

THE Weekly Review

For the Thinking Person

ISSUE NO. 44 | July 2, 2023 FREE WITH 'SUNDAY NATION'



SABA SABA MOMENT

Raila seeks to rekindle the revolutionary movement of the '90s in his campaign against the punitive Finance Act. July 7 is a day revered for unprecedented defiance in a brutal police-state era, when even with their leaders arrested, thousands of citizens heeded calls to attend pro-multiparty rallies in Nairobi



Join Clare Karatu on

Pishi

Bomba

COOK. EAT. ENJOY

Sundays
6:30PM



www.ntvkenya.co.ke

GOTV
Channel 91

DSTV
Channel 271

STARTIMES
Channel 106

ZUKU
Channel 13

SIGNET | ADN

letter from the editor

Inside

8 THE SABA SABA SPIRIT: As Raila plans demonstrations against the government on July 7, questions remain about whether he can rekindle the revolutionary spirit of the 1990s.

10 CHANGING COURSE: A new strategy to create a nationwide movement of change seeks to remove Raila as the face of the opposition.

22 UK-KENYA WAR GAMES: As a parliamentary committee prepares to investigate British army activities in Kenya, it remains to be seen how much dirt they can dig up.

27 A MAVERICK'S TRAGIC END: Stockton Rush's Titanic mission drew scrutiny from industry experts, who warned that he was cutting corners, putting innovation ahead of safety and risking potentially catastrophic results.



'Fuliza' economy: A nation of beggars and swindlers

Kenya has never recovered from the tumultuous days of the Covid-19 lockdown, which occasioned great economic and social damage. The pandemic caused massive job losses, breakup of young families and accumulation of debt. No palliative treatment has been preferred to heal it, nor has any serious study been commissioned to explore the mental anguish and damage it brought forth.

The rather comfortable leadership, well-fed and glossy skinned, is oblivious to this truth. For them, everything moves on and the only thing we get are promises, coming at us like an avalanche. We are assured that things will get better, perhaps in two years to come. It is a bitter pill, too bitter for sore Kenyan throats to swallow.

A majority of Kenyans were raised in a largely rural economy, where life was simple and hard work paid. Although salaries were low, parents paid school fees on time, and ensured there were enough supplies at home. Marriages lasted, there was food on the farms and social services and amenities were available. All this changed in the mid-90s, when the Bretton Woods institutions took a bigger role in controlling economies of developing countries.

The Structural Adjustment Programmes took away most of the social services the government provided and which made life bearable. The latest Central Bank Report on the status of the economy shows that bad loans have hit Sh570 billion. Of these, personal and household loans account for Sh75 billion. Kenyans are borrowing to survive, which signals financial distress.

High inflation – primarily driven by increased food, fuel, electricity and cooking gas prices – alongside a raft of new taxes, are hurting household incomes. During the



Allan Buluku

But we must beware of the social effects of the crazy rise in the cost of living. Those that have reached the end of their tether are seeking to get out of this cauldron to look for a life outside Kenya, while those who cannot afford to move are turning to criminal activity. This pressurised container needs an economic vent - now.

campaigns last year, the Kenya Kwanza coalition's Musalia Mudavadi, a former Finance Minister in the 1990s, said a majority of Kenyans were fugitives from Fuliza. Fuliza is a Safaricom service that allows subscribers to complete mobile money transactions even when they don't have enough funds in their mobile money accounts – a sort of overdraft facility. They "fuliza" about Sh1.6 billion daily to stay afloat.

President William Ruto's administration started the Hustler Fund and the debt trend has grown even larger on that platform. There are plenty of borrowers but their power to pay is getting weaker by the day. Many defaulters unwillingly keep carrying the loans because they lack the ability to pay in the stipulated time. The number of Kenyans listed

as credit defaulters by the CRB is staggering and many find getting out of these shackles of debt difficult. It costs KSh2,500 to be removed from the blacklist, even if the amount defaulted on was KSh500.

We can either pull ourselves out of this hole by learning from the past, or continue digging. President Bill Clinton took the reins when the US was in recession in 1992. He tackled the second highest fiscal deficit in the country since World War II and triggered the turnaround of a scenario akin to Kenya's today. How did he do it? A tight fiscal stance was implemented simultaneously with an expansionary monetary policy and the US regained prosperity.

President Mwai Kibaki did the same between 2002 and 2013, and moved GDP growth from 0.5 per cent to 8.4 per cent by 2010, cutting both fiscal spending and borrowing of domestic debt. He combined increased taxation with efficiency of tax administration and reduced public debt from 64.1 per cent of GDP to 38 per cent. Eventually, Kibaki financed about 90 per cent of the budget from Kenya's own revenues.

Unfortunately, there are many hungry people in the government and we have already sniffed a horrible stench emanating from some procurement deals.

We must beware of the social effects of the crazy rise in the cost of living. Those that have reached the end of their tether are seeking to get out of this cauldron and to look for a life outside Kenya, while those who cannot afford to move are turning to criminal activity. This pressurised container needs an economic vent — now.

abuluku@ke.nationmedia.com

kenya lens

■ MISGUIDED PROPOSALS

TREASURY'S BLUNDERS



To understand the standard policy interests of the National Treasury and the Central Bank of Kenya that need coordination, the former looks to enjoy access to borrowing to address its fiscal deficits, while the CBK should look to regulate the lending and risk-taking behaviour of financial intermediaries and financial market participants to tame and monitor inflationary and exchange rate outcomes of fiscal spending.

The macro-policy combination of Kenya Kwanza's first budget will predictably dash economic recovery and growth in a misapplication that has yielded dismal results around the world

● BY MBUI WAGACHA

Theo's Budget: A friend regaled me weeks ago with Bill Cosby's 2009-episode, *Theo's Budget*, or Economics 101. It details a father's budgetary lesson to his not-so-ambitious son, evading college for the low-paying life of 'regular people'. The father, offering US\$1,200 pock-

et money, opens his son's eyes to the realities of income and taxation in a mock game of cards using US\$ notes. First, he snatches \$350 for taxes, saying, "the government comes for the regular people first". The son is left with \$200 after all the deductions and watches his father snatch even that, "and you haven't eaten yet". Just as Theo runs out of tarmac,

Kenya's budget debates reminded me of a famed Gikūyū cautionary saying for those who do not heed advice: *Mūrega akīrwo ndaregaga akīhetwo* (he who rejects advice, shouldn't blame anyone for his failures).

No one can begrudge the government mandarins their hard work on an economy teeming with distortions. Disappointing-

ly, the government never gets the memo: Red ink in public finances costs the nation dearly, just as corruption eats it from within. Cosby's parenting resonates with the 2023-24 budget. Many struggle to eat, and the carpet of poverty spreads nationwide while budgets disregard economic tools for a plummeting econo-

Continued on Page 6

kenya lens

The problem with the Treasury's policies

Continued from Page 5

my. Wrong-footed and without rhyme or reason, the budget is defined by the headline flaw of an impoverishing macroeconomic policy mix that tightens both sides: The fiscal side increases taxes but only half-heartedly controls government spending. President William Ruto's government itself remains a big spender. For a fiscal deficit of KSh718 billion (4.4 per cent of GDP) including grants, external borrowing is scaled back sharply to KSh131.5 billion (0.8 per cent of GDP), leaving domestic borrowing of KSh586.5 billion (3.6 per cent of GDP).

On the monetary side, the CBK's new leadership had hardly taken their seats before signalling the highest costs of borrowing since 2015, which will slow economic growth. The governor and the Monetary Policy Committee swung a policy interest rate of 10.5 per cent, along with earlier misadventures in controversial monetary policy tinkering to issue bonds for US dollars – wait a minute for this.

The combined fiscal/monetary tightening stance ignores the macroeconomics of aligning Kenya's business cycle to appropriate headline macro-policy to propel sustainable growth. In sum, the double tightening contracts the economy while growth is the only path out of the current slump. Appropriate macro-choices exist that work forcefully in charting economic recovery.

Coherence elusive

Fiscal policy smooths taxation over time (effecting transfers and distributive effects among households and sectors), with strong and direct influences on aggregate demand and acting through variations in spending and a metric called the fiscal multiplier. Counterpart monetary policy also affects transfers, but differently: For example, among creditors, credit shares to government and private sector, returns to banks, and players in the securities market.

While central banks primarily regulate financial markets and



While central banks primarily regulate financial markets and target inflation through money creation, the optimal fiscal/monetary policy mix sets the stage in an interaction that affects prospects for short-to-medium-term and long-run growth. With the appropriate mix, a rise in output brings huge payoffs in external balances, fiscal sustainability, lower deficits, employment and inflation control. Currently, fiscal sustainability as the elephant in the room poses severe sovereign debt risks and erosion of confidence among investors, which will persist until we upgrade our aspirations.

target inflation through money creation, the optimal fiscal/monetary policy mix sets the stage in an interaction that affects prospects for short-to-medium-term and long-run growth. With the appropriate mix, a rise in output brings huge payoffs in external balances, fiscal sustainability, lower deficits, employment and inflation control. Currently, fiscal sustainability as the elephant in the room poses severe sovereign debt risks and erosion of confidence among investors, which will persist until we upgrade our aspirations.

President Bill Clinton over 1991-1998 best demonstrated the power of coherent policy mix, taking power under the cloud of the 1990-91 US recession. In his tough macro-policy mix choices, he addressed the second highest fiscal deficit (4.5 per cent of GDP) in the US since WW2, working with Federal Reserve Chairman Allan Greenspan to trigger the turnaround of a scenario akin to Kenya's today. A tight fiscal stance

was implemented simultaneously with an expansionary monetary policy. Interest rates went down from 7.3 per cent in 1991 to 3.3 per cent in 1994 and the US regained prosperity.

In contrast, Kenya's President may be grossly misadvised to tol-

erate flawed policy choices. A double tightening will see both sides of policy fail together, and fail Kenyans by contracting the economy. One might even argue that in 21st Century economic management, little else works outside of the headline lessons of complementarity and adoption of appropriate policy mix under several applicable scenarios influencing households and the sectors, triggering the desired directions of the mix to achieve economic sustainability.

To understand the standard policy interests of the National Treasury and the CBK that need coordination, the former looks to enjoy access to borrowing to address its fiscal deficits, while the CBK should look to regulate the lending and risk-taking behaviour of financial intermediaries and financial market participants to tame and monitor inflationary and exchange rate outcomes of fiscal spending.

Kenya has only ever successfully applied this model during the

The uptick in the cost of credit at the CBK risks impeding recovery in other dimensions. Little of the interest rate hikes trickle down to savers on the liabilities side of commercial bank balance sheets. As the CBK oversees commercial banking regulations and also acts as government's fiscal agent, an interesting twist emerges on how far it will go to whet government appetite for borrowing the massive amounts in the 2023/24 budget (KSh586.5 billion, which is 3.6 per cent of GDP) without risking credibility of its monetary policy along with financial stability.

kenya lens

time of President Mwai Kibaki, from 2002-2013. He moved GDP growth from 0.5 per cent to 8.4 per cent by 2010, cutting both fiscal spending and borrowing of domestic debt; combining increased taxation with efficiency of tax administration; reducing public debt from 64.1 per cent of GDP to 38 per cent; and eventually financing about 90 per cent of the budget from Kenya's own revenues. In economics, this involved shifting the IS (investment-saving) curve to the left and LM (liquidity preference-money supply) curve to the right to achieve higher growth.

The 2023/24 combination, the first by the new regime, will predictably and vigorously dash economic recovery and growth in a misapplication that has yielded dismal results around the world. It will contract growth, revenues the Kenya government expects to collect, and stoke job cuts, poverty, and inflation.

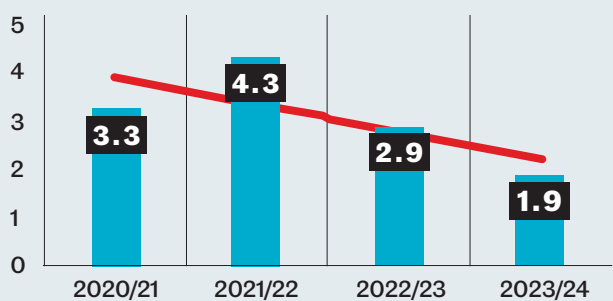
Government in the 2023/24 budget instead prioritises its own operational spending (including funding Prayer Breakfasts, not to mention collusive bleeding of the veins of the economy via corruption) and offtakes for debt repayments in place of a two-punch deficit reduction plan on the fiscal side – tax increases and spending cuts – while the CBK needs to lower interest rates to revive private sector economic activity.

This would switch economic activity to the private sector, paying off in investment, growth, employment, revenue collection and funding to tame our public debt mountain.

The tax raids to fund government business will trigger extreme contraction of economic activity leading, as in Theo's budget, to economic underperformance and the narrow prospects of Theo's 'ordinary people'.

Ironically, no sector faces prospects as bleak as agriculture, where the majority of the population (hustlers) subsist at the bottom of the pyramid, and where Kenya's key exports originate. The graph above maps the linear trend decline in budgetary shares in allocations to agriculture from Ordinary Revenues compared to recent years of budgetary proposals, where Ordinary Revenues rose in percentage allocations from KSh1,594.0 billion (3.3 per cent) in 2020/21, peaked

FIG.1 - ORDINARY REVENUE SHARES: (%) ALLOCATIONS TO AGRICULTURE - 2023/24 BUDGET COMPARED TO RECENT BUDGETS



at KSh1775.6 billion (4.3 per cent) then fell thereafter to the current projected KSh2.57 trillion (1.9 per cent) for 2023/24.

