

Fed Ministries to be paperless from Dec 31 —HoCSF

Mrs Didi Walson-Jack, Head of the Civil Service of the Federation, has said that all ministries and extra-ministerial departments are expected to be entirely paperless by December 31.

Walson-Jack made the declaration on Thursday in Abuja during her keynote address at the "Second Edition of the Citizens and Stakeholders' Engagement".

According to her, the government has determined to achieve the feat through the adoption of an enterprise content management system.

"Our goal is for citizens and users of public services to reach us online and receive instant responses and services. Today, we will let you have official emails of registries of ministries that

are already paperless.

"As we add to the numbers, we will let you have these email addresses even through the media. We envisage that reducing human interaction would eliminate conflicts of inefficiency, delay and corruption.

"Digitalisation represents more than a shift to digital files but a leap towards a modern,

efficient and transparent civil service where decision making is quicker, records are secure and processes are more innovative," she said.

The HoCSF promised that ministries and agencies that would achieve the milestone would be specially recognised for their commitments.

She added that ministries

and extra-ministerial departments on the new platform could talk to one another as files are more secure and virtual meetings are now possible.

Walson-Jack affirmed that all the initiatives employed by the government were homegrown.

According to her, the government system has provided official email accounts for over

92,000 public servants connecting the civil service in unprecedented ways.

"I acknowledge our partner, the Galaxy Backbone Nigeria Limited, who has helped us in no small measure to achieve these milestones as the official ICT provider for the federal government.

"Our capacity building institutions- Administrative Staff

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The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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Reps push 50% cut in airport charges to lower air fares

The House of Representatives on Thursday raised the pressure for cheaper domestic flights as lawmakers demanded a 50 percent reduction in airport charges and tax incentives for airlines to ease travel during the festive season.

The resolution followed a motion moved by Rep. Obinna Aguocha (LP-Abia), who

warned that soaring airfares were shutting millions of Nigerians out of Christmas travel, straining family bonds and even inflating the cost of emergency air ambulance services.

Aguocha said the sharp spike in ticket prices had become a burden on families across the country, stressing that the Christmas period, a season of reunion and joy, was now threatened by harsh economic realities making travel increasingly unaffordable.

He told the House that the rising cost of JetA1 fuel, currency instability and other operational difficulties were driving fares beyond the reach of ordinary citizens.

He cautioned airlines against what he described as an "insatiable pursuit of profit" at the expense of cultural traditions that bind Nigerians,

urging operators to show social responsibility by temporarily lowering fares to allow more people to return home.

He said reducing airfares for the season would demonstrate national solidarity and reinforce the belief that every Nigerian deserves the right to travel home, regardless of income.

Aguocha urged the Federal Government to support the aviation industry the same way it

intervened in the road transport sector last year, insisting the sector is vital to family reunification and national connectivity.

The House also called on the Central Bank of Nigeria to provide foreign exchange to airlines at concessionary rates

to ease operational pressure.

Deputy Speaker Benjamin Kalu directed the House Committee on Aviation to engage the Aviation Minister and airline operators and report back within one week for further legislative action.



19TH ANNUAL TOWN HALL MEETING:

L-R: Alara of Ilara, Epe, Oba Olufolarin Ogunsanwo; Chairman of Conference 57, Sesan Olowa; Minister of Finance and Coordinating Minister of the Economy, Mr Wale Edun; Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu of Lagos State; Chairman Dangote Group of Company, Alhaji Aliko Dangote; Minister of Education, Dr Tunji Alausa and Secretary, Lagos State Security Trust Fund, Dr Ayodele Ogunsan, during the inauguration of the newly purchased security vehicle at the 19th Annual Town Hall Meeting on Security with the Governor in Lagos on Thursday.

Okpebholo leads APC rally in Edo South, receives new supporters ahead of 2027 polls

● **Hails Cardinal Okogie at 59 years in priesthood**

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, on Thursday led leaders of the All Progressives Congress (APC) to Ugo, in Orhionmwon Local Government Area, where hundreds of new supporters were received into the party in a major mobilisation drive ahead of the 2027 general elections.

The rally, which party chieftains described as one of the largest in the district in recent years, further strengthened the APC's growing influence in Edo South and reinforced the state's alignment with President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's political direction.

Addressing the crowd, Okpebholo reaffirmed the party's confidence in President Tinubu's return bid.

"Asiwaju is coming back. Is this not something that has been settled in Edo State? We make this declaration because of the progress we have made in advancing the welfare, security and infrastructural development we are giving our people," he said.

He challenged the opposition, declaring that the APC would not be intimidated.

"If they like, let the opposition kidnap all of us. We are not afraid of them. We will match them," he said, adding that his administration's performance had justified the mandate he received. "Is Edo not shining? Are you not seeing the dividends?"

The Governor also addressed the dilapidated condition of the access road into Ugo, assuring residents that

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Morocco 2025: Chelle picks Nwabali, Osimhen, Ndidi, 25 others for 35th AFCON

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College of Nigeria (ASCON), Badagry, Lagos State, Public Service Institute of Nigeria, Kubwa, Federal Capital Territory and federal training centers in six geopolitical zones of Nigeria remain pillars of professional development.

"ASCON delivers high-level management and leadership training for CEOs and Executive Directors of parastatals and agencies. It is currently being revitalised to serve you better," she said.

She added that the federal training centers provided specialised technical and operational training for federal civil services and top management of parastatals and agencies.

She maintained that the Office of the Head of the Civil Service strengthened competence, leadership and service delivery across the Nigerian public service.

She said the Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation aimed at fostering transparency, accountability and collaboration to shape a more efficient citizen-centered civil service.

She affirmed that the citizens and stakeholders' feedback and insights were vital in strengthening service delivery and accountability.

Wilson-Jack stated that the citizens and stakeholders' gathering reflected unwavering commitment and continuing effort to build an efficient, productive, incorruptible and citizen-centered service.

"We aim to foster trust by ensuring no citizen wait weeks for approvals or signatures, reinforcing our dedication to service excellence.

"For the Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation, citizens and stakeholders engagement is not a mere formality, but a strategic tool to improve transparency, reinforce accountability and foster collaboration.

"We are committed to opening our doors wider to new ideas, constructive criticism, shared innovations and collective efforts to enhance the civil service and

your active participation is essential in this process," she said.

According to her, implementation of Federal Civil Service Strategy and Implementation Plan 2021-2025, popularly known as FC25 has strengthened capability building, digitalisation, innovation, accountability and workplace excellence.

"Our focus now is on consolidating these gains, scaling successful initiatives and deepening innovation to support ongoing reform and ensure sustainable improvement.

"Currently, we are conducting a personnel audit and skills gap analysis, otherwise known as PASSGAP and this audit and skills gap analysis is of the Federal Civil Service.

"The project entails a comprehensive assessment of the Federal Civil Service workforce to identify existing capacities and map critical skills gaps, generating reliable data to support evidence-based decision-making in workforce planning, training, development and policy formulation."

She said the basic verification of civil servants in Nigeria had finished while verification for civil servants in the diaspora would be from December 15 to 19.

She called on stakeholders' continued support to build a more capable, future-ready civil service and to remain engaged in their vital efforts.

"We have also recorded significant achievements with the performance management system (PMS) which is transforming how ministries set expectations, evaluate outcomes and build a culture of market equity.

"The landmark is no longer in use. We have already begun to use the performance management system scores for promotion.

"Structured feedback, clear performance indicators and measurable outcomes are already improving productivity across the service.

"PMS remains one of our strongest reform legacies and I commend all who have embraced it," she said.

Okpebholo leads APC rally in Edo...

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the government would carry out urgent intervention.

"The only access road to the community is in a very bad condition. But the good news is this: by this time next year, we will come to see how it has changed," he said.

He reiterated the state's commitment to delivering massive votes for President Tinubu in 2027.

"We are coming back here to celebrate the 2.5 million votes we promised Mr President," he said.

During the event, the State Deputy Chairman of the APC, Sylvester Aigbobo, formally received hundreds of decampes led by Ambassador Westley Asoro, strengthening the party's grassroots structure in the area.

Top APC leaders at the rally included the Deputy Governor, Hon. Dennis Idahosa; Pastor Osagie Ize-Iyamu; Secretary to the State Government, Umar Musa Ikhilo, Esq.; former Egberanmwun Deputy Governor, Dr. Pius Odubu; and the APC

National Women Leader.

Meanwhile, Governor Okpebholo has congratulated His Eminence, Anthony Olubunmi Cardinal Okogie, on his 59th anniversary in the Catholic priesthood, describing him as one of Nigeria's most respected moral authorities and an enduring voice of courage, humility and principled leadership.

He said the Cardinal, who hails from Uromi, remains a national treasure whose clarity of thought and interventions on governance, morality and national unity have shaped public discourse for decades.

Okpebholo thanked God for preserving the Cardinal in strength and prayed for more years of good health and fulfilment, urging Nigerians to draw inspiration from his life of discipline, sacrifice and faith.

"As His Eminence marks 59 years of dedicated service, we rejoice with him and celebrate his remarkable journey. His legacy of courage and compassion remains a guide to all," he said.

Okpebholo appoints physically-challenged lawyer as law officer in justice ministry

BENIN CITY

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, has approved the appointment of a physically-challenged lawyer, Ms. Kindness Ikponwonsa Idahosa, as a Law Officer in the Ministry of Justice, reinforcing his administration's commitment to inclusion and equal opportunity for persons living with disabilities.

Governor Okpebholo said the appointment further demonstrates that disability does not hinder talent, merit or professional capacity.

Adding that his administration will continue to create spaces for citizens who show competence, resilience and determination.

Ms. Idahosa's story is one of persistence and courage. Diagnosed with Hereditary Sensory Neuropathy, she dropped out

of school in Junior Secondary School Three and remained at home for thirteen years until the Network for the Advancement of People with Visible Disabilities intervened.

The organisation provided her with a wheelchair and facilitated her return to school.

She later gained admission to study Law at the University of Benin, where she graduated with a Second Class Upper Di-

vision in 2023.

She proceeded to the Nigerian Law School in 2024, concluded her Bar Finals, and was called to the Nigerian Bar in September 2025.

Governor Okpebholo's approval of her appointment, officials say, highlights the government's resolve to support hardworking citizens who overcome adversity and aspire to excellence in public service.



PRESENTATION OF GAS TRADING LICENSE:

L-R: Chairman, House of Representatives Committee on Petroleum Resources (Downstream), Hon. Odiannosen Okojie; Director, Nigerian Midstream and Downstream Petroleum Regulatory Authority (NMDPRA), Farouk Ahmed; Minister of State for Petroleum Resources (Gas), Ekperikpe Ekpo and Chairman, JEX markets, Oscar Onyema, during the presentation of Gas trading license and clearing house and settlement authorisation in Abuja on Thursday.

Yuletide: Church urges Nigerians to preach peace, light the world with love

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints has urged Nigerians to preach peace and become beacons of love during the yuletide season as it empowered more than 300 families with foodstuffs in Edo State.

Presiding President of the Church in Edo State, Sampson Eguavoen, gave the advice during the launch of the "Light the World" activities and the distribution of food items to

families in Iguovbiamwun and Okhuo communities in Uhunwonde Local Government Area.

He said the Church selected the two communities as the first beneficiaries of the support, which included bags of rice, beans, palm oil, groundnut oil, noodles, salt, sugar, tomatoes, other cooking ingredients and a live chicken for each family.

Ihogbe Stake President, Igbini Iyobosa Philip, said the

Light the World programme encourages individuals to show love, compassion and unity in the spirit of the birth of Jesus Christ.

He said the season represents a period for peace, unity and forgiveness, urging Nigerians to allow the light of God to reflect in their daily lives.

Community leaders, including the Odionwere of Iguovbiamwun Community, Pa Gabriel Imabieghan, and a former acting chairman of Uhunwonde Local Government Area, Hon. Benjamin

Osas Iredia, commended the Church for supporting families at a time many were struggling to feed.

Pa Imabieghan, a retired police officer, described the gesture as uncommon and timely, given the economic hardship facing many households.

Hon. Iredia, who represents the ward in the council legislature, said the Church has rekindled hope in the two communities.

He urged residents to spread the message of love and become lights to the world.

Okpebholo vows to tackle insecurity in Edo

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, has reaffirmed his administration's determination to confront insecurity and protect lives and property across the state.

He gave the assurance in Benin City while receiving the new Commander of the 4 Brigade, Nigerian Army, Brigadier General Ahmed Olatunboju Balogun, during a courtesy visit to the Government House.

Governor Okpebholo said the state government would

continue to support the Army and other security agencies to ensure that Edo remains safe for residents and investors.

He said the government would promptly address areas requiring intervention, including schools, health facilities and road infrastructure, noting that work was already ongoing in the affected locations.

The governor added that the government was procuring multifunctional drones to strengthen security operations and improve surveillance capa-

bility across the state.

General Balogun said he visited the governor to formally notify him of the change in leadership at the 4 Brigade.

He commended the governor for his strong commitment to security and pledged to sustain the existing cooperation between the military and the state.

He assured the governor that the Army would intensify efforts to make the state safer so that residents could sleep peacefully and conduct their

daily activities without fear.

General Balogun identified the completion of the Ekenwa Barracks road, renovation of the brigade school and provision of drones as priority needs that would aid operational efficiency.

Senior government officials present at the meeting included the Secretary to the State Government, Umar Musa Ikhilo; Chief of Staff, Mallam Gani Audu; and Permanent Secretary, Government House and Protocol, Mrs. Edith Sede.

EFCC to arraign ex-Minister of Labour, Chris Ngige

ABUJA

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) will on Friday arraign former Minister of Labour and Employment, Mr. Chris Ngige, on charges bordering on alleged corruption.

Ngige, also a former Governor of Anambra State, is expected to be arraigned before

an FCT High Court sitting in Gwarimpa.

In the eight-count charge marked FCT/HC/CR/726/2025, he is the sole defendant.

The charge, dated October 31 and filed on December 9 by a team of lawyers led by Sylvanus Tahir, SAN, alleges that Ngige committed several offences during his tenure as Minister of Labour under former President

Muhammadu Buhari.

Count one alleges that between September 2015 and May 2023, he used his position as supervising Minister of the Nigeria Social Insurance Trust Fund (NSITF) to confer undue advantage on Cezimo Nigeria Limited, whose MD/CEO, Ezebinwa Amarachukwu Charles, is allegedly his associate.

Seven NSITF contracts

worth ₦366,470,920.68 were allegedly awarded to the firm.

Count two alleges the award of eight NSITF contracts worth ₦583,682,686.00 to Zitacom Nigeria Limited, also linked to Charles.

In count three, Ngige was accused of using his office to benefit Jeff & Xris Limited, linked to Nwosu Jideofor Chukwunwike, through eight NSITF con-

tracts worth ₦362,043,163.16.

Count four alleges he conferred undue advantage on Olde English Consolidated Limited, linked to Uzoma Igbonwa, through four NSITF contracts worth ₦668,138,141.00.

Count five accuses him of awarding four NSITF contracts worth ₦161,604,625.00 to Shale Atlantic Intercontinental Services Limited, also linked to Igbonwa.

Counts one to five contravene Section 19 of the Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act, 2000.

In count six, Ngige allegedly accepted ₦38,650,000.00 through his campaign organisation from Cezimo Nigeria Limited, a contractor with NSITF.

Count seven alleges that he received ₦55,003,000.00 through his scholarship scheme from Zitacom Nigeria Limited.

