

## Life: Weekender

# Water shortage threatens to make me jobless

I am always sleepy at work because in our estate, the precious liquid only comes in the night and I spend hours filling up containers

## OFFICE DANDY

MAN - ABOUT - TOWN

I am half asleep, struggling to stay awake, and it is only 11 am. I have been ordered to have a report for the acting CEO ready by 12 noon. I have no choice, but to ask Peninah to bring me a flask of black coffee instead of my usual masala tea. I need something to keep me awake.

My nights have really and truly become a nightmare filled with lack of sleep thanks to the ongoing water shortage. Soon after, we started witnessing some erratic behaviour in the regular flow of water.

Water is no longer available when you need it; instead it appears when it chooses to. When we wrote to the landlord complaining, he blamed the drought and the water company. He said we would have to put up with it or look at buying water from vendors. He then gave this ridiculously high additional amount that we would have to pay should we decide to get tanker water.

Almost the whole block refused to accept these increased rates and the landlord promptly ignored our subsequent pleas regarding water.

That is when my problems with sleep began. Turns out that the water supply company only pumps water in our direction in the night. Night time for the water company does not begin at sunset — it has a mind of its own. Some days the water shows up as early as 6pm and other times it comes as late as 1am.

As soon as I get home, I open the taps and hang around waiting for the first loud gush to announce that water is finally here. I used to be a heavy sleeper, but I have had to change my ways very fast. At the first sound from the taps, I make a mad but sleepy dash from my bed to the water point. That is when the water collection begins.

I have had to buy a number of containers for water collection since I now realise that even for a bachelor like me, I use a lot of this liquid. That is when the real torture begins. Sometimes the water comes out generously and within an hour all my containers are full and



I am back in bed. These times are rare and far between. More frequently, the water comes out like saliva dripping and I have to wait it all out. It is the worst form of torture to battle sleep and to keep awake while waiting for the filling up to happen.

Last night was one such time and today I am paying the price. I wish I could lock the door and just nod off, but I shudder to think at what the repercussions of such an act would be — I would be fired on the spot. So I am here battling with sleep and waiting for

Peninah to bring the *kahawa* (coffee). After what seems like eternity, Peninah saunters in with a full flask of black coffee. She quickly notices that I am not myself and demands to know the cause. She takes one of my chairs as she waits to hear what my answer is. I dare not tell her that I live in a neighbourhood where water is scarce and where water collection is a nightmare. Instead, I tell her how I stayed awake most of the night catching the Chelsea game and how I was so depressed since the Blues lost.

## Passing cloud

Peninah starts lecturing me about the folly of getting addicted to a game that is played in a foreign land. I tell her that I am remorseful and that I am paying the price for my sins since I have a report to prepare for the acting CEO in about an hour. I am hoping that my announcement will cause Peninah to leave, but she makes no attempt and even picks my newspaper to look at the obituaries. What I find of interest is that she sneers and says how the acting CEO is a passing cloud and I should not worry about him. I have learnt to take Peninah's remarks with seriousness. So I plead with her to tell me what she means in that statement. So she puts down the paper, looks at me in the eye and offers: "This is for your ears only."

## Are Kenyans prepared to benefit from cheaper, faster Internet?



RICKY'S MYTHS

RICHARD GITONGA



When we were still in our early stages of education, the history class used to be one of the most interesting and intriguing of subjects because our teachers put into our young minds the events and images of past. One particular image that still lingers in most of our minds is the story of the "great snake" which was what was referred to then as the East African Railway.

The railway was to be the link between Mombasa and Lake Victoria and the sole objective of the project was to open up the rich hinterlands of East Africa to facilitate trade and the colonisation of the interior.

As the construction of the railway progressed in the early part of the last century, our forebears looked at this strange "great snake" with awe and curiosity. It was not until the railway was nearing completion that the locals came to the astonishing realisation that the colonial administration of the time had far more ambitious objectives than had been anticipated.

The "great snake" became a crucial

platform to facilitate trade and to exploit and export produce from the rich hinterland to feed peoples and markets in foreign lands. The relics and records of this interesting time in our history can be viewed today at the Nairobi Railway Museum.

Fast track the current scenario to the year 2050. Our children, or grandchildren for that matter, will be sitting in history classrooms being taught about a "great snake" that landed at the port of Mombasa, which was made of up of fibre optic cables.

They will be taught how their forebears looked at this optical cable with awe and wonder and how the leaders of the time told them that it would revolutionise digital communication within the country's borders.

The children will be intrigued to learn that it used to take anywhere between one to three minutes to download a web page and they will be further amazed at how much money their forebears paid for this ridiculously slow and inefficient service.

Like their ancestors of the early part



**History classes:** Our forebears looked at this strange "great snake" with awe and curiosity; what shall we tell the grand-children about the fibre optic cable? FILE

of the 20th century who were totally taken by surprise by the impact the railway had on their lives, the children will learn how their forebears in the early part of the 21st century were totally taken by surprise by the changes that were brought about by the fibre optical cable.

The forebears were suddenly faced with the realisation that they had developed very little local content to stream through the vast amounts of bandwidth

available across their land. They will learn that this "great snake" resulted in the importation of large amounts of foreign content which did not necessarily meet the social-economic cultural needs of their forebears.

They will learn with some trepidation that the country's balance of trade was further skewed in favour of foreign lands since there was more digital content and trade that needed to be paid for coming in to the country than there

was going out.

After the end of the history class, the children will be taken on a school trip to visit a mental museum, where they will meet people suffering from Internet Addiction Disorder or IAD. They will be told that this unfortunate epidemic was as a result of excessive Internet use and pathological computer use through shopping addiction, excessive gaming and blogging. They will also meet IAD sufferers who lost all their wealth and belongings as a result of gambling on Internet sites and also buying non-existent real estate in faraway places where man has never set foot.

## Probing questions

After the school trip is over, the children will go home and tell their parents of the intriguing things that they learnt in their history class.

They will ask their parents probing questions on where they were when all this was going on. Their parents will provide mumbled and half-hearted answers that they were couch potatoes and were more worried at the time of the intrigues of the coalition government of the time and the fact that they did not have too much time to think about how the Internet would affect their lives.

The children will go to sleep that night wondering, "What were our parents thinking?"