

THE Weekly Review

For The Thinking Person

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Haji strikes blow for Kenyatta kin

Director of Public Prosecutions reopens 30-year-old legal battle that had gone all the way to the Supreme Court and House committee over land auctioned by KCB bank in 2007 to recover a Sh44m loan. Now a lawyer claims his signature was forged to facilitate the sale of the land

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letter from the editor

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Cheap maize imports hurt farmers, but state must avoid 'Arab Spring' at all costs

Mohcin Bouterfif, the Tunisian man who a decade ago set himself on fire following unsuccessful attempts to petition his mayor over the high cost of living, remains an enduring symbol of the fate of governments that fail to heed the cries of their citizenry.

Bouterfif's self-immolation in 2011 triggered copycat public suicides in Algeria and Egypt, setting off what was widely referred to as the Arab Spring.

The wave of citizen-driven regime changes that followed was a wake-up call for governments across the world, and especially in Africa, where mass protests are a rarity.

On a less visible scale, food shortages cause deadly intra-country and cross-border conflicts, which are the reason behind instability in many African countries.

It is perhaps for this reason that, as I write this article, the ink has yet to dry on President William Ruto administration's statement approving duty-free maize and rice imports.

The announcement opens a window for traders to import up to 900,000 tonnes of duty-free white maize and 600,000 tonnes of duty-free milled rice from February to August next year.

Tax-free maize imports have been a necessary evil for all Kenyan governments since Independence.

They have always spawned scandals of international proportions, as politicians line their pockets at the expense of poor Kenyans, whose appetite for *ugali* is as high as Mount Everest.

You could bet your right hand that another scandal is cooking from February, but let's not pre-



Washington Gikunju

Africa imports most of its staples, making the inflation transmission from global to local food price heavily significant.

empt this juicy story.

Estimates by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics show that the cost of food increased by 15.4 per cent between November 2021 and November this year, as prolonged drought stifled local supply and the Russia-Ukraine war disrupted global supply chains.

With projections showing that the short season harvest will yield only a fraction of the total national demand for maize, the Ruto government has decided to act early, rather than risk a Bouterfif-like revolution.

Kenya is not alone in this food shortage crisis. Staple food prices in sub-Saharan Africa shot up by an average 23.9 per cent between 2020 and 2022, the steepest incline since the 2008 global financial crisis as per an analysis by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Africa imports most of its staples — wheat, palm oil,

and rice — making the inflation transmission from global to local food prices heavily significant, nearly on a ratio of one-to-one in countries such as Somalia.

Locally grown staples have also recorded sharp price increases in some countries, fuelled by domestic supply inefficiencies, local currency depreciations and higher fertiliser and input costs.

The IMF records that in Nigeria, for example, the prices of both cassava and maize more than doubled even though they're mainly produced locally. In Ghana, prices of cassava jumped by 78 per cent between 2020 and 2021, driven by higher production costs and transport constraints.

Based on price data from 15 African countries on the five most-consumed staple foods in the region — cassava, maize, palm oil, rice, and wheat — the IMF in a paper released on September 27 2022 concluded that global food prices have a big bearing on consumer prices on the continent, besides other local factors.

Such data, and the ever-looming possibility of the 'Arab Spring', should spur African countries to redouble efforts to improve self-reliance on food supplies.

Policies to promote modern agricultural methods including irrigated farming and grain warehousing, input subsidies, efficient transport networks and accessible markets form a firm foundation for long-term self-sufficiency.

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the telescope

■ This is the second-last KCPE examination



Education Cabinet Secretary Ezekiel Machogu addresses journalists at Kisumu Girls' High School on November 17. He reaffirmed the government's preparedness to hold three national examinations for learners in Grade Six, Standard Eight and Form Four. PHOTO | TONNY OMONDI

KCPE results to be announced next week

The Ministry of Education is this week expected to release the 2022 Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) exams results ahead of the Christmas holiday.

This will see 1,244,188 candidates who sat for the examinations countrywide finding out how they fared in the exam, enabling their parents to begin planning for Form One admission next year.

Education Cabinet Secretary Ezekiel Machogu announced last week that marking of English composition and Kiswahili insha – which began on December 1, 2022 – had been completed, with the release of the results next in line.

The 2021 KCPE exam results were

released within 19 days after completion of the tests.

This year, Standard Eight candidates sat for the exams – English, Mathematics, Science, Kiswahili, Social Studies and Religious Education – for three days between November 28 to 30.

The exams ran concurrently with the inaugural Kenya Primary School Education Assessment for Grade Six, which had 1,287,597 candidates.

This is the second-last KCPE examination, with the last 8-4-4 cohort set to complete primary school next year, giving way to the first cohort under the competency-based curriculum.

■ He also violated campaign finance laws

US cryptotycoon on fraud charges

Disgraced cryptocurrency tycoon Sam Bankman-Fried was hit with multiple criminal charges on Tuesday, accused of committing one of the biggest financial frauds in United States history.

The 30-year-old founder of the FTX platform, who was arrested in the Bahamas Monday at the request of the United States, is facing a raft of accusations, including from US market regulators who say that the investor knowingly built a fraudulent house of cards.

A Bahamian judge denied Bankman-Fried bail and remanded him in custody as the one-time high-flyer began to

battle his extradition in a Nassau court room, with his parents looking on.

A new Bahamas court date to examine the US request for extradition was set for February 8, local media reported.

Given the seriousness of the accusations, legal analysts said that Bankman-Fried risked as much as life in prison, recalling the fate of financier Bernie Madoff, who died in a US prison last year after running the largest Ponzi scheme in US history.

In their indictment, US prosecutors said Bankman-Fried also carried out money laundering, violated campaign finance laws and committed wire fraud since the start of his company in 2019.

"It's hard to compare these things, but this is one of the biggest financial frauds in American history," said US Attorney Damian Williams when asked to compare the case to the Madoff affair.

When asked if further charges against other individuals would be forthcoming, Williams added: "I can only say this: Clearly, we are not done."

