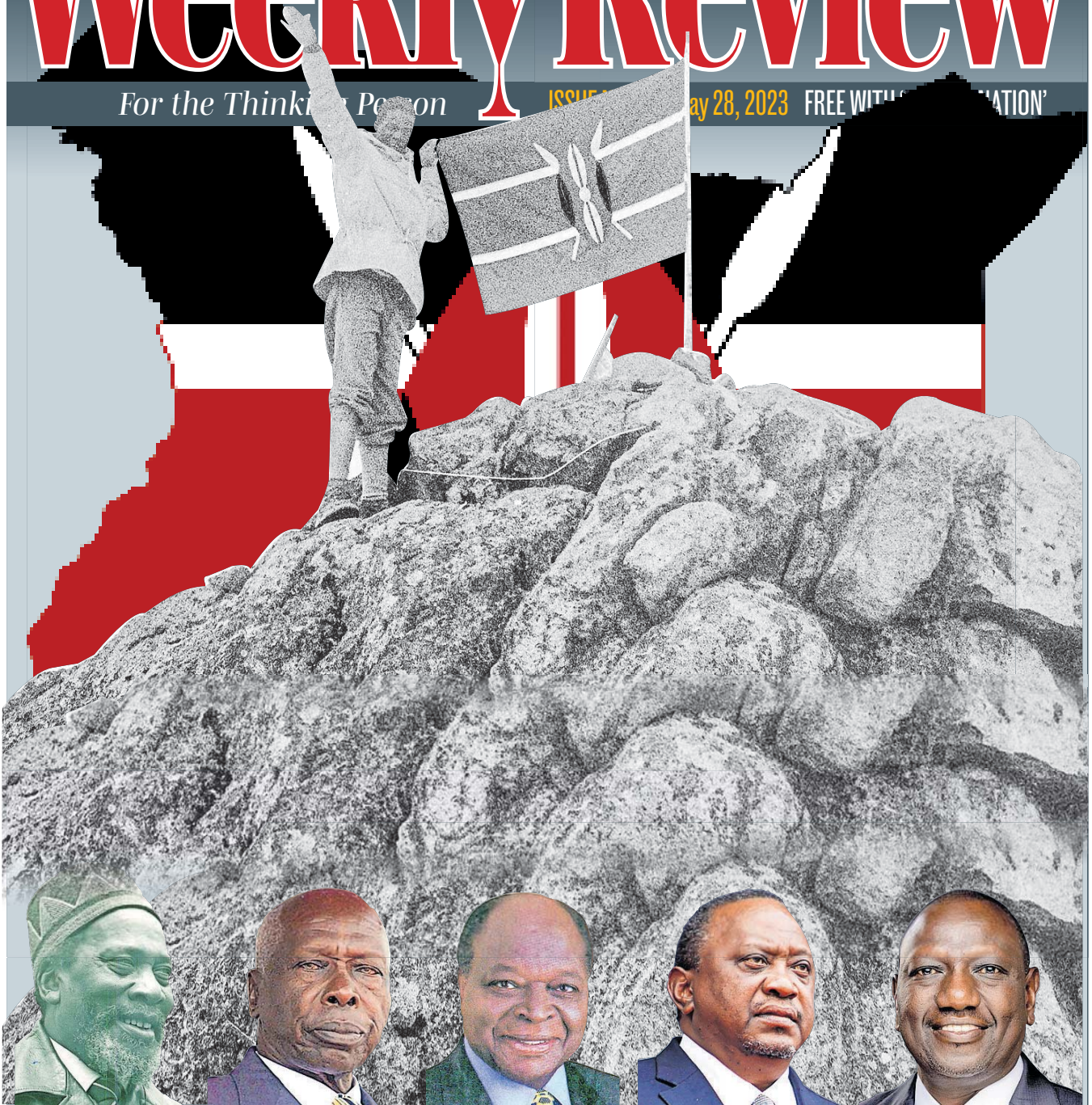


# THE Weekly Review

For the Thinking Person

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## THE 60-YEAR ODYSSEY

The birthday of our nation is an important moment for us to reflect on our past and project our collective aspirations as a people as we march into the future. It's a prompt for us to set our country back on track. At 60, we must see things differently and look forward without fear.

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**NATION** → ePaper

letter from the editor

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Our undying Kenyan spirit must propel us forward without fear

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**22 60 YEARS OF SPORTS EXCELLENCE:** From athletics and rugby to rallying, football and tennis, Kenya is overflowing with talent and is a global giant in sports.

**27 NEW FEATHER IN KENYA'S CAP:** Lilian Seenoi-Barr joins the list of leaders with Kenyan roots in public office abroad, the first black person ever elected in Northern Ireland.



Most of the time, it takes relatively little to raise the morale and boost the unity of an unhappy people. The field of sports demonstrates this better than any other unifying factor ever could.

On August 24, 2004, the nation exploded with joy when Ezekiel Kemboi led home a jubilant Kenyan sweep of the medals in the 3,000m steeplechase final at the Athens Olympics.

The skinny legend from Elgeyo-Marakwet continued Kenya's dominance of the race when he steered Brimin Kipruto and Paul Kipsiele Koech to victory.

Kemboi ignited a sense of pride across the nation when he slowed down in the home stretch to urge his compatriots forward. He had the option of stepping on the gas to widen his lead and, possibly, go for a better record, but he didn't. This noble act of selflessness and patriotism lifted the spirits of millions subscribed to the Kenyan project – a bright cherry to be prized.

That, despite our economic and social woes, there are some within us with the power to unite the nation towards a common goal.

When Kenya won Independence from the British on June 1, 1963, after a lengthy period of oppression and subjugation, the immediate goal of the founding fathers was to rally the nation to overcome the triple scourge of illiteracy, poverty, and disease.

The words of hope they uttered at Independence might seem very distant and unreal to today's young generation. The great dream has easily turned into a scary nightmare and the constant drain of hope from our collective trunks has been the bad outcome.

The fear of the future tells of a bitter and confused present and is palpable in the collective psyche.

Sixty years down the line, we



Allan Buluku

The great dream has easily turned into a scary nightmare and the constant drain of hope from our collective trunks has been the bad outcome. The fear of the future is palpable in the collective psyche and fear of the future tells of a bitter and confused present.

are still confronted by the same, age-old problems that our forefathers sang and danced about at the outset of Independence, thinking they would soon be troubles of the past. But the dust they thought they were shaking off still clings and has built up to create the despicable problems that have become the bane of our nation.

It's absurd and humiliating that most of our public institutions worked better during the colonial era. It is a shame that we start doubting ourselves as some inferior species that cannot be trusted to raise itself from the mire of disorganisation. It is indeed intolerable that government after government gets into power but we don't seem to see much change to our circumstances.

Our education structure has yet to cut out the malaise of illiteracy and ignorance, while the sting of poverty still hurts deep and wide. We have failed

to create employment for our people and even agriculture, the backbone of the country's economy, has not been protected enough to pay farmers and improve food security. Our health system is strangled by unholly corruption and many Kenyans suffer from diseases that the world thought had been surmounted. We are in a fix.

A dereliction of public institutions set in after the Union Jack was lowered. The rule of law was abandoned and in came the rule of the jungle. State graft became standard procedure, the rule rather than the exception. Now, those in positions of leadership in the civil service view it as a vehicle to enrich themselves. Politicians and well-connected businesspeople hold more sway and capital than honest Kenyans.

We are always painfully reminded of how, in the '60s, '70s, and '80s, we were at the same level of economic development as the Asian Tigers. We are obsessed with development, but we've never had a plan. What became of the Kenyan dream? Who 'stole our star'?

The birthday of our nation is an important threshold on which to make a new break and set our country back on track.

We know where we have come from and this peroration is meant to remind us of the pitfalls that have put us in the untenable condition we find ourselves. Sincere acknowledgement of the source of our discomfort is itself an admission that we have the ability to pull ourselves out of the quagmire.

At 60, we must see things differently and look into the future without fear. It's a moment for us to reflect on our past and project our collective aspirations as we march into the future.

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## the telescope

### ■ As PS, he was questioned over Aror scam

## Thugge to be vetted this week

Central Bank of Kenya Governor nominee Kamau Thugge will this week face the final hurdle ahead of his formal appointment when he undergoes vetting in Parliament.

The vetting will be conducted by the Departmental Committee on Finance and National Planning of the National Assembly.

Consequently, the final report by the Committee is expected within the week. President William Ruto nominated Thugge to replace Patrick Njoroge.

Until his appointment, Thugge served as the senior adviser and Head of Fiscal Affairs and

Budget Policy at State House. He has previously served as Treasury Principal Secretary.

He was forced out of his position at the National Treasury over his alleged role in the multibillion-shilling Kimwarer and Aror dams' scandal in Elgeyo-Marakwet but later cleared of any wrongdoing.

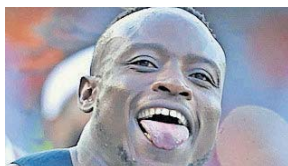
He takes over the critical role at a time the country's currency is struggling against the US dollar and regional currencies, including the Tanzania shilling. He also has a tough juggling act of ensuring Kenya doesn't default on choking debt, mainly from China.



Kamau Thugge when he appeared before the National Assembly Public Accounts Committee on July 5, 2018.

### ■ Jacobs and Kerley waiting for Kenyan ace

## Omanyala lines up for Rabat



Olympic 100m champion Marcell Jacobs from Italy, world champion Fred Kerley (US) and Commonwealth champion Ferdinand Omanyala from Kenya will finally face each other. The 100 metres

Olympic, World and Commonwealth Games champions will go head-to-head at the Rabat leg of the Diamond League on Sunday. Jacobs and Kerley battled at the Tokyo Olympics, with the Italian coming home to take the gold as Omanyala dropped out in the semi-finals.

Omanyala is currently the fastest man this season with his victory at the Kip Keino Classic in 9.84 seconds on May 13.

### ■ Biden taps black officer to be Joint Chiefs boss



General Charles Q. Brown, Jr.

## Top Air Force general to head US forces

President Biden has nominated Gen Charles "CQ" Brown Jr. to become the next chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, formalising the selection of a seasoned, trailblazing officer with insight on China and the war in Ukraine to serve as his senior military adviser.

If confirmed by the Senate, Brown, who has served as Chief of Staff of the Air Force since June 2020, would become the second African American to hold the Pentagon's top uniformed post. His nomination was anticipated for weeks. Brown would replace Gen Mark A. Milley, an outspoken Army officer whose tenure has overlapped with numerous crises, including Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the chaotic and deadly evacuation of Afghanistan, and the January 6, 2021 at-

tack on the US Capitol. By law, Milley must vacate the post by the end of September. Biden considers Brown an experienced tactician who understands the strategic challenges facing the United States across the world and a leader able to represent US military personnel and their families, the official said.

Brown has commanded troops at every level in the Air Force. In joint assignments, he helped conceive and lead the air campaign against the Islamic State group and is "deeply versed" in the challenges that China poses, the official said. As a member of the Joint Staff, he has also been involved in the Pentagon's effort to arm, train and advise the Ukrainian military, a programme that has funneled tens of billions of dollars in weaponry to Kyiv.

### ■ It's been 40 years of failed dreams at French Open

## Home is where the hurt is... in Paris



It's been 40 years since a French player last won the men's singles title at Roland Garros and Yannick Noah's 1983 achievement is unlikely to be matched this year, when the second major of the season starts on Sunday. However, the French are

not alone when it comes to discovering that home is where the hurt is as title droughts for male players have been a regular feature at the other three Slams.

At the Australian Open, Mark Edmondson has pride of place as the last home player to lift the men's title — way back in 1976. Edmondson, ranked 212 in the world, stunned compatriot John Newcombe, a seven-time Slam champion, in four sets when the tournament was still played on grass.

kenya lens

■ MILESTONES OVER SIX DECADES

# AUTOCRACY TO DEMOCRACY



**Protecting the Constitution, the bulwark of their rights and guard rail against tyranny, is a cherished madaraka (responsibility) of Kenyans**

● BY KWENDO OPANGA

**O**n August 27, 2010, Kenya promulgated a new Constitution, marking a watershed in the evolution of its democracy. Scholars, politicians and journalists have since classified developments, especially in regard to politics, power and governance, as happening before or after the advent of the Constitution of Kenya 2010.

On either side of the watershed, the frontlines of Kenya's political arena have been dominated by political actors, especially those in power pitted against those who seek to join them or oust them, with both purporting to speak and act on behalf of those they represent or seek to represent. The bone of contention has remained access to and distribution of resources.

Also at the centre of these struggles have been civil liberties, especially the rights to free speech, assembly and exchange of ideas. Just as the colonial authorities denied Kenyans these rights, so also did independent governments brook no criticism, much less opposition. Colonial instruments of control, such as detention without trial, found new owners in their previous critics.

Before 2010, there had been momentous political developments that helped define eras in Kenya's political history. In 1963, the centralist Kenya African National Union (Kanu) beat the federalist Kenya African Democratic Union (Kadu) to lead the country into Independence. But the following year, the latter dissolved itself and joined the former.

Kenya therefore became a *de facto* single party state. While a

string of changes was made to the Independence Constitution arrived at in the famous Lancaster conferences of 1960, 1962 and 1963 in London, founding President Kenyatta did not legislate for a single party state, settling instead for the expansion and concentration of power in his office and person.

But there was no hiding the tensions at the heart of government and that the left, led by Vice-President Oginga Odinga, was becoming restless at this turn of events – the concentration of power at the centre and his own isolation from it. In March of 1966, matters came to a head, with Kanu's Limuru Conference creating new regional party vice-presidents.

Piqued, Odinga did not even consider offering himself as a candidate for the Nyanza post, which Lawrence Sagini swift-

ly claimed. The new offices were meant to dilute the office of party vice-president and by extension the Number Two position in government. Odinga quit Kanu, formed the socialist Kenya People's Union (KPU) and returned plural politics to Kenya.

Odinga & Co had banked on mass defections from Kanu to KPU and a showdown in Parliament. Fearing trickle would turn to flood, Kenyatta's corner hurriedly introduced a constitutional amendment that required defecting MPs to seek fresh mandates from the electorates. What followed was a series of by-elections that became known as the Little General Election of 1966.

Kanu's campaign theme in the by-elections, especially in Luo-land, then the bastion of opposition politics, was that voting for

Continued on Page 6

## kenya lens

# From a single party to multipartism, devolution

Continued from Page 5

KPU was equal to rejection of the government, which justified exclusion from government and development. The provincial administration made it difficult for KPU to organise and in the end, Kanu carried the day.

