

# THE Weekly Review

For the Thinking Person

ISSUE NO. 27 | March 5, 2023 FREE WITH 'SUNDAY NATION'

## THE MAKING OF A MEGA OIL SCANDAL



**A government-to-government arrangement that seeks to purchase oil from friendly Gulf states at a cheap price has irked local firms in the multibillion-shilling industry over the manner in which it is being executed. A politically-connected oil imports dealer is behind the lucrative tender that could lock out many players from the game**

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## letter from the editor

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# New oil purchasing plan must work for us, not against us

**A**t a time when the economy is getting tighter and tighter, when the prices of petroleum products have risen to an unbearable high, and the costly transport of food and goods from farms and factories to the market is making the price of commodities unaffordable for most Kenyans, it's the duty of the national government to rectify the situation.

There are no more oil subsidies, and the Executive is pressed to find a solution. That may be why the Ruto administration is working on a plan to purchase oil from friendly Gulf states at a cheap price.

Participation will be restricted to state-owned national oil corporations of the Gulf states, such as Saudi Arabia's Aramco, Emirates' National Corporation, and Abu Dhabi's National Oil Corporation.

The clear hint from this move is that we are taking a different direction from what we have been doing before. Kenya is moving away from the "Open Tender System (OTS)" operated by the Ministry of Energy since 2015, which has largely contributed to the dollar liquidity crisis. In the OTS, the tender is floated monthly, where licensed oil marketing companies participate.

The winner of the tender procures oil from refineries in the Gulf on behalf of all players and invoices local OMCs depending on market share – mainly the number of marketing outlets.

The arrangement is that once you get your allocation, you must go to the local market, look for dollars and settle within a week.

Under the current OTS system, settlement must happen in a



Allan Buluku

**Something smells fishy in the new system... We applaud all government efforts to better this stinging economic situation, but we must also not let it run amok and create a situation where we shall all be left weeping, wailing and gnashing our teeth in desperation. If this new system shall not reduce the cost of petroleum products, then it should be scrutinised and shelved if even the slightest whiff of a skunk tickles our collective nasal glands.**

matter of days once oil is delivered. The new plan seeks to cure this problem, because the government will purchase oil on a long-term contract.

The tender has, however, come under criticism from key players, who claim that it is a way to allow well-connected traders to mint billions of shillings from the lucrative trade.

A scrutiny of details of the tender document shows that, apart from the contract, there is little in the new arrangement to show that it is, indeed, "a government-to-government" arrangement, where Kenya has employed diplomacy to purchase oil from friendly Gulf states at a cheap price.

The tender document shows that the price basis shall be the reference price known as 'Platt'. The bidding price shall be "Platt Asia, Pacific Raba Gulf Markets plus freight and premium". There is no assurance that oil imported under the so-called "government-to-government" arrangement will be cheaper.

The short time given for bidders is also the subject of debate in the petroleum sector, as it was advertised on a Wednesday and closed on a Friday. Why is the government hiring privileged foreign firms for a task that can be handled by a local oil marketing company?

Knowing how this country works, something smells fishy. We applaud all government efforts to better the current stinging economic situation, but we must also not let it run amok and create a situation where we shall all be left weeping, wailing and gnashing our teeth in desperation. If this new system shall not reduce the cost of petroleum products in the country, then it should be scrutinised and shelved if the slightest whiff of a skunk tickles our collective nasal glands.

We urge caution in this grand plan.

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## the telescope

### ■ Koech's fate in the hands of Parliament

## CBK nominee's vetting report ready

Central Bank of Kenya Deputy Governor nominee Dr Susan Koech will this week know her fate as Parliament will meet to consider a report of her vetting.

The former principal secretary appeared before a joint-committee of the National Assembly's departmental committee on Finance and Economic Planning, and the Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Budget, for approval and hearings for appointment to the office.

The joint-committee is ex-

pected to table their reports – calling for the approval or rejection of the two – in both Houses of Parliament for consideration.

If approved, Dr Koech's name will be submitted to President William Ruto for appointment. Should she be successful, the ex-PS will replace Ms Sheila M'Mbijwi, whose term is set to end in June this year after eight years as deputy governor.

She was among 10 individuals who were shortlisted for the position.



Central Bank of Kenya Deputy Governor nominee Dr Susan Koech during her vetting at County Hall, Nairobi, on February 28. LUCY WANJIRU | NATION

### ■ ODM leader's 14-day ultimatum expires

## Are you ready for 'maandamano'?



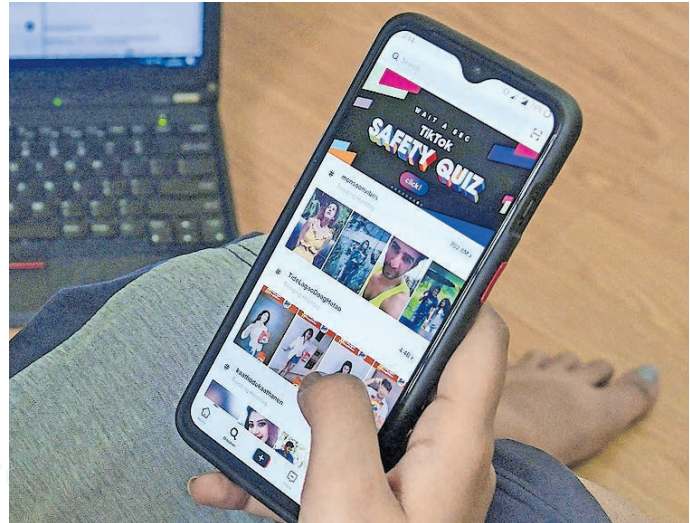
Azimio la Umoja leader Raila Odinga is this week set to lead his supporters in mass action to protest the high cost of living in the country.

The ODM supremo had on February 22 issued a 14-day ul-

timatum to lead countrywide mass action should the Kenya Kwanza government fail to meet their demands, including lowering the cost of living.

He criticised President William Ruto's government for withdrawing subsidies on food and education in the middle of drought and famine. He said the subsidies must be restored, and also called for the reduction of prices of basic commodities within 14 days.

### ■ Feds have 30 days to purge Chinese-owned app



A mobile user browses through the Chinese owned video-sharing 'TikTok' app on a smartphone.

## US agencies set to enforce TikTok ban

The White House has given federal agencies 30 days to purge Chinese-owned video-snippet sharing app TikTok from all government-issued devices, setting a deadline to comply with a ban ordered by the US Congress.

Office of Management and Budget director Shalanda Young, in a memorandum, called on government agencies within 30 days to "remove and disallow installations" of the application on agency-owned or operated IT devices, and to "prohibit internet traffic" from such devices to the app. The ban does not apply to businesses in the United States not associated with the federal govern-

ment, or to the millions of private citizens who use the hugely popular app. However, a recently introduced bill in Congress would "effectively ban TikTok" in this country, according to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).

"Congress must not censor entire platforms and strip Americans of their constitutional right to freedom of speech and expression," ACLU senior policy counsel Jenna Leventoff said in a release. "We have a right to use TikTok and other platforms to exchange our thoughts, ideas, and opinions with people around the country and around the world."

### ■ First Black woman and openly gay city boss

## Chicago mayor loses re-election bid



Lori Lightfoot, Chicago's first Black woman and openly gay mayor, last week became the first leader of the huge Midwestern city in 40 years not to win re-election.

Lightfoot, criticised by rivals for the rising crime rates in the city,

conceded the surprise defeat, telling supporters she was "rooting and praying for our next mayor to deliver for the people of the city for years to come".

Paul Vallas, a former chief executive of Chicago public schools, will now face Brandon Johnson, a Cook County commissioner and former teacher, in a second round on April 4, according to the *Chicago Tribune*.

Vallas is backed by the local police union, while Johnson has the support of the Chicago teachers' union.



# kenya lens

■ WELL-CONNECTED DEALERS TO MINT BILLIONS OF SHILLING FROM THE LUCRATIVE TRADE

# THE OILLIONAIRES OF KENYA



Kenya floated a government-to-government tender that is deliberately structured and closed to restrict participation to state-owned national oil corporations of the Gulf States, such as Saudi Aramco, Emirates National Corporation, and Abu Dhabi National Oil Corporation.



Under the arrangement, the selected Gulf company will 'nominate' one local oil marketing company to supply the whole market, thus excluding other players.



The current system exerts inordinate pressure for dollars because oil companies are constantly in the market to buy them to settle with suppliers and financiers. Oil marketing companies must troop to the headquarters of the Ministry of Energy and Petroleum Development every other month to participate in this tender.



Instead of buying from spot contracts, Kenya will now be importing oil through long-term contracts. The tender floated on Wednesday is a nine-month contract and payment will be made within six months.

All the oil coming into Kenya is purchased from the spot market and coming in monthly in cargo. And, oil imports amount to one third of the economy's total imports, thus constituting 30 per cent of the country's dollar needs.

One issue proving to be controversial is the liberal range of privileges and concession which the government is offering to the sole local oil marketing company, who will be nominated to import the cargo. "On or before the commencement date, the nominated OMC shall obtain and maintain a Letter of Credit confirmed by a financially sound and reputable investment grade international bank acceptable to him."

**A new purchase plan from the international market will effectively lock out many players from the game, and there is no assurance that oil imported into the country under a 'government-to-government' scheme will be cheaper**

● BY JAINDI KISERO

The decision by the Ruto administration to change the system through which the country purchases oil dollar has been greeted with cynicism by the sector that suspects that it is a scheme to allow well-connected dealers to mint billions of shilling from the lucrative trade.

As we went to press, a group of 10 local oil marketers and traders were preparing to head to court to challenge the decision.

On Wednesday, the government, for the first

time since 2015, floated what it has christened "a government-to-government arrangement tender" that is deliberately structured and closed to restrict participation to state-owned national oil corporations of the Gulf States, such as Saudi Aramco, Emirates National Corporation and Abu Dhabi National Oil Corporation.

What has changed? Here is a bit of background. Since 2015, Kenya has been buying petroleum under what is known as the "Open Tender System (OTS)" that is co-ordinated by the Ministry of Energy. The tender is floated

every month with 112 licensed oil marketing companies participating.

Under the arrangement, the winner of the tender procures oil from refineries in the Gulf on behalf of all players and invoices local OMCs depending on market share – mainly the number of marketing outlets.

The arrangement is that once you get your allocation, you must go to the local market, look for dollars and settle within a week.

Oil marketing companies must troop to the headquarters of the Ministry of Energy and

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## kenya lens

**Questions over multibillion-shilling oil import plan**

Energy and Petroleum  
Regulatory Authority  
(Epra) Director-General  
Daniel Kiptoo

Continued from Page 5

Petroleum Development every other month to participate in this tender. Evidently, the system puts inordinate pressure on the market for dollars in the country because oil companies are constantly in the market to buy the currency to settle with suppliers and financiers.

The situation is compounded by the fact that all the oil coming into Kenya is purchased from the spot market and coming in monthly in cargo. And, oil imports amount to one-third of the economy's total imports, thus constituting 30 per cent of the country's dollar needs.

"When products arrive in Mombasa (port), we pay about \$500 million within three days. That causes significant pressure," Energy and Petroleum Cabinet Secretary Davis Chirchir said recently. The government will provide a letter to importers and their suppliers abroad, confirming that payments will be made when they are due, Chirchir said, adding that Kenya is seeking to pay in between six months and up to a year. A trading source familiar with the matter told the *Reuters* news agency on condition of anonymity it has already asked fuel suppliers for 180 days' credit, saying it needs to keep dollars to meet sovereign debt repayment obligations.

So, what has changed? How has the government-to-government tender floated on Wednesday changed the game? The idea behind the system being introduced is that, instead of buying from spot contracts, we will now be importing oil through long-term contracts. The tender floated on Wednesday is a nine-month contract and payment will be made within six months.

In this way, the country will manage the demand of dollars and therefore ease the foreign currency crunch Kenya has been grappling with for several months. Indeed, Kenya is currently in the middle of a major dollar liquidity crisis. Official reserves have fallen to precariously low levels and commercial banks have started limiting the dollars which a customer can withdraw. These restrictions by commercial banks have in turn fuelled worries and consequently precipitated a free-fall of the shilling.

This is how the CEO of the Energy and Petroleum Regulatory (Epra), Daniel Kiptoo, justified the new system when *The Weekly Review* caught up with him this past Wednesday: "We are using the petroleum sector to resolve a macro-economic problem. We can't keep procrastinating because the shilling is continuing to slide." He added: "Monetary policy alone will not give us the stability of the shilling that we need."

Kiptoo explained that "under the current OTS system, settlement must happen in a matter of days once oil is delivered. The dollar needs of the petroleum sector is the biggest



# kenya lens



Motorists wait for fuel at a Nyeri petrol station on April 11, 2022. JOSEPH KANYII NATION

factor on the demand side”.

