

# THE Weekly Review

For the Thinker

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## RESTLESS HEIRESS

**As Raila's chief operative in the August 9 election, Winnie Odinga had the carte blanche to make decisions about the Azimio La Umoja campaign, rattling many with her brash and outspoken manner. But does this ambitious young woman have what it takes to inherit her father's political kingdom?**

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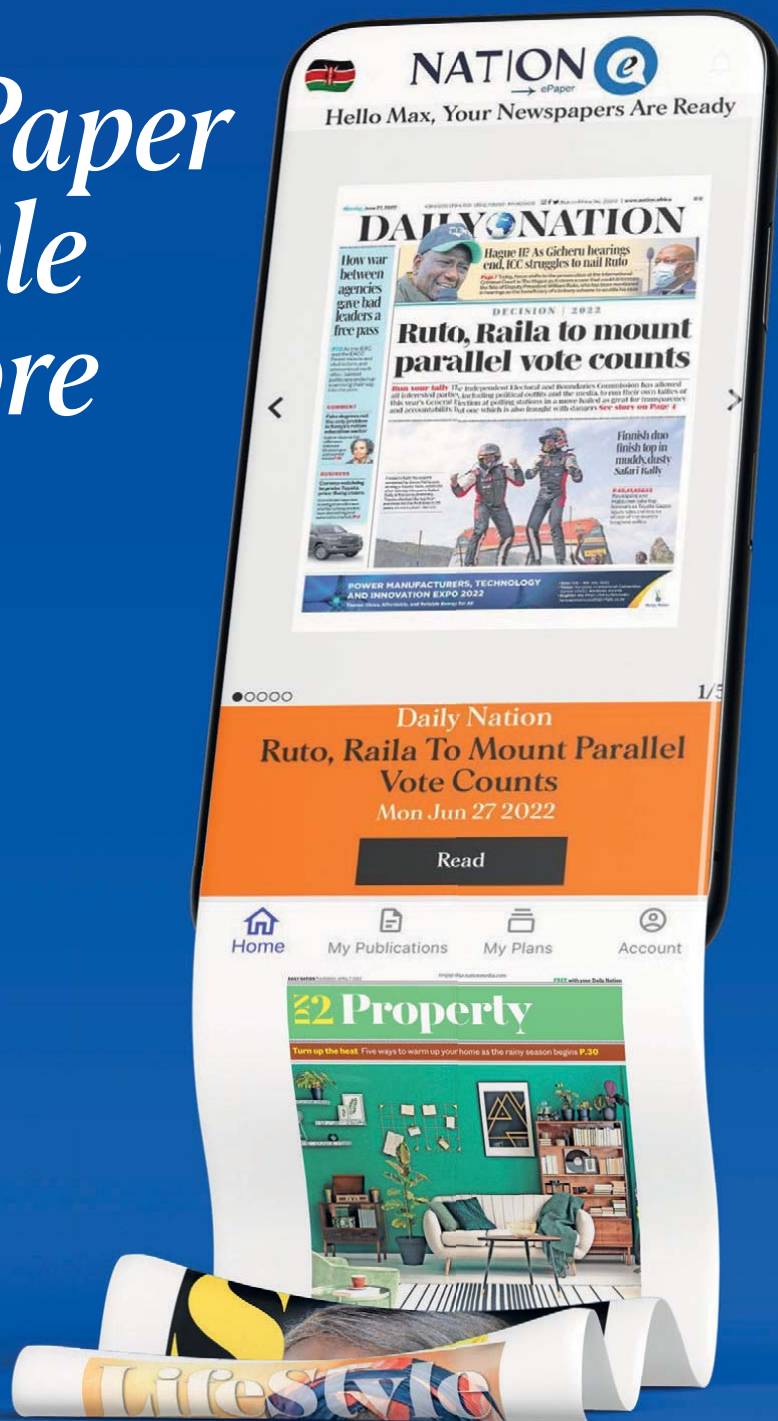
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End of crusade against corruption

In his second term, Former President Uhuru Kenyatta launched an anti-corruption campaign and built a team to execute it. The cynics saw in that initiative a ploy to weaken Deputy President William Ruto by going after his business interests and his allies in the parastatals and other places.

The optimists hoped that finally, somebody was going to do something about Kenya's Achille's heel: a country that is poor not because its people are lazy or daft, but because the theft of public resources has distorted the economy and drained it dry.

In his fight, Mr Kenyatta assembled a credible team, part of which could be seen publicly and part of which was buried in the deepest of the so-called Deep State.

Mr Noordin Haji was appointed the Director of Public Prosecutions, Mr Goerge Kinoti head of the Directorate of Criminal Investigations, Justice (retired) Kihara Kariuki the Attorney-General, and Maj (retired) Twalib Mbarak Chief Executive of the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission, among others. In the background were other powerful forces driving support for the campaign.

It is the duo of Mr Kinoti and Mr Haji that captured the popular imagination.

They had long careers in law enforcement and their enthusiasm and apparent conviction were infections.

The falling-out between the two, making it more difficult for their respective agencies – the Office of the Director of Public Prosecution (ODPP) and the Directorate of Criminal Investigations (DCI) – to work in tandem, has been discussed and reported for months. ODPP accused DCI of conducting shoddy investigations and presenting evidence that could not sustain charges, while DCI claimed the right to charge and ac-



Mutuma Mathiu

**Corruption in Kenya is the quicksand on which political power is anchored. Elections are fought with misappropriated public funds; few Kenyan fortunes have not been greased by graft. A successful fight against corruption can only result from a political discontinuity, not continuity.**

cused ODPP of playing politics and exhibiting a reluctance to prosecute.

The blitz of withdrawals of corruption cases by the DPP in recent days and the resignation of Mr Kinoti put paid to that chapter of Kenya's rather lukewarm fight against corruption and signals a collapse of Mr Kenyatta's crusade, whether genuine or not.

Corruption in Kenya is the quicksand on which political power is anchored.

Elections are fought with misappropriated public funds; few Kenyan fortunes have not been greased by graft.

A successful fight against corruption can only result from a political discontinuity, not continuity.

ity, not continuity.

In putting pressure on Mr Haji to reveal more detailed reasons for withdrawing corruption cases, the Law Society of Kenya has presented the DPP with the devil of a contradiction to resolve: Did an independent constitutional office consent to the prosecution of defective cases?

If so, why and at what point were the defects detected and what remedial measures were considered? How ODPP navigates this will determine whether the public continues to trust and support the fight against corruption or generally becomes cynical and distrustful of future efforts.

Whatever the case, and even though it is totally unacceptable to prosecute anyone without good evidence, the collapse of the cases is unhelpful to future campaigns.

The fate of the investigators in the cases facing Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua is certain to create a strong sense of insecurity in those charged with investigating graft.

They did not benefit from due process nor is it certain whether any consideration was given to the fact that they were under orders.

A detective ordered to investigate a case involving a powerful individual will in future have to fight hard against the temptation to take off in the opposite direction.

This is a bad week in the fight against corruption.

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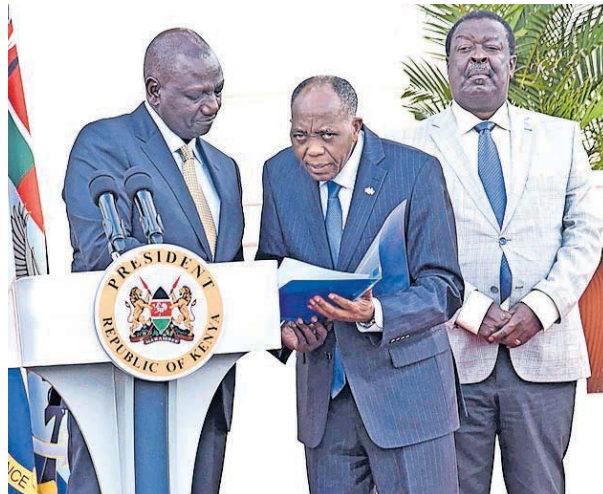
## the telescope

■ Legislators to begin exercise this week

### All set for vetting of Cabinet nominees

Vetting of Cabinet nominees begins on Monday. The exercise will be conducted by the National Assembly's Committee on Appointments. The members are Nelson Koech, Rahab Wachira Mukami, Dido Ali Raso, George Murugara, David Gikaria, Ferdinand Wanyonyi, Mary Emaase, Abdul Rahim Dawood, Junet Mohammed, Caleb Amisi, Stephen Mule, Abdi Shurie, Naisula Lessuda, David Pkosing and Mishi Mboko. The committee is expected to verify the nominees' abilities and quali-

fications to hold public office as per Chapter Six of the Constitution. It will also check the nominees' clearance by various organs, including the Directorate of Criminal Investigations, Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission, Kenya Revenue Authority, and Higher Education Loans Board. Incidentally, two nominees, Mithika Linturi (Agriculture) and Aisha Jumwa (Gender), had criminal charges against them dropped. Jumwa faced corruption-related charges while Linturi was battling a rape-related case.



President William Ruto and Head of Public Service Joseph Kinyua at State House in Nairobi on September 27 during the naming of Cabinet nominees. Looking on is Prime Cabinet Secretary nominee Musalia Mudavadi.

■ It's costing mining firms \$44m in exports a day



Striking miners march in Marikana, 40 kms from Rustenburg, in the South African platinum belt on May 14, 2014. A prolonged strike at state-owned logistics utility Transnet has affected ports and rails, hampering exports and hurting the economy. PHOTO | AFP

### Port, rail strike hits S. African economy

South Africa's government said this week it was "extremely concerned" at a prolonged strike at state-owned logistics utility Transnet that has affected ports and rails, hampering exports and hurting the economy.

Workers at the company, which operates the freight rail network and all the ports in Africa's most industrialised economy, went on strike last week demanding an increase in wages amid high inflation.

"Government is extremely concerned about the negative impact on the South African economy," South Africa's ministers for labour, agriculture and public enterprises

said in a joint statement.

They called for the resumption of exports of agricultural, minerals and other products "as soon as possible", noting that these contributed to maintaining hundreds of thousands of jobs across the country.

The strike is costing mining firms 815 million rand (US\$44 million) in exports a day, according to the Minerals Council South Africa, an industry group.

Major mineral export harbours were operating at between 12 per cent and 30 per cent of their daily averages, the group said in a statement, adding that this was "damaging an already fragile economy".

■ Sources scared of talking to the media

### Spyware a threat to journalism

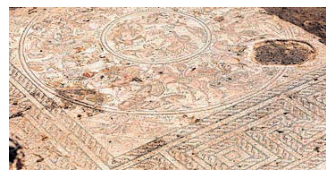


Sophisticated spyware poses an "existential" threat to investigative journalists, causing sources to remain silent for fear of being identified, a US media watchdog has warned. Echoing demands by dozens of NGOs,

the Committee to Protect Journalists called for an immediate moratorium on the development, export, sale and use of spyware until robust guarantees are implemented to safeguard journalists. "I know for a fact that a lot of people are scared to talk to me. A lot of people are scared of writing me, they're scared that my phone is watched," said Moroccan journalist Aida Alami, who works for the *New York Times*.

■ A discovery that is rare on a global scale

### 'Rare' Roman mosaic found in Syria



A 1,600-year-old virtually intact Roman-era mosaic has been discovered in central Syria. The mosaic, measuring 20 x 6m (65.5 x 20ft), was found under a building in Rastan near Homs, which was held by rebels in the civil war until 2018.

Showing mythical scenes including the Trojan and Amazon wars, it is said to be the rarest of its kind. Many of Syria's archaeological treasures have been damaged after more than a decade of war. But the latest find is being described as the most important archaeological discovery since the start of the conflict in 2011. "What is in front of us is a discovery that is rare on a global scale," Hamman Saad, a senior official at Syria's General Directorate of Museums and Antiquities, told the AP.

## ■ THE DIVISIVE LGBTQ DEBATE

# THE GAY CONUNDRUM

*Advocacy for those in Kenya's gay community to live their lives without threats or discrimination has been pursued mostly in whispers and has often recorded more reverses than gains. Even with enactment of the progressive 2010 Constitution, their rights campaigns are often considered a foreign-driven agenda. But will this change with more of them coming out?*



• By MACHARIA GAITHO

Campaigns for human rights, political choice, freedom of expression and other basic rights have been fought openly and loudly over the past 30 years, realising considerable gains since the dark days of the single-party dictatorship.

During the same period, however, advocacy for those in the gay community to live their lives without threats, molestation, violence, discrimination and oppressive laws has been pursued mostly in whispers, and often recorded more reverses than gains even with enactment of the progressive 2010 Constitution.

Very often, the gay rights campaign seems like a foreign-driven agenda. This is witnessed almost every time CNN and other western news networks interrogate the Kenyan president, or when the American president or his envoys comment on Kenyan issues.

Fabled CNN anchor Christianne Amanpour was true to form when she sat down with President William Ruto on September 7.

Predictably, she asked about alleged repression of gays in Kenya, and he gave a stock and

well-rehearsed reply: "I am very clear that we respect everybody and what they believe in, but we also have what we believe in and we expect to be respected for what we believe in," he responded.

"We do not want to create a mountain out of a molehill. . .When it becomes a big issue for the people of Kenya, the people of Kenya will make a choice," he concluded.

Ruto's response was almost a carbon copy of what his predecessor, President Uhuru Kenyatta, told Amanpour in 2018: "I want to be very clear: I will not engage in a subject that is not of any major importance to the people and Republic of Kenya. This is not Uhuru Kenyatta saying yes or no, this is an issue that the people of Kenya have bestowed upon themselves in a Constitution after several years and clearly stated that this is not a subject that they are willing to engage in at this time.

"In years to come, possibly long after I am president, who knows? Maybe our society will have reached a stage where those are issues people are willing to discuss openly and freely".

He concluded that he has his personal opin-

ions on the subject, but would not talk about that because as President he can only venture to convey what the people of Kenya have determined as captured in the laws.

Both Ruto and Uhuru basically refused to dwell on whether they would recognise gay rights, taking shelter in the cultural and religious environment where the subject is taboo, and laws that outlaw gay sex and same sex marriage.

It was notable however, that unlike President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, for example, or Zimbabwe's former President Robert Mugabe, neither Ruto nor Uhuru outrightly condemned same-sex relationships.

Both left the window open for discussion at some indeterminate future when the people of Kenya were ready to confront the sensitive issue.

That in both interviews there was no condemnation of the gay lifestyle and there was also a tiny window left open for future discussion could be taken as a positive, but not for those who note the refusal to speak out for a

...Continued on Page 6

## kenya lens

## Coming out from the shadows

...Continued from Page 5

section of the population that faces discrimination, threats, violence and denial of the basic constitutional freedoms to life and liberty. The gay community, which has adopted the ever-lengthening alphabet soup of LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer) and recently added IAP (Intersex, Asexual, Pansexual), insists there are issues that cannot be swept under the carpet.

On the legal front are the Constitutional prohibitions against gay sex and marriage. Then there are the societal mores in a country of deeply rooted cultural and religious (Christianity and Islam) beliefs that are absolutely hostile to same sex affairs.

On the CNN interviews four years apart, Ms Njeri Gateru, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Coalition (NGLHRC), was not impressed. "It's unfortunate that those in authority frame human rights issues as non-issues," she told *The Weekly Review*.

"The conversation from Uhuru and Ruto is that LGBTQ people continue to be harassed because of their sexual identity. As a queer person it's disconcerting that the same ignorance of the issues carries on less than three months from when we had a public outcry over the murder of a lesbian because of her sexuality. The violence keeps escalating with no reaction from authorities."

She was referring to the case of Sheila Lumumba, 25, a hotel worker in Karatina who was gang-raped and murdered, provoking local and international protests.



Njeri Gateru is the director of the National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Coalition.

In July, after prolonged protests by the gay community and human rights activists against police inaction, a suspect was arrested and charged in a Nyeri court with aggravated assault and murder.

