

THE Weekly Review

For the Thinking Person

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THE SH31BN MYSTERY TRACTOR IMPORTS DEAL

Kenya plans to purchase agricultural implements from Belarus – a Russian ally reeling under economic sanctions from the US, the UK and the European Union over the war in Ukraine. Controversy swirls around the multibillion-shilling deal, which is to be executed by the hitherto moribund and financially troubled Agricultural Finance Corporation in just 18 months

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letter from the editor

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Shadowy tractor deal could dig us into a deeper, darker hole

It hurts us that we may be deemed naysayers; that we may look unpatriotic just by questioning the government. Listen to us, even if not as an alternative voice, but as a voice of conscience; a voice that tickles the current partisanism emanating from the past elections; the only voice remaining that may be deemed neutral by all the discerning public.

We are concerned, and rightfully so, about the novelty in government tendering and procedures laced with horrible legal loopholes much beloved by this administration. And now, a new multibillion-shilling scheme that seeks to purchase agricultural equipment from Belarus is raising eyebrows across the nation, given the suspicious nature of the deal and the key players involved.

The Ruto administration will roll out a Sh31 billion deal with the Belarussian government to supply Kenya with tractors, high-speed propelled forage harvesters, centre pivots and lorries, and assorted equipment. It's a salutary step, but it's a scary move in the times we are living.

There is a raging war in Ukraine, and even though many may view it casually, it's an explosive factor among nations of the world. It may soon affect our present fragility in a big way.

Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko supports the Russian offensive in Kyiv. Belarus is currently under economic sanctions from Washington, London and Brussels for the same support they render to Moscow. This is not a new issue and we suppose the government is in the depth of the matter more than we comprehend.

The US Secretary of State



Allan Buluku

There is a war out there, and we may have no direct interest except humanitarian, or just collective personal feelings over the issue. The consequences of this move may get us sucked into a quagmire we are not prepared for and sink Kenya into an even deeper economic dungeon, one that we may not be able to slither out of soon.

Antony Blinken recently warned – it must have meant Kenya too – that Russia and Lukashenko's regime will pay a severe economic price for the aggression against Ukraine.

He also warned of sweeping sanctions to target export controls, visa restrictions to cut off the two countries' access to vital technological inputs, and measures to atrophy industrial bases of both states.

There is a war out there, and we may have no direct interest except humanitarian, or just collective personal feelings over the issue.

The consequences of this project may get us sucked into a quagmire we are not prepared for and sink our country into an even deeper economic dungeon, one we may not be able to slither out of soon.

If the Belarus deal goes through, it will be the single largest import of tractors and agricultural implements in Kenya in recent years. The biggest question is whether the hitherto moribund and financially troubled Agricultural Finance Corporation has the capacity to handle such a project.

The company to execute the multibillion-shilling project from the Belarussian side is a Dubai-based SPV-type entity established in 2017 by Belarussians, by the name Afrtrade DMCC. Curiously, the firm disclosed that its assessment is that the scheme will cost \$5 million, compared to the \$320 million-budget projected by AFC as scope of the project.

The Cabinet has approved AFC as the implementing agent for the government and has authorised both the National Treasury and AFC to commence negotiations with Afrtrade DMCC, the official agents of the government of Belarus, and procure the equipment.

We need the agricultural equipment to make our farming viable enough to feed ourselves. But if the move drags us into sanctions, we are the fools. If it is designed not to function, then there are really smart non-patriots amidst our leadership ranks who are set to profit from our sad demise as a nation.

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the telescope

■ Opposition members to disrupt business

Senate changes: Azimio up in arms

Azimio La Umoja-One Kenya Coalition senators have threatened to disrupt House sessions should Speaker Amason Kingi fail to communicate leadership changes in the Minority side.

The lawmakers from the two political divides, Azimio and Kenya Kwanza, recently struck a truce after close to a month of back-and-forth over the changes, but the deadline lapsed last week. Azimio senators have vowed to paralyse normal business starting Tuesday should the changes not be confirmed.

After the Political Parties Disputes Tribunal dispensed with a case barring the communication of the changes last month, the House has since degenerated into chaos.

A fortnight ago, there was interruption of the reading of the 2023 Budget Policy Paper as well as the Medium-term Debt Management Strategy Paper. In Azimio, Isiolo Senator Fatuma Dullo lost the Minority Whip position to Narok's Ledama ole Kina, with Nairobi's Edwin Sifuna picked as his deputy.



Isiolo Senator Fatuma Dullo lost the Minority Whip position to Narok's Ledama ole Kina, with Nairobi's Edwin Sifuna picked as the deputy.

■ Operations in hospitals could be paralysed

Doctors threaten to go on strike



Operations in public hospitals across the country could be paralysed this week, with doctors set to go on strike over failure by the national government to honour its end of a deal agreed in January.

Last week, the Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists Union threatened to reinstitute a countrywide strike it suspended on January 6 should the government fail to put in place measures to recruit additional medical practitioners annually.

The union initially suspended the strike after holding talks with the government, with the State then pledging to address some of their concerns.

■ Lawyers say NDA is 'invalid and unenforceable'



Tiger Woods practices on the range prior to The Genesis Invitational at Riviera Country Club in Pacific Palisades, California, on February 14.

Tiger's ex seeks release from NDA

Tiger Woods's ex-girlfriend has filed a lawsuit seeking to be released from a non-disclosure agreement she says the golf superstar made her sign at the start of their relationship in 2017. Erica Herman, who lived with the 15-time major winner at his Florida mansion until late 2022, filed the request in the Circuit Court of the 19th Judicial Circuit in Martin County, Florida.

According to court records seen by AFP, Herman's attorneys are arguing that the NDA she was required to sign is "invalid and unenforceable" under US federal legislation known as the Speak Out Act. The law, which became effective

last year in the wake of the MeToo movement, makes non-disclosure agreements unenforceable in cases involving sexual assault and harassment.

Herman's case filings do not go into further details and there are no specific allegations against Woods. But in response to a question on the court filing which reads "Does this case involve allegations of sexual abuse?" Herman's attorneys have checked the box marked "Yes".

Herman's bid to waive her NDA agreement marks an escalation of a legal dispute with Woods which began last October, but which has gone largely unreported in the US media.

■ The group booked a net profit of \$19.6 billion

BMW profits soar in 2022 despite woes



German automaker BMW reported a sharp increase in annual profits for 2022, as higher prices for luxury models helped make up for a drop in deliveries due to lingering supply chain disruptions.

The Munich-based group said it

booked a net profit of \$19.6 billion last year, a 49-per cent jump on 2021.

Group revenues rose by 28 per cent to 142.6 billion euros, beating analyst expectations.

BMW said the "solid" figures were thanks to "improved pricing" on higher-end vehicles as well as the full consolidation of the Chinese joint venture BBA, which made "a significant contribution".

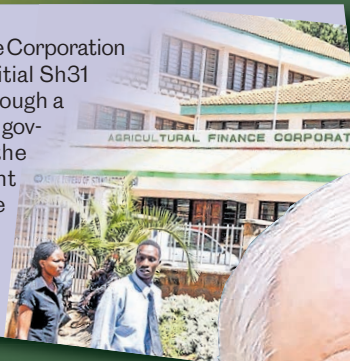
The group delivered just under 2.4 million vehicles in 2022, a 4.8-per cent fall on the year before.

kenya lens

■ THE EASTERN EUROPEAN NATION, AN ALLY OF RUSSIA, IS UNDER US AND EU SANCTIONS

THE SH31BN TRACTOR-GATE SCAM

The Agricultural Finance Corporation proposes to raise the initial Sh31 billion for machinery through a loan to be arranged by the government of Kenya via the Trade and Development Bank of Comesa, where the government of Belarus is a shareholder.



Since the war in Ukraine started, Belarus has been struggling to circumvent Western sanctions against exports of its agricultural equipment industry, and has been constantly fighting to limit exposure of its companies and subsidiaries to the penalties.



Billions worth of imported machines will be dumped on four government entities – Kenya Prison Service, National Youth Service, Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organisation, and the Agricultural Development Corporation.



President William Ruto's administration is taking a risky diplomatic gamble in seeking to transact with a country under trade sanctions from powerful Western countries.



The company to execute the multibillion-shilling deal from the Belarus side is a Dubai-based SPV-type entity established in 2017 by Belarussians, by the name Afri-trade DMCC. It features in nearly all correspondences, including a Cabinet memo.



On the first anniversary of the Russian attack on Ukraine, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said President Aleksandr Lukashenko's regime will pay a severe economic price for the aggression against Kyiv and warned of sweeping sanctions to target export controls to cut off Belarus's access to vital technological inputs.



Belarus has only recently been rated as a sovereign in 'selective default' and 'default' by the global rating agency, S&P. It means that no country's commercial bank or listed entity answerable to shareholders can have any financial dealings with any entity from the country.

The government plans to import tractors, high-speed propelled forage harvesters and tipping lorries from Belarus in a transaction that's envisaged to be implemented in a record 18 months by the hitherto moribund and financially-troubled state-owned Agricultural Finance Corporation

● BY JAINDI KISERO

The government has started rolling out a plan to purchase tractors, high-speed propelled forage harvesters, centre pivots and tipping lorries and assorted equipment in a project estimated at a whopping Sh31 billion, according to documents and correspondence seen by *The Weekly Review*.

If the deal goes through, it will be the single largest import of tractors and agricultural im-

plements in Kenya in recent years. The transaction – which is envisaged to be implemented in a record 18 months by the hitherto moribund and financially-troubled state-owned credit body Agricultural Finance Corporation (AFC) – is shrouded in mystery in several respects.

First, the tractor imports are to come from the Eastern European country and ally of Russia in the Ukrainian war, Belarus, which is currently under sanctions imposed by the Unit-

ed States, the United Kingdom and the European Union.

Since the war in Ukraine started, Belarus has been struggling to circumvent Western sanctions against exports of its agricultural equipment industry and has been constantly fighting to limit exposure of its companies and subsidiaries to the penalties.

Just how high the diplomatic stakes are was aptly demonstrated recently by a strong state-

Continued on Page 6

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Queries over Sh31bn equipment deal with Belarus

Continued from Page 5

ment by the US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, on the first anniversary of the Russian attack on Ukraine.

He said that Russia and President Aleksandr Lukashenko's regime in Belarus will pay a severe economic price for the aggression against Ukraine and warned of sweeping sanctions to target export controls, visa restrictions to cut off Russia's and Belarus's access to vital technological inputs, and measures to atrophy industrial bases of both countries.

Clearly, President William Ruto's administration is taking a risky diplomatic gamble in seeking to transact with a country under trade sanctions from powerful Western countries.

As you follow the key documents in the transaction, including a Cabinet memo, a memorandum of understanding between AFC and a Dubai-based entity known as Afrtrade DMCC, you end up with a narrative that sheds more mystery than light. Where is the money to buy billions-worth of machinery and equipment from Belarus to come from?

In a letter dated February 27 to the Office of the Attorney-General, the chief executive of AFC, George Kubai, requested the AG to help in drafting a government-to-government agreement between Kenya and Belarus, implying that the multibillion-shilling project will be funded by a concessional facility by the state of Belarus.

The second mention of source of funding is to be found in a Cabinet paper headlined 'The National Agricultural Mechanisation Program to be implemented by the Agricultural Finance Corporation'. It says: "The programme will be funded through a line of credit from Trade Development Bank (TDB) for a seven-year period with interest anticipated at a maximum of two and three per cent." It is important to note that TDB is specifically mentioned as the source of funding for the project.

According to a briefing document prepared by AFC, the "National Treasury will negotiate for programme

In a letter to the Office of the Attorney-General, the chief executive of AFC, George Kubai, requested the AG to help in drafting a government-to-government agreement between Kenya and Belarus, implying that the multibillion-shilling project will be funded by a concessional facility by the state of Belarus. The second mention of source of funding is to be found in a Cabinet paper headlined 'The National Agricultural Mechanisation Program to be implemented by the Agricultural Finance Corporation'.

funding on the back of AFC's balance sheet, and augment the funding by budgetary allocations to AFC to at least Sh1 billion".

Once again, TDB is specifically mentioned in the document that adds: "All the government will provide is a letter of comfort to TDB to compliment the programme". Another section of a report prepared by AFC headlined 'An executive report on the mechanisation of select government agencies in the agricultural sector' says the project is to be funded from a line of credit to be arranged between the government of Kenya and Belarus on a 'G-to-G' basis.

TDB's name comes up again in yet another section of the briefing document: "The financing to be arranged will be from the Trade and Development Bank of Comesa, where the government of Belarus is a shareholder." It continues: "The corporation proposes to raise the initial approximately Sh31 billion for machinery through a loan to be arranged by the government of Kenya through the TDB".

It adds: "This will be secured on the back of the programme cash flows and the corporation's balance sheet. The corporation proposes to raise the balance of Sh4.1 billion through equity contributions and government injections."

In yet another section of the briefing document, the AFC says: "The corporation proposes to secure the funding of this project on its balance sheet and annual allocations from the government of Kenya (Sh1 billion). The programme will be secured on the back of AFC's assets. The government will additionally be requested to enhance its annual budgetary allocations to AFC to at least Sh1 billion to enable roll-out of this programme and to provide comfort to the lenders."

Finally, 'a letter of comfort' from the National Treasury to the Trade Development Bank will further compliment the programme? The biggest riddle over the sources of funding of this massive agricultural implements import project deepened when *The Weekly Review* reached TDB itself and asked the regional lender to shed light on its involvement in financing the project.

Here is how the TDB's Chief Operating Of-

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken recently said that Russia and Belarus will pay a severe economic price for the aggression against Ukraine and warned of sweeping sanctions to target export controls to cut off Belarus's access to vital technological inputs.

