

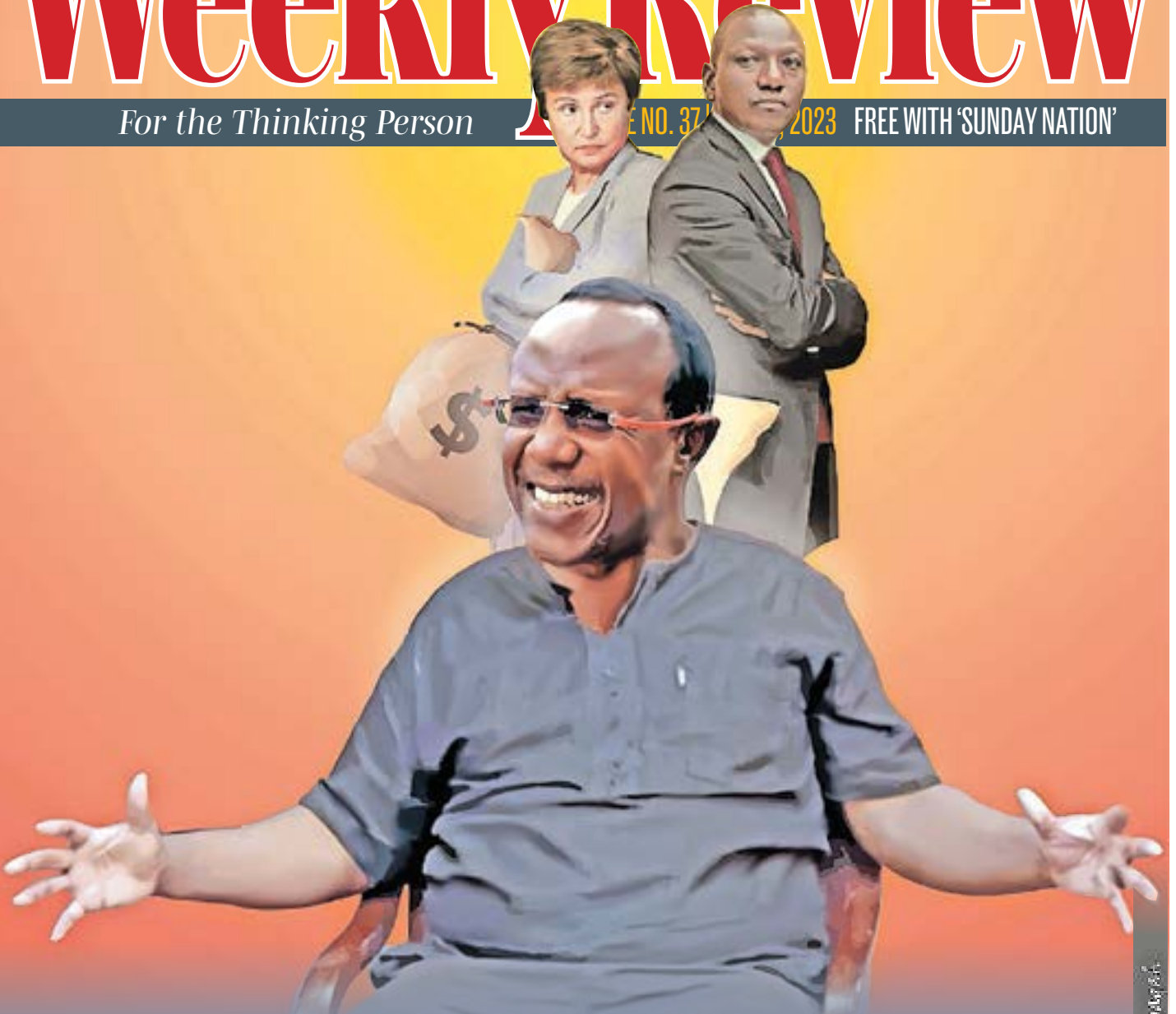
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For the Thinking Person

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BREAKING RANKS WITH THE IMF

Taking the bull by the horns: Ruto's powerful economic adviser, Ndi, faults Washington lender's bitter prescriptions, such as raising interest rates on bonds and devaluing the shilling, which could aggravate social unrest amid protests over the rising cost of living. But, for how long?

T. K. Mwangi

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letter from the editor

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It's time Kenya broke away from depending on the IMF

That the government is in a financial quagmire is no secret. Everybody feels the economic heat, while its dark social impact has yet to be calculated. Similarly, its political ramifications are still not easy to describe. We are back to the days when the Bretton Woods institutions called the shots and all eyes were fixed on what they would impose upon us before loosening their purse strings.

International Monetary Fund Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva was in town last week and the 'diplospeak' in front of the cameras was charming, but the tone used in a closed-door meeting was sharp and demeaning. The raft of demands that the institution has imposed on Kenya are far from flattering; the country is basically handing over its economic sovereignty to the IMF.

In the 1990s, as President Daniel arap Moi's administration fought desperately to control the government amid an onslaught from the opposition and an ailing economy, then-Finance Minister Musalia Mudavadi went on a charm offensive in the West and won back donor confidence.

At that time, we were into the multiparty era but with the political mindset of a single party. Those were the times when prices of goods were shooting up too fast, savings were depreciating while salaries were stagnating.

The loan we got from the donors was a debilitating cancer. The funds came at a steep cost as the government had to implement the infamous Structural Adjustment Programmes imposed by the Washington Consensus – global financial institutions based in the US capital. They included privatisation of



Allan Buluku

The IMF chief wants Kenya to raise taxes one-and-a-half times. The average citizen is still pressed hard against the wall and barely survives on one meal a day, which leaves him on the edge of hunger.

State assets, elimination of price controls, removal of subsidies for essential services such as health and education, retrenchment of civil servants, and removal of foreign exchange control.

Many developing nations are in debt and poverty partly due to the policies of the IMF and the World Bank. When President Mwai Kibaki took the reins in 2003, he freed the nation from the shackles of foreign lenders by increasing domestic tax revenues, which made the country less vulnerable to external influences. Kibaki took over when public debt stood at Sh629 million, 60 per cent of GDP. When he left in March 2013, public debt was at 41 per cent of GDP. But as of September 2022, public debt stood at 67 per cent of GDP.

President Uhuru Kenyatta, sadly, returned to the IMF with a begging bowl. And as President William Ruto's administration struggles to pay the debts in order for Kenya to remain in the donors' good books, fresh IMF proposals are causing jitters in government.

Georgieva wants Kenya to allow interest rates on securities to go up to make the paper more attractive to domestic investors, a proposal that has been faulted by Dr David Ndii, the chair of the Presidential Council of Economic Advisers.

The IMF chief also wants the government to increase taxation levels from the 17 per cent tax take to GDP to 25 per cent. The average citizen is still pressed hard against the wall and barely survives on one meal a day, which leaves him on the edge of hunger. The shilling, too, is expected to devalue further, consequently stifling and devaluing savings.

Certainly, if interest rates on treasury bonds rise, they will attract more domestic investors. This essentially means that the government will have to get back to borrowing from the public at a higher rate. Indeed, successive tax bills have been framed with the thought that if we impose higher taxes, we shall collect more revenue. But this is a fallacy that has never worked.

It is time we moved away from this dependence on the IMF. All our lives depend on this and if we waver, trying to please the international robber, the ramifications may drive many Kenyans to death and insanity for a long time to come.

abuluku@ke.nationmedia.com

the telescope

■ Azimio boss says Shakahola team unlawful

Why Raila opposes Kilifi probe

The High Court will this week commence the hearing of a petition filed by Azimio la Umoja-One Kenya Coalition leader Raila Odinga seeking to quash a decision by President William Ruto to appoint a commission of inquiry to probe the Shakahola massacre.

The case was last week certified as urgent with Justice Hedwig Ong'udi directing all parties be served with the petition by May 18.

The directions were given a day after the Shakahola commission was sworn in by Chief

Justice Martha Koome. In the petition, Odinga argues that it is unconstitutional for President Ruto to appoint a judicial commission to look into the matter.

Odinga says the President usurped the role of Parliament in setting up the commission. He argues that the Executive cannot investigate itself in a matter where its offices have been adversely mentioned.

Through lawyer Paul Mwangi, Odinga states that the commission is a contravention of the Constitution.



Azimio la Umoja One Kenya leader Raila Odinga (right) with Pastor Ezekiel Odero at his church in Mavueni, Kilifi, on May 6.

■ It seeks to create awareness about anxiety

Wellness Walk set for Machakos



Thousands of people are expected to take part in the 2023 Wellness Walk at Kinanie Trail in Machakos County on May 20. The aim is to raise awareness and create deliberate community conversation about anxiety.

Anxiety is a common challenge that affects many Kenyans, and the event seeks to create a safe space for everyone to talk about it openly. The walk will take participants through beautiful scenery as they engage in uplifting conversation about anxiety. "This is a great opportunity to connect with others, learn more about mental health, and take positive steps towards improving your well-being," said the organisers.

■ Carlson was the best-known name on Fox News



Former Fox News host Tucker Carlson

Ex-Fox host teases new Twitter show

Ousted Fox News host Tucker Carlson last week said he will move his show to Twitter after reports said he met with platform owner Elon Musk with the intention of working together. Carlson was until last month the best-known name on Fox's presenting roster, hosting a prime-time evening show that won fierce loyalty among the broadcaster's right-wing viewers.

In a video posted on Twitter, Carlson ripped mainstream media and then concluded with the news that he will host a show on the platform.

"Amazingly, as of tonight, there aren't many platforms left that allow free speech. The last big one remaining in the world, the only one, is Twitter, where we are now," Carlson said. "Starting soon, we'll be bringing a new version of the show

we've been doing for the last six-and-a-half years to Twitter," he added.

Railing against everything from immigration policies to gun controls, *Tucker Carlson Tonight* pilloried liberal trends in modern America, appealing to viewers' outrage and propelling the show to the heights of cable television.

Carlson interviewed Musk on Fox just days before his firing, which came after the outlet paid a huge settlement to end a defamation case in which the host played a part.

Since taking over Twitter late last year, Musk has made efforts to make the platform a welcome place for arch conservatives, reinstating thousands of accounts that had been suspended for hateful language and other content violations.

■ Double Oscar winner has 'just had a baby'

De Niro welcomes seventh child at 79



Robert De Niro has become a father again at the age of 79, the "Raging Bull" actor has said. Double-Oscar winner De Niro corrected an interviewer who suggested he only had six children, telling her it is now seven. "I just had a baby," he

told *ET Canada*, without revealing the baby's gender or the identity of the mother. De Niro's publicist confirmed the news to *AFP*. The almost-octogenarian already shares two children with his first wife, *Taxi Driver* co-star Diahnne Abbott, and two more with socialite Grace Hightower, from whom he separated in 2018. He also had twin sons with model Toukie Smith, whom he dated in the late 1980s. De Niro is currently promoting his new comedy film, *About My Father*.

kenya lens

■ RUTO'S ECONOMIST WANTS THE LENDER TO RESET ITS CONDITIONALITIES FOR NAIROBI

NDII'S TUFF WITH IMF

David Ndi pours cold water on IMF proposal and wonders if the fund is oblivious to the mayhem that has taken down four US banks. "Why would banks buy more bonds where their entire trading portfolios are under water? What I'm I missing?"

In response to recent stresses on the supply side, especially the war in Ukraine, the US Fed and central banks around the world commenced on very aggressive rate hikes and to tame inflation.

The unintended consequence of these rate hikes was the value of treasury bonds that banks were holding lost massive value when they were now revalued to reflect the new realities of a high interest rate regime.

IMF boss Kristalina Georgieva says the domestic market for government securities is not doing well because the government is not accepting higher interest rates on bonds at the auctions. "Start allowing interest rates on securities to go up to make the paper more attractive to domestic investors."

As a result, banks experienced massive outflows of depositors that saw the Silicon Valley Bank collapse. The same phenomena crashed Credit Suisse, which had to be taken over by UBS.

If Kenya adopted the IMF prescription of allowing interest rates to go up, the country would be risking the same mayhem the US was experiencing.

If Kenya was to follow the IMF prescription to increase rates, total debt service costs, which are already sky high at 65 per cent of revenue, will rise significantly, beyond the country's ability to pay.

The influential chair of the Presidential Council of Economic advisers takes on the might of the Washington lender over some of the onerous strings it has attached to offering financial aid. If push comes to shove, will Kenya surrender its economic sovereignty to the Bretton Woods institutions?

• BY JAINDI KISERO

As chair of the Presidential Council of Economic Advisers, what Dr David Ndi says not only counts, but matters. It did not surprise that a tweet in which he appeared to counter a pronouncement by the Chief Executive of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Kristalina Geor-

gieva, made after holding discussions with President William Ruto and a team of his economic advisers at State House last week, ignited a raging debate.

What the visiting IMF chief said can be summarised as follows: "Your domestic market for government securities is not doing well because you are not accepting higher interest rates on bonds at the auctions." And then her pre-

scription: "Start allowing interest rates on securities to go up to make the paper more attractive to domestic investors."

Ndi's response was terse: "Really? Could the Fund be oblivious of the market-to-market mayhem that has taken down four US banks already? Why would banks buy more bonds where their entire trading portfolios are under water? What I'm I missing?"

