Sakai, who works in consulting, found that her ability to effect change and get her voice across had diminished, irrespective of seniority.

"In Japan, men have always been more dominant in the workplace," Sakai told Al Jazeera, describing the work culture as "fundamentally" different from her experience in the US.

"The power hierarchy is so ingrained that men often don't consider where women are, in terms of status."

Japanese corporate culture, which prides itself on gruelling hours spent in the office, has long been derided by critics as patriarchal and unfriendly to women.

Japanese women on average earned 21.1 percent less than their male counterparts in 2021, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), nearly double the average wage gap among developed economies.

Meanwhile, women make up only 14.7 percent of senior roles in Japan, compared with 42 percent in the US, 40 percent in Sweden and 37 percent in the UK, according to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2021.

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has pledged to tackle this gender divide as part of his "new capitalism" aimed at narrowing societal inequality.

Under measures announced by Kishida earlier this year, large firms will be required to disclose differences in salaries between men and women, the ratio of female managers, and the rate of male employees taking parental leave in their annual financial reports.

The disclosure requirements, which will affect more than 18,000 businesses with more than 300 employees, are scheduled to take effect from March 2023, the end of the fiscal year.

Natsumi Yamada, a gender inclusion officer at a government agency in greater Tokyo, said she is hopeful greater transparency will spur change in the corporate world.

"The younger generation has a better sense of gender equality, so once this type of information is disclosed, I believe the companies struggling to achieve gender equality would have difficulty hiring bright minds," Yamada told Al Jazeera.

"The younger generation can't really afford the lifestyle of women staying home and men going to work, so that will also be a push factor for inclusivity."

The policy builds off the late Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's "Abenomics", which sought to introduce structural reforms in the workplace, including measures to encourage greater female participation.

Kathy Matsui, an economic strategist who coined the term "womenomics" to describe Abe's focus on ensuring women could "shine" in corporate Japan, has argued that increasing women's participation could boost Japan's gross domestic product by at least 15 percent.

Japanese women have made gains in the workplace in recent years. The average wage gap between men and women has shrunk by one-third since 2005, while the overall female employment rate has risen above the OECD average.

But by many measures, Japan's female workers still lag their male counterparts and female peers across the developed world.

In the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2022, released on Wednesday, Japan ranks 116 out of 145 surveyed countries across a range of metrics including political representation and economic empowerment, making it an extreme outlier in the developed world.

Though entry-level male and female employees start off with similar wages, according to Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare statistics, Japanese men's average monthly salary peaks between the ages of 55 and 59 at about 420,000 yen ($3,036), compared with 270,000 yen ($1,951) for women.

Though Japan's Equal Employment Opportunity Act penalises discrimination based on immutable characteristics, it does not cover wage-based discrimination.

In 2018, the Japanese parliament passed a law promoting quotas for women in politics, but similar moves have not been extended to the workplace.

Yoshiko Ogawa, who works in human resources in Tokyo, has seen women garner greater respect in the workplace since she began her career in the male-dominated real estate industry.

"Female workers were expected to serve tea to visitors regardless of their work position," Ogawa, 36, told Al Jazeera.

But Ogawa, who is now the mother of three children, said child-rearing remains a big issue for women as daycare is often expensive and oversubscribed.

Though Japan guarantees parental leave of up to 58 weeks – generous by international standards – critics say that women are often short-changed in the hiring process because of their ability to bear children.

"Employers see that as a threat, so they often hire men as there's more potential for longevity," Nina Cataldo, co-founder of Brave and Bold Mastermind, a business accelerator programme for Asian women entrepreneurs in Japan, told Al Jazeera. "There's no conversation politically about actually reshaping the image of women."

Cataldo said many Japanese women see being a housewife as more appealing than the alternative of "working from 8am to midnight every day and being harassed by their bosses."

"And I think that's why the system isn't changing: women have an out, and in some ways that's a bit more freeing."

Sarah Louisa Birchley, a business professor at Toyo Gakuen University, said the ambition of "womenomics" had failed to materialise.

"The pandemic also set the dial back somewhat as women were disproportionately disadvantaged during that time as many working mothers had to quit their jobs to take care of children or support their husbands working from home," Birchley told Al Jazeera.

Birchley said many women are dissuaded by a lack of affordable childcare, high-pressure work environments and overtime culture, and the required attendance at "nomikai", or drinking parties, which she likens to "old boys' clubs".

"There are also strict guidelines on how women have to behave during the recruitment process; their skirt length is specified, along with the type of pantyhose they should wear, there is advice on makeup, hair colour, and even on what should be in their handbag," she said.

"Modern women find this restricts their personality and many students complain to me how uncomfortable it is having to 'play a part' or 'act' in a particular role."

For Sakai, the consultant in Tokyo, the government's efforts to support women in the workplace have generated mixed feelings. She wonders if the policy will be just a "cosmetic change" and whether women will be "tokenized".

"I guess it's good to have female managers, but are they qualified? And if they're qualified, but still outnumbered, what kind of support system is in place?" she said. "They don't need to be babied, but what are we actually doing to empower women?"

-Al Jazeera

















WE CARE

Woermann, Brock

Kenya election: Taking on the sexist bullies to stand

Wavinya Ndeti has defied bullying, attempts to discredit her academic achievements and xenophobic slurs over her marriage to emerge as a front-runner for the powerful post of governor of a key county in Kenya's forthcoming general election.

The 54-year old mother of four told the BBC she has had to "toughen up" because male competitors and some voters "see women as the weaker sex".

Ms Ndeti adds that her attempt to be governor for Machakos county, near the capital Nairobi, has been met with opponents' supporters hurling insults at her, but she is undaunted.

"When they come at me I'm usually encouraged because it shows that I'm doing something right," she says.

In 2007, Ms Ndeti defeated 17 men to become the first female MP in Machakos, representing Kathiani constituency.

Now she is facing off with three men in governorship elections due to be held on 9 August, along with parliamentary and presidential polls.

Governors are in charge of huge budgets, and are expected to spearhead development in their counties.

This will be Ms Ndeti's third attempt at the governorship. If elected she will become Machakos county's first female governor.

Her political journey has not been easy as she has had her academic qualifications and family life questioned by her male competitors.

She holds a degree in computer science from the UK's South Bank University and a masters in business systems analysis and design from City University, also in the UK.

Ms Ndeti's qualifications have been questioned with some filing a complaint with the electoral commission, prompting her to release her graduation photos.

She was married to a Nigerian-British national - the late Dolamu Henry Oduwole, who she met while studying in London.

Critics have labelled her an outsider because of her marriage to a foreigner but she insists that she is a "daughter of Machakos".

Machakos is one of Kenya's 47 counties and its proximity to Nairobi makes its leadership attractive.

"One thing I can guarantee is that there will be gender balance in Machakos county if I'm elected governor," Ms Ndeti told the BBC.

The county boasts a hilly terrain that is attractive to adventurous cyclists.

It is home mainly to people from the Kamba community, with most of their political leaders - including Ms Ndeti - in the coalition of veteran opposition leader and presidential candidate Raila Odinga.

Other female politicians who have been attacked for being married to so-called outsiders include Cecily Mbarire, who is running for governor in Embu county.

Ms Mbarire was born in Embu in the east and got married to a Kenyan from Teso in the west. She once sued a man who sent a text message threatening to kill her and called her a prostitute.