Rights organisations have also been calling on the police to act fast on other recent murders, including that of a gay man, Joash Mosoti, who was killed in Mombasa last year and Rose Mbese, an inter-sex woman slain in Trans Nzoia County earlier this year.

The hashtags #JusticeForSheilaLumumba, #JusticeForRoseMbese and #JusticeForJoashMosoti trended as activists piled on the pressure, insisting that those were not 'ordinary' murders, but killings targeting those of different sexual orientation and identity. While the gay community in Kenya has become increasingly visible and outspoken in recent years, they have become cautious since the election of President Ruto and his close association with often intolerant Christian evangelical groupings.

When *The Weekly Review* started working on this story, many gay activists approached who previously been open about their sexuality preferred to retreat into the shadows, adopting a wait-and-see attitude.

Fear of emergence of an intolerant regime seemed to have been justified when, out of the blue, the acting chief executive of the Kenya Film Classification Board (KFCB) Christopher Wambua declared that all films containing gay and lesbian content are banned in Kenya.

In a September 23 interview on *Spice FM*, Wambua revealed that the Board had over the years prohibited several movies produced in Kenya and abroad with LGBTQ content. He did not cite the specific laws used to make such content illegal other than the existing legal prohibition of gay sex. That seems to be a willfully erroneous misinterpretation of the law, for the fact that the law criminalises a certain activity does not extend to making discussion or depiction of that activity a crime. Nor does it become illegal to lobby for decriminalisation.

In his comments, Wambua seemed to be borrowing from the logic often displayed by his controversial predecessor Ezekiel Mutua, who earned himself the nicknames 'Junior Jesus' and 'Moral Prefect' for trying to impose his narrow moral code on others.

It was during Mutua's tenure when in 2018 Kenyan film *Rafiki*, was banned because it depicted a lesbian love affair. Ironically, he temporarily lifted the ban so that the movie, written and directed by Wanuri Kahiu, could qualify as Kenya's entry for the Oscar Awards.

Njeri of the NGLHRC was appalled by Wambua's comments, likening them to abridgement of the legal and constitutional freedoms of expression. She added that purporting to ban a movie simply because it depicted homosexuality amounted to a vain attempt to erase realities and also erase the stories of those belonging to certain communities.

"It is dangerous that one small institution could completely negate and undo the work of people like me, people who are queer and have queer relatives, friends and colleagues, and thus say we do not exist, and if we exist, publicly act as if we do not, and give life to the lies and misinformation about queer people." She noted that the High Court has ruled that 'popular morality' must not infringe on rights of minorities.

Contacted by *The Weekly Review*, Wambua seemed to walk back on his statement, denying that he was banning films depicting gay content.

He conceded that there was no law banning gay content in films, but rather the examination and rating parameters for film classification which guide movie makers on what is permissible in Kenya, especially in regard to protecting minors and safeguarding cultural values.

He insisted that the problem was not gay content in itself, but content that would be deemed to glorify, normalise and promote the gay lifestyle.

There might be a problem there in that an over-zealous censor would interpret any reference or acknowledgement of gay relations in that light.

## Tribulations of a gay crusader

At first sight, Njeri Gateru comes across as any young, confident, woman professional making her way up the corporate ladder.

But within a few minutes of conversation one sees a driven, passionate activist fully committed to agitation for a minority that daily has to ensure discrimination, threats and violence, while the authorities look the other way. As executive director of National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Coalition, Njeri not only leads advocacy for a grouping that suffers repression, but walks the talk as one of the few Kenyan lesbians brave enough to come out of the closet.

Over a late breakfast at a popular restaurant at The Hub as she took a break from one meeting before attending another, Njeri looked up nonplussed, then offended, when asked about her personal journey of self-discovery as a gay person. To her it was a non-issue. There was no confusion, doubt or identity crisis when, early in life, she realised that she liked girls just like others liked boys. She also found no big deal in 'coming out' because her sexual preference had never been hidden from her family, friends and close acquaintances.

"My family knows, has always known. I never felt a need to hide that I'm a lesbian and that I like women" she declared. "Where I've experienced unacceptance around my sexuality is from people who don't know me".

For a lot of gay people, coming into the open after years of secrecy is a major, liberating moment. For Njeri, there is no tragic or moving story about her sexuality or who she is. She is just her. She encounters homophobic attitudes almost daily, especially with work that involves support for victims of harassment, assault and discrimination.

She has a full-time job rescuing victims from police stations following irregular arrests or helping victims of assault file complaints. She also has to support people evicted from homes because of their sexual preferences or being sacked from their jobs.

## kenya lens

## ■ PRIDE PARADE: LIBERTY IN THE WEST

*In the US, Canada and the UK, leaders have gone out of their way to promote and protect the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons everywhere*

• By KWENDO OPANGA

With 200 appointees, the most of any administration, President Joe Biden has pushed the envelope of visibility and opportunity for America's and the world's minority lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) communities.

It was a deliberate step and message from Washington because Biden set out to ensure that the diplomacy and foreign assistance of the US would "promote and protect the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons everywhere".

And last month, in another signal of his commitment to the LGBTQ cause, Biden looked beyond the shores of America when he honoured English musician Elton John, a long-standing icon of the LGBTQ movement, with a National Humanities Medal.

Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg is the first openly gay person to serve in an American President's cabinet. And Biden in May confirmed Karine Jean-Pierre as the first black and first openly gay person ever to serve as White House Press Secretary.

At the State Department, Mr Ned Price is the first gay person to communicate Washington's foreign policy to the world. And Dr Rachel Levine, an Assistant Secretary at the Department of Health and Human Services is the first openly transgender person to be confirmed to a federal post.

It is highly unlikely this is going to be replicated in Africa any time soon. The continent's LGBTQ people have heard and seen presidents frown upon and despise their sexuality and, they know they are often the butt of jokes.

African leaders, such as Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni, have especially since 2009 locked horns with their counterparts from the UK, US and Canada, to name but three, over the rights of LGBTQ communities. It started with a Ugandan lawmaker who tabled a private member's Bill in Parliament that sought to introduce the death penalty in a move that would not only criminalise

# THE LAND OF THE FREE



US President Joe Biden

same sex relationships between men, but condemn those in such relationships to death.

But the West that so loudly protested this drastic move, with Washington, London and Ottawa leading the way, has itself not always recognised LGBTQ rights.

In July, London saw a colourful Pride Parade in celebration of 50 years of struggle, protest and persistence, perseverance and progress in the fight for equality and tolerance for the LGBTQ communities of the United Kingdom.

When the first Parade was held in 1972 it was estimated that some 2,000 people representing these communities marched, but in July an estimated 600 diverse LGBTQ groups, say organisers, brought onto the streets of London about 1.5 million people in the biggest in-person demo since the advent of Covid19.

Mayor Sadiq Khan called the Parade a celebration of community, unity and progress, but he was quick to tell media that the campaign can never be complacent in the drive for an open, inclusive and accepting world. He was mindful of the fact that a week prior in Oslo, Norway, two people had been killed and 20 injured in an attack on a Pride parade.

Why do LGBTQ parades matter? Because, says Amnesty International, people are still attacked because of their perceived sexual orientation and gender identity even during Prides. AI also says that Prides are an opportunity to challenge homophobic and transphobic legislation and contribute to changing hearts and minds.

So, after 50 years of Pride Parades, what has been achieved? Stonewall Research reported last February that in the 70s, "Gay News, Britain's first newspaper, was founded. Switchboard, a London-based info and support helpline that still runs today, was established. The first trans conference was held in Leeds and the first gay and lesbian Trades Union Congress Conference took place to discuss workplace rights. In a watershed moment, Maureen Colquhoun became Britain's first openly lesbian MP." Fast forward to the 2000s under Tony

Blair and *Stonewall* reports that a raft of positive legislation was introduced. "The UK government lifted the ban on LGB people in the armed forces, the age of consent was lowered to 16, same sex couples were granted equal rights when applying for adoption... We also saw the Civil Partnership Act and the Gender Recognition Act introduced in 2004, granting same sex couples the same rights as married couples."

Forward to the present and the publication is clear that "looking around us today it's clear that we haven't equality... While we know progress has been made, we still have to battle regressive attitudes across society... Stereotypes about gay men and gay and bi men being promiscuous are still being used to justify violence and blame the victims of horrific attacks. In 2022, we are still not safe in our own communities."

The UK is lauded, for example, for having the most LGBTQ parliament in the world with a total of 62 MPs belonging to these communities currently in the House of Commons, whose total membership is 650 MPs. The first MP from these communities sat in the House of Commons between 1593 and 1598. The first gay member of Cabinet was appointed in 1910 and was designated Secretary of State for the Colonies. Since then, the Labour Party has produced 12 LGBTQ members of cabinet to the Conservative Party's two and one each for the Liberal Democrats and Liberals.

However, it was under Conservative Premier David Cameron's watch that legislation allowing same sex marriage was passed in March 2014 and during which same sex unions took place. The immediate former Prime Minister Boris Johnson pitched for LGBTQ rights at the Commonwealth Summit in Kigali in June.

London will make available the equivalent of over Sh270 million to support "civil society organisations working to amend discriminatory laws and practices" across the Commonwealth and committed more than Sh1.1 billion to the "protection of LGBT rights as the Commonwealth chair-in-office".

## kenya lens

■ CLOSE CONNECTION BETWEEN FORMER PREMIER AND HIS LAST BORN DAUGHTER

## POWER BEHIND THE THRONE?

*The arrangement that places Winnie Odinga at the heart of Raila's political operations has created a lot of disquiet, mainly because she has thrown certain individuals who had direct access to and influence over her father off balance*

• By OSCAR OBONYO

Asked in a newspaper interview five years ago about what she does for a living, Winnie Odinga curtly replied, "I work for my father, I am his bodyguard". Brief as it was, the response was quite precise, as it answers a question that many are asking: how the last born child of former Prime Minister Raila Odinga has been thrust into the center of post-poll controversies and succession politics of the Odingas.

Over time, she has emerged as her father's confidant – a close ally and operative who is trusted with first-hand information on Raila's political moves, including high-profile underhand dealings. The current arrangement, which has placed Winnie at the center of Odinga's political operations has, however, created a lot of disquiet, mainly because she has thrown certain individuals – who previously enjoyed direct access and influence on Odinga – off balance.

Her *modus operandi* rattled many during the campaigns for the August 9 elections. From alleged arrogance, takeover of the billboards business, and hiring and firing campaign staff without formal communication, to denying senior politicians access to the presidential candidate, there have been many accusations levelled against her.

At some point, the International Business and Corporate Communications graduate from Philadelphia, US, is reported to have influenced who got audience with her father. A number of business leaders from Mt Kenya region, who largely supported the Azimio campaign, are said to have been "deeply irked" by her actions. Two ODM-allied governors from Nyanza and Western Kenya reportedly protested to Odinga.

"But her parents were her enablers and could not reprimand her. Instead they cheered her on for her efforts towards delivering

the presidency," said a politician from the Coast.

Another one from Mt Kenya protested about the use of reggae beats during the campaigns, saying they were getting into trouble with religious leaders, who were using it to portray Odinga as an anti-Christ crusader. But being lovers of reggae music, the politician says, Winnie and her team of youthful campaigners ignored their protests.

Incidentally, most of those who shared their experiences with *The Weekly Review* did so in confidence. There can only be two reasons for this – that Winnie is either very powerful or they did not wish to politically antagonise the former PM by attacking his daughter.

Our two-week long spirited efforts to get Winnie's side of the story proved unfruitful as she neither picked our calls nor responded to our text messages. But Siaya Senator Dr Oburu Odinga absolves his niece from any blame, saying she was a poll employee just

like all others who worked under the supervision of Ms Elizabeth Meyo, the CEO of the Odinga presidential campaign.

Oburu claims that Winnie is the target of a blame game because she is an Odinga, and that unlike the other members of staff, she enjoyed access to the candidate. "Winnie was a loyal worker who did her very best and if my brother would have been declared winner, today we would be celebrating this very girl whom we are trying to vilify."

Nonetheless, her actions have attracted both cheers and jeers from Kenyans. Even before the Supreme Court made a final ruling on the petition filed by the Azimio coalition party, for instance, she quickly deleted a post in which she had asked party supporters to turn up for

street protests. Around the same time, there were dozens of tweets in her name flying around, engaging in bitter exchanges with supporters and

opponents. She later claimed her Twitter account had been hacked.

And in pointed tweets last weekend, Winnie posted her engagements after a church service in Ki-bra constituency, raising eyebrows about her next political move. There have also been murmurs that the ODM party could nominate the 31-year-old to the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) to represent the youth.

So, does this imply that Winnie is the Odingas' favoured one to inherit the power baton from Raila? Or is she just a rabble-rouser, unknowingly sabotaging the political cause of the Odingas?

Analysts believe Winnie is just doing her duty to safeguard her father's interests. To Odinga, she is a full-package aide who, besides handling his office paperwork, finances and social media, is practically the ODM party leader's personal assistant. And, coupled with private tasks of minding her father's health – medication and diet while out in the field or on overseas trips – she has an unmatched combination of qualities that best suit Odinga's needs.

Winnie's confidential role came to the fore in 2018, when she accompanied her father, along with Suna East MP Junet Mohamed – another cozy ally – to meet President Uhuru Kenyatta at his Nairobi Harambee House for the Handshake deal on March 9.

On the eve of D-Day, the former Prime Minister had engagements with some of his close buddies, including then Siaya Senator James Orengo (now the governor), which stretched late into the night. Odinga reportedly did not open up to these members of his "kitchen cabinet" about his engagement the following day. It was a jealously guarded secret, shared only with Winnie and Mohamed – albeit at the 11th hour.

A member of the Odinga family traces the close connection between the former Premier and his youngest daughter to the issue



Winnie Odinga has become one of her father's confidants. PHOTOPOOL

Continued on Page 11



## kenya lens

## ■ DISILLUSIONMENT IN THE REGION WITH PROJECT KENYA

● By JOSEPH MBOYA

**D**r William Ruto's victory over Raila Odinga in the August 9 presidential election has had far-reaching ramifications on the politics of Luoland.

With age not on his side, few people see Odinga making a stab at the presidential race in 2027. Questions are being asked about whether the Orange Democratic Movement Party leader will still have the stranglehold sway he has had on the Luo Nation since the 1990s.

It's a voting bloc he inherited from his father, Kenya's first Vice-President Jaramogi Oginga Odinga. Jaramogi's control of the region's politics was so complete and the people's support for him so fervent that at one time, Cabinet Minister Stanley Oloitiptip quipped, "Gor Mahia (football club) is a religion and Oginga Odinga is their god". Following the assassination of Tom Mboya on July 5, 1969, with the Nyanza region heartbroken and disillusioned with the Kenyan state, Jaramogi moved in quickly to rise on the wave of mourning to rally the people to his side. He became the unofficial leader of a community that had cut out a niche for itself as a people who spoke with one voice on all matters national.

The only time Jaramogi seemed to go against his people's wish was during the headline-grabbing tussle in 1987 over where to bury celebrated criminal lawyer SM Otieno. While his widow, Wambui Otieno, wanted him buried in Upper Matasia, Ngong, his Umira Kager Clan wanted him interred in Nyalungga, in what is today Siaya County. Umira Kager, through their lawyer Richard Otieno Kwach, argued that Luos could only be buried in their ancestral land. Wambui countered that Otieno had expressed the wish to be buried in Ngong. Trouble was, the good lawyer died without a will.

As the legal drama played out in court, Jaramogi publicly commented, saying that when they formed the Luo Union, it was agreed that the community could settle anywhere and be buried there. A chagrined Kwach was to refer to Jaramogi as a "punctured old politician".

In this year's August polls, Raila was insistent that the community votes only Azimio candidates. This was followed to the script, with Ugenya being the only exception where David Ochieng' flew past the Azimio wave to get elected MP on a Movement for Democracy and Growth party ticket.

