

## 2025 PRESIDENTIALS

# Biya's candidature sets party of flame ablaze



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### ROUNDUP

#### IMMIGRATION POLICY

**U.S. tightens visa rules for Cameroonians** **P.4**

.....

#### BEAUTY MEETS BUSINESS

**Women's concern as weight loss products flood markets** **P.8**

### FAKO

**Several feared dead in Ekona road accident** **P.4**



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## ROUNDUP

## NGOKETUNJIA

## Kidnapped gendarme officer found dead

According to media reports, his body was discovered on July 8, 2025, near Mile 25 in Ndop, the chief town of the Ngoketunjia Division of the North West Region.

By **Brigette BATE**

A gendarme officer kidnapped some two weeks ago by suspected separatist fighters has been found dead. Reports indicate separatist fighters loyal to a commander known as General A Nova Die left the body by the roadside. The officer, stationed at the Ndop Gendarmerie Brigade, per rapport was abducted in late June along the Sabga Hill stretch. Following the discovery, government forces launched a security operation in Bamessing village, a place believed to be a known separatist stronghold. Two suspected fighters were reportedly killed during the raid. Their bodies were taken to a filling station in



Ndop and displayed publicly. One appeared severely burned. Authorities have not officially commented on the operation and identified the deceased. Before the officer's death was confirmed, local officials detained seven civilians five adults and two infants believed to be relatives of the separatists involved in the abduction. The arrests were ordered on June 24 by Ngoketunjia's Senior Divisional Officer (SDO), Kongeh Handerson Quetong. Among the detainees are 22-year-old mothers with two- to three-month-old babies, which has drawn the attention of inhabitants, with some classifying it as an inhumane act. The detentions have drawn criticism from

rights organizations. Conscience Africaine condemned the arrests, stating they violate Cameroonian law and international human rights standards. The group highlighted the illegality of collective punishment and the rights of children, calling for the detainees' immediate release and an independent investigation. With the officer's death confirmed, it remains unclear whether authorities will release the civilians or impose further punitive measures. Ndop remains tense, with increased military patrols and restricted movement reported in nearby areas. The situation reflects broader challenges in resolving the crisis, where both sides face accusations of human rights violations, further complicating efforts for peace.

## GCE 2025

## Marking begins with plea for fairness, respect

The Cameroon General Certificate of Education, GCE Board has started grading answer sheets for the 2025 exams, with officials urging examiners to maintain integrity and offer constructive feedback.

By **Brigette BATE**

GCE board directors have gathered to discuss and adopt a marking session for the 2025 exams. Over 9,000 teachers will assess more than two million scripts from 213,378 candidates across 15 centers, while 4,000 support staff assist in the process. The gathering, which took place at the Bilingual Grammar School in Buea in the Fako Division of the South West Region, brought in the GCE Board Chairman, Prof. Ivo Leke Tambo, who emphasized the importance of respectful criticism. "The GCE Board will always be open to all types of criticism because it is criticism that makes the system strong. But please, do so humbly and respectfully," he said. He also addressed past payment delays, blaming them on the socio-political crisis in the Anglophone regions. Gilbert Acha Nkwenti, representing the South West Governor, commended the examiners for their dedication.



He called for strict adherence to marking guidelines and vigilance against malpractice. "The nation is looking up to you," he said, urging them to ensure the exams remain credible. He also reminded them to stay alert for their safety during the two-week exercise.

This year's exams saw 17,021 more candidates than in 2024, reflecting growing participation and careful looks. Meanwhile, final year candidates await their results, filled with stress and panic as they anxiously anticipate their academic futures.

## The National POST

N°54 - Thursday July 10, 2025

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## NEWS

## SMALL &amp; MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES

## Gov't sets modernization agenda, pledges CFA 2.5 billion boost

The government has pledged fresh support for the country's struggling small and medium-sized enterprises SMEs, announcing a CFA 2.5 billion injection to modernize production tools and improve competitiveness. The announcement was made during a two-day gathering Yaoundé for the third edition of the Cooperation and Partnership Days, a high-level forum aimed at accelerating SME growth through stronger collaboration with international development.