Coming from no less authority than Ruto's chief economic adviser, pundits were left scratching their heads and pondering the implications to Kenya's diplomatic relations with the Fund. Is Kenya considering breaking ranks with the IMF over some of the onerous strings the lenders have attached to offering the country financial help? Or was Ndi's just

Continued on Page 6

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IMF's bitter prescription kicks up a storm

Continued from Page 5

tactical ploy – floating a trial balloon to generate public debate on IMF conditionalities and prepare the public to accept the inevitability of the lender's bitter pill?

Here, a brief background of the market-to-market mayhem in the US that Ndiu was referring to in his tweet. For many years, interest rates in the country were near zero as the Fed flooded the market with easy money in a policy known as quantitative easing.

To respond to recent stresses on the supply side, especially the war in Ukraine, the US Fed and central banks around the world commenced on very aggressive rate hikes to tame inflation.

The unintended consequence of these rate hikes was the value of treasury bonds that banks were holding lost massive value when they were now revalued to reflect the new realities of a high interest rate regime. As a result, banks experienced massive outflows of depositors that saw the Silicon Valley Bank collapse. The same phenomena crashed Credit Suisse which had to be taken over by UBS.

Thus, Ndiu's point that if Kenya adopted the IMF prescription of allowing interest rates to go up, the country would be risking the same mayhem the US was experiencing. In addition, if Kenya was to follow the IMF prescription to increase rates, total debt service costs which are already sky high at 65 per cent of revenue will rise significantly go beyond the country's ability to pay. Ndiu's tweet was alert to the burden which high in-

Justifying higher taxation in the country's current political circumstances is a live wire because of the risk of aggravating social unrest. Already, the government has in recent weeks been grappling with noisy street protests mounted by the opposition on grounds of high consumer prices which – in part – was the consequence of the IMF's imposed policy of removal of subsidies on fuel. Civil servants trade unions have threatening strikes over wage freezes and frequent delays in payment of salaries.



President William Ruto with the IMF Managing Director, Kristalina Georgieva, in Sharma El-Sheikh, Egypt, on November 8, 2022.

terest rates the IMF was demanding was bound to impose on the taxpayer.

Even though he did not mention it, yet another IMF prescription which the government is going to find politically hard to implement is the suggestion by the lender that Kenya should devalue its currency by allowing the shilling to float to its market-determined value.

Indeed, the immediate impact of any significant devaluation of the currency would lead to substantial increase in the external debt repayment costs.

With the country's external debt cost already at 65 per cent of GDP, Kenya has no head room or space of taking any significant increases on debt cost.

Another key prescription in the IMF chief's interview last week was for the government to increase taxation levels from the country 17 per cent tax take to GDP to 25 per cent. Put simply, the Fund is asking Kenya to raise taxes by one and a half times.

Yet, justifying higher taxation in the country's current political cir-

cumstances is a live wire because of the risk of aggravating social unrest.

Already, the government has in recent weeks been grappling with noisy street protests mounted by the opposition on grounds of high consumer prices which – in part – was the consequence of the IMF's imposed policy of removal of subsidies on fuel. Civil servants trade unions have threatening strikes over wage freezes and frequent delays in payment of salaries.

An innocent tweet by Ndiu had highlighted the need for the fund to have a reset of their conditionalities for Kenya. The stakes for Kenya being in good books couldn't be higher.

In the first place, there is still US\$800 million to be disbursed under the current program that was signed in April, 2021. Furthermore, the IMF is dangling a further US\$1 billion under a new and so-called Resilience and Sustainability Facility.

Thus, the Fund continues to strategically maintain leverage over Kenya.

Your domestic market for government securities is not doing well because you are not accepting higher interest rates on bonds at the auctions. Start allowing interest rates on securities to go up to make the paper more attractive to investors.

Kristalina Georgieva, IMF boss



kenya lens

■ WHO WILL BE THE 10TH GOVERNOR?

CBK BOSS: THE DIE IS CAST

Njoroge injected stability in the sector following the collapse of three banks — Chase, Imperial and Dubai — at the beginning of his first term

● BY PATRICK ALUSHULA

The nation is patiently waiting for the next governor of the Central Bank of Kenya, who will play a crucial role in managing the economy. Six candidates — Dorcas Mutonyi, Haron Sirima, Edward Sambili, Nancy Onyango, Adan Mohamed and Kamau Thugge — are in the race to succeed Patrick Njoroge, who will formally leave office on June 17.

The Public Service Commission (PSC) last week gave each of the candidates an hour to explain why they should be considered for the job. It was an experience that Dr Sirima and Dr Sambili were familiar with as in 2013 they lost it to Njoroge. The governor's tenure has been a mixed bag, including injecting stability in the banking sector following the back-to-back collapse of three banks — Chase, Imperial and Dubai Bank — at the beginning of his first term.

He also helped banks wade through Covid-19 disruptions with loan restructuring arrangement but leaves at a time the Kenyan shilling has come under heightened pressure from the dollar. The economy has endured months of dollar shortages for importers as the official rate climbed to highs of 136 units to the dollar, even as Njoroge downplayed the crisis.

His successor will find a battered shilling that is averaging all-time lows to the dollar and inflation that has stayed above government's desired upper limit of 7.5 percent for eleven straight months. There are also the esca-



1. Dorcas Muthoni Mutonyi

- Seasoned banking professional with a career spanning 20 years.
- Worked for different banks, including Equity Group, National Bank of Kenya, and Standard Chartered Bank.
- At Equity, she served as group head of IT research and innovation (April 2020-Dec 2022).
- Studied disruptive strategy at the Harvard Business School and is certified in digital business transformation management.



4. Nancy Onyango

- Director of Internal Audit Director of Internal Audit IMF.
- Previous partner at PricewaterhouseCoopers and Ernst Young.
- Past board member of different firms including Cytonn, KCB Group and Global Give Back Circle.
- Holds MBA from University of Nairobi (1984 – 1989).
- Holds Doctorate of Business Administration from the United States International University (2013-2016).

lating borrowing costs, lower uptake of government paper and dollar shortages to think about.

The new boss at CBK will join Dr Susan Koech, another fresh face that was hired on March 10, as the second deputy governor after years of CBK operating in breach of the law requiring the regulatory body to have two deputy governors.

The current deputy governor Sheila M'Mbijjewe and chairman Mohammed Nyaoga are also exiting on June 17, alongside Dr Njoroge. A second round of re-



2. Haron Sirima

- Director-General, Public Debt Management Office at the National Treasury.
- A career central banker.
- Joined CBK in 1986 as a graduate trainee and rose through the ranks to the position of deputy governor and vice chairman, Monetary Policy Committee.
- Previously served as deputy director Management Department, Ministry of Finance.
- Holds B.A Economics and B. Phil Economics degrees from University of Nairobi.
- Holds PhD in Entrepreneurship from Kenyatta University
- Was also shortlisted for the job in 2015 but lost it to Dr Njoroge.



5. Adan Abdulla Mohamed

- Economic advisor to President William Ruto.
- Former Cabinet Secretary for Industry and Trade in President Kenyatta Cabinet.
- Former CEO of Barclays Kenya
- Former chairman, Kenya Bankers Association.
- Worked for PricewaterhouseCoopers for seven years in London.
- An MBA graduate of Harvard Business School.
- Member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales.

placements at CBK will be due in December next year when the terms of the four board members will end at once, with no room for being reappointed. The position requires recognised professionals with a Bachelor's and Master's degree in fields such as economics,



3. Edward Sambili

- Economist.
- Former PS Planning National Development & Vision 2030.
- Former Deputy Governor CBK (2001-2004).
- Was also shortlisted for the job in 2015 but lost it to Dr Njoroge.



6. Kamau Thugge

- Fiscal affairs and budget policy advisor to President William Ruto.
- Former Treasury Principal Secretary.
- Previously worked in the Ministry of Finance as head of Fiscal and Monetary Affairs Department.
- Worked with the IMF as Economist, Senior Economist and Deputy Division Chief.

banking, finance or law.

The successful candidate is also required to have over 10 years of senior management experience in economics, banking, finance or other relevant fields.

PSC had further stated that the candidate will be required to have knowledge or experience in monetary, financial, and economic matters, as well as a deep understanding of global financial sector trends. Past governors include Dr Leon Baranski, Duncan Ndegwa, Philip Ndegwa, Eric Kotut, Micah Chesherem, Nahashon Nyagah, Dr Andrew Mullei and Prof Njuguna Ndungu.

CORRECTION: An earlier version of this article had highlighted the profile of Doris Muthoni, the CEO of OpenWorld, instead of Dorcas Muthoni, the seasoned banker shortlisted for the position of Governor, Central Bank of Kenya. We apologise for the mix-up.

kenya lens

■ AFFORDABLE HOUSING

HOUSING LEVY UNDER FIRE

The Buxton Point affordable housing project in Mombasa. KEVIN ODIT | NATION

The government's proposed housing scheme becomes the subject of political debate over criticism that it only adds to the woes of an economically burdened citizenry

● BY OSCAR OBONYO

Why an employee who may not be keen on a new house would have his or her money tied up in a housing scheme is supposed to be a simple question. But this is not the case as the query has now metamorphosed into the subject of a major political contest.

Political players allied to President William Ruto's administration and those backing Raila Odinga's Azimio la Umoja-One Kenya are now gearing up for a showdown in the august House. While the National Assembly's Leader of the Majority, Kimani Ichung'wah, maintains the house levy plan is aimed at wealth creation, the opposition considers it an illegal ploy to borrow money from Kenyans in the disguise of a housing scheme.

Ichung'wah, who is by virtue of his position expected to lead the government's defence of the proposal, believes it has been heav-

ily politicised and unfairly demonised. This is not a tax at all, he declares: "It is a means for saving one's income for investment. The deduction is a contribution which can be reclaimed."

According to the proposed plan, one can access his or her contributions after seven years by transferring the money to a retirement benefits scheme or pension scheme, or to one's spouse and children. There is also a leeway for one to receive the cash back after seven years. Unlike a tax, which becomes government money to appropriate, Ichung'wah says the housing levy is an individual's money.

However, Azimio is particularly uncomfortable with the timing of the scheme – when the Kenyan employee is already burdened by heavy taxation and reduced income due to the high cost of goods, including foodstuff. They consider the introduction of the new tax irrational, pointing out that the move – if and when effected – will further reduce the

amount of disposable income available in the economy.

Ruto's administration is proposing a deduction of three per cent of basic salaries to finance the affordable housing scheme. This figure is double that proposed by his predecessor, Uhuru Kenyatta, in 2019. Azimio finds the new arrangement odd, considering that not everyone is qualified for the affordable housing regime, yet everyone is expected to pay.

In April 2019, Musalia Mudavadi took a similar position, rubbishing President Kenyatta's house levy plans and advising him to instead use cash recovered from "rampant graft" in government to build homes. Now Prime Cabinet Secretary in Ruto's administration, Mudavadi has yet to comment on the current debate.

While at it, Odinga on Monday took an apparent swipe at his erstwhile political ally, Francis Atwoli, by suggesting that trade unions had suddenly gone mum despite their members' economic woes. That same day, the Cen-

tral Organisation of Trade Unions (Cotu) Secretary-General, who has now affiliated himself to the government of the day, criticised unions that are opposed to the housing levy and asked members to "stop politicising serious matters". Atwoli said that he had engaged President Ruto and that Cotu was in support of the levy.

Atwoli believes that Ruto's move will help the country manage its foreign debt by borrowing locally. And he offers the example of individual members' contributions to the National Social Security Fund (NSSF), which "has helped the country to increase its savings". Ichung'wah seems to concur with Atwoli on the "local borrowing" aspect by pointing out that the housing levy is a bigger economic agenda than the physical houses. It is about wealth and job creation, he says, as well as growth of the manufacturing sector. He is suggesting that a "housing levy for all" is some kind of super avenue to facilitate government's expenditure and spur

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economic growth.

It would appear, judging from reactions of experts, that adequate consultations were not undertaken. Describing it as “illegal, ill-timed and ill-thought-out,” Wilson Mugambi, for instance, says the government cannot impose on people a shelter project without clear legislation.

The former Architectural Association of Kenya (AAK) president opines that the affordable housing project is being poorly rolled out. He wants the government to sit back and re-think the matter – as projected in the Finance Bill currently before Parliament. Members of AAK polled by *The Weekly Review* want government to engage developers and consultants in the sector. Mugambi hopes legislators can “step up and defend the people”.

The Constitution of Kenya, under Article 43(1)(b) of the Bill of Rights, provides that “every person has the right to accessible and adequate housing, and to reasonable standards of sanitation”. Housing projects run by the 10-year Kenyatta government, in which Ruto was Deputy President, and currently by the Ruto administration, appear premised on this constitutional dictate.

The Executive Director of the Kenya National Civil Society Centre (KNCS), Suba Churchill, observes that the right to housing is not only for civil servants and



An affordable housing project in South B, Nairobi. EVANS HABIL I NATION

those formally employed in the private sector. Any public policy on housing, he says, should encompass measures aimed at securing the right to housing for all citizens of the Republic of Kenya, irrespective of their employment status or whether they live in urban or rural parts of the country.

Housing comes along with the right to security of the person, health and privacy. It is a right not only recognised in the Constitution but a universal right deeply rooted in the United Nations’ International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to which Kenya is a party and signatory.

