

REVERTS

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Henk Mudge, Epafra Mukwiilongo, Ignatius Shixwameni and Mike Kavekotora suing the ECN and questioning the legality of using EVMs without a paper trail that can verify every vote cast on the devices.

Nghikembua said this year's election will be preceded by the General Registration of Voters (GRV), which is expected to run from 3 June to 1 August.

During this period, all eligible Namibian voters will be expected to register afresh to cast their votes in the forthcoming elections.

The ECN also indicated that they will dispatch registration material both locally and internationally from 1 May for voters to get their voters' cards.

Nghikembua announced that Namibia will hold Presidential and parliamentary elections on 27 November.

Peter Shaama, Chief Electoral and Referenda Officer, said at the same event that the election calendar serves as a roadmap to assist the commission in planning and executing its election-related activities.

"The election calendar is categorised into three phases (Pillars), namely, Pre-Election Phase, Election Phase, and Post-Election Phase, which serve as a yardstick that the commission uses to measure the progress of the set electoral activities in the build-up to and post an election," he noted.

In terms of the Electoral Act, the commission is required to conduct the GRV every 10 years, and compile a new voters'

register. The last GRV was conducted in 2014 when the commission deployed a Biometric Voters Registration System for the first time.

Shaama indicated that this process will be followed by the nomination of independent candidates slated for 14 October, while political parties and organisations are expected to register on 16 October.

The election voting process is expected to commence on 13 November for sea-going personnel and members of the armed forces and those in the Diaspora.

Meanwhile, Minister of Urban and Rural Development Erastus Utoni advised the commission to put emphasis on civic education in order to address the voter apathy experienced in previous elections.

"Over the last few years, we have witnessed a worrisome trend, which may threaten our democracy if not addressed. The low turnout of voters during polling is a major concern, with only 60.8% of registered voters turning up to cast their votes during the 2019 Presidential and National Assembly elections," he stated.

The minister indicated that civic and voter education ensures the readiness, willingness and ability of voters to participate in electoral activities. "It imparts basic voter information, which enables every voter to arrive well-prepared at the polling station and vote on voting day," said Utoni.

In this regard, Shaama said the civic and voter education awareness strategy adopted by the ECN in the build-up to the 2024 GRV and national elections will form the basis for delivering the democracy awareness campaign, under the theme "Enhancing

Electoral Democracy through Electoral Processes".

Commentators

The ECN's decision to revert to the ballot papers has been hailed by some political parties and political analysts, stating that the move is in the right direction to ensure credible, free and fair elections.

"This is a result of the court ruling in early 2020, which said that if EVMs are used, there must be a verifiable paper trail. Since we don't have those types of EVMs, we are bound to go back to ballot papers. The local and regional elections in 2020 already reverted to ballot papers," said Graham Hopwood, executive director of the Institute for Public Policy Research.

He noted that the main problem with the ballot papers is that it takes a while to count the votes and verify the results.

Hopwood, therefore, urged the ECN to find ways in which they can speed up the counting and verification process.

"This is a welcome development that we have cried about and lobbied for many years, that we do away with this EVM machines without a verifiable paper trail. It is refreshing to see that the ECN has heeded the call from the courts to do away with the EVMs. It is long-overdue," said Joseph Kauandenge, NUDO's secretary general.

Political analyst Wade Henckert said the ECN's decision should be seen as a step towards enhancing transparency, inclusivity and public trust in the electoral process, ultimately contributing to the consolidation of democracy in the country.

He argued that the use of ballot papers may enhance transparency and public trust in the electoral process. Ballot papers allow for a physical record of votes cast, which can be observed and verified by election observers, political parties and voters themselves.

"This transparency can help mitigate concerns about the integrity and security of electronic voting systems.

While EVMs were intended to streamline the voting process and improve accessibility for voters, concerns have been raised about their usability, particularly for elderly and illiterate voters. The use of ballot papers may ensure greater inclusivity by providing a familiar voting method that accommodates diverse needs and preferences," Henckert reasoned.

He added that the transition from EVMs to ballot papers may also have legal and constitutional implications. It is essential to ensure that electoral laws and procedures are updated to accommodate the use of ballot papers and that constitutional rights, such as the right to vote and the right to a free and fair election, are upheld.

"Ultimately, the success of any electoral system depends on the public's perception of its fairness, transparency and effectiveness. The ECN's decision to adopt ballot papers may reflect a response to public concerns and preferences regarding the electoral process. By prioritising public confidence, the commission aims to strengthen the legitimacy of elections and uphold democratic principles in Namibia," he observed.

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STUDENT

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Yet, despite her remarkable determination, her current wheelchair has become a hindrance rather than a means of liberation.

The arduous task of traversing the expansive campus has left her reliant on the kindness of friends and, at times, even security guards to aid her mobility.

But Kashima's story is not defined by limitations; it's a testament to the power of resilience and the unwavering support of the community. Orphaned at just one-year-old, she was embraced by her grandmother, who instilled in her the virtues of perseverance and resilience.

Fuelled by her grandmother's wisdom, Kashima embarked on her educational journey at IUM, determined to carve out a future filled with promise.

"I lost my parents when I was just a year

old. Growing up in the village, attending primary school was a real challenge. I relied on my cousins to carry me since using a wheelchair wasn't feasible due to the sandy terrain and fences," she added.

