

150m Nigerians 've access to adequate electricity —FG

The Minister of Power, Adedayo Adelabu, has disclosed that approximately 150 million Nigerians now have access to adequate electricity, while 80 million still lack reliable power.

He made this known on Thursday during the 2025 Ministerial Sectoral Update Conference held in Abuja, where he spoke alongside the Minister of Information and National Orientation, Mohammed Malagi, and other key stakeholders.

Adelabu stated that the progress stems from Nigeria's participation in the "Mission 300" initiative—an ambitious joint effort by the World Bank and the African Development Bank (AfDB) aimed at providing electricity access to 300 million Africans by 2030.

"The compact sets ambitious goals to enhance electricity access, increase renewable energy adoption, and improve clean cooking solutions for millions of Nigerians — that is Mission 300, and we are making good

progress on this," he said.

He continued, "I'm happy to tell you that out of the 300 million Africans that the World Bank and AfDB aim to reach, Nigeria is on course to account for no less than 25 per cent, which translates to about 75 million Nigerians. When we presented our compact, they agreed with us."

According to Adelabu, Nigeria, with a population of over 240 million, currently provides adequate electricity access to 150 million people. However, he

emphasised that the issue is not merely access but the 'reliability' of that access.

"As it is today, Nigeria—a country with about 240 million people—has access for 150 million people already, while about 80 million lack access to adequate electricity in Nigeria.

"The real challenge lies in the stability and affordability of electricity. That's how we measure reliability. We must ensure that those who have access enjoy consistent and affordable power," he said.

The minister urged global financiers to prioritise strengthening Nigeria's power grid alongside off-grid solutions, warning that over-reliance on renewables risks leaving urban areas and industries behind.

"When you're extending access to the 300 million people under this initiative, let's not concentrate solely on renewable energy—which is more appropriate for rural communities.

"Strengthening grid infrastructure is equally crucial so that

those connected to the grid can enjoy reliable power. Otherwise, how do we explain the growing number of Nigerian companies opting out of the national grid to generate captive power?"

The minister also highlighted recent improvements in Nigeria's power generation capacity.

"We have increased our generation to 6,003 megawatts, up by 1,700 megawatts in one and a half years since President Tinubu as-

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The Nigerian Observer



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Second Benin flyover gets EXCO approval

The Edo State Government has reaffirmed its commitment to infrastructural transformation under the leadership of Governor Monday Okpebholo, as construction continues on the first-ever flyover bridge in Benin City.

According to the Commissioner for Information and Communication, Hon. Paul Ohonbamu, this project is not merely a physical structure, but a bold testament to the governor's vision for sustainable urban development.

In a statement issued in Benin City, Ohonbamu dismissed circulating rumours suggesting

that the flyover project had been halted, describing such claims as politically motivated falsehoods.

He revealed that the State Executive Council, during its most recent meeting on Monday, 14 April 2025, approved the construction of a second flyover bridge at the Adesuwa-Sapele Road intersection—another milestone in the government's ambitious infrastructure agenda.

"Governor Okpebholo is charting a course guided by a practical and people-focused approach to governance," Ohonbamu said. "His priority remains the growth and development of Edo State, and

he ensures that every project, especially those with significant public impact, meets the highest standards. He personally monitors these projects to guarantee quality delivery."

Describing the governor as a leader who prefers action over rhetoric, Ohonbamu said Okpebholo is determined to place Edo State on the path of long-term growth, through the construction of roads, schools, and support for grassroots communities. He urged citizens to remain patient, stressing that the governor's focus is on rebuilding livelihoods and delivering tangible joy to the people.

According to the Commissioner, Okpebholo is already fulfilling key promises made during his campaign, with improved road connectivity serving as a foundation for broader development across the state. "The flyover projects are not isolated efforts," Ohonbamu explained, "they are deliberate steps in the modernisation of Benin City and the integration of rural communities into the state's economic framework."

He also addressed the quality of the ongoing works, noting that the governor is particularly concerned with the durability and structural integrity of all

projects. "The governor insists on reputable contractors and stringent adherence to specifications," Ohonbamu said. "These developments will speak for the administration far more effectively than political slogans."

He condemned attempts by opposition figures to politicise the projects, stating that such actions distract from the larger vision of progress. "It's unfortunate that some individuals, simply because they are not currently in power, resort to spreading dangerous rumours aimed at derailing public trust," he said.

Ohonbamu also disclosed that

Mr. Andy Duan of CCECC, the contractor handling the ongoing flyover project, has given assurances that the construction will proceed as planned and in accordance with all agreed specifications. The governor, he added, has directed that any contractor failing to meet performance standards will face immediate revocation of their contract.

"The people of Edo State can be confident that Governor Okpebholo is watching closely, and he will ensure that every project reflects the quality and accountability his administration stands for," Ohonbamu concluded.



DEFECTION TO APC:

Edo State Governor, Monday Okpebholo (right), and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) lawmaker representing Ikpoba Okha constituency in Edo State House of Assembly, Hon. Nicholas Asonere, displaying the All Progressives Congress (APC) flag shortly after his defection to APC, in Benin City

Adesina urges end to raw material exports

● As Africa seeks economic transformation

The President of the African Development Bank, Dr. Akinwumi Adesina, has called on African nations to put an end to the export of raw materials if the continent is to overcome poverty and underdevelopment.

According to data from the Office of US Trade Representative and other multilateral institutions, Africa accounts for less than 2 per cent of global manufacturing.

In a post shared on Thursday via his official X handle, Adesina stressed the need for Africa to shift from being a supplier of unprocessed commodities to a producer of value-added goods.

"Africa must end the exports of its raw materials. The export of raw materials is the door to poverty. The export of

value-added products is the highway to wealth. And Africa is tired of being poor," he wrote.

Despite Africa being home to the world's most sought-after raw materials, its share of global trade remains under 3%. Efforts to change this narrative have gained momentum in recent years.

Initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Area are designed to enhance intra-African trade, boost manufacturing, and encourage value addition across sectors.

Adesina has consistently advocated for policies that promote agro-industrialization, energy expansion, and improved infrastructure as a foundation for transforming Africa's econ-

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Ex-Edo COMPOL Otimenyin receives PCRC excellent leadership award

IDAHOUSA MUSA

The immediate past Commissioner of Police in Edo State, CP Betty Eneken Isokpan Otimenyin, has been honoured with the Excellent Leadership Award by the Edo State branch of the Police Community Relations Committee (PCRC).

CP Otimenyin, who recently concluded her tenure as Edo's 49th Commissioner of Police, made history as the first female and the first Benin woman to

occupy the position in the state.

The award was presented in Benin City by Dr Osagie Igbinosun, the PCRC Diaspora Patron, who noted that the recognition was in honour of her outstanding commitment to the protection of lives and property during her time in office. Dr Igbinosun, a United States-based medical practitioner, emphasised that CP Otimenyin's leadership serves as an inspiration, particularly to young girls who may aspire to break gender barriers in male-dominated fields.

"The Edo indigenes in the Diaspora—across the USA, Canada, and beyond—present this Excellent Leadership Award to CP Betty Eneken Isokpan Otimenyin in recognition of your historic and exemplary service as the first female Commissioner of Police in Edo State. Your contributions to the safety and

security of lives and property in Edo and Nigeria at large are deeply appreciated. May God bless and protect you," he stated.

In her response, CP Otimenyin expressed gratitude to the PCRC and Dr Igbinosun for the honour. She used the occasion to advocate for gender equality and the empowerment

of the girl child.

"I'm very proud and grateful for this award. I'm proud to be a girl child, proud to be from Edo State, and proud to serve as a woman officer. This recognition shows that people see and appreciate what I've done, and that brings me joy.

"It is not the sex of a child that determines their worth, but the

strength of their mind, the work they put in, and their level of commitment," she said.

She also encouraged parents to stop discriminating against girls and to support their ambitions and development.

Dr Igbinosun was accompanied to the event by Pastor Ken Okungbowa, a member of the PCRC.

Gunmen ambush NSCDC operatives in Bayelsa, kill one

PHILIP EKE

A Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) officer has been confirmed dead following an ambush by suspected militants in the Igbomatoru community, located in the Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State.

According to local sources, the NSCDC team was returning from an operation targeting illegal bunkering activities in the area when they were attacked on Friday. The assailants, believed to be armed militants, reportedly opened fire on the operatives, leading to a fierce exchange of gunfire.

During the confrontation, the deceased officer was said to have been shot at close

range. The attackers, who were heavily armed with high-calibre weapons, allegedly overpowered the security team.

Several other operatives sustained injuries in the attack and have since been evacuated to a medical facility in Yenagoa for treatment.

When contacted, the spokesperson for the Bayelsa State Police Command, Solomon Ogbere, confirmed awareness of the incident but noted that a full report had yet to be received.

"The information, sincerely speaking, we've gotten it, but I'm still waiting for the OC to give me a comprehensive report. You're not far from the truth, but I can't speak definitively yet because I haven't received all the details," Ogbere stated.

Reps c'ttee postpones meeting with Rivers sole administrator

The interactive session between the House of Representatives Ad-Hoc Committee on Rivers State Oversight and the State Sole Administrator, Vice Admiral Ibok-Ete Ibas (ret'd), earlier scheduled for Thursday, April 17, has been postponed.

The Committee, chaired by the House Leader, Prof Julius Ihonvbere, had invited the retired naval officer to deliberate on the way forward following the suspension of democratic governance in Rivers State by President Bola Tinubu on 18 March 2025.

The postponement, according to a statement issued on Thursday by the Spokesman of the House of Representatives, Akin Rotimi, followed a for-

mal request from the Sole Administrator for the rescheduling of the session.

No new date has yet been fixed.

"The Ad-Hoc Committee on Rivers State Oversight has received a formal request from the Sole Administrator, Vice Admiral Ibok-Ete Ibas (ret'd), to reschedule the interactive session initially set for April 17, 2025, at 4:00 p.m.

"The Committee has acknowledged the request and is in the process of coordinating a new date for the session. In the spirit of transparent and effective oversight, the public will be promptly informed once the rescheduled date is confirmed," the statement read.



STRATEGIC POLICY REVIEW WORKSHOP:

A group photograph of participants in the two-day Strategic Policy Review Workshop aimed at creating a more inclusive, responsive, and innovation-driven Digital Governance Framework in Edo State.

NAF strikes insurgent camps in Sambisa forest, kills several terrorists

The Nigerian Air Force on Thursday said two successful airstrikes conducted on insurgent strongholds in Borno State killed several terrorists.

The service said the coordinated air interdiction missions, executed under the Air Component of Operation HADIN KAI, targeted Kollaram and Arra—two locations long considered havens for terrorist activity in the Sambisa general area and the Southern Tumbuns.

This was contained in a statement by the Director of Public Relations and Information at NAF Headquarters, Air Com-

modore Ehimen Ejodame, on Thursday.

Ejodame said the first strike occurred at about 5:30 a.m. in Kollaram after intelligence and surveillance footage confirmed the presence of high-value terrorist commanders and active operational hubs, including structures fitted with solar panels used by the fighters.

He said, "In a bold display of force and precision, the Nigerian Air Force (NAF), under the Air Component of Operation HADIN KAI, executed two highly successful air interdiction missions on April 15, 2025, targeting terrorist strongholds in Borno

State's Sambisa general area and the Southern Tumbuns.

"The first strike occurred at approximately 5:30 a.m. in Kollaram, a known stronghold of insurgents. Intelligence reports, supported by surveillance footage, confirmed the presence of high-value terrorist commanders in the area. Several structures, some equipped with solar panels, were identified as active terrorist hubs.

"Nigerian Air Force assets carried out a precision strike on the location, eliminating several fighters and disabling key infrastructure."

He added that later in the day,

at around 3:55 p.m., NAF assets struck again in Arra, Sambisa.

According to him, real-time visuals gathered from Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance missions revealed clusters of armed militants.

"Precision-guided munitions were employed, resulting in the effective destruction of targets and disruption of the group's operational capabilities.

"These back-to-back missions are part of a sustained air campaign designed to erode terrorist capabilities, dismantle leadership structures, and eliminate sanctuaries across Nigeria," Ejodame added.

Over 1.9m students to sit for Nigeria's first digital WASSCE

In a major technological shift, the West African Examinations Council has introduced the first-ever Computer-Based West African Senior School Certificate Examination for School Candidates.

According to the council, it is aimed at improving examination delivery and curbing malpractice.

Speaking during a press

briefing held at the WAEC National Office in Yaba, Lagos, on Thursday, Head of the Nigeria National Office of WAEC, Dr. Amos Dangut, said the council was fully prepared for the conduct of the examination.

He said WASSCE for school candidates, 2025, would be held from Thursday, April 24 to Friday, June 20, 2025, across Nigeria.

He said, "The Council has

introduced its maiden Computer-Based WASSCE for School Candidates, 2025.

"It will interest you to know that from this year, two candidates will not have the same questions on each number. This is part of a paradigm shift in test administration techniques to uphold academic integrity."

He revealed that a total of 1,973,253 candidates from 23,554 schools had registered to take the exam, an increase of over 158,000 from the previous year. Of this number, 979,228 are males (49.63

per cent) and 994,025 females (50.37 per cent), showing a continuing rise in female participation.

