

THE Weekly Review

For the Thinking Person

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RUTO'S BITTER PILL

Reality sinks in as the President pushes sour medicine down Kenyans' throats to keep the economy alive. He has to juggle between IMF prescriptions and inflated expectations of supporters who believe he has a solution to the rising cost of living

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letter from the editor

Government must take its time and fix the economy



Mutuma Mathiu

The economy is in the dog house. Battered by external shocks – Covid-19 and its impact on production, distribution and services such as tourism as well as the war in Ukraine, which has pushed up the cost of energy and wreaked havoc on grain supply – and unsettled by endemic internal pressures and contradictions, Kenya is at its most fragile in many years.

Inflation, like that squad of undertakers popularised in memes, is marching on with a firm step, each taking the country closer to serious economic, and possibly social, disruption.

The stock of public debt, quite surprising in quantity and composition compared to the Narc years, is, to put it plainly, frightening.

The iris of a black hole – the event horizon – it expands and destroys the capacity of the private sector to create jobs and wealth, burns the nation's ability to take care of the people, vaporises its ability to manage the risks of the future and undermines sovereignty.

The devaluation of the shilling compounds the debt problem and adds fuel to the inflation.

The incoming administration has been speaking, with round eyes and breathless tones, about what a mess everything is and how the Treasury

The unfortunate truth, however, is that no matter how egregious the alleged misdeeds of the Kenyatta administration are, Kenya Kwanza is the government now. To quote a Nation mantra, the job of a manager is not to diagnose and report problems, it is to fix them.

has been wiped clean by the previous administration.

True, the outgoing government sank billions of shillings into projects whose true cost and value are a matter of some debate. Also true, there exists risk of economic distortion wrought by crony capitalism. You cannot make rational and prudent economic policy if you have direct personal interest in those decisions.

The unfortunate truth, however, is that no matter how egregious the alleged misdeeds of the Kenyatta administration are, Kenya Kwanza is the government now. To quote a Nation mantra, the job of a manager is not to diagnose and report problems, it is to fix them. If somebody has stolen public funds, you are the government; go get it back. If the economy is bad, sort it out.

Economic policy does not lend itself to shrill populism and an excess

of drama, especially in a crisis.

Solid, deliberate thinking, anchored in process that protects decisions from wild flights of fancy, by the right talent, is what it takes.

Intellectuals like Dr David Ndii (though quite insufferable in peacetime and wartime), solid economists and brilliant thinkers are the kind of cohort from which creative solutions in a situation such as this will come, and there is certainly no shortage of them in government and the academia.

The new government must lead by example. It must tightly manage public expenditure, cut borrowing and make every shilling count. It is all very well to dismantle cartels, but no progress will be made if they are replaced with your own.

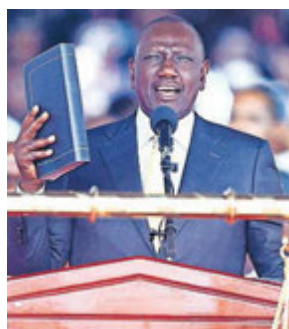
At the same time, a difficult balancing act between honouring campaign promises and keeping the economy alive must be struck. It is a tough place to be: voters recognise a full belly; they don't reward effort.

The burden of leadership is sacrifice. But the fruits of disciplined and careful economic management will most certainly be there for all to see long before the next encounter with the voter.

Otherwise, the dogs will be out.

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Inside



8 HARSH REALITY CHECK: Ruto faces the potentially risky option of going back on some of his lofty campaign promises to voters as the truth of the state of the economy dawns on his new government.

9 KENYA'S FOREIGN POLICY: From the SADR to Somalia and China, Ruto has yet to make up his mind on how to handle external relations. So far, he has managed to send mixed signals.

21 TIME FOR NATIONAL HEALING: With the General Election behind us, we need a conversation to cure the ills that have made the electoral process in our country so bitter and divisive.

22 SIMMERING SIBLING RIVALRY: Western Kenya kingpins Musalia Mudavadi and Moses Wetang'ula separately consider themselves third in command in political influence and power.

the telescope

■ **UK ready for 500 heads of state and dignitaries**



Pallbearers from The Queen's Company, 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards prepare to place the coffin of Queen Elizabeth II on a Catafalque inside Westminster Hall on September 14. PHOTO | AFP

Queen's funeral: Presidents to use buses

Queen Elizabeth's funeral is set to be one of the biggest gatherings of royalty and politicians hosted in the UK for decades. Invitations went out this week, with some 500 heads of state and foreign dignitaries expected to attend. The majority of leaders have been asked to arrive on commercial flights and told they will be bussed en masse from a site in west London. The ceremony at Westminster Abbey has a capacity for around 2,200 people. Here's what we know so far about who will and won't be in attendance. Members of royal families from across Europe, many of whom

were blood relatives of the Queen, are expected. Belgium's King Philippe and Queen Mathilde have confirmed they will be there, as have King Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands and his wife, Queen Maxima, along with his mother, former Dutch queen Princess Beatrix. King Felipe and Queen Letizia of Spain have also accepted an invitation, as have the royal families of Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Monaco. The White House has confirmed that President Joe Biden will attend along with First Lady Jill Biden, although they are understood not to be travelling to the service by bus.

■ **Dropped out of the race calendar in 2018**

F1 unlikely to return to Malaysia soon



Formula One is unlikely to return to Malaysia anytime soon as the government focuses its efforts on rebuilding the economy from the ravages of the coronavirus pandemic, the circuit's boss said. Azhan Shafrihan Hanif, chief executive of the Sepang International Circuit which

used to host the race, has said the government may reconsider its options after two to three years. The Sepang track, located outside the Malaysian capital, Kuala Lumpur, first hosted the race in 1999, with the last Grand Prix held there in 2017. Malaysia dropped out of the F1 calendar from 2018 amid the rising cost of hosting the event. "At this juncture, the answer is no, not for the time being," Azhan Shafrihan said when asked if Malaysia was planning to host the race again.

■ **Worsening hunger and climate change**

IMF urges policy caution for Africa

African countries have to walk the tightrope as they contemplate economic reform at a time of worsening hunger and climate change. In a new report, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said African governments face an "extremely challenging" environment in macro-economic policy.



"Addressing the lack of resilience to climate change (and) critically underlying chronic food insecurity... will require careful policy prioritisation against a backdrop of financing and capacity constraints," it said.

At least 123 million people, or 12 percent of sub-Saharan Africa's population, are projected to be acutely food insecure, it said.

The impact on economies from the Covid-19 pandemic has combined with a surge in grain prices fuelled by the Ukraine War, it said.

At the same time, East Africa is suffering from one of the worst

droughts in recent history. Despite these problems, some liberalising reforms in trade, regulations and markets are feasible, the IMF said. "Trade liberalisation and import diversification could help stabilise regional food supply and prices," the fund suggested. It pointed to a ban that Zambia imposed on exports of its corn in 2020. If some of the harvest had been available, it could have helped with southern Africa's food shortfall. The IMF renewed a pledge to back African countries needing technical assistance and financial support.

■ **Just end the senseless war in Ukraine**

Pope warns of misuse of religion



Religion should not be used as a prop for power. Pope Francis told an inter-faith meeting in Kazakhstan. "May we never justify violence. May we never allow the sacred to be exploited by the profane. The sacred must

never be a prop for power, nor power a prop for the sacred," he said. Francis spoke a day after appealing for peace and an end to the "senseless and tragic war" in Ukraine. "Mindful of the wrongs and errors of the past, let us unite our efforts to ensure that the Almighty will never again be held hostage to the human thirst for power," Francis said. "Let us free ourselves of those destructive notions that offend the name of God."

CLARIFICATION



On Page 11 of the September 11 edition of *The Weekly Review*, we erroneously captioned a photo of former Kenya Broadcasting Corporation Director-General Richard A. Koske (left) as Achieng' Oneko (right), a former Information and Broadcasting Minister. We regret the error.



kenya lens

■ ECONOMY IN THE DOLDRUMS

RUTO: NO QUICK FIX

President walks a tightrope as he seeks to stabilise a bleeding economy. With a large share of tax revenues tied to fixed costs such as salaries, pensions and debt service, opportunities for the new administration to make drastic changes to the state's spending programmes are limited



President Ruto will be operating under stiff IMF conditionalities, requiring him to implement politically unpopular reforms across several sectors.

• By JAINDI KISERO

Reality has forced President William Ruto to swallow the International Monetary Fund's bitter pill. While on the campaign trail, one of the key pledges he made was to lower the cost of living by bringing down the prices of food and fuel – the two main factors responsible for the prevailing heat and inflationary pressures on the economy.

Indeed, pundits were predicting that the new President would announce a raft of subsidies to cushion households from the ravaging effects of persistent and, unpredictably, soaring prices of fuel, food and transport costs.

He had come through from the rhetoric he made on the stump as a populist with a solution to every economic malady facing the country. Keen observers of

economic policy issues were profiling him not just as a populist, but a tax and spend fanatic likely to dismantle all expenditure ceilings that had been set by the outgoing administration of President Uhuru Kenyatta.

On being sworn in, President Ruto confounded friend and foe alike. The rhetoric and language had changed. "We must start living within our means," he said,

repeating the cliché and mantra associated with the Washington consensus and that basically reflects the same mainstream economic thinking by the Kenyatta administration.

It was the pronouncement by President Ruto on state-funded subsidy programmes that clinched it in terms of providing

...Continued on Page 6

kenya lens

■ TOUGH TIMES AHEAD FOR 'HUSTLER NATION'

LIMITED LEG ROOM FOR PRESIDENT

The Central Bank of Kenya. Breaking ranks with the International Monetary Fund could complicate chances of access to international capital markets.

...Continued from Page 5

a road map for the economic policy direction the country is headed in under the new administration. He said: "On fuel subsidy alone, the taxpayer has spent a total of Sh144 billion, a whopping Sh60 billion in the last four months. If the subsidy continues to the end of the financial year, it will cost the taxpayer Sh280 billion, equivalent to the entire nation's development budget."

Taking a dig at his predecessor's administration, Ruto charged that a politically-motivated attempt by the outgoing government to subsidise maize flour during the build-up to the General Election had not worked. "That programme gobbled up Sh7 billion in one month, with no impact," he charged.

Yet, Ruto's stand on elimination of fuel subsidies did not completely surprise analysts. Close followers of dealings between Kenya and the IMF were aware that elimination of fuel and food subsidies was one of the centre-pieces of the prescriptions of the lender's bitter pill under the programme with Nairobi.

In its latest review, the IMF has in one of the

documents published on its website deplored the fact that Kenya's monthly subsidy bill (net of petroleum development levy resources) had jumped from a negligible amount in July 2021 to an estimated Sh13 billion in June 2022.

The IMF warns that fuel subsidies are likely to prove costly and unsustainable for Kenya, especially if international oil prices keep rising. "Maintaining domestic prices unchanged at the June 2022 level will push the cost of the fuel subsidies to about 1.9 per cent of GDP in the 2022/2023 financial year," says the Fund.

The prescriptions by the IMF include a requirement that Kenya must not only review the application of its fuel pricing mechanism but must also appoint "a task force to oversee the progressive elimination of the fuel subsidy within the current financial year". It also wants the government to ensure that fuel pricing actions are at all times aligned with budget deficit targets agreed with the Fund.

Clearly, President Ruto will be walking a tightrope having to juggle between IMF prescriptions and inflated expectations of a support base that believes he has a solution to the rising cost of living. If international oil prices

On fuel subsidy alone, the taxpayer has spent a total of Sh144 billion, a whopping Sh60 billion in the last four months. If the subsidy continues to the end of the financial year, it will cost the taxpayer Sh280 billion, equivalent to the entire nation's development budget.