Count eight alleges the receipt of ₦26,130,000.00 through the scholarship scheme from Jeff & Xris Limited.

Counts six to eight contravene Section 17(a) and are punishable under Section 179(c) of the same Act.



INSPECTION TOUR:

L-R: Representative of the Director General, Bureau for Public Enterprises (BPE), Mr Solomon Agoha; representative of the Chairman, ANAMMCO Motors and Parts Limited (AMPL), Mr Adewale Folowosele and the Executive Director, Corporate Affairs, AMPL, Mr Uche Okeke, during an inspection tour of AMPL Matador trucks by BPE in Enugu on Thursday.

Officer beaten by mob, not involved in theft —Lagos taskforce

LAGOS

The Lagos State Environmental and Special Offences (Taskforce) has dismissed a viral social media report alleging that one of its police operatives stole items during an enforcement operation in Oshodi.

A viral video showed the officer seated on the ground, bleeding from the mouth as a mob assaulted him.

In a statement on Thursday, the Taskforce spokesperson,

Mr. Abdulraheem Gbadeyan, described the allegations as false and misleading.

He said the officer was part of the Taskforce Environmental Services Unit on a routine operation on Brown Street, Oshodi, around 10:00 a.m. on Tuesday, with police officers providing security support.

The team was clearing roadside goods, removing obstructing vehicles and ensuring free walkways — activities the agency said were crucial during the yuletide season.

“The lawful operation was disrupted when street traders, area boys and illegal ticket collectors allegedly launched an unprovoked attack on the enforcement team.

“They attempted to seize a service rifle and inflicted serious injuries on one of the operatives.

“Taskforce personnel used minimal force to disperse the mob and restore order,” he said.

Four suspects aged 28, 34, 39 and 40 were arrested, while others fled.

Gbadeyan urged the public to disregard the viral claims, describing them as attempts to dis-

tort facts and conceal a criminal attack on government officials.

He said the incident had been reported to the Lagos State Police Command for investigation.

He added that the Commissioner of Police, Mr. Moshood Jimoh, had assured residents that security arrangements across the state would be strengthened.

Jimoh also warned that acts undermining public order would attract swift sanctions.

Gbadeyan reaffirmed the agency’s commitment to enforcing environmental and traffic regulations despite attempts to obstruct legitimate operations.

Gwagwalada farmers push for community climate priorities in council’s budget

GWAGWALADA (FCT)

Smallholder farmers in Gwagwalada have called for the inclusion of their communities’ climate priorities, protection of farmlands, and improved mechanisation in the council’s budget.

Speaking on Thursday at the unveiling of the Climate Participatory Budget Proposal at the council secretariat, the farmers said they needed improved seedlings to cope with the harsh impacts of climate change.

The event was convened by the Development of Educational Action Network (DEAN) Initiative under its project on Strengthening Climate Adaptation through Participatory Budgeting in the Gwagwalada Area Council. It was funded by People-Powered, a global organisation promoting inclusive democracy.

Gwagwalada is the first council in Nigeria to adopt a participatory initiative in its budget process, facilitated by DEAN.

The farmers explained that irregular rainfall, droughts, floods and fluctuating temperatures were making it increasingly difficult for crops to thrive.

One of the farmers, Ayu-

ba Zubairu, said they urgently needed improved seeds for maize, guinea corn and yam that could withstand climate threats.

“Some of the maize we used to plant take a long time to mature. But with the current changes in climate, the growing period is too short.

“If we plant the same crop now, termites, maggots and other pests will destroy them. That is why we need improved seeds,” he said.

Zubairu also urged government to provide more farmlands, noting that some of their existing plots had been reclaimed for other uses.

Mrs. Rakiya Mamman, a woman leader in Paiko community, said farmers urgently needed support with fertilisers, pesticides and other inputs to strengthen resilience.

She expressed concern that farmers had not received fertiliser support this year.

In his remarks, Muhammad Saba, the council’s Focal Person on the Open Government Partnership (OGP) Steering Committee and Gwagwalada Council Secretary, underscored the importance of citizen participation in budgeting.

Yobe raises students’ bursary by 100%

DAMATURU

The Yobe Scholarship Board has increased bursary payments for 28,364 enrolled students by 100 per cent.

The Executive Secretary of the Board, Dr. Kagu Abubakar, announced this on Thursday while inaugurating the 2025/2026 bursary disbursement exercise in Damaturu.

He said the beneficiaries were indigent students studying in various universities across the country.

“Under the new structure, Postgraduate (PGDE, Masters, PhD) students will receive ₦110,000, up from ₦55,000.

“Undergraduates will receive

₦46,000, up from ₦23,000, while HND, NCE and National Diploma students will receive ₦34,000, up from ₦17,000.

“Students in other Diploma and Certificate programmes will receive ₦26,000, up from ₦13,000,” he said.

Kagu said the increment reflected the prevailing economic realities and the rising cost of education.

In his remarks, Prof. Abba Adam, Commissioner for Basic and Secondary Education, said the increment aligned with Governor Mai Mala Buni’s commitment to revamping education.

He urged the beneficiaries to study hard and complete their programmes successfully.

PHC leadership challenge: NGF to award \$6.1m to top states

ABUJA

The Nigeria Governors’ Forum (NGF) says states with outstanding performance in primary healthcare delivery will receive a total of 6.1 million dollars under the third edition of its Primary HealthCare (PHC) Leadership Challenge Awards.

NGF Chairman, Governor AbdulRahman AbdulRazaq of Kwara State, announced this while unveiling the award ceremony scheduled for Friday at 7 p.m. in Abuja.

In a statement issued on Thursday by the NGF Director of Media and Strategic Com-

munications, Yunusa Abdullahi, AbdulRazaq described the challenge as a national initiative that rewards exceptional leadership by governors.

He said the initiative recognises efforts aimed at strengthening primary healthcare systems nationwide.

The challenge is organised by the NGF in partnership with the Federal Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, the National Primary Health Care Development Agency (NPHCDA) and UNICEF, with support from the Gates Foundation.

AbdulRazaq said the initiative had become a symbol of

strong and accountable leadership in Nigeria’s health system.

“It celebrates results, rewards performance and ultimately delivers better care for our people,” he said.

He said 13 awards would be presented: two per geopolitical zone — Best Performing and Most Improved and one national award for the Overall Best Performing State.

“The award fund for this edition is 6.1 million dollars, and winning states will reinvest their allocations directly into strengthening PHC systems,” he said.

He noted that the challenge is rooted in the 2019 Seattle

Declaration, unanimously adopted by all 36 governors to improve governance, financing and accountability in PHC.

Governors are assessed using a Performance Monitoring Framework jointly developed by PHC stakeholders and endorsed by states through their commissioners for health.

An independent judging panel, comprising public health experts, academics, religious and traditional leaders, media professionals and civil society groups, reviews assessments conducted by verification agents recruited through the United Nations’ selection process.

NEWS

"Road to S'South initiative 'll deepen N'Delta devt beyond oil"

ABUJA

Hon. Gift Johnbull, Senior Special Assistant to President Bola Tinubu on Community Engagement (South-South), said that the launch of "Road to South-South 2.0" will accelerate development across the region.

Speaking at an event held at the State House, Abuja, Johnbull said the new edition builds on gains recorded in 2024.

"Progress never stands still.

Two point zero means we go further, reach higher and challenge every limit we thought existed," she said.

She explained that the platform was created to strengthen dialogue, promote inclusion and deepen government-community engagement across the six South-South states.

The presidential aide noted that the first edition opened direct feedback channels for grassroots communities to influence national priorities.

She highlighted that thousands of farmers benefited from Project Earn from the Soil, which introduced labour-saving machinery recognised by international partners and state governments.

"For every milestone we reached, new questions emerged. How do we sustain and scale our efforts? How do we move the South-South beyond oil and gas?" she asked.

Johnbull said the 2.0 edition would expand investments in agribusiness, renewable energy, ed-

ucation, technology transfer and community-level wealth creation.

She said the initiative builds on progress recorded under President Tinubu's Renewed Hope Agenda.

"Regional development is the backbone of national progress. When one region thrives, others rise with it," she said.

She cited ongoing interventions including the Lagos-Calabar Coastal Highway stretch through Edo State; works on the East-West Road; the Benin-Sapele-Warri Highway;

and the Eleme-Onne axis.

She urged traditional rulers, political leaders, private sector actors, civil society organisations and youths to partner with government.

"The Renewed Hope Agenda is not a slogan; it is a shared responsibility. Development can only succeed when communities take ownership," she added.

She described the South-South as not only Nigeria's oil belt but also an innovation centre and cultural pillar.

Earlier, Sen. Jarigbe Agom

Jarigbe (APC-Cross River North) described the region as the "circulatory system" of Nigeria's economy.

"For decades, the South-South has powered national growth, supplying the oil and gas resources that fuel the federation. Yet its own arteries remain clogged by pollution, exclusion and recurring social unrest," he said.

He said the Road to South-South 2.0 initiative would help fast-track development across the region.

Clerics commend President Tinubu on security

ABUJA

Clerics at the 138th Annual International Conference of the United Evangelical Church (UEC) have commended President Bola Tinubu for efforts toward addressing Nigeria's security challenges, saying "peace is gradually returning to the country."

The commendation came on the sidelines of the conference, held in Abuja under the theme "Exceeding Great Joy."

The annual gathering serves as a major platform for fellowship, strategic decisions and institutional growth for the church.

Rev. Chris Effiong, Administrator of the Church and host pastor, lauded President Tinubu's "strategic approach" to security.

"First of all, I'd like to commend President Bola Tinubu because for the past few weeks, we've known peace. Over time, it's been bad news. So, we commend him because we are seeing his effort and that is commendable," he said.

He also prayed that God would guide the President and "surround him with people that will not mislead him in

terms of security.

Speaking on the theme, Effiong said "Exceeding Great Joy" represented the church's prophetic expectation for 2026, adding that the nation and its leaders must "entrust every affair of the country into the hands of the Lord."

Mr. Paul Wright, Chief Executive Officer of Mission Africa (UK), said he was encouraged by the Federal Government's recent commitments to strengthen security.

"I was encouraged to hear the report two weeks ago that President Tinubu will dedicate resources to establishing more police, more military and encouraging citizens to stand up to bandits," he said.

He urged the President to "uphold that promise," noting that sustained efforts would allow Nigerians to enjoy lasting peace.

The conference also marked a leadership transition as Rev. Dr. Daniel Anjorin emerged the new Chairman of Conference. Outgoing Chairman, Rev. Samuel Ebukiba, prayed that Anjorin's tenure would "bring an impetus for greater growth" and expand the church's mission frontiers.

**INAUGURATION OF NEW EXECUTIVES:**

L-R: Assistant Secretary of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Oyo State, Apostle, Joshua Adegbiyi, Secretary, CAN, Oyo State, Rev, Samuel Owolabi; Vice Chairman, CAN, Oyo State Chapter Rev. Fr. Richard Omolade; South-West Chairman, CAN, Bishop Akintunde Akin-Akinsanya; Chairman, CAN, Oyo State, Chapter, Dr Elisha Ogundiyi; Treasurer, CAN, Oyo State Chapter, Apostle Akinwale Kolawole during the inauguration of new Executives of CAN, Oyo State Chapter in Ibadan on Thursday.

NSCDC arrests 6 suspected illegal miners in Edo

BENIN CITY

The Edo Command of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) has arrested six suspected illegal miners in the state.

Mr Saidi Akintayo, State Commandant of the corps, disclosed this on Thursday during a news conference in Benin.

He said the suspects were arrested at various mining locations in the state.

Akintayo reiterated the corps' commitment to safe-

guarding the nation's critical mineral resources.

"The six suspects were apprehended at an illegal mining site located in Egbetu Ososo, Akoko Edo Local Government Area of the state," he said.

He added that the arrest was carried out by the Mines and Steel Monitoring and Surveillance Team of the command.

He said preliminary investigations revealed that the suspects were allegedly operating under the instruction of one Mr Casker, who is currently at large.

Akintayo said the suspects

confessed to working at the site without authorisation or legal documentation.

In a related development, he said operatives of the command on December 1 intercepted and arrested two additional suspects.

"They were caught conveying suspected illegally mined minerals, specifically dolomite, in a truck with registration number ABJ 999XF.

"Upon interrogation, it was discovered that the documents presented to justify the transportation of the mineral were forged," he said.

He said investigations were ongoing and all suspects would be prosecuted to deter others.

Akintayo warned that the corps would not allow economic saboteurs to destroy the nation's economy.

He said illegal mining deprived the country of revenue, fuelled insecurity, caused environmental degradation and destroyed host communities.

He reassured the public that the corps, in line with its mandate, would intensify surveillance, enforcement and operations to curb illegal mining across the state.

NAFDAC destroys N5bn substandard goods in Nasarawa

LAFIA

The National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) on Thursday destroyed unwholesome and substandard products valued at more than N5 billion in Nasarawa State, targeting items seized across the North-Central region.

The products, confiscated from Nasarawa, Benue, Kogi, Niger and Plateau States, were destroyed at the Angwan Rere dumpsite in Lafia.

Speaking at the event, the Director-General of NAFDAC, Prof. Christianah Adeyeye, represented by the North-Central Zonal Director, Mr Kenneth Azikiwe, said the fake products were seized during routine monitoring operations carried

out by the agency's personnel.

She said the destruction exercise was aimed at preventing the dangerous products from re-entering the market and posing risks to public health.

Adeyeye explained that some damaged and expired items were voluntarily submitted by traders.

She urged Nigerians to report individuals and groups producing fake or substandard goods, stressing that NAFDAC remained committed to safeguarding public health nationwide.

Nasarawa Commissioner for Security and Safety Matters, Mr Usman Baba, commended NAFDAC's enforcement efforts and pledged the state government's support to ensure that only genuine products reach consumers.

Acquisition of Saipem by Marconi milestone for Nigerian content —NCDMB

PORT HARCOURT

The Nigerian Content Development and Monitoring Board (NCDMB) has described the recent acquisition of Saipem, an Italian oil servicing firm, by Marconi NG EPC as a major boost to the Nigerian content drive.

In May 2025, a consortium of Nigerian investors acquired Saipem from its former owners and rebranded it as Marconi.

Dr Obinna Ezeobi, General Manager, Corporate Communications at NCDMB, stated this on Thursday in Port Harcourt during a media tour of oil and gas facilities operated

by Nigerian companies.

Speaking at Marconi's one-million-square-metre fabrication yard, Ezeobi said the acquisition positions the company to handle projects across all spheres of the sector.

He said the Nigerian Oil and Gas Industry Content Development Act 2010 mandates the board to reserve contracts for land and swamp oilfields exclusively for Nigerian companies.

"The acquisition of Saipem by Nigerian investors indicates that our efforts to promote the participation of Nigerian companies in the oil and gas value chain are yielding enormous fruits.

"With world-class facili-

ties here run by Nigerians, the company can bid for jobs across land, swamp and deep-sea oilfields," he said.

Conducting journalists round the facility, Dr David Editang, Nigerian Content Manager of Marconi, said the new owners retained Nigerian experts who had operated the yard for 15 years.

He said the facility had the capacity to fabricate, store and evacuate oil and gas components through three jetties and a helipad.

Briefing journalists after the tour, Mr Gian Fabio Del Cioppo, Managing Director of Marconi NG EPC, said the Marconi Yard is the largest of its kind in West Africa, covering more

than one million square metres.

