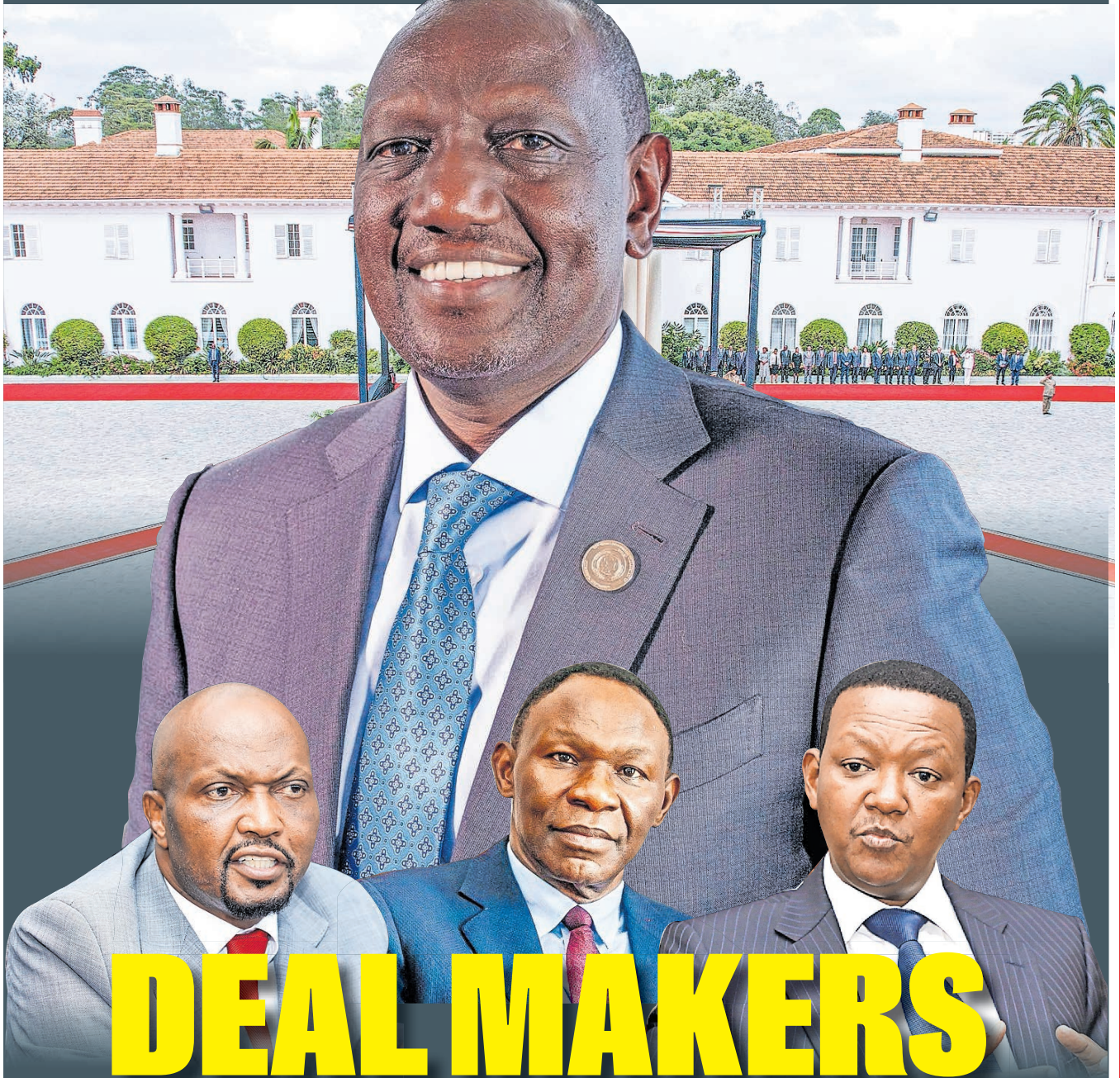


THE Weekly Review

For the Thinking Person

ISSUE NO. 32 | April 9, 2023 FREE WITH 'SUNDAY NATION'



DEAL MAKERS

The Ruto administration's deals with shadowy organisations have raised red flags with the potential of evolving into embarrassing and expensive mistakes for the taxpayer. Kenya is on the radar of a little-known Belgian charity group that promises to pump billions of dollars into infrastructure projects in Africa, but the organisation's records are woefully shallow and suspicious

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letter from the editor

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When did the Church lose its voice, and will it ever recover?

Once upon a time, the Church roared and the State wobbled. There had always been a clear distinction between the two. Religion knew its righteous path and followed it firmly and gently; it was the gadfly tormenting the wielders of power and almost always chided them out of unnecessary excesses.

In those trying times of yore, the clergy spoke and dictators trembled. Where there was suffering and abandon, the church was the expression of reason; where all sound was muzzled and voices hushed for fear of detention, the pulpit gave rays of hope; when in dull times people were attacked by sponsored goons, they ran to the house of the Lord for refuge and were welcomed with open arms. Not anymore.

Today, religious leaders are either in bed with the government or have been cowed into submission. The Holy Scripture tells us to give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God. Two lovely options given by the Nazarene. Caesar now wants what belongs to God too, but the clergy is not bold enough to point this anomaly out. Must the masses rend unto Caesar what belongs to the Almighty?

The silence from the Church over the past two decades in the face of grand corruption and electoral injustices is worrying. Since the bloody protests of June 11, 1999 in Nairobi, which were led by the fiery Presbyterian minister, the Rev Timothy Njoya, to push for a new Constitution, the clergy has been eerily quiet. By so often placing his life on the line for the poor, Njoya was a bold testament to the power of the Church. He ensured that the Church was passionately committed to social justice and of-



Allan Buluku

We have come a long way and today, and the gospel of gain has taken over places of worship. The clergy have taken to peddling therapeutic objects and drama in the name of miracles. Mammon is their hope and indeed their New Jerusalem. The pulpit has become the stage for politicians to demonise each other as much as they wish to.

ten found himself at loggerheads with President Daniel arap Moi's regime.

Njoya once led a group of about 1,500 Kenyans on a march to Parliament, where the annual budget was being read. But police officers in anti-riot gear attacked the clergyman. A sponsored thug rained down blow after blow on his head with a club as he lay defenceless while the police watched from a distance. Other outspoken ministers such as Henry Okullu, Alexander Muge, David Gitari, Manases Kuria and Ndingi Mwana a'Nzeki kept the State in check without fear or favour, despite the immense

power in the hands of the President to silence them. In the post-colonial period, religious leaders were the voice of the overlooked, earning a reputation as the beacon of hope in pinpointing societal wrongs. Those were the days when the common person felt represented even though the 1988 rigged *mlongolo* polls had filled Parliament with perfidious puppets.

Operating within a single-party state, and as MPs were muzzled, the National Council of Churches of Kenya declared itself a "forum for alternative political viewpoints". It criticised detention without trial and called for a ceiling on land holdings. The clergy stood for the people.

We have come a long way and today, the gospel of gain has taken over places of worship. The clergy have taken to peddling therapeutic objects and drama in the name of miracles. Mammon is their hope and indeed their New Jerusalem. The pulpit has become the stage for politicians to demonise each other as much as they wish to.

A people whose present is toil and future scary usually lapses back, reflects and contemplates its past heroes. Can we ever get people like those from the past? Shall any of the present get the gumption to voice anything that may awaken a prevailing power? That is the juncture we are at now.

As Kenyans mark the Easter holiday – the holiest in the Christian calendar – the big question is: When did the Church lose its voice? Shall it ever get it back?

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■ SITUATION IS DIFFERENT FROM WHAT PREVAILED LEADING UP TO THE GRAND COALITION

A NATION ON THE EDGE



The ceasefire announced by Ruto and Raila after a period of violent protests across the country remains on shaky ground. The opposition's preference for a National Accord-type of mechanism has been resisted by hardliners in the Kenya Kwanza administration. Will the truce hold?

● BY MACHARIA GAI THO

It was President William Ruto who sent an emissary to opposition leader Raila Odinga's camp with a significant concession signalling willingness to talk ahead of the State House press conference proposing a bi-partisan initiative in Parliament to help end opposition demonstrations.

Multiple senior sources in both the Raila and Ruto camps, who all requested anonymity because of confidentiality agreements, re-

confirmed that though the two leaders did not meet or even talk on phone, they had over the previous two days engaged in intensive discussions through trusted representatives. They were also both under intense pressure from American, British, European Union, Chinese and Japanese governments to call a truce and halt the increasingly violent confrontations between opposition protesters and police.

It is understood that Ruto was also distressed by the violent raid by a criminal gang on a farm be-

longing to the family of former President Uhuru Kenyatta, which was apparently planned and executed by senior figures in his government acting in concert with the police command without his knowledge. Raila, on his part, was also concerned that the supposedly peaceful demonstrations were taking a violent turn, either through lack of organisation and discipline within his ranks, or infiltration by government security agents deployed to cause mayhem in order to undermine the spirit of the protests.

The indirect talks between the two principals did not go very much into detail, but agreed on general principles for dialogue which would start by Ruto publicly holding out an olive branch and signalling desire for talks. Raila would then reciprocate by immediately calling off the next demonstration, which was set for the following day, Monday last week.

That sequence went ahead as planned, but subsequent tussles over the nature of the talks re-

Continued on Page 6

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Grey areas in Ruto-Raila truce raise temperatures

Police fire tear gas canisters at protesters along Kenyatta Avenue in Nairobi on March 20. SILA KIPLAGAT | NATION

Continued from Page 5

veals the grey areas that had not been agreed on prior to the announcements. A key one was that Ruto announced negotiations limited to Parliament and dwelling only on a review of the selection of new members to the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission, dismissing the key demand for an 'opening of the servers' in regard to fresh scrutiny of the 2022 elections, which Raila still claims to have won.

The opposition chief also insists on a much more inclusive national dialogue, rather than just Parliament, to address all the varied opposition grievances. However, Raila may have betrayed himself by proposing a National Accord type of solution in addition to the Parliamentary process proposed by Ruto. While insisting that he

had never demanded a 'Handshake' as the outcome of any political settlement, reference to the National Accord brokered by former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan to halt the 2007 post-election violence invariably recalls the power-sharing deal by which Raila found a place as Prime Minister in President Mwai Kibaki's government.

The pact formed the Grand Coalition Government out of Kibaki's Party of National Unity and Raila's Orange Democratic Movement, a successful union that only guaranteed the peace for five years, but also delivered on some of the most impressive development programmes ever recorded in Kenya.

The 'Handshake', by contrast, is the Kenyan parlance for the 2018 truce between President Kenyatta and Raila, which in its own

way also calmed political temperatures. The opposition chief, who had disputed the 2017 elections and had himself sworn in as 'Peoples President', abandoned a planned series of demonstrations and instead rallied his troops to back the government.

The opposition was not formally incorporated in government, unlike with the National Accord,

The opposition chief also insists on a much more inclusive national dialogue, rather than just Parliament, to address all the varied opposition grievances. However, Raila may have betrayed himself by proposing a National Accord type of solution in addition to the Parliamentary process proposed by Ruto.

but Raila formed a union with Uhuru that sponsored the ill-fated Building Bridges Initiative, a series of far-reaching reforms that were supposed to be ratified in a referendum before being halted by the courts. A major outcome was that beyond accommodating the veteran opposition chief by the President's side and winning a peace dividend, the handshake regime was also intended to freeze out rebellious Deputy President William Ruto.

In 2022, Uhuru, who was serving out his second and final term, backed Raila's fifth stab at the Presidency, but the powerful alliance could not halt Ruto's march to State House.

After failing yet again in a perennial quest dating back to 1997 and also seeing his Supreme Court challenge thrown out, Raila this time embarked on a series of

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demonstrations that since commencing on March 20 have shut down Nairobi and Kisumu every at least once a week. He has faced constant accusations from Ruto and the Kenya Kwanza brigade, led by Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua, that he was causing trouble so that he could force his way into government through a handshake as he allegedly did after the 2017 polls with Uhuru and the 2007 polls with Kibaki.

The truth is that while Raila has listed a raft of demands, he has never either directly or indirectly asked for a handshake deal. His main demands included an examination of the presidential election result servers to prove his contention that he was the rightful winner, a halt to the selection process for new electoral commissioners, and reductions in prices of food, fuel and other essential commodities that impact the price of living.

That is the essential background to the recent history of political settlements in Kenya. But in denying ever angling for a handshake deal and instead accusing Ruto's camp of being the one obsessed with the issue, Raila opened himself to scrutiny by proposing a National Accord type of deal. He argued that the purely parliamentary process proposed by Ruto at the State House press conference on April 2, while welcome, will address all the concerns raised by the Azimio la Umoja coalition. He suggested a wider national dialogue overseen by a neutral mediator, which is a fairly reasonable proposition, but reference to the National Accord serves only to fire up accusations that his ultimate motive is a place in government akin to the Grand Coalition deal struck with Kibaki. That is exactly the kind of proposal that makes the Ruto camp see red.

The President himself has stated on numerous occasions that a handshake deal which incorporates the opposition in government is out of the question. He terms it unconstitutional and a betrayal of multi-party democracy, saying what he wants to see is a strong opposition to hold his government to account. This reasoning is somewhat ingenious, given that Ruto has, since assuming the Presidency, expended a lot of time, energy and resources pursuing handshakes with individual opposition Members of Parliament and Governors who are be-

ing aggressively courted to abandon Raila and join the government troops.

Ruto has also often highlighted the role he played in the 2007-2008 post-election crisis so that Raila eventually won the seat of Prime Minister in the Grand Coalition government. Ruto himself came into the Coalition cabinet as Minister for Agriculture, as did then ODM colleague and now Prime Cabinet Secretary Musalia Mudavadi, who was Deputy Prime Minister. He did not argue at the time that the Grand Coalition was unconstitutional, anti-democracy or a mongrel government. Neither did he dismiss the negotiations outside Parliament overseen by neutral arbiters as unconstitutional.

It is an undeniable point, however, that the situation today is very different from what prevailed leading up to the Grand Coalition. At that time, Kenya was on the verge of civil war as violence flared up across the country in protest against the suspicious declaration that Kibaki had won a second term as President.

Raila was at the forefront in rejecting the electoral commission's declaration of Kibaki's victory. Ruto and Mudavadi, who now accuse Raila of causing trouble whenever he loses an election, at that time played key roles in mobilising violent resistance to Kibaki's re-election, and were happy beneficiaries of the political settlement which landed them senior roles in government. The country is not on the verge of a complete descent into anarchy and total breakdown this time, but there is no telling what might inform if the weekly or twice-weekly protests continue shutting down Nairobi and Kisumu and maybe spreading to other towns.

