

THE Weekly Review

For the Thinking Person

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CITADEL OF CORRUPTION

Out of graft, civil servants and politicians have turned into overnight billionaires, owning massive properties and large shares in blue-chip companies. In the last eight months, major cases have collapsed, adding credence to an argument that the elite are unwilling to tame the vice



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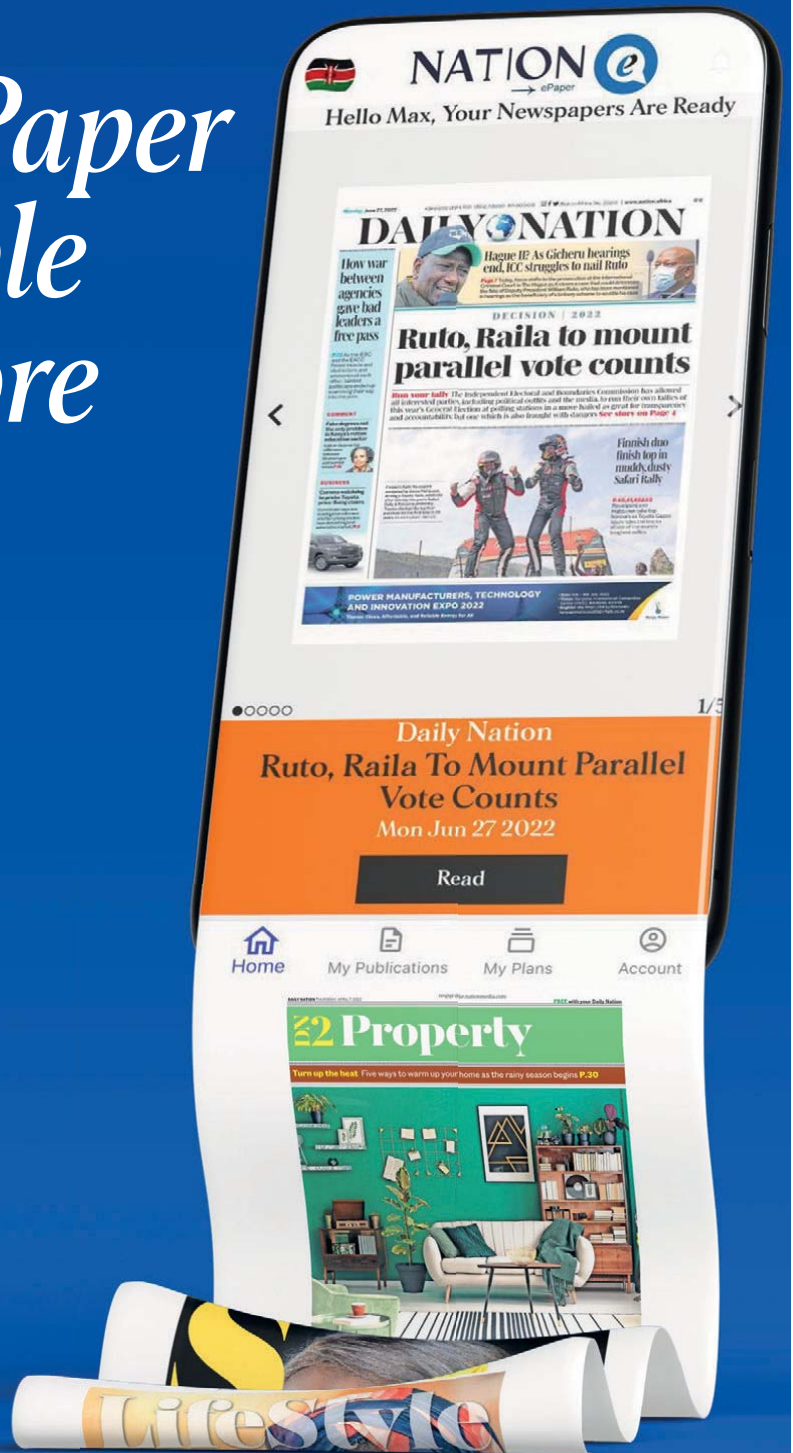
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letter from the editor

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From the government's reaction to the ongoing opposition offensive over the rising and unbearable cost of living, it is easy to discern the official policy that is being taken.

The epitome of the ruling thought is: There is no problem in the country. The people are okay and the demonstrators are just a few misguided and reactionary fools incited by the opposition; the opposition is just out to sabotage the duly elected government by unleashing the 'misguided' populace to gain power.

It is a great reaction whose reverberation has put the supporters in high mood. It has become a chest-thumping arena when the government has employed decadent approach to the situation. The government, in panic, has unleashed measures of the past decades just to win a few points.

It has arrested, abducted, opposition politicians and their bodyguards; it has unleashed 'plain clothes police' to arrest at will anybody suspected of singing a song that is sweet to its ears; the government and those that feel embedded within, is very happy but it doesn't seem to comprehend the cost of the Pyrrhic victory.

We are at the hinge of change. Everything now goes, the human rights embedded in our Constitution are easily being gnawed away. We are setting new precedents and those that applaud the reactionary stance are creating a future beast that may devour them in a not-so-distant future.

Never before have we had a former President derided and forced into a response from whence he was quiet. Never before has a sitting President touched the family or economic interest of a predecessor. Even in the height of our political *de jure* dictatorship, the President never touched the families



Allan Buluku

Never before have we had a former President derided and forced into a response from whence he was quiet; never before has a sitting President touched the family or economic interests of a predecessor. We are turning a dangerous page. We are taking – deliberately – a dangerous turn. Many sane and sober voices have called for both the opposition and the government to strive and find a common ground on the prevailing issues.

of those who opposed them. Their families may have only suffered their incarceration.

Many were detained according to the prevailing draconian laws and later clandestinely apologised to. Even the strong arms of yore had the ability to avoid making future enemies.

We are turning a dangerous page. We are taking – deliberately – a dangerous turn. Many sane and sober voices have called for both the opposition and the government to strive and find a common ground on the prevailing issues. They seem to be wasting their time; they do not know the great egos in those camps. The loose talk from the government side has always been directed to-

wards former President Uhuru Kenyatta. He has avoided public utterances regarding the ongoing mass demonstrations called by the opposition but he is in the radar of buoyant newcomers into big office who hold grudges unknown to the public.

Kenyatta came out riled on Friday evening following the alleged mistreatment of his family by government operatives. Furious at a raid on his son's home in Nairobi by people believed to be State agents, he dared his 'enemies' in President William Ruto's administration to go for him.

Perhaps we are living in denial; perhaps we are closing our eyes to the present weak poison that may coagulate into a very potent cyanide to our society.

Our democratic gains have come from long struggles that were only grabbed through the existing laws while seeking to change them. We got the new Constitution and if we regress in vigilance because we support the *status quo*, we shall be the heaviest losers.

The freedom of speech, which was the main crux of Kenyan struggles, is now slowly transmuted into a crime. The social media is replete with blatant and hitherto closeted tribalists that only see their ethnic side of the divide; politically sponsored tribal clashes in some areas is taking a toll as we wrangle.

There are voices congratulating police brutality on Kenyans who hold different views from their stance. There are hundreds of public mutinies slowly but surely blooming and even the diaspora is reporting tribal divisions when unity outside is their forte. We are setting a very dangerous precedent and in local parlance, *kitaturamba*.

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the telescope

■ Rebel legislators to learn their fate soon

ODM MPs face disciplinary team

The eight rebel ODM MPs summoned by the party's disciplinary committee will now appear before the panel to defend themselves next week.

The committee agreed to their requests to postpone the hearings that were due this week as a result of concerns over the choice of venue and the anti-government protests.

ODM disciplinary committee chairman Ben Sihanya on Tuesday wrote to the legislators, acknowledging their concerns but maintained that due to stringent 30 day timelines, the hearings cannot be pushed to August as they requested.

"We wish to remind you that the Disciplinary Committee

in discharge of its mandate is guided by the Disciplinary Committee (Practice and Procedure) Rules, 2022 and in particular, Rule 19 (3)."

It states: "All proceedings before the Committee in respect of a specific complaint shall be heard and determined not later than thirty days of Committee receiving the decision to charge from the National Chairperson."

"Take note that the Disciplinary Committee received the decision to charge from the National Chairperson on 3rd July 2023 and due to the strict timelines provided for in law, we are constrained not to grant your request," Prof Sihanya's letter states.



Azimio protesters in Nairobi on July 20. Rebel ODM MPs summoned by the party's disciplinary committee will now appear before the panel to defend themselves next week.

■ Commonwealth champion in good form

Omanyala set for Austrian meet



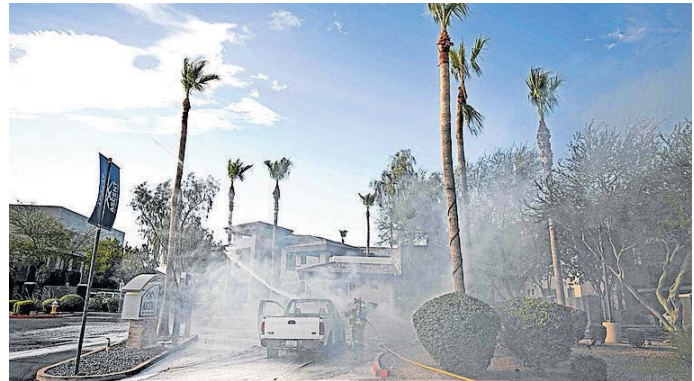
The Commonwealth 100 metres champion Ferdinand Omanyala will compete at the Josko Lauf Meeting on July 29 in Austria before pitching camp in Miramas, France.

Omanyala will then head to

the World Athletics Championships scheduled for August 19 to 27 in Budapest, Hungary before Diamond league Finals on September 15 in Oregon, United States of America.

It will be the second time Omanyala is competing at the world event, having made his debut at last year's championships held in Oregon, USA. Omanyala, who competed a few hours upon arrival in Oregon, reached the semi-finals.

■ Residents warned to limit their time outside



A Phoenix Fire Department firefighter uses a hose line to extinguish a Ford F150 pick-up truck that caught fire during a record heat wave in Phoenix, Arizona on July 18.

Arizona heat wave poses lethal threat

On a sidewalk in Arizona's capital Phoenix, where a record-setting heat wave has prompted warnings for people to limit their time outside, Dana Page struggles to stay hydrated in her tarpaulin shelter.

The 49-year-old, surrounded by bottles of water, knows full well the dangers heat poses to the homeless population. Days earlier, she watched emergency responders perform CPR on a fellow resident of "The Zone," an encampment where hundreds live in tents and makeshift shelters, near downtown.

"He died just inches away from water," she told AFP.

Phoenix, like much of the US southwest, is surrounded by desert, and its 1.6 million residents are used to brutal summer temperatures. But this year's heat wave is unprecedented in its length: it has already helped the city break its

previous record of 18 straight days at or above 110 degrees, with similar highs forecast into next week.

Page, a native of Phoenix, said she has had heatstroke three times in the past five years, describing it as a "secret killer" that sneaks up if not monitoring one's water intake.

The absence of typical monsoon rains has also compounded the problem: no respite from searing heat during the day allows temperatures to remain dangerously elevated overnight.

"If this continues, we will see more heat-related deaths," said Amy Schwabender, head of the Human Services Campus, a large facility near "The Zone" where 16 associations cooperate to provide social services, medical treatment and a shelter for those in need.

"It is a life-and-death situation," she warned.

■ Gains after crackdown on password sharing

Netflix adds six million subscribers



Netflix last week said subscriptions to the media streaming service climbed by nearly six million in the wake of its crackdown on password sharing.

The streaming giant finished the recently ended quarter with a to-

tal of 238 million subscribers and a profit of \$1.5 billion, according to an earnings release.

The pickup in subscribers came as a potentially crippling writers and actors strike hits the US entertainment industry, but with analysts saying Netflix is better positioned than its rivals to weather the storm.

"We are constantly at the table negotiating with everyone across the industry," Netflix co-chief executive Ted Sarandos said during an earnings presentation.

kenya lens

■ PLEAS FOR PEACE

KENYA ON THE EDGE

The media, the clergy and the diplomatic corp have all called for a truce between the government and the opposition, but will they listen?



A police officer engages protesters in Kibera, Nairobi, on July 19. It remains unclear what shape dialogue, if resumed, will take. The Ruto camp would probably be happy with resumption of the bi-partisan committee in Parliament.

● BY MACHARIA GAITHO

A rare joint Page One editorial carried last Thursday by all the main newspapers and broadcast stations underlined the growing calls for an end to the violent confrontations between police and opposition demonstrations.

The editorial – published by the *Daily Nation* and its Kiswahili-language stablemate *Taiifa Leo*, *The Standard*, and the *People Daily* as well as their respective television and radio channels, and also the Royal Media Group broadcast network – followed on the call for peace issued by the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops on Wednesday, day one of the three straight days of demonstra-

tions against the high cost of living called by the opposition Azimio la Umoja coalition.

