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The Villager
wherever you are

- INSIDE -



Pan-African integration has made progress but needs a change of mindset
PAGE 8



'I change how I look and talk to fit in at work'
PAGE 15



Emma Raducanu loses but Cameron Norrie wins at Roland Garros
PAGE 22

"Easier To Destroy Than To Rebuild,"

Says Geingob on Africa Day



■ Hertha Ekandjo

President Hage Geingob says the African continent should reaffirm its commitment to the decision taken by the African Union in 2013, during which the Union pledged not to bequeath the burden of wars to future generations.

Geingob made these remarks on the commemoration of Africa Day on Wednesday.

His comments also follow a spate of coup d'état on the continent last year.

"As a continent, and specifically in the third wave of African leadership, we can ill afford to return to war, political instability and conflict. As the third wave of African leaders, we cannot reverse the gains we have made in fostering effective governance by respecting democratic processes, systems, and institutions," Geingob said.

The President stressed that it is far easier to destroy than to rebuild.

"Thus, all our talents, including those of the youth and women, should be harnessed to advance our common agenda of peace and the shared aspirations of development through respect and promotion of a constitutional government in which the rule of law is supreme."

He said that Africa Day is a key moment in African history as it marks the founding of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 1963, which was instrumental in the continent's eventual decolonisation.

This year's theme is Africa's Year of Nutrition, which is focused on the importance of addressing malnutrition and food insecurity across the continent.

Geingob said that the United Nations Human Development Index indicates that most African countries have made significant progress in education, health and other social sectors since the year 2000.

He further said that Africa today is a better continent for its citizens when compared to any point in its history.

"However, this is not a reason to become complacent because a lot of hard work lies ahead to build a prosperous and inclusive Africa for all her citizens, as espoused in Agenda 2063," added Geingob. According to him, the long march towards economic emancipation is incomplete and requires

Continued on P2





They Don't Care - Tjongarero on Firing Sports Commission Board



■ Ludorft Iyambo

Youth and sports minister Agnes Tjongarero says she fired the entire Sports commission board due to "deliberate" insubordination and ignoring the appointing authority.

Tjongarero relieved the entire board of the commission of their duties with immediate effect on Tuesday.

Joel Matheus, who was the board chairperson, was fired along with members Erica Beukes, Tomas Mbeeli, Alna Similo, Linda Chicalu, Marius Johannes, Karen Mubonenwa and Nicklause Nghumono.

Tjongarelo told The Villager that the board members in charge of sports administrators refused to adhere to what she was telling them.

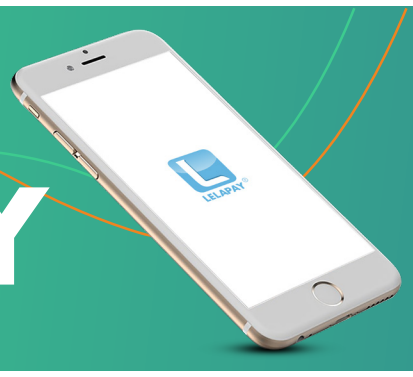
The bone of contention was the renewal of the sports commission's chief administrator's (Freddy Mwiya) contract, which she disagreed with. "The board decided they are not going along with what I am saying, so I decided I am not going along with what they are saying. Sports things must go on. We cannot have a stalemate forever. As I'm talking to you, there is a vacuum at the sports commission. There's no sports administrator for two months under the watchful eye of this board, just because the contract of chief administrator ended in March," said Tjongarero.

Tjongarelo says that Mwiya's contract ended in March. According to her, the board had recommended that the contract be renewed, which refused and said the position should be advertised. Tjongarero says that she wants the position to be taken up by eligible young Namibians, especially those who finished sports admin, to take up the job."The commission did not want this. They only want this person; they don't want any other youth or other people to come in. I have my reasons for saying let's advertise it," she claimed.

She added that "what transpired is that, at the end of the day, we don't understand each other properly on one point, and that's why we have to part away." According to Tjongarero, the board members did not make any efforts during the period to achieve whatever they wanted to accomplish with

Continued on P2

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Africa Day

even more dedication than the fight against oppression.
He said that Namibia will work alongside other African countries to strengthen nutrition resilience for food security on the African continent. "At a difficult time in world history, compounded by the climate crisis, to build the Africa we want, the primacy of peace and stability is, without doubt, a sine qua non-condition for sustainable development and prosperity," said Geingob.
PDM President McHenry Venaani was, however, more critical, stating that Africa has to work on its areas of delivering social progression, and economic growth for its people "59 years ago, Singapore was a village. Today, no African country can compete with Singapore or South Korea's technological advancement, which is a single state with no mineral resources," said Venaani. He questioned African why African leaders led the continent into poverty and not into prosperity. "The dream of the African Unity is very far because there is no cohesion amongst African nations themselves," he said.
He said that African countries have too much tribalism within themselves. "If African countries don't consolidate the project nation, African unity will become a pirate dream."
LPM deputy leader Henny Seibeb said that Africans need to fight against poverty, inequality, expand access to land, and stop ethnic and religious wars. Seibeb told The Villager that the African working class should seize the moment and ensure that those oppressive to the people and imposing unnecessary policies that don't advance the working class should be rejected. He further said the liberation struggle has changed to an economic struggle; therefore, Africans need to pull up their socks and fight the African economic struggle.
"African governments have oppressive policies against the African youth. They should get rid of them," he said.
NUDO Secretary-General Joseph Kauandenge Africa Day is a sad day.
According to him, this is because Africans believe that former Ghanian President Kwame Nkrumah's dream of a united Africa has been made a reality.
He said that is because of the selfish African leaders who betrayed Nkrumah's dream of making the African continent a prosperous continent. Africa Day is observed annually to commemorate the founding of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), which was created on 25 May 1963.
This followed the first Congress of Independent African States, held in Accra, Ghana, on 15 April 1958 and was convened by Ghana's then prime minister Kwame Nkrumah. According to the OAU, this year is an opportune moment for continued actions to build on the gains made over the years in fighting poverty and strengthening nutrition for healthier communities.

Tjongarero

the position of chief administrator.
She added that the board members did not do anything to remedy the situation.
"Remember it is for two months. There is no leadership there. I cannot allow that. Things must move on, whether Tjongarero is there or she is not there. This is an indication to me that they don't care about the sport, and they don't care with the federation," she said.

Quizzed on when the Premier League is expected to return, she said that the football association is fighting each other and using the money from FIFA for other things.
"I cannot tell you when but I'm praying and hopeful that with this Normalisation Committee now, we will resolve all these things. When CAF visited my office, I requested them to look at the statutes of the NFA. The NFA has too many loopholes that are excluding some people to come into the positions," she stated.

The minister said the Premier League could have started long ago if Namibia Broadcasting Cooperation (NBC) could have agreed to the broadcasting rights with the people who wanted to run the professional league.

Namibia has been without a premier league for four years now after the NFA, in 2019, announced that NFA Normalisation Committee had suspended the Namibia Premier League (NPL) for bringing football into disrepute.
The suspension comes following the NPL's refusal to promote Orlando Pirates and Civics to the Premier League after the NC had earlier requested them to do so in terms of 'sporting merit.

Unam Distance Students Demand Return Of Opuwo Regional Centre

■ **Uakutura Kambaekua**

Opuwo-based University of Namibia distance students in the Kunene region on Tuesday demonstrated for the return of the State university's regional centre, which was permanently closed last year, forcing students to travel to the Oshakati Unam centre to access the varsity's services.
The restless and unhappy students said they face tremendous financial difficulties that negatively affect their studies. The petition addressed to the governor's office denounced the university's stance of closing the centre, stating that the university was not paying rent or cleaning services or water and electricity.
According to the students, the only bills the university was incurring were; staff salaries and connectivity bills (Wi-Fi).
The students also reiterated that the centre's closure means that they have to travel to the Oshakati campus for examinations, tests, collection of study materials and other relevant enquiries such as stamps to officiate their documents. "We spend money on travelling and accommodation. It is also important to note that some students opted for the distance mode of study because they could not afford accommodation fees. Therefore it is preposterous to expect them to be able to afford to travel to Oshakati and back due to other commitments. Our academic performance is affected majorly because we have to travel a distance of +/- 230 kilometres to go write exams," stated Raseuako Vevangapi Cilliana Kuuokuta, who read the petition on behalf of more than 90 distance students.
She further narrated that unemployed self-funded students face financial challenges during their academic endeavour, such as the unaffordability to settle accommodation and transport-related expenses in Oshakati.
Kuuokuta also said students are faced with poor student support and constant unanswered phone calls, adding that the university is still at a snail's pace in providing connectivity devices as (most) students from the centre have not yet received their devices.
"And with the fast-approaching exams, students are left with no other alternatives rather than incur additional expenses such as data for regular connectivity to access all online academic activities," noted Kuuokuta.

LONG-DISTANCE DROP OUT
The students further argued that besides the issue of cost, the centre's closure has also inconvenienced them.
"For starters, as distance students, most of us are employed; thus, we need to balance school and other commitments, such as work, family, etc. We struggle with obtaining leave days to travel for examinations and tests. This is a great challenge
for us because we do not only put in leave for the actual test or examination day, but we need to add another day for travelling. They also complained that tests are set during work hours/days and that most of the students are teachers in remote areas where they have poor network/connectivity services.
"We miss a lot of tests that are set especially on workdays, and in the long run, their grades are negatively affected," read the petition.
Additionally, Kuuokuta said tests are sometimes uploaded on short notice. She said there is a rapid increase in the dropout rate due to these challenges.
The student requested the establishment of a campus in the region in the most possible near future. "We strongly recommend that your office consider our demand which we submit not only as academically disadvantaged students but also students from marginalised backgrounds and education deprived communities."
They also demand that the university ensure that the upcoming examinations, which will commence on 31 May, be conducted at Opuwo Unam centre (TRC - Opuwo).
"It is our strong belief and informed opinion as students that re-instating the Opuwo Unam centre will benefit the majority of the students, if not all," said Kuuokuta.
She further argued its return will curb the "skyrocketing" dropout rate.
Kunene Regional Council chairperson Hendrik Gaobaeb said the regional council is aware of the university centre's closure in the region, noting that the council is pushing on the matter to find an amicable solution.
Gaobaeb, who received the petition on behalf of the governor, Marius Sheya, said the petition would be sent to the relevant line ministry and the university's management.
Unam decided to permanently close all 10 regional centres (Tsumeb, Opuwo, Swakopmund, Otjiwarongo, Keetmanshoop, Gobabis, Oshakati, Rundu, Katima Mulilo and Eenhana) last year as part of its restructuring exercise and business process re-engineering to put online education at the epicentre of all programme offerings and administrative services.

> **For starters, as distance students, most of us are employed; thus, we need to balance school and other commitments.**



Windhoek-Okahandja Construction Project To Commence



■ **Kelvin Chirimga**

The Works ministry has made good on its promise of paying out the contractor, Otesa/CMC Joint Venture, responsible for the Windhoek-Okahandja road construction where workers had downed tools for four months due to not being paid.

The workers had paid works minister John Mutorwa a visit last week protesting against not being paid, after which a promise was made that N$300 million would be made available to carter for other unpaid government projects as well.

They had also expressed their dissatisfaction with the finance ministry in a letter in which their union harshly criticized Ipumbu Shiimi's leadership style.

Confirmation of the payment was made by the General Secretary of the Metal Allied Namibia Workers Union (MANWU), Justine Jonas, and works ministry spokesperson Julius Ngweda.

"First and foremost, we must appreciate the leadership provided by hon. Mutorwa. I know we were all under pressure, but I think it's good now that the confirmation of payments is done," said Jonas.

MANWU said they are now engaging the project management on the way forward, which is when the workers can resume their work.

"Of course, nothing was happening on site, so they have to sit and start planning when they will be on site. So, we are busy engaging management, and we are hoping that next week we will meet," she said.

Ngweda, however, said the delayed payments have harmed both the contracting company, which has run losses each day workers did not show up for work and the ministry incurred penalties.

It is presently unclear whether, with the four-month downing of tools by the workers, the construction project will meet its deadline.

"The fact of the matter is that the delay in payments means it is a delay in every progress, whether it is the work now based on the contract that we have signed. In terms of performance, that one has also been pushed backwards.

"The good news is that we have finally settled the outstanding figures or amounts that we were supposed to pay to this particular contractor, but this is not the only one. As I have told you before that we had some outstanding invoices," said Ngweda.

According to the latest Simonis Storm Securities report, the outlook for construction, primarily in Windhoek, remains very bleak.

According to the preliminary national accounts, the construction sector (2 per cent of GDP) contracted by 10.2 per cent y/y in 2021, compared to -11.8 per cent y/y in 2020.

Bank of Namibia forecasts a 2.0 per cent contraction in the construction sector for 2022, followed by a 2.5 per cent growth in 2023.

No new capital projects from the government will be undertaken in the current financial year as per the latest budget.

Growth in the construction sector will therefore have to rely on the private sector.

However, the firm said the private sector, in turn, is faced with rising building material costs, rising interest rates and rising fuel and food prices, which add to operational costs for contractors.

"A number of large projects in Namibia's main urban centres will provide some growth to the sector. Together with low base effects, the contraction in 2022 might be lower than that experienced in 2021," said Simonis Storm.

In the meantime, workers manning a part of the Windhoek-Hosea Kutako road also downed their tools this week, demanding that their employer, China Railway Seventh Group, pay them monies that had been deducted for tax.

The workers, who have vowed to go back to work only after their employer make good on their demands, have claimed that while they are registered with the taxman, the tax office has said they have not paid their dues.

A crowd of aggrieved workers mobbed close to Olympia on the project site threatening to march on the company's offices.

"They told us that we are under China Railway registered for tax and they deducted us, but they did not submit it to that side (taxman). They have not even given us our allowance, and they failed to give us our 10 days' leave for 2020," their representative said.

MANWU has also confirmed that China Henan International Company CHICCO employees at the Asab road project (Mariental) are now back to work.