In effect, none of the populist promises for the 'ordinary people' – such as the Hustler Fund or affordable housing – will revive growth under the erroneous policy mix. Housing pointedly comes at the expense of a new tax on the small proportion of Kenya's labour-force engaged in salaried activities, as well as their employers. The vaunted 'bottom-up' construct also comes last in agriculture, which supports most of the Kenyan population.

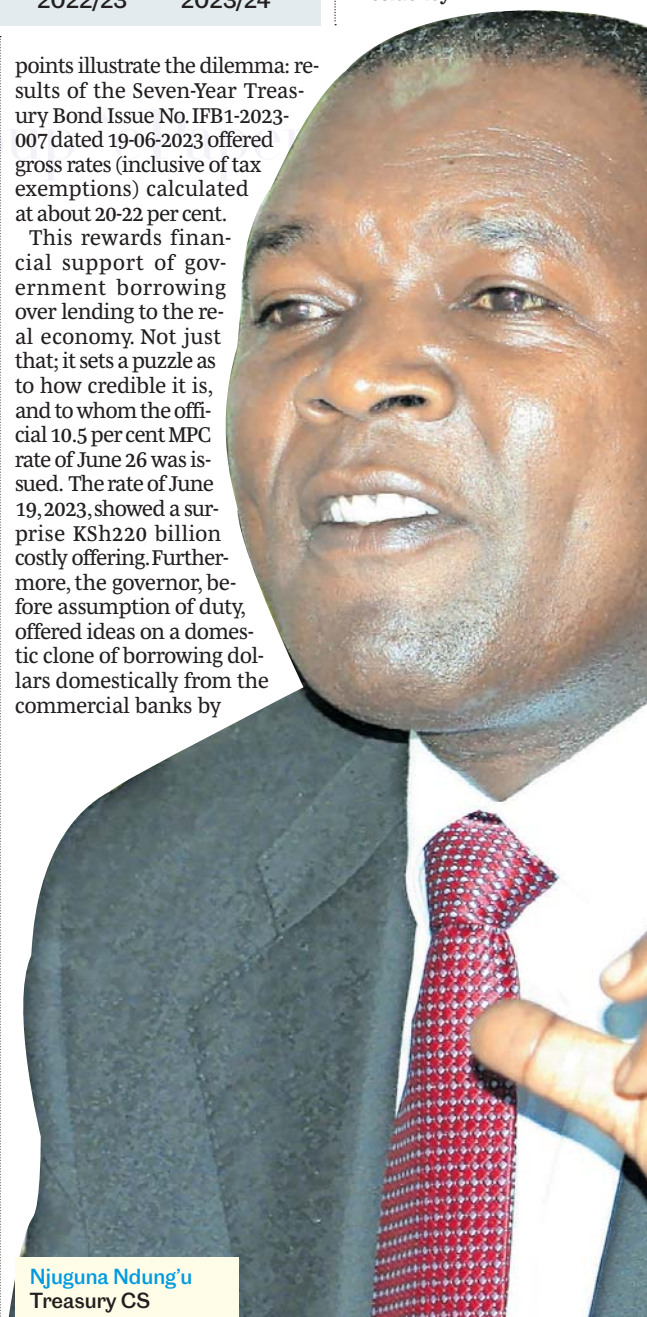
Brinkmanship or weak policies?

The effects of an inappropriate policy mix are predictable. Already, its classic results of failure of economic management are emerging, with the CBK hogging much of the distortion. A ballooning public debt is stoking a debasement of public debt and investor pricing of risks, side-stepping longer-dated lending to government in securities and looking to premiums to evade haircuts.

The uptick in the cost of credit at the CBK risks impeding recovery in other dimensions. Little of the interest rate hikes trickle down to savers on the liabilities side of commercial bank balance sheets. As the CBK oversees commercial banking regulations and also acts as government's fiscal agent, an interesting twist emerges on how far it will go to whet government appetite for borrowing the massive amounts in the KSh586.5 billion 2023/24 budget, which is 3.6 per cent of GDP, without risking credibility of its monetary policy along with financial stability. Two

bond issuance. That would contract money supply, raise interest rates and cause market chaos in key parts of Kenya's monetary base (currency in circulation plus reserves). Effectively, a bond for US\$ with augmented returns to holders would be a subsidy paid for with taxpayer funds. Forgive me for the sense of alarm akin to that of the exiting CBK governor.

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



Njuguna Ndung'u
Treasury CS

kenya lens

■ BACK TO KAMUKUNJI

THE SABA SABA SPIRIT

As Raila plans demonstrations on July 7 against Kenya Kwanza's Finance Act 2023, questions remain about whether he can rekindle the revolutionary movement of the early '90s

● BY MACHARIA GAITHO

Selecting July 7 as the launch date for demonstrations focussed on demands for repeal of the Finance Act 2023 that underpins President William Ruto's first budget might indicate opposition leader Raila Odinga's exquisite sense of timing. Or show up a veteran leader hopelessly trapped in history.

For an older generation, July 7, or *Saba Saba* (Seven Seven), marks that portentous day in 1990 which signalled the beginning of the end of one-party dictatorship in Kenya. It is a day revered for unprecedented defiance in a brutal police state era, when even with their leaders arrested, thousands of citizens heeded calls to attend a pro-democracy rally at the Kamukunji grounds to push the drive for an end to the dictatorship then exemplified by President Daniel arap Moi's monolithic Kanu machine.

Police out to disperse the crowds by whatever force necessary encountered a populace no longer cowering in fear. The running battles between police employing tear gas, truncheons and live bullets up against youthful, stone-throwing protesters not only became the stuff of legend, but was widely recognised as the turning point in the struggle for democracy and human rights.

That was the day leaders of the nascent democracy movement – including a youthful Raila himself; fellow Young Turks

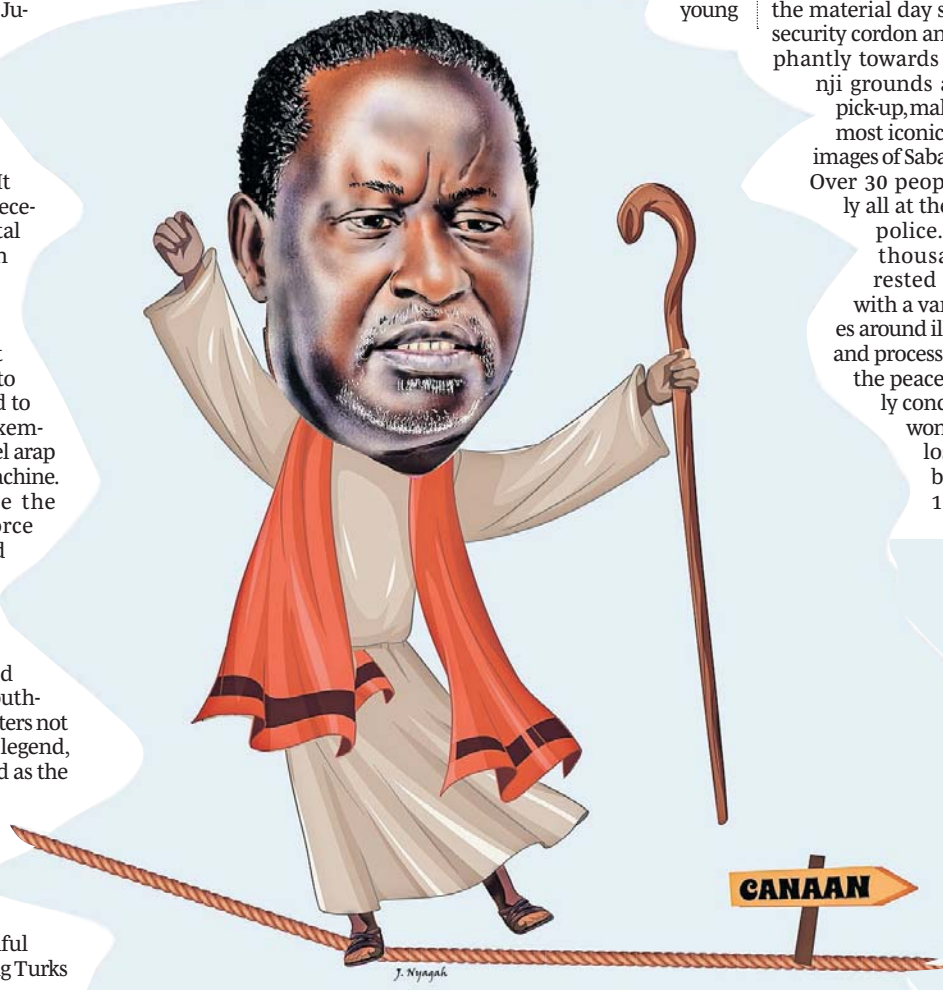
such as James Orengo, now Siaya Governor, and lawyers Paul Muite and Gitobu Imanyara, who both later became MPs; and campaign icons Kenneth Matiba, Charles Rubia, Martin Shikuku and Raila's father, Oginga Odinga – called a rally at Kamukunji to press the campaign launched four months earlier for revival of the multi-party system. The ral-

ly was declared illegal and on the eve of the day, key proponents Matiba, Rubia and Raila were arrested by state security agents and thrown into detention cells. Those were the days when the government had power to arrest and imprison without trial any person it so wished to restrict.

One of the lesser-known victims of the wave of arrests was a young

lawyer in Muite's law firm, Mohammed Ibrahim, now a Supreme Court judge. Muite managed to escape the dragnet and go into hiding, while a legal colleague, Gibson Kamau Kuria, managed to sneak out of the country just ahead of his pursuers. But a few of the key campaigners, Shikuku and Orengo being the most prominent, managed to elude the police and on the material day sneak past the security cordon and drive triumphantly towards the Kamukunji grounds atop an open pick-up, making one of the most iconic photographic images of Saba Saba.

Over 30 people died, nearly all at the hands of the police. More than a thousand were arrested and charged with a variety of offences around illegal assembly and processions, breach of the peace and disorderly conduct. The State won the battle but lost the war, for by the end of 1991, the once



kenya lens

impregnable Moi regime relented and acceded to demands for an end to the one-party system.

Since then, Saba Saba has been the rallying cry for numerous initiatives aimed at transformation of the constitutional, legal, economic and social landscape. This was most evident after Moi returned to power in 1992, when civil society luminaries led by lawyer and former political detainee and exile Willy Mutunga launched a drive for major constitutional reform to place the country on firmer democratic ground beyond mere repeal of Section 2A that had made Kanu the sole legal political party.

The campaign picked up steam ahead of the 1997 elections by choosing July 7 as the launching pad for monthly demonstrations, to be followed by *Nane Nane* (Eight Eight) on August 8, *Tisa Tisa* (Nine Nine) on September 9 and so on. The demonstrations, which turned into running battles with the police, combined with plans for a National Convention that aimed at proclaiming its 'sovereignty', forced Moi to give way. The outcome was the Inter-Parties Parliamentary Group talks that effected a number of limited constitutional reforms before the 1997 elections.

But the Spirit of Saba Saba, also referred to as the Spirit of Ufungamano after the church hall next to the University of Nairobi that was the nerve centre of the campaign, lived on. It was crucial to final realisation of the new Constitution in 2010 midwifed by President Mwai Kibaki and Raila, who was Prime Minister in the Grand Coalition government. It is thus easy to see the spirit Raila seeks to invoke by settling on the coming July 7 as a launchpad for a renewed series of demonstrations.

The opposition veteran had launched his demonstrations in March as part of continuing protests against Ruto's electoral victory. His key demand was 'Open the Servers', as he sought to prove his contention that scrutiny of the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission election results database would show that he was the actual winner of the August 2022 presidential poll. For good measure, he also sought to tap into growing public disenchantment with Ruto's Kenya Kwanza administration by demanding reductions in prices of foodstuffs, petrol, electricity and other cost-

of-living basics.

Eventually, Ruto conceded to some extent by agreeing to dialogue, which was to be driven by a 14-member parliamentary committee with equal numbers from the Kenya Kwanza coalition and the opposition Azimio la Umoja-One Kenya alliance.

The talks never really got going, and Raila had already suspended participation by the time the contentious Finance Bill – which details the revenue-raising and spending proposals of the Ruto government – made it to Parliament. Kenya Kwanza used its numerical muscle to force easy passage of the Bill with all the contentious taxation proposals intact, and that provided the perfect excuse for Raila to take to the streets again. It was at the public 'consultations' at the Kamukunji grounds last Tuesday that a series of resolutions were passed, including pulling out of the parliamentary talks and starting a series of nationwide demonstrations to press for recall of the taxation laws.

But it was not just about the Finance Bill. Speaker after speaker at the well-attended rally, dwelt on forcing Ruto out of power. Raila, his 2022 presidential election running-mate, Martha Karua, and other Azimio principals such as former Defence Cabinet Secretary Eugene Wamalwa and former Kakamega governor Wycliffe Oparanya, made it clear that the ultimate aim was a 'people power' ouster of the Kenya Kwanza regime. The Azimio luminaries may well be confident that in pushing through highly unpopular taxes, Ruto has given them the rope to hang him. They talked of extending protests that were previously confined to Nairobi and Kisumu to all parts of the country, citing the fact that high taxes and increased consumer prices hurt everybody, irrespective of party affiliation.

