

THE Weekly Review

For the Thinking Person

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ON A WARPATH

Azimio la Umoja-One Kenya leader warns that if the 2022 General Election is not 'properly investigated and concluded', Kenyans should 'forget about another presidential poll in 2027'

J. Nyagah

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With the elections behind us, it's time to begin healing our battered nationhood

Elections come and go, says democratic opinion. Similarly, there is the Ecclesiastical adage about there being a time for everything under the sun – a time to sow and a time to reap, a time to be born and a turn to die.

It is easy to accept all this as wisdom if one knows nothing or very little about Kenya's politics. Here, elections never seem to end; the campaigning lingers on, increasing almost to mad shrillness; and the perplexing political vendetta stretches for the whole period of an election term until the end of the next polls, five years away.

It appears that for our politicians to remain relevant, they must cause friction in the country. To keep the loyalty of those who supported them in the elections, they must drag a sectarian agenda into everything that unites our nation.

The August 9 polls were very close and, as such, one side of the country was left jubilating while the other was pouting with contempt.

Regions – and, unhappily, tribes – seem to have totally different agenda. While some wish for the success of the government, others pray night and day that the administration collapses just to prove themselves right.

At the moment, it is easy for those in the opposition to blame everything that goes wrong on the new administration with an 'I told you so' attitude. It's a fact that almost half of the population is still sore and feels like the elections were stolen, while the other half praises everything the new government does, even policies that may soon hurt all of



Allan Buluku

It's a fact that almost half of the population is still sore and feels like the elections were stolen while the other half praises everything, even policies that may soon hurt all of us. This strange gulf is dangerous for our national unity and must be the first issue that we tackle, the premier target that shall bring us the much needed cohesion.

us. This strange gulf is dangerous for our national unity and must be the first issue that we tackle, the premier target that shall bring us the much needed national cohesion. As Abraham Lincoln observed, 'a house divided cannot stand'; that is the catch phrase that we must embrace and preach to Kenyans.

Azimio la Umoja-One Kenya leader Raila Odinga believes he won the elections, although the Supreme Court had a different determination. He has also taken

issue with the way the Kenya Kwanza administration is reconstituting the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission.

The stage is set for another round of confrontations between the Ruto administration and the Opposition.

It's prudent for both sides to work together in the reconstitution of the electoral commission. It's the logical thing to do for our nation. In this vein, we salute President William Ruto's recent tour of the Nyanza region, for long the bedrock of opposition politics in Kenya and the home of Odinga.

The tour was organised without a sign of disrespect to the older statesman. We must laud the enthusiasm with which elected opposition leaders and the people of Nyanza welcomed the President, the polite and respectful way he was treated there, the gifts that were presented to him and the entire gamut of development projects that were agreed upon.

This was a grand step towards a national healing process and acceptance by the populace of their new President. It is an indication of good tidings and we hope that soon, the President will do the same in other counties. Kenya is a shining example of democracy and peace in the region and must continue leading by decorum.

We hope that the gesture by the President marks the beginning of sewing together our shredded national fabric.

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the telescope

■ President signed IEBC (Amendment) Bill

Ruto to gazette IEBC selection panel

President William Ruto is this week expected to gazette the seven members of the selection panel that will recruit the new Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) chairman and six commissioners.

This is after the President last week signed into law the IEBC (Amendment) Bill 2022 following its passage by Parliament.

The Act proposes expansion of the panel to include two slots for the Parliamentary Service Commission, same as the Inter-Religious Council of Kenya, one for the Public Service Commission and two for the Political Parties Liaison Committee

and the Law Society of Kenya.

The composition of the panel will pave the way for the recruitment of new commissioners. Chairperson Wafula Chebukati and members Prof Abdi Guliye and Boya Molu left at the end of their six-year term. Three other commissioners – Juliana Cherera, Justus Nyang'aya and Francis Wandari – resigned after their suspension before President Ruto.

They had disputed presidential results announced by Chebukati in August last year. Commissioner Irene Masit is fighting her suspension before a tribunal led by Justice Aggrey Muchelule.



Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission chairperson Wafula Chebukati (centre) with vice-chairperson Juliana Cherera (left) and Commissioner Prof Abdi Yakub Guliye at the Bomas of Kenya on August 5, 2022.

■ It's more efficient than conventional propulsion



An illustration of the solar system. Nasa is partnering with a Pentagon research agency to develop a nuclear-powered rocket engine in preparation for sending astronauts to Mars.

Nuclear-powered rocket for Mars voyage

Nasa is partnering with a Pentagon research agency to develop a nuclear-powered rocket engine in preparation for sending astronauts to Mars. Nasa Administrator Bill Nelson said Tuesday that the US space agency will team up with the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) to “develop and demonstrate advanced nuclear thermal propulsion technology as soon as 2027”.

“With the help of this new technology, astronauts could journey to and from deep space faster than ever — a major capability to prepare for crewed missions to Mars,” Nelson said in a statement. DARPA is

the Pentagon’s research and development arm and has played a role in many of the notable innovations of the 20th Century, including the internet. Nasa said nuclear thermal rockets can be three or more times more efficient than conventional chemical propulsion and would reduce transit time, essential for an eventual mission to Mars.

In a nuclear thermal engine, a fission reactor is used to generate extremely high temperatures.

Heat from the reactor is transferred to liquid propellant which is then converted into gas, which expands through a nozzle and provides thrust.

■ Gain a better understanding of democracy

MPs set for capacity-building meet



MPs will this week proceed on a four-day seminar aimed at building their capacity in good parliamentary practices as well as promoting national values and ideals.

The seminar, organised by

the National Assembly in partnership with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, runs between January 30 and February 3.

The sessions will see the legislators benefit from best practices in the US Congress, particularly on matters bicameralism and multi-party democracy.

This is in addition to providing the MPs with a window to gain a better understanding of parliamentary systems.

■ Finished with three straight pars to claim victory

Henderson seals LPGA Champions win



Brooke Henderson fired a two-under-par 70 to clinch a wire-to-wire four-shot victory at the LPGA Tour’s season-opening Tournament of Champions in Florida.

The 25-year-old Canadian, who entered the final round with a com-

manding three-shot lead, maintained her composure to seal the 13th LPGA victory of her career in convincing style.

Henderson fired two birdies and a bogey to reach the turn at one under, 15 under overall, and then rolled in a 10-foot birdie putt on the par-five 15th to take a four-shot lead at 16 under.

She finished with three straight pars to claim her first tournament since last July’s Evian Championship major win.

kenya lens

■ HE COULD APPLY PRESSURE THROUGH RALLIES, STREET PROTESTS AND DEMOS

RAILA: WE WON FAIR AND SQUARE

He is quietly satisfied that he has rattled the Ruto government, which seems to have put aside other business to react to whatever he is planning. But there are still some hard questions

● By MACHARIA GAITHO

Far from the charged, angry, bitter politician taking to the public platform with charges, for the fourth time in succession, that he was robbed of presidential election victory, Azimio la Umoja-One Kenya leader Raila Odinga is calm, relaxed and cheerful as he receives *The Weekly Review* at his Capitol Hill office.

He looks trimmer than usual, accentuated by a slim-fit silk shirt untucked over fitting trousers, the casual style completed by comfortable blue canvass loafers. The Raila in a private meeting is a big difference from the political platform lion. He is friendly and considerate of the comfort of his guest, taking the courtesy of putting his cellphone, which tends to ring perpetually, on silent mode.

I was a bit apprehensive meeting him just a day after penning, in my *Daily Nation* column of Tuesday, a scathing dismissal of his claims that fresh whistleblower evidence proved he had been rigged out of the 2022 presidential election victory.

There is no tongue-lashing, no complaint, no reference at all to the negative article. Instead, he is keen to expound directly on claims that a whistleblower had provided incontrovertible proof, extracted directly from the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission servers, that he had won the presidential elections with 8.1 million (57 per cent) votes against President Ruto's 5.9 million (41 per cent).

Just two days after a charged political rally at Nairobi's historic Kamukunji grounds, symbolic of political protest, where he launched his fresh campaign for an audit of the elections and de-



Azimio la Umoja leader Raila Odinga

clared that Azimio does not recognise Ruto as president, Raila looks energised. He is in his element, preparing to go back to the trenches, and it emerges that a series of planning meetings are already taking place for a sustained series of rallies to make his push for an inquiry into the elections.

He is quietly satisfied that he has rattled the Ruto government, which seems to have put aside other business to react to whatever he is planning.

But there are still some hard questions. The Supreme Court threw out Raila's petition challenging Ruto's presidential election victory, closing the door on any other judicial processes. His demands for an audit of the elections and 'opening of the IEBC servers', which he insists will unearth the truth, could be simply ignored. He could apply pressure through political rallies as well as street protests and demonstrations, but at great risk that things could spiral out of control and into violence and bloodshed, for which he could be held accountable.

His latest manoeuvre is also fuelling counter-attacks around the narrative that he is the serial election loser who then instigates unrest so that he can secure a peace settlement that brings him into government. He dismisses all such concerns, but is still hard-pressed on veracity of the whistleblower claims. His stock response is that access to the IEBC servers is what will reveal the true picture of how the election was allegedly stolen.

One area that he fumbles a lot is on why he doesn't simply produce copies of the election count results forms that should have been collected by campaign agents from all the 46,000 polling stations and the tally forms from the 290 constituency tallying centres.

Those, before peering into the IEBC servers

Continued on Page 6

kenya lens

■ THE FUTURE IS VERY GLOOMY, SO THIS IS NOT THE TIME TO TALK ABOUT RETIREMENT

'I'M HERE TO STAY... WON'T RETIRE'

In an exclusive interview with MACHARIA GAITHO, Raila sheds light on his poll dossier, reconstitution of the IEBC, 'Nusu Mkate' politics and the 2027 game plan



Azimio la Umoja-One Kenya leader Raila Odinga addresses supporters in Donholm, Nairobi, on August 21 last year.
SILA KIPLAGAT | NATION

WR: You had your public rally at Kamukunji last Monday and listed your demands in view of new whistleblower evidence on alleged electoral malpractices. Even if an audit of the election helps prove your case, what do you expect going forward seeing as the Supreme Court ruling exhausted the judicial process?

Raila: I'm not actuated by self. I'm not saying or doing what I am for the sake of Raila Odinga, but for the sake of the country. Every generation of our people has a responsibility to ensure that they make governance of our country transparent and accountable to the people. We have gone through different stages in our national development. What we don't want to see is a situation where our country degenerates back to the dark days where we came from. I don't want to go down in history as somebody who refuses to accept the will of the people, the outcomes of elections as expressed by the people through

the ballot. I want history to judge me as somebody who fought and dedicated his life to ensuring that elections reflect the will of the people.

If an audit shows that the presidential election results were not as pronounced by Chebukati, would you expect Ruto to resign?

Before we go there, remember that this time round, as far as arrangements for the elections were concerned, everything went very well at the polling stations: voter identification, voting, counting, tallying, to announcement of results at polling stations, and then tallying and transmission of results at constituency tallying centres. Everything worked well. The problem was basically announcement at the National Tallying Centre, Bomas of Kenya. That is where there was the problem and we pointed that out at the time. We had our misgivings as to what was happening and

This is how we won the election, says Azimio boss

Continued from Page 5

and making allegations of chicanery by IEBC chairman Wafula Chebukati at the Bomas Kenya National Tallying Centre, are what would prove the incontrovertible evidence if the numbers posted on the elections portal were, indeed, doctored.

Pressed on that, Raila makes the startling admission that it was logistically impossible for Azimio to have agents at all 46,000 polling stations. He claims that in hostile regions, his campaign agents were harassed, beaten and denied access to polling stations.

All those might be minor details at the movement for a politician intent on reclaiming his space. If Raila came out of the presidential election loss and the Supreme Court dismissal tired and defeated, one now sees a veteran opposition leader doing what he has always done best: stoking the flames and keeping government distract-

ed and preoccupied with countering him.

Aside from the election fraud demands, Raila seems quietly satisfied that he has latched onto the Ruto government's Achilles Heel in its inability to find a quick fix to economic travails and fulfil extravagant campaign promises. He also points out serious credibility issues facing the Kenya Kwanza administration over the rapid withdrawal of corruption and other criminal cases facing favoured acolytes and their appointments to key public offices.

The people are realising that they were cheated, he says, and one suspects he is hoping to capitalise on growing disillusionment and discontent.

But he must also be aware that he could be losing ground if the growing stampede towards the Ruto government from his own ranks is anything to go by. Azimio ranks in Parliament and county governments have been rapidly depleted as elected leaders are lured to support the government, but he seems to be taking all that in his stride,

pointing out that defections have been a trend since reintroduction of multi-party politics.

Raila is clearly gearing up for resistance politics all over again, and for him that is engagement with the masses rather than the boardrooms. He warns of a looming tyranny, regression to Nyay-era politics in what he says is Ruto's push to seize control of Parliament, neuter the courts, intimidate the media and install a compliant electoral commission.

In that environment, he says, he cannot abandon the people and slink off into retirement. He turned 78 in January. At the next elections in 2027, he will be 82, but insists there is still work to do. Wiper Party leader Kalonzo Musyoka, the perpetual gadfly in his constellation, is already staking claims to the flag, but Raila describes him as a loyal and steadfast Azimio leader alongside Martha Karua, Wycliffe Oparanya, Hassan Joho and others who will be ready to run the ship when the times comes.

kenya lens

we tried to draw attention of the Chairman of the IEBC and his team.

We have since independently carried out our own investigations which have unearthed the structures put in place by IEBC and their collaborators. At the polling station where you had the KIEMS kit, after results were tallied and announced by presiding officer, he used the same kit to scan the result form and then transmit to the server. We found there were four servers, one in Holland, one in Venezuela, one in Anniversary Towers and fourth somewhere in Industrial area. At Bomas, there was portal that received and displayed results from the server. The server in Venezuela was the one transmitting results to Bomas. What they were doing was receiving the results and altering them before transmitting to Bomas.

