

Nigeria's net reserve hits \$23bn, highest in over 3yrs – CBN

Nigeria's Net Foreign Exchange Reserve (NFER) as of the end of 2024 stood at \$23.11 billion, the highest level in over three years, reflecting a substantial improvement in the country's external liquidity, reduced short-term obligations, and renewed investor confidence.

A statement by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) indicated that the increase marked an increase from \$3.99 billion at year-end 2023, \$8.19 billion in 2022, and \$14.59 billion in 2021. NFER, which adjusts gross reserves to account for near-term liabilities such as FX swaps and forward contracts, is widely

regarded as a more accurate indicator of the foreign exchange buffers available to meet immediate external obligations.

Gross external reserves also increased to \$40.19 billion, compared to \$33.22 billion at the close of 2023.

The increase in reserves reflects a combination of strategic meas-

ures undertaken by the CBN, including a deliberate and substantial reduction in short-term foreign exchange liabilities, notably swaps and forward obligations.

CBN also said the strengthening was also spurred by policy actions to rebuild confidence in the FX market and increase reserve buffers, along with recent

improved foreign exchange inflows, particularly from non-oil sources.

The result is a stronger and more transparent reserves position that better equips Nigeria to withstand external shocks.

The expansion occurred even as the CBN continues to reduce short-term liabilities, thereby

improving the overall quality of the reserve position.

"This improvement in our net reserves is not accidental; it is the outcome of deliberate policy choices aimed at rebuilding confidence, reducing vulnerabilities, and laying the foundation for

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The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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PUBLISHED SINCE MAY 29, 1968

VOL. 46, NO. 974

THURSDAY 3RD APRIL, 2025.

Tinubu restructures NNPC board, appoints new leadership

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Tribunal affirms Okpebholo as duly elected Edo Governor

The Edo State Governorship Election Petition Tribunal has affirmed Senator Monday Okpebholo as the duly elected governor of Edo State after dismissing the petition filed by the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and its governorship candidate, Asue Ighodalo, for lacking merit.

In a unanimous judgment that lasted over seven hours, a three-man panel led by Justice Wilfred Kpochi ruled that the petitioners failed to provide suf-

ficient evidence to support their claims of electoral irregularities.

The Tribunal noted that the PDP did not call polling unit agents from all the affected polling units where alleged malpractices occurred.

It further stated that the party failed to present competent witnesses to prove its allegations of over-voting and non-compliance with the Electoral Act.

The Tribunal added that out of the 19 witnesses called by the petitioners, 14 were ward

and local government agents whose testimonies were based on hearsay, which has no probative value in law.

As a result, the panel concluded that the case lacked substantial evidence and upheld Governor Okpebholo's victory.

Following the verdict on Wednesday, April 2, 2025, Governor Okpebholo extended an olive branch to his political opponents, calling for unity and collaboration in the interest of Edo State.

"This victory is not just mine, it belongs to every citizen and resident of Edo State. Now is the time to move beyond elections and politics. Our state's development requires all hands on deck, regardless of party affiliation," Okpebholo stated.

He expressed his gratitude to the Tribunal for upholding the integrity of the electoral process and reaffirmed his administration's commitment to good governance, transparency, and

inclusive development.

He also urged opposition members, including Asue Ighodalo and the PDP, to put aside political differences and join hands in moving the state forward.

The governor reassured Edo residents that his administration is open to ideas and partnerships that will foster progress, empha-

sizing that the focus should now be on fulfilling campaign promises, improving livelihoods, and ensuring sustainable development across the state.

With the legal battles now behind him, Governor Okpebholo reiterated his commitment to serving the people of Edo State

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FG to tighten border as NIS arrests 51 illegal immigrants

The Minister of Interior, Dr Olubunmi Tunji-Ojo, has called for collaboration with the Sahel and West African countries on information and data sharing for effective border control.

He made the call while addressing newsmen on the sidelines of the Summit on Border Security in London.

"There is a need for collaboration of countries within the Sahel and West African sub-region for better international partnerships and information dissemination.

"We need more data sharing and better collaborations to make sure we don't just solve the problem but we stop the problem from happening.

"The major takeaway from this summit is proactiveness and not just being reactive as countries are now more poised to criminalise irregular migration.

"So this summit is a wonderful one because it brings an opportunity for ministers in border control to make sure we are all able to manage our borders to secure our countries," Tunji-Ojo

said. According to him, organised immigration crimes are peculiar to any nation but cut across, hence, the need for collaboration and shared solutions.

"Nigeria has a border control solution because we are not just a destination point. We have automated our solutions as there are more measures in place to ensure the borders are secured and to ensure irregular migration is brought to an end.

"We can't afford to lose the battle before we start it, and so we know that with this kind of summit, as a united front, we will effectively combat this menace," Tunji-Ojo assured.

The UK summit brought together over 30 global leaders, including UK Prime Minister, Keir Starmer, and UK Home Secretary, Yvette Cooper, to discuss critical issues surrounding border control and organised immigration crime.

Meanwhile, the Nigeria Immigration Service has an-

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Governor Monday Okpebholo of Edo State

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Tinubu restructures NNPC board, appoints new leadership

● **NAPE praises Tinubu's NNPC board reshuffle**

In a major shake-up of Nigeria's oil sector, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu has approved a sweeping reconstitution of the Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC) Limited board, removing its chairman, Chief Pius Akinyelure, and the

Group Chief Executive Officer, Mallam Mele Kolo Kyari.

The president also dismissed all other board members appointed alongside Akinyelure and Kyari in November 2023, making way for a new 11-member leadership team.

Engr. Bashir Bayo Ojulari has been named the new Group Chief Executive Officer (GCEO), while Ahmadu Musa Kida takes over as the non-executive chairman. Additionally, Adedapo Segun, who was appointed Chief Financial Officer in November 2023, has been retained on the new board.

The new board also includes six non-executive directors representing Nigeria's geopolitical zones: Bello Rabi (North West), Yusuf Usman (North East), Babs Omotowa (North Central), Austin Avuru (South-South), David Ige

(South West), and Henry Obih (South East).

In addition, Mrs. Lydia Shehu Jafiya, Permanent Secretary of the Federal Ministry of Finance, will represent the ministry, while Aminu Said Ahmed will represent the Ministry of Petroleum Resources.

President Tinubu emphasized that the restructuring, carried out under Section 59, subsection 2 of the Petroleum Industry Act, 2021, aims to enhance operational efficiency, restore investor confidence, boost local content, and drive economic growth.

The new board has been tasked with conducting a strate-

gic portfolio review of NNPC's operated and joint venture assets to maximize value.

The reconstitution aligns with Tinubu's broader oil sector reforms, which have already attracted \$17 billion in new investments since 2023.

The administration now aims to increase this figure to \$30 billion by 2027 and \$60 billion by 2030. It also plans to boost oil production to two million barrels daily by 2027 and three million by 2030, while gas production is expected to rise to eight billion cubic feet per day by 2027 and ten billion by 2030.

Additionally, the government seeks to elevate NNPC's crude oil refining output to 200,000

barrels daily by 2027 and 500,000 by 2030.

Ahmadu Musa Kida, the new chairman, hails from Borno State and holds a civil engineering degree from Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, and a postgraduate diploma in petroleum engineering from the Institut Français du Pétrole in Paris.

He has extensive experience in the oil sector, having worked with Elf Petroleum Nigeria and Total Exploration and Production.

Kida previously served as Deputy Managing Director of Deep Water Services at Total Nigeria and was an Independent Non-Executive Director at Pan Ocean-Newcross Group.