Raila gave a long history of Saba Saba, concluding that the spirit which forced strongman Moi to give way should have no trouble sweeping Ruto away. While there is certainly plenty of public discontent to exploit on the back of Ruto's failed election promise of immediate relief on cost of living, Raila might have neglected to factor in the fact that the bulk of his audience might have no Saba Saba memories to rekindle. July 7, 1990, will be 33 years

ago to the day come Saba Saba 2023. A quick review of video footage from last Tuesday's Kamukunji rally showed that a clear majority of those in attendance were young men and a few women in their late teens and, at best, early 20s. They were not yet born at the original Saba Saba, and therefore would have nothing to resonate with that date. Even those in their 40s present last week would in 1990 have been below mid-teen, and with very little recollection of the momentous events and their significance.

While Raila undoubtedly has a lot of grievances to capitalise on, he has to consider that the here and now would, for a majority of those he is calling out into the streets, be much more important than Saba Saba or the entire history of the multi-party campaign. Many of them would have no recollection or experience of life under the police state of the one-party regime.

Still, missteps of the Ruto regime around the dire state of the economy

provide a potent cause for any anti-government agitation. If lessons from the previous rounds of demonstrations are anything to go by, Nairobi and Kisumu, at least, have thousands of disaffected and angry youth just waiting for the signal to take to the streets. The sour aftermath of the Finance Act might provide fodder for captive ears in Mombasa and other parts of the coast region, western Kenya, eastern region, and probably pockets in some urban areas of Kenya Kwanza strongholds in the Rift Valley and Mount Kenya regions.

The intensity will depend on if Raila still has the capacity to mobilise, and the counter-measures government will deploy.



President William Ruto

kenya lens

■ AZIMIO LA UMOJA-ONE PARTY

CHANGING COURSE

A new strategy to create a nationwide movement of change seeks to remove Raila as the face of the opposition

● BY OSCAR OBONYO

Suppose former Prime Minister Raila Odinga takes a back seat, away from being the face of aggression against the William Ruto administration? Will this disarm the Kenya Kwanza brigade or will it weaken the opposition-led crusade that is heavily dependent on Raila's stature and political constituency countrywide?

These are some of the burning issues responsible for growing concern and dilemma within the opposition ranks. Frustrated that their "noble agenda" to save poor Kenyans heaving under the weight of increased taxation and the high cost of life is being trivialised and politicised because of the Odinga factor, the Azimio la Umoja-One Kenya coalition is reportedly plotting a shift in its game plan.

The Odinga-led group plans to change its approach from an anti-Ruto crusade to a massive national movement of change aimed at bringing all players on board – including civil

society, the clergy and even supporters of the President. Deputy Minority Leader of the Senate, Enoch Wambua, who is privy to the ongoing plot to revamp and refocus Azimio's campaign, says the new movement of change is a "partyless affair" and is for every Kenyan "who finds life unbearable".

But even as Azimio tries to reach out to other players, insiders say the political architecture of the grouping must be retained. This, they argue, is for purposes of operating in a structured manner: "At the end of the day, Raila remains the captain of our team, and alongside his two former running-mates, Kalonzo Musyoka and Martha Karua, the side is good and raring to go."

Still, there is this crop of politicians who feel the former Premier has stood with the ordinary Kenyans for far too long – a duty they regard as thankless because not all have rewarded him at the presidential ballot – and now want him to step back and let the electorate experience the consequences of their

choice. Those of this persuasion include Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) legislator Beatrice Elachi (Dagoretti North) and Kisii Senator Richard Onyonka, who opine that Odinga should allow the Ruto administration a free hand to run "their government" the way they deem it fit so that they can take full responsibility for their actions and any related consequences.

The vocal senator has even suggested – sarcastically – that they should let the President increase taxes to 100 per cent if he so wishes. The import of Onyonka's argument is that the Azimio legislators are increasingly viewing their boss as an impediment of sorts who is denying them the opportunity to nail the political enemy – Ruto.

In a way, they want the President handed enough rope to hang himself, but their team leader has a contrary approach. While appreciating Odinga's steadfastness in standing with Kenyans, Elachi argues that this approach will only place him in a very tough sit-

kenya lens

uation. She points out that, in the event that the Ruto administration forges ahead with this high taxation regime and breaks even after five years, Kenyans will accuse Odinga of trying to stand in the way of the Kenya Kwanza government. Elachi's and Onyonka's stand is shared by many within the Azimio fraternity, most of who are not as bold to openly speak their minds. There is a growing sense in which the politicians are concerned that their leader is too proactive in his dealings and instead want him to take a back seat, more like former President and Jubilee party leader Uhuru Kenyatta has done.

Kenyatta's hands-off approach is deemed by some as fairly safe and deceptive to political opponents. But those close to Odinga say that is not his style. They point out that their boss is a hands-on leader who leads from the front: "He is not the type of coach who prepares his team and sits back to monitor the game. Raila wants to stay on the touchline to give instructions to his team and egg them on," observes a senior Orange party official, who requested not to be named for fear of openly contradicting his party boss.

Noting that Odinga ordinarily does not shy away from controversy or adversity, the official explains the former PM's "weakness" as being too attached to his supporters, who have stood by him over the decades in his political career: "He will neither abandon them or let them suffer at the hands of another leader. He feels obligated to defend his people by doing something to correct the prevailing situation, even if it means hammering out a deal with the powers that be."

The National Assembly's Leader of the Majority, Kimani Ichung'wah, is equally alive to this internal dilemma. According to Ichung'wah, the former PM is an asset to Azimio because he is the only one who can galvanise the opposition, but a liability too because "undoubtedly age has caught up with him and his knack for making the right decisions at the right time has diminished".

The Kikuyu MP seems to suggest that the Kenya Kwanza alliance would be happier dealing with Odinga – who Ruto has lately described as an individual he has known for long and whose political ploys he understands only too well – than any new or unknown leadership order in the rival camp.

"His belief that Uhuru can still take him and Azimio to the proverbial Canaan after failing to deliver the win he had promised and assured him of is, to say the least, one of his major undoings," says Ichung'wah.

The Kenyan opposition's failure to capture power, adds Thirdway Alliance party leader Dr Ekuro Aukot, is caused by its inability to unite, and the practice of politics of deceit and entitlement. The lawyer-turned-politician opines that the political space outside government is occupied by the "big boys", who are fearful of emerging players and who will not allow newcomers room for manoeuvre.

The "big boys" in the current context include Odinga, former Vice-President Musyoka and Narc-Kenya party leader Karua, all members

His belief that Uhuru can still take him and Azimio to the proverbial Canaan after failing to deliver the win he had promised and assured him of is, to say the least, one of his major undoings.

Kimani Ichung'wah, National Assembly's Leader of the Majority



of Azimio. Before they teamed up with Ruto, Amani National Congress and Ford-Kenya party leaders Musalia Mudavadi and Moses Wetang'ula have similarly been perpetual presidential hopefuls and big political players in the opposition corner.

This lot, says Aukot, is impenetrable and although he currently shares similar concerns about the high rate of taxation and cost of living, it is not easy to combine forces with Odinga and his Azimio brigade. Also opposed to Ruto's leadership is Reuben Kigame, a presidential hopeful in last year's elections, who has been unleashing parallel attacks on the Kenya Kwanza administration.

That Odinga's Azimio has failed to harness this available but scattered support into a formidable countrywide force that cuts across political colours is a factor that has attracted criticism of the former PM's style and approach. In fact, failure to maximise on this opportunity has instead exposed him to attacks from the rival Kenya Kwanza brigade, which views his push as a "one man" crusade.

Citing the Punguza Mizigo initiative – a Constitution of Kenya Amendment Bill, 2019 that sought to amend the Constitution of Kenya 2010 to reduce the burden and cost of government borne by Kenyan taxpayers under Article 257 – Aukot says the move promoted by his political party was curiously resisted by colleagues in the opposition.

Pundits attribute this to fear of being elbowed out politically or of rivals gaining political mileage. But for political giants like Odinga, who alongside his allies commands a huge following – nearly half the number of registered voters across the country – such fears should not hold. Aukot believes that the promotion of a good idea should be embraced by all fighting for a common goal against the government.

"Truth be told, the big boys, Raila, Kalon-

zo and even Ruto, do not want free and independent thinkers around them. And this precisely explains Kenya's biggest governance problem – that we have a compromised political class and an electorate that is largely ignorant, subservient and gullible," says Aukot.

But Wambua brushes aside accusations of Azimio not being accommodative. People can use all manner of excuse to claim they are being excluded, he offers. He challenges those keen on Azimio's current push to feel free and team up with them because "nobody will stop you". Singling out former Murang'a Governor Mwangi wa Iria as the latest entrant in the ongoing campaign, Wambua says the politician is now enjoying a lot of public attention, in the same way that the leader of Roots Party, Prof George Wajackoya, who vied for presidency in the last polls, is doing after teaming up with Azimio.

Azimio is reportedly in agreement over the need to cast its net wider in order to get more players on board and inject fresh thinking into developing a new strategy, but the Odinga factor remains a big headache. But players within the coalition are neither agreed on nor do they know how best to push the former Premier from the front bench.

The situation is further complicated by the fact that Odinga is the most experienced political figure in the Azimio grouping, with the largest political party and largest following: "It is a major fix for others. We need a new face for our campaign, yet we cannot elbow him from the centre now because it could well backfire," observes an MP from Odinga's rural county of Siaya.

In the assessment of the Kitui senator, who is also party treasurer, Azimio today speaks for a greater number of people who voted for Dr Ruto than those who voted for Odinga in the presidential race. Wambua attributes this factor to what he terms "a masterstroke hustler narrative strategy" that swept the board among the ordinary struggling population, "but who have since been abandoned by their post-poll hero".

However, political analyst Mark Bichachi argues that Azimio's biggest challenge is its dependence on Odinga. Following last year's poll debacle, he says, many people have lost interest in the former premier and his political strategy: "For the current push to be impactful, Azimio must begin to form new alliances, embrace a youthful vibe and leadership, and expand the movement beyond *maandamano* (mass action). In plotting civil disobedience, they should think of reaching out to businessmen and interesting them in the stakes at hand."

Bichachi is also of the opinion that Azimio should show Kenyans some freshness in its leadership, enough to attract countrywide support and move their focus away from the Ruto-Odinga ping-pong: "Raila is a great leader, but unfortunately he is the sole point of focus in Azimio. And this is because he is too large for everyone within, yet not large enough to uproot Ruto from power," Bichachi concludes.

the limelight



Muslims perform Eid Al-Adha prayers in front of a Mosque in Adjame, a popular district of Abidjan, on June 28. PHOTO | AFP



A vendor carries a ram, bought by a client, at the Isheri Kara market in Ogun State, south-west Nigeria, on June 26, ahead of the Muslim festival of Eid al-Adha. PHOTO | AFP



A boy swims through flood waters after heavy rain in Yangon, Myanmar's commercial capital, on June 28. PHOTO | AFP



President William Ruto delivers a speech during a 'Global Citizen' concert in Paris on June 22. PHOTO | AFP



A vehicle burns during protests in Nanterre, France, on June 27 after police killed a teenager who refused to stop for a traffic check. PHOTO | AFP



Ukrainian servicemen check their T-72 tank at a position in the Donetsk region on June 25. PHOTO | AFP



A young boy plays in the water fountain at Yards Park in Washington, DC, on June 26 as a heatwave settles in on the area. PHOTO | AFP

The
Are



MY SWEET HONEY

Lisa Njenga has built a successful bee-keeping business in Nakuru and is keen to grow it into a global brand

OPEN SPACE

Oduol stays, but questions remain about his fancy chair

Spending KSh18 million to refurbish an office in a county with endless, more pressing needs, is obscene

● BY HENRY GEKONDE

To no one's surprise (history had foreshadowed the outcome), the Senate has "saved" Siaya Deputy Governor William Oduol from impeachment. But, forgive me, I'm still fixated on that infamous high-backed chair that was shown to senators as part of the evidence.

At one point during the Senate committee hearings, a sentry wheeled in the eye-catching chair that Oduol allegedly bought for Sh1.1 million in taxpayer money (the DG claimed the price was for the three chairs, not one).

I saw Senator Richard Onyonka, from my birth county of Kisii, try out the chair, swivelling in it with apparent delight. I might have missed it, but I didn't see him or other committee members ask any questions about the chair's perceived quality, its origin or its manufacturer. Some senators took turns to admire the chair but they didn't scrutinise it in any meaningful way. What an absurd spectacle! Did the lawmakers ask to examine the chairs this way, as opposed to viewing pictures of them on their iPads? To what end? (These things had to be ferried all the way from Kisumu and back!) What did the committee conclude about the chairs in its report? Or was the show Oduol's idea – displaying the pieces as a form of defence and hoping to impress the lawmakers?

If the high-backed chair's appearance at the hearings served any purpose, it was to further demonstrate something that we already knew about Oduol's character. He's arrogant, entitled and self-absorbed – exactly the kind of person who would desire showy items like these for himself. Tellingly, he introduced himself to senators as "CPA William Oduol", as if his professional background, not his current role as a politician, is central to his exaggerated impression of himself.

News reports claimed lawmakers marvelled at Oduol's chair, whose simple design – wooden frame, greyish striped fabric, wheels and a plastic-aluminium swivel system – did not seem to match its eye-watering price. Some reporters speculated that the wood was mahogany, which tends to be more expensive than other types of wood.

But some questions remained: Was it

full mahogany or just a veneer? Who made the chair? Who supplied it? Was it made locally or imported? For those of us watching the proceedings at home, we needed more information in order to properly assess the chair's true value for ourselves.

I'm not a furniture expert, but speaking as a consumer who has bought several pieces for myself over the years – including items from manufacturers with high standards and low-quality specimens from jua kali, sometimes overpaying for some of them – I think Oduol was swindled, and he in turn bamboozled the senators. Oduol's chair seemed to be a crude amalgam of two separate parts, each apparently created by a different maker.