Despite all the tough talk from Gachagua and the Inspector-General of Police Japhet Koome, there has been realisation from more sober voices in government that the security forces alone cannot ensure restoration of law and order. There has also been concern over creeping enthusiasm for a brutal crackdown in which civil liberties will be severely restrained and special units within

the police given a free hand employ extrajudicial means in dealing with unrest.

Another issue is that the hardline forces in government ruling out all dialogue maybe motivated by self-interest. The likes of Gachagua and Mudavadi will be losers in any deal like that of 2008 National Accord or even the informal 2018 handshake where Raila gets a place at the table and displaces them. Ru-

to ruling out a handshake and Raila asserting that was never on his mind should have put to rest such fears. Now the latter's stated preference for a National Accord type of mechanism will have set alarm bells ringing, and also provide justification for those constantly warning against his alleged handshake plot.



President William Ruto

kenya lens

■ SHIFTING POSITIONS

WALKING A TIGHTROPE

Ruto must balance between his obligation as President to nurture national cohesion and his role as UDA party leader

• BY OSCAR OBONYO

Until he addressed the nation last Sunday, climbing down from his tough stance on mass action called by the opposition by extending an olive branch to former Prime Minister Raila Odinga and his brigade, President William Ruto was largely viewed by critics through the partisan lenses of his United Democratic Alliance (UDA) and Kenya Kwanza (KK) alliance.

That his six-month rule has been characterised by an “us versus them” dogma and grandstanding by key lieutenants is not in doubt. The question on the lips of many now is whether or not his latest move will tilt his administration from campaign mode and political party parochialism to nationalism. And will this rare gesture also catapult Ruto to statesmanship and national acceptance?

UDA Secretary-General Cleophas Malala is optimistic that the President will walk the talk. According to him, the UDA leader is determined to shake off any negative political tag he might have acquired over the decades by proving himself a true statesman.

“This is precisely what he has become and some of us were not surprised when he extended an olive branch to his political competitor. The President is genuine in his gesture, only that Raila’s shifting of goal posts could take us back to the streets,” warns Malala.

But as the Secretary-General of the Orange Democratic Move-

ment (ODM), Edwin Sifuna, notes, the President is a politician with the gift of the gab who has said many things before and who “has the capacity of moving crowds while at the same evading accountability”.

Claiming that Dr Ruto’s sentiments are mainly “empty words that are not matched by actions”, the Nairobi Senator points out that his party boss, Raila, and the entire Azimio brigade, are treating the President’s gesture with a lot of caution. The vocal politician says he will wait for the eventual outcome of the proposed di-

alogue before determining the government’s level of seriousness.

Either way, there is a begging opportunity for Ruto to right several wrongs. First is to break the current political impasse by uniting political actors and to address the economic hardships Kenyans are facing. Then he needs to win over new partners on the global stage, and to cleanse and build his reputation owing to his personal history, including his indictment at the International Criminal Court on charges of fanning post-election violence in 2007/8.

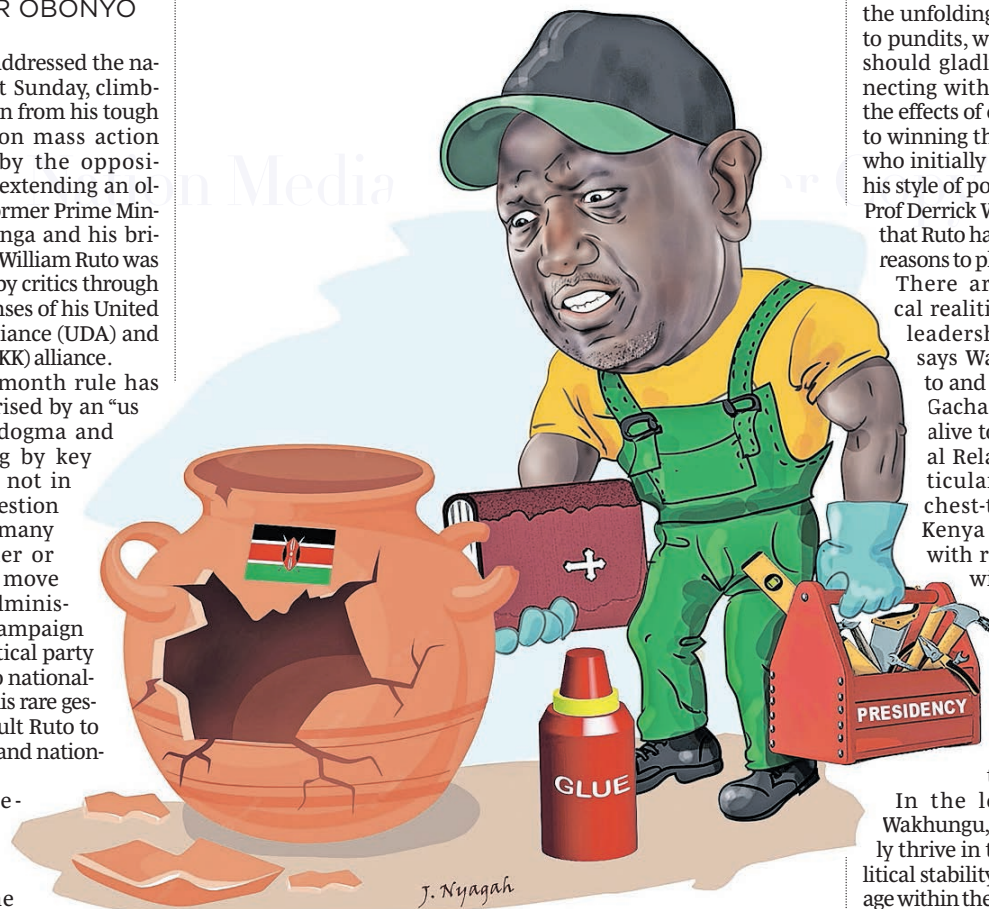
There is a silver lining behind

the unfolding events, according to pundits, which the President should gladly grab. From connecting with citizens suffering the effects of economic hardship to winning the support of those who initially never bought into his style of politics or leadership, Prof Derrick Wakhungu observes that Ruto has many compelling reasons to play along.

There are certain political realities relating to the leadership of a country, says Wakhungu, that Ruto and his deputy, Rigathi Gachagua, might not be alive to. The International Relations expert particularly considers the chest-thumping of the Kenya Kwanza brigade with regards to “dealing with Raila” and opting to ignore the mass action with the belief “they will run up and down and eventually tire themselves” an unfortunate mistake.

In the long run, opines Wakhungu, any leader will only thrive in the presence of political stability and a positive image within the international community. And owing to the current hard economic situation and the high rate of joblessness in the country, he observes, it is wrong to imagine protests under the current circumstances can die down naturally.

Things are already looking up for the country, it appears. On Tuesday last week, at the opening of the 2023 Social Protection Conference at the Kenya School of Government in Lower Kabete, the normally verbose Gachagua amazed his audience with a short speech lasting just 40 seconds: “When Kenya is peaceful, business is uninterrupted and Ken-



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yans are busy, I don't have much to say," he told his shocked audience as he invited the President to deliver his speech.

For decades now, Raila has been the boogeyman of Kenyan politics, especially in the Mount Kenya region. His political inactivity or absence accordingly disarms most of his detractors and rivals. The flipside of this reality is that the Azimio leader knows best how to bring the worst out of his political rivals.

But it is former President Uhuru Kenyatta who, through his sustained silence and inactivity, has best succeeded in portraying the Ruto-Gachagua duo as politically intolerant, immature and vindictive. Gachagua, specifically, has to this day sustained attacks on Kenyatta made on the campaign trail. The attack on the former President's Northlands farm two weeks ago particularly exposed the DP in poor light.

President Ruto appears convincing in attempts to fix the image of his government. The tone of his speech on Sunday, punctuated by affable references to "my brother" and "our opposition friends", reflected a spirit of solidarity and appeasement. On the contrary, the Azimio la Umoja-One Kenya leader sustained his tough stance against the President, including repeatedly referring to him as "Mr Ruto" while acknowledging the friendly gesture extended to his team. Ideally, the friendly aura between the two political groupings can only last depending on the resolve of the team leaders to meet and clear any grey areas as they work out a deal.

The President's KK brigade, for instance, was fairly shocked and uncomfortable with what they consider the President's decision to cede ground. A fresh move by Azimio leaders to broaden the dialogue beyond the bipartisan approach in Parliament is therefore bound to irk Ruto's lieutenants.

Political scientist Prof Amukowa Anangwe fears that Azimio's reaction could force the President to recoil into his yellow UDA and KK cocoon. Noting that Ruto's allies are opposed to his move to embrace Azimio, Anangwe opines that the President will be prevailed upon to abandon this new political project. According to Anangwe, the President's side is buoyed by the aspect of legitimacy in government and the apparent support – to this end – that

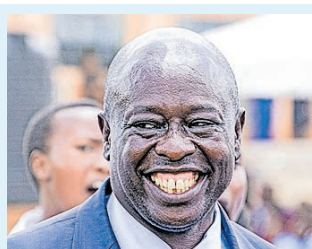
Ruto enjoys from the international community.

US ambassador to Kenya Meg Whitman's recent assertion that last year's poll was "the freest and most transparent election ever in the history of Kenya", for instance, is curious. While the statement raised eyebrows regarding its factuality, it was a pointer to the fact that the current administration enjoys the backing of international partners – a factor that Azimio leaders recently pointed out when they asked "why have our international friends gone quiet?"

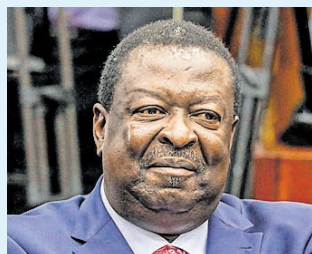
Prof Anangwe believes the President is unlikely to cave in to a lot of pressure as this would upset his governance plan, still at a nascent stage, and dismantle his hold on coalition partners who helped him ascend to power. Incidentally, previous heads of state – Mwai Kibaki and Uhuru Kenyatta – only engaged Raila in the proverbial handshake in their second terms in office. Moi similarly embraced Raila during his final term in office. Nonetheless, the situation is different now. The previous instances revolved around individual political succession manoeuvres. Moi, for instance, hoped to get Raila's help to boost Uhuru's chances of becoming President in 2002, while Uhuru and Raila plotted to edge Ruto out of the power equation.

This time round, the Azimio leader maintains he is pushing the case of Kenya and the common citizen, presently burdened by the high cost of living. While it is difficult to trust politicians with regard to the quest for power, pundits believe the 77-year-old is unlikely seek the Presidency for the sixth time in 2027 and that he is keener on keeping the Ruto administration in check while securing his legacy.

However, it is worth noting the context in which Ruto reached out to his "friend". Coming against the backdrop of sustained mass action, which had turned violent and destructive, the President conceded in his statement that he had caved in to pressure and the advice of religious leaders as well as members of the international community. Noting that the mayhem had caused the loss of human lives, negative publicity globally and plunged citizens into economic crisis, the President summarily observed that "in times like these, it is not about who is



DP Rigathi Gachagua



PCS Musalia Mudavadi



Edwin Sifuna
ODM Secretary-General



Cleo Malala
UDA Secretary-General



Kalonzo Musyoka



Martha Karua

right or wrong". Admittedly, Ruto's about-turn took many – especially diehard UDA supporters – by surprise. Only a day earlier, his principal assistant, Gachagua, had fired a salvo at Raila, warning that last Monday's was going to be his last public protest.

Ruto is not the first Kenyan President to shift position abruptly to the utter surprise of his principal assistant. Daniel arap Moi did just that on March 18, 2002, when he accommodated Raila's National Development Party in a merger ceremony with the ruling party, Kanu, at Nairobi's Moi International Sports Centre. Then, Moi announced to the 6,000 delegates the scrapping of the position of National Vice Chairman, held by Vice-President George Saitoti, and creation of four new vice chairmen's positions.

An enraged Saitoti gracefully bowed out of the race, but not before uttering his famous line – "there come(s) a time when the nation is much more important than an individual". In the new arrangement, Raila replaced party stalwart Joseph "JJ" Kamotho as Secretary-General, while Uhuru Kenyatta, Kalonzo Musyoka, Musalia Mudavadi, and Noah Katana Ngala occupied the four positions of vice-chairmen.

Ruto himself would become victim of President Uhuru Kenyatta's unprecedented move to team up with his main political rival, Raila, in March 2018, in a handshake gesture at Nairobi's Harambee House. The development, which took many Kenyans by surprise, would relegate the then deputy president to the periphery and usher the ODM leader to an influential role in the Executive.

Monitoring the current events, one cannot help wondering whether Gachagua's day, too, has come. And going by the trend of past instances, it is understandable why the former Mathira MP is cautious about the events of last Sunday and why the UDA fraternity is not overly enthusiastic about their party leader's gesture towards Raila.

But as Malala rightly observes, the President remains a politician: "There is a difference between Ruto the UDA leader and Ruto the President. In the latter capacity, he is a unifying leader keen on nurturing national cohesion. But he is also alive to the reality of building his UDA outfit for political interests."

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■ LITTLE-KNOWN BELGIAN CHARITY GROUP ON A MISSION IN AFRICAN CAPITALS

RUTO'S DEAL MAKERS



Since taking the reins in September last year, President Ruto has made no secret of his intention to knock on any doors possible to unlock foreign investment in Kenya, a stand that has sharply increased demand for his time.



For close to 10 years, Bridgin Foundation has traversed the world, promising to pump billions of dollars into infrastructure projects in developing countries. Their source of funds? Supposedly a network of old Jewish tycoons terrified of leaving billions of dollars doing nothing in their bank accounts after they die.



On March 21, the President gave audience to a little-known Belgian charity group in a closed-door meeting. The meeting, which was a culmination of several talks earlier in the year between Belgium's Bridgin Foundation and Kenya's Ambassador to Brussels, Prof Bitange Ndemo, focused on investment.



In Africa, the organisation has made promises to Uganda, Malawi, Nigeria, Liberia and, most recently, Malawi. In November last year, Bridgin signed a contract with the Malawi government that was to see it invest \$6.8 billion (Sh907 billion) in infrastructure projects across the country. The amount is more than double Malawi's budget for the current financial year.



Not much is known about Bridgin, other than the fact that its president is Prof Tanko Mouhamadou and its Programme Director is Christophe Prieels. Its website has no information about its financiers, completed projects that charity institutions are usually quick to showboat, or any data that can be used to verify Bridgin's credibility.