*The Weekly Review:* Have we abandoned the OTS system? Aren't we just kicking the can down the road since the dollar situation will return after six months? Kiptoo: “We are just mothballing the OTS system until the problem of dollar shortages eases. We are buying time for the country’s official dollar reserves to improve.”

Clearly, Kiptoo’s arguments made perfect economic sense. But why are oil marketing companies murmuring and do the critics have a point? The point by the critics is that in the name of the noble objective of stabilising the exchange rate, the government has come up with an opaque arrangement likely to be exploited by greedy elites. As the saying goes, the devil is in the detail.

A proper scrutiny of details of the tender document shows clearly that, apart from the extension of the contract by six months, there is little in the new arrangement to show that it is, indeed, “a government-to-government” arrangement, where Kenya has employed diplomacy in order to purchase oil from friendly Gulf states at a cheap price.

The tender document clearly shows under the sub-title ‘Bidding prices’ that the price basis shall be the reference price, known as Platt. Specifically, the tender documents say that the bidding price shall be “Platt Asia, Pacific Raba Gulf Markets PLUS freight and premium”. The implication of this is that there is no assurance that oil imported into the country under the so called ‘government-to-government’ arrangement will be cheaper.

“Where is the value we are getting from this new deal?” asked a local dealer. He added: “Since every big OMC in this country is capable of doing what these Gulf corporations are being offered, why are we being left out?”

But perhaps the most controversial aspect of the conditions stipulated in the bid documents is the fact that the new arrangement will effectively lock out many players from the game. Under this arrangement, the selected Gulf company will ‘nominate’ one local oil marketing company to supply the whole mar-

ket, thus excluding other players. “If you are using the Platt price as the reference and only competing on freight, why are we giving a foreign company the monopoly to supply us with oil for a whole nine months?”

What is clear is that there will be billions of shillings to make from this arrangement. Contrary to popular belief, money from oil is not made at the pump but from negotiations and relationships with banks and refineries in the Gulf. This week, a prominent trader and regular winner of the OTS contract displayed to *The Weekly Review* documents and correspondence with a refinery from the Gulf showing he had prices that were way below.

Another issue proving to be controversial are the liberal range of privileges and concession which the government is offering to the sole local oil marketing company, who will be nominated to import the cargo.

The details are contained in a letter of comfort by the National Treasury that has been included in the bid documents. It says: “On or before the commencement date, the nominated OMC shall obtain and maintain a Letter of Credit confirmed by a financially sound and reputable investment grade international bank acceptable to him.”

A source from the petroleum sector wondered: “Why are they showering these fellows

**A proper scrutiny of details of the tender document shows clearly that apart from the extension of the contract by six months, there is little in the new arrangement to show that it is indeed, “a government-to-government” arrangement, where Kenya has employed diplomacy in order to purchase oil from friendly Gulf states at a cheap price. The tender document clearly shows under the sub-title ‘bidding prices’ that the price basis shall be the reference price known as Platt. Specifically, the tender documents say that the bidding price shall be “Platt Asia, Pacific Raba Gulf Markets PLUS freight and premium”.**

with privileges for a task that can be handled by a local oil marketing company or trader?”

The very short time given for bidders is also a subject of debate in the petroleum sector. The tender was advertised on Wednesday and closed on Friday. Already, rumours and unsubstantiated claims abound about a politically-connected oil imports dealer billed to win the lucrative multi-billion-shilling tender.

**Under the current OTS system, settlement must happen in a matter of days once oil is delivered. The dollar needs of the petroleum sector is the biggest factor on the demand side. We are just mothballing the OTS system until the problem of dollar shortages eases. We are buying time for the country’s official dollar reserves to improve.**

Daniel Kiptoo, Epra boss





## kenya lens

■ HE CONDEMNS WHAT HE TERMS AS HARASSMENT, INTIMIDATION BY THE RUTO ADMINISTRATION

# MATIANG'I: I DID NOT FLEE THE COUNTRY

**Former Interior minister decries what he claims are attempts to depict him as a criminal and fugitive, insisting that he has done nothing wrong**

● BY  
MACHARIA  
GAI THO

**F**ormer Interior Cabinet Secretary Fred Matiang'i is denying that he fled the country, saying he left on a normal passenger flight and will be back in a week or so after he concludes a private mission in the Britain.

Speaking exclusively to *The Weekly Review* on phone last Wednesday, Matiang'i decried what he claimed were attempts to depict him as a criminal and fugitive, insisting that he had done nothing wrong and had no reason to flee.

He, however, condemned what he termed as harassment and intimidation by President William Ruto's government, which he said was unprecedented in the history of political transition in Kenya.

Speculation that the former CS, who wielded unparalleled power in the previous administration of Pres-

ident Uhuru Kenyatta, had fled into exile soared early last week in the wake of leaked documents indicating that the anti-graft agency was investigating his wealth, and that the police were looking into how he left the country.

On February 28, a letter dated the previous day emerged in which the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission boss Twalib Mbarak was seeking information on Matiang'i's wealth from the Head of Public Service, Felix Koskei.

It read: "The Commission is carrying out investigations involving Dr Matiang'i", and asked to be provided with copies of his Income, Assets and Liabilities declaration forms for the years 2012 to 2022.

On the same day, another letter made its way into the public domain, in which the Department of Immigration was responding to a February 27 query from the Directorate of Criminal Investigations on Matiang'i's departure from Kenya.

A Mr Emmanuel Simiyu, on behalf of the Director-General, wrote that Matiang'i flew out of Kenya on February 19 through Jomo Kenyatta International Airport on KLM flight number KL 566. There was no indication that he had left secretly or through unauthorised means.

The letter, addressed to a Mr Paul Wachira, also enclosed a chart showing the former Cabinet Secretary's recent travel history, but that was not included in the leaked letter. Neither was the letter from DCI generating the request on Matiang'i made public.

Distribution of such letters, especially on the same day they are written, is highly unusual, knowing the way government treats sensitive enquiries. It is therefore most likely that the letters were deliberately leaked by either the authors or recipients in government. Almost as soon as they became public, a social media campaign started depicting Matiang'i as a fugitive who had fled ahead of investigations into possible criminal conduct.

On Twitter, Nandi Senator Kiprotich arap Cherargei posted: "There should be immediate investigations to any officers who cleared CS Matiang'i to travel yet he is under investigation by various agencies. Reshuffling/administrative action should be taken & immediate REPATRIATION of CS Matiang'i back to Kenya to face the law/music!"

At that time, however, there was no indication that Matiang'i was under any investigations that would have prevented him from travelling. He had been required by the DCI to record





## kenya lens

a statement on an alleged February 8 police siege on his house, a drama where he could probably be caught out for spreading false information.

An online news platform, *sauce.co.ke*, came out with claims that Matiang'i had sneaked out of the country through JKIA on February 19 ahead of his date with police, intending to seek asylum in a western country.

Former exile Miguna Miguna, who has always had a bone to pick with Matiang'i over his forceful deportation in 2018, came out with even more sensational allegations, claiming that the former CS "fled into exile aboard a CARGO KLM plane... in the middle of the night wrapped as Fresh Cut Flowers from Kenya for export. Let me take this in SLOWLY!"

However, the letter from the Immigration Department indicates that he left on a regular passenger flight.

Speaking to the WR, Matiang'i insisted there was nothing secret about his departure as he flew out through Kenya's main international gateway, handed over his passport for stamping and chatted amicably with Immigration Officers and airport security staff as he made his way out.

Matiang'i insisted that inquiries launched on his wealth and mode of departure while he was already out of the country were just part of a government smear campaign.

He did not dwell on investigations into apparently false reports of a police raid on his house, promising to address all issues comprehensively on his return, but insisted that at the time of his departure there was no summons for him to report to DCI headquarters or to write a statement.

It was only after he was out of the country, he said, that he was informed that a dozen officers led by the officer in charge of Lang'ata police division had visited his house enquiring as to his whereabouts, but left on being informed that he was away.

But a few days earlier, on February 15, a large squad of police officer from the DCI had, indeed, raided Matiang'i's residence to

**Speculation that the former CS, who wielded unparalleled power in the previous administration of President Uhuru Kenyatta, had fled into exile soared early last week in the wake of leaked documents indicating that the anti-graft agency was investigating his wealth, and that the police were looking into how he left the country. On February 28 last week, a letter dated the previous day emerged in which the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission boss, Twalib Mbarak, was seeking information on Matiang'i's wealth from the Head of Public Service Felix Koskei. It read: "The Commission is carrying out investigations involving Dr Matiang'i" and asked to be provided with copies of his Income, Assets and Liabilities declaration**



seize CCTV footage as part of investigations into the alleged raid a week earlier. Director of Criminal Investigations Mohammed Amin told the press that he had secured a warrant from the courts to enter and search the house after Matiang'i ignored a request to provide camera footage and other evidence of the alleged raid.

The outcome of the police search has not been made public, but it was followed by an order for the former CS to present himself to DCI headquarters. In

contention now is whether Matiang'i had received the order before he left the country.

Meanwhile, an issue that will crop up is whether the fresh investigation is part of a government offensive on political foes and powerful figures under the previous government.

At the DCI, Mohammed seems to have enthusiastically adopted the methods of his predecessor, George Kinoti, who openly pursued in service of the Uhuru Kenyatta regime allies of then Deputy President Ruto and other presumed foes. Now the boot is on the other foot and the DCI seems to be waging war against Uhuru allies and presumed Ruto foes.

Director of Public Prosecutions Noordin Haji has also raised eyebrows with rapid withdrawal of corruption and other criminal cases he had filed against Ruto allies. He has somehow discovered with change of regime that there was no evidence to justify prosecution in the first place.

However, Twalib Mbarak at the EACC vehemently denies pursuing any political agenda on behalf of the Ruto administration. Contacted by WR last week, he conceded writing the letter requesting information on Matiang'i's assets, but explained that such requests are routine on any senior figure joining or leaving public service.

He insisted that such letters are completely normal covering a wide variety of officers, and in this case all the senior figures in cabinet, public service and state corporations who have left office with the transition from President Kenyatta to President Ruto. The difference this time, he lamented, was that a routine request had been leaked in a manner that made it open to politicisation.

He denied ever acting under orders from government or political players, pointing out that not a single one of the investigations and prosecution launched from EACC have had to be abandoned in a manner that might raise suspicion.

Matiang'i, on his part, pleads that there is nothing he ever did as a Cabinet Secretary that would a warrant what he terms

as harassment by the new government.

Other than the probe on his claims of a police siege on his house, Matiang'i says he has never been notified of investigations into corruption or other crimes. Indeed, in the wake of the official denials of the alleged police raid, Matiang'i's successor at the Ministry of Interior, Kithure Kindiki, Inspector-General of Police Japheth Koome and DCI Mohammed Amin all said that the former CS was not under investigation or due for arrest.

Matiang'i reads malice in the entire drama, but wonders why he is being singled out if the target is the power structure of the Uhuru Kenyatta government.

He challenges the administration to come clean on its intentions, and if necessary establish a Commission of Inquiry into the former government instead of pursuing what might look like a witch hunt. That may well come to pass if the government makes good on its campaign pledge to probe 'State Capture' under the Jubilee regime. However, President Ruto and DP Rigathi Gachagua have been giving mixed signals on the issue.

Public rhetoric has been heavy on a formal State Capture inquiry and dismantling of cartels, which would obviously target the former president and the extensive Kenyatta family business empire that seems to have profited handsomely during his tenure. But Ruto and Gachagua have downplayed a formal commission of inquiry, saying that they have other priorities around rebuilding the economy.

The Kenya Kwanza brigade, however, still seems fixated on putting the Kenyattas in their place, alongside opposition chief Raila Odinga, powerful figures in the former government such as Matiang'i and his PS, Karanja Kibicho.

Also on the radar are scores of other figures who benefitted from government procurement, tax breaks and the general gamut of crony capitalism in a regime where there was a very thin line between public assets and private interests.

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## kenya lens

■ THE HEAD OF STATE IS ALREADY GETTING HIS DUCKS IN A ROW

**The President's 2027 campaign has begun and there is no better starting point than the backyard of two of his principals, Mudavadi and Wetang'ula, with the appointment of former Kakamega Senator Malala as new UDA secretary-general**

• BY OSCAR OBONYO

Like the last time, President William Ruto is off the blocks in the race for presidency in 2027 as his main rivals — who coalesce around opposition chiefs Raila Odinga, Kalonzo Musyoka and Martha Karua — appear stuck in their agitation over last year's presidential election results and the high cost of living.

As he tries to steer the country's ship through the stormy waters of the moment, Dr Ruto has kicked off his re-election bid in earnest with a re-focus of the leadership of his political outfit, the United Democratic Alliance (UDA).