The significance of the editorial was that it was the first such joint initiative by the Kenyan media since the common Page 1 Leader at the height of the 2007-2008 post-election violence.

The various statements last week amplified calls by other religious groups and western envoys accredited to Kenya for an end to the violent protests and the equally violent police response, and highlighted the need for President William Ruto and opposition leader Raila Odinga to reach a truce and enter dialogue for a peaceful resolution of issues.

The renewed calls for an end to the violence came as both sides claimed victory on day one

of what has been described as the second wave of protests first launched by Raila in March.

At the end of the day on Wednesday, Interior Cabinet Secretary Kithure Kindiki released a statement claiming that most parts of the country had remained calm and peaceful, “save for isolated cases of hooliganism and breach of peace in a few spots in Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu, Migori, Homa Bay, Siaya and Nakuru counties, and Wote and Emali towns”, both in Makeni County.

What he did not mention is that some of the places cited were in state of virtual shutdown most of the day. Businesses remained shut, schools closed, public transport off the road and most people other than those demonstrating

opting to stay indoors.

He lifted his order of the previous day issued jointly with his Education counterpart Ezekiel Machogu for schools to remain closed, an action that underlined the seriousness with which the government took the protests.

Kindiki also commended the police containing the protests “professionally and with restraint”. His statement was the polar opposite of the one released by Azimio around the same time. The press releases signed by Raila’s 2022 presidential election running-mate, Martha Karua, “noted with tremendous satisfaction the extremely successful ... maandamano across the country today”. She lauded those who

Continued on Page 6

kenya lens

Calls for cease fire as Azimio protests continue

Continued from Page 5

braved bullets, teargas and water cannons to express their stand against punitive taxes, accusing the police of unleashing unwarranted violence on “peaceful and unarmed demonstrators”. And speaking in Kericho, Ruto again criticised the demonstrations but said he remained ready to talk on issues affecting Kenyans, though he ruled out any discussion of power-sharing deals.

Only a few days earlier, Raila had denied for the umpteenth time that he was pursuing any power-sharing or ‘handshake’ arrangement, an accusation that seems to have become an obsession of Ruto’s Kenya Kwanza grouping, though no evidence of such designs has ever been tabled. Ruto maintained a busy working day as if to demonstrate that it was business as usual despite the opposition protests. In the morning, he hosted at State House a delegation of visiting United States Trade Representative Katherine Tai, before heading to Kericho County, where re-commissioned the stalled Kimugu Water Project.

He also addressed roadside rallies, where he recalled his previous gesture of holding out an olive branch to Raila which resulted in formation of a bi-partisan Parliamentary committee to iron out issues. Instead, he said, Raila had opted to walk out of the talks and resume protests. He asked the police to act firmly with anyone out to cause problems, adding that his government had no problem with constitutional provisions on demonstrations, “but we cannot be a country of chaos, violence... anarchy”. Ruto did not directly address the calls for peace, but he will surely have noted the growing clamour directed at both him and Raila to “Save our Country” as all newspaper headlines trumpeted on Thursday.

It is not clear if the visiting American delegation raised the Kenyan situation with the President, but questioned by journalists, Ms Tai indicated support for the joint statements issued the previous day by US ambassador Meg Whitman and 12 other envoys from western nations including Britain, Germany, Can-



A police officer runs away from a group of charging opposition supporters during anti-government protests in Nairobi on July 19.

ada, Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland calling for peaceful resolution of the current crisis.

Tai noted, however, that the US supports freedom of speech, association and expression, and specifically in regard to the demonstrations in Kenya. While Ruto was very visible, Raila, who is the driving force behind the protests, remained out of sight.

Just like happened on the July 7 Saba Saba demonstrations, he did not put in any appearance as thousands of demonstrators heeded his call to turn out. He was absent at the press conference called by the Azimio leadership on the eve of the protests, and another briefing on Thursday.

The top Azimio leadership – Raila, Karua, former Defence CS Eugene Wamalwa, former Kakamega Governor Wycliffe Oparanya, former Murang’a Governor Mwangi wa Iria and former MP Jeremiah Kioni – were all conspicuous absentees as their supporters battled police on the streets of Nairobi, Kisumu, Mombasa, Kisii and other towns.

In most of the past demonstrations, Raila and his key lieutenants have been on the frontline, taking their doses of police teargas and high-pressure water jets, but they seem to have adopted a different strategy of staying behind the scenes. On Saba Saba, the no-show was explained as due to intelligence information that police intended to infiltrate the demonstrations to unleash chaos.

Last week, Raila’s colleagues charged that the police had established a special unit to carry out executions of targeted opposition leaders. There may also have

been fear of arrests, as evidenced by a sweep in which a number of demonstration planners and key Raila aides were held on Tuesday night and Wednesday morning. Meanwhile, it remains to be seen whether Ruto and Raila will positively respond to the calls for peace and dialogue. The government, through Foreign Affairs CS Alfred Mutua, has already reacted angrily to a statement by the Office of the United Nations Committee of Human Rights, blaming the police for excessive use of force.

Azimio, in turn, has faulted the US, Britain and other countries that claim to defend human rights for remaining largely silent in the face of evidence that almost all the killings recorded since the protests started have been attributed to police bullets rather than to violent demonstrators. It is likely that even if there are moves towards talks, the Raila team will demand an inquest into police killings as one of the conditions.

On Tuesday, for instance, video and photographs spread widely on social media of plainclothes police officers firing bullets into crowds and in some cases seeming to execute captured demonstrators by shooting them at point-blank range when already subdued.

Meanwhile, it remains unclear what shape dialogue, if resumed, will take. The Ruto camp would probably be happy with resumption of the bi-partisan committee in Parliament, but that was a mechanism Azimio was not from inception comfortable with. Raila had always preferred talks out-

side the confines of Parliament, and that is what he will probably insist on, together with presence of neutral mediators. It is also unclear what any talks would be about, given the fluid and ever-shifting nature of Azimio’s demands.

The protests began as pressure for a scrutiny of the 2022 presidential election count servers following alleged whistleblower evidence that Raila was the actual winner. To that was added demands for a halt to filling of vacancies in the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commissions until all interests were accommodated. There were also secondary demands to address the rising cost of living.

‘Open the Server’ demands have since largely been pushed to the background as cost of living issues took center-stage following passage of the Finance Bill that galvanised public discontent with what was seen as excessive taxation, doubling of VAT on petrol and imposition of an unpopular Housing Fund.

To that has been added what can only be described as, if public statements from Azimio leaders are anything to go by, an attempt to topple the government through ‘people power’. That is something on which Ruto obviously will not compromise. But he can make some gestures which could persuade Azimio to at least suspend demonstrations pending establishment of a dialogue mechanism.

One, suggested by the Catholic Bishops, would be for Ruto to repeal, or at least suspend implementation of the Finance Act. There will be the argument that the President has no powers under any law to repeal an Act of Parliament but the Bishops, pointedly, also asked for respect for Court Orders.

The government has so far defied a High Court order for suspension of the Finance Act pending conclusion of a suit filed by Busia Senator Okiya Omtatah.

The Kenya Kwanza government was elected partly on the pledge to respect court orders, in contrast to the previous government led by President Uhuru Kenyatta. It might not be asking too much for Ruto to at live up that promise.

kenya lens

■ A SIMILAR PLAN RAISED A STORM UNDER UHURU

THE SH40BN KPC SAGA

Cabinet approves Kenya Pipeline Company's acquisition of Kenya Petroleum Oil Refineries in a deal that's estimated to cost the taxpayer billions of shillings

● BY JAINDI KISERO

We are working on a story based on the announcement that the Cabinet has approved the acquisition of Kenya Petroleum Oil Refineries (KPRL) by the Kenya Pipeline Company (KPC) and would like to confirm whether the transaction will be based on last year's government valuation of KPRL of Sh40 billion. Please clarify whether KPC is expected to borrow money from its existing lenders to purchase KPRL."

That is the question *The Weekly Review* put to the KPC Managing Director, Joe Sang, in a text message. The response delivered through a spokesman, Andrew Kipkemboi, was cryptic: "We are still awaiting details of what was contained in the Cabinet memo from our parent ministry (Energy and Petroleum), then we will advise accordingly." That response raised more questions than answers. Is it, really, conceivable that KPC would not know the details of a transaction of such magnitude that carries such massive implications on its financial health? Or, was it a case of the right hand not knowing what the left is doing? Clearly, KPC had chosen to be economical with the truth.

Yet, the fact that KPC is reluctant to give details should not surprise. There is a political sub text to the shenanigans around the proposal. A similar move by the National Treasury under former Cabinet Secretary, Ukur Yatani, last year, was marred by allegations of irregularities and corruption.

This makes the stakes high for President William Ruto's administration because the government will not want to project to the public the impression that it is engaging in the very same dodgy dealings the predecessors were perpetrating. With KPC remaining mum on details, speculation about motives behind last week's Cabinet decision to revive the proposed acquisition is now rife.

The most plausible theory would appear to be that the government is pushing KPC's acquisition of KPRL because of the pressure on its finances. Having been frozen from international bond markets for more than a year, and with domestic sources of financing becoming more and more expensive, the government is looking for easy sources of money.

Towards the end of President Uhuru Kenyatta's administration, Yatani had deliberately structured the KPRL acquisition by KPC deal in such a way as to allow the government to deploy KPC's balance sheet to indirectly access a whopping US\$400 million loan from a syndicate of KPC's existing lenders. The National Treasury must be finding the arrangement that was structured last year by Yatani alluring because of the speed with which it can be packaged and launched.

Here is a bit of background. On July 15, 2015, KPC entered into a US\$ 350 million facility agreement with six banks – NCBA Bank Kenya Ltd, CFC Stanbic Citibank NA Kenya Corporative Bank of Kenya, Rand Merchant Bank and Standard Chartered Bank as mandated lead arrangers. The purpose of the facility was construction of a '20' diameter pipeline from Mombasa to Nairobi. As of December 2021, KPC had cleared a substantial part of the loan with the facility now standing at a balance of US\$ 150 million.

That large foreign exchange borrowing served to demonstrate that KPC is just but one of the few parastatals that has a healthy balance sheet, reputation, and relationship with lenders to access international debt markets. Towards the end of President Kenyatta's rule, the National Treasury crafted a bizarre scheme to irregularly raise billions from banks by forcing KPC to borrow money from its six mandated arrangers to pay for KPRL's assets, which the Ministry of Lands had valued at Sh42 billion.

Basically, the transaction was structured this way: The government forces a parastatal it owns 100 per cent to borrow billions from a syndicate of banks to purchase another asset that the government also own 100 percent. Stated differently: You (the government) buy non-revenue generating assets that you already own with borrowed money and then dump a huge liability with third party banks on the books of KPC.

It begs the question: Where is transparency in a transaction where the government is buying an asset it already owns on the basis of a valuation conducted by itself? Where is arm's length and how do you buy an asset at a price you have decided by yourself? The clearest indication that the transaction which the National Treasury was trying to force on KPC was dodgy and bizarre was to emerge in a report by the financial services advisory group, PricewaterhouseCoopers Ltd (PWC).

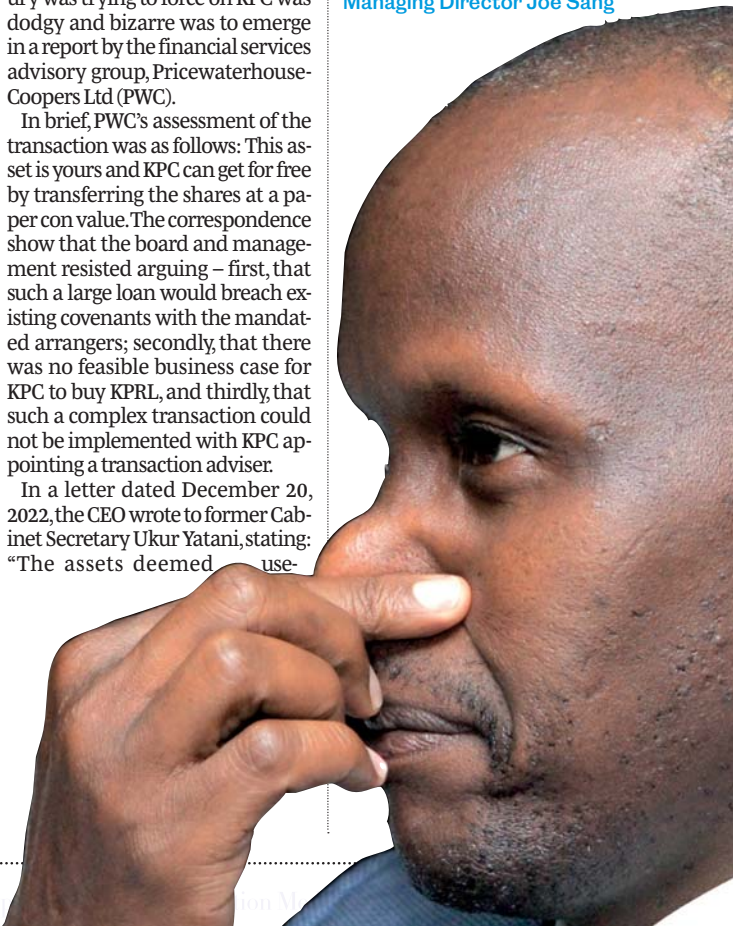
In brief, PWC's assessment of the transaction was as follows: This asset is yours and KPC can get for free by transferring the shares at a paper con value. The correspondence show that the board and management resisted arguing – first, that such a large loan would breach existing covenants with the mandated arrangers; secondly, that there was no feasible business case for KPC to buy KPRL, and thirdly, that such a complex transaction could not be implemented with KPC appointing a transaction adviser.