The Bridgin Foundation engagement is the second incident involving the Kenya Kwanza government to set off global alarm bells, following a February trip to Qatar by Trade and Industrialisation CS Moses Kuria.



Malawi's President Lazarus Chakwera described his country's \$6.8 billion deal as "early Christmas", barely six months after Uganda's education spokesperson admitted that Bridgin's offer sounded "too good to be true".

Kenya is in talks with a little-known Belgian organisation that has been targeting leaders of many developing nations. Interestingly, there's no information about its financiers, and no record of completed projects

● By BRIAN WASUNA

For the last seven months, the doors at State House have been in constant motion as local and foreign visitors scramble for whatever time they can get with President William Ruto. Since taking the reins in September last year, President Ruto has made no secret of his intention to knock on any doors possible to unlock foreign investment in Kenya, a stand that has sharply increased demand for his time.

March 21 was no different, as the

President gave audience to a little-known Belgian charity group in a closed-door meeting.

The meeting, which was a culmination of several talks earlier in the year between Belgium's Bridgin Foundation and Kenya's Ambassador to Brussels, Prof Bitange Ndemo, focused on investment. "Following engagements with the Mission early this year, the president of Bridgin Foundation yesterday met President @WilliamsRuto and discussed possible projects to be undertaken in the country. @bantigito @For-

eignOfficeKE #Partnerships," the embassy tweeted the following morning.

But the meeting, alongside other engagements with foreign consultants, has raised red flags, with the potential of evolving into embarrassing and very expensive mistakes for the taxpayer. For close to 10 years, Bridgin Foundation has traversed the world, promising to pump billions of dollars into infrastructure projects in developing countries. Their source of funds? Supposedly a network of old Jewish tycoons terrified of

leaving billions of dollars doing nothing in their bank accounts after they die.

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The website has only one page, which details that the foundation is registered in Belgium and aims

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to assist developing countries.

"For confidentiality and security reasons, this website is intentionally left without detailed content; should you need further information, please contact us using the button below. Prof Tanko Mouhamadou," a disclaimer at the bottom of the page reads. Attempts to click the contact button only lead us to a link seeking to register a new email address.

From Uzbekistan and Nepal in Asia and Ecuador in South America, Bridgin has made big promises that would have made the developing nations better off. In Africa, the same promises have been made to Uganda, Malawi, Nigeria, Liberia and, most recently, Malawi. In November last year, Bridgin signed a contract with the Malawi government that was to see it invest \$6.8 billion (Sh907 billion) in infrastructure projects across the country. The amount is more than double Malawi's budget for the current financial year.

Bridgin has promised to start by putting up a state-of-the-art hospital city in Malawi and says it will spend \$1 billion (Sh133 billion) to solve the country's health needs through the investment.

But Malawi's government has already started including some of the projects under the Bridgin contract in its budget, an indication that government bureaucrats may have opted to cut ties. In Nepal, Bridgin promised Kathmandu University a \$120 million (Sh16 billion) hydro-power facility, with 10 per cent of the project funds going into other operational costs such as salaries for staff.

The contract was to be terminated if Bridgin did nothing within 12 months of signing. The 12 months lapsed in 2021. In Ecuador, it was a \$200 million (Sh26 billion) research hospital for Cuenca University. In Uzbekistan, a similar amount was promised for agriculture and food security projects. But with all the countries where big promises were made, the only thing to show is images of hearty handshakes and smiles during flashy contract signing ceremonies.

Malawi's government was recently left with egg on its face when journalists from a local publication, *The Nation*, revealed that taxpayers footed travel and accommodation bills for Bridgin Foundation officials dur-

ing the contract signing visit. Prof Mouhamadou claimed, in his response, that the money spent will be refunded when Bridgin starts pouring dollars into Malawi's infrastructure. But the company's track record indicates that Malawian taxpayers may have to accept that they simply gave an all-expenses-paid trip to Prof Mouhamadou and his team.

Ndemo had not responded to our calls or text messages on whether there is any formal arrangement in the works with Bridgin Foundation, or if taxpayers have dug into their pockets to facilitate engagements that have happened with the shadowy institution so far. When Belgian reporters affiliated to the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists visited a building Bridgin Foundation claims to operate from in Brussels, they found no indication that it has offices there. The building is located within the European Quarter, a section of Brussels that hosts offices under various European Union institutions.

The building's staff confirmed that Bridgin periodically hires a conference room to hold meetings. This means that the institution that has signed billion-dollar contracts with several countries, with Kenya seemingly en-route to the club, has no verifiable physical presence. Another red flag in the governance sector.

Bridgin was incorporated in Belgium on November 18, 2014. Other than Prof Mouhamadou and Prieels, Bridgin has Bourgy Sébastien Stéphane and Ruessmann Florence as its directors. Bastin Yves Jean left the institution's directorship in

2020. Investigative journalism outfit AmaBhungane has established that Bridgin has never filed annual accounts with Belgian authorities since incorporation. It has only filed tax returns. Still, Malawi's President Lazarus Chakwera described his country's \$6.8 billion deal as "early Christmas", barely six months after Uganda's education spokesperson admitted that Bridgin's offer sounded "too good to be true". Prof Mouhamadou last month told AmaBhungane that the institution operates using the Judaist spirit of *Tikkun olam*. In *Tikkun olam*, subscribers take remedial action to repair the world and leave it a better place.

The Bridgin Foundation engagement is the second incident involving the Kenya Kwanza government to set off global alarm bells, following a February trip to Qatar by Trade and Industrialisation CS Moses Kuria. Three days before Kuria led a team of 30 individuals for an investment forum in Doha, a letter detailing the travel party's identities was leaked to Nation Media Group journalists.

Alexandr Zingman, 56, and Oleg Vodchits, 36, were listed in a February 24 letter from the Foreign Affairs ministry to the Qatari embassy as being in a team of 30 from Kuria's ministry that was to travel to Qatar for a five-day function starting from February 27. Kuria

listed the two Belarusians as advisors on countries, justifying their presence in the team. Zingman owns Aftrade DMCC, a firm that trades agricultural equipment and solutions with African countries. Vodchits is the company's CEO.

The Dubai-registered firm has a local presence, and has sold some tractors to Ken-

yan farmers. Zingman has close ties with Segei Sheiman, an associate of Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko. The two were arrested in 2021 in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) over links to shady dealings with gold. He has in the past been linked to arms dealing in Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Zingman and Sheiman have gold dealings in the DRC, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Their Zimbabwe gold dealings were falsely presented to the public as a joint venture between Zimbabwe and Belarus. Zingman was among wealthy individuals unmasked in the 2021 Pandora Papers – a trove of documents revealing registration of shell companies in tax havens by hundreds of influential individuals across the world – over the Zimbabwe dealings. He used shell companies registered in the UK and Seychelles in an attempt to hide his ownership of Zim Goldfields, the company at the heart of the shady Zimbabwe gold dealings. Zim Goldfields was in 2018 granted a licence to mine gold in a section of Mutare river in eastern Zimbabwe. The firm also bagged other prospecting deals for platinum and rare earth metals in the same years.

Initially, the contracts were painted government-to-government deals, only for the Pandora Papers to reveal that they were only benefitting private institutions. Zimbabwe's government has since insisted that Zingman is a legitimate businessman whose dealings with the country are above board. He is honorary consul of Belarus to Zimbabwe. Zingman has friends in high places. He is an ally of Zimbabwe President Emmerson Mnangagwa, former DRC President Joseph Kabila, Kuria among other leaders. When we asked Kuria about the two Belarusians in his trip to Qatar, the CS insisted that questions couldn't be asked about his personal friends.

Kuria insisted that the two Belarusians were footing their own bills for the entire Qatari excursion, hence there was no basis to reveal any information on their role in the Ministry of Trade. On Monday, Kuria and his Foreign Affairs counterpart Alfred Mutua met with Belarusian Foreign Affairs minister Sergei Aleinik at the Belarusian Embassy, and discussed bilateral ties. Aleinik also met President Ruto, who urged Belarus to consider investing in Kenya.

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Dr Alfred Mutua

the limelight



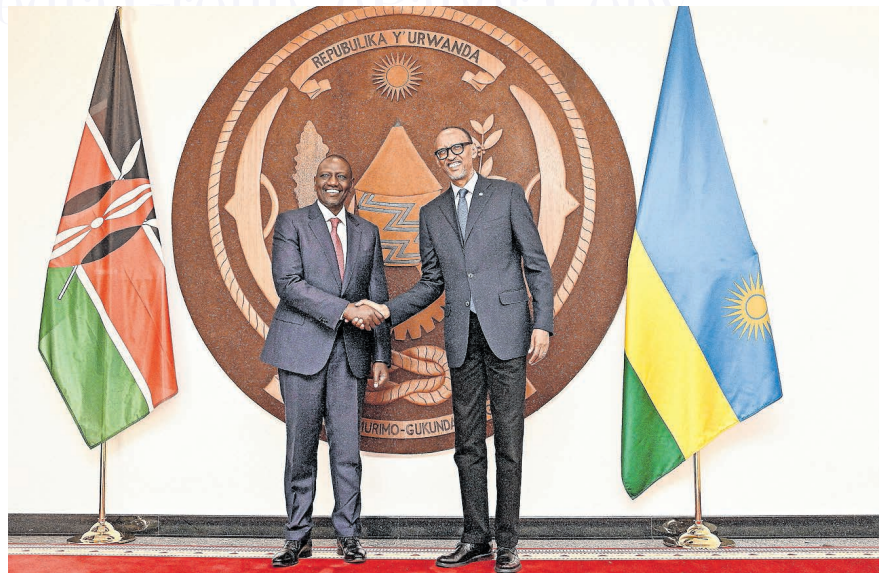
This aerial view shows a derailed night train in Voorschoten on April 4. At least one person died and 30 were injured when the high-speed passenger train slammed into heavy construction equipment and derailed near The Hague, Dutch emergency services said. PHOTO | AFP



Former US President Donald Trump makes his way inside the Manhattan Criminal Courthouse in New York on April 4 to answer criminal charges. PHOTO | AFP



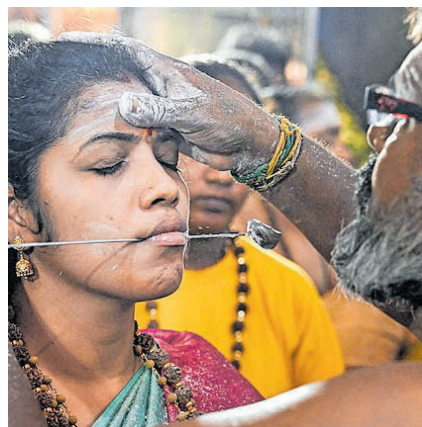
A Palestinian man adds tires to a fire in protests on April 5 after Israeli police entered Jerusalem's al-Aqsa Mosque to dislodge "agitators" from the holy Muslim site, built on top of what Jews call the Temple Mount, Judaism's holiest site. PHOTO | AFP



President William Ruto and his Rwandan counterpart Paul Kagame during a state visit at the Office of the President in Kigali, Rwanda. PHOTO | PCS



This photo taken on April 1 shows elk resting in the Shishou Elk National Natural Reserve in Jingzhou, in central China's Hubei province. PHOTO | AFP



A devotee gets her cheeks pierced with a metal rod in Chennai on April 5 on the occasion the Panguni Uthiram festival, observed in the Tamil month of Panguni. PHOTO | AFP



Pope Francis gestures towards attendees as he arrives in the popemobile car to hold the weekly general audience on April 5 at St Peter's square in The Vatican. PHOTO | AFP

A portrait of Onyango Otieno, a Black man with a short beard and mustache, wearing a white t-shirt. He is resting his chin on his hand, looking thoughtfully at the camera. He is wearing several beaded bracelets on his right wrist and a gold watch on his left wrist. The background is a dark, textured grey.

The
Arc

**MEN,
LET'S
TALK**

Onyango Otieno uses storytelling as a tool for healing and overcoming stigma for African boys and men who have been sexually abused

OPEN SPACE

Support Ruto, Raila pact

The two leaders must understand the fact that the world's eyes are on them, and the burden is on their shoulders

● BY NKWAZI MHANGO

If there's anything Kenya is good at, it is its unique nature of changing quickly. President William Ruto last week extended an olive branch to his erstwhile foe, Raila Odinga, after a period of violent demos. We believe both of them mean well.

After leading demos that split the country and paralysed the economy, Odinga brought to the fore an underlying problem that must be addressed. Now, that Odinga's accepted the olive branch, I've the following for the duo.

First, desist from fanaticism and chest-thumping as you ponder on how to address the conflict. This is key. Squander this golden break, and things might become worse than they've been.

Secondly, you must understand the fact that all Kenyans' and the world's eyes are on you, and the burden is on your shoulders.

Thus, what you've gotten into is not about you. It's about Kenya today, tomorrow and the future. In conflict studies we say that the conflict can sometimes become a chance to address long-drawn-out issues that must be turned into an opportunity but not a liability.

Thirdly, you must understand that Kenya is bigger and more important than the parties in conflict. You have a rare opportunity to display maturity, patriotism and love for Kenya. If the country goes up in smoke, you'll lose bigly, and all blame will be on your shoulders.

Fourthly, all your lieutenants and sympathisers must avoid enkindling Kenya by using voices of reason to dissipate the conflict.

Fifthly, you must avoid hooliganism and let reality apply in addressing the conflict with more give and take. We all saw Kenya sweltering. Demonstrations became a weekly ritual. Kenya's history is strewn with violent ethnic conflict that tends to resurface after elections. Despite the country having one of the most progressive constitutions, it seems that the powers-that-be have horribly failed to apply it to resolve discord resulting from allegations of vote rigging. On March 27, demonstrations took a bad turn. The looters invaded former President Uhuru Kenyatta's farm in Ruiru and made away with livestock.

Those who know Kenya's precariousness still wonder how the unfolding situation will end. This speaks to the dangers of allowing dirty history to define Kenya. Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me. Who wants the repetition of dirty and sad history? Remember, in 2007's elections, there occurred violent ethnic conflict that left over 1,000 Kenyans dead, and property worth millions of dollars vandalised. As if that wasn't enough, 10 years later, in 2017, the same allegations resurfaced. The Supreme Court prevailed by nullifying Kenyatta's win, setting a precedent in Kenya and Africa. Had it not been for the court to assuage the loser of the elections by ruling in his favour, things would likely have been different. Come last year, the same issue resurfaced when Odinga claimed that his win had been stolen.

The Supreme Court ruled in favour of Ruto.

After being handed victory, Ruto and his lieutenants, mainly his Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua honed their clappers irresponsibly, falling right into Odinga's trap.

