

# Renewed Hope Initiative delivers ₦1.9bn lifeline to veterans, elderly

## ● As Edo CSC begins CBT for Agric, Environmental Officers

**BENIN CITY**  
No fewer than 9,500 veterans and vulnerable elderly citizens across Nigeria have benefited from the third edition of the Renewed Hope Initiative (RHI), led by the First Lady of Nige-

ria, Senator Oluremi Tinubu, as part of a nationwide social protection drive. In Edo State, 250 beneficiaries drawn from the three senatorial districts received ₦200,000 each at the New Festival Hall, Government House, Benin City. The initiative, themed

“Finding Joy in Old Age,” involves a total disbursement of ₦1.9 billion, with each state, the Federal Capital Territory, and the Defence and Police Officers’ Wives Association (DE-POWA) receiving ₦50 million. Speaking at the event, Senator Oluremi Tinubu described

the initiative as a reflection of a compassionate, people-centred government that values the contributions of senior citizens. She said the scheme targets citizens aged 65 and above to ease economic pressures and improve their quality of life during the festive season.

Represented by the Coordinator of the Office of the First Lady in Edo State, Mrs. Edesili Okpebholo Anani, she added: “Our elderly citizens walked difficult paths so that younger generations may enjoy smoother roads. It is our moral duty and privilege to ensure they live their later years in comfort, good health and dignity.”

Dr. Andrew Iyamu, Special Adviser on Health to the Edo State Government, urged beneficiaries to adopt healthy lifestyles, engage in light physical activity, and observe regular medical check-ups. Several beneficiaries, including Madam Agnes Akha-

CONTINUES ON PG 2 >>

# The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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**Northern elders reject NEF stance on FIRS, endorse Tinubu's reforms**  
—Pg 5

# Yuletide: Governors pledge tight security measures

## ● NSCDC deploys 1,200 operatives to secure Edo

**ABUJA**  
The 36 state governors, under the aegis of Nigeria Governors’ Forum (NGF), have pledged tight security measures across the country to ensure an incident-free festive period. The governors made the pledge in a communiqué issued after the NGF’s meeting in Abuja.

The communiqué was signed by the NGF Chairman, Governor AbdulRahman AbdulRazaq of Kwara, and read by Governor Dapo Abiodun of Ogun. The communiqué said that the governors at the meeting deliberated on issues, including the security challenge currently affecting the country. “The forum received a communication from the Office of

the National Security Adviser (ONSA) calling for heightened security preparedness across all states during the 2025 festive season, due to increased population movements, large public gatherings and heightened public safety risks. “Governors are committed to strengthening inter-agency coordination, protecting critical infrastructure and main-

taining a visible security presence in identified hotspots to ensure a safe, incident-free festive period nationwide,” it said. The governors said that they received notification from the World Bank confirming the effectiveness of the additional financing for the Nigeria Community Action for Resilience and Economic Stimulus (NG-CARES) programme.

This, according to them, will enable continued disbursements to states to support livelihoods, food security, public works and resilience-building interventions. “Governors renewed their commitment to sustaining implementation momentum, ensuring timely reporting and maximising fund utilisation to deliver measurable outcomes for vulnerable households.. “The forum noted the outcome of the third edition of the Primary

Health Care (PHC) Leadership Challenge Awards, held on December 12, which recognised 13 states for outstanding progress in strengthening PHC systems. “Yobe State emerged as the national overall winner, while Zamfara, Nasarawa, Abia, Rivers, and Osun topped their respective geopolitical zones; Kwara, Gombe, Kaduna, Anambra, Bayelsa, and Ogun

CONTINUES ON PG 2 >>



**MANDATORY GEO-ENTREPRENEUR TRAINING:**  
L-R: MD, Bob Geo Electric Shore Consult Nig. Ltd., Dr Ogungbade Olubukola; MD, Geophase Resources Ltd, Dr Waliu Adeolu; Prof. Moshood Tijani of the Department of Geology, University of Ibadan; President, Nigerian Mining and Geoscientists Society (NMGS), Mrs Rose; Registrar, Council of Nigerian Mining Engineers and Geosciences (COMEG), Prof. Zacheus Opafunso; Principal Consultant, Groundscan Services, Prof. Tamunoene Abam; Director, Mine Tech Innovation Hub, Nasarawa State University, Dr. Aisha Kana and immediate past President, NMGS, Prof. Shedrack Olatunji, during the Mandatory Geo-Entrepreneur Training on the Preparation of Standard Pre-Drilling Hydro-Geophysical Report and the 2025 COMEG Induction Ceremony, in Abuja.

## FG unveils revised Nat'l Migration Policy

**ABUJA**  
The Federal Government on Thursday officially presented and validated the Revised National Migration Policy (NMP) 2025 with its Integrated Implementation Plan. The migration policy was presented in Abuja at the 2025 Migration Dialogue organised by the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons (NCFRMI) with the support of other partners. Speaking at the event, President Bola Tinubu charged migration stakeholders to focus their conversation on innovative solutions, collaborative approaches and the effective implementation of the policy

Tinubu, represented by the Minister of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Reduction, Dr Bernard Doro, underscored the importance of the revised policy. According to him, it introduces innovations, strengthens institutional coordination and provides a clear implementation plan and monitoring framework. “We must adopt a governance model that is evidence-based, people-centered, and development-orientated. “The Federal Government is fully committed to its operationalisation, and we will work tirelessly with all stakeholders to ensure its effective implementation at national

CONTINUES ON PG 2 >>

**Okpebholo mourns victims of Auchu tanker fire, commiserates with Otaru**  
—Pg 2

**Alleged N2.2bn fraud: Court admits ex-labour minister to bail**  
—Pg 6

**Nigeria apologises over Burkina Faso military flight that saw 11 servicemen detained**  
—Pg 9

**AFCON 2025: Super Eagles land in Fez, begin preparations with first training session**  
—Pg 14

# Edo CSC begins CBT for Agric, Environmental officers

## BENIN CITY

The Edo State Civil Service Commission (CSC) on Thursday conducted a Computer-Based Test (CBT) for shortlisted candidates seeking employment as Agricultural and Environmental Officers, underscoring Governor Monday Okpebholo's commitment to merit-based recruitment and practical governance.

Chairman of the commission, Mr. Sam Oko-Ose, mni, told journalists at the CBT centre in Benin City that over 3,000 applicants initially applied, but only about 400 were shortlisted after a rigorous screening process.

"Many applicants did not meet the requirements. Some HND holders applied when we asked for degree holders. Others had third-class degrees or irrelevant qualifications. There is no way we can appoint a medical doctor as an agricultural officer. That is why only 400-plus candidates are sitting for this exam today," he explained.

He said the recruited officers will work in the Ministry of Local Government and the Ministry of Agriculture.

"The CBT is just one stage. Successful candidates will proceed to oral interviews, where their credentials will be thoroughly examined," Oko-Ose

added.

The chairman reassured candidates of the commission's integrity, stressing that the process is strictly merit-based.

"We are people of integrity.

The Governor, Distinguished Senator Monday Okpebholo, is a man of integrity, and we cannot afford to disappoint him or the people of Edo State," he said.

Two candidates, Omoregbe

A. Rosemary and Aituayuwa Hawkins, praised the transparency of the exercise and expressed optimism about joining the Edo State civil service.

The recruitment follows

Governor Okpebholo's earlier pledge to strengthen the state civil service through fresh employment, highlighting the administration's focus on turning promises into action.

## Renewed Hope Initiative delivers...

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mentalor and Mr. Etiake Bernard, thanked the First Lady, describing the initiative as timely, compassionate, and impactful on their wellbeing.

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## FG unveils revised Nat'l Migration...

### «CONTINUED FROM PG 1

and sub-national levels.

"This dialogue provides a rare opportunity to deepen coordination and strengthen partnerships and collaborations towards managing migration in a safe, orderly, and dignified manner," he said

The president further affirmed that the revised policy reflected the evolving realities of migration and aligned with his administration's Renewed Hope Agenda while ensuring coherence with regional and global instruments.

He appreciated the continued support of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the International Center for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), and other partners, whose contributions have strengthened Nigerians' migration governance rights.

In his remarks, the Minister of State of the Ministry, Dr Yusuf Sununu, noted that Nigeria currently hosts over 6 million internally displaced persons, adding that many of them live outside the camps

but within host communities.

"This reality reinforces the need for policies that go beyond emergency response and focus on durable solutions, community stabilisation and social cohesion.

"The revised policy rightly strengthens provision on the internally displaced persons, return, reintegration and community-based recovery," Sununu said.

He, however, identified poverty as one of the strongest drivers of irregular migration, internal mobility and vulnerability, stressing that addressing migration without confronting poverty is incomplete.

Similarly, Alhaji Tijani Ahmed, the Federal Commissioner, NCFRMI said the commission through the support of the federal government provided strategic guidance in which the migration sector has recorded notable progress.

"This engagement will culminate in a special event on climate-induced mobility and the Rabat process senior officials meeting, scheduled for January next year in which Nigeria is the chairman," Ahmed said.



### COURTESY VISIT:

Secretary to Edo State Government (SSG), Barr. Musa Ikhilor (2nd right); Special Adviser on Electronic Media, Paul Ezenwa (right); Chief Press Secretary to Governor Monday Okpebholo, Dr Patrick Ebojele (2nd right) and Public Relations Officer, Governor's Office, Jimoh Akande when the Government House Press crew paid a courtesy visit to the SSG at Government House, Benin City.

## Okpebholo mourns victims of Auchi tanker fire, commiserates with Otaru

RICHARD EWeka

### BENIN CITY

Governor of Edo State, Senator Monday Okpebholo, has expressed deep sorrow over the tragic fire incident in Auchi, Etsako West Local Government Area, caused by the fall of a petroleum tanker that triggered an inferno involving several vehicles.

The Governor described the incident as painful and unfortunate, noting that it has brought grief and distress to families, motorists and residents of the area.

On behalf of the Government and people of Edo State, Governor Okpebholo commiserated with the Otaru of Auchi, His Royal Highness, Alhaji Aliru H. Momoh Ikelebe III, and the people of Auchi Sacred Kingdom over the tragic occurrence.

He said the incident was a stark reminder of the dangers

associated with the transportation of petroleum products on Nigerian highways, adding that the thoughts and prayers were with the people of Auchi Sacred Kingdom at this difficult time.

The Governor extended heartfelt sympathies to individuals who suffered losses, including those whose vehicles and properties were destroyed in the fire.

He also prayed for the repose of the souls of those who may have lost their lives and for the quick recovery of those injured.

Governor Okpebholo assured the people of Auchi that the Edo State Government was working closely with relevant emergency and safety agencies to assess the situation, support affected victims and put measures in place to prevent a recurrence.

He urged motorists and tanker drivers to strictly adhere to safety regulations and traffic laws to safeguard lives and

property across the state, while reaffirming his administration's commitment to the safety and wellbeing of Edo people.

The Governor called on residents to remain calm and cooperate with authorities as investigations into the incident continue

## UATH CMD reiterates need to bridge cancer gap in Nigeria

### GWAGWALADA (FCT)

The Acting Chief Medical Director (CMD), University of Abuja Teaching Hospital (UATH), Prof. Bob Ukonu, on Thursday reiterated the need to bridge the gap in the number of cancer cases in Nigeria.

Ukonu said this during the "Mural of Hope: Unveiling Inspiration for Pediatric Cancer Patient" event in Gwagwalada.

He was represented by the Acting Chairman, Medical Advisory Committee, UATH, Prof. Joseph Obande.

He said the Mural of Hope was done by some foundations, comprising BIO Ventures for Global Health (BVGH), Medic-

aid Cancer Foundation (MCF), Nigeria Solidarity Support Fund (NSSF) and Burkitt's Lymphoma Fund for Africa (BLFA).

He said that this was an artistic painting done in the children's cancer ward of UATH to inspire their lives as they go through their cancer experience.

The CMD said that 80 percent of cancer were curable in the developed world while in our own world only 20 percent are curable.

He described the situation as a very huge and wide disparity.

He said that the programme was aimed at reducing pedi-

«CONTINUE ON PG 3»

## Yuletide: Governors pledge tight security...

### «CONTINUED FROM PG 1

were the first runners-up.

"Governors acknowledged that the results reflect the value of sustained political leadership and peer-driven accountability, and committed to building on these gains to further strengthen primary health care delivery nationwide," the communique said

Meanwhile, the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), Edo Command, has deployed 1,200 personnel across the state to ensure robust security during the Christmas

and New Year festivities.

The Command's Public Relations Officer, SC Efosa Ogbebor, disclosed this in a statement issued on Thursday in Benin City.

Ogbebor said the State Commandant of the Corps, Saidu Akintayo, approved the operation as part of a proactive strategy to safeguard lives, property and critical national assets.

He added that the personnel were drawn from specialised tactical and operational units and strategically deployed across the three senatorial districts.

"This is to forestall criminal

activities before, during and after the festive period.

"The deployment is designed to guarantee a peaceful and secure environment for residents and visitors throughout the Yuletide," he said.

He explained that operatives have been deployed to places of worship, prayer grounds, event and recreational centres, major highways, markets and other vulnerable locations across the state.

The command's spokesperson quoted the commandant as warning criminal elements to steer clear of Edo, stressing

that the corps "will not hesitate to deal decisively with anyone found breaching the law."

Ogbebor added that the NSCDC remained committed to working with other security agencies to ensure uninterrupted celebrations.

He urged residents to be vigilant and law-abiding, calling for timely reports of credible information to security agencies to aid crime prevention and swift response.

He also wished Christians in the state a Merry Christmas and extended the goodwill to all residents.

# Troops foil terrorists' infiltration attempt into Bitta, kill key fighters

## ABUJA

In the eight-count charge m Troops of Operation HADIN KAI (OPHK) have foiled an early-morning attempt by terrorists operating from the Mandara Mountains to infiltrate Bitta, neutralising

several insurgents and dealing a significant blow to their operational capability.

The Media Information Officer of Operation HADIN KAI, Lt-Col. Sani Uba, disclosed this in a statement on Thursday in Abuja.

Uba said the terrorists were detected at about 12.30 a.m. on

December 18 by troops supported by advanced surveillance systems.

According to him, the troops exercised tactical restraint, allowing the terrorists to move into effective engagement range before unleashing coordinated defensive fire.

He said the encounter led to the neutralization of several insurgents, including a key terrorist commander and his cameraman.

Uba added that as the surviving terrorists attempted to withdraw, precision air strikes by the Air Component of

OPHK were carried out on the retreating elements, further decimating them and disrupting their escape routes.

He said a thorough exploitation of the area led to the recovery of assorted arms, ammunition and logistics, including a camcorder, AK-47 rifles, bandoliers, handheld radios and 11 AK-47 magazines loaded with rounds.

Other items recovered, he said, included seven mobile phones, PKT machine guns, belts of PKT and GPMG linked ammunition, as well as motorcycles and bicycles.

Uba explained that further

exploitation revealed multiple blood trails and shallow graves, indicating additional casualties sustained by the terrorists during the encounter and subsequent air strikes.

He noted that the morale and fighting efficiency of the troops remained high as operations continued to deny terrorists freedom of action and ensure the safety of communities within the area of responsibility.

Uba reaffirmed the resolve of the Joint Task Force to decisively defeat all terrorist elements and restore lasting peace and stability across the North-East region.



## 2025 CHRISTMAS CAROL:

A cross-section of the Christian faithful during the 2025 Christmas carol at the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) headquarters in Abuja on Thursday.

## 2026 Hajj procurement: No contract rollover —NAHCON

### ABUJA

The National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON) has described as false and misleading claims that it applied for a rollover approval from the Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP) for 2025 Hajj service providers.

NAHCON stated this in a statement issued on Thursday in Abuja by Ahmad Muazu, Technical Assistant (Media) to the commission's Chairman and Chief Executive Officer.

"NAHCON has noted with concern the persistent misrepresentation and misinformation surrounding the engagement of Hajj service providers

for the 2026 Hajj operations.

"These claims wrongly suggest that the commission sought or applied a rollover approval from BPP for 2025 Hajj service providers. This position is false and misleading.

"For the avoidance of doubt, NAHCON did not at any time request a rollover of contracts from the BPP," he said.

Muazu explained that the commission's decision not to open a fresh bidding process for certain 2026 Hajj services was informed strictly by the emergency nature of Hajj operations.

He said the BPP advertisement rule and the extremely tight timelines issued by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for

all participating countries also influenced the decision.

According to him, the approach is consistent with Section 43 of the Public Procurement Act, 2007, which allows emergency procurement where time constraints make standard tender processes impracticable.

"The Saudi Hajj calendar is fixed, non-negotiable and applies equally to all Hajj missions globally. Nigeria is not an exception.

"It is important to state clearly that the re-engagement procurement does not translate to automatic renewal or preservation of existing contract terms," Muazu said.

He said that following the 2025 Hajj, the commission conduct-

ed performance reviews, service evaluations and satisfaction assessments across all service areas.

"Based on these findings, NAHCON is under no obligation to retain identical contractual terms, scope or volume arrangements previously applied in 2025," he added.

Muazu said the commission's guiding principles remained transparency, accountability, value for money and quality service for Nigerian pilgrims.

"Any engagement of service providers for 2026 is informed by past performance, operational capacity, compliance history and the ability to meet Saudi regulatory requirements within the available timeframe.

## Experts advocate local foods over processed diets

### ABUJA

Some experts and food activists have urged Nigerians to prioritise the production and consumption of local foods over fancy and highly processed alternatives, citing growing health and environmental concerns.

They made the call during interviews with journalists on the sidelines of the 2025 Food Festival themed "My Food is African," organised by the Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) on Thursday in Abuja.