At the tallying centre, we could be talking about data. At the polling station, it is hard, physical copies of the result forms signed by your agents and also the agents of other candidates. Isn't that where the problem was in not producing those copies?

No, the problem is not there. The problem is the results announced ... **If you had presented your own sets of verified Form 34As, would that not prove your case that there was something wrong with the final outcome?**

You have to compare with the real thing. What we are saying is that what was in the public portal is different from what is in the server. That is what we are trying to prove, that what is in the public portal is doctored, it does not reflect the results that originally came from the polling stations.

Couldn't your own records, what you got from your agents at the polling stations, show up those discrepancies?

You have 46,000 polling stations. It's impossible to have agents at all those 46,000 polling stations. In some areas, they were being blocked from entering the polling stations. In some areas, they were beaten up and sent away. You will not be able to get all 46,000 polling stations covered. You will be lucky to get 40,000. In areas where the population is hostile and the police themselves are colluding against your people it is impossible to get results from all 46,000 polling stations. Without that coverage the discrepancies you point out will be questioned. That's why the most important thing is to get access to

the server. The server does not lie.

Now, if they allow access to the server will they not have had opportunity to manipulate what is there?

No, the results were scanned and transmitted as the original. So if you want proof, go to the server. That cannot be manipulated. If somebody attempts, you will see what happened.

The elections were on August 9. The following night, your agents informed you that you had taken an unassailable lead. Your election centre went into celebratory mode, and maybe dropped the ball on monitoring what was going on with the vote count and tallying. Was that finding from your agents premature? Were you let down by your team?

It was not premature. It was clear our agents had known, and even exit polls by various observers showed that it was over 55 per cent against Ruto's 42 per cent.

Back to the question. If you do succeed in having the servers opened and you are proved correct, what then?

The question that has to be answered, and we are not being unreasonable because what we are talking about is for posterity, if this thing is not properly investigated and concluded, then forget about another presidential election in the country. Who will waste their time going for an election if the results are being announced arbitrarily by a compromised IEBC? This is an IEBC that was split. Three are saying these are the results and four are saying 'No', but we are being forced to go with the minority. Instead, the majority who dissented are being persecuted.

What kind of country is this? They are now in the process of reconstituting the commission, unilaterally, so they are now creating seven Chebukatis instead of three. Who would be stupid enough to go contest an election managed by such a commission?

You started on Monday with the Kamukunji rally and I believe you are planning more such activities. What is the risk of rallies or street protests and demonstrations running out of control and degenerating into violence?

We are to not anticipating violence. If there is violence, it will come from the government and they will be responsible for the consequences.

This initiative has given fresh fuel to the narrative that you are the

one who never accepts electoral loss, and that when it happens you instigate trouble so that you can win a seat at the table; citing the post-2007 'nusu mkate' government with President Kibaki and then the post-2017 'handshake' with President Kenyatta.

That is cheap and stupid propaganda spread by very uncivilised characters. We have made compromises in the best interests of this country. With the Uhuru handshake, we never asked for anything in government. My party did not have a single position in government, not even appointment to CAS. We were never in government. People making noise are the ones who were in government. All that we asked for was contained in BBI. If you look at the MOU we signed with Uhuru, we agreed we'd carry out reforms so that subsequent elections were free and fair. And they were free and fair till the last tallying process at Bomas of Kenya

What we are seeing from the fresh evidence is just numbers. To what extent have you interrogated those numbers to satisfy yourselves that what is presented is true and factual?

By now the IEBC would have come out to contradict those figures. They can only contradict them by coming out with the correct ones. The copies of Form 34Bs provided by the whistleblower, the result forms from the constituency tallying centres, they have the IEBC stamp, signature of the Returning Officer, and are countersigned by agents of the parties, Azimio and UDA. Most importantly they have a bar code which you can scan and it will give you information about where and when the image was taken and transmitted, location, date and time. That you cannot fake. If IEBC has an alternative one, they can produce it.

There are 245 constituencies which were available then. This was August 10. People voted on August 9. And all of these 245 constituencies were out by August 10. They have explained that the remaining 45 were delivered directly to Bomas by Returning Officers from where the images were taken and uploaded on the IEBC portal and added. If you add the totals, Ruto gets 5.9 million votes and we get 8.1 million. It's authentic, incontrovertible. This is from an IEBC insider who got

it from the server at Anniversary Towers.

Defections. Just the other day a group of Jubilee-Azimio MPs were hosted by Ruto. Almost from Day One, different groups of MPs switched camp to the Ruto side. To what extent does this weaken you and impact on your political programme?

Defections are not a new phenomenon here. Remember the re-introduction of multi-party politics, the seventh Parliament? Within a few days, President Moi's Kanu was buying MPs of the Opposition. There was Apili Wawire of Lugari, Protus Momanyi of Bonchari, Owini Likowa of Migori, and many others. Important thing is that people defecting at national level, in Parliament, have no effect or impact on the ground. What's important is the people.

Recently, Ruto was warmly received by your Azimio elected leaders in Nyanza who agreed to work with him on development. Now you say Azimio does not recognise Ruto as a legitimate President. Isn't that a contradiction?

No, there's no contradiction. The people don't recognise him as an individual, they recognise the institution. Remember we had a workshop with the governors, and said that the Constitution says that national and county governments are distinct, but must be in collaboration and cooperation. There are functions which are the responsibility of national government and those that are the responsibility of county government. Acknowledging that does not mean recognising the manner in which one assumed the Presidency.

When you went into the handshake with Uhuru, you started defending the government. You were seen to have abandoned your core ideology as defender of the marginalised, downtrodden and oppressed. Ruto actually moved in to steal your platform with his Hustler Movement. Did that leave you exposed?

That's more of media propaganda. I never changed position. Agreement was that we'd work towards reforms, but Uhuru would continue running the government with his team, which included Ruto. But Ruto was against the agreement we signed with Uhuru, the MOU, because he

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kenya lens

■ ENDLESS ELECTION FEVER

CURSE OF CAMPAIGNS**The opening up of democratic space has plunged the country into perpetual electioneering mode**

● By OSCAR OBONYO

Last Monday, President William Ruto strode into the burial ceremony of Trade Cabinet Secretary Moses Kuria's sister in Wamwangi village, Gatundu South Constituency in Kiambu with his deputy, Rigathi Gachagua, in tow. To keen observers, their style of arrival and loaded political speeches were a precise reflection of their campaign *modus operandi* five months earlier.

Following their election as President and Deputy President on August 9 and taking of their oath of office on September 13 last year, protocol dictates that Gachagua should have arrived at the burial venue earlier in order to officially welcome his boss.

But this has often not been the case. Not only do they keep arriving at events together but, just as they did during the campaigns, the two continue to blow their trumpets and to court their support base, five years away from the next General Election.

At the burial of Pauline Nyokabi Kuria, for instance, the name of opposition leader Raila Odinga featured prominently at the otherwise solemn event, with the President warning his challenger in the last poll of unspecified retaliation and his deputy reprimanding musicians who composed and belted out campaign songs in support of Odinga. Speakers at the ceremony were reacting to speeches at Kamukunji grounds, where Raila led Azimio La Umoja chiefs Martha Karua and Kalonzo Musyoka in unleashing a tirade of verbal attacks on the Kenya Kwanza administration. Odinga stated that his coalition would not recognise Ruto as Kenya's fifth President owing to alleged poll theft.

Monday's events, though



about the specific subject of alleged poll theft, point to the emerging political culture in Kenya of unending election campaigns that kick off soon after every poll circle and stretch for years. The Executive Director of the Centre for Multiparty Democracy, Franklin Mukhwanja, attributes this trend to a structural deficiency in the 2010 Constitution which, in its architecture of governance, totally excludes poll losers from occupying any political seats, including in the Senate and National Assembly.

This, argues Mukhwanja, leaves poll losers – especially in the hotly contested presidential poll – with no legal platform or avenue on which to connect with their supporters. “How, for instance, do you expect Raila to keep alive the hopes of over 6.8 million voters who supported his bid without a formal platform other than resort to pub-

lic rallies, which can sometimes turn chaotic violent?”

Experts in electoral issues agree that the problem is fuelled by the highly competitive nature of elections, which in Kenya is driven by the winner-takes-all policy. And, according to former Vice-Chairman of the defunct Electoral Commission of Kenya Gabriel Mukele, the “blind importation of democracy from the US” is to blame for some of the negative impacts.

In their study, *The Cost Of Politics In Kenya: Implications For Political Participation And Development*, Prof Karuti Kanyinga and Tom Mboya observe increased political competition at all levels since 2013, following the promulgation of the 2010 Constitution. They note that the winner-takes-all electoral system tends to exclude the losers completely, “thereby creating a do-or-die environment around political competition”.

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was more concerned with his succession games. Every time things were going wrong I always made it clear to Uhuru. Sometimes I went public. I never abandoned my role. I advised MPs to keep doing their constitutional duty of keeping government in check. Ruto, of course, was coming out with populist politics, criticising the government in which he was serving.

Azimio is essentially an electoral special purpose vehicle. Does it have a future towards 2027?

It's holding together right now. Coalitions usually exist to serve a purpose. They can grow onto formal movements, or they can disintegrate, depending on circumstances. There is goodwill right now and determination for Azimio to continue working together in spite of concerted efforts by the Kenya Kwanza administration to undermine its unity by enticing MPs with little handouts.

And what of your own political future towards 2027? Given your age, do you have a succession plan for both ODM and Nyanza politics in a situation where emerging leaders are not standing out?

First, note that my politics is not based in Nyanza, but Nairobi and national. Secondly, it's not a question of age. I'm very strong and I can continue, but I'm ready to hand over to others when the time comes. I have people I'm working with who have been very loyal and steadfast like Kalonzo Musyoka. We have Martha Karua, very steadfast and principled, Wycliffe Oparanya, Hassan Joho, Jeremiah Kioni and a lot of other younger generation politicians who are all very capable to steer this ship of Azimio.

We are not lacking in terms of succession material. I'm not retiring as yet by demand of the people, and I can't abandon the cause when the situation is looking so gloomy. Even if we say let's forget about 2022, what happens to the country? Will 2027 be any different when those now in power are conniving to put up an electoral commission that they will control and they are already intimidating the media and prompting sacking of those they see as opposed to their agenda? We'll have a media that is also compliant and a state machinery that they control; we are enroute to re-invention of the Nyayo machine. The future is very gloomy so this is not the time to talk about retirement.

kenya lens

■ CURRENCY NOTES CONTRACT



De La Rue does not expect to get new bank orders from the Central Bank of Kenya for the next 12 months. FILE / NATION

CASH COW RUNS DRY

The lucrative, long-running money printing deal between the British firm, De La Rue, and the Kenya government appears to be coming to an end

• By JAINDI KISERO

The announcement by the British currency printer, De La Rue, that it does not expect to get new bank orders from the Central Bank of Kenya for the next 12 months is perhaps a hint that the new administration of President William Ruto is considering contracting the lucrative deal to a new currency printer.

It is a significant development since Kenya has never floated a competitive international tender for currency notes since the Central Bank was established in 1966.

It has been a monopoly by De La Rue all the way, except for the period between 1966 and 1985, when the country's bank notes were printed by a UK company known as Bradbury & Wilkinson that was later acquired by De La Rue.

The British firm has enjoyed so much support from the political elite in Kenya that during the regime of former President Daniel

arap Moi, it built a full-fledged currency printing factory in Nairobi, the only such facility in Africa. The Ruaraka-based plant was built in 1992.

This week, De La Rue also announced that it had suspended printing operations in Kenya and would be sending home more than three hundred employees.

The bank note printer was only recently ordered by the High Court of Kenya to pay Sh1.1 billion to the Kenya Revenue Authority after it lost a protracted court battle. Although the news about the 300 employees who have lost jobs is what hit the headlines, this week's development is sure to reignite debate about whether the government acted prudently in purchasing a 40 per cent stake in the local subsidiary of the UK printer and whether the taxpayer has realised value for money in this transaction.

The joint venture between the government and De La Rue was

signed on August 18, 2016 but was not completed until April 2019.

Since then, De La Rue Kenya has neither made a profit nor declared a dividend to the government. The excuse the company has been giving for not making profits is that the government has not given it an opportunity to compete for domestic projects such as the printing of tax stamps, Kenya Bureau of Standards stamps, and authorisation stamps by the Anti-Counterfeit Authority.

New evidence seen by *The Weekly Review* shows that this was a lopsided joint venture that gave the British multinational too many advantages and privileges at the expense of the government.

In February, 2015, the government engaged the investment banking affiliate of the Commercial Bank of Africa to conduct a business review of the books of the Ruaraka-based subsidiary of De La Rue International.

In a document dubbed *Pro-*

ject Kifaru, the investment bankers came up with insights which should have warned the government about goings-on in the union. The investment bankers made a finding that even with the 40 per cent shareholding stake that had been ceded to the government, the UK multinational had structured a model that rendered the Kenyan operation a mere branch of its head office – a captive entity to which it dictated key decisions, including group sales and purchases.

CBA Capital observed that the Kenyan operation was just one of six production sites belonging to the UK currency printer, the other locations being USA, UK, Malta, China and Sri Lanka. The advisers found that the main vendors for critical inputs for the production sites such as, paper, plates and ink were related group companies.

As a result, the advisers found, the level of intra-group sales was significant. For instance, in 2010, 88 per cent of De La Rue Kenya sales were to the parent company in London.

Purchases within the group were also found to be very significant – as high as 61 per cent in 2011. Thus, what is described in the report by investment bankers is an operation with wide loopholes for profit shifting, transfer pricing-even capital flight.

The CBA report also found that the multinational corporation was also extracting significant profits from the local subsidiary in management fees.

It was not surprising, therefore, that on starting printing work in earnest, the operations of the joint venture generated big disputes with the taxman. First, the company has had a long-running VAT case of a value of Sh1.2 billion that was only disposed of by the High Court recently.

Secondly, a long-running corporation tax dispute for the years 2013-2017 arose after KRA subjected the company to a transfer pricing audit for that period after De La Rue was found to have been paying significant royalty payments to its UK parent company.

