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For the Working Person

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RUTO'S ACID TEST

The protests against the high cost of living are getting bigger and larger as the days go. Azimio la Umoja leader Raila Odinga has upped the stakes with what is now increasingly looking like efforts to mobilise a general uprising, and the President will have no option but to respond. Who will blink first?

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letter from the editor

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The writing is on the wall, listen to the people and act

The protests against the high cost of living are getting bigger and larger as the days go. More and more people seem to realise the need for the turmoil. The country seems as if it is in an antebellum mood and the chiefs of state are very sure these are just paid crowds that are hell-bent to create chaos in the country.

Many interests have converged upon the opposition set dates to holler out their dissatisfaction. The transport sector was hit by threats to illegal laws that are not in the Traffic Act; the squatters of Mlolongo ever fearful that the government is about to evict them from their homes joined in; the hapless Kenyans buffeted by the high cost of living and the edge of hunger they endure day by day; the tea farm workers demoted by machines and facing economic ruins... all these motley interests converged on the Wednesday past to show their disapproval.

The result of the countrywide demos was the needless deaths of people and destruction of property. The government spoke up its frustrations and seems to assure the police to keep shooting unarmed civilians.

They raised many voices condemning nothing else but the opposition chief Raila Odinga. He seems to be the only problem they see in this country and as soon as he keeps quiet, peace shall reign and Kenyans shall be pleased.

This is the myopic view that only sweeps the dirt under the carpet and the man looming large in their 'to hate list' is just a mouthpiece of millions suffering without the ability to raise their voices and be heard.

He is just a reflection they



Allan Buluku

The government condemned nothing else but the opposition chief Raila Odinga. He seems to be the only problem they see in this country and as soon as he keeps quiet, peace shall reign and Kenyans shall be pleased... The waiting window is becoming unbearable and the State must act to stem the disillusion instead of playing strong arm tactics and throwing all the blame to a single person.

ought to see and measure the collective Kenyan disappointment with this relatively new government that is already partially blind and deaf to their woes.

In parts of the county, some semblance of politically instigated tribal clashes are reported with arrows killing unsuspecting 'enemies'. If this is not nipped in the bud and the naive instigators are not chastised and brought to book, all shall regret it massively.

Perhaps the government is on the right track with its policies; perhaps it is a new and fresh approach to economic upswing; perhaps Kenyans ought to be patient and see

whether the prevailing currents shall toss them. We can have many 'perhapses' but the truth is that the time to wait is very painful and many are dying without even the benefit of knowing why.

The waiting window is becoming unbearable and the government must act to stem the disillusion instead of playing strong arm tactics and throwing all the blame to a single person.

In his poem, *Any which way*, the Jamaican dub poet, Allan Hope aka Mutabaruka, talks to the oppressed: *By de ballot or de bullet, by de Bible or de gun... any which way, freedom mus com... now yuh kill I today, yuh can't kill I tomorrow, today for you, tomorrow your sorrow... revolution for de poor, a change mus com...*

Mutabaruka inspires the black man in search of freedom to free his mind and liberate himself. The mind that doesn't aspire for the higher level, the mind that holds him back.

And now, the frustrated Kenyan worker is out to liberate himself. A wind of change is blowing across the length and breadth of the nation. The people are fed up with empty promises. It seems the protests will continue in the weeks to come despite the threats of arrest. In the manicured lawns of State House, meanwhile, the President and his advisers have closed their eyes.

At the same time, Cabinet Secretary Moses Kuria is on record warning the Mlolongo squatters with the direst consequences and stating that he shall flatten all their homes; he seeks to inflame them further.

Mr President, the writing is on the wall: *Mene, mene, tekel, ur-phasin*. Act before it's too late.

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the telescope

■ No retreat, no surrender for Raila charges

‘Maandamano’ thrice a week

The nationwide protests against the high cost of living will continue across the country next week.

In a statement, the Azimio la Umoja leadership said that demonstrations will take place on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays.

“The peaceful protests will be held on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday next week in line with request from the public to include three days of activity,” he said.

The revision of anti-government demonstrations will take place after a five-day break by the coalition, which was dedicated to mourn the people who lost their lives on Wednesday.

The announcement comes after veteran opposition leader Raila Odinga vowed to continue with countrywide demos until the Ruto administration listens to the grievances being raised by Kenyans.

Odinga said the demos are in line with the calls from Kenyans who lament that the Kenya Kwanza administration has moved to overburden them with taxes through the Finance Act, 2023, which is currently suspended by the courts.

Roads and Infrastructure Cabinet Secretary Kipchumba Murkomen said the damage that protesters caused at the Nairobi Expressway would be repaired at a cost of Sh700 million.



Azimio supporters during the Saba Saba protests along the Kisumu – Kakamega Highway at Kibuye on July 7.

■ Coaching his sons has maintained his enthusiasm



LeBron James throws chalk in the air before taking the court against the Oklahoma City Thunder at Crypto.com Arena on February 7.

LBJ says no intention of retiring yet

NBA star LeBron James ended speculation over his future on Wednesday, saying that he is not yet ready to retire and maintains his love for basketball.

James responded to his team, the Los Angeles Lakers, losing the Western Conference final to eventual champions Denver in May, by saying he had “a lot to think about” amid reports he was considering walking away from the sport.

But in a speech at the ESPY awards ceremony, James settled any fears he may be ready to quit.

“I don’t care how many more points I score, or what I can or cannot do on the floor,” James said after receiving the award for Best Record-Breaking Performance for passing Kareem Abdul-Jabbar as the league’s all-time leading scorer.

“The real question for me is: Can I play without cheating this game?”

The day I can’t give everything on the floor is the day I’ll be done. Lucky for you guys, that day is not today,” he said.

“In my 20 years playing this game and all the years before, I’ve never, ever cheated the game and I will never take it for granted,” he added.

James, who will be 39 in December, dismissed suggestions that he wanted to continue playing in the NBA with one or both of his sons — his eldest son Bronny James, who will play college basketball next season at the University of Southern California, and could conceivably enter the NBA in time for the 2024-2025 campaign.

But he said that coaching his sons has helped to maintain his enthusiasm. “You know what brings me back every year? It’s watching and coaching my boys and their teammates,” he said.

■ Biden official to co-chair Tifa meeting

US trade envoy lands in Nairobi



United States Trade Representative Katherine Tai will be in Nairobi from July 17 to July 19 to co-lead a meeting of the US-East African Community (EAC) Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (Tifa)

Council. This meeting marks the 15-year anniversary of the US-EAC Tifa, and comes as the Biden-Harris Administration intensifies engagement both bilaterally with Kenya and throughout the continent.

Tai will meet with senior government officials, including President William Ruto, and Cabinet secretaries Moses Kuria (Trade) and Rebecca Miano (EAC, Arid and Semi-Arid Lands).

■ Whereabouts of its founder Prigozhin unknown

Wagner not participating in fighting



Wagner mercenaries are no longer participating in “any significant capacity” in combat operations in Ukraine, the Pentagon said Thursday, more than two weeks after the group’s aborted mutiny in Russia.

“At this stage, we do not see Wag-

ner forces participating in any significant capacity in support of combat operations in Ukraine,” Pentagon press secretary Pat Ryder said. The armed group, which played a key role in the Ukraine offensive, sought to topple Russia’s military leadership during the brief rebellion, before backing down. The whereabouts of its founder Yevgeny Prigozhin are largely unknown in the wake of an agreement with the Kremlin that allowed for him to be exiled to neighboring Belarus.

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■ THE GOVERNMENT'S DILEMMA OVER MAANDAMANO

PEOPLE POWER

The President must respond to the opposition's challenge lest he appear weak, but heavy-handed action could only further inflame the situation to his disadvantage



● BY MACHARIA GAI THO

The test of wills between President William Ruto and opposition leader Raila Odinga is bound to come to a head if the events that unfolded during the protests last Wednesday are anything to go by.

Ignoring warnings of stern action if he proceeded with illegal and violent protests, Raila effectively threw down the gauntlet. Now the onus is on Ruto to pick it up lest he appear weak and unable to contain his nemesis.

A death toll of at least nine reported from different parts of the country, to add to the six from the 'Saba Saba' day protests of July 7 the previous week, indicated a substantial escalation.

It also became evident that the

series of demonstrations, initially limited to the capital city of Nairobi and parts of Odinga's strongholds in Kisumu Town and other parts of the Nyanza region, are spreading to other parts of the country, and escalating in intensity and violence. Odinga, at the end of the day, would probably have been quietly satisfied that his call for protests over the cost of living was beginning to resonate beyond his traditional base, and most importantly beginning to find footholds in parts of the Rift Valley and Mt Kenya regions, which had voted solidly for Ruto.

What started in March as demands for an audit of the August 2022 presidential election on the back of alleged whistleblower information that Raila was the actual winner of the poll has swift-

ly found a more potent cause in the Ruto government's inability to find a quick solution to the economic black hole inherited from President Uhuru Kenyatta. And from cost-of-living protests, it has morphed into a drive for the ouster of Ruto through a 10 million signature collection effort. It by-passes the constitutional impeachment mechanisms through Parliament and instead goes for a 'People Power' option of no legal standing, but one that could carry great political weight.

Easy passage in Parliament for Ruto's first budget proposals since his election was a boon for the Kenya Kwanza alliance administration, but that provided the fodder for Raila's opposition Azi-

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Kenya Kwanza's litmus test: Who will blink first?

Continued from Page 5

mio coalition to put aside the defeat and make capital of widespread public discontent over rising prices of essential commodities. Raila opted for the classic strategy of going directly to the people, where he found receptive ears on issues around Ruto's unpopular Finance Bill which, to many, exemplifies the government's appetite for taxation in the midst of poverty. Disturbances spread to over 20 counties, from where there were reports of various levels of destruction as mobs clashed with police and vandals took advantage to go on damaging orgies. Raila will no doubt face plenty of flack for what are always billed as peaceful and lawful protests once again descending into chaos and anarchy.

The stock response is that the police are the ones who incite violence by descending on 'peaceful' protesters with tear gas, water cannons, truncheons and even live bullets.

There are also claims that some of the violence is perpetrated by government-sponsored thugs deployed to cause mayhem and paint the opposition in bad light. As happened after Saba Saba, the blame games were going to pick up after the latest riots, with security agencies and Kenya Kwanza politicians accusing Raila of causing death and destruction, and Azimio and supporters in civil society countering that the police deployed lethal force against peaceful protesters exercising their constitutional rights. The big question now is, what next? Raila will no doubt see the growing protests as a success, and will be keen to maintain the momentum. Ruto will want to halt him before things spiral out of control.

Just before the Wednesday protests, the President issued a stern warning directed at the opposition chief, whom he accused of perpetrating chaos. Referring to the six deaths reported the previous week, Ruto vowed that a repeat would not be allowed, and promised all necessary steps to maintain law and order.

The Cabinet Secretary for Interior, Kithure Kindiki, also warned against violence and unlicensed demonstrations, while the Inspector-General of Police, Japheth Koome, pointed out that Azimio had not notified the police of any meeting at Kamukunji grounds in Nairobi or anywhere else, and therefore any gatherings or processions would be illegal and dispersed by force.

Last Wednesday, as the country was still reeling from the scale of destruction, Kindiki issued his strongest statement yet following the series of protests, promising that those responsible would be arrested and made to face the full force of the law. His statement suggested that security agencies would train their sights not just on low-level perpetrators, but also the planners and organisers.

Kindiki traced Raila's history of radicalism back to the failed 1982 military coup attempt on to the present political agitation, warning that "this culture of impunity will stop. All those who took part, directly or indirectly, in today's well-orchestrated violation of public safety and security of our nation shall be punished". He ended by promising "arrest and prosecution of all those involved in the planning and execution of the crimes committed today, including those who funded or otherwise aided or abetted the offenders".

The CS for Roads and Transport, Kipchumba Murkomen, also weighed in with specific reference to the destruction on the southern end of the Nairobi Expressway. He asked for arrest and prosecution of those

caught on caught on CCTV cameras uprooting steel structures at the entrance of the elevated highway, which was forced to close for the day.

He, too, did not stop at the direct perpetrators.

tors, warning that "organisers will be held personally responsible for losses incurred through theft, vandalism and the destruction of public infrastructure and property". It remains to be seen whether these tough statements will lead to the arrest of Raila and his Azimio high command, which includes his 2022 running-mate Martha Karua, Wiper Party leader and a former Vice-President Kalonzo Musyoka, former Cabinet minister Eugene Wamalwa, former Murang'a Governor Mwangi wa Iria and ousted Jubilee Party Secretary-General Jeremiah Kioni.

On Thursday, former Kakamega Governor Wycliffe Oparanya was arrested and grilled at the regional DCI offices. He was later released.

If the government is really serious, it could cast the net wider and also go for former President Uhuru Kenyatta, whom Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua and politicians around Ruto incessantly accuse of being the real force and sponsor behind Raila's insurrection.

A decision on such a wave of high-level arrests would be beyond the pay grades of Director of Criminal Investigations Amin Mohammed, Police IG Koome and the vacant office of the Director of Public Prosecutions. Although such offices are by law meant to act independent and outside the influence and direction of any other authority, realities in Kenya dictate that such politically-sensitive decisions are cleared higher-up. Kindiki's advice would be sought, and he would most probably refer the matter further upwards to Ruto.

Although he often gives the impression of a hardliner, the President is also a very smart and pragmatic politician. He would be highly unlikely to sanction the arrest of Raila or Uhuru, or anyone else who commands a following that could rise up in protests that might become unmanageable. In the wake of the Saba Saba protests, 73 demonstrators arrested and set to be charged in Nairobi were released unconditionally after negotiations involving Azimio lawyers

led by Rarieda MP Otiende Amolo and State Counsels from the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions. There will be little prospect of reprieve this time. A wave of arrests and



J. Nyagah

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Ruto scrambling to respond to the opposition's affront

• BY MACHARIA GAITHO

A closer look at the tough statement released by Interior Cabinet Secretary Kithure Kindiki on the violence last Wednesday reveals a government not sure how to handle the situation. It read like a hastily crafted statement, a clumsy and disjointed effort put together with little thought to how every single word would be interpreted, and the actions that would follow.