He said the facility was secured, fully equipped and positioned for major project execution in Nigeria's energy sector.

"It is one of the few yards in the country with assets and organisation for executing complex projects and includes a 330-metre jetty.

"It has the capacity to fabricate over twenty-five thousand tons of heavy structures for capital EPC projects, both onshore and offshore.

"Marconi has adopted a one-stop-hub model to enhance cost efficiency, streamline interfaces and remain competitive with international alternatives," he said.

OAU graduates 6,562, produces 218 First Class

ILE-IFE (OSUN)

The Vice-Chancellor of Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Ile-Ife, Professor Adebayo Bamire, has announced that the institution will graduate 6,562 students at its 49th Convocation Ceremony for the 2023/2024 academic

session held on Thursday in Ile-Ife.

According to him, the graduating set comprises 5,549 undergraduates, 959 postgraduates and 54 diploma holders.

He added that 218 of the graduands earned First Class Honours, 2,132 obtained Second Class Honours (Upper Di-

vision), 2,244 graduated with Second Class Honours (Lower Division), 625 finished with Third Class Honours, while 34 obtained Pass.

Professor Bamire said convocation ceremonies offer the university a platform to showcase its achievements in teaching, research and service

delivery.

He noted that the graduands had been equipped to contribute meaningfully to national development.

He commended President Bola Tinubu's administration for efforts in the education sector, particularly the recent review of tertiary education

curricula.

The Vice-Chancellor also expressed gratitude to the Ooni of Ife, Oba Adeyeye Ogunwusi, Ojaja II, for supporting infrastructural development within the institution.

"We thank you for facilitating the beautification of Road 1 and the provision of 50 CNG buses and 20 CNG tricycles by the First Lady of Nigeria, Senator Oluremi Tinubu, which

will significantly ease transportation challenges within the university," he said.

He commended the University Council and management team for sustaining a peaceful academic environment.

A minute of silence was observed in honour of the late Pro-Chancellor and Chairman of Council, Professor Siyan Oyeweso, who passed away on 2 December 2025.



CBM, PICNG PARTNERSHIP:

L-R: Business Intelligence Developer and Data Analyst Providus Bank Samuel Alonge; Executive Chairman and CEO, PiCNG, Mr Ismaeel Ahmed and Director-General, City Boy Movement (CBM), Francis Shoga, during the CBM, PiCNG Partnership to Advance Grassroots Development and CNG Adoption in Abuja on Thursday.

Ebonyi inaugurates One Health initiative to tackle AMR

ABAKALIKI

The Ebonyi State Government on Thursday inaugurated its One Health Initiative as part of renewed efforts to tackle Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) and strengthen collaboration across the health system.

Governor Francis Nwifuru, speaking at the event in Abakaliki, reaffirmed his administration's commitment to improving healthcare and supporting economic development.

The programme, organised by Evidence-Informed Policy Approaches for One Health (Oh-Health) in collaboration with the Friedrich-Loeffler Institute (FLI) and the African Institute for Health Policy and Health Systems Nigeria, also received support from David Umahi Federal University of Health Sciences (DUFUHS).

Nwifuru described the One Health approach as a vital multisectoral framework recognising the interconnectedness of human, animal, plant and environmental health.

He identified rapid urbanization, population density, deforestation and increased human-animal interactions as major drivers of zoonotic and vector-borne diseases in Ebonyi State.

"To address these challenges, there is a need to strengthen

collaboration among the state's ministries of Health, Agriculture and Environment, along with their agencies.

There should also be closer partnerships between government bodies and researchers to ensure that research evidence informs policymaking," he said.

Vice-Chancellor of Dufuhs, Professor Jesse Uneke, described the inauguration as "a remarkable day for Ebonyi State," noting that the initiative would enhance cross-sectoral disease surveillance and response.

Dr Laxmikant Chavan, WHO Technical Officer on Amr and Coordinator of One Health in Nigeria, delivered the keynote address titled "Advancing One Health at Sub-National Level to Address Amr and Other Threats in Nigeria, Ebonyi State."

He emphasised that the initiative is crucial for safeguarding public health, warning that without urgent intervention, AMR could cause 39 million deaths by 2050 and cost up to 412 billion dollars annually.

Chavan noted that zoonotic diseases such as avian influenza, Lassa fever and Mers constitute about 60 percent of emerging infectious diseases and that over 75 percent of 30 new human pathogens discovered in the past three decades originated from animals, including Ebola and COVID-19.

Edo HOSTCOM election holds Sat in Benin

BENIN CITY

The Edo State chapter of the Host Communities of Nigeria Producing Oil and Gas (HOSTCOM) has scheduled its election for Saturday, 13 December 2025, in Benin City.

The exercise is in compliance with a directive from

the National President of Hostcom, High Chief Style Tamanebi, who earlier mandated the Edo State chapter to conduct elections and inaugurate a new executive before the end of December.

In a statement issued on Thursday in Benin City, the State Chairman, Comrade Andrew Oyegue, said the election

will hold at the Edo State Secretariat of Hostcom, Pedrocchi House, along Sapele Road. Delegates and aspirants from all 18 local government areas are expected to participate.

Oyegue said preparations for the exercise, being supervised by the electoral committee chaired by Mr Kenneth Aigbe with Prince Odion Abumwere

as Secretary, are in top gear.

He assured members of a free and fair election, noting that the process follows the expiration of the tenure of the outgoing executive.

Prince Abumwere added that adequate security arrangements had been made, with the police already notified to provide security at the venue.

Educationist harps on vocational training to boost students' future prospects

SANGO-OTA

The Proprietress of Adedokun International Schools, Dalemo, Alhaja Romoke Adedokun, has called for stronger integration of vocational training in secondary schools to better equip young Nigerians for future opportunities.

Speaking on Thursday in Ota, she said practical skills

training alongside academic work would help students discover their strengths and provide alternative pathways after graduation.

She noted that many young people ultimately excel in vocational careers, and early exposure could guide their choices.

"At the end of the day, a child may end up pursuing a vocational skill rather than academics

at the university. The academic knowledge will only support and guide such a child," she said.

Adedokun warned that relying solely on academic training limits students' potential.

"We should not train our students only on academia. They should also have vocational skills because no one can tell what a child will become in the future," she added.

Citing examples from countries such as China and Japan, where children begin learning handwork from as early as ages three and four, she said such models contribute significantly to national development.

She urged the Federal and State Governments to strengthen vocational education structures, saying such reforms would be beneficial to all.

Group urges greater inclusion of PWDs in governance

LAGOS

The Deaf Supporters Development Initiative (DSDI) has reaffirmed its support for President Bola Tinubu's administration and called for greater inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in policy formulation and governance.

Its President, Mr Afolabi Dahunsi, made the call at a public lecture in Lagos on Thursday commemorating the 2025 International Day for Pwds.

The event, organised by DSDI, was themed: "The Renewed Hope Agenda: A Life-Saving Intervention for the Deaf and Persons with Disabilities."

Dahunsi said Tinubu's Renewed Hope Agenda includes commitments to Pwds, and emphasised the need for stronger implementation.

He lamented that despite the Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2018, discrimination and unemployment remain widespread.

"We want the government to

help dismantle this discrimination. Economic hardships affect most of our people, and short-term palliatives hardly solve the problem of unemployment in our community," he said.

He also urged government agencies to consider the vulnerability of deaf persons to crimes due to communication barriers.

Representing the Lagos State Commissioner for Information and Strategy, Mr Gbenga Omotoso, Mr Yusuf Olukolu said societal attitudes and systemic bar-

riers compound the challenges faced by Pwds. He emphasised inclusion in policymaking and public engagement.

He highlighted Lagos State's interventions through the Lagos State Office for Disability Affairs (LASODA) and infrastructure upgrades such as accessible BRT terminals, public parks and government complexes.

"Inclusion means ensuring every individual can thrive, and the dignity and rights of Pwds are respected," he said.

COAS visits Oba of Lagos, seeks traditional support for military operations

ABUJA

The Chief of Army Staff (COAS), Lt.-Gen. Waidi Shaibu, on Thursday paid a courtesy visit to the Oba of Lagos, Oba Rilwan Akiolu, seeking royal blessings and traditional support for ongoing military operations across the country.

This was contained in a statement by the Acting Director, Army Public Relations, Col. Appolonia Anele, on Thursday in Abuja.

Shaibu said the visit was to appreciate the monarch and the council of Obas for their continuous support to the Nigerian Army, adding that customs and traditions remained critical to

sustaining national cohesion.

He commended Oba Akiolu for his fatherly guidance to Army formations in Lagos, describing the royal backing as invaluable to operational effectiveness and civil-military cooperation.

Responding, the Oba of Lagos praised the Army for its sacrifices and role in stabilising the country, noting that the military remained a key pillar of Nigeria's security architecture.

Akiolu lauded the COAS for his leadership and commitment to peace and offered prayers for his successful tenure as the 25th Chief of Army Staff and for lasting peace in the country.

NEWS

Tinubu submits 2026–2028 MTEF to Senate

ABUJA

President Bola Tinubu has submitted the 2026–2028 Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) and the Fiscal Strategy Paper (FSP) to the Senate for consideration and approval.

The submission is in line with the regular legislative procedure that precedes the pres-

entation of the annual budget, setting the fiscal parameters for the next three years.

The letter, dated December 2025, was read on Thursday at plenary by the Deputy President of the Senate, Senator Jibrin Barau, who presided over the sitting.

“It is with pleasure that I forward the 2026–2028 Medium Term Expenditure Framework

and Fiscal Strategy Paper for the kind consideration and approval of the Distinguished Senate.

“The 2026–2028 MTEF and

FSP was approved during the Federal Executive Council meeting of December 3, 2025,” the President stated.

Tinubu said the 2026 budget would be prepared based on the approved parameters and fiscal assumptions contained

in the document. He appealed for the cooperation of the National Assembly to ensure expeditious legislative action.

Sanwo-Olu seeks stronger collaboration for safer Lagos

LAGOS

Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu on Thursday said that ensuring security and protecting lives and property in Lagos require shared responsibility between government and citizens.

He spoke at the nineteenth Annual Town Hall Meeting on Security with the Governor, organised by the Lagos State Security Trust Fund (LSSTF) in Victoria Island.

Sanwo-Olu reaffirmed his administration's commitment to partnering with the Federal Government and security agencies to keep Lagos safe.

He said the theme of the meeting, “Building Trust, Enhancing Security: A New Era of Security and Partnerships”, reflects the state's direction in strengthening public safety.

“Every investment we make in security is a direct investment in peace, order and prosperity. Security is not a task for government alone. It is a shared

duty,” the Governor said.

The Executive Secretary of LSSTF, Dr Ayodele Ogunsan, said Lagos remains relatively secure due to the Governor's consistent and strategic investment in security infrastructure.

He listed the Fund's achievements over the past year, including acquisition of patrol vehicles, construction and rehabilitation of security infrastructure and capacity building across agencies.

Board of Trustees Chairman, Mr Kehinde Durosimi-Etti, praised donors for sustaining the Fund and urged more individuals and corporate organisations to support security initiatives.

The Lagos State Commissioner of Police, Mr Jimoh Olohundare, presented security statistics from October 2024 to September 2025.

The command recorded 152 murder cases, arrested 9,275 miscreants and recovered 518 rounds of ammunition within the period, among other crime-fighting achievements.

NGO to empower 100 persons in aquaponic farming, smart ranches in Benue

KATSINA-ALA

The Women Environmental Programme (WEP) said it will empower 100 persons in Benue State through aquaponic farming and climate-smart mini ranches.

The Head of Programmes, Ms Damaris Uja, announced this on Thursday during the project inception meeting in Katsina-Ala Local Government Area.

She said the project is funded by the United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) through the SPRiNG Programme, and implemented with Tetra Tech International Development and ActionAid Nigeria.

Uja said the project responds to persistent farmer-herder conflicts worsened by climate-induced resource pressure, declining productivity and limited livelihood opportunities.

It will establish an aquaponic farm, provide technical training for farmers, and set up climate-smart mini ranches with livestock management

training for pastoralists.

She said the initiative aims to improve food security, household income and climate resilience while promoting peaceful coexistence. Of the 100 beneficiaries, ten per cent will be youths and five per cent persons living with disabilities.

The project runs from November 2025 to March 2026 in Katsina-Ala LGA of Benue State and Batagarawa LGA of Katsina State.

She said the project will support women, youths and persons with disabilities through aquaponics, a home-based, water-efficient farming method, and community-managed mini ranches as alternatives to open grazing.

The Chairman of Katsina-Ala Local Government, Mr Justine Shaku, pledged full support and promised that land would be provided.

He was accompanied by the District Head of Michihe Council Ward, who joined five kindred heads to endorse the project. Community members also expressed commitment to support the initiative.



BREAKFAST MEETING:

L-R: Minister of Livestock Development, Idi Mukhtar-Maiha; President, Livestock Butchers Cooperative Society, Ishaq Mallam-Yahaya and Managing Director, Bank of Agriculture, Ayo Sotinrin during a breakfast meeting on Strengthening Capacities to Access Climate Adaptation Financing for Climate-Resilient Livestock Production System in Nigeria held in Abuja on Thursday.

Budget: Enugu govt earmarks N10bn equity for km rail project

ENUGU

The Enugu State Government has earmarked N10 billion in the 2026 budget as its equity contribution to the first phase of a 135.5-kilometre standard gauge rail project.

The Commissioner for Budget and Planning, Mr Chris-Roberts Ozongwu, disclosed this on Thursday during the budget breakdown held at the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) Press Centre, Enugu.

Governor Peter Mbah had on December 2 presented the N1.62 trillion 2026 budget, tagged “Budget of Renewed Momentum,” to the Enugu

State House of Assembly.

The figure represents a 66.5 per cent rise over the revised 2025 budget of N971 billion.

The appropriation consists of N1.3 trillion Capital Expenditure (80 per cent) and N321.2 billion Recurrent Expenditure (20 per cent).

Ozongwu said the rail project aligns with Mbah's campaign pledge to establish a multimodal transport system combining rail, tram and inland water services to complement existing road networks.

He added that the rail line is designed to link neighbouring states to enhance regional connectivity, especially within the

South East.

The commissioner also revealed that government plans to expand Enugu Air's fleet to 20 aircraft by the end of 2026.

Enugu Air, launched in July 2025 with three aircraft, currently operates with three planes, but three more would be added before the end of the year, bringing the fleet to six.

The additional fourteen aircraft planned for 2026 will bring the total to twenty.

He said government has set aside another N10 billion for equity contribution to the concessioning of Akanu Ibiam International Airport, in line with Mbah's plan to make Enugu a West African aviation and logistics hub.

Another N10 billion has been

budgeted for a vehicle manufacturing programme under which 2,100 taxis will be procured and assembled in Enugu to support youth empowerment and the Distress Response Squad (DRS).

On agriculture, Ozongwu said N49 billion has been allocated for constructing farm estates across the seventeen local government areas, alongside N27 billion for establishing three Special Agricultural Industrial Processing Zones (SAPZs).

He added that N7 billion has been budgeted for tractors and implements to support mechanised farming.

He said the administration remains confident that the 2026 budget will surpass the performance of the 2025 budget.

Army Chief inaugurates new Soldiers' Club, reaffirms commitment to troops' welfare

LAGOS

The Chief of Army Staff (COAS), Lieutenant-General Waidi Shaibu, on Thursday inaugurated a newly constructed Soldiers' Club at Doddan Barracks, Lagos, reaffirming the Nigerian Army's commitment to en-

hancing troops' welfare and morale.