With Ruto firmly in charge, it seems that the Luo community is back to familiar territory – the opposition. Raila's supporters, however, believe his "victory" was stolen. The apathy and general feeling of being cut out of the greater Kenya is very loud. Some members of the community are putting forward proposals on how to develop Luoland without necessarily being an appendage of the government.

There is a swelling movement that is labelling the community as the Igbos of Kenya. In 1967, Lt Col Chukuwumeka Ojukwu rose up

# NYANZA AT A CROSSROADS

*Who will inherit Raila's mantle? There seems to be not a single politician who has the charm, the forceful courage and deep pockets of the Azimio leader*

in arms fighting for the Biafra Republic (Igbos) against the Federal Government of Nigeria that was led by Gen Yakubu Gowon. It was a bloody war that saw many casualties. When the secessionists were finally defeated, the Igbos put their heart and mind into a new direction – education, commerce and the arts. They have since dominated those fields and the Nigerian film industry, which is currently estimated to be the second in the world in terms of movie produced. The proponents of this school of thought are convinced that Luo Nyanza has enough resources which, if well managed, can see the area take off economically. They have a point. Lake Victoria is a huge potential that lies untapped since the creation of time. Big investments in the fishing industry to help the fishermen around the lake

acquire modern boats and other fishing gear would be the first step. This should be followed by investments in coolers and other storage facilities, as well as fish processing plants. The market is there, evidenced by the imports of fish from China. People well-schooled in the art of fish eating will tell you that the difference in quality and taste of Lake Victoria fish and the China imports is as far as East is from the West.

Close to fishing is tourism. The Kisumu Impala Sanctuary offers visitors the chance to see impala, cheetahs, buffaloes and lions, among other wildlife. Kit Mikayi, the mystic rock, is a great attraction. You can then hop across the lake in a ferry or water bus to Rusinga Island. Nearby is the Ruma National Park. For those so inclined, a visit to the Tom Mboya Mausoleum can also be included in the itinerary.

The next battle frontier is on inheritance of Raila's mantle if he decides to retire from active politics. There seems to be not a single politician who has the charm, the forceful courage and deep pockets of the Azimio leader.

Governors Anyang'Nyong'o and James Orenge have been suggested as possible successors. However, with the two being more or less Raila's age-mates, time is not on their side. Former Nairobi Governor Evans Kidero has also been touted as a possible contender. He has the pockets and age is on his side. When Ruto named his Cabinet nominees, the only Luo who made the cut was Eliud Owalo. Being the only minister (if Parliament approves) from the region gives Owalo an elevated position to create clout and build his own brand. In the overall scheme of things, there is some sense of disillusionment among the community with Project Kenya. By some dint of political angling, it has found itself in the opposition since 1966. There have even been murmurs that carrying a Luo name is a liability in Kenya, especially for those who want to build a career in the public service.

This is probably why a new way of naming children is taking root in the community. Instead of better known names like Akinyi and Odhiambo, many parents are now going for such names like Hera (love), Gweth (blessings) and Hawi (luck). However, those choosing such names are derisively referred to as 'posh Luos' by their more conservative kinsmen.



Thomas Joseph Odhiambo 'Tom' Mboya was a highly respected leader in the Luo community. He died on July 5, 1969.

## kenya lens

■ RUTO SEEKS TO BOOST CAPITAL MARKETS

**PRIVATISATION DEBACLE**

*With a moribund and ineffective privatisation commission, key decisions on divestiture, concessions, mergers, joint ventures and outright sale of government interests are made by other state institutions*



President William Ruto during the bell-ringing ceremony to launch the Enhanced Nairobi Securities Exchange Market Place in Westlands on Tuesday. Looking on are Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua (left) and NSE chairman Kiprono Kittony. PHOTO | PSCU

• By JAINDI KISERO

For President William Ruto, the bell-ringing ceremony he was officiating at the Nairobi Securities Exchange on Tuesday presented an opportunity to renew the new administration's pledge to give fresh momentum to the capital markets by approving more listing of shares of commercial state corporations under the privatisation programme.

But the highlight of the event was the light moment of laughter when the President publicly chastised two public officials who were present at the event for poor performance and for earning fat salaries without doing any work.

"You should refund the money we have spent on your salaries," he said. The two men on the spot were the CEO of the Privatisation Commission (PC), Mr John Kosgey, and the director of the Nairobi International Financial Centre (NIFC), Mr Oscar Njuguna.

The President said that the PC had not processed any transaction in the last 13 years. He lamented that the NIFC, despite

being in existence for five years, had only managed to register one investor. Was the President signalling major changes in this space? That remains to be seen.

The biggest and latest shenanigan in the privatisation process was the outcome of transactions involving two of Nairobi's iconic hotels — the Hotel InterContinental and the Hilton Nairobi.

The major global hospitality brands have exited their investments in the two five-star hotels that they have been operating since 1969.

The InterContinental Group and their local partners — the state-owned Tourism Finance Corporation (TFC), Moi family-owned Sovereign Trust Limited and state-controlled Development Bank of Kenya (DBK) — recently placed the Hotel InterContinental on the market, inviting offers and proposals from realtors to either lease or convert the building into a mixed-use property.

The implications of their exit for the economy in terms of lost jobs, the country's position as a tourist

destination and reputation as a good investment location will be far-reaching.

What went wrong? As one peruses the archives to track the evolution of decision-making since a 2009 Cabinet meeting decided that government shares in three TFC-owned hotels — the Hilton, the InterContinental and Mountain Lodge — be privatised, it is clear that it was all as a result of inability to make the correct decisions by the Ministry of Tourism, the National Treasury and the Privatisation Commission.

The evidence that emerges from the files is that of an influential local oligarch pulling strings behind the scenes to, first, block attempts by foreign investors at injecting capital in the businesses; secondly to artificially depress the value of the assets; and, finally to set the stage for the oligarchs to snap up the land and buildings on the cheap.

It would appear that the scheme was implemented in two stages. First, the foreign investors were literally prevented from injecting capital into the businesses and

told to wait until after the government exits from the companies. In the next stage, there were many intrigues that ensured privatisation did not take place as planned.

As far back as July 2014, TFC's former CEO, Marianne Ndegwa Jordan, wrote to Treasury Cabinet Secretary Henry Rotich pleading with the government to let the privatisation proceed. She informed the minister that the American investors were ready to inject USD75 million into refurbishing the hotel and were tired of waiting for the planned privatisation.

As the foreign investors were being forced to wait, the value of the asset kept dwindling. Clever manoeuvres and tactics by the Moi-owned Sovereign Trust were a major factor in the postponement of the planned privatisation.

Correspondence show that as the privatisation was about to start in earnest early in 2014, the Moi family wrote to the Privatisation Commission, offering to purchase the shares owned by the government in the hotel at Sh1.9 billion (Sh325 per share).

A few months later, the company secretaries of the InterContinental Group received a separate letter in which the Moi family had brought down their offer to Sh628 million (Sh107 per share), which the Privatisation Commission declined to accept. The privatisation plan collapsed.

The Cabinet had directed that the shares be privatised by allowing the local shareholders of the hotel to exercise their pre-emptive rights. Sovereign Trust, with a 19.38 per cent stake, was, therefore, in pole position to clinch the deal. The remaining local shareholders hold minimal stakes. The only other significant stake in the company is the 10 per cent indirect share owned by the Transcentury Group in DBK which, in turn, owns 12.99 per cent shares in the hotel. All the commission-

## kenya lens



NIFC boss Oscar Njuguna

ers who resisted the moves by the Sovereign Group's manoeuvres served their terms and left. The CEO, Mr Solomon Kitungu, also left and was replaced by the current CEO, Mr Joseph Koskey, formerly Sovereign Group CEO.

The circumstances of the Hilton Group are not too dissimilar. For nearly 10 years, the American owners have more or less been blocked from refurbishing the hotel as the government kept dithering over its plans to sell its 40.5 per cent stake in the property that is held by TFC on its behalf.

With a moribund and ineffective PC, the trend has been that key decisions on divestiture, concessions, mergers, joint ventures and outright sale of government interests are made by other state institutions.

The PC played a minor role in the acquisition of National Bank of Kenya by the Kenya Commercial Bank. Neither was it involved in the government's aborted attempt in 2018 to merge Kenya Airways with the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport and the creation, through a presidential executive order, of the amorphous entity called the Kenya Transport and Logistics Network to co-ordinate the operations of Kenya Ports Authority, Kenya Railways Corporation and Kenya Pipeline Company.

Last year, Tourism minister Najib Balala announced that the TFC had been dissolved and that its operations would be merged with those of ICDC and IDB Capital to create a new entity to be known as the Kenya Development Bank Corporation. The confusion and uncertainty surrounding these transactions were compounded by the fact that the PC did not have a board of directors for a long time, rendering this key oversight body totally ineffective.

## This is where NIFC failed

• By JAINDI KISERO

The concerns about the slow pace at which the much touted Nairobi International Financial Centre is taking shape by President William Ruto during a bell-ringing ceremony at the Nairobi Securities Exchange has put the focus on one of the most hyped projects in the country.

Addressing the chief executive of the centre, Mr Oscar Njuguna, the President said Kenyans would demand to be refunded the money that has been spent on his salary. Mr Njuguna is a former senior executive of the world-famous Qatar International Financial Centre.

Kenya has been planning to establish such an international financial centre since Parliament passed the NIFC Act way back in 2007. Perhaps a major problem has been in the model which Kenya has adopted.

The government deviated from the international best practice, where international financial centres are designed around the concept of a location that is home to a cluster of international financial providers such as commercial banks, investment banks, fund managers, hedge funds and stock exchanges.

Most jurisdictions put up first-class real estate development projects to host the financial district. Neighbouring Rwanda adopted the same approach of building a special district. Last year, they announced that they had contracted Equity Bank Group to develop the Kigali Financial Towers that will host Kigali International Financial Centre.

Kenya has started a financial centre without a physical district. As a matter of fact, the government has expressly stated that any investor will be allowed to set up anywhere in the country provided it has a certificate from the NIFC Authority.

International experience has shown that investors only get attracted to your financial centre when a country has the following: First, an independent state

agency to market, develop and operate the centre, a licensing authority hosting a company registry dedicated to licensees of the centre.

In Rwanda, the country has created a special state agency called Rwanda Finance to promote and market the Kigali International Financial Centre.

Second, an independent supervisory agency and regulator, operating more or less as a special financial sector regulator for this unique special economic zone.

In Dubai, the governor of the central bank doubles as the chairman of the Dubai International Financial Centre.

Finally, a court of arbitration specifically created to serve licensees of the international financial centre and with capability to adjudicate disputes and contracts based on foreign laws. Instead of an independent supervisory agency, Kenya has a steering committee heavily loaded by political appointees, including the President and the Deputy President.

Instead of a court of arbitration and a sound legal environment modelled on the City of London system, we are proposing a low-key tribunal subject to the laws of Kenya.

When the idea was first conceived, Kenya wanted to build a physical financial district operating more or less as a special economic zone offering international financial services and accommodating a cluster of both international and selected local institutions.

The ambition was to create the largest sector of the city economy, a city within a city in the mould of similar international financial centres in Mauritius, Hong Kong or Singapore.

There was a time when the Treasury engaged the Kenya Airports Authority to provide the land where the district would be located.

Whether Kenya's approach will fly remains to be seen. The experience is that laws and tax incentives alone do not build a successful international financial centre.

## Is Winnie the Chosen One?

Continued from Page 8

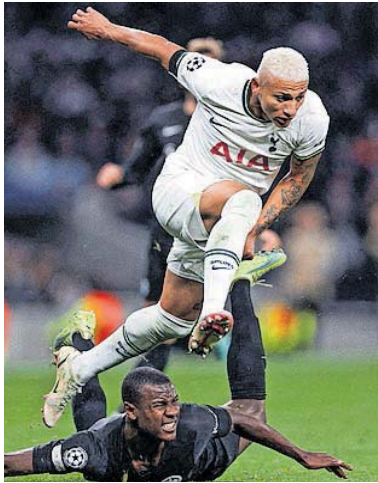
of trust. Odinga has reportedly had reservations about who to trust over the decades, having been betrayed by close friends, political comrades and even aides. When he and others led the Second Liberation struggle from the streets in the 1980s and 1990s, he was sold out to security forces a number of times, partly leading to his political incarceration for a combined period of nine years.

The betrayal stretched to 2017, when individuals whom Odinga entrusted with campaign funds, including to poll agents' fees, allegedly fled with the cash. It is claimed that some bought magnificent houses in the city. Based on these and other experiences, the decision to settle on his daughter as his right-hand woman is understandable. Odinga is said to be very cautious in his dealings now.

Beyond helping out on the political front, Winnie stands out as the heiress to the father's throne – by circumstance and design. Initially her brother, Fidel, was viewed as heir-apparent, but his death in January 2015, placed his eldest child, Rosemary, in the driver's seat. Rosemary was already mobilising to vie for the Kibra seat, when she fell ill in 2019. Although she has recovered from partial blindness, Rosemary has since gone politically quiet. Youngest son Raila Jr is reportedly disinterested in politics, preferring instead to take care of the family's business interests.

Named after the wife of South Africa's iconic leader, Nelson Mandela, Winnie was clearly designed for political business. There are other youngsters in the larger Odinga family who are "teeming with political talent". Oburu holds that Raila's political successor will emerge naturally, like a mushroom, without being planted, just as Raila rose without being handed the mantle by their father.

# the limelight



Tottenham Hotspur's Richarlison (up) jumps over Frankfurt's Evan N'Dicka during the Champions League Group D match in London, on October 12. Spurs won 3-2. PHOTO | AFP



Members of the Disaster Rescue Unit (DRU) from the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) remove debris of concrete at the scene of a collapsed building, blamed on poor construction materials in Kirigiti, Kiambu County, on September 26. PHOTO | AFP



A man assists an injured woman during a protest against Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry calling for his resignation, in Port-au-Prince, October 10. PHOTO | AFP



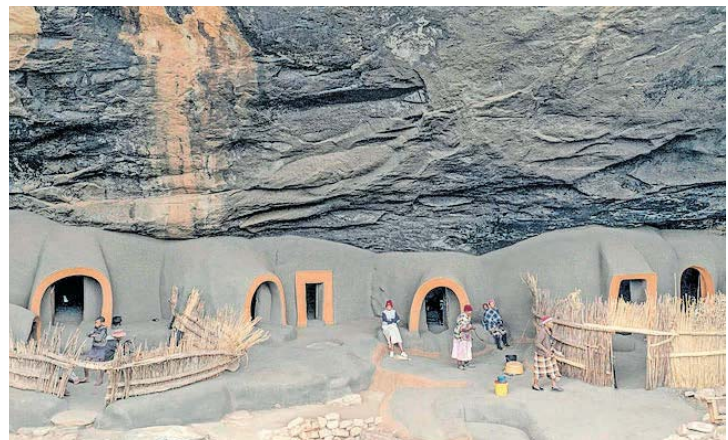
Kenya's Ruth Chepngetich celebrates as she crosses the finish line to win the Chicago Marathon on October 9. PHOTO | AFP



A cosplayer arrives for the final day of the New York Comic Con 2022 at the Jacob Javits Center in New York City on October 9. PHOTO | AFP



The North Korean People's Army front-line long-range artillery division and air force squadron during a fire attack training exercise, at an undisclosed location, on October 6. The 'tactical nuclear' drills overseen by leader Kim Jong Un. PHOTO | AFP



The Kome Caves site in the district of Berea, Lesotho, on October 9. They are a mud dwelling, classified as a National Heritage Site, originally served as hideout for the Basia and a Bataung clan during the 18th century Lifaqane Wars (Mfecane Wars) and cannibalism. PHOTO | AFP

# The Arena

## FASHIONISTA

*From dressing A-list celebrities and high-flying politicians to media personalities, Mawia Muthengi is taking African fashion to a whole new level*

OPEN SPACE

# THE PERFECT STRATEGY

**HUSTLER:** The campaign narrative was woven to represent everyone who was worried about the state of the economy

● BY BILL KEMBO

Love him, hate him or just be indifferent, President William Ruto served his opponents the perfect panna — that football trick when an opponent cheekily but delicately slips a football through your legs as you are in hot pursuit, leaving you bewildered.