"The examination will cover 74 subjects with 196 papers, and over 26,000 senior secondary school teachers will serve as supervisors nationwide," he said.

Dangut acknowledged the security challenges that had previously affected exam administration in some parts of the country, saying, "Conducting examinations in such situations has been challenging, though surmounted.

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sumed office. It took Nigeria over 40 years to achieve an incremental 2,000 megawatts of average energy; we achieved this in less than two years. Past administrations have their positives, but if they had been adding at least 1,000 megawatts of power since 1999, we would be talking about 26,000 megawatts and more in Nigeria.

"Now that we (the current administration) have created the trajectory, if we can sustain it, I can assure you that before the end of this administration's first term in 2027, we should be able to generate and distribute not-

ing less than 8,000 megawatts of power," Adelabu declared.

He also announced that the Kaduna Power Plant would become operational before the end of 2025.

On metering challenges, Adelabu assured Nigerians that "the metering gap will soon be a thing of history."

TARIFF REFORMS, FINANCIAL STRAIN

Addressing the sector's financial framework, Adelabu noted that electricity tariff reforms implemented had yielded an increase of ₦700 billion in revenue.

In April 2024, the Nigerian

Electricity Regulatory Commission (NERC) approved a tariff increase for Band A customers—those receiving a minimum of 20 hours of electricity daily—from ₦68 to ₦225 per kilowatt-hour. This 230% hike affected roughly 1.9 million consumers.

The government had previously explained that the hike was necessary due to the unsustainability of energy subsidies, which were projected to cost ₦2.9 trillion in 2024. Even with the increase, ₦2.8 trillion was still budgeted for electricity subsidies that year. NERC estimated that the tariff adjustment would reduce subsidy obligations by ₦1.14 trillion.

However, the move has drawn criticism. The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN) called it "an additional burden on already struggling citizens." The Abuja Chamber of Commerce and Industry similarly expressed concerns about the impact on Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), citing increased operating costs.

Despite improvements in generation, Nigeria's grid continues to underperform. In 2024 alone, the national grid suffered no fewer than 12 collapses, plunging major cities such as Abuja, Lagos, and Kano into repeated blackouts.

Adesina urges end to raw material...

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omies.

Last week, Adesina criticised the disproportionate allocation of the International Monetary Fund's Special Drawing Rights, revealing that Africa received just \$33 billion, only 4.5 per cent of the \$650 billion issued globally.

The AfDB president stressed that the distribution model of the SDRs failed to reflect the urgent financial needs of Africa, which bore some of the deepest eco-

nomics scars from the pandemic, with limited fiscal capacity to implement a robust recovery plan.

To address this imbalance, Adesina disclosed that the AfDB, in partnership with the African Union, spearheaded efforts to rechannel unused SDRs from wealthy nations to African economies. Leveraging the AfDB's AAA credit rating, a new framework co-developed with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) has now been approved by the IMF Board.

Reps committee affirms Nigeria-Bulgaria ties in trade, health

JOY ODOR

The House of Representatives Committee on Nigeria-Bulgaria has described as very cordial, the trade ties between Nigeria and Bulgaria.

The Chairman of the Committee, Hon Munachim Ikechi Alozie who stated this during the a farewell meeting held at the National Assembly Complex in honor of his Excellency, Ambassador Yanko Yordanov, informed that Nigeria has a very

long history of progressive ties with Bulgaria.

According to the lawmaker, Nigeria which is known as the giant of Africa is also blessed with several cultural and traditional heritage.

He explained: "And so, we have not come to bade him farewell but to celebrate one who by his intentional association, inclination and interaction has become one of us (Nigerian), who enjoys our meals specially.

Welcoming the Bulgarian Ambassador) and his delegation, the

rep member said the partnership deals between both countries will continue, in Trade and Economic Cooperation, Education and human capital development, Agriculture and food Security, Health, Energy sector, Tourism etc. And we hope to continue in exchanging more initiative and ideas towards strengthening the cooperation between us.

"Our aspiration is to become a beacon and a point of reference in initiating, fostering and promoting sustainable partnerships and development, that are respectful, visible, measurable, responsible and mutually beneficial for both our countries.

"As part of our programmes, we will be conducting a Trade

Missions to both Bulgaria and Nigeria; And we already have one coming up soon. And I want to take this opportunity to invite you all to participate in the Investment, Tourism and Trade Mission to identify and explore partnership opportunities in Bulgaria from July 14th - 20th, 2025".

He further informed that Nigeria under the current democratic dispensation is fully determined to strengthen more trade deals and bilateral relations among major countries of the world.

He equally commend the Bulgaria outgoing Ambassador to Nigeria, His Excellency, Tanko Yordanov for delectate practical steps taken for improved

trade deals between his country and Nigeria maintaining that various positive deals had been made during his tenure.

In his address, the Bulgaria outgoing Ambassador to Nigeria expressed satisfaction to the Nigerian government and her people stating that he was able to accomplish all he did because of supports from several people.

The outgoing Ambassador also described as a "great privilege" the opportunity on him to serve his Country and people through Nigeria.

He said Nigeria is not just a giant of Africa but also a giant of other positive endeavours.

Speaking to journalists after the event, the outgoing Bulgari-

an Ambassador to Nigeria, Ambassador Yanko Yordanov said, being in the country as ambassador, he appreciated the strong ties between the two countries.

He said, Nigeria and Bulgaria have a mutually beneficial relationship spanning many decades and has led to cooperation in various fields of development which he said would be maintained and improved upon for the benefit of the two nations.

He said, "This is due mostly to our cooperation in the area of agriculture, in the area of business ties, leading to partnerships in the transportation and the infrastructure project. So we are very much looking forward to build upon what we have achieved.

CBEX: House empathises with victims, calls for urgent crackdown on perpetrators of fraud

JOY ODEY

The House of Representatives has expressed deep concern over alarming reports on the collapse of a fraudulent cryptocurrency investment scheme known as "CBEX," which has reportedly trapped funds belonging to thousands of Nigerians, with financial exposure estimated to exceed ₦1.3 trillion.

The House extends heartfelt empathy to citizens currently facing distress and uncertainty due to their involvement in this elaborate scam through a press statement made available to newsmen by Rep. Akin Rotimi, Jr., the Spokesman, House of Representatives on Thursday

Preliminary findings indicate that the platform, which is not registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), deceptively adopted the name "CBEX," though it bears no affiliation with the legitimate China Beijing Equity Exchange - a Chinese equity trading institution that has disavowed any involvement in digital asset trading or operations in Nigeria.

This large-scale fraudulent scheme, which promised unrealistic returns and preyed on public trust, highlights the growing risks posed by unregulated digital investment platforms.

The House notes that the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Nigeria Police Force have already commenced coordinated investigations, working in concert with Interpol to track the perpetrators, safeguard investors, and recover withheld funds where possible.

"We urge these agencies to sustain swift and effective action in

identifying, apprehending, and prosecuting the masterminds of this massive financial crime".

The House also underscores the importance of the recently enacted Investment and Securities Act (ISA), 2025, signed into law by His Excellency, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, GCFR.

This landmark legislation - resulting from sustained legislative efforts across the 8th, 9th, and 10th Assemblies - strengthens the SEC's enforcement powers, criminalises Ponzi schemes and related frauds, and introduces stricter penalties, including up to ten years' imprisonment.

Through these reforms, the investor protection responsibility of the SEC has been enhanced, reinforcing its mandate to shield Nigerians from fraudulent investment activities.

Chairman of the House Committee on Capital Market and Institutions, Rep. Solomon T. Bob (PDP, Rivers), remarked:

"We must continue to confront financial fraud with the full weight of the law. But beyond enforcement, we must invest in public awareness. Financial literacy is not optional; it is essential in building a resilient, inclusive economy. Fraudsters thrive where ignorance prevails."

The House advises Nigerians to exercise utmost caution and verify all investment opportunities with the SEC and other regulators.

Citizens must remain vigilant to the hallmarks of fraud - especially promises of high returns with little or no risk.

Furthermore, public figures, celebrities, and influencers are reminded of their civic and legal duties.



EDUCATION:

Executive Chairman, Edo State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB), Bar. Mrs. Onomen Briggs (3rd left), with other government officials receiving briefs from one of the contractors handling school reconstruction projects in Benin City.

Delta police nab over 100 crime suspects

AJUWA VICTOR

The Delta State Police Command has recorded a significant progress in its ongoing battle against insecurity, with the arrest of over 100 crime suspects and the rescue of 13 kidnapped victims.

The suspects were alleged to have been involved in various crimes, including armed robbery, kidnapping, murder, cultism, and sexual offences.

This was made known by the Commissioner of Police, CP Abaniwonda Olufemi, during the Command's first-quarter

press briefing for the year 2025, held in Asaba.

Providing a comprehensive breakdown, CP Abaniwonda stated that during the first quarter of 2025, the Command apprehended 35 suspects linked to armed robbery, 24 suspected kidnappers, 21 murder suspects, 22 cultists, and 4 suspects of rape and defilement cases.

The arrests, he said, were part of the Command's strategic and intelligence-driven approach to policing aimed at rooting out crime and restoring public safety across the state.

Besides the arrests, the Com-

mand said it also recovered a significant cache of arms and ammunition. A total of 53 weapons were confiscated, including 11 AK-47 rifles, 1 G-3 rifle, 9 Beretta pistols, 19 single-barrel and cut-to-size guns, and 13 pump-action guns.

The police also seized 5,612 rounds of live ammunition and cartridges of various calibre during various operations.

The Commissioner revealed that 13 victims who had been kidnapped were successfully rescued and reunited with their families, while 14 suspected stolen vehicles were recovered.

The operations equally led to the seizure of assorted illicit drugs and substances, which, he said, posed a threat to youth and community safety.

One of the major breakthroughs highlighted was the neutralization of a notorious kidnap syndicate operating in and around Ogwashi-Uku, Ibusa, Issele-Uku, Ubulu-Uku, and neighbouring communities.

According to CP Abaniwonda, the syndicate, believed to be behind a string of abductions in the region, was eliminated during a gun battle with police operatives.

35 CSOs petition Reps, accuse Rivers Administrator of impunity

A coalition of 35 Civil Society Organisations in Rivers State has jointly petitioned the House of Representatives, decrying what they termed "severe and brazen acts of lawlessness and impunity" being perpetrated by the state's administrator, Vice Admiral Ibok-Ete Ibas (Rtd.).

In a strongly worded letter titled "Severe and Brazen Acts of Lawlessness and Impunity Being Carried Out by the Ad-

ministrator of Rivers State, Vice Admiral Ibok-Ete Ibas, and the Need to Nip Them in the Bud in the Interest of Mutual Peace and Constitutionalism," the groups urged the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee on Rivers State Oversight to take immediate action to halt what they describe as a "drift towards authoritarianism."

The document accused Ibas, who is referred to in the letter as the "Administrator of Rivers

State," of undermining constitutional governance.

It alleged that he has been using federal power and security operatives to intimidate public officers, suppress democratic institutions, and interfere with the proper functioning of government in the state.

"The conduct of Vice Admiral Ibok-Ete Ibas is not only reckless and unconstitutional but also a slap in the face of democratic values. His actions have

continued to aggravate political instability and institutional breakdown in Rivers State," the coalition said in the letter.

The groups demanded that the National Assembly should immediately:

Call Vice Admiral Ibas to order and investigate the legality of his actions;

Ensure that democratic institutions in Rivers State, particularly the legislature, are allowed to function;

Direct security agencies to cease illegal occupation of the Rivers State House of Assembly Complex.

They warned that if left unchecked, the continued disruption of civil authority could incite public unrest and erode trust in Nigeria's democratic framework.

Among those who signed are key Civil society leaders which include:

Comrade Enefaa Georgewill

- Rivers State Civil Society Organizations (RIVCSO)

Amb. Marvin Yobana - Citizens Quest for Truth Initiative

Comrade Loveday Enyinda - MOSOP, Rivers State Chapter

Pastor Mike Daka - Foundation for Leadership and Youth Initiative

Comrade Nwile John - Niger Delta Youth for Peace and Development

And representatives of 30 other organizations.

NEWS

Briggs rallies communities in Edo South to safeguard school projects

The Executive Chairman of the Edo State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB), Barrister Mrs. Onomen Briggs has called for greater community involvement in protecting and maintaining government-funded education projects.

She made the call during a working visit to several school construction sites in Edo South Senatorial District.

Her tour underscored both the pace of ongoing construction and the importance of timely delivery, especially as the new academic term approaches.

At Adolor Primary School in Okabere community, Briggs inspected a major project spearheaded by LaVida Systems Ltd, involving a block of six class-

rooms, six toilet units, administrative offices, a perimeter fence, borehole installation, and general renovation. With most of the work nearing completion.

The community's traditional head, Mr. Fred Osadolor, lauded the state government for the intervention, pledging that the people of Okabere would ensure the facility remains protected and fully functional.

His assurances were echoed by Mr. David Ogbor, Chairman of the School-Based Management Committee (SBMC), who reaffirmed the committee's readiness to oversee the ongoing works and support their successful conclusion.

