

THE Weekly Review

For the Thinking Person

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BETRAYAL AT STATE HOUSE

When Moi pushed his AG out of government in June 1981 after a stormy meeting in his office, only two other people knew about the intrigues that led to the falling-out; Nyachae and Kiereini. We reveal content of an angry letter that James Karugu wrote to the President, which remained a guarded secret for 41 years

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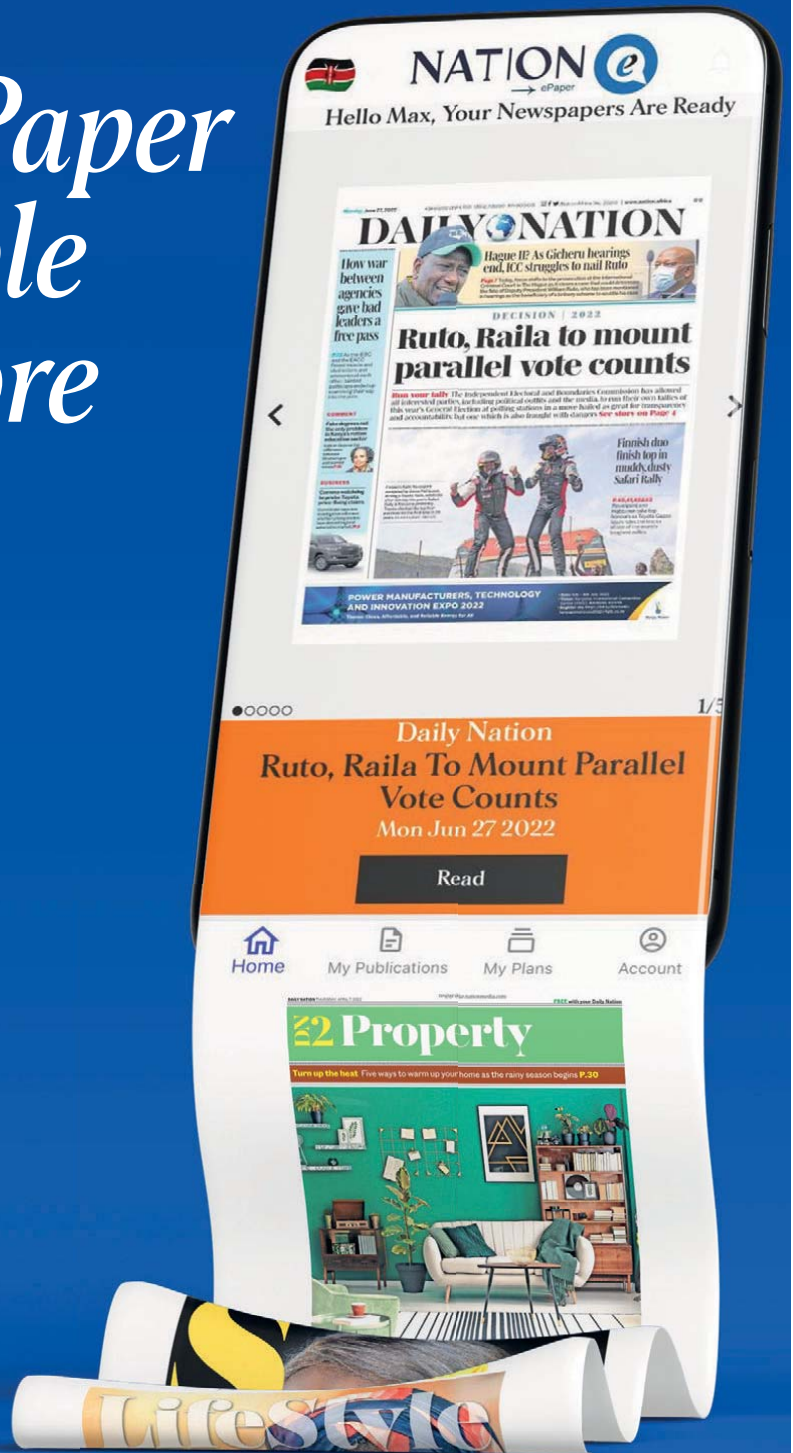
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letter from the editor

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25 THE EL-SISI COMMAND: Since taking power in 2013, the Egyptian President has faced accusations of presiding over 'the worst clampdown on human rights in the country's modern history'.

Why Murkomen cannot wish away the KQ turbulence, or SGR contract

Transport Cabinet Secretary Kipchumba Murkomen has been in the limelight for all the wrong reasons. The bad press has come partly due to reasons of his own making, and partly due to historical happenstance.

Kenya Airways has become a perennial pain in the backside of every Transport CS in the past decade. The national carrier hogs taxpayers' cash with abandon, and comes back for more billions at every turn.

The frequency with which KQ dips into the public cookie jar would make for a classic case study on moral hazard at the University of Nairobi's business school.

Long gone are the glory days when KQ was a prime stock on the Nairobi Securities Exchange, with a seemingly clear strategic focus and a competitive advantage as the biggest carrier in Africa. In its place is an opaque capital structure, an agitated workforce, ridiculously expensive tickets compared to competitors, and a waning market share, not to mention a shabby reputation.

For now, Murkomen has managed to kick the can down the road, until the demons awaken the pampered pilots



Washington Gikunju

Long gone are the glory days when KQ was a prime stock on the Nairobi Securities Exchange, with a seemingly clear strategic focus and a competitive advantage as the biggest carrier in Africa. In its place is an opaque capital structure, an agitated workforce, ridiculously expensive tickets compared to competitors, and a waning market share, not to mention a shabby reputation.

again. Murkomen's SGR contract kerfuffle is a self-inflicted wound, however, that smells of pure mischief.

The Transport CS must have known that what he was purporting to

release was just a small bit of the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) contract, but he went ahead and did it anyway. Kenyans, after all, are shallow on detail and short on memory, he must have reasoned.

The assumption boomeranged on the former Elgeyo Marakwet Senator, leaving sticky egg on his face. Having borrowed the Chinese amounts in the north of half a trillion shillings, which will be repaid by a cross generation of Kenyans, the feeble attempt at covering up the meaty parts of a fetid contract did not wash.

Fears that Mombasa port could become an extension of the Chinese empire if the Treasury defaults on the massive loan is clearly the elephant in the room. The cost of both the concessionary as well as the commercial aspects of the loan is also of great interest to the public.

Who pocketed the \$4 million commission disclosed in the contract, yet this was a government-to-government deal? How could the Attorney-General sign on documents that prohibited disclosure of details of the contract, in clear breach of the constitutional provisions for Kenyans' freedom of access to information? Murkomen's cosmetic disclosure raised more queries than it provided answers, and succeeded in carrying over a monkey that was clearly nestled on the Jubilee government's shoulders.

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the telescope

■ **Kenya Kwanza has five slots, Azimio four**

House to pick nine EALA members

Kenyans are expected to know the names of nine representatives the country will send to the East African Legislative Assembly (Eala) in Arusha, Tanzania, this week. The bicameral Parliament will on November 17 vote, through a secret ballot, to pick the nine from a list of 27 nominees already with a joint committee of both Houses. The 27 nominees were whittled down from the 287 short-listed applicants to be tabled before Parliament for voting. MPs will be voting to select five names from the 15 submitted

by the Kenya Kwanza Alliance and four from 12 presented by the Azimio la Umoja-One Kenya coalition according to the individuals with the highest number of votes. The names of the lucky nine will then be submitted to the regional assembly to be sworn in before beginning their tour of duty. Meanwhile, the Public Service Commission will on November 14 close the application window for the position of Solicitor-General and that of deputy governor of the Central Bank of Kenya.



Winnie Odinga is in the ODM list of nominees for EALA.

■ **He missed the cut at this year's British Open**



Tiger Woods said this week he would be returning to action at the Hero World Challenge in what will be the golf great's first tournament since the British Open in July. PHOTO IAFP

Woods returns at Hero World Challenge

Tiger Woods said this week he would be returning to action at the Hero World Challenge in what will be the golf great's first tournament since the British Open in July.

The 15-time major champion posted a Twitter message confirming his involvement in the 20-man tournament, where he is the host, at the Albany course in the Bahamas from December 1-4. Woods, a five-time winner of the event, is joined by American compatriot Kevin Kisner and England's Tommy Fleetwood in completing the field.

"I am excited to announce that I will be in the field for this year's #HeroWorldChallenge," Woods said. "A big welcome to @K_Kisner and @TommyFleetwood1 for joining us as

well. See you soon at Albany!"

This week has seen Woods caddying for son Charlie and he recently said he intended to take part in 'The Match', a 12-hole exhibition, with Rory McIlroy, Jordan Spieth and Justin Thomas on December 10 in what could be a busy finish to a restricted 2022 schedule following his recovery from a career-threatening car crash.

The exhibition is set for the weekend before the PNC Championship in Orlando, where Woods has previously played alongside Charlie.

Woods missed the cut at this year's British Open at St Andrews, having twice won the sport's oldest major at the Scottish course in 2000 and 2005.

■ **National Assembly to begin vetting of PSS**

CAS hopefuls cross their fingers



The Public Service Commission (PSC) is expected to reveal the short-listed candidates for the position of chief administrative secretary.

The Commission had called for applications for the po-

sition early in October and closed the exercise on October 27. The list will be submitted to President Ruto for appointment.

Meanwhile, the National Assembly will on November 14 commence the vetting of 51 principal secretary nominees. The names have already been committed to the relevant departmental committees of the House. The vetting will end on November 18.

■ **Right-wing policies could propel him to the top**

DeSantis, rising star of Republicans



He talks tough on immigration, attacks abortion rights and pulls no punches in America's endless culture wars: Florida's combative governor Ron DeSantis has used the Sunshine State as a petri dish for right-wing policies that could pro-

pel him to the presidency in 2024.

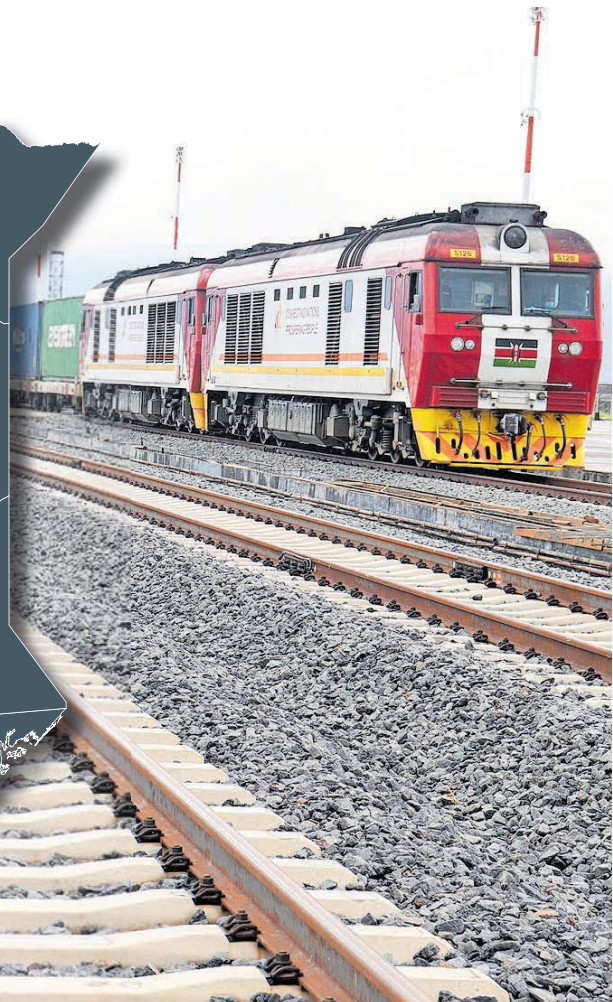
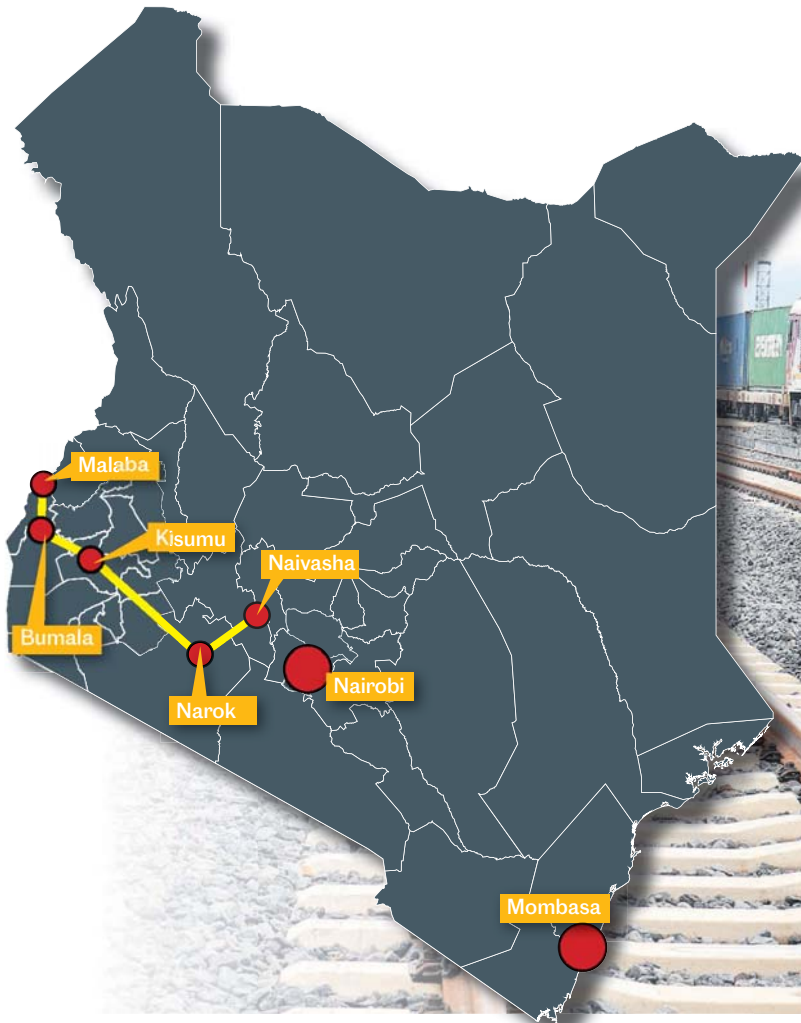
The 44-year-old rising star has spent his four years in office railing against hot-button issues that fire up US conservatives, like pandemic restrictions and the teaching of gender identity, sexual orientation and critical race theory in schools. But the some-time Donald Trump acolyte also cuts a more balanced figure than his likely rival for the White House job, showing a political pragmatism and respect for protocol unfamiliar to the ex-president.

kenya lens

■ UHURU SOUGHT ANOTHER CHINESE LOAN

FRESH SH500BN SGR DILEMMA

The Kenya Kwanza administration seeks to implement the Kenyatta government's plan of extending the railway line to Malaba via Kisumu



● By JAINDI KISERO

Even as the controversy that has greeted the disclosure by Transport Cabinet Secretary Kipchumba Murkomen of confidential Standard Gauge Railway loan contracts between Kenya and China Exim Bank continues to rage, *The Weekly Review* has seen a Cabinet memo that reveals that former President Uhuru Kenyatta had approved plans to borrow another US\$4.8 billion (about Sh500 billion) from China to finance the extension of the line from Naivasha to Malaba through Kisumu.

