

Troops neutralise 80 terrorists, rescue 34 victims in multi-state operations

ABUJA

The Nigerian Army has said that troops have neutralised over 80 terrorists, rescuing 34 kidnapped civilians, and apprehending dozens of criminals in coordinated operations between De-

ember 25 and 29.

A credible Army Headquarters source told newsmen that the successes were recorded across Borno, Adamawa, Sokoto, Katsina, Niger, Zamfara, Plateau, Delta, Cross River, and the FCT.

In Borno, the source said that airstrikes and follow-up preci-

sion operations at Sowolwolo in Bama Local Government Area (LGA), and surrounding areas neutralised 19 terrorists, destroyed logistical bases, and disrupted ISWAP/JAS networks.

He said that subsequent operations in Gulumba Gana, kumshe, Kasha Miri, and Chon-

golokura resulted in the neutralization of 38 additional terrorists, while intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) identified further high-value targets for future engagement.

In Niger and Katsina States, the source revealed that troops successfully repelled coordi-

nated terrorist attacks at FOB Kwanar Dutse in Mariga LGA and along the Shanono-Katsina axis, rescuing one civilian and recovering 78 cows and 28 sheep stolen by the insurgents.

According to him, security operations also yielded significant success in kidnapping rescues.

"In Kebbi State, 16 civilians were rescued by troops of 223 Battalion following a tip-off in Unashi Village, Danko Wasagu LGA.

"In Plateau, one victim was rescued in Yaka Naji Jandutse, Wase LGA, despite two DSS

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The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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Nigeria's Tax Ombudsman begins operations January 1 —Official

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PDP 'I die if I defect to APC —Wike

● **Says APC, PDP collapsed into 'Renewed Hope Family' in Rivers**

PORT HARCOURT

Minister of Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Mr Nyesom Wike, said that the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) will collapse if he defects to All Progressive Congress (APC).

Wike stated this during his end-of-the-year media chat in Port Harcourt on Monday, while responding to a question on whether he would join the

ruling APC or not.

Wike's supporters in Rivers State House of Assembly, including Governor Siminalayi Fubara, had recently dumped PDP and joined APC.

Wike, however, insisted that he is still a member of PDP and not considering leaving the party.

"Today if I say I want to decamp to APC, that will be the end of PDP. You will see leaders of the party in other states who will join me.

"If today I say, gentlemen look, we have had enough of PDP, watch those who will decamp in Benue; watch those who will decamp in Plateau, in Abia, in Edo," he said.

"But the mere fact that people have left PDP to APC does not mean I have to leave. No, it is not correct. I am still a member of PDP," he said.

Speaking on the possible takeover of his political structure in Rivers by Fubara, Wike assured his supporters that his political relevance in the state was incontestable.

He added that he still holds his political structure in the state. According to him, Fubara's

defection to APC does not necessarily make him the leader of the party in the state, like the case in Lagos and Kano states.

"There are exceptions to the rule. There is nothing like 001 in the state, you register in your ward and not at the state level.

"So, if there is 001, it is in your ward, because every party member registered in his ward," he said.

The minister further said that beyond being a governor, there must be exceptional qualities that makes one a leader, worthy of followership.

He argued that Fubara's defection to APC was of no consequence, stressing that he

joined the party alone.

"If a governor is moving to another party, he moves with council chairmen, party leaders and members of the state assembly.

"In his case, the people have already left the PDP and joined the APC on their own, as such, defecting to APC doesn't guarantee him an automatic ticket for second tenure," Wike said.

Meanwhile, members of All Progressives Congress (APC) and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) have put aside partisan differences and embraced President Bola Tinubu's Renewed Hope Agenda.

Minister of Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Mr Nyesom Wike, stated this while address-

ing leaders, youths and women in Etche and Omuma Local Government Areas during a "thank you" visit on Monday.

According to the former Rivers governor, APC and PDP had already collapsed into one family, the "Renewed Hope family," for the good of the people of the state.

He stated that in Rivers, political labels now matter less than unity and collective commitment for development.

Wike said that the collaboration across party lines was driven by shared values, mutual respect and the desire to deliver dividends of democracy

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U.S-led airstrikes neutralised Sokoto terror camps —Army

ABUJA

The Nigerian Army has confirmed a significant operational success following a US-led airstrike on Lakurawa terrorist hideouts in Tangaza Local Government Area of Sokoto State.

A credible Army Headquarters source told newsmen on Monday, that the action formed part of ongoing operations in the 8 Division/Sector 2 Area of Responsibility under Operation FANSAN YAMMA.

He said the troops of Combat Intelligence Battalion VII, acting on credible intelligence about terrorist movements along the Kaurau axis, coordinated with US AFRICOM forces to target camps in the Bauni Forest, near Waria and Alkassim villages, on December 25.

The source said that follow-up patrols on December 26 confirmed extensive destruction of terrorist positions, significantly degrading their

operational capability.

"In a related operation, soldiers of 1 Brigade, Combat Team 12, deployed at Forward Operating Base Jabo in Kebbi State, recovered debris believed to be from unmanned aerial devices and missile components in Kajiji Town, Tambuwal LGA.

"Preliminary assessments by the Army's Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (EME) team identified some as fuel boosters from Tomahawk missiles, each weighing about 300 kilograms and capable of penetrating soft ground up to two metres.

"The Nigerian Army assured the public that investigations are ongoing to safely recover remaining missile components and urged citizens to report any suspicious objects to security agencies.

"The army reaffirmed its commitment to maintaining pressure on terrorist groups while safeguarding lives and property across northern Nigeria," he said.



BRIEF CEREMONY:

Minister of Marine and Blue Economy, Dr Adegboyega Oyetola (left) presenting the revalidated certificate of the Ondo Deep Seaport Licence to Governor Lucky Aiyedatiwa of Ondo State at a brief ceremony in Abuja.

Aiyedatiwa signs N524.4bn 2026 budget into law

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Court refuses application to stop Petroleum Minister, others from allocating oil fields

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US pledges \$2bn for humanitarian aid, but tells UN 'adapt or die'

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Anthony Joshua involved in fatal road accident in Ogun State

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Nigeria's Tax Ombudsman begins operations Jan 1 —Official

ENUGU

The Office of the Tax Ombudsman of Nigeria has said that it will commence full operations on January 1, 2026 aimed at resolving tax related issues.

Mr Chukwudi Achife, the Chief Press Secretary to the Tax

Ombudsman/Chief Executive Officer, disclosed this in statement on Monday in Enugu.

Recall that Dr John Nwabueze was recently appointed by President Bola Tinubu as the pioneer Tax Ombudsman and Chief Executive of the Office of the Tax Ombudsman.