"MANWU Leadership met with employees on Wednesday, 18 May 2022. Employees resumed their duties yesterday, 19 May 2022. A meeting with management is scheduled for 23 May 2022," Jonas had said.

> **"First and foremost, we must appreciate the leadership provided by hon. Mutorwa. I know we were all under pressure."**

Erongo's Andreas Nelumbu Promoted As Police Attaché To Luanda-Angola



■ **Eba Kandovazu**

Nampol Inspector General Sebastian Ndeitunga yesterday affected the promotion of Erongo Police Regional Commander, Commissioner Andreas Nelumbu, as the Police Attaché to Luanda-Angola.

He replaces Commissioner Nicholas Endjala, who went on retirement.

Speaking to The Villager, Nelumbu said he is still a regular police officer whose duty is to serve Namibia. He says he will now represent Namibia to his fullest capacity in Luanda.

"There is nothing special about this appointment because it is just the task that changed. I have moved to different places before in my police capacity, and this is just another one. There's nothing special, but the task has changed because I will now be stationed outside Namibia. Anywhere I go, as long as I am doing police work, I am happy," Nelumbu said, adding that it is just a transfer.

He also said he does not entirely care about the diplomat status that comes with his new job, saying that he cares about upholding his police duties.

Deputy Commissioner Nikolaus Kupembona, the Khomas Regional Crime Coordinator, is promoted to a Commissioner rank and appointed the Erongo Police Regional Commander. At the same time, Deputy Commissioner Chrispin Mubebo is transferred from Karas Region and appointed as the new Khomas Regional Crime Coordinator replacing Commissioner Nikolaus Kupembona.

Chief Inspector Nicodemus Mbango, a staff officer at the Otjozondjupa Crime Coordinator's office, is appointed as the Karas Regional Crime Coordinator and promoted to a Deputy Commissioner rank.

These changes are effective 1 June 2022, the police said.

"The Inspector General, the management, rank and file and civilian component of the Namibian Police Force congratulates all the officers and wish them well as they embark on their new assignments," a police statement said.

> **"There is nothing special about this appointment because it is just the task that changed."**

Rural Clubs Championship Tourney In Khomasdal



"According to the tournament organisers, the football teams will compete for N$ 35 000."

■ **Uakutura Kambaekua**

Renowned event promotion firm Chuu-Vee Events, under the auspices of the Rural Sports Development Federation, will host the first edition of the annual Rural Clubs Championship Tournament set to fixture three clubs from each village settlement.

The football and netball tournament is scheduled for Wednesday and is expected to conclude on Sunday at the Khomasdhal sports ground and Sam Nujoma stadium in Windhoek.

According to the tournament organisers, the football teams will compete for N$ 35 000, while the netball category has been set for a pool and play with teams to register with N$ 700. The registration for the football category is N$ 1 900, with the tournament champions set to walk away with N$ 18 000. The runner-up will pocket 9 000, while the semi-final losers will settle for N$ 4 000.

Rural tournaments aim to promote sports development in rural areas and take the youth away from unwanted activities while keeping professional players busy and active in the absence of professional football in the country.

The tournament will fixture some of the strong forces in rural football and is anticipated to pool a crowd of more than 5 000 spectators as per the usual rural sports occurrences.

The opening game of the tourney will fixture Epukiro based outfit Renamo Bucks Jakombomi up against Fine Young Stars from Otjinene at the Sam Nujoma stadium to be followed by Otjombinde's Life Ino City versus Okahiokaapa from the Aminius settlement.

Northern-based outfits from the Omusati region, Omakange FC, have also joined the pack and will be taking on Okamatapati champions Black Heroes FC. Atletico De Prosit from Otjombinde will taclke Otjongombe Lions from Ovitoto constituency.

Otjimanangombe will be up against El Maestro, and Erekero of the Otjimbingwe settlement will vie against Okauua Rovers from the Omaheke region. At the same time, Upukiro based outfit Ozume will close the games at the Sam Nujoma stadium against Omatjete's Duko Warriors.

The tournament will continue on Thursday at the Sam Nujoma stadium, with Eiseb Pos 01 taking on Ombu United from Okakarara in the first match, followed by Otjinene's Najota Eleven and Epata FC.

Young stars from Otjombinde will take on Ruacana FC, and Eleven Stars from Aminius will be up against Xaire Warriors Jakatupapa from Okondjatu settlement.

Otjombinde's outfit Life Ino City A team will then take on Evara United from Gam to be followed by Opuuo FC up against Stink Water from Dordabes, while Northern champion Ontana FC will close Thursday's fixtures against Otjimati from Epukiro.

The tournament's second round will continue on Friday at the Khomasdal Stadium.

According to the organisers, the tournament will practice all Covid-19 health protocols.

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IUM has embarked on constructing a state of the Art Research, Training and Conference Centre in Swakopmund.

Ground Breaking Ceremony is scheduled for Monday, 30th May 2022.

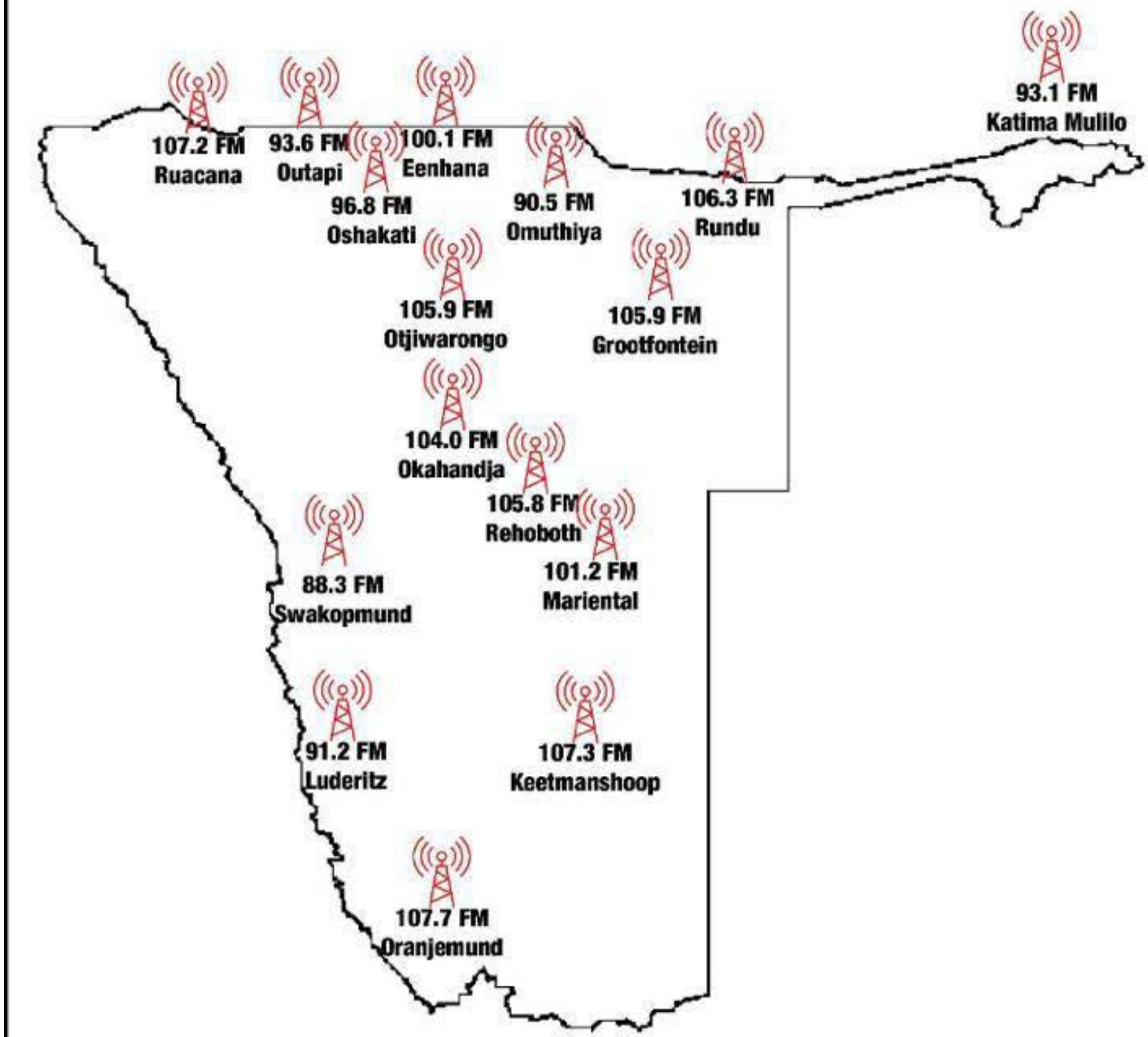




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AFRICAN ROOTS

Obi-Wan Kenobi returns to our screens this week. Here's where he left off



■ Scottie Andrew

After a whopping 17 years away from the "Star Wars" universe, Ewan McGregor returns this week as our beloved bearded Jedi, Obi-Wan Kenobi. "Patience, you must have," INDEED.

But what was Master Kenobi up to when we saw him last? Does one need to watch several animated series to know what's going on? And what breadcrumbs has Disney dropped about the plot of "Obi-Wan Kenobi"?

If you're as lost as C-3PO and R2-D2 were on sandy Tatooine, fear not. Here's everything you need to know before "Obi-Wan Kenobi" premieres on Friday.

Yay, Obi-Wan's back! But where are we in the timeline?

"Obi-Wan Kenobi" is sandwiched between the prequels and original trilogy. Disney+ says that the series takes place about 10 years after "Episode III: Revenge of the Sith," which saw Obi-Wan go into hiding.

This means Luke and Leia are around 10 years old at this point in the "Star Wars" timeline, and Anakin is just a decade into being Darth Vader. Obi-Wan is keeping tabs on Luke from afar, well on his way to becoming "Old Ben." (Though, to be fair to McGregor, his Obi-Wan is more of a "Middle-Aged and Aging Gracefully Ben.")

Uh, I forgot -- what happened in the movies before this show?

Don't have time to spend six-plus hours watching the prequels? Here's a crash course on what Obi-Wan was up to in "Episodes I-III."

"Episode I": Obi-Wan, then Padawan to Qui-Gon Jin, meets a young, sprightly Anakin Skywalker on Tatooine, where "Ani" and his mother are enslaved. Qui-Gon, certain that Anakin is the "chosen one" based on his midichlorian count (don't ask), is killed by Darth Maul, but tasks Obi-Wan with training young Anakin.

"Episode II": Obi-Wan, now Master to a moodier, sand-averse Anakin, checks out what's happening on Kamino, where a Clone army has been secretly commissioned, and wars with Jango Fett. Anakin and Obi-Wan are close, though Anakin eschews Obi-Wan's logical ways to follow his impulses.

"Episode III": Anakin embraces the Dark Side and duels Obi-Wan on Mustafar, where Anakin becomes Vader. Emperor Palpatine/Darth Sidious commands the Clone army to execute Order 66 (aka, kill all Jedi). They mostly succeed, though they fail to kill two of the most important Jedi -- Yoda and Obi-Wan, the latter of whom is distraught by the loss of his "brother."

Do I need to have watched prior TV series to know what's happening?

Probably not, unless you're into homework and good TV. Several "Obi-Wan Kenobi" characters are introduced in the animated series "Star Wars Rebels," which is streaming on Disney+. (More on those shady characters below.) "Rebels" takes place after "Episode III," like this show, and Obi-Wan makes a memorable appearance in the third season.

Who's the bad guy(s) in this series?

In this series, we'll meet the "Inquisitors," a society of trained hunters who are steeped in the Dark Side.

First introduced in "Rebels," their leader is the Grand Inquisitor, played now by Rupert Friend. Inquisitors, oddly, use lightsabers in battle (just wait until Moses Ingram, who plays Inquisitor Reva, wields her double-edged, spinning red saber -- Darth Maul is quaking). Yep, lightsabers aren't reserved for Jedi and Sith anymore -- and not every Force wielder belongs to one of those two orders.

Speaking of Sith, the Inquisitors work for one -- Darth Vader, who wants them to track down one Jedi Knight in particular.

What's up with Vader?

The father of all Skywalkers is BACK and badder than ever. "Obi-Wan Kenobi" marks the return of Hayden Christensen as Darth Vader, a role he fully embodied for only a few minutes at the close of "Episode III."

So what's Vader up to after he lost his wife, believed his children died and cut ties with Obi-Wan (who in turn cut off several of his limbs)? The trailer skimps on specifics, but we can assume that he's still a loud mouth-breather focused on quashing the growing Rebel Alliance and finding our titular Jedi. Prepare the tissues for their inevitable reunion.

Is that a young Luke I see?

In the trailer, we see Obi-Wan watching a boy in pod-racing goggles pretending to pilot a ship. We can presume this kid is a young Luke Skywalker, who appears to be around the same age as his father was when Qui-Gon found him.

Young Luke lives with Owen Lars, the son of Cliegg Lars, who married Anakin's mother, Shmi. Owen and his wife, Beru, raise Luke on their humble moisture farm and keep the truth of his parentage from him, but Obi-Wan knows he's destined for more.

Joel Edgerton and Bonnie Piesse will reprise their roles from the prequels as Owen and Beru, though hopefully they'll get a bit more screen time to flesh out the characters before they meet their very violent end in "Episode IV."

Aren't there other celebs in this?