Suba North MP Millie Odhiambo has also been criticised for her marriage to a Zimbabwean man.

She has often called out men who attack female politicians saying they are weak.

Male politicians who have married foreigners are not targeted for their choice of spouses.

A Kamba community elder, John Mutua, says women are criticised because in most Kenyan cultures they are considered to have left their home of birth after marriage and are expected to "flourish in their new marital homes".

Physical attacks on women have been documented, even in parliament.

During a heated debate in parliament over amendments to security related laws in 2014, Ms Odhiambo accused her male colleagues of slapping her and removing her knickers.

She said one MP pulled up her dress and another tore and took off her panties during a scuffle.

One of the MPs accused has denied it. Ms Odhiambo said she wrote a letter of complaint to the parliamentary speaker but no action was taken.

In another instance, a male politician Evans Kidero while serving as the governor of Nairobi was accused of slapping the then county woman representative Racheal Shebesh after a confrontation about striking council workers.

A case was filed in court. Mr Kidero denied assaulting the MP. The case was later withdrawn and Ms Shebesh said she had forgiven the governor but later admitted to being paid millions of Kenyan shillings to settle the matter.



Despite these ugly incidents, Kenya has made some notable gains in women's leadership.

The country got its first female chief justice, Martha Koome, in May 2021.

Three women - Anne Waiguru, Charity Ngilu and the late Joyce Laboso - were elected for the first time as county governors in 2017.

More than 10 women are running for the post in this election and six are front-runners in their respective counties.

And at a national level, three of the four presidential candidates have female running mates, in what analysts describe as a historic development.

This includes former Justice Minister Martha Karua, who would become Kenya's first female deputy president if Mr Odinga defeats Deputy President William Ruto.

Ms Karua told the BBC that gender discrimination has been a major challenge throughout her three-decade political career, and it remains a problem.

"The same old gender-based slurs that we faced 30 years ago are still with us but it is just a distraction," she says.

Ms Karua adds that she deals with the slurs by ignoring them and "keeping eyes on the ball".

She says the number of women running for office has increased over the years but it is still not high enough considering that women constitute 50.5% of the population, according to the 2019 census.

The electoral commission has put the number of registered female voters at 49%.

Mr Ruto is the only presidential candidate who has not chosen a female running mate, but he has signed a charter pledging to ensure that women are appointed to 50% of government posts.

Analyst Nerima Wako says there has been a huge shift in Kenyan politics.

"More young women are now running for political office and considering to take up political leadership as opposed to the past when they were afraid because of bullying and harassment," she told the BBC.

-BBC

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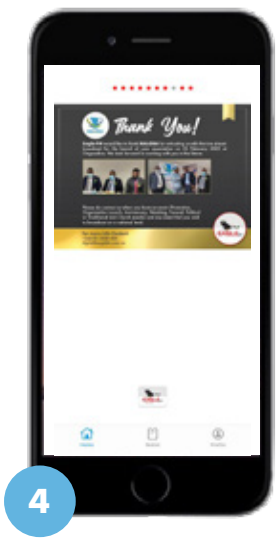
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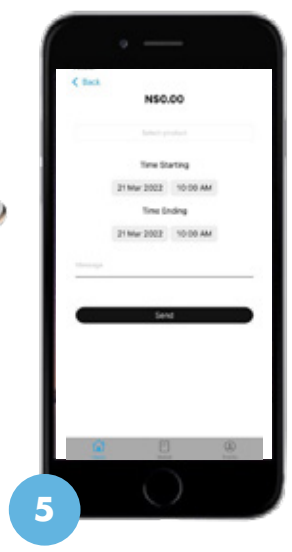
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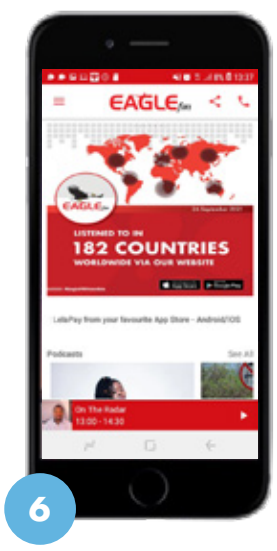
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Libya's elites may unite, but elections still elusive



■ Ufuk Necat Tasci

Divisions that have riven Libya since 2011, when the dictatorship of Muammar Gaddafi was overthrown, have continued to prevent presidential elections initially scheduled for December 2018 from taking place.

To many observers, the delays appear to be the result of the entrenchment of political and military figures on all sides, and their preference for the present situation – even if the status quo has brought several political crises, debates over legitimacy, a financially damaging shutdown of oil facilities and a closure of some of the country's main roads.

The decision in March by the Libyan parliament, based in the eastern city of Tobruk and supportive of the powerful renegade commander Khalifa Haftar, to appoint former Interior Minister Fathi Bashagha as prime minister of Libya, came as Haftar and his allies were pushing hard to replace the internationally recognised Prime Minister, Abdul Hamid Dbeibah.

But despite Bashagha forming a government, an abortive attempt to enter the capital Tripoli where Dbeibah is based, and fears of a renewed military confrontation, the parliament-backed prime minister's momentum has stalled, and there is even now potential for an unexpected alliance between Dbeibah and the man who has been trying to remove him, Haftar.

On July 12, in an unexpected move, Dbeibah sacked the chairman of the National Oil Corporation (NOC), Mustafa Sanalla, and replaced him with Farhat Bengdara, a Gaddafi-era banker who had been working as the head of a bank in the United Arab Emirates, and is believed by analysts to have close ties to the Abu Dhabi-backed Haftar.

The move has been seen as evidence a rapprochement between Dbeibah and Haftar, a scenario that could bring together Libya's divided east and west.

Libyan news outlets have reported that a meeting was held earlier in July between Haftar's sons and a relative of Dbeibah, Ibrahim Dbeibah.

"They met in the UAE and agreed on a quid pro quo. So Haftar drops backing Bashagha and his parallel government in return for appointing Farhat Bengdara as new NOC Chairman, and Dbiebah gets to remain in power," Abdulkader Assad, a senior political editor at the Libya Observer, an online news outlet, told Al Jazeera.

"This shows that the UAE is still backing Haftar and who[ever] is on the other side doesn't matter, whether it is Dbeibah or Bashagha," Assad added.

"Dbeibah intends to appease the Haftar family, but it is still too early to call this a solid peace deal," Jalel Harchaoui, a Libya specialist and associate research fellow at the Royal United Institute for Defence and Security Studies (RUSI), told Al Jazeera.

"What we are seeing is an attempt on the part of Dbeibah; but we do not know yet whether or not Dbeibah will manage to alter the actual behaviour of the Haftar family."

"One thing is certain, Dbeibah has bypassed both Libyan chambers [of parliament]. Even more significantly, Fathi Bashagha and his sponsor Egypt were completely shunted and ignored," Harchaoui added.

Political elites 'uninterested' in elections

According to Emadeddin Badi, a senior research fellow at the Atlantic Council, the closer relationship between Dbeibah and Haftar will not last.

"This is part of a rapprochement between the Dbeibah and Haftar clans, though their convergence of interests is bound to diverge over time," Badi told Al Jazeera.

"No political stakeholder in Libya at this stage is genuinely interested" in proper elections, Badi added.