The Acting Director, Army Public Relations, Colonel Apolonia Anele, disclosed this in a statement issued in Abuja.

Shaibu said the modern facility, designed for Non-Commissioned Officers, would strengthen camaraderie, teamwork and general wellbeing across formations and units.

“This club underscores our dedication to providing soldiers with conducive spaces to relax, interact and build lasting bonds. A motivated soldier is a more effective soldier,” he said.

He commended the 81 Division for executing what he described as a timely project aligned with his vision for a resilient, professional and welfare-driven Nigerian Army.

The facility was constructed by the Commander, 45 Division Engineers, Brigadier-General M. O. Momoh, under the supervision of the General Officer Commanding (GOC) 81 Division, Major-General Farouk Mijinyawa.

The club is expected to serve as a central recreation hub for Non-Commissioned Officers to boost esprit de corps.

CHANGE OF NAME

I formally known as **ESESUMOKHAI ETIONOSA** and **ASUKWO ESTHER ETINOSA**, now wish to be known and addressed as **EMOVONESTHER ETINOSA**. Former documents remain valid. Concern Authority and general public please take note.

CHANGE OF NAME

I formally known as **BELLO MERIATU EMOSHIOKE**, now wish to be known as **MUTARI MERIATU EMOSHIOKE**. Former documents remain valid. Concern Authority and general public please take note.

RECONCILIATION OF NAME

I, **IYOHA JOSEPHINE ESELEGBORIA** am the same person as **ONONSELASE JOSEPHINE** and I, now wish to be known and addressed as **IYOHA JOSEPHINE**. All former documents remain valid, concerned authorities and the general public please take note.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, formerly known and called as **MOSES RUTH**. I now wish to be known and addressed as **MUSA NIWYIM RUTH**. All former documents remain valid, concerned authorities and the general public please take note.

Foreign

NEWS

Severe disruption hits Portugal in first general strike for 12 years

Dozens of flights and trains have been cancelled, schools closed and hospital operations postponed in cities across Portugal, as the two main union federations stage a general strike over unprecedented labour reforms. Public transport was down to a minimum service in many areas, and unions said refuse col-

lections were at a standstill as the strike took hold on Thursday.

The last time the CGTP and the generally less militant UGT joined forces was during the eurozone debt crisis in 2013, when a "troika" of international institutions demanded cuts in salaries and pensions as part of Portugal's bailout.

Twelve years later, Portugal's economy has become the fastest

growing in the eurozone in recent months, but Prime Minister Luís Montenegro says it is still necessary to tackle "rigidities" in the labour market "so companies can be more profitable and workers have better salaries" as a result.

"I will not give up on having a country with the ambition to be at the forefront, to be at the vanguard of Europe," he said on

the eve of the strike.

However, Montenegro appears to have been taken aback by the strength of feeling against his minority right-of-centre government's plans: one of his Social Democrat MPs is on the UGT executive and even he voted for a strike.

The prime minister tweaked some proposals after calling the fed-

eration in for talks late last month, but it was clearly not enough.

Among the most controversial of the more than 100 proposals are:

letting employers roll over temporary contracts for years on end

lifting a ban on sacking workers then immediately rehiring them indirectly via outsourcing

removing a requirement to reinstate employees who were unfairly dismissed.

It is Portuguese in their 20s who are likely to be most affected by the changes - and opinion is rather mixed.

Diogo Brito, who works as an air steward but has friends who do casual work in tourism, supports the right to strike but backs the package: "It has to be done. We have to catch up with richer countries and with these measures I think we can evolve more."

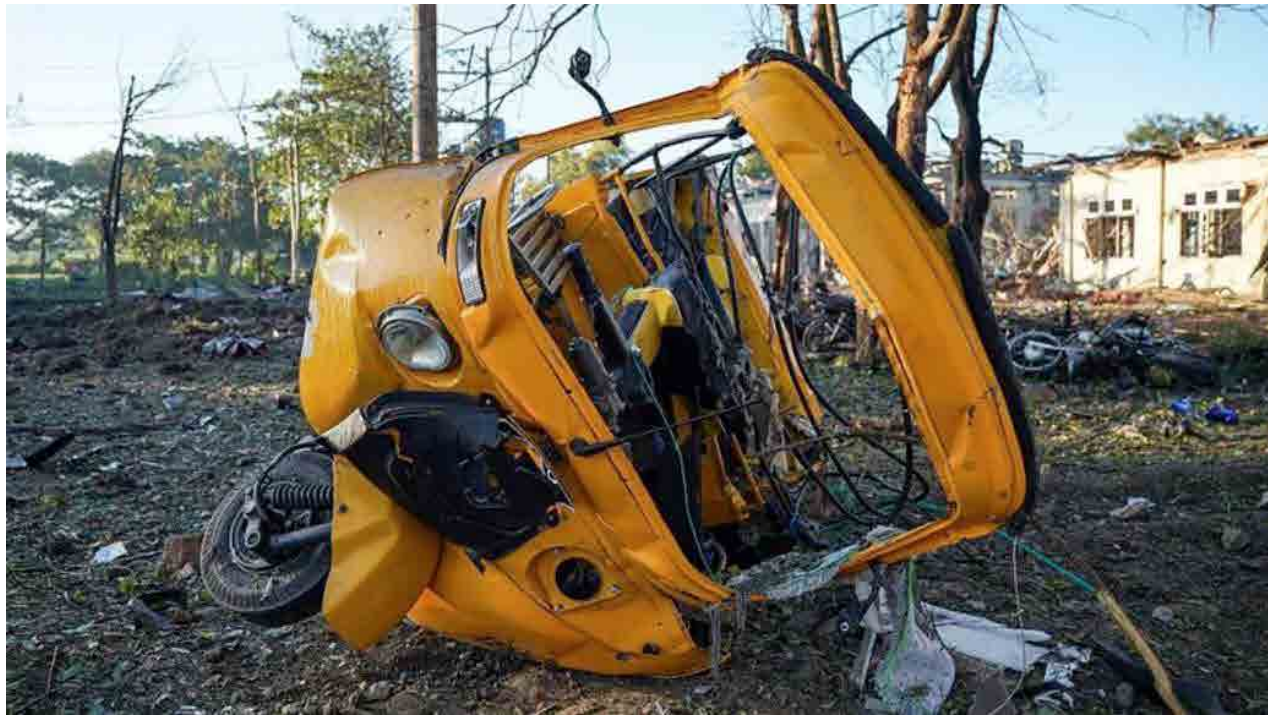
But self-employed photographer Eduardo Ferreira says he knows many people who already cannot find secure jobs and is

pleased to see the unions unite at a "critical moment" for Portugal: "Things have been tough ever since the troika, and workers haven't reacted until now."

The CGTP has condemned the package as "an assault on the rights of all workers, particularly women and young people", while the UGT calls it "so out of step, in a context of economic growth, financial stability and a strong labour market, that... it reflects a clear bias in favour of employers".

The UGT also complains that formal talks between unions, government and business were "unbalanced, restrictive and detrimental to workers".

Montenegro's governing coalition lacks a majority in parliament, and is seeking support for the bill not only from the small, free-market Liberal Initiative (IL) but from hard-right Chega, which since May's general election has been the second-largest party.



AIR BOMBARDMENTS:

The junta has turned to air bombardments to reclaim territory from ethnic armies.

Thousands ready to evacuate as flooding hits Pacific Northwest

Residents in the Pacific Northwest of the US and Canada are bracing for what could be record-setting floods as an atmospheric river dumps heavy rain on already swollen rivers.

On Thursday, the National Water Center reported major, in some cases record, flooding along the Skagit and Snohomish rivers in the state of Washington that is expected to continue through Friday.

In Canada, major highways to Vancouver have been closed because of flooding, debris and the risk of avalanches.

There are evacuation orders in place for thousands of people in the US and Canada, and authorities have warned more rain is on the way.

In the US, the governor of Washington state, Bob Ferguson, declared a statewide emergency on Wednesday and estimated 100,000 residents could soon face evacuation orders.

The emergency declaration warned that continued rain and snow at mountain elevations would exacerbate flooding conditions. Supply chains and transportation could be severely impacted, the declaration added.

Skagit County, a major agricultural area north of Seattle, has issued an immediate evacuation order to residents who live on the floodplain.

Some 75,000 people would be evacuated from low-lying areas on Skagit River, the director of the Washington Military Department's Emergency Management Division, Robert Ezelle, told reporters on Wednesday.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, or NOAA, said on Thursday that the Skagit River will cause "severe near-record flooding from Rockport downstream through Sedro Woolley".

It warned of "deep and swift flood waters" especially in the

Cape Horn, Hamilton and Thunderbird regions.

The Snohomish County Sheriff's Office said in an overnight social media post that they had rescued "multiple" people by helicopter after they became trapped in their homes in Sultan, Washington, a community roughly 40 miles (65km) northeast of Seattle.

The sheriff's office warned residents on Thursday morning that the eastern region of the county is most affected after the Skykomish River crested above 24ft (7m) overnight - just shy of a record.

They said the Snohomish River is also experiencing major flooding and "dancing with records" as water laps against a local flood wall.

King county and Snohomish county officials have said there are multiple closures on state and local roads, with more likely on Thursday.

The Pierce County Sheriff's

office said in an video post on Wednesday that a swiftwater team had to rescue three people from an RV park on Orting, a community about 42 miles south of Seattle. Multiple roads are also closed in that county.

In a post on X on Thursday, Pierce County Sheriff Keith Swank said "this flooding is the worst I have seen here" in the county.

Across the border in Canada's British Columbia, there are evacuation orders in place for the communities of Tulameen and Eastgate, and several other areas.

The City of Abbotsford ordered urgent evacuations for 371 properties at 23:00 local time on Wednesday (07:00 GMT on Thursday).

City officials said the Nooksack River was expected to overflow its banks early on Thursday, and they anticipate flooding, though not as severe as in 2021, when it caused significant damage and five deaths in the province.

Ethiopia arrests 'indecently' dressed TikTok stars after awards ceremony

Ethiopian police have arrested a sixth popular TikTok creator days after five other influencers were detained over allegations of wearing "indecent attire" at a public event in the culturally conservative country.

Adonay Berhane, 25, is a lifestyle and motivational creator with close to four million followers, who was named "TikTok of the Year" at the TikTok Creative Award 2025 - the same ceremony now at the centre of the controversy.

Police said on Wednesday evening that he was under investigation.

The detentions have ignited widespread debate across Ethiopian social media.

Supporters argue the arrests violate freedom of expression and stifle creativity, while conservative voices have defended the police, insisting that public figures must respect cultural norms.

Among those arrested were Wongelawit Gebre Endrias, aka Evan, who posts lifestyle and fashion videos to TikTok. At the event she went braless under an oversized blazer jacket.

Sporting a man-bag was Yohannes Mekonnen, known as Jahnnny, a dancer and content reviewer who won an award for video production at the ceremony.

Adonay was pictured wearing an open-necked shirt.

Bereket Tsegaye, Mekdem Dereje and Girum Gezahegn are were also detained.

None of the six influencers have spoken about their treatment.

But the mother of Adonay Berhane - Abeba Gebru - was shocked by the news.

Adonay is her "backbone" and an "example to Ethiopian youth", she told BBC Tigrinya.

Having spent his teenage years in Canada, Adonay returned to Ethiopia and much of his TikTok content warns of the negative sides of becoming an immigrant. He urges his followers to live and work in their homeland instead.

Ethiopia's government has not commented on the matter, but police said the detainees were suspected of promoting behaviour that undermines public morality - citing concerns about the growing influence of online trends on Ethiopian youth.

With more than eight million social media users nationwide, the incident highlights the growing strain between Ethiopia's rapidly expanding digital culture and longstanding traditional expectations.

Federal police warn that further action will be taken against anyone "violating the country's cultural values" or promoting what they described as "shallow culture."

More than 30 dead after Myanmar military air strike hits hospital

At least 34 people have died and dozens more are injured after air strikes from Myanmar's military hit a hospital in the country's west on Wednesday night, according to ground sources.

The hospital is located in Mrauk-U town in Rakhine state, an area controlled by the Arakan Army - one of the strongest ethnic armies fighting the country's military regime.

Thousands have died and millions have been displaced since the military seized power in a coup in 2021 and triggered a civil war.

In recent months, the military has intensified air strikes to take back territory from ethnic armies. It has also deployed paratroopers to drop bombs on its enemies.

The Myanmar military has not commented on the strikes, which come as the country prepares to vote later this month in

its first election since the coup.

However, pro-military accounts on Telegram claim the strikes this week were not aimed at civilians.

Khaing Thukha, a spokesperson for the Arakan Army, told the BBC that most of the casualties were patients at the hospital.

"This is the latest vicious attack by the terrorist military targeting civilian places," he said, adding that the military

"must take responsibility" for bombing civilians.

The Arakan Army health department said the strike, which occurred at around 21:00 (14:30 GMT), killed 10 patients on the spot and injured many others.

Photos believed to be from the scene have been circulating on social media showing missing roofs across parts of the building complex, broken hospital beds and debris strewn across the ground.

The junta has been locked in a years-long bloody conflict with ethnic militias, at one point losing control of more than half the country.

But recent influx of technology and equipment from China and Russia seems to have helped it turn the tide. The junta has made significant gains through a campaign of airstrikes and heavy bombardment.

Earlier this year, more than

20 people were killed after an army motorised paraglider dropped two bombs on a crowd protesting at a religious festival.

Civil liberties have also shrunk dramatically under the junta. Tens of thousands of political dissidents have been arrested, rights groups estimate.

Myanmar's junta has called for a general election on 28 December, touting it as a pathway to political stability.

News

Foreign

Bulgarian PM and government resign after mass protests

The government of Bulgarian Prime Minister Rosen Zhelyazkov has resigned after protesters took to the streets in cities across the country and filled the centre of the capital Sofia on Wednesday night.

Zhelyazkov's dramatic move came ahead of a vote of no confidence in parliament, and 20 days before Bulgaria joins the euro.

Protesters had accused his minority centre-right government, in power since January, of widespread corruption. The government had already scrapped a controversial budget plan for next year in response to the demonstrations last week.

"We hear the voice of citizens protesting against the government," Zhelyazkov said in a TV address.

"Both young and old have raised their voices for [our resignation]," he added. "This civic energy must be supported and encouraged." A statement on the government website said ministers would continue in their roles until a new cabinet was elected.

Between 50,000 and 100,000 people turned out in Sofia's central Triangle of Power and Independence Square on Wednesday evening calling for the government to go. The words "Resignation" and "Mafia Out" were projected onto the parliament building.

They were backed last week by President Rumen Radev who had also called on the government to stand down.

Zhelyazkov's government had already survived five votes of no confidence and was expected to get through a sixth on Thursday.

Many of the protesters have been angered by the roles of two figures, oligarch Delyan Peevski and ex-prime minister Boyko Borissov, and Wednesday's rally was organised under the slogan "Resignation! Peevski and Borissov Out of Power", Bulgaria's BTA news agency reported.

Peevski has been sanctioned by the US and UK for alleged corruption and his party has helped prop up the government.

Borissov is part of Zhelyazkov's Gerb party, which came first in October 2024 elections, and he was reported to have said on Wednesday that the coalition parties had agreed to remain in power until Bulgaria joined the eurozone on 1 January.

Borissov was prime minister when anti-corruption protests brought down his government in 2020 and there have been seven elections since.