Bankman-Fried "was orchestrating a massive, years-long fraud, diverting billions of dollars of the trading platform's customer funds for his own personal benefit and to help grow his crypto empire," prosecutors said.



Samuel Bankman-Fried, founder and CEO of FTX. PHOTO | AFP

■ Consumer prices rose at 7.1 per cent

Stocks surge as US dollar drops



Stocks surged while the dollar dropped last week as US inflation slowed more than expected, opening the way for the Federal Reserve to reduce the tempo of interest rate hikes.

US consumer prices rose at an annual pace of 7.1 per cent in November, down from 7.7 per cent in October, according to Labor Department data.

The consumer price index is a closely watched measure of inflation and was forecast by analysts to come in higher.

The bigger-than-expected drop should come as a relief to monetary policymakers after wholesale inflation proved hotter than expected last week.

■ The exercise does not target licensed businesses

Nationwide crackdown on illicit drinks



The national government will heighten a nationwide crackdown on counterfeit alcoholic drinks and drugs ahead of the upcoming festive season.

This follows a recent directive by President William Ruto for the In-

terior Ministry to enhance the fight against the production, consumption and sale of illicit alcohol and drugs.

The exercise targets illicit alcohol and drugs and not licensed and legitimate businesses trading in alcoholic beverages.

Interior Principal Secretary Raymond Omollo said the operation is timely as the country traditionally experiences a spike in consumption of illicit alcohol and drugs during the festive season.

kenya lens

■ KANU-ERA BUSINESS INTRIGUES

Business collapsed as no one was willing to trade with opposition operatives

DPP TAKES ON KCB IN SH3.5BN KENYATTA KIN PROPERTY ROW



KCB Group CEO Paul Russo during the announcement of the lender's half-year financial results at the Nairobi Serena Hotel. The lender is embroiled in a legal battle over the auctioning of a 442-acre farm in Thika in 2007. DIANA NGILA | NAIROBI

● By JOHN KAMAU

For the past 30 years, Captain Kung'u Muigai and his brother, Ngengi Muigai, have been fighting to save their Sh3.5 billion 442-acre farm in Thika, which had been auctioned by the Kenya Commercial Bank (KCB). The duo had filed 18 cases to stop KCB from auctioning the farm, but without success. The matter had gone up to the Supreme Court and was even brought before a parliamentary committee. In 2007, however, KCB finally sold the land to Bidii Kenya, a real estate firm, for Sh70 million.

An era had come to an end, or so it seemed. In a new twist, however, a lawyer now claims that KCB forged his signature and the matter

is now before the Director of Public Prosecutions.

As Noordin Haji's office gears up for the re-opening of the intriguing matter, it is turning out to be one of the longest-running cases in the Kenyan courts.

The ODPP has been seeking answers from KCB over the alleged forgery of a consent order that led to the auction. The question that has never been answered is whether the bank officials conspired to sell the property through forgery, an issue that was not addressed in court since there was no complainant.

Over the years, the multimillion-shilling case had centred on a consent order entered before Justice Erastus Githinji on May 4, 1992,

between KCB and Benjoh Amalgamated Limited over loans taken by James Muigai, who was the late President Jomo Kenyatta's youngest brother.

In the 'consent' order, Benjoh, and Muiri Coffee Estate, the guarantor, were said to have agreed to pay the outstanding amount before July 31, 1992, and should they default, the bank was at liberty to sell the properties and recover its money.

Benjoh and Muiri companies protested against the order, arguing that they had not given instructions to the lawyer.

By the time Nairobi lawyer Gideon Kaumbuthu Menye asked the Director of Criminal

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kenya lens

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his signature, some five years ago, the Kenyatta kin had lost a string of cases. While the investigations into Menye's forged signature appear to have moved at a snail's pace, the ODPP this year returned to the police file and wrote to KCB, demanding answers since the sale was premised on a non-existent decree or forged consent. It is this renewed interest that has added weight to the saga.

It all began in 1989, when James Muigai's company, Benjoh Amalgamated, took out a KCB loan to grow flowers in Kinangop for export to Europe. In the arrangement, Benjoh was to take an Sh1.8 million overdraft while the bank, in what was a joint project, would offer a Sh21.2 million long-term loan of eight years.

The KCB-Benjoh agreement was signed in April 1989, and the bank's duty was to pay supplies and contractors directly. Ngengi Muigai's Muiri Farm guaranteed Benjoh a limit of Sh11.5 million.

At its peak, and every week, Benjoh was exporting five tonnes of flowers to Holland and had entered into an airfreight agreement with Express Kenya, which the bank would pay. But the bank, according to court records, later stopped the payments, and Express Kenya stopped airlifting the flowers.

As a result, the family watched their project halt as no cargo company was willing to engage a firm belonging to opposition politicians.

The saga between the two brothers and the bank started when Benjoh Amalgamated demanded to be shown the accounts indicating the suppliers, shippers, and contractors they had paid. According to the records, KCB sent auctioneers to Muiri's coffee farm – which was the loan's guarantor. Ngengi Muigai owned Muiri Farm Limited.

Benjoh then filed a case in court demanding the bank statements

KCB up against Kenyatta kin

and suing for breach of contract. While KCB did not file a defence, a consent judgment was entered before Justice Erastus Githinji in the presence of counsel for both parties. In the 'consent', Benjoh and Muiri Coffee Estate were said to have agreed to pay the outstanding amount before July 31, 1992, and should they default, the bank was at liberty to sell the properties and recover its money.

Shortly thereafter, the entire file disappeared – and has never been found, together with the 'consent order'. Benjoh and Muiri claimed that they had not instructed any lawyer to act on their behalf.

Meanwhile, worried about his property, the 86-year-old James Muigai, on December 14, 1994, paid Sh6 million to the bank, which acknowledged that the balance was Sh3.5 million. But Muigai died sixteen months later, on March 8, 1996. The bank then wrote to his widow, Minie Ngina, demanding Sh44 million. The matter was reported to the Criminal Investigations Department (CID), and a KCB official and a lawyer were charged with conspiracy to defraud. When they were out on bond, the Attorney-General, Amos Wako, entered a *nolle prosequi*.