In the fifth grade, Kashima received a motorised wheelchair through a donation from late president Hage Geingob, which greatly improved her mobility. She used it throughout most of high school, until it was damaged by some children playing with it. Now, she is back to using a manual one.

However, the exorbitant cost of a motorised wheelchair, ranging between N\$20 000 and N\$60 000, stands as a formidable barrier to Kashima's independence.

As a student, she finds herself grappling with financial constraints which impede her ability to acquire the mobility aid she so desperately needs. Yet, her spirit remains unbroken, her resolve unwavering.

In the face of adversity, Kashima's plight

has sparked a wave of compassion and solidarity within the IUM community and beyond.

Margaret Johannes, a friend who has witnessed Kashima's struggles first-hand, echoes the sentiments of many when she expresses a fervent hope for her friend's access to a motorised wheelchair.

As Kashima stands at the intersection of perseverance and possibility, her story serves as a poignant reminder of the transformative power of unity and empathy. In rallying behind her cause, the community not only uplifts a fellow student, but also reaffirms the values of inclusivity and support that define the fabric of IUM.

In a world often marked by division, Kashima's journey stands as a beacon of hope, illuminating the path towards a future where every individual, regardless of circumstance, is empowered to thrive.

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OTAVI

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Auditors express adverse opinions when, having obtained sufficient appropriate audit evidence, they conclude that misstatements, individually or in the aggregate, are both material and pervasive to the financial statements.

One of Kandjeke's findings was that the council had failed to implement the recommendations made by the Ministry of Urban and Rural Development after an in-depth investigation.

Back in 2016, the ministry commissioned an investigation into allegations about unprocedural recruitments, promotions and appointments of staff members to act in vacant positions. The probe also investigated alleged illegal payments of acting allowances and motor-vehicle allowances.

The team was specifically tasked to determine whether the correct procedures were being followed by the council in general, and especially the human resources' department, in compliance with the provisions of Section 27 of the Local Authorities Act. The investigators also dug into whether

Rules 32, 33 and 36 of the Personnel Rules of the Otavi Town Council as well as the Recruitment and Selection Regulations for Local Authority Councils, during the recruitment process and appointment in an acting capacity of staff members, were complied with. There were several findings reflected in the ministerial report, with recommendations on the way forward to rectify these findings.

Supremely, the council was ordered to reverse the appointments and promotions of five staff members. According to the report, the Otavi Town Council irregularly appointed and promoted at least five staff members between 2019 and 2021.

It included the dubious way Ernst Gaoab allegedly elevated himself to the position of acting CEO, despite only being an ordinary human resources practitioner.

As acting CEO, Gaoab effectively presided over more qualified and senior staff members, it was reported at the time. It was also stated that while in that position, he created the position of manager of human resources and administration, appointed himself to this position, and adjusted his own salary. This position was not on the council's staff establishment, and was never approved

by the line minister. "The council has not made any progress in implementing these recommendations. It is recommended that the council should ensure the implementation of the recommendations of the internal auditors," Kandjeke said in the report.

What is more, the local authority failed to disclose Farm Klein Otavi No 799, which is valued at N\$6 million, the auditors found. Otavi's accounting picture gets even worrisome as the auditors discovered that the council has a dumpsite and sewerage pond, but no environmental clearance certificate could be provided. Neither has the council disclosed a provision for a waste fine which amounts to N\$500 000, as required by the Environmental Management Act.

To this, the mayor lamented that the town has struggled to secure an appropriate dumpsite, as it is enclaved by farms. "We have a dumpsite that needs to be decommissioned, [but] we are surrounded by commercial farms. We need to buy portions of land from the surrounding farms. We are in the process of identifying land that we want," he said.

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CALL FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION/COMMENTS

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT PLAN TO OBTAIN AN ENVIRONMENTAL CLEARANCE FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW 33KV POWERLINE FROM SOLITAIRE TO NAMIB DESERT LODGE IN THE HARDAP REGION

Green Earth Environmental Consultants have been appointed to attend to and complete an Environmental Impact Assessment and Environmental Management Plan (EMP) to obtain an Environmental Clearance Certificate as per the requirements of the Environmental Management Act (No. 7 of 2007) and the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations (GN 30 in GG 4878 of 6 February 2012) for the construction of a new 33kv powerline from Solitaire to Namib Desert Lodge in the Hardap Region.

Name of proponent: Naukluft Electricity Investments Pty Ltd (NEI)

Project location and description: NEI intends to expand their 33kv overhead powerline network to link Namib Desert Lodge with their existing line at Solitaire. Thus, an additional section of 36km will be constructed. The new 33kv line will be running parallel to the existing 19kv SWER line servicing customers in the this area. The new 33kv line will be strung with Three Rabbit conductors in a HLPD configuration with average 120m ruling span with shorter spans to compensate for the terrain and bend points, between 11m high poles planted at 1,8m.

A plan showing the proposed alignment of the power line can be obtained from Green Earth Environmental Consultants at the contact details below. Interested and affected parties are hereby invited to register in terms of the assessment process to give input, comments, and opinions regarding the proposed project. Interested and affected parties are hereby invited to register in terms of the assessment process to give input, comments, and opinions regarding the proposed project. A public meeting will be held only if there is enough public interest. **Only I&APs that registered will be notified of the possible public meeting to be held.**

The last date for comments and/or registration is 28 March 2024.

Contact details for registration and further information:

Green Earth Environmental Consultants

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