

Army seeks inter-agency collaboration to tackle insecurity in N'Central

DOMA (NASARAWA)

The Nigerian Army 4 Special Forces, Doma, Nasarawa State, has called for a deeper collaboration among security agencies to tackle insecurity and enhance peaceful coexistence within the North-Central region.

Its Commandant, Maj.-Gen. Olurotimi Azubuike-Awolo, made the call at an event to commemorate the 2025 West African Social Activities (WASA) on Sunday in Doma.

Azubuike-Awolo expressed the Nigerian army's commitment to working with other security agencies towards tack-

ling terrorism, banditry, kidnapping and other forms of security challenges in the region.

The commandant, who underscored the importance of inter-agency collaboration in addressing insecurity, said that the army alone cannot tackle the complex security challenges in the region.

"Collaboration will enable the security agencies to leverage on each other's strengths to enhance intelligence gathering, launch offensive attacks on the criminals with a view to promoting and sustaining peace and stability in the region and the country in general," he said.

The commandant explained

that in line with the Chief of Army Staff command philosophy, his command had recorded remarkable feats in terms of fighting crime and criminalities within its areas of responsibility.

He particularly commended his troops for exhibiting high standard of professionalism

during training exercises and corresponding operational activities within its areas of responsibility

"It is remarkable to note that the command and the ancillary, Operation Whirl Stroke,

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The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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PUBLISHED SINCE MAY 29, 1968

VOL. 46, NO. 1,158

MONDAY 22ND DECEMBER, 2025.

EU offers Edo direct foreign jobs as Okpebholo intensifies safe migration push

—Pg 2

2026 budget: Okpebholo targets infrastructure, jobs in Edo

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Government has said that the 2026 budget and appropriation bill presented to the State House of Assembly by Governor Monday Okpebholo is designed to accelerate infrastructure development, expand employment opportunities and strengthen social services across the state.

The Commissioner for Finance, Engr. Emmanuel Okoe-

bor, disclosed this in Benin City while briefing journalists on the details of the budget.

He explained that budget aligns with the governor's SHINE Agenda, which prioritises Security, Healthcare, Infrastructure, Natural Resources and Agriculture, and Education.

Okoebor said that the 2026 budget represents a departure from routine fiscal planning, describing it as an impact-driven financial framework aimed at structural correction and in-

clusive economic growth.

According to him, the administration deliberately prioritised sectors capable of unlocking productivity, reducing inequality and integrating underserved communities into the state's economic system.

According to him, infrastructure received the largest allocation, with ₦420.62 billion earmarked for the sector, including over ₦305 billion for road construction and rehabilitation.

Okoebor noted that Governor

Okpebholo believes improved road networks will ease the movement of goods and people, lower transaction costs and improve access to healthcare, education and markets, particularly in rural communities.

On agriculture, which received ₦68 billion, the commissioner said the allocation reflects the administration's commitment to food security, job creation and rural stability.

He added that the funding also supports livestock devel-

opment through a dedicated ministry, providing a structured approach to addressing farmer-herder conflicts and strengthening agricultural value chains.

He said the social sector also received attention, with provisions for the recruitment of teachers and health workers, as well as continued investment in schools and healthcare facilities to address manpower shortages and improve service delivery.

Job creation features prominently in the budget, with ₦116.46 billion allocated to employment-related programmes expected to generate jobs through infrastructure de-

velopment, agriculture and expanded government activities.

The budget also sets aside ₦8.9 billion for social welfare programmes targeting women, youths, children and other vulnerable groups to promote inclusive growth.

On governance and accountability, Okoebor said the administration has strengthened oversight through improved procurement processes, adoption of e-procurement systems, regular publication of budget implementation reports and the activation of the Project Monitoring Unit.

He said Governor Okpebholo's decision to describe the 2026 fiscal plan as a "Budget of Hope and Growth" reflects the administration's commitment to delivering completed roads, job opportunities, improved schools and expanded health-care services across Edo State



HANDING OVER CEREMONY:

Former Permanent Secretary (PS), Federal Ministry of Marine and Blue Economy, Olufemi Oloruntola (R), handing over to the new PS, FMMBE, Mrs Fatima Mahmood, during the handing over ceremony at the Ministry's conference room in Abuja.

2026 budget: Experts seek conservative revenue targets, asset reforms

LAGOS

Some financial experts have advised the Federal Government to adopt more realistic revenue assumptions, prudent debt management and innovative asset utilisation to ensure effective appropriation and implementation of the 2026 budget.

The experts, in separate interviews with newsmen in Lagos, said that conservative projections, equity-based asset management and higher oil output would strengthen gov-

ernment finances and reduce implementation risks.

Dr Muda Yusuf, Chief Executive Officer of the Centre for the Promotion of Private Enterprise (CPPE), urged the government to rein in optimism when setting revenue targets, warning that overambitious assumptions often undermine budget performance.

"The more conservative we are, the better for us, regarding budgetary appropriation and implementation," Yusuf said.

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Housewife allegedly fakes own kidnap, extorts N2.5m from husband —Pg 5

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Joshua ends Paul experiment with sixth-round knockout in Miami —Pg 12

EU offers Edo direct foreign jobs as Okpebholo intensifies safe migration push

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Government has secured a major breakthrough in its

migration reform agenda, with the European Union indicating readiness to extend direct foreign employment opportunities to Edo youths.

The Director-General of the Edo State Migration Agency (EDMA), Mr. Lucky Agazuma, disclosed this during a sensitization roadshow held across major streets of Benin City to mark World Migrant Day.

Agazuma said the development followed sustained engagement by the administration of Governor Monday Okpebholo to promote safe, orderly and regular migration,

stressing that the EU has formally invited Edo State to Abuja to finalise modalities for implementing structured foreign employment.

According to him, the Okpebholo administration has prioritised the safety and welfare of Edo citizens at home and abroad, leading to increased rescue, return and reintegration of Edo indigenes stranded in foreign countries.

He noted that renewed confidence in governance and deliberate investment in local talent had encouraged many

returnees to come back and contribute meaningfully to the state's development.

Agazuma said Edo was adopting global best practices, including migration models used in countries such as the Philippines, where structured labour export schemes protect citizens and boost economic growth.

He added that discussions were ongoing with foreign embassies to reduce visa denial rates and address factors driving irregular migration, including high travel costs that push youths toward unsafe routes.

The EDMA boss warned families to be vigilant during the festive season, cautioning against traffickers and fraudulent schemes that lure young people into irregular migration, prostitution and exploitation.

Returnees, including Odigie Osaretin, Glory Agbomoba and Ese Ogbebor, thanked the Edo State Government and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) for facilitating their safe return and empowerment, saying the support received had enabled them to rebuild their lives

Army seeks inter-agency collaboration...

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had an eventful 2025.

"It is also gratifying to state that we completed all training schedules as reflected in the army headquarters forecast of events for the year, notwithstanding some glaring challenges within the period.

"These are in addition to other covert and overt inter-agency collaborative operations carried out under Operation Whirl Stroke and within other formations and units the 4 special command is supporting in all theatres of operation across the country, which is highly commendable.

"We have made remarkable improvements in our operational and administrative performances, especially in the areas bordering on training and other requisite interventions that boosted troops' fighting morale," he added.

Azubuikwe-Awolo, described the WASA annual event as an age-long tradition in the Nigerian army, traceable to the pre-independence period.

He further explained that the annual event aimed at providing a conducive atmosphere to

enable officers, soldiers and their families, as well as civilian friends to interact and make merry.

He also noted that the event aimed at promoting comradeship, deepening esprit de corps and strengthening unity among personnel of the Nigerian army, their families and other members of society.

Speaking, Governor Abdullahi Sule, thanked the military and other security agencies for their efforts toward maintaining law and order as well as ensuring peace in the state and beyond.

The governor, represented by Mr Usman Baba, the Commissioner for Security and Sundry Matters in the state, promised to continually support the security agencies with operational vehicles and other logistics to ensure optimal performance.

He attributed the relative peace in the state to the relentless efforts of the Nigerian army and other security agencies and promised deeper collaboration towards a peaceful state.

Highlight of the event was display of cultural dances by different cultural groups, a tug-of-war contest, presentation of awards to personnel who had distinguished themselves, among others.

2026 budget: Experts seek...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

He cautioned against overly optimistic revenue projections, noting that they often create funding gaps, especially when multiple constituency projects are included.

"We should not be too optimistic regarding revenue assumption, because it creates all sorts of challenges, particularly when there are too many constituency projects for implementation," he said.

Yusuf also stressed the need for stronger debt management, describing Nigeria's rising debt profile as worrisome.

"Our current debt is becoming worrisome, both local and foreign components, and it's a given to service them because it's a first-line charge," he said.

According to him, heavy debt servicing can tighten fiscal space and limit the government's ability to fully execute the budget.

"This could result in tight fiscal space and the inability of government to adequately implement the budget," Yusuf added.

On alternative funding strategies, Dr Ayo Teriba, Chief Executive Officer of Economic Associates, advocated greater equity participation in government assets to boost revenues.

"Allowing private entities

through Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to manage government productive assets will enhance fiscal revenues and support full budget implementation," Teriba said.

He described the approach as a more sustainable option than heavy reliance on international commodity markets, which are vulnerable to shocks.

"This innovative measure to fund the proposed budget is better than relying on international commodity products, which are prone to shocks," he noted.

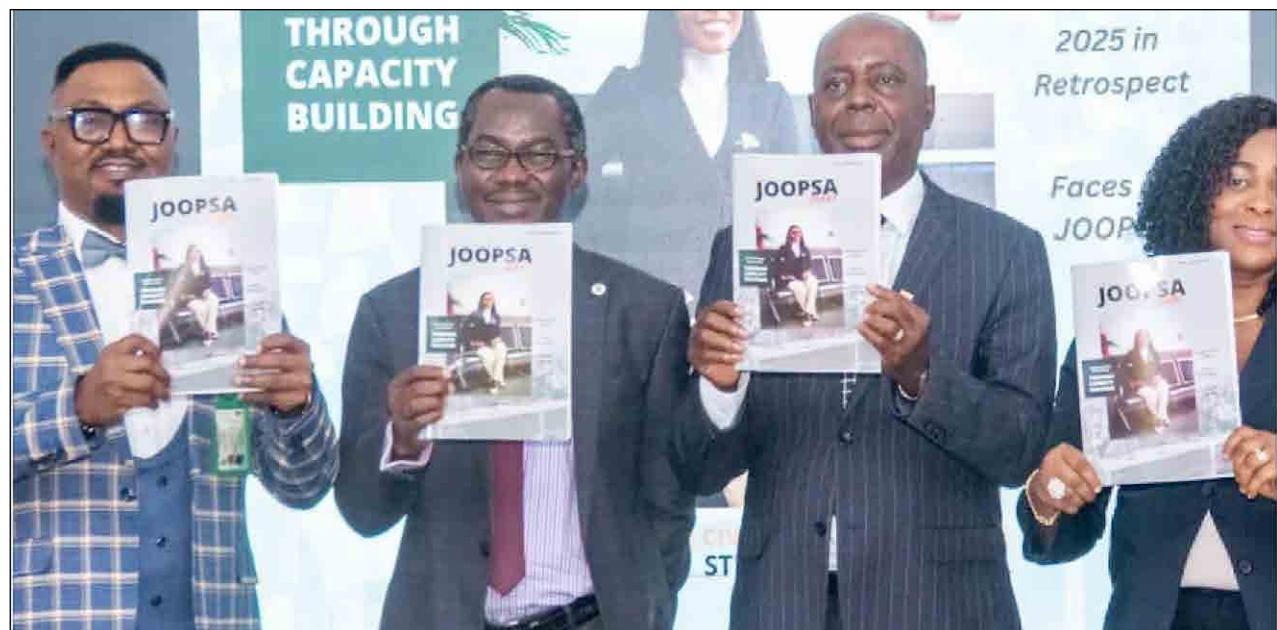
Teriba said the model should also be applied to infrastructure development to avoid abandoned or poorly funded projects.

"This will ensure that projects are completed and avoid the errors of the past where projects are often not executed to the latter due to inadequate funding," he said.

He noted that countries such as Saudi Arabia, Brazil and India were already deploying similar models to meet their infrastructure needs.

Also speaking, Mr Chris Nemedi, a former Director, Research Department, Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), said boosting crude oil production remained critical to strengthening government revenue.