NBM donates writing materials to Edo schools

IDAHOUSA MUSA

A Pan-African Non-Governmental Organisation, the Neo Black Movement (NBM) of Africa Worldwide, Benin Chapter, has donated hundreds of school uniforms and writing materials to Arinze, Oliha, and Ezomo primary schools in Benin City, Edo State.

The President of the Chapter, Comrade Peter Okoh, stated that the initiative is part of the "Support-A-School-Child Project," aimed at assisting and encouraging students in their education.

Okoh noted that the project is a component of NBM of Africa's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) efforts to support its immediate community and humanity.

He emphasised that NBM of Africa is committed to alleviating the struggles of disadvantaged individuals through humanitarian services.

"We in NBM of Africa strongly believe in giving back to society. We empower low-income individuals through various in-

novative and impactful health, social, and economic empowerment programmes that enhance the well-being of disadvantaged groups," Okoh stated.

Continuing, the Benin Zonal NBM President highlighted that the 'Support-A-School-Child Project' is one of many national humanitarian services initiatives undertaken by the organisation.

"Today, we are donating hundreds of school uniforms, notebooks, pens, math sets, and other writing materials to students of Arinze, Ezomo, and Oliha Primary Schools in Benin City, Edo State.

"We believe this will significantly support and encourage the students in their education.

"Our commitment to empowering low-income individuals remains steadfast through various innovative and impactful programmes.

"This initiative is just one of the numerous benefits of our programmes for the people, and we will continue to foster a strong relationship with the community," he said.



NEO-BLACK MOVEMENT:

Pupils of Arinze Primary School, Benin, with the writing materials distributed to them by the Neo-Black Movement of Africa

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long-term stability," Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, Olayemi Cardoso, commented. "We remain focused on sustaining this progress through transparency, discipline, and market-driven reforms."

Reserves have continued to strengthen in 2025. While the first quarter figures reflected some seasonal and transitional adjustments, including significant interest payments on foreign-denominated debt, underlying fundamentals remain intact, and reserves are expected

to continue improving over the second quarter of this year.

Going forward, the CBN said it anticipates a steady uptick in reserves, underpinned by improved oil production levels, and a more supporting export growth environment expected to boost non-oil FX earnings and diversify external inflows.

"The CBN remains committed to prudent reserve management, transparent reporting, and macroeconomic policies that support a stable exchange rate, attract investment, and build long-term resilience," the statement added.

FG to tighten border as NIS...

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nounced the arrest of 51 illegal immigrants in Nasarawa State.

According to the NIS, the illegal immigrants, who were apprehended in New Nyanya, Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, are all from Mali and are between the ages of 17 and 25.

The NIS Public Relations Officer, A.S. Akinlabi, confirmed the arrest on Tuesday, stating that 11 of them are female, while 40 are male.

He said a preliminary investigation conducted by the service suggests that the migrants may be victims of human trafficking and migrant smuggling.

Akinlabi said, "The Nigeria

Immigration Service has arrested 51 illegal immigrants in New Nyanya, Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State.

"The illegal migrants, all Malians aged between 17 and 25, were arrested at their hideouts following credible intelligence. Eleven of them are female, while 40 are male.

"Preliminary investigations indicate that they may have been victims of human trafficking and migrant smuggling. None of them presented any valid travel documents or residence permits during interrogation."

Akinlabi added that the migrants had been taken into NIS custody and were undergoing further profiling and investigation.

Expert links unsafe water to poor maintenance, economic hardship

The Co-founder and President of Safe Water for Africa Community Initiative, Michael Ale, has blamed the Nigerian masses' inaccessibility to clean and safe water on lack of maintenance culture and economic hardship.

In a bid to prevent spread of water borne diseases, Ale urged governments "to invest heavily in the water sector to ensure that the masses can afford the luxury of safe and clean water, which has gone out of their reach."

The development expert spoke in a statement made available in Ado Ekiti as part of commemoration of the 2025 World Water Day with the theme, "Glacier Preservation."

He said, "As the world commemorates World Water Day, the harsh reality for millions of Nigerians comes to the forefront, clean and safe water remains a privilege accessible only to the wealthy, while the poor continue to struggle with inadequate access to this fundamental human right."

Ale, who canvassed the need for innovative and sustainable approaches to water management, traced the problem with safe water accessibility to high cost of drilling boreholes and the poor conditions of public water supply facilities, which he said could no longer get the liquid to needy citizens.

The SWACI president lamented that "the high cost of drilling a

borehole which ranged between N1.5million and N2.6million was beyond the reach of many poor Nigerians, remained largely an obstacle to the reliable source of clean water."

He said, "Another critical issue is the frequent breakdown of borehole infrastructure. Many community boreholes, often donated by the government, groups, philanthropists or politicians, become non-functional shortly after commissioning due to poor maintenance.

"Additionally, government-owned water treatment plants and pipelines are in a state of disrepair, forcing millions to rely on expensive or contaminated water sources.

"This has led to the rampant spread of waterborne diseases such as cholera and diarrhea, clear indicators of developmental stagnation due to inadequate Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) facilities."

The SWACI president disclosed that the body, in collaboration with other organisations, "has developed solutions to address these infrastructural challenges and improve water accessibility in Nigeria."

He called on governments and non-governmental organisations to "collaborate to provide financial and technical support to communities and borehole operators to guarantee a sustainable supply of clean water."

Edo State: Tribunal affirms Okpebholo's victory...

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with dedication and integrity.

He urged all stakeholders, regardless of political affiliation, to unite in building a prosperous and forward-moving state.

Earlier, the tribunal dismissed the Accord Party's allegations of non-compliance and wrongful return of Okpebholo as the governor.

In the first ruling, the Tribunal stated that the Accord

Party failed to provide sufficient evidence to support their claims of non-compliance.

The Tribunal resolved the motion against the petitioners, dealing a significant blow to their case.

The second ruling addressed the Accord Party's allegation that Okpebholo did not receive the required number of lawful votes.

The Tribunal disagreed, resolving the motion in favor of

Okpebholo.

In the third and fourth rulings, the Tribunal dismissed the Accord Party's request to declare their candidate the winner of the election.

The Tribunal cited past Court of Appeal and Supreme Court judgments, emphasizing that relevant facts must be pleaded for such a request to be granted.

The Tribunal also criticized the Accord Party's petition for

lacking clarity and failing to state the facts of the petition.

The motions were subsequently struck out for being imprecise.

This development is a significant setback for the Accord Party and a boost to Okpebholo's administration.

The Tribunal's rulings demonstrate the importance of presenting clear and evidence-based arguments in electoral disputes.

Delta: Okada, keke riders protest fee hike, leave commuters stranded

AJUWA VICTOR

Commercial motorcycle and tricycle operators in Delta State staged a mass protest on Tuesday over what they called the sharp increase in cost of their daily tickets and annual stickers, leaving commuters stranded in Warri, Effurun, and Udu Local Government Areas of the State. The riders, popularly known

as Okada and Keke operators, grounded activities as they refused to operate, forcing many residents to walk long distances to work and other destinations.

Speaking on the development, a protesting rider, Emmanuel Akpore, lamented the over 200 per cent increment, saying, "We are struggling to survive in this harsh economy, and now they want to make things worse

for us. How do they expect us to cope with N1,000 daily tickets from N400 and yearly stickers jumping from N3,000 to N12,500? This is unbearable."

Another rider, Musa Bello, decried the economic burden on operators, stating, "Apart from feeding our families, bike and tricycle parts are now very expensive.

"This hike is unjustifiable. We are calling on the Delta

State Government to review these charges before we are pushed out of business."

The ripple effects of the protest was felt by many commuters, including a mother of two, Charity Emeke, who expressed frustration over the situation. "I was shocked when I came out this morning and couldn't get a bike. I had to walk with my children for a long distance before a neighbor helped me.