Achife said that upon an-

nouncing Nwabueze as Ombudsman CEO, the Special Adviser to the President on Information and Strategy, Bayo Onanuga, had stated that the office was established to strengthen transparency and accountability within the tax system, enhance confidence in tax administration.

This, he said, would be pro-

viding a structured mechanism for the fair and impartial resolution of disputes between taxpayers and revenue authorities.

According to Onanuga, the Office of the Tax Ombudsman will receive, review, and resolve complaints about taxes, levies, regulatory fees, customs duties, excise matters, and other relat-

ed issues in accordance with extant laws and regulations."

"The office also has the power to institute legal proceedings on behalf of the taxpayer at no cost to the taxpayer.

"It will also provide information on the functions of the tax authorities and to raise awareness of taxpayer rights and obligations," he quoted Onanuga saying.

Achife added that the establishment of the new office demonstrated President Tinubu's dedication to amicable and seamless tax dispute resolution and to protecting taxpayers' rights to challenge arbitrary actions by tax and revenue authorities.

He further commended the President's economic policies, which he noted were now stabilizing the Nigerian economy and "guiding the country toward sustainable prosperity."

The policies, he emphasised, had led to a declining inflation rate, a stable exchange rate, growing reserves, higher investor confidence, a bullish mar-

ket, and an export surplus.

According to him, Nwabueze, who has over two decades of experience in tax administration and policy in Nigeria and the United States shares in the President's pragmatic leadership approach.

"Establishing the Office of the Tax Ombudsman shows President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's ingenuity and foresight in reforming tax administration to ensure fairness, accountability, and efficiency," he said.

He said the Tax Ombudsman CEO also lauded the Minister of Finance and Coordinating Minister of the Economy, Mr. Wale Edun, for his role in implementing the Renewed Hope Agenda across all sectors of the economy.

Achife stated that Nwabueze's office had lined up a number of activities, including press briefings and sessions with various stakeholders to inform Nigerians of his vision and plans for a fair, transparent, accountable, and efficient tax justice system.



SIGNING INTO LAW 2026 BUDGET:

Deputy Governor of Oyo State, Bayo Lawal; Alafia of Oyo, Oba Akeem Owoade; Governor Seyi Makinde of Oyo State; Olubadan of Ibadanland, Oba Rashidi Ladoja and Speaker, Oyo State House of Assembly, Debo Ogundoyin at the signing into law of the State 2026 Appropriation Bill into law in Ibadan.

Ofe Owerri Food, Drink festival holds Jan 3 —Convener

OWERRI

Mr Chibuikeem Diala, the Convener, Ofe Owerri Food and Drink Festival, says the event will hold in Owerri, the Imo Capital, on January 3, 2026.

Diala said in a statement made available to newsmen in Owerri on Monday that the event aimed at positioning local cuisine as a viable component of Nigeria's tourism and creative economy.

He said that the festival would also support local food value chains and strengthen Owerri's profile as a hospitality and cultural destination.

Ofe Owerri is one of the most expensive Nigerian soups; it is

made with assorted meat (which is different parts of cow meat), snails, dried fish and stock fish.

Ofe Owerri is often referred to as soup reserved for the wealthy.

The festival scheduled to take place at the Heartland Resort, Owerri, from 1:00 pm, is organised by the International Hospitality Tourism & Eco-Sustainability Forum (IHTEF) in collaboration with Culinary & Culture Africa.

Diala said that the festival would assemble stakeholders in culture, tourism and hospitality, and promote indigenous cuisine as a driver of tourism and economic growth.

"The Ofe Owerri initiative is designed to move indigenous food beyond celebration into

economic relevance.

"Ofe Owerri is a local delicacy that carries national meaning. Beyond celebration, the festival is about positioning indigenous cuisine as a serious tourism and economic asset capable of driving destination appeal, hospitality growth and value creation.

"To reinforce the cultural and historical significance of the dish within Owerri heritage, traditional rulers from Owerri Municipal led by the Chairman of the Council, Eze Possible Uche, are also expected at the event," he said.

According to the convener, the festival has received formal endorsements from the Imo Government and the state's Ministry of Tourism, Hospitali-

ty and Culture, led by the Commissioner, Mr Ernest Ibejiako.

The festival, Diala said, had also been endorsed by the Federation of Tourism Associations of Nigeria (FTAN), the Association of Professional Chefs of Nigeria (APCN), tourism professionals, policymakers and private sector stakeholders.

He explained further that corporate support for the festival included Guinness, Frutta Juice, Campari and Mangero, adding that brand participation will feature tasting sessions and experiential activations.

Activities lined up for the festival include cooking demonstrations, food tastings, cultural storytelling, competitions and entertainment.

FG revalidates Ondo deep sea port licence, issue certificate to Aiyedatiwa

LAGOS

The Federal Government has taken a decisive step to unlock Ondo State's maritime and industrial potential with the revalidation of the Ondo Deep Sea Port licence, signalling fresh momentum for trade, jobs and investment.

The Minister of Marine and Blue Economy, Dr Adegboyega Oyetola, formally presented the revalidated certificate to Governor Lucky Aiyedatiwa of Ondo State at his office in Abuja.

The development was disclosed in a statement issued on Monday in Lagos by the minister's Special Adviser on Media, Dr Bolaji Akinola.

Oyetola described the reval-

idation as a major milestone and a strategic federal intervention to harness Ondo State's vast blue economy resources.

He said the deep sea port would serve as a catalyst for trade expansion, industrialisation and regional economic integration, in line with the Federal Government's economic diversification agenda.

"The Ondo Deep Sea Port is not just a project for Ondo State; it is a national asset that will boost Nigeria's competitiveness in global shipping, ease congestion at existing ports and create a new hub for exports, manufacturing and job creation," Oyetola said.

He added that the port's Atlantic corridor location would enhance non-oil exports, im-

prove the ease of doing business and attract foreign direct investment to the South-West and the wider economy.

According to him, the revalidated licence provides clarity and confidence for investors, reinforcing Nigeria's readiness for large-scale maritime investments.

Receiving the certificate, Aiyedatiwa thanked President Bola Ahmed Tinubu and the Federal Executive Council for approving the revalidation, describing it as the outcome of years of sustained effort.

He explained that the original licence had faced delays due to a naming error in the initial business case, necessitating a fresh and comprehensive submission.

"This revalidated certificate is

a turning point for Ondo State, affirming our vision for industrial growth, job creation and sustainable development anchored on our coastline and maritime assets," the governor said.

Aiyedatiwa said his administration was prioritising supporting infrastructure, including the dualisation of access roads to industrial zones and modernisation projects.

He added that plans were also underway for residential, educational and hospitality facilities to support the anticipated influx of investors and workers.

The governor reaffirmed that the port and its ancillary projects would drive inclusive development across all local government areas of the state.