Coming against the backdrop of a recent pronouncement by Murkomen that the Ken-

ya Kwanza administration of President William Ruto plans to extend the SGR to Malaba through Kisumu, the revelations have brought to the fore the issue of whether Kenya still has capacity to take on more Chinese debt and what the extension of the line to Malaba would entail for Kenya in terms of aggravating the country's external indebtedness.

Murkomen earlier this month observed that the SGR has to reach the Kenya-Uganda border to serve its purpose. He cautioned, however, that this would depend on the availability of funds. "This project will only make sense when it goes past Naivasha as compared to the current situation where we are forced to transport goods by the lake, instead of through the

Kisumu port," he offered. In just over 10 years, loans from China have grown exponentially and to a level where China now holds 20 per cent of Kenya's external debt stock, the third on the queue after the World Bank and the Eurobond holders, but much bigger than the share held by the African Development Bank, PTA Bank and the International Monetary Fund. As at June 30, 2021, according to the recently published annual debt report, amounts outstanding on loans from China Exim Bank alone came to a whopping Sh759 billion. With an economy that constantly runs a merchandise trade deficit and that relies on the little export earnings from coffee, tea, tourism, flow-

Continued on Page 6

kenya lens

Bid to extend SGR from Naivasha to Malaba

Continued from Page 5

ers and diaspora remittances, Kenya will be hard-pressed were the new administration of President Ruto to insist on proceeding with extension of the line.

According to the Cabinet memo, the massive loan that the Kenyatta administration had approved was for building a length totalling to 216.3 kilometres, including an 8.9km branch line to a greenfield port that was to be built in Kisumu as part of the project.

The details in the Cabinet memo show that the \$4.8 billion figure is a lump sum, inclusive of civil works, 35 locomotives (29 mainline locomotives, four for passenger services and two for shunting), 724 wagons and 64 passenger coaches.

The plan was to electrify this section of the SGR. The memo discloses that the cost of electrification of the line was estimated at 20 per cent of the cost of civil works.

The background of the plan by the previous administration to extend the line to Malaba through Kisumu is narrated in the document as follows.

After Mombasa to Naivasha had been completed, the Kenya Railway Corporation (KRC) signed a memorandum of understanding with the Chinese EPC contractor, China Communication Construction Company (CCC), to undertake a feasibility study and preliminary designs for the Naivasha to Malaba section, following which a ministerial committee was set up to review the feasibility study.

As at February 2016, the commercial contract for civil works and rolling stock had been concluded and approved by the KRC board. The understanding was that the commercial contracts would only become effective after successful negotiations with China Exim Bank and when the plans had reached financial closure.

Two additional separate commercial contracts were planned: first, a US\$140 million contract for the Kisumu port, and secondly, US\$233 million to fund expansion and modernisation of the Embakasi Container Terminal that was to be built by China Road and Bridge Corporation.

At a meeting on September 18, 2015, the Cabinet had approved the preferred route for the extended line to Malaba through Kisumu: it would run from Naivasha through Narok, on to Bomet and up to Kisumu, then from Kisumu through Yala to Bumala and Malaba.

The decision by the Cabinet to divert the route away from the Central Rift Valley corridor through Nakuru to Narok was a significant development because talk about town at that time was that politically influential elite had, on learning about the new route, gone on a buying spree of land along the route in anticipation of hefty compensation payments.



According to the Cabinet memo, the budget for acquisition of land along the route of the railway line was set at an estimated figure of a whopping Sh8 billion.

Which is why speculation is rife that the land-grabbing elites are among the forces pushing the government to extend the line.

Meanwhile, the release this week of the confidential SGR loan contracts by Murkomen was greeted with scepticism, with critics insisting that the minister should have disclosed more SGR contracts including those for civil works and the ones for the EPC contractors.

Yet, in reality, Murkomen's disclosures had in many ways struck a blow for transparency around the hitherto secret contracts. Indeed, the real contentious issues around Chinese contracts and loans have all along been three: the secretive nature of the loans, the debates around the China debt trap narrative and whether Chinese loans are more expensive than loans borrowed from the West. Murkomen's disclosures were keenly awaited

because the expectation was that the minister would reveal new facts to forever settle the vexed question around whether or not the port of Mombasa was at risk of being confiscated by the Chinese if Kenya failed to pay up.

It remains to be seen whether the furore that erupted will force the minister to publish two key agreements relevant to the Mombasa Port question, namely, the 'take or pay agreement' between the Kenya Ports Authority and KRC, and the Escrow agreement.

To illustrate just how much Chinese loans come with stringent terms, here are highlights of the terms of one of the three loan agreements disclosed by Murkomen that covered the Nairobi-Naivasha section that was signed in December 2015.

With a tenure of 20 years, one would assume that this facility was the typical long-term loan with a generous grace period and fairly-priced interest rates.

It has a grace period of five years and attracts

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THE NAIVASHA-MALABA SGR DEAL

724 Wagons

35 Locomotives

64 Passenger coaches

(29 mainline locomotives, four for passenger services and two for shunting)

LAND: According to the Cabinet memo, the budget for acquisition of land along the route of the railway line was estimated at a whopping Sh8 billion.

The massive loan that the Kenyatta administration had approved was for building a length totalling 216.3 kilometres, including an 8.9km branch line to a greenfield port that was to be built in **Kisumu** as part of the project.

SH8 BILLION

The budget for land acquisition

216.3 KM

Total length of the railway line



interest rates at a floating rate, with a margin of three per cent above Libor that calculates to about 3.5 per cent, considering the prevailing Libor rate at the time the contract was signed.

But, as the saying goes, the devil is in the detail. Included in the terms is a condition that interest is to be calculated in six-month periods instead of the conventional 12 months. The implication is that over the 20-year period, the effective interest rate on this loan will be much higher.

There are two other significant terms in the loan agreement: a management fee of 0.5 per cent of the facility and a commitment fee on the undisbursed amount of 0.5 per cent, which must be cleared by the end of the grace period.

But what was not disclosed in the contracts Murkomen put out that makes the Chinese loans even more expensive is the cost of insurance.

The agreement states that the government must make an upfront payment of an insurance premium at 6.93 per cent premium payable in two instalments to the China Export Credit and Insurance Corporation (Sinosure).

Calculated, this figure comes to 15 per cent of the total contract amount. Effectively, this means that the Chinese take back 15 per cent of the loan amount upfront.

Kenya's appetite for Chinese loans in the last ten years has been unprecedented. The government has also borrowed heavily for projects of little economic impact — such as procurement of equipment for the National Youth Service and drilling materials — from China.

Going through the external debt register, the Kenya's borrowing from China ranges from loans for buying MRI equipment, procuring of power materials and rehabilitation of technical institutes to modernisation of Kenya Power distribution systems and building of Kenyatta University.

It is a reflection of the power and influence the Chinese companies wield. Indeed, Chinese EPC contractors are adept at putting deals together and getting financing approved by the Treasury.

This is the way the game is played: A Chinese contractor, with his local allies and agents, approaches a CS or parastatal MD to hawk a pro-

ject that he has conceived and which has not been budgeted for by Parliament.

The contractor comes with a promise to arrange financing. An MoU is hurriedly signed between the contractor and the CS or parastatal boss. Then follows a commercial contract between the parastatal or its parent ministry and the contractor.

Finally, the National Treasury is invited to sign financing agreements with Exim Bank of China. This way, a new project funded by the Chinese will have entered the budget. This is how the SGR projects came about.

Why do corrupt elite prefer the route of introducing projects through these shady MoUs and commercial contracts to the conventional competitive procurement route?

It makes it easy to conspire with the Chinese to push a project into the government's spending programme even when it has no money for it. Secondly, since the deal can be procured and concluded without subjecting the project to international competitive bidding, the greedy elite are able to pad the budgets of the project with as many backhanders and kickbacks as they choose.

kenya lens

■ HE ESCHEWED CONTROVERSY AND LOVED HIS PEACE

THE MAN WHO QUESTIONED MOI**On June 2, 1981, Attorney-General Karugu was summoned to State House and ordered to resign immediately, without any explanation. He did, but stunned the President with a rare letter. We reveal its content for the first time**

● By JOHN KAMAU

When former Attorney-General James Boro Karugu shared the resignation letter he wrote to then President Daniel arap Moi with this writer, it was not to be leaked during his lifetime. Like a silent man, he eschewed controversy and loved his peace.

When he died on Thursday aged 86, he passed on with some secrets of the meeting that saw him leave the public service at only 45. Silence gave him peace – and it was part of his survival tactic.

The Weekly Review can now reveal the contents of the letter that Karugu wrote to President Moi, known only by a few people and which provide a window to what transpired that day and the workings of the Nyayo regime.

We now know that on the afternoon of June 2, 1981, a day after the Madaraka Day holiday, Karugu was summoned to State House by President Moi, who was hardly three years in office. When he arrived, Karugu found the President in the company of Jeremiah Kiereini, who was Chief Secretary, and Permanent Secretary in the Office of the President Simeon Nyachae – one of the most powerful people in the Moi government.

It was 3pm, and without the slightest hint, the bombshell was dropped: President Moi wanted Karugu to resign immediately. From the letter's contents, Karugu appears to have tried to salvage his career, but Moi was unwilling to discuss the matter. Either he was not interested, or the atmosphere was poisoned.

Back in his office, Karugu, perhaps shaken by the turn of events, drafted a terse, three-paragraph letter. He said: "In strict compliance with your instructions today at State House Nairobi, at 3pm, in the presence of the Chief Secretary, Mr Kiereini, and the Permanent Secretary, Mr Nyachae, to resign, I hereby submit my resignation, effective immediately as directed by your Excellency.

"Not unnaturally, I would have been most obliged if specific allegations – if there are any – had been revealed to me and perhaps an opportunity given to me to explain. However, Mr President as you indicated that you did not wish to discuss the matter I must respect that decision and your wisdom in the matter.

"I take this opportunity to thank you, Mr President for giving me the privilege to serve

you, your government, and my country. This, I have done with complete dedication, loyalty and honesty as I have done in the past for the last

nearly 18 years in the public service. My conscience is clear."

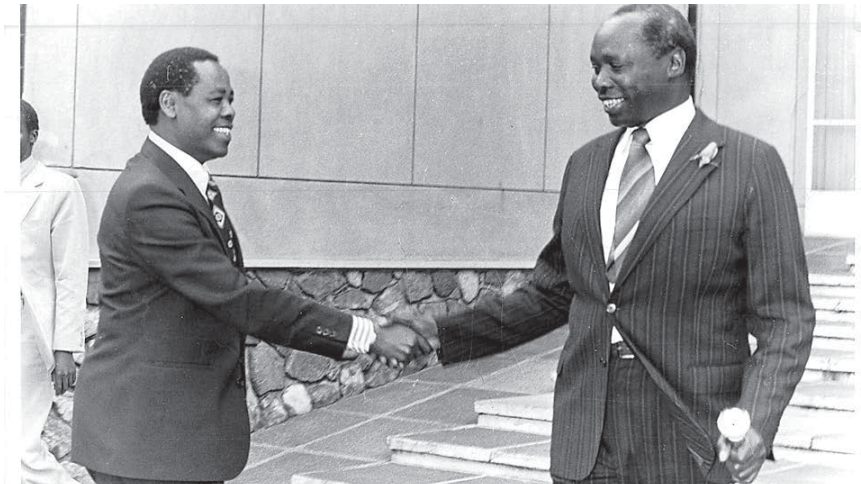
At only 45, Karugu had been asked to leave – and he left his Nairobi office and retreated to his Kiamara Coffee



Former Attorney-General James Karugu during an interview with *The Weekly Review's* John Kamau at his Kiambu home on February 16, 2018. DIANA NGILA | NATION



Former Attorney-General James Karugu during an interview with *The Weekly Review's* John Kamau at his Kiambu home on February 16, 2018. DIANA NGILA | NATION



President Moi with Attorney-General James Karugu in Nairobi on April 21, 1980.

Farm on the outskirts of Kiambu town. Here, he decided to lie low on the small plantation.

Karugu's resignation took everyone by surprise. Known to be fiercely independent and a stickler for the rule of law, he was hardly 15 months as AG when he resigned. In 2018, and in the only interview he conducted after leaving office, I had pressed him for the fine details of the falling-out with President Moi, but it appeared that the memories of the event still bothered him. "Let us put it this way," he said. "There were frustrations and issues that I could not push forward". After promising to get me the details at an opportune time, the "details" came later with a caveat.

As President Moi started the crackdown on his critics, Karugu appears to have become a stumbling block – thanks to his integrity as a stickler for details. But, unfortunately, Moi was pretty vindictive and vicious. So why didn't he look for another job? "I didn't. I did not want to be told what to do. I could not stand being ordered, 'do this, do that...'" he said.

The year 1981 marked the launch of Moi's dictatorship. He had started a crackdown on his critics and reintroduced detention without trial. Interestingly, Karugu's resignation is hardly featured in Andrew Morton's biography of Moi. It is only claimed that the AG resigned after failing to prosecute Nairobi businessman Andrew Muthemba, who had been accused of plotting to overthrow President Moi.

Sharad Rao, who was the Deputy Public Prosecutor, says indeed, Karugu resigned over the Muthemba case. "He and I had been summoned to State House by President Moi. The President wanted to know our view on whether

Muthemba should be charged for treason. I told him that what Muthemba was accused of was technically treason (and) it was difficult to prove it, and in any case (it) was not so serious as to warrant a charge of treason." According to Rao, he suggested during the meeting that they should charge Muthemba with sedition. "Karugu disagreed and insisted that we should charge him with treason and was confident that it would succeed."

"What if it doesn't?" asked President Moi. According to Rao, "if it doesn't, Karugu said he would resign. At the President's insistence, I was asked to prosecute. The case failed and Karugu, true to his word, drove up to State House and handed his resignation. That was the reason he resigned." Rao's view confirms that Karugu never shared with his close associates the story about the State House summons.