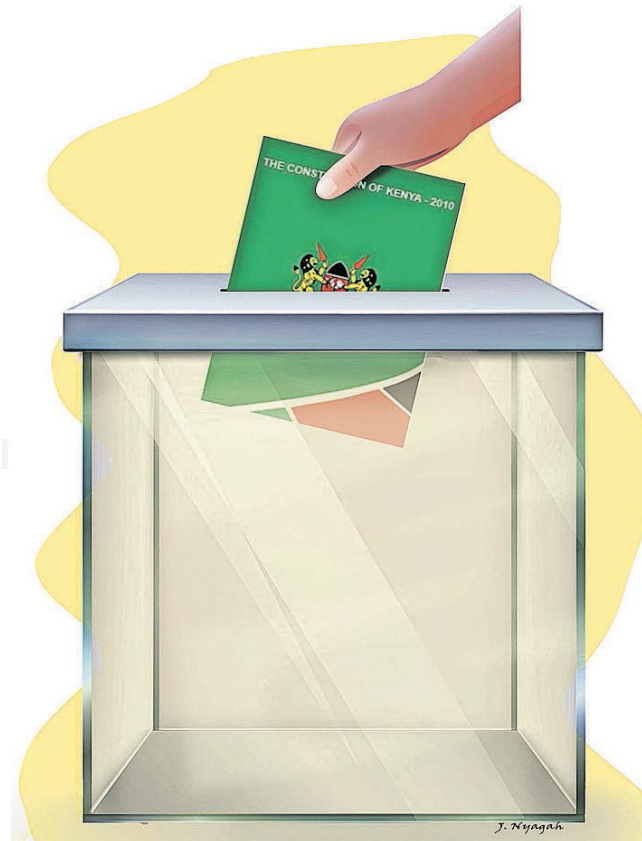
The tension between Kenyatta and Odinga, Kanu and KPU and also the Kikuyu and the Luo soon boiled over. On July 5 of 1969, Thomas Joseph Mboya, the 39-year-old Minister for Economic Planning and Development and Kanu Secretary-General, regarded by many as the enforcer of Kenyatta's anti-KPU schemes and a future president, was shot dead in Nairobi.

Four months later, on a visit to Kisumu, Odinga and Kenyatta exchanged bitter words. When stones were hurled at the dais, Kenyatta's security detail drew guns and threw a cordon around him. In the aftermath, KPU was proscribed and its top brass detained. Kenya was back to a *de facto* single party state. Kenyatta died in August of 1978 without setting foot in Nyanza again.

Contrary to fears, especially in the British press, that Kenya would slide into civil strife, the transition from Kenyatta to Daniel Toroitich arap Moi was smooth and peaceful. However, in the 90 days before a presidential poll could be held, in a sign of things to come, Mombasa politician Shariff Taib Nassir called for Moi to be elected unopposed as the second President of Kenya.

The chorus of support for Nassir's call and Moi was overwhelming. The group that had in 1976 mooted the change-the-Constitution campaign to bar Moi from automatically ascending to the Presidency in the event of Kenyatta's death kept its own counsel. It was silenced by Attorney-General Charles Njonjo's claim that it was a criminal offence to imagine Kenyatta's death.

President Moi took the reins of power with a pledge to follow in the *nyayo* (footsteps) of Kenyatta and made peace, love and unity (also known as the *nyayo* philosophy) his clarion call. In 1979, Moi named Odinga chairman of the Cotton Lint and Seed Marketing



Board in a move aimed at bringing him in from the cold and as a gesture to the Luo to join the political mainstream.

But Odinga soon put his foot in his mouth. He told a public meeting that he had fallen out with Kenyatta because he was a land grabber. Moi sacked him.

In the 1979 General Election, former KPU members were denied clearance to run for election on Kanu tickets. The party high command argued that they had not had a sufficient change of heart to earn party tickets.

Growing discontent was given voice by pamphlets and leaflets such as *Pambana*, which styled itself as the Organ of the December 12 Movement, and which were circulated clandestinely on university campuses. George Anyona and Odinga unsuccessfully tried to register the Kenya Socialist Alliance party. In June of 1982, Parliament turned Kenya into a single party state by law in a debate that took under an hour.

The failed coup of August of the same year, a naked chal-

lenge to Moi's power, changed the man and his politics forever. Moi called the 1983 snap General Election hot on the heels of his claim that some foreign powers were grooming a certain individual to seize power. The election was used as a sieve to rid the system of elements believed, and tagged, to be anti-Nyayo.

Moi transformed Kanu into an all-powerful machine, suspension or expulsion from which spelt reputational ruin, pariah status and exclusion from politics and decision-making for the affected individuals, their families and friends.

The Kanu National Disciplinary Committee became a most powerful politburo, feared and loathed in equal measure, as the enforcer of the *nyayo* doctrine.

The massively rigged 1988 General Election resulted in the most weak-kneed Parliament Kenya had ever seen. With the Sixth Parliament a veritable House of sycophants, Kanu's legal dictatorship was complete, but with it also were sown the seeds of opposi-

tion to political monopoly and exclusion.

In 1990, Kenneth Matiba, a former Cabinet minister, and Charles Rubia, a former Mayor of Nairobi, belled the cat. They called a news conference and demanded the return of multi-party politics. Kenya's politics would never be the same again. The duo were thrown into detention, but there was no stopping the demand for, and march to, pluralism.

Under pressure locally and from bilateral partners, Moi relented and at a meeting of Kanu National Delegates Conference in December of 1991 at the Moi International Sports Centre in Nairobi, announced the return of multi-party politics after a generation. But there was a catch. Section 2a, which made Kanu the sole party in the land, was expunged, but what was essentially a single party Constitution remained intact.

Pleas by Mr Paul Muite for a review of the Constitution before the 1992 General Election fell on deaf ears, and so a new struggle was born – the fight for a new Constitution in synch with the era of plural politics. It took 18 years for this dream to be realised and this side of the watershed has seen Kenyans enjoy a Bill of Rights and devolved governance, which are enshrined in the Constitution.

Kenya's Constitution is progressive because, per former Chief Justice Willy Mutunga, every chapter of it tells a story that Kenyans do not want repeated, be it in regard to human rights, sovereignty of the people, the Judiciary, the new institutions, security, public debt or finance. The Constitution, he said in a previous interview with *The Weekly Review*, tells Kenyans about what must not be done again.

As politicians and lawyers are wont to say, no Constitution is perfect, but changing the supreme law is even more difficult because, as in other cases regarding public participation, the people of Kenya must sanction the change. Protecting the Constitution, the bulwark of their rights and guard rail against tyranny, is a cherished *madaraka* (responsibility) of Kenyans.

## kenya lens

## ■ THE RUTO WAY

## HUSTLERS AND BUSTLERS

**For the President, politics is not a distraction but a full-time occupation around which everything else revolves, including business and religion**

● BY MACHARIA GAITHO

If there are a few factors that define President William Ruto's leadership style beyond aggressive consolidation of power, they are his hands-on approach, close attention to detail and mastery of the policy platforms on which he was elected.

On May 23, his social media propagandist and nominee for Cabinet Administrative Secretary in the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Digital Community, Dennis Itumbi, came out with a revealing post on Twitter: "The Parliamentary Group Meeting at State House is literally a classroom. MPs, Women Reps, Senators, found notes, pens and notebook, and from 8am, it has been a proper classroom on Finance Bill, Housing, Health and Government plan. The first class was taught by President @WilliamsRuto". That is a president who takes it as his personal responsibility to educate his legislators on the finer details of the Finance Bill and other sensitive budgetary and policy proposals that are facing strong headwinds.

Previous presidents would also have hosted Members of the National Assembly and the Senate to impress on them the importance of uniting behind the government when the Bills came to the vote in Parliament, but it would more likely have been about using the bully pulpit to whip them into line, rather than an educational session.

Apart from Ruto himself, Principal Secretaries and government technocrats spent the day at State House taking the MPs through the finer aspects of taxation, petroleum pricing, the controversial housing development levy, universal health care and other policy proposals. The intention was to rebut the fierce public criticism around what is seen as over-taxation and policies that hit the poor, which might have even Kenya Kwanza MPs wary of backing unpopular measures. But there can be no doubt that even as



President William Ruto [ R ] is handed the instruments of power [sword] by his predecessor, Uhuru Kenyatta, after he took the oath of office at Kasarani International Stadium on September 13, 2022.

he employs education and persuasion to get his troops into line, Ruto will also have his whip very much at the ready with the clear message that any MP who defies the party line will face consequences.

That is the Ruto who oozes charm but takes no prisoners in what are clear efforts since taking office last September to consolidate power by neutralising the opposition while also ensuring strict discipline within his own ranks. Ruto might sometimes feel like a control freak, but the same week also showed that he is secure and confident enough to delegate power, including allowing Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua to chair Cabinet meetings.

A day before the State House tutorial, Gachagua had come out with

his own Tweet: "Reviewing progress of implementation of The Plan. Today, I chaired a Committee of the whole cabinet, the first, at the DP official residence in Karen, Nairobi. The Ruto Administration is on track in rebuilding our Nation. *Mbele iko sawa*".

That might seem like a routine assignment, but since Independence, all Presidents have jealously guarded their prerogative on the chairing of cabinet meetings. A 'committee of the whole' cabinet as that chaired by Gachagua last Monday is a cabinet meeting in all but name, which is very distinct from smaller cabinet sub-committees that may occasionally be chaired by the Deputy President, Prime Cabinet Secretary Musalia Mudavadi or any other

minister as assigned.

In allowing his deputy to chair a cabinet meeting, President Ruto might well be borrowing a leaf from his predecessor, Uhuru Kenyatta. In 2019, Kenyatta signed an Executive Order giving his Cabinet Secretary for Interior, Fred Matiang'i, authority to chair a key cabinet committee on the implementation of development programmes, whose membership included all cabinet secretaries, the Attorney-General and the Head of the Public Service.

That was essentially the full cabinet, elevating Matiang'i to the level of a *de facto* Prime Minister in all but name, and earning him the moniker 'Super CS'. It was also the appointment that marked Uhuru's formal sidelining of Ruto, his then Deputy President who had thitherto chaired various cabinet sub-committees on delivery of development programmes, but was now left with no specific functions.

Apart from stripping Ruto of responsibilities, Uhuru's vote of confidence in Matiang'i was also seen in a way to reflect his own laid-back nature and distaste for details and hard work. Uhuru essentially handed over most of his core responsibilities to Matiang'i, and a tradition established since Independence of the President chairing cabinet meetings at least once a week, every Thursday, was abandoned. The cabinet under Uhuru from then on met only sporadically, mainly to ratify decisions reached under Matiang'i's stewardship. If that arrangement was an example of the President ceding key day-to-day functions of office so that he could retreat to a life of leisure and relaxation, it also marks a key difference between President Uhuru and President Ruto. When the latter started his insurgency while still serving as Deputy President, his minions were dispatched on the campaign trail to hit out at the President as lazy, disengaged and a bit too distracted by drink. That contrasted with depic-

Continued on Page 6

## kenya lens

# Ruto the class teacher: A hands-on approach

Continued from Page 5

tion of Ruto as hard-working, energetic, sober and in touch with the common man. It was also what gave rise to the hustler vs dynasty campaign theme, with Ruto portrayed as the son of peasants who reached the top through sheer hard work and Uhuru as the spoilt privileged scion of First President Jomo Kenyatta, who let others do the heavy lifting as everything was handed to him on a silver platter.

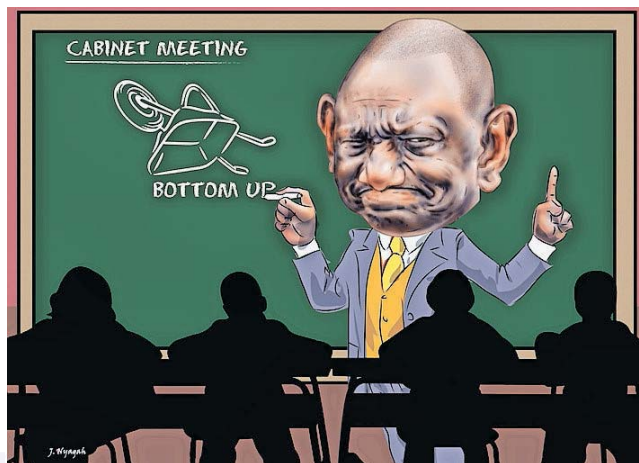
A look at the Ruto Presidency and his leadership style invariably must bring comparisons between the two men, who came into office tied at the hip. The 'UhuRuto' package was elected in 2013 radiating youthful energy and enthusiasm. The dynamic – or digital – duo caught the public imagination with their first cabinet announcement when they appeared dressed in identical fashion: rolled up sleeves and no jackets or ties, signalling a break from the stolid old ways of doing things. Uhuru elected President at 52 and Ruto his deputy at 47 indeed marked a generational change as President Mwai Kibaki left office at the age of 82 (having been elected in 2002 aged 71).

But even as they trumpeted youthful dynamism, Uhuru and Ruto were as different as can be on account of different upbringings and approaches to life.

Uhuru had always been the relaxed, fun-loving 'royal' who had been dragged into the family business, politics, almost reluctantly. He could show steely determination and a ruthless streak when need be, as with running two successful presidential campaigns, but he often gave the impression that he'd much rather be engaged in more leisurely pursuits than the hurly-burly of politics.

If Uhuru at some point was the party animal, Ruto was, from the word go, the political animal. For him politics is not a distraction but a full-time occupation around which everything else revolves, including business and religion. In that regard, Ruto is probably more like one of his mentors, former President Daniel arap Moi.

Like Moi, who succeeded Jomo Kenyatta in 1978 and reigned a record 24 years till 2002, Ruto proclaims a deep Christian faith and is a teetotaler, renowned for being ex-



tremely hard-working and a stickler for discipline and time-keeping.

Ruto, like Moi, is known for moderation, keeping a healthy lifestyle, but even going the extra mile with asceticism, including strict diets evidenced by the recent weight-loss that has spawned rumours of ill-health. A strict personal regimen that reportedly includes cycles of fasting should keep Ruto trim and fit well into his Presidency, in contrast to Uhuru, who came into office impressively lean but had developed an expanded waistline and puffy circles around his eyes by the time of departure.

Like Moi, Ruto, despite his frugal ways, is also one of the sharpest dressers around, displaying a penchant for tailor-made designer suits complemented by top labels in shoes, watches and other accessories. The self-proclaimed hustler's enjoyment of the finer things in life apparently does not distract him from the business of leadership. In terms of pursuing his agenda, Ruto leaves nothing to chance as demonstrated with the State House tutorial. The hands-on approach is also evident with the manner in which, from the start, he moved to consolidate his position by aggressively poaching elected leaders from Raila Odinga's Azimio la Umoja coalition, therefore securing crucial majorities in both the National Assembly and the Senate.

Well aware of the frailties that plagued previous ruling movements – including his own Jubilee union with Uhuru between 2013 and 2022, President Kibaki's NARC between 2002 and 2007 and the Grand Coalition government from 2008 to 2013 – Ruto set out to

build for his 2022 bid a political vehicle he fully controlled. Initially, he ruled out a coalition arrangement, insisting that anyone supporting his presidential campaign fold their own parties and join his United Democratic Alliance.

Most of the small one-man outfits complied, but Ruto, the pragmatist, had to relax his stance in order to bring on board the western Kenya regional formation, Musalia Mudavadi's ANC and Moses Wetangula's Ford Kenya, that could secure electoral victory.

That kind of alliance-building was no different than that displayed by all his four predecessors. Jubilee was a union of his then URP and Uhuru's TNA. When Ruto fell out with Uhuru, he saw the President get into bed with erstwhile rival Raila to keep him in check. Kibaki had his grand coalition with Raila to secure the peace following the 2007 post-electoral violence, and before that the union with Raila that secured victory in 2002.

There was also Moi's short-lived alliance with Raila after the 1997 elections. And in the period leading to Independence, the senior Kenyatta had teamed up with Oginga Odinga, Raila's father, under the Kanu banner to fend off Moi's and Ronald Ngala's Kadu. Then, as Jomo fell out with Odinga in 1966, he brought in Kadu, with Moi as Vice-President, to help him keep a newly-minted opposition at bay. That is the kind of alliance-building common in Kenya, where political parties are just temporary vehicles for acquisition of power rather than movements bound by any ideological platforms.

