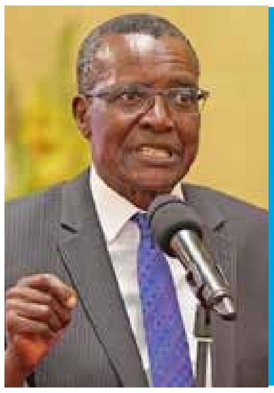

Police reforms stall as Kenya's uneasy march to August 2027 begins

Former Chief Justice David Maraga yesterday accused President William Ruto's administration of illegally retaining two senior security chiefs beyond the mandatory retirement age, reigniting a debate over police reform Page 8

Chuka University's 30,000 students are about to transform Ndagani

Chuka University's student population is set to reach 30,000 following the admission of more than 9,150 first-year students yesterday, a record intake that Vice Chancellor Henry Mutembei says will pump millions of shillings daily into the economy Page 12

Tuesday, September 1, 2026 No. 01625 KSh 60 (TSh 1,700 : USh 2,700 : RFr 900)

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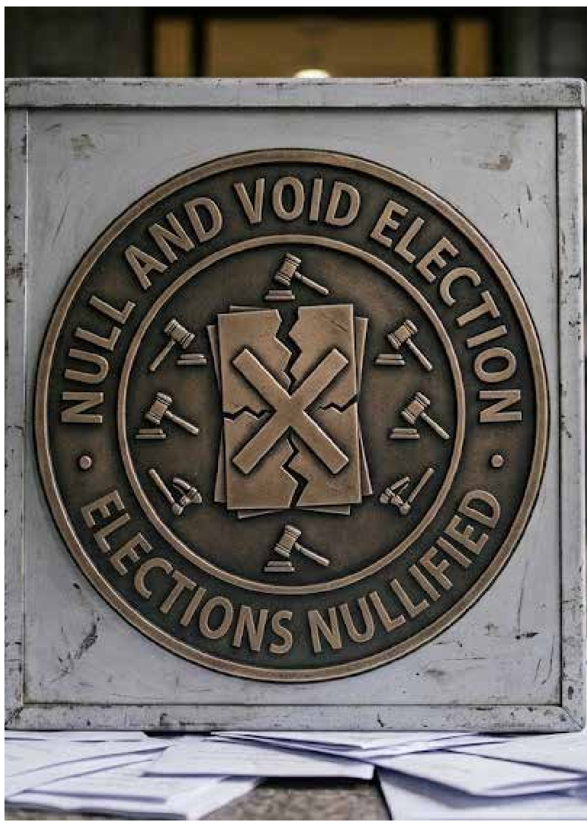
Countdown 2027 Ethekon described the 2027 vote as a "complex, multi-stage national exercise"

2027: Could Kenya face another nullified election?

With a KSh61.7B electoral budget under scrutiny, technology tender allegations mounting and the ghost of 2017 unexorcised, the warning signs are too loud to ignore

Twelve months before Kenya holds its next general election, the independent commission charged with running the vote is defending a KSh61.7B budget before parliament, fielding allegations that its technology procurement has been designed to favour a specific foreign company, and meeting with international observers to manage growing concerns about institutional credibility — a combination of pressures that, in Kenya's electoral history, has never led anywhere comfortable.

The question that serious observers are beginning to ask — quietly in some quarters, loudly in others — is whether August 2027 could produce a result that does not survive legal challenge. It is not an alarmist question. It is a constitutional one. Under Article 140 of Kenya's Constitution, a presidential election result can be challenged in the Supreme Court within seven days of the declaration of results. Page 9



IEBC Chairperson Erastus Edung Ethekon

Ruto unveils Pfizer deal cutting cancer treatment costs seven-fold

BY MKT REPORTER
@themtkenyatimes

President William Ruto yesterday announced a partnership with pharmaceutical giant Pfizer that he said would cut the cost of treating several cancers by more than seven times, with some medicines falling from as much as KSh1 million to under KSh50,000 per cycle.

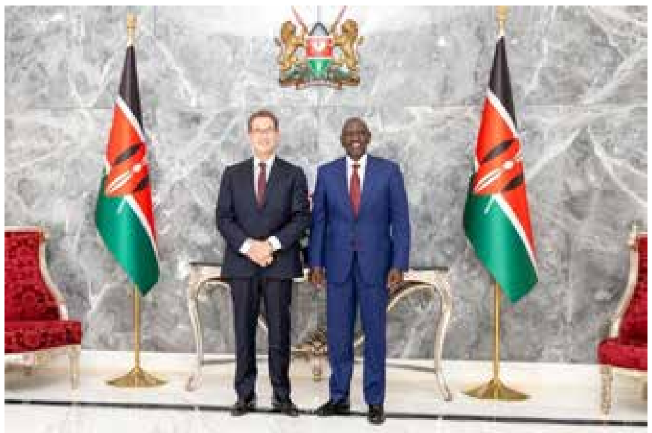
Speaking after hosting Pfizer chairman and chief executive Albert Bourla at State House, Nairobi, Ruto said the agreement, reached between Pfizer and the Kenya Medical Supplies Authority under the company's Accord for a Healthier World programme, covered treatments for breast, stomach, colon, lung, prostate and oesophageal cancers, as well as leukaemia, lymphoma and multiple myeloma. "Today, Kenya has made a major breakthrough in the treatment of several cancers," he said.

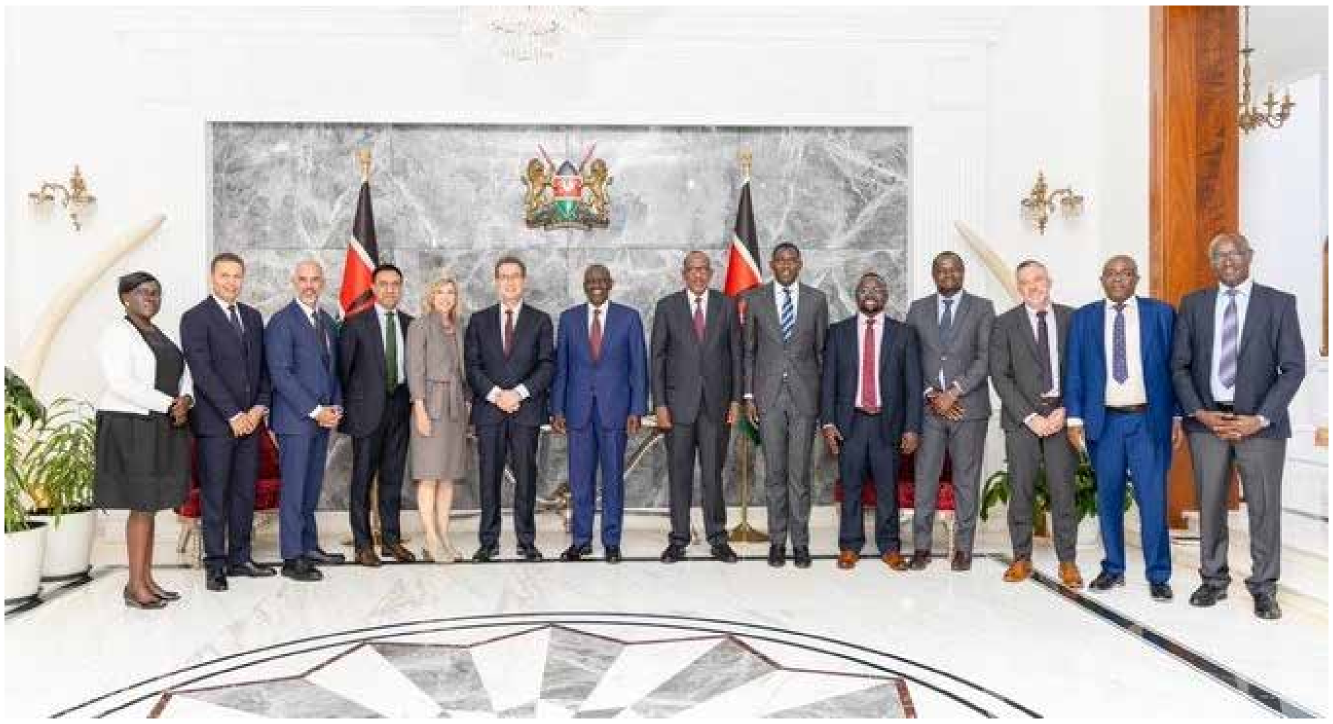
Ruto said the reduced prices would make the Social Health Authority's KSh800,000 cancer package sufficient to cover full treatment without additional cost to patients, and would eliminate the ten-year wait Kenyan patients typically face before newer cancer therapies become available in the country. As the African Union Champion for Local Manufacturing of Medical Commodities, he said Pfizer had also committed to making its technologies and newer medicines available for pharmaceutical production on the continent.

Bourla was accompanied to State House by Health Cabinet Secretary Aden Duale, United States Embassy Chargé d'Affaires Carla Benini, Medical Services Principal Secretary Ouma Oluga and other Pfizer representatives.

The agreement marks one of the more significant interventions in a health sector where the cost of cancer treatment has long forced Kenyan families into debt or abandoned care altogether, and will be closely watched as a test of whether pricing reforms of this scale can be sustained beyond a single announcement.

Some of the moments as captured in pictures





Editor's Desk

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NEWS IN BRIEF

Nairobi County is racing to clear its drainage system and waterways of accumulated waste ahead of the rains, with officials collecting roughly 3,000 tonnes of garbage daily, triple the previous rate. County Executive Committee Member for Green Nairobi Maureen Njeri said Embakasi South alone had recorded more than 4,500 loads of waste removed since April, with 1,538 loads cleared at Kware Bridge and 2,970 at English Press in Mukuru Kwa Reuben. Crews have also targeted collection points along the Ngong River, where debris risks being swept downstream and blocking already strained drainage infrastructure. Officials say the scale of waste being extracted underscores a wider capacity gap, with the city generating rubbish faster than its systems can manage, a problem extending beyond the eastern suburbs.

The Central Bank of Kenya has approved Nedbank Group's acquisition of a 66 per cent stake in NCBA Group PLC, clearing the South African lender's entry into the Kenyan banking sector. The approval, granted under Section 13(4) of the Banking Act, takes effect once the transaction is finalised in line with terms agreed by both parties. Nedbank first announced the deal in January 2026 as part of a broader push into East Africa, with the investment valued at more than $855.5M. NCBA will become a Nedbank subsidiary while retaining its remaining 34 per cent shareholding on the Nairobi Securities Exchange. Nedbank chief executive Jason Quinn described the deal as pairing NCBA's regional network and digital reach with Nedbank's corporate banking expertise and balance sheet strength.

The Ministry of Education and Kenya Red Cross Society are jointly reviewing disaster preparedness plans to shield schools from a forecast strong El Niño event expected in October and November. Education Cabinet Secretary Julius Migos Ogamba said the sector remained vulnerable to climate-related disruptions and met Red Cross Secretary General Ahmed Idris yesterday to discuss safeguarding learners, teachers and infrastructure while ensuring national examinations proceed uninterrupted. The move follows government identification of 18 counties, along with Nairobi, Mombasa and Kisumu, as high-risk zones for flooding, landslides and displacement. The Kenya Meteorological Service has put the probability of a strong El Niño at 81 per cent, with a 97 per cent chance its effects extend into early next year.

Siaya Governor James Orengo yesterday defended his decision to enter the Linda Mwananchi presidential race alongside Nairobi Senator Edwin Sifuna, rejecting claims from within the coalition that his bid was meant to undermine Sifuna's ambitions. Orengo told Citizen TV that internal competition was not unprecedented, citing ODM's 2007 Pentagon arrangement, which fielded multiple presidential contenders from one outfit. He said he remained committed to the coalition eventually settling on a single flagbearer, dismissing critics as "not democrats." Orengo also revealed that he had resisted pressure at the coalition's Limuru retreat to settle the presidential question early, arguing it required further consultation, a stance that reportedly caused friction among fellow principals. Linda Mwananchi held a rally in Meru County on Sunday to address the same issue.

Residents in Kirinyaga County yesterday raised alarm over the rising sale and consumption of illicit alcohol and bhang, warning of its toll on families. Catholic Women Association members Susan Wangari and Nancy Wambui said growing numbers of counterfeit drinks and coded bhang trading were making enforcement difficult, leaving households struggling with addiction's effects. Separately, Mwea-West Deputy County Commissioner Kennedy Nyaboga directed chiefs and elders to intensify crackdowns, recalling a February 2024 incident in Kangai and Mutithi wards that killed more than 17 people and blinded others after they consumed illicit brew. He warned administrators would be held responsible for inaction. Kirinyaga Central MP Joseph Gachoki Gitari alleged collusion between county officials and bar owners in issuing liquor licenses despite security objections.

The government yesterday apologised for continuing disruptions at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport, as industrial action by aviation workers left operations at the country's main gateway paralysed. Prime Cabinet Secretary Musalia Mudavadi said talks were under way to resolve the strike and restore normal operations, urging affected travellers to remain patient and check with airlines for updates. The action, led by the Kenya Aviation Workers Union, began on Saturday night and disrupted both domestic and international flights through the weekend. Kenya Airways warned of delays exceeding six hours, while thousands of passengers were reported to have spent the night at the terminal before some were relocated to hotels. No clear timeline has been given for resolving the standoff.