Muthemba, who was the cousin of Charles Njonjo, Karugu's predecessor in the AG's office, had, according to the court records, approached Njonjo with alarming information that there were people trying to buy arms to overthrow the government. Njonjo told him to report his story to the police. Officers from the Criminal Investigations Department arrested Muthemba and he was charged with attempting to procure weapons from the military.

According to Karugu – as he later told the 1983 Njonjo Commission of Inquiry – Njonjo would also have prosecuted Muthemba had he been at the law office. But it appears that there was some bad blood between Karugu and Njonjo, a close ally of Kiireini's who was present during at State House meeting.

After taking over from Njonjo – who resigned

in 1979 to join politics – Karugu had not been in office for long before he faced the controversial case in which a US sailor, Frank Sundstrom, had killed a Kenyan call girl, Monica Njeri, in Mombasa. After pleading guilty, the sailor was set free on an Sh500 bond, eliciting a major public outcry. Coming at a time when President Moi was building his ties with the White House, Karugu confessed to a hostile Parliament that the case had put him in a predicament and conceded that he was not satisfied that justice had been done. While that was interpreted as an attack on the judiciary, he told Parliament that this was "the price we have to pay for the independence of the judiciary".

Having first graduated in history and political science from Ohio State University before proceeding to London for a law degree, Karugu had returned to Kenya to work at the State Law office. He was a familiar name in the 1970s, when he was the Deputy Public Prosecutor until April 1980, when he was appointed AG.

It was while he was at the prosecution office that Cabinet Minister Tom Mboya was assassinated, and the hunt for the killer led to the arrest of Nahashon Isaac Njenga Njoroge. This was the first case he wanted to prosecute but his senior, Clive Brookes, decided against it. "I wish I had the Mboya case," Karugu said. "There was no way we were going to lose this case."

Another case that was dear to him was the 1970 coup plot against Kenya's first President, Jomo Kenyatta, in which Chief Justice Kitili Mwendwa and army commander Brigadier Joseph Ndolo were implicated. Others were then Yatta MP Gideon Mutiso and Makerere don Prof Ouma Muga.

"This was a very big case, and the focus turned to me. Had I lost that case, Mzee (Kenyatta) would not have forgiven me," he said.

Upon his appointment as AG, Karugu's main worry was that corruption was creeping into the judiciary. More so, there were efforts to dilute the powers of the Attorney-General after Njonjo convinced Moi to create a new ministry of Constitutional Affairs. During the Njonjo Commission, Karugu said that Njonjo had hoped that he would be a 'Yes' man. "Njonjo left the office with some misconceptions or preconceived ideas that I was going to let him have the easy way in the Office of the Attorney-General if I was appointed, [that] I would sit back and let the office be emasculated, so the powers go to a constitutional office of Minister for Justice. Hence my resistance to those overtures was both treacherous and perfidious," he told the Commission.

Whether that refusal precipitated his fall might never be known. But as he left office, he picked a mantra that informed his life outside the government: "I don't have to be corrupt, and I can earn money by farming." On the afternoon he resigned, he took his wife and children to the farm in Kiambu to make what he called an honest living. "I am lucky my children grew up knowing the joy of hard work," he said. In the short period he was in office, he distinguished himself as an AG who served with great professionalism. But it was his silence in the noisy political landscape that has always baffled people. That silence, it is now clear, is where Karugu hid his secrets.

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kenya lens

■ OPPOSITION POLITICS

GEARING UP TO FIGHT BACK

Despite cracks in its ranks, Azimio la Umoja-One Kenya says it has elaborate plans to form a shadow Cabinet to keep President Ruto's government in check



From right: ODM supremo Railla Odinga, Narc leader Charity Ngilu, Wiper boss Kalonzo Musyoka and Muungano Party chief Kivutha Kibwana during an Azimio la Umoja-One Kenya rally in Nairobi on June 2. The coalition's Secretary-General, Junet Mohamed, says they are working on an elaborate and powerful opposition. He says the plans will be rolled out in January next year. PHOTO | FILE

BY OSCAR OBONYO

Fafi MP Salah Yakub's recent revelations of plans to remove presidential term limits may well have been a mere teaser, but it nonetheless mirrors the confidence levels President William Ruto's party enjoys over a Railla Odinga-led opposition that is haemorrhaging politically each passing day.

Never mind that the ruling United Democratic Alliance (UDA) party has officially distanced itself from its own legislator's sentiments that have attracted public outrage. Hardly 100 days in office, the fact that Yakub's coded message to extend Ruto's leadership to more than two terms can be entertained by a section of Kenyans and even debated is an indictment of the vibrancy of the opposition.

With scores of poll losers in opposition zones – especially in Nyanza, Western and Rift Valley regions – currently trooping to President Ru-

to's wing, the government is apparently sitting pretty and comfortable with minimal opposition in sight. Former Kisii and Nairobi governors, James Ongwae and Evans Kidero respectively, are among the latest big names to shift camp.

The situation is further compounded by the notion among some of Odinga's diehard supporters that he lost in an election where he was an outright frontrunner and even enjoyed the goodwill of incumbency.

Former Laikipia North MP Mathew Lempurkel, an ardent ODM supporter, is one such politician who has opted to decamp from Odinga's camp "because he is not serious about his quest for presidency".

Members of the pastoral community, observes Lempurkel, believe that if one in their midst loses his herd of animals, cattle rustlers are blamed for the onslaught. If this happens a second time, members of his family start

questioning his ability to secure his herd, but if theft happens a third and fourth time, the community totally loses faith in that particular herdsman.

"This thing has now slipped from the hands of my elder brother (Odinga) a record five times and you cannot expect me to hang on in there. Even during the chaotic situation at Bomas (national poll tallying centre), his overzealous supporters were nowhere to be seen, except for one Maasai with a club in hand," says the ex-MP in apparent reference to Narok Senator Ole Kina Ledama.

The ODM leader and former President Uhuru Kenyatta have been variously fingered for having underestimated Ruto's political strength, a miscalculation that resulted in a major political shocker for them and their backers.

Noting that the President is a smart and determined schemer, political affairs commentator Dr Henry Wabwire warns that if Ruto man-

kenya lens

aged to upset the duo from “outside of government”, it will be even harder for the Azimio chiefs to challenge him now that he enjoys and controls instruments of power. In other words, it is going to take a lot of spadework and dedication to politically upset the UDA leader.

But again, Raila has over the years proved to be politically alert and at his best when operating under pressure or crisis. If his manoeuvres in the opposition in 1992, 1997 and 2002 are anything to go by, then he is in fairly familiar territory and capable of jolting Ruto’s power base.

Well aware of the Herculean task ahead, Secretary-General of Azimio La Umoja-One Kenya, Junet Mohamed, says they are working on an elaborate and powerful opposition. The plans, according to the coalition’s spokesman, will be rolled out in January next year.

“It is a plan like no other which will eventually remove Ruto from the leadership of this country,” says Junet, without giving details. Not so long ago, Wiper party leader Kalonzo Musyoka hinted at the formation of a shadow Cabinet by the opposition aimed at keeping close scrutiny of operations in the Ruto government. However, *The Weekly Review* has independently established that this move cannot be executed as fast as Musyoka and colleagues within Azimio had envisioned. It is more complicated than the mere naming of 22 individuals for each of the ministerial docks in the Ruto administration.

For effective and efficient opposition, Azimio’s think-tank is suggesting a full-fledged arrangement that will involve various professional teams, including researchers who will work behind the scenes to fully back up the shadow ministers.

The whole idea is to have a solid and informed team that will respond to and critique the government professionally and from a knowledgeable position – complete with concrete statistics and relevant policy statements. This approach is aimed at strengthening offices of the shadow CSs so that they are not reduced to mere spokespersons confined to political verbal exchanges.

The import of that kind of organised approach is that more personnel will be needed. Hiring such a professional team as well as physical space and other operational costs will require funding, which partly explains the delay in assembling a working team to keep the Ruto administration on its toes.

There is also the ‘small matter’ of identifying the political face of the opposition ahead of the 2027 presidential poll. With Kenyatta off the card, Odinga giving mixed signals about his political future and Musyoka and Narc-Kenya party leader Martha Karua warming up to the ODM leader’s rural backyard of Nyanza and his other traditional support bases in Western, Nairobi and Coast regions, Azimio’s leadership is increasingly puzzling.

Mohamed explains that everything will become clear, including the coalition’s leadership, by the time the opposition machinery is unveiled early next year. The MP, a very close ally of Raila’s, is unwilling to divulge details, only promising to talk to this writer again next month “once our plans have been fully concretised”. Odinga has maintained that his active participation in politics post-2022 is persuaded by the need to safeguard the democratic gains made over the years, which he has doubtless played a central role in securing, including the so-called second liberation and return to multi-party politics in 1992. The former PM fears that if he exits the scene, achievements so far made could be eroded under the watch of President Ruto.

With high taxation and plans to expand the tax bracket to include 18-year-olds, as well as high food and fuel prices among a host of unfulfilled poll promises, the electorate is increasingly becoming discontented. And these are developments that Odinga, Kenyatta, Musyoka and Karua can quickly build on in driving home their anti-Ruto campaign.

Furthermore, with newly sworn in CSs making public policy statements that are not in sync with the hustler agenda, protests are emerging that the rival camp can easily take advantage of. During the campaigns, Ruto said his government

would focus on addressing the problems of the downtrodden. But only this Tuesday, university students marched in the streets of Nairobi chanting “*Tunataka Baba, hatutaki Ruto* (We want Raila, not Ruto)” in protest against Education CS Ezekiel Machogu’s alleged announcement that the government would no longer fund public universities.

Separately, leaders of Ford-Kenya and Amani National Congress (ANC), who are partners within the Kenya Kwanza Alliance, have been grumbling rather loudly about their alleged mistreatment with regards to appointments of Cabinet and Principal Secretaries. Even though some of those appointed are from the traditional Ford-Kenya and ANC strongholds, they are ideally allied to the President’s party.

Nominees allied to the Prime Cabinet Secretary, Musalia Mudavadi, and Speaker of National Assembly Moses Wetang’ula, reportedly failed to make the mark – a factor that is a source of new friction within the Kenya Kwanza alliance and one that the rival Azimio can clutch on to.

Azimio has its fair share of political complacency. Even as it struggles to hold things together, it has not helped matters that Odinga, Kenyatta and Musyoka appear to be promoting nepotism. Relatives of the three Azimio chiefs, Winnie Odinga, Christina Pratt and Kennedy Musyoka – Odinga’s daughter, Kenyatta’s sister and Musyoka’s son respectively – are, for instance, among those shortlisted to serve in the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA).

The development easily plays into the hands of rivals who have all along claimed that Azimio is a dynastic leadership, which embraces and promotes individuals from certain Kenyan political families. While this is not necessarily the case, the coincidence enhances this very perception.

Contacted for comment on the issue, Mohamed aptly pointed out that short-listed individuals who happen to be relatives of Azimio leaders also have a democratic right to seek public office. In the end, Parliament will decide who proceeds to EALA through a vote.

The opposition has similarly not been very sensitive to various regional, party and tribal interests, especially with regards to sharing out leadership slots in both houses of Parliament. A repetitive protest by Kakamega’s Deputy Governor, Ayub Savula, to the effect that the western region was short-changed is, for instance, quickly gaining political currency.

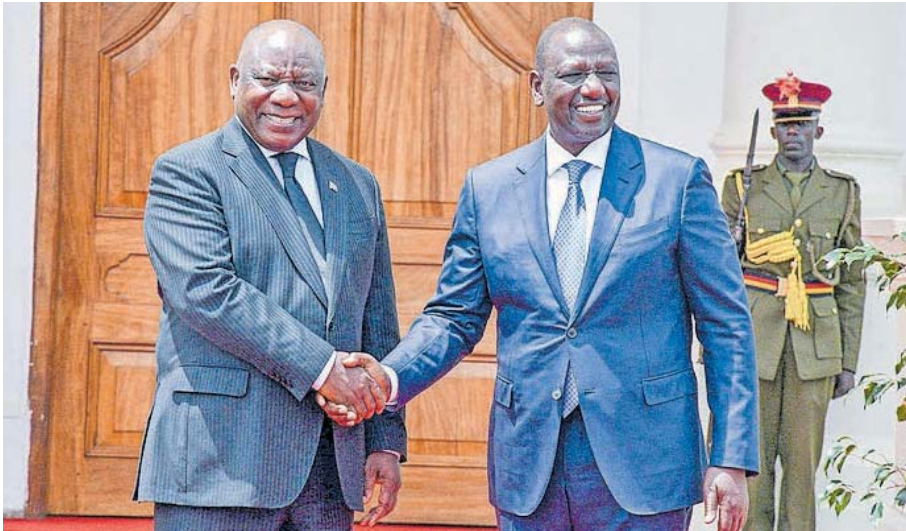
This time round, the region registered even better results in favour of Odinga compared with 2013 and 2017. Ugunja MP Opiyo Wanjau and Junet of Suna East lead the Azimio coalition in the National Assembly as Leader of Minority and Minority Whip respectively.

Dr Wabwire opines that the Azimio team is rather indifferent to concerns over its skewed manner of power-sharing, a tendency which, he warns, could prove politically costly. This trait, he observes, is counterproductive especially at this time when the opposition is trying to protect its support bases from political intrusion by Ruto.