Ruto's UDA, and the wider Kenya

Kwanza coalition, has tried to sell the Hustler Nation and the Bottom Up economic strategy as an ideology or guiding philosophy. However, the challenge in coming years will be retaining a unified front as the Mudavadi-Wetangula grouping moves to counter Gachagua's central Kenya formation ahead of a succession tussle sure to start being played out at the re-election campaigns for 2027.

In the meantime, Ruto still has to fend off the threat posed by Raila, whose on-off, on-again street protests are proving a real distraction at a time he is buffeted on all sides by an economy in turmoil and growing public disenchantment.

Apart from often acknowledging Moi as his political mentor, Ruto has pointed to Kibaki as the President he would like to emulate. That can only be in relation to the manner in which the Third President swiftly revived the economy from the destruction of the Moi era, rather than chaotic political leadership and responsibility for the 2007-2008 post-election violence. A former Finance minister, Kibaki came into office with a stellar reputation as a very sharp economist. He managed to steady the ship and launch impressive social and infrastructure programmes despite diminished capacity following a road accident just before the 2002 elections and a stroke soon after taking office.

With all his mastery of facts and figures around the Kenya Kwanza agenda, however, Ruto has not been able to replicate what might be termed the Kibaki miracle. Even with the debt hole inherited from Uhuru's Jubilee administration – glossing over the fact he served as Deputy President for the ten years – taken into account, the Ruto administration has been unable to display a clear grasp of what it will take to stop further slide into threat of default. Instead, it seems to have invested everything into pushing questionable and unpopular policies such as the housing programme it is unable to sell to the citizenry, even if MPs might be persuaded. Ruto has also been distracted by politics, moving to shore up his power base with manoeuvres more reminiscent of Moi than Kibaki. Eventually, he will have to decide which of the two men he will want to be remembered for learning from.



## kenya lens

## ■ PLAYING POLITICS WITH HISTORY

MAU MAU: **EMPTY** PROMISES

**The Kenya Kwanza government appears determined to keep the narrative around Independence freedom fighters alive and to use it as a political weapon**

● BY OSCAR OBONYO

**F**our months before last year's General Election, the founding First Lady, Mama Ngina Kenyatta, conducted a formal ceremony of shaving the dreadlocked hair of 93-year-old Mau Mau heroine, Mary Muthoni wa Kirima. Although meant to symbolise the eventual fulfilment of the Independence freedom army, which kicked off its activities in 1952, the timing of the shaving was curious.

Coming at a time when her son, the fourth President Uhuru Kenyatta, had endorsed an "outsider", Raila Odinga, as his preferred successor, the event at Pembe Tatu estate in Nyeri town was punctuated by political overtones. It was partly geared at demonstrating national cohesion, with Field Marshal Muthoni, as she is respectfully referred to, calling for unity, peace and coexistence among Kenyans.

Speaking at the event, Mama Ngina buttressed the unity call, noting that other communities, besides the Kikuyu, had participated in the struggle for Independence too, "except that our people bore the brunt of the fight because Mt Kenya region was the battleground and many were killed, maimed and displaced".

But Rigathi Gachagua, then Mathira MP and deputy presidential candidate, dismissed the ceremony as a political ploy to win over the support of Mau Mau heroes. Indeed, the Mau Mau narrative has over the years been used for power games, with players trying to outmanoeuvre each other for political mileage. It is an even bigger factor for political mobilisation in the Mt Kenya region.

As President William Ruto presides over this year's Madaraka Day event, which marks the day in 1963 that Kenya attained internal self-rule, the Mau Mau question is likely

to feature and linger on in subsequent national holidays. In any case, the June 1 celebrations revolve around the exploits of Mau Mau fighters and all those who participated in one way or the other towards the realisation of self-governance.

This is deliberate by design, at least judging from the sentiments of Gachagua, now Deputy President, and National Assembly's Leader of Majority, Kimani Ichung'wah. The top two political figures from the Mt Kenya region in government imply that

the Mau Mau narrative is set to stay on their agenda for the rest of Kenya Kwanza's tenure in office. Koigi wa Wamwere, one of the heroes of the so-called second liberation, attributes the DP's obsession with the Mau Mau narrative to a political leadership trend in Mt Kenya that has over the decades seen the Independence power players – including Kenya's first President, Jomo Kenyatta, and the likes of former influential members of the Cabinet Mwai Kibaki, Charles Njonjo and John Michuki – seize or hand over power, as well as wealth, to their children. According to Wamwere, Gachagua realised that if this trend continued, he stood no chance of ascending to

power in the post-Ruto era, hence the notion of sustaining the Mau Mau argument.

This is a politically profitable card to play, according to Wamwere, for personal interests and, of course, for President Ruto, whose seat Gachagua hopes to inherit. The Mau Mau narrative is particularly welcome considering that the offspring of the freedom fighters – who are the majority in the populous region – feel like they have over the decades been elbowed out of power or denied leadership opportunities.

The leadership in question is not confined to the field of politics.

Those who gained various leadership positions at Independence got a head start

in financial soundness as well and are believed to control power and business in the country today. And this is the lot that the Mau Mau political narrative targets on the basis that it is "unduly advantaged" and living large at the expense of the poor majority.

The Mau Mau question is not entirely different from Kenya Kwanza's "hustler nation" mantra. The two appeal to the underprivileged by harping on social and economic status and pitting the haves against the have-nots. It is a scenario that Wamwere warns could backfire by igniting class wars.

But as Ichung'wah observes, the Mau Mau issue is not just emerging now. He claims that it is just that the people "have not had the dem-

ocratic freedom they now have to speak about the fact that they have all along been suppressed".

The politician, who is highly critical of former President Uhuru Kenyatta, views the current problem in light of misuse of state power. He alleges that, in the same way post-colonial administrations "took away the people's factor of production", subsequent leaders have used the same authority "to loot our factors of production and impoverish the nation". This background, says Ichung'wah, is what has further brought the Mau Mau discussion to prominence.

The DP and the founding First Lady have been consistent in this debate, with the latter protesting what she considers the hijacking of the Mau Mau legacy by individuals who neither fought to wrest Kenya's freedom from the jaws of the colonial masters nor understand the weight and meaning of the struggle.

Her argument confirms fears that the Mau Mau narrative may have become a weapon for political scores. Only last month, she appeared to take a swipe at the DP by asking Kenyans to be vigilant and jealously guard the gains achieved by those who sacrificed a lot for the country. Speaking at her Muthaiga home in Nairobi, she claimed that the real war veterans of the Mau Mau were quickly being overshadowed by masqueraders and asked authorities to recognise and fetter the real heroes. The DP immediately responded by challenging the Kenyatta family to offer a piece of their expansive land to descendants of the Mau Mau descendants who, he claimed, live in deplorable conditions.

The interest in this subject is huge and, as demonstrated by past incidents, the ruling class has in some instances overlooked Mau Mau vet-



Continued on Page 10

kenya lens

■ ECONOMY LACKS CAPACITY TO CREATE DECENT JOBS

# When they woo Mau Mau heroes

Continued from Page 9

erans or even attempted to rewrite political history. The funerals of nationalist Bildad Kaggia, one of the famed Kapenguria-Six, and Mukami Kimathi, wife of slain Mau Mau General Dedan Kimathi, are examples that particularly stand out for Wamwere.

In March 2005, leaders in the Mwai Kibaki administration, including Internal Security Minister John Michuki, took full control of events leading up to Kaggia's interment. Except for their commendable post-Independence national building duty, Kibaki and Michuki had no known credentials in the struggle for Independence. Similarly, when Mukami was laid to rest at her family home in Njabini, Nyandarua County, a fortnight ago, Mau Mau veterans complained of being sidelined. Their national chairman, Gitu wa Kahengeri, was not accorded an opportunity to speak at the event, which was dominated by speeches on taxation and the housing levy from President Ruto, his deputy, Prime Cabinet Secretary Musalia Mudavadi and opposition chief Raila.

The DP, a self-proclaimed "son of Mau Mau", used the opportunity to accuse the political leadership before him of ignoring the heroes of the fight for freedom, their children and grandchildren. The timing was perfect and his plea to the Kenyatta family to share some of their land with the "children of Mau Mau" resonated with his audience.

Kiharu Member of Parliament Ndindi Nyoro, who is one of main proponents of the Mau Mau narrative, nonetheless denies existence of deliberate political motives behind the conversation. The people of Mt Kenya region, he argues, are only pronouncing themselves on their identity, "and if this works for us politically, so be it".

The vocal legislator nonetheless opines that the political history of the Mau Mau gave certain people in their midst "undue advantage", and that it is the Kenya Kwanza administration's duty to correct the existing economic inequalities. By admission, Nyoro is confirming the Mau Mau question as an agenda of the Ruto administration.

Wamwere discounts the notion that the President belongs to the so-called hustler class, or the economically downtrodden, nor do any of the senior political players in the current administration. In 2027, they will "no longer be able to project themselves as hustlers". He argues that political realities on the ground are dynamic and sophisticated, and that players must continue reinventing their narratives. But the one on the Mau Mau seems to have stood the test of time and will become irrelevant any time soon.

# HITS AND MISSES, WINS AND LOSSES

**At 60, Kenya holds the top spot as the region's financial hub... it leads in all segments, including cross-border lending, foreign equities turnover, foreign exchange turnover and private equity**



At Independence in 1963, Kenya's basic physical and institutional infrastructure, the educational levels of its population and the depth of the private sector were all considered among the best in Africa.



In what ranks as one of the most expansive retrenchment programmes ever, the KPTC cut its staff from 17,480 to 7,154. Today, 25 years later, Telkom Kenya – its successor – has a workforce of just about 2,000 employees.



The Kenya Railways Corporation, was also privatised in April 2006 under a concession deal to a South African businessman in what turned out to be one of the most socially disruptive privatisation transactions in history. Some 6,000 employees were sent home.



Yet, long-term economic trends have been disappointing. The average GDP growth rate declined from 7 per cent in the 1970s to 2.2 per cent between 1990 and 1997, falling below the average population growth rate of 2.9 per cent. Kenya's 2.2 growth rate in the 1990s does not compare favourably with those of Tanzania (4 per cent) and Uganda (5.6 per cent).



Despite collecting close to 13 per cent of GDP in taxes, the country has been unable to provide and maintain the basic economic and social infrastructure to support private investments. More than ever before, many Kenyans are having to put up with low-paying, low quality jobs.

• By JAINDI KISERO

The defunct Kenya Posts and Telecommunications Corporation (KPTC), which was one of the biggest employers in Kenya's history, was privatised in 2007. In what

ranks as one of the most expansive retrenchment programmes ever, the corporation cut its staff from 17,480 to 7,154. Today, 25 years later, Telkom Kenya – its successor – has a workforce of just about 2,000 employees. According to a staff audit that was con-

## kenya lens

ducted in August 2005 as part of preparations for privatisation of the corporation, it was found to have employed 1,009 watchmen, 1,028 porters and 1,115 messengers. The number of university graduates in its payroll was a paltry 399.

Another big employer in the economy at the time, the Kenya Railways Corporation, was also privatised in April 2006 under a concession deal to a South African businessman in what turned out to be one of the most socially disruptive privatisation transactions in history. Some 6,000 employees were sent home. Hardly a year after, in October 2007, the South Africans sent home another 440 employees without severance pay.

If I wanted to summarise what has happened to the economy 60 years after Independence, I would say that the most telling shortcoming in the country's development strategies has been failure by successive regimes to register the singular importance of the unemployment problem.

In all the major policy documents, the gravity of the problem was acknowledged. At every opportunity, the determination to resolve the problem was proclaimed. But this was never really reflected in actual policies, especially at operational levels.

The policy of automatic employment of university graduates and diploma holders from other government training institutions was abandoned under the regime of structural adjustment programmes in the '80s. A rising proportion of the workforce is in low-value and relatively insecure jobs.

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The Nairobi Expressway. While the growth rates the country has been posting have been respectable, that growth has been increasingly debt-financed and in unproductive sectors.

maintain the basic economic and social infrastructure to support private investments. More than ever before, many Kenyans are having to put up with low-paying, low quality jobs.

As a daily commuter in Nairobi, most of the workers in matatus or buses going to work in the morning will be hair stylists, fitness instructors, club bouncers, employees of companies offering cleaning services, and people who work where cars are washed using pressure machines.

A good number will be motor vehicle mechanics, workers in M-Pesa outlets, or employees of call centres, telephone repair shops or shops offering photocopying and document binding services. M-Pesa shops and car-wash businesses have sprouted in every corner of the capital.

In the Central Business District, the formerly ubiquitous shops owned by Kenyan Indians are disappearing and being replaced by 10 by 10-foot kiosks selling un-customed clothes, footwear, mobile phones and computers, which invariably will have been brought into the country through Kismayu or Eldoret Airport. Every other town has a "Garissa Lodge" — jargon for shops selling un-customed goods.

While policy makers reel out statistics showing how hundreds of thousands of jobs are created in the informal sector, the issue of poor quality jobs and the fact that the economy has lost capacity to create decent opportunities for the people is hardly articulated. Do we even pause to ask about the quality of jobs in the informal sector — working conditions, working hours, or the return on effort?

Work in the informal sector is

characterised by maximum physical exertion, inhuman working hours and meagre returns on effort.

What can you say of an able-bodied hawker, who walks hours on end from bar to bar in Nairobi's Eastlands, his only stock of capital being a handful of second-hand sports shoes and T-shirts? It is just another form of joblessness.

Even though the evidence may be anecdotal, there would appear to be a direct relation between informalisation of the economy — the explosive growth of slums, the matatu culture, the hawking menace — and urban insecurity. Policy must seek to eliminate this sector so that we can move citizens away from the beastly working conditions to sectors that can offer decent and durable jobs.

There are several other trends I find worrisome. We have done very well in terms of jerking up infrastructure spending. We have a fairly strong financial sector, but the growth of public sector debt as a percentage of GDP is just too high. At 60 years as a free nation, it is an opportune time to look at the changes and plot the major trends taking place in the country's economic landscape.

A comprehensive analysis of the broad economic trends would not fit in this space. Cramming this space with humdrum numbers about GDP growth rates, fixed capital formation, labour productivity, inflation trends, the exchange rate trends or any other measures of quantitative development will only obscure the enduring trends in the economy.

What is possible is the flagging of broad trends about quality of life issues and pointing out the fundamental changes happening

under our very noses but which we refuse to notice or accept as the economic realities of our time.

A few trends stick out. The main long-term trend in the economy has been the shift away from manufacturing to deindustrialisation that manifests in the consistent decline in manufacturing value added to GDP from double digit levels in the 1960s to the current 7 per cent.

Second, finance, insurance, real estate and telecommunications, and retail consumption have become the most dynamic and the only growing parts of the economy. Private sector investment and growth remain relatively subdued as manifested in stagnant private sector credit growth to GDP.

At 60, Kenya holds the top spot as the region's financial hub. It leads in all segments, including cross-border lending, foreign equities turnover, foreign exchange turnover, insurance premiums, fund management and private equity.

Third, although public sector funding of infrastructure — roads, ports, railways, electricity and fibre optic cables — has been substantial, the domination of infrastructure by Chinese state banks and contractors who must be paid by Chinese lenders at source has led to a situation where most infrastructure spending is the kind that doesn't inject liquidity into the macro-economy.

Fourth, public finances are in the deep red, limiting the ability of the government to use fiscal policy. While the growth rates the country has been posting have been respectable, that growth has been increasingly debt-financed and in unproductive sectors.

