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Government Issues 'No Pay' Warning For Civil Servants Thinking of Striking



■ **Justicia Shipena & Hertha Ekandjo**

Labour minister Utoni Nujoma has warned that government is under no obligation to pay any public servant planning to strike.

More than 100,000 government employees are gearing up to down tools after the government and the bargaining unions reached a deadlock for a 10 per cent pay raise across the board.

On Tuesday, the government again reaffirmed its position of insufficient funds for raising salaries. "We recognise that the employees in terms of the law have the right to exercise their right to go on strike, however, under those circumstances, the employer is under no obligation to remunerate any of the employees that partake in the industrial action," said Nujoma during a press brief on civil servants' salary and benefits negotiations between the government and recognised trade unions on Tuesday in Windhoek.

The labour minister said that throughout the negotiations, the government has been

transparent with the trade unions regarding the country's financial position. Nujoma empathised that engaging in a strike will only weaken the country's economic base, disrupt public service delivery and distort all recovery efforts.

According to Nujoma, the trade unions declined their offer of salary increase three times.

"After a discussion, the parties reached an internal deadlock in the first instance. After the internal deadlock, the government offered the trade union an offer to increase benefits of 4.5 per cent for housing and 10 per cent for transport for below-management staff. This amounted to N\$225 million as a cost to the government. The trade unions rejected this offer," he said. The workers also demand a 25 per cent increase to qualifying amounts on housing subsidies, a 9 per cent increase on housing allowances, a 10 per cent increase in transport for civil servants below management, and a N\$7 per kilometre tariff increase.

Previously the unions revised their initial proposals for a basic salary; however, the government still did not consider it. It has

“ The workers also demand a 25 per cent increase to qualifying amounts on housing subsidies. ”

indicated that it was willing to make an offer on housing allowance, where management and staff members below the management cadre would get a 4.5 per cent increase.

He exclaimed that reports that the government offered a zero increment were false.

In November 2021, finance minister lipumbu Shiimi said unions should refrain from demanding salary increases when the economy is at its worst. At that time, Napwu and Nantu demanded that the government give public servants increments.

Shiimi expressed that the public finances are at the worst since Namibia's independence due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The pandemic saw more than 14 500 workers retrenched and 3,567 dying.

Shiimi, then in April 2022, emphasised that salary increases for civil servants would have dire consequences on Namibia's ability to repay debt.

In the same month, President Hage Geingob informed the civil servants that there was no money during his state of the nation address (SONA).

Continued on P2

City Council Not A Failure, Mayor Says



■ **Staff Writer**

Windhoek Mayor Sade Gawanas was adamant that the City's coalition council has not failed but chose to lay the blame at the feet of certain individuals she would not name.

Gawanas said this in a press conference on Tuesday; a follow-up to Monday's press conference that was chaired by the management committee chairperson Ndeshihafela Larandja. The latter, Gawanas labelled as being done to score political points and agendas.

Her comments appear to betray the cracks in an LPM marriage with the IPC that began less than a mere eight months ago after the IPC fell out of favour with AR in ruling the City.

"The City of Windhoek may look good from the outside, but it has been rotting, decaying slowly but surely. Yes, the truth hurts, but we are here now! And the question needs to be answered: what are we going to do about it? Council has not failed - some individuals have failed us. Our assignment is very clear: go out there and affect change so that the most vulnerable in society can benefit and restore their dignity," said Gawanas.

Much like the IPC-led press conference on Monday, a number of councillors were noticeably absent from the Mayor's presser, bar her LPM and MC member Ivan Skrywer and councillor Jürgen Hecht. Gawanas acknowledged this, stating that she has always supported her predecessor, Job Amupanda.

"Whenever there was an event that he (Amupanda) had spearheaded, I myself, Sade Gawanas, had always committed to

support. I have always been there, I have always supported, and I think that would also show the commitment from certain councillors.

She further said she only became Mayor because AR, PDM and Swapo opted not to nominate a second candidate, which made her understand the "challenges" ahead of her. "If any councillor feels they do not want to support any initiative of myself or council at this stage, I cannot force them to do so.

I cannot force them to come to a meeting that the chairperson of council is hosting. I cannot force them to contribute in meetings."

Amupanda, on his part, said he was swamped with work at the Unam, where he is a lecturer. "Classes have started at the University yesterday!"

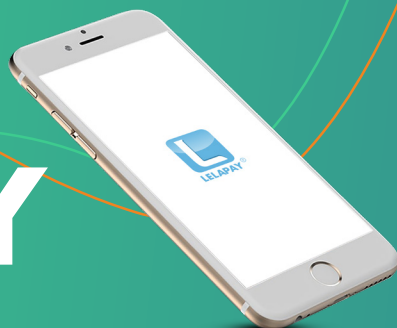
This comes on the heels of Nudo secretary general and former City of Windhoek Coalition Caucus Chairperson Josef Kauandenge admitting that the opposition has failed to tame the City.

"We have, as a collective, failed miserably to govern a City like Windhoek. Our own self-inflicted egos, selfishness and self-righteous attitudes have cost us an opportunity to lead and to lead with wisdom and empathy for our people.

Sadly my words have come to manifest themselves in the theatrics playing their ugly face at the City of Windhoek currently, where although Nudo has a Deputy Mayor position there, we have tried to intervene behind the scenes and to call our fellow councillors in the coalition to reason and have clarity of purpose of why we are in this coalition," he said.

Continued on P2

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Government

STRIKING TEACHERS COULD CAUSE LEARNER FAILURE

Education minister Anna Nghipondoka stated that in the event of teachers striking, the first concern is that learners had experienced immense learning loss over the past two years, thus needing time to recover through face-to-face learning opportunities. According to her, some learners were still performing below the expected curriculum standards and competencies.

"The school system is already experienced a rapid increase in learner population over the past decade, attributed to multiple factors. This led to overcrowding classes and created a higher demand for more than 4 000 additional classes," she said.

Nghipondoka stressed that individual learning support is challenging, and teachers' striking will worsen the situation.

She added that learners are already coming from an extended school holiday, and unnecessary additional days will impact their progress and mental development when they return.

Schools in Namibia opened on 18 July after a long winter holiday. Upon the reopening, education executive director Sanet Steenkamp had stamped that there was no time to waste in the second semester and that it would see 197 days of teaching and learning.

"Our learners cannot lose teaching anymore and learning time. Learning loss within all phases, particularly for grades taking national examinations, will be catastrophic

and might take a long time to recover," said Nghipondoka.

The education ministry had projected that the national examinations for grade 11 and 12 learners would kick start in September. Last year, the external examinations experienced disruption due to a leakage of exam papers. In 2016, a nationwide strike interpreted the Grade 12 final examinations.

WE ARE READY

Meanwhile, Trade Union Congress of Namibia (TUCNA), secretary general Kavihuha Mahongora says the government's position will not shake their resolve to strike. According to Mahongora, what the government is saying is not new to their eyes, and the effect it is referring to is negative to the public employees as employees haven't gotten a pay raise in the last ten years.

"That is not new news to us! Our position is that we are going on strike; the only difference is that they are saying it affects the economy. The effect they are referring to is negative to us," he said.

He believes the strike would benefit the civil servants, adding that it would effect more productive employees.

"We have a positive effect because more workers will have more money to spend in our shops, the money would circulate more in the economy, the public servants will be happy and be more productive. So the strike will be more beneficial."

Mahongora argued that the government was playing with fire in maintaining its stance on

the increment and said the public servants were ready to strike.

"We are not moved by this! Every person in public servants are ready to strike, and I saw that even in the sports shops, the tekkies are finished because all of them are buying tekkies to run nicely," he narrated.

The strike would be put to the vote on Thursday and Friday, where the employees would vote on whether to begin a countrywide strike and Mahongora is convinced that it would bear fruits in favour of a strike.

"There are specific polling stations which we have communicated to the civil servants to vote. Their voting would be yes or no for a strike. We are optimistic that we will have no block, maybe only the families to the ministers that might vote no."

Meanwhile, financial experts and economic analysts have warned civil servants that forcing the government to institute salary increases could backfire in the future.

NAPWU head of education, strategic planning and support services, Gideon Thomas, said that civil servants should not be blamed for any adverse economic effects caused by the strike.

"The only option created by law is to withdraw labour, and they are using that. Are you going to blame them for the economy? That is not the correct approach," he said.

Thomas added that if that is the case, history will record that the last bunch of politicians have lost it in this country.

"And they are responsible for whatever consequences will come out of a strike, not employees."

City Council

According to the politician, personal ambitions, lack of leadership skills, and over-exaggerated egos have taken over.

"Our poor Windhoek residents are suffering while we continue to try and outsmart one another, sad very sad indeed.

We collectively, as opposition parties, have failed our City, and we should be ashamed!

CEO FIGHT CONTINUES

Meanwhile, Gawanas was also of the view that the management committee does not have the power to restart the process of appointing a substantive CEO for the City.

On Monday, Larandja stated that the the process of appointing the CEO, which saw Roads Authority boss Conrad Lutombi recommended for the position, was tempered with and cannot achieve an outcome that is

beyond reproach.

However, Gawanas argued that as the matter stands currently stands, the management committee is allegedly usurping powers which, as a sub-committee, it does not have in law. "Therefore, it could be overstepping its powers. Considering how far the recruitment process went, Management Committee cannot terminate the process without the approval of council and cannot and will not enforce and bully council. The matter is before council, and until such time that council pronounces itself, the Management Committee will not force the process to restart, and council will ensure due diligence. All matters in front of council will be dealt with in terms of principles of legality, rationality, reasonableness, and justifiability," she said.



All Female Candidates For Kunene SPYL Info Secretary ail Vetting Process

Uakutura Kambaekua

The position of secretary for information, publicity and mobilisation for the Swapo Party Youth League (SPYL) for Kunene region remains vacant after all the nominated female candidates failed the vetting process.

The position was previously held by Kunene governor Marius Sheya, who is now a member of the central committee.

SPYL's seventh regional conference took place in Opuwo at the teachers' resource centre over the weekend. It was overseen by the youth league national secretary for information, publicity and mobilisation, Gerson Lineekela. Ndjoroka Tjiroka also retained his position as treasurer.

SPYL secretary for Kunene region, Tuaekoveni Mocks Kenaumue, told The Villager the position will be contested during the party's regional extraordinary conference for a date yet to be announced.

"In Swapo party, we have adopted the policy of a zebra style that says, 'when a regional secretary is a male, the secretary for information should be a female and the treasurer can be whatever gender'. As a Swapo, we are serious with that one. So that is why comrade Marius did not retain the position as regional information. The rest of the female candidates who were nominated by their districts to stand for the regional secretary of information position did not make it through the vetting process for whatever reasons. That's why it's vacant pending the regional extraordinary regional conference," said Kenaumue.

Additional members include Kaijazemisua Muzuma, Gogille Gabriel, Maria Lucas and Victoria Haindongo. The candidates for SPYL Central Committee are Michael Olivia, Norman Nanuseb and Kaijazemisua Muzuma, while Victorino Simon, Ndjoroka Tjiroka, Gogille Gabriel, Maria Lucas, Victoria Haindanga, Norman Nanuseb, Emma Ganuses were elected as delegates to the August SPYL congress.

The youth league has also elected Sam Naub and Sasha Musaso as pioneers delegates to the congress, while Venesa Shinuna, Wilka Mazenge, Johannes Lazarus and Kaijazemisua Muzuma were tasked as delegates to the party's regional conference.

Meanwhile, Kenaumue has vowed to restore four constituencies the ruling party lost to the United Democratic Front (UDF) and



the Popular Democratic Movement (PDM) during the 2020 regional and local authority elections in Kunene.

Kunene used to be one of the ruling party's strongholds (2015-2019), however, that changed in 2020 when UDF reclaimed three of its former constituencies, being Kamanjab, Khorixas and Sesfontein, while PDM also regained Opuwo Urban.