In a letter dated December 20, 2022, the CEO wrote to former Cabinet Secretary Ukur Yatani, stating: "The assets deemed use-

ful from a business perspective are valued at Sh19 billion. Other assets valued at Sh22 billion are related to idle refinery assets which KPC does not need."

The National Treasury would not see KPC's point. "The purpose of this letter is to grant you approval to borrow a maximum of Sh42 billion (equivalents US\$400 million) and to refinance the existing facility. You may seek term sheets from existing lenders for the US\$ 400 million borrowing but extend this to other lenders if the terms are not competitive," said Yatani. Whether President Ruto's administration plans to effect KPC's acquisition of KPRL on the same terms as crafted by Yatani last year remains to be seen.

Kenya Pipeline Company
Managing Director Joe Sang



kenya lens

■ DEVOLUTION OF CORRUPTION

SLEAZE-FEST IN GOVERNMENT

Although City Hall receives the lion's share of funding and revenue, bribery and fraud have denied Nairobi residents quality services

After assuming office in 2013, Dr Evans Kidero signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the EACC for a lifestyle audit of county staff with the aim of having property of individuals convicted of corruption confiscated.



Governor Johnson Sakaja last year pointed out how cartels had managed to thrive at City Hall because of free interaction with cash during the revenue collection process.

A report by the Controller of Budget Dr Margaret Nyakang'o for the fiscal year ended June 2023 names Nairobi County in top five of the poorest spenders of development billions, recording an absorption rate below 20 per cent.



Mike Sonko admitted to the presence of cartels in the county government. He pointed to the Land and Rates department as a playground for cartels terrorising helpless widows and Nairobi property owners through fraudulent transfer of property.



A 2021 audit report by the Auditor-General, Nancy Gathungu, flagged Nairobi among worst counties in terms of managing and reporting use of public funds. The county failed to provide evidence of purported expenditure of at least Sh9.7 billion.



Since 2013, City Hall has received in excess of KSh164 billion as equitable revenue share from the national government, in addition to conditional grants.



A 2009 Transparency International-Kenya placed Nairobi sixth in the list of bribery-prone public institutions in Kenya and 14th overall in the East Africa region.



● BY COLLINS OMULO

When the concept of devolution was hatched more than 10 years ago, the plan was to decentralise the government, bringing services closer to the people through counties. Over the years, however, county governments have become corruption hotspots, devolving embezzlement and mismanagement of public funds instead of advancing development.

Billions of shillings have been pilfered from the devolved units, with several county governors and top officers implicated in corruption cases over the years. Nairobi, in particular, stands out on account of several audit reports exposing massive corruption and blatant theft of public funds.

Nairobi County receives the li-

on's share of funds from the national government from equitable share of revenue as well as collecting the highest amount in own-source revenue.

Since 2013, City Hall has received in excess of KSh164 billion as equitable revenue share from the national government, in addition to conditional grants. During the same period, the county government has also raised on average KSh10 billion annually as own-source revenue (OSR), for a total of at least KSh100 billion.

According to a report by the Commission on Revenue Allocation (CRA), the county received KSh489.4 million as equitable share of revenue and Sh61.5 million as conditional grants in the fourth quarter of the financial year ended June 2013.

In the fiscal year ended June

2014, KSh9.5 billion was received, which then increased to KSh11.3 billion in the following financial year and further to KSh12.9 billion in the fiscal year ended June 2016. Conditional grants for the years were KSh390.4 million, KSh1.6 billion and KSh636.5 million in that order.

In the financial year ended June 2017, KSh14 billion was advanced to the county as equitable share of revenue, with another KSh590.9 as a conditional grant. This then shot to KSh15.4 billion in the financial year ended June 2018.

In the 2018/2019, KSh15.79 billion was received, which then increased to KSh15.91 billion in the next two fiscal years, or KSh16.5 billion, including conditional grants.

City Hall then received KSh19.5 billion in each of the financial

years ended June 2022 and 2023, including conditional grants. In the current financial year, the county will receive KSh20.07 billion as equitable share of revenue, excluding conditional grants.

Despite the billions received by the county government, residents continue to grapple with below par service delivery such as poor housing and sanitation, water shortages, run down early childhood education, among others.

A latest report by the Controller of Budget Dr Margaret Nyakang'o for the fiscal year ended June 2023 names Nairobi County in top five of the poorest spenders of development billions, recording an absorption rate below 20 per cent.

The Public Finance Management Act, 2012, requires county governments to spend a mini-

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num of 30 per cent of their budgets on development.

Runaway corruption and misuse of public funds has left close to five million Nairobi residents with nothing to show in terms of value for their taxes.

Interestingly, City Hall is set to hike levies with the aim of raising more funds, forcing residents to dig deeper into their pockets to fund an administration without commensurate level of service delivery. In its draft Finance Bill 2023, Governor Johnson Sakaja's administration is proposing a raft of new and hiked fees to be borne by residents as it seeks to raise KSh19.9 billion in OSR in the current financial year ending June 30, 2023 to finance a KSh42.3 billion annual budget.

Parking fees, cess, market rental charges, properties rates and single business permits, among others, are set for increase.

Regrettably, billions of shillings collected from residents have ended up lining individual pockets of county officers at the expense of ensuring quality service delivery for the taxpayers. The cartel-ridden City Hall has turned into an exclusive club of millionaires who siphon billions from the county government with wanton abandon.

When Mike Sonko succeeded Dr Evans Kidero as the second governor of Nairobi, he admitted to the presence of cartels in the county government. He pointed to the Land and Rates department as a playground for cartels terrorising helpless widows and Nairobi property owners through fraudulent transfer of property through a well-planned syndicate.

Sonko promised to reshuffle staff at City Hall as some had served in the same departments for over 15 years and had personalised them into family business.

Garbage collection, he said, was a scam riddled with corruption and run by a cartel. Here, too, he promised to ensure that garbage collection and disposal tenders were awarded transparently and in accordance with procurement laws. "I wish to take this opportunity to warn the City Hall-based cartels that sooner rather than later, the long arm of the law shall catch up with you," Sonko warned MCAs in September 2017 at a Nairobi County Assembly.

Interestingly, Sonko faces numerous charges in the courts, including several corruption cas-



City Hall is set to hike levies with the aim of raising more funds, forcing residents to dig deeper into their pockets to fund an administration without commensurate level of service delivery.

es arising from his tenure at City Hall, which he has denied. He is alleged to have embezzled more than KSh300 million partly through the irregular awarding of contracts to friends' companies that are said to have wired money to his personal accounts after receiving their payments from the Nairobi County.

Consequently, the ex-Makadara MP is now permanently barred from holding public office.

In May, an anti-corruption court in Nairobi froze assets belonging to a City Hall employee over unexplained wealth worth KSh537 million. The employee, a junior procurement staff earning a net salary of KSh21,000, acquired the millions within eight years between January 2014 and June 2022. He had as assets 11 vehicles, nine parcels of land and a three-star hotel in Kisumu County belonging to the employee.

Another staff member, Jimmy Kiamba, an accountant on a monthly salary of KSh85,000, had joined City Hall in January 2007 worth KSh1 million but by 2013 was worth KSh401 million.

According to the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC), Kiamba banked Sh400 million in eight of his bank accounts between January and November 2014 and had banked at least Sh1.5 billion between 2007 and 2014. Even with a graft case hanging over him, he was rewarded with a pay rise, pushing his salary to Sh145,000 a month when he left City Hall in January 2015.

Another one was Wilson Kanani, an employee earning KSh55,000 monthly, who had assets of nearly KSh100 million. He was working as a development control officer tasked with clamp-

ing down on companies flouting laws on outdoor advertising.

Still yet another former City Hall employee was arraigned in court after amassing a KSh340 million fortune in both cash and property between January 2011 and April 2016. Stephen Ogaga Osiro, City Hall's head of accounting, is said to have amassed the millions while earning a salary of only KSh90,000 monthly.

The cases of the four employees is just a tip of the iceberg of institutionalised corruption and embezzlement of public funds at City Hall.

Immediately after assuming office in 2013, Dr Kidero signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the EACC for a lifestyle audit of county staff with the aim of having property of individuals convicted of corruption confiscated. He blamed fictitious and inflated contracts for City Hall's KSh41.5 billion debt, even going ahead to say that some corrupt employees had sold off public facilities such as schools, health centres and fire stations.

That year, Nairobi was ranked sixth in the EACC report on bribery, with an average bribe of Sh7,000 solicited by municipal employees, mostly of it being paid by those seeking services.

However, Kidero ended up being the EACC's client on a KSh213 million graft case. EACC investigating officers laid bare how monies were channelled through two companies that had allegedly tendered to supply goods to City Hall, ending up in Kidero's personal accounts held at the Family Bank.

Several reports paint a grim picture of the state of affairs in the county government. An audit report by the Auditor-General, Nan-

cy Gathungu, for the financial year ended June 2021, flagged Nairobi among worst counties in terms of managing and reporting use of public funds. Ms Gathungu fingered the county for failing to provide evidence of purported expenditure of at least Sh9.7 billion, breaching procurement laws in spending, and cases of ghost workers, among others.

Similarly, a 2009 report by Transparency International-Kenya placed Nairobi City Council sixth in the list of bribery-prone public institutions in Kenya and 14th overall in the East Africa region. The defunct City Council was only bettered by Kenya Police, Ministry of Defence, the Judiciary, Ministry of Public Works and Ministry of Lands. Almost 10 years later, a 2017/2018 report by the same organisation flagged land, rates, and health departments in Nairobi County as dens of corruption.

A 2021 EACC National Ethics and Corruption Survey placed Nairobi among the top 10 counties, at position six, where service seekers have to part with a bribe in order to be served. The report said an average of Sh8,500 in bribes is paid by service seekers. The amount is even more for collection of building certificates, for which one has to part with at least Sh20,000. Sakaja last year pointed out how cartels had managed to thrive at City Hall because of free interaction with cash during the revenue collection process.

He explained that out of the more than 150 revenue streams, very few are digitised an anomaly he intends to fix by automating and digitising all county revenue collection streams. "You can't have a cabal of 10 or 15 people putting the lives and livelihoods of five million residents at ransom. The first thing you do is dissociate from them," said the governor.

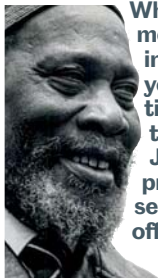
A report by the CRA last year indicated that Nairobi County has the potential of generating KSh25 billion annually as own-source revenue, with KSh7.95 billion from single business permits alone. An earlier report by CRA had put the figure at KSh67.7 billion if the county government could fully automate its revenue collection and close up the loopholes. Our efforts to get comments from current office holders at the county government proved futile as our calls and text messages went unanswered.

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kenya lens

■ BUSINESSMAN KAMANI ACQUITTED IN SH3.6BN SCANDAL

KINGDOM OF CORRUPTION



When Zacharia Shimechero was jailed in 1974 for five years for corruption, this became the first case in the Jomo Kenyatta presidency where a senior government official was jailed.



President Daniel arap Moi's Kanu regime turned the government into a den of corruption, while he projected the image of a religious man. Like Kenyatta, Moi used his office to acquire wealth and allowed his inner circle to do the same.



While Uhuru Kenyatta's government had filed more high-profile corruption cases than his predecessors combined, they have all been withdrawn by President William Ruto's regime.

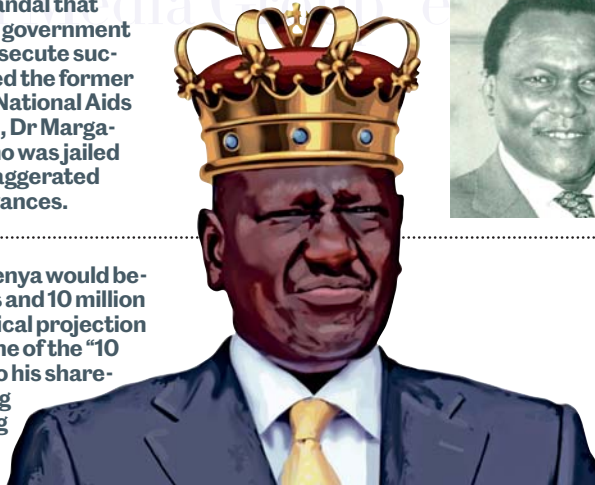


The only 'big' scandal that the Mwai Kibaki government managed to prosecute successfully involved the former Director of the National Aids Control Council, Dr Margaret Gachara, who was jailed for taking an exaggerated salary and allowances.