It also came in the middle of what are clear divisions in government. Kindiki, despite occasional tough statements, is by nature a thoughtful cerebral who thinks through the import of every utterance, and would hesitate to employ harsh measures unless absolutely necessary. Then there are hardliners in government who have no time for the niceties of the prevailing constitutional dispensation that places a premium on democracy, human rights, freedom of expression, movement and assembly, including right to protest, demonstrate and picket.

Figures such as Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua, a graduate of former President Moi's repressive administration and security machinery, and Inspector-General of Police Japheth Kooome, an old-style security apparatchik, would prefer the uncompromising approach where any challenge to the power of the State must be met with unrestrained force. In-between is President William Ruto, who most sides must listen to. The President is not necessarily a liberal or a believer in rights to unruly street action. Neither is he a 'softy' who would countenance violent challenges to his leadership.

He is, however, a realist and pragmatist. He appreciates the limits of Executive authority and the law and order machinery when it comes to resolving either security or political challenges. He also understands that harsh crackdowns can ultimately be counter-productive, especially as that might be exactly what opposition chief Raila Odinga might be out to provoke. It was Ruto who was seen to publicly reach out to Raila at the beginning of April, extending an olive branch that helped halt opposition demonstrations after formation of a 14-strong Parliamentary committee.

But Raila found a convenient excuse to pull out of the talks and resume street protests after the Kenya Kwanza majority in Parliament rammed through the unpopular Finance Bill, taxation proposals that had even its political stronghold up in arms.

Ruto is right now walking a fine line trying to balance the budget through tax collections, while meeting the expectations of 'Hus-

ters', who expected a deluge of freebies once he took office. Paying government salaries is enough of a headache, leave alone finding money to repay government debt and fund development projects. He is working night and day to placate the World Bank and IMF, who will always demand harsh cutbacks on social spending before releasing cash; woo foreign investment and aid from both traditional western partners as well as new players in the Middle East and Asia; and also package himself as an international statesman, campaigner for popular new causes such as climate change, and pan-Africanist crusader against western economic domination.

It does not help when all the international media attention is on the mayhem in Kenyan streets. Images depicting a nation on the brink of anarchy simply do not lend confidence to efforts at economic revival.

Raila must be Ruto's worst nightmare right now and he should be at his wits' end figuring out how to handle him.

This is seen in Kindiki's statement, which blamed Raila for all political disturbances beginning with the failed military "coup-de tat" (sic) of 1982, but deliberately omitted mention of the 2007 post-election carnage. Ruto was a key figure by Raila's side in the deadly protests against the declaration of President Mwai Kibaki's re-election victory, and also a beneficiary of the peace pact that formed the Grand Coalition government.

Instead, Kindiki's statement jumped straight to the post-2017 elections 'handshake' between Raila and President Uhuru Kenyatta, "resulting to a period of government excesses and accumulation of a huge national debt and upsurge in the cost of living, consequences which Kenya is still struggling to recover from".

In short, the government is blaming Raila for the economic travails he is so effectively exploiting to put it on the backfoot. After accusing Uhuru, from day one, of bequeathing it empty coffers, to no avail, shifting blame to Raila will be a hard sell. Confusion in the government response can also be seen in the early statement from Roads and Transport CS Kipchumba Murkomen implicitly blaming Raila for destruction of the southern entrance of the Nairobi Expressway.

The following day, his Trade counterpart, Moses Kuria, attributed the violence to Mavoko MP Patrick Musau, who allegedly led protests against eviction of illegal squatters from East African Portland Cement Company land in Athi River. Kuria communicated through a Twitter message as word came out that Musau had been arrested.

prosecutions are sure to follow, but it still remains to be seen how high, rather than how wide, the net will be cast. In the meantime, it is clear that Raila will not be deterred.

'Success' of the Wednesday protests will, if anything, give him the impetus to move forward, and he was already warning of a third wave of protests even as Kindiki was warning of arrests. A significant element of the latest protests is the way in which disparate groupings that previously were not working in tandem came together in a convergence of interests.

Last Saturday, former Chief Justice Willy Mutunga and colleagues were teargassed outside the Central Police Station in Nairobi, where they had converged to deliver bread, milk and other provisions to arrested demonstrators.

Mutunga is a veteran of agitation politics in Kenya as one of the key architects of the civil society groupings that plotted the drive for constitutional reform from the mid-1990s. He was also involved in putting together the coalition that in 2002 propelled President Mwai Kibaki into power following the retirement of President Daniel arap Moi.

Mutunga has recently been involved, though peripherally, in a growing coalition of civil society, political and other activist groupings under the Kenya Bora Tuitakayo banner.

The movement, fronted by protest veteran Cyprian Nyamwamu, has brought together a large number of individuals and groupings committed to societal transformation, but has been working independently of Raila or any other political formations. Its WhatsApp discussion group reveals a motley bunch of often competing persuasions and aims, but it seems to have attracted the attention of figures around State House. Last week, the so-called 'Hustler Nation Intelligence Bureau' controlled by Ruto's social media propagandist, Dennis Itumbi, came out with sensational revelations, accusing the group of plotting regime change.

The propaganda outlet linked the Raila protests, lawsuits filed against the Finance Bill and appointment of Chief Administrative Secretaries (Itumbi was one of those whose assumption of office was put in hold by the courts), and general disaffection seen in various sectors as all part of a grand scheme to destabilise and eventually oust the government. It is true that some civil society luminaries who had parted ways with Raila after his 'handshake' with President Kenyatta are beginning to find common cause with him. But there are also many who have no time for his agitation and have, in fact, leaned towards Ruto.

It is evident, however, that Raila is right now in prime position to capitalise on growing disaffection seen in various groups such as transport operators, medical unions, teachers, youth groups, university students, small traders, farmers and others hard-hit the economic downturn who are willing to express themselves on the streets. Raila has upped the stakes with what is now increasingly looking like efforts to mobilise a general uprising, and Ruto will have no option but to respond. His dilemma is that heavy-handed action could only further inflame the situation to his disadvantage.

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■ DISPLEASURE OVER HIS STYLE OF LEADERSHIP

WHO'LL TELL THE KING?

The Kenya Kwanza brigade appears to be blinded by Ruto's magical antics, even in the face of the people's protests and defiance



● BY OSCAR OBONYO

It is understandable why President William Ruto may sometimes be persuaded to look the other way by pushing through policies perceived to be unpopular with the people. After all, his political career, spanning a quar-

ter of a century, is replete with instances of him going against the political tide yet still emerging triumphant.

Variably described as an indefatigable politician, unrelenting go-getter and a schemer par excellence who, to use his own words, is impatient with “sloppy charac-

ters”, President Ruto has worked hard and smart towards achieving whatever he puts his mind to. For his supporters, his knack for somehow manoeuvring through major political hurdles sets him above his peers as a reliable and believable politician.

In the last year’s presidential

contest, where he came up against the formidable opposition of seasoned politician Raila Odinga, openly backed by outgoing President Uhuru Kenyatta, is a case in point that sealed Ruto’s bond of trust with his supporters. Although politicians allied to Odinga’s Azimio la Umoja-One Kenya

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An officer lobs tear gas at protesters in Mathare, Nairobi, on July 12. DENNIS ONSONGO | NATION

coalition party still have doubts about the credibility of the poll outcome, they, too, concede that Ruto staged an electrifying campaign and that his “hustler narrative” was a masterstroke.

That he outmanoeuvred the most influential politicians in Kenya at the time, Odinga and Kenyatta, scions of founding President Jomo Kenyatta and Vice-President Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, confirmed Ruto’s knack for surmounting odds. Little wonder, then, that some like National Assembly Majority Whip Silvanus Ogoro and Nandi Odinga Senator Samson Cheragei now believe that nothing whatsoever can stand in the way of the President.

Ahead of Parliament’s main vote on the controversial Finance Bill 2023, a chest-thumping Ogoro stated rather casually that the Bill would be passed into law “because neither President Ruto nor the government can be defeated”. It is this very confidence that Cheragei exudes when he observes that, “if they (Odinga and Kenyatta) failed to stop him (Ruto) from ascending to power when they were influential and enjoyed instruments of power, what miracle can they pull from the outside to destabilise the President?”

This particular feeling is buttressed by none other than the country’s number two-in-command, Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua, who has even stated that the President and the Kenya Kwanza Alliance-led government do not require counsel or advice from anybody on how to run the affairs of the country. Hav-

ing made it against all odds, the DP is categorical that his boss will march on unrestricted.

To the rival Azimio camp, however, the perception by the President’s men and women is a demonstration of indifference and sheer arrogance.

“It is not just arrogance; theirs is total intransigence. I can assure you this is neither good for them nor the country and soon time will prove me right,” the National Assembly’s Leader of Minority, Opiyo Wandayi, told *The Weekly Review*.

The import of Wandayi’s sentiments, shared by many politicians, including pundits allied to Kenya Kwanza Alliance, is that Ruto’s political exploits and recent chain of successes may be getting to the heads of his supporters; that his conquests might have shaped the President into a cocky, arrogant and overconfident politician who is unwilling to listen to counsel from key allies, let alone his so called “advisors”.

Curiously, some of the professionals who played active roles in the President’s campaigns, such as Dr David Ndii, Dr Barrack Muluka and Canada-based barrister Dr Miguna Miguna, have lately been “advising” their boss through public forums. Miguna Miguna, for instance, appeared to make a call to the President to embrace peace and “govern well” in a tweet posted on July 13: “Breaking things up is the easiest thing. Any idiot can throw a stone and break up glass, or pull a trigger and kill an innocent person. To create, build, transform, nurture and govern

well is the real deal.”

And only last week, Muluka, who was a member of the President’s think-tank during the campaigns and is now a communications adviser in the Information and ICT ministry, recently warned of a revolution in the making and appealed to the President to listen to the people and address their plight. Earlier in the year, Ndii, the President’s chief economic advisor, expressed his frustration over pilferage of public funds in government institutions by high-profile politicians, saying the trend went against the country’s prevailing economic situation.

That the President’s men are addressing Kenyans on some of these issues and not the Head of State directly, says Wandayi, is a pointer to the fact that either he is not listening to his foot soldiers or he is blinded by overconfidence and believes he can – just like he did on the campaign trail – go against the wind and have his way.

The Ugunja MP, as well as some politicians allied to President Ruto’s United Democratic Alliance (UDA), opines that, in the face of the high cost of living and the people’s increased disillusionment with the government, the President needs to put his ears to the ground, soften his stand and act accordingly.

Right from 1997, when he joined elective politics and wrested the Eldoret North parliamentary seat from seasoned and well-connected politician Reuben Chesire, Ruto has always been energised to plot political conquests. His victo-

ry over Chesire, against the advice of President Daniel arap Moi, was not the only time that he defied the second President. Ruto went on to bolt out of the then ruling party, Kanu, in the process inheriting Moi’s political constituency in the Rift Valley region, against the old man’s wishes. He pulled a similar stunt against the fourth President, Uhuru Kenyatta, a move that led to his emergence as fifth President against all odds.

Defence Cabinet Secretary Aden Duale, who regards the President as “my boss and my buddy”, says Ruto has always had his way around political challenges and impediments. Describing the President as energetic, workaholic and focussed, the CS believes Ruto is one of the most dependable politicians in the country.

At the height of internal battles within the Jubilee administration in the last government, Duale was confronted with the challenge of choosing between President Kenyatta and then DP Ruto. He opted to team up with Ruto, citing the latter’s political astuteness and never-say-die spirit. In the process, he lost his then coveted position as National Assembly Leader of Majority.

Much as their belief in Ruto is a crucial factor credited for uniting members of the Kenya Kwanza Alliance, there is concern that the President’s allies “are taking this joke too far”.

Wandayi believes the entire Kenya Kwanza brigade is blinded by Ruto’s magical antics “even in the face of the people’s protests and defiance”.


Kisii Senator Richard Onyonka concurs, stating that the government can afford the luxury of using diversionary tactics by focusing on the former Prime Minister instead of facing the challenge at hand squarely because of self-belief and confidence: “They think they can easily skirt around these issues and fool their way again into avoiding responsibility. The ongoing mass action is not about Raila but the ordinary Kenyans. What you are witnessing are deliberate shifts driven majorly by arrogance and Ruto’s overconfidence.”

With growing displeasure over his style of leadership and the people’s rage over the increased economic burden, it remains to be seen whether the President can manoeuvre his way around the current challenge.

kenya lens

■ **A SHRINKING ECONOMY**

LOOMING HYPERINFLATION

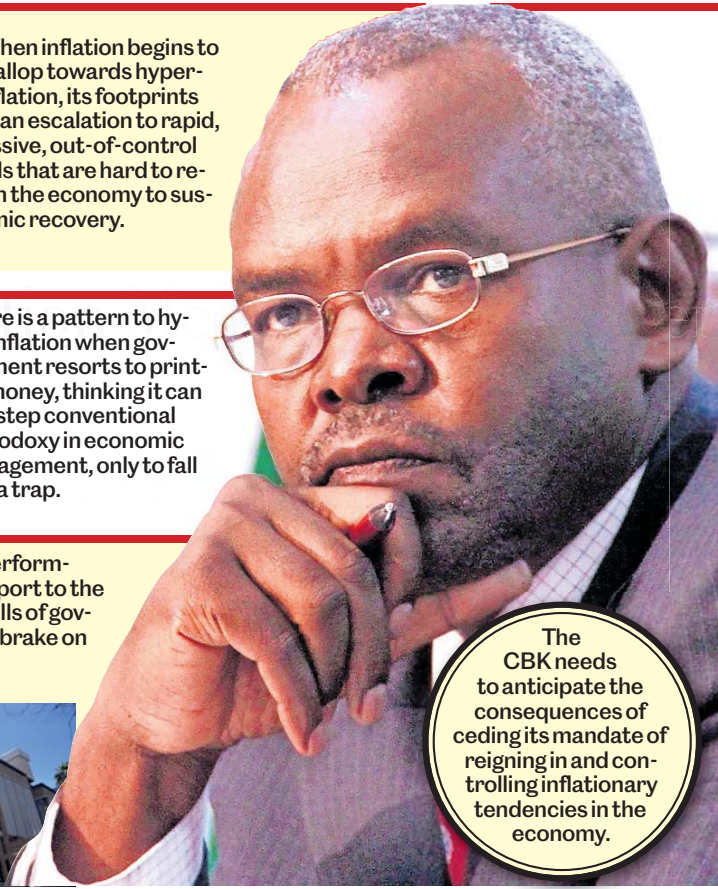


When inflation begins to gallop towards hyperinflation, its footprints are an escalation to rapid, excessive, out-of-control price levels that are hard to reverse and return the economy to sustainability and economic recovery.