The appointment of former Kakamega County Senator, Cleophas Malala as the new Secretary-General of the ruling party is the first powerful statement in this direction. Compared to his predecessor, Veronica Maina, Malala is a political animal, who is fast and suave — just the right credentials needed to drive the President's re-election bid.

In fact, by Malala's own admission, he is cut out for the role. His key business, he says, is to play politics — “good and positive politics that will boost our party leader's re-election bid”. The new Secretary-General points out that UDA does not wish to find itself in the same predicament as the Jubilee Party, which concentrated on governance and service deliv-

ery and forgot the politicking element — with damaging effects in last August's polls.

At the same time, the President has separately kick-started the process of putting in place the next set of referees of the 2027

# RUTO'S WESTERN OFFENSIVE



polls. As a politician and prospective participant, Ruto is obviously an interested party in this process.

Already, he has overseen the ex-

it of former Vice-Chairman of the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) Juliana Cherera and three other commissioners, who are perceived to have been leaning towards the rival camp in last year's elections, and has gazetted names of panelists who will interview and recommend names of the next IEBC chairman and six commissioners.

In a way, therefore, the Ruto 2027 campaign has begun and there is no better starting point than the western Kenya region — the backyard of two of his principals, Prime Cabinet Secretary Musalia Mudavadi and Speaker of the National Assembly, Moses Wetang'ula.

Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) leader Raila also enjoys a huge following in the region, at least going by last year's elections, in which his side of the Azimio La Umoja-One Kenya coalition swept the board in the parliamentary and gubernatorial races, claiming over 70 per cent of the seats.

It makes political sense, therefore, for Ruto to gain entry in the region with a view to politically neutralising Odinga, his key rival at the moment and most likely in the 2027 polls — either directly or through another flag bearer fronted by a political formation allied to the former Prime Minister.

And even within the Kenya Kwanza coalition, Ruto has not shied away from taking the battle to Mudavadi and Wetang'ula's doorsteps. Amid loud protests from the partners, he went against the initial gentleman's agreement that had mapped out the western region as ANC and Ford-Kenya zones by fielding candidates in the area on UDA tickets.

In a fervent plea to residents of his home county of Vihiga, Mudavadi pointedly switched to the local Luhya dialect to dissuade voters from electing an MP allied to an “outsider party”. His protests went unheeded, though, as voters in his home constituency of Sabatia elected an MP allied to UDA. And when another opportunity came up in Bungoma Coun-



## kenya lens



From left: Amani National Congress Party Leader Musalia Mudavadi, then-Deputy President William Ruto and Ford-Kenya Party chief Moses Wetang'ula during a political rally at Posta grounds in Bungoma County on January 28, 2022. JARED NYATAYA | NATION

ty, after Wetang'ula resigned as senator to settle for the Speaker's seat at the National Assembly, UDA insisted on fielding a candidate – much to Wetang'ula's chagrin. It was clearly a case of Ruto releasing a balloon in the air to test his popularity, and sure enough he was not disappointed when his candidate, Mwambu Mabonga, emerged second with 45,907 votes to Ford-Kenya's Wafula Wakoli, who was declared victor with 66,032 votes.

The President has a good foothold in the western region already, with six seats to his credit courtesy of Didmus Wekesa Barasa (Kimilili), Fred Kapondi (Mt Elgon) and Daniel Wanyama (Webuye West), Clement Sioya (Sabatia) and Mary Emaase (Teso South) and Kakamega Senator Dr Bonny Khalwale.

Khalwale observes that when the Central Organisation of Trade Unions (Cotu) Secretary-General, Francis Atwoli, in 2019 equated Wetang'ula's and Mudavadi's parties to kiosks whose purpose is to engage in "political business", many laughed off the claim as a wild joke while others castigated

the Cotu boss for his unkind remarks. But the senator considers the vocal trade unionist's observation to have been spot on.

According to Khalwale, the era of political parties that masqueraded as national parties only by name and not composition is over: "If we hope to make an impact on the political scene as a community or region, then we should be part of a political formation that transcends the communities of Kenya, and that is why Malala and I are more comfortable in UDA than either ANC or Ford-Kenya."

He argues that the only way Odinga ably manages to reinvent himself every election year, for instance, is because he is a member of a strong national party. Accordingly, he calls upon Mudavadi and Wetang'ula to join bigger and broader political vessels in order to stay afloat, otherwise "they will continue sitting on the fence and only waiting to be auctioned at the eleventh hour by leading presidential candidates".

The President is perhaps too smart and swift for the local political bigwigs – as well as Odinga,

who has dominated western politics for decades – to admit. Before teaming up with the Mudavadi-Wetang'ula duo, Ruto struggled to win support in the region without much success.

In Ruto's scheme of things, his approach is solid and western Kenya has been sorted out. Malala's appointment as SG makes him the face of UDA and, by extension, the government. This is a good overture to the people of the region, particularly in the populous Kakamega County, where Odinga's rival camp claimed 12 out of the 13 parliamentary seats, including that of the Woman Representative.

In Bungoma, the President can count on the near-fervent support that his ally, Wetang'ula, enjoys in the region, while in Busia – where the real tough task lies – he can build on the one seat the UDA has in Teso South and latch onto the influence of his Sports CS, Ababu Namwamba, and Principal Secretary for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Susan Mang'eni.

Dr Henry Makokha, a commentator on political affairs, concurs that Ruto is bound to gain accept-

ance in the region. He attributes this achievement to a smart move by the President to win over the Mudavadi-Wetang'ula pair, thereby pulling them away from Odinga and in the process dividing and scattering the western vote further.

"This is a well-thought-out and well executed plot. Ruto's foot is firmly in there now and going forward, he can only continue to share the spoils with the other players, unless, of course, Mudavadi and Wetang'ula re-unite with Raila to lock him out. But this is a very unlikely scenario under the current circumstances," opines the political analyst.

Nonetheless, there is no denying that the latest developments could shake-up trust and stability within Kenya Kwanza. With regards to Malala's exit from ANC, for instance, there are claims that he bolted after differing with his former party boss, Mudavadi. After losing the Kakamega governor's contest to ODM's Fernandez Barasa, Malala reportedly reached out to Ruto for appointment to a Cabinet Secretary or Principal Secretary position. Ruto is said to have turned him down, insisting that as an ANC member, his appointment needed to be sanctioned by the PCS.

Those close to Mudavadi claim that the Prime Cabinet Secretary was unhappy with the way Malala handled the August campaigns, especially with regard to expenditure of the party's campaign funds. It is because of this standoff with his party boss that Malala is believed to have switched camps to UDA.

This position is supported by ANC's national chairman, Kevin Lunani, who maintains that the party's leadership is unaware of any negotiated arrangement between the former senator and the PCS, or the President, to switch camps to UDA. The chairman is also categorical that the ANC will not fold to join UDA in the run-up to the 2027 polls.

Malala's switch to UDA is bound to ignite friendly fire within the Kenya Kwanza coalition, especially between the President's and Mudavadi's allies. Although Malala states that the end game of his move is to bring all political outfits in the coalition under one party, the politician is curiously asking his supporters "to follow me to UDA".



# the limelight



This aerial drone photograph taken on March 1 shows emergency crews searching wreckage after a train accident in the Tempi Valley near Larissa, Greece. At least 32 people were killed and another 85 injured after a collision between two trains caused a derailment near the Greek city of Larissa late at night on February 28. PHOTO | AFP



A reveler takes part in a parade along the Malecón avenue during carnival celebrations in Santo Domingo, in the Dominican Republic, on February 26. PHOTO | AFP



Head of the Africa Union Election Observation Committee and former Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta addresses a press conference in Abuja, Nigeria, at the Ecowas headquarters on February 27. PHOTO | AFP



US First Lady Jill Biden meets with women from the Maasai community at Lesoit village in Kajiado County, on February 26, where she heard about the impoverishing impact of drought on the herder community. She toured a drought response site to highlight the impact of drought on communities. JOAN PERERUAN | NATION



Britain's Catherine, Princess of Wales, laughs as a leek is pinned onto her coat during a visit to the 1st Battalion Welsh Guards for St David's Day Parade at the Combermere Barracks in Windsor, London, on March 1. PHOTO | AFP



This photo taken on February 28 shows a man jumping over a bonfire in order to get rid of bad luck in Jieyang, in China's southern Guangdong Province. PHOTO | AFP



The SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket with the company's Crew Dragon spacecraft lifts off from pad 39A for the Crew-6 mission at Nasa's Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida, early on March 2. PHOTO | AFP



# The Aren



## PECULIAR TIKTOKERS

*The popular Chinese-owned video-sharing platform is researching the vibrant Kenyan market, which it finds 'interesting', before introducing a monetisation programme for local content creators*

OPEN SPACE

# Improve service delivery in public organisations

In government offices, phones rarely function. The guard at the gate is usually a rude know-it-all fellow

• BY MOSES OJUANG'

**B**anking halls always rattle me. The alert security personnel at the entrance, the cool, neat interior with well-clad staff behind fine desks. I have seen a rowdy fellow suddenly become silent and obedient once inside a bank, another angrily switches off his phone upon the slightest ring. This is the environment that makes one to withdraw his own money and still say, "thank you" to the teller.

In most private organisations, customer care is key and service delivery paramount. A client walks in and a comely lady is available at the front-office desk to assist them. Some have call centres, where queries over the phone, e-mail or via the company website are handled, within given timelines. The said staff would seem eager to serve albeit with this constant sense of fear of some unseen authority watching over them, which some crafty clients exploit. They report on time and work on, even when there's no more work to be done. There is a valley of contrast with government offices. The phones rarely function. The guard at the gate is usually a rude know-it-all fellow but agile and amiable when a fuel guzzler parks at the gate.

In some public offices, this is the pointman. He knows all about the organisation, the short-cuts, whom to see for what request. He is a broker of sorts and well-used by some corrupt government officers. Past him would be a notice board with expired announcements and tender notices from four years ago.

The public office is actually a room. Sturdy wooden chairs and desks with stacks of files on them. There are more files in open cabinets along the walls. The desk remains largely un-manned. One may wait on a barren bench for long, pay no attention to the plain lady walking into the office at ten o'clock, only to realise that this is the same person meant to serve you.

The offices, however, are more jovial, staff generally comfortable with

each other, no obvious fear of bosses or glum faces from memorising passwords. Some go for lunch together after "finding" a few lost files from their own cabinets. In many of these offices they speak in mother tongue amongst themselves and with correct clients. There is the issue of jurisdiction too: a single government office, say the Public Trustee, would be mandated to serve the entire Homa-Bay, Kisii, Bomet and Narok counties.

Woe betide a widow who travels all the way to the Trustee's office only to be told there is an error in her names from a document copy-pasted by a clerk from the District County Commissioner's office. There's no hurry. Especially on a Friday afternoon. "Why is the tortoise slow?" goes the joke. "Because it works for the government."

Could the laxity be a result of low motivation in terms of pay and perks? Is it due to relaxed supervision or the average age of staff? The Government is the only employer where the words "permanent and pensionable" carry their true meaning, yet it is where we find the greatest apathy.

A public office yard will be full of grounded vehicles slowly rotting because a driver was careless or a mechanic could not get a mere spark plug due to the opaque procurement process. We have seen competent professionals who succumb to lethargy upon joining public service from the private sector. A cranky nurse with spectacular expletives inside a public maternity ward gets honoured for exemplary service abroad as an immigrant.

With the injection of best practices from the private sector, revamped operational systems and a motivated workforce will come efficiency and profitability that would smother even the suicidal desire for privatisation of parastatals.

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

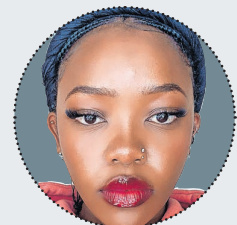
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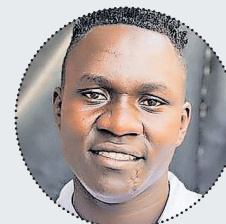
MIND SPEAK



**DonVictor Mugo**  
The government's plan to control cheap imports from China will ensure that the products available in the market are of high quality while also protecting local traders. Interestingly, quality control measures prove to be effective only if they are in place for longer periods. By controlling imports, the government will have made a step towards quality regulation in the market.  
— Mount Kenya University Student Leader



**Aurelia Kinyua**  
The government should carefully weigh the potential benefits and drawbacks before implementing any import controls. Policymakers should seek a balance between protecting local traders and maintaining open and fair trade relations with other countries, including China. They should invest in local industries to help them become more competitive.  
— Riara University Student Leader



**Nick Kalori**  
Importers will bring about healthy competition and bring down prices for the common good. The government is just trying to calm down local traders by promising them what they already know it can't do. A deal has already been signed. Local traders sell the same commodities at exorbitant prices, making the common *mwananchi* suffer more.  
— Youth Activist, Nairobi



**Horace Ongili**  
Following our own national philosophy of African socialism put forward by the late Tom Mboya, we are focussed on doing everything African. Buy Kenyan. Promote Kenyan. Build Kenya. Chinese traders have a right to legally trade in our country but repatriate huge profits back home. Chinese products are cheap, which leaves our traders at a disadvantage.  
— A teacher in Kitale





• BY WAGA ODONGO

One of the most interesting experiences I had in university was when my First Year medical student roommate helped me sneak into his anatomy class to watch a hand being dissected. Back then it was simple enough to get in; all you needed was a white lab coat with a red name tag.