With Swapo now left with only the Outjo constituency in the region, Kenaumue said that the regional focus is now diverted to 2025, adding that they [SPYL] have a plan set up and are en route to securing enough resources and manpower to implement their strategy to retain the region.

Kenaumue also called on young people from the party to step up. "As young people in the Swapo party, we are the transmitting belt of the party's policies and progress. We are the feet of the party, so whatever we do as a party youth league, we might have a positive or negative impact. A great challenge is set upon us, and as regional leaders, we are tasked to deliver," added Kenaumue.

The regional secretary further stated that young people are not just leaders of tomorrow but of today as well.

Furthermore, Kenaumue maintained that their focus is now on the SPYL national conference, which is set for 17-21 August in Windhoek, adding that the central committee has resolved to retain Ephraim Nekongo and Christine Haindaka-Sikongo, as secretary and deputy secretary, respectively.

"We are also going to deliberate on issues faced by young people and find recommendations and resolutions that are beneficial to young people. Most of the time, come congress and conferences, we just spend our time on elections, but the most important things are resolutions and recommendations that are discussed there. So we have to discuss these issues," concluded Kenaumue.

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Make ICT In Lower Grades Compulsory - Swapo's Hofni Lipinge



Hilma Tuukondjele

Swapo party youth league (SPYL)'s secretary for education, Hofni Lipinge, has proposed making Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) studies a compulsory subject in lower grades curriculum.

Lipinge told The Villager that according to his research, there is a lack of ICT studies in lower grades and some secondary schools across the country disadvantage learners. He said this robs learners of much-needed skills and survival tools in the 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR) world, adding that it is narrowing their employability chances.

"There is a need for the early exposure of our learner community to the 4IR. I concur that this notion should be highly adhered to and implemented without further delay," said Lipinge.

He called upon the vigorous inclusion of ICT studies in the school curriculum and the subsequent provision of a laptop for every child's desk.

"At the secondary school level, I discovered that most of our unsuccessful learners in Grades 10 or 11 end up in the streets without any practical experiences. Most of these learners have to resort to scavenging for jobs in restaurants, hotels, bars and supermarkets, which are all of late operated and administered on automated machines and technological implements for which they lack basic operational knowledge at the time of leaving school," he explained.

Additionally, he said the status quo had incarcerated many people in the claws and chains of unemployment due to a lack of computer literacy.

He emphasised that ICT would boost the learners' cognitive development and open many doors for the future, adding that the country needs to educate its people for safety and security.

"It is time for Namibia to campaign for economic empowerment practically but not just rhetorically vigorously."

Lipinge suggested that the country should cut more on imports and start producing its own goods to feed the people and for employment purposes.

When asked about how realistic buying laptops is while kids are being taught under the trees and need classrooms in certain parts of the country, he said that it requires planning before implementation and that statistically, the country needs over 4,000 classrooms across the country, including computer labs.

This comes as the Communications Regulatory Authority of Namibia (Cran) recently revealed that only 500 schools out of 1,800 have access to basic technological infrastructure, while there are no plans to allocate funds for this purpose anytime soon. In 2020, following the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic, the deputy director of information technology in the education, arts and culture ministry, Johan van Wyk revealed that government needed N\$500 million to fully

implement its e-learning needs to cater for learners whose normal learning schedule has been disrupted by

Meanwhile, National Institute for Educational Development (NIED) director Patrick Simalumba says that in the wake of Covid-19, ICT is now available in a subject called information communication, where learners are taught the basics. This, he said, is implemented in grades four to seven while stating that computer studies is also available in the school curricula on a compulsory basis.

Simalumba added that the tools needed such as laptops, computers, and tablets are unavailable due to financial difficulties.

"We are developing a policy and we are mobilising resources to make sure that we see how we can start with certain schools especially those connected to computers, the internet and those having labs and start offering resources," he said.

According to him, the ministry will host a conference next week on digital transformation and blended learning issues.

"When it comes to computers, it has to do with connectivity, data, gadgets such as computers, they need specific funds for replacement of tools, there is a need for ICT people to ensure and indicate that it is the state of affairs," he added.

Simalumba concluded that it's about innovative sources, and there are some platforms where e-learning materials are developing already.

Fransfontein Station Commander Ordered To Pay N\$100K After Crashing Police Car



Eba Kandovazu

The Windhoek High court has ordered that the Fransfontein police Station Commander, Mickey Mbale pays an amount of N\$ 149,625.47 after overturning a police vehicle while driving it without authorisation in November 2016.

The vehicle, which was subsequently written off, resulted in a lawsuit by the government, citing negligence. The government, represented by Freddy Kadhila, indicated that a written trip authority is necessary even for a vehicle allocated for official duties when driven to another town. He argued that the government suffered damages as a result of the accident.

Mbale is said to have been driving the vehicle on the Khorixas/Outjo main road to visit one of his staff members who was admitted to the Okonguarri psychotherapeutic centre.

Mbale, in his defence, denies that he drove the vehicle without authorisation and pleads that although he had no written authority to drive to the Okonguarri psychotherapeutic centre near Outjo, he acted within the course and scope of his employment or the execution of his duties. Therefore, he pleads, authorisation was implied. He also denied negligence.

According to him, he attempted to contact Kunene regional commander, commissioner James Nderura but could not get hold of him and decided to make the trip anyway. He did not testify that it was an emergency.

Nderura was also called to testify on behalf of the government. He testified that a police vehicle can only be driven out of town where it is stationed if a supervisor gave the driver a written trip authority. He said the same also applies to a police vehicle assigned to a particular police station for police work.

Nderura also testified that Mbale, who was a Warrant officer at the time, did not have the written trip authorisation for his trip to the Okonguarri psychotherapeutic centre, which was out of town.

Mbale testified further that as far as he was concerned, he drove the vehicle with authority since he was the station commander and the vehicle was allocated to him for his official duties.

Judge George Coleman presided. Mbale was represented by PD Theron and Associates.

"Mbale is said to have been driving the vehicle on the Khorixas/Outjo main road to visit one of his staff members who was admitted to the Okonguarri psychotherapeutic centre."

Tourists Trickle Back to Namibia

Hilma Tuukondjele

Environment and tourism minister Pohamba Shifeta says there was a 40.9 per cent increase in foreign arrivals, from 192,026 arrivals in 2020 to 270,644 arrivals in 2021. He further said tourist arrivals had a substantial growth of 37.3 per cent. According to him, this growth is commendable considering the negative impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the tourism sector globally in 2020 and 2021. Shifeta, however, said that the number of tourist arrivals is not yet at the level it was before the Covid-19 pandemic in 2019. An increase such as this gives them an improved hope that the sector is on its way to recovery. According to the tourist statistical report for 2021, tourists' intended length of stay was 24 days on average. It is compared to 19 days average length of stay for 2020. African tourist source markets were dominated by arrivals from South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Botswana in 2021, whilst Germany, France, Switzerland, the USA and the United Kingdom made up the top five overseas tourist markets. "A high number of tourist arrivals was recorded in the last quarter of the year, between October to December, accounting for 41.8 per cent of the total tourist arrivals, and there was an increase in the number of the average length of stay in Namibia to 24 days as compared to 19 days in 2020," explained Shifeta. Namibia has been reliant on inbound tourism (international travellers) over the years, but in recent years, experience has

taught that equal focus and priority should as well be given to domestic tourism to minimise undesirable influences from crises such as those brought about by global pandemics, he said. The report further revealed that South Africa remains the key African market to Namibia, bringing in about 47 per cent of total tourist arrivals in 2021. Angola, which usually forms part of the top African countries contributing to tourist arrivals to Namibia, did not cut it this year because of the closure of Angola's borders aimed at combating the Covid-19 pandemic. Germany from the overseas market maintained their position as the significant overseas tourist market, contributing 9.4 per cent to the total tourist arrivals. "The overseas tourist arrivals in 2021 observed a 17.9 per cent increase from 2020. This group made up 30.1 per cent of total tourist arrivals," said Shifeta. The report states that the African and European markets gained a noticeable growth from the previous year, revealing a 45.2 per cent and 29.7 per cent change compared to 2020, respectively. North America brought in 0.2 per cent fewer tourist arrivals than last year. In 2021, the African market brought in about 69.9 per cent of tourist arrivals to Namibia, most of which came from the SADC countries. Europe, on the other hand, brought in 25.3 per cent of the total arrivals. Tourists who came for holiday purposes comprised 42.2 per cent of total arrivals. Those who came for business followed in the second position with 28.5 per cent, while those who visited friends/relatives and other purposes comprised 24.0 per cent and 2.0 per cent, respectively.



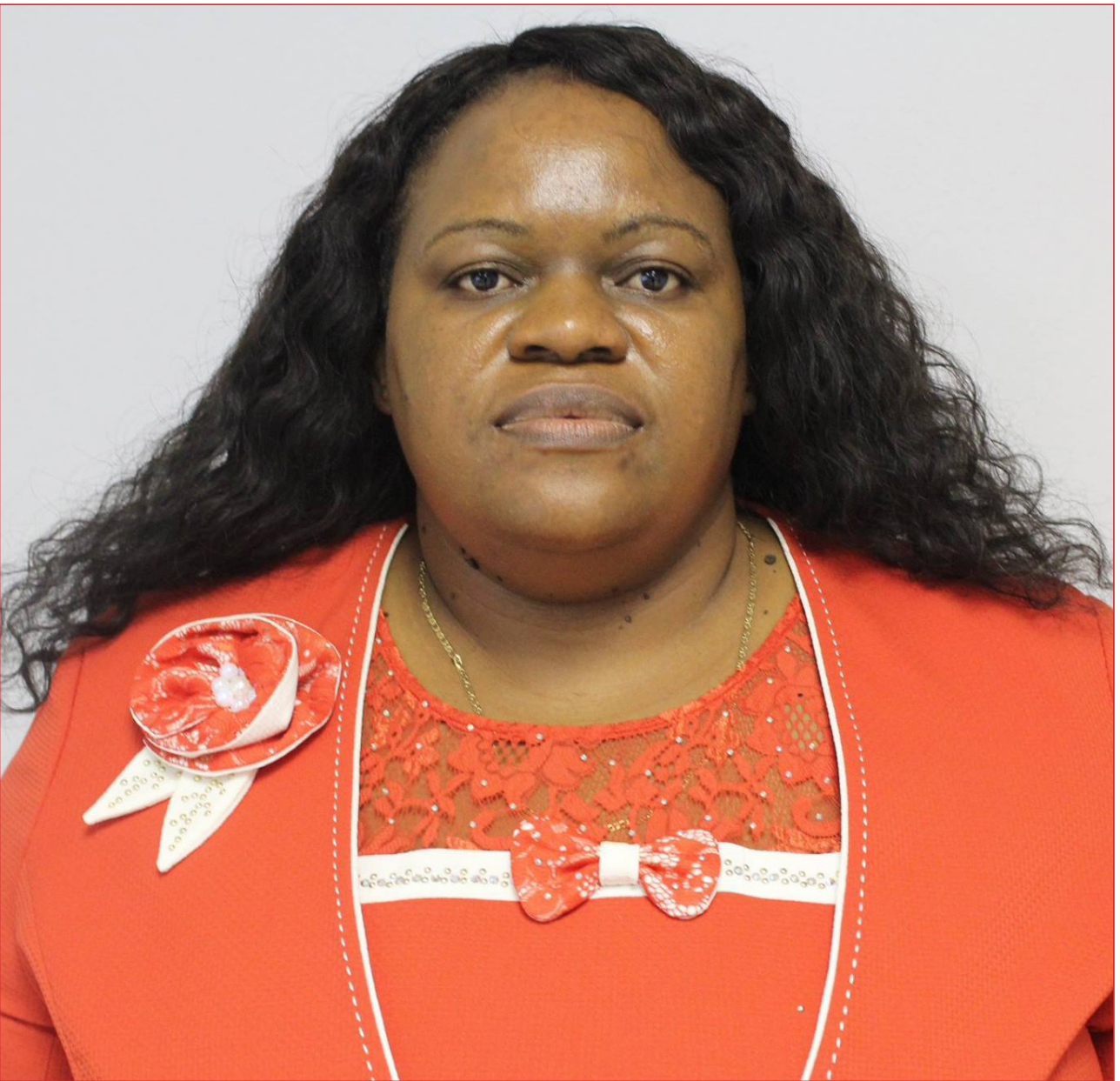
NSI N\$36 million Coastal Center to Expand Inspection