Narc-Kenya leader Martha Karua

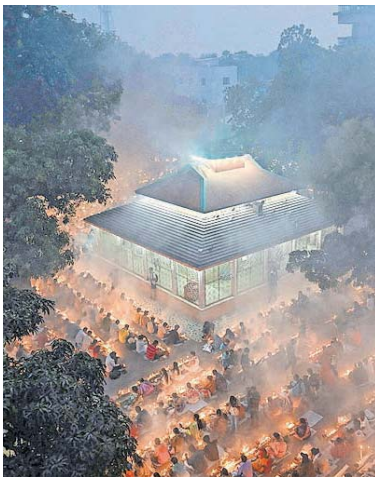
the limelight



President William Ruto (right) with South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa during a press conference at State House, Nairobi, on November 9. FRANCIS NDERITU | NATION



Members of the Grevy's Zebra Trust observe a carcass of a Grevy's Zebra, the world's rarest species that only exists in Kenya and Ethiopia, during hay distribution near Buffalo Springs National Reserve, Isiolo, on November 4. PHOTO | AFP



Hindu devotees offer prayers at the Shri Shri Lokanath Brahmachari temple during the Hindu religious fasting festival of 'Rakher Upobash' in Narayan-ganj on November 8. PHOTO | AFP



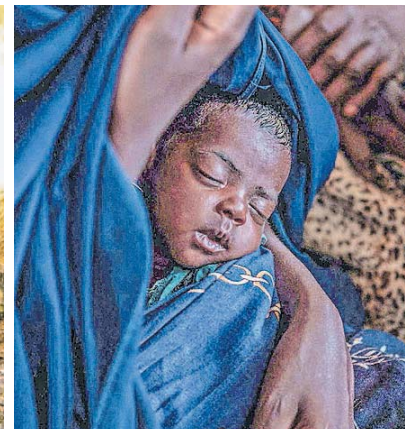
We published this photograph on Page 12 of *The Weekly Review* of October 30, 2022, with a caption which implied that the person in the image had been spreading pesticides over a tea plantation at Kipkebe Estate in Musereita. We have since established that the caption was incorrect. We wish to clarify that the employee was spraying the tea with fertiliser and that Kipkebe Tea Estate does not and has never used pesticides in any of its farms. The error arose from the original caption of the source of the story. PHOTO | AFP



A commercial aircraft flies before the rising full moon above Kuwait City on November 8. PHOTO | AFP

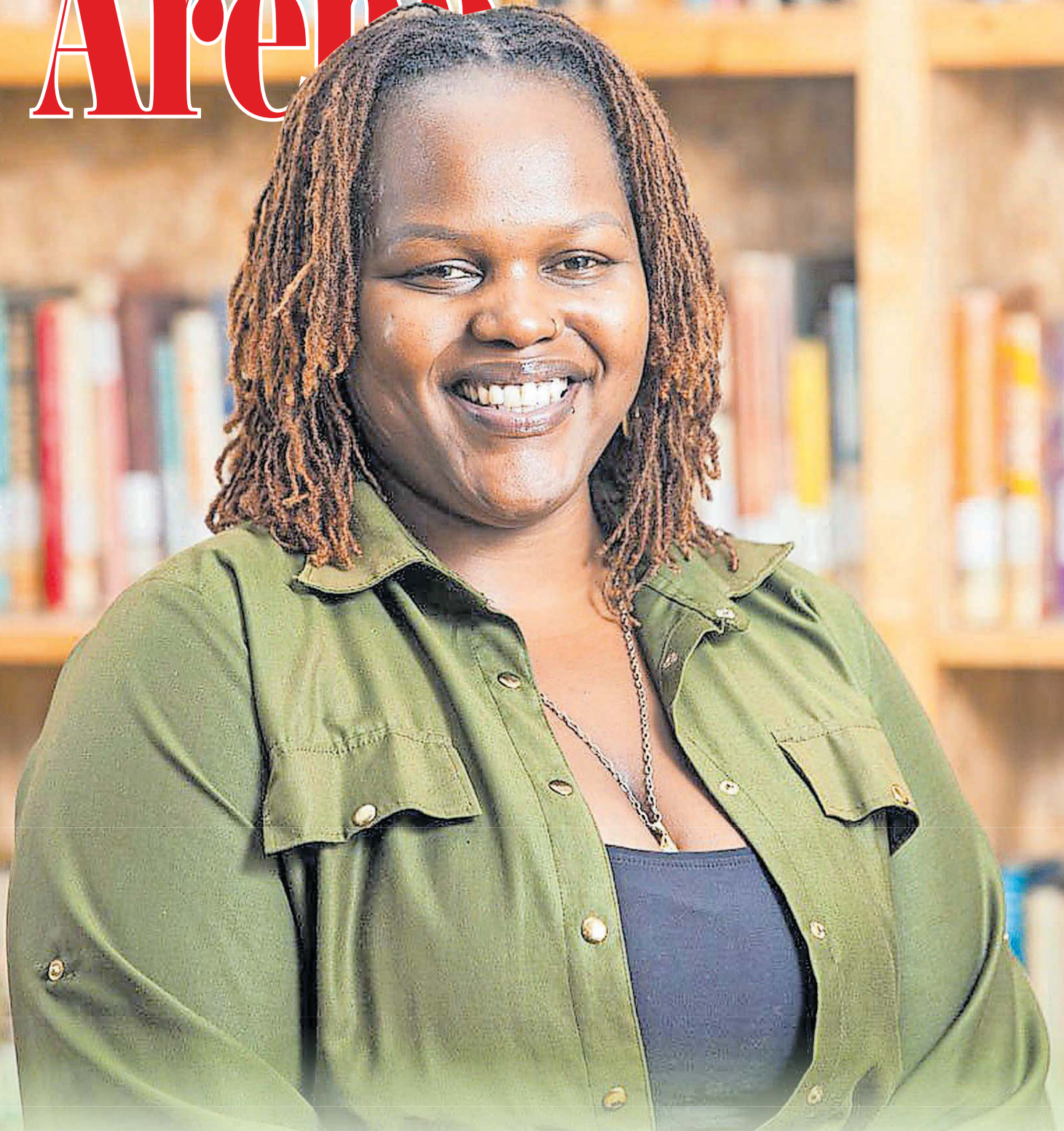


A Ukrainian soldier of an artillery unit fires towards Russian positions outside Bakhmut on November 8. PHOTO | AFP



A mother holds her child while taking part in a breast-feeding class at Danwagaag Mother and Child Health Centre in Baidoa, Somalia, on November 9. PHOTO | AFP

The Arena



BANKING ON BOOKS

Book Bunk, Wanjiru Koinange's public library restoration project, has won international acclaim and is encouraging a reading culture

OPEN SPACE

PATH TO BETTER ROADS

Development strategies: The road sector has been grappling with huge infrastructure deficits, which calls for innovative ways to bridge the funding gap

• BY RASHID MOHAMED

The Kenya Roads Board Act was amended in 2019 and gave express powers for the board to borrow through leveraging on the Roads Maintenance Levy Fund (RMLF). The intent of allowing the board to borrow was to localise road infrastructure funding challenges at the parent ministry in charge of roads as they are better placed to handle them.

In 2021, the Kenya Roads Board (KRB) suffered a setback after the National Treasury put a stop to the floating of a Sh150 billion infrastructure bond. There were fears that the bond would have breached the terms of engagement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The proceeds of the bond were to finance the completion of ongoing and completed road projects.

The road sector has been grappling with huge infrastructure deficits, which calls for innovative ways to bridge the funding gap, currently standing at approximately KSh600 billion.

Currently, the board fully depends on collections from RMLF charged at Sh18 per litre of petrol and diesel and transit tolls to maintain over 164,000 kilometres of road network.

Monies collected from fuel levy are not sufficient to meet the needs of the network, and with rising fuel prices and impact of the shift to electric vehicles, the fund is not expected to expand further.

A study by African Development Bank indicates that African countries need to improve their regulatory frameworks in order to ensure the successful launch of African infrastructure project bonds.

The report further says many of the ingredients for infrastructure project bond issuance are present, but governments need to do more to make it attractive for sponsors to tap local markets. Additionally, governments can play a greater role in supporting stable economic conditions, developing local capital markets and strengthening institutions.

Back home, the issuance of the infrastructure bond was delayed by legislators who cited lack of a legal and regulatory framework. The amendment of the Finance Act 2022 could not have come at a better time.

The Act has introduced a number of changes that aim at raising additional revenues as well to align the tax legislation to the government development priorities. This new development allows the board to grow its funds even as it explores other financing options for infrastructural development.

The amendment to the Kenya Roads Board Act, 1999 through the Finance Act, 2022 provides for allocation of 50 per cent of the Fund to maintenance and 50 per cent towards securing additional funds through options such as bonds to bridge the funding gap in the road sector. This means that 50 per cent may be set aside by the board as security for borrowing funds necessary to

finance maintenance, development and rehabilitation of roads. Previously, the Act had not provided for funds to be set aside for purposes of obtaining additional funding for roads.

Further to this development, the National Assembly has approved Kenya Roads Board (General) Rules, 2022.

The object of these rules shall be to facilitate and enforce the co-ordination of road maintenance, rehabilitation and development and ensure accountability, efficiency, transparency and effective application and utilisation of the KRB fund.

The rules have detailed the duties of the board and the road agencies as well as functions of other requirements such as the submission and revision of Annual Roads Programme, Road Inventory and Condition Survey, Disbursement Programme, Sanctions and Penalties.

Others include release and withholding of funds, environmental and social management, contract project files, technical, financial and performance audits, penalties for failure to comply and audit action plans by road agencies.

If half of the RMLF is set aside to secure additional funds, it could raise at least Sh150 billion through floating of bonds.

Mr Mohamed is the Director-General at Kenya Roads Board.

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

MIND SPEAK



Dennis Ouma

The current government should get to work immediately. We have a lot of challenges as a nation — drought, hunger, the high cost of living and high prices of fuel, plus public universities and parastatals that are unable to function probably due to financial inadequacy. It's prudent for the government to take up the challenge and offer leadership and solutions to these pressing issues.

— President, Egerton Univ. Students Association



Rosemary Njeru

I am glad this Hustler nation has sober and honest minds, such as Prime Cabinet Secretary Musalia Mudavadi. We can't have a government in power blaming the previous regime, which they were actively involved in. In the current economic times, they should stop politics and realise they are no longer aspirants. Kenyans want results, not blame games.

— Youth Leader, Nyandarua County



Nicholas Sirere

As a youth leader in a country where most of my agemates with impressive academic qualifications are battling hunger and unemployment, blame games won't fill the empty coffers they found and improve the economy but will only lead to more brain drain and worse times for all. I wholeheartedly agree with the Prime Cabinet Secretary.

— Kenya Water Institute, President



Catherine Akinyi

Kenyans embraced the Kenya Kwanza regime with open arms and are looking into the future with high hopes. Claiming past mistakes are interfering with its development agenda is self-defeating and inviting gloom when there is an opportunity to encourage nation building and develop the country.

— Student, Technical University of Kenya

MY TAKE



• BY WAGA ODONGO

Earlier in the year, the Central Bank asked the public for views on possible issuance of a Kenyan Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC).

CBDCs are very popular now, with 86 per cent of central banks in the world investigating them and a tenth of them running pilot projects. As I write, at least three African central banks have issued CBDCs, with Nigeria being the largest economy to have one with the creation of the eNaira.

On its paper on the topic, the CBK lists an overview of 14 countries with different CBDCs, a list which excludes Nigeria, whose experience with CBDCs would, in my opinion, be the most applicable for Kenya.

The eNaira has started slow and its struggles hold important lessons that we as a country should consider.

Only about a million people have acquired an eNaira wallet, which is low considering the country has a population of 22.5 million. Transactions have also failed to pick up even though every merchant is required to accept payment in the digital currency. I am more concerned about the potential retail implementation of an eShilling as has happened in Nigeria, where a central bank issues a digital currency for use by citizens.

The main issue with adoption of an eShilling would be its usefulness in facilitating a dictatorship. If adopted widely enough, the state can freeze your accounts or stop you from making purchases. An eShilling would make it easy to snoop on those the State deems enemies and cut them off entirely from the financial system.

Banks are also unlikely to support an eShilling. Part of the reason banks begrudgingly adopted MPesa was because Safaricom was compelled by law to fully back the digital payment system in shillings. Even in the event of a collapse of the telco, the money is fully collateralised at a custodian bank,

WHY AN E-SHILLING ISN'T A GOOD IDEA

Digital currency: An interest-free digital shilling pegged to a depreciating currency held at the CBK sounds like a terrible proposition



meaning that the users' funds are always safe.

With the growth of MPesa, it was always unlikely that only one such bank could keep all the holdings and there was a need to spread the risk among several banks. Banks still get to loan out MPesa funds to the government and earn interest on it.

An eShilling would not need to keep its holdings in local banks so they would lose out on the gravy train.

Banks will be facing competition from their regulator and the CBK does not have the same onerous deposit requirements they do.

Also, if you can keep your money in the Central Bank, why bother with the middlemen? All banks can fail except the Central Bank. If it issues currency for direct use, at a time there is a run on a bank like there was a few weeks ago with First Community Bank, won't everyone as a precautionary step move their money to the eShilling?

The suggested mitigation to this by the Central Bank is scant comfort. CBK suggests that CBDCs would be non-interest bearing, unlike bank deposits. A bank can pay you five per cent interest annually but lose 100 per cent of your money instantly the next time the Chairman wants to buy his wife

a Ferrari as happened a few years ago at a local bank. So why put your money in a local bank?

An eShilling, if successful, would be the death knell for local banks.

But the main reason an eShilling would struggle like the eNaira is doing is because of the CBK itself.

CBK's stewardship of the shilling in the past few years has been less than stellar; we already have the greenback at record highs. The eShilling would be pegged to the shilling, which has been depreciating against the dollar. CBK's figures are not trusted by the banks it regulates, which sell the same dollar at a five per cent premium. Some banks have two dollar rates, one if you want the equivalent deposited in your account and a much higher one if you want dollars in cash. This is a clear sign that there is a shortage of dollars.

Citizens would find scant comfort in holding another version of a managed depreciating currency.

We cannot ignore cryptocurrencies either. With minimal googling, a user can find markets that trade stablecoins backed by dollars held in New York banks, whose accounts are audited monthly.

This is the main reason Kenya currently trades several billion a week in crypto on several exchanges. Many Kenyans I reckon would consider some of the stablecoins

on offer to be a safer investment against depreciation than money at the CBK. New York is known for its very stringent financial regulations and stablecoins based there are seen as a safe bet.

Also, unlike a CBK currency, crypto would be more convenient for the corrupt who, in Kenya, seem to have all the money. Suppose I am a county chief and I loot the coffers by buying non-carcinogenic wheelbarrows; if I put the money at the Central Bank, it can easily be tracked. If I put the money in a stablecoin backed by dollars in New York, it will be almost invisible to Kenyan investigators. The Americans may be able to get your details from the exchange, but this shouldn't be a concern. You probably are too small a fish to bother with.

The lesson I picked up from the billion-dollar Malaysian 1MDB scandal was that it's okay to put stolen loot in American banks as long as you don't buy American property. The initials the corrupt in Kenya are afraid of is DCI, not FBI.

An interest-free digital shilling pegged to a depreciating currency held at the CBK sounds like a terrible proposition.

