

# THE Weekly Review

For the Thinking Person

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## COOKING OIL MILLIONAIRES

Is the multibillion-shilling edible oil imports programme the new gold mine for Kenya's elite? While shelf prices have slightly dropped since the duty-free scheme was introduced, middlemen in Dubai are making a killing as the link between KNTC and manufacturers in Malaysia

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## letter from the editor

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It's sunrise in the Great Rift Valley and the rays of light are shining through the clouds hovering over African Savannah. The beautiful birds perched in the acacia trees are just getting up and singing their hearts out. Below, the pinnate leaves provide towering Maasai giraffes with breakfast.

This is Lake Naivasha, one of the most famous freshwater bodies in the world, renowned for its gorgeous scenery. The Safari Rally, which brings out the thrills and spills that no other World Rally Championship round could ever do, will be staged here from June 21 to June 25. A star-studded cast led by the eight-time world champion Sébastien Ogier of France will be foraging for laurels in the wilderness over four exciting days.

Action begins at the Ndulele Conservancy off the Moi North Lake Road with the Shakedown. Undulating tracks with varying surfaces through a wooded landscape will allow the crews to sample what to expect of the rally and their first feel of the spectacular challenge ahead. The famous Hell's Gate stage, with its fast ascents and descents, will be the final competitive stage of the rally on June 25. With perhaps the most scenic backdrop of any of the power stages on the WRC, Hell's Gate will sign off the rally on a high.

This year's rally promises to be a straight slugfest between Kalle Rovannerä of Finland and Ogier, the 2021 winner and current leader of the WRC standings. Rovannerä and Ogier – winners of the previous two editions – will both field Toyota GR Yaris cars along with Elfyn Evans and Takamoto Katsuta.

Hyundai Motorsport has entered a trio of i20 Ns for Esapekka Lappi, Thierry Neuville and Dani Sordo, while Ott Tänak, Pierre-Louis Loubet and privateer Jourdan Serderidis will pilot M-Sport Ford Pumas. The imperious Toyota



Allan Buluku

**Sports CS Ababu Namwamba lamented about officials embezzling funds released for rally preparations. He should not be lamenting anymore; he needs to act aggressively and hold those corrupt officials to account. Lamentation is for the weak and not for those who wield power donated to them by the government.**

team made history last year, when Rovannerä led a remarkable clean sweep of the top four positions. Only once in nearly three decades has any other manufacturer accomplished the same feat in the championship.

The Safari was first held in 1953, an epic marathon of 2,000 kilometres on often unforgiving terrain. It fast became a great feature, expected annually. For decades, the event was synonymous with the April holidays and everybody with a radio or television followed keenly the performance at every stage. People even had their favourite drivers and machines that they passionately rooted for.

Held on roads still open to the public, it became notorious as the toughest round of the WRC. Arduous conditions and constantly changing weather and more than 5,000 competi-

tive kilometres made simply finishing an achievement.

It's now a modern rally, but with less than a fortnight to go, many Kenyans still do not know that the cars are about to land. There hasn't been any blitz of publicity commensurate with the image of the rally.

It is as if the great event only thrives in the darkness of ignorance. Just like the silent boxing association that had to be publicised to life by Tanzanian pugilist Karim Mandonga. They managed to fill the halls simply because of Mandonga.

That should not be the fate of the Safari. The Ministry of Sports must wake up and realise that this is itself an opportunity to sell Kenya as a magical tourist destination. Brand Kenya, too, should be able to see the gaping prospect to cash in upon. The two entities cannot afford to sleep on the job. The government must be proactive.

In the past, Sports Cabinet Secretary Ababu Namwamba lamented about officials embezzling funds released for rally preparations. The government pumped in Sh1.6 billion this year. The CS should not be lamenting anymore; he needs to act aggressively and hold those officials to account. Lamentation is for the weak and not for those who wield power donated to them by the government. It's time to get up and sell Kenya.

The Safari of old has evolved to fit the new WRC system, but its character remains, with challenging dirt roads, rocky and rutted tracks, unpredictable weather that could transform dry and dusty trails into glutinous mud baths, and stunning, picture-postcard scenery and exotic wildlife.

Va va va vroom!

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## the telescope

### ■ They face Djibouti, Mauritius and Pakistan

## Stars set for four-nation tourney

The national football team, Harambee Stars, will this week compete in a four-nation tournament in Mauritius.

Coached by Engin Firat, Stars will face the hosts, Djibouti and Pakistan. The tournament will take place in the country's capital, Port Louis, between June 11-18. The Turkish coach will use the tournament to fine-tune his charges ahead of the 2026 Fifa World Cup qualifiers, which begin in November.

The draw for the qualifiers will be conducted on July 12, in Cotonou, Benin. Firat has called up 30 players for this assignment and will be gunning

for better returns than the 2-1 loss to Iran in Tehran in March. Those called up include captain Michael Olunga, who is clubless after his contract with Qatar's Al Duhail SC ran out, and Gor Mahia sensation Benson Omalla, who has scored 25 times in the Kenyan Premier League this season.

The Stars are finding their feet after staying out in the cold for 18 months in the wake of a Fifa suspension of Kenya that lasted between 2021 and 2022. The ban ensured the team missed out on competing in the 2023 Africa Cup of Nations qualifiers.



Harambee Stars players train at the Moi International Sports Centre, Kasarani, on March 23. SILA KIPLAGAT | NATION

### ■ Session seeks to empower young leaders

## Interactive day for '30s women'



A free interactive class for women leaders in their 30s will be held at The Social House on James Gichuru Road in Nairobi on June 15.

The free Masterclass will be taught by accredited Wellness

& Leadership coach, Cece Ojany-Bekhor.

Ojany-Bekhor teaches leaders how to get the results they want with less struggle and strain and runs one-on-one workshops and retreats for different organisations.

The event seeks to empower women to invest in personal and professional development that will allow them to create fulfilment and success on their own terms.

### ■ Mystery of the desert: Fortified villages of rocks



A general view of the old town in Fachi. The oasis of Fachi is famous for its fortress and its old town, with almost intact walls. Some symbolic sites of the ancient city are still used for traditional ceremonies.

## The lost cities of the Nigerien Sahara

A long trek across the desert of north-eastern Niger brings the visitor to one of the most astonishing and rewarding sights in the Sahel: fortified villages of salt and clay perched on rocks, with the Saharan sands laying siege below.

Generations of travellers have stood before the "ksars" of Djado, wondering at their crenelated walls, watchtowers, secretive passages and wells, all of them testifying to a skilled but unknown hand.

Who chose to build this outpost in a scorched and desolate region, and why they built it, are questions that have never been fully answered. And just as beguiling is why it was abandoned. No archaeological dig or scientific dating has ever been undertaken to explain the mysteries. Djado lies in the Kawar oasis region, 1,300 kilometres from the capital Niamey, near Niger's deeply trou-

bled border with Libya.

Once a crossroads for caravans trading across the Sahara, Kawar today is a nexus for drug and arms trafficking. Its grim reputation deters all but the most determined traveller. "There have been no foreign tourists since 2002," said Sidi Aba Laouel, the mayor of Chirfa, the commune where the Djado sites are located. "When tourism was good, there was economic potential for the community."

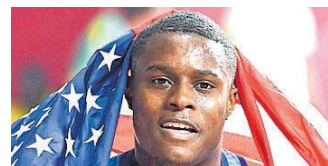
A blessing of sorts occurred in 2014, when gold was discovered. It saw an influx of miners from across West Africa, bringing life and some economic respite, but also bandits who hole up in the mountains.

Few of the newcomers seem interested in visiting the ksars.

The mayor is careful when speaking about local history, acknowledging the many gaps in knowledge.

### ■ World Championships in Budapest this August

## Norman, Coleman in NYC showdown



Reigning world 400-metre champion Michael Norman and former 100m world champion Christian Coleman (above) will race in a 100m showdown at the New York Grand Prix. The June 24 meet will serve as a tuneup for both American

sprinters ahead of July's US championships and the World Championships in August in Budapest. Norman, 25, won the world crown last year at Eugene and ran on US 4x400 gold medal relays at the Tokyo Olympics and the 2022 worlds. He has a 100 personal best of 9.86 seconds. Coleman, 27, won the 2019 world 100m title and his 9.76 personal best is level for the sixth-fastest man in history at the distance. He missed the Tokyo Olympics after a ban for missed drug tests.



# kenya lens

## ■ RENT-SEEKING BEHAVIOUR BY WELL-CONNECTED TRADERS

# AN OILY MESS



According to the import entry documents for the three consignments of 85,120 20-litre jerricans of cooking oil that landed in Mombasa on May 17, the landed cost is stated at US\$26 per jerrican.



The Dubai firm made massive margins because the prevailing international prices quoted daily on commodity exchanges show that the landing price of a 20-litre jerrican of cooking oil is US\$19.



President of the Cairo-based Pan-African trade finance provider, Afreximbank, Benedict Okey Oramah, said the institution would support a plan to convert KNTC into Kenya's export trading agency. He signed a US\$3 billion deal with Kenya.



Kenya has a vibrant edible oils processing industry made up of 13 players with a combined installed capacity of processing 2.1 million tons of crude palm oil per year. The factories are currently estimated to be operating at 40 per cent capacity.



The nouveau rich of the duty-free cooking oil imports game are making tidy margins. The Dubai firm made a cool US\$595,840 in profit from the three consignments.

Trade, Investment and Industry CS Moses Kuria recently unleashed acrimonious attacks on KAM for opposing duty-free imports of cooking oil. He spoke of the existence of a five-member cartel that was dictating high consumer prices for edible oil.



Billions are at stake because the government has tasked KNTC to import 125,000 tons of cooking oil to reduce domestic consumer prices by 30 per cent.

## The case of three large consignments of cooking oil brought into the country by a Dubai-based entity under the duty-free import programme reveals how big bucks are being made by elite traders

● BY JAINDI KISERO

Commodity imports and trading is clearly emerging as the new frontier for rent-seeking elite in Kenya, *The Weekly Review* has established. Trends suggest that the UAE capital of Dubai is the node and core of the activities of the elite. Consider the fol-

lowing recent case: An analysis of Kenya Revenue Authority import entries – which are accountable documents – of three large consignments of cooking oil that were brought into the country by a Dubai-based entity under the government's duty-free import programme, not only uncovered red flags of rent-seeking behav-

our, but revealed how big bucks are being made by these well-connected traders.

Rent-seeking is an economic concept that occurs when privileged groups and the well-connected seek to gain wealth without no reciprocal productivity in the economy. According to the import entry documents for the

three consignments of 85,120 20-litre jerricans of cooking oil that landed in Mombasa on May 17, the landed cost is stated at US\$26 per jerrican.

The Dubai company made massive margins because the prevailing international prices quoted daily on commodity exchanges

Continued on Page 6

## kenya lens

**Elite traders making a killing with duty-free oil**

Continued from Page 5

such as the Kuala Lumpur Commodity Exchange show that the landing price of a 20-litre jerrican of cooking oil is US\$19. Clearly, the *nouveau rich* of the duty-free cooking oil imports game are making tidy margins. Even more revealing in the import entry documents is the fact that the origin of the cooking oil is stated as Malaysia while the exporter and the invoices are from a Dubai-based entity by the name Multi Commerce FZC whose address is stated as Sharjah, UAE.

The Kenya National Trading Company (KNTC) is named in the documents as the final consignee of the cooking oil. Thus, the big bucks were made in Dubai by the exporter of these three large consignments of cooking oil, which were subsequently sold to the KNTC. If you do the math, the Dubai-based entity made a cool US\$595,840 in profit from the three consignments.

Billions are at stake because the government has tasked KNTC to import 125,000 tons of cooking oil, ostensibly to reduce domestic consumer prices by 30 per cent, which begs the question: Why can't KNTC import the cooking oil directly from Malaysia? Why go through Dubai and allow middlemen to reap rents? The reality at any supermarket shelf where the product is sold under the brand name 'OKI' is that cooking oil prices have not come down by 30 per cent as had been promised by the government while announcing the cooking oil duty-free import programme. (See table on Page 7)

*The Weekly Review* has learnt that the Kenya Association of Manufacturers (KAM) last month fired a letter to the acting KRA Commissioner-General, Rispah Simiyu, making the point that the duty-free import programme

**It is common trade practice for companies in both public and private sector to use exporters familiar with the sector and countries of import to bring in commodities. This enables companies to get goods faster and cheaper. No middlemen are used in trade.**

Pamela Mutua, KNTC boss

had not brought down consumer prices by 30 per cent. "The way the process of imports is done will have huge negative implications on both industry sustainability and loss of revenue to KRA," said the association in a letter signed by its CEO, Anthony Mwangi, dated May 24.

KAM made the following demands in that letter: First, that KRA provides data and details on the

amount of finished edible oil imported through KNTC since January 2023; secondly, clarification of applicable import duties, levies and charges, if any, that have been paid by KNTC for the imported finished cooking oil; thirdly, full names of the exporters who have shipped these consignments; and finally, confirmation as to whether the cooking oil being imported meet all standards and complies with all laws of the East African Community.

KAM chairman Rajan Shah said the cheap imports have cut their production capacity by at least 20 per cent, adding that this has reduced the corporate tax that the government collects from processors. The State missed out on the 10 per cent duty that's normally collected by the Kenya Revenue Authority.