President William Ruto

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don't behave, restless segments of Ruto's so-called 'hustler' base may soon start agitating and putting pressure on his administration to demonstrate that the new president can provide leadership on the issue of high fuel and food prices.

The prognosis right now is that the cost of living crisis may deepen. International fuel prices rose by more than 30 per cent between February and May following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Currently, price forecasts based on quotes on future markets predict that global prices will remain elevated through the end of December.

Traditionally, Kenya's fuel pricing formula has been passing international price increases to the consumer. But the Kenyatta administration left domestic prices unchanged between October 2021 and February 2022.

In July, the government introduced a fuel subsidy programme where the existing petroleum development levy would be paid into a fund aimed at smoothening volatility due to changes in international price and import costs. The subsidies had to be discontinued because the government risked breaching

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While on the campaign trail, one of the key pledges the President made was to lower the cost of living by bringing down the prices of food and fuel.

The retail price for a litre of petrol is Sh179.30. The government scrapped petrol subsidies after President Ruto said they were unsustainable.

In 2012, the average price of a two-kilogramme packet of maize flour was Sh109, according to consumer price indices from the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. It now retails at Sh215.

About 1.4 million bags of subsidised fertiliser that will be sold at Sh3,500, down from Sh6,500, will cushion farmers from high production costs and transform the sector into a profitable investment.

budget deficit targets agreed on with the IMF.

In the circumstances, domestic prices were increased in March by an average of 4.1 per cent. But with global prices continuing to skyrocket, and with the government delaying to pay oil marketers, the country witnessed widespread fuel supply shortages in April. Since the subsidy had been eliminated, prices were adjusted upwards on average by 6.3 per cent per month in April, May and June.

President Ruto will be operating under stiff IMF conditionalities, requiring him to implement politically unpopular reforms across several sectors, including introduction of broader taxes, restructuring of Kenya Airways, restoring Kenya Power's long-term financial viability, publication of a forensic audit on Covid-19 spending, publication of beneficial ownership of companies awarded public contracts and overhauling of the anti-money laundering legal framework.

Must President Ruto obey the IMF? He has come in at a time when government finances are in bad shape. With a large share of tax revenues tied to fixed costs such as salaries, pensions and debt service, opportunities for the new administration to make drastic changes on the government's spending programmes will be limited.

The new regime has limited leg room and latitude to do anything bold or extraordinary. Breaking ranks with the Fund could complicate chances of not only accessing more resources from the IMF but also of access to international capital markets. So far only US\$1.2 billion has been disbursed out of a total of US\$2.3 billion under the deal negotiated by

the outgoing administration and the Fund.

While Kibaki survived by keeping the IMF at bay, the circumstances then were different.

He inherited an economy that had suffered decades of underfunding on infrastructure and decided to follow what is known in economic textbooks as the Keynesian rule book: do most of the borrowing domestically, spend massively on infrastructure and keep interest rates low.

Hawking personal loans

That was on the fiscal policy side. On the monetary policy side, he succeeded in bringing interest rates low by disrupting the dynamics in money markets. In his budget speech of 2003/2004, Finance Minister David Mwiraria reduced the cash reserve ratio from 10 to six per cent. Banks suddenly found themselves with massive excess reserves, forcing them to start hawking personal loans to wananchi. Interest rates on the 91-day Treasury Bill tumbled from eight per cent in December 2002 to below two per cent in late 2003 and the first half of 2004. The interbank market — where banks lend to one another —

was also heavily disrupted, with rates falling from around six per cent early in April 2003 to 0.4 per cent in mid-July.

Such was the disruption that the IMF hurriedly dispatched a mission led by Dr Godfrey Kalinga, a Tanzanian, to Nairobi to warn us about an impending collapse of the bond market and advise the government to allow interest rates to start gliding upwards.

By the time President Kenyatta was taking over in 2013, the strategy of tax and spend and low interest rates had run its course and could no longer stimulate durable growth.

But the administration continued with heavy infrastructure spending on roads, ports, railways and electricity infrastructure.

The difference was that unlike Kibaki's time, most of the money for infrastructure spending was funded by external debt.

The big infrastructure investment came with a huge demand for dollars to fund imports of steel and heavy machinery. Earnings from tea, coffee and horticulture remained consistently low. The collapse of tourism added to Kenya's economic woes.

The country ended up with persistently widening current account deficits and massive debt service obligations.

Kenya was exporting massive amounts of dollars to pay Chinese contractors and service expensive syndicated commercial loans and Eurobonds. Regionally, the weak performance of the economy relative to its neighbours has led to appreciation of their currencies against the Kenyan shilling. In the medium term, the country may be forced to survive on the IMF's bitter bill.

President Ruto's stand on elimination of fuel subsidies did not completely surprise analysts. Close followers of dealings between Kenya and the IMF were aware that elimination of fuel and food subsidies was one of the centrepieces of the prescriptions in the lender's bitter pill under the programme with Nairobi.

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■ NO SILVER BULLET FOR ECONOMIC WOES

HARSH REALITY CHECK*The President faces the politically risky option of going back on some of his lofty campaign promises as the true state of the economy dawns on his new government*

● By MACHARIA GAITHO

President William Ruto hardly had time to settle down before confronting the harsh reality that the national budget is not elastic.

He campaigned on the promise to splash money on virtually every interest group, but conceded as he was sworn into office last Tuesday that he was inheriting virtually empty coffers from his predecessor Uhuru Kenyatta.

The Bottom Up policies emphasised on Dr Ruto's Kenya Kwanza manifesto were touted as an economic revolution that would, in simple terms, take money from the rich and give it to the poor in increased support for small, medium and micro-enterprises, youth and women empowerment, and neglected and marginalised regions.

There was also the promise of increased investment in agriculture, particularly in provision of affordable fertiliser, seeds and other inputs. Ruto, his own words, found a deep hole in the National Treasury, and now faces the politically risky option of going back on some of his campaign promises, as well as scrapping some of the expensive subsidies put in place by the former government at the height of the campaign season. While the Ruto campaign crowed that it had transformed electioneering in Kenya from just mobilisation of ethnic blocs to issue-based politics, it still has to contend with the fact that economic policies are essentially political.

The dilemma faced by the new administration was seen on the first full day in office, when it had to make a decision on the fuel subsidy just before the monthly pump price review.

In his inauguration speech on September 13, Ruto had bravely acknowledged that subsidies were a major drain on the Treasury and were not sustainable. He noted that fuel subsidies had already cost the public purse some Sh140 billion, expected to rise to Sh280 billion by the end of the fiscal year next June. At a policy level he offered that subsidies were prone to abuse, distorted the markets and created confusion that instead of ensuring availability of essential products actually led to shortages.

He was obviously aware that the government had been defaulting on its promise of cash refunds to the oil marketing companies, who were quietly threatening to withhold supplies until they were paid. A day after the president was sworn in, there was some confusing messaging. His social media propaganda out-



Jubilant Kenyans during the inauguration of President William Ruto at Kasarani Stadium on September 13. DENNIS ONSONGO | NATION

fit lauded his bravery in scrapping subsidies that supposedly only benefitted multinational corporations, but from elsewhere were coming reports that the subsidies would remain for at least one more month pending discussions with the oil marketers.

It was not until much later that official communication came from the Energy and Petroleum Regulatory Authority confirming removal of the subsidy for petrol, but retaining it for diesel and kerosene.

Removal of the subsidy saw the price of petrol shoot up from Sh159 to a new historic high of Sh179 per litre. The prices of diesel and kerosene also went up by Sh25 and Sh20 to retail at new highs of Sh165 and Sh148 respectively, but consumers were still cushioned by subsidies to the tune of about Sh20 and Sh26 for each product.

Announcing a policy shift in regard to subsidies but then scrapping them for some products and retaining them for others might seem inconsistent, but it is merely acknowledgement that political realities militate against some moves. The thinking here might

be that private cars, which use high octane Super petrol, are for the wealthy, while kerosene is used by the poor for lighting and cooking and diesel powers public transport buses as well as tractors and other agricultural and construction equipment.

It was also politics in play that saw Ruto pronounce himself against subsidies while at the time directing a 50 per cent reduction in fertiliser prices, the difference from market price obviously being met by the government.

It is early days yet and the new president still has myriad constituencies to make happy, the most crucial being financing of the Bottom Up economy through such promises as the Sh50 billion 'Hustler Fund'. He acknowledges that the coffers are empty, but the money must still come from somewhere, which will mean diversions from another budget line.

If the new regime finds that there is simply no money to meet some of the extravagant campaign promise it made, then it might be tempted to divert attention by pointing the

...Continued on Page 11

kenya lens

INTERNATIONAL GOALS

• By JOHN KAMAU

The crowd in Kasarani Stadium did not notice the diplomatic significance of the presence of the Polisario Front's leader, President Brahim Ghali, during the inauguration of President William Ruto.

It was an indicator that Kenya would continue to recognise the contested Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) as a sovereign state – and not as an annex of the Kingdom of Morocco. But as President Ruto started introducing the African presidents present, he skipped President Ghali's name. Whether the omission was deliberate or political is not clear, but what followed shows that Ruto still has yet to make up his mind on his foreign policy.

While the president's speech was shy on foreign policy and rich on domestic issues, close observers noted that the Polisario matter was one of the most significant on that day.

On the dais, too, was Israeli's Minister for Intelligence, Elazar Stern, representing a country that had in 2020 signed a deal with Morocco – brokered by US President Donald Trump. Under the deal, Morocco would resume diplomatic ties with Israel and Washington would recognise Rabat's sovereignty over disputed Western Sahara. Ghali's presence at the inauguration, which was attended by 17 other African heads of state and government, seemed to have created a diplomatic dilemma.

In 1984, President Moi faced a similar dilemma when he was chairman of the Organisation of African Union (now African Union) after Polisario was invited to become the 51st member of OAU, triggering a boycott by 18 countries and exit of Morocco from the continental body. Morocco has been lobbying African leaders for support and using its fertiliser muscle for diplomacy. Western Sahara, as SADR was previously known, and parts of Morocco sit on 70 per cent of the world's phosphate, which is used in the production of phosphorous fertiliser.

Ever since they fell out, Ruto and former president Uhuru Kenyatta were divided on the future of SADR's diplomatic relations with Kenya. When Ruto met with Morocco's ambassador to Kenya in March 2021, he seemed to favour Morocco's autonomy plan as the "best solution", according to an embassy bulletin. This position was different from Kenyatta's support for Polisario, which was part of his pan-Africanist agenda.

It was not a surprise that two days after his inauguration, Ruto stated on his official Twitter handle – after receiving a message at State House, Nairobi, from Morocco's King Mohammed VI and a meeting with Moroccan Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita – that Kenya has rescinded "its recognition of the SADR and (will) initiate steps to wind down the entity's presence in the country".

Before the president deleted the tweet, it had already been picked by Morocco's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which announced that "follow-



FOREIGN POLICY: EAST OR WEST?

From the Morocco-Sahrawi diplomatic goof to Somalia and China, the President has yet to make up his mind on how to handle external relations

ing HM the King's message to the new President of the Republic of Kenya, Dr William Ruto, the Republic of Kenya has decided to revoke the recognition of the pseudo 'rasd' and to initiate steps for the closure of its representation in Nairobi".

Pseudo "rasd" is how Morocco refers to SADR – previously known as Western Sahara – which has been fighting for recognition.