On October 27, 1997, Capt Kungu made an application for review of that consent order and told Justice Githinji that the lawyer who appeared on behalf of Benjoh Amalgamated had no such instructions. Further, he argued that the consent was missing from the file. Justice Githinji then set aside the consent order arguing: This court is a court of records... where the original record is lost, and certified copies of the record and judgment or order made by the court are not available at the time of the hearing, an application by a party challenging the judgment

has to succeed *ex di hito justitiae* (as of right).

KCB appealed this finding, and Justices Otieno Kwach, Philip Tunoi and Samuel Bosire disagreed with Justice Githinji, saying such a move would provide a "field day for unscrupulous litigants" who wished to obstruct the course of justice. "If by simply arranging for the court records to disappear you can put back the clock and postpone the day of reckoning, the courts will be forced to enlist the services of armed guards to secure the safety of its files."

Another attempt by DCI to have bank officials record cautionary statements on how the debt rose from Sh3.5 million to Sh44 million was thwarted by the courts in petition 218 of 2011. Further, Justice D. Majanja stopped DCI from investigating "in any way, summoning, or arresting" petitioner officers in the dispute between Benjoh and KCB. Though the Attorney-General appealed the ruling, his appeal was thrown out.

After a string of losses, the two Kenyatta kin appeared to have resigned themselves to judicial fate until the lawyer emerged five years ago. As Haji's office seems to have a new interest in the case, it will be interesting to see how he will navigate a matter that has been to the apex court.

The DPP has noted, in one of his letters to KCB, that after perusing the police file, and Menye's complaint that "there is overwhelming evidence to demonstrate culpability of Kenya Commercial Bank and Bidii Kenya Limited in the commission of offences, including conspiracy to defraud contrary to section 317 of the Penal Code."

On June 7, the DPP once again wrote to KCB seeking to have the matter resolved 'amicably'. From the letter, it seemed that the KCB Board of Directors had reached a decision and conveyed the information to the complainant, Menye: "The complainant in the matter has informed us that the Bank, through its Board of Directors, has made a resolution regarding the subject matter whose full facts whereof are well within your knowledge."

The DPP went on: "This office has not received any communication from your end regarding the same and we would appreciate if you could give us your position on the matter, knowing that the Board members had committed to settling the same out of court, to pay the buyer and recover the title for onward transmission to Muiri Coffee Estates Limited. It is a matter we firmly believe you can, as parties, resolve amicably."

Was KCB seeking a way out – or could it still hang on a Court of Appeal observation on the missing consent order?

Over the years, questions had been raised about whether the two brothers were victims of the Kanu era mischief, and whether this was the price they had to pay for joining opposition politics in the 1990s.

And now, a multi-million saga rests on a single lawyer who is alleged to have signed the consent order.



Director of Public Prosecutions Noordin Haji. NATION I FILE

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kenya lens

■ TURMOIL IN AZIMIO LA UMOJA-ONE KENYA COALITION

WHY RAILA IS NO LONGER AT EASE

Revelations of a secret election command post cause upset in Odinga's camp

● By OSCAR OBONYO

Among the Kenyan pastoral communities, neighbours will ordinarily sympathise with anyone who loses livestock from his homestead and turn the heat on the raiders. But if this happens a second, third or even fourth time, people will begin to question the man's ability to secure his animals and even shift blame to him for the theft.

This adage, shared several times by none other than President William Ruto in a swipe at Raila Amolo Odinga – his main challenger in the August 9 presidential elections – best captures the former Prime Minister's political quandary after losing out in his fifth presidential bid.

Having missed the presidency in a contest where he enjoyed support from the incumbency and the confident optimism of his backers that he would win this time round, Odinga's sway over his supporters is now fairly delicate. The situation is further muddled by his advanced age and the possibility that he could be on his way out of the political arena.

The discourse kicked off by Odinga's chief poll agent, Saitabao ole Kanchory, on key allies who "fixed" the former PM at the ballot, has just made the reality for Azimio even messier. The lawyer is accusing a host of people, including former Information and ICT Cabinet Secretary Joe Mucheru, the spokesperson of the Odinga Campaign Makau Mutua, and Azimio Secretary-General Junet Mohamed, of standing in the way of Raila's poll victory.

The latest claims only serve to cause more confusion in Odinga's political corner, with his lieutenants previously having attributed the loss squarely to a rigging plot by the Independent and Electoral Boundaries Commission (IEBC) and President Ruto, while others like ODM's Executive Director Oduor Ong'wen have pointed fingers at powers in the West. The prodding camera is now facing within.

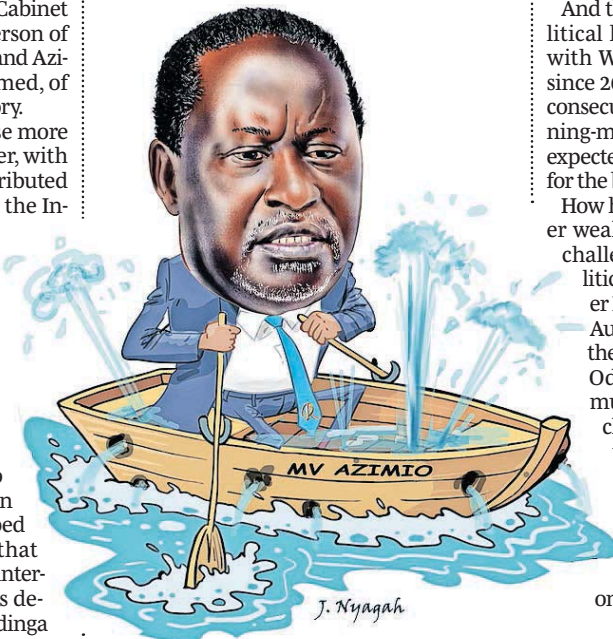
The Weekly Review has traced one of the major sources of friction between the Azimio leader and his key high-profile financiers and backers to the existence of a 'command centre' in Nairobi's Westlands area. Aptly described by critics as "the command centre that never was", it is hosted by a reputable international banking institution and was designed to be the nerve centre of the Odinga

Presidential Campaign through gathering intelligence information and poll data, including announcing the final poll results.