Despite the political drama in Sofia, Bulgaria's move to join the euro is not seen as under threat.

In his resignation statement, the outgoing prime minister said Bulgaria faced a major challenge and its citizens would need to produce "authentic proposals" on what the next government should look like.

Bulgaria ranks among the highest in Europe in terms of the public's perception of official corruption, according to Transparency International.

Austria bans headscarves in schools for under-14s

Austria has passed a law banning headscarves in schools for girls under the age of 14.

The conservative-led coalition of three centrist parties, the ÖVP, the SPÖ and the Neos, says the law is a "clear commitment to gender equality", but critics say it will fuel anti-Muslim feeling in the country and could be unconstitutional.

The measure will apply to girls in both public and private schools.

In 2020, a similar headscarf ban for girls under 10 was struck down by the Constitutional Court, because it specifically targeted Muslims.

The terms of the new law mean girls under 14 will be forbidden from wearing "traditional Muslim" head coverings such as hijabs or burkas.

If a student violates the ban, they must have a series of discussions with school authorities and their legal guardians. If there are repeated violations, the child and youth welfare agency must be notified.

As a last resort, families or guardians could be fined up to €800 (£700).

Members of the government say this is about empowering young girls, arguing it is to pro-

tect them "from oppression".

Speaking ahead of the vote, the parliamentary leader of the liberal Neos party, Yannick Shetty said it was "not a measure against a religion. It is a measure to protect the freedom of girls in this country," and added that the ban would affect about 12,000 children.

The opposition far-right Freedom Party of Austria, the FPÖ, which voted in favour of the ban, said it did not go far enough.

It described the ban as "a first step", which should be widened to include all pupils and school staff.

"There needs to be a general ban on headscarves in schools; political Islam has no place here", the FPÖ's spokesperson on families Ricarda Berger said.

Sigrid Maurer from the opposition Greens called the new law "clearly unconstitutional".

The official Islamic Community in Austria, the IGGÖ, said the ban violated fundamental rights and would split society.

In a statement on its website, it said "instead of empowering children, they will be stigmatised and marginalised."

The IGGÖ said it would review "the constitutionality of the law and take all necessary steps"



US REVISED PEACE:
Scenes of devastated Ukraine settlements.

US seizes oil tanker off Venezuela as Caracas condemns 'act of piracy'

US forces have seized an oil tanker off the coast of Venezuela, marking a sharp escalation in Washington's pressure campaign against Nicolás Maduro's government.

Speaking at the White House on Wednesday, President Donald Trump said the tanker was "the largest one ever seized".

Footage released by the US government showed armed soldiers boarding the vessel, which Attorney General Pam Bondi said was used to transport sanctioned oil from Venezuela and Iran.

Caracas swiftly denounced the action, calling it an act of "international piracy". Earlier, President Nicolás Maduro declared that Venezuela would never become an "oil colony".

The Trump administration accuses Venezuela of funnelling narcotics into the US and has intensified its efforts to isolate President Maduro in recent months.

Venezuela - home to some of the world's largest proven oil

reserves - has, in turn, accused Washington of seeking to steal its resources.

Brent crude prices inched higher on Wednesday as news of the seizure stoked short-term supply concerns. Analysts warn the move could threaten shippers and further disrupt Venezuela's oil exports.

On Thursday, the Kremlin said Russian President Vladimir Putin had spoken with Maduro and reassured him of Moscow's support "in the face of growing external pressure".

Bondi, who leads the US Department of Justice, said the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Defense, Department of Homeland Security, and the US Coast Guard co-ordinated the seizure.

"For multiple years, the oil tanker has been sanctioned by the United States due to its involvement in an illicit oil shipping network supporting foreign terrorist organizations," the nation's top prosecutor wrote on X.

Footage shared by Bondi showed a military helicopter hovering over a large ship, and troops descending on to the deck using ropes. Uniformed men were seen in the clip moving about the ship with guns drawn.

A senior military official told the BBC's US partner CBS that the helicopters used in the operation launched from the USS Gerald Ford, the world's largest aircraft carrier, which was sent to the Caribbean last month.

It involved two helicopters, 10 Coast Guard members and 10 Marines, as well as special forces.

Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth was aware of the operation, and the Trump administration was considering more actions like this, a source told CBS.

When asked by reporters what the US would do with the oil on the tanker, Trump said: "We keep it, I guess... I assume we're going to keep the oil."

Maritime risk company Vanguard Tech identified the

vessel as the Skipper and said it believed the ship had been "spoofing" its position - or broadcasting a false location - for a long time.

BBC Verify has since confirmed that the vessel in the footage released by the Department of Homeland Security is the Skipper.

The US treasury department sanctioned the Skipper in 2022, CBS reported, for alleged involvement in oil smuggling that generated revenue for Hezbollah and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds Force.

BBC Verify also located this tanker on MarineTraffic, which shows it was sailing under the flag of Guyana when its position was last updated two days ago.

A statement from Guyana's Maritime Administration Department on Wednesday evening, however, said that the Skipper was "falsely flying the Guyana flag as it is not registered in Guyana."

Ukraine hands US revised peace plan proposal, Germany says

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said the latest peace plan draft for Ukraine has been presented to US President Donald Trump - including a proposal on territorial concessions Kyiv may be prepared to make.

But Merz highlighted the territorial issue was "a question that must be answered primarily by the Ukrainian president, and the Ukrainian people."

"We also made this clear to President Trump," Merz pointed out.

In recent weeks European leaders have worked closely with Ukraine to come up with a new iteration of a peace plan that addresses Kyiv's interests and concerns.

Trump appears to have grown frustrated with the intricacies of the question of sovereignty over Russian-occupied Ukrainian territories.

Because his negotiating team

has previously worked closely with Moscow, Kyiv's European allies fear the US president might eventually seek to impose a Russian-led solution on Ukraine.

"It would be a mistake to force the Ukrainian president into a peace that his people will not accept after four years of suffering and death," Merz said in a joint news conference with Nato chief Mark Rutte.

He added that in Wednesday's "constructive" phone call with Trump, he, France's Emmanuel Macron and UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer had "made it clear" that Europeans needed to have their interests heard too.

For his part, Trump said the participants had "discussed Ukraine in pretty strong words" and added that he was yet to decide whether to attend a meeting in Europe. "We don't want to be wasting time," he said.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky has long signalled he would be prepared to talk to Trump directly to discuss the sticking points of a deal, but the US president has suggested all issues had to be ironed out before such a meeting could take place.

The territorial question is one of the thorniest. Russia demands that Ukraine withdraws entirely from the parts of the eastern Luhansk and Donetsk regions which it still holds - something Kyiv refuses to do, both on principle and because it fears it would allow Moscow a foothold for future invasions.

"We have no legal right to [cede territory], under Ukrainian law, our constitution and international law," Zelensky said earlier this week. "And we don't have any moral right either."

Zelensky is set to hold more talks with his allies today as

he co-chairs a coalition of the willing call alongside Merz, Macron and Starmer.

As high-level, frantic diplomatic activity of the last few weeks has taken place among US, European and Ukrainian officials, with frequent statements from all sides, Moscow has remained remarkably tight-lipped.

Any comments from Russia have sought to cement the impression that Moscow and Washington are aligned on their hopes for the terms of a peace deal.

On Thursday Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov praised Trump for trying to broker a deal and said the recent meeting between Vladimir Putin and US envoy Steve Witkoff at the Kremlin had "eliminated" the "misunderstandings" which had arisen since last summer's Trump-Putin summit in Alaska.

Opinion

OKPEBHOLO'S COMMITMENT TO A SAFER EDO IS PAYING OFF **From crackdowns to security reforms**

EBOJELE PATRICK

Since taking office in November 2024, Edo State Governor Senator Monday Okpebholo has made the security of lives and property a central pillar of his administration. Through a series of bold and strategic moves, the governor has signalled that Edo is a state where criminality will not go unchecked. Recent operations and reforms indicate that his promise of a safer Edo is steadily becoming a reality.

One of the most visible actions under Governor Okpebholo's leadership is last week's crackdown on cultism and criminal hideouts. In Uromi, Esan North-East Local Government Area, the government recently demolished buildings linked to violent cult activities. The demolition followed a raid by the State's Special Security Squad on 17 November 2025, conducted in collaboration with the Nigerian Army and other security agencies. Thirty-one suspects were arrested during the operation, while leaders of the notorious Black Axe and Eiye confraternities were given a seven-day ultimatum to surrender. When they failed to comply, the state moved decisively to pull down the buildings, citing incriminating evidence recovered from the properties.

Idemudia Noah, coordinator of Operation Flush Out Kidnappers and Cultists, said the demolition was necessary to send a strong message. "This exercise should serve as a warning to landlords and property owners to properly profile their tenants. These houses were demolished because they were linked to criminal activities," he said. The affected properties are now being repurposed as operational bases for security personnel, further strengthening the government's presence in key areas.

The crackdown extended beyond cultism. In a separate operation, 15 people were arrested in Uromi's Hausa quarters for possession of illicit drugs. Authorities highlighted the connection between drug trafficking and violent crime, noting that narcotics often attract hoodlums and kidnapers. One of the suspects, Tajudeen Lawal, admitted to selling marijuana with two others. According to Noah, these arrests are part of a wider strategy to eliminate the networks that fuel insecurity in the state.

Governor Okpebholo has also reinforced the legal framework for his anti-crime initiatives. His administration championed the Secret Cult and Similar Activities (Prohibition) Law, 2025, and strengthened the Kidnapping Prohibition Law, introducing harsher penalties for offenders. These legal tools provide law enforcement with the authority to act decisively against cultists and kidnapers, signalling that Edo is no longer a haven for criminal networks.

The governor's commitment goes beyond legislation. In Benin City, he recently received the new Commander of the 4 Brigade, Nigerian Army,



GOVERNOR OKPEBHOLO

Brigadier General Ahmed Olatunboju Balogun, reaffirming his administration's support for military collaboration. Governor Okpebholo assured the Army of state support and pledged to improve infrastructure critical to security operations, including roads and facilities at Ekenwa Barracks. He also announced the procurement of multifunctional drones to enhance surveillance and intelligence gathering.

The results of these efforts are already visible. Over 300 cult leaders have been arrested since the current administration began active security operations, multiple buildings linked

to criminal hideouts have been demolished, and illegal firearms have been recovered or neutralised. The Special Security Squad continues to operate across Edo's 18 local government areas, with thousands of trained personnel, vehicles and motorcycles deployed to hotspots.

Public sentiment reflects growing confidence in the government's approach. Youth groups and community leaders have expressed support for the administration's initiatives, organising peaceful rallies and urging residents to cooperate with authorities. Communities are increasingly aware that law enforcement is no longer pas-

sive but actively pursuing criminals and disrupting their networks.

Despite the progress, Governor Okpebholo acknowledges that challenges remain. Civil society groups have called for due process safeguards and continued community engagement to ensure that anti-crime measures are effective yet fair. The administration, however, appears committed to balancing these concerns with the urgent need to secure the state.

In conclusion, Governor Monday Okpebholo's approach to security is comprehensive and results-driven. By combining strict legal measures, aggressive enforcement, community en-

gagement and technology-enhanced surveillance, the administration is transforming Edo into a state where criminal elements face real consequences. While the journey toward a completely crime-free Edo is ongoing, the foundation has been firmly laid, and the trajectory is clear: Okpebholo's Edo is becoming safer, more secure and increasingly resilient against criminal threats.

Ebojele Akhere Patrick, PhD, is Chief Press Secretary to the Edo State Governor.

Fubara, Adeleke and the survival dance

You should be aware by now that the dancing governor, Ademola Adeleke has danced his last dance in the colours of the Peoples Democratic Party. His counterpart in Rivers, Siminalayi Fubara has elected to follow some of his persecutors to the All Progressive Congress, after all "if you can't beat them, you can join them."

Politics in Nigeria has always been dramatic, but every now and then a pattern emerges that forces us to pause and think again about where our democracy is heading. This week on The Nation's Pulse, that pattern is what I call the politics of survival. Two events in two different states have brought this into sharp focus. In both cases, sitting governors elected on the platform of the same party have found new homes elsewhere. Their decisions may look sudden, but they reveal deeper issues that have been growing under the surface for years.

In Rivers, Governor Siminalayi Fubara has crossed into the All Progressives Congress. In Osun, Governor Ademola Adeleke has moved to the Accord Party. These are not small shifts. These are moves by people at the top of their political careers, people who ordinarily should be the ones holding their parties together. When those at the highest levels start fleeing, it means the ground beneath them has become too shaky to stand on. It means something has broken.

A Yoruba proverb captures it perfectly: lku to n pa oju gba eni, owe lo n pa fun ni. The death that visits your neighbour is sending you a message. The crisis that has engulfed the Peoples Democratic Party did not start today. It has been building like an untreated infection. Adeleke saw the signs early. He watched senior figures fight openly. He watched the party fail to resolve its zoning battles. He watched leaders undermine their own candidates. At some point, you begin to ask yourself a simple question: if this house collapses today, what happens to me? In Osun, where the competition between the two major parties has always been fierce, Adeleke was not going to sit back and become another casualty of a party that refused to heal itself. Survival became the most reasonable option.

His case makes sense when you consider the political temperature in Osun. This is a state where the opposition does not sleep. Every misstep is amplified. Every weakness is exploited. Adeleke has spent his time in office under constant scrutiny. Add that to the fact that the national structure of his party is wobbly, divided and uncertain about its future, and the move begins to look less like betrayal and more like self-preservation.

Rivers, however, tells a slightly different story. Fubara's journey has been a long lesson in endurance. From the moment he emerged as governor, it became clear he was stepping into an environment loaded with expectations that had nothing to do with governance. His political godfather was not content with being a supporter. He wanted control. He wanted influence. He wanted obedience. Every decision was interpreted through the lens of loyalty. From the assembly crisis to the endless reconciliation meetings, to the barely hidden power struggles, Fubara



FUBARA



ADELEKE

spent more time fighting shadows than building the state he was elected to lead.

It soon became clear that he was governing through a maze of minefields. Those who should have been allies began to treat him like an accidental visitor in the Government House. The same legislators who were meant to be partners in governance suddenly became instruments of pressure. Orders came from places outside the official structure. Courtrooms turned into battlegrounds. At some point, even the national leadership of his party seemed unsure how to tame the situation. These storms did not come in seasons, they came in waves. One misunderstanding today. Another in two weeks. Another by the end of the month. Anyone watching closely could see that the governor was in a permanent state of emergency.

So when the winds started shifting again and lawmakers began to realign, those who understood the undercurrents knew exactly what was coming. Fubara knew too. A man can only take so much. After months of attacks, humiliations and attempts to cage his authority, the move to another party was not just political. It was personal. He had given the reconciliation process more chances than most would. He had swallowed more insults than any governor should. He had watched institutions bend and twist under the weight of private interests. In many ways, his defection is a declaration that he has finally chosen to protect himself.

But the bigger question is how we got here. How did two governors in two different parts of the country end up taking the same decision for different but related reasons? The answer goes back to the state of internal democracy in our parties. No party in Nigeria today fully practices the constitution it claims to follow. They have elaborate rules on paper but very loose habits in reality. They talk about fairness, but their primaries are often messy. They preach unity, but their caucuses are usually divided into rival camps. They call themselves democratic institutions, yet dissent is treat-

The bigger lesson from Rivers and Osun is clear. If political parties in Nigeria continue on this path of disunity and internal sabotage, they will keep losing their brightest and most strategic figures. And if leaders keep running instead of reforming the system, then we will wake up one day to a democracy where the people are treated as an afterthought.

ed as disloyalty.

