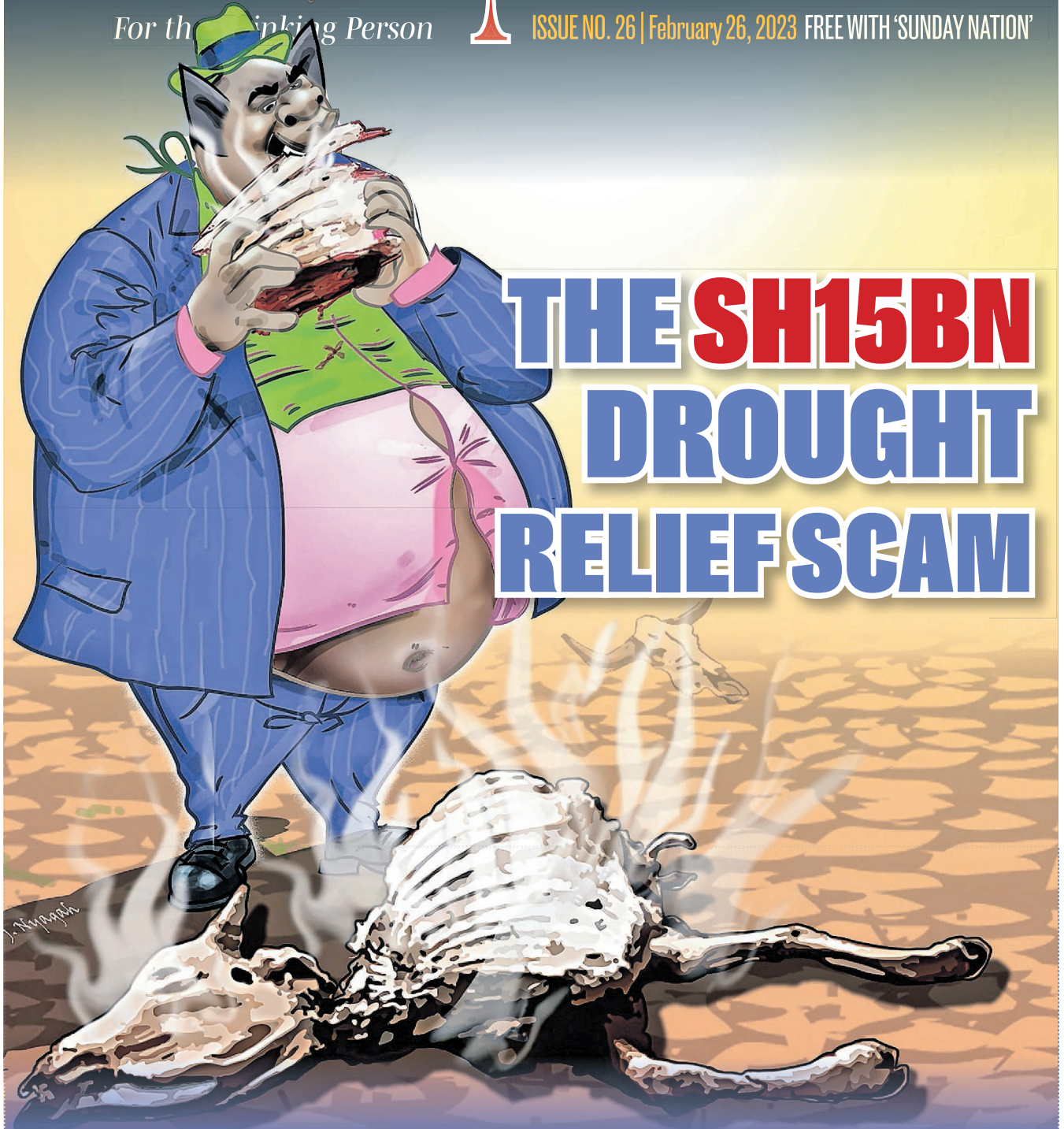


THE Weekly Review

For the Thinking Person

ISSUE NO. 26 | February 26, 2023 FREE WITH 'SUNDAY NATION'



THE SH15BN DROUGHT RELIEF SCAM

The government seeks to pump billions of shillings into a moribund agency to import rice, cooking oil, sugar, wheat and beans. But policy experts have questioned the manner and speed with which the Ruto administration is executing what ranks as one of the largest and most complex duty exemption programmes in Kenya's history

The Nation ePaper NOW Available on the PlayStore anywhere, anytime.

Follow the link to subscribe

➤ epaper.nation.africa.

Scan to
Download



Or download from Google playstore



- Nation
- Nation
- Nation Africa

For customer support Tel: 0790 111 111
Email: epaper@ke.nationmedia.com

NATION 
→ ePaper

letter from the editor

Inside

5 SH15 BILLION FOR DEAD AGENCY: The moribund Kenya National Trade Corporation is to borrow hundreds of millions to import duty-free consumer goods — rice, maize, sugar, cooking oil, wheat and beans.

9 SAME SCRIPT, DIFFERENT ACTORS: As they play 'good cop, bad cop', making seemingly contrasting statements, it is possible that President Ruto and his deputy are working in tandem.

16 LOOKS LIKE A VICTOR: David Avido has earned big bucks and fame dressing international celebrities with his brand, LooksLikeAvido, while putting Kibera on the global map.

25 HOW BIDEN LANDED IN KYIV: The US President travelled covertly to the besieged capital to demonstrate American resolve to help defeat the Russian invasion.



Duty-free programme should feed hungry Kenyans, not greedy goons

The prolonged drought is causing problems across the nation. There is an acute shortage of food in many parts of the country, especially in the north.

Livestock migration is also on the rise due to lack of pasture, which has disrupted livelihoods in dry-season grazing areas.

The wild animals in the parks are not spared either, and dry season savannah fires have already consumed thousands of hectares of water catchment forests.

The United Nations recently warned that the four consecutive failed rain seasons could push millions of people in the Horn of Africa to the brink of starvation unless necessary measures were taken.

The government must act fast, or else we are in for a famine, which could affect our country in such a hurting manner that our generation shall never forget. It will be a calamity if President William Ruto's administration wavers, or just sits, expecting miracles sans work.

It is in this sense that we applaud the economic roadmap put forth by the government to mitigate the looming famine. Barring a catastrophe, the government will execute the largest and most expensive duty-free imports regime of consumer goods in living memory.

Plans are afoot to borrow Sh15 billion from a commercial bank to fund a scheme that will lead to the importation of rice, cooking oil, sugar, wheat and beans. These are the staples most hit by the present situation and we cannot produce them ourselves.

To avoid such a situation, President Ruto's administration has



Allan Buluku

This is a task with high corruption risks, because it's being implemented in an area with very weak administrative structures. The initiative smells like a grand scheme that will leave a bad stench in its wake. This is no time to feed shifty-eyed, connected people; it is a time to think of the downtrodden Kenyans who can't even get a decent meal a day.

approved food imports worth billions of shillings to ensure the nation has enough supplies amid the changing weather patterns. This is a commendable move by the government and the executive needs to ensure that it succeeds. However, it is in the execution of the activity that we draw the line and seek further understanding from the past.

Many a time, calamities of large proportion have been

designed with a profit motive, providing fuel for graft and causing lots of unhappiness.

We question the manner in which the project has been designed. It is the same worry that is raising the eyebrows of many experts and is a danger to our commonwealth.

The government will make the imports through the Kenya National Trading Corporation Limited, a moribund organisation that was active in the 1970s.

KNTC was only relevant when Kenya was still under the past regime of price controls and foreign exchange allocation committees.

The corporation's latest audited and published accounts show that its total annual income was just Sh150 million and a profit of Sh15 million. Does it have the capacity to execute a scheme worth billions of shillings?

Duty-free import programmes of such magnitude only work where there are open and transparent tenders, transparency in commodity sales, transparency of payments and transparency of beneficial owners. This is a task with high corruption risks, because it's being implemented in an area with very weak administrative structures.

The initiative smells like a grand scheme that will leave a bad stench in its wake. This is no time to feed shifty-eyed, well-connected people; it is a time to think of the downtrodden Kenyans who can't even get a decent meal a day.

abuluku@ke.nationmedia.com

the telescope

■ **Former governors, poll losers shortlisted**

CAS hopefuls begin interviews

The Public Service Commission (PSC) will this week commence interviews of shortlisted candidates for the position of chief administrative secretary (CAS). The commission is scheduled to kick off the interviews of the 224 individuals, who include former governors and poll losers, on Wednesday. The final shortlist was picked from a list of 5,183 applicants for the position following declaration of the vacancies in the positions by PSC in early October 2022.

At the end of the interviews,

successful candidates will be forwarded to President William Ruto for appointment. Before the interviews, however, the PSC has also invited the public to submit their petitions against any of the shortlisted candidates through a sworn affidavit to the Commission on or before February 28.

The interviews follow a decision by the Employment and Labour Court two weeks ago to dismiss a case challenging the appointment of CASs, determining that PSC's decision to create the position was lawful.



United Democratic Alliance digital strategist Dennis Itumbi has been shortlisted for a CAS position.

■ **14 candidates in final list for graft job**

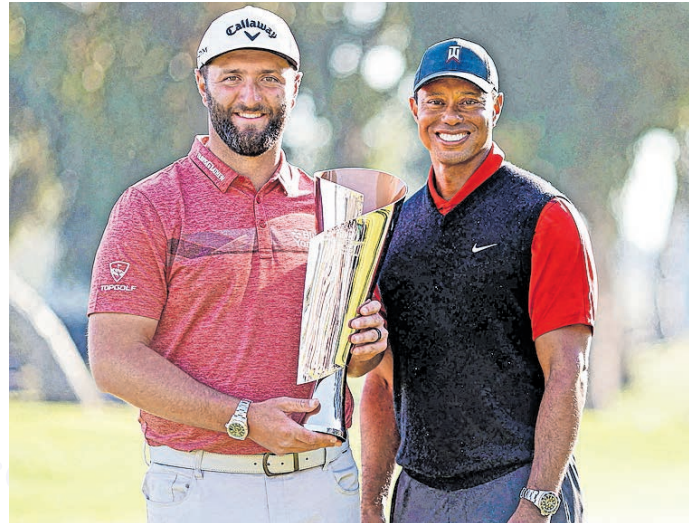
Search for EACC boss intensifies



The Public Service Commission has shortlisted 14 candidates for the position of Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission chairman, who will be interviewed on Monday and Tuesday. Some of those who

made the final shortlist are former Makeni Governor Kivutha Kibwana, senior counsel Charles Kanjama, former presiding bishop of Christ is the Answer Ministries (Citam) David Oginde, and Thomas Letangule, a former member of the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission. Archbishop Eliud Wabukala's tenure as chairperson of the anti-graft agency came to an end mid-last month.

■ **This was Rahm's fifth win in his past nine starts**



The Genesis Invitational host, Tiger Woods, presents the trophy to Jon Rahm of Spain after putting in to claim victory in California.

World No.1 destined for golfing greatness

In a sport notorious for offering very few guarantees, it still feels fair to bet that Spain's Jon Rahm is destined for golfing greatness. With his thrilling victory at the Genesis Invitational in Los Angeles, the 28-year-old claimed his 10th PGA Tour win to nudge ahead of his late great compatriot, Severiano Ballesteros.

Of course, in different times, Ballesteros had far fewer opportunities for success on the American circuit, but Rahm's current rate of progress is astonishing and even earning comparisons with 15-times major winner Tiger Woods.

"He is a spectacular golfer," said Max Homa, after being beaten in-

to second place by the Basque golfer at famed Riviera. "I would say other than Tiger, he's the most consistent player I've seen. I've known him since college and he's been like this since then, number one amateur in the world, number one player in the world, all the accolades."

This was Rahm's fifth win in his past nine starts, and his third victory from his most recent half-dozen events. He has banked prize money of nearly \$10m in 2023 alone and is currently 93 under par for the still fledgling year. The revamped world rankings are in a state of flux but there can be no arguing with his return to the top of the tree.

■ **Concerns over plagiarism and cheating in exams**

Sci-fi magazine bans AI chatbot authors



An American science fiction magazine said it had stopped accepting submissions and banned hundreds of authors after being deluged with stories written by artificial intelligence (AI) chatbots. The rise of AI tools like ChatGPT, which can

churn out text in natural-sounding language in a variety of styles, has sparked concern in many sectors, particularly with regards to plagiarism and cheating in exams. ChatGPT was released in November and has led to a multibillion-dollar deal with Microsoft and the promise of revolutionising the internet search market. But Neil Clarke, editor of the *Clarkworld* sci-fi magazine, said he had banned more than 500 authors in February over "machine-generated submissions".

kenya lens

■ WHERE WILL THE DOLLARS TO FUND THIS MASSIVE PROGRAMME COME FROM?

SH15BN FOR 'DEAD' AGENCY

Trade and Industry Cabinet Secretary Moses Kuria visited Egypt, where he held extensive conversations with the Cairo-based Afri-Exim Bank on the bank's import finance facilities to support a duty-free import scheme.



The government seeks to commit hundreds of millions in hard currency resources to purchase duty-free consumer goods and risk flooding the local market with a deluge of imports that will disrupt local supply chains.

Considering the size of the facility needed, it is clear that any government-approved bank roped to participate in funding the massive duty-free imports programme will face major challenges.



The Cabinet Secretary has directed that 100,000 metric tonnes of brown or milled white sugar, 900,000 tons of white maize and 600,000 tons of milled rice may be imported duty-free.



The economy is under the grip of an unprecedented foreign exchange crisis. Are we looking at a return to the regime of foreign exchange allocations to the well-connected?

Sh5 billion worth of credit lines to be extended to the Kenya National Trading Corporation to import subsidised fertiliser. KNTC's audited accounts show that total annual income was Sh150 million.



The money is to be extended to the Kenya National Trading Corporation in the form of lines of credit, which KNTC will deploy to import rice, cooking oil, sugar, wheat and beans. But why a moribund state enterprise of the 1970s?

● BY JAINDI KISERO

The Kenya National Trading Corporation (KNTC) is to borrow a whopping Sh15 billion from a local commercial bank to fund what ranks as one of the largest and most expansive state-sponsored duty-free imports regime of consumer goods in recent times, *The Weekly Review* has established.

The money is to be extended to the 58-year-old company in the form of lines of credit, which KNTC will deploy to import rice, cooking oil, sugar, wheat and beans.

On top of this, another Sh5 billion worth of credit lines is to be extended to KNTC to import subsidised fertiliser.

The details are contained in a confidential letter to the Ministry of Trade and Indus-

try signed by the Secretary to the Cabinet, Ms Mercy Wanjau, dated November 15, 2022, which was communicating decisions made by a Cabinet meeting held on November 10, 2022.

The name of the specific bank to fund the expensive duty free import programme is not mentioned in the letter, which merely states that the Cabinet had approved that funds be borrowed from a 'government-approved bank' — implying that the new administration of President William Ruto intends to direct one of the state-controlled commercial banks to provide credit facilities to KNTC.