"The government increasing its production above the 1.8



2025 JOOPSA SUMMIT:

L-R: Edo State Head of Service, Dr. Anthony Okungbowa; Founder, Osahon Enabulele Foundation and immediate past President, World Medical Association, Dr Osahon Enabulele; Chairman, Civil Service Commission, Mr. Oko-Ose Ozemhonyelea and Director-General, John Odigie Oyegun Public Service Academy (JOOPSA), Dr. (Mrs.) Gina Otamere, during the 2025 JOOPSA Summit in Benin City.

Edo govt demolishes kidnappers' hideouts on Okpella-Okene expressway

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Government has demolished illegal structures identified as hideouts for suspected kidnappers on the Okpella-Okene Expressway in a renewed effort to combat crime and criminality in the state and its border communities.

The demolished shanties, located around the Obu/Oguda/Bua Cement axis, were uncovered through intelligence reports and investigations as operational bases allegedly used by kidnappers to detain victims

before ransom negotiations.

Findings by security agencies revealed that the area had served as a holding point for abducted persons and had long been feared by residents and motorists due to persistent criminal activities.

Several previous attempts to dislodge the criminal elements were reportedly unsuccessful, making the axis a major security concern for the administration of Governor Monday Okpebholo.

However, on December 20, 2025, at about 9:30 a.m., the Edo State Government carried out the demolition exercise,

pulling down the illegal structures and restoring a sense of safety to the area.

The operation was executed by the Edo State Development and Building Control Agency under the supervision of Town Planning Officer, Williams Ovenseri.

During the exercise, suspects, reportedly resisted security efforts by blocking the Okpella-Okene Expressway at the Obu/Oguda/Bua Cement axis and allegedly using human shields.

Despite the resistance, security agencies maintained control and completed the operation.

The demolition was led by

the Deputy Commissioner of Police, DCP Benjamin Abang, DC Operations, Edo State Command, who coordinated a joint team of police officers and Nigerian Army personnel.

The operation ended without casualties or recorded incidents.

Following the demolition, the area, previously notorious for kidnappings and attacks on motorists, has remained calm, with security agencies maintaining surveillance to prevent a resurgence of criminal activities.

The government said the successful operation underscores the Okpebholo administration's commitment to tackling insecurity and safeguarding lives and property across Edo State.

Yuletide: Idahosa met with staff Christmas

BERNADETTE IDALU

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Deputy Governor, Hon. Dennis Idahosa, has met with staff of his office ahead of the yuletide, urging moderation, family bonding and reflection as they celebrate the essence of the season.

The meeting, held in the deputy governor's office, was organised against the backdrop of the Advent season, a period Christians observe in preparation for the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ.

Idahosa, who interacted freely with staff, said the Christmas season was a time for sober reflection and renewed commitment to Christian values, noting that Christians across the country and beyond were already in a festive mood in anticipation of the birth of Christ.

He cautioned against excesses during the yuletide, stressing that Christmas was not meant for drunkenness or debauchery but for reflection on the significance of Christ's birth and its lessons of humility, sacrifice and love.

The deputy governor also spoke on the importance of

family life, drawing lessons from the biblical account of Joseph's steadfastness in guiding Mary to safety for the birth of Jesus despite daunting circumstances.

According to him, the resilience and faith demonstrated in the story of Christ's birth underscore the strength of family unity and the ability to overcome challenges through love and commitment.

"I wish you a Merry Christmas in advance and a prosperous New Year," Idahosa said.

"Please, go home and spend quality time with your families and loved ones, and avoid unne-

cessary consumption of alcohol."

Responding on behalf of the staff, the Permanent Secretary, Office of the Deputy Governor, Mrs. Abieyuwa Oyenwense, thanked Idahosa for what she described as his fatherly leadership and compassion toward workers.

She said the deputy governor's humane approach had endeared him to staff members, who now see themselves not just as employees but as part of an extended family.

The event ended with prayers for divine protection over the Idahosa family, followed by a praise and worship session, featuring, hymns heralding the birth of Jesus Christ.

NEWS

Afegbua urges information, media officers to reshape public perception, strengthen trust in govt

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Commissioner for Communication and Strategy, Mr. Kasim Afegbua, has urged Information and Media Officers across Ministries, Departments, Agencies, parastatals and the 18 local government councils to play a more strategic role in reshaping public

perception and strengthening trust between government and the people.

Afegbua gave the charge while speaking to journalists at the close of a three-day media training workshop organised for Information and Media Officers across MDAs and local governments in the state.

According to the commissioner, Information Officers

must see themselves as a critical bridge between government and citizens, who are entitled to understand government policies, programmes and the overall direction of governance.

He stressed that the officers are not merely conveyors of information but strategic partners in governance, with a responsibility to go beyond rou-

tine dissemination to actively build public confidence and trust.

Afegbua emphasised the need for stronger collaboration, continuous self-development and effective community engagement to deepen communication across all levels of government.

"The whole idea of the workshop is to encourage our

information officers to be more confident in what they do. Information management is a very sensitive aspect of governance," he said.

"If you give out the wrong information, it may cause problems and create chaos, but the right information will ensure that the people are properly informed," he added.

Afegbua explained that the training was aimed at building a coordinated and seamless communication framework that bridges the gap between the state and local governments.

"As communication and information officers in the various ministries, parastatals, agencies and local government councils, we are trying to build a coordinated approach that will allow us to share information in a symbiotic manner," he said.

The commissioner reiterated the government's commitment to transparency and truthfulness, stressing that communication must not be rooted in propaganda or falsehood.

"We do not want to dwell in the realm of propaganda or falsehoods. Our duty is to identify facts and let the people know the truth," he said.

He announced that the training would be institutionalised and held quarterly to sustain engagement and deepen conversations around governance.

Earlier, a resource person and lecturer from Auchu Polytechnic, Mr. Kelly Odaro, commended the Edo State Government for organising the workshop.

Odaro said his session focused on propaganda and its proper application in governance communication, adding that the training would significantly improve the performance of participants.



177TH STATE EXECO 5KM WALK:

Governor Douye Diri of Bayelsa State (M); Commissioner for Youth Development of the state, Daniel Igali (2nd L), and others, during the 177th State Executive Council Five-Kilometer Prosperity Walk, in honor of the Late Deputy Governor Lawrence Ewurudjakpo in Yenagoa recently.

Okpebholo condoles Idahosa family over passing of patriarch

BENIN CITY

Governor Monday Okpebholo of Edo State has condoled with the Idahosa family of Ehor in Uhumwonde Local Government Area over the death of its patriarch, Hon. Charles Idahosa, popularly known as Charly Tempo.

Governor Okpebholo expressed shock over the sudden passing of Hon. Idahosa, describing him as a strong party leader and eminent Edo

indigene who contributed immensely to the growth and development of the state.

He eulogised the late Idahosa, who served Edo State in the past as a commissioner, board member and special adviser, describing him as a genuine party stalwart who believed in institution-building.

The governor prayed for the repose of his soul and for God to grant comfort to his wife, children, family and the people of Ehor over the loss.

Edo taskforce foils kidnap plot, rescues woman in Benin

BENIN CITY

Operatives of the Edo State Taskforce have rescued a young woman and arrested three suspected kidnapers during a routine patrol along the Aduwawa axis of Benin City.

The suspects—James Ehigator from Uromi, Atiku Muhammad from Suleja in Niger State, and Osas Iwagbonsoria from Ekpoma—were intercepted while conveying the victim in an Audi vehicle with registration number EPE 427

GS.

Speaking to journalists, the Commissioner for Security and Public Safety, Hon. Festus Ebea, said the operation underscored the resolve of Governor Monday Okpebholo's administration to dismantle criminal networks and ensure public safety across the state.

He disclosed that the Governor had directed all security agencies, including the Edo State Security Corps, to strengthen intelligence sharing, deploy surveillance tools and intensify joint operations,

particularly during the festive season.

Preliminary investigations revealed that operatives acted on intelligence reports about suspicious movements around the Upper Mission Extension area before intercepting the vehicle.

The rescued victim, who pleaded for anonymity, said she was deceived into entering the vehicle by one of the suspects who claimed to be seeking directions while she was on her way to visit her elder sister.

Commander of the Edo State Taskforce, CSP Michael Anetor, said inconsistencies in the suspects' responses during a routine stop raised suspicion, leading to further investigation and the eventual arrest.

The suspects are currently being profiled and will be handed over to appropriate security agencies for prosecution.

The state government warned criminal elements to desist or leave Edo, assuring residents that security operations would remain sustained.

Public service agenda: Edo relaunches State-owned e-governance platform

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Government has held its first civil service agenda-setting meeting ahead of the 2026 planning cycle, unveiling a fully restructured, state-owned e-governance platform designed to improve efficiency and transparency.

The meeting, held at the John Odigie-Oyegun Public Service Academy (JOOPSA), was convened by the Office of the State Head of Service and brought together commissioners, Permanent Secretaries, Directors and e-governance champions across Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs).

Declaring the meeting open, the Head of Service, Dr. Anthony Okungbowa, said the session was a strategic forum to align priorities, define key performance indicators and strengthen accountability under Governor Monday Okpebholo's S.H.I.N.E Agenda.

He explained that the re-

vised e-governance platform addressed previous challenges related to intellectual property ownership, backend access and data control, noting that the new system is now fully owned and controlled by the state.

Commissioner for Communications and Digital Economy, Hon. Ohimai Ehijimotor, said the platform had undergone rigorous testing and would enhance service delivery by making government processes faster, smarter and more transparent.

Presentations at the meeting reviewed the service's 2025 performance and outlined strategic adjustments for 2026, while participants expressed optimism that the reintroduced e-governance system would significantly boost collaboration and productivity across MDAs.

The meeting ended with syndicate sessions aimed at deepening institutional reforms and sustaining Edo's public service transformation.

Edo govt committed to build enduring public service —HoS

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Government has reaffirmed its commitment to building a future-ready public service as the John Odigie-Oyegun Public Service Academy (JOOPSA) hosted its 2025 Summit and unveiled the maiden edition of the JOOPSA Diary.

The summit, themed "Transforming Skills for the Future World of Work," was declared open by the Head of Service, Dr. Anthony Okungbowa, who said the academy's growth reflected deliberate investment in learning and

competence development by Governor Monday Okpebholo's administration.

Okungbowa described JOOPSA as a critical pillar in repositioning the civil service for efficiency, innovation and effective service delivery, stressing that continuous training remained essential for governance in a rapidly changing world.

Chairman of the Edo State Civil Service Commission, Mr. Oko-Ose Samuel Ozemhonyelea, mni, applauded the Governor's reform agenda and commended JOOPSA's Director-General, Dr. Gina

Otamere, for running an institution that meets international standards.

He assured civil servants that promotion backlogs were being addressed and would be largely cleared by the first quarter of 2026.

In her address, Otamere said the summit underscored the central role of learning and development in driving productivity, institutional effectiveness and economic growth, noting that human capital remained the true engine of development.

Delivering the keynote lecture, founder of the Osa-

hon Enabulele Foundation, Dr. Osahon Enabulele, urged public servants to embrace emerging technologies, including Artificial Intelligence, as tools to enhance productivity rather than replace human capacity.

He identified digital unpreparedness, weak performance management and ethical lapses as major challenges confronting the public service.

The summit featured a high-level panel session with senior officials and attracted permanent secretaries, directors, heads of MDAs and partners.

Yuletide: Okpebholo boosts diaspora engagement, targets EU jobs as Edo deepens safe migration drive

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Government has intensified efforts to protect, engage and empower its citizens at home and abroad, recording over 20,000 diaspora engagements within two weeks and advancing plans for European Union-linked foreign employment under a strengthened safe migration framework.

The Director-General of the Edo State Diaspora Agency (EDSDA), Dr. Loretta Oduware Ogboro-Okor, disclosed this during a joint press brief-

ing with the Edo State Tourism Agency (EDTA) in Benin City, ahead of the yuletide.

Ogboro-Okor said the engagements were recorded following the launch of the Diaspora Help Desk, established to provide structured support for Edo indigenes abroad on investment opportunities, reintegration processes, identity documentation and welfare-related concerns.

According to her, the response reflects renewed confidence in the diaspora engagement strategy of the administration of Governor

Monday Okpebholo, adding that the agency has mapped more than 300 volunteers across different countries to build a comprehensive diaspora database for policy planning and targeted interventions.

