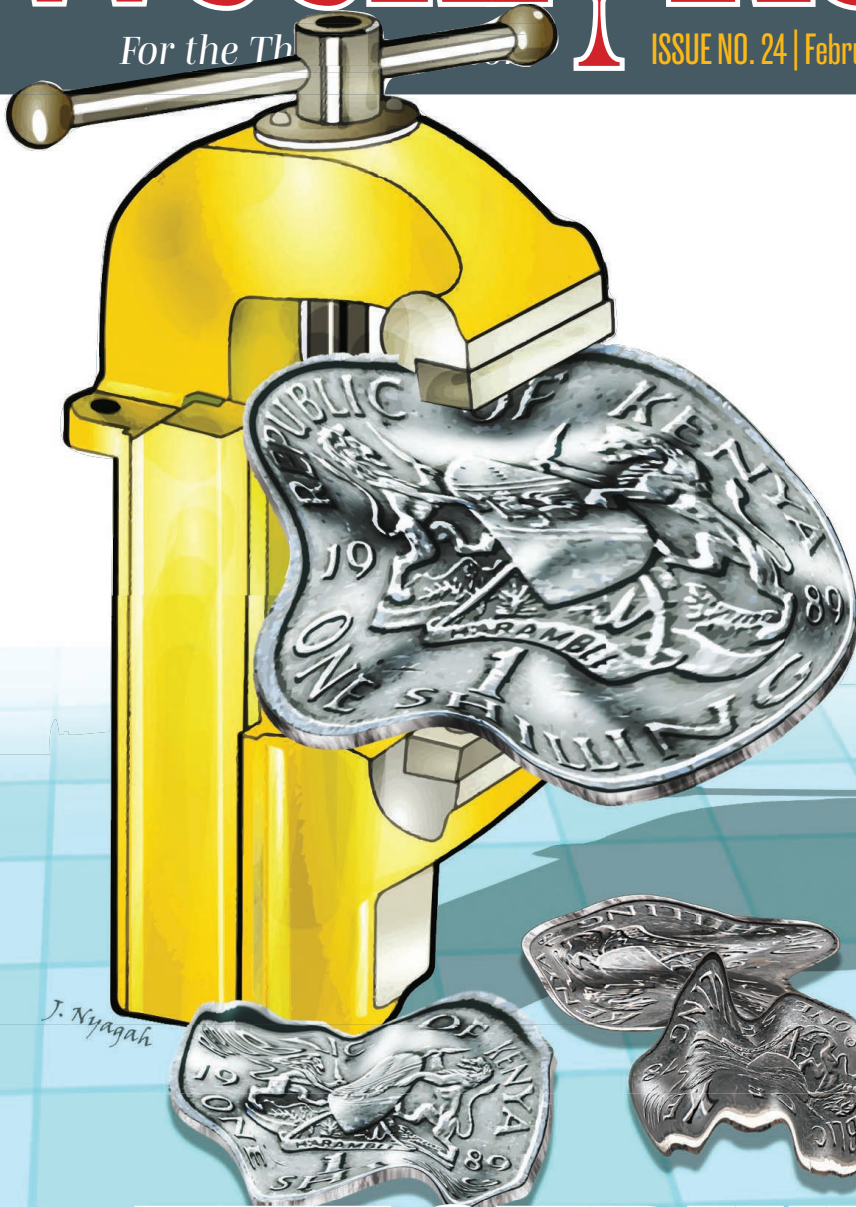


THE Weekly Review

For the Th

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J. Nyagah

THE SHRINKING SHILLING

The depreciating currency is hurting an already limp economy, and the Hustler dream is facing strong headwinds. The reality is sinking in faster than expected for the Ruto administration. Is there a way out of the rut?

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letter from the editor

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What Ruto should do to climb out of the deep economic hole

For a government that was thrust into power based on grand promises to better the living standards of millions of Kenyans; for a creative group that campaigned in every inch of the country promising an economic miracle that would save the hustlers from a drab existence, the reality is sinking in faster than expected.

President William Ruto's administration is clinging dangerously to the edge of a cliff. The opposition is up in arms over the disputed outcome of the last election, Ruto's political nemesis, Raila Odinga, is on the warpath, and the economy is in shambles. We are in a mess and we must admit it.

Accepting shall be the first move towards making necessary interventions to make a positive turnaround.

Although this government says it inherited empty coffers, there's nothing tangible they are doing to show they are taking measures to rebuild the economy from the bottom up.

Instead, Kenyans have been treated to a cat-and-mouse game between the Kenya Kwanza team and the opposition led by the ODM supremo, Odinga, from Day 1.

We are still in campaign mode; the curse of African politics. But for all its inadequacies and political miscalculations, the one thing Kenyans care most about is the economy.

Ruto campaigned on economic revival and pledged to get the nation back on track in about 100 Days. In his inaugural address at the Kasarani Stadium, the President promised radical changes to bring down the cost



Allan Buluku

The price of unga remains high, the pain at the pump continues, cooking gas is becoming more valuable than gold and the cost of water and electricity has created a huge financial gap in many households. The country appears to be on a downward trajectory. We don't seem to have learned anything from our own history. We must remind ourselves of how things were done while in a similar situation in the past.

of living.

Sadly, there's nothing positive five months later. The country is still choking on debt, the price of unga remains high, the pain at the pump continues, cooking gas is becoming more valuable than gold and the cost of water and electricity has created a huge financial gap in many households. The country appears to be on a

downward trajectory.

We don't seem to have learned anything from our own history. We must remind ourselves of how things were done while in a similar situation in the past.

When President Mwai Kibaki took power in 2003, the economy was in the ICU, but within three months, things began looking better. To empower the youth, Kibaki either scrapped or lowered counterproductive taxes that were pulling us back.

The government abolished taxes on motorcycles and ICT products, which created the boda-boda economy. The Narc administration also reduced borrowing, which forced commercial banks to lower their lending rates. As a result, more entrepreneurs accessed credit to boost their businesses. This is what we can borrow from 'Kibakonomics'. Clearly, we can do better with a good plan.

Experts have raised a red flag about the weakening shilling. There are concerns it could trigger fears of inflationary pressure.

The country spends billions importing petroleum products, second-hand clothes, motor vehicles, vegetable oil, and industrial machinery, whose costs keep rising as the shilling weakens against the dollar.

The Kenya Kwanza administration must start climbing out of the hole by focusing on rebuilding the economy as pledged in the campaigns.

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the telescope

■ It will set out the broad strategic priorities

Ndung'u set to table BPS in House

National Treasury and Planning Cabinet Secretary Professor Njuguna Ndung'u is expected to table the Budget Policy Statement (BPS) before the National Assembly, signaling the official start of the budget-making process.

The Public Finance Management Act states that the National Treasury shall prepare and submit the BPS as approved by the Cabinet to Parliament by the 15th of February every financial year for consideration and approval.

The BPS normally sets out the broad strategic priorities

and policy goals that will guide the national government and county governments in preparing their budgets, both for the following financial year and over the medium term.

While addressing the inaugural joint-parliamentary sitting on September 29, 2022, President William Ruto gave an undertaking to cut spending in current financial year.

The President cited depressed revenue amid the burgeoning public debt, currently at Sh8.7 trillion against the ceiling of Sh10 trillion enacted mid-last year.



National Treasury and Economic Planning Cabinet Secretary Prof Njuguna Ndung'u with Budget and Appropriations Committee Chairperson Ndindi Nyoro (left), Auditor-General Nancy Gathungu (second left) and Treasury PS Dr Chris Kiptoo (right) in Nairobi on January 11. DIANA NGILA | NATION

■ Government to cut spending by Sh300bn

MPs resume sittings this week



All eyes will be on the National Assembly when Parliamentarians resume sittings this week after more than two months of recess.

The MPs went on a long holiday recess on December 1, 2022

and will resume plenary sittings on February 14.

Priority business will be the submission of the Supplementary Budget I for the financial year ending June 30. MPs will be expected to consider and approve the budget, which is anticipated to have Sh300 billion cuts.

The supplementary budget will indicate the realignments made on the Sh3.33 trillion budget.

■ Numbers reach 74pc of pre-pandemic levels



Demand for air tickets will reach pre-pandemic levels on most routes by the end of the first quarter and exceed the 2019 levels by around three per cent by the end of 2023.

UN sees recovery to pre-Covid air travel

Demand for commercial travel is expected to make full recovery in 2023, with volumes exceeding the 2019 level at the end of the year, a UN aviation body said this week.

Forecasting a "complete and sustainable" recovery, the International Civil Aviation Organisation said demand will reach pre-pandemic levels on most routes by the end of the first quarter and exceed the 2019 levels by around three per cent by the end of 2023.

The body projected that 2024 air passenger demand would be four per cent above the level in 2019.

The ICAO's press release did not discuss problems frequently cit-

ed by aviation experts as potential constraints on growth. These include shortages of pilots and other key aviation personnel and delays in the construction of airplane engines needed for new planes.

The outlook came as the UN body released data that showed a significant uptick in travel last year compared with 2021, when more of the world still lived under severe Covid-19 restrictions amid limited distribution of vaccines.

In all, air passenger numbers reached 74 per cent of pre-pandemic levels in 2022, while passenger revenues were estimated to have hit 68 per cent of 2019 levels.

■ Offenders will face a maximum fine of US\$0.6m

Uganda's rubbish bin fines on drivers



Uganda's environmental management agency says it will start imposing fines from April on motorists driving private cars without rubbish bins. Offenders will face a maximum fine of up to US\$6,000,000 (\$1,630). Motorists who refuse to

pay the fines will face prosecution and imprisonment or a fine determined by the courts, the agency said in a statement.

Currently, passenger buses travelling over long distances in the country are obligated to have rubbish bins.

But it's the new requirement for bins in private cars that has caught the attention of Ugandans, with many asking if there was a particular standard for what counts as a rubbish bin.

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■ BARKING UP THE WRONG TREE

THE SINKING SHILLING



Noises heard from political tents like ‘belt-tightening’, ‘everybody must pay taxes’, and ‘give us time’ are red-herrings, a subterfuge of politicians circumventing a suffering people

• By MBUI WAGACHA

A memorable insight into the link between the power of economic policy and leadership came from the legendary John Maynard Keynes, macroeconomist per excellence: “The ideas of economists... when...right...when wrong...are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed, the world is ruled by little else.”

Kenya’s prospects today hinge strongly on a critical redirection amidst policy lethargy, confusion and a trail of myopically in-

curred indebtedness. The national debt and key metrics place us sixth among 50 countries in Sovereign Debt Vulnerability Rankings by Bloomberg (2022), with a Debt/GDP ratio at over 70 per cent and outlays of 4.4 per cent of GDP to interest expense. Kenya is right up there with Ghana which, at rank two, has already defaulted. Kenya’s current debate on taxes rides on a public finance system that threw the bill for intransigent over-borrowing and lack of accountability to Wanjiku and her future children. The prospects of the shilling will worsen our economy significantly if we

do not change direction.

How did we get here only a decade after former President Kibaki built a trajectory for recovery, when he made lemon juice from a Moi era wrecking of the economy? Why have multiple warnings by experts and proposals by technocratic institutions on reforms of public finances, such as those crafted by the Parastatal Reforms Implementation Committee, or the Office of Management and Budget (which former President Uhuru Kenyatta announced but did not implement) been ig-

Continued on Page 6

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Feeling the chill: What we must do to save the shilling

Continued from Page 5

nored? The latter, together with a National Sovereign Wealth Fund (NSWF) Bill (2014) would have professionalised budget-making, rid the economy of incompetence and theft of public funds and provided a cushion for state investment in real and financial assets. Are we getting good enough at policy management to stop digging the hole the economy is in and start climbing out?

One consequence of Kenya's high borrowing requirements from the Central Bank (CBK), commercial banks (domestic and foreign), public and private sources is that it ends up eating into the benefits promised to Wanjiku, and her Constitution turning into so much hot air. In the specific case of the 2014 Eurobond, the government, at high level, worked hard to wrestle the Auditor-General when he sought transparency for borrowed funds.

While we play too close to the fire with debt vulnerability, there are choices we can still make to steady the economy. The markets listen better pre-default than in post-default phase. In place of an undefined programme to switch borrowed external funds to retire domestic debt, we can rethink a larger picture.

The call I've heard is substantially an indefensible switch of capital outflows under a depreciating shilling. Since portfolio flows enter the liabilities of lead commercial banks, often earning handsomely on the asset side in Treasury bills and bonds (from Kenya's high returns relative to industrial countries), investors are able to expatriate earnings through our open capital account, only to again reinject portfolio flows for a replay in the next round of TB and bonds sales.

Compare the current government effort to scrape the barrel for back taxes to the framework of economic recovery started by former President Kibaki in 2002. Are back taxes a fiscal policy or a fiscal stance thought out for effects in economic recovery, let alone a cog within a headline policy mix? Or is it a misunderstanding of stocks and flows?