The KNCS boss believes that President Kenyatta almost got it right in 2019, when his government first came up with a proposal to levy 1.5 per cent on the monthly income of all employees (public and private). However, the proposal suffered a still birth because of the manner in which it was being forced down the throats of the people. Ruto’s plan faces an even bigger hurdle because it is proposing to double the contribution percentage and at a time of great economic hardship for Kenyans.

“Sadly, the way the Kenya Kwanza administration wants to implement the housing project is as if it is one of those compulsory subjects for Grade 8 or Form 4 learners.

The government seems not to have learned any lessons as to why a similar approach failed after the Jubilee govern-

ment,” says Churchill. One other thing the Kenyatta administration appeared to have gotten right but which seems to have evaded the current government was to open the housing plan to those in the informal sector, who would have contributed Sh200 per month.

Efforts towards affordable housing are not new. In a memorable event that left residents of the sprawling Kibra in tears of joy, Odinga, then serving as Prime Minister, then-Housing Minister Soita Shitanda, and his assistant, Margaret Wanjiru, were captured carrying mattresses, pans and other domestic equipment to help residents migrate to brand new modern dwellings. This was in September 2009 and it was a part of a government initiative, in collaboration with the UN-Habitat and other stakeholders.

Dubbed the Kenya Slum Upgrading Programme, it was set up in 2004 with the objective of improving lives and livelihoods of people working and living in slums. In March 2012, President Kibaki pumped into the project a further Sh3 billion as he officially launched Kibera People Settlement Development Project, which targeted construction of 900 housing units.

Public Benefit Organisations (PBOs) or Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), as they are still referred to, have also spent considerable resources on housing. An ongoing project in which 50 families so far have been relocated from Nairobi’s informal settlements to western Kenya under the Kiska Repatriation Pro-

ject run by Natural Capital Trust is the clearest demonstration that even PBOs can play a pivotal role in attainment of the affordable housing goal.

As Deputy President, Ruto (mis) used the housing project during his countrywide campaigns last year to portray his then boss as having failed to achieve any milestones on this front.

This was after Kenyatta forged a working relationship with Odinga in the last term of his presidency. Housing was one of the Kenyatta-Ruto pair’s “Big Four agenda”, and Ruto harped on its apparent failure to politically discredit Kenyatta and, by association, Odinga’s candidature.

Odinga served as MP for Lang’ata, which includes the Kibra slum, for two decades, and as Kenya’s second Prime Minister for five years was roundly accused by political rivals of “doing nothing” to address the sorry state of sanitation in the slums.

The shelter question has indeed dominated campaigns every election year, with Odinga’s development record coming under scrutiny and competitors claiming that if elected President, he would turn Kenya into one “shitty mess”, same as the congested Kibra slum.

It is a claim that the Azimio leader has repeatedly shrugged off, stating that slums are not unique to Kenya but a worldwide phenomenon.

On the contrary, Odinga says, he spearheaded reforms in the housing sector in the capital city while serving as Minister for Public Works and Housing between 2002 and 2005, and later as PM.

In the meantime, the politicking goes on. Even though Azimio proposes a raft of fairly good measures aimed at curbing excesses in government expenditure, its Kenya Kwanza rivals are bound to view this through political lenses. Measures such as banning of “non-essential” trips by government top brass to launch projects or attend political rallies in the name of prayer meetings, reduction in size of government and halting appointments of Chief Administrative Secretaries would better endear government to its people.

The bottom line is that the housing project has become a victim of political play, thence a political process that will be executed or frustrated with an eye on the 2027 elections.



Kikuyu MP Kimani Ichung’wah

kenya lens

■ MUTURI OUT TO TAME RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS THAT ENGAGE IN QUESTIONABLE ACTIVITIES

SHAKAHORROR: THE BURIED TRUTH

Commission will identify administrative, security and intelligence gaps responsible for failure to detect and prevent the tragedy as task force seeks to forestall future tragedies caused by cults and extremist groups

● By MACHARIA GAITHO

Sometime between 2011 and 2013, Tana River Senator Danson Mungatana handed over some Sh76 million to a foreign confidence trickster who promised to double his money. The MP, a practising lawyer, took bank loans on his house and cars, cashed in on his shares in the stock exchange and sold all other assets he could lay his

hands on to turn over the hard cash to Abdoulaye Tamba Kouro, a Chadian 'witchdoctor' who had 'doubled' smaller amounts for him in the past.

The get-rich-quick scheme backfired spectacularly as Kouro disappeared after receiving the cash in US dollars. The MP was left almost homeless and penniless as the banks sent auctioneers to recover their securities. Relatives and friends, including fellow parliamentarians, who had lent him

money were also moving in with their demands, some taking him to court. The whole saga makes Mungatana a very interesting choice to lead a Senate committee probing the Shakahola massacre.

Any investigation into how a doomsday cult led believers into mass suicide by fasting to death, and probably killed those who wavered, invariably will involve looking into how the vulnerable, gullible and also probably the greedy, fall prey to charismatic preachers, faith healers and other charlatans. The Senate probe is yet another indication of how the Shakahola massacre has spawned investigative overkill. President William Ruto has already established two separate probes into the Doomsday Cult of Pastor Paul Mackenzie that has claimed 145 lives, and counting, of faithful who apparently starved themselves to death.

The Presidential Task Force headed by Rev Mutava Musyimi, a former Secretary-General of the National Council of Churches of Kenya, is mandated to make proposals on a regulatory regime for religious organisations in order to forestall future tragedies and ensure cults and extremist groups do not have freedom to operate. There is also a Commission of Inquiry chaired by Court of Appeal Judge Jessie Lesiit. It is tasked with investigating the deaths linked to Mackenzie's Good News International Church in Kilifi County, identify the administrative, security and intelligence gaps responsible for failure to detect and prevent the tragedy, and recommend legal and administrative interventions.

The two inquiries, both sworn in last Tuesday by High Court Presiding Judge Eric Ogola, will run concurrently, with some of their mandates clearly overlapping. Meanwhile, police investigations are proceeding apace, with Mac-

kenzie and more than a dozen associates facing charges. Another controversial clergyman, Pastor Ezekiel Odera of the New Life International Church also in the same county, is out on bail after being charged in connection with the deaths.

And even before the Musyimi Task Force starts sitting, Attorney-General Justin Muturi is not waiting for its recommendations, but has gone ahead to retrieve from his dusty shelves and publish anew abandoned draft regulations intended to tame religious organisations that engage in questionable activities. The AG appeared before the Mungatana committee around the same time as the Task Force and the Commission of Inquiry were being sworn in, and said he would incorporate recommendations from both teams in the proposed regulations in an updated Societies Act.

In the meantime, opposition leader Raila Odinga, who has made a public show of support for Ezekiel, is moving to throw a spanner in the works by filing a High Court challenge to Ruto's appointment of the Commission of Inquiry. He charges that the President is usurping the powers and undermining the authority of the Senate, which has already commissioned an ad-hoc Committee whose "mandate is the same shade and colour" as that of the Commission of Inquiry.

He also claims that Ruto is interfering with the independence of the Judiciary, arguing that the formation of the Commission of Inquiry is unconstitutional as it amounts to usurpation of powers vested in other state organs by the Constitution. He further asserts that only Parliament can establish a subordinate court or an independent tribunal through an Act of Parliament. Duplication and overlapping mandates are



Mutava Musyimi

Heads the presidential task force on the review of the legal and regulatory framework governing religious organisations.

kenya lens

just some of the issues the Lesiit, Musyimi and Mungatana teams will have to grapple with.

Director of Criminal Investigations Amin Mohammed and Director of Public Prosecutions Noordin Haji are carrying on with their work uninterrupted, but they may at some point require guidance on how to proceed when there are other inquiries ongoing that may lead to recommendations on prosecution. Then there is the fact that religion is an emotive issue, where past attempts at regulation have been fiercely resisted to the point that they were abandoned.

Evangelical movements, some exhibiting cultish 'worship' of individuals who 'own' the churches have grown spectacularly in recent years, probably outpacing the mainstream groupings like the Catholic Church and protestant churches such as the Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist and Baptist, grouped under the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK) umbrella. Even before the commission of inquiry and the task force had been constituted, there was evident fight-back from televangelists, some of whom enjoy the patronage of Ruto's State House, warning against attempts to control religion or to demonise the entire church over the Shakahola deaths.

The separate probes will not be complete without looking into the spectacular growth of the evangelical movement and some of its more controversial practices such as focus on the so-called prosperity gospel, fake faith healing, aggressive collection of funds that do not seem to go to any worthwhile cause, ostentatious display of wealth and apparent mind-control and brainwashing.

Musyimi, also former Gachoka MP, is a soft-spoken and thoughtful retired Baptist who might find himself coming up against the fire-spitting churchmen out to protect their turf. Then there will also be political factors at play in State House support and promotion of evangelical churches at the expense of mainstream groups, as well as Raila's support for Pastor Ezekiel and also known links to another controversial preacher, the self-proclaimed Prophet David Owuor.

Amidst all that has been Raila's incessant charge that Ruto's State House bears direct responsibility for the Shakahola deaths through

its links with preachers associated with radicalism and extremist doctrines. Contacted last Wednesday by *The Weekly Review* on whether he appreciated the challenges and pitfalls ahead before taking up the assignment, Musyimi simply responded, "Someone has to do it."

He turned down requests for an interview, however, pleading that it would be premature as the Task Force had not even had its first sitting. But there will certainly be challenges, as established by the fact that previous attempts to tame the growth of rogue churches have been abandoned under pressure.

While not directly connected, there was also President Daniel arap Moi's 1994 appointment of a Commission of Inquiry into devil worshipping. The Commission, chaired by Catholic Archbishop of Nyeri Nicodemus Kirima, presented its report to Moi at the end of 1995, but he immediately put it under lock and key, declaring it would not be made public because it contained "sensitive information".

It was not until 1999 that it was finally tabled in Parliament, with sensational findings that devil worship was commonplace in Kenya. It recommended establishing a special police force to investigate crimes of the occult, and also included numerous reports of ritual murder, human sacrifice, cannibalism and feats of magic allegedly done using powers acquired through such acts. It also reported that "satanists" had infiltrated non-indigenous religious groups and other organisations, making them "doorways" to satanism.

The government never acted on the report, but it was probably tainted because the largely conservative clergy dominating the team likened almost everything that did not fit into their narrow doctrine as satanic. That included the mushrooming 'new age' faiths fast eating into the mainstream orthodoxy catchment, other beliefs such as Hare Krishna, Rastafarianism, rock and reggae music, matatu culture, Freemasonry and even a golfing fraternity known as the Lucifer Society. However, there was plenty of extremist dogma and cultism that would be relevant today and worth looking at in relation to Shakahola and renewed attempts to regulate religion.

COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO SHAKAHOLA TRAGEDY

Chairperson: Justice Jessie Lesiit. **Members:** Justice (Rtd) Mary Kasango, Eric Gumbo, Bishop Catherine Mutua, Dr Jonathan Lodompui, Dr Frank Njenga, Wanyama Musiambu, Albert Musasia **Joint Secretaries:** Oliver Kipchumba Karori, Rachel Maina **Lead Counsel:** Kioko Kilukumi **Assisting Counsel:** Wivian Janet Nyambeki, Bahati Mwamuye

Mandate:

(a) Inquire into the matter of the deaths, torture, inhumane and degrading treatment of members and other persons linked to the Good News International Church in Kilifi County within the Republic of Kenya;

(b) Establish the circumstances under which the deaths, torture, inhumane and degrading treatment occurred;

(c) Inquire into the legal, institutional, administrative, security, and intelligence lapses that may have contributed to the occurrence of the Shakahola tragedy;

(d) Identify, based on evidence laid before the Commission, the persons who and organisations which bear the greatest responsibility for the Shakahola tragedy; and recommend specific actions that should be taken against them, including admonition, regulatory actions, reparations or recommendation for criminal investigation;

(e) Recommend legal, administrative or other forms of accountability action against any public official whose actions or omissions are established to have willfully or negligently contributed to the occurrence of the Shakahola tragedy;

(f) Inquire into the factors that led to the rise of that particular religious extremist institution; as well as the factors that give rise to such religious extremist institutions, cults, or occultist groups and other formations that foster negative religion-based activities generally;

(g) Recommend legal, administrative, institutional and regulatory reforms aimed at preventing the occurrence of future situations of deaths or gross violations of the rights and welfare of persons by religious extremist institutions, cults, or occultist groups, and other formations that foster negative religion-based activities; and

(h) Consider, perform, or advise on any other matter or subject ancillary to the above.

The commission of inquiry shall prepare and submit a report and its recommendations to the President within six months from the date hereof.