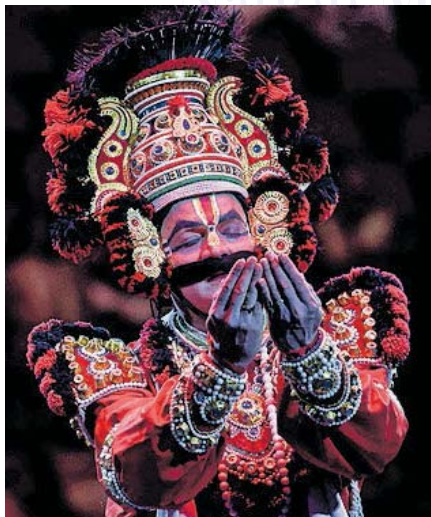
# the limelight



Russian President Vladimir Putin attends a meeting with Bosnian Serb leader at the Kremlin in Moscow on May 23. PHOTO | AFP



This handout photograph taken on May 23 shows Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky (second right) talking with officers during his visit to the forward positions of the Armed Forces of Ukraine in the Vugledar-Maryinka defence zone, Donetsk region, on the occasion of the Marine Day, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. PHOTO | AFP



An artist performs at an event to welcome India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, at the Qudos Arena in Sydney on May 23. PHOTO | AFP



French-Senegalese director Ramata-Toulaye Sy (left) arrives with Senegalese actress Khady Mane for the screening of the film 'Banel E Adama' (Banel and Adama) during the 76th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France, on May 20. PHOTO | AFP



Mandy, 14, mourns during the funeral of her mother, Leslie Ferman Murcia, 34, a victim of a stampede at the Cuscatlan stadium during a Salvadoran First Division soccer match, in San Salvador on May 22. PHOTO | AFP



An Indonesian man rides two bulls at a traditional bull racing event, locally called "Karapan Sapi Brujul", in Probolinggo on May 21. PHOTO | AFP



View of one of the Cantalloq aqueducts, built by people belonging to the Nazca culture, around 1600 years ago in Nazca, southern Peru on May 16. PHOTO | AFP

# The Aren



# IT'S PAINTASTIC!

*Nairobi artist and graphic designer Victor Omondi has painted his way to a successful career with his astounding cityscapes*

OPEN SPACE

# Why we must not review presidential term limits

Checks and balances may not be effective in countries where freedom of speech and association is restricted

• BY EDWARD OPANY

**F**afi MP Salah Yakub once sparked outrage when he proposed scrapping the two-term presidential term and raising the age limit for running for the seat to 75. A presidential term should not be limited to two terms, according to the UDA legislator, because it denies performing leaders the opportunity to develop the nation. In 2010, 68.6 per cent of Kenyans adopted the new Constitution. According to Article 142(2), a person shall not hold office as President for more than two terms. By including this clause, Kenyans who voted for the Constitution made it clear for how long they wanted a person to hold that office, having witnessed President Moi's 24-year rule.

This is not the first time the country has been drawn into a debate over the removal of presidential term limits. The popular initiative, *Punguza Mzigo*, for example, proposed a single seven-year term. Many African societies held their rulers accountable for their actions and had mechanisms in place to remove them from power. Societies used various systems of checks and balances to prevent abuse of power.

It's worth noting that 50 of Africa's 54 countries have presidential terms, the majority of which are five years. Out of the 50, 40 have set a maximum number of terms, almost all with a maximum of two. A majority have presidential systems (36); nine have semi-presidential governments; six have parliamentary systems; and three are monarchies. Term limits have been proven to encourage peaceful transition, with the latest case being the August 9, 2022 General Election, when then-President Uhuru Kenyatta peacefully transferred power to President William Ruto even when it was clear that he was not his candidate of choice.

The presence of time constraints allows for the emergence of new leaders, some of whom may be better than their predecessors or have different perspectives on leadership. The com-

bination of one leader with no successor in sight, and an unplanned, possibly violent transition, or even the sudden death of the long-term leader, can be disastrous.

Term limits aid in the promotion of accountability. When an incumbent has two terms, they will do everything in their power to keep the promises they made to voters in order to secure the second term, and after reelection, will be preoccupied with preserving their legacy. However, without term limits, the president can potentially monopolise the position, which encourages dictatorship and leads to less,

or no, accountability. Countries with the longest-serving leaders have experienced human rights violations, arbitrary arrests and detentions, restrictions on freedom of expression and general disregard for the rule of law. Lessons from countries without term limits show

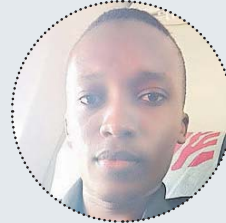
that some leaders cling to power for decades and eventually lose the ability to generate new ideas, while others become convinced that they are somehow indispensable, resulting in some countries becoming politically and economically unstable in comparison to those that have term limits and adhere to the rule of law and constitutionalism.

Furthermore, countries where leaders disregard constitutional term limits tend to trample upon people's rights. This means that checks and balances may not be effective in such countries where, for instance, freedom of speech and association is restricted.

Based on our own experiences, there is no doubt that Kenyans were aware of the facts and benefits of having time limits enshrined in the Constitution. Some things have now become ingrained in our system, including multipartism, civil liberties, presidential term limits and devolution.

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



**Aineah Marabi**

Madaraka Day signifies Kenya's struggle for self-determination. It serves as a reminder of the sacrifices made by freedom fighters and the progress made in building a sovereign state. Madaraka Day celebrations provide an opportunity to reflect on Kenya's history, honour its leaders and unite citizens in a shared sense of national identity and pride. May we dwell in unity, peace and liberty, plenty be found within our borders. God bless Kenya, God bless Africa.

— A software developer based in Nairobi



**Newton Wasike**

I don't think it is justifiable to celebrate this date because we are slaves in our own country. The whites are still controlling our economy using the dollar. Kenya is rich in terms of resources but they are controlled by developed countries. We are still using the coloniser's language in public places like Parliament, and their religion is still dominant. We copy their systems of governance, we still depend on them for medicine and many other things.

— A student at Kisii University



**Carmulus Isutsa**

Kenyans are justified to commemorate Madaraka Day with greater emphasis on the lives lost during the fight for freedom. The events leading up to Independence will always be a brutal reminder of what our forefathers had to endure at the hands of the cruel British administrators. Freedom was not theirs to give, nor ours to take. The Berlin Conference shouldn't have been convened in the first place.

— A student at Kenyatta University



**Grace Kerubo**

This is a day to celebrate our heroes, who gave their all for our Independence. Their blood, sweat and tears bore fruit. They sacrificed to ensure Kenya is free from colonial rule. This is the day we get to celebrate our forefathers. Madaraka Day also reminds us that we are one people, united by our love for our nation. It gives us hope for the future.

— A student at Kisii University

UNLOCK POTENTIAL OF THE YOUTH



# ADDRESS BOTTLENECKS THAT HINDER GROWTH

• BY MOSES OJUANG'

The present economic conditions are unfavourable for the development of the youth. It is a time of anxiety and only extremely optimistic people may sit and opt to wait out the bad times, hoping that sooner or later, things will get better. That would be a defeatist move, a wounding stance since time waits for no man.

In the past three or four decades, many parents believed that only university education would be good enough for their children to get a good start in life. The current situation has proven that faith to be a fallacy.

Many degree holders from our higher institutions of learning have not found any employment to begin climbing up the career ladder or to earn capital for investment. Yet the idle soothsayers known as motivational speakers are selling the gospel of self-advancement without reference to a tenable starting point!

To be honest, there must be something one can sell to the world and that thing must come from a skill. Education is good for socialising us and making us confident in daily interactions with the human world.

It is also a necessary mode for acquiring requisite skills and language to express ourselves and market our abilities. Theoretical studies are important too: technical ability in the work place, technical knowhow and theoretical framing give us the most progressive and competent workers.

Unfortunately, many technical institutions of yore were turned into universities and lost their direction for decades. But the tide is changing albeit slowly. Technical education has woken up again to its importance and we now see many young people attracted to courses being offered by Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions. Here, the students get the practical skills required in the country's job market and can depend on those skills to earn a decent living for themselves and their families for lifetime.

TVET institutions are run under the supervision of the TVET Authority, a public corporate agency established under the TVET Act No. 29 of 2013 to regulate and coordinate training in the country through licensing, registration and accreditation of programmes, institutions and trainers.

The powers and functions of the authority are to regulate and coordinate training; inspect, license, register and accredit training in-

Many parents believe that only university education is good enough for their children to get a good start in life



Graduands follow proceedings at Mukurweini Technical Training Institute in Nyeri County on May 19. Some 890 learners graduated with diplomas and certificates in various fields. JOSEPH KANYI | NATION

stitutions; accredit and inspect programmes and courses; promote access to training programmes; determine national technical and vocational training objectives; and assure quality and relevance of programmes.

Those are very clear-cut mandates and we would have generally applauded the work done by this body if we did not come across some glaring disparities in the distribution of these important institutions in the country.

The public institutions that fall under the TVET rule are not as many as would be expected and even the most casual mapping of their locations in the country gives a skewed picture. Some counties have very few, while others are over represented.

It would be easy to presume that since the

students are Kenyan, they can just go across the country and learn wherever they wish. But this is easier said than done, considering the type of courses the students wishes to pursue and the financial implications of the cross-country movement. If one wanted to train in mechanics, for instance, and did not have sufficient finances to do the course far from home, it would become a frustrating burden, creating many unwilling dropouts.

The North-Eastern Region, the Coast Region and many counties have very few TVET institutions. We don't know how the big towns and some counties got the lion's share of these institutions. All we know is that it is time to spread them near every needy Kenyan.

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## SOCIAL MEDIA BROUGHT HIS ART TO THE WORLD

**PICTURE THIS!**

Victor Omondi, a realism painter, puts final touches on one of his paintings at his home in Syokimau on May 23. PHOTO | FRANCIS NDERITU

● BY EDDY ASHIOYA

**C**hoose a job you love and you'll never have to work a day in your life, advised Confucius, the ancient Chinese philosopher.

Victor Omondi must have mopped up that kibitz with his ears because for the last six years, he has never had to work a day in his life. Artist, graphic designer and Nairobi documenter, Omondi is also somewhat of a Renaissance man. But in this age of gender polarisation and short attention spans, it is perhaps no surprise that most of his clients have only accessed him through the small screen. In fact, if social media had never been invented, most of us probably wouldn't know who he was. I first came into contact with his work through the friend of a friend on Twitter, where he had uploaded a 60-something second time-lapse of him painting Nairobi's cityscape. It was love at first sight.

### **Nairobi artist and graphic designer Victor Omondi has painted his way to a successful career with his eye-catching cityscapes**

"I have always loved art, drawing and sketching. I was the naughty student sketching in the textbooks, but I realised I was becoming a better artist with time. I was lucky to have competition from my classmates and we would rival each other. Little did we know we were sharpening one another's pencils – so to speak. In high school, I joined the Art and Design class, winning all interschool competitions. I didn't need a seer to tell me this was what I was born to do. I later joined the BuruBuru Institute of Fine Arts, where I refined my craft before joining a media company as a graphic designer. But in 2017 I left my job. Now I am a full-time artist and

though I may have a few regrets, this is not one of them."

With deep-set eyes and dreadlocks, perhaps the quintessential uniform of every other artist, Omondi speaks like he is painting. But he isn't any other artist. His paintings are befitting of any of the cathedrals of Kenyan art, and he is especially drawn to Nairobi and its bustling streets and macabre avenues. Why Nairobi? "I was born and raised here. When people talk about Nai they highlight only the negative side. But I want to show the other side that is less talked about. That is why I paint streetscapes of Nairobi."

'People' in this case would be me and hundreds of others who

are disillusioned by this city. It is overcrowded, noisy and smells like a graveyard of dreams. Nairobi often plagiarises Lagos, whereas Demi Ajayi writes in *Finding Lagos: A Jazz Tribute to an African City*: "Dreams may take their time to fruition, and so the citizens of Lagos are best described thus: those who have made it and those who are in the process of making it."

Depending on whom you ask and when, Omondi has either made it as an artist or is in the process of making it. He recently made around KSh385,000 for a commissioned wall painting. "But it was a two-month job," he is quick to demur. What determines the pricing of his art is mostly the size and the complexity. Things like sunsets can be done in a short period but cityscapes take much longer as you have to capture every inch of the city. "The details take longer and translate to higher costs."

He is one of few local artists who tread the gossamer fine





Victor Omondi with one of his pieces at his home in Syokimau on May 23. PHOTO | FRANCIS NDERITU

line between pleasure and pain, paycheck and passion. He can work on up to four projects a month, without overpromising nor putting himself under undue pressure. "It takes me an average of one week to finish large paintings, but smaller ones take a day or two."

With philosophical zest and slow brush strokes, the room quickly fades around him, cue for him to fade too, leaving behind a boy-shaped vapour. Likewise, his mind is fleet and dexterous and artful in private conversation. I ask whether he has ever been paid with exposure, itself a fraternity to which he would rather die than pledge himself. "It is difficult for everyone. I worked as a graphic designer so I was already familiar with how to price and value my work. Experience taught me to see the red flags when clients would not pay. But I also insist on taking a 60 per cent downpayment upfront. That is how I have managed to earn a living from art without going mad."

Of course, he says, he has been paid with exposure too. This is where he was bloodied and which eventually became the rock on which he built his church. "It's not prudent to pay anyone with exposure but I am glad I went through that because in some cases it 'exposed' me to different markets." The first time anyone ever paid him for his work he earned him a paltry KSh500, then KSh1,000, then KSh1,500. "That was for tee-shirts, which I used

## WORLD SALES

Global art sales in 2018 were US\$67.4 billion (Sh6.7 trillion, according to the *UBS Art Basel Report*. Africa and South America made up less than four per cent of the global sales.

Auctioning art fairs and online sales are growing trends in the local art market. The Modern and Contemporary Art Auction East Africa 2019 generated auction sales of over KSh30 million, with 90 per cent of the 59 lots sold.

There is an upsurge in the number of galleries set up around Nairobi, indicating growing interest in local art. Top galleries include Banana Hill Art Gallery, The GoDown Arts Centre, Shifteye Studios, Circle Art Agency, Red Hill Art Gallery, and The Art Space Gallery (now an online space).

While local art is being made by Kenyans, art collection, dealing and curating have been visibly dominated by foreigners for a long time.

to create and design. That's when I knew that maybe I was onto something." The rest, to borrow the trite phrase, is history.

Presently, he has taken it upon himself to spread the artistic gospel. To whom much is given, much is expected. He is not worn down by his burdens. My people say a bull is not worn down by its hump.

"People have a fear of learning and perfecting their skills. I want to show them it is not hard to start. Anyone can become a good artist. I want to be the high priest who teaches people how to be that good artist."

It will not rock the earth from its axis to learn that Omondi draws inspiration from social media artists whom he considers his mentors. I prod him to name a few but he doesn't want to upset the apple cart by naming favourites.

Probably playing to the gallery, but creatives, coincidentally, are known to love their darlings. Victor is no exception. He tells me of an art piece he created for a studio where he used to work as an artist. "The initial plan was for it to be hung there, but someone saw it and bought it. The next day, I was a little bit meh. I really loved that piece and I wanted it to be on the wall."

There is an easy feel to his paintings, an 'anyone can do this' quality to his art, but you wouldn't be more mistaken if you called the Mona Lisa the Monica. Which is why, despite his art not coming cheap, it's certainly worth every shilling. This is apt because his biggest struggle at the moment as an artist is that money from art is seasonal. You are not guaranteed a regular income at the end of the month.