The government should consider both the riders and commuters in these decisions."

It was gathered that the N12,500 sticker fee covers the cost of an identity card, waste basket, customized jackets, and profiling for security purposes.

As at the time of filing this

report, the Commissioner for Transport, Onoriode Agofure, was unavailable for comments.

Meanwhile, tension rose as some striking riders reportedly harassed their colleagues who attempted to work, forcing them to discharge passengers and join in the demonstration.

Opone hosts APC stakeholders, rallies support for Tinubu

AJUWA VICTOR

High Chief Johnson Opono, leader of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in Ndokwa/Ukwuani Federal Constituency, has hosted top party stakeholders to rally support for President Bola Tinubu.

The meeting, had in attendance APC stalwarts across Ndokwa West, Ndokwa East and Ukwuani Local Government Areas including Hon. Friday Ossai Osanebi, Hon. Ossai Nicholas Ossai, Hon. Olise Imegwu, Francis Obigbor, Chief Dele Omenogor, Ugo Nwokolo, Hon. Chika Ossai, Hon. Sam Chukwuji, Engr Patrick Ishie among others.

Stakeholders took a far reaching decision to work in synergy to strengthen the party ahead of the president's re-election bid in 2027.

In an interview, High Chief Opono opined that the APC in Ndokwa ethnic nationality is united, stronger, focused and supportive of President Bola Tinubu's administration.

He appealed to the President to consider appointing individuals from Ndokwa ethnic

nationality to key positions, particularly in the newly established South South Development Commission, since earlier appointments did not favour any stakeholder from the area.

He also offered prayers and wishes to President Bola Ahmed Tinubu as he celebrates 73rd birthday.

In a related development, High Chief Johnson Opono, the national leader of the party raised the bar through the inauguration of the Ossai Opono Women.

The group which consists of women from all walks of life was purposely formed to ensure effective mobilization of women through sensitization campaigns for the All Progressives Congress ahead of 2027.

He also used the opportunity to receive female support groups across the Federal Constituency and supported them with cash donations.

Mrs Charity Ozuem, Hon. Dr. Princess Annizi PhD, Omolara Eke expressed confidence in the capacity of their national leader, High Chief Johnson Opono to take the party to greater heights in the federal constituency and beyond.



COURTESY VISIT:

Oyo State Governor, Seyi Makinde (6th left), and other government officials, when the governor received 39 Oyo State indigenes who are Cadet ASPs on a courtesy visit, led by the new Oyo State Commissioner of Police, Johnson Oluwole Adenola (5th right).

Tinubu off to France on two-week working visit

President Bola Tinubu will on Wednesday depart for Paris, France, on a two-week working visit.

"During the visit, the President will appraise his administration's mid-term performance and assess key milestones," Tinubu's Special Adviser on Information and Strategy, Bayo Onanuga, revealed in a statement Wednesday.

The statement is titled, 'President Tinubu to embark on working visit to Paris'.

Our correspondent had sighted the President's convoy departing his official residence at about 11:00 am (local time).

The Presidency says Tinubu will also use the retreat to "review the progress of ongoing reforms and engage in strategic planning ahead of his admin-

istration's second anniversary."

"This period of reflection will inform plans to deepen ongoing reforms and accelerate national development priorities in the coming year," the statement read.

It said recent economic strides reinforce the President's commitment to these efforts, as evidenced by the Central Bank of Nigeria reporting

a significant increase in net foreign exchange reserves to \$23.11bn—a testament to the administration's fiscal reforms since 2023 when net reserves were \$3.99bn.

While away, President Tinubu will remain fully engaged with his team and continue to oversee governance activities.

"He will return to Nigeria in about a fortnight," it concluded.

Delta police arrest suspected kidnappers, recover arms, ammunition

AJUWA VICTOR

The Delta State Police Command has recorded another major breakthrough in its fight against crime, arresting suspected kidnappers and armed robbers while recovering a cache of arms and ammunition, including AK-47 rifles, a pump-action gun, a Beretta pistol.

The State Police Public Relations Officer, Delta State Command, SP Edefe Bright, in a statement on Tuesday, said on March 26, 2025, operatives of the CP Special Assignment Team, led by ASP Julius Robinson, tracked down a suspected kidnapper, Chedeye Mohammed, in Rivers State.

"Acting on intelligence, officers pursued the fugitive and arrested him at around 6:20 PM. During interrogation, Mohammed led the team to a

bush near a trailer park in Rivers State, where they recovered an AK-47 rifle loaded with thirteen rounds of 7.62mm live ammunition.

"Preliminary investigations revealed that the suspect and his gang were responsible for multiple kidnappings in Ughelli, Agbarho, and other parts of Delta State, using Rivers State as a hideout. Efforts to apprehend other gang members are ongoing.

He said that in another major operation, officers acting on credible intelligence launched a sting operation in Anyangba Town, Kogi State, where they arrested three suspects: Zakari Mohammed (31) from Olugbujo Community, Ibrahim Mumuni (29) from Anyangba Town, and Mohammed Hamisu (25) from Anyangba Town, all in Dekina Local Government Area (LGA).

He said that a search of their residences led to the recovery of an AK-47 rifle and an automatic pump-action gun, stressing that further investigations led to the arrest of another suspect, Samaila Mohammed (35) from Udo Community, Dekina LGA, who was found being in possession of a Beretta pistol loaded with three rounds of live ammunition and cartridges. All suspects remain in custody as investigations continue.

In another development, on March 25, 2025, at approximately 6:20 PM, security operatives arrested Emu Lucky (35) in Olomoro Community, Isoko South LGA. A search of his residence uncovered eighty-two rounds of 7.62mm ammunition.

Preliminary investigations indicated that Lucky was supplying ammunition to kidnappers

in collaboration with Mohammed Bello, a suspected criminal already in police custody.

Bello allegedly acted as a middleman, facilitating the sale of weapons between Lucky and various criminal groups.

According to Edefe, Delta State Commissioner of Police, CP Abaniwonda Olufemi has assured residents that law enforcement agents would sustain their momentum in combating crime.

The command Edefe said is committed to fulfilling the mandate set by the Inspector General of Police in ensuring that all residents of Delta State can sleep peacefully without fear of criminal activity.

CP Olufemi also called on the public to support the police by providing valuable information and maintaining close cooperation with security agencies.

We have subdued terrorists in Kebbi, Zamfara —Army

The Commander of One Brigade, Nigerian Army, Gusau, Brigadier General Timothy Oporum, has stated that troops of One Brigade under Operation Fansar Yamma have significantly reduced terrorists' activities in their area of responsibility, covering Kebbi and Zamfara states.

General Oporum made this declaration on Tuesday evening during a Sallah luncheon with officers, soldiers, and their families at the Brigade Cantonment in Gusau.

According to him, the security situation was previously challenging, but through sustained military operations and the dedication of troops, the army has gained dominance over the region and curtailed terrorist activities to a large extent.

"The One Brigade has been doing well in our operation especially the ongoing operation forest sanity III, you will recall that some few months back it was not that easy but with efforts of our troops, efforts of our officers, we have been able to dominate our AOR and Subdue the terrorists to a very large extent."

The Commander commend-

ed the troops for their sacrifices and unwavering commitment, noting that in recognition of their efforts, the Chief of Army Staff has approved additional logistics support to enhance their operations further.

He urged the soldiers to maintain their momentum, redoubling efforts to ensure all states in the Northwest are secured for peace and economic development.

"Because of the feat we have achieved, the Chief of Army Staff has graciously approved certain logistics for us to continue our operation, it means to whom much is given, much is expected, it means we need to double our efforts, it is not yet uhuru, there is still a lot of work to be done."

