

InBrief

Wi-fi security flaw 'puts devices at risk of hacks'



The wi-fi connections of businesses and homes around the world are at risk, according to researchers who have revealed a major flaw dubbed Krack. It concerns an authentication system which is widely used to secure wireless connections. Experts said it could leave "the majority" of connections at risk until they are patched. The researchers added the attack method was "exceptionally devastating" for Android 6.0 or above and Linux. A Google spokesperson said: "We're aware of the issue, and we will be patching any affected devices in the coming weeks."

The US Computer Emergency Readiness Team (Cert) has issued a warning on the flaw. "US-Cert has become aware of several key management vulnerabilities in the four-way handshake of wi-fi protected access II (WPA2) security protocol," it said. "Most or all correct implementations of the standard will be affected." -BBC

Oil prices increase amid growing tensions in Iraq



Concern over oil supplies from Iraq has pushed crude prices higher as the country's government continues its move against Kurdish forces. The price of Brent crude rose 1.6 per cent to \$58.12 (Sh6003.80) a barrel, while US West Texas Crude climbed 1.4 per cent to \$52.16 (Sh5388.13). Iraq has the second largest output in the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec)'s cartel. Iraqi officials say they have seized oil installations near the disputed city of Kirkuk, but Kurdish officials deny this. Opinions among analysts were mixed, but Neil Wilson at ETX Capital said Brent prices might struggle to push significantly higher than \$60 (Sh6198) a barrel because clashes were "unlikely to spark wider disruption to supplies from the Middle East". -BBC

State mulls ways to boost food security

Agriculture CS Bett says new maize seed varieties offer country major breakthrough

by Wahinya Henry
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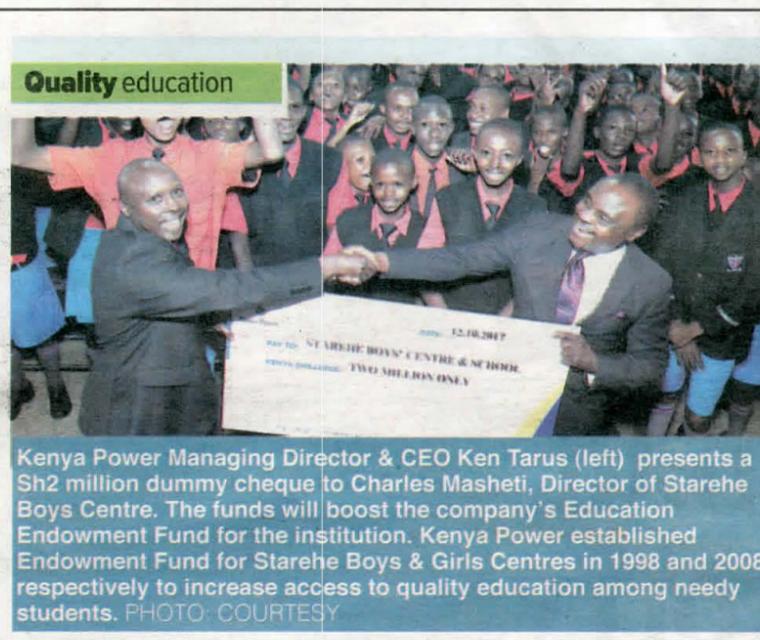
The government has lauded the sacrifice researchers and stakeholders have made in developing new maize seeds which can effectively control insect pests and also improve yields.

Agriculture Cabinet Secretary Willy Bett, however, said more tests and safeguards are still needed before the genetically modified (GM) seeds can be commercially grown in the country. Saying the seeds have since demonstrated high tolerant levels to the Maize Lethal Necrosis Disease (MLND), Bett termed the outcome a major breakthrough for the country and a major step towards making the country food secure.

"The development is timely. The varieties have shown up to 65 to 80 per cent tolerant level," Bett said during a media briefing at his Kilimo House offices. At least the number of people affected by food insecurity has risen this year to about 3.5 million, with a majority being found in the Arid and Semi Arid Lands (ASALs).

The country needs at least 40 million bags. In addition to climate change and prolonged drought, the disease left a trail of destruction of maize fields in the country's growing basket regions as it marched to neighbouring countries.

The CS also spoke on H12 ML1 maize variety tolerant to the Maize Chlorotic Mottle Virus whose emergence also led to massive grain loss in



Quality education

Kenya Power Managing Director & CEO Ken Tarus (left) presents a Sh2 million dummy cheque to Charles Masheti, Director of Starehe Boys Centre. The funds will boost the company's Education Endowment Fund for the institution. Kenya Power established Education Endowment Fund for Starehe Boys & Girls Centres in 1998 and 2008 respectively to increase access to quality education among needy students. PHOTO: COURTESY

LETHAL DISEASE

Maize farming has in recent years been hit by prolonged droughts and a number of diseases including the virulent Maize Lethal Necrosis Disease (MLND) which has wiped out whole crops in, especially, the South Rift breadbasket.