On top all of this is an additional case currently in the alternative dispute resolution system covering payment of royalties for 2018 and 2019.

kenya lens

■ MIXED FORTUNES FOR JUBILEE

● BY OSCAR OBONYO

She was the face of defiance and optimism in Raila Amollo Odinga's corner when William Samoei Ruto's political wave swept across the Mt Kenya region in the run-up to last year's General Election. Four months after Dr Ruto's swearing-in as President, though, Nominated MP Sabina Chege is being fingered for leading a walkout to the government side in a move that could mark the beginning of the end of the Jubilee party.

Over the last one week alone, Chege, alongside some elected MPs from Jubilee, have held meetings, first with Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua and last Monday with the President on the very day the Azimio La Umoja coalition held a public rally at Nairobi's Kamukunji grounds, declaring Ruto's government "illegitimate".

The timing of the breakfast meeting at State House is curious and it is understandable why Chege's presence at the event is an exciting development for the ruling Kenya Kwanza coalition and a slap in the face for Azimio.

Chege is a senior politician within the Azimio fraternity, where she sits in its governing organ, the Coalition Council, whose chairperson is former President Kenyatta. Ruto's apparent political overture to Chege, who is also the deputy Minority Whip in the National Assembly, is therefore politically strategic and focused.

The former two-term Murang'a County MP is just one of the many political bigwigs from the Mt Kenya region that National Assembly Majority Leader Kimani Ichung'wa gleefully predicts will soon cross over "to our side". Another key member of Azimio, East African Legislative Assembly member Kanini Kega, who is Jubilee's director of elections, has also attended meetings hosted by the Kenya Kwanza leaders.

Chege denies any involvement in a scheme to weaken the Jubilee party, maintaining that she is firmly in the former ruling party and loyal to Kenyatta, whom she repeatedly refers to as "my party leader". She is irked by reports linking her to President Ruto's United Democratic Alliance (UDA). "Why does it become an issue of national discourse when

SHIFTING ALLIANCES

Ruto continues to make inroads into Jubilee territory as politicians in Mt Kenya and across the country who lost in the polls quietly drift towards the ruling party



Nominated MP Sabina Chege has had talks with Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua. FILE | NATION

members of my Kikuyu community consult with the President on matters of their development, yet members of other communities, including the Kisii, northern Kenya communities and the Luhya have engaged him too at State House without raising eyebrows?"

In the meantime, the President and his political lieutenants continue to make inroads into Jubilee territory.

Another key cog in the Azimio campaign, Priscilla Nyokabi, who vied for the Senator's seat in Nyeri, is reportedly on the verge of defec-

tion. A fortnight ago, the former Nyeri County MP accompanied the President to Kisumu on his recent tour of Nyanza region.

Many politicians in Mt Kenya – and indeed across the country – who lost out at the ballot in the last elections, are quietly drifting towards the ruling party.

This is a natural trend in Kenyan politics and one that gives the incumbent a great advantage over political rivals.

Alive to this reality, Jubilee party's Secretary-General, Jeremiah Kioni, vows nevertheless to forge ahead irrespective of "decisions of certain individuals to change tune mid-way". The former Ndaragwa legislator holds that it is better to march on with a small but dedicated number of people as opposed to a mass of people, "some of who are knowingly or unknowingly impeding fast movement towards the designated goal".

The Jubilee official has kicked off a spirited campaign of numbers, which is a major source of discomfort for Ruto's allies. Hiding behind revelations of an unidentified Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) whistle-blower, Kioni claims that Odinga won the August polls and maintains that the people of Mt Kenya "want to ensure that the votes that were cast in favour of Raila count and it is our constitutional right to demand this". Ichung'wa separately blames Jubilee's poor showing at the ballot on "the strong-arm and one-man leadership of the party by Uhuru Kenyatta", a move that has put the party "on the same trajectory as other former ruling parties".

Claiming that nobody – including those elected today on party's ticket – considered Jubilee as their party of choice, the Kikuyu MP predicts that they "will in time troop out of the party and probably leave only Jeremiah Kioni".

On his part, former Nyeri Town MP Ngunjiri Wambugu believes Jubilee has become dysfunctional "because of lack of leadership". Except for the party's Secretary General, who has emerged as the symbol of the party at public events, all the party officials, including party leader Uhuru Kenyatta, seem to have gone under. And, Wambugu opines, Kioni does not seem to represent the rank and file of the party. Uhuru Kenyatta's handlers

kenya lens

explain, however, that the former President cannot openly confront his successor politically. Nonetheless, Kenyatta has been pulling strings from the wings as evidenced by the sentiments and actions of his foot soldiers.

Kioni, for instance, initially appeared to attack the Azimio flag-bearer and even suggested in October last year that Jubilee and the residents of Mt Kenya had paid Odinga the political debt he was owed at the ballot and were ready to cut ties with him.

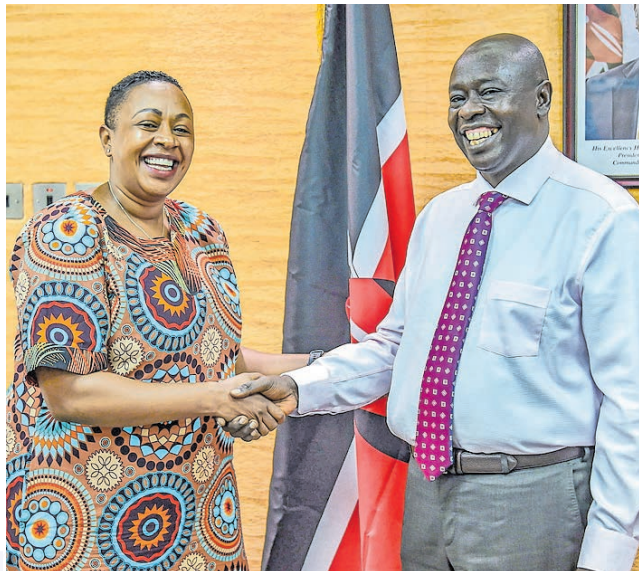
He added: "When push comes to a shove, communities quickly run and rally together. What seems to prevail is loyalty to the community and the writing is on the wall. It does not matter whether you are in UDA or whether you are in Kenya Kwanza." But he changed tune almost immediately after what observers believed was intervention by his party boss.

Noting that Jubilee has representation in Parliament and in county assemblies across the country, Wambugu observes that which Jubilee receives public funding from government, which is enough to make it great again: "But it needs a complete re-evaluation of what it stands for today. We need to analyse why we lost so badly in the last elections and get a new set of leaders who can operate in the reality of this current political dispensation with a view to taking this party back to the mainstream of national politics".

There is also a battle for supremacy in the Mt Kenya region that Jubilee can make political capital out of. The emergence of DP Gachagua as the Mt Kenya kingpin has not been embraced by all, not just yet. And then there is Trade Cabinet Secretary Moses Kuria, who wants to project himself as the political leader of the region.

The latter case is already causing friction as witnessed last Monday during the funeral of Kuria's sister in Gatundu South Constituency. Speaking at the event, influential businesswoman and a key ally of the President, Mary Wambui, protested against area MP Gabriel Gathuka Kagombe for allegedly undermining Kuria. Wambui, the recently appointed Chairperson of the Board of Communications Authority of Kenya, considers the CS as "the political future of our people".

Curiously, Kiambu Governor Kimani Wamatangi was conspicuously absent from the event,



Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua with Nominated MP Sabina Chege. The DP hosted a group of MPs from the Jubilee Party at Harambee House Annex on January 20. PHOTO | DP CS



Jubilee Secretary-General Jeremiah Kioni speaks to the press at the Jaramogi Oginga Odinga Foundation on January 18. LUCY WANJIRU | NATION

which pundits attribute to political differences. Then there are former governors Mwangi wa Iria (Murang'a) and William Kabogo (Kiambu), who add to the mix of

political battles in the region. Because Jubilee remains the largest party in the Mt Kenya region whose top leadership is local, the political infightings and jostling

for power can only be to its advantage. Jubilee, Wambugu advises, must strive to stay active and relevant as a mainstream political outfit, otherwise it will go the way of previous ruling parties.

Since being subjected to an election Waterloo by the National Rainbow Coalition (Narc) in 2002, for instance, independence party Kanu (Kenya African National Union) has never recovered politically. Its strength in Parliament and influence across the country have gradually dwindled every election year to the extent that its party leader, Gideon Moi, failed to recapture his Baringo County senatorial seat this time round.

Narc lasted an even shorter stint of just five years, thanks to internal rifts arising from an unfulfilled power-sharing agreement. Only two years into office, Kibaki on one side, and on the other a team allied to Raila Odinga and Kalonzo Musyoka coalescing around the Liberal Democratic Party, began pulling in different directions.

It all ended acrimoniously at the ballot in 2007, with Odinga as the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) candidate and Kibaki vying on a ticket the Party of National Unity (PNU), which was hurriedly crafted in September 2007 after Odinga's ally, Charity Ngilu (who had registered Narc) declined to surrender the party to Kibaki for his re-election bid. PNU started out as a coalition of several parties, including Kanu, Narc-Kenya, Ford-Kenya, Ford-People, Democratic Party, Shirikisho and National Alliance Party of Kenya.

Today, Ngilu's Narc is a shell of its former self, the once roaring party that kicked the independence party of Jomo Kenyatta, Tom Mboya and other national heroes out of town.

Similarly gasping for a political lifeline is PNU, whose leadership changed hands from Kibaki to former Vice-President George Saitoti and is presently headed by former Agriculture Cabinet Secretary Peter Munya.

Kenyatta's TNA (The National Alliance), on whose ticket he vied for the top seat in 2013, only became politically redundant after he willingly abandoned it in a merger arrangement with Ruto's United Republican Party and other parties such as Kanu and PNU to form Jubilee, his re-election vehicle in 2017.

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the limelight



British-US former professional kickboxer and controversial influencer Andrew Tate talks to the media as he leaves Romania's anti-organised crime and terrorism directorate after a digital investigation of devices, where his presence was required, in Bucharest, Romania on January 25. PHOTO | AFP



Ethiopian Orthodox devotees attend prayers during the celebration of the Ethiopian Epiphany on the shore of Lake Batu on January 19. PHOTO | AFP



A model presents a creation for Viktor & Rolf during the Haute-Couture Spring-Summer 2023 Fashion Week in Paris on January 25. PHOTO | AFP



French President Emmanuel Macron (left) shakes hands with President William Ruto, prior to a meeting at the Elysee Presidential Palace in Paris on January 24. PHOTO | AFP



Riot policemen arrest a demonstrator during clashes within a protest against the government of Dina Boluarte in Lima, Peru, on January 24. PHOTO | AFP

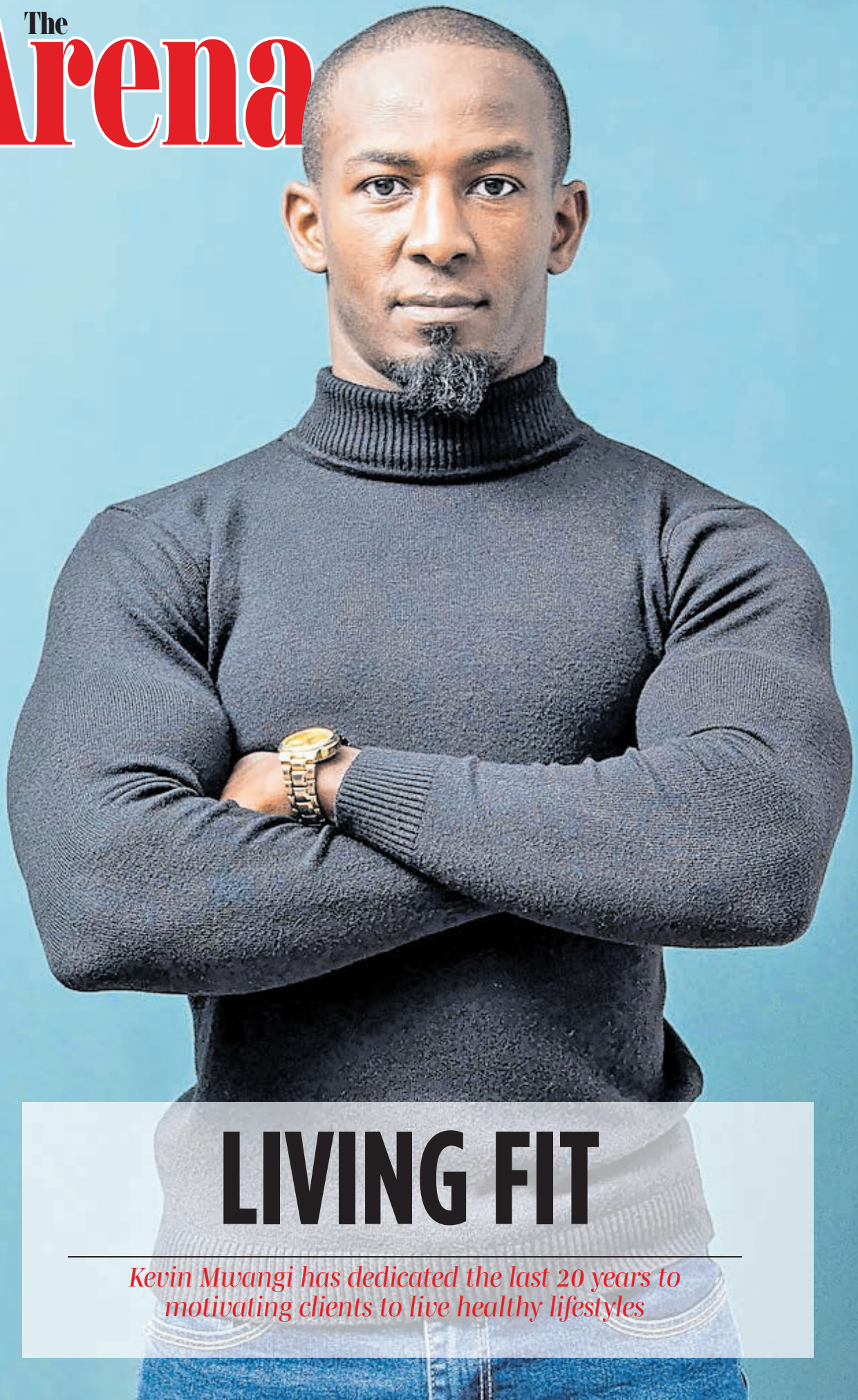


Firefighters try to extinguish a fire at the Guryong village, one of South Korea's last remaining slums, in southern Seoul on January 20. PHOTO | AFP



Amabutho Zulu regiments use a spear on a falling British soldier during the reenactment of the Battle of Isandlwana, in Isandlwana, South Africa, on January 21. The reenactment is performed annually by the Amabutho and the Dundee Diehards, a reenactment volunteers team from Dundee. PHOTO | AFP

The Arena



LIVING FIT

Kevin Mwangi has dedicated the last 20 years to motivating clients to live healthy lifestyles

OPEN SPACE

Why youth empowerment should begin from training

Building the nation: Each organisation must ask itself if it has made any contribution towards creating an efficient labour force

• BY MOSES OJUANG'

A country that attaches importance to its youth and adequately trains them for future development of the nation is a country on the right track. It is a state that knows what its role is. It is a successful entity.