For example, one of Ruto's lieutenants tweeted before the vandalism of Kenyatta's property that they were coming for the chattels of the dynasties and before long, it came to pass when Kenyatta's property was vandalised. Was this a coincidence or a plot? Such utterances must stop as the power of reason comes in to save Kenya from itself.

In sum, I beseech Ruto and his lieutenants to scratch their heads and adequately and competently address the problem instead of letting tongues wag. Should they squander this golden opportunity, neither Kenyans nor the world will forgive them. Kenyans should avoid violence. For me, what is in the offing is another golden chance for Kenya to show the world how mature it has become. The conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, and the horn of Africa are enough. Odinga and Ruto must be supported on this rocky road to resolving the dangerously rolling conflict for Kenya and the region.

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



MIND SPEAK



Sepp-Blatter Kopany

The invasion of former President Uhuru Kenyatta's farm in Northlands is a heinous act that must be condemned. We must advocate for peaceful coexistence and political tolerance between communities. The government must address the lack of job opportunities that often leads to violence and destruction. The police must provide equal protection to all citizens and their property without bias.

— President, Homa Bay College Students Association



Stella Tracy

The invasion of former President Uhuru Kenyatta's land in Ruiru was uncalled for and should be condemned. The law should protect us and not be used against us. Kenyatta is a Kenyan, worthy of protection. At this point, we need to be united to lift the economy. Sending goons to rob someone of his property is not a solution to our problems. Sadly, none of them has been arrested yet.

— A student at Rongo University



Peter Magutu

Kenya might go down soon if the goons are not brought to book. They say that you should not start a fight in the market when you sell eggs. The government should arrest everyone involved in this, though they are unlikely to do so. Let the citizens also reject being used to conduct such heinous acts; the effects are better imagined than experienced. Uphold the Constitution.

— A student at Technical University of Kenya



Ochuonyo Komala

The goons who invaded former President Kenyatta's farm should be arrested. The incident shows that we are unforgiving, revengeful and petty hypocrites. It was wrong to invade the farm of a family that has led us for 25 years. If the goons are left to do as they wish, the nation will be in chaos. We must respect the rule of law.

— Student leader, Technical University of Kenya

MY TAKE



SUMMIT ON THE RUNWAY

No one goes to Sandhurst to learn about armoured combat only to spend his days acting as an usher at the airport whenever the President comes back from having tea in Ethiopia

● BY WAGA ODONGO

Every time the President jets back into the country as happened last week, a curious ritual takes place.

Chiefs from the security services line up in single file next to the plane, uniforms neatly laundered, boots brushed to a sparkly shine for the opportunity to shake the Commander-in-Chief's hand.

The President gets off the plane, steps onto the red carpet and begins greeting everyone. The Deputy President makes sure to hog as much time with the boss as possible – to fend off those nasty rumours that the boss will be looking elsewhere in the next election – assuring him that in his absence those meddling Ugandan generals didn't make good on their Twitter threats to invade and institute a strict nationwide matooke-only diet.

Next up are the service chiefs. There barely is any time to get a word in with the big man; he is probably suffering from jet lag from the long flight. All you can do is smile and give a firm handshake. Rarely does the President ever share more than pleasantries with the welcoming party. There are no finer points of strategy discussed on the tarmac. It is all smiles, handshakes and waves. Why do we do it? What is the point of this summit on the tarmac? Imagine you are the head of the Navy. Your headquarters is about 500kms south-east in Mtongwe and so you must fly in. Being one of the heavies in the military top brass means you need a retinue of flunkies saluting every time you make eye contact to keep your spirits up. You are a busy man in charge of a fleet, so you need one of them big guzzlers on standby in both Nairobi and Mombasa, with a complement of chase cars.

Your epaulette has been lengthened to wholly record your full rank and even a gentle breeze makes your ribbons and shiny medals jingle. You arrive at the airport an hour before the Commander-in-Chief and do the hard part of your job: you wait. At Dartmouth Royal Navy College, where you were a cadet learning the finer points of naval combat, they never told you that part of the job would be spent at the VIP lounge waiting to greet the big man.

One of the Navy's main bases is in Manda Bay, which in the past has been subject to attacks by insurgents, so your retinue has to have a senior officer who can make decisions while you are yucking it up with the C-in-C. It wouldn't be a good show to interrupt the photo opportunity with bad news about the theatre of operations.

The officer in charge of doing your job



President William Ruto with senior military officials led by the Chief of Defence Forces, General Robert Kibochi, at the National Military Command Centre, Karen, Nairobi.

should be senior enough to know when to order in the mortars next time so much as a kefiyeh is seen within 100 metres of the base.

As head of the Navy, you know the Chief of Defence Forces is a movable feast; you have to turn up for these things. You know the Army did their bit, the Airforce is currently enjoying the seat and very soon it might be your turn to add EGH next to your name, so you make sure to laugh loudest at *Mtukufu Rais's* jokes. So, you are ready for the meeting, and maybe this time you will get a word in on his brilliant leadership. You want the boss to know that our seas are fine, and he has nothing to worry about. As a lifelong sailor you are comfortable in the water but in service of the nation, if the occasion demands it, you can be a landlubber in Nairobi as Chief of Defence Forces. You can't mess it up now, because you don't want to read in a few months that the National Security Council has promoted you from Major to Lieutenant-General (Yay!) in charge of the National Defence College (Hell No!).

The process of putting before the President all his soldiers is a display of dominance, a reminder of who is boss. It is about projecting power, more ceremonial than functional.

The fact that everyone who matters in the security apparatus is on a runway waiting for the President means that the reserve team is in charge of operations. This is the case during national celebrations too, but then it can be planned well in advance.

It is, of course, a security risk to have such

high-ranking members of the military gathered at a location with predictable frequency for what amounts to a photo opportunity. More importantly, it is a profound waste of their time. The heads of our security services are in charge of soldiers fighting wars on two fronts and some have their headquarters an hour away from the capital.

No one goes to Sandhurst to learn about armoured combat only to spend his days acting as an usher whenever the President comes back from having tea in Ethiopia. Kenya Kwanza promised to be a clean break with the past, to sweep out the staid ways. They were radicals, hustlers who cared not about pomp and circumstance, procedure and custom, who would get rid of the old and bring the new. I was hoping that they would ditch the ever present big-brotheresque President's mugshot that hangs off every wall. We can do with less of that. Instead, they modernised the practice by changing the photo dimensions and sticking a flag in the background. (Was there no room for a cross there?). While that is an obvious inconvenience, this summit on the runway has the potential of slowing down the decision-making functions of the senior leadership of the security services.

The task of welcoming the President can be left to civilian leadership as the heads of police, intelligence and armed forces presumably make better use of their time.

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SEXUAL ASSAULT

Onyango Otieno has created a safe space for African boys and men who have been raped or sexually abused, using storytelling as a tool for healing and overcoming stigma

● BY EDDY ASHIOYA

Like a moth to a flame, Onyango Otieno attracts opprobrium and praise almost in equal measure. Well, for one thing, he is highly opinionated. You may think he is brash, egoistic even, but he won't leave you in any grey areas; you will know exactly where he stands. Some might even say he just doesn't cross lines — he rubs them off, then redraws and crosses them again. He is a lightning rod for attention in a country with a short attention span. It is like something is in the water, you just don't know what.

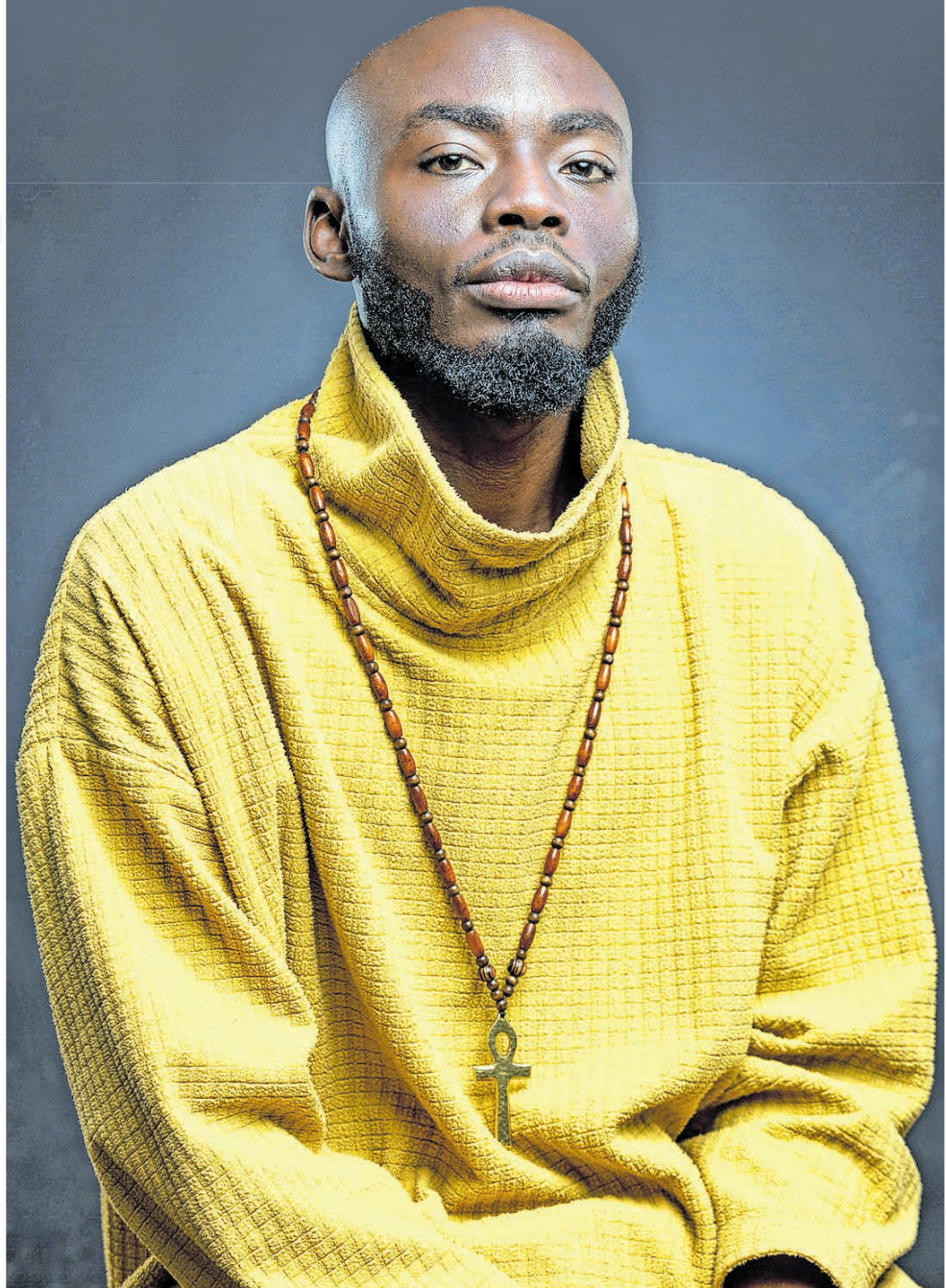
Take this past week, for instance. He has been trending on social media sites for suggesting that men should stock menstrual pads in their homes, just in case a female visitor comes along needing them. His controversial opinions set Twitter ablaze, with the embers spilling over to Facebook and Instagram, people coming at him from all angles, ready to pitchfork him, in his own type of Walpurgis night.

So just why is Onyango Otieno giving a TEDx Talk at Aga Khan Academy in Mombasa on April 1 if he's sparked such controversy? The answer is right there in the question: Onyango Otieno is giving a TEDx talk because he's sparked such controversy.

"As a creative, as a writer and as an activist, I go where the fire is. The work is to keep squeezing our society until these things come out. I am glad there was conversation around it. And this is not the first time I have done that."

But the real thing is that Onyango, like any creative, has something running deep in him. He is not afraid of his scars, and his story offers moments of relief to his followers — not to mention

FACING THE MAN IN THE MIRROR



Onyango Otieno is a trauma therapist, strategic digital advocacy trainer, mental health advocate, podcaster, writer and poet. PHOTO | POOL

KUMVANA FELLOW OF ENGINEERS

• Onyango Otieno is a 2019 Kumvana Fellow of Engineers Without Borders Canada. The Kumvana Programme congregates 10-15 dynamic African professionals for leadership development and network building while enhancing Canadians' understanding of sub-Saharan Africa's development realities. He is also a 2019 alumnus of The Moth's Global Community Programme, which brings storytellers together from all over the world, and a Young African Leaders Initiative East Africa Fellow.

• Onyango is the co-founder of Fatuma's Voice Foundation, a forum using debate, open dialogue and other creative tools to encourage expression, picturing an inclusive and politically conscious Africa. Since the organisation was launched on July 12, 2013, it has hosted over 142 themed community forums, hosted 1,420 artistic performers, and brought together 30,000 community members.

• He has worked as a writer, digital storyteller, social media strategist, communication and advocacy consultant, trauma healing and gender workshop facilitator with The African Women's Development and Communication Network, Mastercard Foundation, Aga Khan University, Council of Governors, Groots Kenya, International Commission of Jurists (Kenya Chapter), Green String Network, and AWAN Africa.

• Rix (Onyango's stage name) has performed in all major Kenyan poetry events, including a paramount stint at the Supreme Court of Kenya before Kenyan Magistrates and then Chief Justice Dr Willy Mutunga. He has also graced the annual Babishai Poetry Workshop in Uganda, SpokenWord Rwanda and Transpoesis in Kigali.

• His poetry is featured in *Breaking Silence: The In-depth Words of a Poet Anthology* published by James Robert Myers in Ghana, and *Badilisha Poetry X-Change*, an online audio archive and Pan-African poetry show delivered in radio format, based in South Africa.

a voyeuristic jolt. He knows better than anyone the darkness that hides behind the light: Onyango was raped at 20 years old by their house help. He came out with his story in November 2019, urging more men who had been sexually abused to emerge from the silence and shame associated with male vulnerability. The strangest part was, there was no build-up to the revelation. The earth did not shake, the air didn't crackle, and there was no sound of approaching footsteps.

"I came out for the first time about my sexual assault ten years after it had happened. Therapy made me realise it was abuse. It was a tweet and it went viral at that time. The usual trolling happened, but what touched me the most was the men who reached out to me and confessed that they also went through the same thing. We never think that men are abused by women. We know about sodomy, but when it's women abusing men, we never pay much heed to it."

"You rob someone of their basic core, and you can't get it back. You can't get your childhood back."

