

THE Weekly Review

For the Thinking Person

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DEMOCRACY ON TRIAL

From the bullet to the ballot: Uganda is in the eye of the storm as the government intensifies crackdowns on political parties. President Museveni's grip on power faces a huge stress test from his controversial son, Muhoozi, and opposition leaders Kizza Besigye and Bobi Wine. Will the Big Man survive?

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letter from the editor

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Listen to the voice of the people for the sake of Uganda's future

Armed with the knowledge of the past, and scanning the present occurrences, we have the dim ability to fret about the future. Elections in Uganda always come with shocking recurrences and ever-growing apprehension. Each wave is a harbinger of new desperation and fretfulness. The 2026 polls will be like no other in the nation's 61 years of independence.

President Yoweri Museveni, who has ruled the nation with an iron fist for 37 years, is likely to face his son, General Muhoozi Kainerugaba, at the ballot. It may be a planned succession draped in Ugandan flag colours and political taste; it may also be a sturdy boat seeking to either run ashore or sink.

Muhoozi is itching to dethrone his father and has on numerous occasions publicly blasted him on social media. In one of his Twitter tirades, for instance, he said: "In 2026, it will be 40 years of the old people in charge. That will change. Those are instructions from Jesus Christ! Our generation will be in charge of this country"

Political experts in Kampala, however, say Museveni is unlikely ever to relinquish power. A six-term president who at 78 has already begun receiving endorsements to run again, Museveni is the typical African Big Man, but age and infirmity have proven to outlast even the boldest of our strongest clingers, to the extent of shaming them in local and international fora.

Museveni is an ideological monolith who believes political parties are hostage to material circumstances. That is why



Allan Buluku

He is thriving where the others are muffled; he is flourishing and reaching the people in the same clime where the other competitors are hushed; he is shining in the multicolours of the flag where the opponents are stifled. Is that democracy? Is it enough to demoralise the others?

he discouraged multi-partyism for many years. He believes political competition is dangerous, and in his own words, it is "because opportunists sow divisions for personal gain".

The opposition, led by veteran politician Kizza Besigye and Robert Kyagulanyi — a former musician popularly known as Bobi Wine — is champing at the bit for another bout with Museveni, whether or not he will be on the ballot.

The government has frustrated opposition leaders. Street battles between their supporters and elite police

units in anti-riot gear have dominated their meetings in the capital, Kampala. Muhoozi, on the other hand, has been allowed to run his campaigns.

He is thriving where the others are muffled; he is flourishing and reaching the people in the same clime where the other competitors are hushed; he is shining in the multicolours of the flag where the opponents are stifled. Is that democracy? Is it enough to demoralise the others?

It is now a well-established fact that Bobi Wine is not a politician who shies away from trouble. He is painfully climbing the uneven playground and just like before, he remains adamant in the race. When he was elected to Parliament in 2017 by a wave of workers, he roared: "If Parliament will not come to the ghetto, then the ghetto will come to Parliament." For this ambition to give alternative leadership to Uganda, the opposition has endured more than is acceptable.

Democracy is on trial in Uganda and if the current leadership is serious about the future of the country, then they must listen to the voice of the people.

It may be a barely audible sigh at the moment; it may be a silent yearning that if hushed might assume the force of a volcano in the future. The era of wresting power via the bush is past. Let democracy thrive in an equal and level playing field. The future demands it.

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the telescope

■ President seeks to break revenue impasse

Ruto sets date with governors

President William Ruto is expected to meet governors this week in a bid to resolve an ongoing impasse over equitable revenue share to counties.

The meeting comes after a meeting chaired by Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua last week failed to reach a middle ground over the contentious issue.

Consequently, the President is expected to discuss the matter with a view to breaking the deadlock by agreeing on an amount.

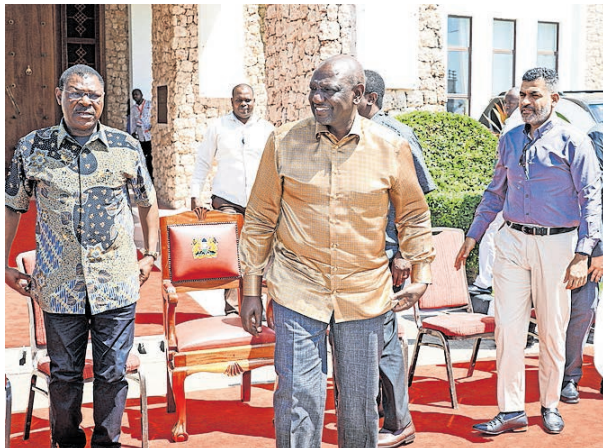
On one hand, the Council of Governors has maintained that the national government,

through the National Treasury, should increase the equitable revenue share allocation from the current Sh370 billion to Sh425 billion.

This, they say, is only a 15 percent increase of the projected revenue growth in the financial year ending June 2024

On its part, the National Treasury says it can only increase the current amount the 47 county governments are currently receiving from the Exchequer to Sh380 billion.

However, the Commission on Revenue Allocation holds that the counties should be allocated only Sh407 billion.



President William Ruto, Speaker of the National Assembly Moses Wetang'ula and Mombasa Governor Abdulsamad Nassir during the Post-Election Seminar for the 13th Parliament in Mombasa on January 30. KEVIN ODIT | NATION

■ More than 35,000 teachers join service

Form 1 students report this week



More than 1.2 million students who sat the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education exam last year will this week report to secondary school.

The results were released on December 21, 2022, while the

selection ended on January 16, 2023. More than 35,000 newly recruited teachers are expected to begin reporting to their new work stations this week.

The tutors, hired last month by the Teachers Service Commission, were set to start reporting to the various schools last week.

Out of the 35,000, 21,550 intern teachers will be posted to secondary schools, and the rest to the primary section.

■ Company fighting for its survival in the US



French online influencer Virginie Grossat promotes plus size fashion on both her TikTok and Instagram accounts. She has earned over 380,000 TikTok followers.

TikTok boss to testify before Congress

TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew will testify in March to US lawmakers in Washington, where the Chinese social media app faces accusations that it is beholden to the Communist Party in Beijing.

TikTok, whose parent company, ByteDance, is Chinese, is fighting for its survival in the United States with rising calls from mainly Republican lawmakers that the company should be outright banned for its links to Beijing.

Chew will give testimony before the House Energy and Commerce Committee on March 23 after Republicans recently took over as the majority in the US House of Repre-

sentatives. "TikTok has knowingly allowed the ability for the Chinese Communist Party to access American user data," US representative Cathy McMorris Rodgers, who heads the committee, said in a statement this week. "Americans deserve to know how these actions impact their privacy and data security, as well as what actions TikTok is taking to keep our kids safe from online and offline harms," she added.

Democrats have increasingly joined the groundswell of criticism against TikTok, and last month US President Joe Biden signed a law that bans the use of TikTok on government-issued devices.

■ His sacrifices will never be forgotten, he says

Modi pays homage to Mahatma Gandhi



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi this week paid homage to Mahatma Gandhi, the freedom movement leader shot dead at point-blank range by a Hindu zealot 75 years ago. "I bow to Bapu on his punya tithi (death anniversary) and re-

call his profound thoughts," Modi tweeted. "I also pay homage to all those who have been martyred in the service of our nation. Their sacrifices will never be forgotten." The death anniversary of Gandhi, who is widely known in India as Bapu (father), is also observed as Martyrs' Day in the country. Gandhi was assassinated at a multi-faith prayer meeting in January 1948 by Nathuram Godse, a religious zealot irked by Gandhi's conciliatory gestures towards the Muslim minority.

kenya lens

▼ SOME MPS HAVE EITHER BEEN INTIMIDATED OR BRIBED INTO SILENCE

UGANDA IN A FINE MESS



Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni

Uganda's opposition Forum for Democratic Change leader Kizza Besigye has been detained dozens of times and lost four elections to long-serving President Yoweri Museveni.

Arrest of opposition leaders and their supporters is shrinking political space, with Museveni maintaining a tight grip on power ahead of 2026 polls

• BY NELSON NATURINDA

On January 24, Ugandans turned their attention to Kikuube District, some 210 kilometres north-west of the capital, Kampala, as President Yoweri Museveni launched the nation's first drilling rig for Kingfisher oilfield, billed to fetch the country over \$50 billion, just two days before the long-time ruler marked 37 years in power.

Back in Kampala, a local non-governmental organisation had arranged a public debate on the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP)

at a city hotel. Invited as key speakers were opposition leaders Kizza Besigye and Robert Kyagulanyi, alias Bobi Wine.

However, as early as 6am, the hotel entrance was sealed off and barricaded from the public by a contingent of police and the military.

According to the officers, no one was allowed into the hotel without written authorisation from the inspector-general of police, Martins Okoth-Ochola.

The previous weekend, the police had arrested at least 13 supporters of Kyagulanyi, a former presidential candidate, on claims of

holding an unlawful assembly in the eastern Uganda city of Jinja.

Some people were injured as the officers fired teargas and live bullets to disperse the function, which the musician-cum-politician had termed a peaceful gathering.

The blocking and arrest of opposition leaders and their supporters is the tip of the iceberg that is increasingly shrinking political space in Uganda, with Museveni maintaining a tight grip on power ahead of 2026 elections. The opposition is increasingly finding it diffi-

Continued on Page 6

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Will Muhoozi succeed his father in 2026?

Continued from Page 5

cult to carry out political activities, including rallies and other gatherings, with both armed police and soldiers only too willing to crack down on them.

The violence against Museveni's rivals has been increasing both in frequency and intensity yet the country opened up its political space in 2006 after extended 20-year one-party rule. Through extra-judicial regulation and application of laws such as the Public Order Management Act, the government has kept opposition leaders confined to their homes and offices; they only manage to speak freely once outside Uganda.

For example, in the run-up to the country's January 2021 elections, security forces were on the spot for arresting presidential candidates and their supporters as well as journalists, and disrupting rallies under what was then termed as prevention of the spread of Covid-19. Elections and the post-election period are always characterised by violence as security forces take sides to harass and intimidate opposition leaders and their supporters. Cases of soldiers taking sides and asking the public not to vote for the opposition are common, with some uniformed officers intimidating the public with threats of violence.

When the National Resistance Movement (NRM) under Museveni captured power in 1986, it introduced a broad-based governance structure and effectively banned operations

of political parties. Parties were not allowed to hold rallies, field candidates in elections or even open offices.

In July 1995, the Constituent Assembly, which debated and enacted the new Constitution, extended the movement's system of government for another five years under Article 269 of the then new Constitution and barred parties from engaging in "any activities

that may interfere with the movement political system".

According to Prof Sabiiti Makara, a lecturer of Political Science at Makerere University, it is surprising that the opposition has continued to attract members despite the heavy military boots placed on its neck.

"The government has been using all forces and resources available to it to try to kill the opposition. It has created the impression in the public that the opposition members are criminals, saboteurs, and anti-development agents and the police

are always eager to ensure that parties do not hold any events," he says.

While it may not be clear whether the opposition members are convinced or bribed, many have ended up in Museveni's government, leaving their followers in disarray — the latest being Democratic Party President General Norbert Mao, who joined the government last year and was appointed the Justice and Constitutional Affairs minister.

Mao's faction of the Democratic Party followed in the footsteps of Jimmy Akena's faction of Uganda People's Congress, which jumped into bed with the NRM in 2016 and Akena's wife, Betty Amongi, was rewarded with a ministerial post.

Mao says his was an alliance between his party and the NRM, but the party's former president, the late Paul Kawanga Ssemogerere, joined Museveni in the same fashion.

Others such as Betty Kamywa, Florence Nakiwala, Betty Anywar and Gilbert Bukkenya openly denounced their parties and fully joined the NRM, upon which they were appointed ministers, with Bukkenya rising to be vice-president for over eight years. There are over 50 opposition MPs representing four leading parties, but their influence on decisions and national agenda is minimal as they face more than 450 legislators from the ruling NRM party in a 529-member chamber. Some of the legislators have either been intimidated or bribed into silence, or have realised that the NRM will always bulldoze them on any decision.

