

# THE Weekly Review

For the Thinking Person

1, 2023 FREE WITH 'SUNDAY NATION'



## WILL HE REOPEN THE LOAN TAPS?

Good old days of Kibaki: His policies enabled banks to lower the cost of borrowing, which gave more Kenyans access to capital. A credit crunch can hurt the economy. Will the next CBK Governor support measures that will inspire banks to lend to more Kenyans to accelerate growth?

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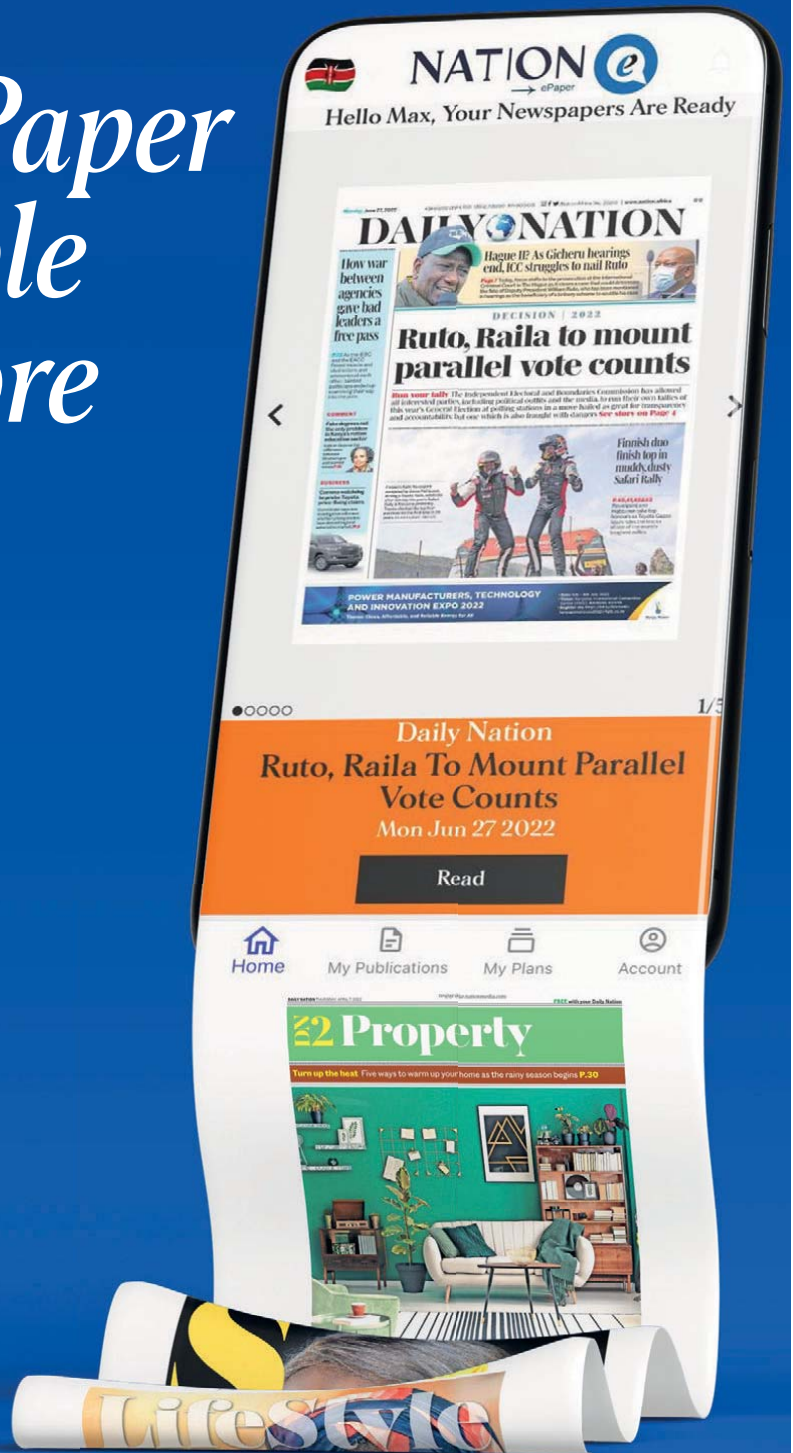
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letter from the editor

# Inside Good people, ethnic profiling of Kenyan-Somalis is retrogressive

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**27 WE AREN'T TOTALLY FREE:** There is widespread support throughout the Caribbean for compensation for descendants of Africans who were enslaved by the British.



**E**thnicity has always been our pitfall and the fact that it is getting refined and bur-nished by the government, without a single thought to the public perception, is a worrying trend. Tribal consciousness is fast overtaking national awareness.

It's a no-brainer that senior appointments in President Ruto's administration reflect a deliberate effort to favour certain ethnicities. It's a narrow and shameful strategy that past Presidents have employed, filling the public service with members of their tribes and communities viewed as 'friendly' to the government. That view has always put the rest of Kenyans in the place of the 'enemy' of the state. President Ruto appears to be amplifying tribalism, cronyism and nepotism in state appointments.

Article 232 of the Constitution demands that the public service must be representative of the diverse Kenyan communities and that adequate and equal opportunity in appointment, training and advancement, at all levels of the public service to men and women, members of all ethnic communities and persons with disabilities.

Such appointments should be based on merit, equity and diversity. This does not suggest that Ruto's appointees are incompetent and undeserving, but all regions should be represented to ensure inclusivity. The nomination of the Director of Public Prosecutions, Noordin Haji, for the position of Director-General, National Intelligence Service, drew criticism from some Kenyans unhappy with the fact that several officials from one community are calling the shots in our security organs.

From the tone of their criticism, however, one could easily see that their bellyache was not about the unfair distribution of jobs, but mere prejudice against Kenyans of Somali descent. The scapegoat-



Allan Buluku

*If it were the 'friendly' people from the King's backyard at the helm of our security organs, we wouldn't expect as much apprehension and annoying sketching of a community in such stone-age manner.*

ing of Kenyan-Somalis whenever there's a national security problem has fuelled an unhealthy relationship between them and other Kenyans. We must nip this narrative in the bud and stifle its growth.

The census results of 2019 were scrutinised with tooth-picks and there were silent murmurings over the growth of the Somali population, which seemed to be too steep for the liking of many staunch bigots. There are many postings on social media of how the Somali are taking over the economic space of some ethnicities. They do not see the honesty and organisation of Somali entrepreneurs that is drawing more customers to them and away from their own cheeky, sleight of hand business transactions.

There is a long history of negative portrayal of Kenyan-Somalis as "terrorists, pirates, refugees and foreigners". Their marginalisation began in the pre-colonial 'error', and was catalysed by the Shifta War in

northern Kenya between 1963 and 1976. The region was subsequently alienated and remains one of the least developed.

The cruel treatment would later result in one of Kenya's darkest moments when, in 1984, President Moi ordered the army to defuse a clan conflict in Wajir. Instead, the soldiers allegedly killed 5,000 people.

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks at the Westgate Mall, the government launched 'Operation Usalama Watch', where authorities swept areas of Nairobi dominated by Kenyan-Somalis to identify illegal immigrants. The operation was riddled with rights abuses. Security forces raided homes and shops, where they reportedly extorted residents. For Kenyan-Somalis, the notion of belonging has been put into question for decades. While nobody questions their link to the north-eastern region, ethnic bigots question whether or not this makes them 'Kenyan'.

How absurd. They have the right to be Kenyans without proving their citizenship. Reading through Prof Ngugi wa Thiongo's diary, *Detained*, we realise he was there in jail with many other prisoners of conscience, a good number of whom were of Somali origin. The professor does not tell us why those people were held at the President's pleasure, but we get the feeling why.

While we are also opposed to the skewed appointments, we do not take the angle of pressing down the victim. Ethnic profiling and stereotyping must stop. If it were the 'friendly' people from the King's backyard at the helm of our security organs, we wouldn't expect as much apprehension and annoying sketching of a community in such stone-age manner.

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the telescope

■ **Legislators to push for electoral reforms**

**Bipartisan report on IEBC ready**

The sub-committee of the bipartisan team tasked to discuss the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission's (IEBC) reconstitution will this week share a report on its deliberations.

The six-member group, chaired by Rarieda MP Otiende Amollo, has lawmakers Edwin Sifuna, Millie Odhiambo, Enoch Wambua, Boni Khalwale and Mwengi Mutuse.

Amollo told the media that the team consisting of Azimio and Kenya Kwanza legislators described the IEBC issue as sensitive.

The sensitivity of the issue

stems from the falling-out between the IEBC commissioners led by former chairman Wafula Chebukati on one hand and vice-chairman Juliana Cherrera on the other in the run-up to the announcement of the August 2022 presidential results.

Chebukati declared President William Ruto winner of the elections but Cherrera and four other commissioners dismissed the results as 'opaque'.

Upon assuming office, President Ruto suspended the dissenting commissioners and formed a task force to constitute a new IEBC office, a move the opposition has protested.



Rarieda MP Otiende Amollo (second right) with other MPs in the team tasked with bipartisan talks at Crowne Plaza Hotel, Nairobi, on May 5. WILFRED NYANGARESII | NATION

■ **Over 200 delegates will attend conference**

**Nairobi set for MedTech summit**



The 2023 Africa MedTech Conference will be held in Nairobi from May 22 to May 24.

It will bring together leaders and organisations in technology design, research, and implementation in health while

connecting them to investors and industry.

The Africa MedTech Hub is a ground-breaking digital health ecosystem builder with deep knowledge of patient-focused digital technologies, and aims to incubate and accelerate health-focused innovations with population level impact.

The hub acts as a catalyst by bringing together the best minds in the industry.

■ **Kota is a sandwich with multiple ingredients**



A KFC restaurant along Mombasa Road, Nairobi. DIANA NGILA | NATION

**KFC denies stealing SA's local dish idea**

Fast food giant KFC has dismissed claims by a South African entrepreneur accusing the company of stealing his idea of a local dish known as kota, local media report.

Romeo Malepe accuses KFC of appropriating his idea of a chicken kota that the fast food chain is launching.

Kota, also known locally as Sphatlo, is a big sandwich with multiple ingredients stuffed into a quarter loaf of bread, wrapped and eaten on the go.

Mr Malepe told a local publication that his idea for a "Streetwise Kota" was stolen while he was looking for a partnership with the chain.

Mr Malepe is also said to have taken to social media recently to con-

demn the fast-food chain for allegedly taking his idea, which he said he developed four years ago.

But KFC has refuted the claims in a statement to South African media, saying it was "no secret that kota is a famous South African meal and the limited-edition KFC Sphatlo is a result of an internal product development process".

It said that for over 50 years, the chain had been inspired by the South African heritage and culture to develop local innovative products in their menu.

"We will continue to use South African food trends as inspiration to bring relevant products to our fans across South Africa," KFC was quoted as saying.

■ **Driver attempted to switch places with his dog**

**Man moves to dog's seat to avoid DUI**



A speeding driver who was pulled over in Colorado tried to switch seats with his dog in the passenger seat to evade arrest, according to police. An officer approached the car and watched the bizarre scene unfold. The man was initially stopped

for speeding at 52mph (84km/h) in a 30mph zone. He was also intoxicated, the Springfield Police Department wrote in a Facebook post.

"The driver attempted to switch places with his dog... as the SPD officer approached and watched the entire process," the department said in a statement.

The man also claimed he "was not driving" the vehicle and attempted to run away from the officer when he was asked about his alcohol consumption.



# kenya lens

## ■ HOW THE CENTRAL BANK CAN STIMULATE THE ECONOMY

# LET THE MONEY FLOW

It is hoped that Kamau Thugge will be as procedural as he proved to be when he represented the National Treasury on the CBK Board. He needs to reach millions whom the CBK barely serves and could rise to star level should he reveal that he is instinctually attuned to the needs of the day at the CBK.



In September 2021, the government implemented a palliative moratorium on the negative listing by credit reference bureaus of borrowers with loans below Sh5 million for a year.

The new governor should start by listening to unlikely noises at the Bank of England, which recently came under fire for incompetence from expert economists, including its once shining star, Prof David Blanchflower of the Monetary Policy Committee.



Key sectors of Kenya's economy have long been left in abeyance while banks transform customer deposits to lucrative and world-class rates of return, all the while emasculating the macroeconomic expectations of an effective CBK monetary policy.

As recently as the third Quarter of 2022, Kenyan banks significantly reduced lending to individuals and small businesses, citing difficulties in evaluating their creditworthiness – the very core of bank licensing and regulation.



The nominated Governor of Central Bank of Kenya, Dr Kamau Thugge, needs to be nimble and inclusive, and to affirm regulation of the banking system adequately for a challenged economy.



Except for the private sector lending initiatives of the Kibaki era during 2002-2013, the banking system has for years ignored holdings of the private sector category in asset portfolios while paying banks handsomely.

## The next governor of the Central Bank of Kenya has his work cut out for him in ending monetary policy brinkmanship and allowing the economy to grow

● BY MBUI WAGACHA

Kenya's policy makers have in the past acted as if struggling to remove the economic noose that institutional duties wrap around their necks. Neglect in the past did not seem to matter or stop the economy from limping on.

The nominated Governor of Central Bank of Kenya, Dr Kamau Thugge, needs to be nimble and inclusive, and to affirm regulation of the banking system ade-

quately for a challenged economy. Accountability that seemed to be for the birds now matters desperately on all the defining issues of the economy.

It is hoped that he will be as procedural as he proved to be when he represented the National Treasury on the CBK Board.

He needs to reach millions whom the CBK barely serves and could rise to star level should he reveal that he is instinctually attuned to the needs of the day at the CBK.

### Disturbing comparisons

Thugge should start by listening to unlikely noises at the Bank of England, which recently came under fire for incompetence from expert economists. No less than its once shining star, Prof David Blanchflower of the Monetary Policy Committee, blasted the BOE on erroneous economic projections that Britain would face a recession and negative economic growth in 2023, then U-turning that to a rosy upgrade, a record growth forecast. The Chief Econo-

mist of the BOE then goofed, asking British households and businesses to 'accept' they are poorer.

But it is British economic experts' critiques of a record-breaking spate of interest rate increases to fight inflation that attracts attention to Kenya's banking system and that helps to uncover how we operate in a moribund and historic quagmire of macroeconomic policy traps without ambition, prone to the slavishness of kowtowing to the International Mon-

Continued on Page 6

kenya lens

# Thugge's glorious chance to jumpstart economy



From experience, one thing the public learns quickly at the CBK is that no one at the top is ever very happy to see Wanjiku, even if dressed in her Sunday best, let alone coordinate monetary policy with the fiscal side to improve livelihoods.