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Meru The government of Governor M'Ethingia will continue supporting the traders and ensuring that they have a conducive environment in which to conduct their businesses during this transition

Gakoromone traders set to move within a week as KSh1.2B market project nears start

BY Brian Gitonga
@themtkenyatimes

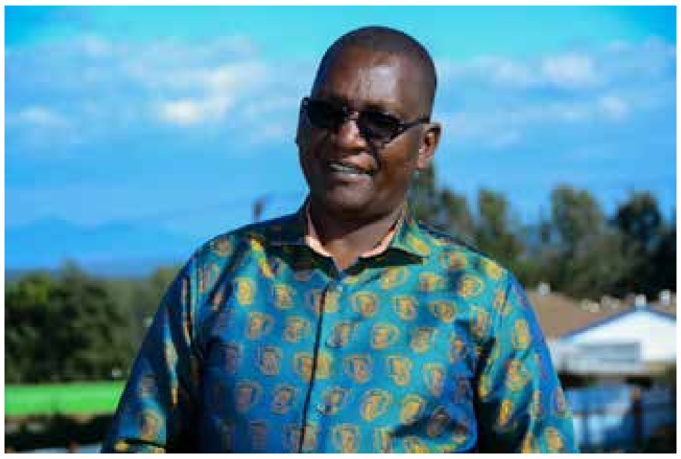
Gakoromone Market traders will relocate to a newly prepared temporary trading site within a week, clearing the way for construction of the KSh1.2B modern market promised by President William Ruto to begin without further delay.

County government and Meru Municipality officials inspected the new temporary site yesterday, two weeks after traders rejected an earlier proposed relocation point and demanded a more suitable alternative before agreeing to vacate the existing market. The inspection marked a significant step forward in a process that has required patient negotiation between the county administration and a trading community understandably cautious about disruption to its livelihoods.

Trade, Tourism and Cooperatives County Executive Committee Member Carol Kaberia, who led the inspection alongside Meru Municipality Manager Gitobu Nkanata, said preparations at the temporary site were progressing well and expressed appreciation for the traders' willingness to cooperate.

"We appreciate Gakoromone traders for accepting to move to the new temporary market so that we can give the contractor enough space and time to begin work as soon as possible," Kaberia said. She confirmed that construction of the temporary facility is expected to be completed within the next seven days, after which traders will receive formal relocation letters directing them to the new site.

Trade, Tourism and Cooperatives County Executive Committee Member Rev. Carol Kaberia, Adresses the press. | *Photo:* Brian Gitonga



Municipality Manager Gitobu Nkanata adresses the press. | *Photo:* Brian Gitonga

Construction works continue at the new temporary market site at Gakoromone. | *Photo:* Brian Gitonga

Kaberia credited Governor Mutuma M'Ethingia with responding constructively to the traders' earlier concerns, noting that the county administration's willingness to find an alternative site rather than insist on the rejected location had been critical in securing cooperation. She described Gakoromone as one of Meru's most important commercial centres and acknowledged that the families who depend on income from the market cannot afford prolonged uncertainty.

"The government of Governor M'Ethingia will continue supporting the traders and ensuring that they have a conducive environment in which to conduct their businesses during this transition," she said.

Nkanata was equally candid about both the opportunity and the inconveniences ahead. He made clear that the temporary facility is precisely what its name suggests — a short-term arrangement expected to serve traders for approximately one year while the permanent structure takes shape. He acknowledged that traders would encounter some discomfort during the construction period, including dust and wind at the temporary site, but said these were manageable short-term challenges compared to the long-term benefit of a modern, well-organised market.

"This temporary market is meant to serve traders for a short period of about one year before we move to the modern market that will be built by the national government at a cost of KSh1.2B," Nkanata said. He urged residents to support development projects in the town regardless of prevailing political differences, framing the new market not as a political achievement but as a practical investment in the livelihoods of thousands of families who depend on trade to pay school fees, build homes and sustain their households.

He also addressed the work already undertaken to prepare the temporary site, which included clearing trees and removing stumps. He was firm on the question of what happens to timber cleared from municipal land, warning that government trees are not for sale and that anyone found selling them would face prosecution.

"We do not sell trees belonging to the government. Anyone caught selling government trees should know that it is against the law and they can be prosecuted in a court of law," Nkanata said. He added that wood cleared from the site would instead be distributed to Early Childhood Development centres and other public institutions, naming Mwiteria Primary, Kinoru Primary, Nthimbiri Primary and Meru Muslim among the potential beneficiaries.

For the traders of Gakoromone, the relocation is the bridge between a market they have known for years and one that promises to transform how they do business. The temporary site will not be comfortable in every respect — no transitional arrangement ever is — but the county administration's assurance that the stay will be brief and the permanent market genuinely modern has, for now, carried sufficient weight to bring the community on board.

Construction of the KSh1.2B facility is expected to begin as soon as the site is vacated. Meru's most important market is about to become something much bigger.


NEWS PAPER
IN BUSINESS

Police reforms "The law on age was bent. Section 81 of the Public Service Act, 2017, retired public officers at 60. Section 82 allows a contract extension only for rare skills the service cannot find," Maraga

Police reforms stall as Kenya's uneasy march to August 2027 begins

Unimplemented police reforms and ageing security chiefs set the tone for a tense election season

BY James Mwangi
@themtkenyatimes

Former Chief Justice David Maraga yesterday accused President William Ruto's administration of illegally retaining two senior security chiefs beyond the mandatory retirement age, reigniting a debate over police reform less than a year before Kenya's next General Election.

Maraga, who chaired the National Taskforce on Police Reforms nearly three years ago, said Inspector General of Police Douglas Kanja and Director of Criminal Investigations Mohamed Amin had both crossed the 60-year retirement threshold set out in the Public Service Act, 2017, and were occupying their offices unlawfully. He argued that the exemption allowing contract extensions was intended for rare, specialised skills, not blanket retention of senior officers.

"The law on age was bent. Section 81 of the Public Service Act, 2017, retired public officers at 60. Section 82 allows a contract extension only for rare skills the service cannot find," Maraga said. "What rare skills do they hold that other senior officers do not? Neither were they chosen by open competition. The result is that they both occupy their offices illegally."

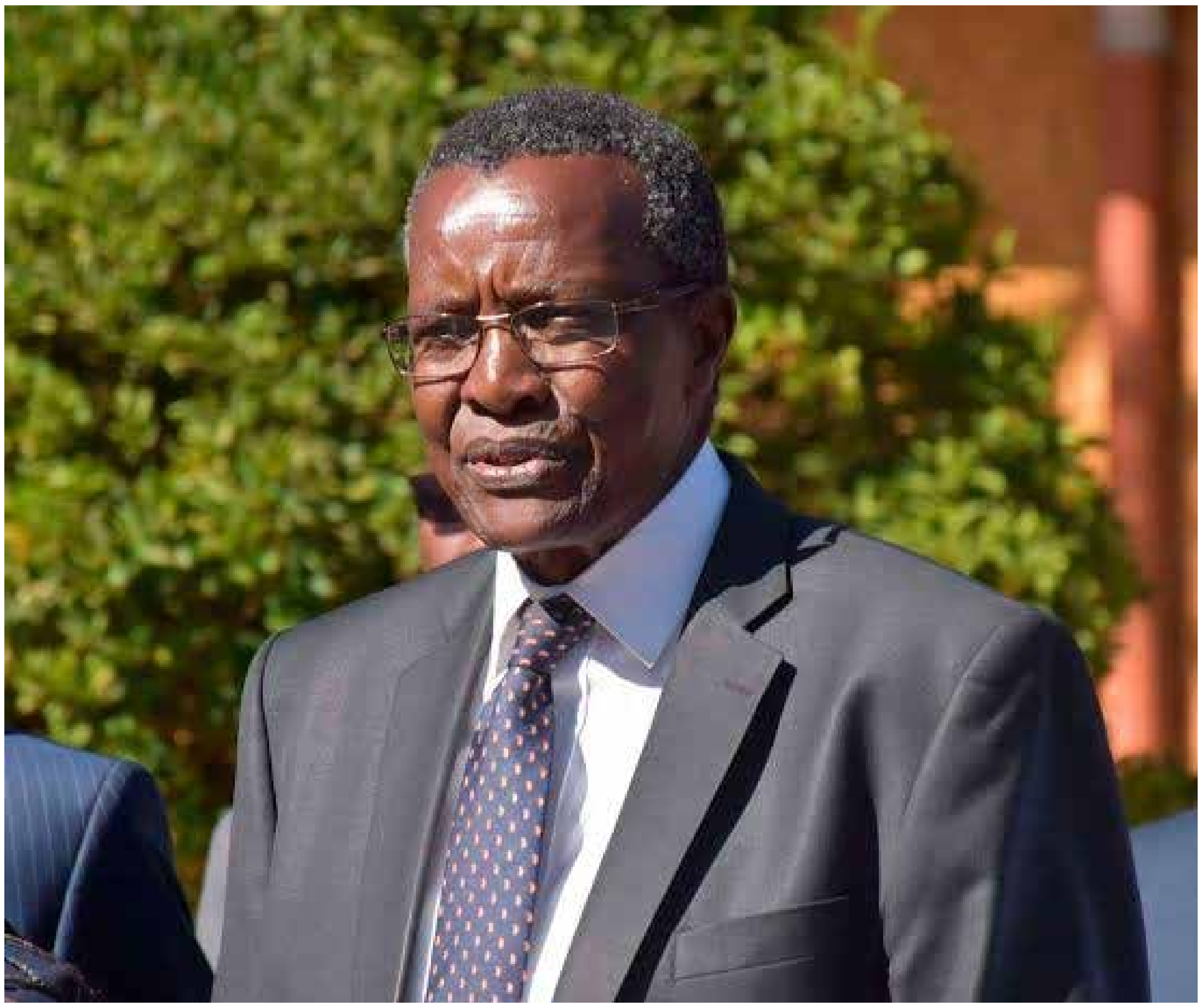
The intervention by Maraga, now co-leader of the United Green Movement Party and a declared presidential hopeful, is unlikely to be an isolated skirmish. It lands at the start of what analysts describe as the most consequential eighteen months in Kenyan politics since the disputed 2007 election, as the country edges toward an August 2027 vote already shadowed by economic strain, youth-led street protests and a fractured opposition.

At the centre of Maraga's complaint is an argument that reaches beyond personnel matters into the machinery that will police the coming election itself. The taskforce he led was established to examine legal, policy and operational failings within the police service and the criminal investigations directorate, and to recommend a shake-up of recruitment, welfare and oversight. Maraga said its central findings — chief among them a call for the fresh vetting and appointment of officers from the rank of senior superintendent upward — had simply been ignored.

He linked that inaction to the 2014 Security Laws (Amendment) Act, which he said had stripped out safeguards designed to keep police appointments transparent and merit-based. "That is not reform, it is capture," Maraga said, adding that the taskforce itself had termed the Act unconstitutional.

The former judge went further, alleging that a security apparatus insulated from independent vetting had allowed itself to be drawn into partisan contests. He cited incidents of political violence in Homa Bay and Ol Kalou, and disruptions at churches in Kisumu, Nairobi and Witima, as evidence of a security sector he said had drifted from its constitutional mandate. He called for the appointment of both the Inspector General and the DCI Director to be removed from the President's direct purview, and for a broader overhaul of the security organs built on merit and open competition.

Government officials have not yet responded in detail to the specific allegations, though the administration has previously defended the tenure of senior security officials as lawful and necessary for continuity.



Former Chief Justice David Maraga

The dispute matters well beyond the fate of two officeholders. Kenya's electoral history is punctuated by episodes in which the conduct of security agencies before and during polling has shaped both the legitimacy of the outcome and the willingness of losing sides to accept it. The 2007 election was followed by weeks of violence in which police conduct came under sustained international scrutiny; the 2017 contest saw the Supreme Court annul a presidential result partly over irregularities that touched on electoral and security institutions. Each cycle has produced its own taskforce, its own reform blueprint, and, according to critics such as Maraga, its own pattern of selective implementation.

The political terrain heading into 2027 is also more volatile than in the previous two cycles. Cost-of-living pressures and public anger over taxation triggered large youth-led demonstrations in 2024, testing the relationship between protesters and police and leaving a residue of distrust that has not fully dissipated. Opposition politics remains fragmented, with several figures, Maraga among them, positioning themselves as alternatives to the incumbent without yet consolidating into a single challenge. Ruto's coalition, for its part, retains control of Parliament and the machinery of incumbency, advantages that historically have proven decisive in Kenyan presidential contests.

Against that backdrop, arguments over who commands the police and the criminal investigations service are not merely bureaucratic. They speak to a broader question that will dominate the run-up to August 2027: whether the institutions meant to guarantee a free and fair contest are seen by all sides as neutral, or whether they are perceived, fairly or not, as extensions of incumbency. Maraga's intervention is best read in that light — as an opening argument in a longer contest over the rules and referees of the next election, rather than a narrow personnel dispute.

Whether his claims translate into legal challenges, parliamentary pressure or simply campaign rhetoric will become clearer in the coming months. What is less contestable is the timeline. With eleven months remaining before Kenyans return to the polls, the questions Maraga has raised about age limits, appointments and institutional independence are unlikely to be the last of their kind. They are, more probably, the opening exchanges of a campaign in which the neutrality of the state itself will be as fiercely contested as any single candidate.

Inspector General of Police Douglas Kanja and DIG Eliud Langat

2027 The question that serious observers are beginning to ask — quietly in some quarters, loudly in others — is whether August 2027 could produce a result that does not survive legal challenge

2027: Could Kenya face another nullified election?

BY Collins Kibet
@themtkenyatimes

Twelve months before Kenya holds its next general election, the independent commission charged with running the vote is defending a KSh61.7B budget before parliament, fielding allegations that its technology procurement has been designed to favour a specific foreign company, and meeting with international observers to manage growing concerns about institutional credibility — a combination of pressures that, in Kenya's electoral history, has never led anywhere comfortable.

The question that serious observers are beginning to ask — quietly in some quarters, loudly in others — is whether August 2027 could produce a result that does not survive legal challenge. It is not an alarmist question. It is a constitutional one. Under Article 140 of Kenya's Constitution, a presidential election result can be challenged in the Supreme Court within seven days of the declaration of results. The court has 14 days to determine the petition. And Kenya, uniquely in Africa, has already travelled this road. In September 2017, the Supreme Court nullified the presidential election, finding that the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission had committed irregularities and illegalities that impaired the integrity of the vote. In his ruling, then Chief Justice David Maraga made an observation that has outlasted the judgment itself: an election is a process, not an event.