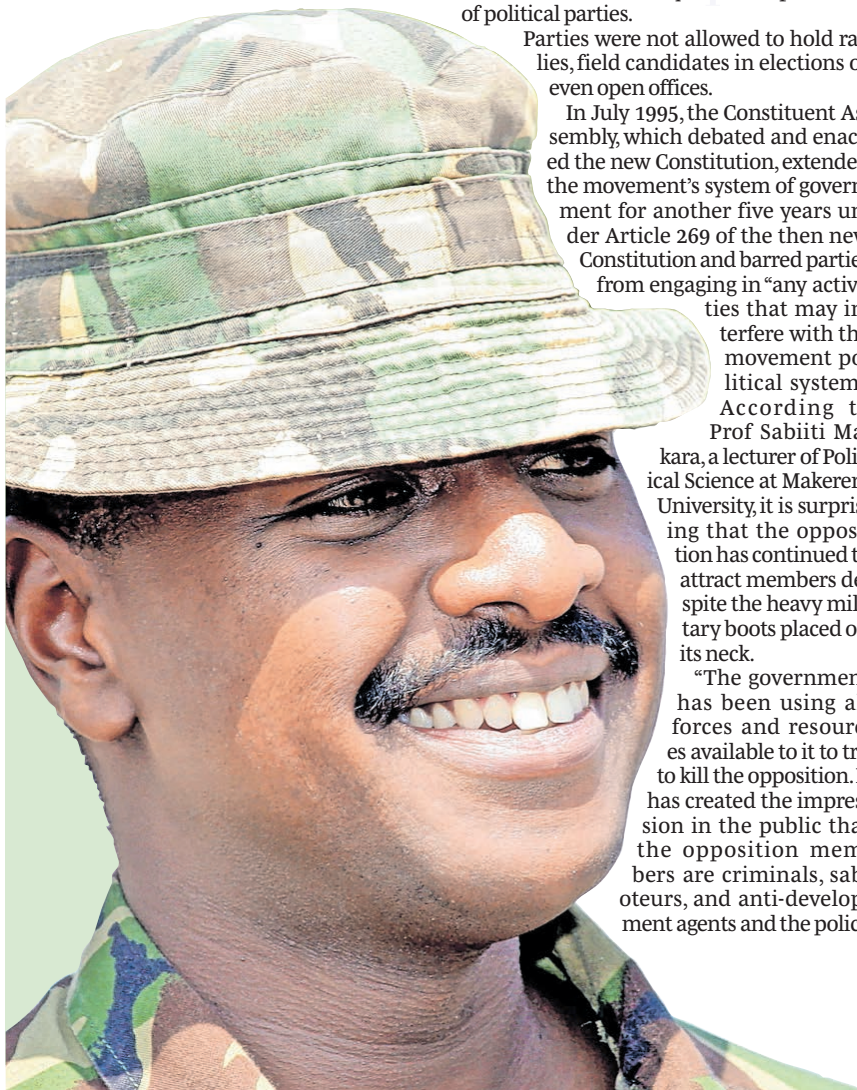
The most telling incident was during a vote to change the law to cap the presidential age limit at 75 in 2018, when, despite the opposition's efforts, the NRM carried the day, giving the now 78-year-old Museveni the leeway to contest for eternity.

As the opposition struggles for political space, President Museveni's son seems to have grabbed the space and taken the country by storm. Gen Muhoozi Kainerugaba, the presidential adviser on special operations and former commander of the land forces, has jolted structures in the military and the ruling party with a declaration of presidential ambitions.

For example, while the police battled opposition supporters in Jinja, 80 kilometres east of Kampala, Muhoozi was leading a political procession through Mbale City before addressing a public rally at Mbale Rugby Grounds, 140 kilometres from Jinja City.

He had already addressed another rally in Kapchorwa, urging the youth to rally behind him. And Besigye pointed it out before he was forcibly driven away. He said it was unfair for the security forces to allow Muhoozi, who is a serving military officer, to traverse the country holding public rallies while other citizens are blocked from doing the same.

"Muhoozi has been all over the country



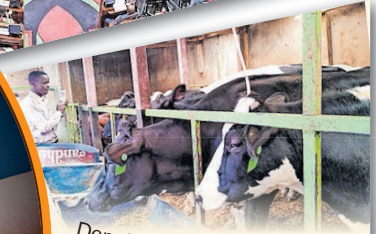
General Muhoozi Kainerugaba

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■ 'DYNASTIES' HAVE AWARDED THEMSELVES TAX BREAKS AT THE EXPENSE OF 'HUSTLERS'

President William Ruto has suggested that former President Uhuru Kenyatta is the one sponsoring Azimio la Umoja's planned protests over the outcome of the 2022 General Election. He has upped the stakes in a drama that could snowball into an outright offensive targeting the vast wealth of the former First Family.

Parliament might launch a general probe into the Kenyatta family holdings and get the Kenya Revenue Authority to hit them with harsh demands if cases of tax evasion are uncovered.

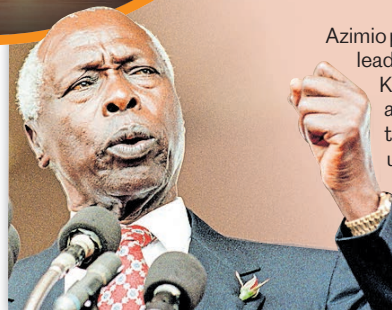


THE RICH 'TAX CHEATS'

There have been questions about the controversial waiver on Stamp Duty granted when the Kenyatta family's Commercial Bank of Africa merged with the NIC Bank, controlled by the family of former Central Bank Governor Philip Ndegwa, to create the NCBA Bank.

Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua – who has been an outspoken critic of the Kenyattas' – has often signalled the government's resolve to destroy unnamed 'cartels' through methods other than a commission of inquiry or other formal structure.

The Estate Duty Act, which provides for taxes on property left behind by a deceased person, states: "This section shall not apply to His Excellency Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, nor to His Excellency Daniel Toroitich arap Moi."



Azimio principal and Wiper Party leader, former Vice-President Kalonzo Musyoka, has accused President Ruto of targeting his predecessor, unlike Uhuru himself and former President Mwai Kibaki, who had not harassed those they succeeded at State House.

Ruto trains his guns on the former First Family over an unjust exemption on estate duty, says the nation cannot continue to operate in a space where those in power exempt themselves from paying taxes

● By MACHARIA GAITHO

To what extent might President William Ruto follow through on the implied threat to go after the vast assets controlled by the family of his predecessor, Uhuru Kenyatta? How would such unprecedented actions impact on the Kenyan political scenario, particularly the culture of peaceful transitions since the re-establishment of multi-party democracy.

These are the questions that must be asked now as what initially looked like just a continua-

tion of the post-poll tussle between Ruto and his defeated presidential election rival, Raila Odinga, escalates into a public row pitting the incumbent against his predecessor.

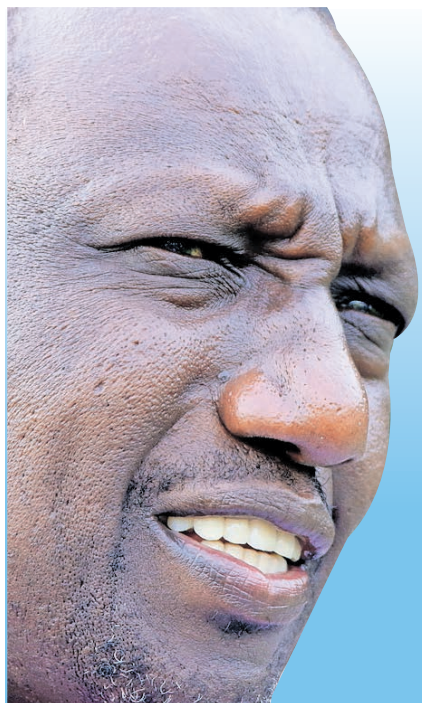
From the moment he suggested former President Uhuru Kenyatta was the one sponsoring Raila's planned protests against what he claims was a stolen 2022 presidential election, Ruto upped the stakes in a drama that could snowball into an outright offensive targeting the vast wealth of the former First Family.

If opposition leader Raila threw down the

gauntlet with plans for a civil disobedience programme on claims that fresh evidence, not yet verified, proves he was the true winner of the 2022 presidential election, President Ruto threw it right back with his own unproven counter-claims that the protests are sponsored by Uhuru.

Although he did not mention Uhuru by name, Ruto's claims in a public speech that the Raila protests were sponsored by those out to block probes into the former First Family's tax-dodging activities were almost simultaneously fol-

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President William Ruto

lowed by his social media propagandist Dennis Itumbi disclosing on Twitter that a little-known law exempted Uhuru's father, the late President Jomo Kenyatta, and his successor, the late President Daniel arap Moi, from paying estate duty on inherited property. Opening the 16th Annual General Meeting and Conference of Africa Prosecutors Association in Mombasa County on January 31, Ruto diverted from the official script to launch an open assault on Uhuru.

"We cannot continue to operate in a space where those in power exempt themselves from paying taxes. Their day is up. Every citizen must pay tax," he told the gathering. "Even if they sponsor demonstrations so that they don't pay tax, I want to promise them that they will pay tax. There are no more exemptions. This country is not an animal farm where some are more equal than others," he added.

Observers would immediately have presumed that Ruto was talking about the controversial waiver on Stamp Duty granted when the Kenyatta family's Commercial Bank of Africa merged with the NIC Bank, controlled by the family of former Central Bank Governor Philip Ndegwa, to create the NCBA Bank.

The open crony capitalism had, during the 2022 campaigns, attracted a lot of flak from the Ruto camp, which made it a prime illustration of the promise to launch an enquiry into 'State Capture' once in office. But this time round, besides the tax waiver benefitting the Kenyatta enterprise, Itumbi publicised the most unusual exemption granted by law for benefit of Kenya's founding President and his Vice-President and successor.

"Did you know that there is a law in Kenya exempting the Kenyattas and Moises from tax on inherited land? Animal Farm!" Itumbi tweeted on

January 30, using the same analogy used by Ruto. He went on to display a screen grab of the Estate Duty Act, which provides for taxes on property left behind by a deceased person, and a 1969 amendment which reads: "This section shall not apply to His Excellency Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, nor to His Excellency Daniel Toroitich arap Moi". The two were, respectively, President and Vice-President at the time. In 2021, four private citizens petitioned the National Assembly to repeal the exemption on grounds that it was discriminatory and unconstitutional, but the effort floundered.

In short order, the hashtag #UhuruNikulipaUshuru was being aggressively pushed by the Ruto social media brigade, who left no doubt that it was in response to Raila's planned series of demonstrations on the back of his claims that an Electoral Commission whistleblower had provided fresh evidence of a stolen presidential election. The propaganda barrage also amplified claims, without any proof, that the Kenyatta family was the one sponsoring Raila's planned protests in order to protect their wealth, with a graphic on twitter bringing in the names of Uhuru's mother, Mama Ngina, and her influential but publicity-shy last born son, Muhoho, who runs the family businesses and is also believed to control political funding. The offensive prompted Uhuru to break his silence on political matters since leaving office last September, criticising Ruto, without mentioning him by name, for leading a government long on rhetoric but short on delivery.

Uhuru spoke when he visited to condole with the family of former Education Cabinet Secretary George Magoha, who had died suddenly the previous week. It was a calculated response as the former President had mobilised some key members of his government to accompany him to the Magoha home, including former Interior CS Fred Matiang'i and colleagues Ukur Yattani, Peter Munya, Eugene Wamalwa and Margaret Kobia; and former Principal Secretaries Karanja Kibicho, Susan Mochache and Jerome Ochieng.

