

Okpebholo seeks stronger Italy–Edo economic, cultural ties

BENIN CITY

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, has called for stronger economic and cultural collaboration between Edo State and Italy, describing cultural exchange as a viable gateway to investment, sustainable development, and global relevance.

The governor made the call during a courtesy visit by the

Deputy Head of Mission of the Italian Embassy in Abuja, Mr. Iacopo Foti, who was in the state after attending the Edo Carnival in Benin City.

Okpebholo said that Edo State was open to strategic sub-national partnerships with Italy, particularly in areas that would deliver mutual economic and developmental benefits, noting that international cooperation at the state level had become criti-

cal in a globalized economy.

“Edo State is willing to welcome strategic collaborations with Italy in areas that will benefit us mutually,” the governor said.

“Our state is rich in culture, history, creativity, and enterprise and partnerships built on these strengths will yield lasting dividends.”

Governor Okpebholo said the shared values of Edo and Italy provide a solid foundation for

enhanced cooperation, assuring Italy of Edo State’s readiness for meaningful cultural, economic, and creative-sector partnerships.

Earlier, Mr. Foti expressed admiration for Edo State, describing it as peaceful and optimistic, contrary to negative perceptions often portrayed outside the state.

He said his experience in Benin City confirmed Edo’s reputation as the “Heartbeat of Nigeria,” citing its rich history,

vibrant culture, and strong entrepreneurial spirit.

According to him, the Edo Carnival was a vivid showcase of the people’s cultural heritage and identity.

Drawing parallels between Italy and Edo State, the Italian diplomat noted that both societies value historical preservation while embracing modern development.

Mr. Foti also commended

Governor Okpebholo for efforts to strengthen security in the state, describing safety as fundamental to tourism growth, foreign investment, and sustainable development.

He highlighted the expanding relationship between Italy and Nigeria, anchored on growing economic ties, cultural exchanges, education, tourism,

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COAS charges troops to sustain momentum, decisively crush bandits, terrorists
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Tax Acts gazetting: Atiku raises alarm over alleged constitutional breach

ABUJA

Former Vice President Atiku Abubakar has raised a red flag over what he described as a grave constitutional breach following claims that the tax acts recently gazetted differ from the versions passed by the National Assembly.

In a strongly worded statement issued in Abuja on Sunday, Atiku said the Senate’s

confirmation of discrepancies between the gazetted tax laws and those duly passed by lawmakers amounted to an alarming assault on constitutional order and the integrity of Nigeria’s lawmaking process.

He warned that any law published in a form never approved by parliament was not merely defective but a complete nullity.

Citing Section 58 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended),

Atiku stressed that lawmaking is a clear and rigid process requiring passage by both chambers of the National Assembly, presidential assent and subsequent gazetting, insisting that gazetting alone neither creates nor amends a law.

“Gazetting is a purely administrative act of publication; it does not create law, amend law or cure illegality,” he said.

According to him, where a

gazette misrepresents what was approved by the legislature, it carries no legal force and poses a serious constitutional danger.

Atiku further cautioned that any alteration of a bill after its passage, without legislative approval, amounts to forgery rather than clerical error, adding that no directive from the Senate President, Godswill Akpabio, or the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Tajudeen Abbas,

could legitimise such an act.

He warned that attempts to hurriedly re-gazette the laws while stalling a full investigation would undermine parliamentary oversight and set a perilous precedent.

“Illegality cannot be cured by administrative speed,” he said.

The former Vice President

emphasised that his position was not an attack on tax reform but a firm defence of legislative integrity and constitutionalism.

He maintained that only a fresh passage by the National Assembly, followed by presidential assent and proper gazetting, could produce a valid tax law for the country.



COURTESY VISIT:

Governor Monday Okpebholo of Edo State (right) and Deputy Head of Mission of the Italian Embassy in Abuja, Mr. Iacopo Foti during a courtesy visit to Government House, Benin City.

Dr. Enabulele tasks Nigerians on solution-driven response to global crises

BENIN CITY

Former President of the World Medical Association, Dr. Osahon Enabulele, has called on Nigerians to rise beyond complaints and actively join the global community in seeking practical solutions to the economic and social challenges confronting the world.

Dr. Enabulele made the call while speaking at the 30th anniversary and award ceremony of the 1995 set of Eghosa Anglican Grammar School, Benin City, where he reflected on the severity of current global conditions and the need for collective responsibility.

According to him, the prevailing economic realities, both at the national and international levels, show that the world is

passing through exceptionally difficult times, stressing that Nigeria’s challenges are part of a wider global struggle affecting Africa and other regions.

He noted that despite the harsh realities, resilience, commitment and shared purpose remain powerful tools for overcoming adversity, adding that individuals and institutions must deliberately align themselves with solution-oriented initiatives rather than despair.

Dr. Enabulele urged professionals, alumni associations and community leaders to contribute ideas, skills and resources that can help address pressing global problems, describing collective action as the most effective pathway to sus-

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Expert tasks govt on brain drain, proffers solutions to health sector migration

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Akpabio seeks Remo, Ijebu unity to achieve Ijebu-Remo State

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Nine arrested in Italy for allegedly raising millions for Hamas

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Bendel Insurance FC ends first stanza in style with 2–0 Victory over Kwara United

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UNIBEN ends first phase of ITF-SUPA artisan training, empowers 200

BENIN CITY

The University of Benin has concluded the first phase of the Industrial Training Fund (ITF) Artisan Training Programme, reinforcing its commitment to skills acquisition, vocational education, and national development.

In a statement on Sunday, the University's spokesperson, Dr. Benedicta Ehanire said that the close-out ceremony brought together the Vice Chancellor, Prof. Edoba Omoregie, members of the university management, programme coordinators and beneficiaries. Implemented under the Federal Government's Skill-Up Ar-

tisan (SUPA) initiative, Ehanire said the programme provided free, industry-relevant training to 200 artisans over an intensive eight-week period.

Participants, according to her, received hands-on instruction in areas such as cyber security, tailoring, welding and fabrication, automobile maintenance, carpentry, electrical installation, plumbing, poultry and crop production, as well as animal husbandry.

In his address, Prof. Omore-

gie praised President Bola Tinubu for initiating the ITF-SUPA programme, describing it as a strategic investment in human capital development.

The vice-chancellor reaffirmed the university's resolve to go beyond degree awards by equipping students, staff and host communities with practical and entrepreneurial skills.

"Our responsibility as a university goes beyond awarding degrees.

"We are deliberately build-

ing technical skills, entrepreneurial capacity and practical competence that can translate into real economic value," Omoregie said.

He added that the initiative aligned with his Five-Point Agenda.

He congratulated the trainees on completing the first phase and urged them to put the acquired skills to productive use while preparing for the next stage.

Omoregie assured that the University of Benin would con-

tinue to champion skill-based and entrepreneurship-driven education.

On his part, the Coordinator of the Vocational and Technical Training Programme (VTTP), Prof. Andrew Amenaghawon, commended the vice-chancellor for positioning the university to take advantage of the ITF-SUPA initiative.

Amenaghawon said the strong institutional backing was central to the successful delivery of the programme.

New Edo HOSTCOM Chairman sworn in, pledges inclusive leadership

BENIN CITY

Mr. Kenneth Aduwaye has been inaugurated as Chairman of the Host Communities of Nigeria Producing Oil and Gas (HOSTCOM), pledging to provide purposeful and inclusive leadership while serving as a bridge between Benin and Ijaw communities in the state's oil-bearing areas.

The inauguration, which was held at the HOSTCOM secretariat in Benin City at the weekend, also witnessed the swearing-in of other members of the executive council, including the Secretary, Prince Odion Abumwere.

The oath of office was administered by Barrister Osayi Ehiorobo, while the process was supervised by Dr. Osasu Isibor.

Mr. Aduwaye, an Ijaw indigene of Gelegele community in Ovia North East Local Government Area, emerged from the election conducted on December 13, 2025, succeeding Comrade Andrew Oyegue.

He is to pilot the affairs of the organisation for the next four years.

In his inaugural address, the

new chairman appealed to the Benin people and other stakeholders for support, stressing his determination to address the challenges confronting oil-bearing communities across Edo State.

Making reference to lingering disagreements between Benin and Ijaw communities over land ownership in some riverine oil-rich areas, Aduwaye urged both sides to embrace unity, peace and cooperation in the interest of development.

"It is not an error that God brought the Ijaws and the Benins together. It is a divine arrangement, and we are one," he said. "We will work together to move Edo State forward. Edo State belongs to all of us."

"HOSTCOM is not a one-man show. Everyone will be carried along. It is a collective responsibility. I need the support of every member of the executive. I love Edo State and Nigeria."

Speaking at the event, the National Organizing Secretary of HOSTCOM, Dr. Osasu Isibor, said there was no room for ethnic rivalry within the organisation, describing Aduwaye as a bridge builder with the experience and capacity to lead.

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football, and shared strengths in small-scale enterprises, film, and fashion industries.

The Italian envoy's visit also featured extensive stakeholder engagements across Edo South, Central, and North senatorial districts, where he met with key political, security, and business leaders.

Those present at the sessions included the Speaker, Edo State

House of Assembly, Hon. Blessing Agbebaku; Majority Leader, House of Representatives, Hon. Julius Ihonvbere; Edo State Commissioner of Police, Monday Agbonika; Deputy Chairman of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in the state, Sylvester Aigbobor; Chairman of Oredo Local Government Area, Hon Iduseri and private sector leaders, including the CEO of Ocean Wave Group, Peter Black Omoh Dunia.

Dr. Enabulele tasks Nigerians on solution-driven response to...

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tainable progress.

He also congratulated Eghosa Anglican Grammar School for emerging winners of the maiden edition of the Dr. Osahon Enabulele Foundation-powered Edo State Inter-Secondary Schools Debate Contest, saying that the achievement underscored the

importance of investing in education and critical thinking as long-term solutions to societal challenges.

The former WMA president said that giving back to society, particularly through education and mentorship, remains essential for building a future generation capable of confronting global problems with confidence and competence.



FOTI VISITS EDO POLICE HEADQUARTERS:

Deputy Head of Mission of the Italian Embassy in Abuja, Mr. Iacopo Foti in a group photograph with officers and men of the Nigerian Police at the Ogbona Divisional Police headquarters in Edo State during his visit to the division.

Tinubu wades into Akume, Alia feud

● *Departs for Europe ahead Abu Dhabi summit*

MAKURDI

President Bola Tinubu has promised to resolve the political feud between the Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF), Sen. George Akume, and Governor Hyacinth Alia of Benue State.

Tinubu made the promise on Sunday in Makurdi at the wedding reception of Deborah and Samuel Akume, son of the SGF.

The president, who was represented by his vice, Sen. Kashim Shettima, said Akume has paid his dues and there was no need for the discord with the governor.

He described the SGF as the longest-serving public servant in the contemporary history of Nigeria.

Tinubu added that he has a moral obligation to wade in because what affects Benue would affect the entire North Central and Nigeria.

The president said Akume, as leader of the North Central and in Nigeria, has shown leadership, accommodation and a great deal of kind-heartedness.

"Benue is too important for us to toy with. We cannot afford to allow the discord between the elder statesman, Sen. Akume, and Governor Alia to

escalate.

"What binds us together supersedes whatever divides us. If this relationship goes asunder, it is the people of Benue, North Central and Nigeria that will suffer.

"Sen Akume has paid his dues. He is the longest-serving public servant in the contemporary history of this country.

"He was director of protocol, permanent secretary, two-time governor, three-time senator and minority leader of the Senate, minister and now SGF.

"This is why I used to call him a cat with nine lives. He installs a governor and de-thrones and puts another. He fell out with that one; he de-throned him and installed another one," he said.

He emphasised that he would not allow the relationship between Akume and the transformative governor to go asunder.

According to him, he has the moral obligation as a leader to fix the damage.

He commended the people of the state for voting massively for him in the 2023 presidential election instead of a northern or religious candidate.

"The 2023 election was the most divisive election ever in the history of our country. But Benue decided to go with the

Nigerian candidate, not a religious or Northern candidate," he said.

Earlier, in his remarks, the father of the groom, Sen. Akume, thanked the president for honouring his family during their moment of celebration.

Akume also commended Governor Alia for finding time out of his tight schedule to honour the invitation to witness the wedding of his son.

He assured the couple of his continuous support and prayers for them.

Governor Hyacinth Alia in his remarks congratulated the new couple and commended them for bringing joy and respect to their respective families, the state and the nation at large.

Sen. Jack Gyado, in his speech, said that God blessed Akume with a good heart, a great family and good leadership qualities.

The Chairman of the occasion, Barr Pius Akutah, Executive Secretary, Nigeria/Chief Executive Officer, Nigerian Shippers Council, congratulated the couples and prayed for them.

Serving and past ministers, senators, heads of government agencies, and others witnessed the celebration.

The immediate past governor of Benue, Chief Samuel

Ortomo, traditional rulers, etc., were also in attendance.