To claim the prize of adulthood you must vanquish the god of your childhood. All of us, in our

own ways, are prisoners of our own flawed brains, children yearning to be freed, trapped and realising that the ultimate aloneness in each of us is, finally, inviolable. Hundreds of victims, and in basic ways it's always the same story. What the children are left with is a gaping hole in the soul. Trust – the magical certainty a baby starts to learn when a cry for comfort receives a response – has been ripped away.

"There is a guy who told me he had been robbed and sodomised by people he knew. And so he hired goons to go and kill those guys. He told me that while supporting my initiative, but he would never come out."

The initiative that he is talking about is a safe space for African boys and men who have been raped or sexually abused. He founded the 200-member online mental health support group where members use storytelling as a tool for tackling the stigma of mental illness, and hosts the *Afro-Masculinity Podcast*, which interrogates the complexities of African masculinities. He also manages a male support group for healthy masculinity, with 150 male members.

"I thought to create a safe space

and a community where these men could meet up and hear each other. I opened up a WhatsApp group in November 2019. When they started sharing their stories, I knew I had to find a way to get them to therapy, though cognisant of the fact that most of them could not pay for it. I talked to a couple of therapists who agreed to put an arm around the shoulders of these guys on an appreciation token basis. By the end of two months, most of them had gained understanding and processed the difficult emotions, with the support group remaining active as well. I fundraise, and there are also people who send recurring money to aid the initiative."

The target is usually KSh100,000 for five people for two months of therapy.

The firstborn in a family of three (he lost his younger sister when she was just six months old) says the highlight of his initiative is understanding. Understanding the despair that men go through. "I grew up in a violent home, lived in the streets, and survived mob justice on June 20, 2004, after being caught shoplifting. I became suicidal at the end of that year, fleeing to Mombasa at 16 years old to self-destruct." But his plans were cut short by his thoughts during the journey. He opted to find friends who lived in Malindi, and they took him in for a month. "We run away and think it is easy to escape. It isn't. You have to face the man – or woman – in the mirror."

"I am communal. I have a group of friends plus two other communities of boys, where we just meet to bond and talk. Women have been a big support system for me, especially my mother and other people who validated me and told me that you don't have to be a stiff, macho, unresponsive man to be a man."

How does he describe himself now? "I am a trauma coach, writer, mental health activist and poet. I also hold storytelling workshops and train on digital advocacy. It's a little bit of both. It depends on where I am using what." In other words, he helps men get in touch with their vulnerabilities. He works with men who have experienced sexual trauma, and runs talks, workshops and seminars in schools across the world championing healthy ideas of masculinity.

What has he learned from his clients? "So many of us are holding onto shame. Many people feel like they don't have a right to talk about what they went through.

They only come out when they are at the end of the rope. But when we are allowed to see ourselves differently, we bloom like flowers. A lot of people want to get help but they feel like they don't deserve to be supported. Without support, healing is very difficult. The more sustainable medicine is people and systems that support your healthcare, your movement, education and freedom."

He has travelled all over the world but it is Canada, on a mental health fellowship in February 2019, that turned his head. It was peak winter and he was visiting mental health clinics while giving talks when he discovered that very many people had a limited view of what Africa is. "I met some guys collecting money for 'poor people in Africa'. I asked which country they were taking the money to and they said Kenya. I told them I was from Kenya and asked what part of the country they were donating to; they were tongue-tied. The idea that we are poor is a story that is sold to them."

That reminds me of Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozie's *summa cum laude* speech about the danger of a single story.

"We are sold stories all the time about who we are and what we are supposed to be. I started thinking about how we can create more cultural exchanges to learn the truth about the stories we have been sold about each other. I realised that the way people tell stories, how they are taught, is also quite a political process and my work is to help people go deeper."

He is also not free of misconceptions. "People imagine I am gay" Are you? "I am not." "That I tell sob stores to get sympathy. I don't. Some think that I am a 28-year-old. I am not." You are not? "No, I am 34."

How does he define success? I define success as being aware of who I am and what I can do with my power. That is bigger than anything. Sometimes we get money or love or both and don't know what do with them or what they mean. Being aware is the greatest success. Clarice Lispector (Brazilian novelist and short story writer) captured it aptly when she said, 'It is inside me that I must create someone who understands.'" Indeed, in an almost Manichaeon vision of a world, where good and evil are joined in battle, Onyango descended into the abyss of hell and rose again to tell his story.

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MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

Famous for his photography skills and content creation for leading brands on social media, Victor Peace Karanja is also a top corporate digital and computer professional

● BY SINDA MATIKO

In computing, WYSIWYG is an acronym for What You See Is What You Get. A rather tired cliché, right?

But what you see on his social media accounts may not be exactly what you get when you get to know Victor Karanja, who prefers the sobriquet Victor Peace. “Victor Peace sounds melodious and sexy I think,” chuckles Peace, who boasts 76,000-plus followers on Instagram.

The clean-shaven 32-year-old is among the top go-to digital content creators in the country, if brands he has worked with are anything to go by: East African Breweries, L’Oreal, Diaryland, Garnier, just to name-drop a few.

His online content centres around home and lifestyle. Blogs describe him as a Lifestyle Influencer and some simply a photographer. But Victor Peace easily passes for anything except what he actually is and does: a resolute, tech-savvy professional with a rich resume: Country Digital Officer, South Africa Breweries; Marketing Manager, Le Grenier a Pain; Digital Marketing Manager, DPO Group; Marketing Communication Manager, Arifu; Facebook Lead Trainer, Digify Africa; Digital Strategy Lead, Amref Health Africa; Digital Marketing Lead Trainer, WomenWork Kenya.

The Business Information Technology and Computer Science graduate is currently the Technology Manager at PATH, a non-profit global health organisation based in Seattle, US with 1,600 employees in more than 70 countries around the world. “What most people see is the content creation side of me but my background is IT. Since September 2021, I have

BEST OF TWO WORLDS



Content Creator and Website Developer Victor Peace at work. PHOTO: IPOOL

been working full time at PATH, developing tech systems,” the website developer clarifies with a cheeky laugh.

After graduating from Strathmore University in 2013, Peace did a little cable networking but ventured out into photography. “Photography paid well at the time. For two years I lived comfortably, shooting a number of billboard adverts for clients like Samsung and working with magazines such as *Drum*, *True Love*, *Healthy Woman* and *Couture*. I also sold images outside the country.” He was even named runner-up at the 2015 Sony World Photography Africa Awards

won by Allan Gichigi. “It was a very lucrative venture then but later on became saturated and there was no bargaining power anymore.”

With the photography industry sodden, Victor made a comeback to the tech world in 2016.

“I started doing a lot of digital marketing, focusing more on creating websites, coding and maintaining software in the organisations I worked in.” His first job on coming back was developing a website for the French restaurant, Le Grenier a Pain. But the project he is most proud of in the course of his career is one that failed.

“In my third year in university, a group (three) of us got funding and in 2013 we launched the first ever e-commerce platform in Kenya called Chochote. There was no Jumia then. There were eBay and Amazon and we thought, why not create one for our Kenyan market?”

For three years, the students did their best to sustain the business but failed. “The profit margins were too small. I also think people hadn’t yet started trusting buying things online and businesses didn’t want to put their products up on the platform either.” After college, he got a job as a digital officer for South African

Breweries, which at the time was selling its Redds alcohol brand in Kenya.

“Digital communication was starting at that time. There was no digital marketing. I did that for a year before moving to Le Grenier a Pain.”

As former US President John F Kennedy once said, change is the law of life and those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future. Peace was on the move again. “I was told that in your 20s is when you experiment a lot to discover what you like and to learn. I did that with every opportunity that presented itself. In March 2018, I joined DPO Group as Digital Marketing Manager.”

DPO is currently the biggest fintech company in Africa that allows one to get paid by shoppers worldwide in any currency of their choice. Shoppers are able to choose from credit and debit cards, mobile money and other payment methods.

“DPO handles a lot of airline transactions. Uber, and even Jumia, were on the platform when I worked there. My role was to conduct research on user interface with and experience of the Application to make it better for client usage, creating campaigns, setting up ads that target clients and tracking them.”

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Victor Peace



Four months later he left for Arifu, a Chatbot company that trained farmers without necessarily using the internet.

Peace continued with his experimental journey, joining Digify Africa in June 2020. “Meta was rolling out its Facebook blueprint, which was a programme to create awareness to the masses on how to use Ads, and because it was technical, some training was needed and I was the country lead trainer.”

Amref Health Africa came calling and Victor was on the move once more. “Amref was my biggest project, working as Digital Strategy Lead in developing a website for the Y-ACT programme. They also needed a training community platform because they had a large cohort of youth advocates who were pushing for formulations and changes of policies through parliament. The community platform was to bring these youth together to interact and share policy ideas.”

At the same time, he was working on a digital programme for businesses. “That’s how I got a part time job with WomenWork Kenya. It’s a women’s platform for professionals who come together to form this community. They had a Digital Future programme with the US African Development Foundation as the main funder and again I was the lead trainer, which was basically teaching them how to effectively use their website to sell more of their

services and products.”

By the time the programme came to an end in January 2022, Peace had grown tired of digital marketing. “I wanted to focus solely on the technology and that’s why an offer to join PATH was very enticing.”

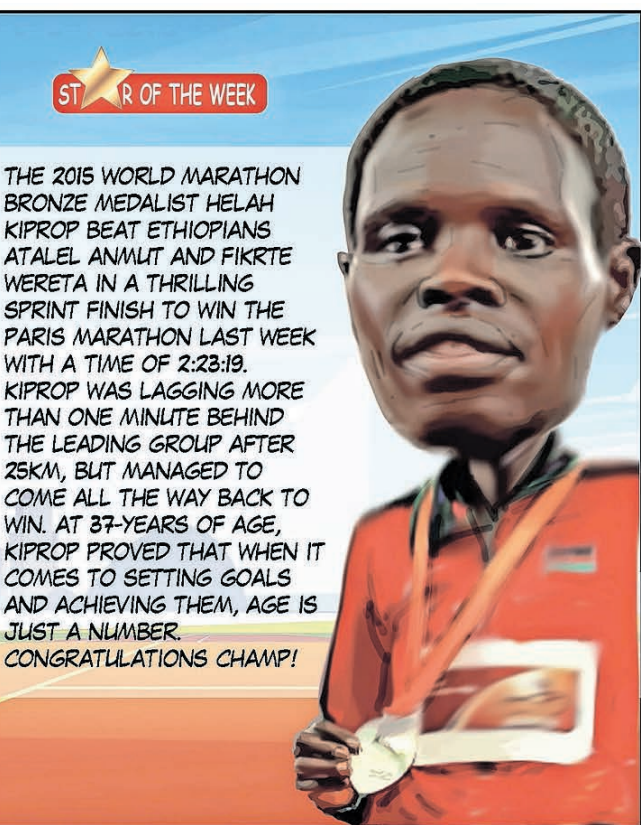
He describes his job at PATH as the most challenging and fulfilling because it’s very techy. “This has served me with the most experience, especially from a tech perspective. Implementing systems is not easy. I am in charge of managing the Pardot Automation Software system, which includes project management, solutions analysis, selection, product management, training and road map forecasting.”

Whenever the tech going gets tough, Peace turns to content creation for a breather. “I started content creation for fun, not to make money. Even if I wasn’t being paid I would still do it for myself. But the more I do it, the better I get, and that is why brands started approaching me for partnerships. I have this rule: be good at something then people or brands will come to you because they have seen your worth and you will have the bargaining power.”

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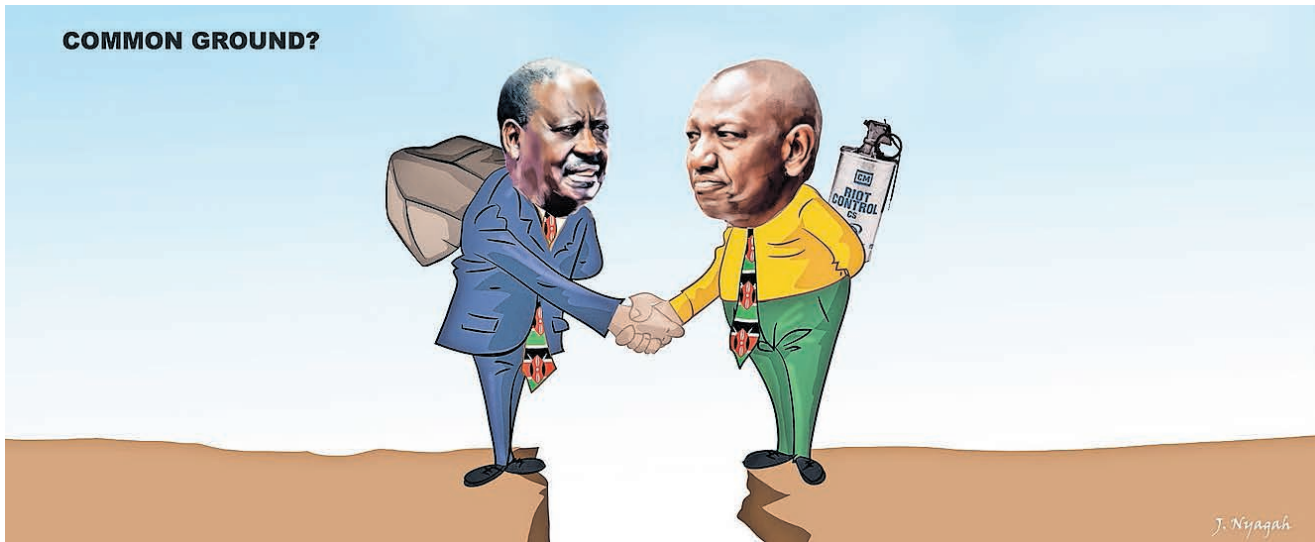
WOMAN POWER
HANNAH KAREMA TUMUKUNDE WAS RECENTLY CROWNED MISS UGANDA 2023/24. “THE ANNOUNCEMENT THAT I WAS MISS UGANDA BLEW ME AWAY,” SHE SAYS, ADDING THAT FOR A MINUTE SHE COULD NOT BELIEVE IT UNTIL SHE WAS HUGGED AND CONGRATULATED BY HER RUNNERS-UP. THE NEW BEAUTY QUEEN SAYS SHE HOPES TO USE HER TIME AT THE HELM TO ADVOCATE AGAINST FORCED EARLY MARRIAGES. THANKS FOR BEING A VOICE FOR THE VOICELESS, QUEEN.