Also present was Azimio coalition principal and Wiper Party leader, former Vice President Kalonzo Musyoka, who set the ball rolling by accusing Ruto of targeting his predecessor, unlike Uhuru himself and former president Mwai Kibaki, who had not harassed those they succeeded at State House.

According to well-informed sources, it was not incidental that Uhuru gathered a powerful delegation to accompany him to the Magoha home. He wanted to make a statement, and is mulling his options should the Ruto Kenya Kwanza coalition stalwarts continue attacking him on the public platform and social media or should the government make any moves targeting family property.

Ruto, just a few weeks ago, seemed to be walking back on his campaign promise to establish a State Capture inquiry, which would obviously target the Kenyatta family and close political and business associates.

However, Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua — who has been an outspoken critic of the Kenyattas dominance of the dairy industry, extensive land holdings, and influence on the agricul-



Former President Uhuru Kenyatta

tural marketing sectors — has often signalled the government's resolve to destroy unnamed 'cartels' through methods other than a commission of inquiry or other formal structure. Whether that could mean administrative action such as seizure of property, cancellation of business licences or denial of government tenders is not clear, but if the onslaught on social media, political rallies and press conferences is anything to go by, the immediate focus will be reversing the tax breaks.

Repeal of the clearly unjust exemption on estate duty and reversal of the NCBA waiver would be an obvious start, accompanied by heavy propaganda highlighting how the 'dynasties' have awarded themselves tax breaks at the expense of the 'hustlers'.

There have also been suggestions that Parliament should launch a more general probe into the Kenyatta family holdings and get the Kenya Revenue Authority to hit them with harsh demands if cases of tax evasion are uncovered.

However, a probe focusing on the Kenyatta family at a time when politicians and business people linked to Ruto are getting generous treatment on dropping of criminal and tax evasion cases would raise eyebrows.

For now, however, Ruto has succeeded in diverting attention from Raila's claims of a stolen election and the threat of street protests to the new allegations that he is just doing Uhuru's bidding.

Having made such serious allegations against his predecessor, all eyes will be turned to see what he does next beyond pointing fingers. And on how Uhuru will respond.

The only thing clear for now is that the famous bromance which propelled the UhuRuto duo to office in 2013 has irretrievably broken down.

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kenya lens

■ POLITICAL REALIGNMENT

MUDAVADI ON A CHARM OFFENSIVE

The Prime Cabinet Secretary is on a strategic and deliberate mission to woo Western Kenya leaders allied to Azimio over to the government side – and he appears to be succeeding



● BY OSCAR OBONYO

Prima Cabinet Secretary Musalia Mudavadi's meeting last Friday on the Kenya-Uganda border town of Busia might have been low-key, but politically strategic and potentially beneficial.

The January 27 meeting in Bulanda village on the outskirts of Busia town took place at the home of former Labour Minister Philip Masinde, where invited guests witnessed the crowning of Mudavadi as political leader of the larger western Kenya community.

While Mudavadi, who has been politically active for the last 34 years, has several times been anointed leader of the Luhya community, the gesture extended to the former Sabatia MP is different and much more loaded this time round.

Besides members of the Luhya Council of Elders, last Friday's event was also graced by elders from the minority communities of Sabat of Bungoma County, Teso (Busia) and Terikeek, who reside on the border of Vihiga and Nandi counties. Terikeek is a sub-tribe of the larger Kalenjin community of the Rift Valley region.

This approach, aimed at consolidating the larger cosmopolitan western Kenya base under the Prime CS, is born out of the realisation that the region is not solely home to members of the populous Luhya community. Truth be told, members of other tribes who reside in the region have previously felt left out of the political mobilisation drives mounted under the cover of 'Luhya unity' or 'the Mulembe nation'.

It is during this event that Busia Governor Paul Otuoma declared his willingness to work closely with President William Ruto and any other senior officers in his government "if that will help in any way to speed up development for our people".

Otuoma's stand is as weighty as it is shocking to some, considering the politician's closeness to opposition chief Raila Odinga, and the fact that Busia is the strongest opposition base in western Kenya.

The timing of Mudavadi's dalliance with western Kenya governors may also be linked to President Ruto's planned tour of the

region later this month. Busia is not particularly politically friendly to the current administration, so the Prime CS may also be on a mission to prepare the ground for his boss's visit. Using Masinde as the entry point to Busia and to wooing the larger western region could not have been more apt. The former MP for Nambale, who enjoys strong ties with the Mudavadi family, is also Chairman of the Luhya Council of Elders.

Masinde briefly served together with Musalia's father, the late Moses Mudavadi, in Daniel arap Moi's Cabinet and claims that his friend, who passed on in 1989, left Musalia in his care.

A day after the Busia meeting, Musalia met Governor Wilber Otichillo of his home county of Vihiga, and the county's entire leadership, which included members of the county assembly (MCAs) and the governor's executive team. The ODM-allied Governor promised to work with the government of the day, remarking rather hilariously that political parties "are just uniforms which we wear to get onto the pitch to play, but once the game is over, we discard them".

Mudavadi is said to have an elaborate plan to win over all the governors allied to the rival Azimio La Umoja-One Kenya coalition party. Besides Otuoma and Otichillo, the Prime CS has made political overtures to Fernandes Barasa of Kakamega and his Trans Nzoia counterpart, George Natembeya. Last November, Mudavadi hosted Barasa at his Nairobi office, where the two "discussed matters of development in Kakamega County".

Observers also believe Natembeya, who is the immediate former regional commissioner of Rift Valley, may embrace the government's de-facto number three in command with little resistance. Having served in government in various senior capacities, Natembeya is well wired in government circles and is probably more comfortable on the government side than the opposition. The remaining governor in the region is Bungoma's Kenneth Lusaka, who is already allied to the ruling coalition, Kenya Kwanza.

In his engagements with the county bosses, Mudavadi has stressed the need for collabora-

kenya lens



Prime Cabinet Secretary Musalia Mudavadi being installed as a Luhya elder at the home of Western Council of Elders chairman Philip Masinde in Bulanda village, Busia, on January 27. ISAAC WALE | NATION



Prime Cabinet Secretary Musalia Mudavadi with Busia Governor Paul Otuoma in Bulanda village, Busia, on January 27. ISAAC WALE | NATION

tion between the national and county governments “for the benefit of county residents”, a factor that has appears to have persuaded the governors from the opposition parties to embrace Mudavadi “for development’s sake”.

While the turn of events reflects the aspect of inter-dependence between the two levels of government, the argument of working with the central government “for purposes of development” has previously been (mis)used as a ploy for political defection or entry into new political marriages. The cooperation for development aside, Mudavadi is a seasoned operative who is alive to political reality; of course, he is also seeking partnerships beyond 2027.

The counties are a product of a devolved system of government introduced under the Constitution of Kenya, 2010. Article 174 of the Constitution provides that one of the key objectives of devo-

lution is to promote social and economic development and provide proximate, easily accessible services throughout Kenya. The import of this is that county governments, which enjoy direct funding from the central government, should function almost autonomously.

However, owing to the five-decade experience of a centralised system of government in which administrative units depended on the President’s goodwill or handouts for development, many leaders still look up to the President and the Executive for favours.

But Otuoma maintains that there are certain initiatives that are a preserve of the national government, and this has compelled him to seek cooperation. He is specifically keen on transforming the Kisumu-Busia highway, which serves as the entry and exit passage to and from the neighbour-

ing country of Uganda, into a dual carriageway.

The former cabinet minister, who served in the Grand Coalition Government of 2007-2013, maintains that ODM remains his political outfit: “For now, I have a duty to deliver services to my people. Let the parliamentarians do the politicking; my business is to offer good governance.”

Also lined up in the second phase of consultations are MPs – Senate and National Assembly – as well as MCAs. Mudavadi actually kicked off the discourse with the MPs last November at his Nairobi office. The next layer of talks will involve professional and community groups. Outside his western Kenya backyard, Mudavadi has made tangible efforts to draw the coastal region into his political fold. Late last year, for instance, he relinquished his position as party leader of Amani National Congress (ANC) to his long-time ally, Lamu County Governor Issa Timamy, upon appointment to the Cabinet.

Matuga MP Kassim Sawa Tandaza hailed the move as one that would help to strengthen ANC in the coastal region. Incidentally Tandaza, who is from Kwale County, served as Mudavadi’s deputy at ANC for four years.

Meanwhile, Mudavadi’s push for political unity in his backyard comes up against Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua’s equally energised campaign to galvanise political support in the Mt Kenya region. Though they have both denied it, the two Ken-

ya Kwanza leaders have been engaged in a quiet battle for political might, with each having a realistic chance, at the moment, of succeeding Ruto.

On the unity front, Mudavadi will require the solid support of his “brother”, National Assembly Speaker Moses Wetang’ula. There were jitters last week, though, when the Ford-Kenya leader, who was supposed to accompany Mudavadi on the Busia trip, failed to show up.

Instead, Wetang’ula held separate meetings with MCAs in Trans Nzoia and Bungoma counties and is this month scheduled to meet MPs and MCAs of Busia County. While their political tours are not synchronised at the moment, their mission is reportedly the same – to win over Azimio-allied governors to the Kenya Kwanza government.

But even as Mudavadi rides on the card of incumbency to hammer out political deals and seduce new allies, some, like Tandaza, believe that any realistic hopes of his succeeding Ruto at State House lie in the opposition.

Since the advent of the second phase of multipartyism, the Matuga MP notes, history has shown that winning the top seat from the government side is a Herculean task. While making it clear that he is not calling on his former party boss to exit government, Tandaza advises Mudavadi to manoeuvre tactfully in the coming years, even as he walks on the same political path with President Ruto and DP Gachagua.

Indeed, the country’s third President, Mwai Kibaki, took over from Daniel arap Moi in 2002 from the opposition benches, as did Uhuru Kenyatta from Kibaki in 2013, when he was considered ‘less governmental’ than PM Odinga and Vice-President Kalonzo Musyoka. And at the end of his second-term, Ruto subtly shifted camp to the opposition, becoming an “outsider” in a government of which he was Deputy President. At that point, Ruto portrayed his main rival, Odinga, who had gone into political bed with sitting President Uhuru Kenyatta, as “a government project”.

“To win the top seat in Kenya, history shows that one has to use the standing and influence within government to galvanise support, but stage an electoral onslaught from outside,” Tandaza told *The Weekly Review*.

The Arena

EXTENDING REALITY

*Longino Muluka takes a lead in stamping Africa's
authority on creating virtual reality content*



OPEN SPACE

Change funding model for the youth to benefit

Great initiatives, but... : After the launch, the reality sinks in... The requirements for eligibility are baffling and individual loans are a nightmare to access

• BY MOSES OJUANG'

When one watches on live TV the launch of some youth government project, one is tempted to dream that, at last, the government has arrived at a sweet solution that will radically change the lot of our struggling youth.

Its a visual spectacle: the fanfare, the lights, the beaming, well-dressed audience, the happy politicians seeking to appear at the centre and thus grace the front pages of the next day's newspapers.

The whole show is very convincing and the speeches send us in to a collective swoon.

They are usually well choreographed, complete with some usually very clever young people who have scaled the heights through sheer hard work and are programmed to give us startling anecdotes of their fabulous journeys, sans fear, into the most attractive realms of entrepreneurship.

At the end of the attractive shows, the whole charade we imagine, proceeds to a luncheon to re energise themselves on behalf of the youth.

We have seen many of these launches, and we suppose the able organisers of such executive activism are themselves well employed and doing a very good job.

The Youth Fund, the Uwezo Fund, the Hustler Fund and the grants for youth development; all these great initiatives have come and gone. Several 'lucky' youth have been employed in those offices to dispense the funds that they presumably do not need themselves.