Nghiinomenwa-vali Erastus

The Namibia Standard Institution has expanded its services to the economy through its newly expanded office on the coast. According to the Minister of Industrialisation and Trade, Lucia Lipumb, the inspection centre has expanded its operations and ability to offer services to the fishing and related industries because of the large size and suitability of the inspection laboratory. The new facility provides adequate space to conduct laboratory frozen and chilled fish inspections. This means the inspectorate can process a much more diverse product range and increase the quantity of products, thus allowing the NSI to move beyond frozen fish inspection as its central focus. Import inspection for especially canned fish and meat, fishery, and related products can now be realised, contributing to food security for the Namibia consumer. Lipumbu also added that it is the ministry's wish and hope that more products will be accommodated soon. She also updated that under the European Union Funded Twinning Initiative, technical support in areas of Standardisation, Certification, Trade, and Industry will be rendered to NSI. Upon completion, the project will capacitate the Inspection Centre with technologically compatible equipment to advance its operations, which will increase Namibia's trade capacity and prospects, according to Lipumbu. In addition, the minister has also updated that the new facility houses a satellite metrology laboratory. The satellite metrology laboratory will be operationalised once the necessary equipment has been sourced through the European Union Funded Twinning Initiative. She said once the laboratory is equipped,

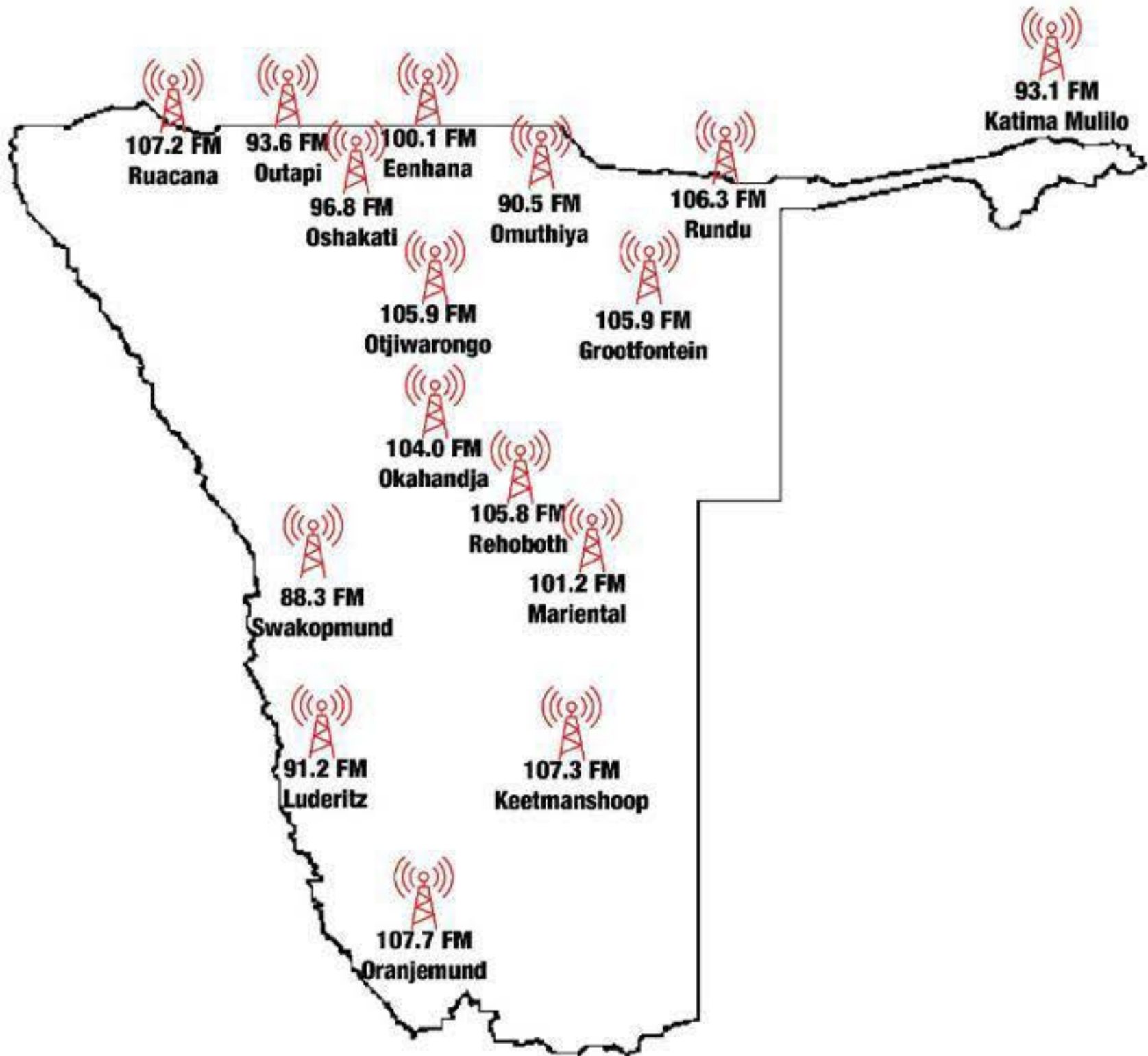
businesses in the Erongo Region that require measurement services will be serviced for volume and mass metrology services by the centre. Lipumbu has also indicated that the centre's construction involved Namibians from start to finish as Namibians conceived and designed and built it by local companies. The new inspection centre is expected to improve the NSI's inspection and metrology capacity to a level that the business community will appreciate. Email: erastus@thevillager.com.na

“ Upon completion, the project will capacitate the Inspection Centre with technologically compatible equipment to advance its operations, which will increase Namibia's trade capacity and prospects, according to lipumbu. ”





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Marvel faces its next big challenge as it tries to go through a Phase



■ **Brian Lowry**

The idea of a Marvel Cinematic Universe has from the beginning given its movies an operatic flavor, where the interlocking template was bigger than any one title or character. Yet the studio's formal unveiling of new "phases" of its grand plans at Comic-Con underscored how the challenge of connecting multiple movies into one sprawling organism might have become, to borrow from another Disney franchise, a trap.

Marvel assiduously built toward "Avengers: Infinity War" and "Endgame," delivering a massive two-part, five-hour-plus, every-hero-imaginable conclusion to the Thanos saga in 2019. The result was a staggering commercial success, bidding farewell to a pair of signature characters who helped launch this run of movies in the process.

What could the studio possibly do for an encore? Phase 4, the latest chapter in Marvel's cinematic march, was intended to address that, serving as what amounted to a multi-movie palate cleanser while resetting the table by introducing new characters and capitalizing on existing ones.

Three significant events, however, followed "Endgame," two beyond anyone's control, and the other above Marvel's specific pay grade: A global pandemic that threw the entire movie industry for a loop; the tragic death of "Black Panther" star Chadwick Boseman; and the late-2019 launch of Disney+, a streaming service that, as a major priority for Marvel parent Disney, became another very hungry mouth to feed.

As dazzling as the "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever" footage unveiled at Comic-Con looked, losing Boseman created a no-good-answers dilemma for the sequel, clouding the future of a franchise that after the first movie appeared poised to be a major linchpin of Marvel's plans.

The pandemic, meanwhile, played havoc with studio schedules, adding degrees of difficulty to the releases of "Black Widow," "Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings" and "Eternals," and making it difficult to evaluate their box-office performances or what impact that might have had.

Finally, buoyed by its enviable movie track record, Marvel not only aggressively supplied Disney+ with original shows but chose to treat them as further extensions

of its universe, adding to the logistical hurdles associated with that.

The tide of series for Disney+ has, best-case scenario, provided a way to tease certain characters -- like the next "Captain America" movie, or introducing the villainous Kang (Jonathan Majors) in "Loki" -- and in the worst case, further stretched the Marvel brand at the risk of diluting it.

Whatever the impact of those second and third factors, Phase 4 has been a mixed bag creatively speaking, highlighted by the tepid responses to "Eternals," introducing less-heralded characters (although like Shang-Chi, they've been around in the comics since the 1970s); and "Thor: Love and Thunder," the latest sequel featuring one of the original Avengers.

The movies outlined for Phase 5 and the glimpse provided of Phase 6 indicate that Marvel is eager to restore the epic scope associated with the story that culminated in "Endgame."

The fact that Marvel dominated trending topics and overshadowed other high-profile commodities at Comic-Con reflects its enduring strength. Even a more mortal Marvel is still playing an extremely strong

and enviable hand.

Nevertheless, there's something to be said for focusing on individual titles, without fretting about their place in the larger MCU. Just getting the Fantastic Four right -- finally -- seems like a formidable objective, beyond dwelling on the sequels and cameos that they can do in the films that follow.

It's worth noting, too, that the comic books Marvel has used as its foundation regularly churn out world-threatening threats. Movies take a few years to make, meaning each individual film already faces the daunting task of hatching a plot capable of bearing that weight.

Marvel's success has owed a great deal to the fact that its movies are seen as events by fans, and the connectedness of its universe has undoubtedly contributed mightily to that dynamic.

As is so often true in Hollywood, though, a blessing can turn into a burden. For now, the studio would be best served by delivering some really satisfying movies and letting the rest of the equation follow. Accomplish that, and by 2025 we might look back and say that Marvel was just going through a phase.

-CNN

The movies outlined for Phase 5 and the glimpse provided of Phase 6 indicate that Marvel is eager to restore the epic scope associated with the story that culminated in "Endgame."



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Long, long ago, when all the animals could talk, there lived in the province of Inaba in Japan, a little hare. His home was on the island of Oki, and just across the sea was the mainland of Inaba.

Now the hare wanted very much to cross over to Inaba. Day after day he would go out and sit on the shore and look longingly over the water in the direction of Inaba, and day after day he hoped to find some way of getting across.

One day as usual, the hare was standing on the beach, looking towards the mainland across the water, when he saw a great crocodile swimming near the island.

"This is very lucky!" thought the hare. "Now I shall be able to get my wish. I will ask the crocodile to carry me across the sea!"

But he was doubtful whether the crocodile would consent to do what wanted. So he thought instead of asking a favor he would try to get what he wanted by a trick.

So, with a loud voice he called to the crocodile, and said: "Oh, Mr. Crocodile, isn't it a lovely day?"

The crocodile, who had come out all by itself that day to enjoy the bright sunshine, was just beginning to feel a bit lonely when the hare's cheerful greeting broke the silence. The crocodile swam nearer the shore, very pleased to hear some one speak.

"I wonder who it was that spoke to me just now! Was it you, Mr. Hare? You must be very lonely all by yourself!"

"Oh, no, I am not at all lonely," said the hare, "but as it was such a fine day I came out here to enjoy myself. Won't you stop and play with me a little while?"

The crocodile came out of the sea and sat on the shore, and the two played together for some time. Then the hare said:

"Mr. Crocodile, you live in the sea and I live on this island, and we do not often meet, so I know very little about you. Tell me, do you think the number of your company is greater than mine?"

"Of course, there are more crocodiles than hares," answered the crocodile. "Can you not see that for yourself? You live on this small island, while I live in the sea, which spreads through all parts of the world, so if I call together all the crocodiles who dwell in the sea you hares will be as nothing compared to us!" The crocodile was very conceited.

