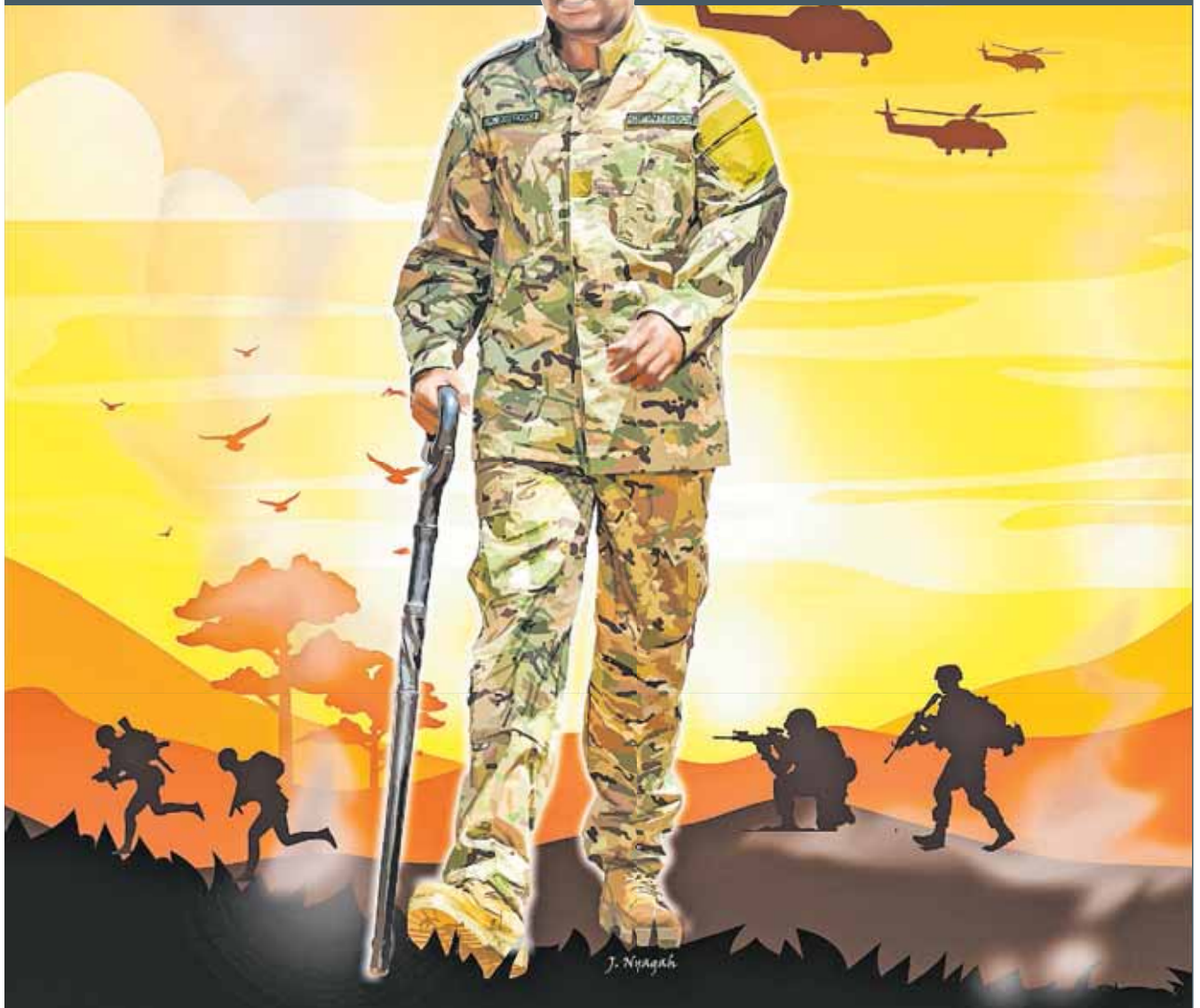


THE Weekly Review

For the Thinking Person

ISSUE NO. 36 | May 7, 2023 FREE WITH 'SUNDAY NATION'



THE COMBAT ZONE

From the restless valley of death to the infamous Shakahola forest in Kilifi, it's baptism by fire for Interior CS Kindiki as he fights banditry and a Doomsday Cult that has claimed over 100 lives. Will the slight, soft-spoken legal scholar who dons military fatigues succeed where past security ministers failed?

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letter from the editor

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Why the Commonwealth is slowly becoming irrelevant

King Charles III ascended to the throne of the British Empire during his coronation in a weekend of pomp and pageantry, a watershed moment for the nation as a new monarch was crowned for the first time in 70 years.

The coronation was beamed across the world. African leaders were in attendance, although they were on the periphery, as usual. The last time they attended a royal event was for the burial of Queen Elizabeth II and they had the misfortune of being bundled in buses.

The British monarchy is the oldest institution after the Papacy, and even though the powers of the sovereign are rather diminished in the rule of his subjects, it is still relevant for social cohesion and cultural pride.

Kenya has borrowed a lot from the British system of government. Our Parliament is based on the Westminster model; our common law derives heavily from British laws; and our judiciary is copied, lock stock and barrel, from them. All these were passed on to us following the brutal colonial rule of British in Kenya. Indeed, it is the British who created our present boundaries and gave our country its name.

There is a lot more that the British have bequeathed the world, one of which is the *Magna Carta* (the grand charter). Issued in June 1215, *Magna Carta* was the first document to put in writing the principle that the King and his government were not above the law.

It sought to prevent the King from exploiting his power, and placed limits on royal authority



Allan Buluku

There is a lot more that the British have bequeathed the world, one of which is the *Magna Carta* (the grand charter). Issued in June 1215, *Magna Carta* was the first document to put in writing the principle that the King and his government were not above the law. It sought to prevent the King from exploiting his power, and placed limits on royal authority by establishing law as a power in itself.

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As Charles III was crowned at Westminster Abbey, royalists cheered the continuity of the world's most famous monarchy. But behind the grand display of pomp and ancient ritual was a growing sense of drift and disaffection in some parts of the UK about the continued existence of the monarchy.

Many nations have a connection with the monarchy through the Common-

wealth, an organisation of all former British colonies and principalities.

These days, other countries have opted to join it, even though the union is slowly becoming irrelevant to the times. The former Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe was not far off the mark when he boldly stated that the organisation was nothing more than a club.

Charles III is no stranger to Kenya, having visited several times to represent his mother, Queen Elizabeth II, as the Prince of Wales. In 1977, he landed in Nairobi for a 10-day Safari, a tour that boosted local tourism and raised the country's profile in the international market.

In 1952, his mother was proclaimed Queen while on holiday in Kenya after her father, King George VI, died in his sleep. Princess Elizabeth and her husband were in Kenya as part of their tour to some of Britain's colonies. They were in Nyeri, where they received their wedding gift – the Sagana Royal Lodge – now the Sagana State Lodge. These little symbolic spaces created a special relationship between Kenya and the royal family.

British companies have interests in practically all sectors in Kenya. They hold more than 30 per cent of Safaricom, and are in the banking and agriculture sectors. Over 100 British companies are registered here. As King, is Charles III likely to have any influence on Rishi Sunak's administration regarding bilateral relations? Time will tell.

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the telescope

■ Former deputies Sambili, Sirima in the race

CBK interviews begin on Tuesday

The Public Service Commission (PSC) will on Tuesday begin interviews for the six short-listed candidates for the post of Central Bank of Kenya (CBK) governor.

The six include former CBK deputies Haron Sirima and Edward Sambili.

Others are Dorcas Muthoni Mutonyi, Nancy Onyango, who is a director in the Office of Public Audit and Inspection at the International Monetary Fund, Adan Abdulla Mohamed and Kamau Thugge, who currently serve as Advisors to President William Ruto.

One of the six will ultimately replace Patrick Njoroge, whose second and final four-year term expires in June 2023.

The interviews come a month after lawmakers approved the nomination of Susan Jemtai Koech as deputy governor. She replaced Sheila M'Mbijjew, whose term of office has also lapsed.

The new governor will have to contend with a depreciating domestic currency and ballooning public debt that has placed pressure on both civil servants' salaries and remittances to county governments.



The interviews come a month after lawmakers approved the nomination of Susan Jemtai Koech as deputy governor.

■ It seeks to promote gender equality

All set for Women of Equity meet



The 2023 Women of Equity Summit will be held at the Villa Rosa Kempinski in Nairobi on May 13.

The meeting seeks to promote gender equality and diversity in leadership roles.

It will also seek to empower women to thrive in their careers, regardless of their family or parental status, by providing them with the tools and support they need to succeed. It will be moderated by Caroline Mutoko, one of Kenya's most respected media personalities.

The keynote speaker will be Amanda Dambuz, a successful South African entrepreneur, author, mentor and motivational speaker.

■ Explosions derailing trains and mysterious fires



Russian military vehicles drive along the Garden Ring road towards the Red Square for a rehearsal of the Victory Day military parade, in central Moscow, on April 27. Russia will celebrate the 78th anniversary of the 1945 victory over Nazi Germany on May 9.

Sabotage acts loom over Victory Day

Explosions derailing trains, power lines cut and mysterious fires: Increasing acts of sabotage inside Russia this week are overshadowing preparations for Moscow's most important celebration — WWII Victory Day on May 9.

President Vladimir Putin has sought to portray Russia as safe and stable while troops have been fighting in Ukraine for more than a year and the death toll mounts. Even as authorities try to recruit more men to refill thinned ranks, they have tried to reassure those at home that the conflict is distant and does not pose a threat to Russian territory.

But a series of incidents in recent days have served as a reminder that Russia, too, is exposed to ene-

my blows — even at hundreds of kilometres from the Ukrainian front.

They have also come at a precarious time for the Kremlin: days before the May 9 grand festivities, when Russia celebrates the Soviet victory over the Nazis in what has become a central event for Putin's rule. Last week, an explosive device derailed a freight train in a region bordering Ukraine for the second day in a row.

After a year of reports of sabotage on the railroads, Monday's derailling was the first time Russian officials confirmed an attack on this scale.

On Monday, some 900 kilometres away in a forest south of Saint Petersburg, another explosive device damaged power lines.

■ The second African player to be crowned MVP

Cameroon's Embiid named NBA's best



The Philadelphia 76ers' Joel Embiid has been named the NBA's most valuable player for the 2022-23 season. The 29-year-old Cameroonian centre picked up 73 first-place votes, with two-time MVP Nikola Jokic of the Denver Nuggets second

with 19. Giannis Antetokounmpo of the Milwaukee Bucks was third. Embiid won his second consecutive NBA scoring title in the regular season, with a career-high season average of 33.1 points per game. The six-time All Star has missed the Sixers' last two games with a knee ligament sprain. Embiid is only the second African player to be crowned MVP, after Hakeem Olajuwon in the 1993-94 season, while it is the fifth consecutive season an international player has won the MVP trophy.

kenya lens

■ THE GENTLE LAWYER WITH A RATHER SHRILL VOICE WAS AN UNLIKELY SECURITY MINISTER

MOVE IN FOR THE KILL



Almost from appointment to the powerful docket, Prof Kithure Kindiki's first agenda had him hopping into and out of Baringo, Elgeyo-Marakwet, West Pokot and neighbouring counties in the northern Rift Valley, where he has been overseeing security operations against bandits and cattle rustlers.

He has also been preoccupied with the series of protests called by opposition leader Raila Odinga's Azimio la Umoja-One Kenya that have often paralysed Nairobi and Kisumu cities.

He was summoned into the now infamous Shakahola forest in the coastal Kilifi County, where discovery of a doomsday cult that has claimed over 100 lives has thrust the country into global news for all the wrong reasons.

The slight, soft-spoken legal scholar was an unlikely security minister compared to a long line-up of predecessors who exuded the power of the office. He succeeded a former University of Nairobi don, Dr Fred Matiang'i, also an academic but brash and tough-talking minister who, under President Uhuru Kenyatta, was elevated to a 'Super CS' whom all other Cabinet secretaries reported to.

The full story of Shakahola was still unfolding when the Cabinet Secretary hopped on a plane again to intercede in clashes along the border between Meru and Isiolo countries. He declared security zones and deployment of the Police Anti-Stock Theft Unit in the area, and then took a short hop north to neighbouring Marsabit, where he ordered an immediate operation against bandits and cattle-rustlers in the expansive county.

Collective punishment in use of security forces against villages where bandits hailed from became the modus operandi of the Moi regime.

President Mwai Kibaki had figures like John Michuki, Chris Murungaru and George Saitoti. President Daniel arap Moi had GG Kariuki, or otherwise ran the docket himself, supervising a figurehead minister, as did Jomo Kenyatta. When under the Ministry of Home Affairs in the Kenyatta regime, the security docket was preserve of the Vice-President, starting with Oginga Odinga followed by Moi.

Kindiki was tapped by the Ruto government to head what has always been one of the most powerful and challenging dockets. His first assignment was to tackle intermittent cattle-rustling, banditry and ethnic warfare that has been the bane of the North Rift for generations. Will he pull it off?

● BY MACHARIA GAITHO

If operators of Kenya Defence Forces and Kenya Police VIP aircraft offered frequent-flyer rewards, the Cabinet Secretary for Interior and National Administration Kithure Kindiki would have more miles than he'd know what to do with.

Almost from appointment to the powerful docket, Prof. Kindiki's first agenda had him hopping into and out of Baringo, Elgeyo-Marakwet, West Pokot and neighbouring counties in the northern Rift Valley, where he has been overseeing security operations against bandits and cattle rustlers.

The assignment was still taking most of his time when he was summoned on similar junkets into the now infamous Shakahola forest at the other end of Kenya in the coastal Kilifi County, where discovery of a doomsday cult that has claimed over 100 lives has thrust the country into global news for all the wrong reasons.

The full story of Shakahola was still unfolding, when the Cabinet Secretary hopped on a plane again to intercede in clashes along the border between Meru and Isiolo countries. He declared security zones and deployment of the Police Anti-Stock Theft Unit in the area, and then took a short

Continued on Page 6

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Kindiki rolls up his sleeves in battle with bandits

Continued from Page 5

hop north to neighbouring Marsabit, where he ordered an immediate operation against bandits and cattle-rustlers in the expansive county.

In between, he has also been preoccupied with the series of protests called by opposition leader Raila Odinga's Azimio la Umoja-One Kenya that have often paralysed Nairobi and Kisumu cities.