While government should indeed collect the stock of back taxes, what assurances exist that the taxes will not be sucked back into the pipeline, where familiar hands grope perpetually in Wanjiku's revenue cookie jar? What if the collections do not inject investments and jobs? If we also targeted kick-starting the recovery in a policy mix driving investments and jobs, we could, in the short to medium term, be collecting a flow and pipeline of revenues from growing output for years to come.

Therein lies much of the genesis of the model and credible fiscal/monetary policy mix that former President Kibaki and his advisers applied to achieve recovery over 2002-2013. Revenues climbed a trajectory from Sh250 billion to Sh850 billion in less than ten years

on the back of an economy that at its peak in 2010 achieved a growth rate of 8.4 per cent in GDP. The model facilitated a cut in public debt from over 70 per cent of GDP to 38 per cent, using revenues to repay debts and switching domestic credit away from government to the private sector. This spurred investment and jobs. Will back taxes or the Hustler Fund achieve Kibaki's impetus?

The main victims of 10 years of mismanagement and muddles have been the shrinking Kenya shilling, slug-

gish economic growth and falling standards of living whose effects will become especially chilling if we do not change track. Start with the direction of the GDP, the source of GDP per capita, and living standards. GDP has gone south from Q3 2021 growth of 9.3 per cent, losing steam to 6.8 per cent in Q1-2022 then falling continuously to 4.7 per cent in Q3-2022, from the latest figure KNBS re-



Cabinet Secretary, National Treasury & Economic Planning Prognosis Njuguna Ndung'u.
PHOTO | DENNIS ONSONGO

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One consequence of Kenya's high borrowing requirements from the Central Bank (CBK), commercial banks (domestic and foreign), public and private sources is that it ends up eating into the benefits promised to Wanjiku, and her Constitution turning into so much hot air. FILE IN NATION

leased. The snapshot on the shilling taken at the last day of each quarter shows it declined from 114.9 per US\$ in Q1-2022 to Sh123.3 in Q4-2022.

For an open economy highly dependent on trade, the trend signals the stark economic management challenges ahead that bring to mind Maynard Keynes insight on the powers of ideas to re-build or harm economic progress. Kenya's rough patch in 2023 is the subject of numerous misinterpretations among even the key drivers of policy articulating Kenya's short, medium and long-term development.

Even the current contractionary stances on both fiscal and monetary policy are colossal mistakes, raising more questions than answers about the outcomes the government promises and plans to achieve. The short run of this trajectory produces delusory gains for some while others are losers.

The core of the shilling/GDP nexus can be illustrated with arithmetic extremes. Supposing Kenya produced only coffee (100 units, all exported) and imported all its consumption goods (say 100 units of rice) from Oceania. Let the initial export/import price index be 1. If a shilling depreciation causes the price of rice in shillings to double for Kenya, it can only with its supplies of 100 units of coffee, paying in shillings, import a half of its rice supplies (50 units).

Unless it doubles coffee production to 200 units, increases taxes to top up payments, borrows or combines purchases with sales of assets, and so on, Kenya's standards of living must fall and the economy must contract.

This is the policy dilemma the Kenya Kwanza government faces today, no matter how much it wrestles taxes, attempts to evade the looming vulnerability assessments, or borrows to pay myopically incurred public debt. From concentrating energies on aggregate demand management, as if we had resolved our supply side problem to drive output (that would engage the increasing army of even highly skilled but unemployed people), we must shift intentionally to supply-side measures increasing output under the appropriate policy mix. Noises heard from political tents, like "belt-tightening", "everybody must pay taxes", and "give us time", are red-herrings, a subterfuge of politicians circumventing a suffering people.

In the meantime, even the adjustment to the shilling slide and transition to output-led regrowth will need extreme competences. As an open economy, we are price takers for imports while the dollar prices of imports remain unchanged after shilling depreciation.

While government should indeed collect the stock of back taxes, what assurances exist that the taxes will not be sucked back into the pipeline, where familiar hands grope perpetually in Wanjiku's revenue cookie jar? What if the collections do not inject investments and jobs? If we also targeted kick-starting the recovery in a policy mix driving investments and jobs, we could, in the short to medium term, be collecting a flow and pipeline of revenues from growing output for years to come.

Domestic prices double, but since they may not in the short run match the depreciation, exporters enjoy increased profits off their workers and sales in dollars.

Similarly, importers increase profit margins off the doubled domestic prices without commensurate increases in domestic costs of business. In long run adjustments, however, the depreciation may have no effects on real variables – real exports, real imports, real output, employment. An output led framework stabilises the exchange rate, soaks up investment and employment, raises output and gives a chance of progress to future generations.

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

CORRECTION

The Weekly Review of January 22 reported the Principal Secretary for Broadcasting and Telecommunications Edward Kisiang'ani, in a meeting with the Media Council of Kenya, berating the Kenyan Media for not reporting that most of the Sh1.4 billion or so owed by the Government Advertising Agency had been paid, leaving a balance of less than Sh250 million, yet but journalists were still being laid off.

The correct position is that Kisiang'ani, said that out of Sh1.2 billion owed, Sh244 had been released. That indicates the bulk of the debt is still unpaid. The error is regretted.

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■ IT'S A MULTIBILLION-SHILLING DEAL INVOLVING PRINTING OF STAMPS

THE STAMP-GATE 'SCANDAL'

● By JAINDI KISERO

The high politics of the multibillion-shilling tax stamp contracts involving the operations of Swiss multinational security printer, Sicpa, is in top gear. The latest to join the fray is the Official Leader of Minority in the National Assembly, Opiyo Wandayi, who last week released a terse statement, in which he charged that the tax stamp contract between Kenya and Sicpa was shrouded in mystery and described the deal as “a well-articulated scheme to steal from the unsuspecting public”. He posed the question: Who is going to benefit from the Sh162 billion scheme in the next five years? The heading of that long statement by the official leader of the Opposition was titled: ‘The makings of a Sh160 billion stamp-gate scandal.’

That statement came against the backdrop of a raging debate sparked by a recent public notice by the Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA), in which the taxman expressed intention to impose massive increases in the prices of Sicpa stamps on a range of consumer products, including soda, bottled water, fresh juices, beer, spirits, cosmetics and cigarettes. The Kenya Association of Manufacturers (KAM) has warned that the proposed increases were bound to increase their costs and precipitate spiralling increases in consumer prices of the affected commodities.

Wandayi made three key demands: a halt on any plans to renew the Sicpa contract, a comprehensive investigation by the Auditor-General of all funds paid to KRA by manufacturers, and a full account for how these funds have been utilised. Clearly, the Sicpa contract had evolved into a hot political potato. In a sense, this is not surprising. The world over, procurement of contracts of tax stamps and banknotes tend to be

Opposition demands a halt to any plans to renew Sicpa contract, a comprehensive investigation by Auditor-General of all funds paid to KRA by manufacturers, and a full account of how the funds have been utilised



Minority Leader in the National Assembly, Opiyo Wandayi

marred by controversy and corruption allegations. In recent times, there have been hundreds of sensational corruption allegations surrounding procurement of excise tax stamp contracts in Nigeria, Brazil, Zambia, Malawi and the Philippines. The excise stamp contract is a multibillion-shilling deal, involving the printing of stamps and provision of track and trace technology to detect fake stamps. Other than bank notes, no other security printed item is consumed in such high volumes in this country.

With Kenya having just undergone a political transition, the political context behind the controversy could not be clearer. Multinational printers of bank notes and security stamps usually rely on well-placed intermediaries in each country to penetrate the corridors of power and obtain access to these lucrative contracts. Indeed, rent-seeking elite in Africa love these types of deals because you can negotiate backhanders to last you a lifetime. These – usually – are multi-year framework contracts where prices, volumes and terms are negotiated to cover long periods.

When a political transition happens – like it has just occurred in Kenya – the scramble for patronage of these becomes intense. The new kids on the block must plot to reap their share of the spoils. Where the multinationals had signed contracts have been designed to gains beyond the tenure of any President, controversy must happen even as the multinational player is lobbied to accommodate the interests of the new gatekeepers.

There is a third factor. With most economies in sub-Saharan Africa in bad economic shape and governments forced to institute austerity measures, including deep cuts in development budgets, opportunities for rent-seeking that come with big budgets and big projects narrow. Rent activity and fights to play gatekeeper for deep-pocketed foreigners tend to shift to activities involving investors looking for power purchase agreements and licences, oil companies looking for licenses on explorations blocks and fields, investors in telecommunication companies looking for frequency licences and allocations, privatisation deals, printing of IDs and passports, and procurement of banknotes and tax stamps.

Close observers of the on-going high-voltage politics around the Sicpa contract opine that even the proposal massive increases the price of it has its explanations are motivations in intra elite fights and calculations of the new power broking networks now at the centre of power following the recent political tran-

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sition. Observers believe it's all about adjusting terms of a long and locked-in contract to accommodate gate-keeping rents for the new entrants. Yet to the manufacturers of fresh juices, soda, beer, spirits, cigarettes and bottled water, the high stamp prices being proposed are bread-and-butter issue. For instance, the cosmetics industry – comprising mainly of SMEs – has cried that the new Sicpa stamp prices being proposed will impact negatively on its competitiveness within East Africa because Tanzania, Uganda, and Rwanda do not impose stamp duties on cosmetics.

Manufacturers of non-alcoholic beverages have also protested, charging that the proposal to increase the prices of tax stamps on their products was likely to precipitate massive rise in consumer products with negative consequences for aggregate demand. This sector is saying that if the new rates are applied, the cost of the Sicpa stamps will be higher than the excise duty charged on the product.

In the case of the category, compounded spirits and wines, where the cost of Sicpa stamp is being proposed to go up by 79 per cent. According to KAM, a comparison of the cost of stamps for alcoholic products in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania has revealed that Kenya is paying the highest prices to this same supplier, an indication that either negotiates poorly or that there could be major integrity issues in the management of funds collected to manage the system. Manufacturers of beer and cider, for which the proposal is to increase stamp prices by 100 per cent, have complained that the new regime will lead to an increase in contraband beer due to widening tax gaps between Kenya and the neighbouring countries of the East African Community

According to an October 2021 study that was conducted on behalf of the Tanzanian manufacturers' lobby – Confederation of Tanzania Industries (CTI) – by international financial services advisory firm Price Water House Coopers, Sicpa tax stamps are 25 per cent higher in Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Mauritius and Zambia than in Kenya.

The CTI study also revealed that, unlike in Kenya, where Sicpa tax stamps have to be affixed to a much broader range of products, the list of products in Uganda, Rwanda, Zambia, Mauritius, Zambia and Zimbabwe is much shorter. That study also revealed that many countries in Africa, including Nigeria, Ghana and South Africa, do not apply tax stamps on products.

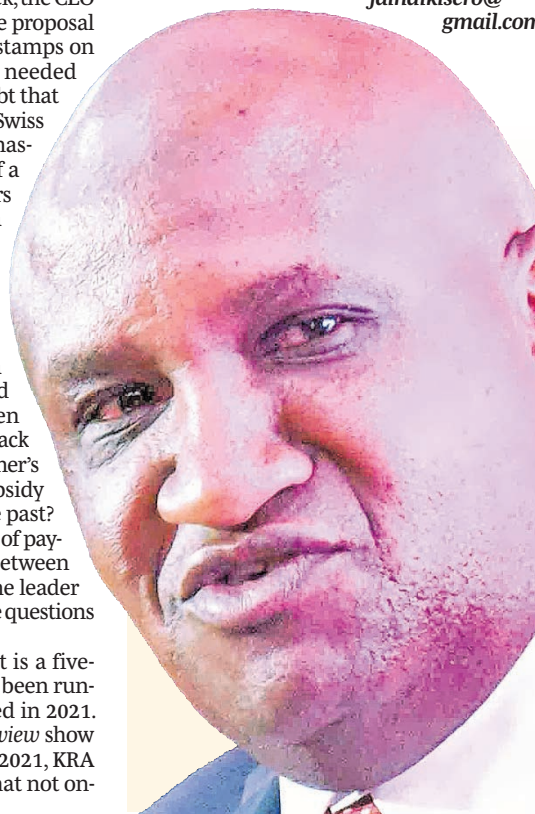
At a meeting with representatives of the manufacturers' association last week, the CEO of KRA, Githii Mburu, defended the proposal to increase the price of Sicpa tax stamps on the grounds that the money was needed to offset a massive Sh4.5 billion debt that the tax man allegedly owes to the Swiss Company. He explained that the massive debt came about as a result of a subsidy on stamps for water bottlers and on depreciation of the Kenya Shilling against the Euro.