The hare, who meant to play a trick on the crocodile, said: "Do you think it possible for you to call up enough crocodiles to form a line from this island across the sea to Inaba?"

The crocodile thought for a moment and then answered:

"Of course, it is possible."

"Then do try," said the artful hare, "and I will count the number from here!"

The crocodile, who was very simple-minded, and who hadn't the least idea that the hare intended to play a trick on him, agreed to do what the hare asked, and said:

"Wait a little while I go back into the sea and call my company together!"

The crocodile plunged into the sea and was gone for some time. The hare, meanwhile, waited patiently on the shore. At last, the crocodile appeared, bringing with him a large number of other crocodiles.

"Look, Mr. Hare!" said the crocodile, "it is nothing for my friends to form a line between here and Inaba. There are enough crocodiles to stretch from here even as far as China or India. Did you ever see so many crocodiles?"

Then the whole company of crocodiles arranged themselves in the water so as to form a bridge between the Island of Oki and the mainland of Inaba. When the hare saw the bridge of crocodiles, he said:

"How splendid! I did not believe this was possible. Now let me count you all! To do this, however, with your permission, I must walk over on your backs to the other side, so please be so good as not to move, or else I shall fall into the sea and be drowned!"

So, the hare hopped off the island on to the strange bridge of crocodiles, counting as he jumped from one crocodile's back to the other:

"Please keep quite still, or I shall not be able to count. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine—"

Thus the cunning hare walked right across to the mainland of Inaba. Not content with getting his wish, he began to jeer at the crocodiles instead of thanking them, and said, as he leapt off the last one's back:

"Oh! You stupid crocodiles, now I have done with you!"

*Yei Theodora Ozaki

Can we Stop with Meetings, Writing Reports, Traveling and Implement?



■ Kandjengo kaMkwanyoka

For this year alone, the country has produced various reports documenting what needs to be done to fix our economy, assist our entrepreneurs and get the best out of our public investment.

The World Bank did a beautiful Country Private Sector Diagnostic (CPSD), the ministry of trade released their private sector development survey, Namibia Economic Complex Report, final report on Business Rescue in Namibia and MSME report by NIPDB has also been released.

All these reports detail what entrepreneurs and investors are facing and suggest doable practical solutions.

So why are we continuing to call conferences, meetings, hiring new consultants and running around seeking the same information to get the same information we have on those reports? How many more reports and committees do we need to sanction before implementing what our reports have suggested? We are so fixated on writing reports, but we are so hesitant to tear out pages on those reports and implement some of the suggested solutions.

My thoughts are that we do not have the guts (political and economic). Secondly, we are working in silos and no alignments in our efforts to address the issues. Thirdly, many of those in charge do not understand the magnitude of the issues on the ground and their impact on economic progress.

If one does not understand the value of his/her effort to a project, then how will they act right and do what is necessary. Secondly, the impact of their effort on entrepreneurial ventures and economic growth is just not a percentage change in goods and services produced alone but the uncounted efforts that enabled such activities to be produced effectively and competitively.

If those trusted with enabling tasks aren't doing their work effectively, then forget growth.

I have the same views when it comes to travelling the world seeking investors when we cannot serve the ones we have now effectively nor fix the business environment. My suggestions are for us to take a step back, zoom in on every report and assessment we have done and allocate tasks among government agencies and all responsible agencies in collaboration with the private sector.

Then we implement it in a parallel format/approach because solving one thing won't improve the ease of doing business

at all. Most of the action items need to be implemented together to have the necessary impact.

The implementation of certain tasks under the HPPII uses the same approach, and the Delivery Unit is tracking them. I suggest we do this for all the issues the above reports highlighted, no more new conferences or assessments on issues that are well documented but rather we start implementing some of the solutions suggested. One observation I have made is that the solutions suggested in those reports do not really require a new monetary injection for their implementations. Secondly, some soft/physical infrastructures and channels exist already that can facilitate the implementation of actionable items.

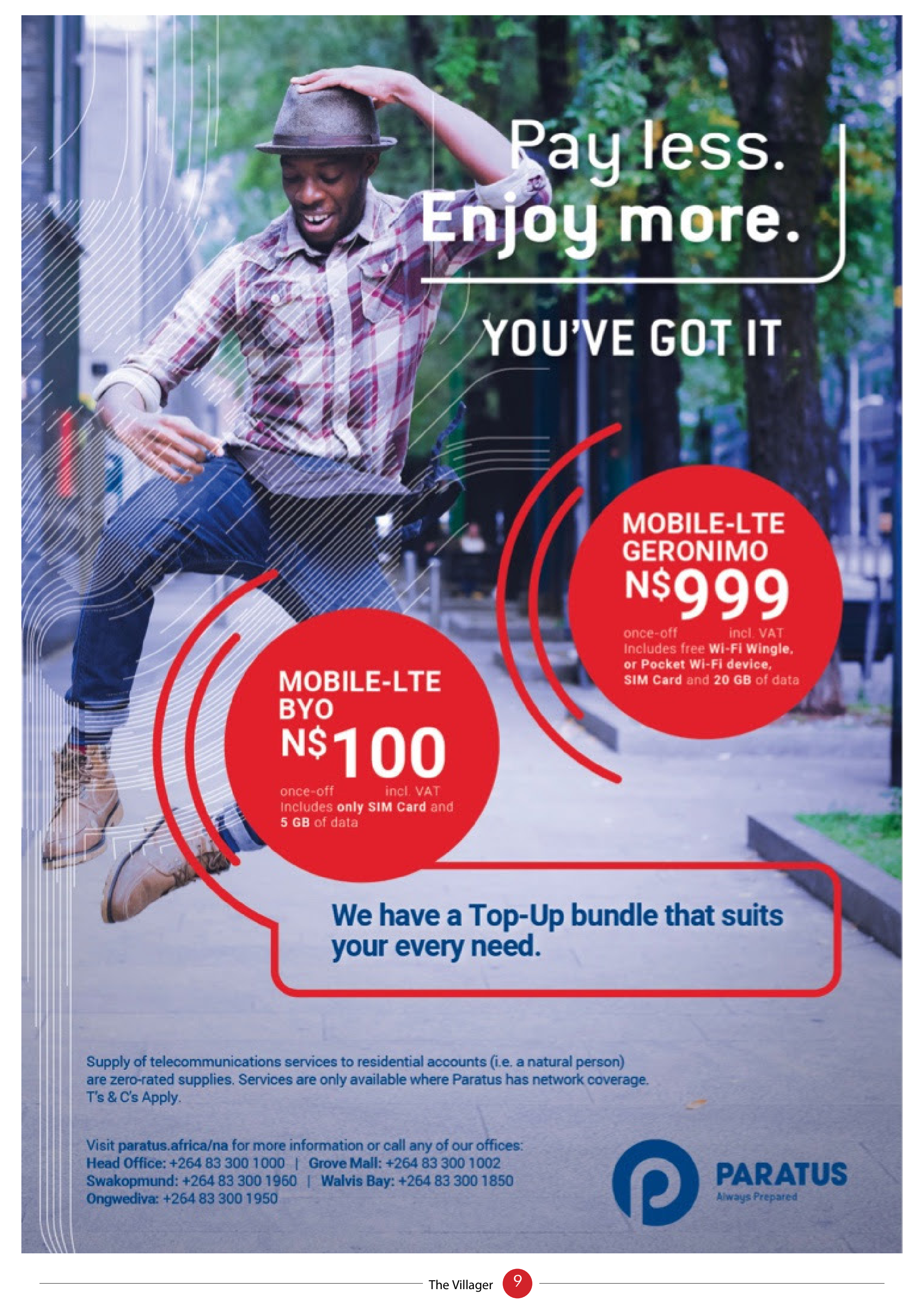
All it requires is some strong will and a sense of urgency, collaboration between public implementing agencies and the private sector. More importantly, better coordination and alignment so that the output can be huge and impactful to all entrepreneurs, small or big. So, can we please stop writing new reports, consulting, travelling the world and calling for conferences on the same issues. Let us implement what we came up with so far by organising all the bodies required and allocating tasks, and seeing the result.

Seeking new investments while we have not solved the pertaining issues on the ground won't improve our economic issues.

A conducive environment is the real elephant that we have to address to improve the prospect of business survival in the country. In other words, economic restructuring will require real work, not just seminars and lectures.

Let us just stop for these two years and implement the suggested solutions. It might result in some positive changes and slowly enable diversification of the country's economic activities. You cannot restructure if the environment does not allow nor enables entrepreneurs and investors to do their work effectively and efficiently.

No more long speeches, presentations, and consultations but implementing committees, project management committees, and strategies to get things done. We have all the information and high-level insights to guide our economic moves. Our actions going forward will result in creating an incubating and supportive environment for our vendors, micro-entrepreneurs, SMEs, and big enterprises. Lastly, the conservative capital that we have will not hesitate to take risks on local projects and ideas. Email: gerastus16@gmail.com



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Highly potent weed creating marijuana addicts worldwide, study says



■ Sandee Lamotte

Higher concentrations of tetrahydrocannabinol or THC -- the part of the marijuana plant that makes you high -- are causing more people to become addicted in many parts of the world, a new review of studies found.

Compared with people who use lower-potency products (typically 5 to 10 milligrams per gram of THC), those who use higher-potency cannabis are more likely to experience addiction and mental health outcomes, according to the study published Monday in the journal *Lancet Psychiatry*.

Scientists have established a "standard THC unit" of 5 milligrams of THC for research. That amount is said to produce a mild intoxication for nonregular users.

"One of the highest quality studies included in our publication found that use of high potency cannabis, compared to low potency cannabis, was linked to a four-fold increased risk of addiction," said study coauthor Tom Freeman, a senior lecturer in the department of psychology and director of the addiction and mental health group at the University of Bath in the United Kingdom, in an email.

In the United States, about 3 in 10 people who use marijuana have cannabis use disorder, the medical term for marijuana addiction, according to the US Centers for Disease and Prevention.

The European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction found a 76% rise in people entering treatment for cannabis addiction over the past decade, "while cannabis potency continued to rise during the same time," Freeman said.

In addition, "a report by the United Nations found that in the past two decades, the proportion of people seeking treatment for cannabis addiction has risen in all world regions apart from Africa," he said.

A yearly rise in potency In a gram of herbal cannabis, the dried and harvested tops of female marijuana plants that are typically smoked, THC concentrations increased by approximately 2.9 milligrams each year, according to a 2020 study by Freeman and his team at the University of Bath.

In cannabis resin, the sticky brown sap on the plant from which extracts and concentrates are made, THC levels increased by approximately 5.7 milligrams each year from 1975 to 2017, the study found. Concentrated products can reach extremely high levels of THC.

This yearly rise in potency may not be clear to consumers, experts fear. While looking at a product label might tell a person the "precise potency" of THC in a store where marijuana is legally sold, "people buying cannabis illegally may not be able to access reliable information about the potency of the product they are using," Freeman said.

"However, certain types of cannabis are typically more potent than others -- cannabis extracts are typically more potent than cannabis flower," he added.

While people do try to adjust their consumption when the potency of their cannabis varies, "such as by adding less cannabis to their joint or inhaling less deeply," these efforts fail to completely work, Freeman said. That means "higher potency products still deliver a larger dose of THC to consumers than lower potency products," he said.

Mental health affected

As marijuana became more potent, cases of marijuana-associated psychosis rose, the review found. Psychosis is a "loss of contact with reality" that can be characterized by hearing voices and having delusions, Freeman said.

"The evidence linking cannabis potency to addiction and psychosis was very clear," he said.

High-potency weed users appear to have a significant increase in the likelihood of developing generalized anxiety disorder than those who smoke less robust strains of marijuana, a 2020 study had found.