By Eratus NDUEH

Cameroon's government, in partnership with international development actors, has embarked on a bold move to modernize its Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, SMEs, sector, widely regarded as the backbone of the national economy. This drive comes as part of the third edition of the Cooperation and Partnership Days, hosted by the Ministry of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, Social Economy and Handicrafts, under the leadership of Minister Achille Basilekin III. Held in Yaoundé under the theme "Modernizing Local Production Tools: Contribution of Technical and Financial Partners," the 2025 edition of the forum brings together major players in the public and private sectors, financial institutions, bilateral and multilateral development partners, and SME stakeholders to collectively strategize on ways to enhance the performance and sustainability of Cameroon's enterprise ecosystem. "We believe that we cannot talk about improving the manufacturing of products if we are not improving the tools, management, and productive capacity of our SMEs," Minister Basilekin stated during his opening speech. "This forum is an opportunity to coordinate action, share resources, and identify what tools are available to fast-track modernization."

## SMEs in distress

SMEs make up over 90% of the country's economic fabric, spanning agriculture, manufacturing, services, and creative industries. However, many of them continue to struggle with persistent challenges: Outdated and inefficient production tools, Limited access to credit and financing, Insufficient skilled labor, Low adoption of digital technologies, Restricted access to global markets. These hurdles have stifled innovation, limited productivity, and made local enterprises less competitive in a rapidly evolving global economy.

## Development partners rally support

The event saw strong representation from Cameroon's interna-



tional allies. Raymond Tavares, representative of the United Nations System, emphasized that digitalization and innovation are essential if Cameroonian SMEs are to thrive on a global scale. "You are not competitive on the international market if you have no access to digital growth," he remarked. Echoing this, the European Union's Resident Representative, Jean-Marc Chartagnier, reaffirmed the EU's commitment to supporting value chain development, capacity building, and green industrialization in Cameroon. Both institutions stressed the importance of strengthening not just financing mechanisms, but also the innovation ecosystems that help SMEs evolve from survivalist ventures into globally viable businesses.

## Government pledges CFA 2.5 billion injection

In a major announcement, Minister Achille Basilekin III disclosed that the government will inject 2.5 billion CFA francs into the SME Bank to provide funding for micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises. This financial lifeline is aimed at easing access to capital, a long-standing barrier to growth for many local businesses. The minister also highlighted that the move aligns with the government's Import Substitution Policy, a long-term plan to reduce dependence on foreign goods and promote "Made in Cameroon" products by empowering local producers. "This fund will not just support access to credit, but also back the acquisition of production equipment and the adoption of best management

practices," he added.

## Promoting inclusive industrialization and local Content

Throughout the forum, discussions centered on creating inclusive opportunities for startups, women-led enterprises, and youth entrepreneurs, key demographics that make up the growing informal and creative sectors. Stakeholders called for better alignment

between academia, vocational training, and SME needs, to close the skills gap. A special segment was also dedicated to promoting collaboration between established businesses and emerging innovators, a strategy seen as key to strengthening value chains and enabling technology transfer.

## Outcomes and expectations

The Cooperation and Partnership

Days serve as a policy incubator and investment platform, where actionable commitments are expected to emerge. Recommendations from the 2025 edition will feed into the government's National Development Strategy, SND30, which prioritizes private sector-led growth, digital transformation, and local content development. As Cameroon's economy continues to face pressure from global market volatility and internal structural limitations, revitalizing the SME sector is no longer optional, it is imperative. For entrepreneurs like Evelyne Ndzie, who runs a small agro-processing unit in Bafoussam, these developments bring hope: "Access to finance and better machines has been a dream. If this initiative reaches us in the field, we can grow and even export one day," she said. As the 2025 Cooperation and Partnership Days unfolds, Cameroonian hope it may well mark a turning point in country's economic transformation if its promises are matched with action.



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## NEWS

## FAKO

## Several feared dead in Ekona road accident

The crash adds to the rising number of deadly road accidents that have been recorded in the Fako Division of the South West Region and other parts of the country since the start of the year.