"We must continue to fight until we destroy all enemies of the state and make Zamfara State, Kebbi State and all states within the Northwest region of this operation to be safe and secure for the socio-economic progress."

The event also featured a moment of silence in honor of fallen soldiers who lost their lives in the line of duty.

NEWS

SEC law 'll tackle ponzi schemes – Senate

The Chairman of the Senate Committee on Capital Market, Senator Osita Izunaso, has cautioned that the era of fraudulent investment schemes and market manipulation is over, as the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) will now properly regulate cryptocurrency trading.

Speaking at a media conference on Wednesday, Izunaso underscored that the new law assented to by President Tinubu has introduced regulatory measures aimed at strengthening Nigeria's financial system, particularly in the cryptocurrency capital market sectors and State government funding.

He warned that promoters and operators of illegal financial schemes face severe penalties, including fines of at least N20 million and imprisonment of up to 10 years or both.

"Before now, people engaged in Ponzi schemes with-

out consequences, but the new law is designed to protect investors' money. If caught, apart from paying a fine, you will go to jail. Initially, we proposed a 20-year sentence, but 10 years has been approved," he stated.

Izunaso also explained the new law now encourages sub-national to access long-term funding through the capital market. He urged states to approach the SEC for infrastructure financing, noting that regulatory reforms have made the process more flexible.

"Every state can now approach the capital market for funding without unnecessary bottlenecks. This will drive infrastructural development across the country," he stated.

Addressing concerns about digital assets and cybercrime, Izunaso assured Nigerians that the new securities law will comprehensively address issues related to cryptocurrency and other digital financial instruments.

Police bust 'yahoo school' in Lagos, rescue 12-year-old trainee, others

The Lagos State Police Command has uncovered and dismantled an illegal internet fraud training facility, known as a "Yahoo School," in the Iju area of the state.

The command's spokesperson, Benjamin Hundeyin, in a statement on Tuesday, stated that four principal suspects were arrested alongside six trainees.

According to him, among the trainees was an underaged boy identified as Minachi Udochukwu.

Hundeyin noted that preliminary investigations revealed that the principal suspects recruited the trainees from Anambra State, engaged them in internet fraud, and confiscated their earnings.

The statement read in part, "During the successful operations, the police detectives arrested four Yahoo experts who were running the notorious school, namely Chibuike Ihejika, 23; Stanley Ihejika, 22; Obiora Oyediba, 26; and Emmanuel Oyedibe, 25.

"The other six suspects are their criminal trainees, all of

whom were undergoing training in cybercrime and fraud: Okorie Henry, Otoh Chisom, 20; Okeke Kwufrochikwu, 26; Uchenna Obeji, 26; Minachi Udochukwu, 12; and Chinedu Ukachukwu, 23.

"Preliminary investigations revealed that the principal suspects of the facility recruited their trainees from Anambra State, engaged them to commit internet fraud and other related crimes.

"The proceeds from their fraudulent activities were being confiscated by the principal suspects."

While the command warned the owner of the facility to turn himself in at the State Criminal Investigation Department, it assured all that all suspects would be charged to court for prosecution upon the conclusion of the investigation into the case.

The statement further revealed that Ugochukwu had been provided with medical care after healing marks of injury believed to have been sustained during the training was found on his body

Sultan seeks end to indigene, non-indigene divide

Sultan Muhammad Sa'ad Abubakar has called on state governors across Nigeria to adopt the inclusive governance approach of the Governor of Sokoto State, Ahmed Aliyu, by eliminating the distinction between indigenes and non-indigenes.

The Sultan made this appeal during his Sallah homage to the governor at the Banquet Hall of the Presidential Lodge in Sokoto.

He emphasised that in Sokoto, all Nigerians are regarded as indigenes, fostering a sense of belonging among residents.

"In Sokoto, we do not categorise people as non-indi-

genes; rather, we recognise them as members of our resident communities," the Sultan stated.

He urged other states to replicate this model to promote lasting peace, unity, and national cohesion.

The Sultan also stressed the critical role of state governors in ensuring the safety and security of their people, noting that security is fundamental to societal progress.

"We appreciate the governor's efforts in Sokoto, and we, the traditional institution, will continue to support his initiatives to transform our state.

"The governor, along with

Nigerian Army begins recruitment of tradesmen, non-tradesmen

The Nigerian Army has commenced the enlistment of tradesmen, non-tradesmen, and women for its 89th regular recruits intake.

The NA made this known on its X handle on Tuesday.

The statement read, "The Nigerian Army wishes to inform the general public that the online application for 89 Regular Recruits Intake for Non-Tradesmen and Women will commence for all interest-

ed candidates.

"Application is free for interested candidates. Applicants are advised to apply once, as multiple applications will lead to disqualification. Interested applicants can log on to <http://recruitment.army.mil.ng> to complete online registration from March 31 to May 17, 2025.

"Shortlisted candidates are expected to report to their respective states of origin for the screening exercise, which

will take place from 2- 16 June 2025."

The application website offers additional instructions for eligible candidates on the application process, detailing the required criteria.

"Applicants must be single and Nigerian citizens by birth, and must possess a National Identity Card/NIN and BVN printout, and must be medically, physically, and psychologically fit by Nigerian Army Standards.

"Applicants must be free of any criminal conviction by the court of law. They must possess a valid birth certificate endorsed by the National Population Commission, Hospital, or Local Government Council, or an age declaration.

"Applicants must possess a valid certificate of state of origin and must not be less than 1.68 metres and 1.65 metres tall for male and female candidates respectively," the post read.



NIGER DELTA SPORTS FESTIVAL:

Ondo State Governor, Lucky Aiyedatiwa (middle); Akwa Ibom State Governor, Umo Eno, and a state official, during the opening ceremony of Niger Delta Sports Festival holden in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State.

Jonathan has set example in political maturity —council

The Executive Secretary of the International Supreme Council for Peace Africa, Ambassador Simeon Uwah, has highlighted the remarkable sacrifice made by former President Goodluck Jonathan in conceding defeat during the 2015 general elections.

Uwah described Jonathan's decision as one of the most defining moments of democratic

maturity in Africa.

In the 2015 general elections, Jonathan made history by conceding defeat to former President Muhammadu Buhari in a fiercely contested race, an act that stunned Nigerians and captured the attention of the world.

Speaking to journalists in Uyo, exactly 10 years after the event, Uwah emphasised that Jonathan's decision to peacefully hand over power serves as a valuable lesson for African leaders who, in times of turmoil, choose to cling to power rather than prioritise peace.

"On March 31, 2015, exactly 10 years ago today, former Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan made history by conceding defeat to Muhammadu Buhari after a fiercely contested presidential election," Uwah said.

"In an era where political leaders across Africa often resort to violence, electoral disputes, or unconstitutional maneuvers to hold onto power, Jonathan's concession stands as one of the most defining moments of African democratic maturity. It was a turning point, and Nigeria's democracy

was draped in bright colors."

Uwah further noted that Jonathan's now-famous phone call to Buhari to offer congratulations was more than just a gracious acknowledgment of the election results.

It was a deliberate act of commitment to peace, democracy, and national stability.

"His phone call to Buhari was not merely a gesture of sportsmanship, it was a purposeful step towards ensuring peace. This single act helped avert post-election violence, saved countless lives, and strengthened Nigeria's democratic standing on the global stage," Uwah added.

He emphasised that Jonathan's decision should serve as a model for Africa, particularly as the continent continues to face political crises.

"As Africa grapples with military coups, disputed elections, democratic backsliding, and the entrenchment of authoritarian regimes, Jonathan's approach remains a crucial blueprint for democratic governance and reforms," Uwah said.

