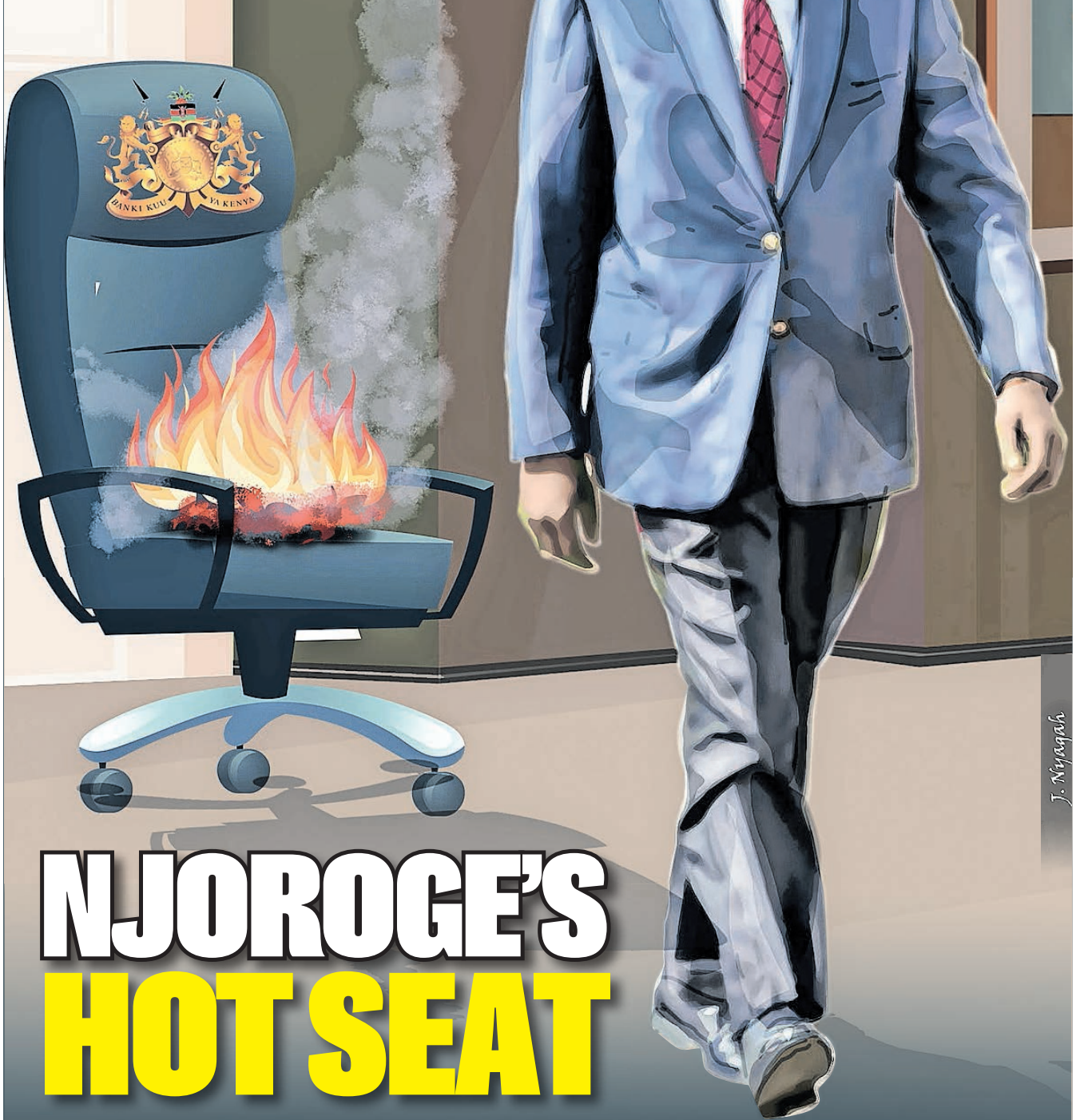


Weekly Review

For the Thinking Person

THE

‘MAY NATION’



J. Njoroge

NJOROGE'S HOT SEAT

The nation is going backwards at an alarming speed. As the economy hurtles to the edge of the cliff of debt default, the next CBK governor faces a baptism of fire. Given the worsening conditions, the new leadership of the banking sector must strengthen policies to stop the rot and restore fiscal discipline

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letter from the editor

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It's time to sober up and talk for the sake of every Kenyan

It's a time of confusion and apprehension. The country seems deeply divided and ethnic overtones are rising in decibels. These are indeed the 'interesting times' flaunted in the famous old Chinese curse.

These are the times that beget heroes and villains. We must admit that the anticipated bipartisan talks have had a cooling effect on the dangerous vibrations and sheer bravado witnessed in past weeks. The talks, whose real kernel we have not yet discerned, may yet act as a salve for our collective conscience.

With this is in mind, we know that there may be some newbie souls tasting real power at the moment, who even in their sleep and worst nightmares are not ready to dialogue. They are seeking ways to scuttle the overture that has given us the uneasy peace we are currently enjoying. There is neither winner nor loser in these matters and in the end, all of us suffer immeasurably.

For about three weeks, Kenya was on the brink of Armageddon. The weekly demos called by veteran opposition leader Raila Odinga to protest the high cost of living and alleged electoral fraud had paralysed the economy. The capital, Nairobi, and the lakeside city of Kisumu were in a mess.

Neutral journalists were brutally attacked and injured by the police in the full glare of cameras. All this sent tremors into the already tumbling economy, so that the cost of living that was the cause of the public demos soared even higher.

A cruise ship that was to land at the Coast reportedly cancelled docking in Mombasa and skipped Kenya as a destination due to the demonstrations. The nation lost millions of dollars.



Allan Buluku

It is not a time to keep trump cards out of sight so as to cheat the other out of the game; it is not the time to flaunt power and talk without consulting the brain; it is not the time to think about 'them' and 'us'; it is not the time to separate shareholders from the others to make them feel a collective disenfranchisement.

All facets of the economy felt the shock of the wave. The last time the nation was rocked by similar demos as opposition leaders demanded reconstitution of the electoral agency, businesses suffered huge losses.

And so, when President William Ruto and Odinga announced a ceasefire and initiated bipartisan talks to address the issues raised by the opposition, the nation breathed a collective sigh of relief. But alas! We might have raised our hopes too soon. The hardliners in Kenya Kwanza have dared the opposition to return to the streets for mass action, and they have responded by announcing the resumption of countrywide rallies dubbed "consultative meetings".

With the benefit of history, it behoves us to look back on past pitfalls to think clearly. In December 2007, it only took 20 minutes for the country to explode after the dubious conclusion of one of the most fiercely fought elections in the nation's history. When then-Chairman of the Electoral Commission of Kenya Samuel Kivuitu declared Mwai Kibaki as duly re-elected, the country erupted like a volcano.

In Kibra, Raila's stronghold, thousands of youth burst out of their dwellings, waving sticks, hurling stones and burning tyres to protest their "stolen victory". The whole country was burning and lives were needlessly lost. That sad period should be our guide out of this present gridlock. It is time to sober up and cool our egos.

It is important that the proposed talks be taken seriously and that they come up with a position congenial to all. This is not the time to keep trump cards out of sight so as to cheat the other out of the game; it is not the time to flaunt power and talk without consulting the brain; it is not the time to think about 'them' and 'us'; it is not the time to separate shareholders from the others to make them feel a collective disenfranchisement.

This is the time to show leadership, to open our ears more to listen rather than flap our lips and make arrogant speeches. We may yet make history in this region as that country that solves its problems in unique style. We are informed by our past and that information tells us we are Kenyans, and we need each other now more than ever.

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the telescope

■ Muslims share presents on special holiday

End of holy month of Ramadan

Muslims are this week expected to celebrate the end of the holy month of Ramadan.

Eid al-Fitr, translated to the breaking of the fast, is primed for Thursday. As per Islam teachings, the occasion is a reminder to be grateful for all gifts bestowed upon them and rejoice with loved ones.

Like the beginning of Ramadan, Eid begins with the first sighting of the new moon and is normally marked with receptions and visits among the Muslim community.

In an extension of the celebrations, which are normally

marked as a public holiday in Kenya, Muslims also share presents, pray and visit the graves of their departed relatives.

Ramadan is the Arabic name for the ninth month in the Islamic calendar. It is considered one of the holiest months for Muslims and is marked by a period of fasting, considered one of the Five Pillars of Islam.

These are five principles which Muslims believe are compulsory acts ordered by God: the other pillars are faith, prayer, charity and making a pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca.



A woman sells iftar delicacies on the streets of Lamu's Old Town on March 23. KALUME KAZUNGU | NATION

■ Her first scripted on-screen venture in a decade



US socialite Kim Kardashian and comedian Pete Davidson arrive for the 2022 Met Gala at the Metropolitan Museum of Art on May 2, 2022.

Kardashian in 'American Horror Story'

Reality TV star Kim Kardashian is swapping her domestic drama for something scripted, with an appearance on cult show *American Horror Story*.

The socialite and billionaire businesswoman posted an eerie video Monday to her 352 million Instagram followers, confirming that she will be joining the series with regular Emma Roberts.

The brief video includes an off-key rendition of *Rock-a-bye Baby* and the whispered line: "Emma and Kim are delicate."

The showbiz news outlet *Variety* reported that Kardashian will have a lead role in Season 12, playing a character that was written specifically for her. Kardashian first came

to public attention as a member of heiress Paris Hilton's entourage, but gained global notoriety with the release of a sex tape.

That was followed by the long-running *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* series and its spin-offs, in which viewers get insights into the lives of the uber-wealthy family.

As well as a now-dissolved high profile marriage to Kanye West, Kardashian has also built a business empire selling lingerie and beauty products. She appeared in a handful of films in the late 2000s, and recently voiced a character in *PAW Patrol: The Movie*.

But *American Horror Story* will be her first scripted on-screen venture in a decade.

■ Technology to power growth in Africa

ICT experts set for Nairobi show



The second Africa ICT Expo Conference will be held at the Sarit Centre in Nairobi on April 20-21. It's a two-day event converging global ICT industry players to showcase cutting-edge technologies and

solutions in the industry. ICT executives and thought leaders will be sharing knowledge, experiences and technical interventions on emerging technologies and give strategic advice on tackling today's most pressing IT challenges, especially in developing countries. Participants will meet public sector executives from the continent for business opportunities and understanding country by country ICT policies.

■ Political base of former President Barack Obama

Dems pick Chicago for '24 convention



The US Democratic Party will hold its 2024 convention in Chicago, the site of its violence-marred 1968 gathering. The Democratic National Committee said the convention, where it will officially choose its 2024 presidential nominee, will

take place from August 19-22, nearly 11 weeks before the election.

The state of Illinois along with neighbouring Wisconsin, Michigan and Minnesota "were crucial to the 2020 victory of President (Joe) Biden and Vice President (Kamala) Harris and to Democrats' success in the 2022 midterm elections", the DNC said.

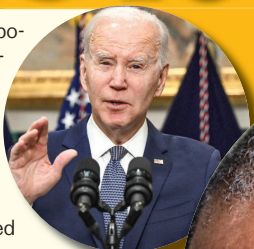
Chicago was also the political base of former President Barack Obama, the country's first and so far only African-American leader.

kenya lens

■ THE MULTIPLICITY OF KENYA'S POLICY CRISES

CBK'S TOUGH CHOICES

Kenya's acknowledged growth potentials still shine. US Ambassador Meg Whitman summarised them recently: Kenya leads as a regional hub for finance and logistics, and is the leading destination for FDI. With the US as its lead export market, its economic conditions can be reshaped to improve our fortunes.



Kenyan banks' unrealised losses at end of 2022 were only about nine per cent of core capital. The US 'loan-book' losses from the inverse rule on stocks and bond prices versus yields raised unrealised losses to \$1.75 trillion or 80 per cent of their capital.

The regulator could pioneer a position that banks holding assets above a certain level would be subjected to special regulations – a quasi-Dodd-Frank Act.



The highest unrealised losses to hit a Kenyan Tier 1 bank showed a paper loss of Sh29.01 billion in 2022 compared to Sh7.09 billion in 2021.

The recent banking crisis exposed Kenya's lending weakness in the private sector as if it was a virtue, mainly because "unrealised" losses were relatively low.



Kenya's highly profitable banks escaped SVB-like fallout not by virtue, but thanks to a conservative tradition of avoiding powering and enlarging private sector loan books.

A CBK leadership is needed that will align with Kenya's domestic and regional and global opportunities by engineering trust or coverage of real or perceived lending risks to borrowers in the private sector.

Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results... The next leadership of the Central Bank of Kenya should inspire investor confidence with novel approaches to policy making, given the worsening economic conditions

● BY MBUI WAGACHA

A concept called the Idiots Curve recently flashed on my LinkedIn pages, thanks to Dr Lucy Muthoni, a mathematician. In summary, you will feel dumber before you get smarter on a new assignment, no matter how well informed or experienced you might be.

The next leadership of the Central Bank of Kenya must ponder

and wade through the assignment to sharpen their deliverables, given the worsening economic conditions and a tradition of bank balance sheets tight-fisted with loans. What a difference compared to March 2015, when as Acting Chairman of the CBK Board, I kick-started the shortlisting process for the current CBK leadership. We had a newly minted Constitution, Article 231 to boot, as well as a newly amended

CBK Act to implement.

The outlook is more daunting than in 2015. IMF's *Global Stability Report* paints a perilous phase, at least since 1990, after banks and businesses failed to prepare for the current phase of rising interest rates. In low-income countries, excessive indebtedness, high cost of failures to tackle fiscal, monetary and debt cracks, as well as a decline in global demand for their exports, are on the plate, and

especially for Africa.