"Most of the elite knows that people have grown frustrated with them, that is why the elite prefers stalling or dangling illusory hopes of stability through solutions that are designed to accommodate them," he said.

Recent protests in Libya show that many citizens have had enough with the country's rulers, but also warned the country's ruling class that opening up their political futures to a vote by the Libyan people is inherently unsettling.

"The level of cynicism amongst Libyan elites is indeed sky-high. Every figure with sway and power is hell-bent on staying," Harchaoui said.

"No one accepts the inherent uncertainty associated with the notion of elections wherein sometimes you lose and must accept relinquishing office," Harchaoui added. "I know of no genuine effort to organise actual elections in Libya within the next year or two. No foreign state is sincere about this, and no Libyan actor is sincere about this, either. Therefore, I doubt elections will occur in Libya within the next few years."

Any deal between Dbeibah and Haftar would clearly leave Bashagha out in the cold.

"Haftar is yet to discard Bashagha," said Badi, but "he may merely ignore him until Bashagha proves to be a useful tool to pressure Dbeibah again."

"The UAE sees a Dbeibah-Haftar rapprochement as useful. Dbeibah can, in his capacity as PM, broker transactional economic-based deals that will further UAE's regional interests."

And yet, whatever happens, it does not mean that Bashagha can be discounted.

"The risk of Haftar abandoning Bashagha exists, obviously," said Harchaoui. "[However] as of this minute, it is imprudent to assume that Haftar has already completely abandoned Bashagha."

"Why would he? It's always useful to keep that connection to exert even more pressure on Tripoli and grab even more power, should an opportunity arise. It is a free option to extract even more concessions from Dbeibah," he added.

The Russian role

Observers have continued to note Russia's position, which backed Haftar in his conflict against the internationally recognised government between 2019 and 2020.

Russian-linked Wagner mercenary forces continue to be based at the Jufra airbase in southern Libya.

Wagner's presence in Libya, despite Moscow's focus on Ukraine, is seen by analysts as a way for Russia to continue having influence in the North African country, without fully committing.

"It is unclear what Russia gets at the moment [but] there is no momentum to force Wagner to depart, which already safeguards Russia's current levels of influence," said Badi.

"Add to that the fact that the LAAF [Haftar-commanded militia] is undergoing internal changes to see who the heir of Khalifa Haftar will be. Russia is extremely well placed to play a central part in that process by its military presence," he added.

-Al Jazeera



Government says video game loot boxes will not be regulated

■ Tom Gerken

The UK government has decided video game loot boxes will not be regulated under betting laws, despite it finding a link between them and gambling harms.

In a long-awaited call for evidence, it instead told the video game industry to take action to protect young people.

It says it will step in if firms do not act, and also wants loot box purchases to be restricted to adults, unless approved by a parent or guardian.

One academic said he was "dismayed" by the government's approach.

Loot boxes are an in-game feature involving a sealed mystery "box" - sometimes earned through playing a game and sometimes paid for with real money - which can be opened to reveal virtual items, such as weapons or costumes.

They have come under fire in recent years, with consumer groups in 18 European countries backing a report calling them "exploitative" in May.

Gambling Act unchanged

The government was considering whether loot boxes should form part of its yet-to-be released review of the Gambling Act 2005 - but it has decided against this.

Video game publishers have been told they must bring in "sufficient measures" to govern player safety, such as protecting vulnerable adults and fully disclosing the odds of getting certain items from loot boxes.

"While many loot boxes share some similarities with traditional gambling products, we view the ability to legitimately cash out rewards as an important distinction," it said in the report. "In particular, the prize does not normally have real world monetary value outside of the game, and its primary utility is to enhance the in-game experience.

"The Gambling Commission has shown that it can and will take action where the trading of items obtained from loot boxes does amount to unlicensed gambling, and it will continue to take robust enforcement action where needed."

The government plans to launch a video games research framework later this year, which it hopes will work with academics and people from the industry to improve the available data. It said there were "limitations in the evidence base regarding loot boxes".

'Insulting' Kinder Surprise comparison

However, some say the government has not gone far enough in its response.

James Close, from the University of Plymouth, who has published research on the link between gaming loot boxes and problem gambling, said he was "dismayed" by the report.

"I take issue with some of the citation of the evidence base," he said. "The report released yesterday did show strong links with problem gambling.

"They cited those things, but then they equally said there's no evidence of causation here. They might not be able to support causation, but if people at serious risk of harm are engaging heavily in this form of monetisation, then it doesn't matter whether loot boxes cause problem gambling."

Dr Close also raised questions about whether the government was right to say prizes did not have real-world monetary value outside the games, as some secondary markets online allow players to easily sell the items acquired in-game.

His research, published in 2021, found loot boxes "are structurally and psychologically akin to gambling".

But games publisher EA previously defended them, comparing loot boxes to children's toys Hatchimals or Kinder Surprise.

Adrian Hon, chief executive of game developer Six to Start and author of forthcoming book You've Been Played, called this comparison "obviously ridiculous".

"It would be like there's a Kinder Surprise shop in your bedroom and you can buy as many as you want," he said.

In order for the two to be comparable, he added: "When you open them up there's fireworks going off everywhere.

"And you can get this amazing toy that you can use in the game that you play with your friends. That's not a Kinder Surprise - the comparison is insulting, really."

-BBC



Pegasus spyware targeted Thai democracy activists: Report

At least 30 Thai activists involved in pro-democracy protests were victims of Pegasus spyware during a government crackdown on dissent, according to an investigation by a group of internet watchdog organisations.

The individuals – who include academics, activists and civil society leaders – were monitored by an unnamed entity using the Israeli-made software during the past two years, according to the results of a forensic investigation released on Monday.

Canadian group Citizen Lab and Thai NGOs iLaw and DigitalReach carried out the investigation after six Thai activists received notifications from Apple in November 2021 advising that they had been the victims of "state-sponsored attacks" intent on distributing malware.

Developed by Israeli security firm NSO, the spyware allows users to read text messages and track the calls and locations of intended targets.

The Thai government and NSO did not immediately respond to Al Jazeera's requests for comment but the security firm has said in the past that it only sells software to vetted government agencies.

Citizen Lab said that it could not definitively tie the spyware attack to the Thai government but its investigators concluded there is at least one known Pegasus operator currently in Thailand.

Circumstantial evidence also points towards the government, according to the report.



Emilie Pradichit, founder of the Manushya Foundation, a Bangkok-based human rights non-profit, said it would be "no surprise" for the Thai government to target its critics with spyware.

"The government's goal is to truly put an end to the pro-democracy movement by exhausting activists physically and mentally in order to maintain the establishment in power," Pradichit told Al Jazeera.

"Now, more than ever, we must mobilize and join forces to resist Thailand's digital dictatorship and ensure pro-democracy activists remain strong and brave and can care for themselves as a priority."

Many of those the spyware attacked have a history of arrest and prosecution for their political activism and criticism of the Thai government.

Thailand has a strict lese-majeste law that makes it illegal to defame or insult the monarchy. While intended to protect the royal family, the law has also been used by the current military-led government to punish critics with decades-long jail terms. Rights groups have repeatedly criticised the law as a tool for suppressing legitimate political speech.