STAR OF THE WEEK
THE 2015 WORLD MARATHON BRONZE MEDALIST HELAH KIPROP BEAT ETHIOPIANS ATAEL ANMUT AND FIKRTE WERETA IN A THRILLING SPRINT FINISH TO WIN THE PARIS MARATHON LAST WEEK WITH A TIME OF 2:23:19. KIPROP WAS LAGGING MORE THAN ONE MINUTE BEHIND THE LEADING GROUP AFTER 25KM, BUT MANAGED TO COME ALL THE WAY BACK TO WIN. AT 37-YEARS OF AGE, KIPROP PROVED THAT WHEN IT COMES TO SETTING GOALS AND ACHIEVING THEM, AGE IS JUST A NUMBER. CONGRATULATIONS CHAMP!

opinion

COMMON GROUND?



■ It must be clear that there can be no negotiations when one side has a gun under the table

Ruto and Raila should step up and tame their hardliners

The Azimio la Umoja-One Kenya Coalition Party made a U-turn on Tuesday. They realised that the parliamentary process suggested by President Ruto a week ago today to resolve the impasse between it and government, and which it welcomed, may not solve all its grouses.

And so, threatening a return to mass action, as they did when they welcomed the proposal as an important development, Azimio counter-proposed that a 2008-style process that produced the National Accord and a coalition government, be the *modus operandi*.

Put another way, Azimio wants the coalition's MPs from the twin houses of Parliament and their counterparts from the governing coalition, to meet and work outside the parliamentary protocols, agree on a way forward and then this be taken to Parliament to be rubber-stamped.

Odinga, who avoided referring to Ruto as President and pointedly called him his opponent in the August presidential poll, denies the pressure he is piling on the government is aimed at bringing about a coalition government or some kind of accommodation for Azimio.

But the Accord he referenced produced the coalition government in which he served as Prime Minister while the handshake (rapprochement) he had with President Kenyatta in 2018 made him a powerful unelected individual who advised the President and was consulted by his ministers.

President Ruto, who was in Rwanda when Odinga & Co. announced their discovery, and speaking on a different matter, ruled out the possibility of a handshake between Azimio



KWENDO OPANGA

and his governing coalition. The President insisted that the issues raised by Azimio are best addressed in Parliament.

The point is that whether captive of the hawks in their coalitions or being themselves hawkish, the President and Odinga must face these simple facts: one, mostly desert Somalia was great before, thanks to politicians; it became the graveyard it has been for 31 years.

Two, Odinga and Ruto, then allies, were on one side and hard-as-nails Martha Karua and a silent President Kibaki on the other in 2007/08 when just weeks of political mayhem brought the robust economy Kibakinomics had painstakingly built to its knees.

Three, the President and Odinga must take responsibility for whatever will befall Kenya if their brinkmanship drives Kenya to the abyss or precipice as did the violence of 2007/08. The two have the responsibility of taming their hardliners and themselves as they consider deliberating. Four, that we voted for the two men does not mean that we cannot make demands of them just as they are making demands of each other. I, for one, demanded

here that they forget their enmity and walk the talk of Kenya being bigger than any of us and meet each other half way. Five, Odinga and the President should consider that Kenyans were aggrieved and ashamed when President Kenyatta and Deputy President Ruto were arraigned in The Hague and the politics of the International Criminal Court dominated our attention economy for years.

We don't want a repeat. Building livelihoods, finding school fees, putting food on the table and pocket book issues are enough for our attention economy! Yes, Kenya's economy is built by what we do and fighting in the streets or killing each other do not build household, county or national economies.

Six, Azimio might want to consider that it takes a great deal of humility and courage for a head of state to eat humble pie *kavu*, the way President Ruto did a week ago, and acknowledge that his enemies have genuine grievances and deserve to be heard. Last, it must be clear that there can be no negotiations when one side has a gun under the table.

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opinion

■ Haji should revisit the decision; criminal masterminds in high places must be taught a lesson

Blanket amnesty for 'Maandamano' criminals is wrong



MACHARIA
GITHO

Director of Public Prosecutions Noordin Haji has earned notoriety since the advent of the William Ruto administration for the alacrity with which he has abandoned criminal cases facing personalities close to the new regime.

Ruto's Kenya Kwanza alliance campaigned on the 'Freedom is Coming' slogan. Haji made that ring true for a large number of those who earned their places in the entourage because of their impressive CVs in areas of looting, murder, plunder, theft, violence and other criminal proclivities.

Freedom has Come also became reality last week for a large number of miscreants facing charges over the protests called by opposition leader Raila Odinga. Haji's decision to withdraw charges for over 200 arrested might at first glance seem like a welcome political decision that furthers the quest for dialogue once Ruto proposed a negotiation forum and Raila responded positively by suspending the demonstrations.

However, it might also mask something more sinister. Halting prosecution for those arrested by a partisan police force merely for exercising their constitutional right to march, picket, assemble and present petitions is the right thing to do. They should never have been arrested in the first place, leave alone charged. If anything, it is police officers and their commanders who should have been taken to task for depriving citizens of their inalienable rights.

The problem here is that freedom came not only for those who were wrongfully arrested, but also for the criminals who exploited cover of the Azimio la Umoja Raila demonstrations to go on wild orgies of arson, looting, robbery, mugging, rape and plunder.

Shops – from roadside kiosks to supermarkets – were looted and set ablaze. People going about their daily business were robbed at knifepoint in broad daylight. Police cars were torched. UDA party offices were burnt. Innocent citizens were shot dead by police or given severe beatings. Criminal elements were sponsored to target the media covering the demonstrations. Police on duty were injured by stone-throwing mobs, with at least one fatality recorded. Government-

sponsored cattle rustlers raided private farms and caused real mayhem. Police commanders under direction of political players betrayed their oath of office and turned against citizens exercising their constitutional rights.

That is a long list of criminals who must not be allowed to get away by decisions that will only entrench the culture of impunity. What the Haji pardon means is that investigations into the violence that accompanied the opposition demonstrations will be halted, and a large number of victims will never get justice. It is important that nobody, however high and mighty, is allowed to get away with criminal actions.

Peaceful demonstrations are and must remain an inalienable right, but those who used the Azimio protests to cause mayhem must be called to account. This applies to criminal elements who took advantage of the demonstrations to prosecute their own missions of robbery and plunder, as well as organisers of the protests who willfully employed violence or failed to control unruly bands of supporters.

It also applies to the ruling party operatives who may have employed criminals to infiltrate the demonstrations and commit acts of violence that would reflect badly on the organisers. This is not too far-fetched as senior government and ruling party figures had publicly demonstrated their capacity and willingness to counter the demonstrations by invading and seizing property.

All those who issued such threats that culminated in engagement of Mungiki-type criminal gangs to accomplish government political errands must be investigated and charge with promotion of warlike activities, if not terrorism.

Not to be spared are National Police Service commanders at the very highest who reduced themselves to errand boys for political groupings, and became accomplices to aforementioned criminal activities.

Peaceful demonstrations are and must remain an inalienable right, but those who used the Azimio protests to cause mayhem must be called to account.

They, too, must be arrested, prosecuted and removed from office. And those police officers who seemed on a special mission to seek out, beat and maim journalists covering the demonstrations as part of a wider plot to impose must not be spared either.

One will otherwise be forgiven for concluding that the real beneficiaries of Haji's magnanimity are not the hapless protesters who became victims of circumstances, but the real criminals who were authors of the mayhem. Unless Haji is taking political decisions or his own to curry political favour, he must revisit the decision that amounts to a blanket amnesty.

Withdrawal of criminal charges must be based on making clear distinction between hapless victims or petty offenders, and criminal masterminds in high places who must be taught a lesson. If we are to inculcate a culture that allows proper practice of the constitutional rights to assemble, march and picket, then we must start by making clear examples of those who debase the principle of introducing violence into what should be peaceful and orderly gatherings and processions' and also those in authority who inject violence to deny basic rights.

*** *** ***

Elsewhere, former US President Donald Trump was arraigned in a New York court last week on criminal charges relating to his buying the silence of pornographic movie star Stormy Daniels. Even to my un-learned ignorance on matters law, the charges are ludicrous. If the hero of the extremist Christian right wing used his own money to procure sexual services, and more money to keep stories of his apparently unimpressive performance and description of an even less impressive member under wraps, that is his business. And loss.

More importantly, the foolish criminal charges serve only to bolster Trump's propaganda of a rogue Joe Biden regime out to persecute the champion of racist elements. The indictment, for Trump, is welcome as the perfect rallying point for a despicable constituency that is desperate for the Second Coming that will 'Make America White' again come the elections next year.

kenya lens

■ POLITICS AND RELIGION

CHURCH AT A CROSSROADS?

Critics are asking whether the Church has dropped society as its burden and become society's new burden

● BY JOHN KAMAU

As Christians mark the Easter festivities – and in a year that marks 180 years since German missionary Ludwig Krapf sailed to East Africa for the pioneer evangelical mission – one of the questions that many people ask is whether the Church has lost its mettle.

When Krapf died – he was found kneeling lifeless by his bed in 1881 – the Church Missionary Society that had sent him eulogised him as having died with “the burden of the dark continent still in his

heart”.

By then, the burden was to conquer new frontiers and assist the State in its colonisation project. The Bible and the gun arrived at the same time – and worked in tandem – and as it was often said, “the flag followed the cross”.

Over the years, the Church has undergone a transformation. In

the post-colonial period, it became the voice of the voiceless, earning a reputation as the beacon of hope in pinpointing societal wrongs.

Critics of the Church are now asking whether the institution has dropped society as its burden and become society's new burden.

After Independence, President Jomo Kenyatta asked the Church to

help in nation-building as he struggled to build schools and health institutions. But as excesses in the regime emerged, the Church broke its silence, with the National Council of Churches of Kenya using its publications, *The Target*, with a Swahili version titled *Lengo, Beyond*, and *Rock* to point out the ills within the society. *Target*, edited by Henry Okullu, was the most radical. The NCCK had given Bishop Okullu editorial independence, and that detachment gave the magazine authority to tackle various issues critical of the State.

Thus, when founding President Jomo Kenyatta fell out with his Vice-President, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, leading to the registration of the Kenya People's Union, and as the Church kept off the political drama, *The Target* published several articles with the title: “Politics: Who cares?” as an invitation to church leaders to begin caring about politics.

At the end of the 1960s, the Kenyatta State went through its first major political test following the

kenya lens

assassination of trade unionist and Minister for Economic Planning and Development Tom Mboya and the advent of oathing in central Kenya. As the mainstream media opted for silence, the NCKK publications criticised the oaths, which also targeted members of the clergy. Okullu and Bishop Obadiah Kariuki were particularly vocal about the issue. In his book, *Church and Politics in East Africa*, Okullu would later lament the fact that the Church was having “too comfortable relations with the State” and that by doing so, its voice as “the nation’s conscience (went) unheard”.

Politicians wanted the Church out of politics, but the radical clergymen believed their flock was in danger as the divisive oaths continued. The clergy was forced to seek an appointment with President Kenyatta, asking him stop the oathing. When that avenue failed, they wrote a letter dated July 22, 1969, signed by Bishop Kariuki and Rt Rev Crispus Kiongo. The then “strictly confidential” letter told Kenyatta that “many Christians, ordained ministers included, have been compelled to take the oath, which is contrary to their religion and belief.”

They then warned him: “There will be no Kenya unless Kenyatta acts now... Kenyatta is the one man who can change the present trend for better or for worse.”

In 1975, the assassination of outspoken Nyandarua MP JM Kariuki saw the Church rally together to condemn the excesses of the Kenyatta government. The State would react by banning Christian songs in central Kenya deemed to be crit-

ical of it. The most notable were songs by the Presbyterian Church of East Africa’s Gathathi choir, including the song *Maañ nĩ Marũrũ* (The water is bitter). Operating within a single-party state, and as alternative voices were muzzled in Parliament, the NCKK declared itself a “forum for alternative political viewpoints”. It criticised detention without trial and called for a ceiling on land holdings as land grabbing continued.

Kenyatta’s death in 1978 saw Daniel arap Moi, an active member of the African Inland Church, take the mantle and legitimise his power by bringing church leaders close to him. Moi, unlike Kenyatta, used the church platform to popularise himself. Every Sunday, television broadcasts covered his attendance of services in various churches.

But after 1982, as Moi reintroduced detention without trial and human rights abuses continued, the Church began criticising his regime. For instance, the introduction of queue-voting in 1988 caused a rift between Church and State, and Moi reacted by banning the NCKK’s *Beyond* magazine for asking: “Who Really Won?” The magazine’s editor, Bedan Mbugua, was jailed “for failing to submit annual sales returns”.

Anglican Archbishop Manasses Kuria termed the queue-voting system “un-Christian, undemocratic and embarrassing”. While Catholic Bishop Ndingi Mwana a’Nzeki called for a referendum on the issue, Okullu said the controversial voting system had “produced some of the most blatant and cruel vote-rigging and cheating that has ever been practiced in Kenya”. During the NCKK’s national conference of 1988, church leaders defended the secret ballot in a letter signed by Anglican Bishops David Gitari, Henry Okullu, Alexander Muge and the Rev Timothy Njoya of the PCEA. But Kanu refused to back down and instead termed the defenders of the secret ballot tribalists and subversives “in the pay of foreign masters”.

Moi asked the churchmen to keep out of politics, which split the Church into pro-regime and anti-government sides. Some of the radical voices that had emerged included Njoya and Bishop Muge, whose eloquence on famine in Pokot and Turkana embarrassed the State. Po-

lice would be deployed to prevent Muge from entering some parts of his diocese, and at one point, MPs threatened him with detention without trial. With the collapse of dictatorships in Eastern Europe, Njoya, on January 1, 1990, declared that similar changes would soon be witnessed in Kenya and suggested that the one-party regime would fall. Njoya was supported by Okullu, who argued that only multi-party politics would guarantee accountability and transparency. But they were criticised by Kanu diehards, who said those events had no parallels in Kenya. The death of Bishop Muge in August 1990 in a car crash after he had been threatened by Cabinet Minister Peter Okondo (that he would not leave Busia alive if he visited) saw the Church’s criticism of the Moi regime increase.

The mainstream churches were now closer to radicals, calling for an overhaul of the Constitution and clean-up of the statute laws.

The Church would be crucial in returning the country to multi-party politics and advocating for minimum reforms necessary for free and fair elections – including an independent electoral commission, repealing many old laws and ending political detentions. But it was in the shaping of a new Constitution that the Church would play a particularly significant role. When the Kanu regime was reluctant, the Church offered the pro-democracy activists space in Ufungamano House to start writing a new Constitution – with or without Kanu’s support. The Church was also vocal in drafting the new Constitution – though it mobilised its supporters to vote ‘NO’ over a clause that allowed Kadhi Courts to be retained in the Constitution.