Mburu's defence raised more questions than answers. If KRA is, indeed, raising money to pay a subsidy, is it to say that this is just going to be a one-off increase in Sicpa stamp prices that will be dropped once the subsidy amount has been recovered? Is it legal or fair to go back and retrospectively raid the consumer's pocket to recover the cost of a subsidy you supposedly gave to him in the past? Until there is comprehensive audit of payments and financial transaction between Sicpa and KRA as demanded by the leader of the minority in parliament, these questions remain one-ended.

The Sicpa excise stamp contract is a five-year framework contract that has been running since 2015 and which expired in 2021. Documents seen by *The Weekly Review* show that on expiry of the contract in 2021, KRA and Sicpa signed an addendum that not only sought to extend the engagement beyond the originally contracted five years, but introduced new terms in which the parties agreed on a hand over

deal, whereby ownership of the whole ICT system and technology was to go to KRA for free, while the Swiss Company will continue to supply stamps to KRA. The Swiss company also agreed to reduce the prices of the stamps by 50 per cent. The big question, then, is: where is the pressure to increase the prices of the tax stamps coming from when we are supposed to be getting the technology for free and the stamps at half the price?

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Kenya Revenue Authority Commissioner-General Githii Mburu

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■ EVENING THE SCORE

TIT FOR TAT: VINDICTIVE POLITICS



Then-President Uhuru Kenyatta chats with his deputy, William Ruto, during the launch of the National Defence Policy and Gender Policy documents at the National Defence College, Karen, on May 3, 2017. EVANS HABIL I NATION

The vendetta mission seemingly being perpetuated by President William Ruto and his administration against his predecessor is to avenge their ‘mistreatment at the hands of Kenyatta’

● BY OSCAR OBONYO

As Eldoret North MP, William Samoei Ruto in 2003 led a protest of legislators allied to the then-ruling party, Kanu, in condemning the Mwai Kibaki government for what he termed harassment of retired President Daniel arap Moi. That remonstrance is apparently being re-played two decades later, but this time round with Dr Ruto as the President.

Ruto, who was interestingly on the same side of the political divide as Uhuru Kenyatta when they publicly attacked Kibaki, is today viewed by some as the chief tormentor of the former President. Kenyatta is similarly viewed as having tormented Ruto at a most delicate time, when the latter needed help with pushing

through his bid for the presidency.

Acknowledging that relations between Kenyatta and Ruto were hostile in the run-up to last year’s General Election, political affairs commentator Prof Macharia Munene argues that the President should nonetheless treat his office with respect: “We know that some really bad things happened between the two men but there are honourable ways of handling this. Kibaki, for instance, was offended in an even more pronounced manner by the Moi administration, but he was not vengeful.”

Public defence of Moi in 2003 was prompted by two factors: a threat by senior officials in the Kibaki administration to bring the old man to justice over alleged misdeeds carried out during his 24-year rule, and a clause in a new Presidential

Retirement Bill barring beneficiaries of the pension scheme from participating in politics.

In an interview with the *Sunday Nation* on November 30, 2021, Kiraitu Murungi, who was then Minister for Justice and Constitutional Affairs, confessed that his office, owing to the push from civil society, had drafted several charges against Moi and that there was immense pressure for his arrest.

There was also a move to kick the old man out of his Kabarnet Gardens house in Nairobi, which was initially meant to serve as the official vice-presidential residence. Ruto warned of a countrywide riot in the event of the former President’s arrest, while Kenyatta, who was Leader of the Official Opposition, demanded respect for Moi: “As a country, our future will be

determined by how we recognise and treat our past leaders.”

Murungi reports that President Kibaki quickly calmed the situation when he dissuaded his enthusiastic ministers from pushing for Moi’s arrest and further directed them to process a title deed for the Kabarnet Gardens property in Moi’s name and hand it over to him. Moi was also given the full retirement package due to him.

Kenyatta gave Kibaki similar treatment upon assuming power but did not do the same for Prime Minister Raila Odinga and Vice-President Kalonzo Musyoka, who had contested against him in the 2013 polls. The Kenyatta-Ruto axis maintained that Raila and Musyoka would only enjoy their retirement packages and related perks upon formal retirement

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from politics. Senior Counsel John Khaminwa attributes the friction between Ruto and Kenyatta to political vendetta – a product of the dirty game of politics. Regretting the current drama between the friends-turned-foes, the seasoned lawyer notes that the Constitution is supreme and that any dispute, no matter its magnitude, can be sorted out by institutions established by the government.

He is particularly irked by reports of alleged harassment of former First Lady Mama Njira Kenyatta, wife of founding President Jomo Kenyatta and mother of the fourth President, Uhuru. Khaminwa cites Article 57 of the 2010 Constitution, which demands of the State to set out measures to ensure respect and the rights of older members of society.

According to the said Constitutional provision, the State should ensure that senior citizens “fully participate in the affairs of society, pursue their personal development, live in dignity and respect, are free from abuse, and receive reasonable care and assistance from their family and the State”.

Khaminwa, who has over the decades distinguished himself as an avid crusader for democracy and the rule of law, points out that political vendetta is not a new phenomenon. Relatives, allies and in some cases even tribesmen of an outgoing President are almost always treated as political orphans, unceremoniously hounded out of government and subjected to open hostility.

Unlike the melodramatic way in which the current government is publicly targeting Kenyatta and his associates over the question of tax payment, the pressure exerted on allies and kin of a President who has left office has previously happened quietly and behind the scenes, with little chest thumping or drama.

Khaminwa remembers representing former Cabinet Minister Njenga Karume and two or three nieces of the late Jomo Kenyatta in separate court cases just a couple of months after the death of the founding President on August 22, 1978. Noting that many other loyalists of the senior Kenyatta were subjected to exclusion and legal suits at the time, the lawyer is highly convinced that his clients were victims of power change-over. Karume, for instance, was one of the authors of the so-



Former presidents Daniel Arap Moi (right) and Mwai Kibaki in Muthaiga on May 4, 2016. Public defence of Moi in 2003 was prompted by two factors: a threat by senior officials in the Kibaki administration to bring the old man to justice over alleged misdeeds carried out during his 24-year rule, and a clause in the Presidential Retirement Bill barring beneficiaries of the pension scheme from participating in politics. PHOTO | FILE

called “Change The Constitution Movement” that in the mid-1970s sought to bar a sitting Vice-President from automatically replacing the President in the event of the demise of the office holder. Moi was the V-P at the time and the aging Kenyatta was in ill health – a factor that clearly gave away the intentions of the former Kiambaa MP and his then Nakuru North counterpart, Kihika Kimani.

Munene, who teaches History and International Relations at the United States International University-Kenya, observes that presidents exiting office have previously had warm relations with their successors. Upon assuming office in 1978, for instance, Moi openly embraced his predecessor by proclaiming publicly that he would “*fuata nyayo* (follow the footsteps)” of the late President.

The historian recalls that Kibaki similarly covered up for Moi, despite the fact that he came to power courtesy of an anti-Moi wave that swept aside his preferred successor, Uhuru Kenyatta.

“The same is true of Uhuru, who in 2013 replaced Kibaki, his fiercest challenger for the Presidency ten years earlier. Only Ruto has demonstrated open hostility towards a predecessor by antagonising the Jubilee party leader,” says Munene.

The political analyst attributes the turn of events to “two bad situations”. The first is the former President’s apparent active role in the affairs of his Jubilee Party and the opposition. Unlike his predecessor, who quit active party politics upon leaving office, Munene opines that Kenyatta’s presence on the political scene exposes him to “inevitable friction” with Ruto.

The second “bad situation”, according to Munene, is the vendetta mission seemingly being perpetuated by the Office of the President – the President and his deputy – to avenge their “mistreatment at the hands of Kenyatta”. Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua, in particular, is on record with claims that the former President “weaponised the war against corruption by tar-

getting supporters of Ruto”. Pundits believe this is partly the reason why the current administration appears to be acting hard on the Kenyatta family and its political allies.

Hostility between the outgoing and incoming presidents is not solely a Kenyan problem. After replacing Kenneth Kaunda as Zambia’s President in 1991, for instance, President Fredrick Chiluba engaged in endless feuds over governance and alleged corruption in the central African nation, with Kaunda harassed several times and top leaders of his party arrested on charges of treason.

But the most curious of these hostilities, that shocked the world was the charge by Chiluba’s government that the founding father of Zambia and the country’s President for 27 years was Malawian. Chiluba executed the move two years into office after his predecessor announced plans to run for the presidency in the following elections.

High-ranking officials of Chiluba’s Movement for Multiparty Democracy quickly took the matter to court and earned a ruling declaring Kaunda stateless. According to the ruling, the former President was not a Zambian citizen under the Constitution because his parents were from the former British Nyasaland, now called Malawi. The ruling ultimately locked Kaunda out of future presidential contests.

Another uneasy development was witnessed in the United States of America, where 45th President Donald Trump tried to reverse most policies on immigration, taxation and health initiated by his predecessor, Barack Obama, including the famed Obamacare health reform law. For the four years of his rule, the Republican leader made his Democratic predecessor a common target of his tirades.

Back home, Khaminwa is disturbed about the timing of the high-profile hostilities – when the country is experiencing hard economic times: “Let us unite at this time because divisions will hurt us even more. Let us avoid the perception that certain families or individuals are being targeted. The so-called big families are our very own people. They are members of this Kenyan society.”

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the limelight



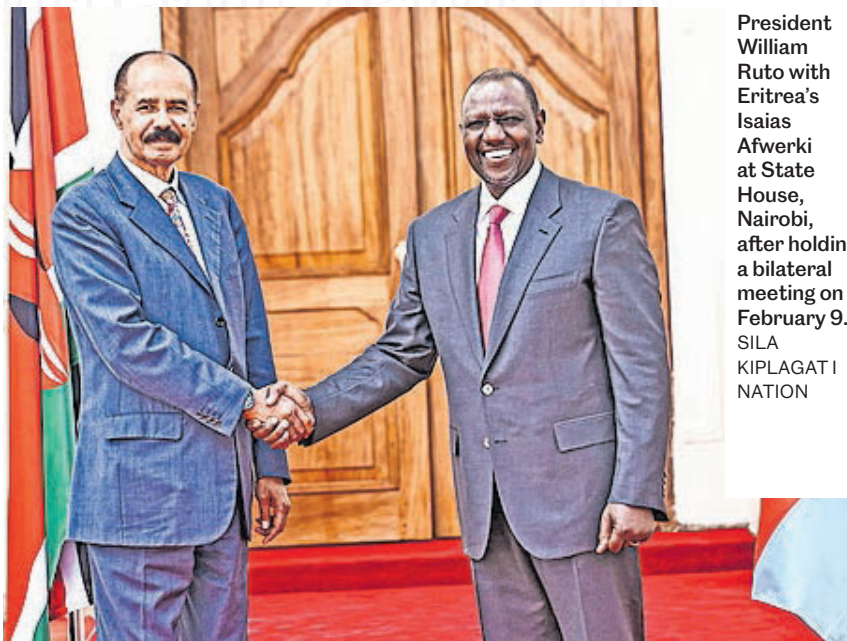
North Korea leader Kim Jong Un (right), his daughter, presumed to be named Ju Ae (centre) and wife Ri Sol Ju (left) at a military parade to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Korean People's Army in Kim Il Sung Square in Pyongyang on February 8. PHOTO | AFP



Collapsed buildings in Hatay, south-eastern Turkey, on February 8, two days after a strong earthquake struck the region. Searchers were still pulling survivors from the rubble of the earthquake that killed over 11,200 people in Turkey and Syria. PHOTO | AFP



US rapper Cardi B arrives for the 65th Annual Grammy Awards at the Crypto.com Arena in Los Angeles on February 5. PHOTO | AFP



President William Ruto with Eritrea's Isaias Afwerki at State House, Nairobi, after holding a bilateral meeting on February 9. SILA KIPLAGAT | NATION



England fly-half Marcus Smith feels the heat from Scotland's Sione Tuipulotu during their Six Nations international rugby union match at Twickenham, London, on February 4. Scotland won 29-23. PHOTO | AFP



A worker piles up discarded truck tyres for recycling in Dhaka on February 8. PHOTO | AFP



A Ukrainian firefighter walks amid rubble in a shopping mall following a Russian shelling in Kherson on February 3. PHOTO | AFP

The Arena

BANKING ON BOOKS

The Cybersphere: Virtual store helps local writers to publish and sell their work online