That distinction has never been more relevant. IEBC Chairperson Erastus Edung Ethekon described the 2027 vote as a "complex, multi-stage national exercise," warning that its credibility will depend less on polling day itself and more on the integrity of the processes leading up to it. That is an accurate and important framing. It is also a tacit acknowledgment that those processes are, at present, under strain.

The latest dispute centres on the IEBC's tender for an Integrated Elections Management System, which is expected to form part of the technology infrastructure for the 2027 election. The tender was advertised on 11 August 2026 and scheduled to close on 1 September. Former Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua has questioned the transparency of the process, claiming that the specifications could favour South Korean technology company Miru Systems. The IEBC has denied the allegation. But the exchange illustrates a pattern that has played out before every contested Kenyan election in living memory: allegations about technology procurement emerge, the commission defends its process, and public confidence fractures along political lines before a single vote has been cast.

The commission hosted a delegation from the Carter Center on 18 August for discussions on electoral preparations and possible areas of collaboration, amid growing political debate over the technology to be deployed in 2027, including opposition concerns over the possible involvement of Smartmatic, the provider contracted by IEBC for the 2022 general election. The Carter Center's presence is reassuring in one sense. It is also a signal that the concerns are serious enough to warrant early international engagement.

Wundanyi MP Danson Mwashako, speaking yesterday, warned that the IEBC must restore public trust long before Kenyans head to polling stations. He said a credible election requires transparency and accountability from the early stages of preparation — including procurement of election technology — and that responsibility for addressing the trust deficit rests squarely with the electoral commission.

The structural vulnerabilities behind these disputes are not new. Kenya's elections have historically been shaped by ethnic mobilisation, personality-driven competition and a tendency to frame contests as battles between communities rather than between competing programmes of governance. When an election is experienced as an existential communal contest, losing becomes far more than a political setback. It becomes a collective grievance — and that transformation is what converts a dispute over vote tallies into a national crisis. The 2007-08 post-election violence, which killed more than 1,300 people and displaced hundreds of thousands, remains the starkest illustration of where that logic leads.

Kenya's voter register has grown from 22.12 million in 2022 to over 23.4 million by April 2026, driven largely by youth-led mobilisation under the "Niko Kadi" campaign. That expansion is a healthy democratic development. It also raises the stakes. More registered voters means more people with a direct stake in whether the election is conducted credibly — and more people available to be mobilised if they conclude it was not.

IEBC Chairperson Erastus Edung Ethekon

IEBC Vice Chairperson Fahima Araphat Abdallah told parliament in May that credible elections require more than ballot papers, citing logistics, ICT systems, transport, ballot boxes and operational services as core components of election delivery. She is right. She is also operating an institution that, by its own account, faces budget pressures, delayed reforms and the kind of political scrutiny that makes every procurement decision a potential flashpoint.

Elections Observation Group head Mule Musau captured the essential paradox with precision: "The process should be predictable. The results should be unpredictable." What Kenya has historically produced is the reverse — a process whose credibility is contested before it concludes, and results whose acceptance depends less on evidence than on whether your candidate won.

The consequences of another nullification — or worse, a disputed result that produces violence rather than litigation — would extend far beyond the political class that caused it. Economic uncertainty would follow immediately. Investor confidence, already sensitive to governance risk, would contract. Development programmes would stall. And the democratic institutions that Kenya's 2010 Constitution was designed to strengthen would absorb damage that takes years, not months, to repair.

The solutions are neither complicated nor secret. The IEBC must conduct transparent procurement, communicate its technology choices in language that citizens can evaluate, and submit to scrutiny rather than demanding trust on faith. Political parties must train agents, resource legal teams and channel disputes through courts rather than streets. Leaders must model the restraint that makes peaceful transitions of power possible — and resist, in the volatile period between the announcement of results and the conclusion of any petition, the temptation to declare victory before the law has spoken.

The question for 2027 is not simply who will win. It is whether Kenya will conduct an election whose credibility survives the declaration of results — one that produces not merely a winner, but the durable public confidence that the people's will has genuinely been respected.

That confidence cannot be manufactured on election night. It must be earned in the months before it — in procurement offices, in parliamentary committees, in community meetings and in the daily choices of leaders who understand that the legitimacy of what they win depends entirely on the integrity of how they win it.

The warning signs are visible. The time to act on them is now.

Profile His regional mandate will centre on creating stronger links among Minet's Eastern African country operations — a task that is as much about culture as it is about structure

The man Minet chose to lead East Africa

Sammy Muthui's elevation from Kenya CEO to Eastern Africa regional chief is a bet on a particular kind of leader — one who builds organisations through people, not just strategy

BY John Kariuki
@themtkenyatimes

Minet Group has appointed Sammy Muthui as Chief Executive Officer for the Eastern Africa Region, expanding his responsibilities beyond his current role as CEO and Managing Director of Minet Kenya while retaining him in that position — a signal that the group's confidence in his leadership extends well beyond a single market.

The appointment is, in one sense, a straightforward promotion. In another, it is a statement about what Minet believes the Eastern African insurance market needs right now: a leader with deep institutional roots, regional ambition and the kind of patient, people-centred philosophy that turns capable organisations into exceptional ones.

Muthui brings more than three decades of experience in the insurance industry to the role, spanning strategic leadership, business development, operational management and complex risk programmes. That breadth matters in a regional mandate. Eastern Africa is not a single market with a uniform character — it is a collection of distinct economies, regulatory environments, risk landscapes and client expectations. Navigating all of them requires someone who understands the mechanics of insurance deeply enough to adapt without losing coherence, and who is diplomatically skilled enough to align multiple country operations around a shared direction without flattening their individual strengths.

His record at Minet Kenya provides a working answer to whether he can do that. His tenure has been characterised by a sustained focus on strengthening the organisation's operational capabilities, improving efficiency and positioning the business to respond to the evolving demands of clients in a market that has changed significantly over the past decade. Technology has reshaped how insurance products are distributed and consumed. Clients — corporate, institutional and individual alike — are demanding faster service, more tailored solutions and greater transparency. Muthui has led through that transition, and the organisation he hands to his regional successor in Kenya is meaningfully stronger for it.

"Insurance is ultimately about people," he has said — a remark that sounds simple until you consider how often the industry forgets it. Behind every policy is a business protecting its assets, a family securing its future, or an institution managing risks that could otherwise prove catastrophic. Leaders who hold onto that human dimension while also running commercially successful operations are rarer than the industry would like to admit. Muthui has been one of them.

His regional mandate will centre on creating stronger links among Minet's Eastern African country operations — a task that is as much about culture as it is about structure. The logic of regional integration in professional services is well established: knowledge developed in one market can benefit another, expertise concentrated in one team can be shared across borders, and a coordinated regional offering is more compelling to large clients with operations across multiple countries than a collection of disconnected national businesses. The challenge is that integration imposed from the top tends to generate resistance, while integration that grows from genuine relationships and demonstrated value tends to stick.

Sammy Muthui as Chief Executive Officer Minet Group.

Muthui's approach to that challenge will be watched closely. His record suggests he is more inclined toward the latter model — building through relationships, earning trust incrementally, and letting results make the case for closer collaboration. That instinct is well-suited to the Eastern African context, where strong local leadership and national identity within organisations are not obstacles to regional coherence but prerequisites for it.

The timing of the appointment carries its own significance. The insurance sector across Eastern Africa is at an inflection point. Insurtech platforms are entering markets that traditional brokers once owned unchallenged. Climate-related risks are redefining what clients need to insure and how frequently they need to revise their cover. Regulatory frameworks are evolving, sometimes faster than the industry can comfortably absorb. Against that backdrop, the regional CEO role is not a ceremonial position. It is a strategic one, requiring someone who can look ahead of the current moment and position the organisation accordingly.

Muthui's elevation from Nairobi to the regional stage also carries a message for professionals across the insurance industry and beyond. His career has not been built on high-profile manoeuvres or sudden reinventions. It has been built on consistency — on mastering the technical dimensions of a complex industry, on developing teams capable of operating independently, and on maintaining the kind of integrity and focus that sustains credibility over decades. In a professional environment that increasingly celebrates speed and disruption, his career is a reminder that patient, disciplined leadership still produces results.

For the Minet Kenya community, his appointment is a moment of genuine pride — not because it reflects well on the organisation in the abstract, but because it is a concrete outcome of the work done, the teams built and the culture sustained over years of deliberate effort. When one of your own is trusted with a bigger stage, it validates something about the environment that shaped them.

Muthui himself would likely resist the idea that the recognition is primarily about him. The leaders who last tend to think in terms of what they can build rather than what they can claim. His Eastern Africa chapter, by that logic, will be measured not by titles or announcements but by what the region's insurance landscape looks like when he has finished building it.

On the evidence of what he has already built, Minet's bet looks well placed.

KEFRI The global pharmaceutical industry has long drawn on compounds first identified in traditional medicine systems. Aspirin traces its origins to willow bark

Kenya's forests hold the pharmacy Africa has always known

As the continent marks African Traditional Medicine Day, KEFRI's director general is making the case that preserving indigenous trees and preserving ancestral healing knowledge are the same fight

KEFRI Director General Jane Njuguna (R)

BY John Kariuki
@themtkenyatimes

The Kenya Forestry Research Institute yesterday joined the Ministry of Health, the Kenya Medical Research Institute and a broad coalition of researchers and government officials at KEMRI's Nairobi campus to mark African Traditional Medicine Day — an annual occasion that, under the leadership of KEFRI Director General Jane Njuguna, is becoming something more substantive than a commemorative gathering.

The event, presided over by Health Cabinet Secretary Aden Duale, brought into one room the disciplines that have too often operated in separate silos: forestry, medicine, research, public health and indigenous knowledge. The conversation they are being asked to have together is urgent, and Njuguna has been one of its most consistent advocates.

Her argument is deceptively simple but structurally important. Kenya's forests are not merely ecological assets — they are pharmacological ones. Many of the plants that African communities have used for centuries to treat illness, manage chronic conditions and support maternal health grow among the country's indigenous tree species and natural ecosystems. To lose those forests is therefore not only an environmental loss. It is a medical one. And to fail to study, document and protect the knowledge systems built around those plants is to allow a library accumulated over generations to disappear without a record.

"Forest conservation is not simply about protecting trees," Njuguna has consistently argued in her work at KEFRI. "It is about safeguarding indigenous knowledge, community livelihoods, biodiversity and a rich African heritage passed down through generations." That framing matters because it repositions conservation as a human concern rather than a purely environmental one — and in doing so, it builds a broader coalition of people who have a stake in getting it right.

KEFRI's participation in yesterday's commemoration was therefore not incidental. It was a deliberate statement of institutional alignment between the forestry research agenda and the health research agenda — a signal that the two institutions recognise they are working on different dimensions of the same problem. Duale acknowledged as much in his address, commending the role played by research bodies such as KEFRI and KEMRI in preserving indigenous knowledge and generating the scientific evidence needed to unlock the genuine potential of traditional medicine. That potential is considerable, and largely underexplored.

The global pharmaceutical industry has long drawn on compounds first identified in traditional medicine systems. Aspirin traces its origins to willow bark. Artemisinin, the basis of the most effective malaria treatments, was derived from a plant used in Chinese traditional medicine for centuries. African traditional medicine systems contain a comparable depth of botanical knowledge — remedies refined across generations of empirical observation, passed from healer to community, community to child, in oral and practical traditions that modern research is only beginning to take seriously.

The challenge is that those traditions are vulnerable in ways that laboratory-based knowledge is not. When an elder who holds detailed knowledge of a medicinal plant dies without passing it on, that knowledge is gone. When the forest containing that plant is cleared for agriculture or settlement, the plant may disappear with it. The window for documentation and preservation is narrowing, and institutions like KEFRI are among the few with the mandate, the scientific capacity and the community relationships to do that work systematically.

Under Njuguna's leadership, KEFRI has positioned itself at the intersection of conservation, research, propagation and promotion of medicinal forest resources. The institute's work in this area includes the identification and documentation of indigenous species with known or suspected medicinal value, the development of propagation techniques to ensure those species can be cultivated and sustained, and the building of research partnerships with health institutions that can provide the scientific rigour needed to move from traditional knowledge to evidence-based application.

That last piece — the bridge between traditional knowledge and scientific validation — is where the collaboration between KEFRI and institutions like KEMRI becomes most consequential. Traditional medicine is not opposed to science. It is, in many respects, the accumulated result of generations of empirical observation — people noticing what worked, refining preparations over time, and transmitting that knowledge through structured systems of apprenticeship and community practice. What it has historically lacked is the documentation and controlled study needed to meet modern regulatory standards and to be integrated into formal health systems at scale.

Building that bridge requires trust — between researchers and traditional healers, between government institutions and communities, between the global scientific mainstream and knowledge systems that have too often been dismissed rather than studied. Njuguna's approach, which treats indigenous knowledge as a legitimate starting point for scientific inquiry rather than a curiosity to be explained away, reflects a growing consensus among researchers and policymakers that Africa cannot afford to discard what its own traditions have spent centuries developing.

The economic dimension of this conversation is also worth naming. Traditional medicine is not only a cultural or public health issue — it is a livelihood issue for millions of families across the continent who rely on medicinal plants for primary healthcare, and an economic opportunity for countries that move quickly to document, protect and develop their botanical heritage before it is appropriated or lost. Kenya, with its extraordinary biodiversity and its network of indigenous forests and botanical knowledge systems, is well positioned to be a leader in that space. KEFRI, under Njuguna's direction, is helping lay the institutional groundwork for that leadership.

Yesterday's commemoration at KEMRI was, in that sense, a working meeting as much as a marking of occasion — a moment for institutions with overlapping interests to reaffirm a shared commitment and to move the collaboration forward. The message that emerged was clear: protecting Kenya's indigenous trees and forests is inseparable from protecting the healing knowledge those forests have sustained for generations.

Africa's traditional medicine heritage is not a relic. It is a resource — one that deserves the full attention of science, policy and institutional leadership.