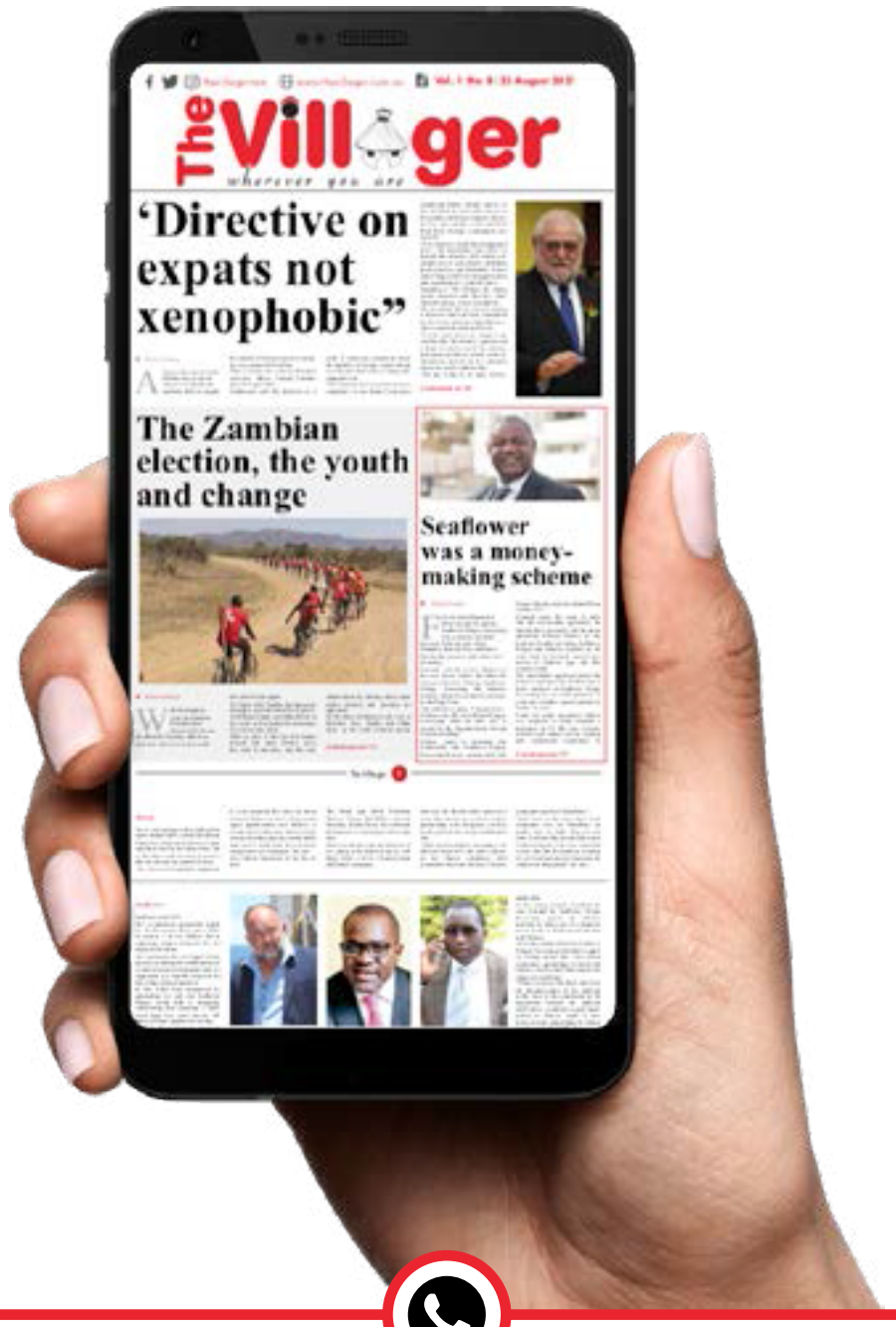
Citizen Lab also found that the dates of the spyware attacks coincided with periods of huge protests and political unrest in Thailand in 2020-21, following elections that failed to restore democratic rule after a 2014 military coup.

Many Thai protesters called for unprecedented reform of the monarchy following the 2019 coronation of King Maha Vajiralongkorn, the less popular son of the much-beloved late King Bhumibol Adulyadej.

Previous spyware attacks by a similar security company in 2020 have been tied to at least three government agencies with links to the military and the government's anti-narcotics bureau.

Citizen Lab said it was possible that Pegasus was used by another regional state-sponsored hacking group that went after Thai activists, although in past cases it has relied on different kinds of malware.

-Al Jazeera



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Gunman kills three at Greenwood Park Mall in US state of Indiana

A gunman has killed three people at a shopping centre in the US state of Indiana in the latest mass shooting in the country.

Two others were also wounded when the attacker, carrying a rifle along with several magazines of ammunition, opened fire at 6pm (22:00 GMT) on Sunday at the Greenwood Park Mall, which is located about 16km (10 miles) from the state capital, Indianapolis, authorities said.

The attacker's identity and a motive for the attack, which took place in the shopping centre's food court, were not immediately released. Police said the attack ended when a 22-year-old "good Samaritan" who was legally carrying a gun fatally shot the attacker. Those injured included a 12-year-old girl, Greenwood Police Department chief Jim Ison said. "This has shaken us to our core. This isn't something we have seen in Greenwood before," he said. "It's absolutely horrendous." "The real hero of the day is the citizen that was lawfully carrying a firearm in that food court and was able to stop this shooter almost as soon as he began," he added.

Gun violence remains common in the United States, with the Gun Violence Archive recording 352 mass shootings so far in 2022. The tracker recorded 611 mass shootings in 2021, up from 417 the previous year.