TASK FORCE ON THE REVIEW OF THE LEGAL AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK GOVERNING RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS

Chairperson: Rev Mutava Musyimi. **Members:** Bishop Mark Kariuki, Bishop Eli Rop, Archbishop Maurice Muhatia, Judy Thongori, Rev Alphonse Kanga, Bishop Philip Kitoto, Dr Faridun Abdalla, Prof Musili Wambua, Joseph Khalende Wabwire, Mary Awour Kitegi, Charles Kanjama, Leah Kaseru, Nancy Murega, Wilson Wanyanga **Joint Secretaries:** Martin Ndiwa Talian, Maria Goretti Nyariki

Mandate:

(a) Identify the legal, institutional, and governance challenges/gaps that have allowed or may allow for religious extremist organisations, sects, cults and other similar outfits in Kenya to engage in practices detrimental to individual health and safety, the public interest or our national values;

(b) Formulate proposals on the legal, institutional, and governance changes required to prevent religious extremist organisations, sects, cults, and other similar outfits in Kenya from committing or fostering actions that are detrimental to individual health and safety, the public interest or to national values;

(c) Formulate proposals on amendments to various laws so as to enable the concerned law enforcement agencies to more effectively tackle crimes committed as a result of religious extremist, or cultic and occultist beliefs and practices;

(d) Formulate proposals on civic education and additions to educational curricula that sensitise Kenyans on identifying, avoiding or leaving religious extremist organisations, sects, cults and other similar outfits;

(e) Formulate proposals for a mechanism for the public to report religious extremist, cultic or occultist beliefs and practices in their local communities;

(f) Formulate proposals on standards and minimum certification requirements for all religious organisations and their leaders for them to be allowed to be registered and to operate in Kenya;

(g) Formulate proposals on a framework for regulation, annual reporting, compliance, monitoring and enforcement action applicable to all religious organisations; including public declarations of their governance structures, programmes, ministries, charitable activities, education activities, commercial ventures and general sources of finances;

(h) Recommend to the competent authorities what actions may be taken against individuals and groups suspected of founding, leading, or part of religious extremist organisations, sects, cults and other similar outfits; and

(i) Consider, perform, or advise on any other matter or subject ancillary to the above. The term of the Presidential Task Force shall be a period of six months.

the limelight



Mukami Kimathi holds a portrait of her husband, former Mau Mau freedom fighter Dedan Kimathi. She died in her 90s on May 10. PHOTO | AFP



Britain's King Charles III and Queen Camilla posing in the Throne Room at Buckingham Palace to mark their Coronation on May 6. PHOTO | AFP



Migrants try to cross into the US as the National Guard put up a barbed-wire fence on the US-Mexico border river on May 10. On May 11, President Joe Biden's administration lifted strict immigration protocols set by Donald Trump. PHOTO | AFP



President William Ruto and Mama Rachel Ruto during a meeting with King Of The Royal Kingdom Of The Netherlands, HM Willem Alexander and Queen Máxima at Noordeinde Palace, The Hague, Netherlands. PHOTO | PCS



This handout image from the James Webb Space Telescope released by Nasa/ESA/CSA on May 9 shows, for the first time, the inner asteroid belts that encircle the nearby star, Fomalhaut. PHOTO | AFP



A Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party activist hits an armoured police vehicle with a stick during protests against the arrest of former Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan in Islamabad on May 10. PHOTO | AFP



Mubirizi village leader Ferdinand Twagiramungu organises hundreds of skulls belonging to victims of the 1994 Rwandan Tutsi Genocide in Rusizi District on May 5. PHOTO | AFP

A portrait of William Kitheka, a young man with long dreadlocks, smiling and wearing a blue and white patterned jacket over a white t-shirt. He is standing in front of a yellow wall. The text 'The Area' is overlaid in the top left corner.

The
Area

HOOD SWAG

From the Mukuru kwa Ruben slum, William Kitheka is building a thriving clothing enterprise that is dressing international celebrities

OPEN SPACE

Counties should now train their sights on investors

Key conditions for success include political goodwill, an enabling environment and availability of resources

● BY AUSCAR WAMBIYA

As devolved governments settle down to deliver on the manifestos of the governors, it is critical that the local governments look critically into ways and means of attracting and retaining economic investments. But how will they do this? A few ideas suffice.

There's a need to start by developing an Investment Master Plan. Each county government needs to prepare a comprehensive blueprint showing land use and the locations of various investments that they will require for development.

The plan should show the requirements in terms of settlements, physical infrastructure, utilities, social amenities and sites earmarked for various development projects, including private investments.

Secondly, each unit ought to identify and document investment opportunities available within the county by doing a series of activities that should include the conduct of its Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis.

Each county should then develop a County Investment Promotion Strategy, draw up a list of potential sectors to be targeted and profile all investments projects for the county in order to be adequately prepared.

The preparation of investment packages for the promotion of the county as a viable investment destination follows from here.

It is also important that the county identifies and resolves impediments to investment, which usually include bureaucracy and corruption in land transactions, and slow approval of building plans.

Counties must also invest in pre-feasibility and feasibility studies to get a clear picture of what they expect using scientific methods. In order to reach out to the investing entities and individuals, counties must invest in the de-

velopment of a live, active and vibrant website.

It's sad that many county offices across the nation have photos of previous executives six months into a new government and nothing on investment options and opportunities.

Counties must also continuously set aside land for investment purposes at competitive terms in order to attract and retain investors. In addition, the need to invest in adequate infrastructure such as power, water and roads to act as incentives to attract investments must be prioritised in the county budgets.

Counties are also encouraged to facilitate and offer after-care services to investors to avoid delays. The elimination of corruption and reduction of bureaucracy are very attractive to investments.

Public entities will be competing over investors, hence the need to develop a conducive environment for the private sector. Public investment has been justified as necessary to achieve a variety of political objectives, including national security, protection of property rights, maintenance of the rule of law, national economic development and full employment, a clean environment, and collective ownership of the means of production.

Obviously, key prerequisites for success include political goodwill and support, an enabling environment, proven expertise, all-inclusive project prioritisation and preparation characterised by central planning and local involvement, and standardisation of agreements to reduce bureaucracy and achieve maximise stakeholder comity in the overall implementation cycle. Attracting and retaining investments is possible.

milestones14@gmail.com

Any feedback on topical issues? We would like to hear from you. Send your views to:

weeklyreview@ke.nationmedia.com

MIND SPEAK



Bradley Ekamuran

The government's source of taxes shouldn't be one of the major factors of the economy, such as fuel or housing. For instance, fuel will cause an economic crisis when its taxes increase as it will lead to a spike in production costs, transport costs, and many other services, which will largely affect the majority poor. This is an ill-advised move that will just leave us in a ditch should the government go ahead with its implementation. There's need to make a U-turn on this.

— A student at Kisii University



Clinton Odhiambo

An increase in fuel pump prices will automatically lead to a spike in the cost of production, and this will in turn translate to a higher cost of living.

The housing fund is an issue that should be given less attention. Instead, the government should focus on lowering the cost of living as 70 per cent of Kenyans live hand-to-mouth. The government should also do away with unnecessary positions in the executive.

— A student at Maseno University



Shirlyne Jerryl

The government's plan to increase taxes on fuel is a necessary step to stabilise the economy. The money generated from these taxes can be used to fund important projects that will benefit the public, such as infrastructure development. I am concerned about the impact this will have on the poor who are already struggling to make ends meet. Ensure the poor are not burdened by the taxes.

— A student at Maseno University



Victor Otieno

The government's plan to increase taxes on fuel is unhealthy. Those in government argue that it will generate revenue for and help to fund social programmes. My view is that it will disproportionately affect low-income individuals and families who may struggle to afford basic necessities. Ultimately, the effectiveness of the government's plan will depend on tax policies.

— A student at Maseno University

MY TAKE



FOCUS ON THE VICTIMS

The more you talk about the villain, the more likely you are to sow seeds for the next millenarist idiot who fancies himself a messiah to sprout from

• BY WAGA ODONGO

When will we have an inquiry into inquiries? They are the second most brazen waste of public resources behind the Independent Electoral Boundaries Commission.

The latest move by the President to set up a judicial inquiry into deaths in Kilifi is baffling. What could we possibly learn that we do not know? Commissions of inquiry in Kenya are mostly a conspiracy to enrich retired judges and are only run for the benefit of the legal profession.

The very first was the Maize Commission in '65 surrounding then minister for cooperatives Paul Ngei. Ever since then, maize has been a major conduit the connected use to bilk the public.

The satanism commission went around and found a devil hiding under every bed. The star that welcomes you to Parliament was deemed masonic, the artsy circles you saw on public buildings represented serpents and as we all suspected, Kenya was actually the seventh circle of hell. It was a waste of everyone's time.

The Goldenberg Commission used hundreds of millions to tell us that hundreds of billions were lost. No one was found guilty. We are no closer to the truth over who led to Kenya having triple digit inflation in '92. Brother Kamlesh Pattni has moved on to selling gold in Southern Africa, according to an *Al Jazeera* documentary. After the Lord delivered unto him Kenya's billions, his cup runneth over with Zimbabwe's bullions. The Bible says that in heaven, New Jerusalem's streets are going to be paved with gold and I suspect that Pastor Pattni is already working hard on the contract.

Aside from the Koech Commission that gave us 8-4-4, almost no commission of inquiry has had any consequence or follow-up. Oftentimes they are used as a release valve by the government to dissipate emotion and kick a subject into the long grass. The government never bothered to see through the Ndung'u Land Commission, which is now 20 years old.

These lawyerthons are also very pricey. The costs of hiring legal counsel, panel members and support staff can quickly mount up, and this is before you even factor in the cost of the inquiry's physical location and associated logistics. In the end, the price tag for a public inquiry can easily run into millions of shillings, and all for something that is unlikely to result in any concrete action or change.

Our learned friends bill by the hour and this incentivises them to chase down all possible leads. The investigators will make sure to leave



Some of Pastor Paul Mackenzie's followers who were rescued from the expansive Shakahola farm on April 19. WACHIRA MWANGI | NATION

no stone unturned because the metre is running. This will lead to a sprawling inquiry that covers every conceivable angle and issue, no matter how tangential or irrelevant. We will get sordid details about feuds between leaders, all manner of petty criminality and weird sex subplots. Then they will abscond to some resort town for a month to write several hundred pages that no one will ever read and which will be of little use outside a law classroom.

These sorts of cults are not a bug of Christianity; they are a feature. Christianity was formed as an end-of-the-world religion and for the past 2000 years has been declaring that the time is nigh. We have several hundred cases of people who read the Bible and saw signs of the end times and decided to help the process along. Even in Jesus's time there were persons walking around claiming to be the Messiah. Nowadays you don't even have to go to Israel to get what is called the "Jerusalem Syndrome".

You can nurse your own ideas at home reading your holy book, declare yourself Jesus of Bungoma and ask your followers to take poison.

Some idiot went to Guyana, shot an American congressman and asked his followers to take poison. Hundreds did. Another idiot declared himself Jesus's younger brother in China and started a war to set up the Kingdom of God and killed 20 million. Heaven's Gate, Waco, the Russian cave people... I can continue.

There is very little new information that can be yielded from an inquiry and even if there was, it is almost impossible to police religion unless you turn into a totalitarian state.

What we could do is notice that the cult in Kilifi occurred in one of the poorest areas in Kenya. That, surely, is the problem.

Also, don't give the cult leaders any more time. The more you talk about them, the more likely you are to sow seeds for the next millenarist idiot who fancies himself a messiah to sprout from. Concentrating on the leader of the sect leads to contagion and increases the chances that someone copies him. The country's attention should be on the victims. Rather than spend millions on yet another inquiry, the government should give the money to victims' families.

Mr Odongo is a Software Engineer
wagaodongo@gmail.com

BUSINESS FOR SUSTAINABILITY

FASHION FROM THE HOOD

From the Mukuru kwa Ruben slum, William Kitheka is building a unique clothing enterprise that is dressing local and international celebrities

• BY EDDY ASHIOYA

If you have ever been to Mukuru kwa Ruben, you will not forget it. *Mukuru* means ‘mother’ in Sheng’ or in Kikuyu, ‘old lady.’ The kwa Ruben Slum (also known as the Mukuru community) was born in Nairobi’s Industrial district nearly 20 years after Independence, when people began to build make-shift homes near the factories they worked in. The area now has a population of over 700,000. It is nothing but box on box beside box – only that these boxes are corrugated iron shacks measuring 10x10 feet. The land on which the Mukuru slum now exists was once held by Jack Reuben, a British Army combat veteran who had returned from World War I. It is here that the Ruben Centre is located, and it is from the ashes of said centre that a phoenix arises: William ‘Bush’ Kitheka, the 26-year-old founder of Vaa KE, a boutique clothing brand.

How far we go in life, and sometimes where we are going in life, is down to where we have come from. The Mukuru slum combines close to 30 villages, about seven kilometres from Nairobi. From the moment you are born here, the odds are stacked against you.

It is why Kitheka’s four-year business is highly influenced by where he has come from. In a community where resources are fickle, you must not only be street smart, but generally smart, working twice as hard to get half as much. “We use thrifted and newly acquired fabrics to design unique and one-off pieces of art that is wearable,” he says. “We are trying to educate people about the importance of recycling and doing away with fast fashion. We are bringing that back-in-time fashion, these unique pieces like the kimono, which is our signature piece, and the kipepeo, which is inspired by the traditional male Nigerian gown, with a twist: ours is genderless.”

He is quick to insist that sustainability is behind use of upcycled fabrics to reduce fashion waste. As the name suggests, upcycling refers to creating an object of greater value from an object of lesser value. In other words, repurposing and ensuring nothing goes to waste.

“We blend waste fabrics from other countries



William ‘Bush’ Kitheka, 26, is the founder of Vaa KE, a boutique clothing brand based in Nairobi. His clients include CNN Correspondent Larry Madowo, actress Patricia Kihoro, poet Gufy Dox and American musician Anthony Hamilton. PHOTO | POOL

to give them a second chance in the fashion world.”