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ficer, Mr Michael Awori, responded to our questions: “I am not sure of your sources, but wish to confirm that we are not in receipt of any application or engaged in any discussions of import financing of agricultural equipment from Belarus. There is nothing under discussion at the moment,” pointing out that Belarus was a very small member of the bank, “with a stake of under one per cent in shareholding”.

The big question that arises is the following: If it is, indeed, the case that even a stage as rudimentary as identifying source of funds has not been determined, what are all these documents – concept notes and Cabinet papers – about? Who is this mysterious source of the billions who is so influential as to set up key government departments to draft Cabinet, memoranda of understanding and brief documents to justify such a massive project? What are the credentials, history, capacity, client list of the Dubai-based counterparty to act on behalf of Belarus?

According to the documents and correspondence seen by *The Weekly Review*, the company to execute the multibillion-shilling deal from the Belarus side is a Dubai-based SPV-type entity established in 2017 by Belarus nationals, by the name Afrtrade DMCC.

As a matter of fact, the name of this company features in nearly all correspondence in this saga, including the Cabinet memo and letters by the CEO of AFC, Kubai.

This is how Kubai’s letter to the Attorney-General puts it: “The government of Belarus has identified Afrtrade DMCC as the company that will organise the whole process of identification of manufacturers, identification of equipment and the party that will lead

negotiations with TDB”.

In an introduction letter sent to AFC dated February 2 and signed by a director of the company, Volha Sheuko, the Dubai-based company listed Zimbabwe, Togo, Burkina Faso, South Africa and Tanzania on its list of clients and the Belarus export credit agency, the Development Bank of Belarus, Trade Development Bank, Afro Exim Bank and the Western Africa Development Bank as its financial partners.

Curiously, the Dubai-based company has also disclosed that its assessment is that the task at hand will cost a mere \$5 million – a paltry amount when compared to the \$320 million-budget projected by AFC as scope of the project.

“We will look for machinery and equipment that meets the needs and then take it a step further by setting up off-shore concessionary Exim-like loan arrangements to make it possible to purchase these technologies,” said the Dubai-based entity in a letter of introduction to Sheuko. Under the plan, billions worth of machines and tractors imported under the programme will be dumped on four government entities – Kenya Prison Service, National Youth Service, Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organisation, and the Agricultural Development Corporation.

The Cabinet memo asked the executive to direct both the National Treasury and the AFC to commence negotiations with the Dubai-based entity and procure the equipment. The memo also sought Cabinet approval for the appointment of AFC as the implementing agent for the Government of Kenya on the project, to mandate the agency to commence negotiations with Afrtrade DMCC and to treat the Dubai-based company as official agents of the government of Belarus.

Belarus has only recently been rated as a sovereign in ‘selective default’ and ‘default’ by the global rating agency, S&P. This means that no advanced country commercial bank or listed entity answerable to shareholders can have any financial dealings with any counterparty or entity from the country.



President William Ruto’s administration is taking a risky diplomatic gamble in seeking to transact with a country under trade sanctions from powerful Western countries.

The programme will be secured on the back of AFC’s assets. The government will additionally be requested to enhance its annual budgetary allocations to AFC to at least Sh1 billion to enable roll-out of this programme and to provide comfort to the lenders.

Transaction brief



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■ ENERGY SECTOR

● BY MACHARIA GAIHO

One of Kenya's most important power producers grinding to a near halt stands as a stark reminder of the rate at which the government and various State agencies are losing court cases, and with that billions in public funds.

Last week, the Kenya Electric and Allied Workers' Union appealed to the government to rescue the Geothermal Development Company, one of the most important producers of geothermal energy in the world, after its bank accounts were frozen on losing a court case filed by a contractor, Lantech Africa Limited. The company accounts were frozen after it failed to pay some Sh2 billion claimed by Lantech and also failed to convince the High Court to suspend the award granted by arbitrator Kyalo Mbovu. "The banks are punishing employees

GEO THERMAL WOES RAISING RED FLAGS

Unless bailed out by the government, Geothermal will be in dire straits as it hardly has the resources to pay a claim of Sh3.6 billion as ordered by the courts

who had loans with them and Stima Sacco is deducting their loans from savings because there are no salaries to deduct from," Union Secretary-General Ernest Nadome complained, as reported by *The Standard*.

However, GDC communications manager Wanjiru Kangara denied that there were any pay arrears, insisting that salaries up to last month had been paid, and that the company would continue meeting staff obligations, including wages and statutory deductions. She also denied that Geothermal operations had halted, though conceding that drilling and other activities were only proceeding on a reduced scale.

Speaking to *The Weekly Review* on March 9, Geothermal CEO Jared Othieno conceded that daily operations had been badly affected as they could not transact on the frozen bank accounts. There had been a mention in the High Court on that day and the substantive challenge is listed for the Court of Appeal on March 22. In the meantime, the freeze remains in place, but he insisted that the company will not completely grind to a halt as it had some reserves to sustain limited operations.

Having already lost a succession

of challenges in the High Court, Geothermal will be arguing at the Court of Appeal that it did not get a fair hearing after being denied a chance to argue its case on the basis that it was time-barred.

It will be seeking urgent access to its bank accounts pending determination of the main appeal against the arbitrator's order.

There is no doubt that frozen bank accounts mean basics such as paying salaries and suppliers will be severely hit. Operations such as drilling, exploration and power generation could be severely affected at a time when Kenya is becoming more and more reliant on geothermal power, where it is a world leader, while prolonged drought has adversely affected hydro-electric power generation.

The power deficit has provided the perfect opportunity for power sector players with close links to the Ministry of Energy and Petroleum to push for come-back of the controversial Independent Power Producer deals that gained notoriety during the regime of President Daniel arap Moi. Many private companies contracted to build thermal power stations and supply the national grid happened to be closely linked to key officials in the Ministry of Energy and the state-owned distribution monopoly, the Kenya Power & Lighting Company. That was during the regimes of powerful personalities like Cabinet Minister Nicholas Biwott and Kenya Power Managing Director Samuel Gichuru.

Kenya has a long history of government or various State corporations and other public entities being sued by aggrieved contractors

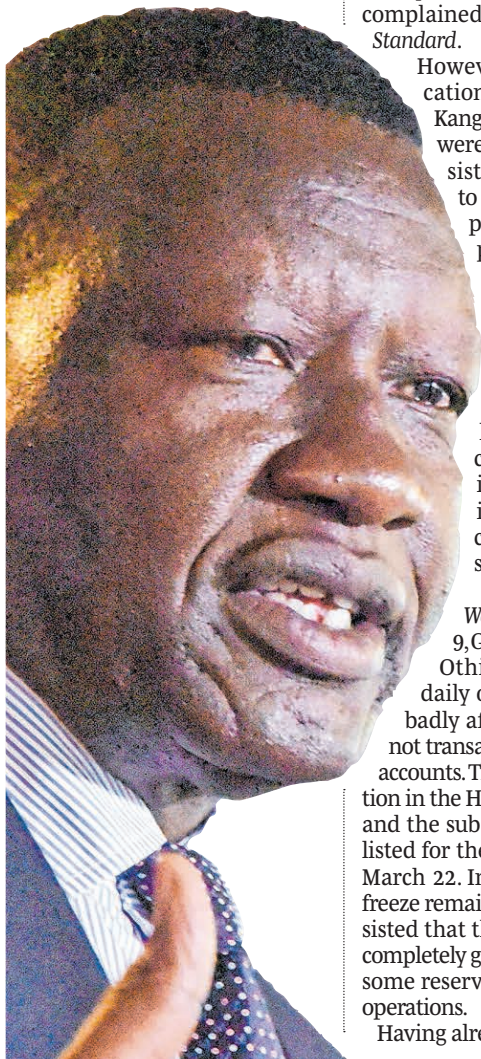
or suppliers for non-payment or breach of contract, and being almost guaranteed to lose in suspicious circumstances that often involve incompetent legal representation or collusion between government lawyers, plaintiffs and the judges or arbitrators.

That is why what often seem like open-and-shut litigation around well-publicised corruption cases, such as the Kamlesh Pattni Goldenberg and related scandals under the Daniel arap Moi regime or the Anglo-Leasing scandal inherited by the Mwai Kibaki regime, often take strange turns in court.

In the Geothermal case, for instance, appeals against the award in favour of Lantech were thrown out largely for being filed out of time. The upshot is that substantive issues challenging the ruling by arbitrator Mbovu, including what the Geothermal lawyers said were awards never canvassed in the plaint, were never heard on their own merit.

On March 8, High Court Judge Dorah Chepkwony granted Geothermal something of a reprieve by blocking Lantech from seizing funds held in an NCBA account after the Attorney-General pleaded that the money was donor funds and loans amounting to €80 million (Sh10.9 billion) ring-fenced for the exploration of steam field development in Bogoria. The bank account had been specifically opened to receive from a 2014 financing agreement with KfW of Germany.

The court heard that allowing Lantech (Africa) Limited to seize the money might spark a crisis between the governments of Ken-



Energy and Petroleum Cabinet Secretary Davis Chirchir

kenya lens



ya and Germany because the funds were meant for a specific project. "I am, therefore, persuaded and it is my conclusion that the Attorney-General has established to the required standard of proof that it has a legal and equitable interest on the subject account held by the judgment debtor with NCBA Bank on behalf of the government of Kenya," Justice Chepkwony said, as reported by the *Business Daily*.

However, there was no reprieve for other GDC bank accounts as on February 28, Judge Alfred Mabeya had thrown out Geothermal's plea for a stay on Arbitrator Mbovu's ruling, upholding garnishee orders by which Cooperative Bank and KCB were directed to hand over to Lantech any money belonging to GDC. The order even extended to the Central Bank of Kenya in respect of funds allocated by the government for geothermal exploration, as well as money due to GDC for power it generates and Kengen for distribution by Kenya Power. Geothermal CEO Othieno inherited an unenviable position when he took over in April, 2020. But he would not have been a complete stranger to the travails afflicting Geothermal as he has been an energy industry insider for much of his working life. He had served as acting chief executive following the exit of Johnson ole Nchoe after four years of a turbulent reign. Before that, he had served in various senior positions at Kenya Power, another struggling energy sector giant and monument to institutionalised inefficiency and corruption.

All in all, the High Court found that Geothermal had failed to satisfy a decree against it of December 16, 2020, and ordered that moneys held by the CBK, Coop Bank and KCB be attached for benefit of the applicant, Lantech, together with "all available receivables for sale of steam by 4th Garnishee (Kengen) for the benefit of Judgment Debtor (Geothermal). The amounts are US\$397,317.9 with 14 per

cent interest for July 1, 2013, coming to US\$842,467.47 (Sh112,048,173). The second award was US\$18,206,548.72 at 14 per cent interest from November 12, less a payment of US\$440,905.64, leaving a balance of US\$26,687,017.47 (Sh3,549,373.261). The actual total comes to Sh3,661,421.434 calculated at current exchange rates.

Sh3.6 billion is not a small sum even for a major public corporation like Geothermal, which faces grave danger of being forced into bankruptcy as avenues for appeal run out. The saga goes back to 2012, when Geothermal contracted Lantech to perform drilling consultancy services at its Menengai Geothermal Project for a fixed price of US\$26 million (Sh3.5 billion at today's exchange rates). An affidavit filed by Geothermal Legal Officer Adrian Topoti recounts that the two-year contract ran from 2013 to conclusion in 2015, but in 2017 Lantech filed a demand letter for payment of two amounts, US\$14.4 million for personnel costs and US\$3.2 for balance of unperformed contract, under a single invoice categorised as "unbilled invoices".

Geothermal claimed that during the period of the contract, it had paid in full all submitted invoices on a monthly basis, and could therefore not settle additional claims not covered in the contract and for which no verifiable supporting documents were provided. If it loses the case, Geothermal will be in dire straits as it hardly has the resources to pay a claim of Sh3.6 billion unless bailed out by the government.

The matter could well go all the way up to the Supreme Court, but ultimately there may be need for an inquiry into why the government and various State agencies have become serial losers in the courts, often in suspect circumstances that should raise red flags over likely collusion between various players to the detriment of the taxpayer.

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Chirchir must deal with in-built inefficiencies

As if the challenges of ensuring a consistent supply of petroleum at a time the shilling is on a downward spiral are not enough, Energy and Petroleum Cabinet Secretary Davis Chirchir inherited another hot potato in the court case that threatens to bankrupt the Geothermal Development Company.

That is just part of the woes bedevilling a strategic sector that in Kenya has long been the gold standard for legendary corruption and looting of public resources. Geothermal and associated entities in the power sector production, generation and distribution sector, namely (Kenya Electricity Generating Company (KenGen), Kenya Electricity Transmission Company (Ketraco) and Kenya Power & Lighting Company (Kenya Power or KPLC) are all monopolies enjoying generous State subventions because of their strategic roles. But despite that, they continue to suffer serious cash crunches due to in-built inefficiencies and historical corruption.

Political considerations in appointment of management and boards of directors does not help. As a keen political operative himself, it will be interesting to see if Chirchir can break the mold and lead transformation of the energy sector towards professionalism rather than cronyism.

Chirchir is already the focal point of a controversial scheme in which the government is striking deals to procure petroleum directly from the United Arab Emirates, by-passing the established import system controlled by local-based oil marketing companies. That could be a welcome disruption if it lowers pump

prices without disrupting supplies. However, there are concerns that the biggest winners could be politically-connected wheel-dealers being engaged in opaque deals that by-pass regulatory and transparency guidelines.

Recently, Trade CS Moses Kuria tweeted that Chirchir is restructuring the oil supply chain in a way that will see the Kenya shilling bounce back to an exchange rate of Sh85 to the dollar, from the present rate that has skyrocketed to Sh134. Analysts who responded to his tweet largely dismissed it as utter nonsense.

Chirchir's docket has also been key to a plan announced by President William Ruto that promised to drastically reduce the price of cooking gas. However, it was evident from Ruto's statement that he had been grossly misinformed as the numbers did not add up.