*Mr Odongo is a Software Engineer
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PUBLIC READING SPACES

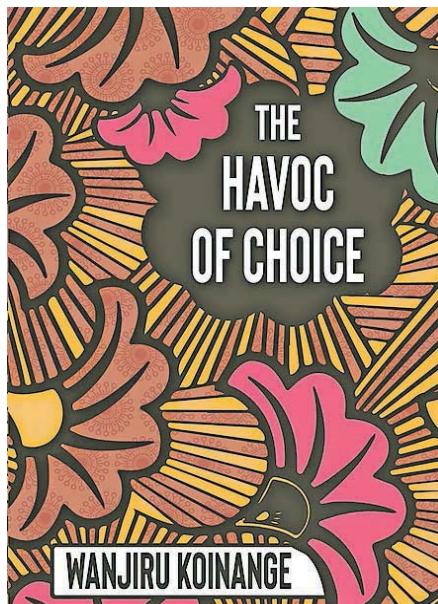
• BY EDDY ASHIOYA

Sunny side up. That's what I kept thinking when having a conversation with Wanjiru Koinange, she of the highly acclaimed *Havoc of Choice* (the novel is based on events that surrounded the 2007 Kenyan general election) and Book Bunk project. There is a lightness in her voice, and she speaks without hemming and hawing, without poeticisms, her words the soundtrack of many a dream in its innocent desires and dawning regrets. She has an enchanting laugh, but even that is blurred by her force of character.

She is a sceptic, not a cynic. She, like her mom, questions things. Questions, questions. The writer's motif. Her moxie? That she just keeps it moving. Scepticism, after all, is a virtue. Cynicism is a vice. When she speaks about the things that make her heart sing, you get the impression of a bubbly lover with her healing water and kooky science, playing with toys she knows everything about. But she has a certain toughness about her; too, more artist than artisan, holding herself to lofty standards, torn between worlds but always showing up to keep it moving and make the tough decisions because life, ultimately, is a havoc of choices.

Choices made her as much as she made her choices. From an early age, she was teetering between being a pilot and a writer. Words won. Words condemned her and she had little choice but to submit to her sentences. Her book is still flying off the shelf – literally and figuratively – and has recently been translated into Arabic.

But it is Book Bunk that has become an article of faith, a reference point, the Rosetta stone, unquestioned and unquestionable. The international press has rolled out the red carpet for it, with features in the *Financial Times*, *CNN* and *Publishing Perspectives*. She and her parabat, Angela Wachuka (one of Kenya's leading



The book cover of 'The Havoc of Choice' by Wanjiru Koinange.

ONE FOR THE BOOKS

READING CULTURE: The international press has rolled out the red carpet for Book Bunk, a library restoration project, with features in the *Financial Times*, *CNN* and *Publishing Perspectives*

publishers of African literature and former Executive Director of Kwani Trust), co-founded Book Bunk in October 2017. In 2020, during the pandemic, they went a step further to co-found a publishing company, Bunk Books, and so far have published two books: Koinange's debut novel and a children's book, *Sulwe*, written by Kenyan actress Lupita Nyong'o and illustrated by Vashiti Harrison.

For all her outlier qualities, Koinange also embodies the zeitgeist of this liminal age. Despite her magic dust, she prefers lurking in the shadows to hogging the limelight. Their biggest achievement, she says, is providing proof of concept for Book Bunk.

"We didn't know that it was going to work because it hasn't been done before. So we started out with a small library to test it and scale as we grow. Now we have spaces that are centred around the user."

The McMillan Library is Book Bunk's third library restoration project following runaway success with the Eastlands Library in eastern Nairobi and the more central Kaloleni Library. Book Bunk initially spent months on a reconnaissance mission, finding out the services that local communities desired most. Wi-Fi, updated bathrooms, extended opening hours, community spaces and fun activities topped the list. Book Bunk did not stop there, adding a feather to their hat by transforming libraries into spaces for events that encourage thought and celebrate writing, including hosting the Nairobi Literature Festival.

They are now working to digitise books and archival content like periodicals that will make access to his-

tory a click away. This forces me to ask, is it true that people are abandoning print for e-books? "That shift isn't as big as we think it is. During the pandemic, millennials were reading 25 per cent more than their predecessors. Now, people are picking up books as an escape from screen time." She says her print edition has done even better than e-books. People who love to read love books. E-books are here to supplement rather than supplant print books.

Koinange was raised on a farm on the outskirts of Nairobi with her four siblings. She



Wanjiru Koinange, author of 'The Havoc of Choice'.



The refurbished Eastlands Library. It was supported by the Book Bunk. PHOTO | POOL



The refurbished Kaloleni Library.



The Eastlands Library. PHOTO | POOL

boasts a Bachelor's degree in Journalism and Literature from the United States International University-Africa to complement her Masters in Creative Writing from the University of Cape Town.

Is writing something she stumbled upon? "I went back and forth between being a pilot and a writer. I wanted to write but then I didn't see many rich Kenyans making a living from this craft. I wanted to write but I also wanted to live a successful life. But I knew early that I was a better communicator with my words."

She recalls all the submissions she sent and all the rejections (and unanswered e-mails) that served as beacons in her journey. "It's only when I began to read African authors who moved me that I began to consider this as a successful career. I can never imagine a world where I am surrounded by anything other than words." She predominantly writes for Kenyans. Kenyans, she notes, fascinate her, and her objective is to paint a picture with words that they can see themselves in.

What words from one story would best summarise her life? "Does it have to be one? (laughs). I think the kind of writing that chronicles people and their lives. I am really interested in reality TV and my favourite thing is to sit in cafes and watch people do their thing, then try to figure out the details outside their actions."

"I really enjoy Sauti Sol's music, how they have grown as men through their music. And Chimamanda (Ngozi Adichie). How can we use our lived experience to connect to people? Any story that sits in that category is what I would pick off the shelf to summarise myself"

Logic dictates, but logic also overlooks the weird, intangible voodoo of what Koinange's story already has: the natural talent, the inef-fable personality, the way everything seems

to have evolved out of some perfect tessella-tion of strengths. She seems so well put togeth-er that I can't help but wonder when she was most unsettled in her life?

"I think I am very unsettled now because I am in the middle of two writing projects and I have to trust the process. I know in my heart that it must be the hardest thing for any writer to write a second book. That's true for Book Bunk as well. The pressure to follow through and do more is bigger than before."

The last time she felt this way was in 2010. Her father had just passed away and conse-quently she moved to South Africa. "I hope I don't move to South Africa now," she chuckles. "I have a team that depends on me."

The said team is Book Bunk's 30-strong work-force. "I have a lot of grace for artists because I understand how hard it is to create something and not pour your soul into it."

She acknowledges her mother as a source of

BOOK BUNK ACHIEVEMENTS

Its responsibilities include sourcing and man-agement of fiscal and other support; steering and management of architectural restoration, and management of the public library spaces including design and delivery of program-ming.

It restored the McMillan Memorial Library on Banda Street, Eastlands Library in Makadara, and Kaloleni Library.

McMillan Memorial Library is the city's oldest library. Built in 1931, only white European colon-isers were allowed to enter the space for the next three decades. Wachuka and Koinange, along with 30 interns, worked over a period of nine months to catalogue 137,705 books.

Book Bunk relies on donors and partnerships to fund its projects and has a dedicated staff of paid and volunteer workers.

inspiration. "She is fierce; she fights every bat-tle worth fighting. She's probably had more run-ins with the cops than all her descendants. My mother questions everything. Why does it have to be this way and not that way?" If the apple did not fall too far from the tree, what is she herself questioning? "Visibility. I am no but-terfly; I am more of a light-avoiding moth. I really wish there was a course at the university about publicity. I understand its value, but it really often feels like a distraction to me."

But leadership demands that you show up. That you must be visible, or if you are into lo-cal parlance, 'you must be seen'. Unlike Wachu-ka, her co-founder, Koinange was thrust into leadership. She has had to learn on the job and speaks wistfully of the struggles she has had in steering Book Bunk.

"For every grant and proposal we write, fund-ing and paying people are always a hard task. If we don't take care of our people then what are we doing? A lot in this industry is funded by grants and it's always a struggle to raise mon-ey to pay employees well because funders have this percentage salary cap, between 10 and 15 per cent." "And," she adds, "policies. I wish the government would fund libraries better. If they can't, they should step out of the way."

Book Bunk, it should be noted, formalised a partnership with the Nairobi County govern-ment giving the firm the mandate to revamp public library spaces in March 2018. The sheen of their success has proved to be no flash in the pan. What then, would she say, does the fu-ture look like? "For Book Bunk, it is to restore more libraries. On a personal level, it is to get to a point where I can write half the time, and the other half do things that interest me." She says by the tenth year, (Book Bunk is five) they want to hand over Book Bunk to other people.

"My ambitions at Book Bunk have happened at the expense of my writing," she says. "I need immersive time to produce good work." The success of her debut novel does not seem to fluster her, and she remains noticeably un-touched by the tabloid drama, or whiff of over-exposure, which can engulf even seasoned ce-lebrities. She tells me that this year she took two months off to write. Have things turned out the way she expected in her late thirties?

"Yes and no. I am a background artist; I be-lieve the work is important but I don't believe who does the work is important."

"At Book Bunk, we don't subscribe to the 'Starving Artist' image. We want people to ap-preciate the art and not focus on the strug-gle." That's why to her, money is energy. It is a key that unlocks people, and projects. I respect money, she says, but I don't give it all the cred-it. "I am smart, not lucky," she says. "I rely on my intuition, which is my north star."

If there was a line in any book that she would like to steal, what would it be? "In Binyavanga Wainaina's Memoir (*One day I Will Write About This Place*) he says (paraphrasing) that we fail to recognise what we are from the beginning." In that light, she never makes any decisions for future Wanjiru Koinange who, she says, will have her own dreams, her own ambitions.

It's hard to not get the feeling that even when Koinange is restoring libraries, surrounded by other people's stories, perhaps the most inter-esting story remains her own.

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URBAN CULTURE

CENTS OF STYLE

CELEBRITY STYLIST: A new generation of fashion stylists is cashing in on the growing popular trend of streetwear through creation of unique, hand-made, custom-fitted haute couture designs

● BY SINDA MATIKO

Nothing in nature is by chance. Things only appear to be by chance because of lack of knowledge. Every day, our history is written on paper and in our thoughts but somehow, without our knowledge, our origins and culture can be lost in translation.

Now more than ever, there seems to be the rise of a generation keen to preserve culture in whatever way it can – if not in music, then in language or fashion. A cocktail of all these has led to the rise of an urban culture, with fashion seemingly dictating the pace.

“In Kenya, there has never been a unified approach to what we consider to be our fashion. That’s why some of us are setting out to represent our history and culture in fashion and style,” explains Brian Msafiri, 29, a renowned stylist in Nairobi.

You might have seen the return of baggy pants, crop tops, big shirts, puffer jackets, sneakers, leggings, hoodies and weird hairdos that were fashionable in the ‘70s and ‘80s but are currently perceived as unconventional. Interestingly though, this streetwear, as it is known, is turning out to be a best seller with the creation of unique hand-made, custom-fitted haute couture designs.

With the cultivation of this urban culture, the local fashion industry has become a melting point of opportunity. Already, the styling business is gaining momentum and fashion pop-ups are on the rise across the country’s major cities.

“Starting out, I didn’t see styling as a job; I did it for free because I didn’t know how the business works,” says Msafiri. “Camp Mullah were the first celebrities I styled for the Channel O Awards in 2012, and later I did it for Sauti Sol’s music videos. That’s when I realised I could make money.”

Having figured that out, Msafiri won his first paying gig when he styled rapper Muthoni Ndonga, alias Muthoni the Drummer Queen, and singer Blinky Bill. He styled various music bands then ventured into commercials, which brought in even bigger pay checks.

His work styling celebrities attracted corporates, which now hire his services to bring their brand cultures to life through fashion. “Right now I know what value I am bringing to the table and stand by it. For a commercial gig, on minimum I charge Sh50,000 per day,” Msafiri reveals.

The rate card is reviewed upwards depend-



A model poses with Nairobi Apparel District streetwear. The store focuses on sustainable fashion and sells its items out of Kenya.

ing on the number of people to be styled. Having understood the business, arriving at a certain amount isn’t rocket science anymore. “You map out the cost of production, which is how much the items needed will cost you, value of your time and your expertise, then connect it to who the client is, where he or she be appearing and how long the gig is.”

Celebrity stylist Melina Gold, whose focus is on luxury service, fully agrees. “Yes there is money in styling; you just need to be smart about it and figure out how to position yourself. Mine is a luxury brand and the money is good, though not many people understand what styling is all about. Still, the industry is growing.”

The 24-year-old has been styling comedian Eric Omondi and has also made money out of commercials. She drops the names of brands like Delmonte, Jumia and Mwananchi Credit.

“Ooh! I just remembered this commercial I did for Spotify featuring Buruklyn Boyz. It’s my best so far; the ‘paper’ was good. But generally, I narrowed my niche to celebrities and public figures because that’s where I noticed a gap.”

Somewhere in Kilimani estate in Nairobi, a streetwear collective dubbed Studio 18 hides within the capital’s concrete jungle. This creative space serves as the office, workshop and chill spot of four fashion entrepreneurs behind Nairobi’s popular streetwear brands — Metamorphised, Nairobi Apparel District (NAD) and Akiba Studios.

Since the studio’s inception in April last year, these young designers, all in their mid-twenties, have hosted and dressed names such as Sauti Sol, Ms Karun, Steph Kapela, Fena Gitu and British afro swig collective NSG, and collaborated with brands like Google and Jagermeister.

“A couple of years ago, streetwear stalls opened up around the city with clothing from Europe and China. None of these stores stocked Kenyan-made garments. United by our mutual love for streetwear and sustainability, we decided to see if we could cultivate a society-based approach to Kenyan fashion,” explains Daudi Junior Orina, the brains behind Metamorphised.

Evans Njenga, who founded NAD, skilfully sources garments from city markets such as Gikomba, where the majority of 140,000 tonnes of used clothing imported every year from Europe, US and Canada, end up.

“Thrifting seems easy but you have to know where to source the garments. It’s a skill that

The new generation is doing it by holding their own fashion shows, setting up e-commerce pages on social media, opening shops and setting up pop-up stores, as was the case with Thrift Social.

Brian Msafiri



Nation Media



Brian Msafiri is a fashion director and stylist. PHOTO | POOL



A model poses with Nairobi Apparel District streetwear. PHOTO | POOL

I've been mastering for a couple of years," Njenga, opens up about the NAD brand, known for its cutting-edge, customised outfits, particularly denims. At the studio, the thrifted denim is deconstructed, fashioned by a canvas and hand-painted to give it a unique touch, creating limited editions. The customised pieces are sold at a price range of between Sh2,400 to Sh3,600 and often sell out in days.

Studio 18 also sets up monthly pop-up stores in different spaces in Nairobi, adding to their cultural currency.