There is a pattern to hyperinflation when government resorts to printing money, thinking it can sidestep conventional orthodoxy in economic management, only to fall into a trap.

The majority of non-performing loans that banks report to the CBK reflect pending bills of government, which puts a brake on private sector growth.



The CBK needs to anticipate the consequences of ceding its mandate of reigning in and controlling inflationary tendencies in the economy.




In June, the Controller of Budget flagged of KSh5.7 billion plundered outside payroll.



A fiscal deficit of KSh718 billion disproportionately leans on domestic borrowing at KSh586.5 billion (3.6 per cent of GDP), compared with external borrowing of KSh131.5 billion (just 0.8 per cent of GDP).

The domestic market tries to whet the current government's appetite for borrowing but may not offer up the massive amounts proposed in the problematic Finance Act 2023 (KSh586.5 billion – that is 3.6 per cent of GDP) at anywhere near the CBK monetary policy rates.



Kenya must not succumb to the disease of money creation despite its predicament of poor access to both domestic borrowing, and external capital

● BY MBUI WAGACHA

Borrowing plans, crowding out, high debt stock: Economic policy is unforgiving and continues to chalk merciless lessons for Kenya's new regime on both sides of the policy isle – fiscal and monetary. Insatiable borrowing and deficit-ridden spending plans have prompted the World Bank to caution repeatedly in its Kenya Economic Updates that the consequences of fiscal dominance – neglect of private sector potentials to grow the economy – equals inappropriate and prolonged crowding out of the private sector in the local debt market, despite growth potential. The fiscal side is not delivering an uptick in aggregate demand while economic shocks and contraction persist. Traditionally, among Kenya's banks, credit

flows to growth of investments, revival of employment, output and GDP growth remain relatively unsupported. And with the Finance Act 2023 now muddled in the courts, the IMF has also shone a light on CBK governance and safeguards in the use of borrowed funds following a recent experts' review. Add to that the Auditor-General's finding that public debt lacks audited financial statements, counties resorting to expensive bank overdrafts to pay delayed salaries, and the Controller of Budget's flagging, in June 2023, of KSh5.7 billion plundered outside payroll, Kenya's entire budgeting system seems tied up in knots. Another example of shortcomings is the Finance Act 2023 under litigation. A fiscal deficit of KSh718 billion (4.4 per cent of GDP) including grants, disproportionately leans on domestic borrowing at KSh586.5 billion (3.6

per cent of GDP), compared with external borrowing of KSh131.5 billion (just 0.8 per cent of GDP). This narrows the road to private sector-led growth, while the majority of non-performing loans that banks report to the CBK reflect pending bills of government, putting a brake on private sector growth. Had former President Uhuru Kenyatta on November 23, 2015, followed through with his pronouncement to establish a professional Office of Management and Budget (OMB), designed in my time at the Executive Office, to work with the existing and highly professional Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO), there would by now be a mechanism to reign in the disarray in public finances. Without that, the current dilemma finds government hamstrung on borrowing domestically and abroad, primarily caused by jitters on the size

kenya lens

of its deficits and the challenge of debt repayments.

It gets much worse because this opens a spell where the tenacity of CBK will be sorely tested on controlling nominal money growth. A squandering government could challenge the CBK's powers to create money. The CBK needs to anticipate the consequences of ceding its mandate of reigning in and controlling inflationary tendencies in the economy; meeting governance stringencies for funds borrowed through it (as a fiscal agent); as well as the accelerated depreciation of the shilling that would ensue. It is the trajectory of money creation that is the greatest scare.

Borrowing options: Good, bad, ugly

There are two options for governments in borrowing from central banks, one of which could ruin the economy unless supported by output growth. Government can borrow just like you and I, and even issue securities – TBs and bonds attracting market-determined rates (domestically and abroad) and which anyone can purchase and redeem. Or it can do what you and I can't do: take powers to create money, powers that in Kenya belong to the CBK. This is called monetising government debt. This type of monetary loosening, called printing money, could ruin the economy with hyperinflation if the CBK lost control of inflation, with too much money chasing too few goods and services.

Recent TB and bond Issues demonstrate the looming hiatus and dilemma for both government and the CBK. The domestic market tries to whet the current government's appetite for borrowing but may not offer up the massive amounts proposed in the problematic Finance Act 2023 (KSh586.5 billion – that is 3.6 per cent of GDP) at anywhere near the CBK monetary policy rates.

Banks are already averse to the credibility of monetary policy along with financial stability. With the uncertainties, pickings declined in the first Quarter of 2023. Average interest rates for the 91-day, 182-day and 364-day TBs increased to 9.62 per cent, 10.06 per cent, and 10.62 per cent respectively in February 2023, from 9.44 per cent, 9.88 per cent and 10.42 per cent in January 2023, to induce buyers. Average time to maturity also declined.

In subsequent offerings, some cancelled, offtakes plunged from proposed borrowing amounts at CBK auctions, even from traditionally compliant banks that now look for premiums as cover for Kenya's teetering public finances. The outlier and surprise results dated June 19, 2023 came from the Seven-Year Treasury Bond Issue No. IFB1-2023-007. It raised KSh220 billion, achieving that amount only by sweetening gross rates (inclusive of tax exemptions) calculated at about 20-22 per cent.

While this resuscitated government borrowing, it removed potential lending to the real economy, with taxpayers up picking the costly tab for higher margins or premiums payable to lure lenders. In the meantime, government borrowing in external capital markets has

dried up. In rating Kenya, financial markets pose challenges of reputation and/or credit-worthiness to access borrowing without punitive rates. How far can the margins offered domestically stray from the prevailing CBK policy rates, and what are acceptable yields in the case of external borrowing, before the CBK loses credibility, or before the borrowing appetite graduates to debt monetisation and hyperinflation?

Hyperinflation

When inflation begins to gallop towards hyperinflation, its footprints are an escalation to rapid, excessive, out-of-control price levels that are hard to reverse and return the economy to sustainability and economic recovery. It can disrupt economic activity and plunge transactions to money illusion, especially after a rate of about 50 per cent. Economic activity and normal public finances check into ICU.

The main winner in the ensuing casino is the government which then pays its debts but triggers the start of hyperinflation. Other winners are holders of Kenya shilling debt, as well as holders of non-cash assets like land and real estate, whose prices escalate. The general public loses massively, caught in the crossfire because hyperinflation taxes all the cash in their pockets. It hammers the poor and widens poverty as it does the spending power of private sector wage earners, including those that hyperinflation regrouping in higher tax brackets (a process called bracket creep), public servants, savers, people liable to capital-gains tax, and hoarders of cash who hope prices will later trend downwards.

That is why, under Article 231 of the Constitution, if the CBK were to stray into printing money in collusion with the government, it would be treading in money creation unconstitutionally or 'under the gun'. Money creation increases government's real (inflation adjusted) revenues and lowers its real debt repayments. Hyperinflation has two key drivers: the inflation tax (that taxes all cash, without formal taxation or spending proposals passed in Parliament through the Finance Bill and Act, or even payments passing into the Consolidated Fund); and seignorage, a key macro-ingredient in monetary theory of hyperinflations: simply, the nominal money created, deflated by the price level, defining the real (decreasing) revenue government gains from money creation as nominal money growth accelerates inflation.

The diagnosis above would risk inflicting on Kenya the long-term scars that hyperinflations impose on former ICU patients, countries that lived to tell the tale. Ask Germany, where 1 US\$ equalled 1 trillion Marks in 1923, and a wheelbarrow of Marks could not buy a newspaper; or Zimbabwe from 2007, when the daily rate of inflation had reached 98 per cent by 2009; or Argentina, Hungary. Bolivia in recent times displays starkly the studied consequences of hyperinflation over the tax sys-

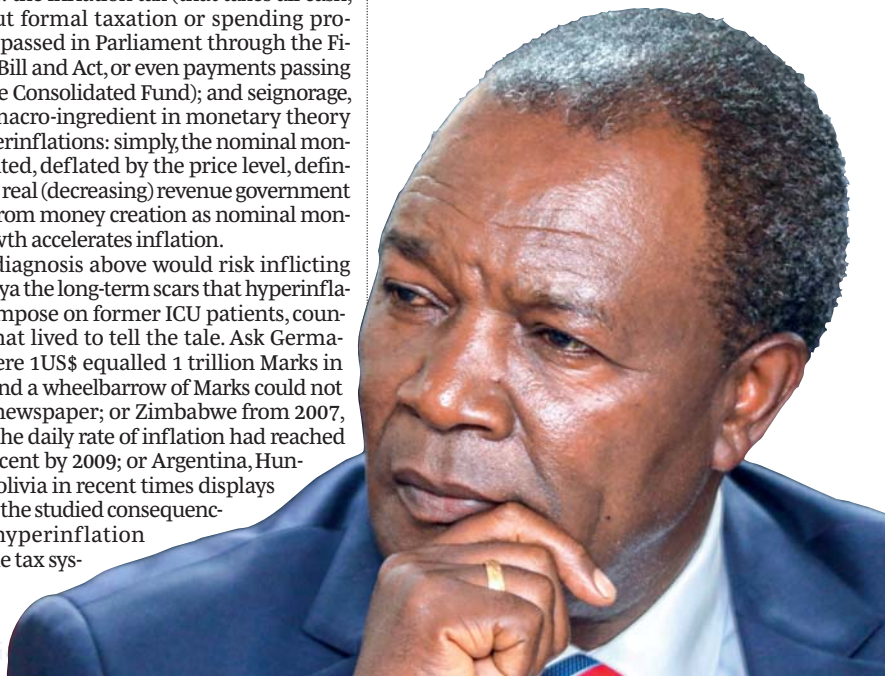
tem. It collapsed in only five years from about 9 per cent of GNP in 1981 to 1.3 per cent in 1985. The seignorage tax did not prevent the dramatic shrinking of tax revenues that followed from a shrinking economy failing to fund pent-up public sector and social spending, failed stabilisation attempts that were overturned in public protests of key constituencies of government, and risk-averse investor perceptions of government policies.

The scars in macro variables persist for decades after discharge from ICU. There is a pattern to hyperinflation when government resorts to printing money, thinking it can sidestep conventional orthodoxy in economic management, only to fall into a trap. Kenya must not succumb to the disease of money creation despite its predicament of poor access to both domestic borrowing, and external capital.

Sidestepping hyperinflation

First, engage a credible deficit reduction and cut, cut spending and wastage. Second, create a to-do list to right the wrongs that bedevil the top echelons of key institutions involved, e.g., recruit, train, and hoist the best skills at CBK and the National Treasury, reestablishing top professionalism and defending it from the CS, CBK's Monetary Policy Committee, Governor, Deputies, and senior staff. Third, between the NT and CBK, monetary policy and treatment of public debt and addressing the deficit should be coordinated. Fourth, all parties need to recognise a division of labor in coordination: fiscal policy influences aggregate demand and monetary policy targets inflation and setting of interest rates. Coordination to achieve the interests of the nation combined in short/medium term strategies do not mean supremacy wars but applying skills for the good of the nation.

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



the limelight



Flood-affected people take shelter at a school after river Yamuna overflowed following heavy monsoon rains in New Delhi on July 14. PHOTO | AFP



Women at Gesore in the outskirts of Nyamira town fight for a sufuria, symbolic of their struggle in getting food for their families. RUTH MBULA | NATION



Serbia's Novak Djokovic serves during a practise session prior to his men's singles semi-finals of the 2023 Wimbledon Championships on July 14. PHOTO | AFP



Foreign and Diaspora Affairs Cabinet Secretary Alfred Mutua (second right) and his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amir-Abdollahian during the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding at State House, Nairobi, on July 12. Looking on is President William Ruto and Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi. LUCY WANJIRU | NATION



An aerial view of flood-affected area after river Yamuna overflowed following heavy monsoon rains in New Delhi on July 14. PHOTO | AFP



Transport Cabinet Secretary Kipchumba Murkomen (right) and Moja Expressway CEO Steve Zhao access the damage caused by protesters at Mlolongo toll station on July 13. WILFRED NYANGARESI | NATION



An Indian Space Research Organisation rocket carrying the Chandrayaan-3 spacecraft lifts off from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota, an island off the coast of southern Andhra Pradesh state, on July 14. PHOTO | AFP



French Foreign Legion march during the Bastille Day military parade on the Champs-Elysees avenue in Paris on July 14. PHOTO | AFP

The
Are



AFRICAN QUEEN

By discussing little-known facts about the motherland, Vivian Okumu has amassed a huge following on TikTok, making her a highly sought-after content creator

OPEN SPACE

Looting and vandalism undermine Raila's cause

Police overzealousness will also hurt the government's standing in the eyes of citizens

● BY HENRY GEKONDE

Among the images from Wednesday's mayhem on the streets of some towns, one stood out for the utter pointlessness of the actions depicted. The photo showed the aftermath of a break-in by protesters at the Kitenge deputy county commissioner's offices, which were ransacked and files, notebooks and uncollected national ID cards strewn all over the place before the building was set afire.

No doubt Kenyans are hurting and angry. Topping their list of grievances are the ever-rising prices of basic goods, fuel and electricity. They are also too heavily taxed (do driving licences, for example, need to be renewed every three years?) And the Kenya Kwanza government has reneged on the promises its leaders made to voters before last year's elections that they would help lower the cost of living.

So, the fury is understandable, and Raila Odinga's new movement is in the vein of similar citizen protest actions elsewhere that aim to galvanise the public around a cause, grab headlines and bring some immediate results – in Azimio's case, making it more difficult for Kenya Kwanza to govern, forcing the opposition's agenda on the government and prompting an invitation to the negotiating table.