Politics has always been, and will remain, about coalescing tribes. These tribes may be ethnic in composition, or ideological, or both. President Ruto and his Kenya Kwanza brigade created a new tribe. Tribe Hustler, with the apt symbol of the wheelbarrow. Why may this be a critical turning point in Kenyan politics?

Ted Brader, in his book *Campaigning for Hearts and Minds – How emotional Appeals in Political Ads Work*, notes that political messaging is designed to summon “...buried feelings of nostalgia, or perhaps revulsion”. He gives the example of Ronald Reagan’s campaigns for a second term. “It’s morning again in America” was Reagan’s campaign slogan, crafted to evoke enthusiasm. Under Reagan, the economy was indeed showing signs of improvement and the “public’s morale” was in upswing.

Contrast this with Kenya Kwanza’s slogan “freedom is coming”. The rhetoric accompanying this painted the Uhuru Kenyatta government, of which Raila Amollo Odinga was now tied to the hip, as one of excesses – citizen surveillance, the collapse of the economy and indifference or outrightly hostile to the thriving of ordinary folk. The plan? Link Raila to this state of affairs as “handshake” bedfellows and hopefully incite revulsion. Unlike in Reagan’s case, things were falling apart, and this worked like a charm on an increasingly discontented population.

Next, form a tribe, then rally and influence their voting with deliberately crafted messaging. This seems to have been the strategy. The human psyche is extremely excitable, especially when we hold allegiances to our tribes. Arguably, the most powerful emotion human beings experience is fear. The skirmishes of 2007 resulted from the exploitation

of our insecurities as ethnic tribes, systematically raising our fears, some perceived and some real, that some ethnic groups wanted to take over others’ land, control government and benefit themselves.

Besides the exceptional execution of rhetoric in their campaigns, Kenya Kwanza, deliberately or inadvertently, also forced their opponents to shift the rallying of ethnic tribes away from the usual tribalism-induced fears to the singular focus on what was and is every Kenyan’s worry: the state of the economy. The hustler narrative was weaved to represent everyone rich or poor, but especially the poor who, at the most basic level, want to gainfully and legally feed, clothe and house themselves without the struggles Kenya Kwanza identified and promised to eliminate.

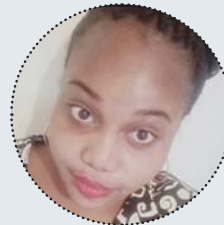
Result? Exceptional resonance with this message among the nine million Kenyans in extreme poverty, four million young people without gainful employment and, unsurprisingly, the working and entrepreneur class that were seeing their savings, fortunes and the purchasing power of the shilling dwindle. Coalescing ethnic tribes became about rallying people to vote with their minds and wallets. By compulsion, even the debates and rallies became, for the most part, not ideologies but ideas to improve the lives of every Kenyan.

Azimio were left playing catch-up. An attempt at prescriptions such as a Ksh6,000 per household social welfare programme, could not compete with Ruto’s more alluring Ksh50 billion “Hustler Fund”, a promise of reduction in taxes, and generally a better thought-out manifesto and masterfully delivered campaign and communication strategy.

*Mr Kembo is a Communication and Public Policy, Law Student University of London, IT Infrastructure Engineer.*

*Are you young and ambitious? We would like to hear from you. Send your views and observations on topical issues to: [weeklyreview@ke.nationmedia.com](mailto:weeklyreview@ke.nationmedia.com)*

MIND SPEAK



**Caroline Mochoge**

The high cost of living is partially due to corruption. Skyrocketing food and fuel prices have worsened the situation. President William Ruto should keep his campaign promise of supporting local farmers and small-scale businesses. He needs to implement the fiscal policy and prioritise funding to avoid debt vulnerabilities. He should also design targeted tax reduction systems with clear timelines.

— *Comms specialist*



**Hosea Otieno**

Most Kenyans are struggling to make ends meet due to the high prices of basic commodities. The government should lower VAT on basics, encourage food importation by reducing import duties, reduce expenditure on long-term mega projects and, more sustainably, support local large-scale production of edible oils like sunflower and simsim farming. That’s the way forward.

— *Law student, UoN*



**Walter Nalwa**

The government should address the high rate of unemployment among the youth. In addition, policies that support professional learners and the Jua Kali sector may help to boost the economy and lower the cost of living. Other factors include long-term sustainable agricultural productivity. Reliance on food imports should be curbed.

— *Student, Daystar University*



**Samuel Mue**

We need to cushion the most vulnerable families and communities. This should not be done through relief aid but tax relief that will increase the purchasing power of families. Furthermore, we need to support local businesses and industries and empower local businesses that are a source of livelihood for many Kenyans.

— *Kenya Model United Nations boss*

## MY TAKE



• BY WAGA ODONGO

Kenya recently lifted a ban on cultivation of genetically modified (GM) crops, ending a decade of one of the worst agricultural policy decisions the government has ever made.

The cognitive dissonance in the situation could give you whiplash: Kenya had become an acknowledged continental leader in researching the field, yet our scientists were confined to endless field trials. I remember meeting three PhD students from Ghana and Tanzania at a public university studying biotechnology in a country that disavows the discipline. The government was subsidising foreigners to come research GM crops yet ignoring the very same research that our public universities are renowned for.

The ban also made no sense. Why must crops that have been deployed and consumed safely in other regions undergo trials locally? Did anyone seriously think that our crop regulatory bodies are better funded or better at research than American ones? It was an unnecessary policy that stemmed from fear.

But we have an added impetus for GM crops now. Hunger stalks the land yet again. Another president is flagging-off relief food. We have a population growing at a fast clip, our country is two-thirds desert, our planet is heating up and we desperately need stable food sources. East Africa, meanwhile, is in the midst of a four-year drought super cycle.

The problem is compounded by falling yields. Our productivity per acre of maize is less than a third the global average. To feed ourselves we will be forced to put more land under agriculture and farmers will kill off the elephants long before the poachers do.

Our best hope, one that would be both quick and cheap, is to begin farming genetically modified crops. It is a decision that is sadly coming three decades too late.

The evidence in favour is over-

# WHY PRESIDENT IS RIGHT ON GMO

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT:** The ban made no sense. Why must crops that have been deployed and consumed safely in other regions undergo trials locally?



whelming: GM is good for farmers and consumers. Because of the fear the crops inspire, GM cereals undergo more testing than wild varieties ever have. We also passed the tipping point long ago. Trillions of portions across the continents have been consumed without so much as a rash.

Half a billion acres around the world are under GM crops. We do not just have scientific studies guide us, we have studies of studies on GM crops and no red flags have been raised. Every repository of settled scientific wisdom concludes that GM is safe for human consumption.

Still opposition abounds.

One argument that has been afforded by the refuseniks is to adopt Europe's positions on GM crops. It makes little sense. European activists are driven by ideological concerns and not scientific research. Europe has no deserts and has a shrinking population. They have lakes of butter and mountains of wheat. Governments pay farmers to leave their fields fallow, they can never be used as an example to emulate in the tropics.

In Africa we have more heat and with it more pests. Crops found around the equator also tend to have less carbohydrates

than their temperate cousins. Life is a lot tougher in the tropics. According to the UN climate change body IPCC, Africa will face harsher conditions from climate change compared with Europe. We cannot afford, on our latitude, to apply prescriptions given by European environmentalists. When it comes to climate change Africa is on red alert, Europe is on standby.

Europe is a different world, we might as well be copying agricultural policy from Martians.

Another false argument given against GM crops is the one on protection of indigenous crops. Our palate is a globalised melange. Our staple food, maize, was brought in by the Portuguese from the Americas. Potatoes and tomatoes are from the Andes. Cassava, peanuts, avocados, guavas, sweet potatoes, pineapples and passion fruit are all South American imports.

It also applies to animals. Jersey, for most Kenyans isn't where Chris Okemo is accused of stashing his loot; it is the name of a cow. The Zebu cows we cherish are Indian. Sahiwal is the name of a Pakistani city. Friesians are from Friesland in the Netherlands. Globalisation is already a factor on our plates. If we only ate indigenous crops, it would be three servings of a millet gruel a day. None of the crops we seek to protect would have been recognisable to our ancestors.

The fear of GM crops because the market is dominated by American multinationals is also not sound. Consider cars. If, for example, you object to the fact that Toyota and Volkswagen between them hold a quarter of the market, the reasonable response cannot be to ban all cars.

We need crops that can better survive droughts, require little pesticide, yield more nutrients and reduce the impact agriculture has on ecological systems.

It does not escape me that President Ruto has a PhD in plant ecology and understands the science far better than most. He should now concentrate on using his considerable political nous in communicating the safety of GM crops. Dr Ruto must ensure that he is the last president to ever have to flag off relief food.

Mr Odongo is a Software Engineer

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## THE CLOTHING INDUSTRY

**HOME OF HIGH FASHION**

**IT'S AFRICAN YUVA'S TIME:** By combining professionalism and creativity, Mawia Muthengi has become a designer to the stars, dressing an array of celebrities from Lupita Nyong'o, Governor Anne Waiguru to former President Uhuru Kenyatta's family

● BY EDDY ASHIOYA

**P**icture this. You are sitting on a beach. A guy named Alejandro is pouring you a Bloody Mary cocktail when he catches your eyes—and I do mean catches your eye—edging in *flagrente delicto* at his chiselled muscles. The naked spine of Good Vibes is twisting slightly in the late-afternoon sunlight streaming onto the sheets of an exclusive inn in some nameless suburb. That is Beverly Mawia Muthengi's idea of a perfect afternoon.

You will not be blamed for not knowing who Mawia Muthengi is, or the things she cares about. That is until I tell you she runs African Yuva, a fashion retail outlet that focuses on African print designs and products. Still not got your tail up yet? What if I tell you she has dressed everyone who is anyone in this industry? Her Mount Rushmore of stars includes Oscar-award-winning actress Lupita Nyong'o, Kirinyaga Governor Anne Waiguru and Former President Uhuru Kenyatta's children during their wedding (Jomo Kenyatta and Fiona Achola).

She has also provided costume design for several Netflix shows, including *Single Kiasi* (others are in the pipeline and due to their Non-Disclosure Agreements, we cannot reveal details). Influencer Murugi Munyi, gospel artist Kambua, communications consultant Lucia Musau, media personality Grace Msalame and content creators Patricia Kihoro and Sharon Mundia have also known the strength of her needle.

"African Yuva began as something I was doing for fun and interest. When I started, there were not a lot of brands doing Made in Kenya, apart from local *fundis* and textile shops along River Road. At that time, *fundis* being *fundis*, they disappointed clients and disappeared with the material or delivered their own thing. That's where African Yuva was born—our promise is simple: what you order is what gets delivered."

And rightly so. Because as anyone who has interacted with *fundis* knows, they teach you patience and make you realise that the jail time is just not worth it. Silver and gold are good to have, but an honest *fundi* who can find? *Fundis*, especially the Kenyan ones, are cut from the same cloth. This is true whether your *fundi* is from Mombasa or Maralal. "Initially, I was more of a broker. I would hire

*fundis* on an as-needed basis, and we'd have an agreement, but then again, they would fail to deliver." African Yuva launched in 2018, with Mawia going full out and assembling a team. In October 2020, her clients bloomed

and she set up a workshop (in Ngara) where she started with two tailors and one support member of staff. Currently, African Yuva has four tailors and five support staff. "Yuva" means 'home' in Turkish. African Yuva, ergo, is the Home of African fashion.

The 26-year-old Economics and Statistics graduate of the University of Nairobi has endured her rough patch of entrepreneurship. Business usually starts as a mix-and-match, at least in the initial days, before you settle on your core. For her, it has been women. Why women? "Women will always buy clothes and besides, I am a woman and I understand what women want to wear. Most of my items can be worn in an array of sizes from petite to plus size."

"I find it a little distasteful charging someone more for being plus size. Sure, more fabric may be used but less fabric will also be used for another person. Why not find a middle ground?" Her ideal client is someone who is looking to look good. And more importantly, is comfortable paying for a good outfit. She says this assuredly, with her gown designs going for up to KShs 25,000.

African Print is fashionable today. Whenever there is a conference for Africa or in Africa, you would be hard-pressed to miss someone wearing not an African print. No one knows or can say what the spell of the African fabric is, or how it works, but it still exudes its inoffensive writ. "There is a demand for fashion made in Africa. My clothes are of the highest quality. We take care of our customers and they keep coming back."

"Often, I produce what I would wear. Even before we release a collection, I may already have worn that outfit and thought it would look good on other people."

Fashion is also about subjective taste. Sauce for the goose is not always palatable for the gander. Which is why I want to know, what do people get wrong about fabrics? "On the wearing or on the producing end?" On the wearing end of course. She thinks for a while—two minutes to be exact. "Take colour blocking for example—people can now wear pink and red and look nice." Wait, pink and red? I stutter. "Yes! I mean I wouldn't do it but you have to be careful about it. You just can't match any colours because fashion has evolved." I make a mental note to finally unleash my red chino pants and pink shirts for Sunday Best. Fashion,



Beverly Mawia runs African Yuva, a fashion retail outlet that focuses on African print designs and products.  
JEFF ANGOTE | NATION





Beverly Mawia with her staff at African Yuva in Ngara, Nairobi, on October 12. JEFF ANGOTE | NATION



Beverly Mawia at her shop Nairobi. JEFF ANGOTE | NATION



One of the outfits that African Yuva designed for Oscar award winner Lupita Nyong'o.

like love and language, is fluid. Lilian, a 'die-hard recurring client' as she likes to refer to herself, weighs in. "I love African Yuva and what the brand stands for. I have bought several Palazzo pants from Mawia and the way everything fits so perfectly you would think they sell made-to-measure." Speaking to Mawia, you get a sense of fashion's High Priest—not yet quite Anna Wintour but almost there—an embodiment of its highest values, its ultimate arbiter of tastes, its aesthete-in-chief, carrying on African Yuva by its magic rather than mettle. What's the one fashion item she can't miss on the daily? "Confidence." Ah, she's witty too. Maybe all I need to pull off my pink shirt and red chino pants is

confidence? "What I love about Mawia is her professionalism," adds Lilian. When she says she will deliver at a certain time, she delivers within that time. And she has this warm welcoming voice, she's just a joy to work with." Celebrity stylist Brian Babu concurs. "Their (African Yuva) craft is African and well-tailored. I am impressed by how they bring out the creative entrepreneurship of Kenya and Africa in general. I especially love the finishing on the pants, which are also very well-tailored. But what I like most about Mawia is that she has amazing customer service and she does a quick turnaround." As a professional, what does Mawia think our clothes say about us? She starts with the

trite "dress how you want to be addressed". People notice things. Women, especially, notice shoes. They also notice confidence, and so should you. She then proceeds to dismantle my dressing style, strand by strand, which for the purpose of my self-esteem I shall not publish here.