Political parties are supposed to be the engine rooms of democracy. They are the homes where ideas are debated, leaders are groomed, and future candidates are shaped. In Nigeria, they increasingly look like fighting arenas where the loudest voices drown out everyone else. When leaders ignore their own constitutions, the structure begins to crack. When factions begin to run parallel meetings, the foundation gets weaker. When decisions are forced down the throats of members, people begin making private plans for their future.

No governor wants to govern in chaos. No politician wants to be the last one standing in a sinking ship. This is why defections are becoming more common. A party that cannot manage itself cannot manage its members. And members who feel exposed will always look for safer ground.

But while these moves make sense for Adeleke and Fubara personally, the people they govern often become the ones left in confusion. Voters choose candidates partly because of party ideology, even if our ideologies are weak. They expect stability. They expect continuity. They expect that the mandate they gave will remain intact. So when a governor shifts political camp without prior consultation, the people feel blindsided. They begin to wonder

whether their votes carry weight in a system where elected officials can switch platforms in the blink of an eye.

This is where the politics of survival becomes dangerous for democracy. If leaders keep prioritising their personal safety over party stability, the system begins to lose coherence. Parties lose their identity. Elections lose their meaning. Governance becomes a game of musical chairs. Today you are here. Tomorrow you are there. Next week you may be somewhere else. The people become bystanders in a democracy that is supposed to revolve around them.

Rivers and Osun should serve as reminders that political parties need urgent restructuring. They need to rebuild trust internally. They need to enforce their constitutions consistently. They need to treat members as stakeholders, not spectators. When members feel protected, they stay. When they feel targeted, they run. This pattern will continue until parties learn the simple truth that power is not built by intimidation, but by inclusion.

There is also the question of what these defections mean for governance. When governors are dragged into endless party drama, service delivery suffers. Time that should be spent on roads, schools, hospitals, water projects and job creation ends up being spent in meetings, reconciliations and press briefings. Resources

that should strengthen the state end up funding political battles. The public loses twice. First as witnesses to the drama. Then as victims of delayed or abandoned development.

In Rivers, the months of tension slowed down the government. Initiatives were stalled because the governor was busy trying to survive political ambush. In Osun, Adeleke had to juggle governance with internal fights in a crumbling party structure. Imagine what they could have achieved if they were not constantly looking over their shoulders.

Now, as both men settle into new political homes, the final question is whether these new homes will provide stability or merely temporary shelter. Nigeria's politics teaches one consistent lesson. New alliances often come with new expectations. New platforms often come with new demands. And new godfathers often come with new conditions. Whether Adeleke and Fubara have truly found peace or simply bought time is something only time will tell.

But as citizens, what we must insist on is simple. The politics of survival should not become the politics of abandonment. Our leaders can fight for their political life, but they must not forget that they hold the people's mandate. The hunger, poverty, insecurity and infrastructural decay that Nigerians face will not be solved by defection. It will be solved by steady leadership and functional governance.

The bigger lesson from Rivers and Osun is clear. If political parties in Nigeria continue on this path of disunity and internal sabotage, they will keep losing their brightest and most strategic figures. And if leaders keep running instead of reforming the system, then we will wake up one day to a democracy where the people are treated as an afterthought.

Governors may survive the storms. Parties may adjust to new alignments. But the people cannot keep paying the price. Nigeria deserves a democracy that works for the many, not the few. That is the real pulse of the nation.

ArtsWorld with Francis Odupte 08023680030

Legacy and innovation: Benin Art Fair 2025, celebrating the past, present, and future of Benin Art

OLUWATOSIN A. JEKAMI

Edo State, particularly Benin City, stands as one of Africa's most distinguished centers of artistic and cultural heritage. Long before the arrival of colonial influences, Benin was renowned for its sophisticated bronze casting, ivory carving, and intricate court art that documented royal history and cosmology. These artistic practices, embodied in the famed Benin Bronzes, were not mere aesthetic expressions; they functioned as archives of memory, diplomacy, and identity. In this way, Benin transcends its role as a historical site to become a living charger of memory, continually reminding us of Africa's intellectual, cultural, and artistic depth.

However, beyond the celebrated bronzes and royal artistry lies an expansive terrain yet to be fully uncovered - a lane that spans across the intersections of contemporary art, entertainment, culture, and indigenous traditions. The Benin Art Fair was conceived to address this continuum: to document, interpret, and re-present the evolving narratives of Benin's artistic journey.

Building on the foundation of the 2024 edition, The Benin Art Fair 2.0 advances this mission by emphasizing both legacy and innovation. These are, obviously, two intertwined forces that have always defined Benin's creative ethos. The Fair recognizes that Benin's past glories were not static achievements but dynamic engagements with creativity, spirituality, and societal order. This year, we extend that engagement into the present, ex-



amining how artists reinterpret heritage in dialogue with modernity and global artistic discourse.

Every element of The Benin Art Fair 2.0 has been intentionally curated to reflect the rhythm, symbolism, and spirit of the Red City. The design of the Fair's spatial experience mirrors the structure of Benin's cultural identity: from Booth 1 (Miniatures and Collectibles), which celebrates the tangible craft traditions of everyday

Benin life; to Booth 2 (Knowledge and Archives), a repository of written and visual memory through exhibition catalogues and books on Benin's history and art; and Booth 3 (The Sound of Benin), which immerses visitors in the sonic heritage of the kingdom through both traditional and contemporary music. Collectively, these elements extend the experience of the Benin Art Fair beyond visual art, transforming it into an educational and sensorial jour-

ney through Benin's evolving identity.

The artworks presented in this edition have been deliberately selected to showcase the chain between master and apprentice, heritage and experiment. They include works by renowned masters whose practices have defined the trajectory of Benin and Nigerian art, fast-rising Nigerian artists who bring fresh interpretations of tradition, and emerging Benin originated artists who are actively sustaining and rede-

fining the expectations placed upon them by virtue of their cultural inheritance. Through these dialogues, the Fair becomes not only a platform for exhibition but also a site of intergenerational exchange and critical reflection.

Ultimately, The Benin Art Fair 2.0 positions itself as both an archive and a laboratory. The curatorial goal for this year is that it becomes a place where memory informs innovation, and tradition encounters transformation. It is a demonstration of Benin's enduring legacy and its boundless potential to inspire new forms of expression across time, geography, and imagination.

Although I am not from Benin, the city feels like the abode of a guardian: familiar, protective, and profoundly inspiring. Curating The Benin Art Fair 2025 has been both a privilege and a journey of enlightenment. Immersing myself in the Red City's creative pulse, its people, and its stories has answered a long-standing curiosity about why Benin's legacy continues to shape not only the artistic landscape of Nigeria but also the broader narrative of African art. From the very beginning, I understood that my role was not to speak for Benin, but to listen: to learn, to connect, and to help illuminate the wholesome brilliance that already resides here.

At its heart, the Benin Art Fair 2.0 was a shared celebration; a space where memory meets imagination, where the past converses with the present, and where innovation lights the path forward. It stands as a heartfelt tribute to the people, artists, and heritage of this Red City, whose enduring spirit continues to inspire us all.

Postponed NAFEST 2025: A blessing in disguise for Enugu State?

The coal-dusted hills of Enugu — often called the “Coal City” — had never looked more alive in recent weeks. Drummers' palms wined from practice, masquerade costumes hung in workshop attics, hotel rooms were booked to near capacity, and the streets of the state capital brimmed with hopeful anticipation. With the 2025 edition of the National Festival of Arts and Culture (NAFEST) slated to begin on November 22, many believed Enugu was poised to host the most dazzling, unifying celebration of Nigerian culture ever seen. But instead of the blaze of festival lights, a somber announcement from the Federal Ministry of Art, Culture, Tourism and the Creative Economy stopped everything in its tracks — and left dreams shattered.

Since earlier this year, Enugu State threw itself wholeheartedly into preparations for NAFEST 2025. The state government constituted a Local Organising Committee (LOC), under the leadership of the Commissioner for Culture and Tourism, Ugochi Madueke, with instructions to deliver a “world-class, top-notch, and memorable cultural festival” befitting the reputation of Enugu as a peaceful, vibrant and culturally rich state.

State officials and the organizing body, the National Council for Arts

and Culture (NCAC), had gone further — unveiling a comprehensive, multi-layered security plan. Under the directive of the state's governor, Peter Mbah, security agencies — police, military, intelligence, local vigilantes — were to come together to safeguard performers, visitors, and tourists. CCTV cameras, digital surveillance, crowd-monitoring systems, and a joint operations centre were to be deployed. According to NCAC's Director-General, the plan would serve as “a benchmark for festival safety in Nigeria.”

Meanwhile, venues such as Michael Okpara Square and the International Conference Centre, Enugu had taken on fresh life — painted, prepared and re-branded for the festival. Vendors and hoteliers dusted off their best furnishings, performers rehearsed tirelessly, cultural troupes from across the country made travel plans, costumes were stitched, masks carved, dances choreographed, songs rehearsed. Observers expected exhibitions, masquerade displays, “Atilogwu” dances, traditional wrestling, archery contests, crafts, and a kaleidoscope of Nigerian identity across states — all under the festival's theme, “Connected Culture.”

For Enugu, hosting NAFEST was more than an honour: it was a chance to showcase the state's cultural pride, draw tourism, boost the creative

economy, and put the Southeast on the national cultural map as a destination for arts, unity, and heritage.

THE SUDDEN POSTPONEMENT —DREAMS CUT SHORT

Then, just days before the festival was to start — with at least 28 state contingents already in Enugu — the Federal Ministry issued a heartbreaking directive: NAFEST 2025 was postponed indefinitely. The reason given: a “careful assessment of the national mood” following a wave of insecurity and tragic incidents across the country. With many communities grieving, the government judged it insensitive to proceed with a national celebration.

The announcement came on Friday night, catching organisers, cultural troupes, vendors, and hundreds of excited visitors off guard. By Saturday morning, the state Commissioner for Culture and Tourism publicly acknowledged the blow — describing the decision as painful, but understood. She noted, despite Enugu's readiness, the security concerns confronting the nation made it necessary to prioritise safety and empathy over spectacle.

As the drums fell silent, the economic optimism dimmed. Hotels, once bustling with bookings, saw empty corridors. Vendors of crafts, food sellers, drivers, artisans — many

had counted on festival traffic and the accompanying commerce. Cultural troupes from states such as Lagos, Delta, Benue, Katsina, Plateau and others had already arrived, with costumes, props, even a trailer load of horses, all prepared for performances that never happened.

The pain of postponed hopes is not new. As one editorial rightly noted, what happened to Enugu mirrors what Bayelsa State experienced 19 years ago — when another scheduled NAFEST hosting was disrupted at the last minute.

Much like now, the Notice of cancellation was sudden, destabilising not only the host state but also the national organising agency, cultural troupes, and participating states. Contingents that had travelled, made elaborate preparations — from stage sets to cultural costumes — returned home without ever stepping on stage. The unforgettable carnival of cultures evaporated overnight. And the economic ripple — from arts and crafts sellers to hoteliers and food vendors — was equally heartbreaking.

Enugu's experience this year, 2025, thus follows a painful repeat: readiness undone, hopes dashed, and cultural ambitions postponed. Yet, like Bayelsa two decades ago, Enugu may yet find in the disappointment a

chance to rebuild — with better lessons, stronger plans, and deeper resolve. But as painful as the postponement has been, there is a compelling case that this pause may yet become a blessing in disguise for Enugu State.

Time for stronger, safer delivery. The postponement offers Enugu additional time to deepen its security plans, strengthen logistics, and refine all organizational details. What was already ambitious can now be meticulous. The joint security task forces, venues, accommodation plans, transport logistics — all gain an extra window for improvement.

Building stronger stakeholder engagement. Cultural bodies, artisans, vendors, hotel-owners and local communities now have more time to coordinate, network, and build collaboration. This could lead to better planning, fairer economic distribution, and a more inclusive festival structure when NAFEST is finally rescheduled.

Heightened anticipation, greater turnout. The postponement may stir a pent-up demand for culture, unity and national celebration. When NAFEST eventually happens in Enugu, it could draw larger crowds — especially if the new date coincides with more stable national security and with greater marketing and awareness built around the “long-awaited” festival.

Friday Sermon

Calling our attentions to the significance of Shari'ah Law and Hisbah in the life of a Muslim believer!

MAJOR M. Y. BABANGIDA

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. Praise is due to Allah, Lord of the worlds, may the blessings and peace be upon our beloved master Muhammad, the last of Prophets, on his family, and all his companions.

Dear brothers and sisters! Know that, Shari'ah law is very important to Muslim believers as it provides divine guidance for all aspects of their lives, from spiritual and religious practices to social, economic, and political matters. It is viewed as a path to fulfill the purpose of serving Allah Almighty, fostering justice, promoting moral values, and achieving success in this life and the hereafter.

Shari'ah law acts as a comprehensive framework for daily conduct, covering personal behaviour, family life, and financial transactions.

Shari'ah law governs acts of worship, such as prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage, and includes the core beliefs of Islam.

It provides guidelines for personal conduct, encouraging qualities like forgiveness, courtesy, and respect for others. It includes principles for marriage, divorce, and inheritance.

Shari'ah law provides a framework for business and financial transactions, emphasising ethical practices and prohibiting specific activities like interest-based lending (riba).

Muslim believers believe that following Shari'ah law is a way to be a complete servant to Allah Almighty and to achieve success in this life and the hereafter.

Shari'ah law aims to create a just and balanced society by providing a legal and ethical system that is devoid of injustice and selfish interests.

Shari'ah law is a comprehensive system, with guidance on virtually every facet of human life, from the mundane to the spiritual.

It establishes boundaries for behaviour, classifying actions into categories such as obligatory, recommended, permitted, discouraged, and forbidden.

Respected brothers and sisters! Shari'ah law in its general sense means the way, and thus the Islamic Shari'ah is the way revealed to our beloved Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him).

Allah Almighty says: "Then We put you on the (right) Way [Shari'ah] of Religion: so follow that (Way)." [Qur'an, 45:18]

This revealed text has been understood and interpreted through the application of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) as well as the Ijtihad of Muslims through centuries. Shari'ah law in its more specific sense means legislation.

Allah Almighty says: "To each among you have we prescribed a law [Shir'ah] and a method." [Qur'an, 5:48]

The Islamic legislation constitutes meanings, laws, rules and principles concerning human actions. Particularly, it aims at identifying the legal rulings for the actions of the legally competent persons.

Shari'ah law means the divine path in Islam. It comes from Allah's guidance in the Qur'an and the teachings and example of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him). Shari'ah law gives rules for worship, ethics, family life, commerce,



and more. It demands justice, compassion, and protection of faith, life, intellect, lineage, and property—known as the Maqasid al-Shari'ah.

Shari'ah remains fixed as divine law. Islamic scholars interpret it through fiqh, which means jurisprudence or legal reasoning. So while Shari'ah law is perfect and unchanging, fiqh adapts to changing times and needs.

Muslims received the Qur'an between 610 CE and 632 CE. Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him), both spiritual and temporal leader, guided the early Muslim community in implementing divine rulings after his passing in 632 CE, his companions and successors governed using principles in the Qur'an and Sunnah.