Pests such as the stem borer and the fall army worm have also been on the rise.

the maize basket regions of the country. The initial Sugar cane mosaic virus will be tamed by the H13M2 maize variety-both developed by Kenya Seed, the CS said adding: "The outcome is as a result by seed experts and other stakeholders involved in the short-term strategy of raising awareness among farmers on measures to

contain the disease and in investing in research." According to the managing director of Simlaw Seed, David Kiplagat, the varieties at present are being bulked to be released into the market next season.

Simlaw is a subsidiary company of Kenya Seed, with extensive distribution networks, including at the continental level. Kiplagat spoke at Soweto Slum Good Samaritan Children's Home where the firm donated food items and cash totaling Sh198,000:

"The innovation is not just for the country alone. Neighbouring states that have borne the brunt of the disease, also stand to benefit. They are recommended for those areas where the disease was prevalent.

According to experts the varieties are also tolerant to other viral diseases in maize such as maize streak virus. Yields are also good. According to Kiplagat they yield up to 38 bags per acre and stays green.

Insurers diversify to boost revenue

by Zachary Ochuodho
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Insurance investors in Kenya are moving away from the traditional investment portfolios to real estates and asset-based investments which yield more returns.

Investments in government bonds and Treasury bills are yielding less compared to what investors these days get from real estate and asset-based investment.

According to an insurance report released yesterday by Cytonn Investment Plc, the yield returns from the real estate and asset-based portfolios

"Because Central Bank of Kenya is not accepting high yields on Treasury securities and the MPC maintains the Central Bank Rate at 10 per cent, it is unlikely that any investment undertaken in Treasury Bills and Security Bonds will yield anything more," Caleb Mugendi, an analyst with the firm said. He said insurers are venturing into the real estate segment particularly in the offices' pace segment which yields more returns. "Britam and UAP have



already diversified their investments in office space while CIC and Sanlam are also adopting asset management to further

diversify their revenue streams to grow their investment incomes," Mugendi said. According to the Insurance Report 2017, Kenya-Reinsurance was ranked the most attractive company as measured by both the franchise value and intrinsic value scores. The franchise score measures the broad and comprehensive business strength of the company and the intrinsic score measures the investment return potential.



Luke Mulunda

Shoddy work derailing development in counties

Devolution is a great thing. It has spread development to rural areas in proportions never imagined before. Most regions have, for the first time, seen modern hospitals while children can go to modern schools, thanks to new Early Childhood Development centres. More has been created for both young and old people.

One of the most important developments in counties have been roads. Many areas have been opened up and transportation has become easier and less expensive.

These projects, boosted by rural electrification, have improved living standards. This has, in fact, started reversing the conventional rural-

urban migration. If you tour most counties you will see serious real estate projects, both commercial and residential. Villages are being dotted with million-shilling maisonettes and bungalows, as Kenyans begin to appreciate life in the villages and local municipalities.

This is good for rural Kenya, whose economies have received a major shot in the arm. If such developments are sustained over the next decade, then the country can truly move into middle income economy status with nearly everyone involved.

The only worry, however, is quality assurance. It is clear counties have become deal-making hubs where

“Roads that have consumed billions of shillings are rendered impassable.”

the quality of work matters less than what the people involved make out of it. Of particular concern is infrastructure, especially roads.

The current rainy season in Rift Valley, Western and Nyanza regions has exposed what was a poorly kept secret. Roads that have consumed billions of shillings are rendered impassable when it rains because of

the shoddy work done.

Most of these roads are classified as all-weather but contractors were allowed to use poor materials, which in some cases have made the roads worse than they previously were. Contractors go for cheaper murrum with more soil than gravel.

Also, most roads do not have culverts which are critical to controlling movement of run-off water. Yet it doesn't need a road engineer to see this oversight. Some roads have been graded partially, yet the contractors have been paid in full. The irony is that roads done in the 1980s have served well for almost three decades.

There is a problem with these new roads since counties will be forced to be making new roads annually as the maintenance work becomes more or less doing a fresh job.

Quality Assurance and Standards officers in counties must do their job right. Otherwise devolution-related development will stick in a mark-timing mode. Governors, too, should become more hands-on and hire independent evaluators and assessors to approve jobs done before payment is made.

Members of County Assembly who are behind some of these projects should also seek expert help in monitoring the work of contractors.

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