Listening to a House Committee Chair fumbling a week ago on subsidies to address hunger, I thought to prefix this piece with snapshots: Kenya's many failing policies compared to governments of quality we've had in the past, such as the Kibaki era. The government teams with experts in metaphoric talk as the economy plummets to the edge of the

Continued on Page 6

kenya lens

What CBK team can learn from ‘Kibakinomics’



The CBK and National Treasury have homework to do in strengthening their policy intents to referee the appropriate macro framework for growth in accordance with our potentials over business cycles. FILE | NATION

Continued from Page 5

cliff of debt default.

One prank by a PS for Labour interprets his job as to roll out a bizarre and simplistic economic fallacy: educate Kenya's skilled workers (at taxpayers' expense – because Kenya boasts 86 per cent of the labour force with post-secondary education, above the regional average of 72 per cent) and use more taxpayer money to migrate that labour to the Middle East (can he, with the macabre deaths there?) not to the domestic economy.

We could cite many policies of shame. Stay with the subject of the day – rebuilding our premier macro-economic institutions and constructing a return to the growth path that Kibaki bequeathed the nation over a decade ago. Kenya's acknowledged growth potentials still shine. US Ambassador Meg Whitman summarised them most recently and brilliantly: Kenya leads as a regional hub for finance and logistics, and is the leading destination for FDI. And with the US as lead export market, its economic conditions can be reshaped to improve our fortunes.

Lessons from a banking crisis

Among Kenya's regulators in the financial sector, few match the capacity embedded in the CBK as I attested in my time, when we added to the CBK regulatory func-

tion of price stability the oversight of financial stability, installing a matching Board sub-committee. But challenges in Central Bank/fiscal policy interplay have since intensified as I warned in *WR* Issue No.17, *Pulling Apart*, and *WR* Issue No 30, *Banking Crisis Raises Red Flag*. Kenya needs to step things up.

Following the recent stock market rout, deposit flight and exodus from US and European banks starting with Silicon Valley Bank (SVB), the resulting failures brought tectonic shifts, placing central banks in a quandary on two mismatched objectives: fighting stubbornly high inflation, while maintaining financial sector stability.

The reasons why recent collapses and systemic dangers were obvious in hindsight but unanticipated by policy makers is that central banks did not raise the alarm when regulatory flood gates were opened, revealing some banks swimming naked. Repeal of Dodd-Frank Act (thanks to the Donald Trump regime) played a part. After the 2008 crisis, the Act had mended bank regulations for holdings of elevated shares in assets.

The never-say-die economy

Now, a high probability of global recession is predicted from the banking fallout. Singularly in G7, the UK economy sinks to a contraction of 0.3 per cent in 2023

forecasts. Yet, while US banks failed trying to purr the US economy with corporate lending on the assets side, Kenya's banks fail to support real economic potentials by sticking to securities and keeping the rest of deposits mainly as liquidity, shunning the work of credit assessments. Banks which by regulations should hold a minimum of 20 per cent liquidity ratio, sometimes have held 88 per cent, piling up holdings in Treasury Bills and bonds — called fiscal dominance.

To promote growth and productivity, Kenya would have to venture into more complicated math, drawing down liquidities and raising loan portfolios, for the following reasons. First, as banks fight stubborn inflation with higher interest rates, dispensing with Covid-era lower interest rates, it was inevitable that bonds and share prices would fall, and yields rise, with pressures to control post-Covid era inflation as a priority.

This drives instability in stocks and bonds markets. Massive unrealised losses have occurred, with banks teetering on insolvencies. Yet, relenting on interest rates as a trade-off to help lower bond yields and stave off the haemorrhage of 'unrealised losses' in banks, associated with loan books, as well as values of stocks and bonds, has never looked more contradictory. Central banks like the FED and ECB insist

on fixing inflation first, over the losses and interests of financial markets.

Second, in Kenya, with the potentials cited above, banking for corresponding opportunities is thematically a private sector arena in which to grow Kenya's socio-economic opportunities. Yet, our banks tread on tiptoe to pin assets in the private sector, putting the asset category firmly on the back burner, which holds back financial intermediation, economic activity and growth.

Third, in an emerging market, policy and National Treasury/CBK decisions, even when wrong, cut differently for domestic and foreign investors and stakeholders. While interest rates, for example, affect capital flows — both portfolio and FDI, increases or cuts affect domestic and foreign players differently. With increases, our business investors' and households' access to credit retreats. Capital flows in contrast increase, especially portfolio flows, in search of interest margins. The reverse is the case when we lower interest rates and are faced with bouts of capital flight.

The macro-policy stance at present is a typical example of our dilemma. Rising interest rates and fiscal austerity run concurrently. This can only contract domestic investor opportunities with reduced access to credit to grow out of the slump, while external capital benefits. Indeed, the Purchas-

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ing Managers Price Index (PMI), trending below 50 per cent shows contracting private sector business activity in manufacturing, retail agriculture, services and construction. Austerity, deflation and economic contraction are associated with this erroneous policy mix.

The strategy we need

In the contest between the two central banking objectives cited, National Treasury's spending and adjustments mainly drive the aggregate supply in targeted areas of the economy but can spill inflation and macro-instability. CBK's monetary policy, while sluggish, influences access to credit through interest rates but cannot influence the supply side. The CBK modulates aggregated demand to align it with supply, using monetary instruments to address overheating when spending or monetary excesses spill into inflation — targeted at the 2.5 per cent to 7.5 per cent band.

The recent banking crisis exposed Kenya's lending weakness in the private sector as if it was a virtue, mainly because "unrealised" losses were relatively low. Paradoxically, muted losses were incurred by Kenyan banks already enjoying comfortable margins, compared to major banks in US and European capitals. In the latter zones, exemplified by SVB, banks piled their large cash deposits to Treasury bonds, long-dated private sector debt and related wealth assets, on the assets side of their balance sheets. These bank operations generate strong corporate lending and securities that drive economic activity and growth.

Kenyan banks, however, keep a tradition on the liabilities side of their balance sheets (mostly customer deposits), translating them into a risk-averse mode — mainly treasury bill, bonds and only muted private sector lending (especially loans) on the assets side. A variety of portfolio hedges are used — lending and repayments in forex for example or minimising 'unrealised' losses from securities by segmenting holdings into a tradable segment (marked to market), a segment for sales to gain from market positions, and a segment held to maturity. I focus the failure of credit in Kenya's macro-economy because, if business cannot access it, growth is restrained. Tighter credit sub-

scribes to that restraint but pointedly contracts the economy when tightened together with fiscal contraction as is happening presently.

Even worse, our broken credit markets restrain both short-term employment and recovery and productivity. As redress, a CBK leadership is needed that will align with Kenya's domestic and regional and global opportunities cited above, by engineering trust or coverage of real or perceived lending risks to borrowers in the private sector. In the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) for example, the Willful Defaulter Law lowers risks and strengthens confidence, with loan collection in favour of banks. On regulation, CBK could also pioneer a position that banks holding assets above a certain level would be subjected to special regulations — a quasi-Dodd-Frank Act.

Some general outcomes bear out some of the disconnects on the recent banking crisis' impact in Kenya and abroad. In the US, high commercial private sector lending powers private sector as an engine of economic growth and policy management. Although the impact of deflated values of stocks and bonds spilled over into Kenya, there is a stark contrast in heightened 'unrealised losses' in the US, compared to Kenya. SVB sold some of its investments on the assets side, clocking losses of US\$1.8 billion. Losses for banks in the US reached US\$620 billion, about 28 per cent of their total capital, but the banks' exposure to other assets like the long-dated loan-book portfolios are much higher.

Contrast this with Kenya, where banks have traditionally shunned private sector lending on the proverbial risks of (especially local) domestic clients. Kenyan banks' unrealised losses at end of 2022 were only about nine per cent of core capital. The US 'loan-book' losses from the inverse rule on stocks and bond prices versus yields raised unrealised losses to \$1.75 trillion, or 80 per cent of their capital. Why the vast difference? Kenyan banks' tepid exposure to private sector lending, vis-a-vis US exposure to both loan books and domestic sovereign risks

is part of the reason. The highest unrealised losses to hit a Kenyan Tier 1 bank showed a paper loss of Sh29.01 billion in 2022, compared with Sh7.09 billion in 2021. This is linked to a strategy of raising exposure to holding sovereign debt instruments — TBs and bonds — while shunning asset holdings in the loan book. Kenyan shareholders need to ask hard questions about how this loss will be managed, given the shareholder dividend payout amounts to only Sh15 billion.

In sum, Kenya's highly profitable banks escaped SVB-like fall-out not by virtue, but thanks to a conservative tradition of avoiding powering and enlarging private sector loan books. The CBK and National Treasury have homework to do in strengthening their policy intents to referee the appropriate macro-framework for growth in accordance with our potentials

over business cycles.

Dr Wagacha, an economist, is a former Central Bank of Kenya chairman and adviser of the presidency



National Treasury CS Njuguna Ndung'u

kenya lens

■ THE SELF-DESCRIBED 'PUBLIC INTELLECTUAL' IS THE FACE OF RUTO'S ECONOMIC STRATEGY

NDII: THE BRUTAL TRUTH

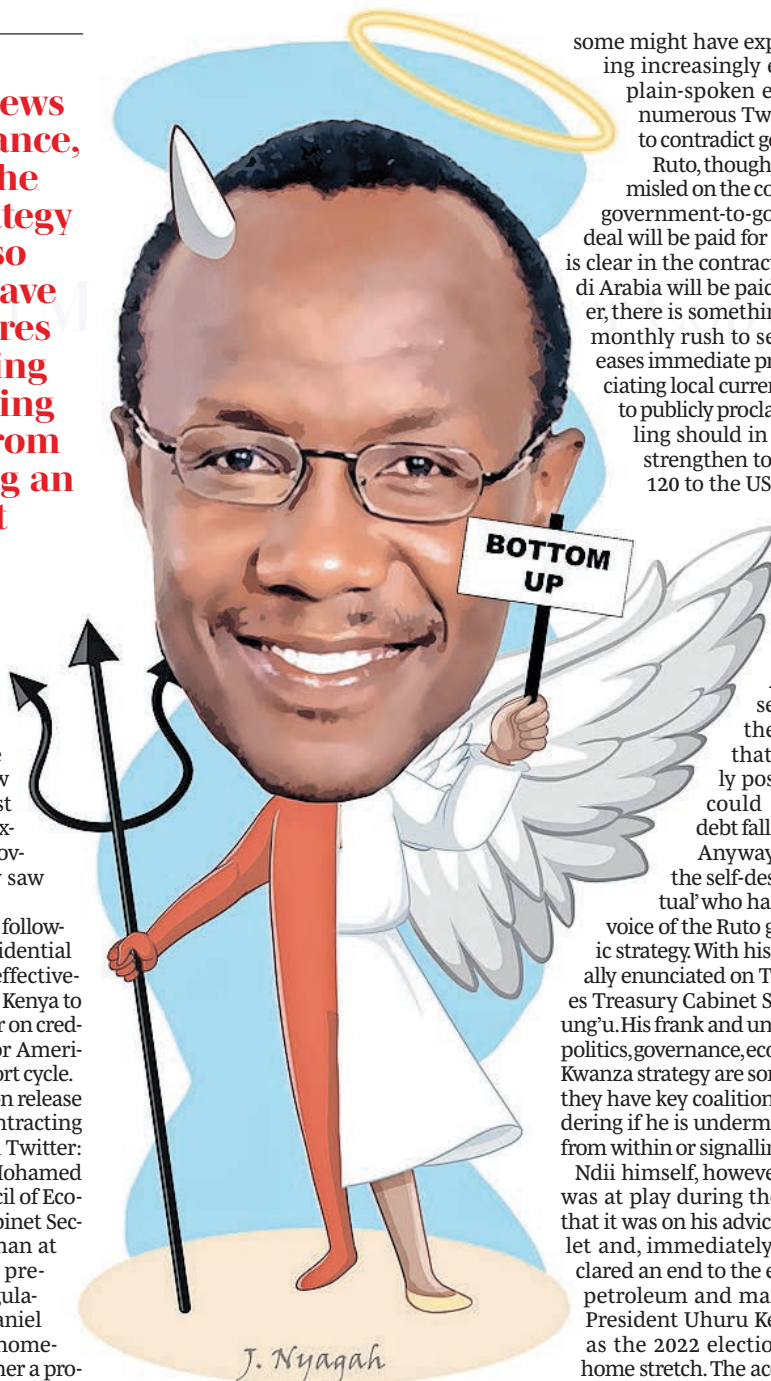
His frank and unconventional views on politics, governance, economics and the Kenya Kwanza strategy are sometimes so brutal that they have key coalition figures wincing, wondering if he is undermining the government from within or signalling an impending exit

● BY MACHARIA GAITHO

Many might have expected that Dr David Ndii would face a severe tongue-lashing after the frank and candid interview with *Citizen Television* last Monday in which he admitted his exasperation at the level of waste in government, and the fact that nobody saw the need to do anything about it.

Instead, President William Ruto the following day lauded the chair of his Presidential Council of Economic Advisers for effectively devising the programme allowing Kenya to buy fuel from Saudi Arabia and Qatar on credit terms, easing the frantic search for American dollars with every monthly import cycle.

The President spoke at a function on release of a public service performance contracting charter, later repeating the same on Twitter: "My economic adviser, David Ndii, Mohamed Hassan (also a member of the Council of Economic Advisers), Davis Chirchir (Cabinet Secretary for Energy) and the young man at EPRA (name not mentioned but presumably Energy and Petroleum Regulatory Authority Director-General Daniel Kiptoo) have done something phenomenal; they have managed to put together a programme that has taken us away from looking for \$500m every month to buy our fuel needs which was snowballing into a crisis...today we can buy fuel in Kenya shillings, which nobody



thought was possible".