The handling of the SADR diplomatic issue illustrates the difficulties that President Ruto will face as the complexities of foreign policy begin to unfold. Kenya has, since 2005, when it recognised SADR as a sovereign state, been blowing hot and cold over the relationship, which has also informed part of its African diplomacy. In 2007, Kenya derecognised SADR during Mwai Kibaki's presidency, only to resume in December 2013 after President Uhuru Kenyatta allowed it to reopen its Nairobi embassy.

With the AU on the side of SADR, and the US and Israel backing Morocco, it will be interesting to see how Ruto will balance domestic interests and those of his allies. The President has a soft spot for Israel due to his religious background, and it was one of the first countries to recognise his victory.

Another quandary that confronts Ruto is the future of Kenyan troops in Somalia, where they have been stationed since 2011, and the fate of the ownership of the oil-rich blocks in the Indian Ocean claimed by the two countries. It will be interesting to see how Uhuru, whom Ruto has retained as his regional peace envoy, navigates the diplomatic issues, especially in the horn of Africa, which has been a theatre of mini-wars.

In the East African region, Ruto has aligned himself with Uganda's Yoweri Museveni, which would explain why he introduced him first at Kasarani. The relationship between Kenya and Uganda was tricky during Kenyatta's tenure, although both countries claimed to enjoy cordial relations. The cold tensions were in recent years informed by Museveni's perceived support for Ruto, whom he hosted at his Rwakitura home last year. During his campaign, Ruto appeared to bash China, Kenya's largest bilateral lender, for the country's debt troubles. In addition, his decision to shift the cargo clearance from Naivasha to Mombasa might jeopardise the Standard Gauge Railway's revenue and put Kenya at loggerheads with the East Asian economic powerhouse.

From railways to highways, China has financed most of the recent infrastructure projects in Kenya, a fact that was often brought up on the campaign trail. It is not clear what position the new government will take on relations with China relations although Ruto signalled to a Chinese delegation that Kenya will still look to China to finance and develop its infrastructure. Chinese news agencies described the move as a "U-turn". This will be a diplomatic issue to watch.

From the west, the US has sent Meg Whitman, a former CEO of eBay and President of Hewlett Packard as its envoy to Nairobi, an indicator that Kenya sits within the framework of the US's commercial and security interests.

As the complexities of foreign affairs unfold, all eyes will be on the person that President Ruto will pick to handle the sensitive docket in the new government. So far, he has managed to send mixed signals.

kenya lens

■ EAST AFRICA'S MOST STABLE DEMOCRACY



KENYA'S MOMENT IN THE SUN

With his inauguration, President Ruto has all the arms of government locked. He begins his term on a high with the approval of the region, the continent and the world, who are ready to do business with the East African powerhouse

• By TONY MOCHAMA

The cavalcade of cars bearing heads of state cascaded into the Kasarani Stadium on the morning of September 13 as the continental potentates arrived in grand style to pay homage to Dr William Samoei Ruto on his inauguration as the fifth President of the sovereign Republic of Kenya.

President Yoweri Museveni (Uganda), Samia Hassan (Tanzania), Paul Kagame (Rwanda), Evariste Ndayishimiye (Burundi), Felix Tshisekedi (DRC), Ethiopia's Premier Abiy Ahmed, Somalia's Hassan Mohamud, South Sudan's Salvador Kiir, Ismail Guelleh (Djibouti), Dennis Nguesso (Congo), Lazarus Chakwera (Malawi), Emmerson Mnangagwa (Zimbabwe), Filipe Nyusi (Mozambique), Azali Assoumani of Comoros, Wavel Ramkalawan (Seychelles) and Guinea Bissau's Umaro Embaló attended the colourful event.

There was even the president of a state that does not exist, the Saharawi Republic, that is located in an autonomous region in Morocco's southern provinces.

A month ago, the Western world,



Outgoing President Uhuru Kenyatta shake hands with President William Ruto at the Moi International Sports Centre, Kasarani, during the inauguration ceremony on September 13. PHOTO | AFP

A month ago, the Western world, led by the European Union, had already indicated that they had absolutely no problem with the way the General, and presidential elections, had gone down in Kenya – unlike in past recent elections (2017, 2013 and especially 2007) when they had “serious reservations ...”

led by the European Union, had already indicated that they had absolutely no problem with the way the General, and presidential elections, had gone down in Kenya – unlike in past recent polls (2017, 2013 and especially 2007), about which they had “serious reservations”.

The official EU communique of their satisfaction came from the High Representative in Kenya Jo-

sep Borell, who commended Kenyans for the “calm and peaceful election day on August 9, when (they) expressed their choice across six elections, including the presidency”, then added: “The EU takes note of the result declaring Dr Ruto the winner ... and we look forward to working together on the EU-Kenya Strategic Dialogue.”

The Supreme Court of Kenya then put nine final nails in the coffin of the presidential aspirations of Azimio coalition leader Raila Odinga, by dismissing all petitions filed to challenge Ruto's win in a unanimous verdict.

Deputy Chief Justice Philomena Mwilu described the dysfunction at the electoral commission that presided over the elections as “*kama vindeo, kama drama*” (like a dramatic film).

Justice Isaac Lenaola, to the keen observer, sounded the death knell for the Raila Odinga team when he posed this fatal question (to lawyer Jothan Arwa): “We saw your clients (the four dissenting electoral commissioners) on TV reading out results until the eleventh hour. What evidence do we have it (their Sere-

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na Hotel split protest address by Deputy Chair Juliana Cherera) wasn't an afterthought?"

Once one's argument in a Court of Law has been dismissed as an afterthought, one may as well pack it up and go home, for that is a lost cause. And so it came to pass that, a few days after the Supreme Court verdict, Chief Justice Martha Koome was able to state publicly at a funeral in Meru that "Kenya has earned respect in the eyes of the world because of the independence of our judiciary (in making its verdict)..."

Senior counsel like new Siaya Governor James Aggrey Orenge vehemently disagreed with this assessment, stating that the Supreme Court's multiple rulings against his client were "political".

Political controversies

Former Attorney-General Githu Muigai views the current judiciary as an independent body, "compared to the courts before the 2010 Constitution, and especially in the (Moi) era where, anxious not to offend the Executive, the courts got themselves entangled in their own inhibitions, fictions and procedures that curbed the judiciary" – and got it hitched like

We look forward to working together and developing further, together with the future Kenyan leadership, the mutually beneficial EU-Kenya Strategic Dialogue that started in June 2021.

EU High Representative in Kenya
Josep Borell



From left; Presidents Yoweri Museveni (Uganda), Ismail Omar Guelleh (Djibouti) and Salva Kiir Mayardit (South Sudan) at the Kasarani Stadium on September 13. JEFF ANGOTE | NATION



President Brahim Ghali of Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic at Kasarani Stadium during the inauguration. JEFF ANGOTE | NATION

a mkokoteni to its operator (the Executive). Yet, discerning counsel like Orenge may see a court now too scared of becoming involved in great political controversies, like in the Maraga era; one that has given supremacy to numbers over procedure in presidential determination processes, and indeed allowed its jurisdiction "on electoral outcomes to be ousted", according to another prominent advocate in the country.

At the tail-end of the week that began with Ruto's victory in court, he enjoyed dual triumphs by winning the Speaker seats in both the Senate and the National Assembly in the so-called 'Last Battle' between the Kenya Kwanza Alliance and Azimio-One Kenya coalition. Amason Kingi, the immediate former governor of Kilifi, was elected as the new Speaker of the next

Senate. In the National Assembly that Friday, former Senator Moses Wetang'ula of Ford-Kenya, who was the butt of popular mirth in the campaign period with jibes such as "buy one MaDuD, get a Weta free!" is now the Speaker of the august House.

With his inauguration, nine September Days after that Supreme Court ruling, President Ruto now has all the arms of government locked. Backed by a new cabinet and in lockstep with his agenda, the new president appears all set to get down to work with the approval of the region, the continent and the world, which seem ready to do business with the regional power house that is Kenya.

Mr Mochama is the author of 'Political Party After Party: A 60-year history of political parties in Kenya.

It's a reality check for new team

...Continued from Page 8

finger of blame at Uhuru Kenyatta.

President Ruto's inauguration speech was notably silent on the pledge to establish a Commission of Inquiry into 'State capture' under the Uhuru regime, a process that promises to unearth massive corruption that benefited the former First Family and their business associates.

A public inquiry of that nature would, for some in the Ruto administration, be the perfect device to explain away failure to meet campaign pledges on the basis that new government inherited empty coffers following ten years of an administration in which the public purse was looted dry. It might not be incidental that former Gatundu MP Moses Kuria, a close Ruto ally, is already dropping hints of revelations in coming days that will shock the nation.

The problem for Ruto, however is that he was tied at the hip to Uhuru for the two terms of the Jubilee government. Although he was frozen out in the second term after Uhuru struck an alliance with opposition leader Raila Odinga, Ruto remained deputy president and was quite happy to continue enjoying the perks of office.

He also traversed the country on presidential campaigns in which he liberally claimed credit for Jubilee achievements in roads and other major infrastructure projects. Ruto would therefore be wary of launching an investigation into his former partner that might also open him to depiction as a co-conspirator in grand theft.

Unlike some of the more loquacious and reckless politicians in his entourage, Ruto would also be cautious that dragging Uhuru through the coals might rebound badly on him if the inquiry is seen as a political witch hunt unprecedented in Kenya where retired presidents are allowed their peace.

the limelight



Britain's King Charles III makes his declaration during a meeting of the Accession Council inside St James's Palace in London on September 10 to proclaim him as the new King. PHOTO | AFP



Kourtney Kardashian and her husband, Travis Barker, attend the Boohoo by Kourtney Kardashian show during the New York Fashion Week on September 13. PHOTO | AFP



Plumes of smoke rise during a reported Russian bombing near the village of Hafsarja, in the rebel-held westside of Idlib, on September 8. PHOTO | AFP



French director Alice Diop poses after receiving two awards during the 79th International Film Festival at Lido di Venezia in Venice, Italy, on September 10. PHOTO | AFP



Security forces repulse a group of people who had tried to force their way into Kasarani Stadium for President William Ruto's inauguration ceremony on September 13. PHOTO | AFP



Canadian actor Will Arnett (left) drags US television host Jimmy Kimmel onstage during the 74th Emmy Awards at the Microsoft Theater in Los Angeles, California on September 12. PHOTO | AFP

The
Arena



MEET THE KING OF THE ROAD

McRae Kimathi has thrilled the European circuit with his daredevil skills. The first Kenyan to enter the FIA Junior WRC Championship hopes to inspire a generation to come

OPEN SPACE

OUR POLITICS IS TRIBAL

REGIONAL ALIGNMENT: While many would like to believe that issues prevailed over ethnicity, voting and dominant discourse in the recent elections proved otherwise

• BY JAMES MUGENDI

During campaigns for the just ended General Election, politicians, political analysts and other commentators often talked about how the tribal factor had been transcended by issues. William Ruto and his Kenya Kwanza team repeated this line often. But is this really true?

Assessment of actions by the leading presidential contenders, utterances by politicians on the campaign trail and the voting data show that 'issues' were nothing but a blip. Certainly, efforts were made to address matters like cost of living, returns in the agricultural sector, the business environment, health and education, but these made up a very small part of the campaigns, which were dominated by fear-mongering, personality attacks and community re-alignment. A number of writers and economists evaluated the manifestos of the two leading formations – Azimio la Umoja-One Kenya Coalition and Kenya Kwanza – and their verdict was almost unanimous: there was little difference between the two documents in terms of big picture plans. The variance was mostly in detail and approach.