National grid collapses again

ABUJA

The Eko Electricity Distribution Company (EKEDC) on Monday said that there was a system collapse at 2.01 which has resulted to loss of power supply across their network.

The information was made known by EKEDC on its official Twitter Handle

"It said, "Kindly be in-

formed that there was a system collapse at 2.01 which has resulted to loss of power supply across our network.

"We are currently working with our partners as we hope for the speedy restoration of the grid.

"We will keep you updated as soon as power is restored."

Confirmation was being awaited from the Nigerian Independent System Operator (NISO).

PDP 'I'll die if I defect to...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

to the people.

"I don't want to hear again, 'I am PDP' or 'I am APC.' What I want to hear is that we are working together. All of us are members of the Renewed Hope family. It is one family," he added.

He explained that the visit to Etche and Omuma council areas was not for a political campaign but to appreciate the people for their long standing support.

The FCT minister commended the leadership of the two local council chairmen, describing them as central to sustaining unity and political stability in the areas.

"We didn't come for any rally. I am here to say 'thank you' for the support you have given

to us over the years because we are not ungrateful people.

"Agreement is agreement. When you agree with people, you must keep it.

"I urge party leaders and elected officials to honour commitments made in the interest of peace and development," he said.

Wike stressed that unity remained key to political and economic progress at the grassroots, stressing that "when you are united, you get results; when you are divided, you lose."

He also thanked women, youths and community leaders for their cooperation and support, noting that the peaceful atmosphere during the visit reflected a growing political maturity in the state.

Troops neutralise 80 terrorists,...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

personnel sustaining injuries during the encounter," he said.

The source said the troops also disrupted criminal activities across the country, apprehending 11 illegal miners in the FCT.

According to him, two armed robbery suspects were apprehended in Plateau and stolen funds recovered.

"In Delta, two illegal oil bunkers were arrested, with 104 sacks (2,600 litres) of crude

oil recovered, while three suspected sea pirates linked to the BIG JOE militant group were arrested in Cross River.

He said the operations underscore the military's resolve to protect lives, enforce the rule of law, and maintain peace and security across all affected areas.

He reiterated the commitment of the Nigerian army to proactive intelligence-led operations, rescue of kidnapped victims, and neutralization of insurgent and criminal threats.

NTA Gombe loses 5 staff in lone auto crash

GOMBE

The Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) has confirmed the death of seven persons in a lone crash that happened on Billiri – Gombe Road in Ladangor communi-

ty of Billiri Local Government Area of Gombe State.

The Sector Commander, Mr Samson Kaura, confirmed the accident in an interview with newsmen in Gombe on Monday.

Kaura said the crash in-

involved a Toyota Hummer bus bearing registration number: NUJ – 01, occurred at about 5:30 pm on Monday.

He said a preliminary investigation linked the cause of the crash to a tyre burst.

The commander said five

of the seven deceased were staff of the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Gombe, while four other passengers sustained varying degrees of injuries.

Kaura said the corps rescue team initially evacuated the

victims to Amana Clinic and General Hospital Billiri, and later referred to the Specialist Hospital, Gombe

He said the corpses had been deposited at the Specialist Hospital, Gombe.

The commander advised motorists to always check the expiration date of tyres to avoid burst, adding that expired tyres risk burst anytime.

Kaura sympathized with the management of NTA and the NUJ family in the state over the loss.

Two out of the five deceased NTA staff included the station's Managers of Administration and News.

They were returning from the wedding ceremony of one of their colleagues in Kaltungo town of Kaltungo LGA.

Transport Minister urges youths to be drivers of their future

KALTUNGO (GOMBE)

The Minister of Transport, Sen. Saidu Alkali, has urged youths in Gombe State to become drivers of their own economic future through practical, opportunity-driven paths.

Alkali made the call on Monday in Kaltungo during the 2025 Kaltungo Cultural Day celebration.

He urged them to leverage opportunities in agriculture, transportation, and entrepreneurship for economic growth, a message aligning with broader development goals in the state.

The minister said sustainable development is driven by an empowered and productive population, reaffirming the Federal Government's commitment to inclusive governance, national integration and eco-

nomics growth under the leadership of President Bola Tinubu.

Alkali noted that Kaltungo occupies a unique and significant place in the historical and socio-economic development of Gombe State, citing its peaceful coexistence, cultural diversity and vast agricultural potential.

He explained that the ongoing modernisation of the transportation sector, including rail development and the construction of modern bus terminals, is aimed at improving connectivity, facilitating trade, creating jobs and opening up rural communities to economic opportunities.

"Kaltungo stands to benefit significantly from improved transport infrastructure, which will enhance agricultural value chains, commerce, tourism and overall socio-economic development," he said.



LAUNCH OF CLM FOUNDATION:

L-R: Mr. Roland Musa, Director, Carfel Schools; Mr. Theophilus Musa, MD, Bralewood Investments; Dr. Evelyn Atisele (Nee Musa), Schools Programs Processor, Saudi Aramco; Mr. Patrick Musa, Chair, Board of Trustees, CLM Foundation and MD, Bonded Energy Power and Mr. Charles Musa SAN, Managing Partner, Charles Musa and Co. at the launch of the Caroline Lefshetu Musa (CLM) Foundation in Lagos recently.

Ododo flags off APC e-registration at his ward

OKENE (LOKOJA)

Kogi State Governor, Ahmed Usman Ododo, on Monday officially flagged off the All Progressives Congress (APC) electronic registration exercise at his Upogoro Ward in Okene Local Government Area of the state.

The flag-off ceremony, held in Okene, marked the formal commencement of the APC e-registration programme across Kogi State.

The event attracted party leaders, stakeholders and supporters, who converged to witness the governor revalidate his membership on the digital platform.

Speaking shortly after completing his online registration, Ododo urged residents to seize

the opportunity to register en masse as members of the ruling APC, describing the initiative as a major step toward strengthening internal democracy and party organisation.

He noted that the e-registration platform was designed to respond to the growing interest of Nigerians who desired to identify with the party's progressive ideology and reform agenda.

"Hundreds of thousands of people have been clamouring to register as members of our party. This platform has created the opportunity to achieve that seamlessly, thanks to our performing President and the national leadership of the party," the governor said.

Ododo attributed the renewed confidence in the APC

to the bold reforms and leadership of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, stressing that the party had become increasingly attractive to Nigerians due to improvements in the economy.

"President Tinubu has made our party the most attractive in Nigeria today. His policies are yielding results.

"The economy is gradually stabilising, the Naira is strengthening, food prices are easing, and agriculture is taking centre stage once again.

"The beginning was tough, but it was necessary to build a stronger and more resilient nation," he stated.