Struggles are woven into life like a tweed into a fine herringbone jacket. Hers, at the moment is whether she is creating the right things. "As a young business owner, I wonder if I am doing enough to keep my employees satisfied. Is my fashion evolving fast enough?" How does she unroll the sleeves? "I like baking. Sunday brunch too. And, I recently joined the gym!" Is there anything she is bad at? "I am very good at being bad at dancing." That razor-sharp wit again. "Sometimes standing up for myself and what I want can be a struggle too." If everything were to end today, what would you want to be remembered for? "My compassion. I would like to be remembered as a kind person to everyone I have interacted with." Not her achievements, not her accolades. Kindness is the glue that sticks humanity together. Think about it. Of all the commercial arts, fashion requires the highest suspension of disbelief from its audience. How many devotees of Paris Fashion Week will ever touch the hem of the garments they've memorised? Looking back, does she think she has been smart or just lucky, I ask. "I am smart and diligent. I have worked hard for all I have achieved." Speaking of, what is the price she has had to pay for her success? "A few personal relationships may have withered out as a result of my being too busy. Plus, I really have no time for myself anymore. I am learning to delegate, to create time for myself. You know those people who say if you do something you love, you'll never have to work a day in your life. That is [not true]. I enjoy it, but let no one lie to you; this is still work," she says. "Africa Yuva is the love of my life. It's what I sleep with and what I wake up to." You know how those pithy Swahili *kangas* and *lesos* have sayings imprinted on them. If hers were to say something, what would it be? She thinks for another two-and-a-half minutes. Can I text it to you? Of course, you can. Later at night, she texts: "We are daughters of women who told us we could be anything we want to be and we heard, 'You have to be everything that you can be'." Too long a quote, but she has the fabric for it. "If it is too long," her text lights up my phone seconds later, as if reading my mind, "we can always put, 'I went to Alliance'." eddyashioya@gmail.com

## EPIC BATTLE FOR VIRTUAL AUDIENCES

# THE DIGITAL MONEY RUSH

● BY SINDA MATIKO

The world turned upside down when TikTok launched in 2016. To date, it remains the fastest growing social media App in Kenya and the world at large as it intensifies its battle with main competitors Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Snapchat and Twitter.

This situation has given content creators and influencers a variety of options to cash in on. With over one billion active users monthly, TikTok has transformed itself into one of the most important influencing marketing platforms today.

In attempts to win back content creators who crossed over and convince existing ones to stay, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and Snapchat have all launched TikTok clones and are dishing out millions of dollars as incentives to lure them back.

Snapchat hands out US\$1 million (Sh120 million) daily to the most viral videos worldwide on its TikTok-like feed, Spotlight, launched in November 2020.

YouTube has its own TikTok clone, YouTube Shorts, launched in September 2020, which offers an incentive fund of US\$100 million (Sh12 billion) that content creators worldwide, including Kenya, can apply for.

Early this month, Meta Platforms, which owns Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, announced that it had expanded its monetisation programme to 150 countries, including Kenya, on its Instagram Reels and Facebook Reels, launched in August 2020 and September 2021 respectively. Kenyan artistes can now make more money from the Reels Play Bonus programme, which has the backing of a US\$1 billion (Sh120 billion) creator fund.

This means that content creators, who include celebrities and influencers, will no longer need to depend on creating content for brands and sponsored

**SOCIAL MEDIA:** As social media platforms compete for the attention of viewers and loyalty of content creators, marketers have more choices in the ways they can reach consumers, while influencers are smiling all the way to the bank

campaigns; they can also tap into paid incentives for Reels based on the performance of their content. The bonus incentive will be based on engagements with one's Reels (views, likes, comments and mentions).

TikTok itself launched a US\$200 million (Sh24 billion) fund in 2020 but exclusively for creators based in the US. But even with the launch of the various competitors and creator funds, which are at their infancy in Kenya, the App continues to be popular in here. Content creator Azziad Nasenya, 22, who rose to fame in 2019 thanks to 15 seconds of fame on TikTok, still prefers the App.

"TikTok has everything I need. I can lip-sync, act, dance and make funny clips; it has provision for all that. It's a platform that allows you to be yourself because you are rarely trolled, offering one a lot of freedom to be creative and original," says Azziad, who has over 2.2 million followers on the App, 1.7 million on Instagram, 565,000 on Facebook, 232,000 on Twitter and 169 subscribers on YouTube.

Nevertheless, her Instagram Reels seems to have a higher conversion rate than TikTok. For instance, a Maybelline product promotion video she uploaded recently garnered 384,000 views on Instagram Reels in four days, compared with 51,000 views on TikTok. She promotes different brands on her various platforms based on her clients' preferences.

Azziad stars on several local TV shows and films but makes most of her money from online brand influencing, charging as much as Sh500,000 for product promotional campaigns and Sh30,000 for brand mentions.

Alma Mutheu, a content creator who holds a Bachelor's degree in English and Literature, credits Instagram and TikTok for giving her most of her paying gigs. However, she prefers the latter because of its design. "Each is distinct in its own way, but if I was to pick one, I would go with TikTok because it's more engaging. It's fun,



TikTok sensation  
Azziad  
Nasenya

easy to create content on and has a wide range of sounds to choose from. I also find it very easy to grow on the platform: I have followers from outside the country, including the US, but it is difficult to do the same on Instagram because of how its algorithm is set." Mutheu makes between Sh30,000 to Sh100,000 depending on the nature of brand engagement she is contracted for.

Brian Mutinda, an agency copywriter and digital influencer in his late 20s, prefers to make his money on Instagram, where he has 105,000 followers compared with 18,500 on TikTok and 134,000 on Twitter. Mutinda spends roughly 30-50 minutes on social media every morning as his first itinerary of the day. "I log on to Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, Instagram and Telegram to check on trends and catch up. It gives me an idea of what content I should plan for the day."

Whereas he sometimes cross-posts content on all his platforms, he mostly tailors it for the various platforms, with Instagram being his preference. "I find it more appealing because it's visual first and very engaging when content is done right. IG algorithms offer a specific audience of like minds, which is good for what I do, unlike TikTok, which is broad," Mutinda explains.

He began his content creation

journey on Facebook in 2012/13 but quickly shifted to Instagram to explore a different avenue of making money. "It was a necessary transition since there was more money on Instagram and hopefully with the latest monetisation programme, things can only get even better."

Comedian-turned-content creator Eddie Butita, founder of online media platform Stage Presence Media Limited, has no platform preference, although he is huge on Instagram with 483,000 followers, 63,000 on TikTok, 506,000 on Facebook and 167,000 on Twitter. The 29-year-old charges upwards of Sh200,000 for brand influencing. "Any of those platforms can work for you provided you understand their respective languages. TikTok gives a creator a huge opportunity to explore new audiences, while Instagram is all about life around you, not about you – where you are, what you are eating and things like that. Facebook is about you and the stories you are telling people, whereas TikTok is purely for entertainment purposes."

"Facebook has for the longest time been shunned by influencers but I find it very powerful because it has some of the highest conversion rates. But I agree that TikTok is the platform to watch. It hasn't been around long but its impact has been huge. Brands

that were initially sceptical about it have begun taking it seriously as a marketing tool because it's attracting the mass market and gaining new audiences much faster than the rest," Eddie observes.

TikTok's rise to the social media apex has been nothing short of sensational, having been dominated by its competitors for years. Despite infatuating the Generation Z aka Gen Z, TikTok did not steal the show of social media apps overnight. It began by captivating the younger generation then worked its ways up to the adults.

A survey by United States International University – Africa involving 9,728 Kenyans between the ages of 14 and 55 across 17 counties in the country, discovered that WhatsApp was the most used platform, at 89 per cent, with TikTok coming second at 86 per cent. Young people in the 21-25 age bracket were the highest users of TikTok, with 42.4 per cent of them actively using the app on a daily basis. Of the active users, 53.6 per cent were female.

The simple reason why more people from all walks of life are continuously flocking to TikTok is because of its logarithm flexibility and, ironically, because it is a superb time waster. The App is designed to play videos from anywhere in the world on a loop until the user scrolls to the next vid-

eo, creating a platform that keeps one actively engaged.

In September 2021, TikTok revealed it had over a billion active users monthly; the number was estimated to have grown to about 1.6 billion by end of March this year by data.ai. With the expansion of TikTok video length from 15 seconds to 10 minutes, the App became a serious direct competitor to YouTube. However, brands that have dabbled with campaigns on TikTok may find the results aren't necessarily applicable to YouTube Shorts.

"Millennials and the older generations are more active on YouTube Shorts than Gen Z, so lessons learnt on TikTok may not apply as well on YouTube Shorts," notes Joshua DuBois, CEO of market research firm Gauge. The Apps are not only competing for users and creators, but also advertising revenue. YouTube generated US\$28 billion (Sh3.4 trillion) in 2021 in advertising revenue compared with TikTok's USD4 billion (Sh480 billion), a figure that will nearly triple to US\$12 billion (Sh1.4 trillion) in 2022.

As social media platforms compete for the attention of viewers and loyalty of content creators, marketers have more choices in the ways they can reach consumers, while influencers are smiling all the way to the bank.

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The **91.5** **SIDE**  
FLIP  
With John Nyanjaniyaga  
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**WOMAN POWER**

SUSAN KIHKA OF THE UNITED DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE IS ONE OF THE SEVEN WOMEN WHO WERE ELECTED AS GOVERNORS IN THE RECENT GENERAL ELECTIONS. SHE WAS ELECTED THE GOVERNOR OF NAKURU COUNTY AFTER HANDING THE INCUMBENT, LEE KINYANJUI, A HUMILIATING DEFEAT IN 10 CONSTITUENCIES OUT OF 11, GARNERING 440,707 VOTES AGAINST KINYANJUI'S 225,623 VOTES. KIHKA PROMISED TO WORK EXTRA-HARD TO PROVE TO THE ELECTORATE THAT WOMEN DESERVE LEADERSHIP POSITIONS AND ARE AS GOOD AS, IF NOT BETTER THAN, THEIR MALE COUNTERPARTS. CONGRATULATIONS YOUR EXCELLENCY.

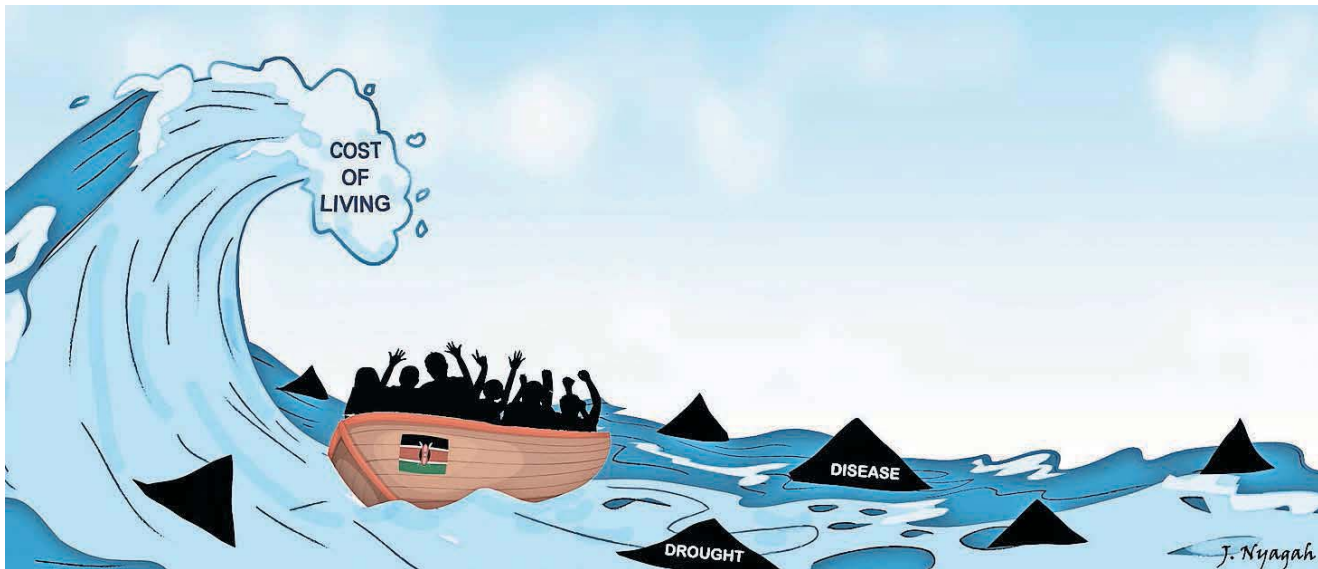


**STAR OF THE WEEK**

THE GREATEST MARATHON RUNNER OF ALL TIME ELIUD KIPCHOGE BELIEVES HE CAN GET EVEN CLOSER TO A POSSIBLE SUB-TWO HOUR MARATHON AFTER NARROWING THE GAP BY 30 SECONDS WHEN SETTING HIS RECENT WORLD RECORD IN BERLIN. THE 37-YEAR-OLD RAN A TIME OF TWO HOURS, ONE MINUTE AND NINE SECONDS TO BEAT HIS PREVIOUS BENCHMARK, WHICH HAD STOOD SINCE 2018 "I BELIEVE THAT I STILL HAVE TIME TO SHOW THE WORLD HOW TO PUSH LIMITS," HE SAID AFTER HIS LATEST RECORD. HATS OFF TO THE KING.



## opinion



■ He's among many conservative Russians who believe the split up of the USSR was a mistake

# Putin determined to re-establish Soviet Union

The world should know that Moscow will not stop doing what it has set itself to do, including pulverising neighbours militarily, because Berlin, Paris, London, Washington, the European Union and/or the United Nations, have asked it not to or condemned it for doing so.

President Vladimir Putin is among many conservative Russians who believe the split-up of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was a mistake. Indeed, Putin has been reported by *World Is One News* as describing the disintegration of the USSR as the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century.

Last month, Putin was shown on television standing alone beside the coffin of the last Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.

He spent quiet moments, crossed himself, touched the coffin, looked at the portrait of the deceased and then walked away. Officially, Putin did not attend Gorbachev's funeral because his schedule could not allow him. Put another way, he was busy. Other reports pointed to the visit to the hospital as his way of paying his last respects to his predecessor.

Putin is among many in Russia who blame Gorbachev and his twin policies of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring or reform) for the collapse and eventual 1991 disintegration of the USSR. Gorbachev was celebrated by the West's leadership and Putin was

**In 2014, Moscow sent troops into Crimea, regarded internationally as Ukrainian territory, and, after holding a referendum, annexed it and declared it part of Russia.**



**KWENDO  
OPANGA**

not going to join them at his final farewell.

Regarding the invasion of Ukraine, it would appear there is a template which was drawn by Moscow in 2008.

Claiming genocide in the territories of Abkhazia and Ossetia, Russian troops invaded Georgia and occupied the two areas. The Parliament of Georgia, in a resolution, called the Russians an army of occupation.

In 2014, Moscow sent troops into Crimea, regarded internationally as Ukrainian territory, and, after holding a referendum, annexed it and declared it part of Russia. Moscow claimed the lives of the people of Crimea and its (Russia's) military installations were threatened by Ukrainian extremists.

Seven months ago, Russian troops invaded Ukraine because Moscow claimed Kyiv was engaged in genocide against populations living in the border areas but chiefly because Kyiv's move to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation was tantamount to parking military hardware on its porch.

Moscow is vehemently opposed to the former Soviet states joining Nato, which it sees as the expansion of the West into the former East at its expense. The Nato creed is that an attack on one member is an attack on all. A Na-

to member on Russia's border is what Moscow calls a military enemy on its porch.

Moscow looks beyond its conflict with Kyiv and sees the West and therefore views this as a war in which Kyiv is the West's proxy.

It is why Putin has threatened to use nuclear weapons and doubled down on this, warning it is no bluff.

Moscow has so far withstood the sanctions imposed on it and appears emboldened to tough it out by, for example, cutting gas supplies to Europe, demanding Europeans pay for their gas in roubles and joining hands with Beijing and Riyadh to undermine the global dominance of the dollar.

Moscow is not bending over; it is fighting back knowing well that cutting gas supplies to Europe and demanding payment for gas and oil in roubles divides the continent.

Monday's blitzkrieg that rained missiles on 10 Ukrainian cities was the clearest message yet that Moscow is determined to bring Kyiv on its knees by any means necessary.