Continued from Page 5

etary Fund, if not all of Washington, as if only others can think for us. Our use of development tools and agenda remain a 1980s copycat of failed structural adjustment programmes that few countries would swallow in their policies today. Austerity measures – higher taxes and tighter monetary policy – are added to the traditional fuel of tight-fisted local banking credit to the private sector. This creates failed states, overseen by the CBK and National Treasury treating the financial sector as a club for the rich.

Fig 1 (see table) calculates and compares credit to the private sector as a ratio of GDP. On a scale of 0-150 per cent from 2009-2021, it portrays resources provided to the private sector from financial corporations, such as loans and purchases of non-equity securities, in Kenya versus rest of the world.

The snapshot shows what the rest of the world does with its available customer bank deposits and resources from financial markets at large in financial intermediation to grow wealth. Kenya's niggardly investments for wealth creation in the private sector (remember that's where the largest pie of revenues grow) are a puny and glaring diamond of neglect, embarrassing even, given

our supply-side potentials. Private sector credit as a ratio of GDP for the world in 2020 touched nearly 148 per cent.

In Kenya, as recently as the third Quarter of 2022, banks significantly reduced lending to individuals and small businesses, citing difficulties in evaluating their creditworthiness – the very core of bank licensing and regulation. The ratio hovers from a high of 36.7 per cent (2015), having fallen to 21.9 per cent (2009).

In September 2021, the government felt compelled to implement a palliative moratorium on the negative listing by credit reference bureaus of borrowers with loans below Sh5 million for one year. It temporarily curtailed the collusion among banks against borrowers. Add predatory fintechs fast shutting down MPesa payments in the name of financial inclusion, at a cost to Safaricom and customers financially disinclined.

Clearly, the CBK has work to do in regulating a better setting for customers (who are the owners of bank deposits) and improving the rules of the game in private sector borrowing, including regulating loan repayment terms to protect banks.

### Imports-driven inflation

In other disturbing news for Kenya from external developments,

note the poisoned success of Britain in notching up interest rates to 4.5 per cent on Thursday, May 11, 2023, for the 12th consecutive month. Kenya, a massive importer, faces much the same issues in its fight against historic inflation as does Britain. Having strayed from the EU in Brexit while substantially reliant on food imports, the latter finds it more difficult to fight imported inflation and keep

prices down. Yet escalating interest rates alone cannot bring down the prices of imports.

On the contrary, they put a break on domestic production in key sectors of the economy that could be the drivers of economic recovery, with prices stabilising at target rates of inflation. In their math, expert economists argued that British rate increases were proving more costly than the in-

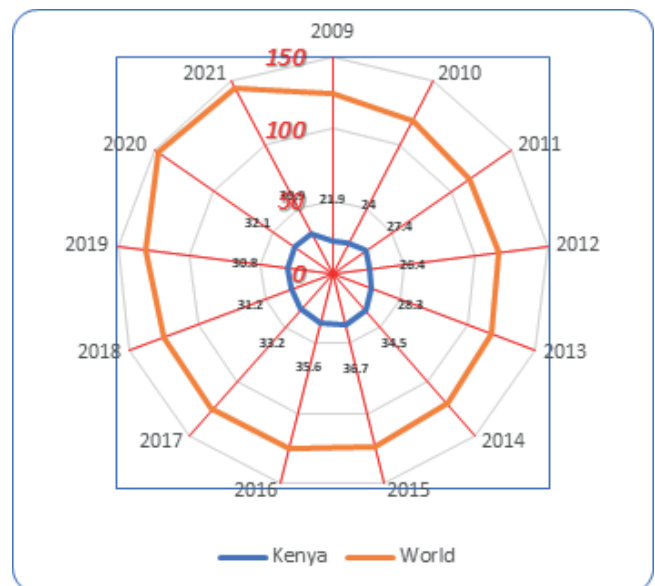


Figure 1: Domestic Credit to Private Sector (%GDP)-World & Kenya-2009-2021-Source: World Bank data on the topic.



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flation they purported to fight.

### Neglect of credit to the private sector

Key sectors of Kenya's economy have long been left in abeyance while banks transform customer deposits to lucrative and world-class rates of return, all the while emasculating the macroeconomic expectations of an effective CBK monetary policy.

From experience, one thing the public learns quickly at the CBK is that no one at the top is ever very happy to see Wanjiku, even if dressed in her Sunday best, let alone coordinate monetary policy with the fiscal side to improve livelihoods.

In contrast, government takes a sizeable bite of her deposits as banks purchase TBs and bonds issued in government domestic borrowing. And as a placatory exercise prior to every Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) sitting, CBK in its flagship *MPC Market Perceptions Survey Report* holds a conversation to obtain perceptions of banks, non-banks and private sector firms on expectations in selected economic indicators including inflation, economic growth, demand for credit, growth of credit to the private sector and exchange rate. This 'opinion feed' is clearly not the hallmark of CBK independence enshrined in the Constitution, the main pillar being Article 231 on central banking.

Central banks independently study and set monetary policy, maintaining price stability and financial stability among a host of



other desirable targets such as growth, employment and exchange rates.

The Survey that is also conducted to gather degrees of 'optimism' on the economy can hardly speak for most of the sectors, except those in the conversation. Thus, sectors like employment, agriculture and housing construction are relatively immune to the conversation and Central Bank Rate periodically articulated. But as cited, nothing in banking hurts Kenya's monetary policy as does the government's traditional access to customer deposits in commercial banks as holdings of TBs and bonds, and a large domestic debt.

In Kenya, the sectors are mainly off-the-radar as government domestic borrowing from the financial sector has become a lifeline (4.8 per cent TBs and 82.9 per cent bonds as reported in the

*Treasury Bulletin*, February 2023). The problem is that with the current banking turmoil and the uncertainties around Kenya's public debt, the pickings of TBs and bonds have declined. The 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 in February 2023 from 9.44 per cent, 9.88 per cent and 10.42 per cent in January 2023 respectively. The average time to maturity has also declined.

This curtails government borrowing (sending similar signals to external lenders). While the sectors have little to lose, the upgraded costs of borrowing or mortgage costs have little transmission to the economy.

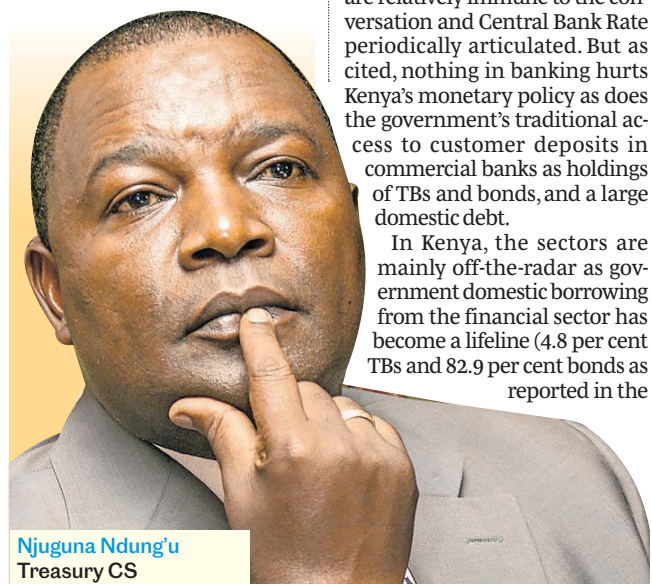
And except for the private sector lending initiatives of the Kibaki-era during 2002-2013, the banking system has for years ignored holdings of the private sector category in asset portfolios while paying banks handsomely, using taxpayer revenues for lending the customer deposits to government. Our archaic and predatory financial system perpetuates poverty and has reached a crossroads of sorts, where customer deposits

absorbed by banks are substantially on-lent to government in securities and bonds while taxpayers pick up the tab for the lucrative interest rates offered mainly to banks.

If government borrowing is blackballed by the financial markets domestically as well as externally, except for short-term maturities, the new Governor has to crack his brain as adviser to government to find alternatives.

In contrast, in Britain, and the era of rising rates, monetary policy transmission has worked principally to demonstrate to analysts how policy causes a downturn in performance of sectors such as agriculture, mortgages and housing, impacting an overheating economy in the desired direction of anti-inflation plans. Given such neglect, CBK policy rates have little effect on macro-aggregates in the sectors that are so starved of credit that people live in poverty while unable to invest in supply side potentials.

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



Njuguna Ndung'u  
Treasury CS

## kenya lens

## ■ END OF THE ROAD FOR TENDERPRENEURS MILKING UTILITY FIRM DRY

# BIG SHIFT IN POWER



**Davis Chirchir** Energy and Petroleum Cabinet Secretary

## World Bank forces the government to adopt a corporate governance system at limping parastatal in a bid to fight graft and improve oversight by minority shareholders and independent board members

• BY JAINDI KISERO

**A** confidential Cabinet Paper seen by *The Weekly Review* details how the government is planning to effect a new corporate governance system at Kenya Power, where minority shareholders will now be having a prescribed number of directors representing their interests on the board of the company.

The new system has been forced on the government by the World Bank, a key condition for new lending to the financially troubled utility firm.

Despite the fact that the stake of the State and minority shareholders is almost equal, with 51.1 per cent for the government and 49.9 per cent for minority shareholders, the government usually takes advantage of the narrow lead to pack the board of this critical state corporation with either political appointees or civil servants sitting as ex-officio members. Minority shareholders have no representation.

The Cabinet Memo says that a mechanism shall be instituted to actualise fair representation, with minority shareholders nominating and voting their preferred directors to fill their proportionate allotment. To achieve this, the Kenya Power Board will shortly be asked to convene a Special AGM to allow amendments of the company's Memorandum and Articles of Association to effect the radical changes.

True meaning and significance of election of directors has been impossible to achieve because of abuse of voting power by the majority shareholder. In recent months, Treasury Cabinet Secretary, Prof Njuguna Ndung'u, has been doing whatever he wants.

Weeks before the last AGM in December last year, the CS sealed the fate of most of the company's

directors by giving an advance notice to the Company Secretary, Imelda Bore, that he would be making a resolution to remove most of the directors, including the chair, Ms Vivian Yeda. In good corporate governance practice, directors are elected by a system of rotation. Yeda was not on rotation this time round.

Another director who was kicked out, Mr Yida Kemoli, had only been appointed to the board in December at the previous AGM and was also not due for rotation. But he did not offer himself for election after powerful individuals reportedly informed him that the government did not want him. He threw in the towel in advance of the December AGM.

Ms Sarah Mbwana, Brig (Rtd) James Gatiba, and Justice (Rtd) Aaron Ringera, who had been on the board for five months, offered themselves for re-election but were kicked out by the powerful vote of the majority shareholder.

Mr Kairu Thuo, the longest-serving member of the Board was retained despite the fact that the Mwongozo Code that spells out corporate governance rules for state corporations is against long tenures because they tend to breed conflict of interest.

Clearly, by abuse of voting power, the major shareholder had turned Kenya Power director elections into rituals that were largely a formality.

The Yeda-led Board became unpopular with the powers that be mainly because it started pushing for comprehensive forensic audits on key operations of the company.

After the members stepped aside, four forensic audit exercises that they initiated have yet to be completed.

The first was on the procurement of power purchase agreements, the second was the procurement of Heavy Fuel Oil, the



## kenya lens

third was an audit of system losses and finally a comprehensive audit on the procurement of cables, transformers, meters and equipment for substations.

The majority shareholder vote merely served to tilt the balance of power in the Board away from a team of public-spirited individuals who were on a mission to restore the fortunes of the company, to powerful cartels and tenderpreneurs who have captured Kenya Power's supply chain for years.

Indeed, effective influence in the company has been in the hands of a tiny group of elite suppliers who have organised themselves into a formal association. For a long time, the cartel engaged the company in protracted court battles over tenders of cables, meters and equipment for substations, the consequence of which is that Kenya Power has been unable to buy essential supplies.

In a tender floated in March last year, the Kenya Power Board decided to introduce higher quality standards for meters, transformers and substation equipment. First was a requirement that the tenderer had to have 15 years of technical experience in manufacturing meters and transformers. Secondly, the brand of the equipment was required to be in service and used in at least three of the following regions – Europe, North America, Africa, Asia and South America.

Thirdly, the company would only buy meters that had been tested for accelerated life expectancy in a certified laboratory. Finally, it was a requirement that the meters offered had to have a non-volatility memory with a long-term retention period of not less than 10 years.

The tenderpreneurs would have none of it. They challenged Kenya Power by advancing the

**The Cabinet Memo says that a mechanism shall be instituted to actualise fair representation, with minority shareholders nominating and voting their preferred directors to fill their proportionate allotment. To achieve this, the Board will shortly be asked to convene a Special AGM to allow amendments of the company's Memorandum and Articles of Association to effect the radical changes.**



Kenya Power last week picked John Siror as its substantive managing director after a two-year wait with an acting boss. The recruitment of Dr Siror, a former general manager for systems operations at the State-owned Kenya Electricity Transmission Company followed a selection by consultancy firm Deloitte East Africa.

### PROGRAMME FOR RESULTS

A scheduled Programme for Results (PforR) tied to the concessional debt by the International Development Association (IDA) – a member of the World Bank – revealed widespread reform demands even as Kenya Power readies itself for a fresh round of electricity supply at the grassroots through the Last Mile Connectivity (LMC).

Under the proposals, governance systems are set to be shaken up to improve oversight by minority shareholders and independent board members as well as the competitive appointment of both executives.

"The programme will support policy actions aimed at ensuring long-term planning, institutional stability and capacity, and improved governance at KPLC, including a timely competitive selection of the Managing Director, and the election of three positions of independent directors to the Board nominated by the minority private shareholders to strengthen the Board's objectivity and ensure the right balance between the social and commercial objectives of the utility," the World Bank reveals in the PforR.

Kenya Power last week picked John Siror as its substantive managing director after a two-year wait with an acting boss. The recruitment of Dr Siror, a former general manager for systems operations at the State-owned Kenya Electricity Transmission Company (Ketraco) followed a selection exercise by consultancy firm Deloitte East Africa. And with the CEO position now filled, the World Bank's reforms demand list means that attention is shifting to Board appointments.

"Several other governance strengthening measures will be supported under the programme, which includes, enhancing transparency in KPLC Board appointments," the World Bank says in its reform plan. Davis Chirchir is the Energy Cabinet Secretary.

following arguments.

Firstly, the quality standards introduced were aimed at discriminating against local producers. Secondly, Kenya Power was bound by the policy of the government of 'buy Kenya, build Ken-

ya' which requires that locals be given preference in tenders. Finally, the introduction of stringent rules was a violation of the 2010 Constitution.

They lodged a challenge at the Public Procurement Appeals Tri-

bunal, where they lost. They took the case to the High Court and lost. They went to the Court of Appeal and lost again. If you track and trace beneficial ownership of members of the Energy Assemblers and Manufacturers Association, you will find that it resembles a list of 'who is who' of operatives within major political parties.