He publicly announced that the government will pump in money that will from June see the price of 6kg cylinder of gas drop from between Sh2,000 and Sh2,800 to between Sh300 and Sh500. The truth, however, is that the 6kg cylinder, the popular 'Meko', retails at between Sh1,200 and Sh1,500. It later transpired that Ruto was supposed to be talking about the price of empty cylinder, rather than the price of gas.

Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua then let out that motivation was not so much the consumer, but government efforts to slay the so-called 'cartels', this time in reference to opposition leader Raila Odinga, whose family firm, East African Spectre, enjoys a virtual monopoly in local manufacturing of gas cylinders.

— **Macharia Gaiho**

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■ THE NATION SHOULD BE GROWING TO DEEPEN ITS LOWER MIDDLE-INCOME STATUS

THE INTEREST RATE CONUNDRUM



The Central Bank of Kenya may signal a lower base rate to switch credit to the private sector relative to credit to government (domestic borrowing), stimulating more lending, the objective being to trigger uptick in economic activity by increasing growth of business and output in the private sector.



● BY MBUI WAGACHA

Some of the key tenets of central banking are regulatory oversight, protection of consumer and depositor interests but most importantly to play a vital role in economic policy-making. Experts at the Central Bank of Kenya study monetary policy trends based on their work, tracking scores of key economic indicators and the business outlook domestically and abroad. When I chaired the CBK Board in recent years, I found the banking sector sometimes not on board with the regulator.

The issues were as legendary as they were surprising, given Kenya's bank performance ratings. Rankings globally deviate from the debates where banks sometimes look uneasily at CBK's regulations, keeping it on its feet. But conservatives averse to regulations quickly discover that setting them aside is easier said than done. Monetary policy, when set

The banking sector struggles with multiple issues of rate setting, access to credit and inequitable lending. The agricultural sector is neglected, despite giving livelihoods to millions of Kenyans

to influence economic conditions, works to strengthen the economy and lives of the people.

On interest rates, for example, CBK may signal a lower base rate to switch credit to the private sector relative to credit to government (domestic borrowing), stimulating more lending, the objective being to trigger uptick in economic activity by increasing growth of business and output in the private sector. The rewards, as long as the mandated inflation target range, 2.5 per cent – 7.5 per cent, is observed, are investment, jobs and incomes, and poverty reduction.

Importance of interest rates

The researched position in Kenya is that hiking interest rates (called tightening) cuts growth while enriching banks. Consider, then, a country where lead local banks report the central bank to the International Monetary Fund, pressing for the doors be opened for higher interest rates. CBK decisions may well attract expert scrutiny (as in self-forgetfulness observing inflation and escalating interest rates abroad, dispro-

portionately to the study of domestic developments). But pointing at a cooling economy to rate hikes is reason for a rethink. It is unconventional that such pause should attract tutelage from the IMF at the behest of banks (as opposed to, say, credit-starved agriculture or SMEs) regulated by the CBK, given legal mandates that exist for CBK, Board, Monetary Policy Committee etc. Such tutelage is virtually unthinkable for western countries – Bank of England or European Central Bank, for example.

Yet, IMF showed its hand when Kenyan banks were featured in 2021 protesting to it about the CBK's scrutiny of their desired interest rate hikes following the removal of the rate cap in November 2019. Interestingly, after the rate cap removal, lending rates did not spike to reveal repressed pressure for higher interest rates. Fig. 1, using data from the CBK, shows lending rates hovered around 11 points, dot something, for most of 2020.

Yet, banks put the CBK in the spotlight (again) for scrutinising bank requests for rate increases.

Issues of risk assessments and/or punitive levels arose. With hindsight, the MPC was wise to pause rate hikes that negatively affect economic growth as the price to pay for excessive concerns with inflation while banks reap higher profitability. The CBK let the virtual back-and-forth play out, persevering the attempted bank regulation by remote control, via a multilateral institution, exerting unnecessary pressure on the CBK and the government. Why so?

Better performance

Kenya's banking by 2021 portrayed enviable performance indicators in the mirror of global efficiency and other ratings. For instance, return on assets (3.79 ranked 12th) and return equity (21.83 ranked 18th) in Global economy.com. In a key industry figure, Net Interest Margin, affected by supply of savings and demand for loans, Kenya at 6.14 per cent is ranked 19th among 135 countries, where Zimbabwe topped with 12.83 per cent). In operating costs, the cost-to-income ratio (of which the lower the better for efficient performance)

kenya lens

Kenya was ranked 118 out of 133 countries at 42.18, well below the global average of 54.8, and against an acceptable ratio of 50 per cent.

It suggests Kenyan banks manage their operations appropriately to create revenue growth. In bank lending rate-deposit rate spread of 5.03 per cent, compared to a global average of 6.59 per cent for 93 countries, Kenya is ranked 53rd. Bank credit to deposit ratio peaked at above 96 per cent in 2016 yet declined to about 84 per cent by 2021. On non-interest income (those fees, etc. married to loans) to total income ratio for Kenya (34.34 per cent) it is below the average of 38.13 per cent for 133 countries, and Kenya is in the 65th position. Nevertheless, Kenya's ratio is regionally uncompetitive: Burundi, 17.76; Rwanda 21.31; Uganda, 22.76; and Tanzania, 29.42. All these (there are much more complex assessments) depict a profitable and efficient sector.

The efficiencies have proved vital and can be applied to policies for economic progress, but only when government runs the appropriate mix of policies to propel growth and development. With the expertise to select the appropriate fiscal stances matching the monetary policy stance in the economy in the short, medium-term and long-term, Kenya should be growing to deepen its lower middle-income status.

When government fiscal policies dither in profligate debt and uncertainty as in recent years, banking, as a vital cog of the financial sector, macroeconomic policy and economic management, offloads a disproportionate share of available credit to pasting band-aid to government (domestic credit in TBs and Bonds). Inefficient and debt-ridden finances trap the economy in decline as

the private sector craters with tepid access to credit, low investment, rising unemployment and deepening of poverty.

Twists and turns on rates

The debate on interest rates has predictably taken twists and turns in a series of transformations mostly sparked by the fiscal side, with some actions outrightly empty of economic policy while destroying economic activity. Other turns propelled the economy to growth during long spells. Under weak debt-increasing policies, when government crowds out the private sector in credit allocation, bankers cannot be blamed for their preoccupation with playing golf while their liabilities (mostly customer deposits) earn well from TBs and Bonds payable by revenue collected by KRA from taxpayers (and falling in recent years with tepid economic activity). The result is that with a larger share of deposits transitioned to government securities in bank portfolios, and with savings falling with income, a private sector starved of credit yields anaemic economic recovery, and the economy contracts.

The last three decades are littered with hits and misses. The Moi-era interest rate and forex controls destroyed large swathes of the economy and drove lending interest rates to a peak of 36.2 per cent in 1994, while during Kibaki-era economic recovery, 2002-2013, the rates bottomed-out in 2004 at 12.5 per cent (within two years of Kibaki's ascension to power) and never reached 20 per cent during that tenure. In the rare period when the government's appetite for credit was intentionally lowered, pre-announced and coordinated with the CBK, lowering domestic borrowing signalled the Kibaki/Mwiraria experiment

in banking. As proved after 2002, bankers fled golf courses to undertake the lending assessments needed to move credit to the private sector. The result was economic recovery from GDP growth of 0.5 per cent in 2000 to a booming 8.4 per cent by 2010.

Interest rate capping: How the CBK recaptured the analytic initiative

The government set the law on interest rate caps on a formula of CBR+4 per cent via amendment of the Banking Act Section 33B on 14th September 2016. The banks pushed back for risk-based rates in the courts and in Parliament, at one time having the status quo maintained for one year. Subsequent deliberations by the courts and Parliament saw the cap removed on November 7, 2019, with the IMF batting for the banks.

While Parliament caved in and passed the skunk to CBK, the unintended policy consequence kicked in in favour of evidence-based policy making: CBK has the mandate to modulate the lens of interest rates against researched economic conditions. This became the de-facto platform requiring banks to justify rate increases by submitting their risk-based justifications thereof.

It is not strict interest-rate capping, but it has set up CBK both in a pole position policy-wise, and as an unenviable punching bag. The pushback by banks via IMF to CBK must rank a low point in sovereign policy-making. In the meantime, Kenya's banking sector struggles with multiple issues of rate setting, access to credit and the fu-

ture of banking: inequitable lending to the sectors – with the agricultural sector neglected, despite giving livelihoods to the majority of Kenyans; the impact of digital lending as a wild card that has cut large swathes of total lending at predatory interest rates; and the impact of MPesa, which moves over 40 per cent of GDP and carries a massive electronic float belonging to its millions of customers. The float is deposited in appointed trustee banks, and the interest earnings thereof unconventionally end up (hear this) not in the MPesa owners' balances, but as contributions to charities that just happen to be ones flaunting elite pursuits: vintage car shows; marathons in the wild (favouring conservancies) etc.

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



Central Bank of Kenya Governor Patrick Njoroge

the limelight



This photograph taken on March 8 shows a truck driving towards a fire blockade on the Radicate Terminal of the harbour in Port Jerome sur Seine erected to protest against the French government's proposed pensions reforms, which include raising retirement age from 62 to 64. Public transport was severely disrupted by the protests. PHOTO | AFP



Croatia's tennis player Donna Vekic poses with her trophy after winning the Monterrey WTA Open final match against France's Caroline Garcia in Monterrey, Mexico, on March 5. PHOTO | AFP



Riot police form a cordon during clashes with protesters near the Georgian Parliament in Tbilisi on March 7. Thousands of demonstrators took to the streets to oppose a controversial "foreign agents" bill. PHOTO | AFP



A child receives a shot during the launch of the extension of the world's first malaria vaccine (RTS, S) pilot programme for children at risk of illness and death from malaria within Kenya's endemic lake region at Kimogoi Dispensary on March 7. Coordinated by the WHO, the programme has provided malaria vaccines in Ghana, Malawi and Kenya since 2019. PHOTO | AFP



Dog-shaped robot units created by Chinese company Unitree are presented at a demonstration during the World Police Summit 2023 in Dubai on March 7. PHOTO | AFP



An artist dressed as goddess Radha dances along with devotees during celebrations for Holi, the Hindu spring festival of colours, at a temple in Amritsar on March 8. PHOTO | AFP



A man walks beside a burqa-clad woman riding a donkey along a street in Fayzabad on March 8. PHOTO | AFP

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OH, **FUNKY** SCIENCE!

Tracey Shiundu has turned her love for science into a venture to make the subject more enjoyable for students

OPEN SPACE

National conversation due on state of varsity education

These underfunded institutions produce half-baked, unmarketable graduates owing to lack of resources

• BY WYCLIFFE OSABWA

Kenya's public university education faces imminent death owing to insolvency. For far too long, universities have been indicted for financial mismanagement. But the claims haven't been followed by concrete action on individual institutions.

That said, no sane individual can vouch for the current funding model. Instructively, universities have three sources of funds: government capitation, student fees and research grants. A few have income-generating units which, like our parastatals, don't fare well. Research grants, which have plummeted even among developed countries, aren't guaranteed hence cannot form a basis for planning. Further, most faculties have terrible workloads and other clerical duties that leave them with little time for research activities. Worse, a majority staff are part-time lecturers who don't owe allegiance to any particular institution, hence cannot fundraise for them.

Yet, an interrogation of the two major sources – government allocation and student fees – reveals utter unsustainability. It baffles one how the institutions can remain afloat by levying fees that were last reviewed in 1989. Even the little loan from Helb isn't guaranteed, as evidenced by delayed disbursement.

The country must make a definite decision on how it plans to fund universities. Some of the models being experimented on, for instance the Performance Based Funding, reportedly failed in some developed nations. Even the Differential Unit Cost model won't remedy the situation if proportionate allocations won't reflect the current economic realities.

So which way Kenya? One, our crippled universities should be bailed out to some extent. Two, a reasonable fees increment, however unpopular, will help. Three, the government must rethink its practice of halving budgets presented by universities, more so considering the current cost of living. Four, the government should consider outsourcing lucrative consultancy projects to universities where pos-

sible. Five, universities should institute self-regulatory mechanisms in planning and management so that funds are only spent on the necessary vote heads.

With relatively good funding, universities will acquire adequate learning facilities and hire qualified faculty, hence improve education quality. Further, technical and academic staff will be able to engage in productive research that attracts grants, benefits society and raises the institutions' global standing. Again, such adequate human and material resource will attract many students, especially post-graduate and international ones – two groups that generate good money.

Worldwide, universities are engaged in aggressive marketing campaigns since they know how much they gain from international students. Kenyan public universities are losing many post-graduate students to local and foreign private universities, majorly because of supervision delays occasioned by strained or under-

qualified staff or inadequate learning resources. As the country boasts of 100 per cent transition, only a few students access university. More resources are channelled to basic education and vocational training while universities are starved. In turn, the underfunded institutions produce half-baked' unmarketable graduates, a situation that we capitalise on to disparage university education.

In the early 19th Century, the American federal state wasn't only weak but poor, hence couldn't provide for higher education, never mind its lack of interest in the same. Private universities thrived. To break the cycle, voters compelled the government to support higher education since it had become an attractive but private good. It took World War II for the government to realise the need for higher education, since universities were central to military research and development. No war would be won without such investment. Kenya has many wars to fight.

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



Lucy Wachuka

They often say that a man's friends count for one of the best measures of his worth. But it's not always this way. Some friends abandon you at the sight of trouble. They laugh at your misery, leaving you lonely and bitter. They would prefer to pay your funeral cost than medical bills. Be keen on whom you call 'bestie', 'bro', or 'sis'. Fake friends are the stars in your life who will always be there even though they don't always shine.

— *Kiambu Students Alumni*



Maritha Nyambane

I agree with the lyrics, "Don't scatter the roses after I'm gone; give them to me while I carry on". It's good to laud the work of those gone before us in an effort to preserve their memories. But what good is that if you had never done so while they were alive? Scattering roses would be meaningless; it would be a show as the person it should matter most to is not able to enjoy the sentiment. Focus on building the empire when it matters.

