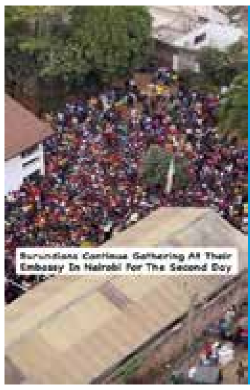

'We feel unwanted here': Burundians weigh departure as 90-day amnesty deadline looms

The Kenyan government issued a 90-day amnesty in August for Burundian nationals to either acquire proper documentation or exit the country. But instead of rushing to comply, many are packing their bags.

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Court ruling clips Kenyatta's wings at the worst possible moment

The High Court yesterday upheld a law barring retired presidents from holding political party leadership positions beyond six months after leaving office, a ruling that lands directly on Uhuru Kenyatta's political operations

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Countdown 2027 Ruto tours Nyanza commissioning projects while branding Kenyatta as opposition financier

Ruto's sponsor war hits Nyanza

President William Ruto is midway through a five-day tour of Luo Nyanza — historically the country's most reliable opposition territory — commissioning projects, courting grassroots leaders and continuing his sustained public campaign to brand former President Uhuru Kenyatta as the hidden financier of the forces gathering against him ahead of the August 2027 general election.

The tour, which runs through Kisumu, Siaya, Homa Bay and Migori counties, combines inspections of government projects, launches of new developments and political engagements in a region that has become increasingly important to the president following the broad-based cooperation between UDA and ODM.

As part of what was presented as a KSh700 billion package of development projects for the region, Ruto commissioned the Lake Victoria Water and Sanitation Project in Kisumu Central constituency and the construction of the Rabuor-Chiga road in Nyando constituency.

The development optics are deliberate and substantial. But it is the political battle running beneath the commissioning ceremonies that is drawing the sharper attention.

Speaking in Kisumu on the second day of his tour, Ruto hit back at Linda Mwananchi leader Edwin Sifuna over claims that Kenya's slums are primarily an income problem rather than a shortage of housing, dismissing the argument and saying Sifuna was getting his economics wrong.

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President William Ruto in Kisumu

Ruto tells Kisumu rally that 2027 will end tribal politics and usher in national unity

BY MKT REPORTER
@themtkenyatimes

Some of the moments as captured in pictures

President William Ruto yesterday told residents of Kisumu that the 2027 general election would mark a turning point in Kenya's political history, declaring that the poll would bring an end to tribalism, division and discrimination and open a new chapter defined by national unity and shared purpose.
Speaking at Jua Kali Garage in Kisumu City Centre during his ongoing tour of Luo Nyanza, Ruto said Kenyans would rally around a common national transformation agenda that expanded opportunity for every citizen regardless of region, religion or background.
In a moment that drew attention from the crowd, Ruto invoked the name of the late former Prime Minister Raila Odinga, saying the vision of an inclusive Kenya was one he had shared with Odinga before his passing.
"This is the Kenya we envisioned with the late former Prime Minister Raila Odinga," Ruto said.
The remarks came on the fourth day of the president's five-day development tour of Nyanza, a region historically aligned with the opposition, where he has been commissioning projects and making a direct pitch for political support ahead of next year's election.

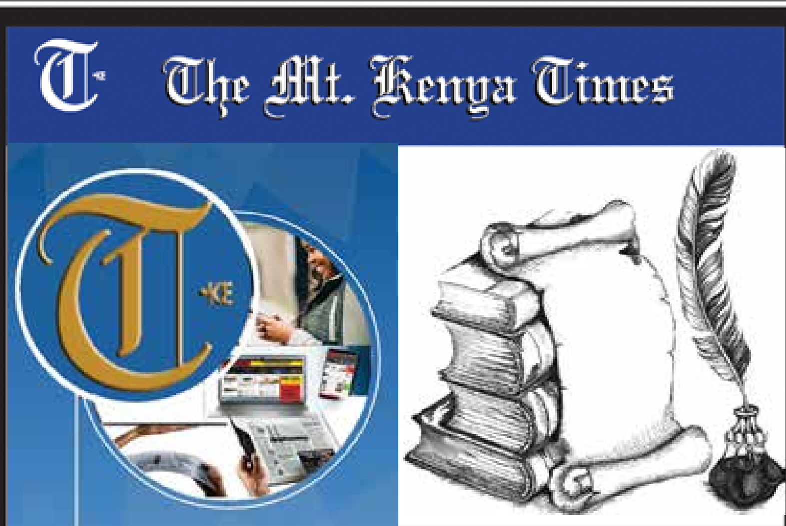








Editor's Desk



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NEWS IN BRIEF

A parliamentary committee has called for sweeping changes to the policy framework governing Kenya's National Infrastructure Fund, recommending that the Sessional Paper guiding the fund's board on financing commercially viable projects be substantially rewritten before it proceeds further. Lawmakers raised concerns about significant loopholes within the KSh340 billion fund that could undermine transparency and effectiveness in the delivery of major national infrastructure. The committee's intervention signals deep unease among legislators about whether the existing framework provides sufficient safeguards over public resources earmarked for large-scale development. Members indicated that the document, as currently drafted, falls short of the standards required to govern a fund of this magnitude, and that fundamental revisions rather than minor amendments are needed before the board can operate with proper legal and policy backing.

Five people died on Sunday night when a bus and a private car collided head-on along the Nairobi-Nakuru highway near Kikopey trading centre, in another fatal crash on one of the country's most dangerous road corridors. Two of the five victims were women. The bus, which was travelling towards western Kenya, struck the oncoming vehicle in a collision that killed all five on the spot. Emergency responders were called to the scene as survivors were retrieved from the wreckage. The stretch of highway near Kikopey has been the site of repeated fatal accidents, with speed, overtaking and poor visibility at night among the factors that investigators frequently cite in crashes along the route. The cause of Sunday's collision was under investigation yesterday.

National Assembly Speaker Moses Wetang'ula yesterday urged Members of Parliament travelling to a Commonwealth parliamentary conference to carry Kenya's national interests into every engagement, positioning the country's legislative priorities firmly within the international forum. Wetang'ula said the gathering presented a platform not merely for procedural exchange but for Kenya to project its policy positions on matters of regional and global significance. He called on the MPs to move beyond passive participation and use the conference to build alliances, raise Kenya's profile and return with commitments that translate into tangible legislative and diplomatic outcomes. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association brings together legislators from across member states to exchange best practice and coordinate positions on shared challenges ranging from governance and trade to climate and security.

The cost of fuel at the pump will hold steady for another month after the Energy and Petroleum Regulatory Authority retained current prices in its latest review. Super petrol, diesel and kerosene will remain at their existing rates across the country, offering some relief to motorists, transporters and households still navigating the pressure of a high cost of living. The regulator cited stable global crude oil prices and a relatively steady exchange rate as the basis for the decision. Kenyans had been bracing for a possible upward adjustment ahead of the review, making the unchanged prices a modest but welcome reprieve. The rates will be reviewed again next month when the authority conducts its regular assessment of international market conditions and local factors affecting pump prices.

Six Iranian nationals will face a full criminal trial over one of the largest drug seizures in Kenya's recent history after a court ruled yesterday that the prosecution had established a sufficient case for them to answer. The suspects are linked to a KSh8.2 billion narcotics haul, a figure that places the case among the most significant drug trafficking prosecutions the country has seen. The ruling means the six will now be required to mount a formal defence against the charges, having failed to convince the court that the evidence against them was too thin to warrant a trial. The case has drawn attention to Kenya's vulnerability as a transit point for large-scale narcotics trafficking moving through the region.

Kiharu Member of Parliament Ndindi Nyoro yesterday delivered a sharp rebuke to the political establishment, dismissing calls for national agenda-setting as hollow while ordinary Kenyans grapple with economic collapse and insecurity. Nyoro said leaders had forfeited the moral authority to lecture citizens on any agenda after presiding over rising unemployment, shuttered businesses and a wave of violence that had left families grieving. "You cannot lecture Kenyans anything about agenda when you have only succeeded in killings and collapsing the economy," Nyoro said. His remarks captured a broader public frustration that has hardened into outright disillusionment, with many Kenyans describing promises of reform as having yielded nothing but hardship. Nyoro demanded that those in power confront the measurable consequences of their governance before claiming any mandate to set national direction.


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Tourism Kenyans themselves remain among the most important partners in growing the sector

The months ahead offer Kenya a golden opportunity to grow tourism

BY Rebecca Miano
@themtkenyatimes

Every Kenyan has a role in telling this country's story and ensuring visitors leave with memories that bring them back

By Rebecca Miano

Tourism is much more than travel. It is a powerful driver of jobs, enterprise and local economic development. From the farmer supplying a hotel with fresh produce to the young person working as a tour guide, the driver transporting visitors and the artisan selling locally made crafts, tourism creates a chain of opportunity that touches communities across the country.

The months ahead offer Kenya an important opportunity to build on strong momentum in the sector, prepare our destinations for increased travel and ensure that more Kenyans benefit from the opportunities this vital industry creates. We should see this period not simply as a countdown to the festive season, but as a time to prepare, innovate and position Kenya for sustained tourism growth.

Kenya has an extraordinary range of experiences to offer. The country is internationally recognised for its wildlife and beaches, but our tourism story extends much further. Rich cultures, diverse landscapes, mountains, forests, lakes, culinary experiences, sporting activities and a growing meetings and conferences sector provide opportunities to attract visitors throughout the year. This diversification remains central to our tourism policy.

We want more visitors to stay longer, explore more destinations and experience different aspects of Kenya. We also want more counties and communities to participate meaningfully in the tourism economy.

Domestic tourism is an important part of this ambition. Kenyans themselves remain among the most important partners in growing the sector. I encourage families, young people, businesses and institutions to take time to discover destinations within our own country. Every domestic trip supports a local enterprise, creates demand for tourism services and contributes to livelihoods. It also reminds us that we do not need to wait for international visitors to appreciate the beauty and richness of Kenya.

At the same time, growth in tourism must be responsible and sustainable. Our wildlife, forests, oceans, mountains and cultural heritage are treasures that cannot be taken for granted. Conservation must remain at the centre of our tourism agenda because protecting these resources is ultimately about protecting the future of the industry itself.

This responsibility extends to all of us. Tourism businesses must continue improving service standards and creating memorable experiences. Communities should be empowered to participate in and benefit from tourism. Visitors should respect our environment, wildlife and cultural heritage. Government will continue providing the policy direction, partnerships, infrastructure support, regulation and marketing required to create an enabling environment for the sector.