The middle ground, he says, is to have consistent ties of payment. "I make prints of my art and make them very affordable. When art is affordable a lot of people buy it. When people cannot afford the original artwork, I can make other versions for as little as KSh7,000."

Would he consider himself successful, then? "Success is being happy with everything, with what you do and having a good work-life balance, one of the few good things that art gives me. In other words, success is happiness." And failure? "I look at failure as encountering a challenge and not picking anything positive from it."

How he keeps the grass from growing under his feet is simple: "I attend many exhibitions to see what other artists are doing out there. I have a small network of artists who share their skills, which I gladly take. Visiting art galleries and seeing what other people are doing online has really helped me a lot." That is, when he is not hiking, which is his way of blowing off steam.

Art finds her own perfection within and not outside of herself. She is not to be judged by any external standard or resemblance. She is a veil, rather than a mirror. When he does lift the veil, what is he unlearning, learning, and relearning? "I am unlearning 'being busy' and focusing more on being productive. I am relearning some of the things I took for granted in school – like business education. I realise it is very important in life."

Is there a question I should have asked that I have not? Yes, he says. "The impact of social media on my work. Social media has gotten me a lot of clients and engagement. My following has ballooned and I have got a bigger audience as opposed to if I was in traditional galleries, thanks to my following on Twitter, TikTok, and YouTube. And it has also helped in levelling the playground; it is no longer galleries who dictate who an artist is. Social media has made it a willing buyer, willing seller market."

Romantic? Yes. But life doesn't reward romance. Eventually, Romeo, thinking Juliet is dead after having taken a potion that would make her sleep for being forced to marry someone else, poisons himself. Juliet wakes up and sees Romeo dead. She then kills herself with Romeo's dagger. Only in this case, Victor is no Romeo. His romance story with art ends in a wedding, rather than death.

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## YOUTHFUL EXPATRIATE

**FARMING AFAR**

Isaac Kasonde, 22, a Kenyan farmer based in Botswana, is on a mission to create one of the biggest agribusiness ventures in the southern African nation. PHOTO | POOL



**A young Kenyan farmer, Isaac Kasonde, ventures into agribusiness with a vision of helping Botswana to boost food production**

• BY MOSES AUMA

Isaac Kasonde describes himself as hardworking, driven and possessing a solid understanding of his life's goals and aspirations. In 2018, just after completing high school at Westwood International School in Botswana, where he grew up, the Kenyan embarked on a journey to establish a profitable agribusiness venture in Metsimaswane, about 25 minutes' drive from

Botswana's bustling capital, Gaborone.

Isaac observed that the southern African country, positioned inland and straddling the subtropical high-pressure belt, had an arid and semi-arid climate characterised by unpredictable rainfall. Seventy per cent of Botswana's landscape consists of desert and poor soils. This climatic predicament compelled the nation to rely heavily on food imports, with agriculture accounting for only two per cent of GDP. Witnessing the dire food crisis around him, Isaac was determined to redress the situation. "I noticed that there was food insecurity and convinced myself that I could do something about it. I dedicated myself to rigorous research in the pursuit of innovative solutions," he says.

Kenya's Ministry of Agriculture data reveals a disheartening reality: the average age of a farmer is 61 years, while a life expectancy of around 65 years. In the face of such discouraging statistics that often stack the odds against young people in the farming industry, Isaac, at the tender age

of 22, defied the norm and set out to manage a sprawling 25-acre farm in Metsimaswane.

Despite the prevailing notion that farming is a pursuit primarily for the older generations, he recognised the potential in the agricultural sector and saw an opportunity to challenge the status quo. By leveraging his skills, knowledge and passion for farming, Isaac embraced the risks and sought to create a successful enterprise that could potentially change the trajectory of his life and contribute to the local economy.

He harboured a multitude of aspirations, initially aspiring to become a veterinarian. However, his dreams took a different course in high school, when he realised that the sciences were not his forte. It was during this formative period that his fascination with agriculture began to blossom. Though his parents live and work in Botswana, Isaac traces his affinity for farming to his mother, who grew up on the Berea farms in Subukia, along the Nakuru-Nyahururu road. Owned by the Anglican Church, the farms

were renowned for their extensive cultivation of crops such as tea, coffee, maize and pyrethrum. He was enamoured by his mother's narratives about life on the farm, and had been captivated by Kenya's agricultural landscape whenever they visited the country. His father's involvement in cattle farming further fuelled his passion for agriculture. It is no wonder, then, that his parents were supportive of his grand vision, recognising its potential once he showed them his project proposal. They did not hesitate to give him with the seed capital he needed to procure the land and establish his venture.

His choice of location was guided by access to the retail outlets and vendors he intended to supply. With a keen eye on maximising the farm's potential, he embarked on a comprehensive feasibility study, visiting retail shops and having extensive conversations with distributors and suppliers of fresh vegetables and selected meats. He delved into industry dynamics, gaining insights into the market's demands, expectations and intricacies. "I sought to understand what would be needed in terms of quality, consistency and due diligence. There is no point of venturing into agribusiness without having information on your intended market and industry actors. By mapping out the market first, I was able to pre-empt potentially fierce competition from established farms in South Africa, thereby amplifying my chances of survival and success," he says.

Presently, the farm has a flourishing stock of 31 pigs, nine dairy cows and several dozen chickens and ducks. In addition, he has under horticultural crops, including spinach and chomolia, an exquisite African kale, tomatoes, onion, beetroot, strawberries, carrots and bell peppers.



A farm owned by Isaac Kasonde, 22, a Kenyan based in Botswana. PHOTO: POOL

Isaac uses shade nets to shield his vegetables from the harsh rays of the sun and temperatures that can go up to 40 degrees Celcius during summer. Additionally, he has installed a drip irrigation system that pumps water from a borehole capable of producing 2,000 litres per hour. "When I started farming, I began to appreciate the skills farmers have. They treat their crops like their children, nurturing them through the various stages to maturity, making sure they are in the best health and using the resources necessary to guarantee a good harvest."

Having started his agribusiness straight out of high school, several challenges hindered his progress, a major one being his lack of practical experience – he relied mainly on information he found on the internet – which sometimes resulted in significant post-harvest losses. Additionally, he had to cope with the adverse effects of climate change, market volatility and high employee turnover. He currently has six workers, who live on the

farm.

The ministry of agriculture in Botswana has been helpful in conducting farm checks and extension services, and running workshops to train farmers. The government has also implemented laws to control importation of vegetables to protect domestic farmers, including a long-term ban of 16 vegetables announced in December 2021. One can also use tractors provided by the government, paying only for the fuel.

His long-term vision for the farm is to expand his operations in terms of acreage and production, and creating opportunities for the youth to learn about farming, not only as a business but also as a way to produce healthy, nutritious food for themselves.

"The youth just need to embrace the fundamentals of farming. Getting young people to farm is an immensely important approach to bolstering food security and tackling the immense challenge of feeding a nation."

The **911** SIDE  
With John Nyanganyaga  
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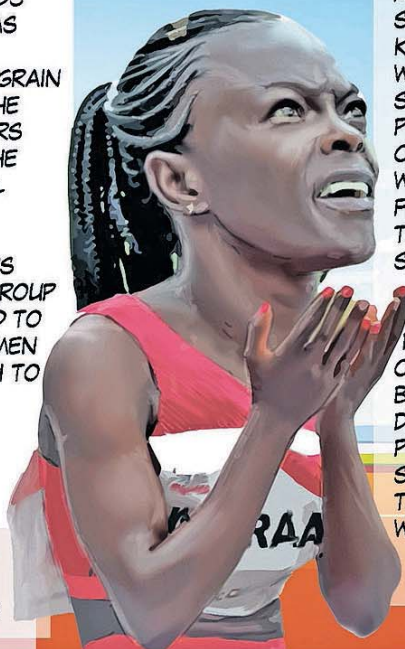
**WOMAN POWER**

AMRIN NOOR GREW UP IN MOMBASA IN A CULTURE THAT DEMANDED THAT WOMEN TAKE CARE OF THEIR FAMILIES WHILE DEPENDING ON THEIR HUSBANDS FOR EVERYTHING. HOWEVER, MS NOOR, A MOTHER OF FOUR, DECIDED TO GO AGAINST THE GRAIN AND SOUGHT TO CHANGE THE STATUS QUO. TWENTY YEARS LATER, SHE IS AMONG THE WOMEN IN MANAGERIAL POSITIONS AT EAST AFRICA'S LARGEST INDIGENOUS LOGISTICS COMPANY SIGINON GROUP AND HAS CONTINUED TO NURTURE MANY WOMEN AND EMPOWERING THEM TO SEEK GREENER PASTURES AND ADVANCE THEIR PROFESSION THROUGH EDUCATION. WE CELEBRATE YOU MS NOOR FOR BEING A VOICE FOR THE VOICELESS.



**STAR OF THE WEEK**

COMMONWEALTH GAMES 800M CHAMPION MARY MORAA EXACTED SWEET REVENGE AGAINST SOUTH AFRICAN PRUDENCE SEKGODISO BY WINNING THE KIP KEINO CLASSIC TITLE WHICH SHE HAD LOST AT THE SAME VENUE LAST YEAR, POSTING AN IMPRESSIVE TIME OF 1:58.83. "THIS WAS WHAT I WANTED TO DO AND I HAVE FINALLY DONE IT. THE REVENGE WAS GOOD AND SHE WAS NOT MY CLOSEST CHALLENGER TODAY," SAID MORAA. SHE THEN PROMPTLY SET HER SIGHTS ON LOWERING HER PERSONAL BEST TIME IN THE RABAT DIAMOND LEAGUE AND TO POSSIBLY RETAIN THE TITLE SHE WON LAST SEASON IN THE MOROCCAN CAPITAL CITY. WE ARE ROOTING FOR YOU AS YOU KEEP CHASING RECORDS, MARY.



## opinion



■ They won't let Uhuru rest: They have insulted him, stolen his goats and vandalised his farm

# Ruto unwittingly galvanising opposition against himself

**T**here are some things you do not want to hear a former Head of State speak, much less lament, about. There are some things a former President should not be subjected to by those who succeeded him. When a President hands over power and takes his final bow in a smooth transition, he deserves his peace and quiet, which is why the Constitution guarantees his comfort.

In his own telling on Monday, Uhuru Kenyatta had decided to hand over the leadership of his Jubilee Party and spend his retirement on personal pursuits. Having been elected to serve as President, he said, he had done his best, finished his term and, despite the insults directed at him by the winners of the last election, he handed over power peacefully and in broad daylight.

But those prone to threats and force would not let him rest. They have insulted him, stolen his goats and vandalised his farm. It would appear that Kenyatta was ready to move on, but then he saw the hand of the governing coalition in the commotion in his Jubilee Party, in which Nominated MP Sabina Chege and East African Legislative Assembly member Kanini Kega starred.

The fight had been brought to his political abode. The current men of power were spitting in his eyes. Kenyatta read in the move to oust him as chairman and Jeremiah Kioni as secretary-general a personal attack by the governing coalition using hirelings from his own Mount Kenya backyard. That was a red line and it was time to say enough is enough



**KWENDO  
OPANGA**

and defend his house. It was a rousing speech that was music in the ears of sympathetic party faithful and a restive populace. It was a rallying call that readied the troops for a fight in defence of the party leader and in defence of the party. And it was a call to arms that told the faithful to remain steadfast, the young to be ready for positions of leadership and the older people to be their advisors.

As he put his house in order, Kenyatta introduced partners in the coalition that Jubilee put together and with whom it fought the last General Election. They had come over to declare their solidarity with their besieged colleagues and they were in turn inviting Jubilee to join them in the struggle to force the government to lower prices of staples, fuel and power.

Now the government has President Ruto, Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua, Majority Leader Kimani Ichung'wa and Trade Cabinet Secretary Moses Kuria to thank for uniting the opposition behind former President Kenyatta, former Prime Minister Raila Odinga, former

Vice-President Kalonzo Musyoka and former Justice Minister Martha Karua.

Daniel arap Moi was hugely unpopular towards the end of his 24-year reign, but Mwai Kibaki, his successor, did not fight him. Kibaki handed over to Kenyatta after two terms and stayed largely out of sight. Kenyatta, thanks to the downright provocation of the said foursome, has revived a Jubilee that was sliding into the backwaters and turned it into a beachhead.

The best insurance policy for any government is a populace that believes the men and women they put in positions of leadership are doing the best for them.

Therefore, President Ruto should worry that his people, reeling under the high cost of living, are becoming increasingly desperate for his help. This is not the time for government to be lighting, or be fighting, fires all over the place.

Kenyans want President Ruto to succeed, but by galvanising opposition against himself, he has been hoist with his own petard.

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## opinion

■ Rejection of such a right is unconstitutional, and a sign of dissidence, subversion and unpatriotism

## Yes, the 'haves' must build homes for the 'have-nots'



MACHARIA  
GITHO

Every society has its share of naysayers, rebels and refuseniks. Every *marigiti* has its madman. That is the only conclusion one can draw from the virulent opposition to President William Ruto's visionary plan to ensure that every Kenyan owns a home.

With his affordable housing scheme, Ruto is the first president to try and breathe life to the Bill of Rights in the Constitution of Kenya, which demands that every person has the right to accessible and adequate housing.

Ruto might have been leader of the 'Nyet' camp during the 2010 debate and referendum on the progressive new Constitution, but now as President of Kenya, he has re-read the document and realised that it is the greatest thing since sliced bread.

He has therefore committed himself, even at great political risk, to ensure full implementation of the supreme law, particularly in regard to rights and freedoms that were ignored by his predecessors, Presidents Uhuru Kenyatta and Mwai Kibaki.

While others are pretending to assert their Constitutional rights by forever going on the rampage under the guise of peaceful protests, Ruto is ensuring that the jobless, rootless, homeless *maandamano* mobs will secure the even more important rights of roofs over their heads. Ruto took the oath of office, to obey, preserve and protect the Constitution. In furtherance of that goal, it is his sacred duty and obligation to ensure that there is no homeless person in Kenya, and that those in slums and other sub-standard habitation move up a notch to better quality of housing.

The broke government does not, of course, have the money to build a house for everybody, but under the great and visionary Bottom Up ideology, those with means will be obligated to contribute to a fund for the benefit of those not as privileged.

It does not matter whether those in salaried employment may already be owning their own houses or paying off mortgages and are not interested in the Kenya Kwanza government housing projects. It is still their patriotic duty to contribute towards fulfillment of Constitutional rights for others.

Neither does it matter that those who are not

in salaried employment and are condemned to living in slums might not be in a position to pay for moving a notch up the economic and social stratum. It is their Constitutional right to have decent shelter, and they must accept it even if they have more pressing needs and priorities. Rejection of a Constitutional right is in itself unconstitutional, and a sign of dissidence, subversion, unpatriotism, anti-development tendencies and being under control of foreign masters.

Once that is established, there is no need to determine whether there might be needs more urgent than housing. Food and basic sustenance, medical care, education, and all other rights will follow. Neither is there need to examine whether the growth of a slums in our urban centre indicates unemployment, a weak economy or general poverty.

No, Bottom Up philosophy has established that slums are the consequence of lack of decent housing. Once the houses are in place, those living in the slums will be obligated to move in, and by decree find the funds to pay for them. Once the slums are emptied of human habitation, those terrible, smelly, disease-ridden eyesores constructed of mud, carton and plastic will be razed to the ground, creating room to build even more units of affordable housing.