She said EDSDA has strengthened collaboration with key national institutions, including the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NiDCOM) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while sustaining outreach

to Edo diaspora communities in Italy, Canada and the United Kingdom to promote reintegration, partnerships and socio-economic development.

Ogboro-Okor added that the agency is also engaging traditional institutions and local government chairmen to drive community-based diaspora initiatives across the state.

On her part, the Director-General of EDTA, Lady Vivian Elabor, assured visitors

and returnees that Edo State remains safe and welcoming during the festive season, attributing growing confidence to the Okpebholo administration's investments in security and governance.

In a related development, the Director-General of the Edo State Migration Agency (EDMA), Mr. Lucky Agazuma, said the state is being positioned for foreign direct employment opportunities from

countries within the European Union as part of a broader push for safe, orderly and regular migration.

Agazuma disclosed this while addressing journalists during a sensitization roadshow in Benin City to mark World Migrant Day.

He said the Okpebholo administration has prioritised the protection of Edo citizens at home and abroad, recording progress in the rescue, return and reintegration of indigenes previously stranded in foreign countries.

Christmas: FONWIP, Foundation Builders donate food items to orphans in Benin

BENIN CITY

In the spirit of the yuletide, Forum of Nigeria Women in Politics (FONWIP) and Foundation Builders have presented food items to orphans as part of activities marking the 2025 Christmas celebration.

The items were presented to children at the Tender Heart Orphanage and Charity Home International, Benin City.

Speaking during the presentation, Mrs Joy Adodo said the gesture was in line with the annual tradition of the President of FONWIP, Hon. Florence Gbinigie, to celebrate Christmas with orphans and less-privileged children.

According to her, the FONWIP president consistently reaches out to the children every year with gifts and food items to enable them to share in the joy of the season.

She added that FONWIP

partners, Apostles Christopher and Lakesha Colander of Kingdom International Ministries, New York, USA, also joined in celebrating with the children.

Adodo expressed optimism that more gifts would be presented to the children as the season progresses, noting that FONWIP remains committed to supporting vulnerable children.

She further commended FONWIP and Foundation Builders for the gesture, while appreciating caregivers at the orphanage for their dedication, praying that God would continue to strengthen them in their work.

In appreciation, the children offered prayers and sang special songs for FONWIP and Foundation Builders, asking God to bless them for being a source of joy and support during the festive season.

Items presented included bags of rice, beans, corn, red oil, biscuits, among others.

Anambra police arrest 5 robbery suspects posing as vigilantes

AWKA

The Anambra State Police Command has arrested five male suspects allegedly posing as vigilante operatives and using firearms to rob unsuspecting members of the public.

The Police Public Relations Officer, SP Tochukwu Ikenga, disclosed this in a statement issued on Sunday in Awka.

"In furtherance of ongoing investigations into criminal conspiracy and armed robbery, operatives of the Rapid Re-

sponse Squad, Awkuzu, have arrested five suspects," he said.

Ikenga said items recovered from the suspects include two pump-action guns, five live cartridges, one ash-coloured shuttle bus, face masks, number plates and other incriminating items.

He said the suspects, during interrogation, admitted involvement in criminal activities and revealed how they operated in a shuttle bus under the guise of vigilante personnel.

According to him, the suspects are cooperating with the police and providing useful information to assist in uncovering other accomplices.

Ikenga assured residents that the command remains committed to the protection of lives and property, urging the public to support the police with timely and credible information.



JOINT PRESS BRIEFING:

Director-General (DG), Edo State Diaspora Agency (EDSDA) Oduware Ogboro-Okor (L) and Director-General, Edo State Tourism Agency (EDTA), Lady Vivian Elabor at a joint press briefing in Benin City on activities of their agencies

Auchi inferno: Edo govt assures victims of support, begins assessment for preventive measures

AUCHI

The Edo State Government has reiterated its commitment to the safety and welfare of citizens following the recent petrol tanker fire incident in Auchi, Etsako West Local Government Area, which left several persons injured but recorded no death.

A high-powered delegation led by the Chief of Staff to the Governor, Mallam Gani Audu, visited the scene of the incident and hospitals where vic-

tims are receiving treatment, on the directive of Governor Monday Okpebholo.

The Chief of Staff said the delegation was mandated by the governor to immediately proceed to Auchi to sympathise with the community and carry out an on-the-spot assessment of the incident.

"We were given a clear mandate by the governor when we heard of this incident on December 17 that we should come to Auchi immediately to show solidarity and sympathise with the

Auchi community and the victims. We are here on the directive of His Excellency, Senator Monday Okpebholo, to assess exactly what happened," Audu said.

He explained that although the governor would have personally visited the area, he was unavoidably engaged in Abuja on state matters and therefore constituted a strong delegation to demonstrate the responsiveness of his administration.

"When you have the Chief of Staff, the Commissioner for Public Safety and Security, the Chief

Whip of the Edo State House of Assembly, the Director-General of EdoSEMA and officials of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), you can see that this is a responsible and responsive government that cares about the people," he said.

Audu noted that the delegation visited the scene of the inferno as well as hospitals where victims were admitted, adding that a detailed report would be submitted to the governor to guide long-term preventive actions.

NSCDC to regulate scrap dealers, intensify crackdown on infrastructure vandalism in Edo

BENIN CITY

A security agency in Edo has unveiled plans to regulate scrap dealers in the state from 2026, aiming to strengthen efforts against the vandalism of critical national assets and infrastructure.

Mr Saidi Akintayo, State Commandant of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), announced the plan in Benin City

Akintayo, who was represented by Deputy Comman-

dant Mr Bola Morantiola, made the announcement during the first state-level stakeholders' meeting with scrap marketers and dealers.

The commandant said the meeting was convened to address the growing security and economic threats posed by unregulated scrap metal activities.

He said the engagement was aimed at establishing a lawful, transparent and accountable framework for the sector in the state.

According to him, NSCDC is statutorily mandated to protect critical national assets and

infrastructure and to regulate activities with security implications, including scrap metal trading.

"In Edo State, the NSCDC has been entrusted with monitoring, regulating and enforcing compliance among scrap dealers to ensure their operations do not threaten public safety, economic development or national security," he said.

Akintayo said scrap trading had increasingly been linked to the vandalism of electricity installations, telecommunications facilities, rail lines, water infrastructure and other public

and private assets.

He said that such acts undermine government investment, disrupt essential services, and endanger lives.

According to him, the corps is adopting a dual approach of sensitization and enforcement, stressing, however, that awareness and education remain critical to achieving voluntary compliance.

"The engagement is aimed at educating dealers on legal frameworks, proper registration, scrap source documentation, adherence to standards, and the risks of dealing in illicit materials," he stated.

CHANGE OF NAME

I formerly known as **OSAZEMEN MARY EHIMENMA** now wish to be known as **OSAZEMEN MARY**. Former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and the general public should please take note.

NEWS

Osun APC leaders call for party cohesion ahead of governorship election

OSOGBO

The All Progressives Congress (APC) leaders' forum in Obokun Local Government Area of Osun State has urged party members to shun divisive actions capable of undermining its chances in the August 8, 2026, governorship election.

The appeal is contained in a communiqué issued by the co-conveners of the forum, Mr Olatunbosun Oyintiloye and Mr Tunji Adesokun, and made available on Sunday in Osogbo.

The forum said that if members of the party could work together in unity, the APC candidate, Mr Bola Oyebamiji, would record a landslide victory

at the polls.

It called for unity among party faithful ahead of the election, urging members to avoid actions or strategies that could create internal conflicts or splits.

The communiqué described Oyebamiji as a loyal, committed and highly experienced politician, stressing that his victory in

the election was non-negotiable if party members remained loyal and committed.

The forum appealed to leaders of the APC at both the state and national levels to work hard to unite all interests and opinions within the party to ensure victory.

"We are approaching a major election, and we must ensure that we go into the poll as a united and cohesive group.

"The choice of Oyebamiji as

the party's candidate has made the task easier, but our leaders at both the state and national levels must still work hard to prevent internal sabotage.

"We, the members of the forum, are in full alignment with the choice of Oyebamiji as our flag bearer, and we will mobilise for his victory across the grassroots," the communiqué stated.

The forum said it agreed with the resolution of party leaders that every member should jettison allegiance to other aspirants once the party produced a candidate, irrespective of the constitutional mode of choice.

While commending party leaders for ensuring a peaceful primary in the state, the forum urged them to bring all aggrieved members together for the success of the party.

According to the forum, indications showed that the electorate was yearning for the return of the APC to power in the state, but members must shun divisive tendencies.

The forum commended President Bola Tinubu, the National Chairman of the party, Prof. Nentawe Yilwatda, the national leader of the party, Chief Bisi Akande, and the Minister of Marine and Blue Economy, Alhaji Adegboyega Oyetola, for their continued support for the party.

It also said the contributions of the National Secretary of the party, Sen. Ajibola Basiru, the Chairman of the party in the state, Mr Tajudeen Lawal, the leader of the APC elders' forum, Pa Sola Akinwunmi, and other party leaders in the state could not be overemphasised.



INAUGURATION OF LASHMA-AID:

L-R: Permanent Secretary (PS), Lagos Health District II, Dr Dayo Lajide; PS, Lagos State Health Management Agency (LASHMA), Dr Emmanuella Zamba; Chairman of LASHMA Board, Dr Adebayo Adedewe; Chairman, Committee on Health, LSHA, Musibau Lawal; Special Adviser to the Governor on Health, Dr Kemi Ogunyemi; Permanent Secretary, Lagos State Public Service Office, Mrs Sunkanmi Oyegbola and Special Adviser to the Governor on Parasternal Monitoring Office, Mr Ibrahim Obanikoro, during the inauguration of LASHMA-AID in Lagos.

Health sector reforms restoring trust, industrial harmony —Pate

ABUJA

The Coordinating Minister of Health and Social Welfare, Prof. Muhammad Pate, says ongoing reforms are restoring confidence in Nigeria's health system while addressing longstanding grievances of health workers.

Pate stated this on Sunday in a broadcast posted on his verified X handle, @muhammadpate, where he reflected on decades of challenges faced by health professionals.

The broadcast also reviewed progress recorded in the last

two and a half years of the administration.

He acknowledged that for years, health workers served Nigerians under difficult conditions with limited recognition, noting that successive governments failed to provide an enabling environment for the sector's best talents to thrive.

"Under the compassionate leadership of President Bola Tinubu, we acknowledge that successive governments did not always provide the enabling environment for our best talents to thrive," he said.

Pate said poor implementa-

tion of past commitments led to widespread dissatisfaction among health workers.

He particularly mentioned members of the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), the Joint Health Sector Unions (JOHESU), and the National Association of Nigerian Nurses and Midwives (NANNM).

According to him, this informed the administration's deliberate focus on cultivating industrial harmony through constructive engagement with stakeholders and addressing both legacy and current challenges.

"In spite of recent disruptions by a small segment of health workers, the overwhelming ma-

majority of Nigeria's capable health workforce have continued to report for duty, serving our people with dedication, care and innovation," Pate said.

The minister said that while not all inherited challenges had been fully resolved, unprecedented progress had been achieved under President Tinubu's leadership through transparent negotiations with health sector unions.

He disclosed that the retirement age for clinically skilled health workers had been increased from 60 to 65 years, outstanding arrears from 2023 to date had been paid, and a new hazard allowance was currently being processed.

Housewife allegedly fakes own kidnap, extorts N2.5m from husband

LAGOS

The Police Command in Lagos State has arrested a 26-year-old housewife and her 30-year-old accomplice for allegedly staging her own kidnapping and extorting N2.5 million from her husband.

The command's spokesperson, SP Abimbola Adebisi, confirmed the arrest in a statement issued on Saturday in Lagos.

Adebisi said the command received a distress call on November 24 from the husband of the suspect through one of

its emergency lines, reporting that his wife had been kidnapped by armed men.

She said the caller disclosed that the alleged kidnappers initially demanded a ransom of N10 million, which was later reduced to N3 million, adding that after he paid N2.5 million, the woman was still not released.

"Upon receipt of the complaint, the Command Special Squad immediately deployed human and technical assets to track the alleged kidnappers.

"The supposed victim was eventually released and reunited

with her family," Adebisi said.

She said that during police debriefing, the woman claimed she was abducted by six armed men in a silver Toyota Venza, taken to their hideout and dispossessed of her iPhone 12 Pro Max.

