

THE **STANDARD**

Sunday July 20, 2008 For Fairness and Justice.



**BUY AFRICAN  
BUILD AFRICA**

Love Africa as you love your Mother...

# Sunday Magazine

Cover story:  
Rising from  
the ashes

# Big Dreams for Kenya



# Kenya's envoy abroad

*From riches to rags, then back to riches. That's an apt description of kenyan-born Khalid Sheikh's life, now among UK's elite entrepreneurs. He has a dream to change fortunes of entrepreneurs, writes Mwingirwa Kithure.*

ONE cold morning of September 28, 1972, a forlorn-looking 14-year-old boy nervously disembarked from a plane at Stansted Airport, UK. Sandwiched between his equally worrisome siblings, his youthful face showed no emotion.

But the truth was that he was frightened by the looming uncertainty. His family, like other 30,000

Ugandans of Asian origin, had just been banished from Uganda by then president Idi Amin Dada.

They were banished for no reason other than that they were foreigners who operated successful businesses in Uganda at the height of glamour for "Ugandanisation" of the economy. Khalid Sheikh was not too young to comprehend the

consequences of his family's abrupt ejection from the matoke loving country. His hardworking family had lost property worth millions of shillings to the vengeful mobs that looted Asian shops after Amin's unconstitutional decree.

The family that had much to drink, eat and even donate suddenly found itself poor in Britain. Khalid's father, Abdul Rashid Sheikh refused to go down as many Asian families did.

## **Two worlds**

It was not easy to make it in the UK and the beginning was especially difficult.

"It was two different worlds. One minute we were living a comfortable lifestyle in Uganda, the next there were up to six of us crumbled in a room," Khalid recalls.

## **Moved to Uganda**

His father moved to Uganda and established a branch of the clothing business.



*Khalid in Casual wear in London*



*Khalid with his father in Uganda*

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# Kenya's envoy abroad

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He and his siblings were brought up in Jinja, a cotton-growing district. Khalid says they watched helplessly as people took over their business even before the expiry of the 90-day ultimatum that Amin had given.

"We thought it was a bad dream but when one morning we woke to the reality of Amin's decree, it was a sad scene," he reminisces.

Before the ejection, Khalid attended Magwa Primary School. He had passed his exams and joined the prestigious Jinja Senior Secondary School until 1972 when the family fled. On arrival in the UK, the family settled in Leicester and Khalid joined Melton Mowbray College for 'O' Levels and 'A' Levels, graduating a few years later with a diploma in Business Management. Khalid then joined Bristol Polytechnic to study accounting and finance. He recalls how his father, who died in October 1985, did menial jobs in a number of UK companies to make ends meet. His mother had died in a road accident in Uganda a year before the family fled.

## Riches to rags

Today, Khalid is a classic case study of riches to rags and back to riches. He is the chairman of Leicester-based Clifton Packaging Group Plc. Clifton, based at Meridian Business Park on the outskirts of Leicester is a leading manufacturer of high-tech, modern and creative food packaging films, and food and drink pouches.



Khalid in his office in UK.

"I never inherited any money. I started Clifton with my younger brother Zahid with £500 (Sh65,000 at current exchange rate) savings. It was sheer guts, tenacity, hard work and determination to succeed against all odds," says the father of two.

His company is named after the world famous Clifton suspension bridge in Bristol, UK. Khalid is now eyeing Africa, and specifically Kenya, as the next destination for his business.

Khalid was recently in the country as a guest speaker during a small and medium enterprise workshop, where he sold his concept to delegates from more than 40 countries.

## Love Africa

His dream to transform Africa lies in

a personal outfit he calls BABA, 'Buy Africa and Build Africa'. It is a plan Khalid says has potential to transform the continent into a global industrialisation.

"Buy African... Build Africa... love Africa like you love your mother. It was my tough upbringing which made me think how I could play a part in transforming Africa," says Khalid.

"It is my vision to be at the forefront in changing the fortunes of Africa for the benefit of Africans in a most practical way.

I am determined to expose this concept and spread the message all over the Western world," he adds.

He has involved his sister, Munawar and brothers, Tahir, Zahid and Shahid in the business.

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# Kenya's envoy abroad

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"Nothing unleashes the potential of humans than the power of togetherness. All our lives, my brothers and sister have co-existed peacefully. The whole family is involved in Clifton packaging," he says.

## Expertise needed

He says the region requires a knowledge transfer programme, whereby the developed countries transfer skills to Africa.

"The continent needs expertise; not people who are only out to milk it of its resources," he says.

Khalid, who started exhibiting business acumen at a young age to the excitement of his entrepreneurial parents, is a strong advocate of government and private sector boosting youth investments. The youth, he says, need role models to inspire and encourage them to succeed because they hold the key to the continent's development.

Khalid says the West is to blame for some of Africa's poverty. Many companies from the West buy raw materials from Africa for a song only to rake profits and do little for the continent's development.

## Bring right change

It is time, Khalid says, Africans in the Diaspora became vocal about this



*Khalid Sheikh, right, and Shahid Sheikh of Clifton Packaging with Uganda President Yoweri Museveni at the launch of the commonwealth Business Forum 2007 at Marlborough House, pall Mall, London*

***"We thought it was a bad dream, but when we woke to the reality of Amin's decree, it was a sad scene"***

unfair trade and stop the exploitation of Africa.

Exuding confidence, Khalid concludes, "I am sure the hardworking and warm African people will join me so that we can, together, grow stronger and attain the continent's industrialisation goal."