At Umagbae Junior Secondary School, Briggs visited two active construction sites. One

block of six classrooms has been roofed and awaits interior finishing, while another block—currently at the damp-proof course (DPC) stage—will mirror the same structure.

Both projects include perimeter fencing, reinforcing the emphasis on school security and long-term maintenance.

Briggs used the occasion to express concern over the deteriorating condition of classrooms in many parts of the district and commended the Governor of Edo State, Senator Monday Okpebholo for declaring a state of emergency in the education sector.

She noted that the bold step has translated into tangible improvements in basic education infrastructure across the state.

While engaging with site

engineers, she urged them to fast-track their work to ensure all facilities are ready for pupils before schools reopen.

She also restated the critical role of local stakeholders in sustaining these developments, highlighting the SBMC's responsibility to guard against vandalism and neglect.

Commending the leadership of both Mr. Osadolor and Mr. Ogbor, she encouraged other communities to emulate Okabere's model of grassroots ownership.

Accompanying the SUBEB Chairman on the tour were Martins Amune, Director of Projects and Planning; Mr. Austin Otas, Director of Schools; and Pastor Mrs. Angela Okpamen, the Board member representing Edo South.

Tinubu's NNPC leadership change timely, commendable —PEDAN

The Petroleum Dealers Association of Nigeria (PEDAN) has described the recent appointments of Bashir Ojulari, as Group Chief Executive Officer, Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited and others by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu as commendable and timely.

In a statement signed by its National Secretary, Ibrahim Yahaya and made available to newsmen on Thursday, the group noted that, given the company's history there was a pressing need for the injection of real technocrats to usher in a new era, especially now that the company operates as a private entity.

"Transforming the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) from a bureaucratic behemoth riddled with corruption and opaque accounting systems into a private limited company founded on transparency and accountability had been long overdue.

PEDAN, therefore, acknowledges with delight that the appointment of seasoned technocrats with extensive expertise and vast experience from the private sector is a welcome development. It is a step toward restructuring the affairs of the national oil company for optimal

performance and the benefit of the Nigerian people.

"This visionary appointment represents a paradigm shift in resource management. It will foster the development of the industry and promote public-private sector collaboration," the statement read in part.

PEDAN noted that the reforms initiated in the industry through the Petroleum Industry Act will be sustained and deepened with the competent team of technocrats assembled by the President.

The group added that Tinubu's visionary leadership change at the NNPC will allow the company to operate according to the principles of good corporate governance, in line with industry standards and international best practices.

"While wishing the new management of NNPC a successful tenure, PEDAN hereby appeals to them to approach their assignments with patriotism, dedication, and a sense of responsibility.

"We also call on all industry players to provide the necessary support to the NNPC management to ensure their success, as their success is a success for Nigeria and all Nigerians," the statement concluded.



HEALTH INSURANCE:

LR: Director General, Edo State Health Insurance Commission (EdoHIC), Dr Mrs Augusta Ikpea Enaholo, and Edo State Coordinator of the National Health Insurance, Mr. Theodore Ehanire.

Uromi killings: Edo Police Commissioner says no reprisal attacks expected

IDAHOSA MUSA

The newly appointed Commissioner of Police in Edo State, CP Monday Agbonika, has assured residents that no reprisal attacks are anticipated following the recent killing of 16 hunters from Kano State in Uromi, Esan North-East Local Government Area.

Speaking during a visit to the Edo State Council of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) on Thursday, Agbonika stated that the state government, under Governor Monday Okpebholo, had taken proactive steps to de-escalate tensions and prevent any outbreak of violence.

"A number of decisive measures have been taken regarding the Uromi incident, and at this point, we do not foresee any reprisal attacks," the police commissioner said.

He praised Governor Okpebholo's swift response, highlighting his outreach to affected communities both within and outside the state.

"The governor has done a lot—when I first resumed duty, we visited Uromi together. Prior to that, he travelled to Kano State to commiserate with the families of the deceased and to appeal for calm. He urged them to speak to their people residing in Edo State to ensure that peace is maintained."

Agbonika further disclosed that the governor's peace mission had prompted a reciprocal visit by the Kano State Government. "As a result of his efforts, the deputy governor of Kano State visited Edo to demonstrate solidarity and support peaceful coexistence."

According to Agbonika, both

the Esan and Hausa communities in Uromi were engaged in dialogue during the visit, which contributed significantly to easing tensions. "We met with stakeholders from both the Hausa and Esan communities. The dialogue, along with other measures taken by the governor, helped to calm nerves and correct misinformation."

He added that his peace-building efforts extended beyond Uromi. "I did not stop at Uromi. I visited neighbouring areas with significant northern populations—places like Igara and Auchi—where I met with community leaders. I made it clear that we must continue to live in peace despite what has happened. And I've received assurances from their leaders that they remain committed to peaceful coexistence."

CP Agbonika emphasised

the importance of community cooperation in sustaining peace and tackling crime.

He said the police command was intensifying operations across the state, particularly targeting criminal hideouts.

"As part of our renewed strategy, all officers have been mobilised to conduct patrols and comb through criminal enclaves. We are taking this fight to every corner of the state. But we cannot do it alone—we need the support of the public. I urge residents to share useful information with us and to give us the benefit of the doubt. Let us see what unfolds in the next three months."

In response, the NUJ Chairman in Edo State, Dr Festus Alenkhe, pledged the union's cooperation with the police in their efforts to tackle crime and maintain order.

Edo govt hosts workshop to review, strengthen digital policy framework

UKOKO OGHENEYOLEME

Edo State government has reiterated its commitment to digital transformation by convening a two-day strategic policy review workshop aimed at creating a more inclusive, responsive, and innovation-driven digital governance framework.

Held under the auspices of the Edo Digital Policy Project, the workshop marks a significant effort to reassess and refine the state's digital development agenda.

It brought together top government officials and stakeholders from the digital ecosystem to examine the current policy environment and identify pathways to enhance its effectiveness.

Declaring the session open, the Commissioner for Information and Communication, Barrister Paul Ohonbamu, represented by the Permanent Secretary, Dr Desmond Agbama highlighted Edo State's vision of building a digitally inclusive society where technology improves government operations, public service delivery, and citizen participation.

According to Dr Agbama, the objective is to align the digital policy framework with present-day realities, while ensuring that Ministries, Departments, and Agencies

(MDAs) are fully equipped to adopt and implement modern governance technologies.

A key feature of the workshop was an interactive session facilitated by digital governance expert, Osayi Omokaro, who guided participants through core principles of e-Governance and digital interfacing, focusing on tools to enhance both civil and public service performance.

Notable attendees included the Permanent Secretary of the State Transformation Office, Dr Mrs Joy Akhigbe; Director of Documentation and Publication, Mr Matthew Okunsebor; Director of Communication, Mr Dan Odion; Director of Finance and Accounts, Mrs Grace Ogbeide; and Director of Shared Services, Mrs Omosigho Joy. They were joined by other senior officials from across various MDAs.



OKPEBHOLO

Dr. Osehobo bags award for pioneering telemedicine breakthrough in Edo's rural clinics

Dr. Philip Osehobo has been recognised with a distinguished award at the 2025 Association of Nigerian Physicians in the Americas (ANPA) conference, held at the EKO Hotel and Suites in Lagos, for leading a transformative telemedicine project that is reshaping healthcare deliv-

ery in rural Edo State.

The accolade was awarded in celebration of a year-long study titled "Telemedicine Promise for Tomorrow: The Role of Video Synchronous Medical Consultation in a Primary Health Center (PHC) in a Sub-Saharan Africa Setting."

The project brought togeth-

er Dr. Osehobo of Grace Medical Clinic in Griffin, Georgia, USA, and three co-researchers—Pamela Moye of Mercer University in Atlanta, Dr. Teresa Pounds of Clinipharm Global Health USA and the University of Benin, and Dr. Obehi Akoria of the University of Benin Teaching Hospital.

The research was conducted across three primary health-care centres located in Oredo, Ukpenu, and Ugbor, where synchronous, two-way video consultations connected local

patients with physicians based in the United States.

The initiative focused on individuals with chronic illnesses—particularly hypertension and diabetes—who often face barriers to consistent medical care due to poverty and remoteness.

Findings from the pilot were compelling. Of the 75 participants, two-thirds of whom were women with an average age of 66, notable clinical improvements were recorded. Systolic blood pressure fell significantly—by as much as 22 mmHg at both the

Oredo and Ukpenu centres. Diabetic patients in Ukpenu also showed marked reductions in fasting glucose levels.

Speaking at the event, Dr. Osehobo hailed the recognition as a victory for both innovation and equity in healthcare, emphasising that the project proved how modern technology and global partnerships can bridge the healthcare divide and reach the most marginalised populations.

Dr. Akoria, representing the research team, described the results as a strong endorsement

of telemedicine as a viable strategy for strengthening Nigeria's struggling primary health sector, urging policy-makers and institutions to adopt and scale such solutions nationwide.

The award not only celebrates individual achievement but also signals a wider shift toward digital health interventions on the continent. It highlights the growing role of diaspora-led collaborations in addressing Africa's longstanding healthcare challenges through innovative, tech-driven models.

Remi Tinubu urges Ondo monarchs to help end HIV, FGM

The wife of the President, Senator Oluremi Tinubu, has called on traditional rulers in Ondo State to help eradicate female genital mutilation, Hepatitis B, and other diseases affecting women in the state.

Mrs Tinubu also urged them to support her advocacy in tackling pressing health challenges affecting Nigerian women, including the elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis B, Syphilis, and Tuberculosis, among others.

She made the call during a meeting with members of the Ondo State Council of Obas in Akure, the state capital, as part of her visit to the state on Thursday.

Tinubu said, "Ending female genital mutilation is also one of our key priorities. It is a harmful and outdated tradition built on myths. It does not stop promiscuity, as some believe. Instead, it destroys the lives of young girls."

The Nigerian First Lady, who also flagged off the South-West leg of the Renewed Hope Initiative as part of efforts to improve

the well-being of women and girls across the country, announced plans to distribute no fewer than 10,000 professional kits — comprising Crocs and scrubs — to nurses and midwives in the South-West region.

She also introduced a new menstrual hygiene campaign, tagged Flow with Confidence, through which her office intends to supply 10,000 sanitary pads to young girls in each state, with a focus on rural areas.

In his remarks, the Chairman of the State Council of Obas and Olowo of Owo, Oba Gbadegesin Ogunoye, who was represented by the Deji of Akure, Oba Aladetoyinbo Aladelusi, commended Mrs Tinubu's initiatives and pledged the support and prayers of the traditional institution.

The monarch said, "We may not be able to offer financial help, but our prayers will never cease for the success of President Tinubu's administration."

He also praised the First Lady's loyalty and visible support for her husband, stating that "By the time Asiwaju completes his first term, Nigerians will beg him to go for another."



NIGERIA SPOKESPERSONS SUMMIT:

The President and Chairman of Governing Council, Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR), Dr Ike Neliaku, fnipr, (right) with the Director General of Delta State Orientation and Communications Bureau cum Public Relations Officer, Delta State Chapter of NIPR, Dr Fred Latimore Oghesivbe Esq at the just concluded Nigeria Spokespersons Summit held in Abuja.

Edo honoured for strides in health insurance delivery

FRED EZEH

The Edo State Health Insurance Commission (EDHIC) has been honoured with the inaugural Leadership Award of the Institute for Health Insurance and Managed Care of Nigeria (IHIMN), in recognition of its exceptional contributions to healthcare delivery through health insurance.

At the IHIMN 2025 Leadership Awards night held in Abuja on Tuesday, the award for Best Health Insurance and Managed Care Government Agency in Health Care Coordination and Management was presented to the Edo State government and received by the Director General of EDHIC, Mrs Augusta Ikpea Enaholo.

According to the leadership of IHIMN, EDHIC has emerged as a model institution nationally, particularly for its effective coordination and management of healthcare services. The institute noted that EDHIC stands out among a small number of state-run health insurance bodies that have consistently pro-

vided quality and sustainable health coverage for their populations, a distinction which merited the recognition.

Mrs Enaholo, while accepting the award, described it as a deep honour and a reaffirmation of the shared commitment to building a health insurance system that is inclusive, sustainable, and responsive to the needs of Edo people.

"To be acknowledged by an institution rooted in excellence, research and advocacy is both humbling and energising," she said. "At EDHIC, we have always held the belief that access to quality healthcare is not a privilege but a fundamental right."

"In the past year, we have introduced innovations, built strong partnerships with public and private stakeholders, and, most importantly, engaged directly with those we serve. From digitising our enrolment processes, expanding provider networks across all 18 local government areas, to improving claims and care coordination, our efforts have been focused on one goal: ensuring no one is left behind."

NGF condoles Plateau gov over killings, urges unity, dialogue

The Nigeria Governors' Forum visited Plateau on Thursday and condoled with Governor Caleb Mutfwang over the recent attacks and killings in the state.

Governor Abdulrahman Abdulrazaq of Kwara State and Chairman of the forum led other governors on the visit.

He said that the visit was to commiserate with the government and people of Plateau over the recent security breach in some parts of the state.