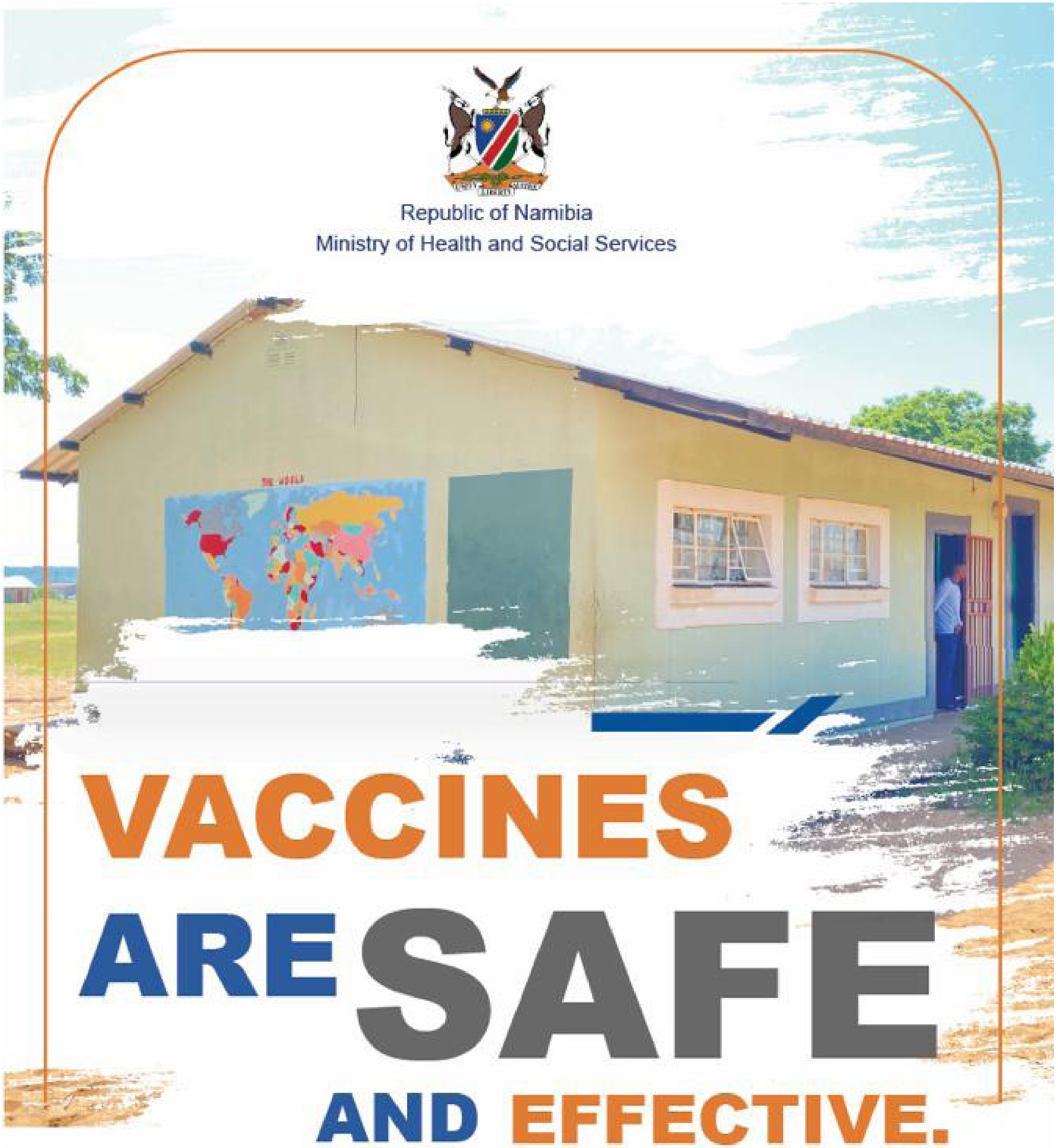
There sure are! Joining OGs McGregor and Christensen are comedian Kumail Nanjiani, "Straight Outta Compton's" O'Shea Jackson Jr. and "Uncut Gems" co-director Benny Safdie, among others. We haven't seen footage of any of them except for Nanjiani, who's in the trailer for a split second, looking distressed. Otherwise, we don't know who the stars are playing -- a fun surprise as the series rolls out.

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Big Lips

Current African Leaders Need to Remember Founding Fathers' Words

The difference between the founding fathers of Africa and the current leadership is focus and resolve. Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, and those who marched with them set out goals and achieved them.

Kwame Nkrumah declared that Ghana would never be completely free and independent as long as other African countries remained colonised.

Kwame Nkrumah also said it is clear that we must find an African solution to our problems and that this can only be found in African unity.

He further said divided, Africa is weak; united Africa could become one of the greatest forces for good in the world.

Sekou Touré said he would rather be the least man in a united Africa than be the most important man in a divided Africa.

Julius Nyerere said unity might not make us rich, but it will undoubtedly make it difficult for Africa and the African peoples to be disregarded.

Mandela said he dreamt of the unity of Africa, whereby its leaders combine in their efforts to solve the problems of this continent.

Haile Selassie said until all Africans stand and speak as free human beings, equal in the eyes of the almighty; until that day, the African continent shall not know peace.

The slain Congolese leader Patrice Lumumba said Africa must take action, which the people of Africa are patiently awaiting.

According to Patrice Lumumba, African unity and solidarity are no longer dreams.

Ahmed Ben Bella was forthright when he said let us all agree to die a little, or even completely, so that African unity may not be a vain word.

Reggae superstar Bob Marley's son, Ziggy, said if African countries can unite and pull resources together, that will be the best thing we could ever do for the problems in Africa.

Reading through all these quotes, it is clear that the current leadership has nothing tangible to offer apart from enslaving their people and lowering Africa's dignity by begging.

The founding fathers wanted to unshackle Africa from both political and economic colonisations. They succeeded in getting control of politics. The earliest leaders had plans to establish an economically powerful continent through unity, which the current leadership does not talk about because they do not think about it.

The actions of current African leaders have embarrassed every dignified African who is proud of this land. Their scramble to be recognised by former colonisers and their appetite for donations defeat the purpose of fighting for independence.

One rarely hears our current leaders talk about a sustainable future for Africa apart from how much money they want to borrow. They always express gratitude to donor countries and spend money travelling around the globe talking about poverty in their countries instead of using those resources to start something small and build towards more important things.

The current leaders take so much pride when they travel to talk about the riches in their countries but never feel ashamed that they cannot control those riches. These leaders boast about beautiful landscapes, open spaces, fertile land, gold, diamonds, uranium and anything but feel no shame that those resources are beyond their reach.

In his midnight speech that charted the path to the formation of the Organisation of the African Unity, Kwame Nkrumah said: Our people supported us in our fight for independence because they believed that African governments could cure the ills of the past in a way which could never be accomplished under colonial rule. If therefore, now that we are independent, we allow the same conditions to exist that existed in colonial days, all the resentment which overthrew colonialism will be mobilised against us.

Looking around us today, the conditions that existed during colonialism still exist today. This is why in every African country; people express their anger through different means.

The current leaders have also resorted to the tactics colonisers used against the Africans - violent suppression of dissent!

Pan-African integration has made progress but needs a change of mindset

This year's celebration of Africa Day provides another opportunity to assess how far continental integration has progressed.

Integration would mean a truly united Africa – either a federalist "United States of Africa" or the African Union (AU) exercising binding powers over member states. At present the AU merely serves as a platform for coordinating the interactions of its 55 member states.

Although some progress has been made, more needs to be done to achieve the goal of integration.

Member states need to move beyond paying lip service to unity, and empower critical AU organs. This requires a shift in mentality. States need to appreciate the need to sacrifice some autonomy for common socioeconomic and political gains. Lacklustre commitment to continental integration is connected with Africa's peripheral position in global dynamics.

In my view, as a researcher of the institutional dynamics of Africa's integration process, pan-African integration is in a crucial phase. This phase is as important as the creation of the Organisation of African Unity in 1963 and its eventual replacement with the AU 20 years ago.

A pan-African worldview

In a 1969 speech, the then Tanzanian president, Julius Nyerere, captured what the African worldview entails: We recognise that we are involved in the world and that the world is involved in us. Involvement without understanding, however, can be embarrassing and even dangerous.

A pan-Africanist worldview understands that the continent cannot exist in isolation. However, this must be accompanied by a determination to drive an agenda that enhances pan-African goals.

This position reflects the views of many of Nyerere's contemporaries, and those who came after him, on how Africa should position itself on the global stage.

Kwame Nkrumah's "African personality", Thabo Mbeki's "African renaissance", and the oft-repeated "African solutions to African problems" have also been used to capture the essence of an effective pan-African worldview.

Mbeki's idea speaks to restoring Africa's dignity, and pushing for its economic and political development. Nkrumah's advances the principles of societal equality. It places the community over the individual in preparing African societies to establish a federal union of African states that is assertive on the global stage.

What's working

The continent has seen some positive developments that could advance integration. They include the adoption of the following instruments and processes:

- AU Agenda 2063, the AU's blueprint for faster economic growth
- 0.2% import tax levy on member states to finance AU programmes and policies
- the African Continental Free Trade Area
- the free movement protocol (yet to come into force)
- sanctions for non-payment of membership dues
- reducing the number of AU Commission members
- gender equality in leadership
- regulating the relations between the AU and the eight regional economic communities.

As Thomas Tieku, an expert on Africa's international relations, has observed, despite some of the failures of pan-African integration, the AU has set admirable guidelines on governance, peace and security.

It has also developed enforcement mechanisms for violations of its standards. It has quickly adopted the African Continental Free Trade Area, empowered the African Union Development Agency-NEPAD, mobilised resources to get COVID-19 vaccines, and integrated the AU development agenda into national development plans.

Yet pan-African continental integration remains constrained by many problems. These include countries' unwillingness to transfer powers to AU organs.

Addressing this will require a change of worldview. Africa needs to rebalance the way it sees itself and relates to the world. African states need to equip national and regional institutions to deliver on the promise of political and economic development.

What's not working

The ability to project a strategic pan-African worldview is undermined by several factors. One is the unwillingness to transfer supranational powers to key AU institutions. For example, the Pan-African Parliament has only limited, advisory rather than full legislative powers.

Similarly, the AU Commission lacks the power to make member states comply with institutional rules. The 2017 Kagame report on AU reforms noted that the union has passed over 1,500 resolutions but has no mechanism for tracking their implementation.

Member states have failed to comply with about 75% of the decisions of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights. In reaction to judgments against them, member states such as Tanzania, Benin, Rwanda, and Côte d'Ivoire have withdrawn the permission allowing individuals and NGOs access to the court.

The AU's dependence on external funding is another impediment. Despite ongoing financial reforms, at least 61% of its budget comes from external donors. Some use donations as a tool to manipulate AU processes.

The continuous violation of AU norms and standards on human rights and governance is a major obstacle to deepening continental integration. For example, there has been an upsurge in military coups in recent years. In addition, democratic backsliding is on the rise, through unconstitutional changes of term limits, digital repression, violent clampdown on opposition voices, and electoral fraud.

The AU's response has been tepid. In some cases, leaders involved in suppressing democratic voices are tasked with leading key processes in the AU.

The limited role of civil society in pan-African integration is another concern. And there is little public awareness of what the AU does and how.

Despite the benefits that could come from an integrated Africa, many African countries remain wary of the process. For example, some restrict human mobility. They have refused to sign the continental protocol on free movement, citing security concerns and protection of local jobs.

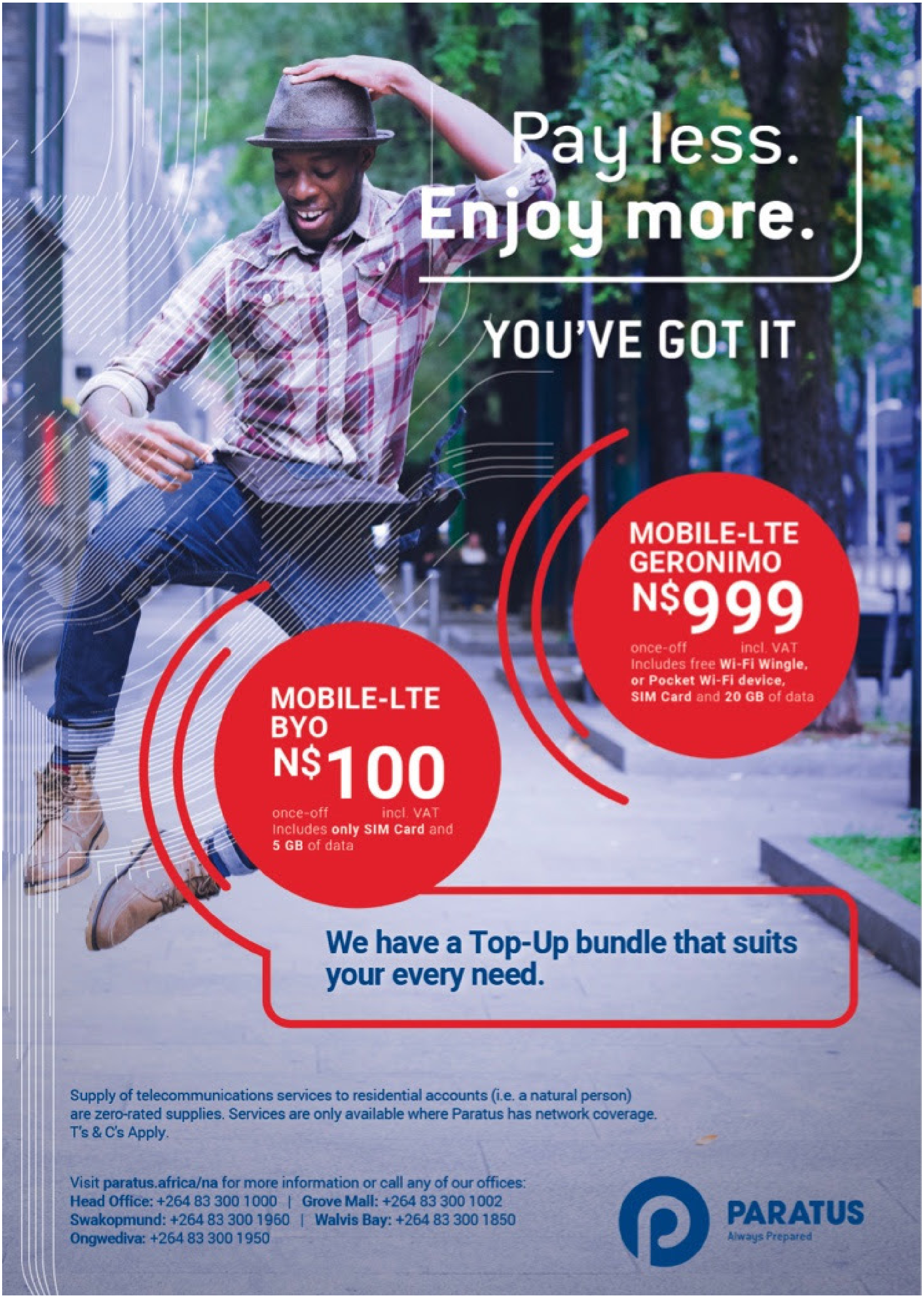
Changing mindsets

The effectiveness of reforms at the AU depends on a change of mindset. Members need to understand that enhancement of Africa's position in global realpolitik depends on an internally cohesive body. This will require actions in three key areas:

- a detailed but flexible plan showing how willing states will transfer supranational powers to AU organs
- including the African populace in AU programmes and processes
- adherence to constitutionalism.