The top part (seat and back) was probably made locally, and the swivel mechanism appeared to have been cannibalised from a simple office chair imported from China. That could explain why the two sections looked somewhat incongruous.

If Oduol paid what he claimed he paid for the chair, he must be a gullible buyer. But, to state the obvious, this wasteful spending of taxpayer money does not set him apart, and his fellow politicians did not want to punish him for it.

Many such extravagant purchases happen in other counties (remember the 2014 Sh100,000 "anti-carcinogenic" wheelbarrow scandal in Bungoma?). As for Oduol's future, it's unclear where the Senate's not-guilty verdict leaves him with Governor James Orengo and the MCAs who impeached him. More political clashes loom ahead. But it would help his case if he curbed his self-adoration – if he looked beyond himself every now and then.

Siaya is a middling county, neither the wealthiest nor the poorest. Last year, it was reported to be among 14 counties that were on course to eradicate extreme poverty by 2030. Spending Sh18 million to refurbish an office and hundreds of thousands of shillings on a single chair in a county with endless, more pressing needs is obscene.

Mr Gekonde is an independent book editor; gekonde@gmail.com

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

■ MIND SPEAK



Judith Adero

Higher learning institutions produce many graduates each year, more than can be absorbed in the available job market. There's need for young people to focus on self-employment. We must also encourage the youth to embrace technical courses that can give them the skills to open their own businesses. Education is good, and from it one is able to pursue various opportunities. Be that as it may, having something that generates income as a side hustle is very vital.

— A student at Bondo Technical Training College



Omondi Kizito

The government has a responsibility to create jobs. There's no doubt about that. An administration that doesn't work hard to create opportunities for the youth opens the door for crime and other societal ills. We must work hard as one people and create a conducive environment for our youth to prosper. It is clear that the citizens are on their own. Parents have toiled to ensure that their children are educated and deserve to enjoy the fruits of their sweat.

— A businessman based in Nairobi



Dorcel Odago

It's always heartbreaking to see graduates suffering due to lack of jobs. This situation highlights the importance of addressing unemployment challenges across the country, especially affecting college graduates. It may be beneficial for individuals to explore alternative avenues of job creation. They can become entrepreneurs. We only hope that the government provides a conducive environment for young people to excel.

— A businessperson based in Nairobi



Tabitha Bwonda

Jobs are scarce all over the world. It's not just a Kenyan or African problem; it's an economic issue. Degrees and diplomas should not be the only way for graduates to earn a living; they should be business-oriented and find other ways for self-employment. It's not easy to secure a job in Kenya; a few get lucky while a majority suffer. Use your knowledge to employ yourself.

— A student at Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture & Technology

LANDMARK RULING ON LAND OWNERSHIP



NO MORE LAND GRABBING

Public land must not only be protected but legally recovered where it has been grabbed

• BY SAMMY OJWANG'

The Supreme Court of Kenya recently made a landmark ruling that promises to rattle many a hornet's nest. The said ruling was on a petition filed by Dina Management Ltd to appeal the decision of the Court of Appeal No.150 of 2021, where the lower court had awarded Mombasa County Government the ownership of a disputed 1.2 acre plot located in the upmarket Nyali area of Mombasa County.

The piece of land in question was initially an open space, through which an access road to the beach passed and therefore it was designated as public land. In 1989, former President Daniel arap Moi obtained a title deed for the land through the then Commissioner of Lands, Wilson Gachanja. Moi proceeded to sell the land to Bawazir and Company in 1993, who later sold it to Dina Management Ltd. The new owner erected a perimeter wall around the property, sealing off public access to the beach.

In September 2017, the Mombasa County Government forcefully demolished the wall, claiming that the land had been illegally acquired and therefore it remained vested in the people of Mombasa, held in trust by the County Government. The Land and Environment Court in Mombasa ruled that President Moi could not pass or transfer title to a third party since the property was irregularly and illegally allocated to him. Since it had undertaken due diligence before purchase, Dina Mgt. Ltd. was dissatisfied with the verdict and proceeded to file Supreme Court Petition No. 8, seeking redress as the bona fide purchaser.

The bench noted that while Article 40 of the Kenya Constitution entitles persons to right of property, that right cannot be extended to cover or protect any property that has been unlawfully ac-



Residents of Akiba Estate in South C put up a signage on a piece of land set aside as a children's playground on June 10, 2022.

quired. It was noted that there were no documents provided to support the allocation to President Moi in the first place. The judges ruled that the suit property was at the time designated as an open space, rendering it a public utility. It was therefore not available for alienation to President Moi or for further alienation. The judges generally urged more caution in undertaking due diligence.

Dina Mgt. Ltd is not alone in these corridors. The 248 Samburu herders who went to court in 2017, seeking to recover 17,105 acres of what they termed as their ancestral land, originally held by President Moi and which he later sold to the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), also lost their suit, with costs.

Recently, the 93-year-old widow of a former MP, Noah Chelugui, has moved to the Supreme Court to claim an award of KSh1.06 billion granted by the lower courts over 53 acres of prime land she claims was grabbed from her husband by President Moi in 1983 and later sold to Rai Plywood. In another incident in 2021, the El-

doret Municipality rescued land allocated in 1995 to a former District Criminal Investigations Officer, John Futu Mwachai, after authorisation by Wilson Gachanja. The courageous Justice Ombwayo, then at the Eldoret Land and Environment Court, ruled that the land in question revert to the Municipality, having been unlawfully allocated.

Public land has been an object of abuse in Kenya since Independence. Arbitrary allocations and blatant grabbing have been tolerated mainly because the perpetrators are mostly the powers that be in the country and their cronies.

The so-called "private developers" are rarely called out as they wantonly grab land set aside for schools, cemeteries, recreational spaces, beaches, forests, and game and road reserves. Institutions like banks, private schools, churches, private companies and homes could be sitting on public land acquired without following due process, and there could be title deeds held by banks as collateral for credit extended to clients who illegally acquired land or

were unlawfully allocated public land. The Supreme Court verdict on the Dina Mgt Ltd vs Mombasa Country petition, therefore, offers an important weapon to the country should we be interested in finding a lasting solution to the land question in Kenya.

The Land Act No.6 of 2012 clearly spells out the modalities for management of public land in Kenya, providing a legal framework for the allocation of such land that is held in trust on behalf of the people of Kenya and administered by the national and county governments. The Land Commission is mandated to prepare and keep a database and evaluation data of all public land. This data is to be shared with the public and relevant institutions. In instances of allocation of land, notices have to be provided to the public and the relevant county governments in a specified time frame that allows for feedback.

The Land (Amendment) Bill 2019 provides for registration of public land and land set aside for public purposes to guard against grabbing. In a letter addressed to the clerk of the National Assembly on February 2020, the chairman of the National Land Commission, Gershom Otachi, raised the Commission's concern about the protection of the Public Seal and the loopholes in laws exploited by land grabbers. The Commission welcomed efforts to ensure that public land was not only protected but legally recovered where it has been grabbed. Therein lies the huge challenge that Kenya must not shy away from in order to rebuild the foundation for a civilised approach to handling public land. Indeed, government must develop the will to take this bull by the horns. The crocodile tears shed by land grabbers and their beneficiaries shall merely provide cleansing for the desecrated land they so shamelessly stole. As we have been shown by the Supreme Court, there is no easy way back to sanity.

samojwang7@gmail.com

THE BUSINESS OF APICULTURE

HONEY MONEY

Lisa Njenga has built a successful bee-keeping business and is keen to grow it into a global brand

• BY EDDY ASHIOYA

Lisa Khakayi Njenga really has a beautiful laugh. Sweet-natured and innocent, her laugh rings the bell of her throat. It's quick but intense, hollow yet full, an unabashed, throaty gargle, and it seems to put dazzle in her eyes as if coolly lit from within by some tiny, inner moon. She punctuates our conversation with a chuckle, or a giggle, or both.

You can hear the smile in her voice. She possesses this child-like spirit, like water washing over a smooth stone, that seems to say she doesn't have time to be bothered by the small, everyday vagaries of life like the rest of us. Instead, she sticks to her grand vision of what she wants to achieve with her time on earth, and the rest of it just washes over her: water over a stone. "Two years ago, I was working in New York with Unicef's Generation Unlimited when Covid-19 hit and I had to come back home," she says. "We were all applying for jobs and I thought, we can't possibly all be consumers. Sometimes you have to take the chance as a producer. My mom has a farm with some beehives. I started reading up on beekeeping and ways to turn this newfound passion into a pay check.

That's how a delectable organic honey company was birthed. Its name, 'Oh, Honey', Lisa says, is a reflection of her personality – the barb of a professional provocateur temperamentally averse to provocation. "Branding is everything and I concentrated a lot on creating a worthy one. You see, honey is one of the least labour-intensive business activities. As long as you have the hives and you harvest it correctly, sometimes up to three times a year depending on how many hives you have, you've got a good business going. One of the biggest problems is that there is a lot of adulterated honey in the market. Do you know people even get sick? I supply to hotels tell me they used to worry because their clients were falling sick."

She sighs with audible Weltschmerz. "Honey is already lucrative even if you sell it in its natural state. I pride myself in selling organic honey. The value-added products that I sell, like body butter and lip balm, are



made from beeswax. I also make chocolate infused with honey rather than sugar as it is more appealing to segments of people who are concerned about health and the environment.”

For every sale, Oh, Honey plants a tree. “We are trying to offset our carbon footprint and part of our proceeds goes to training young women on how to be agripreneurs. I am also a youth development consultant with the UN and African Union. Outside of this business, I thought, why not use my passion and experience and expertise to benefit the community? The people that we train get a double benefit because we also source honey from them when we have big orders.”

Her client base ranges from online customers to establishments in Nakuru, including hotels. She is on her way to getting licensing to supply supermarkets in Nairobi but decries the red tape involved. She acknowledges that her honey is not cheap. A 1.5kg jar sells at KSh1,750. “I know the value that I am giving. My honey is authentic and organic. I do a lot of exhibitions and I am working on it to be exported. You know, in Kenya, we are able to produce so much honey, so why not export it? Globally, we are either the third or fourth highest exporter of honey. We could be the first.”

One of her highest moments was being flagged by the Kenya Investment Authority and winning a grant from a German corporation in May 2022 that served as a windvane, predicting that the winds of access were blowing her way. Shortly after, she and her business partner were invited to exhibit at the third International Kenya Investment Conference (KICO) at Safari Park in May 2023.

KICO, to those not familiar with it, is the Grammys of Kenyan exhibitions, with over 2,000 delegates from government, private sector, development partners and non-state actors. “To exhibit there, one had to pay 100K, but, out of goodwill, we didn’t pay a dime to exhibit alongside long-standing businesses. I tapped into these spaces quickly, a reminder of the blessings accorded me and my team,” says Lisa. Speaking of teams, the business has an employee base of eight, ten if you include her and her business partner. So, what’s the process of collecting honey? “Well you have to have bees, and the right wood for your hive; should I go that far back?” It’s now my turn to laugh.

No, I say. “There are two types of hives,” she continues, “but I use the modern Langstroth hive, which is really great because I can harvest honey three to four times a year. With the more traditional hive, you can only harvest honey once a year. After harvesting, we clean the honey and separate it from the beeswax. We sell raw and processed honey – the difference is that the raw honey is thicker, while the other is a lot more liquid.”

Lisa projects an aura of power but not of invincibility, a girl acutely aware of her vulnerability, one who knows that where she is is not a full stop but a comma. What has business taught her? “The importance of collaboration. You can have a great idea but if you don’t have somebody to support you

Two years ago, I was working in New York with Unicef’s Generation Unlimited when Covid-19 hit and I had to come back home. We were all applying for jobs and I thought, we can’t possibly all be consumers. Sometimes you have to take the chance as a producer. My mom has a farm with some beehives. I started reading up on beekeeping and ways to turn this newfound passion into a pay check.

Lisa Njenga



HONEY PRODUCTION

• Langstroth beehives are designed to ensure that little or no harm is inflicted on bees during the harvesting process, as well as the sustainability of honey production by eliminating the need for further hive colonisation.

• Lisa is a professional psychologist and an alumnus of the African Union Youth Volunteer Corps. She is the co-founder of a youth-focused enterprise called the Green Point Initiative that is focused on advocating for climate action and developing ‘social agripreneurial mindsets’ in young people. She also founded the Eden Empowerment Programme, which focuses on reintegrating young mothers back into society through sexual reproductive health education, life skills and vocational training.

or hold your hand on those days that life is wearing you down, you will falter. If you want to go fast go alone, but if you want to go far, go together. That has been a very big lesson. Business is hard. Just the other day, some people came to visit and harvest honey, about 20 litres, and they wasted all of it. Do you know how much 20 litres of honey would fetch?

Argh. It was a disaster. If I was doing it alone, I would have gone bonkers.”

She unravels like the frayed end of a rope, and with a warm, fluttering tone of one who’s been there, done that, lets you in on a secret: You need experts if you want to get to the level where I see myself going, she says. She tells me her employees are learning that you can be anything with diversification. “I am the CEO but I still do sales, and I still clean up. You have to be able to know everything and be okay to learn from somebody who has a different skill. I believe in linear leadership where everybody is a leader in their own right. Nobody should feel less than the other. We are all together in this.”

How has running a company changed her? “I think I have more belief that anything is possible. It has shown me that if you put in effort, legitimately, you can do it all.”