The future, as we all know, is urban. Giant housing projects in Nairobi, as well as Mombasa, Kisumu, Nakuru, Nyeri, Eldoret and other major cities and towns will motivate increased rural-urban migration. Jobless youth will move from the countryside in big waves to proudly take their place as urbanites in the great new society.

Enemies of the Kenya Kwanza dream will, of course, ask stupid questions. They will

**Enemies of the Kenya Kwanza dream will, of course, ask stupid questions. They will demand to know how jobless folk who can't afford the new housing units will pay for them. Others will wonder how all those moving in from the countryside to enjoy the benefits of affordable housing will sustain themselves in the absence of jobs.**

demand to know how jobless folk who can't afford the new housing units will pay for them. Others will wonder how all those moving in from the countryside to enjoy the benefits of affordable housing will sustain themselves in the absence of jobs.

Those are questions posed by a tiny elite, the wealthy dynasties who want to keep out the hustlers so that they can continue monopolising the urban lifestyle for themselves. The revolution is here, my people. Once every individual owns their own house, there will be no need for rentals. The landlords who own most of the urban housing and exploit the hustlers through exorbitant rents will be out of business.

The sons of homeguards who own all the prime farmlands at the expense of sons of the Mau Mau will suddenly find themselves with no cheap labour to till their land.

Their coffee, tea, flowers and other crops, will wither and die; the dynasties will be scattered like the wind; and their lands will go to waste and become available for sub-division and redistribution in the next phase of the Bottom Up programme. It will not stop at housing and land. The Constitution also demands that every person has the right to the highest attainable standard of healthcare; access to quality education; freedom from hunger and access to adequate food of acceptable quality; adequate quantity of clean and safe water; social security; and sanitation.

These are constitutional rights that the Kenya Kwanza administration will ensure are available to all, without exception.

The Housing Fund is a brilliant idea that will be emulated with the establishment of mandatory contributory funds for education, food, water and sanitation, while existing contributions for health and social security will be scaled up. All working persons will by law be required to contribute to these funds, even if they will not be direct beneficiaries, to ensure quality education for every child and limitless gourmet meals at every table.

These are constitutional rights which the government is committed to delivering and which every earning person is obligated to pay for.

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## kenya lens

### ■ A NATION OF TRAILBLAZERS

# 60 YEARS OF SPORTS EXCELLENCE



## Overflowing with talent: From Kipchoge Keino and Joe Kadenge, to Maurice Odumbe and Eliud Kipchoge, Kenya is a global giant in sports

● BY OMULO OKOTH

**K**enyan athletes are the most famous on the global stage, although footballers, cricketers, boxers and tennis stars have equally contributed to the nation's sporting excellence.

Kipchoge Keino, the father of Kenyan athletics, became the face of Kenyan sports and the flag-bearer among the second generation of local athletes who conquered the world. Hardly four years after the young nation had gained Independence from British colonial rule, Keino led a band of athletes in storming the exclusive club of world-beaters at the very top.

The then young policeman led Kenyans to the pedestal in Mexico City in 1968 Olympics to announce

to the sporting world that Kenya had a rich talent. Kip won gold in the 1,500m and a silver in 5,000m behind Ben Jipcho, who took gold, Naftali Temu, who won gold in the 10,000m and Amos Biwott, won gold too in 3,000m steeplechase.

What made his career even more remarkable was that four years later, at the Munich Olympic Games, he again won gold in the 3,000m steeplechase and silver in the 1,500m. During these very games, best remembered for the ordeal Israeli athletes went through at the hands of a band of terrorists, Kenyan sprinters won gold in the 4x400m, where Julius Sang anchored the team of Robert Ouko, Naftali Nyamao and Charles Asati to victory. From that performance, Kenyan athletes

have not relented in riding roughshod over competitors in subsequent Olympics, World Championships, Commonwealth Games and African Games. Any athletics competition at the continental or global level is a story of Kenyan dominance.

Amidst reports of doping, which affected many athletes, Kenyans have dominated lucrative city marathon races from Tokyo, to London, New York City, Boston and Chicago. The icing on the cake was double Olympics marathon champion Eliud Kipchoge's 2:01:09 world record in Berlin last year.

While footballers of the generation of Joe Kadenge, John Nyawanga and Bobby Oronge dominated the East African region in the 1960s, Harambee Stars

produced a stellar performance in 1987 that saw them win silver behind Egypt at the fourth All African Games in Nairobi, the same year Gor Mahia won the continental Nelson Mandela Cup after beating Tunisia's Esperance Sportif.

But if the sporting world thought that was the best our footballers could do, they would be proved wrong as they watched McDonald Mariga break the glass ceiling when he won the world's most prestigious football title, European Champions League, with Internazionale of Milan, who beat Bayern Munich in the 2010 final.

His younger brother, Victor Wanyama, also blazed the trail in his own illustrious career, becoming the first Kenyan to play in the lucrative English Premier League,

# kenya lens

where he starred for Southampton and Tottenham Hotspurs. He is now playing for CF Montreal in Canada. Divock Origi, who played for Liverpool and now plays for Serie A side AC Milan, is a Belgian national, but his father, Mike Okoth Origi, was a well-known Kenyan footballer who turned out for Shabana and the national team. Such is the rich football talent that abounds in Kenya.

What other sports have Kenyans stunned the world in? If the Wakhungu sisters, Judy and Susan, Kush Bhadhwaj, Aasif Karim and Paul Wekesa and his siblings exposed Kenya's hidden talent in tennis during the 1987 All Africa Games, Angela Okutoyi raised the bar much higher in June last year, becoming the first Kenyan to win a grand slam title in the girls' juniors at a Wimbledon event, partnering with Rose Marie Nijkamp. The young Okutoyi also won a girls' junior singles Grand Slam match in last year's Australian Open.

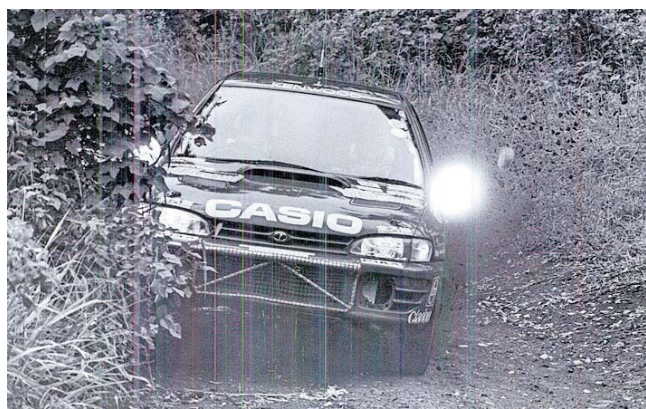
Okutoyi's performance in Wimbledon saw Kenya's High Commissioner to the Court of St James, Manohar Esipisu, escort her to the Heathrow Airport on her plane back to Kenya, a rare but very deserved honour from a Kenyan diplomat abroad.

Things have changed quite a bit in Kenyan cricket, but we cannot forget the 1996 ICC World Cup, where Maurice Odumbe, Steve Tikolo and Aasif Karim led the so-called Kenyan Dark Horses to a spectacular victory over the mighty West Indies with Brian Lara, Curtly Ambrose, Ian Bishop and Roger Harper, among others, in the line-up in the Indian sub-continent. Kenyans mercilessly annihilated the Windies, whom they beat by 73 runs, with Odumbe emerging the player of the match.

That performance stunned the cricket world. Odumbe and Tikolo went on to play professional cricket in England and Wales against some of the best players from around the world.

In boxing, the late Robert Wanjala won gold at the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games and proceeded to the American professional circuit under the Top Rank Inc stable. Since then, no Kenyan pugilist has gone that far.

This could be attributed to stringent qualification rules by the world's boxing ruling body, where boxers undergo many qualifica-



Patrick Njiru powers forward during the 1995 Safari Rally.

tion competitions leading up to the Olympic Games.

In motorsports, Patrick Njiru and Ian Duncan followed in the footsteps of rallying champions Joginder Singh (Simba wa Kenya), Shekhar Mehta and Vic Preston Junior. Kenyans competed against the world-rated drivers like Bjorn Waldegaard but were somehow disadvantaged by lack of technical support, considering that they competed against teams with helicopters and a slew of vehicles as back-up. The World Rally Championships circuit is back in Kenya and a lot can be expected from the local crews.

A majority of Kenyan sportsmen are still winning fair and square, save for a few incidents of career-breaking over-indulgence in alcohol and marijuana. But cases of doping and other performance-enhancing substances are worrying observers. Unfortunately, such cases have badly affected the good things that happened to Kenyan sport, especially when Olympic gold medalists were stripped of their wins after it emerged that they had failed doping tests.

Whenever they won marathons abroad, whether in Boston, New York City, London, Berlin or Tokyo, the first question asked is 'how clean are they?' But thanks to the reputa-

tion of the older generation, who believed in training hard and winning easy – the generation of John Ngugi, Moses Kiptanui, Paul Ereng, Peter Rono, Julius Kariuki, Yobes Ondieki, Paul Tergat, Daniel Komen, Wilfred Bungei, Pamela Jelimo, Janeth Jepkosgei, Tegla Lorupe, Catherine Ndereba and the late Samuel Wanjiru – there is evidence that Kenyans can win clean. In fact, a large majority of Kenyan athletes are clean.

For rugby enthusiasts, the 2023 calendar has been a contradiction of itself. On one hand, Kenya's oldest rugby club, Nondescripts, turns a century old, evidence that the sport and its components – clubs, partners, players and fans – can achieve some form of immortality.

On the other hand, the seven-a-side team, Shujaa, has lost core

status in the World Rugby Sevens Series after 23 years in the elite league.

For the shorter version of the game, only participating in the Olympics and Sevens World Cup can bring more shine to players and their nations than competing as a core team in the series. For many players, playing in the series has opened doors that may have remained shut.

The Enterprise Cup, which was started by a team of British sailors, is the oldest rugby tournament in East Africa. The first event was held in 1930, the same year Impala RFC was formed. Despite its last cup win being in 1998, Nondescripts is the tournament's most successful club, with 25 titles.

Kenya hosted her first international match in 1954, when the national team took on Tanganyika. A year later, the British Lions, a combination of the best players in England, Scotland and Wales, visited Kenya and took on a combined East African side dubbed the Tuskers. The Lions won 61-0.

In 1977, the University of Nairobi's Mean Machine became the first club for and by indigenous Kenyans to compete in the Kenya Cup, and it won the league title in its inaugural appearance. The club produced many legends such as Eddie Rombo, Cliff Mukulu and Sammy Khakame.

A year later, players who graduated from the university formed Mwamba RFC, which has grown into one of the best rugby academies in the country, producing some of the best athletes who played in the national seven-a-side team in its golden years, including Collins Injera, Humphrey Kayange and Lavin Asego.

In 1999, Kenya was invited to the Dubai Sevens, the first leg of the Sevens Series, in which it has participated every year since. The team won the Singapore Sevens in 2016 after previous falls in tournament finals.

The team has also competed in the Olympics, Commonwealth Games and World Cup.

The national 15-a-side team also boasts some glory, winning the Africa Cup multiple times and is currently ranked third in Africa after South Africa and Namibia.

The local rugby scene has grown immensely and seen a change in fate for traditional powerhouses like Nondescripts, Kenya Harlequin, Impala and Mean Machine.

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Maurice Odumbe

## SCIENCE &amp; TECH

# AXIOM FLIGHT PAVES WAY FOR A COMMERCIAL SPACE STATION



The SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket with the Crew Dragon spacecraft lifts off at the Kennedy Space Center on May 21 in Florida.

## • MIAMI

**O**n May 22, Axiom Space mission carrying a private crew blasted off from NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida, heading toward the International Space Station. The crew of four, led by former NASA astronaut Peggy Whitson, flew aboard a SpaceX Dragon spacecraft. It's the second time Axiom has ferried paying customers to the ISS. Last year's inaugural flight was a milestone for space tourism. This time, it's a glimpse at the future of the space station itself.

The ISS's years are numbered. NASA has committed to supporting the station through 2030, at which point the agency wants to have the first components of a commercial successor in place. In 2021, the agency assigned contracts to a trio of companies – Blue Origin, Northrop Grumman, and Nanoracks – to develop competing designs. NASA awarded a separate contract to Axiom in 2020 to develop a habitable module to attach to the ISS, with up to three modules to follow. The first one is expected to launch in late 2025, and once NASA and its partners

decommission and deorbit the ISS, Axiom's modules will detach and merge with each other, becoming a standalone space station.

But in the interim, private passengers and seasoned space agency astronauts will need to learn how to live and work side by side. Over time, as the number of visitors and modules add up, the interactions between Axiom passengers and traditional astronauts could change, especially once the private customers essentially have their own orbital hotel rooms. "These missions are very important to us at NASA as we try to open up space to a greater cross section of society. We think the economy in low Earth orbit will continue to expand, and some day NASA will just be a participant in that economy, buying services from private industry," said Ken Bowersox, a NASA associate administrator, at a joint press conference last week with Axiom and SpaceX officials.

Ax-2, as this spaceflight is called, is carrying three paying visitors for an eight-day stay, plus Commander Whitson, Axiom's director of human space flight, who will build on her record as

the American who has spent the most time in space – 665 days. (Russian cosmonaut Gennady Padalka holds the global record at 878 days.) The other members of the quartet include American race-car driver and businessman John Shoffner, Royal Saudi Air Force pilot Ali AlQarni, and biomedical researcher Rayyanah Barnawi. AlQarni and Barnawi are the first Saudi Arabians to visit the ISS, and Barnawi is also the first Saudi Arabian woman in space. "I am very honoured and happy to be representing all the dreams and hopes of people in Saudi Arabia and all the women back home," Barnawi said at a press conference with the rest of the crew on May 16.

The Saudi Arabian government is paying for their tickets, and Shoffner is paying for his own. Axiom declined to reveal the exact ticket price for this flight, although the coveted seats for Ax-1 in 2022 cost in the ballpark of \$55 million apiece.

Barnawi and AlQarni's presence onboard Ax-2 will mark a major success for the human spaceflight programme of the Saudi Space Commission, which the Saudi government established in December 2018.

## Man uses AI to steal millions from trader

A scammer in China used AI to pose as a businessman's trusted friend and convince him to hand over millions of yuan, authorities have said.

The victim, surnamed Guo, received a video call last month from a person who looked and sounded like a close friend.

But the caller was actually a con artist "using smart AI technology to change their face" and voice, according to an article published Monday by a media portal associated with the government in the southern city of Fuzhou.

The scammer was "masquerading as (Guo's) good friend and perpetrating fraud", the article said. Guo was persuaded to transfer 4.3 million yuan (\$609,000) after the fraudster claimed another friend needed the money to come from a company bank account to pay the guarantee on a public tender.

The con artist asked for Guo's personal bank account number and then claimed an equivalent sum had been wired to that account, sending him a screenshot of a fraudulent payment record. Without checking that he had received the money, Guo sent two payments from his company account totalling the amount requested. "At the time, I verified the face and voice of the person video-calling me, so I let down my guard," the article quoted Guo as saying.

He only realised his mistake after messaging the friend whose identity had been stolen, who had no knowledge of the transaction.

Guo alerted police, who notified a bank in another city not to proceed with the transfers, and he managed to recover 3.4 million yuan, the article said.

It added that efforts to claw back the remaining funds were ongoing but it did not identify the perpetrators of the scheme.