"By cutting production by at least 20 per cent, it





# kenya lens

means that companies that manufacture packaging containers have also been affected. About Sh29 billion will be lost in Import duty, VAT, IDE, and other fees, which have been waived on the importation of the 125,000 tons. The government will also lose corporation tax of about Sh500 million,"said Shah. Processors normally refine 600,000 tonnes of oil annually to meet the country's total requirement. From the outset, critics questioned the wisdom of giving KNTC the responsibility of executing the big task of importing billions worth of consumer goods.

KNTC Managing Director Pamela Mutua, however, defended the programme, saying shelf prices had reduced "by almost half" since they started importing edible oil. "The prices will reduce further as our products hit the market, lowering the cost of living as was intended. Due to KNTC's initiative, manufacturers have also started self-regulating and the market is now fairer to consumers," she told *The Weekly Review*.

She also refuted KAM claims that middlemen were making a killing from the scheme. "It is common trade practice for companies in both public and private sector to use exporters familiar with the sector and countries of import to bring in commodities. This enables companies to get goods faster and cheaper. No middlemen are used in trade. The fact that KNTC products have managed to lower the cost of edible oil by almost 50 per cent despite KNTC being in the business for a few months demonstrates how some industry players have been exploiting Kenyans," said Mutua.

"KNTC has been a trading agency since 1965 and generates internal funds. Last year, we sold goods worth Sh2.6bn through our eight depots located across the country. We sold to consumers, the military, police, relief agencies and other organisations that buy in bulk. We are a profitable organisation and we rely on cash generated from our trading operations and have access to credit lines from banks that we tap into," she added.

**“By cutting production by at least 20 per cent, it means that companies that manufacture packaging containers have also also been affected. About Sh29 billion will be lost in Import duty, VAT, IDE, and other fees, which have been waived on the importation of the 125,000 tons.**

Rajan Shah, KAM chairman



KNTC was until recently perceived as a moribund state-owned trading enterprise that only had relevance in the '70s and '80s, when Kenya was still under the ancient regime of command economy, price controls and foreign exchange allocation committees.

The fact that the KNTC supply contracts were not being given openly through transparent tendering also became a big issue. Then there was the fact that hardly months after the programme was unveiled, before the project took off, there were sensational stories in the marketplace about how well-connected briefcase traders had been wandering the streets of Dubai hawking contracts from KNTC and looking for suppliers.

As criticism against the arrangement mounted, the Minister for Trade, Investment and Industry, Moses Kuria, unleashed acrimonious attacks on KAM for opposing duty-free imports of cooking oil. Appearing on a local prime-time television show, Kuria spoke of the existence of a five-member cartel that was dictating high consumer prices for cooking oil. He warned the quintet of a loom-

Average prices of edible oil (selected brands)	
<b>Fresh Fri (5 litres)</b>	
January	<b>Sh1,840</b>
Now	<b>Sh1,222</b>
<b>Golden Fry (5 litres)</b>	
January	<b>Sh1,660</b>
Now	<b>Sh1,266</b>
<b>Top Fry (5 litres)</b>	
January	<b>Sh1,360</b>
Now	<b>Sh1,010</b>
<b>Avena (5 litres)</b>	
January	<b>Sh1,260</b>
Now	<b>Sh1,199</b>
<b>Salit (5 litres)</b>	
January	<b>Sh1,726</b>
Now	<b>Sh1,520</b>

ing "waterloo". Kuria charged that local cooking oil manufacturers did not do any significant value-addition. All they did, he said, was merely bringing in imported finished products in drums to pack locally.

The minister said local firms did not deserve to be called manufacturers and derisively suggested the industry's lobby, the KAM, should change its name to Kenya Importers Association.

As things stand, all indications are that the government is bent on seeing KNTC play a bigger role in its price stabilisation mandate. Last month, the President of the Cairo-based Pan-African trade finance provider, Afreximbank, Prof Benedict Okey Oramah, said in a press statement that the institution would support a plan to convert KNTC into Kenya's export trading agency.

Prof Oramah, who was in Nairobi to sign a new US\$3 billion programme with Kenya, did not elaborate on the scope and type of facilities Afreximbank was planning to provide to KNTC. Kenya has a vibrant edible oils processing industry made up of 13 players with a combined installed capacity of processing 2.1 million tons of crude palm oil per year.

Additional reporting by Gerald Andae

## kenya lens

## ■ WALKING A TIGHTROPE

## PRESIDENT IN A PICKLE

**Ruto has become almost like a lone spokesman for the Finance Bill, particularly the controversial Housing Fund, despite widespread opposition to the unpopular budget proposals**

• BY MACHARIA GAI THO

President William Ruto is caught between the proverbial rock and hard place as he plays hardball in pushing for the controversial Finance Bill, while undoubtedly aware that the unpopular Housing Fund and other contentious proposals could cost him politically.

Ruto is also painfully aware that while not in open rebellion, many of his Kenya Kwanza alliance parliamentarians are at best lukewarm in support of the first budget proposals of his new regime. That was what informed the harsh warning directed at MPs when the President attended a Thanksgiving ceremony in Narok County last Sunday, June 4, in honour of the Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Soipan Tuya. He cautioned MPs that they would face consequences if they defied the party line.

"I am waiting to see the MPs who will go against the government's plan to give their voters employment. We want to see and know those going against this Finance Bill." He was alluding to warnings directed at MPs by opposition Azimio la Umoja principal Kalonzo Musyoka and several civil society groups that those who voted in support of the Finance Bill would face a backlash from the voters.

Kalonzo had demanded an open vote in Parliament so that citizens can know which of their representatives backed proposals widely criticised as imposing heavy and oppressive tax burdens on the people.

Ruto said he, too, wants an open vote rather than secret ballot, using the latest campaign narratives on the Housing Fund, which is now depicted as critical to not only making decent shelter available for the poor, but also creating employment.

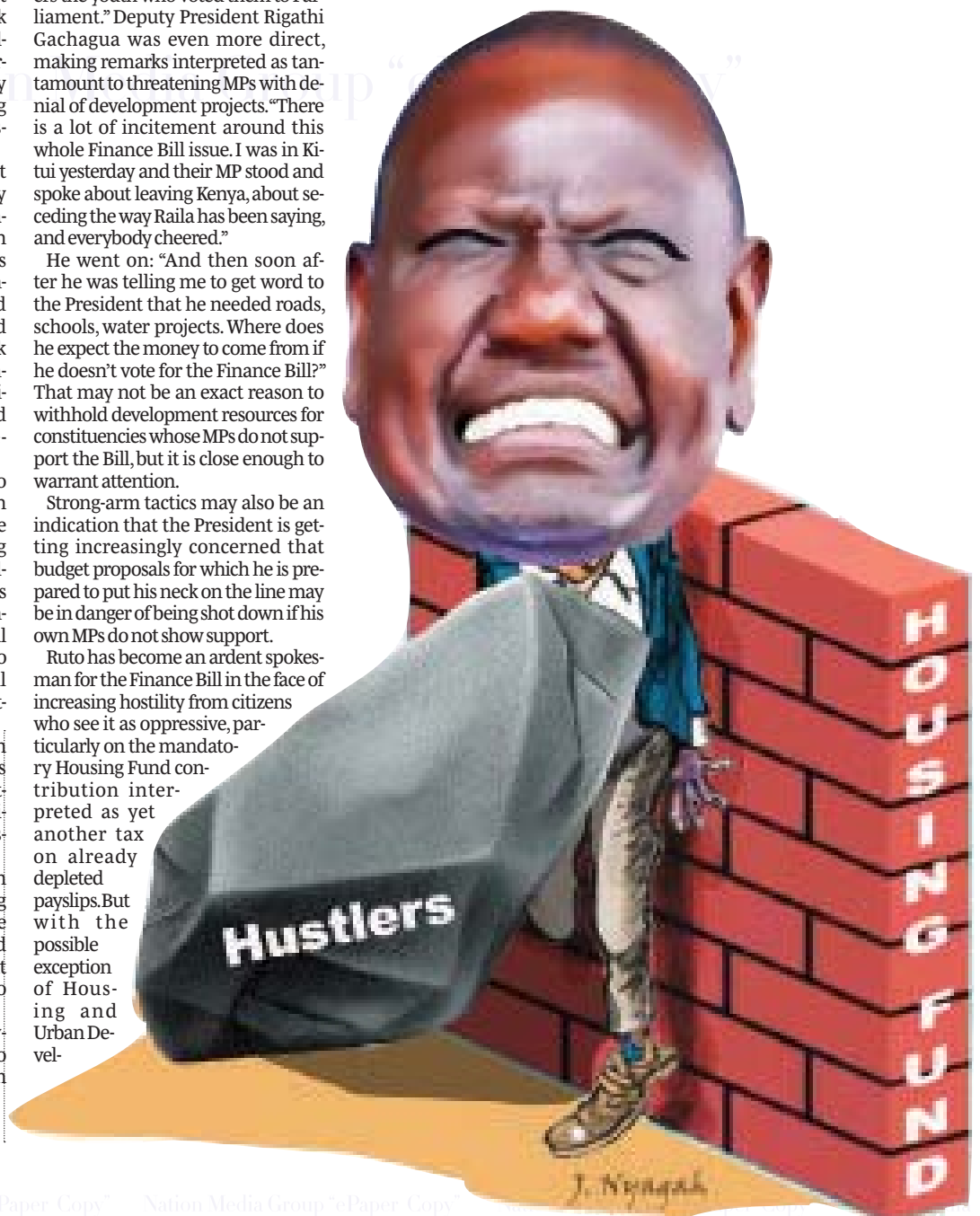
"I have heard some people saying they are waiting to see MPs who will vote for the Bill to pass, but I am equally waiting to see the Members of Parliament who will vote against

the Finance Bill... we are waiting to see them oppose a plan that empowers the youth who voted them to Parliament." Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua was even more direct, making remarks interpreted as tantamount to threatening MPs with denial of development projects. "There is a lot of incitement around this whole Finance Bill issue. I was in Kitui yesterday and their MP stood and spoke about leaving Kenya, about seceding the way Raila has been saying, and everybody cheered."

He went on: "And then soon after he was telling me to get word to the President that he needed roads, schools, water projects. Where does he expect the money to come from if he doesn't vote for the Finance Bill?" That may not be an exact reason to withhold development resources for constituencies whose MPs do not support the Bill, but it is close enough to warrant attention.

Strong-arm tactics may also be an indication that the President is getting increasingly concerned that budget proposals for which he is prepared to put his neck on the line may be in danger of being shot down if his own MPs do not show support.

Ruto has become an ardent spokesman for the Finance Bill in the face of increasing hostility from citizens who see it as oppressive, particularly on the mandatory Housing Fund contribution interpreted as yet another tax on already depleted payslips. But with the possible exception of Housing and Urban Development





## kenya lens

opment Principal Secretary Charles Hinga, the architect of a plan he crossed over with from the previous government of Uhuru Kenyatta, there is hardly anyone else speaking out consistently and with knowledge in support of the Housing Fund.

Hinga is a constant presence on the television and radio talk show circuit, but he is not a very good spokesman for a project which he understands more than anyone else. He speaks passionately and with deep knowledge of the finer details, but as witnessed when State House organised a media briefing, he gets flustered and sweaty under interrogation.

From within the vast bureaucracy of Ministry of Lands, Public Works, Housing and Urban Development, Hinga has become a largely lone spokesman for the affordable housing scheme, with his Cabinet Secretary, Zacharia Njeru, nowhere near as visible.

And from within the political sphere, the President has become almost like a lone spokesman for an initiative that is clearly close to his heart, and one that he has evidently defined as a legacy project.

The problem is that he has effectively become the chief promoter of a scheme that has become almost personalised because no else in government is able to speak about it with the same passion, understanding and knowledge. Gachagua, National Assembly Majority Leader Kimani Ichung'wa, Majority Whip Silvanus Osoo and others such as Kiharu MP Ndindi Nyoro, Senator Samson Cherargei of Nandi, Senator Aaron Cheruiyot of Kericho and Cabinet Secretaries Moses Kuria of Trade and Aden Duale of Defence, are among a substantial number occasionally speaking up for the Bill.

However, their interventions have been mostly in responding to or launching attacks on opposition critics rather than offering cogent, reasoned and knowledgeable arguments. The tricky bit is that the Finance Bill – and the Housing Fund in particular – has become a political hot potato. And it is apparent the President does not have the troops, whether from the political or technocratic spheres, or the government communications team, to competently back his crusade. If chatter on political platforms, news surveys, social media or street talk, hair salons, churches, market places or wherever else Kenyans gather and discuss cur-

rent events is anything to go by, Ruto's budget proposals are widely unpopular, especially the perception of massive tax increases. He is aware of that and has even jocularly acknowledged the fact that he has earned the nickname 'Zakayo', after the tax collector in the Bible. The political risk of pushing painful prescriptions is one Ruto accepted from the moment he took office last September, starting with scrapping subsidies on petroleum and maize flour.

He would also be aware now that many of the quick fixes he promised have not come through, and he is at risk of losing the core base, the so-called Hustler Nation – the hawkers, the boda operators, the mama mboga, and others on the margins of the modern economy – who propelled him to the Presidency. Despite his public disdain for opinion polls, which might be justified given wrong projections that he was trailing Raila as the polls of last August approached, Ruto does have a healthy respect for number crunchers.

Almost from the time he started preparing his Presidential bid while still serving a first term as President Uhuru Kenyatta's deputy, he commissioned polls that drew up all the likely scenarios. In the closing stages of the presidential campaigns last year, his favoured pollster, a little-known outfit, was the only one predicting his victory, while all the 'mainstream' researchers had Raila overhauling him.