Yeda, Kemoli and Abdulrazak Ali, Elizabeth Rogo, Caroline Kitony and Sachin Gudka before them did not exit the Board of their own volition. The government had changed. The boot was on the other foot. With the field cleared, who will win the multi-billion tender for meters, transformers and equipment for substations?

Weeks before President Ruto was inaugurated, well-known supporters of the ruling party went to social media to warn the company against proceeding to award the coveted and lucrative contract until the new government was sworn in.

An explosive case has been lodged at the Public Procurement Tribunal challenging the decision by the company to award a Sh30 billion contract for supply of meters that has been deliberately divided between the four members of the official cartel – the Energy Assemblers and Manufacturers Association.



## kenya lens

## ■ DISCORDANT MESSAGING BECOMING THE HALLMARK OF RUTO'S ADMINISTRATION

**In an administration with an insatiable appetite for new and increased taxes at a time everyone is feeling the pinch of a depressed economy, the President is unapologetic in shifting of positions and policy U-turns**

● By MACHARIA GAITHO

**P**resident Ruto: Nothing stops you from contributing to this fund, because, it is not a tax.

**Ayub Abdi:** You say it is not a tax?

**Ruto:** It is not a tax.

**Abdi:** What is it?

**Ruto:** It is a contribution you are making, because it is not tax, this is not a tax, because, it is not a tax. It is your money.

**Abdi:** It is legally binding?

**Ruto:** Of course.

**Abdi:** It is not a tax, you said?

**Ruto:** It is not a tax

**Abdi:** Why should I contribute? And if I don't want?

**Ruto:** That's what the law says. It is a contribution you are making, because, it is not a tax.

**Abdi:** Why are you passing it?

**Ruto:** Because it is not tax.

**Abdi:** Why would I make contribution for others to succeed? It's your business as government. As Head of State you have the responsibility, you have the mandate. . .

**Ruto:** And that's why the Constitution gives me the power to tax.

**Abdi:** You are saying it's not a tax!

**Ruto:** That's why the Constitution gives me the power to tax. It is not a tax.

**Abdi:** There's a Bill coming before Parliament. If it is passed, why would I have to contribute?

**Ruto:** Because it is not a tax.

A video clip on the above exchange between President William Ruto and Ayub Abdi of *Citizen TV* swiftly went viral on the Internet, becoming one of the main talking points as the President faced-off against six journalists in the second of his live interviews from State House.

Usually calm and self-assured in front of TV cameras, Ruto this time seemed to have lost his way, struggling to justify the controversial

housing scheme that proposes to dock three per cent from the salaries of all workers, with employers contributing an equal amount.

The compulsory scheme, which will apply to all, even those not interested in acquiring government-built houses, is being pushed through despite stiff opposition from both workers, already reeling under heavy taxation, and employers, who see it hitting their bottomlines.

Ruto laboured to explain, correctly, that the salary deduction was indeed not a tax, but merely a contribution just like the National Social Security Fund, and that the money was not going to boost the exchequer but towards a social housing programme. Contributors would benefit from the opportunity to purchase affordable houses, but if not interested would eventually get their money

back, with interest.

He also added a patriotic element, suggesting that those with means have an obligation to contribute to a programme that benefits those in need of affordable housing, thereby helping people move up from slums to decent accommodation.

And finally, he added another justification — that the programme would generate massive employment, thus pulling youth out of poverty. He claimed that Asian countries like Malaysia grew their economies and addressed unemployment through labour-intensive construction pro-

# THE KING OF DOUBLESPEAK



President Ruto



## kenya lens

jects. He was not convincing, and it is clear that the President might be putting his neck on the block for what is an extremely hard sell.

While it is true that the contribution is not a tax, not many are bothered by the distinction because it does hit their payslips. The promise of affordable housing might not be a priority for workers buffeted from all sides by what is generally seen as the Kenya Kwanza administration's insatiable appetite for new and increased taxes at a time everyone is feeling the pinch of a depressed economy.

It does not help that details on the proposed affordable housing project are extremely hazy in terms of project timelines, costs and payment terms, and intended beneficiaries considering the fact that those not in salaried employment will not be contributing.

The government also seems to be operating on the assumption that the menace of urban slums will be eradicated by provision of low-cost housing, while the reality might be that the problem is not a housing deficit, but unemployment and low earning.

Kenya, in fact, might provide many case studies of projects that are built supposedly to benefit slum dwellers, but turn out unaffordable for the presumed target, being taken up by the middle class instead.

The housing programme is just one of the minefields Ruto has to navigate at a period he is under pressure from all sides on proposed taxation measures that to many amount to trying to squeeze blood from a rock.

The President appeared at the interview well primed to face tough questions from Abdi and the other five — Nancy Okware of *KBC*, Eric Munene of *TV 47*, Lofty Matambo of *NTV*, Daniel Kiptoo of *K24* and moderator Eric Latiff of *KTN/Spice FM*.

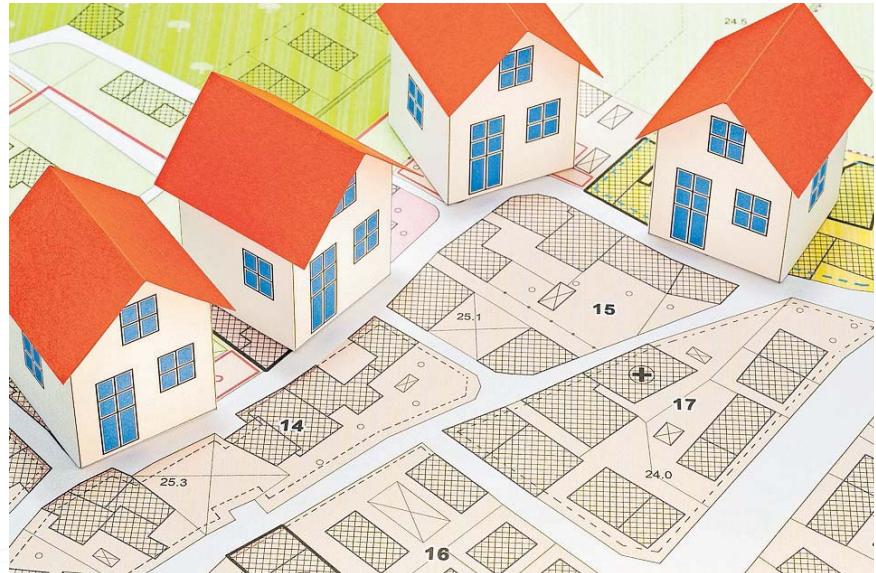
Other than the 'it is not a tax' assertion coming out like a stuck record, he did demonstrate that he was very well prepared, having anticipated all the tough questions to be faced and probably having rehearsed his responses.

He came out very knowledgeable on the finer details of his development priorities and economic recovery strategy, reeling out an amazing array of facts and figures without reference to any notes.

He displayed almost missionary zeal and a firm conviction that he was on the right path despite the naysayers, and aware that he must take responsibility for politically risky measures that will inflict pain on Kenyans but are necessary if the country is to avoid looming economic collapse.

These include measures such as removing subsidies on fuel and maize flour, cutting government spending and even resisting further borrowing, to the extent that public service salaries were delayed last month for the first time in history. But the interview also showed a Ruto who was quite liberal with double-speak as well as unapologetic shifting of positions and policy U-turns.

On the economic black hole inherited from the Uhuru Kenyatta regime, the President started off by asserting that he would not find excuses in blaming his predecessor, a pointed



Usually calm and self-assured in front of TV cameras, President Ruto seemed to have lost his way, struggling to justify the controversial housing scheme that proposes to dock three per cent from the salaries of all workers, with employers contributing an equal amount.

reference to the Kenya Kwanza talking points frequently enunciated by Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua.

But the moment he was cornered on his contentious taxation proposals at variance with his campaign pledges, he fell back to emphasising the dire financial situation he found on assuming office.

From his responses, one would be forgiven for assuming that Ruto was the outsider who had no idea of the size of government's external and domestic debt and the parlous state of government finances.

A stranger watching the interview would have had no clue that he was the Deputy President of two terms who toured the country taking credit for the very projects responsible for ballooning debt.

The only time he referred to his time in the DP's mansion was in the claim that in the later stages of the Jubilee Party administration's term, his office was denied funding and he had to dip into his own pocket to fuel official cars and pay staff allowances. None of the interviewers followed with a question on whether he might have exhausted the budget allocation by going out on the campaign trail.

He also displayed a clear contradiction in supporting reduced taxation for aircraft and spare parts, arguing that Kenya's place as a repair and service hub for the entire region was in danger of being lost to neighbouring countries unless incentives were offered to the industry. At the same time, however, he supported increased taxation on fuel on the basis that differential tax regimes were units and open to abuse. He also supported the contentious doubling on VAT of petrol on the grounds that the enhanced revenue would be critical to supporting road development projects that are presently in danger of stalling due to lack of funds.

Ruto further addressed issues around government appointments tilted towards Kenya Kwanza faithful and regions or ethnic groups that voted for him.

He insisted that meritocracy rather than political considerations was the key factor. He gave the example of the new Chief of Defence Forces, Gen Francis Ogolla, who got the nod to succeed Gen Robert Kibochi despite the fact that he was amongst the National Advisory Security Committee members who allegedly tried to overturn his election victory by putting pressure on the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission at the tail end of the electoral process last August.

Gen Ogolla is increasingly being held up as a poster boy for Kenya Kwanza inclusiveness, with Gachagua also pointing out on more than one occasion that he got the top military job despite hailing from opposition leader Raila Odinga's ethnic bastion.

And from there, a related question that Ruto tried very hard to parry was on Gachagua's oft-repeated contention that the Kenya Kwanza administration is a 'shareholder' government where jobs and other dividends will be reserved for those (presumably in reference to ethnic origin, who voted for the winning coalition).

That was the one question across nearly three hours of the interview that Ruto tried hard to deflect, refusing to say whether or not that was the party position. He suggested instead that the question be posed to the Deputy President who, he said, was more than capable of speaking for himself.

And that perfectly illustrated the difficulties Ruto faces with the discordant messaging that is in many ways becoming the hallmark of his administration, despite a surfeit of communication directors, spokesmen and specialists at State House and every government ministry.



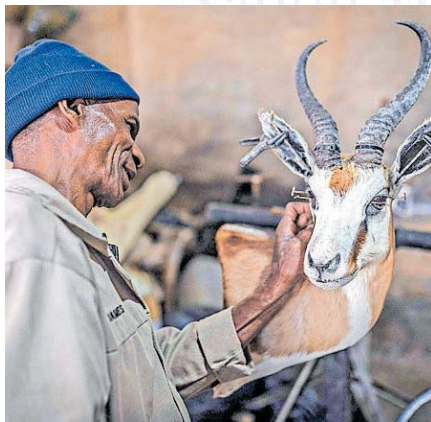
# the limelight



Kenya's Ferdinand Omanyala wins the 100m race during the Kipkeino Classic Continental Tour in Nairobi on May 13. SILA KIPLAGAT | NATION



British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak holds a huddle with political journalists on board a government plane as he heads to Hiroshima, Japan, for the G7 summit on May 17. PHOTO | AFP



John Khelby Kock, an employee of Afrikan Tanning & Taxidermy, which trades in wildlife products, works on a stuffed antelope at a shop in Rayton, South Africa on May 9. Legislation banning import of hunting trophies to Britain was approved by UK lawmakers in March and is being scrutinised by the Upper House. PHOTO | AFP



Chief Justice Martha Koome (second right) receives Colombia Vice-President Francia Marquez Mina (second left) at the Supreme Court in Nairobi on May 15. With them is EAC Cabinet Secretary Rebecca Miano (left). DENNIS ONSONGO | NATION



British-Thai actress Araya Hargate arrives for the screening of the film 'Kaibutsu' (Monster) during the 76th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France, on May 17. PHOTO | AFP



A soldier takes part in training for women at the Military Air Base in Tolemaida, Colombia, on May 16. The last time the army enlisted women in its ranks was 1993. Over 1,200 women joined the military. PHOTO | AFP



A man loads his truck with recyclable materials to be sold to recycling companies at Managua's municipal garbage dump on May 16, on the eve of World Recycling Day. PHOTO | AFP



# ART FOR JUSTICE



# Mena

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*Award-winning poet Willy Oeba travels with Chief Justice Martha Koome as a performer when she opens small claims courts.*

OPEN SPACE

# Why we should use PPPs to accelerate development

They've been used since 381 BC, when the city state of Eretria contracted a private contractor to drain a lake

• BY DANIEL MUTEGI

The government is implementing the Bottom-Up economic transformation agenda, the key pillars of which are agriculture, Micro-Small and Medium Enterprise (MSME) economy, housing and settlement, healthcare and the digital superhighway, and creative economy. These are aligned with the Vision 2030 development blueprint.

The key sectors touch on the livelihoods of Kenyans in many ways. Agriculture is our economic mainstay, and generates 20 per cent of our GDP, employing over 40 per cent of the total population and over 70 per cent of the rural population. The MSMEs economy employs 14.9 million Kenyans. The sector has the potential for generating more employment and revenue under the right conditions.

Thirdly, housing and settlement — which is expected to lead to the creation of over 250,000 affordable, accessible, adequate and quality housing units per year — will provide the necessary incentives for national economic growth and development. This is because housing has forward and backward linkages with many sectors of the economy.

Fourthly, healthcare will ensure that the workforce is available for many working hours. On the fifth key agenda of digital superhighway and creative economy, the government has prioritised reinvigoration of the role of the arts, sports and culture in national economic growth.

The funds needed to finance the plan cannot come from the normal public sector financing. The nation has to turn to the application of Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) to support various programmes and projects. PPPs imply the working together of public and private players through well-defined structures as stated in the PPP Act 2021.

PPPs have been used globally since 381 BC, when the independent city state of Eretria contracted a private contractor, Chairephanes, to drain a lake.

The discovery of the Americas, the colonialisation of the world, the railway and steam engine building, the canals and turnpikes and the agrarian and industrial revolution are all examples of successful PPPs.

There are several reasons for use of PPPs. First, globally, the public pulse has been declining, while the demand for infrastructure and services has been increasing due to rapid urbanisation, high population growth rates and increased poverty levels. For example, Kenya requires to make investments of over US\$40 billion per year in the next 10 years for infrastructural development, of which only US\$15 billion is available, leaving an annual infrastructural financing deficit of US\$25 billion. Such deficits in infrastructure financing can only be addressed through PPPs.