The experts warned that excessive consumption of processed foods posed serious health risks, noting that diseases such as cancer and kidney failure had been linked to fast food consumption.

In her remarks, the Programmes Director of HOMEF, Mrs Joyce Brown, said the festival was organised to celebrate and promote Nigeria's indige-

nous foods.

She observed that many Nigerians now preferred modern processed foods, which researchers had linked to several health challenges, adding that changing dietary habits were threatening local seed varieties with extinction.

"So knowing that these foods can cause health complications like that, and the methods of production also bring about environmental degradation.

"I encourage our mothers and our people generally to help their children make the right choices when it comes to local foods.

"Sometimes people think about the time it takes to prepare food, but we should think long term. Consuming unhealthy food over time can seriously affect your health.

"In terms of taste, we find that local foods, the seeds as we had them in time past, actually tasted better than what we have today," Brown noted.

## Tinubu reconstitutes NERC board, tasks members on power sector reform

### ABUJA

President Bola Tinubu has approved the reconstitution of the Board of the Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission (NERC), following the Senate's confirmation of its members on Tuesday.

This is contained in a statement issued by the Presidential Spokesperson, Mr Bayo Onanuga, on Thursday in Abuja.

Dr Musiliu Oseni was appointed Chairman of the Commission.

Oseni began service as a Commissioner in January 2017 and was later appointed Vice Chairman of NERC.

His appointment as Chairman took effect from December 1, 2025, and will subsist until the completion of his 10-year tenure, in line with the Electricity Act, 2023.

Dr Yusuf Ali was appointed Vice Chairman.

Ali was first appointed as a Commissioner in February 2022.

His designation as Vice Chairman also took effect from December 1, 2025, and will run until the completion of his first term.

Other members of the reconstituted board include Mr Nathan Shatti, Commissioner.

Shatti is serving a second term, having been first appointed as a Commissioner in January 2017.

Mr Dafe Akpeneye is also serving a second term as Commissioner, following his initial appointment in January 2017.

Mrs Aisha Kanti Bello is serving her second term, having first joined the Commission in December 2020.

Dr Chidi Ike is serving his first term, having been appointed as a Commissioner in February 2022.

Dr Fouad Animashaun was appointed Commissioner for his first term, effective December 2025.

## FG reopens all 47 closed unity colleges, assures of safety

### ABUJA

The Federal Government has reopened all 47 Federal Unity Colleges that were shut following the rise in insecurity in some parts of the country.

The government also reaffirmed its commitment to safeguarding the lives of students and ensuring uninterrupted education nationwide.

This was contained in a

statement issued on Thursday in Abuja by the Director, Press and Public Relations of the Federal Ministry of Education, Mrs Folasade Boriowo.

Boriowo said academic activities had fully resumed after the strengthening of security architecture within and around the affected schools.

According to her, students have returned safely, with many currently concluding their December academic pro-

grammes, while others have completed their examinations.

"The Federal Ministry of Education assures parents, guardians and the general public that the safety, welfare and well-being of students remain a top priority.

"The government continues to work closely with relevant security agencies to sustain stability and restore normalcy within school environments nationwide," she said.

Boriowo added that the administration placed strong emphasis

on human capital development and recognised education as a critical pillar for national growth.

She said the government remained determined to prevent any disruption to the academic calendar.

"The safe return of students and the successful conduct of examinations in several Unity Colleges underscore the government's resolve to keep learning on track despite prevailing challenges," she added.

## UATH CMD reiterates need to bridge...

### «CONTINUED FROM PG 2

atric cancer treatment abandonment, providing emotional support and improving the overall patient experience.

"When people come and are diagnosed and treatment commenced by staff of the hospital at the course of treatment, six out of 10 will abandon treatment.

"This shows that there is a

whole lot we need to do in terms of reducing this gap," he said.

According to him, nearly 60 percent of pediatric patients at UATH discontinue cancer treatment, often due to fear, anxiety and a lack of hope.

"Research shows that art in

clinical settings can ease anxiety, promote healing, and improve overall wellbeing.

The highlight of the event was the presentation of a cash gift to the winner of the designed and painted Mural of Hope art work.

## NEWS

# COAS to prioritise personnel training for improved operational outcomes

## LAGOS

The Chief of Army Staff (COAS), Lieutenant General Waidi Shaibu, has said the Nigerian Army will place greater emphasis on personnel training to achieve improved operational outcomes.

Shaibu stated this on Thursday at the closing ceremony of the COAS Annual Conference 2025 held at Nebo Hall, Abalti Bar-

racks, Ojuelegba, Lagos State.

He explained that the conference served as a platform to critically assess the Nigerian Army's operational and administrative performance throughout 2025, with a view to consolidating plans for 2026.

"Arising from our deliberations, the Nigerian Army will immediately begin to rejig its training, operations, as well as other administrative and logistics concerns.

"This is to further align with my command philoso-

phy, which aims to advance the transformation of the Nigerian Army into a more professional, adaptable, combat-ready and resilient force capable of decisively discharging its constitutional responsibilities within a joint and multi-agency environment.

"Going forward, my grand plan for a total overhaul of our schools' training curricula will be codified, as I believe that realistic training directly influences operational outcomes," Shaibu said.

He disclosed that Army Headquarters, through its Department of Training, would drive mission-specific and focused training, while carrying out a holistic

review of training across all Nigerian Army schools.

"We shall be making radical but informed changes to our training and operational activities in 2026 for the Special Forces School to optimally conduct its training," the COAS said.

According to him, intelligence briefings during the conference affirmed that the army's operating environment was becoming increasingly complex.

"This evolving threat spectrum necessitates that we enhance our capabilities in intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance, as well as in cyber operations.

"In addition, current regional dynamics, with attendant instability, coupled with global shifts in the character of warfare, require that we continuously learn, adapt and innovate at all levels.

"While we play our part as an army, we will continue to leverage the timely interventions of our country's political leadership for military hardware and software procurement," he said.

Shaibu added that the army would continue to promote a culture of innovation and technological integration at all levels.

"In line with our welfare commitments, I shall continue to build on the efforts of

past Chiefs of Army Staff in addressing the crisis of accommodation shortages.

"I have directed that all ongoing residential accommodation projects be completed in good time and allocated to personnel, while new ones are to be initiated across barracks in all the Divisions.

"As a stopgap measure, the Nigerian Army will be investing in a more comprehensive spread of renovation works in all our barracks," he said.

The COAS said efforts to alleviate accommodation shortfalls would be balanced with securing post-service housing for soldiers.

## 46 inmates sit for NECO GCE in Oyo custodial centres —PRO

## IBADAN

The Nigerian Correctional Service (NCoS), Oyo State Command, says 46 inmates sat for the 2025/2026 National Examinations Council (NECO) General Certificate Examination (GCE), which ended on Saturday.

The Command's Public Relations Officer (PRO), SC Olanrewaju Anjorin, disclosed this to newsmen in Ibadan on Thursday.

Anjorin said the conclusion of the examination, which commenced on November 26, marked significant progress in the command's educational rehabilitation mandate.

He said 21 inmates sat for the examination at the Medium Security Custodial Centre, Agodi, Ibadan, while 25 inmates wrote the examination at the Medium Security Custodial Centre, Abolongo, Oyo.

According to him, the Agodi facility, whose inmates have been sitting for the examination since 2018, maintains an

impressive 85 percent success rate in candidates obtaining five credits, including Mathematics and English Language.

"This sustained performance demonstrates the effectiveness of the facility's educational programme in preparing inmates for academic achievement and future opportunities," he said.

Anjorin noted that the 2025/2026 session marked a transformative milestone for the Abolongo facility, which received NECO approval as an examination centre earlier in 2025.

"The 25 participating inmates represent the inaugural cohort in what the command anticipates will become a sustained educational intervention supporting long-term rehabilitation objectives," he said.

The spokesman said candidates at both facilities expressed gratitude for the opportunity, with many articulating clear post-release academic aspirations.

## Devt in rural communities key to poverty reduction in Africa —IITA DG

## IBADAN

The Director-General of the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), Dr Simeon Ehui, has said that the development of rural communities remains the panacea to poverty reduction in Africa.

Ehui stated this during the 2025 General Assembly and Annual Conference/Panel Discussion of the International Association of Ivorian Civil Servants (AF2I), which ended at IITA, Ibadan, on Wednesday.

The conference was themed, "Inclusive and Innovative Agro-Industrial Transformation: Youth Empowerment, Jobs Creation and Strengthening Food Security."

He said African countries, including Nigeria, must prioritise the growth and development of rural communities to meaningfully reduce poverty.

According to him, agri-

culture accounts for between 20 per cent and 25 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of many African countries, stressing the need for balanced development between urban and rural areas.

"If growth does not take place in the rural sector, we will not be able to reduce poverty. Therefore, we must focus on the rural sector," he said.

Ehui noted that although Côte d'Ivoire recorded annual growth rates of between six and seven per cent with significant poverty reduction, poverty remained high in rural communities.

He said the situation was similar in many African countries, including Nigeria.

The IITA boss called for greater youth empowerment in agriculture, urging governments and stakeholders to make the sector more attractive by promoting it as a business rather than subsistence farming.



## NEWS CONFERENCE:

L-R: Director, Orizu@100 Stage Drama King Orizu (OSDKO), Dr. Ikechukwu Erojikwe; Chairman Igwe Orizu Centenary Celebration, Dr. Ben Etiaba; Executive Director, Centre for Memories, Maazi Iheanyi Igboke and Production Manager, OSDKO, Mr Chinonsu Udeh during a news conference on the forthcoming Centenary Celebration of Igwe Orizu in Enugu on Thursday.

## ACP dies during management meeting in Ebonyi

## ABAKALIKI

An Assistant Commissioner of Police in Ebonyi State, ACP Ogbon-inu Popoola, has died, the state police command has confirmed.

The command's spokesperson, Superintendent of Police Joshua Ukandu, disclosed this in a statement issued in Abakaliki on Thursday.

Ukandu said Popoola died on Wednesday while attending a management meeting of the command.

"The Ebonyi State Police Command regrets to announce the death of ACP Ogbon-inu Popoola, who died on Wednesday at the command's clinic in Abakaliki.

"Until his demise, he was the Assistant Commissioner of Police in charge of the State Intel-

ligence Department.

"Late Popoola was a dedicated officer who served the force with commitment and professionalism.

"The command commiserates with the family of our departed officer on this irreparable loss," Ukandu said.

A senior police officer, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the deceased suddenly developed breathing difficulty

during the meeting.

"He was immediately rushed to the command's clinic at the Police Headquarters, Abakaliki, where he died.

"He was confirmed dead by a medical doctor on duty," the officer said.

The remains of the deceased have been deposited at the Alex Ekwueme Federal University Teaching Hospital mortuary in Abakaliki.

## LP cautions Abia Dep Gov, others against illegal party activities

## ABUJA

The Labour Party has cautioned the Deputy Governor of Abia State, Dr Ikechukwu Emetu, and other suspended members against involving the party in what it described as illegal activities.

Other suspended members named by the party include Senator Nenadi Usman and Senator Darlington Nwokocha.

In a statement issued on Thursday in Abuja, the National Publicity Secretary of the party, Mr Obiora Ifoh, said the party would pursue lawful means to challenge any individual or group undermining

its rules and regulations.

He also warned the public to be wary of activities allegedly being carried out by the suspended members, including soliciting new membership registration and calling for an illegal convention.

Ifoh said the party had successfully conducted its national convention in March 2024 and had earlier flagged off both online and physical membership registration across the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory, recording significant participation.

"Our attention has been drawn to a viral video in which Dr Ikechukwu Eme-

tu, the Deputy Governor of Abia State, alongside Senators Nenadi Usman and Darlington Nwokocha, were allegedly engaged in an illegal unveiling and inauguration of a Labour Party National Steering Committee for membership registration," the statement said.

He noted that the party had recently conducted Independent National Electoral Commission-monitored congresses across 35 states and the Federal Capital Territory, with the exception of Abia State due to a court order.

According to him, the electoral commission had also monitored processes leading to

the party's participation in the 2026 governorship elections in Osun State and Ekiti State.

The party recalled that the deputy governor had led Abia State executives and members of the House of Assembly to the national convention held in Nnewi, Anambra State, in March 2024, where the Julius Abure-led National Working Committee was elected.

Ifoh also disowned a viral report attributed to a faction of the party, which released a timetable of activities towards the 2027 general elections, including a proposed national convention slated for February 28, 2026.



## NEWS

## NAFDAC destroys substandard products worth N10bn in Kano

## KANO

The National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) on Thursday destroyed 618 tonnes of fake, counterfeit, substandard, expired and unwholesome regulated products worth over N10.19 billion in Kano State.

The Director-General of

NAFDAC, Professor Mojisola Adeyeye, disclosed this during the burning exercise of the seized items in Kano.

She said the exercise marked a major milestone in Nigeria's commitment to safeguarding public health.

Adeyeye, who was represented by the NAFDAC Director for the North-West Zone, Mr Fraden Nantim-Mullah,

said the destruction was not merely an enforcement action but a clear statement that the era of impunity for those endangering lives through fake and dangerous products was coming to an end.

She explained that NAFDAC, established under Act Cap N1, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004, was empowered to regulate and control foods, drugs, cosmetics, medical devices, chemicals and related products to ensure their safety, quality and efficacy.

"Our mandate is unequivocal: to ensure that every regulated product available to Nige-

rians meets stringent standards of safety and quality.

"Today's exercise demonstrates our unwavering commitment to executing this mandate without compromise," Adeyeye said.

The NAFDAC boss warned manufacturers, importers, distributors and retailers involved in the production and sale of counterfeit and substandard products that the agency's surveillance and enforcement mechanisms were robust, adding that offenders would face legal consequences.

According to her, the products destroyed were seized from unscrupulous operators across the pharmaceutical, food, cos-

metic and chemical sectors.

She listed the destroyed items to include counterfeit medicines such as antibiotics, anti-malarial, antihypertensives, analgesics, herbal remedies and controlled psychoactive substances.

Other items included adulterated vegetable oils, contaminated beverages, unsafe sachet water, substandard condiments and falsified tomato paste, as well as hazardous cosmetic products containing dangerous chemical compounds.

Adeyeye said fake agrochemicals, including insecticides and pesticides that

threatened food security, and counterfeit medical devices such as diagnostic kits and compromised infusion equipment were also destroyed.

"Each of these categories represents a deliberate assault on public health. Those involved are not just breaking regulations; they are endangering lives and undermining Nigeria's health security," she said.

Adeyeye also highlighted Nigeria's recent attainment of the World Health Organisation Maturity Level 3 status, describing it as evidence of a stable and well-functioning regulatory system.

## NIPC facilitates \$10bn investments in 2025 —Rimi

## ABUJA

The Nigerian Investment Promotion Commission (NIPC) said it facilitated over \$10 billion in investment commitments in 2025.

The Executive Secretary of the Commission, Ms Aisha Rimi, disclosed this during a media parley on Thursday in Abuja, saying the Commission also supported the creation of more than 5,000 direct jobs across key sectors of the economy during the period.

Rimi said capital importation rose significantly during the year, with 5.2 billion dollars recorded in the first quarter of 2025, up from 3.4 billion dollars in the corresponding period of 2024.

The executive secretary, who was represented by the Director of Strategic Services, Mr Abubakar Yerima, said total inflows in the first half of the year reached 10.23 billion dollars.

She said the Commission facilitated nearly 100 company incorporations, processed

hundreds of investor inquiries and approved expatriate quotas as part of efforts to ease doing business.

According to her, 17 companies were granted pioneer status incentives in the second quarter, mobilising about 809.57 billion dollars in capital investments and creating over 3,000 direct jobs.

Rimi said additional approvals in the third quarter generated more than 2,400 jobs.

She added that NIPC enhanced digital investment platforms, strengthened sub-national investment promotion and expanded Nigeria's visibility through global engagements.

She said these engagements included the Africa Chief Executive Officer Forum, BRICS platforms and bilateral business forums.

Rimi further said the Commission was preparing to transition to the Economic Development Incentive framework by January 2026, in line with the new tax law.



## NEWS CONFERENCE:

L-R: Deputy Chairman, House of Representatives Committee on Public Service Matters, Akintola George; Administrator/CEO, Public Service Institute of Nigeria (PSIN), Ms Imeh Okon, and Committee Chairman, Sani Bala, during the news conference on the Administrator's 100 days in office and Committee's oversight visit to PSIN headquarters in Abuja on Thursday.

## NAOWA unveils model school in Badagry Barracks

## BADAGRY

The Nigerian Army Officers' Wives Association (NAOWA) on Thursday inaugurated a model school at the 15 Field Engineer Regiment, Topo Barracks, Badagry, Lagos State.

The intervention is designed to cater for the educational needs of children of officers and soldiers within the barracks community.

Speaking shortly before the inauguration, the President of NAOWA, Mrs Safiyah Shaibu, said the creche and nursery school would support army families and offer opportunities for children of personnel, including those of fallen heroes.

According to her, the school would ease the burden on parents, provide a conducive learning space for young children and promote holistic development through structured care and early education.

"We are not only providing a conducive learning environment for our children, but also empowering them with the knowledge, skills and values necessary to succeed in life.

"I urge the teachers, staff and pupils to make good use of the facilities in the school," she said.

She noted that the association remained dedicated to welfare and service, ensuring that even the youngest members of the military community were not left behind.

Shaibu commended the Chairperson of NAOWA, 81 Division Chapter, Mrs Zainab Mijinyawa, for her passion and effective coordination in bringing the project to reality.