The governor expressed confidence that Nigerians would reward the President's courage and reforms with renewed trust, noting that the

people had faith in his leadership and vision for the country.

He further charged party leaders at all levels to ensure a smooth and massive rollout of the e-registration exercise across the state, describing it as a clear demonstration that the APC was leading Nigeria into a new era of digital party management.

Ododo directed the highest political appointee in each local government area to work closely with council chairmen and key party stakeholders to guarantee the success of the exercise in their respective councils.

"Let us open our doors wide for others to join the progressive family. Everyone who comes into this party is welcome and will be treated as an equal stakeholder," he assured.

PUBLIC NOTICE

The general public is hereby notified that I, **MR SUNNY OYEYINKA OKAH**, the husband of **GRACE OGHAE OKAH (Deceased)**, hereby state and bring to the knowledge of the general public that **OSARO OKUNGBOWA** and **GODWIN OKUNGBOWA**, who were written as the Next of Kin of **GRACE OGHAE OKAH** on her **Premium Pension (200138840025)** are imaginary and non existing persons.

Concerned authorities, Premium Pension and the general public should take note.

SIGNED: **SUNNY O. OKAH**

REMOVAL OF NAME

The general public is hereby notified that **AIGBUZA JAMES OGBEWI** and **AIGBUZA JAMES** are one and the same person. Henceforth, I now wish to be known as **AIGBUZA JAMES**. Former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and the general public should please take note.

CORRECTION OF NAME

The general public is hereby notified that **OLOTU OKHUOSURI EVBIKOMWAN** and **OLOTU OKHUOSURI EVBIKOMWAN ESTHER** are one and the same person. Henceforth, I now wish to be known as **OLOTU OKHUOSURI EVBIKOMWAN ESTHER**. Former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and the general public should please take note.

CHANGE OF NAME

I formerly known as **MISS IGHARUOSA LOVETH** now wish to be known as **MRS. LOVETH COLLINS-ONI**. Former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and the general public should please take note.

CHANGE OF NAME

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

CHANGE OF NAME

I formerly known as **MISS IKPONMWOSA ESOSA DAVID** now wish to be known as **MRS. IKPONMWOSA ESOSASERE**. **OSAHENRUMWEN**, former documents remain valid, concerned authorities and general public should please take note.

CORRECTION OF NAME

The general public is hereby notified that **ALOAMAKA ESEOSA ANWULICHUKWUKA** and **ALOAMAKA ESEOSA ANWULI** are one and the same person, Henceforth I now wish to be known and called as **ALOAMAKA ESEOSA ANWULICHUKWUKA**. Concerned authorities and general public should please take note.

CHANGE OF NAME

I formerly known as **MISS UKACHUKWU CHIOMA MERCY** now wish to be known as **MRS. ONYEBUCHI CHIOMA MERCY**. former documents remain valid, concerned authorities and general public should please take note.

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Aiyedatiwa signs N524.4bn 2026 budget into law

AKURE

Ondo State Governor, Lucky Aiyedatiwa, on Monday in Akure signed the N524.4 billion 2026 budget into law.

The appropriation law is tagged "Budget of Economic Consolidation."

The N524.4 billion budget comprises recurrent expenditure of N220.8 billion, representing 42.11 percent, and capital expenditure of N303.57 billion, representing 57.89 percent.

Assenting to the bill, Aiyedatiwa said the capital component underscored his administration's commitment to infrastructure development and economic growth.

He described the budget as a strategic blueprint designed to respond effectively to prevailing national economic realities, while positioning the state on a path of self-reliance, resilience and enduring prosperity.

The governor said all sectors, including agriculture, trade and industry, education and health were adequately provided for in the budget.

He also reaffirmed the ongoing drive to expand internally generated revenue through technology-driven and transparent tax systems, expansion of the revenue base, and blocking of revenue leakages.

Aiyedatiwa charged ministries, departments and agencies to align their programmes

strictly with budget provisions and ensure timely, prudent and efficient execution of projects and services.

He said economic transformation and infrastructure development, including the completion and initiation of critical projects in roads, power and water supply, would create an enabling environment for businesses to thrive.

The governor thanked members of the Ondo State House of Assembly for their expeditious, meticulous and patriotic consideration of the 2026 Appropriation Bill.

"Your work is a demonstration of shared vision and a strong partnership in the service of the people who entrusted us with leadership," he said.

Aiyedatiwa described the budget as a covenant between the government and citizens, a promise of responsible governance and shared prosperity, urging residents to take ownership and actively participate in project implementation.

He also commended the House Committee on Finance and Appropriation for its thoroughness and professionalism during the budget review process.

The governor urged all stakeholders to collaborate with his administration to ensure effective implementation of the budget, so that 2026 would become a year of consolidation, growth and inclusive development for Ondo State.

NEWS

Over 200 inmates in Enugu custodial centre taking degree courses —Official

ENUGU

The Medium Security Custodial Centre (MSCC) in Enugu has disclosed that about 200 inmates are currently enrolled in degree and higher degree programmes at the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). The Deputy Controller of

Corrections in charge of the centre, Dr. Sunday Igwe, made the disclosure while speaking with journalists on Monday in Enugu. Igwe said the majority of the inmates were pursuing first degree programmes, while others were enrolled for master's and doctorate degrees.

He further revealed that over 102 inmates recently sat for the

just-concluded National Examination Council (NECO) examinations in preparation for admission into degree programmes.

According to him, the Nigerian Correctional Service (NCoS), under the leadership of the Controller-General, Sylvester Nwakuche, has continued to make significant impact in the reformation and rehabilitation

of inmates through education.

Igwe said the current leadership of the NCoS had prioritised humane and result-oriented reformation, with special emphasis on educational advancement and certification.

"Once they are here, we don't just keep them idling away. We engage them in meaningful activities that make their stay worthwhile.

"In many instances, some of them come here without know-

ing how to write their names. Through the educational process, some of them leave with degree certificates in various disciplines.

"We are in partnership with the National Examination Council and the National Open University of Nigeria to achieve this result-oriented educational reformation.

"In NOUN alone, over 200 inmates in this Medium Security Custodial Centre are undertaking various degree-awarding courses," he said.

He described it as heartwarming that out of a population of over 3,000 inmates, about 200 were actively pursuing university education.

Igwe added that beyond formal education, inmates were also trained in vocational skills through tailoring, carpentry and welding workshops within the centre.

He expressed appreciation to the Assistant Controller-General of the NCoS in charge of Zone M, Enugu, Prisca Oku, and the Controller of Corrections in Enugu State, Valins Obizue, for their support and guidance.

"As government cannot do it all alone, we call on public-spirited individuals, groups and organisations to partner with the Nigerian Correctional Service to sustain these reformation programmes," he said.