The first case of political impunity was recorded in 1964, when a maize scandal involving Cabinet Minister Paul Ngei broke. At the time, Kenya was a net exporter of maize, mainly to Japan, and under Ngei's watch, maize disappeared, leading to a crisis.

Vocal MP JM Kariuki predicted Kenya would become a country of "10 millionaires and 10 million beggars". It was a rhetorical projection because Kariuki was one of the "10 millionaires", thanks to his shareholding in the gambling business and mining companies.



The 1964 maize scandal would be equivalent to the current cooking oil racket under Moses Kuria's Trade ministry.



Out of corruption, Kenyan civil servants and politicians have turned into overnight billionaires and millionaires, owning massive property and large shares in blue-chip companies, only a handful have ended up in jail.

For the last eight months, major corruption cases have either collapsed or have been abandoned by the Director of Public Prosecutions, adding credence to a historical argument that Kenya's elite are unwilling to tame runaway graft

● BY JOHN KAMAU

When Zacharia Shimechero was jailed for five years in 1974, he became the only senior personality in President Jomo Kenyatta's 15-year rule to be jailed over corruption. Shimechero was unlucky.

While out of corruption – rather than business – Kenyan civil servants and politicians have turned into overnight billionaires and millionaires, owning massive property and large shares in blue-chip companies, only a handful have ended up in jail.

When Shimechero was jailed in 1974 for five years for corruption, this became the first case in the Jomo Kenyatta presidency where a senior government official was jailed.

As a former Deputy Secretary in charge of Government Central Medical Stores, now Ken-

ya Medical Supplies Agency, Shimechero was accused of corruptly receiving KSh144,000 from the director of Poly Chemists, Arvind Patel – who was also jailed – to supply goods without going through the tender board. The prosecutor, Sharad Rao, told the court that Shimechero used the money "to buy various properties" and that there was information that he was given a Mercedes Benz, too.

For the last eight months, major graft cases have either collapsed or have been abandoned by the Director of Public Prosecutions, ostensibly to spite the former Director of Criminal Investigations, George Kinoti, adding credence to a historical argument that Kenya's elite were unwilling to tame runaway corruption. The first case of political impunity was recorded in 1964, when a maize scandal involving Cabinet Minister Paul Ngei broke. By

today's standards, the 1964 maize scandal was equivalent to the current cooking oil racket under Moses Kuria's Trade ministry. Ngei, then the Minister for Co-operatives and Marketing, doubled as the chairman of the Maize Marketing Board.

At the time, Kenya was a net exporter of maize, mainly to Japan, and under Ngei's watch, maize disappeared, leading to a crisis. While Kenyatta appointed a Commission of Inquiry, headed by Justice Chanan Singh, to probe corruption at Ngei's ministry and the Maize Marketing Board, Ngei was never punished.

The Commission instead redefined corruption: "There is no evidence before us showing 'corruption' in the legal sense. In most instances, 'unfairness' would be an appropriate description of what took place. People took

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unfair advantage of their positions as businessmen or politicians. In some cases, abuse of public office was involved," said the report.

In 1969, six years after independence, Butere MP Martin Shikuku (inset) had challenged the government to form a judicial commission to investigate increasing corruption cases. He asked: "Is it a known fact that most of us (leaders) had very little in terms of wealth before we became leaders, and above all, before Kenya attained Independence? What do we now see after this short period of Kenya becoming independent?" Calling for the formation of a judicial commission, Shikuku said: "It would be fair for people in high positions to tell the country how they acquired the wealth they had within this short period." But Attorney-General Charles Njonjo – one of the new millionaires – told Parliament that a commission of inquiry was not warranted. "I am myself satisfied that these matters are being dealt with satisfactorily," he said, dismissing the formation of such a commission as a "waste of time and public funds".

Shikuku was at it again in 1971, when he asked Parliament to set up a select committee on corruption, tribalism and nepotism. While this was passed, Jomo Kenyatta summoned the Kanu parliamentary group over the matter and it did not progress. Shikuku later alleged that tribalism and nepotism were used in picking members of the committee.

That year, the Ndegwa Commission of Inquiry, created to examine and investigate matters affecting the structure and remuneration of the public service, presented a report recommending that civil servants be allowed to conduct business with the government within the same institutions they worked as long as it did not lead to a conflict of interest. In practice, it never worked. Overnight, government offices were turned into spaces for commercial transactions in what has become a tradition. The import of the 1971 Ndegwa Report was that it sanitised what was previously known as corruption and civil servants became as rich people working in the private sector.

A few years later, in 1974, the small village of Chepkube in Bungoma was turned into a coffee smuggling hub by local politicians, security officers and government officials. Coffee worth millions of dollars stolen and smuggled from the volatile Uganda was brought into Kenya through this corridor, primarily using bicycles. The traders would transport it from 'border to border', the origin of the word boda-boda. It was a risky business and in June that year, veteran politician Kung'u Karumba, one of Kapenguria Six, disappeared without a trace in Uganda while on a 'business' trip.

As the elite grew rich, the poor began sliding down into the abyss. One of Kenyatta's ministers, Dr Julius Ki-ano, was nicknamed "Mr Ten Per Cent". Vocal MP JM Kariuki predicted Kenya would become a country of "10 millionaires and 10 million beggars". It was a rhe-

torical projection because Kariuki was one of the "10 millionaires", thanks to his shareholding in the gambling business and mining companies. In May, 1975, buoyed by the anger over the murder of JM Kariuki, Shikuku succeeded in moving a motion to "set up a select committee to probe corruption in Kenya". It was the first challenge to the patron-client system that encouraged using public positions for private gain. For the first time, all the members were publicly supposed to declare their wealth – and they did.

The death of Jomo Kenyatta saw President Daniel arap Moi ban smuggling (*magendo*) and it was hoped that corruption might end. During his 23-year reign, however, Moi's Kanu regime turned the government into a den of corruption, while he projected the image of a religious man. Like Kenyatta, Moi used his office to acquire wealth and allowed his inner circle to do the same. Under Moi's watch, mega-corruption was reported in almost all sectors, including energy, building of infrastructure and the sale of parastatals. Though the auditor-general captured this in his annual reports, no action was taken.

Meanwhile, land allocation became a key tool by which Moi bought loyalty, and government parastatals were turned into dens of sleaze. The political elite raided cash-rich institutions such as National Social Security Fund. But nothing surpassed the Goldenberg scandal, in which businessman Kamlesh Pattni raided the Treasury, and by the time he was done, taxpayers had lost \$600 million.

While Moi had reluctantly set up the Kenya Anti-Corruption Authority at the insistence of donors, his appointment of Harun Mwau as the person to lead the fight was a surprise. To show his mettle, Mwau in 1998 arrested several Treasury officials, triggering a conflict between him and Finance minister Simeon Nyachae. Moi was forced to sack Mwau, and he was declared incompetent. Solicitor-General Aaron Ringera succeeded Mwau, but his tenure was cut short in December 2000, when the High Court ruled that the organisation was unconstitutional.

Moi left power before his government could prosecute any significant corruption case. It was hoped that Mwai Kibaki, elected on an anti-cor-

ruption ticket, would. But Kibaki abandoned previous opposition parties' efforts to prosecute President Moi over corruption. As a result, those who had made their

wealth illicitly during the Kanu regime got away scot-free. Nevertheless, Kibaki formed a Judicial Commission of Inquiry into the Goldenberg Scandal, which eased pressure on him to prosecute Moi.

Finally, Moi emerged unscathed in the judicial investigations, and though the Commission recommended the prosecution of Pattni and other masterminds, the cases collapsed in court. Pattni was later set free.

As a result, the only 'big' scandal that the Kibaki government managed to prosecute successfully involved the former Director of the National Aids Control Council, Dr Margaret Gachara, who was jailed for taking an exaggerated salary and allowances, and a former National Bank of Kenya official, Wellington Oluga, who was jailed together with billionaire Ketan Somaia over a KSh115 million London-look taxi scandal. The two were later set free by the High Court.

Kibaki's tenure was tainted by the Anglo Leasing scandal in which billions of shillings were paid to phantom offshore companies. But still, there has yet to be any success in prosecuting the cases. Two weeks ago, the High Court set free businessman Deepak Kamani over the KSh3.6 billion scandal.

Others set free were senior government officials. Today, only one person, Sylvester Mwaliko, a former Home Affairs Permanent Secretary, has been found guilty, earning him a fine of Sh3 million or three years in jail. While Uhuru Kenyatta's government had filed more high-profile corruption cases than his predecessors combined, they have all been withdrawn by President William Ruto regime. During the election campaigns last year, Ruto accused President Kenyatta of using corruption cases to intimidate Ruto's supporters.

The unlucky few who have been netted are not the usual symbols of corruption.

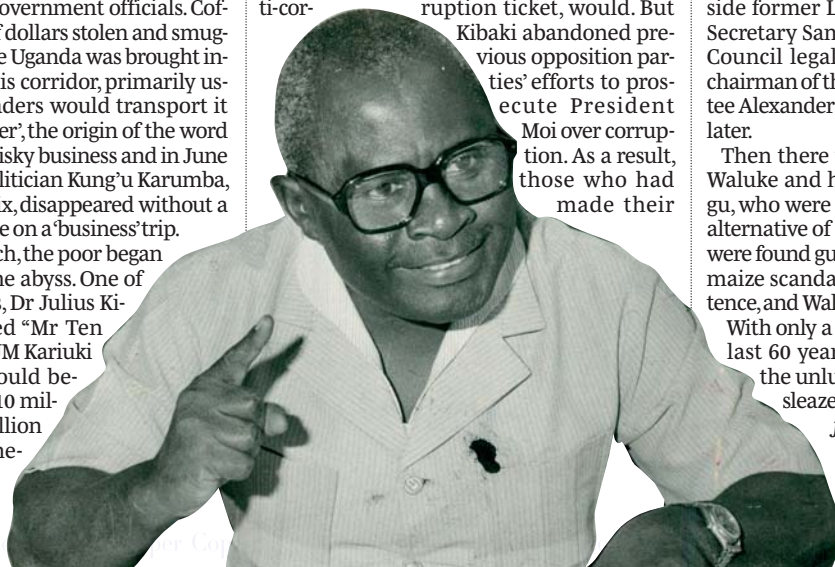
In 2012, Ms Rebecca Nabutola, former Tourism PS, and former Kenya Tourism Board Managing Director Dr Ochieng' Ong'ong'a, were handed four-year prison sentences without the option of a fine for defrauding the Tourism ministry of Sh8.9 million.

In May 2018, former Nairobi Town Clerk John Gakuo was given a three-year jail term over a Sh283 million cemetery scandal, alongside former Local Government Permanent Secretary Sammy Kirui, former Nairobi City Council legal secretary Mary Ng'ethe and chairman of the City Council's tender committee Alexander Musee. Gakuo died five months later.

Then there was a case involving MP John Waluke and his co-accused, Grace Wakhungu, who were fined over Sh700 million or an alternative of seven years in prison after they were found guilty of fraud in a KSh313 million maize scandal. They have appealed the sentence, and Waluke is still an elected MP.

With only a handful of people jailed for the last 60 years over mega-corruption, only the unlucky few have been caught. The sleaze continues.

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the limelight



Children under adult supervision, handle weapons that have been disengaged for safety, as they play in the Family Historical Tank park in Saint Petersburg, on July 15. PHOTO | AFP



The test firing of a new intercontinental ballistic missile "Hwasong-18" in North Korea on July 13. PHOTO | AFP



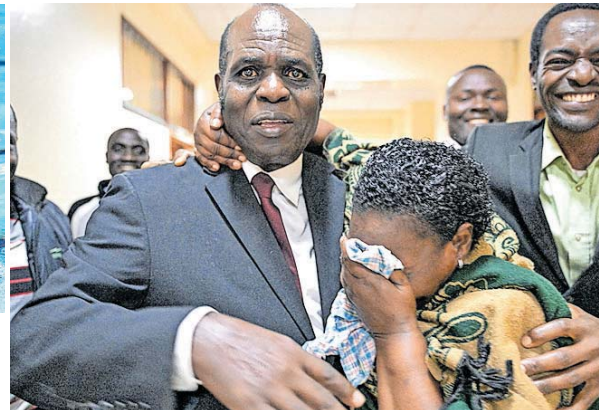
A man rides a two-wheeler with two children covered with plastic sheets during a monsoon rainfall in Hyderabad on July 18. PHOTO | AFP



A young Kenyan sits next to a burning barricade used to block a main road during the third day of protests in Nairobi, on July 21. PHOTO | AFP



Team Kazakhstan competes in the preliminary of the Team free artistic swimming event during the World Aquatics Championships in Fukuoka on July 20. PHOTO | AFP



Gilbert Deya (left), celebrates outside the court room with his followers after he was acquitted in Nairobi on July 17. The court acquitted the controversial self-styled preacher, who claimed he could help infertile couples conceive "miracle babies" through prayer. PHOTO | AFP



A cloud of smoke rises during a fire in Dervenochoria, north-west of Athens, on July 19. Extreme heat was forecast across the globe as wildfires raged and health warnings were in place in parts of Asia, Europe and North America.