It was a baptism by fire when Kindiki was tapped by the new government of President William Ruto to head what has always been one of the most powerful and challenging dockets.

His first assignment was to tackle intermittent cattle rustling, banditry and ethnic warfare that has been the bane of the northern Rift Valley for generations, insecurity that successive regimes, starting with Jomo Kenyatta upto Uhuru Kenyatta, had failed to contain. The slight, soft-spoken legal scholar with a rather shrill voice was an unlikely security minister compared to a long line-up of predecessors who exuded the power of the office.

He succeeded another former University of Nairobi don, Dr Fred Matiang'i, also an academic but brash and tough-talking minister who, under President Kenyatta, was elevated to a 'Super CS' whom all other CSs reported to. Matiang'i's predecessor was Lt Gen (Rtd) Joseph ole Nkaissey, who also matched the profile of previous occupants of what was previously called the Internal Security and Provincial Administration docket — ambitious, outsize personalities who went out of their way to exude power, with more than a fair share of arrogance thrown in.

President Mwai Kibaki had figures like John Michuki, Chris Murungaru and George Saitoti. President Daniel arap Moi had GG Kariuki, or otherwise ran the docket himself, supervising a figurehead minister, as did Jomo Kenyatta. When under the Ministry of Home Affairs in the Kenyatta regime, the security dock-



et was preserve of the Vice-President, starting with Oginga Odinga, followed by Moi.

He would seem a lightweight in comparison, and perhaps to compensate for his slight stature and mild demeanour, Kindiki became the first security minister in Kenya to regularly don military-style camouflage fatigues when visiting trouble spots. Seeing how far he had come with Ruto and the need to placate him after losing out to then Mathira MP Rigathi Gachagua for the running-mate slot ahead of the 2022 presidential election, one of the most prestigious and influential Cabinet seats might have been fitting reward for the one-term Senator for Tharaka-Nithi.

It might have seemed like a tall order, however, when Ruto tasked Kindiki with tackling the bandit-

ry menace in the North Rift once and for all. It was like he was being set up for failure, seeing as to how the traditional competition for resources amongst rival communities in the region had bred a culture of ethnic militia, cattle rustling, banditry and free flow of illegal firearms.

It was a phenomenon that transcended Kenyan borders into Ethiopia, South Sudan and Uganda, and had defied colonial administration as well as the rough law-and-order regimes of Jomo Kenyatta and Moi. Kindiki's first order of business was to enlist the Kenya Defence Forces into the campaign, which involves special authorisation as the military does not ordinarily engage in internal security matters.

But even that recalled events in the mid-1980s, when Moi author-

ised the use of Kenya Army helicopter gunships to strafe villages in West Pokot where bandits were suspected to be hiding. The indiscriminate bombing resulted in large numbers of civilian casualties that to date remain an unresolved human rights query in the region.

Collective punishment in use of security forces against villages where bandits hailed from became a modus operandi of the Moi regime. There were also widespread arrests of local leaders, particularly in West Pokot, suspected to be sponsoring attacks against neighbouring communities. Some prominent leaders like Francis Lotodo were either detained without trial or charged with promotion of warlike activities, a capital offense akin to treason.

Still there was no respite despite all the tough action. Insecurity remains to date in Baringo, Elgeyo-Marakwet, West Pokot, Turkana, Samburu and Laikipia counties. Police have often been outgunned and outmanned by fleet-footed youth operating on familiar terrain despite superior firepower, heavy machine guns, helicopters and armoured cars.

That was the situation into which Kindiki called in the military, and after persistent questions by local leaders and others on whether the new mission was bearing fruit, the CS towards the end of last month confidently pronounced it a success. On April 26, Kindiki told the Senate that bandits had been flushed out of their hideouts.

"All these places, the caves, gorges and ravines, all others that were being used as hideouts for bandits have been cleared and dominated by security forces," he said in response to a question from Samburu Senator Steve Legwe. The CS said the recent attacks in the midst of the security operation were by bandits who mixed with members of the public after the government issued a 24-hour notice for all to vacate the areas used as hideouts.

Three days later, Kindiki vis-

kenya lens

ited the operation zone, where he again declared the mission to rid the North Rift area of banditry a great success. Speaking at the Joint National Police Service and Kenya Defence Forces 'Operation Maliza Uhalifu' Command Centre at Chemolingot in Baringo, he pledged that the government will do whatever it takes to end the menace that has affected the region for decades, and directed that the said areas remain under the command of security operation, thus keeping it under virtual martial law.

He was accompanied by the mission commander, Deputy Inspector-General of Police Noor Gabow, and other senior officers. However, declaration of the success of the mission could have been premature, given that Kindiki's pronouncements left a host of unanswered questions.

While he announced 'liberation' of the gorges, caves, ravines and other hideouts used by the bandits, he was silent on the numbers captured or killed, leaving open the possibility that a large number had simply fled the advancing security forces, hidden their guns and melted into the civilian population. They would be ready to strike again when the heat cools, as was the trend during the Moi years. The CS had also told the Senate that investigations had revealed that the financiers and commanders of the banditry and cattle rustling were influential political and community leaders who would soon be charged in courts of law.

He said that one of the top bandit commanders was already in custody and was helping police with investigations. "We will win this war. It is either Kenya or the bandits. It is either the law or criminals. Kenya will not give way. The law will not give way. It is the bandits and criminals to give way. We will defeat bandits through intelligence-driven security operations."

There has, however, been no information on arraignment of bandits and their commanders. *The Weekly Review* reached out to Kindiki for his comments on some of these questions and gaps, but he had not responded by time of going to press. Kindiki's other major headache has been Shakahola, where a Doomsday Cult led by Pastor Paul Mackenzie of the Good News International Church had persuaded or forced over 110



Police from the Rapid Deployment Unit, who responded to an attack by bandits at Yatya in Baringo North, Baringo County, and took an injured boy and man to Marigat Sub-County Hospital on March 17. JARED NYATAYA | NATION



Kenya Army soldiers on the Eminging-Marigat Road in Baringo County on March 13. JARED NYATAYA | NATION

followers to fast to death so they could ascend to heaven.

The CS was seen to be a bit slow in responding to the matter when the first few graves were unearthed in the sprawling piece of land and adjoining forest, but once on the scene, was quick to declare it a massacre. As the magnitude of what had transpired unfolded, he broached the possibility of charging the preacher with terrorism, genocide or crimes against humanity. Autopsies on the bodies recovered so far have revealed that some of the victims had been strangled or suffocated,

rather than succumbing to starvation, which presents the option of multiple murder charges.

While Mackenzie is not a very well-known figure in the Kenyan evangelistic movement, a dramatic development in the investigations was the arrest of Pastor Ezekiel Odero, who runs a mega-church in an imposing virtual city in the same locality.

Police believe there is a link between the bodies being exhumed on Mackenzie's land with goings-on at Ezekiel's New Life Centre, where televised faith healing sessions attracted desperate con-

gregants for far and wide seeking miracle cures.

Ezekiel is big-time, reputed to enjoy cosy relations with politicians, government officials and security chiefs in Kilifi County and the wider coastal region. He is part of the network of evangelical preachers who have gained national profiles through their televised crusades and healing sessions, and under the Ruto government are displacing the mainstream Catholic and Protestant in its access to State House.

First Lady Rachel Ruto openly patronises the evangelical movement, and is a key driver of the prayer sessions organised by State House that are often presided over by some of the more controversial faith-healing preachers.

Gachagua's wife, Dorcas, is also an evangelical preacher and was quick to plead that the entire church be spared demonisation because of the activities uncovered at Shakahola. Indeed, it seems the evangelical movement is moving fast not only to dissociate itself with Mackenzie, but to push a new narrative that the Church is being targeted.

Kindiki might come up against powerful forces if he tried to make good on his resolve to bring the church into line. His vow to ensure that Mackenzie spends his life behind bars will be tempered by realities that courts convict on the strength of evidence tendered and witness testimony, not public declarations or citizen outrage.

Already, the State has suffered a setback after the High Courts in Mombasa ordered Inspector-General of Police Japhet Koome to reopen Ezekiel's church, which had been directed closed once he was linked to the Shakahola deaths. Another challenge for Kindiki is in the Azimio protests, where he often seems caught between his liberal outlook and a group of government hardliners led by Gachagua.

At the height of the protests, it appeared that the Interior CS was frozen out as Koome and Nairobi Police chief Adamson Bungei took instruction from politicians. An embarrassing moment was the controversial raid on the Northlands Ranch owned by the family of former President Kenyatta, which was seemingly planned by Mt Kenya politicians with connivance of the national police command, with the CS kept in the dark.

kenya lens

■ NO ROYAL SNUB FOR KENYA

GOD SAVE
THE KING

With over 100 British firms operating in practically every sector in Kenya, King Charles III cannot afford to turn his nose up at Britain's former colony

● BY JOHN KAMAU

Prince Charles, now King Charles III, was not used to African bullies – until he met Idi Amin, the man who styled himself as the ‘Conqueror of British Empire’. It was in full glare of cameras on the day Jomo Kenyatta was buried in August 1978. Prince Charles had arrived in Nairobi to represent Buckingham Palace as heir to the throne. What caught the international media’s attention more than what had brought him to Nairobi was the way he snubbed Amin’s handshake.

In those days, Prince Charles was well known in Kenya. Some 17 months earlier, he was hosted by President Kenyatta at State House, Nakuru, when he flew in for a 10-day Safari. For Kenya, the arrival of a member of the royal family as a tourist was a mark of approval to the industry. He loved Starhe Boys, Maasai Mara Game Reserve and Lake Turkana.

Kenya has always had a place in the history of the Royal family – some of it tragic. But Kenya is so central to British interests that King Charles III might not give it a snub.

It was in Kenya that Queen Elizabeth II was proclaimed Queen after her father, King George VI, died in his sleep in 1952. At the time, Princess Elizabeth and her husband, the Duke of Edinburgh were in Kenya as part of their tour to some of the British colonies. They had left Mombasa for Nyeri, where they would receive their

wedding gift – the Sagana Royal Lodge, now known as Sagana State Lodge. It is these little symbolic spaces that always made Kenya connect to the royal family.

Queen Elizabeth’s reign also witnessed one of the worst crack-downs on nationalists as her regime tried to retain the Kenya colony by force. The brutalisation of the Mau Mau and incarceration of many other activists seeking inclusion in the political space on equal footing with the settlers, was a memory that Britain has always tried to erase. More so, it is a legacy that King Charles will inherit. Whether Britain will issue a formal apology to excesses of the colonial project remains to be seen.

To most Britons, Kenya was the colony they lost. Though they had lost many others, Kenya was a settler colony and was, from the start, supposed to become the “white man’s country”. But British interest in Kenya never waned after London micro-managed the writing of independent Kenya’s Constitution, afraid that radicals could have an upper hand in the transition.

More so, the Independence transition – in which Jomo Kenyatta, the man they had despised as a ‘leader unto darkness and death’, became Prime Minister – was managed by moderates who included Tom Mboya and James Gichuru. Soon, the British managed to moderate Kenyatta to their advantage, making sure that pro-British policies remained. Visits by the Royal family and Ken-



Britain’s King Charles III after a ceremony to present the new standards and colours to the Royal Navy, the Life Guards of the Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment, The King’s Company of the Grenadier Guards and The King’s Colour Squadron of the Royal Air Force at Buckingham Palace in London on April 27. PHOTO | AFP

ya’s continued membership of the Commonwealth were part of a larger scheme in which the British empire would retain its influence within the former colonies.

As he officially takes over the throne, King Charles will be inheriting the thinking, theory and practice that he has been part of as the longest monarch-in-waiting.

Britain had a policy that always served as a guide to its relations with former colonies, including Kenya. This was spelt out in a 1964 government report: “It is in the general interest that Britain’s voice should continue to be heard and to carry weight in the world.” Today, scholars see continuities in

former British colonies – rather than a break. These policy continuities are in various spheres including commerce, industry and military training and have led to a discourse on whether the sun actually set on the empire.

To radicals, the failure by Britain to extricate itself was akin to neocolonialism. Scholar Mahmoud Mamdani once argued that Kenya was “not an independent national economy, but a neo-colonial economy in which Britain was the leading imperialist”.

It was Kenya’s elite who decided to work with the British and, as historian Poppy Cullen notes in her book, *Kenya and Britain after Independence*, they crafted their

kenya lens



Prince Charles and Princess Anne on holiday at the Maasai Mara Game Reserve on February 17, 1971.



Prince Charles and Princess Anne upon arrival at Embakasi Airport being welcomed by Vice-President Daniel arap Moi, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr Njonjo Mungai, the British High Commissioner, Sir Eric Norris and Lady Norris on February 6, 1971.



(From left) Queen Mother Elizabeth, Prince Charles and Princess Margaret attend the coronation ceremony of Queen Elizabeth II in Westminster Abbey in London on June 2, 1953.

own terms of engagement.

Personal connections played a major part in driving British policy in Kenya. In strategic places were the likes of Agriculture Minister Bruce Mackenzie and Attorney-General Charles Njonjo. So central was Kenya to British inter-

ests that they had started organising Kenyatta's burial way before the old man died, explaining why Prince Charles came for the burial and Britain donated the gun carriage that carried the coffin from State House to Parliament, where Jomo was interred.

Andrew Morton, Moi so admired the royal family that he baptised his children Doris, Elizabeth and Philip in its honour.

A few months after he took over power, Moi was hosted at Buckingham Palace in 1979, one of his first trips abroad. The Queen presented him to members of the royal family and other dignitaries, including the new British prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, who was to become Moi's ally for many years.

The Queen would make two visits to Kenya during the President Moi's reign. The first was in 1983, when she toured Sagana Lodge – the place where her 1952 tour was cut short. The last visit was in 1991 as a guest of President Moi's, but that visit came under criticism as it was seen as an approval of Moi, who was under pressure to abandon his dictatorial, single-party regime and release political detainees.

Moi's successor, President Mwai Kibaki, did not get a chance for a state visit to Buckingham Palace, an indicator of Kenya's drift from the Empire. After a pullback from Kenya after the election of President Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto, who were facing charges at the International Criminal Court, Britain later softened its stand and the Queen hosted President Kenyatta on April 20, 2018 – an indicator of London's desire to cultivate relations.

Whether King Charles III will continue with this trend will depend on how he relates to President Ruto. So far, there are indicators that Britain is back in the power game as Nairobi turns into a playfield for Western diplomats seeking to woo the new regime to their sides.