That he chose to laud Ndii just a day after the interview was a vote of confidence as

some might have expected he was becoming increasingly exasperated with the plain-spoken economic czar, whose numerous Twitter posts often seem to contradict government messaging.

Ruto, though, appears to have been misled on the constant refrain that the government-to-government oil import deal will be paid for in Kenya shillings as it is clear in the contracts that Qatar and Saudi Arabia will be paid in US dollars. However, there is something positive in that the monthly rush to secure dollars possibly eases immediate pressure on a fast-depreciating local currency. Ruto went as far as to publicly proclaim that the Kenya shilling should in the next two months strengthen to between KSh115 and 120 to the US dollar, from the present low approaching KSh140 on a developing parallel market higher than the stated bank rates of rates of around KSh133.

Also, government self-congratulations on the deal ignore the fact that buying on credit only postpones a crunch that could still come when the debt falls due in six months.

Anyway, the real story now is the self-described 'public intellectual' who has become the face and voice of the Ruto government's economic strategy. With his outspoken views, usually enunciated on Twitter, he often eclipses Treasury Cabinet Secretary Njuguna Nding'u. His frank and unconventional views on politics, governance, economics and the Kenya Kwanza strategy are sometimes so brutal that they have key coalition figures wincing, wondering if he is undermining the government from within or signalling an impending exit.

Ndii himself, however, gave a hint of what was at play during the interview, revealing that it was on his advice that Ruto bit the bullet and, immediately on taking office, declared an end to the expensive subsidies on petroleum and maize flour imposed by President Uhuru Kenyatta's government as the 2022 election campaigns hit the home stretch. The acclaimed scholar – who served as adviser to President Mwai Kibaki's much-lauded economic recovery strategy between 2002 and 2013, and then as opposition leader Raila Odinga's economic policy chief

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between 2013 and 2017 – is famous, or infamous, for speaking his mind without regard to political sensibilities.

He is credited with conceptualising Ruto's 'Bottom Up' economic policy mantra and crafting the campaign manifesto, and was widely tipped to occupy a senior executive position in the Kenya Government, such as Treasury Cabinet Secretary or Principal Secretary. Either of the two posts, according to campaign insiders, would have been his for the asking. But instead, he preferred to take a background advisory post, crafting policy and strategy and leaving others to manage the implementation.

From his Twitter activity and media appearances, however, Ndiu is not one to remain the invisible backroom operator. Whether serving Kibaki, Raila and now Ruto, he remains an outspoken gadfly within any organisation, speaking the hard truths few dare to utter, stressing the politically risky policy positions and ruffling feathers from within.

His Twitter activity and other public pronouncements since Kenya Kwanza took office are often the first signals that campaign promises will not necessarily be met, and that Kenyans, particularly the 'Hustler Nation', will have to lower their expectations. He has publicly dismissed presumptions, for instance, that Kenya Kwanza undertook to lower the prices of electricity, fuel and food — the very issues at the centre of opposition protests on cost of living.

There are many in the Ruto government who remain suspicious of Ndiu and his motives. On discussion groups populated by Kenya Kwanza adherents, questions are asked about whether he is really helping the regime with his Twitter engagements. In the wake of the *Citizen TV* interview, critics within were extremely uncomfortable and had begun to sharpen their knives until Ruto's implicit vote of confidence. Approached by *The Weekly Review* on how Ndiu's pronouncements are taken within the party, Murang'a Governor Irungu Kang'ata pleaded that he now only comments on county rather than national issues. This despite the fact that he writes a weekly column in Kenya's best-selling newspaper, the *Sunday Nation*, where he gives opinions almost exclusively on national issues.

Senate Majority leader Aaron Cheruiyot was more forthright, acknowledging there may be frictions but the party has to learn to accommodate his ways: "Ndiu's style of work is non-conventional. It has many of our team members greatly concerned with his didactic ways. Some conspiracy theorists even hold the view that he never really left the opposite camp. However, he enjoys the full confidence of the boss as he is quite good at his job.

The senior politicians in the administration are rather concerned that he has a habit of veering off his course of duty and makes what many consider to be reckless political statements. They have no issue with his views on the economy. "I don't think he is about to change; given that he is fairly single-minded. So basically, the team will have to learn to live

with him as is," observes Cheruiyot. There is no doubt that Ndiu comes across as a supremely self-confident intellectual who does not suffer fools gladly. If many in the Ruto inner circle suffer the arrogance of power, it might be fair to say that he suffers, or is blessed, with the intellectual arrogance that frames much of his discourse. The economic adviser, for instance, openly proffered on Twitter that a bloated government, as in Ruto's appointment of 50 Cabinet Administrative Secretaries at a time when official exhortations were on belt tightening, was a necessary political investment. "The first obligation of a government is survival and political stability. The more the dynasties (in reference to Raila and Uhuru) foment destabilisation the more we will have to spend on political capital".

And in typical fashion, he concluded with an option that would be anathema to the key figures around Ruto: "If push comes to shove, handshake is always an option". That basically means cutting a deal with Raila so that he calls a halt to political protests. He put it in very crude terms, about using scarce public funds to 'buy' the veteran opposition leader.

Ndiu was also very candid around the sensitive issue of delayed public service salaries for the first time in independent Kenya.

While colleagues such as National Assembly Majority Leader Kimani Ichung'wah were in denial or keeping uncomfortable silences, Ruto's economic adviser put it starkly that it had to be a choice between paying salaries or paying government debts, and the latter had to take priority. That would be cold comfort for thousands of public service employees who were facing the prospect of Easter holidays without their march salaries, but Ndiu is not one to be slowed down by such concerns.

If anything, he seemed to have emboldened others to admit that the situation was dire, with Ruto following up later with his first comments on the delayed salaries. He stressed that the government would not borrow to pay salaries but wait for resources generated internally, playing up the narrative of blaming the cash crunch on the Uhuru administration's penchant for borrowing.

Others, such as Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua and Ichung'wah, found room to tear into Uhuru for allegedly emptying the Treasury and leaving empty coffers for Kenya Kwanza to inherit, excuses that have been repeated at every opportunity with no proof ever offered of massive looting. Ndiu was always an unlikely Ruto ally, but has become a trusted confidant, and also one of the few insiders ready to tell the President some hard truths away from the ritual praise-singing.

The economic adviser is so far the only person in government brave enough to broach the issue of cutting the bloated government wage bill through retrenchment, in addition to shutting down or selling parastatals and State agencies that can no longer justify their existence. Layoffs would be advocated by the IMF and World Bank twins as a rational way of slashing government expenditure, but would be a political hot potato that even Ruto would

approach very cautiously. It might seem rather hypocritical that Ndiu would advocate retrenchment in the public service whilst supporting appointment of CASs as political rewards.

The President seems to appreciate his honest and forthright approach to issues, in addition to shared antipathy to the Kenyatta 'dynasty'. When he served as Raila's adviser, Ndiu was one of Ruto's most brutal critics. On Twitter and elsewhere, he brutally tore into Ruto on his alleged corruption, typifying him as one who in leadership would oversee rapid destruction of public institutions.

He can be a contradiction in terms. He was co-founder of the Institute of Economic Affairs, Kenya's first public policy think-tank that was partly funded by the same local 'dynasties' he now eviscerates with passion. The Institute gained credibility for its groundbreaking surveys on corruption in Kenya during the Moi years. British newspaper *The Telegraph* described him as "one of Africa's best known economists and an outspoken anti-corruption crusader", but once latched onto Ruto coattails, Ndiu deliberately abandoned his anti-corruption credentials. While he had harshly criticised unchecked graft under the Uhuru-Ruto regime, he suddenly changed tune to dismiss the anti-corruption crusade as of no more consequence.

Ndiu ditched Raila in 2018 after the latter teamed up with Uhuru following the famous post-election handshake. He played a key role in the court cases leading to collapse of the 'handshake brother's' ill-fated Building Bridges Initiative. He also made it clear that his key motivation henceforth was to counter any prospect of the Kenyattas retaining political influence, and for that he was prepared to get into bed with the devil.

Hence his moving into the Ruto camp and driving policy positions that were grounded first of all on cutting the Kenyatta's down to size. The Hustler versus Dynasty crusade is not an accident but a very well thought out agenda which, even after the elections, is still being played out in anti-Kenyatta diatribes driven by the likes of Gachagua, as well as very clear attempts to hit the former First Family where it might hurt most — their economic base.

As long as he enjoys Ruto's confidence, Ndiu can be secure in his job, but he also has to be aware that at some point he might step on too many toes, especially with the undisguised contempt he reserves for those not on his intellectual level. In a previous discussion with *The Weekly Review*, Raila recalled how his 2007 campaign manifesto, largely authored by Ndiu, was deemed too high-brow and academic. He resisted pleas to revise it, so the task was given to others and the campaign ended up with two competing documents.

He can be inflexible and arrogant, and the irony is that in 2022, the Raila camp was accusing Ruto of stealing their manifesto. It was Ndiu they stole, and in the process also stole Raila's traditional platform as the voice of the underdog, the voiceless and the marginalised.

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kenya lens

■ RUTO-RAILA STANDOFF

DAGGERS DRAWN

As disillusionment among the public soars, poisoned by delays in payment of government workers' salaries, Azimio's "consultative meetings" could mutate into a major threat to the establishment

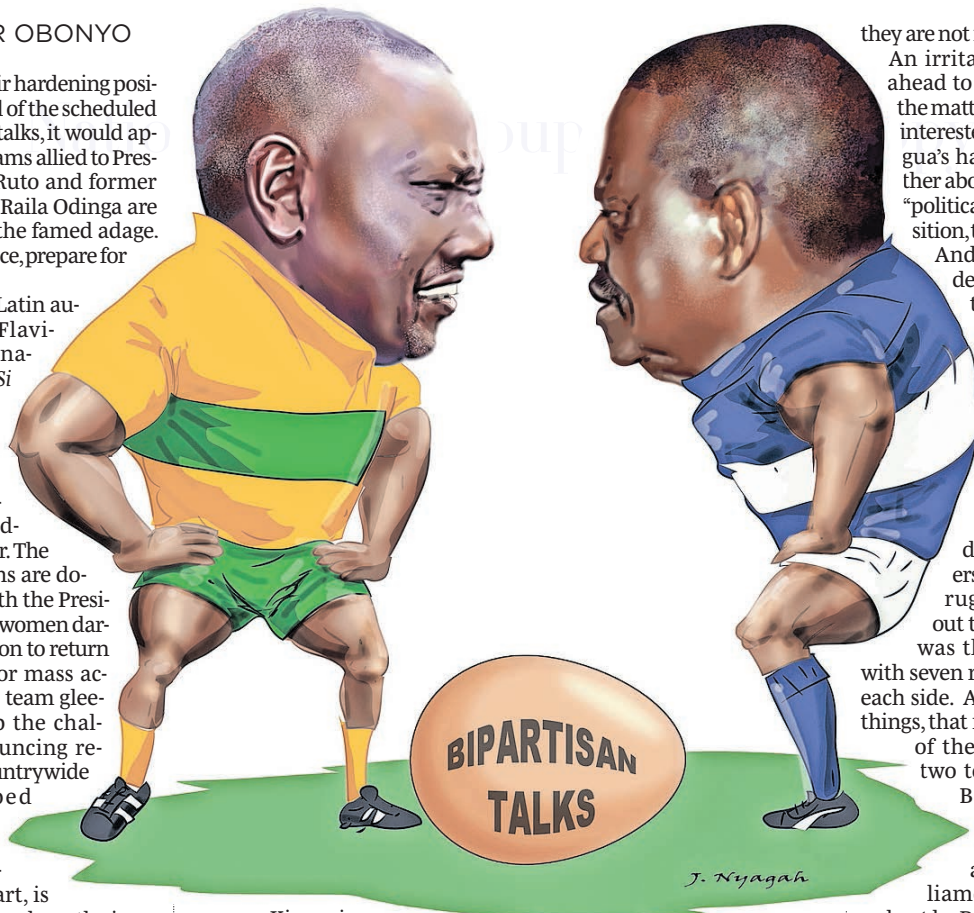
• By OSCAR OBONYO

Going by their hardening positions ahead of the scheduled bipartisan talks, it would appear the teams allied to President William Ruto and former Prime Minister Raila Odinga are hiding behind the famed adage. "if you want peace, prepare for war".

Originally by Latin author Publius Flavius Vegetius Renatus, the phrase *Sis vis pacem, para bellum* implies that conditions for peace are often reflected by preparedness to go to war. The Ruto-Raila teams are doing just that, with the President's men and women daring the opposition to return to the streets for mass action and Raila's team gleefully taking up the challenge by announcing resumption of countrywide rallies, dubbed "consultative meetings".

The government, on its part, is giving mixed signals on the issue by publicly pronouncing support for the talks while at the same exhibiting indifference. Unlike the Azimio team, which attaches a lot of importance to dialogue, this is clearly not a priority for Kenya Kwanza.

"Mambo ya handshake hakuna. Mambo ya kuharibu biashara hakuna. Waende huko bunge waongee na Kimani Ichung`wah. Sisi tuko busy na kazi ya maendeleo (There is no handshake and there is no disruption of business. Let them go to Parliament and



engage Kimani Ichung`wah. We are busy with development work)," Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua casually remarked recently when prodded by the media.

Still, the proposed bipartisan talks are of great interest to the DP at a personal level. Going by the most recent instance in the last Parliament, where the symbolic handshake between Raila and President Uhuru Kenyatta resulted in the elbowing of Ruto – then the DP – to the sidelines, the former Mathira MP is unlikely to

be enthusiastic about embracing the opposition.