Vaa KE is momentarily scaling down its orders as a result of Kitheka receiving a KSh300,000 grant from the British Council KE and subsequently enrolling in a mentorship programme – Creative DNA 3.0 – that is training 20 early-stage fashion and accessories entrepreneurs to build sustainable and successful businesses. “We have been in class for six weeks, learning about quality, selling price and placing yourself in competitive markets.”

“But don’t worry,” he says, showing off his precognition aptitude, “we are working on a new collection that we shall launch soon.” His previous collection was priced at a modest

KSh8,500 and KSh12,000 per piece, from which he would move around 15 pieces every month. Did he know he always wanted to be in business? “Technically, yes, because when I was younger, I would find myself playing with needles and thread, even putting my uniform together. When I was done with high school, I started selling second-hand clothes near GM (General Motors on Mombasa Road). There was free wi-fi available and I started watching videos on how to make clothes. That’s when I joined the Ruben Centre Vocational School, focusing on tailoring.”

Kitheka talks about the luck that he has had, the opportunities that have come his way, and the exposure he has received. He has dressed everyone who is anyone: CNN Correspondent

Models pose with clothes designed by William 'Bush' Kitheka, 26, the founder of Vaa KE, a boutique clothing brand based in Nairobi. PHOTO: POOL



but it is the dreaming that is important.

“In the next few months, I will be among, if not the top the best fashion brand in Kenya. With the training at the Creative DNA, I am learning how to scale my business and exercise quality control over my work. It will be a smoother journey,” Kitheka prophesies.

“At Vaa KE, we deal with African and Kenyan wear. We want to bring back the lost glory and inspire new people. People associate tailoring and handmade stuff with women. I want to remove that perception of gender work, of being called a *fundi*, of being associated with low quality or low prices.”

Running a business has changed his perspective of judging people *prima facie*, by appearances. Which is ironic considering that he is in the business of appearances. Because of my online work, he says, people are very cautious, and to win their trust, I deliver first and give them the onus to pay later. “I want to show that people are trustworthy out here and that we appreciate what other people do.”

To whom much is given, much is expected. And in this aspect, too, he does not fall short. “I am here so I can give back to the community. I teach younger girls at the vocational school I went to, easing their process. I am them also training them on upcycling.”

It is very difficult for me to get two pieces that look the same, he says. Is that what makes him different? “We don’t do shortcuts. With the thrift fabric, we may have two but rarely, if ever, three of the same. We look for something unique and blend our fabrics. And of course, our designs are cut to measure, not here for fast clothes that people easily get bored with. But we also don’t want to be too loud. We are fighting for that sweet spot of functionality and aesthetic. We don’t want to commercialise our products but understand we also need to sell. It is a delicate balance.”

He looks up to fashion designers Kiko Romeo and David Avido. “I also admire my late parents, who used to wear corduroy pants. I didn’t like then because they were quite heavy. Now, I try and borrow those designs. I think our parents were the original fashionistas.”

“Entrepreneurship has taught me the art of being patient. If I was looking to make quick money, I would make the things that people want, for instance, the bootleg of Gucci, but if I am patient I can make something that speaks to me and to the people around me. “It comes at a cost, however. My time and the hard work that I had to put in are the price I have had to pay for my ambition. The idea of success for me now is to afford my needs and not struggle in raising my family, as well as helping others.”

It will not rock the earth from its axis to learn that Kitheka doesn’t really think there is such a thing as failure in life. “But if it pleases the court,” he says, “I think failure is when you are not willing to work, when you give up on your dreams.” He struggles with the fact that he trusts people easily and sometimes they disappoint him. So why does he do it? “Looking at my peers and the people where I come from, I want to change perceptions, I want to prove that fashion can start from the hood, and to encourage those who never went to university. I went to a vocational school in Mukuru Kwa Ruben and look at me now.”

eddiashioya@gmail.com

MENTORING SESSIONS

Creative DNA 3.0 offers digital and face-to-face mentoring sessions, micro-grants, co-created online campaigns, and UK and Kenyan access to market opportunities – delivering business skills development and strengthening participants’ networks in Kenya and the UK.

Participants also receive group masterclasses and workshops by international and local experts and are part of a pop-up shop in Nairobi.

The Ruben Centre, with its five core areas of Education, Health, Social and Economic empowerment, Organisational Capacity and Advocacy, works directly with the surrounding community by providing quality education, health, financial and social services to children and families in the area.

Run by the Christian Brothers African Province, the Ruben Centre is one of eight Christian Brothers project sites across Africa, and offers a vital source of community development programmes to the residents of one of the largest slums in Nairobi.

Revenue in the fashion segment in Kenya is projected to reach US\$1,251.00m in 2023. It is expected to show an annual growth rate (CAGR 2023-2027) of 4.73 per cent, resulting in a projected market volume of US\$1,505.00m by 2027.

Larry Madowo, actor Patricia Kihoro, poet Gufy Dox, singer Tina Ador, actor-cum-musician Grace Wacuka, American musician Anthony Hamilton. . . we could go on and on, but you get the point. He does not take it for granted. Not everyone makes it out of the slums; sometimes talent alone is not enough. The gods choose who they choose.

“I remained here so I can have an impact the youth in Mukuru. Everyone wants to make it big out there, but why not make it from here too? You can sit in a global market through the online community right from where you are. You can work from anywhere in the world.”

He tells me the biggest challenge he is facing

right now is market, and the capacity and capital to run and maintain his business. “My fabrics are very expensive and the markets I want to go to are also expensive to access.” So how does he promote his business? “Word of mouth and referrals. I like to maintain good customer relationships with my clients.”

Speaking of, he will have you know that he does not play favourites when it comes to clients. “I respect all my clients and most of them are repeat customers.” The lesson runs deep: treat everyone the same, for we all dream the same dreams. Nobody remembers how the dreams end — whether you succeed or fail, whether you achieve or just fall short —

STILL CHASING HER DREAM

LIFE AFTER THE LIMELIGHT

Former youthful CAS Nadia Abdalla has set her sights on Kenya's Presidency in 15 years' time, or the top UN seat

• BY EDDY ASHIOYA

Nadia Ahmed Abdalla cries a lot — when she's sad, when she's happy, when she's overwhelmed. The former Chief Administrative Secretary (CAS) in the Ministry of ICT, Innovation and Youth Affairs, appointed in 2020 at just 29 years of age — then the youngest holder of that office — can teach you a thing or two about managing emotions. She's hemmed and hawed and dissembled and prevaricated, and, as the interview proceeds, I am increasingly drawn to her innocent desires and dawning good-naturedness. She is all *legato* and good vibes, a young woman, coming of age, waiting in the wings, shuffled straight into the spotlight then unceremoniously pulled off the stage.

One day you are cock of the walk, the next, a feather duster, so the wise men say. But Nadia, you also

learn, is not the type to put sentimentality or nostalgia above hard-headedness and clear thinking.

“At the moment, I am in between careers. It's a big shift.”

The shift she is talking about is leaving public office, like a god suddenly flung to earth. Having learned to manage the fame of politics, now she has to learn to manage the politics of fame — without being a politician.

She just shifted houses, and it's strange because at the moment, it seems like her life is packed up in boxes, ready to be moved somewhere, anywhere, just not here. But what is the shift like, from a big government job back to being an ordinary *mwanaanchi*?

“Honestly, it has been hard,” she offers. “And not hard in terms of benefits and privileges, because I had a plan for that. I could tell how the systems are in Kenya: either you are politically aligned or you are nowhere.”

When you join government, she tells me, they tell you what is expected of you. When you leave, no one cares about you. There is no exit interview. “I have learned that the system is not built for young people. It is for people who already have businesses and a life outside their work, so when they leave, they have a cushion.”

“This was my first proper job. I didn't have any savings or business. I had to dust off what I was doing to start realigning back to society. It was draining — mentally, socially and even career-wise. Everyone is asking, what next for Nadia? I don't know what's next for Nadia — and I am Nadia! It's hard being in public and trying to detach yourself from that, even if you are an extrovert like me.”

When she was in government, and I use that term loosely, she says she was lucky to have a minister from the private sector (Joe Mucheru, also thrust into public service), who used a gentle but firm hand to chaperon her. “I wasn't political but I was in a political position.” She feels that she is where she is right now because she chose to be apolitical. “But people don't understand that the position just amplified my presence on a very large scale, I am still the same in terms of my beliefs. I still advocate a lot, and I speak my mind.” Speak she does. With conviction, with purpose, with good intention, knowing full well how the road to hell is paved.

In the old literary traditions, the devil always gets the best part. Nadia can claim, though, that she played her role, and she gave it her all. Let your work speak for you, she says. “Young people get opportunities, get sucked into the vacuous fracas around them and their entire careers just get cancelled at inception. You have to be work-centric and if that is your goal, then you keep doing that.”

She is a devout believer in the power of luck, acutely aware that she and the rest of us are governed by, but not subjugated to, the way fortune ebbs and flows, regular people achieving cult-like status, ordinary lives transformed extraordinarily through some combination of happenstance and force of will.

And through her own



Nadia Ahmed Abdalla

alchemy of luck and success-dressed-in-overalls mantra, she has achieved her dream — most of it, anyway — if her books are anything to go by.

“The first book I wrote was in 2017. I was doing my Masters in International Relations and Cultural Diplomacy then and I wanted to write a thesis on African feminism and how it is different socially and politically. It was just a small book with testimonials from people.” The book, *The Feminist in Us*, published in April 2017, opened doors for her: it started a communication network, trained and mentored the youth and amplified her voice. And because one good deed deserves another, former President Uhuru Kenyatta appointed her CAS in January 2020 after hearing about her work, which was highlighted in the *Madam President* reality show, on which she was a contestant.

Her second book, *Of Dreams and Whatever* is an amalgamation of her dreams. “I realised if you really want to capture the attention of the masses, you must come up with something that is interesting, fun and educative at the same time.”

Enter Ndoto Halisi, her non-profit organisation which, as the name suggests, is all about driving people to do more, be more. Her focus, she says, is to try and help teenage girls and young women actualise their dreams.

Life has been a typhoon for her, a whirlwind of dreams and work and sudden shifts. Now she is taking a breather, having lived at over 100km per hour. And that comes at a cost: she’s always looking for the tell, for the sleight of hand, for one to show their hand.

“Being in the public space has made me more conscious of my surrounding. I look at everyone with caution and suspicion. I know my value, respect my time, and know I don’t

TOP 10 AFRICAN WOMEN

In 2022, Nadia Abdalla was among the Top 10 African women voices on LinkedIn.

The CAS position was introduced by former President Uhuru Kenyatta more than four years ago. Shadowing as a Deputy Minister, and second-in-command in the ministries, the CAS coordinates work by state departments headed by Principal Secretaries.

Before her appointment as CAS, Nadia worked as a chief tourism officer at the Mombasa County department of trade, tourism, and Investments.

Nadia holds a Bachelor’s Degree in Public Relations and Mass Communications, and a Master’s Degree in International Relations and Cultural Diplomacy.

She also serves on the New Voices Council, where she offers insights to inform their curriculum, location of new programmes and strategic direction. The Council highlights distinguished leaders aged 35 and under who are working to build better politics.

need to be in every room or get any validation from anyone. Growing up in a humble home has taught me to appreciate life and the things I am blessed with.”

She is content, but she is also scared. “I am scared for my career trajectory. Right now, nothing else matters other than figuring out who this new Nadia is. It could be good, or bad, so I am scared.”

The future, she says, is looking hazy. “Back then I was full of sunshine. Since 2018, things have been going as God wanted. It will look bright again once I figure it all out.”

“The friends I make either have to add value to my life or be a strong wall. There is a lot about me people don’t know, even though I

am an open person.” For instance? “I am very picky about who I speak to. The reason I do that is because I am an empath and take in a lot. Even when I am dating guys feel like I am such a tough woman but once they get to know me, they are like ‘You know Nadia, you are actually very soft.’ But you have to do that to create a boundary between what you want to do and what your body and mind need to get.

What’s the best piece of advice someone ever gave her? “What’s meant for you will never miss you.” And the worst? “They will appreciate the work you are doing. It’s a lie. It’s really not about effort or work. It’s beyond that. I wish I took that seriously.”

Now, the 32-year-old Nadia says her dream is to become the President of Kenya. “In 15 years,” she says. If that doesn’t happen, then she is going for the UN Secretary-General’s job. Those are big boots to fill but I reckon she came with her own pair.

How does she find balance? “I cry a lot. When things get too much. When things got tough, I would cry myself to sleep, or cry before I showed up to events. I have a therapist friend. When I am overwhelmed, I call him. I also journal a lot. And cooking is my biggest therapy.” Her go-to meal? “Pilau, biriyani, lasagne and pasta.”

Tears, I read and share with her, are emotions that don’t have names. Regardless, she still smiles through the pain, still brings sunshine in the rain.