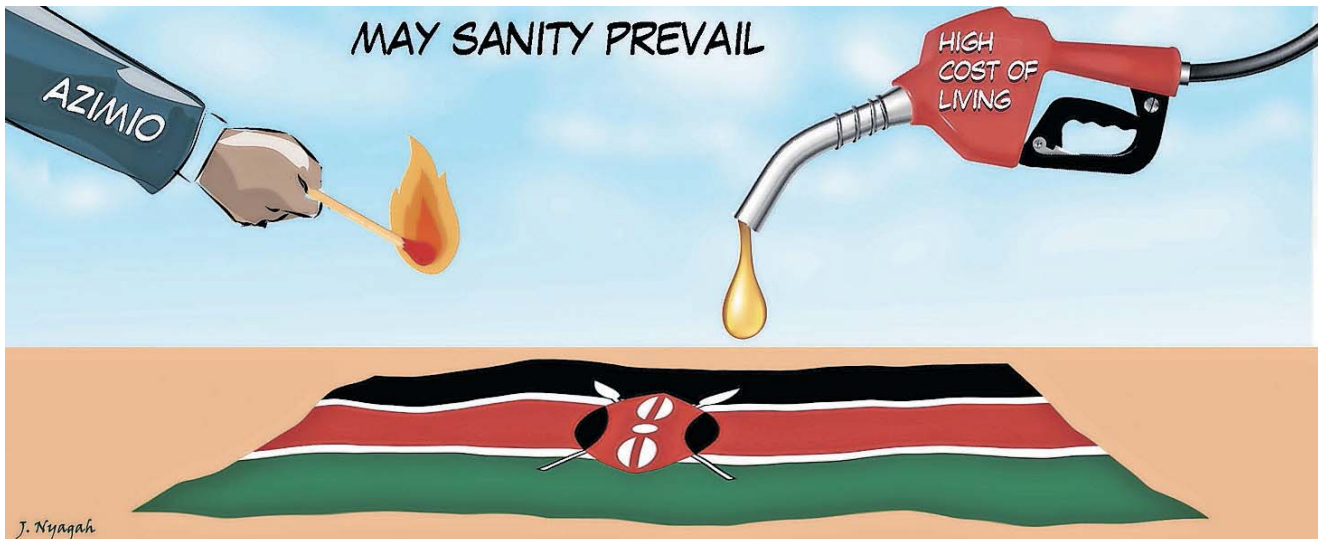


An injured man who was caught up in running battles between police and demonstrators in Mathare, Nairobi, on July 19. DENNIS ONSONGO | NATION



Kazakh rider Yevgeniy Fedorov cycles past a mural by artist Nicolas Maurel during the 16th stage of the 110th edition of the Tour de France cycling race, on July 18. PHOTO | AFP

opinion



■ They do not care about ordinary citizens in the stand-off that has led to loss of life and property

Both government and Azimio are selfish rascals

Who is benefitting from this chaos? Who is benefitting from the broken limbs, lost lives and the attendant grief? Who, pray, is cheering when businesses shut down and incur losses or are raided and looted by hoodlums and goons? Who benefits when economic growth slows down?

Azimio la Umoja leaders are insisting that they will continue with street action until President William Ruto listens to the cries of Kenyans and brings down the cost of living. Put another way, Azimio does not mind bringing down the economy in order to force the President to change his fiscal policies.

This government, thanks to the high cost of living, is on the ropes, struggling to find its footing and get a grip 11 months after coming into office. This government is blunder-prone and yet arrogant, enacting an unpopular Finance Bill and casually trashing public opinion on said bill.

Azimio's problem is not the suffering of ordinary people under a tone-deaf government. Its problem is that it remains persuaded that President Ruto was not elected by Kenyans, but that he was rigged in by the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission, and which travesty was upheld by the Supreme Court.

The high cost of living provides Azimio with the perfect justification for agitation against the government. That prices of basic commodities and staples have gone through the roof gives Azimio principals Raila Odinga, Martha Karua and Kalonzo Musyoka the perfect cover for rallying the populace against the government.

Unsurprisingly, President Ruto is persuaded



**KWENDO
OPANGA**

that Odinga & Co want to bully their way into the government in some form of coalition. The President and Odinga are former allies-turned-bitter foes, especially because, one, the latter sacked the former from the cabinet of the Grand Coalition Government of 2008 to 2013. Two, President Ruto remains convinced Odinga sold him down the river when he distanced himself from the mayhem occasioned by the dispute over the 2007 presidential poll and for which he and five other prominent Kenyans were arraigned before the International Criminal Court.

Three, from March of 2018, Odinga was recruited by President Uhuru Kenyatta and unleashed to fight Deputy President Ruto for a long stretch that culminated in Kenyatta backing, and actively campaigning for, Odinga to succeed him at State House at the expense of his Number Two.

The President cannot countenance sharing power with Odinga. That would give credence to claims he was rigged into office. Odinga would like to see people power sweep the government out of power, but a 1986 Philippines-style exit for the government is

not yet on the cards.

While the government is on the ropes and the populace is restive, while the destruction of private and public property earns the government more enemies than friends; and while the rising deaths in protests are blamed on the government, the Odinga-led opposition is not yet an unstoppable movement.

The government, resisting pressure from local and outside forces, is determined to tough it out and wear down Odinga & Co until the protests fizzle out. Odinga, on the other hand, boasting a four-year-long campaign against a sitting deputy president, fancies a drawn-out war of attrition.

It is Azimio that benefits from the chaos and mayhem caused by the protests it leads. But what joy does the destruction of property and lives bring the coalition? What joy do deaths and damage of property bring to a government whose prime duty is to protect lives and property?

Listen, think again. Neither the government nor Azimio cares about you. They are all rascals. But they are our rascals.

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opinion

■ Those bodyguards are loyal first and foremost to their employer – the government

Thank you, Mr President, for withdrawing the spies



MACHARIA
GAITHO

The government last week withdrew police officers deployed to guard key personalities associated with the opposition protests.

Among them were bodyguards assigned to Azimio coalition principals Raila Odinga and Kalonzo Musyoka. Not spared was former First Lady Mama Ngina Kenyatta, widow of the country's first President Jomo Kenyatta and mother of President William Ruto's predecessor, Uhuru Kenyatta.

I support that seemingly petty, churlish and childish move wholeheartedly, having argued time and time again that too many of our men and women in uniform are wasting away on non-core duties as watchmen, handbag carriers, nannies, cooks, gardeners and messengers for the high and mighty.

Re-deployment of our highly trained officers to what they signed on for will in the first instance signal the government's intent to save money in these hard times. It will also free the officers to make use of their special skills and training in fighting crime.

We will have more officers patrolling the streets to take care of robbers and muggers; our efforts to secure porous borders against infiltration by al Shabaab terrorists and other bad guys will be beefed up considerably; we will have more resources to combat cattle rustlers, bandits and illegal militias in Kenya's Wild North; and we will be better resourced to nab and jail the VIPs – Vagabonds in Power – who populate the Ruto government and give it such a bad name with their insatiable greed for the public kitty.

We have to assume that recall of the said officers had nothing to do with punishing Former Prime Minister Raila, a former Vice-President Musyoka, or a host of Azimio coalition MPs, governors and other elected leaders who have the temerity to challenge Ruto's hold on power. Or Uhuru, who Ruto and his mouthpieces, without ever offering the slightest bit of evidence and with regularity bordering on unhealthy obsession, incessantly accuse of being financier of the opposition protests.

No, it's about rationalising deployment of our police officers. Police records many years

ago indicated that more than 10 per cent of the officers are deployed to accompany and drive senior government officials and guard their homes, farms, business premises and other property. The generosity extends to spouses and children, parents and other relatives, and in cases even to illicit lovers.

Ruto is the first President brave enough to put an end to all that waste of public resources. His next step will obviously be to amend the laws setting out retirement benefits to retired Presidents and Deputy Presidents.

Security will no longer be part of the package, as they already have enough in pension, let aside what they acquired illegitimately while in office, to afford private security guards. If they so wish they can contract the Wagner Group, Executive Outcomes, Gurkha Security Group, Military Professional Resources Inc, or any other renowned private army from across the globe.

No need to mention, in any case, that mothers and other relatives were never part of the package.

We can also be confident that the President will next look inward as he likes to lead by example. His own security detail can be scaled down considerably with absolutely no compromise to his safety and wellbeing. He will also be quite happy to have private residences, farms, businesses and other property under care of private security guards.

The excessive number of officers attached to Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua and

As for Cabinet Secretaries, without exception, one driver-cum-bodyguard should be more than enough. No chase cars. Same for the Speakers of Parliament and the Chief Justice. Unless facing specific confirmed threats, judges, Members of Parliament, county governors, State Corporation and Constitutional Commission bosses, and any others who have previously rated security paid for by taxpayers should be able to take care of themselves.

Prime Cabinet Secretary Musalia Mudavadi will also be drastically reduced. Other than for vain displays of power, they can comfortably do with one driver and one bodyguard, and no more than one chase car with at most two armed officers.

As for Cabinet Secretaries, without exception, one driver-cum-bodyguard should be more than enough. No chase cars. Same for the Speakers of Parliament and the Chief Justice. Unless facing specific confirmed threats, judges, Members of Parliament, county governors, State Corporation and Constitutional Commission bosses, and any others who have previously rated security paid for by taxpayers should be able to take care of themselves. If they are so insecure or find it demeaning to live or move around like ordinary citizens, without the attention of fawning armed flunkies, let them pay for the privilege out of their own pockets.

Meanwhile, there is something I find extremely naive of our opposition leaders, who complain loudly every time their security is removed or reduced. Have they ever stopped to wonder who it is that reports on their every move? Don't they find it odd that the government machinery knows everything about who visits them, who they visit, where they go to socialise and with whom, their clandestine trusts included?

Those same police bodyguards and status symbols they so highly value are not on their payroll. They are paid by the State security system, which maintains keen interest in keeping tabs on them. Those bodyguards who accompany the boss everywhere, open and shut doors, lock out unwanted visitors, hold onto the mobile phone, carry the briefcase, files and iPads, and so on, are loyal first and foremost to their employer.

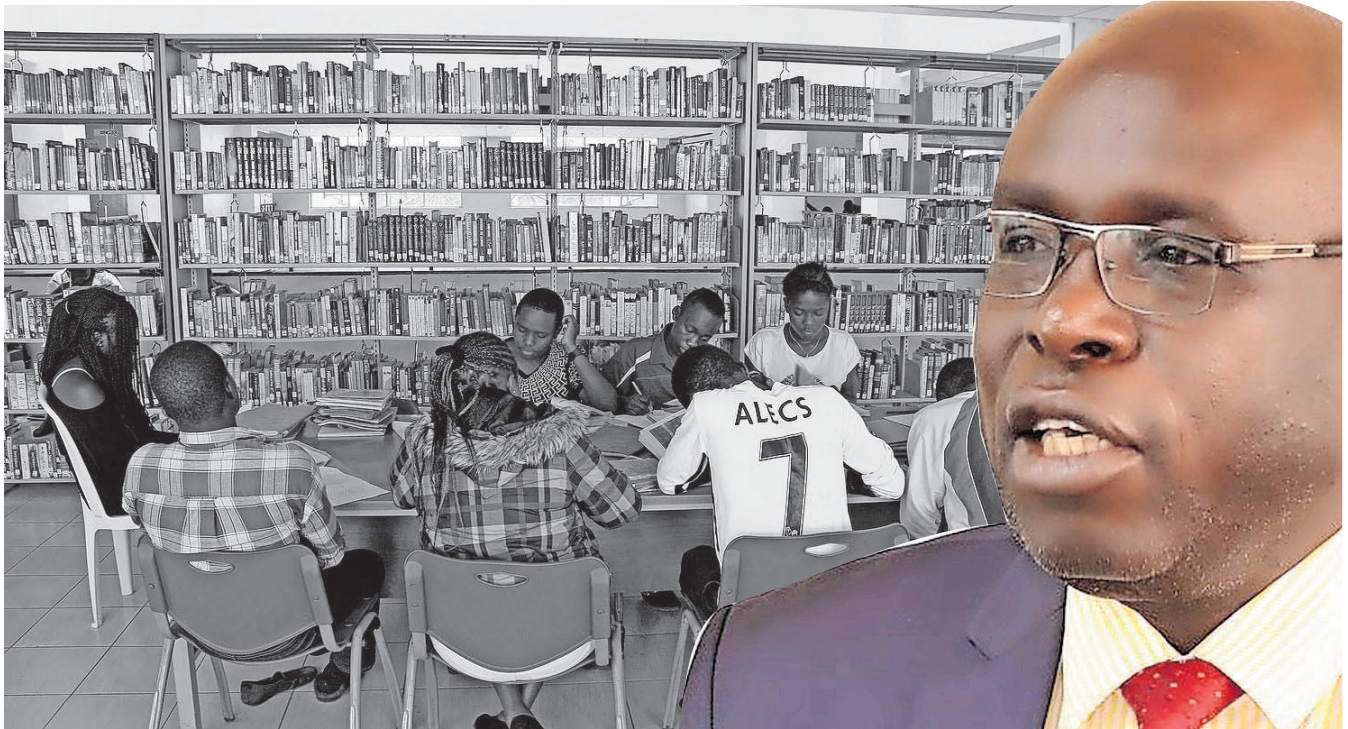
The brief is not only to protect but to snoop and file detailed reports. They have the expertise and opportunity to plant listening and seeing devices, copy documents and peer into mobile phone and computer data.