The longer our conversation drags on, the more starkly she reveals herself to be the kind of girl you had no idea she could be. That’s why her definition of success is simplistic, if not reductionist. “Success is contentment in where you are, where you are going, and where you’ve been; being able to enjoy the full process of whatever you are working on, knowing that wherever you are going, you’ll be happy with it; knowing that you’ve done all you can to get there. As long as you are true to yourself, you can be content in that. Your input will determine your output.”

The dream for Oh, Honey is to be a national treasure. “Oh, Honey should be the reason Kenya is on the map for exporting high-quality organic honey around the world. I want to create generational wealth. Seeing how people who come from wealthy families live, it’s a different ball game,” she says. “Even if I have to work for 60 or 70 years so my descendants can have the best lives, then I will be a happy ghost.” It is very important to be a happy ghost, she adds.

What would this ghost tell younger entrepreneurs to ignore? “Everybody has an idea of what you should do. Don’t listen to people who have never run businesses. Listen to them only if you are looking for a target consumer. When you are starting a business, you have to believe in yourself and take everything with a pinch of salt. Not everyone will see your vision the way you see it. Create your plan and implement your business. That is the way to have a strong foundation that nothing can shake.”

Is she a music person or a movie person? “Do I have to be one?” Well, for the purpose of this conversation, yes. “I like making music but I love watching movies.” Okay, but if her life was to be a movie, who would play her and why? “Taraji P. Henson in *Empire*. This is quite unfortunate because I am portraying myself in a different light, but I am such a sucker for love. I had my first kid when I was 19, when I was trying to work on a music career, and then everything changed for the better, I think. I just turned 30 this year, and a man can never run my life. I have such a fire in me for myself and my kids, and I think that’s why I’d choose her.”

eddyashioya@gmail.com

REAL ESTATE

**HOUSE
HYPE**

Edna Moraa found a niche in marketing vacant houses online and has made a successful venture of it

• BY SINDA MATIKO

When they are not promoting alcohol, beauty or betting brands then they are involved in one publicity campaign or another about a corporate service or television show. This is the new norm: brand advertising perpetuated by so-called content creators or, simply, influencers.

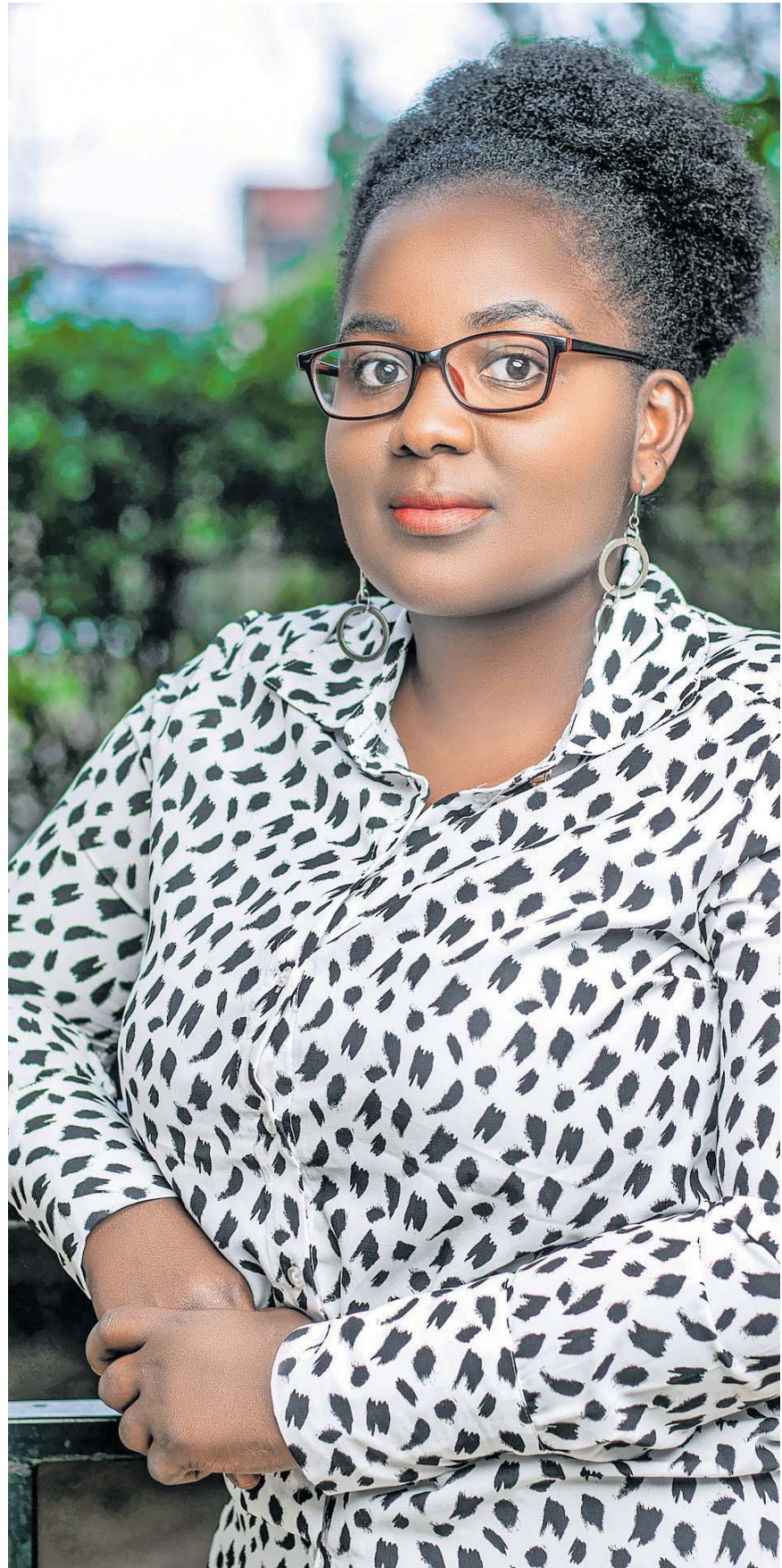
Whereas she does more or less the same thing as her peers, Edna Moraa doesn't fancy the 'Influencer' title. "I'm a real estate enthusiast doing online marketing," she asserts.

This real estate enthusiast has amassed a cult following on her social media platforms, with over 107,000 followers on Instagram alone, where she only posts reviews of houses within Nairobi and its environs.

From bedsitters and studio apartments to bungalows and mansions, Edna reviews them all. What started as a pastime is now her bread and butter.

"I used to work at the Ministry of Planning and when my contract ended in 2015, my brother contracted me to run his beauty and cosmetics business. Whenever I was free I would create content with my phone around natural hair and share it on Facebook, giving grooming tips. People kept urging me to open a YouTube account. I never expected the content to become popular, but it did. I ended up building a community that was largely female."

Edna bought a camera and related paraphernalia to create better content. Then the corona virus struck. "When Covid-19 hit, everybody went online and hair content became competitive because many people were getting into that space. One afternoon, Edna noticed a vacant bedsitter in the



apartment where she lived and decided to share a review online to help those who were house-hunting. "I realised there was a surge of people looking for cheaper houses because of job cuts and salary reductions."

The video drew a lot of interest, including a comment from a realtor. "He was impressed by my review narration. He gave me his number and asked me to reach out so that he could get me more houses to review," she recalls.

The two would meet the next day in Umoja estate and Edna, who lived in Buruburu then, shot videos of 10 different apartments. "That week, I posted one video every single day." With her social media numbers soaring, her phone did not stop buzzing, with most calls from real estate agencies, developers, agents and landlords.

Edna's intention was to make money from YouTube with the real estate content, but that wasn't happening. "Honestly speaking, YouTube doesn't pay much for this kind of niche. It's different from those that do entertainment, travel or lifestyle. I guess it's because Kenya's CPM (cost per mile) is lower."

Edna says even though she wasn't making as much from YouTube as she had hoped, what kept her going was the number of real estate players who continued reaching out, seeking her services.

"I started charging them for my services, which hasn't been easy, because many think I am an agent. In this space, an agent's earnings are based on commissions: you look for prospective buyers, sell the house and get paid a commission. Many see what I do with my content and assume it's the same thing but my job is to market, not look for buyers.

In this space, an agent's earnings are based on commissions: you look for prospective buyers, sell the house and get paid a commission. Many see what I do with my content and assume it's the same thing but my job is to market, not look for buyers. Many landlords and developers have yet to understand what online marketing is about.

Edna Moraa



Edna says even though she wasn't making as much from YouTube as she had hoped, what kept her going was the number of real estate players who continued reaching out, seeking her services.

Many landlords and developers have yet to understand what online marketing is about."

Her YouTube, TikTok and Instagram platforms have become a one-stop shop for any kind of housing one seeks, be it rental or for sale.

"Even though I have reviewed some of the poshest houses you can think of, I still do reviews of bedsitters because I want to create a community for all. Housing is a concern for everyone, right?" she asks.

Edna is reluctant to say how much she charges, but she earns enough to pay her bills and enable her to continue with content creation.

"I wouldn't say I have a fixed rate because clients vary, but I don't take less than KSh50,000, all factors considered, including time, how far the facility is, what kind of facility it is and the number of units."

Two weeks ago she was contracted to review newly built apartments at Valley Arcade in Nairobi.

"It's an apartment block called Amboseli. It has 150 units. All the units were vacant when the owners reached out and gave me the job. I did the review and within one week they had all been occupied. I guess you could say all those 150 occupants are my 'clients'."

tmatiko@ke.nationmedia.com

The FLIP SIDE
with John Nyaganyaga



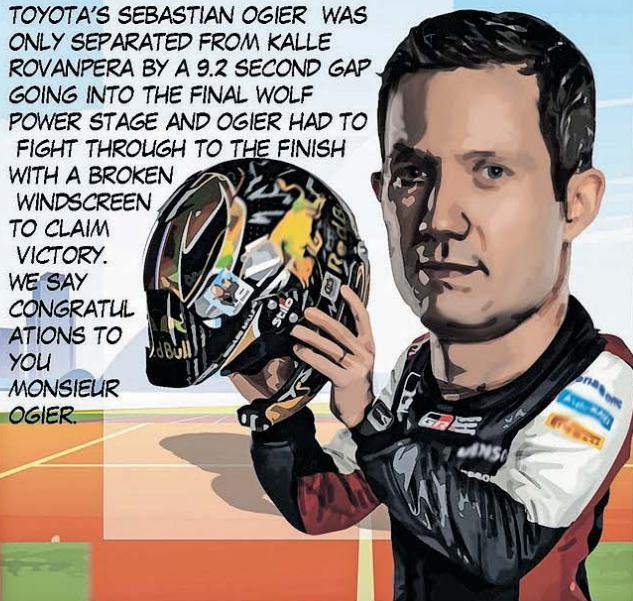
WOMAN POWER

JOURNALIST PAULINE SHEGHU AND HER EXPERIENCED CO-DRIVER LINET AYUKO FINISHED 13TH OVERALL IN THE KNRC CATEGORY OF THE SAFARI RALLY IN AN EXCEPTIONAL SHOWING BY WOMEN DRIVERS IN THIS YEAR'S EVENT AND THEY REMAINED GRATEFUL FOR THE GOVERNMENT SUPPORT THEY RECEIVED. THE MINISTRY OF YOUTH AFFAIRS, THE ARTS AND SPORTS BACKED ALL FEMALE DRIVERS UNDER THE TALANTA HELA PLATFORM WITH CO-SPONSORS INCLUDING KENYA BROADCASTING CORPORATION, HOMEBOYZ AND ATLANTIS TECHNOLOGIES. A ROUND OF APPLAUSE FOR THE LADY DRIVERS, THE GOVERNMENT AND SPONSORS FOR A JOB WELL DONE.

jnyaga@ke.nationmedia.com

STAR OF THE WEEK

SEBASTIAN OGIER IS THE 2023 WRC SAFARI RALLY CHAMPION. THE FRENCHMAN EDGED OUT HIS TOYOTA TEAMMATE AND RIVAL KALLE ROVANPERA TO REGISTER HIS SECOND WIN HERE IN KENYA IN A NERVE-RACKING END TO THE WORLD'S TOUGHEST RALLY. TOYOTA'S SEBASTIAN OGIER WAS ONLY SEPARATED FROM KALLE ROVANPERA BY A 9.2 SECOND GAP GOING INTO THE FINAL WOLF POWER STAGE AND OGIER HAD TO FIGHT THROUGH TO THE FINISH WITH A BROKEN WINDSCREEN TO CLAIM VICTORY. WE SAY CONGRATULATIONS TO YOU MONSIEUR OGIER.



opinion



■ We need new laws to give deputy governors defined roles or do away with the office

Impeachment should only be the last solution

Deputy Governor William Oduol appeared before the Senate last week to face two charges of impeachment brought against him by the County Assembly of Siaya, just six months after Governor Kawira Mwangaza of Meru went through a similar fate. This returns the spotlight to the relationships between governors, their deputies and county assemblies.

First, impeachment is a powerful weapon Members of County Assemblies (MCAs) wield with abandon, and invoke with frightening frequency, against governors. MCAs do not regard impeachment as a tool of last resort. They do not care about a threshold. Indeed, governors are always looking over their shoulders to decipher what MCAs are saying or thinking.

Second, governors devalue deputy governors immediately they assume office. As gubernatorial candidates, they need strong running-mates to act as firewalls against their opponents. They campaign as one. But in power, governors ignore the deputies and deny them responsibilities. They are seen and not heard. They are in office but have neither work nor power.

As chairman of the Senate committee that pored over the articles of impeachment and listened to the lawyers for Mwangaza and the Meru County Assembly, Kakamega Senator Bonny Khalwale pointedly told the embattled governor that it was incumbent upon her to embrace MCAs if her government was going to deliver for the people of Meru.