“Be your own vibe,” she tells me, as her eyes get cloudy. What is it Charles Dickens said? Heaven knows we need never be ashamed of our tears, for they are rain upon the blinding dust of earth, overlying our hard hearts.

eddyashioya@gmail.com



WOMAN POWER

GROWING UP IN RURAL THARAKA NITHI COUNTY, KAWIRA MICHINKU REALISED HOW MALE-DOMINATED THE TECH SPACE WAS AND RESOLVED TO BREAK THE STEREOTYPE. SHE DESCRIBES HERSELF AS A VILLAGE GIRL. BUT UNLIKE ANY OTHER VILLAGE GIRL, SHE IS CHANGING THE NARRATIVE ABOUT WOMEN IN THE SCIENCE FIELD, ONE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AT A TIME. SHE HAS PARTICIPATED IN EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMMES SUCH AS THE ACADEMY FOR WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS, MS PRESIDENT AND THE LEARNAHOLICS ACADEMYAFRICA TO BETTER HER PERSONAL AND LEADERSHIP SKILLS. YOU ARE A GREAT INSPIRATION, KAWIRA!

STAR OF THE WEEK

GRENADA’S DOUBLE WORLD JAVELIN CHAMPION ANDERSON PETERS SAYS HE IS KEEN TO KNOW HOW THE 2015 WORLD JAVELIN CHAMPION JILLIUS YEGO, WHOM HE DESCRIBED AS “A GOOD FRIEND,” HAS HELPED TRANSFORM JAVELIN IN KENYA. PETERS, WHO WAS ELATED TO BE IN AFRICA FOR THE FIRST TIME FOR THE ABSA KIP KEINO CLASSIC, SAID HE IS LOOKING FORWARD TO COMPETING AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF A CROWD THAT REALLY APPRECIATES WHAT JAVELIN IS. ALL WE CAN SAY TO YOU MR PETERS IS, ‘KARIBU KENYA’.




opinion



■ As things stand, the high cost of living has seriously eroded support from the masses

Tsunami of taxes will hurt hustlers across the nation

Our new constitution is now established and has an appearance that promises permanency; but in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes.”
— American statesman Benjamin Franklin in 1789.

But don't those words ring true for Kenyans, especially now when their broke government is casting the tax net ever further and wider in what is called expanding the tax base? Don't they ring true as the government seeks new ways of raising revenue to finance its KSh3.6 trillion budget?

Don't they ring true as the government, hard put to meet its expenditure requirements, introduces myriad new taxes in an attempt to bridge its fiscal deficit? It was this which prompted Raila Odinga, the leader of the Azimio la Umoja-One Kenya Coalition Party, to decry what he called a tsunami of taxes.

It was this that roused the ire of the leaders of Kenya's public sector unions who, a week ago today, threatened to call out their members on strike in what they threatened would be the mother of all walkouts. Not long afterwards, others threatened to paralyse government operations, starting with disconnecting water to State House!

The Anglican Church, these days always unpredictable, followed suit. While he did not call Kenyans to walk out of their jobs, Archbishop Jackson ole Sapit, flanked by the church's leading clergy, spoke out against myriad taxes.

He called for a public debate on the Finance Bill 2023/2024, which proposes the new



**KWENDO
OPANGA**

taxation, before it is put before Parliament.

But government-supporting hawk, Senator Samson Cherargei, barged in with a dismissive postulate, arguing that the Finance Bill will be passed by Parliament without so much as a change of a punctuation mark. He said the government has a KSh800 billion deficit and if measures to raise revenue are not put in place, it will be forced to resume borrowing.

What is worrying is not the pull and push between the government and the opposition politicians. That is what they always do on anything apart from protecting or raising their salaries. What is worrying is that a government that borrowed and spent, then taxed and spent, handed the country this economic mess. And the inheritors of the mess are similarly taxing and spending.

In 2013, a newly minted President Uhuru Kenyatta warned eloquently about recurrent expenditure reaching unsustainable levels and squeezing out resources meant for development. And he also called on all government departments to reduce the ballooning public sector wage bill. It did not

happen. The current government is similarly paying lip service to limiting its spending.

Remember the words of Ronald Reagan in March 1981? “The American taxing structure, the purpose of which was to serve the people, began instead to serve the insatiable appetite of government. If you forgive me, you know someone has likened government to a baby. It is an alimentary canal with an appetite at one end and no sense of responsibility at the other.”

He could have been talking about our own government. It comes to power and announces it has inherited empty coffers, but immediately expands the public wage bill by creating tens of new state offices for the boys and their political cronies. And it turns a deaf ear to the cries of a citizenry saddled with high prices of basic commodities and staples as well as fuel and power.

A government's insurance policy is the support of the populace, but as things stand, the high cost of living has seriously eroded this support. Why can't Cherargei the hawk and ilk get it?

kwendo58@gmail.com

opinion

■ The civil society and religious leaders kept the quest for a new Constitution alive

Recreate spirit of Ufungamano to get Kenya moving



MACHARIA
GAITHO

A group of patriotic citizens is presently working on a public dialogue mechanism that creates a broad-based, all-inclusive national conversation. That is dialogue not limited to the William Ruto-Raila Odinga political deal-making which finally got under way last Thursday at Bomas of Kenya under the aegis of a bipartisan parliamentary forum.

If all goes according to plan, the Kenya Tuitakayo (The Kenya Want) convening on May 15 at the Ufungamano House could be a seminal moment in our democratic evolution. It is designed to seize the dialogue platform from politicians with their narrow self-interests, and restore it to the people.

The initiative, fronted by civil society activist Cyprian Nyamwamu, includes a host of veterans who shared pain and blood in the trenches of the struggle for freedom and justice. The choice of venue is not accidental, for obviously the proponents hope to re-create what can only be described as the Spirit of Ufungamano.

It was at that place — the Christian Student Leadership Centre run by the University of Nairobi joint Protestant and Catholic chaplaincy — that in the mid-1990s civil society luminaries of the day teamed up with religious leaders, trade unions, professional associations, academics, student leaders and other stakeholders to re-ignite the march towards democratisation.

At a time when the political class had become complacent after the Second Liberation had been realised following the multi-party elections of 1992, the movement born at Ufungamano, planning to proclaim itself a Sovereign People's Assembly, shook up the matrix. Opposition leaders of the day, suddenly realising they could be overtaken by events, abandoned their comfort zones in Parliament and rushed to Ufungamano.

The outcome was the Inter-Parties Parliamentary Group negotiations that resulted in limited but far-reaching constitutional amendments ahead of the 1997 elections.

However, Ufungamano did not stop there,

leading to agitation for comprehensive constitutional reform deemed critical towards entrenching and protecting the transition to a modern, multi-party democracy.

While politicians will always want to take credit for it, there is no doubt that eventual enactment of the progressive 2010 Constitution will always be owed to the brave souls outside the political theatre, particularly civil society and religious leaders, who kept the quest alive when most others were content with the status quo.

Can the spirit of Ufungamano be recreated? Time and circumstances are different. Reality is that civil society today falls far short of the brave, visionary leadership of yesteryear. Many of the trailblazers have retired, been absorbed into the political establishment, taken up international jobs or simply diverted attention to other pursuits.

It is encouraging, however, that the likes of Nyamwamu and company are still focused on what must be done to get Kenya back on a path where the interests of citizens come above those of political leaders.

Another key Ufungamano component was religious organisations. At some Kenya Tuitakayo conversation recently, somebody posed the question: Where are the faith leaders to also take the frontline?

There was an uncomfortable silence on realisation that to preach the gospel of freedom and justice, there were no successors to the likes of Henry Okullu, David Gitari, Ndingi Mwana a'Nzeki or Alexander Muge. Today the pastors, bishops, prophets, evangelists and other clerics with grand titles who make all the news, and noise, are the likes of Paul Mackenzie, Ezekiel Odero, David Owuor, Margaret Wanjiru, Victor Kanyari and James Ngang'a.

Their churches are attuned to self-glorification rather than faith, one-man or one-woman shows geared towards amassing of wealth that is liberally displayed as part of the prosperity gospel.

What they run are commercial enterprises rather than houses of worship, and they will enslave, brainwash and hold captive the vulnerable, weak, gullible and often foolish

who turn to them in desperation.

They care nothing about social justice or the well-being of their congregants as long as the money keeps on flowing, and they will always side with the oppressors rather than the oppressed.

They are all part of the evangelical movement that will happily pray for the leaders and get handsomely rewarded, while keeping silent about the plight of citizens condemned to poverty and helplessness.

Even within the mainstream — the Catholic Church or the National Council of Churches of Kenya and its protestant affiliates — one would need to look far and wide to find conscientious clerics who will bravely stick their necks out as voices for the voiceless. In other words, even the 'owners' of Ufungamano have long abandoned the struggle. So what hope, then, is there for Kenya Tuitakayo in the midst of a depleted civil society and truant religious affiliates?

There is hope as long as there is one brave soul left standing. The struggle for justice, freedom and an equitable society is never won by big numbers from inception. It is won by a few brave and lonely souls who stick their necks out and soldier on towards what might seem like a foolhardy and hopeless cause.

The fight for Independence would never have started and seen fruit were it not for a few pioneers who lit the flame and kept it burning. Ditto the struggle for multi-party democracy and the quest for a new constitution. However, there must also be very clear and definite goals.

Kenya Tuitakayo is today a large, unwieldy group. Maybe it can be termed inclusive, but it is populated by fellows with wildly differing aims, some the direct opposite of others and some clearly just parrots for rival political formations. Perhaps the gathering on Monday will present a clear, concise and unified road map to wherever the initiative wants to take Kenya.

Woolly statements about democracy, justice, social and economic equity and all that are all very good, but useless without clear objectives and implementation plans.

gaithomail@gmail.com

kenya lens

■ KENYA-ISRAEL RELATIONS

Israel's 60-year dalliance with Kenya is characterised by overtures to infiltrate the top echelons of incoming governments

● BY JOHN KAMAU

Embassy Hotel, Nairobi: In the early weeks of October 1962, a Mossad secret agent, Mr E Peled, arrived on a mission. Peled was the man handling the secret departure to Israel of Waruhiu Itote, the Mau Mau general commonly known as General China. Mr Itote was heading to Tel Aviv for training ahead of Independence after an arrangement agreed upon between Jomo Kenyatta and Ehud Avriel, the Special Adviser to Israel's Foreign Minister.

Israel sought to have a foothold in East Africa and had identified its version of airlifts as the best avenue to infiltrate the top echelons of the incoming government. It is a strategy it has always utilised on every Kenyan government since Independence – and it explains President William Ruto's visit to Israel last week.

Those approached in 1962, according to a Kenya Intelligence Committee report, included Dr Njoroge Mungai and legislator JM Kariuki.

After his trip to Israel, Mungai returned with offers to train pilots. At the same time, JM, as he was popularly known, came with 45 scholarships to train security and intelligence personnel.

According to historian Kenneth Kyle, 25 of the scholarships were for military training, while 20 were for instruction in intelligence and security.

"Kenyatta delegated the choice of candidates to Dr Julius Kiano, who was expected to pick the potential intelligence officers only from the Kikuyu," alleges the late Kyle.

On paper, the recruits were to be going for agricultural training, and the Israeli consul in Nairobi



President William Ruto and Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during a meeting in his office in Jerusalem on May 9. BELOW: A Recce squad officer in Nairobi. PHOTOS | PCS AND FILE

was asked to prepare the paperwork. "The Israelis' purpose was to break the Arab barrier and to establish friendly governments in sub-Saharan Africa, with whom they could do trade through the Gulf of Aqaba," wrote Kyle in his book, *The Politics of the Independence of Kenya*.

On November 12, 1962, Itote was sneaked out of Kenya via Tanzania without a passport, accompanied by 30 other Kenyans. He was picked by the Israelis and taken to Kibbutz Kfar Hannassi in Upper Galilee, where the group attended the Military Officers Training School in Tel Aviv.

It was not the only move that

the Israelis were making. They had also approached Tom Mboya, one of the most influential figures in Kenya. After Mboya's wedding on January 22, 1962, a honeymoon was

organised for him in Israel's city of Jerusalem by the country's labour movement, Histadrut. During that wedding, one man stood out – Asher Naim, a political operative and diplomat who would later play a critical role in the Israeli-financed National Youth Service. His association with Mboya and JM would explain why JM moved the NYS motion in Parliament and was its director for many years. The NYS Bill was introduced in Parliament by Bruce Mackenzie – another ally of the Jewish state and later regarded as the Mossad contact.

JM had overseen the opening of training centres in Thika, Yatta, Gilgil and Mombasa before the National Youth Service Bill was tabled in Parliament. When it was, one of the first things that JM lobbied for was to make sure that the NYS leader's position was not a "public office" for the purposes of Section 41 (f) of the Constitution, which barred public officers from becoming MPs.



kenya lens



From left: Former Israeli commandos and hostages Eyal Oren, Shlomo Carmel, Jaffer Amin, Amjon Peled and Alex Davidi in Kampala ahead of the 40th anniversary of the daring raid on Entebbe on June 14, 2016. Below: Ugandan President Idi Amin speaking to one of his soldiers injured during the raid in hospital. On July 4, 1976, Israel commandos rescued more than 100 hostages from Entebbe Airport in a 90-minute operation and later stopped in Nairobi to refuel for the return flight.

His job was to advise the minister and a clause was inserted which stated that the NYS leader shall be a member of Parliament. That locked out many other aspirants for the position. JM's deputy was the man he sent to Israel, General China, and that made sure that friends of Israel led NYS.

If Kenya-Israeli relations were cemented that early, some credit goes to Asher Naim – later Israeli ambassador to Ethiopia. His mission to East Africa was to befriend the leaders of the emerging nations and lay the ground for the opening of diplomatic relations. He was also to act as the deputy to Israel Somen, the former Nairobi Mayor, who also worked as the Jewish state's Honorary Consul.