Considering the size of the facility needed, it is clear that any 'government-approved bank' roped in to participate in funding the massive duty-free imports programme is going to face

major challenges and risks on compliance with single borrower limit guidelines set by the Central Bank of Kenya. Commercial banks can only lend a described percentage of their capital base to a single customer. Very few banks have the capital to absorb the exposure.

If anything, this is a risk that crystallised in a separate transaction, where a similar arrangement between the government and the Kenya Commercial Bank in 2018 left the lender with a sticky non-performing loan that sits out on its balance sheet to date.

Several questions arise. Where will the dollars to fund this massive programme come from? Indeed, the economy is under the grip of an unprecedented foreign exchange crisis, characterised by historically low levels of fo-

Continued on Page 6

kenya lens

Duty exemption programme raises eyebrows

Continued from Page 5

rex reserves at the Central Bank of Kenya and a currency that is on a free fall. Are we looking at a return to the regime of foreign exchange allocations to the well-connected? Does it make economic sense for the government, in the name of stabilising local prices, to commit hundreds of millions in hard currency resources to purchase duty-free consumer goods and risk not only an inflation of the foreign exchange crisis, but a flooding of the local market with a deluge of imports that are bound to disrupt local supply chains?

The manner and speed with which the new administration of President Ruto is executing what ranks as one of the largest and most complex duty exemption programmes in Kenya's recent history has raised eyebrows.

Mark you, this is an assignment with high corruption risks, especially because it is being implemented in an area with very weak governance institutions.

The wisdom of giving the responsibility of executing the task of importing billions worth of consumer goods to the KNTC — the hitherto moribund state-owned trading enterprise that used to thrive and only had relevance in the '70s and '80s, when Kenya was still under the ancient regime of the command economy, price controls and foreign exchange allocation committees — is also controversial. The experience in the country is that duty-free import programmes of such magnitude only work where there are open and transparent tenders, transparency in commodity sales, transparency of payments and transparency of beneficial owners.

KNTC and other state-sponsored price stabilisation enterprises in Africa have been collapsing under pressure from domestic liberalisation and international trade rules. Where they still exist, their effectiveness is hampered by chronic underinvestment in storage and transport capacity, inadequate commercial trading skills, limited access to finance and weak contract enforcement capacity. KNTC does not have a balance sheet to support the tax. Its latest audited and published accounts show that total annual income was a measly Sh150 million and a profit of Sh15 million.

Sensational stories about well-connected briefcase traders wandering the streets of Dubai and Kuala Lumpur hawking contracts from KNTC to suppliers of cooking oil. Although the evidence may be anecdotal, the fact that the state

trading company is not contracting supplies transparently has not helped. KNTC could emerge as a big locus for corruption.

What, exactly, are the items being imported and in what quantities? What is the scope of the duty-free import programme being rolled out by the government?

Until recently, the only information in the public domain were the details of Treasury Cabinet Secretary Prof Njuguna Ndungu published in the *Kenya Gazette* of December 22, 2022. The notice states as follows: The Cabinet Secretary "directs that 100,000 metric tonnes of brown or mill white sugar may be imported into the country duty-free not later than March 31, 2023".

With regard to maize and rice, the notice says: "The Cabinet Secretary directs that 900,000 tons of white maize and 600,000 tons of milled rice may be imported into the country duty free from February 1, 2023 to August 6, 2023." As is evident from this first list of exemptions, there is no mention of involvement of KNTC in the imports. It is a free-for-all affair, where any trader can bring in stuff.

Inexplicably, the second category of exemptions have not been gazetted as required by the East African Customs Management Act. The list of goods are to be found in a letter dated January 20, 2023 from Ndung'u to then-KRA Commissioner-General Githii Mburu. The details are as follows: "80,000 MT of

beans, 25,000 MT tons of wheat, 200,000 MT of sugar, 125,000 MT of cooking oil and 150,000 MT of rice".

On February 14, KRA put out a circular to its Customs and Border Control department directing them to start allowing duty-free imports of the items listed for exemption in Prof Ndung'u's letter. Inexplicably, the duty-free approvals, which will run until January 19, 2024, have been backdated to January 20, implying that even goods that came into the country several weeks before the February 14 internal circular will enjoy duty-free status.

The internal memo signed by Nancy Ng'etich added: "The quantities approved in the referred letter of January 20, 2023, relating to the imports by KNTC do not in any way affect the exemptions previously granted under legal notice."

Several legal questions arise. First, is it legal to effect duty exemptions without publishing a notice in the *Kenya Gazette*? Secondly, can a letter by the CS for Finance of Kenya vacate what is stipulated in the East African Customs Management Act? But the most blatant lie in the saga was the attempt by KRA to purport to show that the duty-free imports the government has allowed are in line with the provision of the East African Customs Management Act, 2015.

That Act only allows a member to unilaterally declare duty-free imports in the manner Kenya is doing after the President of the country has declared a national crisis, the Council of Ministers has approved, and when the secretariat of the community has gazetted the exemptions. Why are we stoking unnecessary trade wars with other member states of the East African Community?

Last week, a press release put out by the Ministry of Trade and Industry reported that Cabinet Secretary Moses Kuria, had been on a visit to Egypt, where he had extensive conversations with the Cairo-based Afri-Exim Bank on the bank's import finance facilities to support the KNTC duty-free import scheme. As a matter of fact, the cabinet memo that came up with the proposal had identified regional banks specialised in commodity financing as another source of money for KNTC.

Yet this space is fraught with huge corruption risks. Several years ago, a son of former Sudanese President Bashir was accused of using influential middlemen with links to Sudan's government elite to secure contracts from government agencies funded by the country's revolving lines of credit with the regional lender, PTA Bank.



Kenya Revenue Authority acting Commissioner-General Rispah Simiyu

kenya lens

■ DESIGN A MACRO-POLICY COMPACT GUARANTEEING GROWTH OF OUTPUT

THE GAPS IN TAX POLICIES



• By MBUI WAGACHA

The current amalgam of querying back taxes, calling in uncollected Kenya Revenue Authority dues – or exempting them in sleight of hand, with little clarity – do not make a fiscal or taxation policy



National Treasury Cabinet Secretary Njuguna Ndungu

For governments, nothing clarifies the mind more about taxation, fiscal policy and budgeting than the need to get the metrics right. Taxation is just the crash course in an extensive economics domain amenable to expert combinations of the chosen policy with monetary policy to steer the economy out of recession, to growth and increased revenues.

Taxation objectives widely emphasise a number of rules necessary for a desirable system: neutrality – no discrimination against social groups or their choices; efficiency, such as not concentrating spending in the centre of the revenue agency while revenue results are meagre in the field; certainty and simplicity; effectiveness and fairness – minimising tax avoidance and evasion; and flexibility – keeping pace with a changing world of technology and commerce.

A recent pupil of the crash course is Britain's former Prime Minister Liz Truss, ousted in record time in

late 2022 for pursuing massive tax cuts (lacking neutrality and biased for the rich) against the advice of mainstream economists, a backlash from investors, a run on the pound and a sulking Bank of England. All of these tripped her on her way out. The downside is that a switch to more conventional policies – the opposite direction taken by current Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, is hobbled by the Conservative ideological vows to big capital, and squabbles with the EU. Corrections may even have come too late to avert economic decline of Britain.

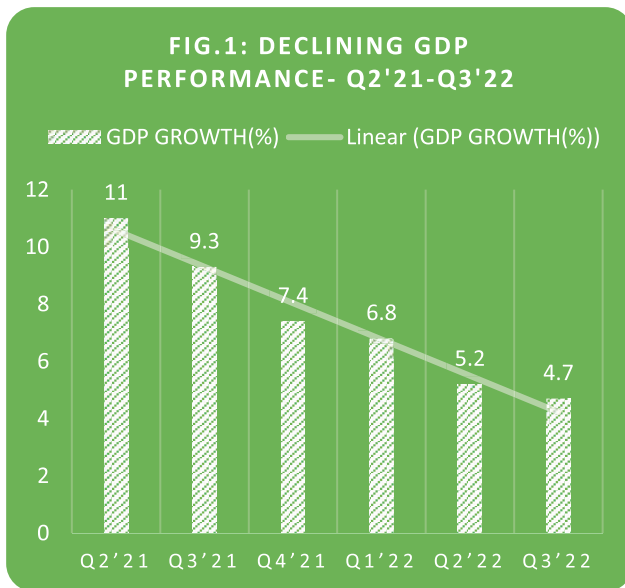
For Kenya, the lesson to learn is how to redress a faulty taxation architecture that breaks many of the above conventional rules and creates new unconventional ones.

The current amalgam of querying back taxes, calling in uncollected Kenya Revenue Authority dues (or exempting them in sleight of hand, with little clarity) do not make a fiscal or taxation policy. Key risks remain if government is to gain credibility or identity in resetting taxation, or the economy, with the following:

Output-revenue nexus

For starters, basic as it seems, some do not think twice about taxing air instead of first creating output. Data on GDP growth for six consecutive quarters, from Q2'21 to Q3'22, puts Kenya's economy on a contractionary phase (at 11 per cent, 9.3 per cent, 7.4 per cent, 6.8 per cent, 5.2 per cent, 4.7 per cent,

...Continued on Page 8



kenya lens

How gaps in tax policies subdue economic output

Continued from Page 7

5.2 per cent, and 4.7 per cent, as per Fig. 1). From a historic post-Covid growth of 11 per cent (Q2'21), all actuals fell well below key model forecasts. Thus, talking up output (and thus potential revenues) seems like a vehicle running on empty; even the variance from actuals to forecasts trends upwards. The conventional route from the economic ditch is to design a macro-policy compact guaranteeing growth of output, cutting non-output-increasing spending, and then gliding revenue upwards from the outcomes, without relapsing to recession. Raising taxes, as in UK's stance, may inform Kenya's recent plans to review taxation, but expecting higher revenues from a contracting economy is disingenuous.

Review tax structure

Taxation flaunts a reservoir of concepts on impacts and consumer responses, such as income distribution, commodity substitution and excess burden, but we stick to marginal tax rates – tax rate paid for the additional shilling earned as income. The top marginal rate in Kenya for resident corporations is 30 per cent, and that for non-resident corporations is 37.5 per cent. For both, taxes are on profits after allowable expenses. The top marginal rate for personal income is 30 per cent for earnings of Sh388,000 and above. Other indirect and consumption taxes impact households, and input costs to businesses, such as taxes charged on bills for energy and water.

In comparisons, from African Union/European Union revenue statistics (as of 2020), Kenya's tax structure and its Income Tax Act enacted in 1973 lacked clear policy objectives. Containing piecemeal amendments, erratic changes in tax codes, inconsistencies that attract expensive litigation and measures, high-cost investments in technology, and stationing of KRA at business premises as well as multiple authorities between national and county governments, the system needs transformation.

The structure attracted a lower share of corporate revenue domestically (11 per cent share of total revenues) than most regions except



Kenya Revenue Authority headquarters in Nairobi. PHOTO | FILE

OECD (10 per cent). Other regions of the developing world posted higher corporate tax revenue shares as follows: Africa (19 per cent for 31 countries), Asia Pacific (19 per cent for 28 countries) and Latin America and the Caribbean (16 per cent).

For Kenya's Personal Income Tax (26 per cent share) the share is the highest among all regions: OECD (23 per cent), Africa (18 per cent), Asia Pacific (16 per cent) and Latin America and the Caribbean (10 per cent). Kenya's tax system thus assigns a relatively higher burden to Personal Income tax (and persons in the register) as its workhorse than corporate tax, even by global comparisons. This excludes other tax categories payable, such as VAT.

Eliminate super-subsidies

To rebuild jobs, sector output, and revenues, domestic economic activity should spearhead the recovery, not imports (for instance maize, cooking fat, wheat rice, beans) repeatedly given duty-free status – against the neutrality rule. They are ill-disguised super-subsidies government accords by the backdoor to high-street millers, packers, and shopping malls, who never wield *jembes* in the maize- and wheat-growing areas of Kenya. It costs Kenya dearly, while we tolerate the ensuing mind games at our own peril.

While disguised as measures to alleviate domestic scarcities for poor Wanjiku, they are rip-offs that take jobs abroad, reduce potential taxable output and revenues, attract high domestic prices for imported commodities and enrich well-connected elites, never the farmer, let alone the consumer. As the current tussle between maize millers, government and traders shows, authorities even attempt to issue price controls to imports on the high seas. In this grab for the *unga* market solely for millers, traders and intermediaries as beneficiaries of

the duty-free facilities, there is not a maize farmer in sight. Patriotic leaders should implement a major reset towards domestic production of these imported goods fronted by political elites and their laid-back benefactors in the private sector. Domestic production potentially is a key driver for economic recovery, employment, domestic incomes and higher revenues, including duty remissions saved.

Promote production, savings

All taxes adversely hit savings and investment, and negatively impact second-round job creation and output. While promoting the hustler segment would reward the KRA, savings are low at low levels of income while rising with higher income. In contrast, taxation of the rich has the least effect on efficiency or dampening of the ability or willingness to work.

Steep taxation in the hustler segment would retard recovery among low-income earners. The large hustler segment of the Kenyan labour force contains a significant pool of educated but unemployed youth. Stiff taxation could be a disincentive, driving away the ideas in a key segment of human resources educated mainly at government expense. The hunt for revenues could dampen innovativeness and kill off nascent productive ideas.

As an example, we have world-class initiatives in Kenya demonstrating that the hunt for tax revenues is never a zero-sum game. Consider MPesa. When it set up and gained traction in the economy, it made a mountain of profits and both the consumers of services and MPesa investors added a new layer of revenues to the exchequer. But no one can argue in 2023 that the Kenya economy did not socio-economically gain more than revenues, given its place as a role model for national transactions, connectedness and financial inclusiveness.

In taxation of bottom-up operators, therefore, the segment called the hustler economy needs more granular thinking. The struggling but low-tax revenue contributor could be the predominant workshop of future workers. Stiff taxation now would feed the current economic contraction and increase poverty. Tax policy for recovery should nevertheless, and especially, favour growth of jobs and incomes irrespective of the lowest and top marginal tax rates.

Address revenue leakages

Kenya should be active in collaborative efforts to staunch leaking revenues payable by foreign entities. Key institutions mandated to this task are the CBK, Treasury and KRA.

Economists and financial analysts detect cracks via the usual suspects: grand corruption, transfer pricing, misinvoicing, trade in contraband and trafficking in substandard goods. Kenya should become vigilant, tracking the last US President in the field of litigations to understand how far the rich will go to avoid taxes. A stark example is flower farming in Kenya. While Dutch firms reportedly make profits of US\$250 million a year for their domestic flower market, their subsidiaries in Kenya report losses to KRA.

The High-Level Panel on Illicit Financial Flows from Africa, led by Thabo Mbeki, released a report showing how African countries need closer collaboration and coordination to deal with the problem. It demonstrated Africa loses in excess of US\$50 to US\$60 billion every year to industrial countries and tax havens through illicit flows. Kenya, with its open capital account, was specifically cited as having lost an estimated Sh160 billion up to 2011.