NURIA
THE HONEST STORE

Make It Count
PLANNER

LONGEVITY
PARADOX

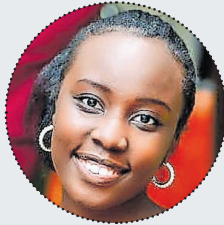
THE ODYSSEY

RADIO
CANDY

Where Truth

OPEN SPACE

■ MIND SPEAK



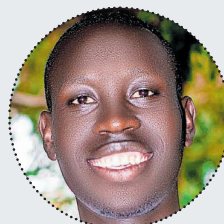
Gabriella Jepkirui

High electricity and water prices will impact highly on cost of production in most industries. In a country where prioritising manufacturing has been given lip service, the government ought to subsidise the cost of power to alleviate the already dire situation the manufacturing, processing and MSME sectors like the Jua Kali are already facing due to the tough economic times.
— Nairobi-based quantity surveyor



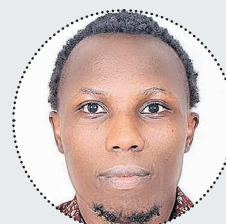
Eunice Ngari

Substantially increasing prices of electricity and water at a time when the cost of living is so high will have an immense impact on the lives of Kenyan citizens. Electricity being a source of energy for manufacturing companies could easily drive them out of business as the cost of production increases, which could lead to loss of jobs and potentially increase the crime rate.
— Communication and Marketing Consultant in Nairobi



Kevin Rotich

Development depends on the country's capability to generate electricity and water. The choice of market players may be influenced by boosting the price incentives. More energy facilities may be needed to create enough power to meet demand. This applies to all domestic users and businesses.
— Director, Partnerships and Corporate Affairs, Kiambu University College Students Alumni Association



Henry Loch

It's laughable that such ridiculous proposals would be made by companies publicly known to have been held hostage by cartels for a long time. Everyone has the inalienable right to access affordable utilities, and in a country with over 17 per cent of the population living on under a dollar a day, this will profoundly impact households.
— Projects Manager, Landscape Kenya

Genuine exam results exist; mechanical ones abound

Premium has been placed on what appear to be outlandish high scores across the country, diverting our attention from many candidates who performed poorly

• BY WYCLIFFE OSABWA

The 2022 Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education examinations results continue to elicit mixed reactions. Premium has been placed on what appear to be outlandish high scores across the country, effectively diverting our attention from the many candidates – about 70 per cent – who performed poorly.

Back to the topic. Undoubtedly, there exist students who are endowed with cognitive agility and who, with support, have earned genuine grades. These must never be vilified alongside suspected exam cheats, but separating the wheat from the tares needs more capital.

I have no evidence of examination malpractice among the said cohort. Regardless, we ought to allow people to stretch their imagination and breathe life in the data thrown their way. Data, without thoughtful and correct interpretation, can be misleading. Accordingly, we may be staring at excellence by nonsense. For instance, I struggle to understand how a class of 400 students could all score the 'A' grade. Just how did the school manage to gather so many geniuses under one roof?

The problem that we see as examination malpractice is only a symptom of a big malaise – fraud – one we hardly follow up even when we suspect it. Just before last year's tests kicked off, the Directorate of Criminal Investigation hinted at organised groups that were planning to engage in examination irregularities. How far did this go?

Two, we always argue that the candidates aren't to be blamed; instead, sane adults who abet in the crime should. What nonsense! In any case, these victims should be compelled to reveal fellow conspirators. When cheating becomes the norm, even the candidates from clean schools will demand that their principals follow suit.

Three, I understand that cancelling exam results not only affects the

candidates, but the country's global standing too. So we would rather stay silent and allow the villains to walk scot-free lest our education system gets vilified? A moral dilemma indeed. Four, it is easier to ignore and forge forward; outright admission of examination irregularities places more responsibilities on our desks, making us to commit to following up and providing solutions. No one wants extra work. Five, those who claim to have seen red flags (teachers included) never reported it, nor are they willing to lay bare the fraud. I am not a parent of any of the candidates in



question, but if I were, would I have come forward to disown excellent results from a child I've known to be below average? I don't know. The cheating nation that we have become will eventually consume us all.

Six, the relevant authorities will claim to covertly follow up the cases and bring the culprits to book. But they forget that such clandestine steps only serve to embolden the would-be-cheats, since the latter miss the chance to learn vicariously.

In the end, we are talking about our education system – all the way from its foundations to the planning and management, including what we consider as education, resource distribution, teacher promotion criteria, the process of teaching and learning and the values we hold. The factory production model that attends our school system – devoid of intellectual, social and spiritual substance – must be looked at against our values as a nation. It's no wonder that the aroma of the super grades disappears when the students step in college, not to mention their inability to excel in their trades.

Dr Osabwa is a lecturer, Alupe University, Busia. (wosabwa680@gmail.com)

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

MY TAKE



• BY WAGA ODONGO

I finally got round to getting a ChatGPT and my feelings were mixed. ChatGPT is a software that generates text after being given a prompt. With all certainty, future iterations of this bot will kill the copy writing business stone-dead.

It can write solid, usable fluff pieces in an instant. Need a paragraph on why your detergent is the best? That can easily be magicked into existence. Need several pages on a report no one will read? Done. The grunt work of writing reports only meant to be read once then cast away with force into the nothingness they belong is gone. As we speak, ChatGPT is already writing the obituary of the pay-for-essay writing mills that keep Kenyatta University students in Kahawa busy.

The more structured a task is, say, a letter, the better the results. It's also a dab hand at code, although not good enough to replace programmers – yet. The main job of ChatGPT is to hold a conversation, so it takes a prompt and goes through previous sentence structures that look like what you are asking as it determines a suitable output.

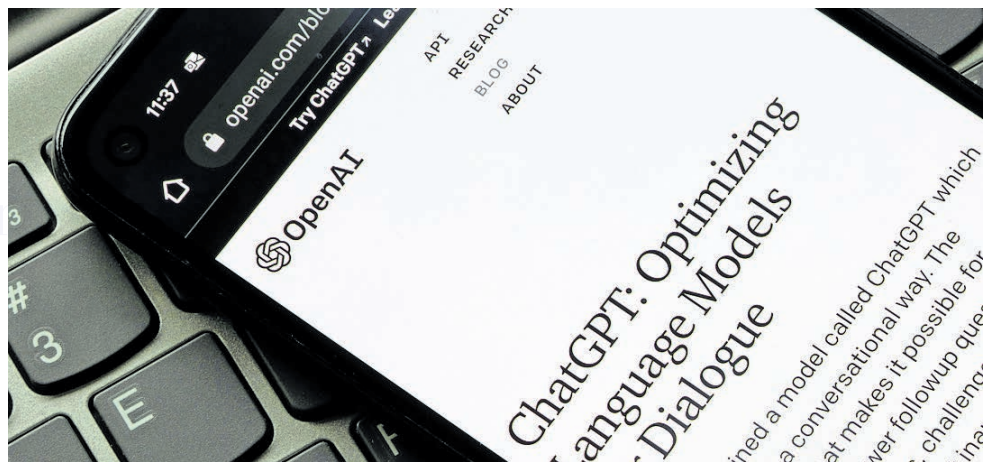
Sometimes it gets stuff factually wrong; it didn't know of any Tanzanian who has ever played in the NBA – a slight to former NBA second overall pick from Dar es Salaam Hasheem Thabeet. But more worrying is not its lack of knowledge; it's okay to admit to being stumped. What concerns me about it is its insistence on making up an answer on the fly.

For example I asked: "Who was the first Alaskan to go to space?"

I didn't know the answer to the question in the beginning and was merely checking how it would attempt to resolve hard-to-reason-out information. It would need, for example, to know the names of all the people who went to space, whittle it down to the Americans, and see if any was born in the country's largest state. It responded with: "The first

WHY CHATGPT WILL BE GOOD FOR PROPAGANDA

The almost magical text-creating software will be great for politics, as it generates 'plausible-sounding but incorrect or nonsensical answers' to any question



Alaskan to go to space was John Phillips, who was a mission specialist on the Space Shuttle Endeavour during STS-100..." The answer contains a nugget of truth. John Phillips is real and he did go to space on said mission. He wasn't from Alaska, though, but Arizona. Intrigued by this mistake, I asked about Phillips' early life. The bot doubled down on the lie, insisting that Phillips was born in a town called Girdwood, Alaska, grew up in Anchorage, the capital of Alaska, and also went to a university in the state.

His official biography on NASA sets the record straight: he isn't from Alaska and didn't grow up in the state. It further gave him a PhD from Stanford rather than the University of California, where he went.

That is when I understood the whole point of ChatGPT: its training is to be on the other side of a conversation and generate plausible answers. It is meant to give you plausible-sounding answers that can fool a human regardless of whether the information is correct or not. It can't reason and if a fact is hard to scrape from the internet it will make it up. Even its makers admit that it has "plausible-sounding but incorrect or nonsensical answers".

It conveniently remembers conversations and keeps up previous lies going with the new information. That is why it came up with additional unprompted information about Phillips going to school in Alaska. The reason it sent Mr Phillips to Stanford rather than UCLA is probably – allow me to speculate here fact-free, just like ChatGPT – that since going to space is rare and is only done by the most elite researchers you will likely find that more astronauts went to Stanford than UCLA.

So it draws an inference from that fact that if someone tells you they are an astronaut, it's more likely that they went to Stanford – amongst the most prestigious schools in the world – than perhaps any other university.

ChatGPT can be useful in lengthening sketchy information into wholly manufactured and convincing answers. Where would there be a premium for this sort of thing? Politics.

The code is largely open source, but it is just a matter of time before someone removes the human-placed speed bumps that stop the truly vile content. Currently, OpenAI rejects inappropriate requests such as when you ask it about committing fraud.

In the past election we had so many sock-puppet accounts that tweeted and retweeted the same message, indicating a problem with political propaganda: it is too damn repetitive. You skip messages you have seen before. This is because you need an actual person to come up with these messages and then get bots to retweet it.

ChatGPT can easily be asked the same question, such as "Why is the Kenyan government great?" and each time it will come up with a decent, semi-plausible and different answer. After a few tweaks it won't get tired of telling you why GMOs cause cancer or why the Palestinians/Israelis are right. It can craft you a Mein-Kampf worth of propaganda every hour, unceasingly, and make it all sound different. The tsunami of textual propaganda that will soon flood social media will make swimming against the tide nearly impossible.

Internet platforms lack the tools to protect themselves against what will be a torrent of AI-generated content. It will be impossible for a human to deal with the sheer volume of plausible but wrong explanations or answers.

Mr Odongo is a Software Engineer
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Nuria Store founder Abdullahi Bulle displays some of the titles at his book store in Nairobi on February 7. FRANCIS NDERITU / NATION

the money into the business. But it still wasn't picking up. In 2019, I began to think this gamble wasn't going to pay off. Worse, even the guy I had hired got a job somewhere else and started feeling sorry for me," he says, chuckling, like he knows a secret he can't tell anyone yet. "Business is tough. Most people don't see the bummock, only the tip of the iceberg, but it is difficult running a business with limited resources."

Still, he soldiered on. Because what else can you do? You didn't come this far to get this far. Potential isn't prophecy. You can't ride a wish horse. The path from promise to promised land must be matriculated, all its obstacles surmounted. Eventually, his diligence paid off. In 2020, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the business began to turn around: Everyone was indoors and there is only a finite amount of TV one can watch.

"Now we stock books of 560 self-published authors, and we are looking to hit 1,000 by the close of the year." The first author they onboarded, he says, was Joan Thatia, who penned *I'm Too Pretty to be Broke* and *Confessions of Nairobi Women*, books which, needless to say, are all available at Nuria.

The online store, Bulle tells me, now fills over 1,000 orders monthly. Sales are above KSh5million yearly, with the crux of their demographic that sweet spot between 25 and 44 years old. When he started, he says, the market was skewed towards international books. "At the moment, it is a 55-45 share in favour of the international books. Only just." Debunking the urban folklore that Kenyans don't read, he attributes the growth of local books to the authors who know the ultimate quid pro quo secret of advertising: the more you market, the more you sell, the more you make.

"But I make more margins from international books than local ones. We get 30 per cent

MASSIVE WITHDRAWALS

*Chase Bank collapsed in 2016 under the weight of massive withdrawals from depositors following revelations of fraud at the bank, including insider loans of more than Sh13.62 billion advanced to directors, shareholders, employees and associates.

On Monday, January 9, 2023, the store announced its top-selling books written by Kenyans of the year 2022, with 63 out of 100 being self-published books.

Nuria has a WhatsApp group where local writers whose books it stocks interact.

from local books. International books give us between 50 and 70 per cent."

He saw a gap in the market and filled it, he says, explaining the subtle but unmistakable growth of the self-published market. "Mainstream publishers had become sort of gatekeepers, taking a long time with manuscripts, mostly because they make more money through selling textbooks. Now, information has become decentralised, with more of us helping authors print, edit and sell their books. Social media is now a marketplace: simply build an audience and sell your book. With less than KSh50k, you can have your book in the market."

The "more of us", in this case, refers to other independent bookstores like Books and More KE, Rafu Books, and Kibanga Books, which are rebuilding the Library of Storytelling one local book at a time.