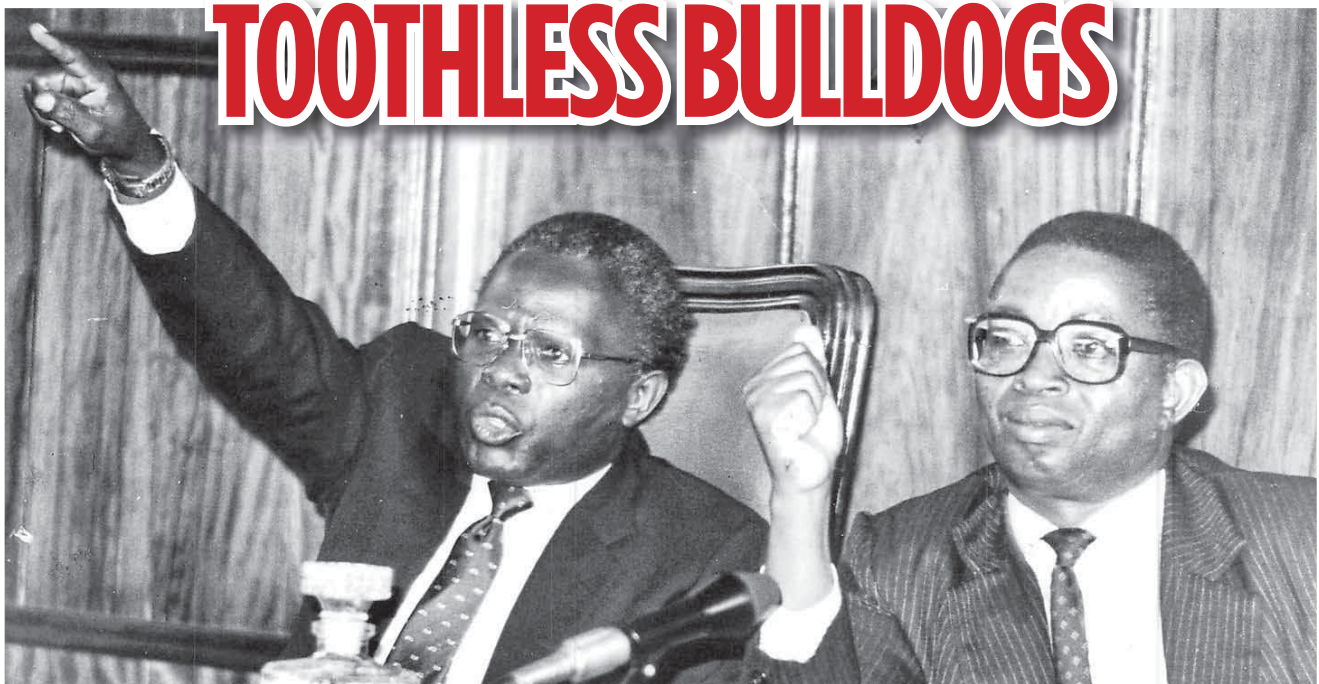
So far, President Ruto has held talks with British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and was also present at Queen Elizabeth II's funeral. Furthermore, former British PM Tony Blair is trying to entrench the UK's interests in Kenya, where British companies have stakes in practically every sector, including telecommunications (30 per cent stake in Safaricom), banking and agriculture. It is estimated that there are over 100 British companies operating in Kenya.

This is what King Charles III will be seeking to protect. He certainly cannot afford to snub Kenya the way he did Idi Amin.

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kenya lens

■ UNRAVELLING SHAKAHOLA DEATHS



The Ouko Judicial Commission of Inquiry chairman, Justice Evan Gicheru (right), with Justice Richard Otieno Kwach during the proceedings in Kisumu on October 23, 1990.

TOOTHLESS BULLDOGS

A survey of commissions of inquiry over the last quarter century raises disturbing questions about whether they serve any purpose at all

• By OSCAR OBONYO

As chairman of a parliamentary committee probing the assassination of Josiah Mwangi Kariuki in 1975, Kilimili Member of Parliament Elijah Wasike Mwangale opted to vent his frustration through an oral narrative. A hyena, he told to the House, once came across a stone and stopped by to salute it. But the stone did not respond, to which the hyena retorted, “Even if you have not responded, you have heard.” And with those few remarks, Mwangale tabled the committee’s report.

The allegoric implication of the message by Mwangale – then a firebrand youthful politician and later an influential cabinet minister in the Daniel arap Moi administration – was that Jomo Kenyatta’s government and a section of legislators in the Third Parliament were not keen on unraveling the circumstances of the death of “JM”, as the Nyandarua North MP was famously known. And true to Mwangale’s projection, the populist politician’s

death is to date still one of the country’s unresolved high-profile murders.

To this day, most parliamentary murder probe committees, task forces and judicial commissions of inquiry have suffered the fate of the “muted stone” Mwangale described. This precisely explains the muted response, in some quarters, to President William Ruto’s decision to set up a judicial commission of inquiry to probe the much-publicised cult deaths in Shakahola, Kilifi County.

Indeed, the President’s latest move begs a host of questions. What will be the scale of public investment in this process and will it provide value for money? Will the commission’s findings be judiciously implemented and culprits – if any – prosecuted, or will the report, once handed over, gather dust on the shelves as has been the case in some instances? Or will execution of some of the recommendations be suspended, or trashed altogether, on account of political interests and sensitivities as we have seen before?

Even more addling is the fact

that several investigative processes, including an 11-member committee of the Senate to probe the mysterious deaths in Shakahola, are already ongoing. Separately, Pastor Paul Mackenzie of Good News International Church and televangelist Ezekiel Odera of New Life Prayer Centre are in police custody facing possible charges of murder for the killings of over 100 people. They are suspected of indoctrinating followers into fasting to death on the belief that they will ascend to heaven to meet Jesus Christ.

Human rights lawyer Harun Ndubi wonders how all this sits with the commission arrangement: “How do they bring an inquiry outside the police process, when these two (Mackenzie and Odera) have been charged and the courts are already hearing their defence?”

But an optimistic Ruto believes the exercise will help to weed out “the characters who want to abuse religion to run businesses and things that are anti-religion in the republic”. Already, local administrative officials, secu-

rity heads, investigation and intelligence officers have been transferred from Kilifi to pave way for the probe. The commission had yet to be set up one week after Ruto’s announcement, nor had its terms of reference been outlined.

In the meantime, opposition leader Raila Odinga is opposed to Ruto’s plans, claiming that the President is an interested party. According to the former Prime Minister, the two suspects are the President’s faith leaders “who even attended his so-called cleansing ceremony of State House”.

Incidentally, the President’s action came only a day after the political party of one of his key allies, Speaker of the National Assembly Moses Wetangula, waded into the Shakahola drama. Through a statement signed by party Secretary-General John Chikati, Ford-Kenya appealed to Ruto to form a commission of inquiry into the Shakahola massacre, arguing that it would be the best way to help the country “understand what really happened”.

Ford-Kenya’s case for the com-

kenya lens

mission is curiously pegged on the notion that “Kenyans have lost trust in the police”, especially after ignoring red flags which the party believes could have prevented the deaths.

It is worth noting that the proposed commission of inquiry in this case is inquisitorial – charged with ascertaining the facts of the issue. This is totally different from investigatory inquiries – those formed to gather information for policy formulation or review.

The former have since Independence been used by different governments to seek answers to weighty and seemingly elusive issues. They were a favoured tool in the Moi and Mwai Kibaki regimes, in particular. However, a cursory survey of the results of commissions of inquiry by the Africa Centre for Open Governance (AfriCOG) over the last quarter century raises disturbing questions about whether such inquiries serve any purpose at all.

The Cecil Miller Commission was set up in 1984 to investigate whether former Attorney-General Charles Njonjo “had conducted himself in a manner prejudicial to the security of the State, the position of the Head of State, the image of the President and the Constitutional government of the Republic of Kenya”.

AfriCOG argues that the open inquiry could only have directly and materially benefitted one aggrieved party – President Moi. The climax of the inquiry was when Njonjo was labelled “a traitor” for reportedly plotting a coup against the government, a development that quietly pushed him into retirement – perhaps the prime desire of the architects of the expensive exercise.

And then there was the Gicheru Commission on the death of Dr Robert Ouko, who was Foreign Affairs minister at the time of his death in 1990. When it became clear that the inquiry was moving in uncomfortable direction for government, it was disbanded. Like JM’s case, the matter remains unresolved to date.

AfriCOG also points to another disturbing trend in the commissions – the delayed or handing over or release of reports. The 1995 release of a report on devil worship in schools was, for instance, done secretly. The agency regrets that a number of recommendations made in the report would have required an



Justice Samuel Bosire, chairman of the Goldenberg Commission Inquiry and Commissioner Peter le Pelley (right) during at the KICC on May 22, 2003.

open and high-profile release for successful implementation.

Then there was the 1998 Akiwumi Commission, which investigated ethnic cleansing that had occurred in parts of Kenya, particularly during elections. Owing to high political stakes and interests, the release of its findings proved a delicate issue and implementation of recommendations even more slippery. The Attorney-General at the time, Amos Wako, attributed the delay in release of the report to fears that it would prejudice the administration of justice in relation to the intended prosecution of persons adversely mentioned in the report.

Similarly, the Goldenberg Commission of Inquiry, which investigated a financial scandal involving businessman Kamlesh Pattni completed its work in October 2005, but its chairman, Justice Bosire, only presented its report to President Kibaki in February 2006.

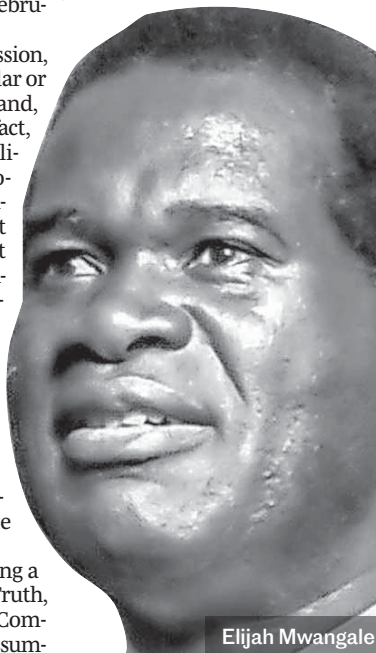
The 2003 Ndungu Commission, which dealt with the irregular or illegal allocation of public land, made a series of findings of fact, which ascribed responsibility for established wrongdoing to a number of individuals. To date, the government has not implemented most of these foundational recommendations by the Commission, appointed by Kibaki.

In fact, then-Justice and Constitutional Affairs Minister Kiraitu Murungi expressed fears that implementing the Ndung’u report fully would rattle the status quo and even engineer land clashes across the country.

Much later, despite receiving a 2,200-page report from the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC) soon after assum-

ing office, former President Uhuru Kenyatta opted to keep mum on its contents. Nevertheless, he made a blanket apology to Kenyans during his State of the Nation address in March 2015 for past wrongs committed by his government and previous ones. An apology was one of the recommendations of the TJRC, set up following the 2007 post-election violence.

Other post-poll commissions were chaired by retired South African judge Johann Kriegler, whose team made a raft of recommendations that included the setting up of an independent agency to manage elections and an integrated and secure tallying and data transmission system, and Judge Philip Waki, whose Commission of Inquiry into Post-Election Violence set out to investigate clashes following the highly disputed 2007 presidential poll.



Elijah Mwangale

The TJRC, Kriegler and Waki commissions were relatively successful for two main reasons – that they were strictly time-bound and were quasi-international, closely monitored by the African Union and United Nations.

Nonetheless, Ndubi maintains that most commissions of inquiry are a waste of time and tax-payers’ money. Pointing out that they are not legal processes, the lawyer argues that the police should be accorded a free hand to investigate and thereafter hand over the cases to the judiciary for prosecution. His argument is that judicial commissions are by nature judicial processes, which mostly rely on judicial officers in their undertakings – a factor that makes the said officers investigators and judges at the same time.

This approach complicates the entire justice equation, since there is shared responsibility between the police, prosecutors and judges. Unlike the French system, for instance, which is mainly inquisitorial – meaning the judiciary can undertake investigations and then preside over cases of the same – Ndubi points out that Kenya’s is an adversarial system, in which the accused comes face to face with the accuser. The latter requires clear separation of roles.

However, Ford-Kenya argues that the commission route is the best, and that it has its job cut out for it. Chikati, who is also Tongaren MP, particularly wants investigations undertaken into allegations of organ trafficking to Western countries following reports that some of the bodies exhumed in Shakahola were missing vital organs.

While some commissions are probably set up for cover-up purposes, Ndubi believes Ruto was not in the know about what happened in Shakahola and has no intention of glossing over the matter. Nevertheless, he considers setting up of a judicial commission of inquiry unconstitutional.

Still, a commission of inquiry could offer the President the best opportunity to break from the past by firmly and truthfully oversee the process in a transparent fashion. Implementation of recommendations made would provide a positive turning point for judicial commissions of inquiry, whose history is largely characterised by opaqueness and lack of execution.

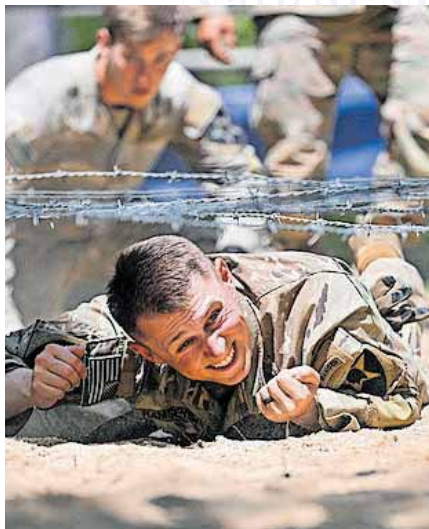
the limelight



A lorry burns on the Southern bypass in Nairobi on May 2 after it was set on fire during Azimio demonstrations over the high cost of living. EVANS HABIL I NATION



An Orinoco Crocodile at the Leslie Pantin Zoo in Venezuela on April 8. Native to Venezuela and Colombia, the endangered reptiles are bred in captivity then released. PHOTO I AFP



US soldiers take part in an obstacle course during the Best Squad Competition at the US Army's Camp Casey in Dongducheon on May 3. PHOTO I AFP



Police officers and members of the public push the wreckage of a matatu that was set on fire by protesters along Ngong Road in Nairobi on May 2 during Azimio demonstrations over the high cost of living. EVANS HABIL I NATION



A member of the Royal Household works on the Chair of Estate at Frogmore Workshops in Windsor on April 21 ahead of the May 6 coronation of Britain's King Charles III and Camilla, Queen Consort. PHOTO I AFP



A refugee fleeing the effects of drought in Somalia waits for processing by UNHCR in a makeshift residence at a holding area for unregistered arrivals at the Dadaab refugee complex in Garissa on May 2. PHOTO I AFP



People fire traditional cannons during a festive event locally known as "Kuluwung" held a few days after Eid ul-Fitr, in Bogor, West Java, on May 4. PHOTO I AFP

The Arena



FOODELICIOUS

Mirriam Allan has established a thriving catering business, leveraging social media as her primary marketing strategy



OPEN SPACE

Sudan's path to turmoil

For the three decades they were in power, what did they do for the people, and what'll they now do differently?