The front lines are in the Donbas, but Putin took the war to the whole of Ukraine. Putin wants victory in Ukraine. He is telling the West: Keep off or stop me.

[kwendo58@gmail.com](mailto:kwendo58@gmail.com)

opinion

■ Whatever the case, the DPP will be hard-pressed to justify the withdrawal of cases

# Fall into line, there is a new sheriff in town



MACHARIA  
GAITHO

The High Court upholding the lengthy prison terms and fines for Sirisia MP John Waluke and his partner Grace Wakhungu, a sister of former Vice-President Moody Awori, was no doubt a significant advance in the fight against corruption.

It served to debunk the common perception that all cases against the high and mighty invariably fail due to corruption and collusion within the criminal justice system.

Jail time of over 67 years and fines of nearly Sh1 billion each are a record in a country where acquittals following deliberately botched investigations and prosecutions are the norm. Even in the cases that conclude in guilty verdicts, the accused are usually sentenced to a wink, a pat on the back and a slap on the wrist, often a fine much less than what they stole.

The High Court upheld the sentences on the same day it also vacated the acquittal of former Kipipiri MP Amos Kimunya and ordered her proceed to trial on a separate corruption case.

Just as significant in the wake of the High Court verdicts was lack of the usual furious protests from politicians.

One can be sure that if Waluke, Wakhungu and Kimunya had been associated with the Kenya Kwanza movement, the usual rabble would be breathing fire and brimstone, alleging victimisation and persecution aimed at weakening President William Ruto's support base.

All the despicable who hide under Ruto's skirts when caught with their grubby fingers in the till, and other serious crimes including murder and rape, would be the ones leading the charges against the police, prosecutors and judges.

They would be fulminating against the system while issuing all kinds of threats that greatly undermine the criminal justice mechanisms, and of course vowing that now they are in power, all their cohorts would be freed, the officialdom responsible sacked and all the guns instead turned on political foes.

It would be nice to dream and imagine that in the days to come, the courts will show similar resolve in dispensing with the numerous cases clogging the system, including those affecting the high and mighty in the Ruto power

structure. However, what we see is one step forward and three steps backwards.

Over the course of last week, Director or Public Prosecutions Noordin Haji withdraw a slew of corruption cases, some touching key personalities in the Ruto entourage.

A Sh19 million graft case against the Cabinet Secretary nominee for Public Service and Thingummy Aisha Jumwa was withdrawn with little explanation.

It was a very timely reprieve as the former Malindi MP readies for vetting by Parliament where integrity issues were sure to arise. She still has a murder charge hanging over her head though.

Other beneficiaries of Haji's charity following on quick order were former Kenya Power executive Ben Chumo and 10 co-accused, and former Samburu Governor Moses Lenolkulal.

He also announced dropping of charges against scores of human rights and political activists arrested during different public protests over the last couple of years.

Most of the prosecutions were withdrawn without as much an 'excuse me', but they raise questions that are bound to place Haji's decisions under a great deal of scrutiny.

If it was determined that there was not enough evidence to justify proceeding with the trials, then Haji must answer why the accused were charged in the first place.

Some of those freed have been presented perfect grounds to sue the State for millions of shillings in damages over false arrest, malicious prosecution, harassment, intimidation, defamation, loss of business, and anything else they might conjure up to further fleece the taxpayer.

The withdrawals lend credence to claims by the Kenya Kwanza followers that they had been victimised all along because of their support for Ruto.

Another scenario likely to come up is that it is not lack of evidence or any other noble fac-

tor, but Haji either acting out of coercion given the Ruto campaign vows to reverse allegedly discriminatory court cases, or out of his own free will trying to ingratiate himself to the new regime.

Whatever the case, the DPP will be hard-pressed to justify withdrawal of cases under timing and circumstances that fit so neatly into the Ruto government desires.

The impression created is that if the police, prosecutors, judges, tax and other authorities under the Uhuru Kenyatta administration were rightfully or wrongfully accused of playing to political designs of the regime, they are now contorting themselves with 180 degree turns to be at service of the new sheriff in town.

There are dozens of court cases touching Ruto adherents that are still pending and it will be interesting to see whether they will also be withdrawn.

Next is the vow to go after denizens of the Uhuru family and close business and political associates, who are being accused of bankrupting the government through massive looting that allegedly exceeds even the industrial-scale plunder of the Daniel arap Moi kleptocracy.

This could come through presidential appointment of inquiry into State Capture, or alternatively through investigations and prosecutions launched through existing channels.

The Directorate of Criminal Investigation is searching for a new boss to succeed political hatchet man George Kinoti, who read the signs and resigned as soon as Ruto took office. A key pre-requisite for appointment might be one who is KK-compliant.

The Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission headed by Twalib Mbarak has been put on notice that it better recognise the new order, while Haji at the Office of DPP already seems to be playing ball.

On the Judicial front, the Supreme Court has earned gratitude of the new government with the ruling throwing out Raila Odinga's presidential election petition.

Many commentators, meanwhile, were quick to note the obeisance Chief Justice Martha Koome seemed to pay Ruto during the official opening of Parliament.

The King is Gone, Long Live the King!  
gaitomail@gmail.com

**One can be sure that if Waluke, Wakhungu and Kimunya had been associated with the Kenya Kwanza movement, the usual rabble would be breathing fire and brimstone, alleging victimisation and persecution aimed at weakening President William Ruto's support base.**

## kenya lens

## ■ CONTROVERSIAL PRONOUNCEMENTS

**‘RIGGY G’ SHOOTS FROM THE LIP**

● By MACHARIA GAITHO

**D**eputy President Rigathi Gachagua openly concedes that his controversial comments have caused discomfort, but takes pride in being a plain-spoken man with little regard for political correctness.

Three weeks ago, in his first interview since taking office, he agreed that some were unhappy with his speech at Kasarani stadium during the presidential inauguration, but maintained that he had no apologies and will continue to speak his mind as taught by his parent.

In his speech before inviting President William Ruto to address the nation, Rigathi seemed to go off-tangent with hard-hitting criticism of outgoing President Uhuru Kenyatta, who sat silently as the new DP tore into him.

Many faulted Rigathi for introducing angry campaign platform rhetoric in what was otherwise a sober and celebratory occasion, and one at that in the presence of nearly 20 African heads of state and government and top-level diplomatic representatives from across the world.

The Deputy President has since continued to make public comments that raise eyebrows. When not directly attacking former president Uhuru or Ruto's presidential campaign rival Raila Odinga, he is wading into public institutions with comments intended to illustrate the Kenya Kwanza narrative of theft, mismanagement and depleted coffers under the former government.

He has also made a stream of pronouncements on the Kenya Kwanza agenda and priorities, but even those have caused controversy and confusion as there has been often been no clear line between government policy and personal opinions.

To his credit, Gachagua has

*Rigathi Gachagua's loose tongue and unscripted public utterances could eventually paint him as a political joker who is out of his depth as Deputy President and cannot be taken seriously*

made himself widely available for media appearances. He has become a fixture on radio and television interviews, including appearances on stations such as NTV and Citizen TV, which had become subjects of hate for the Kenya Kwanza campaign due to alleged bias.

The discomfort Gachagua's unguarded utterances have caused was illustrated in the middle of last week, when three Members of Parliament accused some State agencies of undermining the DP by publicly correcting him over various statements.

Senators Wahome Wamatinga of Nyeri and John Methu of Nyandarua as well as member of the National Assembly for Mukurweini

John Kaguchia told journalists in the latter's constituency that it was unfortunate that public officials have resorted to correcting Gachagua in public yet he speaks for the same government they serve.

The three MPs from Gachagua's Mt Kenya backyard were responding to separate rebuttals is-

sued by Kenya Airways chairman Michael Joseph, Central Bank of Kenya Governor Patrick Njoroge and outgoing Cabinet Secretary to the Treasury Ukur Yattani over comments they felt were misinformed or ignorant.

The three MPs insisted that the DP spoke for the government and threatened to summon the state agency bosses for grilling by Parliament.

Nandi Senator Samson Cherargei had the previous week weighed in on the same, accusing state agency bosses of not according Rigathi the respect he deserves.

"To all state agencies and officers, stop responding to our DP Gachagua through social media and pressers. There are better channels to communicate on government issues and it's about respect to the office," the senator said.

The DP also got unexpected support from former Nyeri Town MP Wambugu Ngunjiri, who was one of the early and key Raila campaigners in the region.

In a statement released on October 4, Wambugu, who was toppled by the Kenya Kwanza wave, accused the media of targeting the DP by painting him in bad light.

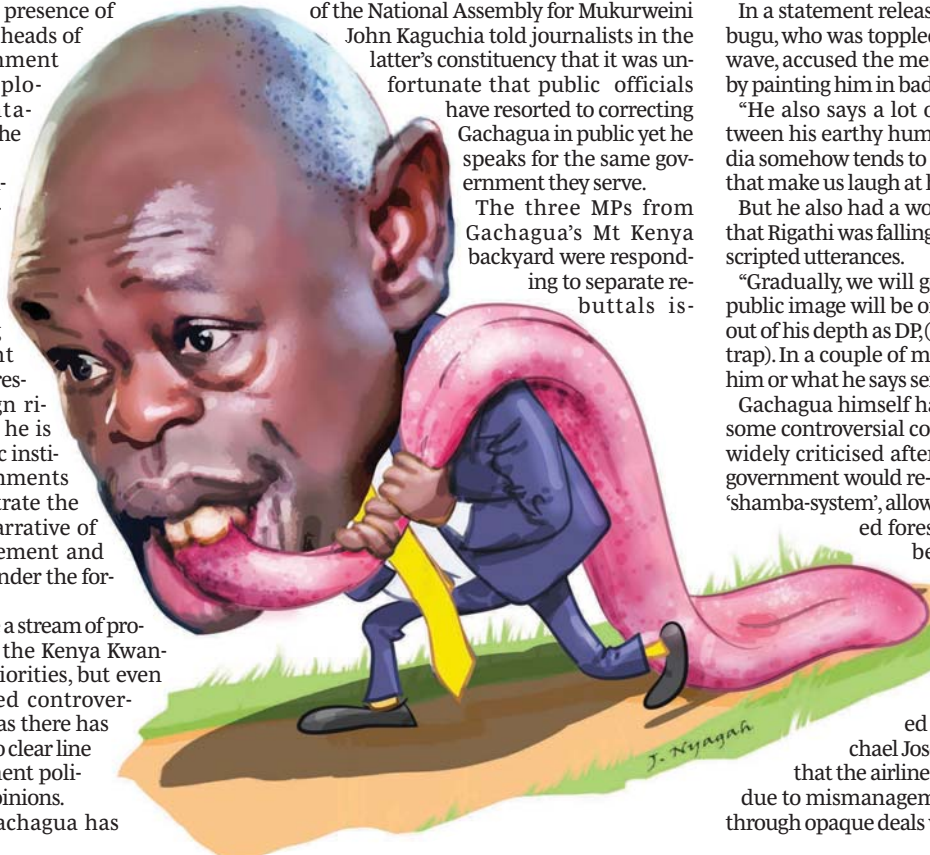
"He also says a lot of sensible stuff in between his earthy humour and jokes. But media somehow tends to only carry those stories that make us laugh at him," he said.

But he also had a word of caution, warning that Rigathi was falling into a trap with his unscripted utterances.

"Gradually, we will get to a point where his public image will be of a political joker who's out of his depth as DP, (and he's falling into the trap). In a couple of months, no one will take him or what he says seriously."

Gachagua himself has had to walk back on some controversial comments. When he was widely criticised after announcing that the government would re-introduce the so-called 'shamba-system', allowing farming in protected forests, he claimed to have been misquoted by the media, though his comments were captured on video.

The fightback for Gachagua started after KQ chairman Michael Joseph disputed his claims that the airline was in a financial mess due to mismanagement and 'state capture' through opaque deals with aircraft leases that



# kenya lens



Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua joins Kisii National Polytechnic students on stage during their performance at the 94th edition of the Kenya National Music Festival in Kisumu on September 23. ANTHONY NJAGII NATION

benefitted a few individuals. “They have the highest fares on the continent and their planes are always full but they make losses. We are trying to deal with that state capture so that we can bring down the cost of the operations of the airline so that they can make profits,” Gachagua said in a recent interview with *Citizen TV*.

Joseph disputed the claims, saying that the national carrier had entered into lease agreements with renowned international companies that manage hundreds of aircraft leased to different international airlines globally.

He outlined in a statement the number of aircrafts operated by KQ under lease arrangements, dismissing claims that they were paying above market rates.

The Kenya Airways statement, however, skirted around an issues that has caused controversy for decades, especially around claims that the KQ aircraft are not obtained directly from the leasing companies, but through third-party arrangements with shadowy entities owned by prominent individuals camouflaging their interests in various tax shelters abroad.

Gachagua had also claimed in a TV interview that Kenya was running out of sufficient foreign exchange.

“Even yesterday, we had a crisis because at the Central Bank, we found there isn’t enough foreign

currency to pay for oil imports,” he said.

Central Bank responded immediately with a rebuttal, explaining that the government does not import oil and therefore did not source foreign exchange for that purpose from the official reserves.

Oil importers, who are private sector players, obtained foreign exchange from commercial banks and not from the CBK, explained the statement issued on behalf of the governor.

“CBK does not supply foreign exchange for transactions other than for the National Government (i.e., government’s own imports or debt service payments) or CBK’s operations. Oil importers, therefore, obtain their requisite foreign exchange from the commercial banks and not CBK,” wrote CBK in a statement.

The statement further clarified that “the CBK foreign exchange reserves, therefore, continue to provide adequate cover and a buffer against shocks in the foreign exchange market”, dismissing general claims by banks and the business community that reserves were running dangerously low.

Outgoing Treasury Cabinet Secretary Ukur Yatani also had occasion to tell off Gachagua soon after the new government took office. At the presidential inauguration, the DP had claimed that the new administration had inherited empty coffers.

He later claimed in an *NTV* interview that the government found only Sh93 million in the Treasury coffers. “There is barely any money in this country and we are starting from scratch. I have asked the people of Kenya to be patient with us because we have a plan but it cannot be immediate because we have found a bad situation in terms of the economy,” said Gachagua.

The CS responded that such claims were misinformed and made out of ignorance.

“Government does not collect money and store it in one place, keep it for one month and later distribute it after a few months or after one year,” clarified the Treasury CS.

He explained that revenue was raised and disbursed on daily basis for funding of government activities within the set timelines, including salaries and other expenditures.

Even the acting Director of Criminal Investigations, Hamisi Massa, who is holding fort following the unsurprising exit of George Kinoti once the new government took office, has had occasion to comment on the DP.

Gachagua, while addressing a meeting of governors, hit out at the police for allegedly harassing elected leaders through criminal investigations and raids on their offices and homes. He proceeded to instruct the DCI to spare elect-

ed leaders such embarrassment, a statement that raised eyebrows as it seemed to place such leaders above the law.

Not long afterwards, Massa at a meeting with heads of independent and constitutional institutions, stated that the police will continue to investigate crimes according to its mandate and without regard to the status of anyone.

Although he did not make any direct reference to Gachagua and his previous comments, some newspaper reports deduced that he was referring to what the DP had said in regard to sparing county governors and other elected leaders.

This placed Massa in an uncomfortable position, forcing his office to issue a hasty denial.

“The purported sentiments referring to the DP were not obtained from the Ag Director, neither are they his position,” the statement said. “This is thus to clarify that at no point did the Ag DCI mention or refer to the DP or any other government official in his remarks, hence the newspaper headline presents a misrepresented and uncredited position.”

Gachagua’s penchant for careless statements goes back to the campaign period. A notable one was when he asserted that corruption charges he is facing will be dropped once Kenya Kwanza takes over the government, and Sh200 million seized from him by court order as proceeds of crime returned.