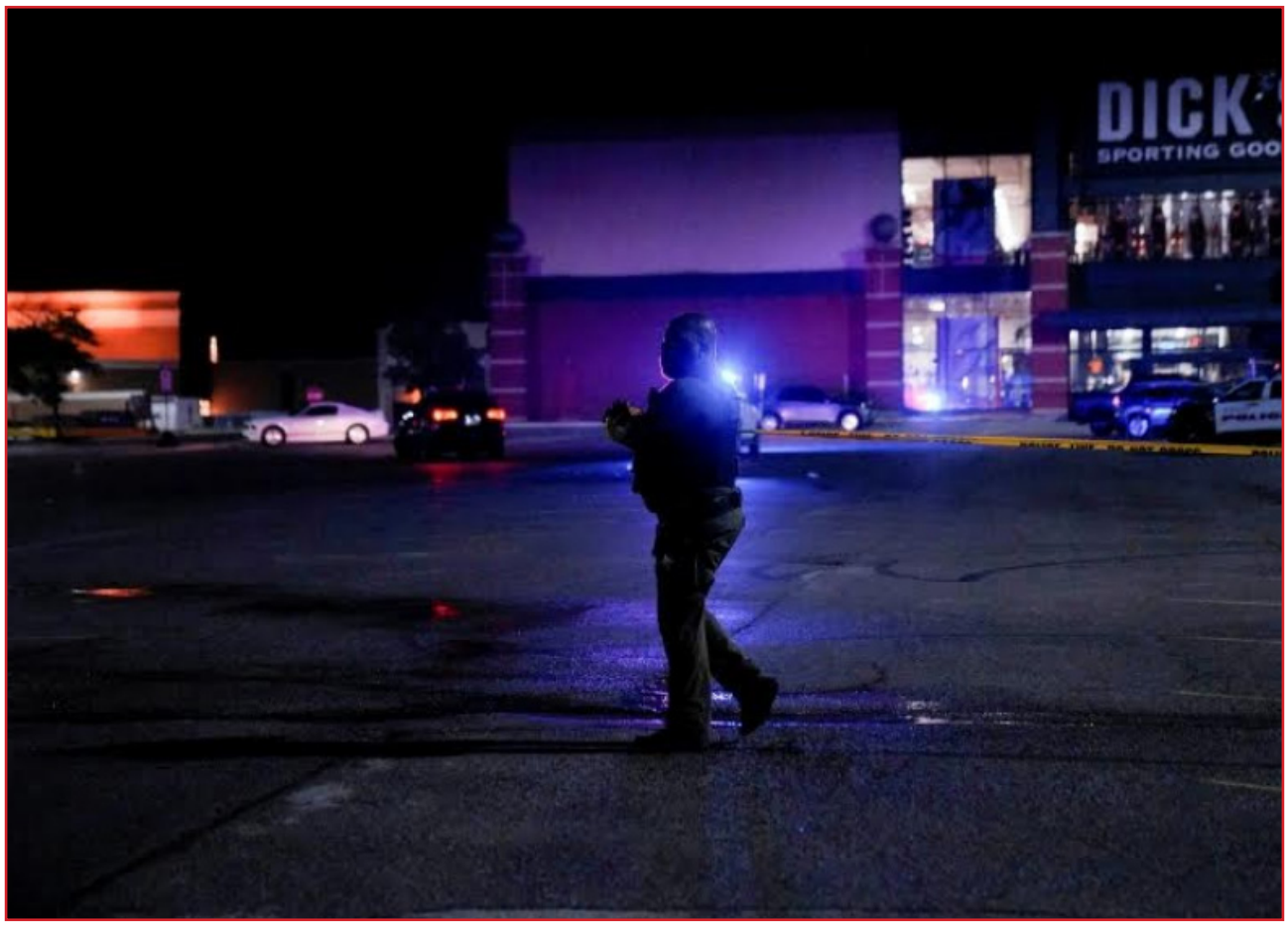
Meanwhile, the Federal Bureau of Investigation has recorded an increase in recent years in so-called "active shooter" incidents, which it defines as a gunman killing or attempting to kill people in a public space in a seemingly random fashion. The agency recorded 61 such incidents in 2021, a more than 50 percent increase over those recorded in the three previous years.

The latest attack comes just weeks after an attacker opened fire on a July 4 parade in an affluent Chicago suburb, killing seven people and injuring at least three dozen. That followed two attacks in May that saw 10 Black people shot dead in a racist attack at a Buffalo, New York supermarket; and 19 children and two teachers fatally shot at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas.

The recent high-profile shootings have prompted the US legislature in June to pass the first – albeit modest – gun control legislation in decades.

A US House of Representatives committee is set this week to discuss a bill that would ban assault weapons for the first time in nearly 20 years, although such a measure is all but assured to face Republican opposition in the US Senate. A previous 10-year federal assault weapons ban expired in 2004.

-Al Jazeera



UK braces for hottest day on record with precautions put in place

The United Kingdom is on course for its hottest day on record on Monday with temperatures forecast to hit 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit) for the first time, forcing railway companies to cancel services and health authorities to put more ambulances on standby.

Much of Europe is baking in a heatwave that has pushed temperatures into the mid-40s Celsius in some regions, with wildfires raging across the tinder-dry countryside in Portugal, Spain and France.

The British government triggered a "national emergency" alert as temperatures were forecast to surpass the previous highest of 38.7C (102F), recorded in the Cambridge University Botanic Garden in 2019, on Monday and Tuesday.

"We've got a difficult 48 hours coming," Kit Malthouse, a minister in charge of government coordination, told the BBC.

The London Underground metro network imposed temporary speed restrictions for Monday and Tuesday, meaning it would run a reduced service with journeys taking longer than normal. It urged commuters to travel only if essential.

The National Rail network also urged passengers to stay at home and said some services – including a key route between northeastern England and London – would not run during parts of Tuesday.

Jake Kelly from Network Rail said he hoped normal operations would resume on Wednesday, when temperatures are forecast to fall, but that would depend on "the damage that the weather does to the infrastructure over the next couple of days".

Some schools were due to close earlier than usual on Monday.

The Health Security Agency (UKHSA) raised the heat health warning to Level 4 for England for Monday and Tuesday.

Britain's Meteorological Office defines a Level 4 alert as a national emergency, and is used when a heatwave "is so severe and/or prolonged that its effects extend outside the health and social care system. At this level, illness and death may occur among the fit and healthy, and not just in high-risk groups."

The Met Office said "substantial" changes in working practices and daily routines would be required and there was a high risk of failure of heat-sensitive systems and equipment, potentially leading to localised loss of power, water or mobile phone services.

Malthouse said the government was prepared for the extreme weather and would seek to learn lessons from it.

"We definitely need to adapt the way we build buildings, the way we operate and look at some of our infrastructure in the light of what seems to be an increasing frequency of these kinds of events," he told BBC Radio.

-Al Jazeera

> **The damage that the weather does to the infrastructure over the next couple of days.**



As his war on Ukraine rages, Russia's Putin is set to visit Iran



■ **Maziar Motamedi**

Russia's President Vladimir Putin is expected to meet his Iranian counterpart Ebrahim Raisi in Tehran on Tuesday.

The meeting, which will include Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, will take place in the trilateral "Astana format" aimed at resolving differences in Syria, but there is much more at stake as war rages in Ukraine.

The leaders and their delegations are also expected to hold bilateral meetings, during which issues ranging from the war in Ukraine to Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers could be discussed.

Here are six things you need to know:

What's the situation in Syria?

The Tehran summit takes place as tensions simmer with Turkey on one side of an argument, and Russia and Iran on the other.

On June 1, Turkey announced it will soon launch a new military operation in at least two northern Syrian cities to target what it calls "terrorist" Kurdish armed groups.

Russia and Iran are the two largest backers of the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, who has maintained power throughout his country's civil war, which began more than 10 years ago.

As Erdogan spoke of establishing a 30km (18.5 miles) "security zone" by "cleaning up" the two cities of Tal Rifaat and Manbij, Moscow and Tehran called on Ankara to refrain from new attacks.

Washington also opposes Ankara's planned move.

Recently, Erdogan tested his leverage in NATO in an attempt to strengthen his position on Kurdish fighters in Syria.

In late June, he ultimately dropped his opposition to Finland and Sweden joining the alliance after the Nordic nations agreed to stop supporting Kurdish armed groups and extradite dozens of individuals that Turkey considers "terrorists".

Separately, Russia earlier this month vetoed a United Nations Security Council resolution to extend cross-border aid deliveries to people in Syria for one year, forcing a compromise involving a six-month extension.

Where do Turkey and Iran stand on Ukraine?

This is a rare foreign trip for Putin, who in February launched a "special operation" with a stated aim of demilitarising neighbouring Ukraine and thwarting Kyiv's NATO ambitions.

Erdogan has played a delicate balancing act during the Russia-Ukraine war. Turkey, which has voiced support for Ukraine while opposing the scope of Western sanctions on Russia, has tried to mediate between Moscow and Kyiv with the goal of reaching a ceasefire agreement.