Secondly, well-structured PPPs have the potential to avail innovative finance, technology, managerial expertise, efficiency and effectiveness in the development process. PPP models reduce operation and maintenance costs, which consume huge amounts of government finances. Thirdly, PPPs are designed as per agreed specification, outputs and deliverables, involving a lot of participation by all stakeholders throughout the project cycle. Focus is on the functionality of finished product or outputs than inputs, which leads to cost reductions and huge savings.

Fourthly, the involvement of the private sector reduces additional expenses as well as improving the life of a project, which eliminates the need for constant development of infrastructure assets. Fifthly, Kenya has the unutilised private capital potential as found in private equity firms, insurance firms, co-operatives and Saccos, high net worth individuals and other private players who have massive resources for participation in PPPs.

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



## MIND SPEAK



**Bradocks Mkube**

The government should conduct a thorough investigation to identify the underlying reasons and implement the necessary measures behind the emergence of cults. To raise awareness, offer assistance, and guarantee the safety of those already in cults may entail working together with law enforcement, religious leaders and community organisations. To stop the exploitation of the poor, it is essential to advance education and critical thinking.

— An entrepreneur based in Nairobi



**Shiryline Ouma**

President Ruto should take a proactive approach to addressing the root causes of the cult-like deaths in Shakahola. He should ensure the government provides adequate resources to support the families of those affected, as well enable them to access mental health services, education and employment opportunities. He should also combat the spread of extremist ideologies and provide support for vulnerable populations across the nation.

— A student at Maseno University



**Emmanuel Wanyonyi**

Religion is a fundamental right, but it should not be abused. The government should regulate religion and ensure church leaders work within certain parameters. A church leader should have a degree in theology and must acquire a licence to practice. The government should also provide civic education to Kenyans to avoid being brainwashed. This will ensure the people are more responsible.

— A student at Maseno University



**Rose Amase**

To assure Kenyans of their safety, and to protect the poor from exploitation by churches, the government should regulate churches. The government should also set up rules that will guide the activities of churches. Such measures will ensure certain regulatory standards are met by the clergy. If it fails to meet set standards, a church should be denied a practising licence.

— A student at JKUAT



## GOVERNMENT PROCUREMENT SYSTEM



# THE NAKED TRUTH ABOUT STATE TENDERS

• BY SAMMY OJWANG\*

**N**udity has always been used as a weapon of mass action. The sight of a naked man, in whatever setting, is traumatising to a fellow man, whether confused or straight. It is silently tolerated by the opposite gender since it comes with receivables. Besides the mostly feather-weight category *gluteus maximus*, one quickly wonders how those legs are able to carry around such a wonderful pot-belly.

Adam and Eve, we are told, used to happily stroll unclad in Eden without consternation. We can picture Eve innocently astride branches, picking juicy apples, dropping some to Adam, just before a forked tongue eternally shocks mankind into shameful awareness.

Recently, crowds of picketing citizens marched in the streets against the rising cost of living in the country, among other pressing demands. History remembers the Wagalla protests, the 1969 Kenyatta-Oginga confrontation in Kisumu following the killing of Tom Mboya, the Saba-Saba demonstrations and many others. Kenyans have spoken up when they felt aggrieved.

Nobel Laureate Prof Wangari Maathai led a group of determined women in protest against a powerful dictatorship, succeeding in stopping the grabbing of a precious piece of public land. These gallant women faced the police and teargas in broad daylight while stark naked.

All the politically instigated protests are well documented. Some of the fruits of that costly labour are visible, including the repeal of section 2A of the Constitution that had decreed Kenya a *de jure*, single party state. One recent protest touches the heart, though. It was not called officially. It was not captured on live television. There were no crowds, no teargas, no blaring horns. Just a solo demonstration by a Kenyan denied his rights. A lone man shouting outside the Treasury offices, clad only in blue underwear.

Many low-brow Tiktokkers and other addicts have made fun of him, the sober ones attributing his “derangement” to the prevailing economic environment that the country almost deservedly finds itself in. His story is not clear. The social media commentators have yet to purposely unravel who this man is and what brings a seemingly respectable gentleman to such a pass. Our focus rudely rests on his mental state and his Chelsea FC-blue briefs instead

Well-connected “tenderpreneurs” get hefty payments for supplying air, the said goods or services rendered merely on paper while the pay-out in the bank account is real



Some tenderpreneurs have become rich almost overnight without seeming to work too hard, suddenly having more time and money for leisure. PHOTO | POOL

of the tender processes involving the Government office he stands without.

Some of us have acquaintances who have become rich almost overnight without seeming to work too hard. These fellows operate off-peak, work less hours and suddenly have more time and money for leisure.

Their secret lies in pushing paper across the dotted lines in National and County Government offices, “winning” tender awards back-to-back, and using multiple companies, sometimes with fake credentials. Well-connected “tenderpreneurs” get hefty payments for supplying air, the said goods or services rendered merely on paper while the pay-out in the bank account is real.

The government loses billions while the citizens unknowingly suffer greatly from this tolerated practice.

The devilish tenderpreneurs taint the entire

system, which unfortunately relies on crafty insiders blatantly flouting the rules. On the other hand, honest businesspeople find hurdles in their path, from bidding to the release of payments for genuine deliveries, negatively affecting their operations.

Only the brazen sharks remain afloat, billing the tax-payer at four times the retail price. The high uptake of procurement courses in our universities by the youth is, in fact, a red flag.

Without the streamlining of Government tendering processes, many hardworking businessmen, like our lone protester, who probably do not bribe to get paid or do not have the financial weight to hibernate when Treasury is said to be broke, shall find the field very rough. Like Chelsea in the English Premier League, their businesses will keep receiving a beating.

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## USING ART FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

**Recently enlisted as the Judiciary's poet, activist Willy Oeba travels with Chief Justice Martha Koome as a performer when she goes to open small claims courts**

• BY EDDY ASHIOYA

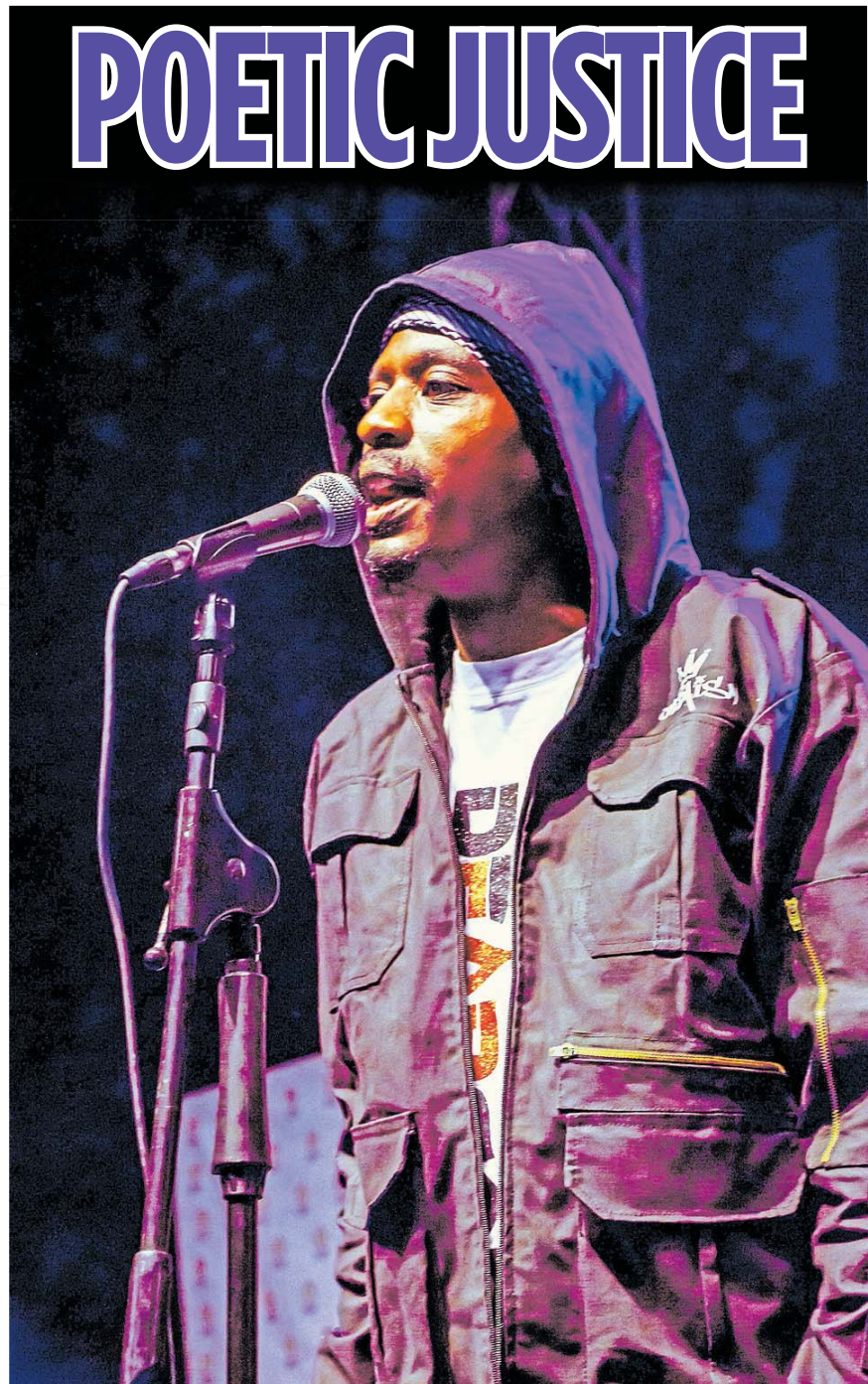
In the middle of my interview with poet Willie Oeba, he drops a line that throws me off my game: "I have forgotten how hard I prayed to be here and sometimes I want to be somewhere else." Where is here? Well, he is currently – hyperbole removed – Kenya's best poet, bar none. He's been writing ever since he discovered the power of the pen which, as playwright Edward Bulwer-Lytton noted, remains mightier than the sword. Because of that powerful pen, he is currently on first-name basis with Chief Justice Martha Koome, enlisted to perform poetry whenever she travels. More on that later.

Where to start? How about the beginning – or as poets would say: rewind and take it back from the top. "I started poetry in Class Four, back in 2004 at Bondeni Primary School in Nakuru," he says. "The teacher who was training us in poetry was looking for students who could express themselves in English. He dished out scripts to pupils in classes four up to seven. It was a set piece for students in classes four and five competing across the country. I remember the poem was called *My Mother's Baby* – something about how my mother had got another baby, dislodging me from the lastborn position."

But because every poet loves a tragedy, Oeba's was written by the gods. "There was a boy whose name was Samuel Odour. I will never forget him. He was the apple of the school's eye. During presentations, I came first and Samuel forth. As fate would have it, they picked Samuel, who went and performed under my name at the Provincial Music Festival!"

He may be laughing now but he wasn't then. "I have never forgotten and I think that is the fire that burns within me." Oeba is relentless and can be overwhelming – he thinks faster than he speaks with the lawless wit of a Casanova, casting spells over anyone within earshot. From then on, all through primary and high school, he perfected his performances and began training other people in poetry. "I was looking for what the adjudicator saw that the teacher who preferred Oduor did not see." The rest, as they say, is history.

"The highlight of my career is seeing how poetry has evolved from a curtain raiser for other performances. There were no platforms for poets [until the advent of the Churchill Show in 2007 and later poetry competitions like Slam Africa], so we had to sneak into other



Poet William Oeba performs in a past event. In 2021, he won the Upcoming Human Rights Defender of the Year Award presented by the Working Group on Human Rights Defenders, partner of Defenders Coalition KE and several of diplomatic corps. PHOTO | POOL

people's concerts. Poetry was what we'd call 'other' then. Now I am invited to many big forums where my performance is the centre of the discussion."

If you'd never heard of him before, reading him leaves you with a sense of bigness: big voice, big attitude, big entertainer. He draws you in with his clarity of thought, a guy blessed with a giant instrument as voice, the voice of someone confiding, not someone emoting.

"But personally, my biggest achievement is winning BLAZE by Safaricom (in 2017) in the music category while doing poetry. This was during the Eldoret leg."

Art, so they say, is there to comfort the afflicted, and afflict the comfortable. Oeba seems to invoke Roland Barthes's *The Neutral* as explained by Maggie Nelson in *The Art of Cruelty*: "In a world fixated on the freedom to speak and the demand to be heard, the neutral



**MENTORSHIP PROGRAMMES**

Willie Oeba has performed at: The Court of Appeal 4TH Bench Launch presided over by the Chief Justice; the Civil Society and Kenya Law MoJ Signing; the Annual Defenders Human Rights Awards at the Swedish Embassy; Mashujaa Love Festival; Democracy and Human Rights Festival; and Creative Force Project at Kakuma Refugee Camp.

His awards include Safaricom Blaze Be Your Own Boss Music Pod Champion 2017; East Africa Spoken Word Battle King 2018; Spoken Word Artist of the Year 2021; Upcoming Human Rights Defender of the Year 2021.

In June 2021, he started a Community-Based Organisation in Nakuru dubbed Voices Guild 254 (VOG 254) that seeks to promote the use of art to drive social change. Through it, he nurtures other young artists to use art to protect human rights and dignity, and to defend democracy and social justice.

He also holds an annual masterclass mentorship programme, ISM Academy, where he mentors young artists on writing, lyricism, performance, branding, financial freedom and activism.

proposes a 'right to be silent—a possibility of being silent... the right not to listen... to think nothing of it, to be unable to say what I think of it: the right not to desire.'

But don't be fooled. The right people sitting in the right offices took note of his art at the right time. 'Recently, through the Head of Staff and Protocols at the office of the Chief Justice, I was enlisted as the judiciary's poet.'

So, is he some sort of a court jester, albeit a serious one, pricking the conscience? 'Not really. It is called alternative justice system. When the Chief Justice goes around the country opening small claims courts, I travel with her as an artist and my work is to curate and perform.' People want the truth, he says, but you have to be funny or else they will kill you.'

To be where he is, though, you must shake yourself out of cliché. His poetry is a mirror to society, an ode to justice, a call for comeuppance. It's no surprise, then, that in 2021, he won the Upcoming Human Rights Defender of the Year Award presented by the Working Group on Human Rights Defenders, partner of Defenders Coalition KE, and diplomatic corps consisting of Sweden, France, Norway, Belgium and the UK embassies. 'It is the first of its kind awarded to an activist – anyone using art for social change. It opened doors for collaborations with the Swedish embassy and other organisations.'

But does poetry pay? 'I say that whoever says art doesn't pay is correct. Art doesn't pay. Poetry doesn't pay. What you do with poetry is what pays you. I have an album. I used KSh10,000 to record a single track and the album has 12 tracks. That means I spent over KShs100,000 to record it, only to sell that album at KSh500 bob. I have used that same album, *Dear God*, to franchise stage shows, collaborations and partnerships, and sponsorships. I am living off poetry entirely.'