Likewise, a government whose policies have nothing touching on the youth, whose view of them is clouded by other issues they deem to be of pressing importance, is a vain government, one that lacks ability to govern, and whose a populace is moving haphazardly towards sure doom.

We boast of a lot of youth empowerment programmes in Kenya and we laud all the effort put towards them.

Times are changing fast and we fear that we are not doing enough as it is. We see that the simplest things we used to do are now no longer fashionable; hearts are becoming darker in selfishness and lack of care for the welfare of the others until we lose sense of direction.

A few decades ago, college courses were only completed successfully after the student had gone for internship or attachment as it was called.

This was where all the theory came to life and a few practical skills were honed, and from which a whole individual emerged as a force into society.

It was a simple requirement and somehow the space for doing that was available. Companies, organisations, factories and other employers always looked forward to the coming of these bright-eyed youth ready for work and learning.

To be fair, some of these organisations were very accommodating to the young people, offering them transport, or bus fare, to and from work and even paying them a small stipend to keep them comfortable during their three-month stay.

Others were not as generous due to lack of company policy over treatment of in-

tern workers or due to the selfishness of their bosses.

Even the seasoned employees would once in a while treat the young lads and ladies to lunch or entertain them on Friday evenings.

This is the system that birthed the efficient managers of today. It just never occurred to us that things would change so drastically, and for worse.



These days, it is common to meet young men and women walking around seeking attachment.

You might have seen a young lady walking all day long from one establishment to another, looking for internship; or a young man, tired and frustrated, sitting on a bench in the park after a week of disappointment; or you have been told about the sister of a friend whose paternal nephew is seeking placement. It is difficult.

Some heartless people even ask for bribes to 'help' secure internship for those seeking the few spaces available.

They have totally forgotten that they themselves were once helped.

Things must change in this country.

The youth must be energised and each organisation must ask itself if it has made any contribution towards creating an efficient labour force.

If need be, all must be compelled by the government, to wake up to their social responsibility.

Mr Ojuang' comments on social issues. mojuang@gmail.com

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

MIND SPEAK



Michael Asule

The recent results are an indication of the hard work and dedication of both the teachers and students. It is encouraging to see that the results have improved from last year, with a slight increase in the overall pass rate. We must continue to strive for excellence and ensure that all students have access to quality education. That's the way forward.

—Kenyatta University student



Oscar Mumaraki

Some parts of the country overperformed, while others flopped. Interestingly, the best performers came from the region where Education Cabinet Secretary Ezekiel Machogu hails. Is this a case of creating a good name gone bad or are the students from the region just endowed with better brains than others? A coincidence, or maybe not.

—Technical University of Kenya student



Raymond Kipkurui

Hearty congratulations to all the KCSE candidates of 2022. You were all phenomenal. That said, the Ministry of Education's performance has been poor in handling of national examinations. The CS reiterated that there were "no" attempts to doctor the results. "Many" parents are now considering sending their kids to Kisii and Nyamira County Schools.

—Public Health Officer



Mercy Meya

The credibility of the 2022 KCSE results is questionable, especially in Kisii region, where the CS comes from. It's a good thing for students to score grades that see them to university but a school whose candidates all earn university entry slots is questionable. Many university students are struggling because of fake results.

—Rift Valley Institute of Science and Technology

MY TAKE



• BY WAGA ODONGO

It is impossible to explain to a Ugandan who Mandonga is and why he is popular. He is a boxer who can't box, a fighter whose best qualities are on display before the fight. They wouldn't get it, his appeal fizzles out by the time you get to Busia. Every country seems capable of creating celebrities whose appeal is region-locked, and Mandonga is a prime example.

It's not just the language barrier. Mandonga is an in-joke for those of us who speak Swahili. In his promos, Karim Said constantly repeats his nickname "Mandongga" which loosely translates to hard punches and his catch phrase, "Mtu Kazi", a man of action as it were, when his main quality is actually the opposite — he is a man of words. Lots of them. He talks constantly and says very little.

His act seems stripped bare for social media, where attention spans are neutered and words are therefore metered. It makes sense why he is so popular now: he speaks entirely in catch phrases. He refers to himself in the third person. He ignores interview questions, only to repeat well-worn phrases.

His catchphrases are meaningless, what linguists call a "phatic phrase", a sort of identifying noise that helps make him memorable. He kept saying "Mandongga Mtu Kazi" until it stuck.

In fact I have read several pieces where the journalist in question refers to Said repeatedly using his nickname as his last name, never knowing it was a *nom de guerre*.

The man should teach a class on branding at a local university because of how he has talked himself into the collective conscience.

Mandongga is an accomplished communicator. His fight promotions are calibrated to excellence. First, there is the childish playground dismissal. His opponent Ali Baba Tarimo was christened Ali "Mama". Then we have the christening of a punch with mystical powers. Every fight has

MANDONGA 'MTU KAZI': THE UNSTOPPABLE FARCE

Boxing: His skills are subpar but his ability to sell the fight is excellent... He needs a slew of tomato cans who will quickly roll over to allow him to continue



Tanzanian boxer Karim Mandonga in Nairobi on January 13.
SILA KIPLAGAT | NATION

a new punch, born from current events. We had the Qatari World Cup infused "Peresu, Peresu", we had "Ndoige", a punch that was said to be unavoidable like Judgment day. It was like a bullet with your name on it, inescapable. It could cut corners magically if you tried to rope-a-dope in the ring. Try to run from fate and only end up meeting it all the same. His fists were human heat seeking missiles. Then we have "Sugunya" that was aimed squarely at Daniel Wanyonyi. "Sugunya" was a weapon birthed in the midst of the Ukraine war, a possible experiment not covered by Geneva Protocol that governs deployment of chemical and biological weapons in war zones. Russia has a couple of wonder weapons like Novichok, an odourless, nearly imperceptible toxin that was slathered into dissident Alexei Navalny underwear. Maybe this was something along that vein.

This weapon was being smuggled into Kenya to be used on an unsuspecting opponent. For anyone else the joke would be too macabre. The Ukrainian conflict has all the signs of the world sleepwalking into World War III as the full might of Nato is brought in to sustain Kyiv and the Russians threatening to use

nukes. Jokes about Ukraine are beyond the pale, but Mandonga was able to pull it off.

He plays the role of a loud braggart, overconfident and under skilled, that Swahili has a surfeit of. A sort of modern day Abunuwasi — know it all. A single note cartoonish character, who talks in incredulous boasts. The act wouldn't work if Mandonga was actually good at fighting. Former boxing champ Deonte Wilder's braggadocio was scary because he actually hit hard. A bit too hard. When he said that he hoped to kill someone in the ring, he was fined because he hit so hard that it was well within the realm of possibility.

I barely watch the fights. What is the point, there is no artistry or mastery to be enjoyed. His arena is the microphone, his skills are verbal, not pugilistic. Mandonga's fights will always have the air of an exhibition about them. No one would dare consider them legitimate sporting contests. We come for the build-up, the antics, the stare-down theatrics and the post-fight press conference. In between there is light sparring that barely elicits a yawn.

Mandongga is popular despite having fewer fights than he has fingers. Boxing is notorious for

starting off fighters with padded records. In the beginning, when you show promise, all you face are journeymen and has-beens. Most would fall over after a fart let alone a punch. Mandonga has a paltry four wins, three losses and one majority draw. How do you get a no-decision with such a low record? His losses are all very concerning. He has been knocked out cold in all three. In his early 40s, time isn't on his side; he is way past his athletic prime. He also lacks the muscle memory that other fighters in their 40s have. Mandonga is playing a dangerous game; his skills are subpar but his ability to sell the fight is excellent. He needs a slew of tomato cans who will quickly roll over to allow him to continue. So far it has been hit and miss.

There is a personal reason I find Mandonga titillating. He makes me fall in love with Swahili again.

I noticed that for communication, I regularly use English almost exclusively. My mother speaks to me almost exclusively in English, functionally making my Mother Tongue English and even the bloody voice in my head is English. My friends use more English than Swahili. The only times we use Swahili is when we talk about politics. Only with Swahili which we mostly began hearing while we were young can we communicate the true depths of our atavistic hatreds. English is something they infected our minds with in school.

The missionaries won; they made black Englishmen out of us, three generations after colonisation the voice in our heads hide us in cut-glass English accents. Mandonga is proof that a rebellious streak of Swahili still burns within us even as the voices in our heads converge towards Received Pronunciation.

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MONEY MARKETS

• BY EDDY ASHIOYA

Perhaps if it was up to Eric Jackson, he would stop the ticking of time just so he could smell the lilies a little longer. Stoic, a little stodgy and soft-spoken, like a little tin god, he punctures the conversation with chuckles, dropping anecdotes here, lessons there. The 32-year-old co-founder of Hisa App is courteous, almost to a fault.

The question most on my lips is less why he is so chill and more why does he have two English names? “You might have to ask my mom,” he says.

“She gave me two English names. I don’t know why. And I never asked.” Okay then, remind me to ask for his mom’s number. But what I will ask about, however, is his journey from an engineer to an entrepreneur.

Hisa, he says, was born out of necessity. “We tried to invest abroad, particularly in the US, and found it extremely debilitating. Rather than throw tantrums, we decided to develop this idea to help others invest, not just locally, but also internationally. We needed to come up with an investment vehicle that anyone could board.”

By we, of course, he means his co-founder, who is also called Eric. Eric Asuma. He tells me there were three Eric’s initially, him, Asuma, and another Eric who sits on their advisory board. If two is company, three [Eric’s] is an army. Eunice Nyawira is the final piece of the jigsaw puzzle, the oil that keeps the engine running.

Hisa as a startup is not just an investment platform. Users are able to choose from an array of activities, be it real-time market updates, expert learning, following their favourite financial and investment podcasts, or interviews with thought leaders.

“At Hisa, we are building the infrastructure for borderless investments in Africa through micro-investments. Less than one per cent of the population in sub-Saharan Africa invests in the capital markets, mainly due to lack of access, low financial literacy, lack of IPOs as well as low liquidity of the local stock exchanges,” said Erick Asuma.

Hisa was not the Eric’s and Eunice’s first dabble in business. They also run *Kenyan Wallstreet*, an online financial paper à la *New York’s Wall Street Journal*. The trick to running two companies simultaneously, he says, is to put out information daily. “With *Kenyan Wallstreet*, we tell you what’s happening in the business and finance world. At Hisa, we look at helping people invest better and grow their wealth as well as improve their financial literacy. We use *Kenyan Wallstreet* to generate news, podcasts and content around finance data. Once you understand it, you use that knowledge to invest, through Hisa. It’s two sides of the same coin.”

Speaking of, there are about 18,000 users trading through Hisa. Eric, however, has an ambitious target: “By May 1 [2023], we are looking to get to 200k users on the app.” So far, over a million dollars has been traded on the platform.

But apps are an expensive business. How are they making money? “Our co-founders went out of pocket to support the business, from

MAKING MONEY WORK FOR YOU

Eric Jackson and his partners are helping ordinary folks improve their financial literacy and grow their wealth through their innovative investment platform, Hisa



Eric Jackson is the co-founder of Hisa app, which seeks sustainable ways for ordinary folks to earn returns on financial investments. PHOTO | POOL



Eric Jackson with senior managers of the Nairobi Securities Exchange led by chief executive Geoffrey Odundo during the launch of the Hisa app. PHOTO | POOL

2020. We pooled funds to run the business initially. We are now doing our pre-seed to raise a million dollars to finish the product and allow us to scale.” When it comes to making money, he says, Hisa charges a one per cent transaction fee on every trade. “The goal is to break even within 18 months.”

The challenge, he says, is that they are not growing as fast as they wanted to, to reach more people and expand into other markets. “We can’t scale that fast because you really need to do a lot of investment. We are growing fast, just not as fast as we want.”

Looking back, were there particular moments that pushed him to where he is today? “I am an electrical engineer, but I was fascinated by programming. My first interaction with computers was in high school.

Funny thing is, I built the Online Hostel Management System for Moi University where students could book a room while at home. That cut down the time taken to look for accommodation on campus.” His sojourn into entrepreneurship may not have been born that day — but it had been christened.

What has he learned about Kenyans’ money habits? The fact that we work so hard to make money but then do not make any effort to understand how to best use the money. In other words, we work for money but our money hardly works for us. “And oh, Kenyans love shortcuts.”

“That’s why at Hisa we look at sustainable ways to earn returns. Which explains why the stock market is one of the biggest generators of wealth.” All this is to say that if the hare-brained Charles Ponzi was alive in Kenya, he would make a killing building his pyramid schemes. A con artist, is, after all, an artist.