During the ‘NO’ campaign, the Church would identify with William Ruto, who also rallied his followers to vote ‘NO’.

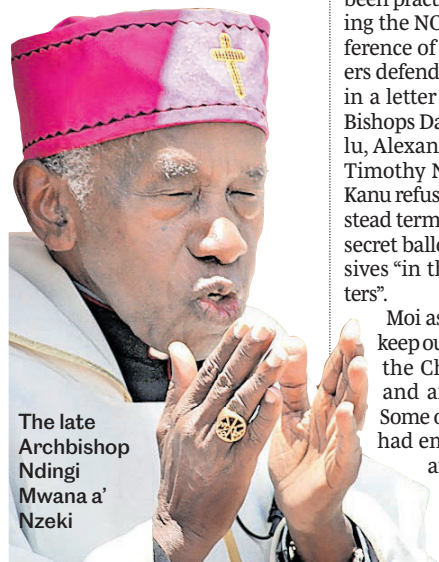
Interestingly, Ruto used the same church platform to win the presidency last year, and thus the Church has found itself in an awkward position in which it appears unable to criticise the government.

Last week, 27 Catholic bishops challenged President Ruto to sit with veteran opposition leader Raila Odinga and other leaders to address national concerns, including the high cost of living. “We also invite Raila to accept dialogue for the good of the country. We believe that a sitting and dialogue can resolve this dangerous standoff. The two need to establish a common ground to address the ills facing the country and restore sanity in our country,” said Archbishop Martin Kivuva, chairperson of the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The bishops said the fact that demonstrations are legal shouldn’t be exploited to paralyse the country or degenerate to a forceful takeover of a legitimate government.

“The only way to avoid chaos and anarchy is always to follow the constitution and the laws of the land. We therefore appeal to all leaders to pursue the path of peace and dialogue and create an enabling environment where all Kenyans can work and increase productivity,” said Bishop Maurice Muhatia. Whether it will find its old voice remains to be seen – but so far, only a few clergymen are vocal about State excesses. Is the church at a crossroads? Only time will tell.

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The late Archbishop Ndingi Mwana a’Nzeki



Archbishop Martin Kivuva

SCIENCE & TECH

NASA NAMES FIRST WOMAN, BLACK MAN ON MOON MISSION



The Artemis I unmanned lunar rocket lifts off from launch pad 39B at Nasa's Kennedy Space Centre in Cape Canaveral, Florida, on November 16, 2022.

• SAN FRANCISCO

The US space agency Nasa has named the four astronauts who will take humanity back to the Moon, after a 50-year gap.

Christina Koch will become the first woman astronaut ever assigned to a lunar mission, while Victor Glover will be the first black astronaut on one.

They will join Reid Wiseman and Jeremy Hansen to fly a capsule around the Moon late next year or early in 2025.

The astronauts won't land on the Moon, but their mission will pave the way for a touchdown by a subsequent crew.

The three US citizens and one Canadian were presented to the public in a ceremony in Houston, Texas. They will now begin a period of intense training to get themselves ready. In selecting a woman and a person of colour, Nasa is keeping its promise to bring greater diversity to its exploration efforts. All the previous crewed missions to the Moon were made by white men.

Reid Wiseman (47)

A Navy pilot who served as the head of Nasa's astronaut office. He's flown one previous space mission, to the International Space station in 2015.

Victor Glover (46)

A US Navy test pilot. He joined Nasa in 2013 and made his first spaceflight in 2020. He was the first African American to stay on the space station for an extended period of six months.

Christina Koch (44)

An electrical engineer. She holds the record for longest continuous time in space by a woman, of 328 days. With Nasa astronaut Jessica Meir, she participated in the first all-female spacewalk in October 2019.

Jeremy Hansen (47)

Before joining the Canadian Space Agency, he was a fighter pilot with the Royal Canadian Air Force.

"The Artemis-2 crew represents thousands of people working tirelessly to bring us to the stars. This is their crew, this is our crew, this is humanity's crew," said Nasa Administrator Bill Nelson.

"Nasa astronauts Reid Wiseman, Victor Glover, and Christina Hammock Koch, and CSA astronaut Jeremy Hansen, each has their own story, but, together, they represent our creed: *E pluribus unum* — out of many, one. Together, we are ushering in a new era of exploration for a new generation of star sailors and dreamers — the Artemis Generation."

Wiseman will be the commander; Glover will be his pilot; Koch and Hansen will act as the supporting "mission specialists". The quartet are essentially repeating the 1968 mission carried out by Apollo 8, which was the first human spaceflight to reach the Moon.

Its crew took the famous "Earthrise" picture that showed our home planet emerging from behind the lunar horizon.

The major difference this time will be the use of the 21st Century technology that Nasa has developed under its Artemis programme. In Greek mythology, Artemis was the twin sister of Apollo.

Can computer coders trust ChatGPT?

"It felt like magic to me," says Pietro Schirano. "It scared me a little bit because it was so good."

He's talking about the latest version of ChatGPT, an artificial intelligence (AI) tool. You type something in, and it makes up a reply for you.

It's uncanny how human, friendly and intelligent the responses seem. Underneath it is an AI model called GPT-4.

Mr Schirano, design lead at business finance company Brex, has been using ChatGPT to make computer programmes. "I want to build a Pong-like game," he typed, referencing Atari's table tennis game of the 1970s. "What's the best language to [use] so that lots of people can try?" ChatGPT not only recommended a programming language that runs in the browser (JavaScript), but also generated the code for a simple version of the game.

What would have taken an experienced developer half an hour to write took ChatGPT 40 seconds. It worked equally well for classic arcade games Breakout and Asteroids.

There are lots of code examples for these games online, but ChatGPT isn't searching the internet for a ready-made answer.

Although it's been built using huge amounts of web content, ChatGPT generates new text just for you by predicting the right answer. "ChatGPT was able to understand my question about how I make this game more popular," says Mr Schirano. "It has a lot of contextual understanding that somebody who's never developed couldn't get from Google."

Using a search engine, you'd have to figure out which coding language to use, how to use it, and how to finish any incomplete examples online. ChatGPT can give you all the game code, together with instructions tailored to your needs.

"Now, even somebody who has no idea of what they're doing can create a simple web app," says Mr Schirano.

africa lens

■ MOSCOW'S APPROACH APPEARS MUCH MORE AKIN TO THAT OF THE COLONIAL ERA

NEW SCRAMBLE FOR AFRICA



Russia, China and the US are engaged in spirited charm offensives centred around political, military, economic and cultural initiatives

● BY CHRIS ERASMUS AND HARRY MISIKO

Three global powers are in a race to win over Africa, the continent's market of more than a billion people, and to tap its natural resources.

Russia, China and the US are engaged in spirited charm offensives centred around political, military, economic and cultural initiatives.

The US, for instance, recently co-hosted the second Democracy Summit with Zambia amid a week-long tour of the continent by Vice President Kamala Harris to "counter the growing influence of China and Russia".

Harris visited and spent days in Ghana, Tanzania and Zambia and delivered bags of goodies – including offering military, financial and technical assistance to restructure

Accra's and Lusaka's near-impossible debts, partly blamed on Beijing. Russia, on the other hand, has undertaken several diplomatic missions to Africa, and in February conducted a 10-day naval exercise with South Africa and China off the Indian Ocean coast.

China's drive, primarily infrastructural through its strategic 'Belt and Road Initiative', laced with cultural and political influence dimensions, is controversial in some circles, and has even been labelled 'neo-colonial'. Beijing has not only acquired friends in governments but also development rights and major infrastructure deals, across the continent.

Yet it is Russia's approach which appears much more akin to that of the colonial era, when ruthless individuals and private companies use official license from their govern-

ment to pursue extractive policies for self-enrichment and that of the 'home' country involved – inevitably, at the cost of locals.

In part to counter that growing perception, especially in African capitals, Moscow has recently been on a 'diplomatic charm offensive' across Africa. Last year saw Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's first African tour, with another having taken place recently and a third planned.

These outreach efforts are taking place in overlap with both the US's and China's wooing of Africa, the latter's Foreign Minister, Qin Gang, having recently visited Ethiopia, Gabon, Angola, Benin and Egypt.

Competing with both China and Russia is Washington's 'African reset' initiative, the US having sent Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen on a tour to Senegal, Zambia and

South Africa, along with similar outings to Africa by Secretary of State Anthony Blinken. Blinken has been to South Africa, Ethiopia and Niger as the Biden administration looks to bolster relations with African 'partners' and counter both Chinese and Russian advances.

Biden has been working intensively to revive relations with African states in the wake of the Trump era, when disdain for the continent permeated Washington from the Oval Room in the White House.

Biden wants to change that as both Russia and China make their separate drives to push their profiles, influence, and agendas across the continent in what in some quarters is being described as the 'new race for Africa'. The Americans are determined to demon-

...Continued on Page 26

africa lens

Continued from Page 25

strate that they are not on another ‘neo-colonial’ push, but are working hard on the diplomatic front to help isolate Russia over its Ukrainian war, and China over its alleged ‘neo-colonialism’ on the continent and increasing geo-political reach.

In pursuit of a ‘new understanding’ with Africa, a string of Biden administration officials has recently visited the continent, are currently in Africa, or are planning on making trips to the continent.

Under-secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights, Uzra Zeya, visited the Gambia and Senegal from March 12 to 14, while Lee Satterfield, Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs, was also in South Africa in March.

Lavrov has made two visits to South Africa, as well as going, in July last year, to Egypt, Congo-Brazzaville, Uganda and Ethiopia, also meeting the African Union (AU) leadership in Addis Ababa, with Eswatini, Botswana and Angola included on his recent itinerary.

In addition, Tunisia, Mauritania, Algeria and Morocco were visited by the Russian foreign minister last month, bringing to 12 the number of African states, plus the AU, he has visited in just over six months, with almost all his efforts designed to bolster Russia’s international position after its Ukrainian invasion of February 2022.

“The Qin and Lavrov trips could be seen as responses to US President Joe Biden’s Africa summit in December, which appeared to have been successful and certainly pulled a big crowd of leaders,” said the Institute for Security Studies.

Despite all this high-level official attention from Washington, Beijing and the Kremlin, Lavrov only briefly mentioned Africa in a three-hour press conference (near its end and in answer to a media question) in Moscow in mid-January, covering mostly Ukraine.

Lavrov was asked to comment on relations between Moscow and Pretoria, after South African Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor had repeated a demand for the withdrawal of the Countering Malign Russian Activities in Africa Bill, as adopted by the US House of Representatives in 2022.

The proposed law imposes sanctions on Russian entities – like the Wagner Group – which are deemed to be conducting ‘malign’ activities on the continent, and possibly lead-

Global powers in tight race to win over Africa



US Vice-President Kamala Harris with Tanzania’s Vice President, Dr Philip Mpango, at the Julius Nyerere International Airport in Dar es Salaam on March 31. She unveiled an initiative to expand trade with Tanzania as she hailed the nation as a “champion” of democracy.

ing to US sanctions on African governments and businesses dealing with such Russian entities.

That South Africa has been one of the few African states prepared to ‘stand up’ for Moscow after the invasion of Ukraine is proof that Lavrov’s mission to counter Washington’s efforts have not been in vain.

Nevertheless, and while ostensibly ‘friends forever’, according to a recent treaty of mutual support between Beijing and Moscow with both countries being members of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) multi-lateral community, Russia and China are, in practical terms, also in direct political and economic competition with each other in Africa.

Included in that competitive approach to the continent are its billion-strong consumer market, key resources and extending their respective realms of influence. But they are using very different strategies to achieve their similar ends.

China has been relentless with its ‘soft loans’, extensive provision of technical knowhow and indirectly addressing the many developmental needs of Africans, as well as pursuing ‘soft diplomacy’ through its artistic, sporting and cultural exchanges, especially higher educational opportunities for many aspiring young Africans.

Russia’s approach appears more ‘opportunistic’, as described by one African specialist, independent Institute for Security Studies’ senior

researcher on Russia’s activities in Africa, Priyal Singh. The balance of political, military and economic evidence ‘on the ground’ also directly supports this view. Russia’s approach to Africa is not, says Singh, a concerted, strategic plan, such as China’s, or even Washington’s, but rather an ad hoc policy taking advantage of opportunities as they arise and, when not in the form of fleeting visits by Lavrov, largely employed through proxies – mainly the Wagner Group.

Moscow seeks diplomatic backing, while its on-the-ground proxy, the Wagner Group, seeks financial advantage in the form of mining and extractive rights, including for diamonds, rubies and other gems, gold, rare metals and rare earth minerals, such as lithium, as used in digital technologies.

Founded by Russian President Vladimir Putin’s one-time caterer, now right-hand military man Yevgeny Prigozhin, the Wagner Group PMC (Paramilitary Company) is overtly active in several African countries, and perhaps covertly so in some others. It is or has been present as a military force in Mozambique, the CAR, Mali and Sudan.

The mercenary outfit was registered in St Petersburg in 2014 and is now leading Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in the Donbas region, specifically in the months-long brutal battle for the town of Bakhmut, where Wagner contractors, many

fresh from Russian prisons where they were ‘recruited’, have been dying by the hundreds, daily, in what has become Europe’s bloodiest battle of attrition since World War II. The US and other peacekeepers having lost troops in West African countries and then pulling out ‘observers’, trainers and operatives, Wagner operatives have moved in to replace them under non-democratic governments.

Wagner in Africa has undertaken what the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, a think-tank, describes as “a targeted effort against countries with weak governance, ongoing security challenges, oftentimes authoritarian or military government and rich natural resources that they can exploit as part of that deal, often through mining concessions”.

Sean McFate, author of *The Modern Mercenary*, says Wagner in Africa are into “diamond mines, gold mines, stuff like that”.

“That’s the business model: in exchange for extractive industry, they (Wagner) will provide muscle, protection” adds McFate. Overlaying that process is the domestic political dimension within Russia.

Washington is apparently determined to counter this growing role for Moscow’s military ‘cut-out’, along with the Kremlin’s growing influence on the continent, by playing a low-key but crucial role in resolving a number of ongoing conflicts, including that in northern Mozambique, as well as eastern DRC. “Russia is self-sufficient with gas, and therefore does not need any from Mozambique, so it doesn’t feature high up on the (Putin) agenda,” explained Singh.

That is not the case in Mali or some other African states, where Wagner is to be found, and where mineral riches are being “plundered” on an industrial scale, as payment for their “services”, mostly by non-elected regimes. “This allows Moscow to maintain political ties across Africa,” said Singh.

“So, in Sudan Wagner/Russia are involved in gold extraction, and similarly with rare earth minerals in the CAR.” In both instances, Wagner operatives act as their own security at mining sites, with locals kept well away.