The upshot is an economy that comes short on potential revenues while the originators of illicit flows enjoy its wealth abroad. Kenya then runs deficits while resorting to financing with domestic and external borrowing. Our woes escalate with risks of both underdevelopment and debt distress as is the case currently.

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

kenya lens

■ POLITICAL TACTICS

SAME SCRIPT, DIFFERENT ACTORS

As they play 'good cop, bad cop', making seemingly contrasting statements, it is highly possible that President Ruto and DP Gachagua are working in tandem

● BY OSCAR OBONYO

Going by their seemingly conflicting pronouncements and actions lately, could President William Ruto and his deputy, Rigathi Gachagua, be playing 'good cop, bad cop'?

While, for instance, the President has stressed the importance of national cohesion and assured Kenyans that his government will work for them all no matter whom they voted for last, his principal assistant has wasted no opportunity to publicly push the case for those who supported Kenya Kwanza to access the national cake.

But it is his latest pronouncement, equating government to a private company with shares, that has triggered an emotional national discourse. Speaking last Sunday in Kericho County, the country's second-in-command suggested that those with "majority shares" will get priority in accessing government jobs and contracts, while those with "fewer shares" or "none" will wait in the queue for their turn.

That the President could be speaking through his deputy is high possible, persuaded by the fact that Ruto has not publicly reprimanded Gachagua for his latest outburst. And even if he has done so privately, it is curious that the DP keeps repeating the same "mistake".

Yet still, sentiments by senior government officials in Ruto's administration, including Transport and Infrastructure Cabinet Secretary Kipchumba Murkomen and his Interior counterpart, Prof Kithure Kindiki, to the effect that they will only attend to the needs of governors who supported Ruto's presidential bid or who keep away from the ongoing public rallies organised by opposition leader Raila Odinga, buttress Gachagua's viewpoint.



The sentiments, also expressed by Senate Minority Leader Aaron Cheruiyot, make it appear that Ruto and Gachagua could be reading from the same script.

A well-known technique in law enforcement and in negotiations within diplomatic circles, the 'good cop, bad cop' tactic aims to win the trust of the unsuspecting opponent and in the process milk concessions.

Renowned American organisational psychologist Prof Bob Sutton posits that the reason why encountering both a nice and a nasty person is more effective than dealing with either of them is because of the "psychological contrast effect".

"In essence, the impact is to make the 'carrots' offered by the good cop seem even sweeter and the 'sticks' offered by the bad cop even harsher," says Sutton.

The portrayal of Ruto as the good cop and Gachagua as the bad cop is deliberate and understandable. Alive to the fact that as President he is a symbol of national unity, the United Democratic Alliance (UDA) party leader has elected to stay in the background and speak less but act firmly as intended. Instead, the DP is the one openly verbalising the President's plot.

The DP, opines Dr Henry Wabwire, is happy about the current arrangement for two main reasons – that it endears him to Ruto's populous Kalenjin community, whose goodwill he requires to succeed his boss, and that it places him at a vantage point to build his political base in his Mt Kenya backyard.

The arrangement also enables Gachagua to shield the President from unwarranted political confrontation. Even as Ruto embraces the opposition, for instance, Gachagua last Sunday declared himself the State House *nyapara*

Continued on Page 11

kenya lens

■ KIHARU MP'S SOCIAL MEDIA PAGES FULL OF POSTS LAUDING HIS LEADERSHIP CREDENTIALS

NYORO WAITING IN THE WINGS

Although most Kenya Kwanza leaders have maintained an awkward public silence after Gachagua's latest verbal blunder, concerns over a possible backlash have been expressed at the highest levels

• BY MACHARIA GAI THO

Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua “will gradually get to a point where his public image will be of a political joker who’s out of his depth as DP. And he’s falling into the trap. In a couple of months, no one will take him or what he says seriously”.

That was the prescient observation last October by former Nyeri Town MP Wambugu Ngunjiri in the wake of yet another controversial pronouncement from the DP.

Gachagua clearly did not heed the message, as evidenced by the latest outrageous comment likening the country to a private company in which dividends go only to the ‘shareholders’ who contributed to Kenya Kwanza alliance’s electoral victory. A video of the DP making the comments at a public forum in Kericho County a week ago swiftly went viral, and with probably unintended consequences as opposition chief Raila Odinga was handed a ready weapon in his continuing campaign against President William Ruto’s government. The series of protest rallies organised by the Azimio coalition leader exploited Gachagua’s gaffe to the maximum, playing up the narrative that for the ruling elite, Kenya was a private enterprise in which the proceeds will be shared only within a small circle.

The messaging now from Azimio is that all taxpayers are ‘shareholders’ and must get equal treatment, failure to which they either halt their contributions to the national kitty, or demand that their taxes are ploughed back exclusively to their regions.

Skewed allocations that punished regions which did not vote for the Ruto-Gachagua ticket would indeed be worrying, and would place the

President in a tricky situation as he continues trying to win constituencies that cast their lot with Odinga’s Azimio’s coalition.

Although most Kenya Kwanza leaders maintained an awkward public silence after Gachagua’s latest verbal blunder, *The Weekly Review* learnt from multiple sources that concerns over a possible backlash were expressed at the highest levels. President Ruto, it is understood, did not want to upbraid his deputy, but may have given a tacit okay for other senior leaders to embark on damage-control messaging. That is what may have prompted Prime Cabinet Secretary Musalia Mudavadi to on Wednesday come out with a public assurance that the Kenya Kwanza government serves all Kenyans and would not discriminate on provision of services and distribution of development projects. Speaking, in Gachagua’s presence during the launch of the Nairobi River Commission, Mudavadi said the government will work with all irrespective of political affiliation. “Today, we are in Korogocho and the people here chose their leaders who are not in Kenya Kwanza, and being here is a testament that we are going to work for all Kenyans despite who they voted for,” Mudavadi stated.

When his turn at the podium came, Gachagua walked back to an extent on his earlier statement, telling that crowd that as President, Ruto will serve all Kenyans equally, but he will focus on the party faithful. “President Ruto will serve all Kenyans. He, as the leader of the country, will continue with that work, and I, as the leader of the UDA, will continue to deal with the people of the UDA,” he stated. Gachagua and Mudavadi taking contrary positions on the issue is continuation of a long-simmering rivalry between President Ruto’s two lieutenants, often taking ethnic undertones. The rivalry was seen as soon as Mudavadi, who was still a declared presidential aspirant on his Amani National Congress, spurned overtures from Odinga and then President Uhuru Kenyatta, to join the Ruto side.

He bargained hard and signed a coalition pact securing for himself the office of Prime Cabinet Secretary, a docket unknown in the Constitution but which made him an equal in the power structure to the Deputy President. Gachagua was not amused and his supporters from the Mt Kenya region openly made their discomfort known.

When Ruto won the election and named his Cabinet, he expanded the institution of the Presidency by also incorporating the office of the Prime Cabinet Secretary, effectively giving DP Gachagua and Mudavadi equal billing.

The DP is the one mandated by the Constitution as principal deputy to the President and first in the line of succession. The Prime Cabinet Secretary does not feature at all in the mother law, and even if given extra supervisory powers by the President is legally no more than any other cabinet secretary. That, however, does not placate Gachagua’s supporters, who still see a threat in Mudavadi, especially as he still has his own party independent of the UDA machine.

Gachagua’s supporters also take a dim view of the fact that Mudavadi has tried to actively project himself as the voice of reason and moder-



Kiharu MP Ndindi Nyoro

kenya lens

ation in the Kenya Kwanza government, often coming out with reconciliatory statements following the DPs' hardline or inflammatory comments. Mudavadi's Western Kenya brigade in Kenya Kwanza has always been quick to come to his defence any time he is under fire from the Gachagua camp. It could not have been lost on Mudavadi that when he opened his mouth on government being fair to all, he would be seen as not merely stating a commonsense official position, but repudiating the DPs' 'shareholder' comments. And Gachagua's supporters would be wondering if he merely exploited an opening to take a dig at the DP, or whether he was nudged into it by the President. Gachagua's comments also came at a time when a campaign projecting Kiharu MP Ndiriri Nyoro as an alternative leader for the Mt Kenya region has resurfaced.

Nyoro was launching a bursary fund in his constituency on February 15, when speaker after speaker touted his credentials for the Mt Kenya leadership baton, and the region's best hope to succeed President Ruto. Murang'a Senator Joe Nyutu declared it was the county's turn to produce a president from Mt Kenya as Kiambu had

the first and fourth President while Nyeri had the third. "The deputy presidency has now gone to Nyeri, thereby bypassing us, and we are now saying it is Murang'a's turn through Mr Nyoro," he asserted. Dagoretti South MP John Kiarie said: "Nyoro has a brain to nurture. He is akin to our political cardinal... his nationally acclaimed brain should not go to waste and Kiharu will (benefit) should he become the next President."

The calls were echoed by nearly a dozen other guests, and not just from Murang'a or the Mt Kenya region, but as far as Rift Valley and Western Kenya. Gachagua's Mt Kenya supporters were furious, launching scathing attacks on Nyoro. Mr Martin Warui, chair of the 'Mt Kenya Million Plus for Gachagua' campaign group, charged that it was ambition taken too far for a "mere MP to start thinking of dislodging a deputy president". Asking him to acknowledge that "Gachagua is the point of reference in all matters Mountain". Nyoro beat a quick 'it wasn't me' retreat, pleading unconvincingly that he had no influence on what his guests chose to say at his meeting.

It is not the first time that Nyoro has been touted as an alternative to Gachagua, with his so-

cial media pages full of seemingly orchestrated posts lauding his leadership credentials and the faith Ruto has in him. Indeed, the biggest worry for Gachagua is that Nyoro might not be just some over-ambitious upstart, but one positioning himself with Ruto's blessings. While President Ruto has himself often praised Gachagua for his forthright and uncompromising mien, it is also likely that he might not be too comfortable with a DP who sometimes projects himself as an equal 'shareholder', and seems to have prematurely started his own presidential campaign.

Gachagua has been working hard to ensure that the few pockets in the region that had remained loyal to Kenyatta in supporting Odinga's bid are brought into the Kenya Kwanza tent. However, there is also a keen awareness in the inner circles that Gachagua was never the favourite of the Mt Kenya leaders who had been with Ruto well before he came on board. Many of those upstaged by his rise may have grudgingly accepted the reality once Ruto picked him for running-mate, but are biding their time, ready to pounce in case of any missteps. He is not disappointing.

Gachagua, Ruto reading from the same page

Continued from Page 9

to ensure that those who voted for Kenya Kwanza are at the front of the queue of those seeking favours from the President. The only "little concern", perhaps, is that the DP is so brazen in his fight-back and vicious in his attacks on former President Kenyatta to the extent of being viewed – rightly or wrongly – as attempting to revive and entrench the one-party dictatorial regime.

The talk of granting favours to certain communities in service delivery and job opportunities has not only irked the Azimio leadership, with Raila protesting at what he considers "balkanising of the country along tribal lines", but also caught the attention of second-liberation lobbyists, former Chief Justice Dr Willy Mutunga and clergyman Rev Dr Timothy Njoya. Mutunga is now warning of a revolution, while Njoya warns that the DP will quickly bring down Ruto's administration. But according to National Assembly Deputy Speaker Gladys Boss Shollei, Gachagua is only affirming a "simple fact": that loyalty should be rewarded.

Indeed, a quick look at Ruto's Cabinet and other senior appointments to government confirm this fact – that the DP speaks to the heart of his boss. Article 27 of the Constitution requires of the appointing authority to ensure that appointments to government and public institutions are executed in an open, transparent and an-all inclusive manner, taking into consideration regional and disability factors. Protests over violation of this provision of the Constitution and alleged witch-hunt by the Ruto administration have been on for some time now. Upon taking oath of office on September 13 last

year, Gachagua, in a rather bizarre and embarrassing display of rage, launched a scathing attack on Kenyatta, right in front of invited dignitaries who included African heads of state, for "crippling the country's economy" and for allegedly presiding over a dictatorial regime that targeted politicians allied to his then DP, Ruto.

Only two months ago, Gachagua was on the receiving end of attacks for bullying Nairobi County Governor Johnson Sakaja, whom he accused of harassing businesspeople from the Mt Kenya region following the governor's directive to keep public transport vehicles out of the city centre. Embattled Jubilee Secretary-General Jeremiah Kioni last month declared that the DP was loose-tongued and suggested that the President was (mis)using the Gachagua to "hit out at others". According to the former Ndaragua MP, Ruto has deployed the services of his deputy to address delicate issues touching on the Mt Kenya region, including the coffee, tea

and milk sectors.

Kioni is among a set of politicians in the region who believe the role given to the DP is a set-up because the issues at hand are fairly explosive and potent with political repercussions. But Ruto has refuted claims that he has given his deputy rope to hang himself politically. And at every opportunity, the DP has warned – probably to the chagrin of his boss – that those who "masterminded state capture" under Kenyatta's tenure will soon "face the music".

The Deputy President's stand contradicts that of his boss. "I am acutely aware that our country is at a stage where we need all hands on deck. We do not have the luxury of looking back. We do not have the luxury to point fingers. We have to work together for a prosperous Kenya," Ruto said last August upon being declared the winner of the presidential contest. Never mind, though, that the President's actions today do not reflect these and a host of other promises he made. Noting, for instance, that the President has been holding closed door meetings with legislators allied to the rival Azimio la Umoja camp, Kioni accuses Ruto of being on a mission to destabilise the opposition.

The Jubilee party politician points to the replacements and alleged sacking of individuals appointed by Kenyatta to government positions, including parastatal bodies, and the push for the Kenyatta family to pay taxes as "glaring" instances of political revenge. He lists revocation of a host of government policies and halting of several projects, including roads, initiated by the former President, as part of the revenge mission. Whether playing 'good cop, bad cop' works for or boomerangs against the UDA remains to be seen.