The leading presidential contenders knew that the tribal factor was still the most critical element in the elections and they worked hard to have community and regional lords in their teams. To make inroads into the western and coast regions, Ruto enticed ANC's Musalia Mudavadi and Ford Kenya's Moses Wetang'ula (western), and Salim Mvurya and Amason Kingi (coast) with promises of key government positions. On the other hand, Azimio's presidential candidate, Raila Odinga, had Uhuru Kenyatta, Martha Karua and other political leaders in Mt Kenya in his efforts to take a large chunk of the region's votes, which have always eluded him. Odinga and Ruto fought hard to woo Kalonzo Musyoka, largely considered to



be the Kamba region's head honcho. Eventually, Raila won him over, together with large numbers of Kamba votes. The only exception to the kingpin formula was in the Mt Kenya region, where different tactics were used.

The Kenya Kwanza team centred its messaging in the region on vilification to reserved praise as the situation demanded. The bogeyman factor (Odinga, and lately Uhuru), which has dominated the region's politics since 2013, was added into the mix. But tribe was not completely left out: Ruto's choice of Rigathi Gachagua as his running mate was largely informed by this. Even so, Raila made significant gains in central Kenya with the backing of several kingpins from the region. In Tharaka-Nithi, for example, where he polled less than one per cent in 2017, he received 9.32 per cent in the just concluded elections. Overall, the former Prime Minister garnered 22 per cent of the vote in the 10 Mt Kenya counties, more than double what he had received in the 2013 and 2017 elections. Similarly for Kenya Kwanza, Ruto performed much better in Vihiga, Mudavadi's home county, than he and Uhuru did in 2017, when the ANC leader was largely rejected in his home county. Bungoma was the icing on the cake for the Kenya Kwanza Alliance, after it flipped completely to Ruto's side as the county backed its kingpin, Wetang'ula. At the coast, Ruto made modest inroads, garnering over 48,000 more votes than he and Uhuru did in 2017. Thus, while we would like to believe that we have put tribal politics behind us, the numbers and dominant discourse in the campaigns prove otherwise.

Mr Mugendi is a sub-editor with the Nation Media Group.

Are you young and ambitious? We would like to hear from you. Send your views and observations on topical issues to: weeklyreview@ke.nationmedia.com

MIND SPEAK



Kevin Lemaiyan

I appreciate all Kenyans for maintaining peace since the August 9 General Election. I urge our new President to serve all Kenyans equally. He now represents all of us, those who voted for him and those who didn't. We should all have a fair share of the pie.
— Accountant



Zemran Ahmed

President William Ruto is a hard-working man. He's also strategic and visionary, just the kind of man that Kenya needs to move forward. His style of leadership will transform the nation. He has proven that it's possible to rise from a peasant to the highest office in the land.
— Producer



Brian Munene

Mr President, don't ever forget to empower "hustlers". You inspired us to vote for you. I am confident you'll work hard to lift us up. Work on economic stability, health-care and create jobs for the youth. We are looking forward to a prosperous future. Don't let us down.
— Driver



Stephanie Mbogua

Mr President, the "Hustler Nation" has high expectations. We are struggling to make ends meet as the cost of living is very high. Implement policies that will create more jobs for the youth who rallied behind you throughout the campaigns. That's my prayer.
— Journalist

MY TAKE

CRACKING THE CRYPTOMARKET

'HIDDEN HAND': Limits on exchanges should be subject to government oversight. Traders on these platforms should, in case of emergencies, have their history made available to authorities



• BY WAGA ODONGO

How much is a dollar worth? It is currently a moving target. The Central Bank of Kenya (CBK) is keen on maintaining the fiction that it is worth Sh120. My bank doesn't believe them and thinks that a dollar in your pocket is worth a measly Sh115 but will sell you the same at an extortionate Sh130.

The best deal on the greenback available comes from several global cryptomarkets, which at the time of writing allow you to buy tokens pegged to the dollar at Sh125.4 and sell the same at Sh125.8. Many Kenyans, tired of the immiseration caused by the bottom falling out of the shilling, are turning to dollar-pegged stablecoins to preserve the value of the little that they own.

Firstly, I would like to discourage you from dealing in crypto. It bears high risks; the market is crawling with shysters and the price swings will have you gasping for breath. I would suggest instead to pick up a more easily curable vice like alcoholism. Also, I do not want to demoralise cryptoexchanges; they provide work for many young Kenyans, some who make a living bid-

ding up the price of internet funny money. Companies like Paxful, LocalBitcoins and Binance are a godsend and banning them is unimaginable. I am more interested in the few weaknesses in these markets that can be exploited by criminals.

I recently signed up to one of the bigger exchanges and about ten minutes after handing over my ID and scanning my face – they require you to contort your face in front of a camera as they take multiple photos for almost a minute – I was given a daily trading limit equivalent to \$8 million dollars (Sh960 million using the Central Bank's dollar rate).

Note that this is not the maximum trading limit. It is what is immediately available to signed up users. You can raise your trading limit to \$96 million per day by jumping through a few extra hoops. In Kenya, every time you make a transaction worth \$10,000, your bank is supposed to report the activity to the CBK. M-Pesa limits you to Sh300,000 per day in batches of Sh150,000. Cheques are limited to under Sh1 million.

A local bank once summoned me for sending Sh550,000 to a dormant account and then trying to withdraw it all a few seconds later. The money was well below the legal limit, the bank said, but it looked suspicious. I was forced to prove that it was mine using emails and bank statements.

Here we have a trading platform with limits that are hundreds of multiples of what your bank would deem kosher and does not even require you to send a Kenya Revenue

Authority pin. What should be of particular concern to Kenyans and the CBK are the measures some sellers on these platforms put in place to make it harder to leave a digital trail. One seller on the site with a balance of over \$1 million, says in his bio that for deals worth more than Sh350,000 the payment through the bank will be split into smaller, less conspicuous payments. He won't take a trade for less than Sh100,000.

Another trader explains that you can kick out the middle man – pesky M-Pesa and bank accounts – and barter cold, hard cash for dollar tokens, all for the very reasonable fee of three per cent. This gets rid of any digital paper trail. About a decade ago, Anthony Chinedu of the Chinedu and Akinyi soap opera had his bank account flagged when he tried to deposit several million shillings. He was later deported over drug trafficking allegations. Today, someone in need of quick conversion of cash into easily acceptable digital currency wouldn't go to a bank but a cryptoexchange.

After the Westgate attack, detectives were able to piece together the network involved by tracking the banking activity of one of the attackers. For a country that is periodically victim to terrorism, it is essential that in the aftermath of an attack, investigators can quickly seize a suspect's financial history to sniff out possible accomplices. Terrorism skews towards young and male, a demographic whose financial history nowadays more often than not includes digital tokens.

These exchanges are not new.

They have been around for a decade. What is different is their scale and the full range of options catering to the local market offered nowadays. I met a sales girl who is paid completely in digital tokens and then loans them on a separate platform to earn interest, forming a sort of loop which never needs ever to be turned into cash or deal with the local banking system. Cryptoexchanges are now complex ecosystems from which users need never exit and into which our central bankers may not peek to see their inner workings.

Even in the stagger and stumble of the current Bitcoin market, one of the smaller exchanges reports it trades Sh10 billion a week in Kenya. Some of these exchanges are several multiples the size of the largest companies in Africa and going after them will be difficult. It is not clear whether or not these exchanges share trading information with the CBK. I wager they do not. Secrecy is worn as a badge of honour in crypto; I mean, "crypto" itself means hidden.

My view is that limits on these exchanges should be subject to government oversight. Trades and traders on these platforms should, in case of emergencies, have their history made available to authorities. A billion-shilling-a-day limit is also ludicrous and such sums should only be available to institutional players. At the same time, advertisements for cash bartering of digital tokens should be limited to small amounts.

Mr Odongo is a Software Engineer



Brad Osumo (right), the proprietor of the Big Fish Restaurant in Westlands, at work with his staff on September 15. EVANS HABIL | NATION

FEEDING THE NATION

REELING IN THE BIG FISH

HOW TO SATISFY THE MASSES: Osumo Brad appears to have found a successful formula for drawing top-notch clientele to his fast-growing restaurant business

● BY EDDY ASHIOYA

He is a busy man. At least that is the impression I get from the Twitter-esque *summa cum laude* hot shot, I being the underdog writer with a bowl out for a story. I say Twitter because that is where his big break came from. Like an updated Messiah, from retweets and likes, he now feeds multitudes.

He earns his bread by selling fish. “He” is Osumo Brad, a 29-year-old fishmonger, as he likes to describe himself, doing what God meant him to do — setting up The Big Fish Restaurant, a nidus for social intercourse, where the who’s-who of the who’s-who take their dates on Fridays, when everyone is ready to usher in the weekend just like God meant it to be — with a belly full of fish and hands grasping Dutch courage.

Nairobi, it seems, has always had a predilection for fish. Think of the K’Osewes, the Mama

Oliechs, and now The Big Fish. Why Big Fish, anyway?

“I wanted everyone to know this as the place you go to for the good kind of fish. We wanted to be popular, and famous.” His honesty is disarming, in a way that, depending on whom you ask, is either driven by ambition or avarice. I settle on a Biblical phrase: What you confess you possess.

And speaking of big fish, he recently hosted a star-studded line-up of A-list politicians, including former Prime Minister Raila Odinga and Narc-Kenya party leader Martha Karua. Throw in lawyer-cum-politician Nelson Havi. Asking him about that moment feels intrusive as he is clearly still swimming in a pool of aggrandisement. Now, everyone wants to have what Baba had. Can he satisfy the masses?

“I think I can, you know. We have almost 40 employees.”

Cards on the table, I confess I am not a big fan of fish (ahem) but I can be persuaded. So, why fish? “I grew up in Migori. I only came to

Nairobi for work, with no success. I decided to cast my net on the other side to see what I could catch. Now, we cook fish for our clients the way we cook fish at home.”

The work he is speaking about is in line with bio-chemistry, which was his major at the university. There were no jobs and rather than stay at home complaining (on Twitter), he decided to team up with his sister, who was selling fish on the roadside, in some sort of *quid quo pro*.

While the sister prepared the meals, Brad be-

29

Age of Osuna Brad, who runs two popular restaurants in Nairobi. From the inaugural branch in Roasters, Garden Estate, opened four years ago, he recently opened another on Church Road, Westlands.

Quite speedily, one of Nairobi's most popular fish joints became one its most valuable, too. From their inaugural branch in Roasters, Garden Estate, opened four years ago, they recently opened another on Church Road, Westlands.

came the face of the business. As fate would have it, it was Twitter that would provide the rocket fuel that would launch their dreams.

Quite speedily, one of Nairobi's most popular fish joints became one its most valuable, too. From their inaugural branch in Roasters, Garden Estate, opened four years ago, they recently opened another on Church Road, Westlands. Have things turned out the way that he expected at 29? "I never had expectations. I just knew that I had to have a car and a house. But Big Fish has taken me places."

I think of a joke which I am overeager to share with him. "You know I could have started this series with other people but my teacher always told me to aim high—to go for the Big Fish." He doesn't get it, so I move on. What does he spend his money on? "I'm a teetotaler but I spend a lot of my time in the clubs. I don't even buy stuff for myself, you know?"