But Odinga is not going to resolve the anger created by the high cost of living by provoking a different kind of rage against our fellow citizens who are setting us back by looting businesses and destroying installations on roadways. No sane, patriotic Kenyan observing the senseless destruction of property on Wednesday in Kitenge and Mlolongo, for example, will affirm these actions as legitimate forms of protest.

Two elements of this and previous violent protests are troubling. The first is that young people are the most active participants. It's obvious why. They are already in the streets, idle, jobless and seething with resentment against the grownups who have made a mess of the country or are unable or unwilling to help them make something of themselves.

Even without the context of violence, Kenyan leaders don't seem to be worried enough about youth unemploy-

ment. The World Bank estimates that one billion 15-24-year-olds, most of them in low-income countries like Kenya, will enter the job market in the 2020s, but less than half will find formal jobs. International Labour Organization figures from 2019 put Kenya's youth unemployment rate at 12.43 percent (which sounds like an undercount).

Alienated and hopeless, frustrated youngsters can be easily manipulated, bought for the price of a smoke, always at the ready when calls to street protests are made by politicians. You can read the mood of young Kenyans in the scribbles they share on social media – the dark jokes they make about themselves and politicians, their stunning admiration of white-collar criminals, their resignation to their despair. If they tip over, they could take Kenya with them.

The other troubling aspect of the Odinga-Ruto stalemate is the arrogant defiance of government officials and ruling-alliance politicians. While one was inclined to agree with Interior Cabinet Secretary Kithure Kindiki when he said on Thursday that protesting to lower the cost of living should not mean "damaging the highway that was built with Kenyans' taxes", it was a bit melodramatic of him to call Wednesday's events "an act of terrorism". Words shouldn't be thrown around this recklessly.

In Parliament, meanwhile, Kenya Kwanza politicians are making their rejection of Odinga's demands personal. Demonstrating primitive animus by legislating for now rather than for posterity, they have drafted a bill that would hold organisers of protests liable for destruction of property or injuries or deaths that happen during demos. This is a slippery slope and citizens should be wary.

Perhaps the two sides are waiting for things to boil over before they start talking. If the police take literally Kindiki's advice to be tough on protesters, we can expect bloodier clashes when the two sides return to the streets next week. More looting and vandalism will undermine Odinga's cause, while police overzealousness will hurt the government's standing in the eyes of citizens.

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

MIND SPEAK



Vivian Nyaminsa

The anti-government protests aren't fading away anytime soon. The opposition leader Raila Odinga is absolutely right and clear on government failures. The government is not willing to listen to the people, leaving the country in chaos. How unfortunate. My unsolicited advice to the President is never to stifle the views or opinion of Odinga. Dialogue is the way forward. The political bickering will lead to more negative impact on the economy of the country.

— A student at Kisii University



Kevin Onyango

President Ruto needs to show that he is willing to listen to the concerns of the opposition and the people, and he should be open to dialogue. His dilemma is that, he doesn't want to appear to be giving in to the demands of the protests. He wants to remain firm and defiant. So, I think the best advice I could give would be to strike a balance between being firm but also being open to listening and engaging in sensible and honest dialogue.

— A student at Bondo Technical Training Institute



Winnie Anyango

The President should prioritise dialogue with the opposition to understand their concerns and grievances. Demonstrating a willingness to listen and address their legitimate grievances can help build trust and reduce tensions. He should also take steps to improve transparency and accountability within the government. Cut fuel prices as well. Finally, he should hold consultations to lower prices of basic commodities.

— A student at Mt Kenya University



Lucky Komala

The protests are gaining relevance while the government is being irrelevant, considering their reaction. The President should not promote impunity by thinking that the main agenda of the opposition is to destabilise his administration. I urge the President and his allies to open their door for talks to get a solution. That will do us good as citizens and the country at large.

— A student at Technical University of Kenya

COMPETENCY-BASED CURRICULUM



WHY CBC MUST WORK

Parents need information about the curriculum; how it's envisaged to operate up to university, and its acceptability internationally

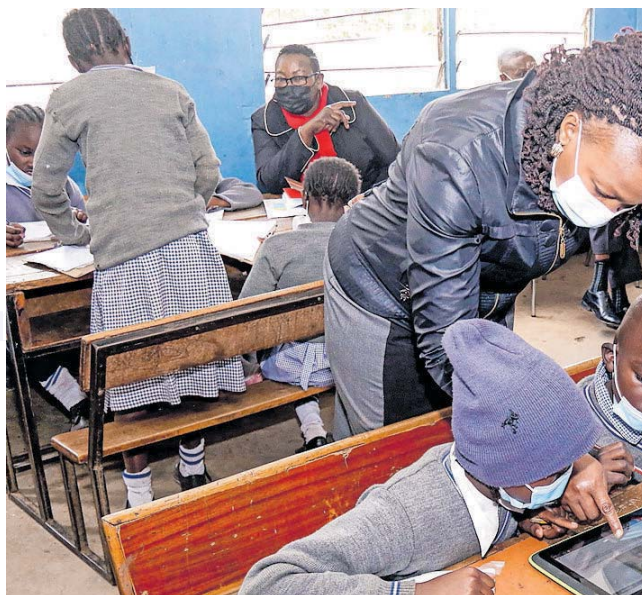
• BY SAMMY OJWANG'

A Kenyan parent with a child learning in the new Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) education system is akin to a person embarking on a journey without knowing where he is going. Just like the national debate on the housing fund, the arrival of the new curriculum had raised concerns for Kenyans.

This was due to its abrupt introduction and almost hurried implementation without initial creation of general awareness within the population, coupled with its distinct departure from previous examination models.

For the first few terms of the CBC era, we saw dedicated parents struggling in public transport, loaded with all manner of clay or stick models, tray cloths and caricatures on manila papers best understood by the CBC learner and the parent. In the evenings, parents would rush home to do homework with their children. It was back to school all over again for everyone, including those parents who had not been to school. The teachers also gave assignments that required to be downloaded from online portals, making the cyber cafe a crucial part of the school system.

The implementation of the 8-4-4 system had followed a similar pattern, without much public sensitisation. Pupils who were expecting to sit their Certificate of Primary School Education examinations in 1984 were simply told there would be no national exams that year, and that they were to remain in primary school for one more year, after which they would sit a new examination christened the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education examination. The examinable subjects now included Art and Craft, and Music. They, too, were soon sewing tray cloths. The requirement to find material for building a traditional hut within the school compound was the subject of hilarious discussion, especially in urban schools.



Ms Pauline Musyoka, a teacher at Mariakani Primary School in Nairobi, shows Grade 3 pupils how to use a tablet during an E-learning event by Kenya Literature Bureau on September 8, 2021.

New classrooms had not been built to accommodate the Standard Eight pupils in 1985, while Form One classrooms in secondary schools were empty since there were no admissions that year. There were no textbooks for the new syllabus and an enterprising Kenyan author, Malkiat Singh, who appeared to be a master of all subjects from primary through secondary school, plugged the gap for a good while, earning a handsome profit.

The pioneer 8-4-4 class sat their Form Four examinations in 1989, together with the last A-level lot from the preceding 7-4-2-3 system, prompting a double intake into our universities. Kenya weathered the storm, but does not seem to have learnt any lessons from that experience. Currently, we have secondary school students whose seniors are still primary school pupils within the same school.

The need for a new education system is, perhaps, necessitated by cheeky financiers and by the drawbacks noted in the 8-4-4 system, as well as a desire to provide flexible learning that places the learner,

formed a basis for a self-reliant citizenry, with emphasis on acquiring practical skills. Its implementation obviously met with resource constraints that saw reviews of the new syllabus by several commissions formed for the purpose, essentially reverting to the old, mostly theoretical system in all but name. A sickening culture of competition in examinations engulfed the country, with education falling into the hands of business people.

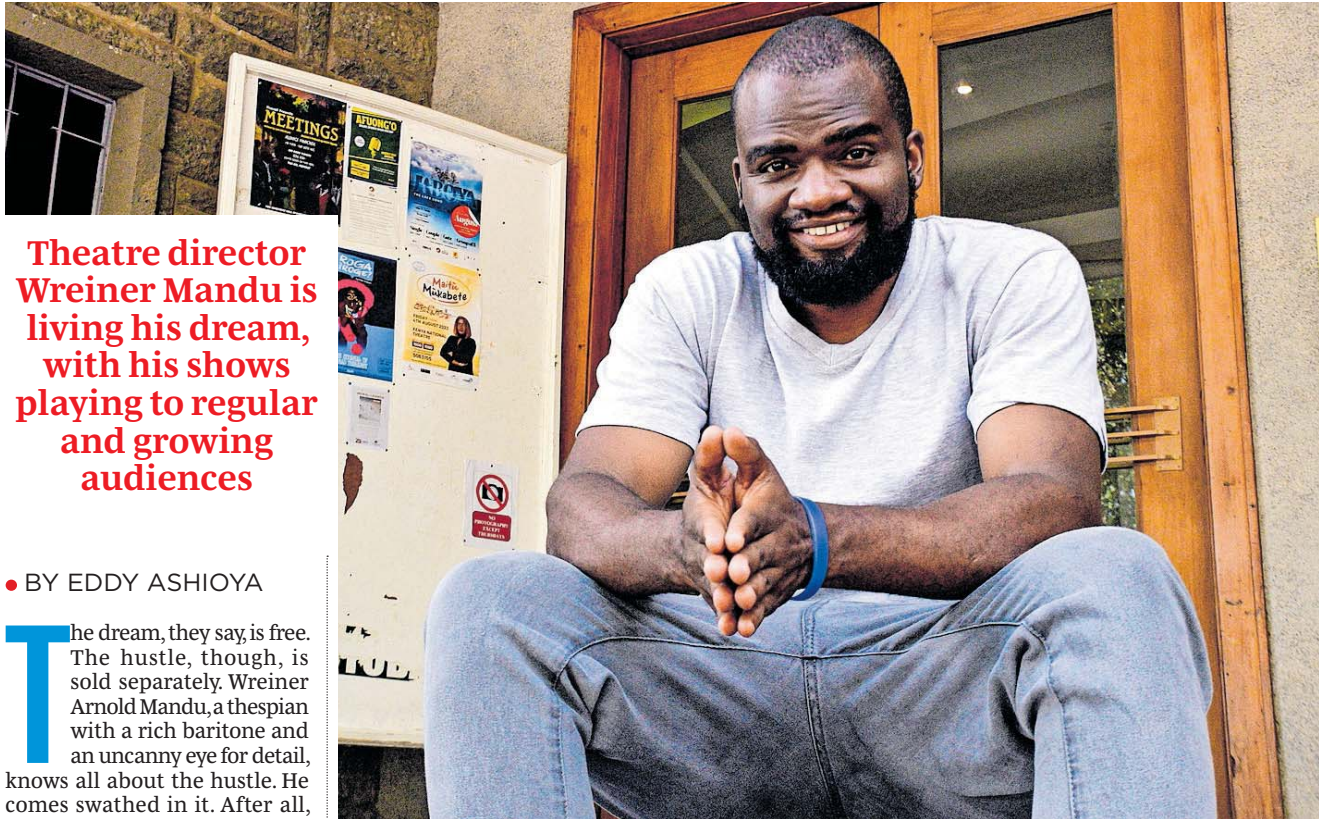
Parents began transferring their children from public schools to 'performing' private schools. Cheating in examinations became rampant as schools sought to outdo each other in registering stellar performances. The decline of public schools began. When results were announced, parents and teachers danced, carrying A-students shoulder-high on national television. It was no longer about learning but the passing of examinations, by whatever means necessary.

The CBC system partly aims at curing this examinations charade in the education of the future generation of Kenyans by eliminating the rote learning that produces half-baked learners. The move may slam the long overdue brakes on the school principals who have mastered the art of soliciting for funds from complicit parents to 'motivate' teachers to compromise willing Kenya National Examinations Council officials.

The Kenyan parent urgently needs clear information about the new curriculum; how it is envisaged to operate from start of the journey to university level, and its acceptability internationally. What, for instance, will be the criteria for university admissions and course structure in a system where everybody moves to the next level? By declaring intent to identify and promote talent rather than just cerebral ability, are there plans to provide the required facilities and infrastructure? If the CBC does not avoid the pitfalls suffered by the outgoing 8-4-4 system, then the upsetting change is for naught.

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IGIZA ARTS THEATRE

A THESPIAN PAR EXCELLENCE

Theatre director Wreiner Mandu is living his dream, with his shows playing to regular and growing audiences

• BY EDDY ASHIOYA

The dream, they say, is free. The hustle, though, is sold separately. Wreiner Arnold Mandu, a thespian with a rich baritone and an uncanny eye for detail, knows all about the hustle. He comes swathed in it. After all, how many of us can confidently say that we stuck to a childhood dream, ready to render to Caesar what is Caesar's and offer a blood sacrifice of our lives to see the dream come to fruition?

He is that rare commodity in life. Yes, he's also humble and hard-working, but he also knows exactly how good he is. The founder of Igiza Arts Theatre is unsurprisingly eloquent when it comes to his goals and ambitions. I suppose when you live your life directing plays, you know exactly which part you are playing and when to exit stage left. The curtains, however, are only just opening for him.

This is merely the continuation of a scene he opened in 2017. "I have been very passionate about theatre right from high school. When I joined JKUAT I found they had an acting club, and my contemporaries out here were doing this thing professionally. Why don't we create a career out of this in a more professional way? That was the thinking in

Wreiner Mandu, a producer at Igiza Arts Theatre, during the interview at the Kenya National Theatre on July 11. FRANCIS NDERITU | NATION

February 2017."

Igiza Arts Theatre focuses majorly on telling world stories that affect society using theatre, educating and entertaining while nurturing talent. Igiza's biggest achievement, says Wreiner, has been establishing and mastering a huge audience.

"With theatre, the marketing is mostly organic. Promoting it using TV and radio doesn't have much of an impact. It was a challenge getting an audience initially but within five years we have been able to curate a following and a community. Now I can plan and know the size of audience we are going to get and the financial and logistical manpower needed. That has been the greatest achievement. We have people patronising the show."