Jubilee Secretary-General Jeremiah Kioni

the limelight



A man accused of pickpocketing is attacked during an All Progressives Congress rally at Teslim Bologum Stadium in Lagos on February 21, ahead of the Nigerian presidential poll on February 25. PHOTO | AFP



Ali al-Bash and his mother, Amina, drink coffee at home in a building damaged by the 7.8-magnitude quake in Aleppo city, Syria, on February 21. Once a major commercial hub, Aleppo had been battered by over a decade of war when the quake struck early this month. PHOTO | AFP



A photo shows the filling of the hold on the UN-chartered vessel *MV Valsamitis* while it is loaded to deliver 25,000 tonnes of Ukrainian wheat to Kenya and 5,000 tonnes to Ethiopia, at the port of Chornomorsk on February 18. PHOTO | AFP



President William Ruto arrives in Korogocho, Nairobi, on February 22, to unveil the Nairobi River Commission. DENNIS ONSONGO | NATION



Ragpickers scout for re-usable materials at Pirana landfill on the outskirts of Ahmedabad, western India, on February 20. PHOTO | AFP



A supporter of former US President Donald Trump waits outside of Trump's President Day event at the Hilton Palm Beach Airport in West Palm Beach, Florida, on February 20. PHOTO | AFP

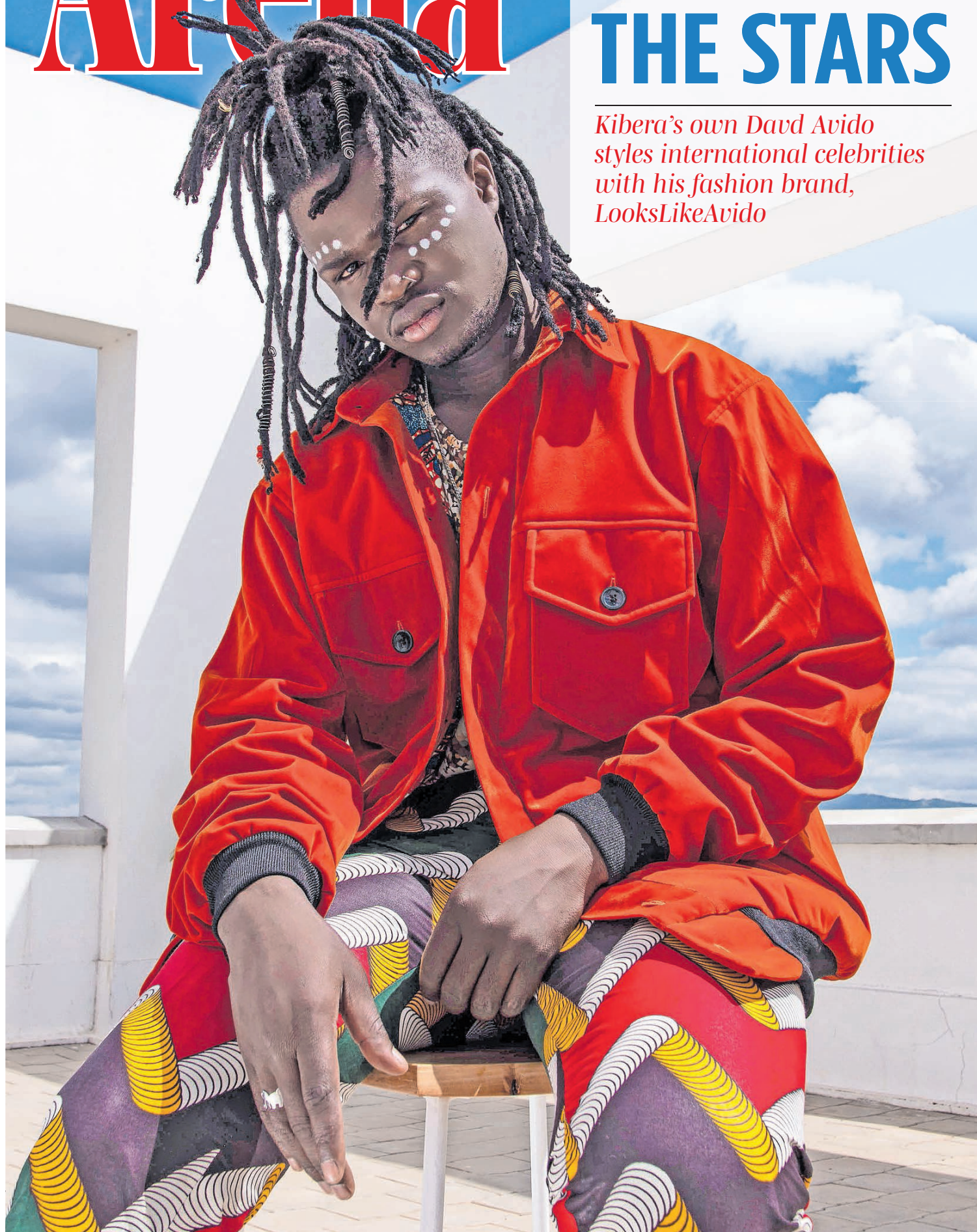


Alex Morgan raises the 2023 SheBelieves Cup trophy as the US Women's National Soccer Team celebrates following their match against Brazil at Toyota Stadium in Texas, on February 22. PHOTO | AFP

The Arena

DRESSING THE STARS

*Kibera's own Davd Avido
styles international celebrities
with his fashion brand,
LooksLikeAvido*



OPEN SPACE

■ MIND SPEAK



Maycy Chepngetich
The government has to look into the use of contraception by teenagers. Contraceptives are meant to help with birth control and as preventive measures against sexually transmitted diseases. Sadly, the youth now engage in casual sex due to easy access of contraceptives. It's important to speak about values. More emphasis should be put on abstinence.
— Former student leader, Eldoret Polytechnic



Arfon Ibrahim Adan
Times have changed due to the influence of the West on issues about sex. A lot of information is being peddled about early pregnancies, same-sex relationships and gay rights. Urging teen girls or boys to abstain from sex won't stop them from experimenting. Let's just ensure the youth have access to reproductive health education. Teach young girls and boys on how to value and respect themselves.
— Customer care representative



Fred Dawo
Contraceptives are the most preferred means of protection from sexually transmitted diseases. We should guarantee easy access to condoms and other forms of contraceptives to protect the youth from infections. The youth account for more than 60 per cent of the population and are also the most productive in society. Let's protect the youth.
— Student leader, University of Nairobi



Sandra Odhiambo
Sex education is not even in schools anymore, so how will abstinence work? This was not well thought-out. The government has to make a greater commitment towards ensuring the youth get access to sex education. Everyone advocating for this has a sister, auntie or teenage female friend. This will promote sexually transmitted infections.
— Entrepreneur

The horror of bogus varsity courses and fake degrees

Parents have lost millions of shillings, while students have been left holding unrecognised certificates, exposing them to rejection in the job market

● BY MOSES OJUANG'

Few things are more demoralising than a sudden discovery that you have been living a lie, chasing a mirage, holding smoke in your clenched hands. To have spent years in college, only to be told that the institution you attended is not recognised and as such, its diplomas, certificates and degrees are not even worth the paper they are written on, is tragic.

It is the height of madness, it is the genesis of depression and drop in self-worth. Some-time back in 2010, the Ministry of Higher Education jolted Kenyans into reality by stating that it was about to close some 592 technical and vocational education and training institutes not registered with the ministry.

The ministry gave a time limit to these illegal institutions, stating: "At the expiry of the deadline, all those colleges which have not passed the vetting will be closed down without further consultations with the proprietors."

This was not the first time the government went full throttle to clean up the higher education sector. Unscrupulous 'businessmen' were all over the country and colleges were mushrooming everywhere – fake colleges sans accreditation, sans qualified teachers, sans everything required for them to be referred to as learning centres. These 'institutions' operate illegally, admitting students and collecting fees from Kenyans.

The battle against these colleges have been waged for a very long time, albeit periodically, but no sooner are they shut down than others sprout in their place. Even in 2010, when the government was taking action against such colleges, the press reported that "the situation is the toughest test then-minister William Ruto has faced since his appointment as high-

er education minister less than a year ago".

Today, Ruto is the President and as such "the buck stops with him". If at the time it was a tough test, it was because there were many powerful cartels and people behind these colleges. He could not have stepped on such toes. Today, he can see to it that this dangerous game with our youth is brought to a screeching halt. The vetting of colleges will also afford parents and prospective applicants increased peace of mind, guaranteeing that they put their money only into institutions that are registered with the government and offer approved courses.

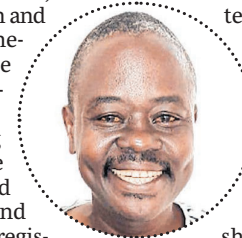
Over the past few years, parents and guardians have lost millions of shillings to bogus institutions, while students have been left holding unrecognised certificates, exposing them to rejection in the job market.

Corrupt government officials have also been issuing registration certificates to colleges that fail to meet the requirements, worsening the bourgeoning of deficient institutions.

This college issue is compounded by the fact that there is a hunger for higher education that has not been satiated in Kenya. We cannot leave our youth in the rough hands of streetwise conmen. The youth needs protection and peace of mind while it pursues its future which, if good, shall be good for the whole society. It is time to act and weed out these undesirable and dangerous institutions from our midst.

Mr Ojuang' comments on social issues. (mosesojuang@gmail.com)

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



MODERNISING PAYMENT SYSTEMS

TIME TO DITCH THE CHEQUE



• BY WAGA ODONGO

One of the few consolations of climate change is that in about a century, Britain shall sink into the North Sea. It is just deserts that the country that kick-started the Industrial Revolution gets done in by flood waters from increased fossil fuel burning.

The litany of evils the British invented and have spread across the globe are too many to list: concentration camps, Manchester United, machine guns and, of course, the English language.

Their nonsensical language, a temporary inconvenience I am addressing you in as we await the eventual global switch to Mandarin, has a saying: Don't look a gift horse in the mouth.

The saying makes no sense (why would anyone want to subject themselves to equine halitosis?) as is the case with most English proverbs. (Don't worry comrades, all Chinese sayings are immediately obvious).

The saying means that we shouldn't find fault with something that was done in our favour. So don't complain when you are handed a gift.

This was exactly my thinking when I read that De La Rue was freezing its operations in Nairobi and as a result, banks need to figure out where to source cheque books for their clients. Some banks are advising clients to use other payment methods as they try to manage the shortage. One bank in the country has already decided to cease entirely issuing cheques to its account holders.

This news is both good and bad: first, the Kenyan economy is in such bad shape that even those with a licence to print money can't get by. This, however, is a great opportunity that has been handed to us, so that we can finally phase out cheques.

Cheques are an inefficient, time-wasting chore and a security risk; we finally have a valid reason to stop issuing them.

The writing is on the wall. The



value of transactions done by cheques went up from Sh2.05 trillion to Sh2.54 trillion in the decade between 2011 and 2021, while the number issued fell from 18.2 million to 16.4 million. For context, the value of mobile money transactions has sextupled in the same time from Sh1.17 trillion to Sh6.87 trillion. Cheque values are stagnant and the number issued is trending downwards.

I am sure everyone in Kenya who has ever been paid by cheque has a horror story to recount. You do the job and then rush and get to the office to collect your cheque, only to be told that the person who signs the cheques has not deemed it fit to descend from his throne on Mt Olympus to sign the damn thing. Your cheque with your name and funds just sits there as it awaits authorisation for what might feel like millennia. If the money is in the account, why take this circuitous and torturous route to pay people?

The endurance of the cheque has something, I think, to do with control. The cheque is signed by some big shot who gets to feel like the President signing a bill into law as the rest wait anxiously. It is the final act of a power play by those in charge. It is such an inconvenience that it became one of the most famous lies in busi-

ness: "The cheque is in the mail."

I once got a call from my bank about a cheque I had deposited that had an issue. My government name is actually Odongo Waga, but the cheque I had submitted was addressed to some impostor called Waga Odongo. The lady wanted to know whether or not I was me or whether this was just the fraudsters from Mulot in Bomet County diversifying from hacking bank accounts. It took a while to convince the lady that names are interchangeable and that if I was committing fraud I wouldn't be so stupid as to deposit the cheque into the account myself. If the money was wired into my account I wouldn't have to explain myself to this bossy human abacus that the money was, indeed, mine.

The government itself stopped issuing cheques over a decade ago and the Central Bank in the National Payment Strategy 2022-2025 says that the decision made government payments safer.

Cabinet ditched paper a few months ago and even on the continent, countries like South Africa and Namibia have seen the back of cheques.

The shortage of cheques is an opportunity to drag banks kicking and screaming into the sunlit uplands of modernity. We can't pretend to the world that we are the silicon savannah, birthplace

of MPesa, then ask venture capitalists to write us cheques for fintech companies.

A banker's cheque itself is a calculated insult. Banks have access to several instant payment facilities; why choose the slowest, most cumbersome, inconvenient and indeed most expensive way to make a payment? It is a bit like rebels breaking into a government armoury and only carting away the smoke grenades.

Cheques are an anachronism. All improvements by the CBK to lower clearance times from five days to one have been off the back of electronic transmission systems. If cheques require a digital system to speed them up, why keep the paper?

It is as though we put the load on a cart hitched to a donkey then load the donkey and cart onto a lorry to speed up the process. Why not just ditch the donkey? The process is already more electronic than snail mail.

There is no risk of exclusion of businesses that rely on cheques as the CBK worries about in its payment report. If a business has a cheque book it has heard of MPesa, RTGS and PesaLink. If it hasn't, granddad needs to hand over the reins to his kids.

Banking needs a reality-check: it's time to ditch the cheque.

Mr Odongo is a Software Engineer
wagaodongo@gmail.com

FASHION AND PASSION

LOOKS LIKE A VICTOR

David Avido has earned big bucks and a big name dressing international celebrities with his brand, LooksLikeAvido, while putting Kibera on the global map

• BY EDDY ASHIOYA

The first thing he ever made was a pair of boxers.

“When I was young, I never wore boxers. My mother could not afford it. So, when I learned how to sew, that was the first thing I made. I wanted to feel how people feel when they wear boxers, says David Ochieng ‘Avido’, the founder of fashion brand LooksLikeAvido and the Kibera Fashion Week.

Needless to say, Avido can now afford, if not make, as many boxers as he wants. He has done well for himself, so well, in fact, that his fashion brand has set him on runways across the world. This time round, he is in Melbourne, Australia. “I am here to learn. I am also here to look for opportunities for my community in the form of exchange programmes.”

There is a popular truism that is thrown around carelessly in high-brow streets: “If you cannot afford fashion, you must settle for clothes.” Settle, however, has never been a word that exists in Avido’s dictionary, declaring early and feeling self-righteously that he had a higher calling than to be a mere *fundi* (tailor). At times, speaking to him you glimpse his dogged talent, the thing that has put him on that stage, the sense of a giant marzipan man oozing into whatever shape fits the moment—marzipan concern, mar-

David Ochieng ‘Avido’, the founder of fashion brand LooksLikeAvido and the Kibera Fashion Week. PHOTOPOOL

zipan defiance — as it turns from side to side. But his talent is precocious, a kind of affirmation. If you are still waiting to be convinced about the church of Avido, look no further than one of his high-profile congregants, in the mien of Keringet Water, who have just made him a brand ambassador.

“The billboards will be out in a fortnight, but you get the exclusive story.” He says they chose him because they wanted someone who is in touch with the grassroots and who has not compromised his beliefs. “And someone who is proud of the rich culture of where they have come from, just like Keringet.” His enthusiasm bordering on an advertorial, I skew the subject away. But not before he tells me that his contract is for one year, subject to renewal. “The chedars are not too shabby either,” he says, smiling like a man for whom life’s riches had come all at once.