It is only after the launches that the reality sinks in. Most of the young

people who are targeted by the programmes have no idea what to do next and how to access the money.

The bulk of the youth in the rural areas do not even know about the opportunities unveiled.

The requirements for eligibility are baffling and individual loans are a nightmare to access. Those in the know shuffle up and down to form groups that hitherto never existed, brainstorm on business ideas – the most common and copy-pasted idea is of a carwash business – and fail in their request for funding.

Those who are better organised may be able to get some funds.

They may start well but challenges often arise when they need to repay the loan, causing disagreements that sometimes break up friendships built long before the fund.

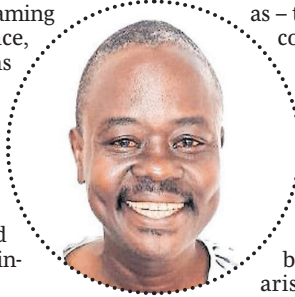
Non-governmental organisations and societies built around youth empowerment crusades are the best players in this field.

These outfits have all the requisite knowledge to glide and slide within the government corridors, their well-oiled movements aiding their success in obtaining the funds on behalf of the youth. They then spend a small fraction of the money 'empowering' the young people through motivational speakers.

This funding model has to change to give the youth access to money that is meant for them.

Mr Ojuang' comments on social issues. mojuang@gmail.com

Any feedback on topical issues? We would like to hear from you. Send your views to: weeklyreview@ke.nationmedia.com



MIND SPEAK



Stephanie Musembi

The health sector has made many milestones and that's commendable. I have worked in a facility providing the best services in terms of personnel, quality drugs, medical procedures and even food for patients. However, it's disheartening when patients have to dig into their pockets to pay for services that are not covered by the National Hospital Insurance Fund. The government should enhance the cover.
— Pharmacist



Pharis Jane

One of the pertinent issues that has affected students is the high cost of living. The high increases in food prices, transportation and rent have negatively impacted education. We have registered a 30 per cent drop-out rate nationally. Even so, those still in colleges and universities fight depression because of financial challenges. Increase allocation for education to save poor students.
— Chairman, Mt Kenya Colleges and Universities Students Association



Cynthia Wangui

Is it right for a student at any public university who has political ambitions to fail to join the political associations within the campus council due to the fees payment? Some varsity administrations have been rejecting applications for students who want to venture into campus politics if they have not cleared fees. Should it really happen that way? It's one of the issues affecting students.
— Student



Sani Abacha Mkube

Kenyans are hurting. People are shedding economic tears. Both dynasties and hustlers are feeling the pinch. The elimination of subsidiaries in important industries like agriculture and energy, the increase in taxes, and the cost of electricity have taken a toll on Kenyans.
— Deputy Secretary-General, Kiambu County University and College Students and Alumni Association

MY TAKE



• BY WAGA ODONGO

One of the most fitting choices for a Cabinet Secretary's docket was putting Salim Mvurya at the Mining Ministry. The former two-term governor comes from a county that accounts for more than 60 per cent of all mining royalties. If there is a leader who could propose changes to the split between county and national government with regards to royalties, there can be no man better for the job.

During his first term as governor, Mvurya sent an invoice to Base Titanium for Sh500 million. He argued that Kwale had not been properly compensated for its mineral wealth.

It is tough running a mining project in Kenya. Mining, by its nature, is capital-intensive and risky. Prices of the commodities fluctuate in the global market and it takes a very long time to realise profit. The majority of sites that are under exploration never make it to the level of exploitation. This is the reality that guides businesses in the extractive sector. Years later, the oil and refinery in Hoima, Uganda, is a pipe dream and Turkana will probably never see any derricks.

The zeitgeist on mining also changes fast. Take, for instance, the coal in Mui Basin in Kitui County, which has a value in trillions of shillings with a capital "T". According to one estimate by the Ministry of Mining, the value of the coal in the basin can fund our budget for years. The problem, though, is that coal is now a no-no as the rock cedes ground to renewables.

The timelines involved in bringing a project to fruition also require a lot of consideration. The current mineral sands project in Kwale began under the Daniel arap Moi government. It didn't begin any proper shipments until two governments later, when the Uhuru Kenyatta administration was in power.

In between, the investment re-

SITTING ON UNTAPPED TROVE OF MINERALS

The challenges of mining: It is not hard to foresee a near future where Kenya's earnings from titanium might increase dramatically



Mining at the Base Titanium Site in Kwale County. KEVIN ODIT | NATION

quired is in the billions of shillings. Titanium is the world's toughest and strongest metal. It is essential in building aircraft and high-end cars because it is strong, resistant to corrosion and far lighter than steel.

It is not hard to foresee a near future where Kenya's earnings from titanium might increase dramatically. Indeed, we may have just lucked into such a situation. Kenya is ninth in Titanium production globally according to a US Geological survey, producing some 300,000 tons annually. A fifth of all the titanium produced globally comes from Russia. After the invasion of Ukraine, Russia has been hit by sanctions from the West that would probably have crippled any other country. As the world foreswears everything Russian – vodka obviously exempted – Kenyan titanium will look very attractive and may as yet fetch a premium. There are other potential titanium mines in Kwale.

The challenge for the local government hosting the mine is how little in the way of bodies the site requires. Titanium mining is almost all mechanised. I recall vis-

iting the site ahead of the first shipment and seeing the specialised equipment required for the job. One massive earth mover at the mine, we were told, burns through a thousand litres of diesel an hour. Mineral sands are obtained from blasting a cliff face of sand with jets of water and this causes the site to use a lot of water. The project needed to build its own dam, a matter which irked some locals who claimed it had diverted a river. I noticed during our guided tour at least three Orlando Pirates jerseys and when I inquired, I was told many of the engineers doing the welding and wiring were from South Africa.

So the locals have a problem because the site leads to massive strain on local water sources but doesn't employ that many people. The site would struggle to employ 1,000 persons directly. The people it does employ often do specialised jobs and have to be imported from countries with more advanced mining economies like South Africa.

Mining is famously easy to disrupt, a Super Panamax ship comes to collect the merchandise once a month and the demur-

rage fees – paid when you fail to load and see off a ship in time – must be enormous. The ship is a third of a kilometre long and several stories high and so any delays must be eye-wateringly expensive. It is essential for the operators to keep the local community on their side as any disruption can lead to large losses.

The 2016 Mining Act mandates that 70 per cent of all royalties go to the Treasury, 20 per cent to the county and 10 per cent to the local community. Whether this allocation is fair on local counties or needs rejigging is something Mvurya is well placed to state. As governor of Kwale, he often complained about attempts by Base Titanium to further explore additional mining sites in the county.

The challenge of setting up a mining operation in Kenya is that you will, in all likelihood, have to navigate treacherous local politics and changes at the national level while investing billions in advance. How the government manages the situation will determine whether or not more mines are set up at the Coast.

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THE GROWING AR/VR JOB MARKET

The global market size of AR and VR is projected to hit over \$250 billion by 2028. In 2021, the market size was a 'meagre' \$28 billion — its value multiplied almost nine times. In 2022, the global market value of AR was \$38.56 billion, a figure forecast to grow at a compound annual growth rate of over 40 per cent from 2022 to 2030.

5G connectivity and other technological innovations are driving up demand for skilled AR and VR professionals in workplaces around the world.

Krista Kim created the Mars House, a metaverse property, during the height of the Covid-19 lockdowns in 2020. It was built with the 3D-creation tool Unreal Engine, which allows stunning visuals and virtual reality immersion. The Mars House was the first metaverse property sold as an NFT, and it helped introduce the public to Web3 and the metaverse. Art on Internet bought the Mars House for 288 Ether, a cryptocurrency amount worth \$512,000 when the house was sold in March 2021.

The metaverse, a buzzword in the tech industry, refers to a variety of experiences, environments and assets that exist in the virtual space. It could be a fully realised virtual world where your imagination is your limit, or a place you can hold your meetings without leaving your physical home. It was coined by speculative fiction writer Neal Stephenson in his 1992 novel 'Snow Crash' and the concept was further explored by Ernest Cline in his novel, 'Ready Player One'.

In 2014, in a deal valued at more than \$2 billion, Facebook acquired Oculus, a start-up that made virtual reality headsets — goggles that trick your brain into thinking you are inside a digital landscape.

Artificial intelligence leverages computers and machines to mimic the problem-solving and decision-making capabilities of the human mind.

rity team was going bonkers.”

“There is another project I am working on but I cannot put it on record. I can tell you but you can't put it on record.” He proceeds to tell me about this great project which blows my mind and I could tell you but I won't because I can't put it on record. How does a 26-year-old scale to such dizzyingly lofty heights? “Well, the thing with this industry is that there is no one to teach you. You have to go out there and learn. I am privileged that at this time, I am able to teach people about the tech.”

Now working as an XR developer at BlackRhino VR, which creates bespoke virtual and augmented reality content, the Technical University of Kenya graduate actually studied Interactive Design, where his love for gaming was fostered, so much so that he began creating a game but abandoned it halfway. “I should really finish that game.” The game was his final year project, and it was named 'Upande'. It was based in Kenya and tackled issues concerning the *Kipande* (identification) System and how



BlackRhino XR Developer Longino Muluka Habby at his office in Nairobi on February 2. LUCY WANJIRU | NATION

colonialism affected our culture. His inspiration? Tomb Raider. Upande was his foray into the AR and VR world, landing him an internship at BlackRhino, where today he is one of the charging forces.

He reckons that being a developer is all about learning and doing lots of RnD (research and development) and keeping up with the tech. “The knowledge I had two or three years ago

would render me obsolete if I had not learned new things. Agility in this industry is oxygen.”

But with tech giants paring down workforces — Alphabet, Amazon, Meta, and Microsoft have announced a total of more than 50,000 job cuts in recent months — how does he remain competitive? “Sometimes the solutions they (big tech) implement out there do not work for their market but will work for ours. A large part of Africa's population is young, and we consume lots of information via mobile phones. That's why we come up with our own solutions.” The latest fad on the streets is the whiz-bang ChatGPT, a chatbot launched by OpenAI in November 2022 that can write letters, spin quick articles and essays, solve mathematical problems, generate sermons, and reports et cetera. Should we be afraid of tech taking over? It's a redundant question but I mostly want to know whether my job is safe. “Well, it's about how you adapt. Rather than looking at it as something that is coming to take your job, look at it as something that is coming to make your work easier. It supplements, not supplants.” His words remind me of an old Russian joke that tells the story of a peasant with one cow who hates his neighbour because he has two. A sorcerer offers to grant the envious farmer a single wish. “Kill one of my neighbour's cows!” he demands.

When he is not killing it at work, how does he let his hair down? “Gaming is what got me into all of this, but then again, that's just still me indoors with my computer.” What about your social life, I ask. “What social life?” He breaks into a chuckle. “In a sense, some of the projects we do include a lot of outreach projects, and that more or less bridges my social metre.” He has been a mentor in several hackathons, and metaverse training seminars.

The eldest of three children — he has two sisters — can't wait to bring more Africans to tech. “We hardly have first access to tech when it is released. We want to be self-sufficient and be among the people who shape and build the tech, and then teach people about that tech. I want us to create our own *Wakanda* and not depend on anyone.” His sentences belie his reserved nature, but they are the brushstrokes painting the portrait of a person who is beginning to believe, rightly or wrongly, that reality itself can be bent to his preferences.

How, then, would he describe his life if he were to put it on a billboard? “It would say I am passionate about my family, about tech, and of course, making our own *Wakanda*. Let's shape our own futures as Africans. However, the exact quote would be: ‘Passionate about family. About tech. About learning.’” That is a long quote for a billboard, I tell him, but why not, I figure? Like all mythology, it dumps with the queasy, the uneasy and an undercurrent of reality — IRL.