The centre, whose existence and location were treated as a top secret known only to a handful of Azimio operatives, reportedly did not execute any of the listed functions effectively. Instead it became a secretariat for piecing together the presidential petition, and it is at this point that it was opened up to the larger Azimio fraternity.

Many campaign officials and leaders who had been domiciled in other campaign centres mainly in Karen and Lavington areas were shocked at the development. A senior ODM official recalls former Kakamega County Governor Wycliffe Oparanya confronting Raila over existence of the office. According to the official, Oparanya was irked that, as Odinga's deputy at the Orange party, he was kept in the dark over such a crucial office.

The one-time Chairman of the Council of Governors neither denied nor confirmed this report when we called him. Businessman SK Macharia, who openly campaigned for Mr Odinga, reportedly also learnt of the existence of the Westlands hub when he was approached to surrender "crucial evidence" that was in his possession by a team of lawyers based at the Westland's office.



An infuriated Macharia is said to have declined the invitation. According to sources close to the media mogul, he wondered loudly how a candidate he had sacrificed so much to support had opted to treat him "as a stranger". *The Weekly Review* was unable to get Macharia's comments on the matter.

Mucheru, Ong'wen, Mohamed, Mutua and newly elected East African Legislative Assembly MP Winnie Odinga, were among those behind the establishment and day-to-day running of the said command centre. Makau, too, declined to comment, while Mohamed observed that "there is a scapegoat in every election" and that this time round he happens to be the object of hate and accusation owing to his political proximity to Odinga.

The anticipated exit of Raila's presumed political and financial benefactor, Uhuru, from Azimio, is expected to further alienate him from his supporters. Wiper Democratic Movement's vice-chairman Mutula Kilonzo Jr is convinced that the Azimio dream is one that is already dead. "The Azimio dream would only have been realised courtesy of an election victory. In the absence of that, the parties and players within the coalition are only holding on to share the spoils coming their way as they plot the political journey ahead of 2027," says the Makeni Governor.

And this reality only makes Mr Odinga's political headache worse. Having teamed up with Wiper party leader Kalonzo Musyoka since 2002 and enjoyed his support for three consecutive presidential bids – twice as a running-mate – the ODM party leader is largely expected to support Kalonzo's anticipated bid for the big seat in five years' time.

How he will do that effectively under the ever-weakening Azimio umbrella poses a big challenge. In addition, there are other political players like Narc-Kenya party leader Martha Karua, his running-mate in the August poll, or any of his two deputies in the party –

Odinga appears politically caged. He must either cobble up a campaign machine with a clear candidate in mind for the top seat in 2027, which is no easy task, or he could opt out of active politics altogether and play no role in the next presidential poll – which those who know him concede is not a practical option for the seasoned, hands-on politician.

opinion



■ **Ida Odinga comes out with all barrels blazing to defend her husband**

Rail at Azimio turncoats was imminent

Per Ida Odinga, nicknamed Min Piny (that's Dholuo for Mother of the Nation), politicians who only recently unfailingly turned up at her homes for breakfast, lunch and dinner and assured her husband, Raila, of support and victory, now attack, blame and pour scorn on the family for the Azimio Coalition's loss of the presidential poll.

Odinga the politician has lost elections before and faced myriad adversities, which the family has ridden out bravely and borne stoically. And true to character Ida, unlike her daughter, Winnie, has let the politicians do the blame game and buck-passing. But last week she reached the end of her tether and let rip. She is still hurting and she's not alone.

Odinga's loss has been hard to bear and the reasons are multiple and simple. Unlike his previous runs, this time around he had the money men of the central region, via the Mount Kenya Foundation, pledging support at every turn, praising his struggle for social justice and political freedoms, and peppering his campaign with fiscal, physical and human assets.

Second, he had in his corner none other than Uhuru Kenyatta, then President of the Republic, the kingpin of the Agikuyu and the man at whose fingertips and control lay the levers of power, the so-called deep state or, in his (Raila's) brother Oburu's words, the support of the system and, in the minds of many, the ubiquitous state machinery.

Put another way, the presidential contest featured one ticket comprising Deputy Presi-



**KWENDO
OPANGA**

dent William Ruto and running-mate Rigathi Gachagua while the other comprised Odinga, running-mate Martha Karua and Kenyatta.

Third, there was not a single region of Kenya where Odinga lacked in crowd attendance and exuberance for a campaign that oozed money, candidate quality and class.

Fourth, the strangely named Azimio La Umoja-One Kenya Coalition Party campaign portrayed itself as "serikali inayokuja" (the incoming government) and such was Odinga's confidence that he would ask then Kitui Governor Charity Ngilu to quit the gubernatorial race for he needed her in his government in Nairobi. Confident, Odinga started naming his cabinet before a vote was cast.

Fifth, the Azimio propaganda mills engulfed, choked and buried the United Democratic Alliance (UDA) and Kenya Kwanza Alliance (KK) in the smoke of blue that showed up Ruto's UDA and KK as truly yellow, uncouth, thieving and crooked, with the then Deputy President portrayed as the chief priest in this temple of the undesirables.

Last, Odinga's fifth stab at the presidency, therefore, presented the veteran politico, at 77,

with his best and last chance to be the tenant at State House because he has valiantly fought the people's cause for all of his political life. The stars seemed to have aligned perfectly for Odinga to become what the Azimio campaign proudly popularised as the Fifth President of Kenya.

This is the background to the vicious post-poll blame game and buck-passing; attacks on Winnie, at 32 the youngest Odinga; the shifting alliances as Azimio politicians who lost their contests scramble to catch the eye of President Ruto for positions in the new dispensation; and criticism of Odinga by his former allies in order to curry favour with Ruto.

Ida is a tough cookie and will ride out the storm, but she had to come out swinging not only to defend her husband and protect her daughter, but also shame those who have forgotten that just the other day they were eating from the palm of her hand.

But then politicians talk from both sides of their mouths, don't they? So, after blaming rigging for Odinga's loss, they are blaming Odinga for their defeat.