However, the new review of studies found a "more varied" connection between the increase in marijuana potency and depression and anxiety, "meaning that the impact is unclear for these other mental health outcomes," Freeman said.

-CNN



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Bangladesh seeks \$4.5bn IMF loan as forex reserves shrink: Report

Bangladesh has sought a \$4.5bn loan from the International Monetary Fund, the country's leading newspaper reports, joining South Asian neighbours Pakistan and Sri Lanka in seeking help to cope with mounting pressure on their economies.

Known for its big garment-exporting industry, Bangladesh has sought the funds for its balance of payment and budgetary needs, as well as for efforts to deal with climate change, the Daily Star reported on Tuesday, citing documents it had seen.

It said Finance Minister A H M Mustafa Kamal wrote to IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva on Sunday.

Officials at the finance ministry and the office of the IMF in Bangladesh did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The Bangladesh Bank recently announced a policy to preserve dollars by discouraging imports of luxury goods, fruits, non-cereal foods, and canned and processed foods.

The bank's foreign exchange reserves fell to \$39.67bn as of July 20 – sufficient for imports for more than five months – from \$45.5 bn a year earlier.

Bangladesh's July to May current account deficit was \$17.2bn, compared with a deficit of \$2.78bn in the year-earlier period, according to central bank data.

In the first 11 months of the fiscal year that ended on June 30, imports jumped 39 percent but exports grew only 34 percent. Remittances from overseas Bangladeshis fell 5 percent in June to \$1.84bn, the

central bank said, as many migrant workers lost their jobs because of the COVID-19 pandemic and many of them could not get home because of the travel disruption it caused.

Economists say the Bangladeshi taka has effectively slid against the US dollar by approximately 20 percent in the past three months. The depreciation of the local currency has further weakened the nation's finances, with the current account deficit hitting \$17bn.

Authorities were grappling with a "crisis" because of rising international fuel prices after the Russian attack on Ukraine, said junior planning minister Shamsul Alam. "Our balance of payments is in the negative zone. We need to stabilise our exchange rate," he said.

'Austerity measures'

Alam said the government had rolled out "austerity measures" in addition to electricity rationing, including import curbs and cuts to development spending. Diesel power plants across the country, accounting for 1,500 megawatts of generation capacity, have been taken off the grid, while some gas-fired plants are also idle.

The country has experienced lengthy blackouts in recent weeks, sometimes for up to 13 hours a day, as utilities struggle to source enough diesel and gas to meet demand.

Tens of thousands of mosques around the country have been asked to curtail their



use of air conditioners to ease pressure on the electricity grid, with power shortfalls compounded by the depreciating currency and dwindling foreign exchange reserves. Bangladesh's precarious financial position has also been worsened by unprecedented floods in the northeast, inundating the homes of millions of people and causing nearly \$10bn in damage, according to government estimates.

The opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party has blamed the government for the economic crisis, accusing it of squandering cash on multibillion-dollar vanity projects. Elsewhere in South Asia, Sri Lanka, facing its worst economic meltdown in seven decades, is currently in negotiations for an IMF bailout.

The island nation ran out of foreign currency to import even its most vital

essentials, triggering long queues at petrol stations, food shortages and lengthy power cuts.

Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves are depleting rapidly. Earlier this month, it reached an agreement with the IMF that would pave the way for the release of an additional \$1.2bn in loans and unlock more funding.

-Al Jazeera



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As inflation in Argentina skyrockets, everyone is poorer



■ **Natalie Alcoba**

After Ivana Roa lost her job a few years ago as a manager at an energy company, she went back to school to study law and economics with the aim of building a new career and income. But those hopes are dwindling fast as a deepening economic crisis is breaking thirty-year inflation records and pummeling the value of the Argentine peso.

Roa, 29, tutors math to cover her bills but has barely enough left over to buy herself a calculator for class. Earlier this month, she joined thousands of people who marched to Buenos Aires's central square to protest their depleting incomes.

"I can assure you that every one of these people here are not only living through a very rough time, but they just don't have enough," said Roa.

"The situation for young people is basically to leave," she said. "Imagine how sad that is — that in a country with good public education, and a free health care system, you have to consider leaving because you feel you don't have a future." With inflation running at 64 percent in the past twelve months and consulting firms forecasting it could hit 90 percent by the end of the year, the prognosis is grim in the third most populous country in South America.

It is difficult to know what something is worth in Argentina now, with prices in grocery stores changing every week. Vendors of construction materials warn buyers that they may not be able to honour a quote for more than a few days, as some manufacturers were forced to halt production altogether. Import restrictions intended to protect the government's dwindling foreign currency reserves are stoking fears of future shortages. And people are watching in horror as the street value of the US dollar goes up in relation to their fragile currency, regardless of whether they can afford to save in the greenback, because it has become a shorthand for the health of the economy. Argentina staved off default on a \$44bn loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) earlier this year, but the legitimacy of the new deal — and the spending cutbacks it entails — continues to be questioned by swaths of society that cannot make ends meet. An earlier default on a payment in 2020 means that it has limited access to international credit. The resignation of Martin Guzman, the economy minister who had shepherded that deal, signalled a new low in the fractious unity of the ruling Peronist coalition.

"We are in a very critical time," said Silvia Saravia, a leader with Barrios de Pie/Libres del Sur, one of the main social

organisations that run soup kitchens in the low-income neighbourhoods in and around the capital city.

"We don't know how high prices are going to go," Saravia told Al Jazeera. "And because the earnings are so unstable, with more than 50 percent of people in the informal economy, someone who has an odd job, if it rains, they can't work, and so they don't make any money. This generates a lot of anguish and drains you." "Fiscal balance"

At a press conference earlier this month, the newly minted economy minister Silvina Batakis sought to transmit calm and pledged that Argentina will meet the obligations of the IMF deal.

"I am someone who believes in fiscal balance and the solvency of the state as an engine of economic activity," she said. "We are not going to spend more than we have."

She announced a series of measures intended to stabilise the economic picture, including a move towards hiking interest rates — a standard policy tool to rein in inflation — a state hiring freeze and stricter control of prices set by the major companies.

"Everything that happened last week was an abuse in prices, they are just speculations, there is no technical explanation," she stressed, referring to a sudden jump in

prices. In some cases, the abrupt increase had reached 20 percent overnight to match the 17 percent depreciation of the parallel peso in less than one week following Guzman's resignation.

Damian Di Pace, an Argentinian economist at the helm of consulting firm Focus Marketing, does not see a way for the government to put the brakes on inflation in the short term. Argentina is a country used to inflation in the double digits, but the pandemic dealt it another blow along with the war in Ukraine. And while countries around the world had to print currency during the global shutdown, in Argentina the pace has continued, he said. "The big challenge for the economy minister is to ensure that Argentina does not reach triple-digit inflation by the end of the year," he told Al Jazeera. "Argentina needs to avoid a further spiral."

"It has to lower the fiscal deficit, emit much less currency, and partially increase the interest rates to incentivise savings in pesos," he said. "The Argentine doesn't want to hold on to their own currency. In any moment of crisis, they try to shed pesos. They use it to buy food, or they buy US dollars."

"Under the line of poverty"

Karina, 43, sees that tendency first hand from the streets of Buenos Aires's Microcentro, where people like herself

work on behalf of underground exchange houses, trying to entice prospective buyers or sellers of foreign currency. Argentina has several exchange rates. The parallel exchange rate — known locally as the dollar blue — on Monday was selling at about 322 pesos per US dollar, more than double the official exchange rate controlled by the government. And while it represents a small fraction of the exchange market, its value is the one most people look to. On July 21, the government added a new exchange rate specifically for tourists and intended to convince them to exchange their currency with banks so that their dollars flow into the formal market, not the parallel one.

"People are going crazy trying to buy dollars. On the one hand I get it, because it's a way to safeguard your savings, but I also know that it's not good for the economy," Karina, who declined to give her last name, told Al Jazeera. "If the [price of the] dollar goes up, so does everything else. It's more expensive to buy food, clothes, electronics."

Roberto Bereche said he tracks the rise and fall of the dollar exchange rate as a "hobby" — he cannot possibly afford to buy the currency now. The 74-year-old Peruvian sells avocados, oranges and bananas on a main avenue of the Buenos Aires neighbourhood of Chacarita.

Of his nearly 20 years living in Argentina, "this one is the hardest," said Bereche, who sees the effect of inflation reflected in his sales. He used to sell two 20kg (44lb) boxes of avocados a day. Now it is half that. Bereche says if it were not for a small 7,000 peso (\$54 at the official rate or \$21 at Monday's parallel rate) subsidy from the government, he would not be able to afford the room he rents at 8,000 pesos (\$62 at the official rate or \$24 at Monday's parallel rate) a month. With a monthly currency conversion cap set at \$200, which is accompanied by a slew of taxes, most people turn to the black market to convert their pesos.

Saravia, with Barrios de Pie, says organisations such as hers are seeing an increase in the number of people relying on soup kitchens, in particular among pensioners. She believes there is more the government can do to punish big companies that speculate with price hikes. However, the message transmitted by the economy minister did not allay her concerns. She said the spending cuts attached to the IMF deal will hurt the lowest income sectors of society the most.

"More than half of the children in this country are under the line of poverty. The situation is very critical," said Saravia. "We don't think declaring default would have led to a situation that is much worse than the one we're living in now."

-Al Jazeera





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Zimbabwe launches gold coins to stem inflation

Zimbabwe has launched gold coins to be sold to the public, in a bid to curb an inflation spike that has eroded the country's unstable currency.

The move was announced on Monday by the country's central bank, the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe, which disbursed 2,000 coins to commercial banks.

Called Mosi-oa-Tunya, which in the local Tonga language refers to Victoria Falls, the coins "will have liquid asset status", meaning they "will be capable of being easily converted to cash and will be tradable locally and internationally", the central bank said in its announcement, adding the coins "may also be used for transactional purposes".

Holders will only be able to trade them for cash after 180 days from the date of buying.

Individuals or companies will be able to buy them from authorised outlets such as banks and keep them at a bank or take them home, according to the announcement. Foreigners can only buy the coins in foreign currency.

The first batch was minted outside the country but eventually they will be produced locally, said John Mangudya, the governor of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe.

He added the 22-carat coins can be used for purchases in shops, depending on whether the shop has enough change, as well as security for loans and credit facilities.

Their price will be determined by the international market rate for an ounce of gold, plus five percent for the cost of producing the coin. At the time of the launch on Monday, the cost of one Mosi oa Tunya was \$1,824.

Trust in Zimbabwe's currency is low after people saw their savings wiped out by hyperinflation in 2008. In June, inflation jumped to 191.6 percent, from 132 percent in May.

Authorities are struggling to pull Zimbabwe from the grips of an economic crisis characterised by a rapidly devaluing local currency, 90 percent unemployment and declining manufacturing output.

Harare-based independent economist Victor Bhoroma told Al Jazeera that "gold coins are a good idea in terms of storing value ... but they will likely be indexed in US dollar which means it's a fundraising scheme to get US dollars from the market by the central bank. The success will thus depend on confidence in the central bank as the seller of the coins and guarantees that back them."

Internationally, gold coins are used in countries such as China, South Africa and Australia to hedge against inflation and as an investment opportunity, although they are not as widely used as currency as envisaged by Zimbabwe's central bank.

Harare has substantial gold deposits and exports of the precious metal are one of the southern African country's major foreign currency earners.

However, gold smuggling has been rampant. Smuggling is costing the country about 33 tonnes of gold annually, according to a report issued last month by the Centre for Natural Resource Governance.

All gold mined in Zimbabwe is supposed to be sold to the central bank, but many producers prefer to smuggle it out of the country in order to get payment in US dollars.