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ANIMAL CARE



Taha Mohamedali plays with dogs at the Kenya Society for the Protection and Care of Animals in Nairobi.
PHOTO | POOL

A HOWLING SUCCESS

• BY NDUGU ABISAI

What language do dogs speak? As you think about that, let me spin it further: if dogs had a language, what would they have on their menu as their preferred food? Unless you own a dog, or your work revolves around dogs, you may not know how to answer these questions. But for dog lovers and dog whisperers, the aficionados of man's best friend, these are not just questions; they are the kind of salient dictums they interact with on a daily basis. And that is true for Taha Mohamedali and Tariq Karmali, the directors and owners of Petstore Kenya — a pet food importation and distribution company established in 2017. Taha talks to dogs, he minds their menus and his life's purpose, in part, is to see happier dogs.

Petstore started as an accident, Taha says.

"A friend gave me a puppy and as a dog lover, I wanted to raise it properly. And that starts (but doesn't end) with food. Tariq and I went to various pet stores in Kenya looking for food for our dogs (Tariq had two) but we couldn't find any with the nutritional value our dogs needed."

Many stores later, Taha joked in frustration: "Why can't we import this food?" They ended up stretching the joke too far when they imported a whole container of dog food. When their consignment docked in Mombasa weeks later, they had no space to store the food and they certainly did not need that much food for the three dogs. It had cost them Ksh3 million to bring in the food, which they raised from their savings and loans from friends and family.

You'd think that having struggled to look for the food, they would keep the surplus for a rainy day. Instead, they began knocking on the doors of the stores where they had looked

for dog food earlier. "We went to pet stores, supermarket and vet shops, and advertised in pet-owners' communities and networks."

As luck would have it, a local security company advertised looking for suppliers of the food they had in stock. They had a month's worth of dog food for the company. It is then that they noticed a gap for internationally certified pet foods and jumped into it as a business. They incorporated Loki Ventures — the parent company of Petstore Kenya — and began distributing pet food. Notice the change from dogfood to petfood. They added cats, parrots and rabbits to their list of clients.

"We had other businesses; I was running a 120-year-old family enterprise in the construction glass supplies industry and Tariq was in logistics. But a great business opportunity was staring at us, and we stared back at it intently. Tariq, my wife and I opened shop. My wife became a web developer to

support the online side of the business," says Taha. They transitioned to supplying regularly to big stores, which was good, except that it affected their cash flow as the big stores took up to 90 days to convert inventory into cash. So, they took more loans to stay afloat.

Like Taha and Tariq, Emmy Belt, a regular client at Petstore Kenya, had looked for food for her dogs and almost given up. "For me, the convenience of placing an order from wherever I am is important especially when I am away on travel and supplies run low at home. The delivery time is good and the variety the store has is great. From Petstore Kenya, I have not just gotten supplies, I

have also learned basic but very important facts about human-pet relations, safety and health," Emmy says.

From the founding team of three, they now have a team of 75 people working in their two shops, warehouses and distribution channels across the country. They have an external board of directors that helps them in the governance of the business and in making crucial decisions. They have moved from docking one, 20-foot container in the first year to over sixty for a similar length of time. And in the process, they have been selling pet foods and other pet-related products like toys, leashes and storage, catering to about 30,000 animals monthly. They are also on e-commerce platforms like Jumia and Glovo to reach their clients easily and on demand. The online shop provides, in Taha's words, "very affordable courier service". Additionally, they now work with pet rescue and care centers like the

Kenya Society for the Protection and Care of Animals and TNR Trust Nairobi.

The partnerships, says Taha, are very close to his heart, and together they make documentaries to create awareness about pet care. "I love dogs and animals in general and I want is to ensure that they are taken care of. We target people in communities where there are many stray animals. We are also looking at opening two more shops in the city, and building a mobile application that will encompass all pet-related services."

Priya Kalsi is another beneficiary of Petstore's services. "My dog suffered from severe allergies and was losing his fur until the store recommended switching him to Reflex and Spectrum. He has been healthy and happy for over two years now," says an elated Priya.

The store imports 11 international pet food brands including Bonnie, Reflex, Trendline, Josera, Royal Cannin and King. Says Taha: "We source high quality products from at least six countries. We have ensured that all our suppliers are ISO certified as a measure of quality control. We only import products that have been internationally certified in their places of origin."

So why can't they make their own foods after years of learning from the market? "We could, eventually, but most of the raw materials are not available locally and a lot must be done to make ensure that manufacturing locally will not eat into our profit margins, otherwise our products will be too expensive," he says, adding: "For most of their clients these three elements stand out: affordability, availability and the convenience of doorstep delivery, he adds. His advice to entrepreneurs? "Don't overborrow. Overborrowing affects your operations because you start working to pay back more than you work to make profits."

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Tariq Karmali and Taha Mohamedali, the directors of Petstore Kenya, a pet food importation and distribution company established in 2017. PHOTO IPOOL

The **911** SIDE
With John Nyuganyaga
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WOMAN POWER
BETTY OGIEL RUBANGA FROM UGANDA HAS A PASSION FOR SETTING PEOPLE UP FOR SUCCESS AND SIGNIFICANCE; SPEAK LIFE INTO PEOPLE, GIVE THEM HOPE AND BUILD RESILIENCE THUS TRANSFORMING LIVES. SHE DRAWS FROM HER LIFE AND WORK EXPERIENCES TO INSPIRE OTHERS. BETTY OVERCAME SERIOUS ADVERSITY IN HER EARLY LIFE AFTER BEING ABANDONED BY RELATIVES TO WELL WISHERS WHO SAW HER THROUGH SCHOOL. THEN IN 2006 SHE GOT INTO AN ACCIDENT WHICH LEFT HER PARALYSED. SHE HAS RISEN FROM ALL THIS TO BECOME A MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER AND CAREER COACH. SHE IS ALSO AN AUTHOR AND A HUMAN RESOURCE CONSULTANT. WE CELEBRATE YOU, MADAM OGIEL.

STAR OF THE WEEK



BRITAIN'S MOST SUCCESSFUL TRACK ATHLETE SIR MO FARAH WILL WAVE GOODBYE TO THE LONDON MARATHON IN APRIL, AFTER ADMITTING THAT THIS YEAR'S EVENT WILL BE HIS LAST. FARAH HAS BEEN CONFIRMED ON THE ENTRY LIST FOR THE MEN'S ELITE RACE THIS YEAR AFTER MISSING LAST YEAR'S EVENT DUE TO INJURY. HE WILL BE 40 BY THE TIME THE LONDON MARATHON COMES AROUND ON APRIL 23 AND HE WANTS AT LEAST ONE LAST PERFORMANCE IN FRONT OF HIS HOME FANS. "IT'S BEEN AN AMAZING CAREER AND TAKING PART IN THE LONDON MARATHON IS A VERY BIG DEAL," FARAH SAID. "WE ARE GETTING CLOSER TO THE END OF MY CAREER, FOR SURE." THANKS FOR YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO SPORTS, SIR MO.

opinion



■ Kibaki wanted a working nation and set about building a vibrant economy

Dear Ruto, stop whining and start working

President Ruto has not grasped four simple facts and the sooner he does that the better it will be for him and Kenyans. One, is that on becoming President, whatever mess and whatever wrong there was in whatever and whichever corner of the country, became his to clean up and to right. Therefore, empty coffers, to pick but one wrong, are no longer Uhuru Kenyatta's problem to solve, but William Ruto's to grapple with and fill.

President Ruto should take a leaf from President Kibaki. He did not waste his breath, energy or time picking fights with his predecessor, Daniel Moi, or blaming him for the near-kaput economy he inherited. Kibaki told Kenyans he wanted theirs to be a working nation and set about building a vibrant economy, quietly.

Kibaki despised empty talk and people who "talked the day before yesterday, talked yesterday, are talking today, and will talk tomorrow". While he jokingly said that it was not his wish that they be denied food, he wondered aloud when they would cease empty talk and get down to do some work. So quiet was Kibaki, a mistaken Kenyatta, who was Leader of the Official Opposition, thought he was "hands off, eyes off, everything off."

Two, President Ruto, needs to concern himself with a simple matter which, fortunately, all Kenyans, supporters and adversaries alike, can help him remember. It is that he campaigned on a platform of working for Kenyans to make their lives better. It is that to this end that he preached the twin gospels of bottom



**KWENDO
OPANGA**

up economics and hustler politics. Like five-month-old babies, they need utmost care.

Three, the President should see he is in a hole. His economy is struggling. His people are struggling under the weight of the high cost of living, with most basic commodities now out of reach for most.

They say at Westminster, when you find yourself in a hole, stop digging. The President is digging, threatening more taxes on a people weighed down by his non-performing economy. The President is digging, lighting fires right, left and centre.

Let the President revisit quotes about an empty stomach. Here are four: An empty stomach is not a good adviser; happiness rarely keeps company with an empty stomach; no man can be a patriot on an empty stomach and, of course, a hungry man is an angry man.

Four, the President must choose which battles to fight. His people in Turkana are, for the umpteenth time, being clobbered by armed bandits. His people in Samburu are, for the umpteenth time, being killed and maimed by armed bandits. His people in the two counties

are being forced, for the umpteenth time, to flee their homes. Children cannot go to school because these have, for the umpteenth time, been ransacked by bandits.

The security of Kenyans everywhere and anywhere within their borders must be the foremost objective and priority of the President. It is not enough for Interior Minister Kithure Kindiki to tour parts of the country ravaged by banditry. That has been done, umpteenth times, by his predecessors since 1963.

This administration needs, as a matter of urgency, new ideas, new strategies, new weaponry to combat and contain bandits.

The President is leading Kenya into its 60th anniversary and should demonstrate that it can fashion a paradigm shift and introduce systems to take Kenya into the future. That is a platform on which to build the economics of rebirth and renewal and demonstrate, with word and deed, politics that empowers the struggling majority economically.

Mr President, you are fighting the wrong wars.

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opinion

■ It is the only law in Kenya worded for the benefit of individuals, not by office held, but by name

Repeal this unjust and unconstitutional tax law



MACHARIA
GITHO

If we have a perfect example of the criminal manner in which those we elect to office feather their nests, it is revelation of a little-known law exempting former President Jomo Kenyatta and his successor, Daniel arap Moi, from provisions of the Estate Duty Act.

As far as I know, that must be the only law in Kenya worded for the benefit of individuals, not by office held.

We owe a debt of gratitude to President William Ruto's social media hatchetman Dennis Itumbi for bringing that obscure provision to our attention, but that would be tempered by the fact that the Kenya Kwanza regime's propaganda machinery is not motivated by commitment to good governance, rule of law, principles of equitable treatment for all citizens or the exhortations for all to pay their taxes.

The only motivation is to hit at Ruto's predecessor, old Jomo's son, Uhuru, who would have been left untouched to continue enjoying his wealth had he not fallen out with his erstwhile comrade-in-arms.

Anyway, whatever the reason, whatever the motivation, an unjust and unconstitutional tax exemption must be repealed as soon as possible.

This is beyond Ruto versus Uhuru or Ruto versus Raila Odinga, but about removing some obscure piece of legislation that served no public good.

It gave tax exemption to two individuals, and by extension two families, who were already enjoying more than their fair share of the national cake while demanding that everybody else pay their dues to Zacchaeus.

Repeal of that exemption must, however, go beyond the two families. It can set the platform for a wider discourse on what we expect of our elected leaders in regard to accountability, fidelity to the law, and the principle of service beyond self.

For many years we were held captive by the lie, encouraged by those in power, that the President is above the law. Even today, there are many who hold that false belief, not realising that the President is only protected from criminal prosecution or civil suits while in office, but once reduced to an ordinary citizen becomes fair game.

We have put those we elect as President on a high pedestal, where they are allowed to hold in contempt the very laws they take an oath to protect and defend.