But that’s not where the story begins. Imagine you were born 26 years ago somewhere in Kibera,

as many legends are. Your mother, a house help, washes clothes to feed your family (Avido is the eldest in a family of four). You finish your studies at Mbagathi Primary School and, as the first born, assume more responsibilities in the home. With the vigour of youth, you work at a construction site for six months to support the family. But at 16, there’s only so much weight your body can shoulder, even if the streets made you. You join high school but drop out because there is no money to continue, then relentlessly enrol in adult classes to study and score a sturdy D+ in your Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education exam. Not too bad, considering you skipped Form 2. And 3. And 4.

You join a soccer team, then a dance team, but the meagre pay hardly moves the needle. You are 20 when you stumble upon fashion, and the needle finally turns. You get financial support to join Buruburu Institute of Fine Arts. Slowly, you start to patch your life

together, and things start looking up. You are putting the hood in adulthood. Crushing it.

LooksLikeAvido, your eponymous fashion label is born, inspired by your time as a dancer. The customised outfits are liked by many people and so you go all out into the fashion business—doing things with panache, gusto and a tinge of simmering rebellion. The dream gets bigger. People begin to notice. Everyone starts looking — first at you, then for you. Bruno Mars. Romain Virgo. Even the patron saint of girl power, Beyoncé, feels like you are tailored for each other and in no time, you two are collaborating. At 20, you are living your wildest dreams. Not many make it there.

You are now organising your second Kibera Fashion Week because you saw how impactful the first one was. The railway line that cuts through the heart of Kibera is your runway. Bodaboda riders and welders provide the light because, as you say, “People say Kibera is





Emmah Adanah models during the Kibera Fashion Week 2022. PHOTOPOOL

not safe at night. We will hold the event at night.” It worked in 2022, what’s to stop it from working in 2023 and building on the 500+ guests who attended? “I created this show to create self-confidence for people who were born in Kibera. Whether it is *jua kali* or white collar jobs, everyone is playing their part for a better Kenya. You have to learn and respect people for what they do, is the message I want to spread,” he says, taking a jibe at the plastic glamour of most people wanting to showcase their skills and creations only in high-class areas.

“I want artists to be appreciated for their work and effort. The aspect of working together creates relationships for long-term opportunities. It’s not a competition, it’s a collaboration,” says Avido.

There’s a certain kind of longing experienced by the kid who is often dismissed as the indiscriminate hypebeast. Avido understood that longing because he never rid himself of it, regardless of how successful he became. “This year, I am planning to create an exchange programme where our local artists will go outside the country to learn about their craft, because travelling helps you understand a lot of stuff in life.” That’s what brings him to his three-week staycation in Australia, where he will be partnering with the University of Australia and Sanaa Festival, a precursor to his trip to Germany, where he will be partnering with Cologne University, the Berlin Fashion Week and Bonn University. These are the strings that he hopes to thread into the fabric of his networking and lift others

THE BEAUTY OF KIBERA

Kibera Fashion Week showcases the beauty of the informal settlement of Kibera, challenges exploitative global supply chains and changes the discourse around fashion from the perspective of the global south. The project was initiated by David Avido of LooksLikeAvido in collaboration with the Goethe-Institut, Nairobi Design Week, Maasai Mbili and EUNIC Kenya and is funded as part of the European Spaces of Culture, with over KSh5 million pumped into this year’s edition.

LooksLikeAvido was part of Beyoncé’s 2020 Black is King album project about amazing people in the world creating opportunities and impact with their businesses. David has a dozen employees and is also listed in Beyoncé’s Directory of Black Businesses.

Avido has had the international press rolling out the red carpet for him, with features in leading fashion magazines and news channels such as Vogue Italia, The Sauce, Africa News, Essence and Al Jazeera.

LooksLikeAvido has dressed celebrities like Chronixx, Buju Buntun, Ty Dolla Sign, Bruno Mars, Alaine, Ce’cile, Christopher Martin, Romain Virgo, Jah Cure and former President Uhuru Kenyatta.

with him. If not lift, then at least hand them the rope to pull themselves up with.

“Art is just not about earning an income,” he says, “but also about making an impact.” How does it feel to be on top of the world? “I feel like I am doing what I wanted to do and achieve. My purpose is to change my community by creating opportunities.”

He tells me of his vocational training for 30 members of the Kibera community — 15 deaf women, 15 young mothers — and training them to make clothes for six months, for free, then securing their internships and work placements with partners like Sandstorm Kenya. Is that his purpose? “I am more of a community organiser. I champion the problems and things that affect the community and create light for my people. If you can shed light for the young-

er generation, they are going to change the world.”

This year, he says, he is looking to work with anyone who is bringing opportunities to Kibera. He already has several projects in place: he is sponsoring ten children and making school uniforms for others. “I believe that if they can stay in school, they can do better.” Where does his giving heart come from? “When I was young, I needed a lot. If someone had held my hand, I might have been further than I am. Besides, giving is therapeutic for me. I don’t wait for them to ask; I do it of my own volition.” *Tenda wema nenda zako* (Do good and go on your way), the Swahili say.

“Every time I sell clothes, 20 per cent goes into my NGO, the Avido Foundation.” Through the foundation, he gave out over 28,000 face masks in 2020, getting commen-

dations from as high up as Former President Uhuru Kenyatta. “That 20 per cent also caters for the sewing programme, paying school fees and making school uniforms.”

Money talks. What does his say? “Money is just a tool. My challenges earlier in life and now are different but not having money young made me understand how that feels. I believe God wanted me to experience that so I can learn that it is just a tool and appreciate the fact that I have it now. I use it to improve my community.”

Avido, he says, struggles to help himself find more of himself. He wants to learn himself and make time for the things he loves, especially because his ambition has come at a price — high expectations of many people asking for help. “It’s very hard to say no, but before I help people, I have to research them first. People can use you if you are not careful.” What’s his idea of failure? “Not believing in yourself. No matter how many times people push you and your mindset is wrong, you won’t achieve. Whether today is a good day or a bad day, at least create something.”

At 26, have things turned out the way he expected? “One of my main goals this year is to create an exchange programme. I have short-term goals that will lead me to it. Pushing myself more and enjoying family time, coupled with a great team, is what will make everything work.” EB White, writer of the popular children’s novel, *Stuart Little*, said that luck is not something you mention in the presence of self-made men. So, with all due respect to EB White, is Avido smart or just lucky? “I wouldn’t say I am lucky. I am street-smart. There are many people who are more talented than me, but I am smart enough not to be greedy or jealous or too ambitious without a good work ethic. Ambition without work is fantasy.”

Be that as it may, he understands that fantasy is the stuff of what dreams are made. And what are men without their dreams?

How best would he summarise himself? “Even if you take fashion out of me, it is my personality that defines me. The grit I have in me is what makes me who I am, otherwise, I could just be any regular *fundi mtaani* (local tailor).”

“*Me ni boy wa mtaani* (I am just a local boy),” he styles himself. That boy would be proud of the man he now is: from having the weight of the world on his shoulders, looks like Avido (I couldn’t help it) has the world at his feet.

eddieashioya@gmail.com

ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT

THE SWEET SCENT OF SUCCESS

● BY SINDA MATIKO

Long before Rachel Sintamei decided to do what she does now, she had trained as a Christian Religious Education and History teacher whose only ambition was to work in the capital city of Nairobi.

“Getting a job in Nairobi wasn’t easy so the only option I had was to go back home to Narok and I loathed the idea,” she says over a glass of cold water, bursting into laughter seconds later.

She has just finished taking stock of her inventory. “Last week was Valentines, a busy week for me. I’m sorry we couldn’t meet then,” she apologises. We are seated in a botanical backyard a short distance from Sintamei Flower Shop on Peponi Road in Westlands, Nairobi, with a perfect view of her business.

Colourful, medium-sized buckets containing fresh bouquets of roses, lilies, tulips, gardenia, calla lilies, Gerbera daisies, Baby’s Breath and Birds of Paradise are neatly arranged on a zigzag metal rack.

To her, flowers are to land what a rainbow is to the sky – bursts of colour you cannot help but marvel at.

The 30-year-old self-taught floral designer chuckles again, wiping water droplets off her lips.

“I laugh because my parents really wanted me back in Narok, since I had no business living in Nairobi,” she explains. “Now I do and I have also employed four young people to help me manage Sintamei Flowers.”

While she failed to get a teaching job in Nairobi, Sintamei was lucky to find work in customer care for a startup company, where she worked for a year-and-a-half before leaving in 2018. For a year she toyed with several business ideas and when she finally zeroed in on one, the Covid-19 pandemic hit.

“I was planning on starting a candle business because I could make them at home. Then I had another idea – of becoming a sommelier because I am good with wines as well. It’s at that point that the flower business idea hit me. I did some digging and realised it

Although Rachel Sintamei started her retail flower shop with nil capital, she now grosses Sh800,000 per month and plans to go into farming and exports



Rachel Sintamei of Sinta Flowers with a bouquet of roses at her shop on Peponi Road, Nairobi, on February 21.
FRANCIS NDERITU | NATION

would not be as capital-intensive as the other two.”

She had no money to invest, but she came up with a plan. “I used to buy myself flowers, so I asked my florist if we could have an arrangement where I advertised bouquets online and they sent me the processed product to sell. They agreed.”

Having been very active online, Sintamei had built a good following on Twitter, which currently stands at 28,000-plus.

“I would take photos from my florist and advertise them online. Then I began receiving orders and made my commission.”

And thus Sintamei Flowers was born. For two years, from the comfort of her bedroom, Sintamei made her cut, and as the numbers of orders grew, she needed a physical station. That is how she ended up on Peponi road.

Starting off with no capital, the business now generates an average gross revenue of Sh800,000 a month. Thirty per cent of that goes into operations and a substantial amount is ploughed back into the business.

“The Covid-19 pandemic really pushed my business growth because everybody was home and flowers were the new thing in town, offering hope, I guess. In the beginning, orders were few and far between. She sold two or three bouquets in a week, then the orders began to increase, rising to 50 per week.

“At some point I had a breakthrough and began getting consistent income from selling online. I employed a florist and two delivery guys to help me manage the orders. This relieved me a lot because I was also able to study marketing.”

Simon Mageto, 26, has been with Sintamei for two years. “I am a florist and my job basically is to prepare the flowers, store them, ensure they are well hydrated, sorted and arranged. I help in designing bouquets like these ones here,” he says, pointing at a freshly made arrangement of lilies, ready for delivery.

The business has never hit a plateau, says Sintamei. “There is always business because flowers



Rachel Sintamei of Sinta Flowers at her shop on Peponi Road, Nairobi, on February 21.
FRANCIS NDERITU | NATION

are perishable but also very addictive. In a week the business processes between 100-150 orders. The Valentines week was different; we did about 500 orders. It has always been like that on Valentines.”

To ensure constant clientele, Sintamei has made her package prices as affordable as she possibly can. “A small bouquet goes for KSh1,000 which is a few batches of different flowers, then we

have another for KSh2,500. Our most expensive bouquet sells at KSh4,000. This is an extravagant bouquet when a client really wants to show off. I know there are those who charge more than we do, but for me it’s the vision of the business that I have,”

The prices are not fixed, and could rise to as much as KSh10,000.

“In most cases, bouquets are accompanied by gifts, for which I charge more. For instance, I am just

about to buy a bottle of champagne to accompany a bouquet.” Sintamei also allows clients to send her their choice of gift so that it is sent together with the flowers. “This is part of client service, which is really important in this business. You have to ensure clients trust you by being flexible and understanding.”

At the moment, Sintamei is working on partnering with fragrance stores to expand her business. “I am also working on

how I can serve male clientele. There is this notion that only women should be gifted flowers, but flowers are for everybody. I know men will appreciate a well packaged gift with flowers in it.”

Besides retail sales, Sintamei also flowers on subscription. “I sell to individuals and also supply to establishments, mainly offices, on subscription packages.”

Three years into the business, Sintamei is already harbouring ambitious of getting deeper into the flower industry.

“I believe those who make a lot of money from this business are those who grow flowers. I would love to have a farm because then I can sell to more markets, including exports. But the challenge at the moment is that it’s a capital-intensive undertaking and we are still very young.”

She is also planning to venture into events. “I would love to curate flowery themes for weddings, corporate events and even funerals. All these are money-making avenues.”

Josephat Ngetich makes deliveries for Sintamei and has many tales to tell. “There was this one time a guy was trying to apologise to his girlfriend. He sent a bouquet which she refused to take. I had to calm her down and persuade her to accept the gift – in the interest of both our client and our business,” he says, laughing as he recalls the incident.

tmatiko@ke.nationmedia.com



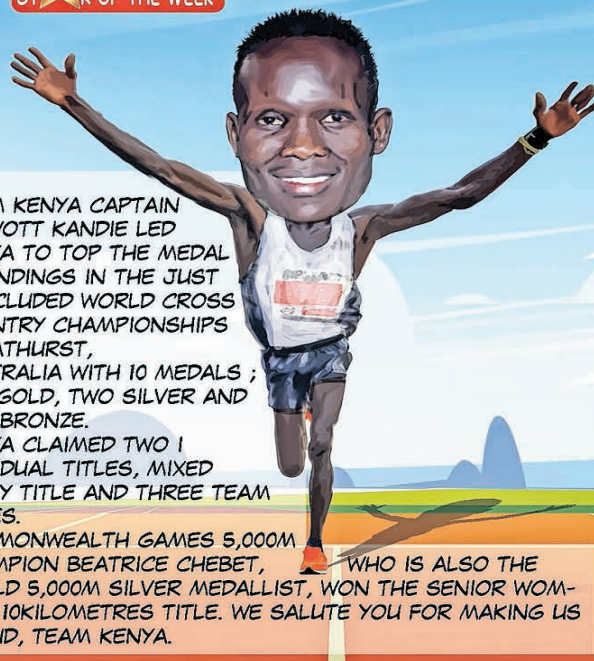
WOMAN POWER

MARY WANJA MUGO IS THE COUNTRY DIRECTOR, EDUKANS, WHICH WAS FOUNDED IN 2002 AS A DUTCH NGO WITH HEADQUARTERS IN THE NETHERLANDS AND COUNTRY OFFICES IN KENYA, UGANDA, MALAWI AND ETHIOPIA. IT IS AN EDUCATION EXPERT ORGANISATION WHICH PROMOTES QUALITY BASIC EDUCATION, YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND EMPLOYABILITY PROGRAMMES. UNTIL 2022, SOME 97,203 PUPILS (48,769 BOYS AND 48,434 GIRLS) HAVE BENEFITTED FROM INITIATIVES FOR PROMOTING QUALITY EDUCATION. WE CELEBRATE YOUR ASTUTE LEADERSHIP, MADAM MARY.