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opinion

■ Our leaders at the US-Africa Summit must only make deals that benefit their countries

Africa is not up for grabs by East or West



Magesha
NGWIRI

On Monday evening, President William Ruto flew to the United States at the invitation of President Joe Biden. He had had a long day officiating over the 59th Jamhuri Day celebrations, but he obviously couldn't forgo such an important opportunity, hence the hectic schedule. In Washington DC, he joined scores of other heads of state and government, as well as representatives from the African Union, for a three-day US-African Leaders Summit, only the second such meeting since 2014, when they last assembled under the auspices of former President Barack Obama. Since then, Africa has not featured prominently in American foreign initiatives, as President Donald Trump's "America First" policy took centre-stage.

One of the unstated reasons for this summit is that during that hiatus, American influence in the continent had considerably waned as that of other super-powers and industrialised nations grew in leaps and bounds. As a result, America had become alarmed at the shifting configurations, and its policy-makers had begun recognising that its geopolitical and military interests were under rising threat. Too many African countries had started "looking East" in ways that had to jolt it awake. The influence of global powers like China and Russia, as well as countries like France, Germany, India, Brazil, Turkiye (formerly Turkey) was rapidly rising.

All these countries, especially China, had been holding such meetings regularly, during which they made profitable trade and investment deals with African leaders in return for military hardware assistance and a few other sweet deals, plus the chance to exploit Africa's vast unexplored energy resources like oil and gas, and minerals like uranium, copper, gold and cobalt. These are the reasons why observers have concluded that Africa is in the grip of yet another scramble, more than a century after the first one left the continent in a shambles of artificial boundaries, dehumanising poverty, and gross exploitation of natural and human resources.

The 1881-1914 scramble for Africa and the subsequent 50 years of colonialism are now fading memories, but since then, what historians call neo-colonialism has taken hold in many guises, one of which has culminated in an equally distasteful scramble for the continent's resources which, if not checked, might result in yet another

very dark period for the continent. It is already happening in parts of Africa. Could there be any other reason for the unending strife in the Democratic Republic of the Congo fomented by a few multinationals which arm ragtag militias to destabilise huge swathes of territory? Does anyone really believe that it is not the scramble for the vast mineral resources of the DRC that has made it one of the poorest countries on earth?

This is all the more reason why African leaders, while making their pitches during formal speeches, must go beyond the expected platitudes and voice the continent's concerns, explaining why they had to turn East if they wanted any kind of development for their nations. The West and the Bretton Woods institutions were wont to make sanctimonious speeches about the need for enhanced democratisation, attaching financial aid and loans to too many conditions, some unpalatable. As a result, many African countries were forced to turn to China when they wanted vital roads and better rail networks built. Now the Western powers are worried that they are on the verge of "losing Africa", while many African countries are worried that they have borrowed too heavily for comfort.

During the 1960s, Western countries vied with Eastern powers on ideological grounds — ver-

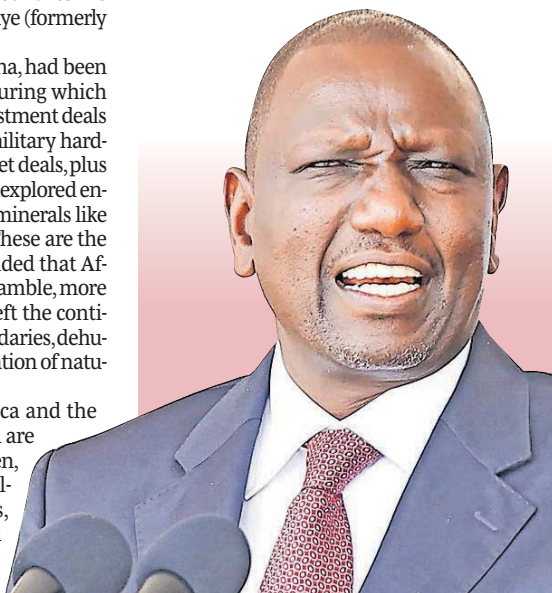
sus communism — giving rise to the 'Cold War', during which the West propped up bloodthirsty kleptomaniacs in Africa. Today, ideology is not an issue; even the most fervent Marxists have become capitalists at heart. In any case, the rate of democratisation has gathered pace in the continent, and today it is no longer possible to tolerate compromised, ruthless tyrants for too long. The likes of Mobutu Sese Seko and his ilk are long gone, though of course there are a few dinosaurs still hanging on in eastern and former "Francophone" Africa.

One hopes that during this summit, African leaders resolved to put their collective foot down and negotiated from a position of strength by telling the Americans that they will only make concessions if whatever they agree on is beneficial to their countries. Long gone are the days when Western leaders thought they could do without Africa, and benign neglect was the favourite buzz-phrase. They have come to recognise that the continent is the last repository of vast untapped oil and gas resources, rare earth deposits and minerals like uranium, copper, gold, cobalt and diamonds.

Unfortunately, at the moment, African leaders seem to lack a coherent political will to protect the continent's resources. They must do more to change the perception that Africa is a vast market for processed goods — whose raw materials are mostly sourced from the continent itself — and seek ways to turn it into a peerless exporter of those products in their finished state. It is time the African leaders stressed that they can no longer accept a situation in which they become perpetual beggars for food aid in a continent that can feed the whole world if only the technology required was available. It is possible to seek a more equitable sharing of the earth's bounty while at the same time protecting the earth from the deleterious effects of climate change.