By TEMBA Junior SUH

A road accident near Ekona in the Fako Division of the South West Region has reportedly left several persons dead and a host of others injured. According to sources, the crash occurred yesterday after a trailer drove into an 18-seater bus that had passengers onboard. Details of the accident remain sketchy. But media reports that The National Post has not been able to independently verify have stated that at least 16 of the passengers that were aboard the vehicle were killed in the accident. Some news organs have stated that all 18



passengers died in the process, stating that a nine-year-old baby is the lone survivor of the accident. The crash comes to add to the rising number of deadly road accidents that

have been recorded in the Fako Division of the South West Region and other parts of the country since the start of the year. Late last month, three persons, including two sis-

ters, died in a road accident in Limbe in the Fako Division after a motorbike on which they were travelling was knocked down by a vehicle. In March, another accident in Mutenge-

ne still in the Fako Division left six persons dead. The accident occurred after vehicle had a tire puncture leading to the car losing control and ramming into a truck. On a larger scale, the Ekona crash adds to the multiple number of accidents that happen in Cameroon annually which has left official figures revealing that at least 1500 to 2000 deaths are registered in the country every year due to road accidents. The statistics from the Ministry of Transport and the United Nations health agency, the World Health Organization, WHO, stems from the estimated 16 thousand road accidents that are recorded in the country each year, per the two institutions.

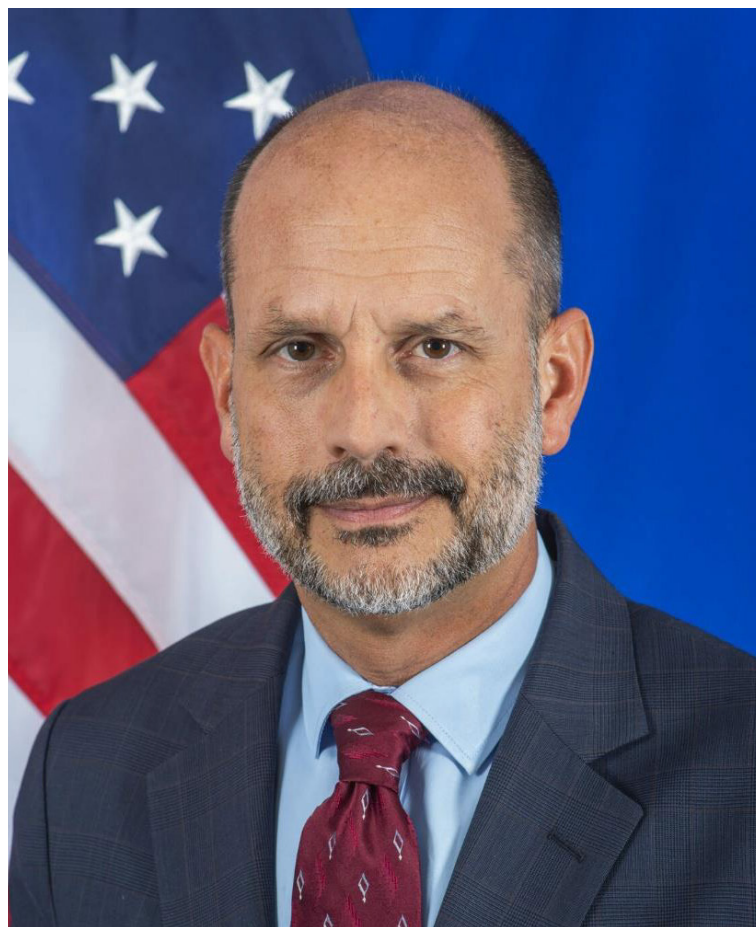
## IMMIGRATION POLICY

## U.S tightens visa rules for Cameroonians

Cameroonian applicants for tourist, student, business, or exchange visas will now pay a reduced issuance fee of FCFA 21,000, \$35, down from FCFA 129,000, \$215. Temporary work visas will cost FCFA 27,000, \$45. This information is contained in a press release issued by the U.S. Embassy in Yaoundé on July 9, 2025, and is expected to take effect immediately.