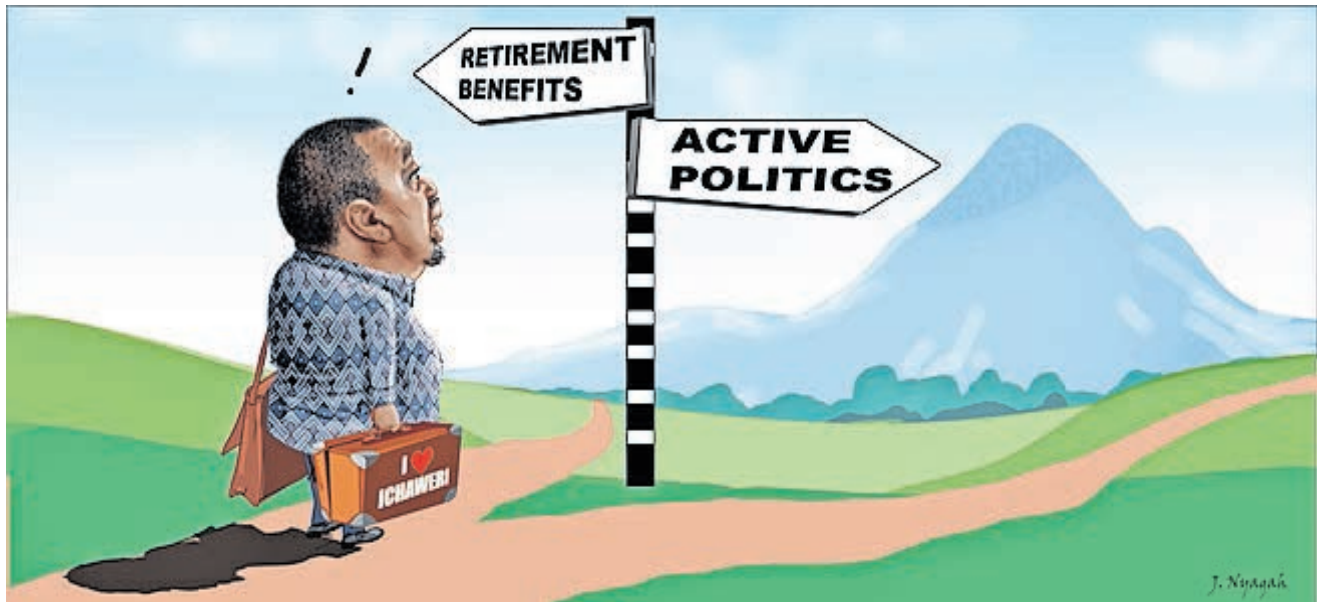


STAR OF THE WEEK

TEAM KENYA CAPTAIN KIBIWOTT KANDIE LED KENYA TO TOP THE MEDAL STANDINGS IN THE JUST CONCLUDED WORLD CROSS COUNTRY CHAMPIONSHIPS IN BATHURST, AUSTRALIA WITH 10 MEDALS ; SIX GOLD, TWO SILVER AND TWO BRONZE. KENYA CLAIMED TWO INDIVIDUAL TITLES, MIXED RELAY TITLE AND THREE TEAM TITLES. COMMONWEALTH GAMES 5,000M CHAMPION BEATRICE CHEBET, WORLD 5,000M SILVER MEDALLIST, WON THE SENIOR WOMEN'S 10KILOMETRES TITLE. WE SALLUTE YOU FOR MAKING US PROUD, TEAM KENYA.



opinion



■ This is why the government should discourage land hoarding for speculative purposes

Yes, tax idle land to encourage production

On December 13, 1999, former President Daniel arap Moi announced that his government had resolved to start imposing tax on idle land with the aim of spurring agricultural production, advising those who could not, for one reason or the other, utilise whatever they owned productively to consider leasing it to those who could.

Considering that Moi's word was law then, it is astonishing that 24 years later, we are still hearing the same thing from Housing Principal Secretary Charles Hinga, who, of course, is more interested in land on which to build decent shelter for the urban poor.

In between these years, the issue has regularly been raised by Lands ministers and PSs in successive governments. For instance, in 2018, then Lands Cabinet Secretary Farida Karoney said virtually the same thing, adding that the objective would be to encourage food production and discourage keeping land idle for speculative purposes. As late as last year, a motion was inconclusively debated in Parliament on the same issue, where representatives of pastoral communities saw a sinister motive to dispossess them of their vast land holdings.

There have always been vast expanses of idle or under-utilised land, both in rural and urban settings, even as the country habitually went through cyclical throes of food scarcity. The disease has regularly been diagnosed and a possible cure prescribed, but the pill has always proved to be too bitter to swallow.



**MAGESHA
NGWIRI**

Unfortunately, the doctors have, seemingly, been content with merely doing their job, leaving someone else to administer the medication. Either there has never been any political will to follow through the sensible measure that would boost food production, or the forces ranged against the idea have been too powerful.

How else can one explain that in a country whose arable land is 48.5 per cent of the land mass while the rest is arid or semi-arid (according to 2020 statistics), there exist huge swathes that lie idle? Even the statistic above does not tell the whole story: only 10 per cent of arable land is actually agriculturally viable since most of the crops grown depend on rainfall, which is becoming scarcer by the year. Why should some individuals own 100,000 acres which they cannot possibly cultivate, while in some areas, five acres makes one a wealthy man?

There is no intention here of straying into the very treacherous territory—that of limiting land ownership, a very hot political potato indeed. What is more pertinent is how the

government can discourage land hoarding for speculative purposes while boosting agricultural production and at the same time ensuring that there is enough land left in urban areas to house the poor. Those who confuse the two issues—tax on idle land and ownership limits—may be doing so with the ulterior motive of ensuring that neither ever sees the light of day, but the time may come when both become absolutely inevitable.

Needless to say, land issues must be handled with great care. It is not enough to make public pronouncements of intent. The first thing to do is to define what constitutes “idle land”. The second would be how to determine what kind of tax to impose, and third, who would benefit from the tax—the national or county governments, or both. The fourth, of course, is to decide how such a tax would be collected. These details would have to be turned into policy and then ratified by Parliament. It would also help to know what safeguards are put in place to ensure the tax does not defeat the purpose for which it is being levied.

andrewngwiri@gmail.com

opinion

■ Just cancel all passports so that anyone who wishes to travel must apply for fresh documents

Kenyan doctors flying abroad? No, lock them up!



MACHARIA
GAITHO

Kenyan leadership is blessed with the most brilliant minds in the entire universe. The latest display of genius comes from eggheads at the Ministry of Health, who have determined after a long and vigorous study that the best medicine for Kenya's broken public health care systems is to imprison doctors within Kenyan borders so that they cannot take their skills elsewhere.

The ministry bureaucrats came up with this gem of an idea after extensive benchmarking visits across the globe, covering North Korea, Uzbekistan, China, Russia, Eritrea, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Ethiopia, Equatorial Guinea, Uzbekistan and other beacons of freedom, democracy and human rights.

In between the shopping orgies and merry-making demanded of every benchmarking tour, they were persuaded that Kenya should join the ranks of other Popular People's Democratic Republics that protect their citizens, particularly the top brains, from exploitation in foreign lands.

They were particularly smitten with the concept of an exit visa which will ensure that highly valued doctors must not be allowed to leave the country without special permission, lest they are lured out and forced at scalpel-point to offer their skills elsewhere while Kenyans suffer lack of medical care.

Universal Health Coverage, after all, is a mantra of the Kenya Kwanza alliance government. That critical campaign pledge will not be achieved if Kenyan doctors are busy treating patients elsewhere in the world.

In any case, doctors must be patriots and offer their skills at home first before hawking their services outside our borders.

They are trained at great expense in public universities that are heavily subsidised by the taxpayer, and therefore have a duty to give back to society by serving within the Kenyan healthcare system.

That government hospitals are unable to employ over 4,000 medical school graduates, and neither are private facilities snapping them up, is neither here or there. Having been trained at public expense they must be patient and patriotic enough to remain jobless until such a time that national prayers, paid for by the government, work their miracles.

Soon and very soon the skies will open up

and parched landscapes will turn green. Food prices will come down for the consumer even as prices paid to the producers shoot up.

The shilling will recover against the dollar and other international currencies. Oil Sheiks in the Arabian Peninsula will be touched and drastically cut their crude oil prices. President Vladimir Putin will see sense and withdraw his troops from Ukraine. The godless communists running China will forgive our debt. The National Treasury will be overflowing, and there will be money to engage all the unemployed doctors.

It's just a matter of being patient, patriotic and waiting for the miracles and wonders. In the meantime, however, practical steps must be taken to protect jobless, hungry and frustrated medics from the temptation of well-paying jobs in foreign lands.

It does not matter that the Laws of Kenya do not have any requirement for exit visas for any category of citizens. Neither are there any bars on travel outside the country except for public servants who need permission from their employer, or those facing penal restrictions.

Neither does it matter that the extensive Bill of Rights in the Constitution of Kenya guarantees freedom of movement within Kenya and into and out of the country.

The laws and the Constitution cannot be superior to the whims and foibles of paper-pushing bureaucrats who know what is best, and the politicians who hold preference controlling shares in Enterprise Kenya.

Once an exit visa is introduced for doctors, it will only be natural for similar protection to be accorded to nurses, clinical officers, medical technologists and other healthcare workers.

The ministry bureaucrats came up with this gem of an idea after extensive benchmarking visits across the globe, covering North Korea, Uzbekistan, China, Russia, Eritrea, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Ethiopia, Equatorial Guinea, Uzbekistan and other beacons of freedom, democracy and human rights. In between the shopping orgies and merry-making demanded of every benchmarking tour, they were persuaded that Kenya should join the ranks of other Popular People's Democratic Republics that protect their citizens, particularly the top brains, from exploitation in foreign lands.

Then we move on to architects, engineers, urban planners, agriculturists, IT experts, all university lecturers, airplane pilots and all other highly-skilled cadres who must prioritise working for Kenyans and also be protected from the risk of enforced servitude elsewhere.

But why discriminate? It will be needless labour determining the status of every individual who wants to travel outside the country and what skills might be lost. Therefore, just introduce an exit visa for every Kenyan.

And to make work easier, just cancel all passports so that anyone who wishes to travel must apply for fresh travel documents and provide justification before a joint committee of the KKP Politburo and the KKGestapo.

*** *** ***

The British Broadcasting Corporation recently came up with a damning expose on sexual exploitation of Kenyan women in tea plantations owned by major British transnational corporations, Unilever and James Finley.

It is encouraging that the two firms have sacked the managers involved, although only following pressure from British consumers, which included major retail chains cutting their orders.

Here at home the Director of Public Prosecutions Noordin Haji has ordered an immediate investigation, which hopefully will lead to arrest, prosecution and long jail terms for the sexual predators. Let us just hope they don't brandish the Kenya Kwanza 'Freedom has Come' card.

These actions illustrate the power of the press as the Watchdog of Society. It is dismaying, however, how some of us, including media colleagues, have been reacting to the outstanding piece of BBC journalism.

We are coming up with all sorts of hackneyed conspiracy theories around British efforts to sabotage Kenyan tea exports. We are playing patriots and nationalists, decrying alleged moves to spoil the good name of Kenya.

How about the plight of the poor, desperate women forced to give in to sexual demands of heartless beasts just so that they can get some low-paying menial jobs? Kudos BBC.

gaitmail@gmail.com

kenya lens

■ WE WILL REAFFIRM OUR COMMITMENT TO THE FUTURE OF KENYA

US First Lady Jill Biden has the President's ear, so whatever she says is what the American leader wants delivered



First Lady Rachel Ruto receives her US counterpart Jill Biden at the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport on Friday. Her travels have always been linked to the US policy fronted by her husband, President Joe Biden.
SILA KIPLAGAT
IN NATION

FROM AMERICA WITH GOODIES

• By AGGREY MUTAMBO

US First Lady Jill Biden is not often seen as a diplomat. But this week, she was in Nairobi, seeking what officials called an opportunity to strengthen partnerships.

“Our world is connected — what happens oceans away affects us all,” Dr Biden said ahead of her arrival in Kenya.

“We will honour our shared democratic values, and reaffirm our commitment to the futures

of Namibia and Kenya,” she said before departing to Africa, where she also toured Namibia.

Namibia and Kenya may be divergent, however, making Dr Biden’s trip all the more significant. So, can Dr Biden turn around US policy perception in Kenya?

Experts think it is not unusual that the US First Lady is fronting her husband’s policy views. After all, support for it should begin from his household. But they also say the First Ladies stick to ‘softer’ issues that bring less political controversy, while pushing crucial le-

vers of influence. “The trip is a PR job.

The First Lady has the ear of the President, so whatever she says is what the President wants delivered,” said Macharia Munene, a Professor of history and international relations.

“She will push for a good narrative. The US hasn’t had a good image on the continent lately, so by showing up, she is trying to help change that perception.”

Under US law, the role of first lady does not have a specified job description. Neither is it applied

for and has no determined pay structure. Furthermore, there is no experience or certain skills set required.

When Joe Biden was sworn into office, Jill chose to stick to her old teaching job, a break from tradition where first ladies have often concentrated on serving in the White House. Her travels, however, have always been linked to the US policy fronted by her husband, President Biden.

And in spite of coming off early as a behind-the-scenes person, the trip this week made it her

SCIENCE & TECH

Implant gives hand control after stroke

Electrically stimulating the spinal cord instantly restores some ability to control the arm and hands in people who have had a stroke, US researchers say.

Heather Rendulic, from Pittsburgh, was able to cut and eat a steak by herself for the first time in nine years. She said the technology was “nothing short of amazing”. The University of Pittsburgh team say more research is needed to see who can benefit, as the spinal implants have been tested in only two people. Strokes disrupt the blood supply in the brain and lead to brain cells dying. This often leaves those that survive with long-term health problems.

People can retain the desire and intent to move but the instructions from the brain become so weak nothing happens. When Heather was in her early 20s, she was diagnosed with a cluster of abnormal blood vessels in her brain — a cavernous angioma.

It bled multiple times and led to a large stroke. One morning, she woke up unable to move the left side of her body.

In the nine years that followed, Heather learned to walk again but control of her left arm and hand never recovered — “something I struggle with every day”. Even the simplest tasks, such as putting on shoes, became a challenge.

Before having the procedure, Heather’s goal was “to be able to cut a piece of steak”, as she relied on her husband to do it. Heather had electrodes implanted in her neck so parts of her spinal cord could be stimulated.

The nervous system communicates with electricity — but after Heather’s stroke, the electrical signals travelling from her brain were too weak to activate the nerves controlling her arm and hand movements.

Stimulation excites the nerves so they are already itching to respond — and now, those weak messages are enough to trigger movement.

A NEW KIND OF BUG SPELLS TROUBLE FOR PHONE SECURITY



Researchers from security firm Trellix’s Advanced Research Center have published details of a bug that could allow criminal hackers to break out of Apple’s security protections.

• SAN FRANCISCO

For years, Apple has hardened the security systems on iPhones and Macs. But no company is immune from such issues. Research reveals a new class of bugs that can affect Apple’s iPhone and Mac operating systems and if exploited could allow an attacker to sweep up your messages, photos, and call history.

Researchers from security firm Trellix’s Advanced Research Center have published details of a bug that could allow criminal hackers to break out of Apple’s security protections and run their own unauthorised code. The team says the security flaws they found — which they rank as medium to high severity — bypass protections Apple had put in place to protect users.