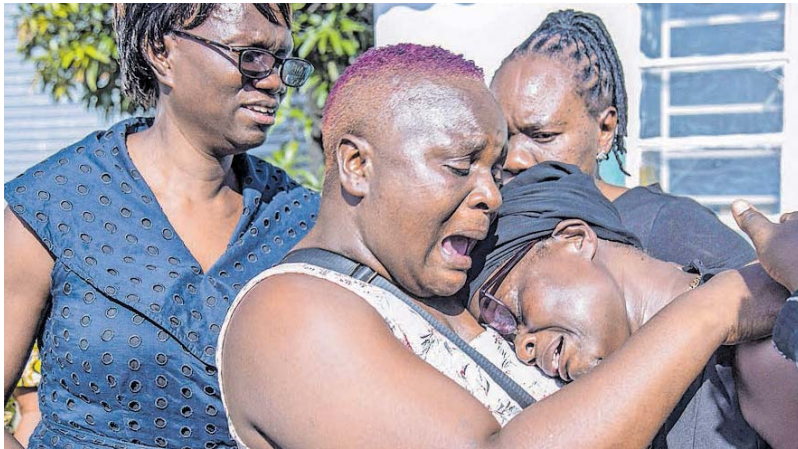
In this respect, the African Union has a major role to play, and it must do so by developing a comprehensive strategy to deal with competition for the continent's natural resources, insisting on co-operation rather than exploitation. The days when a few chieftains were enticed with trinkets to sell their people's birthrights are long gone. We are in the digital age now, and information is no longer the preserve of a few cunning exploiters from the East or the West. Therefore, if the people realise what might be happening, they are not likely to take such shenanigans lying down.

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President William Ruto. NATION | FILE

the limelight



Florence Nyirenda (R) mother of Zambian student Lemekhani Nyirenda, who died in the Ukraine conflict last September, is consoled by relatives as his coffin arrives at the Kenneth Kaunda International Airport in Lusaka on December 11. PHOTO | AFP



An employee of the SEA LIFE Blackpool aquarium, dressed as Father Christmas, swims in a large ocean tank as the sea creatures are fed on December 14. PHOTO | AFP



Japan's Naoya Inoue poses for a photograph during a press conference after beating Britain's Paul Butler in his bantamweight title unification match in Tokyo on December 13. PHOTO | AFP



President William Ruto at the US-Africa Leaders Summit at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in Washington, DC on December 14. PHOTO | PCS



A view of the presentation ahead of the Qatar 2022 World Cup semi-final between France and Morocco at the Al-Bayt Stadium in Al Khor on December 14. PHOTO | AFP



A man collects plastic from the polluted Citarum river in West Bandung on December 14. PHOTO | AFP



Pope Francis holds a toddler's dummy as he meets with attendees during the weekly general audience on December 14 at Paul-VI hall in The Vatican. PHOTO | AFP



africa lens

■ WORLD CUP IN QATAR

SO CLOSE YET SO FAR FOR AFRICA

Continent will have to wait for another four years before it can launch another stab at the top spot in the FIFA World Cup

• By KWENDO OPANGA

The FIFA World Cup thrills, what with the skills on the pitches and the dances on the terraces! And it kills the hopes of millions with the whistles on the turf and the moans in the stands. It delivers happiness and heartache, cheers of joy and tears of sorrow, among the players and fans in the host nation and the millions watching across the world.

As the 2022 World Cup kicked off in Qatar last month, *The Weekly Review* asked the per-

continent question on the minds of most African fans: “Will African prides roar, stars shoot or eagles soar past the quarter final stage?” As it turned out, Ghana’s Black Stars, Tunisia’s Carthage Eagles, Senegal’s Lions of Teranga and Cameroon’s Indomitable Lions bowed out at the quarter final stage.

So, the Atlas Lions of Morocco became the first team from Africa to qualify for the World Cup semi-finals. They did it by beating Iberian peninsular neighbour, Spain, in the round robin and eliminating Portugal in the quarter finals. The Atlas Lions went one better than

Cameroon, Senegal and Ghana, who bowed out at the quarters respectively in 1990, 2002 and 2010.

Second, while *The Weekly Review* posited, rather obviously, that the attention of the world would for the next 29 days be fixed on Qatar and the football, it featured predictions by global players as to who would win it. As the final kicks off this afternoon, only one prediction has survived, namely, that predicting football victories and defeats is unpredictable business.

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africa lens

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London's famed insurers, Lloyd's, who rightly boasted that they correctly predicted Germany's and France's wins in 2014 and 2018, put their money on England. The Three Lions were sent packing by France, whom many predicted, based on the history of defending champs, would struggle in Qatar. In their quarter final clash, Les Blues edged out the Three Lions two to one.

Sports data provider, OPTA, using Artificial Intelligence as opposed to Lloyd's insurable value as a guide, made Brazil the favourites to lift the Jules Rimet trophy. The world watched, largely in disbelief, as a believing Croatia, inspired by superstar captain and midfielder Luka Modric, bundled out Neymar Junior & Co in the quarters.

Former Indomitable Lion and now President of Cameroon Football Federation Samuel Eto'o got it wrong when he predicted that Cameroon would meet another African team in today's final. But he was spot on when he backed the Atlas Lions to beat Portugal and book a place in the semi-final. Neither Lloyd's nor OPTA had the Moroccan pride on their radar as they sought the last four.

After strolling through the round robin, 16 of the original 32 teams switched into higher gear as the adrenaline pumped up on the turf and the tension mounted on the terraces. The Croatians boasted that, boring though their football may be, semi finalists they were. The Moroccans taught Cristiano Ronaldo & Co defensive football as they weathered wave after wave of attacks.

And the Atlas Lions beat the Red Devils of Belgium, among them global stars Eden Hazard, Kevin De Bruyne and Romelu Lukaku, who have been touted by pundits as part of the golden generation of Belgian football. But Bruyne & Co were flattened by Morocco and like the Germans, four times the Cup champions, could not get out of their group.

Africa has waited since 1990, when Cameroon first made it to the quarters of the World Cup, to get to the semis and many will hope that the continent will not have long to wait for it to be represented in the last four again. The Atlas Lions were not dominated by France in Wednesday's match. They kept Mbappe largely quiet and shut Olivier Giroud out.

Should the Lions' run have been surprising? Not per BBC's Peter Okwoche and FIFA. The two attribute Morocco's World Cup success to the establishment of the US\$15 million Mohammed VI Football Academy that was opened in 2009 and, per FIFA, aims to "discover talents in different regions of Morocco, develop

Morocco raises Africa's hopes



them, and facilitate their transfer to European clubs". The *Focus on Africa* reporter and FIFA also pointed out that two Moroccan sides met in the continental Super Cup, a rarity, and that the Moroccan Women's national team reached the finals of this year's AFCON, where they lost to South Africa's Bayana Bayana. The Moroccan women also qualified for next year's World Cup, which will be hosted by Australia and New Zealand.