But at the same time, it has sold its Bayraktar combat drones to Ukraine, which have been used in the war, angering Russia. Turkey had also opposed Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014.

Ankara, however, has in recent years forged close ties with Russia on energy, defence and trade while also relying on Russian tourists.

Meanwhile, Iran has refused to condemn Russia for invading Ukraine and blamed NATO's expansion as the root of the conflict, but has opposed the war and called for dialogue to stop the fighting.

It has also relayed messages between Ukraine and Russia several times.

Does Iran want to sell drones to Russia?

Putin's visit comes after United States national security adviser Jake Sullivan claimed last week that Iran wants to sell "hundreds" of armed drones to Russia to be used in the war in Ukraine.

CNN reported that a Russian delegation visited an airbase in central Iran at least twice in the past month, where they saw a showcase of two models of weapons-capable Iranian drones.

The Kremlin has refused to comment on the issue, but Tehran has explicitly denied the accusation, saying it will not militarily assist either side of the conflict as it wants the war to end.

Giorgio Cafiero, head of the Washington, DC-based geopolitical risk consultancy firm Gulf State Analytics, said it would be "unprecedented" if Iran were to export that many drones, and that the US claim should be viewed with a "healthy degree of scepticism".

"Iran lacks experience exporting that many drones to another state, which should also cause one to question the validity of Sullivan's assertion," he told Al Jazeera.

Are tensions between the US and Iran still heated?

The Iran summit comes days after US President Joe Biden wrapped up his Middle East tour, during which he visited Iran's arch foe Israel and rival Saudi Arabia, prompting backlash from Tehran.

It is important to interpret Putin and Erdogan's trip to Iran within the context of "increased East-West bifurcation" following the Ukraine war, according to Cafiero.

As the war rages and Russia's economy has taken a hit from Western sanctions, Moscow seeks stronger ties with non-Western countries that do not support the measures, he said.

"There is a strong message being sent to Washington about Moscow, Tehran, and Ankara's desires to work together without US policies, positions, and agendas being imposed on them."

There is also the issue of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal – of which Russia is a member. During Biden's trip, the US, Israel and some Middle East leaders underlined their goal that Iran never gains a nuclear weapon.

Tehran insists it will never seek a bomb, but its indirect negotiations to restore the accord that Washington unilaterally abandoned in 2018 have stalled for months over disagreements on what sanctions the US needs to lift.

What else might be discussed at the summit?

The three leaders are expected to hold important bilateral talks on the sidelines of the Nur-Sultan talks.

In addition to the safe export of grain from Ukraine, Putin and Erdogan could discuss energy, trade and other ways of improving relations.

Iran, meanwhile, wishes to sign 20-year cooperation agreements with both nations, and has made proposals in recent months.

As Iran's economy suffers from Washington's stringent sanctions, the Iranian president has focused on a regional diplomacy initiative to counter the effects.

Iran also wants to boost trade with Russia and Turkey, and officials have discussed using national currencies with Moscow.

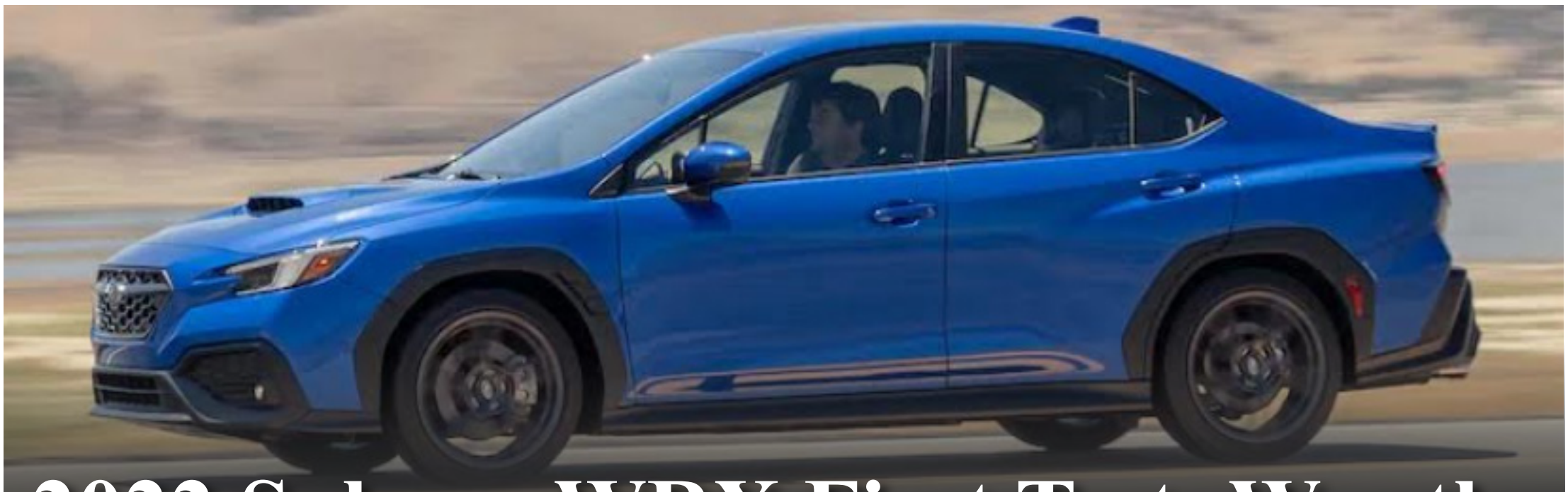
"Russia and Iran have similar import and export demands – both export similar products which is part of the reason why Moscow has far more substantial economic relations with Turkey than Iran," said Nicole Grajewski, a research fellow with the International Security Programme at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs.

She told Al Jazeera that even if Russian businesses are willing to expose themselves to secondary US sanctions, Moscow has been looking to increase domestic production following the war, which would mean it would be less inclined to import some Iranian goods.

Grajewski said Putin and Raisi are unlikely to finalise the 20-year agreement during this visit, "but there seems to be a greater impetus to strengthen ties compared to previous decades".

-Al Jazeera





2022 Subaru WRX First Test: Was the Old One Quicker? Better?

■ Duncan Brady

You may already know how MotorTrend feels about the new 2022 Subaru WRX based on our First Drive coverage. Subaru's latest take on its rally-inspired AWD sport sedan is, as senior features editor Jonny Lieberman described it, "fun, if not great, to drive, shockingly competent at sticking to pavement, practical, and a true performance bargain. "

When we inquired at that drive event, the Subaru representatives were surprisingly tight-lipped regarding a 0-60-mph estimate. Not only that, but following the automaker's announcement that it will not build a higher-performance WRX STI based on the same platform, it's also curious that the 2022 WRX has almost identical power and torque figures to its predecessor.

Lucky for us, MotorTrend is one of the very few outlets in this industry to actually test vehicles. Allow us to offer a bit of a spoiler here: This is one of the slowest WRXs to 60 mph we've tested in the past 20 years. Why? Keep reading to find out.

Back Road Behavior

Our introduction to the World Rally Blue Pearl WRX Limited that Subaru delivered for testing took place on the Angeles Crest Highway, which is one of the best driving roads in the nation and happens to be in our backyard. The wide, sweeping corners of ACH didn't illuminate the WRX's strengths the way the damp pavement in Sonoma County did during our first drive, but did highlight the Subaru's high-speed stability.

