

THE STANDARD

Starving land commission of funds renders it impotent

It is a matter of deep regret that the national Treasury is deliberately underfunding the National Land Commission (NLC) and thereby dashing Kenyans' hopes for meaningful land reforms. The Constitution is clear that NLC is responsible for managing all public land and leading reforms to restore a sense of equity among Kenyans, which was systematically whittled down during the colonial period. This led to the historic injustices in land allocations and use in various parts of the country.

It is these injustices, imagined or real, that have stoked the periodic communal conflicts experienced in different parts of the country, especially on the eve of national elections. The tragic reality is that many

leaders have ridden into public office on the back of these real or imagined injustices. Additionally, many of them have taken advantage of these grievances to acquire vast swathes of land, little of which is put to good use.

Perhaps, it is the fear of losing these ill-gotten gains that has persuaded some in the National Treasury to ignore the NLC's request for funds. Its allocation of Sh776.9 million against NLC's request for Sh14.8 billion in the 2014/2015 financial year is ridiculous.

The Commission's ability to carry out its constitutional mandate will be hamstringing in the coming two years as its request for Sh15.3 billion for the 2015/2016 financial year was cut to Sh996 million while its

request for Sh16.4 billion was reduced to Sh1.044 billion for 2016/2017.

Sadly, NLC has been reduced to an impotent witness to continued land grabbing of community land, especially in areas where oil and mineral deposits have been discovered. As expected, these questionable transactions are fuelling tension in these regions with the potential to explode into violence at most awkward times.

Common sense dictates that the National Treasury finds time to sit down with the NLC before slashing their allocations in a manner that seems to suggest the commission has lost its way.

In the unlikely event that the Government has decided the NLC should be kept alive only on life-support, but defanged — equiva-

lent to being seen but not heard — then Kenyans have a right to know.

It is noteworthy that the strategy of keeping NLC on a tight leash did not start with the Jubilee government.

In the 2012/2013 fiscal year, the commission was allocated a paltry Sh125 million which was raised to Sh206 million for the recurrent expenditure for 2013/2014.

Equally noteworthy, a report titled *Budgeting for Land Reforms: Ensuring People's Participation* revealed that the much-awaited land reforms would remain a mirage because of the commission's budgetary constraints.

Yet resolving the land question was the central plank on which the last election was fought and won. ■

Two deaths from cancer every hour are too many

Health Cabinet Secretary James Macharia's admission that cancer kills at least two people every hour is an indictment of the Government, in general, and the ministry in particular. The benign neglect of public health goes back to the time the country gained independence.

The neglect has manifested itself in several ways; inadequate financing and allowing the key office holders to make money at the public expense. Indeed the most notorious corruption case prosecuted during the administration of the founding president involved the supplies department of the then ministry of health.

This means the Government will make little headway in the provision of drugs to cancer, and other patients, until it gets a proper handle on its supplies department.

Kenya Medical Association (KMA), KCB and other stakeholders are to be commended for kick-starting a cancer awareness campaign on early detection and management. Dubbed "Bila Cancer Society", the campaign will be officially launched on February 4, 2014 and will run for one month.

The Health ministry also deserves commendation for identifying the main challenges the country faces as it deals with the disease that has become one of the top three killers. But having identified the lack of awareness as one of the challenges is not enough. The ministry must follow this through by crafting and implementing a sustainable strategy that will be rolled out across the country.

Needless to say, this should be done in tandem with the setting up of screening and treatment facilities in all the country's regions. The ministry should also consider hiring additional health professionals, especially oncologists, to work in the public facilities. The case of oncologists is especially challenging because the country has only 12 working in public hospitals.

While the answer lies in stepping up training of the needed cadres, the ministry should not shy away from hiring professionals from abroad to fill gaps in the interim period. ■

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WHAT OTHER MEDIA SAY...



How do the Chinese spend their money during Spring Festival this year?
 Reasonable prices in high-end restaurants. New Year's Eve dinner, also called family reunion dinner or Spring Festival dinner, is the most important meal of the Spring Festival. In contrast to "high-end" and expensive New Year's Eve dinners in previous years, most restaurants have lowered the price of the meal this year. "It's convenient to have the family reunion dinner in a restaurant," says Mrs Wu, a housewife from Sheyang in northeastern China's Liaoning Province. "We can book a dinner in the restaurant where we usually eat and it won't cost too much, about 500 to 1000 yuan." Although most restaurants have reduced the number of dishes in their dinner packages, an increasing number of people choose to eat out in a restaurant in order to avoid the bother of cooking at home. ■



The State of the Union address - taking the longer view: No politician these days gets any traction from the exploitation of bad news, unless he/she is currently out of power and, like the GOP, trying to work their way back in. Democratic presidents concerned with their legacy are not in that position; which is why all we can legitimately expect of any State of the Union Address these days is some sort of claim for progress in the immediate past, plus an equivalent case for more progress in the year to come. That, in truth, is most of what we heard from President Obama on Tuesday evening. Fine rhetoric well delivered, mildly progressive goals modestly pursued, and a strong statement of the continuing importance of American exceptionalism and American power. But just because a president cannot do a full and honest stock-taking of our overall condition doesn't mean that we shouldn't. ■



Stem-cell medical treatments are growing closer: We can be forgiven for thinking there is an element of magic behind the announcement from Japan that researchers have created stem cells — the basic tissue from which all others are made — simply by bathing a sample of blood in a weak solution of citric acid.

The Japanese scientists who made this phenomenal breakthrough were inspired by something that is familiar to every keen gardener — the ability of plants to make copies of themselves without sexual reproduction.

Taking a cutting or a piece of tissue from the apex of the growing stem of a plant can be used to create an entirely new tree or shrub with all its complex parts. It was thought until relatively recently that mammals — and humans — were very different from plants in this respect. ■