By the 8th and 9th centuries, Islamic scholars developed Usulul-Fiqh, principles of legal methodology. They began to form schools of jurisprudence: Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali in Sunni Islam, and Ja'afari in Shi'a Islam. These schools shaped how communities practiced Shari'ah law in different cultures and societies.

By the 10th century, legal reasoning solidified. Islamic scholars built authoritative legal doctrines in each mazhab to advise leaders and guide judges. Traditions governed marriages, inheritance, worship, contracts, and public order, even penal codes, yet always emphasised fairness and mercy.

Shari'ah law originated from two main sources: The Qur'an, Allah's final revelation, providing core values and principles. The Sunnah, authentic Hadiths and the Prophet's practices.

Islamic scholars also use tools like ijma (consensus) and qiyas (analogy) when direct rulings don't exist. These tools ensure fairness and wisdom in new circumstances while maintaining divine guidance. This rooted yet flexible approach keeps Shari'ah law relevant and transformative.

When you study fiqh, you learn how to apply Shari'ah law to modern choices—ritual, commerce, family, governance. Fiqh works to clarify, explain, and guide every action. Islamic scholars trained for years to interpret rulings, and they use rigorous methods to ensure accuracy and compassion.

Deepening fiqh knowledge brings confidence. This confidence helps you worship better, conduct ethical business, and live family life with Islamic values.

Rituals of worship are the heart of a Muslim's life. These acts connect Muslim believers with their Creator, Allah

Almighty, and build discipline, gratitude, and unity.

Shari'ah law defines every aspect of worship—from intention to actions—based on authentic sources. Fiqh guides how these rules apply based on ability, time, and place.

The five pillars of Islam are central to Shari'ah's worship rulings: Shahada – the testimony of faith

Salah (Prayer) – performed five times daily, with rules on cleanliness, timing, direction, and recitation. Zakat (Charity) – a fixed share of wealth for the needy. Sawm (Fasting in Ramadan) – refraining from food, drink, and harmful behaviour from dawn till sunset. Hajj (Pilgrimage to Makkah) – a once-in-a-lifetime journey, if one has the means.

Shari'ah law provides clarity so Muslims know exactly how to fulfill these duties with sincerity and precision. Through worship, Shari'ah law instills self-purification, community support, and spiritual strength.

Shari'ah law is not just about personal piety—it's about building a just, caring society. It addresses family life, economics, governance, politics, health, education, and public behaviour.

Shari'ah law gives strong rights to spouses, children, and parents. It organises inheritance, divorce, guardianship, and maintenance with justice and mercy.

It bans interest (riba) and promotes honest trade. Business ethics, fair contracts, and zakat to ensure economic balance.

Shari'ah law encourages truthfulness, cleanliness, helping neighbours, and social justice. It also outlines laws on crime, punishment, and public responsibility—but always within the limits of compassion, evidence, and due process.

While there's no fixed "Islamic state model," Shari'ah law supports governance based on consultation (shura), justice, and accountability. A leader should protect rights, serve people, and uphold the public good.

Understanding Shari'ah law and implementing it brings powerful changes in the life of a Muslim: It helps you support others—making your family and community thrive. It strengthens your faith with clarity and purpose. It builds integrity in daily choices. It fosters fairness in both personal and social life. It fills your heart with hope and mercy, knowing divine guidance leads you.

Some people misunderstand Shari'ah law, especially some Americans and other non-Muslims, because they see legal extremes or political regimes. Real Shari'ah law emphasises mercy and

ethics. It does not force, only invites. It balances limits with grace and applies only within fair guidelines. Many misrepresentations come from politics, not fiqh or theology.

For Muslim believers, If you want to understand Shari'ah law begin by reading the Qur'an with commentary and learning authentic Hadith. Study fiqh within a supportive community. Seek reputable scholars. Join structured programs that help you apply Shari'ah law compassionately and confidently.

Fellow brothers and sisters! Know that, Shari'ah law does not change—Qur'an and Sunnah remain fixed. Fiqh rulings adapt to new contexts through rigorous scholarship and proper methods.

And Shari'ah law is not about punishment only. It also focuses on balance, compassion, and guidance. Punishments exist but apply under strict criteria. Mercy and prevention matter most.

In many communities, Muslim believers follow Shari'ah law privately while living in legal systems where non-Muslims also enjoy justice and rights.

Fiqh enables clarity in worship, business, family, and moral choices. It shapes decisions aligned with divine guidance.

Shari'ah law grants women rights in inheritance, education, marriage consent, and economic activity. Real-world misconceptions often misrepresent these rights.

Shari'ah law forms the beautiful bond between Muslim believers and their faith. It uplifts individuals and communities through justice, worship, and ethics. Studying Shari'ah law through Qur'an, Sunnah, and fiqh deepens your spirituality and purpose. Feel hopeful, empowered, and inspired to live life under divine guidance.

Dear brothers and sisters! Shari'ah law is crucial for Muslim believers because it provides a divinely-guided correct path for all aspects of their lives, from personal worship and ethics to social, economic, and political matters. It is derived from the Qur'an and the Sunnah and aims to guide Muslim believers toward fulfilling their purpose of servitude to Allah, ensuring success in this life and the hereafter.

And Hisbah in Islam is a powerful, foundational principle rooted in the Qur'anic command of "enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong" (al-amru bil-ma'ruf wal-nahy anil munkar), serving as a mechanism for social accountability, justice, and the overall well-being of the community.

Hisbah is a collective duty (fard kifaya) upon the Muslim community, giving every individual an active role in society. It transforms passive citizenry into a self-correcting force, ensuring the government and society remain on a righteous path. The Qur'an reminds Muslim believers that they are the best of nations precisely because they uphold this duty. When Hisbah is taken seriously, communities can curb malpractices, fraud, and injustice, fostering a highly moral society.

The Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) himself was the first Muhtasib (official of Hisbah), personally conducting market inspections to ensure fairness. In a famous incident, he found

a seller who had hidden wet wheat under dry, leading him to declare:

"Whoever cheats is not one of us." [Muslims]

This powerful example teaches us that Hisbah is not just about major sins, but also about honesty, integrity, and preventing exploitation in daily interactions, ensuring economic stability and social trust.

Also the Rightly Guided Caliphs continued and institutionalised this legacy.

For example, Umar (RA) formally established the office of the Muhtasib (official of Hisbah), whose duties included market supervision, maintaining public order, and ensuring proper performance of religious obligations. His use of a simple stick (Dirrah) for petty wrongs, which he applied without discrimination, struck immense fear of injustice in people's hearts.

Abubakar (RA), in his inaugural address, set the precedent for accountability, stating that:

"Obey me as long as I obey Allah and His Messenger. If I disobey them, then you have no obligation to obey me."

This demonstrates the intrinsic link between leadership, adherence to divine law, and public accountability.

Ultimately, Hisbah is an act of Ibadah (worship). To be effective, it must be performed with sincerity, knowledge, leniency, mercy, patience, and the objective of protecting the community's well-being. It is not about harsh judgment of private beliefs (which are for Allah alone to judge on the Day of Reckoning) but about addressing obvious, public wrongs for the sake of Allah, not for material or worldly benefits. The profound internal motivational force comes from the belief in ultimate accountability to Allah Almighty on the Day of Judgment, when every soul will see the weight of their deeds, no matter how small.

Respected brothers and sisters! Shari'ah-oriented political scientists define Hisbah as the duty of enjoining good when it is neglected and forbidding evil when it is prevalent in society.

Ibn Khaldun considers Hisbah as a religious post. That is why Muslim jurists (Fuqaha) differentiate between the Muhtasib (one who practices Hisbah), who is appointed by the head of state or governor to look after the state's subjects, and the Mutatawi'i (volunteer), who practices Hisbah without being assigned by the political authority.

Historically, Hisbah as a system was founded in the political life of Muslims during the era of Caliph Umar Ibn Al-Khattab. However, the term itself was known only in the era of the Abbasid caliph Al-Mahdi. According to Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, Hisbah started in a simple form in the early days of Islam, but acquired various features and ramifications over time. In fact, some contemporary government ministries and departments — such as those of health, social affairs, municipalities, transport, and police — are now assuming duties that used to be entrusted to the Muhtasib (official of Hisbah). The Muhtasib must be a capable, discerning Muslim adult. This person serves as the eye of the law on both state and society.

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2ND NIGER DELTA GAMES: Edo State Liason Committee Inaugurated as Enabulele Assures of Cooperation, hospitality



The Executive Chairman Edo State Sports Commission Hon. Amadin Desmond Enabulele (Center), Mr Osayomore Aghahowa, Director, ESSC (right) and Kehinde Osagiede Chairman SWAN Edo State left with Fred Edoreh, Project Director, Niger Delta Games during the Inauguration of Edo Liaison Committee for Niger Delta Games yesterday in Benin.

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

As the preparation for the 2nd Niger Delta Games begins, the Executive Chairman, Edo State Sports Commission Hon Amadin Desmond Enabulele has assured the sponsors and organisers of the games of full cooperation and excellent delivery in order to achieve improved and hitchfree games in Benin.

The Edo State Sports Commission boss who is also the chairman of the newly inaugurated Edo State Liaison Committee for the 2026 Niger Delta Games gave the assurance on Thursday during the Committee inauguration ceremony at the Samuel Ogbemudia stadium.

Hon Enabulele who re-echoed the readiness of Edo State to host the rest of the oil rich region as earlier declared by the state Governor Senator Monday Okpebholo said that Edo State is the right destination for the second edition of the Niger Delta Games.

"I want to assure the Niger Delta Department Commission, NDDC and development partners, and the rest participating states that we are ready to begin work immediately and be rest assured that we will do our very best as host State to give you the best hospitality and improved games."

"We want to also assure you that we are going to abide by the rules of the games and cooperate with the main organizing body to pursue and achieve the goal of surpassing the inaugural edition." He assured stating however that Edo is not just hosting but will strive to win the games.

In a remark shortly before the

Inauguration of the Edo state Liaison committee for the 2026 Niger Delta Games, Mr Fred Edoreh the Project Director of Niger Delta Games, said that the organizing body plans to organize a memorable event in Benin in 2026 and wants all

the participating states, including Edo to abide by the rules of the game.

"Mr chairman thank you for your cooperation so far. We expect work to begin and trial for athletes to go through the inner parts of the 18 local government areas Edo State to give opportunities to all indigenes. We have raised the age limit to 20 years.

It is not about winning at all cost but to establish the platform for all eligible athletes to showcase their talents and skills." He said.

Members of the Edo State Liaison Committee include:

1. Hon Amadin Desmond Enabulele, Executive Chairman Edo State Sports Commission - Chairman
2. Bright Idahosa- Secretary
3. Sogbayi Opeoluwa - Member
4. Joseph Aghahowa, Director of Sports - Member
5. Kehinde Osagiede, SWAN Chairman, Edo State - Member.

According to the organizing body of the Niger Delta Games, the function of the committee is to organise the preliminary trials of athletes, from the Local Government level to the final selection at the state level; To ensure the online registration of all participating athletes and the entry of the selected athletes in the games registration/DRM portal and to ensure adequate publicity of the exercise.

Other responsibility for the committee is to ensure that the trials and selection of athletes are in strict conformity with the general and technical rules and regulations of the games; To ensure the successful camping and training of the contingent ahead of the games; To ensure the comfortable transportation of the state contingent to and from the Games, and during the games and to ensure the effective application of funds in line with the directives of the Project Consultant among other things.

NSC concludes plan to establish Integrity Unit to strengthen Nigeria's Zero tolerance for ethical misconduct

The National Sports Commission, NSC, has concluded plans to establish an Integrity Unit as part of its ongoing reforms to make Nigeria one of the World's leading Sports countries.

Sequel to the recently concluded Council of Sports meeting in Calabar where several decisions were taken to revitalise Nigeria Sports De-

velopment drive, the NSC has swiftly swung into action with the establishment of its Integrity Unit (IU).

The NSC after securing the approval of the National Council of Sports to criminalise and institutionalized sanctions against age falsification in Nigerian sports, have now taken a further step to create a more structural approach towards its fight against ethical misconduct in sports with its IU (Integrity Unit) department.

The Director General of the NSC, Hon. Bukola Olopade, said the Integrity unit will work closely with all Sports Federations, the anti doping

unit, the athletes and the Elite and Podium board.

"The Chairman, Mallam Shehu Dikko and myself are very committed to institutionalising this reform because it will solve most of the problems Nigeria has been battling with in Sports at the international level for many years".

"The Integrity Unit will ensure Nigeria at all times is in line with global best practices with the quality of athletes we present for international competitions in terms of both age integrity and doping conduct".

"As a top sporting country with rich history in major international sporting competitions, we want to lay a very good foundation for our integrity profile to be very strong in the eyes of international Sports organisations", he stated.

He added that the establishment of the Integrity Unit is a core component of the Renewed Hope Initiative for Nigeria's Sports Economy (RHINSE) agenda of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, GCFR.



HON. BUKOLA OLOPADE

Niger Delta Sports Festival Organizers Announce Commencement of Registration

The organizers of the Niger Delta Sports Festival have announced the commencement for the registration of athletes for the 2nd edition of the games slated for Benin City, the Edo State capital.

Bayelsa State defeated perennial rivals, Delta to emerge champions of the inaugural edition of the festival held at Uyo, Akwa Ibom State.

This was disclosed by the Director of Operations, Mr. Fred Edoreh in a meeting with states' liaison secretaries and Directors of Sports of the various participating states.

According to him, registration of the athletes will commence from Thursday 11th December, 2025 through the 10th of January, and states are advised to adhere strictly to the



guidelines of the registration for the games.

He noted that the technical support for the registration would be sent to the respective

states, pointing out that this year's fiesta would witness a tremendous improvement over the previous edition in Akwa Ibom State.

Big boost for Enyimba as Joseph Abiodun returns ahead of Kwara United clash

Enyimba's mercurial winger, Joseph Abiodun is back to training after being out due to injury.

The winger got injured in Enyimba's 2-1 loss to Plateau United on October 26. The former AS Douanes of Niger Republic forward has returned to training.

Abiodun has scored two goals in 7 games this season, one against Niger Tornados and another in Enyimba's dra-

matic 3-2 comeback victory against Bendel Insurance in Aba. He was denied by the woodwork in Enyimba's loss to Kun Khalifat in Owerri..

Prior his injury, he was a shining light in Enyimba's attack and was a key part of the team in their 7-game unbeaten run.

He returned to full training after attaining fitness and will be available for selection as the People's Elephants host Kwara United in Aba on Sunday.



JOSEPH ABIODUN

Morocco 2025: Chelle picks Nwabali, Osimhen, Ndidi, 25 others for 35th AFCON



Head Coach of the Super Eagles of Nigeria Eric Sékou Chelle has opted for goalkeeper Stanley Nwabali, defenders Calvin Bassey, Semi Ajayi and Zaidu Sanusi, midfielders Wilfred Ndidi and Frank Onyeka, and forwards Victor Osimhen as well as Ademola Lookman, and 20 other players as he released Nigeria's 28-man team for the 35th Africa Cup of Nations starting in Morocco, scheduled to kick off in 10 days' time.

The Franco-Malian also picked defenders Chidozie Awaziem and Bright Osayi-Samuel, midfielders Fisayo Dele-Bashiru and Raphael Onyedika, and forwards Samuel Chukwueze and Simon Moses, among others.