He finishes everything with that verbal tic, "you know". I can tell, from his challenges, that he is a different kind of CEO. The ones who lead from the heart. He is an avatar for

the new age manager — the jeans-wearing, tee-shirt clad honcho. "My biggest struggle right now is that everyone is looking to me for guidance. When you have a business, you are like a parent. They all expect you to have deep insights into life. That's the price you pay, you know?"

"Success is doing what makes you happy. It's not the money aspect; it's internal fulfilment. There are people who start something and stop, but if you are consistent in your activities, there is no sweeter feeling than making it in the end, you know?"

When it comes to the fishes, he remains an arriviste rather than an aristocrat. He remembers his last big failure, when he almost walked away from it all. Actually, he did.

In 2018, business was so bad that he left for the village, swearing never to touch fish again. But the thing with callings is that they are a flea in the ear. He came back and is here for good, channelling all his *joie de vivre* peppered with reminiscence.

When I get the opportunity, I hit him with the question I have been yearning to ask: small fish, big pond, or big fish, small pond?

"I would rather be a small fish in a big pond. You have more challenges and outsmarting them gives you a sense of pride. You approach life with the mentality of an underdog, and who doesn't love an underdog, you know?"

I know.

I would rather be a small fish in a big pond. You have more challenges and outsmarting them gives you a sense of pride. You approach life with the mentality of an underdog, and who doesn't love an underdog, you know?"

Osumo Brad



The Big Fish Restaurant in Westlands, Nairobi, on September 15. EVANS HABIL | NATION

RALLY OF THE GODS

THE SPEED MERCHANT

BLAZING THE TRAIL: A prodigious driver, McRae Kimathi has dazzled crowds all over the world with his daredevil skills. He seeks to become the first East African professional rally driver and, hopefully, inspire a generation in years to come



McRae Kimathi was the only indigenous African driver to finish in the Top Eight of the 2021 Equator Rally in Naivasha. **BELOW:** Navigated by Mwangi Kioni, Kimathi powers his Ford Fiesta forward during the 2022 Equator Rally on April 1. PHOTOS | ANWAR SIDI AND SILA KIPLAGAT

• BY PETER NJENGA

McRae Kimathi almost touched the gods of medieval Greece last weekend, setting into motion a burgeoning career conceived in Kenya but spreading across Europe like a tornado sweeping through a sleepy village in Asia.

Navigated by Mwangi Kioni, the young Kenyan rally driver is demolishing the perceived notion of a black man's inability to excel in motorsports.

He is living the dream of his teenage idol, seven-time Formula One world champion Lewis Hamilton, who recently toured



Kenya during his summer break. Hamilton has confirmed the superior nature of a black person's chromosomes in many

ways, especially in matters speed. Kimathi, 27, concluded a tight rally schedule that took him to freezing winter and snow in

Scandinavia, Sweden, Croatia and Estonia, before racing through rocky Portugal and finally making a triumphant entry into Greece, celebrated as the home of architects, philosophers, mathematicians and sports.

Kimathi conquered the EKO Acropolis International Automobile Federation's Junior World Rally Championship 2022 last Sunday, finishing in fifth position.

He now looks forward to an even busier international calendar in his quest to become the first East African professional rally driver, hoping his activities will inspire a generation in years to come.



McRae Kimathi and co-driver Mwangi Kioni before the WRC Safari Rally at the Moi International Sports Centre, Kasarani, on June 17. SILA KIPLAGAT | NATION

The Acropolis Rally is known as “the rally of the gods”. Whether he touched the gods is unknown. Nonetheless, Kimathi found an inner sense of belief. “I started the season in Sweden as a boy. Today I feel like a teenager, and from here I can only become a man in

1999

Phineas Kimathi, McRae’s father, was the first person to give Hyundai Motor Corporation their first WRC points in winning the 1999 F2 category of the Safari Rally.

rallying. It has been a long season, very tough. I am happy with the results,” said Kimathi in Greece.

“You keep learning. Combining the world and Africa championships has been challenging. I think this is the season in which I have done the greatest number of rallies in my life. I have learnt a lot and my speed has improved.”

“I look forward to the next WRC season. They are very committed to their driving and I am sure I can go far with more training and exposure,” he added.

An alumnus of Strathmore University, the lanky Kimathi is both unassuming and urbane. He made his debut in the 2015 Kenya National Rally Championship series in Naivasha, which turned

out to be a baptism of fire, although he managed a top 10 position in one of the stages.

The first child in a family of three, Kimathi was born and brought up in a rallying atmosphere, getting inspiration from his father, Phineas Kimathi, who gave Hyundai Motor Corporation their first WRC points in winning the 1999 F2 category of the Safari Rally.

The younger Kimathi has been rallying under the M-Sport Poland professional team, which has invested heavily in his career, including training him in the difficult skill of snow driving in Gellio, Norway.

“One I started rallying, I realised that it demanded discipline as well as physical and mental

fitness. I also realised that I needed something more realistic to help me develop into a better driver,” he said.

“With this in mind, I entered the autocross championship in 2017 and finished second. In 2018, I was third.” His rallying skills improved, but he also learnt that haste was not a virtue.

“When I was 17 and full of adrenaline, my father had a Subaru Forester that I would take out for a spin on Sundays, just around the estate. One Sunday, I drove too fast, slid off the road, hit an electricity post and rolled. It was a nasty accident but thank God I got out without major injuries.”

The incident taught him the need to respect cars and to follow the proper learning curve if he was ever to become a rally driver. Was it a worthy lesson?


“The incident taught me many things. First of all, I discovered where my limit is and the dangers of motorsport,” he said. “It also played a big psychological role in the early days of my career as I was a bit scared.” “In rallying, you have to have a strong mentality and I quickly forgot about it and moved on. In hindsight, it allowed me to be more responsible outside of the sport.”

And indeed, his cool, calm and collected demeanour has made him stand out as Africa’s most promising rally driver, an enviable position that continues to encourage other young drivers speeding up the racetrack in Kenya.

The FLIP SIDE
With J. Nyaganyaga
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ALL EYES ON HIM

THE HUSTLER WHEELBARROW FINALLY ARRIVED AT THE HOUSE ON THE HILL LADEN WITH GOODIES ON TUESDAY THE 13TH OF SEPTEMBER 2022. IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME, THE MERITS OR DEMERITS OF THE CONTENTS WILL BE SELF-EVIDENT. FOR NOW ALL WE SAY IS CONGRATULATIONS YOUR EXCELLENCY.



STAR OF THE WEEK

ONE OF THE MOST AWE-INSPIRING STORIES TO COME OUT OF THE RECENTLY CONCLUDED GENERAL ELECTIONS HAS TO BE THAT OF 30 YEAR OLD MUMIAS EAST MP PETER SALASYA. HIS POLITICAL JOURNEY HAS BEEN ABOUT SURMOUNTING NEAR-IMPOSSIBLE OBSTACLES. IT BEGAN WITH A HUMILIATING LOSS AT EGERTON UNIVERSITY WHERE HE VIED FOR ACADEMICS DIRECTOR AS A FRESHMAN. HIS FIRST ATTEMPT AT CAPTURING THE MP SEAT ENDED IN ANOTHER HUMILIATING LOSS WHERE HE EMERGED LAST ONLY MANAGING A PALTRY 254 VOTES IN THE 2017 GENERAL ELECTIONS. HE SUBSEQUENTLY LOST HIS BANKING JOB AND TOOK UP PART-TIME TEACHING TO MAKE ENDS MEET, ALL THE WHILE KEEPING HIS MP DREAM ALIVE. HIS NEVER-SAY-DIE ATTITUDE FINALLY PAID DIVIDENDS IN THE 2022 GENERAL ELECTIONS WHEN HE WON THE MUMIAS SEAT WITH HARDLY ANY MONEY IN HIS POCKET, TROUNCING FINANCIALLY STRONG AND MORE SEASONED POLITICIANS. A ROUND OF APPLAUSE FOR MHESHIMWA SALASYA.



opinion



■ Support and invest in small businesses and the informal sector

Bottom-up economics should lift us up

Did the old adage, all's well that ends well, hold true on Tuesday? As President Uhuru Kenyatta handed over the reins of power to his former deputy William Ruto, debate started as to what that particular moment signified for both men, and for Kenya. It was bitter for the former and bittersweet for the latter.

The political legacy of the two men will be forever intertwined, especially because Kenyatta handed over power to the man he campaigned against and whom he refused to congratulate when he won.

The two politicians together won the presidency in 2013 and then again twice in 2017. Yet, in 2012, they were co-accused at the International Criminal Court charged with crimes against humanity. Nothing could be more heinous, but they still won, because sentiment against a foreign court hardened. They shared government on a 50-50 basis. They dressed like lookalike toddlers. They high-fived and flaunted a camaraderie not seen before at Kenya's political apex.

Indeed, Kenyans thought they had won themselves two presidents for the price of one. Yet, last month, Kenyatta declared publicly that while he would hand over power as per the constitution, his preferred leader remained Raila Odinga, the heir apparent for whom he unsuccessfully campaigned.

Never before has a Kenyan President invested

Power changed hands smoothly and swiftly before 20 heads of state and a cheering filled-to-capacity Nyayo National Stadium. After four long years, it was time to quit electioneering and to move on to the business of building the nation.



**KWENDO
OPANGA**

so much time, energy and resources in fighting his deputy. Never before in Kenya's political history has a presidential succession struggle raged so fiercely at the top for over four years.

And never before has a Kenyan Number Two hit back at his boss with everything but the kitchen sink, at every opportunity and for so long in a sustained war of attrition between bosom buddies-turned feral enemies. But in the end, for the people of Kenya, all's well that ends well. Power changed hands smoothly and swiftly before 20 heads of state and a cheering filled-to-capacity Kasarani Stadium. After four long years, it was time to quit electioneering and to move on to the business of building the nation.

And the business of building the nation must now be led by President Ruto who on the campaign trail unveiled bottom-up economics and the rise of hustler politics. Hustler politics promises that the children of the lowly can rise to positions of prominence and, like Ruto, become assistant minister, minister, deputy president or president.

There are two strands to bottom-up economics. One is that the government is duty bound to create opportunities for young people to participate in the economic growth of the country by becoming

creators of wealth, getting employment and running businesses.

Here too, children of the lowly, given an opportunity would, like Ruto, start small businesses that would transition to big businesses, or transnationals even, and help transform the economy.

The second strand says that since Independence, Kenya has pursued a policy of encouraging large-scale enterprises, especially transnationals, to invest in the Kenyan economy, but this policy has not changed the majority of Kenyans. Indeed, this school of thought says, most Kenyans — over 70 per cent — are employed by small businesses and medium enterprises and the so-called informal sector. It is therefore time for the government to switch to supporting and investing in small businesses and the informal sector more.

Together, bottom-up economics and hustler politics promise inclusivity. On the campaign trail, Kenya Kwanza leading lights pronounced this as ensuring no person and no region would be left behind and that all Kenyans and their regions would play greater roles in the economic development of the country. Seated at the top, President Ruto must lead from the bottom up.

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opinion

■ We need a conversation to cure the ills that make the electoral process so bitter and divisive

The elections are over, it's time for national healing



MACHARIA
GAITHO

Acept and move on." That is the exhortation those who win elections, by means fair or foul, reserve for those who lose and dispute the results.

This is a message we need to re-emphasise now that elections are over and we must accept the reality that there is a new tenant at State House.

Accept and move on. No, I am not addressing the losing presidential candidate Raila Odinga and his running mate Martha Karua or their millions of supporters, but President William Ruto and Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua, who were sworn into office on Tuesday evidently still suffering hangovers from the campaign trail. The elections are over, Mr President and Mr Gachagua, and you are now safely enscathed in office for the next five years. Accept and move on.