Technology will also increasingly shape how visitors discover and experience Kenya. Digital platforms, online booking systems, electronic payments and better access to destination information are making travel more convenient and opening new opportunities for tourism enterprises, particularly small businesses that previously lacked the reach to connect with international visitors.

The months ahead should therefore be about building confidence and readiness. Kenya has an opportunity to showcase itself at its best — a country of remarkable natural beauty, diverse cultures, warm hospitality and endless possibilities. Every Kenyan has a role in telling this story and ensuring that visitors leave with positive memories that bring them back.

As government, we remain committed to making tourism more inclusive, sustainable and competitive. But the success of this agenda will ultimately depend on the partnerships we build across national and county governments, the private sector, communities and citizens.

The future of Kenyan tourism is bright. Our task now is to nurture the momentum, prepare well and ensure that the benefits of tourism reach as many Kenyans as possible. Let us use the coming months to open our doors wider, explore our own country more, support local enterprises and proudly share Kenya's story with the world.

Rebecca Miano
Cabinet Secretary for Tourism and Wildlife

Treasury breaks law over KSh91B CBK overdraft

Controller of Budget Margaret Nyakang'o

BY Jane Njeri
@themtkenyatimes

Controller of Budget Margaret Nyakang'o has accused the National Treasury of violating the law by failing to clear a KSh91 billion overdraft borrowed from the Central Bank of Kenya by the end of the 2024/25 financial year, raising fresh concerns about the government's fiscal discipline at a sensitive moment in Kenya's economic calendar.

Nyakang'o said the continued existence of the large outstanding balance raised concerns about compliance with regulatory requirements and the effectiveness of the government's short-term cash-flow planning.

The overdraft facility is restricted to a maximum of five per cent of the most recently audited government revenues, is payable within 12 months and is limited to development expenditure financing in line with the Public Finance Management Act. Allowing it to roll beyond the financial year end is therefore not a procedural irregularity — it is a statutory violation.

The decline in overdraft interest payments during the reporting period, compared with the previous year, was attributed to a drop in the CBK's interest rates, which stood at 8.75 per cent in June 2026, down from 9.75 per cent in June 2025. The reduction was also linked to the implementation of the Treasury Single Account system, which began in July 2025 and enables the consolidation and optimum utilisation of government cash.

Nyakang'o has separately urged the Treasury to reduce the budget deficit, strengthen domestic revenue collection and align annual borrowing with the targeted debt path. "This will reduce reliance on borrowing to finance the budget and ensure the annual debt-ratio milestones towards 55 per cent of GDP are monitored," her August 2026 National Government Budget Implementation Review Report states.

The National Treasury had not responded to the Controller of Budget's findings at the time of publication.


NEWS PAPER
IN BUSINESS

KNLS and Book Aid donate 600 books on Literacy Day

The government yesterday marked International Literacy Day 2026 at Eldama Ravine County Library

BY Grace Wanja
@themtkenyatimes

The government yesterday marked International Literacy Day 2026 at Eldama Ravine County Library by donating 600 books to local schools, reaffirming literacy as a national development priority at an event that brought together learners, teachers, parents, librarians and county officials.

The books were donated through a partnership between the Kenya National Library Service (KNLS) and Book Aid International, and were formally handed over to representatives of participating schools before an audience that included children who had earlier led an International Literacy Day Book March procession through the town and toured the county library.

Cabinet Secretary for Gender, Culture and Children Services Hanna Cheptumo said literacy could no longer be treated as the preserve of the education sector alone.

"Literacy today encompasses not only the ability to read and write, but also the capacity to access, understand, evaluate and apply information," Cheptumo said, citing digital, financial and media literacy as growing national priorities.

She linked literacy directly to Kenya's wider human capital agenda, arguing that it underpins education, skills development and economic participation. She called for children in rural and underserved areas to have the same access to quality learning resources as those in better-served parts of the country.

"A child's location should not determine the quality of learning resources and opportunities available to them," she said.

Cheptumo described the book donation as a practical investment in the education and future of Kenyan children and commended Book Aid International for its longstanding partnership with KNLS.

The commemoration was held under the theme Literacy for People, the Planet and Prosperity, marking the 60th anniversary of International Literacy Day. Following the book march and library tour, the event included reading-focused activities and entertainment involving learners from participating schools.

KNLS Director General Charles Nzivo said the institution's libraries give communities opportunities to access knowledge, develop reading habits, acquire digital skills and engage in lifelong learning. He encouraged learners to make libraries a consistent part of their education rather than treating them as occasional resources.

KNLS Board Chairman Bishop Robert Theuri Maina called for closer collaboration between national and county governments and development partners, noting that Eldama Ravine County Library continued to serve as a key community resource with capacity to expand literacy initiatives further.

The Eldama Ravine event was one of several International Literacy Day commemorations held across the country yesterday, with KNLS branches and partner institutions marking the occasion through book donations, reading programmes and community engagement activities.

Nairobi Women Representative Esther Passaris

MPs scrutinise women's economic policy as Parliament moves to close implementation gap

Lawmakers gather to interrogate financing and accountability mechanisms behind Kenya's National Policy on Women's Economic Empowerment

BY John Kariuki
@themtkenyatimes

Members of Parliament yesterday began a two-day engagement on the National Policy on Women's Economic Empowerment (NPWEE) and Sessional Paper No. 6 of 2026, with legislators pressing for concrete action to translate policy commitments into measurable outcomes for women across Kenya.

The engagement, convened by the Kenya Women Parliamentary Association (KEWOPA) in partnership with the Institute of Public Finance (IPF), is bringing together MPs from different parliamentary committees to examine the policy's financing, institutional arrangements, coordination between national and county governments and the mechanisms required to track implementation.

Opening the session on behalf of KEWOPA Chairperson Leah Sankaire, Nairobi Women Representative Esther Passaris called on legislators to ensure the policy moves beyond paper commitments.

"Most importantly, let us ensure that the National Policy on Women's Economic Empowerment does not remain only a framework on paper, but becomes a basis for coordinated action that expands women's economic opportunities," Passaris said.

Hillary Kosgei, representing the Chairperson of the Departmental Committee on Social Protection, said the Sessional Paper was designed to address long-standing gaps in how women's economic empowerment programmes are coordinated and funded.

"The Sessional Paper seeks to fill this void by serving as a comprehensive framework to address systemic barriers to women's economic empowerment in Kenya," Kosgei said.

The discussions are covering a broad range of sectors where the policy is expected to have direct implications, including agriculture, employment, enterprise development, social protection and public finance. Legislators are also examining the Committee on World Food Security Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Empowerment as a practical framework for advancing the NPWEE within the agricultural sector specifically.

With the Sessional Paper already before Parliament, the engagement is focused on how its priorities can be connected to adequate budgetary allocations, effective inter-agency coordination and accountability structures that ensure implementation is tracked and reported.

The central challenge identified by participants is one that has historically undermined similar policy initiatives in Kenya: the gap between well-intentioned commitments and the institutional and financial infrastructure required to deliver them. Legislators indicated that parliamentary action would be needed to close that gap and ensure the NPWEE produces tangible economic opportunities for women at both national and county level.

The two-day engagement concludes today.

Politics Ruto hit back at Linda Mwananchi leader Edwin Sifuna over claims that Kenya's slums are primarily an income problem rather than a shortage of housing

Ruto takes the sponsor war to Nyanza — and finds a warmer welcome than his opponents expected

The president's five-day tour of opposition heartland delivers KSh700B in project launches and a fresh political attack on Kenyatta, while Kisumu crowds complicate Linda Mwananchi's narrative

BY James Mwangi
@themtkenyatimes

President William Ruto is midway through a five-day tour of Luo Nyanza — historically the country's most reliable opposition territory — commissioning projects, courting grassroots leaders and continuing his sustained public campaign to brand former President Uhuru Kenyatta as the hidden financier of the forces gathering against him ahead of the August 2027 general election.

The tour, which runs through Kisumu, Siaya, Homa Bay and Migori counties, combines inspections of government projects, launches of new developments and political engagements in a region that has become increasingly important to the president following the broad-based cooperation between UDA and ODM.

As part of what was presented as a KSh700 billion package of development projects for the region, Ruto commissioned the Lake Victoria Water and Sanitation Project in Kisumu Central constituency and the construction of the Rabuor-Chiga road in Nyando constituency.

The development optics are deliberate and substantial. But it is the political battle running beneath the commissioning ceremonies that is drawing the sharper attention.

Speaking in Kisumu on the second day of his tour, Ruto hit back at Linda Mwananchi leader Edwin Sifuna over claims that Kenya's slums are primarily an income problem rather than a shortage of housing, dismissing the argument and saying Sifuna was getting his economics wrong. He also responded directly to Sifuna's claims that the government intended to allocate affordable houses to police officers. "They also say we will divide these houses and allocate them to the police. Let me tell you, we have planned 20,000 houses for police officers already," Ruto said.

The exchange is the latest chapter in a confrontation that Ruto has deliberately widened to include Kenyatta. Speaking earlier in Eldoret, the president was unambiguous about where he believed the opposition's resources were coming from. "I want to ask you. When you look at those people, their sponsor, didn't he fail on the issue of affordable housing? Didn't he fail on Universal Health Coverage? Didn't he fail on educating our children?" Ruto told residents. He followed that with a direct accusation: "Now he has gone to organise his proxies, sending people here to come and compete with me."

President William Ruto in Kisumu

The accusation has become so routine that it now functions less as news and more as a running subplot of the 2027 campaign — Uhuru the sponsor of Jubilee and Linda Mwananchi, Uhuru the puppeteer, Uhuru the financier of bloggers against the government. Ruto is not alone in making the argument. Senate Majority Leader Aaron Cheruiyot has accused the Linda Mwananchi convoy of being financed by "that retired man."

The accusation has a significant vulnerability, however. When Ruto was challenged in a newspaper interview to substantiate his repeated assertions that Kenyatta was sponsoring the opposition, Sifuna said the president admitted his only source was media reports. "That guy who supposedly holds all of Kenya's intellectual capital was asked a very simple question, to provide evidence that Uhuru is the sponsor of the opposition, and he said he only read about it in the newspaper," Sifuna said.

Jubilee Deputy Party Leader Fred Matiang'i has strongly refuted the claims, urging Ruto to cease blaming others and seek alternative explanations. Sifuna has maintained that the movement relies on support and contributions from ordinary Kenyans and other well-wishers, not Kenyatta's personal resources.

Kenyatta's own response has been pointed. At the 23rd memorial service for former Vice President Michael Kijana Wamalwa in Kitale, when supporters erupted in cheers as he mentioned Sifuna's name, Kenyatta said: "Whenever citizens decide they want Kalonzo, it is Kalonzo. If they say they want Ruto, it is Ruto. If they say they want Matiang'i, it is Matiang'i. If Kenyans want Sifuna, then Sifuna it will be. Please be careful. I do not want to be called a sponsor. I do not want those many issues."