● BY NKWAZI MHANGO

Those who toppled Omar Bashir, the long-time despot, are now destroying Sudan. The ongoing conflict between Lt Gen Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo and Gen Abdel Fattah Burhan will destroy Sudan. The country will only settle after the two finish each other or being finished by the demonstrators, if not the international community, though it's failed to remind them that after their duel, they'll be delivered to The Hague.

The two would like to avoid being delivered to The Hague to face charges related with the genocide they committed in Darfur under Bashir. Secondly, the duo is not likely to share power. One needs to — and must — finish the other to prevail. The economic tanking provides a good impetus and reason for deposing and disposing of the duo in power.

As the de facto ruler, Burhan knows what it takes to finish the impasse. Dagalo has the numbers in the army though he isn't on the seat of power. Since toppling Bashir, the two exhibited brutality and incompetence Sudan's never evidenced. Apart from being incompetent criminals, they'd never read from the same script. Thus, it wasn't if but when the two would turn tables on each other.

Sudan is on its way to a failed state. The Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Response Forces (RSF) — an unconstitutional and criminal private army Bashir created and headed by Dagalo to help him cling on power — are doing battle of the destruction of Sudan.

Burhan and Dagalo are both opportunists. The same army that took power from Bashir betrayed him. In fact, the army that duped demonstrators into believing that it hated Bashir is the same one that had kept him in power for three decades of dictatorship. Besides, the army has no where-withal to run the country competently. For the three decades they were in power, what did they do, and what'll they do differently? Armies were created to protect states, not to rule them.

Secondly, the reasons that led to

Bashir's fall from power are still untouched. Bashir was overthrown after mass demonstrations against the high costs of living once Sudan lost its source of income (petrodollars) following South Sudan secession. In addition, the issue of corruption has never been addressed. The situation was compounded by the fragility of the world economic resulting from Covid-19, conflict in Ukraine and natural calamities.

The generals mismanaged opportunities by denying a transitional civilian government to assume power as the people desired. They brutally suppressed alternative voices and killed many innocent people who were enjoying their rights of association.

The junta didn't protect all those who were in the past regime, and some elements felt vulnerable.

For the three years the junta's been in power, demonstrators were its main enemies. However, things are different today. The abettor with whom the junta committed crimes against Sudanese, the RSF, is the danger. The organisation that used

to be the part of the junta is now being referred to as a rebel group.

Again, why are the two baying for each others' blood? Power. After manipulating the force for demonstrators, they are now accusing and calling each other names.

Dagalo was recently quoted as referring to Burhan as "this criminal (who) forced this battle upon us". But who's a criminal and who's not? Nobody can tell even though the history of the two speaks volumes about them.

While Dagalo called his boss a criminal, Burhan responded by saying that everything was under control.

We don't know who'll finish whom, and what will happen next. However, from the look of things, Burhan may prevail temporarily. All in all, what's happening in Sudan is the most dangerous experience in the nation's history. Whatever happens, Sudan won't be the same again.

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



MIND SPEAK



Allan Kipkorir

I agree with President Ruto's move to have Kenyans contribute more towards quality healthcare that will be provided by the government, though it would depend on the specific details of the plan and its implementation. Investing in quality healthcare is a critical aspect of a nation's development and well-being, and ensuring that citizens have access to affordable and comprehensive healthcare is a fundamental responsibility of governments.

—A policy analyst, political and leadership consultant



Precious Agema

Health care is one of the most important sectors in the country, therefore any effort with regards to its betterment is vital. The National Hospital Insurance Fund eases the burden for patients and their families in times of emergencies and financial crisis. However, not all services are catered for through this scheme. The initiative by the government is a great step towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals number 3 on Good health and wellbeing.

—A student at Kisii University



Anthony Baki

The government has reduced what Kenyans used to pay for NHIF from Sh500 to Sh300 per month so as to attract the large number of people in the informal sector. NHIF has faced quite a number of challenges in service delivery. The government has committed funds for health. We hope NHIF will deliver, otherwise private insurance will still be a preference for those who can afford it.

—A student at Daystar University



Consolata Shamola

The national government should address all the challenges in health care, such as lack of medicine in public hospitals, limited access to facilities in rural areas and lack of adequate personnel, expertise and poor infrastructure. Therefore, we can talk about Kenyans contributing more towards quality healthcare if these issues are adequately addressed.

—A student at Maseno University



• BY WAGA ODONGO

There's only one way to have coffee: Hot as hell, bitter as an ex-wife, black as death. No milk please, I am not a child. I am all for apartheid when it comes to the breakfast mug, keep the white and the black separate; integration is for degenerates.

Unfortunately, the majority don't share tastes as refined as mine. Milky tea is our national drink. More milk is drunk in Kenya than anywhere else on the continent. We also produce it by the bucketload. In fact, Kenya is a continental leader in milk production, dairy looming large on the cultural zeitgeist. Our dairy sector accounts for close to a quarter of our agricultural output and has more than a million smallholder farmers.

We now know how bad cows are for the planet. The world doesn't end in a cataclysmic bang, but with the bellowing of cows in the background. The farts and burps of cows are a cancer on the planet and the glaciers are melting. The planet has sprung a leak and our coastal cities will be underwater marine parks within the century.

Most of it is because of beef, but milk also tips the carbon scales. Milk itself isn't as pristine as we imagined. Is it good for us? All other mammals wean their young of milk. Cow's milk seems purpose-built to quickly fatten furry infants, and most of us can't even digest it properly. You could say milk has calcium for your bones, but then the vegetarians will counter that it is also saturated with cholesterol. It may give you strong bones, but it will also harden the walls of your arteries.

I recently saw on Twitter a supermarket aisle's worth of Brookside soymilk, and it got me curious about milk alternatives (alt-milk). I decided to find out whether it was a food fad or there was something there. I used to think that alt-milks were some feel good fluff invented by Europeans to pretend to care for the environment.

Europeans would never actually switch to the stuff. France is hard to govern because it has over 200 types of cheese, as President Charles de Gaulle famously quipped. Some Italian cheeses are protected by the European Union as only producible in certain geographical locations. Europe's massive farm subsidies have led to lakes of milk and mountains of butter, and they are not churning off white.

While in a supermarket in Rome I noticed that a carton of one alt-milk brand was cheaper than the real stuff. That changes everything. If alt-milk gets to the point where it is competing on price, then the laws of economics will

MY TAKE

ARE COWS GOING OUT OF FASHION?

If even in Europe, the land of milk and money, milk is losing out to alternatives on price, we should pay attention



put the stun guns to the herds' foreheads.

So, I got a litre each of almond, soy and oat milk to add to my coffee over the past three days to see whether it is a viable alternative.

Almond milk tastes surprisingly sweet, so sweet that I checked the packaging for additional sweeteners. It claimed to have none. Upon googling – our omniscient overlord ChatGPT was none the wiser – I found out it had something to do with enzymes. Apparently, you can break down sugar in almonds by adding enzymes, making the resulting mix sweeter.

Neither oat nor soya was an improvement on regular milk; in fact by my palate, both were clear downgrades. Soya has a hard cereal edge about it and is an acquired taste. Oat is too bland. The best creamer to add to coffee, I have found, is actually one brand made by Nestle that uses milk powder and palm oil. The resulting look and texture of the coffee is better than milk ever could be but still not better than black. What's really interesting about the rise of alt-milk is the way that it challenges our assumptions about what milk is and where it comes from.

Alt-milk has a lot going for it. There is an opportunity for equating it with superfoods. I recall how goat milk was fetishised as being so much healthier than the bovine kind, or how

camel milk is outed as some sort of aphrodisiac. Aside from saving us from the iceberg, it could have an alphabet full of minerals alongside it. Some may dismiss it as a passing fad, but it is part of the conversation about the impact our diet is having on the planet.

Of course, I don't think that alt-milks will replace milk across the board. Whole milk, with its rich and creamy texture, is still perfect for making ice cream. I noticed in all the alt-milks the clear lack of creaminess you get with full-fat milk; instead, they tend to be watery and froth-free. That barista thing they do on your coffee at Java where they make drawings in the froth might just die out as an art when we switch to soy milk.

As a nation, we are producing and exporting a lot of milk at a time when the world's fascination with the liquid is beginning to sour. When you do the math, you find that cows are an increasingly inefficient way to make milk. Plants can do it faster and it is better for the environment. Alt-milks are getting to the point where the taste difference is either imperceptible or there is an actual improvement. If even in Europe, the land of milk and money, milk is losing out to alternatives on price, we should pay attention.

*Mr Odongo is a Software Engineer
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THE FOOD INDUSTRY

THE VIRTUAL CATERESS

After a string of mishaps, Mirriam Allan has established a thriving catering business, Asili Eateries, leveraging social media as her primary marketing strategy

• BY MOSES AUMA

Unless you were acquainted with Mirriam Wacera Maingi during her childhood, you would not recognise her by that name today. The 37-year-old has established a brand known as Mirriam Allan, which has now become her predominant identity. Her clients and friends on social media address her as such. She adopted this name as a tribute to her father, whom she regards as an exemplary parent. "Allan is my father, just to clarify, as many people assume it is my husband," she explains.

Originally from Murang'a County, Mirriam's father worked as a driver in Nairobi while her mother tended their small farm, cultivating coffee and pumpkins. Despite not having much, she emphasises that their family never went to bed hungry. She recalls a time when their father fell ill after a road accident, breaking his leg and jaw, and it was their mother who supported the family with the modest income from the farm. "That was the period when I consumed the most pumpkins in my life, yet my love for it remains," she reminisces.

Mirriam's passion for the food industry



Despite not completing her catering and hotel management course, Mirriam Allan continually hones her culinary skills through online platforms. PHOTO | POOL



Mirriam Allan has expanded her catering business, Asili Eateries, to include outdoor catering and cooking classes. PHOTO: IPOOL

dates back to her childhood. During her time at St Catherine Gaturi Girls in Murang'a, she excelled in home science, particularly in cooking. Her teacher, Mrs Martha Kigoi, recognised her exceptional talent and urged her to pursue a course in catering and hotel management after high school. Kigoi would often call on her to cook for the school's board of management and parent-teacher association, which boosted her confidence in her culinary skills.

After finishing high school in 2002, she enrolled at the now-defunct Wote College in 2006 to pursue a diploma in catering and hotel management. However, her education was cut short when she became pregnant. While her parents were supportive of her, Mirriam admits that those moments were the most tumultuous in her life.

As a youth leader in her church, she felt the pressure of being a good role model and the pregnancy took a psychological toll, leaving her feeling like she had let her parents down. In a moment of desperation, she married the father of her child, but the marriage was short-lived. Looking back, she advises her younger self that relationships require careful cultivation over time, recognising that the

choices we make can impact people who were not involved in the making of those decisions.

Mirriam's entrepreneurial journey began with a setback in 2021, after she lost her job at a restaurant. She turned to her friend, Irene for support and ideas on how to get back on her feet, only to discover that Irene had also quit her job. Rather than succumb to despair, they seized the opportunity to collaborate and launch a cloud kitchen in Nairobi, selling ready-made meals.

With a third partner on board, they pooled their savings to set up their kitchen, but their optimism was short-lived as their business struggled to gain traction. Despite offering top-quality food, they priced it too low, assuming that customers would be put off by high prices. They soon realised that they had been giving away their hard work. Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic dealt a harsh blow to their nascent business, compounding their struggles.

In the face of these challenges, Mirriam found herself wrestling with personal difficulties and did not want to burden her partners. She made the difficult decision to step away from the venture, but her entrepreneurial spirit remained undaunted. She launched Asili Eateries in late 2021, located in Ruiru,

but encountered challenges such as a small kitchen studio. To keep her business afloat, she resorted to selling *uji power*, a local porridge, with the help of a few hired ladies. But the venture proved to be unsustainable due to high expenses and low earnings.

In 2022, Mirriam relocated to Thome estate off the Thika Superhighway and took concrete steps to establish her business. She registered it officially, obtained a food handler's certificate and resumed her original plan of cooking and selling African cuisine, exclusively online. Her hard work and determination paid off, and Asili Eateries now has enough business to employ two chefs.

Not content with merely offering ready-made meals online, Mirriam has expanded her services to include outdoor catering and cooking lessons. She visits clients' homes to teach households proper food handling techniques and the preparation of nutritious meals.

On a regular workday, she manages various tasks, including taking orders, sourcing ingredients, preparing meals and ensuring prompt delivery to her customers. With a strong emphasis on maintaining the freshness of her products, she sources her ingredients based on individual orders from local markets like Gikomba and Marikiti. The meals are packaged in disposable tins and distributed with the help of four riders. During peak seasons, she occasionally hails a cab to supplement her delivery team.

Mirriam effectively leverages social media as her primary marketing strategy, boasting an impressive following of over 20,000 on Facebook alone. As a true gourmand herself, she distinguishes her culinary creations from others through her commitment to quality. "I take immense pride in preparing food that I would personally be delighted to purchase. Coming from the Central region, where the prevailing stereotype suggests that we indiscriminately mix ingredients and drown dishes in water, I question the need for such practices," she confidently asserts.

Despite not having completed her catering and hotel management course, she continually hones her skill through online platforms. "There's a remarkable Facebook group called 'Let's Cook Kenyan Meals'. I doubt there's a Kenyan chef who isn't a part of it. You gain insights into people's favourite dishes and their preferred cooking methods. Additionally, I have shared the skills I've acquired because teaching is an indispensable means of personal growth," she says.