Abdulrazaq, who commended the security agencies for their swift response, called on key stakeholders in the state to support the government's efforts

towards ending the cycle of killings in the state.

"On behalf of NGF and the people of our various states, I bring you sincere words of condolences on the unfortunate events in which many of our compatriots have lost their lives.

"We call on leaders and influencers across all communities and sectors in Plateau to join the governor in the task of uniting the people and restoring sustainable peace.

"Leaders should come together to speak strongly against violence of any kind; we urge the good people of Plateau to resolve all differences through dialogue, fair negotiations, mutual respect,

and perspective taking.

"Sustainable development can be a mirage in an atmosphere of tension and violence; Plateau is full of potential, especially in agriculture and tourism.

"But these potentials could be affected negatively if we allow violence or threats of it to define how people see our communities," he said.

Abdulrazaq, who commended Mutfwang for the steps taken to forestall similar occurrences in the future, added that the visit was also to show solidarity with their colleague.

Responding, Mutfwang thanked his colleagues for the visit, insisting that the visit had

further strengthened him to ensure the safety of lives and property in the state.

The governor, who vowed to secure lives and property in the state, commended President Bola Tinubu for supporting the state in its trying times.

He, however, called on the security agencies to intensify border security, insisting that the perpetrators of the attacks were largely foreigners.

Other governors who visited were Hyacinth Alia of Benue, Babagana Zulum of Borno, Bala Mohammed of Bauchi, Seyi Makinde of Oyo, and Dr Emmanuel Akabe, the Deputy Governor of Nasarawa State.

World Economy should avoid recession despite tariffs —IMF

IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva delivered a keynote speech ahead of the IMF/WB Spring Meetings at IMF headquarters in Washington, DC, on April 17, 2025. (Photo by Jim WATSON / AFP).

The global economy is likely to avoid a recession despite the hit to growth from US President Donald Trump's tariff rollout, the head of the International Monetary Fund said Thursday.

The stop-start US tariff plans have fueled levels of market volatility unseen since the Covid-19 pandemic, and most economists expect the imposition of new import levies will stifle growth and push up inflation, at least in the short term.

Trade disruptions "incur costs," IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva told reporters in Washington on Thursday according to prepared remarks, adding that the Fund now ex-

pects "notable" markdowns to growth but no recession.

"This is a reminder that we live in a world of sudden and sweeping shifts," she said of the recent market volatility during her speech, which came ahead of next week's Spring Meetings — a gathering of global financial leaders co-hosted by the IMF and the World Bank in the US capital.

"And it is a call to respond wisely," she added.

Her comments suggest the IMF will use its upcoming World Economic Report, published Tuesday, to pare back its previous forecast for global growth to hit 3.3 percent in 2025 and 2026.

IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva arrives to deliver a keynote speech ahead of the IMF/WB Spring Meetings at IMF headquarters in Washington, DC, on April 17, 2025. (Photo by Jim WATSON / AFP).

Friday Sermon

The rights and responsibilities in Islamic neighbourhood

ABDUL-KADIR ABDULLAH

Praise be to Allah, the Lord of all that exists. We praise Him, seek His help, and ask for His forgiveness. We seek refuge in Allah from the evil of our own souls and from the evil consequences of our deeds. Whomsoever Allah guides, none can lead astray, and whomsoever Allah leaves astray, none can guide. I bear witness that there is no god but Allah, alone, without any partners, and I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and messenger. May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, his family, his companions, and all those who follow him in righteousness until the Day of Judgment.

O servants of Allah! Fear Allah as He should be feared, and do not die except as Muslims.

Today, in this blessed congregation, we turn our hearts and minds to a fundamental pillar of our faith, a cornerstone of a thriving and compassionate society, the concept of neighbourhood in Islam. This is not merely a matter of geographical proximity; rather, it is a profound spiritual and social obligation, deeply rooted in the teachings of the Holy Quran and the Sunnah of our beloved Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him).

Islam, as a comprehensive way of life, meticulously outlines the rights and responsibilities that individuals hold towards one another, fostering a harmonious and supportive community.

Among these rights, the rights of the neighbour occupy a significant and elevated position. The Quran and Sunnah are replete with injunctions emphasizing the importance of treating neighbours with kindness, respect, and compassion. Neglecting these rights is not merely a social failing; it is a transgression against the very principles of our faith, potentially leading to spiritual deficiency and divine displeasure.

Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala emphasizes the importance of neighbours in the very fabric of our existence, mentioning them alongside the most fundamental relationships in Surah An-Nisa (4:36):

"Worship Allah and associate nothing with Him, and to parents do good, and to relatives, orphans, the needy, the near neighbour, the distant neighbour, the companion at your side, the traveler, and those whom your right hands possess. Indeed, Allah does not like those who are self-deluding and boastful."

In this powerful verse, Allah Almighty enjoins us to treat the neighbour, both near and distant, with *ihsan* – excellence, goodness, and kindness. This is not a mere suggestion; it is a divine command, placed alongside the fundamental duty of worshipping Allah alone and being good to parents and relatives. The inclusion of both the "near neighbour" (*al-jaar dhi al-qurba*) and the "distant neighbour" (*al-jaar al-junub*) highlights the universality of this obligation. It transcends familial ties and geographical closeness, encompassing all those who reside in our vicinity, regardless of their background, faith, or social standing.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) further elaborated on the profound significance of the neighbour's rights through his

words and actions. So emphatic were his pronouncements that the companions even began to believe that neighbours would inherit from one another. Imam Bukhari and Muslim narrated from Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said:

"Angel Jibril (Gabriel) continued to advise me concerning the neighbour until I thought he would make him an heir."

This powerful statement underscores the immense importance Allah and His Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him) placed on the well-being and rights of the neighbour. The constant reminders from the angel Jibril, the intermediary of divine revelation, highlight that fulfilling the rights of the neighbour is not a peripheral matter but a central tenet of Islamic conduct.

What then are these rights that Islam so strongly emphasizes? They are multifaceted and encompass various aspects of our interactions with those around us.

KINDNESS AND GOOD TREATMENT (AL-IHSAN):

The cornerstone of neighbourly relations in Islam is kindness and good treatment. This includes speaking to them politely, greeting them warmly, and showing them a friendly disposition. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said:

"Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, let him be good to his neighbour." (Sahih Muslim)

This hadith connects good treatment of the neighbour directly to the very essence of faith. It is a manifestation of one's belief in Allah and the accountability of the Hereafter.

AVOIDING HARM AND ANNOYANCE (Kaff al-Adha):

Just as important as being kind is refraining from causing any harm or annoyance to our neighbours. This includes physical harm, verbal abuse, spreading rumors, or any action that might disturb their peace and tranquility.

Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala warns against those who harm their believing men and women without any just cause in Surah Al-Ahzab (33:58):

"And those who harm believing men and believing women for [something] other than what they have earned have certainly borne upon themselves a slander and manifest sin."

While this verse specifically mentions harming believers, the principle extends to all neighbours, regardless of their faith. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said:

"By Allah, he does not believe! By Allah, he does not believe! By Allah, he does not believe!" It was said, "Who, O Messenger of Allah?" He said, "The one whose neighbour is not safe from his evil deeds." (Sahih Bukhari and Muslim)

This stern warning highlights the severity of harming one's neighbour. It negates the very claim of faith if a person's neighbour does not feel secure from their ill-treatment.

SHOWING COMPASSION AND SUPPORT (Al-Rahmah wal-Mu'awanah):

Islam encourages us to be compassionate and supportive towards our neighbours, especially in times of need.

This includes visiting them when they are sick, offering condolences when they are bereaved, and helping them overcome difficulties.

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said:

"He is not a believer who eats his fill while his neighbour beside him is hungry and he knows it." (Al-Mu'jam Al-Kabir by At-Tabarani)

This hadith emphasizes the importance of being aware of our neighbours' circumstances and extending a helping hand when they are in need. It is a powerful reminder that our faith is not just about individual piety but also about our responsibility towards the community around us.

PRESERVING THEIR PRIVACY (Sitruhum):

Islam teaches us the importance of respecting the privacy of our neighbours and not intruding into their personal lives. We should avoid eavesdropping, spying, or spreading information about them that they would not want to be public. Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala says in Surah Al-Hujurat (49:12):

"O you who have believed, avoid much [negative] assumption. Indeed, some assumption is sin. And do not spy or backbite one another. Would one of you like to eat the flesh of his brother when dead? You would detest it. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is Accepting of repentance and Merciful."

While this verse addresses believers in general, the principle of avoiding suspicion, spying, and backbiting is particularly relevant in the context of neighbourly relations, where proximity can sometimes lead to unwarranted interference.

RESPONDING TO THEIR INVITATIONS AND ACCEPTING THEIR GIFTS (Ijabatul Da'watihim wa Qabulul Hadaayaahim):

Islam encourages us to foster positive relationships with our neighbours by responding to their invitations and accepting their gifts, as long as there is nothing contrary to Islamic principles involved. This strengthens the bonds of friendship and goodwill within the community. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said:

"Respond to the invitation and do not reject the gift." (Sahih Bukhari in Al-Adab Al-Mufrad).

Allah does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes - from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly

OFFERING CONGRATULATIONS IN TIMES OF JOY AND CONDOLENCES IN TIMES OF SORROW (Tahni'atuhum fil-Afrah wa Ta'ziyatuhum fil-Atrah):

Sharing in the joys and sorrows of our neighbours is an essential aspect of Islamic brotherhood and neighbourly conduct. Offering congratulations on happy occasions and expressing condolences during times of grief strengthens the social fabric and provides emotional support.

FORBEARING THEIR MISTAKES AND OVERLOOKING THEIR SHORTCOMINGS (Al-Sabru 'ala Akhtaa'ihim wat-Taghaful 'an Zallaatihim):

As human beings, we are all prone to making mistakes. Islam teaches us to be patient with our neighbours, to overlook their minor shortcomings, and to avoid being overly critical or judgmental. This fosters a spirit of tolerance and understanding within the community.

MAINTAINING GOOD RELATIONS EVEN IF THEY ARE NON-MUSLIMS (Husnul-Jawar ma'a Ghairil-Muslimeen):

The rights of the neighbour in Islam extend even to those who are not Muslims. We are commanded to treat them with justice, kindness, and respect, and to avoid any form of oppression or discrimination. Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala says in Surah Al-Mumtahanah (60:8):

"Allah does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes - from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly."

This verse clearly establishes the principle of treating non-Muslim neighbours with righteousness (*birr*) and justice (*qist*), as long as they do not initiate hostility.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF NEGLECTING NEIGHBOURLY RIGHTS:

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) warned against the severe consequences of neglecting the rights of the neighbour.

He said: "He will not enter Paradise whose neighbour is not safe from his evil deeds." (Sahih Muslim)

This is a grave warning, highlighting the seriousness with which Islam views the transgression of neighbourly rights. It indicates that neglecting these obligations can have dire consequences in the Hereafter.

Furthermore, strained neighbourly relations can lead to social fragmentation, mistrust, and conflict within the community. A society where neighbours are at odds with each other is a weak and unstable society, lacking the essential bonds of cooperation and mutual support that Islam seeks to cultivate.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PROACTIVE ENGAGEMENT:

Fulfilling the rights of the neighbour is not merely about avoiding harm; it also involves proactive engagement in fostering positive relationships. This includes taking the initiative to greet them, offering help when needed, and showing genuine interest in their well-being.

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) encouraged visiting the sick, attending funerals, and sharing in the joys and sorrows of our neighbours.

These acts of kindness and compassion strengthen the bonds of community and create a supportive environment for all.

PRACTICAL STEPS TOWARDS BETTER NEIGHBOURLY RELATIONS: How can we, as individuals and as a community, improve our neighbourly relations and fulfill our Islamic obligations? Here are some practical steps:

BE MINDFUL OF NOISE LEVELS: Avoid loud music, excessive construction noise, or any other disturbances that might affect your neighbours, especially during rest hours.

MAINTAIN THE CLEANLINESS OF YOUR SURROUNDINGS: Ensure that your property is clean and does not negatively impact the cleanliness or aesthetics of the neighbourhood.

BE CONSIDERATE WITH PARKING: Avoid blocking driveways or parking in a way that inconveniences your neighbours.

OFFER ASSISTANCE WHEN NEEDED: Be observant of your neighbours' needs, especially the elderly, the sick, or those with young children, and offer help when appropriate.

RESOLVE DISPUTES PEACEFULLY: If disagreements arise, strive to resolve them amicably through dialogue and understanding, rather than resorting to confrontation or aggression.

TEACH CHILDREN THE IMPORTANCE OF RESPECTING NEIGHBOURS: Instill in our children the values of kindness, respect, and consideration for those living around us.

PARTICIPATE IN COMMUNITY INITIATIVES: Engage in activities that promote unity and cooperation within the neighbourhood.

MAKE DUA (SUPPLICATION) FOR YOUR NEIGHBOURS: Pray for their well-being and happiness.