"With political instability on the rise across the continent—

from Guinea to Sudan, Gabon to Burkina Faso—instituting patriotic and democratic leadership is not just optional, it is imperative. If this direction is not followed, Africa risks facing even greater challenges."

Uwah also suggested that Jonathan's peaceful concession should be taught as a case study in governance and leadership training for African leaders.

He called on the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States to institutionalise peaceful handovers and leadership transitions as democratic standards to safeguard the continent's democracy from collapse.

"Political transitions should be collaborative, not adversarial," Uwah urged. "Future leaders must embrace bipartisanship and national reconciliation as core principles of governance."

He concluded by recalling Jonathan's words from that pivotal moment: "My ambition is not worth the blood of any Nigerian."

Uwah called for African leaders to adopt this mindset—not just in rhetoric but in practice—moving forward.

Foreign

News

Deadly strikes in Gaza as Israel expands offensive to seize 'large areas'

Deadly Israeli air strikes have been reported in Gaza, as Israel's defence minister said its military would expand its offensive and seize large areas of the Palestinian territory - incorporating them into what he described as "security zones".

Israel Katz said the expanded operation aimed to "destroy and clear the area of terrorists and terrorist infrastructure", and would require a large-scale evacuation of Palestinians.

Later, at least 19 Palestinians, including nine children, were killed in a strike on a UN clinic sheltering displaced families in the northern town of Jabalia, the nearby Indonesian hospital said.

The Israeli military said it targeted " Hamas terrorists" hiding there.

Overnight strikes across Gaza killed at least 20 more people, according to local hospitals.

The Civil Defence said its first responders recovered the bodies of 12 people, including children and women, from a home in the southern Khan Younis area.

Rida al-Jabbour said a neighbour and her three-month-old baby were among the dead.

"From the moment the strike occurred we have not been able to sit or sleep or anything," she told Reuters news agency.

The Israeli military said it was looking into the reports.

The Civil Defence said the strike in Jabalia later on Wednesday hit two rooms in a clinic run by the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (Unrwa) which was being used as a shelter.

Video verified by the BBC showed dozens of people and ambulances rushing to the building. Smoke was seen billowing from a wing where two floors appeared to have collapsed.

The Israeli military said in a statement that it targeted Hamas operatives who were "hiding inside a command-and-control centre that was being used for co-ordinating terrorist activity and served as a central meeting point".

"Prior to the strike, numerous steps were taken to mitigate the risk of harming civilians, including the use of aerial surveillance and additional intelligence," it added.

A spokeswoman for Unrwa told the Associated Press that one of the agency's buildings had

been hit, but that she had no further details on casualties or what the building was being used as.

There were also reports of extensive Israeli air strikes and shelling along the Egypt border overnight and there is a growing sense that a new major Israeli ground offensive is looming in Gaza.

Israeli Army Radio said on Wednesday that Israeli tanks and ground forces had begun to advance into central and eastern parts of the southern-most city of Rafah.

This week, Israel's military ordered an estimated 140,000 people in Rafah to leave their homes and issued new evacuation orders for parts of northern Gaza.

Israel has already significantly expanded a buffer zone around the edge of Gaza over

the course of the war, and seized control of a corridor of land cutting through its centre.

Israel launched its renewed Gaza offensive on 18 March, blaming Hamas for rejecting a new US proposal to extend the ceasefire and free the 59 hostages still held captive in Gaza.

Hamas, in turn, accused Israel of violating the original deal they had agreed to in January.

The Hostages and Missing Families Forum in Israel, which represents many hostages' relatives, said they were "horrified to wake up" to the news of the expanded military operation.

The group urged the Israeli government to prioritise securing the release of all hostages

es still held in Gaza.

In his statement announcing plans to seize more territory, Katz also urged Gazans to act to remove Hamas and free remaining Israeli hostages, without suggesting how they should do so.

The humanitarian situation across Gaza has dramatically worsened in recent weeks, with Israel refusing to allow aid into the Gaza Strip since 2 March - the longest aid blockade since the war began.

Last month the UN announced it was reducing its operations in Gaza, one day after eight Palestinian medics, six Civil Defence first responders and a UN staff member were killed by Israeli forces in southern Gaza.

**COUP ATTEMPT:**

L-R: Benjamin Zalman-Polun, Marcel Malanga and Tyler Thompson were sentenced to death over last year's coup attempt in DR Congo.

Death sentence for three Americans over DR Congo coup attempt overturned

Three Americans convicted for their role in a failed coup in Democratic Republic of Congo last year have had their death sentences commuted to life imprisonment, the presidency has said.

They were among 37 people sentenced to death last September by a military court.

The three were accused of leading an attack on both the presidential palace and the home of an ally of President Félix Tshisekedi last May.

The overturning of the sentences comes ahead of a visit to DR Congo by the newly appointed US senior advisor for Africa, Massad Boulos.

Boulos, father-in-law to President Donald Trump's daughter, Tiffany, is expected to arrive in Kinshasa on Thursday on a trip that will also take him to Rwanda, Kenya and Uganda.

The US has not declared the three Americans to be wrongfully jailed in DR Congo but the

State Department said previously there have been talks between the countries over the matter.

The three were convicted of criminal conspiracy, terrorism and other charges, which they denied.

The suspected leader of the plot, Christian Malanga, a US national of Congolese origin, was killed during the attack, along with five others.

In total 51 people were tried

in a military court, with hearings broadcast on national TV and radio.

Fourteen people were acquitted and freed, with the court finding they had no connection to the attack.

Death sentences have not been carried out in DR Congo for roughly two decades and convicts who receive the penalty usually serve life imprisonment instead.

The government lifted this moratorium in March this year, citing the need to remove "traitors" from the nation's dysfunctional army. However, no death penalties have been carried out since.

On Tuesday, President Tshisekedi signed orders to commute the Americans' death sentences, his spokesperson Tina Salama said in a televised statement.

Myanmar military fires at Chinese Red Cross quake relief convoy

Myanmar's military opened fire at a Chinese Red Cross convoy carrying earthquake relief supplies on Tuesday night.

The Ta'ang National Liberation Army, an armed rebel group, said that military troops shot at the convoy of nine vehicles with machine guns in eastern Shan State.

The convoy was en route to Mandalay, the hard-hit city near the epicentre of the magnitude-7.7 earthquake that struck last Friday. No injuries have been reported.

Myanmar's junta, which said it was investigating the incident, denied shooting directly at the vehicles. It said troops fired shots into the air after the convoy did not stop, despite it being signalled to do so. China's foreign ministry said on Wednesday that its rescue team and supplies were safe, adding that it hoped "all factions and parties in Myanmar will prioritize earthquake relief efforts".

Myanmar has been gripped by violence amid a civil war between the junta - which seized power in a 2021 coup - and ethnic militias and resistance forces across the country.

The country's humanitarian crisis has worsened significantly after last week's massive earthquake, which has killed more than 2,700 people, by the government's estimate. The actual death toll is believed to be much higher.

Multiple international aid agencies and foreign governments have dispatched personnel and supplies to quake-hit

regions.

A military spokesperson on Wednesday said troops saw the aid convoy coming from Naungcho township on Tuesday night, with vehicles sporting Chinese stickers and Myanmar number plates, but had not been given prior notice of the vehicles' movement.

"When we saw the convoy, we stopped it. But they continued. We opened fire from about 200m away, but they didn't stop," he said.

"At about 100m away, we fired three shots in the air, after which the vehicles turned back towards Naungcho."

China's Blue Sky Rescue Team, which has been providing rescue support in Mandalay, had been given a security cover when they travelled through this route, the spokesperson said.