Every society has a blind spot, an area into which it has great difficulty looking. For us, it is death. As a society, we try not to think of our mortality, avoid wills like the plague and rarely think of where we go when we die.

By where we go, I don't mean our souls; I mean our corporeal casing – the blood, bone and sinew that is us.

We all have bodies and we should therefore be interested in them. Members of the public should be allowed to view dissection training of medical students, at least once. You can read all about a body, know which joint goes where and what gland does what, but nothing beats seeing the real thing. It also forces you to examine your mortality and would be helpful in increasing the number of donations of bodies.

It is odd that most of us wouldn't even want to see the natural engineering behind our bodies, yet the human body is the beginning of our shared history as a species, the very space which we occupy as human beings, our very first home.

Two stories in the past month caught my attention. The first is that Nairobi City Mortuary will be disposing of hundreds of unclaimed cadavers. And last week, I read that the University of Nairobi has a cadaver shortage, forcing graduate surgery students to train on how to perform operations virtually.

Cadaver shortages aren't new and their role in medical discoveries cannot be gainsaid. William Harvey, who discovered the circulatory system, did so after dissecting his father and sister. Medical schools in England used to pay bodysnatchers to rob fresh graves. Some enterprising gang took it to the logical, capitalistic extreme and murdered 16 people in order to sell their remains. When William Burke, the leader of this gang, was caught, he was hanged and his body was publicly dissected and put in a museum, where it remains to this day.



Many of the bodies used to train our doctors are in poor shape. Usually they are the remains of the unwanted and unloved at the morgue. Quite often they are not fit for teaching (one cadaver I saw at the University of Nairobi had what looked like bullet holes and was named 50 Cent by the trainee doctors after the American rapper who was shot nine times).

I was told by a friend recently that Covid-19 for a while caused – and you hardly need to point out the irony – an increase in the short-

## ANATOMICAL DONATION

# GIVE SOMEONE A HAND, OR A FOOT

Kenya finally has laws governing the use of human tissue after death but the government has hardly made any effort to popularise this fact

age of cadavers in medical schools because people thought bodies could be infectious.

Kenya finally has laws governing the use of human tissue after death but the government has hardly made any effort to popularise this fact.

The truth is that under the current donation system, demand will always vastly outstrip supply. We venerate dead bodies and they are the centrepiece in our mourning rituals. Many would consider it cruel and unusual punishment to ship off a dead relative to be gawked at on cold slap in Chiromo.

There is also a problem with only allowing donations to this cause as the quality of the body is almost always immeasurably worse for wear. Donors can only leave you their bodies once they die, and Kenya's life expectancy is pushing 70. A septuagenarian wouldn't make the best specimen for doctors to study.

Importation from other countries with robust frameworks around handling human remains is difficult because bodies cost an arm and a leg. One study I read showed that a well preserved stiff will set you back tens of thousands of dollars.

It is important that trainee doctors deal with fresher bodies, and while popularising donations of bodies is important, it isn't going to be adequate.

I suggest an opt-out system, where your body becomes available after a certain shortish period for organ donation/ medical research unless you actually opt out. Once you die, you are gone. There is no sense burying you with a perfectly good kidney or liver.

Organ donation is the greatest act of altruism. Nothing can be more noble, no act of giving can be more profound, than giving an organ. The second best thing to organ donation is to donate your body to a medical institution.

The body donation aspect should be Trojan-horsed in organ donation to make the move more palatable. Many, I believe, would want to donate their organs; fewer would want their bodies studied for research.

It is sad that there are Kenyans losing their eyesight while others are being buried with perfectly working corneas. The liver transplant centre at the Kenyatta National Hospital is underutilised for want of organs. Give your fellow human a hand, and add a foot, the corneas, liver along with anything else you can spare.

*Mr Odongo is a Software Engineer*

SHE'S SUCH A CARD!

# PUN INTENDED



Joy Moraa  
Nyanaro of  
Punny Crafts  
at her shop  
in Nairobi.  
FRANCIS  
NDERITU I  
NATION

**Joy Moraa's mission is to give joy to others through humorous greeting cards and other printed merchandise that can be gifted to family and friends**

● BY EDDY ASHIOYA

**W**akili, a quick one."*Naskia sijui aje. (I don't know how I am feeling)*" "*No kugeria manii. (I'm just trying)*" These are the pithy bon mot sayings that have made Punny Crafts Ltd the go-to one-stop-shop for all things gifts.

Joy Moraa, the 24-year-old proprietor of the boutique gift shop, in living with the brand's core value, says her mission is to give others joy. And she does so with her great sense of humour and sharp wit. Puns drip from her fingers like

a birth right, as if her whole life began with an on button that works only when she is proximate. She is box office, but it is the zingers that made her name.

Logic dictates, but logic also overlooks the weird, intangible voodoo of Joy's fridge magnet wisdom packaged on small cards and badges and notebooks that seem to summarise the typical life of a Kenyan. The Financial Economics graduate from Strathmore University with her too-cool-for-school aura, knows only too well that there are some things which you are just born with. "I have al-

ways been an artistic person. I used to make cards and bookmarks for my friends. At the back, I'd put 'MadeByJoy' and put a copyright and trademark sign (™). I saw a market need because there were only very simple and generic cards in the market. I asked myself, why not just start making my own?" Voila, Punny Crafts was born.

This was in 2019, around February, when the Valentine's bug was biting and love was in the air. "I wanted to design cards that capture the essence and uniqueness of everyday life and add a Ken-

yan touch to it," she says. When she began scouting for a print shop in Nairobi to reproduce her designs, she was shocked when the first printer she approached produced exactly what she wanted. "It was like looking at a Pinterest photo and I was impressed I didn't have to import anything or break the bank!"

Hit the iron while it is still hot, they say. And hit she did, designing 30 unique Valentine's Day cards with creative puns and registering for the flea market at her school. To her surprise, buyers found the puns very funny and relata-



ble and she sold all the cards. She has expanded the business from selling gift cards to printed merchandise such as T-shirts, diaries, pens, mugs, flasks, chocolate bars wrapped in naughty puns and anything that can be gifted to self or loved ones. “Business is slow and gradual,” she says, “but a beautiful process.” In 2022, Punny Crafts did KSh5 million in sales, which was twice what they did in 2021. They can only go higher.

“We have one branch in Nairobi’s CBD at Digital Shopping Mall on Moi Avenue with four permanent employees and two on part-time basis.” She lists UN-WFP, Greenlight, Women Work, Maersk, Davis & Shirliff, Tusker, Liquid, Muthaiga Golf Club and Hivos as among the leading brands she has worked with and/or supplied punny merchandise to. Joy says that the biggest lesson business has taught her is finding the sweet spot between staying the course and being comfortable in chaos. Business, she says, is chaos nestled in a cocoon, extreme order in the clothes of extreme disorder.

“Being the one steering this ship means that the responsibility lies solely on my shoulders.” Like having the sword of Damocles hanging over your head, business is a capricious thing, everyday similar and yet different from the next; it’s a complicated business,

**What business has taught me is the value of human relationships. Gifting is a primary love language, and that’s how I spread my love. Doing this for the last four years has made me value people and the relationships.**

Jor Moraa



Some of the branded products made by Punny Crafts. FRANCIS NDERITU | NATION

business. She speaks like she has mustered the vague midday platitudes that could only ever be insufficient after a journey defined by midnight glory and emotion. “I can’t lose focus of the vision of Punny Crafts. There is still chaos going on – employees, customers and just trying to keep all the balls in the air. That is still the lesson that I keep learning.”

The big dream for Punny Crafts is to become a household name. “You see how you hear of companies like Safaricom and don’t have to ask who Safaricom is. That’s where I want Punny Crafts to get. Whenever you are thinking of gifting yourself, family or co-workers, we want to be top of mind. We want to always have something going on – Punny Home, Punny Lifestyle – and to paint this town yellow with happiness.”

Her best-selling items, she says, are the cards with quirky messaging. “But if we are being pedantic, it’s a tie between our Kenyan birthday cards and the notebooks. But the cards have been received well and they sell well.”

Entrepreneurship has not all been smooth sailing. Certainly, it is worth remembering that in this business you are never more than a profit away from being heralded as a genius nor a heavy loss away from being lampooned as a failure. “At the moment we don’t have enough capital to take Punny Crafts to where it can be. We have untapped potential in all the areas that we are looking at. We require some serious investment to really scale.”

“I think what business has taught me is the value of human relationships. Gifting is a primary love language, and that’s how I spread my love. Doing this for the

**Hit the iron while it is still hot, they say. And hit she did, designing 30 unique Valentine’s Day cards with creative puns and registering for the flea market at her school. To her surprise, buyers found the puns very funny and relatable and she sold all the cards. She has expanded the business from selling gift cards to printed merchandise such as T-shirts, diaries, pens, mugs, flasks, chocolate bars wrapped in naughty puns and anything that can be gifted to self or loved ones.**

last four years has made me value people and the relationships that we have. Almost 90 per cent of people buying merch from our shop are doing it for their loved ones, be it family or spouses, and that has altered my view of relationships.”

Speaking of relationships, how does she keep people coming back? “We call our clients pundits. We make them feel seen. All our products and marketing are designed in a very nuanced way. This brand is about you.” She speaks wistfully about the months preceding the 2022 General Election, when she almost lost it all.

“My risk appetite is quite large, so I figure it out as I go. The months before elections almost crippled us. Our clients were still buying things from us, we were making money and sustaining the business, and the team grew, which meant more overhead. We also moved shop and things were looking up. Then suddenly it all stopped. The elections seemed to have taken money out of people’s pockets. No one was buying any-

thing. I used to just sit in the dark and ask, ‘what are we doing?’ We went through the fire in that period.”

Like Daniel, Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego in the Bible, she emerged from the furnace, but unlike them, the fire had burnt her. But that only served to light the fire in her belly. Now, she is thinking bigger; having gone over one mountain, scaling the next is like taking a walk over a molehill.

She says the wow factor that keeps them top of mind is being unique.

“I always have one person at the centre of the brand. It’s not a business or a brand talking to them. We personalise and Kenyanise it completely, using emotion to relate with you as a person.”

Was this all she ever wanted to do? “I think human beings are multifaceted. But I want to take Punny Crafts as far as I can before giving it to other people. I really want to work with children in the education space, even if it is with NGOs. Besides, I also want to do something in music production.”

She would want younger entrepreneurs to be teachable. “Being teachable will get you farther faster. Get a mentor who serves you and your purpose truly, or a team of people who can guide you. I look back and I can see that lack of foresight cost me. If I had a mentor earlier, I would have reduced my margin of error. Those are my sprinkles of wisdom for any aspiring entrepreneur.”

“Recently, I got a strategist to help in setting up structures, systems and processes. I know this will help us scale our operations. I’m also a member of a business group called Unthinkable. I joined it while still in university working as an intern in bookkeeping. I’ve met different leaders in both the business and the corporate worlds and I’m learning how successful businesses are run.”

When you do something for long, you could easily get bored. How does one feed the fire in the belly?

“You won’t be motivated every day. There are those days we go with the motion, but the point is to keep it moving. We move regardless. Imagine there is no other way. Cry, laugh, but keep it moving. Keep moving, regardless.”

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Recently, Punny Crafts was named the Most Innovative Business by Kayana Kenya, an organisation that supports and incubates women-led businesses.

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## CASHING IN ON SOCIAL MEDIA

# PECULIAR KENYANS ON TIKTOK

**The popular App is researching the vibrant Kenyan market, which it finds 'interesting', before introducing a monetisation programme for the country's content creators**

• BY SINDA MATIKO

**E**ven DJ Syd, real name Boniswa Sidwaba, doesn't know what to call herself.

"I am a content creator, English teacher, theatre and performance practitioner, a musician, a Deejay, events curator, and Head of TikTok's Content Programming for sub-Saharan Africa," she says as we settle down for breakfast at Villa Rosa Kempinski, Nairobi.

She would have been a corporate lawyer too, had she not abandoned the ship at the dock. The self-effacing and smooth talker is in white fluffy slippers and a black sleeveless dress that allows you to gawk at small tattoos littered all over her triceps, biceps and forearm. One that stands out is of a humongous triangle that runs across her chest. As she takes bites of her scrambled eggs, I take a dig into her profound resume.

The 35-year-old's CV reads like a geek's tour of Kerala backwaters. Cape Town, Johannesburg, Beijing, Seoul, Daishan, Windhoek are just some of the cities she has explored in pursuit of life and career.