Meanwhile, President Bola Tinubu on Sunday departed Lagos for Europe as part of his end-of-year break and ahead of his official visit to Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates.

This was contained in a statement issued by the Presidential Spokesperson, Mr Bayo Onanuga, in Lagos.

The president is scheduled to participate in the 2026 edition of the Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week (ADSW 2026) Summit.

His visit follows an invitation by the President of the United Arab Emirates, His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

ADSW 2026, which will be held early in January, is a week-long global platform that convenes leaders from government, business, and civil society to shape the future of sustainable development.

The summit will be held under the theme: "The Nexus of Next: All Systems Go," focusing on linking ambition with action across innovation, finance, and human capital.

The forum is expected to showcase pathways for advancing sustainable growth and global cooperation in a rapidly evolving world.

President Tinubu is expected to return to Nigeria after the conclusion of the summit.

NEWS

Ex-Presidential hopeful, Hashim advocates home-grown solutions to insecurity

KADUNA

A former Presidential hopeful, Gbenga Hashim, has said that home-grown solutions remain the only plausible panacea to the recurring security challenges in Nigeria.

He, however, described the recent United States airstrikes targeting Islamic State (IS) ele-

ments operating within Nigeria as a "damning indictment of the country's security architecture."

This was contained in a statement issued to newsmen on Sunday, in Kaduna.

Hashim said that the US intervention reflected growing international concern over Nigeria's deteriorating security situation, particularly in the North-West, where terrorist groups were steadily consolidating their influence.

According to the former presidential candidate, responsible global actors cannot afford to ignore the emergence of an IS foothold in Nigeria, stressing that the country is "too large, too strategic, and too important to be allowed to fail."

Hashim revealed that since 2021, and more intensely over the past year, his team had repeatedly

warned that security modelling in the North-West pointed towards a dangerous trajectory, including the potential emergence of an IS-aligned enclave if urgent action was not taken.

He attributed the worsening insecurity to deepening poverty, prolonged governance failure, and weakened institutions, which he said had "emboldened extremist groups while silencing moderate political and secular voices across the region."

While acknowledging that international airstrikes may

temporarily degrade terrorist capabilities, Hashim stressed that lasting solutions can only come from within.

He added that as external interventions were not expected to be one-off actions, the mechanisms guiding them must be carefully negotiated.

According to him, this should be done within the framework of security cooperation between sovereign nations, with clear accountability structures and transparent reporting measures to prevent abuse and ensure long-term stability.

Hashim said: "The situation in the North-West is dire.

"Without urgent internal reforms, improved governance, and decisive political

leadership, external military interventions will not produce sustainable results.

Hashim further "questioned the readiness of the APC-led government to undertake the critical internal reforms needed to stabilize the country."

He argued that Nigeria had continued to "grapple with fundamental governance and security deficits that threaten its democratic future."

Concluding, Hashim cautioned that Nigeria can no longer afford denial or half-measures in the face of what he described as an existential threat.

He called for "urgent, courageous leadership to prevent further deterioration of national security."



PRESENTING GIFTS:

The Chief Medical Director, University of Benin Teaching Hospital, Prof Idia Ize-Iyamu, presented gifts to patients and newborns at the End Of Year Party/Nine-Lessons and Carol Night organised by the hospital management recently.

Edo security improving under Tinubu's strategies —Okpebholo

IRRUA

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, has assured Nigerians that President Bola Ahmed Tinubu is implementing robust security strategies nationwide, in collaboration with relevant agencies to safeguard lives and property.

The governor gave the assurance while speaking at an interdenominational prayer service held at his residence in Irrua, Eban Central Local Government Area.

Okpebholo said that sustained collaboration with security agencies, coupled with prayers, had continued to yield

positive results in Edo State, leading to a noticeable reduction in kidnapping, cultism, and other violent crimes.

"I want to assure you that our administration, in partnership with President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, is doing everything possible to ensure the safety of lives and property," he said.

"The kidnappings and cult-related activities we saw yesterday, we shall see them no more."

The governor called on Nigerians to continue praying for President Tinubu and his administration, stressing that prayers were critical to the success of ongoing economic reforms and security operations.

According to him, despite criticism, the President remains committed to implementing far-reaching policies aimed at repositioning the country for long-term growth and stability.

Okpebholo said his administration had also put deliberate strategies in place to ensure sustained development in Edo State, but expressed concern over attempts by critics to distract the government.

"As we are working to develop Edo State, some people are trying to divert our attention and drag the state backward," he said.

"We need prayers for our land because without prayers, development will be difficult and economic activities will suffer."

In his sermon titled "Crossing

Over with Gratitude," Reverend Francis Okhale urged the congregation to cultivate gratitude, describing it as a pathway to fulfillment and divine intervention.

He encouraged continued prayers for Governor Okpebholo, whom he said had convened the service to thank God for the achievements recorded by his administration over the past year.

"We are here to honour God for what He is using Senator Monday Okpebholo to do for Edo people," the cleric said, citing visible progress in infrastructure, education, healthcare, and other critical sectors.

The service concluded with special prayers for the governor, his administration, and the people of Edo State.

Grooming young cultural successors key to sustaining Carnival Calabar —Band handlers

CALABAR

Band leaders at the ongoing Carnival Calabar say the festival's survival depends on grooming kids early, turning them into the next generation of cultural torchbearers.

The handlers told newsmen in separate interviews on the sidelines of the Junior Carnival in Calabar at the weekend

The Junior Carnival, with seven bands competing in a parade, is one of the main features at the ongoing Carnival Calabar.

Some of the bands included Calas Vegas, Freedom, Bayside and Passion 4.

The carnival, which is the 20th edition since inception in 2005 is with the theme, "Traces of Time."

The theme was brought alive by the children through costumes, presentations and

choreography that reflected colonial history, the nation's democratic journey and culture.

The Chief Marshal of the Calas Vegas Band, Prince Gershon, said the Junior Carnival was introduced and re-modified by the Governor of Cross River and his wife to ensure continuity.

Gershon, who is also the Special Adviser to the Governor on Intelligence, said that the Junior Carnival aimed at building the minds and strength of the children to take over the festival in future.

According to him, the practice is also aimed to catch them young, and identify their special abilities.

"If only us, the older ones play it, after we are gone, the carnival would also go," he said.

Noting positive feedback from parents, Gershon said the Junior Carnival would also help to reshape the children's character and behaviour.

Wike pledges support for Tinubu's second term

ABUJA

The Minister of the Federal Capital Territory, Mr Nyesom Wike, has pledged unwavering support for President Bola Tinubu's second term.

The Senior Special Assistant to the minister on Public Communications and Social Media, Mr Lere Olayinka, said that Wike made the pledge at the weekend while meeting PDP stakeholders in Ochigba, Rivers State.

Wike attended an end-of-year thanksgiving service organised by former Deputy Speaker of the House, Mr Chibudom Nwuche, in Ahoada East Local Government Area of Rivers.

Addressing stakeholders, Wike said their struggle would not be in vain, urging them to continue supporting Tinubu despite what he described as intimidation in the state.

He recalled openly backing Tinubu during the 2023 pres-

idential election, even when support was difficult in Rivers.

Wike said he would continue supporting the President now that conditions were easier, stressing that early supporters were recognized after Tinubu's victory.

"I want to thank you for standing with us all through these years. We know those who are ungrateful," he said.

He said political courage was required in 2023, when many were unsure of Tinubu's chances and feared openly supporting him.

"In politics, you must take a stand, believing that at the end of the day, it will be good. Now, it is good," Wike said.

He added that Rivers supporters made Tinubu "stand strong" in the state when it was difficult to declare loyalty.

Wike assured supporters he respected agreements, saying, "When we take a decision, Nigerians know we have taken it."

Ogudugu bags 'Esan Man of the Year' award

EKPOMA

The organisers of the Esan Icons Award 2025, Dave Entertainment International, have honoured the Chief Executive Officer of Daniels Homes Limited and Geovina Hotel and Suites, Mr. Daniel Ogudugu, with the prestigious 'Esan Man of the Year' award, in recognition of his humanitarian service and

community impact.

The award was presented during the grand ceremony of the Esan Icons Award in Emaudo, Ekpoma, Edo State.

Ogudugu, the founder of the Daniel Ogudugu Global Initiative Foundation (DO-GIF), was also recognized for his sustained commitment to addressing key social challenges, including homelessness, hunger relief, child welfare,

and support for widows and widowers across Esanland and other parts of the country.

The organisers said his interventions, driven by the values of dignity, inclusion, transparency and long-term community resilience, have continued to uplift vulnerable groups and strengthen grassroots development.

According to Dave Entertainment International, the Esan

Man of the Year award is reserved for individuals whose leadership, philanthropy and selfless service have made significant contributions to the development of Esanland while inspiring positive change in society.

The Esan Icons Award is an annual platform that celebrates excellence, honours legacy and recognizes individuals whose impact continues to shape the present and future of Esanland.

Police arrest suspect over murder of 43yr-old man in Edo community

IDAHOSA MUSA

The Edo State Police Command has arrested a suspect in connection with the killing of a 43-year-old man, Eghosa Osas, in Oben community, Orhionmwon Local Government Area, Edo State.

Police Public Relations Officer, CSP Eno Ikoedem, confirmed the incident on Sunday, saying the suspect, identified as Amadin William, was alleged-

edly a childhood friend of the deceased.

Ikoedem said the incident was reported by the victim's elder brother, adding that preliminary investigations revealed that Osas had recently returned from abroad to celebrate Christmas with his family.

According to her, the deceased was attending a house-warming ceremony in the community when he reportedly excused himself from

the gathering and was allegedly cornered by the suspect, who inflicted a fatal machete cut on his neck.

She said the suspect fled

the scene after the attack but was later tracked and arrested by police operatives in Benin City.

The police spokesperson

noted that investigations are ongoing to establish the motive behind the attack, assuring that the Command would ensure diligent prosecution of

the case.

"The suspect is currently in custody and will be charged to court at the conclusion of investigations," Ikoedem said.

Why turbine 'll not test-run this month, Bayelsa Electricity Company explains

YENAGOA

The Bayelsa State Electricity Company has explained why the new gas turbine expected to supply electricity to Yenagoa and other parts of Bayelsa State will not commence test-running before the end of December as earlier projected.

In a statement signed by the Managing Director of the company and Technical Team Lead for the project, Engineer Olice D. Kemenanabo, the delay was attributed to logistics challenges in shipping critical components needed to complete system coupling.

Kemenanabo said the outstanding parts had arrived in Nigeria and would soon be delivered to Bayelsa State, assuring that installation and test transmission would commence once installation was completed.

He extended condolences to the family of the late Deputy Governor of Bayelsa State, Senator Lawrence Ewhrudjakpo, describing him as a dynamic and resourceful leader.

Kemenanabo explained that the December timeline an-

nounced by the Bayelsa State Governor, Senator Douye Diri, was based on technical schedules and delivery projections provided by the project team.

He stressed that Governor Douye Diri had provided full financial backing for the project and personally chaired a high-level committee to fast-track approvals and reduce bureaucratic delays.

According to him, while most equipment had been delivered and installed, delays arose from revised estimated arrival times by shipping companies beyond the control of the project team.

He assured Bayelsans of transparency and reaffirmed commitment to the power transformation agenda of the Assured Hope Administration.

Meanwhile, Governor Douye Diri has constituted the Bayelsa State Electricity Regulatory Board to ensure effective service delivery once the turbine becomes operational.

Residents of Yenagoa and other parts of the state had been anticipating improved electricity supply before the end of the year.

Yuletide: Ebonyi youths benefit from Renewed Hope Agenda outreach

ABAKALIKI

Youths and women across Ebonyi State have benefited from the Renewed Hope Agenda outreach as food items were distributed in the spirit of the festive season.

The Southeast Coordinator of the Renewed Hope Agenda, Mr. Belusochukwu Enwere, disclosed this during the distribution exercise on Sunday.

Enwere said items, including bags of rice, were distributed across the 13 Local Government Areas of the state.

He described the initiative as a demonstration of compassion, solidarity and commitment to improving the welfare of the people, especially during

the Christmas season.

According to him, the Renewed Hope Agenda of President Bola Tinubu is anchored on inclusiveness, people-centred governance and restoring hope to Nigerians.

The Ebonyi State Coordinator of the agenda, Mr. James Alaka, said the distribution reflected President Tinubu's concern for the people amid prevailing economic challenges.

One of the beneficiaries, Miss Peace Aloh, expressed gratitude to the organisers, pledging continued support for the President's programmes.

If you want, I can tighten them further for front-page national newspaper style or rewrite any single story for lead placement.



CAN VISIT TINUBU:

President Bola Tinubu (4TH R); First Lady, Oluremi Tinubu (3RD R); President, Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Bishop Daniel Okoh (4TH L); Chief of Staff to the President, Femi Gbajabiamila (3RD L) and other members of CAN delegation during their visit to the President in Lagos during the yuletide.