He added that when international agencies want to give aid, they need to inform the Myanmar government.

The TNLA, which was escorting the Red Cross convoy, said they had informed the military council about going to Mandalay. After retreating to Naungcho, they would be continuing their journey, the group said in a statement.

Rebel groups have unilaterally announced a ceasefire to support earthquake relief efforts. But the military has refused to do the same.

Hours after the quake struck on Friday, the junta launched an air strike in Naungcho township that killed seven people.

'Water break saved me from blast that killed my brother in India'

On Tuesday morning, Rajesh Nayak stepped outside the firecracker warehouse in India's Gujarat state where he worked to drink water.

Some moments later, an explosion ripped through the building, killing 21 people, including Mr Nayak's brother.

"Some of my other relatives have also died. I had come to work here only from Sunday,"

a distraught Nayak, who is in hospital with minor injuries, said.

Most of the victims were from neighbouring Madhya Pradesh state and had recently come to work at the warehouse, located in an industrial estate in Banaskantha district in Gujarat.

Their families lived in huts close to the building and some of them were also killed from

the force of the explosion. Banaskantha District Collector Mihir Patel told BBC Gujarati that the victims included four women and three children.

It's not clear yet what caused the explosion, but officials are investigating if firecrackers were being manufactured illegally at the warehouse.

"Primary information has been received that the explosion took place when firecrack-

ers were being made here," said Mr Patel, the collector.

India has strict rules around firecracker production but these are often not enforced strongly on the ground. Accidents are regularly reported, especially at illegal factories.

The incident in Gujarat came a day after eight people were killed in an explosion at an illegal firecracker factory hundreds of miles away in

West Bengal state.

Police in Gujarat have arrested two men, owners of the warehouse, in connection with the explosion and are searching for one more person. A special investigation team has been set up to look into the incident.

Banaskantha district police chief Akshay Raj Makwana said a preliminary investigation showed that aluminium powder was stored in the building.

Foreign

News

Myanmar quake: Imam's grief for 170 killed as they prayed in Sagaing

As the call to prayer rang out in Sagaing last Friday, hundreds of Muslims hurried to the five mosques in the city in central Myanmar.

They were eager to hold their last Friday prayers for Ramadan, just days away from the festive period of Eid that would mark the end of the holy month.

Then, at 12:51 local time (06:21 GMT), a deadly earthquake struck. Three mosques collapsed, including the biggest one, Myoma, killing almost everyone inside.

Hundreds of kilometres away, the former imam of Myoma mosque, Soe Nay Oo, felt the quake in the Thai border town of Mae Sot.

In the following days, he found out that around 170 of his relatives, friends and members of his former congregation had died, mostly in the mosques. Some were leading figures in the city's close-knit Muslim community.

"I think about all the people who lost their lives, and the victims' children - some of them are young children," he told the BBC. "I can't hold back my tears when I talk about this."

More than 2,700 people have died in the quake which happened near Sagaing and Mandalay, Myanmar's second city. The death toll is expected to rise as rescuers continue to

pull out bodies from rubble.

While the area was known for its ancient Buddhist temples, the cities were also home to a significant Muslim population.

An estimated 500 Muslims died while praying in their mosques, according to figures given by the country's leader, Min Aung Hlaing, on Monday.

Eyewitnesses in Sagaing have told the BBC that the road where the mosques were, Myoma Street, was the worst hit in the city. Many other houses on the street have also collapsed.

Hundreds of people have sought shelter by the side of the road, either because they are now homeless, or are too afraid to go back to their homes in case there are aftershocks. Food supplies are reported to be scarce.

In Myoma alone, more than 60 people were said to be crushed in the collapse, while scores more died in the Myodaw and Moekya mosques. More bodies were still being pulled out on Tuesday.

There are indications that the worshippers had tried to escape, according to Soe Nay Oo, who has received multiple reports from surviving members of his community.

He currently lives in the Thai city of Mae Sot with his wife and daughter, after escaping from Myanmar soon after a coup that took place in 2021.



BUILDING LEFT: Inside the city left in ruins after two years of war

Niger's military leaders free ministers, but not ousted president

Niger's military leaders have released more than 50 detainees, including former ministers in the government they toppled in 2023.

Among them are the former ministers of defence, oil and finance, as well as several senior army officers, convicted or accused of plotting previous coups.

Ousted President Mohamed Bazoum, who has been under house arrest since the 2023 military takeover, was not on the list of those released despite international calls for him to be freed.

When the BBC asked about President Bazoum's continued detention, Justice Minister Aliyou Daouda cited "national security and sovereignty" concerns.

"The question of his release is an internal matter in Niger and only concerns Niger," Jus-

tice Minister Aliyou Daouda told the BBC.

Bazoum is accused of undermining national security and high treason.

The release of the others is among the recommendations of a national conference held in February, along with extending the rule of General Abdourahamane Tiani by five years.

The freed ministers and officials were arrested after the July 2023 coup which brought General Tchiani to power, and had been held for alleged conspiracy to undermine state security and authority.

This move could be an attempt by the junta to reconcile the country and gain popular support.

Similar amnesties have been granted by military governments in Burkina Faso and Guinea.

China carries out live-fire exercises in drill encircling Taiwan – Military

China's military conducted a live-fire exercise in the Taiwan Strait to simulate strikes on key ports and energy facilities, it said on Wednesday.

The exercise, codenamed "Strait Thunder", is an escalation of military drills China held on Tuesday around Taiwan, the democratic island Beijing claims as its territory.

Taiwan's presidential office said on Tuesday that it "strongly condemns" the "military provocations", which have become increasingly routine amid souring cross-strait ties.

The drills come as China sharpened its rhetoric against Taiwan's President Lai Ching-te, labelling him a "parasite" and "separatist". Lai had earlier this month referred to China as a "foreign hostile force".

The drills were meant to be a

"serious warning and powerful containment of 'Taiwan independence' separatist forces", said a statement from China's People's Liberation Army (PLA).

It also released a series of cartoons depicting Lai as a "parasite" that was "poisoning Taiwan island" and - along with an image of Lai being grilled over a fire - "courting ultimate destruction".

Another video by the PLA, titled "Subdue demons and vanquish evils", likened the military's capabilities to the magical powers of the Monkey King, a mythical Chinese character.

In recent days, the Chinese Communist Party newspaper People's Daily published a series of op-eds denouncing Lai as a "troublemaker" and "warmonger".

"Facts have fully proven that Lai Ching-te is a vicious war maker," read one of the arti-

cles published on Wednesday. "Subdue demons and vanquish evils, use force to stop war."

While the trigger for this week's drills were not spelled out, Chinese authorities and state media have referenced a slew of policies announced by Lai last month to counter influence and infiltration operations by Beijing - where Lai used the "foreign hostile force" term.

However, the timing of the exercises, coming weeks after Lai's announcement, suggests that Chinese authorities wanted to wait for the conclusion of meetings between Chinese President Xi Jinping and international business leaders, along with the annual Boao business summit that wrapped up on 28 March.

They also come with the world's attention turned else-

where, as global markets brace for the Trump administration's latest round of tariffs.

In response to China's latest military drills, the White House said on Tuesday that US President Donald Trump was "emphasising the importance of maintaining peace in the Taiwan Strait". On Wednesday, the US State Department reaffirmed its "enduring commitment" to Taiwan.

During his recent visit to Asia, US defence secretary Pete Hegseth also repeatedly criticised China's aggression in the region and pledged to provide "robust, ready and credible deterrence", including in the Taiwan Strait.

However, the PLA seems to be moving towards a situation where such exercises around Taiwan occur regularly rather than in response to any specific perceived provocation.