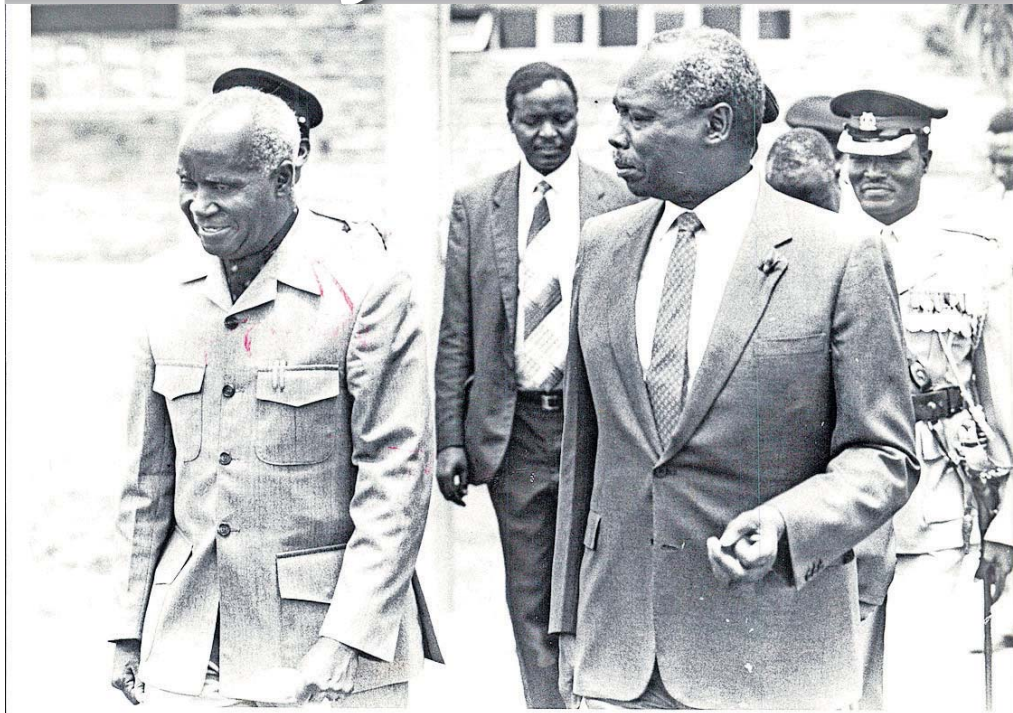
The potential pitfalls of groundbreaking AI technology have received heightened attention since US-based company OpenAI in November launched ChatGPT, a chatbot that mimics human speech.



# africa lens

## PAN-AFRICAN POLITICS

# KENYA, THE PRIDE OF AFRICA



President Moi escorts President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia to his plane at the JKIA on October 1, 1987.



Tom Mboya



Pio Gama Pinto



Jaramogi Oginga Odinga

## From the early '60s, Nairobi continues to play a major role in continental affairs due to its high profile in the world

• By JOHN KAMAU

Kenya has never had a bigger galaxy of pan-Africanists than the political team of the 1960s. In this mix were Jomo Kenyatta, Pio Gama Pinto, Mbiyu Koinange, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, Tom Mboya and Joseph Murumbi. Their politics transcended the nation, and Kenya was turned into a space where pan-African politics thrived.

In continental politics – whether lobbying on the formation of the Organisation of African Unity or non-alignment membership – you could always count on these internationally respected super-diplomats. They could easily find coverage in international me-

dia, for their statements carried the thinking of other silent African politicians. Today, Kenya is still leading in efforts to demilitarise civilian populations in the Democratic Republic of Congo and in confronting the al-Shabaab headache in neighbouring Somalia – an indicator of its continued presence in Africa's theatres of war. It has been a long walk. From the late 1950s, when Ghana became the first colonised African nation to gain independence, one of the goals of pan-Africanists was the retention of the colonial maps – to evade the chaotic cartography that could have befallen African countries as they entered the post-colonial phase.

Kenya was unlucky, too. The

country started with a national headache after the expansionist Somali government engineered some nationalist claims on Kenya's 'northern frontier districts' of Mandera, Wajir, Garissa and Moyale. They also claimed the Ogaden region of Ethiopia.

This irredentist move would lead to prolonged civil strife in that part of Kenya.

Another poser facing Africa at the dawn of independence was what to do with alternative races. A multi-racial Africa seemed to create a dilemma in some countries – especially with white settler societies. Kenya was at the forefront of imagining a multi-racial state in theory. In November 1963, pan-Africanists Mboya and

Odinga attacked a group of backbenchers who lobbied the House to refuse Kenya citizenship to anyone who was not a black African.

Mboya's and Odinga's stand sent signals across Africa that Kenya would build a multi-racial state. In Parliament, Mboya questioned why members were comfortable attacking racism in South Africa, the United States and Portugal and still thought it was "morally right to discriminate against people" based on their skin colour. This paradox emerged during the discussion on the Citizenship Bill after MPs Oduya Oprong and Gideon Mutiso asked Parliament to restrict citizenship, jobs, and

...Continued on Page 26

## africa lens

# Kenya's superb role in the Pan-African movement

Continued from Page 25

businesses to blacks only. So Kenya knew it had to lead from the front. Internationally, Kenya was pursuing a non-aligned, pan-African foreign policy combined with Commonwealth membership. But while there was a stated claim of neutrality, the reality was that Kenya was leaning more towards the West than the East, reflecting the views of Kenyatta and Mboya and the realities of development aid and finance. As a result, Kenya's foreign policy reflected the tensions between its non-alignment policies and the domestic pressure to support self-rule for the then-colonised, white-ruled African states. The pressure was from some donors pushing African nations to support their Western interests.

Within Africa, Kenya was asked by the Organisation of African Unity to lead peace negotiations in the 1964 Congo crisis. This crisis followed the US-backed murder of Patrice Lumumba in 1961. In 1964, a pro-Lumumba communist-backed rebellion captured large areas of the country and took hundreds of foreign hostages. The US-supported prime minister, Moise Tshombe, responded with white mercenary-led troops as both East and West armed their proxies. While the OAU asked Kenyatta to mediate and the Americans attended talks in Nairobi in 1964, Kenyatta was furious at the US deception, and some anti-US demonstrations took place in Nairobi. Kenyatta's anger was after the US assisted Belgian paratroops in rescuing the hostages, killing many Congolese while he was negotiating. He had learned his lesson.

There were challenges in East Africa too. While Kenya and Uganda were dragging their feet towards an East African federation, Tanganyika's Julius Nyerere reached out to Zanzibar, a country on its own, and they decided to form the Republic of Tanzania on April 27. Kenyatta and Obote felt slighted by Nyerere after they learned that Sheikh Abeid Karume and Nyerere had exchanged Articles of Union – and only got to know after the deal was inked. As a result, the idea of an East African Federation



President Jomo Kenyatta with United Nations Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim at State House, Nakuru, on May 8, 1976.

hatched in the run-up to independence did not materialise. Instead, it was the East African Community that would be formed.

But the EAC started limping in 1971 after Idi Amin deposed Uganda's President Milton Obote in a military coup. After that, Kenyatta and Nyerere decided to cold-shoulder the new Uganda president, with Nyerere vowing never to sit down with Amin. As a result, the East African Authority, the highest organ within the EAC and which brought together the three presidents, did not meet after 1971.

This falling-out was driven partly by ideological differences and partly by ego. While Kenya and Uganda had rejected nationalisation of foreign companies – at least by the time the EAC was formed – Tanzania embraced socialist principles. Nyerere thought of Kenya as a neo-capitalist “man-eat-man” society. Kenyatta thought Idi Amin was a “mad man”, their relationship was further complicated by Uganda's claim of some parts of Kenya.

On the positive side, Kenya was thrown into negotiating conflicts in Africa during the Cold War. Jomo Kenyatta found himself in 1975 resolving the Angola crisis between Unita leader Jonas Savimbi, Holden Roberto of FNLA, and Agostinho Neto. In the crisis, the Eastern bloc had backed Neto, while the Western bloc supported Roberto and Savimbi. Kenyatta told the leaders that the Angola

crisis was an “imperial game of divide and rule”.

Africa was the playground as the ideological rift between East and West translated to a bitter contest over Africa, with each bloc trying to broaden its turf. For instance, the Soviet Union – since it had no colony – was trying to get a foothold in various parts of Africa.

The collapse of the East African Community on its tenth birthday and the closure of the Arusha offices created a bitter divide between Kenya, Uganda (under Idi Amin) and Tanzania. As a result, Tanzania closed its border with Kenya in February 1977 and all three countries seized EAC assets on their soil.

By lobbying the UN to establish a UNEP headquarters in Nairobi, which opened in 1972, Kenyan diplomats surprised many due to their compelling presentation. Nairobi was a source of pride for the Global South, for it was the only UN headquarters outside the Global North. Apart from the UN headquarters, the other offices were in Vienna and Geneva.

Another significant contribution was when Moi was Chairman of the Organisation of African Unity from 1981 until 1983. He was the only Chairman who served for two terms, for OAU members could not agree on the chairmanship of Libya's Muammar Gaddafi. Therefore, the Libya Summit could not raise a quorum. While Moi was Chairman, the question of Polisario and Mo-

rocco arose. More crises would follow after OAU Secretary-General Edem Kodjo admitted the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic to an OAU Ministerial meeting in Addis Ababa. This invitation produced a split in the organisation over the legality of his action. As a result, Morocco led a boycott of the OAU. Finally, in June 1981, chaired by Moi, the Summit agreed on the Western Sahara referendum and ceasefire.

Kenya has been contributing its troops to African causes. For example, during the Namibia transition to a free state, Kenyan troops under Daniel Opande were deployed in 1989 under the United Nations Transition Assistance Group. This would see Kenya contribute troops to other regions such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia and Sudan.

Kenya's invasion of Somalia in October 2011 to destabilise al-Shabaab bases caught the world's attention. It was the first time that Kenyan troops had invaded another country. The troops have been integrated into the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia – the final phase of the peacekeeping force before foreign troops are withdrawn from Somalia by December 2024.

Kenya has also played a role in stabilising the region and led the international effort to create the new state of South Sudan. It was in Kenya that a final Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed in 2005 to mark the end of the long-running, 22-year-old, civil war in the Sudan. Besides Sudan, Kenya was involved in negotiating with the various factions in Somalia, and Nairobi was turned into a hub as the Transition Authority was born.

For the last 60 years, Kenya's imprint in Africa's crisis has been a mixed bag of success. While it was part of the group that sabotaged the initial Kwameh Nkrumah dream of a united Africa, it was also instrumental in forming the OAU and its successor, the African Union. Moreover, it is widely regarded as a diplomatic powerhouse and respected within the UN.

It has been 60 years of pan-Africanism, twists and turns.

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# global lens

■ FIRST BLACK TO BE ELECTED IN NORTHERN IRELAND

## NEW FEATHER IN KENYA'S CAP

**Lilian Seenoi-Barr joins the list of leaders with Kenyan roots elected into public office abroad**

● BY SAMMY OJWANG'

**K**enya continues to shine in the community of nations as its industrious people lead by example. Some of the globe's most influential countries have elected leaders with Kenyan roots into office in the recent past.

After Rishi Sunak's election as UK Prime Minister last year, a Kenyan woman from Narok County has now become the first Black person to be elected into public office in Northern Ireland. Lilian Seenoi-Barr, a human rights activist who practiced in Kenya before moving to the UK more than a decade ago, made history on May 20 when she won the Foyleside ward seat by a landslide.

The Director of Programmes at the North West Migrants Forum had campaigned tirelessly, knocking on countless doors across the Foyleside District Electoral Area. Her efforts were repaid with 960 first preference votes – one of the highest counts of all candidates in the hotly contested DEA. Barr said she was honoured to represent the people of Foyleside and indeed the wider city and district.

"As the first black councillor to be elected in Northern Ireland, this is an historic moment and I am immensely grateful to the people of Foyleside for placing their trust in me."

Narok Senator Ledama Ole Kina heaped praise on Lilian, whose achievements, he said, would inspire many black women across the world. "Congratulations to my

baby sister Lilian Seenoi Barr, the first ever black person to be elected as a councillor in Northern Ireland, United Kingdom. May the Good Lord open many doors for you," he tweeted.

Barr's election as a member of the Social Democratic and Labour Party comes 13 years after she arrived in Northern Ireland as an asylum seeker. "This victory is not just mine but a testament to the power of diversity and representation in our community. I hope that my election serves as an inspiration for individuals from all backgrounds to step forward and serve their communities. I firmly believe that anyone, regardless of their background, can make a difference and serve their community."

She said her aim was to make a lasting difference to the lives of local people. "I am committed to fulfilling the promises I made during the campaign and addressing the needs and concerns of my constituents. I love this city and over the past 13 years I have made Derry my home. It's emotional to know that this city in turn has truly adopted me and its people have trusted me to

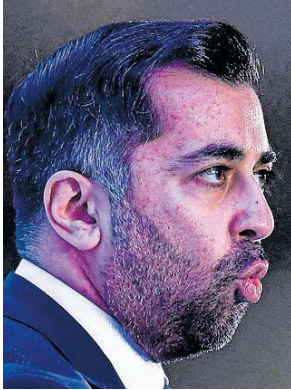
Continued on Page 28



Lilian Seenoi-Barr, a Kenyan woman, has made history after being elected the first ever black councillor in Northern Ireland, United Kingdom. Ms Seenoi-Barr, who is from Narok County, was voted to represent the Foyleside area of Derry and Strabane Council. The councillor, who describes herself as a community development practitioner and social justice advocate, was elected under the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP). PHOTO: IPOOL

## global lens

# Maasai activist first black person in Irish office



Scottish leader Humza Yousaf



British PM Rishi Sunak

Continued from Page 27

represent them. Today I truly am a Derry girl.”

Barr’s steadfastness in the face of challenges saw her transition from life in the tropical country of her birth to being a notable person in a foreign land. After her arrival in Northern Ireland, she saw the hurdles that immigrants and minority groups met. She began to vigorously participate in social work, helping them to find their footing in the new environment.

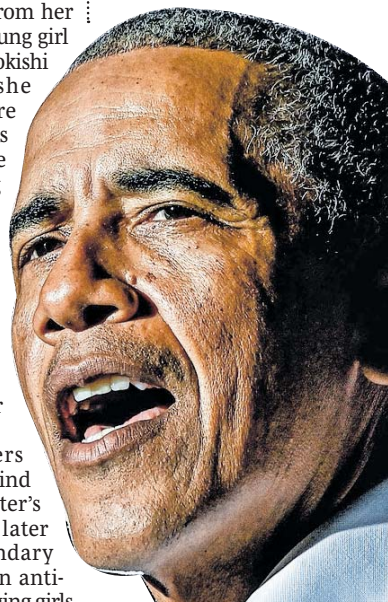
In 2012, she joined the North West Migrants Forum, an organisation that fights racial inequality and prejudice. Barr’s passion for helping the less fortunate stems from her roots in Kenya. As a young girl growing up in Oloombokishi in Narok County, she became acutely aware of the social challenges encountered by the Maasai girl, including cultural practices requiring girls to undergo female genital mutilation (FGM), early marriage (often to older, polygamous older men), teenage pregnancies and loss of opportunities for education.

These grave matters troubled her young mind as she attended St Peter’s Primary School, and later Ole Tipis Girls’ Secondary School. She became an anti-FGM advocate, encouraging girls to pursue their education, which she promised would open doors

to a brighter future as opposed to being forced into early marriage.