Luckily on this one, Gachagua enjoys the support of his boss, who maintains that all engagement must be made in accordance within existing governance structures that recognise the ruling and opposition parties. The President is accordingly unwilling to accommodate the opposition in government – a factor that opposition chief Raila and his key allies, Martha Karua and Kalonzo Musyoka, have also emphasised

they are not interested in.

An irritated Raila has gone ahead to make a mockery of the matter by stating he is not interested in shaking Gachagua's hand. So, if this is neither about a "handshake" nor "political posts" for the opposition, then what is it about?

And why are the President's allies fighting off their counterparts if there is "nothing" to fear?

Hours before President Ruto extended an olive branch to Raila on April 2, there were tweets and coded messages from confidantes of the two leaders about a "seven-side rugby game". It turns out the game in question was the bipartisan talks, with seven representatives from each side. And from the look of things, that is as far as execution of the secret pact by the two top politicians goes.

Besides the naming of the "rugby team" – whose members are curiously all parliamentarians as pointed out by Ruto – everything else seems contentious and in dispute. Orange Democratic Movement Secretary-General Edwin Sifuna observes that the President has opted to disregard "the initial aspects agreed upon between the two principals".

While the Nairobi Senator will not delve into the details, his comment is a pointer to the fact that there was a discussion and agreement between Ruto and Raila – directly or through their emissaries – on the end game of the bipartisan engagement. Pointed-

the limelight



Emine Burc sits on a chair on April 5 near where her house stood as the rubble of collapsed buildings is removed, two months after a 7.8-magnitude jolt and its aftershocks wiped out swathes of Turkey's mountainous south-east in Antakya. Many survivors blamed the government's stuttering response for a death toll that has now surpassed 50,000. PHOTO | AFP



Former President Donald Trump and his son, Donald Trump Jr., attend the Ultimate Fighting Championship 287 at the Kaseya Center in Miami, Florida, on April 8. PHOTO | AFP



A pedestrian walks past a 'Living Wall' art project produced in collaboration with The National Portrait Gallery and the Earls Court Development Company, in west London on April 8. PHOTO | AFP



Seychelles' sprinter Sharry Dodin (right) trains alongside Kenya's Ferdinand Omanyala at the Moi International Sports Centre, Kasarani, on March 23. PHOTO | AFP



A group of brides waits to take part in a mass wedding ceremony for 80 couples at the International Pentecostal Holiness Church in Zuurbekom, South Africa, on April 9. PHOTO | AFP



Pope Francis performs the "Washing of the Feet" of 12 young detainees at the "Casal del Marmo" Penal Institute for minors in Rome on April 6, as part of celebrations of the Holy Week. PHOTO | AFP



Visitors ride a merry-go-round at the 'Wunderland Kalkar' amusement park western Germany on April 11. Wunderland Kalkar was a nuclear fast breeder, which was completed but never taken online until 1991. PHOTO | AFP

A woman with braided hair, wearing a tan bucket hat, blue-rimmed glasses, a yellow t-shirt, and blue overalls, stands in a lush green field. She is smiling and holding a bunch of green leafy vegetables. The background is filled with various green plants and trees.

The Aren

BEAUTY WITH BRAINS

Beauty queen Cleotilda Jemutai is using her knowledge in agricultural and biosystems engineering to set up coffee farms

OPEN SPACE

Solar energy systems will enable schools to cut costs

They offer several benefits, including reduced energy costs, reliability of power supply and a smaller carbon footprint

• BY ROSE HASSAN

One challenge I have always encountered while marketing solar energy solutions to institutions is the financing aspect of the EPCFM (Engineering, Procurement, Construction, Financing and Management). Negotiating even with banks that have a green line of credit on behalf of schools is one of my key remit. The argument by financing institution, plausible on the face of it, has always been: how can we finance a package that is not on service package and/or warranty?

For a long time, my team and I have grappled with achieving a middle ground for schools considering their termly nature of income flow, but this is changing. First, key decision makers in schools, especially private schools which I have had a pleasure of interacting with under the auspices of Kenya Private Schools' Association, are signalling acceptance of a package with lower instalment payments per month.

Institutional solar plants have been growing in popularity over the past few years as more organisations seek to reduce their carbon footprint and become more energy-efficient. However, the solar systems currently being used in these plants are often inflexible and have significant maintenance and repair costs, which can hinder long-term financing.

Fortunately, the marriage of (AI) Artificial intelligence and good old Solar PV such as Huawei Fusion, with its modular and scalable design, long-term warranty and service, may finally unlock the potential for longer-term financing for these institutions. From my experience with school solar systems, I highly recommend solutions such as Smart Micro-grid Solution (ranging from five to 25-kilowatt systems) for small- to medium-size high schools with boarding facilities. The solution can be tailored for schools that are located in off-grid areas, or islands and provides a reliable and sustainable source of energy, which is critical for schools to function effectively.

The Smart Micro-grid Solution combines solar PV, energy storage or diesel

generator technologies to provide a stable and continuous power supply. The solution is designed to operate in standalone mode, without relying on the grid, making it ideal for schools in remote areas.

It offers several benefits for schools, including reduced energy costs, improved reliability of power supply, and a smaller carbon footprint. The system's energy storage capabilities ensure that power is available even when there is no sunlight or when the generator is offline. This guarantees a stable power supply for the school, which is essential for teaching and learning activities. The Smart Micro-grid Solution also comes with advanced monitoring and control capabilities, which allows school administrators to monitor the system's performance in real-time. It's intelligent energy management system optimises the use of energy, ensuring that power is used efficiently and effectively. Now a school administrator with rights can switch off a non-critical heavy load when the solarisation is low.

Smart solar PV systems, such as Huawei Fusion, offer several advantages over traditional solar systems. The modular and scalable design means that the system can easily be expanded or reduced as needed, allowing institutions to adjust their energy production to meet changing demands. The long-term warranty and service agreements also mean that maintenance and repair costs are minimised, making it easier for institutions to secure long-term financing.

The adoption of smart solar PV for institutional plants is not just beneficial for individual organisations; it also has broader environmental and societal benefits. The increased adoption of renewable energy ties in with President Ruto's increased calls for reduced greenhouse gas emissions and to combat climate change. It also creates job opportunities in the renewable energy sector, which can help boost local economies and improve social equity.

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

■ MIND SPEAK



Zincy Okari

The government's financial woes may be solved through a combination of steps. It can borrow a loan from international organisations, such as the IMF or World Bank, reduce non-essential spending and increase taxes to boost revenue. It should also broaden the tax base and crack down on evaders, encourage foreign investments and introduce economic reforms to encourage private sector growth and job creation.

— A student at KCA University



Fred Mokua

The government is struggling financially due to the reckless borrowing of the previous regime. It's unfortunate that more than 70 per cent of the tax collected goes to paying debts. It should renegotiate the terms of repayment with lenders and cut expenditure. It should work well with the opposition to create an ambient political atmosphere that will stimulate expeditious economic recovery.

— A Multimedia University graduate



Ian Kiprono

The government should reduce its spending in various areas such as travel and luxury allowances. It can also reduce subsidies to certain industries or reduce the size of civil service. Secondly, the government can negotiate with civil servants to find a mutually beneficial solution. This could involve temporarily reducing salaries or implementing furloughs to help government save money.

— A student leader at Technical University of Kenya



Maureen Atitwa

The government may explore options for emergency borrowing from international organisations, such as the International Monetary Fund or other financial institutions, to obtain short-term funding to cover the salaries of civil servants. It can also review its current budget and reallocate funds from non-essential areas to prioritise payment of salaries.

— A student at Mount Kenya University

DIGITAL CONNECTIONS



AI PARTNERS ARE COMING

Many people are struggling with toxic relationships and the best friend they can have is a virtual one

• BY WAGA ODONGO

A while back I had a girlfriend who used to subscribe to a service that would send her an uplifting text message every morning. It was an annoying thing, a ding at 6am with a girlboss message like “You are the captain of your ship” to help her plough through her day as a medical intern. I found it ridiculous and made fun of her. Why couldn’t she just self-medicate with alcohol like every other doctor, I joked.

This memory came flooding back when I read that users of AI companion app Replika were up in arms because a recent update made their companion less likely to engage in sexting. Like many people, I assumed that apps like Replika were a bit weird, a slippery slope to a digital dystopia. “Virtual friend” sounds like an oxymoron to anyone who grew up before a scrolling timeline was invented.

Going by the outpouring of grief from users of the app over a software upgrade of their virtual friends, it seems like it matters. Too many people think that AI friends are worth something for them to be ignored.

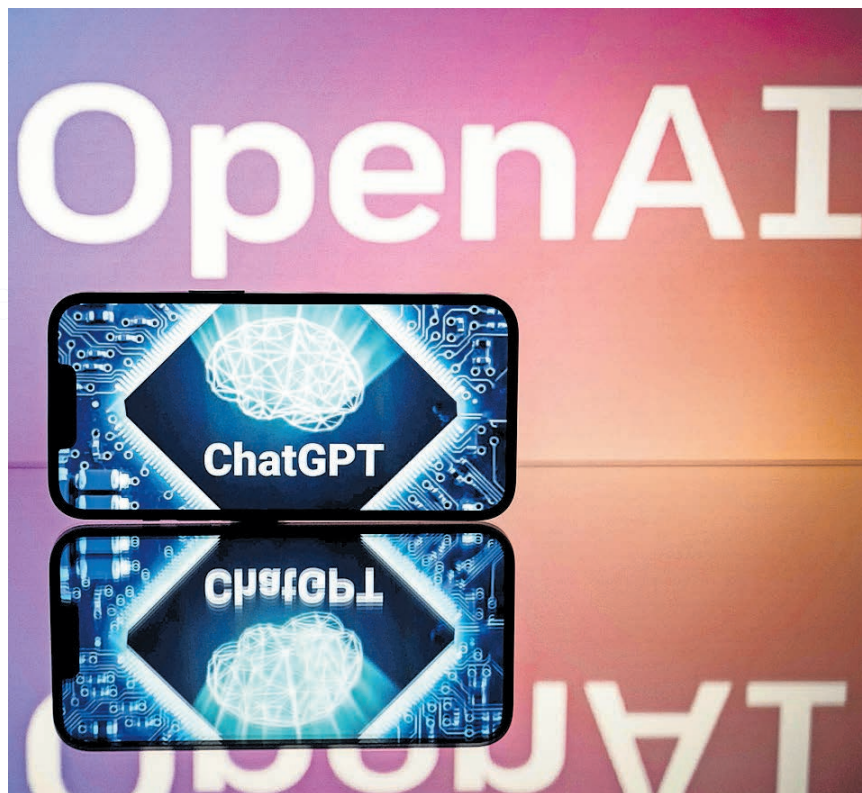
Predictably, the country with one of the largest markets for AI companions is China which, due to its one-child policy, has the most skewed gender ratio. Many men in the Middle Kingdom are locked out by demographics from ever finding a partner, so they turn to the virtual world.

One chatbot, Xiaoice, has over a hundred million users, with some proudly claiming to be in a “relationship” with their app. Loneliness is the great unmentionable. It’s the elephant in the room, the black sheep of the human experience. We all feel it at some point in our lives, but few of us are brave enough to admit it. It’s a taboo subject, our own shameful secret that we keep hidden from the world.

But loneliness isn’t just an emotional burden. It’s a physical one too. Studies have shown that loneliness can have a detrimental effect on our health, contributing to everything from depression to heart disease. It’s a self-perpetuating cycle: the lonelier we feel, the more we withdraw from the world, making it even harder to connect with others.

It makes sense why loneliness bothers us so; we evolved in herds and being away from your tribe in an unforgiving world where everything was out to get you meant death. Loneliness is the savannah’s way of reminding you that a loner is a goner.

Loneliness is so common that in Japan, they have a name for those who die from it: Kod-



okushi. Fittingly, Japan is one of two countries with ministers in charge of combating loneliness, the other being Britain.

Sometimes, even though we are in a relationship, our partners are unwilling to listen to us and we have no one else to confide in. So, does it matter that the person who is there for you isn’t really a person? Does it matter that the text sent to you every morning to give you a pep in your step is generated by a machine rather than a person, as was my girlfriend’s case? Sometimes we want someone to talk to, but the world is a busy place. Everyone else seems to be up and about their business, with no time for little old us. It would be nice if we could get a shoulder to cry on, or a voice to talk to. (Replika can actually read out its responses to you.)

Everything is currently going downhill for relationships in the younger generation. Empathy is dead, communication skills are underdeveloped and even testosterone levels among men are plummeting. Thank the heavens the climate won’t hold up for much longer because they would have to live in this hellsc-

Most conversations we have, have no point. Conversations are the end in themselves, rather than a means to an end. But we want to be heard, to be felt, to be understood.

We want a safe space to share thoughts and fears without fear of judgement. Many people are struggling with toxic relationships and the best friend they can have is a virtual one. Perhaps in real life you can’t get a girlfriend, but maybe virtually you can.

Relationships are difficult, fractious things and perhaps it would be good if we could have them with the training wheels still on. You can practise your lines on the app before deploying them in real life.

Or, even better, go all virtual and skip the meatspace girlfriend all-together. I tried logging on to Replika for this piece, but I couldn’t. Ever since it upgraded its systems to stop all the risqué messages, signing on has been a challenge.

We can’t end human loneliness but, bit by bit, it seems like we can alleviate it using a digital friend.

*Mr Odongo is a Software Engineer
wagaodongo@gmail.com*

Beauty queen Cleotilda Jemutai is using her knowledge in agricultural and biosystems engineering to help design and set up coffee farms

● BY EDDY ASHIOYA

Perhaps Cleotilda Jemutai was always born to be a star. For starters, she is a model. If that doesn't turn your head, then know this: she is also an agriculturalist, svelte yet athletic, another petite girl made larger than life by her exploits and hard work. Tough and flinty and shrewd, beauty balanced by practicality.