“The key thing here is the vulnerabilities break Apple’s security model at a fundamental level,” says Doug McKee, director of vulnerability research at Trellix. McKee says

that finding the new bug class means researchers and Apple will potentially be able to find more similar bugs and improve overall security protections. Apple has fixed the bugs the company found, and there is no evidence they were exploited.

Trellix’s findings build on previous work by Google and Citizen Lab, a University of Toronto research facility. In 2021, the two organisations discovered ForcedEntry, a zero-click, zero-day iOS exploit that was linked to Israeli spyware maker NSO Group. (The exploit, described as highly sophisticated, was found on the iPhone of a Saudi activist and used to install NSO’s Pegasus malware.)

Analysis of ForcedEntry showed it involved two key parts. The first tricked an iPhone into opening a malicious PDF that was disguised as a GIF. The second part allowed attackers to escape Apple’s sandbox, which keeps apps from accessing data stored by other apps and from accessing other parts of

the device. Trellix’s research, by senior vulnerability researcher Austin Emmitt, focuses on that second part and ultimately used the flaws he found to bypass the sandbox.

Specifically, Emmitt found a class of vulnerabilities that revolve around NSPredicate, a tool that can filter code within Apple’s systems. NSPredicate was first abused in ForcedEntry, and as a result of that research in 2021, Apple introduced new ways to stop the abuse. However, those don’t appear to have been enough. “We discovered that these new mitigations could be bypassed,” Trellix says in a blog post outlining the details of its research.

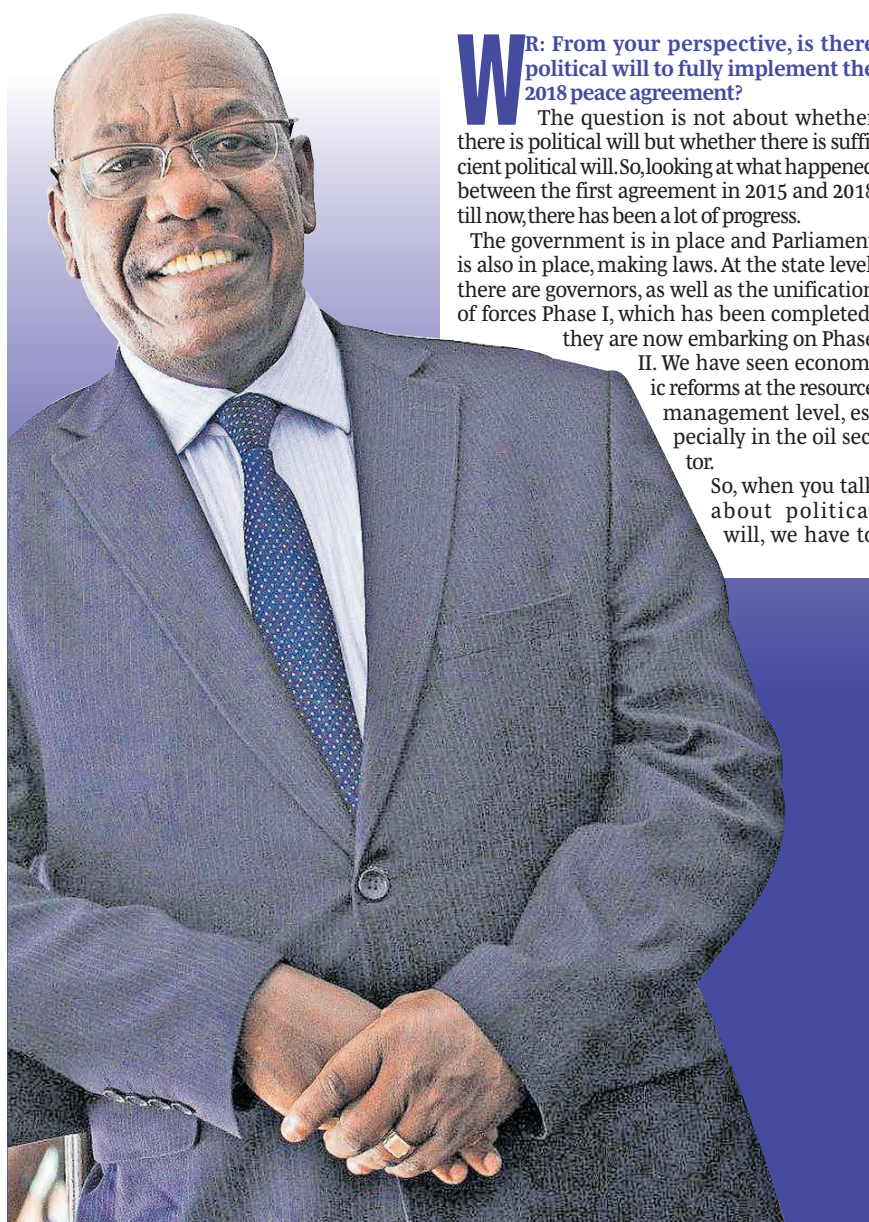
McKee explains that the bugs within this new NSPredicate class existed in multiple places across macOS and iOS, including within Springboard, the app that manages the iPhone’s home screen and can access location data, photos, and the camera. Once the bugs are exploited, the attacker can access areas that are meant to be closed off.

africa lens

■ A CASE OF NEW HOPE AND OLD CHALLENGES

SOUTH SUDAN TRANSITION

The Chairman of the South Sudan Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission, Gen (Rtd) CHARLES TAI GITUAI, speaks to *The Weekly Review's* FRED OLUOCH about the successes and challenges in the implementation of the 2018 Peace Agreement



WR: From your perspective, is there political will to fully implement the 2018 peace agreement?

The question is not about whether there is political will but whether there is sufficient political will. So, looking at what happened between the first agreement in 2015 and 2018 till now, there has been a lot of progress.

The government is in place and Parliament is also in place, making laws. At the state level, there are governors, as well as the unification of forces Phase I, which has been completed; they are now embarking on Phase

II. We have seen economic reforms at the resource management level, especially in the oil sector.

So, when you talk about political will, we have to

look at what is the difference between the past and present. We have seen a lot of progress going on, but it is slow progress.

Our expectations were that by that time we shall have done a lot. There is political will but it is not sufficient. As you know, it took two years for the vice-president, Dr Riek Machar, to return to Juba and it was only in February 2020 that the government was formed.

Soon after, Covid-19 hit the world. So, there were over two years wasted when nothing was being done. That is why the extension of the transition was agreed to recover the time wasted.

Talking about the extension to 2025, do you think it was necessary or the parties were just buying time to avoid elections?

The extension came about because we as evaluators put pressure on the transitional government to explain to us what they were going to do because time had elapsed and we were not seeing actual implementation, according to the guidelines.

The leadership went back to the parties, who all agreed to the extension. It was passed by the Cabinet and then Parliament. After that, it was brought to RJMEC under Article 8.4 and we agreed to that extension. The two years' extension was based on some critical issues that they had to undertake before the elections.

The unification of forces must be completed, the constitutional framework must be completed, the legal framework must be in place and the election framework too, which takes time. The fact that it was an agreement by the parties, makes us believe that they will meet the dead.

Has the unification of the armed groups proceeded according to the agreement?

The unification of forces is in Chapter 2 on security arrangements. This is one of the very important requirements in the agreement and it was supposed to be completed during the pre-transition period. But this did not happen because of the prevailing situation then.

Naturally, it is difficult to bring together forces that had been fighting each other. This takes

Chairman of the South Sudan Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission, Gen (Rtd) Charles Tai Gituai. FRED OLUOCH | NATION

...Continued on Page 26

africa lens

Will South Sudan hold credible elections?

Continued from Page 25

time because we are talking of a country that has several militias. But at least they have completed Phase I of the unification. Out of the 83,000 troops required, they have trained and absorbed 53,000, which is huge progress. We believe the remaining 30,000 will be completed before the end of April.

Essentially, it was delayed because various forces had different ranking structures, and agreeing on how to harmonise these ranks takes time. There is also the challenge of what to do with those who are not eligible so that they don't foment a new rebellion.

They also have to come up with Strategic Defence Review on how they tend to work out the security sector reforms. All these are taking time but we know that the commitment is critical and we hope that they will finish the process within the remaining time.

The Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (RJMEC) has not been vocal against violations of ceasefire from both sides. Does RJMEC have a sanctions mandate against violators?

Our role is to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the agreement. The issue of the violations of ceasefire purely depends on the signatories being engaged. So, when you talk about a permanent ceasefire, it is about those that signed the agreement and at the moment they are not fighting each other.

Where there is a violation, we have the Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring Mechanism, which is responsible for reporting the actual situation on the ground.

Once they bring the report to the committee of senior officers that there was a violation, the first point of contact is with the government to tell them that there was a violation and that they have to take action. If they can't, we report to Igad to respond to the situation.

We also write reports that we forward to the leadership of the country, Parliament, Igad's seven heads of state, the Igad council of ministers, and the UN. We are also mandated to address the African Union Peace and Security Council on any violations.

So, we have been very vocal and that is what has kept the agreement alive and enabled the transitional government to address emerging challenges.

Given that holdouts are still outside the agreement, do you think they are likely to interfere with the permanent ceasefire?

It is the responsibility of Igad to ensure that the holdouts come on board. The Rome Peace Process through the Community of Sant' Egidio, has been speaking to these holdout groups to bring them on board. The government has been participating in the process. Recently, when the Pope went to Juba, the president said that he

had agreed for the Rome process to proceed after it was suspended last year.

What would you say are some of the achievements of the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission since 2018?

As I mentioned, RJMEC's role is to ensure that the issue of South Sudan is on the international agenda. It is the RJMEC that initiated the revitalisation of the agreement in 2018, and the formation of the 10 states instead of the 32 that had been proposed by President Kiir.

Between 2018 and 2022, RJMEC has overseen the formation of the government, the legislation of 18 laws and the unification of the forces. We have seen the establishment of the Judicial Review Committee and the improvement of humanitarian situation and about 600,000 refugees have returned to the country.

We have also pushed for reforms in socio-economic management and the establishment of oversight institutions. Issues such as transitional justice and constitutional reform processes are in progress courtesy of pressure from RJMEC.

Do we see a lot of inter-communal conflicts even after their leaders signed the peace agreement?

The issue of inter-communal conflict must be understood within its context. One, there are fights based on traditional cattle rustling, those based on revenge, and those based on natural calamities such as floods that force herders to drive their cattle to other people's areas, and there is a conflict between pastoralists and farming communities who get agitated because of livestock invading their crops. We have seen these clashes in Jonglei in Upper Nile. It is important to separate inter-communal fighting from that of the belligerents that signed the agreement.

What do say about the fact that some critical institutions which should have been reconstituted to pave the way for the implementation of crucial aspects of the agreement are not in place?

Yes, there is still a lot of work that needs to be done. Under Article 1.19, there are a lot of institutions and commissions that have yet to be reconstituted. The constitution-making process has yet to take off despite the president assenting to the law.

We are now waiting for the establishment of the National Constitutional Review Commission and the Constitutional Drafting Committee, which are likely to take time. The Anti-Corruption Commission and the Audit Chamber are yet to be established. The roadmap has set critical issues that must be completed before the country goes to the elections.

If the National Constitutional Review Commission has yet to be reconstituted by now

and yet constitutional review takes a long time, don't you think South Sudan is running out of time in this aspect?

The parties agreed to the extension and the agreement has given constitution making 24 months, the longest period in the agreement. The assumption is that since the law has been signed, we expect it to be completed latest July 2024. There is no reason why we should doubt them because it is the leaders, who are the implementers, that have given this commitment on timelines. Our work is just monitoring.

South Sudan is supposed to hold elections at the end of the transition. Do you think the country can hold credible elections without any glitches?

The credibility of elections will be determined by the completion of the constitution-making process, to come up with the government that they want whether presidential or parliamentary, the delimitation of boundaries, the unification of forces, the National Election Law, and the Political Parties Act.

If they are able to complete these processes with the support of the international community, then we don't see why South Sudan cannot hold credible elections.

The Kiir government feels that Troika is not supporting the implementation. What do you say?

Well, I can't speak for Troika, but all I know is that Troika has been supportive in terms of humanitarian issues. As you know, there are 2.3 million internally displaced, and a similar number of refugees in neighbouring countries.

The Troika has been contributing a lot of money to support ordinary South Sudanese. But Troika has been insisting on seeing that the agreement is fully implemented. Their frustration is that they don't see a sense of urgency in the implementation. If South Sudan can be focused and show urgency, the Troika is likely to support the country more.

The region and the international community remain sceptical that violence and fighting in South Sudan might not end soon, even with the elections. Your take?

The stability of South Sudan is important to the region and the international community. We have seen the suffering but this time we have seen a sense of commitment by the leadership. The president has said many times that he will never take the country back to war. This was the same message he repeated during the Pope's visit, and we don't see any reason not to trust him.

Even among the general public, nobody wants war. What we are seeing is a focus on stability in South Sudan. If there is support, we don't see any reason for the country going back to war, because those who have the instruments of violence are the ones saying that they don't want to take the country back to war.

global lens

■ DARING EXPEDITION: INSIDE THE SURREAL AND SECRETIVE TRIP TO A WAR ZONE

HOW BIDEN LANDED IN KYIV



US President Joe Biden (left) walks with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky at St Michael's Golden-Domed Cathedral during an unannounced visit to Kyiv, Ukraine, last Monday. President Biden promised increased arms deliveries for Ukraine and also vowed Washington's "unflinching commitment" in defending Ukraine's territorial integrity.

US President travelled covertly to the besieged capital, hoping to demonstrate American resolve to help defeat the Russian forces that invaded a year ago

● WASHINGTON

As the train rumbled across the Ukrainian countryside through a long night, the view outside the window left little to see, just the occasional street light or shadows of buildings in the distance. But neither could those watching the train go by see who was inside, nor would they likely have guessed had they stopped to wonder.

Huddled aboard the anonymous train were President Joe Biden and a skeleton team of advisers accompanied by armed and edgy Secret Service agents, embarking on a secret mission to visit Kyiv. As far as the world was concerned, Biden was back in Washington, home for the evening after a date night at an Italian restaurant. In fact, he was on a journey unlike any other taken by a modern American president.

In an audacious move meant to demon-

strate American resolve to help Ukraine defeat the Russian forces that invaded a year ago this week, Biden travelled covertly to Kyiv to meet with President Volodymyr Zelensky and promise even more weapons for the country's defenders. The visit produced an indelible image of the two presidents striding to a memorial for fallen soldiers in broad daylight even as an air-raid siren blared, a show of defiance of Moscow quickly beamed around the world.

"I thought it was critical that there not be any doubt, none whatsoever, about US support for Ukraine in the war," Biden said during his five hours on the ground in Kyiv before leaving again. He was speaking, in effect, not just to President Vladimir Putin of Russia but to fellow Americans back home doubting his decision to invest so deeply in Ukraine's war. "It's not just about freedom in Ukraine," he said. "It's about freedom of democracy at large."