The strategic logic behind Ruto's Nyanza tour is as important as the political combat. Only days before Ruto's arrival, Sifuna was mobilising supporters for a major Linda Mwananchi rally at Nairobi's Jacaranda Grounds, while Rigathi Gachagua was touring the United States positioning the united opposition for 2027. The movement has built much of its momentum around one central argument: that public dissatisfaction with Ruto is translating into unstoppable political energy.

Then Kisumu happened. The optics complicate that narrative. If Ruto can attract large crowds in the symbolic heart of Raila's movement, opposition strategists may need to rethink how they frame their "people versus government" message. The broad-based cooperation between UDA and ODM continues reshaping Nyanza politics, with Cabinet Secretaries John Mbadi and Opiyo Wandayi now occupying senior positions in Ruto's government.

Ruto's visit comes as the government rolls out more than KSh220 billion worth of projects across Kisumu, Siaya, Homa Bay and Migori, covering roads, housing, markets, health, water and other infrastructure. The scale of the investment is a calculated argument in itself — that the government is delivering for a region that did not vote for it, and that political loyalty should follow economic results.

Senator James Orengo has meanwhile said he plans to hold more grassroots meetings across Nyanza, including town-hall gatherings, to explain why he believes Ruto should not be re-elected, citing the growing presence of the Linda Mwananchi movement in Homa Bay, Kisumu and Siaya as evidence that mobilisation on the ground is already underway.

The contest for Nyanza is therefore fully joined, and it will be decided not by a single tour or a single rally but by a sustained competition between a government offering development and an opposition offering accountability. Ruto's crowds in Kisumu this week have given his campaign a useful image. Whether that image translates into votes when the ballots are counted next August is a different question entirely — and one that the people of Nyanza will answer for themselves.

Linda Mwananchi leader Edwin Sifuna

Burundians Community leaders say some families have already begun crossing back into Burundi through Busia and Isebania, while others are heading to Uganda

‘We feel unwanted here’: Burundians weigh departure as 90-day amnesty deadline looms

With 16,000 nationals ordered to regularise their status or leave, many Burundians say they would rather return home than remain in a country where they no longer feel welcome

BY Agnes Otieno
@themtkenyatimes

The Kenyan government issued a 90-day amnesty in August for Burundian nationals to either acquire proper documentation or exit the country. But instead of rushing to comply, many are packing their bags.

The directive affects an estimated 16,000 Burundians living in Kenya, most of them in Nairobi, Nakuru and border counties. Officials have described it as part of broader efforts to regularise immigration records and address security concerns. Human rights groups, however, argue that the timing — coming months after a wave of political violence targeting opposition gatherings — has deepened fear within refugee communities and is pushing people out rather than bringing them into compliance.

Human Rights Watch reported this week that six people had been killed and dozens injured in attacks on civil society meetings and political gatherings in recent months. For many Burundians, that context makes the amnesty feel less like an administrative exercise and more like a signal that they are no longer welcome.

For a significant number of those affected, Kenya has been home for more than a decade. They run small businesses, send their children to Kenyan schools and have built lives that extend well beyond the camp system. Many have children born on Kenyan soil.

The amnesty requires proof of legal entry, valid work permits and police clearance certificates — documents that many say are difficult to obtain at short notice and at considerable expense. Others fear that presenting themselves to authorities will flag them for deportation rather than regularisation. The result is that a process designed to bring people into the formal system is, in practice, driving many towards an exit.

Community leaders say some families have already begun crossing back into Burundi through Busia and Isebania, while others are heading to Uganda. The movement is quiet but steady, with households making calculations about risk, cost and dignity.

“We feel unwanted here,” one community representative said, capturing a sentiment that has spread widely among Burundians in Nairobi. The phrase has become something of a refrain in a community processing both the practical demands of the amnesty and its psychological weight.

Community leaders say some families have already begun crossing back into Burundi through Busia and Isebania, while others are heading to Uganda. The movement is quiet but steady, with households making calculations about risk, cost and dignity. “We feel unwanted here,” one community representative said, capturing a sentiment that has spread widely among Burundians in Nairobi. The phrase has become something of a refrain in a community processing both the practical demands of the amnesty and its psychological weight.

Burundians at their embassy

The move comes as East Africa continues to grapple with large-scale refugee flows from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan. Kenya currently hosts more than 700,000 refugees in total, the majority in the Dadaab and Kakuma camps. The Burundian population is smaller and more urban, which has historically made its members less visible in policy discussions but no less vulnerable to sudden shifts in official posture.

Analysts say the way Kenya handles the Burundian case will be closely watched, particularly with the 2027 general election approaching and political temperatures rising. Opposition figures have drawn large crowds by channelling public frustration over governance, and the treatment of foreign nationals has the potential to become a flashpoint in a charged political environment.

Civil society organisations are calling on the government to extend the amnesty period and provide legal aid to help affected individuals navigate documentation requirements. The Ministry of Interior has not indicated whether any extension is under consideration.

For now, families are making difficult choices: risk remaining without documentation, absorb the cost and uncertainty of the application process, or leave behind years of built lives in Kenya. None of the options is straightforward, and the deadline is drawing closer.

The 90-day window expires in November. How the government responds to the mounting pressure from rights groups and affected communities in the weeks remaining will determine whether the amnesty is remembered as a regularisation exercise or as the moment Kenya’s Burundian community began to leave.

Business Denri's 11-year trajectory offers a case study in the kind of enterprise SasaPay says it wants to serve

SasaPay joins Denri runway celebration as digital payments firm eyes creative economy

The fintech company used Denri's 11th anniversary showcase to reinforce its push into Kenya's growing creative and entrepreneurial sector

BY John Kariuki
@themtkenyatimes

Digital payments company SasaPay yesterday joined fashion brand Denri in marking 11 years of creative enterprise in Kenya, attending Denri Runway 2026 as part of its broader effort to position itself as a payments partner for businesses operating in the country's creative economy.

The event, which brought together designers, fashion entrepreneurs, models and industry stakeholders, provided a platform for Denri to showcase its creative identity while celebrating more than a decade of building a recognisable local fashion brand. SasaPay was among the corporate partners present at the runway, using the occasion to engage with entrepreneurs and small businesses in the fashion and creative sectors.

Stephen Kaguchia, Managing Director of SasaPay, said the company's presence at the event reflected a deliberate effort to connect with the kind of businesses that form the backbone of Kenya's creative economy.

"At NCBA, we believe in supporting young people as they pursue their ambitions," Kaguchia said. "Through our support of junior golf, we are creating opportunities for young players to compete, develop their skills and build confidence."

The company has been expanding its engagement with small and medium-sized enterprises across different sectors, arguing that digital payment infrastructure is increasingly central to how Kenyan businesses operate, reach customers and manage revenue. The creative industry, which encompasses fashion, design, photography, music and related trades, has seen growing adoption of digital commerce tools as entrepreneurs seek to expand beyond physical retail.

For fashion businesses in particular, the ability to process payments conveniently — whether in person, online or via mobile — has become a practical necessity rather than an optional upgrade. SasaPay has positioned itself as a provider of accessible payment solutions aimed at businesses that may lack the scale of larger retailers but require the same transactional reliability.

Denri's 11-year trajectory offers a case study in the kind of enterprise SasaPay says it wants to serve. Building a fashion brand in Kenya over more than a decade requires navigating shifting consumer tastes, managing supply chains that span designers, tailors, fabric suppliers and retailers, and maintaining a creative identity that resonates with a market that is itself evolving rapidly.

The runway event brought that journey to life in a public setting, drawing an audience of fashion enthusiasts, entrepreneurs and industry observers. For SasaPay, the occasion was as much about visibility within the entrepreneurial community as it was about celebrating Denri's milestone.

Kenya's creative economy has attracted increasing attention from both private sector players and policymakers in recent years. The sector encompasses a wide range of businesses and individual entrepreneurs whose livelihoods depend on the health of the broader creative ecosystem. Fashion alone supports a chain of economic activity that runs from fabric importers and local weavers through to boutique owners, online retailers and export-oriented designers.

Digital payments sit at a critical junction within that chain. A transaction that fails, delays or proves inconvenient for the customer carries a direct cost for the business — in lost sales, reputational damage or operational friction. SasaPay's argument is that by making payment infrastructure more accessible and reliable, it reduces one of the practical barriers that small creative businesses face as they try to grow.

Kaguchia has framed the company's strategy around what he describes as a business-first philosophy — the idea that technology should solve concrete commercial problems rather than exist as an end in itself. That framing is intended to differentiate SasaPay from payment providers that lead with technical features, positioning it instead as a company that starts from an understanding of how entrepreneurs actually operate day to day.

That approach has guided the company's decisions about which sectors and events to engage with. Denri Runway 2026 was not simply a sponsorship opportunity; in SasaPay's framing, it was an entry point into a network of creative entrepreneurs who represent a target market for its services.

Behind every fashion brand of Denri's scale is an ecosystem of contributors — photographers, marketers, logistics providers, venue operators and retailers — each of whom conducts their own financial transactions and faces their own payment infrastructure challenges. SasaPay's engagement with the fashion sector is, in part, an effort to reach that wider ecosystem rather than focus narrowly on the headline brand.

The fintech sector in Kenya has grown substantially over the past decade, driven by the widespread adoption of mobile money and a regulatory environment that has gradually become more accommodating of digital financial services. Competition among payment providers has intensified, with both established banks and newer technology companies vying for the business of Kenya's growing class of digital entrepreneurs.

In that environment, SasaPay's strategy of building visibility through sector-specific events and partnerships represents one approach to differentiation. Rather than competing solely on the basis of transaction fees or technical specifications, the company is attempting to build a presence within the communities where its potential customers already gather.

Denri's milestone provided a natural setting for that approach. The brand has built its reputation through consistency, creative ambition and a willingness to evolve — qualities that resonate with the narrative SasaPay has constructed around its own development as a company.

For Denri, the runway celebration marked not just a commercial anniversary but a statement of cultural presence. Eleven years in Kenya's fashion industry, where trends shift quickly and competition from international brands is constant, represents a meaningful achievement for a locally founded label.

The creative sector's appetite for reliable digital tools is expected to grow as more Kenyan consumers shift towards online and mobile commerce. SasaPay's engagement with Denri Runway 2026 signals its intention to be positioned within that growth rather than responding to it after the fact.