That is why Raila, Kalonzo and the others should actually be thanking Ruto for being so considerate as to remove those detailed to spy on them.

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kenya lens

■ EFFECTIVE DIGITAL PLATFORM FOR STUDENTS

HELB APP A GAME CHANGER

Students in a library. Right is Prof Stephen Odebero of the Department of Educational Planning and Management at Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology. Key advantages of the Odemmusta app lie in its ability to discriminate students according to their levels of need, time saved in applying and receiving feedback on 'loanable status'. Below is Helb chief executive Charles Ringera.

The 'Odemmusta' offers an online application option for Helb loans, saves time and is cost-effective for students

● BY OSCAR OBONYO

One day, during his undergraduate studies at the Egerton University's Njoro Campus, Stephen Odebero – a third-year student – skipped lectures because he was too weak to wake up and walk to the lecture hall. He had gone for three days without a meal.

His roommate and classmate, Bernard Muronga, returned to the hostel at 11am to find Odebero languishing in bed – scrawny and faint. Dr Muronga, who is today a lecturer at the University of Amoud in Somaliland, recalls quickly summoning “comrades” to get some food for his friend. Some bread and tea was

arranged from the next room and Odebero began to regain his strength.

This single incident in 1994 inspired Odebero to reflect on other needy cases, especially of college students too hungry to learn. Although tuition expenses were catered for by the government during his time, a scholarship or private financial boost was required to take care of indirect expenses such as purchase of books, printing of reading material, notes from lecturers and research work, as well as living expenses and transport.

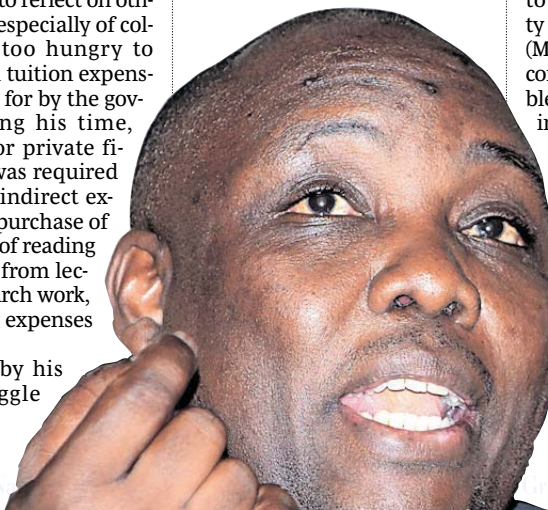
Disturbed by his personal struggle

to successfully complete college education, Odebero was keen to find a way to help needy students through loans or scholar-

ships to cover indirect private costs.

Several decades later, his dream has come to fruition – thanks to Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology's (MMUST) invention of an online computer application for equitable targeting of needy students in the disbursement of Higher Education Loans Board (Helb) loans.

Prof Odebero, a seasoned researcher and the Director of Postgraduate Studies at MMUST, is the brains behind the innovation, alongside co-innovator Mr Hesbon Amwayi. The tool is an offshoot of Prof Odebero's PhD thesis on “equity in



kenya lens

Helb loan financing in Kenya in relation to demand, supply and effectiveness in loan recovery". It took him over 15 years to crack the innovation.

"As a result of this study, it was established that the means testing instrument used by Helb was not effective in targeting the needy university students and more particularly, it could not effectively pick out students according to their different levels of need," he says of his post-graduate thesis, which was supervised by Prof Joseph Bosire and Prof Anthony Kiplangat Sang of Egerton University.

The latest innovation – born out of a scientific study – on identification of Helb beneficiaries is the first of its kind in Kenya and in the larger eastern Africa region. Other models adopted so far have not been based on scientific inquiry as factors influencing demand for students' loans on one hand and supply on the other.

The MMUST product departs from the way Helb has been identifying the needy in several ways. First, an applicant for a Helb loan does not have to obtain and fill forms manually; the application is done online. Secondly, the innovation uses the app to instantaneously process the information provided by applicants; as soon as one finishes providing information, their level of need is determined.

This prepares applicants early enough to look for additional funds in the event that their applications are not successful. The tool is patented by the Kenya Industrial Property Institute (KIPI) as "Odemmusta" to MMUST, Prof Odebero and Amwayi.

The import of this is that anyone using the app must partner with MMUST and the two researchers from the Kakamega County-based institution. Key advantages of the Odemmusta app lie in its ability to effectively discriminate students according to their levels of need, time saved in applying and receiving feedback on "loanable status", and cost-effectiveness as it is done online.

The app has inbuilt mechanisms to detect cheating. It uses past information such as personal identification numbers used in primary and high schools to link the applicants' past status to the present situation which, Odebero and Amwayi point out, reduces chances of cheating. Being an online app, the entire process reduces chances of human interference in loan allocation. This, according to Odebero's thesis, was found to be a major impediment in the issuance of student loans, with HELB staff accused of influencing loan allocation to recipients.

In a comment on MMUST's official website, Vice-Chancellor Prof Solomon Shibauro observes that the innovation "actualises the grave responsibility of higher institutions as catalysts for socio-economic development through the creation of new knowledge, research and commercialisation of outputs emanating from these initiatives". He further urges scholars and researchers to forge powerful collaborations with the business sector to translate research findings into industries to create wealth and jobs.

The MMUST product departs from the way HELB has been identifying the needy in several ways. First, an applicant for a HELB loan does not have to obtain and fill forms manually; the application is done online. Secondly, the innovation uses the app to instantaneously process the information provided by applicants; as soon as one finishes providing information, their level of need is determined. This prepares applicants early enough to look for additional funds in the event that their applications are not successful. The tool is patented by the Kenya Industrial Property Institute (KIPI) as "Odemmusta" to MMUST, Prof Odebero and Amwayi.

"This is in tandem with our mandate as a University of Science, Technology, and Innovation. We are keen to foster research output that creates innovations that contribute to socio-economic development," says Prof Shibauro.

In testing the app's efficacy, Prof Odebero explains that he conducted multiple regression analyses for the determinants of Helb loan supply. "A comparison of Helb loan allocations between the top and bottom quintile allocations showed that those in the top quintile tended to receive more loans than what was deserved, however, those in lower quintiles got a less than what they merited. If this model is used, this problem will be fixed."

His co-innovator, Amwayi, offers assurance

This is in line with our mandate as a university of science, technology, and innovation. We are keen to foster research output that creates innovations that contribute to socio-economic development.

MMUST Vice-Chancellor Prof Solomon Shibauro



on the security of the app with regards to storage of and access to information submitted by users. The app, he explains, has a two-factor verification that adds an extra layer of security to the user's account in case the password is stolen. Further, a Unique Personal Identifier number is linked to the Nemis to countercheck the authenticity of the information provided.

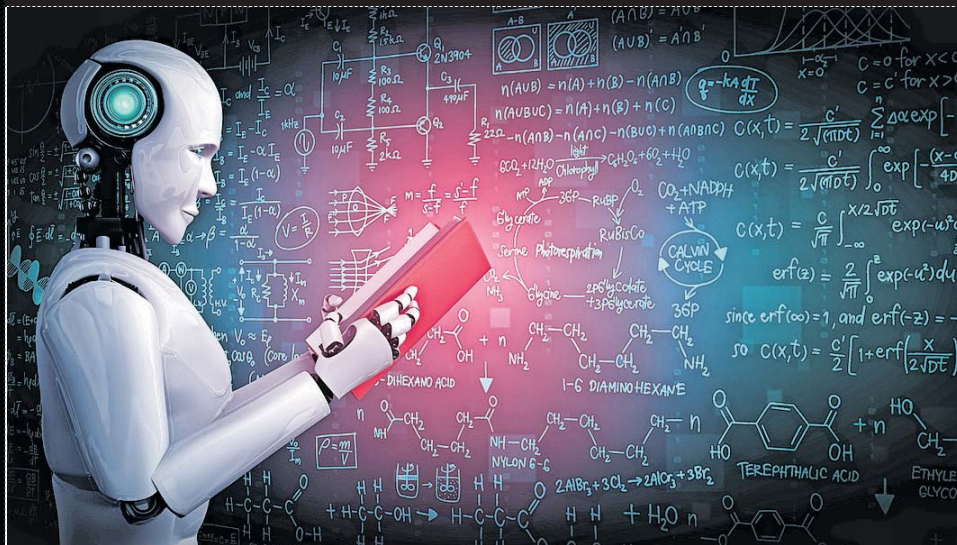
Previous studies have shown Helb loan allocation to needy students to be inequitable, factors that persuaded him and Amwayi to come up with an invention that bridges this gap "by enhancing the means of testing and targeting of the needy, apart from improving on the effectiveness in the loan application and disbursement process".

The MMUST researchers believe this will be achieved when the App is in-built into the higher education financing model recently proposed by the presidential working party "so that we partner to give students a better and efficient means to apply and receive loans". With his innovation, Prof Odebero is optimistic that fewer students will experience similar financial hardships as those that nearly forced him out of college.



SCIENCE & TECH

ATOMIC BOMB MOVIE 'IS A WARNING TO WORLD ON AI'



● LONDON

The story of the invention of the atomic bomb told in the new film “Oppenheimer” is a “warning” to the world as we grapple with artificial intelligence, insists the movie’s director Christopher Nolan.

The British-born maker of “Memento,” “Dunkirk” and the “Batman” trilogy said he believes a lot of the anguish around technology “in our imagination stems from (Robert) Oppenheimer,” the physicist who helped invent nuclear weapons during World War II.

What he and his team at the Los Alamos Laboratory in the United States did was “the ultimate expression of science... which is such a positive thing, having the ultimate negative consequences,” Nolan said.

Like back then, the startling advances in artificial intelligence (AI) are raising similar fears about the dangers of a technology with potentially uncontrollable consequences.

Some worry that AI could escape its creators and endanger humanity, much like scientists and others fretted eight decades ago with the dawn of the nuclear

age. “That was a moment in history. This is one too,” Nolan’s star Cillian Murphy — who plays the haunted scientist — told AFP while the pair were in Paris to promote the film, which opens across the globe this weekend.

“Artificial intelligence researchers refer to the present moment as an ‘Oppenheimer moment,’” said Nolan, referring to the first atomic tests, when some feared nuclear fission would lead to an uncontrolled chain reaction that would pulverize the entire planet.

Those now working on AI “look at his story for some guidance as to what is their responsibility — as to what they should be doing,” Nolan said. “But I don’t think it offers any easy answers. It is a cautionary tale. It shows the dangers.” “The emergence of new technologies is quite often accompanied by a sense of dread about where that might lead,” he argued.

Nolan’s drama turns on the dilemma this posed for the scientists working on the Manhattan Project, the codename of the drive to develop the bombs that were later dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

“They had lived through World

War I and they were trying to end World War II,” he said.

Oppenheimer argued in vain for international control of nuclear weapons, hoping it would lead to peace. The director said many would argue that “actually some stability in the world has been achieved through the existence of these weapons. “Personally, I don’t find that reassuring, but it just goes to show there are absolutely no easy answers to the dilemma.”

The war in Ukraine has reawakened the threat of nuclear Armageddon raising tensions between the superpowers not seen since the end of the Cold War.

Actor Matt Damon, who plays General Leslie Groves, the head of the Manhattan Project, said the last year has been a reality check that the danger of nuclear disaster is still very much there.

“How did I forget about this? It’s like the Cold War ended and my brain played a trick on me and said, ‘OK, let’s put that away, you don’t have to worry about that anymore’ — which is absurd.”