When he is directing or producing or mentoring his

actors, you get the sense of a master at work. He bellows orders, a stick here, an arm around the shoulder there. Sometimes though, you can hear the testiness in his voice, the sound of a man getting frustrated, and even then, this patchiness only serves to underlie the alluring sense that he is an artist in an age increasingly dominated by machines. He is not the most sought-after, nor is he the most demanding, but when you watch him do his thing, he is surely the most fun. "We target nine monthly productions every year," he says. "We don't do shows in January, August and December."

Igiza Arts Theatre stages four shows a weekend – two on Saturdays and two on Sundays – and has an audience base of around 400 to 600 people. A regular ticket will set you back

KSh 1,000 and a couple's ticket costs KSh 1,800.

The most attractive is a 'Group of Five' offering at KShs 4,000. Wreiner says interest in the theatre industry has been rising. "Since 2017, a lot of people have become alive to theatre. Initially, only music and cinema sold. More people have discovered theatre and are bringing friends and spreading the gospel through word of mouth. Very soon, we will have sold-out theatres."

Not many of us are as persistently stubborn, or stubbornly persistent in our chosen fields. Wreiner is. He is at his best when he is in his tunnel vision – writing, delving, exploring, pondering for the sake of sheer intellectual titillation. Did he always know this was his calling? "I have always known this is it. I have never had any

confusion about it. In 2004, I attended my first national drama competition at Lenana School. Since then, I've been doing lots of writing projects. I know this is what I wanted to be and this is where I am."

The dream for Igiza Arts is to become a fully-fledged production house à la Tyler Perry Studios.

"My story and his (Tyler Perry's) are similar. I just don't want to do theatre on small scale; I want to do it on a large scale, where we are shooting adverts and documentaries and we are running an academy. We are launching Igiza Arts Academy to nurture talent right from the nascent stages. We want to have curricula for every section, mentoring talent in singing, dancing, instrumentation, writing –everything. That is the dream for Igiza."

He speaks fondly of the lessons he has learnt, with delicacy and discretion, not for their own sake but towards a greater goal. "Like any other business, acting has its ups and downs. When you are starting out is the hardest. You need to have an open mind; it will probably take you two years for you to realise any return on your effort. You need people with like minds who will believe in the dream, who understand that it takes a lot of harrowing and toil and sweat and blood before it takes off.

We started with an audience of 20 or 30 people, charging only 100 bob. I have done many shows that have almost rendered me bankrupt, paying the actors out of my pocket. That has not happened recently. Now we have contracts. At the moment I can confidently say that our greatest worry is having enough shows to sustain the audience." Knowing that there are people who are yearning for more of your work is a blessing, he adds.

Having learnt all these lessons, how does he define success? "Having an impact on an individual. When you take people and eliminate the doubts that they can do it and give them a platform that they then do it on and make some money, that is the true mark of success." Failure, on the other hand, he says, is not using the talent that God has given you. "Failure is not fully exploring your potential, and therefore a lot of the world fails to drink from your pool of talent."

For that he has had to pay the price for this ambition. "When

Igiza was starting out, we formed a group but there was a splinter. There were those who believed in me and those who did not. I lost friendships the price of a dream. I have also had a frosty relationship with my parents who wanted me to become a teacher like them. But I always felt that in theatre, I am also teaching and mentoring. We fought quite a bit with them." Yet here he is: Wreiner, the gravity-defying rule-breaker, a shapeshifter and an acute judge of what works, able to trim his motivations and ambitions to the circumstance. Proving others wrong has made his successes all the sweeter.

He is now learning that you have to be really consistent in theatre. The people who are living out of this do even 12 shows a year, and because of their consistency they are able to get an audience and sell out, he says. Consistency is very influential when you try to make a living out of this.

"You have to stay true to yourself. People believe in you, and your product. That is your identity, and your credibility."

He tells me, however, that he is unlearning the mentality that theatre is just for passing time and passion. "Over time I have seen people live off theatre." Crucially, he says, he is relearning hard work. "It pays off. And I am relearning that every day."

The depth of your struggle will determine the height of your success. That's why he wants his life to be remembered as the epitome of dreaming and believing in your dreams. "I am living proof that you can do anything if you set your mind to it. I looked like I was crazy when I started Igiza Arts Theatre. If I had not stood up for my dreams, I would now have been truly crazy. Everyone should believe in their dreams because it is achievable."

Maybe he has a point. They say that the surest way of encouraging those trying to chase you down is by standing still. Now, this is his chrysalis moment, a triumph he was not just part of but central to. Thus, if his life was a theatre play, who would play him? My dad, he says.

"Because we have so much in common. He was a basketball player and his father wanted him to go into the sciences. He wanted to become a lawyer but missed by a single point, ending up as a teacher. I also wanted to become a lawyer, but I missed my cluster

KENYAN BLOCKBUSTER

■ Theatre in Kenya has its roots in traditional performances such as dances, storytelling and songs. However, the modern theatre as we know it was introduced during the colonial era. The establishment of the National Theatre in Nairobi in the 1950s and the establishment of the Kenya National Theatre in 1962 helped to formalise the industry. Over the years, theatre productions in Kenya have addressed social and political issues.

■ One of the most successful Kenyan theatrical productions was Sarafina!, a musical that was produced in 2018 by the Kenya National Theatre, based on a film about students' uprising in apartheid South Africa.

■ Some of the graduates from the Kenya National Theatre have gone on to work on successful Netflix films. One such movie is the Kenyan blockbuster, Nairobi, which tells the story of university students who attempt to pull off a heist.

points. I had a similar grade to his. He would be the perfect person to play me."

It is apt, then, that his latest production slated for July 29 and 30 at the Kenya Cultural Centre (née Kenya National Theatre) is titled The Homecoming – because his story is a homecoming that's befitting of a storybook ending. And why not? He is the sort of guy you instinctively root for, the thespian you relate to, the midwife who births his plays into reality and nurtures his dream every time he is on stage.

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REVEALING TRUTHS ABOUT THE MOTHERLAND

TELLING **THE AFRICAN STORY**

By discussing little-known facts about the continent's history, Vivian Okumu has amassed a huge following on TikTok, making her a highly sought-after content creator

• BY SINDA MATIKO

Vivian Taabu Okumu, or Swiri Nyar Kano as she prefers to be called, isn't your everyday content creator. The Microbiology and Biotechnology graduate wears many crowns, describing herself as a fashion designer, mental health advocate but most importantly African History and Spirituality Content Creator. The content creation is what propelled Vivian into the limelight. For some reason, she has managed to attract a legion of over one million followers on TikTok, 88,000 on Instagram and 7,000 on Facebook by posting unconventional information – content about African history, which she claims is never taught in Africa due to “the white man syndrome”.

Africa, says Vivian, is Alkebu-lan. In *Kemet: History of Africa*, Dr Cheikh Anah Diop writes that ‘the ancient name of Africa was Alkebu-lan – ‘the mother of mankind’ or ‘garden of Eden’. It is the oldest and the only name of

indigenous origin which was used by the Moors, Nubians, Numidians, Carthaginians and Ethiopians.

Africa, the misnomer adopted by almost everyone today, says Vivian, was given to the continent by the ancient Greeks and Romans, the Westerners whom she refers to as colonisers in her content.

This is the kind of information that intrigues Vivian and what she has been serving to the masses since 2021, when she first joined TikTok, consequently building an online community from which she now earns a living through market influencing.

Her social pages are loaded with historical facts and stories that sometimes leave her followers confused, startled and appreciative.

“Within two months of starting to share this content, I had gathered one

million followers. I didn't expect to gain such massive following in such a short time, but then again, I wasn't surprised,” she says.

“The numbers are no fluke. Most of what I share is never taught in Kenyan schools and that's what a lot of people find fascinating, especially about their origin as Africans.”

She goes on: “The African history taught in our schools is mostly composed of biased colonial lies that always paint Africa as a barbaric, uncivilised, savage, war-infested continent. History taught here only addresses slavery and colonisation of African people yet Africa is the mother of civilisation. What I share are the knowledge and philosophies I have studied about us Africans.”

Vivian credits TikTok for her success. She had been posting similar content on other social media platforms for years but never did not get much attention until she jumped on the short video App.

“I had no idea I would attract attention because I had been talking about African history on Facebook for



years but people didn't care to listen. When I started on TikTok, I thought the results would be the same. At some point I was shocked when Beyonce's manager reposted one of my videos," she recalls.

Due to her vast knowledge of African history, many people presume that she is a historian by profession. That is not the case. "I don't have a degree in History, I never studied History and I don't think I need to because, like I said, modern education doesn't teach true history. What is taught is not our history."

Although she appreciates TikTok for giving her a platform to share her content in an impactful manner, there have been some disappointments. "The only problem I face is that TikTok is racist. Almost all black content creators complain about this. The platform discriminates and disrespects black people all the time because systematic racism has its roots very deep in this world," she claims. Nonetheless she is satisfied with the impact she has created, and the recognition she has received.

"I won two awards: Positive Impact Award and Voice for Africa Awards. I was competing against notable people in Africa, the likes of Mo Abudu, who has millions of followers. That to me meant that I was creating the impact that's needed. I also received a lot of messages and monetary appreciations from people, thanking me for my enlightening content."

Despite Africa being behind other continents in many ways, Vivian insists that the continent is heading in the right



direction and that, with this kind of activism, things can only get better.

"The beauty of it is that the necessary changes are already being made. Congo decided to take control of its resources, Mali kicked the French out, Ghana is no longer exporting its cocoa to exploitative colonisers and the African Union has made Kiswahili the official working language. All these have happened within one year," she observes.

For her fashion, too, is Africa-inspired. "I was born of a mother who was a tailor

Within two months of starting to share this content, I had gathered one million followers. I didn't expect to gain such massive following in such a short time, but then again, I wasn't surprised.

Vivian Okumu



so fashion has always been a part of my journey, perfectly intertwined. As a fashion designer, my desire is to figure out what my ancestral fashion would have morphed into if there was no colonial interference."

With her huge following, brands and corporates have been reaching out for collaborations. She charges KSh70,000 for content creation, KSh50,000 for product photography, KSh35,000 for product reviews and KSh120,000 for brand ambassadorial roles.

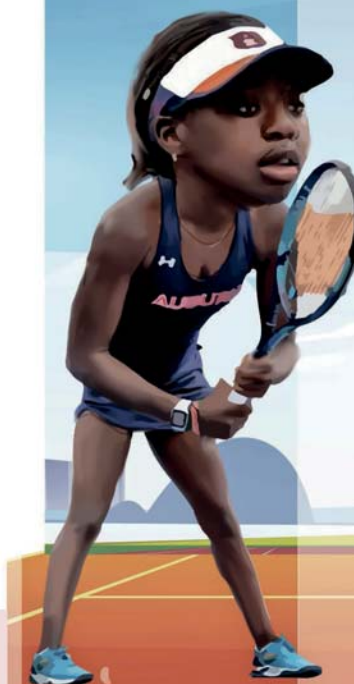
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WOMAN POWER

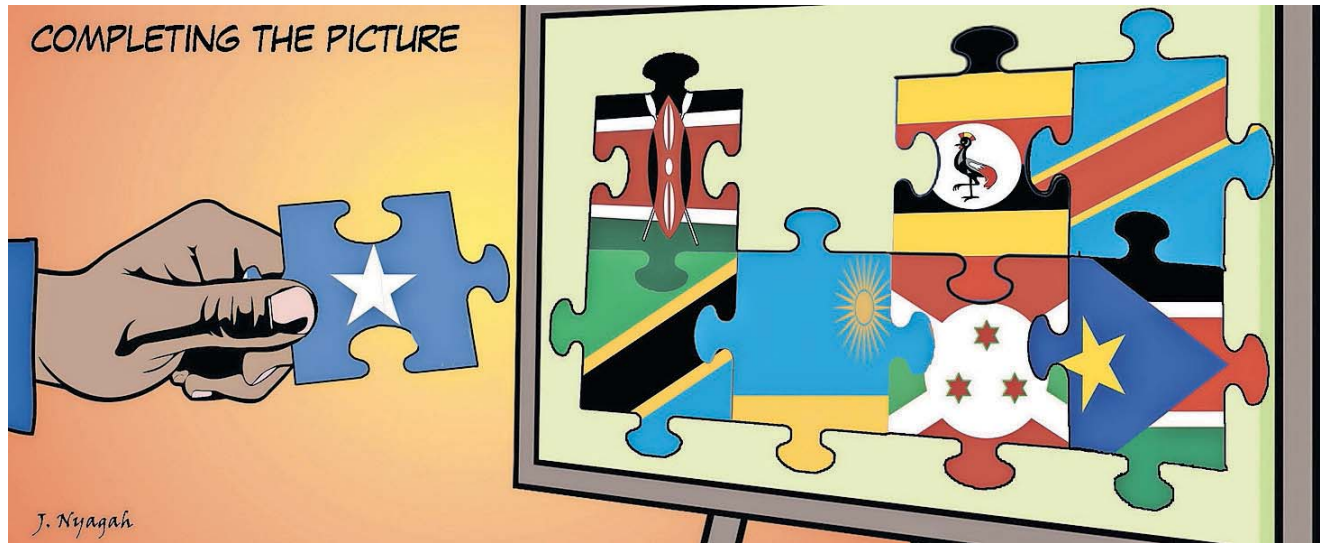
KENYAN COMMONWEALTH GAMES BOOM CHAMPION MARY MORAA OVERCAME MONUMENTAL ODDS ON HER JOURNEY TO SUCCESS. SHE WAS ORPHANED AT THE AGE OF TWO AND DID MENIAL JOBS TO SURVIVE IN HER FORMATIVE YEARS. INTERESTINGLY, RUNNING A LONG DISTANCE TO AND FROM SCHOOL WITH A HEAVY BAG ON HER BACK IS WHAT SET HER UP FOR WORLD DOMINATION AS AN ATHLETE LATER IN LIFE. THANK YOU MARY FOR SHOWING EVERYONE THAT IF INDEED LIFE HANDS YOU LEMONS INSTEAD OF ORANGES, YOU MAKE LEMONADE INSTEAD OF SITTING AND GRUMBLING!