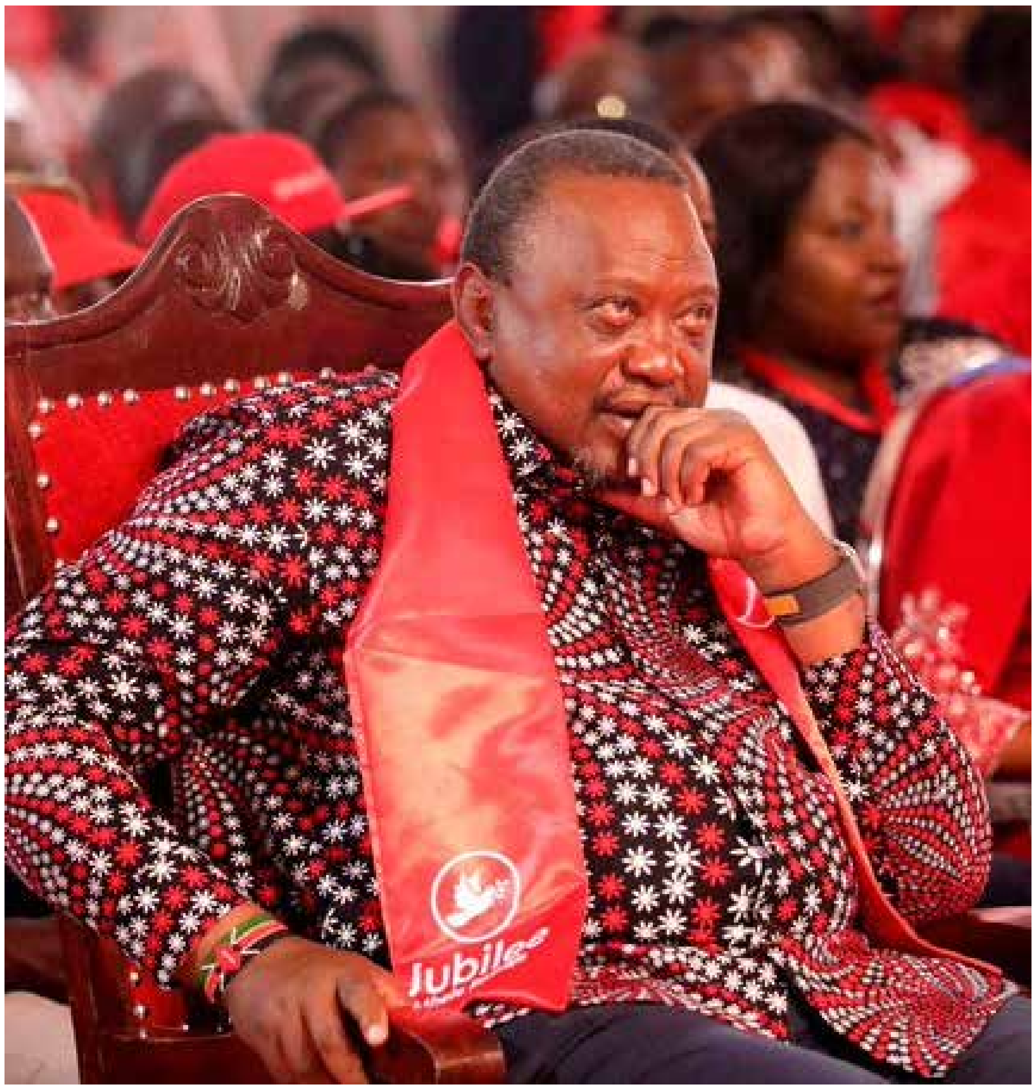
Whether the company can convert that visibility into sustained market share among creative sector businesses will depend on the quality and reliability of its products, the competitiveness of its pricing and its ability to provide genuine support to the small enterprises it is courting.

For now, the runway appearance marks a point of engagement between Kenya's fintech sector and its creative economy — two industries whose futures are increasingly intertwined.

Former presidents The decision directly touches on the leadership dispute that has surrounded Jubilee Party since President William Ruto took office in September 2022

Court ruling clips Kenyatta's wings at the worst possible moment

A High Court judgment upholding the ban on retired presidents holding party office lands as Kenya's 2027 succession race enters its most dangerous phase



Former President Uhuru Kenyatta

BY David Kimani
@themtkenyatimes

The High Court yesterday upheld a law barring retired presidents from holding political party leadership positions beyond six months after leaving office, a ruling that lands directly on Uhuru Kenyatta's political operations at precisely the moment he needs institutional leverage most.

Justice Lawrence Mugambi dismissed a petition challenging Section 6 of the Presidential Retirement Benefits Act, ruling that the restriction does not violate the rights to freedom of association, political participation or equality. The judgment, delivered virtually in Nairobi on September 3, clarified that the law does not prohibit former presidents from joining or becoming members of a political party — it only bars them from holding party leadership positions beyond the six-month window prescribed by law after leaving State House.

The decision directly touches on the leadership dispute that has surrounded Jubilee Party since President William Ruto took office in September 2022. Kenyatta has been Jubilee's party leader since its formation in 2017 and retained the position after retiring as president in September 2022, well beyond the period the law permits. He also serves as chairperson of the Azimio la Umoja–One Kenya Coalition Council, a role that Ruto's allies have repeatedly cited as evidence of unlawful political activity.

Justice Mugambi was unambiguous about the ruling's intent. "I do not think that this provision has outlived its usefulness," he said, finding that the restriction met the constitutional proportionality test under Article 24. The court held that a former president belongs to a distinct constitutional category — one whose influence, networks and public standing set them apart from ordinary citizens — and that treating them differently under the law does not amount to unfair discrimination.

"A retired president belongs to a special constitutional category of citizens that enjoys constitutionally sanctioned benefits as a person who has held the highest office in the land," Justice Mugambi stated. The restriction, he concluded, was proportionate to the democratic interest it was designed to protect.

The petition had been filed by Peter Odhiambo Agoro, Paul Muiruri Kiguathi and Damon Onyango Osawa, who argued that Section 6 unfairly singled out retired presidents and violated Articles 27, 36 and 38 of the Constitution, which protect equality, freedom of association and political rights respectively. The court dismissed the petition for lack of merit. Because the case was brought in the public interest, Justice Mugambi made no order as to costs.

Citing the law's origin in 2003, shortly after the end of Daniel arap Moi's 24-year rule, the court found the restriction intended to safeguard democracy by preventing former heads of state from exerting undue political influence. The historical reference is pointed — the law was written precisely because Kenya had watched what happened when a departing president retained the machinery of a ruling party and used it to shape the succession, a pattern that distorted democratic competition for years.

The ruling arrives at a moment of acute political sensitivity. Kenya is eleven months from a general election that will determine whether Ruto wins a second term or becomes the first incumbent ejected after a single presidential term. The opposition, fragmented but energised, is attempting to consolidate around credible challengers. Kenyatta's informal authority — his Mount Kenya networks, his financial resources, his capacity to shape coalition conversations — remains considerable. But authority without formal institutional structure is harder to convert into organised electoral force at the granular level where Kenyan elections are actually won and lost.

The broad arithmetic of the 2027 election is already visible. Ruto enters the campaign as an incumbent whose economic record is fiercely contested. The cost of living remains the dominant concern for ordinary Kenyans, and the government's fiscal decisions — including tax measures that triggered street protests — have left marks on his approval ratings that development project launches alone will not erase. An incumbent whose economic narrative is disputed fights a fundamentally different campaign from one who can point to broadly felt improvements in daily life.

Against that backdrop, the opposition's central argument — that Ruto's government has delivered hardship rather than transformation — is not without resonance. The Linda Mwananchi movement built around Nairobi Senator Edwin Sifuna has drawn large crowds on precisely that platform, channelling economic frustration into political energy. Former Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua, now firmly in the opposition, has been touring the country building a coalition he says is committed to ensuring Ruto serves only one term. Jubilee's Fred Matiang'i has positioned himself as a presidential contender with establishment credibility and opposition backing.

For Kenyatta to be effective within this constellation, he needed institutional anchors — formal positions within party structures that give his endorsements organisational weight rather than merely symbolic significance. The court ruling removes that. He can still speak, endorse, fundraise and deploy his networks. What he cannot do is sit at the head of a party table and exercise the formal authority that converts political loyalty into structured electoral machinery.

The ruling therefore matters most not in what it prevents Kenyatta from saying but in what it prevents him from organising. Kenyan elections are won through delegate structures, party primaries, nomination processes and the ground-level logistics of getting voters to polling stations. All of those require institutional access. A former president operating purely through informal channels retains influence but loses control — and in the high-stakes, high-pressure environment of a contested election campaign, the difference between influence and control can determine outcomes.

Ruto's allies have wasted no time framing the ruling as vindication. They have spent months arguing that Kenyatta was operating outside the constitutional boundaries intended for retired heads of state, and the court has now provided legal architecture for that argument. Whether that framing shifts votes in Mount Kenya, where Kenyatta's personal loyalty networks remain deep, is a separate and harder question.

What the ruling does not resolve is the fundamental political tension driving Kenya's pre-election landscape. Kenyatta and Ruto are engaged in a bitter, personal and high-stakes contest over who controls the succession — a contest that began long before the 2022 election and has intensified with each passing month. Courts can define the formal boundaries of political participation. They cannot determine where loyalty, money and ambition will flow when the campaign reaches its most intense stage.

Kenya has eleven months to discover whether the law's architecture holds when genuine electoral pressure bears down on it. The ruling has set the legal framework. The political storm gathering around it has barely begun.

Mau Mau MMV Associates CLG Director General James Njuguna Mahuria said the organisation was established specifically to bring the various groups together

Mau Mau groups urged to unite over compensation push

Mau Mau groups urged to unite over compensation push

BY Brian Gitonga
@themtkenyatimes

Leaders representing former freedom fighters and their descendants yesterday called for unity among more than 57 Mau Mau-related organisations, warning that fragmentation could undermine efforts to secure compensation and reparations for victims of British colonial atrocities.

The leaders, operating under the umbrella body MMV Associates CLG, said the numerous groups advocating for the welfare of former freedom fighters needed to establish a common platform to pursue compensation for those who were killed, injured, detained or displaced during Kenya's struggle for independence.

They argued that the proliferation of separate organisations had created confusion in the reparations campaign, particularly following the operationalisation of the Public Benefit Organisations framework.

MMV Associates CLG Director General James Njuguna Mahuria said the organisation was established specifically to bring the various groups together and coordinate their efforts, ensuring that thousands of former freedom fighters and their descendants were not excluded from any compensation process.

"We need to bring these organisations together so that we can have a coordinated approach in seeking reparation and compensation for those who suffered during the struggle for independence," Mahuria said.

