

KABAKA'S BIRTHDAY RUN

Paintin with red. Officials from Buganda Kingdom led by the Katikkito Charles Peter Mayiga (3rd L) and Airtel Uganda chief executive officer Soumendra Sahu (3rd R) show off the kits at the launch. PHOTOS/GEORGE KATONGOLE

Kabaka Birthday Run renews fight against HIV/Aids

BY GEORGE KATONGOLE

More than 120,000 runners are expected to lace up on April 12 as the Buganda Kingdom officially flagged off the 13th edition of the Kabaka Birthday Run, renewing its nationwide charge against HIV/Aids with a sharp focus on mobilising men to protect the girl child. The run will take place on April 12, a day before the Kabaka marks his 71st birthday. The 2026 edition was launched yesterday at Bulange, Mengo, by Katikkito Charles Peter Mayiga, who unveiled the official run kit and rallied Ugandans to turn the annual celebration of Ronald Muwenda Mutebi II's birthday into a powerful statement in the push to end HIV/Aids by 2030.

Held under the theme "Men for Good Health to Save the Girl Child and the Fight to End HIV/Aids by 2030," this year's run continues to rally men to take a frontline role in prevention efforts as Uganda pushes to eliminate the disease as a public health threat.

Mayiga described the Run as one of the country's most effective community mobilisation platforms against HIV/Aids.

"Awareness, engagement, communication in short, mobilisation, is the strongest force against the HIV/Aids scourge. The Kabaka's Birthday Run is a mobilisational tool which His Majesty is pleased we use to send the right messages, to create awareness and to pass on the knowledge we have about the virus and its destruction of life," Mayiga said.

He noted that when the Kabaka added his voice to the fight, behaviour change gained stronger traction, especially among young people and men.

"The need to abstain, to test our status, to take ARVs for

those who are positive, and faithfulness for married couples was appreciated and taken more seriously," he added.

Growing event

The run's main sponsor, Airtel Uganda, reaffirmed its long-term commitment to the cause. Managing Director Soume-

ndra Sahu said the event has grown into the largest charity run

of its kind on the continent.

"We started with about 1,000 runners, and last year we crossed 120,000. Close to Shs2.4 billion was mobilised towards the goal of ending HIV and Aids by 2030. When we wear this kit, we are not just runners but advocates. We are saying, 'I care, I am part of the solution to end Aids,'" Soumendra said.

Kits are priced at Shs20,000 and are available at selected Airtel shops, with payments also facilitated via Airtel Money. Proceeds will fund HIV/Aids awareness, testing and prevention initiatives across the country.

Progress and caution

Data shared at the launch showed Uganda's steady gains in the fight against HIV/Aids. National prevalence among adults aged 15-49 has declined to 4.9 percent in 2024 from 7.3 percent in 2010. New infections have dropped from 96,000 in 2010 to 37,000 in 2024, while Aids-related deaths have reduced significantly over the same period.

Expanded access to antiretroviral therapy now reaches more than 1.3 million Ugandans, contributing to improved viral suppression rates.

Representatives from UNAIDS noted that Buganda remains home to the largest population of people living with HIV in Uganda but has registered marked improvement. Antiretroviral treatment coverage in the region has increased from 81 percent to 89 percent, while new infections fell by 21 percent between 2020 and 2024.

However, the chairperson of the Uganda AIDS Commission, Dr Ruth Ssenyonyi, warned that new infections among children remain a concern.

"By December 2024, Uganda registered 4,700 new infections among babies. That is too high. We should not have any child below five getting infected," she said.

Dr Ssenyonyi announced a Shs30 mil-

The Katikkito Mayiga and Airtel director Ali Balunywa.