Khalwale had done his homework well. He knew the mood of the MCAs and as he listened to their counsel, he was in no doubt



**KWENDO
OPANGA**

that while the Senate would clear Mwangaza, she would be alone, battered every day by the clamorous MCAs. Properly chastened in the Senate and out of it, Mwangaza, a first-time governor, toned down and is just managing, walking a tightrope.

Oduol could have been governor of Siaya in 2013. It was the high command of the Orange Democratic (ODM) Party that intervened and handed Mr Cornel Rasanga the ticket. Last year, Oduol appeared set to gun for a parliamentary seat until he was paired up with Mr James Orengo to propel ODM past the battling rival ticket of Nicholas Gumbo and David Ohito.

Oduol pointed an accusatory finger at Orengo when he alleged the withdrawals of unusually large sums of money as imprest which ended up, he said, in the governor's office. In a prosecutorial tone, he went public, revealing he had been cold-shouldered since he asked Orengo about the unusual withdrawals.

Orengo's corner retaliated by waging political war against Oduol and countered his claims of thievery by accusing him of

manipulating tendering processes and misusing public funds. The evidence, in the form of a Sh1.1 million chair, was transported to Nairobi, much to the bemusement of senators and citizens alike. Long story short, the Senate did not find Oduol guilty.

It matters precious little that the Kenya Kwanza senators used their numerical strength to defeat the impeachment move against Oduol. Now Oduol must face the music in Siaya. He will be alone in his now infamous chair in his lonely office. Orengo, the MCAs and ODM will gleefully see to that.

Which brings me to the matter I raised here three Sundays ago, namely, that we need to bring in new rules and laws to give deputy governors clearly defined roles or do away with the office altogether. In my view, this is what the Senate, as the custodian of devolution, needs to take up as a matter of urgency. Secondly, the Senate needs to come up with a plan for ensuring that County Assemblies use impeachment only as a last resort to stop MCAs from holding county executives to ransom.

kwendo58@gmail.com

opinion

■ EA Spectre is a fabricator of pressurised iron vessels with 50 years of experience

Raila's firm should build super submersibles



MACHARIA
GAITHO

The world was recently transfixed by the episode of a small submarine that imploded whilst trying to reach the wreck of the fabled Titanic cruise ship some 13,000 feet at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean.

The story of the Titan submersible that disappeared shortly after launch in the wintry seas between Canada and the United States was at once an uplifting story of human endeavour and bravery, the spirit that drives adventurers and dreamers to venture at great risk towards where no man has reached before.

But it was also a tragedy attributable to criminal recklessness and ineptitude. Put simply, the Titan was not built to reach the desired depth. Despite warnings by his own staff and external deep sea enthusiasts, Stockton Rush, the owner of OceanGate Expeditions, the American company responsible for the pioneering venture, cut corners in construction of the submersible craft.

One might say it is to his credit that Rush fully believed that the craft was strong and durable and able to withstand the extreme water pressures at such depths. He was on the ill-fated expedition and perished alongside his four paying passengers.

Anyway, the fact now is that the mini submarine suffered a catastrophic implosion, opposite of explosion, not too long after launch. And that is where we come in. The Kenya Kwanza policy of achieving lower consumer prices by allowing tax-free imports intended to push exploitative tax-paying manufacturers out of business will have many casualties.

Unless they smell the new dispensation and adjust accordingly, many very well-established industrial concerns will have to close their doors, and of course lay off hundreds of thousands of employees.

But they need not despair, as under the brilliant initiatives conceived and implemented by merchants close to the movers and shakers in President William Ruto's government, they have the opportunity to retool and rejig their factories. They can take advantage of that big shift to employment creation by building houses and so many other major projects which nobody really needs, all

paid for by taxpayers. An enterprise that comes easily to mind as overdue for total rethink is the cooking gas cylinder manufacturing outfit started by opposition leader Raila Odinga.

East Africa Spectre is a staid old family business that for years has enjoyed an almost unchallenged monopoly in manufacturing and supply of Liquefied Petroleum Gas cylinders for the Kenyan and wider east and central African market. It should worry Raila that half a century after Spectre was launched, it remains stuck in a time warp, fabricating the same old metallic pressurised cylinders.

Even if the wheelers and dealers of the Ruto government were not out to kill the Raila firm by granting themselves waivers to import tax-free cylinders, there can be no doubt that Spectre is headed for extinction once the metal tubes for our cooking gas become obsolete. The OceanGate submarine, being crushed like a lightweight aluminium beer can, should give him food for thought.

Even as he is preoccupied with on-off agitation aimed at forcing Ruto out of office so he can take his rightful seat, Raila must not let the family firm fade into extinction. There is a yawning chasm somewhere in the north Atlantic waiting to be filled, and as a fabricator of pressurised iron vessels with 50 years of experience, East Africa Spectre is well-placed to design and build the next generation of

Through that vast colonial era underground storm water drainage network, the subs will navigate their routes to Kenya's main waterways to surface in the Indian Ocean, from where uber-rich citizens of the world will be able to pay premium to dive into the depths of Atlantis. The Ruto houses and other super-scale job-creation projects will already have created the steel and other industries required for converting the gas cylinder plant to make seagoing tubes. We have titanium aplenty in Kwale County, which is a vital component of the submarine bodies, as well as fibreglass factories in Ruaraka that can easily upgrade to produce super-strength carbon fibre.

Titan submersibles. It's a business strategy that would, to Ruto's consternation, fit neatly into Kenya Kwanza plans to kill established local enterprises that for their innovation and success stand accused of being monopolies and cartels.

Kenya Kwanza sycophants will cheer themselves hoarse when Spectre is run out of the gas cylinder business by tax-free imports. But it will be completely unprepared for the mini submarines that will float out of the Industrial Area factory.

Through that vast colonial era underground storm water drainage network, the subs will navigate their routes to Kenya's main waterways to surface in the Indian Ocean, from where uber-rich citizens of the world will be able to pay premium to dive into the depths of Atlantis.

The Ruto houses and other super-scale job-creation projects will already have created the steel and other industries required for converting the gas cylinder plant to make seagoing tubes. We have titanium aplenty in Kwale County, which is a vital component of the submarine bodies, as well as fibreglass factories in Ruaraka that can easily upgrade to produce super-strength carbon fibre.

As for skilled manpower, there will be no shortage there as Raila is himself a skilled welder, the best of the best. The German Master's degree in mechanical engineering that conceived and built East Africa Spectre out of nothing will easily lend itself to the new venture.

And who will pay for that brave new enterprise? Ruto, of course. Or to put it more accurately, the Kenyan taxpayer. Soon and very soon we will all be hit with yet a new tax to fund enterprises that create jobs. Building submarines obviously should be one of them, presuming that opportunities are not strictly reserved only for family, relatives, friends, business partners and political acolytes of those in power.

Discrimination to the benefit of Kenya Kwanza shareholders will, of course, be overturned by our highest courts, which will find in favour of equal opportunity to loot the public purse, as well as the principle of collective irresponsibility.

gaitomail@gmail.com

kenya lens

■ UK-KENYA MILITARY DEALS SHROUDED IN SECRECY

COLONIAL WAR GAMES

Britain's Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson (centre) talks to soldiers at the British Training Unit Kenya, popularly known as BATUK, in Ole Naishu, Nanyuki, on March 17, 2017.

As a parliamentary committee prepares to investigate British army activities in Kenya, it remains to be seen how much they can dig up, given the long and secretive history involved

● BY JOHN KAMAU

The unresolved death of Agnes Wanjiru at the hands of a British soldier in March 2012 appears to have given Kenyan politicians a chance to look at the British Army's activities in the country. Whichever way the inquiry into the conduct of the training units in Nanyuki goes, the long history of impunity and secrecy of the military pact could be of interest.

Before Wanjiru's murder became public, British troops had previously been accused of rape, murder, environmental damage and littering military training

fields with unexploded ordnances. At best, when cornered by lawyers, they opted for out-of-court settlements and paid compensation to victims, and, at worst, they displayed impunity.

And now, as the National Assembly's Defence, Intelligence and Foreign Relations Committee prepares to investigate British Army activities in Laikipia, Isiolo, and Samburu military fields, one question remains: how much they can dig up, given the long history and secrecy involved.

For the last 60 years, controversy has stalked British troops in Kenya. Initially, they had wanted a permanent military base, but this

was downgraded to training. It is this history that the parliamentary committee will look at as it tries to unravel the genesis of British troops' impunity in Kenya.

Records indicate that in the late 1950s, the British had decided to build an army base in Kahawa, hoping to station their troops there after independence. More so, they were planning naval and air force bases. This became a contentious issue and in November 1961, the African members at the then Legislative Council (LegCo) moved a motion asking Britain to stop the construction.

At the time, Britain viewed Kenya as a strategic colony where it

would retain military bases for its defence policy and programmes. Tom Mboya, one of the negotiators for Kenya's Constitution, told the LegCo that "an independent Kenya shall remain positively independent, positively neutral" from global power struggles. "We do not want Kenya to become the football ground on which the East and West come to play their game outside their territories," said Mboya.

It was Mboya who set the tone for the downgrading of British army bases to training units. The bone of contention was the £3.6 million expansion of Templer Barracks in Kahawa. Built

kenya lens

between 1959 and 1962, the barracks housed two battalions and were said to be among the most expensive British bases overseas. Though Britain had agreed to scale down the project, Mboya argued that “even if the base was on one acre of the soil of this country, ... we would not be in a position to have full sovereignty over the breadth and width of our country. ... it would be an attraction to those who would seek to destroy our country's independence”.

Interestingly, Kahawa did not survive as a British military barracks, and most buildings were handed over to form what is today Kenyatta University.

Another opponent of the British bases was Argwings-Kodhek, the first African lawyer. “The British are not being philanthropic at all in putting these bases here so that we shall have employment at Kiambu, or that we shall have some people who will be able to bath correctly at the coast of Mombasa... our job at the moment is to try by all means to get rid of all forms of vestiges of colonialism,” he argued.

The other fear was that the British troops would use such bases to crush nationalist revolts in their remaining colonies. The Mboya motion was passed on November 30, 1961, and stated that the “future of the British bases in Kenya will be the subject of negotiation between the Kenya Government and the Government of the United Kingdom”.

After independence in December, 1963, it was agreed that the British hand over the Templer Barracks to Kenya by 1965. But as the British finalised the handing over of the barracks to Jomo Kenyatta – set for September 17, 1965, when the Kenyatta College was to open – a January 1964 mutiny within Lanet Barracks made Jomo Kenyatta rethink the removal of the British troops. On that day, the 11th Battalion soldiers broke into the armoury and demanded to meet Kenyatta, then the Prime Minister.

The British forces in Kenya quickly quelled the mutiny, with the 3rd Regiment of the Royal Horse Artillery securing strategic areas in Nairobi, while others ring-fenced the Lanet Barracks. It appeared to be an indication that the independent Kenyan state would require the British troops for protection.

As Kenyatta's Vice-President,



Kenyan and British soldiers in a joint-training exercise at Archer's Post in Samburu, on October 7, 2020. This is in line with the strategic partnership between Kenya and the United Kingdom.

Oginga Odinga, would later say, Kenyatta “seemed not to recover from the shock of the army mutiny and ... seemed to be plagued by a fear that the government was not safe from internal revolution”.

It was during this period – on June 3, 1964 – that a Memorandum of Intention and Understanding was signed by Kenyatta and the British High Commissioner, Geoffrey de Freitas, giving Britain some say in Kenya's military, and its non-negotiable demand: that twice year, the British would be training in Kenya.

As a result of that MOU, British troops would play a crucial role in the kind of military that emerged in Kenya as they trained many elite soldiers. More so, they recommended the creation of the Chief of Defence Staff position. Kenyatta is said to have requested that this position go to a British officer, Maj Gen Bernard Penfold. He also appointed Brigadier Joseph Ndolo as Commander of the army.

With all that, Kenyatta felt secure since, under the MOU, Britain agreed to “make available (its) troops stationed in Kenya to assist (his) government in dealing with internal disturbances”. By default, Kenya had chosen a military ally. More so, historians argue that with the clause that obligated the British to protect the Kenyatta government if their troops were in Kenya, the British soldiers, in some kind of reverse psychology, also ensured that apart from the time they were in training they had no other troops in Kenya.

Kenyatta's next scare came from the Somali government,

which threatened to annex part of north-eastern Kenya by supporting a secession. This fear saw Kenya negotiate what historians call the ‘Bamburi Understanding’, which was verbally agreed upon in 1966.

It was controversial since the British had what was known as the ‘Sandys Understanding’: “There were clear differences between the British and Kenyan interpretations of what (Commonwealth Secretary Duncan) Sandys had said,” argues historian Poppy Cullen. In their understanding, Kenyan officials “assumed that British ground attack aircraft would be available to support the Kenya Army within 24 hours and that limited ground forces would start arriving within 48 hours of Somali regular forces violating our frontier”.

Only a few people in the Kenyatta cabinet knew that there was no clarity in the Bamburi Understanding. These included President Kenyatta, Attorney-General Charles Njonjo, Agriculture Minister Bruce Mackenzie and Defence Minister Dr Njoroge Mungai, and they openly pushed the British High Commission to craft a formal paper. A final paper was handed over to Kenyatta on January 25, 1967, and one sentence read: “Kenya government may be sure that if Kenya were the victim of outright aggression by Somalia, the British government would give the situation most urgent consideration.”