At these events, each brand showcases a new collection. "For a long time, what was lacking was understanding of the business, how to monetise it as a feasible source of income. The new generation is doing it by holding their own fashion shows, setting up e-commerce pages on social media, opening shops and setting up pop-up stores, as was the case with

Thrift Social," says Msafiri.

In a country where the urban youth aged 16-24 spend over Sh64 billion annually on clothes, according to a report by marketing research firm Youth Dynamix, Msafiri sees this space as an opportunity that is under-exploited.

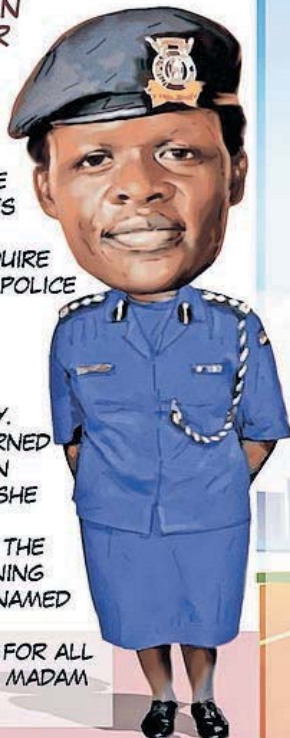
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WOMAN POWER

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DR RESILA ATIENO ONYANGO IS A WOMAN OF MANY FIRSTS. LATE LAST YEAR, SHE MADE HEADLINES WHEN SHE BECAME THE FIRST FEMALE POLICE OFFICER TO ACQUIRE A DOCTORATE IN THE NATIONAL POLICE SERVICE'S HISTORY. NOW SHE HAS MADE HEADLINES YET AGAIN AFTER BEING NAMED THE FIRST FEMALE POLICE SPOKESPERSON IN THE COUNTRY. THE SENIOR POLICE OFFICER EARNED HER FIRST DEGREE IN EDUCATION FROM MOI UNIVERSITY BEFORE SHE JOINED THE NPS IN 2003. DURING HER GRADUATION FROM THE NATIONAL POLICE SERVICE TRAINING CAMPUS IN KIGANJO, SHE WAS NAMED THE BEST FEMALE RECRUIT. WE TAKE OUR HATS OFF TO YOU FOR ALL THAT YOU HAVE ACCOMPLISHED, MADAM SPOKESPERSON



STAR OF THE WEEK

NEWLY CROWNED NEW YORK CITY MARATHON CHAMPION EVANS CHEBET SAYS A POOR PERFORMANCE IN THE SAME EVENT FOUR YEARS AGO IS WHAT SPURRED HIM TO VICTORY THIS TIME ROUND. THE BOSTON MARATHON CHAMPION DID NOT FINISH THE RACE IN 2018 AND WAS ELATED TO HAVE REDEEMED HIMSELF WITH HIS SECOND WORLD MARATHON MAJORS WIN IN A YEAR. "IN 2018, I WAS HERE BUT WAS UNABLE TO FINISH. AT THE 29KM MARK, I GOT TIRED AND QUIT THE RACE. THAT I RETURNED HERE TO NEW YORK AND WON THE RACE IS A BIG IMPROVEMENT AND COMMENDABLE EFFORT THAT CALLS FOR CELEBRATION. I AM SO DELIGHTED," CHEBET SAID. WE TOTALLY AGREE WITH YOU, CHAMP!



opinion



■ The President will be retained or rejected in 2027 on account of his record

Kenya doesn't need a life president

Mr Johnston Muthama, the chairman of the United Democratic Alliance, sensationally prophesied last month that President Ruto would be elected unopposed in 2027. He said Ruto would perform beyond the expectations of Kenyans who, in wholesome appreciation, would refuse to subject him to the indignity of vote-seeking.

Last week, Fafi MP Salah Yakub, also a member of UDA, crawled out of the woodworks to argue that the two-term limit on presidential tenure should be removed, via a change to the Constitution, to allow a successful president to run for re-election until he or she is 75.

Put another way, Yakub was saying that the President is only 55 years young and therefore good to lead for the next 20 years. And, Yakub was saying, what is standing in the way of the coming great performance of Ruto is the constitutional two-term limit on presidential tenure. Therefore, get rid of the presidential term limit and the President will do wonders.

Muthama quickly denied Yakub's unprovoked, yet provocative intention to launch an assault on the Constitution, did not have the blessing of UDA. What is the difference between Muthama's prophecy of the President's success, made even before a Cabinet was named, and Yakub's prediction of his successful delivery?

It is that Muthama reckons that, impressed by the President's overwhelming performance, Kenyans would move to protect the goose that



**KWENDO
OPANGA**

lays the golden egg by fiercely guarding the nest, while Yakub, sure the goose will lay the golden egg, proposes that MPs, Kenya's elected representatives, move to give the goose a longer lifespan.

Muthama's and Yakub's utterances are a test balloon floated by UDA on behalf of the President. Strictly speaking, the prophecy that inspires Yakub's powers of thinking should be directed towards the execution and delivery of Kenya Kwanza's 2022 campaign pledges and not the 2032 presidential poll.

Muthama should ensure the UDA platform is being implemented and low-hanging fruits are picked this early and trumpeted as signs that the UDA train is going to check into all the stations on time, with passengers safe and sound and cargo intact until Terminus August 2027. Then the passenger and cargo manifests will tell the story of safety, reliability and believability.

An old English saying advises that the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Kenyans have just served themselves, or have been served by Mrs Martha Koome, an electoral pudding.

However, before they can begin to eat it, they are being told it is made of the best ingredients found in Kenya, so they should be careful not to eat the plate as well, sweetened as it is by the pudding.

Please, Muthama, let us eat the cake and then we will advise whether, in fact, it was worth the plate on which it was served. Please, Yakub, first listen to yourself. Don't tell us we should not have let President Kibaki go in 2013 because he was a progressive leader, and at the same time tell us presidents should not be above 75 years of age.

UDA should be addressing the cost of living because it was said a long time ago that a hungry man is an angry man. And somebody needs to remind UDA, Muthama and Yakub that their thinking about 2032 polls when Kenyans and their livestock are dying of hunger and thirst in 2022 is obscene and as tone deaf as it gets.

The President will be retained or rejected in 2027 on account of his record of service and not UDA's plan to create a life presidency.

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opinion

■ Many leading economies have failed to allocate 10pc of national budgets to agriculture

The 'Africa Rising' narrative: Myth or reality?



ALEXANDER
OWINO

At the turn of the Millennium, scare stories were swirling around of computers going to crash from the so-called millennium bug. In the middle of 2000, a quiet narrative was born which, even for those tumultuous times, kicked off a veritable storm.

This was the narrative of Africa as a hopeless continent wallowing in poverty, ignorance and disease – and racked by endless and senseless wars. Within a decade by 2011, this doomsday narrative was dramatically turned on its head.

A chorus of Africa Rising narratives promptly broke out among Africa's "development partners". Respected institutions joined in to chant the new mantra (really!) of a prosperous Africa in our times, bravely proclaiming Africa as the world's next economic powerhouse.

In 2013, the narrative had morphed into the hopeful continent, represented typically by pictures of a smiling *mama mboga*.

Development finance institutions piled in to tout the new mantra with statements like "10 of the 15 fastest growing economies in the world are in Africa" or local variations like "Kenya is among the five or six fastest growing economies in the world".

A leading consultancy weighed in with its variation on the same theme in landmark reports on Africa's "Lions on the Move".

The Africa Rising narrative came in handy in explaining that Africa is, indeed, "catching up" by growing rapidly, and that Africa is "on the right track" and will soon "catch up" with the high per capita income levels of the "Tiger" economies of East Asia and ASEAN.

Kenya's economic trajectory from near-zero around 2000-2003 to fast-paced economic growth that peaked at around eight per cent under the Kibaki administration was a powerful example of the Africa Rising narrative.

Sadly, the Africa Rising narrative remained largely a myth as it had no relationship to the lives and livelihoods of ordinary citizens on the ground. Most of Africa's leading economies have not grown fast or fast enough when measured in absolute per capita income terms or relative to per capita income levels in developed countries.

And neither are per capita incomes converging to advanced country incomes as economic growth in Africa has remained far too low for far too long.

Kenya, for example, has not sustained annu-

al economic growth rates of 8-12 per cent that it would need to outpace its high population growth rates of 3-4 per cent and "catch-up" to advanced country incomes.

Africa's growth tragedy

Africa and Kenya's failure to grow fast-for-long begins with the failure to execute meaningful structural transformation. A farm-to-factory structural transformation would shift labour currently employed or "locked" in low productivity agriculture and informal sector "hustles" to manufacturing and services.

The share of Africa's labour force employed in subsistence agriculture and rural, extractive activities at 60-80 per cent remains much higher than levels in advanced country levels of two to six per cent. This is now a binding constraint to rising incomes and increasing productivity on the continent.

To illustrate in simple terms a high share of employment in low-productivity agricultural, rural and extractive activities means that, on average, four farmers in Africa are "tied down" in producing barely enough food to feed themselves and one more (non-farming) person. This has resulted in the grim reality of the continent being a net food importer to the tune of US\$35 billion annually.

Africa's leading economies, including Kenya, have consistently failed to allocate 10 per cent of national budgets to agriculture under the Maputo and Malabo Commitments they signed up to. The result is decades of under-investment in agriculture and stagnant or declining agricultural productivity for Africa's key grain crops (per acre and per unit of labour employed).

That failure in turn hinders structural transformation – shifting of resources to higher value-adding manufacturing and services to raise productivity and incomes. Structural transformation requires significant domestic investments, especially in agriculture, that can only be sustainably funded by high levels of domestic savings. Most African countries, includ-

ing Kenya, lack the high levels of domestic savings that the East Asian "miracle" economies mobilised to fund high levels of domestic investments.

A low-productivity informal sector comprising of street hawkers, *mama mbogas* and *bodaboda* riders is common in virtually all African economies. These informal sector workers are forced by circumstances to eke out a living on the periphery of urban areas and in unplanned settlements (slums).

Worryingly, the low-productivity informal sector increasingly includes young, educated and tech-savvy Africans who, through no fault of their own, cannot get formal sector jobs commensurate with their skills and education, as there are simply none.

This is Africa's ticking demographic time bomb, which is aggravated by high income and wealth inequalities and inequities that rank amongst the highest in the world.

Africa cannot rise while de-industrialising. Most African countries, including Kenya, profess the intent to industrialise and aim to increase the share of manufacturing in GDP to 15 per cent as a critical pillar of rising incomes and productivity.

A few go a step further and seek to raise the share of manufactured (and high-tech) exports in relation to total exports. By comparison, the rapidly industrialising Tiger economies of East Asia, in their high growth phase, raised the share of manufacturing in GDP to as high as 30 per cent to 40 per cent. Africa's leading economies are not industrialising but are moving in the opposite direction of rapidly de-industrialisation. The share of manufacturing in GDP in Kenya has declined steadily to 7.5 per cent from 12.5 per cent a decade ago.

The Africa Rising narrative needs to be buried in the "Alternate African Reality" (Metaverse, maybe?) that it purports to describe. Meanwhile, a new narrative tied to Africa's abundant mineral resources that are critical to the global energy transition has been born – a new scramble for Africa. It all sounds eerily familiar.

Mr Owino was a joint secretary to the Presidential Taskforce on Parastatal Reforms, and also Parastatal Reforms Implementation Committee (2013-2014)

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Kenya's economic trajectory from near zero economic growth around 2000-2003 to fast-paced economic growth that peaked at around eight per cent under the Kibaki Administration was a powerful example of the Africa Rising narrative.

kenya lens

■ REGIONAL POLITICS

BY JOSEPH MBOYA

Three major events that took place last week — the naming of principal secretary nominees to run the Kenya Kwanza administration, the call by a section of politicians led by former Nairobi Governor Evans Kidero for ODM leader Raila Odinga to quit active politics, and the launch of a maize flour brand by the Homa Bay county government — had a major bearing on and sparked a fierce debate about the political future of Luo Nyanza.

First, the naming of the PS nominees was the talk of town. A good number of commentators in conversations and social media had different views on the appointments. There were those who felt that the Luo Nation had been handed the short end of the stick by President William Ruto's administration by getting only two slots.

The slots were for the Interior and Coordination of National Government, which went to Raymond Omollo, while Alfred K'Ombudo who was named PS for Trade. It is interesting that people from the region felt short-changed by Ruto yet they overwhelmingly voted for Odinga in the August 9 polls.

What these people fail to realise is the fact that ours being winner-take-all politics, Ruto had no obligation whatsoever to appoint to his government anyone from areas that did not give him substantial votes.

It was perhaps to create a government that mirrored the face of Kenya, or just personal considerations, that the two were allowed into government.

According to those in the know, Omollo, who had been serving as the boss at the Lake Basin Development Authority, stood firm against the wave that saw senior government officials back the Azimio la Umoja bandwagon in the period, leading up to the elections.

He is said to have been a key supporter of the UDA leader in very hostile territory and for his troubles, he bagged the powerful docket. In their excitement, some of Omollo's admirers have hacked back to the days when another Luo, the late Hezekiah Oyugi, wielded great power sitting on the same seat.

Known as '*kalam maduong* (Powerful Pen)' by his admirers, Oyugi was a power unto himself, giving jobs to fawning fans at whim and using his office to make serious policy decisions to favour his native South Nyanza district (now split into Homa Bay and Migori counties).

But his supporters must realise that Omollo will be operating in an environment where the President is more in charge. Not forgetting the fact that, unlike Oyugi, who 'reigned' at a time when Kenya was a single party state and the word of the President and those close to him was the law, Omollo will be discharging his duties to a politically literate population who will run to court at the slightest hint of a breach of the law. On the other hand, K'Ombu-

RESTLESS WATERS

Recent events spark fierce debate about the political and economic future of Luo Nyanza



Kenya's first Vice President Jaramogi Oginga Odinga. PHOTO | FILE

kenya lens

2027

It is a call borne by the argument that, at 77, Odinga is at an age where he should call it quits from active politics. The argument gathers more weight when looked at against the milieu that, when the next polls are held in 2027, Odinga will be 82

do, who boasts a spectacular CV, is said to have been a key member of Ruto's economic advisory team, which created the bottoms-up economic model that the President sold at all the campaign rallies he addressed when canvassing for the highest office in the land.