She is famous among the kind of people who read agriculture magazines or those who want to know where their tea actually comes from. She does not let her beauty speak for her; she is not that kind of girl. She has no interest in becoming a content creator; she is not that kind of girl either. She is the kind of girl you see once and never again.

Let's be clear: All her life she has walked a highwire tightrope, both interesting and confusing because, as a rule of thumb, a woman generally doesn't present herself as both beauty and brains. Beauty rarely challenges men, but intelligence does. Women who are admired as beauties risk being dismissed as not being brainy. But Jemutai is both. It is impossible to dismiss her outlook, and it is impossible to ignore her looks.

In a way, it is the perfect image: In a society that so often decrees that you can only be one thing, she is like a ray of sunshine at the wet end of August, a breath of fresh air. She has done a lot, and she is only just getting started. The hard way too, however easy she makes it look.

How did she get here, this agricultural and biosystems engineer practising in the tea industry? "I have been quite passionate about agriculture since I was young. My father was a first-generation kind of farmer, and I grew up interacting with agricultural systems, specifically dairy, subsistence and tea farming. That was all the motivation I needed to pursue agriculture in university, but my mom was having none of it. Eventually, something had to give and I stuck to my guns. I told her I was a farmer." Or perhaps, a daddy's girl.

She went to Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT) to pursue an undergraduate degree in Agricultural and Biosystems Engineering, Soil, Water and Environmental Engineering. "When I joined university, this was a new course in the department. I think I was in the second ever cohort, and that presented us with the challenge and uncertainty of a glaring lack of job opportunities. The course was a merge between agricultural engineering and bioprocessing engineering." She graduated

BEAUTY AND BRAINS

THE FETCHING FARMER



Cleotilda Jemutai is an Agricultural and Biosystems Engineer. She runs Zurrii Coffee Consultancy, offering farm design and set-up services, agronomy support and training. PHOTO | POOL



Cleotilda Jemutai was declared Miss Earth JKUAT in 2017 and realised she could use the platforms it presented and her voice to speak out for the environment. PHOTO | POOL

in 2019 with a second-class upper division. “I was the best in my class, if I do say so myself”

She did her attachment at a tea factory in Tinderet and then taught part-time at the Kenya Water Institute before joining Eastern Produce Kenya, where she works as an assistant factory manager. “The tea industry is quite diverse, and I have been here for a year and a few months. It is very intense, understanding the art of manufacturing tea from the nurseries till you have the final product in the market.”

At just 27, tireless focus has imbued her with the charm of knowledge. “I have this burning passion and want to get deeper in the coffee value chain. When people wonder why I am invested in two warring beverages, tea and coffee, I tell them now I am planting my own coffee. I want more youth to venture into high-value crops. That’s why I have Twitter conversations about the coffee economy. Many young people are going into coffee, and I believe there has never been a better time to start trying out farming.”

Her love affair with agriculture bloomed when she discovered that someone needed to feed the nation. That someone could be her. That someone should be her, she thought. “With the rapid climate change we have to develop resilience and need to interact with the environment seamlessly. This is how I show my love for the environment, by choosing to protect it.”

It is one thing to choose. It’s another thing to be chosen. She is both. It was written in the stars. I mean, in 2017, she was Miss Earth (JKUAT). “I realised maybe modelling isn’t too bad

either. I was lucky to be among the selected few championing the environment... that you can have different platforms to speak up... and that I could use my voice for change.”

The devil works hard but even he will tell you, Jemutai works harder. What keeps her driven? “My mantra for quite a long time has been to always keep the focus. I already identified my niche in the agricultural space. I stick to my lane and drive forward in it. I love being consistent but I know discipline is the key. There is no shortcut; you have to put in the work. You need to be smart, detailed and precise, at least in this industry. You can’t go wrong when you are designing a system.”

She does not wear her work rate, her physicality, on her sleeve. She is, instead, elegant and graceful; the best metaphor to summarise her would be that she is like a duck, serene and calm above water, but paddling furiously underneath. The problem is, effortlessness can seem like a lack of effort. Not that she will lose any sleep over that. Her work speaks for itself. The highlight reel of her exploits is stuck on the progress that she has made in developing and growing her career. “And of course, being a parent. My daughter is three years and seven months old.”

How she keeps all these plates floating in the air is a marvel of balance and multi-tasking worthy of a standing ovation. It’s a high-wire act, Philippe Petite with boxing gloves on. “You need to know how to manage your time, otherwise your time will manage you. Plan yourself, plan effectively but don’t be too hard on yourself. Life can be hard at times but pick yourself up and move on, head held high.”

How does she define success? “Success to me is achieving your goals and not being in a rush. Things happen with time. Seeking help and advice, and having a support system, (people) that can hold your hand, that you can bounce ideas off of.”

The future, she says, is encouraging the youth to embrace technology. It doesn’t have to be rocket science or reinventing the wheel. The future is innovative, and we are the innovators, she says. Jemutai runs her own firm, Zurrii Coffee Consultancy, offering coffee farm design and setup services, agronomy support and on-farm training.

She is an introvert. “I just like my own space, but it’s not that I am shy. I speak and will stand up for myself if I have to.” But, she adds, she rarely has to. Love yourself, treat people fairly, and choose happiness. Those are the three things she would want to plant in anyone. In everyone.

Have things turned out the way she expected at 27? “On a scale of one to 10, I’ll give myself a six. I thought after my undergraduate studies I would proceed to do my Masters but I am working on that now.” She got here through hard work, and cannot afford to fail. “I am afraid of failure, so I make sure I win. I am a winner. All my failures have made me who I am.”

And she is not just a star, but a supernova. Despite being so young, there is a sense that she has always been here, always been the best, a model of consistency and reliability. Who needs a scriptwriter when you can write your own story?

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From left: 'Igiza' production manager Peggy Ogollah, director Abdi Shuria, producer Dina Mwende and actor Keith Chuaga during the premiere of the drama series. PHOTO | POOL

my set to see what I was up to, including the MGM boss."

The boss was impressed by the young man's creativity, and Shuria was contracted by MGM to do a Public Service Announcement (PSA) commercial. "That was my first big job and my breakthrough in the Kenyan film industry. The

PSA was about the 'My Dress My Choice Movement' that was trending at that time, in 2015."

He executed the PSA successfully and with something to show, began pitching for more commercial adverts, and the jobs kept coming. Word got around quickly and Shuria became a much-sought-after commercial

and documentary filmmaker, working with several big production companies either as a director or cinematographer. The list includes Protel Studios, Mojo Productions, C-Hub and Trans. Lieu.

"It's been a long time in the making, pushing and still being regarded as a newcomer in the

industry. But as I always like to say, you are as good as your last job. Finally, there is a glimpse of hope."

In 2017 and 2019, he directed Seasons 12 and 13 of the popular political satire animation TV series, *The XYZ Show*, produced by legendary cartoonist and animator Godfrey Mwampembwa (Gado). He worked as a cinematographer for the 2021 hit film *Nafsi*, directed by Reuben Odanga.

Shuria is currently producing a mockumentary TV series that he is hopeful will be picked up by a broadcaster. "Black and Blue is a comedy show based on Kenyan police. Forget the police comedy shows you might have seen in before. This will be different. Think of a Kenyan version of the American sitcom *The Office*."

When not producing films, you will catch Shuria giving lectures and master classes on cinematography in several arts institutions. Africa Digital Media Institute is one of his main clients.

"Capacity building in the local film industry is one of my greatest passions. Having studied and lived abroad and experienced the industry there, ours is still growing and we can only contribute to it by sharing our knowledge with others," he enthuses.

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The **FLIP** SIDE
With John Nyaganyaga

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WOMAN POWER

IF BRAVERY HAD A FACE, IT WOULD BE THAT OF ZAHRA JOYA. MS JOYA IS AN AFGHAN JOURNALIST WHO DOES THE UNTHINKABLE; STANDING UP TO THE BRUTALITY OF THE TALIBAN ON WOMEN AND GIRLS.

WOMEN WHO PROTEST AGAINST THEIR BRUTAL RULE ARE BEATEN UP, REGARDLESS OF WHETHER THEY ARE PREGNANT OR NOT. THEY ARE ARRESTED FOR DISOBEYING OR DISRESPECTING THEIR HUSBANDS, OR MERELY

ESCAPING FROM DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.

THEIR HUSBANDS OR FATHERS ARE ALSO ARRESTED FOR FAILING TO TAME THEIR WIVES OR DAUGHTERS.

MS JOYA RUNS RUKHSHANA MEDIA, AN ONLINE NEWS AGENCY SHE FOUNDED IN NOVEMBER 2020.

HERE, SHE PUBLISHES STORIES IN PERSIAN AND ENGLISH LANGUAGES, PRIMARILY HIGHLIGHTING THE BRUTALITY OF THE TALIBAN ON WOMEN AND GIRLS.

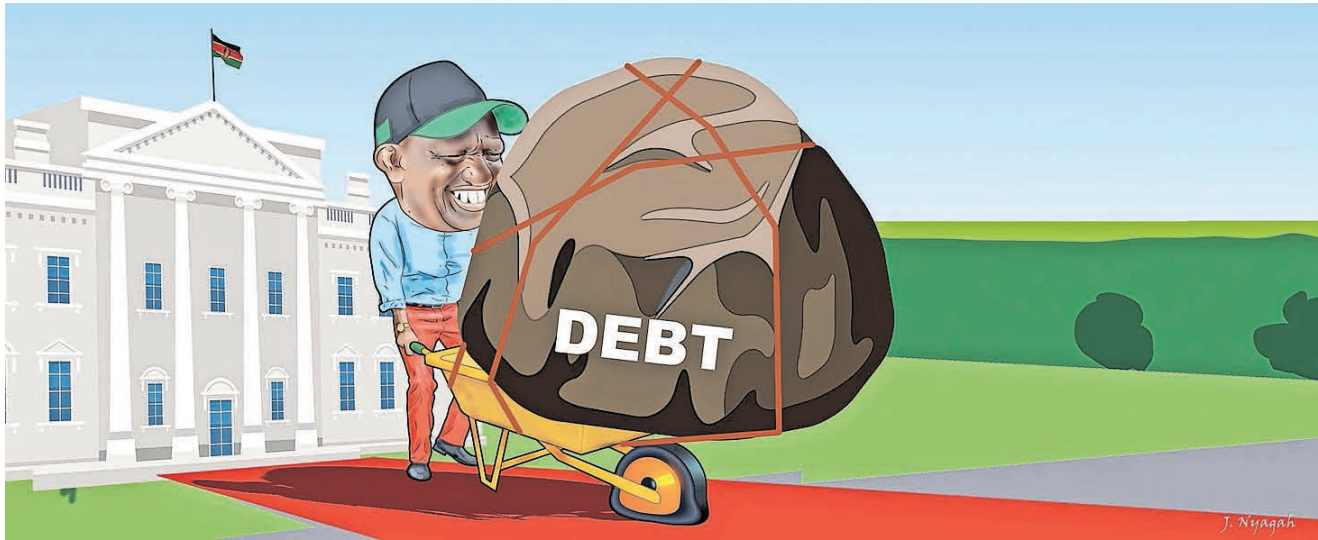
WE SALUTE YOU, MADAM JOYA.



★ STAR OF THE WEEK

JAMAICAN MULTI OLYMPIC AND WORLD CHAMPION SHELLY-ANN FRASER-PRYCE WILL DEFEND HER KIP KEINO CLASSIC 100 METRES TITLE ON MAY 13, THIS YEAR AT THE MOI INTERNATIONAL SPORTS CENTRE, KASARANI. FONDLY KNOWN AS MOMMY ROCKET, FRASER-PRYCE, WHO HOLDS 10 WORLD TITLES INCLUDING HER 100M TITLE FROM OREGON LAST YEAR, WILL ONCE AGAIN START HER SEASON IN AFRICA WHERE THE WORLD SHOULD EXPECT FAST TIMES. WE CELEBRATE YOU AS YOU KEEP BREAKING THE RECORDS, MS FRASER-PRYCE

opinion



■ The two sides should not tear each other down; they need to treat this as an emergency

Ruto, Raila should pull together and save the economy

The government is in a hole. The economy is stagnant. The purchasing power of the people has been drastically eroded. The cost of grains and cereals has shot through the roof. To make a grave situation tragic, the cost of power and fuel has similarly skyrocketed.

And, for the first time in Kenya's history, the President publicly confirmed that the government had not paid the salaries of civil servants on time. Indeed, as if to rub salt into the wound, it emerged that the government is contemplating retiring civil servants early.

This is situation critical. When a government which has no money to pay public servants decides to retire those workers, it cannot pay them their dues. At best it will pay them some of their money and promise to pay them the remainder as soon as possible.

Consider the following: There is a public servant in every corner of the country. In the villages especially, at the end of the month these women and men pay their workers who, in turn pay their debts and buy from the shopkeepers and farmers, who in turn replenish their stock.

The disposable incomes of these women and men give local meaning to trickle-down economics. There has been no money trickling down because government has not paid public servants and if *serikali* will send its *wafanyi kazi* home, many household economies will shut down.

So, the government must stop digging. Similarly, the political class should stop digging. The best way to stop digging is for the politicians to call a ceasefire, turn to each other,



**KWENDO
OPANGA**

rather than on each other, and discuss the best possible way to deal with this crisis for the benefit of all.

The challenge, however, is that quite apart from the economic crisis, there is also the political crisis.

The bone of contention is that Raila Odinga and Azimio la Umoja-One Kenya Coalition Party argue that they won the presidential poll last August and their victory was stolen from them by the Independent Electoral Boundaries Commission (IEBC) and handed to President Ruto.