Mirriam emphasises professionalism and meticulous customer service as the two paramount values in her profession. She highlights fluctuating commodity prices as one of her biggest hurdles. "Clients often anticipate that food costs will stay the same, despite the surging inflation, leading to confusion when I increase my prices," she explains.

Among her most memorable achievements, Mirriam takes pride in catering at local weddings, known as *ruracio*, and serving over 200 guests at the Sanctuary of Truth Centre Ministries in Lucky Summer. "Patience and consistency are essential for success in this industry," she concludes.

ENTERPRISE FOR SOCIAL IMPACT

Sylvia Wambui has not let ADHD stand in her way as she seeks to provide digital support for young women to build their capacities for doing business

● BY EDDY ASHIOYA

No matter how long we live in the concrete jungle, we still listen, in the pauses of the Nairobi rain, for the sounds of birds. They sing, defiantly, providing a velvet carpet to carry this tale of resolve and courage and conviction, a brisk determination to go after your dreams despite being an anxious little fella. Somewhere between the rectangular stones sits Sylvia Wambui Muriithi, the founder of Mursly Digital Group, with an ominous look in her eyes, chasing down clients like a covetous alien in an apocalyptic sci-fi film. Mursly is an impact consulting and leadership development enterprise committed to bridging the economic and knowledge gap in Africa. Mursly works with individuals and organisations to accelerate their social impact through knowledge training, impact consulting and leadership development, whilst also offering mentorship, coaching and consulting services.

It is here that Sylvia is the head honcho, the impresario with fire in her belly and eyes sparkling with sheer grit. Has she always been like this? So audacious?

She rejects the very premise of the question. There is, she says, no other way of living life. “The people in my family are very audacious. We have the audacity to speak and to try and to go after what we want, with no apologies to anyone.”

Mursly, by the way, is a portmanteau of Muriithi, “my family name,” she explains, “which helps me pay homage to who I am as a person and where I come from — and Sylvia, which is my name.” What’s in a name? Well, if you are religious, then you must know calling upon the name of your Lord and Saviour holds power; if you are agnostic

AUDACIOUS AMBITION

then you understand being called something different has power too. It’s the same reason why storms are named after people.

And she should know something about storms. The 29-year-old has done her time in the trenches — spending six years as a marketing lead across local and international markets, managing multiple large tech brands while battling ADHD (Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder) and anxiety.

So, what’s her typical day like? “My day-to-day includes planning our to-do list with my executive assistant and engaging with our community. We are a two-man ship with contractors that work with us.” It’s called teamwork; it’s as old as the hills yet as difficult as smoke.

Mursly is majorly a social impact, digital marketing and virtual assistance agency. “We are a social impact organisation for young women entrepreneurs, from 18 to 45 years old, who are out here trying to build a business. We offer them knowledge on how to run a business and offer support through mentorship by people who have been there.”

Incorporated in March 2023, Mursly currently has ten clients for social impact, and six on-and-off virtual assistant ones. “We are working with Village Capital (a venture capital firm) through their mentorship programme, among others. Witnessing the impact we have had on other entrepreneurs — about 30 women — is soul-satisfying.”

In less pluralistic societies, you might assume that, with all the civil rights, empowerment and women-led incubation programmes, we would be past all the gender boardroom politics, but in reality, you would be wrong. Has Sylvia ever experienced thinly veiled discrimination? “Actually, just a few minutes ago I was having this same conversation. As a woman,



Sylvia Wambui’s Mursly Digital group provides consultancy and virtual assistance both in Africa and internationally. PHOTO: POOL

it is unwritten that you show up overly prepared because you will be scrutinised a little bit harder than other people. It is a crucible. At first I used to be offended, but with time I started seeing that maybe all you need is audacity.”

It is with that same audacity that she would like to expand Mursly’s reach in Africa. “I’d love to host more programmes geared towards women entrepreneurs and be the spotlight that shines on every woman that has had the audacity to build a business. I’d love to engage with potential partners that have the same outlook as us, and we’d love to

partner with people looking to unlock capital for women entrepreneurs. Capital is a really big thing when you are running a business. We need to make it accessible, especially grants and equities that do not come with not too much red tape.”

Running a business, she says, has shifted her mindset. “It has pulled me out as a human being; you can really suffer from imposter syndrome and it makes you question yourself: am I really doing this for passion or money? It has shaped who I am, it has changed the way I interact with other people, how I communicate

and how I generally offer my thoughts and express myself.”

Business is brutal, even if it is wrapped in the shine of ‘freedom’ and ‘BYOBs — Be Your Own Boss’. If romance is common sense leaving your body, then business is reality knocking it back in.

“Business is challenging,” observes Sylvia, “especially when you are looking for capital. There is also the aspect that people need knowledge. We may take it for granted because of accessibility, but are you speaking someone’s language? Are you able to convince other people and be part of their platform? Do you want to be a full-fledged, woman-driven enterprise or generally an entrepreneurial enterprise? People don’t always take women enterprises seriously. And most importantly, finding the right people that align with you. It is very easy to be transactional, but are we really impacting or are we just doing business?”

That’s a reality check for other entrepreneurs to cash in on, but did she always know she wanted to be in business? “Those of us from African homes were told to read and work hard to be in corporate. But mine is a good mix: I wanted to get into the C-suite with a seven-figure salary, but Mursly was not my first dabble into entrepreneurship waters. I sold confectionery, and you know how sales are hard. Every time I tried corporate it just didn’t last. Let’s simply say entrepreneurship chose me.”

She invites me to hop off the rails with her, confessing that in her journey, she didn’t have any particular person she could identify as a mentor. “Back then, nobody even really spoke about mentorship that much. This journey

DIGITAL MARKETING

Mursly Digital Group provides consulting and virtual assistance both in Africa and internationally, having worked with community and tech-driven brands like Black Women In Clinical Research, Blaze Group LLC and *Bauce Magazine*.

Sylvia Muriithi is a mentor who has worked to support entrepreneurs and professionals by providing knowledge on capacity building and upskilling for scale/professional growth.

Sylvia holds an undergraduate degree in Information and Technology from the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology as well as a Postgraduate Diploma in Digital Marketing from the British Academy of Digital Marketing.

is so lonely. How do people even survive and do this by themselves? I looked up to people like Caroline Mutoko, and seeing their journey helped me navigate my own course.”


Now a parent, she says her biggest struggle as a person is that old monster, the imposter syndrome and its cousin, ADHD. You can understand why. “It’s hard navigating a business when our mind is so active and alive, I need a routine to tame it, she says. “I am a very anxious person and I can always feel it. It’s a lot to navigate through this, and it puts me off. I don’t really talk about it. The challenge is negotiating through your own personality. There are things I want to do that make me seem like I am out of my mind. I still feel like there is so much to do. Anxiety, imposter syndrome and ADHD? They are with me every single day.”

Her definition of success is generally witnessing the impact that she has made on just one person. “If I died today — touch wood — and there was a legacy that Sylvia actually shifted this, or impacted this, I would die in peace. That’s what keeps me moving. I love the money, and I want to buy a G-wagon, but that feeling of accomplishing and changing someone else’s life gives me a good night’s sleep.”

Failure, she says, is staying stuck in the mud, till you start smelling of it. “I tell my eight-year-old son the definition of failure is not trying. There is a difference in ‘I failed to do it’, and ‘I failed while doing it’. It is important to experience that annoying thing; just don’t fail to try.” As a woman entrepreneur, nay, scratch that, as an entrepreneur, what piece of advice should women ignore? “That they are defined by their wombs. Also, being married or having children are important, but they are not credentials. I can’t lead by: ‘My name is Sylvia and I am married.’


Does she consider herself smart or lucky? “I am lucky. Being smart helps, but sometimes it’s luck.” To put it another way, while everyone else drank the Kool-Aid, she knows what got her here, and what will take her to the next level. That through her digital footprints she is leaving cookies that seem to exclaim: a woman could speak without hedging her bets, without hemming and hawing, without making nice, without poeticisms, without sounding pleasant or sweet, without deference, and even without a doubt. Thus, if there was a billboard in the world that would best surmise her life, what would it say? “This girl right here is audacious.”

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WOMAN POWER

KTN ANCHOR ZUBEIDA KANANLI HAS BEEN ELECTED PRESIDENT OF THE KENYA EDITORS GUILD (KEG), SUCCEEDING VETERAN EDITOR CHURCHILL OTIENO. MS KANANLI, THE OUTGOING VICE PRESIDENT OF THE GUILD, WON WITH 72 VOTES WHILE HER OPPONENT SAMMY MURAYA FROM JOURNALISTS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS GARNERED 36 DURING THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING. SPEAKING AFTER HER VICTORY, MS KANANLI PROMISED TO ENSURE THAT THE GAINS IN MEDIA FREEDOM ARE NOT ERODED UNDER HER LEADERSHIP AND THAT THE WELFARE OF JOURNALISTS IS PRIORITISED. CONGRATULATIONS ZUBEIDA.



STAR OF THE WEEK

UKRAINIAN HIGH JUMPER YAROSLAVA MAHUCHIKH FIRST COMPETED IN KENYA AS A FRESH-FACED 15-YEAR-OLD SIX YEARS AGO. IT WAS A PERFORMANCE THAT DAZZLED THE NAIROBI AUDIENCE WITNESSING HER IMPRESSIVE EXPLOITS FIRST-HAND. SHE RETURNS TO KENYA FOR HER SECOND COMPETITIVE APPEARANCE AT THIS YEAR’S KIP KEINO CLASSIC SCHEDULED FOR MAY 13 AT THE MOI INTERNATIONAL SPORTS CENTRE. SHE HAS TWO SILVER MEDALS FROM THE WORLD ATHLETICS CHAMPIONSHIPS AND A WORLDS INDOOR TITLE, AND IS THE LATEST ATHLETE TO SIGN UP FOR KIP KEINO CLASSIC, A WORLD ATHLETICS CHAMPIONSHIPS GOLD TOUR EVENT. WE WISH YOU WELL, YAROSLAVA

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opinion



■ He wants Kenyans to be proud of their choices in elections and join hands under his leadership

Mr President, it's your duty to give Kenyans hope

It will be a long time before Kenyans forget about the last General Election and move onto other matters that concern their future. We have yet to move on from the August 9, 2022 presidential results. The outcome is a country that remains divided and a government forever fighting fights lit by the opposition and by itself and stuck in a past election.

In his Labour Day address from Uhuru Gardens, President Ruto appealed, three times, to leaders of organised labour to join hands and work with him to help make better the life of the Kenyan worker. The President also took time to thank Kenyans for turning up to vote last August — irrespective of the way they voted because they exercised their democratic rights. On one hand, it is disturbing that 10 months after the elections, the President is still asking leaders to forget about the election and turn their attention, energies and efforts to delivering for the Kenyan people. Immediately the poll results are announced, the country should forget the electioneering and turn to developing household, county and national economies.

On the other hand, the President felt compelled to seek the support of organised labour, especially in the face of the high cost of living caused by a non-performing economy, which has buoyed the opposition to organise demonstrations on Mondays and Thursdays to press their political agenda, instigating a popular uprising.

For the same reason, the President asked Kenyans to be proud of the individual choices they made at the polls and to now work



**KWENDO
OPANGA**

together under his leadership to develop Kenya. However, the sparse and unenthusiastic crowd and the looming spectre of anti-government protests called for the following day cast a dark shadow on the workers' fete.

Undeterred, the President turned on his most eloquent performance yet on creation of jobs. He plugged a six-point agenda fronted by the creation of farm-based markets in each one of Kenya's 290 electoral constituencies. These markets, the President said, will cut out middlemen, cartels and brokers and ensure farmers get their rightful proceeds from the sale of their produce.

Next, he talked about an export promotion programme that entails the Export Promotion Zones and Special Economic Zones and which, he said, should produce about 200,000 jobs annually. He followed this up with a strong pitch for small entrepreneurs who, the President said, should be able to get credit to grow their businesses using only their track records as collateral.

And he dwelt at length on his campaign

for affordable housing, this time arguing that creation of employment is an offshoot of construction. In other words, the more construction sites there are, the more jobs there will be. And then, turning to the health of workers, the President announced reduction of monthly remittances to the National Health Insurance Fund from Sh500 to Sh300.

Unsurprisingly, he returned to his favourite subject, the Hustler Fund, arguing that it has so far given out loans amounting to Sh27 billion to 15 million people, and that a total of Sh17 billion has been repaid. The President appeared happy with this and announced that next the fund will loan from Sh10,000 to 200,000.

Usually, these announcements would have drawn cheers for the President or enthusiastic responses when he asked "Si tunakubaliana?" (aren't we agreed on that?) That did not happen. And that must drive home the point that he needs to do much more, especially in regard to the cost of living, to raise the spirits of Kenyans and give them hope.

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opinion

■ I was rooting for Arsenal, not because I like the misfiring Gunners, but because I like Man Shitty less

The Arsenal-ManU and Azimio-Kenya Kwanza games



MACHARIA
GAITHO

I was at a local 'stadium' on April 26 amongst scores of fans watching Arsenal meekly surrender their English Premier League title aspiration with a comprehensive 4-1 thrashing by seemingly unstoppable Manchester City.

Beyond paying rapt attention to the TV screen, I was also watching the others who were watching it. The Arsenal fans, who throughout the season had been in boisterous form at the prospect of a first league title since Noah's time, retreated into anguished silence as the roars for Man City hit high decibels.

What struck me was that those bringing the roof down were not City fans, but what one might call the anti-Arsenal brigade in attendance.

I know for fact that City, Noisy Neighbours notwithstanding, have no fans in Kenya, except maybe one or two. The noise was coming from fans of another struggling giant, Manchester United, who would rather support the devil than see their old Premier League rivals back in the silverware.

And herein my dilemma as a lifelong fan of United who, since the departure of Sir Alex Ferguson, have joined Arsenal in struggling for a top four finish rather than contending for the title. I was rooting for old rivals Arsenal that Wednesday, not because I particularly like the misfiring Gunners, but because I like Man Shitty less. Or hate them more.

Manchester United are a team with a glorious past that I have followed since the days of George Best, Dennis Law and Bobby Charlton. Even when they suffered a major blip and were relegated from the then First Division to the Second Division in 1974, my faith did not waver.