It was a poor show, to say the least. A national event attended by dignitaries from around the world, including at least 20 African heads of state and government, was reduced to the venal rhetoric and petty jibes from the campaign rallies.

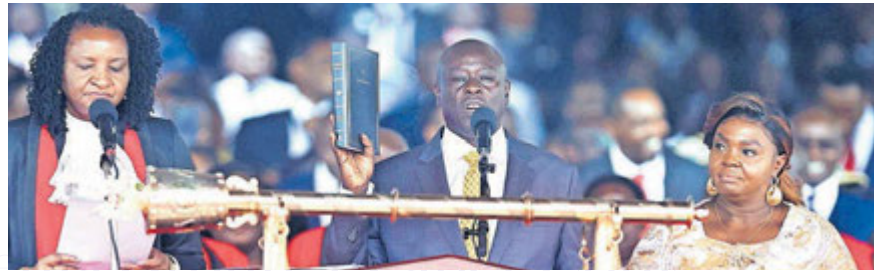
The inauguration broadcast live across the world was supposed to be a showcase of a maturing democracy that should be envy of the rest of Africa and much of the Third World. The African oligarchy of life rulers present were supposed to witness first hand a civilisation where power regularly passes from one president to another peacefully and in joyous celebration.

Instead, Presidents Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, Evariste Ndayishimiye of Burundi, Umaro Mokhtar Sissoco Embaló of Guinea Bissau, Paul Kagame of Rwanda and other life potentates in attendance were provided justification for their refusal to let go.

Anger and bitterness were the hallmark of the Ruto presidential campaigns. What we saw on Tuesday indicates that State House and the Deputy President's mansion will still need anger management programmes.

Meanwhile, as we look forward with hope and optimism on the ascension of a new regime, we must also be rather apprehensive of what those

The inauguration broadcast live across the world was supposed to be a showcase of a maturing democracy that should be envy of the rest of Africa and much of the Third World. The African oligarchy of life rulers present were supposed to witness first hand a civilisation where power regularly passes from one president to another peacefully and in joyous celebration.



Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua takes the oath of office as his wife, Dorcas Gachagua, looks on at the Moi International Sports Centre, Kasarani, on September 13. The oath was administered by the Chief Registrar of the Judiciary, Anne Amadi (left), and witnessed by the Chief Justice and President of the Supreme Court, Martha Koome. SILA KIPLAGAT | NATION

who rule while consumed by anger and bile can visit upon us.

There is a tendency for such characters to forever look back instead of looking forward, to blame their opponents and their predecessors for their own failures, and to lash out with vengeance at those they evidently still harbour grudges against. President Ruto had a graceful, inspirational and forward-looking written speech that focused on his agenda while recounting the difficult journey travelled and also paying tribute to his opponents. Unfortunately, delivery was marred not just by the difficulty of navigating an iPad, but by injection of unscripted comments that revealed the chip still on his shoulder.

He seemed to be echoing the ungracious diatribe of his DP, Gachagua, who abused the opportunity to say a few words by launching into ugly rhetoric that had no place in such a solemn occasion. Gachagua's jibes directed at outgoing President Uhuru Kenyatta were absolutely unnecessary and exposed an uncouth, uncultured person who cannot be entrusted with higher office.

It was a menacing delivery that was actually frightening for the threats it carried. He gave us reason to be afraid, very afraid. But he also provided us with an apt reminder that eternal vigilance is the best guarantor of our democracy.

Meanwhile, we must also urge Odinga and Karua to accept and move on. Their skipping President Ruto's inauguration because they still do not accept the electoral outcome and the Supreme Court validation is pitiable, to say the least. Karua has indicated that she will continue to challenge the election results beyond the Supreme Court by moving to the East African Court of Justice in Arusha. That is perfectly within her right, but honestly, I don't know whether to laugh or cry.

I am not one of those fellows who pompously

address each other as Learned Friend and spout Latin gibberish at every opportunity, but my layman's reading tells me going to the regional court will be an exercise in futility.

Odinga and Karua have much more important things to do than hopeless pursuits on a lost election. They can first commission an independent inquiry into what went wrong with the Azimio la Umoja presidential campaign. It is likely that over-confidence in the power of the State machinery did them in.

They might also want to examine why their Supreme Court challenge was so pathetic, especially in the fatal failure to present incontrovertible evidence in their own Form 34 A election count result slips from polling stations.

More important, however, is that they command loyalty of half the country. That is a vast constituency in need of leadership. A strong and vibrant opposition remains a vital bulwark against any threats to democracy, human rights, freedom of expression and comeback of the Moi-style lootocracy. And if what we saw at President Ruto's inauguration is anything to go by, there is urgent need for national healing.

The dream of a national conversation to cure the ills that make the Kenya electoral process so bitter and divisive still needs to be championed, alongside the unending pursuit of a fair, just and equitable society. The ill-fated Building Bridges Initiative was doomed to failure once it became a political engineering project outside the initial lofty goals of national unity.

There is room for leadership on that score. Political players teaming up with civil society, professional associations, religious groupings, trade unions, business lobbies and community groups can form powerful movements that not only provide checks and balances against abuse of power, but also set the roadmap towards realisation of the Kenya we want.

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kenya lens

■ FIGHT FOR SUPREMACY IN WESTERN KENYA

SIMMERING SIBLING RIVALRY*Already, political brothers Mudavadi and Wetang'ula separately consider themselves as 'third in command' in political influence and power after President Ruto and DP Gachagua*

● By OSCAR OBONYO



Musalia Mudavadi

In one of the most discrete political plots ahead of this year's elections, President Uhuru Kenyatta's handlers first identified Amani National Congress (ANC) party leader Musalia Mudavadi as his preferred successor. Midway through execution of their scheme in 2019, however, they shifted attention to Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) leader Raila Odinga because he best suited their interests.

David Murathe, the outgoing President's close ally and one of the transition schemers, says the initial decision to back the ANC leader as heir to the throne was persuaded by his political experience and national stature. Mudavadi was further adjudged favourably as a comprise candidate who enjoyed political chemistry and a long-standing relationship with Kenyatta.

In their assessment, though, Mudavadi's "Mr Nice" outlook and his gentlemanly political mien were not enough to crack the quandary at hand, which was to stop Kenyatta's deputy William Samoei Ruto from ascending to the presidency. Behind-the-scenes manoeuvres opted for Odinga, a seasoned politician and four-time presidential contender, whom Murathe says "was solidly grounded and therefore the only one capable of stopping Ruto".

In retrospect, Murathe may well have been correct about Mudavadi when he pointed out that he was "incapable of stopping Ruto". This is because he actually just succeeded in

doing the opposite – enabling a Ruto presidency. Alongside his Ford-Kenya counterpart, Moses Wetang'ula, who was recently elected Speaker of the National Assembly, Mudavadi is basking in the glory of scorning Kenyatta's plea to support Odinga's candidature. In a highly dramatised protest move, dubbed "Earthquake", Mudavadi instead threw his support behind Ruto. Today, he peers into his political future and that of his western Kenya backyard with hope.

With the election of Wetang'ula as Speaker and his own nomination as Prime Cabinet Secretary on the cards, the excitement among voters in western Kenya is understandable.

While Mudavadi and Wetang'ula secured less votes for Kenya Kwanza in the region than Odinga's (besides bagging fewer elective seats in the gubernatorial and parliamentary races), Ruto's ultimate victory is a most welcome development for the two. It has catapulted them to senior national positions and given them great opportunity to charm the ground to their side.

Exciting battle ahead

Under the emerging circumstances, a political battle with Odinga is inevitable. As ODM's deputy party leader, immediate former Kakamega Governor Wycliffe Oparanya is primarily the custodian of the Odinga support base in the region and will put up a spirited fight to guard what he worked so hard to achieve.

Besides securing 10 out of 12 parliamentary seats for Azimio in Kakamega County, Oparanya, who spearheaded the coalition's campaign in the region, also ensured a resounding victory in Busia, and in Mudavadi's home county of Vihiga, where Azimio won the gubernatorial and senatorial slots. Going forward, these are gains that Mudavadi and Wetang'ula will want to wrestle from Oparanya, and by extension Odinga, which makes for an exciting political battle ahead.

But perhaps the most vicious and less talked about battle is going to come from right within – between the two "political brothers". Henry Wabwire, a commentator on political

kenya lens

affairs, argues that Mudavadi and Wetang'ula cannot be Ruto's joint pointmen in the region as well as joint leaders of the Luhya nation, or joint presidential candidates in the next elections.

"At the risk of being accused of wedging a rift between them, I have to mention it plainly that the two will naturally clash in their pursuit for political influence and repositioning ahead of the next General Election. It is just the nature of politics," opines Wabwire.

Already, Wetang'ula and Mudavadi separately consider themselves as "third in command" in political influence and power after President Ruto and DP Rigathi Gachagua. Internal political competition is one great hurdle that the two leaders will have to overcome if they are to avoid the same pitfalls as their predecessors.

Unlike the neighbouring Luo community, or the Kikuyu and Kalenjin, who ordinarily rally their support behind one leader at a time, Luhya politics has over the years been characterised by intense rivalry between leaders from the community. In 2002, for instance, when President Daniel arap Moi of the then ruling Kanu party appointed Mudavadi as the vice-president – the first from the community – he received strong opposition from Michael Kijana Wamalwa of Ford-Kenya. Wamalwa went ahead to vanquish Mudavadi and Kenyatta at the ballot to become the eighth VP.

Wamalwa passed on in August 2003, and although President Mwai Kibaki replaced him with another Luhya – Moody Awori – the move was resisted by leaders from present-day Bungoma and Trans Nzoia counties. Musikari Kombo, who replaced Wamalwa as Ford-Kenya party boss, led protests to Kibaki, saying they wanted a new VP appointed from either of the two counties and from the Ford-Kenya fraternity. Awori, from Busia County, was then allied to Odinga's Liberal Democratic Party.

The disagreements are reminiscent of the political supremacy battles witnessed in the 1970s and 1980s between ex-Cabinet minister in the Jomo Kenyatta government Masinde Muliro and Musalia's father, Moses

The disagreements are reminiscent of the political supremacy battles witnessed in the 1970s and 1980s between Masinde Muliro and Moses Mudavadi. The stars of other influential politicians of the time, including Butere MP Martin Shikuku and his Kimilili counterpart, Elijah Mwangale, similarly failed to shine at the national stage.

Mudavadi, who was a powerful Local Government minister in Moi's government. The stars of other influential politicians of the time, including Butere MP Martin Shikuku and his Kimilili counterpart, Elijah Mwangale, similarly failed to shine at the national stage. Shikuku, for instance, vied for the presidency in 1997 under the Ford-Asili party, garnering a paltry 36,302 votes that represented 0.60 per cent of the votes cast.

Campaign pledges

Their numbers notwithstanding, Wabwire surmises that the political leaders of the Luhya – the second largest community after the Kikuyu – have over the decades lacked unity and coordinated focus. While, for instance, the senior Mudavadi is credited for fostering development, including securing employment for residents from the region, Muliro focused more on political unity as a means of securing power.

Wabwire, nonetheless, hails the long-standing cordial relations witnessed between Mudavadi and Wetang'ula. The two Kenya Kwanza principals now shoulder the political dream of most western Kenya residents, who are fixated with the notion of occupying the country's top seat. While all Luhya political players agree that one of the two should rise to the helm of the country's leadership, the avenue of realising this goal remains a major source of debate and disagreement.