"She further claimed that the ransom paid by her husband was first credited into her bank account before being handed over to the kidnappers," she said.

Adebisi, however, said police investigations revealed several inconsistencies in her narrative.

She said that on December

3, operatives apprehended the accomplice in Ede area of Osun State, adding that a SIM card used to register the WhatsApp account through which ransom negotiations were conducted was recovered from him.

"During interrogation, the accomplice confessed that the suspect requested the use of his SIM card to create the WhatsApp account used for the ransom negotiations.

"He admitted providing the one-time password sent to his line, which enabled her to operate the account," she said.

Christmas: Gov Nwifuru disburses N254m to widows, elderly in Ebonyi

ABAKALIKI

Governor Francis Nwifuru of Ebonyi State has approved the disbursement of N254 million to indigent widows and elderly persons in the state for the Christmas celebrations.

The governor, represented by his Deputy, Mrs Patricia Obila, made this known during the Elders and Widows Christmas Party organised by the state government.

Nwifuru said the beneficiaries, numbering 5,008, would receive a cash gift of N50,000 each.

He said the celebration of indigent widows and the elderly had become an annual ritual to appreciate their contributions to the workforce and development of the state.

The governor described them as special people whose prayers had kept the administration progressing.

He urged them to continue believing in the government and promised not to disappoint the people of the state.

In his remarks, the Commissioner for Local Government, Mr Uchenna Igwe, said the celebration demonstrated the commitment of Governor Francis Nwifuru to the downtrodden.

Igwe advised them to continue praying for prosperity and peace in the state.

The Chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria in the state, Rev. Sam Nwoko-lo, appreciated the governor for emulating Jesus Christ by showing kindness during the festive season.

Some beneficiaries, including Mr Cyril Obazi and Mrs Grace Nnachi, commended the governor for his magnanimity, particularly in the payment of gratuities to retired citizens, and pledged continued support for the administration.

Army eliminates 21 terrorists, intercepts logistics in Borno

ABUJA

Nigerian Army troops under Operation Hadin Kai have neutralised more than 21 terrorists during a fierce encounter in Sojiri and Kayamla villages along the Damboa-Maiduguri Road in Borno State.

The operation was carried out in collaboration with the Civilian Joint Task Force.

A source at Army Headquarters disclosed that the encounter occurred around 12:15 a.m. on Sunday, following credible intelligence on a large gathering of terrorists suspected to be preparing coordinated attacks.

The source said troops mobilised and engaged about 100 terrorists around noon on Saturday.

According to him, despite attempts by another group to

flank the troops, the forces held their ground using superior firepower.

"At least 17 bodies were confirmed at the scene, with more suspected as blood trails were observed leading into nearby bushes.

"Items recovered included arms, ammunition and other logistics, as troops continued to apply pressure to deny the terrorists freedom of movement," he said.

The source said a tactical withdrawal was carried out to stabilise the situation and allow troops to regroup, noting that troop morale remained high.

He reiterated the commitment of the military to sustaining offensive operations to protect Maiduguri, Damboa and surrounding communities in the North-East.

OBUBRA (C'RIVER)

Foundation hosts 100 widows in C'River

No fewer than 100 widows from Obubra and Etung Local Government Areas of Cross River State were, on Sunday, hosted by the wife of the Governor of Cross River State, Mrs Bishop Eyoawan Otu.

The humanitarian gesture was carried out under her foundation, Humanities Without Borders Initiative, in collaboration with the Abon Abang Foundation.

The First Lady, who was represented by her Special Adviser on Non-Governmental Organisations, Dr Inyang Asibong,

reiterated her commitment to promoting dignity, care and inclusion for vulnerable groups across the state.

She said sustained care for vulnerable persons could be life-changing, noting that such support helps beneficiaries access basic needs, feel included in society and live with dignity.

"Widows often face unique challenges such as economic instability, social isolation and emotional distress. Providing care and support can make a huge difference in their lives," she said.

Also speaking, the Executive Director of the Abon Abang Foundation, Dr George Abang, said the initiative was designed to enable beneficiaries to enjoy the yuletide season in an atmosphere of joy, warmth and shared happiness.

Abang pledged the foundation's continued commitment

to addressing the plight of widows and other vulnerable persons in Cross River State.

"They need our support and care, especially during this yuletide season, which teaches love and compassion for one another," he said.

Some of the beneficiaries expressed appreciation for the

gesture.

One of them, Mrs Jessica Agbor, said she was grateful to be remembered, particularly during festive periods when widows often lack support.

"It is not easy to live without a husband. Sometimes, it feels like the community has forgotten you," she said.

Another beneficiary, Mrs Mary Ewang, described the gesture as a source of relief and encouragement.

"These gestures show that we are being integrated into the scheme of things. God bless the governor's wife and the Abon Abang Foundation for remembering us," she said.

Kogi Police urge public cooperation for safe holidays

LOKOJA

The Kogi State Police Command has urged residents to collaborate with security agencies to ensure a peaceful and safe yuletide season.

The Commissioner of Police, Mr Naziru Kankarofi, gave the advice on Sunday through the command's spokesperson, CSP William Ovyé-Aya, in Lokoja.

Kankarofi emphasised the importance of vigilance, urging residents to promptly report suspicious activities, avoid illegal gatherings and shun reckless behaviour.

He advised motorists to obey traffic regulations and drive responsibly, while also encouraging communities to activate neighbourhood watch programmes and work closely

with community leaders.

The police commissioner further urged residents to report suspicious strangers and activities to the nearest police station.

Kankarofi commended the people of Kogi State for their resilience and law-abiding conduct.

"With these simple precautions, we can safeguard our families, markets, churches and roads.

"Let this Christmas be a season of hope, peace and security. If you see something, report immediately. Information from citizens helps us prevent crimes.

"We are stronger when communities and the police unite. Together, let us make Kogi a crime-free Christmas and beyond," he said.

**INAUGURATION:**

Olubadan of Ibadanland, Oba Rashidi Ladoja (L) and Chief of Army Staff (COAS), Lt. Gen. Waidi Shaibu, during the Inauguration of the Affordable Home Ownership option for All Soldiers at Ako.

Enugu APC trains 1,300 ward agents on e-registration

ENUGU

The All Progressives Congress (APC) has trained 1,300 ward agents for its electronic registration exercise in Enugu State.

The party also expressed confidence that it would complete the registration exercise before the January 30, 2026 deadline set by its National Chairman, Professor Nentawe Yilwatda.

The APC E-registration Coordinator in the state, Chief Flavours Eze, disclosed this at the weekend while taking journalists around the four training centres where the agents were trained.

Eze said the party trained five agents in each of the state's 260 wards, ahead of the registration exercise scheduled to commence in January 2026.

He described the ward agents as the backbone of the party at the grassroots and urged them to fully understand the training in order to deliver effectively on their assignments.

"The APC wants to ensure there are no mistakes during the registration exercise. If we get it wrong, there will be serious challenges.

"That is why we are making sure everyone understands the process. I am happy with their level of comprehension," he said.

Eze added that beyond the ward agents, the party would deploy canvassers to rural communities to mobilise more members.

According to him, the Governor of Enugu State is taking the registration exercise seriously and has pledged to provide necessary logistics to ensure its success.

He urged residents of the state to appreciate the gesture of the state government, noting that empowerment packages have also been put in place to support the people

**ENUGU GOV. PETER MBAH**

1,420 persons benefit from IFAD-LIFE-ND projects

MBO (AKWA IBOM)

The Federal Government-International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) Livelihood Improvement Family Enterprises in the Niger Delta (LIFE-ND) project said that no fewer than 1,420 persons have benefited from the programme in Akwa Ibom State between September 2024 and date.

The project, funded by the Federal Government and IFAD, is being implemented by the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) with counterpart funding from nine participating states in the Niger Delta region.

The State Project Coordinator, Mr Solomon Joe, disclosed this on Sunday on the sidelines of a media tour of LIFE-ND

facilities at Ibetu community, Mbo Local Government Area.

Joe, who was represented by the Knowledge Management and Communication Officer of the project, Mr Mfon Umoeke, said the project targets 4,250 beneficiaries drawn from 10 selected communities across 10 local government areas of the state.

He explained that 350 persons benefited in the first batch, 500 in the second batch and 750 in the third batch.

"The project duration is six years. It was originally designed to run for 12 years from 2019, but we lost six years due to non-release of funds by the NDDC.

"We effectively commenced implementation on September 13, 2025, and within one year we have recorded remarkable

achievements," he said.

The National Project Coordinator, FG/IFAD-LIFE-ND, Dr Abiodun Sanni, said the media tour was organised to enable journalists gain first-hand understanding of the project's operations and impact.

Sanni, who was represented by the Knowledge Management and Communication Coordinator of LIFE-ND, Mr Jerus Uvieghara, said the tour would also help the media report accurately on project interventions as implementation progresses.

According to him, the project targets individuals aged 18 to 35 years, with emphasis on women-headed households, youths and persons with disabilities.

He said LIFE-ND focuses on seven priority commodity value chains, including rice, cas-

sava, palm oil, cocoa, poultry and fisheries.

Sanni said the project's overall goal is to transform the rural economy of the Niger Delta, enabling rural populations to achieve prosperity and equitable benefits.

"The project development objective is to enhance income, food security and job creation for rural youths and women through sustainable agri-enterprise development.

"It operates by identifying experienced agri-entrepreneurs in rural areas and clustering youths and women who have interest in specific enterprises.

"They are attached to master trainers, also known as incubators, where they acquire hands-on experience. The trainees are referred to as incubates," he said.

NADDCC pushes bill to back automotive policy with legislation

ABUJA

The National Automotive Design and Development Council (NADDCC) said it is intensifying efforts to secure legislative backing for the National Automotive Industry Development Plan (NAIDP) to ensure policy stability and attract long-term investment into Nigeria's automotive sector.

The Director-General of

NADDCC, Mr Joseph Osanipin, disclosed this during an interactive session with journalists in Abuja.

Osanipin said that while the NAIDP currently exists as a policy framework, it must be strengthened through an Act of the National Assembly to provide legal certainty for investors.

He explained that automotive manufacturing requires huge capital outlay, noting that establishing a functional auto-

mobile manufacturing plant could cost between three and four billion dollars.

According to him, such levels of investment demand guarantees that go beyond policy pronouncements.

He said converting the NAIDP into legislation would ensure continuity, protect investments and shield the sector from abrupt policy reversals.

Osanipin added that discussions were ongoing with rel-

evant stakeholders, including lawmakers and industry players, to actualise the proposed legislation.

He said the bill would institutionalize incentives, strengthen local content development and enforce standards across the automotive value chain.

Osanipin described the move as critical to Nigeria's ambition of building a sustainable and globally competitive automotive industry.

NEWS

Court rejects motion seeking to stop David Mark leadership from holding ADC congress

ABUJA

The Federal High Court in Abuja has rejected an application seeking

to restrain the African Democratic Congress (ADC), led by Senator David Mark, from holding congresses. Justice Emeka Nwite, in a ruling

on the motion ex-parte filed by Nafiu-Bala Gombe, a former Deputy National Chairman of the ADC, and moved by his counsel, Michael Agber, held that the re-

spondents must be put on notice in the interest of justice.

"I have listened to the submission of the learned counsel for the applicant and have also gone through the affidavit evidence with exhibits thereto along with the written address.

"It is not in dispute that this

honourable court made an order for the defendants/respondents in this suit to show cause why the interim order restraining them from acting as leaders of the 1st defendant (ADC) should not be made on September 4, 2025.

"It is not in dispute that the parties have exchanged processes pursuant to the said order and are waiting for hearing of the said application.

"It is also not in dispute that the present application is an offshoot of the substantive matter.

"It is not in dispute that all the parties are already before this court.

"Hence, any ex-parte application without notice to the other parties will be overreaching.

"Consequently, the interest of justice will be met by putting the other parties on notice.

"Accordingly, the application is refused," Justice Nwite ruled.

The judge adjourned the matter to February 3, 2026, for the respondents to show cause.

In the motion ex-parte marked FHC/ABJ/CS/1819/2025, Gombe listed the ADC, Senator David Mark and Ogbeni Rauf Aregbesola as 1st

to 3rd defendants/respondents. Also joined as 4th and 5th defendants/respondents were the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and Chief Ralph Nwosu.