Expert tasks govt on brain drain, proffers solutions to health sector migration

ABUJA

A United States board-certified physician, Dr. David Ikudayisi, has called on the Federal and State Governments to address the root causes of brain drain by improving working conditions and hospital equipment standards in Nigeria.

Ikudayisi, the Medical Director of Glory Wellness and Regenerative Centre, who operates medical practices in both Florida, United States of America, and Nigeria, gave the advice while speaking with journalists on Sunday in Abuja.

He said health-worker migra-

tion could only be stemmed if practitioners see clear and credible career-progression pathways that reward competence.

"Nigeria can reduce the pressure driving health-worker migration by achieving pay and working conditions satisfactory for the majority of the healthcare sector and ensuring high standards of hospital equipment," he said.

The medical expert also advocated strong incentives for research careers and sustained attention to the expressed needs of workers in the sector.

He urged Nigerians to embrace regenerative medicine, saying it could significantly re-

duce outbound medical tourism and strengthen the country's healthcare infrastructure.

According to him, regenerative medicine can strengthen advanced skills and infrastructure such as cell processing, cold-chain logistics, imaging-guided procedures, rehabilitation pathways and outcomes tracking.

He said it could also reduce outbound medical tourism when Nigeria builds trustworthy centres with proper governance, transparent outcomes and ethical practices aligned with regulatory guidance, noting that it is already attracting inbound medical tourism.

Ikudayisi said Glory Wellness and Regenerative Centre

was privileged to be at the forefront of regenerative medicine practice in Nigeria.

Speaking on his vision, he said he looked forward to a Nigeria that becomes a regional leader in cutting-edge medical innovations, especially regenerative medicine.

"My dream is to bridge global innovation with local needs, creating a healthcare future where regenerative medicine is home-grown, sustainable and transformative for Africa," he said.

Ikudayisi advised the public to be cautious when seeking advanced treatments, urging them to patronise only reputable centres with verifiable positive outcomes to ensure safety and efficacy.

Alumni lament deplorable state of Lagos Model College

BADAGRY (LAGOS)

Alumni of Iworo-Ajido Model College, under the umbrella of Ebute-Olofin Badagry Old Student Association, have lamented the deplorable state of infrastructure in the school.

The alumni expressed their concerns during the association's Annual General Meeting held at the college in Iworo-Ajido, Badagry Local Government Area of Lagos State.

The President of the association, Mr. Okelowo Oyedele, described the condition of the school as pathetic.

Oyedele, who said he graduated in 1983, recalled that the school once had a functional

science laboratory, but noted that the situation had worsened over the past two years, calling for Lagos State Government intervention.

He said some students had no desks and tables and were forced to sit on the floor during lessons, despite the school serving more than 1,000 students drawn from seven communities in Badagry.

According to him, although the school was upgraded to a model college about 10 years ago, it had not received a prototype building like other model schools.

He urged the Lagos State Government to construct a prototype building to improve learning conditions, adding that the association had al-

ready provided desks and tables for over 100 students.

Also speaking, the Vice-President of the association, Mrs. Margaret Olusanya, said she was the first female science student of the college in 1983, noting that science laboratories and classrooms were functional at the time.

She lamented that the laboratories had not been in use for over a decade, while students in junior and senior secondary classes now sit on the floor using wrappers to learn.

A lecturer at the Lagos State University, Ojo, Professor Olusegun Whenu, described the condition of the school as heartbreaking, calling for greater corporate social responsibility from companies

and industries.

The Principal of Iworo-Ajido Senior College, Reverend Omodele Aminu, confirmed that all Senior Secondary School One students were sitting on the floor, noting that leaking roofs worsened learning conditions during rainfall.

Similarly, the Principal of the junior college, Mr. Oluwatoyin Adeleye, said lack of classrooms forced the school to use two classrooms belonging to the senior college.

However, the Personal Assistant to the Permanent Secretary, Education District Five, Lagos State, Mr. Paul Akinyele, said the ministry had inspected the school and assured that prototype buildings would be constructed in 2026

NEWS

Explore regenerative medicine for chronic ailments, Expert urges Nigerians

ABUJA

A Nigerian-American Regenerative Medicine Expert, Dr David Ikudayisi, has urged Nigerians living with chronic and incurable conditions to explore regenerative medicine as a viable alternative for biological repair.

Ikudayisi, the Medical Di-

rector of Glory Wellness and Regenerative Centre, stated this in an interview with news- men in Abuja on Sunday.

He described regenerative medicine as a transformative field focused on helping the body heal itself by repairing or restoring damaged cells, tissues and organs, rather than merely managing symptoms.

According to the US Board-certified physician, the field utilizes the body's own biological systems, specifically adult stem cells and Platelet-Rich Plasma (PRP)—to restore function to damaged organs.

He said that in current medical practice, doctors mainly use mesenchymal stem cells taken from bone marrow or fat

tissue to reduce inflammation and release healing signals, called growth factors.

This, he said, represents a major shift in healthcare from long-term symptom management to actual cellular recovery, stating that the effects are well documented in leading peer-reviewed medical journals.

"Today, regenerative medicine is most commonly used in orthopaedics and sports medicine.

"It helps to manage joint wear, tendon and ligament injuries, and early arthritis by improving tissue quality rather than just reducing pain.

"It is also used in chronic wound care, skin repair and some aspects of pain management.

"In heart disease, stroke and nerve injury, regenerative treatments are still largely in research and clinical trial stages, but results so far are encouraging.

"Looking ahead, the potential is significant. Scientists are developing tissue engineering methods, where cells are grown on supportive structures, called scaffolds, to form new tissue.

"This raises the possibility of lab-grown cartilage, skin, blood vessels and eventually, organs," he said.

Ikudayisi further stated that

researchers were also studying ways to guide healing at the genetic level, helping cells repair damage more effectively.

The medical expert noted that the treatment was particularly effective for diabetes complications, post-stroke recovery, sexual dysfunction as well as orthopedic issues like arthritis, among others.

"One of the biggest practical benefits is in difficult-to-heal diabetic wounds where improved circulation and tissue repair can make a real difference.

"There is also growing interest in how regenerative approaches can support organs commonly affected by diabetes, such as the kidneys, by improving the local healing environment and reducing ongoing inflammation."



A JOURNEY:

Motorists loading their vehicle as they prepare to set out for a journey at mile 1 Park in Port Harcourt on Sunday

Police confirm 2 killed, 4 abducted in Gombe community

GOMBE

The Police Command in Gombe State has said gunmen killed two persons and kidnapped four in an attack on Pindiga Community in Akko Local Government Area of the state.

The Command's Spokesperson, DSP Buhari Abdullahi, in a statement issued in Abuja on Sunday, said the attack happened at 3.30a.m. on Sunday morning.

Abdullahi stated that unidentified armed men invaded the residence of the victims along Pindiga-Kashere Road, where

they shot 31-year-old Yusuf Mohammed and 28-year-old Faiza Mohammed while abducting 16-year-old Zainab Mohammed Yusuf, all of the same address.

He said that the gunmen further proceeded to the residence of one Alhaji Yayaji Abdullahi, where they abducted his wife and two children.

Abdullahi said that the two gunshot victims were immediately rushed to the Cottage Hospital, Pindiga, where they were confirmed dead by a medical doctor.

He said following this development, tactical and intelligence-led operations had been intensified in the area.

"Consequently, hunters and

local vigilante groups were mobilised, while concerted efforts are ongoing to rescue the abducted victims and apprehend the perpetrators of this heinous crime."

In a related development, Governor Inuwa Yahaya of Gombe State has condemned the murder, describing the attack as barbaric, cruel and utterly unacceptable.

According to him, the killing of innocent citizens in their homes, alongside the abduction of women and children, is a heinous crime that deeply offends humanity and challenges the peace and security Gombe State has worked hard to sustain.

"This dastardly act is a direct as-

sault on our collective conscience and a painful test of our resolve to protect lives and property.

"The Government and people of Gombe State share in the grief and anguish of the affected families and the entire Pindiga community," he stated.

The governor assured that the crime would not go unchecked, disclosing that the Nigeria Police and other security agencies had commenced intensive investigations into the killings and abductions.

The governor directed that all necessary resources be deployed to track down the perpetrators, rescue the abducted victims unharmed, and bring all those involved to justice.

Forest Guards: FG graduates 7,000 to strengthen internal security architecture

ABUJA

The Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA), has announced the graduation of over 7,000 newly recruited Forest Guards drawn from seven frontline states to strengthen Nigeria's internal security architecture.

This followed the successful completion of an intensive three-month training programme under the Presidential Forest Guards Initiative launched by President Bola Tinubu, in May 2025.

This was contained in a statement issued by the Special Assistant on Media to Minister of Information and National Orientation, Malam Rabiu Ibrahim at the weekend in Abuja.

According to the statement, the initiative represents a coordinated Federal - State security intervention aimed at reclaim-

ing Nigeria's forests from criminal exploitation.

Ibrahim, in the statement, said the graduation ceremonies were held across seven states of Borno, Sokoto, Yobe, Adamawa, Niger, Kwara, and Kebbi.

"The programme is designed to strengthen Nigeria's internal security architecture by denying terrorists, bandits, kidnappers, and other criminal groups sanctuary within forested and hard-to-reach terrains.

"The training programme was deliberately intensive, structured, and demanding, designed to transform loyal and committed Nigerians into agile, disciplined, and capable field operatives.

"The curriculum integrated environmental conservation principles with advanced security competencies, ensuring a balanced, professional, and mission-ready force."

Eyo festival underscores Nigeria's tourism potential — Tinubu

ABUJA

President Bola Tinubu says Nigeria's diverse culture and traditions hold immense tourism potential and should be harnessed as valuable tools for destination promotion.

The president stated this on Saturday at the Grand Finale of the week-long 2025 Eyo Festival held at Tafawa Balewa Square, Lagos.

This was contained in a statement issued by Presidential spokesperson, Mr Bayo Onanuga at the weekend.

"It is a reminder that our culture and traditions hold great tourism potential.

"Indeed, our cultural assets can serve as valuable resources for destination promotion.

"The glamour of white-robed figures parading our streets sends a resounding message about our identity and

our country," Tinubu said.

The president attended the festival dressed in a white robe, damask sash and a distinctive star-studded hat, carrying the traditional opambata staff.

The colourful celebration began with homage paid to the President at his Lagos residence on Sunday, December 21, ahead of the grand finale.

The Eyo Festival, which dates back to 1854, was held this year for the first time in eight years.

The 2025 edition honoured four eminent Lagos personalities: former Military Administrator Mobolaji Johnson; former civilian governor Lateef Jakande; former governor Michael Otedola; and Alhaja Abibatu Mogaji.

Tinubu described the carnival as "a great rekindling of our culture."

"The Eyo Festival is a vibrant expression of the rich traditions of Lagos."

NCoS FCT equips inmates with skills, education for successful reintegration

ABUJA

The Nigerian Correctional Service (NCoS), Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Command, on Sunday, said it has recorded significant achievements in empowerment of inmates, through expanded skill acquisition and educational training programmes.

NCoS said this is aimed at rehabilitation and reduction of recidivism.

The Controller of Corrections, FCT Command, Mr Christopher Jen, said that the in-

itiatives were designed to facilitate seamless reintegration of inmates into society, by equipping them with relevant vocational skills and formal education.

In a statement by the Command Public Relations Officer (CPRO), Samson Duza, in Abuja, Jen explained that since assuming office, the Command had prioritized the training of inmates.

He said this was through strategic partnerships with various organisations, adding that donations of training materials by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) had greatly strengthened the pro-

grammes across custodial centres in the FCT.

"I am immensely proud of the transformative progress we've made in empowering inmates through skills acquisition and education.

"These partnerships with NGOs have not only equipped over 800 inmates with practical skills, but are paving way for true rehabilitation and reduced recidivism," he said.

According to him, the Command currently runs diverse skill acquisition programmes, cutting across vocational, creative and agricultural sectors.

He listed some areas to include: barbing with 32 inmates in training, cap making with 35 inmates, embroidery with five inmates, shoe making with 42, tailoring with 48 inmates, carpentry with eight inmates, among others.

He said that these inmates and more, were respectively undergoing training in the aforementioned fields, and more.

The NCoS boss added that agricultural-based skills featured prominently, with 200 inmates trained in fisheries, 78 in poultry farming and 80 in paint production.

Akpabio seeks Remo, Ijebu unity to achieve Ijebu-Remo State

SAGAMU (OGUN)

The Senate President, Senator Godswill Akpabio, has urged the people of Remoland to strengthen unity and cooperation with their Ijebu kinsmen in pursuit of the proposed Ijebu-Remo State.

Akpabio made the call at the 2025 Remo Day celebration held at the Akarigbo Pavilion in Sagamu at the weekend, describing harmony as essential to the realization of the collective aspiration.

The programme had as its theme: "One People, Diverse Cultures, One Identity."

He described the Remo people as industrious, enterprising and astute industrialists, noting that their spirit of cooper-

ation would be pivotal to the creation of the new state.