Never in Biden's lifetime had a president ventured into a war zone that was not under the control of American forces, much less on a relatively slow-moving locomotive that would take nine-and-a-half hours to reach its destination. During that time, he was potentially exposed to circumstances beyond the control of the hyper-vigilant security phalanx that normally seeks to shield a commander-in-chief from every conceivable physical danger and minimise his time outside a hardened shelter.

For much of the past year, in fact, most of the people around the president resisted any urge to go, on the assumption that it was too risky. But nearly a year after the Russian invasion, with Ukrainian troops faring far better than anyone expected at the start and other American and European leaders having made the trip, Biden and his team gambled that he could get in and out safely. "Of course there

Continued on Page 28

global lens

Inside Biden's journey into a war zone

Continued from Page 27

was still risk, and is still risk, in an endeavour like this," Jake Sullivan, the president's national security adviser, told reporters by phone from the train as it departed Kyiv for the return trip to Poland. "And President Biden felt that it was important to make this trip because of the critical juncture that we find ourselves at as we approach the one-year anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine."

It was a long journey and a surreal one. This was not how Biden was used to seeing Ukraine. He visited six times as vice-president — three times in a six-month stretch — arriving in an American jet, gazing out the window in daylight to take in the sights of Kyiv from above. Now he was sneaking in under cover of darkness, arriving shortly after sunrise. The trip had been in the works for months, aides said, as just a trusted few officials at the White House, Pentagon, Secret Service and intelligence agencies weighed the threat assessments. In meetings, Biden focused on the risk his visit could pose to others, not himself, one aide said.

Finally, the decision came to a head on Friday, when the president gathered with a handful of top advisers in the Oval Office and consulted with others by phone. He opted to go. Biden was already set to travel to Poland for the anniversary. Often when presidents make secret stops in uncertain locations, the visits are added to the end of an existing trip. In this case, the White House decided to put it on the front end in hopes of keeping the secret.

The president played his part in the ruse. On Saturday evening, he and Jill Biden went to Mass at Georgetown University, then stopped by the National Museum of American History and finally went out to dinner at the Red Hen restaurant, where they enjoyed the rigatoni, widely considered the best in the nation's capital. When the couple arrived back at the White House, most people might have assumed they were in for the night.

But a few hours after midnight, Biden was spirited out of the mansion and taken to Joint



US President Joe Biden (right) with Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelensky in Kyiv on February 20.

Base Andrews in the Maryland suburbs, where a small coterie of aides, security agents, a medical team, a White House photographer and two journalists awaited him.

The two journalists, Sabrina Siddiqui from *The Wall Street Journal* and Evan Vucci from the *Associated Press*, had been summoned to the White House on Friday and sworn to secrecy. They were told to wait for further information in an email whose subject line would read: "Arrival instructions for the golf tourney."

The two-person journalism pool was a radical departure from even other security-sensitive presidential trips, when the usual complement of 13 reporters and photographers was taken. But it would not be the only unusual feature of the trip.

Since Abraham Lincoln rode to the front lines outside Washington to watch battles in Northern Virginia during the Civil War, no sitting president has gotten that close to combat. Franklin Roosevelt visited North Africa; Lyndon Johnson went to Vietnam; Bill Clinton toured the Balkans; George Bush and Barack Obama travelled to Iraq and Afghanistan; and Donald Trump went to Afghanistan.

But in all those cases, they went to countries or areas under control of American forces or after hostilities had eased. In this

case, the United States military would not be present in Ukraine, nor would it control the airspace. American military planes were spotted hovering in eastern Poland near the border during the trip, but officials said they never entered Ukrainian airspace out of concern that it would be taken as the sort of direct American intervention that Biden has avoided.

Arriving at Andrews early on Sunday morning, the two journalists surrendered their phones, not to be returned for 24 hours. They were taken not to the usual blue and white Boeing 747 designated as Air Force One when the president is on board, but to an Air Force C-32, more typically used for domestic trips to airports with shorter runways. The plane was parked in the dark next to a hangar with shades drawn.

Biden arrived about 4am and the plane took off at 4.15am for the flight across the Atlantic. Biden was joined by a handful of aides — Sullivan; Jen O'Malley Dillon, a deputy chief of staff; and Annie Tomasini, the director of Oval Office operations.

The plane touched down at Ramstein Air Base in Germany at 5.13pm local time, where with its shades down, it was refuelled before taking off again at 6.29pm. It then made its way to Rzeszów-Jasionka Airport in Poland, landing at 7.57pm.

Biden was put in a motorcade

with roughly 20 cars and driven without sirens for about an hour along a mostly empty highway to the small city of Przemyśl and taken to the train station where many thousands of refugees have arrived from Ukraine over the past year. Arriving at 9.15pm, the travellers found few people there and the stalls closed. The motorcade pulled right up to a mostly purple train, with several cars painted blue with a yellow stripe along the middle to resemble the Ukrainian flag. Rarely does a president ride in any vehicle other than those of the Secret Service or American military, but flying into Ukraine is not deemed safe.

The train pulled away from the station without ceremony at 9.37pm and crossed the border into Ukraine around 10pm. The White House was so intent on keeping the secret that it lied to reporters back in Washington. About four hours after Biden crossed the border into Ukraine, his office back in Washington issued a public schedule falsely stating that the president was still in the nation's capital and not planning to leave for Europe until Monday evening.

Talking with aides, Biden recounted his telephone call with Zelensky on February 24 last year as Russia's invasion began, marvelling about how the Ukrainian leader told him at the time that he was not sure when they would speak again. Now, Biden mused to aides, here they were a year later about to meet face-to-face in Kyiv.

After the all-night trip, the train pulled into Kyiv-Pasazhyrsky station at 8am local time. The platform had been cleared. On a sunny day with blue skies and a brisk chill in the air, Biden disembarked, wearing a blue suit with a tie featuring Ukrainian colours. He was greeted by Bridget A. Brink, the American ambassador.

"It's good to be back in Kyiv," he said. During his five hours in the city, he met with Zelensky at Mariinsky Palace, joined him in laying a wreath at the Wall of Remembrance at St Michael's Golden-Domed Monastery, and stopped by the United States Embassy to meet with its staff. Then he headed back to the same train station, departing at 1.10pm.

— *The New York Times*

global lens

■ PYONGYANG SAYS IT'S CAPABLE OF A 'TACTICAL NUCLEAR ATTACK'



N. KOREA'S NUCLEAR 'WARNING'

Korean People's Army conducts a drill in response to US-South Korean exercises, and blames the allies for the deteriorating security situation

● SEOUL

North Korea fired two rockets on Monday from its latest launcher, claiming it is capable of a "tactical nuclear attack" that can take out entire enemy air bases.

It was North Korea's second weapons launch in 48 hours, after it fired one of its most powerful intercontinental ballistic missiles on Saturday, in response to planned US-South Korea military drills.

Japan said the ICBM landed in its exclusive economic zone, and its launch prompted the United States and South Korea to stage joint air drills on Sunday. Pyongyang said the Korean People's Army conducted the drill in response to those US-South Korean exercises, blaming the allies for the deteriorating security situation, according to a report by the official *Korean Central News Agency (KCNA)*.

"Through today's firing drill with the involvement of super-large multiple rocket launchers, the tactical nuclear attack means, the KPA demonstrated its full readiness to deter and will to counter" the joint air drills, *KCNA* said.

The South Korean military said it detected the launch of two short-range ballistic missiles on Monday at 0700-0711 (2200-2211 GMT Sunday). One travelled 390 km (240 miles) and the other 340 km, before they landed in the East

Sea, it said, referring to the body of water also known as the Sea of Japan.

It described the launches as "a serious provocation that undermines peace and stability on the Korean peninsula", and called on North Korea to stop "immediately".

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's powerful sister warned that the country was closely monitoring Washington's and Seoul's moves to deploy more US strategic assets to the region, vowing "corresponding counteraction" if Pyongyang deemed such moves a threat.

"The frequency of using the Pacific as our firing range depends upon the US forces' action character," Kim Yo Jong said in a statement published by *KCNA*. Pyongyang said its Saturday ICBM launch was a "surprise" drill that demonstrated North Korea's capacity to carry out a "fatal nuclear counter-attack".

Japan said that ICBM flew for 66 minutes and landed in its exclusive economic zone.

In response, Seoul and Washington staged joint air drills on Sunday, featuring a strategic bomber and stealth fighter jets.

The sanctions-busting launch was widely condemned, including on Monday by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, who called on Pyongyang to cease "provocative actions".

North Korea gave its soldiers an "excellent mark" for carrying out the "sudden launching

drill" on Saturday, but South Korean analysts pointed out that the estimated nine hours between the order and the launch was not particularly rapid. Kim Yo Jong dismissed such criticism on Monday as "a bid to undervalue the preparedness of the DPRK missile forces", she said, using North Korea's official name.

Hong Min of the Korea Institute for National Unification told *AFP* that the angry reaction was part of a pattern of North Korea pushing back against any external analysis of its ICBM capabilities. "Kim's strong and angry reaction to outside assessment of its ICBM launch shows the North really cares about delivering a message that it is capable of hitting the US mainland," he said.

The launches were North Korea's response to the US-South Korea air exercise on Sunday, he added. Using shorter-range missiles indicated North Korea was "virtually targeting US bases and South Korean command centre in the area". The North Korean weapons launches came ahead of a joint US-South Korea tabletop exercise this week, aimed at improving their response in the event of a nuclear attack by Pyongyang. North Korea warned last week of an "unprecedentedly" strong response to the planned joint drills by Seoul and Washington, which it describes as preparations for war.

— AFP

OBIT

■ HE BUILT A CAREER OF IMPACT, CONTINUED LEARNING AND EDUCATION

• JOSEPH MBOYA

A prophet is never honoured in his home town' is a popular line used by many to describe people who achieved a lot but never quite got the recognition due to them.

The opposite is true for Architect John Dumas Gachara, who died on January 22 this year, and whom professional colleagues, government officials, friends and family have described as "a giant who walked in our midst", beating many odds to rise to the pinnacle of his profession, which he pursued with a life-long passion.

Gachara's contribution to the field of architecture in general and the built environment in particular saw him clinch the prestigious Scroll of Honour Ward, the hallowed hall of fame for those contributing to sustainable human settlements conferred by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). This recognition was because of a revolutionary building technology he championed through his firm, Newbuild, that reduces building costs by up to 40 per cent.

Many have spoken of Gachara's strength of character in his quest to uplift the lives of fellow Kenyans through improved architectural designs, as well as innovations in fish farming and recycling of waste water.

In the words of fellow architect Njendu Mugure, the former chair of the Architectural Association of Kenya, "in an industry where one can make good money by sticking to the script, Gachara chose to be an innovator, to challenge how we build, to research and develop that which would contribute to a better and more affordable built environment".

"An architectural legend and thinker of our time," is how Kilimani Project Foundation Chair Irungu Houghton, described Gachara. Said Irungu: "Last year, Dumas spent many hours mentoring our members, helping in building the architectural historical and journey of post-independent Nairobi. He longed to see high standards of cleanliness, order and structure re-established."

Born on April 24, 1944 in Morendati, Naivasha, Gachara started his education at Gathaiti African Independent School located in Githunguri, Kiambu, in 1951.

THE GENIUS ARCHITECT

John Gachara's exemplary intelligence was matched by his passion for innovative building designs



John Dumas Gachara died on January 22.
PHOTO | POOL

Due to his outstanding intelligence, he was taken straight to Standard One, although he was much younger than his classmates.

The following year, his education was interrupted following the declaration of a State of Emergency by the colonial government on October 22, 1952.

After a devastating three years, the family relocated to Nakuru and in January 1956, he resumed his schooling at the DEB (District Education Board) African Government Primary School.

Then began the academic 'miracles' that Gachara would perform nearly all his schooling life. Despite missing class for four years, he was found to be so smart that the school allowed him to skip Standard One and Three.

The District Education Board assessed Gachara and found his in-

telligence to be exemplary. He was exempted him from the Common Entrance

Exam taken at the end of Standard Three and was allowed to proceed to Standard Five in 1958. In 1961 under the Colonial Protectorate of Kenya's Ministry of Education, Gachara sat for his Kenya African Primary Examination (KAPE), in which he excelled with distinctions, attaining three As.

In 1962, Gachara joined Chewoiet High School, now Kapenguria High School, as the first student in Kenya to win the prestigious African American Institute Scholarship from New York for his secondary education. Chewoiet was one of the first two premier government secondary schools in

the North Rift – the other being Kapsabet Boys – whose alumni include former Vice-President – and Gachara's long-time friend – Kijana Wamalwa and his brother, former Cabinet Minister Eugene Wamalwa, former Chief of General Staff Daudi Tonje, former Nairobi Town Clerk John Gakuo, Education PS Dr Bello Kipsang and the former Rift Valley Provincial Commissioner Ishmael Chelang'a.

Gachara excelled in his secondary school studies, earning a Cambridge School Certificate in 1965. Though his dream was to join the military, his exceptional performance in high school was rewarded with a scholarship to the then newly instituted Kenya Polytechnic in Nairobi, where he trained for a diploma in Building Construction and Civil Engineering, specialising in Architectural Studies and Construction. His academic genius got him listed as a prospect for the Tom Mboya African Student Airlift to pursue Architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in Boston, USA, but his apprenticeship boss would not release him as he was working on some key projects at the time.

In 1969, Gachara was bonded for four years for pupillage and on-the-job training on various building designs, including the Kenya Navy Headquarters in Mombasa; the National Veterinary Investigation and AI Centres in Nairobi; the Kenya Institute of Mass Communication and Government Secretarial College, also in Nairobi; the School of Community Nursing in Thika and GSU Headquarters in Ruara. Most notably, he participated in the architectural design of the iconic Kenyatta International Conference Centre.

Gachara worked at the Ministry of Works and Brooke Bond Liebig in Kericho before eventually establishing He established Newbuild Limited, an innovation think tank in construction solutions, sustainable housing and technological application developments.

In his home town of Nakuru, his creations included the magnificent Presbyterian Church of East Africa's Dr Arthur Church, and the Anglican Church of Kenya Section 58 Cathedral, which is still under construction, and whose design was inspired by the Holy Trinity and also reflects elements of the 12 tribes of Judah and 12 disciples of Christ by providing 12 steps on each stairway.

josephmboya@gmail.com

GET YOUR FAVOURITE DAILIES DELIVERED TO YOUR HOME

Fresh and unbiased news delivered to your doorstep

NEWSPAPER
DELIVERY



SMS the word **GAZETI** to **20567**,
Share your preferred delivery location
and our agent will get in touch with you

FREE SMS text and **FREE** Delivery

DAILY NATION

Business
Daily

DAILY
LEO

The EastAfrican

Terms & Conditions apply*



SPORTS TV!

JAMES
WOKABI

BERNARD
NDONG

HOSTS



NATIONFM 96.3^{FM}
WHERE GOOD MUSIC LIVES

SATURDAYS 3PM