City, by contrast, are 'crosstown rivals who could safely be ignored because they offered no real threat to United's dominance. Then they came into big money, outbid everybody else for the best players and coaching staff, and rose to dominance as United went into decline. If they might have a handful of fans in Kenya, it is not out of any commitment but the variety that follow success and cash, and guaranteed to desert them once the taps run dry. Just like Chelsea and the sudden rise of Abramovich-era fans. And just like our political system,

where there is no loyalty to anything other than the allure of cash and power.

Former President Uhuru Kenyatta might be crying real tears right now as he sees whatever little political influence he had remaining fast dissipating to the extent that he might even be kicked out of his own Jubilee Party.

He must reconcile himself to the fact the politicians, political operators and social media activists who once stuck to him like leeches, fought his political wars and swore 'till death do us part' were not loyal to him or any policies and principles he proclaimed.

He wielded power and controlled the purse strings. And President William Ruto now would be deluding himself if he imagined that the disreputable cast of characters ditching Uhuru and opposition leader Raila Odinga to join his camp are anywhere near loyal.

No, they are drawn to him like moths to a lamp, and sooner or later will decamp to a brighter light. They are like City and Chelsea fans. Ruto must also reckon with the fact that the successful alliance he cobbled together



What can we do to build a democracy anchored on factors more solid than selfish pursuits and temporary special purpose electoral vehicles like Kenya Kwanza and Jubilee, Azimio and its forerunners Nasa and Cord, or President Mwai Kibaki's PNU and Narc? We missed the opportunity to do with the 2010 Constitution, and neither did we even attempt to address it with Raila's and Uhuru's abortive post-2017 polls Building Bridges Initiative.

was not based on any particular love or loyalty to him or his agenda, but merely the need to stop Raila. Kenya Kwanza was never about loving Ruto, but about hating Raila more.

Just like United fans cheering City over Arsenal, or in my case rooting for the latter over the former. The upshot is that Kenya Kwanza, just like its Jubilee parent, is as fragile as can be, built on the quicksand of short-term opportunism rather than commitment to any cause. Even Raila's Azimio coalition is not built on any solid foundation, and hence the cracks appearing as Ruto lures the weak and greedy to his side.

What can we do to build a democracy anchored on factors more solid than selfish pursuits and temporary special purpose electoral vehicles like Kenya Kwanza and Jubilee, Azimio and its forerunners Nasa and Cord, or President Mwai Kibaki's PNU and Narc? We missed the opportunity to do so with the 2010 Constitution, and neither did we even attempt to address it with Raila's and Uhuru's abortive post-2017 polls Building Bridges Initiative.

If anything positive is to come out of the talks mooted between the Ruto and Raila camps, establishing some basic hygiene in our way of doing politics should be high on the agenda. As long as the talks have a narrow focus around the juvenile 'mine is bigger than yours' contest, the end product will be the same old cutting of political deals.

The talks must be expanded beyond Ruto and Raila camps, beyond Kenya Kwanza and Azimio, beyond the confines of the political merchants in Parliament. The talks must expand bilateral to multilateral, bringing in wider interests and stakeholders beyond the steak-holders. We have to move beyond talks that can only result in selfish, short-term accommodation of the egos of two dominant individuals.

If the parliamentary parasites cannot understand this, then the people of Kenya themselves must take the initiative and convene a 'Kenya we Want' convention that must be bigger and broader than a duel between two protagonists.

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kenya lens

■ INTRIGUES BEHIND KENYATTA KIN'S FIGHT FOR 443-ACRE THIKA LAND

Despite losing multiple battles in court and Parliament, a company owned by two brothers from the Kenyatta family still possesses the prime property

● BY BRIAN WASUNA AND RICHARD MUNGUTI

For over 30 years, the intrigues behind a 443-acre land in Thika auctioned by KCB Bank in 2007 have posed a big question: Are its owners, estranged relatives of former President Uhuru Kenyatta, good legal gymnasts or masters of impunity?

Despite losing multiple ownership battles in court and Parliament, Muiri Coffee Estates Ltd, a company owned by two brothers from the larger Kenyatta family, still possesses the prime property. They have maintained over the years that it was illegally auctioned to a real estate firm.

Barely four months before the 2007 General Election, KCB Bank placed an auction advertisement in the local dailies as it sought to offload a 443-acre coffee farm in rural Thika, Kiambu County.

The land was registered to Muiri Coffee Estates Ltd, which used the property as collateral for a loan taken by another company, Benjoh Amalgamated Ltd. Both companies are owned by Kenya Cultural Centre Council chairperson and Kikuyu Council of Elders patron Kungu Muigai and former Gatundu South MP Ngengi Muigai. The Muigai brothers are cousins of former President Uhuru Kenyatta.

Benjoh Amalgamated borrowed KSh18 million from KCB Bank in 1989, with Muiri Coffee Estates as its guarantor. But the loan was defaulted and several years later, KCB auctioned the property. In August, 2007, real estate firm Bidii Kenya Ltd purchased the 443-acre piece of land at an auction after its Sh70 million bid was determined to be the best.

LEGAL GYMNASTS OR LORDS OF IMPUNITY?



From left: Ngengi Muigai, Uhuru Kenyatta, Jane Kenyatta and Margaret Kenyatta after a memorial service for the founding President Jomo Kenyatta on August 23, 1985.

But 16 years later, Bidii Kenya has never set foot on the land in one of the longest running property disputes in the country's justice system. In the last three decades, the Muigai brothers have filed 18 cases at the High Court, Court of Appeal and Supreme Court seeking to block or reverse KCB's auction of the land. They have also filed a National Assembly petition.

All those cases were dismissed, but Muiri Coffee Estates is still in possession of the property. Apart from ruling that the auction was conducted in line with the law, the courts have ordered the eviction of Muiri Coffee Estates from the property. Bidii Kenya has in the past told judges that attempts to take possession have been thwarted by armed youth allegedly hired by Muiri Coffee Estates in a bid to frustrate justice.

On Tuesday this week, the High Court in Nairobi will mention one of the cases Muiri Coffee Estates and Benjoh Amalgamated filed in 2008. The court will be trying to establish whether an eviction order against Muiri Coffee Estates issued by retired judge Jonathan Havelock in 2014 has been effected.

The eviction order directed police, headed by Thika's commanding officer, to assist Bidii Kenya in taking possession of the property. Justice Havelock's order in 2017 became a source of controversy after Thika's commanding officer was summoned to court over failure to effect it. The contempt of court application filed by Bidii Kenya against the police boss was eventually dismissed.

Every month since February, Bidii Kenya has written to the Attorney-General's office, seeking as-

sistance with getting police to assist with the eviction. Two weeks ago, the Attorney-General's office wrote to Bidii Kenya stating that it has not received any communication from Inspector-General Japhet Koome in relation to the property and eviction.

In 1989, the Muigai brothers had big investment dreams that involved putting up a flower farm in Kinangop, a sector that had largely been the preserve of foreign investors who, to date, reap billions every year from European exports. Benjoh Amalgamated, the principal borrower and flower farm proprietor, presented two pieces of land as collateral. The bank demanded additional security, and that is where Muiri Coffee Estates stepped in.

Muiri Coffee Estates' 443-acre land was sufficient to cover the Sh11.5 million guarantee re-

kenya lens



Then-Deputy President William Ruto with Ngengi Muigai during a service to mark 50 years of Muhoho High School in Kiambu County on July 17, 2015.

quired to process the release of funds to Benjoh Amalgamated. The flower farm dream ended in bitter disappointment for the brothers, though, leaving their companies knee-deep in debt and at the mercy of auctioneers sent by KCB to recover the defaulted loan.

In what may have been a politically motivated move, the bank stopped paying for transportation of flowers to the Netherlands, where the Muigais were shipping tonnes of flowers, crippling their ability to export their products.

At the time, Kenya's economy was in a shambles on account of inflation and big money scandals such as the Goldenberg debacle, coupled with turmoil in the banking sector that saw interest rates fluctuate to highs of over 30 per cent in the early 1990s. The *in duplum* rule in Kenya, which stops addition of interest once it matches principal debt, had also not been introduced. This meant that the defaulted loan would continue to grow into an unscalable mountain.

By the time Kenya introduced the *in duplum* rule in 2006, KCB had claimed over Sh148 million in both principal amount and accumulated interest. When KCB first listed the loan as defaulted in 1992, Benjoh Amalgamated had repaid approximately Sh6 million.

After declaring the loan defaulted, KCB issued auction notices to Benjoh Amalgamated and Muiri Coffee Estates. The firms filed the first case challenging plans to auction the property. That court file has since gone missing, making

it difficult to corroborate the contested course of events. KCB holds that lawyers representing all parties reached an out-of-court deal that would see the loan repaid by the end of July, 1992 and the auction called off.

The consent document was filed before High Court judge Erastus Githinji, who was at the time 43-years-old. Since then, Justice Githinji has been promoted to the Court of Appeal. He retired in 2019 when he hit the mandatory retirement age for judges, 70 years. Yet the land saga drags on with no end seemingly in sight. When the loan default continued, KCB renewed its auction plans the end of July, 1992.

The Muigai brothers have always disputed the deal, arguing that they did not give any lawyer instructions to agree to auction of the land in default of loan repayment. In 1997 Justice Githinji had halted KCB's auction plans on account of the missing court record, but the lender moved to the Court of Appeal, which allowed KCB to proceed with its auction plans.

Though the Muigai brothers deny that there was ever a deal, the High Court and Court of Appeal have in the past maintained that there was one, written out and signed by lawyers on both sides of the fence. In dismissing the Muigais' case in 2016, the Supreme Court declined to reopen that debate.

"In asking this court to pronounce itself on the propriety of a missing record of the High Court, we are being called upon in the very first place to determine the question of the legality of the con-

sent made by the parties in that missing record. That question was settled as far back as 1998. It is not conceivable that this Court should reopen that consent," the Supreme Court bench said in its judgment.

Three years later, the Muigais tried to revive one of the cases that flopped at the High Court. They sought the Court of Appeal's permission to revive the suit on grounds that there was new evidence to show that the consent filed in the missing 1992 case was a work of forgery. The Court of Appeal dismissed that application.

In 2017, as Bidii Kenya was putting pressure on police to effect Justice Havelock's eviction order, the Muigais took the land battle to the National Assembly. Through a petition, Ngengi asked Members of Parliament to find that KCB was wrong to auction a guarantor's property before exhausting collateral provided by the principal borrower.

Despite drawing sympathy from the National Assembly, its Finance Committee held that no law had been broken. Kenya's laws do not provide the hierarchy when lenders have multiple collateral from both principal borrowers and guarantors. Lenders can choose which property to sell first or last.

The Muigais had also accused KCB of auctioning property without the registered owner's consent. They insisted that the two pieces of land presented by Benjoh Amalgamated were sufficient to cover the loan balance if auctioned, hence KCB acted maliciously.

"On the prayer that the National Assembly establishes why KCB sold Muiri Coffee Estates without the consent of the owner and before realising the securities offered by Benjoh Amalgamated, the Committee did investigate the matter and found that due process was followed in the sale," the Finance Committee ruled.

Two years after the National Assembly's ruling, then Juja MP Francis Waititu sponsored a Bill seeking to compel lenders to first exhaust recovery processes with borrowers before descending on guarantors. Waititu's Bill was inspired by the Muigais' petition.

The National Assembly passed the Bill, but former President Uhuru Kenyatta declined to sign it into law. Instead, he sent it back to the National Assembly for consideration alongside a memoran-

dum detailing his reservations with the proposed law change.

The President was particularly concerned that some of the proposed changes would cause debt recovery to take more time and money, which he argued could negatively impact the banking sector. Ruiru MP Simon King'ara last month proposed a new Bill, similar to Waititu's.

Shortly after the National Assembly's ruling in 2017, Benjoh Amalgamated and Muiri Coffee Estates filed a complaint with the Directorate of Criminal Investigations (DCI), claiming that KCB had auctioned property on the strength of a forged consent.

In the course of the DCI investigation, lawyer Gideon Kaumbuthu Menye, whose signature appeared in the disputed consent document as a representative of the Muigai firms, has now claimed that he did not sign the document. Menye asked the DCI to investigate KCB for allegedly forging his signature on the consent document that opened the door for auction.

The Office of the Directorate of Public Prosecutions (ODPP) has since shown signs of prosecuting bank officials on account of Menye's complaint, even seeking confirmation from KCB on whether it intends to resolve the land dispute amicably. Past attempts by police to investigate complaints against the lender were stopped by the courts in 2011. Muiri lawyer Kithinji Marete in January 2023 wrote to the ODPP, pushing for prosecution on the basis that KCB was not keen on resolving the dispute.

"KCB has no intention of resolving the matter at hand and is happy to string our client along at its convenience, thereby making a mockery of the criminal justice system. Our instructions are that in reviewing the matter, you did concur with Muiri's long-standing assertion that there is overwhelming evidence to demonstrate on the part of KCB and Bidii Kenya Limited (Bidii) in the commission of offences including conspiracy to defraud contrary to Section 317 of the Penal Code," Marete wrote.

Muiri has been asking the bank to return its title deed then reimburse Bidii the Sh70million it paid for the property through a public auction.

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SCIENCE & TECH

SCIENTISTS USE BRAIN SCANS AND AI TO 'DECODE' THOUGHTS



Scientists have found a way to use brain scans and artificial intelligence modelling to transcribe “the gist” of what people are thinking, in what has been described as a step towards mind reading.

● LONDON

Scientists said last week they have found a way to use brain scans and artificial intelligence modelling to transcribe “the gist” of what people are thinking, in what was described as a step towards mind reading.

While the main goal of the language decoder is to help people who have lost the ability to communicate, the US scientists acknowledged that the technology raised questions about “mental privacy”.

Aiming to assuage such fears, they ran tests showing that their decoder could not be used on anyone who had not allowed it to be trained on their brain activity over long hours inside a functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) scanner.

Previous research has shown that a brain implant can enable people who can no longer speak or type to spell out words or even sentences.

These “brain-computer

interfaces” focus on the part of the brain that controls the mouth when it tries to form words. Alexander Huth, a neuroscientist at the University of Texas at Austin and co-author of a new study, said that his team’s language decoder “works at a very different level”.

“Our system really works at the level of ideas, of semantics, of meaning,” Huth told an online press conference.

It is the first system to be able to reconstruct continuous language without an invasive brain implant, according to the study in the journal *Nature Neuroscience*.

For the study, three people spent a total of 16 hours inside an fMRI machine listening to spoken narrative stories, mostly podcasts such as the *New York Times*’ *Modern Love*.