— *Youth leader in Nairobi*



Winks Nyangala

It's unfortunate that when someone is in need people tend not to associate with him or her, but when the worst happens, the family members and friends will be all over social media platforms with crazy captions like "RIP, we loved you but God loved you more". What an irony! Family and friends need to learn how to be there for others when it's needful not when it's too late. We should stop pretending.

— *Graphic Designer*



Brian Ochieng'

We live in a fake environment where people don't care about each other but about what society will say about the them. According to Thomas Hobbes, human nature is selfish and cruel. People spend money on funeral arrangements just show off. Why spend Sh300,000 on a funeral, when the money could have been used to save that life? Let's learn to do the right thing.

— *Zetech University*

MY TAKE



• BY WAGA ODONGO

Last month the Supreme Court of Kenya dismissed an appeal by the government to bar the registration of gay and lesbian organisations. It couldn't have come sooner. All Kenyans regardless of sex, creed and beliefs have a right to organise as they see fit.

Kenya's spasm of homophobia is one of its worst aspects. While other outgrowths of intolerance have slowly been sloughed away, homophobia has proved immovable.

It is one of those matters about which history will not look kindly on. You know the tide changed, the corner was turned and time is up. Legal barriers to homosexuality have fallen the globe over. Iceland had a gay premier. The United States has a gay member of cabinet currently serving. I am sure if Pete Buttigieg were to arrive in Nairobi today, his sexual orientation would not be on our leaders' minds but rather the loans he would bring.

Religion is always given as the most convenient reason behind this hatred. The reflexive abhorrence of members of the LGBTQ community is so strong that President Ruto, in the midst of hunger and a deepening economic crisis, finds time to comment on the matter, knowing it will earn him points with his evangelical following.

It is inescapable that religion is rabidly intolerant of homosexuality and our holy books sanction it with death.

LIVE AND LET LIVE

The moderating message of loving your neighbour compels us to embrace all others in dignity and love

However, we are a secular state. Morality that governs questions of how to treat our fellow men evolves independently of religion. In fact, our holy books constrain morality rather than encourage it. The perfect example of this is slavery.

Abrahamic religions, which over 95 per cent of Kenyans ascribe to, permit slavery, a practice which, as a society, we have banned. Society has evolved to the point where we feel every human has worth and a contribution to make and it is deeply immoral to condemn anyone to slavery regardless of their or your religion. Anyone who kept a slave in Kenya and tried to use his religion as an excuse would find himself behind bars. As a society we have transcended and expanded the narrow bounds of morality advocated for by some of our religions, and we are the better for it.

Our sacred books are the works of men, and reflect the times they were authored. That is why a book written by desert herdsmen would paint heaven as a city with rivers of milk. If you were to author a book today in Kenya you would tell them that heaven would have free WIFI and a metaverse filled with Vera Sidikas. Their views on sexuality are of their time and should trouble us no more than their views on indentured servitude.

Consider also the case of Mormons and black people. The religion was forged in the white heat of the An-

tebellum period as America was going to war over whether it would continue being a racist society. The religion's teachings considered black people to be a cursed and a sub-human race which, therefore, stopped them from being granted access to their version of heaven.

In the 1970s, this idea of a white-only heaven and banning blacks from becoming priests was dropped. The church even has a mission in Kenya and once, two missionaries actually knocked at my door hoping to entice me with the wonders of their desegregated heaven. Hopefully, fingers crossed – there are no written guarantees with these things – when the time comes I will be allowed into their pearly gates.

It is fitting that Barack Obama, a black man, defeated Mitt Romney, a Mormon, and gained access to the White House in 2012. As the Mormons evolved on blacks and their heaven, so have other religions evolved. Anglicans had to let women be priests. I mean, if the head of the church itself and Christ's representative on earth was the Queen of England, why can't a woman lead prayers? The church is now having an agonising discussion on whether or not it will give blessings to same-sex unions rather than just recognising them.

History tells us that the Church of England will accept gay marriage. Church doctrine is not immutable; it has evolved numerous times before: it changed for slavery, divorce, abortion and most recently, ordination of women. It will do so again. When the people move, so must their religions.

When people weaponise the Old Testament verses condemning same sex unions, I ask them for advice on how to sell our daughters into slavery as advocated for in the book of Exodus. The moderating message of loving your neighbour compels us to embrace all others in dignity and love.

I am normally shocked to read people claiming how homosexuality is alien to Africa. Homosexuality is as African as heterosexuality, since no race has a monopoly on sexuality. This fact has been debunked numerous times and does not deserve anyone's attention.

Even the Pope himself famously asked, "Who am I to judge?" when asked about gays. We have a situation where there are Kenyans who are more Christian than the Pope.

Kenya is not yet a theocracy, although, like Iran, I see the clerics moving closer into the inner sanctum of power. Religious doctrine cannot be allowed to dictate norms. Kenya belongs to all, whether they worship gods, devils or think that neither gods nor devils exist. What may offend your religion may be perfectly constitutional. Live and let live.

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EXPERIMENTS FOR CHILDREN



Tracey Shiundu of FunKe Science during the interview on March 8. Her main goal is to make science fun for all.
FRANCIS NDERITU | NATION

MAKING SCIENCE FUNKY

Tracey Shiundu turned her love for science into a venture to make the subject more accessible to and enjoyable for students

• BY EDDY ASHIOYA

There are no guarantees in life but I guarantee you this: Tracey Shiundu lives in a world of her own imagining, where laws bend to the artist's will or whim. Only she is less of an artist and more of a scientist. "In an effort to make science more enjoyable in Kenyan schools, I helped found FunKe Science, whose goal is to make science fun for kids." Okay then, she is an artistic scientist.

What's it like being Tracey Shiundu? "My true north and life has always been around science and I always wanted to do sciencey things and discover why things work the way they do."

Things were not always working, which is when she and a friend realised there was a problem among students – a lack of confidence or know-how in using technical lab equipment at the University of Nairobi. Upon further inquiry, the secrets told on themselves: many of the students had never been in a lab setting until the day they were doing their KCSE... or a week before. And that's it. They discovered that this was a common thread that ran across the fabric of most students, especially those in public schools. "That's when we decided to create a system that would at

least make science accessible, not just to us as budding scientists but also to the larger public."

Initially, they had planned to work with scientists, but what is that thing they say? A prophet is always rejected in his hometown, or at least not readily accepted. They decided to 'dumb it down', so to speak, dealing with children between the ages of eight and 13. She built the company doing science experiments for kids, using videos as content, making it fun, relatable and easily accessible to the public.

FunKe is a wordplay on 'funky' and fun-ke(nyan). Its biggest claim to fame is receiving a grant in 2019/20, and also pivoting during the pandemic. Covid-19 forced them to evolve into online classes. "Our first had 100 children drawn from Uganda, Tanzania, Nigeria and Morocco. It was eye-opening, how technology can inspire across borders."

FunKe Science charges for its services, both online and physical classes, with online classes ranging from KSh500 to KSh700 while physical classes begin at KSh1,000, depending on the needs of the students. Science kits go for KSh3,500 bob. FunKe Science now has two full-time and four part-time employees.

Tracey speaks wistfully of her major learning about science in

Kenya and the uptake of it. "It's been quite a long journey. We started testing around 2009 and have been running the business actively since 2017. The job market is slim for scientists and we have been limited to either manufacturing or research. But things are opening up; we are seeing a big uptake around tech courses."

Tracey, who holds a Master's degree in Environmental Chemistry from the University of Nairobi to complement her Master's in Project Management (Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology) says that the next frontier is inspiring the next generation of African scientists by making science accessible to children in tandem with Kenya's Agenda2030.

Science, she says, has taught her to push boundaries and go beyond what she thinks she can do. "My thesis was using human waste as energy!" Now she is even doing a sanitation project with a few friends, focusing on bio-gas as renewable energy with an emphasis on human waste.

Human waste has been some sort of gold for her: "I did extensive research in informal settlements in Nairobi, working with an NGO in highly overpopulated areas with community toilets to find out the possibility of creating biogas from human waste. And that got me thinking about what biogas could do. Do you know India and Sri Lanka use it for electricity? It's a circulatory system, nothing goes to waste, pardon the pun!"

It's funny then, that for one who loves experimenting, her biggest fear is cockroaches. "My life stops when I see one. But on a more intellectual level, I fear not living a life of compassion. Having kids makes you see the world in a different sort of light. I want to see the other person and what they are going through and acknowledge it."

Does she feel she has to prove herself as a woman in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics)? "The perception has not changed. You have to show that you are not just a pretty face but smart enough to be in the room. People are different; some spaces are welcoming, others are a tad hostile. Some people are there, others still need to be pulled to get there."

When does she ever question herself? Daily, she says. I have this mantra, just do it, even if you are scared. You never know what the outcome will be.

And how's the view from the



Tracey Shiundu, Co-Founder, FunKe Science.

EXPLAINS COMPLEX TOPICS

Funke Science uses household items to make simple experiments that explain complex topics. They also sell science kits with free explainer videos meant to educate and entertain.

Funke Science was birthed in 2013 and incubated at C4DLab in 2014. C4DLab is a prototyping and innovative start-up incubation lab at the School of Computing and Informatics, University of Nairobi. This lab was founded in 2013, as the first phase of a bigger complex CC4D (Centre of Computing for Development) to be built at the school. It was officially registered as a business in 2017.

science peak? "I have a lot more women to bring up with me. My ladder is open to pulling many women up here. We can all climb and enjoy the view together."

She picks the freshest flowers for Claire Munene (Customer Experience Director at Telkom Kenya) and Patricia Okello (Co-founder, Kayana Create) who, she says, embody ultimate womanhood — that you can really have it all.

What is the chapter of her life that she would recommend people to read? "My teen years. When I was 19, I ran science experiments that helped put me out there. The learning, relearning and unlearning process of my 30s has made the past 11 months exciting. I have unlearned a lot of things I learned in my 20s. It's a roller-coaster, but I love it. I don't know what to call it anymore," she says.

She says, because of her smiley

contours, people think she is always light-hearted with a happy-go-lucky demeanour, which masks her industrious patina. Indeed, she is the hardest worker in the room, first one in, last one out. How does she keep firing on all fronts?

"I always have someone guiding me. I am a big fan of moving with people, sharing our stories and learning from each other. I am also moving and visiting regulatory bodies to learn due processes and from what I have learned, their doors are always open and they are willing to help, but it is a two-way street and you have to be open too."

She speaks with disarming honesty and reveals the price she has had to pay for her ambition: sleep. Or more accurately, a lack of sleep. "Maybe I am lucky in a way that things fit together. I just wish I

could sleep more."

So, is she just smart or lucky? "Both. It's an alchemy to make me who I am now. I have had strong aspects of luck but I have also had to study very hard to get to where I am."

She says the biggest lesson FunKe Science has taught her is that it is okay to let your team down occasionally. Who you start with is not necessarily who you finish with. Sometimes priorities change and people leave and you have to rebuild the team. "It feels like you have lost something, but the joy of bringing in new people is that you get fresher perspectives you may not necessarily have had before. Now, I take it as a growth process."

Entrepreneurship, or business, is a lonesome journey. Just because someone is walking next to you doesn't mean they are walking with you. And her biggest achievement? "When *BBC Horizons* reached out to FunKe Science to showcase what we are doing. It was very humbling to see the growth among our children. Going through our hands-on learning increased their social confidence levels. Young as they were, they knew their stuff."

Plus, she adds, the impact that it had on her team, including growing their leadership skills and work ethic, makes her happy. Seeing them grow in their different roles keeps the oil in her engine running.

Absence of evidence isn't necessarily evidence of absence. She deals with facts, so what is that one thing that has not been proven that she believes personally?

"I believe in energies and auras and souls moving through mediums. I believe there are energies that guide us and our thoughts and directions. This could even be relatives who passed on and are acting as guardian angels and they are the energies that whisper in your ear when you are about to do something not so clever. Spirits, angels, energies, call it what you want. And now I can hear the angel in my mind saying you have released the secret!"

Tracey Shiundu, the kooky scientist, the light sleeper, the cockroach fearer has enough needle to prick a contrived metaphor: her love affair with experiments could hardly be more blatant if it dripped from William Shakespeare's pen. This is not just an investment in the future; it is homage to the past.

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INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

BIG IDEA, BIG WIN



Former US President Bill Clinton with St Paul's University Mass Communication students and Eco-Bana founders (from left) Brian Ndung'u, Lennox Omondi and Shiltone Ogutu Dullah with the Hult Prize Trophy in New York in September 2022.

With their cash prize of US\$1 million, four Kenyan students are set to ease the suffering of millions of girls with their award-winning invention

• BY SINDA MATIKO

Keylie Muthoni has just finished participating in a panel discussion hosted by Olive Burrows on NTV's *AM Live* morning show when I bump into her. Rocking a yellow, knee-length dress, a pair of short, black heels with a black handbag and black jacket hanging on her forearm, Muthoni wears a flirtatious smile that's fine-tuned with a little bit of red lipstick. No other trace of make-up can be spotted on her 24-year-old face.

She is confident, you can tell, despite having to deal with a great deal of pressure – the pressure of winning.

The screen of her android phone keeps lighting up. She ignores the stream of calls. This has been the norm for the last seven months or so. Last September, Muthoni and her three colleagues, all Mass Communication students at St Paul's University, grabbed the attention of the nation when they were declared winners of the 2022 Hult Prize for their business innovation – biodegradable banana sanitary pads that aim to address period poverty. They were awarded a whopping one million US dollars (about Sh130 million).

"Everybody thinks we have the money. The other day my grandmother asked when I was starting to build her a new house. I can't tell people that I am broke, because no one

believes me," she sighs.