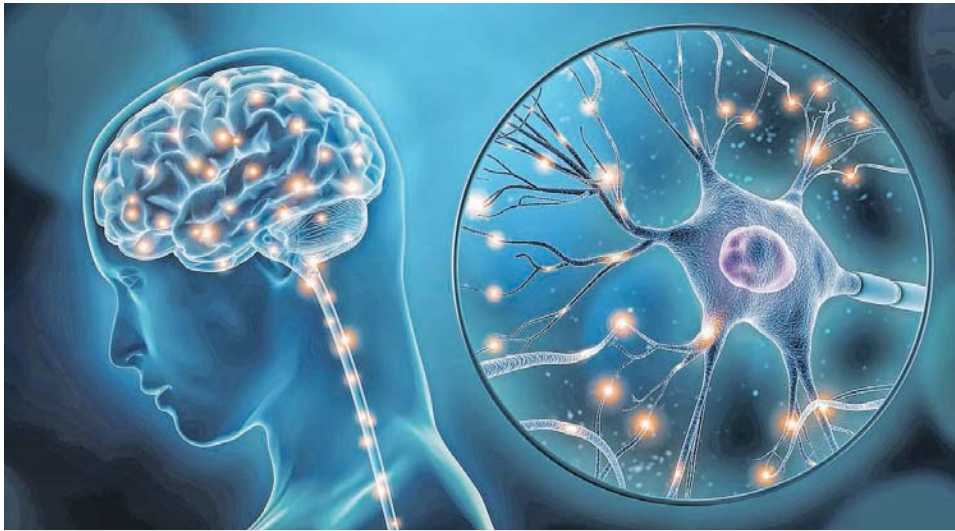
It was a statement that made nonsense of President Ruto’s vow to insulate the police, prosecution authorities and the judiciary from political influence and pressure.

Many elected Kenya Kwanza leaders and cabinet nominees under investigations or already indicted for various criminal offenses have been claiming political persecution. It will be interesting to see whether the Ruto government will let the law run its course, or if there will be a sudden spate of dropped cases. Gachagua’s loose tongue might have let the cat out of the bag.

*The Weekly Review* unsuccessfully tried to reach DP Gachagua for his comments on this story. An officer from the Presidential Strategic Communications Unit assigned to the DP undertook to try and avail him for an interview, but had not got back by the time we went to press.

## SCIENCE &amp; TECH

# LAB-GROWN BRAIN CELLS PLAY TENNIS VIDEO GAME



LONDON

**R**esearchers have grown brain cells in a lab that have learned to play the 1970s tennis-like video game, Pong. They say their “mini-brain” can sense and respond to its environment. Writing in the journal *Neuron*, Dr Brett Kagan of the company Cortical Labs, claims to have created the first “sentient” lab-grown brain in a dish. Other experts describe the work as “exciting” but say calling the brain cells sentient is going too far. “We could find no better term to describe the device,” Dr Kagan says. “It is able to take in information from an external source, process it and then respond to it in real time.” Mini-brains were first produced in 2013 to study microcephaly, a genetic disorder where the brain is too small, and have since been used for research into brain development. But this is the first time they have been plugged into, and interacted with, an external environment, in this case a video game. The research team grew human brain cells from stem cells and some from mouse embryos to a collection of 800,000, and connected this mini-brain to

the video game via electrodes, revealing which side the ball was on and how far from the paddle. In response, the cells produced electrical activity of their own. They expended less energy as the game continued. But when the ball passed a paddle and the game restarted with the ball at a random point, they expended more recalibrating to a new unpredictable situation. The mini-brain learned to play in five minutes. It often missed the ball — but its success rate was well above random chance. Although, with no consciousness, it does not know it is playing Pong in the way a human player would, the researchers stress. Dr Kagan hopes the technology might eventually be used to test treatments for neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer’s.

“When people look at tissues in a dish, at the moment they are seeing if there is activity or no activity. But the purpose of brain cells is to process information in real time,” he says. “Tapping into their true function unlocks so many more research areas that can be explored in a comprehensive way.” Next, Dr Kagan plans to test the impact alcohol has on the mini-brain’s

ability to play Pong. If it reacts in a similar way to a human brain, this would underscore just how effective the system might be as an experimental stand-in.

Dr Kagan’s description of his system as sentient, however, differs from many dictionary definitions, which state it means having the capacity to have feelings and sensations. Cardiff Psychology School honorary research associate Dr Dean Burnett prefers the term “thinking system”. “There is information being passed around and clearly used, causing changes, so the stimulus they are receiving is being ‘thought about’ in a basic way,” he says. The mini-brains are likely to become more complex as the research progresses — but Dr Kagan’s team are working with bioethicists to ensure they do not accidentally create a conscious brain, with all the ethical questions that would raise. “We have to see this new technology very much like the nascent computer industry, when the first transistors were janky prototypes, not very reliable — but after years of dedicated research, they led to huge technological marvels across the world,” he says.

## Space tourist set for moon flight with SpaceX

Dennis Tito, an American entrepreneur who in 2001 became the first person to pay for his own space voyage, plans to fly with his wife, Akiko, on a future SpaceX mission around the Moon.

The voyage will take place after Elon Musk’s company has finished developing its prototype Starship rocket and has flown a first commercial flight that will include Japanese billionaire Yusaku Maezawa.

“Since my first human spaceflight I continue to be passionate about space, and the possibilities it has for all humanity, which leads me to this mission” Tito, 82, said. The weeklong mission would see Starship fly within 125 miles of the lunar surface before returning home. Tito did not disclose how much he and Akiko had paid for their tickets, but said ten more seats remain open for others to sign up. Maezawa, on the other hand, has chartered all the seats on his mission called “dearMoon”, set to fly no sooner than 2023 but likely much later.

In 2001, Tito paid \$20 million to fly on a Russian rocket to the International Space Station, heralding the era of space tourism. An aeronautics and astronautics engineer by training, Tito worked for Nasa’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory in the 1960s before founding the investment management firm, Wilshire Associates, in 1972.

Japanese-born Akiko, a systems engineer who later moved to the finance industry and relocated to New York in 1995, added: “I want people to know that they can do whatever they set their mind to. “It’s never too late, no matter your age, race or gender.” It’s unclear when SpaceX will commence commercial missions with Starship — a giant rocket that the company hopes to one day use to colonize Mars. Musk has promised the rocket will complete its first orbital test this year, and a version of Starship has already been selected to be used as a lander for Nasa’s Artemis missions to return humans to the Moon.



# africa lens

■ BURKINA FASO BESET BY GROWING JIHADIST VIOLENCE

## RUSSIA'S HAND IN COUP



Burkina Faso's new leader, Captain Ibrahim Traore (second left), arrives for a ceremony to honour the soldiers killed in Gaskinde, in Ouagadougou on October 8. The ambush in Gaskinde, claimed by Al-Qaeda, officially killed 37 people, including 27 soldiers on September 26.

*Prigozhin, an oligarch close to President Putin and the founder of the Wagner Group — a shadowy mercenary organisation active in several African countries — congratulated the young junta leader, Captain Traoré, describing him as ‘a truly worthy and courageous son of his motherland’*

### ● OUAGADOUGOU

The latest coup in Burkina Faso saw young people waving Russian flags in the streets of the capital, Ouagadougou — something that must have warmed hearts in the Kremlin.

Although fairly small in number, it has prompted speculation that there may have been some Russian involvement in the events that saw Captain Ibrahim Traoré seize power in a nation beset by growing jihadist violence.

Yevgeny Prigozhin, an oligarch close to Russian President Vladimir Putin and the founder of the Wagner Group — a shadowy mercenary organisation active in several African

countries — congratulated the young junta leader, describing him as “a truly worthy and courageous son of his motherland”.

“The people of Burkina Faso were under the yoke of the colonialists, who robbed the people as well as played their vile games, trained, supported gangs of bandits and caused much grief to the local population.”

Here he is referring to former colonial power France — and those welcoming the coup in the West African nation not only waved Russian flags but attacked French institutions, including the embassy. The violence sent shockwaves across the region, once more demonstrating the strength of anti-French resentment in many of France’s former colonies in

Africa. For nearly a decade France has been trying to help armies in the Sahel region — a strip of semi-arid land south of the Sahara Desert that includes Burkina Faso — to tackle jihadist militants, some of whom are linked to al-Qaeda or the Islamic State group.

But it has recently withdrawn from neighbouring Mali, also a former colony, following a breakdown in relations with the military junta there, which has been accused of increasingly turning to Russia for aid to fight the militants. Sergei Markov, a former Kremlin adviser, has been more forthright in his observations: “Our people helped the new leader [of Burki-

...Continued on Page 26

## africa lens

# Why Russia is cheering on Burkina Faso coup

Continued from Page 25

na Faso). “Another African country will move from co-operation with France to an alliance with Russia.”

For geopolitical analyst Dr Samuel Ramani, this marks a departure from Russia’s usual responses to political instability in the region.

“In previous coups Russia has tried to position itself as an accidental beneficiary of regime changes,” says Dr Ramanai from the Royal United Services Institute (Rusi), a defence and security think-tank, and author of *Russia in Africa*. “This time around Russia is a lot more proactive in support for the coup, and that has led to speculation that Russia has played a co-ordinating role.”

This points to the Wagner Group, though Russia has consistently denied that the mercenaries have any connection to the state and there is no evidence of direct Russian involvement. Shortly after taking power, Capt Traoré made it clear he wanted to work with new international partners to push back Islamist militant groups that have been active in the country since 2015.

Many assumed he meant the Russians. But with his focus being on defeating the jihadists, he says he is also open to working with the US or any other country willing to help improve security in the country. The US organises a big annual counter-terrorism training exercise for countries in West Africa - though this year both Mali and Burkina Faso were absent from Operation Flintlock.

“I think that Burkina Faso wants to avoid the trap that Mali got into,” says Dr Ramani, noting that Mali’s junta was very hostile towards the Europeans and the Americans since they took power in 2020. “They’re now completely dependent and captured by the Russian state,” he says. “Once the Russians come into these theatres they can’t get them out. The same thing happened in the Central African Republic (CAR).”

The Wagner Group has been active in the CAR since 2018 and its operatives have been accused of human rights violations, including mass killings, torture, enforced disappearances and rape. Holding groups like Wagner accountable can be difficult, says Dr Sorcha MacLeod, an associate professor at the University of Copenhagen and chair of the UN Working Group on the Use of Mercenaries.

“When you’ve got these mercenary proxies there, then the state can be involved in an armed conflict, without being an official party to the conflict.

“And then you’ve got plausible deniability... and of course that has huge implications when it comes to responsibility and accountability.” On top of that their very presence can prove counter-productive, she says. “When these kinds of actors are inserted into armed conflicts, the conflict is prolonged and there is



Supporters of Burkina Faso’s new junta leader Captain Ibrahim Traore hold national flags of Burkina Faso and Russia during a demonstration near the national radio and television headquarters in Ouagadougou on October 6. Traore was appointed as president of Burkina Faso on October 5, according to an official statement, after the West African country’s second coup in less than nine months.

a greater risk of war crimes.

“The reality is these organisations have no incentive in bringing a conflict to an end. They are financially motivated.” The US agrees, saying the Russian mercenaries are exploiting natural resources in the CAR, Mali and Sudan to fund Moscow’s war in Ukraine.

In a starkly worded warning last week, the US ambassador to the UN said it was a heavy price for Africa to pay. “Rather than being a transparent partner and improving security, Wagner exploits client states who pay for their heavy-handed security services in gold, diamonds, timber, and other natural resources - this is part of Wagner Group’s business model,” Linda Thomas-Greenfield told a UN Security Council briefing.

“We know these ill-gotten gains are used to fund Moscow’s war machine in Africa, the Middle East, and Ukraine.” This may all explain Capt Traoré’s reluctance to put all of his eggs into Russia’s basket.

“I think that Traoré is trying to hedge his bets and show that he can try to balance all sides,” says Dr Ramani. “But of course any co-operation with Russia will almost certainly be a death knell for France and for the West. The Americans and the French won’t co-exist with the Russians. “That’s the dilemma for Traoré - does he side all the way with Russia? Or does he hedge, and risk having no real external backer.” Yet the anger demonstrated by young

Burnikabés shows that dealing with the jihadist threat must be the new junta leader’s priority. One regional leader observed this week that Burkina Faso had been “on the brink of collapse” because of the insecurity.

Nonetheless there are questions about how effective Wagner fighters would be in Burkina Faso. Although operatives from the group have been active in Mali for less than a year, early signs are not looking good as jihadist attacks are increasing and they have been accused of human rights abuses.

The country is regaining its place as the epicentre of the Sahel crisis, recording the highest number of fatalities from militant attacks so far in 2022. Furthermore, 2022 is set to be the deadliest year for both Burkina Faso and Mali since the insurgency began.

“Wagner is good at creating chaos. But as a fighting force it struggles, particularly in new and hostile terrain,” says Dr Ramani.

Still he believes that juntas in the Sahel region may choose to work with Russian mercenaries given France’s failure to stop the spread of the violence.

Plus Russia is a much less demanding foreign ally. “Russia is seen as a partner that doesn’t meddle in terms of human rights and democracy,” says Dr Ramani. “Nor does it try to impose its way of life on you - and that’s seen as very desirable for would-be autocrats and kleptocrats.” — **BBC**

# global lens

■ THIS IS HOW BIDEN WOULD LAUNCH NUKES AGAINST RUSSIA

## EDGE OF ARMAGEDDON



US President Joe Biden (right) says Russia's Vladimir Putin 'miscalculated' the war in Ukraine 'significantly'.

*US President says Putin is threatening the world with "Armageddon" when he hints at using nuclear weapons against Ukraine. The US riposte, if it happened, could be launched from the back of the Beast, Air Force One, or a secret bunker*

### ● LONDON

**D**oomsday could start with a football — the so-called “nuclear football” as the attache case carried wherever the US president goes is popularly known.

The rather awkwardly stuffed black bag doesn't look like much, the only clue to its importance being that it never leaves the hand of a uniformed military aide.

But inside are top secret codes and plans enabling a president to authorize nuclear strikes — and pick from a sort of menu of targets — anywhere in the world. In the White House, the president has his secure Situation Room,

where he could order war and communicate with military leaders.

But when President Joe Biden, for example, traveled to Puerto Rico, Florida, New York, New Jersey and Maryland within the space of a few days this November, he traveled, as he does everywhere, with his “football.”

According to Biden, Russian President Vladimir Putin is threatening the world with “Armageddon” when he hints at using nuclear weapons against Ukraine.

The US riposte, if it happened, could be launched from the back of the Beast limousine. Or Air Force One. Or a secret bunker.

Or really anywhere the “football” and the president were together.

The public has caught glimpses of the “football,” officially known as the Presidential Emergency Satchel, ever since one was photographed being carried behind John F. Kennedy at his seaside family home in Hyannis Port, Massachusetts, in 1963. Another accompanied Ronald Reagan right into Red Square during his summit with Mikhail Gorbachev in 1988.

More discreet — and also bearing a deceptively innocuous nickname — is the other

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## global lens

# Just one step from nuclear war in Europe

Continued from Page 27

important element in triggering nuclear war: The “biscuit”. If the “football” houses the menu of war plans, the “biscuit” contains the codes, known as Gold Codes, by which the president can identify himself and make the order.

About the size of credit cards, one of these is meant to be carried by the president at all times.

Ultra-secret, ultra-secure they may be, but both items have had their share of misadventure.

Bill Clinton was said to have mislaid his “biscuit”, while the one carried by Reagan was inadvertently dumped with his clothing in a plastic hospital bag when he was stripped for surgery after being shot in Washington in 1981.

When Donald Trump’s mob of supporters invaded the Capitol on January 6, 2021, vice president Mike Pence had to flee to safety — along with a military aide holding the backup “football,” which also always accompanies the president’s successor. The chain of command — legally speaking — could not be shorter.