STAR OF THE WEEK



WIMBLEDON JUNIOR DOUBLES CHAMPION ANGELLA OKUTOYI OF KENYA IS THROUGH TO THE ROUND OF 16 IN THE INTERNATIONAL TENNIS FEDERATION (ITF) WOMEN'S WORLD TENNIS TOUR WIS MONASTIR AFTER BEATING EIGHTH- SEED JULIA STAMITOVA FROM BULGARIA IN STRAIGHT SETS IN TUNISIA LAST WEEK. AT THE 2022 AUSTRALIAN OPEN, OKUTOYI BECAME THE FIRST REPRESENTATIVE OF KENYA TO WIN A GIRLS' JUNIOR SINGLES GRAND SLAM MATCH. WE CELEBRATE YOU ANGELA AS YOU KEEP SHINING IN THE WORLD OF TENNIS.

opinion



■ Protests proved that Kenyans are unhappy, but caused a lot of damage too

Azimio should own the good, bad and ugly of demos

Azimio la Umoja, thanks to their frequent calls for street action, have made the point, loudly, clearly and abundantly, that Kenyans are unhappy with the prevailing economic situation that has caused the prices of basic commodities and staples to go through the roof and the cost of living to skyrocket.

Azimio have interpreted the fact that Kenyans are heeding their calls for mass protests as a rejection of the 11-month old government of President Ruto and Kenya Kwanza. It is why the coalition has embarked on a search for 15 million signatures to serve both as evidence of the disaffection with government and a signal for it to exit the stage.

That said, what will Azimio do next, having made the point that Kenyans are unhappy with the performance of their government, especially in regard to the economy. The point cannot be repeated endlessly. The protests, while working against the government, cannot go on forever, especially when they result in destruction of private and public property and death of innocents.

Just as the protests were widespread, so also were muggings, robberies and thievery. Criminal gangs monitor the deployment of police just as the police monitor the movements of the gangs. At times, criminal elements among the police tip off their brothers in the underworld of happenings just as informers in the underworld sell their colleagues to the cops.

Criminal gangs wreaked havoc in various parts of Nairobi as police were mobilised and deployed in areas their bosses thought demonstrators would gather or pass through. Shops were boarded up, resulting in loss of



**KWENDO
OPANGA**

business. Shops that were open were looted. Shut, businesses lost; open, businesses lost. Open, government lost and shut, government lost. Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi was here on a state visit during which Tehran and Nairobi signed multiple investment deals. But you would not have known it. The news was about the anti-government demonstrations and the chaos protestors unleashed as they looted, vandalised, fought with police, and the deaths that ensued from the skirmishes.

The news was dominated by the cries of mothers struggling to rescue their children from choking tear gas lobbed into their school and the woes of commuters unable to reach their destinations, thanks to a strike by PSVs. TV news showed marchers confronting police as missiles flew, tear gas fumes engulfed the air and insults were hurled at the police and President Ruto. Azimio leaders crowed. The protests were witnessed across Kenya, they said. The demonstrations proved Kenyans are fed up with the Kenya Kwanza government, they declared. We will not relent and so Kenyans should be prepared for more protests

to force the President to act on their demands to bring down the cost of living, they vowed.

Azimio chieftains may have been happy their protests eclipsed the state visit by the Iranian president. They may have been pleased protests are growing bigger and may have been thrilled their strategy of panning out showed Kenya was restless. Azimio may relish pushing the government to the wall and are eager to pile more pressure on a beleaguered President.

But as they celebrate the impact of their demos, should not Azimio also own the vandals and their destruction of the Expressway? If they are happy the government is reeling under pressure of people power, should they not also not share the blame for the deaths in Machakos County, and looting of a supermarket and burning of a chief's office in Kitengela?

Before announcing their next course of action in driving Kenya Kwanza out, let Azimio own both the noble and ignoble of maandamano of Jumatano.

kwendo58@gmail.com

opinion

■ Looting and mugging playing important roles to realisation of the Bottom Up agenda

Raila protests crucial for wealth redistribution



MACHARIA
GAITHO

The scrap metal trade — at the bottom end of the food chain, not the scale of Irshad Sumra and other major barons — is the very personification of the hustler economy. Dramatic footage of Mlolongo entrepreneurs cutting up and carting away guardrails, barriers and all other metal bits at the southern entrance to the Nairobi Expressway should therefore have had President William Ruto grinning like the proverbial Cheshire cat (No relation to his former Eldoret North political foe Reuben Cheshire).

Ruto should right now be penning a thank you note to opposition chief Raila Odinga for breathing new life into the floundering dream of a hustler economy. The series of protests against the high cost of living, amongst an ever-expanding list of grievances, have provided hustlers the perfect opportunity to take things into their own hands. Quite literally.

Ruto campaigned on the promise of Bottom Up ideology, or rather slogan, by which the hustler nation would henceforth leapfrog to the top of the government’s development programmes. The under-class would leapfrog the elitist tuffs in a grand re-distribution of wealth that would see the scions of dynasties toppled from their lofty perches.

The government, distracted by more urgent matters such as cutting duty-free cooking oil deals to enrich relatives and friends, overlooked the goodies much awaited by the hustlers. Until Raila came to the rescue.

The Expressway, as Ruto’s economic adviser David Ndii once declared, is an elitist project designed to provide access to Northlands City project owned by the Kenyatta dynasty. The elevated highway was envisaged to transport, above the heads of the toiling *hoi polloi*, high rollers, between the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport to the mega development being put up by the family interests of Ruto’s predecessor, Uhuru Kenyatta.

Ruto as President couldn’t well start dismantling the Uhuru legacy project, but Raila inadvertently started doing it for him, and things were going wonderfully until some stupid police officers who didn’t understand

the hustler revolution intervened. It isn’t only scrap metal dealers who stood to benefit. Wealth redistribution has been much in evidence during the Raila protests, with the looting, mugging and robberies playing important roles to realisation of the Bottom Up economic slogan.

Every supermarket looted means business revival for the mama mboga, hawkers and other itinerant traders crowded out of the market by dynasty chains; not to mention that the products liberated will find their way into the informal retail market. And we have not yet started counting the boom for carpenters, welders, masons and electricians and other artisans and technicians who will be engaged to carry out repairs and reinforcements.

In the early stages of the protests, powerful politicians close to Ruto came up with a brilliant plan to empower hustlers by giving them freedom to raid the Northlands Farm and drive away hundreds of prize sheep and goats as police were instructed to look the other way.

By now it has been realised that merely



Every supermarket looted means business revival for the mama mboga, hawkers and other itinerant traders crowded out of the market by dynasty chains; not to mention that the products liberated will find their way into the informal retail market. And we have not yet started counting the boom for carpenters, welders, masons and electricians and other artisans and technicians who will be engaged to carry out repairs and reinforcements.

raiding and robbing private property is not enough, as there can be much more profit in tearing down major public infrastructure projects, and then of course creating employment in rebuilding.

The Expressway was just the first step. Kenya has millions and millions of tonnes of metal just lying around waiting to be liberated by hustler entrepreneurs. He is not called Raila for nothing, so railway tracks will be the obvious next target. Remember the ‘ng’oa reli (Uproot the railway)’ chants of 2007? Next will be the metal guard rails and barriers along all major, bridges, electricity pylons, telephone and broadcast transmission masts... the list is endless.

The beauty of it is that hustlers will make a killing and so will no longer have to bother Ruto to deliver on the goodies promised during the campaigns. Raila will be held accountable for the destruction, while merchants close to the regime will earn their own bounties in winning uncontested tenders for all the rebuilding and repair works. The protests continuing unabated is therefore critical to realization of the Kenya Kwanza administrations economic agenda.

And there could be another bonus in Raila soon calling for consumer boycotts on all petrol stations that do not revert to the pre-budget pump process. The government and the petroleum markets have defied the High Court order against implementation of the Finance Bill, and germane here the doubling of Value Added Tax on petrol from 8 to 16 percent.

The Odinga dynasty has interests in the industry with a growing chain of petrol stations, but that should be no bar to the patriot in him ordering mass action on outlets that ignore an order to reduce pump prices.

Ruto will be looking on with interest here, for the increase in petrol prices has been the main catalyst for growing disaffection with his administration. He doesn’t want to be seen buckling down to Raila’s demands, but will welcome ‘voluntary’ price reductions that might calm the angry masses. And with the added bonus that Raila’s pocket will take a direct hit.

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kenya lens

■ IRANIAN AND SAUDI ARABIAN VISITS

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi inspects a guard of honour at State House, Nairobi, on July 12. LUCY WANJIRU | NATION



DANCING WITH THE GULF

President Ruto appears to be keen on ramping up economic and diplomatic relations with rich Gulf countries

● BY JAINDI KISERO

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, accompanied by a big delegation of businessmen from Tehran, last week visited Nairobi where they signed bilateral agreements with President William Ruto.

Even though the details of what transpired in the meetings with Ruto were worded in diplomatic speak, it is an open secret that Tehran's interest is to expand influence globally and to fight sanctions and isolation.

What are Kenya's economic interests and what does that high-profile visit to Nairobi by the Iranian leader mean for our dip-

lomatic relations with the United States, Israel and other nations that have a growing standoff with Iran over its nuclear programme?

When a country with whom you are closely diplomatically engaged is in bad books with the West, are you also exposed? These are pertinent questions in the minds of pundits as they struggle to discern conduct and direction for policy under President Ruto.

On paper, trade volumes between Kenya and Iran are not significant. Kenya regards Iran as one of the most valued destinations for its tea, with exports worth US\$28.4 million in the first quarter of this year, an eight-fold

increase from sales in the same period last year. Still, the impact of warming relations with Tehran can only be significant for Kenya depending on capacity to ramp up export capacity, which only helps where there is room for significant trade-offs. Ruto announced that the Iranians plan to build a motor vehicle assembly plant in Mombasa.

President Ruto would appear to be keen on ramping up economic and diplomatic relations with the rich Gulf countries. The fact that the visit by the Iranian leader coincided with another high-profile visit to Nairobi by one of the largest trade delegations from Saudi Arabia was not

without significance.

Middle East Gulf States are diversifying their economies from dependence on oil exports to areas such as financial services, port and railway concessions and construction of world-class airports.

It was significant that, against the background of President Ruto's high-level diplomatic engagement with two key Gulf states, the National Treasury also announced that it was planning to issue a 'sukuk' – an Islamic sovereign bond – to support plans to refinance mounting debt repayment obligations.

With access to mainstream international capital markets proving to be increasingly challenging

kenya lens

for Kenya, it seems that the Treasury is plotting to take advantage of the high-profile diplomatic offensive President Ruto's administration has rolled out to the Gulf region. It is in the financial sector where the interests of Gulf countries has been most evident in recent years. The Qataris have for many years been keen on building a proposed Nairobi International Financial Centre.

As far back as April 2014, Qatar National Bank (QNB) tabled a request to the government to buy a local bank – their preference – a large institution with a regional footprint. But what has intrigued observers most is the fact that QNB has recently adopted the practice of regularly publishing its audited accounts in local newspapers.

The largest bank in the Middle East and

northern Africa region, with a whopping \$140 billion (Sh14.2 trillion) in assets, its move confounded many observers because banks only publish financial statements in markets where they are licensed to offer banking services. Pundits in Nairobi's financial sector read the gimmicks as teasers put out by QNB for an impending big acquisition in the local market.

When Kenya floated the Eurobond in 2014, QNB Capital placed a bid of \$200 million (Sh20.4 billion) – a strong indicator of the level of interest and confidence by the markets of Gulf countries in Kenya paper.

Trends suggest that large and rich financial institutions from the Gulf are quickly positioning themselves as the entities ready to provide resources to African countries locked

On paper, trade volumes between Kenya and Iran are not significant. Kenya regards Iran as one of the most valued destinations for its tea, with exports worth US\$28.4 million in the first quarter of this year, an eight-fold increase from sales in the same period last year.

out from the international debt markets and are, unlike conventional debt markets, ready to lend to Africa without attaching too many conditions. Financial institutions and markets of the Gulf region are morphing into sanctions busters in a western-dominated international financial system.

At the Coast, investors from the Gulf have been very keen on the Port of Lamu. The Al Bader Group, an investment owned and operated by a network of high net worth individuals out of Kuwait and the UAE, expressed interest in financing and developing some of the Lappset projects, including the Lamu Port, several years ago.