This allowed the researchers to map out how words, phrases and meanings prompted responses in the regions of the brain known to process language.

They fed this data into a neural

network language model that uses GPT-1, the predecessor of the AI technology later deployed in the hugely popular ChatGPT.

The model was trained to predict how each person’s brain would respond to perceived speech, then narrow down the options until it found the closest response.

To test the model’s accuracy, each participant then listened to a new story in the fMRI machine.

The study’s first author, Jerry Tang, said the decoder could “recover the gist of what the user was hearing”.

For example, when the participant heard the phrase “I don’t have my driver’s license yet”, the model came back with “she has not even started to learn to drive yet”.

The decoder struggled with personal pronouns such as “I” or “she,” the researchers admitted.

But even when the participants thought up their own stories — or viewed silent movies — the decoder was still able to grasp the “gist,” they said.

Clouds carry drug-resistant bacteria: Study

For a team of Canadian and French researchers, dark clouds on the horizon are potentially ominous, not because they signal an approaching storm, but because they were found in a recent study to carry drug-resistant bacteria over long distances.

“These bacteria usually live on the surface of vegetation like leaves, or in soil,” lead author Florent Rossi said last week.

“We found that they are carried by the wind into the atmosphere and can travel long distances — around the world — at high altitudes in clouds,” he said. The discovery was published in last month’s edition of the journal *Science of The Total Environment*.

The researchers from Laval University in Quebec City and Clermont Auvergne University in central France searched for antibiotic-resistant genes from bacteria found in cloud samples.

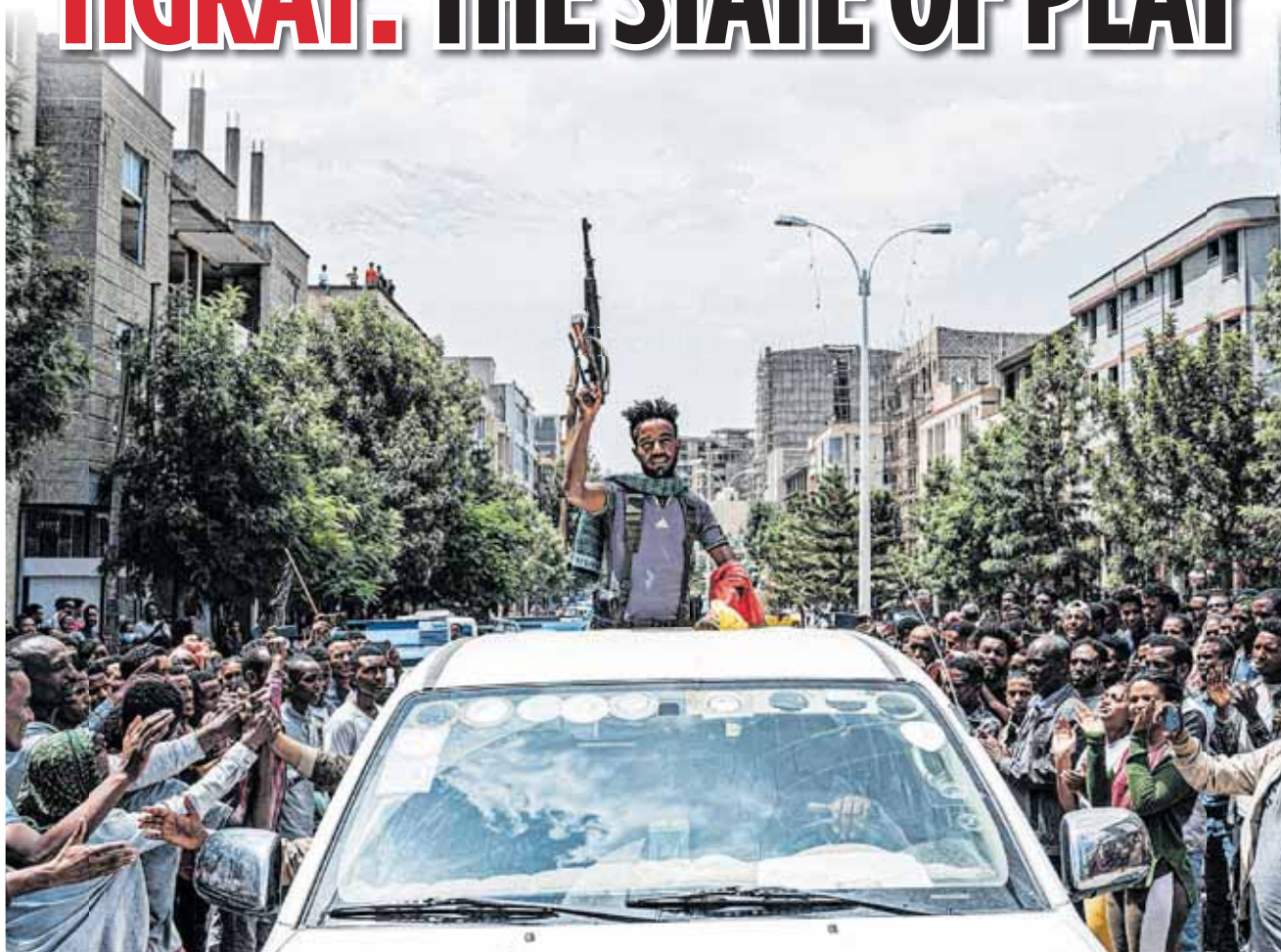
The samples were taken from an atmospheric research station perched 1,465 metres (4,806 feet) above sea level atop the Puy de Dome summit, a dormant volcano in central France between September 2019 and October 2021. An analysis of the retrieved mist revealed that they contained between 330 to more than 30,000 bacteria per milliliter of cloud water, for an average of around 8,000 bacteria per milliliter.

They also identified 29 subtypes of antibiotic-resistant genes in the bacteria. Drug resistance occurs when bacteria are exposed to antibiotics and develop an immunity to them over generations. Health authorities have repeatedly warned these adaptations are becoming what the study described as a “major sanitary concern worldwide”, making it harder — in some cases impossible — to treat certain bacterial infections as antibiotics use continues to rise in health care and agriculture. The study offered no conclusions on the potential health effects of the spread in the atmosphere of antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

africa lens

■ SIX MONTHS ON AND AGAINST ALL EXPECTATIONS, THERE HAS BEEN GOOD PROGRESS

TIGRAY: THE STATE OF PLAY



A Tigray People's Liberation Front fighter reacts to people as he parades by in a car in Mekele, capital of Tigray region, on June 29, 2021.

Despite the brutality of the fighting between pro-government forces and the Tigray People's Liberation Front, observers note goodwill on both sides to execute the accord, although there are delays

● MEKELLE

Ethiopia's government and Tigrayan authorities signed a surprise "Cessation of Hostilities Agreement" on November 2 to end a two-year war that has inflicted a devastating human toll.

Six months on and against all

expectations, there has been progress implementing a deal which, according to one diplomat, no one believed would work. The guns have fallen silent and humanitarian aid is being restored to the stricken region of Tigray, but numerous challenges remain to cement the peace.

Despite the brutality of the fighting between pro-govern-

ment forces and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), observers note goodwill on both sides to execute the accord, although there are delays.

"The two sides acknowledge that the deadlines were untenable and agree they should not be a reason to block (implementation)," a second diplomat said. "The dynamic is positive," add-

ed geopolitical researcher Patrick Ferras.

"The two parties are quite honest and the implementation is fairly rapid," he said, conceding that "such issues cannot be resolved in five months". Benjamin Petrini, research fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, said.

...Continued on Page 26

africa lens

Hope as Addis Ababa, Tigray relations on the mend

Continued from Page 25

gic Studies in Washington, voiced caution about the “opacity” of the process.

But he highlighted several positive developments since the deal was signed in Pretoria. “The halt in violence has been nearly complete. Restoration of services to Tigray and the delivery of external aid are also key accomplishments,” he said.

Ethiopia’s government still restricts journalists’ access to Tigray, but according to two people who visited recently, electricity and communications have been restored in the main urban centres. However, power cuts are frequent and large areas remain without mobile phone service. Access to cash is also very limited outside Tigray’s capital, Mekele.

Relations between Addis Ababa and Tigray are on the mend. An interim regional administration led by the TPLF was set up after the group was removed from a list of “terrorist” organisations, and the federal government is helping to finance the regional budget.

The African Union’s monitoring mission confirmed in mid-January that the TPLF had begun surrendering heavy weapons. The process is ongoing but the scale of the disarmament is not clear. “The AU mission estimates between 60 and 80 per cent of heavy weapons have been recovered. In fact we don’t know for sure,” the first diplomat said.

“When it comes to light weapons, it is complicated to completely disarm the TPLF in a country where small arms abound.”

Alongside disarmament, the accord called for the withdrawal from Tigray of foreign troops and non-federal forces — seen as a reference to Eritrea’s army and paramilitaries from the neighbouring Amhara region.

Both played a crucial role supporting the Ethiopian army on the battlefield but were not invited to the Pretoria talks.

Accused of some of the worst wartime atrocities, Eritrean troops have largely withdrawn from Tigray but have a low-key presence in border areas, according to a diplomat. Amhara forc-



Tigray People’s Liberation Front fighters react to supporters as they are welcomed on a street in Mekele, the capital of Tigray region, on June 29, 2021. Below: Redwan Hussein (left), representative of the Ethiopian government, and Getachew Reda (right), representative of the TPLF, sign a peace agreement in Pretoria on November 2, 2022.



es still control Western Tigray, a disputed region claimed by both Amharas and Tigrayans and a potentially dangerous flashpoint.

About 90 per cent of Tigray’s six million people, who were largely cut off from the outside world during the conflict, rely on humanitarian aid. Although northern Ethiopia is now more accessible, aid has yet to reach the level required, UN humanitarian agency OCHA said in April.

“Many inhabitants still say they are going hungry,” said one humanitarian source.

Jude Fuhnwi, spokesman for the International Committee of the Red Cross in Ethiopia, warned: “A terrible number of emergencies persist, not only in Tigray but also in parts of neighbouring Afar and Amhara.

“Emergencies linked to malnutrition, destroyed health infrastructure, sexual violence, displacement and conflict wounded persons are particularly severe.”

The scale of the destruction is colossal after a conflict the US says cost around half a million lives. “It will take at least 10 years to rebuild Tigray to the way it was before November 2020... (but) with what money?” said Ferras.

Tigray’s once efficient health system is on its knees, and according to OCHA, 85 per cent of schools have serious or partial damage.

All warring sides face accusations of atrocities that could amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity, and the international community and rights campaigners are demanding the

guilty be held accountable.

“How is the country and society supposed to move on from this extremely destructive war?” said Petrini. “Institutional mechanisms to ascertain responsibilities on war crimes, as well as nationwide reconciliation initiatives, are needed.”

While Addis Ababa is establishing a transitional justice process, “there’s a strong temptation by both sides to sweep these crimes under the carpet”, the first diplomat said. The issue of Western Tigray remains intractable and “risks being put off indefinitely”, said Ferras.

Elsewhere, Africa’s second most populous country — a mosaic of more than 80 ethnic groups — continues to grapple with multiple regional conflicts and challenges to its unity and stability.

Last month, violent protests erupted in Amhara over federal government moves to disband various regional paramilitaries in Ethiopia that have been operating illegally for years. “A serious security sector reform is needed,” said Petrini.

“And looking at the situation in Sudan, reining in the regional security forces is the arena where it will be decided if Ethiopia can move toward peace and an updated political settlement or not.”

global lens

■ NUMBER OF BRITONS WHO SUPPORT THE MONARCHY STANDS AT A RECORD LOW OF 29PC



King Charles III in the House of Lords during the State Opening of Parliament on May 10, 2022.

Elected leaders of Scotland and Wales want to scrap the monarchy, Northern Ireland's biggest party Sinn Fein wants reunification with the Republic of Ireland, while British republicans are unhappy with the royal family

● LONDON

King Charles III on Saturday formally took the crown of the United Kingdom. But arguably the realm is more disunited today than at any time since the tempestuous days of his 17th century namesakes.

The elected leaders of Scotland and Wales want to scrap the monarchy; Northern Ireland's biggest party, Sinn Fein, wants reunification with the Republic of

Ireland; and British republicans are unhappy with the royal family. "I consider myself first and foremost a citizen, not a (royal) subject," Scotland's new First Minister Humza Yousaf told *The National* newspaper in March.

He vowed to look at installing an elected head of state within five years of Scotland gaining independence from the UK — even if that goal has receded after numerous setbacks for Yousaf's ruling Scottish National Party. Nevertheless, Yousaf planned

to attend the coronation, as did Welsh First Minister Mark Drakeford — another avowed republican. And in a historic first, so would Sinn Fein, which refuses to take its seats in the UK parliament out of opposition to British rule in Northern Ireland.

The nationalist party's Northern Ireland leader Michelle O'Neill said she would come to Westminster Abbey on May 6 out of respect for the divided territory's pro-UK unionists. Further afield in the

Commonwealth, political fissures threaten the post-colonial inheritance of the 74-year-old Charles, who is also king in 14 countries outside the UK.

Australia's government is actively planning to scrap the monarchy. Barbados has already done so. Anti-monarchists at home scent a chance to renew debate about the constitutional future of the British royal family, long suppressed by public respect

Continued on Page 28

global lens

Charles III inherits a fraying realm in the UK

Continued from Page 27

for Charles's long-reigning mother, Queen Elizabeth II.

Graham Smith, chief executive of the pressure group Republic, acknowledged that the late queen was the monarchy's "star player" over her record-breaking reign of 70 years. Her son took over at a relatively advanced age, and enjoys little of the same deference.

The number of Britons who believe the monarchy is "very important" stands at a record low of 29 per cent, according to annual survey data collated by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen).

An overall majority still supports the monarchy, but backing falls markedly among the young. "The challenge going forward will be for the monarchy to deliver its relevance and appeal to a younger generation to maintain this support," NatCen chief executive Guy Goodwin said. No blood will be split over the future of the monarchy this time — unlike in the 17th century.

Charles I led England into civil war, and ended up losing his head in 1649 a short walk from where his descendant's coronation will take place. Charles II remained king of Scotland after his father's execution, and was restored to the English and Irish thrones after a republican interregnum.