THE IDEAL ISLAMIC NEIGHBOURHOOD:

The ideal Islamic neighbourhood is one characterized by mutual respect, compassion, cooperation, and a strong sense of community. It is a place where individuals feel safe, supported, and valued, regardless of their background or circumstances. This vision can only be realized when each member of the community actively strives to fulfill their obligations towards their neighbours, guided by the teachings of the Quran and the Sunnah.

Finally, O servants of Allah! The rights of the neighbour in Islam are not mere social etiquette; they are a sacred trust, a fundamental aspect of our faith that reflects the interconnectedness of our community and the importance of compassion and justice in our interactions. Let us strive to emulate the teachings of the Quran and the example of our Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) in our dealings with our neighbours, both near and distant, Muslim and non-Muslim. Let us cultivate relationships based on kindness, respect, and mutual support, thereby strengthening the fabric of our society and earning the pleasure of Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala.

May Allah grant us the understanding and the ability to fulfill the rights of our neighbours in the best possible manner, and may He make our communities places of peace, harmony, and compassion.

Feature

Governor Okpebholo as PDP's nemesis

KASSIM AFEGBUA

Governor Okpebholo comes across as an uncommon personality doing uncommon things with less talk, but greater reach. Those who once wrote unpalatable stories about him and dismissed him with benign remarks have since eaten their words. Today, many of them have become enthusiastic promoters of this easy-going Governor who remains focused on his objectives.

They insulted his intellect, mocked his calm demeanour, misunderstood his candour, and underestimated his political reach. In the end, Governor Okpebholo defeated his opponents handsomely. Some of his critics have even turned into unsolicited publicists, now singing his praises and showering him with superlatives as he transforms Edo State into a massive construction site.

From roads and education to health, sanitation, security, and job creation, Okpebholo has proven to be a hardworking leader. He is driven by the desire not to disappoint the people of Edo, who have placed their collective trust in him. His popularity has soared not just because of his title, but because of the visible impact he is making in the lives of the people.

The PDP, lame and decrepit under Godwin Obaseki, continues to nurse its wounds. Lamenting both their electoral and tribunal defeats, they persist in delusion. Their candidate, Asue Ighodalo, is being misled to believe he can still secure what he failed to win at the polls—through the back door.

In a desperate bid to remain relevant, the PDP has assembled a handful of its idle loyalists into a so-called response team, feeding the public propaganda under the slogan "Joy is



OKPEBHOLO

coming." But Edo people are already experiencing joy under Okpebholo's administration, not waiting for a distant promise.

The PDP's statements have become incoherent and riddled with contradictions, seeking to resuscitate a conversation that has long been dead. The APC's tribunal victory only reaffirmed the resounding mandate Governor Okpebholo received from the discerning people of Edo.

So far, Okpebholo's performance has been superb. His rapport with the

people is rich, his listening ears assuring, and his compassion for the common man deeply rooted. His governance style is grounded in humility and purpose.

Yet the PDP's propaganda machine continues its lamentation, grieving not just their electoral loss, but the legacy of misrule under Obaseki. Obaseki's divisive and quarrelsome nature sowed discord and factionalism within the party. He denied Assembly members their right to inauguration, impeached his deputy, and

With the right energy and tone now echoing through the state, it is only fitting to pray for God's continued guidance and protection for Okpebholo. He stands poised to usher in an era of positive change, keeping Edo in the spotlight for all the right reasons

imposed a Labour Party member to fill the gap, even against a court order.

These acts of political impunity and the arbitrary choice of Asue Ighodalo as flag bearer—without due process—only deepened the PDP's crisis. Obaseki's reign was marred by intolerance and disunity, and Ighodalo became a willing participant in that theatre of political absurdity.

As Chairman of the Alaghodaro Summit and a key part of the Obaseki administration, Ighodalo ignored the signs of public discontent. Seduced by the allure of power, he failed to study the political terrain and was blindsided by the backlash.

In contrast, the APC presented Okpebholo, then a sitting senator representing Edo Central. Despite a wave of negative publicity, his humility and calm disposition offered voters a refreshing alternative to Obaseki's authoritarianism. Many saw Ighodalo as merely an extension of Obaseki—two sides of the same coin, even in the name: obASUEKI.

Okpebholo, fondly called Akpakomiza, became the antidote to Obaseki's political suffocation. Criss-crossing the state with a message of love and humility, he won hearts. After the election, former critics quickly changed tune, turning into his unsolicited advocates. Their hypocritical rhetoric now grows daily like an iceberg, cold and massive.

Following the tribunal's judgement, Ighodalo appeared deflated, yet tried to maintain a composed facade. But his defeated expression mirrored the loss he had just endured. He longed for a victory he failed to earn at the polls, but Edo voters had already made their choice—Okpebholo, wholly and decisively.

Governor Okpebholo has become the PDP's nightmare. In just a short period, he has embarked on projects that PDP failed to deliver in eight years. From flyovers and school renovations to job creation and road construction, he is rewriting the state's story—one previously tainted by Obaseki's draconian governance.

With the right energy and tone now echoing through the state, it is only fitting to pray for God's continued guidance and protection for Okpebholo. He stands poised to usher in an era of positive change, keeping Edo in the spotlight for all the right reasons. The moment has arrived—and Governor Okpebholo fits it perfectly.

Okpebholo's Shine Agenda: A strategic alignment with global devt goals

FRED ITUA

In an age where global development is increasingly measured by a set of universally accepted indicators such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Human Development Index (HDI), and the Global Competitiveness Report, the role of subnational governments in aligning with these benchmarks cannot be overstated. For states and regions to be meaningfully integrated into the global economy and development discourse, they must reflect intentional governance strategies that advance these objectives. In Edo State, Governor Monday Okpebholo is doing just that.

In his first five months in office, Governor Okpebholo has introduced the SHINE Agenda—a visionary roadmap that places Security, Health, Infrastructure, Natural Resources and Agriculture, and Education at the heart of Edo's transformation. Beyond being a domestic policy direction, SHINE is a strategic reflection of key pillars embedded in the SDGs. His approach demonstrates a clear understanding that local governance must not be insular but rather a contributor to the global pursuit of sustainable development.

No society can thrive without peace and the rule of law. That is why Goal 16 of the SDGs—Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions—emphasizes the creation of peaceful and inclusive societies. Governor Okpebholo's aggressive repositioning of the state's security architecture, especially through community-policing partnerships, intelligence coordination, and the containment of cult-related violence, directly feeds into this global objective.

The administration has also prioritized institutional collaboration with federal security agencies and local vigilante groups. By promoting security, the government is protecting livelihoods, enabling business confidence, and ensuring social cohesion—metrics that directly affect Edo's rating in global peace and competitiveness indexes.

The third SDG speaks directly to ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all. From the beginning of his administration, Governor Okpebholo made it clear that healthcare delivery must be equitable, accessible, and community-driven. His government has rehabilitated numerous primary health centres, deployed mobile clinics to rural areas, and recruited additional frontline health workers across the state.

The Governor's approach isn't mere-

ly infrastructural—it is also strategic. His emphasis on maternal and child health, disease prevention, and immunization campaigns align with global targets for reducing child mortality, increasing life expectancy, and preventing communicable diseases. In Edo today, health is no longer seen as a luxury but a constitutional right, which this government is determined to uphold.

Infrastructure is both a development indicator and an enabler. SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) place premium importance on the development of resilient infrastructure to foster economic growth and human well-being. Governor Okpebholo's infrastructural interventions—from urban road construction to rural electrification and drainage works—are opening up communities, boosting commerce, and raising standards of living.

In the last five months, dozens of roads have either been completed or are ongoing. These include key arteries connecting remote communities to urban centres, facilitating the movement of goods and people. Schools are being rebuilt, markets modernized, and public facilities upgraded—all as part of a larger plan to make Edo a functional,

inclusive, and resilient space for residents and investors alike.

Agriculture is the lifeline of many Edo communities. Recognizing this, the Governor has placed a renewed focus on agribusiness, food security, and climate-conscious resource management. SDG 2 aims to achieve zero hunger, while SDG 12 and SDG 13 advocate for responsible consumption and climate action, respectively. The administration's SHINE pillar on Natural Resources and Agriculture reflects these global concerns.

Governor Okpebholo is currently working to improve access to land for agriculture, strengthen extension services, and attract private-sector investments into agro-processing and value chain development. The promotion of sustainable farming practices and erosion control measures also positions Edo as a forward-looking state responsive to climate vulnerabilities.

A well-educated population is the surest pathway to innovation and long-term development. SDG 4 commits governments to ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education. Governor Okpebholo has matched this commitment by upgrading school infrastructure, training teachers, providing digital learning tools, and ensuring that

no child is left behind—especially in marginalized communities.

Under his administration, Edo is scaling up its education sector to meet global standards. From early childhood education to tertiary partnerships, the focus is on producing problem-solvers, entrepreneurs, and leaders. This long-view investment will shape the next generation of Edo's workforce and civic leadership.

In just five months, Governor Monday Okpebholo has proven that leadership is not about duration but direction. The SHINE agenda is not just a state policy—it is Edo State's declaration that it is ready to meet global development standards with clarity, courage, and competence.

As the world marches toward the 2030 deadline for achieving the SDGs, subnational actors like Edo State will be judged not just by budgets or bureaucracy but by vision, implementation, and impact. Under Governor Okpebholo's leadership, Edo is not only shining—it is aligning, advancing, and transforming in tune with the rest of the world.

Fred Itua is the Chief Press Secretary to the Edo State Governor.

US-Somali airstrike as battle rages for key town

The US and Somalia have carried out an airstrike against Islamist militants during a battle for control of a strategic central town, the government says.

The “well-coordinated” strike on Adan Yabaal, north of the capital Mogadishu, came hours after al-Shabab raided the town which is used as a key launchpad for military operations.

Among the 12 militants

killed in the airstrike were several senior fighters from the al-Qaeda-linked group, the Somali information ministry said in a statement on X.

The latest fighting comes amid fears of a jihadist resurgence in Somalia after growing militant attacks, including one that targeted President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud’s convoy last month.

Al-Shabab, which controls large parts of southern and

central Somalia, has been fighting the government for nearly 20 years. It seeks to overthrow the federal government and establish an Islamist state.

The African Union-led peacekeeping force helped push the jihadists onto the defensive in 2022 and 2023, but the group remains a big threat despite numerous military operations against it.

The Somali government insists the group has been weakened.

The airstrike late on Wednesday by Somali armed forces and the US Africa Command (Africom) “aimed to neutralize the threat posed” by militants, the information ministry said.

“The targeted strike hit a site used by the militants as a gathering and hideout,” it said, adding: “Importantly there were no civilian casualties.”

Adan Yabaal, in the Middle Shabelle region, was seized by

al-Shabab in 2016 before being recaptured by government forces in 2022.

Heavy fighting broke out early on Wednesday after al-Shabab fighters raided the town, using heavy explosives.

Later the group said it had captured the town. Two local residents told AFP news agency that militants had taken control of Adan Yabaal.

The government did not say who was currently in control of the town.

President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud visited the town last

month and met military commanders, underscoring its strategic significance in the fight against the militants.

In a separate incident, the national army said it killed at least 35 fighters near the city of Baidoa on Thursday, after they attempted to attack an army base there, the ministry said.

President Mohamud has downplayed the al-Shabab advances, saying that occasional battlefield setbacks were inevitable. He has maintained that his government was determined to defeat the militants.



LAUNCHED SERIES:

Al-Shabab has in recent months regrouped and launched a series of counter-attacks (file photo).

Ex-Russian general jailed for seven years over bribes

A former top Russian general has been jailed for seven years after being accused of taking bribes.

Lt Gen Vadim Shamarin was arrested last year during a crackdown on corruption in the defence ministry launched by the Kremlin, and was accused of taking “a particularly large bribe” from a telecommunications company.

Russia’s Investigative Committee said he took bribes worth 36

million roubles (£331,000) between 2019 and 2023 from a factory that produces communications equipment - and, in return, increased the size of state contracts awarded to the company.

Prior to his arrest he had served as deputy chief of the army’s general staff overseeing the signals corps and military communications.

Russia’s Tass news agency quoted Shamarin’s lawyer as saying: “In total, Shamarin was

sentenced to seven years in a maximum security penal colony, a seven-year ban on public service, and was stripped of his military rank.”

The court also confiscated 36 million roubles from him, the RIA Novosti news agency reported.

Shamarin was among several senior defence ministry figures who were detained last year, which also included deputy defence minister Timur Ivanov and Lt Gen Yuri Kuznetsov,

head of the defence ministry’s personnel directorate.

It came after Russian President Vladimir Putin dismissed his long-term Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu in May 2024.

He was replaced by Andrei Belousov, an economist with little military experience.

Experts suggested that the corruption crackdown marked an attempt by the Kremlin to boost efficiency in the Russian military.

French jails have come under attack are violent drug gangs to blame

Officially, all lines of enquiry are still open into a wave of arson and gun attacks at French prisons.

That means police haven’t ruled out the extremist left, or a foreign power such as Russia or Algeria.

But the conviction is growing that the attacks - 12 since Sunday night - can only have been the work of drugs gangs, hitting back at the government’s latest crackdown.

That is certainly the belief of the government itself.

