

A fast tour back through 50 years

The history of The Nation is the history of the nation. You can see this in the photographs now on show at the RaMoMa room at Rahimtulla Tower, an exhibition, A Piece of History; you can read it in the new book by Gerry Loughran, *The Birth of a Nation: the Story of a Newspaper in Kenya*. Both the exhibition and the book are celebrating the newspaper's 50th anniversary.

The Nation was a most apt title for the paper founded by the Aga Khan and launched back in 1960. When the young leader of the Ismailis first put the idea of starting a newspaper in Kenya to Michael Curtis, once editor of the *News Chronicle* in England, Curtis was tempted but said that he could not be involved in a paper for the Ismaili community. "No, no, that's the last thing I want," the Aga Khan said. "I want a completely independent paper."

And Curtis, who would become the Nation's first chief executive, went on to say that he was quickly convinced that what the Aga Khan wanted was a newspaper to give voice to Kenya's nationalists who, in those few years before independence, were not being heard in the political debate.

And that is the constant dilemma for those running a newspaper in a country like Kenya, or anywhere for that matter: how to give voice to people you wish to support, and at the same time remain truly independent – and non-partisan.

It is not, of course, a dilemma that is apparent in the display of photographs at Rahimtulla Tower. It makes for a fast and

fascinating tour back through 50 years – a pictorial record of a country's pleasures and pains, moments of happiness and times of tragedy.

There's a relaxed picture of Mzee and the Aga Khan sharing smiles – Kenyatta in his favourite leather jacket and the Aga Khan in a businesslike suit and tie. There's the tense photograph of Thomas, Lord Delamere, leading Kenyatta into the 1963 pivotal meeting with white settlers in Nakuru. And there's the amazing photograph taken by the young Mohamed Amin – when, on the Saturday, July 5, 1969, Tom Mboya was gunned down in a Nairobi street, and Pame-

GOING PLACES

John Fox

la, his wife, and fellow Luos were collapsing in paroxysms of grief. The record moves on – showing terrified Kenyans holding up ID cards after the 1982 failed coup attempt; people scrabbling through the wreckage of the bombed American Embassy in 1998; and a distraught woman outside the Kiamba church where 30 people were burnt to death in 2008.

All these photographs are also in Gerry Loughran's book. But there is also Gerry's own commentary (from the inside, as he was at The Nation in a senior editorial position for 12 years) and his collection of memories and opinions of old colleagues such as fellow Europeans Gerry Wilkinson and Rob-



bie Armstrong – and Kenyan senior editors such as Joe Kadhi, Philip Ochieng, Wangethi Mwangi and Tom Mshindi.

Gerry tells how the very first issue of The Nation on Sunday, March 20, 1960, carried a cartoon on the editorial page that showed Kenya's black and white leaders gathered around a new-born baby in a pram marked Nation. One of them was saying, "He's a cute little fellow, but will he behave?" It was a cogent caption, Gerry remarks, considering the many painful conflicts that lay ahead between the paper and politicians. Throughout the book (from the time in the early days when President Kenyatta embarrassed the Aga Khan by asking him if he could install his nephew, Ngengi Muigai, as

The amazing photograph taken by young Mohamed Amin – when, on the Saturday, July 5, 1969, Tom Mboya was gunned down in a Nairobi street, and Pamela, his wife, and fellow Luos were collapsing in paroxysms of grief. Photo/ JOHN FOX

chairman of the holding company, Nation Printers and Publishers Ltd, to the months after the botched elections of 2007 when The Nation was often accused of favouring the PNU) Gerry tells of the "many painful conflicts" between the paper and the politicians. He tells it with the kind of wit we now enjoy in his *Sunday Nation* column, Letter from London.

Pity the book costs over Sh4,000. But if you have some money to spare, you also might like to join in the auction of the A Piece of History photographs. You can make your bids online at www.nationmedia.com.

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THEATRE

ProPerArt stage play on fright and plight of carjack victims

By ANTHONY NJAGI

Prompted by the rising number of carjackings and abductions, playwright and thespian JPR Ochieng' Odera has written a new play, *When it Rains*.

The play to be staged at Phoenix Players presents real life stories of victims of crime.

When it Rains is therefore a reaction to the society's need and fledgling attempt to relate to crimes, especially those that revolting and terrifying type such as rape, robbery and murder.

"In this play we ride on these conflicts and deluge of emotions," said JPR.

Using storytelling to encourage public discussion on how to deal and cope with crime, JPR and his colleagues began this project in 2004.

They interviewed victims of crime who survived to tell their stories.

'When it Rains' is a reaction to the society's need and fledgling attempt to relate to crime



ProPerArt members in the play 'When it Rains' to be staged at the Phoenix Players Theatre. Photo/ANTHONY NJAGI

One such harrowing case is that of the Kenyan scientist working at the International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology (Icipe), who was carjacked with his wife on their way home along Waiyaki Way.

The couple was held hostage for over six hours, as their captors used their car to rob other Kenyans in the Lavington area.

When it Rains is a "multi-

media convergence project", so the story will be presented both on stage and film.

ProPerArt and Phoenix Players are also designing this production as unique training ground for the youth.

The play is produced by Kigara Kamweru of ProPerArt and Millicent Ogutu of Phoenix Players and directed by George Mungai.

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