The new WRX is a car that doesn't feel as fast as it is. Subaru's standard AWD system delivers unshakable grip through ACH's fast sweepers even at higher speeds, allowing the driver to stomp the go pedal early and tug the would-be rally car through the apex.

That said, we didn't feel the Subaru shuffling torque around the way we did in a front-drive car with a limited-slip differential like the Volkswagen GTI. As a result, on dry, open roads the handling characteristics are a bit dull; just get up to the limit, hang out for a second, and power out. Through any combination of tighter corners, wet pavement, loose gravel, or snow, the four-wheel traction would come alive.

This car's 2.4-liter turbocharged flat-four feels like it's producing every one of its 271 hp and 258 lb-ft, but you'll have to work with it. Unlike a naturally aspirated engine that makes all its power at the top end or a conventional turbo I-4 with a torque peak at 2,000 rpm, the WRX powerplant is all midrange—keep it between 3,500 and 5,500 revs, or it can feel more like a base Impreza. More than one editor expressed wanting for a higher redline, too, but the narrow powerband keeps the WRX feeling distinct from its peers.

As for the engine note, it's the classic bundle-of-bees soundtrack we expect from a WRX, and we wouldn't change a thing. The shifter is also classic Subaru: too tall and begging for a short-shift kit, but precise, accurate, and mechanical.

A note about steering: The helm of the WRX is lighter than that of any of its competitors', taking next to no effort to twirl in the direction of your next bend. Seriously—the steering is fingertip light, so much so that a sharp bump can see you making a big correction if you're gripping the wheel too tightly. Once you loosen up, though, the feel is rich, almost like that of a hydraulically assisted steering setup.

As for the brake pedal, it's seriously lacking in bite at the top of its engagement, which can be disconcerting when driving fast in the canyon but makes for easy limo stops around town. Actual braking performance is acceptable once you're in the meat of the pedal travel, but the initial feel leaves us wanting.

Why Isn't the New WRX Faster?

Here's where Subaru fans get disappointed. At 6.1 seconds to 60 mph, the new WRX is the second-slowest Subaru World Rally eXperimental we've tested since its North American debut for the 2002 model year. (The only example that took longer to reach 60 mph was a 2018 WRX Premium.) Even the original was quicker, and we tested a 2013 example that accomplished the same deed in just 4.7 seconds.

So what gives?

According to road test editor and seasoned 0-60 specialist Chris Walton, it all comes down to the clutch, and specifically how it's damped. Subaru protects its clutches now more than it did in the past. Older models allowed violent, 5,000-rpm clutch dumps that produced rapid acceleration times but also frequently resulted in broken press cars sent back to the manufacturer for repair. Today's WRX clutch is heavily damped such that it won't tolerate aggressive engagement either at launch or between gears. The modern car feels plenty quick in gear, but the adoption of more aggressive clutch protection keeps it from posting more impressive numbers.

Case in point: The new WRX posts a figure-eight number that's much more competitive than its acceleration figures, partially because there isn't as much shifting involved. The 2022 car posted a lap in 25.0 seconds at 0.74 average g, faster than any WRX without an STI suffix. This chassis could easily handle more power, though. Walton called it essentially neutral around the figure eight and praised how it put the power down. We're excited to see what the aftermarket dreams up in the coming years.

Braking performance is midpack among WRXs of the past but hardly impressive. The 2022 WRX stops from 60 mph in 113 feet. Road test analyst Alan Lau mentioned decent braking distance but that the brakes themselves didn't last long, fading over the course of testing and smoking at its conclusion. If you're going to push your wannabe rally car, upgrade the stoppers.

Numbers Don't Tell Full Stories

Based on what we've said so far, it may seem as if Subaru has lost its way with the WRX, but that's not the case. Sure, there's room for improvement, but more than one staffer recalled the days when the WRX name was preceded by Impreza. The 2022 WRX will be familiar to anyone who's driven its ancestors, from the fingertip-light steering to the beehive engine note, truck-tall shifter, and AWD performance. This may not be the generational leap in performance we were hoping for, but it's 100 percent WRX.

-Motor Trend







Dina Asher-Smith fourth as Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce wins women's 100m title

Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce won a record fifth women's 100m world title in a Jamaican clean sweep of the medals as Dina Asher-Smith finished fourth.

Fraser-Pryce ran a championship record of 10.67 seconds to finish ahead of silver medallist Shericka Jackson and Elaine Thompson-Herah, who took bronze.

She is the first person to win five golds in an individual track event at the World Athletics Championships.

GB's Asher-Smith equalled her British record of 10.83 in Eugene, Oregon.

"This performance is phenomenal for me and I've had a fantastic championships," said Asher-Smith, who won silver in the event at the 2019 Worlds in Doha. "I really couldn't fault it but I'm so gutted that it didn't get me on the podium. I was so close. But that's just champs. I'm upset.

"It's been an interesting season for me so far. I've been in physical shape for a bit but I've had some life things that I'll probably talk about more after the 200m. I needed to make sure my mind was actually in the race rather than with my family or here.

"We're looking to keep going faster throughout the summer into Commonwealths and Europeans. But I definitely came here with an eye to get on to the podium."

It is the first time a nation has taken a clean sweep of the women's 100m medals at a World Championship, and comes a day after the United States completed the one-two-three in the men's 100m final.

The same Jamaican trio achieved the feat at last year's Olympics in Tokyo - Thompson-Herah winning her second gold on that occasion - with the nation also doing it at the 2008 Games in Beijing.

Asher-Smith's GB team-mate Daryll Neita missed out on a place in the final, finishing third in her semi-final in 10.97.

On Saturday, 26-year-old Asher-Smith had qualified fastest for the semi-finals in 10.84, the second quickest time of her career, and placed second in 10.89 in her semi-final behind Jackson on Sunday.

She drew lane eight for the final and after a good start, looked the most likely to threaten the Jamaicans' podium domination but was reeled in by Jackson and Thompson-Herah.

Asher-Smith's narrow miss of the podium - by just 0.02 seconds - comes after a mixed start to the season, in which she was beaten by Neita to the 100m UK title.

"I was in better shape than the times I was running throughout the season," she added.

"I know sometimes it must have sounded crazy when I was saying I was in good shape and then the races were popping up with something different.

"But it is psychological. It's one of those things where you really have to be in the room and emotionally in the room.

"For lots of the season I couldn't do that. I didn't have it in me. That's just life stuff. I'm happy that I got it in time but I'm gutted."

Fraser-Pryce 'feels blessed'

Two-time Olympic champion Fraser-Pryce's fifth world title comes 13 years after her first, won in 2009 in Berlin.

She now has 10 World Championship titles across the 100m, 200m and 4x100m relay. Three of those have come since she gave birth to her son in 2017.

"I feel blessed to have this talent and to continue to do it at 35, having a baby, still going, and hopefully inspiring women that they can make their own journey," said Fraser-Pryce.



"I can't even imagine the amount of times I've had setbacks and I've bounced back and I'm here again.

"I continue to remind myself that sometimes it's not because you don't have the ability but it's the right time. It was the right time and I'm so, so grateful for the continuous support.

"This is the third one-two-three that I've been a part of and I'm so excited. I was able to come away with the win."