"I want to urge the Remo people to continue to live in peace. Remo is blessed with hardworking industrialists, which explains the concentration of industries in this area.

"I want you to work closely with the Ijebu people towards the creation of Ijebu State. We at the National Assembly will support you.

"I will not speak about where the capital will be located, but you already know. However, the capital must be in a peaceful environment," he said.

Akpabio said the cultural celebration served as an opportunity for collective reflection and strategic thinking about the development of the homeland.

He added that his presence at the event symbolized Nigeria's unity across ethnic boundaries, stressing that diversity should be embraced as a strength rather than a weakness in nation-building.

The Senate President assured Nigerians that insecurity across the country would soon become a thing of the past, noting that

President Bola Tinubu is working assiduously to address the nation's security challenges.

Akpabio also commended Governor Dapo Abiodun for his infrastructural strides across Ogun State, singling out the Gateway International Airport, which he described as the best airport in the country.

In his remarks, Governor Abi-

odun described Remoland as a land blessed with illustrious sons and daughters who have contributed immensely to the development of Ogun State and Nigeria.

The governor said the massive turnout at the event underscored the unifying power of culture, warning that societies that lose touch with their roots risk losing their identity.

"Remo is far more than a geographical expression; it is a people defined by a rich and enduring history," the governor said.

Earlier, the Akarigbo and Paramount Ruler of Remoland, Oba Babatunde Ajayi, said the vision behind instituting Remo Day was to celebrate, preserve and project Remo culture to the global stage.

MTN Nigeria gifts couple N2m at surprise Yello Wedding in Enugu

ENUGU

MTN Nigeria, as part of its nationwide YelloTide festive campaign, has presented a N2 million gift to a newlywed couple, Mr and Mrs Uchekukwu Anugwo.

The organisation presented the gift during a surprise Yello Wedding activation held at the Community Primary School, Ugwuaji, Enugu South Local Government Area of Enugu State, at the weekend.

The YelloTide campaign was launched by MTN earlier in November as a three-phase celebration aimed at spreading joy, kindness and connection across Nigeria during the 2025 festive season.

The initiative includes community engagements, surprise giveaways and social experiences designed to foster togetherness and create memorable moments for Nigerians.

Speaking at the event, Mr Tobe Okigbo, Chief Corporate Services and Sustainability Officer of MTN Nigeria, said the gesture reflected the company's commitment to impacting lives and reinforcing connection, which he described as the core value of the telecom operator.

"It is MTN. We impact people's lives, support and surprise them. We ensure connection between people; that is what we do.

"So what we have done today is to support and recognise the connection between this couple, which is essentially what we do," he said.

He explained that the couple was chosen randomly, adding that there was no selection criteria and that they were unaware of the planned surprise.

Responding, Mr Anugwo, an Assistant Superintendent with the Federal Fire Service, Enugu, said he and his wife, Igwedima Dorin, were overwhelmed by the gesture.

Ondo police intensify manhunt for abductors, rescue victim

AKURE

The Police Command in Ondo State has rescued one Ali Kolade, who was abducted by armed men from his residence at Ijelu Quarters, Owo, in Owo Local Government Area of the state.

The command's spokesperson, Deputy Superintendent of Police Jimoh Kazeem, disclosed this in a statement issued at the weekend

in Akure.

Kazeem said the rescue followed a distress call from one Major Tajudeen at the A Division Police Headquarters, Owo.

He said the abductors, numbering about six, robbed the victim of Samsung and ITEL mobile phones, as well as an iPad.

According to him, the assailants also carted away an unregistered black Toyota Corolla car, while N1.47 million was transferred from the victim's

bank account.

"Acting promptly on the information, the Divisional Police Officer mobilised a response team in collaboration with the military and embarked on an intensive pursuit of the suspects.

"Although the suspects managed to escape, the victim was successfully rescued and immediately taken to a nearby hospital for medical attention, and subsequently debriefed by investigators.

"Meanwhile, investigation is ongoing, with concerted efforts being intensified to identify, track and apprehend the perpetrators of this heinous crime," he said.

The police spokesperson reiterated that Ondo State would never be a safe haven for criminal elements.

He said the command has consistently demonstrated that criminals operating within the state would always be identified, tracked and brought to justice



2025 DALET BARRACKS UNION PARTY:

Chairman, Diaspora Board of trustee (Germany), Mr Charles Joseph (L) presenting a gift to the grand patron of the Association Mr Oliver James, during the 2025 Dalet Barracks Old Boys and Girls' Association Union party in Kaduna on Sunday.

COAS charges troops to sustain momentum, decisively crush bandits, terrorists

ABUJA

The Chief of Army Staff, Lieutenant General Waidi Shaibu, has charged troops to sustain the current operational tempo to decisively eliminate bandits and terrorists operating within their Areas of Responsibility.

Shaibu gave the directive while addressing troops of 248 Reconnaissance Battalion, Illela, Sokoto State, operating un-

der 8 Division and Joint Task Force, Operation FANSAN YAMMA.

This was contained in a statement issued at the weekend in Abuja by the Acting Director, Army Public Relations, Colonel Appolonia Anele.

The Chief of Army Staff commended the troops for their gallantry, professionalism and resilience in confronting criminal elements whose activities have brought untold hard-

ship to innocent Nigerians.

He lauded their operational successes, noting that their sustained efforts have significantly improved security within their Areas of Responsibility.

"I commend you for your courage, professionalism and the operational successes recorded so far.

"Your sacrifices have translated into improved security in your Areas of Responsibility.

"You must maintain the mo-

mentum to further annihilate and send the terrorists to their maker, who will decide what to do with them.

"We can no longer tolerate their excesses against the Nigerian people," he said.

Shaibu further reassured the troops of his unwavering commitment to their welfare.

He directed the construction of additional accommodation, medical and other essential facilities at Illela Barracks to enhance the morale, well-being and operational effectiveness of troops and their families.

Foundation seeks early care for children living with scoliosis

LAGOS

The Scoliosis Focus Foundation has advocated early medical intervention for scoliosis patients, especially children, to improve treatment outcomes and quality of life.

The founder, Dr Ayomide Akintan-Adejuwon, made the call at the foundation's 12th anniversary celebration held in Lagos at the weekend, describing scoliosis as a deformity of the spine.

The programme, organised in partnership with God's Love Medical Mission, had the theme, "The Hope of Glory."

Akintan-Adejuwon, a gen-

eral practitioner at Gbagada General Hospital, urged parents to present children with spinal deformities early for proper medical management.

She said late presentation often results from spiritual misconceptions or lack of funds, which worsen the condition and treatment outcomes.

"There is a need for awareness to enlighten Nigerians and stop the stigmatisation experienced by people living with scoliosis.

"Scoliosis is not a disease or attack. It is a deformity of the spine, mostly idiopathic, meaning the cause is unknown.

"If you notice a deformity you do not understand, the first step is to take the child to a health-

care centre or hospital," she said.

She cautioned parents against patronising traditional bone healers, warning that mismanagement could result in paralysis.

Akintan-Adejuwon, who also lives with scoliosis, said the foundation has supported patients through treatment, counselling and awareness programmes nationwide.

"In the last 12 years, we have supported individuals with scoliosis and other deformities requiring special care.

"We work with over 20 participants across the country and collaborate with the National Orthopaedic Hospital, Lagos, for urgent cases," she said.

She appealed to government

to provide more resources to improve access to care for scoliosis patients.

Consultant spine surgeon, Dr Mutaleeb Shobode, said scoliosis is more common in girls, with nine out of every 10 reported cases.

He described scoliosis as a sideways spinal deformity, often affecting the right side, noting that not all cases require surgery.

"Children with curves between 20 and 40 degrees can be managed with braces," Shobode explained.

He identified late presentation, personnel shortages and inadequate facilities as key challenges, urging increased investment in local capacity.

NEWS

Troops rescue abducted victim, recover motorcycles, cattle in Kano

KANO

Troops of the Joint Task Force (JTF) Faruruwa have rescued a kidnapped victim following a suc-

cessful security operation along the Kano-Katsina border in the early hours of Sunday.

The Army Public Relations Officer of the 3 Brigade, Nigerian Army, Kano, Major Zubair

Babatunde, told reporters that the operation followed a credible tip-off received at about 1:00 a.m. on the movement of armed bandits from Daurawa and Kira areas of Katsina State towards the Kano axis.

According to him, troops operating from the Forward Operating Base (FOB), Yank-

wada, swiftly mobilised a fighting patrol to the fringes of the Kano-Katsina border to intercept the suspected bandits.

"On arrival at Ungwan Dogo and Ungwan Tudu, the troops made contact with the armed bandits and engaged them in a fierce gun battle.

"The bandits were overpower-

ed and forced to withdraw in disarray towards Matazu Local Government Area of Katsina State," he said.

Babatunde said that during the encounter, one kidnap victim, identified as Rabi Alhaji Halilu, aged 38, was rescued by the troops.

According to him, Halilu sustained a gunshot wound on his leg during captivity and was promptly evacuated to the JTF Faruruwa Medical Centre,

where he is currently receiving treatment.

Items recovered during the operation included three motorcycles abandoned by the fleeing bandits, as well as an undisclosed number of cattle believed to have been rustled.

He added that troops had remained on high alert and intensified patrols in the area to prevent further criminal activities and ensure sustained security in border communities.



13TH ANNUAL COOKOUT INITIATIVE:

National Coordinator, Afe Global Development Foundation, John Onyema (2nd L), sharing food to the needy, during the festive season as part of the Foundation's 13th Annual Cookout Initiative to feeds 2,000 less privileged Nigerians in Abuja on Sunday.

Fire: LCCI outlines measures to safeguard markets, sustain economic activities

LAGOS

The Lagos Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) has outlined strategic measures to prevent market fires, safeguard enterprises and sustain economic activities following the fire outbreak at Great Niger Insurance House on Lagos Island.

The blaze, which occurred between Wednesday and Thursday, razed the building on Martins Street, causing losses worth millions of naira and affecting numerous small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

The Director-General of LCCI, Dr Chinyere Almona, said in an interview with journalists at the weekend in Lagos

that the incident underscored the vulnerability of market-based enterprises, which form the backbone of Lagos' commercial ecosystem.

She noted that beyond the immediate destruction of goods and infrastructure, such incidents raised serious concerns about business continuity, safety preparedness, investor confidence and the resilience of Nigeria's trading environment.

Almona added that with insurance penetration among Nigerian SMEs estimated at below five per cent, most affected operators lacked the financial buffers required to restart operations quickly.

"This often leads to pro-

longed downtime, loss of income and potential exit from the market.

"Beyond individual businesses, such incidents disrupt supply chains, weaken customer confidence and reduce overall commercial activity in affected areas, highlighting the fragility of business continuity planning among market-based enterprises," she said.

According to her, the recurrent outbreak of fires in major markets exposed critical infrastructure gaps requiring urgent attention.

She said many markets lacked functional fire hydrants, reliable water supply and onsite firefighting equipment, forcing responders to rely on external resources and delaying containment.

Almona added that over-

crowded layouts, narrow pathways and unauthorized structural extensions further accelerated fire spread and hindered emergency access.

"Addressing these gaps demands a comprehensive redesign of market infrastructure that prioritises safety, enforces building codes and integrates fire prevention into market planning and operations," she said.

The LCCI director-general stressed that improving safety and preparedness required a deliberate shift from reactive responses to preventive and structured risk management.

She said this included installing functional fire detection and suppression systems such as smoke alarms, fire extinguishers, sprinklers and clearly marked emergency exits.

Watchman arrested over alleged killing at Gombe Govt House

GOMBE

The Police Command in Gombe State has arrested a 19-year-old casual watchman, Shuaibu Adamu, for allegedly killing a fellow casual worker at the Government House.

The command's spokesperson, Deputy Superintendent of Police Buhari Abdullahi, confirmed the arrest in a statement issued at the weekend

Abdullahi said the police

received a distress call at about 3:50 p.m. on Friday reporting a suspected case of culpable homicide within the Government House premises.

"The report stated that a male adult, Mallam Umar, a borehole operator, was found lying motionless within the premises.

"Preliminary findings showed that his trousers were tied around his neck, while a local intoxicant, popularly known as rubber solution, was

found in his mouth," he said.

The victim was rushed to the Specialist Hospital, Gombe, where a doctor certified him dead, while his body was deposited at the mortuary for autopsy.

Abdullahi said the Commissioner of Police, Umar Chuso, visited the scene and ordered a thorough investigation.

He added that CCTV footage revealed that Adamu, also known as "Yaya Mama", assaulted the deceased shortly before his death and fled the scene.

"A follow-up operation at about 11 p.m. on Friday led to his arrest at Bagadaza Quarters, Gombe," he said.

According to him, the suspect confessed during preliminary interrogation and would remain in custody pending completion of investigations and prosecution.

"The command reassures the public of its commitment to justice and safety around government facilities," Abdullahi added.