For the last five years, she has worked at TikTok in various capacities, rising to her current position, one that is very key in driving the fortunes of the social

media platform. TikTok became the world's most downloaded App in 2022, with over two billion downloads and 689 active monthly users worldwide.

She is on a visit to Kenya and has met various content creators, offering them a master class of some sort. DJ Syd is also on a fact-finding mission of how best the App can tap into the Kenyan market. "I am in charge of the content and as you may know, content is crucial in dictating which way we should go."

TikTok has identified Africa as a key growth market due to the continent's young and rising population, increase in smartphones, greater broadband penetration rates and affordable internet. But even with the App's increasing popularity in the country and Africa, DJ Syd says Kenya is still not one of TikTok's main markets in Africa, but a potential one.

"We have been able to roll out monetisation programmes in South Africa, which is our main market on the continent. Our focus now is on Nigeria, which looks really promising for us. As for Kenya, it's a peculiar market that we are still trying to figure out but one that can't be ignored, and that's why you see us here," she explains. TikTok already has local physical offices in Nigeria and South Africa, with Kenya on the cards.

Research by Statista reveals that TikTok gained 31.9 per cent market share in Nigeria in 2020, while South African Social Media Landscape Report 2021 produced by marketing research firm World Wide Worx and Ornico, estimated active TikTok users in South Africa to be nine million in January 2020.

"I am sure the numbers have since grown though I can't give the correct figures at the moment. We are this small baby who is growing pretty fast," Boniswa remarks.

She believes that what sets TikTok apart from other social platforms is the personalised feed experience. "We are based on a content graph as opposed to a social graph and because our strategy is fun and entertainment, our content will always

Boniswa Sidwaba, TikTok Head of Content Programming, Sub-Saharan Africa.









## opinion



■ **'Made in China': To the ordinary shopper, any objection to cheaper goods is arrant nonsense**

## Kuria is right; the problem is how he's doing it

**T**he indefinite closure of a month-old shopping complex said to be owned by Chinese entrepreneurs at Kenyatta University's Unicity Mall could herald the beginning of troubles in our relationship with the Asian economic giant. It is not clear what prompted Trade Cabinet Secretary Moses Kuria to raise such a fundamental economic issue now or why he preferred political populism over quiet diplomacy, but one thing is clear: very little can be solved by such activism, and a great deal could go wrong.

Very few people, even in Nairobi, have had the opportunity to shop at China Square but almost every Kenyan has come into contact with stuff labelled "Made in China", be it apparel, electronics, kitchen utensils or even toothpicks and ear swabs. You will find all these in traditional, locally-owned supermarkets and there has never been any hullabaloo about it.

You don't even need to enter a supermarket; products from China teem on every street corner in major towns. So what is the big deal about China Square?

Well, it turns out that products sold at the complex are much cheaper than those sold not only in traditional supermarkets, but also at market stalls and street corners.

Indeed, it is said that while doing their market study, the would-be investors visited supermarkets, saw the mark-ups on familiar products, and detected a ready market if only they lowered the prices, making huge profits from Kenyans seeking bargains in these hard times. What they may have failed to realise was that they would push vendors, an important



**MAGESHA  
NGWIRI**

voter bloc, from the streets.

On the face of it, Kuria saw that something was going wrong and acted, right out of the blue like a bolt of lightning.

He told us that an establishment like China Square could not continue undermining members of the Gikomba, Nyamakima, Muthurwa and Eastleigh Traders' Association. These traders sell everything, and only the rich urbanites have never ventured to their stalls to buy clothes, shoes and household goods, most of them sourced from Asia. Where the upstart China Square went wrong was to sell the same stuff at lower prices.

This gives rise to two views on the matter. Kenyan shoppers will never be convinced there is something wrong with buying anything at a low price. In fact, to the ordinary shopper, any objection to cheaper goods is arrant nonsense.

And, as some perceptive blogger observed, the obviously sponsored "business community" mob that protested in Nairobi streets on Tuesday were probably blowing *vuvuzelas* manufactured in China and

carrying messages on paper sourced from the same country.

Goods imported from China permeate the country. We opened our arms wide to welcome the dragon into our homestead and now we are crying foul.

That is why, a minister whose job involves protecting local traders and manufacturers, should not be condemned. In fact, Kuria was not wrong, but the way he did it was bound to raise suspicion among cynical Kenyans as to who stands to benefit from such a move.

What is indisputable is that the government cannot afford to take such precipitate action against individual businesses from China. Not only do we owe that country too much, we are also trying to seek a market for our meagre produce there.

Someone, in his wisdom, let the dragon into the house, and getting rid of it will be a Herculean task. What we as a country need to do is to repay a substantial percentage of our debt to China, and then we can start asserting our economic sovereignty.

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## opinion

■ Protests against Supreme Court's ruling on gay rights are just distractions from bigger national crises

# Let's prioritise saving Kenya from looming disaster



MACHARIA  
GITHO

It is well established that we are a nation of queer habits. We have this odd tendency to shut our minds, eyes and ears to the most urgent and pressing issues of the day, the existential issues that can make or break this nation, while obsessing over what individuals may be doing behind locked doors.

Today, we all know that Kenya may be on the brink of a catastrophe. The national coffers are empty and the government has very little clue how to prevent us hurtling into the abyss. Many respected analysts reckon we may be on the verge of falling into Greek, Ghana or Zimbabwean situations. This means the country essentially going bankrupt, defaulting national debt, running out of money to pay salaries and other basic commitments, experiencing hyper-inflation, collapse of the shilling and depressed growth.

The economy is the least of President William Ruto's worries. The weatherman projects that we could be going into the sixth straight year of failed rains. We all know what drought and famine entail, especially when there are no resources to restock the granaries and provide relief food.

Up north, marauding bandits are running around at will, mowing down both civilians and security officers, stealing cattle which somehow disappear into thin air and generally showing that there is complete lack of government in those badlands.

If it is not domestic terrorism in the north under the guise of cattle rustlers and ethnic militia, it is the ever-present threat of al-Shabaab terrorism across the entire north-eastern and adjacent parts of the coast region.

And meanwhile, opposition leader Raila Odinga is continuing with his serial complaints against allegedly stolen elections, and planning the latest in his infamous 'mass action' protests that have the potential to bring the country grinding to a halt at a time of general disgruntlement and disillusion.

Meanwhile, we are demonstrating unhealthy fixation with what consenting adults do in the privacy of their bedrooms. This national voyeurism says as much about us as it says about them.

If there is one lesson from the Supreme Court judgement on the rights of association for the LGBTQWERTY community, it is that we

are a sick, intolerant, mean, cruel and totally hypocritical society.

We are going into national hysteria over willful misreading and misinterpretation of the Supreme Court ruling.

Religious leaders and other supposed paragons of virtue are ignoring the giant logs in their own eyes while holding magnifying glasses to what are essentially issues of personal morality. Nowhere did the Supreme Court move to de-criminalise or promote gay (I'll use that term since I can't keep up with that ever expanding LGBTQ+ alphabet soup) sex. It simply recognised that the gay community exists, and has the right to associate within itself (no pun intended) and to enjoy constitutional protection against discrimination or threats to life.

In Kenya we have this strange way of misinterpreting laws to the effect that if something is illegal, as gay sex is, then it becomes illegal to talk about it, think about it, acknowledge its existence, or lobby for a change of mindset.

It is illegal to grow, sell, distribute, possess or consume marijuana in Kenya. One George Wajackoyah grew to fame by standing for President last year on a 'Legalise it' platform. He committed absolutely no crime by advocating decriminalisation of weed or promoting production, consumption and trade in the prohibited substance.

That was fully within his rights as protected by the Constitution.

Those growing hysterical over the Supreme Court ruling might be interested to learn that the government fully acknowledges existence of the gay community, and has for many years moved to protect them and take care of their

**The weatherman projects that we could be going into the sixth straight year of failed rains. We all know what drought and famine entail, especially when there are no resources to restock the granaries and provide relief food. Up north, marauding bandits are running around at will, mowing down both civilians and security officers, stealing cattle which somehow disappear into thin air and generally showing that there is complete lack of government in those badlands.**

special needs within national healthcare programmes, especially around HIV-AIDS and other sexually-transmitted diseases.

The government also recognises and supports other vulnerable groups in users of hard drugs such as heroin and cocaine. It runs programmes for treatment and rehabilitation, including provision of clean syringes for those taking injectables. We all know that narcotics are illegal and a real threat to society. The drug trade, in fact, poses real threats to national security at the same level as organised crime, money laundering, poaching and trade in game trophies and terrorist financing.

Nowhere are we hearing that drug addicts should be locked up in jail or treated as if they don't exist. We may condemn their addiction, whether as a medical problem or lifestyle choice, but treat them with respect, sympathy and understanding.

We should do the same for the gay community. For some it is a lifestyle choice in regard to sexual orientation. For others, it is actually a medical, physical or physiological condition related to indeterminate development of sexual organs and the related self-identity issues.

Whatever the case, we are dealing with a community that exists and cannot be wished away, not unless we want to borrow a leaf from the 'Angel of Death', Josef Mengele, and condemn all of them to extermination.

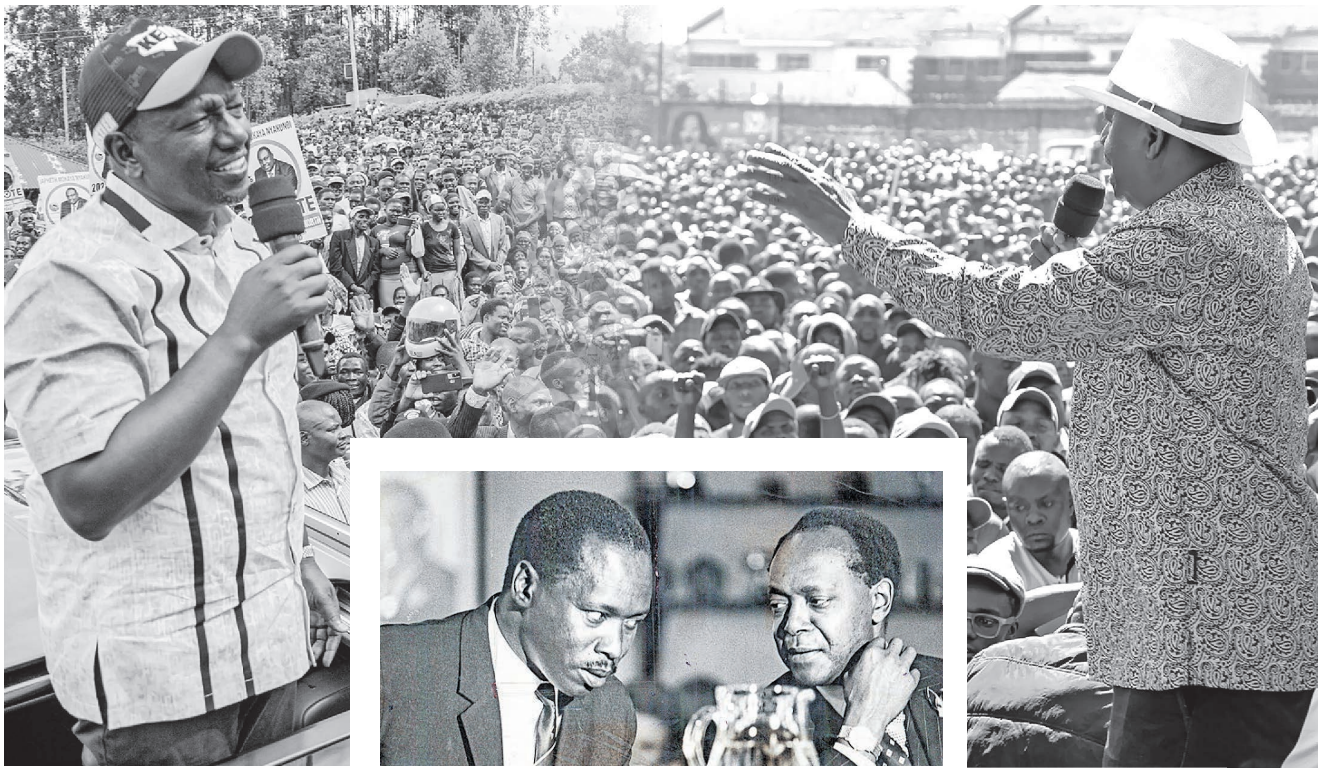
In the meantime, let's get our priorities right. Kenya is on the verge of meltdown on so many fronts, and President Ruto needs all the support he can get to put things on an even keel. He doesn't need disruptions. Protests against the Supreme Court or even the pledge by Attorney-General Justin Muturi to seek a review of the decision (while we continue telling Raila that the court ruling on his presidential election petition was final and must be accepted) are just distractions from our bigger national crises.