Wetang'ula, for instance, holds that locals must first "politically free themselves" from Odinga's stranglehold, which explains his decision late last year to defect from the defunct National Super Alliance to team up with Ruto. The next step, according to him, is to win over the ODM leader's supporters in the region before seeking backing from other Kenyans.

But Oparanya considers such an approach simplistic and a product of siege mentality. The former governor believes the region can only make impact on the national stage by teaming up with neighbouring communities under the old "Kavirondo" arrangement, and not through exclusion of other communities.

As the Mudavadi-Wetang'ula pair settles down in the new political dispensation under Ruto, observers and pundits will be on the alert, monitoring how they balance between executing their campaign pledges and manoeuvring their way on the political chess board towards the coveted prize in 2027, and beyond.



Moses Wetang'ula

SCIENCE & TECH



The new iPhone 14 Pro

iPhone 14 Pro's 48MP camera will blow you away

The new iPhone 14 Pro and iPhone 14 Pro Max feature the Dynamic Island — a new design that introduces an intuitive way to experience iPhone — and the Always-On display.

Powered by A16 Bionic, the fastest chip ever in a smartphone, iPhone 14 Pro introduces a new class of pro camera system, with the first-

ever 48MP main camera on iPhone featuring a quad-pixel sensor and Photonic Engine, an enhanced image pipeline that dramatically improves low-light photos.

These groundbreaking advancements make iPhone even more indispensable for everyday tasks, creative projects, and now even emergency situations with

features such as Emergency SOS via satellite and Crash Detection. iPhone 14 Pro and iPhone 14 Pro Max will be available in four gorgeous new finishes: deep purple, silver, gold and space black. Available in 6.1-inch and 6.7-inch sizes, both models include a new Super Retina XDR display with ProMotion.

WHY GO BACK TO THE MOON?



The Artemis I uncrewed lunar rocket on its launch pad 39B at NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida, on September 6. BELOW: US astronaut Stanley Glen Love speaks to the press at the Kennedy Space Center.

WASHINGTON

On September 12, 1962, then US president John F. Kennedy informed the public of his plan to put a man on the Moon by the end of the decade.

It was the height of the Cold War and America needed a big victory to demonstrate its space superiority after the Soviet Union had launched the first satellite and put the first man in orbit. "We choose to go to the Moon," Kennedy told 40,000 people at Rice University, "because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win." Sixty years on, the US is about to launch the first mission of its return programme to the Moon, Artemis. But why repeat what has already been done? Criticism has risen in recent years, for example from Apollo 11 astronaut Michael Collins and the Mars Society founder, Robert Zubrin, who have long advocated for America to go directly to Mars.

But NASA argues re-conquering the Moon is a must before a trip to the Red Planet. Here's why: NASA wants to develop a sustainable human presence on the Moon, with missions lasting



several weeks, compared with just a few days for Apollo. The goal: to better understand how to prepare for a multi-year round trip to Mars. In deep space, radiation is much more intense and poses a real threat to health. Low Earth Orbit, where the International Space Station (ISS) operates, is partly shielded from radiation by the Earth's magnetic field, which isn't the case on the Moon. From the first Artemis

mission, many experiments are planned to study the impact of this radiation on living organisms, and to assess the effectiveness of an anti-radiation vest.

What's more, while the ISS can often be resupplied, trips to the Moon — a thousand times further — are much more complex. To avoid having to take everything with them, and to save costs, NASA wants to learn how to use the resources present on the surface.

In particular, water in the form of ice, which has been confirmed to exist on the lunar south pole, could be transformed into rocket fuel by cracking it into its separate hydrogen and oxygen atoms. NASA also wants to pilot on the Moon the technologies that will continue to evolve on Mars.

First, new spacesuits for spacewalks. Their design was entrusted to the company Axiom Space for the first mission that will land on the Moon, in 2025 at the earliest.

Other needs: vehicles — both pressurised and unpressurised — so that the astronauts can move around, as well as habitats.

Finally, for sustainable access to an energy source, NASA is working on the development of portable nuclear fission systems.

africa lens

■ LEADERS PLEDGE TO STRENGTHEN TIES



President William Ruto held talks with Somalia President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud at State House, Nairobi, on September 22. They discussed the security situation in Somalia and the Horn of Africa. PHOTO | PSCU

NEW SOMALIA-KENYA DANCE

Mohamud-Farmaajo rivalry reactivated as Mogadishu welcomes Ruto presidency after a period of sour relations between the two neighbouring states. Mohamud has been flexible and fast in embracing the new Kenyan leader. He was among the first heads of government across Africa to send a congratulatory message even before the victory was validated by the Supreme Court

● BY OSCAR OBONYO

The election of William Samoei Ruto as Kenya’s fifth President has peculiarly ignited celebrations in Mogadishu just as it did in Nairobi. Somalia’s political class is just as hopeful as the Kenyan voter in the new administration.

Ahmed Ali Salaah, a Nairobi-based Information Technology (IT) consultant from Garowe, the administrative capital of Somalia’s Puntland State, attributes jubilation by supporters of immediate former President Mohamed Farmaajo to the “political connections” he enjoys with Ruto’s camp.

The import of Salaah’s sentiments is that Far-

maajo could leverage on his closeness to the Ruto administration to execute a plot to return to power, in the same way Hassan Sheikh Mohamud did to recapture his seat (from Farmaajo) three-and-a-half months ago.

Alive to the Ruto-Farmaajo political chemistry, President Mohamud has been flexible and fast in embracing Ruto. Incidentally, he was among the first heads of government across Africa to send a congratulatory message to Ruto upon being declared winner of the August contest, even before his victory was validated by the Supreme Court.

The importance of Nairobi as an operational base for Somali politicians cannot be overstated. Owing to the state of insecurity back home,

coupled with access to Nairobi-based international media, most politicians – including presidential hopefuls – have their campaign command centres housed in the Kenyan capital. And many more have members of their families living and studying or working in Nairobi.

And while in Kenya, observes Salaah, the politicians similarly benefit from readily available professional services from an array of experts in the fields of strategic communication, IT, research and translation services from Somali to English and vice-versa.

Farmaajo, who has already indicated inten-

...Continued on Page 26

africa lens

Rebuilding Nairobi-Mogadishu relations

Kenya Defence forces soldiers under the Africa Union Mission in Somalia patrol Kismayu town on November 22, 2015.
JEFF ANGOTE | NATION



...Continued from Page 25

tions of challenging Mohamud in the 2026 polls, best understands the strategic location of Nairobi. Before ending Mohamud's initial term in office in 2016, Farmaajo was a common face in the Kenyan capital, from where he plotted his campaign and fundraising, staging a series of strategic meetings in high-end hotels. Borrowing from the same wisdom, leader of Wajir party Abdirahman Abdishakur, a former political-ally-turned-foe of Farmaajo's, also based his activities in Nairobi to plot the Somali leader's ouster. In August 2018, however, Kenyan authorities cancelled Abdishakur's political rally in Nairobi, with then National Assembly's Leader of Majority Aden Duale affirming that the government would not allow "a Somali opposition leader to undermine their democratic government from our soil".

Today, the interests of Somali political players in Nairobi remain the same. The excitement among Farmaajo's supporters is persuaded by the fact that the for-

Mohamud was the leader in power when Somalia sued Kenya at the International Court of Justice in 2014. He is just the right man to undo his earlier actions that brought about the hostility between the two nations.

mer Somali leader enjoys cordial relations with Duale. They both belong to the larger Darod clan.

Speaking to *CNN* moments after being pronounced poll victor, Ruto promised to team up with his Somalia counterpart "with a view to promoting good neighbourliness and improving regional security".

Addressing journalists in Nairobi, Somalia's Information Minister, Daoud Aweys, said Mohamud and Ruto were focused on strengthening the cooperation and relationship between the two countries. The minister sought to allay fears of disharmony in relations between the two nations owing to the change of guard in Nairobi: "Any agreement entered into by the two countries will stay. If there are technical issues, we will set up special committees to ensure they are ironed out."

Aweys' reassurance is important considering the "small friction" between Ruto's and former President Uhuru Kenyatta's political camps. Due to the powerful position he held in the 11th and 12th parliaments as Leader of the Majority in the National Assembly before falling out of favour with Uhuru, Duale has over the recent past played a central role in Somalia-Kenya ties. This has further been cemented by the fact that he is also a member of the larger Somali community. When he landed in the country

last Monday ahead of the inauguration, for instance, President Mohamud was received at the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport by the Garissa Town MP, a close ally of President Ruto's. Appreciating a shared history of culture, language and trade, as well as the global threat of terrorism, Duale considers improved relations between Nairobi and Mogadishu as crucial for regional peace. Already, Mohamud has rolled out a

Any agreement entered into by the two countries will stay. If there are technical issues, we will set up special committees to ensure they are ironed out.

Somalia Information Minister Daoud Aweys



host of policies aimed at improving relations between the two countries. These include resumption of miraa (*khat*) exports and Kenya Airways' scheduled flights to Somalia two months ago, improvement of related travel bureaucracy by directing the relevant agencies "to implement the issuance of courtesy visas free of charge/gratis, on arrival" as well as processing visas for holders of ordinary passports as soon as possible, "preferably within 0 working days". These recommendations are contained in a pact signed between Mohamud and Kenyatta during his first visit to Kenya barely 40 days after being sworn into office for the second time. Kenya and Somalia have also demonstrated commitment to the fight against terrorism.

The return of Mohamud and his speedy moves to mend relations with Kenya, poisoned by hostility over an unresolved maritime border dispute, is no doubt a welcome gesture. The move has quickly calmed tension between the two countries leading to Kenya's Major General (Rtd) Thomas Chepkuto taking up office, last Friday, as new ambassador to Somalia. The two nations had earlier suspended diplomatic relations.

A host of factors, including Kenya's continued political dalliance with officials of the semi-autonomous government of Somaliland and the regional state of Jubaland, as well as the maritime border dispute, were responsible for the hostility. Mohamud, whose first term in office as Somali President stretched between 2012 and 2017, enjoyed a cordial relationship with Uhuru, who was first elected into office almost at the same time. Unlike Kenyatta, however, Mohamud lost his re-election bid to Farmaajo in 2017.

The recent show of unity between Ruto and Mohamud is a reassuring factor that the friction between the two countries may soon subside. Mohamud was the leader in power when Somalia sued Kenya at the International Court of Justice in 2014. He is just the right man to undo the damage caused by that action and begin the process of mending relations between the neighbouring nations.

global lens

■ FREEDOM FINALLY COMES HOME

OH, THE JOY OF LIBERATION

Ukrainian forces have advanced, and Russian forces have beaten a hasty retreat – critically from strategic locations in the eastern region of Kharkiv. They have lost the cities of Kupiansk, a crucial logistics hub, and Izyum, a launchpad for attacks



A rider cycles through Balakliya, Kharkiv region, on September 10. The speed – and breadth – of the counter-offensive has surprised the occupiers, and many Ukrainians. PHOTO | AFP

● KYIV

Natalia's face lights up as she recalls the moment of her liberation – when the hated occupiers were forced from her village, Novovoznesenske, in the southern region of Kherson.

She farmed there in peace and quiet until the Russians arrived on March 29. What they did not destroy, they stole, she says, including forks and spoons, and the shoes from a pensioner's feet.

"They were a rabble," she says, wringing her hands as she relives her trauma. Freedom final-

ly came on September 2. "When our armed forces arrived, we were in the basement," says the 50-year-old.

"They asked, in Ukrainian, 'Is anyone alive?' and I realised they were ours. They were so handsome, so beautiful especially compared to the fascists (her term for Russian forces).