Even now, Ruto does have numbers confirming to him that the base he relied on is become increasingly disenchanted. There is a growing anger around the country over the cost of living and broken promises. His voter base also feels abandoned and betrayed over such issues as government jobs only going to privileged few with access to the corridors of power, nepotism and tribalism in public appointment, and perceptions of runaway corruption.

His private researchers and analysts are churning out data which is corroborated by official agencies. And even politicians close to Ruto understand that, despite the confident bluster, the ground is shifting and they could become casualties. And that is why very few Kenya Kwanza politicians, including some of the most rabid Ruto supporters, are going out to aggressively campaign for the Finance Bill. Many fear it is a lost cause that would cost them dearly at home.

About the only Kenya Kwanza MP who has openly spoken out against the Finance Bill is Kiambu County Women Representative Gathoni wa Muchomba. The former radio presenter, in true Kenyan political fashion, organised a public hearing in her constituency, where she pledged to follow the dictates of voters in the direction she had guided them – against the Bill.

Wa Muchomba's ploy may have been stage-managed, but it is likely that sentiments in Kiambu against the Bill are mirrored in the rest of the vote-rich Mt Kenya region, which was critical to Ruto's electoral victory.

Even in Ruto's northern Rift Valley bastion, support for the Bill seems ambivalent at best. Armed with all that knowledge on shifting ground and the way in which the opposition is moving in to capitalize on the issue, most politicians would beat hasty retreats.

But not Ruto. While he is undoubtedly concerned and frustrated by inability to convince Kenyans that the Housing Fund is a good thing, he remains confident that despite his troops being nervous and unsure, he still has the numbers to ensure passage in Parliament. Beyond the public warning against defying the party line, Kenya Kwanza strategists have been working the phones over the last few weeks, impressing on individual MPs that voting for the Bill is essential to the party agenda. The message is that all must, without exception and no room for abstaining or absenteeism, turn up in Parliament on due date and vote for the Finance Bill.

There will be consequences if they don't obey. The most immediate punitive measure would be de-whipping, the process by which a rebel MP is denied opportunity to represent the party in House committees, official delegations, foreign trips and so on. That can hit MPs hard as they rely heavily on the allowances earned from committee sittings and other official assignments outside the Chambers. But de-whipping also comes with risks, as it gives rebels the excuse to snub their own party platforms and continue voting with the other side. There is also the potent threat to deny rebels nomination to defend their seats come the next elections. That could be enough to whip everybody back into line, especially if UDA and other Kenya Kwanza affiliates are still considered front-runners at this stage.

According to those close to Ruto, he is convinced that as long as the Finance Bill passes, he will have the opportunity to start fixing the economy within a process that involves paying off the crippling public debt inherited from the previous government.

He is prepared for some shock therapy and very painful measures, but believes that once the ship starts stabilising he will be proved right, and have the time to start winning back lost support in advance of campaigns for the next elections. The problem is that already, some projections are going awry. On the Housing Fund for instance, it has been difficult to show that it is a priority, even for the intended beneficiaries, in the face of so many more urgent needs.

Campaign spin that it will lead to the eradication of slums, create hundreds of thousands of jobs and generally be the magic bullet to economic growth does not seem backed by any real research. It has also not been demonstrated that slums are the consequence of housing deficit rather than poverty and unemployment. Focus on the Housing Fund has also obscured what may be other equally important proposals in the Finance Bill, especially in new and increased taxes across so many sectors that will ultimately lead to higher consumer prices, and as disincentives to both local and foreign investment. Ruto has a difficult balancing act in trying to prevent the economy crashing, while at the same time meeting expectations of those who voted him in on promises of massive cash injections for every interest groups.

In office, he is finding that he promised more than he can deliver, but getting lost in all the noise is the fact that the forces he is up against are not offering alternative prescriptions to those proposed in the Finance Bill.

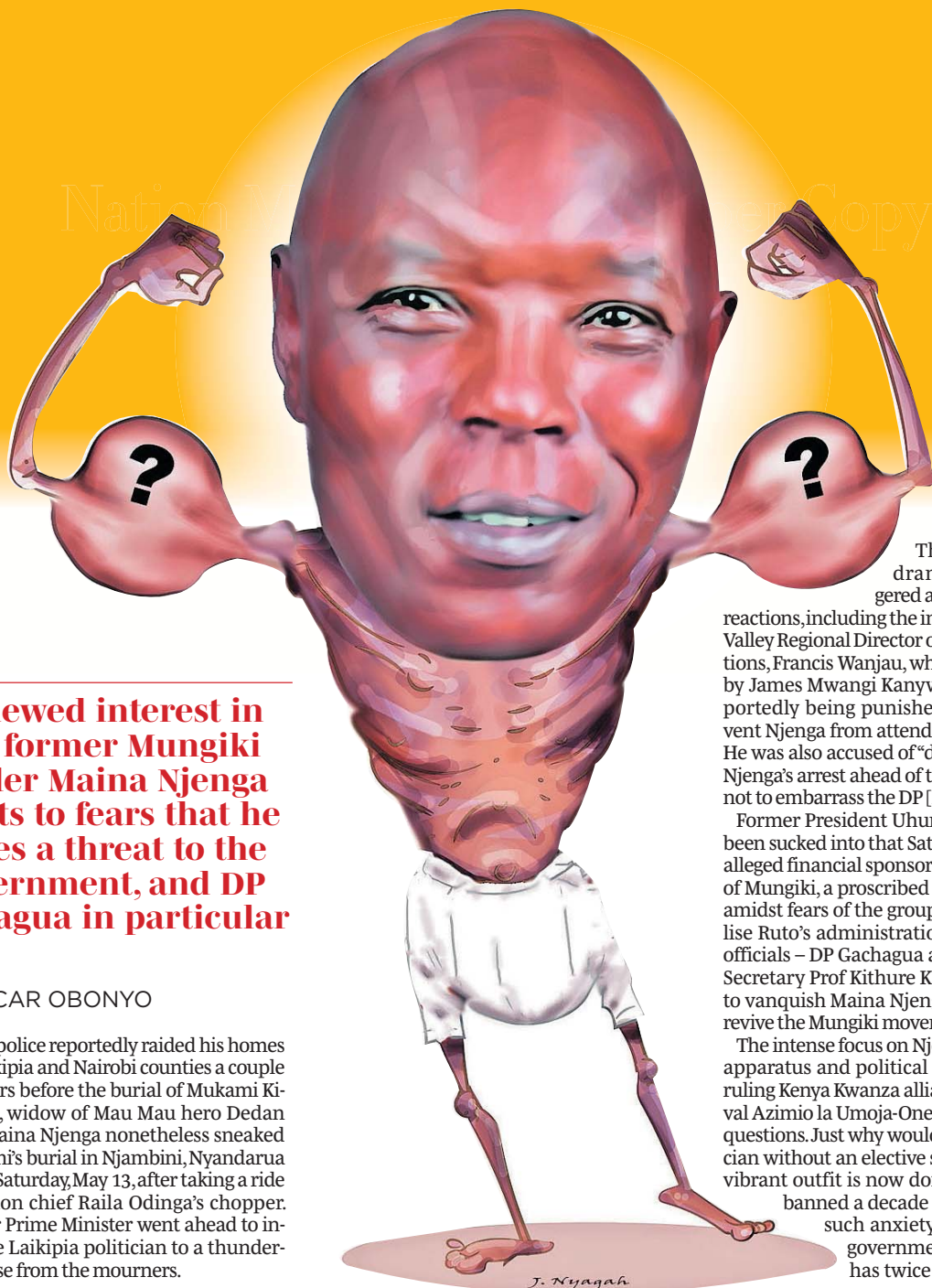
That is the nature of politics. Civil society, industry lobbies, trade unions, religious groups, student unions, youth groups, small scale traders and other groupings form a captive pool against the tax policies that Raila's Azimio coalition would be foolish not to exploit.

That is what might force Ruto to bend. He might well seek a truce on the Housing Fund pending further consultations. The general relief all round could provide him breathing room to gain passage for the rest of the Finance Bill largely intact.

kenya lens

■ JITTERS OVER NJENGA

# THE MUNGIKI NATION



**Renewed interest in the former Mungiki leader Maina Njenga points to fears that he poses a threat to the government, and DP Gachagua in particular**

● BY OSCAR OBONYO

**A**rmed police reportedly raided his homes in Laikipia and Nairobi counties a couple of hours before the burial of Mukami Kimathi, widow of Mau Mau hero Dedan Kimathi. Maina Njenga nonetheless sneaked into Mukami's burial in Njambini, Nyandarua County on Saturday, May 13, after taking a ride in opposition chief Raila Odinga's chopper. The former Prime Minister went ahead to introduce the Laikipia politician to a thunderous applause from the mourners.

This short but high drama has since triggered a series of actions and reactions, including the interdiction of the Rift Valley Regional Director of Criminal Investigations, Francis Wanjau, who has been replaced by James Mwangi Kanywira. Wanjau was reportedly being punished for failing to prevent Njenga from attending Mukami's burial. He was also accused of "doing little" to ensure Njenga's arrest ahead of the burial day – "so as not to embarrass the DP [Rigathi Gachagua]".

Former President Uhuru Kenyatta has also been sucked into that Saturday episode as the alleged financial sponsor of the former leader of Mungiki, a proscribed ethnic organisation, amidst fears of the group's revival to destabilise Ruto's administration. Top government officials – DP Gachagua and Interior Cabinet Secretary Prof Kithure Kindiki – have vowed to vanquish Maina Njenga "if he attempts to revive the Mungiki movement".

The intense focus on Njenga by government apparatus and political figures allied to the ruling Kenya Kwanza alliance as well as the rival Azimio la Umoja-One Kenya begs a host of questions. Just why would a 53-year-old politician without an elective seat and whose once vibrant outfit is now dormant, having been banned a decade ago, be the source of such anxiety and fear for Ruto's government? Is the man who has twice unsuccessfully vied



# kenya lens



Supporters of former Mungiki leader Maina Njenga in running battles with the police outside DCI headquarters, Kiambu Road, on May 25. WILFRED NYANGARESI | NATION

for the senatorial seat in Laikipia now become such a forceful figure? Alternatively, is he a political threat to the government or a hazard to the political scheme of things in the Mt Kenya region, in particular Gachagua’s individual political career?

Former Subukia legislator Koigi wa Wamwere observes that officers in the Ruto administration are right about one thing – Njenga’s demonstrated capabilities in endearing himself to the youth and mobilising them for a targeted political goal.

Pointing out that Njenga has over the decades demonstrated a knack for “political opportunism”, Koigi, who was a crusader for political pluralism the 1980s and 1990s, recalls how Second President Daniel arap Moi used Njenga in the late 1990s to shield himself against political pressure from the Gikuyu Embu and Meru Association (Gema), spearheaded by then cabinet minister and Kiambaa MP Njenga Karume.

Moi reportedly gave Maina Njenga’s group money, vehicles and weapons to destabilise Gema from within. Njenga has confirmed several times that he worked closely with Moi, including engaging in “political and development activities” from when he was just 20 years old.

Curiously, that is just around the time when Gachagua – another close ally of the second President – served in Moi’s administration as District Officer. And noting that Gachagua was Moi’s “Mr Fix It” in the Mt Kenya region, Wamwere wonders whether it might be the former DO who connected the emerging Mungiki leader to Moi.

“How did this poor, struggling boy get to meet the country’s CEO and strike a working agreement if not through some connections by high-profile individuals in his administration?” he wonders. “And if that is the case, then these two (Gachagua and Njenga) are pretty well known to one another, in which case the DP’s fears about Njenga are justified.”

The Kenya Kwanza fraternity concurs with the concerns around Njenga. Kikuyu Mem-

ber of Parliament Kimani Ichung’wah, for instance, considers him “a special purpose vehicle by merchants of violence and saboteurs” who, in his opinion, is plotting to use violence and “fear-mongering” to undermine the country’s national peace and security.

The National Assembly’s Majority Leader believes that the revival of Mungiki and its remobilisation and financing by political actors is a big threat to national security. “The people of Mt Kenya have absolutely no time for criminal elements and their financiers must know it will end in tears for them just as it has before whenever they have used the criminal elements for their own selfish ends.”

Although Ichung’wah does not disclose the said financiers, there is no doubt that his tirade is directed at Uhuru. It is a narrative that the allies of President Ruto have pushed for some time and one that DP Gachagua, in particular, is not shying away from.

Giving the resounding warning to Njenga a fortnight ago, Gachagua said that the government would not allow criminal gangs to cause mayhem in the country. He promised “to crash” Njenga and his group and accused Jubilee party leader, Kenyatta, of financing Njenga’s activities.

Typically, the former President has not reacted to the allegations but Wamwere insists that Gachagua is spot on about Njenga being a potential threat to Ruto’s administration. “They are afraid that he can mobilise rebellion against the government and totally dismantle the political equation for Gachagua in Mt Kenya region,” opines Wamwere.

Njenga leads a quiet life, only making occasional appearances at public gatherings, the latest being at Mukami’s funeral, former Vice-President Kalonzo Musyoka’s Yatta home, and the courts in Nakuru, where he made a brief appearance in an ongoing case against him.

Attempts by *The Weekly Review*, to interview the former Mungiki leader on his political considerations and to respond to accusations of plotting to revive the outlawed out-

fit proved tricky. After days of planning with one of his closest confidantes and a series of near-misses at discreet locations, Njenga reportedly turned down the interview.