A former schoolmate at Ole Tipis, Nkini Karia, remembers Lilian as a disciplined student who took her studies seriously. “A social girl, she looked more mature than her age even back then,” she told *The Weekly Review*.

Her election in Derry City puts Lilian in good company with other leaders with Kenyan roots who have made a mark across the world, President Barack Obama in the US, Senator Lucy Gichuhi in Australia, Rishi Sunak at Number 10 Downing Street and First Minister Humza Yousaf in Scotland.

Barack Obama  
Former US President

## Things that make Kenya tick

• BY SAMMY OJWANG’

There is something about the Kenyan acumen once properly settled outside the country. The sheer number of Kenyan intellectuals and professionals celebrated abroad is unbelievable. Our great sons and daughters seem to click and flourish where systems work, merit is recognised and awarded for its own sake, talent is promoted and hard work rewarded. We are proud of Lupita Nyong’o and claim Barack Obama as one of ours. We are pleasantly surprised to learn that a Kenyan brain is behind the complex city plan adopted by highflying London.

One is quickly reminded of our own capital, the former City in the Sun. The crazy traffic jams guzzling colossal man hours and afflicting citizens with blood pressure; the pavements crowded with petty traders and the roads with crazy matatu people. Muthurwa, an area in Nairobi and the London city planner come into mind at one go. One wonders whether his skills could have saved us this anguish.

Some questions arise. What is it that stifles a Kenyan so as to make him less productive in his own country but allows him to blossom and be great outside of it? Could it be the structure of our education system that makes us spend too many years on non-specific disciplines? Do our youth step out into the world only to face naked tribalism, consuming corruption and sleazy “who do you know” networks? Do we find mediocrity and carelessness, especially in public service, that breeds lethargy and a *laissez-faire* attitude that kills the Kenyan spirit? Who gets to suffer the end result of such disorganisation and mischief?

Kenyans tend to get used to lack of services. A friend recently visited Sio Port in Busia County. Having grown up in Mombasa, the word “port” promised a certain level of engagement. A billboard somewhere along the way proudly stated: The County of Busia. Gateway to East and Central Africa. He had joined in the great county’s pride until he discovered that the road leading into Sio Port was not

a road, *per se*. He sent a video of himself, driving on a rough path with overreaching vegetation on both sides. “Sixty years after Independence, Sio Port doesn’t have a single tarmacked road. The township is just a cloud of dust,” he wrote. The people of Busia are hardworking taxpayers. Like all Kenyans, they expect and deserve exemplary service. A resident opined that the area had struggled with development because of being an opposition zone.

The plight of Sio Port is the story of many rural towns in the country, even after the birth of devolution. It is a story of accepting shoddy service and second-rate lifestyles. It is the story of Kenya; a pointer to the general malaise encompassing every facet of Kenyan life; a picture of our collective approach to our national wellbeing. It no longer matters whether a child dies from treatable malaria or a farmer loses his produce to a broker; a neighbour carelessly disposes of his garbage or a graduate remains half-baked and jobless. It feels normal.

We lost it right at Independence, when tribalism cut its teeth. Insatiable greed then gave birth to corrosive corruption. It was natural that our governance systems would be skewed, aimed at feeding these vices. This dance led us right into the whirlpool we pitifully referred to as “*siasa mbaya, maisha mbaya* (bad politics, bad life)”. The said silent balkanisation of non-aligned regions would probably lead to stunting of some parts of the country, like a person attempting to starve off one of his legs for stumbling. Merit dies with it.

When Napoleon took over command of the French forces, he abolished nepotism and created a system where the rank and file would rise to key positions based on ability. Talent and patriotism mingled to produce a winning army. As a result he managed to become one of the greatest generals and went on to build a great republic. Lessons from Napoleon’s journey can enable Kenya to unlock the immense potential lying inert in many citizens, repair our ailing country and improve the sorry state of our livelihoods.

## global lens

■ ANOTHER TRUMP WITHOUT THE CHAOS?

## IT'S RON DESANCTIMONIOUS

● MIAMI

Expanding gun rights, defunding diversity programmes and banning books, Ron DeSantis has become a darling of US conservatives for his embrace of an “anti-woke” agenda that has fuelled his rise in the Republican Party.

The Florida governor – who launched his presidential campaign on Wednesday, ending months of feverish speculation – has spent four years molding his state into the front line of the battle for the soul of America. As he steels himself for an 18-month campaign against his one-time cheerleader Donald Trump, the 44-year-old is offering Republicans a version of Trumpism without the chaos that often accompanies the twice-impeached former president.

Over recent months, DeSantis’s unofficial campaign has been dented by the Trump juggernaut, but he has won some important converts. “I was honoured to advocate for President Trump... I now believe that this is the next natural phase of that movement,” key former Trump aide Steve Cortes told CNN.

“Governor DeSantis is the most electable, most conservative candidate out there who can both win the general election, as well as govern effectively.” DeSantis appears almost daily in the national media to lock horns in the cultural wars against “woke” politicians, businesses and professors he accuses of forcing their progressive ideology on Americans.

His most headline-grabbing initiatives have included allowing Floridians to carry concealed guns without a permit, imposing one of the country’s most restrictive abortion laws and banning classroom discussion of sexuality and gender identity.

He has also barred universities from spending public money on diversity, equity and inclusion programmes, and liberals have lamented education policies that

### Florida Governor is offering Republicans a version of Trumpism without the madness that often accompanies the twice-impeached former president

have led to dozens of books being removed from school libraries. But the outrage has been matched by applause in America’s most conservative circles, and media coverage that has brought him national exposure.

Little remains of the political ingenue who pulled off a shock victory in the 2018 Florida gubernatorial election after his gushing praise of Trump was rewarded with the Republican kingmaker’s endorsement.

DeSantis’s management of the Covid-19 pandemic, pushing for a rapid reopening of the economy, and his opposition to the shutdowns of President Joe Biden’s administration made him an instant hit.

He won a landslide reelection as governor in 2020, and has since sought a national platform, setting out his political vision in speeches in a number of the early voting states he will need to win the nomination.

In his memoir – *The Courage to Be Free: Florida’s Blueprint for America’s Revival* – DeSantis writes about the struggle of “we the people” against the “entrenched elites who have driven our nation into the ground”.

Born in Jacksonville, Florida, on September 14, 1978 to a middle-class family with Italian roots, DeSantis went to Yale University, where he was a standout baseball player, before attending Harvard Law School.

He practiced law in the US Navy and entered politics in 2012, winning a seat in the House of Representatives before his narrow election as governor in 2018.

Underscoring

his alignment with Trump, the candidate released a fawning campaign ad in which he is seen with his daughter, building a wall of toy blocks in reference to the then-president’s plans for a border wall with Mexico.

But the relationship soured with the governor’s comfortable reelection. Trump, rattled by a potential rival, began attacking the upstart daily, calling him “Ron DeSantimonious.”

Doubts over Trump’s electability continue to mount following his indictment on felony financial charges, a finding of liability in a civil sexual assault case and criminal probes into alleged election interference and mishandling of government documents.

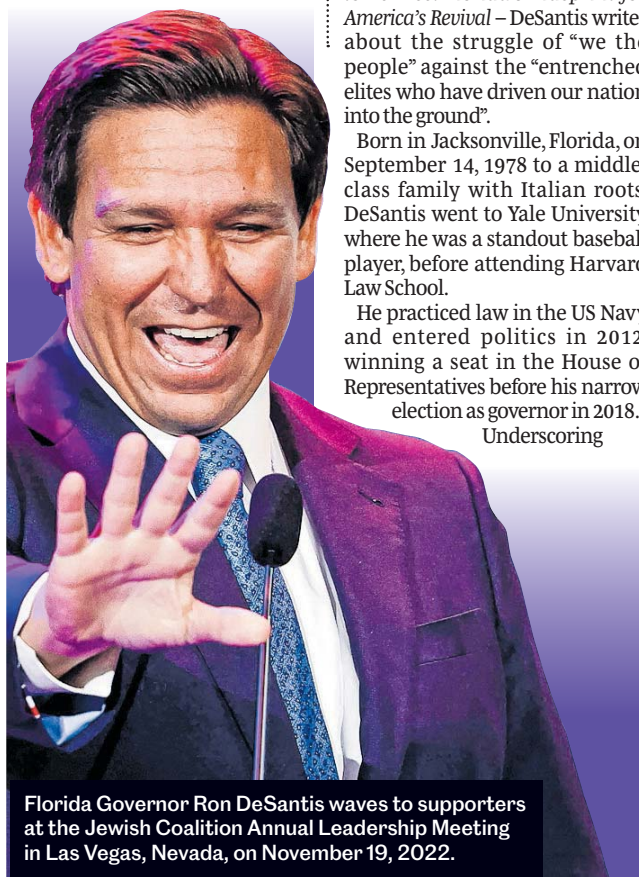
But DeSantis has failed to capitalise, making missteps that have raised red flags over his own readiness for the highest office, as his 76-year-old rival has opened an average polling lead of close to 40 points. A bitter and avoidable feud with Florida’s biggest private employer Disney over its politics has bewildered champions of the free market, while the six-week abortion ban has moderates worried that he is out of touch with public opinion.

DeSantis has also been accused of appearing lightweight on foreign policy, taking hits for downplaying Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and delivering “low-wattage” speeches during a recent trip to Britain.

Analysts are warning against counting DeSantis out just yet, pointing to his popularity among the suburban women who see Trump as toxic and to the governor’s status as a winner – something Trump has not been able to claim since his 2020 defeat to Biden.

“You have basically three people at this point that are credible in this whole thing – Biden, Trump and me,” DeSantis said on a May 18 call to donors, according to The New York Times. “Of those three, two have a chance to get elected president – Biden and me.”

— AFP



Florida Governor Ron DeSantis waves to supporters at the Jewish Coalition Annual Leadership Meeting in Las Vegas, Nevada, on November 19, 2022.

## O B I T

■ **TINA TURNER: NOVEMBER 26, 1939 — MAY 24, 2023**

Tina Turner performs on March 30, 1987 at the Palais Omnisports in Paris, during the first concert of her new tour, the first one in six years.

# BETTER THAN ALL THE REST

**The Black eight-time Grammy winner lit up the stage from the 1960s onwards. Her explosive stage presence electrified fans the world over**

When the family was reunited after the war, Anna Mae started singing in a local Baptist church. Her mother walked out when she was just 11 and, two years later, when her father remarried, Anna and her sister were sent to live with her grandmother in Brownsville, Tennessee. She became a cheerleader at her local school, played basketball and enjoyed a hectic social life. On graduating in 1958, she got a job at a hospital in St Louis, Missouri, and set out to become a nurse.

It was in a nightclub, where she and her sister had gone for the evening, that she first saw Ike Turner perform with his band, The Kings of Rhythm. Ike was already established as a performer and session musician, and his band were one of the biggest attractions on the R&B club circuit. During an interval one night, Anna Mae was offered the microphone and her performance so impressed him that it led to her being asked to sing with the band. At the time, she was in a relationship with the band's saxophonist, Raymond Hill, by whom she had a child, Raymond. She made her first recording as a backing singer in 1958, but her big chance came two years later on a song called *Fool in Love*, penned by Turner.

When his lead singer, Art Lassiter, failed to show up for the recording, Anna Mae was asked to fill in with the intention that her vocals would later be removed. But a DJ who heard the demo was so impressed, he passed it on to a local record label. Ike was encouraged to put his protegee in the front of the band and persuaded her to change her name to Tina, a move he later said was

designed to prevent former lovers from tracking her down.

*Fool in Love* reached number 27 in the Billboard charts and the follow-up, *It's Gonna Work Out Fine*, hit the top 20 and won the duo a Grammy. By now, she was in a relationship with Ike, who had divorced his fifth wife. The couple finally married in 1962. The newly dubbed Ike and Tina Turner Revue went on the road for the best part of three successful years without having the benefit of a hit single to back them up. Tina also made solo appearances on US television in shows like *American Bandstand* and *Shindig*. Producer Phil Spector, impressed by Tina's voice, persuaded her into the studio to record *River Deep, Mountain High*. Concerned that Ike, whose controlling tendencies were well known, would try to dominate the recording, Spector paid him to stay away from the studio.

The record, featuring Spector's famous "wall of sound", was credited to Ike and Tina Turner although Tina's was the only voice. It did not initially do well in the US but became a huge hit in the UK. It was enough for the Rolling Stones to ask the Revue to back a UK tour, and that led to further European dates and a bigger audience. When the Stones toured the US, the Turners were again asked to support the band, which gained them a performance on the Ed Sullivan Show.

Two years later, the couple had their biggest American hit single with a cover of Creedence Clearwater Revival's *Proud Mary*. In 1973, Tina travelled to London to make a critically acclaimed performance as the Acid Queen in Ken Russell's bombastic film of Pete Townshend's

rock opera, *Tommy*. In the same year, the duo had their last big hit, *Nutbush City Limits*, but their personal relationship was on the slide. By the mid-70s, Ike was heavily dependent on alcohol and cocaine, and his controlling attitude over his wife's life and career had escalated into physical abuse at home.

In July 1976, Tina fled with just a handful of loose change in her purse and spent months hiding with friends while suing Ike for divorce. Backed financially by a friendly record executive, she set out on a series of solo tours that established her as an artist in her own right. She found it difficult at first. "A lot of people thought that Tina Turner was history," she told *German Vogue*. "They only knew Ike and Tina Turner and didn't understand what was going on. So I had to test myself." After two albums failed to make the charts, she reinvented herself with a much more gritty sound, which led to gigs with Rod Stewart and another tour with the Rolling Stones. Her 1983 hit, *Let's Stay Together*, was the beginning of a career revival. An album, *Private Dancer*, recorded in London, spawned seven chart hits and launched a major world tour.

She was back on screen two years later as Auntie Entity in *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome*, and contributed to songs on the film's soundtrack, including the theme song, *We Don't Need Another Hero*. It seemed she could do little wrong as hit followed hit and she played to sell-out tours throughout the 1980s.

Success continued through the following decade, including a recording of *GoldenEye*, the theme song for the first James Bond film to star Pierce Brosnan. At the turn of the century, and at the age of 61, she announced she was going into semi-retirement.

Tina Turner was hailed as a feminist icon, and, in 2003, attended the Kennedy Centre Honours evening where stars such as Oprah Winfrey, Al Green and Beyonce joined President George Bush to pay tribute. She made a comeback in 2008, singing at the Grammy Awards and setting out on tour to celebrate her 50 years as a singer. Despite the advance of time, her energy seemed undiminished and the voice as strong as ever.

In 2013, at the age of 73, she became the oldest person ever to feature on the cover of *Vogue* magazine. "I will never give in to old age until I'm old," she said. "And I'm not old yet."

## • LOS ANGELES

**T**ina Turner's husky contralto and raunchy stage presence made her one of the best-known singers of her generation. It was a long and often painful journey from a troubled childhood in rural Tennessee to global stardom.

She was almost 40 before she broke free from an abusive relationship to establish herself as a solo artist. But she went on to record a string of best-selling albums, garner a host of awards, and become one of music's most popular live acts. Tina Turner was born Anna Mae Bullock on November 26, 1939 in the small rural town of Nutbush, Tennessee. Her father, Floyd, worked on a local farm. She had a disrupted childhood. She and her elder sister, Aillene, were separated when her parents moved to work in a munitions factory, and the young Anna Mae went to live with strict religious grandparents.

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