

BY FRED WAMBEDE

URA recovers Shs1b in fines during operation

MBALE. The Uganda Revenue Authority (URA) has recovered more than Shs1b in fines from traders implicated in the smuggling of mobile phones and other electronics across eastern Uganda, following a targeted enforcement operation.

Daily Monitor learnt that the operation codenamed "You cannot smuggle a phone without paying taxes" began three weeks ago after intelligence indicated a rising trend of illegal imports along the eastern border between Uganda and Kenya.

The border, which stretches more than 800 kilometres, has long posed monitoring challenges due to its vast

and porous nature. Authorities say smugglers exploit informal crossing points and remote areas to move goods undetected.

Mr Moses Wanjala Owino, the URA manager for enforcement and border control in the eastern region, said in an interview on Monday that the crackdown has yielded significant results, including the recovery of over Shs1b in taxes and the impounding of several vehicles.

"Our goal is to end smuggling and any form of illicit trade, stabilise the market, protect genuine traders and local manufacturers, and improve tax collec-

tion. This operation is still ongoing," he said. He warned traders against engaging in smuggling, noting that URA has strengthened its intelligence network and expanded coverage across border points in the region.

"We want traders to know that our intelligence is strong, and it may not be easy for anyone to bypass taxes. They should use the right channels to avoid losing their capital because once apprehended, they will be prosecuted," Mr Wanjala said.

He added that smuggling continues to undermine URA's efforts, citing its negative impact on the economy

through unfair competition, market distortion, and reduced capacity utilisation by local industries producing similar goods.

Meanwhile, Brig Gen David Gonyi, chief of staff of the Uganda People's Defence Force Air Force, said the biggest challenge facing the Buy Uganda Build Uganda policy is the perception among Ugandans that imported goods are superior to locally manufactured products.

"From what we have seen, products produced locally are actually much better than those smuggled from neighbouring countries," he said.