His first wife, Virginia Nyakio, was brutally murdered in 2009 while he served sentence in prison, and his second wife, Grace Wairimu Nyambere, was also gunned down in a dramatic car chase in 2014. He is therefore highly secretive and security-conscious, more so now with the heightened interest in his activities. He neither picks calls from unknown people nor engages in “serious” discussion over the phone, preferring physical meetings which are difficult to honour because of his odd hours and choice of location.

In the meantime, Azimio has been quick to put in a word for the former Mungiki leader. In a press statement on Tuesday, the opposition coalition accused Kenya Kwanza of profiling Mt Kenya youth by linking them to Mungiki. Azimio argues that the government is profiling the region for political and economic domination.

“It is our position that profiling the Mt Kenya youth will not solve the regime’s problems. It will only derail the healing process,” remarked Narc Kenya party leader Martha Karua.

In addition, Gachagua appears to have shot himself in foot by kicking off an anti-alcoholism campaign to rid the Mt Kenya region of excessive consumption of cheap and illicit drinks and use of drugs. The youth are the main victims of the ongoing swoop. Coupled with joblessness and the high cost of living, they are a highly disenchanted lot that can easily be mobilised against the regime of the day. Judging from history, Njenga knows only too well how to manoeuvre such a situation.

He may have lost out on his bid for elective seats, but he continues to be a person of great importance on the national political stage. Except for his “lack of ideological clarity”, observes Wamwere, Maina Njenga is a lethal player and a ruthlessly efficient mobiliser who can be a “major source of political discomfort” if he is not on your side.



# the limelight



Cannons fire a 21 gun salute at the National Cemetery as South Korea marks Memorial Day, which honours those who died during the 1950-53 Korean War and in other operations while serving their country, in Seoul on June 6. PHOTO | AFP



People try to save their belongings from a flooded house in the coastal province of Esmeraldas, Ecuador, on June 5. More than 500 people were evacuated due to flooding caused by heavy rains, with no fatalities reported. PHOTO | AFP



A human skull found in Toledo on June 7 during excavations in search of people who disappeared during Uruguay's 1973-1985 dictatorship. PHOTO | AFP



Villagers use nets to catch offerings thrown by members of the Tengger sub-ethnic group in the crater of the active Mount Bromo volcano as part of the Yadnya Kasada festival in Probolinggo, East Java Province on June 5. PHOTO | AFP



Mount Mayon spews white smoke on June 8. Hundreds of families living around the mountain in the Philippines are expected to be moved to safer areas following a "hazardous eruption" alarm. PHOTO | AFP



Bees cover with wax a 3D printed simile of a bronze statue of Roman Emperor Hadrian created by designer Tomas Libertiny, beekeeper Rafi Nir and curator Dudi Mevorach, that will serve as a template for a bronze mold at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem on June 7. PHOTO | AFP



This handout image provided by US Geological Survey on June 7 shows Kilauea erupting from the Halemaumau summit crater within a closed area of Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park. PHOTO | AFP



The  
**Ape**



# **SOUL OF THE PARTY**

*A talented musician and gifted content creator, Anto Neosoul has always found ways to recreate himself and keep his wallet full*

OPEN SPACE

# Let's re-evaluate relations with the US and the West

Prioritise partnerships that can contribute to Kenya's long-term development and address key challenges

● BY ABDIWAHAB ABDISAMAD

**K**enya's relationship with the United States has been dominated by a narrow focus on humanitarian aid, roundtable discussions and issues surrounding (peculiarly) LGBTQ+ rights. This approach fails to fully harness the potential for collaboration in areas that could benefit Kenya's economy and development. To adapt and forge relationships that serve mutual interests, Kenya should strive for a balanced approach that takes into account its national interests while maintaining constructive engagement with the US. President Ruto should express Kenya's desire for a more comprehensive partnership.

In his visit here last November, the US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken reiterated that Kenya is considered an anchor state by Washington and as such it must "...be in the frontline in advancing stability, especially in Ethiopia, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo." This, however well-meaning the US may intend it to be, does not sit well with the aforementioned states. Kenya continues to be seen as a country holding brief for the US and the West in the region.

In an increasing multipolar world, it is time for Kenya to go beyond this lopsided approach to its international relations. It should shift to "friend of all, vassal of none". Towards this end, Kenya heavily criticised Russia at the United Nations last year, then recently hosted its Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

President Ruto should prioritise strategic partnerships that can contribute to the country's long-term development and address key challenges. He should diversify Kenya's international partnerships beyond traditional allies by recognising that other countries can offer unique opportunities for collaboration.

China, Russia, India and Brazil have experienced rapid economic growth and possess valuable expertise in areas such as infrastructure development, technology and agriculture. Strengthening ties with these emerging powers could open doors to investment, knowledge transfer and increased market access for Kenyan goods and services. One al-

ternative that deserves serious consideration is strengthening ties with the BRICS countries — Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. These nations possess vast resources, technological advancements, and expertise in various sectors that can greatly contribute to Kenya's progress. Take China, for example. Over the past few decades, it has become a global economic powerhouse. Through its Belt and Road Initiative, China has invested heavily in infrastructure development across Africa, including Kenya. Chinese investments in Kenya's railway projects, ports and energy sectors have significantly contributed to the country's economic growth.

By fostering closer ties with China, Kenya can tap into its expertise in infrastructure development, manufacturing, and trade, opening up new avenues for economic expansion and job creation. Russia's expertise in energy could be of immense value to Kenya, which has been exploring various renewable energy sources to meet its growing demand for electricity. India offers immense potential for cooperation in various sectors too. With its thriving technology industry, India can support Kenya in areas such as information technology, telecommunications and innovation.

Brazil and South Africa also offer unique opportunities for cooperation. Brazil's agricultural expertise can support Kenya's efforts in modernising its farming practices. South Africa has a thriving mining industry and can provide valuable insights and technology transfer to help Kenya develop its own mineral resources more effectively.

President Ruto should leverage Kenya's position as a regional leader to enhance cooperation within Africa, prioritise investments in education, innovation and technology, and prioritise infrastructure development. He should also prioritise the fight against corruption to attract foreign investment and build trust with international partners. These initiatives can be achieved through increased participation in regional organisations and championing goals that foster intra-African trade.

*Any feedback on topical issues? We would like to hear from you. Send your views to: [weeklyreview@ke.nationmedia.com](mailto:weeklyreview@ke.nationmedia.com)*

■ MIND SPEAK



**Brian Agar**

Tanzania's economy is growing at a fast rate and it will soon overtake that of Kenya. Kenyan leaders are shamelessly corrupt. Their needs come before the needs of the country. Besides that, taxation is too high. Kenyans are heavily taxed, which affects businesses and production. In Tanzania, they are fighting corruption well and their tax regime is business-friendly. This creates a conducive environment that encourages investors, who aid in economic growth.

— A student at Pwani University



**Cynthia Nyambura**

For the past six decades, Kenya has been the economic hub of Eastern Africa. It has been the most attractive investment destination in the Horn of Africa. That glorious position is, however, now under threat due to a series of blunders by successive governments. The Ruto administration has many bright economists, but you wonder what they are doing. They ought to put in place measures and strategies to jumpstart the economy.

— A student at the Co-operative University



**Vostone Luke**

Tanzania has added impetus to its economic firepower, growing by an impressive seven per cent over the past five years compared to Kenya's growth of just above five per cent. That's a difference of just about two per cent, so it's not surprising that Tanzania's economy might soon surpass that of Kenya. With time, Kenyans might be forced to emulate their neighbours. It doesn't look good.

— A student at Technical University of Kenya



**Tonny Orinda**

The Kenyan economy is clearly struggling. Tanzanians produce their own food and build their infrastructure using taxes. Kenya has only been known for high taxation with nothing to show for it on the ground. Kenya exports almost everything, which has left the country exposed to international shocks. We must work harder and change the tide of our nation.

— A student at Rift Valley Technical College



## PURSUIT OF KNOWLEDGE



# VICTIMS OF STATE BRUTALITY

The government must take the education of our children off the burdened hands of parents if we are to raise a productive population

• BY SAMMY OJWANG\*

**S**aramba Primary School is listed as a public educational institution, located in Homa Bay County. Nothing much has changed in the school compound over the last five decades, apart the newly introduced uniforms worn by students enrolled in the disturbing Junior Secondary Education programme, and the much larger student population of 465. Over the years, the rural school has been able to produce a handful of alumni who went on to become successful businesspeople. These, unfortunately, are mostly male. As acknowledged by Homa Bay Governor Gladys Wanga in her Madaraka Day speech last week, early marriage and teenage pregnancy are a big challenge in the county.

Sixty years after the solemn pledge by the country's founding fathers to eradicate poverty, disease and illiteracy, pockets of Kenyans still lack real awareness of the benefits of education, the advantages ploughed back by into society by an exposed, skilled population and the cumulative effort that leads to national progress. Thousands of children still study under trees or make-shift structures, sitting on stones or crowded around narrow desks. At Saramba, for example, every pupil has to bring a container of water to school every day to pour on the dust to keep jiggers away.

The school's infrastructural problems would be somewhat more bearable if it had an adequate number of teachers. The official 60:1 pupil-to-teacher ratio is unworkable. The Board of Management (BoM) employs a few qualified teachers on contract as a stop-gap measure, but this does not cure the problem. Since the school lacks the resources to maintain the contractual staff, parents are asked to pay Sh150 monthly each towards the teachers' wages. The result is a time-wasting, monthly tug-of-war between the principal and the parents as the teachers wait to be paid.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, when research suggests that a huge percentage of pupils in Kenya are not able to read or write simple sentences. This is not because they are slow learners, but this grim reality is the direct outcome of the challenging school environment in which they find themselves. Why do the same pupils thrive when they get an opportunity to relocate to well-equipped private schools? Failing to provide them with basic learning facilities makes the children unwitting victims of state brutality. Meanwhile, some characters in the Ministry of Education continue to register and send capitation funds to ghost schools.



The return of automatic hiring of teachers upon graduation will be a giant step in the right direction for the nation. DENNIS ONSONGO | NATION

Nancy Macharia, the head of the Teachers' Service Commission (TSC), recently requested Sh14.8 billion from government for recurrent expenses. The funds, she said, would facilitate the recruitment of 111,870 new teachers over the next five years, the magic bandage required to dress the festering wound of teacher shortage in the country. The move appears aimed at absorbing most of those already serving as interns, and she has probably considered the effects of attrition and retirement of teachers from service. Senators responding to the request were clearly out of touch with reality, asking her to employ the interns as interns!

Even with the help of interns, the teacher shortage in our schools is pathetic, an effect of the government's free primary school education and 100 per cent transition to secondary school policies. There are currently hundreds of teachers employed on BoM terms all over the country, some for as long as five years without TSC accommodation, which is clearly outside the law. At Maasai Girls' Secondary School in Narok County, for example, the over 1,200 pupils are handled by 50 teachers, half of whom are employed by the BoM, making salaries a major item on the school's balance sheet. The situation is replicated in most schools across the country, where there are many unemployed teachers. The situation is the result of a government freeze on automatic hiring of teachers after training, a redundant directive under the meddling International Monetary Fund's self-serving Structural Adjustment Programmes that our country gobbles down together with injurious loans.

Whole forests can be created from tree seedlings purposefully nurtured in a nursery. The tallest building one ever saw derives its pride from a stable foundation. The same must apply to the bringing up and education of the citizens of this country. We must carefully prepare the seedbed that shall bring forth a productive population in our quest for nation-building.

Take Japan, for instance, where literary levels and standards of living are among the highest in the world. The country pays great attention to the training and development of children and has managed to stem theft and corruption, even from its politicians, mainly by raising disciplined children.

There is a small bridge at Riat, not far away from Saramba Primary School. Villagers like to take long baths on the riverbank near the bridge, and one can often see an adult, with soap suds all over his bare self, waving at a passer-by. Both are most likely parents of children at Saramba, the very people that the school (and by extension, the government) relies on to employ BoM teachers.

The government must take the education of our children off the burdened hands of parents. It is their constitutional right. Before we attempt to build houses for "every Kenyan", enough classrooms should be constructed in all our public schools, sufficient numbers of teachers employed and learning materials made available as a priority under a recognisable education system. Return of automatic hiring of teachers upon graduation will be a giant step in the right direction.

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## THE MUSIC INDUSTRY

**CELEBRITY  
MAKER**

**Owora spearheads marketing and partnership activities for Ziiki Media, working with some of East Africa's most celebrated musical talent**

• BY EDDY ASHIOYA

**C**amilla Owora is a woman of many talents. The regional manager of Ziiki Media East Africa is also an aspiring chef, a former Kenyan Olympic swimmer, a PR executive and owner of a communications company. She's just 5'3" but she's larger than life. She has recently returned from Tanzania, from giving a talk in the National Assembly at the invitation of Dr Pindi Chana, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Sports. She honoured the invitation on behalf of Ziiki Media, where a Rolodex of popular regional musicians more or less call her boss. "I am a big deal," she says.

That she is. But she does not want the meaning of her life to rest on her reputation as a celebrity whisperer, a term she pronounces with some disdain. I needn't belabour the point here that our society worships celebrities. They are our compass. They set trends, exemplify vogue, live in luxury, eat delicious food, wear haute couture and travel to exotic places and do whatever the hell they want. We study them, debate them and give tribute to them. We make pilgrimages to their shrines: *Kondegang, Wasafi, Rong Rende*. Celebrities give us faith that there's something more to life than mere existence, something more than work, hustle and grind.