USAID cuts put US on sidelines of Myanmar aid, former officials say

The US has been unable to meaningfully respond to the Myanmar earthquake due to the Trump administration's decision to slash foreign aid, according to three former senior US officials.

One former US Agency for International Development (USAID) mission director for Myanmar told the BBC that "America has been on

the sidelines" after the disaster.

"The US basically was not there for the rescue-window period," said another official. All three suggested the deep cuts to aid probably cost lives.

A 7.7 magnitude earthquake struck on Friday, leaving at least 2,700 people dead, more than 4,500 injured and hundreds still missing, according

to the country's military. Those figures are expected to rise.

The former USAID officials said the agency mobilised Disaster Assistance Response Teams (DARTs) from the US after previous major earthquakes. Comprised of highly trained rescuers, sniffer dogs and specialist equipment, the teams are immediately made ready then dispatched when the affected country requests them.

A typical deployment, like that sent to the Turkey-Syria earthquake in 2023, could comprise some 200 people - the majority of them rescue workers. US teams are often the biggest of all foreign assistance groups on the ground.

The US Department of State said on Monday a US team based in the region was on its way to Myanmar. It is believed to comprise three people who are advisers, not rescuers.

The state department also said

it was donating \$2m (£1.6m) to humanitarian assistance organisations to support earthquake-affected communities. This figure is significantly smaller than previous US government donations during disasters, according to the former officials.

President Donald Trump's adviser Elon Musk is finalising the shutdown of USAID after weeks spent dismantling the agency and placing staff on administrative leave. Trump targeted foreign assistance on his first day in office, calling it an "industry" that was in many cases "antithetical to American values".

On Friday, after the earthquake struck, the White House attempted to mobilise a DART team, according to Andrew Natios, who served as USAID administrator in George W Bush's administration. But, he said, it couldn't because key officials were on administrative leave.

Loss and hope in Sudan's ruined capital after army victory

The battered heart of Khartoum lies eerily quiet now, after weeks of intense urban combat in the Sudanese capital.

We entered the city just days after Sudan's army recaptured it from the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), the culmination of a six-month offensive through the central part of the country.

Once the commercial heart and seat of Sudan's govern-

ment, Khartoum is now a burnt-out shell.

Taking back the capital was a turning point in the two-year civil war, which erupted out of a power struggle between the army and the RSF, and is estimated to have claimed at least 150,000 lives.

But - as celebrations for Eid spill out into the capital's streets and people here consider the war to be over - it is not clear what direction the conflict will

take now.

We drove first to the presidential palace, which the RSF seized early in the war.

It was an important base for the paramilitary fighters.

The floors are covered with debris and broken glass.

Cushioned chairs once used for official functions stand covered with dust, a few paintings still hang on the walls, ragged chandeliers dangle from the ceilings.

But almost everything else had been looted - even the electrical cables were yanked out of the walls.

The worst damage is at the front of the building, which was struck by RSF drones shortly after the army seized the palace.

The main entrance is wrecked, dried blood still visible on the stairs, the windows now gaping holes looking out over the River Nile.

 <p>The Nigerian Observer ...That the people may know</p>	<h2 style="margin: 0;">ADVERTISEMENT RATES (PRINT)</h2>
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10 X 4	340,000	365,500	273,500	294,013	177,400	190,705	370,000	397,750	295,600	317,770
HALF PAGE	295,600	317,770	236,500	254,238	147,800	158,885	340,000	365,500	273,450	293,959
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FP 4X2	73,000	78,475	80,700	86,753	4 X 2	45,260	48,655	34,400	36,980
FP 3X2	64,870	69,735	73,000	78,475	3 X 2	30,900	33,218	26,600	28,595
FP 2X2	59,000	63,425	64,900	69,768	2 X 2	18,680	20,081	15,600	16,770
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Sports

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FA Cup 2025: Bendel Insurance advance to Round 16 as Kayode's hat trick sends Adamawa Utd packing

Kehinde Osagiede

It was another impressive outing for Bendel Insurance Football Club of Benin on Wednesday, April 2, 2025 at the Lafia City stadium in Lafia, Nasarawa state as the Benin Arsenal brushed aside Adamawa Utd 3-0 in the round of 32 match of the 2025 President Federation Cup to advance to the round of 16.

Kayode Oke Solomon turned out to be the only potent instrument Insurance FC needed in their attack as he scored a hat trick to help the Benin Arsenal triumph over the Adamawa side.

The Benin Arsenal's for-

ward Kayode Oke opened scoring for the 2023 champions in the 25th minute and doubled the lead in the 38th minute to go into halftime with confidence. The energetic forward remained hungry for more goals as his effort was crowned with a third goal in the 87th minute to seal victory for Insurance FC and also get his first hat trick for his new club.

Recall that Bendel Insurance FC also thrashed NLO side Dandidi Babes FC of Jig-saw state 5-0 in the round of 64 game at the same Lafia City stadium in Nasarawa state last month.

Skipper Meyiwa Oritseyey-

inmi's brace with Uche Collins opening goal, Michael Enaruna and Chinedu Onyjekwe's goals gave the Benin Arsenal the victory over the NLO team in Lafia.

The 2023 Federation Cup champions Bendel Insurance FC will be returning to Benin to begin preparation for the NPFL Match Day 32 against Rangers International of Enugu in a revised fixture on Saturday, April 5, 2025 as they await their next opponents in the Federation Cup round of 16.

In a post match interview, Coach Greg Ikhenoba said he was impressed by Kayode Oke and the team's perfor-



While congratulating the striker on his first hat trick

for Insurance FC, coach Greg Ikhenoba noted that Kayode Oke is developing into the super striker he wants him to be..

He however admitted

that his team is still work in progress despite the overwhelming victories they have recorded so far in the 2025 Federation Cup.

Breaking: Ogun State disburses ₦16.5 Million to Sports Associations ahead of Gateway Games 2024

In a major boost for grassroots sports development, the Ogun State Government, through its Ministry of Sports Development, has presented subvention cheques worth a total of ₦16.5 million to 33 sports associations in the state.

Each association received ₦500,000 at a formal ceremony held at the June 12 Cultural Centre, Kuto, Abeokuta.

The financial support is aimed at strengthening the associations' preparations for the Gateway Games 2024, the 22nd edition of the National Sports Festival, which Ogun State will be hosting.

Originally set for January, the event has been rescheduled to May 16-30, 2025, to allow for better preparations and facility upgrades.

Speaking at the event, Hon. Wasiu Isiaka, the Commissioner for Sports Development, reaffirmed the state govern-



Ogun disbursement

ment's commitment to nurturing sports at all levels. He emphasized that the subventions would help associations develop athletes, enhance training programs, and ensure Ogun State's strong presence at the festival.

This initiative is part of a

broader effort by the state government to build a thriving sports sector, attract investment, and create opportunities for young athletes.

In line with this vision, Premium Trust Bank was recently unveiled as the lead sponsor for the Gateway Games 2024,

marking the largest sponsorship deal in the history of the National Sports Festival.

With this financial backing and strategic planning, Ogun State is positioning itself to host a world-class sporting event while fostering talent and unity through sports

Asensio and Malen steer Emery's side up to seventh

There are not many clubs in Europe, let alone the Premier League, who can send on players as talented as Ollie Watkins and Marco Asensio when things need switching up.

Yet Unai Emery has exactly those options on his bench and they helped carry Aston Villa another step towards their targets on three fronts.

So many managers across the world would trade their

squad with Emery's today and that depth is why Villa are also in the FA Cup semi-finals and face a Champions League quarter-final against Paris Saint-Germain, with the first leg in France next Wednesday. They are only two points short of fifth place, which is likely to bring Champions League football next term.