Without a system that emphasises fundamental rights and good governance, regional integration goals such as trade, free movement of people, gender equality, peace and security cannot be realised.

Babatunde Fagbayibo
Professor of International Law, University of South Africa


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HEALTH

NFHS-5: Indians are getting fatter - and it's a big problem



■ **Geeta Pandey**

Indians are getting fatter, according to a new government survey, and experts are warning about a health emergency unless the growing obesity problem is tackled on a war footing.

Once considered a problem of the affluent West, obesity has been spreading in recent years in low and middle-income countries - and nowhere is it spreading more rapidly than in India.

Long known as a country of malnourished, underweight people, it has broken into the top five countries in terms of obesity in the past few years.

One estimate in 2016 put 135 million Indians as overweight or obese. That number, health experts say, has been growing rapidly and the country's undernourished population is being replaced by an overweight one.

According to the latest National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), the most comprehensive household survey of health and social indicators by the government, nearly 23% of men and 24% of women were found to have a body mass index (BMI) of 25 or more - a 4% increase for both genders over 2015-16. The data also shows that 3.4% of children under five are now overweight compared with 2.1% in 2015-16.

"We are in an obesity epidemic in India and globally, and I fear it could soon become a pandemic if we don't address it soon," warns Dr Ravindran Kumeran, a surgeon in the southern city of Chennai (Madras) and founder of the Obesity Foundation of India.

Dr Kumeran blames sedentary lifestyles and the easy availability of cheap, fattening foods as the main reasons why "most of us, particularly in urban India, are now out of shape".

BMI, which is calculated by taking an individual's height and weight into account, is the most accepted measure globally to classify people into "normal", "overweight", "obese" and "morbidly obese". According to the World Health Organization (WHO), a BMI of 25 or above is considered overweight.

But Dr Kumeran and many other health experts believe that for South Asian populations, it needs to be adjusted at least two points lower at each stage because we are prone to "central obesity", which means that we easily put on belly fat, and that's more unhealthy than weight anywhere else on the body. This would mean that an Indian with a BMI of 23 would be overweight.

"If you take 23 as the cut-off point for overweight, I think half the population of India - certainly the urban population - would be overweight," says Dr Kumeran.

According to WHO, too much body fat increases the risk of non-communicable diseases, including 13 types of cancer, type-2 diabetes, heart problems and lung conditions. And last year, obesity accounted for 2.8 million deaths globally.

Dr Pradeep Chowbey, former president of the International Federation for the Surgery of Obesity and Metabolic Disorders (Ifso), says "every 10kg of extra weight reduces life by three years. So, if someone is overweight by 50kg, they might end up losing 15 years of life. We also saw that mortality during Covid was three times higher for overweight and obese patients."

Dr Chowbey, who pioneered bariatric surgery in India 20 years ago - used as a last resort to treat dangerously obese people with a BMI of 40 or above - says obesity's medical impact is well known, but what is less talked about is its psychological and social impact.

"We did a survey of a 1,000 individuals three years back and we found that being overweight impacted sexual health, it led to poor self-image which could impact people's psyche and lead to marital disharmony."

And no-one knows it better than Siddharth Mukherjee, a 56-year-old actor who underwent bariatric surgery in 2015.

An athlete, he weighed 80-85kg until a few years ago when an accident put an end to his sporting career.

"But I had a sportsperson's diet. I ate a lot of oily, spicy food and I enjoyed drinking, so I kept putting on weight and it went up to 188kg," he said.

And with that came a host of illnesses - diabetes, high cholesterol levels, and thyroid problems - and during a holiday in 2014, he suddenly developed breathing difficulties.

"I couldn't breathe lying down so I had to sleep sitting up," he said. "But Dr Chowbey has given me a new life. My weight is generally down to 96kg. I go riding my bike, I act on stage, I go on holidays.

"There was a time when I couldn't climb a set of stairs, now I can walk for 17 to 18km in a day, I can eat sweets, I can wear fashionable clothes now."

He said to be fat was a curse for him.

"The world is a beautiful place, and we have a commitment to our families so I would tell people to stop being selfish and take care of their health."

Dr Chowbey says for people like Mr Mukherjee, bariatric surgery can be life-saving, but the most important thing is to create awareness about the perils of putting on weight in the first place.

But his efforts to get the government to recognise obesity as a disease have remained unsuccessful.

"The government has been busy trying to control infectious diseases and their focus is on communicable diseases, they have very little resources for lifestyle diseases. But obesity is very difficult and expensive to manage, it puts a huge burden on the healthcare system."

A few years ago, there was talk of a "sin tax" which would raise prices of unhealthy foods and drinks to discourage their consumption, but health experts say it never happened because of pushback from companies that market them.

Dr Kumeran says that India must adopt the same strategy to discourage unhealthy eating as it did with smoking.

He adds that once smoking was allowed in public places, including in flights and offices, but it's banned now. The government has made it mandatory for TV soaps and films to carry disclaimers and all cigarette packets have pictorial warnings.

Dr Kumeran says such repeated warnings help in reinforcing the message and the same needs to be done for obesity.

-BBC



Mining giant pleads guilty to UK bribery charges



A subsidiary of the mining and commodities trading giant Glencore has pleaded guilty to seven counts of bribery in a London court.

The firm also said it will pay more than $1bn (£800m) to resolve similar claims with the US and Brazil.

The UK's Serious Fraud Office said it had exposed "profit-driven bribery and corruption" across Glencore Energy UK's oil operations in five African nations.

The firm will find how much it must pay in fines at a sentencing in June.

It previously set aside $1.5bn to cover the investigations it faced in the UK, US and Brazil.

Glencore's chairman said "unacceptable practices" had taken place in relation to the bribery charges it pleaded guilty to at Westminster Magistrates' Court on Tuesday.

The company's agents and employees paid bribes worth over $25m for preferential access to oil, with approval by the company between 2011 and 2016, the Serious Fraud Office (SFO) said.

The bribes were paid in Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, and South Sudan, it added.

'Major prosecution'

SFO director Lisa Osofsky said: "We won't stop fighting serious fraud, bribery and corruption, and we look forward to the next steps in this major prosecution."

In 2018, the US Department of Justice (DoJ) launched an investigation into Glencore's compliance with American money-laundering and corruption laws dating back as far as 2007. It concerned the mining giant's operations in Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Venezuela.

The UK's SFO followed suit in 2019, investigating one of Glencore's UK subsidiaries over "suspicions of bribery" in Africa.

On Tuesday, the mining and commodities trading giant confirmed it had pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to violate the US Foreign Corrupt Practices Act related to the group's past actions in certain overseas jurisdictions.

It also pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit commodity price manipulation related to past market conduct in certain US fuel oil markets.

As part of the plea deal with the DoJ, Glencore said an independent compliance monitor will be appointed for three years to check its "internal controls".

It has also settled Brazilian bribery charges against it, but said Dutch and Swiss investigations remained ongoing.

'Unacceptable practices'

Chairman Kalidas Madhavpeddi said: "Glencore today is not the company it was when the unacceptable practices behind this misconduct occurred.

"The board and the management team are committed to operating a company that creates value for all stakeholders by operating transparently under a well-defined set of values, with openness and integrity at the forefront."

Spotlight on Corruption, a pressure group, welcomed the charges but said it was essential that those responsible for the wrongdoing, including senior executives and the parent company, were held to account.

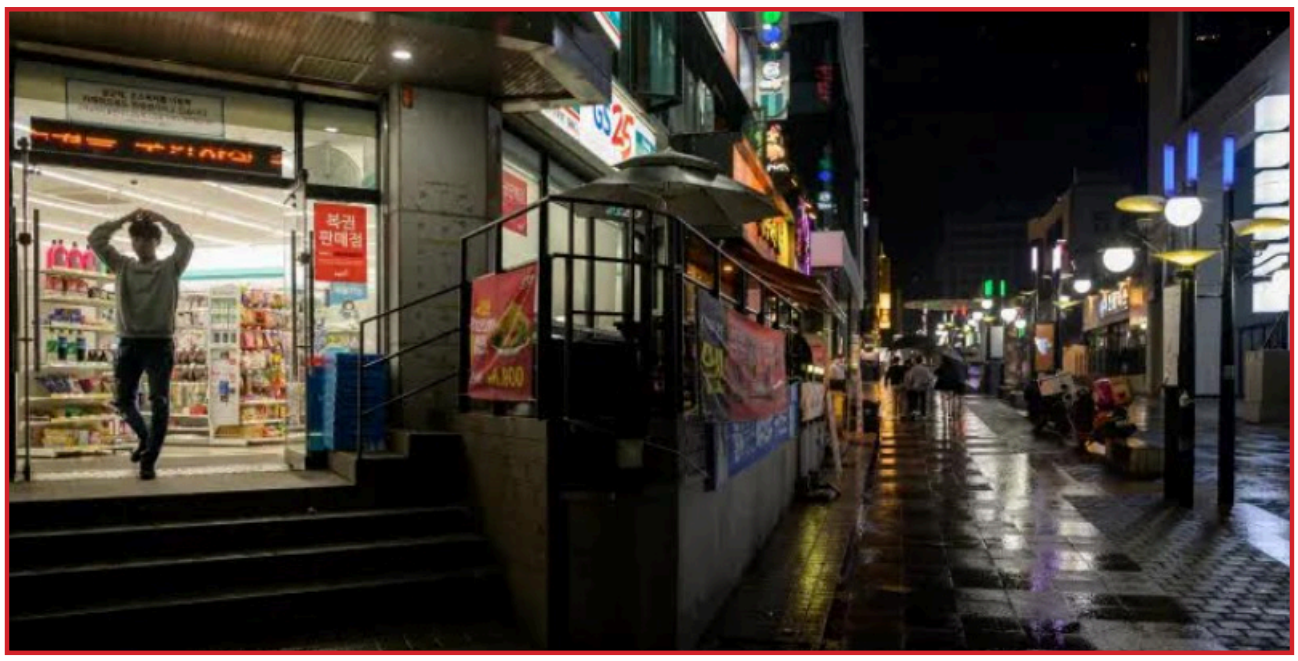
"It's also critical that the $1.5 billion that Glencore has set aside to settle the investigations includes compensation for the victims of their alleged corruption in West Africa," it said.

-BBC



South Korea's low paid brace for 'pro-market' turn under Yoon

■ Stevens Borowiec



Choi Myung-gon works the cashier on the overnight shift at a convenience store in southern Seoul, ringing up purchases and stocking shelves. During the long lulls without customers, he tries to study.

Choi this year plans to sit South Korea's civil service exam, a highly competitive test that thousands prepare for in the hope of landing stable government jobs. He hopes that a high score will be his ticket out of low-wage work, but often finds it difficult to focus on his books due to his irregular work schedule and long hours working on his feet.

South Koreans customarily work long hours, and slowing growth and rising costs of living in Asia's fourth-largest economy have many struggling to get ahead.

While workers like Choi have been given a boost in recent years in the form of large bumps in the minimum wage, many are still finding it difficult to make ends meet.

"Over the past five years, I don't think the minimum wage increases improved workers' daily lives very much," Choi told Al Jazeera. "Of course, it's better having a higher wage, but with housing being more expensive and food being more expensive, things have just gotten harder."

Moon Jae-in, the left-leaning previous president, took office in 2017 pledging to ease inequality by boosting the incomes of low-wage workers. Moon, who left office when his term ended in early May, argued that raising the minimum wage would set off a virtuous cycle whereby workers with extra cash would spend more, spurring consumption and creating more jobs.

South Korea's minimum wage currently stands at 9,160 won ($7.25) per hour. In 2018, Moon's first full year in office, the minimum wage spiked by 16.4 percent – the largest annual increase ever. The following year's increase was more than 10 percent, followed by increases in the 1-2 percentage-point range and 5.05 percent last year.

The recent inauguration of Yoon Suk-yeol, a political neophyte who represents the conservative People Power Party, has raised expectations that the large increases of the past five years may not continue.

Yoon's office has said that he will not take an official position on this year's minimum wage negotiations or join the discussions, which got under way earlier this month.

While short on specifics, Yoon, a former chief prosecutor who campaigned on restoring a market-driven economy, has pledged to enact policies that give companies more room to operate free from excessive regulation.

Employers' groups have called the minimum wage increases of recent years excessive, arguing that street-level businesses like convenience stores and restaurants cannot afford to pay workers more. At the same time, workers like Choi say the increases are not enough amid soaring prices. In April, South Korea's consumer inflation spiked to 4.8 percent, the highest level since 2008.

Representatives of labour and business appear headed for contentious negotiations, as unions are insisting a further rise in the minimum wage is necessary to keep pace with rising costs, while employers argue that many small businesses have yet to recover from the damage caused by COVID-19 and cannot handle any additional burden.

At a meeting of the Minimum Wage Commission earlier this month, Lee Tae-hee, an official at the Korea Federation of SMEs, was quoted by local media as saying that small businesses were already worried about "just being able to pay this month's salaries".