But for Camilla, it's all the same. She knew from early on that her work was not to hog the spotlight but to know where it shines. "I always had a passion for music. I could cram an album, an EP (extended play recording) and singles. Back in the day, I was a die-hard fan of E-Sir, Longombas, Nameless. I'd cut out those lyrics and put them in a book. I knew I would either end up in music or sports."

The gods had ears on the ground and



Ziiki Media Regional Manager, East Africa, Camilla Owora. FRANCIS NDERITU | NATION



**This industry will test you all the way to the top. You can have some very high highs and some very low lows... Success is when you wake up and do what you love and love what you do. It's different for everyone. I want to leave the industry better than I found it, and have an impact on people's lives. When I win, other people win. And the reverse is true: when others win, so do I.**

Camilla Owora



**PARTNERSHIPS**

Ziiki Media offers services such as music distribution, content aggregation, music marketing, label services and content production (albums, singles, EPs, videos).

Camilla spearheads marketing and partnership activities across East Africa for some of the region's top artists, including Diamond Platnumz, Zuchu, Khaligraph Jones, Otile Brown, Rayvanny, Harmonize, Tanasha Donna, Nyashinski and Cedo

Camilla has a BSc. in International Business Administration as well as a Master of Business Administration, both from United States International University - Africa.

set her on her path at an agency doing PR and handling the "other side of business". Heineken, she says, was one of her biggest clients in East Africa before she defected to Boomplay, an Africa-focused media streaming and download service first launched in Nigeria by TECNO Mobile in 2015. "That's when I got into the actualities of the music industry." Ziiki Media played her tune and she danced gracefully to it, joining as head of marketing

for East Africa before being bumped up to her current position as regional manager.

It must be said that when you meet in her in person, Camilla is bubblier than what the traditional manager's role would require of her. She's straight-shooting, she's coherent, she's sharp, she's structured, she's determined, she's well-mannered and has a cool head on her shoulders. She seems not just sane but disappointingly sane, judging by reports of how crazy it can get working for, or with, celebrities. But that's not all she is. "I run two companies as well. One is catering company, MumsSoulFood, which I co-own with my mother; we started out making frozen samosas and ring rolls. I also have a communications company, Graphene Global, but now I am trying to fine-tune it into artist management, brand building and talent management. We have big artists who do not have steady management teams behind them." She wants to change the face of the East African music industry. "I have seen a lot of the trends and lots of talent. I want to take our artists global."

Camilla would know something about that. In her younger years, she represented Kenya in swimming competitions, all the way up to university. Recently, she completed a triathlon (endurance multisport race consisting of swimming, cycling and running over various distances), which she describes as one of her biggest achievements this year. "Business-wise," she adds, "my career apex was representing a whole industry in front of the Tanzanian parliament and other dignitaries. Plus, since I joined [Ziiki] we have onboarded 25 new artists to the company." And she has worked with the Who's Who of the Who's Who in East Africa: Diamond, Mbosso, Zuchu, Lava Lava, Ali Kiba, Rayvanny, Harmonize, Nandy (whom she's recently signed), Otile Brown, Nyashinski, Cedo, Khaligraph Jones as well as Lexy, Fina, Louis, Ssaruru and Tommy Flavour.

What makes her good at what she does? "Well, I am a go-getter. I have this drive and resilience that has burned in me since I was young. My parents instilled in me discipline, hard work and the importance of treating people well. I am meticulous: I plan something from the front coming backwards, so to speak. I could have no money but I am planning for a holiday in the Maldives." So just blind luck? "Not quite. No is just not an answer for me. I feel like there's always a way. Another way"

Plus, she loves what she does. "I love connecting with artists, producers and talent. This is something that I truly enjoy." But the point is, she's the kind of girl who enjoys being a regular, or a habitué, or streetwise. The loci of her charm, she feels, is knowing who you are and who you represent. "First, we don't see them as celebrities. We are all human beings. When you first understand the person and their personality, whatever they do after that is just an extension of themselves. When you consider what it has taken them to build their careers, you learn how to manage them. When I am dealing with ego, I am the middle ground that calms down the whole situation. But look, we are also friends with the artists. It's just not business all day, every day." That does not mean they don't rub each other up the wrong way. "We fight, but we fight fair." Straddling

both employment and entrepreneurship, what has her experience been? "It's like a baby. You have to take care of it. For employment, sometimes you can get comfortable because you have a cushion. Balancing the two is a task, but nothing comes easy."

"Once I self-actualise," she says, "I will go into my long-term calling and become a fully-fledged entrepreneur." Was this all she ever wanted to be? "I knew it would be something in the business field because I always liked money. What I just didn't know was which industry, but it was always either sports or entertainment. Even when I worked at the agency, any brief on sports or entertainment would light my eyes up." She also had dreams of being a chef. "I learned a lot of my cooking from my mother and with time I started experimenting a lot. That homely feel of food is what I would like to bring to other people. But this all ties back to business."

What is she learning? "Patience. I'd say I am patient to an extent but a little humility does not hurt. This industry will test you all the way to the top. You can have some very high highs and very low lows. When you are in a role such as mine, you tend to take on everything, trying to keep everyone happy. It's taught me a lot of patience and humility." Has her definition of success changed? "Success is when you wake up and do what you love and love what you do. I don't think there is a definite vision of 'if I get to this point then I am very successful'. It's different for everyone. I want to leave the industry better than I found it, and have an impact on people's lives. When I win, other people win. The reverse is true: when others win, so do I." Is there a piece of advice women should ignore? "That we should be competing with our male counterparts. If it's your time it's your time. Don't make it feel that you have to be in competition with somebody else. We all have our role in society, and women will do what women need to do. Ditto men." She feels that that is a controversial statement, but she says it anyway. Her rope is long because her patience is not. She doesn't always care if others understand.

As a high-achieving woman, is there anything she struggles with? "Emotions. I wear my heart on my sleeve. I am very soft so when people come at me hard, I could cry. I struggle with tough love; even if they mean well, sometimes the approach can be quite problematic. Teach me calmly. I will learn. Don't talk down at me. If you do, I shut down." Deep down, she is just the girl next door who was willing to offer a sacrifice to the gods of ambition for her ensuing success. She doesn't shy away from talking about it either. "I haven't been to the gym lately, or been able to shoot breeze with my family and do things that we love together. They understand, but it is not lost on me that this is a time I will never get back. In my defence, I have consecrated Sundays as my family time. That is sacred."

She starkly reveals herself to be the kind of girl you had no idea she could be, except maybe you should have imagined as much. What song then, best summarises the season of life she is in right now? "*Live Your Life* by Rihanna and T.I." Is she living the life she prayed for? "Definitely"

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# ANTO NEOSOUL'S NINE LIVES

JACK OF MANY TRADES



Singer, songwriter Antony 'Anto Neosoul' Mwangi performs in Mauritius on May 26. PHOTOPOOL

• BY SINDA MATIKO

Since leaving his job as a radio host, nothing much has changed for the multitalented entertainer, Antony Mwangi. Nothing in the sense that he is still able to make ends meet from his other creative ventures, enough to pay his dues.

The loquacious 38-year-old, known for his wit and zeal, resigned as host of *Nation FM's The Drive* in February this year after working for the station for three years. This was his second stint at *Nation FM*, having left in 2015 before returning in 2020. Until 2014, he had hosted NTV's *Teen Republik* show alongside Anita Nderu.

"My decision to leave this time round was purely based on my welfare and nothing else. I felt that what I was earning wasn't commensurate with the value I was bringing

**From musician to radio show host to content creator, he has always found ways to recreate himself and keep his pockets full**

to the station," he offers. Upon leaving radio, he turned to content creation for various agencies and curating his own concerts.

His networking skills, he says, have always kept him afloat. "If there is one useful skill I have learnt over time as a creative, it is cultivating relationships with the right people – the decision makers – and keeping them. That's what will keep you afloat in this creative industry, not your talent. I mean, how many talented creatives have we seen

go down? My talents and craft are not what create income for me; it's my relationships. Money is one thing, but if people don't enjoy working with you or they are not happy with the work you put out, how then will you secure your next paycheque?"

If there is one thing Mwangi, nicknamed Anto Neosoul, insists he is good at, it is surviving in the creative space. He sees himself as a cat with nine lives and does all manner of things within this creative sphere that will always guarantee him an opportunity one way or the other.

"I believe one of the reasons I was rehired on radio was because of the many things I was doing with brands. For example, I developed content for Big Square on Mombasa Road, and for a year the place was known as Anto Square. I have scripted for shows such as *Mali*, *Siri* and even *Shuga*, in which I also acted alongside Lupita Nyong'o. I was actually in the





Singer-songwriter Antony 'Anto Neosoul' Mwangi performs in Mauritius on May 26.

story development for *Shuga 1* and *2*. In *Mali*, I was in story development and in *Siri* I was the script editor for the four seasons.”

Anto is okay with what many know him for: songwriter, performer and event host, has helped him with brand positioning. “I

have also worked at an advertising agency, formulating marketing strategies for clients like Bidco and APA Insurance. If there is one thing I am really good at, it is strategy and marketing. This is why clients are always reaching out for partnerships. You need all

these skills to give you multiple streams of income.”

When he dropped his hit song, *Paragasha*, in 2016 and later curated a concert by the same name, he already had an audience. “Having been in the advertisement space, I knew the target audience I wanted for the event. I targeted campus students or those that were about to leave, which is why the entry fee was Sh500. I knew most of this lot would end up working in advertising, marketing or creative agencies, so the concept would easily pull in the numbers I wanted. It did.”

The *Paid My Dues* hit maker has recently returned from Mauritius, where he had three performances. “It’s interesting how I ended up in Mauritius. A businessman called Jean-Luc Willequet was in a restaurant in Nairobi and heard the song *Paid My Dues* play. He happens to be the manager of the Clarisse Sisters, one of the biggest bands in Mauritius. He looked for my email, reached out and asked if I would be willing to work with the Clarisse Sisters. That how this relationship began.”

The Clarisse Sisters band is made of twins Anick and Veronique, and their older sister Dominique.

Anto is currently working on his third album. “I have recorded five songs so far. My aim is to have 14 then pick 10 to make up the album. I don’t have the name yet but I’m toying with the idea of calling it ‘Just three of us’. My first album was called *Stubborn*, my second *Welcome 2 My Soul*.”

He also hosts a podcast, *Unlocking with Anto Neosoul*, where he holds conversations on issues that many of his guests, especially celebrities, rarely talk about in interviews.

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The **911** SIDE

With John Nyaganyaga  
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**WOMAN POWER**

MS CYNTHIA OTIENO FROM SHAURI YAKO IN HOMA BAY COUNTY IS PROMOTING THE USE OF BRIQUETTES-MOULDED CHARCOAL DUST AND CLAY BALLS THAT HELP IN ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION BY SAVING TREES.

MS OTIENO MAKES BRIQUETTES, WHICH BURN LONGER WHEN USED IN COOKING, THUS REDUCING THE NUMBER OF TREES CUT TO MAKE CHARCOAL TO MAKE BRIQUETTES, SHE BUYS CHARCOAL ASH AT SH100 A BAG. THIS IS THEN MIXED WITH CASSAVA FLOUR AND OTHER MATERIALS TO MAKE IT STRONGER.

HER DAILY PRODUCTION CAN FILL A 90KG SACK, WHICH SHE THEN SELLS. WE APPLAUD YOU FOR BEING A CHAMPION FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, CYNTHIA.



STAR OF THE WEEK



FAITH KIPYEGON SHATTERED THE WOMEN’S 1500M WORLD RECORD, SETTING A NEW TIME OF THREE MINUTES AND 49.11 SECONDS DURING THE WANDA DIAMOND LEAGUE 2023 GOLDEN GALA ON JUNE 2, 2023 AT THE RIDOLFI STADIUM IN FLORENCE, TUSCANY. KIPYEGON HAD TAKEN A MATERNITY BREAK AFTER WINNING GOLD IN RIO BEFORE RETURNING TO SETTLE FOR SILVER IN A NATIONAL RECORD TIME OF 3:54.22. SHE SAID HER RECORD-BREAKING FEAT WAS EVIDENCE THAT MOTHERHOOD CAN ONLY MAKE FEMALE ATHLETES STRONGER AND DEDICATED THE RECORD TO MOTHERS. WE CELEBRATE YOU FAITH FOR BEING AN INSPIRATION NOT JUST TO WOMEN ATHLETES BUT TO ALL WOMEN AND MOTHERS.



## opinion



J. Nyagah

■ Orengo is mired in a vicious and unedifying fight with his DG, a marketing and accounting expert

# Urgent need to set clear roles for deputy governors

It should be made abundantly clear in law and, or, rules governing the running of counties the exact roles and duties of deputy governors (DGs). Governors wield power and left to decide what their deputies should do, most choose to keep their Number Twos as far away as possible from power. If DGs cannot have set roles, the post should be scrapped.

Secondly, DGs hold these offices because of deals cut with those who want to run for governorship. The latter seek out politicians from those parts of the counties whose votes they need to win the gubernatorial races. Constituents are neither consulted nor made aware of these deals and what they mean for the two politicians.

In May, Kericho Governor Eric Mutai was going to be away from his office for some time. He wrote a memo to a member of his cabinet (the County Executive Committee) and informed her that she would be in charge of the county when he was away. It was a massive snub to DG Fred Kirui, who is constitutionally mandated to act in the governor's absence.

Mutai and Kirui fell out only days after they were sworn in after the General Election of August of last year. In Kirui's telling, Mutai did not bother to consult him as he filled cabinet positions and other executive offices.