His success, however, has come at a price. Especially since he has a young family. “I have a daughter and two sons whom I realise I have not spent enough time with. I have learned to

EXPANDING IN AFRICA

Hisa has a B2B (Business-to-Business micro-investments solution that allows other fintech, banks and telcos to leverage its infrastructure and regulatory compliance to embed investments like fractional stocks, ETFs (Exchange Traded Funds), or unit trusts into their offerings, as well as a B2C (Business-to-Consumer) mobile app that allows retail investors to buy fractional stocks—both local and global—as well as ETFs and REITs (Real Estate Investment Trusts).

Hisa has partnered with Faida Investment Bank, which holds its investors’ funds in its custody. This means that if anything were to go wrong with Hisa, investors would be compensated.

Hisa became the first mobile application to get regulatory approval from the Capital Markets Authority and the Nairobi Stock Exchange (NSE) to facilitate fractional investing. Fractional investing allows people to buy less than a whole share of a stock or security, opening up access to stocks that would otherwise be out of reach due to a high nominal price.

Kenya-focused for now, Hisa nonetheless already has partnerships signed in Rwanda and Tanzania and is looking at expanding into these countries, as well as to Zambia, in the first half of 2023.

The Hisa App was officially launched at the trading floor of the NSE in November 2022 after a 10-month beta period. Hisa is available on the iOS AppStore, Google Playstore.

be more proactive and cognisant of the fact that there is work but there is also family, and once you lose that time, you never get it back.”

Eric tells me that money is not necessarily evil. I tell him he is preaching to the believers. He grew up in an environment where he was taught to resent money.

“Money is not necessarily evil; it’s how you

use it to effect change and grow wealth. It is a means to an end.”

I remind him of the fox fable, where the fox knows he can’t have the grapes, and in an attempt to save his reputation and cure his smarting ego, the fox says the grapes were sour anyway, so he never really wanted them.

Unlike the fox, he, Eric realises that he faces the biggest struggles known to man: the balance between ambition and reality; that you can hold two contrasting views in your mind; the fact that every single day you have to see change but you can only see it over time; staying hungry and ambitious, but also not being too hard on yourself because good things take time.

In the same breath, have things turned out the way he had envisioned at 32?

“I enjoy the work and I always wanted to be in a place where I get fulfilment from what I am doing. You always have to be hungry and ambitious. I have taken the longer route but I am happy with where I am.”

He says he is in a season of his life where he is at peace with himself. Learning to let go and let things run. Even the king can’t stop the sun, he believes.

Our time is running out, but I can’t help wondering, if he was a currency, which one would he be? “I would be cowrie shells. If you look at the history of money, I think cowrie shells were used predominantly across both eastern and West African coasts. That was one of the motivations for Hisa, to appreciate our own cultures.”

When I finally let him go to tend to one of his revolving doors, my life sharply comes into focus, and I can hear from the distance the words of the legendary actor, MacDonald Carey, whistling in through the window: “Like sands through the hourglass, so are the days of our lives.”

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HEALTH AND NUTRITION

THE FITNESS LIFESTYLE

When Mwangi crosses his arms, all you see is lean, hardened muscle. He has dedicated the last 20 years to motivating clients towards healthy living



Rollin Total Fitness' Kevin Mwangi (left) with coach Stephen Adika in Nairobi on December 20 last year. LUCY WANJIRU | NATION

● BY SINDA MATIKO

Um, OK... What elixir must everyone consume to remain this youthful?

When I meet him, Kevin Mwangi is coming from a small black and white-themed party he threw for his family. "It was just a small family gathering to celebrate life," he says with a bold smile.

'Mwas' or 'Kevo' as many call him, has just turned 40. Glancing at him, Mwangi could easily pass for a younger person in his late 20s or early 30s.

He is not your typical 40-year-old. It's difficult to pick out a wrinkle on his brow, nor can you trace a single fine line beneath his eyes, a main characteristic of 40-plus-year-olds.

Mwangi cheeks aren't saggy crinkled or leathery but rather firm. Whereas many these days try to slow things down with anti-ag-

ing skin care products, Mwangi a fitness consultant, does not take shortcuts. Weighing 67kg, his small frame is chiseled to the core. He wakes up every day at 4.30am to have his first meal of the day and plan his workout sessions. By 8am he is in his office situated at Valley View, Parklands, attending to clients with various fitness challenges.

When Mwangi crosses his arms, all you see is lean, hardened muscle, proof of years of an active, aggressive routine. His chest puffs out while his six-pack presses against the black, slimfit t-shirt he is wearing on this day.

When we start to converse, he begins to sound more like the 53-year-old Forever a Fly Girl Jennifer Lopez (J-Lo), who has defied age for decades. "Affirmations are important. Keeping a positive mindset is as important as diet and exercise. I am youthful and timeless. I tell myself that every day, age is all in your mind," J-Lo

ones said in an interview. Mwangi shares the same sentiments.

For the last 20 years, the fitness maven has dedicated his life to educating, empowering and motivating clients towards leading a healthier and fit lifestyle, and understanding nutrition and the science behind it.

"It's the only reason why most people say I look younger than I am. I have been leading an active lifestyle since I was a teenager," he says. While in high school, Mwangi gained weight and didn't look anything like his younger brother, who was a dining hall captain thanks to his well-built frame.

"Being older than him, I was mocked at school. My brother used to lift weight while my passion was in music, but with the mockery I decided to start hitting the gym too. I was lucky that my father owned a modest gym, Rollin in Kayole. It still stands to date."

The journey to losing weight and looking good developed into

a passion which eventually translated into business.

"After I finished Form Four in 1999, I was tasked by my father to run the gym. It wasn't a lucrative business then. There was too much stereotype about gyms at the time because the most common clients were bouncers and guards."

First forward to today, the fitness business is booming and people like Mwangi are making a killing out of it. He has been running Rollin Total Fitness for over a decade now. The company imports and sells supplements while also offering body assessment services and nutrition consultations.

"When I began managing my father's gym, I realised that retaining clients was a major challenge. If they worked out and couldn't gain muscle, they would disappear." Having excelled in sciences, Mwangi had a good understanding of the human anatomy. He began researching the use of supple-



Fitness consultant Kevin Mwangi with Mr Physique (2017-2018) Joseph Oyatta at the Rollin Total Fitness in Nairobi. PHOTO | POOL

ments.

“There wasn’t much information available by then. I started by selling two products that I understood well, one of which was Creatine.” Not many people had heard of supplements and Mwangi had to do a lot of awareness-raising.

“I had to first educate people because many thought the supplements were cocaine or since they were white powders. I had to make sure they understood that these were supplementary meals to aid in the growth of their muscles,” he recalls.

Slowly and steadily the few skeptical clients who decided to be the initial guinea pigs began to witness muscle gain and the news spread by word of mouth. Referrals increased and so did demand for the products. But Mwangi was still not making any profit with the business.

“Supplements have always been expensive and not many could afford them at the time. I would purchase at wholesale price but end up not making any profit because I sold on the basis of how many scoops one needed or per pill, depending on the product. I was al-

ways falling short.”

At current market rates, basic essential pre- and post-workout supplements cost at least KSh10,000. Quality protein whey costs between 6,500 to Sh11,000 for a 1.5Kg container.

But even without making no profit, Mwangi was determined to retain his clients at the gym and increase numbers.

“I had to continue doing the business without making any meaningful profits because I realized I was building trust especially of the bodybuilders I was interacting with”

With the numbers of his clients rapidly growing and without enough capital to set up the business, Mwangi came up with an idea.

“At this point in time, almost every bodybuilder in Nairobi knew me because I used to walk around with a duffle bag selling supplements in small quantities to them. I had earned their trust sooner than later. I started getting referrals to dealers outside the country.” With many bodybuilders and other notable clientele vouching for him, suppliers started delivering supplements worth millions of Kenya shillings.

“Because of the trust I built, most suppliers picked me as their agent. They would deliver goods to me and let me sell on their behalf. I would then make my commission.”

Mwangi would then set up Rollin Total Fitness sometime in

2011 and started by receiving consignment on credit. “Trust has been everything to my business because these suppliers would deliver goods and have me sell them on credit and pay them later or on installments. That’s how I have been able to build the business by putting clients’ interest first instead of money,” says Mwangi.

In recent years, there has been a surge of gyms sprouting in major towns as more urban residents continue to become more and more concerned about their health situation.

What this has done is to expand the fitness industry business into a multi-million empire according to Mwangi’s observation.

“It’s still early days but the future really looks bright. I have observed a sudden rise of fitness enthusiasm in Nairobi, Eldoret and Mombasa. These are currently the major towns supporting the fitness business in Kenya. There are as many athletes in these cities and a surge of people joining the gyms. Then gyms are also increasing.” Mwangi clientele currently includes top celebrities, politicians and prominent businessmen.

“For politicians, athletes, and businessmen I would not want to give names because they asked for client confidentiality. As for celebrities the list is endless starting with KRG The Don, Khaligraph Jones, Redsan, Daniel Ndambuki alias Churchill among others.”

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The FLIP SIDE
With John Nyaganjira
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WOMAN POWER

ROSEMARY NAMBOOZE OF LIGANDA IS ONE OF SIX ROTARY MEMBERS FROM AROUND THE WORLD TO BE HONoured AS ‘ROTARY PEOPLE OF ACTION: CHAMPION OF INCLUSION FOR EDUCATING AND NURTURING CHILDREN WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES’. A MOTHER HERSELF WHOSE CHILD HAS DOWN SYNDROME NAMBOOZE SAYS SHE REALISED THE LACK OF SOCIAL SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES AND THE STIGMA THEY WERE FACING.

SHE THUS FOUNDED THE ANGEL’S CENTER FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN 2012, WHICH PROVIDES TAILORED EDUCATION AND THERAPY SERVICES, AS WELL AS ASSISTANCE FOR CAREGIVERS AND TEACHERS.

STAR OF THE WEEK



RUGBY FANS AROUND THE WORLD LAST WEEK CELEBRATED KENYA SEVENS LEGEND COLLINS INJERA, SAYING HIS LEGACY WILL REMAIN FOR ETERNITY. INJERA, 36, WHO IS CURRENTLY THE SECOND HIGHEST TRY SCORER IN THE WORLD RUGBY SEVENS SERIES AND THE 2016 SINGAPORE SEVENS PLAYER OF THE FINAL, RETIRED AFTER A STELLAR CAREER SPANNING TWO DECADES.

INJERA SAID IT HAS BEEN HARD FOR HIM AFTER 17 YEARS OF LITERAL BLOOD, SWEAT AND TEARS TO FINALLY STEP AWAY FROM THIS GREAT GAME THAT HAS GIVEN HIM MORE THAN HE COULD EVER ASK FOR.

WE CELEBRATE YOU, COLLINS, AND WISH YOU THE VERY BEST IN THE YEARS AHEAD.

opinion



■ Politicians should not foist their secretly sealed, self-serving pacts on Kenyans

Kenyans are tired of secret boardroom deals

Why is there talk of a 'handshake'? One, because Kenya's politics makes for strange bedfellows. Two, because what a politician tells you during the day is not what he will be saying during the night. Three, betrayal makes and breaks political unions and, four, the principals have no truck with principles.

Hence, what I called in 2016 through 2020 a quinquennial problem: namely that we, the people, troop to the polling stations, wait patiently in the queues, IDs in hand or pocket, then cast our votes and go home or to work or elsewhere to wait for the results.

Then, suddenly, we cannot count. So one's vote does not count and, just as suddenly, the polls umpire botches it.

In December of 2007, all indications were that Mr Raila Odinga of the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) would be declared president at the expense of incumbent Mwai Kibaki. Then the miracle votes from Tharaka Nithi poured in late in the count and the late Samuel Kivuitu let it be known that he was going to announce the results even if it meant doing so from a battleship.

Among the people at the Kenyatta International Convention Centre who was determined to thwart the announcement of the re-election of Kibaki as president was William Ruto, who had just been re-elected Member of Parliament for Eldoret North.

Battleship or not, Ruto was persuaded the right position was that Odinga, and not Kibaki, had been elected President.

Matching Ruto's verbal fire and venom in



**KWENDO
OPANGA**

Kibaki's corner was his hard-as-nails poll agent Martha Karua.

Ruto was to be deeply aggrieved when Odinga chose to enter negotiations that culminated in a power-sharing arrangement between Kibaki's Party of National Unity and ODM. For her part, Karua was to argue that defeated ODM bullied its way into the government.

Ruto and Odinga fell out when the latter was Prime Minister and sacked him from the lofty perch of Minister for Agriculture.

At the height of their fight, Odinga sarcastically asked, who is Ruto? He was saying that he and Ruto are not in the same political league.

In 2013, Ruto was named Deputy President, thanks to the Constitution he opposed and which Odinga backed. Now, the boot was on the other foot. Odinga claimed he had been cheated out of victory. The Supreme Court did not find for him.

His parting shot was that the Chief Justice Willy Mutunga-fronted court was *bandia* (counterfeit). But when, five years later, Chief Justice David Magara found for Odinga after another controversial poll, Odinga boycotted the re-run he ordered.

Why? Because, he argued, the polls umpire, the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), would still steal the vote for Uhuru. But in 2022, the same IEBC was in place and Odinga says its immediate former chairman Wafula Chebukati subverted the people's will by stealing his vote for Ruto.

And, beginning today, Odinga & Co. are back to the barricades.

And that is why Ruto & Co. are arguing that Odinga is threatening mass action in order to force the government to negotiate, as he did with President Kenyatta in 2018, and get into government. And, of course, Odinga & Co. are saying the issue here is that Ruto is trying to create an IEBC that will preside over the next election, now that Chebukati has retired.

Long before the March 2018 'handshake', I had argued that there should be no boardroom deals because these are secret contracts between politicians on Kenya, and not contracts between Kenyans about Kenya.

IEBC must not be crafted for politicians, nor should politicians foist their secretly sealed, self-serving pacts on Kenyans.

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opinion

■ The decree, if it can be termed so, was unenforceable, illegal and unconstitutional

Mr President, don't touch my bottle



MACHARIA
GITHO

President William Ruto is a famous teetotaler, as is his right. He also has genuine concerns about the high rate of drunkenness, especially among the youth who in many parts of the country have turned themselves into zombies.