Retired AIG Dalijan appointed commandant of Zamfara community protection guards

GUSAU

Governor Dauda Lawal of Zamfara State has approved the appointment of retired Assistant Inspector-General of Police, Dr Muhammad Dalijan, as Commandant of the state-owned security outfit, Community Protection Guards (CPG).

This was contained in a statement issued on Sunday in Gusau by the Secretary to the State Government, Malam Abubakar Nakwada.

Dalijan served as Commissioner of Police in Zamfara State between 2023 and 2025 before his promotion to the rank of Assistant Inspector-General of Police.

According to Nakwada, the appointment is part of decisive efforts by Governor Dauda Lawal to strengthen the security architecture of the state.

"Governor Dauda Lawal has approved the appointment of a retired Assistant Inspector-General of Police, Dr Muhammad Dalijan, as the new State Commandant of the Zamfara Community Protection Guards.

"The appointment takes immediate effect," the statement said.

The governor also directed a comprehensive overhaul of the Community Protection Guards to address operational and administrative challenges affecting its performance.

Until his retirement in June 2025, Dalijan served as Assistant Inspector-General of Police in charge of Counter-Terrorism at the Force Headquarters, Abuja.

He holds a Bachelor's degree in Sociology from Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, obtained in 1990, as well as Master's and Doctorate degrees in Criminology from the University of Abuja, earned in 2007 and 2018 respectively.

Governor Dauda Lawal expressed confidence that Dalijan's familiarity with Zamfara's security challenges and terrain would enable him to reposition the CPG in line with the administration's rescue agenda.

He also commended the immediate past commandant for his selfless service, wished him speedy recovery and reassured him of the government's continued support.

Anambra community seeks govt intervention over erosion displacing residents

AWKA

Residents of Enugu-Nanka Village in Orumba North Local Government Area of Anambra State have appealed to government for urgent intervention to address worsening gully erosion threatening the community.

They also appealed to the World Bank and relevant environmental stakeholders to prevent further destruction of lives and property.

Chairman of the Enugu-Nanka Erosion and Flood Control Committee, Chief Emmanuel Osele, told journalists that the erosion had displaced more than 200 families, while houses worth billions of naira had collapsed into the gullies.

He said several buildings, farmlands, access roads linking the village with neighbouring Amakor and Ubahu commu-

nities, as well as critical infrastructure, were at risk if urgent action was not taken.

Osele said residents had embarked on self-help measures, including tree planting, construction of drainages and catchment pits, and had warned against indiscriminate tree felling, but with limited success.

"We are calling on the Federal Government and the Anambra State Government to urgently intervene in the worsening erosion threatening our community," he said.

A resident, Nze Joshua Obinwa, said the erosion had persisted for decades and displaced many elderly people from their ancestral homes.

Another resident, Mr Alexander Nwafete, said more than 1,000 plots of land had been lost to the erosion, severely affecting socio-economic activities.

Foreign

NEWS

Polls close on first day of Myanmar's widely criticised 'sham' election

The first of three phases of voting has finished in Myanmar in an election widely dismissed as a "sham", with major political parties dissolved, leaders jailed and as much as half the country not expected to vote due to an ongoing civil war.

The military government is holding a phased ballot nearly five years after it seized power in a coup, prompting widespread opposition and spiralling into civil war.

Observers say the junta, with China's support, is seeking to legitimise its power as it seeks a way out of the devastating stalemate.

More than 200 people have been charged for disrupting or opposing the polls under a new law which carries severe punishments, including the death penalty.

There were reports of explosions and airstrikes across multiple regions as the first round of voting took place on Sunday. A rocket attack on an uninhabited house in the Mandalay region in the early hours of the morning injured three people, the region's chief minister told the BBC.

Separately, a series of explosions damaged more than ten houses in the Myawaddy township, near the border with Thailand, late on Saturday. A resident told the BBC that a child was killed and three others were taken to hospital.

Voters have told the BBC that the election feels more "disciplined and systematic" than previous polls.

"The experience of voting has changed a lot," said Ma Su ZarChi, who lives in the Mandalay region.

"Before I voted, I was afraid.

Now that I have voted, I feel relieved. I cast my ballot as someone who has tried their best for the country."

First-time voter Ei Pyay Phy Maung, 22, said she was voting because she believed it is "the responsibility of every citizen".

"My hope is for the lower classes - right now, the prices of goods are skyrocketing, and I want to support someone who can bring them down for those struggling the most," she said.

"I want a president who provides equally for all people."

The Burmese junta has rejected criticism of the polls, maintaining that it aims to "return [the country] to a multi-party democratic system".

After casting his vote at a highly fortified polling station in the capital, junta chief Min Aung Hlaing told the BBC that the election would be free and fair.

"I am the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, a civil servant. I can't just say that I want to be president," he said, stressing that there are three phases of the election.

Earlier this week, he warned that those who refuse to vote are rejecting "progress toward democracy".

Film director Mike Tee, actor Kyaw Win Htut and comedian Ohn Daing were among the prominent figures convicted under the law against disrupting polls, which was enacted in July.

They were each handed a seven-year jail term after criticising a film promoting the elections, state media reported.

UN Special Rapporteur Tom Andrews on Sunday called on the international community to reject the election - saying "nothing legitimate" can come of it.

Three killed in Sweden as major storm sweeps across Nordic countries

A third person has died in Sweden after a powerful winter storm swept across Nordic countries, causing travel disruption and power outages.

Sweden's meteorological agency issued alerts for strong winds for large parts of the northern half of the country as Storm Johannes hit.

One man in his 50s died after being struck by a tree at the Kungsberget ski resort in the country's south, local media and police reported. Further north, regional utility company Hemab said one of its employees died in an accident while out working.

Police also said a man in his 60s was taken to hospital after being hit by a tree while working in a forest in Hofors, east-central Sweden, and later died of his injuries.

Tens of thousands of homes in Sweden, Norway and Finland have been left without power as a result of the storm.

In Sweden, more than 40,000 homes were affected by power outages and numerous rail services were cancelled, Swedish news agency TT reported.

Several flights, rail and ferry services across parts of the Nordic nations have been cancelled.

Roads and rail services have also been disrupted due to the storm conditions.

In Norway's Nordland region, one of the most northerly counties in the country, the fire department responded to more than 200 weather-related incidents, broadcaster NRK reported.

Storm Johannes cut power to around 23,000 homes in Nordland and a further 9,000 were without electricity in the Inland region, according to NRK.

In Finland, the storm - known there as Hannes - subsided on Sunday morning but had left more than 60,000 homes without power, according to public broadcaster Yle.

Flights at Kittila airport in northern Finland were grounded after heavy winds pushed a passenger jet and a smaller plane off the runway and into a bank of snow, the Helsinki Times reported.

The Swiss Air jet, carrying about 150 passengers, had just landed from Geneva and was taxiing when it veered off, the paper said. The smaller jet, a 400XT model, was on the ground at the same time and was also pushed off course by the wind, it added.

There have been no reported injuries.



MYANMAR VOTERS QUEUE:

Voters queue to cast their ballots in Yangon, Myanmar.

Zelensky says Russia 'doesn't want peace', ahead of Florida meeting with Trump

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky will meet Donald Trump in Florida on Sunday, for the latest round of talks aimed at ending nearly four years of war with Russia.

The pair will discuss an updated version of a US-brokered peace plan, which Moscow is yet to support, as well as separate proposals for US security guarantees.

Their meeting at the US president's Mar-a-Lago home follows intense Russian bombardment of Kyiv over the weekend, which Zelensky said is evidence that Moscow "doesn't want peace".

On Friday night, a 10-hour missile and drone barrage targeting Ukraine's capital killed two people and left 32 others injured, local authorities said.

There were further Russian strikes on Saturday night.

At the meeting in Florida, Zelensky is expected to raise security guarantees and territorial concessions for Ukraine, both of which are issues that Russia has previously been unwilling to compromise on.

They will also discuss the new 20-point peace plan, a revised version of an earlier 28-point plan drafted by US special envoy Steve Witkoff which was widely seen as being too favourable to Russia.

Control of Ukraine's eastern Donbas has been a major sticking point so far, but Zelensky has now said a "free economic zone" could be an option.

Moscow currently controls about 75% of the Donetsk region, and some 99% of the

neighbouring Luhansk. The regions are collectively known as Donbas.

The Kremlin has not commented on Zelensky's offer to withdraw troops from the eastern Donbas region, if Russia pulls back too.

But on Saturday, Russian President Vladimir Putin said Ukraine was "in no hurry to resolve this conflict peacefully", state-owned news agency Tass reported.

Putin added that if Kyiv did not want to resolve the conflict peacefully, Russia would accomplish its objectives militarily.

On Friday, he told reporters that it was 90% complete: "Our task is to make sure everything is 100% ready."

But in an interview with Politico, Trump warned that Zelensky "doesn't have any-

thing until I approve it".

Trump added that he was expecting to see the new draft on Sunday.

"I think it's going to go good with him. I think it's going to go good with [Vladimir] Putin," Trump said in the interview, adding that he expects to speak with Russia's president "soon".

Following meetings with Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, Zelensky said Moscow's latest attack on Kyiv was "Russia's answer [to] our peace efforts and this really shows that Putin doesn't want peace".

Zelensky also took a call with European leaders to discuss diplomatic "priorities" ahead of his meeting with Trump, adding that "strong positions are needed" to move forward with the plan.

Executions in Iran set to double in 2025, report says

The number of executions in Iran in 2025 is set to more than double compared to the amount which took place across the country in 2024.

Norwegian-based Iran Human Rights (IHR) group told the BBC it had verified at least 1,500 executions up until the start of December, adding that many more have taken place since.

Last year, IHR was able to verify 975 executions - although the exact number is never completely clear as Iranian authorities do not give official figures.

However, the analysis shows another significant annual rise, and the figures chime with those provided by other monitoring groups.

Iran's government has previously defended its use of the death penalty, saying it is limited to only "the most severe crimes".

Execution figures were already on the rise before mass demonstrations broke out across the country in 2022 following the death in custody of Mahsa Amini.

The 22-year-old Kurdish woman was detained by morality police in Tehran for allegedly wearing her hijab "improperly".

That protest movement represented the biggest challenge to the legitimacy of Iran's theocratic leadership for many years.

In response, authorities intensified the rate of executions from around 520 in 2022 to 832 the following year - according to the figures verified by IHR.

There have been some executions for protesters or alleged spies - but 99% of those executed have been for murder or drug offences - a ratio which has remained constant.

Activists have said that the rate of executions in Iran increases when the regime feels under threat and that the aim is to forestall internal opposition by instilling fear in the population.

It seems to be borne out by the fact that since the 12-day war with Israel in June, as well as major setbacks for Iran's proxy forces across the region, there's been another big surge.



NEWS

Foreign

Nine arrested in Italy for allegedly raising millions for Hamas

Italian police have arrested nine people accused of raising around €7m (£6m) for Hamas over more than two years.

The money was ostensibly collected as humanitarian aid for Palestinian civilians, a police statement said, but was instead sent to the militant group via a "complex fundraising system".

Alongside the arrests, police say they have seized more than €8m (£7m) in assets as part of the investigation.

Police say the suspects are "specifically accused of carrying out financing operations believed to have contributed to terrorist activities".

The arrests were made as part of a joint initiative between Italy's counter-terror police and financial police.

The investigation began after the 7 October 2023 Hamas attack in southern Israel.

Police say they analysed "a series of reports of suspicious financial transactions" involving some of the suspects in the lead up to the attack.

Investigators uncovered a "complex" system of fundrais-

ing, which was headquartered in Genoa with branches in Milan, the statement adds.

"The suspects collected donations intended for the civilian population of Gaza, however, it emerged that over 71% of these funds were diverted to Hamas's coffers to finance its military wing and support the families of suicide bombers or those detained for terrorism," the police statement says.

Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi said the most well-known of the arrested suspects was Mohammad Hannoun, the president of the Palestinian Association in Italy.

Piantedosi thanked police for their work in a post on X, but also noted that "the presumption of innocence... must always be recognised at this stage".

Mr Hannoun said that he is "neither closely nor remotely" related to Hamas but has always supported them.

"I have always declared with utmost transparency that I am a Palestinian citizen and publicly support the legitimate resistance of the Palestinian people," he told reporters.

Fresh clashes reported in eastern DRC town of Uvira despite M23 promise to withdraw

Hopes of peace in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo are fading after new clashes erupted in Uvira on Friday.

Rwanda-backed M23 rebels captured the strategic town earlier this month just days after Kigali and Kinshasa reaffirmed their commitment to a US-brokered peace deal during a meeting in Washington. M23 is not party to the accord, but is negotiating separately with Kinshasa in Qatar.

The United States accused Rwanda of violating the agreement and M23 said it would withdraw. But residents say the rebels in plainclothes or wearing police uniforms have stayed behind. Kinshasa has

accused M23 of regrouping in the hills above Uvira.

Early on Friday, Congolese armed forces reportedly used drones to strike rebel boats in Lake Tanganyika's Kalundu port, local security forces say.

Residents also reported hearing gunfire exchanged between pro-Kinshasa forces and M23 fighters earlier this week.