The application, dated and filed on December 15, sought three reliefs, including an interim injunction restraining the ADC from holding or convening any convention, congress, conference or meeting for the purpose of electing or ratifying any person into its executive committees or other governing bodies, pending the determination of the motion on notice.

He also sought an order restraining INEC from monitoring, observing or recognising any persons purportedly elected, as well as an order directing the maintenance of the status quo in the management and organisation of the party.

Earlier, when the matter was called, Agber informed the court that he had a motion ex-parte to move.

Justice Nwite recalled that a similar application had earlier been refused, with a directive that respondents be put on notice.



SEND-OFF:

Head of the Civil Service of the Federation, Mrs Didi Walson-Jack (4TH L); Permanent Secretary (PS), Federal Ministry of Marine and Blue Economy (FMM/BE), Mrs Fatima Mahmood (L); former PS, FMMBE, Olufemi Oloruntola (3rd L); retiring Director, Maritime Safety and Security, Babatunde Bombata (M); retiring Director, Human Resource Management, Esifa Akon (3rd R); former Director, Maritime Safety Services, Dr Mercy Ilori (2nd R) and the representative of Minister of MM and BE Dr Charles Okaga, during the send-off in honour of retiring PS and Four Directors in Abuja on at the weekend.

Court jails trader 30 months for stealing items worth N420,000

JOS

Magistrates' Court in Jos, has sentenced a 23-year-old trader, Moses Pam, to 30 months' imprisonment for stealing home appliances valued at N420,000.

The Magistrate, Mrs Irene Pati, sentenced the convict

after he pleaded guilty to a three-count charge of trespass, housebreaking and theft.

Pam was sentenced to six months' imprisonment for trespass, 12 months for housebreaking and 12 months for theft, with the sentences to run concurrently.

The court, however, gave him

an option of an N80,000 fine.

The magistrate also ordered the convict to pay N120,000 as compensation for a home theatre set that was not recovered.

Earlier, the prosecutor, Inspector Daniel Damulak, told the court that the complainant, Mr Ishaya Zhacom, reported the case on July 20 at the An-

glo-Jos Police Station.

He said the convict broke into the complainant's house and stole a smart television, two home theatre sets, curtains and bedsheets, all valued at N420,000.

He said the offence contravened provisions of the Plateau State Penal Code Law.

Court jails teenager 18 months for housebreaking and theft

JOS

Magistrates' Court in Jos, has sentenced a 19-year-old man, Samuel Emmanuel, to 18 months' imprisonment for housebreaking and stealing.

Emmanuel pleaded guilty to a two-count charge of house-

breaking and theft.

The Magistrate, Mrs Irene Pati, convicted him after the prosecutor reviewed the facts of the case.

The court sentenced him to six months' imprisonment for trespass and 12 months' imprisonment for theft, with the sentences to run consecutively.

He was, however, given an option of a N20,000 fine for trespass and N30,000 fine for theft.

The prosecutor, Inspector Daniel Damulak, told the court that the complainant, Mr Victor Daniel, reported the case on November 3 at the Anglo-Jos Police Station.

He said the convict broke

into the complainant's house through the ceiling and stole a television set, gas cylinder, wristwatch, perfume and shoes.

He said Emmanuel was arrested while attempting to board a tricycle with the stolen items.

The offence contravened the Plateau State Penal Code Law.

Two men bag one-year jail term each for stealing phone

JOS

Magistrates' Court in Jos has sentenced two men, Kefas Bala and Shamma Emmanuel, to one year's imprisonment each for stealing a mobile phone valued at N140,000.

The convicts, aged 20 and 22 respectively, pleaded guilty to charges of conspiracy and theft.

The Magistrate, Mrs Irene Pati, sentenced them to six months' imprisonment each for conspiracy and six months each for theft, to run consecutively.

Each convict was given an option of a N30,000 fine.

The court also ordered them to pay N70,000 each as compensation to the complainant.

The prosecutor, Inspector Ibrahim Gokwat, said the complainant, Mr Meshack Ishaya, reported the case on Septem-

ber 25 at the Gada Biyu Police Station.

He said the convicts distracted the complainant during a conversation, stole his phone and fled before selling it to an unknown buyer.

The offence contravened the Plateau State Penal Code Law.

Man bags 2yrs imprisonment for causing grievous hurt

ABUJA

Life Camp Chief Magistrates' Court in Abuja has sentenced a 22-year-old man, Hamed Musa, to two years' imprisonment for causing grievous hurt.

Musa, who resides at Galadima in Gwarinpa, pleaded guilty to the charge and begged the court for leniency.

The Magistrate, Mr Musa Jobbo, sentenced him to two years' imprisonment without an option of fine and warned

him to desist from crime.

The prosecutor, Mrs Charity Nwachukwu, said the complainant, Mr Suleman Toker, reported the matter on December 3 at the Galadima Police Station.

She said a misunderstanding

led to a fight, during which the convict used a sharp knife to inflict grievous injuries.

The complainant was rushed to hospital, incurring medical expenses of about N120,000.

The offence contravened Section 383 of the Penal Code.

Supreme Court dismisses INEC appeal against SDP, awards N2m cost

ABUJA

The Supreme Court has dismissed an appeal filed by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) challenging the leadership of the Social Democratic Party (SDP).

In a lead judgment delivered by Justice Mohammed Idris, the apex court held that the appeal lacked merit and had become academic.

The five-member panel held that elections had already been conducted and winners sworn in, leaving no live issue for determination.

The court declined to interpret provisions of the Electoral Act in a vacuum and dismissed the appeal, awarding N2 million cost against INEC's counsel.

The Court of Appeal, in a unanimous judgment delivered by Justice Adebukola Banjoko, had earlier dismissed INEC's appeal and upheld the judgment of the Federal High Court.

INEC had sought to overturn the October 17 judgment which compelled it to include SDP candidates in by-elections conducted across 12 states.

The SDP had sued INEC after the commission refused to recognise its candidates, citing issues with party correspondence signed by Dr Sadiq Umar Abubakar and Dr Olu Agunloye.

INEC claimed the duo were suspended, but the high court ordered recognition of the candidates, a decision upheld up to the Supreme Court.

Senior lawyer seeks prosecution of sponsors of killings in Nigeria

ABUJA

A senior lawyer, Dr Reuben Atabo, Senior Advocate of Nigeria, has urged the Federal Government to prosecute sponsors of killings in Nigeria, regardless of their status.

He also called for stronger laws to prosecute former political office holders for abuse of power and wrongful decisions while in office.

Atabo made the call at an event marking his 36 years at the Bar in Abuja, stressing the need for accountability and transparency.

In a lecture titled Reflections of Legal Practice, he attributed his success to divine grace and recalled landmark cases handled by his firm.

Speakers at the event, including Dr Joseph Akubo, Senior Advocate of Nigeria, and Mrs Elizabeth Max-Uba, praised Atabo's integrity and dedication.

His wife, Mrs Martha Atabo, described him as a champion of the defenceless and expressed pride in his professional growth.

The event also featured awards for long-serving staff members of the law firm.

Foreign

NEWS

Gunmen kill nine in South Africa tavern attack

A manhunt is under way after a shooting at a tavern in South Africa left nine people dead and another 10 injured.

Police said seven men and two women were killed in Bekkersdal, near Johannesburg, after about 12 unidentified gunmen arrived in two vehicles and opened fire at patrons.

The shooting happened at about 01:00 local time on Sunday (23:00 GMT Saturday) and the perpetrators "continued to shoot randomly as [people] fled the scene", police added.

South Africa has one of the highest murder rates in the world. Sixty-three people were killed every day on average between April and September this year, according to police figures.

Murders are often the result of arguments, robberies and

gang violence. The motive for this attack is not clear.

At the scene, deputy provincial police commissioner Maj-Gen Fred Kekana told broadcaster Newzroom Afrika that the perpetrators, armed with pistols and one AK-47, were "unprovoked".

"The poor patrons were just enjoying themselves when people came and shot," he said.

Two of the victims were shot outside the tavern as they tried to flee and a third was a taxi driver who had dropped off a passenger nearby, Maj-Gen Kekana added.

Police have been carrying out investigations at the tavern

Resident Nokuthula Bhukwana went to the tavern after she heard the shooting.

"When we arrived at the scene, we opened the doors and indeed scores of people were lying on the floor," she told the

Reuters news agency.

"We rushed around and others were calling the police, and we also called the ambulance and they arrived. We had to carry some of the injured people using wheelbarrows to the clinic."

Speaking to Newzroom Afrika, one resident described how gunfire had become a normal thing at night in Bekkersdal.

"Criminals, they do as they please here," the unnamed man said.

"These guns, they sound each and every evening... as soon as it's dusk we know that gunshots are about to sound and they will sound severely.

"It is terrorising our communities."

Interviewed at the scene, deputy mayor for the local municipality Nontombi Molatlhegi said that locals were afraid of speaking out and identifying

those responsible.

She said that the police were under-resourced, and too thinly spread, and called for the military to get involved in protecting residents.

"We are crying, as well as the city political leadership, for the intervention of the national government to release [the army] so that they can be able to come in this space" and be visible.

There are about three million legally held firearms in South Africa, but there are at least the same number of unlicensed weapons in circulation in the country, which has a population of 63 million, according to statistics cited by Gideon Joubert from the South African Gunowners' Association.

Earlier this month, at least 11 people - including a child - were shot dead at a hostel near Pretoria.

US seizes second oil tanker off Venezuela's coast

The US has seized an oil tanker that had recently departed from Venezuela, according to the US Department of Homeland Security.

It is the second time this month that an oil-carrying ship has been seized off the country's coast.

The move comes after President Donald Trump said on Tuesday that he was ordering a "blockade" of sanctioned oil tankers entering and leaving Venezuela.

Venezuela has described the latest US move as "theft and kidnapping". It has previously accused the Trump administration of trying to steal its resources.

"These acts will not go unpunished," a statement from the Venezuelan government said, adding that it intended to file a complaint with the UN Security Council and "other multilateral agencies and the governments of the world".

The operation was led by the US Coast Guard, similar to the operation earlier this month. The ship was boarded by a specialised tactical team, and was in international waters when it was taken.

Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem, whose department oversees the Coast Guard, shared a seven-minute video of

the operation on X.

It shows US helicopters landing on the deck of a ship with the name Centuries written on the side.

It is a Panamanian-flagged ship, but in the past five years it has also sailed under the flags of Greece and Liberia, according to records seen by BBC Verify.

It is not on the US Treasury's list of sanctioned vessels, but in the hours after the announcement, the White House clarified that its cargo was sanctioned.

"The tanker contained sanctioned PDVSA oil," said a post from Anna Kelly, White House deputy press secretary, referring to Venezuela's state-run oil company.

The post said the tanker was "operating as part of the Venezuelan shadow fleet to traffic stolen oil and fund the narcoterrorist Maduro regime."

In recent weeks, the US has been building up its military presence in the Caribbean Sea and has carried out deadly strikes on alleged Venezuelan drug-smuggling boats, killing around 100 people.

It has provided no public evidence that these vessels were carrying drugs, and the military has come under increasing scrutiny from Congress over the strikes.

Israel approves 19 new settlements in occupied West Bank

Israel's security cabinet has approved the recognition of 19 new settlements in the occupied West Bank as the government continues its settlement expansion push.

Far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, a settler who proposed the move alongside Defence Minister Israel Katz, said the decision was about blocking the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank are considered illegal under international law.

Saudi Arabia condemned the move. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has said Israel's "relentless" settlement expansion fuels tensions, restricts Palestinian access to land, and threatens the viability of a sovereign Palestinian state.

Violence in the occupied West Bank has surged since the war in Gaza began in October 2023, further heightening fears that settlement expansion could entrench Israel's occupation and undermine a two-state solution.

The two-state solution refers to the creation of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with East Jerusalem as its capital, broadly along the lines that existed prior to the 1967 Arab-Israeli war.

Since taking office in 2022, the current Israeli government has significantly increased the approval of new settlements and begun the legalisation process for unauthorised outposts,

recognising them as "neighbourhoods" of existing settlements.

The most recent decision brings the total number of settlements approved over the past three years to 69, according to Smotrich.

The approvals come just days after the United Nations said settlement expansion had reached its highest level since 2017.

The latest approvals include the re-establishment of two settlements — Ganim and Kadim — which were dismantled nearly 20 years ago.