There is a return for Cyprus-based goaltender Francis Uzoho, defender Igoh Ogbu and forward Paul Onuachu, while England-based defender Ryan Alebiosu, midfielders Usman Muhammed (Israel), Ebenezer Akinsanmiro (Italy) and Tochukwu Nnadi (Bel-



gium), and Croatia-based forward Salim Fago Lawal will be joining up with the group for the first time.

The Super Eagles will clash with the Pharaohs of Egypt in a friendly encounter at the

Cairo Stadium on Tuesday, 16th December, before flying aboard a chartered flight from Cairo to Fès (their battlefield in Group C) two days later.

The three-time champions take on the Taifa Stars of

Tanzania on 23rd December, before further group phase encounters against Tunisia's Carthage Eagles (27th December) and Uganda's Cranes (30th December).

28 SUPER EAGLES FOR 35TH AFRICA CUP OF NATIONS MOROCCO 2025

Goalkeepers: Stanley Nwabali (Chippa United, South Africa); Amas Obasogie (Singida Blackstars, Tanzania); Francis Uzoho (Omonia FC, Cyprus)

Defenders: Calvin Bassey (Fulham FC, England); Oluwasemilogo Ajayi (Hull City, England); Bright Osayi-Samuel (Birmingham City, England); Bruno Onyemachi (Olympiakos, Greece); Chidozie Awaziem (Nantes FC, France); Zaidu Sanusi (FC Porto, Portugal); Igoh Ogbu (Slavia Prague, Czech Republic); Ryan Alebiosu (Blackburn Rovers, England)

Midfielders: Alex Iwobi (Fulham FC, England); Frank Onyeka (Brentford FC, England); Wilfred Ndidi (Besiktas FC, Turkey); Raphael Onyedika (Club Brugge, Belgium); Tochukwu Nnadi (Zulte Waregem, Belgium); Fisayo Dele-Bashiru (SS Lazio, Italy); Ebenezer Akinsanmiro (Pisa SC, Italy); Usman Muhammed (Ironi Tiberias, Israel)

Forwards: Ademola Lookman (Atalanta BC, Italy); Samuel Chukwueze (Fulham FC, England); Victor Osimhen (Galatasaray FC, Turkey); Simon Moses (Paris FC, France); Chidera Ejuke (Sevilla FC, Spain); Akor Adams (Sevilla FC, Spain); Paul Onuachu (Trabzonspor AS, Turkey); Cyriel Dessers (Panathinaikos FC, Greece); Salim Fago Lawal (NK Istra 1961 (Croatia

NFF launches FIFA Talent Development Scheme for Girls

The Nigeria Football Federation officially inaugurated the FIFA Talent Development Scheme (TDS) for Girls in Abuja on Wednesday, 10 December, at the Noble Hall Leadership Academy in Abuja.

This initiative follows the initial launch of a similar program for boys two years ago, and is meant to provide support to member associations of FIFA to realise their full potential. The President of the Nigeria Football Federation, Alhaji Ibrahim Musa Gusau MON, underscored the significance of the scheme, which is primarily designed for talent identification.

"This scheme is dedicated to uncovering talents among both boys and girls. Nigeria has consistently led women's football in Africa for the past twenty-five years, a fact validated by recent CAF Award recognitions. I extend my congratulations to these young girls as the first beneficiaries of this initiative. It is heartening to see that football remains a sport of interest among many young people, which is truly commendable.

"I assure you that we will enlist experts to train and develop your skills, with the hope that some of

you may represent Nigeria at the national level and perhaps emulate icons like Asisat Oshoala and Rasheedat Ajibade," said the NFF President. He added that the program, established by FIFA, aims to advance the game of football globally, beginning from the grassroots level.

NFF's Director of Competitions, Ms Ruth David, who represented the General Secretary, Dr Mohammed Sanusi (MON), said: "The Talent Development Scheme (TDS) is part of FIFA's collaborative efforts with Member Associations to enhance global competitiveness. It reflects a long-term commitment to nurturing talent worldwide."

Head of Women's Football at the NFF, Hajiya Amina Daura, expressed gratitude to the school management for their hospitality and elaborated on the foundation of the TDS program. "We sincerely thank the school for hosting this program. It is designed to promote your talents in football, initiated by FIFA top official Arsene Wenger, to discover and develop your potential, not only as players but also as future health-conscious individuals who can serve as coaches, referees, physiotherapists,



NFF CHAIRMAN, ALHAJI IBRAHIM MUSA GUSAU

Salah 'meets Henderson for lunch as unhappy Liverpool star quizzes ex-Reds team-mate about playing football in Saudi Arabia amid uncertainty over his future'

Mohamed Salah was reportedly grilling his former Liverpool team-mate Jordan Henderson at a secret meeting in London this week as speculation continues to mount about his future.

Salah has been the headline story over recent days following an explosive interview he gave to reporters after Liverpool's 3-3 draw at Leeds on Saturday having been left on the bench at Elland Road.

Salah remarkably accused the club of throwing him under the bus and said he had no relationship with boss Arne Slot.

The outburst has led to suggestions Salah could leave Anfield in the upcoming January transfer window, with the Egyptian having previously been linked with a big-money move to the Saudi Pro League (SPL) along with the MLS.

On Wednesday, SPL chief Omar Mugharbel admitted Salah was a target for the top clubs in the Middle Eastern league, while on Thursday MLS commissioner Don Garber launched a charm offensive for the 33-year-old.

And, according to The Sun, Salah - who was left out of Liverpool's squad for their win over Inter Milan on Tuesday - met Brentford star and former Reds captain Henderson in an upmarket restaurant in West London on Wednesday afternoon.

The report claims the pair linked up at Italian eatery Scalinini in Chelsea and given Henderson's previous stint in Saudi Arabia with Al-Ettifaq, the meeting is likely to set tongues wagging.

Salah was said to be deep in conversation with Henderson and listened attentively to what

he had to say, after the pair initially tried to go undetected upon their arrival at the venue.

Henderson only spent six months in the Middle East and left in January 2024 to join Ajax, but the report adds that the 35-year-old was speaking positively about his experiences and was 'answering a lot of questions from Mo'.

A source told The Sun: "They both came in wearing Covid-style masks and had hats covering their faces. They tried to stay under the radar.

"Our mouths dropped when we saw it was Mo and Jordan. The immediate thought was, "Salah's off to Saudi!"

Another onlooker added: "Mo looked happy as he listened and took it all in. He kept asking Jordan questions, and lent in eagerly to hear what was being said.

"I couldn't believe what I was

witnessing. It was obvious Jordan was explaining things to Mo, who listened so intently and was clearly mulling over what he was being told."

The pair are believed to have spent 90 minutes together and were seen eating pasta and drinking coffee and fizzy water.

Speaking last Saturday after the Leeds game in the mixed zone, Salah had said: "I could

not believe I was sitting on the bench for 90 minutes. That's the third time. It's the first time in my career I think.

"(I am) very disappointed, I have done so much for this club over the years, especially last season. It seems like the club has thrown me under the bus. That's how I feel.

"Someone wants me to get all the blame. The club promised



MOHAMED SALAH AND ARNE SLOT

me a lot in summer. Now I'm on the bench so I can say they haven't kept those promises.

"I used to have a good relationship (with manager Slot). Now we don't have any relationship and I don't know why."

As Simon Jones reported for Daily Mail Sport, SPL clubs are waiting to see if peace can be brokered between Salah and Slot before making any approach for the unhappy Liverpool forward.

Liverpool maintain a stance that Salah only signed a new contract, worth in excess of £400,000-a-week, months ago and expect him to see that out. They have no plans to sell as they believe the issue with Slot can be resolved.

SPL sources, however, suspect that is an attempt by Liverpool to protect Salah's transfer value and are keeping a keen eye on developments.



Family bonding: A culture in decline

It is yuletide once again. The air during this season was rich with anticipation, merriment, and the comforting rituals of the season.

I recall with nostalgia how I savoured Christmas during my denarian years. Today, the streets no longer glow with colourful lights and the dusty harmattan winds are on the brink of extinction. The Nigerian economic quagmire and climate change are indubitably taking a toll on the yuletide season.

My mind drifts to the formative years of my life. Christmas was not merely a date on the calendar. It was an experience. One soaked in anticipation, innocence, laughter, and a deep sense of family. Those days, particularly during festive periods like Christmas and Easter, were intoxicatingly fun. They were moments we identified with more than any other time of the year, because they made us feel the meaning of family in its purest form.

Christmas was once a season where parents were under tremendous yet joyful pressure: buying new dresses, shoes, picking spectacles and wristwatches for both Christmas and New Year celebrations. Children felt like royalty. A simple set of clothes made one feel reborn into a new possibility. The excitement built gradually as the day drew near. Every passing day was a countdown to magic.

The eve of Christmas was alive with a delightful chaos, as the sharp crackle of locally made knockouts echoed from every direction and music throbbed joyfully from homes, trumpeting the coming of Christmas, the day Jesus Christ was purportedly born.

On Christmas morning, the whole house buzzed. Mothers woke up earlier than usual, unbothered by the weight of work that awaited them in the kitchen. Fathers slaughtered chickens, turkeys, or goats, and neighbours helped one another without being asked. It was a time when no house ate alone. The aroma of stew travelled freely across compounds, giving a communal announcement that a feast was underway. Children ran around barefoot, coated in dust, faces shining with “Stella pomade”, and “Nightshift powder”. It was undiluted and unlimited fun.

Above all, there was bonding — intense, effortless bonding. After the morning church service, my siblings and I would join other children in the neighbourhood to visit relatives. Cousins were not distant relations; they were extended siblings. Aunts and uncles were second parents. Families interlocked like branches of the same tree, making every holiday feel like a joyful reunion with destiny.

The bond did not end with festivities. Even outside Easter and Christmas, cousins visited one another regularly. Many weekends were spent sleeping over at a relative’s house, eating what they ate, and sharing bed space with no complaint. We did not need invitations, and no one needed to schedule family interactions. It was natural. Relation-



ships were nurtured with presence, time, and shared experiences.

Today, the story is different. Painfully different. Modern life, with its fast pace and hyper-individualistic values, has produced a generation that is more digitally connected yet socially isolated. Cousins seldom visit one another. Some do not even know each other. In many cases, cousins meet for the first time at weddings, burials, or family crises, and find it difficult to connect because they are strangers holding the same surname. The erosion of bonding goes beyond physical distance; it is emotional distance disguised as civilisation.

This rupture has produced disturbing consequences. Without close knowledge of extended family members, young people drift into emotional relationships blindly. There have been cases where cousins unknowingly enter into romantic affairs, fuelled by ignorance. A tragedy that would have been unthinkable in the past. Worse still, some have committed incest, unaware of the blood ties that bind them. These are not isolated incidents; they are symptoms of a larger social illness — the fading of family bonds.

One may ask: How did we get here? The answer is layered, but parents hold a major share of the responsibility. The transformation of family dynamics did not happen overnight. It was gradual, almost imperceptible, creeping in through urban migration, economic pressures, modern parenting styles, and the evolution of cultural values.

In the past, family meant everything. Decisions were collective. Children belonged to the entire family. I remember vividly that a child could be corrected by any adult in the community without resistance. Today, parenting has become territorial. Families are fiercely private, and children are shielded from the influence of extended relatives. Parents

now believe that raising children alone is a badge of honour. The presence of cousins, aunts, or uncles in a child’s life is considered interference or a threat to parenting authority.

With the rise of digital distractions, children are now raised more by screens than by family conversations. Cousins no longer play football together; they play online games with faceless strangers. Family gatherings are replaced with virtual chats that disappear after a few seconds. Rather than learning the history of their lineage, children learn the trending dance challenges on the internet. While technology is not the enemy, its unregulated dominance has eroded the natural bonding that shaped previous generations.

Urban migration has reshaped the family landscape. Many families live in cities far from their roots, surrounded by high fences, busy schedules, and overwhelming economic pressures. Parents barely have time to visit relatives, and children grow up without the lived experience of their extended family. Holidays that were once annual pilgrimages home have become optional, or worse, burdensome. Children who were raised with village cousins now prefer to stay in the city, visiting malls rather than grandparents.

Back then, Christmas and Easter meant returning to the ancestral home — a place where family history breathed through the walls. The reunion was sacred. Today, some families celebrate holidays in isolation or travel abroad for vacations, prioritising enjoyment over family connection. The ancestral homes gather dust, and the elders sit waiting with stories that will soon die with them.

One of the most powerful pillars of African family culture was communal parenting, a shared responsibility model

where every adult played a role in raising children. I grew up with many parents — some biological, most adopted through culture. The discipline I received was not a function of fear; it was a product of mutual respect and familiarity.

Modern families have abandoned this approach. Children are now told to “mind their business,” and relatives are asked not to interfere. The result is a generation with shallow roots. Without strong family ties, identity becomes fluid, and values become retail items purchased from influences online.

Festivities themselves have been redefined. In the old days, Christmas meant family, sitting around a big bowl of white rice with ‘fry’ or jollof rice, listening to elders share stories of their youth, singing carols in native languages, and taking long walks to see relatives. The joy was in the togetherness, not the luxury.

Today, festivities are centred on consumption — gifts, travels, flamboyant fashion, loud music, and social media displays. The family gathering is replaced by photo sessions. The meaning of celebration has been commercialised, leaving little room for genuine bonding.

Nothing damages the family structure more than emotional distance. When children do not feel the warmth of extended family, they grow up prioritising friendships over blood relations. While friendships are important, family provides the foundation that shapes character and identity. The absence of emotional bonding leads to fragile relationships, weak conflict-resolution skills, and a lack of collective responsibility within families.

The fading family bond is not irreversible. It can be repaired through conscious, collective effort. The responsibility lies with parents, cultural institutions, religious bodies, and the

education system. Parents must become intentional about exposing their children to extended relatives. It is not enough to show them photos; let them meet, interact, and grow together. Festivities should be used as opportunities for bonding, not isolation.

Besides, families should prioritise returning to their ancestral home during festive periods. Let children touch the soil of their roots. Let them sit with grandparents and hear family histories. Let them know where they come from.

Moreover, cousins should be encouraged to relate like siblings. Sleepovers, weekend visits, and joint activities create deep bonds. Parents must facilitate these interactions, not restrict them.

More so, celebrations should go beyond consumption. Families should engage in activities that strengthen bonding: cooking together, storytelling, games, cultural displays, visiting relatives, and helping the less privileged.

In addition, families should document their lineage and stories. Children should know their family tree. Understanding one’s roots prevents mistakes like incest and romantic entanglements among relatives.

Finally, technology should be a tool for bonding, not separation. Video calls to relatives, family group chats, and shared activities online can bridge distances, if used wisely.

As I reflect on my childhood, I realise that the joy of those days was not accidental. It was built on values: love, presence, sacrifice, openness, and shared humanity. We did not have much materially, but we had everything that made life meaningful — family.

Today, as the world becomes more modern and globalised, we must be careful not to lose the essence of who we are. Technology will evolve, cities will expand, lifestyles will change, but the fundamental need for family remains constant. Family is the first school, the first tribe, the first social network, the first support system. When family bonds fade, society weakens.

As we celebrate this yuletide, let us remember that Christmas is not just about lights, food, clothes, or travels. It is about reconnecting with those who share our blood and history. It is about children learning the warmth of belonging. It is about renewing bonds that time and distance may have threatened. It is about honouring the values that shaped us.

Let us bring back the days when cousins knew one another intimately, when aunts and uncles were second parents, when family gatherings were moments of joy, and when children ran around freely without knowing the burden of loneliness.

The family bond must not fade. Not on our watch.

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