"I didn't know what to do with them – if I should hug them or hold their hands? I touched them and I was very happy."

After months of deadlock, Ukrainians – and Russians – are facing a new reality. Suddenly there is momentum in the largest conflict in Europe since World War Two.

Ukrainian forces have advanced, and Russian forces have beaten a hasty retreat – critically from strategic locations in the eastern region of Kharkiv. They have lost the cities of Kupiansk, a crucial logistics hub, and Izyum, a launchpad for attacks.

"The Russian army is rushing to get famous as the fastest army in the world," wrote Andriy Yermak – chief of staff for President Volodymyr Zelensky – on Twitter: "Keep running".

Social media here has been flooded with images of abandoned or destroyed Russian posi-

...Continued on Page 28

global lens

Ukraine: Shock and joy in liberated villages

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky visits combat positions at the frontline with Russia-backed separatists in the Donetsk region on the Day of the Armed Forces of Ukraine on December 6, 2021.

...Continued from Page 27
 tions, and Ukrainian forces raising their flag in newly liberated areas. The speed – and breadth – of the counter-offensive has surprised the occupiers, and many Ukrainians. One Ukrainian colleague pronounced himself “shocked, pleasantly so.”
 “We needed a loud victory to cheer us up,” he says, “and it looks like there is a domino effect in Kharkiv. But they still have weapons and troops and lots of our territory. People still understand who our neighbour is. But there’s less fear and more confidence.” The advances have given a war-torn nation a shot in the arm, after grinding losses over the summer in the Donbas region.
 When we reported from there in June there was no indication that Ukrainian forces might be able to mount such a strong counterattack. “It’s a military mira-

It also looks like the Ukrainians outsmarted the Russians, not for the first time, by talking up plans to counter-attack in the southern Kherson region.

cle,” says Mykhailo, a 38-year-old IT engineer. The “miracle” has been achieved with plenty of foreign weaponry – including long-range multiple rocket launch systems – and foreign intelligence. It also looks like the Ukrainians outsmarted the Russians, not for the first time, by talking up plans to counter-attack in the southern Kherson region.
 The Kremlin appears to have taken the bait, redeploying some forces there, leaving their positions in Kharkiv dangerously exposed. But the offensive has also shown that the Ukrainians can beat the Russians on the battlefield, according to Western military experts.
 “We are now seeing the Russians being defeated, not just outmanoeuvred,” says Professor Michael Clarke, former Director of the Royal United Services Institute. He views this as “an early turning point.”
 Recently, President Zelensky said his country’s armed forces had recovered around 2,000 sq km since the beginning of September. The army put it at 3,000 sq km.
 For now, journalists are being kept away from the frontlines. We cannot verify all of Ukraine’s claims –

but Russia admits its troops have withdrawn from parts of Kharkiv, claiming they were “regrouped” rather than driven out.
 Despite Ukraine’s recent progress,

We needed a loud victory to cheer us up, and it looks like there is a domino effect in Kharkiv. But they still have weapons and troops and lots of our territory.

Andriy Yermak, chief of staff for President Volodymyr Zelensky



2000

President Zelensky says the armed forces have recovered around 2,000-sq km since the beginning of September.

the Russians still hold around a fifth of Ukraine – including the city of Kherson. It was the first major Ukrainian city to fall after the invasion and is just north of the Crimean peninsula (held by Russia since 2014). We managed to reach a woman still living there – who says the Russians are starting to lie low. For her protection we are not naming her.

“Over the past two or three days, the military seem to have quietened down a bit,” she tells us. “They are less visible in cafes and restaurants. If street fighting starts it will be very dangerous. But I will sit in the basement for days or weeks if need be. I want to see our army here and thank them. I want to see the victory.”

Also waiting for victory is a network of activists inside the city who are resisting the Russians. They gather intelligence on military positions and pass this to Ukrainian forces. A member of the resistance – who we cannot identify – told us they are being hunted.
 “The Russians are finding places where photos are being taken,” he says. “There are mass searches of flats close to strategic vantage points. There have been two cases in the past week when people were taken from the streets.” But he says the news from the frontline is bringing hope. “People are now very encouraged by the advance around Kharkiv,” he told us. “Many hope that we will be next.”
 Kherson city is a critical battle to come, but the advances so far have been cathartic for Ukraine and reassuring for its Western backers. If the gains are held, this could change the arc of the conflict. No one expects President Putin to throw in the towel. When it comes to Ukraine, he takes the long (and obsessional) view. But in places Russia’s frontlines have completely collapsed and its troops have fled. That’s not just a defeat. It’s a humiliation.

global lens

EXPORTS GREW BY 15 PER CENT LAST YEAR

Cuban factory that rolled Castro's cigars still strives for 'the perfect puff'. The Cohiba Lancero, which he smoked until he quit in 1985 at the age of 59, is still produced in the country

HAVANA

Seated before a machine that checks cigar quality, Orquidea Gonzalez says she is proud to carry on the craft's tradition and contribute to an export industry that grew during the pandemic.

"I love making cigars. This is where I've spent my life, and it's an art. Not everyone knows how to make cigars, like not everyone knows how to paint a picture," said the 55-year-old factory worker.

Her job is to measure in a metal tube the draw of each cigar to ensure that the smoker gets the perfect puff.

"If it's less than 40, the (suction) level is excessive; if it's more than 80, it's too low," she explained, her eyes glued to the machine's needle.

The El Laguito factory opened in 1966 in western Havana to make the cigars favoured by the hero of the 1959 Communist revolution and long-time president Fidel Castro.

The factory is the birthplace of Cohiba cigars, Cuba's most prestigious brand. The name recalls the way the native Taino people referred to the rolled tobacco leaves they smoked.

Rolling one's own leaves is a tradition that endures among farmers in the western province of Pinar del Rio, where most Cuban tobacco farms are located.

Castro's favourite cigar, the Cohi-

Despite the coronavirus pandemic, Cuban cigar exports grew by 15 per cent in 2021, totalling \$568 million, according to Habanos SA, which includes all national brands.



A worker packs cigar at the Cohiba factory in Havana on September 8. INSET: Cuba's President Fidel Castro smokes a cigar during a news conference at the Jose Marti airport in Havana on January 15, 1976.

CUBA, COOL AND 'CIGARIFFIC'



ba Lancero, which he smoked until he quit in 1985 at the age of 59, is still produced in the factory.

"Despite all the difficulties we face," the goal is to manufacture "nearly two million" cigars in 2022, or roughly 9,000 a day, said factory head Oscar Rodriguez.

Despite the coronavirus pandemic, Cuban cigar exports grew by 15 per cent in 2021, totalling \$568 million, according to Habanos S.A., which includes all national brands.

That constitutes a significant boon for the Cuban economy, which is in the grips of its worst crisis in 30 years, with daily shortages and power cuts.

The factory "did not stop for a single day" during the pandemic, eventually making cigars "the country's second-largest export," Rodriguez said.

Spain, China, Germany, France and Switzerland are among the top buyers.

Expertly handling curved blades and a sticky substance, dozens of workers put the finishing touches to the ends of newly rolled cigars.

Some 60 per cent of the workers are women – following a tradition at the factory founded by Castro's comrade-in-arms Celia Sanchez – that aims to give opportunities to single mothers or women in difficulty.

Another founder, Norma Fernandez, who died during the pandemic, rolled the cigars for the leader of the revolution.

"It was a privilege to be able to say, 'I made the president's cigars,'" said Orquidea Gonzalez, hard at work at the factory, which is housed in an elegant 1950s villa.

Caridad Mesa, now 55, started working at El Laguito as a cleaning lady. Thirty years later, she is in charge of spotting the smallest defects in the cigars.

It is necessary to control "the quality, the weight, the length... the thickness," she said, scrutinising boxes brimming with cigars under a large portrait of Communist revolutionary icon Ernesto "Che" Guevara.

Cohiba cigars, which include a wide range of styles, can cost \$30 to \$200 each, both in Cuba and abroad.

"Cuban tobacco is distinguished from all other kinds by the flavour of the land of Pinar del Rio," said Gonzalez.

It is there, she added, "where the best tobacco crops are grown".

OBIT

■ SUCCESS AGAINST GREAT ODDS

FALL OF A SELF-MADE MAGNATE



With little formal education, Samwell Ngetich managed to build a business empire and a political career that inspired and challenged all those who interacted with him.

● By VITALIS KIMUTAI

The death of Mzee Samwell Kipterer Ngetich closed the final chapter for a man who rose from humble beginnings to emerge as a business magnate with vast interests in the real estate, transport, tea, sugar, hospitality, mining, warehousing and retail sectors.

It also opened the lid on the life of a man who, despite dropping out of Class Three at Kericho Primary School, where he was enrolled in 1956, rose to be a councillor, a County Assembly Member, and Kericho Deputy Mayor.

Born in Chepsetyon village in Kericho county in 1949, the politician-cum-businessman died while undergoing treatment for a liver ailment, at MP Shah hospital in Nairobi, weeks after returning from India, where he had been taken for specialised treatment. He was 73.

Mzee Ngetich was popularly known as Chepsetyon (named after his village). His Kaunda suits and trademark flowered shirts, which he wore untucked, complemented his burly figure, broad smile and grey afro.

His was truly a rags to riches story. After dropping out of school, Ngetich did a series of odd jobs, including digging pit latrines, weeding maize, picking tea, selling chicken and as a hotel waiter. Eventually he opened his own hotel, a bar and a shop, then went into the matatu and transport business.

His flagship companies included Mbo-go Valley, Sangalo Tet and Kuresoi tea factories, Kipchimatt supermarkets, SABS Mining and Construction company, ABSS Warehouses Limited and West Valley Sugar company – running under the umbrella of Kipchimchim Group of Companies.

1949

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Notwithstanding his success, family and friends remember him as a humble and generous man who went out of his way to help others, including paying fees for more than 5,000 needy students.

He did not allow his lack of formal schooling to become a barrier to leadership. He always paid attention to detail and was regarded as a “walking library” on matters relating to Kericho town. As representative of Kapkugewet ward, he keenly followed the proceedings of the County Assembly, always insisting that the speaker, Kiptergech Mutai, spell out for him any matter he did not understand.

“He was a very knowledgeable old man who took very seriously the trust bestowed on him by the voters as their leader. He truly wanted to change the lives of the people he represented,” recalls Mutai.

Mr Jackson Kikwai, a former Member of the County Assembly who served with the deceased in the county assembly from 2013 and 2017, agrees.

“Mzee Ngetich was a very informed man on local and international matters, more than those of us who were better educated. When we visited Namibia and Israel to see their agricultural development, he amazed us with the grasp of technology deployed in the sector,” Kikwai says.

Before they left for Namibia, Ngetich had warned his fellow county assembly members that they would not get a market for their tea there because of low demand, a warning that many ignored but which proved to be accurate.

Former Kericho Mayor Joel Siele admires Ngetich’s resilience. “He never gave up. He was the perfect example of dusting oneself up and rising after every fall.”

“His children rallied behind him in his business enterprises and took them to the next level. They manage his various enterprises and are a solid example of how to run a family business,” says Siele.

Besides business, Ngetich also taught his children how to win in life.

“He exemplified the reality of daring to dream,” son Ben Soi says, and adds: “He travelled the world from China, Dubai, India and Namibia to the United Kingdom and Israel, and not even the language barrier could hold him back.”

Mzee Ngetich’s life, though ended, provides a classic example of pulling down barriers and never allowing one’s background to be an impediment to success.

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