So, who will win today's contest between Argentina and France, who have each won the cup twice and feature superstars Lionel Messi and Kylian Mbappe? Messi wants it most for it is the one trophy that has eluded him so far, having won the Spanish and French premier leagues, UEFA Champions League, the European Super Cup and the continental Copa America.

At 35, this is Messi's last World Cup, but Mbappe is only 23 and already a World Cup winner having starred in Russia in 2018. Both have five goals at this World Cup and each remains favourite for the Golden

Boot. But Argentina last won the World Cup with Diego Maradona in 1986 and France want to be the first defending champions to win it since Brazil in 1962.

Argentina's forward, Lionel Messi, celebrates after scoring his team's first goal during an international friendly football match between Argentina and Estonia at El Sadar stadium in Pamplona on June 5.

PHOTO | AFP

global lens

■ US-CHINA BATTLE FOR GLOBAL SUPREMACY

CHINA'S XI PROMISES SECURITY, ENERGY COOPERATION AT SAUDI SUMMITS



China's President Xi Jinping at the G20 Summit in Nusa Dua on the Indonesian resort island of Bali on November 16. PHOTO | AFP

But Washington is apprehensive about the influence that China is trying to grow around the world

• Riyadh

Chinese President Xi Jinping on Friday, December 9, touted close security and energy ties with Gulf nations during summit meetings in Saudi Arabia that have highlighted tensions with Washington. On the third and final day of his visit, Xi attended summits of the six-member Gulf Cooperation

Council (GCC) and a broader China-Arab leaders' meeting. This is only Xi's third journey outside China since the coronavirus pandemic began. The discussions came one day after bilateral sit-downs with Saudi royals yielded a joint statement stressing "the importance of stability" in oil markets — a point of friction with the United States. Washington has urged the Saudis

to raise production. "China will continue to firmly support the GCC countries in maintaining their own security... and build a collective security framework for the Gulf," Xi said at the start of the China-GCC summit. "China will continue to import large quantities of crude oil from GCC countries on an ongoing basis," he said, also vowing to expand

other areas of energy cooperation, including liquefied natural gas imports. Oil from Saudi Arabia alone accounted for 17 per cent of China's imports last year, and last month Qatar announced a 27-year natural gas deal with China. Earlier on Friday, a joint Chinese-Saudi statement spoke of "focusing on emissions rather

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global lens

China courts Gulf in new trade plan

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than sources” in tackling climate change, the approach championed by the resource-rich Gulf monarchies.

Forty-six bilateral agreements and memoranda of understanding were announced on everything from housing to Chinese language teaching.

Both sides are seeking economic and strategic benefits by deepening cooperation.

However, few details were released despite a Saudi state media report on Thursday that about \$30 billion in deals would be signed during Xi’s visit.

Riyadh and Beijing stressed “deepening relations within the framework of the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries, and reaching new and promising horizons”, the statement said.

Xi’s visit comes during tensions between Saudi Arabia and the United States, its long-time partner and security guarantor, over oil production, human rights issues and regional security.

It follows US President Joe Biden’s trip to Jeddah in July, before mid-term elections, when he failed to persuade the Saudis to pump more oil to calm prices.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Saudi Arabia’s 37-year-old de facto ruler, addressed both summits on Friday, promising “continuing Arab-Chinese cooperation to serve our common goals and aspirations of our peoples”. The Gulf countries, strategic partners of Washington, are bolstering ties with China as part

of an eastward turn that involves diversifying their fossil fuel-reliant economies.

At the same time China, hit hard by its Covid lockdowns, is trying to revive its economy and widen its sphere of influence, notably through its Belt and Road Initiative, which provides funding for infrastructure projects around the world.

Officials provided few details about the talks, but one potential area of focus was a China-GCC free trade agreement under discussion for nearly two decades.

Drawing those negotiations to a close would be “a matter of prestige for Beijing,” said Robert Moshnicki of the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington.

“It’s not as simple for the GCC states, which seem to be more invested in advancing bilateral ties and are engaged in varying degrees of regional economic competition with their neighbouring member states.”

A breakthrough on the trade pact, experts said, could help Saudi Arabia, the Middle East’s biggest economy, diversify its economy in line with the Vision 2030 reform agenda championed by Prince Mohammed.

Beijing’s foreign ministry described Xi’s trip as the “largest-scale diplomatic activity between China and the Arab world” since the People’s Republic of China was founded.

The visit earned a rebuke from the White House, which warned of “the influence that China is trying to grow around the world”.

Washington called Beijing’s objectives “not conducive to preserving the international rules-based order”. (AFP)

Resource-rich Gulf countries turn Eastwards

● Dubai, AFP

Arab Gulf countries, strategic partners of Washington, are bolstering ties with China as part of an eastward turn that involves diversifying their fossil fuel-heavy economies.

After the Gulf-China summit in Riyadh, AFP examines key areas of economic cooperation between the six-member Gulf Cooperation Council and the world’s second-largest economy:

By 2020, China had risen to become a primary trading partner with the GCC states, especially in the field of energy.

China imports hydrocarbons from Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, which alone accounted for 17 per cent of the Asian giant’s oil imports in 2021.

Qatar supplies China with liquefied natural gas, trade that has been bolstered by the global energy crisis resulting from the war in Ukraine.

In November, Qatar announced a 27-year natural gas deal with China worth more than \$60 billion, saying it was the longest such agreement to date.

In July 2004, China and the GCC announced the launch of negotiations for a free-trade agreement.

Nearly two decades later, and after nine rounds of talks, the parties have yet to clinch a final deal, despite pledging in January to “accelerate the process”.

Friday’s Gulf-China summit is widely seen as an opportunity to jumpstart the negotiations.

Chinese trade relations are particularly strong with the UAE, which is the largest Middle East market for Chinese products and is a major export hub for Chinese goods, especially to the rest of the Arab world.