It is probable that Ruto's rise to the political pinnacle has been helped, in part, by the fact that he does not touch alcohol. He is disciplined, focussed, hard-working and blessed with single-minded determination in pursuit of his goals.

As President, he should be concerned that too many of his subjects are wasting their lives away due to capture by the demon drink.

Drunkenness and alcoholism destroy not just individuals, but families, the community, the wider social structure and even impact on the national economy.

Children are left untended and subjected to trauma when their parents drink too much. Family finances are diverted to bars and children are denied parental love and guidance and the responsibility supposed to provide them with education, clothing, medical care and shelter.

It puts undue stress on healthcare systems when scarce resources are extended to care for affliction arising out of drink.

Development goals are compromised when those supposed to provide labour, services, goods and intellectual capital are preoccupied with the bottle.

Indeed, drink is a national problem, and here we must do away with nonsense once and for all that is it a uniquely Central Kenya problem.

In fact if there is a community for whom alcoholism presents an existential crisis, affecting men and women of all ages, backgrounds, economic and social status, it is Presidents Ruto's own northern Rift Valley people.

Something clearly needs to be done and it falls on the President to whip his government into action.

However, acknowledging that we have a drinking problem must present no excuse for Ruto to try and enforce his own temperance on the rest of Kenya.

He can stick to his cup of hot tea without misusing presidential fiat to force every other person into abandoning their preferred

beverage. In that regard his recent edict purporting to limit the number of bars in Kenya to just one per constituency was completely out of order.

It was in the realm of those infamous roadside policy declarations of the Moi error, and would achieve nothing other than provide police officers on the beat and government administrators an avenue for graft.

The decree, if it can be termed so, was unenforceable, illegal, unconstitutional and an outright encroachment on the powers and functions of devolved county governments.

It was also a classic example of the hypocrisy that infects every level of the Kenya Kwanza maladministration.

On the one hand, we are pretending to fight alcoholism by closing bars. But on the other, we are supporting and praising alcohol manufacturers, including those who have gained notoriety for robbing the taxman, as patriotic entrepreneurs who should not be asked to pay their dues to Caesar.

How illogical can we be? If indeed brewers, distillers and vintners are an essential element of the economy, major employers and valued contributors to exchequer, how can we at the same time move to cripple them by shutting down sales and distributions outlets?

Now, I am not supporting drunkenness, unchecked manufacture and consumption of harmful illicit brews, or existence of noisy bars near schools or in residential areas.

I simply pointing out the hypocrisy and the harmful impact of policy edicts into which little thought has gone.

Drunkenness and alcoholism destroy not just individuals, but families, the community, the wider social structure and even impact on the national economy. Children are left untended and subjected to trauma when their parents drink too much. Family finances are diverted to bars and children are denied parental love and guidance and the responsibility supposed to provide them with education, clothing, medical care and shelter. It puts undue stress on healthcare systems when scarce resources are extended care for affliction arising out of drink.

I love my beer. It is a great social lubricant that I prefer to take at a place within minimum staggering distance of my official abode because I don't want to drive miles under the influence. I'd be the first to concede that occasionally, I might over-indulge. I did that a lot in my younger days, but I don't think I am much the worse for wear.

Experience elsewhere has shown that the more government moves into prohibition territory, the more incentive is provided for business to go underground, and into the control of organised crime.

Closing down licensed bars will simply fuel the proliferation of unlicensed bars and a shift towards the deadly illicit liquors that are leaving a trail of destruction across the length and breadth of Kenya.

By all means let us control, regulate and tax, but let us resist the temptation to try and impose our own individual social mores or religious inclinations on others.

Before and beyond ham-fisted approaches that don't solve the problem, we also need to understand why so many in Kenya are becoming captive to drink, as well as to miraa, muguka, bhang, cocaine and other mind-altering substances.

If our leaders examined themselves, they will find they are part of the problem and no demonstrations of moral outrage and proclamations of piety will solve anything.

Hopelessness, despair, alienation, poverty, joblessness, social and economic injustices and all those other issues the government refuses to address and solve are the real problems.

Our youth are told to work hard and to lead pious, honest, lives, but everyday all they see is those in leadership giving false promises, leading extravagant lifestyles at public expense, and looting the national kitty without fear of arrest.

A young man or woman who steals a chicken or a packet of flour out of desperation will land many years in jail, if not executed on the streets, while the fat cat who steals from Kenya Power, Kenya Pipeline, the County Treasury or other public assets is praised and promoted as long as he or she sings the right political song.

Mr President, you need a drink. It will open your eyes.

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kenya lens

■ HE'S THE FIRST KENYAN TO BE INDUCTED INTO FIJI'S RUGBY TOWN WALK OF FAME

A TRUE WARRIOR OF RUGBY

● BY BRIAN WASUNA

A rugby icon, a national treasure and a global symbol. Maybe more.

After 17 years, multiple team and individual accolades, rugby superstar Collins Injera has called it a day in one of the most demanding contact sports.

Just like his time in the game, Injera's retirement is special. For one, he has blazed a trail that millions will try emulate for the foreseeable future. Also, it reminds everyone that everything comes to an end at some point.

"He is going to be a world leader. His leadership skills show that he has become more mature. On the pitch, he is versatile. ...," former Kenya Sevens head coach Mitch Ocholla said of Injera in 2016, following a unique and successful hunt for the national team and one of its key players.

As Injera walks off the pitch, he strolls into a role as UN Sustainable Development Goals Quality Education Partner. Already a world leader in sport, the new role could be a start to emulating the same in the humanitarian sector.

On January 11, Injera became the first Kenyan and only the second African, after Johannesburg-born Brian Habana, to be inducted into Fiji's Rugby Town Walk of Fame. The Rugby Town Walk of Fame is an honours programme in Fiji's Sigatoka town. The programme pays homage to the best rugby players in the world who have made an immense impact on the sport.

Past inductees include David Campese (Australia), Waisale Serewi (Fiji), Jonah Lomu (New Zealand), Viliame Satala (Fiji), Ben Gollings (England), Karl Te Nana (New Zealand) and Lote Tuqiri (Australia), Habana and the 2016 Fiji Sevens team that won Olympic gold in 2016.

Just like most rugby players of his generation, getting into the game was by chance. Having grown up playing football, Injera only gave the gentleman's sport

Injera calls time on rugby career after 279 Sevens Series tries, four World Cups, 424 appearances in 83 international tournaments – the most by any Kenyan – and two Olympics



Collins Injera during the Safari Sevens at the RFUEA grounds in 2008.
CHRIS OMOLLO | NATION

a try when he joined Vihiga High School.

After completing his O-Levels at Vihiga in 2004, a teenage Injera followed his brother, Humphrey Kayange, another legend of the game, to military outfit Ulinzi RFC.

Had the military's top echelons known what Kayange, Injera and other players like Dennis Mwanja would turn out to be, perhaps they would not have disbanded Ulinzi RFC in 2005.

But *c'est la vie!* Injera and Kayange joined Mwamba RFC, where they almost immediately became priceless assets for a club that held a special place in the history of Kenyan rugby.

On the Sevens front, Injera and Kayange were symbiotic. They were a marvel to watch, and either of them could create something out of nothing.

In 2006, the Kenya Rugby Union (KRU) appointed Benjamin Ayimba as player/coach of the national seven-a-side team in what was meant to be a reboot of the system aimed at taking things to the next level.

The Sevens team was not what it is today. Kenya was still a young nation trying to catch up with teams that had long developed strong talent identification and management systems. Teams like New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, Fiji and France were miles ahead. Kenya could only secure a couple of invitations to a handful of tournaments in the World Rugby Sevens Series back then.

But even in those times, Kenya was a crowd puller. Fans across the world fell in love with the team as its rugby was full of flair and pace, which helped cause a huge upset every once in a while.

When putting together his team for the 2006 Dubai Sevens, Ayimba included Injera, a rugby firebrand with a lot of pace to burn.

This was the start of a legendary

kenya lens

run for Ayimba, Injera and the national Sevens team.

Kenya finished the 2005-2006 season in position nine overall, with 13 points. The team dropped to 11 points the following season, but managed to improve the points tally to 22. In the 2007-2008 season, the world started to take note of Kenya and some of its standout players like Injera.

Ayimba's brand of rugby had seen Kenya move from mere crowd pleasers to regular contenders for a quarterfinal place in each tournament. The team finished in seventh place overall, with 38 points.

Kenya was playing good rugby, and Injera's try count was rising. But it was in the 2008-2009 season that Injera made his mark. The Mwamba RFC winger scored an incredible 42 tries.

There was no competition, as the closest competitor was South Africa's Rayno Benjamin with 28 tries. Injera's try tally gave him a total of 210 points for the season. He was only bested by England's Ben Gollings, who managed 260.

Injera was the only player that featured in both lists of top try and points scorers. He was also the only player in the top 10 points scorers without a single conversion. That season there was simply no stopping Injera; he scored at will and could do no wrong. His efforts propelled Kenya to position six at the end of the season with 64 points, her best ever finish at the time.

On March 5, 2009, Dubai hosted the Rugby World Cup Sevens. Kenya went into the tournament as a team to watch owing to the previous season's exploits.

Having never proceeded to the main cup of the World Cup, pressure was high, considering the raised expectations. It was a strange outing as all the pre-tournament favourites – New Zealand, South Africa and Fiji – were eliminated at the quarterfinal stage.

Kenya had gotten a reputation of being giant killers, and had at one point or another beaten every top team in the World Sev-

ens Series tournaments, save for Fiji. In the 2009 World Cup quarterfinal, Kenya earned her first ever victory over the pacific islanders, winning 26-7.

Moments into the first half, Lavin Asego burst through the Fijians' loose defence to score the first try and make Kenya's intent known. Injera, Kayange and Biko Adema all scored in the second half to secure a semifinal date

against Argentina. Argentina beat Kenya 12-0 in the semifinal before falling to Wales in the final.

It was still the best season for Kenya and Injera yet, and he was nominated for World Sevens Player of the year for the 2008-2009 season.

Injera also represented Kenya in the 2011 and 2022 15-a-side Rugby World Cup qualifiers, in which the country has not had much luck. On both occasions, Kenya fell at the final step to Namibia. He would continue being one of the most important players for the Sevens team until his retirement. He has been overlooked at times in squad selections over the last few years, but his absence was clearly felt.

On May 17, 2015 Injera became the first African to reach 200 tries at the World Rugby Sevens Series.

The milestone came in a 24-12 win against Japan at the London Sevens, towards the end of the 2014-2015 season.

The moment came with an iconic, albeit controversial, celebration. After touching down, the then 29-year-old popped a marker pen from his socks and autographed an £60,000 (Sh9.2 million) camera.

Word broke out that Injera's permanent marker may have ruined the camera, but that has since been disputed by several stakeholders, including the Kenyan legend. At the time, Argentina's Santiago Gomez Cora was the all-time top try scorer in the World Sevens Series with 230. England's Ben Gollings was the only other player that had crossed the 200 tries mark.

In the 2015-2016 Injera touched down 32 times, taking his tally to 235 tries and enabling him to leapfrog both Gollings and Cora.

He scored the all-important 231st try against France in the final pool game of the London Sevens. The pacy winger then dashed to the stands, took off his jersey and handed it to his parents as they embraced in joy and overcome by emotion.

If there was any doubt before, he was now undoubtedly a legend of the game. Two of the tries came at the best possible time. In the Sin-

gapore Sevens final, where Kenya blanked Fiji 30-7 to claim her first ever tournament win.

Ayimba, whose first stint as coach opened the door for Injera, had returned to the helm that season. His return saw Injera achieve two of the most important accolades of his career – top of the all-time try scorers list and a tournament title. It was a victorious season for Injera, for Kenya, for Africa and for rugby. The winger has never been one to stay down after tripping. In 2011 he was axed from the national team following a conflict of loyalties.

Then coach Mike Friday ordered players to take a break after the Wellington and Las Vegas legs of the series. But Injera's club, Mwamba, was in the Kenya Cup semifinals and wanted him to play. Injera did not play, so the club suspended him for eight weeks and ordered him not to report for Kenya Sevens training.

Injera failed to train with the national team as ordered, so his contract was cancelled.

Friday told Injera that he knew what needed to be done to get his contract back. While those terms have never been made public, Injera returned to the fold, meaning he did the needful.

Injera has called it a day. That day ends with 279 World Sevens Series tries, and the respect of just about all rugby stakeholders.

England's Dan Norton has since managed 358 tries, relegating Injera to second on the all-time top try scorers' list, but that has not taken away the shine from Kenya's best rugby export. Injera has played in four World Cup Sevens tournaments, made 424 appearances in 83 tournaments – the most by any Kenyan – of the World Rugby Sevens Series, and played in two Olympic Games.

He has won the Safari Sevens on multiple occasions, won the local Sevens Series with Mwamba and featured in the Commonwealth Games with Kenya. He was the 2009 Sports Person of the Year (Soya). Former President Mwai Kibaki bestowed the Order of the Grand Warrior upon Injera in 2009.

Unlike the indenture on the £60,000 camera, Injera's signature on the canvass that is rugby sevens will never come off the books of history.

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Name: Collins Injera
Born: October 18, 1986
Clubs: Mwamba, Ulinzi
Nationals caps: Shujaa (7s) 2006-2022, Simbas (15s) 2011-2022
Wife: Chebet Limo
Children: Three
Siblings: Humphrey Kayange, Michael Agevi
Education: Bachelor's Degree in Mass Communication from Daystar University
Hobby: Golf

SCIENCE & TECH

Microsoft to invest billions in OpenAI



Microsoft has announced a multi-year, multibillion dollar investment in artificial intelligence (AI) as it extends its partnership with OpenAI.

OpenAI is the creator of popular image generation tool Dall-E and the chatbot ChatGPT. In 2019 Microsoft invested \$1bn in the company, founded by Elon Musk and tech investor Sam Altman.