This is the military relationship and support from the British that President Daniel arap Moi inherit-

ed. Moi was close to British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. But while the military expanded, it was the Americans who would be of more use to Moi than Britain. In return, Moi gave the US a military base at the Kenyan coast. Still, Thatcher agreed to Moi's request for a grant to repay British loans for military expenditure. Thatcher wanted Moi to support British Africa policy over Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe).

The pact expired during the reign of President Mwai Kibaki, who was initially reluctant to renew it due to the hostility that his government experienced from London.

These agreements have always informed the British troops' presence in Kenya. But they have also led to controversies. In 2001, the British law firm of Martin Day secured a total of KSh450 million compensation to Kenyan pastoralists who had been maimed or killed by unexploded ordnances.

The UK refused to pay some of the claims on the basis that the incidents happened too long ago. At Archers Post, the British are now evading payments by arguing that the fields are used by Kenyans too.

Besides the case of Wanjiru, the British Army Training Unit-Kenya is facing criticism from 6,000 residents of Loldaiga in Laikipia North who were affected by a wildfire triggered by military activities. All eyes will be on the parliament team to see how much dirt it can unearth.

jkamau@ke.nationmedia.com
@johnkamau1

SCIENCE & TECH

TAKE OFF FOR VIRGIN GALACTIC ON COMMERCIAL SPACEFLIGHT



This still image from a Virgin Galactic video shows the Galactic 01 mission spacecraft launching the first commercial flight from Spaceport City in New Mexico on June 29.

● LONDON

Virgin Galactic on Thursday officially commenced commercial spaceflights, a major milestone for the company founded in 2004 by British billionaire Richard Branson.

Dubbed Galactic 01, the 90-minute mission took off from Spaceport America, New Mexico, around 430 GMT, a broadcast feed provided to media by the company showed. Virgin Galactic's website will also host a livestream.

Unlike its competitors, Virgin Galactic uses a piloted "mothership" aircraft that takes off from a runway, gains high altitude, and drops a rocket-powered plane that soars into space at nearly Mach 3 before gliding back to Earth.

Passengers in the spaceplane's cabin experience a few minutes of weightlessness and catch a glimpse of the planet's curvature from more than 50 miles (80 kilometers) above sea level.

Thursday's flight includes Col Walter Villadei and Lt Col

Angelo Landolfi of the Italian Air Force, Pantaleone Carlucci of the National Research Council of Italy, and Colin Bennett of Virgin Galactic. There are also two pilots on the spaceplane.

It comes almost two years after Branson soared to the final frontier in a test flight meant to usher in a new era of lucrative space tourism.

But the company subsequently faced setbacks, including a brief grounding by the Federal Aviation Administration, which found the Branson flight deviated from its assigned airspace and Virgin Galactic did not communicate the "mishap". Later, lab testing revealed certain materials used in its vehicles had fallen below required strength margins, necessitating upgrades to the fleet.

The company ended its spaceflight pause with a successful test in May, paving the way for Thursday's mission. In total, it ran five test flights before Thursday's commercial flight.

The Galactic 01 crew will conduct 13 supervised and autonomous experiments, and

collect data on their suits and sensors in the cabin.

Experiments include measuring radiation levels in the under-studied mesosphere, and how certain liquids and solids mix in microgravity.

Virgin Galactic has sold around 800 tickets for future commercial flights — 600 between 2005 and 2014 for US\$200,000 to US\$250,000, and 200 since then for US\$450,000 each.

Movie stars and celebrities were among the first to snap up seats, but the company's programme suffered a disaster in 2014, when a spaceplane on a test flight broke apart midair, killing the copilot and seriously injuring the pilot. Virgin Galactic competes in the "suborbital" space tourism sector with billionaire Jeff Bezos' company, Blue Origin, which has already sent 32 people into space.

But since an accident in September 2022 during an unmanned flight, Blue Origin's rocket has been grounded. The company promised in March to resume spaceflight soon.

Israel enlists drones, AI to farm for future

As climate change and global population growth pose ever greater challenges for agriculture, Israeli technology offers a wealth of inventions and advanced tools to help farmers adapt.

At an avocado orchard in a kibbutz in central Israel, a tractor slowly pulls a device through the trees.

Flag-sized attachments that evoke canoe paddles on the mobile platform gently stroke the plants to draw pollen using an electrostatic charge, then let them rub off on the next row of trees.

Such artificial pollination can help boost crop yields to feed the world's growing population, said Thai Sade, founder and CEO of Israeli company BloomX. The firm uses algorithms to predict the optimal time to maximise the efficacy of pollination.

"Our pollination is an attempt to deal with many of the problems we have today, which we expect to worsen in the future," said Sade, noting the shortage of pollinating insects and the risks global warming poses to them.

"It's much more expensive to plant a new orchard than to make better use of an existing one," he said.

Ofri Yongrman Sela, who oversees avocado, wheat and persimmon production at the Eyal kibbutz, said that of all the unknowns in his line of work, pollination is the most difficult to manage.

Avocado trees rely on honey bees for pollination, he said, but "we don't really know if they'll come or not, and when".

Using BloomX's technology alongside the bees has raised yields by up to 40 per cent, he said.

Standing amid the avocado trees, Yongrman Sela noted the rapid changes his sector has undergone in the decade since he began work as a farmer.

Agriculture is now supported by sensors that measure soil parameters, drones and big data, he said, adding that "technology has entered every corner".

africa lens

■ IT'S UNCLEAR WHETHER PRIGOZHIN WILL RUN HIS PRIVATE ARMY FROM BELARUS

MENACING MERCENARIES



Members of Wagner group inspect a car in a street of Rostov-on-Don, on June 24.

Wagner's network on the continent, where it has several thousand fighters based as well as lucrative business interests, faces uncertain future

● MOSCOW

The failed mutiny in Russia by the Wagner mercenary group is likely to have repercussions for Africa, where it has several thousand fighters based as well as lucrative business interests. It is unclear whether Wagner's leader, Yevgeny Prigozhin, who has been told to relocate to Belarus, will still run his private army from there to allow it to service its security contracts in places like the Cen-

tral African Republic (CAR) and Mali. Last week, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov assured CAR and Mali of the status quo in terms of their crucial security arrangements.

Why is Wagner in Africa?

Primarily to make money – though as it had tacit approval from the Kremlin, it also bolstered Russia's diplomatic and economic interests.

It was a major boon for Russia, for example, when France with-

drew its forces from Mali after Wagner agreed in 2021 to help the new military junta in its battle against Islamist militants.

Wagner has just posted a timeline of its operational history on Telegram, confirming its official involvement in Africa began in 2018, when it sent "military instructors" to the CAR and Sudan – and then moving into Libya the following year. It has been noted that these countries have natural resources of interest to Prigozhin's outfit. The CAR, which

has been unstable for decades, is rich in diamonds, gold, oil and uranium.

Wagner has allowed President Faustin-Archange Touadéra, who even has the mercenaries as his bodyguards, to shrug off the influence of former colonial power France as the country tries to gain the upper hand against rebel groups – in return for a slice of the resource pie.

"Wagner's operational strategy

...Continued on Page 26

africa lens

Wagner's network in Africa faces uncertain future

Continued from Page 25

over the past two to three years has been to expand both its military and economic footprint in Africa," Julia Stanyard, from the Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime, said.

The think tank analyst says Wagner has a network of companies associated with it – and they have pursued commercial activities in the countries in which the mercenary group operates.

In CAR, these allegedly trade in conflict minerals and timber, as well as making beer and vodka. Wagner's brief foray into Sudan allowed Russian mining firm M Invest, which the US Treasury alleges is owned or controlled by Prigozhin, to set up operations there. Its subsidiary, Meroe Gold, is one of Africa's biggest gold producers.

In Libya, Wagner is not thought to have the numbers of fighters in the country as it did when it backed renegade general Khalifa Haftar's attempt to take the capital, Tripoli, nearly four years ago. But strategically, Libya creates a gateway for Russia into Africa, strengthens its presence in the Mediterranean and aligns with the Kremlin's backing of Gen Haftar. Wagner mercenaries still remain around key oil facilities in Haftar strongholds in the east and south of the country – and sources said there has not been a noticeable change on the ground.

Wagner's interest in Mali may be linked to its rich gold reserves – though there is no evidence as yet of its firms operating there – and it is likely to be more strategic, opening up Russia's sphere of influence in West African countries under pressure from so-called Islamic State and al-Qaeda groups.

Mali could also, according to the large batch of US military documents leaked earlier this year, have been used as a proxy to acquire weapons from Turkey on Wagner's behalf, with one Pentagon dispatch saying junta leader Col Assimi Goita had confirmed it would do so.

What has Wagner's impact been on the ground?

Wagner fighters have been accused of widespread human



Wagner boss Yevgeny Prigozhin

rights abuses in several countries. In 2021, a BBC investigation found evidence that implicated members of the group in Libya in the execution of civilians and the unlawful use of anti-personnel mines and booby traps in family homes around Tripoli.

In Mali, figures from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project show that militant violence more than doubled between 2021 and 2022, with civilians making up the highest number of casualties. Operations by the army involving the Wagner group have led to higher civilian deaths. Among the worst incidents was the killing of some 500 civilians in a week-long operation in the central town of Moura. The UN linked "foreign forces" and the Malian army to the killings, while the US sanctioned two soldiers and the de facto commander of Wagner in Mali.

Earlier this year, the US Treasury accused the mercenaries of en-

gaging in an ongoing pattern of serious criminal activity, including "mass executions, rape, child abductions, and physical abuse in the Central African Republic and Mali", though Wagner's success against a powerful rebel coalition in the CAR has entrenched public support there.

This fan base has been helped by local troll farms, run by Mr Prigozhin, with the intention of influencing debate in Africa and whipping up anti-Western sentiment. For example, the Malian junta has just asked the UN peacekeeping force to leave the country – in line with a social media push to get the force replaced by Russian troops. In May, Prigozhin told the Cameroon-based *Afrique Media TV*, a station affiliated with him, that Wagner mercenaries were "more effective" than UN peacekeepers in Mali and the CAR.

What is the possible fallout**for Africa?**

Analysts say while Wagner has been incredibly useful for the Russian state in Africa, especially as it seeks diplomatic support amid the Ukraine conflict – the mercenary group could not be where it is without the Kremlin. The two are so intertwined, unravelling them on the continent seems a perilous task.

It is clear in Libya, for example, that Wagner units have been relying heavily on support from the Russian defence ministry.

A UN diplomatic source and Wagner watcher has told the BBC that if the group were to be completely disbanded, its units in Africa would no longer be resupplied by the Russian authorities. Meanwhile all their fighters in Africa are paid by a Prigozhin holding company, Lou Osborn from the All Eyes on Wagner Project – an interesting point with regard to Lavrov's recent assurances to the CAR and Mali.

The UN source says that if fighters are left unpaid, with no political or military support, they would essentially be out of a job and up for hire in countries grappling with dangerous civil wars and insurgencies.

Russia's President Vladimir Putin has said Wagner fighters should join the regular army, go home or head for Belarus – but Stanyard says it is unclear if this will be the case for the Russian soldiers of fortune in Africa.

The analyst suggests there may be "some sort of compromise position whereby Yevgeny Prigozhin, from his current exile in Belarus, will retain control and ultimate responsibility for the Wagner operations in Africa".

There are also big questions about what will become of the murky business operations in Africa linked to Wagner and Prigozhin.

Interestingly the African-based troll farms, which went silent during the mutiny on Saturday, have focused on the Kremlin's line since the Belarus deal was announced. One called Mr Putin "the master of war" but did not go so far as to discredit his erstwhile ally, Prigozhin, perhaps indicating the two may fudge a way forward together on Africa.

global lens

■ THE OCEAN PROMISED ADVENTURE, ADRENALINE AND MYSTERY

A MAVERICK'S TRAGIC END



Stockton Rush's Titanic mission drew scrutiny from industry experts, who warned he was cutting corners, putting innovation ahead of safety and risking potentially catastrophic results

● WASHINGTON

Stockton Rush wanted to be known as an innovator. It didn't seem to matter how he did it. Bright, driven, born into wealth, his dream was to be the first person to reach Mars. When he realised that was unlikely to happen in his lifetime, he turned his attentions to the sea. "I wanted to be Captain Kirk and in our lifetime, the final frontier is the ocean," he told a journalist in 2017.

The ocean promised adventure, adrenaline and mystery. He also

believed it promised profits – if he could make a success of the submersible he helped design, which he directed his company OceanGate to build.

He had a maverick spirit that seemed to draw people in, earning him the admiration of his employees, passengers and investors. "His passion was amazing and I bought into it," said Aaron Newman, who travelled on Rush's Titan sub and eventually became an OceanGate investor.

But Rush's soaring ambition also drew scrutiny from industry experts, who warned

he was cutting corners, putting innovation ahead of safety and risking potentially catastrophic results.

It wasn't something he was willing to accept. Last week, he and four other people on board the Titan lost their lives when it imploded. "You're remembered for the rules you break," Rush once said, quoting US general Douglas MacArthur. "I've broken some rules," he said about the Titan. "I think I've broken them with logic and good engineering behind me."

Stockton Rush III was born in

California in 1962 into a family that made its fortune from oil and shipping. He was sent to a prestigious boarding school, the Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire, and went on to earn a bachelor's degree in aerospace engineering from Princeton University in 1984.

At 19, he became the youngest pilot in the world to qualify for jet transport rating, the highest pilot rating obtainable. He worked on F-15s and anti-satellite missile programmes, with the hope of eventually joining the

Continued on Page 28

global lens

Titanic sub firm: A rule-breaking founder

Continued from Page 27

US space programme and being an astronaut. But eventually that ambition lost its appeal, as a trip to the Red Planet seemed increasingly out of reach.