But the religious tensions that were a driving factor of the civil war remained potent. Charles II's Catholic brother was deposed in favour of Protestant heirs. The monarchy is more stable today, according to Anna Whitelock, professor of the history of monarchy at City, University of London. "But yes, it's a disunited kingdom in many ways. Clearly there's an opportunity to engage in a debate which just wasn't in play during the queen's long reign," she told AFP.

"Young people, especially, are beginning to question what the monarchy does, its worth, whether it's accountable. There's a shifting of the dial, with the hashtag #NotMyKing."

"There's no chance of this Charles following in the grisly steps of the first one."

Charles III became heir to the



Queen Elizabeth II with Prince Charles at Buckingham Palace following the Queen's Birthday Parade, Trooping the Colour, as part of Her Majesty's platinum jubilee celebrations on June 2, 2022.

throne at the age of just three and waited seven long decades to succeed Queen Elizabeth II. Born on November 14, 1948, his course in life was plotted for him when his grandfather, King George VI, died, making his mother queen.

In 1958, Elizabeth made him Prince of Wales, the traditional title for heirs-apparent dating back to the 13th century. Described as a sensitive and awkward child, he was bullied at Gordonstoun Boarding School in north-east Scotland.

His no-nonsense father, Prince Philip, was a former pupil and thought its austere regime — and the even harsher Scottish weather — would toughen him up. But being sent away widened the gulf between him and his father, a gruff former Royal Navy officer, and mother, who was often away on official trips.

According to Charles's authorised biography, the queen was "not indifferent" to her son but was "detached". The young prince still had to bow to her. On her return from one six-month tour, when he was five, she greeted him not with a hug but a handshake.

Aged 20, Charles was formally crowned prince of Wales at a grand televised ceremony in

Caernarfon Castle. At the time, he was a student at the University of Cambridge, where he began taking an interest in plastic waste and pollution, and the future of the planet.

In the early 1970s, a burgeoning romance with Camilla Shand, whom he had met at a polo match, was cut short by his commission in the Royal Navy. While he was away at sea, Camilla married a British Army officer, Andrew Parker Bowles, in 1973.

For the rest of the decade, Charles was linked to a string of women as the country's most eligible bachelor. That changed in 1981 when, at the age of 32, he married the 20-year-old Lady Diana Spencer at St Paul's Cathedral in central London.

Prince William, his heir, was born in 1982, while Prince Harry, the self-styled "spare", came along two years later. Charles and Diana split in 1992 and formally divorced in 1996 after very public revelations of infidelity on both sides. In 1997, with Charles having resumed his relationship with Camilla, Diana was killed in a car crash in Paris.

The couple made their first official engagement in 1999 and, after a calculated campaign to win public acceptance of Camilla,

they married in 2005.

Charles once said of his role as heir that "there isn't a job description, so you have to rather make it up as you go along". But he has developed a keen interest in architecture, the environment, farming, faith and alternative medicine. His views, particularly on organic farming and climate change, once dismissed as those of a crank, have since become mainstream.

On acceding to the throne, there were concerns remain politically neutral as head of state.

But he has long experience already of top-level diplomacy, having represented his mother on overseas visits after she ended foreign travel due to old age.

William and Harry have described their father as a hard worker, whom they often found asleep at his desk at night.

He can sometimes be irritable, as at last year's official proclamation of him as king, when an aide failed to take away an ink pot quickly enough.

Camilla has spoken of an impatient man who "wants things done by yesterday", but also of a doting grandfather who reads Harry Potter stories to his grandchildren "and doing the voices".

global lens

■ SHE'S INCREASINGLY SEEN BY THE PUBLIC AS A WARM AND DOWN-TO-EARTH FIGURE

QUEEN CAMILLA: KING'S SOULMATE

In the turbulent 1990s, she was vilified as “the other woman” in Charles’s marriage to his first wife, Princess Diana

• LONDON

The crowning of Camilla alongside King Charles III was both a royal milestone and a personal victory for the monarch, who has long been quietly determined to make her his queen.

In the turbulent 1990s, Camilla was vilified as “the other woman” in Charles’s marriage to his first wife, Princess Diana.

But she has slowly won acceptance for offering steadfast support to her husband, and an unshowy dedication to good causes. Before the couple married, Charles let it be known that his relationship with the then Camilla Parker Bowles was “non-negotiable” and she would always be “central to his life.”

At the time his mother, Queen Elizabeth II, was reportedly worried that the marriage would cause irreparable damage to the monarchy.

Royal experts have described a long campaign behind the scenes by Charles’s office to improve Camilla’s image and ultimately ensure she would be queen.

The royal seal of approval for Camilla finally came before Elizabeth’s death last year when she said it was her “sincere wish” that Camilla be known as Queen Consort after her death. That finally put to rest a 2005 royal household plan for Camilla to become Princess Consort when Charles acceded to the throne.

In recent weeks, the “consort” part of her title has been quietly dropped and she is to be known simply as Queen Camilla. Although her popularity ratings remain lower than most other senior royals, Camilla is increasingly seen

by the public as a warm and down-to-earth figure.

Royal commentator Richard Fitzwilliams said the public now took a “benign view of Camilla”, nearly three decades after Charles and Diana’s very public divorce.

“She’s someone who has a strong sense of duty,” he told *AFP*. “There’s no question that she regards her role as to support Charles, and that they are soulmates — similar age, a similar sense of humour, similar friends... everything that he and Diana did not have in common.”

“The rehabilitation of Camilla was very successful, and it led to their marriage and it’s been very happy,” he said. Camilla has also shown her “tough” side by silently enduring much criticism over the years.

Since Elizabeth’s death last year, the causes Camilla has supported for years have been given a much bigger platform. They include the arts, promoting literacy and supporting survivors of rape and sexual assault.

“She’s been very low-profile in the UK in recent decades,” said the former UK ambassador to France, Peter Ricketts, speaking in March before the couple’s state visit to Germany.

“Now she has a moment to come more into the spotlight.” Camilla is a “strong woman” and “a very warm person” who “believes passionately in her charitable convictions”, said Ricketts.

One cause close to her heart is the Royal Osteoporosis Society, of which she has been president for more than 20 years. Both her mother and grandmother died from the crippling, bone-weakening condition.

Camilla Rosemary Shand was born in London on July 17, 1947 and had a traditional upbringing among the monied upper classes.

She first met Prince Charles as a young woman at a polo match in the early 1970s, and they later became close. But believing Charles would never propose, she married British Army officer Andrew Parker Bowles in 1973.

The couple had two children — food writer Tom Parker Bowles and art curator Laura Lopes. She now has five grandchildren. As the royal marriage crumbled, Charles and Camilla rekindled their relationship. Camilla and Andrew Parker Bowles divorced in 1995, a year before Charles and Diana.

After Diana’s death in a Paris car crash in 1997, the couple made their first public appearance together in 1999. They married on April 9, 2005, in a civil ceremony in Windsor, drawing a cheering crowd of 20,000 on the streets before a religious blessing.

Camilla has since been widely accepted by the royal family, including Charles and Diana’s eldest son, Prince William.

The king’s younger son, Prince Harry, accused Camilla in his recent autobiography of playing “the long game” with a campaign aimed at “marriage, and eventually the crown with Pa’s blessing we presumed”.

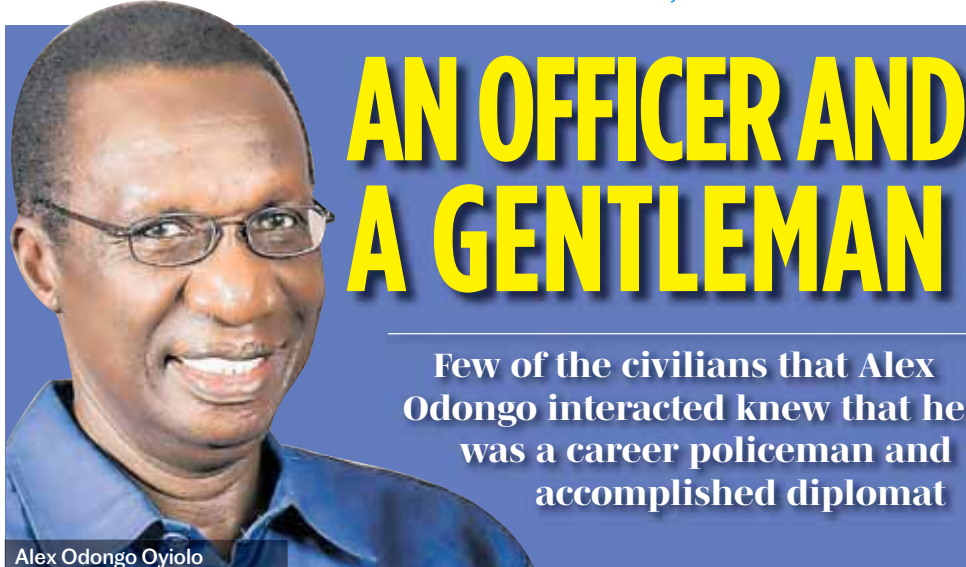
But Tom Parker Bowles rejected the claim: “This wasn’t any sort of end game,” he said last week. “She married the person she loved.”



Camilla, the Queen Consort of the United Kingdom.

OBIT

■ IF WE LIVE BY THIS WISDOM, ALL SHALL SURELY BE WELL



Alex Odongo Oyiolo

AN OFFICER AND A GENTLEMAN

Few of the civilians that Alex Odongo interacted knew that he was a career policeman and accomplished diplomat

● BY OSCAR OBONYO

They may not have been reprimanded or arrested for occasionally unleashing hostile criticism against the government whilst in the company of one of the country's top sleuths, but the realisation – upon his death – that he was a spymaster has got some thinking about the damning secrets they might have shared with him.

At a popular pub in Nairobi's Eastlands area, where the Alex Odongo Oyiolo occasionally enjoyed his chilled Tusker beer with friends, grieving patrons discuss the career police officer in disbelief. He was not your ordinary policeman – mostly associated with a forcefulness and commanding presence. Tall, with a disarming smile, Alex was gentle, friendly and very generous.

That he sometimes drove from his residence in the leafy suburbs of Kileleshwa to the middle-class neighbourhood of Donholm – a distance of 21 kilometres – just to meet with friends is humbling. It is the kind of gesture that reassures those he mingled with that even if he shared their tales with state agencies, he did so cautiously, or that he has taken their secrets safely to the grave.

"We are surprised to learn about his professional background. Alex was just a simple and humble patron who preferred to enjoy his drink unnoticed in the company of friends," says Kevo, the barman at the Donholm pub.

From Kevo, as the barman is popularly known, to former Vice-President Moody Awori and even the late Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom, with whom he rubbed shoulders as Deputy Commissioner at Kenya's High Commission in London, Alex was a sociable being with friends cutting across the extreme ends of social class.

A crest-fallen Awori, his former Member of Parliament for Funyula Constituency in Busia County, was among those who attended the officer's burial in Nangina Ward, Funyula, last weekend.

The ninth Vice-President and the career police officer-cum-diplomat were close. Whenever Alex replaced the gun in his hand with the Bible, he teamed up with Awori at the local Nangina Catholic Parish, where the two spearheaded a number of development projects, including renovation of the church building, purchase of modern pews, musical instruments and uniforms for the church choir.

Former Parish Chairman Edward Ogusinyi describes Alex as generous and "quite instrumental" in helping the local Christian community: "Besides offering material support, he was always ready to participate in funds drives for various purposes."

Ogusinyi, a former area councillor, observes that locals in the neighbourhood of Ebukhuma village, Alex's rural home, also benefited from good roads as well as water and electricity supply, courtesy of Alex's influence in govern-

ment and his personal resources.

But perhaps Alex's most notable venture in the area is the imposing Samia Resort. Named after the Abasamia people of the larger Abaluhya community, the hotel sits next to an abandoned airstrip and is just seven kilometres away from Lake Victoria.

Complete with a swimming pool, en suite rooms and conference facilities, Samia Resort is not just a personal achievement but the pride of the locals, and indeed the wider Busia community. The hotel, and the adjacent Alema petrol station, which he also owned, employ a huge number of locals.

Born on July 10, 1954 to the late Isidoro Oyiolo and Janerose Oyiolo, Alex joined the Kenya police force in 1972, retiring in 2014 as Deputy Commissioner at the Kenya High Commission in Kampala, Uganda.

His career in the security sector kicked off in earnest immediately after his secondary school education at Port Victoria School, the present-day John Osogo Secondary School, when he sought admission to the Kiganjo-based Police Training College at the level of Police Constable.

Owing to his sharp wit and positive attitude, John Odongo recalls that his older brother impressed the interviewing panel and was instead enrolled for the position of Police Inspector.

After a short stint in the force, Alex was recruited to serve as an intelligence officer in the so-called Special Branch, present-

ly the National Intelligence Service (NIS). A couple of years later, he was seconded to the Diplomatic Missions, serving as the Second Secretary at the Kenya High Commission of Zambia in Lusaka between 1983 and 1989. Besides Zambia, the mission also covered the southern African nations of Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland.

The following year, Alex was recalled home to serve as Chief Protocol Officer at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. December 1993 would herald another crowning moment for Alex, when he was appointed the Deputy Commissioner at the Kenya High Commission in London. His wife of 43 years, Mary Naburi Oyiolo, recalls with nostalgia the few times the couple met and dined with the Queen.

From hosting his villagemates in their Busia rural home to rubbing shoulders with the high and mighty in some of the world's biggest cities, Mrs Oyiolo, who recently retired from the United Nations Environmental Programme, says she gained wide exposure from her husband's tours of duty. The couple had four children: Anita, who passed on in a tragic accident in London in 2002, Jude, Gloria and Michelle.

The officer, who led a double-life – more as a civilian than a career policeman – will be missed in equal measure in the two opposing worlds. His last postings in the security sector were at the level of Assistant Director and Chief of Liaison of the NIS and later as Director of External Division at the NIS between 2003 and 2005.

Upon eventual retirement in 2014, after serving in Somalia and Uganda as Deputy Chief of Mission and Deputy Kenyan High Commissioner respectively, Alex settled down to managing his string of businesses in Nairobi, Nakuru and Busia, until he succumbed to pancreatic cancer on March 27.

His brother, John, is optimistic that the discipline and values Alex instilled in family, friends and colleagues are capable of standing the test of time: "He was a kind-hearted person who helped the needy in society. But most of all, he urged people to work hard and not expect free things. If we live by this wisdom, all shall surely be well."

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