She thanked her for ensuring the completion of the project within a short period and for the high quality of work delivered.

Shaibu said NAOWA must continue to innovate, collaborate and invest in projects that uplift lives and sustain the legacy of compassion and service that define the association.

In his welcome address, the Commanding Officer, 15 Field Engineer Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel S. L. Lawan, said the establishment of the school would reduce the challenges faced by military families in transporting young children to schools outside the barracks daily.

## NAF C-130 crew continues mission from Burkina Faso to Portugal

## ABUJA

The Nigerian Air Force C-130 crew earlier detained in Burkina Faso and released on Thursday has continued its mission from the country to Portugal with the same aircraft.

The crew, comprising 11

Nigerian personnel, was on a mission to Portugal for scheduled aircraft maintenance when it made an emergency landing in Burkina Faso.

The emergency landing, which occurred in Bobo-Dioulasso on December 8, 2025, was described as a precautionary measure following a technical issue with the aircraft.

The Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr

Kimiebi Ebiensa, said the crew resumed its journey to Portugal after engagements between Nigerian and Burkina Faso authorities.

Ebiensa said the release of the crew followed diplomatic interventions by a high-powered Nigerian delegation dispatched to Burkina Faso by President Bola Tinubu.

The delegation was led by the Minister of Foreign Affairs,

Ambassador Yusuf Tuggar, and included the Director-General of the National Intelligence Agency, Ambassador Mohammed Mohammed; the Chief of Policy and Plans, Nigerian Air Force, Air Vice Marshal A. Y. Abdullahi; Nigeria's Permanent Representative to ECOWAS, Ambassador Olawale Awe; and the Chief of Protocol in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Wahab Akande.

## AFAN urges Kogi farmers to strengthen synergy for food production

## LOKOJA

The National President of the All Farmers Association of Nigeria (AFAN), Dr Farouq Rabi-Mudi, has urged farmers in Kogi State to strengthen synergy for food production in the state.

He gave the charge while inaugurating the Kogi State chapter of the association, led by a retired Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly (Senate), Alhaji Ahmad Abdullahi.

Rabi-Mudi said Kogi State has the potential to produce food on a massive scale for local consumption and export, given its vast arable land and

favourable climate.

He congratulated the newly elected executive members and charged them to ensure inclusiveness by carrying all farmers along, regardless of location.

The AFAN president expressed confidence in the ability of the new state chairman to lead the chapter to greater heights.

In his remarks, Abdullahi pledged to serve with dedication, honesty, truthfulness and justice.

"As executive members, our loyalty is to the All Farmers Association of Nigeria led by Dr Farouq Rabi-Mudi and his National Executive Committee.

"We shall support the Executive to implement laudable

programmes designed to uplift the wellbeing of Nigerian farmers. Our support is in our own interest and to ensure that all programmes and policies are achieved," he said.

Abdullahi said the Digital Identity Card initiative for registered farmers would help identify genuine farmers and eliminate sharp practices.

"Through this, real farmers will be known, and it will eliminate the fleecing and duping of genuine farmers of various forms of support and assistance," he added.

He said the Farmers Data Bank initiative would capture accurate data on farmers nationwide for planning purposes.

The chairman assured members that memoranda of understanding signed with reputable non-governmental organisations would be diligently pursued for their benefit.

According to him, the state AFAN executive would align with the Kogi State Government and support its agricultural policies and programmes.

"This is because we have observed that the Executive Governor of Kogi State, His Excellency Alhaji Ahmed Usman Ododo, is strategically placing the Kogi farmer at the centre of efforts to make the state a hub of agricultural production and food security in Nigeria," he said.

## JUDICIARY

## NEWS

# Alleged N2.2bn fraud: Court admits ex-labour minister to bail

## ABUJA

An Abuja High Court on Thursday adopted the earlier bail conditions set by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) for a former Minister of Labour and Employment, Chris Ngige, who is standing trial over an alleged N2.2 billion fraud.

Delivering the ruling, Justice Maryam Hassan said the conditions include the provision of a surety who must be a director in the Federal Government, own a landed property within Abuja Municipal Area Council and possess an international passport, which must be deposited with the court registry alongside the certificate of occupancy of the property.

Justice Hassan also ordered

Ngige to submit his international passport after obtaining a new one.

She held that bail conditions must not be unreasonable, noting that imposing overly stringent conditions was "as good as denying bail."

Following the ruling, EFCC counsel, Eunice Daylo, requested two consecutive hearing dates for the commencement of trial. However, the judge adjourned the case to January 28 and 29, 2026, for trial.

Earlier, the EFCC had, on December 12, arraigned Ngige on eight counts bordering on fraud and acceptance of gifts.

According to the commission, the alleged offences were committed while Ngige served as Minister of Labour and Em-

ployment during the administration of former President Muhammadu Buhari.

Ngige, a former Governor of Anambra State and former Senator, pleaded not guilty to all the charges, prompting his remand at the Kuje Correctional Centre pending the hearing and determination of his bail application.

On December 15, the court heard arguments on the bail application through Ngige's counsel, Patrick Ikwueto (SAN), who urged the court to consider the defendant's age and health status.

Ikwueto also argued that Ngige had no previous criminal record and was not likely to commit the alleged offences again.

In response, the EFCC, through its counsel, Sylvanus Tahir (SAN), opposed the bail application, ar-

guing that Ngige had violated the terms of an earlier administrative bail granted by the commission, making him a flight risk.

After listening to arguments from both parties, the court reserved its ruling until Thursday.

The EFCC alleged that Ngige awarded contracts to associates and accepted monetary gratifications from some of them through his organisation, Dr Chris Nwabueze Ngige Campaign Organisation.

According to the charges, Ngige allegedly awarded seven contracts worth over N366 million for consultancy, training and supply by the Nigeria Social Insurance Trust Fund (NSITF) to Cezimo Nigeria Limited, a company owned by his associate, Ezebinwa Charles.

The commission further alleged that he awarded eight additional contracts worth over N583 million to another company belonging to Charles.

It was also alleged that Ngige used his office to give preferential treatment by awarding eight contracts valued at over N362 million to Jeff & Xris Limited, owned by

Nwosu Chukwunwike.

Other companies allegedly awarded contracts under controversial circumstances include, Olde English Consolidated Limited and Shale Atlantic Intercontinental Services Limited, both owned by Uzoma Igbonwa, to the tune of N668 million and N161 million, respectively.

## Osun judiciary workers resume after prolonged strike

## OSOGBO

Judiciary workers in Osun State, under the umbrella of the Judiciary Staff Union of Nigeria (JUSUN), have returned to work following the suspension of a prolonged strike over unpaid entitlements and allowances.

The strike, which began on September 19, was embarked upon to press for the promotion of members for 2024 and 2025, as well as training programmes to enhance staff capacity.

On Thursday, magistrates' courts were opened, with workers observed cleaning court premises, while lawyers were seen freely accessing the State High Court.

One of the lawyers, Mr

Olatunbosun Oladipu, expressed optimism that full judicial activities would resume soon.

He said the resumption would enable magistrates and judges to clear pending cases, allow defendants in police custody to take their pleas and secure bail where applicable, and facilitate the delivery of pending judgments.

Oladipu added that court schedules were expected to be busy from next week and after the Christmas and New Year holidays.

Earlier, the Chairman of JUSUN in Osun State, Mr Idris Adeniran, said only Magistrates' Courts were permitted to reopen.

He explained that the decision was aimed at decongesting police cells and expediting bail processes.



## 40TH CONVOCATION LECTURE:

L-R: Guest Lecturer, Muyiwa Akinboro (SAN); Rector, The Polytechnic Ibadan, Dr Taiwo Lasisi and Chairman, Governing Council, The Polytechnic Ibadan, Prof Lanre Nassar at Institution's 40th Convocation Lecture in Ibadan on Thursday

## Woman, 22, docked for allegedly stealing firewood, charcoal

## IBADAN

A 22-year-old woman, Tawa Lukman, on Thursday appeared before a Grade A Customary Court sitting at Mapo, Ibadan, over the alleged theft of charcoal and firewood.

Lukman, whose address was not provided, is standing trial on a charge of stealing. She pleaded not guilty.

The prosecutor, Inspector

Ayodele Ayeni, told the court that the offence was committed between July 4 and November 23 at Bode Market, Ibadan.

Ayeni alleged that the defendant stole 62 bags of charcoal valued at N62,700, firewood worth N543,600, 12 big-size charcoal pots valued at N30,000, and 11 small-size charcoal pots valued at N22,000.

He further alleged that she stole 152 packs of big-size

charcoal wrapped in large nylon valued at N76,000, as well as 178 packs of small-size charcoal valued at N35,600.

The items were said to belong to Mrs Ajoke Salawu.

According to the prosecutor, the offence contravenes Section 390(9) of the Criminal Law of Oyo State, 2000.

The Court President, Mrs S.M. Akintayo, granted the defendant bail in the sum of N200,000 with

two sureties in like sum.

She ruled that the sureties must be blood relations of the defendant and must present valid Ibadan Electricity Distribution Company (IBEDC) verification receipts.

The court ordered that the defendant be remanded at the Agodi Correctional Centre pending the perfection of her bail and adjourned the case to January 15, 2026, for hearing.

## Kaduna JSC suspends 2 registrars over alleged misconduct

## KADUNA

The Kaduna State Judicial Service Commission (JSC) has suspended two court registrars over alleged misconduct.

This was disclosed in a statement issued on Thursday by the Secretary of the commission, Murtala Halidu.

Halidu said the decision was part of administrative and disciplinary measures approved at the commission's Tuesday meeting, chaired by the Chief Judge of Kaduna State, Justice

M.T.M. Aliyu.

According to him, the commission adopted the findings and recommendations of investigations conducted by the Judicial Staff Service Committee.

He said Iliya Awok, an Assistant Chief Registrar, was suspended for falsification of records, an offence classified as serious misconduct.

Halidu added that Mohammed Salisu-Mohammed, a Principal Court Registrar at the Chief Magistrate Court, Daura Road, was suspended for the unauthorised auction of

three court-attached vehicles and other related misconduct.

He further disclosed that the rank of Sanusi Musa, a Higher Administrative Officer, was reduced for publishing politically sensitive content on Facebook, in violation of public service neutrality rules.

The commission also approved the interdiction of Aliyu Yakubu-Dogara, a Deputy Chief Registrar, and Salisu Maigana, a Court Bailiff, over their alleged involvement in the unauthorised auction of court-attached vehicles.

Halidu said investigations

would continue to determine their level of involvement.

He added that a petition against Saidu Babanjae, Presiding Judge of the Principal District Court, Daura Road, was dismissed for lack of merit.

The commission reaffirmed its zero-tolerance stance on corruption and indiscipline, stressing its commitment to integrity and professionalism within the judiciary.

Meanwhile, the JSC also confirmed the appointment of Gladys Nathan as Deputy Chief Registrar of the Customary Court of Appeal, Kaduna State.

## Man, 23, arraigned for allegedly stealing phone, home appliances

## IBADAN

A 23-year-old man, Kaazem Ridwan, was on Thursday arraigned before a Grade A Customary Court at Mapo, Ibadan, over the alleged theft of a smartphone and home appliances valued at N740,000.

Ridwan is facing a two-count charge of conspiracy and stealing. He pleaded not guilty.

The prosecutor, Inspector Ayodele Ayeni, told the court that the offence was committed on December 8 at the Asi-Bodija area of Ibadan.

He alleged that the defendant conspired with others still at large to break into the resi-

dence of Mr Alabi Fayemi.

According to the prosecution, Ridwan stole a Samsung smartphone valued at N400,000, a gas cooker worth N180,000, and a deep freezer valued at N160,000.

The offences contravene Sections 390(9) and 516 of the Criminal Law of Oyo State, 2000.

The Court President, Mrs O.E. Owoseni, granted the defendant bail in the sum of N200,000 with two sureties in like sum.

She ruled that the sureties must be blood relations of the defendant and must present valid IBEDC verification receipts.

The case was adjourned to January 15, 2026, for trial.

## Court dissolves 2-year marriage over lack of love

## ILORIN

An Area Court sitting at Centre-Igboro, Ilorin, on Thursday dissolved a two-year Islamic marriage between Usman Maimunat and Babatunde Saka over irreconcilable differences arising from lack of love.

In his ruling, the Presiding Judge, Mr Toyin Aluko, said the respondent had written to the court accepting the divorce application filed by the applicant.

The judge consequently dissolved the marriage and ordered the applicant to observe a one-month iddah (waiting period) before remarrying.

Custody of their two-year-old child was awarded to the

mother, with the court explaining that Islamic law favours the mother in matters of custody, particularly for children of tender age.

The court ordered the father to pay N20,000 monthly for the child's feeding and maintenance, while also bearing responsibility for the child's education and healthcare.

The judge further ruled that the father should have unrestricted access to the child at reasonable times, provided he informed the mother before making any decision concerning the child.

He directed that a copy of the judgment be served on the respondent and forwarded to the former husband.

## News

## Foreign

## Zelensky gives stark warning as EU leaders decide on Russia's frozen assets

Ukraine's president has warned Europe's leaders that an agreement has to be reached by the end of the year. Volodymyr Zelensky has called on EU leaders at a crunch summit urgently to agree to a multi-billion euro loan in frozen Russian money to fund Ukraine's military and economic needs.

Ukraine is months from running out of cash and Zelensky said without an injection by spring Ukraine "will have to reduce production of drones".

Most of Russia's €210bn (£185bn; \$245bn) worth of assets in the EU are held by Belgium-based organisation Euroclear. Until now Belgium and some other member states have said they are opposed to using

the cash as a "reparations loan".

Russia has warned EU leaders not to use its money, but Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said they had to "rise to this occasion".

The Brussels summit comes at a pivotal moment in the war and Russia has filed a lawsuit against Euroclear in a Moscow court in a bid to get its money back.

Zelensky said Ukraine was definitely facing a 45-50bn [euro] deficit next year, and European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen vowed "we will not leave the summit without a solution". One European government official described being "cautiously optimistic, not overly optimistic" that a deal would be agreed.

All eyes are on Belgian Prime Minister Bart De Wever, who

told the Belgian parliament on Thursday that if everything was nailed down and shared by the rest of the EU, "then we'll jump into the abyss together with the rest of the Europeans and hope the parachute holds us".

Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump has said a deal is closer than ever to end the war - which began with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

US and Russian officials are due to meet in Miami this weekend for further talks on a peace plan, a White House official has told AFP news agency. It is thought Kremlin envoy Kirill Dmitriev will talk to Trump envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner in Miami.

Ukrainian officials are also heading to the US, and President

Zelensky, who is in Brussels, said Kyiv needed the money, either to support its army if the war continued, or to direct the funding entirely for recovery: "It's moral, it's fair and it's legal, confirmed by the expertise of many, many professionals."

Russia has not yet responded to the latest peace proposals, but the Kremlin has stressed that plans for a European-led multinational force for Ukraine supported by the US would not be acceptable.

President Vladimir Putin made his feelings towards Europe clear on Wednesday, when he said the continent was in a state of "total degradation" and that "European piglets" - a derogatory description of Ukraine's European allies - were hoping to profit from Russia's collapse.

## French 'Doctor Death' who poisoned patients jailed for life

A former anaesthetist has been jailed for life for intentionally poisoning 30 patients, 12 of them fatally.

Frédéric Péchier, 53, was convicted Friday at the end of a four-month trial in the eastern city of Besançon.

In one of France's biggest ever medical malpractice cases, Péchier was found to have introduced chemicals like potassium chloride or adrenaline into the infusion bags of patients.

His youngest victim, a four-year-old child, survived two cardiac arrests during a routine tonsil surgery in 2016. The oldest victim was 89.

"You are Doctor Death, a poisoner, a murderer. You bring shame on all doctors," said prosecutors last week. "You have turned this clinic into a graveyard."

The chemicals Péchier added triggered cardiac arrest or haemorrhaging in patients, which required emergency intervention in the operating theatre.

This was often provided by Péchier himself, who was then able to pose as the patient's saviour.

But in 12 cases he was unable to intervene, or it was too late, and the patient died.

The prosecution argued that Péchier acted in order to discredit fellow anaesthetists against whom he bore a grudge.

In most of the operations, he was not the primary anaes-

thetist. It was alleged he came in early to the clinic to tamper with the infusion bags.

Then, when things went wrong, he was able to step in after diagnosing the problem and ordering an antidote.

Péchier was first placed under investigation eight years ago, when he was suspected of poisoning patients at two clinics in Besançon between 2008 and 2017.

The alert was raised in 2017 after a surfeit of potassium chloride was found in the infusion bag of a woman who had a heart attack while being operated on for a back complaint.

Investigators found a pattern of "serious adverse events" at the Saint-Vincent private clinic in Besançon. While the national average for fatal heart attacks under anaesthetic was 1 in 100,000, at the clinic it was more than six times that.

And in most cases nationally, an explanation for the heart attack was subsequently found, whereas at Saint-Vincent the cause remained a mystery.

It was also found that the "serious adverse events" ceased when Péchier left for a short period to work at another clinic, which itself then saw an uptick. Then when he returned to Saint-Vincent, the emergencies resumed there. When he was disbarred from practising in 2017, the anomaly stopped.



xx: Frédéric Péchier faces a minimum of 22 years behind bars for poisoning patients.

## Australian PM announces crackdown on hate speech after Bondi shooting

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese says his government will crack down on hate speech following Sunday's deadly shooting at Bondi Beach that targeted a Jewish festival.

Fifteen people were killed when two gunmen opened fire at an event to mark the first day of Hanukkah.

New laws will target "those who spread hate, division and radicalisation", Albanese told reporters in Canberra.