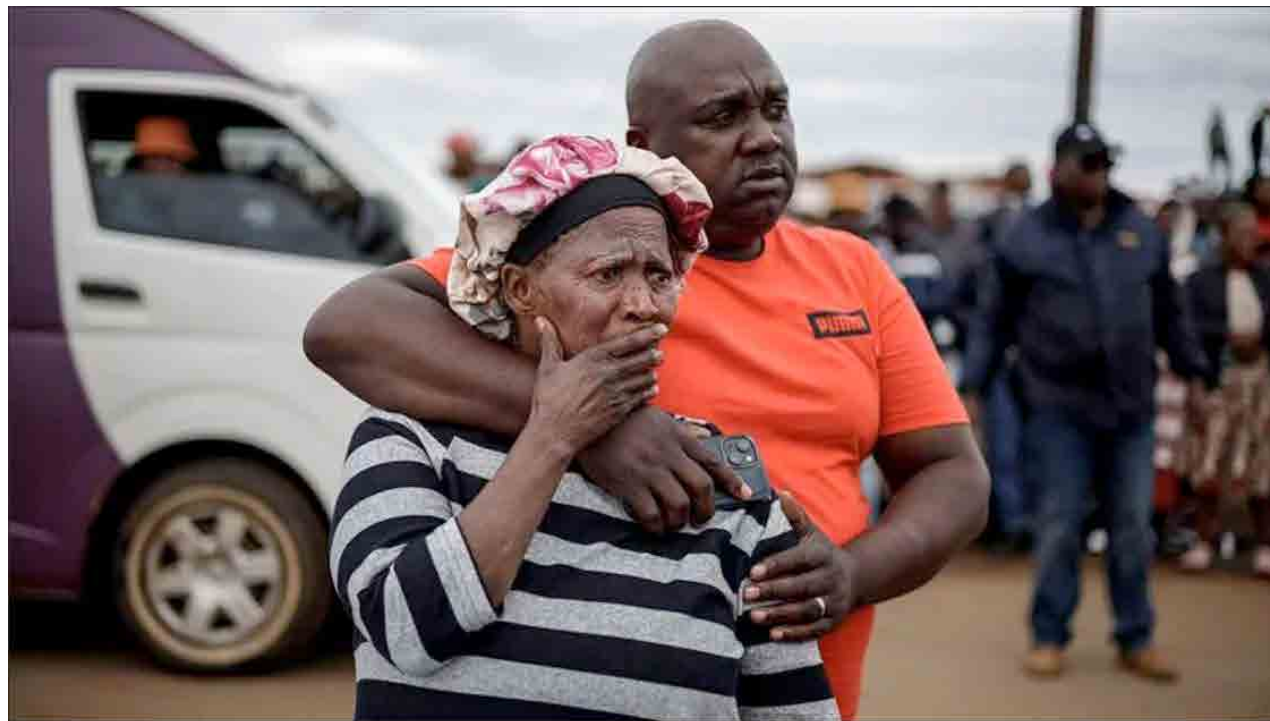
In May, Israel approved 22 new settlements in the occupied West Bank - the biggest expansion in decades.

The Israeli government also approved plans in August to build more than 3,000 homes in the so-called E1 project between Jerusalem and the Maale Adumim settlement, which had been frozen for decades amid fierce opposition internationally.

Smotrich at the time said the plan would "bury the idea of a Palestinian state".

About 700,000 settlers live in approximately 160 settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, according to Israeli anti-settlement group Peace Now. It is land Palestinians seek for a future independent state.

Settlement expansion has angered Arab nations who have consistently said it undermines prospects for a two-state solution.



SHOOTING SCENE:

Bekkersdal residents at the scene of the shooting.

Minute's silence held to remember Bondi Beach attack victims

Mourners in Australia fell silent on Sunday in honour of the victims of the Bondi Beach attack.

The memorial was part of a national day of reflection to mark a week since the shooting in which two gunmen opened fire on an event celebrating the Jewish festival of Hannukah.

A 10-year-old girl, a British-born rabbi and a Holocaust survivor were among 15 people killed in the attack.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese was booed when he arrived at the memorial event - an expression of anger by Australia's Jewish community against his government after a rise of antisemitic attacks over the past few months.

As the sun set over Sydney on Sunday evening, a minute's silence was observed at 18:47 (07:47 GMT) - exactly one week since the first reports of gunfire at the famous beach.

There was heavy security at

the memorial event. Some cordoned-off areas were guarded by armed riot squad officers who had their faces covered, while a police patrol boat was visible off the coast of Bondi Beach.

For many Australians, this level of security is an unfamiliar sight.

A large crowd - many wearing kippas, the Jewish skullcap, or draped in Australian flags - gathered to listen to speeches after the observing the silence.

Bee balloons floated in the wind in honour of the youngest victim of the attack, Matilda, who was nicknamed "Matilda Bee".

Later in the ceremony, the crowd sang *Waltzing Matilda*, the song the 10-year-old was named after.

Soon after, the crowd chanted the name of another child - Chaya, a 14-year-old who put herself in the firing line to protect a stranger's children.

Shot in the leg, she used crutches to take to the stage.

"If you guys get inspired by one thing, one thing on all this, be the light in that field of darkness," she said.

The event ended with the lighting of the menorah - something the crowds gathered for Hannukah last week couldn't do.

But Sunday's memorial was not limited to Bondi Beach or the state of New South Wales.

In a nation-wide gesture of "light over darkness", the windowsills of countless homes across Australia were lined with candles.

As Albanese arrived for the ceremony, one person in the crowd shouted: "Blood on your hands."

The prime minister looked startled at the hostility and his wife Jodie Haydon grasped his arm in support.

At least one member of the crowd was tackled by police after moving towards the prime minister.

The Jewish community in Australia has repeatedly said

this attack was a shock but not a surprise after a rise in antisemitic attacks in Australia since the 7 October 2023 Hamas attack on Israel, and the subsequent military retaliation war launched by Israel in the Gaza Strip.

The overwhelming view is that more could and should have been done to prevent the Sydney attack from happening.

Albanese has acknowledged the criticism, saying: "I accept my responsibility for the part in that as prime minister of Australia."

More widely, Albanese has been accused by some of siding with the Palestinians over supporting Israel.

The relationship worsened when he moved to recognise the state of Palestine earlier this year.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has accused him - as well as the leaders of other countries that have recognised a Palestinian state - of rewarding Hamas.

NEWS

Foreign

Imran Khan and wife given further jail terms after state gift fraud case

Former Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi have been sentenced to further jail terms following a fraud case involving state gifts.

They were convicted of breaking Pakistan's rules on gifts after Bibi was given a luxury jewellery set by Saudi Arabia's Mohammed bin Salman during a 2021 state visit.

The pair are already serving time in prison for earlier convictions, and the new sentences - 10 years for criminal breach of trust and seven years for criminal misconduct, and a fine - will reportedly run concurrently to their earlier terms.

Khan has described the charges as politically motivated and his lawyer told BBC News his team plan to challenge the verdict.

Speaking to the BBC after the hearing, the former prime minister's lawyer, Salman Safdar, said Khan's legal team had only been informed about the sentencing late on Friday night, after normal court hours.

They planned to mount a challenge to the verdict in the high court, Mr Safdar said.

This case is the latest in a series of charges laid against the cricket star-turned-politician, who has been detained since August 2023. In January, he was sentenced to 14 years in prison over a separate corruption case.

He has faced charges in more than 100 cases, ranging from leaking state secrets to selling state gifts. The BBC has been unable to confirm the exact number brought against him.

The jewellery case, referred to as Toshakhana 2 in Pakistan, concerns a Bulgari jewellery set given to Bushra Bibi by Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman during a state visit in 2021, according to court documents.

Under Pakistan's rules on state gifts, these items go to

Pakistan's Toshakhana department (state treasury), but politicians are able to purchase the items back.

Khan is alleged to have asked a private firm to undervalue the jewellery set, before purchasing it back at a significantly reduced price.

In addition to their jail terms, the pair were handed a fine of over 16 million Pakistani rupees (£42,600).

Khan was also convicted in an earlier, different Toshakhana case - but he challenged that conviction, meaning his sentence is suspended until the outcome of his appeal.

He also has other cases outstanding against him.

These include terrorism charges relating to violent protests that took place on 9 May 2023, when he was previously arrested.

Khan was Pakistan's prime minister until April 2022 when he was ousted in a vote of no confidence.

Although he has not been seen in public, his social media accounts have continued to operate with messages attributed to him on X often appearing after jail visits.

These have been highly critical of Pakistan's current government and its politically powerful army Chief Field Marshall Asim Munir, including posts calling him a tyrannical dictator.

In November, he was denied any visitors for nearly a month.

After campaigning by his family and party, his sister was allowed to visit in early December; a few hours after she saw him, his account posted a comment credited to Khan calling the Field Marshall Asim Munir a "mentally unstable person".

Khan, 73, has not been allowed any family visits since.

The judgement states the judge was lenient in sentencing because of Khan's "old age".



SAUDI ARABIA PRINCE:

Prince Mohammed bin Salman has loosened social restrictions while simultaneously silencing criticism.

Rights groups condemn new record number of executions in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia has surpassed its record for the number of executions carried out annually for a second year in a row.

At least 347 people have now been put to death this year, up from a total of 345 in 2024, according to the UK-based campaign group Reprieve, which tracks executions in Saudi Arabia and has clients on death row.

It said this was the "bloodiest year of executions in the kingdom since monitoring began".

The latest prisoners to be executed were two Pakistani nationals convicted of drug-related offences.

Others put to death this year include a journalist and two young men who were children at the time of their alleged protest-related crimes. Five were women.

But, according to Reprieve, most - around two thirds - were convicted of non-lethal drug-related offences, which the UN says is "incompatible with international norms and standards".

More than half of them were foreign nationals who appear to have been put to death as part of a "war on drugs" in the kingdom.

The Saudi authorities have not responded to the BBC's request for comment on the rise in executions.

"Saudi Arabia is operating with complete impunity now," said Jeed Basyouni, Reprieve's head of death penalty for the Middle East and North Africa. "It's almost making a mockery of the human rights system."

She described torture and forced confessions as "endemic" within the Saudi criminal justice system.

Ms Basyouni called it a "brutal and arbitrary crackdown" in which innocent people and those on the margins of society have been caught up.

On Tuesday, a young Egyptian fisherman, Issam al-Shazly, was executed. He was arrested in 2021 in Saudi territorial waters and said he had been coerced into smuggling drugs.

Reprieve says 96 of the executions were solely linked to hashish.

"It almost seems that it doesn't matter to them who they execute, as long as they send a message to society that

there's a zero-tolerance policy on whatever issue they're talking about - whether it's protests, freedom of expression, or drugs," said Ms Basyouni.

There has been a surge of drug-related executions since the Saudi authorities ended an unofficial moratorium in late 2022 - a step described as "deeply regrettable" by the UN human rights office.

Speaking anonymously to the BBC, relatives of men on death row on drugs charges have spoken of the "terror" they're now living in.

One told the BBC: "The only time of the week that I sleep is on Friday and Saturday because there are no executions on those days."

Cellmates witness people they have shared prison life with for years being dragged kicking and screaming to their death, according to Reprieve.

Prince Mohammed bin Salman has loosened social restrictions while simultaneously silencing criticism

The de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman - who became crown prince in 2017 - has changed

the country profoundly over the past few years, loosening social restrictions while simultaneously silencing criticism.

In a bid to diversify its economy away from oil, he has opened Saudi Arabia up to the outside world, taken the religious police off the streets, and allowed women to drive.

But the kingdom's human rights record remains "abysmal", according to the US-based campaign group Human Rights Watch, with the high level of executions a major concern. In recent years, only China and Iran have put more people to death, according to human rights activists.

"There's been no cost for Mohammed bin Salman and his authorities for going ahead with these executions," said Joey Shea, who researches Saudi Arabia for Human Rights Watch. "The entertainment events, the sporting events, all of it is continuing to happen with no repercussions, really."

According to Reprieve, the families of those executed are usually not informed in advance, or given the body, or informed where they have been buried.

The Saudi authorities do not reveal the method of execution, although it is believed to be either beheading or firing squad.

In a statement sent to the BBC, the UN's special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Dr Morris Tidball-Binz, called for an immediate moratorium on executions in Saudi Arabia with a view to abolition.