X: Lagos State Governor, Babajide Sanwo-Olu (right), in his cultural regalia, during the 73rd *Adamu Orisa Play*, popularly known as the Eyo Festival, at the Tafawa Balewa Square (TBS), Onikan, Lagos.

FRSC confirms 4 dead in Nasarawa-Eggon carnival accident

NASARAWA-EGGON

The Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) has confirmed the death of four persons in a tragic accident involving three trucks during the annual Eggon Carnival in Nasarawa-Eggon Local Government Area of Nasarawa State. The Nasarawa State Sector

Commander of the FRSC, Yahaya Sabo-Adikwu, confirmed the incident to reporters, saying it occurred on Sunday, December 28.

According to him, the accident happened when one of the trucks rammied into a carnival procession moving from the palace of the Aren Eggon, the Paramount Ruler of the Eggon people, to the Eggon Commu-

nity Secondary School, venue of the annual celebration.

He said several other persons sustained varying degrees of injuries and were receiving treatment at the Nasarawa-Eggon General Hospital.

Sabo-Adikwu attributed the accident to reckless driving, adding that the bodies of the deceased had been deposited at the Federal University of Lafia Teaching Hospital, Lafia.

An eyewitness said the truck

lost control near the Eggon Community Secondary School and rammied into the procession, while two other trucks ran into the scene from behind.

The eyewitness alleged that the drivers were reckless and called for a thorough investigation into the incident.

He also emphasised the need for compulsory drug tests for drivers of articulated vehicles before being allowed to operate on Nigerian roads.

CSOs want compensation for communities affected by U.S. strike

ABUJA

A coalition of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) has called for compensation for communities affected by the recent United States airstrike in Sokoto State.

President Donald Trump of the United States had announced on Christmas Day, via a post on Truth Social, what he described as a devastating

airstrike on terrorists mobilising for attacks in Nigeria.

In a statement issued on Monday in Abuja, the CSOs also demanded an independent investigation into the strike and public disclosure of the findings.

The coalition comprises over 80 organisations, including Yiaga Africa, the Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC), Accountability Lab Nigeria, ACE-Nigeria and the African Centre for Media and

Information Literacy (AFRIC-MIL).

The groups said an open probe would help deepen public trust and reduce communal tension.

They noted that the incident raised serious concerns about Nigeria's sovereignty, constitutional governance, civilian protection and democratic accountability.

The CSOs criticised what they described as the silence of

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the Service Chiefs and the National Assembly on the matter.

They also decried the lack of transparency surrounding the operation, including its legal basis, rules of engagement and safeguards for civilians.

The coalition said the concerns were heightened by reports that debris from the strike fell on farmlands in Sokoto State and near a hotel in Kwara State.

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ABUJA

A coalition of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) has called for compensation for communities affected by the recent United States airstrike in Sokoto State.

President Donald Trump of the United States had announced on Christmas Day, via a post on Truth Social, what he described as a devastating airstrike on terrorists mobilising for attacks in Nigeria.

In a statement issued on Monday in Abuja, the CSOs also demanded an independent investigation into the strike and public disclosure of the findings.

The coalition comprises over 80 organisations, including Yiaga Africa, the Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC), Accountability Lab Nigeria, ACE-Nigeria and the

African Centre for Media and Information Literacy (AFRIC-MIL).

The groups said an open probe would help deepen public trust and reduce communal tension.

They noted that the incident raised serious concerns about Nigeria's sovereignty, constitutional governance, civilian protection and democratic accountability.

The CSOs criticised what they described as the silence of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the Service Chiefs and the National Assembly on the matter.

They also decried the lack of transparency surrounding the operation, including its legal basis, rules of engagement and safeguards for civilians.

The coalition said the concerns were heightened by reports that debris from the strike fell on farmlands in Sokoto State and near a hotel in Kwara State.

APC faults opposition's criticism of Tinubu's Europe trip

LAGOS

The All Progressives Congress (APC) has urged opposition parties to raise the quality of their engagement and stop what it described as "meaningless noise-making" over President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's trip to Europe.

The party made the call in a statement issued on Monday in Lagos by its Lagos State Spokesman, Seye Oladejo, while reacting to criticisms by the African Democratic Congress (ADC).

Oladejo said the opposition's comments reflected a poor understanding of modern governance and international diplomacy.

"The latest outburst by the ADC over President Tinubu's Europe trip is a familiar dance of ignorance and desperation.

"When confronted with serious governance, strategic leadership and results-driven diplomacy, the opposition predictably resorts to misinformation and pedestrian politics," he said.

He stressed that Nigeria could not be governed in isolation in a highly interconnected

global environment

"Nigeria is not governed from a village square. Serious leadership entails constant engagement with global partners, investors, development institutions and strategic allies," he added.

According to him, the President's trip was aimed at advancing Nigeria's economic interests, strengthening bilateral relations, attracting investment and reinforcing the country's global standing.

"This trip is not about sight-seeing, as the opposition would like Nigerians to believe, but about purposeful engagement to reposition the country," he said.

Oladejo described as misleading the suggestion that governance depended solely on the President's physical presence in the country.

"The President governs with intent, structure and continuity. The machinery of government remains in motion through clear policy direction, delegated authority and strong institutions," he said.

He accused the opposition of lacking concrete ideas and viable alternatives.

Clerics urge children to rise above pleasures, shine globally

ABUJA

Clerics and stakeholders have urged Nigerian children to look beyond fleeting pleasures and societal distractions, encouraging them to embrace their divine potential and develop into global achievers. The call was made in Abuja

during the 2025 Annual Love Feast for Children, organised by the Fruitful Welfare Initiative for Women and Children, a faith-based organisation focused on spiritual and academic mentorship.

The event attracted children and teenagers from across the Federal Capital Territory and

Nasarawa State.

A major highlight was the unveiling of four books authored by the initiative's Executive Director, Dr. Monisola Fadoju.

The books are, 'I Am Uniquely Unique,' 'The Escape Route,' 'The Eagle's Traits: Biblical Lessons for Spiritual Growth,' and 'You Are a Star.'

Pastor Michael Adebayo urged children to reject labels of failure, stressing that they were created to lead and excel.

Using a "landlord and tenant" analogy, he encouraged children to exercise spiritual authority over challenges and build strong moral foundations through the Word of God.

469,235 pirated materials seized, 57 copyright violators arrested —NCC

ABUJA

The Nigerian Copyright Commission (NCC) has seized more than 469,235 units of pirated materials with an estimated street market value of N750 million.

The Director-General of the NCC, Dr John Asein, disclosed this in an interview with journalists on Monday in Abuja, stating that the seized items included suspected pirated books and contrivances.

He said the commission also arrested 57 copyright violators during enforcement opera-

tions carried out across Abuja, Lagos, Ibadan, Port Harcourt and Makurdi, among other locations.