Njuguna is making sure KEFRI plays its part in that effort.

Education By the close of business yesterday, close to 6,000 students had been admitted, with the process continuing through to the target of 9,150

Chuka University's 30,000 students are about to transform Ndagani

A record intake of more than 9,150 first-year students is turning a university town into one of central Kenya's most dynamic local economies — but the vice chancellor has a warning for landlords

Thousands of Chuka University first-year students' line up for admission at the university on yesterday. The institution plans to admit more than 9,000 students, pushing its total population to over 30,000.

BY Dennis Mutua
@themtkenyatimes

Chuka University's student population is set to reach 30,000 following the admission of more than 9,150 first-year students yesterday, a record intake that Vice Chancellor Henry Mutembei says will pump millions of shillings daily into the economy of the university's host town of Ndagani in Tharaka Nithi County.

The numbers are striking in their simplicity. "If each of them spends KSh10, that translates to KSh3 million injected into the local economy, which is a big boost," Mutembei told journalists as the university's admission exercise got under way. Scale that modest figure upward to the actual daily expenditure of 30,000 young people buying food, paying rent, using transport and purchasing everyday necessities, and the economic argument for treating the university as a community asset becomes impossible to dismiss.

By the close of business yesterday, close to 6,000 students had been admitted, with the process continuing through to the target of 9,150. The new cohort will push the university's total population to approximately 30,000 — a figure that places Chuka among the country's top four universities by first-year admissions this year, behind Kenyatta University, Maseno University and the University of Nairobi. It is, as Mutembei put it with characteristic directness, a move into a higher league.

The ripple effects for Ndagani are already visible. Demand for student accommodation, food outlets, retail goods, public transport and other services rises sharply with each new intake, and the current numbers represent the largest influx the town has absorbed. For traders, hostel owners and small business operators who depend on the university community for their livelihoods, the surge is welcome news.

Mutembei, however, had a specific message for private hostel owners: the increased demand is not an invitation to raise rents. He was direct and unambiguous on the point. "We need to work collaboratively with our students and student leaders to ensure there is no taking advantage of these students, especially in terms of rent fees," he said, adding that the economic pressures felt by landlords are shared by the parents struggling to finance their children's university education. He urged hostel owners to count their blessings — noting that their properties are now fully occupied, unlike in previous years when they competed for a smaller student pool — and to respond with fairness rather than opportunism.

It is a tension familiar to every university town: the same growth that creates prosperity for local businesses can, if unmanaged, place students in genuinely difficult circumstances, undermining the educational environment the university is trying to sustain. Mutembei's public call for restraint is an attempt to get ahead of that dynamic before it takes hold.

On the physical environment, the partnership between Chuka University and the Tharaka Nithi County Government drew specific praise from the vice chancellor. He highlighted the newly developed Ndagani Market as a practical example of what collaborative investment in university towns can produce — a clean, modern facility where students can purchase food and other essentials while local traders benefit from reliable, concentrated footfall. It is the kind of infrastructure that makes a town genuinely liveable for a large student population rather than merely adjacent to one.

This year's admission exercise was also notably smoother than in previous years. The digitalised self-admission process — which allows students to complete significant portions of their registration online before arriving on campus — reduced the long queues that have historically characterised the first days of university intake across the country. Mutembei attributed the improvement directly to the digital system, and the contrast with previous years was visible.

One area of ongoing uncertainty is the new higher education funding model, which requires a household contribution from parents alongside government support. Mutembei acknowledged that confusion persists around how the model operates and what parents are required to pay. The university has responded pragmatically, allowing all students to proceed with admission on whatever amounts they have paid while awaiting further government guidance. He urged parents who can afford to contribute to do so willingly, framing it as both a responsibility and an investment — and encouraged students from needy backgrounds to access support through the Higher Education Loans Board.

Ndagani is no longer simply a town that hosts a university. With 30,000 students on its doorstep, it is becoming something more substantial — a growing economic hub whose fortunes are tied, for better or worse, to the institution at its centre.

The challenge now is making sure that growth works for everyone: the students, the traders, the landlords, and the community that will live with its consequences long after each graduating class has moved on.

Chuka University Vice Chancellor, Professor Henry Mutembei, makes a spot check on the ongoing admission exercise at the university.

Upbringing My childhood was not spent on smooth, smooth, asphalt streets like now, but on stony, muddy, dusty streets. At that time, my greatest wealth was colorful rags

Childhood memories

BY Shahnoza Zokirova
@themtkenyatimes

Every time I go to the village, to my mother's, I stop in front of the old mirror on the wall. There I remember not the present me, but the time when I was a little girl with my hair braided in two and my eyes shining. It was the same today. The smell of basil and ginger that hit my nose when my mother and I opened the old chest took me back to my innocent childhood - to the times when my girlish dreams began.

My childhood was not spent on smooth, smooth, asphalt streets like now, but on stony, muddy, dusty streets. At that time, my greatest wealth was colorful rags, dolls, and various small clothes that I sewed for my little girl. I really loved playing dolls.

I remember that when the almond trees bloomed in spring, my friends and I would make necklaces from flowers. We would wear marigolds and basil in our hair and feel like the most beautiful princesses in the world. And the colorful ribbons that my father brought from the market would make us very happy. Back then, even simple things brought us great joy. When my mother braided my hair, I would put on those ribbons and rush out into the street. When we would jump rope on the dusty streets, the ribbons in my hair would fly like butterflies.

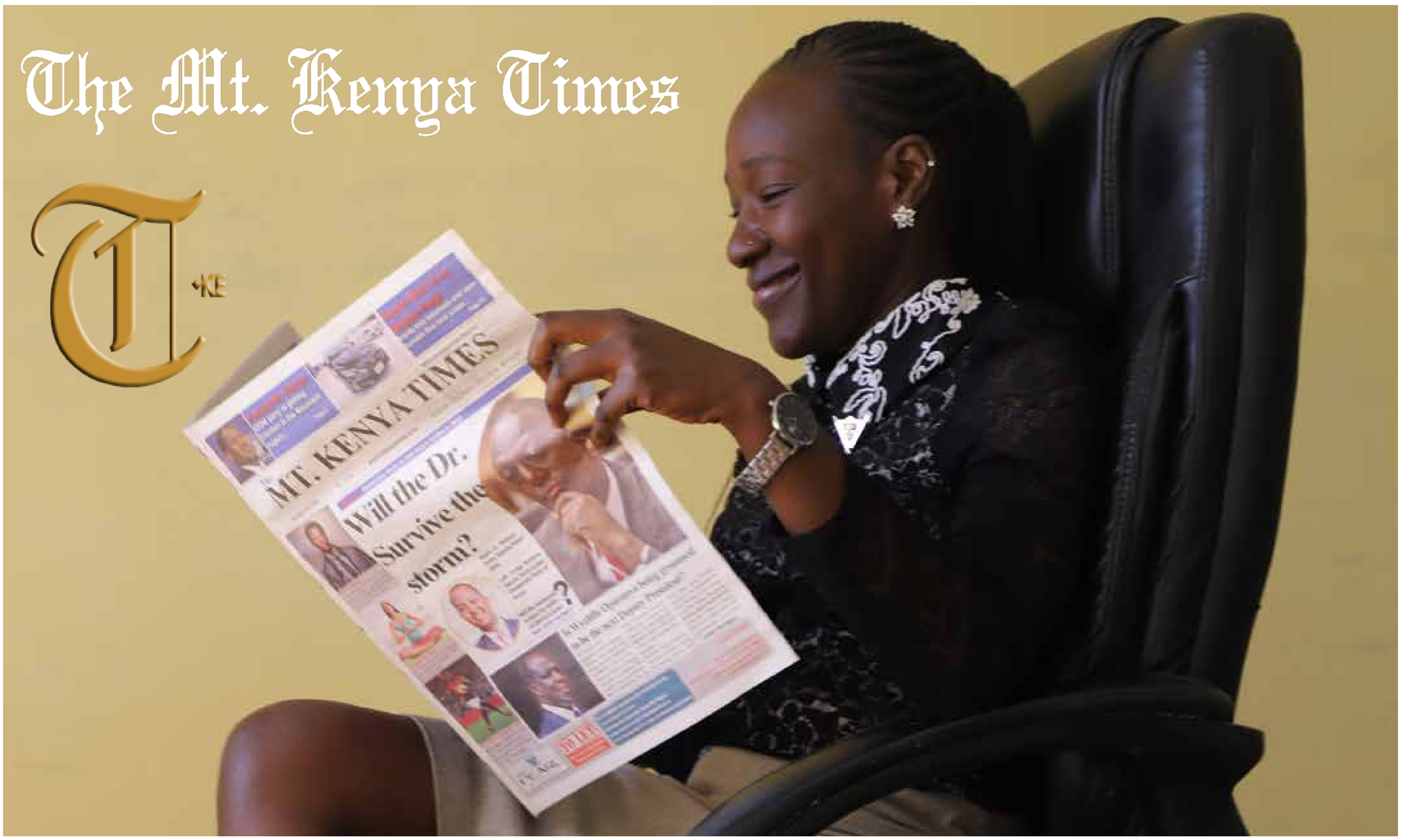
I will never forget how one day I tried to sew clothes for my doll from my mother's favorite satin dress and cut off the skirt. My heart was pounding with fear. But instead of scolding me, my mother took the scissors and awl from my hand and said, "My daughter has become a craftswoman," and then she herself taught me how to be a craftswoman.

On hot summer days, we would spread out blankets in the shade of a large mulberry tree and play "guest-guest." We would bake bread from clay, trade apricot pits as "money", collect candy wrappers, and play the game of "par" from the grass growing along the ditch. At night, we would sit as a family and pick cotton. The fairy tales my mother told us, the stories about "Zumrad and Qimmat" taught us kindness and etiquette. At night, we would count the stars in the sky and argue, "This one is mine, this one is yours." At that time, the sky and the stars seemed very close to me. In those days, the world seemed very safe, and people seemed very kind. We didn't have expensive phones, computers, or tablets, but we had sincere love

for each other and sincere secrets. At that time, we didn't have all the conditions and opportunities to live well, but we were lucky. We were. Now we have all the conditions, but I can't find the joy I had as a child.

Now that I think about it, those girlish years taught me the grace of womanhood, patience, and the sanctity of family. Today, walking among the tall buildings of the city, I sometimes miss those basil-scented nights, my grandmother's warm embrace, and the first dress I sewed for my doll.

Childhood is the most beautiful picture drawn in a person's heart, and it does not lose its color even after years. I will cherish those innocent girlish memories in the deepest part of my heart, like the most precious treasure



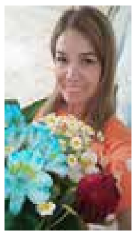
What you water today, will bloom tomorrow

Sow the seed of hope
Never let your courage slope
Pour water of confident
Energizing yourself as component
Weed negatives & schedule your work
As sun that shines without irk

Enjoy the sprout that shoots
Manure when buds bloom with positive thoughts
Sway the fragrance of will power
Watch yielding fruitful prosperity forever
Every drops of your sweat
With sacrifice you've made in wet
Gifts you a positive treat
To be inspired by your next Genre to greet
So planting your present worthy
Earns you the future wealthy.

G. Sarala
CREATIVE WRITERS

Another evening is coming to an end without you



The spring of life is slowly passing by.
Missing you in this emptiness without you,
The shores of longing are reaching far and wide.

Distributing happiness to flowers wrapped in bloom,
My paths are filling up with sharp thorns.
Dark clouds have taken over the sky,
Even they are shedding tears in your absence.

You walked away and abandoned me, but to whom?
The sparks of love are fading away.
The value of your warmth in words is dropping low,
And the reasons for my patience are running out.

Together, we held the hand of separation,
Happiness is a stranger to us, reunion is a stranger.
As long as we walk down the path of pride,
In truth, both of us are equally mad fools.

Author Amirova Nodira

The Wonder of My world

The wonder of my life is the morning light,
That paints my room gold and makes the world feel bright.
It's my mom's smile when I'm tired and low,
It's the friends who say "I've got you" and never let go.

It's the books that take me to places unknown,
The music that makes me feel less alone.
It's the rain on my window, the stars up high,
The dreams that make my heart want to fly.

Every small moment, every laugh and tear,
Is what makes my life feel precious and near.
Life isn't perfect, but it's mine to see,
And the biggest wonder is simply being me.

"Treasure the small things, let your heart be free,
Because the wonder of life is the life inside thee."

Penned By: JEGADEESWARI V
Standard:11-A
School: St. Joseph's Matriculation HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOL ACHARAPAKKAM.

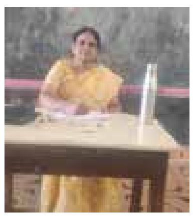
Prevail patience for extraordinary outcomes!!!!

Patience turns ordinary moments into extraordinary ones.
Patience is a powerful quality.
A person with patience is the winner of the world.
A guy with anger suffers by the by; he is hated by everyone.
A calm soul is liked by all; he is the winner of hearts.
Patience awards us with pride, a slow and clear guide, explains softly so wide.
A person of perfection abides, achieving the skill of powerful might.
A keen observation of the things too right,
passionately in hearing and responding.
Patience in recalling and executing, patience in correcting and remodelling, patience with respect and obedience.
Patience in retrieving, patience in recalling, patience in removing, patience in sustaining, patience in reminding — paves way to success, than shouting in anger and spoiling everything in arguing.
Patience is a positive vibe, overrules everything with calmness, realises everyone with reality, and accepts in positive point of view.
Patience turns ordinary moments into extraordinary outcomes!!!

Be in patience ever, impatient never!!!!

V.R. Vijayalakshmi,
Graduate Teacher,
CW Writers Group,
Kanchipuram District,
Tamil Nadu, India.