"Through Nuria's vendor system, our authors can access their money immediately after we sell their books. I sell their books and get a commission. In other words, I have given authors

back their power," says Bulle.

Bulle has a few words for anyone standing at the edge of a cliff: "Take a risk yes, but take a calculated risk." And have a fallback plan. "I learned that nobody will come to your rescue; you just have to rescue yourself."

What misconception do people have about him? "That we are big in the market, but we are not that big."

Well, perception is reality? He chuckles. "Maybe, it's the noise. The brand value of Nuria is big but in terms of actual value, we are a bit small. We have good clients who help to push our brand." He says that Nuria is still at the growth stage, and this demands more capital, more resources, and more employees.

"What I see as success for us is a radical increase in customers and the referral system that is built on Nuria. The repeat customer is the biggest success; 80 per cent of our business is organic. We rarely sponsor or promote Nuria." Among his biggest clients of authors and readers are activist Boniface Mwangi and columnist Gabriel Oguda.

His road here wasn't paved and his ambition has cost him family time. The father of two says he only gets to spend quality time with his family on Sundays. "Because something has to be sacrificed for you to achieve your ambitions," he says.

He strikes me as a fearless guy. What does he fear? "Being unable to pay my employees and suppliers. That, and what would happen to my children if I died today. I love thinking through stuff. I am paranoid. What is my fallback, what are my reserves, what will I do next?"

So what is next for Nuria? "The plan is to expand and have stores in different cities. My dream is to have a people-less bookshop. Where you just come in, swipe your card, take your books and leave. 24/7."

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LOCAL MANUFACTURING

• BY NDUGU ABISAI

When Susan Mwangi became a mother, she worried a great deal about what products to use on her baby's skin and hair. When she discovered that many of the products available on the Kenyan market were full of chemicals, she looked across the pond and imported lotion, massage oil, bath soap and shampoo for her baby.

That was an expensive foray for the new parent, akin to taking out a mortgage on skin and hair care products. So Susan researched on natural products suitable for African baby skin. She talked to dermatologists and skin specialists about her challenge, and to a host of new parents she met, who would lament about the same thing. "It was clear to me that we had a shortage or complete lack of natural baby skin and hair care products in the country," says Susan. Eventually, she stopped importing the baby products and began the journey of making them herself, mixing raw shea butter, calendula and other bits and bobs that are safe for baby skin and hair. That is how Baby Blossom was born – in her kitchen.

With a capital of KSh4 million (which she, her spouse and her friends raised) and a strong will, Susan got a manufacturer abroad to make what she — or, if we are putting it correctly — her baby needed out of the research she had conducted. She created a website, registered a company and was all set.

"Our first products landed in the country in January of 2019. We began selling them immediately. The initial plan was to create distribution and sales channels in small retail outlets, selling to local shops to make the products as widely available as they could possibly be. Then she realised that the market was not as granulated as she'd thought. So, she changed tact. "We discovered that our target market was in big stores and online shops and baby shops. We had to change our mode of operation. Now we sell mostly from our online shop, supermarkets or baby shops in the city, especially those on Biashara Street."

The first thing people do when they chance upon a new skin product is doubt it. The scepticism is expected because skin, especially that of a baby, is extremely sensitive. For this reason, Susan was keen on quality control to assure their buyers about the safety of their products. "We passed KEBS quality and safety standards and are certified for distribution in the country. We are in the process of seeking certification from the Kenya Pharmacy and Poisons Board so that our products can be authorised for sale in pharmacies around the country," she adds.

Like Susan, Wanjiru Ndung'u had been searching for suitable products for her baby. "My child had this unending contact dermatitis, which is common with children. I asked for advice from friends and the products they recommended were just not it. Then one friend, Jane Njeri, referred me to Baby Blossom products and within days of using the Calendula Baby Soap and the Baby Lotion, my baby's skin was healed and smooth. I have

SMOOTH AS A BABY'S BUM



Baby Blossom Founder Susan Mwangi at her office on February 7. FRANCIS NDERITU / NATION

Susan Mwangi's young venture, Baby Blossom, makes skin and hair care products using natural ingredients that are gentle and safe for babies



Baby Blossom Founder Susan Mwangi with some of her products at her office on February 7. FRANCIS NDERITU | NATION

also used the Baby Wash + Shampoo and all I can say is, I should have started earlier,” Wanjiru declares.

For Phoebe Wanjiku, her search for suitable products for her toddler began when the baby developed rashes and advice from doctors and friends was not working. “A friend referred me to Baby Blossom and what can I say? It was the end of my search and the beginning of a great experience. I get the Baby Blossom Full Pack that comes with their four products. I order it from their website and it is a money saver for me,” says Phoebe.

Baby Blossom serves about 1,000 customers every month and currently sells four products: Calendula Baby Soap, Baby Massage Oil, Baby Lotion, and Baby Wash + Shampoo. All ingredients used are natural, save for an approved organic preservative without which they would need refrigeration, Susan explains. And although the products are made with children in mind, adults can also use them.

Baby Blossom has two full-time employees and five marketers-cum-distributors. They do not have a physical shop yet, preferring to use e-commerce sites like Glovo, Jumia and Copia, which helps to cut down operational costs. “We made profit for the first time in 2022 after operating on losses for the longest time. Having a lean workforce and operating on bare-minimum overheads has helped us keep our heads above water.” Why did she remain in business despite the losses? “I get reviews from people who have used our products, parents of children with eczema or sensitive skin. They say our products either cured the conditions or cut short the long search for products suitable for their babies. That is enough reason for me to continue,” Susan concludes.

Her plan is to grow the business locally and regionally and, in the future, internationally, as well as localising the manufacturing process.

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The FLIP SIDE
With John Nyaganyiaga
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WOMAN POWER

NAIROBI COUNTY FIRST LADY BEATRICE SAKAJA HAS TOLD OF HOW SHE NARROWLY ESCAPED FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION (FGM), WHILE SHE WAS A YOUNG GIRL. MS SAKAJA REVEALED THAT SHE FIRST LEARNED ABOUT FGM WHEN SHE WAS 17 YEARS OLD.

“MY MOTHER TOLD ME FGM WAS ONE OF THE HARMFUL CULTURAL PRACTICES IN MY TAITA COMMUNITY. SHE CONFESSED THAT I HAD ACTUALLY ESCAPED THE CLIT BY A WHISKER, AFTER SHE STOOD FIRM AGAINST MY GRANDMOTHER’S PUSH TO HAVE ME CIRCUMCISED,” SHE SAID. THANKS FOR OPENING UP AND INSPIRING OTHERS WITH YOUR STORY, MADAM FIRST LADY.

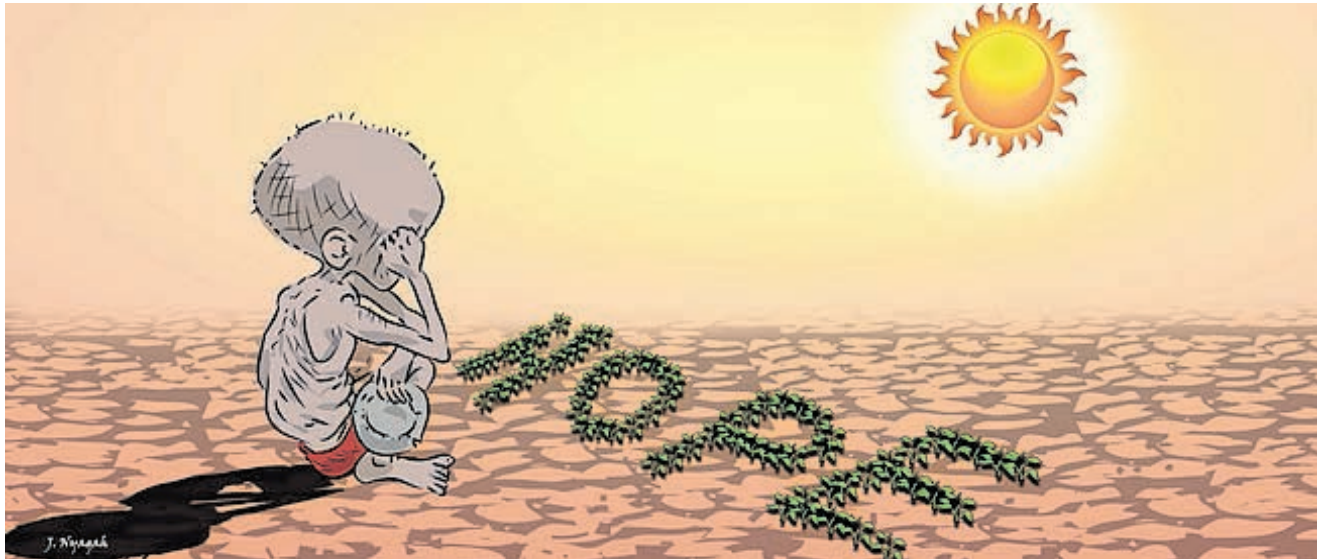


STAR OF THE WEEK



THE TOP SCORER IN FRANCE’S LIGUE 1 IS AN ENGLAND UNDER-21 INTERNATIONAL CALLED FOLARIN BALOGUN. HE HAS SO FAR BAGGED 14 GOALS, OUT-SCORING GLOBAL SUPERSTARS KYLIAN MBAPPE, LIONEL MESSI AND NEYMAR. THE YOUNGSTER IS ON LOAN FROM ENGLAND’S PREMIER LEAGUE LEADERS ARSENAL TO REIMS, A MID-TABLE TEAM MANAGED BY FELLOW ENGLISHMAN WILL STILL, WHO IS ONLY 30 AND NEVER PLAYED PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL. ACROSS EUROPE’S TOP FIVE LEAGUES, ONLY ERLING HAALAND, HARRY KANE AND VICTOR OSIMHEN HAVE SCORED MORE THAN BALOGUN THIS SEASON. WHAT AN INSPIRATION!

opinion



■ The President must reckon with a populace that is reeling under the high cost of living

Concentrate on delivering on poll pledges

Last week's meetings between President Ruto and MPs from the Azimio la Umoja-One Kenya Coalition reflect the President's continuing endeavour to bolster support for the Kenya Kwanza government and, therefore, stall or stymie a surging and energised opposition.

While Azimio stalwart Raila Odinga, buoyed by a whistle-blower's report that alleges that he walloped Ruto in last August's presidential poll, rallies his supporters at public rallies against the government, the President is countering this by wooing Azimio MPs to his corner. Herewith lies the conundrum.

While Odinga lampoons the government as illegitimate and refuses to recognise Ruto as head of state because he is a vote thief, MPs from his Luo Nyanza backyard and those from Mt Kenya are pledging support for the President and the government.

It is an old leaf from an old playbook. Indeed, as Kenya emerged from last year's General Election and it appeared Ruto would not have the numbers to push through his legislative agenda despite having been declared President, he swiftly hit Azimio for six.

MPs who had been elected under the coalition's banner were persuaded to cross over to Kenya Kwanza and shifted the parliamentary balance of power in Kenya Kwanza's favour in terms of winning the speakership which, in turn, declared Kenya Kwanza the majority coalition.

But that was last year. This month, with his election under fresh scrutiny, the cost of living gone through the roof, the economy



**KWENDO
OPANGA**

underperforming and the government broke, Ruto is perilously on the back foot and the government is vulnerable. A political shark, Odinga has smelt blood.

He has, for all practical purposes, hit the campaign trail, with his poll team of Martha Karua and Kalonzo Musyoka leading the troops. This time around, the campaign theme is two-fold: rejection of Ruto's presidency and the government, and reclamation of Baba's "stolen victory".

In a move not dissimilar to formation of the National Resistance Movement of 2017, Odinga & Co. have launched the Movement for the Defence of Democracy. Mass action remains on the cards and calls for the President to resign have hit a crescendo.

By winning Azimio MPs over to his side, the President is looking to take the wind out of Odinga's sails. The same action also pits MPs against the people, with the President banking on the former prevailing over the latter in their electoral constituencies and as thought leaders. The strategy also makes Parliament less of a battlefield because Azimio MPs are expected to vote with Kenya Kwanza MPs to

pass the President's and government's agenda and give both of them legitimacy and, in the process, deflate Odinga's balloon.

However, President and Parliament must reckon with a populace that is reeling under the high cost of living, an economy that is not performing and empty public coffers that cannot allow the government to deliver on its poll pledges. That means, as they say in tennis, advantage Azimio. This is so because when people cannot put food on the table, the culprit is usually the government. When hungry people are told their vote did not count, fuel is added to the fire. And worse for the President, he does not miss an opportunity to shoot himself in the foot.

Why, pray, with all the problems facing his government, would he give Odinga a golden chance to lampoon him and compare him to dictators by plotting to arrest former Interior Cabinet Secretary Fred Matiang'i at night? He cannot convince anybody he is not settling scores. The best propaganda war for the President is to concentrate on delivering on his poll pledges.