The home affairs minister will also be given new powers to cancel or refuse visas for those who spread hate and a new taskforce will be set up to ensure the education system "prevents, tackles and properly responds to antisemitism".

The new laws will also include penalties for preachers and leaders who promote violence, a new federal offence of

"aggravated hate speech", and the introduction of "hate" as an aggravating factor in sentencing crimes for online threats and harassment.

"Every Jewish Australian has the right to feel safe, valued and respected for the contribution that they make to our great nation," Albanese said.

"The terrorists, inspired by ISIS... sought to turn Australians against each other. Australians have responded to that act of hatred with love and sympathy for those in mourning."

Tensions have been high in the country since the shooting, with police detaining seven men in southwest Sydney on Thursday after receiving a tip that a "violent act was possibly being planned", New South Wales Police said in a statement.

Police said they did not identify "any connection" to their investigation into Sun-

day's attack in Bondi.

Two cars were "intercepted" at George Street, police said. In videos shared by local media sites, armed officers appeared to detain people on the street just hours after Albanese made his speech.

Antisemitism envoy Jillian Segal, who also spoke at the press conference, said the country was "at a very important moment not only for our community, but for fighting antisemitism around the world."

Albanese said his government would be "fully supporting and adopting" the recommendations Segal put forward in July in a report.

Her report was criticised by some upon its release in July due to its implications for free speech, including plans to monitor universities and arts organisations and withhold funding if they were deemed to have failed to act against anti-

semitism. There were concerns for instance, that the funding could be used to silence pro-Palestinian protests.

The Jewish Council of Australia said it supported Albanese's commitment to act, including his focus on gun reform and online hate.

But, it said it was "concerned that elements of today's announcement resemble long-standing proposals from the pro-Israel lobby which have nothing to do with addressing violent extremism."

"If education initiatives like university scorecards become a form of ideological policing - particularly where they are used to limit legitimate criticism of Israel - they will only make Jews less safe, and do the opposite of combating antisemitism," Jewish Council of Australia executive officer Dr Max Kaiser said.

## Trump expands access to cannabis in a major shift in drug policy

President Donald Trump has signed an executive order that will expand access to cannabis, a long anticipated move that would mark the most significant shift in US drug policy in decades.

The order directs the US attorney general to reclassify cannabis from a Schedule I narcotic, to a Schedule III drug - placing it under the same category as Tylenol with codeine.

Cannabis will remain illegal at the federal level. But classifying it as a Schedule III narcotic would allow expanded research to be conducted into its potential benefits.

Several Republican lawmakers cautioned against the move, with some arguing it could normalise cannabis use.

The US Drug Enforcement Agency notes that Schedule III narcotics - which also include ketamine and anabolic steroids - have only a "moderate to low potential for physical and psychological dependence".

The new classification also has tax implications for state-authorized cannabis dispensaries, as current regulations bar them from some tax deductions if they sell Schedule I products.

In addition to the rescheduling of cannabis, Trump has ordered White House officials to work with Congress to allow some Americans access to cannabidiol, commonly known as

CBD. As part of a new programme announced as part of the order, some Medicaid recipients will be able to access CBD, at a doctor's recommendation, at no cost.

Health officials have also been tasked with developing "methods and models" to examine the real-world health benefits and risks of CBD.

A senior administration official said that the order was a "commonsense action that will let us better understand and study" cannabis and CBD.

In recent years, a majority of US states have approved cannabis for some medical use, and nearly half - 24 - have legalised recreational use. But since 1971, cannabis has been a Schedule I narcotic, which means it has no accepted medical use and a high potential to be abused.

The Biden administration proposed a similar reclassification, and in April 2024 the DEA proposed a rule change, but got bogged down under administrative and legal issues.

Trump has long expressed a desire to change US drug policy regarding cannabis.

"I believe it is time to end endless arrests and incarcerations of adults for small amounts of marijuana for personal use," he wrote on Truth Social last year while running for president.

**Foreign****NEWS****Thailand bombs near Cambodia's Poipet border crossing**

Thailand says it has bombed a "logistics centre" near the Cambodian town of Poipet, known for being a major casino hub and the biggest land crossing between the two countries.

The bombings come as renewed border clashes show no sign of abating.

Cambodia's defence ministry said Thai forces dropped two bombs, while the Thai side said that they targeted a facility storing rocket systems.

The renewed fighting this month has killed at least 21 people in Thailand and 17 in Cambodia, while displacing around 800,000, officials say.

In a statement, the Cambodian defence ministry said Thai forces dropped two bombs in the area of Poipet municipality at around 11:00 am (0400 GMT) Thursday.

Shortly after, Thai Air Force spokesman Air Marshal Jackkrit Thammavichai said that the Thai military had attacked the centre outside Poipet that had been used to store BM-21 rockets and that no civilians were harmed.

BM-21 rockets are weapons that are typically fired in volleys from the back of an armoured vehicle.

The bombings appear to be the first on Poipet, which is known for casinos popular with Thai gamblers and its international border checkpoint.

Thailand said Tuesday that between 5,000 and 6,000 Thai nationals remained stranded in

Poipet after Cambodia closed its land border crossings between the two countries.

Cambodia's interior ministry said the border closures were a "necessary measure" to reduce risks to civilians, adding that air travel remained an option for those seeking to leave.

The century-old border dispute between the South East Asian neighbours dramatically escalated on 24 July with a Cambodian rocket barrage into Thailand, followed by Thai air strikes. That set off five days of intense fighting, which left dozens of soldiers and civilians dead.

The two countries later agreed to an "immediate and unconditional ceasefire" brokered by Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and US President Donald Trump - who at the time threatened to stop tariff negotiations until the hostilities stopped.

But that ceasefire fell apart again last week, with both sides blaming each other for re-igniting the fighting, which has seen air strikes and exchanges of artillery fire.

Trump claimed last week that he could stop the fighting between Thai and Cambodian forces that broke out by just picking up the phone, but it has continued.

Earlier this week, Cambodia accused Thai forces of bombing Siem Reap province, home to the ancient Angkor temples - the country's top tourist draw - for the first time in the latest round of clashes.



Nigerian Air Force - cleared

**Nigeria apologises over Burkina Faso military flight that saw 11 servicemen detained**

Nigeria's Foreign Minister Yusuf Tuggar with the now released servicemen. Nigeria's Foreign Minister Yusuf Tuggar has formally apologised to Burkina Faso for the unauthorised entry of a Nigerian military jet into Burkina Faso airspace, an incident that led to the detention of 11 Nigerian servicemen.

Tuggar's spokesperson told the BBC that the detained personnel had been released and were due to return to Nigeria, without saying when.

The plane was flying to Portugal when it developed a technical problem and had to land in Burkina Faso, according to the Nigerian Air Force.

The unauthorised landing sparked a diplomatic row with the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) made up of Burkina Faso and its neighbours, Mali, and Niger.

In a statement, AES char-

acterised it as an "unfriendly act" and said member states' respective air forces had been put on maximum alert and authorised to "neutralise any aircraft" found to violate the confederation's airspace.

The three AES states, all run by the military, have withdrawn from the West African regional bloc, Ecowas, and moved closer to Russia, while

most Ecowas members remain allied to the West.

Tuggar led a delegation to the Burkina Faso capital, Ouagadougou, on Wednesday, to discuss the incident with military leader Captain Ibrahim Traoré.

"There were irregularities concerning the overflight authorisations, which was regrettable, and we apologise for this unfortunate incident," Tuggar

said on national TV.

It remains unclear when the military personnel, said to be in "high spirits", and the aircraft will return to Nigeria.

According to Nigeria's foreign ministry, both sides agreed to "sustain regular consultations and pursue practical measures to deepen bilateral cooperation and regional integration".



Nigeria's Foreign Minister Yusuf Tuggar with the now released 11 servicemen detained.

**M23 announces withdrawal from Uvira following US pressure**

The rebel movement M23 has announced its exit from the strategically important city of Uvira in eastern DRC. This reportedly comes at the request of American mediators in the conflict between the M23 and the armed forces of the DR Congo.

The rebel movement M23 announced on Wednesday that it had agreed to a request from US mediators a day earlier to withdraw its forces from the city of Uvira in eastern DRC.

The M23 has been fighting Congolese armed forces in the region for the past year in a brutal conflict that has killed and displaced hundreds of

thousands of civilians

Despite the leaders of the DRC and Rwanda - accused of backing the M23 - signing a US-brokered peace agreement in Washington on 4th December, the M23 rebels were not included in the negotiations. As a result, they captured Uvira, which is situated near the borders with Burundi and Rwanda, just days after the peace deal.

The M23 said that its withdrawal was happening "for the sake of peace" and reports confirm that their troops began leaving the town voluntarily.

The withdrawal is reportedly set to be completed on Thursday.

**CAR deploys armed forces and MINUSCA to secure elections**

Reinforcements from the Central African Armed Forces (FACA) have been deployed in the Vakaga region with the support of the UN peacekeeping mission MINUSCA to help secure the elections.

As part of the implementation of the Integrated Election Security Plan (PISE), additional FACA troops were deployed to Vakaga on 16 December 2025.

MINUSCA provided air transport for the troops.

The Central African Republic is set to host presidential and parliamentary, but also municipal elections - the first ones in decades on 28th December. Human rights organisations have voiced concerns over the democratic credibility and inclusiveness of the elections, as key opposition candidates were barred from run-

ning until mid-November.

President Faustin-Archange Touadéra also concentrated power in his hands in recent years, notably through a controversial referendum in 2023.

Practical concerns over the means to open all polling stations in time and organise the elections across the country also remain.

The deployment of troops aims to strengthen FACA per-

sonnel in order to better secure the electoral process in the area, alongside UN peacekeepers. The operation, which began last week, will continue in other prefectures, with continued logistical support from MINUSCA.

The security plan also provides for the protection of candidates and all stakeholders involved in the organization and implementation of the electoral process.

**Multiple deaths reported after small aircraft crashes in North Carolina**

Multiple people are reported to have died in a plane crash while the aircraft was landing at a regional airport in North Carolina, officials say.

Six people were aboard the Cessna C550 aircraft when it crashed at Statesville Regional Airport around 10:20 local

time (15:20GMT), aviation officials investigating the incident told reporters.

Iredell County Sheriff Darren Campbell confirmed to The Associated Press that there were fatalities, but declined to say how many.

Registration information for the plane suggests it is

owned by a private company affiliated with Greg Biffle, a retired Nascar driver, WBTV, a CBS affiliate reported.

Statesville Airport director John Ferguson described the aircraft as a corporate jet and said that it was already engulfed in flames when he arrived on the scene.

The business jet took off

around 10:06 local time and was in the air briefly before the crash.

It crashed on the east end of the runway and authorities do not yet have information on the cause of the crash.

Statesville Airport will remain closed until further notice as crews clear debris off the runway, Mr Ferguson told

reporters.

Officials did not provide any information about deaths or people aboard the aircraft during the media conference.

The National Transportation Safety Board, which is leading the investigation, said it was launching a go team to investigate the fatal crash. The

team expects to arrive on scene later Thursday night.

The Statesville Regional Airport (KSVH) is owned by the City of Statesville, which is about 45 minutes north of Charlotte.

It also provides aviation facilities for Fortune 500 companies and several Nascar racing teams.

## Dangote, Farouk and the Oil *Penkelemesi*

*Penkelemesi* traces its roots to Adegoke Adelabu, the colourful Nigerian politician of the 1950s renowned for his sharp wit and powerful oratory. During a heated debate in the Western Region House of Assembly, Adelabu reportedly described the political opposition as a “peculiar mess.” To many in his largely non-literate audience, the phrase was unfamiliar. They rendered its sound into the local vernacular as “*penkelemesi*,” and the mispronunciation took on a life of its own, eventually becoming a popular nickname closely associated with Adelabu.

Decades later, Fela Anikulapo Kuti drew on this loaded historical reference in his music. True to his tradition of fearless social commentary, Fela repurposed “*penkelemesi*” as a metaphor for the persistent corruption, chaos and moral decay he believed defined Nigeria’s political order. In doing so, he connected past and present, using Adelabu’s “peculiar mess” to underscore the uncomfortable continuity of Nigeria’s socio-political troubles. This word, I have chosen to adopt for the ongoing “two fighting” in the oil sector.

One of those things I hardly involve myself in is meddling in the business of two fighting. Two fighting is that familiar Nigerian colloquialism for a public quarrel, sometimes verbal, sometimes physical, often unnecessary. Under the Criminal Code Act, challenging another to a duel or engaging in public fighting can earn one to three years in prison. The law, at least, understands how quickly personal disputes can corrode public order.

In Nigeria, however, public figures serve us weekly portions of two fighting, and we consume them whether we ask for it or not. Last week, it was Senators Adams Oshiomhole and Ali Ndume trading words over ambassadorial screenings, a process that increasingly feels like the worst of us was being selected ahead of the best of us, and the take a bow group sitting in judgment. This week, the arena has shifted. Africa’s richest man, Aliko Dangote, and Engineer Ahmed Farouk, Chief Executive of the Nigerian Midstream and Downstream Petroleum Regulatory Authority, appear to have answered the gladiator’s call.

On the surface, it looks like a clash between a businessman fighting for the survival of his investment and a regulator insisting on enforcing his mandate, even if that mandate still leans heavily on imported products in a country capable of refining its own. Beneath the surface, however, this fight is becoming ugly, personal and deeply revealing. It is beginning to confirm a suspicion many Nigerians quietly hold: that public office holders may not be as different from our politicians as we hope.

There is something deeply unsettling about watching a country sabotage its own lifeboat while still crying about drowning. Nigeria says it wants investors. It says it wants industrialisation. It says it wants to stop importing what it can produce. Yet, when the most ambitious industrial project in its history begins to operate, the system seems unsure whether to nurture it or wrestle it to the ground. The growing conflict between Dangote



DANGOTE



AHMED

and Ahmed has moved far beyond policy disagreement. It has become a stress test for Nigeria’s economic credibility.

When a man builds a farm with borrowed money, clears the land with blistered hands and waters it under a scorching sun, he does not joke with pests. He does not negotiate morality with goats. He builds a fence and stays alert. Dangote is not fighting because he enjoys confrontation. He is fighting because, from his standpoint, the Dangote Refinery is being hemmed in by interests that could quietly suffocate it while claiming to act in the name of regulation.

This refinery was not an accident. It was a deliberate bet on Nigeria. Billions of dollars were committed to a country with a long history of policy reversals and institutional friction. Nigerians were promised energy security, foreign exchange savings and industrial rebirth. Government officials celebrated it. The public applauded it. Then operations began, and the romance ended.

The first crack appeared around crude supply. A refinery without crude is a car without fuel. Dangote complained publicly that despite Nigeria being a crude-producing nation, his refinery struggled to access adequate supply at commercially sensible terms. The irony was painful. Nigeria exports crude cheaply and imports refined products expensively, yet a local refinery asking for crude encountered resistance. That alone raised uncomfortable questions about alignment between national interest and bureaucratic conduct.

Then came the debate over import licences. Dangote argued that issuing fresh licences for fuel imports while a massive local refinery was operational defeated the logic of domestic refining. To him, it was like digging a borehole and still paying water vendors to roam the streets. Farouk Ahmed and the regulator countered with concerns about monopoly, market dominance and the need to preserve competition.

*These allegations, whether ultimately proven or disproven, are seismic. They strike directly at the heart of regulatory credibility. A regulator accused of living far beyond visible means while presiding over decisions affecting billions of dollars in investment places the entire system under suspicion. Investors do not wait for court verdicts before adjusting their risk calculations. Perception alone is often enough*

On paper, it sounded responsible. In reality, it exposed a deeper contradiction. You do not build competition by weakening production. You do not strengthen markets by privileging imports over local capacity.

As the exchanges intensified, Dangote suggested openly that entrenched interests benefiting from importation were uncomfortable with a refinery that threatened their relevance. It was a bold accusation, implying regulatory capture and institutional bias. Farouk Ahmed rejected this narrative, insisting that the regulator was simply doing its job. He raised concerns about pricing transparency, product quality and market balance. What should have remained a technical conversation quickly turned personal and public.

The aviation fuel episode poured petrol on an already raging fire. Dangote announced local production of jet fuel. Airlines welcomed the prospect. Disputes soon followed over pricing and regulatory approvals. Marketers complained. Regulators stepped in. To outside observers, Nigeria appeared uncertain whether to embrace a solution it had waited decades for.

Then the conflict crossed a dangerous line. Dangote escalated matters

with allegations that shook the establishment. He publicly accused Farouk Ahmed of enriching himself through corrupt practices, alleging that the regulator paid about seven million dollars in tuition for his four children schooling in Switzerland. Dangote did not frame these claims as rumours. He presented them as evidence of a compromised system and openly called for Farouk’s investigation and prosecution. These allegations, whether ultimately proven or disproven, are seismic. They strike directly at the heart of regulatory credibility. A regulator accused of living far beyond visible means while presiding over decisions affecting billions of dollars in investment places the entire system under suspicion. Investors do not wait for court verdicts before adjusting their risk calculations. Perception alone is often enough.

Farouk Ahmed has denied wrongdoing, and it must be stated clearly that allegations remain allegations until proven in a court of law. But governance does not operate only on legal thresholds. It also rests on trust. When the head of a powerful regulatory body is publicly accused by the country’s most prominent industrialist of corruption, silence or procedur-

al deflection is not sufficient. Institutional integrity demands transparent scrutiny, not quiet dismissal.

This is where the matter rises above personalities. If Dangote is right and regulators are compromised, then Nigeria has a grave institutional problem. If Dangote is wrong and is deploying accusations to pressure a regulator, then Nigeria faces a different but equally troubling challenge. In either scenario, the casualty is investor confidence.