President Kenyatta was also friendly to Golda Meir, the powerful Israeli Foreign Minister who would later become Prime Minister between 1969 to 1974. It was a friendship she had cultivated from August 1961, when she sent a personal note to Kenyatta congratulating him on his release from detention. In addition, there was another personal letter to Kenyatta from Prime Minister Ben-Gurion, inviting him to visit Israel. The Jerusalem Post reported that Kenyatta had accepted Ben-Gurion's invitation – delivered to him by Ehud Avriel and Aharon Remez.

Remez was a commander of the Israeli Air Force and was the man who had given Dr Mungai the scholarships to train pilots.

With the isolation of Israel following the 1973 Yom Kippur War, its operations in Kenya were left



in the hands of a construction company, Solel Boneh – a Histadrut Trade Union's Construction Corporation. While Solel Boneh was involved in construction, it also created spaces within which the Israeli intelligence could operate in the days when African nations had ganged up against the Jewish state.

Mboya's interest was to build a trade union similar to Histadrut. He was a friend of Aharon Becker, the secretary-general of Histadrut, a movement that was the lifeline of the Mapai party. It was the Histadrut that had organised Mboya's honeymoon.

Mboya had wanted to replicate the Israeli experiments within his Kenya Federation of Labour and signed an agreement in 1962 with Histadrut to start a newspaper, *Mfanyi Kazi*.

Kenya had always had a special relationship with Jews. Some of the most influential investors in the country included Abraham Block and Israel Somen, who in-

spired many other businessmen to settle in Kenya. Others who came later included Charles Szlapak, who used to run the Fairview Hotel. At one point, in 1903, the British colonial secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, suggested the settlement of Russian Jews in Kenya, where they were to form an independent and autonomous country. While the proposal was later rejected, it did not diminish Jewish influence locally.

That influence would be seen when Israel managed to stage a rescue mission of hostages from Entebbe after Air France Flight 139, an Airbus, was hijacked and taken to Uganda in 1976. By working with their Jewish contacts in Nairobi, such as Mackenzie – who was minister for Agriculture in Jomo Kenyatta's government – and Attorney-General Charles Njonjo, Israel had managed to secure some landing rights before the raid. Kenya would pay later after the Jewish-owned Norfolk Hotel was bombed on December 31, 1980.

In 1979, Daniel arap Moi – an old friend of Israel's – became the first Kenyan President to visit Saudi Arabia as he looked for cheaper oil. He criticised Israel over its raid on Lebanon in what seemed to be a shift in relations. But ten years later, Kenya would become one of the first African countries to restore diplomatic ties with the Israeli state, relations that had been severed in 1973 under heavy pressure from the Arab world.

But Moi's biographer, Andrew Morton, explains that Moi had a special place for Israel – though

the explanation was awkward: "Personally, Moi has always greatly admired the state of Israel, not only because it is the cradle of Christianity, but also because of a widespread belief among the Kalenjin tribe that they are descended from 'wandering Jews' of ancient times. He feels that the Jews, perhaps more than any other race, understand both the black man's burden and the problems of a new nation state in a hostile world."

Moi had close Jewish friends – among them his personal doctor, David Silverstein, who was instrumental in building solid business and political networks for Moi's close associates. Israel built formidable networks within Kenyan intelligence circles and since the country was always under threat from Arab terrorists, it reached out to Israel for help. Several attempts were thwarted, although some Israeli establishments were attacked. There was even an attempt to bring down an Israeli airliner in Mombasa in 2002.

For his inauguration in 2013, President Uhuru Kenyatta invited Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as a special guest, signalling the relations that the two countries wished to have.

Israel has been involved in various projects in Kenya, but its attempt to turn around the Galana Kulalu project came a cropper. President Ruto's recent visit to Israel is building on a long heritage of relations with the Jewish state, known for dashing to occupy a seat in the front row before it fills up.

SCIENCE & TECH

STAR SWALLOWS PLANET IN FIRST GLIMPSE OF EARTH'S LIKELY END



An illustration of the solar system, with its eight planets and the sun: Mercury, Venus, the Earth, Mars, asteroid belt, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune and at its outer limits, the Kuiper Belt.

• LONDON

Scientists last week said that they have observed a dying star swallowing a planet for the first time, offering a preview of Earth's expected fate in around five billion years.

But when the Sun finally does engulf Earth, it will cause only a "tiny perturbation" compared to this cosmic explosion, the US astronomers said.

Most planets are believed to meet their end when their host star runs out of energy, turning into a red giant that massively expands, devouring anything unlucky enough to be in its path.

Astronomers had previously seen the before-and-after effects of this process, but had never before caught a planet in the act of being consumed. Kishalay De, a postdoc researcher at MIT in the United States and the lead author of the new study, said the accidental discovery unfolded like a "detective story".

"It all started about three years ago when I was looking at data from the Zwicky Transient Facility survey, which takes images of the sky every night," De told an online press conference.

He stumbled across a star that had suddenly increased in brightness by more than 100 times over a 10-day period. The star is in the Milky Way galaxy, around 12,000 light years from Earth near the Aquila constellation, which resembles an eagle. De had been searching for binary star systems, in which the larger star takes bites out of its companion, creating incredibly bright explosions called outbursts.

But data showed that this outburst was surrounded by cold gas, suggesting it was not a binary star system. And NASA's infrared space telescope NEOWISE showed that dust had started to shoot out of the area months before the outburst.

More puzzling still was that the outburst produced around 1,000 times less energy than previously observed mergers between stars. "You ask yourself: what is 1,000 times less massive than a star?" De said. The answer was close to home: Jupiter. The team of researchers from MIT, Harvard and Caltech established that the swallowed planet was a gas giant with a similar mass to Jupiter, but was so close to its star

that it completed an orbit in just one day. The star, which is quite similar to the Sun, engulfed the planet over a period of around 100 days, starting off by nibbling at its edges, which ejected dust.

The bright explosion occurred in the final ten days as the planet was totally destroyed when it plunged inside the star.

Miguel Montarges, an astronomer at the Paris Observatory who was not involved in the research, noted that the star was thousands of degrees hotter than the planet.

"It's like putting an ice cube into a boiling pot," he told *AFP*.

Morgan MacLeod, a postdoc at Harvard University and co-author of the study, published in the journal *Nature*, said that most of the thousands of planets discovered outside the Solar System so far "will eventually suffer this fate". And in comparison, Earth will most likely end not with a bang, but a whimper. When the Sun expands past Mercury, Venus and Earth in an estimated five billion years, they will make "less dramatic disturbances" because rocky planets are so much smaller than gas giants, MacLeod said.

Health experts 'to raise alarm on AI threats'

Health professionals must warn the world about the dangers of artificial intelligence (AI), a group of academics wrote on Wednesday, as clamours grow for work on the technology to be halted.

The academics wrote in the *BMJ Global Health Journal* that time was running out to take action because corporations, the military and governments were working fast to develop AI tools. AI exploded into the public consciousness last year with ChatGPT, a bot capable of generating tracts of coherent text from short prompts.

The wild popularity of the bot sparked a race between tech giants like Google and Microsoft to embed AI in everything from spreadsheets to search tools, and prompted investors to pour money into AI startups.

But the health academics pointed to a range of threats, including powerful AI surveillance systems being developed in dozens of countries, killer robots and disinformation.

For healthcare, they wrote, people with darker skin were at serious risk of harm or reduced care because the datasets used to "train" AI algorithms were often biased. They argued that "the window of opportunity to avoid serious and potentially existential harms is closing".

The authors, led by Frederik Federspiel of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and David McCoy of the United Nations University in Kuala Lumpur, wrote that global cooperation would be needed.

"Healthcare professionals have a key role in raising awareness and sounding the alarm on the risks and threats posed by AI," they wrote in an analysis piece.

"If AI is to ever fulfil its promise to benefit humanity and society, we must protect democracy, strengthen our public-interest institutions, and dilute power so that there are effective checks and balances." Concern about the direction of AI research is prompting alarm even among those at the centre of the field.

africa lens

■ ACTS OF VIOLENCE HAVE INTENSIFIED OVER THE PAST YEAR

SADC FORCES STORM DRC



A Kenya Defence Forces soldier serving under the East African Community Regional Force on patrol at Kisigari in the Democratic Republic of Congo on April 18. EVANS HABIL I NATION

Southern African countries will deploy troops to help quell violence in eastern DR Congo as Tshisekedi criticises a regional military force deployed by East African nations to stabilise conflict-torn regions

● KINSHASA

Southern African countries last week agreed to deploy forces to help quell violence in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, where armed groups have terrorised civilians for decades. A special summit of the 16-bloc Southern African De-

velopment Community, which includes South Africa, Angola and Tanzania, backed the deployment “to restore peace and security in eastern DRC”, SADC said in a statement from the Namibian capital Windhoek.

The decision was reached at talks attended by several heads of states, including DRC’s Felix Tshisekedi, his South African coun-

terpart Cyril Ramaphosa, Tanzania’s Samia Suluhu Hassan and ministers from the regional group. The meeting did not give the numbers of troops to be deployed nor a timeline for the deployment.

Armed groups have plagued much of mineral-rich eastern DRC for three decades, a legacy of regional wars that flared in the

1990s and 2000s. One militia, the M23, has captured swathes of territory in North Kivu since taking up arms in late 2021 after years of dormancy. The rebel campaign has displaced over one million people, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Some troops

...Continued on Page 26

africa lens

SADC troops march to Congo to quell violence

Continued from Page 25

from three SADC countries — South Africa, Tanzania and Malawi — have already been operating in eastern DRC since 2013 under the umbrella of the major a UN peacekeeping force, MONUSCO. “South Africa stands ready to contribute to the development of effective regional instruments that could assist to stabilise the current security situation prevailing in the eastern DRC,” President Ramaphosa said in a statement.

The deployment will also add to an East African regional military force that has taken over some areas previously occupied by the M23 since December but has so far failed to thwart the insurgency. The East African Community (EAC) force draws on troops from Burundi, Kenya, Uganda and South Sudan.

There is a need for SADC to work together with the East African Community and other (regional groups) in order to better coordinate our efforts in support of government and people of the DRC,” Namibian President Hage Geingob told the summit.

SADC executive secretary Elias Magosi said: “We are regrettably noticing a very disturbing security situation in eastern DRC with the deterioration of the humanitarian situation due to the resurgence of the M23 rebellion and illegally armed groups.”

Acts of violence intensified over the past year, undermining the DRC’s “sovereignty and integrity” as well as development prospects as the country prepares for national elections in December, Magosi added.

“This calls for immediate collective action in support of the DRC to restore peace and security.” Tshisekedi visited Botswana, which houses the headquarters of SADC, for four days. The DRC accuses its smaller central African neighbour, Rwanda, of backing the M23, something Rwanda has repeatedly denied.

But US and French officials, as well as United Nations experts, agree with the assessment. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Saturday urged African leaders to redouble efforts to bring peace to conflict-ravaged



A KDF soldier guides pupils to a classroom at Kanyaruchinya refugee camp in the Democratic Republic of Congo on April 21. Below: Kenya’s President William Ruto with President Félix Tshisekedi of DR Congo at a past function. PHOTOS | EVANS HABIL AND FILE



region. Guterres addressed a meeting in Burundi of African nations that signed the 2013 accord to promote stability and security in DRC.

However, “Despite our collective efforts, more than 100 armed groups — Congolese and foreign — still operate today and thus threaten the stability of the entire Great Lakes region. “It is time for the violence to stop. I reiterate my call to all armed groups — lay down your arms, immediately,” Guterres said.

President Tshisekedi criticised a regional military force deployed by East African nations to stabilise conflict-torn regions in the country’s east, hinting that the troops could depart by the end of June. Speaking in Botswana, Tshisekedi voiced concerns of “cohabitation” between rebels and the regional force that started deploying late last year.

Dozens of armed groups plague eastern DRC, a legacy of regional wars that raged in the 1990s and 2000s. The seven-nation EAC cre-

ated a military force to respond to the crisis last June, with Kenyan soldiers deploying in November followed this year by Burundian, Ugandan and South Sudanese contingents.

“There is cohabitation that we have noticed between the contingent of East African Community and the rebels,” Tshisekedi said at a news conference. “That is a genuine problem when it comes to the mission assigned, and also compels us to ask, what is the purpose of the mission?” he said, claiming that except for the Burundi troops, others “are now living together with M23”.

Tshisekedi said the EAC force’s mandate ends in June, “and if we feel that the mandate was not fulfilled will return them and thank them for having tried”. “We have the confirmation of the coming of SADC troops which we will have to put in place,” he added.

Namibian President Hage Geingob emphasised the need “for SADC to work together with the East African Community...to better coordinate our efforts” to back Kinshasa.

SADC countries include South Africa, Angola, Tanzania, Namibia, Zambia, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and the DRC.

global lens

■ FRONTRUNNER FOR THE REPUBLICAN NOMINATION HAS SUFFERED A SERIES OF SETBACKS



Former US President Donald Trump is a man under siege. The business practices of his family company, the Trump Organisation, are being examined by prosecutors in New York City. PHOTO | AFP

He became the first former president to face criminal charges – over an alleged hush money scheme – and was separately ordered to pay millions of dollars to a writer after being found liable for sexual abuse

● NEW YORK

Donald Trump is under investigation for everything from his handling of top secret documents to alleged efforts to overturn his 2020 election defeat.