After Asensio's fellow loan star Marcus Rashford had given Villa the lead with his first league goal for the club, the Spaniard scored his eighth in all competitions and fellow substitute Donyell Malen added a third in stoppage time.

That made it six wins in a row for Emery's men, and a third in two games for Rashford since joining from Manchester United in the winter.

'Now is not the time to speak about it (Rashford joining permanently)', said Emery. 'It's not the same decision if we are in the Champions League next season, as opposed to the Europa League, the Conference League or not in Europe at all.'

'He is here because he wanted to be here, to play football, feel confident and try to help us. We signed him because we were thinking about how much he could help us.'



President Tinubu signs National Anti-Doping bill into law

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu has signed the National Anti-Doping Bill into law, marking a significant milestone in Nigeria's commitment to fair play and integrity in sports.

The newly enacted law domesticates the International Convention Against Doping in Sports and establishes an independent body responsible for implementing the World Anti-Doping Code and International Standards in Nigeria. Most notably, it leads to the creation of the Nigeria Anti-doping Center, positioning Nigeria as an anti-doping hub on the continent.

The National Sports Commission (NSC) Chairman, Mallam Shehu Dikko, has expressed his gratitude to the President for his prompt action, stating that this move reinforces Nigeria's alignment with global anti-doping standards and overall sports development.

Mallam Dikko praised the President's commitment to fairness in sporting competitions, ensuring Nigerian athletes compete clean and free from banned substances.

The Director-General of the NSC, Hon. Olopade, in his reaction assured that the NSC will collaborate with the National Anti-Doping Organization (NADO) to ensure Nigeria's full compliance and provide necessary support for a seamless takeoff.

The National Anti-doping Act 2025 offers numerous benefits, including reclaiming Nigeria's position in global sports, addressing doping issues, and solidifying the country's commitment to fairness and integrity. This development is expected to earn Nigeria respect from the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), and the UNESCO Convention Against Doping in Sports.



SPORTS



President Federation Cup: NNL clubs show class as Beyond Limits, Solution romp into round of 16



Clubs in the nation's second tier league, the NNL today showed class in the President Federation Cup.

Reigning NNL champions, Beyond Limits set the biggest upset of the campaign so far this season as they bundled out NPFL top club Rivers United by 2-1 at the Samuel Ogbemudia Stadium in Benin.

In Abuja, Wikki Tourists secured a 1-0 victory over Rovers of Calabar in an all NNL setting. It would be noted that another NNL club Warri Wolves secured their passage into the round of 16 without kicking

a ball following the disqualification of 3SC of Ibadan. 3SC were thrown out of the competition for fielding an ineligible player earlier in the race.

Osun United another NNL club has also landed in the round of 16 where they would be doing battle against Plateau United.

at Ijebu Ode as Ikorodu came from behind to win by 3-1.

In Abuja, Wikki Tourists secured a 1-0 victory over Rovers of Calabar in an all NNL setting.

Mourinho pinches the NOSE of Galatasaray boss Buruk after Fenerbahce lose

Jose Mourinho remarkably pinched the nose of Galatasaray boss Okan Buruk as Fenerbahce were beaten in a fiery Istanbul derby on Wednesday.

Mourinho's side suffered a disappointing 2-1 defeat in the clash, which came in the quarter-final of the Turkish Cup.

However, the game was marred by a chaotic ending, triggered by Mourinho that saw three players - Fenerbahce's Mert Yandas and Galatasaray's Kerem Demirbay and Baris Yilmaz - sent off.

As the game reached its conclusion, Mourinho clashed with Buruk as he made his way onto the pitch.

The Portuguese coach was clearly unhappy with something and was seen pinching his counterpart's nose.

Buruk fell to the floor after the incident as players from both sides rushed in, with the Galatasaray boss left clutching his nose and face.

Mourinho was subsequently pulled away from the scene by a member of his coaching staff.

While the former Chelsea, Man United and Tottenham boss escaped punishment on the night, he could be hit with a retrospective ban following the clash - which quickly went viral on social media.



NBBF board members, stakeholders Hail Musa Kida's appointment as Chairman, NNPC

Encomiums and felicitations have been pouring for the President of Nigeria Basketball Federation, Engineer Ahmadu Musa Kida, on his appointment by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, as the new Chairman of Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPC).

Since the appointment which many experts in the oil and gas industry described as long overdue, but timely, it has been prayers and heartfelt goodwill messages for Kida by all Nigerians and particularly, from his immediate sports constituency, the basketball community.

In a press statement signed and released by veteran sports journalist Felix Awogu, on behalf of the NBBF board members, congratulates Kida on his appointment as the chairman of the board of NNPC.

It noted that Kida has proven his ability, capability and integrity as a globally renowned expert in the energy, oil and gas industry, with over 40 years experience bouyoed by high levels of efficient and spectacular achievements.

"It is no gain saying that you're a great achiever with so much experience and sagacity in administration, and that is glaringly



evident in the unprecedented feats your leadership as President of the NBBF has brought to the game of basketball in Nigeria.

"We acknowledge your reputation as a globally renowned expert in the oil industry and like the other good people of this great nation, we have implicit confidence that you shall deliver on the mandate of your new board of the NNPC.

"The board members of the NBBF, the stakeholders, as well as, enthusiasts and aficionados of the game, say a big thank you to His Excellency, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, on your appointment. And we heartily pray that God in His infinite mercies continue to guard, guide and bless your steps in your new national assignment.

nothing like that. I am a board member, and there has not been any issue raised about the coach's contract."

Meanwhile, Chelle is set to embark on a trip to Europe, where he will meet with Nigerian players and attempt to convince eligible players to represent the country. Top on his agenda is a meeting with Arsenal wonderkid Ethan Nwaneri, whose chances of switching allegiance to Nigeria were boosted by an England snub during the last international break.

Chelle was appointed as the Super Eagles coach in January on a two-year deal, subject to renewal. His tenure has seen two matches so far, with a 2-0 victory over Rwanda and a 1-1 draw with Zimbabwe

NFF debunks rumors of Super Eagles Coach Eric Chelle's contract termination

The Nigeria Football Federation (NFF) has categorically denied rumors circulating about the potential termination of Super Eagles coach Eric Chelle's contract. Chelle's future with the team had been uncertain following the underwhelming results in March's

2026 World Cup qualifiers.

A top NFF official described the reports as "fake news," emphasizing that the executive committee did not convene a meeting to discuss Chelle's contract. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, stated, "There is



Liverpool are a little closer to heaven after a difficult but deserved victory over Everton

The good news for Liverpool is that this may be as hard as it gets. The only team wishing to deny them as badly as Everton between now and the end of the season will be Arsenal and by the time they visit Anfield on May 10, this title race may be all but over.

This was difficult for Liverpool. It really was desperately difficult. Emotional, tense and occasionally petty, everything that a derby usually is but at the same time everything a team chasing only its second league title in 35 years doesn't need a game to be.

Deep into injury time - at around about the time Everton and James Tarkowski got them at Goodison Park in mid-February - the nerves that had threatened to derail Liverpool in the first half were back. They

were giving the ball away needlessly and inviting pressure.

At the death Everton won a corner. Goalkeeper Jordan Pickford advanced and Anfield inhaled. It came to nothing and Anfield exhaled. And a minute later it was over. A major obstacle overcome, a big step taken.

So now Arne Slot and his players are a little closer to

heaven, a little nearer to their journey's end.

The lead over Arsenal is 12 points again and now Liverpool need four wins and not five. On Sunday Liverpool are at Fulham 24 hours after Arsenal play at Everton. This is how it tends to work at this stage of the season. The psychology of it all can feel overwhelming.