He also pressed for "full compliance with international safeguards (including effective legal assistance and consular access for foreign nationals), prompt notification of families, the return of remains without delay and the publication of comprehensive execution data to enable independent scrutiny".

Burkina Faso starts building first expressway in push to modernize

Approximately 332 km long, Burkina Faso's first expressway will connect the capital Ouagadougou and Bobo Dioulasso in the country's south-west.

Burkina Faso's army ruler Captain Ibrahim Traore inaugurated its construction near Ouagadougou.

The project is under his Faso Mebo initiative, an ambitious

plan to modernize the Sahel country. With at least \$357 million earmarked in the 2026 state budget, authorities say they are using locally generated funds to finance the construction.

The completion of the highway will facilitate traffic flow along the corridor connecting the ports of Abidjan, Lomé, Tema, and Cotonou with landlocked Sahel.

Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger launch Sahel regional force

At an airforce base in Bamako, Mali's army ruler General Assimi Goita presided over a ceremony marking the creation of a unified force for the Sahel countries.

The force is the latest in a series of measures by Burkina

Faso, Mali and Niger to achieve closer integration.

The three countries are all led by juntas and are beset by an Islamist insurgency.

In January, Niger's defence minister said that the 5000-strong force would 'intervene together' to counter secu-

rity threats in the region.

Burkinabe General Daouda Traoré was appointed to head the force which will maintain a command base in Niamey, Niger's capital.

The ceremony in Bamako was attended by the defence ministers of the Sahel Alliance member states, as well as ambassadors and representatives of international organizations accredited to Mali.

Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger formed the Sahel alliance after withdrawing from ECOWAS, which the alliance accuses of inhumane, coup-related sanctions and working against the interests of citizens in alliance countries.

Gaza: Egypt, Russia urge strict implementation of ceasefire deal

Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty and his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov discussed Friday the importance of maintaining a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip to ensure stability in the region.

Speaking during a joint news conference with Lavrov on the sidelines of the Second Ministerial Conference of the Russia-Africa Partnership Forum in Cairo, Abdelatty said Egypt is continuing its efforts to push for the launch of the

second phase of the ceasefire in Gaza.

Abdelatty and Lavrov also stressed the need to fully implement the U.N. Security Council resolution, including upholding the ceasefire, allowing unrestricted and un-

conditional aid into Gaza, and reopening the Rafah crossing from both sides.

Abdelatty urged the international community to step up pressure on Israel to halt what he described as daily ceasefire violations.

Feature

How Governor Okpebholo's first full budget year set direction for Edo's development

EBOJELE AKHERE PATRICK PHD

Budgets are often judged by figures and projections, but their true meaning lies in what people can see, feel and experience in their daily lives. A close look at Edo State's 2025 budget performance, compared with the 2024 exit budget of the previous administration, shows a clear shift in both the tempo and direction of governance under Governor Monday Okpebholo.

The 2024 budget closed an era. It was largely a consolidation document, focused on sustaining existing structures, maintaining fiscal order and completing ongoing programmes. It performed creditably in revenue terms and helped stabilise the state's finances at the point of transition. However, it was never designed to be bold or transformational.

The 2025 budget, Governor Okpebholo's first full fiscal year in office, has been different in both tone and intent. It was crafted at a time when Edo faced deep security concerns, mounting social pressures and growing public expectations. Rather than slow down, the Governor chose to act.

SECURITY: A CLEAR BREAK FROM THE PAST

Perhaps the most visible change between 2024 and 2025 is in the area of security. When this administration came in, cult killings, kidnapping and violent crime had reached worrying levels. Governor Okpebholo moved quickly, not with promises but with decisions.

A stronger anti-cultism law, the recruitment and training of 2,500 personnel into the Edo State Security Corps, and the deployment of patrol vehicles and motorcycles across the state sent a strong message. Communities that once lived in fear are now beginning to breathe easier. This did not happen by chance; it was the result of firm leadership and clear priorities.

INFRASTRUCTURE: FROM PAPER TO THE STREETS

Infrastructure under the 2025 budget has moved beyond plans on paper. The award of 28 road projects covering about 255 kilometres and the construction of two flyovers in Benin City — a first in Edo's history — have changed the conversation around development.

While the 2024 budget made steady but limited infrastructure interventions,

the Okpebholo administration raised the bar. Roads are opening up communities, easing movement and supporting local businesses. The flyovers, once considered impossible, are now taking shape and symbolising a government willing to do what others deferred.

HEALTHCARE AND EDUCATION: INVESTING IN PEOPLE

In healthcare, the difference is

The recruitment of 5,000 teachers and the significant increase in subvention to Ambrose Alli University and Edo State University, Iyamoh, go beyond routine budgeting

equally clear. The rebuilding of primary health centres, the provision of diagnostic equipment and the commencement of a 150-bed specialist hospital in Edo Central show a government that understands that development begins with healthy citizens.

Education has also received uncommon attention. The recruitment of 5,000 teachers and the significant increase in subvention to Ambrose Alli University and Edo State University, Iyamoh, go beyond routine budgeting. They reflect a belief that Edo's future depends on what happens in classrooms and lecture halls today.

ECONOMY AND LIVELIHOODS

The 2025 budget also shows a human face. The N1 billion interest-free loan scheme for market women and traders and the creation of over 10,000 direct and indirect jobs speak to an administration that understands the daily struggles of families and small businesses.

Unlike previous approaches that focused mainly on macroeconomic indicators, this administration has paid attention to how policies affect ordinary people at the grassroots.

PUTTING THE COMPARISON IN PERSPECTIVE

It is important to be fair. The 2024 budget performed well in revenue mobilisation and fiscal discipline, reflecting years of institutional reform. But the 2025 budget has delivered wider impact, stronger visibility and a more direct connection to people's needs.

In simple terms, 2024 kept the system running.

2025 began to move the system forward.

LOOKING AHEAD

The lessons from the 2025 budget explain the confidence behind the 2026 Budget of Hope and Growth. Governor Monday Okpebholo has shown, within a short time, that leadership is not about managing expectations but meeting them.

Indeed Edo is shining and many Edo people are beginning to see the difference — in safer streets, better roads, improved schools and renewed confidence in government. That, more than any statistic, is the real measure of performance.

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



Sports

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

NPFL26: Resurgent Bendel Insurance FC humble defending champions Remo Stars 3-2 in Abeokuta



Bendel Insurance FC Humble Defending Champions Remo Stars

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

Bendel Insurance Football Club on Sunday, December 21, 2025 produced another superlative performance in the Nigeria Professional Football League as they defeated defending Champions Remo Stars 3-2 in front of their home crowd in Abeokuta.

The Benin Arsenal got their first away victory in the current season when they defeated Katsina Utd 1-0 in Ilor-

in two weeks ago.

Udom Wisdom opened scoring for the resurgent Benin Arsenal in the 14th minute of the game. Chinedu Nwosu doubled the lead in the 28 minute to raise their hope of getting second away victory.

Olalekan Adeleke pulled one back in the 31st minute for the hosts as the battle raged. Henry Oyian was rewarded for his trademark long throw in the 37th minute to put the Sky Blue boys under pressure till the end of the first half.

Victor Mbaoma capitalized on Insurance defensive error and reduced the goals deficit in the 61st minute for Remo Stars but Insurance kept the

lead to the end and ran away with 3-2 victory.

Insurance FC under the new manager Kennedy Boboye recorded their first away victory against Katsina Utd in Ilorin in the match day 16 fixture before they were forced to a 1-1 by Rangers last weekend in Benin.

The 3-2 victory against Remo Stars at the MKO Abiola stadium in Abeokuta has elevated the Benin Arsenal to a new height (10th) on the league table as the first stanza of the league comes to an end next weekend.

Bendel Insurance FC will be at home against Kwara Utd in the Match day 19 scheduled for Sunday December 28.

Clinton's Gambit: Edo teen tops impresses at National U20 Chess Championship

EDWARD OSEGHE

Akinrogunde Clinton has announced himself as one of Nigeria's brightest chess prospects, after delivering a standout performance at the Nigerian National Chess Competition that has placed him firmly in the national spotlight.

The 19-year-old Edo State prodigy emerged as the top finisher in the Under-20 (U20) category, while also competing creditably in the demanding Masters division—an achievement that underlines both his ambition and his growing stature in the sport.

Born on January 30, 2006, and hailing from Ikpoba Okha Local Government Area of Edo State, Clinton represents the Life and Chess Club Edo State. His rapid rise has been driven by discipline, consistent training, and structured mentorship under his manager and coach, Princess Omoyemwen Adeyinka Afolabi.

Registered with FIDE under ID 8518823, Clinton's progress has been marked by steady improvement and notable results on both local and national stages. His performance at the national championship was not a surprise to keen observ-

ers, but rather the latest chapter in a promising competitive journey.

His growing list of honours includes winning the IDSDP Benin Chess Championship in 2025, finishing second at the Cyntoco International Chess Tournament the same year, and claiming the chess title at the Edo Heritage Sports Festival and Carnival 2025.



AKINROGUNDE CLINTON

Megwo Late strike secures Abia Warriors 1-0 win over Warri Wolves in Umuahia



SUNDAY MEGWO LATE GOAL

Sunday Megwo scored his fifth league goal of the season, after he converted a 90+5 minute Penalty kick, which helped the Imama Amapakabo's led to secured the maximum points following a 1-0 victory over Warri

Wolves, in a Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL) matchday 18 encounter.

The Umuahia-born forward who featured for 85th minute during their 1-0 away win against Kun Khalifat last Sunday in Owerri, stepped up

when the team needed him the most, to slotted home a brilliant Penalty and sent the Warri Wolves goalkeeper to the other way, to end three games winless streak at home.

while speaking shortly after the final whistle, Megwo expressed excitement for securing the needed three points against a difficult Warri Wolves side.

"I'm happy that we got the maximum points, but we were not able to performed the way we wanted in the game but the most important thing is the three points. they (Warri Wolves) made it difficult for us but the gaffer asked us to keep pressing hard and push forward for a goal, which we did."

African Youth Games: Florence Oluwadamilanre strikes triple Gold in weightlifting

Nigeria recorded another major highlight at the ongoing 4th African Youth Games in Angola on Friday, as female weightlifter Florence Oluwadamilanre delivered an outstanding performance to win three gold medals in the 58kg A category.

Oluwadamilanre dominated the competition, finishing ahead of Chanel Vivier of South Afri-

ca and Etori Bakie of Ethiopia to emerge the overall champion in her weight class. Her commanding display further underlined Nigeria's growing strength in weightlifting on the continental stage.

The triple-gold feat adds significant momentum to Team Nigeria's campaign at the Games and reflects the country's strategic plan in developing youth talents.



FLORENCE OLUWADAMILANRE

AFCON to hold every 4 years —CAF

Patrice Motsepe, President of the Confederation of African Football (CAF), has announced that the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) will be held every four years beginning after the 2027 edition to be hosted by Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.

Motsepe made the announcement after a CAF Executive Committee meeting on Saturday in Rabat, ahead of the 35th AFCON scheduled to kick off on Sunday in Morocco.

Hosts Morocco are set to face the Comoros national team in the group A opening match of the tournament in Rabat.

Morocco are ranked 11th in the world, the highest-ranked African nation, while Comoros are ranked 108th.

Comoros are appearing in the tournament for the second time, having made their debut at the 2021 edition hosted by Cameroon.

The AFCON has been held every two years since 1968, except for a one-year gap between the 2012 and 2013 editions.

Motsepe, who also announced an increase in prize money for the AFCON winners from seven million dollars to 10 million dollars, said an annual African Nations League would commence from 2029 to fill the gap created by the new four-year cycle.

"Historically, the Nations Cup was the prime resource for us, but now we will have financial resources every year," he said.

He described the new structure as exciting, noting that it would contribute to CAF's sustainable financial independence and ensure better synchronisation with the FIFA calendar.

NAN reports that CAF had previously opposed a four-year AFCON cycle proposed by FIFA President Gianni Infantino due to the significant revenue the tournament generates for the federation.

CAF has also long been at odds with European clubs over the timing of AFCON, which traditionally takes place in the middle of the European football season.

NNL: City FC Abuja pip Doma United 1-0 in Abuja

City FC of Abuja recorded a hard-fought 1-0 victory over Conference C leaders, Doma United FC, in their Nigeria National League (NNL) Matchday Seven encounter on Saturday in Abuja.