Mzee Kenyatta and his then Vice-President, Moi, could in 1969 pass a law to defend their greedy interests. That was the period when Kenya was a de-facto one-party dictatorship, but even today after return of multi-party democracy in 1992 and passage of a progressive new Constitution in 2010, we still accord our leaders demi-god status.

It is true that we are free to criticise, mock, caricature and even insult the President, and with much more freedom than probably any other country in Africa, if not the world.

However, the President still operates above the law on many respects. That is why no state organs dare call him to account for theft, abuse of power, land grabbing, tax evasion or inflated expense accounts.

Quite often the illegal immunity extends beyond the President to his family, relatives and close political and business friends and allies, all of whom become untouchable and strut around putting on shows of wealth and power.

That is why Uhuru's state apparatus could be misused to harass and intimidate political opponents through falsified criminal charges and tax demands. And that is why, once in power, Ruto's administration can abuse the same machinery in pursuit of political foes, and also secure strange discharges for allies who have fallen foul of the law.

We now must work to inculcate a culture of true servant leadership. We can start by

It was JM Kariuki who was killed by the Jomo regime for decrying that Kenya was a country of 10 millionaires and 10 million beggars. We have transitioned from Jomo to Moi, Mwai Kibaki, Uhuru and now Ruto, and grown to a country of 50 trillionaires and 50 million beggars. A criminal rich-poor gap gives us about the most unequal society in the world. Something will snap sooner or later, and even those ruling tycoons claiming to be leaders of the Hustler Revolution will find themselves at the receiving end of unfriendly mobs.

severely limiting the executive fiat enjoyed by the President so that he or she is governed by the law, just like any other Kenyan.

A good idea would be to reinforce the role of function of other arms of government so that the Speakers of the two Houses of Parliament and the Chief Justice are not reduced to subservient *Yes Men* (or women) as seems to be the fashion under the present administration.

There is also an urgent need to restore independence of all the governance, justice, law and order institutions so that the heads of the National Police Service, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecution, the Ombudsman, the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights and other such organs are distinguishable from Kenya Kwanza youth wingers.

As we repeal that despicable law written for two individuals and their families, let us also give serious thought to how those in power have used office for personal gain. It isn't because they are particularly sharp business people that Kenya's wealthiest comes from families of those who have held the highest office. Even though it may have been multiplied by canny dealings, all that wealth was built on a bedrock of blatant looting of public resources.

While wealth seizures would be too messy and possibly even destabilising, we must give serious thought to a national discourse on establishment of a fair, just and equitable society.

We cannot pretend that Kenya is a viable state when a tiny oligarchy of past and present political leaders wallow in obscene wealth, while the vast majority swim in poverty.

It was JM Kariuki who was killed by the Jomo regime for decrying that Kenya was a country of 10 millionaires and 10 million beggars.

We have transitioned from Jomo to Moi, Mwai Kibaki, Uhuru and now Ruto, and grown to a country of 50 trillionaires and 50 million beggars.

A criminal rich-poor gap gives us about the most unequal society in the world.

Something will snap sooner or later, and even those ruling tycoons claiming to be leaders of the Hustler Revolution will find themselves at the receiving end of unfriendly mobs.

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kenya lens

■ SKELETONS IN CHURCH CLOSETS

PREACHING WATER, DRINKING WINE**Pope Francis's firing of Caritas International's management draws attention to the unholy goings-on in many Christian organisations**

● By JOSEPH MBOYA

The decision by Pope Francis to send the entire management of the Catholic charity wing, Caritas International (CI), packing and naming an interim administrator to run the organisation exposed the soft underbelly of Christian NGOs, some of which have been accused of serious malpractices ranging from unethical business practices to sexual predatory tendencies and practising Chinese accounting to steal funds.

The Pontiff's unheralded action serves to show that, although expected to operate under the highest moral standards – after all, they are modelled on godly templates – some of these organisations tend to push the boundaries. This does not apply to Caritas only but to a number of para-church organisations.

A press release said an independent review found deficiencies in Caritas International's "management and procedures, seriously prejudicing team-spirit and staff morale", according to the *Catholic News Agency*.

Consequently, Pope Francis issued a decree appointing Pier Francesco Pinelli, an Italian management consultant, as temporary administrator of CI. With the same ordinance, the Pope said the positions of the Catholic confederation's leadership are to cease immediately.

This decision includes CI president Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle and secretary-general Aloysius John. The positions of the vice-presidents, treasurer, ecclesiastical assistant, executive council, and representative council all end, the agency added.

To their credit, the dissolved Caritas management seemed to have kept their fingers out of the

cookie jar. "No evidence emerged of financial mismanagement or sexual impropriety, but other important themes and areas for urgent attention emerged from the panel's work."

"Real deficiencies were noted in management and procedures, seriously prejudicing team-spirit and staff morale."

It is because of this issue of staff morale that many have left such organisations in tears. For many Christians, employment in a church-affiliated organisation is a dream job because the assumption is that one would be working with brethren of the same religious persuasion and it would be an act of serving God.

However, talking to some Kenyans who have worked in such organisations, one learns of a different reality. Backstabbing, mudslinging, looting of funds and other malpractices witnessed by a number of the people we spoke to have left a bitter taste on their professional palates.

What astounds these people is that in nearly all these organisations, staff meet in the morning for an all-inclusive time of devotion where scripture is read, praise and worship abound and everyone wishes the other a blessed day

ahead. It turns out that the pronounced blessings are more often than not just from the lips and not the heart.

Jane* worked in the communications section of an international development agency with a deep Christian foundation.

"It was a dream job because as a born-again Christian, I was finally going to work in a place whose values aligned well with mine. I was elated," she said in an interview in



His Holiness Pope Francis PHOTO | AFP

kenya lens



Pope Francis blesses attendees during a meeting with victims of the conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) at the Apostolic Nunciature in Kinshasa. Pope Francis arrived in the Democratic Republic of Congo on January 31, on the first leg of a six-day trip to Africa. PHOTO | AFP

Nairobi.

She soon realised, however, that the much-touted values only existed on paper and that *'kwa ground vitu ni different'* (things are different on the ground), as Kenyans would say.

"It looked like immediately we said 'Amen' to close the prayers, some of the staff, especially the senior ones, went on overdrive in their efforts to throw mud at their colleagues. False claims were the order of the day and if the victim was a true believer who could never mount a revenge, his or her career at the place was all but over," she says.

She was later edged out in what she says were flimsy grounds of donor funding drying up. Another person was appointed to the post immediately afterwards.

What astounded Susan* was that the institution where she worked as a lecturer was owned by a renowned church and all employees signed a form agreeing to abide by Christian principles.

"My assumption, therefore, was that we were all brothers and sisters and we could do no harm to our colleagues. I was shocked that at the morning devotions we were all lovey-dovey but all hell broke loose when people switched on their computers. Angry emails were exchanged and there were claims of people fiddling with monies entrusted in their care or even false claims being lodged with the accounts for reimbursement," she recalls. A sex scandal involving a high-ranking don was swept under the carpet, she claims.

While Agnes* acknowledges that she went

against the rules governing her employment at the church-affiliated media house where she worked, she feels that there should have been some empathy and that such infringements should be handled on a case-by-case basis.

"The rules were that a single woman who got pregnant was to be fired but when it happened to me I found the whole thing thoroughly devastating. Here I was, pregnant, just fired and the man responsible also went missing. I believe we should follow Christ's teaching – that the law was made for man and not man for the law," she offers.

Although these cases deal with employment at Christian-affiliated institutions, they all point to the bigger issue of management of places of worship. Kenyans have been treated to long-drawn-out battles between factions in some churches as those in authority fight for control of not only buildings, but ultimately finances.

A few years ago, the country watched in disbelief as members of the normally laid back Seventh Day Adventist Church went tongs and hammers at each other over control of the Maxwell Church in Nairobi. There were undercurrents of tribalism as it emerged that a section of the church from the Abagusii community were opposed to the fact that their Kikuyu brethren had the control levers of leadership yet they (Abagusii) formed the bedrock of the laity and hence gave more in offerings and tithes.

There is also the case of the Methodist Church of Kenya, whose Presiding Bishop, Rev

Joseph Ntombura, and his lawyers have been camping at the courts, where he sought protection for his life. A recent story in the *Sunday Nation* revealed that at the heart of the tiff between him and other church leaders is property worth KSh500 billion belonging to the church.

The big question is, if these organisations are led by people who are supposedly Christians, why the shortcomings? Apostle Nickson Orieny of The Temple of God Ministries says the answer lies in the fact that not all who claim to profess the Christian faith are bona fide believers.

"The Church is where crooks hide. When they come in they are all innocent but give them positions of authority and their true nature comes out. It is like a seedling. You never quite know what it is until it grows thorns when it comes of age," says Orieny.

Rev Zainab Hussein of Latter Glory Family Church in Ongata Rongai, agrees. "Some of these people say they are saved but they are not grounded in the word of God. We are all liable to temptation, especially when one over-see finances."

Zainab adds that there those who lie about their spirituality to get jobs and promotions to head para-church organisations.

"They become their true selves after getting the job. Someone like that cannot be expected to run a company with integrity," she says. She cites the case of a Christian friend of hers who has become wary of employing people who come to her in the name of being saved.

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SCIENCE & TECH

Clouds part to reveal colossal Antarctic iceberg



An iceberg floe melts in the Baffin Bay near Pituffik, Greenland. The EU's Sentinel-2 satellite has obtained a crystal clear image of Antarctica's new monster iceberg.

The European Union's Sentinel-2 satellite has obtained a crystal clear image of Antarctica's new monster iceberg.

The 1,550sq km frozen block broke away from the Brunt Ice Shelf this week. Its detachment occurred close to Britain's Halley research station, which sits just 20km upstream from the line of rupture.

The base and its 21 occupants are all secure. Officials see no need for an evacuation. Concerns had been expressed that a major Emperor penguin colony near the breakaway could have been disrupted.

The Emperors breed on sea-ice attached to the coast — so-called “fast ice”. But the new Sentinel-2 picture clearly shows the stains from the birds' excrement, or guano, to be on an ice platform that remains intact.

The imagery on this page was processed by Ben Wallis from the Institute for Climate and Atmospheric Science at the University of Leeds. It is on the Brunt Ice Shelf, which is the floating protrusion of glaciers that have flowed off the Antarctic continent into the Weddell Sea.

On a map, the Weddell Sea is that sector of Antarctica directly to the south of the Atlantic Ocean. The Brunt is on the eastern side of the sea. Like all ice shelves, it will periodically calve icebergs. Prior to this latest berg and A74, the last major chunk to come off the Brunt was in 1971.

NASA'S MARS ROVER COMPLETES ROCK DEPOT



Nasa's Perseverance Mars rover using its dual-camera Mastcam-Z imager to capture this image of “Santa Cruz”, a hill about 2.5 kilometres away, on April 29, 2021.

● LONDON

Nasa's Perseverance rover has finished building a rock depot on Mars. It's laid down a series of tubes on the ground containing a variety of rock and environmental specimens.

The depot will serve as a reserve cache to be brought back to Earth in the event Perseverance is unable to complete the next stage of its mission.

Scientists want rock samples brought home to study in the lab. It will be the best way to determine whether life has ever existed on the Red Planet.

Photos downlinked from the robot on Monday showed the last of the 10 titanium cylinders intended for the depot that were lying in the dust between the vehicle's wheels. The tube's exact position has been carefully documented.

Perseverance was sent to Mars to investigate a 45km-wide bowl called Jezero Crater.

It is a location thought to have held a lake billions of years ago.

It also has on its western fringe the remnants of a delta.

This is a structure created from the silt and sand dumped by a river as it slows on entry into a wider body of water. It's the kind of feature that might just have trapped evidence of past microbial organisms.

Perseverance has drilled a mix of volcanic and sedimentary rocks that should tell the story of the crater and the lake it once held. Examples of those rocks are now in the depot on a flat piece of terrain dubbed “Three Forks”. To be clear, the collection is not the primary cache Nasa wishes to return to Earth; it's more of a “Plan B”.