And, finally, all those holier-than-thou critics waxing indignant and waving their fingers should ask themselves a simple question: What would Jesus have done? I'm not an authority, but I know that Jesus embraced, rather than condemned, those who might not have walked the straight and narrow path.

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## kenya lens

■ OVERHAULING THE IEBC

**60 YEARS OF ELECTORAL MISCHIEF**

**As Kenyans search for a new team to run elections, the question will be whether we have learned any lessons from our history**

● By JOHN KAMAU

**A**s President William Ruto begins overhauling the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), it seems Kenya is still grappling with the electoral machine – 60 years after independence.

The Judicial Tribunal, led by Justice Aggrey Muchelule, picked to investigate the conduct of the Cherera Four who protested the handling of the tallying of presidential results last August, was treated to behind-the-scenes intrigues and how the IEBC, though perceived to be independent, is usually a site of mischief by various entities out to rig election outcomes.

Azimio la Umoja-One Kenya leader Raila Odinga insists that the four commissioners – Juliana Cherera, Francis Wanderi, Irene Masit and Justus Nyang'aya – did nothing wrong and that the poll results were rigged. That opinion is divided over the independence of a body that should be above board is the continuing story of Kenya's election machine.

A look at the history of Kenya's electoral bodies shows a terrain littered with various experiments to either run a clean poll or introduce a vote-manipulation framework. Over the years, there have been both successful and unsuccessful attempts to steal the election, and mischievous conduct, too. The last presidential election faced the same predicament, Muchelule's tribunal observed.

What we find from history is fascinating. After Independence in 1963, Attorney-General Charles Njonjo would single-handedly appoint the Supervisor of Elections – a small office within the AG's chambers. Njonjo was deemed the custodian of the public good, and he had the district commissioners and the entire public administration, who played a central role in organising joint campaign meetings for candidates to sell their agenda. As it were, Njonjo, and later the provincial administration, would interfere with elections, leading to a poll culture of deceit that has become ingrained into the entire government machinery. Just before Independence, the elections

were conducted by F. P. Derrick, who was appointed by the Governor in 1960 to oversee Kenya's transition to Independence. It was a tricky ballot since, in those days, the vote was weighted: a person with a university degree or civil servant earned more points than an ordinary citizen. After Independence, the electoral body did not enjoy autonomy from the central government, given that the AG was an appointee of the President – an interested party in the outcome of an election.

Elections on May 18, 1963 were carried out amidst fear that violence would erupt in the race between the rival Kenya African National Union (Kanu) and the Kenya African Democratic Union (Kadu). This election was supervised by Rogers Wilkinson, appointed by the acting Governor, Sir Eric Griffith-Jones. After Kanu won the race and Jomo Kenyatta was appointed Prime Minister, he retained Wilkinson until 1965, when Donald Owuor was appointed the first African supervisor of elections. But Owuor would not last, for Njonjo did not believe that he would be impartial enough to



## kenya lens

conduct the 'little by-elections' triggered by the defection of Kanu members of Parliament to Jaramogi Oginga Odinga's Kenya People's Union (KPU).

So Njonjo removed Oduor and replaced him with Darius Mbela. No reason was given, but it is suspected that Njonjo linked him to the KPU. Therefore, Mbela's appointment in 1966 came at a time when the ruling party, Kanu, was going through serious internal wrangles as ideological wars between a faction led by Vice-President Odinga on one side and Kanu Secretary-General Tom Mboya on the other raged. While Kanu had used the defection tactic to increase its numbers in Parliament from the Kadu side without a by-election in 1964, Odinga's 1966 attempt to use the same tactic and build his KPU was thwarted by Njonjo, who asked Parliament to change the law and stop members from switching parties on the floor of Parliament without going through a by-election.

Thus, Darius Mbela conducted the murky little by-elections of June 12, 1966 that followed the defection of Odinga and allies to the KPU. During that election, Kanu won eight senate seats to KPU's two and 12 House of Representative seats to KPU's seven. KPU accused Mbela of rigging the election in favour of Kanu. Shortly afterwards, Mbela was appointed a Permanent Secretary and replaced by Norman John Montgomery, whose term ran from 1967 to 1980. Montgomery would supervise the 1969, 1974, and 1979 post-Kenyatta elections; he quit quietly in protest over rigging in the 1979 poll.

But rigging had not started in 1979. During the 1974 elections, and under Montgomery's watch, the government barred a candidate for the Nyandarua North parliamentary seat, Josiah Mwangi Kariuki, from campaigning (it was alleged he was inciting people), and forced him to print posters distributed by his wife which read: "If this man has done nothing for you don't elect him." Kariuki won the seat with 16,000 votes to his rival's 3,000. The following year, 1975, he was assassinated. With Jomo Kenyatta's death in August 1978, the electoral machine was set for an overhaul as Daniel arap Moi wanted to have control of it. Although rigging was prevalent before Kenyat-



Charles Njonjo



Samuel Kivuitu



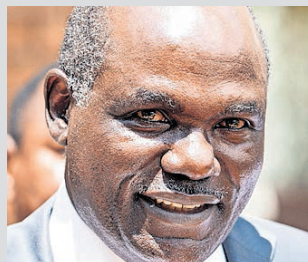
Darius Mbela



Isaack Hassan



Zacchaeus Chesoni



Wafula Chebukati

ta's death, it had not reached notoriety levels. The central government tried to stop its critics from winning parliamentary seats – although some radicals still managed to get into the House.

In 1979, Moi used the electoral machine to eliminate powerful Kenyatta-era politicians, causing an embarrassed Montgomery to resign in protest against management of polls in Baringo, Nandi and Elgeyo Marakwet, where Moi's henchmen were elected unopposed.

Montgomery was replaced by Zachary Nyarango, a close ally of the powerful Simeon Nyachae, who had just left the provincial administration for the president's office. During his tenure, Nyarango witnessed some of the most tumultuous elections. It was he who supervised the 1983 snap general election that saw the fall of all those associated with Njonjo. While that election was, by rigging standards, still regarded one of the worst, it hardly measures up to the 1988 queue-voting elections supervised by J.P. Mwango-

vya, appointed in 1987 by Moi.

In the queue-voting system, some MPs were deemed elected unopposed if they garnered more than 80 per cent of the votes during nominations. But this was marred by claims of rigging, with protests that numbers had been changed after the physical count, though there was no chance of verification.

Mwangovya's tenure would last until 1991, when Moi appointed Justice Zacchaeus Chesoni chairman of the Electoral Commission of Kenya as the country prepared for its first multi-party elections. While the opposition had demanded various reforms, the parties agreed on minimum changes that included an expansion of the commission to include opposition sympathisers.

But still, the provincial administration played a key role in managing elections, in the process frustrating the opposition candidates. Chesoni would be blamed by the opposition for rigging the polls in favour of Kanu and for swearing Moi in as president at

dawn in a race that had pitted him against opposition candidate Kenneth Matiba.

In 1993, a Constitutional amendment was made that increased the number of commissioners to 12, but more was needed to restore Kenyans' lost faith in the ECK. In 1997, following the so-called Inter-Parliamentary Parties Group (IPPG) reforms, the number of Commissioners was increased to 22 to give political parties a chance to nominate their representatives. Yet again, Moi won the presidency, and the ECK was accused of being swayed by Kanu.

The ECK established an independent secretariat in 1998 – away from the Attorney-General's chambers – which functioned until 2007, when it was disbanded following chaotic presidential polls. It was by that time headed by Samuel Kivuitu, who had to swear in President Kibaki for a final term late in the evening.

Also created by a 2008 Constitutional Amendment was the Interim Independent Boundaries Review Commission (IIBRC) chaired by politician Andrew Ligale to stop the political gerrymandering of previous years, when politicians used their powers to shape constituency boundaries.

The IEBC, formed in 2011, was supposed to cure the electoral ills of former years, but the first commission, led by lawyer Isaack Hassan, immediately ran into trouble from politicians who wanted to pull it down. In 2017, the body saw a change of guard with the entry of Wafula Chebukati some seven months before elections. But Chebukati's handling of the poll that saw the Supreme Court order a repeat presidential contest indicated that Kenya was still far from experiencing smooth elections.

As pressure mounted on Chebukati to quit, some of his commissioners – Consolata Nkatha, Paul Kurgat, Roselyn Akombe and Margaret Mwachanya – left in protest. And in the 2022 election – another four would differ with him, triggering a falling-out, a tribunal and resignations.

As Kenyans search for a new team to run elections, the question will be whether we have learned any lessons from our history.

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## SCIENCE &amp; TECH

## Google's eSIM feature for Android

Google has announced several new features for Android at this week's Mobile World Congress (MWC) in Barcelona. While some of the features have already rolled out to users, Google has also promised to bring eSIM transfer support to Android later this year. This will make it easy for users to transfer their mobile plan to a new device. Built on GSMA's global standard, the new feature will remove the need for swapping a physical SIM card to transfer the mobile plan to a new phone.

Google has shared that the new eSIM transfer feature will be rolled out to Android devices later this year. Though it hasn't confirmed the exact rollout timeline, it said that Deutsche Telekom will be the first carrier to get this support. It also noted that the new eSIM transfer ability will be built on GSMA's global standard. It will let users transfer their existing mobile plan to a new phone without having to swap a physical SIM card.

In addition to the eSIM announcement, Google also shared the latest Android abilities on the newly launched smartphones from its partner brands like Samsung, OnePlus, Oppo, and Xiaomi. While Xiaomi 13 and 13 Pro have been launched with support for digital car keys, OPPO Find N2 Flip and OnePlus 11 have received the Nearby Share feature.

The company also announced a set of new Android features like the Google Keep single note widget on the home screen, Wear OS' new shortcuts to create notes and to-do lists from the watch face, audio enhancements, and new emoji packs. While the new note widget lets users manage notes and to-do lists from the home screen, the new shortcuts for Wear OS enable users to create notes or to-do lists with just one tap on their watch face. The audio enhancements to Google Meet on mobile bring a noise-cancellation feature during calls.

# META'S AR/VR HARDWARE ROADMAP FOR FOUR YEARS



An attendee demonstrates the Owo vest, which allows users to feel physical sensations during metaverse experiences such as virtual reality games, including wind, gunfire or punching, at the Consumer Electronics Show on January 5, 2022 in Las Vegas, Nevada.

### • SAN FRANCISCO

**M**eta plans to release its first pair of smart glasses with a display in 2025 alongside a neural interface smartwatch designed to control them. Meanwhile, its first pair of full-fledged AR glasses, which CEO Mark Zuckerberg has predicted will eventually be as widely used as mobile phones, is planned for 2027.

The details were shared with thousands of employees in Meta's Reality Labs division on Tuesday during a roadmap presentation of its AR and VR efforts. Altogether, they show how Meta is planning to keep investing in consumer hardware.

With regards to the VR roadmap, employees were told that Meta's flagship Quest 3 headset coming later this year will be two times thinner, at least twice as powerful, and cost slightly more than \$400. Quest 2. Like the recently announced Quest Pro, it will prominently feature mixed reality

experiences that don't fully immerse the wearer, thanks to front-facing cameras that pass through video of the real world. Meta has sold nearly 20 million Quest headsets to date, Mark Rabkin, the company's vice president for VR, said.

Meta's main challenge with the Quest 3, which is internally codenamed Stinson, will be convincing people to pay "a bit more" money than the cost of the existing Quest 2, according to Rabkin. "We have to get enthusiasts fired up about it," he told employees Tuesday. "We have to prove to people that all this power, all these new features are worth it."

Mixed reality will be a huge selling point, and Rabkin said there will be a new "smart guardian" to help wearers navigate the real world while they are wearing the device. "The main north star for the team was from the moment you put on this headset, the mixed reality has to make it feel better, easier, more natural," he said. "You can walk effortlessly

through your house knowing you can see perfectly well. You can put anchors and things on your desktop. You can take your coffee. You can stay in there much longer."

There will be 41 new apps and games shipping for the Quest 3, including new mixed reality experiences to take advantage of the updated hardware, Rabkin said. In 2024, he said that Meta plans to ship a more "accessible" headset codenamed Ventura. "The goal for this headset is very simple: pack the biggest punch we can at the most attractive price point in the VR consumer market."

Rabkin didn't say whether a second generation of the recent Meta Quest Pro is coming anytime soon. The closest to what sounds like a successor will be "way out in the future" after Ventura in 2024, when Meta is planning its most advanced headset codenamed La Jolla featuring photorealistic, codec avatars. "We want to make it higher resolution for work use and really nail work, text and things like that," Rabkin said.



# africa lens

■ HE EXERTS POWER FROM BEHIND THE SCENES, USES HIS INFLUENCE TO SUPPORT CANDIDATES

## HOW TINUBU CLAIMED THE PRIZE

**In the most wide-open election Nigeria has seen since 1979, Tinubu polled 8,794,726 votes to defeat 17 other candidates. He has consistently played major roles in party politics since 1992, when he was elected senator for Lagos West District**

● LAGOS

**O**n March 1, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the candidate of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC), was declared president-elect by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Abuja, Nigeria's capital.