By Eratus NDUH

In a sweeping revision of its visa policy, the United States Embassy in Yaoundé has announced new measures aimed at tightening immigration procedures, while easing some financial burdens for Cameroonian applicants. The changes, which take immediate effect, impact both the validity periods and issuance fees for various categories of U.S. nonimmigrant visas. According to the Embassy's press release, Cameroonian citizens who successfully apply for tourist, business, student, or exchange visas will now be issued single-entry visas valid for three months. Most notably, the issuance fee has been reduced to FCFA 21,000, \$35, a substantial drop from the previous FCFA 129,000, \$215. Temporary work visas also follow the same single-entry, three-month validity model, with a revised issuance fee of FCFA 27,000, \$45. "These changes are part of the U.S. Government's global efforts to align immigration policy



with evolving national security priorities," the statement read. While the fee reduction may be seen as a relief for many, the Embassy is simultaneously tightening procedural require-

ments. The interview waiver program, which previously allowed eligible applicants to renew visas without appearing in person, has been suspended indefinitely. This means all

nonimmigrant visa applicants in Cameroon must now appear for in-person interviews at the U.S. Embassy in Yaoundé, regardless of past visa history. The Embassy emphasized that a visa only permits travel to the U.S. up to the visa's expiration date, and that the final determination of a traveler's stay duration is made by U.S. Customs and Border Protection at the point of entry. In light of these developments, the Embassy is urging applicants to carefully evaluate their eligibility before initiating the application process. "We encourage all applicants to review the legally-established visa eligibility criteria prior to paying for an appointment," the release stated. "An objective self-assessment will help avoid unnecessary expenses on applications that are unlikely to be approved." Further information on the new procedures, as well as the scheduling of interviews, is available on the Embassy's official website: <https://cm.usembassy.gov>. Applicants needing assistance can also contact the Visa Appointment Center via email at

[cameroon@usvisaappt.com](mailto:cameroon@usvisaappt.com), or by phone at +237 694 359 560 or +1 734 228 4062 (from the U.S.).

#### Over 233 Cameroonian migrated to the US in 2024

While exact figures remain unavailable, indicators suggest a steady flow of Cameroonian migration to the United States in 2024. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), at least 233 Cameroonian refugees were resettled in the U.S. between January and March 2024 under regular migration programs. Meanwhile, the U.S. continues to host a growing Cameroonian diaspora, with over 90,000 Cameroonian-born residents recorded in previous national estimates. Deportation figures, however, have raised concern, with reports indicating that over 1,700 Cameroonians were facing removal proceedings in late 2024. These figures reflect both the opportunities and challenges facing Cameroonians seeking better prospects in the United States amid evolving immigration policies.



## NEWS

## OCTOBER PRESIDENTIAL POLLS

## Kamto eyes northern region as 2025 gamechanger

Ahead of the October polls, the leader of the Cameroon Renaissance Movement, CRM, party Maurice Kamto has unveiled a special development plan for Northern Cameroon. The four-page document, released this week, outlines key priorities for the Far North, North, and Adamawa regions, including improved security, food security, infrastructure, and even the symbolic return of former President Amadou Ahidjo's remains.

By Eratus NDUH

**A**s political momentum builds ahead of Cameroon's 2025 presidential election, opposition leader Maurice Kamto has unveiled a targeted development plan for Northern Cameroon, a region he describes as «strategically vital» to the nation's future. In a four-page policy statement released on July 9, Kamto called on residents of the Far North, North, and Adamawa regions to unite behind his candidacy. He positioned the proposal as an excerpt from his larger campaign manifesto, expected to be officially presented in the coming days. "I call on the political and intellectual elites, traditional rulers, religious authorities, civil society organizations, women, youth, and the entire population of the North to support my candidacy," Kamto declared. Kamto's development plan is anchored on five major pillars: improving security, eradicating famine and malnutrition, closing regional development gaps, rehabilitating infrastructure, particularly roads, and organi-



zing the repatriation of former President Amadou Ahidjo's remains, currently interred

in Senegal. The leader of the Cameroon Renaissance Movement, CRM, emphasized that