The structure of South Korea's economy, where a small number of corporate conglomerates dominate and much of the population is employed by mum-and-dad operations, makes wage negotiations a pressing matter for many households.

"South Korea has a lot of small businesses that rely on low-wage workers who work for long hours, and the rapid increase of the minimum wage was inevitably a burden on them," Choi Pae-kun, a professor of economics at Konkuk University in Seoul, told Al Jazeera.

Economists have also pointed out that there are alternative methods, such as tax credits, to boost the fortunes of struggling workers without imposing costs on small business owners, many of whom are barely getting by.

"In order to strengthen the incomes of low-income households, it is necessary to strengthen transfer payments from the government while adjusting the speed of the minimum wage increase," Choi said.

In what would be an unprecedented development since South Korea instituted a minimum wage in 1988, employers have also argued in favour of differentiating the minimum wage by industry. Under the proposals, instead of a nationwide standard for all workers, certain low-margin businesses, such as restaurants and motels, would be permitted to pay less.

Labour groups and left-leaning politicians have baulked at the proposed change.

At a recent press conference outside the presidential office in Seoul, Kang Eun-mi, a politician with the left-wing Justice Party, called on the government to recognise the minimum wage's role in protecting the living standards of society's most vulnerable.

Differentiating by sector would disproportionately harm women, youths and temporary workers, Kang said, imploring participants in this year's negotiations to keep vulnerable groups in mind.

"We must work to ensure that the purpose of the minimum wage is not harmed."

-Al Jazeera

China pledges support for ailing economy, analysts doubt impact



China has pledged tax cuts and infrastructure spending to support economic growth, as economists poured doubt on a strong rebound for the world's second-largest economy as long as lockdowns persist.

Beijing will increase annual tax cuts by more than 140 billion yuan ($21bn) to 2.64 trillion yuan, offer tax rebates to more economic sectors, and postpone social security payments worth 320 billion yuan until the end of the year, the state-run Xinhua news agency quoted the State Council, China's Cabinet, as saying on Monday.

Other measures include 150 billion yuan ($22.5bn) in emergency loans for the struggling aviation sector, the issuance of 300 billion yuan ($45bn) in bonds to fund railway construction, and investment in new projects in energy, transport and water conservation.

"At present, the downward pressure on the economy continues to increase and it's very difficult for many market entities," the cabinet said, according to Xinhua.

China's leaders have pledged to ramp up support for the flagging economy, even as they double down on an ultra-strict "dynamic zero COVID" policy that has confined millions to their homes, shuttered factories and thrown supply chains into disarray.

Carsten Holz, an expert on the Chinese economy at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, expressed doubt that the measures would jumpstart the economy as long lockdowns continue.

"Tax cuts, rebates and deferred social security payments will have no effect on the economy unless the additional funds in the hands of the public can be spent – not possible in lockdown – and the public is willing to spend the funds – less likely in times of uncertainty," Holz told Al Jazeera.

"I am just not optimistic about economic growth in the PRC for this year – and even for the future, due to long-term, systemic features and traditional economic development trajectories," Holz added, referring to China's official name, the People's Republic of China.

Iris Pang, chief economist for Greater China at ING, said the stimulus "isn't small" but its impact will depend on the severity of restrictions in future.

"It is at least 3.76 percent of gross domestic product in 2022," Pang told Al Jazeera. "Whether this is enough depends on how flexible coming lockdowns will be."

China's retail sales and industrial production in April slumped to their lowest levels since the early days of the pandemic, as draconian pandemic restrictions brought major cities, including Shanghai and Beijing, to a standstill.

Beijing has set an ambitious target of about 5.5 percent growth in 2022, which many economists believe is unrealistic given the mounting toll of lockdowns and the lack of a timetable for moving past draconian controls for good.

On top of fiscal measures, China has also set out a looser monetary policy, last week cutting the benchmark reference rate for mortgages by a more than expected 0.15 percentage point.

Gary Ng, a senior economist at Natixis in Hong Kong, said China's fiscal stimulus may be less effective this time around than during the early days of the pandemic.

"In a way, the success story of China back in 2020 depends not only on the supportive fiscal stimulus but also on the looser mobility restriction after the early containment of the virus. However, the world has changed and the virus has evolved into more transmissible variants," Ng told Al Jazeera.

"So if the zero-COVID strategy is to remain, corporates and households will still find it difficult to invest and consume despite the more substantial help from the Chinese government. The fiscal policies may not be as effective as before if on-and-off lockdowns prevent normal economic activities."

-Al Jazeera



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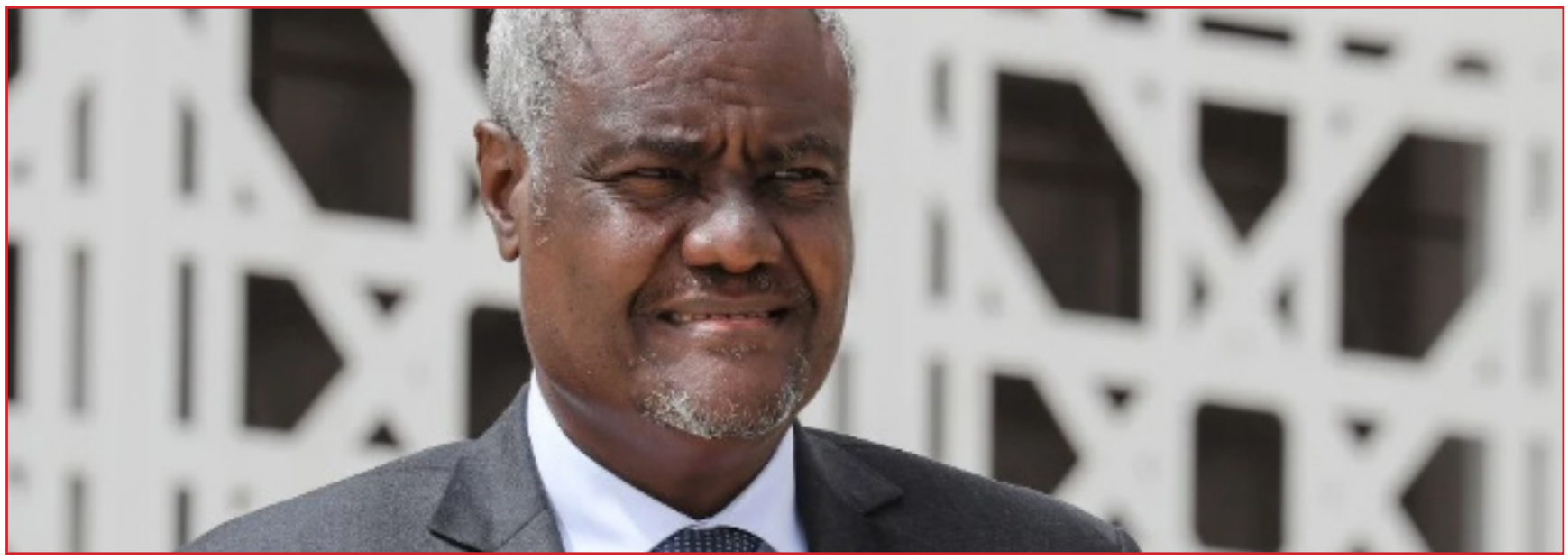
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Tech Eagle with Frans
12h00-13h00
Brand Conversation with Sally
13h00-14h30
On the Radar with Dwight
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Ookundana Dhingi with Helen
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AU chairperson says Africa a 'collateral victim' of Ukraine war



Africa has become a "collateral victim" of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, further denting the continent's ability to fulfil its "enormous promise and potential", top officials of the African Union and United Nations have said in messages for Africa Day.

Every year, May 25 is marked as Africa Day, the anniversary of the founding of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) on May 25, 1963, which became the African Union in July 2002.

"Africa has become the collateral victim of a distant conflict, that between Russia and Ukraine," said Moussa Faki Mahamat, chairperson of the African Union Commission. "By profoundly upsetting the fragile global geopolitical and geostrategic balance, it has also cast a harsh light on the structural fragility of our economies.

"The most emblematic sign of these fragilities is the food crisis following the climatic disorders, the health crisis of COVID-19, amplified today by the conflict in Ukraine," he added. "This crisis is characterised by a shrinking world supply of agricultural products and a soaring inflation of food prices."

Millions of people in Africa, which has an estimated population of 1.3 billion, have been pushed into extreme poverty by the COVID-19 pandemic. And now, the continent has been hit hard by rising food costs caused partly by disruptions linked to the war.

Russia and Ukraine produce approximately a third of global wheat and barley, and two-thirds of the world's exports of sunflower oil used for cooking. The conflict has damaged Ukraine's maritime and agricultural infrastructure, and that could limit its agricultural production for years.

Mahamat said Africa remains embroiled in a ceaseless struggle against "terrorism, violent extremism and transnational crime – human, drugs and arms trafficking".

The AU chairperson's statement comes just as the body begins a three-day summit in Equatorial Guinea.

In his message, UN chief Antonio Guterres warned that the "war in Ukraine is creating a perfect storm for developing countries, especially in Africa".

"This crisis is resulting in soaring costs for food, energy and fertilizer with devastating consequences on nutrition and food systems, while making it even more difficult for the continent to mobilize the financial resources needed to invest in its people," he said.

However, Guterres also recognised Africa as "a home for hope," hailing the "enormous promise and potential of this diverse and dynamic continent".

"The prospects on the horizon are bright – from Africa's growing and vibrant youth population, to initiatives like the African Continental Free Trade Area, the Decade of Women's Financial and Economic Inclusion, and the African Union's bold vision for the future, Agenda 2063," he said

-Al Jazeera

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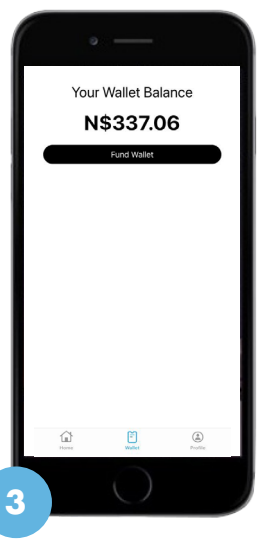
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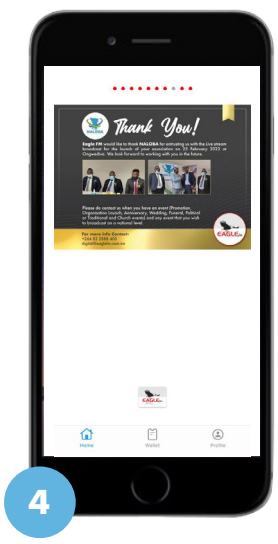
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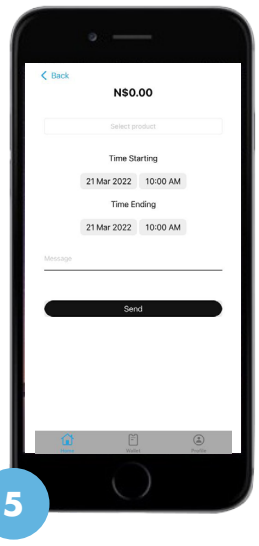
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'I change how I look and talk to fit in at work'

■ Adina Campbell

"I do notice that I'm not being myself in the workplace," says Hilda Kwoffie. "I try to tone it down a little bit. You find yourself having to always slick your hair down just to fit in."

The 24-year-old from Ghana says she's changed her look and the way she talks since moving to the UK in 2016.

Two-thirds of women of colour in UK workplaces say they change themselves to fit in, according to a new report.

The government said all workplaces should be free of discrimination.

The changes Ms Kwoffie finds herself making are experienced by some women of colour and it's known as "code-switching".

It's a term widely used to describe how Black, Asian and other people from ethnic minority backgrounds feel the need to hide their cultural identity in white-majority spaces, such as in workplaces.

"We've been programmed this way: this is how you should act, this is how you should talk, this is how you should walk and this is how you should look," said Ms Kwoffie.

"I do speak to my family and my friends completely differently to how I speak in the workplace," added the paralegal who works in London.

Ms Kwoffie's experience mirrors the findings of a survey by the race equality think tank the Runnymede Trust and gender equality organisation the Fawcett Society.

Their report found that 61% of women of colour said they had changed their language, topics they discuss, hair, food they eat, or even their name by "a great deal" or "quite a bit" to fit in at work. This compares with 44% of white women.

The report, Broken Ladders, is based on a survey of 2,000 women of colour in UK workplaces, which the groups said was the largest representative survey of women of colour to date.

Three quarters of these women said they had experienced racism at work which in some cases has led to walking away from jobs, not being promoted and careers being cut short.

Dr Halima Begum, chief executive of the Runnymede Trust, said employers risked losing talent.

"Women of colour face a double jeopardy. From school to the workplace, there are structural barriers standing between them and the opportunities they deserve," she said.

Jemima Olchawksi, chief executive of the Fawcett Society, said society must not put up with completely unacceptable racism at work.

"This evidence and the stories women have shared with us must be a rallying call to government, to employers to our educational institutions to drive real change," she said.

A trainee lawyer told the BBC she quit a previous job because of the way a colleague made her feel about her success at work.

"I had a supervisor who was a little bit patronising. I didn't put up with it and actually just left," said Sophia - not her real name.

"I did find out afterwards that she had mentioned to a colleague of mine that she was quite surprised at how well I was doing.

"She had given me the job. So I think the only thing that could have really given her this idea was seeing an African last name on a CV and then also seeing the fact that I didn't go to a private school.

"It made me doubt myself in terms of how well I could do in this profession."

Surveys show that Black, Asian, and other people from ethnic minority backgrounds continue to be under-represented in senior positions.

The Broken Ladders report has made a number of recommendations for employers including clear, transparent processes for reporting racism, intersectional anti-racism training and "stay interviews" rather than "exit interviews" to feedback on career experiences.

It also wants the government to introduce a business-led plan to tackle ethnicity and gender pay gaps as well as salaries to be published on job advertisements.