That development, on the first day of March, marked not just the conclusion of a contentious presidential election process, but also the culmination of one man's long and difficult march to the zenith of his country's political power.

In the most wide-open presidential election Nigeria has seen since 1979, Tinubu polled 8,794,726 votes to defeat 17 other candidates. His two closest opponents, former Vice President Atiku Abubakar of the PDP and former Governor Peter Obi of the Labour Party, are calling for the cancellation of the February 25 poll, alleging that it was tainted by voter suppression and the failure of INEC to upload polling unit results from the over 176,000 polling stations to a web portal as stipulated in its guideline.

INEC has dismissed the claims of the candidates, whose agents walked out of the national collation centre, where the returns from the states were tallied, and advised them to take their grievances to the election petition tribunal, as stipulated by law. The president-elect a few hours later on Wednesday gave an acceptance speech before cheering party leaders and supporters, in which he offered reconciliation to his opponents and their supporters.

Tinubu has consistently played major roles in party politics since 1992 when he was elected senator for Lagos West District. He has since then been governor of Lagos for eight years. But unlike his three main opponents, including former Governor Rabiu Kwankwaso of the New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP), who returned fourth, this was the first time he would be running for president, whether in the party primaries or general elections. His victory means that he took the prize on first attempt, just like Shehu Shagari, Olusegun Obasanjo and Umaru Yar'adua before him.

Yet, it seemed on many occasions, between the point that he declared his bid and the certification of his election early Wednesday morning, that the feat might elude him. Tinubu was the first in the APC to announce his bid. That was in January 2022, after a meeting with President Muhammadu Buhari at the presidential villa in Abuja.

The choice of location or timing of the announcement seemed to have been a strategic design to create the impression that President Muhammadu Buhari was in full support of the former governor's ambition. But after several weeks of hesitation, many other aspirants declared too, including some ministers assumed

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Ahmed Tinubu won the Nigerian presidential election.

## africa lens

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to be close to the president.

And when Vice President Yemi Osinbajo, an associate of Tinubu's, also declared, it was taken as a confirmation that the president did not want the former Lagos governor, his most important political ally since they formed the APC in 2013, to succeed him. Tinubu's presidential ambition finally seemed imperilled a few days before the party primaries when he made the controversial "Emi lokan" (it is my turn) remark in Abeokuta, Ogun State while addressing party delegates. It was taken as a public attack on the president and the last kicks of a dying horse. But after a few more days of intrigues in the party, Tinubu recorded a stunning landslide victory at the APC national convention in Abuja.

But it did not take long before the speculation that the president was not supportive of his candidature regained life. Tinubu seemed to confirm the speculation when at a campaign stop again in Abeokuta, he spoke out against a fuel supply shortage that had lingered for several months across the country, and a currency redesign policy of the Central Bank of Nigeria. Kaduna State Governor, Nasir el-Rufai, later said on television that some fifth columnists at the presidency designed the two disruptive policies to incite voters against the APC at the general elections.

In spite of appeals by APC governors to the president to extend the deadline for the swapping of old naira banknotes for new designs of the banknotes, the central bank stuck to its schedule. Violent protests broke out in parts of the country over the severe scarcity of cash that arose from the implementation of the policy. But even after some APC-led state governments sued the federal government at the Supreme Court over the policy, Buhari refused to vary his approval to the central bank for the implementation of the policy. The opposition, led by Atiku and Peter Obi of the Labour Party, hailed Buhari for his stand on the issue, interpreting it as a determination to stop Tinubu and state governors from buying votes during the elections.

It was under these circumstances that the APC went into the elections on Saturday. And the outcome underscored widespread dissatisfaction with the ruling party. In the presidential poll, it came top in only 12 states across the country, down from 19 when Buhari was reelected in 2019. Tinubu also lost Lagos, his stronghold since 1999, to the Labour Party, while Buhari's Katsina flipped to the PDP. In the North of Nigeria, where it had been dominant since 2015, the APC won only six of the 15 states in which it has governors.

In the end, Tinubu managed to draw the highest votes, although the votes in quantum and as a percentage of the total votes cast were still the lowest by a winning candidate in the Fourth Republic. Yet that feat was entirely due to the division of the opposition, which split into three, and an unresolved internal crisis in the PDP. The Labour

# Political 'kingpin' finally fulfils presidential dream



Bola Tinubu acknowledges supporters in Abuja during celebrations at his campaign headquarters on March 1. Tinubu won Nigeria's highly disputed weekend election, securing the former Lagos governor the presidency of Africa's most populous democracy.

Party, whose candidate was the PDP vice presidential candidate in 2019, seized the strongholds of the main opposition party in the South-east, South-south and North-central. In Lagos, where Obi embarrassed Tinubu, the PDP candidate suffered a worse rout, leaving Mr Tinubu with a net gain of about 500,000 votes over Atiku, his closest rival. And in Kano, where the APC's share of the votes fell by half, the beneficiary was the NNPP, which also seized most of what had been the PDP shares in previous elections. The crisis in the PDP also saw the party losing strategic support especially in Rivers, Oyo and Benue states.

However, in spite of the opposition cannibalising and leaving itself supine in the fight, the poll could still have dragged into a run-off but for the residual support that the APC retains across the North. Tinubu came out with more votes in the North-west and North-central than Atiku, despite losing the four-K (Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi) states and taking only two of the seven states in a zone with the largest voter population in the country and long-term fortress of the APC.

By his victory in the presidential election, Tinubu became the third person from the South-west to be elected president in 30 years and in the entire history of the country. Howev-

er, the election of the first one, Moshood Abiola, was annulled and he died in prison under the military while insisting on the de-annulment of the 1993 presidential election and revalidation of his mandate.

Despite the hard way he secured his victory, the president-elect is going to the Aso Rock Villa with the reputation of a successful governor, party builder and political strategist. This will raise expectations among Nigerians and outside the country about the prospects of Nigeria on his watch. After the security and economic crises of the past eight years, many believe Buhari's is not a tough act to follow. Some reports on Tuesday stated that Nigerian stocks rose upon information that Tinubu was heading for victory.

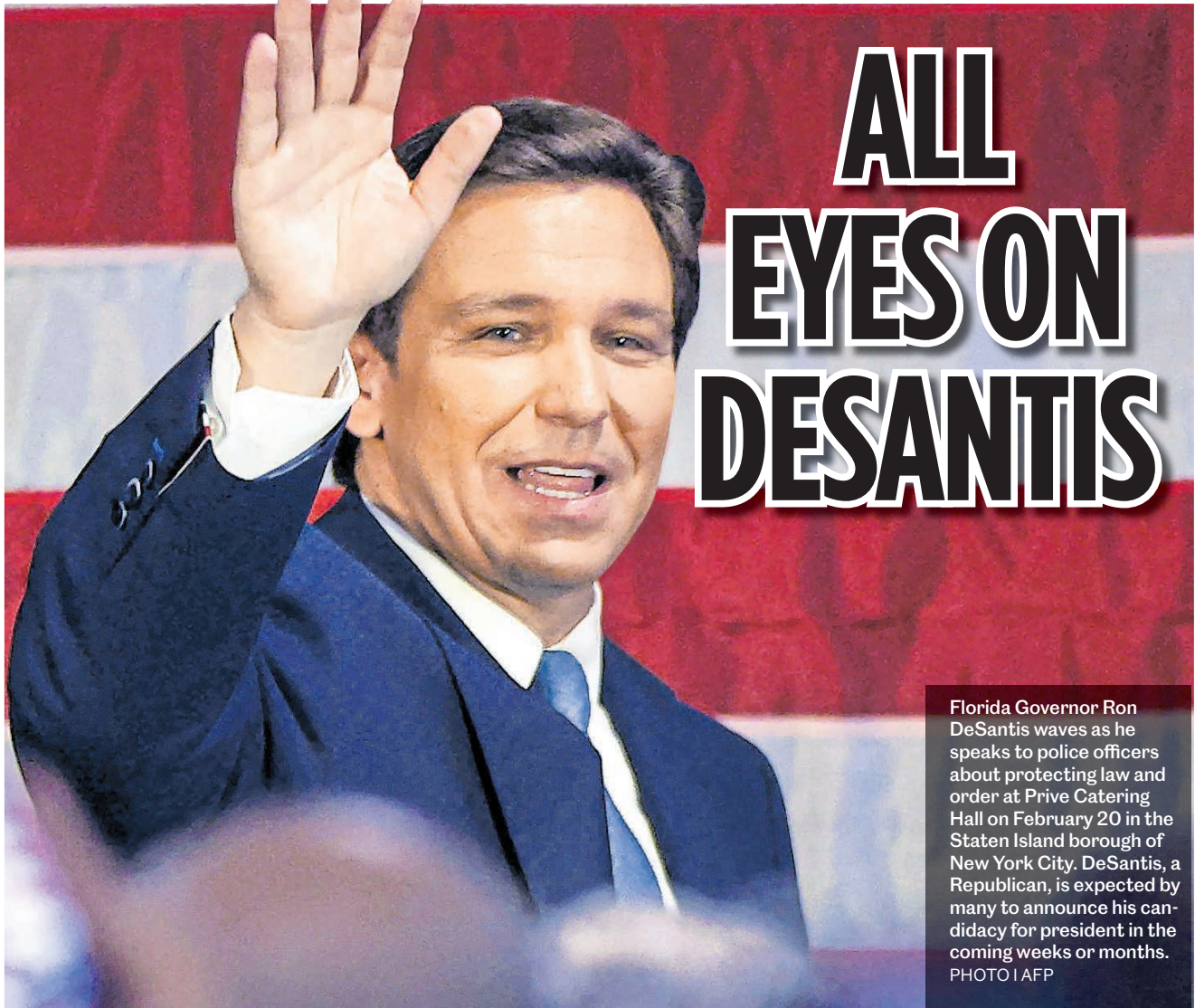
Tinubu made an almost anonymous entry into the political terrain during the political transition programme of Gen Ibrahim Babangida. He was a member of the Peoples Front political association founded by the late Shehu Yar'adua but the group and others were denied registration as political parties by the junta. Instead, it established two parties, the Social Democratic Party and the National Republican Convention. The Yar'adua group moved into the former and it was under the party that Tinubu was elected senator in July 1992.

— *The Premium Times*



# global lens

■ EVERYONE IS TALKING ABOUT THE PRESIDENTIAL PROSPECTS OF FLORIDA GOVERNOR



Florida Governor Ron DeSantis waves as he speaks to police officers about protecting law and order at Prive Catering Hall on February 20 in the Staten Island borough of New York City. DeSantis, a Republican, is expected by many to announce his candidacy for president in the coming weeks or months. PHOTO | AFP

**The Republican party's newest star appears almost daily in the national media as a battlefield commander in the cultural wars prosecuted by his party against 'woke' politicians, whom he accuses of wanting to impose their progressive ideology on wide swathes of America**

● WASHINGTON

As the United States heads into another election cycle and candidates line up to make their case for the White House, everyone is talking about the presidential prospects of Florida Governor Ron DeSantis. Except DeSantis. For the moment, the Republican firebrand is

happy to focus on the state he has turned into a laboratory of right-wing policies that supporters hope will propel him to the Oval Office. The party's newest star appears almost daily in the national media as a battlefield commander in the cultural wars prosecuted by his party against "woke" politicians, businesses and professors, whom he accuses of wanting

to impose their progressive ideology on wide swathes of America. In Florida, the opening salvos were fired last year over the powder keg issue of education, with DeSantis restricting discussion without parental permission of sexual orientation and gender identity in elementary schools. He also signed off on a law limiting teaching material on

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## global lens

# DeSantis leads race for Republican presidential ticket

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race and its relationship to US history, and in January vetoed a high school course on African-American issues whose content he called indoctrination.

His administration also raised hackles by replacing seven trustees of New College of Florida, a public liberal arts school in Sarasota, to give the board a conservative majority.

The result has been the same in each case: applause in America's most conservative circles, outrage from his opponents and media coverage that has brought national exposure to the 44-year-old governor. In public he demonstrates little interest in talk of his future on the national stage, but DeSantis does very little to hide that his management of Florida reflects his wider views on US politics.

The title of his memoir, due for release next Tuesday, is *The Courage to Be Free: Florida's Blueprint for America's Revival*.

For Charles Zelden, professor of political science at Nova South-eastern University, a half-hour drive north of Miami, there is no question DeSantis is thinking about the White House. "He is in no rush to declare that he is running for president because he doesn't have to. He is building his brand. And it's easier to do it by saying he's just focusing on Florida," he said. So far the DeSantis brand has been a success.