“If someone would tell me what the commercial or military reason to go to Mars is, I would believe it’s going to happen,” Rush told *Fast Company* magazine. “It’s just a dream.” So he shifted his gaze downward and in 2009 founded OceanGate, a private company that offered customers – Rush preferred the term “adventurers” – a chance to experience deep sea travel, including to the wreck of the Titanic. The company, based in Everett in Washington state, was small and tight-knit. Rush would chair all-staff meetings at its headquarters, while his wife, Wendy – another member of Princeton’s class of 1984 – was his director of communications.

A junior employee who worked at OceanGate from 2017 to 2018 and asked not to be identified said the company headquarters felt homey and lived-in, with wiring and equipment seemingly everywhere. “It was very free-flowing.”

At the helm was Rush. “He was just really passionate about what he was doing and very good at instilling that passion into everybody else that worked there,” the employee said.

At one staff meeting, Rush brought virtual reality goggles for everyone to take a digital underwater tour. Rush told them that this is what they were aiming for – to allow more people to have this view. “This is the world I want,” he told them. Rush was “not a leader from the back, telling people what to do; he led from the front”, said Newman, the investor.

Newman went on the Titan with Rush to see the wreck of the Titanic in the summer of 2021. The first time they met, Rush “spent hours” talking with him about the potential of exploring the bottom of the ocean. Rush “followed his own path”, Newman said. Newman’s recollection of OceanGate was of a team that looked out for each other.

And Rush’s wife, Wendy, was



The Titan submersible that imploded near the wreck of the Titanic with five people on board.

“up at the top, looking over his shoulder, making sure that he was doing everything perfectly and not cutting corners or skipping things”, he said. Newman was so taken by Rush that he decided to invest in OceanGate. “You know, I didn’t know if I’d ever see any return or not. That was not the point,” he said.

“The point was to be part of something that’s experimental and is breaking new ground, and pushing forward our technology, and how the world works, and going places and doing amazing things; that’s what this is about.”

Newman described himself as a minor investor. As a private company, OceanGate is not obliged to publish all financial records. US financial records from January 2020 show that Rush and his fellow directors sold a stake in the company worth US\$18m, thought to have been used to fund the development of Titan.

To recoup the costs, OceanGate’s sub, “well-lit and comfortable”, the company said, came with a price tag of US\$250,000 (£195,600) for an underwater trip. Rush’s clients were uber-rich thrill seekers, willing to part with that sum for a once-in-a-lifetime adventure. Las Vegas businessman Jay Bloom

had been messaging Rush about joining a dive, before finally turning down a seat for himself and his son on the fatal excursion.

He said the chance to see the wreck up close would have been a “bucket-list” experience. It was about being able to say “you did something very few people have the opportunity to do”, he said. Despite the large sums of money involved, OceanGate equipment sometimes had a home-made feel.

The former junior employee told the *BBC* he was surprised to find that Titan’s electrical design included off-the-shelf development boards, as opposed to using a custom, in-house design like other engineering companies.

David Pogue, a *CBS News* journalist who joined Rush on a trip to the Titanic wreck in 2021, said the chief executive drove the Titan with a game controller and used “rusty lead pipes from the construction industry as ballast”. Yet Rush assured Pogue that the only thing that really mattered was the vessel’s hull, built from an unusual and largely untested material for a deep sea vessel: carbon fibre, with titanium end plates.

Rush knew carbon fibre was used successfully in yachts and aviation, and believed it would allow for his submersible to be made more cheaply than industry-standard steels. “There’s a rule you don’t do that,” said Rush in 2021. “Well, I did.” The tube shape of the Titan was also unusual. The hull of a deep-diving sub is usually spherical, which means it receives an equal amount of pressure at every point, but the Titan had a cylinder-shaped cabin. OceanGate gave it sensors to analyse the effects of changing pressure as it descended.

The glass viewport, from which passengers could see out, was only certified down to 1,300m, far short of the depths of the ocean floor where the Titanic wreck lay. Rob McCallum, an explorer who acted as a consultant for OceanGate, became concerned when Rush decided against getting official certification for the submersible.

Subs can be certified or “classed” by marine organisations, like the American Bureau of Shipping or Lloyd’s Register, meaning the vehicle must meet certain standards on things like stability, strength, safety and performance. But this process is not mandatory. In emails to Rush in March 2018, McCallum said: “You are wanting to use a prototype unclassified technology in a very hostile place. As much as I appreciate entrepreneurship and innovation, you are potentially putting an entire industry at risk. Four thousand metres down in the mid-Atlantic is not the kind of place you can cut corners.”

Rush, apparently indignant, responded that he was “tired of industry players who try to use a safety argument to stop innovation”.

Safety was “about culture, not paperwork”, he said. He talked of needing “sensible design, extensive testing, and informed consent of the participants”, but said a piece of paper did not guarantee the safety of a sub. While he admitted deviating from some guidelines, such as “overly conservative” viewport limits, he argued the Titan’s safety systems were “way beyond” anything else in use.

global lens

■ GLOBAL PRICE RISES MAKE PILGRIMAGE INCREASINGLY UNAFFORDABLE

A PRAYER FOR CHEAPER HAJJ

The expedition starts on the eighth day of the Islamic lunar month of Dhul Hijjah, which this year corresponded to June 26 in the Gregorian calendar

● WASHINGTON

Some 1.8 million Muslims from across the world made it to Mount Arafat in Saudi Arabia last week to mark the most important day of the Hajj. But due to global price rises, the pilgrimage is becoming increasingly unaffordable.

“The number of bookings has significantly dropped this year. It’s too costly for many people,” says an employee at a private Egyptian tour operator in charge of organising Hajj trips, who wanted to remain anonymous out of fear of a backlash over their criticism of their country’s economic situation.

In Egypt, the most populous Arab country, the cheapest government-sponsored pilgrimage currently costs around \$6,000 — double what it was last year. The price hike has been fuelled by the sharp devaluation of the Egyptian pound, which has lost more than 50 per cent of its value against the US dollar since March 2022. As a result, the cost of living has also skyrocketed, with annual core inflation hitting 40 per cent in May.

About 30 per cent of the population was living below the government’s poverty line before the Covid-19 pandemic, and the World Bank says the figure is likely to have risen since then. Farida, a retired Egyptian civil servant, saved to go on the Hajj for five years. “All my savings are not enough to pay for the trip. When I saw the price list, I was shocked,” she says. Farida — not her real name — is a widow and mother of five.

She also asked not to be identified because she did not want to publicly criticise Egyptian authorities over the rising cost of living. Farida says that performing the Hajj is “my dream”, adding: “Hajj cleanses the soul.” She says her children are all married, so “social and financial responsibilities have been lifted off my shoulders. It is about time to go to Hajj.”

Farida has already been to Mecca four times before to perform the lesser Umrah pilgrimage, which includes some of the rituals of the Hajj and can be undertaken at any time of the year. This time, she used a loophole in the system so that she could perform the Hajj.

“Instead of the Hajj visa, I got a three-month-tourist visa and arrived in Mecca a month before the Hajj season kicks off,” she tells me from Saudi Arabia while waiting to start the pilgrimage. “This is the only option I have got.”

Farida’s whole trip to Mecca works out 80 per cent cheaper than the government-sponsored



Water mist is sprayed to cool down Muslim pilgrims during the symbolic stoning of the devil ritual as part of the hajj pilgrimage in Mina, near the holy city of Mecca, on June 29.

Hajj package. Hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam. Muslims are required to make the journey to Mecca at least once in their lifetime if they are physically and financially capable of doing so.

The pilgrimage starts on the eighth day of the Islamic lunar month of Dhul Hijjah, which this year corresponded to June 26 in the Gregorian calendar, and lasts five to six days.

The Hajj usually attracts between 1.5 million and two million pilgrims, but this is the first time since the pandemic that Saudi authorities have allowed it to return to full capacity. Saudi Arabia allocates each country an annual quota based on the number of Muslims living there.

The biggest goes to Indonesia, the world’s largest Muslim-majority nation, with a population of 270 million. It was given 221,000 places. Indonesian authorities decided this year to cut the subsidy for the pilgrimage to 50 per cent from 60 per cent, meaning that each Indonesian pilgrim had to pay US\$3,320. In 2022, the package cost US\$2,660.

While the financial cost can prove an

obstacle for many Muslims around the world, for those in Yemen — Saudi Arabia’s war-torn and impoverished southern neighbour — the situation is far more complicated.

The country has been devastated by a conflict that escalated in 2015, when a Saudi-led military coalition intervened after the Iran-backed rebel Houthi movement seized control of large parts of the country. The fighting has reportedly killed more than 150,000 people and caused one of the world’s biggest humanitarian disasters.

This month, Yemeni pilgrims flew directly from the rebel-held capital, Sanaa, to Saudi Arabia for the Hajj — the first such commercial flights in about seven years. Those who travelled had to pay about \$3,000 — a considerable sum in a country where more than 21 million out of a population of 30 million people need some kind of humanitarian assistance and 17 million do not know where their next meal will come from. “In 2016, I went to Hajj for less than half of this price. It’s too expensive for me now,” one Yemeni journalist says.

O B I T

■ FATHER AND SON HAD A FALLING OUT IN THE 1990S

BILL LEE EXITS THE SCENE**The jazz bassist composed music for several of son Spike Lee's movies before a personal feud stopped them from collaborating**

● LOS ANGELES

Bill Lee, a jazz bassist who played with Bob Dylan, Simon & Garfunkel, Aretha Franklin and Duke Ellington, who was also the father of filmmaker Spike Lee, died at his Brooklyn home at 94 on May 24.

Bill Lee composed scores for several of Spike Lee's early films, including *She's Gotta Have It* (1986), *School Daze* (1988), *Do The Right Thing* (1989) and *Mo' Better Blues* (1990).

Born William James Edwards Lee III in Snow Hill, Ala., on July 23, 1928, Bill Lee was the son of two musicians. "My learning in music started with my mother and father," he said during a 2012 interview with jazz bassist Jonah Jonathan. He instilled the same love of music in some of his own children: David played piano, Joie practiced bass, Cinqué played drums, Chris took up trumpet and Spike played cello.

Lee told *The Times* in 1994 that his great-great-great-grandfather, Mike, was the defiant son of an African king and that his grandfather went to school with Booker T. Washington. "I went to school with Martin Luther King," he added.

Inspired by saxophonist Charlie "Bird" Parker, Lee forayed into jazz, picking up his first bass while attending Morehouse College in Atlanta. But because the historically Black school didn't have a music department, he actually spent time at Spelman College, another HBCU (historically black colleges and universities) in Atlanta, where he sang in the Glee club and played in the quartet.

After graduating from Morehouse in 1951, Lee travelled by train to Chicago's South Side, where there was a robust jazz scene. He made his way to New York City in 1959. "New York is the epitome of jazz to me," Lee said. "All the great musicians



Bill Lee in an undated portrait by his son David Lee, a photographer. Over six decades his ebullient string bass could be heard in thousands of live performances and on more than 250 record albums.

New York is the epitome of jazz to me. All the great musicians come here.

Bill Lee

”

come here." There, he recorded on Strata-East Records, a musician-owned label, and founded and directed the New York Bass Violin Choir, described as a "narrative folk, jazz opera" with pieces like *One Mile East*, inspired by growing up in the South near for-

mer slave quarters.

After collaborating on several films, Bill and Spike had a falling out in the 1990s that, according to both men, was a long time coming. Bill Lee told *The Times* in 1994 that the turmoil stemmed from Spike Lee being displeased with the bassist's relationship with his second wife, Susan Kaplan, and came to a head when he asked to borrow money from his son after getting arrested for heroin possession.

"I'm glad I was arrested. It woke me up....Dope was not part of my life until I was 40 years old. People remember you by the work that you do," Bill Lee said. Spike told the *LA Times* in that same cover story that his movie, *Crooklyn*, was "very, very, very loosely based" on his childhood with his father. His siblings, Cinqué and Joie, helped write that film, which starred Alfre Woodard and Delroy Lindo.

Spike and Bill reunited at a 20th anniversary screening of *Do the Right Thing* at New York City's Directors Guild of America Theater in June 2009, posing together on the red carpet. They again joined each other for a 25th anniversary event for the movie held at the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Harvey Theater in 2014.

Still, Spike Lee respected his father's musical genius. "Everything I know about jazz I got from my father," the filmmaker told *The New York Times* in 1990. "I saw his integrity, how he was not going to play just any kind of music, no matter how much money he could make."

In addition to Kaplan and Spike Lee, the elder Lee is survived by sons David and Cinqué, daughter Joie Lee, and Arnold Lee, his son with his second wife, and two grandchildren. Christopher Lee died in 2014, and first wife, Jacquelyn Lee, died in 1977.

ntv
WILD Talk

WITH SMRITI VIDYARTHI



WATCH THE NEXT EPISODE:
SAVING THE SPECIES ntv
turning on your world

SUNDAY 2ND JULY 2023 | 8:25PM

GOtv
entertaining africa

Channel 91

DStv
Feel every moment

Channel 271

StarTimes
StarTimes Live

Channel 106

zuku

Channel 13

SIGnet
a world of possibilities

Available on Signet

ADN

Available NTV1

www.ntvkenya.co.ke



THE TREND

WITH AMINA ABDI RABAR

FRIDAYS

8PM & 10PM

GOtv
entertaining africa
Channel 91

DStv
Feel every moment
Channel 271

StarTimes
Channel 106

zuku
Channel 13

SIGNet
Available on Signet

ADN
Available NTV 1