In April 2022, prior to their Hult Prize win, the students had entered the CleanTech competition backed by the Kenya Climate Innovation Centre in collaboration with the Swiss Embassy and walked away with KSh900,000 after emerging the winners, beating over 300 participants.

But it was their Hult Prize win that got them global recognition. Competing under the umbrella of their start-up, Eco-Bana Limited, Muthoni, Einstein Lennox Omondi, Shiltone Ogutu Dulla and Brian Ndung'u beat five other finalists from around the world at an award gala on September 21 in Boston, USA, attended by renowned entrepreneurs, including former US President Bill Clinton.

President William Ruto was in New York at the time and sent a congratulatory message personally to the quartet as well as on Twitter. "Congratulations to Eco-Bana, a Kenyan social venture started by four university students that has just won the prestigious Hult Prize and a cash award of one million dollars. The prize is awarded to entrepreneurs who strive to tackle pressing global issues through innovation," he shared on Twitter on September 21, 2022.

The four made it to the finals, having finished second in the semis, which had 28 contestants from all over the world. One of the semi-finalists was a start-up that made

alcohol from leftover bread. "We knew we were not going to win because unlike us, they were already selling the product. They already had the numbers yet all we had was an idea in the form of a prototype with zero sales. We had knocked on many doors looking for sponsors to help us in production but they all turned us down," Keylie says.

Since they were declared winners, the four have been living under intense social pressure, their phones constantly buzzing with people who now want to be part of their success, or to exploit them. "I have lost friends who feel I am being mean with the fortune. We have even received invitations to sponsor events. Can you imagine?" she asks.

What many seem to miss is the fact that, despite the quartet winning the colossal amount, expenditure is controlled. "First of all, the money comes in batches and we have to do a detailed proposal for each batch. There is a lot of documentation involved and we have to account for every coin. If we misuse the money on anything other than the project we will be cut off completely." The stringent measures were introduced following misuse of the prize money by past winners to whom the full amount was released.

Described as the 'Nobel Prize for Students', the Hult Prize is an annual, year-long competition that was founded by a group of Hult International Business School MBAs

and is funded by Swedish billionaire Bertil Eric Hult. The competition was invented to crowd-source ideas from university students across the world that help address social issues around topics such as food security, water access, energy, the environment and education. "The four of us met in 2020 in university. I was chair of the Enactus Club, which had over 20 members but only the four of us consistently showed up whenever there was a meet-up, and that's how we became close," says Einstein, 21.

Described as the 'brainie' of the group, Einstein came up with the idea of making a biodegradable sanitary towel using banana fibre.

"Keylie told to us how, growing up, she couldn't afford pads and at some point dropped out of school because of that. I felt we needed a solution and so I started researching the effects of period poverty. It took us eight months to actualise the idea," he says.

They entered their prototype for the Enactus competition in 2020 and 2021 but were unsuccessful. Then a fellow student told them about the Hult Prize. They applied to participate in the South Africa region rather than Kenya and Nigeria and emerged winners out of 72 entrants. As Africa's winners they entered a pool of 28 from all over the world, battling to make the cut for the six finalists. "No one believed in us, except some of our lecturers and parents. My colleagues were mocked and nicknamed 'pad men' by fellow students. Now everybody wants in," Keylie laughs.

Prof Peter Nguni, Vice-Chancellor at St. Paul's University, believes Eco-Bana have just offered a solution to one of Africa's most nagging problems.

"This is a win for the girl child. We know the



Eco-Bana Chief Operating Officer Keylie Muthoni. BONFACE BOGITA | NATION

debate around lack of affordability, access and how it impacts their education progress and self-esteem. I can now see that being completely reversed. Bananas stalks and stems are hardly used for anything other than animal feed. Now we get to use them for a very meaningful venture".

"Banana pith has a high absorption rate and is biodegradable, which is why we settled on it as a solution," explains Brian Ndung'u, 22, Eco-

Bana's Chief Marketing and Communications officer. "Our business model is social enterprise; we aim to generate profits while creating social and environmental impact, which could mean selling our product directly to non-governmental organisations that align with our mission."

The start-up is also in talks to enter the Egyptian market through a partner once production begins. "We have been receiving traffic on pre-orders. People are interested in trying this new product," adds Ndung'u.

Mass production has yet to begin as they first have to set up structures. When I speak to Dullah on the phone, he and Ndung'u are in Kisii, where the company has secured a parcel of land courtesy of the County government for building a production plant and growing bananas.

Plans to import high-tech manufacturing machinery worth KSh10 million are in motion. "We don't need to move fast but correctly. Equipment that is able to produce 200 pads per minute will be a game changer.


Our target is for our products to hit the shelves by the end of this year or early 2024," says Muthoni, who is Chief Operations Officer.

The four partners have resorted to distance learning as they split time between building a company and pursuing their studies. Already they have roped in 25 employees on various capacities, including Emmanuel Omondi as Chief Technology Officer, and a lawyer recommended to them by Hult Prize organisers. "Innovations have the best promise for creating jobs, increasing income and translating knowledge into products," observes Prof Nguni.

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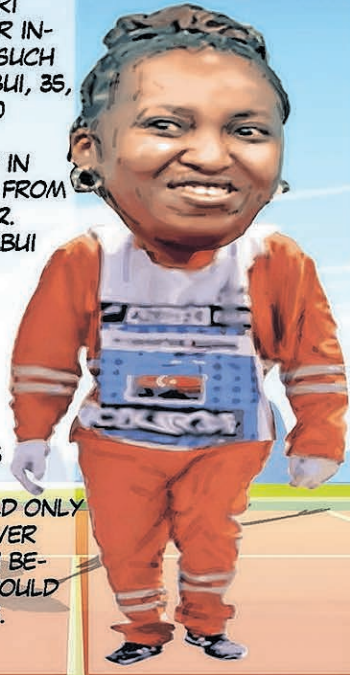
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WOMAN POWER



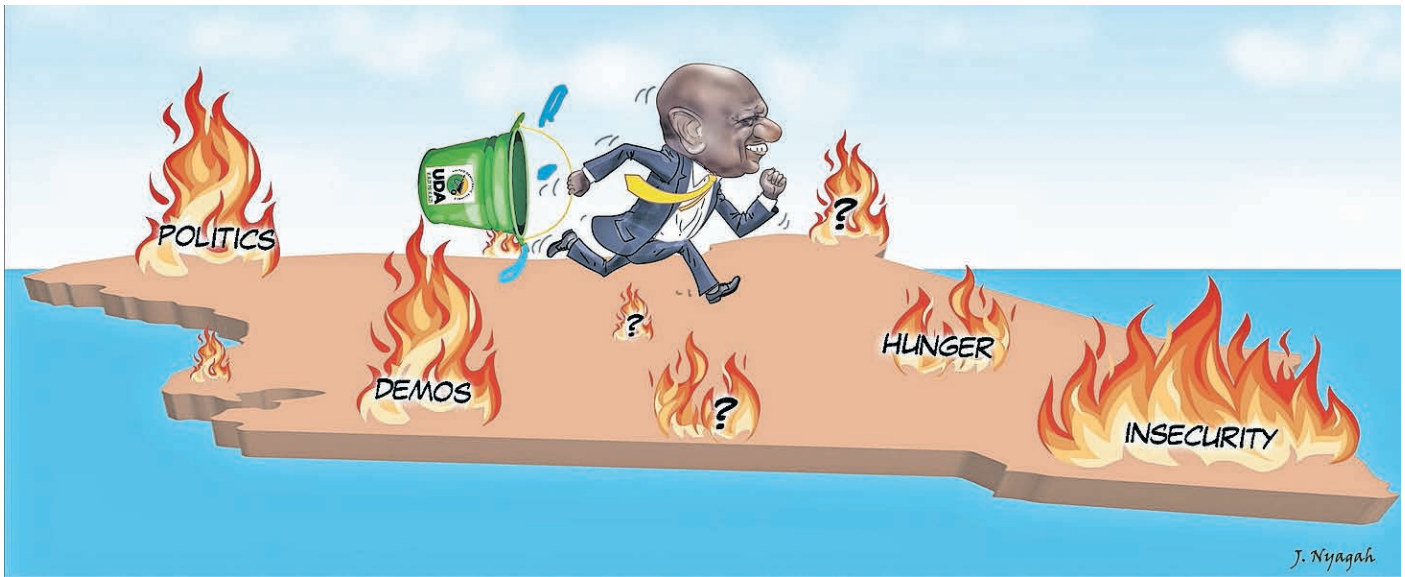
FLORENCE KEYA IS THE FOUNDER OF MAISHA GIRLS SAFE HOUSE. AFTER EXPERIENCING SEXUAL ABUSE WHEN SHE WAS YOUNG, SHE REPORTED IT TO THE POLICE BUT THAT ONLY LED TO HER LIVING A LIFE ON THE RUN FROM THE POWERFUL PERPETRATOR. MIRACULOUSLY, SHE MANAGED TO GO THROUGH SECONDARY SCHOOL, AND GOT A SCHOLARSHIP FOR HIGHER EDUCATION. SHE PURSUED A COURSE IN PSYCHOLOGY. ARMED WITH THE KNOWLEDGE IN 2014, SHE DECIDED TO ADVOCATE FOR THE RIGHTS AND SAFETY OF ABUSED GIRLS. SHE TURNED HER HOUSE INTO A SHELTER AND THAT IS HOW SHE BEGAN RESCUING GIRLS WHO HAVE GONE THROUGH SEXUAL ABUSE AND MAKING SURE THEY GET AN EDUCATION AS A WEAPON TO FACE LIFE AND GIVE THEM A VOICE.

STAR OF THE WEEK



MAGDALENE WAMBUI KIIRU IS THE SECRETARY OF STEWARDS IN WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIPS SAFARI RALLY. SHE IS THE FIRST EVER INDIGENOUS WOMAN TO HOLD SUCH A POST IN THE SAFARI. WAMBUI, 35, WAS AMONG THE ABOUT 1,500 MARSHALS AT THE 2022 SINGAPORE GRANDPRIX HELD IN MARINA BAY STREET CIRCUIT FROM SEPTEMBER 30 TO OCTOBER 2. "IT WAS SURREAL," SAID WAMBUI OF HER EXPERIENCE IN THE THREE-DAY RACE THAT WAS WON BY RED BULL RACING DRIVER SERGIO PEREZ. SHE WAS AMONG 24 WOMEN FINALISTS, OUT OF 300 APPLICANTS GLOBALLY, FOR VOLUNTEER MARSHAL DUTIES AT THE SINGAPORE RACING. IN SINGAPORE, WAMBUI COULD ONLY WAVE AT HER FAVOURITE DRIVER MERCEDES' LEWIS HAMILTON BECAUSE AS A MARSHAL SHE COULD NOT CHEER OR TAKE SELFIES.

opinion



■ One can foresee a situation where ministries and departments will be working at cross-purposes

When trade supersedes diplomacy, it's chaos

The abrupt shift in the country's foreign policy could have gone unnoticed by most Kenyans, but it may have major ramifications on how Kenya relates with other countries, especially on matters to do with trade and investment. In a move that amounts to more than a normal tweak, foreign countries and their envoys have been allowed to engage directly with ministries, departments and agencies without going through the Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs, which means it will simply be shunted aside and only given copies of any agreement that may have been brokered.

Since Independence, the Foreign and International Relations docket has been the preserve of the sitting head of government. Indeed, the first holder of that crucial docket was Prime Minister Jomo Kenyatta back in 1963, but then it was a mere department in his office and would continue to be a ministry of State in the Office of the President for a number of years afterwards. One can surmise that every President would be keen to keep an eye on developments in the rest of the world, especially as it relates to Kenya's fundamental interests, but this is altogether different.

Strangely, Kenya never had a written foreign policy in one package until 2014, when a meticulous document was prepared, comprehensive enough to guide all who would later hold that office. Nevertheless, the policy, which has been described as essentially Afrocentric, has never really changed radically at any one time in the past 60 years. Its main objectives have remained the protection of the country's territorial integrity, the promotion of regional integration, the enhancement of economic prosperity through regional and



**MAGESHA
NGWIRI**

global trade, as well as the promotion of the interests of its Diaspora. Now that we are in this situation in which the office-holder may not have much say on its application, it will be interesting to see how it will work out, especially in this era of globalisation with all its attendant evils like terrorism, money laundering, transnational drugs and human trafficking, when foreign policy requires a steady guiding hand. Never before has trade superseded diplomacy; they usually work in tandem but it looks like things will be different this time round without a "clearing house".

One can foresee a situation where ministries and departments will be working at cross-purposes with each other, tying themselves up in knots, and then expecting the country's top diplomats to solve the mess created. It may turn out to be a veritable Tower of Babel, with discordant voices all yelling at once. To avoid this, Foreign Cabinet Secretary Alfred Mutua will have to use all the tact he can muster to allay the fears of confused foreign allies. Although he has already explained the move as necessary to remove the "bureaucratic bottlenecks that hinder the completion of MoUs and other important negotiations", keen observers are not convinced.

Before Dr Mutua, of course, there have been men of towering intellect who held the office, some of them becoming darlings of the West, others the bane of neocolonialists. Two come to mind here: Dr Munyua Waiyaki and Dr Robert Ouko.

Dr Waiyaki is the man who shaped Kenya's foreign policy most decisively in the 1970s, during the Cold War era, at a time when there was great pressure from some quarters to recognise apartheid South Africa: "Over my dead body," he is reported to have said. By so doing, he saved Kenya from becoming a continental pariah.

Dr Ouko, on the other hand, was foreign minister from 1979-1983, and then from 1988-1990. Two things define his stewardship. First, he succeeded in endearing himself to Western powers. Although his work was largely overshadowed by the turbulent times the country was undergoing — at the height of the Kanu dictatorship — the highly articulate minister defended the Moi regime to the hilt. But apparently, his star shone too bright, and he paid with his life. Dr Mutua should learn from this fate. In some situations, principles don't mean a damn thing.