He has collaborated with musicians like Kenya's King Kaka, Stamina and Bear (producers) from Tanzania, and lyricists Nacha and Bright from Tanzania as well. His goal now is to make poetry an industry rather than just a scene. 'We want every poet to be able to live off poetry. I want to take my poetry global. They say that activism is the future of activism. I want my poetry to influence change, this is what I love to do.'

Loving is, after all, an art. It should be practiced as such, a return of the favour bestowed. And Oeba is loved. For his poetry. For who he is. By his mother. 'My mother is

my biggest fan. She listens to me more than I listen to myself. She has a smartphone where she puts my music on replay, watching all the ads. She believes if she watches all the ads I will earn more from YouTube. When I have no reason to release poetry pieces, I will do it for her. If I call her right now, she will be listening to my poetry. I am my mother's legacy: if she has dreams that she has not fulfilled yet, I am that legacy. Everything that I will accomplish and fulfil will be credited to her.'

The 28-year-old lastborn in a family of five (three brothers and a sister) says that his favourite poet is King Kaka. 'What I borrowed from King Kaka is his mantra – that the impossible is a myth. He challenged cultures, norms and stereotypes using art. He has changed his life and other people's lives, mine included, by believing in his art and craft.'

'And Poet Teardrops too. He started poetry when most people didn't believe in puns, metaphors and lyricisms. Teardrops used Sheng and elevated it to a national platform. Now we can use it anywhere and still have gigs.'

What does it cost to book Oeba for a performance? 'Do you want a solo or dull band performance? It depends on the kind of event and who is calling because relationships are also a kind of leverage. But if you have \$2,000 dollars, you know my number.'

His past, he says, have had the most impact on his life. 'All I do is write about what I have gone through and what others have gone through and people call that poetry. I would not say that I am a poet *per se* but I am an expressionist. It is other people who call that poetry. My real-life experiences and those of people close to me have been integral to my writing.'

Those close to him also know of the promise that he made to himself: that every year he would stage a live poetry performance on December 12 dubbed the Oebaism Concert. It is said concert that birthed his three albums -ism, *Dear God* and *Mungu Anasaidia*.

What is he unlearning, relearning, and learning? 'When I started poetry, I really prayed and wanted to be where I am right now, and I am there. I am redefining what all this means and relearning the realities of life and success. After I drop the mic will I feel satisfied or have lingering doubts? Success to me now is self-satisfaction and creating an impact. This means raising other people who will continue with the legacy, not doing art for art's sake, but having a philosophy that will live long after

**Success to me now is about self-satisfaction and creating an impact. This means raising other people who will continue with the legacy, not doing art for art's sake, but having a philosophy that will live long after you are gone — protection of human rights and dignity, gender mainstreaming and social justice. In the past, I'd write about love and good times. Life is bigger than all that. Now I am in a space where my art is conscious.**

William Oeba



you are gone – protection of human rights and dignity, gender mainstreaming and social justice. In the past, I'd just write about love and good times. Life is bigger than all that. Now I am in a space where my art is conscious.'

How does he define failure? 'Failure is not trying. For a long time, I was a big procrastinator. I even wrote a line about it: *'Tunaishi kwa nchi inanisaidia kuspostpone my dreams, now the only country I live in is procrastination.'* Failure for me is not showing up, regardless. If I showed up and I failed, then I succeeded in showing up – better than not showing up at all.'

It wouldn't be a poetic interview if we didn't finish with a favourite line of his, and he doesn't disappoint: 'Even if you write Nairobi in small letters, it is still a capital.'

Art is a game within a game – the larger game being life itself, an absurd mosaic of incidents and accidents. Maybe Samuel Odour will never read this. Maybe he doesn't have to. Now, because of him, no one who hears Willie Oeba's poetry will ever forget his name.

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## THRIFT SHOPPING

**The young generation not only prefers but has actually popularised the hunt for unique vintage apparel**

• BY SINDA MATIKO

Some call it the Depop generation, others the second-hand generation. Whatever name you may give it, it's the Generation Z we are talking about. Gen Z shoppers are bringing about a renaissance of thrifting. Chances are that if you walk into a vintage store, the person you bump into will be a Gen Z strolling about in some old Levi's mom jeans.

Ever since the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been a noticeable change in this generation's attitude towards clothes and fashion in general. Their huge appetite for designer clothing brands appears to be shifting increasingly from fast fashion towards vintage clothing.

One could easily argue that there are many reasons why the young generation not only prefers but has actually popularised the hunt for unique vintage apparel. Besides the fact that they are more experimental with styles and open to new trends, the desire to be different from the norm of wearing known designer brands plays a role.

With the rise of social media, in the last few years, thrift shopping among Gen Z and to some extent the millennials has actually become a fashion fad itself, with many small thrift stores mushrooming on Instagram.

ThredUp, an online consignment store, found out that Millennials and Gen Z are among the age groups that have embraced thrift shopping and are doing it two-and-a-half times faster than Baby Boomers or Generation X.

Last year, Google Search Trends revealed there had been a 160 per cent rise in searches for 'thrift meaning' and 'thrift stores'. "Since the onset of the pandemic in 2020, new data from Google Search Trends reveals that Kenyans have taken a particular interest in searching for 'Thriftling' – the buying and selling of second-hand items that have been gently used," Sharon Machira, former Google Kenya Communications and Public Affairs Manager, noted.

The data indicated that the majority of the searches originated from Mombasa, followed by Nairobi. As of this month, there were over 100,000 hashtags on thrift shops in Kenya on Instagram.

Mercy Wamboi, who prefers the moniker, Macy Wambo, remembers feeling embarrassed to shop at thrift stores a couple of years ago. Surrounded by peers in brands names such as Chanel and Tommy Hilfiger, Wambo felt like there was a stigma associated with wearing used clothes. Over



Though she runs a thrift clothes store at the NexGen Mall Mombasa Road, Mercy Wamboi makes more sales from online marketing. SINDA MATIKO | NATION

time, however, there has been a shift towards acceptance. Many of her peers are now looking for pre-loved, long lasting clothes that are one-of-a-kind, inexpensive and fashionable.

"I no longer wear designer clothes and no one can dare convince me otherwise. For the last six years, I have been fully immersed in a thrift lifestyle," she tells me.

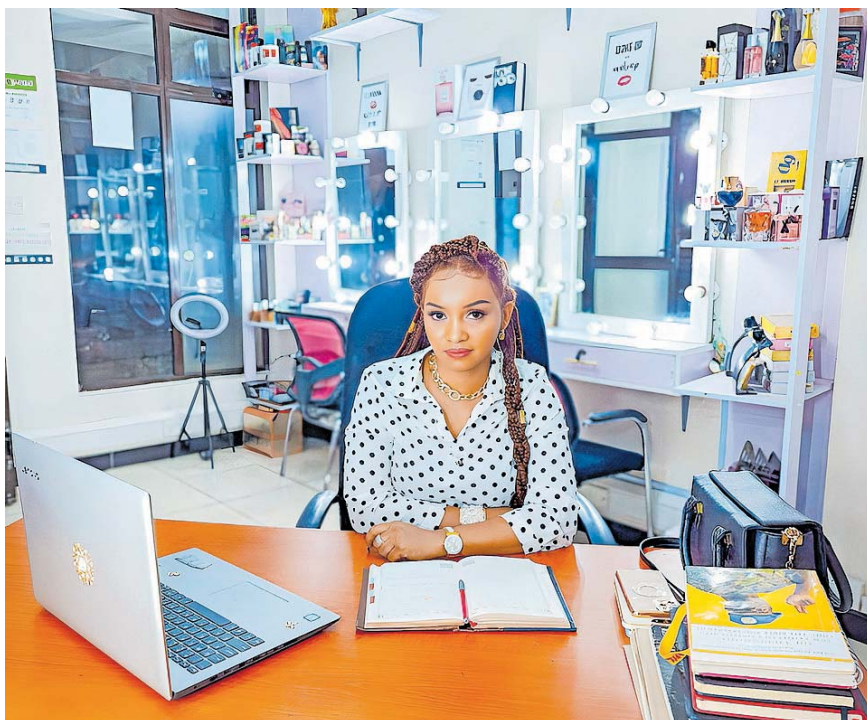
When we meet the 36-year-old mother of one, she wears a white polka dot blouse, paired with blue jeans and completed with low, cream party heels. It's evident she is keen on being stylish. "I got this blouse for Sh250 and

the pair of jeans for Sh800. The belt is less than five hundred bob," she explains with a cheeky smile.

With thrifting becoming a craze, Wamboi has gone ahead to make a business out of it. Within a year, she has managed to establish a lucrative enterprise, making over KSh150,000 a month to supplement her human hair and perfume boutique business at Nexgen Mall on Mombasa Road in Nairobi.

"It all started as a joke. Sometime last year, I wore black and white gingham pants that I paired with my son's white shirt, took a nice





Mercy Wamboi, 36, has made a successful business of selling thrift clothes online and at her store situated at the NexGen Mall on Mombasa Road. SINDA MATIKO | NATION

photo and posted it on social media. My DM exploded with ladies asking for my plug and how much the pants cost. When I said I got it for Sh300, most of them doubted it. That's how I saw an opportunity to do business."

From her thrift supplier, she bought the first bale of dresses for Sh16,500. "I got the dresses

because that's what most people kept asking about. The bale had 150 pieces of different sizes and designs and within a week and three days I had sold every piece, making Sh40,800. The following week I made about Sh50,000. I was selling them from home. All I did was take good photos of the dresses and share them

online on my page, thee\_fashion geek."

In March 2022, she opened a physical thrift store at Nexgen Mall, adjacent to her boutique, and employed two people. "I now take buy one or two bales every Monday. I have a dedicated camera guy who takes the pictures that are then shared on our WhatsApp group, which has over 200 clients, and on Instagram. I sell on a first come, first served basis."

Even though she owns a store, 90 per cent of the sales emanate from the social media posts.

She deals in thrifts from the United Kingdom and USA, which she gets from a supplier in Mombasa. "I focus on ex-UK and ex-US. China is not a good source because they target small people, size 6 and size 7."

Part of her marketing strategy is to model some of the dresses. "Because I can't sell what I have already worn, I use Pinterest to fetch images of foreign people in the same outfits."

With the high incidence of joblessness in the country, Macy says this is a lucrative business that doesn't need much capital to start. "All you need is a phone with a good camera. The client needs to see what you are selling, so be very transparent with your pictures. Also, the way you caption the posts is very important. People need to know what colour the item is. It might be yellow and black but someone else sees it as mustard, so you have to be clear. Say exactly what size it is, where it comes from, whether it stretches – all those tiny details are important."

Wambo encourages sponsoring one's social media pages by paying an advert fee to Instagram to have the page's algorithm expanded, thus reaching as many people as possible.

tmatiko@ke.nationmedia.com

The **9117** SIDE  
With John Nyaganyaga

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**WOMAN POWER**

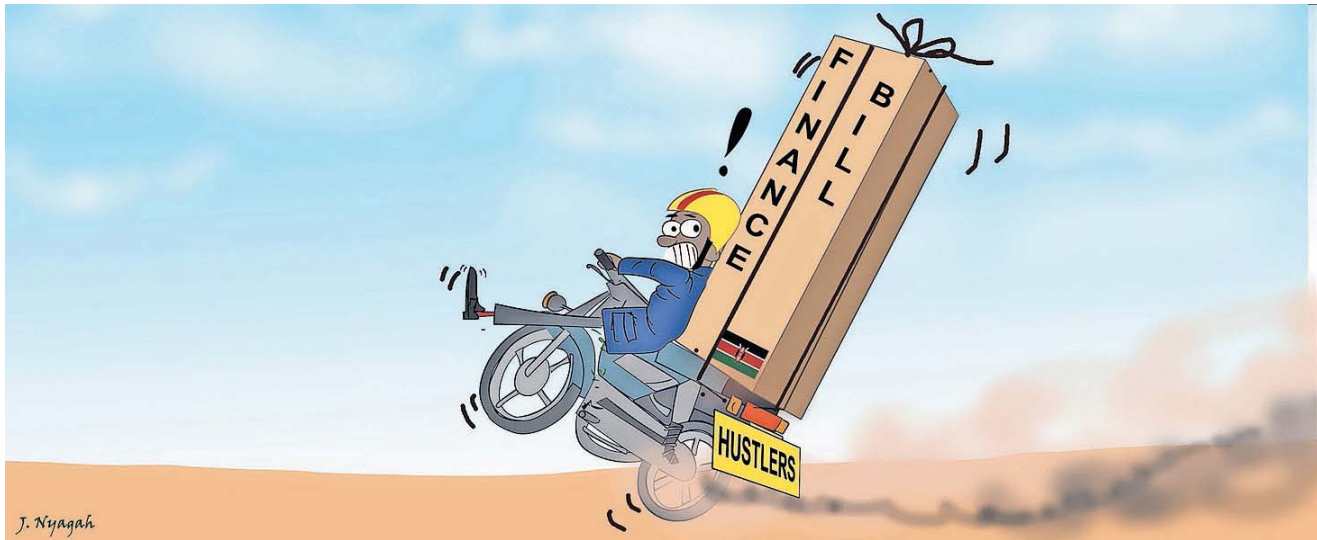
IF SURVIVAL HAD A FACE, IT WOULD BE THAT ONE OF LUCY WANJIKU NJENGA. HAVING GROWN UP IN DANDORA, AN INFORMAL SETTLEMENT IN KENYA, SHE WAS PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE TO THE TRIPLE THREAT OF HIV INFECTION, TEENAGE PREGNANCY AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE. THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF POSITIVE YOUNG WOMEN VOICES (PYWV) WAS SEXUALLY ABUSED AT ONLY EIGHT YEARS OLD, AND JUST AFTER COMPLETING HIGH SCHOOL IN 2010, SHE GOT PREGNANT. TO TOP IT ALL OFF, SHE FOUND OUT THAT SHE WAS HIV POSITIVE DURING A FREE MEDICAL CAMP IN 2012. SHE NOW USES PYWV TO INSPIRE OTHER YOUNG WOMEN LIVING IN INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS TO AVOID THE MISTAKES SHE MADE. THANK YOU FOR BEING SUCH AN INSPIRATION, LUCY.

**STAR OF THE WEEK**



COMMONWEALTH GAMES 100M CHAMPION FERDINAND OMURWA OMANYALA PUT ON A SHOW STOPPING PERFORMANCE AT THE RECENTLY CONCLUDED 4TH EDITION OF THE KIP KEINO CLASSIC AT THE KASARANI STADIUM WHEN HE WON THE 100M TITLE. THE REIGNING AFRICA 100M RECORD HOLDER DEFENDED THE TITLE HE WON LAST YEAR DURING THE CHAMPIONSHIPS AT THE SAME VENUE, POSTING AN IMPRESSIVE TIME OF 9.84 SECONDS. A ROUND OF APPLAUSE FOR THE KING OF THE TRACK.