According to Asein, the year 2025 represented a critical consolidation phase for the commission.

"Within the year, the commission recorded measurable achievements in institutional strengthening, enforcement, prosecution, public education and regulatory oversight.

"At the same time, it confronted enduring structural, legal and technological challenges that underscored the

complexity of copyright administration in the nation's digital and informal economy," he said.

Speaking on institutional capacity and organisational strength in 2025, Asein said the NCC prioritised human capital development as a cornerstone for effective copyright administration.

He said the commission conducted in-house training sessions and professional workshops to enhance staff competence in copyright administration, enforcement procedures, communication and emerging

intellectual property issues.

"NCC also facilitated engagements on Artificial Intelligence and copyright, focusing on policy implications, rights ownership and enforcement challenges associated with AI-generated content," he said.

Asein added that the commission collaborated with universities, research institutions and government agencies to expand knowledge on intellectual property, innovation and the creative economy.

"These efforts strengthened institutional readiness and

positioned the commission to respond more effectively to evolving copyright challenges," he noted.

He said the NCC sustained its role as a key policy actor in Nigeria's copyright ecosystem throughout 2025, particularly in policy and legal framework development.

The NCC boss further explained that the commission implemented nationwide copyright awareness campaigns through public events, traditional media engagements and digital platforms.

He noted that the commission also produced educational content and programmes such as the "Copyright Connect" series and "Creative Icon," designed to recognise and celebrate creatives across various social media platforms.

He said the commission also participated in cybercrime awareness campaigns and national consultations, reinforcing collaborative responses to digital copyright infringement.

Asein, however, acknowledged persistent challenges in piracy and infringement.

Aerodrome certification to boost investors' confidence at PH Int'l Airport

PORT HARCOURT

The South-South Regional Manager of the Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria, Mrs Lynda Ezike, has said that aerodrome certification by the Nigeria Civil Aviation Authority will boost investors' confidence in the aviation industry.

Ezike, who is also the Airport Manager, stated this on Monday in Port Harcourt while reacting to the recent certification of the Port Harcourt International Airport by the NCAA.

She said the certification would also position the airport for global recognition and pro-

mote ease of doing business.

According to her, the certification confirmed that the airport met global benchmarks in infrastructure, operational procedures and safety management.

Ezike disclosed that the NCAA recently issued aerodrome certificates to Kano and Port Harcourt international airports following rigorous regulatory processes carried out jointly with FAAN.

She said the certification, officially presented on December 19, 2025, underscored the importance of inter-agency collaboration in ensuring safety and operational excellence.



X: Oyo State Governor, Engr. Seyi Makinde (5th right - standing front row), with former classmates from the 1985 set to mark their 40 years of graduation from Bishop Phillips Academy, Ibadan.

ABU partners pharmaceutical coy to boost local drug production, research commercialisation

ZARIA

Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, has entered into a strategic partnership with AMA Pharmaceutical Company to accelerate local drug production and enhance pharmaceutical self-reliance in Nigeria.

The Director of Public Affairs of the university, Malam Auwalu Umar, disclosed this in a statement issued on Monday in Zaria.

He said the collaboration would also strengthen the commercialisation of the university's research outputs and deepen linkages between academia and the pharmaceutical industry.

Umar described AMA Pharmaceutical Company as the largest pharmaceutical manufacturer in Northern Nigeria, with advanced facilities for producing intravenous fluids using Automated Form-Fill-Seal technology.

He said the partnership aligned with the Federal Government's policy direction fol-

lowing an Executive Order by President Bola Tinubu prioritising local sourcing of pharmaceutical raw materials.

According to him, the collaboration would lower production costs, boost local capacity and strengthen Nigeria's healthcare value chain.

Umar said discussions on the partnership began during a visit by the Vice-Chancellor of ABU, Prof Adamu Ahmed, to the company's facilities in Kaduna to explore SIWES placement opportunities for students.

He said the collaboration would provide hands-on industrial training for students, improve employability and ensure that academic research translates into tangible economic benefits.

Umar added that the partnership was a significant step toward bridging the gap between academia and industry while supporting Nigeria's drive for pharmaceutical self-reliance.

If you want, I can tighten further for front-page fit, harmonise figures, or localise Edo-style reporting tone.

PDP 'll emerge stronger if it addresses leadership challenge —Wike

PORT HARCOURT

The Minister of the Federal Capital Territory, Mr Nyesom Wike, has said that the Peoples Democratic Party could still emerge stronger if it addressed its current leadership challenges.

Wike stated this on Monday during his end-of-year media chat in Port Harcourt, noting that things could improve for the party if its leadership learned to

do things the right way.

The PDP is currently facing mass defections following a lingering leadership crisis that threatens its existence.

The minister recalled that he had earlier warned the party leadership that failure to take corrective steps could place the party in an unfavourable position.

"Leadership is very key to everything you are doing, whether in an association or in government.

"If the leader does not take the right decision, everything will go wrong," he said.

He said the party had faced similar challenges in the past without collapsing, attributing its survival then to committed leadership.

"But when you have a leadership that is not focused, that does not understand that politics is different from business, you are bound to see what is happening today," he said.

Describing the PDP as a well-known party to Nigerians, Wike said the party was cur-

rently taking the back seat due to leadership failure.

According to him, the party's present situation is a result of a lack of focus and unwillingness to accept suggestions.

He expressed optimism that the PDP would bounce back if the leadership acknowledged its mistakes and took steps to correct them.

Wike added that party loyalty should be based on contribution to growth and development, not merely holding a membership card.

Governor Alex Otti signs Abia 2026 budget into law

NVOSI (ABIA)

Governor Alex Otti of Abia State has assented to the 2026 Appropriation Bill of N1.016 trillion, as passed by the State House of Assembly.

Speaking at the brief ceremony held at Nvosi, Isiala Ngwa South Local Government Area, the governor pledged that, barring unforeseen circumstances, the budget would be judiciously implemented to advance development in the state.

He assured that the government would remain disciplined and committed to implementing the budget as approved, stressing that any future adjustments would be returned to the House of Assembly with proper justification.

Otti commended the team that prepared the budget and transmitted it to the legislature, as well as lawmakers for their diligence and speedy passage of the bill.

He said the House demonstrated attention to detail and

upheld democratic principles through constructive engagement with the executive.

According to him, the time taken to pass the bill ensured thorough scrutiny and credible figures, noting that despite the rigorous review, the total budget remained N1.016 trillion, with capital and recurrent allocations retained.

Otti said the budget reflects the government's empowerment philosophy, driven by creating an enabling business environment and investments in health,

education, environmental sanitation and road infrastructure.