President, Amadou Ahidjo, as part of a national reconci-

the North has long been plagued by poverty, educational setbacks, underinvestment, and recurrent crises such as cholera and flooding. He described his initiative as both a humanitarian and political commitment. "The Northern regions suffer disproportionately from the ills of underdevelopment," Kamto stated. "My engagement is driven by the well-being of the people and the urgent need to act where the state has failed for decades." In an emotionally charged pledge, Kamto also vowed to organize the official return of Cameroon's first

liation process. He stressed the importance of acknowledging the country's history and honoring its foundational figures. "There is no nation without a history, nor history without great figures," he said. "Cameroon's political history has been written in pain, often under authoritarian rule. It is time to heal divided memories." Kamto's statement comes amid shifting political dynamics in Northern Cameroon. The resignation of influential northern political figures such as Issa Tchiro-ma Bakary and Bello Bouba Maigari from government posts has opened new political space. Analysts suggest that the North is becoming an increasingly competitive electoral zone that could play a decisive role in the outcome of the October polls. With this regional development blueprint, Kamto aims to consolidate support in what many now consider Cameroon's new political battleground. His campaign team says more detailed national policy proposals will be unveiled in the coming weeks.

## OPPORTUNITIES

### 1. Female finance officer needed

A logistics company seeks a Finance Officer. The position requires a female candidate with a bachelor's degree in finance, accounting, business administration, or a related field. Crucially, applicants must possess 3-5 years of experience in accounting and financial management. Essential skills include strong communication to clearly convey financial information, excellent organizational abilities to manage multiple tasks efficiently and meet

deadlines, proficiency in accounting software and financial modeling tools, and problem-solving skills to identify and resolve financial issues. The starting salary is 60,000. Interested candidates should submit their applications before July 15, 2025. The office is located at MRS Duche Derrie Guarantee AKWA. For inquiries, contact 654943631.

### 2. National Employment Fund is Hiring

Hiring a female Chief Accountant for a large retail

company in Douala-Akwa. Responsibilities include maintaining accounts, overseeing closings, ensuring tax compliance, managing tax authority relations, and preparing financial reports. Requirements: BAC+4/5 in Accounting or equivalent, 4 years of experience. Deadline: July 11, 2025, 10:00 AM. Apply by submitting CV in PDF form to the National Employment Fund, insert registration number to Mme Mbelel at the Douala Bassa agency opposite Belavie Ndokoti or via WhatsApp to

675769663. Must be registered with a fund agency.

### 3. Doula BASSA recruiting

Two female Hotel Receptionists for a hotel in Douala-Ndogbong are needed. Primary duties include welcoming guests, managing reservations, and answering phone calls. Requirements include a Ordinary or Advanced level of education. No prior experience is required, making this an excellent opportunity for beginners. To apply, candidates must be

registered with their fund agency, submit their CV in PDF format, including the fund registration number, to Mme Mbelel at the Douala Bassa agency located opposite Belavie Ndokoti. Alternatively, applications can be sent via WhatsApp to 675769663. The application deadline is July 11, 2025, at 10:00 AM.

By NFE





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## INDEPT

## 2025 PRESIDENTIALS

## Biya's candidature sets party of flame ablaze

Several CPDM bigwigs have in the last over three days, been openly engaged in singing contrasting lyrics over the chances of the party's long-serving leader running as its candidate for the forthcoming mega political showdown. While the Minister of Communication, Rene Emmanuel Sadi has continued standing strong on his view that chances of the Head of State contesting remain 50/50, other bigshots like the Minister of Higher Education and the CPDM's communication secretary says the structure is 100% sure Biya will be the party's candidate.