Between 2005 and 2022, Chinese companies invested more than \$107 billion in GCC states, according to data collected by the American Enterprise Institute.

The largest share of Chinese investment went to Saudi Arabia, the Arab world’s biggest economy.

Investments in the kingdom were valued at around \$49.6 billion over the past 17 years, according to the think tank.

For its part, Saudi Arabia was the 12th-largest investor in China in 2019.



This handout picture released by the Saudi Press Agency shows Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (R) addressing Chinese President Xi Jinping (L) during the China-Arab Summit in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, on December 9. PHOTO | AFP

SCIENCE & TECH

US unveils high-tech B-21 stealth bomber



• Washington

The US Air Force has this month unveiled its new B-21 Raider, a high-tech stealth bomber that can carry nuclear and conventional weapons and is designed to be able to fly without a crew on board.

The B-21 — which is on track to cost nearly \$700 million per plane and is the first new US bomber in decades — will gradually replace the B-1 and B-2 aircraft, which first flew during the Cold War.

“The B-21 will be the backbone of our future bomber force. It will possess the range, access and payload to penetrate the most highly-contested threat environments and hold any target around the globe at risk,” US Air Force spokesperson Ann Stefanek told *AFP*.

The first B-21 flight is expected to take place next year, and the Air Force plans to buy at least 100 of the aircraft, Stefanek said.

Manufacturer Northrop Grumman said six of the planes are currently in different stages of assembly and testing at its facility in Palmdale, California, where the unveiling will take place.

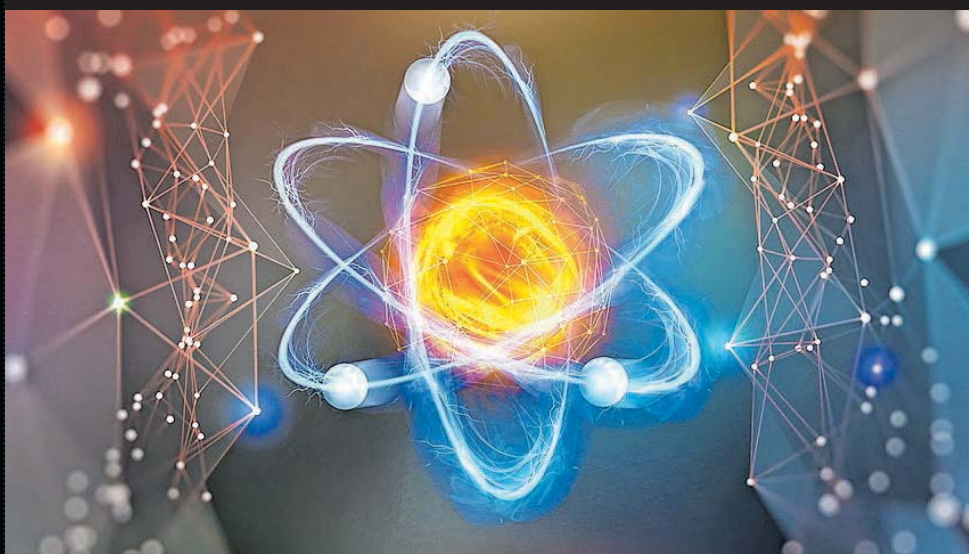
Many specifics of the aircraft are being kept under wraps, but the plane should offer significant advances over existing bombers in the US fleet.

Among the new capabilities offered by the B-21 is the potential for uncrewed flight. Stefanek said the aircraft is “provisioned for the possibility, but there has been no decision to fly without a crew”.

The plane also features an “open architecture”, which is meant to allow easier and quicker upgrades.

Amy Nelson, a fellow at the Brookings Institution think tank, said the B-21 is “designed to evolve”. (*AFP*)

NUCLEAR FUSION: ENERGY OF THE FUTURE



• Washington

US researchers have finally surpassed an important milestone for nuclear fusion technology: getting more energy out than was put in.

The US Department of Energy announced on Tuesday that it had made a historic breakthrough with what some consider to be the energy of the future.

Here is an update on how nuclear fusion — which produces no greenhouse gases and leaves little waste — works, what projects are underway and estimates on when they could be completed:

Fusion differs from fission, the technique currently used in nuclear power plants, by fusing two atomic nuclei instead of splitting one.

In fact, fusion is the process that powers the sun. Two light hydrogen atoms, when they collide at very high speeds, fuse together into one heavier element, helium, releasing energy in the process.

“Controlling the power source of the stars is the greatest

technological challenge humanity has ever undertaken,” tweeted physicist Arthur Turrell, author of *The Star Builders*.

Producing fusion reactions on Earth is only possible by heating matter to extremely high temperatures — over 100 million degrees Celsius (180 million Fahrenheit).

“So we have to find ways to isolate this extremely hot matter from anything that could cool it down. This is the problem of containment,” Erik Lefebvre, project leader at the French Atomic Energy Commission, told *AFP*.

One method is to “confine” the fusion reaction with magnets. In a huge doughnut-shaped reactor, light hydrogen isotopes (deuterium and tritium) are heated until they reach the state of plasma, a very low density gas.

Magnets confine the swirling plasma gas, preventing it from coming into contact with the chamber’s walls, while the atoms collide and begin fusing.

This is the type of reactor used in the major international project known as ITER, currently under construction in France, as well as the Joint European

Torus near Oxford, England. A second method is inertial confinement fusion, in which high energy lasers are directed simultaneously into a thimble-sized cylinder containing the hydrogen.

This is the technique used by scientists at the National Ignition Facility at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL) in California, who were behind Tuesday’s announcement.

Inertial confinement is used to demonstrate the physical principles of fusion, while magnetic confinement seeks to mimic future industrial-scale reactors.

For decades, scientists had attempted to achieve what is known as “net energy gain” — in which more energy is produced by the fusion reaction than it takes to activate it.

LLNL director Kim Budil cautioned that much remains to be done before it can be commercially viable.

“A few decades of research on the underlying technologies could put us in a position to build a power plant,” Budil said. (*AFP*)



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