And the frontrunner for the Republican nomination in 2024 has suffered a series of recent legal setbacks. He became the first former president to face criminal charges – over an alleged

hush money scheme – and was separately ordered to pay millions of dollars to a writer after being found liable for sexual abuse. Here are the cases ahead that pose the most serious legal risks.

What's being investigated?

New York is a hotbed of legal activity when it comes to Trump.

He became the first former president to face criminal charges when he was indicted there following an investigation into

a \$130,000 payment to former adult film star Stormy Daniels. Daniels claims the pair had sex, something Trump denies, and says she accepted the money from his former lawyer before the 2016 election in exchange for her silence.

Meanwhile, the business practices of his family company, the Trump Organisation, are being examined by prosecutors in the state.

The New York attorney-general

is leading a civil investigation (which cannot result in criminal charges) and has spent years looking at whether the company committed various acts of fraud over several decades.

A criminal investigation is looking at similar issues.

What has Trump said?

Trump described the indictment in the Stormy Daniels case as

Continued on Page 28

global lens

Just how big are Trump's legal problems?

Continued from Page 27

“political persecution” and said he did not expect a fair trial. Separately, the former president and his lawyers have insisted the allegations against the Trump Organisation are politically motivated.

So how serious is it?

Trump has pleaded not guilty to 34 counts of falsifying business records in the Stormy Daniels case. It is now heading to trial, which is likely to happen in February or March 2024.

The most likely outcome there is a fine. The criminal investigation into the Trump Organisation has already yielded convictions. The company was found guilty of fraud and falsifying business records and fined. Allen Weisselberg, the organisation's chief financial officer, was sentenced to jail.

In the civil case, the attorney-general has filed a lawsuit against Mr Trump and three of his children, accusing them of “astounding” fraud and of inflating their net worth. It seeks \$250m that was allegedly obtained through fraudulent means. A trial in that case is scheduled for October.

What's being investigated?

The Department of Justice is looking into the removal of government documents from the White House, which were then taken to Trump's Florida estate, Mar-a-Lago, after he left office. Investigators are assessing how these documents were stored and who may have had access to them.

The former president's sprawling beachside property was searched in August and 11,000 documents were seized, including around 100 marked as classified. Some of these were labelled top secret.

Unsurprisingly, we know very little about what's in the documents. But classified material usually contains information that officials feel could damage national security if made public.

What has Trump said?

He's denied wrongdoing and criticised the justice department's

investigation, branding it “politically motivated” and a “witch-hunt”.

He has offered shifting defences which have mostly hinged on the argument that he declassified the material. No evidence has yet been provided that this is true.

The former president has also argued that some of the documents are protected by “privilege” – a legal concept that would prevent them from being used in future proceedings. An independent lawyer is reviewing the seized material to determine if this is the case.

But Mr Trump has not directly addressed the key question of why the documents were at Mar-a-Lago in the first place.

So how serious is it?

This is an active criminal investigation and could result in charges being filed. Among other statutes, the justice department believes Trump may have violated the Espionage Act by keeping national security information that “could be used to the injury of the United States”.

In addition to charges relating to the classified documents themselves, prosecutors are also looking at obstruction of justice as another potential crime. The justice department has appointed an independent lawyer, or special counsel, to oversee all of its criminal investigations into Mr Trump. Jack Smith will lead its various inquiries and will ultimately decide whether to

bring charges.

What's being investigated?

Trump's alleged role in the attack on the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, when a mob of his supporters stormed the building in an effort to stop the confirmation of President Joe Biden's election victory, is under scrutiny from prosecutors.

A congressional committee spent 18 months looking into Trump's actions. They held a series of televised hearings laying out their case that his election fraud claims led directly to the riot.

Following these hearings, the committee accused Trump of inciting insurrection and referred its findings to the justice department.

The department is running a criminal investigation into January 6 and broader efforts to overturn the election, but this has largely been shrouded in secrecy. It's the largest police investigation in US history, but the extent to which Trump is a target is still unclear.

What has Trump said?

He's denied responsibility for the riot and has continued to repeat his unsubstantiated allegations of widespread voter fraud in the 2020 election.

So how serious is it?

It is up to the justice department to decide whether to file criminal charges, and its investigation has

already led to hundreds of people who stormed the Capitol being charged.

The former president has not been called for questioning in that inquiry, but it remains a possibility. He could – in theory – be charged if investigators believe there is sufficient evidence of wrongdoing on his part.

What's being investigated?

Prosecutors have been investigating whether Trump and others acted illegally to try and overturn his narrow loss in the state in 2020.

The criminal investigation was opened after the disclosure of an hour-long phone call between the former president and the state's top election official on January 2, 2021.

“I just want to find 11,780 votes,” Trump said during the call to Republican Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger – a reference to the number of ballots needed to give him victory in the swing state.

A grand jury heard evidence for over eight months before filing a final report, which remains sealed.

What has Trump said?

He's described the investigation – as he has many others – as a “witch hunt”. He has also attacked the legal official leading the inquiry – the chief prosecutor of Fulton County, Fani Willis – as a “young, ambitious, Radical Left Democrat”.

So how serious is it?

“The allegations are very serious. If indicted and convicted, people are facing prison sentences,” Ms Willis told the *Washington Post* in September.

The 26-member grand jury did not have indictment powers but may have recommended charges. Among the potential crimes it looked into were the solicitation of election fraud, making false statements to government officials, and racketeering.

It is not known whether the former president is being directly investigated, but some of his allies are known to be part of the inquiry. Willis is expected to disclose whether Trump and others will be charged this summer.



US magazine columnist E. Jean Carroll at the Manhattan Federal Court in New York City on May 9. A jury ruled last week that Donald Trump was liable for the sexual abuse of the former columnist in the mid-1990s. The nine jurors decided following a civil trial that the ex-president did not rape Carroll, but did find him liable for defaming her. Trump was ordered to pay Carroll a total of \$5 million in damages.

global lens

■ JUDGE ORDERS RELEASE OF SINALOA GANG LEADER

Héctor Palma founded the powerful cartel with Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán and spent the past 28 years in jails in the US and in Mexico

● MEXICO CITY

A judge in Mexico has ordered the release from jail of a notorious drug lord who founded the powerful Sinaloa cartel with Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán. Héctor Palma, 63, has spent the past 28 years in jails in the US and in Mexico.

Palma’s criminal career was portrayed in the Netflix series *Narcos: Mexico*. He pleaded guilty to drug trafficking in 2005, but could now be freed after a judge said there was not enough evidence to continue holding him on separate charges of organised crime.

Judge María Dolores Olarte ruled that the arguments presented by prosecutors linking Palma, who is widely known as El Güero (Spanish for someone with fair skin or light-coloured eyes and hair), to organised crime were mostly “unfounded”.

Palma’s layer said there were now no outstanding arrest warrants for his client, meaning that he could be released shortly.

Palma was released once before two years ago, when he was acquitted of organised crime

A Venezuelan man, Rafael Clavel Moreno, seduced Palma’s wife, Guadalupe Leija, convincing her to leave her husband and move to the United States along with the two children she had had with Palma. Once they had arrived in San Francisco, Clavel Moreno killed Palma’s wife and reportedly sent her decapitated head to Palma. Clavel Moreno then took the two children, aged four and five, with him to Venezuela, where he killed them by throwing them off a bridge.

DRUG LORD’S FREEDOM



Veteran drug lord Hector “El Guero” Palma Salazar during his arrival at the International Airport in Mexico City on June 15, 2016. Palma’s criminal career was portrayed in the Netflix series *Narcos: Mexico*. He pleaded guilty to drug trafficking in 2005, but could now be freed after a judge said there was not enough evidence to continue holding him on separate charges of organised crime.

charges.

But he was rearrested within seconds after a judge annulled the acquittal, arguing that two witnesses who had accused him of two murders and links to drug smuggling should be tracked down so they could testify against him.

However, the prosecution has been unable to locate the two witnesses who had incriminated him, prompting Judge Olarte’s decision to free Palma.

Palma is one of the most notorious drug lords of the 1980s and 90s.

He started his criminal career as a hitman for Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo, one of the founders of the now-extinct Guadalajara drug cartel.

When Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo was arrested in 1989, his criminal empire split into two, one controlled by his nephews, the Arellano Félix brothers, with its power base in the city of Tijuana, and another controlled by Palma and Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán, based in Sinaloa state.

The two splinter groups soon

started competing with each other and Palma was accused of having “betrayed” Felix Gallardo by keeping the proceeds from a drug shipment for himself. It was about this time that Palma became involved in one of the most gruesome and infamous vendettas to engulf Mexico’s criminal underworld.

A Venezuelan man, Rafael Clavel Moreno, seduced Palma’s wife, Guadalupe Leija, convincing her to leave her husband and move to the United States along with the two children she had had with Palma.

Once they had arrived in San Francisco, Clavel Moreno killed Palma’s wife and reportedly sent her decapitated head to Palma.

Clavel Moreno then took the two children, aged four and five, with him to Venezuela, where he killed them by throwing them off a bridge.

Palma took revenge by having Clavel Moreno’s family killed, as well as a number of relatives and close associates of Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo.

Clavel Moreno, who had been arrested for the murder of the two children, was killed in jail. There are conflicting reports as to who had hired Clavel Moreno, with some pointing the finger at Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo directly and others blaming the jailed drug lord’s nephews.

Palma built his wife and children a lavish pantheon in a cemetery in Culiacán used by members of the Sinaloa cartel as a resting place for their relatives.

He was arrested in 1995, shortly after the private jet he was travelling in crashed. His lavish golden pistol drew the attention of police when they questioned the injured Palma at the home where he was convalescing.

Palma was extradited to the US in 2007 and handed back to the Mexican authorities in 2016 after serving his drug-trafficking sentence. He has fought against the charges brought against him in Mexico and his lawyer said he hoped his client would be released “within hours”.

— BBC

OBIT

■ MEXICAN TELENVELA ACTOR ANDRÉS GARCÍA DIES AT 81 AFTER LIVER ILLNESS

ADIOS ANTONIO, 'NO ONE BUT YOU'

Starring alongside 'Raquel', the soap became a major international hit and is considered one of the most successful telenovelas from the 1980s

• LOS ANGELES

Mexican actor Andrés García died last month at the age of 81 as a result of liver cirrhosis that was diagnosed a year ago. Mexican singer and actress Anahí wrote a heartfelt message saying goodbye to the actor, who had a great friendship with her and a father-daughter-type affection.

"I can't find the words," Anahí wrote in Spanish. "I thank God for giving me the gift of your kindness. I know you are in a better place now. I will love you and remember you all my life with all my heart, my beloved Andrés."

García (as Antonio Lombardo) starred alongside Mexican actress Lucía Méndez (as Raquel) in the 1985 soap *Tú o nadie* (*No One But You*), one of the most popular and still considered one of the most successful telenovelas of all time. It had one of the most memorable soap villains and heroes.

The plot revolved around Salvador Pineda (as Maximiliano Alveniz) and Antonio, two step-brothers. Max loathes Antonio because his father, the husband of Max's mother, Victoria, left all his fortune and the business to him. Max then hatches a dastardly plan to take all of Antonio's money by marrying Raquel, a girl of humble roots. The soap was popular in Kenya in the late '80s and early '90s.

In recent days, García's health had weakened and his wife, Margarita Portillo, requested prayers for him. The actor ate was eating very little and could no longer walk because the disease had weakened him and left him bedridden.

"I remained by his side, taking care of him and loving him until his last breath," Portillo wrote in Spanish on Instagram on Tuesday. "He left in peace and in a manner that I thank God for."

García was born on May 24, 1941, in the Dominican Republic before his family emigrated to Mexico and settled in Acapulco. While working on a boat in Acapulco, the actor was discovered by film producers, who invited him to participate in the film *Chanoc* when he was 25 years old. His gallantry made an impact in show business in the 1960s.

García had three children, Leonardo García and Andrés García (with former wife Sandra Vale), as well as Andrea García, whom he had with actress María Fernanda Ampudia. He also was married to actress Sonia Infante throughout the 1980s, later divorcing her after a little over a decade of marriage.

Méndez paid tribute to the late actor in a tweet. "Rest in peace #andrésgarcía," she wrote in Spanish.

"Our prayers are with you and your family. A great actor, great friend has passed, but our affection will be with you today and always."

In cinema, the actor stood out in more than 50 films, including *Pedro Navajas*, *La Última Noche*, *Toña Machetes*, *Tintorería*, *Hermelinda Linda*, *El día de los Asesinos*, *Carlos el Terrorista* and *Nora la Rebelde*.

On television, García worked on telenovelas such as *El Privilegio de Amar*, *Mujeres Engañadas*, *Con Toda el Alma*, *El Cuerpo del Deseo* and *Tú o nadie*.

He was involved in several controversies in his life, including challenging longtime friend Roberto Palazuelos to a gun duel after claiming the fellow actor had threatened one of García's children. Palazuelos rejected the duel out of respect for García.

On his YouTube channel, García allegedly threatened journalist Anabel Hernández for claiming he was friends with drug traffickers in her book *Emma y las Otras Señoras del Narco* (*Emma and Other Narco Women*).

The author filed a complaint with the Special Prosecutor's Office for Attention to Crimes Committed against Freedom of Expression in the Attorney General's Office of the Republic.



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