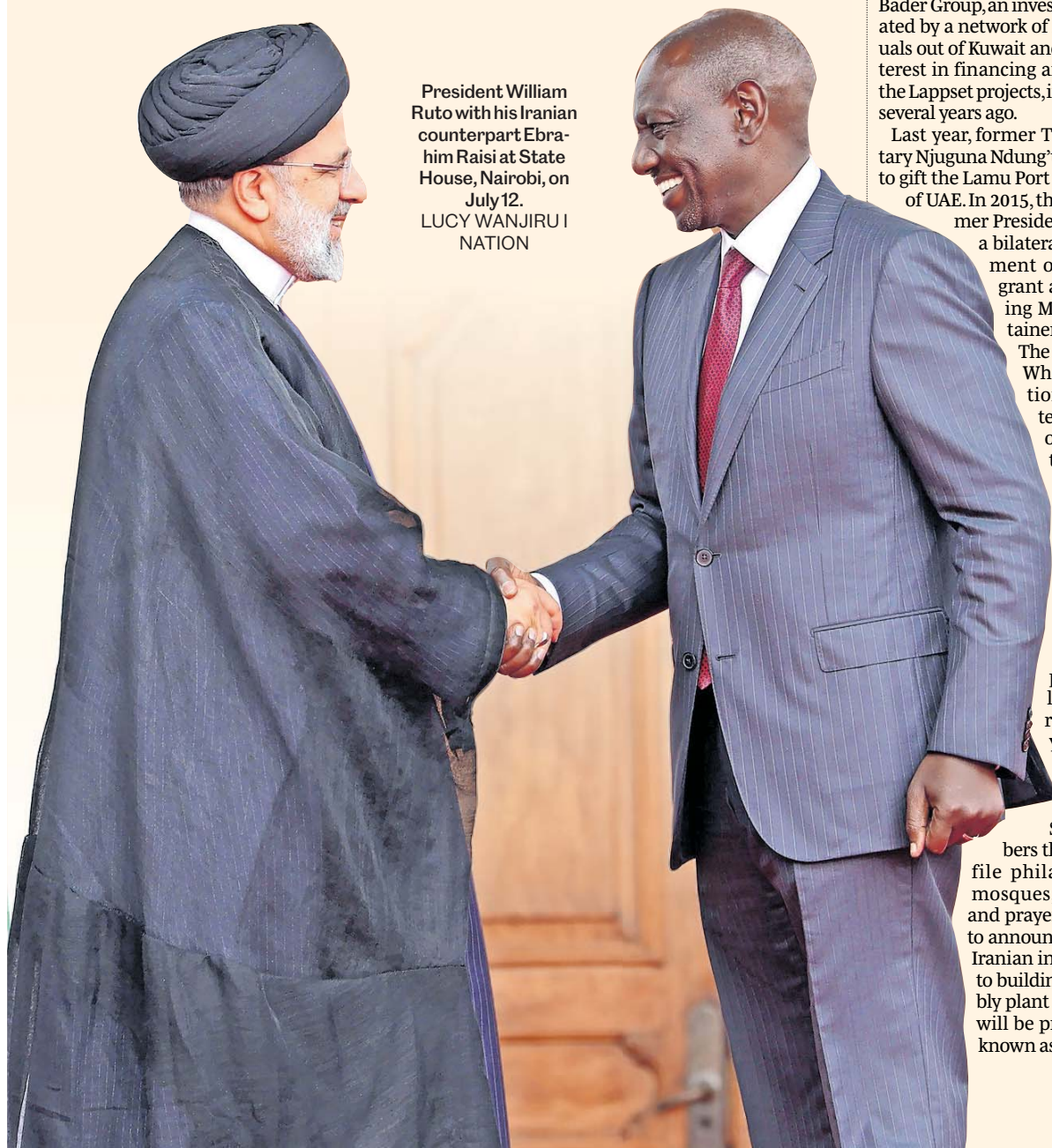
Last year, former Treasury Cabinet Secretary Njuguna Ndung'u unsuccessfully offered to gift the Lamu Port concession to DP World of UAE. In 2015, the administration of former President Uhuru Kenya signed

a bilateral deal with the government of the UAE, offering to grant a concession of managing Mombasa's Second Container Terminal to DP World.

The deal did not go through. When Ruto's administration finally puts out the tender for concessioning of the Lamu Port, competition from port operators from the Gulf will be stiff.

Diplomatic relations between Kenya and Gulf have been a hot and cold affair for many years over security issues. But an important factor in the persistently cordial relations between Tehran and Nairobi over the years is the presence, mainly in areas around Mombasa, of an influential network of Shia community members that engages in high-profile philanthropy building of mosques, local schools, health and prayer centres. President Ruto announced on Wednesday that Iranian investors had committed to building a local vehicle assembly plant in the coastal town that will be producing a brand to be known as Kifaru.

President William Ruto with his Iranian counterpart Ebrahim Raisi at State House, Nairobi, on July 12.
LUCY WANJIRU | NATION



SCIENCE & TECH

AI-CHARGED NEUROTECH THREATENS MENTAL PRIVACY



● LONDON

The combination of “warp speed” advances in neurotechnology, such as brain implants or scans that can increasingly peek inside minds, and artificial intelligence poses a threat to mental privacy, Unesco has warned.

The UN’s agency for science and culture has started developing a global “ethical framework” to address human rights concerns posed by neurotechnology, it said at a conference in Paris.

Neurotechnology is a growing field seeking to connect electronic devices to the nervous system, mostly so far to treat neurological disorders and restore movement, communication, vision or hearing.

Recently neurotechnology has been supercharged by artificial intelligence algorithms which can process and learn from data in ways never before possible, said Mariagrazia Squicciarini, a Unesco economist specialising in AI.

“It’s like putting neurotech on steroids,” she told AFP.

Gabriela Ramos, Unesco’s assistant director-general for social and human sciences, said that this convergence of neurotechnology and AI was “far-reaching and potentially harmful”.

“We are on a path to a world in which algorithms will enable us to decode people’s mental processes and directly manipulate the brain mechanisms underlying their intentions, emotions and decisions,” she told the conference.

In May, scientists in the United States revealed they had used brain scans and AI to turn “the gist” of what people were thinking into written words — as long as they had spent long hours inside a large fMRI machine.

Later that month, billionaire Elon Musk’s firm Neuralink received approval to test its coin-sized brain implants on humans in the United States.

Musk has said his ultimate goal is to ensure that humans are

not intellectually overwhelmed by AI — though on Thursday he launched his own artificial intelligence company xAI.

Squicciarini emphasised that Unesco was not saying that neurotechnology is a bad thing.

“If anything it’s fantastic,” she said, pointing to how the technology could let blind people see again, or paralysed people walk.

But with neurotechnology “advancing at warp speed,” UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that ethical guidelines were needed to protect human rights.

Investment in neurotech companies increased by 22 times from 2010 to 2020, rising to \$33.2 billion, according to a new Unesco report co-authored by Squicciarini.

The number of patents for neurotech devices doubled between 2015 and 2020, with the United States accounting for nearly half of all patents worldwide, the report said.

The neurotech devices market is projected to reach \$24.2 billion by 2027.

Elon Musk announces new start-up

Tesla boss Elon Musk has announced the formation of an artificial intelligence startup.

The new company, xAI, includes several engineers that have worked at companies like OpenAI and Google. Musk has previously stated he believes developments in AI should be paused and that the sector needs regulation.

He said the start-up was created to “understand reality”. It is unclear how much funding the entity has, what its specific objectives are or what kind artificial intelligence the company wants to focus on.

The company’s website says the goal of xAI is to “understand the true nature of the universe.”

Musk was the one of the original backers of OpenAI, which went on to create the popular large language model ChatGPT, which has — often controversially — become popular for uses such as assisting students with writing homework.

However, the billionaire’s relationship with the company has soured. He has criticised ChatGPT for having a liberal bias.

“What we need is TruthGPT”, Musk tweeted in February.

He also disagrees with how ChatGPT has been run — and its close relationship with Microsoft.

“It does seem weird that something can be a nonprofit, open source and somehow transform itself into a for-profit, closed source,” Musk said.

In March, Musk signed an open letter calling for a pause to “Giant AI Experiments”, which to date has around 33,000 signatures. In April, Musk said he had been worrying about AI safety for over a decade. “I think there should be a regulatory body established for overseeing AI to make sure that it does not present a danger to the public”, he said. Musk has also pitted himself against AI companies due to the data they use to train chatbots — the software that learns how humans interact by scraping masses of data from various sources to fuel its knowledge and interaction styles.

africa lens

■ AFRICA'S EXPENSIVE FLIGHTS



NO, YOU CAN'T FLY

If just 12 key countries in Africa worked together to improve connectivity and opened up their markets, it would create 155,000 jobs and boost those countries' Gross Domestic Product by more than \$1.3 billion.

It is often cheaper to fly to another continent than to another African country as travellers pay higher ticket prices and more tax

● JOHANNESBURG

Flying within Africa is more expensive than just about anywhere else in the world. Travellers pay higher ticket prices and more tax. It is often cheaper to fly to another continent than to another African country. For a quick comparison, flying from the German capital, Berlin, to Turkey's biggest city, Istanbul, will

probably set you back around \$150 for a direct flight taking less than three hours.

But flying a similar distance, say between Kinshasa, capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Nigeria's biggest city, Lagos, you will be paying anything between \$500 and \$850, with at least one change, taking up to 20 hours.

This makes doing business within Africa incredibly diffi-

cult, and expensive - and it is not just elite travellers that are affected. The International Air Transport Association (IATA) - the global trade body representing some 300 airlines which make up about 83 per cent of world air traffic - argues that if just 12 key countries in Africa worked together to improve connectivity and opened up their markets, it would create 155,000 jobs and boost those countries' Gross Do-

mestic Product (GDP) by more than \$1.3bn.

"Aviation contributes directly to the GDP in every country. It generates work and it activates the economy," says Kamil al-Awadhi, IATA's regional vice-president for Africa and the Middle East.

Adefolake Adeyeye, an assistant professor of commercial law at the UK's Durham University,

...Continued on Page 26

africa lens

Costly flights hold the continent back



There is also a growing middle-class who could potentially travel by air if the tickets were priced at similar levels to Europe or elsewhere. African states have been trying for decades to integrate the aviation sector, but they haven't been successful, yet.

Continued from Page 25

agrees that Africa as a whole is missing out because of its poor air service.

"It's been shown that air transport does boost the economy. As we've seen in other continents, budget airlines can improve connectivity and cost, which boosts tourism, which then creates many more jobs," she says.

The poor quality of road networks and lack of railways in many African countries often makes air transport the practical choice for cargo too.

The climate emergency, which has severely impacted Africa, means everyone needs to be more careful about their carbon footprint and should aim to fly a lot less.

But even though around 18 per cent of the world's population lives in Africa, it accounts for less than 2 per cent of global air travel and, according to the UN's Environment Programme, just 3.8 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions. This is in contrast to 19 per cent from the US and 23 per cent from China. Africa may be rich in minerals and natural resources, but of the 46 nations on the UN's Least Developed Countries list, 33 are on the continent, and poverty continues to be the biggest daily threat for millions of people on the continent.

But there is also a growing middle-class who could potentially travel by air if the tickets were priced at similar levels to Europe or elsewhere. African states have been trying for decades to integrate the aviation sector, but they haven't been successful, yet.

"There needs to be a coherent strategy by Af-

rica to address the issue of its poor air service if they want to transform Africa's economies," says Zemedeneh Negatu, the global chairman of US-based investment firm Fairfax Africa Fund. He says that flights within Africa are still structured around cumbersome bilateral agreements from one country to the next, and that most flag-carrying state airlines in Africa barely cover their costs, while some even run at a loss.

"Every government in Africa wants to see their flag on the tail of an aircraft at Heathrow or JFK airport, but African governments need to realise that stand alone carriers are not viable."

Zemedeneh argues that African airlines should take inspiration from Europe and form major partnerships, such as between flag-carriers Air France and KLM of The Netherlands, and the Anglo-Spanish International Airlines Group (IAG) formed between British Airways and Iberia. He says even in the rich market of Europe, conglomeration is the way forward for airliners to survive, and provide a cheaper more reliable service.

The current system in Africa is very fragmented, and although 35 countries are signed up to the Single African Air Transport Market, an African Union (AU) initiative to free up the skies to African airlines and bring down costs, it could be years before it's implemented.

IATA's Mr Awadhi says governments are reluctant to work together.

"There is a hard-headedness where each state thinks they know how to handle it better and will stick to their remedies even when they are not very effective," he says.

"In the end it's a business and there is a level of protectionism that starts to hurt the aviation industry. Then there is no benefit to having your own national carrier." There is one notable exception in Africa of an airline that is absolutely thriving, and that could provide a blueprint for others to copy – Ethiopian Airlines.

Just over 15 years ago the company employed about 4,000 people. Now that figure is over 17,000. It is state-owned but run entirely as a commercial venture without government interference.

It has more than doubled the size of its fleet of cargo and passenger planes and has made Addis Ababa a regional hub, driving foreign currency into the Ethiopian capital, and boosting the country's service industry.

At the turn of the millennium Ethiopia was one of the poorest countries in the world, now it's one of the fastest growing economies.

Zemedeneh, an Ethiopian-American who played a key role as an adviser to Ethiopian Airlines as it developed its strategy, says Ethiopian Airlines has played a part in that boom.

"Ethiopian Airlines generates millions of dollars in hard currency for the country, and it makes every Ethiopian proud that they have been able to create one of the most successful indigenous African-owned, African-operated, multinational companies," he adds.

African travellers will be hoping these kinds of commercial successes will ultimately impact their airfares, bringing them down more in line with Europe or Asia - and that they can finally get to where they want to go more quickly and cheaply.

global lens

■ THE 2023 FIFA WOMEN'S WORLD CUP: AUSTRALIA-NEW ZEALAND

IT'S HOT DOWN UNDER



The tournament will see four African representatives out of 32 teams, with Morocco and Zambia making their debuts, while Nigeria will be appearing for the ninth time and South Africa their second

● JOHANNESBURG

All African teams will head into the Women's World Cup as underdogs, but Nigeria have twice made the knockout rounds and will be out to prove they are still Africa's dominant force.

The tournament in Australia and New Zealand (July 20 - August 20) will see four African representatives out of 32 participating teams, with Morocco and Zambia making their debuts, while Nigeria will be appearing for the ninth time and South Africa their second.

South Africa

Pros: South Africa have momentum behind them as African champions, having won the most recent Women's Africa Cup of Nations. Many of their players have vital overseas experience, which they can lean on during crucial Group G battles.

Refiloe Jane has played in Italy since 2019 (previously for AC Milan and currently Sassuolo) and will therefore be able to pass on insight about the Italian national team, which will likely largely consist of her familiar friends and adversaries at club level.

Likewise, Linda Motlhalo has

experience playing in Sweden, who Banyana Banyana will also face, although they will likely pull on plenty of foreign-based talent.

In 2019, South Africa were new to life at the Fifa Women's World Cup. This time, they are more experienced and coach Desiree Ellis has had more than enough time to leave her mark on the team, having been appointed as interim manager in 2016 and head coach in 2018.

Cons: South Africa only has a semi-professional women's league, which is dominated by Mamelodi Sundowns. There is

plenty of talent in the country, but a shortage of development structures to nurture it.

Star striker Thembi Kgatlana (Racing Louisville FC) said in a recent interview with ESPN that South Africa's lack of a technical centre, in addition to the absence of a professional women's league, could cost them their place on top of Africa.

There has also been discontent within the squad, as they boycotted a friendly against Botswana on July 2, claiming mistreatment from the South African Football Association

Continued on Page 28

global lens

The pros and cons of each African team

Continued from Page 27

(Safa). The players were reportedly unhappy with the quality of the field on which they were asked to play, as well as the strength of their warm-up opponents. Furthermore, they were unhappy

with Safa's unwillingness to promise them a substantially increased financial package.