-Al Jazeera



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Civilians in crossfire as shifting alliances spark Libya violence



■ **Malik Traina**

Fathi Bashagha, one of Libya's two rival prime ministers, is from Misrata – as is his rival, Abdul Hamid Dbeibah, whose internationally recognised government sits in Tripoli.

But Bashagha has largely stayed away since being appointed by the country's eastern-based parliament, because Misrata has long been seen as a stronghold of support for the Dbeibah government and opposition to General Khalifa Haftar, the eastern-based militia leader who has backed the parliament.

But many there are now wary of Dbeibah after he struck a recent deal with Haftar to replace the head of the National Oil Corporation, Mustafa Sanallah.

Farhat Bengdara, who is seen as closely allied with Haftar, was appointed head of the NOC by Dbeibah earlier this month, and forces and tribes loyal to Haftar announced an end to the months-long oil exports blockade the following day.

The closure had cost the Libyan government more than \$3bn in lost revenue.

Misrata, known as Libya's economic

hub, is Libya's third-largest city, houses the country's largest port and is seen as a major source of power in western Libya.

Bashagha's return

Mabrook Ismail, a young businessman who fought against Haftar's forces when the latter attempted to take Tripoli in 2019, is one of those who are now more open to Bashagha.

"Bashagha has always been transparent," Ismail told Al Jazeera by phone from Misrata. "His recent alliance with Haftar was on top of the table. I didn't like that and considered him a traitor. But Dbeibah is now making deals with Haftar behind closed doors. I'd rather have the devil I can see."

That feeling is echoed by many in Misrata and has given Bashagha an opening he previously did not have.

Last Wednesday, he returned to his home on the outskirts of Misrata, and violence followed him.

On Saturday, clashes on the city's outskirts erupted between the joint operation force funded by Dbeibah and another group supporting Bashagha. At least one person was killed in the fighting before city officials and tribal leaders negotiated a deal to calm the situation.

"Misratans are known as the defenders of democracy and have foiled many attempts to turn Libya back to military rule," said Emad Beleid, a Libyan journalist based in Tripoli.

"The issue is greater than the story of the Dbeibah government and the Bashagha government, this is a military and political project to weaken the city and to create a social rift that pits the people of Misrata against each other."

Men from Misrata were critical to the success of the Libyan revolution that toppled longtime leader Muammar Gaddafi in 2011.

They were also the major force that liberated the city of Sirte from ISIL (ISIS) control and greatly contributed to the defence of Tripoli during Haftar's failed military campaign.

US Ambassador and Special Envoy to Libya Richard Norland said the "clashes in Misrata demonstrate the dangerous prospect that the recent violence will escalate".

He added that the "heightened tensions demonstrate the urgent necessity for Libya's political leaders to immediately embrace an agreed path to elections which

can install a truly legitimate, unified government to serve the interests of all Libyans."

Tripoli fighting

The clashes in Misrata came a day after fighting broke out between two armed groups in Tripoli.

The violence between the Special Deterrent Forces and the Presidential Guard broke out when the rival groups traded blame for kidnappings. Both are part of the Libyan government's fragile security services, and the sporadic fighting that lasted for two days took place in several heavily populated areas across the capital, damaging many homes.

Health officials say that at least 16 people were killed and more than 34 injured. Children were among the victims.

"We protest the presence of military bases inside our neighbourhoods," a statement issued by the protest organisers said. "Last night we didn't sleep. Not us, our children, or our elderly. Our homes were hit and our cars destroyed in the clashes."

Dbeibah has suspended interior minister Khalid Almazan from his duties until an investigation is completed.

His temporary replacement, Badr Aldin

Tumi, told Al Jazeera he will work to ensure the fighting does not happen again.

"Tripoli has never witnessed this level of fighting in times of peace," Tumi said while touring neighbourhoods damaged by the fighting. "We've established a committee to assess the damages incurred by private citizens so they can be reimbursed. We've launched an investigation into this incident, and have developed a security plan so that events like this won't be repeated."

But people are angry.

Mohamed was standing in front of his home during Tumi's visit but refused to speak to the minister, he said the visit was too little, too late.

"The government doesn't care about us," Mohammed said. "The ministers are coming now? What do we want with them now – after the fighting stopped? After our homes were destroyed. We don't need them now."

Elections postponed indefinitely

Libya has seen relative peace since a nationwide ceasefire was signed in October 2020.

A political settlement in March 2021 saw Dbeibah take power. He was tasked with leading the country until elections, which were expected in December 2021 but have been postponed indefinitely.

In March this year, the eastern-based parliament voted in a parallel government headed by Bashagha, but Dbeibah refused to step down until there was an elected government to hand over power to. He still enjoys international recognition.

Negotiations between the rival administrations have been stuck in a political deadlock. A meeting in Geneva in June between the speaker of the parliament Aguila Saleh and President of the High Council of State Khalid al-Mishri failed to reach any final consensus on a constitutional framework to hold elections. Bashagha, the former minister of interior, has the support of various armed groups across the country. But many people in western Libya are cautious of his alliance with Haftar.

Clashes ensued when Bashagha attempted to enter Tripoli in May, and he was forced to flee the capital and decided to base his government in the city of Sirte saying he "refused to use force to enter Tripoli".

But now sources close to Bashagha say he is determined to enter Tripoli in the coming days or weeks. That has raised concerns among Libyans and the international community that the country could fall back into a full-scale conflict.

-Al Jazeera



The tech helping to bring you your morning coffee



■ Luana Ferreira

For an estimated one billion people around the world drinking coffee is a daily regime. Yet what many coffee lovers might not know is that they are often drinking a brew made, at least in part, from Brazilian beans.

"Brazilian beans have popular characteristics, and are known for their body and sweetness," says Christiano Borges, boss of the country's largest grower, Ipanema Coffees.

"Therefore, many coffee blends in the world use our coffee as a base."

Brazil is far and away the world's largest grower of coffee beans. It accounts for more than one third of all global supplies, or 37% in 2020, to be exact. In second place is Vietnam with 17% of supplies.

Some 70% of Brazil's coffee plants are the highly-priced arabica species, used in fresh coffee. The remaining 30% are robusta, which is used primarily for instant coffee. The problem for Brazil, and world coffee supplies in general, is that last year the country's annual crop plummeted by almost a quarter due to a drought across its

main coffee growing region, which centres on the south-eastern states of Minas Gerais, São Paulo and Paraná.

The knock-on affect has been a global reduction in coffee beans supplies, and a subsequent doubling in wholesale prices since this time last year.

To try to alleviate any future falls in production, Brazil's largest coffee producers are increasingly turning towards technology to help them successfully grow and process the best possible crop, both in terms of size and quality.

One such firm, Okuyama, says it is now investing at least 10% of its revenues in technology. Based in Minas Gerais, it has coffee plantations covering 1,100 hectares (2,718 acres).

Its staff use a computer app called Cropwise Protector, which is made by Swiss-Chinese agricultural tech firm, Syngenta. Linked to ground sensors and satellite imagery, the tool gives the farm workers a visual analysis of the farm, or plantation, on a tablet device or laptop.

They can then quickly apply such things as drip-irrigation, or pest-control, to a very specific area that might need it, rather than a whole field or the entire farm.

The idea is that this far more targeted approach is far faster, and kinder on the environment.

"Every year there is a new challenge, and these technologies help us to overcome those barriers," says Bruno Hiroiti, coffee beans manager at Okuyama.

"We have also invested in technologies for the coffee drying process, where we can monitor the temperature, which is defined by the type of coffee we are drying."

Okuyama dries some of its coffee beans in drum heaters after harvesting, to prevent them from spoiling while they are stored ahead of being roasted. Getting the temperature and timing correct is essential to avoid wastage, both in terms of the beans and the energy used to power the heaters.

At Ipanema Coffees, which has 4,300 hectares of plantations across three sites in Minas Gerais, Mr Borges says it has also very much gone down the tech route in recent years.

"We have made a huge investment on semi-automated irrigation, where the system measures the water deficit and weather conditions - giving us recommendations

for each area."

He adds that the investments are helping the firm to reduce the impact of climate change. "We have climate problems such as droughts, and global temperature increases.

"The irrigation system has helped us to improve our productivity... and it has become a climate insurance for us."

Ipanema says it also has trackers on all its tractors to measure productivity, and is another user of Cropwise Protector. "It helps us monitor agricultural pests, by only using a tablet," says Gustavo Michalski, the firm's agricultural coordinator.

"It allows us to manage the problem and make more assertive decisions, and more sustainable ones, as we can monitor the indicators that give us the location and intensity [of a particular problem] in each areas." After its beans are harvested, Ipanema has, for a number of years, been using automated selection machines, which only pick the ripe ones, which are yellow and red. "We set the machine by programming the colours we need," says Rodrigo Ferreira, the firm's industrial director. "Once we put the beans in the conveyor belt the beans that are not the

colour we defined will be expelled by a compressed air jet."

Flora Viana, global marketing manager for digital agriculture at Syngenta, says that Brazil's coffee producers can "no longer increase their productivity just by buying more land".

"We are reaching the limit of areas available," she adds, "producers need to instead optimise their production process." Yet, Mr Borges adds that the technology is reliant upon having trained staff. "It is pointless to have great tool if we don't have a team motivated and prepared for them." He adds that Ipanema has 800 employees, and often they go to college for training.

However, this increased use of technology is not universal across Brazil's coffee producers. While it has been adopted by the big players in industry, such as Ipanema and Okuyama, the myriad of small producers that produce 66% of the country's crop are lagging behind.

But the hope is that the roll out of 5G mobile phone networks will improve internet connections in rural areas, making technology such as Cropwise Protector more prevalent.

-BBC





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EAGLE FM PROGRAMMMES

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Morning Scoops with Kelvin
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Unpacking the Day with Wonder
 07h00-09h00
Free Your Mind
 09h00-11h00
Tech Eagle with Frans
 11h00-12h00
Brand Conversation with Dwight
 12h00-13h00
On the Radar with Justicia
 13h00-14h30

Ookundana Dthingi pamwe na Eba
 14h30-16h30
The Home Run with Envaade
 16h30-18h30
Business Segment with Dwight
 18h30-19h30
Pulling Heart Strings with Elizabeth
 19h30-21h00
Omutumwa pamwe na Tate Fly
 21h00-23h00
Off the Hook
 23h00-02h00
Penge Omhito
 02h00-05h00

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Sixth boy charged in 1989 Central Park jogger case is exonerated

A codefendant of the Central Park Five, a group of Black and Latino teenagers whose convictions in a notorious 1989 rape of a jogger in New York City were thrown out more than a decade later, has had his conviction on a related charge overturned. A New York judge exonerated Steven Lopez on Monday in response to requests by both Lopez’s lawyer and prosecutors. Lopez was 15 when he was first named in the indictment along with five other Black and Latino teenagers for the night-time rape and attempted murder of Trisha Meili, an investment banker whose horrific injuries became the subject of sensationalist media coverage. Lopez later pleaded guilty to robbing a male jogger that same night in a deal with prosecutors that saw the charges alleging his involvement in the attack on Meili dropped, and was sentenced to between 1-1/2 and 4-1/2 years in a state prison. Judge Ellen Biben of the New York State Supreme Court on Monday agreed to a motion by Manhattan’s chief prosecutor and a lawyer for Lopez to vacate the plea that Lopez entered at age 17, ruling that it was involuntary, unconstitutional and based in part on false witness statements. “What happened to you was a profound injustice and an American injustice,” Eric Shapiro Lopez, a defence lawyer who was not yet born when his client was indicted, said in remarks to Lopez before the court. “They say justice delayed is justice denied and I’m sorry we’ve had to wait for 30 years.” Lopez, whose long beard is now greying, appeared to have tears in his eyes.