Little is left of the political unknown who pulled off a surprise victory in the 2018 gubernatorial election with the support of the man who would likely be his greatest rival in 2024, former president Donald Trump.

The governor's management of the Covid-19 pandemic, pushing for a rapid reopening of the economy, and his opposition to the health measures of President Joe Biden's administration, made him an instant hit with Republicans. In November he won landslide reelection, with almost 60 per cent of the vote against Democrat Charlie Crist, boosted by policies that mobilised the conservative electorate, people like 48-year-old former teacher Katy Campbell.

The mother of three has been a member of the Brevard County School Board since 2018 and shares DeSantis's ideas on education.

"I am a conservative and I don't think that the conversations around sexual orientation or gender identity belong to the classroom. I believe they belong to the family," she said.

Others lament the governor's education policies, which have led to dozens of books being removed from school libraries in recent months. "DeSantis is using education in Florida as part of a campaign for something that has nothing to do with improving education in Florida," said Amy Reid, 58, the director of the gender studies programme at New College.

"I hope that people realise that what's going on here is part of a broader orchestrated attack on freedom of speech, freedom of edu-



President Joe Biden greets guests after giving remarks at the Kempson Recreation Center in Virginia Beach, Virginia, on February 28. President Biden traveled to Virginia Beach to give remarks on his administration's plan to help Americans access to healthcare. Below: Former US President Donald Trump speaks at the East Palestine Fire Department in East Palestine, Ohio. PHOTO IAFP



cation, the public education system and freedom of religion in this country," she adds.

Zelden, the Nova South-eastern professor, notes that DeSantis knows how to leverage his position as governor to seduce Republicans beyond his state.

"I think he is very comfortable with how things are going. I think he sees a path forward to his goal, which is the presidency," he said.

In an excerpt from his memoir, DeSantis talks about the struggle of "we the people" against the liberal establishment — making clear he sees his governorship of the Sunshine State as something much larger than simple day-to-day management. "What Florida has done is establish a blueprint for governance that has produced tangible results while serving as a rebuke to the entrenched elites who have driven our nation into the ground," he writes.

Elsewhere, President Joe Biden has indicated that he will indeed be announcing a 2024 bid

for a second term — only not right away. Speculation has been mounting over Biden's plans. At 80, he is the oldest person ever in the US presidency and while he has repeatedly said he intends to run again, he has yet to commit.

In an interview with *ABC News*' David Muir, he said: "my intention is... has been from the beginning, to run". Asked about an earlier interview Friday in which his wife, First Lady Jill Biden, told the *Associated Press* that the time and place of a campaign announcement was all that remained to decide, Biden quipped: "As my mother would say, God love her."

However, he indicated that he is in no hurry. "There's too many other things we have to finish in the near term before I start a campaign," he said. "I've got other things to finish before I get into a full-blown campaign."

Asked by *ABC* whether his age is part of his calculation on whether or not to run, Biden said: "No. But it's legitimate for people to raise issues about my age. It's totally legitimate to do that." "The only thing I can say is 'watch me,'" he added, referring to his record in office.

Biden would be 86 at the end of a second term. Earlier this month, an extensive medical test found him to be "healthy, vigorous" and "fit to successfully execute the duties of the president".

"President Biden remains a healthy, vigorous, 80-year-old male, who is fit to successfully execute the duties of the Presidency, to include those of as Chief Executive, Head of State and Commander in Chief," Biden's physician, Kevin O'Connor, said in a letter published by the White House. "The President remains fit for duty, and fully executes all of his responsibilities without any exemptions or accommodations."

On the Republican side, the frontrunner so far is former president Donald Trump, whom Biden beat in the tumultuous 2020 election.

—AFP



## global lens

■ COUPLE REPORTEDLY TOLD TO VACATE THE PROPERTY IN JANUARY

## HARRY EVICTED FROM ROYAL HOME

• LONDON

Prince Harry and his wife, Meghan, are being evicted from their home on the British royal family's Windsor estate, leaving them without a UK base. Frogmore Cottage, which they refurbished at a reported cost of \$2.9 million, had been a wedding present from the late Queen Elizabeth II in 2018. It has now been offered to Prince Andrew, King Charles III's disgraced brother.

Harry and Meghan, also known as the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, were reportedly told to vacate the property in January just days after the publication of the prince's tell-all memoir, *Spare*. Charles, who has long favoured a slimmed down monarchy, is currently undertaking an overhaul of funding.

A possible axing of Andrew's £250,000-a-year grant could see him forced out of his current residence, the 30-room Royal Lodge, also on the Windsor estate, due to its massive upkeep costs. Harry and Meghan moved to California in 2020 after dramatically quitting royal life.

Since then, they have taken part in a string of projects — from an interview with Oprah Winfrey to a *Netflix* documentary — airing grievances about their experiences as members of the British royal family.

Harry's autobiography, *Spare*, smashed sales records when it was published in January, but also saw his popularity ratings slump. Andrew was forced out of public life over his friendship with the late convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. Last year, Andrew

**Frogmore Cottage, which had been a wedding present from the late Queen Elizabeth II in 2018, has now been offered to Prince Andrew, King Charles III's disgraced brother**

settled a US civil case for sexual assault with accuser Virginia Giuffre. Buckingham Palace declined to comment on the reports. A representative for the Sussexes was not immediately available.

The ten-bedroom house, alongside Harry's bijou first residence, Nottingham Cottage (or Nott Cott), has also gained a moment of fame by appearing in the couple's *Netflix* documentary. It's the kitchen that's the star of the show, as Meghan is seen painting her nails while Harry eats a yoghurt, and the pair kiss while Meghan perches on a countertop.

Their most recent visit was at the end of the summer in 2022, when they spent a little time there in preparation for their European tour in early September. Earlier in the summer they were in residence for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, and reports emerged that they hosted their daughter Lilibet's first birthday at the cottage, a casual picnic party complete with royal guests and one very charming photograph.

The autumn of 2020 saw reports that Frogmore Cottage had new tenants in the form of Prince Harry's cousin, Princess Eugenie, and her husband, Jack Brooksbank. The couple, who had their first child together in early 2021, had moved into the property owned by the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, with arrangements for the tenancy kept under wraps. According to *The Sun*, "the Sussexes' prized possessions were hauled out of Frogmore Cottage in the dead of night to make way for their new tenant".

However, it was reported within a few weeks that the couple had swiftly moved out.

The ten-bedroom house on the Windsor Estate became ready in April 2019 after months of extensive renovations. The cost was rather staggering, even though the couple mostly paid for 'fixtures and fittings' themselves. The house, which had previously been split up into sections for offices, was returned to a single residence, and major works were necessary, including replacing ceiling beams and floor joists, rewiring the electrical system, and installing new gas and water mains.

When news broke that the Duke and Duchess of Sussex were stepping back from royal duties, moving to North America and focusing on commercial ventures instead of receiving public funds, there was some controversy around the cost of renovations to the British public. Following this, Prince Harry apparently offered to pay back the cost early on in the process of negotiating his new role. The couple are now also said to be paying commercial rent to the royal estate for Frogmore Cottage, as part of their move to become financially independent. The surroundings of the cottage are certainly dear to Harry and Meghan's hearts — their engagement photos were taken in the grounds of Frogmore House, the larger, grander house on the estate, and their evening wedding reception was also held there. That house, built in the 17th century, was once used as a country retreat by Queen Charlotte, and it was later occupied by various royals, including Queen Victoria's mother, the Duchess of Kent; Princess Helena, the third daughter of Queen Victoria; and the future George V and Queen Mary.

Frogmore Cottage itself is a slightly less grand affair, but still very lovely indeed. It was built by Queen Charlotte for the use of her daughters at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and the young Henry James spent some time there with his family in the 1840s. The building is Grade-II-listed and has ten bedrooms, but was for some time used as accommodation for palace staff.

Renovations of the cottage took months and included some very modern and unexpected changes. As well as the general refit to turn it into a five-bedroom property, and the addition of two orangeries to the house, the couple have added a vegetable garden and even a yoga studio. Meghan is an avid yoga fan, and her mother, Doria Ragland, teaches yoga in Los Angeles. A royal source told the *Daily Mail*: "The duchess has a passion for cooking so it was suggested to include a small plot in the spacious garden where they can grow some of their own produce." Soundproofing has been installed to tackle noise from planes going in and out of Heathrow.



Prince Harry and Meghan Markle at Frogmore House in Windsor in December 2017.

## OBIT

■ **WHEN HIS FATHER GAVE KIBAKI AN OFFICE IN HIS BUILDING, MOI TARGETED THE FAMILY**

● BY JOHN KAMAU

**W**hen he decided to fight the military, Lt Col Benjamin Muema, a graduate of the prestigious Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, looked like a man on a suicidal mission. Muema was the leader of a group of former military officers who had been forcefully retired – and were languishing in poverty. They could neither start businesses nor lead a normal life. They were being harassed, and most had cases in court.

By the time of his death in a road accident on February 6, Lt Col Muema was Chief Executive Officer of the DAP-K (the Democratic Action Party) – and had won some of the battles.

When we first met some 20 years ago, Muema narrated how fellow officers who had been removed from the military were losing hope. Some had committed suicide. But Muema, who had been forced to “resign” as a commissioned officer, had decided to sue the government and fight back. He was asking the High Court to interpret the military law and also the legality of Legal Notice No.61, which was introduced by Chief Secretary Jeremiah Kiereini, to govern soldiers’ pensions and gratuities.

Trained as a helicopter pilot — he scored an ‘A’ at the US Army Aviation School — Muema had risen fast through the ranks, first as a Combat Tactics Instructor, and by 1992, he was a Lieutenant Colonel.

Multi-party democracy was in sight, and President Daniel arap Moi was getting paranoid. That was when Muema’s father, a former school headmaster, allowed Mwai Kibaki’s Democratic Party to open an office in his building in Mwala Town. From then on, Muema was a hunted man for the sins of his father.

On March 24, 1993, he was called by his boss, Maj Gen Humphrey Njoroge, and asked to report to the military police. He was consequently arrested and handed over to the Flying Squad, who took him to Pangani Police Station. He was alleged to have stolen a motor vehicle and was held incommunicado for six days, after which he was taken

# THE SOLDIER WHO FOUGHT THE ARMY

**By the time of his death on February 6, Lt Col Muema was the DAP-K chief executive and had won many battles**

back to Njoroge by armed police and forced to sign a resignation letter. He was then charged with robbery with violence, which he allegedly committed on the night of January 7 and 8, 1993. After spending 26 days in Kamiti Prison, the charge was changed to simple robbery. If the police officers had checked, they would have realised that Muema was in Bangladesh on the dates in the charge sheet. After calling 18 witnesses, the State entered a *nolle*

*prosequi*, and the case was terminated.

But on March 16, 2000, he was arrested again on the same charges. He went to the High Court, which ruled that the case was illegal. He then sued the government for malicious prosecution. Muema believed he was being kept busy because he was pursuing his rights within the military. In addition, he was protesting the legality of his resignation.

The notice had subjected all military personnel to age limitations and empowered the Defence Council to fire soldiers. Muema argued that Kiereini and the Defence Council had overstepped their mandate since the Pensions and Gratuities Act, Cap 201, could only be changed by Parliament. Muema was a man on a mission. His group pointed out that it was becoming hard even to file cases against the military since key military laws were not in the public

domain and had been expunged from various records.

The laws were reportedly removed from public libraries in 1979, and after that, most military matters were sorted out through legal notices and orders from the Defence Council.

When Muema went to Court, it ruled that the Defence Council had to work under the Armed Forces Act and could not dismiss officers at will. Although the High Court ordered his reinstatement and full pay backdated to 1993, when he was forced to resign, his case opened wider scrutiny of the military.

Another issue that emerged during the ruling was that Commissioned Officers (those who had served for over 10 years) could not be removed from the forces since they were under statutory protection. Therefore, they could only lose their positions through a court martial or following the Armed Forces Act.

The law stated that soldiers who had left the military as Commissioned Officers were supposed to be in the “reserve army”, which was provided for in the military laws, and with full pay. Every year, according to the law, they were supposed to return for training for at least 28 days.

Three years ago, the Court of Appeal awarded Lt Col Muema Sh6.4 million for the torture that he went through and the forced resignation. The Court agreed with the military officer that the cases were meant to harass him. Court of Appeal judges Roselyn Nambuye, Asike Makhandia and William Ouko found malice in the number of unsuccessful criminal cases pressed against him and an admission by an army officer who testified for the State that he had no clue of any criminal case Muema was involved in.

“The unsuccessful initiation of a large number of criminal cases based on the same facts and background leaves no doubt in our minds that there was malice, especially when no effort was made by the appellants to tender evidence in court to justify those prosecutions,” the judges said.

His knowledge of military law was hailed by Justice Prof Jackton Ojwang’ when Muema decided to prosecute his case in the High Court.

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Lt Col Benjamin Muema



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