Capital is cowardly. It avoids noise, controversy and uncertainty. Investors watching this drama will not spend time judging who is morally superior. They will simply note that Nigeria’s regulatory environment appears volatile and personalised. They will ask whether success here attracts oversight or ambush.

The conflict also exposes Nigeria’s uneasy relationship with scale and power. Dangote is wealthy, influential and unapologetic. That combination inspires admiration in some quarters and resentment in others. There is a temptation to cut powerful figures down to size, even when their success aligns with national goals. But serious countries learn to manage powerful investors, not antagonise them.

There is also the uncomfortable truth that the downstream oil sector has long been sustained by importation rents. A functional refinery threatens that ecosystem. It disrupts old arrangements, political alliances and economic habits. Resistance was inevitable. The tragedy would be allowing that resistance to dictate national policy.

President Bola Tinubu cannot afford to be a distant observer. His administration has promised reform and investor confidence. This moment tests that promise. Leadership now requires clarity. Regulatory agencies must be independent, yes, but independence does not mean opacity or immunity from scrutiny. A transparent and credible inquiry into the allegations surrounding this conflict is not about appeasing Dangote. It is about reassuring Nigeria and the world that institutions are bigger than individuals.

At the same time, Dangote must submit to the same standards he demands. Regulation cannot be suspended because an investor is large or patriotic. What Nigeria needs is balance. Fair regulation. Transparent oversight. Clear rules applied consistently.

There is a saying that when two elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers. In this case, the grass is Nigeria’s economy. Jobs, prices, investor trust and national reputation are all on the line. This conflict must not be allowed to harden into another symbol of dysfunction.

Nigeria is standing at a crossroads. It can resolve this dispute through openness, law and national interest, or it can reinforce its reputation as a country where ambition is punished and success attracts hostility.

The fence around the farm should protect the harvest, not become a battleground. If Nigeria truly wants to grow, it must learn to defend its investments without sacrificing accountability. Anything less will keep the country trapped in a familiar cycle of promise and disappointment.

# ArtsWorld with Francis Odupte 08023680030

## The effects of westernisation on our culture

LOVETH ACHONU

A people without the knowledge of past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots, says Marcus Garvey. Our culture is the very cord that binds us together as a people, what now happens when the very thing that holds us together is now being severed by external influence?

Africans are known for their culture which is the "SHARED" way of life including language, traditions, arts and beliefs, that defines a society or community.

In our society today, salutation is one aspect of our culture that is slowly fading away. It has become a normal thing for a young one to see an elder and just walk past without greeting. When the young one is being corrected, you will hear that salutation is not love, salutation is love over here because it is an art of giving respect to an elder. Growing up, salutation is the least we do. After salutation, you go as far as carrying the load or goods from the elder and help to take it to the elder's house, if he/she is someone that you are familiar with I could remember vividly something happened when I was younger, myself and two others went to a community to see someone, when coming back, we were carried away by what we went to do and didn't even see some elders sitting in the front of a certain house. They allowed us to go far, and sent someone to call us back. We went back to answer the call, then they said among all of them seated there, are our fathers older than them? We looked around and saw they were actually very elderly and said No, then they asked us the reason we will pass them and not greet them. We imme-

diately genuflected and apologized and greeted them well. They prayed for us and we left. It was abnormal to wake up in the morning and not greet your parents. In fact, it was a taboo.

Children weren't corrected by their parents alone, if a child does something wrong before the parents of the child comes back, the child has already been corrected in every way possible. As a matter of fact, your parents will hold you by the hands and take you to the person that corrected you and appreciate the person. But reverse is the case now, we hear and see parents going to school to fight with teachers for disciplining their children, such was the case at my child's school, a mother went there and fought with the class teacher for disciplining her hyperactive child, so whenever the child is displaying his hyper-activeness, the teachers became afraid to talk or correct him. In the process of running, he fell down and broke his arm. The proprietor called the mother. She came and took the child home. If only the mother didn't come to school to fight with the class teacher, I think, the whole thing could have been avoided. Though there are some teachers that go overboard in disciplining.

Festive period is a season in Africa where we share love, laughter, joy and also food and drinks to our neighbors. This practice is almost extinct now because of fear of the unknown. Increased cases of food poisoning and one can't help but wonder, how did we get here? When did this trend start? It was never like this, everyone is now afraid to share because of fear of what if i give the person food now and the person ends up in the hospital and i am accused of food poisoning? So everyone is careful. Those days we normally compete over who will go

and deliver the food to the neighbors because they normally give money to the child who delivers the food but now it is all about, mind your business while i mind my business. Everyone is minding their business and things are going bad. They are watching and smiling.

One of the greatest challenges we are facing now is that of insecurity, and kidnapping is at the forefront of it all. I miss the days when one could stay outside to receive fresh air till the early hours of the next day but right now, you don't want to think about it. One can't walk freely or travel freely, there's fear. Kidnapping wasn't a part of our culture, it is alien to us. Formerly, an individual can just pass through someone's compound and come out in the next street. It was not an issue, just normal but for security reasons, in today's society almost all compounds are fenced and those that are not fenced, the owner won't allow accessibility and they shouldn't be blamed because, you could just allow someone access to just pass through your compound, not knowing the person is an informant to a gang because before an armed robber invades any house, they are fully guided, they have full information about or concerning where they are going. Many of them when caught and interviewed, you hear them pointing accusing fingers to someone around that gave them information.

There's also the issue of fraud that has made so many Africans lose good international opportunities because we all are now categorized as fraudsters and that's not true. Fraud is not part of us or our culture. Fraud is when someone intentionally deceives or misrepresents information to take, an advantage or benefit, often finan-

cially. It's like playing a trick on someone, but with serious consequences. Many Africans are honest people, we are not all fraudsters as many foreigners think. We deserve a chance and we are hardworking people. An average African is trained morally to be content with what we have.

No sane African child talks back at their parents; it was totally unacceptable. You can't even look at your parents' faces when they are talking to you. Talk more of talking back at them. You will be so disciplined. It is completely normal now to see children talk back at their parents, some even go as far as insulting and beating their parents up. We have heard of cases of children stabbing their parents to death. It is like our culture of bringing up children properly has faded into thin air. The young ones keep misbehaving and the older ones that should be correcting them are busy hailing them calling them "GEN Z badie".

However, not all aspects of westernization are bad because there are some aspects of our culture that are barbaric, for example the killing of twins. The killing of twins is a dark part of history, particularly in some African cultures. The killing of twins was practiced in some parts of Africa. Twins were seen as cursed or abnormal. The practice was linked to poverty and lack of medical care, lack of information. They were seen as a sign of bad luck and evil spirit. But today, Africans gladly accept twins and even pray to have twins, triplets etc. Mary Slessor also played a significant role in it by educating the locals about the value of human lives. She adopted many abandoned twins and provided them with care and support.

The fight against human sacrifices,

most cultures in Africa was deeply immersed in human sacrifice to appease whatever they believe in and to bury their king because they believe that their king will need escorts and servants in the great beyond but thanks to westernisation, all of that are in the past now to the best of my knowledge.

Improved Healthcare: western medicine and healthcare practices have improved healthcare outcomes in Africa. Many Africans now have access to better medical facilities, treatments, and trained professionals, leading to increased life expectancy and reduced mortality rates.

Technological Advancements: western technology has transformed Africa's economy and society. The adoption of mobile phones, computers, and the internet has enabled Africans to connect globally, access information, and innovate.

Democratic Values: western-style democracy has influenced Africa's political system, promoting principles like rule of law, human rights, and free speech. This has helped shape Africa's governance and institutions. Entrepreneurship and Innovation: western-style entrepreneurship has inspired Africans to start businesses, create jobs, and innovate. This has contributed to Africa's economic growth and development. Cultural Exchange: westernization has facilitated cultural exchange between Africa and other continents, promoting cross-cultural understanding, trade, and collaboration.

We shouldn't lose the good aspect of our culture in trying to be more civilized but some aspects of our culture should be trimmed away. It's not every western trend that we should embrace, e.g. same sex marriage.



# Friday Sermon

## Evil consequences of defamation of character/ character assassination in society!

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! Defamation of character is publishing false statements (spoken as slander or written as libel) that harm someone's reputation, dignity, or livelihood, damaging their good name in the community by portraying them negatively, such as being a liar, thief, or generally untrustworthy.

To prove defamation, the false statement must be presented as fact (not opinion), published to a third party, and cause actual harm (financial or emotional), with public figures needing to prove the speaker knew it was false (actual malice).

Respected brothers and sisters! Here are the different types of Defamation of character:

**SLANDER:** False defamatory statements made orally (spoken).

**LIBEL:** False defamatory statements made in writing, print, or other permanent form (like blogging or photos).

Yes, Islamic teachings strongly condemn defamation of character, considering it a major sin with severe consequences both in this life and the hereafter.

Islamic teachings on this topic emphasise the importance of guarding one's tongue and protecting the honour of fellow Muslims.

Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) clarified the difference between backbiting (Ghibah) and slander (Buhtan). He said: "If what you say of him is true, you have backbitten him, and if what you say of him is not true, you have slandered him."

So slander is thus a more severe sin. The Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) said: "He who defends the honour of his brother, Allah will secure his face against the Fire on the Day of Resurrection."

Therefore defamation of character (Ghibah/Slander) is a major sin, violating a Muslim's honour, blood, and wealth, with severe spiritual consequences like losing good deeds or taking on others' bad deeds, punishable by 80 lashes if proven in court for accusing chaste women without witnesses.

Islam emphasises protecting reputation, forbidding backbiting and false accusations, urging repentance, and promoting brotherhood, viewing such acts as destructive to unity and dignity.

Spreading lies or discussing a Muslim's faults in their absence (backbiting) is a serious offense, akin to eating one's dead brother's flesh.

A Muslim's honour is sacred, and harming it is a major transgression.

Speaking ill of someone when it's true is ghibah (backbiting); speaking ill when it's false is buhtan (slander/false accusation), which is even worse.

Defamation of character causes fitnah, strife and discord, which is highly condemned, as seen in the Quran's condemnation of false accusations against chaste women.

Those who defame others risk los-

ing their good deeds to the victim or taking on the victim's bad deeds.

Accusing chaste women without four witnesses carries a punishment of 80 lashes, and their testimony is rejected.

A person must seek forgiveness from the wronged party, either by asking for pardon or by making amends if telling them would cause more harm (by praying and speaking well of them).

Fellow brothers and sisters! Reject the lies against your Muslim brothers and sisters, forbid the slanderer, and advise them. Maintain a good opinion of the person being defamed. View slander as a gift of good deeds from the slanderer, as their sins are transferred to you. Seek immediate forgiveness from the person wronged, as no monetary or good deeds will suffice later.

I repeat, Islamic teachings strongly condemn defamation of character, whether through backbiting (speaking the truth about someone in a way they would dislike) or slander (spreading falsehoods). These acts are considered major sins that destroy relationships and have severe spiritual consequences.

The Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) said: "The Muslim is one from whose tongue and hand Muslims are safe."

In a professional setting, this means fostering an environment of trust and safety, where colleagues feel secure from malicious gossip or unfounded accusations.

The tongue is emphasised as a primary source that can lead people to Hellfire if not controlled. The advice is simple yet profound: "Speak good or remain silent."

Slandering an innocent person is a sin for which one cannot escape punishment, in this life or the next, unless the wronged person forgives them.

The story from Surah An-Nur in the Qur'an recounts how the Mother of the Believers, Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her), was wrongly accused of adultery. The Qur'anic verses were revealed in response reprimanded those who spread the rumours, highlighting how quickly falsehood can spread and how tremendous a sin it is in the sight of Allah (Qur'an, 24:12-15).

This story is a powerful reminder to verify information before spreading or sharing it, especially in the age of social media where information goes viral rapidly.

And when the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) faced persistent slander and defamation from the Quraish leaders, he never stooped to their level. His conduct demonstrated patience and dignity, serving as a model for dealing with workplace or professional defamation.

The Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) once passed two graves and mentioned the inhabitants were being punished for major sins: one for not being careful about urine, and the other for spreading malicious gossip (slander).

This story powerfully illustrates that verbal sins are significant enough to warrant punishment in the grave itself.

So before sharing any information about a Muslim, colleague or business, always verify its authenticity.

*Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) clarified the difference between backbiting (Ghibah) and slander (Buhtan). He said: "If what you say of him is true, you have backbitten him, and if what you say of him is not true, you have slandered him"*

The Qur'an (49:6) instructs believers to investigate news brought by a "disobedient one" to prevent harming people out of ignorance.

And encourage dialogue based on good character and mutual respect. As a leader or team member, set a standard that rumour-mongering will not be tolerated.

If you hear someone being slandered in your presence, Islam encourages you to defend them. Standing up for a wronged person not only protects their reputation but is also a highly rewarded act.

Defamation of Character is also known as a 'character defamation,' defamation of character is the legal term for when a person's reputation is dragged through the mud via a false assertion of fact, which is ultimately published or communicated to a third-party. More specifically, the defamation of the character's definition may be broken down into two fundamental types as mentioned above: libel and slander.

**LIBEL:** the written or published (pictures, video, and media) communication of a false statement to a third-party, which ultimately causes harm or damage to another's reputation.

**SLANDER:** the spoken and verbal communication of a false statement to a third-party, which ultimately causes harm or damage to another's reputation.

And in order to successfully bring a character defamation lawsuit, plaintiffs will typically have to prove the following four elements:

A. The statement/s in question were false,

B. The statement/s were "of and concerning" the plaintiff (the plaintiff may be reasonably identified),

C. There was publication to a third-party, and The plaintiff suffered damages as a result of the false statements.

D. Defamation laws vary from country to country, but generally, a person must prove that a statement was defamatory to make a claim. All of the following must be established by a person who brings a defamation lawsuit against another:

A. The statement was published by the defendant, meaning it was distributed to at least one person other than the plaintiff.

B. The statement provides enough information that the plaintiff is identifiable.

C. The statement harmed the plain-

tiff's reputation in some way.

D. In addition, the plaintiff must be able to prove that the defendant was negligent in some way, either in doing something she should not have done or failing to do something he or she should have. If the plaintiff is a private figure, only negligence must be proven. If the plaintiff is a public figure, such as a government official, he or she also must prove actual malice, which is a reckless disregard for the truth of the published statement. Finally, the allegation made about the plaintiff must be false.

Most states also recognise that certain statements are defamatory per se, and therefore, no proof is needed. Some such examples include:

- Allegations that harm a person's trade, profession, or professional standing;

- Allegations that a person is infected with a sexually transmitted disease;

- Allegations that an unmarried person is unchaste; or

- Allegations of criminal activity.

A plaintiff bringing a defamation claim may be awarded monetary damages pertaining to:

Loss of job; Loss of reputation; Humiliation Or mental anguish.

In order to do so, it must be proven that these losses resulted from the defamatory statement. Lower monetary damages may be awarded if it can be proven that the plaintiff had a poor reputation before the alleged defamatory statements were made. A court also may order a retraction of the statement. Rules vary from country to country.

So as a Muslim, be careful who you insult and slander. Spreading rumours and speaking ill of others will cost you dearly on the scale of deeds. Leave such acts!

Dear servants of Allah! Defamation of character in Islam encompasses Namimah, Buhtan and Ghibah.

**NAMIMAH OR MALICIOUS GOSSIP:** means telling one person what another said in order to cause trouble between them.

**BUHTAN OR SLANDER:** means saying things about a Muslim that is not true, or in other words, telling lies about him.

**GHIBAH OR BACKBITING:** means speaking about a Muslim in his absence and saying things that he would not like to have spread around or mentioned.

In a Hadith collected by Abu Dawud that Abu Hurairah said: "It was asked, 'O Allah Messenger (Peace be upon him)! What is Backbiting?' He said, 'Mentioning about your brother in a manner that he dislikes.' He was asked, 'What if my brother was as I mentioned?' He said: 'If he was as you mentioned, you will have committed backbiting. But if he was not as you say about him, you will have slandered him.'" [At-Tirmidhi]

Allah Almighty says: "... Nor defame yourselves..." [Surah Al-Hujurat: 11]

This forbids Muslims from defaming each other.

"... Neither backbite one another." [Surah Al-Hujurat: 12]

This prohibits backbiting. Backbiting was sternly warned against, which is why Allah the Exalted and Most Blessed

compared it to eating the flesh of a dead human being. Allah the Most High says:

"Would one of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Nay, You would hate it." [Surah Al-Hujurat: 12]

Just as you hate eating the flesh of a dead person, on account of your nature; so hate backbiting, on account of your religion. This Qur'anic verse seeks to discourage people from backbiting and warns against it.

Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) narrated that during the Night of Ascension (Mi'raj), he saw a group of people who were scratching their chests and faces with their copper nails. He said, that when he asked:

"Who are these people, O Jibril?" Jibril replied: "These are the people who ate the flesh of others (by backbiting) and trampled on people's honour." [Riyadus Salihin]

The Prophet (Peace be upon him) said: "A man will come on the Day of Resurrection with good deeds like mountains, but he had wronged this one, taken the wealth of that one and slandered the honour of another. So each of them will take from his good deeds. And if there is nothing left of his good deeds, it will be taken from their evil and placed on him."

He among men who is a slanderer, and a backbiter, is cursed and condemned as Allah Almighty states: "Woe to every Humazah, Lumazah." [Surah Al-Humazah: 1]

Hamz is defamation by action, while Lamz is by words.