Speaking on Thursday morning, Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau said he was “certain that what we’re dealing with is the drugs-yobs [in French, narco-racaille]”.

“It’s not they who have declared war on us. It’s we who declared war on them with our new law on drugs trafficking. They know we’re going to be

hitting their wallets.”

In what was obviously a co-ordinated plan over three nights, gangs set fire to cars outside prisons and a prison officer training centre. In two locations, guns were used.

In many attacks, the perpetrators sprayed graffiti bearing the initials DDPF, which stands for Droits des Prisonniers Français - Rights for French Prison Inmates.

The group was previously unheard of, but on Tuesday it posted a video on the messaging platform Telegram showing the burning of a prison officer’s car.

In French that is full of mistakes, the video’s text accuses Justice Minister Gérard Darmanin of declaring “war” on prisoners.

“All we want is that human rights be respected,” the text reads. “If in 2025 we can watch TV, smoke and eat our meals without

being bothered in our cells, it’s only because our elders fought for these fundamental rights.”

Presenting themselves as defenders of human rights may not be the usual methodology of drugs gangs.

But nor does the DDPF come across as a classic far-left or anarchist organisation, which might more naturally be fighting for the cause.

For one thing, such groups tend to have intellectual underpinning which means they write grammatical and properly spelled French. Nor have far-left groups till now made prisoners’ rights a particular issue.

Investigators have said that perpetrators of the attacks caught on video were dressed more like drugs-gang foot soldiers rather than far-left militants, who tend to come from a different social background.

And in one location they wrote the wrong set of initials - DDFM - suggesting that their attachment to the supposed organisation was not exactly deep.

The theory of foreign manipulation is taken seriously - especially after proven cases of Russian interference such as the spraying of Stars of David in Paris after the October 7 attacks.

Relations with Algeria are also at an all-time low at the moment.

But if the drugs gang theory is the favoured one, it is because means and motivation are both so easy to grasp.

The French government currently includes an unusual tandem: an interior and a justice minister who are not rivals; who are both on the political right; and who have pledged to fight head-on the scourge that they say is the drugs trade.

US to hold talks on Ukraine with European allies

Donald Trump’s special envoy Steve Witkoff and top diplomat Marco Rubio were due to hold talks with European counterparts in Paris later on Thursday to discuss efforts to end the war in Ukraine.

Ukraine’s foreign minister and defence minister have arrived in the French capital to take part in the discussions.

The talks, hosted by French President Emmanuel Macron, form the highest level of transatlantic engagement about the war since February.

European diplomats have said they will urge the US to put more pressure on Russia to agree an unconditional ceasefire.

“We want the US to use a bit more stick,” one official said.

Ongoing efforts to secure a ceasefire come days after a Russian missile attack killed at least 35 people and injured 117 in the Ukrainian city of Sumy.

Earlier this month, at least 18 people died in a strike on a residential area in Kryvyi Rih.

Overnight on Wednesday, Ukrainian authorities said a Russian drone attack on the city of Dnipro killed three people, including a young girl.

US Secretary of State Mar-

co Rubio and Witkoff will join meetings at the Elysée Palace attended by Macron, the UK’s national security advisor Jonathan Powell, as well as other European national security advisers.

There will also be a separate meeting of foreign ministers, which UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy is expected to attend.

The US State Department said the focus would be on how to end the fighting in Ukraine, and that Witkoff would report on his meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin last week.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky’s chief of staff Andriy Yermak said “we are working on important issues for the security of Ukraine and the whole of Europe”.

When asked about the talks, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said European leaders were focussed on “continuing the war”.

In May 2023, prior to returning to the White House, Trump said he would be able to settle the war between Russia and Ukraine “in 24 hours”.

His administration has taken action to drastically improve relations with Moscow, while seeking to broker a ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine.

Colombia declares health emergency after dozens die of yellow fever

Colombia has declared a nationwide health emergency after at least 34 people died of yellow fever, according to official figures.

Yellow fever is caused by a virus transmitted to humans by infected mosquitoes. It can be prevented by a vaccine which in most cases provides lifelong protection.

The government has urged people to get vaccinated ahead of the Easter weekend, a time when many Colombians travel to warmer areas where the mosquitos that spread the disease are more prevalent.

Health Minister Guillermo Alfonso Jaramillo said those going to high-risk areas would be required to show proof of vaccination.

The health minister said that there had been 74 confirmed cases of yellow fever in Colombia so far during this outbreak and urged people to get the vaccine, which in Colombia is

free of charge.

The number of cases reported is much higher than in recent years.

In 2023, there were only two cases, and there were none from 2019 to 2022, according to figures published by the ministry of health.

Mr Jaramillo told Colombian radio station RCN that the current outbreak had been particularly lethal “with a mortality rate of nearly 50% among those infected”.

Many of the yellow fever cases were clustered in the eastern part of Tolima province.

The area is known for its coffee plantations and beautiful landscapes and is popular with both national and international tourists.

Colombian President Gustavo Petro warned on social media that “people who have not been vaccinated should not go to high-risk areas during Easter: for now the coffee area”.

News

Foreign

UK bans EU cheese and meat to stop disease spreading

The UK government has brought in a temporary ban on holidaymakers bringing in cheese and meat products from the EU in a bid to prevent the spread of foot and mouth disease (FMD).

Travellers have not been allowed to bring back items such as cured meat and cheese, including in sandwiches, since Saturday due to the growing outbreak on the continent.

The restrictions apply regardless of whether the goods are packed or packaged, or bought from duty free.

It follows an earlier ban of similar products from Germany, Hungary, Slovakia and Austria after rising cases of the cattle disease in those countries.

FMD is a highly infectious virus that causes blisters inside an animal's mouth and under their hooves, and can cause lameness and problems feeding.

It causes no risk to humans and there are currently no cases of foot-and-mouth disease in the UK.

Any products of animal origin, like meat and dairy, could potentially be contaminated with FMD.

There are concerns that if contaminated products enter the UK, even if they are designed for human consumption, there is a chance that they could be consumed by animals - for instance if they are thrown away in a way that could come into contact with foraging wildlife or domestic livestock.

The restrictions apply to people arriving in Great Britain, not Northern Ireland, Jersey, Guernsey, or the Isle of Man.

Products will be seized and destroyed if people try to bring them in, and in "serious cases" people could be fined up to

£5,000.

The list of restricted products includes:

pork, beef, lamb, mutton, goat, venison, other products made from these meats, for example sausages, milk and dairy products like butter, cheese and yoghurt.

People can bring up to 2kg per person of powdered infant milk, infant food, or special food needed for medical reasons.

In 2001, an outbreak of FMD in the UK led to the culling of millions of animals. Although there were only 2,000 confirmed cases, more than six million sheep, cattle and pigs were slaughtered.

This is because each of those cases meant a farm having all of its livestock killed and burned.

The last outbreak of FMD in the UK was in 2007, although this was much smaller with only eight infected premises concentrated in one small area of the country.

Tom Bradshaw, the president of the National Farmers Union (NFU), said the government had been quick to bring in the initial ban and the NFU was glad it was now being extended.

"While the FMD source remains unidentified in parts of Europe, stricter border controls are essential," he said.

"It's imperative we have a comprehensive cross-government biosecurity plan with the necessary investment behind it, and which would place these restrictions on a permanent legislative footing."

The Guild of Fine Food, which represents independent food and drink retailers, said the ban on "holiday treats" had been "hurried", but added it brought UK government policy for holidaymakers more in line with restrictions already placed on small businesses.



ALLEGEDLY SHOT:

Erik and Lyle Menendez allegedly shot and killed their parents to gain access to their wealth

Tesla whistleblower wins latest legal battle in fight against Musk

A Tesla whistleblower who has fought Elon Musk and his company through the courts for years has won the latest round of a long-running legal battle.

Engineer Cristina Balan lost her job after she raised a safety concern in 2014 about a design flaw which could affect the cars' braking.

Her defamation claim against the firm seemed to have run out of road when a judge confirmed an arbitration decision dismissing her case - but a panel of appeal judges in California has reversed this decision in her favour.

She told BBC News she now wants to face Elon Musk and Tesla in open court.

Tesla has not responded to a request for comment.

Ms Balan said she believes the case will now in effect go back to square one, and new proceedings can be launched.

"We are hoping we will start a new lawsuit and we will have the chance to take on Elon Musk in front of a jury and judge," she said.

The engineer was once so prominent at Tesla that her initials were engraved on the batteries inside Model S vehicles.

In an interview with BBC News last year, she said she is determined to prove her innocence for the sake of her son.

She also revealed she was in remission from stage-3B breast cancer, and her biggest worry

was she may not live to see her final day in court.

Ms Balan claimed she was worried the carpets were curling underneath some pedals in Tesla models, creating a safety hazard.

She said managers rebuffed her concerns, became hostile, and she lost her job.

She then won a wrongful dismissal case - but this turned out to be the start of a long journey through the courts.

Ms Balan was publicly accused by Tesla of using its resources for a "secret project" - accusations which amount to embezzlement, a crime under US law.

She has consistently denied the accusation, and decided to bring a defamation case against the firm in 2019.

"I want to clear my name," she told BBC News last year.

"I wish Elon Musk had the decency to apologise."

A court then decided Ms Balan's case should be subject to arbitration per a contract she signed while working for Tesla.

The arbitrator found in favour of the firm and Musk, dismissing her claims, due to California's statute of limitations - meaning too much time had passed since the alleged defamatory statements were made.

Tesla brought the case back to

a district court in California to have the decision confirmed.

However, Ms Balan appealed this decision, and judges from the US Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit found in her favour - in effect deciding the California court did not have the jurisdiction to make its judgement.

They have ordered for the confirmation of the arbitration award to be cancelled, and for the district court to dismiss the action due to its lack of jurisdiction.

What could happen next?

The majority of legal experts the BBC has spoken to believe the case has some way to go before there will be any conclusion.

"Tesla is among the many corporations that force employees and customers into opaque arbitration processes and deploy aggressive strategies to retaliate against employees who voice criticism of corporate practices," said Stanford professor Anat Admati.

And Bill Moran, Ms Balan's attorney, agreed the legal process is far from over.

But he said the case was "revived" by the latest ruling.

"We are confident we can secure her either a new arbitration or alternatively a trial in court so that her case can be heard on the merits after so many years," he said.

Trump administration threatens Harvard with foreign student ban

The US government has threatened to ban Harvard University from enrolling foreign students - after the institution said it would not bow to demands from President Donald Trump's administration and was hit with a funding freeze.

The White House has demanded the oldest university in the US make changes to hiring, admissions and teaching practices - to help fight antisemitism on campus.

Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem has asked for records on what she called the "illegal and violent" activities of its foreign student visa-holders.

Harvard earlier said it had taken many steps to address antisemitism, and that demands were an effort to regulate the university's "intellectual conditions".

"The university will not surrender its independence or relinquish its constitutional rights," Harvard President Alan Garber wrote in a message on Monday to the Harvard community.

The new request from Noem said the institution would lose the "privilege of enrolling foreign students" if it did not com-

ply with the demand for records.

Harvard said it was aware of the new request from Noem, which was made in a letter, the Reuters news agency reported.

International students make up more than 27% of Harvard's enrolment this year. Even before Noem's statement, billions of dollars hung in the balance for the university, after the freeze of some \$2.2 bn (£1.7bn) in federal funding.

Trump has also threatened to also remove Harvard's valuable tax exemption, the loss of which could cost Harvard millions of dollars each year. US media reports suggest the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) has started drawing up plans to enact this.

"Harvard can no longer be considered even a decent place of learning, and should not be considered on any list of the World's Great Universities or Colleges," Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform on Wednesday.

"Harvard is a JOKE, teaches Hate and Stupidity, and should no longer receive Federal Funds."

The administration's attacks on Harvard are not isolated. The government's antisemitism task force has identified at least 60

universities for review.

During his presidential campaign, Trump pitched a funding crackdown on universities, painting them as hostile to conservatives. He and Vice-President JD Vance have long railed against higher education institutions.

Polling by Gallup last year suggested that confidence in higher education had been falling over time among Americans of all political backgrounds, particularly Republicans - in part

due to a belief that universities push a political agenda.

Since taking office, Trump has focused particularly on universities where pro-Palestinian protests have taken place. Some Jewish students have said they felt unsafe and faced harassment on campus.

In March, Columbia University agreed to several of the administration's demands, after \$400m in federal funding was pulled over accusations the university failed to fight antisemitism.

What to know as Menendez brothers ask for freedom in resentencing hearing

After decades spent in prison by Erik and Lyle Menendez - and months of contentious court fights - a judge will hear arguments on whether the brothers should be resentenced, in a murder case that still divides America.

The pair are serving life in prison for killing their parents, Kitty and Jose Menendez, in 1989, when they were 21 and 18. Their case gained renewed attention after a popular Netflix series last year.

Thursday's resentencing hearing will determine whether the pair should be resentenced to a lesser penalty. If approved,

the brothers could become eligible for parole - potentially allowing their freedom.

Prosecutors at the time argued Erik and Lyle meticulously planned the killings so they could access their parents' fortune. The current Los Angeles District Attorney says the brothers have continued to cling to lies about the case.