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opinion

■ We are already deep in hock to the Chinese, Americans, Britons, Japanese and other lenders

It is time for Kenya to declare bankruptcy



MACHARIA
GITHO

When a business is bleeding money and all honest assessments show no prospects of recovery, very tough decisions are called for. One is to sell it, lock, stock and barrel, to an investor who thinks he has the resources and ideas to turn it around. Another is simply to cut your loses and close it down.

This is what we must do with dozens of state corporations that have become a big drain on the exchequer. Many of them exist for absolutely no reason other than to pay salaries to staff and management, who do nothing but sit around twiddling their thumbs. That is when they are not busy running their own matatus, butcheries, beauty salons, rental houses and other side hustles. Some will also be busy selling asset that they come into contact with courtesy of their employment.

Over the last two decades, the government of Kenya has pretended to reform loss-making parastatals, state corporations, statutory bodies and other parasitic ventures that have long lost the rationale for being.

Many of them in eons past not only served critical functions, but actually made profits and gave dividend cheques to the exchequer at the end of every financial year.

The ravages of President Daniel arap Moi's kleptocracy combined with endemic theft and mismanagement stripped most of them down to empty shells. Changing times and circumstances also made many of them irrelevant in the social and economic environment of today.

After failed and abandoned efforts under President Mwai Kibaki and again under President Uhuru Kenyatta, the administration of President William Ruto is signalling a fresh start in efforts to revamp or sell off state-owned enterprises.

It is even moving to cut red tape and bureaucracy by removing the requirement that Parliament approve all such disinvestment. That would be commendable if meant to speed up the process and remove the hurdles sure to be placed by greedy, rent-seeking politicians.

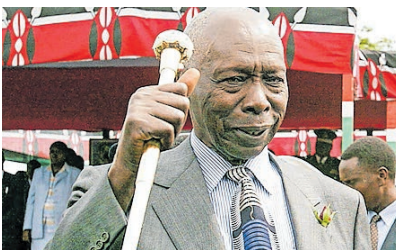
It is also a red sign. It is not inconceivable that fellows in the new State Capture regime want to give themselves opportunity to make a killing by selling-off public assets to

themselves for a song without an oversight mechanism. Some of those state corporations may be technically insolvent and in business that holds no prospect of turnaround, but have billions in assets such as land, buildings, factories, machinery and equipment.

The Kenyan oligarchy — later emulated by Russia and its ex-Soviet satellites, as well as China — grew by massive plunder of public assets by those in power.

When dodgy fellows in the Ruto regime rant and rave against State Capture and cartels, you can be sure that the intent is not to restore to the public assets diverted under the Uhuru administration, but to get their own greedy paws controlling the looting machine.

Anyway, if they are genuine about turning around, selling or shutting down State-owned enterprises, they are on to something. They recognise that many of those entities serve absolutely no purpose. They also know that it will take gonads of steel to withstand the backlash sure to follow when thousands of employees who get paid for doing no work are laid off. The Ruto government should go further, however, and acknowledge that the problem is far bigger than public corporations



If they are genuine about turning around, selling or shutting down State-owned enterprises, they are on to something. They recognise that many of those entities serve absolutely no purpose. They also know that it will take gonads of steel to withstand the backlash sure to follow when thousands of employees who get paid for doing no work are laid off. The Ruto government should go further, however, and acknowledge that the problem is far bigger than public corporations deep in red ink.

deep in red ink.

The problem is Kenya itself. Just this week we heard Treasury Cabinet Secretary Njuguna Ndung'u, a former Central Bank Governor, lamenting that Kenya is broke. He was echoing the chorus started by Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua on Day 1 of the Kenya Kwanza administration in loudly wailing that the new regime had inherited empty coffers.

Indeed it has become the mantra of the Ruto government that the Uhuru Kenyatta government left it nothing to work with.

All we see from the new regime is not what it will do to get Kenya out of economic quagmire, but lame excuses for what it cannot do because the previous regime left nothing in the vaults.

With that we see clearly that closing down or selling parastatals in nothing but a puny band aid solution. The problem is not broke parastatals, but a broke Kenya.

If those elected to work and solve the problem of a bankrupt country can only hold their hands up in despair and forever fail to demonstrate that they are clueless, planless and helpless, the logical thing would be to concede defeat and get out of the way.

But if it appears that resignation of the Ruto government will not provide any solution to the existential crisis, the next logical thing would be to close down Kenya, or sell it to the highest bidder.

We are already deep in hock to the Chinese, Americans, Britons, Japanese and other lenders, as well as to multilateral financiers such as the World Bank and IMF.

It might therefore be time to declare bankruptcy and allow our creditors to take over. Receiver-managers might well do a better job of selling every moveable and immovable asset and putting Kenya under a regime where none of us will sit around expecting anything of or from the government.

Once the receivers are done and move out, a period of anarchy and chaos might just be the tonic we all need. That is what will bring us to realisation that we can never depend on government for anything; and that we all bear direct responsibility when we elect into office self-righteous charlatans who cover up their shortcomings by wailing from the Book of Lamentations.

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kenya lens

■ SLOW JUSTICE AGAINST IMPUDENT LAND ROBBERS

THE LAND-GRAB CARTELS

With many cases pending in court, aggrieved families of brazen land grabs point to connivance at various levels of government

• By MACHARIA GAITHO

The two men caught on video when they tried to lay claim to property in the affluent Karen suburb at the beginning of this year have a string of similar land grab cases across Nairobi.

Peter Kamau Munene and Jackson Mwangi Wambui drove into the residence of long-time Karen residents Richard and Clare Hooper towards the end January, with the former claiming that he was the owner of the land, and the latter that he was the deputy police chief for the area. The couple had lived in the house for 25 years and were alarmed when Munene claimed he was the owner while Mwangi threatened them with arrest for alleged trespass.

Mr Hooper alerted neighbours and the neighbourhood security watch, who rushed to the scene and parked their cars at the gate to prevent the intruders from driving out. They also started filming the confrontation, with the video soon going viral on social media.

The police were also called and the genuine officer in charge of Karen Police Station led a team to the scene and arrested the duo. The following day, Mwangi was arraigned in court and charged with impersonating a police officer, while Munene was released but instructed to report regularly to the police station as investigations continued.

The attempted land grab happened just three months after Munene lost a long legal battle over a piece of land he had tried to grab from a Nairobi family in Thome Estate. Judge Lucy Mbugua of the Environment and Land Court High Court found that Munene had presented a fraudulent Title Deed and transfer documents in an attempt to dispossess the family of Gabriel Gichuru Kuria and his wife, Veronica Wanjiru, both deceased.

Munene is involved in another 2019 case, in which he is being sued by John Kamau Njoroge and Stephen Muya Njoroge, administrators of the estate of Njoroge Kamau.

In the Gichuru family case, it is ironically



Embakasi Ranching Company shareholders demonstrate outside the Supreme Court on May 24, 2022, demanding justice over claims that land that they acquired over 30 years ago had been grabbed. FILE | NATION

Munene himself who moved to court in June 2019 seeking eviction of Winfred Wambui Gichuru and her siblings, claiming that the heirs of the late couple had trespassed on land they had owned since 1916.

He wanted the court to grant him unimpeded and exclusive right of occupation and possession of the land, as well as a permanent injunction restraining Wambui and her siblings from entering, trespassing on interfering with his enjoyment of the property.

In her defence and counterclaim, Wambui demonstrated to the court how their parents had properly acquired the land, which was originally part of the Thome Farmers' Company. They wanted the land restored to them and a title deed fraudulently issued to Munene cancelled. They also wanted a permanent injunction against Munene from similarly entering, trespassing and interfering with the property or disposing or dealing with it in any way.

Munene had claimed in court that he had purchased the property from one Paul Ndegwa for Sh24 million, but did not offer any proof of such transaction, while the court found that the defendants gave a detailed history of how their parents acquired the land as members and shareholders of Thome Farmers' Company, as well as receipts and letters showing payments for various transaction, including purchase, sub-division and survey fees. The judge

agreed with the defendants and ordered that the title deed held by Munene be cancelled and full rights of occupation and ownership be restored to them.

Munene was also ordered to pay the family Sh5,000,000 for destruction of property during his attempt at illegal occupation. The case and others still pending opened up a Pandora's Box around the Thome Farmers' Company, where shareholders and members who acquired land experienced long delays in issuance of title deeds. Those following up found that files were missing at both the company offices and the Ministry of Lands, while crooked individuals with connections at the Nairobi Land Registry were able to present fake claims and be issued with ownership documents.

On the strength of the titles deeds issued irregularly, they then used hired goons to invade the targeted property and ejected the occupants, sometimes helped by police officers. The Kasarani Police Station, Directorate of Criminal Investigations, the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission and the Ministry of Lands have been inundated with complaints around rampant land grabs, but justice has been slow in coming. One of the documents Munene presented in his claim was a letter issued by the Directorate of Criminal Investigations signed by a Mr James Magambo confirming that he was the bona fide owner of the disputed land. The

kenya lens

judge dismissed the letter as worthless. Aggrieved families who have been victims of the land fraud point to connivance at various levels. They point to a Land Registrar who they claim

has been central to issuance of the suspect titles and is also closely related to one of the fraudsters. Following numerous complaints, she was transferred to Ngong land registry in Kajiado

County, where all of a sudden causes of fraudulent activity rose so alarmingly that the office had to be temporarily closed in 2021.

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■ PONTIFF'S AFRICA VISIT

• By JOSEPH MBOYA

For the war-ravaged populations of the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan, the recent visit by Pope Francis was heaven-sent. Their hope was that the Pontiff would give them a New Year's gift of what their own leaders had failed to deliver: silencing of guns and a lasting peace.

The President of the National Episcopal Conference of Congo, Archbishop Marcel Utambi Tapa, said as much before the visit. "Pope Francis is coming to strengthen the faith, hope and charity of the people of God spread throughout the world, so that all of us may be reconciled in Jesus Christ, to whom we have become brothers and in him we are members of one family," the archbishop was quoted as saying by the Catholic News Agency, *ACI Africa*.

The Pope was on what the Vatican described as a 'Pilgrimage of Peace' in the two strife-ridden countries. The climax of the visit to the DRC was a mass in Kinshasa on February 1 that was attended by one million people, according to reports.

But even as Pope Francis and his congregants were celebrating the holy mass, a not-so-holy war continued to devastate the eastern part of the DRC, where an amalgamation of rebels, alleged foreign fighters and the national army have locked horns in deadly combat that does not appear to have an end in sight. Add to this mix the presence of United Nations peacekeepers and a regional peacekeeping force, and eastern DRC is a powder keg in every sense of the word.

The perilous situation obtaining there caused the Vatican to cancel at the last minute a planned visit to the eastern capital city of Goma.

In Kinshasa, the Pope saw, firsthand, the reality of the war in the DRC when he met with scarred victims of the conflict. Some of them had their limbs chopped while the women spoke of being turned into war slaves by the antagonists in the sporadic wars in that have rocked the eastern part

PILGRIMAGE OF PEACE

While Pope Francis's call for peace in the DRC and South Sudan may have raised some hope for an end to conflict, the hostilities continue



Pope Francis blesses a child during the holy mass at the John Garang Mausoleum in Juba, South Sudan on February 5. He urged leaders to focus on bringing peace to the fragile country. FILE INATION

of the country on and off since the 1990s. To these people, Pope Francis might have been the nearest they could get to God and present Him their petition for peace. Aimedia Wakarungulu, a former hostage of the rebels, told the Pope that the attackers forced their captives to eat human flesh of victims who had been killed, a news report said. Survivors of the violence, the report added, laid machetes, knives and other weapons before the Pope with the hope that they would never hear of war and violence in their provinces again.

The Pope's response that "peace shall not fall from the sky" was an indictment of the DRC leadership and its adversaries, and an exhortation for them to work together to give their people peace. He also took a swipe at vested foreign interests fuelling the DRC war.

Meanwhile, the war goes on unabated and just last week, the facilitator of the DRC peace process, former Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta, called for calm and immediate cessation of hostilities. "The facilitator continues to call on regional leaders and the international community to lend their political goodwill and support to the full realisation of the EAC-led Nairobi Peace Process for the Restoration of Peace and Stability in eastern DRC," Kenyatta said in a statement.

In South Sudan, the Pope was joined by the Moderator of the Church of Scotland, Dr Iain Greenshields, and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, for a joint ecumenical service in Juba on Sunday, February 5, the first of its kind. As the historical service bringing together the church heads was held,

drums of war were being beaten by disgruntled military officers upset with the leadership of President Salva Kiir.