The Windows and Xbox maker plans up to 10,000 redundancies, but said it would still hire in key strategic areas. Breaking the news in a memo to staff last week, chief executive Satya Nadella said: "The next major wave of computing is being born, with advances in AI."

The firm said it believed AI would have an "impact at the magnitude of the personal computer, the internet, mobile devices and the cloud". ChatGPT is able to provide convincingly human responses to questions.

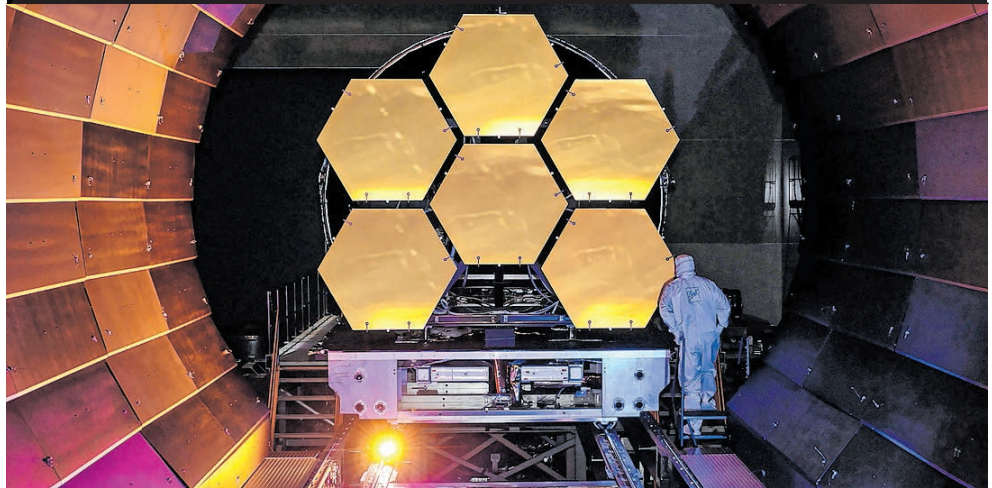
Speculation about the potential misuse of the technology, from helping students cheat in exams to writing malware, has gone hand in hand with suggestions that it has the potential to revolutionise many industries, including search.

Microsoft owns the Bing search engine, and while it lags behind Google in popularity, some suggest that ChatGPT poses a threat to the industry leader. *The New York Times* reported it has led Google to declare a "code red" over fears it might enable competitors to eat into the firm's \$149bn search business. Google has previously held back from releasing some AI systems for public use.

The firm has cited "ethical challenges" for not releasing its image generation system, Imagen.

Researchers said there was a risk the system, which is trained on data scraped from the web, would learn "harmful stereotypes and representations".

WEBB TELESCOPE HUNTS LIFE'S ICY CHEMICAL ORIGINS



Mirrors for the James Webb Space Telescope undergo testing at Nasa's Marshall Space Flight Centre in Huntsville, Alabama.

● LONDON

The new super space telescope James Webb has ventured into the freezer. It has been probing some of the darkest, coldest regions in space for clues about the chemistry that goes into making planets, and perhaps even life.

This newly released image shows a segment of the Chameleon I molecular cloud, some 630 light years from Earth.

It is here, at temperatures down to about -260C, that Webb is detecting types of ice grains not previously observed. Eventually, such clouds will collapse to form stars and, around them, planets. And the chemistry being spied by Webb will be incorporated. You can see this in action at top-left of the image. The orange "hourglass" feature is a protostar — a star in the mode of formation, pulling material from the cloud on to itself.

The orange stars underneath are more mature and bright enough that they generate the distinctive six spikes that have now become familiar in Webb pictures and are artefacts of the telescope's segmented mirror

design. But to detect the ices, Webb is ignoring all of these stars to the side and looking to stars behind the blue wispy Chameleon I.

As the light from these objects shines through the cloud, some of it is absorbed by the ices to betray their composition.

"It's sort of like a shadow puppet," explained Dr Melissa McClure from Leiden University, Netherlands. "You have some kind of shape that makes the shadow. The ices make an absorption at particular wavelengths of light and you add all those up into a spectrum to see what chemical species you have," she told *BBC News*.

This is work done principally on Webb by its near-infrared and mid-infrared spectrometers, and to a degree by its near-infrared camera which produced the beautiful image at the top of the page.

In addition to simple ices such as water, carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, ammonia, and methane, Webb sees several other compounds, including carbonyl sulphide and the more complex organic (carbon-containing) ice methanol. And there are hints, too, of chemical

species with multiple carbon atoms such as acetone, ethanol, and acetaldehyde.

It is much easier for astronomers to see these targets in space when they are gases. Webb is breaking new ground by seeing them in the solid state, as ices. It will aid scientists as they try to understand where the chemistry for life came from and how it built the sophistication it now displays on our planet.

"Even though we detected more ice than ever previously reported, the amount of 'light elements' (carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen, and sulphur) present within them is still less than we expect," explained Dr Helen Fraser, from the Open University, UK.

"For astronomers that is exciting, because it means there is something we don't yet fully understand about interstellar chemistry — and that challenges us not just to keep observing, but also to experiment in the laboratory."

Close in to a newly forming star, the icy dust grains like those in Chameleon I would mostly evaporate, but further out they could survive and clump together to make comets.

africa lens

■ THE 'DELAY BY ANY MEANS' TACTIC HAS JUST ABOUT WORN ITSELF OUT IN THE SYSTEM

ZUMA'S TROUBLED WATERS



South Africa's President, Cyril Ramaphosa (right), gestures as he shakes hands with his predecessor, Jacob Zuma, at a farewell cocktail function at The Presidency in Cape Town on February 20, 2018. PHOTO | AFP

Without a 'turning point' in his current trajectory, the former president and twice former prisoner looks set for another stint in an 'orange jumpsuit'

● By CHRIS ERASMUS

If 2022 ended badly for Jacob Zuma – and it did – the prospects for the former South African president in 2023, and beyond, are much worse yet. Zuma's 'troubles in earnest' begin on Monday, when he is due to be back in court on corrupt charges.

Last week, a full bench of the High Court ruled for President Cyril Ramaphosa to the effect that Zuma was abusing legal processes in citing Ramaphosa in a bid to prosecute, privately, both the state prosecutor in the former president's long-running corruption tri-

al and a journalist covering Zuma's numerous outings to the courts. The decision by the High Court as to whether Zuma may cite Ramaphosa for, in effect, not breaking the law, was handed down just prior to proceedings in which Ramaphosa had been summoned under Zuma's private prosecution exercise.

Zuma's complaint was that Ramaphosa did not remove or act against State Advocate Billy Downer, the prosecutor who Zuma wants removed for alleged 'bias'.

Ramaphosa's legal team had pointed out to the three-judge bench that what Zuma wanted would be unconstitutional, if acted

on, and that what Ramaphosa did was nothing at all, which is no crime. Legal opinion in this unique and untested terrain into which Zuma has dragged Downer, journalist Karyn Maughan and Ramaphosa, is that it is more of his well-known 'Stalingrad defence strategy', using every legal delaying tactic known, and then dreaming up new ones.

The reality is that, once the Zuma private prosecution 'show' is over, with almost no chance of success, based purely on the known facts, Zuma must on Monday face up to the

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start-in-earnest of his trial dating from a late 1990s arms deal in which he is alleged to have received kickbacks.

Zuma's former 'financial advisor' was sentenced to 15 years behind bars – but only served a short jail term, being released on what appear to be spurious 'medical grounds' – on the same 783 counts of fraud, money-laundering and corruption, among other charges, which Zuma faces.

The effort to have prosecutor Downer, the same man who successfully prosecuted Zuma's financial advisor more than a decade and a half ago, removed from the case delayed matters through most of 2022 and Zuma's legal team appears intent on delaying matters further yet, given the chance.

Zuma has also tried to have his corruption trial judge recuse himself, again for alleged bias, the judge refusing and being supported by higher benches. Out of ploys, beyond the private prosecution he is undertaking on the flimsiest of grounds, Zuma now faces the legal music without any obvious means to further delay testimony's start, and with scores of witnesses and an enormous paper trail for the court to wade through.

The core issues remain as they were for his financial advisor, who was found by his trial judge to be in a "generally corrupt" relationship with Zuma.

Unless Zuma's legal team "pull a rabbit out of the hat", said one senior legal observer, there's no reason to believe that the court in his corruption case will not arrive at much the same verdict, on the same evidence.

On the political front, things are going just as

No respite for Zuma as graft case continues

badly for the former head of state.

Zuma and most of those supporting him, including a coterie of 'young lions' of the ruling African National Congress (ANC) party's youth league in Zuma's home province of KwaZulu-Natal, were metaphorically soundly whipped in the ANC's five-yearly elective conference, wrapped up late in December.

The ANC in Zuma's region, the largest by population, has been broadly loyal to the former president and sent nearly a quarter of the voting delegates to that conference but could garner only a small proportion of the 87-person national executive of the ruling party, and none of its top seven posts.

That, in political terms, is about as severe a beating as one could imagine, especially as Zuma and his closest allies had set the conference up as an intended 'ambush' of President Ramaphosa, designed to sideline him from power in both ruling party and state. The idea was to 'disqualify' Ramaphosa from standing for his second term. In the event, Ramaphosa side-stepped the plot, ostensibly based on the President's 'Phala Phala game farm scandal' in which US\$580,000 was stolen, and easily won, with a much-increased support-base

in the party's top hierarchy. It had been hoped by Zuma and acolytes to forge from Ramaphosa's planned ouster a 'turning-point' in Zuma's almost two-decade-long struggle to escape answering graft charges.

With Zuma, 'Number 1' as he was called when in power between 2009 and 2018, in the dock, others involved in 'state capture' thievery from the fiscus will be following in greater numbers, the National Director of Public Prosecutions has promised.

Without a 'turning point' in Zuma's current trajectory, the former president and twice former prisoner – initially jailed during the dark apartheid era, when he served a 10-year sentence for his anti-apartheid activities, and more recently about two months of a 15-month contempt conviction from the apex Constitutional Court – looks set for another stint in an 'orange jumpsuit', the uniform of serving convicts.

Testimony in Zuma's arms deal kickback trial could yet again be delayed, however, if the trial judge takes the unlikely step of recusing himself, having previously refused a motion to this end. Pietermaritzburg High Court Judge Piet Koen, whose 'fairness' has been contradictorily both praised and attacked by Zuma's defence team, will address Zuma's last objections before testimony begins.

On several occasions while 'Stalingrad defence' tactics were being employed by Zuma's lawyers, Judge Koen has clearly been exasperated, but has bent over backwards to avoid any sign of prejudice against Zuma.

Complaints from Zuma's legal team on how pre-trial motions were handled ultimately led to what has been described as the "desperate measure" of a private prosecution by Zuma of prosecutor Downer in a last-ditch, but almost certain to fail, bid to remove Downer from the case. The removal or recusal of either judge or lead prosecutor is likely to have the effect of obtaining further delays, just as Zuma's legal team have been and are still aiming for.

Downer's alleged but undemonstrated, and essentially irrelevant, 'bias' is why Zuma tried, all the way to the Constitutional Court and without success at any level, to have the lead State Prosecutor removed, ostensibly because such 'bias' strips Downer of "legal title to act".

This is an entirely untenable legal position, never before tried, and recently dismissed permanently by the Constitutional Court as invalid. The reason for Zuma's animus towards Downer is the prosecutor's successful prosecution of Zuma's close friend and advisor, Schabir Shaik, in the same arms deal kickback matter that Zuma is facing.

By 2023's start, the 'delay by any means' tactic has just about worn itself out in the South African legal system.

But every ongoing appeal is a basis for his lawyers to claim, yet again, that there are relevant matters under consideration by other courts, and therefore the case cannot proceed. One day soon, however, the appeals and related delaying tactics will all run to an end, and then it will be Zuma for whom the bell tolls.

Supporters of South African President Cyril Ramaphosa celebrate after he was re-elected as African National Congress leader during the 55th National Conference of the ANC at the National Recreation Centre (NASREC) in Johannesburg on December 19, 2022.

PHOTO I
AFP



global lens

■ IN LYMAN, 13,000 RESIDENTS ARE LIVING IN GRUELLING WINTER CONDITIONS

**IT'S HELL,
JUST HELL
THERE**



Ukrainian troops fire with surface-to-surface rockets MLRS towards Russian positions at a front line in the eastern Ukrainian region of Donbas on June 7, 2022.

Despite heavy fighting continuing in the Donbas region, civilians are trickling back to liberated Ukrainian towns close to the front line

● KYIV

Two Ukrainian fighter jets roar low overhead as we emerge from a dense, snow-bound forest and drive into the railway junction town of Lyman, in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine.

It is nearly four months since Russian troops were forced to retreat from here, pushed back some 25km to the east. But the boom of artillery fire, close to the

front lines, is still audible every few minutes, and this town — much of it in ruins — is not yet safe from Russian missiles.

“I live on the seventh floor. The rocket hit the fifth floor, early this morning, at around five. But I’m fine,” says Alexander Rogovitz, a 73-year-old retired businessman and the only remaining resident of a large apartment block on the edge of town.

He bends over to share out some dried food to the eight cats — sev-

en of them strays, abandoned by neighbours — he now looks after.

That resilience, and a strong collective spirit, seem to be widespread here among those who have clung on amid the snow and rubble. In a nearby courtyard, beside a giant bomb crater, a 45-year-old railway technician named Valeri Dmitrenko is busy chopping wood to heat the basement where he and 21 neighbours have been sheltering for the past nine months. Lyman still

has no running water or central heating system, and the daytime temperature has been hovering around freezing.

“What can we do?” Valeri shrugs, stroking the head of a stray dog he and his wife, Ira, recently adopted and named Princess Diana. When he’s not busy with his axe, Valeri helps neighbours repair broken doors and windows in their badly damaged apartment building.