In his remarks, the Speaker of the House of Assembly, Mr Emmanuel Emeruwa, said the budget, titled "Project of Acceleration and New Possibilities," signified a phase where strong foundations had been laid for faster development.

Emeruwa said the state was closing developmental gaps created over the past 24 years and pledged the House's continued support for policies aimed at sustained growth in Abia State.

NEWS

Court refuses application to stop Petroleum Minister, others from allocating oil fields

ABUJA

The Federal High Court in Abuja has refused an application seeking to stop the Minister of State for Petroleum Resources (Oil), Mr Heineken Lokpobiri, and others from allocating some oil fields.

Justice Emeka Nwite, in a ruling on an ex parte motion filed

by Hi-Rev Oil Limited and Hi-Rev Exploration and Production Limited, but moved by their counsel, Mr Ambrose Unaeze, instead ordered that the respondents be put on notice.

"The respondents are hereby ordered by this honourable court to show cause why the application should not be granted," Justice Nwite ruled.

Justice Nwite, a vacation judge, adjourned the matter until January 5 for the respondents to show cause.

The second and third respondents in the ex parte motion marked FHC/ABJ/CS/2678/2025 are the Attorney-General of the Federation and the Nigeria Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission.

The motion, dated and filed on December 11 by a team of lawyers led by Unaeze, sought an order of interim injunction restraining the defendants, or any person acting on their behalf, from selling, assigning or allocating Yorla South (Petroleum Prospecting Licence 2A32 – OML 11) located in Rivers State. The applicants also sought

to restrain the defendants from allocating Akiapiri (PPL 2A48 – OML 25) located in Bayelsa State; Diebu Creek East (OML 32), also in Bayelsa State; and Idiok (PPL 2A41 – OML 67) located in Akwa Ibom State.

According to the applicants, the fields are direct replacements for the Utapate Oil Field, formerly part of OML 13, and OPL 2002, previously allocated to them but later withdrawn by the defendants, pending the determination of the interlocutory application.

Giving four grounds in support of the application, Unaeze said the companies were earlier allocated the Utapate Oil Field and OPL 2002, but these were unreasonably withdrawn by the Federal Government.

He said there was a settlement agreement for the replacement of the Utapate Oil Field, which was adopted by the court as a consent judgment.

Unaeze stated that the firms had taken substantial steps and offered consideration in respect of the grant of the oil prospecting licence and licence to establish a petroleum refinery.

He argued that the legal rights of the companies were under threat following the defendants' move to sell or allocate the oil fields to third parties through a public bid round, making the interim order necessary.

In an affidavit in support of the motion, the companies' Director, Chief Felix Ezeamama, averred that in 2007 the firms won the bid for OPL 2002, but the exercise was suspended following a lawsuit instituted by Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Limited, the former operator of OML 13.

He said the plaintiffs later instituted an action against the defendants over lack of access to the oil field, which resulted in an out-of-court settlement in 2015, adopted as a consent judgment.

According to him, the settlement confirmed the plaintiffs

as the rightful winners of OPL 2002 and provided for the issuance of a 50,000 barrels-per-day modular refinery licence at Iko Community, Eastern Obolo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State.

Ezeamama said the Department of Petroleum Resources, now Nigeria Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission, subsequently issued the award letter for OPL 2002 and the licence to establish a petroleum refinery.

He added that the plaintiffs made part payment of the signature bonus and engaged the Central Bank of Nigeria on foreign exchange arrangements for the balance.

He said the plaintiffs submitted a detailed engineering design for the construction of the refinery, which was approved by the defendants after review.

According to him, a high-level stakeholders' meeting chaired by the then Attorney-General of the Federation later proposed the allocation of alternative oil fields, either two from OPL 2002 or three marginal fields from the government's basket.

Ezeamama said the plaintiffs selected the Obuzo, Uzoaku and Ofemini oil fields, which were approved but later included in a marginal field bid round and allocated to other operators.

He alleged that the defendants had continued to make promises to provide alternative oil fields of equivalent value, but failed to do so.

He said the plaintiffs were entitled to Yorla South, Akiapiri, Diebu Creek East and Idiok oil fields, having fulfilled all conditions and in line with the consent judgment.

Ezeamama warned that irreparable loss would be suffered if the defendants were allowed to proceed with the allocation of the fields to third parties.



LUNCH OF 2026 EMBLEM APPEAL FUND:

A cross-section of members of the Nigerian Legion Rivers State, during the lunch of 2026 Emblem Appeal Fund for the Armed Forces Remembrance Day celebration in Port Harcourt.

Man, 47, arraigned for allegedly assaulting girlfriend

IBADAN

A 47-year-old man, Samson Duru, on Monday appeared before an Iyaganku Chief Magistrates' Court in Ibadan over an alleged assault.

The defendant, who resides at the Felele Rab area of

Ibadan, was charged with one count of assault.

He pleaded not guilty to the charge.

The prosecutor, Mr Akeem Akinloye, alleged that the offence was committed on December 22 at about 7.00 p.m.

He told the court that following a misunderstanding, the de-

fendant unlawfully assaulted his girlfriend, Mary Slyvernus, by dragging her on the floor.

Akinloye alleged that the defendant punched the complainant on the face and left hand, causing her harm.

He said the offence contravened Section 355 of the Criminal Law of Oyo State, 2000.

The Chief Magistrate, Mrs Olabisi Ogunkanmi, granted the defendant bail in the sum of two million naira with two sureties in like sum.

She ruled that one of the sureties must be a blood relative of the defendant.

The court adjourned the case until March 2, 2026, for hearing.

Defendant arraigned for allegedly stealing N120,000 phone

BADAGRY

The police on Monday arraigned a 31-year-old man, Ifeanyi Igwegbe, before a Badagry Chief Magistrates' Court in Lagos for allegedly stealing a mobile phone valued at N120,000.

The defendant, whose address was not provided, is standing trial on charges of

stealing and breach of peace.

He pleaded not guilty to the charges.

The prosecutor, ASP Edet Ekpo, told the court that the offences were committed on December 18 at about 5.00 p.m. at the Ile-Oba Ilogbo-Eremi area of Badagry.

Ekpo alleged that the defendant stole a Poco mobile phone

belonging to Mr David Eyoton.

He further alleged that the defendant conducted himself in a manner likely to cause a breach of peace by causing pandemonium in the area.

The prosecutor said the defendant was arrested and handed over to the police for prosecution.

He said the offences contravened Sections 168 and 287

of the Criminal Law of Lagos State, 2015.

The Chief Magistrate, Mr Nurudeen Layeni, granted the defendant bail in the sum of N100,000 with two sureties in like sum.

He ordered that one of the sureties must be a community leader.

The case was adjourned until February 19 for mention.