The strongest roots grow in the toughest soil



Every hardship creates a stronger achievement.
Roaring waves teach us how to survive difficult moments.
Good parents teach their children respect.
Sincere and dedicated teachers produce brilliant students for the world.
Hard situations develop our problem-solving skills.
Even the toughest tasks can become easier through continuous practice.
Every difficult experience teaches us something new and
makes us stronger.
So, let us face every situation boldly.
It will build a strong mind,
just as the strongest roots grow in the toughest soil.

__G.YasminSirajudheen
Secondary grade teacher
Melmalayanur block
Villupuram dt.

Mazingira jamani

Imelia ya mgambo,ya mgambo imelia
kwa yakini yapo mambo,twataka kuzungumzia
hakika si kama ng'ambo, mandhari twahurumia
Mazingira yaumia,yaumia mazingira

Hapa petu siridhiki, siridhiki hapa petu
Daima hapakaliki,yote chanzo chake watu
waunda yao mikuki,kumaliza mali yetu
Mazingira yaumia, yaumia mazingira

miti kote inakatwa,inakatwa miti kote
kote kwabakia jangwa,mvua haipo kote
Nasi mashaka twapatwa,hima kulalia mate
Mazingira yaumia, yaumia mazingira

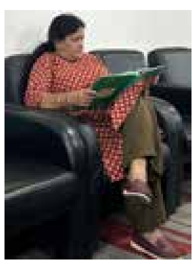
Nyasi kote zakauka,zakauka nyasi kote
Mifugo wakateseka ,hakuna chakula kote
mbuga zasahaulika, wanyama meisha wote
Mazingira yaumia, yaumia mazingira

Mito imeshachafuka,imeshachafuka mito
kote tunalalamika,ndwele zimepanda moto
kotekote twateseka, tuliojiona lipyoto
Mazingira yaumia, yaumia mazingira

Mazingira yaumia,yaumia mazingira
kote tuweze jikia,kutetea mazingira
tuweze kushabikia ,yalo safi mazingira
mazingira yaumia, yaumia mazingira

WACHIRA.V.WAGAKI
MALENGA ALI WA MSUMARI MPYA
SHULE YA MSINGI YA KARIMA

Every journey has lessons to share



Every heart holds wisdom rare.
Let courage guide each step you take,
Let patience grow with each mistake
Believe in yourself,keep moving on-
Your unique path will lead you strong.
Walk your path with faith and grace.
D.RENUKAGANDHI
GHSS,MULLAINAGAR, HOSUR

Politics Wainaina is accused of suggesting, in a video that circulated widely, that Kikuyu residents of Uasin Gishu County who did not support Ruto's re-election should leave.

Wamuchomba's ultimatum exposes cracks in Ruto's Mt Kenya alliance ahead of 2027

BY David Kimani
@themtkenyatimes

Githunguri MP Gathoni Wamuchomba yesterday warned that a section of Mt Kenya leaders would withdraw support for President William Ruto unless nominated MP Joseph Wainaina and Health Cabinet Secretary Aden Duale are arrested within three days over alleged hate speech.

Wamuchomba said the two men had made remarks capable of inciting ethnic tension, yet remained unchecked while the law was applied selectively to shield allies of the administration. "The bubble is growing bigger every day. The time for Kenya to rupture is coming if nothing is done," she said, adding that continued inaction would push some Ruto allies to walk away "when he really needs us."

The threat is less a personal falling-out than a symptom of a wider strain running through Kenya's governing coalition as the country moves toward the August 2027 General Election. Mt Kenya's political class has long operated as a bloc whose support is transactional, offered in exchange for representation and protection from precisely the kind of rhetoric Wamuchomba says is now going unpunished. Her ultimatum is a public test of whether that arrangement still holds.

At issue are two separate controversies. Wainaina is accused of suggesting, in a video that circulated widely, that Kikuyu residents of Uasin Gishu County who did not support Ruto's re-election should leave. He has denied inciting violence, arguing he would be the first to leave were that his position. Duale, separately, faced criticism in July after remarks contrasting the historical treatment of Somali and Kikuyu communities under successive presidents, which he later described as a Somali proverb about breaking entrenched habits, not an attack on any community.

Neither man has been charged. That fact, more than the remarks themselves, is what Wamuchomba has placed at the centre of her challenge: a claim that enforcement of hate speech law in Kenya tracks political proximity to power rather than the conduct in question.

The episode illustrates a pattern likely to recur with greater frequency as the election approaches. Ethnic mobilisation has shadowed every Kenyan poll since multiparty politics returned in the 1990s, and rhetoric once confined to rallies now spreads instantly through video clips stripped of context, forcing politicians into public retractions or defences within hours. For a coalition built on regional arithmetic, each such episode carries the risk of eroding the very alliances that delivered victory in the first place.

Whether Wamuchomba's ultimatum produces arrests, an apology, or simply passes unanswered will say a great deal about how secure Ruto's coalition believes itself to be with eleven months remaining before Kenyans vote again. What is already clear is that the tone of that campaign has been set: contested, ethnically charged, and fought as much over what leaders say as over what they promise to do.

Githunguri MP Gathoni Wamuchomba

Tuesday, September 1, 2026 The Mt. Kenya Times

Kingdom **Nyinamwiru wept in a cave and Nyabagabo wept in a court — and Tooro, born between their tears, has never fully escaped either**

The two mothers who cursed a kingdom

By: Mukama Phillip Kahigiriza
mukphix@gmail.com

The Batooro have a saying: Obukama butandikire omu kurira tekulyaka — a kingdom founded on weeping never rejoices.

It is not a proverb about sadness. It is a warning about history. And in Tooro, history has a way of arriving on time.

To understand the Kingdom of Tooro, you cannot begin in 1822, when it was founded. You must go back much further — to a cave, a mutilated princess, and a curse that entered the bloodlines of every Babiito kingdom long before Tooro existed. The story begins with a woman named Nyinamwiru.

She was the daughter of King Bukuku of the Batembuzi dynasty, said to be the most beautiful woman in the ancient empire of Kitara. Her father loved her, but he feared something more than he loved her. His royal seers, the Barahuka, delivered a prophecy: your own grandson, born from Nyinamwiru, will overthrow you, kill you, and take your throne.

Bukuku resolved to kill fate itself. He locked Nyinamwiru away. He posted guards around her hut so that no man could come near her. But beauty, and apparently fate, found a way. In his panic, Bukuku ordered the unthinkable. His servants cut off both of Nyinamwiru's breasts so she could never nurse a child. They gouged out one of her eyes to disfigure her. Then they threw her into the cold, dark cave networks that lie just outside what is today Fort Portal.

Alone, bleeding, mutilated by her own father, Nyinamwiru wept. And her weeping became a curse.

She spoke to the stones of the cave, to the blood on her chest, to the kingdom that had destroyed her. She said: because you have cut my body to keep power, your power will never have peace. Your rulers will die young. Your crowns will be too heavy — you will be forced to place them on the heads of children. Your palace will know no succession without blood.

Home to Amabere ga Nyina Mwiru caves

And then fate proved itself unmockable. Despite everything Bukuku had done, Nyinamwiru became pregnant by King Isaza, a great chief from beyond. She gave birth in secret inside that cave. She could not breastfeed her son, so she pressed her lips to the stalactites above her and squeezed the milky, calcium-rich water dripping from them into his mouth. White like milk, cold as stone — that was his first nourishment. Those caves are called Amabere Ga Nyinamwiru — the Breasts of Nyinamwiru — and tourists still visit them today, still watching the white stalactites drip.

That child was Ndahura, founder of the great Chwezi Empire. He grew up disguised as a potter's son. When he was a man, he met his grandfather King Bukuku and killed him, exactly as the prophecy had foretold. The curse of Nyinamwiru entered the bloodline of Kitara from that day. Every Babiito kingdom that descended from Kitara — Bunyoro, Tooro, Busongora — inherited it.

So when Tooro was born in 1822, it arrived already carrying a thousand-year-old wound.

The second curse came from a mother's love, not a father's cruelty. Prince Kaboyo Omuhundwa Kasusu, son of the powerful King Kyebambe III of Bunyoro-Kitara, was caught stealing his father's prized cattle. The King, unmoved by blood ties, invoked the ancient law: gouge out his eyes.

Kaboyo's mother, Nyabagabo, the King's favourite wife, ran barefoot to the court. She begged. She pleaded. Kyebambe refused. In tears that turned to fire, she cursed her husband and his throne: may your kingdom never be whole again. The land my son steps on will never be yours again.

That night, Kaboyo fled south across the River Muzizi and declared himself King Olimi I of a new kingdom — Tooro. The mother's curse held. Bunyoro never recovered that land, and father and son became enemies locked in permanent war. But Kaboyo carried Nyinamwiru's older curse south with him, embedded in his Babiito blood.

What followed was fifty years of fratricidal horror. The Babiito system held that any prince with enough strength and will could claim the throne — usually by eliminating the competition. Between 1822 and 1871, Tooro buried eleven kings while neighbouring Buganda buried only three. Olimi II Ruhundura poisoned his brother Kazana with his own hands. Nyaika killed his brother. The stones of Karuzika Palace, people said, turned black from royal blood. A throne that devours its own children cannot stand, and Tooro fell — first to Buganda, then to the British.

The Babiito responded to both curses with ritual. Every coronation in Tooro is, at its core, an attempt to break what Nyinamwiru and Nyabagabo set in motion.

In the ritual of Okusita Amagita — Stepping Over Blood — a spotless white cow is slaughtered at the palace gate on the eve of coronation. It represents a mother's tears. The new king, barefoot, steps over its warm blood, vowing not to spill kin blood. He then steps onto a leopard skin, the Engo, totem of the Babiito, to show he has conquered his own ferocity.

The Sacred Fire, Orubingo Rwa Kazooba, has burned since Kintu. Carried south by Kaboyo when he fled Bunyoro, it is guarded by the Basiita clan in a small hut inside Karuzika. When a king dies, the fire dies with him, and the kingdom enters spiritual darkness until his successor re-lights it from the sun using a crystal. When Obote's soldiers extinguished it in 1967, Tooro wandered in that darkness for 26 years — until King Oyo re-lit it in 1995.

The coronation itself, Empango, is not a celebration. It is a resurrection. For three days, the king-elect is locked inside the Akabukali hut and beaten with sacred reeds by elders. They beat the childhood out of him, the greed, the curse of Nyinamwiru. He must cry. Then at dawn, the royal drum Empuuga Ya Tooro — said to be made from the skin of a man and a leopard and believed to carry the voices of every dead king — is beaten. The new king must dance before it until he collapses. Only then does the drum accept him.

The most secret ritual targets Nyabagabo's curse directly. At four in the morning, the new king goes alone to the source of the River Mpanga — the river that separates Tooro from Bunyoro — and bathes naked in its icy water while ritualists chant. He washes off Bunyoro. He washes off exile. He washes off the mother's curse. King Kasagama refused this ritual after converting to Catholicism. Traditionalists believe that refusal cost his lineage dearly.

And indeed, the child kings came.

Kasagama, watching his sons position themselves to fight over his throne, is said to have whispered on his deathbed in 1928: let the throne go to children, not to greedy adults. His wish was granted — but it was also Nyinamwiru's prophecy fulfilling itself on schedule.

George Rukidi III was crowned at five and died at forty-one. His son Patrick David Mathew Kaboyo Olimi III took the throne at nineteen, only for Obote to abolish the kingdoms in 1967 and burn Karuzika. Patrick died in exile in Kampala in 1969, aged twenty-four. A young king, dead young — exactly as decreed.

That left a three-year-old. In 1995, Oyo Nyimba Kabamba Iguru Rukidi IV was carried to the throne, the youngest reigning monarch in the world. An orphan king, raised by the kingdom itself. His father had died young, as fathers in this line tend to do. But Oyo reigned longer than any of them — until last week, when he died at thirty-four. That he survived to adulthood at all, say the elders, was the first whisper of hope that the ancient curse might be loosening its grip. That he still died young suggests otherwise.

Historians will frame all of this differently. Bad succession laws, colonial manipulation, Obote's politics, medical realities — these are the explanations that documented history provides, and they are not wrong. King Oyo's father died of causes medicine can name.

But in the villages around the Amabere caves, they will tell you that medicine only names what the curse already decided. Tooro sits on some of the richest soil in Uganda — endless tea plantations, copper at Kilembe, gold in the Rwenzori Mountains — yet its people remain poor. Rich land, poor people. The elders call that the final curse, the one Kaboyo's ghost laid upon the politicians who dismantled tradition.

Today, Fort Portal speaks of the land curse too — that anyone who buys kingdom land illegally falls sick. And that the tensions between the Queen Mother and the Queen are simply Nyabagabo's story, playing itself out again in modern dress.

Every king of Tooro still steps over blood, is beaten with reeds, bathes in a cold river before dawn, and dances before a drum until he falls. He is not being crowned. He is begging two thousand years of grief to let him live a little longer.