Ira walks past, hurriedly, with

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global lens

Living on the edge: 'Hell on earth' in Ukraine

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buckets of water she has pumped from a well in the yard. "I still find it stressful to stay outside, in the open, for long," says Ira, a 41-year-old accountant, before heading down a dark flight of stairs and into the cramped cellar of 6 Railway Street.

Despite heavy fighting continuing in the Donbas, civilians are trickling back to liberated Ukrainian towns close to the front line — against the advice of local authorities. In Lyman, devastated by Russian forces last year, some 13,000 residents are living, precariously, in gruelling winter conditions.

As Russia's forces approached Lyman last June, 41,000 civilians fled, leaving about 10,000 people behind. Many of those were elderly, or poor — or, like Ira and Valeri, had sick relatives who refused to leave. For the next four months, about 60 people squeezed into the same cellar on Railway Street.

"It was difficult at times. People are different. Some became aggressive — we're not used to living all together like this," says Ira.

Adding to that stress was the fact that, by Ira's reckoning, about a third of those who had chosen to stay in the cellar were pro-Russian, actively hoping that Ukraine would lose the war.

"Yes, there were people who supported Russia. But they left when Ukraine started liberating territory. When the so-called Russian authorities moved out, they went with them, taking their children. Probably because they were scared of what would happen to them here," adds Ira.

On October 3, Lyman was liberated by Ukrainian forces and soon afterwards the town's mayor, Alexander Zhuravlyov, returned to discover that "80 per cent, maybe 90 per cent" of the buildings had been damaged or destroyed.

The railway lines that pass through the centre of town are still a mass of broken overhead cables and blocked tracks.

In recent months, the mayor and his team have managed to restore electricity to most of the town and the surrounding villages. Pensions are now being paid, on time, and some shops have reopened.

The government and humanitarian groups have brought in wood stoves and distributed logs. Every day, one aid group brings in hundreds of packed lunches to distribute free of charge. There are roughly 700 children living in Lyman and the mayor estimates that another 3,000 residents have returned since the town was liberated. But he's urging the rest to stay away.

"At the moment we do not recommend people to return here. On the contrary, they're better off in safer places and cities. There are no comfortable living places here, for now. People will be accepted in other regions and will be provided with accommodation and food," he says, driving to the site of a two-week-old



An elderly woman reacts after her house was shelled during an artillery duel between Ukrainian and Russian troops in the city of Lysychansk, eastern Ukrainian region of Donbas, on June 11, 2022. PHOTO | AFP

missile attack that ripped the entire wall off a nine-storey apartment block.

The mayor says local police are still dealing



A woman reacts outside a damaged apartment building after a strike in the city of Slovyansk at the eastern Ukrainian region of Donbas on May 31, 2022, amid Russian invasion of Ukraine. PHOTO | AFP

with "a handful" of Lyman's residents suspected of working for the Russian occupiers. But he believes the experience of the past year has persuaded many pro-Russian residents to change their views.

"I think those people now understand that they made a mistake. They were led astray by the media — watching Russian propaganda on television every night and thinking it was the truth. They were in a minority, and they have already changed their minds. They see that this Russian world is not the one they'd been led to expect," says Zhuravlyov.

A 62-year-old woman called Valentina, queueing for food at the local hospital, seems to reflect that change of heart when asked about the security situation in Lyman since it was liberated. In recent months, pro-Russian civilians have often hinted at their allegiance by implying that both sides are equally guilty of shelling towns, and that it is therefore impossible to assign blame.

"The bombardment hasn't stopped. The shells still hit the town. We don't know who is firing," she begins. But then, unprompted, Valentina changes her mind.

"I suppose it must be the Russians. Yes, no doubt," she says, adding: "We're Ukrainians. This is a Ukrainian town. The shops are open. Our pensions come on time. The state has not abandoned us."

— BBC

global lens

■ IT AIMS TO DRAW A MILLION CHRISTIANS IN 2030

● LONDON

Today the River Jordan lacks its biblical proportions, but some 200,000 visitors still flock to the traditional spot for Christian baptisms in Jordan in a typical year.

I watch as groups from the US and Europe take turns to dip cautiously in the narrow breadth of muddy water and photograph themselves along the reed-lined banks. "When you're in the area you have to visit. It's part of history," enthuses Oliver, who is French. Mark from Maryland says he came for "the spirituality, to be able to walk in the footsteps of Jesus".

This month is peak season for pilgrims as Western — and then Eastern — Orthodox churches celebrate Epiphany. The holiday marks both the visit of the Three Wise Men, or Magi, to a new-born Jesus, and his later baptism by the prophet John. Recently, Jordan announced an ambitious \$100m plan aimed at drawing a million Christians to al-Maghtas in 2030, to commemorate what is seen as the 2,000th anniversary of Jesus's baptism.

It promises a biblical village and the largest Christian pilgrimage and interfaith centre in the region, recognising that the River Jordan and its valley is also loaded with religious importance for Jews and Muslims.

"It's always great to have our visitors, our pilgrims, experience what John and Jesus did," says Rustom Mkhjian, director general of Jordan's baptism site.

"I call it 'the fifth gospel,' as you physically see what you read in all the four gospels. Truly you feel in the midst of religious history and faith."

Among the many features he points out is a native plant popular with bees, called *yanbout* or locust pod, reminding me that the Bible describes St John dressed in his camel-hair garments, eating "locusts and wild honey".

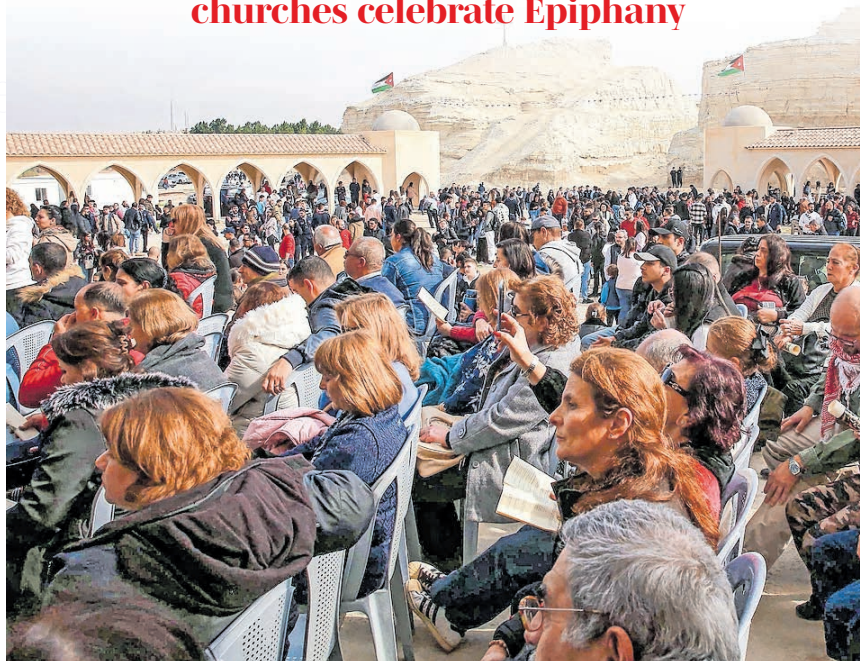
The baptism site, also known as Bethany Beyond the Jordan, is a Unesco World Heritage site, where the ruins of Roman and Byzantine churches, a monastery and baptism pools are preserved among the wilderness near to the lowest point on Earth.

They were uncovered in 1995 after Jordan's peace treaty with Israel.

Prior to that, both sides of the river had been a closed military zone since the 1967 Middle East War, in which Israel captured the West Bank from Jordan and occupied it. "The rediscovery of the site is one of the fruits of peace," Mr Mkhjian tells me. "Imagine, 11 huge minefields were demined. I'm talking about tens of thousands of mines were taken away. Isn't it great to have millions of pilgrims instead of mines?" Although the Jordanians vie with the Israeli-controlled side of the river for tourists, in the past two decades three Catholic popes, two popes from the Coptic Church and church leaders from all over the world have visited al-Maghtas. The rich and famous have had their children baptised here, and Jordan's royal court has sent the holy waters for British royal christenings. On the invitation of the Jordanian authorities, different Christian denominations have built new

JESUS BAPTISM SITE MAKEOVER

This month is peak season for pilgrims as Western — and then Eastern — Orthodox churches celebrate Epiphany



Catholic pilgrims attend a mass outside the Church of Saint John the Baptist, near the baptism site of Al-Maghtas, where Jesus is believed by Christians to have been baptised by the saint, in the Jordan river valley, some 60km southwest of the Jordanian capital, Amman, on January 13. Thousands of Catholic Christians attended the special mass on the banks of the Jordan River in an annual pilgrimage. PHOTO | AFP

churches here, with more planned. It makes for a rare sight in the Middle East.

"It's heart-warming," an American visitor, Sharon, tells me, praising the initiative by Jordan's Muslim royal family.

"We're learning how much we all have in common, and that the Jordanian government is establishing all of this to give each and every denomination they can find the right to share in the property here." The masterplan for the new 340-acre baptism zone, next to the Unesco site, was unveiled last month by King Abdullah. Samir Murad, who chairs the non-profit foundation set up by the Jordanian government to oversee the project, insists the integrity of the area will be maintained.

"It would be foolish and unwise to try and

create a touristic destination that's based on commercialisation and theme park-type issues in a site so holy," he says. "Let's remember this is the third-holiest site in Christianity. This is the site where Jesus got his calling and so it would be highly inappropriate, if you will, to corrupt it or violate in any way." Plans for the new development include so-called glamping-style lodging and eateries, serving locally grown organic food. Internet and electricity cables will be hidden underground.

A large part of the zone will be reserved for agriculture and a bird sanctuary to protect the natural environment. Help is being sought from the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew in the UK to reintroduce some biblical plants.

— BBC

OBIT

■ COLLEAGUES WOULD SPEAK OF HIM AS FORCEFUL WHEN HE WANTED TO GET THINGS DONE

THE NEWEST SCHOLAR IN HEAVEN

The University of Nairobi Tower will remain etched in the memory of many who have studied, worked and passed through it as evidence of Magoha's vision for the institution



Former Education Cabinet Secretary George Magoha died on January 24. His size, voice and stare were often more than enough to silence contrary opinions. PHOTO | FILE

• BY TOM ODHIAMBO

Very often, Prof George Albert Omoro Magoha appeared in public as a non-smiling man, too serious to bother with such trifles as greetings, jokes or even laughter. Yet this man could laugh uproariously when circumstances allowed, just as he could be extremely serious when expected to relax. Many of the eulogies in the media have already characterised him as a man who loved to have his way, who would bulldoze through situations, a hard worker with little or no time to waste. Indeed, Magoha often appeared as a man who had too much work to do in a limited amount of time. Two happenings that I witnessed demonstrated his complex character.

I recall one incident that illustrates why Magoha would best be described as a workaholic who was set on delivering on all his commitments. On August 3, 2019, a book launch had been scheduled for Gem, Yala, Siaya County. Prof Bethwel Ogot had organised a ceremony at his home to unveil his book, *History of Kisumu: 1901-2001*. People had congregated at the home from early in the morning. Natives of Yala, visitors from Uganda and other parts of the world, Ogot's former students and colleagues, journalists, and other guests waited patiently for the guest of honour to arrive.

As lunchtime approached, food was served. Guests appeared apprehensive. Was the 'big man' who was expected to officially launch the book going to come? As they sipped soda in the heat of the day, a government SUV suddenly rolled into the compound. And thus arrived Magoha. He had been at some public event that morning. He was ushered to his seat and served a plate of food, which he ate in public. After a glass of water, Magoha stood up and spoke about the book and the importance of knowledge in society in not more than 20 minutes.

One would have expected the son of the soil, in his own village, to talk politics, to speak about the dreams of his people and what the government would do for them. Magoha was then Education Cabinet Secretary. He was a big man in government. Did this man not have political ambitions? How could he leave such an audience without even a single political statement? Magoha confounded all of us when he left the ceremony just as an *ohangla* band was just about to begin the entertainment. How could a man who had been a member of a popular musical band in his earlier life not do even one jig? That was Magoha in his element.

There was little time left in the day. He had another event or duties to attend to. Service to the people was some kind of higher calling for him.

The second incident had happened years earlier when Magoha was still the

Vice-Chancellor at the University of Nairobi. There had been troubles during elections of the Student Organisation of Nairobi University officials. It was alleged at the time that one Babu Owino, who was a candidate in the elections, had disputed some results, leading to a fracas at one of the polling stations.

The elections were cancelled and an interim committee to run the affairs of Sonu was constituted. I was invited to one of the consultative meetings on setting up the interim committee in Magoha's office.

Once we were all seated Magoha began to explain the role of student leaders in the university. But he stopped midway and wondered why stories were circulating in the university that he was afraid of Babu Owino. He laughed out boisterously, asking all of us in the room to 'look at me properly' and compare him to Babu Owino.

He asked, 'Why would people say that Magoha is carrying a gun because of Babu Owino, really? Why would I be scared of Babu Owino?'

Later, Magoha would end up having to work with Babu Owino when the latter was elected Chairman of SONU. In turn, Babu Owino would be in Parliament when Magoha appeared before the House for his vetting when he was nominated as the Education CS.

These two incidents reflect a man who was very convinced about his ideas and actions. At the University of Nairobi, he would pursue his projects unrelentingly, seemingly intent on making the university the best in the region. Several infrastructure projects at the university bear testimony to his vision.

The University of Nairobi Tower will remain etched in the memory of many who have studied, worked and passed through it as evidence of Magoha's vision for the institution.

Colleagues at the university would speak of Magoha as forceful when he wanted to get something done. But they would immediately qualify the statement by noting how he was a man who would listen to all and sundry. Many others would talk about him as being empathetic to those who went to his office seeking help.

Yet, very few would willingly meet him face to face or challenge him in a meeting. His size, voice and stare were often more than enough to silence contrary opinions. Which didn't mean that he wouldn't listen to an opposing idea. Such an idea needed to be very convincing to the man who was benignly called the 'people's plumber' for him to listen and appreciate it. Such committed individuals are rare to find these days but their memories remain as signposts of what humanity should be.

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