By TEMBA Junior SUH

The Cameroon People's Democratic Movement party, the CPDM has been thrown into full-blown internal crisis and a relative lack of direction over the candidature of its National President and Head of State, Paul Biya, in the forthcoming 2025 presidential election. Several of the party's bigwigs have in the last over three days, been openly engaged in singing contrasting lyrics over the chances of the party's long-serving leader running as its candidate in the mega political showdown expected to hold in October this year. While the Minister of Communication, Rene Emmanuel Sadi has continued standing strong on his view that chances of the 92-year-old contesting remain 50/50, other party front leaders like the Minister of Higher Education and the CPDM's communication secretary, Prof Jacques Fame Ndongo says the structure is 100% sure Biya will be the party's candidate.

With just barely three months to the October elections, the internal disruption within the party has left many increasingly asking questions about the effectiveness that the CPDM party will have in the forthcoming elections. This, analysts argue, is more disturbingly so as the crisis comes amid other issues that are believed to have weakened the party's foundation in the lead up to the crucial elections particularly the recent collapse in the relationship between Biya and long-time allies, Issa Tchiroma Bakary of the Cameroon National Salvation Front, the FSNC party and the National Union for Democracy and Progress' Bello Bouba Maigari. The rising internal breakdown is also believed to getting compounded by what has been termed the disorganization within the party as the party stretches with proper coordination in its bid to mitigate the possible damages that have been caused by the collapse in Biya's alliance with the top allies who are seen as major threats to Biya in the vote-rich three northern regions.

#### CPDM's ever-strong engine grinding facing disruptions

According to media sources, the Minister of State, Secretary General at the Presidency of the



Republic, Ferdinand Ngoh Ngoh, the Minister of State and Minister of Higher Education, Prof Jacques Fame Ndongo, his colleagues the Minister of Communications, Rene Emmanuel Sadi and the Minister of Territorial Administration, Paul Atanga Nji, have recently been leading what is now being described as a threatening rivalry over the hot cake topic of Biya's candidature in the 2025 poll. Since Bello Bouba and Issa Tchiroma announced their candidatures for the election in a shocking plot twist, the CPDM has been left in a near complete unease. To mitigate the damages, the Minister of State, Ferdinand Ngoh Ngoh has been holding consultation talks at the Unity Palace with CPDM bigwigs since the start of this week to boost momentum within the party and come up with new strategies ahead of the October election. Since the exercise began, CPDM delegations from the North West, the Littoral and other regions have taken turns at the Unity Palace

for the exercise. One key message has been consistent on the table in the course of the exercise: the move to present President Biya as the party's candidate for the 2025 election. The likes of Minister Paul Atanga Nji have come out openly restating their position on the possibilities of the 92-year-old leader contesting the election as the party's flag-bearer in the political showdown, strongly arguing that there has never been a doubt at the level of the institution over Biya's status as the man for the job. Speaking in an interview after the exercise, Atanga Nji further came out to reassure the population that the North West Region will hand Biya a 100% victory at the regional level in a bid to further bolster his argument.

#### Clash of communication bosses

While the likes of Ngoh Ngoh and Atanga Nji have sang the same lyrics on the candidature headache and promised a smooth victory for

the CPDM National President, the story has been completely different particularly at the level of the communications bosses of the CPDM party as an institution and the entire regime as a bloc. Government spokesperson and Communication Minister, Rene Sadi and the Communications Secretary of the CPDM Central Committee, Prof Jacques Fame Ndongo, have since Monday, both marketed contrasting opinions about the Biya candidature. Minister Rene Sadi who doubles as a member of the party's elitist and top-ranked central committee, said in an interview with RFI on Monday that Biya's candidature in the poll remains a 50/50 affair. "I am not a soothsayer, to tell you the truth. He will make up his own mind. And he is a man of great foresight and wisdom. He will know how to tell his compatriots what his position will be. Its 50/50," the government spokesperson stated in the interview before going on to further grant another interview to Ger-