Despite having won its independence from Sudan in 2011 after decades of civil war, South Sudan, has known no peace. Even after the signing of a 2018 peace deal between Kiir and former rebel leader and now Vice-President Riek Machar, the country has continued to experience widespread violence and ethnic tensions.

As late as last week, the BBC reported that heavily armed men loyal to a rebel general have been mobilising in the north, which has recently seen some of the country's worst ethnic violence. It said the fighters are allied to Gen Johnson Olony, a military commander who opposes the transitional government in South Sudan.

Nevertheless, Archbishop Welby was optimistic. "The fact that three religious leaders have come together for the first time ever, certainly since the Reformation, before which two of our Churches did not exist, is a sign of hope for peace and reconciliation around the world," he said, adding: "I don't normally wear it, but at the moment I'm wearing the ring that Pope Paul VI gave to Michael Ramsey in the 1960s as the first sign of the link between our churches. That ring, and the pastoral staff that the Pope gave me in 2016... speak powerfully of a change of heart."

"That brings me to South Sudan. We need a change of heart (in South Sudan)," he said. Whether the blood-thirsty fighters in the two war-scarred African countries will heed to the peace call by Pope Francis and his fellow church leaders is hard to say for now. However, a look at the recent history of both countries leaves even the most hopeless optimist disheartened.

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SCIENCE & TECH

Netflix ups crackdown on passwords



Netflix is introducing limits on password sharing in four more countries: Canada, New Zealand, Portugal and Spain.

Customers in those countries are being asked to pay an extra fee if they want friends and family who don't live with them to share their subscription.

The move follows a crackdown on password sharing in South America. The media giant estimates 100 million people around the world use shared accounts. The hit to revenues from the shared accounts was affecting Netflix's ability to invest in new programming content. It has said it is planning to extend the new approach to more countries in coming months.

"Over the last year, we've been exploring different approaches to address this issue in Latin America, and we're now ready to roll them out more broadly in the coming months, starting today in Canada, New Zealand, Portugal and Spain," it said. Up until now it has been easy for subscribers to share their logins and passwords with friends outside their homes.

Back in 2017, Netflix even appeared to be sanctioning the practice when it tweeted "Love is sharing a password". But growing competition in the streaming market, and customers cutting back on subscriptions due to the rising cost of living, have prompted Netflix to focus on shoring up its revenues.

The firm said that allowing accounts to be used by several people within households had "created confusion" about when and how people could share. It said members in Canada, New Zealand, Spain and Portugal would now be asked to set up a "primary location" for their account and manage who has access to it.

SPACEX PLANS TO FIRE UP ALL 33 STARSHIP ENGINES



SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket and Crew Dragon spacecraft rolled out to Launch Complex 39A at the NASA Kennedy Space Center.

• LONDON

SpaceX plans to fire up all 33 engines powering its massive Starship launch system ahead of its first orbital launch, a key milestone in the company's efforts to reach the moon and Mars, Gwynne Shotwell, the company's president and chief operating officer, said this week at an industry conference in Washington. That would pave the way for the rocket's orbital launch within "the next month or so", she said.

The announcement comes about two weeks after the company, formally known as Space Exploration Technologies, filled the rocket and booster with propellant in a "wet dress rehearsal".

These timelines are not assured. A year ago, Chief Executive Officer Elon Musk gathered members of the press in Boca Chica, Texas, to show off a Starship prototype on a launchpad. He said it would be

ready to launch in a "couple of months". Starship is SpaceX's next-generation launch vehicle, designed to carry cargo and eventually people to deep-space destinations. SpaceX also holds a contract with NASA to develop Starship as a lunar landing system that can take NASA astronauts to and from the surface of the moon.

The company plans for Starship to be a spacecraft that it can assemble quickly.

"Falcon was never built to be producible and launch quickly," Shotwell said, referring to the Falcon 9 workhorse rocket. "We have designed Starship to be producible and launch quickly. So if we can do 100 flights of Falcon this year, I'd love to be able to do 100 flights of Starship next year." Shotwell also discussed SpaceX's internet-from-space initiative, Starlink, which she said had a cash flow positive quarter last year.

"They're paying for their own launches and they will still make money," she said in response to

questions from reporters.

Last year, SpaceX and Musk provided Starlink terminals to the Ukrainian government after Russia's invasion of the country.

Shotwell said that Starlink ended up being used in unintended ways, which the company has since tried to stop.

"It was never intended to be weaponised," she said. Ukrainians "leveraged it in ways that were unintentional".

We thought "humanitarian, keep the banks going, hospitals, keep families connected", she said. "I think comms for the military is fine. We know the military is using them for comms and that's OK. But our intent was never to have them use it for offensive purposes."

Some Ukrainian military units had used Starlink to connect their combat drones, the *Times of London* reported last March.

SpaceX sent a letter to the Pentagon in September asking for the agency to pay for Ukraine's Starlink service, *CNN* first reported.

africa lens

■ IT'S MORE THAN A YEAR SINCE WAGNER GROUP BEGAN OPERATING IN THE COUNTRY

MERCENARIES VS JIHADISTS



It is now more than a year since Wagner Group fighters began operating in Mali, though the authorities have never formally confirmed this.

Russia promises continued military support for Mali, which has been battling an insurgency since 2012

● BAMAKO

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has promised continued military support for Mali, which has been battling a jihadist insurgency since 2012.

Last year, Mali turned its back on former colonial power France, favouring help from Russia instead.

This is the foreign minister's second visit to Africa in two weeks.

Russia aims to shore up allies as the Ukraine war continues, but its involvement in West Africa pre-dates that and has been growing over time.

Lavrov, who was on a two-day trip to Mali, outlined Moscow's ambition to provide military backing for governments across West Africa in the battle against Islamist militants.

Mali's military government has batted away criticism of this shift to Russia.

"We will no longer justify our choice of partner. Russia is here on demand by Mali and responds efficiently to our strategic needs," Mali's Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop said during a joint press briefing with his Russian counterpart.

It is now more than a year since Wagner Group fighters began operating in Mali, though the authorities have never formally confirmed this.

But evidence suggests that they have not been any more successful than other forces in dealing with the decade-long jihadist threat and insecurity may have worsened.

Civilian casualties as a result of violence more than doubled last year, according to data from the crisis mapping organisation Acled

Info.

Nevertheless, Mali's military junta has dismissed reports about the country's deteriorating security situation as "fake news".

It has instead lionised Moscow for empowering the Malian armed forces after despatching heavy military equipment to Bamako on several occasions since the army seized power in August 2020.

These include Sukhoi fighter jets, as well as surveillance and combat helicopters.

"The military success we achieved in the past two years outweighs anything that was done in past decades. Our weapons are the pride of the entire nation," Mali's interim President Col Assimi Goita said in a speech on army day last month. He said that people had been able to

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africa lens

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return to their homes but did not offer specific examples. Yet, the presence of Russian mercenaries abruptly halted a decade of efforts by France and its European allies to bolster Mali's attempts to counter the jihadists.

Wagner's deployment was in response to waning patience with French forces, which had initially made significant strides against militants when first deployed in 2013. The capacity of the nearly 18,000-strong UN peacekeeping mission (Minusma) to protect civilians threatens to be weakened with the impending withdrawal of nearly 3,000 troops from Germany, the UK, Ivory Coast and Benin.

Attacks by branches of the Islamic State group and al-Qaeda have over time spread into neighbouring Burkina Faso and Niger, while militant activity is gradually moving south towards the Gulf of Guinea.

Emboldened by their work in Mali as well as its success in influencing public opinion, Wagner is making overtures to Burkina Faso — which experienced two military coups in 2022 — and possibly Ivory Coast.

But concerns have been raised about the way Wagner Group fighters operate and the UN has demanded investigations into possible war crimes by Malian soldiers and the mercenaries, which Malian authorities consistently deny. Rights groups have documented reports of torture, summary executions and sexual assaults during joint counterinsurgency operations dubbed Keletigui that began in December 2021. Analysis of data from Aclad shows that civilians died in larger numbers than militants in such operations in 2022.

At least 700 people were killed in incidents involving the mercenaries, largely in the volatile central regions of Mali.

One of the highest death tolls came in March 2022, when at least 300 people were reportedly killed in week-long counterinsurgency operations in the central town of Moura. Survivors

How Russia's Wagner Group is supporting Mali

told Human Rights Watch that Malian soldiers and "white soldiers speaking in a strange language" summarily executed dozens of men.



French soldiers of Operation Barkhane, an anti-terrorist operation in the Sahel, patrol in an armoured vehicle in Gao, northern Mali, on May 30, 2015.

The army denied this and instead talked about how its forces had become stronger, thanks to Russian instructors and military equipment. The Wagner Group — which the US alleged were contracted at a cost of \$10m per month — has not publicly commented on its activities in Mali. Rather, propaganda associated with the mercenaries has inflated their military capabilities, particularly in Mali, and sought to discredit France and the West.

This has been widely spread on social media and the pro-Wagner messages gained some public appeal when they were shared by those Malian pressure groups that have held protests agitating for increased co-operation with Moscow. Wagner Group founder Yevgeny Prigozhin has cheered the propaganda campaigns as "the new era of decolonisation", exploiting long-standing distrust of former colonial power France. People and organisations trying to scrutinise Russia's influence and Wagner operations have come under attack, which has led some to fear for their safety.

Last March, Mali banned broadcasts by French public media outfits *RFI* and *France 24* over their reports on alleged atrocities by Wagner and Mali's army. The government accused them of "sowing hatred and ascribing an ethnic angle to the insecurity in Mali".

Prominent activist Aminata Dicko was forced into hiding last week after pro-junta activists accused her of being unpatriotic for outlining alleged atrocities by the army and Wagner mercenaries while addressing the UN Security Council.

At the weekend, the junta later expelled Minusma's human rights chief for purportedly collaborating with Ms Dicko. The authorities have trumpeted military gains, but overall deaths from violence have increased between 2021 — when there were 1,913 fatalities — and 2022, which had 4,803 fatalities.

Last month, Mali's Ministry of Health and Social Development said humanitarian needs had spiked by 17 per cent compared with 2022 because of mass displacements induced by militant violence.

In addition, mounting claims of civilian casualties by Wagner and the Mali army have given militant groups ammunition to stage retaliatory attacks and expand recruitment.

About a third of propaganda statements issued by the al-Qaeda affiliate JNIM in 2022 explicitly mentioned the Wagner Group as a target or used their presence to justify anti-army attacks. Its IS-linked rivals also said they had killed 15 mercenaries and downed a drone belonging to the Wagner Group. Despite these concerns, Russian, and Wagner, assistance to Mali looks set to continue. During his visit to Mali, Mr Lavrov described how "Russian aviation equipment" was used to "carry out successful operations against terrorists in recent times". But perhaps more significantly, he hinted that Russia could help others in the region dealing with a similar jihadist threat, saying that "this concerns Guinea, Burkina Faso and Chad and the Sahel region generally, and even the coastal states on the Gulf of Guinea".



Members of the military junta arrive with their escorts at the Malian Ministry of Defence in Bamako on August 19, 2020.

global lens

■ RESISTANT INFRASTRUCTURE IS PATCHY IN SOUTH TURKEY AND EVEN MORE SO IN SYRIA



Onlookers watch as rescue teams look for survivors under the rubble of a collapsed building after an earthquake in the regime-controlled northern Syrian city of Aleppo on February 6. A 7.8-magnitude earthquake hit Turkey and Syria early on February 6, killing hundreds of people as they slept, levelling buildings and sending tremors that were felt as far away as the island of Cyprus, Egypt and Iraq.

WHY WAS IT SO DEADLY?

Of the deadliest earthquakes in any given year, only two in the last 10 years have been of equivalent magnitude, and four in the previous decade

● ISTANBUL

More than 17,000 people are now known to have been killed and thousands injured by a huge earthquake that struck south-eastern Turkey, near the Syrian border, on Monday.

The earthquake, which hit near the town of Gaziantep, was closely followed by numerous aftershocks – including one quake that was almost as large as the first.

The death toll is expected to keep rising.

The power of the tremor

The first earthquake was big; it registered as 7.8, classified as “major” on the official magnitude scale. It broke along about 100km of fault line, causing serious damage to buildings near the fault.

Prof Joanna Faure Walker, head of the Institute for Risk and Disaster Reduction at University College London, said: “Of the deadliest earthquakes in any given year, only two in the last 10 years have been of equivalent magnitude, and four in the previous 10 years.” But it is not only the power of the tremor that causes devastation.

This incident occurred in the early hours of the morning, when people were inside and sleeping. The sturdiness of the buildings is also a factor.

Dr Carmen Solana, reader in volcanology and risk communication at the University of Portsmouth, said: “The resistant infrastructure is unfortunately patchy in South Turkey and [even more so] in Syria, so saving lives now mostly relies on response. After 48 hours, the number of survivors decreases enormously.” This was a region where there had not been a major earthquake for

more than 200 years or any warning signs, so the level of preparedness would be less than for a region that was more used to dealing with tremors.