The majority of Islamic scholars have stated that repentance for committing the sin of defamation is that one refrains from defamation intending not to repeat it again. Some Islamic scholars stated, that it is not necessary for one to ask those whom he has backbitten to forgive him because if they knew what was said about them, they could be hurt more than if they were not told about it. It is better, they said, that one should praise those whom he has backbitten in audiences in which he has committed the act. It is also better if one defends the injured party against any further backbiting, as much as one can, as recompense for his earlier backbiting.

Dear brothers and sisters! As mentioned above, during the Prophet's time, there were certain people in Madinah who wanted to defame a member of the Prophet's family. It was a case of character assassination. At that juncture some Qur'anic verses were revealed, which appear in Surah Al-Nur.

According to Islamic teachings, character assassination is a heinous crime. An act of this kind is against humanity, against ethical values, and against Qur'anic teachings. Those guilty of any ethical crime of this nature will be severely punished by Allah Almighty.

The Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) once said: "If you make a negative remark against someone while that person is innocent, then it will have a boomerang effect. Your negative remark will turn back upon you and you will find that remark being applied to you." [Bukhari]

# Entertainment

— with Davidson Imosime Izegaegbe —

## Talent, logic, research and creativity

Often times our ears are constantly on the mill, forced to hear emotional words from the creatives that their arts are inborn, a gift, which make them uniquely pure in the presence of the god and goddess of the arts and creativity. Their emotions most times make these gods to sneeze uncomfortably where ever they abide just same way it makes the mere mortals see them as insane beings that require the attention of expert psychiatrists.

Are these talented beings right in their self acclaimed closeness to the god and goddess of the arts and creativity, to an extent they were gifted such talents to make them stand out? Are they just being logical, hypothetical or just guessing in the bid to avoid the needles of expert doctors? After all we are made to understand there are divers grades and level of insanity. Of course, that brings me to the sect that believe in logic above all. They stand tall in their defense of logical reasoning and realism and pride themselves as the river of knowledge, wisdom and understanding. They do not see talent from same perspectives as those who believe in their being gifted by the graces, a god or goddess of arts and creativity. They see talent differently and assess full control over how they see talent. Are these sect of people right in their conceptualization of what talent is from a logical reasoning standpoint? Did they involved themselves in various researches to arrive at the conclusion of whatever logical conclusion? Are these sects standing at the opposite side of the number "6" with these believers of talent? If they do, are they both seeing the number as 6 and 9 from their various perspectives?

We all know that the word art is uniquely different to many people especially looking at it from diverse cultural perspectives and philosophy. Artistically, you can fine art in sciences and in every ways of our lives in terms of usage.

Another word struck me while analyzing the role of believers in logic and how they apply it to every facets of life- research. In the world of scholars, lam not saying here that those who reason logically are not scholarly, lam using the word in a more narrow context to make us see those in the academia in this regard. After all, are logical reasoning not the methodology of the academia? Now, the word research is a common word in this world of the academia. It's like the air around us and everything we do. Research can never be separated from the scientific methods of thought processes of these people. Everything starts and ends with research and if not satisfied with their theories, they indulge in more research to fault a theory they initially researched on. They do not believe formulas are gifts to be given as hands out to them by a god or goddess. They believe more in querying anything that strike their fancy or minds, list out methods and ways to navigate these methods to find answers to their initial idea or thought. Does this mean talent and logic are needed in their processes to find answers to questions? Are these researchers a third part to the other two in trying to know if 6 is 9 or just an illusion?

Again, are these trio, talent, logic and research actually one or separate entities overlapping and complimenting each other in other to achieve a common purpose? If yes, why are they some what like one in a labyrinth? Personally, I strongly feel that in as much as they might mean

different things in meaning, they are like the holy trinity (not in a blasphemous sense), though separate but one in terms of end results and relationships. The art is like a vehicle. We all know that every vehicle requires three main elements to make it move. First is the engine, the driver to control the vehicle via its directions through the steering while the vehicle definitely needs a fuel or gas to make it move. This doesn't rule out other parts like the spark plugs and others too numerous to mention here. So let's look at talent, logic and research from three parts of a vehicle, engine, steering and fuel.

Talent is like the engine of a vehicle. It's like a raw material, a clay in its raw form. Talent is an idea, a push, a force, a window or door to your soul or mind. It is a natural propensity, athletes on the mark waiting in dead silence for the sound of a gun shot to propel them. Talent is likened to space occupied in anticipation of nothing yet. A clay is a clay and not a potter or the form the clay later becomes.

Logic is the steering of a vehicle. It is the structural framework or codes to make you think and see things differently. The steering is control and if you don't have what it takes to control or organize how to control, the engine would soon be either dead from accident or not even move from that spot at all. It is the movement from the occupied space as soon as the gun shot is heard by the athletes. The swift motion, maintenance of lanes to avoid collisions in other to breast the tapes. It is a conscious, deliberate and intentional choice and decisions to achieve a purpose via organizational structures.

Research which is a deliberate search for answers to questions, is more like an external exploration with set objectives.

"Research is the intentional act of gathering information, data, and evidence from the outside world to expand your knowledge base", according to internet sources. While logic is more of cognitive processing, research is more of gathering, it's more informational. While talent is in us, like raw materials around us, logic is critical thinking while research is methodical.

How have all these helped the creative industry; film, music, sculpture, painting, writing, stage productions, criticism etc etc? The first thing is for us to know out

strong points, where they mix with others in the bid to achieve a common purpose. In film, music or stage productions, there are different roles by different people to achieve a common purpose. The goal is actualization of the purpose. The academia is not left out of this thought line towards the actualization of the creative goals. Questions must be asked about methods, critical thinking must be considered in order to understand how the creative process led to success. The objectives of the research in to the creative works is always informational which again is supposed to bring the creatives back to the drawing board to enable a more effective approach to future creative works.

Talent, logic and research are collaborators in the creative sector. They are meant to fight side by side to win battles no matter how difficult it may seem. No matter how good a car engine is, no matter how beautiful the steering is or the driver's experience, without fuel the car can never be driven. A mix of talent, logic and research is like the creative industry, and the academia- town and gown in a compressed way to see it.

"These three elements work in a feedback loop. You can have one without the others, but the results change drastically:

- \* Talent + Logic (The Intuitive Genius): This person can solve complex problems quickly but might "reinvent the wheel" because they didn't look at existing research.
  - \* Logic + Research (The Scholar): This person is highly disciplined and informed. They may lack the "spark" of talent, but they produce reliable, high-quality work through sheer methodology.
  - \* Talent + Research (The Informed Artist): This person has great natural flair and knows their field well, but without logic, their work might be disorganized or inconsistent."
- "The Sweet Spot  
When all three intersect, you achieve Innovation.
- \* Research tells you what the world needs or what has been done.
  - \* Logic helps you map out a path to improve it.
  - \* Talent allows you to execute that path with a level of excellence that others can't easily replicate."



## Either grants or notin

Nor bi today yansh don bigin de back. Na wia laif carri- Nam put bi dat. Afta all, we all no say, nor bi say crayfish nor laik to de straight, but na kondishon make am bend. I no say meni of una go de wonda, wetin make me de yan in parebo dis morning, but na de kain wahala wey make rabbit de run for hot aftanoon, laik who bandit de purshu with AK47, naim hold me so. I no say una must to ask say Wetin de shele, or wia kasala for burst abi? Make una nor worri, bicos as de mata don take de so, no lele. We go soon unfold de mata liak woman wey rimove rapa for waist.

Una nor say, we for Naija nor de neva gree for enibodi, kpakpa to com even rison am say we go wan com carri for dat kain mata. Una rimemba say, ones upon a time, awa cinema Korshur for Naija na one-in-town? Wetin l de yan so fit bi laik film for dem GenZ pipo. For dem eyes, eni time dem hia cinema, dia minds go flash to cinema of today. I de yan about cinema de hold grand gidigba in de olden days laik 1960 to late 1970 befor de whole tin vamuz laik say e hia abracadabra. Na wen cinema don yamutu, pipo com bigin wosh television. De vibes for television nor bi laik dat of cinema, but las las cinema com appear laik wiliwili and even com bi laik wetin nor readi to comot at all.

All dis yanings nor really bi about de cinema but de way de cinema fit take de operate and get films wey dem de show to pipo as at dat time. Most of de films na war films wia actor nor de eva die for film. Dia films na to show to us say oyinbos dem be special pipo wey get levels pass black pipo. De main koko for dis mai yanings be say, all de war films den, na films wey dia film pipo use grants from dia gofment take do.

Una no say l nor de fail network to always let gofment no say, na dia responsibility to giv grants to film pipo to do ogbonge films wey go fit bigin ginger Naija pipo to com bigin see dem sef as special pipo with big brain to fit do enitin wey dem mind rison with dem. Wen l say gofment, l de yan about awa President, gofnor sand local gofment chiamen. All awa Presido need to do na to anaounce say film grants don de composry from fedra, states to local gofments. Afta dat, tell me wai awa film industri nor go rule Africa and de world?

Awa gofment need to aktivato on meni tins to help de film industri plus orda erias of de krietive sector to de get grant. Even if gofment wan do laik Fada krismas wey nor wan giv eni gift for free to film pipo, gofment fit also use dia konet to make all dis multi-nashonals to de remit certain amount of kuza to a particular akaunt for film pipo as grant. Once dis one or partan for grant mata don set, film pipo fit de kolet free kuza to do films wey go make de world see Naija from different levels.

Na one tin to giv film pipo plus orda krietives free grants, but gofment also need to make shur say, pipo nor jus kolobi de kuza to go marri women, buy cars and build houses. If gofment aktivato EFCC to com turn monitoring spirit to evri film and krietive person wey kolet de grants, to make shur dem use de kuza wella, wahala nor go de and evri bodi, dat na both gofment and de film pipo go de happi as evri bodi go don ashiv Wetin de dem minds.

Eni ways, tori full grand and we go kontinu to de yan about dem for hia. Till nex wik, make we de galant and no kpai awasef oooo!

# Feature

## Cybersecurity and Nigeria's unpleasant record

KAYODE ADEBIYI (NAN)

The African Perspectives on Cyber Security Report 2025, released by Check Point Software Technologies, indicates that Nigeria records an average of 4,200 cyberattacks weekly.

According to the report, this figure is higher than the continental average of 3,153 and about 60 per cent above the global baseline of 1,963 attacks per organisation per week.

The report linked Nigeria's ranking to exposed identities, misconfigured systems and the growing use of artificial intelligence by cybercriminals.

Check Point Software Technologies, a global cybersecurity solutions provider, said the report marked a critical step in addressing the most pressing cyber threats and trends of 2025.

These threats include the destructive nature of cyber wars, evolving ransomware tactics, the rising tide of infostealers, increased targeting of edge devices and vulnerabilities within cloud infrastructures.

The report identified key sectors targeted by cybercriminals exploiting exposed identities and misconfigured systems as finance, energy, telecommunications and government departments.

Cyberattacks have become a major global data security concern and, according to the Global Threat Index, attacks on government agencies and organisations are rising in Nigeria.

The Cyber Security Experts Association of Nigeria has warned of a potential increase in insider threats in the coming years, driven largely by the malicious use of artificial intelligence.

Experts say that beyond data theft, cyberattacks cause productivity losses, business disruptions and reduced investor confidence. They argue that the situation calls for a shift from reactive to predictive security by embedding protection into digital systems from the outset.

They also stress that collaboration with law enforcement agencies is crucial to effectively tackle and prosecute cybercrimes.

This underscores the importance of the Cybersecurity Act 2024 (originally enacted in 2015), which provides a comprehensive legal, regulatory and institutional framework for the



prohibition, prevention, detection, prosecution and punishment of cybercrimes.

The Act also aims to protect critical national information infrastructure and promote cybersecurity, including the protection of computer systems and networks, electronic communications, data, computer programmes, intellectual property and privacy rights.

It established the Cybercrime Advisory Council (CAC), comprising representatives of relevant Ministries, Departments and Agencies listed in its First Schedule.

The council is responsible for formulating general policy guidelines for preventing and combating cybercrimes and promoting cybersecurity in Nigeria.

As chairman of the council, the National Security Adviser, Malam Nuhu Ribadu, has reiterated the commitment to implementing the National Cybersecurity Policy and Strategy (NCPS), which provides the operational framework for the Act.

Some stakeholders say the current administration has shown interest in securing Nigeria's cyberspace, including developing a protection plan for Critical National Assets and Infrastructure (CNAI).

They cite the Designation and Protection of Critical National Information Infrastructure (CNII) Order, 2024, signed by President Bola Tinubu, as evidence of the government's commitment to addressing cyber threats.

Nigeria is also among 114 countries that have adopted national cybersecurity strategies and 118 that have established Computer Security Incident Response Teams (CSIRTs).

Cybersecurity experts say protecting CNII is central to national security, noting that a robust digital economy depends heavily on effective cybersecurity.

They warn that cybercriminals now target critical infrastructure such as oil pipelines, communication facilities, hospitals and military installations, elevating cybersecurity to a key national security concern.

The establishment of the Nigerian Computer Emergency Response Team (ngCERT) and the National Digital Forensic Laboratory has also been commended as part of efforts to combat cybercrime.

However, experts argue that given the cross-border nature of cyber threats, stronger synergy and international collaboration are required to

address the growing challenge.

Mr Jude Olabori, a cybersecurity expert, said unlocking Nigeria's digital economic potential depends largely on cybersecurity, which itself relies on cooperation and sustained support.

"Section 41(2)(b) provides for the conformity of Nigerian cybercrime and cybersecurity laws with regional and international standards.

"The objective is to support and participate in international cooperation to address the menace of cybercrime," he said.

Others note that the five pillars of the Ministry of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy's Strategic Agenda (2023–2027) can only drive economic growth if anchored on strong cybersecurity.

Mr Charles Oluma, another cybersecurity expert, said none of the pillars would succeed without a resilient security framework.

"The five pillars Dr Bosun Tijani, the Minister of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy, is building the digital economy on are knowledge, policy, infrastructure, innovation and capital, and trade.

"He has said the ministry aims to become a reputable public-sector eco-

system that enables economic growth through enhanced productivity driven by technology.

"None of these pillars can thrive in the absence of a strong and continuously evolving national cybersecurity framework," Oluma said.

In November, Surfshark, an Amsterdam-based cybersecurity firm, reported that Nigeria ranked 16th among the most breached countries in Q3 2025, with 408,900 leaked accounts.

Surfshark's Senior Product Manager, Sarunas Sereika, said the growing use of AI tools means even minor data breaches can be exploited at scale.

"Previously, exploiting leaked data required significant technical skills, but AI has lowered the barrier.

"AI now allows malicious actors to quickly analyse and weaponise seemingly insignificant data, turning leaked names, addresses and preferences into highly personalised attacks," he said.

According to Cybersecurity Ventures, global digital economic growth is projected to reach 10.5 trillion dollars annually this year, a development that also implies a rise in the cost of cybercrime.

While some stakeholders argue that rising cyberattacks reflect increased digital activity, experts caution that Nigeria cannot afford to be seen as a country with weak cybersecurity.

The vision of the NCPS is "a safe, secure, vibrant, resilient and trusted cyberspace that provides opportunities for citizens, safeguards national assets and interests, and promotes peaceful engagement for national prosperity."

Key findings of the African Perspectives on Cyber Security Report show that attackers increasingly use AI for sophisticated phishing, identity theft, ransomware and exploitation of cloud vulnerabilities.

The report concluded that attackers are outpacing existing security frameworks as digitalisation expands, stressing the need for preventive and collaborative security built on strong legal frameworks and trust in digital transformation.

Experts believe that with strong political will and strict implementation of the Cybersecurity Act 2024, Nigeria's cybercrime challenge can be effectively addressed. (NAN FEATURE)

## Razzl celebrates originality with 'Normal Is Boring' campaign

Razzl, Nigeria's bold carbonated soft drink, has taken a firm stand against conformity with its recently concluded Normal Is Boring campaign, a youth-focused movement promoting originality, fearless self-expression and confidence in being different.

At a time when fitting in often feels like the norm, the campaign encourages young Nigerians to embrace what makes them unique. To amplify the message, Razzl partnered with two of the country's most expressive entertainers, Brain Jotter and Emmanuella, who led a digital movement

that turned judgement into confidence through humour, creativity and unapologetic individuality.

The campaign videos recorded thousands of engagements within hours of release, sparking widespread conversations across social media platforms. On the same day, Normal Is Boring trended on X (formerly Twitter), as fans and content creators joined the challenge to celebrate authenticity in their own distinctive ways.

Mirroring its range of flavours—Cola, Lemon and Orange—Razzl positioned itself as a symbol of versatility and bold expression. Each flavour

reinforces the idea that individuality cannot be boxed, and that being colourful, spontaneous and different is something to be celebrated.

Across Instagram, Facebook, TikTok and X, young Nigerians shared dance clips, comedy skits, storytelling videos and lifestyle content, all echoing the campaign's central message: Why be normal when you can be more?

Beyond celebration, the campaign also rewarded creativity. Forty of the most outstanding entries nationwide shared a ₦4 million prize pool, transforming originality into tangible rewards.

Speaking on the initiative, Razzl's Marketing Director, Toyin Nnodi, described the campaign as a call to bold self-expression. "Razzl is a youthful brand, and Normal Is Boring reminds young Nigerians that they don't need to fit in when they were born to stand out. Originality and uniqueness define us. We are impressed by both the volume and quality of entries, which show that Nigerian youth are ready to own their uniqueness and shine through it," she said.

In a society where thinking differently is often labelled as being "weird," the campaign highlighted that those

same individuals are frequently the ones who shape culture, start trends and lead conversations. Razzl, through Normal Is Boring, has given that boldness a flavour—one rooted in authenticity, creativity and confidence.