A spokesperson at the Department for Business said the government takes the issue of racism extremely seriously.

They said it believes that all workplaces should be safe environments for people of all backgrounds to work together and thrive, free of discrimination.

-BBC



S Africa's Ramaphosa: Russia sanctions hurting 'bystander' states

South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa has said that "bystander countries" were suffering due to sanctions against Russia and called for talks as the African Union (AU) prepared a mission to foster dialogue between Moscow and Kyiv.

Ramaphosa spoke as German Chancellor Olaf Scholz visited South Africa on the final leg of a trip to the continent that aimed in part to rally diplomatic support for Ukraine.

South Africa has close historical ties to Moscow due to the Soviet Union's support for the anti-apartheid struggle. It abstained from a United Nations vote denouncing the invasion of Ukraine and has resisted calls to condemn Russia.

The European Union has aggressively pursued sanctions and a severing of economic ties in a bid to punish Moscow for its military operations in Ukraine, a strategy that Ramaphosa said was causing collateral damage.

"Even those countries that are either bystanders or not part of the conflict are also going to suffer from the sanctions that have been imposed against Russia," he said during a news conference in Pretoria.

Africa, which has already seen millions pushed into extreme poverty by the COVID-19 pandemic, has been hit hard by rising food costs caused in part by disruptions linked to the war.

Russia and Ukraine account for nearly a third of global wheat and barley, and two-thirds of the world's exports of sunflower oil used for cooking. The conflict has damaged Ukraine's ports and agricultural infrastructure, and that is likely to limit its agricultural production for years.

In an interview with German broadcaster Deutsche Welle earlier on Tuesday, Scholz called on countries to increase oil and gas supply to curb global energy price increases.

Standing beside Ramaphosa, Scholz – who is also visiting Niger and Senegal – said he was pleased to have the opportunity to discuss South Africa's position on the war. But he underlined that what he called an attempt by Russia to alter international borders by force is unacceptable.

"Mr President, I think it is important that we continue these discussions intensively," he said. "We are very concerned about the outcome of the war for Africa."

Senegal's President Macky Sall – the current chairman of Africa's top political bloc, the African Union – said on Sunday while hosting Scholz that he was preparing to visit Kyiv and Moscow to foster peace.

Last month, Sall had a call with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who has requested an audience with the AU.

Ramaphosa, who has been invited to attend the Group of Seven (G7) summit being hosted by Germany next month, said the only way to resolve the war is through dialogue, and Africa "does have a role to play" because it has access to the leaders of both Ukraine and Russia.

-Al Jazeera

> **Even those countries that are either bystanders or not part of the conflict are also going to suffer from the sanctions that have been imposed against Russia.**



The unstoppable machines behind the game console shortage



■ Luke Winkie

Without some help. Flippers have become notorious for snatching up the fresh restocks offered online with the help of ultra-fast buying bots, forcing everyone else to buy units off the secondary market for egregious, 100-dollar markups. But after delving into the console reselling underworld, I was shocked to learn that resellers aren't the primary problem. Instead, they're merely the pawns of the true powerbrokers of the industry: the enterprising developers selling these bots to aspiring flippers in the first place.

Dozens of what are known as "AIO resale bots" have popped up in recent years, offering prospective flippers an "all-in-one" service that can snatch up tons of sneakers, graphic cards, and consoles in order to power their own black market businesses. They offer a suite of tools that allow users to pass through the digital checkout infrastructure of retailers like Walmart and Best Buy in an instant with a heavy load of plunder in tow. Most of these bots are saddled with an upfront payment and a recurring usage fee, which means they're simply the middlemen for the scalping industry writ large. The programmers all believe that they're fighting the good fight; after all, what's more American than supply and demand?

"Financial freedom is something the United States and all countries stand for. We're all aiming for it in the end, not just resellers but consumers," says Fuat, a German entrepreneur who is one of the partners behind the buying bot Dakoza, in a Discord call with The Verge. (He only shared his first name for the story.) "We have users DMing us saying, 'Thank you so much for this opportunity. I was able to afford my wedding. I was able to buy clothing for my baby.' The impact we have on people is not negative; it's definitely positive. This software lets them change their lives."

Dakoza's pitch is simple. For an initial $300 fee and monthly $50 payments afterward, the bot lets its users morph their computers into an unparalleled price-gouging force of nature. In a demonstration of Dakoza's UI plastered across its homepage, we see a trickle of receipts for Xbox Series X consoles, PS5s, and Nvidia graphics cards leak into a shark's inventory like clockwork. The service is optimized for Target, Best Buy, Amazon, and Walmart.

The Twitter account "Dakoza Success" proudly promotes all of the bounties scored by the bot's users. In one memorable post, one lucky rounder shows off nine freshly purchased GeForce RTX 3080s stacked to the ceiling like LEGO bricks. It's an image that evokes an enfeebling combination of envy and rage, as it becomes increasingly clear that the botters are perpetually one step ahead of our mere keyboards and mouses.

Fuat, like the two other partners involved in Dakoza, stumbled into the resale industry through the dark art of sneaker flipping. Enthusiasts and scalpers routinely queue for hours outside of flagship Nike stores so they may secure a hot pair of LeBrons before the price tag quintuples on the open market. "[A friend] asked me to go to a store and buy a pair of shoes so he could hand them to a client. He gave me $50 for it," says Fuat, detailing his own origin story. "He explained the whole scene to me."

This was during the height of the pandemic when Fuat was stuck at home, plugging away at his day job in IT, looking for any sort of distraction. Few people possess the vocational expertise to capitalize on a notable inefficiency in the resale market, and with just a few lines of code, Fuat understood that he could effectively function as a middleman — funneling merchandise directly to the grinders in the streets.

"I noticed that a lot of people who run this scene, or have businesses in the scene, are in IT," he says. "I was like, 'Man, this community is super talented. There must be an opportunity here.'"

Botting has been a fixture in reselling for a good five years, but the combination of Covid boredom, mogul dreams, and overwhelming mainstream intrigue brought a generation of amateur hustlers into the flipping ecosystem, says Anton, another German who co-founded Dakoza and declined to give his full name for the story. His case bears truth in the data. According to CNBC, Americans are purchasing more from scalpers than ever before.

There is likely all sorts of abstruse chicanery happening on a checkout bot's backend, and I was not surprised that my sources didn't want to go into detail on how their apps worked. But the owner of Hayha, another popular resale service, broke down the programming basics for me in a message sent over Discord chat. "When your browser checks out an item on a retail site, it sends 'requests' to the site's server. These requests are basically commands that tell the server what to do. Add this item to the cart, submit my order, and so on," they wrote. "We send those commands associated with checking out to the servers of sites we automate without requiring a browser. Basically, we can mimic what a human does, stripping out the unnecessary lags and delays of a browser."

"It's nothing really tricky," adds Anton. "We just mirror what the user would do."

Of course, Anton notes that the Dakoza membership experience offers more than just a devious bit of code. Like other botting cartels, the company employs a crack team of human moderators to constantly keep subscribers informed on incoming retail restocks so that they're ready to pounce at the exact moment Target rolls out a new suite of consoles. "We're basically able to tell people when they should run [Dakoza,]" he adds.

There are a shocking number of resale platforms offering the exact same promise as Dakoza. I reached out to about 10 while writing this story and began to run into some strange recursive quirks. All of the websites for these platforms look suspiciously similar, right down to the interface and graphic design. Can you detect a discernible aesthetic difference between, say, Trickle and Viper, two popular bots in the scene? Anton tells me that this is simply a coincidence. "New software products always have a default design," he says.

What's more bizarre is that nobody can buy Dakoza right now — or most of the other bots on the market. Any prospective flipper must instead linger on a waiting list for an indefinite amount of time before finally being offered the chance to license the software. This is remarkably common across the entire scene. In fact, I didn't encounter a single botting company that allowed me to purchase their automation service off the rack without first signing up for an interminable queue. Just like the sneakers and game consoles they're designed to buy, these apps are offered only in a limited supply to a lucky few buyers.

It's a strategy that doesn't add up economically. Wouldn't Dakoza make a ton more money by broadening out their subscription apparatus to anyone interested in the scalping lifestyle? But Anton tells me he wants to keep numbers small in order to ensure that the company can meet the bespoke needs of all of its customers. The limited number of members, he argues, all add up to a better user experience. "With limiting access to the bots it makes it easier to run everything without cutting into profits," he says. "There's less troubleshooting and software handling. We have a weekly Twitch stream where one of our moderators answers questions live."

Manufactured scarcity is crucial to a bot's notoriety, says a person who knows the sneaker industry and asked to remain anonymous for employment concerns. It lets us imagine the sea of PS5s that could be ours, if only we could breach through that locked door. "Creating FOMO is part of the business plan," the person says.

This sentiment was echoed by Matthew Milic, an 18-year-old in Canada and dedicated flipper who says he's scooped up huge quantities of PS5s. Milic believes that the idea that anyone can purchase a piece of automation software and immediately rake in massive revenue is a fantasy. This scene has become saturated with questionable upstart companies, and most of them, he says, are overpromising what their software can do.

"There's maybe only two or three bots that perform well on a consistent basis. Then all the other bots are just a waste of money," Milic says. "Those are for new people who don't know the industry. They're like, 'Oh, this bot is only $500,' and they'll buy it up and it'll get them nothing." (For what it's worth, Milic says that he doesn't know much about Dakoza or the quality of its product.)

The Hayha founder tells me that his user base doesn't just include resellers. They claim to have plenty of casual collectors in the mix who "feel frustrated trying to check out manually on these sites" and simply want an Xbox to call their own. Never mind the fact that the "frustration" he refers to can be blamed solely on the secondhand market that companies like Hayha are making more predatory by the day; nobody wants to see themselves as the villain.

In fact, the bot programmers pitch themselves as the arbiters of a beguiling new techno-yeoman fantasy: for just $50 a month, maybe you too can pull yourselves up from the grey muck of stagnant employment with the power of ludicrously expensive eBay listings.

"Instead of going to McDonald's for $13 an hour, they're trying to [make it] themselves," says Fout, on Dakoza's users. "They're trying to buy a pair of Yeezys and make $200."

He is not wrong, which is the scary thing. In this precarious economy, beset by mounting inflation and a structural breakdown of the very contours of full-time work, people would rather flip video game consoles than work a job with no agency or absolution on the horizon. The bot makers and the scalpers are both cogs in the same machine — a mad scramble for any leverageable commodity, as side hustles become a survival requirement, rather than, you know, a hobby.

Perhaps someday the supply chain will snap back into order and there'll be too many consoles to scoop up. Until then, I'll be refreshing the Best Buy homepage, hoping to finally edge out the machines.

-The Verge

> **"I noticed that a lot of people who run this scene, or have businesses in the scene, are in IT."**



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Free Your Mind
10h00-12h00
Tech Eagle with Frans
12h00-13h00
Brand Conversation with Sally
13h00-14h30
On the Radar with Dwight
14h30-16h30
Ookundana Dhingi with Helen
16h30-18h30
The Home Run with Frans/ Fanus
18h30-20h00
Business Segment with Gabriel
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Omutumwa pamuee naTate Fly
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INTERNATIONAL

India sentences Kashmir rebel Yasin Malik to life imprisonment

A special National Investigation Agency (NIA) court in the Indian capital New Delhi has sentenced iconic Kashmiri pro-independence leader Yasin Malik to life imprisonment in "terror" funding case.

Malik, one of Indian-administered Kashmir's prominent rebel leaders, is the chief of now banned Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF). The group renounced violence in 1994.

The court prosecutor had sought the death penalty for Malik.

Malik, 56, last week was convicted of "terrorist" acts, including illegally raising funds, membership in a terrorist organisation, criminal conspiracy, and sedition.

The People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD), a coalition of pro-India parties in the region, termed Malik's life imprisonment as "unfortunate".

"Life imprisonment given to Yasin Malik is unfortunate and a setback to the efforts for peace. We are afraid that this will further compound the uncertainties in the region and will only fuel more alienation and separatist feelings," the group said in a statement on Wednesday.

The "… court has delivered its verdict but not justice," the statement said.

The mobile internet services in some parts of the region's main city of Srinagar were suspended soon after the verdict was announced by the anti-terrorism court based in the Indian capital New Delhi.

During the trial, which Malik's family and lawyers alleged was not fair, the Kashmiri leader rejected the charges and said he was a freedom fighter.

A statement released by the JKLF after Malik's conviction last week said charges levelled against him were "concocted, fabricated and politically motivated

"If seeking aazadi (freedom) is a crime, then I am ready to accept this crime and its consequences," the statement quoted Malik as telling the judge.

Malik was arrested by India's National Investigation Agency (NIA) in a "terror-funding case" shortly after the JKLF was banned in 2019.

The agency charged him with receiving funds "from Pakistan to carry out terrorist activities and stone-pelting during the Kashmir unrest, especially in 2010 and 2016".

In August the same year, New Delhi scrapped the special status of Indian-administered Kashmir and unilaterally divided the country's only Muslim-majority region into two federally controlled territories.

The move was followed by months of military and communications lockdown in the region and arrests of major political and rebel leaders.

Shutdown, anger in valley

In several areas of the disputed region's main city of Srinagar, shopkeepers downed their shutters before the pronouncement of the sentencing against Malik.

Dozens of women protested at Malik's home in Maisuma in advance of the verdict, shouting slogans: "Ye tamasha nahi hai, ye maatam sahi hai" (This is not a spectacle, this grief is a reality).

Protests were reported in some areas of Srinagar as security forces in riot gear patrolled the streets.

After the sentencing was announced, Malik's family members told Al Jazeera they were "shattered but not able to utter a word".

"He has rested his case with God," said one of Malik's relatives, who did not want to be identified fearing reprisals from the government.

'Setback to separatist politics'

Originally founded in the 1970s, the JKLF under Malik repeatedly called for the independence of Indian-administered Kashmir from both India and Pakistan, who rule over parts of the Himalayan territory but claim it in its entirety.