The match was played at the FIFA Goal Project Pitch, Package B of the Moshood Abiola Stadium.

In spite of their contrasting positions on the Conference C table with Doma United sitting top and City FC placed seventh, the fixture lived up to expectations as a fiercely contested affair.

Both sides produced disciplined performances in the first half, cancelling each other

out with organised defending and purposeful attacking play.

City FC's midfield trio of Justin Dominic, Sunday Oliseh and James Isah provided stability, while Prince Friday, Jacob Daniel and Isek Simon maintained the tempo.

However, neither team was able to break the deadlock at the end of the first half.

On resumption of the second half, City FC increased the intensity, aided by Shuaib Akinwande and Franklin Ozor, whose energy added bite to the attack.

Adeyemi Mogbademu also caused problems for the Doma United backline with sustained pressure.

Sports

Edo Teqball programme records steady growth, stakeholders laud impact

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

● Sports Commission rewards performing athletes

The Edo State Teqball programme has deepened its strong root and continued to record steady growth as administrators and participants express confidence in the future of the sport in the state.

The Permanent Secretary of the Edo State Sports Commission Mrs Patricia A. Efe-Amenze

gave the assertion on Friday during Edo Teqball Association end of year event, organized to honour Teqball athletes for their commitment and discipline as the year comes to an end.

The appreciation event, held at the Indoor Sports Hall of the Samuel Ogbemudia Stadium, Benin City, where management

team, board members and other Stakeholders gathered to appreciate the athletes and coaches for their contributions to the growth of the sport in Edo State.

Speaking further at the event, the Permanent Secretary of the Edo State Sports Commission, Mrs. A. P. Amenze, who represented the Chairman of the Commission,

Hon. Amadin Desmond Enabulele, praised the athletes, coaches, technical officials, and media partners for their dedication to the development of Teqball in Edo State.

Mrs. Amenze assured the team of the Commission's full support, stressing that the leadership of Hon. Enabulele remains committed to the growth and sustainability of the sport.

She noted that the Edo State Sports Commission would not take the programme for granted and that all necessary support required to strengthen Teqball would be provided.

She urged the athletes to remain focused, disciplined, and committed to the pursuit of excellence, describing Teqball as "a mustard seed that has been planted" and now ready to yield bumper harvest and give Edo positive results, adding that the sport holds great promises for the future.



The Permanent Secretary, Edo State Sports Commission Mrs. Patricia Efe-Amenze receives Teqball Association award on behalf of the commission chairman Hon Amadin Desmond Enabulele.

Kuti, Aiyelabegan reclaim gold at 3rd Daniel Ford Table Tennis Tournament

Matthew Kuti and Sukurat Aiyelabegan have reclaimed the titles they lost in 2024 at the third Daniel Ford Elite Invitational Table Tennis Tournament in Lagos.

The competition held at the Molade Okoya-Thomas Hall, Teslim Balogun Stadium, drew young talents from across the country.

The colourful finals attracted Gov. Babajide Sanwo-Olu of Lagos State and Abike Dabiri-Erewa, Chairman of the Nigeria Diaspora Commission.

Sponsor, Yemi Edun, reaffirmed his commitment to hosting the tournament annually, saying the competition's growth reflected rising interest in grassroots table tennis.

Kuti delivered a dominant run, beating Muiz Adegoke 4-0 in the final to reclaim the boys' U-19 title after near-perfect performances throughout.

The victory marked Kuti's second U-19 triumph in three editions of the championship.

Aiyelabegan also impressed, defeating Khadijat Okanlawon 4-0 to secure the girls' U-19 crown, her second win in three years.

In other results, Chinenye Okafor retained the girls' U-15 title and won the female Most Valuable Player award.

Habeeb Adebayo claimed the boys' MVP award and the U-12 boys' title, while Eliza-

beth Emelike won the girls' U-12 singles crown.

Joseph Marvelous of Kogi defeated Umar Ayoola of Lagos 3-0 to claim the boys' U-15 title.

Speaking with NAN, Edun said his passion for grassroots sports inspired the sponsorship of the tournament.

"I grew up around this venue and watched competitions here. I was never a great athlete, but I enjoyed watching others excel," he said.



MATTHEW KUTI

Joshua ends Paul experiment with sixth-round knockout in Miami

British heavyweight Anthony Joshua stopped boxing novice Jake Paul in the sixth round of a heavily one-sided bout in Miami.

Joshua dominated proceedings as Paul spent long stretches evading, before the former champion imposed his power with successive

knockdowns in the fifth round.

Paul fell again in the sixth after a clean right hand ended the contest at the Kaseya Centre.

The American failed to beat the count but later rose and left the ring unaided, drawing relief from the crowd.

Joshua admitted the fight

took longer than expected but said patience paid off when his right hand finally landed.

The outcome matched widespread predictions, renewing concerns about safety in contests with glaring gaps in experience and size.

The victory was Joshua's 29th in 33 professional bouts, sharpening focus on a possible clash with Tyson Fury in 2026.

Paul, 28, could not deliver his promised upset and struggled under Joshua's pressure, in spite of briefly surviving into the middle rounds.

The YouTuber-turned-boxer had previously faced Mike Tyson, but found Joshua's power overwhelming.

The event, streamed globally by Netflix, drew celebrities including Rory McIlroy ringside.



ANTHONY JOSHUA AND JAKE PAUL

SWAN-Dikko Radda 2025 Super four football competition set to begin

The Katsina State Chapter of the Sports Writers Association of Nigeria SWAN has concluded arrangements to organize a football competition tagged the SWAN/Dikko Radda Super Four Tournament.

The competition is designed to accommodate four labor unions in Katsina State.

The participating unions include the Nigeria Union of Journalists (N.U.J.), Radio, Television, Theater, and Arts Workers (RATTAWU), the Ni-

geria Medical Doctors Association (N.M.A.), and the Medical & Health Workers Union of Nigeria (MHWUN).

The exciting football tournament will kick off on Saturday the 3rd of January, 2026, at the Muhammadu Dikko Stadium

in Katsina.

Organizing the competition is aimed at fostering more cordial relationships between the unions and encouraging civil servants to engage in sporting activities for fitness and health-care improvement.

STANDING						
TEAMS	MP	W	D	L	GO	PTS
1 RIVERS UNITED	17	9	6	2	5	33
2 NASARAWA UNITED	17	9	4	4	7	31
3 ABIA WARRIORS	18	9	3	6	4	30
4 IKORODU CITY	18	7	8	3	7	29
5 RANGERS INT'L	18	8	5	5	5	29
6 SHOOTING STARS	18	8	5	5	3	29
7 NIGER TORNADES	18	8	2	7	6	26
8 KWARA UNITED	18	6	6	6	2	24
9 ENYIMBA	18	6	5	7	2	23
10 BENDEL INSURANCE	18	5	8	5	1	23
11 WARRI WOLVES	18	6	5	7	0	23
12 BAYELSA UNITED	18	6	5	7	-5	23
13 KATSINA UNITED	17	6	5	7	-2	22
14 WIKKI TOURISTS	18	5	7	6	-3	22
15 REMO STARS	18	7	1	10	-5	22
16 EL-KANEMI WARRIORS	18	6	4	8	-6	22
17 BARAU	17	5	5	7	-3	20
18 PLATEAU UNITED	18	6	1	11	-8	19
19 KUN KHALIFAT	18	4	7	8	-5	18
20 KANO PILLARS	18	5	4	9	-9	16

NPFL: Barau FC thrashes Rivers United 4-1 in Kano

Barau Football Club on Friday recorded a resounding 4-1 victory over Rivers United in a rescheduled Matchday Five fixture of the Nigerian Premier Football League.

The encounter, played at the Sani Abacha Stadium, Kofar Mata, Kano, marked Barau FC's final home game of the first stanza of the 2025/2026 NPFL season.

Rivers United took an early lead in the fourth minute, but the hosts responded strongly as midfielder Usman Maidubji equalised from the penalty spot in the 25th minute, scoring his second goal of the season.

Barau FC completed the turnaround just before half-time when Jimmy Ambrose found the net in the 45th minute to give the Kano-based side a 2-1 advantage at the break.

The hosts extended their dominance in the second half through substitute Kabir Abdullahi, a former Rivers United

player, who struck twice in the 64th and 72nd minutes.

The goals, his first of the season, sealed a comprehensive victory for Barau FC.

The result represents Barau FC's biggest win in Nigeria's top flight this season and also inflicted Rivers United's heaviest defeat of the campaign.

With the win, Barau FC climbed to 16th position on the NPFL standings with 20 points from 17 matches, moving out of the relegation zone.

Midfielder Muhammad Umar was named Sports Writers Association of Nigeria (SWAN) Man of the Match for his outstanding performance.

Speaking at a post-match news conference, Barau FC Technical Adviser, Ladan Bosso, commended the resilience and commitment of his players and commended the club's management for their continued support.

Calabar Table Tennis challenge draws 7 states

No fewer than seven states have converged in Calabar, Cross River, for the third Calabar Table Tennis Challenge aimed at discovering young talents and sustaining the sport.

The two-day tournament has attracted players, coaches and officials from across Nigeria, reinforcing Calabar's growing reputation as a sports development hub.

Chairman of the Local Organising Committee, John Akintola, said the event continues to gain national relevance with increased participation yearly.

Akintola listed participating states as Lagos, Anambra, Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom, Ondo, Ogun and host state, Cross River.

He said the competition's ex-

panding national spread was driven by passion for table tennis and commitment to youth development.

According to Akintola, the annual December tournament was created to ensure table tennis does not fade in Cross River and Nigeria.

"The idea was born out of love for the game and a desire to create opportunities for young players," he said.

The matches began on Friday and ends on Saturday across different age categories.

Young players from various states are competing keenly for honours and prizes, while scouts monitor emerging talents.

Akintola said the challenge was strategically aligned with the Calabar Carnival to maximise participation.



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OPINION

When silence kills: Rethinking protection for the Nigerian girl child

ASENOGUAN ETINOSA 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.



Nigeria children in the street

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 of-

ten 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?

Schools raise alarm over rising student dependence on AI tools

ASENOGUAN ETINOSA ANNABEL

Educators across Nigeria are expressing growing concern over the rising number of students who rely on artificial intelligence to complete schoolwork. What began as a helpful digital tool is now becoming

an academic crutch, with many teachers warning that the trend is weakening students' writing, comprehension, and critical thinking skills.

A RAPID SHIFT IN STUDY HABITS

Across state and private schools, teachers say they now encounter as-

signments that bear little resemblance to a student's natural writing style.

"We are seeing essays that are too perfect, too polished, and completely out of character for some students," said an English teacher in Benin. "When you ask them to explain what they wrote, they suddenly go silent. That is how you know AI did the work."

Universities report the same pattern. Some lecturers say the misuse of AI tools spiked after the 2024/2025 academic session when free mobile AI apps became more popular among students.

WHY STUDENTS ARE GETTING ADDICTED

Education analysts say the trend is driven by a mix of academic pressure, social influence, and a lack of clear guidance on responsible technology use.

"Students today are overwhelmed. They have assignments, tests, side

hustles, and personal challenges," a lecturer said. "AI feels like an easy escape. Unfortunately, it's an escape that steals their learning."

Others point to peer pressure. "When your classmates are using AI and getting high grades, you start to feel like you must use it too," "Before long, it becomes a habit."

SKILLS AND LEARNING AT RISK

Teachers say they see a gradual erosion of essential academic abilities among students who depend too heavily on AI tools.

"Some students can submit a flawless essay generated by AI, but they cannot summarise a simple three-paragraph article" and this worries a lot of teachers.

Lecturers observe the same problem during oral examinations and presentations.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY UNDER

PRESSURE

Schools are updating their policies to address the issue, with many warning students about the consequences of submitting AI-generated work without disclosure.

Some institutions are also holding digital responsibility workshops to teach students safe and ethical use of AI.

A CALL FOR RESPONSIBLE USE

Educators say AI can be helpful — but only when used correctly.

"AI should guide you, not replace you," "Students must learn to think for themselves. That is what education is about."

Counsellors echo the same message: the goal is not to reject technology but to prevent addiction and protect learning.

"We cannot allow a generation to lose the ability to write, reason, and create," "Nigeria needs thinkers, not copy-and-paste graduates."