M23 seized the South Kivu cities of Goma and Bukavu along the border with Burundi at the start of the year.

Their offensive into Uvira on December 10 forced tens of thousands of people to flee across the border into Burundi, overwhelming its capacity, according to the United Nations refugee agency, UNHCR.



FRENCH ACTRESS DIES @ 91:

Brigitte Bardot - pictured here in 2006 - gave up acting to concentrate on animal welfare at the age of 39.

French cinema actress Brigitte Bardot dies aged 91

French actress Brigitte Bardot, who revolutionised 1950s French cinema and became a symbol of sexual liberation, has died aged 91.

The cinema icon - BB as she was known in her home country - acted in almost 50 films, including *And God Created Woman*, but retired in 1973 to devote her life to animal welfare.

Paying tribute, President Emmanuel Macron said France is mourning "a legend of the century", while the Brigitte Bardot Foundation remembered her as a "world-renowned actress".

Later in life, Bardot's reputation was damaged after she made homophobic slurs and was fined multiple times for inciting racial hatred.

In a statement, the animal welfare foundation she established said it was announcing her death with "immense sadness".

The Brigitte Bardot Foundation said she was "a world-renowned actress and singer, who chose to abandon her prestigious career to dedicate

her life and energy to animal welfare and her foundation."

It did not specify where or when Bardot died.

In a tribute on social media, President Macron wrote: "Her films, her voice, her dazzling glory, her initials, her sorrows, her generous passion for animals, her face that became Marianne, Brigitte Bardot embodied a life of freedom.

"French existence, universal brilliance. She touched us. We mourn a legend of the century."

Another who paid tribute was French far-right politician Marine Le Pen: "France loses an exceptional woman, through her talent, her courage, her frankness, her beauty."

Bardot's husband, whom she married in 1992, was Bernard d'Ormale, a former adviser to the late far-right politician Jean-Marie Le Pen - the father of Marine.

Brigitte Anne-Marie Bardot was born in Paris in 1934 to a wealthy family, who wanted her to become a ballerina.

She was discovered in her teens after posing on the cover of *Elle* magazine, swiftly

becoming a sensation in her home country, and was persuaded to enter the cinema world.

She played iconic roles, the most notable in the 1956 film *And God Created Woman*, directed by her then-husband Roger Vadim, in which she played a sexually liberated woman.

The film scandalised the American public and was banned in some US states, while the French existentialist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir hailed her as an icon of "absolute freedom".

Through the late 1950s and 1960s, she became a global phenomenon with roles in *The Truth*, earning critical acclaim for her dramatic depth; *Contempt*, a Jean-Luc Godard masterpiece; and *Viva Maria!*, showcasing her comedic flair alongside Jeanne Moreau.

Beyond her most iconic roles, Bardot showcased her versatility in films like *Love on a Pillow*, where she portrayed a complex, emotionally-torn character, and *Two Weeks in September*, a romantic drama

that highlighted her ability to convey vulnerability.

In *The Bear and the Doll*, she brought playful charm to a comedic role, proving her range across genres. These films, though less celebrated, underscored her ability to captivate audiences in diverse narratives.

As well as her work in film, Bardot will also be remembered as a fashion icon, with her blonde tousled hair and bold eyeliner setting beauty trends worldwide. After wearing an off-the-shoulder number in Cannes in 1953, similar styles became known as the Bardot neckline.

She was married four times and had one son, Nicolas, with French actor and film producer Jacques Charrier, who died in September.

Nicolas later sued his mother for emotional damage after she wrote in an autobiography that she would have preferred to "give birth to a little dog".

Ruthlessly marketed as a hedonistic sex symbol, Bardot was frustrated in her ambition to become a serious actress.

Polls open in Guinea with junta leader favoured to win first presidential vote since 2021 coup

Polls opened in Guinea on Sunday in the country's first presidential election since the 2021 coup that ousted President Alpha Condé.

The vote is being held under a new constitution approved in a referendum in September. It revokes a ban on military leaders running for office and extends the presidential term from five years to seven.

Junta leader General Mamadi Doumbouya is expected to win the election after clamping down on dissent. Of the eight other candidates in the race, he faces no major opponent. Two opposition candidates have been barred from running and two others forced into exile.

Doumbouya has built his

campaign around major infrastructure projects and reforms launched since he took power four years ago. His closest rival, Yero Baldé of the Democratic Front of Guinea, is running on a platform of anti-corruption and economic growth.

The junta's most important project has been the Simandou iron ore project, a 75 percent Chinese-owned mega-mining project at the world's largest iron ore deposit which began production last month after decades of delays.

Authorities say that a national development plan tied to the Simandou project aims to create tens of thousands of jobs and diversify the economy through investments in agri-

culture, education, transport, technology and health.

"In four years, he (Doumbouya) has connected Guinean youth to information and communication technologies," said Mamadama Touré, a high school student wearing a T-shirt with Doumbouya's image in the capital of Conakry, as he cited digital skills training programs put in place by the authorities.

Despite Guinea's rich mineral resources — including as the world's biggest exporter of bauxite, used to make aluminium — more than half of its 15 million people are experiencing record levels of poverty and food insecurity, according to the World Food Program.

"This vote is the hope of

young people, especially for us unemployed," said Idrissa Camara, an 18-year-old resident of Conakry, who said he has been unemployed since graduating from university five years ago. "I'm forced to do odd jobs to survive. I hope this vote will improve the standard of living and the quality of life in Guinea," he added.

'Return to league of nations' The vote is the latest such election among African countries that have seen a surge in coups in recent years. At least 10 countries on the continent have experienced soldiers forcefully taking power after accusing elected leaders of failing to provide good governance and security for citizens.

"This election will open a new

page in Guinea's history and mark the country's return to the league of nations," said Guinea political analyst Aboubacar Sidiki Diakité. "Doumbouya is undoubtedly the favorite in this presidential election because the main opposition political parties have been sidelined and the General Directorate of Elections, the body that oversees the presidential election, is under the supervision of the government," he added.

In addition to a weakened opposition, activists and rights groups say Guinea has since the coup seen civil society leaders silenced, critics abducted and the press censored. More than 50 political parties were dissolved last year in a move au-

thorities claimed was to "clean up the political chessboard" despite widespread criticism.

There was heavy security in Conakry and other parts of Guinea with nearly 12,000 police officers among security forces mobilised and checkpoints set up along major roads. Authorities had said on Saturday that security forces "neutralised" an armed group with "subversive intentions threatening national security" after gunshots were heard in Conakry's Sonfonia neighborhood.

More than six million registered voters are expected to cast ballots with results due within 48 hours. There will be a runoff if no candidate wins a majority of the vote.

Feature



SMEDAN trains new BDSPs to boost SME growth nationwide. In a strategic move to strengthen Nigeria's small business ecosystem, the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) has inducted a new cohort of certified Business Development Service Providers (BDSPs)..

How SMEDAN is strengthening small businesses in Nigeria

LUCY OGALUE (NAN)

Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) remain a critical pillar of Nigeria's economy, accounting for a large share of employment, income generation and grassroots economic activity.

However, operators continue to face challenges ranging from limited access to finance and skills gaps to infrastructure constraints and weak policy coordination.

The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) says it is intensifying reforms, financing support, capacity development and infrastructure interventions to help small businesses move from survival to sustainability.

Speaking at an interactive session with journalists in Abuja, the Director-General of SMEDAN, Mr Charles Odii, said that business formalisation would accelerate in 2026 following groundwork laid over the past two years.

Odii said that SMEDAN targeted the registration of over 250,000 new businesses by the first quarter of 2026, noting that discussions with the presidency could further scale up the figure.

On MSME policy to shape the ecosystem, the SMEDAN boss said that the agency was leading the review of the National MSME Policy, which expired at the end of 2025.

According to Odii, the revised policy will be unveiled in 2026 after nationwide consultations and collaboration with relevant stakeholders.

"We can not sit behind desks in

Abuja and write policies for small businesses in the 36 states and the FCT. Small businesses must be part of shaping the policies that affect the," he said.

The director-general described MSMEs as the backbone of Nigeria's industrial economy.

He said that strengthening them was critical to job creation, value addition and inclusive economic growth.

Odii said that SMEDAN was brokering about N12 billion in single-digit interest loans in partnership with the Bank of Industry (BoI) and several state governments.

According to him, all the were negotiated at single-digit interest rates, between nine per cent to about 9.5 per cent.

On capacity building and skills development, he said that many MSMEs still struggled to access funding due to weak managerial and financial capacity.

"If you ask banks today, they will tell you there is money for small businesses. But many small businesses are not equipped enough to access that money," he said.

He said the agency was engaging in capacity building and training sessions for small business owners to equip them with skills on how to access such facilities.

To reduce operating costs for MSMEs, Odii said that SMEDAN was investing in shared workspaces and industrial facilities nationwide.

The Managing Director of the Bank of Industry (BOI), Dr Olasupo Olusi, said that collaboration with agencies

such as SMEDAN was essential to improving MSME loan performance.

"SMEDAN helps prepare small businesses to become bankable. That preparation reduces risk and improves loan performance," he said.

A development economist, Dr Mary Atama, said that access to finance must be complemented by skills development.

"Finance alone will not solve MSME challenges. Skills, discipline and market knowledge are equally important.

"They should be given all the support necessary, especially through training and capacity building to help address many of their challenges," she said.

SMEs in many nations are responsible for the economic growth and development of the nation. They, therefore, require basic infrastructure to support their businesses.

At an energy policy dialogue, an energy analyst, Mr Justine Achimugu, said that decentralised power solutions could significantly reduce MSME operating costs.

Achimugu said that small businesses could not rely on the national grid alone.

He called for emphasis on practical alternatives such as hybrid and renewable solutions.

Mrs Anita Okafor, an economist, reiterated the need for fiscal measures by the government to support MSMEs to grow.

According to Okafor, price instability due to hyperinflation affects operations of small businesses.

"Small businesses face multiple challenges which affect their businesses and there is a need for government action to support MSMEs.

"The government needs to reduce inflation, stabilise prices of products and provide funds at low interest rates to support MSMEs," she said

Similarly, Mr Godspower Jideofor, a financial expert, emphasised the importance of creating an enabling environment for small businesses to thrive in the country.

"SMEs in many nations are responsible for the economic growth and development of the nation. They, therefore, require basic infrastructure to support their businesses.

"If we have good road networks and stable power supply, the cost of production becomes relatively cheaper for SME operators.

"The government has a great role to play in ensuring the provision of the basic infrastructure and the right en-

vironment for business to thrive."

A small business operator, Mrs Blessing Obinna, decried the many challenges small businesses faced in Nigeria that hinder expansion and growth.

"Some of the challenges, including the unstable state of the economy, poor state of infrastructure and unstable power supply have forced so many businesses to shut down or relocate," she said.

According to Obinna, it is also very crucial to facilitate discussions on strategies that will help position small and medium business operators for sustainable growth.

She called on the government and other relevant stakeholders, as well as agencies like SMEDAN, to provide the needed support to small businesses for the growth and development of the country.

Meanwhile, the Registrar-General of the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC), Mr Hussaini Magaji, said that formalisation remained key to MSME growth.

"When businesses are formalised, they gain credibility. It becomes easier for them to access financing, participate in government programmes and scale their operations," he said.

As Nigeria pursues economic diversification, stakeholders agree that MSMEs remain central to inclusive growth.

With reforms in policy, finance, skills development and infrastructure, SMEDAN says it is positioning small businesses as engines of job creation, innovation and long-term economic stability.

Ending the exploitation called price increase at Yuletide

UCHENNA ELETUO (NAN)

Yuletide – Christmas and the period around it, with its festivities – is seen by many as a season of warmth, love and peace, with Christmas itself being the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ.

Yuletide is characterised by merriment, travels, recreation, charity, gatherings, etc., which promote social integration, peace and love.

Yearly, many families buy food stuff and other commodities some months or weeks before Yuletide due to increase in prices of such commodities which characterises the season in most cases.

Increase in services including transport also characterises Yuletide yearly as many people travel during the period to reunite with loved ones.

Analysts argue that increase in cost of goods and services during the period is exploitative.

They are worried that this puts pressure on many Nigerians, with some spending more than necessary and even taking loans, while unpatriotic ones engage in stealing, fraud and other vices to raise money.

They believe that celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ and New Year should not put such pressure on Nigerians.

A social scientist, Dr Adebawale Lasisi, says Nigerians have the penchant to take advantage of any opportunity to exploit others.

He says the exploitation is a reflection of greed and unpatriotism.

“The crave to take advantage of others or cash in on a season such as Yuletide to exploit others through in-



ITEMS ON DISPLAY IN LAGOS, WAITING FOR BUYERS

crease in prices of goods and services should not arise.

Describing the trend as a social deformity, Lasisi is convinced that, with social security in place, such a situation will not be.

Lasisi, a university lecturer, calls on governments and the civil society to help put an end to the trend.