Perseverance retains copies of the Three Forks samples in the caching system inside its belly.

The hope is the rover can directly deliver these rocks — and others yet to be drilled — to the mission that comes to take them home. But Nasa can't risk the scenario where

the rover breaks down with all the rocks stuck inside it. The depot is therefore an insurance. It guarantees something is available to pick up when the retrieval mission arrives at the end of the decade.

Should the nightmare happen and Perseverance dies, the fetch mission will be directed straight to Three Forks. The rover is about to drive up on to the top of the delta, accompanied by its scout drone. This mini-helicopter, named Ingenuity, has already begun the climb.

Perseverance is going to investigate what appears to be evidence of flood activity, judging from the large size of some of the boulders scattered across the top of the delta.

The robot will then move to the edge of the crater where satellite imagery indicates there are carbonate-type sedimentary rocks. These, again, will be a good place to look for traces of ancient biology. Perseverance still has more than 20 sample tubes waiting to be filled.

africa lens

■ DELAY IN ITS ADMISSION TO EAC DUE TO THE LEVEL OF INSECURITY IN THE COUNTRY

SOMALIA'S THIRST FOR PEACE



Hawa Mohamed Isack, 60, drinks water at a distribution point at Muuri camp, one of the 500 camps for internally displaced persons in Somalia. PHOTO | AFP

For the past three decades, the nation has experienced unparalleled terror due to attacks by al-Shabaab within Somalia, and in Kenya and Uganda

● By OSCAR OBONYO

A team of experts tasked to assess Somalia's eligibility to join the East African Community (EAC) has completed its mission this Friday, amid concerns that admitting the country into the community would serve to draw the region more into conflict than business.

Somalia meets most of the criteria of joining the bloc – thanks to the country's geographical proximity to EAC member states, status of its market-driven economy and its potential contribution to the bloc. However, on the key criteria of security, it does not score favourably.

The delay in its admission – it applied in 2012 – is largely attributable to the level of insecurity in the country. The situation is fuelled by the al-Shabaab, who are linked to the militant pan-Islamist organisation, al-Qaeda. For

the past three decades, the country has experienced unparalleled terror in the region due to bloody attacks by al-Shabaab within Somalia, and in neighbouring Kenya and Uganda.

Owing to this scenario, some security pundits and observers have expressed fears that Somalia's entry into EAC could import terrorist activities into the region, thereby multiplying the threat. EAC Secretary-General Peter Mathuki argues, however, that admission of Somalia into the EAC would help in addressing the security threats in a structured manner. Speaking during the launch of the verification process, Mathuki observed that inclusion of Somalia would enable the bloc to tackle insecurity effectively.

Mr Mohamed Dubo, Director of Somalia Investment Promotion Office (SOMINVEST) at the Ministry of Planning, Investment and Economic Development, concurs: "All decisions have pros and cons. A decision to admit Soma-

lia into the EAC outweighs the security concerns some member states may have. In fact, it would give member countries the regional muscle to address the Somalia security challenges conclusively."

Burundi, Kenya and Uganda are among the Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs) that have been on a peace-keeping mission in Somalia under the umbrella of the African Union Mission in Somalia (Amisom) established in 2007 and now African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS). The other TCCs include Ethiopia, Djibouti and Sierra Leone.

Somalia President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud has over the last 10 years staged a spirited campaign – during his first term in office and after recapturing the seat last year – to join the bloc. With the support of EAC member states, the Somali leader has given a commitment "to

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africa lens

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work tirelessly” to remove all security impediments.

As a government statutory body charged with the duty of promoting Foreign Direct Investment to Somalia, SOMINVEST is particularly enthusiastic about teaming up with Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda, South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

In EAC, Dubo sees enhanced inbound regional investments, expanded trade, and transfer of knowledge, skills and technology. This, according to the SOMINVEST boss, will also formalise Somali investments and businesses of individuals, who currently operate under great uncertainty.

Officials in Mogadishu are nonetheless banking on South Sudan and the DRC’s flawless admittance as the community’s sixth and seventh member states respectively. Like Somalia, South Sudan and the DRC are still heavily plagued by insecurity and internal conflict.

South Sudan was admitted in 2016 but bloody conflict amongst forces allied to President Silver Kiir and former First Vice-President Riak Machar rage on, while the conflict-scarred DRC, which formally joined the community in July last year, is presently struggling amid tensions between its forces and Rwandese neighbours over security breaches and accusations of support for armed groups hostile to both governments.

Trouble between these two states has attracted global attention, with Head of the Catholic Church, Pope Francis, being the latest personality to exhibit concern. The Pontiff kicked off his official tour of the DRC and South Sudan on January 31 with a message of peace and reconciliation.

Arguing that “a threat to security anywhere is insecurity everywhere”, Nairobi-based law and security consultant Gerald Majany points out that the al-Shabaab threat cannot be handled “in silos or by placing demarcations and boundaries of geographical space”. Dr Majany, who heads the criminology department at the Presbyterian University of East Africa, observes that al-Shabaab has over time changed its operational tactics, including striking at targeted enemies through sophis-

Insecurity slows down Somalia’s quest to join EAC

ticated artillery such as drones.

The conspiratorial theory that al-Shabaab is a problem of Somalis alone, according to the security expert, ought to be dismissed since every country is unique in its own security apex. “Al-Shabaab is a transnational problem whose solution requires collaboration across states. The al-Shabaab threat is alive everywhere and in every country,” he observes.

The don opines that it is prudent to do so (viability of the issue) in terms of anticipated benefits and interests and not deficiencies or threats. The threats notwithstanding, argues Majany, one must strive to maximise the interests. And it is on this account that he believes Somalia stands a good chance of being integrated into the regional bloc.

To the senior Somali leaders, the long wait for the EAC’s nod is regarded as a decision deferred, since they already view themselves as part of the regional community. According to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Abshir Omar, Somalis are already present in the East African region, where they integrate with the rest as brothers

and sisters of the region in business and other social aspects. The Somali nationals also share a language, culture and heritage with citizens from other countries, especially Kenya, and the Minister points out that what remains now “is the decision to formalise our interactions by joining the EAC”.

While pleading his case in Mogadishu last October, President Mohamud reiterated that Somalia belongs to EAC and pleaded with the body’s secretariat to speed up his country’s integration process: “There is no country among the EAC partner states that is not linked by business with Somalia and existing historical linkages, include language and culture.”

Somalia shares its border with Kenya and its long Indian Ocean-Red Sea route that links Africa to the Arabian Peninsula is a vibrant economic zone. Expounding on the economic benefits, Dubo reports that the Somalia government envisions a win-win situation in its EAC membership.

“Our corporations will also expand regionally, giving it bigger market space. The government may also negotiate with the EAC

during the integration stage in order to address the private sector concerns in the event of high external competition,” says the Planning and Investment Ministry official. And even as Somalia builds its human capital, Dubo separately observes that EAC member countries could fill the gap and take advantage of the increasing demand for skills and knowledge.

The worthwhile benefits notwithstanding, the shadow of the al-Shabaab threat still looms large over a host of economic ventures in the region. Dr Theodore Karasik, a senior adviser at Gulf State Analytics in Washington, opines that a joint counter-terrorism effort against al-Shabaab is essential in aiding regional peace.

Already, Karasik observes that President Mohamud is working with Ethiopia and Eritrea to limit al-Shabaab’s activities. An increased military presence in Djibouti monitoring al-Shabaab, he says, “is part of a growing web of security connections to combat terrorism and ensure major infrastructure projects work”.

Besides the help from ATMIS, Somalia has for long also enjoyed help from friendly nations such as Turkey in organising, training and equipping Somali counter-terrorism forces: “Overall, the Somali leader is putting Mogadishu on a course that can lead to greater integration of East African states by addressing both counter-terrorism realities and economic necessity,” writes the security analyst in an online article.

The fate of Somalia now hangs on the findings of the mission led by Tiri Marie Rose from Burundi. The team, comprising experts from member states, arrived in Mogadishu on January 25 for an intense assessment exercise that ended on February 3, 2023.

A report of the Mogadishu exercise is to be presented to the heads of state summit, which is expected to take place in a month’s time. According to Dr Mathuki, the verification team’s report will revolve around institutional and legal frameworks in place, policies, strategies, projects and expected areas of cooperation with other EAC partner states. The EAC Treaty separately requires of a foreign country intending to join the bloc to adhere to universally acceptable principles of good governance, democracy, the rule of law, and observance of human rights.



President William Ruto and his Somalia counterpart, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, at a meeting in Washington DC. FILE | NATION

global lens

■ EFFORTS SINCE HIS KILLING FAIL TO STEM POLICE VIOLENCE IN AMERICA



Protesters gather during a rally against the fatal police assault of Tyre Nichols, in Atlanta, Georgia, on January 28. The city of Memphis on January 27 released a graphic video, depicting the fatal police assault of Nichols, a 29-year-old Black man. Five Memphis officers, also all Black, were charged with second-degree murder in the beating of Nichols, who died in hospital on January 10 three days after being stopped on suspicion of reckless driving. PHOTO | AFP

NO PROGRESS SINCE FLOYD

Nichols, a Black man, died in a hospital on January 10, three days after a brutal beating by five Black police officers in the southern city of Memphis, Tennessee. The five have since been charged with second-degree murder

● WASHINGTON

The shocking death of Tyre Nichols after a police beating has reopened anguished debate across the United States about police violence, fuelling a sense that the huge, nationwide demonstrations of 2020 have done little to solve the problem.

Nichols, a 29-year-old Black man, died in a hospital on January 10, three days after a brutal beating by five Black police officers in the southern city of Memphis, Tennessee.

The five have since been charged with second-degree murder. Memphis police released body-cam footage of the incident – after starkly warning viewers of its brutality – late Friday.

“I’m just sad for where we are in America; we’re still here,” said Lora King, whose father, Rodney King, sustained a violent beating by police in Los Angeles in 1991, also caught on camera. The incident fuelled lethal and destructive riots in that city and elsewhere. “I’m in disbelief.”

“We have to do better,” she told

CNN. “This is unacceptable.”

Nichols’ death left many Americans questioning how much real progress had been made since 2020.

The killing that year in Minneapolis of George Floyd, a Black man whose videotaped death under the knee of a white officer was viewed millions of times, reignited the historic Black Lives Matter movement across the US and abroad.

In the wake of Floyd’s death, promises of police reform swept across the country.

And yet two years later, the number of people who have died during interactions with police hit a 10-year high in 2022, at 1,186 deaths, according to the website Mapping Police Violence.

“They say it’s a new year, but same old, same old,” said Robert Jones, a 26-year-old salesman in Memphis. African Americans accounted for 26 per cent of those deaths, though Black people represent only 13 per cent of the US population.

By way of comparison, fewer

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global lens

Systemic crisis: US police violence continues

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than 20 people die in France each year during police interventions.

A huge factor explaining the difference is the enormous number of privately owned firearms in the United States – there are more guns than there are people – which sharply increases the sense of vulnerability police feel during interactions with the public, making them much quicker to draw their own arms.

Last year, 66 police officers were killed by gunfire while on duty, according to a fund created to honour them. But attorney Ben Crump, who represented Floyd's relatives and is now working with Nichols' family, sees a deeper dynamic at work. "We have to talk about this institutionalised police culture that has this unwritten law that you can engage in excessive use of force against Black and Brown people," he said during a press conference Friday.

The tumult of 2020 led, among other things, to efforts to curb the considerable legal immunity granted to American police, or to establish a register of officers who have been found to use excessive force. Proposed federal legislation, initially supported by both political parties, ultimately failed in Congress at a time when homicides were rising sharply, with Republicans falling back on their traditional appeals for "law and order."

In the absence of progress on the federal level, the push for reform advanced primarily on the local level, modestly and unevenly, producing a patchwork of different approaches.