Monday’s decision closes another chapter in a case that has become emblematic of judicial overreach in the United States, racial profiling by both law enforcement and news outlets, as well as the malpractice of police officers forcing confessions from innocent people. Meili was beaten and left for dead. The attack was seized upon by local media as an emblem of soaring crime rates in New York City in the 1980s. News stories frequently referred to the boys arrested by the New York Police Department as animals. Decades before he would become president, Donald Trump, then a prominent real-estate developer, took out full-page advertisements in city newspapers calling for the boys to be executed. Later, the five boys’ convictions were overturned in 2002 after evidence linked a convicted serial rapist and murderer, Matias Reyes, to the attack. Prosecutors who reviewed the case had concluded the teenagers’ confessions, made after hours of interrogations, were deeply flawed. “A comparison of the statements reveals troubling discrepancies,” they wrote in court papers at the time. “The accounts given by the five defendants differed from one another on the specific details of virtually every major aspect of the crime.” Antron McCray, Kevin Richardson, Raymond Santana, Korey Wise and Yusef Salaam, now known as the Exonerated Five, brought a lawsuit against the city, which was settled for \$41m in 2014. Lopez was not part of that lawsuit, and his story has often been overlooked in



coverage of the exoneration of his former codefendants. Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg told the court that there was no physical evidence linking Lopez to the attacks on either jogger and that the witness

statements naming him had been recanted. That, coupled with Lopez’s youth at the time, made the plea involuntary, Bragg said. “Mr Lopez, we wish you peace and healing,” the judge said after dismissing

the indictment. “Thank you,” Lopez replied, his only remarks in court. “It is so ordered,” the judge said, as Lopez rose to shake the chief prosecutor’s hand. -Al Jazeera

Toxic liquor kills dozens in India’s ‘dry state’ of Gujarat

At least 28 people have died and 60 others became ill from consuming toxic liquor in western India’s Gujarat state, officials have said. Senior government official Mukesh Parmar on Tuesday said the deaths occurred in the Ahmedabad and Botad districts of the state. The manufacture, consumption and sale of alcohol are banned in Gujarat, Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s home state. There are some government-authorized liquor shops where residents with special health permits and foreigners can buy alcohol. Critics say the alcohol ban encourages peddling of illegal and often tainted liquor that is brewed without any regulation. The victims in Gujarat were mostly villagers, police officials said. Preliminary laboratory tests indicated that chemicals including methanol were present in the liquor mix, regional police official Ashok Kumar Yadav said. A large amount of suspected spurious alcohol has been seized in raids.

Ashish Gupta, Gujarat state’s police chief,

said several suspected bootleggers who were involved in selling the spiked alcohol have been arrested. “We have taken the incident very seriously and a detailed investigation has been launched,” Gujarat’s home secretary Raj Kumar said. The tragedy first came to light when villagers who consumed the liquor on Sunday night were admitted into hospitals in the area early on Monday. There are at least 30 people in a serious condition being treated, NDTV news channel reported. Deaths from illegally brewed alcohol, popularly called hooch or country liquor, are common in India, where illicit liquor is cheap and often spiked with chemicals such as pesticides to increase potency, making it a hugely profitable industry. This is the second major incident in which spurious liquor has caused a large number of deaths in the past year. In November, more than 30 people died in the eastern state of Bihar, where, like Gujarat, there is an alcohol ban. In 2020, at least 120 people died after drinking tainted liquor in Punjab state that neighbours Gujarat. -Al Jazeera



Myanmar's military says executions were 'justice for the people'

Myanmar's military-led government has defended the execution of four pro-democracy activists, even as international condemnation over the killings grew.

Major General Zaw Min Tun, spokesman of the military government that seized power in a coup last year, said the executions – the first to take place in the country in decades – were lawful and not “personal”.

“This was justice for the people. These criminals were given the chance to defend themselves,” Zaw Min Tun told a news conference in the capital, Naypyidaw, adding that the government knew the executions would draw criticism.

Among those executed were democracy campaigner Kyaw Min Yu, better known as “Jimmy”, and former lawmaker and hip-hop artist Phyo Zeya Thaw, an ally of former Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been in detention since the military's power grab. The two others killed were Hla Myo Aung and Aung Thura Zaw.

All four were sentenced to death in secretive trials in January and April after being accused of involvement in violent resistance against the military since it seized power on February 1, 2021 – charges which were denied by their defenders.

State media said on Monday “the punishment” had been “conducted”, but did not specify when, or by what method, the men had been killed. Previous executions in Myanmar have been by hanging.

International condemnation mounts. The latest criticism of the executions was aired earlier on Tuesday by the United Nations' Special Envoy on Myanmar Noeleen Heyzer and Malaysia's Foreign

Minister Saifuddin Abdullah, who denounced the killings as a “crime against humanity”.

Saifuddin told a news conference in Kuala Lumpur that the executions would be a focus of an upcoming meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which begins in Cambodia in a week.

The 10-member bloc, of which Malaysia is a member, had been pushing for Myanmar to adhere to a five-point consensus settled on in April 2021 to try and end the violence triggered by the military's seizure of power.

But Saifuddin accused Myanmar's rulers of “making a mockery” of the plan, which also called for dialogue among all concerned parties, provision of humanitarian assistance, the appointment of a special envoy and a visit by the latter to meet with all sides.

“We hope we have seen the last of the executions and we will try to use whatever channel that we can to try and ensure that this will not happen again,” he said, adding that Malaysia would seek to present a framework for the implementation of the peace plan at the upcoming ASEAN meeting.

Myanmar announced in June it was going to resume executing prisoners and has 113 others who have been sentenced to death, although 41 of those were convicted in absentia, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, a non-governmental organisation that tracks killings and arrests.

“Great concern” over potential for more executions. Al Jazeera's Tony Cheng, who has reported

extensively on Myanmar, said there was a “great concern” that further executions may take place in the near future.

“There's been no statement [confirming this], but again there was no warning that these executions were going to take place,” Cheng said.

“In fact, the families of the four men weren't informed beforehand either ... it took everybody by surprise,” he added. “So there is a great concern that if this is the direction Myanmar's military has turned in then there could be more [executions to come].”

Cheng also warned the killings could lead to an “even bloodier” period of resistance against Myanmar's military rulers, noting there had been calls for “revenge” over the executions.

The military's seizure of power from Aung San Suu Kyi's elected government triggered peaceful protests that soon escalated to armed resistance and then to widespread fighting that some UN experts characterise as a civil war.

AAPP says 14,820 people have been arrested since the coup. During the same period, 2,120 people have been killed by military forces, according to the group.

Meanwhile, some resistance groups have engaged in assassinations, drive-by shootings and bombings in urban areas. Mainstream opposition organisations generally disavow such activities while supporting armed resistance in rural areas that are more often subject to brutal military attacks.

-Al Jazeera



Palestinian lawyers protest against Abbas governing by 'decree'

Hundreds of Palestinian lawyers have held a rare street protest in the occupied West Bank against the Palestinian Authority's “rule by decree”, condemning President Mahmoud Abbas for governing without a parliament.

The Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) – created under the Oslo Accords with Israel – has been inactive since 2007, meaning Abbas has led without a functioning parliament for nearly all of his tenure as president.

But a new leadership at the Palestinian Bar Association has sought to pressure the Palestinian Authority (PA).

The association's President Suheil Ashour told AFP news agency at the protest in the city of Ramallah on Monday that his body would stand firm against legislation delivered by presidential decree that curbed Palestinian “rights and freedoms”. “Our demand is either to stop their implementation now or to cancel” a raft of restrictive laws, said Ashour, who pushed for reforms when he was elected association president earlier this year.

The draft Palestinian constitution allows for presidential decrees “if necessary”, in cases where the PLC cannot act, but lawyers at the protest said Abbas has gone too far.

“These laws don't only affect the Bar Association, but also the Palestinian people as a whole. I am here to tell President Abbas that these decrees destroy the judicial system, destroy the ruling authority, and could start a civil war,” Zainab al-Salfity, a lawyer, told Al Jazeera. Riot police prevented the demonstrators, clad in their black robes, from entering

the building housing the office of Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh.

Abbas was elected PA president in 2005, following the death of iconic leader Yasser Arafat.

Hamas, bitter rivals of Abbas's Fatah movement, swept to victory in the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections.

Fallout from that vote helped spark a split in Palestinian governance, with Fatah retaining control of the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Hamas running Gaza since 2007.

According to estimates by Palestinian legal experts, Abbas has issued some 400 presidential decrees while in office. He officially dissolved the PLC in 2018, and moves to hold new elections have faced pushback.

“We need a legislative council, because laws need to go through different readings before they're enforced. Now there are a few people making laws and that's a problem,” Abed Shabaneh, a lawyer, told Al Jazeera.

Abbas had set dates for presidential and legislative elections to be held last year across the Palestinian territories, with Hamas's participation, but cancelled the polls citing Israel's refusal to allow voting in occupied East Jerusalem.

Public demonstrations against Abbas and the PA have been on the rise in the West Bank, notably following the death in Palestinian custody of activist and Abbas critic Nizar Banat last year. The top Palestinian prosecutor has accused 14 security force members of beating Banat to death.

-Al Jazeera



2022 Mercedes-Benz EQB300 4Matic

First Drive: Li'l Transformer

■ Angus MacKenzie

The electrification of Mercedes-Benz in America is off to a good start. The U.S. is already the top market in the world for the flagship EQS sedan, and dealers are eagerly anticipating the arrival of the more affordable EQE sedan this fall. Insiders are quietly confident that Mercedes-Benz can sell up to 45,000 electric vehicles stateside in 2023. And the perky 2022 Mercedes-Benz EQB will be a key contributor to hitting that number. Unlike the EQS and EQE sedans, the EQB is not built on a dedicated EV platform. Instead, it shares much of its structure with the conventional internal combustion GLB subcompact SUV. As we reported in our preview drive of the EQB350 4Matic late last year, the smooth, silent, punchy electric powertrain transforms the subcompact SUV. The EQB feels much more like a miniature Mercedes than the GLB.

We've covered the EQB350 4Matic in detail, though since our drive Mercedes-Benz USA has confirmed the 288-hp, 383-lb-ft SUV. And although no official figures have been released, informed sources suggest the EQB350's 70.5-kWh battery (its usable capacity is 66.5 kWh) will deliver an EPA-rated range of about 220 miles.

It's identical to the EQB350, right down to the last nut and bolt, as well as the 188-hp motor at the rear axle. The only difference is the power and torque output of the motor at the front axle, which has been dialed back to deliver a total system output of 225 hp and 288 lb-ft.

Less power means slightly less performance—Mercedes says the EQB300 is about 1.8 seconds slower to 60 mph than its more powerful sibling, stopping the clock at just under 8.0 seconds. But less power also means there's less demand on the battery, which should equate to more range. Unofficial figures suggest the EQB300 4Matic will have an EPA range of 230 miles. Now, just as with an internal combustion engine, your mileage may vary, depending on how, when, and where you drive. But a 10-mile improvement in rated range isn't quite the headline number you might expect.

That's because Mercedes has chosen to optimize energy consumption in both EQBs by using the permanently excited synchronous electric motor driving the rear wheels as often as possible, as the front motor's asynchronous design means it generates only minimal drag losses in partial-load operation. And that means the EQB350's more powerful front motor isn't always sucking down extra electrons. For most of your driving time, the two models are—in energy consumption terms—identical.

Our key takeaway from the EQB350 drive—that the EV powertrain adds a level of refinement and performance that's missing from the gasoline-powered GLB—holds true for the EQB300. But keen drivers will notice a difference between the two EQBs on the road, especially if the road is

one that twists and turns.

In simple terms the EQB300 doesn't claw its way out of the corners with the same urgency as the EQB350. As a result, it doesn't feel as surprisingly lively or quite as much fun to drive. There's not a lot in it, and in truth few EQB customers are likely to notice, especially on the school run or the daily commute. The transition between regenerative and mechanical braking didn't feel quite as seamless as in the EQB350, either. That said, the multilink rear axle felt just as well-planted and delivered plenty of traction out of corners.