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opinion

■ Senate Majority Leader Cheruiyot says the President must 'crush' alleged cartels in the media

The sickening 'Nyayo Error' mindset in Ruto's regime



MACHARIA
GAITHO

It was former Machakos Kanu branch boss and Ukambani political kingpin Mulu Mutisya who infamously likened journalists to miscreants "conceived by the river beds".

I'm not sure whether it's a bad thing to be the product of a union consummated in such a romantic and idyllic setting, but in the days of single party dictatorship, Mutisya meant it as the ultimate insult for a despised class that did not always kowtow to the high and mighty.

President Daniel arap Moi's monolithic regime had more than its fair share of ill-educated buffoons forever competing to catch his eye with the most outrageous of slurs and threats aimed at media, civil society, religious leaders, dissenting politicians and others who strayed from the straight and narrow path.

The self-appointed 'Nyayometers' included characters such as Nakuru Kanu branch strongman Kariuki Chotara, who once publicly wondered why the government did not move with haste to imprison the dissident Karl Marx who was reported to be poisoning the minds of University of Nairobi students.

There was the other Nakuru politician, Wilson Leitich, who advocated amputation for multi-party campaign activists caught flashing the 'two-finger' salute.

If any proof was needed that the government of President William Ruto is the true successor to the Nyayo regime, it is in the emergence of politicians and activists whose primary job is to wage verbal war and issue threats and condemnations against any person and entities that don't pay total and absolute obedience to Numero Uno.

Controversial threats by Senate Majority Leader Aaron Cheruiyot that President Ruto must 'crush' alleged cartels in the Kenyan banking and media sectors can only be seen as coming from the Nyayo 'Error' mindset.

The contemporary government defenders may be well-educated, tech-savvy, designer-suited charmers as familiar with digital war strategies as they are with political platform theatrics, but they are no different from the Mutisyas, Chotaras, Nassirs and the entire battalion of crude, foul-mouthed, rustic, semi-literate war mongers they have succeeded.

Indeed, if the first Jubilee regime of President Uhuru Kenyatta and Deputy President William

Ruto sowed the Kanu heirloom seeds, Kanu III of President Ruto and Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua brings it all to fruition as consolidation of the same dynasty under a different name.

That Kanu, Jubilee and now Kenya Kwanza are one and the same thing can be seen in a style of governance that gives premium to searching out and eliminating enemies, real or imagined, rather than in the core functions of State. Under Kanu, all the time and energy was wasted on condemning 'anti-Nyayo elements', 'enemies of development', 'agents of foreign masters' and other imaginary threats.

In the democratic dispensation of today, Ruto does not have the power to detain opponents without trial, jail others on trumped-up sedition charges, or condemn foes to political purgatory. And, to his credit, he comes across as an intelligent, open, genial leader really keen to reach out across the board and build alliances towards fulfillment of an ambitious economic renewal agenda. But the fact that he is encouraging minions like Gachagua, Cheruiyot, National Assembly Majority Leader Kimani Ichung'wa and a battalion of keyboard warriors to be forever on platform and social media battles is cause for concern.

The Jubilee regime, almost from inception declared war on media, civil society and other entities that did not kiss its bottoms. The



What President Ruto must now recognise is that the enemy is not in his predecessor, Uhuru Kenyatta, opposition leader Raila Odinga, media, civil society, banks, human rights campaigners or any other external actors. The enemy is embedded deep within every fibre and being of his administration. The enemy is in appointees, hirelings, political partners and a whole army of sycophants who dare not tell the King that he is naked.

guiding philosophy was that if you are not in our pocket, you must be against us.

Its successor has taken the same philosophy many steps further. It has expanded the list of enemies from merely the political opposition, media and civil society to include the banking sector, private enterprise, mainstream churches, constitutional commissions and any other entities that show the slightest signs of independent thinking. And this time it's not just merely about ignoring those that don't pay homage, but about isolating, sidelining, bankrupting and crushing them.

But to what purpose and to what avail? How will Kenya benefit if banks that are wary of extending credit to dubious projects are crushed? Who will benefit if media, the voice of the voiceless and people's watchdog, is crushed? Will short-sighted, thoughtless actions against imagined foes reduce the cost of living or improve the lot of the so-called hustlers? The fact is that these fights against all and sundry have no rhyme or reason. They are just diversionary tactics designed to disguise the fact that the Kenya Kwanza government has no solutions to the mess it brought with it from its Kanu predecessor.

What President Ruto must now recognise is that the enemy is not in his predecessor, Uhuru Kenyatta, opposition leader Raila Odinga, media, civil society, banks, human rights campaigners or any other external actors.

The enemy is embedded deep within every fibre and being of his administration. The enemy is in appointees, hirelings, political partners and a whole army of sycophants who dare not tell the King that he is naked.

Instead of driving forward the ambitious Kenya Kwanza agenda to economic renewal and creation of a prosperous and just society, all the President's men and women are just drunk with power and expending precious time and energy shadow-boxing non-existent enemies.

They are the enemy, for if President Ruto fails to deliver and is booted out by voters in 2027, he will be isolated, lonely and abandoned. He will take the blame alone, while all those loudmouths in his entourage will be quick to desert a sinking ship and latch on to the next paymaster.

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kenya lens

■ MENTAL WELLBEING IN SPORTS



From left: Harambee Stars Captain Musa Otieno, Dennis Oliech, Taiwo Atieno and Victor Wanyama train at the Moi International Sports Centre, Kasarani, on June 18, 2009. They were preparing for their World Cup/ Africa Cup of Nations qualifier against Mozambique. PHOTO | FILE

WHEN THE STARS FALL

Many successful sportspeople find themselves battling mental health issues at the end of their careers, often with no respite or support

● By JOSEPH MBOYA

For those who watched him on the pitch, there is no doubt that Kevin Malumbe was one of the finest midfielders Kenya had ever seen. With sleek passes and good speed, 'Kevo' was a joy to watch when he donned the yellow-and-black livery of the Tusker Football Club in 1997 and 1998. A call-up to Harambee Stars followed, but he never got to play for the national team.

Years later, Kevo took to drinking, and could often be found in one pub or another in Nairobi West, the estate where he was born and lived all his life. He would regale anyone who cared to listen with tales of his exploits on the pitch in an era long gone. That was, until

he died in April this year, becoming another sad statistic of the many talented footballers whose lives take dangerous turns after their careers on the pitch, ending up in drug and alcohol addiction, penury and finally, the grave.

The sad reality is that many of our local football clubs do not invest much in the mental wellbeing of their players. Many join the clubs fresh out of school or college, earning salaries many can only dream of, with all the 'freedom' and hedonistic lifestyles that money can buy. It does not end well for many.

Solomon Gacece, an elder at the PCEA St Andrews Church in Nairobi, knows this story only too well. A former sportsman who also got a call-up to Harambee Stars in his youth, Gacece chose the path of chaplaincy and mental ad-



Sammy Shollei

kenya lens

visor to players. His work has taken him to the All African Games, Commonwealth Games and the Olympics, and counts among his friends people like American sprint great Carl Lewis, former Formula One driver and chaplain of the 1994 World Cup winners Brazil Alex Ribeiro, and former Watford and Manchester United chaplain Rev John Boyers.

In the early '90s, Gacece started the Watume Football Club, an evangelism outreach project. Each year, he would scout for the best footballers in Nairobi schools who were in their final years of education. He had a full-time coach and a team manager. The boys and girls would meet at the Bahati PCEA church for Bible study and mental health coaching sessions. Thursdays were training days and Camp Toyoyo grounds in Jericho would come alive as the gifted players sharpened their skills.

The reason behind the formation of the team was that Gacece had realised that some of the players who shone in school tournaments went into oblivion after school, lost to drugs and other vices. He wanted a good foundation for such talent. "We never registered for any league; ours was a mentorship programme for the players. They signed for the top sides in the local league but would always be available for our Bible study and mental mentorship sessions. Some of them became born again, and even for those who did not, we laid a strong foundation," he says.

Some of the players who passed through the Watume programme include long-serving Harambee Stars captain Musa Otieno and his younger brother, Eric Omondi, and AFC Leopards and Harambee Stars dependable defenders John Luchuku and Zablon Amanaka, both deceased. The success of the programme was displayed in the fact that when Harambee Stars took on Nigeria in a World Cup qualifier match at Kasarani in 1997, seven out of the 11 starting players



Arsenal's Emmanuel Eboué celebrates scoring against Burnley at the Emirates Stadium on March 8, 2009.

were Watume graduates. Former Tusker FC and Kenya international Sammy Ty Shollei agrees that players' mental health needs to be prioritised.

"Unfortunately, many players are suffering mental health problems and in most cases it is something that could have been detected in its early stages. It's sad that many of our sportspeople are not covered by any insurance so that players can visit hospitals for check-ups. This is one area that needs to be given serious thought," he observes. Stella Kivuti is a counselling psychologist at the Retreat Rehabilitation Centre in Tigoni, Limuru. She says heightened expectations from sports people may cause some of them develop mental problems. "Sports give people an avenue to express themselves as well as release stress and tension. However, with high expectations of performance, some become maladjusted and get into substance abuse. There needs to be a good connection for all team members to perform as a team," she says, "but sometimes this does not happen, leading to disagreements and other negative results."

The issue of players battling mental health issues is not strictly a Kenyan or a Third World matter. In May 2021, tennis superstar Naomi Osaka opened the lid on what goes on in the world of super athletes. She withdrew from the French Open and later confessed that she had been battling mental health issues.

Osaka explained that she was introverted and suffered from social anxiety. She talked of suffering "long bouts of depression" and that she had struggled with coping. Later in September, Osaka tearfully apologised after throwing a tantrum during her shock US Open defeat to teenager Leylah Fernandez. She announced that she would take an extended break from tennis, and that she did not know when she would play next, citing a loss of love for the game.

In 2019, former Cote d'Ivoire and Arsenal defender Emmanuel Eboué went public about his struggles with mental health. In an emotional interview with a French TV station, the star talked about his battle with depression and said he had even considered suicide.

He disclosed that his problems began when he was suspended by Fifa from all football-related activity for one year. The ban, a result of failing to pay money owed to a former agent, led to the termination of his short-term contract at then Premier League side Sunderland in March 2016. Without a professional club and shattered financially after a bitter and acrimonious divorce, he said he had suicidal thoughts. "Sometimes I would lock myself in my room for three or four days, just thinking and asking 'what's left?'" Eboué said on the show.

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Japan's Naomi Osaka gestures during the 2022 US Open.

SCIENCE & TECH**Sony's new PS5 brings Discord tool**

Sony has released a new PS5 update that includes the highly anticipated Discord integration. Version 7 of the PS5 software is available for all consoles right now, allowing PS5 owners to join Discord calls on their console, alongside improvements to 1440p resolution, the ability to transfer data between PS5 consoles, and a new option to use your voice to capture clips of your gameplay.

PS5 owners will be able to use the Discord app on mobile or a PC to transfer a Discord call to their console. It's very similar to how Microsoft initially launched Discord support on the Xbox last year, which means you can't directly access Discord servers on a PS5 without using a mobile device or a PC to transfer the call.

The Discord integration is sleek, though. Once a call has been transferred you can see your friends across Xbox, PC, and elsewhere in a call and it exists on the PS5 dashboard like a party in a separate app until you terminate the call. Only voice calls are supported right now, so you won't be able to see any Discord chat messages or stream your console screen to the Discord call or view other Discord user's streams.

Discord integration is a great addition for crossplay, allowing PS5 players to chat to Xbox and PC gamers without having to rely on in-game chat features. Microsoft improved its own Discord integration for Xbox last year, allowing Xbox owners to join voice channels straight from a console without having to use a phone or PC. Hopefully we'll see Sony do the same in the coming months.

The PS5 also gets some improvements to its 1440p mode with this update. Sony says 1440p has been expanded, with Variable Refresh Rate enabled for 1440p to add smoother visual performance in games. More modes and HDMI devices are now supported for 1440p.

COUSINS TURN E-WASTE TO BIO-ROBOTIC PROSTHETIC

David Gathu (right), 30, and Moses Kiuna (left), 29, both self-taught innovators, demonstrate the operation of a bio-robotic prosthesis using brain-signals created using salvaged electrical components, mechanical parts, plywood and rubber bits at their makeshift laboratory at Thogoto village in Kikuyu, Kiambu County, on January 31.

● By MARY KULUNDU

Two portraits of Albert Einstein hang on the walls of a makeshift laboratory on Nairobi's outskirts, inspiring a pair of self-taught Kenyan innovators who have built a bio-robotic prosthetic arm out of electronic scrap.

Cousins Moses Kiuna, 29, and David Gathu, 30, created their first prosthetic arm in 2012, after their neighbour lost a limb in an industrial accident. But their latest invention is a significant upgrade, according to the duo.

The device uses a headset receiver to pick up brain signals and convert them to an electric current, which is then sent to a transmitter that wirelessly relays commands to the arm, prompting it into action.

It all happens in less than two seconds. "We saw people living with disabilities go through a lot of struggles and desired to make them... (feel) far more abled," Gathu told *AFP*.

Kiuna said their first prosthetic arm, custom-made for the

neighbour, had "helped him operate around the house on his own".

The high cost of prosthetics means only one out of 10 people in need are able to access them globally, with the World Health Organization warning that such exclusion adds to the burden of disability. "We noticed that Kenya imports prosthetics which are costly," Kiuna told *AFP*. "So we asked ourselves, 'How can we solve our own problems?'"

They found the answer in junkyards.

Since high school, the pair have been scouring dumping grounds around the Kenyan capital in search of discarded gadgets that they have repurposed to create over a dozen inventions.

Although conventional education did little to feed their curiosity, with Gathu dropping out of school at 17 and Kiuna quitting college a couple of years later, their appetite for learning has not dimmed.