But the brothers' lawyers have long argued the killings were an act of self-defence and claimed their father abused them for years. They have also pointed to court filings detailing their rehabilitation during their years behind bars.

Here is what to expect from

the hearing - and a recap of how we got here.

What did the Menendez brothers do?

The brothers shot and killed their parents with shotguns at their Beverly Hills mansion. There has long been a debate over their motive.

Prosecutors painted them during their trials as spoiled rich kids who wanted to access their parents' \$14m (£10.7m) fortune. They argued that the duo methodically bought shotguns and opened fire on their parents 13 times as the couple watched TV - before going gambling, to parties and on shopping sprees.

The brothers ultimately ad-

mitted to the killings - but argued they acted out of self-defence after years of emotional, physical and sexual abuse by their father Jose, a high-powered record label executive.

The brothers' trial in 1993 was one of the first high-profile murder cases to be shown live on television, gripping audiences in the US and globally.

It ended deadlocked, but in 1996, the brothers were convicted of first-degree murder in a second trial during which the judge barred many of their claims of sexual abuse. They are imprisoned near San Diego.

Sports

● Football ● Athletics ● Golf ● Basketball ● Tennis ● Boxing

Gateway Games: Place premium value on media involvement in sports development, SWAN urges Ogun govt, LOC

Concerned by the poor media report of the forthcoming National Sports Festival, the Sports Writers Association of Nigeria (SWAN), Ogun State chapter has warned the state government and the Local Organizing Committee of the festival not to deviate from established standards that place premium value on media involvement in sports development.

The association noted that activities of the National Sports Festival are under reported in the media, thus creating communication gap within the social media space and the general public.

This was contained in a communiqué issued at the end of its congress held on Wednesday, April 16, 2025, at the SWAN Secretariat within the MKO Abiola Stadium, Kuto, Abeokuta.

According to the communiqué jointly signed by SWAN Chairman, Michael-Azeez Ogunsiji, Secretary, Segun Folarin, and members of the communiqué drafting committee — Daud Olatunji (Chairman), Yetunde Fatun-



gas (Secretary), and Babajide Adewunmi (Member) — the congress emphasized that modern media facilities are crucial to sustaining quality coverage of sporting events beyond the festival.

The congress also commended the recent upgrade of the MKO Abiola International Stadium but expressed concern over critical infrastructural deficit within the stadium that requires urgent attention.

These include dilapidated dressing rooms, the absence of a proper medical bay, and the lack of a designated media gallery.

SWAN also expressed dismay

over the non-inclusion of a media centre in the current upgrade plan for the stadium, stressing that such a facility would benefit journalists and serve as a lasting legacy of the games.

Ogun SWAN equally applauded the state government for its infrastructural contributions towards the successful hosting of the upcoming National Sports Festival.

The association lauded the provision of world-class sporting facilities across the state, singling out the new swimming pool as a notable highlight.

It urged authorities to address outstanding facility gaps,

particularly at the MKO Abiola International Stadium.

On the fate of the MKO Abiola Stadium after the festival, the congress advised the state government against plans to concession the facility. Instead, it called for the stadium to remain accessible to the public, noting its role in talent discovery and grassroots sports promotion, urging the government to put in place proper maintenance mechanisms.

While pledging a warm and supportive environment for all journalists covering the festival, the association also appealed to the government to include the SWAN Secretariat, situated within the stadium complex, in the ongoing reconstruction works to improve its standard and functionality.

The congress further urged the government to revisit the abandoned multi-million-dollar FIFA Goal Project located within the stadium premises.

The association noted that the project, fully funded by FIFA and implemented in other states, only requires land allocation by the state to commence.

Dalma Maradona accuses doctors of causing father's death

Diego Maradona's death "would have been avoided" if the medical team around him had done their job, his daughter Dalma accused on Tuesday at the trial of health professionals of the circumstances of the death of the Argentine football idol.

Dalma, 38, the elder of Maradona's two daughters with his ex-wife Claudia Villafañe, was a star witness on the 11th day of the trial in San Isidro (north of Buenos Aires). And like others since the start of the trial, she blamed the caregivers of her father's final weeks and the framework of his convalescence.

"If they had done their job, (his death) would have been avoided," Dalma said, referring to the medical team and in particular to three of the accused: attending physician and neurosurgeon Leopoldo Luque, psychiatrist Agustina Cosachov and psychologist Carlos Diaz.

"They deceived us (the fam-

ily) in the most cruel way (...) They made us believe that the only possible option was to convalesce at home after his operation, in a house that was rented for the occasion in Tigre (north of Buenos Aires)," Dalma said.

According to them, "it would be a serious home hospitalisation," Diego would have everything like in a clinic, but in a house, "with 24/7 medical attention, medical equipment, an ambulance at the door permanently, she continued.

"It never happened," she said in a statement often interrupted by tears. In this "disgusting, piss-smelling" house, a doctor only came to see him from time to time."

Maradona died at the age of 60 on November 25, 2020, from a cardiorespiratory crisis complicated by pulmonary oedema, in this private residence, where he had been convalescing for two weeks after neurosurgery for a head hematoma.

Nigeria's U18 and 20 Women handball coaches release final team lists

ahead of IHF Women's Trophy zonal phase Championship

Coaches of Nigeria's under 18 and women handball teams have released their final lists of 14 players respectively ahead of the IHF Women's Trophy Zonal Phase which will hold in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire from April 20th through to the 24th 2025.

The two teams have been training at the Rowe Park Sports Center, Yaba, Lagos for close to two weeks and have decided to streamline their lists to 14 players as they prepare to travel to Abidjan for the competition.

The teams left Lagos, Nigeria on Thursday morning enroute to Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire for the competition.

Coach John Uzor of the National Under 18 team has included Omole Joy of Defender Babes and her sister Omole Shola alongside Ojie Princess of Funad Academy alongside Right back Faisat

Balogun in the mix while Success Duru, Chetachi Ngaodurubie of COAS Babes and Sharon Okonkwo makes the cut amongst others.

In the under 20 team, Coach Shittu Agboola has largely stuck with the players he has been grooming since their under 18 days. The team us led by Captain Chidera Ogbusimba alongside her Rima Queens teammates the Samuel Sisters, Amina Mohammed and Joy Peters. Israel-based Rahima Bello, Kehinde Babatunde of ASPAC HBC of Benin Republic and Esther Mathew who is also based in Benin Republic keep their placed.

Despite not having key player Taiwo Babatunde due to her school Yaba College of Technology refusal to release her for national service, Coach Shittu believes his team will make Nigeria proud just as they did previously in the under 18 level.



NSC, National Council on sports approves fixed calendar for National Sports Festival, streamlines number of sports to 32

and Regulations, as reached at the Extraordinary Council Meeting held in Benin City, Edo State on Thursday, March 14, 2019.

The Rule 11(i) stated that a maximum of 32 sports shall feature at the Festival (27 compulsory and 5 optional).

Rule 11(ii) affirmed that the compulsory sports were selected based on their popularity in the 36 states, including the FCT, State entries in the sports in previous Festivals, and the standard of Nigeria's participation in the sport at the international level.



Rule 11(iii) stated that the Host State is at liberty to select a maximum of 5 sports out of the 25 optional sports to make up the 32 sports to feature at the Festival.

This move will help stabilize the number of sports at the multisports event, to mitigate irregular changes that may affect management and organization of the Games.

Gabon forward Boupendza dies in terrible circumstance

Gabon forward Aaron Boupendza has died at 28 following a fall from the 11th floor of a building in China, the Gabonese Football Federation (FEGAFOOT) said on Wednesday. Boupendza, who joined Zhejiang FC earlier this year, was in good form with four

goals in six matches.

"At 28, Boupendza is remembered as a great striker who left a lasting impression at the African Cup of Nations in Cameroon (in 2022)," FEGAFOOT said in a statement.

"Trained at CF Mounana and Bordeaux in France, the

Gabonese striker joined the Chinese league after a brief spell in Romania.

"FEGAFOOT and the great family of Gabonese soccer offer their biological family their sincere condolences in this difficult time."

Authorities in China have launched an investigation to find out whether the fall was an accident, suicide, or the result of foul play, media reports in Romania said.

There was no official confirmation of the cause of death.

"It is with great sadness that I learn of the tragic death of Aaron Boupendza, a talented centre-forward who brought honour to Gabonese soccer," Gabon President Brice Oligui Nguema said.



NWFL Premiership MD 12 Wrap: Benue Queens in historic NWFL win as Naija Ratels pip Robo Queens to throw super six race open

Newcomers Benue Queens recorded their first-ever win in the 2024/25 Nigeria Women Football League (NWFL) Premiership season following a hard-fought 1-0 victory over Ibom Angels in Lafia on Wednesday, April 16, 2025.

Joy Ikyagh's 57th-minute strike proved decisive in Lafia, ending a frustrating 11-game run without a win—comprising 10 losses and one draw—for Coach Liadi Bashiru's debutant side at Lafia City Stadium.

In Benin City, reigning champions Edo Queens extended their unbeaten streak with a dominant 3-1 win



against Dannaz Ladies at the Samuel Ogbemudia Stadium. Anjor Mary netted a brace, while

Chioma Moses added a third for the hosts. Rosemary Okorie's goal for Dannaz was merely a consolation

as the Cedars suffered their seventh defeat of the campaign.

Bayelsa Queens also maintained their unbeaten record, playing out a 1-1 draw with Adamawa Queens in Numan. Delight Isaac opened the scoring in the eighth minute, but Katon Waken equalized early in the second half for the home side.

Elsewhere, Abia Angels secured the only away win of the round thanks to returning Super Falcons goalkeeper Christiana Obia, edging Confluence Queens 1-0 in Anyigba thanks to Winner Onajite's goal—reviving their chances of a top-three finish.

In Owerri, Remo Stars Ladies

were held to a 1-1 draw by Heartland Queens. Onyinyechi Kalu gave the hosts the lead before Bolaji Olamide ended her four-game goal drought to rescue a point for Wemimo Mathew's side.

In Port Harcourt, Rivers Angels produced the most emphatic result of the matchday, dismantling Delta Queens 3-0 in a South-South derby, courtesy of a hat-trick from Mary Moses—her second treble this term.

Naija Ratels continued their playoff push with a narrow 1-0 win over FC Robo Queens in Abuja, with Sofiat Bankole scoring the match-winner.

In Ibadan, Ekiti Queens and

Nasarawa Amazons played out a thrilling 2-2 draw at the Lekkan Salami Stadium.

Zainab Ismail scored twice for the hosts, while Jenat Akekeromewei and Hembafan Ayatsea were on target for the visitors.

With two rounds left in the regular season, Edo Queens, Bayelsa Queens, and Rivers Angels have sealed their places in the Super Six. Remo Stars Ladies can join them on Matchday 13 with a win.

Meanwhile, Nasarawa Amazons and Abia Angels, as well as FC Robo Queens and Naija Ratels, will take their Super Six qualification hopes to the final day of the regular season.

Nigeria wheelchair Basketball Federation denies reports of its elevation as compulsory sports for Gateways Games

The President of the Nigeria Wheelchair Basketball Federation, Seyi Johnson, has debunked reports making around that the Ogun state Government has elevated wheelchair basketball as one of the games Compulsory Sports at the forthcoming 2024 National Sports Festival, tagged Gateway Games.

The Wheelchair Basketball boss said the report was never true and a wrong representation of what transpired at the Extra Ordinary National Council of State meeting that was successfully held in Abeokuta, Ogun State.

"I want to use this medium to put the record straight that there was never a time that wheelchair basketball was listed by Ogun state as a compulsory Sports at the Gateway Games".

"Nothing like that happened and the Communique issued after the extra ordinary council meeting was very clear about all the decisions that were decided at the council meeting regarding the Sports festival in Ogun state and subsequent festivals".

"Once again I want to plead with our friends in the media to always verify their information before going to the public to avoid wrong dissemination of information and wrong casting of headlines".

"It was a very fruitful deliberation of issues concerning the betterment of the Upcoming Sports festival in Ogun state and how future Games

can be improved upon to align with the new vision of the current leadership of the National Sports Commission. And in the Nigeria wheelchair basketball family, we commend the new vision of Sports in the country and we fully align to the new focus", he concluded.

He stressed that Wheelchair basketball is one of the optional Sports at the upcoming Festival and that has not changed.

The 22nd edition of the National Sports Festival in Ogun state is expected to hold from the 16-30th of May 2025.



SCRABBLE: Yenagoa SC to battle Gateway SC for Inter Club Challenge premium prize

The surprised package of the 2025 Nigeria Scrabble Federation Inter Club finals, Yenagoa SC have punched their ticket to today's final of the competition in Benin City, Edo State, South South, Nigeria.

Thanks to their convincing and comfortable win over Central Scrabble Club A in the semi-finals decided on Wednesday, with the oil rich coaster club winning the first three matches, leaving the two other matches for record and rating purposes.

Led by the very impressive Doubra Enai and supported by Bright Ohaka, Ezekiel Eniekebi, Vincent Munanyo and Precious Igal, the coastal city club took the semi-finals match 4-1 with a cumulative of plus 1634 points,

winning 19 out of 25 games.