## opinion



J. Nyagah

■ Azimio la Umoja-One Kenya Coalition sees them as a means to dig in, fight and threaten mass action

# Don't expect bipartisan talks to get going anytime soon

**E**xpect a politician to do and say one thing when in power or a position of power and quite another when the boot is on the other foot. Our politics is not about serving the public; it is about self or private interest. Public resources are therefore used to create private wealth. It is why there was Goldenberg, then Anglo Leasing and now we have Kemsa.

That is why I have argued here that the turbulence in the political arena pitting the Raila Odinga-led Azimio la Umoja Coalition Party against the Kenya Kwanza government of President William Ruto, is actually a struggle between those in power and those who want to get into power. Both sides make our lives ever more difficult while pretending to be fighting for us.

Listen. Odinga has taken umbrage in the boast and threat by hawkish operatives of the governing Kenya Kwanza coalition that the unpopular Finance Bill 2023 will be enacted into law by Parliament without so much as deletion of a coma. Odinga is well aware of the oft-repeated phrase that after the opposition has had its say, the government will have its way.

That is why, when running for President, Odinga asks Kenyans to give him a majority so that he can run an effective government. It is why, when he entered a detente with President Uhuru Kenyatta in 2018, he asked his MPs to vote with the government, which already had a comfortable majority. This alliance effectively killed parliamentary opposition and installed an elective dictatorship.

Amid the mayhem and murders of the post-



## KWENDO OPANGA

election violence triggered by the declaration of Mwai Kibaki re-elected President in 2007, Kalonzo Musyoka was made Vice-President, principally to enable Kibaki to form government and lock out Odinga. It was a brutal calculation to buttress Kibaki's power grab. Who was its public face? A certain Martha Wangari Karua.

Let us visit Uncle Sam. At the recent so-called town hall, former President Donald Trump asked Republican congressional leaders to refuse to raise the debt ceiling President Joe Biden is asking for and therefore force the US government to run out of money by June 1, and therefore default on its bills and debts.

When reminded by moderator Kaitlin Collins that he had a different position when he was president, that is, he sought a deal rather than risk a default, Trump responded that then he was President.

He was eager for a deal with Democratic congressional leaders because he was president. But Biden should not get a deal despite being President.

Mitch McConnell, the Republican Senate

Minority leader gave Biden a more pragmatic line. Though he has previously helped Biden negotiate the debt limit, this time around, when Biden sought his help, he told the President to negotiate with House Speaker Kevin McCarthy. Power in the Republican Party has shifted to the right and McConnell has shifted gears to align with McCarthy.

Back to Azimio and Kenya Kwanza. The former is asking Kenyans to reject the Finance Bill and to force the government to bring down taxes and the cost of living or force the government out. The government is clear that it inherited the current economic mess and is pulling all the stops out to clean up after Kenyatta and Odinga.

The fight continues as the economy hurtles downhill. Therefore, do not expect bipartisan talks to get going anytime soon. Azimio sees them as a means to dig in, fight and threaten mass action. The government in turn stands its ground that Azimio wants to bully its way into the government. Both parties appear motivated to ground the economy altogether.

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opinion

■ They're prepared to bite the bullet, even if mass removal of everyone leaves vacant the Presidency

# It's a clean government, zero tolerance for corruption



MACHARIA  
**GAITHO**

The sackings and suspensions of scores entangled in mosquito nets of endemic graft at the Kenya Medical Supplies Agency and the release of condemned sugar into the market by the Kenya Bureau of Standards is proof that the Kenya Kwanza administration will not countenance theft and plunder within its ranks.

The suspects were summarily dismissed without regard to that usual nonsense of 'no money was lost', demands for a fair hearing, or completion of the investigative and prosecutorial process until adjudged guilty and all avenues of appeal exhausted.

That is the way it should be. Mere suspicion that a public officer is involved in hanky panky should provide sufficient grounds for removal from office. In fact the moment one is under probe for theft, fraud or other malfeasance, good governance — whether in the public or private sector — demands instant removal from any position where he or she could tamper with evidence or otherwise interfere with investigations.

Indeed, the public service code of ethics mandates that any officer indicted on criminal charges is immediately suspended and barred from accessing office until declared innocent.

It is also encouraging that none of those removed from office have, so far at least, cried that they were being victimised and persecuted because of their political or ethnic affiliations. That was the stock defence for all those caught with their hands in the till in the Uhuru Kenyatta government, but such nonsense will not be allowed under President William Ruto's administration.

Those netted in the two scandals might have taken too literally the grossly mistaken perception that a string of criminal cases for theft, rape, murder, violence and other misdeeds is the essential requirement on the CV of anyone serving the Kenya Kwanza administration.

If they got into office without having faced criminal charges, they might have assumed that demonstrating proclivity to plunder is the path to career progression and upward mobility.

They have been brutally reminded that they were dead wrong. Their sudden removal from office also intended to send a stark and unmistakable message to all public officers that this administration will deal swiftly and decisively with any officers who sully its squeaky-clean image.

What we have witnessed is just the first phase of what will be a campaign to root out all government officers who carry the slightest whiff of suspicion.

I am reliably informed that the net will be cast far and wide, and will target not only those who may be involved in present iniquities, but also those who came into office stinking to high heaven.

In coming days, Cabinet secretaries, principal secretaries, chief administrative secretaries, managers and board members of state corporations and statutory bodies, and all other senior officials will face the axe if they have ever been mentioned in corruption and other crimes.

It will not stop there.

All senior officers who may have somehow sneaked through constitutional and statute law ethical requirements to assume appointive or elective office will be deemed to have been in office illegally. Even if they have already left those offices be it by retirement, transfer or promotion, they will be deemed to have served through fraud and chicanery.

They will be declared to have been employed illegitimately, therefore required to refund all the salaries, allowances, emoluments and other benefits. Perks such as government housing, cars, medical insurance, police bodyguards and sentries, personal assistants and other staff enjoyed during that period will be costed and refunds demanded.

These are the kind of drastic steps required to send very strong signals that this government is taking no prisoners in the war against corruption.

The leadership is prepared to bite the bullet, even if mass removal of everyone who fails the test leaves vacant the presidency and denudes the Cabinet table, the Legislature, Governor mansions and the boards and management of public institutions.

Unlike the previous regime, which declared

war on corruption and then threw up its hands in surrender, this government will offer direct action rather than lip service.

It will demonstrate its revolutionary credentials by completely overthrowing all vestiges of the old regime, including ridding itself of all officials tainted by association with the Jubilee government who somehow conned their way back into office and now besmirch this administration.

The corrupt Jubilee and its remnants and successors will have to go. On that, there can be no compromise. After all, no revolutionary movement can allow itself to be infiltrated by agents of an irredeemable old order, whose priority will be to sabotage from within all the prospects of real and comprehensive progress to a bright new order.

\*\*\*                      \*\*\*                      \*\*\*

It has been the tradition of Kenyan governments that most of those fellows employed as Directors of Communication, Spokesmen (and women), Communication Secretaries and other fancy titles are no more than glorified briefcase carriers.

They are not allowed to speak to the Press, and can at most only respond to even the simplest of queries by referring upwards to the Cabinet Secretary or Principal Secretary.

Even when allowed to draft a press statement or other public communications, it must be cleared by a senior, who is in most cases just a stuffy bureaucrat with no communication skills.

Efforts over the past 10 years and more to craft a comprehensive government communications strategy have failed because insecure bosses insist on hogging the limelight for themselves. One result is the confused, uncoordinated, undisciplined and incoherent public communications that is endemic within this government.

President William Ruto can cure all that simply by freeing to do their work that veritable army of communication specialists already on the public payroll. And instructing all members of his Cabinet to shut up until every public pronouncement is cleared with their designated experts.

*gaitomail@gmail.com*

## kenya lens

■ **ONSLAUGHT ON FORMER HEAD OF STATE**

**The party might have shrunk in membership, political might and even finances, but the fight for its control is a symbolic battle for power between Kenyatta and Ruto**

• BY OSCAR OBONYO

**R**etired President Uhuru Kenyatta has over the last decade worked closely with Murang'a politician Sabina Chege, whom he assisted to secure nomination to Parliament. But that the two are now engaged in a dogfight – or so it seems – over the soul of the Jubilee Party, is a demeaning development for the former Head of State.

The awkward scenario that places the fourth President and the former Murang'a Woman Representative on a political weighing scale is by no means accidental. It is a daring move partly aimed at humiliating Kenyatta, and Chege perhaps offers the best desired results to this effect.

The hidden message behind this action is that the former Head of State has diminished in political value to the level of an ordinary Member of Parliament. And Chege, who admits to having enjoyed Kenyatta's favour, which saw her win nomination to Parliament and secure the deputy Minority Whip slot, buttresses this thinking. She no longer considers him politically influential in the country or even within Mt Kenya. Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua, she holds, is the new political kingpin in the region.

While it is factual that there is a political shift of power in the Mt Kenya region and indeed the rest of Kenya, as is always the case during power change-over, the display of open defiance and dishonour directed at the former Head of State is astounding. Chege, who

# THE BATTLE FOR JUBILEE



has since been declared a caretaker leader of the Jubilee Party by one faction of the party, and East African Legislative Assembly MP Kanini Kega, are only the face of this defiance.

Only last week, Chege and Kega, who serves as Secretary-General of the Jubilee Party faction opposed to Kenyatta, summoned the retired President to appear before a disciplinary committee over alleged gross misconduct. Kenyatta was similarly directed by the Registrar of Political Parties, Anne Nderitu, to respond to the resolutions of a National Executive Council (NEC) meeting that replaced him as party leader with Chege, latest by Monday (May 15).

Of course few – including Chege and Kega – expected the retired President to physically appear and humble himself before them for “disciplinary action”. The high drama was partly engineered to publicly portray Kenyatta as an ordinary Jubilee Party member whose political potency had waned.

The retired President might have snubbed the summons by the Chege-Kega faction and declined to respond to the Regis-

trar's letter, but the well-orchestrated message downplaying his political might had soundly been delivered to Kenyans. And even tomorrow (May 22), as Kenyatta hosts the Jubilee Party's National Delegates Conference at Nairobi's Bomas of Kenya, a cloud of uncertainty – in terms of legal challenge and political intrusion – hangs over the event.

With the sustained attacks on Mr Kenyatta's character, the Monday event may not be as “presidential” as largely anticipated. As historian Prof Macharia Munene rightly observes, no Kenyan President, sitting or former, has been subjected to the kind of humiliation and derogatory remarks as those now being directed at the fourth President.

Perhaps the only leader subjected to similar hostility was the Second President, Daniel arap Moi, in 2002. Even then, it was short-lived and was fostered by members of the rival Mwai Kibaki-led National Rainbow Coalition, who had dethroned the Independence party, Kanu, from its four decade-long hold on power. Kenyatta's case is curious, because it is engineered within his own party and large-

ly by members of his own Kikuyu community.

Terming the development “very unfortunate”, Munene, who teaches at the United States International University, says there is need to investigate this odd turn-around of events: “Just how did Kenyans get to this point of humiliating their leaders and is there anything that Kenyatta did that so offended his supporters, or which was so wrong and odd, compared with what his predecessors might have done?”

According to the historian, Kenyatta is partly to blame for his current political woes. The retired President, he argues, should have exited the stage the moment his term in office ended. Daniel arap Moi, for instance, relinquished the leadership of Kanu to Kenyatta upon exiting office and Prof George Saitoti took charge of the Party of National Unity in the sunset days of Kibaki's rule. On the other hand, the founding President, Jomo Kenyatta, died in 1978 while in office, therefore leaving his Vice-President, Moi, to take over the leadership mantle of the ruling party, Kanu.

Nonetheless, the situation is



## kenya lens



Jubilee Party leader Uhuru Kenyatta with Secretary-General Jeremiah Kioni addressing journalists at their headquarters in Kileleshwa, Nairobi, on April 26. LUCY WANJIRU | NATION

different this time round for the Fourth President. Mr Kenyatta, who ascended to the throne in 2013 aged 52, is still “fairly young” and politically active. And having handed power to President William Ruto, his former Deputy President who was not his preferred successor, Kenyatta feels obliged to fight for political space and arm himself against a possible onslaught from his former friend-turned-political foe.

Dr Henry Wabwire, a commentator on political affairs, believes the retired President has solid justification for staying on the political stage. This is particularly the case considering Ruto’s not-so-friendly history with the Jubilee Party, which elbowed him aside during his second term in office as DP: “There is a sense in which he (Ruto) appears vengeful, as demonstrated by his orchestrated manoeuvres to raid the Jubilee kraal. Only Kenyatta can stand in his way – at least he cannot openly confront the retired President. If there was no Kenyatta intervention, today the whole of Jubilee would be gone to Ruto and Kanini Kega would be the confirmed Secretary-General”.

Yet still, there are those who opine that the President should save face and his dignity by disengaging from the battles over ownership of Jubilee, which are getting uglier by the day. Former

Nyeri Town MP Ngunjiri Wambugu is among those who believe Kenyatta is above the fray and should accordingly concentrate on private affairs and any global assignments.

But some close allies of the retired President’s believe the current onslaught is personal and he must fight back. David Murathe, who serves as Vice-Chairman of the faction allied to Kenyatta attributes the scheme to take over Jubilee to “forces enjoying the backing of the State”. He believes that Ruto is keen on politically vanquishing Kenyatta in revenge for sidelining him during the last lap of their term of office and declining to back his candidature.

But, perhaps more poignantly, the motivation behind Kenyatta continuing to hold on to Jubilee is that he may find room to rise above again politically and offer a challenge to Ruto. Jubilee is the sole visible political vehicle with top leadership from Mt Kenya, and pundits believe this is reason enough to make the President uncomfortable. There is also a possibility that Kenyatta is hanging on to this political outfit as a platform to shield himself against a political and even economic onslaught targeting his private establishments. During street protests called by the opposition in March, for instance, individuals believably persuaded by lead-

ers from President Ruto’s United Democratic Alliance stormed the Kenyatta family’s Northlands farm in Thika, Kiambu County, and made away with hundreds of prize sheep.

In the meantime, the retired President’s resistance seems to be paying off as he is gradually winning over some public sympathy. A set of politicians from the Mt Kenya region is now calling for sober and respectful treatment of Mr Kenyatta.

They include former Agriculture Cabinet Secretary Mwangi Kiunjuri and lately Murang’a Woman Representative Betty Maina, who incidentally succeeded Chege in the last polls.