The Governor sidelined his Deputy as if he were not his partner nor part of the executive. Such arrogance should have no place in the counties.

Little wonder public spats between the Governor and DG are common. Worse, it has emerged that the bone of contention may well



**KWENDO  
OPANGA**

be that the two entered a pre-election pact, but on taking the reins of power, Mutai, much to Kirui's chagrin, decided that while running for the governorship was a joint ticket, governing Kericho was his job alone.

James Aggrey Bob Orengo is known to all and sundry as the dare-devil veteran of the trenches and barricades of the unending fight for democracy, civil liberties and rights at the national political level. As the recently minted Governor of Siaya, Orengo is mired in a vicious and unedifying fight with DG William Oduol, a marketing and accounting expert.

According to Oduol, he and Orengo started off brilliantly, with the Governor delegating to him the finance docket, no doubt because that is up his professional street. But no sooner had he settled down than he noticed unusually large amounts of money being withdrawn as imprest. He saw that as a red flag, but when he asked Orengo, their close working relationship ceased.

By accusing Orengo's finance chiefs of corruption and inviting the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission to investigate them,

Oduol tied his boss to graft, especially when he said the large imprest withdrawals ended up with the Governor. While he maintains he is waging war against thievery, Orengo's corner is waging a political war against him.

Oduol faces impeachment by the County Assembly and expulsion from the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM). Before then, he must fight a whispering campaign that paints him as a hireling of enemies of ODM. Whatever the county government is delivering remains unknown as the fetid feud between Orengo and Oduol grabs attention of all media and minds.

The imbroglio rekindles what obtained in 2013. Oduol was the red-hot favourite to become Siaya's first governor, but ODM controversially handed the nomination to Mr Cornel Rasanga. Last year, Oduol could have become MP, but Orengo needed him as a firewall against the Nicholas Gumbo/David Ohito ticket. On Tuesday, all changed again; Orengo accused Oduol of manipulating the tendering process.

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## opinion

■ Leaders must safeguard financial stability in de-dollarisation process

# Weaponisation of dollar erodes international trust



VINCENT  
MAOSA

President William Ruto on May 29 urged African leaders to take the first step towards dumping the globally-bullish US dollar by embracing local currencies to facilitate intra-continental trade.

Speaking at the third Kenya International Investment Conference in Nairobi that seeks to engage the private sector in the African Continental Free Trade Area, Ruto lamented that payment instructions from one African country to another typically pass through several intermediary financial institutions without a single payment platform, hence pushing up costs. The global de-dollarisation campaign – the process of reducing the dominance of the US dollar in global trade and financing activities – is gathering momentum as countries around the world seek alternatives to the dollar's hegemony. A number of developments point to the global movement aimed at undercutting the dollar's unipolar supremacy.

In an effort to address the biting dollar shortage, the Kenyan government in March this year signed an agreement with three international oil companies that will allow the country to purchase oil using Kenya shillings. Previously, the local Kenyan oil industry required approximately \$500 million (Sh64 billion) monthly to purchase about 740,000 metric tonnes, with oil companies having to pay importers in US dollars. The BRICS nations, comprising China, Russia, Brazil, India and South Africa, are looking to establish a new reserve currency backed by a basket of their respective currencies. The potential currency, which is still under review and development, would allow these nations to assert their economic independence while competing with the existing financial system.

When China's President Xi Jinping visited Moscow in March this year to meet Vladimir Putin, he pledged changes the likes of which have not been seen in a century, declaring war on the US dollar's dominance and promising to deepen economic integration with Russia. President Putin revealed that two thirds of the countries' bilateral trade is already conducted in the ruble and the renminbi. He further committed to adopt the renminbi for payments between countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America in the quest to challenge the dollar's primacy.

On March 30, China and Brazil (respectively the world's most populous and sixth most populous countries) announced that they had come to an agreement to trade with each other in their local currencies, yuan and reais. The deal will enable the two economic giants to conduct their massive trade and financial transactions, valued at more than U\$150.5 billion (Sh20.7 trillion) directly, eliminating the need for the greenback.

On March 28, finance ministers and central bank governors of the member states of the Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN) met in Jakarta, Indonesia, and deliberated upon reducing dependence on the US dollar for settlements and instead adopting local currencies to execute financial transactions in the region. ASEAN is developing a cross-border digital payment system that would allow the use of local currencies in regional trade.

The dollar is the world's most important currency; it is the most commonly held reserve currency. A reserve currency is one which is held by central banks in significant quantities. The dollar's status as the global reserve currency was cemented in the aftermath of World War II by the 1944 Bretton Woods Conference, in which 44 countries approved the creation of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The dollar remains the primary currency used in cross-border transactions, traded in foreign exchange markets and held by central banks as reserves around the world.

Locally, the CBK Act requires the apex bank to maintain adequate official foreign exchange reserves equivalent to at least four months of import cover for servicing government external debt and non-debt government external obligations; intervening to smoothen erratic exchange rate movements when deemed necessary; and to act as a buffer against external crises. As of March 30, the usable foreign exchange reserves amounted to U\$6,426 million (Sh85.2 billion).

The dollar's prominence has been underpinned by the sheer size and strength of the US economy, the deep and liquid US financial markets, the perception of the US as a bastion of stability with its sound monetary and fiscal policy frameworks, and the United States' geopolitical heft.

There are a number of factors driving the global de-dollarisation campaign. Firstly, the US has been leveraging its financial system to subjugate its geopolitical adversaries, especially in the conflicts with Russia and China. Russia is already prohibited from using SWIFT, a system which anchors global money transfers, making it difficult to conduct business with other countries. This 'weaponisation' of her currency has eroded international trust and accelerated the move away from the dollar. According to the Bloomberg, the percentage of dollars held in foreign exchange reserves has decreased from 73 per cent in 2001 to 58 per cent by 2023.

Secondly, the US administration's unilateral action and choices regarding the dollar exacerbated the current dollar crisis. The US Federal Reserve steeply raised its interest rates in the past year, sparking massive capital flight, hence triggering a serious dollar shortage in economies around the world and causing sharp depreciation of domestic currencies, especially in developing economies like Kenya. Thirdly, the growing economic power of emerging markets and their desire to foster a more diversified and resilient financial architecture has spurred de-dollarisation, as these countries seek to promote stability by mitigating the potential for economic contagion.

The benefits of de-dollarisation include enhancing financial stability by reducing the dependence of other countries on the US dollar and encouraging diversification of reserve currencies, which can lead to a more stable international monetary system.

However, as the de-dollarisation campaign gains steam, one key challenge must be addressed to ensure the preservation of global financial stability and sustained economic growth. As countries reduce their reliance on the US dollar, adjustments in the composition of global reserve assets may lead to shifts in capital flows and changes in asset prices. In the absence of adequate policy co-ordination and risk management, these fluctuations could precipitate financial instability, particularly in countries with substantial dollar-denominated debt like Kenya. Policymakers must, therefore, remain vigilant in monitoring these dynamics and taking appropriate measures to safeguard financial stability.

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## kenya lens

## ■ FROM GRACE TO GRASS

**A MIGHTY FALL**

Kenya Sevens celebrate with the trophy after beating Fiji 30-16 in the Main Cup at the Singapore Sevens on April 17, 2016.

## How did Kenya get from winning the cup at the World Sevens in 2016 to relegation from core status of the series in 2023?

● BY PAUL OKONG'O

**O**n April 17, 2016, Kenya beat Fiji 30-16 to register her finest hour with victory in the Main Cup of the Singapore leg of the World Rugby Sevens Series. Shujaa became only the ninth team to win a world title. How did we get from such dizzy heights to relegation from core status of the World Sevens Series in London on May 21, 2023?

The relegation was followed that same week with the withdrawal of the Kenya 15s side from the Currie Cup due to lack of funds. What is the import of the relegation from the World Series? It means that Kenya will not get the US\$150,000 annual grant from World Rugby for Sev-

ens development which, according to KRU financial statements for 2021, is a big blow for a body in dire financial straits.

And why did the Kenya Rugby Union (KRU) commit the 15s side to the Currie Cup in South Africa only to arrive late, giving walkovers to their opponents in the first two matches and then eventually withdrawing from the competition altogether after the clash with Zimbabwe in Nakuru on May 20? What was the point of entering the competition when they knew they did not have finances to honour the fixtures?

Max Muniafu, a member of the first ever Kenya Sevens team in 1986, says that the buck stops with the KRU. "The buck will always stop with the KRU. We seem

to be lacking rugby nuance at the board level that allows them to put their finger on exactly what is going wrong and to stem the downward spiral of a treasure like Shujaa. The team has fallen in the same river several times."

Muniafu points out that Kenya Sevens rose on the back of a dedicated group of Mwamba FC players such as Humphrey Kayange, Collins Injera and Lavin Asego, who schooled themselves in the shorter version of the game. "They profoundly influenced our local Sevens circuit and eventually the international one. Is there awareness of this in our rugby trust? Are there any efforts to replicate such a group with a young group of selected players? Do we have the talent in store to play out there

and what efforts have we made to ensure this?" Andrew Amonde was the captain when Shujaa triumphed in Singapore. He talks of "off-pitch distractions", money issues such as late allowances. "Players cannot be expected to perform if they are not settled," he observes. "The rain started beating us in 2019. We were on the brink of relegation but we survived. That was a warning sign but it was not taken seriously."

"Secondly," he continues, "The transition from my lot was not handled well. Without a shadow of doubt, Kenya has talent; the win in Singapore is proof. The opposition has invested heavily in their teams with high performance units, money and coaching staff. We cannot compete as



# kenya lens



**Alex 'Sasha' Mutai**  
Kenya Rugby Union chairman



**Max Muniafu**  
Member of the first ever Kenya Sevens team in 1986



**Benjamin Ayimba**  
Won the Main Cup as head coach of the Kenya Sevens in Singapore in 2016



**Fred Ollows**  
Former KRU Development Manager



**Mike Friday**  
Former Kenya Sevens coach



**Oduor Gangla**  
Former KRU Chairman



Kenya Simbas Team Manager Wangila Simiyu leads players in celebrating victory in the Elgon Cup at the RFUEA ground on July 30, 2016. CHRIS OMOLLO | NATION

we are.”

Fred Ollows, a former KRU Development Manager, who was in office when Kenya got core status, recalls: “The World Series itself was new, having begun in 1999. Eventually, we got admitted as a core side in 2005. This was both an on- and off-the-field endorsement. It will come as a surprise to many but this was the culmination of long discussions with World Rugby. Mark Egan, then-World Rugby Sevens Manager, kept in close contact, calling after every tournament for about three seasons running into 2005.”

“Once we got into the circuit, we did not appear to have a clear pathway for how we wanted to develop the team. Over the 18 seasons, the clearest difficulty has been transitions. The best transition seems to have been from Bill Githinji to Benjamin Ayimba and onto Mike Friday. Ayimba was particularly lucky to have worked with his long-term playmates, Oscar Osir and Felix Ochieng. The chemistry was excellent,” Ollows recalls.

Shujaa, says Ollows, has been on the brink of relegation for some time now. “In the last set of mainstream tournaments, we have not won a match on Day 1. We haven’t kept up with the pace at which the other core teams have evolved in the circuit. Eventually, we have settled for a physically direct approach, which is not how we played when we were more successful in the earlier part of the se-

ries, in early 2000 to 2015.”

Subsequently, he argues, Shujaa seems to have lurched from management to management without a coherent strategy. “Of course this has partly been due to the ongoing paucity of resources that has ensured that there is no proper player feeder into the team. As a result, we have players in the set-up for far too long. Sevens is a young players’ game especially due to its agility and pace demands. We saw players going into their early, mid- and late 30s.”

Eric Nguni, a risk analyst, agrees. “We need a better way to transition younger players into the team. I honestly believe there’s a core group of players that stayed in the team for too long.”

In the last few years, he adds, Shujaa have had too many coaches, an average of one coach every two years. “This isn’t enough time to achieve a playing philosophy and strategy. We’ve been left behind by the advanced nations. The biggest issue is money. Money is the oil that lubricates the machine. Without it everything stalls as we have witnessed in the past when the players had spat with the Board.”

Nguni suggests a way forward. “We need new avenues to raise money. Why not give out the commercial rights for Kenya and Enterprise Cup’s and the National Sevens circuit to a for-profit company that can take over from KRU and run the leagues profitably. They may be better placed

to secure funding and television rights.” Rugby aficionado Hamilton Majiwa observes that ball handling mistakes, conceding penalties and a lack of concentration cost the team. “The team needs to get the basics right. With proper management and goodwill from the Union, we will be back in the top flight,” he says.

Bill Cherry, Vice-President of Nondies FC, thinks it is more of an attitude problem. “Kenya lost because they think that the others would just let them off the hook or do their work for them. Kenya Sevens failure is symptomatic of the entire Kenya rugby programme. There are many teams who want those spots on the HS-BC Sevens Series and are willing to work for it. The 15s were tossed out of the Currie Cup simply for failing to show up. And having a private citizen bail out the 15s team in Dubai in 2022 suggests that Kenya no longer belongs on the world stage. Until the Kenya rugby programme starts pointing fingers at itself, we will not return to the international stage.”

*The Weekly Review* reached out to KRU officials for comment but immediate former KRU Chairman Oduor Gangla declined to answer questions while current chairman Alex Mutai had not got back to us by the time we went to press. The ball is firmly in KRU’s court. Will Kenya Sevens get back to the World Sevens series? Only time will tell.