What caused the earthquake?

The Earth’s crust is made up of separate bits, called plates, that nestle alongside each other. These plates often try to move but are prevented by the friction of rubbing up against an adjoining one. But sometimes the pressure builds until one plate sud-

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global lens

‘You need hands on site, and you need gloves’

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denly jerks across, causing the surface to move. In this case it was the Arabian plate moving northwards and grinding against the Anatolian plate. Friction from the plates has been responsible for very damaging earthquakes in the past. On August 13, 1822, it caused an earthquake registering 7.4 in magnitude, significantly less than the 7.8 magnitude recorded. Even so, the 19th Century earthquake resulted in immense damage to towns in the area, with 7,000 deaths recorded in the city of Aleppo alone.

Damaging aftershocks continued for nearly a year. There have already been several aftershocks following the current earthquake and scientists are expecting it to follow the same trend as the previous big one in the region.

How are earthquakes measured?

They are measured on a scale called the Moment Magnitude Scale (Mw). This has replaced the better known Richter scale, now considered outdated and less accurate.

The number attributed to an earthquake represents a combination of the distance the fault line has moved and the force that moved it. A tremor of 2.5 or less usually cannot be felt, but can be detected by instruments.

Quakes of up to five are felt and cause minor damage. The Turkish earthquake at 7.8 is classified as major and usually causes serious damage, as it has in this instance. Anything above 8 causes catastrophic damage and can totally destroy communities at its centre.

How does this compare with others?

On December 26, 2004, one of the largest earthquakes ever recorded struck off the coast of Indonesia, triggering a tsunami that swept away entire communities around the Indian Ocean. The 9.1 magnitude quake killed about 228,000 people. Another earthquake – off the coast of Japan in 2011 – registered as magnitude 9 and caused widespread damage on the land, and caused a tsunami.

It led to a major accident at the Fukushima nuclear plant along the coast. The largest ever earthquake registered 9.5, and was recorded in Chile in 1960.

The search and rescue operation

When rescuers first arrive at the scene of an earthquake, they assess which collapsed buildings are most likely to contain trapped people. They do this by looking for “voids” – spaces under large concrete beams or stairwells where survivors can be found. The possibility a building could collapse further also needs to be taken into consideration, as do other dangers such as gas leaks, flooding and hazardous items, like asbestos in roofs.

While rescuers attempt to reach survivors, support workers watch for building movements and listen out for strange sounds. Build-



A man sits in the rubble of collapsed buildings in Kahramanmaraş on February 9, three days after a 7.8-magnitude earthquake struck south-east Turkey. PHOTO | AFP

ings that have completely collapsed are usually the last to be searched, because the likelihood of finding survivors is very slim. The work of rescue teams is co-ordinated by an agency, usually the United Nations (UN) and the host country. Rescuers are specially trained and work in pairs or bigger teams, while local people are often involved as well.

What rescue equipment is needed?

To shift rubble, rescue teams use heavy machinery – including diggers and hydraulic jacks. Large concrete slabs on the outside of buildings can be pulled aside by diggers, enabling rescuers to get a view of any people trapped inside. Video equipment on the end of flexible poles can be passed through gaps to help locate survivors. Specialist sound equipment can detect the faintest of noises to within a few metres. Silence on the site is needed while a member of the rescue team bangs three times and hopes to hear a response. Carbon dioxide detectors can be used to find survivors who are unconscious. They work best in confined spaces where they detect the greater CO₂ concentration in the air exhaled by those still breathing.

Thermal imaging equipment can be used to locate people not directly in a rescuer's line of sight, because their body heat can warm the

rubble around them.

What do rescue dogs do?

Using their sense of smell, specially-trained dogs can pick up on signs of life where human rescuers cannot. Dogs are also able to cover large areas quickly, speeding up the search and rescue process.

Do people need to use their bare hands?

Once the large slabs and structures are removed, rescue teams use their hands and small tools like hammers, pickaxes and shovels, as well as chainsaws, disc-cutters and rebar cutters – which can be used to tackle the metal bars in reinforced concrete.

They have protective equipment, including helmets and gloves to protect their hands as they remove sharp pieces of rubble. But in some areas of Turkey, where rescue efforts have been slow, locals have been digging through frozen wet rubble with bare hands.

Bedia Gucum, a restaurant owner in Adana in southern Turkey, said: “We need strong work gloves to move that rubble by hand. Because once they hear somebody alive in there, all heavy machinery stops and they have to dig in with their hands, and that just is beyond human capabilities. “You need hands on site, and you need gloves for them.” – BBC

global lens

■ EXPERTS SAY SHE'S BEEN DESIGNATED AS THE DE FACTO SUCCESSOR

NORTH KOREA'S SPECIAL ONE

Kim's second child inspected a guard of honour in the most recent of a slew of high-profile appearances that have sparked fervent speculation she has been anointed his heir



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un attends a banquet with his daughter to mark the 75th anniversary of the Korean People's Army on February 7. PHOTO | AFP

● SEOUL

It wasn't the nuclear missiles, ranks of goose-stepping soldiers or medal-bedecked generals that captivated most attention at North Korea's recent military parade. It was a 10-year-old girl.

Alongside the country's leader Kim Jong Un, the girl – likely Kim's second child Ju Ae – inspected a guard of honour in the most recent of a slew of high-profile appearances that have sparked fervent speculation she has been anointed his heir. For years, North Korean state media never mentioned Kim's children, although Seoul's spy agency has said he has three with his wife. They are believed to be aged around 13, 10 and six.

The only previous confirmation of their existence had come from former NBA star Dennis Rodman, who claimed he met a baby daughter of Kim's called Ju Ae during a 2013 visit to North Korea. But three months ago, at the launch of his most powerful intercontinental ballistic missile, Kim turned up with his "beloved" daughter in tow. Although North Korea has never officially identified her by name, Seoul's spy agency and analysts believe the girl is Ju Ae, Kim's second child.

It certainly looks that way, experts say.

State media has called her Kim's "beloved" and "respected" daughter, and she has been shown walking hand-in-hand with her father – as her mother trailed behind them. This indicates North Korea has started building a "personality cult" around Ju Ae, said Cheong Seong-chang, a

researcher at South Korea's Sejong Institute.

It "signals that she has been designated as the de facto successor even though she doesn't hold the official 'successor' status yet", he said.

In state media images, Ju Ae has been placed in the middle, next to her father and surrounded by the country's top brass.

"It suggests that Kim Ju Ae will become the supreme commander of the military in the future," Cheong added. When it comes to women assuming political leadership roles, North Korea's glass ceiling has been bulletproof, says Bronwen Dalton, head of the department of management at the University of Technology Sydney's business school.

But change is afoot, she said, and North Korea's leadership is trying to "maintain its legitimacy by creating a new version of womanhood" that reflects social changes in the country over recent decades. Younger generations have "grown up buying and selling in markets, using mobile phones and accessing foreign media content", which has forced North Korea to recalibrate its version of an ideal woman.

North Korea's current leadership, although predominantly male, does have some high-profile women, including foreign minister Choe Son-hui and Kim's younger sister, Kim Yo Jong, as a regime spokeswoman.

Kim Jong Un is "presiding over a propaganda apparatus forging a new narrative on the place of women", Dalton told AFP. But crucially, the most important role of all North Korean women remains "devotion to their 'father' Kim Jong Un", which Ju Ae embodies perfectly, she added.

Not necessarily, experts say.

"Perhaps more than any other country, relying on family ties and being in the proximity of power is precarious", Dalton said, pointing to a "revolving door" of family members who have been exiled from North Korea or killed.

"Women are not immune," she added.

A female leader remains "impossible" in North Korea for now, An Chan-il, a defector turned researcher who runs the World Institute for North Korea Studies, told AFP.

"No one would welcome the idea if Kim Jong Un disappeared right away and Ju Ae had to succeed him," he said. But her gradual introduction to the public over the next decade or two, coupled with "ideological education" should help, he said. "The North Koreans seldom question who becomes the ruler."

While North Korea is not a monarchy, Kim Jong Un is the third generation of his family to rule the country, after his father and grandfather, founding leader Kim Il Sung.

For the Kims, one of the most important elements of regime preservation has been their nuclear and ballistic missile programmes.

"Celebrations of North Korea's nuclear-capable missile build-up may seem like strange occasions to project a child-friendly image," but they are effective domestic propaganda, Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul, told AFP. "Kim is portraying Pyongyang's nuclear arsenal as a multigenerational asset to national security while proclaiming the military's complete loyalty to his political dynasty."

– AFP

OBIT

■ HIS POLITICAL CAREER ULTIMATELY ENDED IN DISGRACE AND ARREST

● ISLAMABAD

The political career of Pervez Musharraf, Pakistan's most recent military ruler who has died aged 79, was defined by its extremes. After seizing power in a 1999 coup, Musharraf went on to survive numerous assassination attempts, finding himself on the front line of the struggle between militant Islam and the West. Notably, he formed an alliance with the United States, claiming it helped him modernise Pakistan and improve the economy.

But by 2008, the career soldier had suffered defeat at the polls and was forced from office. His political career ultimately ended in disgrace and arrest: he was sentenced to death in absentia for treason in 2019.

He had been allowed to leave Pakistan in 2016 to receive medical treatment, meaning the sentence was unlikely ever to be carried out. But it was a humiliating first for the military, which has ruled the country for long spells.

In June 2022, following premature reports Musharraf had died in Dubai, his family announced there was little chance he would recover from multiple organ failure linked to a rare disease from which he suffered, amyloidosis. Pervez Musharraf was born in Delhi on 11 August 1943, but his family joined millions of other Muslims in the newly created Pakistan, following the partition of India in 1947 after British rule ended. He attended school in Karachi and Lahore before entering the Pakistan Military Academy in 1961.

He served in the Indo-Pakistani war of 1965 and in the second conflict between the countries five years later, by which time he was a company commander.

Musharraf rose to the top job in 1998, when Pakistan's army chief, Gen Jehangir Karamat, resigned two days after calling for the army to be given a key role in the country's decision-making process. Many observers took the resignation as a sign that Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's political power had become strong enough to secure the long-term future of civilian administrations.

In October 1999, Prime Minister Sharif attempted to dismiss Musharraf from his position, but

EXIT THE GENERAL

After seizing power in a 1999 coup, Musharraf went on to survive numerous assassination attempts



Former Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf

the move was opposed by senior army officers. Musharraf, who was out of the country at the time, quickly returned to Pakistan and seized power in a bloodless coup, taking the title of chief executive.

Pakistan's then President Rafiq Tarar remained in office until June 2001, when Musharraf formally appointed himself as his replacement. Any thoughts his takeover might herald a stabilisation in ties with neighbouring India, or even a new start, were dashed early in his rule.

There was optimism when he visited India for a landmark summit in July 2001, holding talks with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and also fitting in a photo opportunity with a visit to the Musharraf family's ancestral home in Delhi.

But hope waned and the talks ended without agreement; the long-running dispute over Kashmir was seen as the main reason for the deadlock. India regarded Musharraf as the architect of the 1999 conflict in Kargil, and sus-

pected Pakistan's army of involvement in the hijack of an Indian Airlines plane to Afghanistan the same year. As Pakistan's leader, Musharraf had to deal with the fallout for his own country from the September 11, 2001 attacks by Islamist militants on targets in the United States.

The blunt message from the administration of then US President George Bush was: "You are either with us or against us." So Musharraf made a controversial U-turn on Pakistani policy: supporting the American-led military campaign to oust the Taliban regime in neighbouring Afghanistan, who had harboured Muslim radicals blamed for the attacks.

In January 2002, he issued a strong condemnation of extremism, pledging to fight Islamist terrorism in Pakistan. He also banned all foreign funding of mosques and Islamic education centres and limited the numbers of foreign students coming to Pakistan for Islamic studies.

The new president also found himself under increasing pressure to hold democratic elections and restore civilian rule. In October 2002, a pro-Musharraf coalition won the majority of parliamentary seats, although the opposition effectively blocked any proceedings in the National Assembly for more than 12 months.

Two years later, he struck a deal with a coalition of Islamic parties that saw a measure passed which legitimised his 1999 coup and allowed him to remain in the army and retain the title of president.

Turning around the decline in economic growth was part of President Musharraf's promise on assuming power and his reforms were generally praised by international institutions.

Musharraf had to cope with a humanitarian tragedy in October 2005, when a massive earthquake hit Pakistan-administered Kashmir, killing more than 73,000 people and making more than three million homeless. The pressure on his rule increased during 2007 following his decision to suspend the Chief Justice, Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, accusing him of corruption. A huge protest by the country's lawyers saw the Supreme Court eventually reinstate the chief justice and dismiss all allegations of misconduct.

—BBC

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