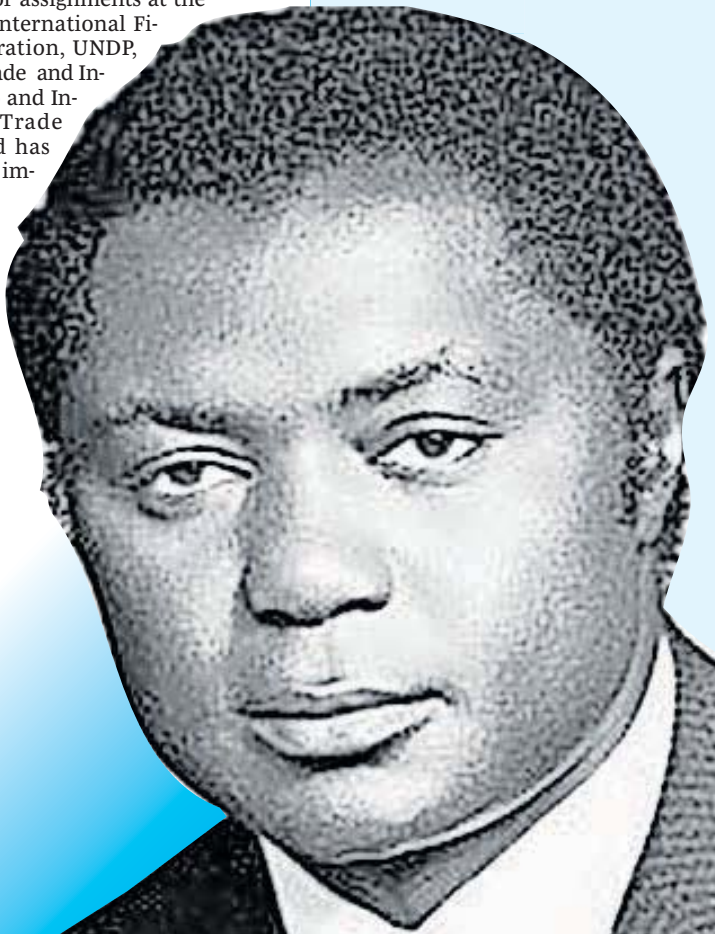
The son of long-serving Nyakach MP Ojwang' K'Ombudo has had an interesting career that saw him work at the International Trade Centre. His bio on LinkedIn mentions that he "is a multi-award winning advisor of African governments offering solutions to the most complex development challenges they face, and has experience in over 14 African countries. Through senior assignments at the World Bank, International Finance Corporation, UNDP, East Africa Trade and Investment Hub and International Trade Centre, Alfred has designed and implemented ground-breaking economic development, trade and in-



Homa Bay Governor Gladys Wanga



Former Nairobi Governor Evans Kidero



There is a narrative being driven that the group calling for Raila Odinga to quit politics is pushing for a South Nyanza-North Nyanza divide in Luo politics, a throwback to the 1960s, when Tom Mboya, who hailed from the present-day Homa Bay County, was a counterweight to Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, who was from present-day Siaya County.

According to those in the know, Omollo, who had been serving as the boss at the Lake Basin Development Authority, stood firm against the wave that saw senior government officials back the Azimio la Umoja bandwagon in the period, leading up to the elections. He is said to have been a key supporter of the UDA leader in very hostile territory and for his troubles, he bagged the powerful docket. In their excitement, some of Omollo's admirers have hacked back to the days when another Luo, the late Hezekiah Oyugi, wielded great power sitting on the same seat.

vestment projects."

On to Kidero and his associates with their call for Odinga to leave and create space for others: Ever since he lost to Ruto in the August 9 presidential poll, Odinga has heard this chorus almost on a daily basis. And it is a sticking point among his supporters, the majority of whom are from Luo Nyanza.

It is a call borne by the argument that, at 77, Odinga is at an age where he should call it quits from active politics.

The argument gathers more weight when looked at against the milieu that, when the next polls are held in 2027, Odinga will be 82.

There is a narrative being driven that the group calling for Odinga to quit politics is pushing for a South Nyanza-North Nyanza divide in Luo politics, a throwback to the 1960s, when Tom Mboya, who hailed from the present-day Homa Bay County, was a counterweight to Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, who was from present-day Siaya County. Those in this camp accuse Kidero, who is also Mboya's son-in-law, of being behind the scheme.

The reality is that, come 2027, if he chooses to run, Raila will have a Herculean task in trying to turn the tables on Ruto.

With the support of the system of the day, he lost to Ruto in this year's polls. With Ruto having the benefit of incumbency in the next elections, it will be a miracle if Odinga gets past him to bag the prize that has eluded him five times in the past — the presidency.

Finally, Homa Bay Governor Gladys Wanga recently launched a maize flour brand known as 'Mokwa' (our flour), creating a buzz with the presence of Odinga at the launch.

Many believe that the counties of Luo Nyanza should explore ways of exploiting local resources to build industries that will not only provide employment but also contribute to the general economic empowerment of the region.

It is a sad fact that more than 10 years into devolution, not a single county in the resource-rich region has put up an industry that can stand out for its contribution to the wellbeing of the residents.

This initiative by Wanga should inspire some healthy sibling rivalry among the governors of Siaya, Kisumu and Migori, the other counties making up Luo Nyanza.

SCIENCE & TECH

Nile in mortal danger, from source to sea



Jowali Kitagenda, 40, fishing on River Nile in Jinja, on October 7.

The pharaohs worshipped it as a god, the eternal bringer of life. But the clock is ticking on the Nile.

Human-driven climate change, pollution and exploitation are putting existential pressure on the world's second-longest river, which half a billion people depend on for survival. All along its 6,500-kilometre length, alarm bells are ringing. From Egypt to Uganda, AFP teams have gone out on the ground to gauge the decline of a river that drains a tenth of the African continent.

At its mouth on the Mediterranean, Sayed Mohammed is watching Egypt's fertile Nile Delta disappear. In Sudan, fellow farmer Mohammed Jomaa fears for his harvests, while at its threatened source in Uganda, there is less and less hydroelectric power for Christine Nalwadda Kalema to light her mud and wattle home.

"The Nile is the most important thing for us," said Jomaa, who at 17 is the latest generation of his family to work the river's rich banks at Alty in Gezira state.

But the Nile is no longer the unperturbable river of myth. In half a century its flow has dropped from 3,000 cubic metres per second to 2,830 cubic metres. Yet it could get much, much worse. With multiple droughts in east Africa, its flow could fall by 70 per cent, according to the United Nations' most dire predictions. Every year for the past six decades, the Mediterranean has eaten away between 35 and 75 metres of the Nile Delta. If the sea level rises even by a metre, a third of this intensely fertile region could disappear, the UN fears, forcing nine million people from their homes.

NOW TWITTER USERS JUMP TO MASTODON



Elon Musk took control of Twitter and fired its top executives, hours before the deadline for the billionaire to seal his on-again, off-again deal to purchase the social media network.

LONDON

In the wake of Elon Musk's takeover of Twitter, some users have been seeking alternative platforms. One of the biggest beneficiaries has been Mastodon. But what is it?

The social network says it now has over 655,000 users — with over 230,000 having joined in the last week. On the surface Mastodon looks like Twitter — account users write posts (called "toots"), which can be replied to, liked and re-posted, and they can follow each other.

Under the bonnet, though, it works in a different way.

That's one of the reasons it is attracting fresh users, but it has caused some confusion to new people signing up. The platform is six years old but its current activity is unprecedented and it is struggling under the weight of new joiners.

What are all these servers?

The first thing you have to do when you sign up is choose a server. There are loads of them. They are themed — many by country, city or interest — like UK, social, technology, gaming

and so on. It doesn't hugely matter which one you are on because you will be able to follow users on all the others anyway, but it does give you a starting community who are more likely to post things you are interested in as well.

Some of the popular ones — such as social and UK — are currently running very slowly because of demand. Ryan Wild, who is running the MastodonApp.UK server via his firm Superior Networks, said he had over 6,000 new joiners in 24 hours and had to pause registration.

"I wanted to see what the hype was about," he said. "I stood the server up at 10pm Friday night, and I woke up next morning to 1,000 people I didn't know would rock up."

How do you find people?

Unlike Twitter, Mastodon won't suggest followers you may be interested in. You can also search hashtags. The original founder of Twitter, Jack Dorsey, is working on a new network called BlueSky, by the way — and he has said he wants that to be decentralised too.

How is it moderated?

This is a real hot potato. At the moment, all the servers have their own moderation rules, and some have none. Some servers are choosing not to link to others that are full of bots or seem to have a high quantity of hateful content; this means they will not be visible to those on the servers where they are blocked. Posts can also be reported to the server owners.

If it's hate speech or illegal content then those owners can delete it — but that does not necessarily delete it everywhere.

It's going to be a huge issue if this platform continues to grow.

There are already reports of people being targeted by hateful content and the BBC has seen examples of homophobic abuse.

Are there any ads?

No. There are no ads although there's also nothing to stop you writing a post promoting your company or product. Mastodon also doesn't offer a curated experience like Twitter does in terms of how you view posts — you generally see what your followers are saying, as they say it.

africa lens

■ CLIMATE CHANGE SUMMIT RAISES PRESIDENT'S PROFILE

THE SISI COMMAND



Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi

Since taking power in 2013, the general has faced accusations of presiding over what some international human rights organisations have described as the ‘worst clampdown on human rights in the country’s modern history’

● BY LEVIN OPIYO

The COP 27 summit in Egypt has provided a platform for President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to bolster his international image amid concerns about his government’s human rights record.

The summit, whose top agenda is to help four billion people adapt to climate change by 2030, is being attended by world leaders, most of whom have embraced el-Sisi despite his heavy handedness.

Even though British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and US President Joe Biden had earlier expressed their intentions of raising hu-

man rights issues with Sisi, nothing more than lip service could be expected from them. In fact, their concerns were mainly about the citizens of their countries detained in Egypt on trumped-up charges.

This is even as UN human rights expert and advocates of free speech continue to raise concerns about draconian measures introduced prior to the summit by the Egyptian government to prevent demonstrators and protesters coming anywhere close to the resort city of Sharm el-Sheikh, where the leaders and delegates are meeting.

Since taking power in 2013, el-Sisi, a military general-turned-politician, has faced accusations of presiding over what some inter-

national human rights organisations have described as the “worst clampdown on human rights in the country’s modern history”.

According to Humans Rights Watch in its Middle East-North Africa report, el-Sisi’s government has imprisoned tens of thousands of government critics, including journalists, peaceful activists and human rights defenders on abusive “terrorism charges”.

However, the Egyptian government has often defended itself against these accusations by emphasising that extraordinary measures were needed in order to defeat terrorism. The truth is that the while el-Sisi deserves a pat on

...Continued on Page 26

africa lens

Continued from Page 25

the back for eliminating most terrorist groups that were thriving in Egypt, he has also been using the fight against terrorism as a cover to crack down on dissidents and critics.

The cover of fighting terrorism does not only offer his administration a defence line against human rights accusations levelled against it, but also endears it to the US and European countries, whose pursuit of strategic interests in the Middle East supersede the demand for human rights.

Early this year, in the run-up to the European Union-African Union summit in Brussels, Amnesty International warned Europe leaders that they risked legitimising el-Sisi's crack-down on human rights if they only concerned themselves with their countries' interests.

"EU leaders must not offer him an opportunity to whitewash Egypt's deeply repressive policies," said Eve Geddie, Director of Amnesty International's EU office. "By continuing to pursue business-as-usual relations with Egypt, the EU risks undermining its own credibility."

US leaders, in particular, have been the coziest with el-Sisi. At the tail end of his presidency, Donald Trump, while hosting el-Sisi at the White House, described the Egyptian leader as a "great president, doing a great job" also pointing out that "we've never had a better relationship than we do right now". This was happening at a time when 12 Americans were languishing in Egyptian jails on what US law makers described as "dubious charges".

A couple of months later, while waiting to meet Sisi at Hotel du Palais during the G7 summit in France, Trump left everyone dumb-

Cop27 gives Egyptian president political capital

founded when he shouted: "Where is my favourite dictator?" Although the remarks were made in jest, they highlighted Trump's apparent ease with the Egyptian leader.

Joe Biden, who by then was campaigning to become US president on a Democratic Party ticket, was so irked by the Trump-el-Sisi "strategic bromance" that when Mohamed Amashah, an American citizen of Egyptian ancestry, was released from an Egyptian prison, he wrote a tweet chiding the friendship and el-Sisi's brutality. "No more blank checks for Trump's favourite dictator. Arresting, torturing, and exiling activists or threatening their families is unacceptable," he tweeted.

Even though el-Sisi was the first Arab leader to congratulate Biden when he won the election, his government was in great panic over the ramification of a Biden presidency on Egypt-US relations, especially in view of his stand on human rights.

"Egyptian officials have always rejected discussions about human rights," said Egyptian

journalist Khalid al-Balshi. "They therefore view anyone who raises these issues as an enemy of the Egyptian government."

El-Sisi's government was so anxious that it hired a top US lobby firm to help improve the relations and build its image before Biden's administration. But as Biden settled in the White House, his firm stand on el-Sisi's administration melted as he began getting cozy with the Egyptian strongman.

This drew condemnation from critics who accused him of being about-faced. "The Biden administration frequently proclaims it is placing human rights and democracy at the centre of US foreign policy yet it has disgracefully chosen to cosy up to vicious dictator Abdel Fattah," said Washington-based think tank Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED).

The prioritisation of strategic interests over human rights by the Biden administration is further underscored by the enormous military aid it has been giving to the Egyptian government. Last year alone it gave Egypt military aid worth \$1.1 billion, but tried to save face by withholding a meagre \$225 million for what it described as human rights concerns.

According to Mohamad Elmasry, an associate professor of media studies at Doha Institute of Graduate Studies, this aid serves as a green light for el-Sisi to continue with his crackdown on human rights activists.

So why do world powers, especially the US, appear measured in their dealings with Egypt?

The answer lies in remarks made by Dalia Youssef, an Egyptian parliamentary and a stauncher supporter of el-Sisi, who stated: "It is difficult for any American president to overlook Egypt. The US cannot protect its interests in the region in the absence of a strong ally like Egypt."

Some of the main reasons that make Egypt of great strategic importance is that it controls the Suez Canal, one of the world's most important waterways, and also it is one of two stable and friendly countries that share a border with Israel. As a result, US greatly relies on it for the stability of the Middle East and the security of Israel.

For instance, Egypt has always given US military vessels preferential passage through the Suez, and war planes access to its airspace. This is part of a military collaboration that has existed for close to 30 years now and whose aim is to contribute to the stability of the middle east.

Cairo has also been instrumental in helping Israel reinforce its 15-year-long blockade of the Gaza Strip, which is supported by the US.

Buoyed by this strategic importance, el-Sisi will continue with his crackdown on critics and political rivals in a bid to tighten his grip on Egypt. If anything, he is one man who has perfected the art of manipulation to salvage his dented image, depending on the situation. For instance, when he realised Biden was winning the election, he released hundreds of prisoners, and in the period leading to COP27, he released 1,500 others.