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## SCIENCE &amp; TECH

# NOW AI MEETS VR TO KEEP HOLOCAUST MEMORY ALIVE



A man wearing VR goggles is seen next to a screen depicting Holocaust survivor Inge Auerbacher at the Meta hub in Berlin on June 6.

## • LONDON

Inge Auerbacher fears for a future when Holocaust survivors like her can no longer bear witness. But advances in virtual reality and AI give her hope their stories will live on.

Auerbacher, 88, is the star of a new interactive VR experience called “Tell Me, Inge” in which she recounts her horrific experiences as a small Jewish child in a Nazi concentration camp and what it took for her to not give up.

“I’ve been involved in many (Holocaust education) projects but I find this one is made for today,” Auerbacher, who travelled from her home in New York for the launch in Berlin, said. “I wanted it to be able to be used for all ages, and particularly young people. With a book, you have to create your own images in your head but with this technology, you see it with your own eyes.”

Through artificial intelligence, users of the VR headset can have a “conversation” with Auerbacher, asking about her encounters with heartbreaking loss and occasional heroism.

The project is a collaboration

between Los Angeles-based company StoryFile, the World Jewish Congress and Facebook-owner Meta, which billed it as the first AI and metaverse Holocaust education experience in Germany.

Auerbacher, a trained chemist, sat for two days of interviews, answering around 60 questions in fluent German and English to create a database of video files.

When a user asks a question based on prompts on the screen, the system spools to that section of the interview using key words and Inge “answers”, creating the effect of an immersive, one-on-one exchange.

On screen, Auerbacher wears a butterfly scarf and brooch -- for her, a symbol of the 1.5 million children killed by the Nazis. In the backdrop, 3D animated graphics and archival footage illustrate her story. Asked how it was seeing her own image via the headset, the sprightly Auerbacher said with a laugh, “It was great, I look so young!”

StoryFile co-founder Stephen Smith, who has worked in Holocaust education for three decades, said the technology allows users to “talk to history through the people who went through it”.

“I spent much of my life with Holocaust survivors and in spite of all of the hate that they experienced, they have made amazing contributions to society,” he said.

“There’s a great deal to take from the human spirit, from resilience and tenacity. So this project is giving young people the opportunity to open their eyes very early.” Meta, which two years ago changed its name from Facebook to reflect a metaverse priority, has invested heavily in VR headgear for a range of purposes from gaming to conferencing and education.

Julia Reuss, Meta’s director of public policy for central Europe, declined to discuss its financial contribution to the project but said the company hoped to keep expanding it with other survivors. “We’ve long had a focus on fighting anti-Semitism in our team here in Germany and we’re happy we found the right partner to help us address Holocaust remembrance culture and education using VR,” she said. In addition to the programme for headsets, smartphone and computer versions are available. Reuss said museums and schools would be ideal settings to use them.

## Arctic could be ice-free as soon as 2030

The Arctic Ocean’s ice cap will disappear in summer as soon as the 2030s and a decade earlier than thought, no matter how aggressively humanity draws down the carbon pollution that drives global warming, scientists said Tuesday.

Even capping global warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius in line with the Paris climate treaty will not prevent the north pole’s vast expanse of floating ice from melting away in September, they reported in Nature Communications. “It is too late to still protect the Arctic summer sea ice as a landscape and as a habitat,” co-author Dirk Notz, a professor at the University of Hamburg’s Institute of Oceanography, told AFP.

“This will be the first major component of our climate system that we lose because of our emission of greenhouse gases.”

Decreased ice cover has serious impact over time on weather, people and ecosystems -- not just within the region, but globally.

“It can accelerate global warming by melting permafrost laden with greenhouse gases, and sea level rise by melting the Greenland ice sheet,” lead author Seung-Ki Min, a researcher at Pohang University of Science and Technology in South Korea, said.

Greenland’s kilometres-thick blanket of ice contains enough frozen water to lift oceans six metres. By contrast, melting sea ice has no discernible impact on sea levels because the ice is already in ocean water, like ice cubes in a glass.

But it does feed into a vicious circle of warming.

About 90 per cent of the Sun’s energy that hits white sea ice is reflected back into space.

But when sunlight hits dark, unfrozen ocean water instead, nearly the same amount of that energy is absorbed by the ocean and spread across the globe.

Both the North and South Pole regions have warmed by three degrees Celsius compared to late 19th-century levels, nearly three times the global average.



# africa lens

## ■ HORN OF AFRICA

# SOMALIA'S NEW DAWN



A man casts his ballot in Baidoa on November 16, 2016. The mood in the Horn of Africa nation is ecstatic and palpable following the first direct 'one person, one vote' election in the Puntland regional state earlier this month.

## The country stands on the verge of a renaissance following decisions to restructure its political system and a nod to join the East African Community

● OSCAR OBONYO

The first day of June found Somalia basking in the glory of three historic developments: the first direct 'one person, one vote' elections in the Puntland regional state; endorsement by political leaders of "universal suffrage" and restructuring of the country's political system by abolishing the premiership; and – the icing on the cake – adoption of a 'Verification Report' by the East African Community Heads of State on Somalia's application to join the economic bloc.

The mood in the Horn of Africa nation has understandably remained ecstatic and palpable, to this day. The rare convergence of the three groundbreaking devel-

opments – unfolding between May 25 and June 1 this year – point to a major development in the country's democratic landscape punctuated by a prospective economic boost, which could allow the country to access a wider trading market in the region.

These anticipated gains are not just lighting up the faces of the country's top political leadership, including President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud and Prime Minister Hamza Abdi Barre. They have in essence united Somalia – friends and foes – into one big jamboree. Even great sons and daughters of Somalia in the diaspora, like American politician Ms Ilhan Abdulelahi Omar, who has been US representative for Minnesota's 5th Congressional Dis-

trict since 2019, are elated.

"I want to congratulate the people of Puntland and Somalia on their historic elections this week. When I was in Qardo [a district in Puntland, northern Somalia] at the end of last year, I was touched by people's hope for the future and commitment to democracy. These elections will be the most significant step towards cultivating democracy in Somalia. And it's incredible to see Puntland lead the charge in this way," Omar said in a press statement to the local Somali media.

Even President Mohamud's political nemesis and competitor in the May 2022 presidential elections, Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo, has expressed his support for the latest developments,

including universal suffrage. In a post on his social media accounts, the immediate former President stated late last month: "We welcome the general principles of the agreement reached by the leaders of the National Consultative Council (NCC) sitting in Mogadishu. The people of Somalia have been waiting to see their leaders and representatives elected with their votes, based on the multi-party system."

Although he is now out of power, Farmaajo's endorsement of the restructuring of the electoral and governance systems is a big boost to the execution of the NCC agreements. The former president still enjoys some level of political in-

...Continued on Page 26

## africa lens

# Somalia finally on the mend after decades of conflict

Continued from Page 25

fluence in the country and his stand on political issues continues to resonate with many.

For a country that has witnessed violent war and bloodshed for over a quarter century – leading to the breakdown of infrastructure and service delivery, and ultimately shattering the government of Siad Barre in 1991 – the excitement elicited by the recent developments on the democratic front is understandable.

This is especially so viewed against the backdrop of militia groups, like the al-Qaeda-linked al-Shabaab, which have over the decades disrupted operations of the Mogadishu government, making it practically impossible for the holding of direct elections.

In a way, therefore, the successful execution of polls in Puntland and the optimism of the Federal Government of Somalia to roll out universal suffrage polls nationally is a statement of confidence that the situation has improved.

The proposed changes in the electoral system are a break from the past, when community elders nominated legislators to Parliament based on clan considerations.

Even then, it remained a major security risk as members of the al-Shabaab hunted and gunned down clan elders who participated in the nomination of the MPs.

While most people in Somalia, and their leaders alike, have welcomed the notion of directly voting in their political leaders, some proposals by the NCC event – which brought together the President, PM and presidents of Somalia's regional states, among other stakeholders – are not particularly popular with a section of the political class. Besides, proposals such as the whittling down of existing political parties to just two competitive ones contradict the Constitution of Somalia.

At least four former prime ministers and a former president, Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, are among the political bigwigs opposed to some of the proposals arrived at by the NCC.

The idea of allowing only two political parties to participate in presidential elections is viewed



A Somali polling agent (right) explains the voting procedure to a voter before she casts her ballot in Baidoa on November 16, 2016. Most people in Somalia have welcomed the idea of directly voting in their political leaders.

by many as a drawback to the recent strides made towards expansion of the democratic space: “We applaud efforts to get the country to a level of one-person, one vote and a multi-party system that enforces democratic governance, but making a decision of such national interest without the full representation of all federal member states will put the unity of the people in jeopardy,” the leaders said in a statement on Monday.

The president of Puntland, Said Abdullahi Deni, who skipped last week's NCC event in Mogadishu, holds that “making changes in the power-sharing mechanism and the governance system of the country without in-depth consultation and without consulting the public will lead to a breakdown, a lack of confidence, and the disintegration of society.”

The emerging frictions on this matter were even more evident on Saturday last week during parliamentary debate by members of Somalia's Lower House on implementation of the NCC proposals. The discussion generated a lot of heat, with MPs differing on proposal to extend the tenures of the president and parliament from four to five years.

Attributing the current misunderstanding to “the typical irritating small talk by politicians

jostling for space at the expense of the bigger picture of national good”, Mogadishu-based political analyst Dr Ahmed Abdishakur warns that the political class, “if not monitored closely, could throw out the baby with the bathwater.”

Dr Abdishakur opines that Somalia's political leadership should ride on the public goodwill by building on the positive proposals made by the NCC. “This is a very delicate moment for Somalia and the issues at hand are intertwined. If we are not careful we could lose it all and get back to square one – which is a life of insecurity, political and economic instability.”

Abdishakur's argument appears to hold water, at least with regards to Somalia's quest to join the regional economic bloc.

For a country to be admitted into the EAC, it must have strong democratic institutions – a factor that Somalia has just partly demonstrated in Puntland. During his first term in office, between 2012 and 2017, President Mohamud tried joining the EAC without success. The country's applications were turned down on grounds of insecurity, sporadic conflict and weak institutions.

Somalia's journey to full membership of the regional bloc is going well so far, but it could face im-

pediments owing to challenges in political direction and harmony. Presently, the EAC comprises Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo, which is the regional body's newest member.

However, alive to the thorns that could be strewn in Somalia's way by fellow politicians, President Mohamud has assured the country that the NCC agreement will be subjected to debate and ratification by parliament: “I confirm that a political agreement, law, or constitutional change that has not been passed by the parliament of the country is not a law and cannot work in the country. The country is governed by law and order.”

The import of the president's remarks is that sections of the Constitution may be altered to suit certain proposals, once agreed upon.

PM Abdi Barre buttresses this factor by emphasising the need to get all players on board this “democratic and economic journey”. Chairing a cabinet meeting a week ago, he said: “The electoral process presents a significant opportunity for the Somali people to determine their destiny and as a government, we have a responsibility to give the people the opportunity to elect their leaders.”



# global lens

■ PENCE, CHRISTIE ENTER PRESIDENTIAL RACE

# REPUBLICAN RUCKUS



**Trump is the early front runner, but the former president is facing multiple criminal investigations into his personal and professional conduct that have already yielded dozens of felony charges in New York**

● WASHINGTON

**M**ike Pence entered the 2024 United States presidential election, as the former vice president goes up against his ex-boss Donald Trump for the Republican nomination.

“Today, before God and my family, I’m announcing I’m running for president of the United States,” he said in an online campaign video.

Pence’s announcement comes

two days after papers filed with the US Federal Election Commission showed he had formally entered the race.

“I believe in the American people, and I have faith God is not done with America yet,” the 64-year-old wrote in a tweet accompanying the video.

“Together, we can bring this country back, and the best days for the Greatest Nation on Earth are yet to come!”

Pence honed his reputation

as an unstintingly loyal vice-president who stuck with Trump throughout a scandal-plagued four years in the White House and brought the religious right into the tent.

But he became a pariah in Trumpworld after rejecting the Republican leader’s demands that he overturn the 2020 election in his role as president of the Senate. Berated constantly by Trump after Joe Biden’s election victory – and even heckled

at a conservative conference with chants of “traitor!” – Pence continued to praise the tycoon in public.

That changed after Trump’s torrent of false claims of election fraud led to a mob chanting for Pence to be hanged at the US Capitol. Pence announced his presidential run a day after former New Jersey governor Chris Christie joined the contest. Former governors Nikki Haley

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## global lens

# It's a crowded field in the Republican race

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and Asa Hutchinson are also in the race.

Polls show Trump as the overwhelming early front runner, regularly posting leads on DeSantis in excess of 30 points. None of the other candidates is achieving double figures. But the former president is facing multiple criminal investigations into his personal and professional conduct that have already yielded dozens of felony charges in New York.

Christie, who filed his paperwork with the Federal Election Commission before an evening announcement in Manchester, New Hampshire, presents a novel challenge as the only Republican contender so far willing to land genuinely damaging blows on the former president.

The 60-year-old Newark native came sixth in New Hampshire seven years ago and eventually endorsed Trump, serving as a key advisor before the pair fell out over the tycoon's refusal to accept his 2020 election defeat.

At his announcement in New Hampshire, Christie depicted Trump as self-obsessed and dishonest. The former US president, Christie said, "always finds someone else and something else to blame for whatever goes wrong, but finds every reason to take credit for anything that goes right".