But as soon as Russia invaded Ukraine “suddenly overnight it became the most important thing for us all to think about again,” said the 52-year-old star.

Eli Lilly hopeful of Alzheimer’s drug approval

A second Alzheimer’s drug proven to slow cognitive decline was a step closer to US approval last week after clinical trial results published in a top journal confirmed its efficacy.

Many experts have hailed the developments as major breakthroughs after years of little progress in the field, although others have urged caution, casting the benefits as modest while noting the high costs and risks of life-threatening side effects.

In an analysis of nearly 1,200 people with the early stages of Alzheimer’s disease, the drug called donanemab slowed the progression of symptoms by 35 percent over a period of 18 months compared to placebo, according to a paper in the Journal of the American Medical Association (Jama).

This was measured by the people’s results on cognitive tests and ability to carry out daily tasks.

The drug — taken as an intravenous injection every four weeks — is made by drugmaker Eli Lilly, which said it expects regulatory action in the United States by the end of the year.

The new paper comes days after the US Food and Drug Administration took a step that made Leqembi, produced by Biogen and Eisai, available on the government-run insurance program for the elderly called Medicare. Both work by targeting amyloid beta, a protein that impairs cognition when it accumulates in the brain.

“These first-generation drugs are by no means perfect, but represent an important breakthrough,” Giles Hardingham, interim director of the UK Dementia Research Institute, said in a statement.

At the same time, however, he said it was important to realize that Alzheimer’s is a complex disease, and amyloid beta was just one element in its genesis.

But in an editorial in Jama, Eric Widera of the University of California, said it was too early to declare the new medicines would be beneficial over the long run.

africa lens

■ FIGHTERS ACCUSED OF ENRICHING THEMSELVES WITH ILLICIT GOLD DEALS

WAGNER HERE TO STAY



Wagner soldiers are embedded in countries including Mali and the Central African Republic (CAR) - where rights groups and the UN accuse them of committing war crimes.

Prigozhin, head of the mercenary group, says they will continue to fight in African countries despite the setbacks in Ukraine and Russia

● MOSCOW

The head of the Wagner mercenary group, Yevgeny Prigozhin, says they will continue to fight in African countries where they are already present.

Ever since Prigozhin mounted a failed mutiny in Russia last month and was banished to Belarus, there have been questions over Wagner's future.

"There was no, and there will be no, reduction in our programmes in Africa," Prigozhin told Afrique Média TV.

He did not appear on camera during the interview with Afri-

que Média, which is a pro-Kremlin news channel that targets French-speaking African countries and has been linked to the Wagner group. Prigozhin's soldiers are embedded in countries including Mali and the Central African Republic (CAR) - where rights groups and the UN accuse them of committing war crimes.

The UK announced sanctions against 13 individuals and businesses linked to the Wagner Group, accusing them of executions and torture in Mali and CAR and threats to peace and security in Sudan. They include the heads of Wagner's operations in Mali, Ivan Aleksandrovitch Maslov and

in CAR, Konstantin Aleksandrovitch Pikalov.

Wagner fighters are also accused by the US of enriching themselves with illicit gold deals on the continent. But Prigozhin insists their work is of a different nature.

"We continue to work in all the countries where we started or are now doing this work of co-operation and development," he told Afrique Média TV. "If the assistance of the Wagner Group is needed anywhere to combat gangs and terrorists and to protect the interests of the people of these countries, we are ready to begin immediately to fulfil this

task after agreeing on the conditions."

The Wagner boss' comments echo those of Russia's foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, who has said that despite recent events, Wagner and Russia were in Africa to stay.

Last month, Lavrov vowed that Wagner Group's operations in Mali and the Central African Republic "will continue" despite the failed rebellion led by Prigozhin, leader of the mercenaries, against Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The paramilitary group has ex-

...Continued on Page 26

africa lens

Russian mercenaries to remain on the continent

Continued from Page 25

panded its reach across Latin America, the Middle East and Africa in recent years and is seen by Western governments as Russia's armed foreign policy apparatus. Prigozhin's mutiny raised questions about the future of its overseas operations.

Prigozhin led an uprising against Putin's army, first seizing the major southern city of Rostov-on-Don and sending his mercenary forces on a march to Moscow before abruptly standing down his men Saturday night.

In Africa, where the group exercises influence in the Central African Republic, Mali and Burkina Faso, Wagner offers its services and help to prop up anti-Western governments in exchange for access to natural resources. And Lavrov was bullish on the group's future prospects in the region.

"At their request, several hundred servicemen are working in the CAR as instructors — this work, of course, will continue ... Both the CAR and Mali appealed to the Wagner PMCs (Private Military Contractors) with a request to ensure the safety of their leadership," Lavrov said in an interview with RT. Lavrov said the recent events in Russia would not affect its relations with "partners and friends."

Paris, which has seen Wagner utilise disinformation and cyberwarfare against French interests in the Sahel region, is watching closely. France's Foreign Affairs Minister Catherine Colonna said that while it was "too early" to draw conclusions about the impact in Russia of Wagner's revolt, else-



The UK announced sanctions against 13 individuals and businesses linked to the Wagner Group, accusing them of executions and torture in Mali and CAR and threats to peace and security in Sudan.

where in Africa the situation required "all our attention" and "vigilance."

Fidèle Gouandjika, a minister and special adviser to CAR President Faustin-Archange

Touadéra, told AFP his country had signed "a defense deal with Russia and not Wagner ... Moscow has subcontracted to Wagner, and if Russia doesn't agree, it will send us a new contingent," he added. Wagner appears to have made few changes on the ground for now, according to the open-source network All Eyes on Wagner, but analysts say it's unlikely the status quo will prevail.

Russian presence in Africa has so far involved both state and non-state actors, said Maxime Audinet, a research fellow at France's IRSEM and a Russian politics specialist. While it's too early to foresee the exact consequences, what happened over the weekend is bound to lead to a "fracture," he added.

Russia and Wagner are interdependent, he added: The mercenary group relies on the Russian state for military supplies and Russia depend on Wagner to operate in areas where Moscow doesn't want to have an official footprint.

In a deal reportedly brokered by Belarus to end the mutiny, some of

Prigozhin's mercenaries will be absorbed into the regular Russian army, raising questions as to whether Wagner mercenaries in Africa will remain a separate entity or not. Replacing Wagner mercenaries overnight would be very difficult, Audinet added.

There are also financial disputes that need to be resolved. Prigozhin reportedly complained on Telegram about missing Russian money in Africa. "Prigozhin complained that Russia didn't support him enough in Africa ... In Mali, the authorities are late on payments [for Wagner] because they don't receive any European aid from Europe. And Wagner is expensive, it's several million euros," said Nicolas Normand, a former French ambassador who was posted in Senegal and Mali.

For Benjamin Haddad, a French MP from Macron's Renaissance party, the events in Russia were "a warning" for leaders in Africa who use the services of such mercenaries. "The lesson learned here is that the instability that Wagner is seeking to export, backfires on its own regime," said Haddad.

"Nations who call on their services, lose a part of their sovereignty, [and] we may be entering a period of volatility," said Haddad.



global lens

■ BAR BRAWLS, FAMILY GRIEF TRAIL ARMY MAN HELD IN NORTH KOREA

THE ROGUE US SOLDIER

Travis King was being escorted to Seoul's airport due to fly to Texas, after a drunken bar fight, an altercation with police, and a stint in South Korean jail



● WASHINGTON

US soldier Travis King certainly made an impression during his time in South Korea.

Private Second Class King was being escorted to Seoul's airport last week, due to fly to Texas, after a drunken bar brawl, an altercation with police, and a stint in South Korean jail. But instead of getting on the plane to face disciplinary hearings at Fort Bliss, King slipped away, joined a tourist tour of the Demilitarised Zone, and fled across the border. He is now believed to be in North Korean custody.

His family say they are “shocked” by his actions, which they have described in media interviews as out of character. They said King, 23, had struggled with being far from home and was grief-stricken after the death of a young cousin earlier this year.

But Seoul police said King had a history of run-ins with the law — punching a Korean national when drunk in a nightclub district in September last year, then attacking a police car in October when officers sought to detain him over a separate incident.

The young soldier “aggressively kicked the door (of the police car)” while shouting obscenities, the police officer said, causing 584,000 won (\$461) of damage to the vehicle.

The incident resulted in a five million-won (\$3,955) fine, the Yonhap News Agency reported, which King did not pay, leading to a two-month stint in jail. Released from prison on July 10, King was taken to Seoul's Incheon Airport on

Tuesday but his escorts couldn't accompany him beyond the security checkpoint, creating an opening for escape. “At the gate, he approached an American Airlines official and reported that his passport was missing, and was able to return out of the departure gate,” an airport official told The Korea Times.

Experts told AFP that King's sprint across the border appeared to have been done “impulsively” but some level of planning was required for him to book a tour of the Joint Security Area (JSA).

The area, also known as Panmunjom, is administered by the United Nations Command and all visitors must provide passport details for background checks. Tourist trips typically sell out weeks in advance.

In May, King booked two different DMZ tour dates, according to US site The Messenger, including the July 18 one he eventually attended, using a private company called Hana Tours ITC.

The company, which according to their website organises DMZ trips for both tourists and US military based in South Korea, told AFP they had “nothing to say” and referred questions to the United States Army in Korea and the UN Command.

Some 27,000 US soldiers are based in South Korea, a key US regional security ally, which relies on Washington for a security guarantee to protect it from the nuclear-armed North. The two Koreas remain technically at war and most of the shared border is heavily fortified, including with minefields. Inside the JSA, however, the border is marked only by a low concrete divider.

When King crossed it,

global lens

American soldier held in North Korea

he initially tried to enter Panmungak Hall, a North Korean building, but, finding the door locked, he ran to the back of the facility and was hurried into a van and driven away by North Korean guards, a US official told CNN.

Army spokesperson Bryce Dubee told US media King was a cavalry scout who enlisted in January 2021 and had no record of combat deployment.

His rank of private second class after more than two years of service suggested King may have been held back for disciplinary issues, Military.com said, because promotion to private first class is automatic after 12 months.

King's family said he had been struggling with being far from home. His uncle Carl Gates told *The Daily Beast* the illness and eventual death of his son, King's cousin, had "affected Travis a lot".

"Because he couldn't be here. He was in the Army, overseas," he said. King had "loved and cherished" his cousin, Gates said, and "started being reckless and crazy" when he died earlier this year. Former high-ranking North Korean official Thae Yong Ho, who is now a lawmaker in the South, said King will "soon find out that he made the wrong choice" in going to the North.

It will be particularly difficult for Washington to seek consular access to King, he said, because nearly all foreign embassies in Pyongyang withdrew foreign staff after North Korea closed its borders in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. That includes Sweden, which handles US consular affairs in the North Korean capital. About a half-dozen American service members have crossed the border since the Korean War ended in 1953.

That number doesn't include the several American civilians who have been detained in North Korea over the years — such as college student Otto Warmbier, whose death in 2017 (after he was released in a coma) prompted the U.S. to ban American citizens from traveling to the country, with which it has no diplomatic relations.

While many may think of defection as a political choice



US soldier Travis King (fourth left, black shirt) attends a border tour to the truce village of Panmunjom in the Demilitarised Zone dividing the two Koreas.

between ideologies, peoples' motivations are often very mixed. Some face problems at home, some — like King, evidently — face disciplinary issues and others act on a whim.

Pvt. Larry Allen Abshier

Abshier was the first US soldier to defect to North Korea after the Korean War, crossing the border at the age of 19 in May 1962. He had been deployed to South Korea the previous year and was caught smoking marijuana on duty several times, according to *NK News*, an American news site headquartered in South Korea. "They were going to court-martial him or kick him out of the Army," said Pfc. James Joseph Dresnok, who defected several months after him. "Instead of going back to his old life, he just came over to the DPRK."

Pfc. James Joseph Dresnok

Dresnok dashed across the border in broad daylight in 1962 out of frustration. He was divorced, serving on DMZ stakeout posts and about to be court-martialed for forging his sergeant's signature to visit a woman, he told the 2006 documentary *Crossing the Line*. "I was fed up with my childhood, my marriage, my military life, everything," he

said. "There's only one place to go."

Cpl. Jerry Wayne Parrish

Parrish, 19, was patrolling the demilitarised zone in 1963 when he dropped his supplies and crossed the border, according to the Kentucky newspaper *The Gleaner*. He left a note on top of his rifle: "Tell mother I love her. I'll be back home someday. Tell my friends goodbye." It's not clear why Parrish, who reportedly had an unblemished service record, defected. His mother was convinced at the time that he had been captured.

Sgt. Charles Robert Jenkins

Jenkins was stationed in the Demilitarised Zone in South Korea in 1965 when, drunk on 10 beers, he walked across the border to avoid facing combat duty in Vietnam. The US Army sergeant, who was 24 at the time, later called that "the biggest mistake I ever made". He said he thought he would be handed over to the Soviet Union and eventually returned to the US in one of their semi-regular Cold War-era prisoner exchanges, as NPR reported.