Our European-spec EQB300s were all on optional 20-inch rims shod with 235/45 tires. That setup won't be available in the U.S., and we won't be missing anything. Our experience with the EQB350 suggests the standard 18-inch wheels and optional 19s will offer better low-speed ride. What's more, the 20s appeared to make the steering feel glazier and less linear, as if the system was working harder to twist a bigger contact patch.

Mercedes offers three driver-selectable lift-off regen levels, actuated via the paddles on the steering column. There's also a mode that allows the car to use navigation data, traffic information, and speed sign recognition to automatically adjust the regen level itself. As with its more powerful sibling, on anything but busy city streets the EQB300 feels best to drive with the least amount of regen, as it enables it to flow more freely down the road.

Visually, the EQB300 is identified by EQ-specific design tweaks such as the front and rear LED light bands. The tall, boxy bodywork delivers an interior that is surprisingly roomy. The second-row bench seat slides fore and aft 5.5 inches, and in the rearmost position, there's plenty of leg- and knee room for 6-footers. There's lots of headroom, too, even though the rear seat H-point is higher than that of the front to give rear passengers better all-around visibility. Load space ranges from 16.4 cubic feet with the third row in place, to 57.2 with the second and third rows folded flat.

Although Mercedes-Benz makes it clear that in the event of a rollover it considers the optional third row suitable only for those under 5 feet 5 inches tall, the \$1,250 option will appeal to those using the EQB for the school run. Why does it cost \$400 more than in the GLB? The third-row seats fold flat into the load space floor, so the electrical hardware stored there in the EQBs must be moved into a compartment underneath that's accessed via a flap in the rear bumper.

Standard equipment on the EQB300 includes the 10.3-inch digital instrument cluster and 10.3-inch touchscreen multimedia display for the MBUX multimedia system. Standard safety features include active lane keeping assist, blind-spot assist, and active brake assist.

Those who prioritize range and performance

over everything else will almost certainly opt for Tesla's Model Y Long Range, which also offers seven-passenger capability.

No, this Mercedes won't go as far or as fast as the Tesla. But it drives and feels like a real Mercedes and boasts a better-packaged and better-finished interior than the Tesla. Unless you're planning a lot of long, fast road trips in your compact luxury electric SUV, the quieter, more comfortable Mercedes-Benz EQB300 4Matic is a better value—and worth a second look.

—Motor Trend



New research finds links between repetitive head impacts & degenerative brain disease

Sport governing bodies have been called on to acknowledge that repetitive head impacts cause a degenerative brain disease after new research found a causal link between the two.

The authors say they have found "conclusive evidence" that repetitive head impacts cause chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE).

"Sport governing bodies should not mislead the public on CTE causation while athletes die and families are destroyed by this terrible disease," lead author Dr Chris Nowinski said.

Sports organisations, government officials, parents and the military have been asked to put preventative measures in place.

The study was carried out by researchers from Oxford Brookes University and 12 other academic institutions, alongside analysis from the Concussion Legacy Foundation.

One co-senior author said they were "surprised at how strong the causal relationship is between repetitive head impacts and CTE" was shown to be.

"This analysis shows it is time to include repetitive head impacts and CTE among other child safety efforts like smoking, sunburns and alcohol," Dr Adam White, executive director of the Concussion Legacy Foundation UK, said.

"Repetitive head impacts and CTE deserve recognition in the global public health discussion of preventable disorders caused by childhood exposure in contact sports like football, rugby, ice hockey and others." The research paper - Applying the Bradford Hill Criteria for Causation to Repetitive Head Impacts and Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy - has been published in *Frontiers in Neurology*.

The Football Association will trial a ban on heading in England by players in matches at under-12 level from the start of the 2022-23 season.

Lawyers for more than 185 players are also suing rugby union's governing bodies for negligence, claiming that playing the sport caused brain damage.

The most studied causes of CTE are caused by contact and collision sports such as football, rugby and American football.

What is CTE?

CTE is the disease found by Dr Bennet Omalu in the brain of American football player Mike Webster, and the subject of the film *Concussion* starring Will Smith. In 2011, a group of former American football players started a class action against the NFL and won a settlement worth about \$1bn.

Omalu was the first to find physical evidence linking sports-related brain injury and CTE.

CTE can develop when the brain is subjected to numerous small blows or rapid movements - sometimes known as sub-concussions - and is associated with symptoms such as memory loss, depression and progressive dementia.

Sub-concussions cannot be detected on the pitch or in any post-match examination.

The disease can only be diagnosed in a brain after death, but some experts believe if history of exposure is evaluated, it is reasonable to conclude that the risk increases.

It has been found in the brains of dozens of former NFL players, as well as a handful of deceased footballers.

Dr Omalu spoke to the *Scrum V* podcast in December, 2020 and you can listen to that interview [here](#).

-BBC



Carlos Alcaraz, 19, becomes youngest top-five player since Rafael Nadal

Spanish teenager Carlos Alcaraz will become the youngest player in the top five of the ATP rankings since Rafael Nadal in 2005 after reaching the Hamburg Open final.

Alcaraz, 19, beat Slovak Alex Molcan 7-6 (7-2) 6-1 and will face Lorenzo Musetti for the title on Sunday.

The Miami Open and Madrid Open champion has won his five previous Tour finals.

"I have a lot of confidence for the final and hope to make it six-for-six," said Alcaraz after his latest clay win.

"Lorenzo is playing really well. It's going to be a great final."

Nadal was under a month away from turning 19 when he became fifth in the world for the first time.

Alcaraz is a huge admirer of Nadal, beat him in Madrid and has also trained with the 22-time Grand Slam champion.

He will overtake Norwegian Casper Ruud when the updated rankings are released on Monday. Musetti, 20, reached his first Tour final with a 6-3 7-6 (7-3) victory over Francisco Cerundolo. The world number 62 said he was surprised by the form that has earned him a meeting with the top seed in Hamburg, following his first-round exit at the Swedish Open.

"I was not playing my best tennis last week," said Musetti. "I didn't expect to be

in the final here."

Pera shocks Kontaveit to win title

World number 81 Bernarda Pera won her second title in seven days by beating top seed Anett Kontaveit 6-2 6-4 to claim the women's singles title in Hamburg.

After tasting WTA Tour glory for the first time in Budapest last week, Pera earned a 12th consecutive win to stun the Estonian world number two. American Pera won her 24th straight set to clinch victory and is expected to enter the top 60 in the rankings, having been world number 130 when she arrived in Budapest.

Swiss Open: Berrettini to play Ruud in final Matteo Berrettini halted Dominic Thiem's impressive return to action by beating the former world number three 6-1 6-4 to set up a final against reigning champion Ruud in the final of the Swiss Open in Gstaad.

Thiem skipped the grass court season following a difficult run of results when he initially came back from a long-term wrist injury in March.

World number 15 Berrettini was playing his first event since withdrawing from Wimbledon with Covid-19 and needed only 77 minutes to beat the 2020 US Open champion. Top seed Ruud will bid to end Berrettini's 12-match winning run after requiring barely an hour to thrash Spaniard Albert Ramos 6-2 6-0.

-BBC



'My dad burnt my training gear' - Tobi Amusan on road to 100m hurdles world record



Lynne Wachira

Tobi Amusan has become a world record holder and a world champion in the 100m hurdles, but she still remembers her father burning

her running gear.

A fourth-placed finisher at both the 2019 World Athletics Championships and the delayed 2020 Tokyo Olympics, the Nigerian's persistence has finally seen her engrave her name into the track and field record books.

The 25-year-old ran a time of 12.12 seconds - shaving almost a tenth of a second off the previous world record - in the semi-finals of the World Championships in Oregon before going on to win gold in the final. However, it always seemed as if the odds were stacked against her running career from the beginning.

"My parents are both teachers, they are strict disciplinarians," Amusan told BBC Sport Africa.

"When you grow up in such a family, they

feel you should focus on school. And being a female, they think you are going to go astray, lose focus and all of that.

"But because my mum saw what I didn't see [in] myself, she felt she could give me a chance. And she kept telling me not to disappoint her.

"My mum would tell my dad I was going to church while I sneaked to practice or tell him I was going to a school debate while I went to an out-of-state competition. That's where it all started.

"My dad got really mad one time when he found out [I was running]. He burnt all my training gear and told my mum that's the last time he wanted to see me in a stadium." Fast forward several years, and tears of joy flowed freely as Amusan stood on the top step of the podium at Hayward Field on a historic day for Nigeria, which saw the country's national anthem played at the World Athletics Championships for the first time ever.

"It has not sunk in yet, maybe the magnitude of what just happened it will hit me later," she said.

"I go out there and put 100% in every championship and it's just never enough. Every time it's a fourth-place finish.

"Then this time my 100% is not only a gold medal but a world record. Trusting myself just made everything easier. I'm thankful to the man above for keeping me healthy. When God says it's your time, it's your time."

A champion hurdler via football and relay running

Her father may have doubted her, but Amusan has always had plenty of belief in her own ability.

Back in November 2016 she tweeted:

"Unknown now but soon I will be unforgettable, I will persist until I succeed." That message has remained pinned to the top of her social media profile and provides a summary of her rise to glory in Eugene. Yet her journey into athletics started as somewhat of an accident at Our Lady of Apostles Secondary School in Ogun state, Nigeria.

"I used to be on the soccer team, but I would be all over the place on the pitch,"

Amusan said.

"My coach suggested I go try out on the track team and I became the fastest girl on the team, and that's how I got on the school relay team."

She went on to make the national squad for the 2013 Africa Youth Games in Nigeria, but she missed out on a place on the relay team and went on to win a bronze in the long jump instead.

Competing over hurdles was another unexpected switch in Amusan's journey to stardom, and is where she would truly break through on the senior stage.

"The officials were always picking who they wanted in the relay team. Sometimes they would say I didn't have the experience so they would pick whoever was their favourite," she explained.

"It was a lot of pressure on a young athlete. I considered quitting. I really wanted to travel with the senior national team and some coaches told me to try the hurdles."

A move to the USA and fourth-placed finishes

She had to overcome doubts from officials

in Nigerian athletics before picking up her first senior hurdles title at the African Games in Congo-Brazzaville in 2015.

"The typical Nigerian approach is to make you feel like you cannot make it," she said.

"I wasn't expected to medal at those Games. There were so many voices saying I couldn't but I used that to show that I could - and that title changed my life.

"That's how I got a scholarships to the United States. I can say that's really when my athletics career began. I never dreamt of going to the United States. I just wanted to run fast and be one of the Nigerian greats."

Since moving to attend the University of Texas, El Paso, Amusan has not looked back.

She won gold in the 100m hurdles at the 2018 Commonwealth Games in Australia, and later the same year took her first African Championships title on home soil in Asaba.

Yet at major global events, she would agonisingly miss out on medals - finishing fourth at the World Championships in Doha three years ago and then again in Tokyo last year.

"2019 was tough because I remember running the fastest time in the qualification rounds, around the same time in the semi-finals and the same time in the final," she said.

"I ran so fast but wasn't fast enough to get a medal. I was broken, I was devastated. That was one of the most horrible experiences.

"I moved on, and then came the Tokyo Olympics. Things just crumbled a month before when I strained my hamstring at practice."

She has constant support from her mother, but her father has remained unfazed by her exploits.

"Honesty, he still doesn't support me doing track," she said.

"He just feels like there's more to life than running around. Every time I call him when I'm at a competition he just says 'Okay, do your best, God will help you' and that's it."

The newly-minted world champion and record holder - who also picked up a cheque for \$100,000 for her blistering showing in Oregon - will now defend her Commonwealth gold in Birmingham.

Given Amusan's starting success, her father will surely embrace her achievements soon.

-BBC