And Christie argued last month that the *de facto* Republican leader was "afraid" of debating serious opponents. Trump has indicated that he may skip at least one of the first two Republican primary debates, expressing a reluctance to share the limelight with lower-polling rivals.

"If he really cares about the country – and I have deep questions about that – but if he really cares about the country, then he's going to get up there, and he shouldn't be afraid," Christie told conservative radio host Hugh Hewitt. Christie has assailed Trump on all manner of issues,

highlighting the escalating criminal probes targeting the embattled billionaire, trashing his false claims of election fraud and dubbing him "Putin's puppet" over his isolationist stance on Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

John Ellis, a former head of the *Fox News* Election Night Decision Desk, told *AFP* that while a bigger field benefits Trump, Christie's candidacy could put the top-polling candidate on the back foot.

"Because he will attack Trump relentlessly, Christie's campaign will get a ton of coverage in the mainstream press, which may help him do well in New Hampshire," said Ellis.

Trump, posting on his social media platform Truth Social, said Christie's campaign

announcement "rambled all over the place". "Hard to watch, boring, but that's what you get from a failed governor," Trump wrote, promising New Hampshire would again reject Christie at the polls.

Meanwhile, Trump's lawyers met with Justice Department attorneys as an investigation into the former president's handling of classified documents appears to be nearing an end. John Rowley, James Trusty and Lindsey Halligan were seen by reporters arriving at the Justice Department building in Washington but did not make any comment.

The *Washington Post*, citing an unidentified "person familiar with the situation,"

said Trump's lawyers had come to make their case that the former president should not face any charges.

A special counsel named by Attorney-General Merrick Garland has been looking into a cache of classified documents that Trump had stored at his Mar-a-Lago residence after leaving the White House.

The FBI carted away some 11,000 papers after serving a search warrant on Mar-a-Lago in August, and Trump could face obstruction of justice charges after spending months resisting efforts to recover the trove.

Several sources with knowledge of the investigation told the *CBS* news network that they believe that a charging decision in the documents case is imminent. Trump posted on his Truth Social platform that he was the victim of the "greatest witch hunt of all time!" "How can DoJ possibly charge me, who did nothing wrong, when no other presidents were charged, when Joe Biden won't be charged for anything," Trump wrote.

Trump, who is seeking the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, was apparently referring to the discovery of some classified documents at Biden's former office and in the garage of his home in Wilmington, Delaware. Garland named a special counsel in January to examine whether the Biden cache violated any law.

The Justice Department and Trump's attorneys did not immediately respond to inquiries from *AFP* about the meeting.

The classified documents case is one of several legal challenges that threaten to derail Trump's 2024 election bid.

Trump was charged by New York prosecutors in April with 34 counts of falsifying business records to cover up alleged hush money paid to porn star Stormy Daniels in 2016.

Trump is also being investigated over his efforts to overturn his 2020 election loss in the southern state of Georgia and his involvement in the January 2021 storming of the US Capitol by his supporters.



Former South Carolina Republican Governor Nikki Haley speaks at the Republican Jewish Coalition Annual Leadership Meeting in Las Vegas, Nevada, on November 19, 2022. Haley announced on February 14 she is running for president in 2024, challenging fellow Republican candidate Donald Trump by proposing a "new generation" of leadership in Washington. PHOTO | AFP



## global lens

## ■ DESCENDANTS OF THE BIBLICAL TRIBE OF LEVI

## JEWISH TEMPLE 'AT AL-AQSA'

**A rightwing group is getting ready for the moment it will rejoice at the reconstruction of the Jewish temple some 2,000 years after its destruction, which members believe will accelerate the arrival of the Messiah**

## ● JERUSALEM

**W**ith imported sacrificial cows, ancient hymns and growing support, some nationalist Jews hope to rebuild their temple in Jerusalem's Old City, at a site at the heart of Israeli-Palestinian tensions.

In a suburb of Tel Aviv, a group of choristers were getting ready for the moment they will rejoice at the reconstruction of the Jewish temple some 2,000 years after its destruction, which they believe will accelerate the arrival of the Messiah. But for others, realising their goal would massively inflame tensions around the Al-Aqsa mosque compound in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem. Chorister Shmuel Kam said Jews have been "waiting" two millennia for the revival of the temple.

Members of the Orthodox Jewish group claim to be descendants of the biblical Tribe of Levi, which performed hymns and music at the holy site.

"When the temple will be built, we will ask the Levites to come sing and they won't know. They have to learn," said Menahem Rozenthal, director of the men-only choir created a few months ago by the Temple Institute.

Founded in 1987, the institute aims to rebuild the temple, training choirs and clerics and making objects for use in religious rites.

While apprentice choristers come from across Israel to delve into the collection of ancient hymns, the Temple Institute has made all of the objects deemed necessary for Jewish rites according to rabbinical instructions. These include priestly robes, baking moulds for bread, incense burners and musical instruments.

The faithful have their sights



Supporters of the Palestinian group, Hamas, raise placards as they demonstrate against visits by Israeli right-wing groups to the Al-Aqsa mosque compound in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip May 26. PHOTO | AFP

set on the large, tree-dotted compound in the heart of Jerusalem's Old City. Known as Temple Mount to Jews and revered as their holiest site, the compound has for centuries housed Al-Aqsa mosque, the third most sacred place in Islam.

Those seeking to rebuild the temple recall the former place of worship, destroyed around 70 AD during the Roman period.

According to Jewish tradition, their first temple was demolished in 586 BC by Nebuchadnezzar II at the same location. For Haim Berkovits, a 50-year-old third temple advocate, "you can say whatever you want (about the Muslim presence), this was the place for Jews".

Jewish worship at the future temple is "only a matter of time", he said. Berkovits is part of Boneh Israel (Building Israel), an organisation which, according to its website, works at "bringing the redemption closer".

In order to hasten their sought-after redemption, Boneh Israel imported five red heifers from

the United States last year.

The plan is to sacrifice them and blend the ashes with water, a mixture that will be used to brush anyone deemed impure – such as those who have had contact with a corpse – before their ascent to the third temple. The rare cows are crucial, because the inability to perform this ritual is part of Israeli rabbinical authorities' opposition to Jewish visits to Temple Mount. The animals' "return is a messianic sign", affirmed Berkovits at a farm in northern Israel, where they are inspected by vets and rabbis to ensure that every hair is red.

Berkovits said Boneh Israel had already acquired land on the Mount of Olives in east Jerusalem, so the animals can be burned facing Temple Mount. For Yizhar Beer, director of the Keshev Centre for the Protection of Democracy in Israel, these "third temple lovers" are in no way marginal. From a few dozen adherents two decades ago, their ideology has "spread to the centre of the political level – to the

parliament, to the government", Beer said.

Since December, Benjamin Netanyahu has led a government alongside extreme-right ministers who advocate imposing Israeli sovereignty on the Al-Aqsa mosque compound. The compound is administered by the Waqf Islamic affairs council of Jordan, whose forces were routed from east Jerusalem in the 1967 Six-Day War.

Defying the ban by top rabbis, some 50,000 Jews "ascended to Temple Mount" last year, according to a nationalist Israeli organisation that carries the site's Hebrew name, Har Habait. The Jewish visitors include firebrand politician Itamar Ben-Gvir, who has also visited twice this year since becoming Israel's security minister. The UN, US and EU have all pressed in recent months for the status quo to be respected at Jerusalem's holy sites.

Tours by Jews of the holy compound, where only Muslims are permitted to pray, are denounced by Palestinians as a "threat" and an attempt to "Judaize" the site. The compound is a point of perennial tensions in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and any Jewish visit has the potential to become "an atomic bomb", warned Beer.

The international community has never recognised Israel's annexation of east Jerusalem, and considers it occupied Palestinian territory. For Yitzchak Reuven, the Temple Institute's head of communications, "the controversy is stirred up by the Palestinians who use it for nationalistic reasons".

"It's not really a Muslim issue," he said. Reuven did not specify what would become of Al-Aqsa mosque, a notable anomaly in otherwise detailed plans by organisations focused on the third temple.

# OBIT

## ■ SHE RECORDED 19 ALBUMS IN HER CAREER



# CIAO, 'THE GIRL FROM IPANEMA'

**Astrud Gilberto, the Brazilian star who provided a huge boost to the budding bossa nova genre, dies at 83**

Brazilian singer Astrud Gilberto performs on stage during a Jazz Festival on July 16, 1982, at The Hague. The singer's soft, beguiling voice made "The Girl from Ipanema" a worldwide sensation in the 1960s. PHOTO | AFP

### ● RIO DE JANEIRO

**A**strud Gilberto, the Brazilian singer whose soft, beguiling voice made *The Girl from Ipanema* a worldwide sensation in the 1960s and provided a huge boost to the budding bossa nova genre, has died at age 83, her family said. "I come bearing the sad news that my grandmother became a star today and is next to my grandfather Joao Gilberto," Sofia Gilberto wrote on social media last week.

The singer died at home in Philadelphia, in the United States, where she had lived since the 1960s. Gilberto was born in Salvador, capital of Brazil's north-eastern state of Bahia, in 1940 and was married to Joao Gilberto, a pioneer of the bossa nova genre who died in 2019.

Astrud Gilberto recorded 19 albums in her career, but she had little professional music experience when she turned *The Girl from Ipanema* – the now-classic song by Tom Jobim and Vinicius de Moraes – into a global smash, singing the English verses alongside American saxophonist Stan Getz and her guitar-playing then-husband. The version made Astrud Gilberto the first Brazilian to be nominated for a Grammy – which she won, for song of the year, in 1965. The silky-

smooth song changed Gilberto's life, turning it upside down both personally and professionally.

As she told the story, she owed her popularity to an off-the-cuff suggestion by Joao Gilberto while they were recording it in New York to try singing a verse in English.

"That song is going to make you famous," Getz told her in the studio.

It was apparently not just her music that wowed the saxophonist – and vice-versa. She ended up leaving her husband for Getz and moving to the United States permanently.

But that turbulent period in her life produced some of the best-loved recordings of all time, including the live album of the three friends' concert at New York's Carnegie Hall in October 1964. Aged just 24 at the time, Gilberto suffered from stage fright, which she overcame by taking theatre classes at the Stella Adler acting academy.

The coy young brunette wowed audiences with her satin voice, which she took on tour with Getz. She earned the nickname "The Queen of Bossa Nova", bringing the syncopated, relaxed Brazilian musical style to the world.

But she claimed she never earned any royalties from her best-known song, saying she received just a day rate for recording it.

She remained in the US after separating from Getz, continuing her career with hits such as *Fly Me to the Moon* (1972) and *Far Away* (1977), and turning to songwriting with the albums *Astrud Gilberto Now* and *That Girl from Ipanema*. After a career touring the world, she retired from the stage in 2001. She was inducted into the International Latin Music Hall of Fame the following year. In 2008, she was awarded a Latin Grammy for lifetime achievement.

She devoted herself to painting and animal rights activism in her later years.

The music world mourned the passing of one of its iconic voices.

"Farewell Astrud Gilberto," English rocker Tim Burgess, front man for alternative rock band the Charlatans, wrote on Twitter, alongside a black-and-white video of a shy-looking Gilberto performing *Girl from Ipanema* in a vintage '60s beehive. "Her contribution to bring Brazilian music to the world was immeasurable. Her incomparable swing and good taste will remain with me always," American musician Mark Lambert wrote on Instagram.

It was the latest loss for Brazilian music lovers, after rock icon Rita Lee died last month at age 75 and popular music legend Gal Costa, a leading figure in the "Tropicalia"

movement, died in November at 77. Bebel Gilberto, Joao Gilberto's daughter and a singer-songwriter herself, called Astrud her "eternal Muse".

"(May) you sing with birds and angels," she wrote on Instagram.

The song – *Garota de Ipanema*, in the original Portuguese – was written in 1962 by poet-lyricist Vinicius de Moraes and pianist-composer Tom Jobim. "Vinicius and Tom", as the duo became known, were regulars at a bar called the Veloso, in the Rio de Janeiro beachside neighbourhood of Ipanema. The song was inspired by a 17-year-old local girl, Heloisa Pinheiro, who would walk by the bar, looking "tall and tan and young and lovely", as the English translation of the lyrics goes. The song, originally titled *Menina que Passa* – the girl walking by – was first performed live by Moraes, Jobim, singer-songwriter-guitarist Joao Gilberto and the band Os Cariocas at a restaurant in the nearby neighbourhood of Copacabana that August. Critics have complained the English version of the song lost some of the original's melancholic bossa nova charm.

In the original Portuguese, a narrator feeling "so alone" in the world sighs at the fleeting beauty brought to life by the "poem" that is the passing girl.

The English version, translated by American lyricist Norman Gimbel, is instead a song of unrequited love: "When she passes, I smile, but... she just doesn't see." Astrud complained she never received the same royalties for the song as Gilberto and Getz. She was not named in the song credits on the first version of the album, and was reportedly paid just \$120 at the time, the going day rate then for session musicians in the US.

The track is the most-covered Brazilian song of all time, with 442 registered recordings, according to Brazil's national copyright collection agency, ECAD. Music icons including Ella Fitzgerald, Frank Sinatra, Nat King Cole, Cher, Placido Domingo and Amy Winehouse have all done versions.

One of Brazil's biggest pop stars today, Anitta, reinvented the track in 2021, remixing it with a hip-hop beat as *Girl from Rio* – a song about a "different Rio", closer to the favelas than posh Ipanema.

"Hot girls, where I'm from, we don't look like models. Tan lines, big curves and the energy glows," it goes.



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