The kingdom has carried its inception story since inception — from Nyinamwiru's cave to Nyabagabo's tears. And that story still drips, white and slow, like milk from the stones.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A reflection of the strength and positivity of African women and men
Compiled by Joy Zenz
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SHAMLAL PURI
BEST SELLER NOVELS
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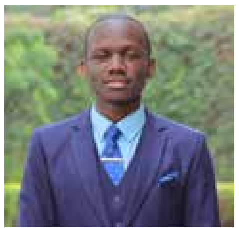
Constitutional Consider the human texture of this inversion. A family that has cultivated the same ridge for three generations receives a notice

The unyielding line: Constitutional boundaries and the state's compulsory reach for Kenyan soil



By: Jerameel Kevins Owuor Odhiambo
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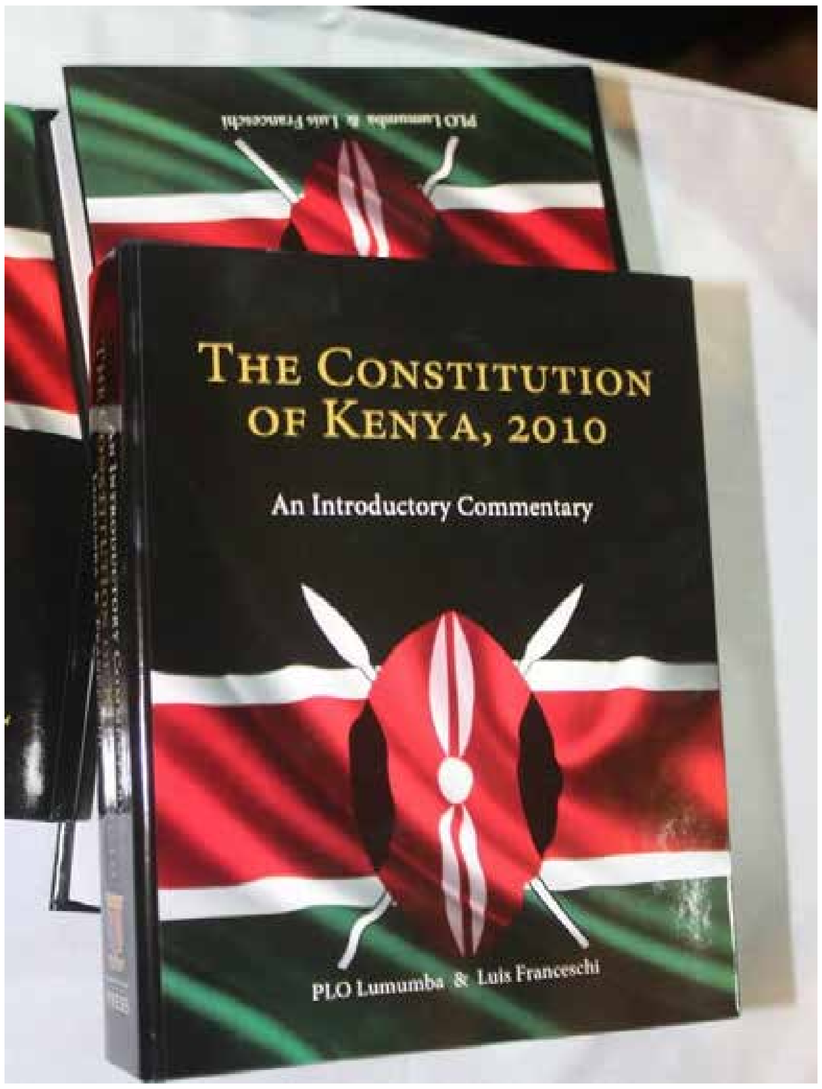

Constitution of Kenya, 2010

Article 40(3) of the Constitution of Kenya, 2010, declares with crystal-line precision that the State shall not deprive any person of property of any description, or of any interest in or right over it, unless that deprivation is for a public purpose or in the public interest, is carried out in accordance with the Constitution and an Act of Parliament, requires prompt payment in full of just compensation, and preserves the right of access to a court of law. This is not advisory language. It is a hard constitutional boundary drawn in the blood and memory of a people whose land was once treated as an open ledger for imperial pen strokes. Yet today that boundary is tested, stretched, and too often quietly crossed by the very institutions sworn to guard it.

The issue is not the existence of the power of compulsory acquisition. Every sovereign state must, at times, take private land for roads, schools, hospitals, security installations, or utilities that serve the collective. The Land Act, 2012, Part VIII, arms the National Land Commission with the machinery to do so: preliminary notice, mapping, inquiry, valuation, award, and payment before possession. The Constitution itself contemplates the power. The scandal lies in the chronic, almost casual, failure to treat those constitutional conditions as inviolable. When compensation is delayed for years while families are displaced, when "public purpose" is stretched to cover projects that primarily enrich connected interests, when notices are defective or inquiries are theatrical, the State does not exercise a lawful power it commits a constitutional trespass.

History renders this failure unforgivable. Between the Crown Lands Ordinances of 1902 and 1915 and the eve of independence, roughly 7.5 million acres half of Kenya's best agricultural land were alienated into settler hands under the fiction that African occupation was not ownership. The 1897 extension of the Indian Land Acquisition Act and the subsequent declaration of "wasted and unoccupied" lands as Crown property were not mere administrative acts; they were the legal architecture of dispossession. Independence did not dissolve that architecture. It often merely changed the names on the titles. Post-1963 settlement schemes, politically directed allocations, and the quiet conversion of public and community land into private holdings continued the pattern of selective enrichment and collective loss. The 2010 Constitution was meant to mark a decisive rupture. Article 40, Chapter Five on land, the establishment of the National Land Commission, and the recognition of community land were designed as institutional memory made law a refusal to allow the State to behave again as if the soil of Kenya were its private estate.

Nevertheless, the rupture remains incomplete. Courts have repeatedly been forced to remind the State of the obvious. In successive decisions, the Environment and Land Court and the Land Acquisition Tribunal have held that the necessity of a project must outweigh the hardship imposed on the landowner, that acquisition is a last resort, and that procedural shortcuts invalidate the entire enterprise. Cases involving university expansions, road corridors, and purported public projects have exposed the same pathologies: gazettement without genuine inquiry, valuations that undervalue ancestral and productive land, and the taking of possession before full payment. The constitutional requirement of "prompt" compensation is not a suggestion timed to the convenience of the Treasury; it is a condition precedent. To seize first and pay later is to invert the Constitution and revive the colonial logic that the State's need is self-justifying.

Consider the human texture of this inversion. A family that has cultivated the same ridge for three generations receives a notice. The inquiry is held far from their home, or in a language that does not fully capture their claims. The award arrives years later, eroded by inflation, or is contested in a tribunal whose backlog stretches into seasons of planting and harvest. The land, once the storehouse of memory, identity, and livelihood, becomes a site of bureaucratic abstraction. The correlation is stark: the further the process drifts from the constitutional sequence public purpose rigorously tested, necessity demonstrated, just compensation paid in full and promptly the deeper the wound to both individual dignity and public trust. Land is not merely an economic asset in Kenya; it is the living archive of belonging. When the State treats it as fungible inventory, it does not merely take soil; it severs the cord between citizen and republic.

Intellectual honesty demands that we name the actors who must now act. The National Land Commission must reclaim its constitutional role as an independent gatekeeper, not a rubber stamp for acquiring authorities. Section 107 of the Land Act empowers it to reject requests that fail the Article 40(3) test. That power must be exercised with courage and consistency, backed by published guidelines that force every Cabinet Secretary and County Executive to demonstrate, with evidence, that no reasonable alternative exists and that the public benefit is concrete, measurable, and proportionate. Parliament must amend the Land Act where necessary to impose statutory timelines for payment, with automatic interest and personal liability for officers who cause delay. The Executive must end the practice of treating compensation budgets as residual items; prompt payment is a constitutional obligation, not a fiscal afterthought. The Judiciary, already the most reliable defender of these boundaries, must continue to apply a presumption against interference with vested property rights and to award robust remedies, including restitution where possible and exemplary damages where the State has acted with indifference.

Citizens and civil society, for their part, cannot remain spectators. Every defective notice, every undervalued award, every project that cloaks private advantage in the language of public interest must be challenged. The right of access to court is not ornamental; it is the final constitutional safeguard. Legal aid organisations, community land associations, and professional valuers must expand their capacity so that ordinary Kenyans are not left to face the machinery of the State alone.

Original insight crystallises here: the constitutional boundary around compulsory acquisition is not a technical constraint on state power; it is a moral and historical compact. It says that the State may take, but only as a reluctant trustee of the public good, never as a conqueror. When that compact is broken, the damage is not confined to the displaced family. It corrodes the legitimacy of every public project that follows. Roads built on unresolved grievance become monuments to distrust. Schools erected on land whose owners still wait for justice teach a different curriculum: that power, once again, answers only to itself.

The data of history and the evidence of contemporary litigation converge on a single imperative. Kenya has already paid the price of treating land as the spoils of authority. The Constitution of 2010 offered a different covenant one that places the citizen's security of tenure at the centre and subjects every exercise of eminent domain to rigorous, transparent, and just conditions. That covenant is not self-executing. It requires vigilance from the Commission, discipline from the Executive, courage from Parliament, fidelity from the courts, and organised insistence from the people.

The line drawn in Article 40 is clear. It is categorical. It is non-negotiable. Either the State respects it in both letter and spirit, or it continues the long betrayal that began with the Crown Lands Ordinances and has never been fully repudiated. The choice is no longer theoretical. It is practical, urgent, and moral. The soil of Kenya has witnessed enough dispossession dressed as necessity. The time for constitutional fidelity is now.

The writer is a social commentator

Health ....

Mental health is not a luxury — it is a national priority

By: Wanjohi. P. Mugambi
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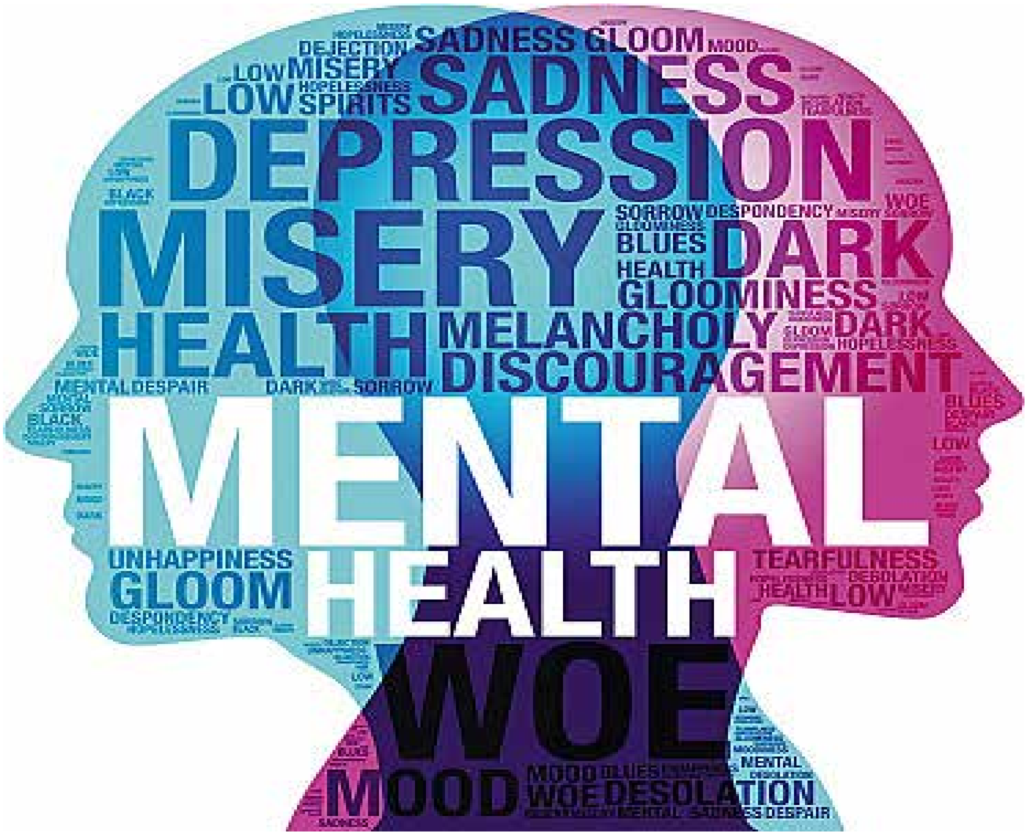

For too long, health in Kenya and across Africa has been measured by the physical — no fever, no visible wound, therefore fine. That understanding has cost us dearly, and it is time we replaced it with something more honest and more complete.

The World Health Organization defines mental health not as the absence of illness but as a state of wellbeing in which a person realises their abilities, copes with the normal stresses of life, works productively, and contributes to their community. By that definition, mental health is not a personal achievement reserved for the privileged few. It is a foundation — for individuals, families, classrooms, workplaces, and nations.

The mind and body are inseparable. A stressed mind produces headaches, stomach problems, disrupted sleep, and weakened immunity. A healthy mind, by contrast, builds resilience, strengthens relationships, and sharpens decision-making. This is not philosophy — it is physiology. And it is why we can no longer afford to treat mental health as secondary to anything.

The factors driving poor mental health are well documented. Biological influences include genetics, brain chemistry and hormonal changes. Psychological contributors range from childhood trauma and low self-esteem to patterns of chronic negative thinking. Socially, poverty, unemployment, isolation, family conflict, bullying and academic pressure all take a measurable toll. In Kenya and across Africa, there is an additional and increasingly urgent layer: the pressure on young people to succeed visibly, to appear perfect online, and to remain silent about pain. That silence is not strength. It is a wound that goes untreated.

The most common conditions that result from unaddressed mental health struggles are stress and anxiety — persistent worry, a racing heart, an inability to settle — which, at manageable levels, serve a purpose but at chronic levels become paralysing. There is depression, which is far more than sadness: it is the loss of interest in things once loved, a pervasive emptiness, exhaustion and withdrawal from others. And there is burnout — from school, work, caregiving — that hollow feeling of being used up, cynical and unable to produce.

The greatest barrier to addressing all of this remains stigma. In many of our communities, someone struggling with their mental health is still told wewe ni mvivu — you are lazy — or jifanye mgumu — toughen up. These responses do not heal. They simply push pain underground, where it grows. Good mental health is not something one stumbles upon. It is something one builds, deliberately and consistently, with the right tools and the right support.

Those tools are accessible. Consistent sleep — seven to eight hours — restores the brain and directly reduces anxiety and irritability. Regular physical movement, even thirty minutes of walking or dancing, releases endorphins, the brain's natural antidepressants. Human connection matters profoundly: isolation, research shows, is as harmful to health as smoking. Talking to a trusted friend, teacher, elder or counsellor is not weakness — it is wisdom. Mindful use of technology helps too. Taking breaks from screens, resisting the urge to measure your private reality against someone else's curated public image, and deliberately curating feeds that inspire rather than drain all make a measurable difference. For many Kenyans, spiritual and cultural roots — prayer, meditation, music, storytelling, Kiswahili poetry, communal rituals — remain powerful and deeply personal sources of calm and identity. These are not quaint traditions to be discarded. They are mental health resources.