Odinga & Co. want IEBC's poll servers opened for scrutiny; they want the government to bring down the cost of living and they want four IEBC commissioners who disputed the presidential poll results and later resigned their positions reinstated.

They have only halted their Monday and Thursday street demonstrations to press the demands because the President called for a truce and talks by parliamentarians to deal with the issues raised by Azimio. However, each

side seems determined to tear down the other.

Each blames the other for the poor state of the economy. Azimio refuses to recognise President Ruto and the government, calling them illegitimate. The President appears persuaded that Odinga & Co. want to force their way into government, but the former want to reclaim their poll victory.

Both sides appear unwilling to see that the longer this stalemate goes on, the deeper Kenya sinks into this economic quagmire. True, politics and economics are intertwined, but a *kaput* economy causes suffering to all and takes an eternity to get back on track.

This economic slide needs to be stopped now and reversed if Kenya is to avoid a long stretch in the doldrums. What the two sides need is not to tear each other down, but to put the recovery of the economy top of the agenda and treat this as an emergency.

This is what it should mean to stop digging, what it means to put Kenya first, and what Kenya is bigger than all of us should mean.

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opinion

■ We will soon witness the most thorough and far-reaching prosecution in Kenyan history

No more cartels, no more graft; hustlers are in charge



MACHARIA
GAITHO

We are set for the best piece of good news since the William Ruto administration assumed office. We have it from impeccable and unimpeachable authority that soon and very soon, those responsible for Kenya's descent into an economic black hole will be hauled in handcuffs and leg irons before a very stern specially-selected judge, and in short order sentenced to very long jail terms at some remote locations.

If President Uhuru Kenyatta's Jubilee regime was the embodiment of grand corruption, unchecked greed and the singular cause of the economic meltdown afflicting Kenya, it is exciting that those responsible for what can only be economic sabotage on a treason scale will get their just deserts.

Far too often in this country, we have breathed fire and brimstone, pledging that no stone will be left unturned in pursuit of criminals, but invariably the stones turn out to be too heavy to move. Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua and other Kenya Kwanza mouthpieces have, instead of doing the work which we pay them for, spent all their time and energy blaming Uhuru for every crime under the sun.

We are finally going beyond the proverbial toothless bulldog and ensuring that justice is done. The political will is there to have the culprits arrested and jailed. It has been determined from the topmost echelons that strong action against criminals is necessary if we are to inculcate in this country principles of accountability and deliver decisive blows against the culture of impunity.

There is no money to pay civil servants and Kenya is at grave risk of defaulting on the national debt because power brokers, cartels and deep state denizens of the Uhuru government carted away cash from the National Treasury in truckloads.

Those responsible will shortly face the full force of the law. Beyond stiff jail terms to be served at Lokitaung, Kapenguria, Hola and other places presently being refurbished by penal consultants from Belarus, they will must also be made to surrender all proceeds of crime.

Their banks accounts, locally and abroad, will

be seized. Their farms, homes, factories, banks, hotels, real estate and other property and commercial ventures will similarly be taken over and restored to public ownership.

Kenya being a country of laws, we will go beyond unleashing barking dogs on the political platform and twitter space. Neither will we again countenance irregular actions such as employing Mungiki-type criminal gangs to invade and seize property.

Interior Cabinet Secretary Kithure Kindiki has enough headache trying to tackle the domestic terrorists and ethnic militias we call bandits and cattle rustlers in northern Kenya, and need not be further burdened with urban dorper sheep rustlers sponsored by his colleagues. Therefore, all these allegations are now being removed from the area of political propaganda and excuses for failure, and turned over to the law enforcement agencies.

We should be confident that seven months into the Kenya Kwanza administration, the very competent, professional, independent and impartial Director of Criminal Investigations, Mohamed Ibrahim Amin, and Inspector-General of Police Japhet Koome, as well as the boss of the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission, Twalib Mbarak, are about to complete investigations.

They should now be in a position to hand over watertight cases for action by the Director of Public Prosecutions, Noordin Haji, who will benefit greatly from information provided by Gachagua and other Kenya Kwanza operatives who are armed with intimate knowledge of all the crimes committed by Mr Kenyatta and his handshake partner, opposition leader Raila Odinga. Soon we will witness the most thorough and far-reaching prosecution in Kenyan history. In the dock will be the entire

team of politicians and senior public servants who worked in the previous regime, together with the families and business associates who may be beneficiaries of organised looting.

As we say in French, '*Gutiri muici na mucuthirira* (There is no difference between the thief and the onlooker)'. All those who served in the Jubilee regime over its two terms and were either willing accomplices and beneficiaries, or preferred to close their eyes to the goings-on instead of blowing the whistle and resigning, will not be spared.

This will be the broom that sweeps clean, and nobody will be spared. Kenya Kwanza promised a revolution. This is what will be achieved once everyone, without exception, who served the corrupt Jubilee regime, is safely behind bars, leaving room for emergence of the brave new dawn. Locking up the lords of corruption and seizing their ill-gotten wealth will reap instant dividends in unlocking resources previously under control of a few families. There will be enough to pay public servants, clear the national debt and release the billions required to drive the Kenya Kwanza development agenda. The dams, irrigation projects, stadiums and other projects abandoned by Uhuru to spite Ruto will be revived.

No Kenyan will ever have to labour in the farming fields again, as we will have the resources to import maize, rice, beans, sugar, wheat and other foodstuffs to ensure a well-fed nation. As we say, a hungry man is an angry man. No Kenyan will ever go hungry again, and therefore none will heed calls for *maandamano* and other protests driven by enemies of development, disgruntled elements and agents of foreign masters.

In the process, we will also build a new generation of entrepreneurs issued permits for duty-free imports. Patriotic and public-spirited Kenya Kwanza shareholders will also help this country a great deal by being allowed to import tractors, fertiliser, security equipment, petroleum and other goods without the hindrances of pesky public procurement laws. Welcome to the brave new Kenya, where hustlers take over the economic zones previously the preserve of dynasties and deep state cartels.

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kenya lens

■ YOU CANNOT FORCE YOUR FATHER TO GIVE YOU LAND HE HAS ACQUIRED ON HIS OWN



There is a great misapprehension among many potential heirs that they are, by law, entitled to whatever belongs to their parents

● BY MAGESHA NGWIRI

A major ruling made by Environment and Land Court judge Sila Munyao in Kisii was buried in the political turbulence of recent weeks that led to costly disruptions to the economy. At a time of a tense standoff between hardliners in the Azimio la Umoja-One Kenya coalition and their counterparts in government, everything else was ignored by Kenyans, with the possible exception of lawyers and experts on land issues who care little about politics and oth-

er mundane happenings.

Ruling in a case in which two men sued their father, accusing him of selling ancestral land and thus disinheriting them, Justice Munyao did not mince his words when he told them they could not dispute their father's right to dispose of his property as he deemed fit. The judge argued that the property in question had been acquired solely by the father and was not, therefore, part of the "ancestral land" which, under the law, cannot be sold without their consent.

"It is despicable, if not outra-

geous, for a child to assert that his father must subdivide his land in a particular way, and proceed to sue his parent because he does not want to deal with the land in the way proposed by the child," he ruled.

Shorn of the circumlocution peculiar to the legal fraternity, the judge was telling the litigants a few simple truths: No, you cannot force your father to give you land he has acquired on his own and you cannot tell him what to do with it. Your father has educated you up to university level, thus fulfilling an important part of his pa-

ternal obligations, and since you are now adults, you should go out there and acquire your own property instead of engaging in conduct that is both "shameful" and "abominable".

There is no reason to disagree with that assessment, which will certainly comfort many parents who are dragged into court over their own property. In many societies, it is traditional for fathers to bequeath property to their children. It is common sense borne of filial love, and rarely do such things make their way into the courts except during formal sub-

kenya lens

It is despicable, if not outrageous, for a child to assert that his father must subdivide his land in a particular way, and proceed to sue his parent because he does not want to deal with the land in the way proposed by the child.

Justice Sila Munyao



division processes. Only a very callous parent would deny his or her offspring property, unless under very extraordinary circumstances.

Nevertheless, it is inevitable that disputes over property will erupt from time to time, especially when the father dies intestate. In such cases, land courts are the final recourse, particularly if alternative arbitration methods are found to be inadequate due to bad blood between the heirs. This is most common in high population density areas of central Kenya and Nyanza, where land is scarce, and where an ownership dispute over an eighth of an acre is common.

However, a greater concern here is the misapprehension among many potential heirs that they are, by law, entitled to whatever belongs to their parents. This is usually brought about by a misunderstanding of what constitutes ancestral land, matrimonial land and, in some instances, communal land. We are not concerned with the latter category, which is governed by a different set of laws. Legally, matrimonial proper-



Children play in Ruring'u, Nyeri, on August 1, 2011. In many societies, it is traditional for fathers to bequeath property to their children. FILE | NATION

ty, specifically land, is that which is inherited from parents, or that which is acquired by the spouses after marriage.

There are no issues about this definition except that a recent court ruling determined that couples are not automatically entitled to 50 per cent property share in case of a divorce. In that case, the court ruled, the property should be shared out depending on the contribution each of the spouses made towards its acquisition. The men lauded the ruling, a reaction that was to be expected in a custom-bound patriarchal system.

Matrimonial property includes the home where your children were born and raised and any other movable or immovable property jointly acquired by the couple during a marriage. This definition has in the past seriously disadvantaged women, who contribute their share in activities that cannot be monetised like keeping the home, doing the farm-work, and generally rearing children, which is a back-breaking job on its own.

However, due to ignorance about their rights, many women are still being chased away from their matrimonial homes, and they have no way of getting justice, especially where the structures of communal arbitration are weak.

This was especially prevalent

in days of old, when women were classified as part of the movable property that could be kicked out on a whim. Today, a spouse cannot be evicted from her matrimonial home unless under a court order, which is rare to come by.

One issue remains unexplained, though. If one of the spouses has bought land without the input of the other, why does he or she require spousal consent to dispose of it? According to lands professional Ibrahim Mwathane, there is no law that dictates that such consent be demanded, but land boards across the country insist on it.

The most likely interpretation is that board members want to

shield themselves from litigation should things go bad later. Indeed, Mwathane adds, Section 9 of the Land Control Act does not have spousal consent as one of the grounds for granting leave to sell land, and the matter can be challenged in court.

A lawyer contacted on the issue agrees, saying that the reason for involving the spouse in land transactions is that some men have gone to the extent of fraudulently selling off property solely belonging to the spouse. As such, the boards have to ensure that families are not dispossessed by uncaring fathers.

The other sticky issue is the health of the property owners. Instances have been recorded of land owners sliding into senility which, of course, impairs decision-making.

In some cases, such men start dishing out land to outsiders at the expense of the family. What protections do the offspring have in such circumstances? Dragging your own father to court over property cannot be easy, nor is it easy to prove that a father's faculties are severely compromised. This dilemma confronts many families, and it can best be resolved within the extended family. If such interventions fail, the court must decide, which is not always fair to all the claimants.

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SCIENCE & TECH

NASA UNVEILS 'MARS' HABITAT FOR YEAR-LONG EXPERIMENTS



A mobility prototype for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration Mars Sample Return mission is demonstrated in the Mars Yard at Jet Propulsion Laboratory on April 11, in Pasadena, California.

• HOUSTON

Four small rooms, a gym and a lot of red sand – Nasa unveiled last week its new Mars-simulation habitat, in which volunteers will live for a year at a time to test what life will be like on future missions to Earth's neighbour.

The facility, created for three planned experiments called the Crew Health and Performance Exploration Analog (CHAPEA), is located at the US space agency's massive research base in Houston, Texas.

Four volunteers will begin the first trial this summer, during which Nasa plans to monitor their physical and mental health to better understand humans' fortitude for such a long isolation.

With that data, Nasa will better understand astronauts' "resource use" on Mars, said Grace Douglas, lead researcher on the CHAPEA experiments.

"We can really start to understand how we're supporting them with what

we're providing them, and that's going to be really important information to making those critical resource decisions," she said on a press tour of the habitat. Such a distant mission comes with "very strict mass limitations," she added.

The volunteers will live inside a 1,700 square-foot (160 square-meter) home, dubbed "Mars Dune Alpha," which includes two bathrooms, a vertical farm to grow salad, a room dedicated to medical care, an area for relaxing and several workstations.

An airlock leads to an "outdoor" reconstruction of the Martian environment – though still located inside the hangar.

Several pieces of equipment astronauts would likely use are scattered around the red sand-covered floor, including a weather station, a brick-making machine and a small greenhouse. There is also a treadmill on which the make-believe astronauts will walk suspended from straps to

simulate the red planet's lesser gravity.

"We really can't have them just walking around in circles for six hours," joked Suzanne Bell, head of Nasa's Behavioural Health and Performance Laboratory. Volunteers will use the treadmill to simulate long trips outside to collect samples, gather data or build infrastructure, she said.

The members of the first experiment team have yet to be named, but the agency said selection "will follow standard Nasa criteria for astronaut candidate applicants", with a heavy emphasis on backgrounds in science, technology, engineering and math.

Researchers will regularly test the crew's response to stressful situations, such as restricting water availability or equipment failures. The habitat has another special feature: it was 3D-printed. "That is one of the technologies that Nasa is looking at as a potential to build habitat on other planetary or lunar surfaces," Douglas said.

Search for life in Jupiter's icy moons

Could vast, long-hidden oceans be teeming with alien life in our very own Solar System?

A new chapter in humanity's search for extraterrestrial life opens on Thursday as Europe's JUICE spacecraft blasts off on a mission to investigate the icy moons of Jupiter.