The officials also announced that Paul Mwangi Gatundu, a grandson of former freedom fighter Kung'u Karumba, had assumed the position of acting chairman following the death of Samuel Wambugu.

Accepting the appointment, Gatundu called on the government, through the State Department for Culture and Heritage, to convene a meeting of leaders from the different Mau Mau organisations to chart a common way forward.

"We are ready to move forward and ensure that the remaining freedom fighters are able to benefit from the fruits of the struggle for independence," Gatundu said.

New chairman Dr Paul Mwangi Gatundu addressing the media as Bishop Johnson Mwai (left), Mr James Njuguna Mahuria (2nd right) and Fr. Gathang'i Waiguru looks on | *Photo:* Courtesy

He noted that approximately 5,000 former freedom fighters had previously received compensation from the British government, but said that figure represented only a small proportion of Kenyans who participated in the independence struggle. A coordinated process, he argued, was essential to ensure that surviving veterans and affected families were not left behind.

"We need to bring these organisations together so that we can have a coordinated approach in seeking reparation and compensation for those who suffered during the struggle for independence," Mahuria said.

Mahuria confirmed that Gitu Kahengeri remained the organisation's secretary and expressed optimism that the establishment of the PBO Authority could help advance the compensation process.

He disclosed that the organisation had recently received communication from Treasury Principal Secretary Chris Kiptoo after submitting a memorandum seeking to participate in preparations for the next financial year's budget. The letter, shown to journalists, asked the Principal Secretary for Culture and Heritage, Ummir Bashir, to consider a proposal submitted by MMV Associates CLG. The correspondence was also copied to the organisation's Chief Executive Officer, Emmah Cherotich Kasis.

The briefing was also attended by Bishop Johnson Mwai and Father Gathang'i Waiguru, both of whom welcomed the initiative to bring the different groups together under a unified structure.

The officials further called on Kenyans to maintain peaceful coexistence as the country approaches the August 2027 general election, urging political leaders and their supporters to avoid actions and rhetoric that could undermine national unity.

My Homeland...

Calling you Homeland, I walked through the skies,
Out of the clouds I built my dreams so high,
Here I stand, your daughter, ever at your service —
And you — just feel that I exist, that's enough for me…

I called you my mansion, embracing your walls,
Even if their colors fade before nightfall,
I opened my eyes and saw paradise itself —
And you — just feel that I exist, that's enough for me…

The moments spent with you burn warm and true,
My childhood grew weary, always beside you.
My homeland, I speak your name, I long for you —
And you — just feel that I exist, that's enough for me…

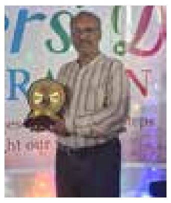
The podium of the world awaits you still,
Whatever your people do, it bends to your will.
A sacred line has been written for you —
And you — just feel that I exist, that's enough for me…

Your mountains stand majestic, pride in their breast,
Red snow lies cradled in the tulips' chest.
Upon my head, I bear peaks just like you —
And you — just feel that I exist, that's enough for me…

Among the nations, I sing your praise,
Is my voice enough? Alas, I cannot say,
But I will never stop writing of you —
And you — just feel that I exist, that's enough for me…

I am Avazjon Tohirbekova, a young Uzbek poet and writer from Khorezm, Uzbekistan. I study German language and philology at the National University of Uzbekistan. I have been writing poetry since childhood, inspired by my homeland, its history, culture, and people. My dream is to share the beauty of Uzbekistan with the world through my words.

Some people's job in my life



Some people's job in my life is showing the correct path.
Some may help me to take correct decesion.
Some may help me to take care of ourselves.
Some may help me to secure my life consistently.

Some may guide me to learn more things.
Some may monitor my mistakes and help to connect.
Some may act as Closed Circuit Camera CCC to record my tasks.
Some may teach me how to handle wisely.

Some may always travel along with me.
Some may always disturb my tasks.
Some may always criticising my activities.
But I am confident in my tasks and move forward.

Rajesh Kanna B N

RAJESH KANNA .B N
M.Sc.,M.A.,
PGDG&C,B.Ed., CELT.
BT Asst.
GMHSCHOOL, TIRUR.
TIRUVALLUR DISTRICT.
Tamil Nadu
India.
Creative Writers.
Educationist.

The strongest roots grow in the toughest soil

The strongest roots grow deep,
Where the soil is hard to keep.

Through the dark, a seed will stay,
Waiting for a brighter day.

With hope and strength, it starts to grow,
Facing winds that strongly blow.

So never fear a time that's tough,
Your roots can make you strong enough.

Hard times help us learn and rise,
Like a plant reaching for the skies.

Remember this when days are hard—
Great strength can grow from every scar.

R. SRIPRIYA
(Creative Writer)
BT ENGLISH
GHSS KOLAPAKKAM KANCHIPURAM DISTRICT
TAMILNADU
INDIA

"It's Okay mean, It's not Okay. But it's Okay"

"It's okay," I said proudly,
while my life updated new problems
like phone notifications.

Heart broke?
It's okay.

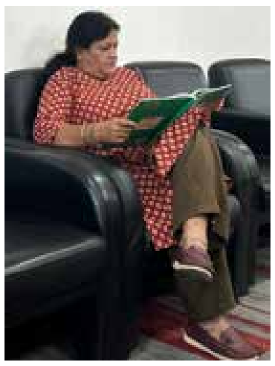
Wallet empty?
Still okay.
Sleep missing?
Very okay.

Somehow we humans
drink tea, laugh loudly,
and continue surviving
with zero energy and full drama.

Maybe "It's okay"
doesn't mean everything is fine —
it just means
"Crying tomorrow… today let me manage."

R. SRIPRIYA BT
(Creative Writer)
ENGLISH GHSS KOLAPAKKAM KANCHIPURAM DISTRICT
TAMILNADU INDIA

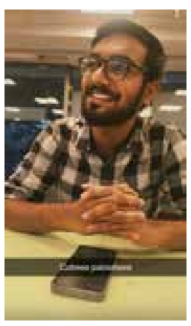
When laughter begins



Once you start laughing
The heart begins to heal
A little joy a little light can change the way you feel
Let laughter fill the empty spaces
Let smiles brighten everyday
Sometimes the simplest moments
Can chase the clouds away
Laugh with the morning sunlight dance with the gentle breeze
Find happiness in little things
And let your worries case
A smile needs no reason a laugh needs no reason
A laugh needs no grand plan
It brings warmth to every heart and makes us human again
So laugh a little louder let your spirit freely sing
For when laughter fill your heart healing quietly begins.

D.RENUKAGANDHI
GHSS,MULLAINAGAR,HOSUR
KRISHNAGIRI D .t.,

When laughter begins to heal



Once you start laughing, healing starts,
A little sunshine fills our hearts
The weight of sorrow fades away,
And clouds of gloom give way to day.

Laugh from the heart, let joy run free,
Let every giggle set you free
For laughter is a gentle art,
That mends the wounds within the heart.

It stirs the endorphins, nature's cheer,
Bringing a brighter mood, drawing joy near,
A healing rhythm, soft and light,
That turns the darkness into bright.

So pause for a moment, forget the race,
Let laughter dance across your face,
For sometimes the finest medicine we need
Is a hearty laugh,a soul's happy seed.

So laugh till your worries lose their way,
Laugh till your heart welcomes the day
For where warm laughter finds a start,
Healing quietly blooms in the heart.

Nandini AnandKumar
Educator,Writer,Motivator
(In Service of Education)

Kisumu The Lake Victoria Water and Sanitation Project puts essential services at the centre of development where they belong

Kisumu water project lays foundation for dignified urban growth

BY James Kilonzo Bwire
@themtkenyatimes

The commissioning of the Lake Victoria Water and Sanitation Project in Kisumu by President William Ruto marks a significant step in building the infrastructure that modern urban life actually requires. Water and sanitation are not peripheral utilities — they are the foundation upon which public health, household wellbeing, economic activity and institutional performance all depend.

Kisumu is an important urban centre in the Lake Victoria region, and strengthening its water and sanitation systems carries implications that extend well beyond individual households. Businesses, health facilities, schools and the wider community all depend on reliable services to function effectively. For too long, rapid urban population growth has placed pressure on ageing infrastructure that was never designed to serve the scale of demand now placed on it. This project directly addresses that gap.

President William Ruto in Kisumu

Reliable access to clean water changes daily life in ways that are easy to underestimate until they are experienced. When families have dependable water services, they maintain better hygiene, prepare food safely, care for children with greater confidence and manage their responsibilities without the uncertainty of depending on unreliable sources. The value of this investment is therefore not found only in pipes and pumps — it is found in the improved conditions that citizens experience in their homes every day.

Sanitation matters equally. A city cannot be considered modern if it supplies water without ensuring that wastewater is safely collected, transported and treated. Expanding sewerage services alongside water connections provides the complete approach that urban service delivery requires. The two systems must develop together. Supplying water while leaving sanitation unresolved addresses only half the problem and leaves public health and environmental protection exposed.

The project also addresses efficiency. Reducing water losses within distribution networks ensures that available resources reach consumers rather than disappearing before delivery. Water lost in transit places additional pressure on infrastructure and limits the ability to extend services to new areas. Improving network efficiency is therefore as important as building new capacity — development is not only about construction but about managing existing systems responsibly.

The connection between water infrastructure and affordable housing deserves recognition. A building without reliable water and sanitation is not a complete home. Connecting affordable housing developments to dependable services ensures that urban expansion does not produce residential areas where people have shelter but lack the basic infrastructure required for decent living.

Major health facilities in Kisumu will also benefit directly. Hospitals and clinics require reliable water for hygiene, patient care and safe operations. When health institutions have dependable services, they are better equipped to maintain the standards that patients and health workers require.

Kisumu's position within the Lake Victoria ecosystem gives the project an important environmental dimension. Proper wastewater management reduces pollution pressure on the lake, which is a shared natural resource for communities across the region. Urban development and environmental responsibility must advance together.

The real measure of this project will not be found in the commissioning ceremony. It will be found in the consistency of the services it delivers in the years ahead — in whether networks are maintained, faults are repaired promptly and citizens can access support when problems arise. Infrastructure commissionings mark a beginning, not an ending. The institutions responsible for managing these systems must now ensure that the investment produces the sustained improvements that Kisumu's residents were promised.