Seeking professional help is not failure. If for more than two weeks you experience persistent sadness, hopelessness, extreme anxiety, inability to sleep or eat, or thoughts of harming yourself, please speak to someone qualified to help. Reach out to a school counsellor or trusted teacher, a medical doctor or psychologist at your nearest health facility, a trusted religious leader or community elder, or a helpline in your country. If you are in immediate distress, contact a local emergency number or speak to someone near you without delay.

If you know someone who is struggling, resist the impulse to judge or offer quick reassurances. Do not tell someone in pain to simply be happy. Instead, listen without interruption. Say: "I am here. I am listening. You are not alone." Then encourage them, gently and persistently, to access professional support.

A classroom full of anxious students cannot learn. A family in which pain goes unspoken cannot grow. A nation whose people are mentally broken cannot build. We need schools where students can speak openly, workplaces that build in genuine rest, families that know how to listen, and a culture that no longer equates struggle with shame.

Just as we teach children to wash their hands to protect their bodies, we must teach them to manage their thoughts, regulate their emotions and ask for help when they need it — because there is no health without mental health.

Dangote refinery Dangote will come to Kenya because he sees commercial opportunity. Kenya must therefore approach the transaction because it sees an equally compelling opportunity for its citizens

Kenya's black gold test: The Dangote refinery and the question of who really owns our future

BY Fredrick Chelimo

@themtkenyatimes

Dangote refinery in Lamu

Kenya must never mistake the discovery of oil for the creation of wealth. Oil beneath the ground is only potential wealth; the real wealth is the remains with the people after the oil has been extracted sold and exhausted"

There are investments that arrive quietly, create a few jobs and disappear into the ordinary rhythm of commerce. Then there are investments so large that they can alter the economic geography of an entire country. The proposed Dangote refinery in Lamu belongs to the second category.

With a reported capacity of 700,000 barrels a day and an estimated investment value variously placed between US$16 billion and US$20 billion, the project could become one of the most consequential industrial undertakings in Kenya's history. Dangote Industries has indicated that construction could begin between September and October 2026. If realized at the proposed scale, the refinery could transform Lamu Port, accelerate the commercialization of the LAPSSET corridor and establish Kenya as a major petroleum-processing and trading centre for East and Central Africa. This is therefore not an investment Kenya should fear. It is an investment Kenya should welcome—with open arms, but also with open eyes.

Because beneath the excitement lies a question that should concern every Kenyan, from the fisherman in Lamu to the taxpayer in Eldoret, the entrepreneur in Nairobi and the farmer in Turkana: When the refinery begins generating enormous economic value, how much of that value will remain in Kenya, and how much will simply pass through Kenya? That distinction could determine whether this becomes a landmark of national transformation or another impressive example of private wealth growing beside public expectation.

There is nothing wrong with Aliko Dangote becoming richer through a successful Kenyan investment. In fact, that is what a successful investor should do. Kenya needs capital, technology, expertise, markets and ambitious entrepreneurs. The presence of a major African industrialist should be regarded as an opportunity, not a threat. But investment is a partnership, not philanthropy.

Dangote will come to Kenya because he sees commercial opportunity. Kenya must therefore approach the transaction because it sees an equally compelling opportunity for its citizens. The question is not whether Dangote should make money. The question is whether Kenya will make enough money, build enough capacity and acquire enough economic power alongside him. This is where the refinery becomes much more than a petroleum project.

Kenya possesses considerable natural-resource potential. Oil and gas, titanium, gold, rare earth elements, niobium, graphite, manganese, copper, nickel, iron ore, limestone, fluorspar, soda ash and gemstones are among the resources that have attracted varying degrees of exploration and commercial interest. Some deposits have been associated with extraordinary geological valuations. Mrima Hill in Kwale, for instance, has been linked to estimates exceeding US$62 billion. But Kenyans must learn an important economic lesson: a resource is not the same thing as wealth.

A mineral deposit worth billions underground does not mean billions are waiting to be collected by the Treasury. Between geological discovery and national prosperity lies an intricate chain of exploration, financing, infrastructure, extraction, processing, taxation, environmental management, technology, markets and commercial negotiation. And at the centre of that chain is the contract.

That is why Kenya's greatest resource question may not be what lies beneath the ground, but whether the country has the institutions and negotiating capacity to convert what lies beneath the ground into lasting public prosperity. For too long, Kenyans have been told that the country is sitting on vast mineral wealth. We hear about trillions in the ground, billions in investment and thousands of jobs. Yet the public is rarely shown the complete economic architecture behind those announcements.

Who owns the asset? Who finances it? What does government contribute? What tax concessions are granted? Who bears the risk? Who receives the dividends? How are related-party transactions controlled? What happens if the investor wants to sell? What happens if the project fails? What obligations exist towards local communities? What proportion of the value chain remains in Kenya? These are not questions designed to frighten investors. They are questions that responsible governments ask before committing the national interest to long-term commercial arrangements.

Reports that Dangote has offered East African governments a combined 30 per cent stake, with Kenya considering approximately 10 per cent for US$500 million, therefore deserve serious public scrutiny. Ten per cent may be a superb investment—or a poor one. The percentage alone tells us almost nothing. What matters is the quality of the rights attached to that percentage.

Will Kenya have meaningful representation on the board? Will it have protection against dilution? Will it participate in strategic decisions? Will domestic supply obligations be legally enforceable? Will Kenya receive reliable access to refined products during periods of regional shortage? Who will control storage, pipelines, export terminals and related infrastructure? What tax incentives will be provided? Will the Kenyan taxpayer be expected to guarantee any borrowing? Can Kenyans be given the option to invest in it?

And if the refinery becomes commercially distressed, who carries the burden? These questions must not be dismissed as matters for corporate lawyers and government officials alone. They are matters of national sovereignty because they determine who ultimately controls the economic value created by an asset of continental significance. If Kenya contributes US$500 million, the public should know precisely what that money purchases.

If the project is worth US$16 billion or US$20 billion, Kenyans deserve a transparent explanation of the valuation. If there is a substantial discount, they should understand why. If public land, roads, port infrastructure, security, tax incentives or government guarantees are part of the wider arrangement, their economic value must also be recognised.

Nothing provided by the Kenyan taxpayer is free. Every road has a cost. Every tax concession has a cost. Every government guarantee carries a risk. Every acre of public land has an opportunity cost. That is why Parliament must not be reduced to the role of applauding a groundbreaking ceremony after the important decisions have already been made.

Before public money and natural resources are committed, Kenyans needs an independent value-for-money assessment and rigorous institutional scrutiny. Parliament, the Auditor-General, the Controller of Budget, EPRA, the Competition Authority and relevant environmental institutions should examine the transaction within their respective mandates.

Most importantly, Kenyans must be able to understand the broad commercial and public-interest terms of the final arrangement. Transparency should not be treated as an enemy of

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Dangote refinery Dangote will come to Kenya because he sees commercial opportunity. Kenya must therefore approach the transaction because it sees an equally compelling opportunity for its citizens

Kenya's black gold test: The Dangote refinery and the question of who really owns our future

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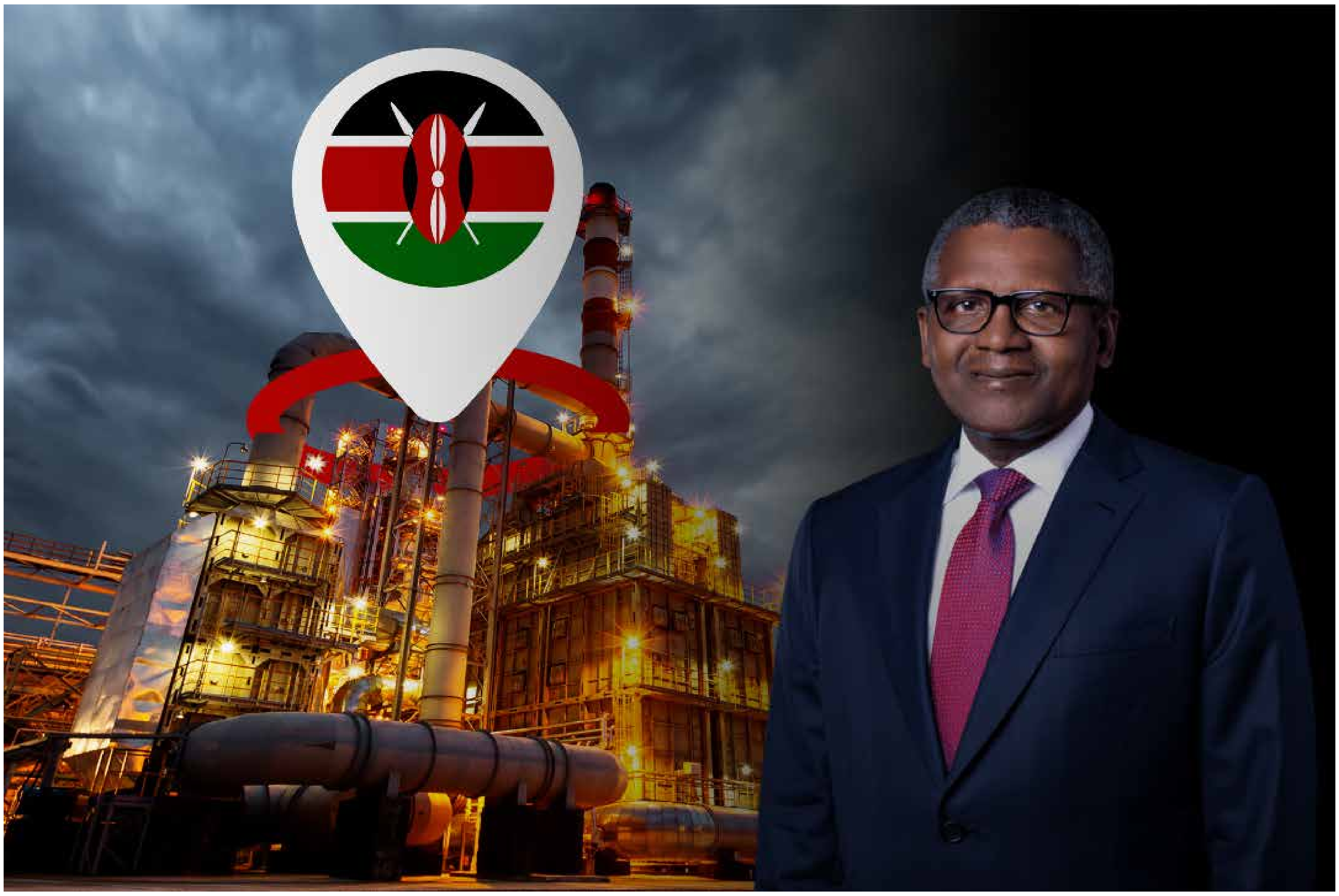

Dangote refinery in Lamu

investment. Serious investors should welcome serious institutions.

There is also a deeper constitutional principle at stake. Kenya's natural resources are held in trust for the people and must be managed sustainably and equitably for their benefit. Government is therefore not the private owner of Kenya's inheritance. It is its custodian. That responsibility extends beyond the political lifespan of any administration. A Cabinet secretary can leave office. A government can lose an election. A corporation can change ownership. But a badly negotiated resource agreement can bind generations. That is why the Lamu refinery should become the beginning of a much larger national conversation. Kenya should not be satisfied with owning a small percentage of a refinery. It should negotiate for an entire industrial ecosystem around it.

The refinery should stimulate petrochemicals, fertiliser production, plastics, lubricants, aviation fuel, bitumen, industrial chemicals, engineering, fabrication, logistics and manufacturing. Kenyan universities and TVET institutions should be integrated into the skills pipeline. Kenyan companies should move beyond low-value contracts for catering, security and casual labour into sophisticated engineering, maintenance, technology and supply chains.

The young people of Lamu should not merely watch an enormous industrial complex rise beside them. They should have a stake in its future. That is what inclusive development looks like. And Lamu itself must not become another place where national infrastructure is built but local prosperity remains elusive. Communities must benefit meaningfully, environmental safeguards must be credible and enforceable, and local enterprise must be deliberately integrated into the emerging economy.

The greatest danger is not foreign investment. It is foreign investment without sufficient domestic value capture. Africa's so-called resource curse is rarely caused by the resource itself. Oil does not impoverish a country. Gold does not create corruption. Minerals do not weaken institutions. Weak governance does. Opaque contracts do. Political patronage does. Poor taxation does. Failure to process resources locally does. And the greatest tragedy occurs when citizens live beside extraordinary natural wealth but remain economically excluded from it.

Kenya has an opportunity to break that pattern. The Dangote refinery could become a symbol of a new Kenya—confident enough to welcome global capital, but sophisticated enough to negotiate fair value; ambitious enough to build infrastructure, but wise enough to ensure that infrastructure creates domestic industry; and open enough to welcome investors, but patriotic enough to protect the interests of generations yet unborn.

Kenya may indeed have won the race against Tanzania to host a refinery. But that is the easy race. The difficult race begins now. It is the race to ensure that Lamu becomes not merely a place where a refinery stands, but a place from which Kenyan industrial prosperity radiates across the country and the region. Years from now, the success of this project will not be measured by the number of dignitaries who attend its launch, the height of its towers or the number of barrels it processes. It will be measured by whether Kenyan engineers occupy its most sophisticated positions; whether Kenyan companies have entered global supply chains; whether Lamu's young people have better lives; whether the port has become commercially vibrant; whether government earns sustainable revenues; whether consumers benefit from greater energy security; and whether the Kenyan economy has genuinely moved up the value chain.

The refinery may be privately owned. The capital may be foreign. The profits may legitimately belong to investors. But the opportunity is national. Kenya must therefore negotiate not from fear, desperation or the excitement of beating a neighbour, but from confidence in its own worth.