Pfc. Roy Chung

There were two more notable defections in the decades that

followed. In 1979, Chung (born Chung Ryeu Sup) reportedly surfaced in North Korea two months after disappearing from his unit in West Germany. The 22-year-old South Korean immigrant was not a US citizen, but had joined the US Army the previous year reportedly for education benefits.

The Washington Post reported at the time that Chung had originally been classified as a deserter, but that officials had little reason to doubt Pyongyang Radio's announcement that he had defected to North Korea because he "could no longer endure the disgraceful life of national insult and maltreatment he had to lead in the US imperialist aggressor Army."

Pvt. Joseph T. White

White defected in August 1982 by shooting the lock off a border gate in the early morning hours and walking through. *The Korea Times* reports that he carefully made his way around minefields, yelling "I am coming" and calling for help in Korean. Eyewitness reports and the United Nations Command later confirmed that nearly a dozen North Korean soldiers apprehended him and led him into a bunker.

global lens

■ JAY Z'S DELIGHT AS NEW YORK CELEBRATES 50 YEARS OF HIP-HOP

HIP-HOP'S GOLDEN JUBILEE

The movement was born as a way for African Americans and Hispanics to escape poverty and discrimination

● NEW YORK

From a display of Jay-Z lyrics on the facade of the Brooklyn Library to a concert of rap pioneers at Yankee Stadium, New York is celebrating 50 years of hip-hop, a genre born in its ghettos and now dominant around the world.

Inside the library, a vast exhibition retraces the career of one of Brooklyn's most famous sons, charting his rise from "a street-smart hustler to a global revered music mogul."

The artist born Shawn Carter has written about dealing drugs in the Marcy Houses housing project where he grew up, before becoming a billionaire rapper whose marriage to Beyoncé created one of the most glamorous couples in pop culture.

"I've never really been to a lot of exhibitions," said 31-year-old warehouse worker Jamarly Thomas, joking that he goes by "Jay-T".

"So to witness something like this from my favorite rapper is pretty mind-blowing. For a lot of African American kids coming up here, he can set an example for them that they can be bigger," Thomas added.

The free exhibition, which opened Friday and was conceived by Jay-Z's entertainment empire Roc Nation, is entitled "The Book of HOV," a reference to one of the 53-year-old's nicknames.

Jay-Z's string of hits include 1998's "Hard Knock Life (Ghetto Anthem)" and "Izzo (H.O.V.A.)" from 2001. He also crossed rap's boundaries, including with his megahit "Empire State of Mind," and holds the record for the most number-one albums of any solo artist on the Billboard 200 with 14. Only the Beatles have more, with 19.

Long queues formed over the weekend as fans rushed to visit the exhibition or register for one of 13 Brooklyn Library

cards stamped with the artist's album covers. The tribute precedes the opening of another immersive retrospective about the history of hip-hop at the Hall des Lumieres on August 2 as the Big Apple marks half a century of the genre with a slew of events.

Although early forms of hip-hop expression were bubbling years earlier, musicologists cite August 11, 1973 as the date of its birth.

On that day, on the ground floor of a low-income building at 1520 Sedgwick Avenue in the Bronx, Jamaican-born DJ Clive Campbell, aka DJ Kool Herc, broke new ground. He spun the same record on two turntables, isolating the sequences of rhythms and percussion to extend the beat, an essential component of

hip-hop music.

Fifty years later, on August 11, 2023, DJ Kool Herc will perform at Yankee Stadium in the Bronx alongside other hip-hop veterans, including Grandmaster Caz, Kurtis Blow and Roxanne Shante.

Lil Kim, Ice Cube, Snoop Dogg, Run DMC and The Sugarhill Gang, whose song "Rapper's Delight" is known as the first commercially successful hip-hop single, are also due to take the stage.

"When we first started, nobody was interested in hiring a hip-hop DJ, or getting an emcee or getting some breakdancers," said Ralph McDaniels, hip-hop coordinator for the Queens Public Library.

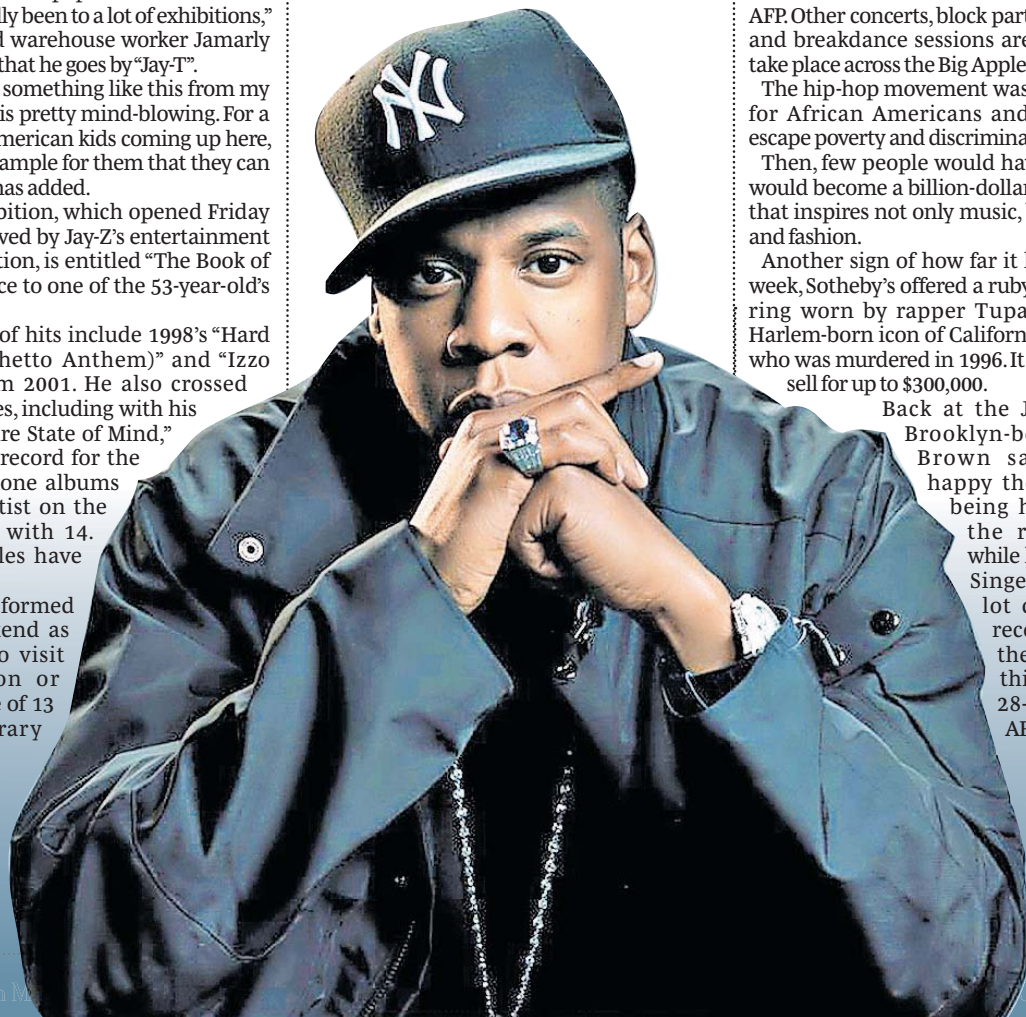
"To be celebrating 50 years is amazing because there was no value on this," he told AFP. Other concerts, block parties and graffiti and breakdance sessions are scheduled to take place across the Big Apple.

The hip-hop movement was born as a way for African Americans and Hispanics to escape poverty and discrimination.

Then, few people would have predicted it would become a billion-dollar phenomenon that inspires not only music, but also sports and fashion.

Another sign of how far it has come: this week, Sotheby's offered a ruby and diamond ring worn by rapper Tupac Shakur, the Harlem-born icon of California's West Coast who was murdered in 1996. It is estimated to sell for up to \$300,000.

Back at the Jay-Z exhibit, Brooklyn-born Amanda Brown said she was happy the rapper was being honored with the retrospective while he is still alive. "Singers that did a lot don't get the recognition until they are gone so this is nice," the 28-year-old told AFP.



O B I T

■ OSCAR WINNER FOR 'LITTLE MISS SUNSHINE'

'SOBIBOR' STAR BOWS OUT**Alan Arkin, with a body of work that spans seven decades of stage and screen acting, dies at 89 in California**

● LOS ANGELES

Alan Arkin, an Oscar-winning actor for "Little Miss Sunshine" with a body of work that spans seven decades of stage and screen acting, died June 29 at his home in Carlsbad, California. He was 89.

Arkin's sons Adam, Matthew and Anthony, said in a joint statement, "Our father was a uniquely talented force of nature, both as an artist and a man. A loving husband, father, grand and great grandfather, he was adored and will be deeply missed."

Arkin, who was known for projecting a characteristically dry wit but could play tragedy with equal efficacy, won his Oscar for his supporting performance in the indie comedy "Little Miss Sunshine" in 2007; he scored an encore nomination for his punchy and profane turn in Ben Affleck's best picture winner "Argo". Arkin picked up two earlier nominations in his film career, for "The Russians Are Coming, the Russians Are Coming" in 1967 and for "The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter" in 1969.

More recently, Arkin received back-to-back Primetime Emmy Award nominations in outstanding supporting actor in a comedy series for his performance in the Netflix series "The Kominsky Method", in which he starred alongside Michael Douglas. Arkin received four additional Emmy nominations (across other categories) earlier in his career.

Beyond his screen career, Arkin began in entertainment as a stage performer, serving as an early member of the Second City comedy troupe in Chicago before making his Broadway debut in "From the Second City" in 1961. Two years later, he scored a Tony Award for starring in Joseph Stein's comedy "Enter Laughing".

In "Argo", he played Lester Siegel, the Hollywood veteran who was



In 1987, Alan Arkin starred as Leon Feldhendler in the Holocaust-themed CBS telepic 'Escape From Sobibor'.

recruited to produce a fictional sci-fi film whose production would provide cover for the rescue of American hostages in Iran. Siegel, wrote Pete Hammond in his review, even "goes to the extreme of announcing the project in a Variety ad and article. 'If I am going to be making a fake movie, I want to have a fake hit,' says Lester, played to amusing perfection by Arkin."

In "Little Miss Sunshine", Arkin played the foul-mouthed, heroin-snorting grandfather Edwin. The San Francisco Chronicle said: "The cast is so perfect that it's impossible to imagine anyone else in the roles. Arkin's spontaneity gives the impression that he's improvising."

Abigail Breslin played Arkin's granddaughter, whose desire to compete in a talent contest take the whole family on a road trip in

"The Pentagon Papers".

Remarkably, Arkin earned his first Oscar nomination for his first credited feature performance. Norman Jewison's "The Russians Are Coming, the Russians Are Coming" was a Cold War comedy in which a Soviet sub runs aground on a New England island; Arkin played the leader of the Russian party set to scout out the area. Hilarity ensues as Russians and Americans make wild encounters. The New York Times noted that it was Arkin's debut film and said he gave "a particularly wonderful performance."

Not all the critics were impressed with his performance in the thriller "Wait Until Dark," in which he played a psycho terrorizing a blind Audrey Hepburn, but the role increased his profile in Hollywood and has maintained a strong reputation to this day; next he played Inspector Clouseau in a movie of that name, with Peter Sellers nowhere in sight.

Then in 1969 he earned his second Oscar nomination with Carson McCullers adaptation "The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter." In a review that was otherwise critical of the film, the New York Times said Arkin's performance as the deaf-mute Singer is "extraordinary, deep and sound. Walking, with his hat jammed flat on his head, among the obese, the mad, the infirm, characters with one leg, broken hip, scarred mouth, failing life, he somehow manages to convey every dimension of his character, especially intelligence."

He played a Puerto-Rican father in the comedy "Popi," Yossarian in Mike Nichols' adaptation of "Catch-22" and the title character in Neil Simon's adaptation of his own play "Last of the Red Hot Lovers." Seeking a different kind of experience, he appeared as a Puerto-Rican police detective alongside James Caan in Richard Rush's crime drama "Freebie and the Bean."

"Little Miss Sunshine"

"Alan Arkin was one of the kindest gentlest and hilarious actors I ever worked with," Breslin said. "We may not have been related in real life but he will always be Grandpa in my heart. I send my deepest sympathies this his wife Suzanne and his family."

Arkin was an actor whose gifts were recognized early. After his Tony in 1963, he earned his first Emmy nomination, for the "ABC Stage 67" episode "The Love Song of Barney Kempinski", in 1967, the same year he earned his first Oscar nomination. Arkin never really left television despite the success of his film career. His next Emmy nomination came in 1987 for the Holocaust-themed CBS telepic "Escape From Sobibor"; the third was in 1997 for a guest appearance on "Chicago Hope" and another in 2003 for telepic



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