First discovered by Italian astronomer Galileo Galilei more than 400 years ago, these ice-covered moons are so far from the Sun that they were long dismissed as possible candidates to host life in our backyard.

Until recently, the Solar System's habitable zone was thought to "end at Mars", French astrophysicist Athena Coustenis, one of the scientific leads of the European Space Agency (ESA)'s JUICE mission, told *AFP*. But Nasa's Galileo probe to Jupiter in 1995 and the more recent Cassini spacecraft's trip to Saturn caused scientists to broaden their horizons. The gas giant planets themselves were correctly ruled out, but their icy moons — particularly Jupiter's Europa and Ganymede, and Saturn's Enceladus and Titan — offered fresh hope of nearby life.

Under their icy surfaces are thought to be huge oceans of liquid water — a crucial ingredient for life as we know it.

Nicolas Altobelli, a JUICE project scientist at ESA, said it would be "the first time that we explore habitats beyond the frost line" between Mars and Jupiter.

Beyond that line, temperatures plummet and "liquid water can no longer exist on the surface", Altobelli told *AFP* earlier this year.

The Jupiter Icy Moons Explorer (JUICE) mission launches from Europe's spaceport in Kourou, French Guiana on an eight-year odyssey through space. By July 2031 it will have entered Jupiter's orbit, from which it will probe Ganymede, Europa and fellow icy moon Callisto. Then, in 2034, JUICE will enter the orbit of Ganymede, the first time a spacecraft has done so around a moon other than our own.

africa lens

■ INVESTIGATION POINTS TO MAJOR FAILINGS IN SCREENING AND DERADICALISATION

INSIDE JIHAD ‘REHAB CAMPS’



Victims of Boko Haram insurgency at Malkohi internally displaced persons' Camp in Yola, Adamawa State in northern Nigeria, on August 31, 2022. At least 25,000 people have been reported missing in the north-east of Nigeria in the 13 years since the bloody conflict with jihadist groups began, more than half of them children, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross. With 40,000 dead and more than two million people forced from their homes, those figures are seen as underestimates.

Hajj is a centre for processing tens of thousands of jihadists, their families and those who lived under their control

● MAIDUGURI

On an arid plot of land in northern Nigeria, veiled women hurry past vegetable stalls and men idle outside endless rows of tarpaulin tents in what, at first glance, appears to be a typical camp for displaced people.

In reality, Hajj Camp in Borno State is a centre for processing tens of thousands of jihadists, their families and those who lived under their control. In exchange for freedom, the government persuaded them to turn themselves in – a move aimed at ending an insurgency by Boko Haram and

the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) group that has killed thousands and displaced over two million more since 2009.

But an investigation by *AFP* points to major failings in the screening and deradicalisation process, while the need for justice has been set aside. In May 2021, a key event gave the authorities an opportunity. Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau died after rivals ISWAP invaded his hideout, demanding he pledge allegiance. After his death, his fighters and their captives had a decision to make: either join ISWAP or flee.

The government acted fast. Flyers were dropped from hel-

icopters over their camps in the “bush”, vowing that if they emerged from hiding, they would be safe. “We will not hand you over to the military. We will take care of you and your family in a camp in Maiduguri for four or five months and then you will be released,” was the message.

In many ways, the tactic worked. More than 90,000 people formerly associated with Boko Haram and, to a much lesser extent, ISWAP defected. Most have transited through Hajj and some through Shokari or Bulumkutu, which are similar centres. A number of women and children were taken directly to ordinary camps

for those uprooted by the fighting.

The large majority of those who turned themselves in are not former fighters but rather men, women and children who lived under jihadist rule. Even so, the centres’ potential to usher in peace has attracted global attention. The European Union, Britain and the United Nations are all in favour of the initiative – known as the Borno Model – and pledged to support the expansion of a programme presented to them as a way to help end conflicts.

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africa lens

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Over several months, *AFP*, the first international media to access Hajj Camp, the largest of the three centres, spoke with 12 former residents as well as the top two local officials in charge, humanitarian workers and security experts. Official documentation says the scheme takes far-reaching steps to separate former fighters from non-combatants – an “intensive process of identification and evaluation”.

But the former residents, whose names have been changed for the purpose of this article, all described the screening system as threadbare. Among the three former fighters interviewed by *AFP*, only one said he was asked which battles he had participated in and why. Two women said they had not been asked any questions at all – and that females were simply categorised as “wives”.

One of three farmers interviewed, who had lived under Boko Haram control, said the authorities asked former fighters to screen him and others by pointing at whoever they believed was “one of them”. Those interviewed also reported that members of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), a militia which fights the jihadists alongside the military, are involved in the screening.

Abdul, 43, a former Sharia judge under Boko Haram who spent eight months in Shokari and two in Hajj, said the filtering system did not always work. “There is some corruption going on because sometimes relatives come and give something to the CJTF so that they say ‘these are not Boko Haram,’” he said. Retired Brigadier General Abdullahi Sabi Ishaq, the governor’s special adviser on security affairs, said the programme, including the screening, was “being handled by professionals”.

In theory, non-combatants stay only a couple of days or weeks in the centres, while former fighters are kept for several months. Certain camp residents get day passes to roam freely in the city. Interviewees told *AFP* that some are released more quickly than others, either to make space for new arrivals or because community leaders give them authorisation to leave.

Ishaq said former fighters are given a two-week training course that includes classes on “values

How Nigeria is treating former Jihadists, victims



Residents of Ngarannam village on December 19, 2022. Ngarannam is located in the state of Borno in north-eastern Nigeria, which was the stronghold of the terrorist organisation Boko Haram. The village was once completely destroyed by the organisation.

in Islam”, “fundamental human rights” and basic civic education. Before they are released, the men also have to take an oath, swearing on the Koran that they will not go back to the bush or spy for those still fighting. Momo, who joined Boko Haram when he was

13, told *AFP* he had taken part in “many attacks” against soldiers and “disbelievers” to establish “an Islamic state” before deciding to surrender.

During his five months in Hajj, the now 26-year-old said preachers advised him and others to “be patient with people when we leave, that we have to be obedient with local authorities and that we should be serious about our religious duties”. That was the extent of the “deradicalisation” process he said he went through. Even among those who were not fighters, some, like Abdul, held radical beliefs.

The former judge and Islamic teacher spent years inflicting lashes on those who didn’t follow the group’s interpretation of Sharia law and brainwashed hundreds of children in his school for young jihadists.

The father of nine, who now lives free, said he would have joined rival group ISWAP if he could have, instead of surrendering. Saratu, a 20-year-old woman married to a senior commander, also seemed to still be sympathetic towards the insurgents. She told *AFP* that Boko Haram “only preach and kill those who use drugs”.

She said she ended up in Hajj, so named as it was once a transit place for pilgrims heading to Mec-

ca, because ISWAP invaded their hideout when she was away visiting relatives. She deemed it too dangerous to go back, opting to surrender instead. An additional motivating factor for those in the armed groups is that once they surrender, the authorities give them money – monthly stipends and a lump sum when they leave – as well as food and other basic goods. But this stirs resentment among residents of Borno who have suffered from the conflict.

And while security experts insist on the value of providing an exit path to those who want to surrender, many believe that victims also deserve some redress. “Serious crimes have been committed... Someone must be held to account, because without some measure of justice, it’s hard to see how there can be lasting peace,” said an international security expert in the country who asked to remain anonymous.

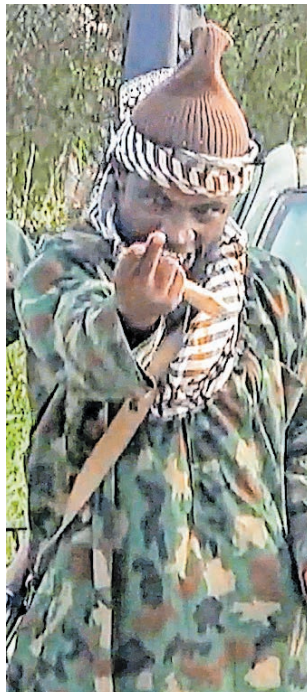
The absence of justice is partly a result of the poor screening. But it could also be due to Borno’s reluctance to refer individuals to the federal level, where suspects previously charged with terrorism have ended up behind bars in pre-trial limbo for years.

In addition, the authorities’ ability to investigate potential crimes is limited. “What evidence do we have of who did what?” said Ishaq, adding that later on they will ask victims to identify potential perpetrators. “The justice process will follow. We must get to that stage, but let us first have everybody out (of the bush),” he told *AFP*.

Borno plans to build another centre and three “integrated villages” where those who surrendered would live temporarily before being reintegrated into communities. The state government has devised a three-year plan requiring an estimated \$150 million, and is appealing to the international community for help.

“Maybe their plan will work,” said the security expert. But “if it doesn’t, the risk is that you have violent former fighters at large who could return to criminal or militant activity.” Two weeks after interviewing the surrendees, a source contacted *AFP* to say that Saratu, the woman married to a senior Boko Haram commander, “has gone back to the bush with her children”.

Her husband and his unit, he said, killed at least 37 fishermen near Dikwa town last month.



Former Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau

global lens

■ HOW INVASION PLUNGED COUNTRY INTO DECADES OF CHAOS

SHOCK AND AWE: WAR@20



Iraqis feel the results of the invasion every day. Its consequences have shaped and blighted millions of lives and changed their country profoundly

● BAGHDAD

The invasion of 2003 was a catastrophe for Iraq and its people. More proof of that, measured in broken lives, was at a suspected site of a mass grave in the desert outside Sinjar, not far from the border with Syria.

Survivors of one of Iraq’s damaged communities, the Yazidis, looked on as the earth in a marble quarry was excavated. On a wire fence around the site were photos of dozens of people, mostly men, who had been killed by jihadists from the Islamic State group. They were from Zile-li, a village near the quarry, where 1,800 men were taken and killed on August 3, 2014.

The Yazidis revere both the Quran

and the Bible; their religion is influenced by both Christianity and Islam. The Islamic State considered them to be infidels and carried out a genocidal assault. It happened after the Americans and British had ended their occupation, but a direct line links the massacre to the invasion, and the disastrous years that followed. Among those watching the excavation was Naif Jasso, the Sheikh of Kocho, a Yazidi community that suffered an even worse attack than Zile-li.

He said that in Kocho, 517 people out of a population of 1,250 were killed by jihadists from IS, also known as ISIS or Daesh.

In Zile-li, men were separated from their families at gunpoint and shot dead at the quarry. Sofian

Saleh, who was 16 at the time, was among the crowd at the excavation. He is one of only two men from Zile-li who survived. As he waited for death with his father, brother and 20 to 30 other men, he saw another group shot dead. Their bodies tumbled down a cliff into the quarry. Then it was their turn.

“They tied our hands from behind before the shooting. They took us and threw us on the ground,” he said. Sofian’s father and brother were killed, but he survived because bodies fell on him, covering him up.

The Islamic State was using its favourite tactic. First, they killed the men, then took the women as slaves. Children were removed from their mothers to

be indoctrinated as IS recruits. A mother sitting near the suspected grave wept as she remembered the baby ripped from her and given to a jihadist family.

Next to the wire fence around the site, Suad Daoud Chatto, a woman in her 20s, stood with a poster. On it were the faces of nine men from her extended family who were killed, and two missing female relatives. She said jihadists captured her in 2014, when she was 16, along with many other women and girls, and held her in Syria. She remained until 2019, when she was rescued as the Caliphate collapsed.

“They were like barbarians, they kept us in handcuffs for a long

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global lens

Tide of violent sectarianism rumbles in the Gulf

Continued from Page 27

time. Our hands were still tied even during the meals," she said.

"They married me off many times... they were marrying the slaves. They did not spare anyone. We were all raped. They were killing people before our eyes. They killed all the Yazidi men – they killed eight of my uncles. They destroyed many families." In the end, only a few bags of human bones were found at the site. Dozens of others are still to be excavated. By the time IS rampaged through Iraq in the summer of 2014, the US and the UK had ended their occupation. Jihadist ideology existed long before the invasion, and had inspired the 9/11 attacks.

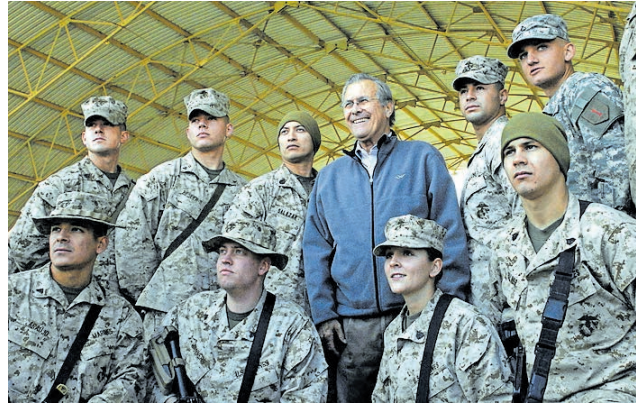
But far from destroying the ideology of Osama Bin Laden and the jihadist extremists, the years of chaos and brutality set off in 2003 turbo-charged murderous jihadist violence. Al-Qaeda, broken for a while by an alliance between the Americans and Sunni tribes, regenerated into the even more barbarous IS.

Iraq is more stable so far this year than it has been for a long while. Baghdad, Mosul and other cities are much safer. But Iraqis feel the results of the invasion every day. Its consequences have shaped and blighted millions of lives and changed their country profoundly.

It is a grim irony that the invasion has dropped out of political and public debate in the US, which conceived and led it, and in the UK, its closest ally in the coalition. The Americans and British bear a heavy responsibility for what happened after the invasion, and its consequences also affect them.