The association's apparent hesitance to reward their players comes despite Fifa paying \$30,000 per player minimum in prize money, leaving Sundowns owner

Patrice Motsepe to step in and fund the shortfall.

On the field, Banyana have plenty of tremendously skillful players, but a shortage of out-and-out lethal finishers. There will be pressure on Kgatlanga to find the back of the net.

They stand a chance against Argentina, but finishing above both La Albiceleste and at least one of Sweden or Italy is a tough ask, and a top two finish in the group is required in order to qualify for the next round.



Nigeria

Pros: Nigeria not only have the most experienced squad in competitive situations such as the World Cup, but they also have more depth than their competitors.

On paper, they also have the most balance in their ranks, with quality tried-and-tested players in every position. Notably, they have Paris FC's Chiamaka Nnadozie in goal, Houston Dash's versatile Michelle Alozie and Deportivo Alavés' Osinachi Ohale in defence, Sevilla's Toni Payne on the flanks, Rosengård's Halimatu Ayinde in midfield and star striker Asisat Oshoala (Barcelona).

Cons: Coach Randy Waldrum has given himself a tough task as he looks to keep morale in the squad high, despite making a selection choice which did not go down well within Nigeria - excluding veteran Ngozi Okobi-Okeoghene from his World Cup squad. The Levante Las Planas midfielder did not see a significant amount of club action in 2022/23, appearing 10 times in the Primera Iberdrola and racking up a total of 338 league minutes. However, she was one of their more impressive players at the WAFCON, where Nigeria finished a disappointing fourth, and is hugely popular in the country.

Additionally, the relationship between the Super Falcons players and their national federation has been tense at best for some time, with regular protests from players pertaining to alleged financial mistreatment.

Australia, the Republic of Ireland and Canada will all likely prove difficult to beat in Group B, one of the toughest in the tournament.

Morocco

Pros: Moroccan women's football has risen rapidly in recent years, with forward Rosella Ayane (Tottenham Hotspur) the star overseas-based addition to a squad with a solid core of local players. Morocco have sought to develop talent locally, with their federation announcing the creation of a professional women's league with two tiers in 2020.

Last year, the results of years of planning were on full display. Not only did Morocco make the final of the WAFCON in their first appearance since 2000 and their first foray ever beyond the group stage, but they also claimed club continental honours.

Furthermore, Morocco have been placed in a manageable group. South Korea and Colombia have never made it beyond a World Cup round of 16, while even favourites Germany are long past their golden era.

Cons: In a word, inexperience. Morocco do not have the same level of muscle memory from high pressure scenarios as their African counterparts, serial winners Nigeria or current WAFCON queens South Africa.

This is their first appearance at a Women's World Cup and they were well below par in the early minutes of the WAFCON final, which suggests that there is still work to be done on their big game management.

England-born Ayane aside, they also do not have overseas-based players who are both experienced and playing at the highest level.

The foundations are in place for Moroccan women's football to build an identity from grassroots up to the Atlas Lionesses. For now, this team is a work in progress - a mere glimpse of what could be to come from African women's football's next potential superpower.



Zambia

Pros: Shanghai Shengli's Barbra Banda is eligible for the World Cup after being controversially denied the chance to play in the WAFCON due to high testosterone levels. Racheal Kundananji's 25 goals in the 2022/23 Primera Iberdrola season for Madrid CFF left her as the league's second-highest scorer and so Zambia's already impressive forward line is looking even stronger than at the Olympics, where Banda announced herself to the world.

Kundananji's Madrid teammate, Grace Chanda, also held her own in the 2022/23 season from midfield. With Chanda 26 years of age and Banda and Kundananji each 23, all three players are likely only just entering their prime.

Offensively, Zambia have the tools to go toe-to-toe with anyone they come across. Kundananji and Chanda's knowledge of Spanish top-flight football is likely to come in handy when Zambia face Spain.

Cons: The Copper Queens have been handed a tough draw in Group C alongside Spain, Costa Rica and Japan.

Zambia's defensive frailties were exposed severely at the Tokyo Olympics, where they conceded 15 goals in three games, shipping double digits against the Netherlands in a 10-3 defeat in which Banda scored a hat-trick.

By qualifying for both the Olympics and the World Cup, this generation of Copper Queens stars proved that they are far from a one-hit wonder, but they still lack the experience of Nigeria and their Group C opponents.

global lens

■ RISING STARS UP THE ENERGY IN US SQUAD

USA CHASE THIRD TITLE

The Americans should easily get out of the group along with the Dutch, but Australia, Spain, Germany and England are all threats in the latter rounds

● LOS ANGELES

The United States believe that young talent combined with the savvy of veterans such as Megan Rapinoe will make a lethal combination as they seek an unprecedented third straight Women's World Cup title.

Coach Vlatko Andonovski named 14 World Cup newcomers in his 23-player squad for the tournament in Australia and New Zealand, which kicks off on July 20. The holders and favourites still also have the likes of Rapinoe and Alex Morgan — both headed for a fourth World Cup — and Andonovski is doing nothing to dampen expectations. “I’m excited about the energy and the enthusiasm that the young players bring, the intensity and the drive as well,” the 46-year-old said before their arrival this week in Auckland.

“I think that will be one of our advantages.”

Injuries to captain Becky Sauerbrunn, striker Mallory Swanson and the talented Catarina Macario have been a blow to the Americans, but the stage is set for their youngsters to shine. They include the 22-year-old Sophia Smith, the National Women's Soccer League MVP with Portland last year. She has scored 12 goals in 30 appearances for the USA.

Also among the newcomers are Trinity Rodman, the 2021 NWSL rookie of the year and daughter of former NBA star Dennis Rodman. There is also the 18-year-old Angel City FC forward Alyssa Thompson, the second-youngest player ever named in a US World Cup squad.

The Americans, chasing a fifth World Cup crown overall, will also be able to count on Rose Lavelle, Lindsey Horan and Crystal Dunn, all veterans of the 2019 World Cup campaign that saw the Americans triumph against the backdrop of their battle with the US federation for equal pay and benefits.

Their efforts led to a groundbreaking contract with US Soccer, and Morgan said that improved conditions for women

Coach Vlatko Andonovski named 14 World Cup newcomers in his 23-player squad for the tournament in Australia and New Zealand, which kicks off on July 20. The holders and favourites still also have the likes of Rapinoe (inset) and Alex Morgan — both headed for a fourth World Cup — and Andonovski is doing nothing to dampen expectations.

players around the world have helped other countries close the gap on the top-ranked USA.

So much so that despite their number one FIFA ranking the US players were careful throughout their send-off media day to refer to themselves as only “one of the best” teams in the world. They are right to be cautious.

Since beating the Netherlands 2-0 in the 2019 final, the United States missed out on the gold-medal match at the pandemic-delayed Tokyo Olympics and had to settle for bronze.

Last year they lost to England, Spain and Germany in quick succession — the first time they had lost three in a row since 1993.

Andonovski considers it his job to shepherd a dynasty not only through this World Cup but beyond. But he and his players made it clear that amid all the changes, nothing less than the title in New Zealand and Australia will satisfy them. “Would I be happy with anything short of a third straight win? No, absolutely not,” Andonovski said. “Our goal is to win the World Cup. I don’t think anyone on our team thinks anything different.”

The challenge will start early in a group that features the Netherlands in a re-run of the 2019 final, as well as Vietnam and Portugal.

“It’s obviously one of the hardest groups if not the hardest group in the World Cup,” Andonovski said.

“We had to dissect the three different styles, have three different approaches. “But we think that we have enough time to prepare for them, to get ready for every single one of them separately.

“The goal is to win the group before we move on to the ultimate goal.”

The Americans should easily get out of the group along with the Dutch, but Australia, Spain, Germany and European champions England are all threats in the latter rounds.



OBIT

■ HE WAS A SCHOLAR OF ARABIC, KISWAHILI AND LINGUISTICS

BURIANI MWALIMU

The world says farewell to Prof Mohammed Abdulaziz, the father of Swahili Studies

● BY TOM ODHIAMBO

There is probably a generation of Kiswahili scholars today who do not know Professor Mohammed Hassan Abdulaziz. They may not be aware that the study of Kiswahili as a discipline today can be traced to the efforts of Abdulaziz, who died on July 10. One would guess that it is largely due to his self-effacing character. He was a simple man who, even after his retirement from teaching at the University of Nairobi, continued to carry himself with the humility of a refined academic.

Abdulaziz was a scholar of Arabic, Kiswahili and Linguistics. He obtained his BA in Modern and Classical Arabic from the School of Oriental and African Studies in 1962 and MA in 19th Century Swahili Poetry, with a focus on the poetry of *Muyaka*, in 1965. He would thereafter go to the University College, London, where he obtained his PhD in Swahili Syntax in 1976. On his return to East Africa, Abdulaziz would be hired to teach at the University College, Dar es Salaam, where he subsequently was made an acting Head of the Department of Languages and Linguistics.

When he transferred to the University of Nairobi, he became the Chairman of the Department of Linguistics and African Languages. In Dar es Salaam and Nairobi, Abdulaziz firmly established the roots for the study of Kiswahili at a time when in Tanzania and Kenya, though they were independent, African languages were regarded as inferior to European and classical languages.

Therefore, one can say without fear of contradiction that Mwalimu Abdulaziz is the father of Kiswahili studies today. His MA thesis, 'Analysis of Swahili Poems of *Muyaka bin Haji* of Mombasa, 1776-1840', which he

submitted in 1966, is a foundational text that any serious scholar of Kiswahili linguistics or literature must consult. It would subsequently be published in 1979 as *Muyaka: 19th Century Swahili Popular Poetry* by the Kenya Literature Bureau.

This work does three key things in scholarship of languages, linguistics and literatures of East Africa: First, it is an inaugural study of one of the most celebrated Swahili poets from Mombasa. *Muyaka*, who "lived approximately between A.D. 1776 and 1840... wrote on almost all subjects within the cultural and political experience of his community, making his writings an important record of the cultural life of Mombasa in the first half of the nineteenth century," writes Abdulaziz in his book.

And why would *Muyaka* have been worthy of research and academic study? Abdulaziz notes that *Muyaka's* "... verses abound in metaphor and many of his poetic statements have now become proverbial... and his work is certainly one of the most important sources for the study of the linguistic literary development of the Swahili language." In essence, what Abdulaziz was doing in his study was to recognize, justify and affirm the necessity to study the language of everyday life of

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his people, the Swahili, his community of Mombasa and their art and artists.

Secondly, Abdulaziz's work, though done as a study in linguistics, it is a major critical work in the literature of Mombasa. What he does in his study is to analyse the form and content of *Muyaka's* poetry. The poems are pre-

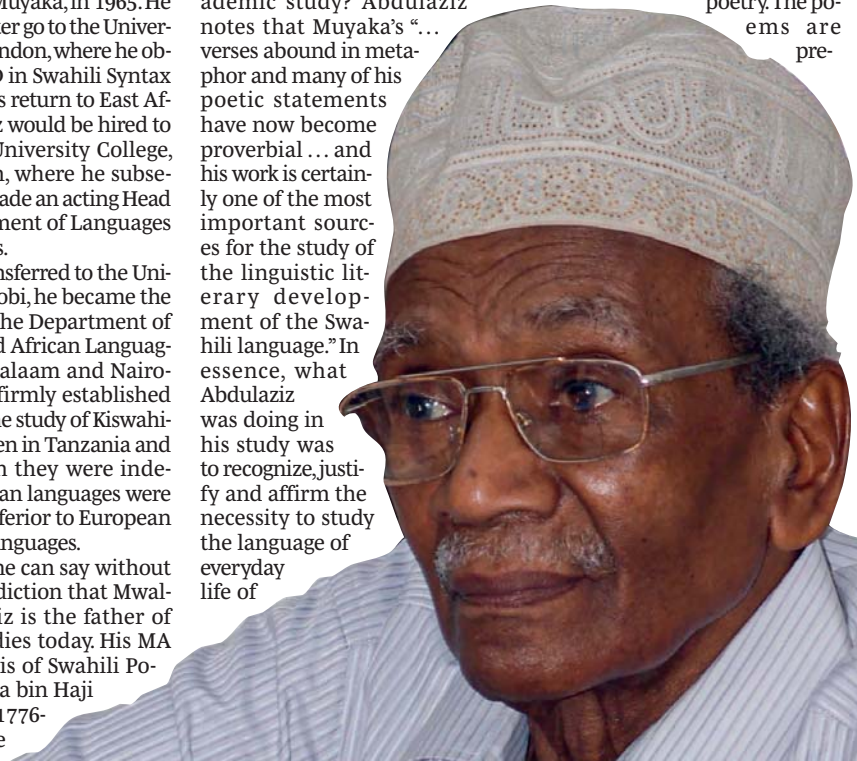
sented in Swahili, translated into English, and critiqued in terms of diction, style and structure. Abdulaziz patiently evaluates the sounds, the allusions, the contexts and the meanings that the poet invests in his verse. If scholars today emphasize the importance of interdisciplinary research, Abdulaziz's work is an apt example of the relationship between different disciplines. There is some history, sociology, religion, politics and economics, all mixed in the linguistic analysis of *Muyaka's* verses.

Thirdly, by studying Swahili verses, Abdulaziz was proclaiming the place of Kiswahili in the world family of languages. His study affirmed the importance of this language of commerce and politics on the Coast of East Africa, a language that would later become a global tongue, spoken and taught in major universities in the world. How sad that Abdulaziz passed on at a time when the whole world was celebrating Kiswahili!

For those that Mwalimu Abdulaziz taught and mentored, he was a well-grounded teacher, who was committed to scholarship. He taught and supervised many students in Linguistics and Kiswahili at the University of Nairobi. Mwalimu Kithaka wa Mberia remembers him as firm and supportive teacher and supervisor for his MA and PhD. He also remembers Abdulaziz as a much-loved Dean of the Faculty of Arts, who served staff without considering their ethnicity and political convictions.

In a country that easily forgets its heroes, one imagines that associations, departments and centres for the study of Kiswahili will properly memorialise the late Mwalimu Abdulaziz. May his legacy live on forever.

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