The story was the same with the dominant Gateway SC as they beat Benin City SC 4-1 with a cumulative points of plus 892 to set up the final battle against Yenagoa SC today.

To reach the last four, Yenagoa SC topped Group A ahead of Benin City SC, Surulere SC and Central Scrabble Club B while Gateway SC led Group B, followed by CSCA A, Pyramid SC and PHC Club.

Oluwatimilehin Doko, Cyril Umebiye, David Ojih, Hakeem Ogundokun and Abdulmumin Jimoh are the stars that stopped CSCA A from reaching the final.

David Ojih of Gateway SC and Doubra Enai of Yenagoa SC went unbeaten in the

semi-finals while Christopher Nnamani of CSCA lost all his games in the last four.

SEMI-FINAL - 1
4-1 - 19-6 +1634 Yenagoa
1-4 - 6-19 -1634 CSC A
SEMI-FINAL - 2
4-1 - 17-8 +892 Gateway
1-4 - 8-17 -892 Benin City

Curtain falls on the week long Scrabble Festival supported by Edo State Sports Commission with the NSF Awards and Gala Night where the winner of the Asaph Zadok National Championship Edo State's George Ezinore will be decorated with the highly esteemed and prestigious NSF Green Jacket last held by Enoch Nwali in the colours of Lagos State.

Athletics: Tobi Amusan listed for Diamond League season opener

World 100 metres hurdles record holder Tobi Amusan has been officially listed among the entrants for the 2025 Diamond League season opener in Xiamen, China, as she begins her quest for another title-winning campaign on the global circuit.

The entry list for the Xiamen Meeting, published on Tuesday, confirms Amusan's participation in what is set to be a highly competitive field.

The event will take place on April 26 at the Egret Stadium and will feature nine track and seven field events in the main

program, marking the third edition of the Chinese leg of the prestigious athletics series.

Amusan, who holds a personal best of 12.12 seconds and currently sits 13th in the global rankings, will face fierce competition in the 100 metres hurdles. The line-up includes Devynne Charlton of the Bahamas, the world indoor record holder in the 60 metres hurdles and ranked seventh globally, Danielle Williams of Jamaica, a world champion with a personal best of 12.32, and top American contenders such as Grace Stark, Tonea Marshall, and Nia Ali.



Plateau Utd face Rangers as NFF releases Presidential Cup quarterfinal fixture

There was a major heartbreak as underdog, Abakaliki FC stunned giants, Enyimba FC with a 2-0 victory to book their quarter-final ticket in the 2025 Presidential Cup.

Meanwhile, Rangers International continued their fine form with a narrow 1-0 win over defending champions Bendel Insurance, while Akwa United edged past Inter Lagos thanks to a solitary strike in a tightly contested match.

Ikorodu City proved too strong for Beyond Limits, cruising to a 2-0 win, while Warri Wolves and Wikki Tourists delivered a thrilling 1-1 draw that was decided by penalties, with Wikki advancing 4-3 in the shootout.

Elsewhere, Plateau United overcame a resilient Osun United 2-1, while Nasarawa United held their nerves to defeat Bayelsa United 5-4 on penalties after a 1-1 draw in regulation time.

Kwara United made light work of Solution FC, running out 3-0 winners to seal their quarter-final spot.

Quarter-Final Fixtures: Abakaliki FC vs Nasarawa United, Wikki Tourists vs Ikorodu City, Akwa United vs Kwara United, Plateau United vs Rangers International.

The quarter-finals promise more fireworks as minnows like Abakaliki FC continue their fairy-tale run while heavyweights clash for a place in the final four.

Arsenal knock out Madrid from UEFA Champions League, to face PSG in semi-final



Arsenal have advanced to the Champions League semi-final for the third time in club history with a 2-1 victory over Real Madrid at the Bernabeu, winning 5-1 on aggregate.

Having won the first leg 3-0, Arsenal increased their advantage in the 65th minute with a lovely chipped goal from Bukayo Saka, but Madrid cancelled that strike just two minutes later as Vinicius Junior caught William Saliba napping.

A goal in second-half stoppage time from Gabriel Martinelli put the result beyond any doubt.

In a frenetic first half, Saka saw a Panenka penalty saved by Thibaut Courtois while VAR intervened at the other end to deny Real Madrid a spot kick of their own.

Arsenal will now face Paris Saint Germain (PSG) in the semi-final, while Inter Milan battle Barcelona in the last four.



Silencing dissent: The threat of repressive media laws in Nigeria

In what appears to be yet another attempt to curtail the freedom of expression in Nigeria, the Nigerian Senate is currently considering a bill aimed at regulating the activities of bloggers in the country.

This legislative move has drawn widespread condemnation from various quarters, particularly from the Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP), a leading civil society organisation known for its dogged pursuit of transparency, accountability, and human rights.

SERAP has openly urged the Senate to withdraw the controversial bill, warning that it poses a grave threat to press freedom and could easily become a tool for muzzling dissenting voices in the country. This intervention is not only timely but necessary, especially in a nation that purports to operate a democratic system of government.

This repressive bill is another attempt to gag the press, akin to the controversial suspension of Twitter (now X) some years ago. In June 2021 precisely, the administration of former Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari made global headlines by announcing the suspension of Twitter operations in Nigeria. The ban followed the platform's deletion of a tweet by the president that was considered to have violated Twitter's policies.

The government swiftly accused Twitter of allowing content that threatened Nigeria's corporate existence and used national security as justification for its action. However, critics quickly saw through the veil, interpreting the move as a direct assault on freedom of expression and press freedom in Nigeria.

The Twitter ban was not just about a deleted tweet; it symbolised the government's broader discomfort with unfiltered public discourse on social media platforms. By cutting off access to a major platform for political commentary, activism, and journalism, the Buhari administration sent a clear message: dissent would not be tolerated.

The government's high-handedness set a dangerous precedent that emboldened further efforts to control the digital space and silence alternative voices.

This clampdown on digital freedoms mirrors the current attempt by the Nigerian Senate to pass a bill aimed at regulating bloggers. Like the Twitter ban, the bill is couched in the language of national interest and public safety, yet its underlying motive appears to be the suppression of free speech and independent thought. Both instances highlight the Nigerian

political elite's growing aversion to accountability and criticism in the public space.

Bloggers, like Twitter (X) users, play a critical role in disseminating information, uncovering corruption, and giving voice to ordinary Nigerians. Attempts to regulate or silence them through vague and punitive legislation constitute a direct attack on press freedom. The proposed blogger regulation bill, if passed, would legitimise state surveillance and censorship of online activities under the guise of law.

What unites these two events — the Twitter ban and the blogger bill, is the state's desire to monopolise narrative control and limit the influence of non-traditional media. In a democratic society, such authoritarian tendencies are not only unacceptable but dangerous. The rise of citizen journalism and online platforms has decentralised information and put power back in the hands of the people - a reality that some in power find threatening.

The Twitter ban and the anti-blogger's bill reflect a broader strategy of gagging the press and shrinking the civic space in Nigeria. It is vital for civil society, the media, and the general public to resist such repressive moves and demand a governance model that respects and protects freedom of expression in all its forms.

A closer examination of the bill, its possible implications, and the reactions it has elicited, underscores a broader pattern of despotic legislation that seeks to undermine freedom of speech and suppress the media under the guise of regulation.

The proposed bill, while still in its early stages, allegedly seeks to establish guidelines for bloggers, including mandatory registration, licensing, and compliance with undefined standards of practice. Supporters of the bill argue that it is a response to the proliferation of fake news, cyberbullying, and unverified information often published on digital platforms.

However, critics assert that these concerns, though legitimate, are being used as a pretext to clamp down on independent voices and alternative media.

One of the most alarming features of the bill is its vague and overly broad language, which leaves room for arbitrary interpretation. Terms such as 'offensive content,' 'fake news,' and 'unauthorised information' are left undefined, creating a fertile ground for abuse.

In a country where critical journalism and whistle-blowing have already put many at risk, this bill represents a veiled threat to those who dare to

speaking truth to power.

SERAP has taken a bold stand against the bill, urging lawmakers to resist the temptation of prioritising political interests over democratic values. According to the organisation, the bill, if passed into law, would erode the gains Nigeria has made in promoting freedom of information and media pluralism. It warns that this bill is an affront to both Section 39 of the 1999 Constitution, which guarantees freedom of expression, and Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which Nigeria is a signatory to.

In a recent statement, SERAP noted: "Rather than attempting to gag bloggers and online media, the Senate should be focusing on ensuring access to information, promoting transparency, and holding public officers accountable." This encapsulates the crux of the matter.

The government should not be in the business of silencing voices, especially in an era where digital platforms have become vital for civic engagement, journalistic investigation, and public discourse.

If the bill is allowed to pass, the chilling effect on media freedom will be enormous. Nigeria already has a turbulent relationship with press freedom. Journalists and bloggers are frequently harassed, detained, and sometimes charged with trumped-up accusations of sedition, cybercrime, or defamation.

In the developed world, particularly in the United States, former President Thomas Jefferson once echoed a profound sentiment, that he would prefer a nation without a military to one without a free press. This powerful assertion underscores the indispensable role of the press in safeguarding democracy and promoting an informed society.

Regulating bloggers and gagging the press through a draconian legal framework would further underdevelop Nigeria and entrench fear and self-censorship among digital content creators.

Blogging, for many, is not just a pastime; it is a means of livelihood, a channel for activism, and a way of amplifying the voices of the voiceless. Imposing restrictions, licensing fees, and penalties on bloggers could marginalise critical perspectives and tilt the information ecosystem in favour of state-sponsored narratives.

In a democracy, the role of the media — whether mainstream or digital — cannot be overstated. They serve as a watchdog, a platform for citizen engagement, and a mirror reflecting society's ills. Silencing bloggers is tantamount to dimming the torch of truth and weakening the pillar of ac-

countability.

This is not the first time Nigeria has flirted with repressive digital legislation. In 2015, the infamous Frivolous Petitions Bill, commonly referred to as the "Anti-Social Media Bill," was introduced but subsequently thrown out following widespread backlash. Again in 2019, there was the Protection from Internet Falsehood and Manipulations Bill, which sought to criminalise the spread of 'false information.' It too met stiff opposition and was eventually shelved.

The recurrence of such proposals suggests a persistent desire by some lawmakers to control the digital space and stifle dissent. This is deeply troubling in a country with an already fragile civic space and where critical voices are often targeted by the state.

One of the defining features of any functional democracy is the freedom of expression. It is the oxygen that sustains vibrant debates, fosters citizen participation, and holds leaders accountable. Curtailing this freedom under the guise of regulation is both disingenuous and dangerous.

While it is true that misinformation and cyber abuse are real concerns, the solution does not lie in blanket restrictions or the criminalisation of digital expression. What Nigeria needs is a balanced approach that encourages responsible online conduct without trampling on constitutionally protected rights.

Digital literacy campaigns, fact-checking initiatives, and transparent self-regulatory frameworks by content creators themselves are more sustainable and democratic means of addressing the challenges of the digital age.

A regulation aimed at bloggers today could be extended tomorrow to social media users, influencers, online journalists, podcasters, and even ordinary citizens with strong opinions. This creeping authoritarianism must be checked before it crystallises into law and becomes the norm.

The digital age has democratised information. No longer is the power of the press confined to traditional, regimented newsrooms. Ordinary Nigerians now wield influence through their phones and laptops, using blogs and social media to spotlight issues that would otherwise remain hidden. The digital media (blogs, social media platforms, podcasts) disseminate what the traditional or conventional media (newspaper, radio, television) forbid to do owing to supervisory and regulatory constraints. This empowerment must not be taken away under any guise.

Nigerians must not remain silent in the face of such legislative overreach.

Civil society organisations, professional bodies, the media, and indeed all lovers of democracy should rise up to demand the withdrawal of this bill.

Already, the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), the Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE), and numerous legal professionals have voiced their concerns. Public opinion, when galvanised, has the power to reverse harmful policies. The same way the Anti-Social Media Bill was defeated through public resistance, so too can this current attempt be thwarted.

Rather than attempting to regulate bloggers through punitive laws, the Nigerian Senate should focus on legislation that improves digital infrastructure, protects journalists, enhances access to information, and promotes ethical standards in media practice. These are the building blocks of a truly democratic society.

The government must also invest in media literacy programmes to equip citizens with the skills needed to discern fact from fiction online. Empowering the public to think critically is far more effective than censorship in combating the spread of misinformation.

Additionally, laws like the Freedom of Information Act should be strengthened and fully implemented to ensure transparency in governance. A society where public information is easily accessible leaves less room for speculation, conspiracy, or misinformation.

The attempt to regulate bloggers is not just about legislation; it is about the soul of Nigerian democracy. If this bill passes, it will open the floodgates to more authoritarian laws, and the consequences could be dire for press freedom, civic space, and democratic development.

In times like these, silence is not neutrality; it is complicity. We must speak out, stand up, and push back against any law that seeks to gag the media. As SERAP has rightly pointed out, "A free press is not a threat to democracy; it is its lifeblood."

Let the Senate be reminded that democracy thrives where voices are heard, not hushed.

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