Across the United States, there are nearly 18,000 autonomous policing entities – city police, county sheriffs, state highway patrols – each with its own rules for recruitment, training and on-the-job practices. Some of them have reviewed and revised their rules, notably banning strangleholds, such as the one that killed George Floyd, requiring greater use of body-cams and increasing the penalties for unjustified violence. The Memphis police were among those adopting reforms. Officers were barred from forcing their way into homes unannounced; were told they must step in to stop colleagues engaging in violence; and were given additional training in de-escalating dangerous confrontations.

Despite all that, the officers who stopped Nichols for a simple traffic violation were "riled up" from the beginning and "the escalation was already at a high level," said Cereelyn Davis, the Memphis police department's first Black female chief. For activists, the central problem is the extensive arrest powers American police have, even over minor infractions.

"We must stop relying on police to respond to issues related to poverty and disinvestment," said Kathy Sinback, director for Tennessee of the American Civil Liberties Union.

That approach, she said in a statement, "leads to more frequent, unnecessary and aggressive actions by law enforcement toward communi-



This still image from a Memphis Police Department body-camera video released by the city of Memphis on January 27 shows Tyre Nichols handcuffed on the ground surrounded by police officers, in Memphis, Tennessee. PHOTO | AFP

ty members". US police have killed nearly 600 people during traffic stops since 2017, according to Human Rights Watch.

The US city of Memphis has disbanded the special police unit whose officers fatally beat Nichols after graphic video of the assault sparked widespread shock and outrage. The video, which shows five officers repeatedly kicking and punching Nichols as he moans and calls out for his mother, triggered calls for police reform amid the anger.

The southern US city announced it had deactivated the officers' special unit, known as Scorpion, which was launched in 2021 to reduce illegal activity by assigning more police to high-crime areas.

The Memphis Police Department said in a statement it was "in the best interest of all to permanently deactivate the Scorpion Unit," which stands for Street Crimes Operation to Restore Peace in Our Neighbourhoods. "The officers currently assigned to the unit agree unreservedly with this next step," the department added. Several dozen demonstrators called for police reform Saturday afternoon as they gathered in the chilly rain in front of city hall shouting "No justice, no peace!" and carrying signs with slogans such as "Justice for Tyre Nichols".

At one point, a police car ended up surrounded by a group of protesters, who directed their angry chants at the vehicle. Memphis City

Council member JB Smiley Jr addressed the crowd's demands, speaking to protesters in the rain. "Memphis has an opportunity to set the standard on how to respond to actions like this," he told them.

The five Memphis officers were charged with second-degree murder in the beating of Nichols, who died in hospital on January 10, three days after being stopped on suspicion of reckless driving. The lengthy video footage from police body cameras released Friday evening shows the group of officers detaining Nichols, attempting to take him down using a Taser, then giving chase as he evades them. Subsequent segments – the footage runs about an hour in total, and is audio-only in parts – show Nichols calling for his mother, and groaning as officers repeatedly assault him.

"They had beat him to a pulp," Nicholas's mother RowVaughn Wells told CNN Friday. "He had bruises all over. His head was swollen like a watermelon. His neck was bursting because of the swelling."

Nancy Schulte, 69, who works at a hotel in downtown Memphis, said she lost respect for city police after viewing the grim footage. "It's just a horrible thing," said Schulte. "Watching five big guys beat the living heck out of this man." Even after the release of the video, some key questions remained unanswered, mainly what caused Nichols to be stopped.

— AFP

global lens

■ RUSSIA EVOKES STALINGRAD FOR UKRAINE BOOST

DESCENDANTS OF VICTORS

More than one million members of the Red Army died fighting for the city, a sacrifice that has seen it evolve into a symbol of the Soviet Union's victory over Nazi Germany and a Mecca of modern Russian patriotism

● MOSCOW

Eighty years after the devastating battle for Stalingrad in southern Russia, one of the bloodiest chapters of World War II, volunteers like Andrei Oreshkin are still retrieving remains of killed Soviet soldiers.

More than one million members of the Red Army died fighting for the city, a sacrifice that has seen it evolve into a symbol of the Soviet Union's victory over Nazi Germany and a Mecca of modern Russian patriotism.

But the anniversary on February 2 to commemorate that crucial battle has taken on added meaning this year as Russian troops fight in Ukraine. The Kremlin has gone to great lengths to present the nearly year-long conflict there as yet another fight against Nazism, like the one two generations ago in the southern city now called Volgograd.

And many, including Oreshkin, are receptive to this narrative. "Of course, we're fighting fascism," he told *AFP* at Rossoshka, a burial ground near Volgograd for Soviet as well as German and Romanian soldiers killed.

Moreover, he agrees with Moscow's view that the conflict in Ukraine is rooted in the West's miscalculation of Russia's resolve and capabilities, as in World War II.

"At the time, Nazi Germany and its allies underestimated... the Soviet Union, its power and the patriotism of its people," Oreshkin said. "The West is hoping that Russia is weak."

Such comparisons with the past are everywhere in Volgograd, a city of one million people where every street bears a reminder of the destruction 80 years ago. Symbols of Russia's forces in Ukraine — the letters Z and V — are displayed side-by-side banners and memorials honouring Soviet troops.

The historical messaging — that Moscow once again must fight European fascism — echoes the justifications by President Vladimir Putin when he launched the offensive in February last year, vowing to "de-Nazify" Ukraine.

At the Battle of Stalingrad Museum, employee Tatiana Prikazchikova said Western criticism of Russia was "nothing new" after centuries of confrontation. Recently her museum has hosted ceremonies to give medals to the families of Russian soldiers killed in Ukraine.

"The message is this: their ancestors were fighting fascism," she said, pointing to a 360-degree panorama depicting the battle. "They are following in this tradition."

The museum recently hosted a ceremony for the Youth Army patriotic movement, financed by the defence ministry, where leaders told the children: "You are the descendants of the victors of Stalingrad!" The city's famous war memorials, such as the "Motherland Calls" statue, have also been used as send-off points for volunteer soldiers heading to Ukraine.

Most Volgograd residents that spoke to *AFP* said they were glad of the commemorations to mark the 80th anniversary of the battle, though many did not want to make any comparisons with the Ukraine conflict.

"We should think about it, so we do not repeat mistakes and draw some conclusions," said Yekaterina Sedova, a 21-year-old chemistry student, who said her great-grandfather fought at Stalingrad. She has taken part in patriotic events linked to the commemoration but did not want to "mix" the events, adding that she was trying to limit her exposure to news about Ukraine so as "not to harm myself emotionally". Others felt uncomfortable with the pomp. "This is a tragedy for Volgograd and for our country," 31-year-old Maria Anshakova told *AFP* by the bank of the Volgograd river, saying it "should be marked quietly".

Local historian and activist Vyacheslav Yashchenko said the

celebrations had become far bigger compared to those in Soviet times.

He also said he was disturbed to see the government promoting the Ukraine offensive alongside the Stalingrad anniversary.

"It is true that the (World War II era) victories were really huge for our country," he said.

"But the authorities now are using past victories and historical events that suit them for the image of the country and to manipulate peoples' consciousness."

Back at the Rossoshka memorial, Oreshkin, part of a group that recovered the remains of more than 1,000 Red Army soldiers last year alone, showed *AFP* the ID tags and other personal items he found in the clay ground outside Volgograd. "Future generations may have to do what we do," he sighed.

"I just hope those in charge will learn from our experience and that the dead will not be left out in the fields." — *AFP*



Russian President
Vladimir Putin
PHOTO | AFP

OBIT

■ THE PEN PROVED MORE POPULAR THAN THE SCALPEL

● BY JOHN KAMAU

Some 30 years ago, Yusuf Dawood wrote the ultimate summary of his life. It was an admission and a look at his space and what he did.

“I have led a double life, starting as a surgeon and then incarnated as Dawood the author. The pen proved more popular than the scalpel, the writer became better known than the surgeon. I suppose many more were touched by the pen than the knife, yet there is a common meeting point between the two instruments which gave me the thrill of a lifetime.”

Nairobi had been good to Dawood – and by the time he died a week ago, he was the man with two identities – that of a writer and another as a surgeon.

As a surgeon, he had followed his father's wish. As a writer, it was a case of being in the right place at the right time.

Unbeknown to many, Dawood donated all his income as a writer – from his column and his books – to the Rotary Foundation, which has been a leading driver of global polio campaigns for many years. While writing would have offered him some extra income, Dawood was not driven by the search for wealth. Instead, he saw writing as therapeutic. The story of his writing career was tied to his work as a Rotarian, and he naturally gave it back.

As a member of the Rotary Club of Nairobi, he regularly attended the weekly meetings, but the scheduled speaker – who was to speak about his job – failed to turn up. So, as an emergency, Dr Yusuf Khodwawwalla (his actual name) was asked to step in.

For the next 30 minutes, he drew on his experiences at the hospital, the human side of his patients, and the social struggles they face. He also spoke about patients' decisions before surgery or during follow-up.

In the audience was Joe Rodriguez, the *Nation's* editor-in-chief.

He listened keenly to all the exciting stories that Dawood was narrating and the attention paid by the club members. “Could you

SURGEON WHO DONATED ALL HIS WRITING INCOME

The story of Dawood's writing career was tied to his work as a Rotarian



Dr Yusuf Dawood's with two of his titles, 'The last Word' and 'Eye of the Storm', on October 3, 2014. FILE | NATION

put those stories in writing,” Rodriguez asked him?

Dawood kept notes about his patients – their tiny biographies, fears and relations were all in those notes, as he would say later.

“I wrote about what I knew. I wrote about my work in the hospital and the operating room and the patients and the people I met. Naturally, I invested the writing with my own philosophy and sense of humour.”

On why he picked the name Dawood, the late columnist usually explained that it was because his surname, Khodwawwalla, was

a “tongue twister.” Dawood is his father's first name.

Medics in Nairobi used to call him Dr K when he arrived in Kenya in early 1960s. When he started writing, he simply became Yusuf Dawood and those who followed his literary life knew him as such. “In time, writing became a process of catharsis, proved to be a personal panacea and worked as a balm for my jangled nerves. It even helped to maintain my sanity,” he once wrote.

In 2003, Dawood surprised many when he donated \$235,000 to Rotary. The money had accu-

mulated from his writing income and had been banked in a separate account from his income as a surgeon.

The separate account is another story. Its genesis is that his first writing cheque came under the pen name, and the bank told him to open a new account.

“From that point on, I just started putting the royalties from my writing into this separate account. It wasn't much at first, but over the years it grew into a nice little nest egg,” he told *The Rotarian*, Rotary International's magazine.

He decided to place the “little nest egg” into the bank account of the Rahima Dawood Foundation, which he had set up in honour of his parents, to go towards worthy causes. He would often say that he Dawood was comfortable with his income as a surgeon and that this extra money would be helpful in philanthropy work. The \$235,000 donation was made from this account, which was in addition to \$15,000 he had previously contributed to the Rotary Foundation.

For their contributions, Dawood and his wife, Marie, have their photos in the Hall of Honour of Rotary International in Evanston, USA, where they are listed as major donors.

Dawood was certainly writing with a mission. He had vowed to continue writing long after he retired from the theatre.

“As long as my brain can conjure up stories, factual or fictional, and I can put pen to paper, I shall remain a writer. In this respect, I believe I will be able to hold the pen steadily for longer than the scalpel,” he wrote in his autobiography, *Nothing but the Truth*.

The biography was one of the various books he had penned in his writing career. One question that baffled many was how he balanced his work as a surgeon, a family man, a writer, and a Rotarian.

Balancing between these four pillars of his life was his mark of identity. It was also the sub-title of his book, *The story of a surgeon with four wives*.

If passion and common good were a person, his name would be Yusuf Dawood aka Dr Yusuf Khodwawwalla.

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