By tapping into the raw energy of youth culture, Razzl has strengthened its connection with its audience, positioning itself not just as a beverage, but as a symbol of confidence and self-belief. The campaign underscored the power of digital storytelling in shaping youth conversations, turning social media into a vibrant space for originality and expression.

# Edo First Lady: Pride of humanity

AUSTIN OSEGBE

Edo State First Lady, Her Excellency, Mrs Edesili Okpembho Anani, by any means, is a quintessential mother and peerless symbol of womanhood.

For me, it is with a deep sense of responsibility to note that in the course of performing my official duties, I have been privileged to work closely with the Office of the First Lady, courtesy of my inspirational boss, Hon Ebanehita Sonia Omonzane, Executive Chairman, State Universal Basic Education Board, SUBEB.

Permit me to place on record that, our amiable First Lady is such an amazing personality, whose calmness, candor charisma and passion for humanity are eloquent testimony of her sterling leadership qualities.

Her Excellency, is indeed, a resourceful leader who inspire her team, while working with uncommon zeal and vigour for the betterment of Edo children, women and humanity at large.

Since the Senator Monday Ok-

pebholo-led administration came on board on November 12, 2024, Her Excellency has touched lives in many positive ways.

Many families and homes have benefited from the numerous impactful activities of the First Lady - ranging from - but not limited to payment of hospital bills for indigent patients, including nursing mothers, economic empowerment/livelihood support programs, advocacy/ sensitization activities on child rights protection and gender based violence.

The Office of the First Lady is also known to be actively involved in advancing the ideals of quality education for Edo children. The latest being the distribution of U-Lessons Tablets to learners in public primary and junior secondary schools in Edo South.

This laudable initiative was in collaboration with the Niger Delta Development Commission, NDDC.

It is worthy to affirm that public schools pupils and students in Edo Central and North Senatorial Districts are expected to benefit from the U-Lessons Tablets distribution exer-

ise, as soon as academic activities resume for second term in January, 2026.

No doubt, Her Excellency compares to the proverbial mother hen whose delight is caring, protecting and showering love for her chicks, come rain or sunshine.

Like the brain and beauty that she is, the mother of our dear state to all intents and purposes, is a beacon of RENEWED HOPE for the mass of Edo children and women to prosper and enjoy the SHINE agenda of the people-centric Governor, Senator Monday Okpembho.

Truly, a new Edo has risen and our people, irrespective of tribe, gender or socio-cultural background, are on the pathway of prosperity.

God bless our First Lady for her good heart; God bless Edo State, the heartbeat of the nation.

*Dr Austin Osegbe  
(Director, Schools Support  
Services, SUBEB)*



MRS. EDESILI OKPEBHOLO ANANI

## When silence kills: Rethinking protection for the Nigerian girl child

ASENOGUAN ANNABEL

When news broke in 2018 of the death of 13-year-old Ochanya Ogbanje, Nigerians were horrified. The teenager from Benue State had reportedly endured years of alleged sexual abuse from her guardian, Andrew Ogbuja, and his son, Victor. Her story sparked national outrage and drew attention to one of Nigeria's most painful realities — the continued failure to protect the girl child.

Ochanya's death was not just a tragedy; it was a wake-up call. For years, she allegedly suffered in silence, her cries unheard, until her body gave in to the trauma. Her case exposed how deeply rooted issues of child abuse, gender inequality, and societal silence continue to rob young girls of their futures.

In the months following her death, protests and social media campaigns erupted across the country under the banner #JusticeForOchanya. Women's rights groups and civil society organizations demanded accountability — both for her case and for the countless other victims who remain voiceless.

While her guardian was later convicted by a Benue State High Court, the long legal process and initial delays underscored the systemic weaknesses in Nigeria's child protection framework — from poor law enforcement to lack of safe reporting channels for victims.

Ochanya's story is one among many. According to UNICEF, one in four Nigerian girls experiences sexual violence before the age of 18, and only a fraction of those cases are ever reported. Cultural norms, family pressure, and fear of stigma often force victims into silence, allowing alleged abusers to go unpunished.

Experts say the problem runs deeper than individual acts of abuse. It reflects structural neglect — inadequate social

welfare systems, weak enforcement of child protection laws, and the normalization of gender-based violence in homes and schools.

For many girls, silence becomes a matter of survival. Families are often reluctant to speak out for fear of "bringing shame" upon themselves. Communities, too, sometimes protect alleged perpetrators — especially when they hold social or religious influence.

"The tragedy of Ochanya shows what happens when we choose silence over justice," says child rights advocate Betty Abah, who led early campaigns demanding justice for the late teenager. "Until we change that mindset, no girl is truly safe."

### PROTECTING THE NEXT GENERATION

To save the girl child, experts emphasize prevention over reaction. This includes educating parents and guardians on early warning signs of abuse, empowering girls to speak up, and ensuring that schools and communities become safe spaces.

Government action remains crucial. Stronger enforcement of the Child Rights Act, increased funding for shelters, and community-based awareness programs can help curb the cycle of abuse.

Civil society organizations continue to push for change, but many say progress remains slow. In rural communities like Ochanya's, awareness is still low, and victims often have nowhere to turn.

Though gone, Ochanya's story continues to echo in Nigeria's national conscience. Her name has become a symbol of resilience and a reminder of what's at stake when society fails its most vulnerable.

Saving the girl child means more than protecting her body — it means giving her the freedom to learn, to speak, and to dream without fear.

Until that becomes reality, the question remains: how many more Ochanyas must we lose before we act?

## FAITH UNDER FIRE

### The rising burden on Nigeria's Christian minority

ASENOGUAN ANNABEL

It is impossible to ignore the growing ache in many Christian communities across Nigeria — a fear born not from ordinary conflict, but from repeated attacks carried out by individuals and extremist groups who hide violence behind the veil of religion. For countless families, the question is no longer whether faith can coexist, but why human lives are being cut short simply because they bear the name "Christian." It is a reality that many describe as deeply unjust, a wound that refuses to heal in a nation that proudly calls itself one people under God.

Reports from human-rights and religious monitoring organizations indicate that these fears are far from unfounded. According to the International Society for Civil Liberties and Rule of Law (Intersociety), over 7,000 Christians were killed in Nigeria in the first eight months of 2025, while nearly 8,000 were abducted. These figures underscore the scale of a crisis that continues to devastate communities in multiple states across the country.

Between 2023 and 2025, several incidents highlight the pattern of attacks. In Zangon Kataf Local Government Area of Kaduna State, gunmen attacked villages in Christian-majority areas, reportedly killing dozens and displacing thousands. In Yelwata, north-central Nigeria, documented reports estimated that between 100 to 200 people were killed in a single attack on a community sheltering displaced persons. In addition, church properties, Christian schools, and local infrastructure have been destroyed during such attacks, leaving communities without places of worship, education, or shelter.

Experts point to overlapping factors behind these attacks. Armed extremist groups like Boko Haram and ISWAP explicitly target Christians, often in regions where the state's security presence is limited. Similarly, communal conflicts, including clashes between herders and farmers, often assume a religious dimension, making Christian communities especially vulnerable. Banditry, kidnapping for ransom, and other criminal activities frequently intersect with religious identity, further exacerbating the risks.

The impact on Christian communities extends beyond immediate violence. Thousands of families have been internally displaced, abandoning ancestral homes, farms, and livelihoods. Displacement not only disrupts daily life but also erodes the social and economic stability of entire communities. Reports suggest that the destruction of farmlands and the closure of businesses in violence-prone areas have had a significant economic toll, while access to education for children is often interrupted, threatening long-term prospects for affected communities.

One particularly troubling aspect of the crisis is impunity. Investigations show that many attacks go unpunished, and perpetrators are rarely brought to justice. Analysts argue that this lack of accountability emboldens attackers and perpetuates a cycle of violence. Without a credible system of justice, communities continue to live in fear, and trust in state protection diminishes.

International watchdogs, including Open Doors and the World Watch Monitor, have repeatedly raised alarms about the scale of Christian persecution in Nigeria. In 2024, Open Doors reported that Nigeria

topped the list of countries with the highest number of Christians killed and kidnapped globally, citing 3,100 deaths and 2,830 kidnappings that year. These numbers highlight that the threat is both persistent and widespread, rather than isolated incidents.

Beyond the statistics, the consequences for social cohesion are profound. Violence fuels mistrust between religious and ethnic groups, undermines efforts at interfaith dialogue, and risks creating long-term divisions within communities. Analysts note that while most Muslims in Nigeria do not condone or participate in such attacks, extremist actors exploit religious identity to manipulate and inflame tensions, leaving communities caught between fear and suspicion.

Efforts to address the crisis have been ongoing but uneven. Some local NGOs and interfaith organizations work to mediate conflicts, provide support to displaced communities, and promote peacebuilding initiatives. However, limited resources, challenging terrain, and the scale of violence make these interventions difficult. The government's response has also been criticized as insufficient, with security operations often reactive rather than preventive, and with slow prosecution of offenders undermining deterrence.

Despite these challenges, hope persists. Communities continue to rebuild, interfaith dialogue initiatives strive to bridge divides, and advocacy groups push for increased protection and accountability. Experts emphasize that a comprehensive approach is needed — one that combines improved security, consistent enforcement of law, community support, economic recovery, and education aimed at fostering tolerance.

# Sports

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

## Niger Delta Games: Edo Liaison Committee charges coaches, other stakeholders on athletes mobilisation

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

The Liaison Committee of the host state, Edo for the 2026 Niger Delta Games has charged the coaches of the accredited 16 sports for the games to be thorough and sincere in mobilizing athletes that will represent the state as work begins in earnest.

The secretary of the Edo State Liaison Committee

Mr Idahosa Bright who presided over the inaugural Meeting on behalf of the Executive Chairman of the Edo State Sports Commission Hon Amadin Desmond Enabulele gave the charge on Thursday, De-

cember 18, 2025 at the Samuel Ogbemudia stadium.

He told the coaches and other technical officers drawn from different sports associations in attendance that the



NDG Project Director, Fred Edoreh and members of the Abia State Liaison Committee.

Edo State Sports Commission boss has directed him to let them know that only athletes of Edo origin under 20 years of age be scouted and prepared for registration. According to him, honourable Amadin Desmond Enabulele wants the best for the state.

"Our chairman has directed us to go into the interior parts of our eighteen local government areas to discover raw talents, even if it is not possible for the raw talents to win gold for us but the opportunity be given to our indigenes. That's what the Niger Delta Games is out to address.

"As we strategize on how to mobilize athletes as the state plans to start registration of athletes for the Niger Delta Games, we have to do what we know how to do best. Let's work towards excellence. We

can host and win, but it is not a do or die affairs." He said.

He urged the coaches and head of sports associations to be fair in their dealings with athletes and subordinates under them. 'The chairman wants everybody to be happy. Be honest about your demands and allocation of resources for the preparation.

Mr idahosa Bright, president, Nigeria Scrabble Federation appealed to his colleagues to put behind whatever is part of the carryover grievances from the maiden edition of the Niger Delta Games and promptly supply necessary information concerning their sports associations for prompt responses.

The second edition of the Niger Delta Games, has been scheduled to be staged in Benin, Edo State, from February 20 to 27, 2026.

## Nigeria Rugby League appoints high-performance director, mentors

The Nigeria Rugby League Association (NRLA) has strengthened its technical and development structure with the appointment of a Director of High Performance and new mentors for the men's and women's national teams.

The governing body announced Luke Shearman as Director of High Performance, International Teams and Competitions. Shearman transitions into the role from his previous position as assistant coach of the women's national team.

In addition to Shearman's appointment, the NRLA confirmed New Zealand international Njavadu George as mentor to the women's national team.

Renowned Australian official Ashley Klein has been appointed referee mentor, while Tara Jones will support the development

and increased participation of women referees in Nigeria.

Announcing the appointments on Wednesday, the NRLA highlighted Shearman's extensive experience in high-performance systems and international rugby league development.

"The Nigeria Rugby League is proud to announce the appointment of Luke Shearman as Director of High Performance, International Teams and Competitions," the statement read.

"Luke brings extensive international experience across high-performance systems, elite athlete pathways, competition delivery and global rugby league development. In this role, Luke will oversee all national team programmes, high-performance frameworks, international competitions and strategic pathways from grassroots to elite level.

"His appointment marks a significant step forward in Nigeria Rugby League's commitment to world-class standards, professional structures and long-term international success ensuring Nigeria continues to set the benchmark for rugby league development across Africa and on the global stage."

Referee mentor Ashley Klein is widely regarded as one of the best officials in the sport globally. The Australian has officiated National Rugby League (NRL) Grand Finals in 2018, 2022 and 2024, bringing vast experience to Nigeria's referee development programme.



NIGERIA RUGBY LEAGUE

## Imo inaugurates Liaison Committee as preparations for 2nd Niger Delta Games gather momentum

Preparations for the second edition of the Niger Delta Games received a major boost on Tuesday as organisers of the championship inaugurated the Imo State Liaison Committee ahead of the event proper scheduled to hold next year in Edo State.

The inauguration took place

at the office of the Imo State Commissioner for Sports, where the Managing Director of Dunamis Icon Limited and Project Consultant for the Games, Sir Itiako Ikpokpo-Atanaru of Irri Kingdom, formally set the committee in motion.

Sir Ikpokpo, who was represented at the ceremony by vet-



Imo State Commissioner for Sports, Hon. Obinna Onyecho, and Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) members

eran sports journalist, Sir Fred Edoreh, announced that the 2026 Niger Delta Games would strictly be an under-20 competition. He charged members of the liaison committee to ensure massive mobilisation and timely registration of Imo athletes on the Games' official portal, stressing that only duly registered athletes would be cleared to participate.

In his remarks, the Imo State Commissioner for Sports, Hon. Obinna Onyecho, commended the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and Dunamis Icon Limited for initiating and sustaining the Games for two consecutive years, describing the championship as a credible platform for talent discovery and development in the region.

Hon. Onyecho noted that

the Niger Delta Games align perfectly with the sports development vision of the administration of Governor Hope Uzodimma, assuring that Imo State is fully prepared to participate and comply with all rules and regulations guiding the competition.

"It is the mandate of His Excellency, the Governor of Imo State, for us to go to the grassroots to discover talents, and these Games have come to help us achieve exactly that," Onyecho said. "On behalf of the committee, I assure you that we will insist on quality, thoroughness, discipline and total compliance."

The Imo State Liaison Committee is chaired by Hon. Obinna Onyecho, with Hon. Willie Okolieogwo serving as secretary.

## AFCON 2025: Super Eagles land in Fez, begin preparations with first training session

Super Eagles will touch down at 12 noon in Fez, the venue for their Group C matches at the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations, after departing Cairo International Airport on Thursday.

The team's camp officially opened in Cairo last Sunday, with team officials and goalkeepers Francis Uzoho and Stanley Nwabali arriving first ahead of Tuesday night's international friendly against Egypt.

The Super Eagles suffered a 2-1 defeat to the Pharaohs in their final warm-up game before the continental tournament. The encounter, played at the Cairo International Stadium, saw Sabad Mahmoud give Egypt the lead in the 28th minute before Chidozie Awaziem equalised for Nigeria late in the first half. However, a 54th-minute strike from Mostafa

fa Mohamed secured victory for the hosts.

Following a recovery session at the gym on Wednesday, the Nigerian delegation travelled to Morocco on Thursday afternoon. The team is scheduled to hold its first training session same day in Fez at 6:00 pm local time.

Star striker Victor Osimhen joined the squad in Cairo before the team's departure, completing the 28-man squad submitted to the Confederation of African Football (CAF).

The three-time African champions will begin their Group C campaign against Tanzania on December 23, before facing Tunisia on December 27. They will conclude the group stage with a match against Uganda on December 31.



EAGLES IN TRAINING

## Niger Delta Games: Organisers condole Bayelsa Govt on Senator Ewhrudjakpo



The NDDC Executive Director, Finance and Administration, and the Chairman, Main Organising Committee, Alabo Boma Iyaye, and others during the inaugural meeting.

Organisers of the Niger Delta Games, Dunamis-Icon, have commiserated with the government and people of Bayelsa State on the demise of the Deputy Governor, Senator Lawrence

Ewhrudjakpo.

In a condolence message signed by the Managing Consultant, Sir Itiako Ikpokpo KSM, and physically delivered by its Project Director, Mr Fred Edoreh, through the State Commissioner

for Sports, Hon Daniel Igali, at the Yenogoa Sports complex on Wednesday, December 17, Ikpokpo stated that the demise of the Deputy Governor is not only a loss to his immediate family and the government of Bayelsa

State, but to the Niger Delta and nationwide sports.

"We are well aware of his contributions to nation building, not only as a former Senator and Deputy Governor, but also as a notable figure in the development and promotion of sports in the Niger Delta region and at the national level," Ikpokpo stated.

"His passage is therefore a huge loss, not only to the government and people of Bayelsa State, but also to the sports family, nationwide.

"As Project Consultants of the Niger Delta Games, the management and staff of Dunamis-Icon Limited share in your grief and wish to convey our heartfelt condolences to you and all Bayelsans.

"We pray that God grant you the fortitude to bear this great loss."



## African Championship: CAA Confirms Date

The Confederation of African Athletics (CAA) has officially confirmed that the 24th African Senior Athletics Championships will commence on Tuesday, May 12, 2026, in Accra, Ghana.

The confirmation was announced by Ghana Athletics in a statement released on Wednesday, following formal approval from the Minister for Sports and Recreation and the CAA, thereby affirming Ghana's status as host nation.

The continental showpiece is scheduled to run until Sunday, May 17, 2026.