A man tries to get a selfie with French President Emmanuel Macron at the COP27 climate conference at Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt on November 7.

global lens

■ BURIED PHONES, BRIBES AND PARANOIA



A child looks through a fence as war-displaced Ukrainians arrive at a humanitarian relief centre in the central Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhia on November 7 from the Russian-held town of Berdyansk, amid the Russian military invasion of Ukraine. Psychiatrists at the humanitarian relief centre prepare to receive those displaced by war, offering them immediate counselling and further guidance.

LIFE UNDER OCCUPATION

Russia has imposed martial law and curtailed communications across four Ukrainian regions it proclaimed as its own in September

● KYIV

One couple buried their phones in the garden to keep them from being seized by the Russian invaders. Others gave away their cars or paid bribes to get Russian troops to let them flee to Ukrainian-held land.

And many more lost their businesses and homes to the new rulers of Kherson and its neighbouring region of Zaporizhzhia in Ukraine’s war-shattered south.

The accounts of life under occupation by

those who managed to escape tell a tale of near-total paranoia and subjugation to the whims of soldiers and Kremlin appointees.

Russia has imposed martial law and curtailed communications across four Ukrainian regions it proclaimed as its own in September.

None are under full Kremlin control and all are enduring heavy fighting in the third month of Ukraine’s pushback into captured lands.

Lack of independent media access to Russia-held regions makes these stories nearly im-

possible to independently verify.

But the pattern they paint does not easily fit with the version Kremlin media portray for their domestic audience. “It was incredibly scary,” said former Zaporizhzhia nuclear power station engineer Anton Ovcharov.

The Russian-held plant — Europe’s largest — is near the scene of constant shelling and only has enough power to keep its six shut reactors from melting down. “Our entire city is

Continued on Page 28

global lens

The misery and terror of life under Russia

Continued from Page 27

full of strangers with guns,” the 44-year-old Energodar native said.

Lyudmyla and Oleksandr Shevchuk said Russian troops in their Kherson region village of Kachkarivka would barge into people’s homes and seize mobile phones.

The 56-year-old husband and wife said the Russians probably feared that locals would give their positions away to Ukrainian forces near the front. “They would walk from house to house with their weapons. Then they would throw all the phones in a bucket and walk away,” Lyudmyla said.

“We would bury our phones. Everyone would do that. The ones that didn’t bury theirs in time — all of them lost theirs.”

Mother-of-two Iryna Mykhaylena said soldiers once stopped her and her daughter in the middle of the street in the Zaporizhzhia region city of Berdyansk.

“They rifled through her bag, looking for her phone. That same day, my friend’s 12-year-old was walking down the street alone and was also stopped. They also searched her bag,” the 43-year-old realtor said.

“You have to delete all your correspondence — God forbid you say something somewhere against Russia. No one feels safe.”

Russia has been rushing families into areas under its firmer control as Ukraine slowly fights its way deeper into Kherson.

But those who escaped in the opposite direction said soldiers were ready to drive people up to Ukrainian positions — for a price.

“You used to be able to pay them off with vodka but now you have to really pay,” said a Kherson-region woman who agreed to be identified only as Olga for fear of retribution.

“The Russians would take you out and then come back and take your belongings,” the 57-year-old resident of partially-recaptured Duchany said.

Oleksandr Shevchuk said his friends handed over their car keys to the Russians to be let through. “We later saw the soldiers driving around in that car,” he said.

The husband and wife said the soldiers also put “psychological pressure” on Kherson residents to move to the Kremlin-annexed peninsula of Crimea instead.

“They were happy to drive you in that direction,” the husband said. The phones that the Kachkarivka villagers buried all had to use Russian SIM cards and could only access sites approved by Moscow censors.

The transition is part of a Russification drive that has forced local officials to either switch sides or face arrest.

Kherson region native Nina Bezguba said she fled her village of Nizhni Serohozy when soldiers from Chechnya — a region under command of feared strongman Ramzan Kadyrov



A woman holds her child as they arrive from the Russian-held town of Berdyansk, at a humanitarian relief centre in the central Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhia on November 7, amid the Russian military invasion on Ukraine.



Ukrainian men talk to AFP after they managed to flee from the Russian-occupied territory of Kherson in Zaporizhzhia on November 5.

—flooded in two weeks ago.

“The Chechens are taking over our homes,” the unemployed 44-year-old said.

“I would say 60 per cent of the population is now Chechen.”

Many described locals across the occupied territories staying home as much as possible to avoid contact with the Russians.

The realtor, Mykhaylena, said the occupation authorities were using their new powers to confiscate profitable businesses such as resorts and hotels in her Sea of Azov city.

“They come with the commandant, point their finger, say they want this, and that’s it,” the Berdyansk native said.

But not everyone was giving up without a fight. Oleksandr Gorbonosov said he and his friends would pour sugar into Russian military fuel tanks to make the machines — if only briefly — inoperable.

“But then we understood it was no use. They would just go up to farmers and threaten to burn down their equipment unless they gave them more fuel,” the Energodar native said.

“I fled when the Russians figured out where we lived. There are so many informants.”

global lens

■ RACKETEERING

CAMBODIA: THE 'LIVING HELL'

Thousands of hopeless people in Asia being forced to operate online scams to line their Chinese captors' pockets

● SIHANOUKVILLE

Trafficked, beaten and locked up far from his family in China, Lu was one of thousands of people in Cambodia forced to operate online scams to line their captors' pockets.

Covid shutdowns had left the builder out of work, so when he heard he could earn \$2,000 a month on a construction project in Cambodia, he jumped at the chance.

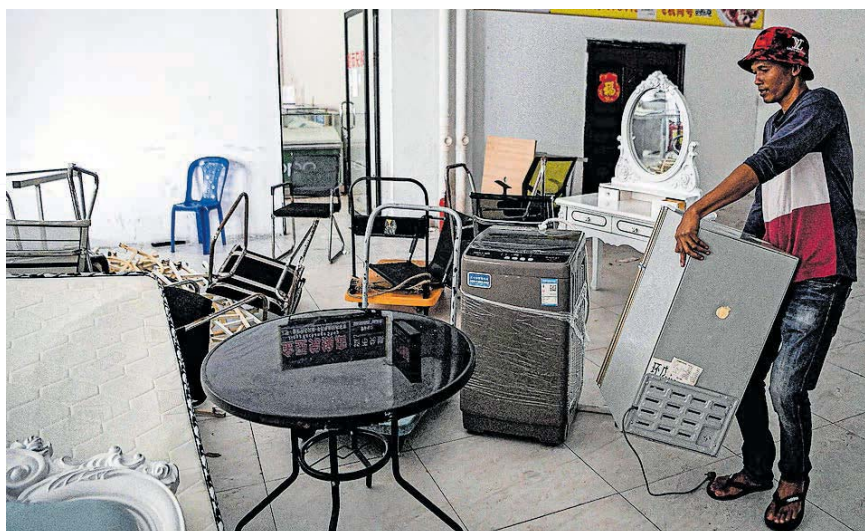
But he soon realised he had been lured by a scamming gang to a compound in the seaside resort of Sihanoukville, along with hundreds of others. There he was forced to work 12- to 16- hour shifts, trawling social media and dating apps on the hunt for victims to scam out of huge sums. "Once I arrived it was too late to escape," Lu said "But as long as I was alive, I would keep trying." People from countries around Asia — including Vietnam, the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Bangladesh and India — have been sucked into similar operations.

Some, like 34-year-old Lu, have made it out, though thousands of others are feared still trapped. In August, the UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia, Viti Muntarbhorn, said the trafficking victims "were experiencing a living hell, often resulting in torture and even death".

Sihanoukville was once a sleepy resort town, but it was transformed by a vast influx of Chinese investment. Dozens of casinos sprang up in recent years, making it a hub for Chinese gamblers and drawing in international crime groups. As travel restrictions bit during the pandemic, these groups shifted their focus. Jeremy Douglas of the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC) said "criminal groups moved casino businesses online, and some then did a pivot and added online and phone scams".

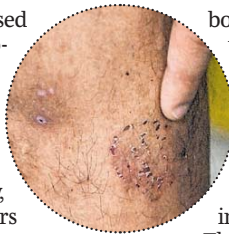
One gang member told AFP on condition of anonymity that the first people to fall prey to operations like his were Chinese nationals already in Cambodia. Then gangs started trafficking people into the country.

Douglas said "thousands, and some have estimated possibly tens of thousands" of people have been ensnared. To stop victims from escaping, compounds were installed with metal window bars and barbed wire. "Once they arrived in the compound, they could not leave," the gang member said. "People were beaten



A Cambodian worker carrying equipment as he clears a building of Chinatown district in Sihanoukville in Preah Sihanouk province on September 25. Dozens of casinos sprang up in recent years in Sihanoukville following Chinese investment, making the City a hub for gamblers and drawing in international crime groups. As travel restrictions bit during the pandemic, these groups shifted their focus from gambling to scams. INSET: A victim of a Chinese scamming gang shows a scar on his leg after he was tortured.

or tortured and sold if they refused to scam others." Within Cambodia, some were sold on to other gangs, the source said. Those with good IT or English-language skills could be sold for up to \$50,000. AFP interviewed four trafficking victims who said they, too, received lucrative job offers during the pandemic.



A 38-year-old Malaysian Chinese man called Roy described flying to Phnom Penh and being met by a woman in smart office wear who whisked him through immigration and into a car for the five-hour drive to Sihanoukville.

There, he was taken to a complex of apartment blocks a dozen or so storeys tall, housing a mix of accommodation and office rooms. "It just looked like a normal office, with three rows of tables with monitors and keyboards, just like a cybercafe," said.

But, he said, "once you get in you know you're not doing customer service". Roy and others like him had their passports taken away and were instructed to set up fake profiles on apps and dating sites including TikTok, Face-

book, Instagram and WhatsApp. Under the constant threat of violence, they would groom targets to pour money into cryptocurrency or other investment platforms. Others were forced to build online "love" relationships with their targets and to scam them under the guise of needing help to pay debts off.

There are no reliable figures on how much money the gangs have netted from the scams, though the UN's Douglas said the numbers are "staggering".

It is not clear where the money ends up, he added, though criminal proceeds are often bundled together with online betting profits, with many of the scam compounds located near legal gambling businesses.

The gang member in Sihanoukville told AFP he did not know who he was ultimately working for. "We don't know who is who," he said. "They are the real mafia."

Forced scammers who resisted paid a high price. Construction worker Lu said he was "beaten quite often" because he was caught trying to escape.

OBIT

INTERNATIONAL ATHLETICS

CHUMO RUNS HIS FINAL RACE

He put Kenya on the world map with his win of the country's first ever Olympic medal – a bronze in the 800m at the 1964 Olympic Games

● BY OMULO OKOTH

Wilson Kiprugut arap Chumo, who won Kenya's first Olympic medal, died on November 1 from a cardiac arrest.

Chumo cut the figure of a polite and refined gentleman, and refined he was, but behind the veneer of that genteel, soft-spoken and affable persona was a steely, no-nonsense man who took no prisoners.

On the many occasions I visited him at his expansive Kipchebor home behind Kericho Girls' High School, few people from the neighbourhood passed by.

He often sat alone in the compound, listening to his radio as his wife, Ruth, performed her domestic chores and the farmhand attending to his dozen exotic dairy cows.

"*Sipendi tabia ya masengenyo hapa. Watu wafanye kazi wanas-tahili kufanya* (I don't like gossips. People should be busy with their work)," he once remarked.

Arap Chumo spent most of his time with his nuclear family, savouring the success of commercial farming. And he liked it that way.

"I am happy with my life and I thank God for what I have achieved and for my family," he said at our last interview five years ago.

His death, at the age of 84, drew the curtain on one of Kenya's most illustrious athletic careers.

Chumo made his international debut at the 1962 British Empire and Commonwealth Games in Perth, Australia, where he ran alongside Kimaru Songok, Peter Francis and Seraphino Antao.

His bronze medal in the 800m at the 1964 Olympic Games behind New Zealand's Peter Snell and Canadian William Crothers opened the flood gates for Kenya's medal haul at subsequent Summer



Mzee Wilson Kiprugut arap Chumo displays medals he won over the years at his home in Kipchebor village, Kericho County, on October 24, 2019. JARED NYATAYA | NATION

Games. Kenya's first President, Jomo Kenyatta, handed Chumo the national flag to lead Team Kenya to the 1965 All Africa Games. He did not disappoint, winning gold in 400m and 800m.

At the 1966 Commonwealth Games in Kingston, Jamaica, arap Chumo won silver in the 880 yards. At the Mexico City's Olympics in 1968, he again came in second in the 800 metres.

Besides Chumo, Kenya has in the last three years lost several athletes who flew Kenya's flag high at international meets, including

Naftali Bonn, Daniel Rudisha and Nyantika Maiyoro.

Other first-generation athletes who have died include Songok, Maboria arap Tesot, Musembi Mbathi, Kiptalam Keter, Paul Boit, Kanuti Sum and Joseph Leresae, all of whom were trained by colonial government-appointed coach Archie Evans.

Born in 1938 in Kinamget, Kipchebor in Kapndege in Kericho, Chumo's athletics prowess emerged at age 20 while at Sitotwet Intermediate School. He joined the Kenya Army in 1959

shortly after leaving Sitotwet.

His first posting was to the Kenya Regiment near King George Hospital (now Kenyatta National Hospital), then Kahawa Barracks' 92 Transport Company. After joining the Army, he participated in inter-institutional competitions and regional championships, specialising in the 400m and 80m races. The Commonwealth Games in Perth opened his eyes (and ears) to the technical aspects of the sport when he eavesdropped on a coaching session by a Canadian trainer and his band of athletes.

"When I got back home, I implemented what I had heard and augmented with what [coach] Archie Evans taught us." His efforts paid off handsomely with his subsequent medal wins. Chumo dominated the two-lap race until the emergence of Mike Boit, who broke his national record.

He retired from the army in 1974 at the rank of Warrant Officer 2 and between 1975 and 1989 worked for Unilever's Brooke Bond Liebig as Field Assistant.

Although he had been unwell for a while, Chumo stoically went about tending to his farming business.

He told stories about his running life with passion and last year, the National Olympic Committee of Kenya recognised his great career at a gala function in Eldoret.

"My wish is to be part of the team to the [2021 Tokyo Olympic] Games because that is where I won Kenya's first Olympic medal," he once said.

That would have capped the sterling career of the athlete who first put Kenya on the global map. Although that dream did not come true, he had accomplished in his life what many can only dream about.

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