The two nuclear-armed nations have fought two of their three full-scale wars over the territory. India accuses Pakistan of backing the armed rebellion in Indian-administered Kashmir. Islamabad denies the allegation, saying it only offers diplomatic and moral support to the rebels.

In a tweet on Tuesday, Pakistani Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari demanded Malik's acquittal. "The fabricated charges against him must be dropped. He must be released forthwith and allowed to reunite with his family," he posted.

"India must also release all political prisoners and stop egregious human rights violations" in the region, Bhutto-Zardari added.

In 1988, Malik was one of the first Kashmiri rebels to cross the border to Pakistan to receive training for an armed



rebellion against New Delhi's rule that began in Indian-administered Kashmir the next year.

However, Malik disbanded the JKLF's military wing in 1994 and announced his commitment to iconic Indian freedom fighter Mahatma Gandhi's ideas of non-violent political struggle to achieve independence.

A Kashmiri political commentator described Malik as "a saner voice among the separatists" and said his sentencing was a "major setback to separatist politics" in the region.

"He did not shun dialogue. Many hardline groups would deride and laugh at his image as a Gandhian. But Malik continued with his Gandhian ideals and has entered into talks with both India and Pakistan for the resolution of Kashmir issue," the commentator, who did not want to be identified, told Al Jazeera.

-AL JAzeera

Sweden, Finland hold talks in Turkey over NATO membership

Senior officials from Sweden and Finland have met with Turkish counterparts in Ankara in an effort to overcome Turkey's objections to the Nordic nations' bids to join NATO.

Sweden and Finland submitted their written applications to join NATO last week. The move represents one of the biggest geopolitical ramifications of Russia's war in Ukraine and could rewrite Europe's security map.

Turkey has said it opposes the countries' membership in the Western military alliance, citing grievances with Sweden's – and to a lesser extent, Finland's – perceived support of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, and other entities that Turkey views as security threats.

The PKK, which is listed as a "terror organisation" by several of Turkey's allies, has waged a decades-long fight against Turkey, a conflict that has killed tens of thousands of people.

The Turkish government also accuses Finland and Sweden of imposing arms export restrictions on Turkey and refusing to extradite suspected "terrorists".

Turkey's objections have dampened Stockholm's and Helsinki's hopes for joining NATO quickly amid Russia's invasion of Ukraine and put the trans-Atlantic alliance's credibility at stake. All 30 NATO members must agree on admitting new members.

Ankara talks



The Swedish and Finnish delegations on Wednesday met with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's spokesman, Ibrahim Kalin, and Turkish deputy foreign minister Sedat Onal.

The Swedish delegation was led by state secretary Oscar Stenstrom, while Jukka Salovaara, the foreign ministry undersecretary, headed up the Finnish delegation, Turkish officials have said.

Turkey this week listed five "concrete assurances" it was demanding from Sweden, including what it said was "termination of political support for terrorism", an "elimination of the source of terrorism financing", and the "cessation of arms support" to the banned PKK and a Syrian Kurdish armed group affiliated with it.

The demands also called for the lifting of arms sanctions against Turkey and global cooperation against terrorism.

Turkey said that it has requested the extradition of Kurdish fighters and other suspects since 2017 but has not received a positive response from Stockholm.

The Turkish government claimed Sweden had decided to provide $376m to support the Kurdish fighters in 2023 and that it had provided them with military equipment, including anti-tank weapons and drones.

'Humanitarian donor'

Sweden has denied providing any "financial assistance or military support" to Kurdish groups or entities in Syria.

"Sweden is a major humanitarian donor to the Syria crisis through global allocations to humanitarian actors," foreign minister Ann Linde told the Aftonbladet newspaper. "Cooperation in northeastern Syria is carried out primarily through the United Nations and international organisations," she said. "Sweden doesn't provide targeted support to Syrian Kurds or to the political or military structures in northeastern Syria, but the population in these areas is, of course, taking part in these aid projects."

Speaking on Tuesday before a meeting of the Council of the Baltic Sea States, German foreign minister Annalena Baerbock said Russia had left Sweden and Finland "no choice" but to join NATO.

She said Germany would support the two countries' membership, calling it "a real gain" for the military alliance.

-Al Jazeera

19 children among dead in primary school attack



■ **Angelica Casas & Max Matza**

Nineteen young children and two adults have died in a shooting at a primary school in south Texas.

The gunman opened fire at Robb Elementary School - which teaches children aged seven to 10 - in the city of Uvalde before he was killed by law enforcement, officials said.

The 18-year-old suspect had a handgun, an AR-15 semi-automatic rifle and high-capacity magazines, investigators say.

The teenager is suspected of shooting his grandmother before the rampage.

Local media report he may have been a high school student in the area.

Uvalde Consolidated Independent School District Chief of Police Pete Arredondo said the shooting began at 11:32 local time on Tuesday, and that investigators believe the attacker "did act alone during this heinous crime".

Texas Governor Greg Abbott said the shooter, whom he named as Salvador Ramos, abandoned a vehicle before entering the school to "horrifically, incomprehensibly" open fire.

Several of the children who died have been identified.

Family members confirmed the deaths of 10-year-olds Xavier Lopez and Amerie Jo Garza in statements on Tuesday night.

Angel Garza said on Facebook that his daughter Amerie had been killed.

"My little love is now flying high with the angels above. Please don't take a second for granted. Hug your family. Tell them you love them," he said.

The two adults who died were both teachers - Irma Garcia and Eva Mireles.

According to the school district's website, Mrs Garcia is a mother-of-four and had been a teacher for 23 years. The same website says that Ms Mireles had been a teacher for 17 years, has a daughter in college and loved running and hiking.

Nearly 500 pupils are enrolled in the predominantly Hispanic school around 85 miles (135km) west of the city of San Antonio.

The Associated Press news agency reports that a US Border Patrol official who was nearby when the shooting began rushed into the school and shot and killed the gunman, who was behind a barricade.

Border Patrol is a federal agency that guards US ports of entry. Uvalde, which is fewer than 80 miles from the border with Mexico, is home to a Border Patrol station.

Two border agents were reportedly shot in an exchange with the gunman. One agent was shot in the head, officials say, adding that both were now in a stable condition in hospital.

According to CBS News, the attacker was wearing body armour as he carried out the attack. Another 18-year-old who is suspected of attacking a grocery store in Buffalo, New York, on 14 May was also wearing body armour and carrying a semi-automatic rifle - both of which are commercially available in the US.

The Uvalde Memorial Hospital posted on Facebook earlier that 13 children had been taken to hospital "via ambulances or buses".

A 66-year-old woman and a 10-year-old girl were in a critical condition at a hospital in San Antonio, University Health hospital officials said.

This is a profoundly shocking tragedy, yet in America it is also depressingly familiar. The grief and sympathy being expressed around the country is genuine. But no one is genuinely surprised that this could happen.

There have already been 27 school shootings this year alone. Young school children routinely rehearse what to do if a gunman enters their classroom.

It's only 10 days since ten people were killed in a mass shooting in New York.

Politicians recognise this a problem almost unique to America, where guns have overtaken car crashes as the leading cause of death for children and teenagers. But it's a problem that politics seem incapable of solving. Deeply entrenched views on gun control are not changed in response to events like the tragedy in Uvalde.

"Why do we keep letting this happen?" asked President Biden. "Why are we willing to live with this carnage?"

But there is no sign that Democrats will get any closer to passing tighter gun control legislation. Some Republicans are already accusing them of using this latest school shooting to cynically further their own political objectives.

Robb Elementary School will join the roll call of school shootings along with Sandy Hook and the Parkland shooting. The killing of innocent schoolchildren has reignited the debate over guns in America, but has not brought it any closer to a resolution.

As evening fell police remained outside the community centre in Uvalde braving an intense rainstorm.

Earlier, cries and sobs could be heard from outside as family members who gathered there received the devastating news that their children had been killed.

Others were asked to give DNA samples to help identify some of the young victims.

Just a few blocks from the Robb Elementary school, a small vigil was held for the victims and survivors of the attack.

Karla Bohman's voice cracked as she told the group about a family friend whose young daughter, a student at the school, was among those still unaccounted for.

"They don't know if she's in surgery or one of the fatalities, but they know she's a victim of some sort because she's missing," Bohman cried. "I can't believe this."

Cheryl Juhasz, a lifelong resident of Uvalde, quietly wept during the prayer.

"You can't comprehend evil like this. No matter where it happens, but it's harder when it happens at home."

School district superintendent Hal Harrell said the school year had been ended early in the wake of the shooting.

In a speech from the White House, US President Joe Biden said he was "sick and tired" of responding to mass shootings, as he called for gun control.

"How many scores of little children who witnessed what happened - see their friends die, as if they're in a battlefield, for God's sake," he said. "They'll live with it the rest of their lives."

He ordered that flags at the White House and other US federal buildings be flown at half-mast in honour of the victims in Uvalde.

School shootings have become recurring emergencies in the US, with 26 recorded last year, according to EdWeek, an education trade publication.

Active shooter lockdown drills are a common part of the school curriculum, from primary to high school.

The 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut was the deadliest such attack. Twenty of the 26 victims were between the ages of five and six.

Speaking on the floor of the US Senate in Washington DC on Tuesday, Connecticut Democratic Senator Chris Murphy begged his colleagues to pass gun control legislation.

"These kids weren't unlucky," he said. "This only happens in this country. Nowhere else, nowhere else do little kids go to school thinking that they might be shot that day."

But Texas Senator Ted Cruz, a Republican, rejected the calls for gun control. He said restricting the rights of "law-abiding citizens... doesn't work. It's not effective. It doesn't prevent crime."

Guns overtook car crashes to become the leading cause of death for US children and teenagers in 2020, according to data released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) last month.

On Monday, an FBI report found that "active shooter" rampage attacks have doubled since the coronavirus began in 2020.

-BBC





2023 Mercedes-AMG GT Track Series First Drive: Every Other Track-Day Car, Go Home

■ **Angus Mackenzie**

Do you like the idea of driving a GT3-class race car? Have the money but don't have the time to get your FIA-approved racing license and commit to a season in a GT3 championship? Relax, because Mercedes-AMG has just the car for you: The 2023 Mercedes-AMG GT Track Series is perfect for unleashing your inner Mario Andretti at your local track's next open day.

The 2023 GT Track Series pulls together hardware from the roadgoing Mercedes-AMG GT Black Series model and the Mercedes-AMG GT3 and GT4 race cars to create the nearest thing to a GT World Challenge race-winning Mercedes you can drive without a competition license. Yes, it's essentially a pick-and-mix parts bin car, but when your bin is filled with goodies like AMG's, that's hardly a criticism.

The mighty dry-sump, flat-plane-crank 4.0-liter twin-turbo V-8 is the heart of the 2023 Mercedes-AMG GT Track Series. This is the same engine that powers the awesome Black Series, but motorsport-spec fuel injectors and engine mapping boost its output by 4 hp and 37 lb-ft of torque, to 724 hp and 627 lb-ft. The engine is bolted by way of a carbon-fiber torque tube to the six-speed sequential-shift Hewland transaxle transmission used in the GT3 and GT4 race cars. The V-8 is cradled by the GT4 version's light and extremely rigid aluminum spaceframe chassis.

Like the Black Series and the GT3 and GT4 race cars, many of the Track Series' body panels are also carbon fiber. The hood and front fascia look very similar to those on the GT3 but are significantly different in detail; the high-downforce front splitter was developed specifically for the GT Track Series. The giant, adjustable rear wing is based on the Black Series' but is reworked to deliver more downforce.

The multilink suspension features height-adjustable race-spec four-way Bilstein dampers featuring high- and low-speed settings in both compression and rebound. As on the GT Black Series, the front and rear camber settings and anti-roll bars are manually adjustable. But instead of the carbon-ceramic brakes used by the Black Series, the Track Series is fitted with the 15.4-inch front and 14.0-inch rear steel rotor setup used on the GT3 and GT4 race cars, complete with a balance bar to adjust front/rear brake bias.

The AMG GT Black Series rolls on 19-inch front and 20-inch rear lightweight forged aluminum wheels shod with Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2 R tires. The GT Track Series, however, has 18-inch forged wheels all round, like the race cars, which means it can use a wide range of racing rubber. Other technologies lifted from the Mercedes-AMG racers include the dry-break fuel filler and fuel cell, and race-spec traction control and anti-lock brake systems, each of which is independently adjustable across 12 settings, with "1" offering the most intervention and "off," well, the least.

Here's where things get interesting. At 3,086 pounds, the 2023 Mercedes-AMG GT Track Series weighs just 253 pounds more than the homologated base weight of the actual GT3 race car. But—and it's a big but—FIA regulations restrict the GT3's 6.2-liter naturally aspirated V-8 to about 542 hp and 480 lb-ft in baseline tune. With a third more power and 30 percent more torque than Mercedes-AMG's front-line sports racer, the GT Track Series brings a bazooka to your track-day gunfight.

I've driven both the Mercedes-AMG GT3 and GT4 race cars, so the cockpit of the GT Track Series lurking in the pit garage at the legendary Circuit Paul Ricard at Le Castellet in the south of France feels instantly familiar. The butterfly steering wheel, designed exclusively for the GT Track Series by sim-racing expert Cube Controls, is peppered with 13 buttons, the most important of which (for me) is the one that shifts the transmission to neutral, as well as the pit-lane speed limiter. Behind it is a dash with a fully programmable Bosch DDU 11 digital screen that offers two different display modes and will show lap times recorded by the integrated data-logging system.

The car's center console hosts, among other things, the ignition switch, a push-button to select reverse, a fire extinguisher switch, and even an exterior-mirror adjustment button. Also present are the knobs that control the traction control and ABS settings.

Like the GT3 and GT4 race cars, the AMG GT Track Series is designed to accommodate drivers of all shapes and sizes. After all, Mercedes-AMG Motorsport understands many of the well-heeled gentlemen drivers who buy its track cars don't have the snake hips and trim physiques of pro racers. Conveniently, a small lever next to the center console allows the spring-loaded pedal box to move back and forth, and the steering wheel is adjustable for height and reach.