A former Imam of Lagos State University, Prof. Amidu Sanni, describes such an increase as retrogressive.

Sanni says instead of adding flavour to Yuletide, the trend dispossesses people of purchasing power to celebrate during the period.

“It has become an ugly tradition to have prices of consumables such as rice,

condiments and confectioneries and services such as transport to increase during this period for no just cause.

“As a people, we must reverse this trend that serves no good.

“The worst is that any price that goes up never comes down irrespective of economic derivatives geared toward price reduction by governments,” he argues.

He regrets that this Yuletide some inter-state transport fares have increased by over 65 percent, keeping many travellers stranded.

Mr Ogwuchukwu Ezeodili, a Manager at Alaba, Ojo, Lagos State, Luxury Bus Park, blames the increase on bad roads.

The transport manager describes Yuletide as a time of upsurge in the number of travellers, saying that bad condition of some roads and its wear tear on vehicles, as well as the cost of vehicle maintenance, contribute to increase in transport fares.

Another transporter, Mr Andrew Bioseh, observes that increased fare has compelled many travellers to opt for night journeys in spite of the associated risks.

Bioseh notes that before Thursday (Christmas Day), transport fare from Lagos to Abia was between N28,000 and N30,000 during the daytime while night travel cost N22,000.

According to him, at the moment,

daytime bus fare to Abia stands at N42,000 while night bus fare is N33,000.

A traveller, Ms Ijeoma Ekezie, says she prefers night travels during festive periods to save cost and avoid overcrowding associated with daytime travels during such periods.

Bishop Charles Ighele of the Holy Spirit Church, Ikeja, warns that exploitation of any sort is a sin and should be avoided for personal and societal progress.

In a statement penultimate Sunday, the Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (FCCPC) warned that exploitative or unfair practices by road transport operators would attract regulatory sanctions.

In the statement signed by its Director of Corporate Affairs, Ondaje Ijagwu, FCCPC said the warning followed complaints of arbitrary fare hikes by inter-city road transport operators across the country.

It acknowledged that seasonal demands, operational pressures and other legitimate factors might affect transport pricing.

“However, consumers are entitled to clear, accurate, and timely information on fares before travels. Any fare adjustment must therefore be transparently communicated and applied fairly,” it said.

Analysts urge collective efforts by governments, market associations, transport unions, the civil society and other stakeholders to eradicate unwarranted increase in the cost of essential commodities and services during Yuletide in the interest of the masses.

Okpebholo's anti-cultism war prevails

KASSIM AFEGBUA

For the first time in nine years, Christmas celebrations passed without bloodshed in Benin City and other major towns across the state. It was a long-awaited sigh of relief after years of being held hostage by the unwholesome activities of cultism. Benin City is once again breathing an air of nourishment, refreshment, freedom and recovery from the octopoidal grip of cultism since Governor Okpebholo assumed the mantle of leadership. Nightlife has returned to Benin. The prevailing mood is one of celebration.

Those who visited Benin City from far and near, within and outside the country, have every reason to celebrate and appreciate the Governor's intervention in ensuring a peaceful yuletide. For the first time, a carnival of this scale added colour and vibrancy to the season. Comedy shows featuring A-list artistes from across the country were held. Several events took place in Benin City, all conducted in an atmosphere of peace, tranquillity and calm. The obvious question was: how did Governor Okpebholo achieve this feat?

The answer lies in the power of

strong political will, conviction, resilience and unflinching commitment.

When Governor Okpebholo assumed office, he inherited a state where cult-related killings had become the order of the day. Almost immediately, he resolved that his administration would not tolerate such killings, regardless of how highly placed the culprits might be. He sounded a clear warning, reminding all who cared to listen that a new sheriff was in town. He held several meetings with members of cult groups, unveiling his no-cultism vision and mission. He was unequivocal: under his watch, there would be zero tolerance for cultism and its associated vices.

The Governor moved decisively by taking the anti-cultism law to the State Assembly for amendment, injecting new provisions to strengthen and broaden its scope. Once the amendments were passed, he was equipped with a robust legal framework to back his actions.

Thereafter, demolition exercises followed wherever culpability was established. Court orders were often obtained to give legal backing to government actions. From the Arena area to various neighbourhoods, buildings linked to cult activities were

pulled down, forcing cultists to flee. Landlords were also sensitised on the consequences of harbouring cultists, and they, in turn, helped pass on the message to prospective tenants. Soon enough, the cautionary measures became articles of faith across the state.

The committee set up to drive the

cleansing exercise proved effective and result-driven. From Edo South to Edo Central and Edo North, the message was consistent. Edo State gradually began to regain its rhythm. Nightlife returned, night-time economic activities bounced back, and the state began to bubble once again.



GOVERNOR MONDAY OKPEBHOLO

All these were made possible by the Governor's commitment to rid Edo of cultism. The operation to clean up the state is still ongoing. Many cultists have renounced their membership, while many others have fled the state.

Governor Monday Okpebholo, the Akpakomisa of Edo State, deserves commendation for this rare feat. It is an achievement some opposition politicians would rather ignore. When the Governor scores first, they look the other way. When he records breakthroughs, they attempt to distract and divert attention through deliberate acts of commission and omission. However, Edo sons and daughters who returned home in large numbers for the yuletide are full of appreciation and commendation for this achievement.

The Governor deserves every encomium for making the yuletide a worthy and memorable experience. Rather than blood, Benin was painted in alluring colours, illuminated by well-calibrated streetlights and artworks. A carnival brought candour and excitement to the streets, marked by pomp, colour and ceremony.

• Prince Kassim Afegbua is the Edo State Commissioner for Information and Strategy.



Edo state Governor, Monday Okpebholo's and some investor confidence in Edo

How Gov Okpebholo's security drive is restoring investor confidence in Edo

ABDUL-KADIR ABDULLAH

For any economy to thrive, safety must come before prosperity. In Edo State, Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, has made this principle the cornerstone of his administration, placing security at the heart of governance and economic revival.

Through decisive leadership, strong legislation, improved logistics, manpower expansion and coordinated enforcement, the administration is confronting violent crimes that once undermined public confidence and stifled business growth.

Before the inauguration of the Okpebholo administration, Edo State, particularly Benin City, was grappling with an alarming surge in cult-related violence. Credible security records indicated that over 300 cult-related killings occurred in 2024 alone, throwing communities into fear and severely disrupting social and economic life.

The magnitude of the violence was unprecedented. Businesses shut down early, night-time commercial activities collapsed, and many investors adopted a wait-and-see posture.

This grim reality prompted Governor Okpebholo to elevate security to a top priority under his SHINE Agenda, recognising that no meaningful development can take place in an atmosphere of fear and lawlessness.

To confront the crisis, the admin-

istration reinforced and passed the Secret Cult and Similar Activities (Prohibition) Law of 2025, a tough legal framework designed to dismantle cult networks and deter violent crimes.

The law prescribes severe penalties for cult membership, sponsorship and the use of properties for criminal activities, empowering security agencies to act decisively.

Backing the law is the Edo State Special Security Squad, code-named Operation Flush Out Kidnappers and Cultists, a coordinated security initiative aimed at reclaiming communities and restoring peace across the state.

At the centre of the security offensive is the Edo State Task Force, a multi-agency unit coordinated by the Commissioner for Public Security and Safety, working closely with the Chairman of the Task Force. This leadership structure has ensured effective intelligence gathering, swift response and seamless collaboration among security agencies.

In addition, Operation Flush Out Kidnappers and Cultists is strategically coordinated by the Principal Security Officer (PSO) and the Chief Security Officer (CSO) to the Governor, ensuring direct oversight, rapid decision-making and alignment with the governor's security directives.

Under this coordinated command, the task force has recorded major breakthroughs, including the arrest of notorious cultists and kidnapping

syndicates; dismantling of criminal hideouts across the state; demolition of buildings linked to cultism and kidnapping; apprehension of suspects involved in kidnapping for human organ harvesting; and the rescue of victims and seizure of dangerous weapons.

These operations have sent a clear and uncompromising message that Edo State will no longer provide a safe haven for violent criminals.

Beyond policy and enforcement, Governor Okpebholo has matched resolve with resources. Within the first year of his administration, the governor approved and delivered significant security assets to enhance operational effectiveness across the state.

These include over 400 motorcycles deployed to security agencies to improve rapid response, patrols and access to difficult terrain; more than 80 Hilux patrol vehicles to boost mobility, visibility and response capability across urban and rural areas; and ongoing processes to acquire multifunctional surveillance drones to strengthen intelligence gathering and monitor flashpoints.

In addition, the governor recruited, trained and absorbed 2,500 officers into the Edo State Security Corps, significantly expanding security manpower and strengthening community-level policing and intelligence.

These combined investments have greatly improved the reach, speed

and effectiveness of security operations statewide.

Operation Flush Out Kidnappers and Cultists has helped restore calm in areas once known for violent clashes and criminal activity. With sustained patrols, intelligence-led raids, improved logistics and visible enforcement, communities are gradually reclaiming their streets.

The impact on the business environment has been immediate and tangible. Traders now operate for longer hours without fear; transporters move goods more freely across major routes; artisans and small business owners have resumed normal operations; and investors are reassessing Edo State as a safer destination for investment. As fear recedes, economic activity is steadily finding its rhythm once again.

Perhaps the strongest validation of Edo State's improving security and investment climate came recently during a courtesy visit to the Government House, Benin City, by the management team of Presco PLC, led by its Chairman, Mr Rasheed Sarumi.

During the visit, Mr Sarumi announced a new \$100 million foreign direct investment (FDI) by SIAT and its parent company into Presco's operations in Edo State.

He described the investment as historic and the first of its kind in Nigeria's agricultural sector, noting that the improved security environment and the governor's clear com-

mitment to stability played a key role in the decision.

The announcement stands as a powerful endorsement of the Okpebholo administration's security-first strategy and its direct impact on investor confidence.

Governor Okpebholo's decision to prioritise security under the SHINE Agenda reflects a clear understanding that peace is the foundation of progress. By confronting cultism, kidnapping, cybercrime and organ-harvesting crimes head-on, and backing enforcement with logistics, manpower and technology, the administration is tackling the root causes of economic stagnation.

A secure environment encourages enterprise, attracts investment and restores public trust in governance. For Edo State, this renewed sense of safety is translating into increased commercial activity and an improved quality of life for residents.

While the fight against crime is ongoing, the direction is unmistakable. Edo State is moving from a period of fear to one of confidence, driven by strong leadership, coordinated security operations and sustained investment in security infrastructure.

Governor Okpebholo's security-first approach is proving that when government takes decisive action to safeguard lives and property, prosperity naturally follows—and Edo State's business environment is already beginning to reflect that transformation.

Sports

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

Bendel Insurance FC ends first stanza in style with 2-0 Victory over Kwara United

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

Bendel Insurance Football Club on Saturday, December 27 ended the first round of the 2025/2026 Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL) season on a high after a convincing 2-0 victory over Kwara United in a Matchday 19 encounter played at the Samuel Ogbemudia Stadium, Benin City.

Emmanuel Akpan opened scoring for the Benin Arsenal in the 20th minute after finishing

calmly from a well-constructed attacking move initiated by Adamu Yazid from the left flank, giving the home side an early advantage. Bendel Insurance continued to press and were rewarded again in the 42nd minute when Kayode Oke doubled the lead, with a tap in, following Chinedu Nwosu's assist as the hosts went into halftime firmly in control of the match.

The win, which also marked Bendel Insurance's final home game of the year, saw the Benin Arsenal delivered a dominant

first-half performance, scoring twice before the break to secure maximum points and moved up to 8th position on the NPFL table.

Kwara United however attempted a response in the second half, but Bendel Insurance remained disciplined at the back, limiting the visitors' attacking threats and seeing out the game comfortably stable as Chigozie Dennis, Onyia Henry and Efe Enabulele controlled backline very much alive to their responsibility in neutralizing the opponents threat.

Speaking after the match, Bendel Insurance head coach Kennedy Boboye expressed satisfaction with his team's performance and result, describing the victory as a fitting end and beautiful way to conclude the first stanza of the season.

"I'm happy with the result and the performance of the players. It was important for us to end the first round of the season in a convincing victory and our last home game of the year on a positive note.



BENDEL INSURANCE FC

Penalty shootout drama crowns Buddy Group of Schools at ULMI tourney in Uromi

The 2025 Annual Secondary Schools Football Tournament organised by the Uromi Like Minds Initiative (ULMI) ended with Buddy Group of Schools emerging champions after defeating defending title holders, Agba Grammar School, 4-1 on penalties following a 1-1 draw at regulation time.

The thrilling final, played at the main bowl of the Esan North East Council Sports Complex, drew a large crowd of students, parents, community leaders and football enthusiasts, who witnessed a tense contest marked by discipline, tactical play and resilience from both sides.

Earlier, the girls' final between Our Lady of Lourdes Secondary School and Ebhoyi Secondary School, further underscored the growing popularity of grassroots football among female students in Esan North East Local Government Area of Edo State.