According to the programme released by Ghana Athletics, preparations will begin ahead of the championships, with the arrival of CAA administrators and technical officials slated for May 8, 2026.

Members of the CAA Council are expected in Accra on May 9, while the council meeting and the arrival of participating

teams will take place on May 10. A technical meeting has been fixed for May 11, one day before the official start of competition. Athletes from across the continent will then begin contesting for honours from May 12.

The championships will conclude on May 17, with all participating teams expected to depart Accra on May 18, 2026.

The Minister for Sports and Recreation is expected to officially welcome CAA Council members and deliver a keynote address before the championships transition fully into the competition phase.

Meanwhile, the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between Ghana and the CAA is expected to take place on or before January 8, 2026, subject to the availability of the Sports Minister.

In addition, the Local Organising Committee for Accra 2026 is scheduled to be inaugurated on Thursday.

## AFCON Update: NFF President Gusau, others, get free accommodation, \$100 daily allowance in Morocco

The President of the Nigeria Football Federation (NFF), Ibrahim Gusau, alongside other top federation officials, will enjoy free accommodation and a daily allowance of \$100 during the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) in Morocco.

According to information obtained by WinWin, the Confederation of African Football (CAF) has approved comprehensive welfare packages for senior officials of its member associations attending the tournament.

Under the arrangement, the President of each member association, including NFF President Gusau, will be provided with complimentary accommodation throughout the duration of the competition, in addition to a daily allowance of \$100.

The same benefits will also extend to honorary presidents and secretaries general of member associations.

This means the NFF Secretary General, Dr Mohammed Sanusi, will equally receive free lodging and the stipulated daily allowance while in Morocco.

The gesture forms part of CAF's standard administrative support for participating federations, aimed at easing logistical and financial burdens on national football bodies during its flagship tournament.

The Africa Cup of Nations is scheduled to be hosted by Morocco, with football administrators, players, and fans from across the continent expected to converge on the North African nation for the competition.



NFF PRESIDENT IBRAHIM GUSAU

## Ighalo explains why Osimhen should be handed Super Eagles captaincy

Former Super Eagles striker Odion Ighalo has explained why he believes Victor Osimhen should be handed the captaincy of the Nigerian national team.

The armband became available earlier this month after William Troost-Ekong retired from international football, ending a decade-long spell with the Super Eagles. While Wilfred Ndidi, who previously deputised for Troost-Ekong, is widely expected to take over, Ighalo insists Osimhen is the better candidate.

"Victor Osimhen should be the next captain not because

he is the oldest player in the team," Ighalo told ESPN journalist Colin Udoh.

Osimhen has scored 31 goals in 45 appearances and is likely to break Rashid Yekini all time most goal record which stands at 37 goals.

"There are older players like Moses Simon, Alex Iwobi, and Chidozie Awaziem. Osimhen is in his prime, and he dares to demand what he wants."

Ighalo, who earned 37 caps and scored 16 goals for Nigeria, highlighted Osimhen's leadership both on and off the pitch. He described Ndidi

as "very calm" and reserved, while Osimhen is outspoken and fearless in speaking up for his teammates.

"Ndidi is not the talking type. He's calm, but Osimhen rallies the players and makes sure everyone is focused. Being a captain is not an easy job, your neck is always on the line, and the captain must represent the team to the NFF and beyond. Osimhen has the character to do that," Ighalo added.

He also pointed out that Osimhen's status as Nigeria's biggest star gives him authority in the dressing room.



VICTOR OSIMHEN AND NNDIDI

## NBF unveils plan to integrate professional boxing, protect boxers' welfare



The Nigeria Boxing Federation (NBF) has announced plans to introduce and regulate professional boxing under its framework as part of a sweeping reform aimed at protecting boxers' welfare, ensuring transparency, and strengthening grassroots development across the country.

Chairman of the Marketing Committee of the current NBF board, Mr. Azania Omo-Agege, disclosed the new initiative while outlining the federation's vision to blend professional boxing with the existing amateur system.

According to Omo-Agege, the move is designed to give the federation greater control over boxing activities in Nigeria, especially in areas where boxers' health, age verification and contractual rights have previously been overlooked.

"We are about to launch professional boxing under the Nigeria Boxing Federation. What we have been doing has been purely amateur, but now we want to integrate professional boxing into that structure so we can properly manage and protect our boxers," he said.

He explained that the initiative aligns with new policies of the National Sports Commission on age discrepancies in sports, noting that the federation intends to strictly enforce proper age documentation to eliminate falsification of athletes' ages.

"The days of artificial ages on passports are over. We want to know the true ages of our boxers so we can manage them properly and responsibly," Omo-Agege stated.

As part of the reforms, the NBF plans to take boxing development to the grassroots by scouting tal-

ents from secondary schools, colleges of education, polytechnics and universities. The federation, he said, will groom these athletes from their formative years through the amateur ranks and guide them into professional boxing under a structured and monitored system.

Omo-Agege also expressed concern over the frequent loss of Nigerian boxers to foreign professional promoters after major competitions such as the Commonwealth Games, Olympic Games and African championships.

# Protests, Playoffs, and Ineligibility: Nigeria's Bizarre Road to the 2026 World Cup alive

DOUGLAS BAYE-OSAGIE

At a time when the African continent is preparing for the commencement of the biggest football event in Africa, the 35th edition of the biennial Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) tournament organised by the Confederation of African Football (CAF), the Nigeria Football Federation has awoken the hopes and raised the consciousness of soccer fans with a different kind of distraction. They've whispered loudly to the Nigerian football lovers globally that there is a backdoor entrance available to the biggest football event in the World next year in America, Canada and Mexico.

Like a petulant kid, Nigeria's Football Federation is protesting at football world governing body, FIFA's doorstep again. Remember during the qualifying rounds, a protest against South Africa for fielding a player, Mokhoena with accumulated yellow cards led to point deductions and helped pushed Nigeria to the playoffs

NFF General Secretary, Dr. Sanusi Mohammed on Tuesday 15th December 2025 alleged ineligibility players as a reason Nigerias hope of making the World Cup next year is real.

"FIFA was deceived into clearing those players because it is not FIFA's responsibility to interpret or enforce domestic citizenship laws.

"DR Congo law does not permit dual citizenship, yet some of the players involved reportedly hold dual nationality.

"It is not FIFA's duty to know the domestic laws of every country; that is why we formally drew FIFA's attention to the issue, and we are now awaiting their verdict."

We have a group of Administrators who have failed to grow out football in the last 10 years . From Amaju Pinnick to Ibrahim Gusau, the federation has focused on attending competitions rather than building the right structure of the game in Nigeria. From failure to qualify for consecutive Olympic soccer events to back to back World Cups and also missing out on our once birthrights 3 straight U17 World Cups, it is very obvious the politicians in them will want to grab at any window to jump into the 2026 World Cup. Right now they have awakened the hopes of millions of Nigerian football fans who are meant to have switched off from the World Cup to the Nations cup tournament.

But do we have a chance. YES! Does the rule work in our favour? It will boil down to how FIFA interprets her own laws. There is total panic in the streets of Kinshaha because they know the registration of foreign players a bit hurriedly done.

"FIFA does not reason in terms of legal nationality but rather in terms of sporting nationality. If that is the case, I advise you dear Nigeria brothers to focus on the Afcon – Herita Ilunga former West Ham player and Head of Football, DR Congo Federation. Even though the Congolese are defiant and brash about the whole episode, there is a sense of fear that they might need a lot of prayers to scale past these allegations. They claim once FIFA approves a play-



SUPER EAGLES IN TRAINING

er, they don't have to bother and sports rules are different from Countries laws.

Just this week FIFA has penalised Malaysia with three 3-0 defeats for fielding ineligible players, the country's football authorities said Wednesday, the latest punishment in a simmering scandal.

Friendly wins over Palestine and Singapore, and a draw against Cape Verde, all at home this year, have been overturned, the Football Association of Malaysia said.

FIFA has already suspended seven foreign-born national team players over forged documents that claimed they had Malaysian ancestry. This will further send a chilled fear all over DR Congo as they await judgement day when FIFA gives a ruling on Nigeria's protest.

“  
However, FIFA determined that Nsue didn't follow the proper procedure for changing his nationality, making him ineligible to play for Equatorial Guinea.



NFF PRESIDENT IBRAHIM GUSAU

Under DR Congo's own Constitution, nationality is not something that can be rushed or improvised.

Foreigners can only become Congolese through clearly defined processes — naturalization, marriage, option, or adoption — and even then, only when the state determines that the decision is in its national interest. Final approval is not automatic; it must pass through the National Assembly, the Council of Ministers, and the President.

In simple terms, a passport alone is not enough.

#### NATURALIZATION, FOR EXAMPLE, REQUIRES:

- Proven good character
- No serious criminal convictions
- At least seven years of residence (or five years of permanent residency)
- Evidence that the applicant's citizenship serves a real national interest

Some Nigerians have come out to say this is a shameful and disgraceful path to the World Cup and we should be worried about fixing our football. But in this scenerio two truths can coexist. Nigeria football administrators have been below average despite



SUPER EAGLES COACH ERIC CHELLE

the avalanche of talents and secondly DR Congo seems to have breached their own laws in the registration of players for the National team. So Nigeria can pull every form of evidence to nail the Congolese

The Nsue case is a prime example of FIFA's strict eligibility rules. Emilio Nsue, the former captain of Equatorial Guinea's national team, was ruled ineligible to play for the country due to not meeting the necessary requirements.

Nsue was born in Spain to an Equatoguinean father and played for Spain's youth teams before switching to Equatorial Guinea in 2013. However, FIFA determined that Nsue didn't follow the proper procedure for changing his nationality, making him ineligible to play for Equatorial Guinea.

#### AS A RESULT, FIFA:

- \*Suspended Nsue\* for six months from international football
- \*Fined Equatorial Guinea\* \$164,000
- \*Revoked Equatorial Guinea's wins\* against Namibia and Liberia in the 2026 World Cup qualifiers, awarding 3-0 victories to their opponents

Nsue had played for Equatorial Guinea for over 11 years, scoring 23 goals in 40+ games, including five goals at the 2023 Africa Cup of Nations. The decision was a major blow to Equatorial Guinea's World Cup hopes

However, in March 2025, FIFA lifted Nsue's suspension, making him eligible to play for Equatorial Guinea again <sup>4</sup>.


If FIFA confirms that any DR Congo player in the CAF playoffs final:

- Did not meet the country's legal nationality requirements
- Illegally held dual nationality
- Or relied on falsified or misleading documents

Then FIFA will have no choice but to act.

That would mean annulling the result of the match and applying forfeiture rules — a decision that would strip DR Congo of its place in the 2026 Intercontinental Playoffs and keep Nigeria's hope alive.

From the South African protest to the African playoffs to the ineligibility of DR Congo players, if we somehow manage to advance, it'll be the most convoluted route to a World Cup in the tournament's history...

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## BAKERS AND BREAD

# A polemic on the cost of survival

In every society, there are certain foods that symbolise survival. They are not delicacies; they are necessities. Bread is one such food. It is meant to be cheap, and within the reach of the poorest household.

Bread carries an ancient story, woven into sacred history -- the tale of how Jesus Christ fed a multitude with five loaves and two fishes. From time immemorial, bread has stood as a humble yet enduring sustenance, a timeless food, simply made and easily accessible, nourishing both body and spirit across generations.

In Nigeria today, however, bread has been stripped of this social character. What ought to be the cheapest food on the table has become an emblem of economic injustice and a painful reminder of how far the Nigerian consumer has been pushed to the margins.

There is a disturbing economic pattern in Nigeria that has become so normalised that many citizens now accept it with weary resignation: when the cost of major raw materials rises, the prices of finished products immediately skyrocket; yet when those same input costs fall, the prices of the final goods stubbornly refuse to come down.

A 50-kg bag of flour, which reportedly sold for about N80,000 a few months ago, now goes for approximately N58,000. Despite this significant reduction in input costs, many bakeries have failed to adjust the price of bread accordingly, even though flour remains its primary raw material.

This asymmetric pricing culture finds its clearest and cruellest expression in the bread industry. Here, price increases are swift and unforgiving, while price reductions are virtually non-existent.

Bread is not merely another commodity. For millions of Nigerians, it is breakfast, lunch, and sometimes dinner. It fills the gap when garri, rice, yam, or beans are unaffordable. Students rely on it, labourers survive on it, and families turn to it when economic hardship tightens its grip. When bread becomes expensive, hunger is no longer abstract; it is immediate and visible.

For years, bakers have justified the rising cost of bread by pointing to the price of flour. They cite foreign exchange volatility, import dependency, energy costs, transportation, and logistics. Whenever the price of flour rises, the response from bakers is instant. Bread prices go up overnight, and loaf sizes are quietly reduced. The adjustment is swift, decisive, and non-negotiable. Consumers are expected to understand, empathise, and comply, regardless of their own shrinking incomes.

Yet, when the cost of flour declines



as it has done at various points, the promised relief by the bakers' Association never comes. Bread prices remain fixed at their inflated levels, and the reduced loaf sizes are rarely, if ever, restored. The same bakers who once pleaded economic hardship suddenly fall silent. No explanations are offered, no apologies tendered, and certainly no reductions implemented. What was presented as a temporary response to rising costs becomes a permanent burden on the consumer.

Undoubtedly, Nigerians are quick to blame their leaders for the country's economic distress, largely due to ineptitude and corruption; however, the hardship is further compounded by the conduct of many local businessmen who, driven by parochialism, refuse to lower their prices even when the cost of their major raw materials falls, thereby deliberately passing avoidable suffering onto consumers.

This is the real tragedy of bread pricing in Nigeria. Increases are treated as permanent, while reductions are treated as optional. Bread, which should reflect the ebb and flow of input costs more than most foods, becomes trapped in a one-way pricing system that only favours producers. The poor, who depend on bread the most, suffer the worst consequences.

The suffering is compounded by the fact that wages do not rise as quickly as bread prices. The average Nigerian worker earns the same salary whether bread costs five hundred naira or two thousand naira per loaf. There is no automatic adjustment, no cushioning mechanism. Families are forced to buy smaller loaves, reduce consumption, or eliminate bread entirely from their meals. Hunger quietly enters

homes under the guise of economic adjustment.

What makes this exploitation particularly troubling is the absence of effective regulatory intervention. Nigeria is not without consumer protection institutions. On paper, agencies exist to monitor prices and protect citizens from unfair trade practices. In reality, these bodies are either underfunded, compromised, or largely invisible. Bread prices are left to the discretion of bakers and their associations, with little regard for fairness or public interest.

Consumer protection agency established to safeguard consumers, is scarcely felt in the daily realities of bread buyers. There are no clear benchmarks, no transparent cost reviews, and no enforcement mechanisms that compel bakers to pass cost reductions to consumers. The result is a bread market governed by impunity, where exploitation flourishes unchecked.

Bakers often defend themselves by pointing to their own challenges: high energy costs, poor infrastructure, insecurity, multiple taxes, and policy inconsistency. These challenges are real and undeniable. However, they do not justify a system where every increase is immediately transferred to consumers, while every reduction is quietly absorbed as profit. Economic hardship cannot become a licence for moral indifference.

The moral dimension of bread pricing cannot be ignored. Bread is not cement or luxury goods; it is food. Profiteering from hunger reflects a deeper crisis of values, where survival instincts have eclipsed empathy. A society that allows its most basic food to become unaffordable for the poor

is a society flirting with social breakdown.

The psychological impact is equally severe. Nigerians increasingly believe that prices only move in an upward direction. This perception breeds frustration, anger, and helplessness. Bread queues shrink, not because hunger has reduced, but because people can no longer afford to eat their fill. What was once a daily staple becomes an occasional indulgence.

This reality also erodes trust in economic reforms. When officials announce improvements in supply chains or reductions in input costs, citizens are sceptical. Experience has taught them that such gains rarely translate into cheaper bread. The disconnect between policy and lived experience deepens cynicism and weakens faith in governance.

In a properly regulated and competitive economy, bread prices would respond to changes in flour costs, energy prices, and logistics. Efficiency gains would benefit consumers, not just producers. What Nigeria experiences instead is a distorted market where risks are transferred to the public, while profits are privatised.

Consumer advocacy in Nigeria remains weak. Complaints are scattered, poorly organised, and easily ignored. Social media outrage flares briefly and dies out, leaving structural problems untouched. Without strong institutions and legal enforcement, bakers face little pressure to change exploitative practices.

Government must therefore rise above rhetoric. Active market surveillance, transparent pricing frameworks, and enforceable consumer protection laws are urgently needed. Bread pricing should not be left en-

tirely to private discretion when it directly affects food security and social stability.

Bakers, too, must reflect on their social responsibility. Businesses do not operate in a vacuum. Communities sustain them, and trust keeps them alive. Short-term profit gained from exploiting hunger undermines long-term social cohesion and economic sustainability.

For Nigeria to move forward, bread must return to its rightful place as the cheapest food on the table. When flour prices rise, adjustments may be unavoidable; when they fall, relief must follow. Anything less is economic injustice.

The plight of the Nigerian consumer, as reflected in the price of bread, is both an economic and moral issue. A nation that allows its people to struggle endlessly for basic sustenance risks breeding anger, apathy, and instability.

Until bread prices are allowed to fall as easily as they rise, until regulators act with courage, and until bakers recognise the humanity of their customers, the suffering of Nigerian consumers will persist. The demand for fairness is not radical; it is fundamental.

In the end, an economy that cannot guarantee affordable bread is not merely inefficient, it is unjust. And no society can sustainably thrive on injustice.

*Odaro, a columnist, lectures in the Department of Mass Communication, Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi.*