Elections For ordinary Kenyans, political instability carries a heavy personal cost. Businesses close, investments stall, transport is disrupted and families become anxious about their safety

Kenya's 2027 election is taking shape — and the early signs are troubling

As political rhetoric heats up and incidents of violence multiply, the country faces a familiar question it has never fully answered

BY Collins Kibet
@themtkenyatimes

Kenya is once again entering a politically sensitive period, and the warning signs are becoming difficult to ignore. As politicians position themselves for the 2027 general election, rhetoric is intensifying, rival camps are growing more confrontational and incidents of violence at political gatherings are raising an uncomfortable question that Kenyans have faced before: is the country drifting towards another election in which political competition threatens national peace?

Recent violence surrounding political rallies has revived memories of Kenya's painful electoral history. Political competition is a fundamental feature of democracy. Violence is not. Kenya has lived through the consequences of allowing political disagreement to spill into organised destruction, and the cost — measured in lives lost, businesses ruined, communities fractured and years of economic damage — is well documented. The country cannot afford to treat fresh warning signs as routine news.

The responsibility for what happens next does not belong to politicians alone. Political parties, government institutions, security agencies, the media, civil society and ordinary citizens all have a role to play in preventing an atmosphere where violence becomes normalised. Every incident, however small, should be treated as a warning that demands a serious response — not a headline to scroll past and forget.

For ordinary Kenyans, political instability carries a heavy personal cost. Businesses close, investments stall, transport is disrupted and families become anxious about their safety. The people who suffer most are rarely the politicians competing for power. They are the young people searching for work, the traders trying to protect their livelihoods and the families stretching tight budgets further than they should have to. Political leaders who understand this reality must also understand that careless statements, inflammatory rallies and the deliberate mobilisation of supporters against opponents carry consequences that extend far beyond the campaign trail.

Goons in Kenya

The 2027 election is still ahead, but the environment surrounding it is already being shaped. That creates an opportunity to act before tensions become entrenched. Political leaders must demonstrate that they can disagree without turning supporters against one another. Opposition figures should be free to criticise government without being painted as enemies of the state. Government leaders must tolerate scrutiny as part of democratic life. Parties should compete fiercely, but within the law.

Security agencies carry their own distinct responsibility. The state must protect the right to peaceful political participation while dealing firmly and impartially with those who organise or incite violence. Security forces must not become a political instrument deployed selectively against opponents of those in power. Equally, political actors must not exploit public demonstrations as opportunities to provoke confrontation or pit communities against each other.

Perhaps the deepest responsibility belongs to Kenyan voters. Citizens must resist the idea that political loyalty requires defending wrongdoing. A politician is not a family member who must be protected regardless of their conduct. Leaders should be judged by their policies, their integrity, their performance and their capacity to improve people's lives. Kenya does not need politicians who can fill a field. It needs leaders who can answer difficult questions about jobs, the cost of living, public debt, corruption, healthcare, education and economic opportunity.

Those are the questions that should define the road to 2027. Political debate, however, has a well-established tendency to become consumed by personalities, insults and accusations while the economic pressures facing ordinary Kenyans go unaddressed. A young person without work does not need a political confrontation — they need an opportunity. A small trader does not need political violence — they need a stable environment. A family does not need intimidation — it needs security and a credible reason for hope.

Kenya must also reckon honestly with where political violence actually begins. It rarely starts with stones or fire. It begins earlier — with inflammatory language, deliberate misinformation, ethnic mobilisation and the calculated creation of fear. When that behaviour is tolerated or ignored, it gradually becomes accepted as part of how politics is done. That normalisation is where the real danger lives.

Kenya's future does not have to follow the pattern of its past. The country has institutions, laws and a citizenry capable of defending democratic values. What is required is political maturity and a collective refusal to allow elections to become a justification for harm. Winning an election means little if the country is left divided and wounded in the process. Losing should never become a justification for destabilising the nation.

The 2027 general election should be remembered as a moment when Kenyans demonstrated that political competition and national unity can coexist. The country is capable of proving that democracy is stronger than political hatred, that disputes can be resolved without violence and that leadership is ultimately about serving citizens rather than mobilising them against one another.

The question is no longer simply who will win in 2027. The larger question is whether Kenya can compete for power without putting its peace at risk. The answer will be shaped by what political leaders, institutions and citizens choose to do now — not when the campaign reaches its most volatile stage.

Kenya has been here before. The consequences of getting it wrong are already written into the country's history. The responsibility now lies with everyone to ensure the next electoral contest becomes a demonstration of democratic maturity rather than another chapter of fear, destruction and division.

Kenya must compete for power without losing its soul.

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Kajiado There is an important complication worth acknowledging. Kenya is not ignoring electricity infrastructure entirely

Kajiado's blackout is a test Kenya's government is failing in plain sight

When residents block roads over electricity outages, the state must ask not just how to restore power, but why patience ran out in the first place

BY Levis Wangamati
@themtkenyatimes

On a road in Kajiado, darkness stopped being an absence of light and became a language of anger. Residents frustrated by prolonged electricity outages took their grievances to the streets, disrupting transport and forcing a problem that had been quietly endured inside homes and businesses into the public eye. Somewhere behind that roadblock was a shopkeeper watching business hours disappear, a student struggling to study after sunset, a family trying to preserve food and an entrepreneur counting losses that would never appear in a government report. The road was blocked, but the message was straightforward: when the lights stay off for too long, patience eventually runs out. Kajiado was not simply protesting a blackout. It was protesting what the blackout had come to represent.

For the people living through it, a blackout is never simply a blackout. It means the barber cannot run his machines, the small restaurant cannot preserve food reliably and the entrepreneur who depends on electricity cannot pretend that business can continue as usual. In Kajiado South, residents have reported that extended outages have disrupted domestic life, small businesses, health facilities and educational institutions. That is why the language of inconvenience is inadequate. What looks like a technical problem from a government office can become an economic emergency at household level, particularly for families whose survival depends on daily income.

Kenya has spent years celebrating electrification as a foundation of development — new connections, transmission lines, substations and rural electrification programmes have been regularly presented as evidence of progress. But connection is only half the promise. The other half is reliability. There is little comfort in telling a family it is connected to the national grid if electricity disappears repeatedly or remains unavailable for prolonged periods. Development cannot be measured only by the number of poles planted or households connected. It must also be measured by whether electricity is available when people actually need it.

That distinction matters because Kenya is trying to position itself as a modern, competitive economy. The national conversation is full of ambition — digital jobs, industrialisation, manufacturing, agribusiness, technology and a 24-hour economy. Yet beneath all those ambitions sits something remarkably simple: dependable electricity. A young Kenyan cannot build a digital enterprise in darkness. A small manufacturer cannot increase production by staring at an idle machine. A hospital cannot provide modern healthcare if essential infrastructure is unreliable. The grand language of economic transformation eventually meets the very ordinary reality of a switch that does not work.

Kajiado is not a forgotten corner of the country. It sits close to Nairobi, holds immense economic potential and is strategically positioned along important transport and commercial corridors. Proximity to the capital should not, however, determine whether a Kenyan enjoys reliable public services. Counties with growing populations and expanding economic activity should be receiving infrastructure capable of matching that growth. Development that arrives only after frustration has boiled over is development moving at the speed of crisis.

There is an important complication worth acknowledging. Kenya is not ignoring electricity infrastructure entirely. On September 3, a new 132kV Sultan Hamud–Loitoktok transmission line was commissioned, a 107-kilometre project intended to strengthen power supply across parts of Kajiado and Makueni, including a new substation at Loitoktok. Some villages that had endured outages lasting up to three days were expected to benefit. That investment matters. But it also raises a harder question: why should residents have to protest before the urgency of reliable electricity becomes impossible to ignore?

Infrastructure announcements are important. New substations are important. But the ultimate test of public investment is not the ribbon-cutting ceremony. It is what happens the following Monday when a mother switches on a light, a student sits down to study, a business opens its doors and a clinic needs power. The real measure of infrastructure is the quiet normality that follows — when people can finally depend on it. If a new power project is commissioned but citizens continue experiencing prolonged interruptions, government must be prepared to explain not merely what has been constructed, but what has failed between infrastructure and service delivery.

This is where Kenya's electricity conversation needs to mature. Planned maintenance and prolonged unexplained outages are not the same thing. Citizens can prepare for a scheduled interruption. They cannot reasonably plan their lives around a system that becomes unpredictable. Reliability is not an optional luxury. It is part of the service citizens reasonably expect after paying their bills.

The cost of unpredictability is real and personal. It is paid by the trader who discards spoiled stock, the student who loses study hours, the salon owner who turns away customers and the family forced to spend money on alternatives simply to maintain ordinary life. These costs rarely appear in budget documents or GDP figures. Yet they accumulate quietly across thousands of households until frustration becomes anger. The economic damage of unreliable electricity is not always dramatic enough to make headlines, but it can be devastating over time.

The burden of weak infrastructure is also not distributed equally. It falls hardest on those with the fewest alternatives. A large corporation can absorb downtime with generators and backup systems. A small shopkeeper operating on narrow margins has no such luxury. For that person, electricity is not merely an operational convenience — it can determine whether the day's sales become profit or loss. When policymakers discuss the cost of doing business in Kenya, electricity reliability should be central to that conversation, not an afterthought.

Kenya cannot simultaneously demand that young people create jobs, small businesses formalise, farmers add value and counties attract investment while tolerating infrastructure that makes basic enterprise unpredictable. If electricity is the engine of modern economic activity, reliability is the fuel. Without it, the language of transformation becomes another promise stranded somewhere between a policy document and lived reality.

When residents block roads because a basic service has failed them, that protest should not be automatically reduced to a law-and-order problem. Authorities should ask what brought people to that point. Protest is often the final language of citizens who believe quieter forms of communication have failed. If complaints are acknowledged early, problems can be resolved before they become confrontations. If every public grievance is addressed only after roads are blocked, institutions end up managing anger instead of preventing it.

The response to Kajiado should therefore include more than restoring power. It should include communication, accountability and measurable follow-through. Residents deserve to know what caused the prolonged outages, what is being repaired, what timelines apply and what mechanisms exist for reporting recurring failures. Citizens can tolerate problems. What they struggle to tolerate is the feeling that their problems do not matter.

Kajiado has given Kenya a clear picture of a much larger challenge. A power line that stays functional is more persuasive than a hundred development slogans. A repaired transformer is more meaningful to a struggling trader than a political declaration. And a government that responds before citizens take to the streets demonstrates something more valuable than political popularity — institutional competence.

The residents of Kajiado are asking a question every Kenyan should be asking: what does development mean if the basics cannot be relied upon? The answer cannot be another promise. It must be a functioning system, clear accountability and reliable service. Because when the lights go out, politics becomes very small. The speeches disappear. The slogans disappear. What remains is a family sitting in darkness, a business losing money and a citizen wondering whether anyone in power is listening.