Beyond the excitement on the pitch, the tournament provided a platform to celebrate excellence in education, as ULMI honoured 10 long-serving teachers for their years of dedicated service and their impact on the academic and moral upbringing of students across the local government area.

In his address, ULMI Executive Chairman, Mr Darlington Okpebholo Ray, described the

annual football competition as a legacy initiative aimed at youth empowerment, talent discovery, unity and character development.

He urged the students to uphold sportsmanship at all times, noting that humility in victory and dignity in defeat were essential values that extended beyond football.

The address was delivered on his behalf by the Chairman of ULMI's Welfare Committee, Mr Sylvester Ezehi.

Speaking after the event, ULMI Financial Secretary, Mr



CROWNS BUDDY GROUP OF SCHOOLS WITH THE TROPHY

Henry Unuane, commended the participating schools for their discipline and competitive spirit, describing the tournament as a vital platform for nurturing young talents

Anthony Joshua apologises to Jake Paul's mother for breaking her Son's Jaw



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Nigerian-born former world heavyweight boxing champion, Anthony Olaseni Oluwafemi Joshua quickly apologised to the mother of Jake Paul after breaking the American social influ-

encer's jaw last week Friday.

Sports247 gathered that 'AJ' did not waste time in making the apology, as the two-time former champ of the world calmly walked over to his opponent's mum to plead for forgiveness.

This much has been revealed by Paul's mum, Pam Stepnick, who posited that Joshua showed that he is a gentleman, but slammed the boxer's promoter, Eddie Hearn for smirking over her son's plight.

Stepnick, who is the mother of Jake and his fellow-YouTuber sibling, Logan Paul, praised how Joshua made his way through the crowd to apologise after knocking her son out in the sixth round.

While praising Joshua for his gentlemanly conduct, Jake's mum slammed Hearn for apparently showing now emotions about her son's plight and confessed that she felt like punching him.

AFCON: Mozambique make AFCON history as Conde seals first finals win

Chiquinho Conde became the first Mozambican manager to record a victory at the Africa Cup of Nations finals as the Mambas claimed a dramatic 3-2 Group F win over Gabon at the Adrar Stadium in Agadir.

After a cagey opening half-hour, the contest burst into life late in the first half as Mozambique surged into a two-goal lead.

The breakthrough came from a well-worked set-piece, with Geny Catamo delivering a dangerous ball into the area for Faisal Bangal to glance home from close range.

Moments later, Mozambique doubled their advantage when Domingues was hauled down in the box by Gabon defender Bruno Ecuele Manga. Catamo kept his composure from the penalty spot, converting confidently

from 12 yards.

Diogo Calila celebrates his first international goal for Mozambique against Gabon. Photo Credit: AFP

The Mambas came close to turning dominance into a commanding lead when Witi struck the crossbar, but instead they were pegged back before the break. Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang reacted quickest to reduce the deficit with the final kick of the first half, ensuring Gabon went into the interval just one goal behind.

Any hopes of a Gabon comeback were dealt an early blow after the restart. Mozambique broke swiftly in behind the defence, with Witi picking out right-back Diogo Calila, who had ghosted into the area to nod a downward header past Loyce Mbaba and restore the two-goal cushion.



MOZAMBIQUE PLAYERS



NIS DG, PHILIP SHAIBU AND HIS WIFE

NIS DG, Philip Shaibu congratulates Super Eagles

● Charge players on Renewed Hope Agenda for Nigeria sports

The Director General and Chief Executive Officer of the National Institute For Sports (NIS), H. E. Comrade Philip Shaibu has congratulated the Super Eagles of Nigeria on their swift qualification to the round of 16 of the ongoing 2025 Africa Cup of Nations in Morocco.

He applauded the players' patriotism, commitment and

doggedness in their 3-2 win over the Carthage Eagles of Tunisia on Saturday to ensure that Nigeria secures her ticket in the knockout phase of the competition with a game to spare.

"I must salute the fighting spirit of the Super Eagles. They have clearly put the 2026 World Cup miss behind. Winning these two straight games evidently showcased that",

Shaibu said.

The DG further charged the Eagles to be focused and align with the President Bola Ahmed Tinubu Renewed Hope Agenda of transforming Nigeria sports sector especially through football.

"The job is not complete yet. The target is to win a fourth continental title. Like we all know, President Bola Ahmed

Tinubu is interested in what is going on in the sports sector of the country. And that he has proven by releasing funds to the sports industry particularly football. We equally recall how he rewarded the triumphant Super Falcons and D'Tigresses. These gestures are a strong message to our sports men and women across the board." He noted.

OPINION

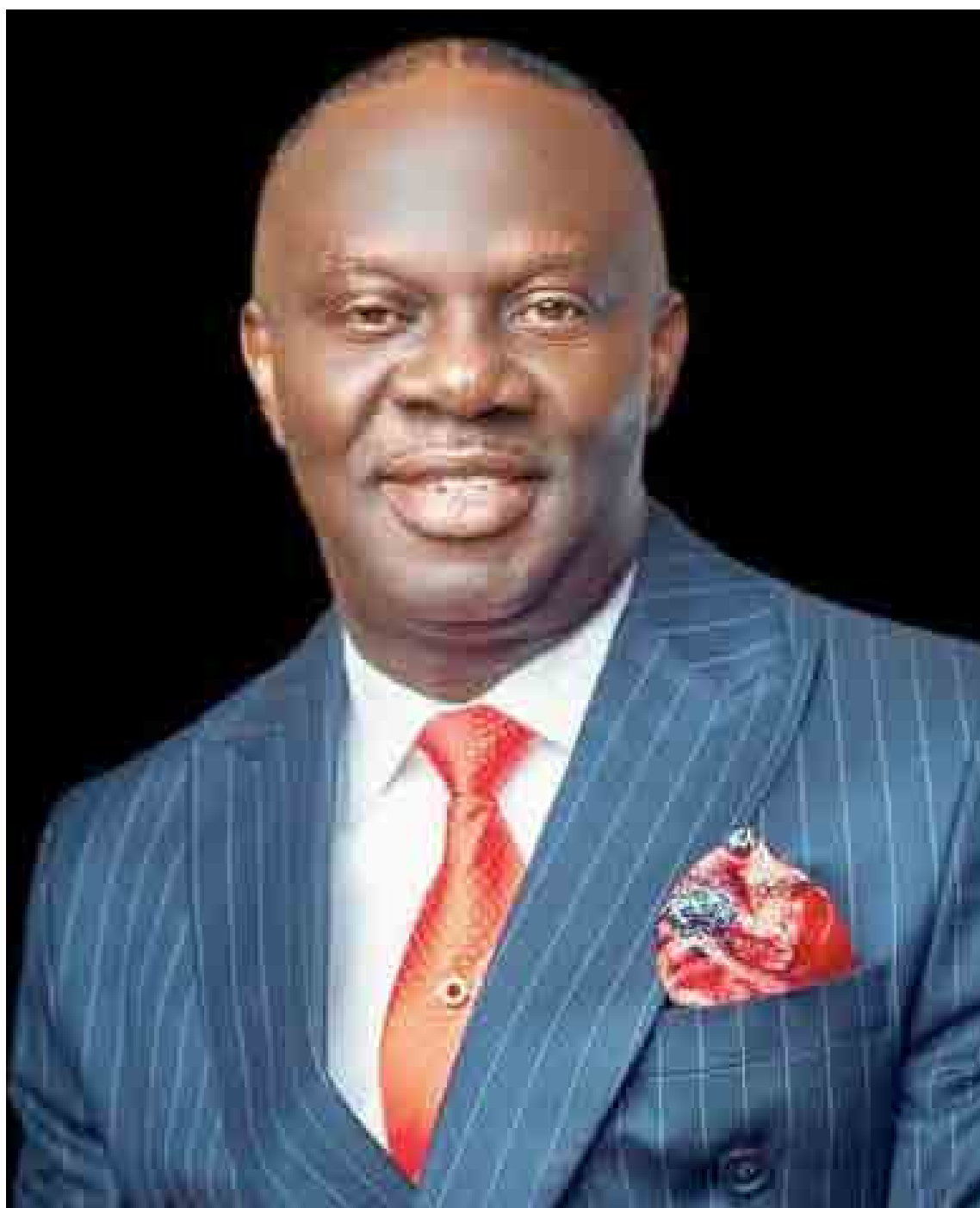
HOW NOT TO ATTRACT INVESTORS

A response to Cheta Nwanze

KASSIM AFEGBUA

Since former Governor Godwin Obaseki has chosen an inelegant route, choosing to become a fugitive in his own country, he has thrown up several persons who are driving his churlish narratives every time his invidious tenure comes under review. No one is denying him of being the author of the Radisson Hotel, MOWAA or EMOWAA, the sticking point is that the transactions that enabled these projects were replete with financial pollution and opacity. Attracting investors to a state like Edo shouldn't be rocket science, and the process could have been kept simple and understandable, with transparency, accountability and probity. Why should anyone assemble state resources to carry out state-sponsored projects and somehow along the line, surreptitiously gift the projects over to friends, business associates, economic buccaneers and political predators. Investors should be people who are ready to add value to our economic wellbeing using their own capital; and not those who will use our own resources to fund their business interests. All the so-called state investments of Godwin Obaseki as governor, are curious, deep in opacity, have unclear ownership, and tell of subterfuge, subterranean manipulations, and backdoor hand-over of Edo's supposed investment.

So, in trying to locate the nexus between promise and performance, in Obaseki's tenure, we must rationalize his motivation or lack of it. Behind all his so-called investments is a byzantine structure of confusion and manipulation; the reasons are not far-fetched. The due diligence that should have formed the basis for due process, was near absent and proof of funds from these--what we may call impostor investors --was not clearly established. Project ownership structure changed multiple times with alteration after alteration, depending on the mood of Godwin Obaseki: C.A.C documents were altered, through the backdoor: the Museum changed from Legacy Restoration Trust Fund, to Edo Museum of West Africa Arts and later Museum of West Africa Arts; the Radisson Hotel project followed similar opacity and subterranean manipulations. It appeared originally that the State Government brought in a hotel project, but before it got midstream, Obaseki had more or less gifted it to his friends through a newly registered company, Tilbry, without any public competitive bidding. He purportedly sold the company by ceding 80% to his friend and 20% to the Chief sponsor of the investment; the Edo state Government. If his friend's company was buying the company, the as-



PRINCE KASSIM AFEGBUA

sets and liabilities of the investment ought to be part of the bargain. They couldn't have bought the assets without the liability, leaving the state to be paying the project's debt through Irrevocable Standing Payment Order. A whopping sum of N385m is paid by Edo State Government every month, to defray the N25b bond issued to the State Government by the Nigeria Stock Market.

When a state government invests such huge amount in a project, the expectation would be that the new "investor" will also take over the relevant debt as part of the liabilities of that investment. In Godwin Obaseki's school of economics, there are no logical ex-

The ease of doing business index has improved by light years ahead in Edo state. We already have investors who are interested in Cement production, Edo-Airline, Agricultural produce, Rice production, Ranching and Furniture

planations for due process. Transparency was absent. Accountability took capital flight. And suddenly, a hotel that just commenced rose to N65bn

valuation by Obaseki's experts, without a valuation document. It was acquired without competitive bidding. The liabilities were left for Edo State Government to bear, but the assets were handed over to his friends. What manner of financial management and economics is that. My mind tells me that if Godwin Obaseki is recruited to be Nigeria's financial expert, he will surely sell Nigeria to his business associates and friends. And the easiest way to do that will be to tell us that we are too uneducated to understand his financial wizardry.

The current issue with the MOWAA and RADISSON hotel is simple: battle for control of their private investments. Ditto for Ossiomo Power Plant. The Edo State Government was paying bogus charges for power that was never consumed, all in a bid to line the pockets of Godwin Obaseki and his cronies. All his noise is not about love for Edo people, but the fear of losing what they had appropriated to themselves through blind trust. We desire to see the commencement of these investments, but they will be run by government as their own properties and investments. Pure and simple. Next time, when investors are coming to Edo for business, they should know how to follow due process, transparency and accountability. Using backdoor tactics won't cut it any longer. A new Sheriff is in town who does not tolerate sharp practices. Godwin Obaseki may choose to remain in his tax-free Island, but to us, he remains a fugitive to the law. He should visit Edo and appear before Edo people to give an account of his stewardship for the years when he was governor.

The point must be made that Edo state is now home to a lot of investors who are willing to follow due process in trying to situate their investment. The ease of doing business index has improved by light years ahead in Edo state. We already have investors who are interested in Cement production, Edo-Airline, Agricultural produce, Rice production, Ranching and Furniture. They are already aware that there are no shortcuts like in the previous government. Come with your money, and we will encourage you on what you intend to do. That is why we are building our infrastructural base for ease of mobility. Those who pretended they were bringing in investment left our roads infrastructure in ruins, our health sector in comatose, school infrastructure in decay and human capital development in humiliating standard.

Prince Kassim Afegbua is Edo State Commissioner for Information and Strategy.