But Singh also points out that among problems for Russia in Africa are its supposed allies, China and India, parties to the five-nation BRICS grouping of states.

Both India and China have their own interests in Africa.

global lens

■ FORMER US PRESIDENT CHARGED WITH 34 COUNTS IN A MANHATTAN COURT



Former US President Donald Trump faces 34 felony charges of falsifying business records in the first degree. The charges all relate to a \$130,000 hush-money payment by his lawyer, Michael Cohen, to porn star Stormy Daniels just before the 2016 presidential election.

This case is based largely on documents, which typically make for a very strong case because, unlike witnesses, documents don't lie and documents don't forget, says former District Attorney

● NEW YORK

The historic case against Donald Trump faces a number of legal hurdles if it is to result in the first conviction of a US president on criminal charges, legal experts said last week.

As to be expected, Trump's attorneys dismissed the 34-count indictment unsealed on Tuesday at the high-profile arraignment in New York of the 76-year-old real estate tycoon.

"It was a little disappointing, a little bit of a relief quite frankly to see that indictment," Joe

Tacopina told *NBC's Today* show. "This case is going to fall on its merits."

Even some of Trump's fiercest critics were not impressed with the case brought by Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, a Democrat who has been accused by Trump and other Republicans of waging a "political witch hunt".

Trump's former national security adviser John Bolton, who is now one of his most outspoken foes, told *CNN* the indictment was "even weaker than I feared it would be". "Speaking as someone who very strongly does not want Donald Trump to

get the Republican presidential nomination, I'm extraordinarily distressed by this document," Bolton said. "I think it's easily subject to being dismissed or a quick acquittal for Trump."

The indictment charges Trump with 34 counts of falsifying business records over a US\$130,000 hush money payment to porn star Stormy Daniels ahead of the 2016 presidential election.

Trump's personal lawyer, Michael Cohen, arranged the payment to Daniels and then was reimbursed by Trump in instalments, which

accounts for the 34 charges. The payments rise from the level of a misdemeanour to a felony because, the indictment says, they were allegedly made with "intent to commit another crime".

The indictment fails, however, to specify what the other crime was and that's where things may get tricky. At a press conference, Bragg said the payments were part of a scheme orchestrated by Trump, Cohen and others to "suppress negative information" and boost his election chances.

"The scheme violated New York

Continued on Page 28

global lens

Trump might have falsified nature of payments

Continued from Page 27

election law, which makes it a crime to conspire to promote a candidacy by unlawful means," he said. It's legally questionable, however, whether Trump could be found to have violated New York election law while he was running for president and not for a position in the state.

Ellen Yaroshefsky, a law professor at Hofstra University, said prosecutors may be hard-pressed "to prove that the false business records were with intent to influence the election".

Andrew McCabe, a former FBI deputy director, told CNN the indictment was a "disappointment". "What is the legal theory that ties a very solid misdemeanour case... to the intent to conceal another crime, which is what makes it a felony?" he asked.

"If all of our legal friends read this indictment and don't see a way to a felony, it's hard to imagine convincing a jury that they should get there." Another potential stumbling block for prosecutors could be Cohen, who was sentenced to prison over the Daniels payments, tax evasion and other crimes.

Cohen's credibility as a witness is certain to come under attack from Trump's lawyers because he is now a convicted felon and a bitter critic of his former boss.

William Banks, a law professor at Syracuse University, said the case was "fraught" with difficulties and the charges pale in comparison to the legal jeopardy Trump could face elsewhere. Banks specifically cited Georgia, where prosecutors are investigating Trump's efforts to overturn the 2020 election results in the southern state.

A special counsel is also looking into Trump's role in the January 2021 attack on Congress by his supporters and classified documents taken from the White House to his Florida home.

Richard Hasen, a law professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, said prosecutors would have to prove that Trump knew he was violating campaign finance laws with the payments. "Proving intent can always be tricky," Hasen wrote in *Slate*



Supporters of former US President Donald Trump gather near his residence awaiting his arrival at the Mar-a-Lago Club in West Palm Beach, Florida, on April 4.

magazine, citing the case of John Edwards, who twice sought the Democratic presidential nomination. Edwards was put on trial in 2012, accused of campaign finance violations for making hush-money payments to a mistress, but the jury deadlocked.

Not all legal experts were so disparaging of the case. Barbara McQuade, a former district attorney now teaching at the University of Michigan, said she believed it to be "very solid".

"This case is based largely on documents, which typically make for a very strong case because, unlike witnesses, documents don't lie and documents don't forget," McQuade said. Here are the details of the historic case:

Charges relate to hush money

Trump faces 34 felony charges of falsifying business records in the first degree. The charges all relate to a \$130,000 hush-money payment by Cohen to Daniels just before the 2016 election in order to prevent her from talking about her allegations that she had an affair with Trump in 2007.

In the court documents, Cohen is referred to as Lawyer A and Daniels as Woman 2. The first line of the Statement of Facts, a document that accompanied the indictment, spells out the prosecution case: "The defendant repeatedly and fraudulently falsified New York business records to conceal

criminal conduct that hid damaging information from the voting public during the 2016 presidential election."

Cover-up happened

Trump's alleged cover-up happened when he was president.

In 2017, after becoming president, Trump met with Cohen in the White House. Shortly thereafter — and over the course of 10 months — Trump began sending cheques from a trust handling his assets, and later from his own account, to Cohen. Those cheques were registered as "legal fees", but Cohen says they were, in fact, reimbursements for the hush-money payment.

The prosecution case states: "The payment records, kept and maintained by the Trump Organization, were false New York business records. In truth, there was no retainer agreement, and Lawyer A was not being paid for legal services rendered in 2017."

The defendant caused his entities' business records to be falsified to disguise his and others' criminal conduct.

A misdemeanour to a felony

Bragg alleges that Trump falsified the true nature of the payments because those payments were made in support of a crime. While hush-money payments are not by themselves illegal, spending money to help a presidential campaign but not disclosing

it violates federal campaign finance law. Cohen was convicted of just such a violation for not disclosing his payment to Daniels. By reimbursing Cohen for that payment, Bragg asserts, Trump is tied to that criminal act — and it makes his falsification of business records a more serious offence. Trump's defenders argue that is a legal stretch, and that this is a politically-motivated prosecution.

Pattern of criminal behaviour

Bragg cites two other examples of hush-money payments by Trump's campaign. These payments, he says, support the prosecution case that Trump knew his payments to Cohen were part of an illegal attempt to influence the 2016 election.

"The defendant orchestrated a scheme with others to influence the 2016 election by identifying and purchasing negative information about him to suppress its publication and benefit the defendant's electoral prospects," the indictment's Statement of Facts asserts. "In order to execute the unlawful scheme, the participants violated election laws and made and caused false entries in the business records of various entities in New York."

In one case, a doorman who said he knew Trump had a child out of wedlock received \$30,000. In another, a second woman who claimed she had an affair with

global lens

■ HE'S BUSY CAMPAIGNING TO WIN BACK THE PRESIDENCY IN 2024

For a born showman who grew famous as a playboy real estate entrepreneur, his date with a New York State judge marks a moment of supreme peril

• WASHINGTON

Donald Trump always wanted to be king of New York but last Tuesday, perhaps the most controversial US president in history instead walked into a Big Apple courtroom as a criminal defendant.

Even by the standards of a uniquely gaudy, attention grabbing, tradition-smashing career, Trump's arraignment in Manhattan marked an unprecedented low. For a born showman who grew famous as a playboy real estate entrepreneur, then astonished the world by winning the presidency on a hard-right platform in 2016, his date with a New York State judge marks a moment of supreme peril.

But because this is Trump – the man who ran for the White House boasting he could get away with shooting someone on Fifth Avenue – the drama is also, incredibly, a kind of gift.

Already the first ex-president ever to be charged with a crime, he's busy campaigning to win back the presidency in 2024 and the more scandals he accumulates the more he feels able to promote his brand. Opinion polls, making him the strong frontrunner for the Republican nomination, suggest that so far he's not wrong.

In doing so, Trump is pushing American politics ever further into uncharted territory.

To his millions of backers, the 76-year-old is the man who broke the mold with his White House win, defying political norms to champion what he dubbed the "forgotten men and women" of middle America.

To much of the country, though, Trump just broke America. The Republican's first term began in 2017 with a dark inaugural address evoking "American carnage". It ended in mayhem when the former entrepreneur refused to accept his defeat by Joe Biden, then goaded supporters into storming Congress on January 6, 2021. In office, Trump upended every tradition, ranging from the trivial (what got planted in the Rose Garden) to the fundamental (relations with Nato).

And as an ex-president, his wrecking ball political presence continued to dominate an increasingly far-right Republican Party. Entangled in mounting legal woes, he pushed his 2020 lies ever more vigorously – arguably sabotaging his party's mid-term performance last year by backing an army of election-denying candidates, who fared dismally.

Then, to the dismay of the few remaining moderates, he announced a run for 2024. Whether Trump can survive his New York

ART OF THE COMEBACK OR END OF THE ROAD?



Supporters hold flags and wave to traffic as they gather to show near former US President Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago home in Palm Beach, Florida, on April 1.

troubles or a number of other legal probes is still up in the air. But he has proved repeatedly up until now an uncanny ability to slip his pursuers.

When the FBI searched his Mar-a-Lago residence in Florida last summer to retrieve top secret documents Trump hoarded on his way out of the White House, opponents thought his time must be up. But again, Trump defied norms, refusing to accept responsibility and insisting he was being persecuted.

He likewise claims that the charges in New York, related to allegedly paying an adult film performer to keep quiet on the eve of his 2016 election, are fabricated by leftwing foes. In a statement minutes after his indictment first became public, Trump used his Truth Social app to complain of "Political Persecution and Election Interference at the highest level in history".

Back in 2016, many Americans literally laughed at the prospect of a Trump White House. Yet he defeated Democratic heavyweight Hillary Clinton. And when Democrats launched two impeachment proceedings, the Republican Party backed him to the hilt. He was acquitted both times. Offstage tur-

moil that might sink an ordinary presidency only fuelled Trump's message of grievance. Journalists became the "enemy of the people". Intelligence services and the FBI were demonised as the "deep state".

Opponents in Congress were variously branded "crazy" and treasonous. On the world stage, it was the same story. Trump turned US alliances into cut-throat business relationships. Friendly partners like South Korea and Germany were accused of trying to "rip us off". By contrast, Trump repeatedly declared respect for the likes of Russian President Vladimir Putin or North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un, with whom he said "we fell in love".

Prior to 2016, Trump was famous mostly for the ruthless character he played on reality TV show *The Apprentice*, for developing luxury buildings and golf resorts, and for his former fashion-model wife Melania. But academics noted parallels between Trump's evolution as a politician and those of autocrats in countries where democratic institutions exist only as facades, allowing populist showmen to take power.

—AFP

OBIT

■ WITH HIS SIGNATURE KITENGE SHIRTS AND BEARD, HE TOOK HIS APPEARANCE SERIOUSLY

● BY TOM ODHIAMBO

Muga K'Olale lived through two defining decades in higher education in Kenya. The one-time secretary-general and chairman of the University Academic Staff Union (UASU) was among the founder members of the union when it was registered by the government in 2003. At the time of his death on April 1, K'Olale remained a much celebrated trade unionist, even though he had retired from the union.

K'Olale, according to one of the members who agitated for the union's registration, lived Odera Oruka's Sage Philosophy, which is captured in what the late African theorist identified as 'three obstacles to philosophy: social-economic deprivation; cultural-racial mythology; and the illusion of appearance. Oruka argued that these three also affected "wisdom and human justice in general".

A combination of such an understanding of philosophy and his own experiences when he was detained and jailed after the 1982 coup attempt is what separated K'Olale from some of his peers in the trade union. This was a man who had suffered the violence and indignity of being incarcerated on suspicion of having been involved in the coup. He had seen his colleagues lose jobs simply because they were assumed to be "government", with some going into exile either because they feared for their lives or were unemployable locally.

It seemed, therefore, that during his tenure, K'Olale had sworn to fight what he thought was injustice and poor treatment of university teachers. In Oruka's philosophy, individuals who are economically deprived have limited mental development and lack creativity; hunger and poverty do not allow the individual to think beyond food and mundane existence. For K'Olale, a poorly paid lecturer would not be able to research, publish or even teach competently. This is why he often appeared unyielding whenever there was a stalemate between UASU and the government on the signing and delivery of Collective Bargaining Agreements.

Former UASU-Nairobi chapter

DEFENDANT OF THE DONS

During his tenure at UASU, K'Olale fought injustice and poor treatment of university lecturers, winning them benefits that rivalled those of their peers in the private sector



Muga K'Olale

chair Samuel Nyandemo eulogised K'Olale as a "very focused, committed and honest person". His legacy, he added, was that during his tenure, K'Olale ensured that signed CBAs were honoured. According to Nyandemo, K'Olale avoided pettiness and discharged his duties fearlessly.

With his signature kitenge shirts and beard, K'Olale took his ap-

pearance seriously, but also followed his mentor Oruka's credo that people should be careful about "orators, actors and beauties". He always strove to speak with conviction and with facts to back up his statements, for, appearances, Oruka had warned, could lead to mere platitudes and empty promises. Words can charm workers, yes, but at the end

of the day it is the extra coin in the pocket that really matters.

K'Olale and his UASU colleagues of the early 2000s delivered the goodies, to use a cliché. Members of staff in public universities enjoyed benefits that nearly rivalled what their colleagues in the few private universities were getting. Working conditions improved significantly in the early 2000s as the post-KANU government's economic policies resuscitated the economy and there was general goodwill from development partners.

The opening up of the political space and the extra funds dedicated to education by the government from 2003, as well as the subsequent introduction of self-sponsored students, enabled universities to improve teaching and learning facilities and to pay lecturers competitive salaries. UASU, under K'Olale and others, remained steadfastly committed to the welfare of the teaching staff.

Of course, good times tend to come to an end. K'Olale's colourful term ended when he resigned from contesting any position at the national office in 2001. Had he outlived his usefulness to the union, was he a victim of changed circumstances, or were the gods saving him from a fate worse than he knew?

The post-K'Olale UASU may be standing, but it is standing on quicksand. The universities are broke. Some are broken.

In fact, few public universities can balance their books of accounts. They just don't have money to fund teaching, learning and research. Some universities cannot pay salaries regularly, and so cannot remit union dues as required. Consequently, some university unions can no longer claim to be performing their roles. It is as if history is being repeated. Kenyan academics may just have to wait for another K'Olale to remind the government that poverty and hunger make for lacklustre professors.

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