The one-time Gatundu South MP could also be a beneficiary of whispers that are gaining ground in Mt Kenya that the high-profile appointments in the Ruto Administration are skewed in favour of individuals from the Rift Valley at their expense. The assumption here is that the active presence of the Jubilee Party is important and strategic should disgruntled Kenyans who have been backing the Kenya Kwanza government decide to withdraw their support.

And this precisely explains why the retired President won’t let go of the Jubilee Party just yet. Some have even suggested that if the going gets tough, then Kenyatta should be encouraged to register

a splinter group, say Jubilee-Asili, Jubilee-Fresh or New Jubilee, as has been the fashion in the history of Kenya’s highly competitive party politics.

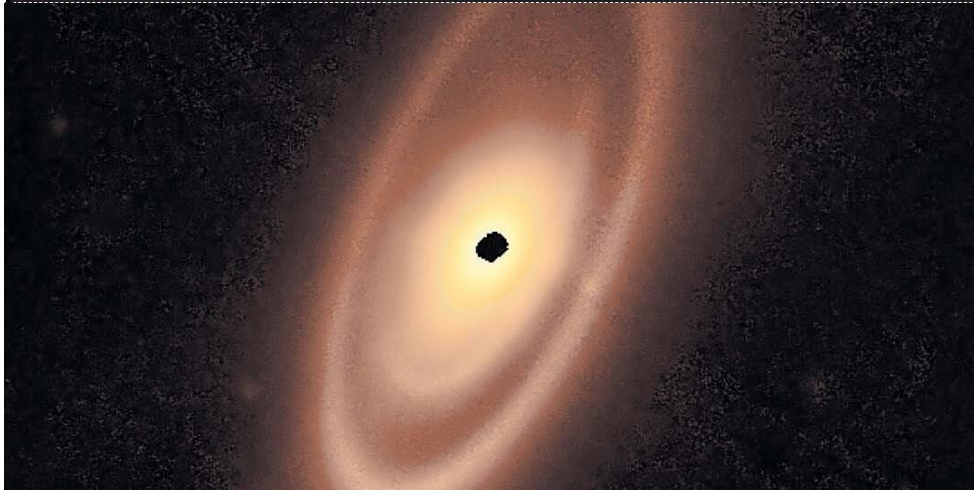
During the reintroduction of multiparty politics in 1992, the main opposition movement – Forum for the Restoration of Democracy (FORD) – was split into two factions: Ford-Kenya, allied to Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, and Kenneth Matiba’s Ford-Asili. The party was later split further into a third unit – Ford-People, under whose ticket former Head of Civil Service Simeon Nyachae vied for the Presidency in 2002. There have also been Narc and Narc-Kenya, headed by ex-Cabinet ministers Charity Ngilu and Martha Karua respectively.

But taking a leaf from these instances, according to Wabwire, would be a mistake as Kenyatta would be playing into the net of the Chege-Kega Jubilee faction and their perceived political sponsors.

The political analyst argues that the design behind the moves against Kenyatta is to frustrate him out of the leadership of the party. The party might have shrunk in membership, political might and even finances, but the battle for its control is beyond the physical. It is symbolic, and it is about power – which Kenyatta cannot be seen to cede to Ruto.

## SCIENCE &amp; TECH

## WEBB TELESCOPE SPOTS SIGNS OF UNIVERSE'S BIGGEST STARS



This image from the James Webb Space Telescope released on May 9 shows for the first time the inner asteroid belts that encircle the nearby star, Fomalhaut. It reveals three nested belts extending out to 23 billion kilometres from the star.

## ● LONDON

The James Webb Space Telescope has helped astronomers detect the first chemical signs of supermassive stars, “celestial monsters” blazing with the brightness of millions of Suns in the early universe.

So far, the largest stars observed anywhere have a mass of around 300 times that of our Sun. But the supermassive star described in a new study has an estimated mass of 5,000 to 10,000 Suns. The team of European researchers behind the study previously theorised the existence of supermassive stars in 2018 in an attempt to explain one of the great mysteries of astronomy.

For decades, astronomers have been baffled by the huge diversity in the composition of different stars packed into what are called globular clusters.

The clusters, which are mostly very old, can contain millions of stars in a relatively small space.

Advances in astronomy have revealed an increasing number of globular clusters, which are thought to be a missing link between the universe’s first stars and first galaxies.

Our Milky Way galaxy, which has more than 100 billion stars, has around 180 globular clusters.

But the question remains: Why do the stars in these clusters have such a variety of chemical elements, despite presumably all being born around the same time, from the same cloud of gas?

Many of the stars have elements that would require colossal amounts of heat to produce, such as aluminium which would need a temperature of up to 70 million degrees Celsius.

That is far above the temperature that the stars are thought to get up to at their core, around the 15-20 million Celsius mark which is similar to the Sun.

So the researchers came up with a possible solution: a rampaging supermassive star shooting out chemical “pollution”. They theorise that these huge stars are born from successive collisions in the tightly packed globular clusters.

Corinne Charbonnel, an astrophysicist at the University of Geneva and lead author of the study, told *AFP* that “a kind of seed star would engulf more and more stars”.

It would eventually become

“like a huge nuclear reactor, continuously feeding on matter, which will eject out a lot of it,” she added.

This discarded “pollution” will in turn feed young forming stars, giving them a greater variety of chemicals the closer they are to the supermassive star, she added.

But the team still needed observations to back up their theory. They found them in the galaxy GN-z11, which is more than 13 billion light years away – the light we see from it comes from just 440 million years after the Big Bang.

It was discovered by the Hubble Space Telescope in 2015, and until recently held the record of oldest observed galaxy.

This made it an obvious early target for Hubble’s successor as most powerful space telescope, the James Webb, which started releasing its first observations last year. Webb offered up two new clues: the incredible density of stars in globular clusters and – most crucially – the presence of lots of nitrogen.

It takes truly extreme temperatures to make nitrogen, which the researchers believe could only be produced by a supermassive star.

## OpenAI boss calls for US to regulate AI

The creator of advanced chatbot ChatGPT has called on US lawmakers to regulate artificial intelligence (AI).

Sam Altman, the CEO of OpenAI, the company behind ChatGPT, testified before a US Senate committee on Tuesday about the possibilities – and pitfalls – of the new technology.

In a matter of months, several AI models have entered the market.

Mr Altman said a new agency should be formed to license AI companies.

ChatGPT and other similar programmes can create incredibly human-like answers to questions – but can also be wildly inaccurate.

Mr Altman, 38, has become a spokesman of sorts for the burgeoning industry. He has not shied away from addressing the ethical questions that AI raises, and has pushed for more regulation.

He said that AI could be as big as “the printing press” but acknowledged its potential dangers.

“I think if this technology goes wrong, it can go quite wrong...we want to be vocal about that,” Mr Altman said. “We want to work with the government to prevent that from happening.”

He also admitted the impact that AI could have on the economy, including the likelihood that AI technology could replace some jobs, leading to layoffs in certain fields.

“There will be an impact on jobs. We try to be very clear about that,” he said, adding that the government will “need to figure out how we want to mitigate that”.

Mr Altman added, however, that he is “very optimistic about how great the jobs of the future will be”.

However, some senators argued new laws were needed to make it easier for people to sue OpenAI.

Mr Altman told legislators he was worried about the potential impact on democracy, and how AI could be used to send targeted misinformation during elections – a prospect he said is among his “areas of greatest concerns”.



# africa lens

■ SUDAN BECOMES BATTLEGROUND FOR FOREIGN FIGHTERS

## PLAYGROUND OF DESTRUCTION



Rapid Support Forces fighters ride in the back of a technical vehicle in the East Nile district of greater Khartoum on April 23. FILE | NATION

### Army chief al-Burhan accuses Rapid Support Forces of recruiting fighters from troubled nearby countries, including ‘mercenaries from Chad, the Central African Republic and Niger’

● KHARTOUM

Sudan has long sent mercenaries abroad, but now the country itself has become a battleground for foreign fighters and shadowy military backers lured by money and gold, experts say. Armed “fortune seekers” are flooding into the fight

from across Africa’s Sahel region including Mali, Chad and Niger, UN special representative Volker Perthes has said, warning that “their number is not insignificant”.

Sudan’s army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan has accused the rival Rapid Support Forces (RSF) of recruiting fighters from troubled

nearby countries, including “mercenaries from Chad, the Central African Republic and Niger”. Sudan’s army has claimed to have killed “a foreign sniper” in the ranks of the RSF, and witnesses in Khartoum say they have heard some RSF paramilitaries speak French, the language of neighbouring Chad.

For the past month, Sudan has been rocked by deadly battles between de facto leader Burhan and his former deputy, RSF commander Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, also known as Hemeti. The RSF under Daglo, a former camel trader, emerged out of the notorious Jan-

...Continued on Page 26



## africa lens

# Mercenaries turn Sudan into their battleground

Continued from Page 25

jaweed militias which from 2003 pillaged villages in the Darfur region, where they were accused of widespread atrocities and war crimes.

In recent years, the RSF has sent guns for hire into the Yemen war, on the side of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates against Iran-backed Huthi rebels, and to Libya, in support of different camps, including eastern-based general Khalifa Haftar.

Washington and Brussels charge the RSF has ties with Russia's Wagner mercenary group, which is fighting in Ukraine and has long been active in multiple African countries, including Libya, where it backed Haftar. Wagner boss Yevgeny Prigozhin recently insisted that "for two years, not a single Wagner... fighter has been present in Sudan. And today there is none".

Cameron Hudson, of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, said that "the Wagner group is not fighting in Sudan, but they have technical advisers". The European Union in February imposed new sanctions against Wagner, accusing it of human rights abuses in Ukraine as well as Sudan, Mali and CAR.

After major fighting erupted in Sudan in mid-April, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken voiced "deep concern about the engagement" of Wagner there, charging that the group "brings more death and destruction" wherever it operates. Western diplomats have reported seeing groups of mercenaries frequently passing through Khartoum's airport and hotels since the CAR government in 2018 called on Wagner to help repress a rebellion.

Daglo's family has long controlled gold mines in Darfur and elsewhere in Sudan, Africa's third-largest producer of the precious metal that has also attracted the attention of Wagner.

The US Treasury has accused Prigozhin of operating shadow companies in Sudan that were awarded gold-mining concessions, and the latest EU sanctions also targeted gold companies linked to Wagner in Sudan.

For Daglo, gold has provided



Sudanese soldiers, loyal to army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, in the Red Sea city of Port Sudan on April 16. Below: A man raises his arm in support as he drives near Sudanese army soldiers manning a position in the Red Sea city of Port Sudan on April 20. PHOTOS I FILE



a revenue stream to pay fighters, said Andreas Krieg, associate professor of security studies at King's College London. "The fact that Hemeti has access to quite a lot of gold wealth and avenues to bring it to market means he can pay salaries in a way that many in sub-Saharan Africa or the Sahel cannot," Krieg told *AFP*.

"We had people from Chad join the RSF as well over the years looking for salaries." Hemeti hails from western Darfur's pastoralist Arab Rizeigat people and has family roots in Chad, with which Sudan shares a long and porous

border. Sudanese militias have long padded their ranks by offering "Chadian Arabs access to Sudanese citizenship and land abandoned by displaced non-Arabs", the *Small Arms Survey* research project found in 2017.

The RSF in its recent social media campaign has published videos of fighters in Chad and Niger voicing their support for them. While the RSF can draw on fighters from Chad and elsewhere, it is believed to receive weapons from Libya, analysts say.

Krieg said that areas under Haftar's control are now a like-

ly "hub and node to deliver arms and supplies to the RSF". Weapons sent there in the past by the UAE "could now be proliferated with plausible deniability to the RSF", he said. Sudan specialist Alex de Waal said that money and fighters "are interchangeable currencies in Sudan's political marketplace, and Hemeti trades in both".

"The RSF is now a private transnational mercenary enterprise," de Waal wrote in a recent analysis. "It's a gold-mining and gold-trading operation and the enforcement arm of Hemeti's ever expanding commercial empire." If the RSF wins, de Waal predicted, "the Sudanese state will become a subsidiary of this transnational venture". Meanwhile Sudan's conflict has also fuelled another business line for professional soldiers, who have offered desperate foreigners with the means of a chance to flee the country, said Hudson.

For those who could not get a spot on mass evacuations, he said, "a number of small 'boutique' private companies, mainly retired British special forces operators, were evacuating people for a large fee, up to US\$20,000-50,000."

—*AFP*



# global lens

## ■ KING CHARLES IS HEAD OF STATE IN EIGHT CARIBBEAN COUNTRIES

● LONDON

The Prime Minister of St Vincent and the Grenadines has said having a British monarch as head of state is “an absurdity” he would like to end in his lifetime.

Ralph Gonsalves said he would welcome an apology from the British state and monarchy for past injustices relating to slavery. He said he believes King Charles III is open to talking about reparations. King Charles is head of state in eight Caribbean countries.

Within the past year, political leaders in the Bahamas, Belize, Grenada, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis and Antigua and Barbuda have all indicated their plans to review their positions as constitutional monarchies.

The Prime Minister of St Kitts and Nevis, Terrance Drew, said his country is “not totally free” as long as King Charles III remains head of state and that a public consultation on whether the nation should become a republic would begin during his leadership.

Gonsalves said the current constitutional arrangement “offends people in a psychological way” and his country wanted a president “selected by our own constitutional processes”.

In 2009, St Vincent and the Grenadines held a referendum to decide whether to transition to a republic. Forty-five per cent of voters chose to replace Queen Elizabeth II with a ceremonial president — falling far short of the two-thirds required. Gonsalves has said he would like to try again.

“I don’t know whether it will happen. But I’m hoping so. If it doesn’t happen, somebody else will stand on my shoulders and carry forth that work,” he said.

According to a recent poll conducted in the 15 countries where the King is head of state, St Vincent and the Grenadines is among those most opposed to becoming a republic. The survey, conducted by UK politician-turned-pollster Lord Ashcroft, suggests that the idea would be rejected by a majority of 63 per cent to 34 per cent.

Lord Ashcroft Polls interviewed

**‘WE  
AREN’T  
FREE  
UNDER  
A KING’**



King Charles III waves from the Buckingham Palace balcony in central London on May 6.

### **There’s widespread support throughout the Caribbean for compensation for the descendants of enslaved Africans. A strong indication of that support was highlighted by a 10-point plan proposed by the Caricom Reparations Commission**

22,701 adults across the 15 countries between February 6 and March 23. In a statement, Buckingham Palace said the decision on transitioning to a republic “is purely a matter for each country to decide”.

Gonsalves added he would welcome an apology from both King Charles and the British government on the legacy of slavery. “King Charles at least, is clearly interested in having a conversation. And I welcome that.