man broadcaster, Deutsche Welle yesterday to further buttress the point. However, in an interview with Rfi just hours after Rene Sadi's declaration on Monday this week, Prof Fame Ndongo stated that contrary to what the government spokesperson had stated in his earlier interview, the CPDM party is sure that Biya will contest as candidate. "I am telling you that he is a candidate. Because, having criticized all the sources, I can tell you peremptorily that he is the CPDM candidate in the presidential election. Everything else is guesswork," Prof Fame Ndongo stated, insisting that there is no confusion over the candidature of the party's National President. "There is no cacophony. One speaks for the government of the Republic and the other for the party in power. There is no state party. I speak for the party, not for the government. Minister Sadi, who is a brother, a friend, speaks on behalf of the State, on behalf of the government," he emphasized. Prof Fame Ndongo said the party is completely unbothered by all external or internal figures questioning the possible candidature of the long-serving leader, emphasizing that the structure remains firm on riding on its statutes which he says fully gives Biya the leeway to contest as a candidate even without the holding of a congress to designate him. "The CPDM candidate is designated. Article 27, paragraph three, of the party statutes. What does this article say? The National Chairman of the CPDM is the party's candidate for the presidential election. He is the candidate and I say that categorically," Prof Fame Ndongo said. "We don't need a congress. We don't need anything else. We have our statutes. That's positive law. In other words, Article 27 of the party statutes leaves no room for doubt. The national president of the CPDM is the candidate of the CPDM, of that party, in the presidential election. Our statutes are clear. To be a CPDM candidate in the presidential election, you have to be the party's national president. I don't know of any other national president of the CPDM. So, it is the national president of the party, His Excellency Paul Biya, who is the candidate. It's in the party statutes," he detailed.

## SPORT

## HAVE YOUR SAY

## BEAUTY MEETS BUSINESS

## Women's concern as weight loss products flood markets

The growing amount of weight loss products flooding in the market is becoming hard to ignore.

By Eratus NDUHE

Many people use pills, herbs and special teas to lose weight fast. These products promise quick results with little effort. But what is the real story behind them. Some weight loss pills claim to burn fat and seize hunger to avoid users' feet too much. Some Slimming teas advertised even insist on the time to be taken with long term effect. While some people may see short-term changes, these often do not last. "The



weight usually comes back when you stop using the products," Brighton says, expressing concern about the weight loss product. There are real concerns about safety too. Some products contain strong ingredients that can cause health problems. These might include heart issues, stomach pain or trouble sleeping. Even natural herbs can sometimes cause bad reactions. The bigger problem is we often do not know exactly what is in these products. Tsamo Ornella an experienced nurse says « the safest way to manage weight is through good eating ha-

bits and regular activity. This takes more time but works better in the long run. Small changes like eating more vegetables, drinking water instead of sweet drinks, and moving more each day can make a real difference ». Women, girls, and even men have turned to slim teas for weight loss particularly to reduce stomach fat while others take pills to enhance their breasts, buttocks, or other body parts. Before trying any weight loss product, it is smart to talk to a health professional, they can explain the risks and help find what is right for individuals.

## TSAMO Ornella - Health practitioner

## "Most sustainable way to manage weight is consistent, mindful eating habits, regular exercising"

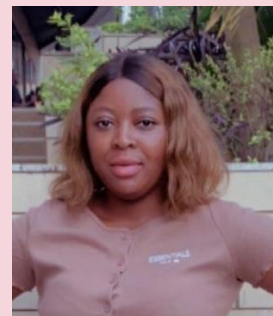
"The safest and most sustainable way to manage weight is through consistent, mindful eating habits and regular physical activity. While it may require patience and dedication, this approach leads to lasting results and overall better health. Many people seek quick changes, turning to pills, herbs, and other shortcuts without considering the long-term consequences. They ignore the diseases and health problems that may arise over time. Weight gain is often seen as growth some strive to gain fat, while others struggle to lose it. That is the irony. And you cannot lose belly fat without losing fat from the entire body it is a gradual, full-body process."



## MANGER Rashel - User

## "We just want to join the trends"

"It is true we often follow trends without thinking about how they affect us. TikTok, Facebook, and other platforms show us quick, fun videos like home workouts, challenges, or life hacks and we jump in without considering the consequences. Maybe the trend is unsafe, or it wastes our time. But in the moment, we just want to join in, to feel part of something. To copy and paste what we see. The problem is not the trends themselves it is that we do not stop and ask, Is this good for us? If yes, how do they know, we get so caught up in doing what everyone else is doing and engage in what we see like people always put the Before and After image to convince us."