The shelves in the bare-bones lab next to their grandmother's house are stacked with science

books and the sheet metal walls are covered with charts detailing human anatomy or the periodic table. "We studied neurophysiology by reading books and sitting with doctors to explain concepts to us," Gathu said, explaining how they came up with the prosthetic arm.

It is just one of the inventions conjured up by the cousins.

When Covid-19 struck, they built a device to sterilise banknotes using infrared technology, and later, a green-energy generator that converts oxygen into electricity, aimed at tackling climate change.

"These two are proof that Africans can make a significant contribution to technology and science as we know it," said Mukuria Mwangi, the founder of the Jasiri Mugumo School in Nairobi, which caters to youth up to 10-years-old. Mwangi, who regularly invites Gathu and Kiuna to mentor children at the school, told *AFP* that Kenya's education system did little to encourage innovation.

—*AFP*

africa lens

■ FRENCH PRESIDENT OUT TO COUNTER RUSSIAN INFLUENCE ON THE CONTINENT

MACRON'S MISSION POSSIBLE



France's President Emmanuel Macron (left) and Democratic Republic of Congo's President Felix Tshisekedi shake hands after a press conference as part of their meeting at the Palace of the Nation in Kinshasa on March 4.

His African tour came at a time of ever-increasing competition from China and Russia, and growing resentment of close economic ties between France and its former colonies, which some see as a form of continued exploitation

● PARIS

Libreville, Luanda, Brazzaville, Kinshasa – France's President Emmanuel Macron was on a whirlwind tour of African capitals last week as he tried to shift French policy on the continent away from military involvement.

He could hardly be accused of ignoring Africa – this was his 18th presidential trip – but it came at a time of ever-increasing competition from China and Russia, and growing resentment of the close economic ties between France and its former colonial, which some see as a form of continued exploitation.

And he insisted that he would come back,

again and again, to a continent that he regards as a crucial partner for Europe in tackling major global issues over the decades ahead.

Although Ukraine inevitably dominates the international diplomatic agenda, Macron believes that Paris and Brussels cannot afford to neglect Africa. It presents challenges and huge development opportunities, with a youthful dynamism that, he argues, will be a huge contributor to Europe's own future growth.

France's president is also acutely aware of how other nations are seeking to extend their own influence south of the Sahara.

Russia, hoping to rebuild the influence it had lost since the Cold War decades, is offering security support to governments that feel under threat or isolated from the internation-

al mainstream: mercenaries from the Kremlin-linked military contractor Wagner are now operating in Mali and the Central African Republic, where they have been accused of human rights abuses.

China is a massive funder and builder of infrastructure, albeit on terms that Macron fears could trap some countries in debt crisis. Turkey and India are increasingly active too.

And across the region, popular anti-French sentiment is fanned by lively social media messaging, to which Paris has so far found no effective response.

In a lengthy speech last week, the president reasserted his own strategy to sustain a role

...Continued on Page 26

africa lens

Continued from Page 25

for France in this increasingly competitive arena. It was a message addressed both to Africans and to his own domestic audience. He does not think the French should try to match the Russian security effort by re-expanding its own military presence to match what Moscow offers. In any case, that would hardly be an option when Paris has been forced to pull its troops out of Mali and Burkina Faso, where the military junta now in charge are seeking to distance themselves from the former colonial power in both countries.

Instead, he aims to re-orient French support to focus more on training and technical back-up for African armed forces, with troop numbers reduced and programmes of military collaboration tailored to the specific requests of individual countries.

Macron took that policy a step further, announcing that the remaining French bases in Africa – in Senegal, Ivory Coast and Gabon – would now be co-managed and shared with the forces of the host nations, and even available to welcome other external partners if those governments wished. Only the base in Djibouti, strategically located at the mouth of the Red Sea, will remain exclusively French.

He pointed out that the base in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, is well positioned for training troops from the various West African states now collaborating in efforts to prevent jihadist groups in the Sahel from pushing south towards the coast. But he is also anxious to pursue the diversification of French engagement across a much broader canvas, touching culture, history, immigration, trade, development and even reform of the CFA franc — a currency used by 14 countries and pegged to the euro under a guarantee provided by Paris.

There is growing opposition to the use of this currency, which some see as a form of neo-colonialism, although its supporters say it helps ensure financial stability.

Macron first launched this approach in a high-profile Africa speech back in November 2017, in front of an audience of students in a lecture theatre at Ouagadougou University in Burkina Faso. And he has pursued it over the past five years, in an effort to transform perceptions from both sides. Previous governments in Paris, particularly in the 1990s, had already sought to move away from the old network of mutually complacent vested special connections between African and French elites encapsulated in the term “Françafrique”, shifting instead towards stronger support for democracy and grassroots development.

However, Macron has gone further in confronting the painful and sometimes shameful episodes of the past, commissioning historians to produce reports unsparing in their examination of France's track record in the war over Algerian independence and the events surrounding the Rwandan genocide of 1994.

A programme of returning treasures looted during the colonial era has already seen the return home of a totemic Senegalese sword

Macron out to stem Russian, Chinese influence in Africa



President Emmanuel Macron poses for selfies as he meets with guests following a concert by the Kinshasa Symphonic Orchestra at the French Institute in Kinshasa on March 4.



President Emmanuel Macron and Congo's Denis Sassou Nguesso address a declaration at the presidential palace of Brazzaville, on March 3.



President Emmanuel Macron is welcomed by Angola's Joao Lourenço at the Casa Rosada presidential palace, in Luanda on March 3.

and part of a Malagasy royal throne, while artefacts looted from the kingdom of Dahomey have been sent back to Benin and arrangements have been made for the return of an iconic Ivorian drum. In parallel with this effort at reconciliation over past history, Macron has been seeking to deepen today's cultural connections and exchange of ideas. He has announced schemes to promote sports training and to ease access to visas for Africans to pursue post-graduate study in France.

However, the public impact of these initiatives, particularly in the eyes of African public opinion, has been largely lost during years when the most prominent dimension of French engagement has been the military struggle against militant groups in the Sahel.

Growing controversy came to surround the operations of the French force, Barkhane, finally withdrawn from Mali in August last year.

This has fuelled an upsurge in populist nationalism in some countries and a more generalised resentment of France across most of Francophone West and Central Africa, particularly among urban youth.

Having instigated a shift towards a lower profile and more collaborative military approach, Macron is trying to use this week's four-country tour to reinvigorate this broader reform and change agenda. But even this trip will be beset by familiar political complications. There have been anti-French demonstrations in the Democratic Republic of Congo ahead of his visit. Furthermore, opponents of Gabon's President Ali Bongo Ondimba and DR Congo's President Félix Tshisekedi have been complaining that Macron's visit could be read as interference to bolster the image of these incumbent rulers in an election year.

—BBC

global lens

■ HE WOOS BLUE COLLAR AMERICANS WITH PROPOSALS TO PROTECT THEIR HEALTH CARE

JOE BIDEN'S RE-ELECTION JUGGERNAUT

US President's budget blueprint shows a strategy to extend the solvency of Medicare, the government-funded health insurance programme for seniors 'by at least 25 years' — by raising taxes on upper tier households

● WASHINGTON

President Joe Biden leaned harder into a — still unofficial — reelection campaign last week, making a pitch to older, blue collar Americans with proposals to protect their health care by taxing the wealthy.

His budget blueprint shows a strategy to extend the solvency of Medicare, the government-funded health insurance programme for seniors “by at least 25 years” — by raising taxes on upper tier households.

“Let’s ask the wealthiest to pay just a little bit more of their fair share, to strengthen Medicare for everyone over the long term,” the 80-year-old president wrote in a *New York Times* column accompanying the proposals.

With Republicans in charge of the House of Representatives, the Democratic president’s proposals will face a bitter spending fight in Congress — a situation Biden seems ready to wield for his political advantage. “For decades, I’ve listened to my Republican friends claim that the

only way to be serious about preserving Medicare is to cut benefits,” he wrote in the *Times*. “The budget I am releasing this week will make the Medicare trust fund solvent beyond 2050 without cutting a penny in benefits,” he promised.

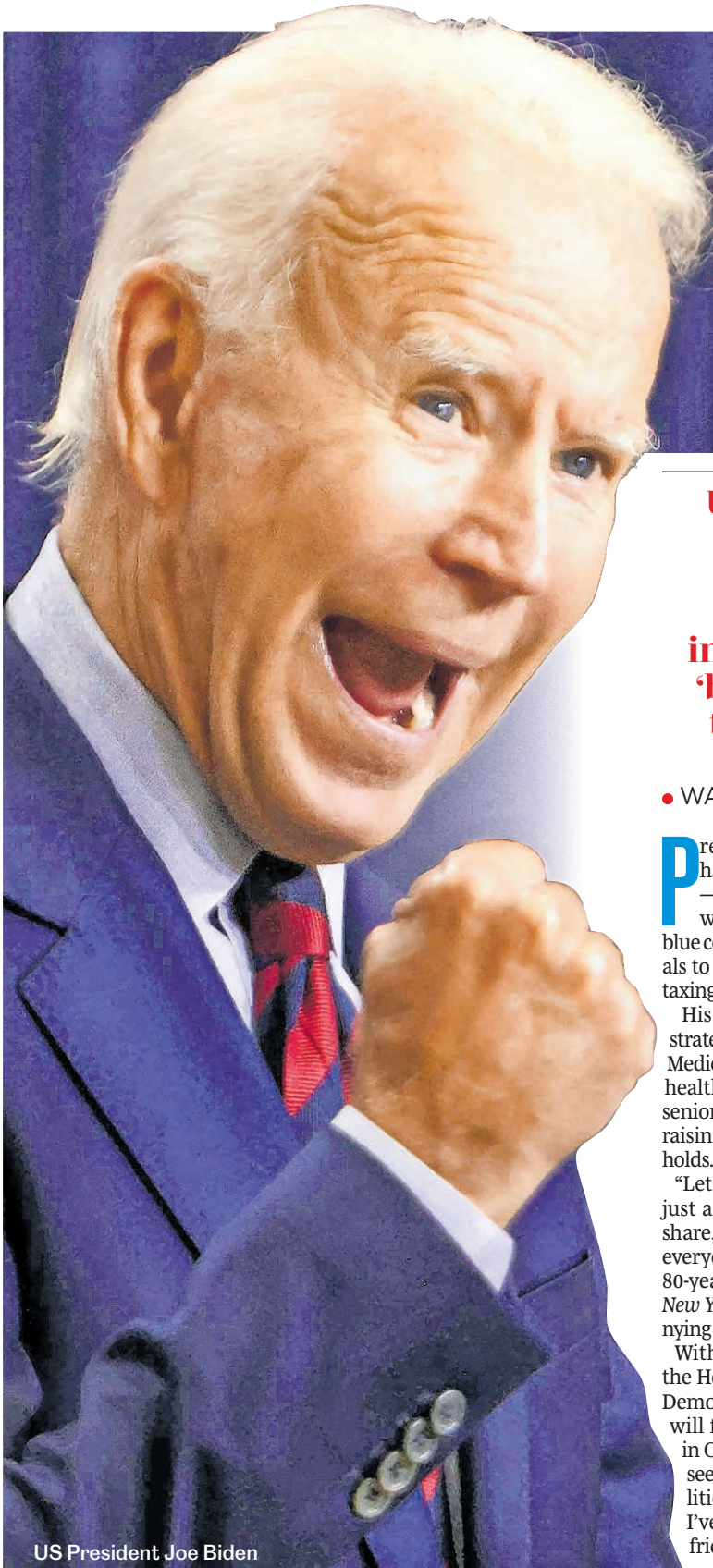
More than 60 million people in the United States, mostly those over age 65, rely on Medicare for their health insurance. According to the White House, the programme is at risk of running out of money by 2028 without intervention. Biden’s plan would increase the Medicare tax rate from 3.8 per cent to 5.0 per cent on income above \$400,000 per year.

“These are common-sense changes that I’m confident an overwhelming majority of Americans support,” Biden wrote.

“Republican plans that protect billionaires from a penny more in taxes — but won’t protect a retired firefighter’s hard-earned Medicare benefits — are just detached from the reality that hardworking families live with every day,” he wrote.

Previewing a Republican line of attack, one lawmaker hit back im-

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US President Joe Biden

global lens

Biden woos seniors as DeSantis courts the right wing

Continued from Page 27

mediately at the plan. “Biden’s budget does nothing to legitimately address lowering our debilitating national debt,” tweeted Senator Mike Braun. “At some point, the numbers will catch up to us — and that will be (a) very bad day for Americans.”

Biden, who has said he “intends” to seek a second term but has not officially announced a reelection bid, is fine-tuning his message to appeal to a very specific demographic: working-class white people without a college degree — and older voters in particular.

The Medicare proposal is an attempt to win some of them to his side in 2024 — well aware that older white Americans have tended for the past two decades to vote Republican. In 2020, Biden won the election in large part due to support from Black people and university graduates.

A recent *Washington Post/ABC* poll found that only 31 per cent of voters without a college diploma are satisfied with his economic policy, against 50 per cent among those with a degree. In 2016 and again in 2020, around two-thirds of white voters without a college degree opted for Donald Trump, who has already launched a campaign for the next election.

Since his State of the Union address to Congress on February 7 — seen as the informal start of his reelection quest — Biden has worked to solidify an image of himself as a man of the people, a regular guy who can sympathise with families struggling to make ends meet. He frequently references his father, who Biden depicts as an example of proud, hardworking folk, often saying to him: “Joey, a job is about a lot more than a paycheck. It’s about your dignity.”

Biden also regularly alludes to his no-frills childhood home in Pennsylvania — three rooms for his parents, four children and a grandfather — which he bills as certifying his middle-class credentials.

Trump, for his part, has developed his own plan to attract white working-class voters. In a speech Saturday at a conference of conservatives, he pounced on economic and social issues, insisting America is going down the tubes and only he can save it.