But I don’t know whether King Charles is going to do an apology without the British state.”

Buckingham Palace said the King takes slavery “profoundly seriously”. Buckingham Palace has said that it is co-operating with an independent study exploring the relationship between the British monarchy and the slave trade in the 17th and 18th centuries. Gonsalves said he had contacted David Cameron’s government on the issue, but was rejected.

“Their response was that, ‘Look, we’re not doing apologies. Let’s look forward, let us learn. Let’s not look to the past’. There’s only one problem with that. The present is the past,” he said.

Gonsalves said the current Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, was also wrong for refusing to apologise for the UK’s historic role in the slave trade, adding that going to the International Criminal Court to

Continued on Page 28

## global lens

# Rebellion in some countries over British 'control'

Continued from Page 27

pursue the issue was also an option. "We can continue the political work, we can do diplomatic work, but we can also go to the International Court of Justice, for example," he said. "But I would prefer if we have the conversation, rather than to have to do that."

Speaking two days after the Coronation, Gonsalves praised the King for his positions on climate change and inter-faith dialogue.

"I hold his Majesty in great personal regard," he said. "My conversation is not one of revenge. It is just something which is reasonable and fair." Buckingham Palace said the King previously pledged to deepen his understanding of slavery's impact. "That learning process has continued with vigour and determination since His Majesty's Accession," it read.

The statement also added that the monarch "has long acknowledged the discussion about constitutional arrangements", and referred to a speech to Commonwealth leaders last year when King Charles III said: "I want to say clearly, as I have said before, that each member's constitutional arrangement, as a republic or monarchy, is purely a matter for each member country to decide."

Last year the Dutch government issued a formal apology for its role in the slave trade. Prime Minister Mark Rutte said slavery should be recognised as "a crime against humanity". St Kitts and Nevis were the first Caribbean islands where English colonisers permanently settled. Locals still refer to the dual island federation as the "mother colony".

Built upon sugar and slavery, it's a legacy that lingers today. And if there is one place that illustrates St Kitts and Nevis' colonial past, it's Brimstone Hill Fortress. Designed by the British starting in the 17th Century, it was built and maintained by enslaved Africans.

King Charles visited Brimstone Hill back in 2019. Local historian Leonard Stapleton also gave the monarch a tour of the island while he was visiting.

"It was very exciting," Leonard said. "I still feel proud, having been tasked with that important job." The historian's respect and



Britain's King Charles III with the St Edward's Crown on his head during the coronation ceremony inside Westminster Abbey in London on May 6.

affection for the Royal Family are clear. But he's also aware that symbols matter. While he said the Royal Family are "kind and genuine human beings" in person, the Crown "represents the same force that was behind the enslavement of Africans".

Leonard Stapleton believes it is time to update some of the language of governance in St Kitts and Nevis.

"One of the things that kind of irks us as a people is when our leaders are being sworn in, we still hear them swear allegiance to the King or the Queen and their heirs and successors," he said. "We definitely want to move to the point where we can swear allegiance to our own beliefs, our constitution."

But he remains hopeful. "I do believe that King Charles is going to do something positive about past injustices. I am very confident. As I've said, I've met him." Both the King and the Prince of Wales have previously expressed personal sadness about slavery. Speaking during a trip to Rwanda last year, then-Prince Charles said he could not describe "the depths of his personal sorrow" at the suffering caused by the slave trade.

Prime Minister Terrance Drew also spoke about the issue of slavery reparations — meaning some form of compensation offered to the descendants of enslaved Africans, which could include formal apologies, cash payments to individuals, or cancellation of national debt for certain countries.

"We are not just speaking about a monetary contribution, because we are not acting like victims," he said. "It is about real changes even within the systems that are still affecting people of African descent in negative ways." During then-Prince Charles's royal visit to Barbados in 2021, Buckingham Palace said that the issue of reparations was a political matter for individual governments to address.

There is widespread support throughout the Caribbean for compensation for the descendants of enslaved Africans. A strong indication of that support was highlighted by a ten-point plan proposed by the Caricom Reparations Commission.

Caricom is an inter-governmental organisation of 15 member states including Barbados, Jamaica, the Bahamas and St Kitts and Nevis. The main aim of the 10-point plan is to achieve reparatory justice for the descendants of enslaved Africans — including cash payments, development funding, and full, formal apologies. In 2014, it was unanimously approved by Caricom members. At times demands for reparations have been met with unease. A common point of contention for some is whether descendants of enslaved Africans should be compensated now, given slavery ended almost 200 years ago.

But those in favour point to the fact that slave owners were compensated, while the enslaved and their descendants were

not. In 2015 British taxpayers finished paying off the debt which the government incurred to compensate British slave owners after abolition in 1833.

In recent years, royal tours to Caribbean countries have also intensified the debate around reparations. The day before the then Duke and Duchess of Cambridge arrived in the Bahamas in March 2022, the National Reparations Committee in the Bahamas released a letter calling for Britain to pay reparations for the slave trade.

Niambi Hall-Campbell Dean is the committee's chair and a psychologist. She also welcomes the news that King Charles is supporting a study into the Royal Family's links to the slave trade.

But she thinks that "the information that we all know is enough for the Crown to make a full and formal apology, rather than the statement of regret that we have come to be familiar with".

"In the Bahamas, and the Caribbean, slavery ended, and colonisation came in. We went from being enslaved to [being] British citizens," she said. "So we had to fill in those gaps, fill in those spaces with the culture of someone that was different from us, and the culture of someone that enslaved us."

For Niambi, reparations are about justice, saying sorry, but also about donating money — to public health programmes, national debt and historical research.

Her views are not shared by the British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak. In April Mr Sunak refused to formally apologise for the UK's historic role in the slave trade, telling the House of Commons, "trying to unpick our history is not the right way forward". But Niambi believes reparations are important for the descendants of both slave owners and enslaved Africans.

"The perpetrator requires healing," she said. "You can't commit a crime... and just keep it a secret, and think that secret will not affect how you live your life." Each time Britain's links to the slave trade come back under the spotlight, the debate around reparations intensifies.

But reaching a general consensus of agreement regarding any next steps appears to be a long way off.



## global lens

■ HE DEFIED POLLSTERS TO COME WITHIN A FRACTION OF A PERCENTAGE POINT OF VICTORY



Recep  
Tayyip  
Erdoğan  
Turkish  
President

# ERDOGAN HEADS FOR HISTORIC POLL RUNOFF

**Resurgent Turkish leader in strong position to extend two decades of his Islamic-rooted rule by another five years**

1990s to come within a fraction of a percentage point of winning Sunday's presidential ballot.

His right-wing party also retained control of parliament through an alliance with ultra-nationalists on a drama-filled night that concluded with Erdoğan delivering a victory speech from a balcony to jubilant supporters.

He even won in regions hit by a calamitous February earthquake that claimed more than 50,000 lives — and where anger at the government's slow response to Turkey's worst disaster of modern times was seething.

"A staggering win for Erdoğan," emerging markets economist Timothy Ash said in a note to clients. "He has the magic dust at these times. And he just gets Turks — the nationalist, socially conservative and Muslim ones."

The main opposition party led by Kemal Kilicdaroglu confronted the reality Monday that they were unable to beat Erdoğan at one of his most vulnerable moments.

"Don't despair," Kilicdaroglu told his supporters. "We will stand up and take this election together." Turkey's election officials confirmed that there would be a second round because the remaining uncounted votes would not swing the outcome.

Erdoğan secured 49.5 per cent of the vote and Kilicdaroglu picked up 44.9 per cent. Nationalist candidate Sinan Ogan — a former member of a far-right party now allied with the government — won 5.2 per

cent. Official turnout reached a record 88.9 per cent.

Observers from the Council of Europe said the election was "marked by an unlevel playing field but still competitive". The markets were depressed and Erdoğan's supporters ecstatic.

The lira touched new lows against the dollar and stocks on the Istanbul exchange fell on a realisation that the era of Erdoğan's unconventional economics may not be over.

"We think Turkey is now at very high risk of an increase in macroeconomic instability," the Capital Economics consultancy said.

The view was different in the more nationalist and conservative corners of Turkey.

"The people won!" the right-wing *Yeni Safak* newspaper proclaimed in a banner headline.

The pro-government *Sabah* daily called Erdoğan's performance a "superb success".

Erdoğan supporter Hamdi Kurumahmut was brimming with confidence the morning after Turkey's biggest election of its post-Ottoman era. "Erdoğan is going to win. He is a real leader. The Turkish people trust him. He has a vision for Turkey," Kurumahmut said.

"There are things that need to be improved on the economy, education or the refugee policy. But we know he's the one who can sort all that out," the 40-year-old tourism sector worker added.

US President Joe Biden is "looking forward to working with whoever" wins Turkey's knife-edge election, the White House said Monday as it praised the Nato ally for holding a peaceful

vote. "We congratulate the Turkish people for expressing their desires at the ballot box in a peaceful way," National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told reporters.

Some Kilicdaroglu supporters tried to stay positive.

"I don't want to even think about a scenario in which Erdoğan wins," Emin Serbest said as the last voted were being counted. "If Kilicdaroglu wins... a beautiful time awaits us," said the 33-year-old Istanbul municipality worker.

But most analysts feel that Kilicdaroglu and his six-party opposition alliance will have a difficult time halting Erdoğan's momentum over the coming two weeks.

Emre Peker of the Eurasia Group consultancy put the odds of an Erdoğan victory at 80 per cent.

"The results show that Erdoğan and his allies successfully bolstered the incumbent's support with strong messaging on terrorism, security and family values — even as the economy continued to top voter concerns," Peker said.

Political risk consultant Anthony Skinner said Sunday's result underscored the difficulty of trying to gauge public opinion in the strongly polarised nation of 85 million people.

"Many pre-election public opinion poll results did not reflect Erdoğan's resourcefulness and the degree of support he still enjoys in the country," the veteran Turkey watcher said.

"It just goes to show how careful one needs to be when looking at public opinion polls prior to elections."

— AFP

## ● ISTANBUL

**T**urkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan last week emerged from his toughest election test unbowed and in strong position to extend two decades of his Islamic-rooted rule by another five years in a historic May 28 runoff.

The 69-year-old leader defied pollsters and his country's most dire economic crisis since the

# OBIT

■ SHE WAS UNAPOLOGETICALLY HER

# A BRILLIANT ONE OF A KIND

**Tori Bowie was talented, a quick study – it's no wonder she enjoyed success while still so young and green**

• LOS ANGELES

The post-race glory photo-op is a time honoured tradition, an occasion for athletes to get their hit of global adulation in case their compatriot fans forget to tune in to the medal ceremony. Tori Bowie never looked more resplendent than she was in a snapshot of USA's 4x100m women's team after their remarkable triumph at the 2016 Olympics.

Interlocked with Allyson Felix, English Gardner and Tianna Bartoletta in a postcard for #blackgirlmagic, Bowie served a little bit of everything on that hot and sticky evening at João Havelange Stadium on the penultimate night of the Games. She flexed serious power with those washboard abs and flashed pops of colour with her fuchsia headband – a silken cousin to the bonnets many Black women use to preserve their locks. But instead of wearing it to bed, Bowie wore hers on the world's biggest stage. Gardner says that was typical of Bowie: "never what the world asked for, always unapologetically her".

In a sport where women of African descent dominate, Bowie, wrapped in the stars and stripes at her first-ever Olympics, literally planted a flag for Black women with darker complexions, showing how supremely comfortable they could be in their skin and confident in defining their own aesthetics. Girls in Ghana could see themselves in her. So too could teens from her native Mississippi. You could see why the style arbiters at Valentino tapped the former high school hoops star for a spokesmodel. Who'd look more



From left: Team USA's Tianna Bartoletta, English Gardner, Tori Bowie and Allyson Felix celebrate after winning the Women's 4x100m Relay Final at the Rio 2016 Olympics.

convincing in a silk track suit cradling a basketball, set against Manhattan's night lights?

That's what makes the news of Bowie's death so utterly gut-wrenching. Here was a 32-year-old woman who had already done so much, including winning state titles shortly after joining track in her teens and breaking national collegiate records as an NCAA title-winning long jumper at Southern Miss. She made a living competing in a sport she loved at the highest level – not bad for a girl from Sand Hill, a bent stop-sign town smack in the middle of the poorest state in the union.

"She was 100 per cent small-town Mississippi, and proud of it," says her longtime coach, Lance Brauman, who helped Bowie move from long jump to sprinting. "She had no problem telling everyone in the world that's where she's from." Bowie was talented, a quick study – it's no wonder she enjoyed success

while still so young and green. "None of it took her by surprise," Brauman says. "She thought she should be there."

Bowie even had a knack for the dramatic entrance. To keep Bowie fresh for her individual events – the 100m and 200m – in Rio, USA Track and Field kept her spot warm on the relay team with Morolake Akinosun, a four-time college champion relay racer. Akinosun ran well in the first heat. In the second she saw the Americans' hopes of defending their Olympic title imperilled when Felix, running the start leg, fumbled

the handoff to Gardner. A video replay showed Felix had actually been bumped by Brazil's Kauiza Venancio.

The Americans were disqualified, and then reinstated under appeal – and then forced to run a heat alone to secure a place in the final. Akinosun, who walked off the track after Felix lost the baton, called that heat "a glorified practice". For everyone but her, as it turned out. Akinosun knew she was just a placeholder. "(Bowie) was top three in the US, and she did get the silver in the 100m and (bronze) in the 200m," Akinosun said in a 2018 sitdown with *Run-BlogRun*. "So she absolutely deserved to be on that anchor leg. It was disappointing, but I was still part of the relay team and got a gold medal as well."

Because of their near-disqualification, the US went from running the final in the middle of the track among the powerhouses to the inside-most lane, which also starts the farthest back. It wasn't where any team wanted to be with the formidable Jamaicans – led by golden girls Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce, Veronica Campbell-Brown and Elaine Thompson (currently the fastest woman alive) – aiming to take the title from the Americans. But when the gun fired, Bartoletta got off to a brilliant start, and Felix had no issue taking the handoff – or passing the baton to Gardner. When Bowie's turn came to bring it home, the handoff was sloppy again. "A lot of people don't know she had never even taken a baton pass in her life," says Gardner, the emotion thick in her voice as she remembers the race. You'd never know as much from the jump Bowie got on Fraser-Pryce on the final leg. Gardner completed the handoff then charged a fist skyward in celebration. She had complete faith in Bowie.

To have her gone less than seven years later cuts deep. If there's scant consolation in the aftermath of her death, it's that the golden final in Rio is one that will stand for all time. We can say we saw the very best of Bowie and offer up that photo of her and her teammates as proof.



Tori Bowie



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