“The US president has sole authority to authorise the use of US nuclear weapons,” the Congressional Research Service states.

The president does have to identify himself (with the “biscuit” codes) and he can, and presum-



Soldiers of Ukraine’s 5th Regiment of Assault Infantry react after firing a US-made MK-19 automatic grenade launcher towards Russian positions in less than 800 metres away at a front line near Toretsk in the Donetsk region on October 12, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

ably would, discuss options with the top brass.

But even if presidents “seek counsel” from military staff, “those advisors are then required to transmit and implement the orders authorising nuclear use”, the congressional analysis says.

The order would pass through the ranks down to service members manning the switches in silos or submarines or in the air.

In a memo to Congress in 2021, the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, General Mark Milley, said that even he is not in the “chain of command” — only the “chain of communication.”

The president has no big red button to push and whatever he orders still has to filter through several sets of human beings before becoming reality.

US military personnel are re-

quired to disobey illegal orders and, as John Hyten, then the commander of the US Strategic Command (STRATCOM), said in 2017: “We think a lot about these things.”

“If it’s illegal, guess what’s going to happen? I’m going to say, ‘Mr. President, that’s illegal.’ And guess what he’s going to do? He’s going to say, ‘What would be legal?’ And we’ll come up with options, with a mix of capabilities to respond to whatever the situation is, and that’s the way it works. It’s not that complicated.”

In a more extreme situation, the cabinet could theoretically intervene to strip the president of his powers, by invoking the 25th amendment.

That hasn’t happened, although there were numerous claims that high level discussions on the subject took place during the chaotic Trump presidency. More likely, though, is a far less dire shift in the chain of command for planned medical procedures.

In this way, November 19, 2021, became a historic day: Biden underwent anaesthesia for a colonoscopy procedure and his vice president, Kamala Harris, became the first US woman to serve as commander in chief — for 85 minutes the keeper of the “biscuit” and “football.” — **AFP**



Ukrainian soldiers move with a crate of ammunition after firing a US-made MK-19 automatic grenade launcher towards Russian positions in the Donetsk region on October 12.

## global lens

## ■ THE URUGUAY CRASH AND CANNIBALISM THAT STUNNED THE WORLD

## ● MONTEVIDEO

The first night was the worst, Roy Harley recalls of the ten weeks he and other survivors of a plane crash 50 years ago managed to cling to life on an Andean glacier without food or shelter, and very little reason for hope.

Of the plane's 45 occupants, 16 made it home from the 72-day ordeal that became known as the "Miracle of the Andes".

The only way to survive was to eat the flesh of the dead. But for Harley, a retired engineer now aged 70, that was not the worst of the nightmare made famous by the 1993 film "Alive."

After the initial shock of their plane crashing into the Andes mountains on that fateful Friday the 13th of October, 1972, Harley and 31 other survivors found themselves in the pitch dark in minus 30 degrees Celsius at an altitude of some 3,500 meters. Many of them not yet 20 — the plane was flying an amateur Uruguayan rugby team and family members to a match in Chile — none were dressed for the cold.

Several were badly injured. Those who could squeezed into what remained of the fuselage between dead bodies and the screams of the wounded.

"That night, I experienced hell," Harley told *AFP*. "At my feet was a boy who was missing a part of his face and... choking on blood.

"I didn't have the courage to reach out to him, to hold his hand, to comfort him. I was afraid. I was very afraid." By morning, four more were dead, and so started a seemingly relentless torment that would eventually whittle the number of survivors down to 16.

There were too many dark moments to list.

"I don't have words to describe how cold it was," said Harley's former rugby teammate, fellow survivor and friend Carlos Paez, 68. "We were so cold, it was so difficult, that I have no words to describe it." Many times they thought it was the end.

On Day 10, the survivors heard on the plane radio that the search for them had been called off.

"One of the most painful things was... to realise that the world was going on without us,"

# THE MIRACLE OF ANDES

*The only way to survive was to eat the flesh of the dead. But for Harley, a retired engineer now aged 70, that was not the worst of the nightmare made famous by the 1993 film "Alive"*

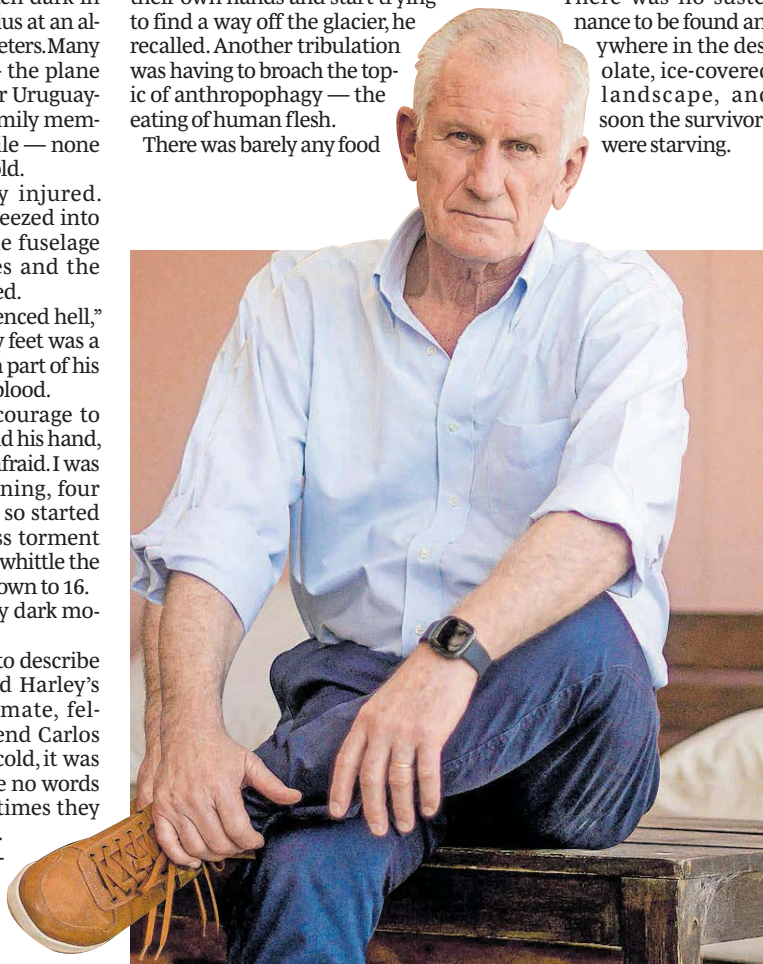
said Paez, who today travels the world as a motivational speaker.

But it was also the jolt the survivors needed to take matters into their own hands and start trying to find a way off the glacier, he recalled. Another tribulation was having to broach the topic of anthropophagy — the eating of human flesh.

There was barely any food

on the plane that was to have made a short flight from Mendoza in Argentina, where it had a stopover, to Santiago, Chile.

There was no sustenance to be found anywhere in the desolate, ice-covered landscape, and soon the survivors were starving.



Roy Harley, one of the 16 survivors of an air plane crash in the Chilean Andes in 1972 and who remained lost in the mountains for 72 days, in Viñedos de la Tahona, Canelones, Uruguay, on August 15.

A majority voted "yes" to eating their dead friends.

"We had tried to eat leather, we tried to eat cigarettes, we tried to eat toothpaste," Harley recalled at Paez's home in Montevideo.

"We were dying. When you have this choice, to die or to use the only thing you have... we did what we did in order to live."

On Day 16, disaster struck yet again. An avalanche buried the mangled fuselage, the survivors' only shelter, as they slept.

Eight were killed, leaving only 19 of the original 32 crash survivors. Three more would die in the coming days. "The avalanche was as if God had stabbed us in the back," said Paez.

Displaying incredible ingenuity and tenacity, the survivors learnt, with no tools, to use plane debris to fashion bonnets, mittens, snow shoes, quilts and dark glasses against snow blindness.

They found a way to melt ice and snow for drinking water in spite of the sub-zero temperatures.

And finally, help did arrive.

In a last, desperate effort that almost cost them their lives, survivors Roberto Canessa and Fernando Parrado walked for 10 days into the unknown, hostile terrain, guided by nothing but instinct.

Finally, they came to a river and spotted men on horseback on the other side. Over the noise of the water they could not make themselves heard, but the next day one of the men was back with a piece of paper wrapped around a stone that he threw to the pair.

On it, Parrado wrote a plea for help that started with the words: "I come from a plane that fell in the mountains." The next day, the first helicopters came.

When he had boarded the ill-fated Uruguay Air Force plane for Chile, Harley weighed 84 kilograms.

By the time he was rescued, there were a mere 37 kilograms on his 1.8-meter (5.9-foot) frame. On average, the survivors lost 29 kilograms, according to Andes 1972 Museum records.

Harley and Paez insist they are not victims; their tale is one of resilience and teamwork.

"An extraordinary story starring ordinary people," said Paez. "In the end, life triumphed." — *AFP*

# OBIT

■ **REST IN POWER**

## CHEPKUT'S MERRIMENT FIZZLES OUT

*The former MP's humour and humility were legendary. They had nothing to do with seeking political mileage but connecting with the people who had given him the mandate to serve them*

● BY COLLINS OMULO

**W**illiam Kamuren Chirchir Chepkut was a man who stood out for his larger-than-life personality. Jovial, hilarious and witty, Chepkut could not fit into a single description.

While many of his counterparts in Parliament stole the limelight for all the wrong reasons, the former Ainabkoi MP was the darling of many because of his down-to-earth and amiable disposition.

He was a man of contradictions, too: an interesting and lively character with a mix of boyish behaviour and tomfoolery, he rarely minced his words but shot straight from the hip.

He was always impeccable in his trademark three-piece suits, but for him, they were just pieces of clothing. The former lawmaker could often be seen using the inside of his bespoke suit to wipe his face after a sumptuous meal at the Bunge canteen.

That was Chepkut in his element. The man had no boundaries and his humility transcended social class and ethnicity.

He mingled with anyone, anywhere, and could easily be found helping out with the cooking during weddings, digging graves for constituents, dancing vigorously during functions or munching on *githeri* with protesting matatu operators, caring little about his "mheshimiwa" tag.

He was capable of pulling the most unusual stunts and lighting up even the dullest moments with his funny-to-the-bone theatrics.

For him, the antics had nothing to do with seeking political mileage but connecting with the common *mwana* who had given him the mandate to serve them.

"I am a patriotic person and I don't belong to these small, small tribal cocoons. Leadership comes from God and in realisation of the calling from God, we must serve humanity with dignity, honour,

fairness and justice as opposed to personal greed and sycophancy," he said in a speech in Parliament.

His popularity and peculiarity catapulted the Kenyatta University alumnus beyond his Uasin Gishu political backyard to the national political stage and to the top echelons of society through his closeness with Nicholas Kipyator arap Biwott, former President Daniel arap Moi's point man.

He served as Biwott's personal assistant when he was minister in the Office of the President between 1997

and 2003.

In his last speech in Parliament in March 2022, Chepkut asked his colleagues to believe in God and get born again so that they would get a chance to meet his hero, Biwott.

"We shall all go to heaven and receive President Moi. We shall see Jomo Kenyatta, we shall see my hero Nicholas Kipyator Kiprono Biwott, alias the Total Man, and Jaramogi Oginga Odinga," said Chepkut to peals of laughter from the House.

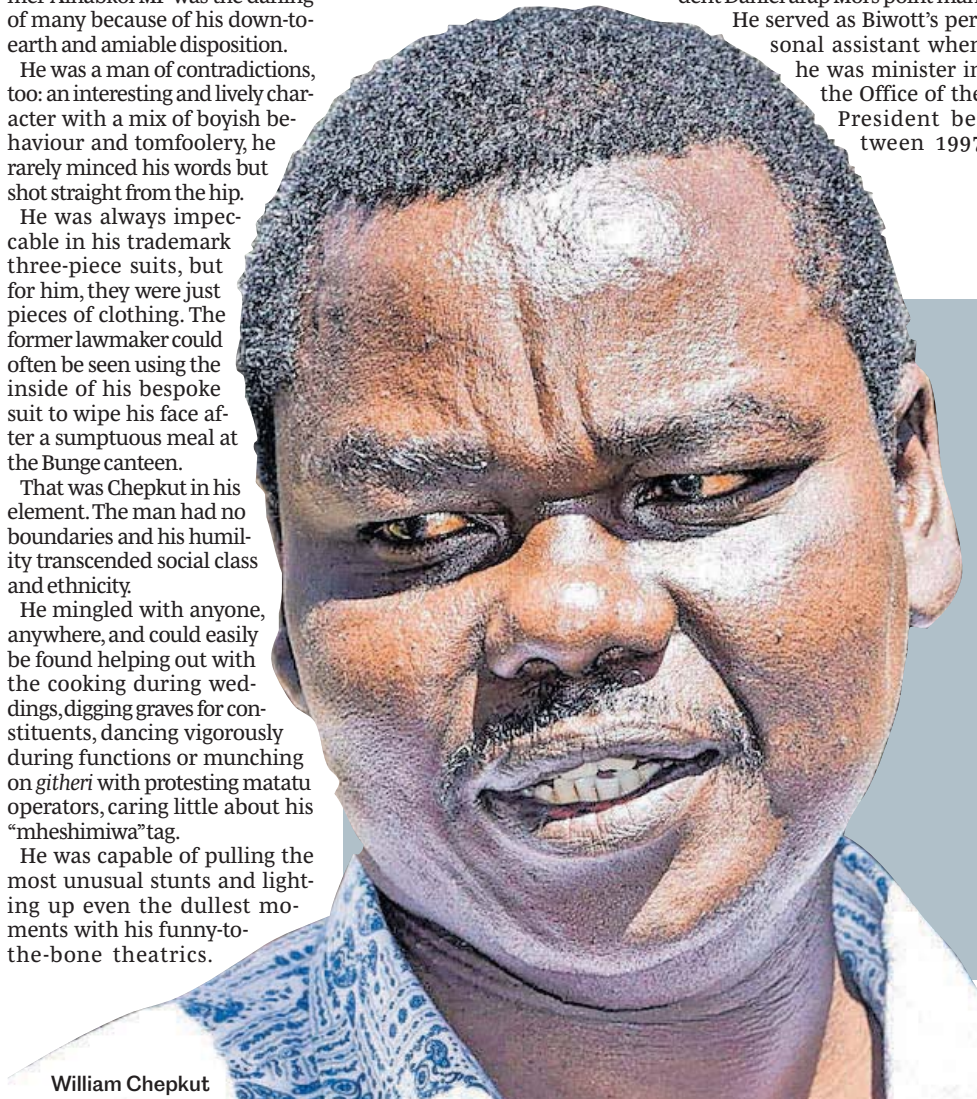
His loyalty to Moi and Biwott was unquestionable. When the former president died, an angry Chepkut called out a fellow MP for criticising Moi. "Moi was a great man. You are not God to judge and you have no capacity to judge. There is no bad person in this world," he declared.

Whenever Chepkut rose to speak in the House (232 times in total) his speeches, which were often accompanied with wild gestures, always left his colleagues in stitches.

Chepkut vied for the Ainabkoi parliamentary seat in 2013 through Biwott's National Vision Party but lost to United Republican Party's Samuel Chepkong'a.

The two would renew their rivalry in 2017, when Chepkut ran as an independent candidate and beat Chepkong'a, then in Jubilee. Chepkong'a reclaimed the seat in the August 9 elections through President William Ruto's United Democratic Alliance party.

"The only soul alive", as he loved to call himself because of narrowly dodging death a number of times, Chepkut breathed his last on Saturday October 8, 2022. He had battled kidney disease for a long time, surviving on one kidney that was donated by his sister and had been on medication for decades. He will be buried on Tuesday, October 18 at his home in Kapsunde, Uasin Gishu County.



William Chepkut

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