Florida Governor Ron DeSantis speaks to guests at the Republican Jewish Coalition Annual Leadership Meeting on November 19, 2022 in Las Vegas. Below: Former President Donald Trump PHOTOS | AFP



Billing himself as a defender of Social Security and Medicare spending puts Trump in a position to take jabs at other potential Republican presidential hopefuls who favour leaner government spending. Meanwhile, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis positioned himself as the leading Republican alternative to Trump by launching a legislative state session that offers red meat to the party base.

A darling of the populist right, the 44-year-old DeSantis — who has not yet entered the 2024 presidential race — has devoted much of his time as governor to bashing Democrats for liberalism and “wokeness”.

His “State of the State” address kicked off a session aiming to expand gun rights, curb diversity efforts at universities and end the “authoritarianism” of Covid-19 vaccine mandates — all issues that play well in the battle for the Republican

nomination. “Now is not the time to rest on our laurels. We have the opportunity and indeed the responsibility to swing for the fences so that we can ensure Florida remains number one,” DeSantis said in his address in state capital Tallahassee.

“Don’t worry about the chattering class, ignore all the background noise, keep the compass set to the true north,” he added.

“We will hold the line, we won’t back down. And I can promise you this: You ain’t seen nothing yet.”

Under DeSantis, state lawmakers are looking at extending a ban on classroom discussion of sexuality and gender identity — currently in effect through third grade — to eighth grade children, who are typically 12 or 13 years old.

And Republicans filed a bill ahead of DeSantis’s speech that would lower the legal abortion threshold from 15 weeks to six, making the Sunshine State one of the country’s most restrictive.

“Florida’s proposed bill would ban abortion before many women know if they are pregnant, virtually eliminating a woman’s right to make health care decisions about her own body,” White House spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre said, excoriating the “wrong and out of touch” proposal.

Republicans control both chambers of congress in Tallahassee, so

little significant opposition is expected to any of the programme.

The address came with DeSantis attempting to sell Republicans a version of Trumpism without the chaos that engulfed the White House of the twice-impeached former president who is running again for the White House.

Florida is facing a cost-of-living crisis, with soaring rents and an estimated 2.6 million residents lacking health care insurance.

But DeSantis offered an upbeat assessment of the state’s progress that drew a sharp contrast with Trump’s doom-mongering keynote Saturday at the conservative CPAC conference in suburban Washington.

DeSantis’s education initiatives and other right-wing red meat, such as a proposal to allow Floridians to carry concealed weapons without a permit or training, place him firmly in the Trump lane, however.

And they would be sure to get him noticed in a crowded primary field where he to jump into the race, guaranteeing him more of the glowing coverage he earned in conservative media for opposing President Joe Biden’s pandemic health curbs.

Hours before the “State of the State,” Trump took to his Truth Social platform and swiped at DeSantis, reprising one of his many nicknames for his rival. “FLORIDA WAS DOING GREAT FOR MANY YEARS, LONG BEFORE RON DESANCTUS GOT THERE,” Trump blared.

DeSantis has already signed into law measures stripping Walt Disney World of its self-governing status in a move seen as revenge for the entertainment giant’s criticism of Florida’s effort to restrict the teaching of sexuality and gender ideology. “We defied the experts, we bucked the elites,” he said. “We did it our way, the Florida way, and the result is that we are the number one destination for fellow Americans who are looking for a better life.”

But in the presidential stakes, the former US congressman is keeping his powder dry for now, preferring touting his new memoir around the country to joining the primary season fray. At a Sunday event in Democratic-led California, DeSantis boasted of a “great American exodus” from liberal to conservative states and later this week travels to Iowa, the host of 2024’s first presidential nominating contest.

— AFP

global lens

■ HE NOTCHED HIS FIRST OSCAR NOD FOR THE 1967 FILM 'VALLEY OF THE DOLLS'

• LONDON

From *Star Wars* to *Jaws* to *Schindler's List*, John Williams has written many of the most instantly recognisable scores in cinema history.

The 91-year-old is already the oldest person to receive an Oscar nomination for a competitive award, which he earned thanks to his spare yet poignant compositions for Steven Spielberg's *The Fabelmans*.

With 53 total nods, Williams has more Academy Award nominations than any other living person, and is second only to Walt Disney, who had 59. And if he gets another statuette on Sunday, which would be his sixth, he will become the oldest person ever to triumph in any competitive category. The record is currently held by screenwriter James Ivory, who was 89 when he won.

It "seems unreal that anybody could be that old and working that long", Williams recently told *NBC News*, adding: "It's very exciting, even after 53 years." "I'm very pleased, I think it's a human thing — the gratification of any kind of appreciation of one's work." Out of the dozens of nominations over the course of his extraordinary career, the composer won Academy Awards for the original *Star Wars*, *Fiddler on the Roof* and three films by Spielberg, with whom he is closely associated — *Jaws*, *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* and *Schindler's List*. He's even competed against himself multiple times for Oscars glory.

William is known for his grand neo-Romantic scores in the fashion of Wagner, a contrast to the more experimental fare prevalent among many modern composers outside Hollywood. But his work is also steeped in mid-century influences including jazz and popular American standards. Williams holds he's not as Wagnerian as his music might indicate, but admits the 19th century German giant's influence on Hollywood's early composers, and therefore his own, is palpable.

"Wagner lives with us here — you can't escape it," he told *The New Yorker* in 2020.

"I have been in the big river swimming with all of them." Williams was born on February 8, 1932 in New York's Queens borough to a percussionist father,

HOLLYWOOD: THE NIGHT OF DESTINY

Movie maestro John Williams goes for more history at Oscar awards



John Williams (left) and director/producer Steven Spielberg attend the premiere of Disney's "The BFG" at El Capitan in Hollywood, California, on June 20, 2016. From "Star Wars" to "Jaws" to "Schindler's List," Williams has written many of the most instantly recognisable scores in cinema history.

and was the eldest of four children. The family moved to Los Angeles in 1948, where Williams later studied composition and took a semester of jazz band at Los Angeles City College.

While in the Air Force, he played both piano and brass while arranging music for the service's band. Afterwards, he moved to New York, where he enrolled at the prestigious Juilliard school to

study piano. Though he aspired to be a concert pianist, it became clear to Williams that composition was his true forte.

He moved back to LA, where he worked on orchestrations at film studios — earning plaudits for his range — and as a session pianist, including for the film adaptation of Leonard Bernstein's *West Side Story*. Williams notched his first Oscar nod for the 1967 film *Val-*

ley of the Dolls, and won his first in 1972 for *Fiddler on the Roof*.

His momentous partnership with Spielberg began in the early 1970s, when the soon-to-be household name director approached him to score his debut, *The Sugarland Express*. Spielberg approached him once more to work on his second film, *Jaws*. The menacing two-note ostinato Williams composed for the film has practically become synonymous with fear itself: "John Williams actually is the teeth of *Jaws*," Spielberg said last year at a concert for the composer's 90th birthday.

The pair then worked on *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and a decades-long creative partnership unfurled. At the Williams birthday celebration in Washington, Spielberg dubbed their relationship "the single greatest collaboration of my career and one of the deepest friendships of my life. Through the medium of movies, John has popularized motion picture scores more than any other composer in history".

Spielberg also introduced Williams to one George Lucas — it would become another iconic collaboration that spawned perhaps the most recognisable film score ever. Several of Williams' *Star Wars* compositions are prime examples of leitmotif, with musical cues tying together the vast, character-rich story. "He has written the soundtrack of our lives," conductor Gustavo Dudamel told *The New York Times*. "When we listen to a melody of John's, we go back to a time, to a taste, to a smell."

"All our senses go back to a moment." Other credits from Williams' more than 100 film scores include the music for 1978's *Superman*, the first three *Harry Potter* films and a number of *Indiana Jones* films. "Harrison Ford made Indiana Jones into an iconic action hero, but John made us believe in adventure again, through that pulse-pounding march," said Spielberg. Off-screen, he is responsible for the *Olympic Fanfare and Theme* first composed for the 1984 Summer Games in Los Angeles and used ever since on US broadcasts. Williams has recently indicated he might take a step back from film scoring, giving more energy to conducting and composing concert music.

—AFP

O B I T

■ POLITICAL LEGENDS

● BY JOHN KAMAU

When she was elected into Parliament as first woman MP following the December 6, 1969 General Election, Grace Onyango had outlived one person who wanted to curtail her rise: Tom Mboya, who had been assassinated on July 5, 1969. That she was an iron lady was not in doubt, though by the time she died this week she had largely been forgotten in political circles.

Mboya had, during the 1968 civic elections, staged a campaign against Onyango's election as mayor, linking her to political rival Jaramogi Oginga Odinga's Kenya People's Union (KPU). But Onyango told Mboya off and invited him to an open debate "to determine who is popular in Kisumu Town". Mboya did not rise to the challenge, and Onyango later remarked that he was "over-excited about my political influence in Kisumu".

Born in 1927 in Siaya, Onyango was elected a councillor in 1964 to represent Kaloleni Ward. The following year, as her popularity rose, she was elected mayor after the death of Mathias Ondiek, the first African mayor of Kisumu municipality. Kisumu was the bedrock of national politics as Jaramogi and Mboya wrestled to gain control of Kanu. Finally, Mboya got the upper hand and Odinga formed the opposition KPU.

Onyango found herself caught between the radical fights between KPU and Kanu, and in particular two warring Luo elders – Paul Mboya (unre-

THE IRON LADY OF KENYAN POLITICS

Kenya's first woman MP, Grace Onyango, survived a frightening period of detention, violence against women, and misogyny

lated to Tom Mboya) and Jaramogi. As a result, she decided to leave the council in 1967, and as she would later remark, she did not want to belong to any party. She was also under pressure from Tom Mboya, the influential Minister for Economic Planning and Development and Kanu's Secretary-General, who questioned her loyalty. "How long can she go bluffing? Is she KPU or is she Kanu...?" he asked.

With the detention of Jaramogi and almost all elite KPU supporters after the 1969 Kisumu riots triggered by the killing of several civilians in the lakeside town, Onyango was one of the top figures spared. She had the support of Paul Mboya – the respected elder – in her bid for a parliamentary seat. Her election introduced an element that had been missing in the House: women's representation. That she opened a small window and inspired a generation of many other women to confront the masculine Parliament is the history she made. Soon, in the 1974 General Election, she would be joined by Phoebe Asiyi, the founding president of Maendeleo ya Wanawake, whom Paul Mboya also supported.

In Parliament, Onyango made her mark during the discussion of

the Development Plan 1970- 1974, which was to succeed the famous Sessional Paper No 10 titled *African Socialism and its Application to Development*. While this was Kenyatta's grand scheme to justify his ideological position (or lack of it), Onyango dismissed the well-publicised Sessional Paper as a "failure" and asked Parliament to reject the proposed Development Plan. Both papers were Tom Mboya's brainchild, and she undoubtedly wanted to cast him as a failure.

Onyango did not just dismiss the Development Plan but suggested an amendment that would only "note" it rather than "adopt" it as requested. "Before we allow this Development Plan to fail as Sessional Paper No 10 failed," she said, "We would like to have some people with rural area development (expertise) to try and work on it." Onyango proposed the formation of a select committee to study the document, and went ahead to name the members she wanted on it. They included some of the radical names of the 1970s: Elijah Mwangale, Koigi wa Wamwere, Jean Marie Serony, Brown Tsuma, Yunis Ali, Juma Boy, Meshack Sompisha, Gideon Mutiso and Arthur Magugu. Her bone of contention with the Development Plan was that it had left out Kisumu, which was not earmarked for any project during the period.

While supporting Onyango's proposal, Mutiso, a known Jaramogi ally, said: "There is no need giving us a bogus document here which does not tell us what is going to happen from 1970 to 1974 in Maasai or in Ukambani or in any other place."

Though her bid failed, Onyango had left a mark. In Parliament, she reminded the MPs that she represented all women and men in her Kisumu Town Constituency. But whether she was radicalised enough depended on how she navigated some issues. Nakuru North

MP Koigi wa Wamwere would later claim that Onyango was not vocal enough when the question of detainees was raised.

In his book, *I Refuse to Die*, Koigi says: "For some MPs, even the survival of loved ones could be sacrificed upon the altar of self-interest. Grace Onyango was an MP and a deputy speaker in Parliament for many years. She was also the sister of Ochola Achola, the detainee whom President Kenyatta would not release until he went completely crazy in prison. When I took a motion to Parliament condemning indefinite imprisonment, the horrible conditions under which we were kept and denial of work after release, Grace Onyango did not say a word about how her brother was driven to insanity by detention."

But those were tough times.

As the secretary-general of the Paul Mboya-led Luo Union (East Africa), a powerful patriarchal organisation then, she took on a group led by William Odongo Omamo in July 1978 that had organised a coup against Mboya. Declared Onyango: "The group led by Omamo are free to launch themselves into a new association of their own choice – keeping their hands off Luo Union." She added: "Our records do not have a Mr Omamo as one of our members."

She distinguished herself as a brilliant debater in the august House. During a discussion on the Marriage Bill in 1979, Onyango stood firm as traditionalists tried to water down some clauses that disallowed violence against women. The most vocal traditionalist was Wafula Wabuge, who called for deletion of a clause stating that "no spouse shall have any right to inflict corporal punishment on the other". To Wabuge, this clause was "unnecessary" since "in our custom, if you do not slap your wife, she will not know that you love her..."

To which Onyango interjected: "Is the honourable member trying to explain to the House that when a wife is beaten to the extent of even breaking her ribs or legs, then that is an act of love?" "Unless you do that," Wabuge retorted, "your wife will not even love you... even my colleague Mrs Grace Onyango knows this. She was at one time slapped." That was the political space she was operating in – a frightening period of detention, violence against women, and misogyny. Only an iron lady could have survived it.

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Grace Onyango, the first woman to be elected Mayor of Kisumu.

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