Iraq's tyrant, Saddam Hussein, was well worth overthrowing – he had imprisoned and killed thousands of Iraqis, even using chemical weapons against rebellious Kurds. The problem was how it was done, the way the US and UK ignored international law, and the violence that gripped Iraq after the Bush administration failed to make a plan to fill the power vacuum created by regime change.

The past 20 years since the invasion, coming on top of Saddam's dictatorship, add up to almost half a century of torture for the Iraqi people. Even for those who



US Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld poses with troops assigned to Al-Asad Air Base in Iraq's restive Al-Anbar province during a surprise visit to Iraq, on December 9, 2006.

were there, it is hard to recreate the febrile atmosphere of "fear, power and hubris", as one historian put it recently, that gripped the US in the 18 months between al-Qaeda's 9/11 attacks in 2001 and the invasion of Iraq. I was in New York a few days after the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center were destroyed, as F-15 jets patrolled above Manhattan. It was a visible demonstration of American force, as the biggest military power on the planet worked out how to respond.

The shock of the attacks swiftly produced George W Bush's declaration of "war on terror" against al-Qaeda and its jihadist fellow travellers. UK Prime Minister Tony Blair chartered a Concorde to cross the Atlantic to offer support. He believed Britain's best guarantee of influence in the world was to stay close to the White House. They moved fast against al-Qaeda's network in Afghanistan. Before the end of the year, a US-led coalition removed the Taliban regime from power when it refused to give up al-Qaeda's leader, Osama Bin Laden. Kabul was not enough for America.

President Bush and his advisors saw a global threat to the US. They thought states that opposed them could make deadly alliances with al-Qaeda and its imitators. The biggest target in their sights was Iraq. Saddam Hussein had been a thorn in America's side ever since he sent his army into Kuwait in 1990. Without any evidence, the Americans tried to manufacture a link between Saddam and al-Qaeda when none existed. In

reality the Iraqi leader, a secular dictator, saw religious extremists as a threat. The US president's father, George HW Bush, decided not to remove Saddam from power in Baghdad after the Iraqi occupiers were driven out of Kuwait by an international coalition assembled by the US in 1991. The first President Bush and his advisors saw trouble ahead if they continued to Baghdad. A long, belligerent occupation of Iraq looked like a morass and they had no UN authorisation to topple the regime. I was in Baghdad when the ceasefire was declared. Regime officials I knew could not believe that Saddam's dictatorship had survived.

Twelve years later, by 2003, America's rage and arrogance of power blinded the second President Bush to the realities that had constrained his father. When the US and UK could not persuade the UN Security Council to pass a resolution explicitly authorising invasion and regime change, Messrs Bush and Blair claimed earlier resolutions gave them the authority they needed.

Among many who did not buy their argument was the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan. In a BBC interview 18 months after the invasion, he said it was "not in conformity" with the UN Charter – in other words, illegal. France and other Nato allies refused to join the invasion. Tony Blair ignored huge protests in the UK. His decision to go to war dogged the rest of his political career.

No president or prime minister faces a bigger decision than going

to war. George Bush and Tony Blair embarked on a war of choice that killed hundreds of thousands of people. The justifications for the invasion were soon shown to be untrue. The weapons of mass destruction that Tony Blair insisted, eloquently, made Saddam a clear and present danger, turned out not to exist. It was a failure not just of intelligence but of leadership.

The Americans called the huge air raids that started their offensive "shock and awe". Neo-conservatives around George W Bush deluded themselves that democracy, and regional stability, could be imposed through the barrel of a gun. Overwhelming US force would not just safeguard America, it would stabilise the Middle East too, and democracy would spread through Syria, Iran and beyond, like a good virus.

Saddam was removed within weeks. Iraqis were in no mood to be grateful. In Saddam's last decade as leader, the vast majority of them had been impoverished by sanctions authorised by the UN, but driven hardest by the US and UK. The Americans, the British and their allies were unable to bring peace to the streets. Nightmarish years started with wholesale looting, revenge attacks and crime. An insurgency against the occupation turned into a sectarian civil war. Iraqis turned against each other as the Americans imposed a system of government that split power along ethnic and sectarian lines – between the country's three main groups, Shia Muslims, Kurds and Sunni Muslims. Armed militias fought each other, the occupiers, and killed each other's civilians.

Jihadist groups moved in to exploit the chaos and kill foreigners. Before the Americans managed to kill him, a brutal Sunni extremist from Jordan, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, targeted attacks to turn the insurgency against the occupation into a sectarian civil war. Shia death squads retaliated with their own reign of terror.

No-one knows exactly how many Iraqis have died as a result of the 2003 invasion. Estimates are all in the hundreds of thousands. The tide of violent sectarianism continues to rumble around the Middle East.

global lens

■ FACING CRIMINAL CHARGES, HE VOWS TO 'NEVER' DROP PRESIDENTIAL BID

TRUMP: THERE'S NO TURNING BACK



Former US President Donald Trump

Facing 34 felony counts over alleged hush money paid to a porn star, the real estate magnate says nothing will stop him from running – even a conviction

● WASHINGTON

Former US president Donald Trump, having been criminally charged in New York, pledged Tuesday to “never drop out” of the 2024 race for the White House, and insisted Joe Biden is not fit to run again.

The Republican real estate magnate, who is facing 34 felony counts in New York over alleged hush money paid to an adult film actress, told *Fox News* anchor Tucker Carlson that nothing would prevent him from running—even a conviction.

“I’d never drop out,” he said. “It’s not my thing. I wouldn’t do it.”

Trump, 76, in his first major interview since being arrested and fingerprinted last week, cast doubt on whether Democrat Biden, 80, would be in the 2024 race.

“I don’t see how it’s possible,” he said.

“It’s not an age thing... I don’t think he can. I just don’t see Biden doing it from a physical or a mental standpoint. I don’t see it.”

Trump and other senior Republicans have repeatedly cast doubt on Biden’s mental acuity and apparent frailty.

Right wing outlets like *Fox News* frequently highlight his verbal flubs, and moments where he appears to have lost his train of thought.

Throughout his own presidency, *Fox* offered an uncritical forum for Trump to air his grievances.

The then-commander-in-chief sometimes called in unannounced to shows and talked at length to presenters.

The relationship cooled after Trump’s defeat to Biden at the ballot box in 2020, but has

steadily grown again as the Republican nominating contest heats up.

The interview, part two of which is expected to be broadcast on Wednesday, comes weeks after texts emerged showing Carlson speaking disparagingly about Trump after his election loss.

The messages were uncovered as part of a \$1.6 billion lawsuit brought by Dominion Voting Systems against the Rupert Murdoch-run *Fox News* over its coverage of Trump and his allies’ unfounded claims of widespread fraud in the 2020 election.

“We are very, very close to being able to ignore Trump most nights. I truly can’t wait,” says one Carlson text message sent two days before a Trump-supporting mob – inspired by the then-president’s false claims of a “stolen election” – invaded the US Capitol in Washington.

“I hate him passionately,” says another.

No mention was broadcast of the texts or of other evidence produced in discovery.

At the same time, Trump last week said French President Emmanuel Macron was in China meeting with Xi Jinping and “kissing his ass”.

The former US president sat down with Tucker Carlson for his first mainstream media appearance since being indicted on criminal charges in New York.

In a rambling interview, the Republican Party’s presumptive presidential nominee said the United States had lost influence in the world since he left office.

“You got this crazy world, it’s blowing up and the United States has absolutely no say,” he told Carlson.

“And Macron, who’s a friend of mine, is over with China, kissing his ass. Okay, in China! I said, France is now going to China.”

Macron caused a storm after a state visit to China last week in which he cautioned Europeans should not chain themselves to US foreign policy.

In remarks to journalists, Macron said European countries should not get caught up in the tense standoff between Beijing and Washington over the fate of Taiwan. China has vowed to regain control of Taiwan, while the US government pledges to help Taiwan defend itself.

Macron, who discussed Taiwan with Xi on Friday, warned against Europe being “caught up in crises that are not ours, which prevents it from building its strategic autonomy”.

“The paradox would be that, overcome with panic, we believe we are just America’s followers,” Macron said. “The worse thing would be to think that we Europeans must become followers on this topic and take our cue from the US agenda and a Chinese overreaction.”

The remarks sparked unease in Washington, although the White House sought to play them down, with spokesman John Kirby saying the Biden administration remains “comfortable and confident in the terrific bilateral relationship we have with France”.

—AFP

OBIT

■ HE HELPED MOULD THE GOLDEN GENERATION OF VOLLEYBALLERS

SERVICE WINNER

Waithaka Kioni is credited with revolutionising Kenyan volleyball through seven continental title wins by the national team in a span of 13 years

● BY DAVID KWALIMWA

One warm afternoon in mid-2014, Kenya's national women's volleyball team arrived at the Mexico International Airport to compete in the FIVB Grand Prix.

To get to Mexico, the side, commonly referred to as the Malkia Strikers, with yours truly as media liaison officer, had endured an eight-hour journey from Nairobi to Amsterdam, a six-hour layover, and a gruelling 14-hour trip across the Atlantic.

The star-studded squad, consisting of the likes of Brackides Agala, Mercy Moim, Janet Wanja, Jane Wanja and Everlyne Makuto, had won the African title and earned the right to compete at this international event alongside Mexico, Bulgaria and Algeria.

The day after they arrived, the squad, handled by veteran coaches David Lung'aho and Japheth Munala, masterminded a remarkable 3-1 set win over the hosts at the Olympic Arena in Mexico City.

Puzzled, hundreds of Mexican fans took in the defeat in style: they stormed the court to laud the gallant African Queens with handshakes and hugs. A significant number asked for autographs.

In the midst of the celebrations, Waithaka Kioni, the Kenya Volleyball Federation chairman, posted an emotional message on the team's Whatsapp group from Nairobi. "This is the first ever competitive win we've posted against a non-African team. The whole country is so proud of you. Keep going. May this (win) be the first of many," he wrote.

For years, Kioni remained a constant feature in the stands as Kenyan volleyball teams dominated at continental assignments. He was always resplendent in a crisp suit with a matching shirt and tie, his grey hair and beard neatly trimmed. He would watch keenly from the VIP seats at the 5,000-seater Kasarani indoor arena as the Kenya national women's volleyball team, or clubs such as Kenya Pipeline and Kenya Prisons, hammered their opponents to submission.

Kioni, who until his death a week ago also served as Confederation of African Volleyball vice-president, would rarely display emotion as team Kenya, statistically the best African team by a mile, swept aside seasoned opposition from West and North Africa. Instead, he'd remain glued to the game, occasionally scribbling some notes, or whispering into the next ear.

"He was unique. It was not easy to know when he was happy or disappointed; he would rare-



Waithaka Kioni

ly show it. Even when we had won comfortably, he'd put his hands together for a few claps and immediately after say we should have done better," recalls veteran coach Paul Bitok.

Kioni was greatly respected and considered the father of Kenyan volleyball. He and Lung'aho are credited with revolutionising the sport in Kenya, a feat achieved through seven continental title wins by the national team in a span of 13 years.

"He believed in me as a young coach and brought me to (Kenya) Pipeline at the end of 2003 while he was working there. He was very supportive and maintained me as head coach (of the national team) when he took over the federation until 2016," says Lung'aho.

Transforming the women's national team into statistically the best in Kenya and Africa did not happen overnight. After graduating with a degree in Public Administration at the University of Nairobi in 1980, Kioni briefly practised journalism at the Standard Group before landing a public administration job at Kenya Pipeline.

He briefly played amateur football before stumbling his way into sports management. "I

was invited to a volleyball tournament somewhere in Nyeri in 1984," he recalled in a previous interview.

"It was never the same after that," he added. "They (volleyball fans) are very passionate about the game. I fell in love with the scenes I saw and during our next executive meeting at the company, I suggested to the Kenya Pipeline Managing Director, William Mbote, that we start a team. Luckily he agreed and that's how the Kenya Pipeline women's volleyball team was formed."

With Kioni as manager, the team recovered from a slow start to win seven African titles between 1995 and 2019. In between, Kioni, who helped mould the golden generation of volleyballers such as Doris Wefwawa, Lucy Fataki Kamweru, Wanja Kanyi and Esther Enane, quit the dugout for administrative duty when he successfully vied for the Kenya Volleyball Association Nairobi branch chairmanship.

"He was friendly and harsh at the same time. Without him, I'd probably never have achieved my potential in volleyball. He pushed us to limits we never believed we'd achieve," says former volleyballer Janet Wanja.

Despite the successes, Kioni yearned for more. He was consistently frustrated by the inability of the men's team to replicate the women's successes on the continental front.

There were other challenges as well. On the management front, despite serving as the vice-president of the continental body and representing sub-Saharan interests at the high table, Kioni watched helplessly as the deep-pocketed North Africans skewed administrative decisions to their favour; taking the lion's share of hosting rights for continental events and development aid.

With volleyball officially an indoor sport, Kioni's pleas to successive governments to invest in sports infrastructure consistently fell on deaf ears.

The national teams were forced to share the Kasarani indoor arena with political and social events. At times, teams would be kicked out of the government facility for failure to pay for their use. This forced Kioni to beg professional clubs in Japan to host the Kenya national team for professional training ahead of international meets.

He once requested the Japanese Ambassador to Kenya for help in building an international volleyball court.

"He was set to retire as KVF chairman at the end of this month and wanted those who are going to come in as the new executive to volleyball to the next level. He asked us to get credible and hardworking officials who have the interests of the game at heart and promised us he will forever remain a supporter of volleyball activities," said Lung'aho.

A trained public relations professional par excellence, Kioni did not suffer any negative publicity in his role as KVF chair and enjoyed a good relationship with the media. He is survived by four children – Kioni Waithaka Jr, David, and celebrated motorcross riders Mwangi and Jemimah.

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