## KENYA

## Ruto faces tough task taming protests and winning over Gen Z

Ruto won power almost three years ago vowing to protect the poor and end police violence, but he is facing mounting public dissatisfaction over high living costs, corruption and police brutality that could yet seal his fate as a «wantam» leader.

By Hereward Holland & Edwin Okoth\*

Protesters braving police batons, water cannon and occasional bullets on Kenya's streets this week have taken up a rallying cry that is likely to unnerve its embattled president, William Ruto: «Ruto wantam», or Ruto one-term. Ruto won power almost three years ago vowing to protect the poor and end police violence, but he is facing mounting public dissatisfaction over high living costs, corruption and police brutality that could yet seal his fate as a «wantam» leader. As the faint drum beat of the 2027 election grows louder, analysts say, his administration will need not only to deliver on its economic promises but also adopt a more conciliatory tone to win over a younger, better-educated population. «Persistent economic hardship and widespread allegations of police violence pose serious challenges to any ambitions he may have for securing

re-election in 2027,» said Mucahid Durmaz, Senior Africa Analyst at risk intelligence firm Verisk Maplecroft. A government-funded rights group said 31 people were killed nationwide in the latest anti-government protests on Monday, held to mark the 35th anniversary of pro-democracy rallies. Police fired to disperse the demonstrators after also using tear gas and water cannon. «We can't feed our families, so we have to be on the street to stop the increasing prices, to stop the (police) abductions, and to stand up for our country,» said Festus Muiruri, a 22-year-old protester in the capital Nairobi. «We want the president to hear us.» But Ruto's government has been consistently slow to respond to public discontent. Last year, he only abandoned proposed tax hikes after protesters overran parliament in unprecedented scenes flashed across TV screens around the world. His interior minister, Kipchumba Murkomen, branded last month's protests as a «coup attempt» by what he called «criminal anarchists».

Gen Z

Unlike his predecessors, Ruto faces a generation of uncompromising young Kenyans desperate for economic opportunities, who can mobilise amorously through social media, bypassing opposition parties and leaders. The so-called «Gen Z» protesters, the product of free schooling introduced two decades ago, have no recollection of authoritarian rule. Many were not yet born when Kenya introduced multi-party elections in 1992. With up to 800,000 young people entering the job market each year, Gen Z are more educated than their elders, but also more likely to be unemployed, according to a report by Afrobarometer, a pollster. «They have no memory of the rough times,» said Macharia Munene, a professor of history and international relations at the United States International University (USIU) in Nairobi.

«They've learned how to ask questions.» Discontent with the government found a

lightning rod last month with the death of blogger Albert Ojwang in police custody. On June 25 some 19 people lost their lives in demonstrations over Ojwang's death. The administration's hardline response to protesters has rattled investors in East Africa's largest economy. Business expectations fell to their second-lowest level on record in May, according to a survey by Stanbic Bank Kenya. «Repeated protests and shutdowns will continue to erode investor confidence and disrupt economic activity, especially if the government continues to prioritise force over dialogue,» said Jervin Naidoo from Oxford Economics.

'Blind, deaf and dumb'

Despite the swelling disillusionment, Kenyans are left with few options for now. Ruto's large parliamentary majority ensures he won't be unseated prematurely. He also faces a weak and fractured opposition which is yet to find a standard bearer for the next election. Following last year's

protests, Ruto brought former Prime Minister Raila Odinga into his government, neutralising his main threat. He has two more years to turn things around, or use his incumbency to help ensure a second term. Ruto will hope that his increased social spending and programmes aimed at tackling youth unemployment, combined with positive economic prospects and a decline in inflation, will bolster his appeal, according to Control Risks. However, that may not be enough to avoid «wantam», said Javas Bigambo, a political commentator. «The government is perceived to be blind, deaf and dumb by the young people. This perception needs to be managed. Dealing with the protesters with this condescending attitude will only worsen Ruto's re-election prospects,» he said. «It is urgent that measures are taken to bridge the divide.»

\*Reuters reporters