Mercedes-AMG team pro driver Jules Gounon gives me the pre-drive briefing. A GT3 race winner at the impressive Spa-Francorchamps circuit in Belgium and at Australia's mesmerizing Bathurst track, Gounon is here at Paul Ricard for a specific purpose. He's finalizing the chassis and suspension tunes before the first of the 55 GT Track Series cars being built in the Mercedes-AMG Motorsport shop in Affalterbach, Germany, are made available to customers. Why 55 cars? To celebrate the founding of AMG by Hans Werner Aufrecht and Erhard Melcher in 1967, 55 years ago.

Gounon explains my car is set up with the suspension on the soft side, and with mild understeer. "Journalist Mode," in other words. There's no such restraint under the hood, however: The engine map is set at position 3 for maximum power. Though he's running with traction-control and ABS settings in the 8 to 10 range, Gounon advises me to keep both at 6, midway points he says will allow the car to move around a bit under power and won't set the brake pedal juddering at every corner but will still provide a solid safety net.

That's good by me.

We'll be using the French Grand Prix Formula 1 track, minus the chicane halfway along the 1.1-mile Mistral Straight. Gounon's car hits its 200-mph maximum speed before whizzing past the entry to the chicane. My car is geared slightly lower, with a top speed of 186, but that still means a long, fast, max-revs run down to Signes, the sweeping right hander that is one of the most epic corners in F1 racing.

F1 drivers take Signes flat in top (eighth) gear, a 210-mph slingshot ride. In the AMG GT Track Series, it's a fifth-gear corner. The trick to Signes, Gounon says, is to work up to staying off the brakes until the first marker board. Brake hard, then come off the pedal smoothly and get on the throttle early, feathering it to keep the car balanced as you sweep down to Beaussett, a tricky, double-apex right hander. Sounds easy … in theory.

The flat-plane crank V-8 fires up with an angry growl. Dip the clutch, flick the right paddle. There's a hiss-clunk as the Hewland's pneumatic actuators ram first gear into place. Revs, then slip the clutch, more revs. The Track Series clanks and bangs and whines and whirrs down pit lane, a caged beast waiting to be unleashed. Gounon leads me around for a couple of laps before heading into the pits for fresh tires and restarting his test program.

As in the GT Black Series, the engine stampedes to 7,000 rpm with a menacing metallic edge to the wall of sound filling the cockpit. The gearbox bangs off clutchless upshifts with such rapidity, there's scarcely a pause in the searing acceleration. The steel brakes feel utterly unquenchable, hauling the Mercedes down with calm authority. No matter how hard I hit the pedal, I can modulate the pressure easily and keep away from the ABS threshold. Fanning the left paddle produces rapid-fire downshifts like a short burst from a machine gun.

It's clear after only a couple laps that the 2023 Mercedes-AMG GT Track Series absolutely nails its mission of being a thrill ride for good drivers who want a professionally developed track car but who don't want to spend the time and money on a racing program. It's seriously fast and quick—more than enough to have you fully engaged behind the wheel—but also benign enough not to scare you silly as you approach either your limit or the car's.

In its relatively soft setup, the GT Track Series telegraphs its punches with such clarity that even a non-race driver without experience on slick tires can easily sense what's going on where the rubber meets the road, at both ends. Trail braking into the tighter corners keeps the front end loaded so the slicks can bite and get you into the apex. And I can feel the weight transfer to the rear axle as I go to power, the back end hunkering down as the car punches out of the corner.

Signes? Yeah, it's intimidating at first, but I did what Gounon told me and trusted the car to do the rest. It worked, and I had more trouble trying to get through the double-apex right immediately afterward. It wasn't the fast fourth-gear first apex that was the problem; it was trying to get the car turned for the tighter second. Gounon told me afterward he downshifts to third between the two to get the front end to bite harder and uses the power to get the car to rotate.

Compared with the stiffly suspended GT3 race car, which generates more than twice the aerodynamic grip at 125 mph, the AMG GT Track Series rolls more and is much more pitch sensitive. The car's attitude under braking and during cornering and acceleration, and how it affects the load on each tire, determines its balance and grip levels. Understanding this is key to unlocking a good lap time.

It's also what makes the Track Series a hugely involving driver's car. The same dynamic dance occurs in the Mercedes-AMG GT3, but the transitions are all so much quicker, so much more intense, that unless you've spent a lot of time behind the wheel of one it's difficult to detect when you're at the edge of the envelope. Other than in fast corners the Track Series is as quick as the GT3, but the easily deciphered dialog between tire and tarmac makes its limits much more approachable. You can feel what's going on and adjust your inputs accordingly.

The 2023 Mercedes-AMG GT Track Series isn't cheap. It's a staggering 43 percent more expensive than a GT4 race car, and just 7.5 percent cheaper than a GT3. But customers are buying a car backed by the same service and technical support given to owners of the race cars, including detailed technical training, race-engineer support, and spare parts supply. And put plainly, the Mercedes-AMG GT Track Series is a seriously fast, seriously capable machine. How capable? Just before the end of our afternoon at Circuit Paul Ricard, Gounon strapped on a fresh set of tires and ran a lap quicker than his best time in the GT3 race car.

That's track-day bragging rights, right there, with more than a little extra sprinkled on top.

-Motor Trend





Europa Conference League final: Tammy Abraham - the toast of Rome



■ Gary Rose

While sitting on the bench waiting to come on for Chelsea against an all-but-relegated Fulham, Tammy Abraham could have hardly envisaged how different things would be for him a year later.

The striker is coming towards the end of a stunning first season at Roma, where he is their top scorer with 17 goals - the most scored by an Englishman in a Serie A season - and is idolised by their fans.

On Wednesday Abraham will have the chance to cement legendary status at the Italian side as they make their bid for a first European trophy for 50 years when they play Feyenoord in the Europa Conference League final.

It could be said that the move to Rome has been the making of Abraham, or it could be that the once out-of-favour Chelsea striker is simply being given the platform to display the quality he already possessed.

Trust in Tammy as faith pays off

Abraham's exceptional form has not come out of nowhere.

In the 2019-20 season, when Frank Lampard was in charge of Chelsea, Abraham flourished with 18 goals in all competitions.

But the arrival of Thomas Tuchel in January last year saw his first-team opportunities decline. Abraham made only seven appearances under the German in the remainder of last season, with Tuchel later admitting he did not have "trust" in him.

The signing of Romelu Lukaku in August made it clear that Abraham was down the pecking order and, four days later, he joined Roma.

It was a big-money move for the Italians as they paid £34m, with manager Jose Mourinho convincing the club's hierarchy that Abraham would be worth the outlay.

"It was all about someone believing in me," said Abraham, who could add to his 10 England caps in June after being named in the squad to face Hungary, Germany and Italy in the Nations League.

"The past manager - Frank Lampard - gave me that chance. He showed real faith in me and that's when I was producing. It's the same now.

"When you have belief from the manager it makes you want to do the best you can. It's just confidence."

Fans fall in love with 'Tammy Tre Punti'

Having a manager's belief is one thing, but being able to settle in another country is another.

While there are many instances of English players heading overseas and flourishing, there are also cautionary tales of those who have struggled to adapt to a new culture and language.

For Abraham, now 24, from the moment he stepped off the plane to be greeted by swathes of fans he felt wanted - and that helped him to settle quickly.

"Since day one, as soon as I touched down in Rome, it made me feel like one of their own straight away," he said.

"I told myself, 'I'll give my blood, sweat, tears for this club,' and it's been an amazing year."

Abraham threw himself into his new surroundings. When not on the pitch he can be seen around Rome with his girlfriend, visiting the tourist attractions and exploring the city.

"Just learn about Rome," he said when asked what he likes to do after training. Once, after being spotted by a group of fans at a restaurant following a Roma defeat he bought them all dinner.

The sight of Abraham passionately singing the Roma anthem before kick-off last September strengthened the bond between player and fans, who now chant Tammy Tre Punti - Tammy Three Points - whenever he scores.

"He has really got into the life out here. He isn't just staying in his hotel room," Rome-based Football Italia journalist Andrew Cesare told BBC Sport.

"He once told a funny story of when he was caught drinking cappuccino after dinner, but it is a morning drink here. He is really getting to know the culture.

"I am not sure how much Italian he has learnt yet, but there was a recent video where he teased Chris Smalling for having not learned any of the language, suggesting he does understand the importance of it.

"Roma fans are so proud of where they come from and they want people to at least acknowledge that, which Tammy has done."

History awaits - but then what?

It has already been a record-breaking season for Abraham.

He broke Gabriel Batistuta and Vincenzo Montella's record of 21 goals in their debut Roma season and currently has 27 in all competitions.

Abraham's goals have been key to Roma reaching the Europa Conference League final, with nine in only 12 games.

His tally makes him the highest-scoring Englishman in Europe's top five leagues - alongside Tottenham's Harry Kane - and that form will not go unnoticed.

"I don't think it's an easy decision for a young, local player to leave his club, to leave his house, his city, his country, to leave the Premier League - which of course is a competition that, when a player is in it, it's hard to leave," said Mourinho.

"He made that option and I think he made it by trusting in me. If he wants to go back to England - I don't think he wants to now - he just needs to click his fingers."

It is clear Abraham loves Roma and Roma loves him and that love will only grow stronger if he scores the winning goal in Tirana on Wednesday.

"He would have the freedom of Rome," said Cesare.

"Francesco Totti previously spoke about when Roma won the league in 2001, celebrations lasted for the whole summer.

"A European trophy would be up there. There would be another summer of celebration."

-BBC



Emma Raducanu loses but Cameron Norrie wins at Roland Garros



■ **Jonathan Jurejko**

British number one Emma Raducanu was unable to capitalise on a one-set lead as her French Open debut ended with a defeat in the second round.

Raducanu, 19, lost 3-6 6-1 6-1 to Aliaksandra Sasnovich of Belarus.

Later on Wednesday, Cameron Norrie became the first British singles player to reach this year's third round.

Norrie, seeded 10th, earned a 6-3 6-4 6-3 win over Australia's Jason Kubler to reach the last 32 on the Paris clay for the second successive year.

Norrie will face Karen Khachanov, the 21st seed, for a fourth-round spot.

British number two Dan Evans is aiming to join Norrie when he plays on Thursday.

Raducanu's exit means there are no British women left in the singles draw, with Heather Watson and Harriet Dart losing in the first round.

Raducanu improving but still developing

Raducanu, seeded 12th, was unable to take any of five break points in the third game of the deciding set - and it proved pivotal.

Sasnovich held serve after a 13-minute game, broke in the next and that enabled her to coast to victory.

The US Open champion has lost in the second round in her two Grand Slams since the win in New York last year.

Raducanu played 47th-ranked Sasnovich in her first match as a Grand Slam champion, losing in straight sets at Indian Wells last October, but said she was a "different player now".

Seven months on, Raducanu is still trying to find her feet in a debut full season on the WTA Tour which has provided significant challenges.

That learning curve has been particularly different to most teenagers beginning their careers because of the added attention that comes with being a major champion.

The main hurdle has been coping with the rigours of playing full-time against the world's best players, with a constant stream of niggling injuries hampering her progress.

A back injury was an issue going into the French Open and she seemed to be far from her physical peak as she faded badly against Sasnovich.

But Raducanu is likely to look back on her debut clay-court season with a decent amount of pride, having won six of her 11 matches on the surface.

"I think overall it was a really tough match from both sides, we played some good tennis and in the bigger points she was better today," Raducanu told BBC Sport.

"I definitely think it has been a positive clay-court season and looking back I've learned a lot of things."

Raducanu unable to capitalise on lead

After coming under pressure at the start of the first set, Raducanu figured out 28-year-old Sasnovich, stuck to her gameplan and was able to bring out more errors from her opponent.

While the scoreline perhaps flattered Raducanu, it seemed likely she would use the platform to maintain her confidence and potentially improve further.

The teenager has proved to be a good front-runner, most notably in her US Open run, and had lost just two of the 20 matches where she had won the first set from Flushing Meadows onwards.

But something was different during the second set on Court Suzanne Lenglen.

The emotion she showed during the opening set disappeared and her body language quickly changed as Sasnovich began to find the time to again start executing crisp winners.

A number of cross-court forehands proved particularly devastating at the start of the second set, with the Belarusian also showing a delicate touch to break for a 3-0 lead that she never looked like relinquishing.

Raducanu nipped off court before the decider, perhaps aiming to seek inspiration from a moment of solitude.

However, she made an error with a forehand return at 30-30 in the opening game and her frustrations - hands covering her face as she bowed her head and turned away from the court - were clear.

Despite that blow, she regrouped and had five chances to take the lead by breaking Sasnovich's serve in a tense third game.

None of them could be taken as the Belarusian rallied to hold the lengthy game and from that point, Raducanu never looked like winning as her physical levels dropped.

Norrie continues winning streak in France

Norrie, 26, continued his fine form with a victory that was straightforward until he was forced to dig a little deeper in the third set against qualifier Kubler.

The left-hander won the opening set thanks to a single break of serve, then took the final three games of the second set after earlier exchanging breaks with the world number 160.

Kubler, making his Roland Garros main-draw debut, showed spirit to move into a 3-0 lead but Norrie fought back brilliantly to win six games in a row and seal victory.

The British men's number one has never reached the last 16 of a major and a deep run is his key goal as he looks to further build on a superb couple of seasons on the ATP Tour.

Norrie reached the third round at last year's Australian Open, French Open and Wimbledon, but saw his hopes of further progress blocked by two of the game's greats.

Spain's Rafael Nadal outclassed Norrie with straight-set wins in both Melbourne and Paris, with Switzerland's Roger Federer having too much nous for the Briton on Centre Court.

But now, after breaking the top 10 earlier this year, he will be hoping his greater experience will enable him to beat Khachanov and break more new ground.

-BBC