Kenya should not wait for another county to block a road before finding out.

Education Each report costs KSh 300, paid via M-Pesa through an STK Push transaction triggered within the WhatsApp conversation

WhatsApp platform offers CBC career guidance at KSh 300 a report

Rezial Career Centre's digital service aims to bring professional pathway advice to Kenyan learners regardless of location

BY Ashford Kimani
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Kenya's shift to the Competency-Based Curriculum has changed what career guidance needs to do. Where the old system rewarded academic performance above most else, CBC asks learners to identify their talents, interests and passions before choosing a pathway — a demand that requires informed, personalised advice at an earlier stage of schooling than most families are used to navigating.

The gap between that demand and what is actually available to most Kenyan families is wide. Professional career counselling has historically been expensive, concentrated in urban centres and largely inaccessible to learners in rural or peri-urban areas. A new digital platform from Rezial Career Centre, operating under the name Office of Career Pathways, is attempting to close that gap using a tool most Kenyan families already have on their phones: WhatsApp.

The service is accessible by sending a message to +254 737 099 099. Users are then guided through an automated conversation that gathers information about the learner before generating a personalised career guidance report. No specialist software is required, no office visit is necessary and the service is available at any hour.

The platform serves three distinct groups. Learners in Grades 6 to 9, who are in Junior Secondary School, can use it to explore career pathways, identify suitable senior schools and understand which subject combinations lead to which careers. Visual pathway reports illustrating the route from school to employment are included.

Rezial Career Centre's digital service

Students in Grades 10 to 12, preparing for higher education, receive more detailed analysis — personalised career maps, university and college recommendations aligned with their preferred career, and a clearer picture of what educational progression looks like for their chosen field.

The third group is post-Form Four students facing the often daunting task of selecting university programmes, diplomas or certificate courses. For this group, the platform provides programme recommendations, institutional searches covering both local and international options, and an analysis of Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Service admission possibilities based on the student's cluster points.

Each report costs KSh 300, paid via M-Pesa through an STK Push transaction triggered within the WhatsApp conversation. Once payment is confirmed, the system generates the report and delivers it directly to the user, with downloadable visual summaries included depending on the service selected.

The process involves answering a short questionnaire covering the learner's interests, preferred study destination, academic results and career aspirations. The system saves each response and presents a summary for confirmation before payment is initiated.

The pricing is deliberately positioned to reach families who would not ordinarily pay for professional career counselling. Traditional services in Kenya can cost several thousand shillings per session and are typically located in Nairobi and other major towns. At KSh 300, the platform is within reach of a significantly larger portion of the population, including families in counties where career guidance infrastructure is thin.

The timing aligns with a broader challenge facing schools. As CBC rolls out and learners move through Junior Secondary into Senior Secondary, guidance and counselling departments are under increasing pressure to help students make pathway decisions earlier and with greater specificity. Many schools lack the staffing or resources to deliver that at scale.

Rezial's platform is not designed to replace school-based counselling but to complement it. Career teachers and guidance counsellors can direct learners to generate a report before a face-to-face session, allowing the counsellor to spend the appointment interpreting personalised findings rather than collecting background information from scratch.

The CBC framework places emphasis on nurturing individual competencies rather than sorting learners by examination scores alone. That philosophy requires parents and students to engage with career planning in a more deliberate way, and earlier, than previous generations had to. A platform that delivers evidence-based, personalised recommendations through a widely used application addresses a practical need that has emerged directly from the curriculum reform.

Whether it reaches sufficient scale to meaningfully shift access to career guidance will depend on uptake among schools, community networks and parents who are navigating CBC pathways for the first time. The infrastructure, however, is already in place — and at KSh 300, the barrier to trying it is low.

Kimani is a teacher of English and Literature who writes on education and social affairs.

Gospel Concert Baba naAmai Charamba have been pillars of Zimbabwean gospel for decades. Their ministry started in church and grew into crusades, albums, and national moments of worship

Night of Praise: Charambas and Cherayis lead Odyssey Gospel Concert in Zimbabwe

By: Chimeno Azriel
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Zimbabwe

Kadoma came alive last Saturday as thousands gathered for the Odyssey Gospel Concert, a night led by some of the country's most loved Zimbabwean artists. Zimbabwe's two most talked-about gospel couples shared one stage: Baba na Amai Charamba with their decades of anointed ministry, and Ellard and Sharon Cherayi with their signature harmonies and fresh sound.

What started as a concert quickly turned into a citywide worship experience. From the opening praise to the final benediction, it felt less like a show and more like church. By the end of the evening, one phrase kept echoing through the crowd and on social media: it was a night to remember.

Zimbabwe has been blessed with gospel duos who minister as one, and Odyssey proved why that model resonates so deeply. In a time when families are looking for hope and encouragement, seeing husbands and wives lead worship together carried weight. Kadoma, a city that doesn't always get the big gospel bills, showed up in full force and reminded promoters that praise has no zip code.

Ellard and Sharon Cherayi

Baba naAmai Charamba have been pillars of Zimbabwean gospel for decades. Their ministry started in church and grew into crusades, albums, and national moments of worship. They are known for songs that turn testimonies into theology, and for leading congregations until every voice is lifted.

Ellard and Sharon Cherayi represent the new generation carrying the same mantle. Their blend of contemporary sound and deep scriptural lyrics has made them favorites in both youth gatherings and Sunday services. On stage they model something rare: marriage and ministry walking in step.

While other couples like Baba naAmai Patai have also made a mark in church ministry across the country with music about marriage and faith, it was the Charambas and Cherayis who took the stage in Kadoma for Odyssey. Having two generations of gospel couples on one bill made the night feel historic.

The venue filled early. Families came with children, choirs came with banners, and ushers were still seating people when praise and worship started. Kadoma showed up dressed for celebration: gospel t-shirts, flags, and a lot of dancing feet.

Local choirs CCAP Rimuka Exodus, Delighted Voices Choir, Tabernacle Grace Choir and worship teams opened the night and set the temperature high. The Unveiled also performed much to the delight of the gospel fans. By the time the headliners were announced, the air was thick with expectation. The lighting was simple but effective, and the sound team kept the focus where it belonged: on the voices and the message.

Between sets, pastors took moments to pray for marriages and for the city. That pastoral thread is what separated Odyssey from a typical concert. People weren't just clapping, they were responding.

Baba naAmai Charamba led with authority. Their set moved from deep worship into praise that had the whole auditorium on its feet. They spoke briefly between songs about God's faithfulness in marriage and ministry, and you could hear amens rolling through the crowd. Their strength has always been congregational leading, and Kadoma sang back every word.

Ellard and Sharon Cherayi brought a deeply personal moment to the night. Ellard opened their set by acknowledging Kadoma as his childhood town, and the crowd erupted.

"Kadoma, thank you for welcoming me back home again. This place raised me, and to stand here minis-

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Gospel fans

Ellard Cherayi

Gospel Concert Baba naAmai Charamba have been pillars of Zimbabwean gospel for decades. Their ministry started in church and grew into crusades, albums, and national moments of worship

Night of Praise: Charambas and Cherayis lead Odyssey Gospel Concert in Zimbabwe

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tering with my wife is a full circle moment for us. God has been so good."

He went on to describe the evening itself "Tonight was not about performance. Tonight was about presence. You welcomed us with open hearts, you sang every word, and we felt the Lord move in this place. This was beautiful."

Their vocal blend was tight, and their stage presence was warm. Between songs they shared short testimonies about walking through seasons together, then ministered songs that balance celebration with reflection. Couples in the audience leaned in during those moments. It was clear why they have become a household name so quickly.

Together, the two couples created a beautiful contrast: experience meeting freshness, tradition meeting contemporary. Yet the message was the same — God is faithful.

Odyssey Gospel Concert set out to do two things: bring top-tier gospel outside Harare, and spotlight the power of family in ministry. Both happened.

For Kadoma, it was validation. The turnout showed there is a hungry audience for quality gospel events in the Midlands. For the church, it was encouragement. Seeing two couples model unity on stage gave people something to take home to their own marriages.

Baba naAmai Charamba

Ellard's homecoming added another layer. His gratitude connected with many in the crowd who remembered him growing up in the city. "We don't take this welcome lightly. Kadoma, you made us feel at home. Thank you for supporting gospel music and for supporting families."

Online, the buzz was immediate. Attendees posted clips with captions like "night to remember" and "God showed up in Kadoma." That matters because gospel music in Zimbabwe travels as much through WhatsApp and Facebook as it does through radio.

Most importantly, the concert pointed back to the church. Both couples started in local congregations, and they kept pointing people back there. That is why the night landed with such weight.

When the lights dimmed and the last note faded, Kadoma did not leave empty. People left with songs on their lips, prayers on their hearts, and hope for their families.

Baba naAmai Charamba and Ellard and Sharon Cherayi did not just deliver a concert. They pastored through music. They reminded a city that God still uses families to reach families, and that worship is stronger when it is shared.

If Odyssey is the standard going forward, then Zimbabwe's gospel future is bright. Kadoma got the first taste last Saturday. Now the question across the country will be simple: where to next?

The night proved one thing clearly. When praise meets family, it is unforgettable.

CCAP Rimuka Exodus

Local group performing

Sports >> *Referees' body Pro Ref concedes error of judgement after Haaland's winning goal stands despite offside row

Refs admit VAR blunder as City beat United in controversy-filled derby

By **Martin Weche**

Manchester City beat Manchester United yesterday at Old Trafford in a derby that ended 1-0 — but the match will be remembered less for the result than for the officiating controversies that engulfed it.

The Premier League referees' body, Professional Referees Organisation (Pro Ref), admitted an "error of judgement" after VAR awarded Erling Haaland's winning goal in the 60th minute despite questions over whether Enzo Fernandez, who was in an offside position, had interfered with play.

Haaland turned home at the back post from Josko Gvardiol's cross. The goal was initially ruled out for offside on the field but overturned by video assistant referee Matt Donohue, who determined that Dorgu's boot had kept Haaland onside.

What the VAR failed to adequately address was Fernandez, who threw himself into a diving header in the centre of the six-yard box without making contact with the ball. United defender Lisandro Martinez was directly behind him as the cross arrived.

In a statement, Pro Ref acknowledged the failure: "It was established that Enzo Fernandez did not play the ball and therefore that makes any offside offence subjective. However, on this occasion, the VAR did not recognise the likely impact of his position and should have recommended an on-field review. Contact has been made with Manchester United this evening to acknowledge what we deem is an error of judgement."