Fraser-Pryce became the oldest woman to claim a 100m world title in 2019, and after extending that record by three years in Eugene, shows no signs of winding down.

"It's my favourite world title - doing it at 35, yes I said 35," Fraser-Pryce said.

"Whenever I'm healthy I'm going to compete. I'm hungry, I'm driven and I always believe I can run faster and I'm not going to stop until I stop believing that."

-BBC

England all-rounder to retire from one-day internationals

England's World Cup winner Ben Stokes will retire from one-day international cricket after Tuesday's series opener against South Africa in Durham.

The 31-year-old, who made his debut against Ireland in 2011, has scored 2,919 runs, including three centuries, and taken 74 wickets in 104 ODIs.

Stokes, who became Test captain in April, will still play Twenty20 cricket as well as leading the red-ball side.

"Three formats are just unsustainable for me now," said the all-rounder.

"This has been an incredibly tough decision to make. I have loved every minute of playing with my mates for England. We have had an incredible journey on the way."

At one-day level, Stokes will best be remembered for his player-of-the-match performance in England's 2019 World Cup final win over New Zealand at Lord's, with the left-hander making 84 not out to force a super over, which Eoin Morgan's side won on boundary countback.

He announced last week that he would miss this season's Hundred competition to manage his workload, and was left out of England's T20 squad for the upcoming games against South Africa.

Stokes added: "As hard as a decision as this was to come to, it's not as hard dealing with the fact I can't give my team-mates 100% of myself in this format any more. The England shirt deserves nothing less from anyone who wears it.

"Not only do I feel that my body is letting me down because of the schedule and what is expected of us, but I also feel that I am taking the place of another player who can give Jos [Buttler, England's one-day captain] and the rest of the team their all. It's time for someone else to progress as a cricketer and make incredible memories like I have over the past 11 years.

"I have loved all 104 games I have played so far, I've got one more, and it feels amazing to be playing my last game at my home ground in Durham.

"As always, the England fans have always been there for me and will continue to be there. You're the best fans in the world."

Clare Connor, the England and Wales Cricket Board's interim chief executive, called Stokes a "superstar in every format" but said the body's management "understand and respect his decision" and "look forward to watching him excite and enthral in an England shirt for many years to come".

Rob Key, managing director of England men's cricket, said: "Ben Stokes has had an incredible international career in ODI cricket, culminating in his match-winning performance at the 2019 ICC Men's Cricket World Cup final.

"I know this must have been a tough decision, but I completely understand why he has reached this conclusion.

"I'm sure that when we look back on Ben's career and see this as one of the reasons he will play 120-plus Tests and help England in T20 matches and World Cups for many years to come.



"It is a typically selfless decision that will benefit England long-term."

Stokes' decision comes on the back of England's 2-1 series defeat against India, in which he scored 48 runs in three innings, but only bowled three overs.

England's defence of their 50-over title is set to take place in India in October 2023, and following the retirement of Morgan in July, they are now left with two gaps to fill in a middle order that has struggled for runs this summer.

The next T20 World Cup is in October this year, but Stokes has not played in the format for England since March 2021 after taking a break from cricket for his mental wellbeing last summer.

Stokes' ODI retirement means he is likely to have a break from cricket before England's three-Test series against South Africa starts on 17 August.

-BBC

SPORT

Champion Cameron Smith declines to rule out move to LIV Golf series



Cameron Smith said to win the historic 150th Open Championship at St Andrews was "unbelievable", but then did not rule out joining the controversial Saudi-funded LIV Golf series.

The 28-year-old won his first major at the Old Course in Scotland on Sunday.

But when asked about rumours linking him with a move to the series fronted by fellow Australian Greg Norman, he said: "I don't know, mate.

"My team worries about all that stuff. I'm here to win golf tournaments."

He added: "I just won The Open, and you're asking about that. I think that's not good." Talk of the LIV Golf series has rumbled on all week in St Andrews. The R&A had hoped to keep the focus on their landmark championship by not inviting Norman, a two-time winner of The Open, to this week's exhibition event and dinner for past champions. It was a move Norman - a friend of Smith - called "petty", while players such as Sergio Garcia, Ian Poulter and Lee Westwood have fielded questions this week about their involvement in the £1.6bn start-up.

Garcia, talking to Spanish reporters, said he was going to quit the European-based DP World Tour "imminently" after completing his final round at St Andrews - a move that would make Europe's record Ryder Cup points-scorer ineligible to play in next year's contest in Italy.

"I have given more than half my life to the European Tour and I wanted to continue playing it, but I am not going to be where they don't want me," said Garcia, who recently quit the American-based PGA Tour, which has suspended its members that have played a LIV event.

They include 2013 Open champion Phil Mickelson, who was also asked not to attend this week's celebration events, and major winners Brooks Koepka, Dustin Johnson, Bryson DeChambeau and Patrick Reed. 'I love the golf course, love the town'

Smith reeled in overnight co-leaders Rory McIlroy and Viktor Hovland's four-stroke final-round advantage to win by one shot from American Cameron Young, with McIlroy finishing two shots back in third.

"To win an Open Championship in itself is probably going to be a golfer's highlight in their career," said Smith. "To do it around St Andrews, I think is just unbelievable.

"This place is so cool. I love the golf course. I love the town."

He celebrated the victory with his team, after his father decided at the last minute not to make the trip from Australia because of the long flight and the "thought of doing all that travel for one week".

"My dad was actually meant to come over, and he pulled out in the last minute basically. I had a quick chat with him before. He's kicking himself now," laughed Smith.

"I really wish he was here too. It would have been such a cool week, even without this, to be at the home of golf. Dad loves his golf as well. It would have been awesome."

The Brisbane-born golfer joked during his television interviews that he would see how many beers would fit in the Claret Jug, adding in his news conference the answer might be two.

"I'll probably have about 20 Claret Jugs," said Smith, who confirmed his iconic mullet hairstyle would be staying. "To be honest, I'm really tired. It's been a long week, so I'd be surprised if I make it past 10:00 or 11:00 tonight!"

'Rory will get a fifth major very soon'

For the galleries at St Andrews, this was meant to be the fairytale Open that ended McIlroy's eight-year major drought, and it looked like it would be that way until Smith's sublime run of five successive birdies on the back nine.

"He's obviously a great player," said Smith about the Northern Irishman.

"He's one of those guys that you can't help but stop when he's hitting balls on the range, and he just keeps knocking on doors every week, it seems like. He's probably the most consistent player out here.

"Yeah, he's going to get a [fifth] major, I'm sure, very soon. He's just really solid. For me, I've played with Rory a few times, and there's really nothing that you can fault."

Smith had held a two-shot lead heading into the weekend only to see the evaporate as McIlroy and Hovland played some fantastic golf on Saturday. The newly crowned major champion headed to the putting green to get some practice before he left that night.

"I knew my game was there. I felt really comfortable," he added. "I didn't do anything wrong [on Saturday]. It was just really one of those days.

"So I shrugged it off pretty good, hit a few putts. I just wanted to see a few putts go in. I didn't think there was really anything wrong technically. I just wanted to see a few putts go in before I went to sleep, and that kind of put me at ease to know that it really wasn't me, it was just kind of one of those days.

"That was the best thing I did all week, just to go out there and spend five minutes on the green."

-BBC