We should welcome Dangote to Lamu. We should welcome the jobs, capital, technology and industrial ambition. But we must also welcome something else: the courage to ask difficult questions before signing away the future. Because ultimately, the question is not whether Dangote will become wealthy from Lamu. He should, if he builds a successful refinery.

The question is whether, when our children look back thirty years from now, they will find that Kenya became wealthier too. Whether the fishermen of Lamu prospered. Whether Kenyan businesses grew. Whether our engineers found world-class careers at home. Whether our young people inherited skills rather than promises. Whether the Treasury received a fair and enduring return. Whether the port fulfilled its promise. Whether an industrial ecosystem emerged around the refinery. And whether Kenya finally learned how to turn the resources beneath its soil, the strategic value of its geography and the energy of its people into national wealth rather than merely private fortunes. That is the real black-gold test.

Kenya does not merely need to host the refinery. Kenya must capture the opportunity. Because we are not negotiating only for a refinery. We are negotiating for the economic inheritance of generations yet unborn.

Sports >> *The 2022 Ballon d'Or winner has terminated his Saudi contract by mutual agreement, leaving one of football's greatest modern careers at a crossroads

Benzema cuts ties with Al Hilal as retirement looms

Karim Benzema has terminated his contract with Saudi Pro League club Al Hilal by mutual agreement, leaving the 38-year-old French striker to decide whether he will play on elsewhere or bring the curtain down on one of the most decorated careers in modern football.

The departure, confirmed yesterday, was reached without dispute between the two parties — a clean break that ends Benzema's Saudi chapter at Al Hilal and opens what could be the final act of a career spanning more than two decades at the highest level. No timeline has been given for his decision, and those close to him say he intends to take his time before committing either way.

The options before him are straightforward but significant. He could remain in Saudi Arabia with a different club, continuing in a league he already knows well and where he has established himself during the latter stages of his career. He could look further afield, with clubs elsewhere likely to register interest given his experience, reputation and technical quality. Or he could retire — a genuine possibility, according to those familiar with his thinking, though no final decision has been made.

Whatever he chooses, the weight of what he has already achieved provides more than enough context for the deliberation. Benzema's career was built on a foundation of consistency, intelligence and an ability to perform when it mattered most — qualities that became particularly apparent during his extraordinary final years at Real Madrid, the club he joined from Lyon in 2009 and where he would eventually become one of the most important players in the club's modern history.

For much of his time in Madrid, Benzema operated alongside Cristiano Ronaldo, contributing goals and creativity while the Portuguese star commanded the spotlight. When Ronaldo departed for Juventus in 2018, Benzema stepped fully into the leading role — and the transformation was remarkable. He became Madrid's heartbeat, a complete forward whose value extended well beyond his goal tally. He linked play, created space, held the ball under pressure and unlocked defences with a football intelligence that made him consistently dangerous without always being the player who finished the chance.

The 2021-22 season was the undeniable peak. Benzema led Real Madrid to both the UEFA Champions League and La Liga title, delivering a series of performances in the knock-out rounds of the Champions League that will be remembered for as long as the competition exists. His hat-trick against Paris Saint-Germain, his contributions against Chelsea and Manchester City in one of the most dramatic European campaigns in recent memory — these were not merely good performances. They were career-defining moments that confirmed what those who had watched him closely already knew.

The reward came in October 2022, when Benzema was awarded the Ballon d'Or — the highest individual honour in football and a recognition long overdue, in the view of many who had followed his career from its early days. He became only the second Frenchman to win the award after Zinedine Zidane, and at 34, one of the oldest recipients in the trophy's history.

His subsequent move to Saudi Arabia in the summer of 2023 was part of the wider wave of elite players drawn to the Kingdom's ambitious football project. The arrival of Benzema, alongside others of similar stature, signalled a new chapter both for him and for a league seeking to establish itself on the global stage. His time at Al Hilal has now concluded, and the questions surrounding his future are as much about appetite as they are about ability.

Karim Benzema

At 38, Benzema is no longer the explosive centre-forward who terrorised defences in his prime. But football intelligence does not diminish at the same rate as pace, and his ability to read the game, occupy space intelligently and bring teammates into play means he could still offer genuine value to a club with the right structure around him. Whether he has the desire to commit to another demanding professional season is the question only he can answer.

For Al Hilal, the departure creates space — and questions. The Saudi giants have invested heavily in building a squad capable of competing domestically and internationally, and Benzema's exit will prompt fresh thinking about the club's attacking options going into the next phase of their project.

For the football world, the next announcement from Benzema's camp will be followed with the attention reserved for figures whose careers have genuinely mattered. From his early days at Lyon, through his transformation at Real Madrid, to his Ballon d'Or triumph and his Saudi Arabian chapter, his journey has been defined by major trophies, historic performances and a quiet, enduring excellence that outlasted the critics who once doubted him.

At 38, the next decision belongs entirely to Karim Benzema. And the football world is listening.

Sports >> *The Colombian right-back is set to undergo a medical today before signing a three-year contract at the City Ground

Nottingham Forest agree £22m deal for Crystal Palace defender Muñoz

By **Pascal Okoth**

Nottingham Forest have agreed a deal worth £22 million plus add-ons to sign Colombian right-back Daniel Muñoz from Crystal Palace, with the 30-year-old expected to complete his medical today before putting pen to paper on a three-year contract.

The agreement, understood to be fully in place between the two clubs, represents one of Forest's most significant pieces of business ahead of the new season and signals the club's continued ambition to strengthen with proven Premier League talent. An option is included in the contract, giving Forest flexibility over Muñoz's future beyond the initial three-year term.

Muñoz has been one of the more quietly impressive full-backs in the Premier League since his arrival at Crystal Palace, building a reputation as an energetic, attack-minded defender whose contribution extends well beyond his defensive duties. His pace, physicality and ability to arrive in dangerous areas have made him a consistent threat going forward, while his defensive aggression and positional discipline have ensured he remains a reliable option at the back. He has carried that form into international football, becoming a trusted figure in the Colombia national team and demonstrating that his qualities hold up at the highest levels of the game.

For Forest, the appeal is clear. The right-back position has been identified as an area requiring reinforcement, and in Muñoz they are acquiring someone who arrives not as a project but as a ready-made contributor — a player familiar with the Premier League's demands and capable of slotting into the team's structure from the outset. His attacking output in particular could prove valuable for a side that, under head coach Nuno Espírito Santo, has shown a willingness to use its full-backs as genuine weapons in the final third.

The £22 million fee reflects both the quality Forest believe they are acquiring and the competitive nature of the market for established Premier League defenders. Crystal Palace, for their part, will have mixed feelings about the departure. Muñoz became a popular figure at Selhurst Park, and his energy and commitment earned him genuine affection among the club's supporters. His exit creates a gap that Palace will need to address before the window closes.

The financial commitment from Forest is also a continuation of a transfer strategy built around intent and clarity. Rather than chasing speculative targets, the club have consistently pursued players whose Premier League credentials are already established — individuals who understand the rhythms of the English game and can contribute immediately without an extended settling-in period. Muñoz fits that profile precisely.

Assuming today's medical raises no concerns, the formalities will be completed swiftly and Forest will have their man in place well ahead of the season's early demands. For Muñoz, the move represents a fresh challenge at a club with genuine ambition, a passionate support base and a stadium that has produced some of English football's most atmospheric occasions. The City Ground will be a new home, but the competition — and the expectation — will be familiar.

Daniel Muñoz

At 30, Muñoz is entering what many would consider the prime years for a defender — experienced enough to read the game with composure, fit enough to sustain the physical intensity the role demands, and motivated enough to prove himself at a club pushing for a place among the Premier League's established forces. The three-year contract gives him the security to commit fully and the time to build something meaningful.

For Forest supporters watching the summer's business take shape, Muñoz's arrival will be read as a statement — evidence that the club's leadership is serious about building a squad capable of competing across a full season rather than simply surviving one. The right-back position, often undervalued in public debate about squad construction but critical in practice, will now be occupied by a player who has shown he can handle Premier League football at a consistent level.

The paperwork is all but done. The medical awaits. And barring any unexpected complications, Daniel Muñoz will become a Nottingham Forest player before the week is out.

SPORTS AS THEY HAPPEN

The MT. KENYA TIMES

Politics Deputy President Kithure Kindiki has repeatedly signalled his determination to defend his place on the ticket

The running mate race has begun: Why Ruto's 2027 ticket is already dividing Mt Kenya

Long before the ballot, the question of who stands beside President Ruto is reshaping alliances, testing loyalties and exposing the fault lines that will define the next election

BY Levis Wangamati
@themtkenyatimes

Kenya has not reached the ballot, but the politics of 2027 are already being negotiated as though election day were a matter of weeks away — and the sharpest early contest is not over the presidency itself, but over who will stand beside President William Ruto when voters eventually return to the polls.

Deputy President Kithure Kindiki has repeatedly signalled his determination to defend his place on the ticket. But senior Orange Democratic Movement figures have publicly endorsed Cabinet Secretary Wycliffe Oparanya for the position, transforming what might otherwise have been an internal Kenya Kwanza decision into a full coalition dispute. That friction makes the running-mate question far more consequential than it initially appears.

For Ruto, retaining Kindiki carries a straightforward appeal: continuity. Having succeeded the impeached Rigathi Gachagua in late 2024, Kindiki now occupies the country's second-highest constitutional office. Keeping him on the ticket would allow the President to present his 2027 campaign as a stable continuation of an administration that absorbed significant internal turbulence without losing its footing. But behind that argument lies a considerably more difficult calculation — whether Kindiki can genuinely help consolidate Mt Kenya, a region whose electoral weight remains too significant for any serious presidential campaign to set aside.

That is precisely where Gachagua re-enters the picture. The former deputy president has moved from being Ruto's 2022 running mate to one of his most organised political opponents, keeping himself firmly within the 2027 conversation through sustained mobilisation and legal challenges surrounding his impeachment. His continued political presence complicates the President's efforts to rebuild a coherent base across Mt Kenya, where loyalty has historically been shaped by a combination of national alignments and acutely local interests. The question for Ruto is therefore not simply whether Kindiki remains on the ticket, but whether Kindiki can help mend a political relationship with the mountain that has become visibly strained.

Deputy President Kithure Kindiki and his predecessor Rigathi Gachagua

Kindiki's challenge, in that context, extends well beyond occupying the second office. He must demonstrate that he is not merely the man who inherited Gachagua's position, but a politician capable of building an independent constituency of his own across Mt Kenya. That requires more than governmental visibility or constitutional authority. It requires networks, regional confidence and the ability to speak to voters who may not automatically see his elevation as a satisfactory substitute for what they had before. If he fails to establish that independent political identity, his place on the 2027 ticket will remain exposed to wider coalition calculations.

Geography adds a further layer of complexity. Gachagua's influence has been strongest historically in Mt Kenya West — across Nyeri, Murang'a and Kirinyaga — while Kindiki comes from Tharaka Nithi in Mt Kenya East. Although both belong to the broader Mt Kenya political sphere, the distinction is not trivial. Regional politics rarely operates as a completely unified bloc. Historical differences, local networks and competing perceptions of leadership shape how different parts of the mountain respond to national alliances, and Kindiki must navigate that sub-regional divide carefully if he is to build the kind of cross-county standing that would make him genuinely indispensable.

Gachagua's essential argument — that Mt Kenya should negotiate with national political forces from a position of collective strength rather than being treated as an electoral reservoir courted during campaigns and forgotten afterwards — retains genuine appeal within the region. Ruto's counterargument, that development performance and broad national alliances matter more than the influence of any single regional politician, represents a rival and competing logic. Kindiki sits awkwardly between these narratives. He must project loyalty to the President while simultaneously persuading Mt Kenya voters that his political identity is not entirely derivative of State House.

ODM's demand for the deputy presidency is ultimately about leverage. Having entered the broad-based government, the party now seeks to translate its cooperation into tangible political influence. Its push for Oparanya is not simply a contest over one individual — it is an opening move in negotiations over how the governing coalition could be structured for 2027. The more aggressively the party pursues the position, the harder it becomes for Ruto to treat the running-mate decision as an internal matter within his own camp. Either he satisfies ODM and risks alienating Kindiki's supporters, or he retains Kindiki and risks frustrating a coalition partner whose votes he may need.

A presidential ticket, in Kenya's political culture, is never merely a list of two names. It is a political map — communicating priorities, rewarding alliances, reassuring constituencies and signalling which bargains have been struck. The 2022 election demonstrated this logic when Ruto ultimately chose Gachagua over Kindiki after intensive internal deliberations. Four years later, the landscape looks almost unrecognisable. Gachagua is building an opposition base from outside government. Kindiki holds the deputy presidency. ODM is simultaneously operating within the government and negotiating its political future. And the broader opposition is still trying to convert multiple competing ambitions into a coherent electoral alternative.

Ruto's instinct may be to delay a definitive declaration for as long as politically viable. An early announcement strengthens Kindiki but eliminates bargaining room with potential partners. Leaving the question open carries its own risks — political uncertainty generates its own politics. Every regional gathering becomes a loyalty test. Every endorsement becomes a signal. Every statement about the running mate triggers fresh speculation about who is gaining ground and who is losing it. Strategic flexibility, held too long, curdles into political anxiety.

Mt Kenya, for its part, will not wait indefinitely for clarity. The region's political future cannot be assumed to belong permanently to any single leader. Voters shift when leaders disappoint, when alliances change and when new bargains appear more attractive. The real contest is not merely over who speaks for the mountain, but over who can convince it that their strategy offers the strongest route to genuine influence in the next administration.

For Ruto, the task is to retain enough mountain support without allowing the region's internal politics to dictate the entire architecture of his campaign. For Kindiki, it is to prove he commands influence beyond the authority of office. For Gachagua, it is to convert dissatisfaction into a durable movement rather than a temporary rebellion. And for ODM, it is to extract real concessions without losing its identity in the process.

The running mate is not a footnote to the 2027 contest. It is becoming one of its first major battlegrounds — and the campaign has not yet officially begun.

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