BBC Sport football issues correspondent Dale Johnson was categorical in his assessment. Under the laws of the game, a player in an offside position commits an offence if clearly attempting to play a ball which is close when that action impacts an opponent.

Erling Haaland celebrates his goal against Manchester United. PHOTO/MANCHESTER CITY

Both conditions, Johnson argued, were plainly met. Fernandez lunged for the header; Martinez, directly behind him, was affected. The VAR, Johnson concluded, should have sent referee Michael Oliver to the pitchside monitor — creating the unusual situation of a disallowed goal being reviewed only to remain disallowed.

United's frustration was palpable. Martinez called the outcome an "injustice" and questioned the consistency of officiating briefings given to clubs at the start of each season.

"Every season they come to our club and explain the rules for one hour, and they look so confident," Martinez said. "And then five or six people make these mistakes in the best league in the world. It's unacceptable."

United manager Michael Carrick said the decision raised deeper concerns about the direction of the game. "If that's the interpretation of not interfering in play now, that's really worrying for me," Carrick said. "The decision isn't going to change the season, but it's had a major impact on the game."

Punditry reaction was similarly damning. Wayne Rooney, appearing on Match of the Day, said Fernandez's movement directly affected Martinez and called the VAR's failure to act "baffling". Former Tottenham midfielder Danny Murphy argued that had Fernandez not made his run, Martinez would have stayed tighter to Haaland. Gary Neville, on Sky Sports, anticipated a formal apology from the referees' association.

City manager Enzo Maresca was succinct: "I think it was onside clearly, so it's good."

The offside row was not the only storm from the afternoon. City finished the match with 10 men after Phil Foden was shown a straight red card in the 23rd minute for kicking out at United captain Bruno Fernandes while on the ground. Replays showed Fernandes had kicked Foden first, yet was not booked.

Pundits were split on the Foden decision. Rooney described the contact as "more of a flick than a kick". Roy Keane said Fernandes was the primary offender and that Foden should not have been dismissed. Micah Richards said both flashpoints represented a poor day for English officiating, while insisting the errors did not diminish City's performance.

Pro Ref confirmed a formal review of the Haaland goal incident would follow.

Sports >> *A 3-under-par 69 from Savir Shah headlined a competitive day of junior golf at Muthaiga Golf Club

Shah leads junior golfers at Muthaiga in fourth leg of NCBA-backed tour

Savir Shah, the Boys 15 – 18 years category winner of the U.S. Kids Golf Nairobi Local Tour at Muthaiga Golf Club on Sunday.

By **Martin Weche**

Savir Shah fired a 3-under-par 69 to claim victory in the Boys 15–18 years category as junior golfers from across Nairobi converged on Muthaiga Golf Club yesterday for the fourth leg of the U.S. Kids Golf Fall Local Tour — Nairobi, backed by NCBA Bank.

Shah's round was the lowest score of the day and gave him a comfortable two-shot margin over nearest rival Yuvraj Rajput, who carded a one-under-par 71. Wahome Mutahi finished third on 82, with Alan Mbogo fourth on 84.

The Girls 15–18 years category was won by Shani D'Souza with a score of 98. Kalendi Ndambuki was second on 114 and Chanel McKenzie third on 119.

Ashley Gachora claimed the Girls 13–14 years title with a round of 76, while Ryan Njuguna won the Boys 13–14 years category on 78. Xichao Huang and Adam Nesbitt tied for third in that category, both posting 81.

Aria Dodhia produced one of the standout performances of the day in the Girls 11–12 years category, carding a one-under-par 71 to take the title. In the Boys 12 years category, Ishaan Patel won on 81. Paren Reel went two under par with a 70 to claim the Boys 11 years category.

In the younger age groups, Hakeem Mutungi won the Boys 10 category with an even-par 36, and Zowie Oliver topped the Girls 9–10 years category with a score of 42.

The fourth leg brought together junior golfers aged five to 18 across multiple age-group categories, competing for Priority Status points that count towards national junior golf rankings. The tour is organised in partnership between NCBA, U.S. Kids Golf and the Junior Golf Foundation Kenya, and forms part of a structured circuit designed to give young players regular competitive experience as they build their games.

NCBA Branch Manager at Village Market, Jeremiah Ngatia, said the bank's involvement in junior golf reflects a wider commitment to youth development.

"At NCBA, we believe in supporting young people as they pursue their ambitions," Ngatia said. "Through our support of junior golf, we are creating opportunities for young players to compete, develop their skills and build confidence. It is also important that we equip young people with the right financial habits early in life, and we are delighted to be part of their journey."

The tour has steadily grown in participation since its launch, providing a platform for young Kenyan golfers to compete at a structured, internationally benchmarked level. U.S. Kids Golf operates local tours across multiple countries, using the circuit model to feed junior talent into regional and global competitions.

Yesterday's Muthaiga leg drew participants across nine age categories. The format rewards consistency and course management as much as raw talent, giving players at every stage of development a meaningful competitive environment. With the fall series now past its halfway point, attention turns to the remaining legs and which players will accumulate sufficient Priority Status points to qualify for end-of-season honours.

Among the category winners, Shah's 69 in the Boys 15–18 stood as the round of the day. D'Souza won the Girls 15–18 on 98; Gachora took the Girls 13–14 on 76; Njuguna the Boys 13–14 on 78; Dodhia the Girls 11–12 on 71; Patel the Boys 12 on 81; Reel the Boys 11 on 70; Mutungi the Boys 10 on 36; and Oliver the Girls 9–10 on 42.

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Romantics, Sufis and seekers: A journey across poetic traditions

By: Sidra Safdar
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Illustration

The Romantic movement that swept through Europe in the late 18th century was more than a literary trend. It was a revolt — against cold reason, rigid classical form and the dehumanising effects of industrialisation. Poets such as William Wordsworth, John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley and William Blake turned inward, celebrating imagination, emotion, nature and individual experience. What is remarkable, however, is how deeply their central preoccupations resonate with poets from an entirely different world — the Sufi mystics, Punjabi bards and Urdu masters of South Asia. Separated by language, geography and century, these traditions share a common heartbeat.

Wordsworth and the poets of the people

Wordsworth believed poetry should be written in the real language of ordinary men and women. His rural figures — shepherds, solitary reapers, displaced wanderers — were given dignity and voice at a time when literature largely ignored them. He defined poetry as the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings, recollected in tranquility, and built an entire philosophy around the idea that nature was not merely scenery but a living spiritual force. For Wordsworth the true Pantheist, God and nature were inseparable.

Amrita Pritam, the celebrated 20th-century Punjabi poet, operated from a strikingly similar instinct. She wrote in the authentic, idiomatic Punjabi of the masses rather than the elevated register of literary convention, and gave voice to refugees, oppressed women and the dispossessed — those whom polished literature had long overlooked. Her poem recalling the partition of India mourned the wholesale destruction of shared humanity with the same grief Wordsworth brought to his elegies on lost innocence.

Both poets also understood memory as a creative force. Wordsworth's daffodils bloom again in the mind's inward eye long after the moment has passed. Pritam's most celebrated poem, in which she promises to meet her beloved again — as a shimmer in his imagination, as a mysterious line on his canvas — captures precisely the same truth: that powerful emotion, recollected in solitude, becomes the source of art.

Keats, Mir and the aesthetics of pain

John Keats occupies a singular position among the Romantics as the poet of beauty, sensuousness and melancholy. He understood that the most exquisite moments carry within them the seed of their own ending, and that awareness of transience sharpens rather than diminishes the experience of beauty. His concept of Negative Capability — the capacity to remain in uncertainty and mystery without anxiously reaching for resolution — placed him ahead of his time philosophically as well as poetically.

Mir Taqi Mir, the towering figure of classical Urdu poetry, arrives from a different civilisation but inhabits the same emotional landscape. Both poets lost much that they loved early in life. Both transformed personal sorrow into poetry of extraordinary refinement. Where Keats wrote that merely thinking about the world is enough to fill the heart with sorrow, Mir described the human heart as a lamp burning in the house of a pauper — dim from the very beginning of evening. Both poets were worshippers of beauty who could not escape the knowledge that beauty dies.

Their sensuous imagery works similarly too. Keats brings Autumn to life as a drowsy figure sleeping on a granary floor, hair lifted by the winnowing wind. Mir paints a beloved's lip as delicate as a single rose petal, then immediately reminds the reader that the entire universe is as fragile as glass. The connection between them is not influence but essence — two poets who arrived independently at the same understanding of what it means to be human and mortal.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi, the Punjabi poet who died at 36, completes this constellation. Called the John Keats of Punjabi literature without exaggeration, Batalvi shared not only Keats's themes of beauty, death and unfulfilled love but his biographical fate. Both lived briefly and intensely. Both made their pain into melody so beautiful that it outlasted them entirely.

Shelley, Faiz and the fire of resistance

Shelley was the revolutionary among the Romantics — a poet who believed verse could and should change the world. His fury at the Peterloo Massacre, where British troops cut down peaceful working-class demonstrators, produced some of the most electrically charged political poetry in the English language. His west wind was not merely a meteorological event but a force of historical transformation, scattering the seeds of a new world across a dying one.

Faiz Ahmad Faiz, writing under the military dictatorship of General Zia-ul-Haq in Pakistan, channelled the same fire. His poem promising that the day of reckoning will come — that the mountains of tyranny will blow away like cotton, that thrones will fall and the dispossessed will be restored — carries the exact cadence of Shelley's vision. Both poets understood that oppression is seasonal, that winter however brutal cannot prevent spring, and that the role of the poet in dark times is to keep that promise alive in language.

Blake and Bulleh Shah: Mystics against the institution

William Blake stood apart even among the Romantics. A visionary who claimed to see the divine in a grain of sand and eternity in an hour, he directed his sharpest critique at organised religion — at the priests and institutions that used God's name to bind and diminish rather than liberate. His London is a city of mind-forged manacles. His Garden of Love has been invaded by priests who replaced flowers with graves.

Bulleh Shah, the Sufi poet of the Punjab, waged the same rebellion centuries earlier. He attacked the hypocrisy of mullahs and qazis who accumulated religious learning without ever reading their own souls. He declared that God lives not in mosques or temples but in the human heart — that destroying a heart is a greater sin than demolishing any building of worship. His famous questioning of his own identity, in which he refuses every label of religion, sect and nation, mirrors Blake's insistence on universal humanity that transcends all imposed boundaries.

What emerges from this comparison is not coincidence. It is evidence that the deepest questions of human experience — about beauty, suffering, resistance, the divine and the nature of the self — produce strikingly similar answers when approached by poets of genuine vision, regardless of the century or civilisation in which they write.

Romanticism, it turns out, was never only European. It was a way of seeing.

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