Man, 58, docked for allegedly invading court premises

IBADAN

The police on Monday arraigned a 58-year-old man, Gbenga Adejwon, before an Iyaganku Chief Magistrates' Court in Ibadan for allegedly invading court premises with intent to commit a felony.

The defendant, whose address was not provided, is standing trial on a two-count charge of attempted felony and assault. He pleaded not guilty to the charges.

The prosecutor, Sgt Akeem Akinloye, alleged that the defendant scaled the fence of the magistrates' court at about 2.30 a.m. on December 24.

He alleged that the defendant had a plier in his possession and attempted to commit a crime.

Akinloye further alleged that a security personnel, Victor, attempted to apprehend the defendant, but was bitten on the left hand.

The prosecutor said the defendant was eventually arrested by the police.

He said the offences contravened Sections 355 and 508 of the Criminal Law of Oyo State, 2000.

The Chief Magistrate, Mrs Olabisi Ogunkanmi, granted the defendant bail in the sum of two million naira with two sureties in like sum.

She ordered that one surety must be a blood relation of the defendant, while the other must own landed property within the court's jurisdiction.

The case was adjourned until January 27, 2026, for hearing.

Police arraign man for allegedly defrauding couple of N4m

BADAGRY

The police in Lagos on Monday arraigned a defendant, Ezekiel Oluwafemi, before a Badagry Chief Magistrates' Court over an alleged four million naira fraud.

The defendant, whose address was not stated, is facing charges of fraud and stealing. He plead-

ed not guilty to the charges.

The prosecutor, ASP Edet Ekpo, told the court that the offences were committed between May 2024 and July 2025 at Iragon Community in Badagry.

He alleged that the defendant fraudulently obtained four million naira from Mr and Mrs Patrick Ogbade under the pretext of purchasing domestic

animals and planting yam and cassava for them.

Ekpo said the defendant converted the money to his personal use without the consent of the complainants.

He added that the defendant was arrested and handed over to the police for prosecution.

The offences contravene Sections 287 and 314 of the Crimi-

nal Law of Lagos State, 2015.

The Chief Magistrate, Mr Nurudeen Layeni, granted the defendant bail in the sum of one million naira with two sureties in like sum.

He ordered that one of the sureties must be gainfully employed.

The case was adjourned until February 19, 2026, for mention.

Foreign

NEWS

Ukraine denies drone attack on Putin's residence

President Volodymyr Zelensky has denied allegations by Russia that Ukraine launched a drone attack on one of President Vladimir Putin's residences, and accused Moscow of trying to derail peace talks.

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov claimed Kyiv had launched an attack overnight using 91 long-range unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) on Putin's state residence in Russia's northwestern Novgorod region.

Russia said it would now review its position in peace negotiations. It is not yet clear where Putin was at the time of the alleged attack.

Zelensky dismissed the claim as "typical Russian lies", intended to give the Kremlin an excuse to continue attacks on Ukraine.

He said that Russia had previously targeted government buildings in Kyiv.

Zelensky added on X: "It is

critical that the world doesn't stay silent now. We cannot allow Russia to undermine the work on achieving a lasting peace."

In a statement shared on Telegram on Monday, Lavrov said all of the 91 drones he claimed were launched at Putin's residence were intercepted and destroyed by Russian air defence systems.

He added that there were no reports of casualties or damage as a result of the attack.

"Given the final degeneration of the criminal Kyiv regime, which has switched to a policy of state terrorism, Russia's negotiating position will be revised," he said.

But he added that Russia does not intend to exit the negotiating process with the US, Russian news agency Tass reported.

The claim by Moscow comes after talks between the US and Ukraine in Florida on Sunday, where Presidents Trump and Zelensky discussed a revised

peace plan to end the war.

Zelensky said the US had offered Ukraine security guarantees for 15 years, and Trump said an agreement on this point was "close to 95%" done.

Ukraine's leader described territorial issues and the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant as the last unresolved matters, and there was little sign of progress on the future of Ukraine's contested Donbas region - which Russia wants to seize in full.

Moscow currently controls about 75% of the Donetsk region, and some 99% of the neighbouring Luhansk. The two regions are known collectively as Donbas.

Russia has previously rejected key parts of the plan under discussion.

The White House said on Monday that President Trump had "concluded a positive call" with Putin, following the US-Ukraine talks.

Yuri Ushakov, a Kremlin

foreign policy aide, told reporters on Monday that during the call, Putin had pointed out the alleged attack on his residence happened "almost straight after what the US had considered to be a successful round of talks".

Ushakov said: "The US president was shocked by this information, he was angry and said he couldn't believe such mad actions. It was stated that this will no doubt affect the US approach to working with Zelensky".

During a later press conference, Trump initially appeared to say he did not know about the alleged incident, but later told reporters that he was told about it by Putin and was "very angry" about it.

Asked if the US had seen any evidence supporting Russia's claim, he responded: "Well we'll find out. You're saying maybe the attack didn't take place - that's possible too, I guess. But President Putin told me this morning it did".

US pledges \$2bn for humanitarian aid, but tells UN 'adapt or die'

The United States has pledged \$2 billion (£1.5bn) to fund United Nations (UN) humanitarian programmes, but has warned the UN it must "adapt or die".

The announcement was made in Geneva by Jeremy Lewin, President Trump's Under Secretary for Foreign Assistance, and the UN's emergency relief chief, Tom Fletcher.

It comes amid huge cuts in US funding for humanitarian operations, and further cuts expected from other donors, such as the UK and Germany.

Mr Fletcher welcomed the new funds, saying they would save "millions of lives". But \$2 billion is just a fraction of what the US has traditionally spent on aid. In 2022 its contribution to the UN's humanitarian work was estimated at \$17 billion (£12.6bn).

And the funding comes with some strings attached. Although UN donors do sometimes earmark specific projects, the UN funding prioritises just 17 countries, among them Haiti, Syria, and Sudan.

Afghanistan and Yemen will not, Mr Lewin said, receive any money, adding that Washington had evidence that in Afghanistan UN funds were being diverted to the Taliban and that "President Trump will never tolerate a penny of taxpayers' money going to terrorist groups".

Such restrictions will be hard for aid agencies working in countries not on the list. The impact of funding cuts has already led to the closure of mother and baby clinics in Afghanistan, and reductions in food rations for displaced

people in Sudan. Globally, child mortality, which has been declining, is set to rise this year.

The conditions placed on the new US funding also rule out spending money on projects related to tackling climate change, which Mr Lewin said were not "life saving", and not in "the US interest".

Mr Lewin, a Trump loyalist who reportedly masterminded the shutdown of USAID and the firing of its thousands of staff, warned the UN that it must "adapt or die", saying that the US "piggy bank is not open to those organisations that just want to return to the old system".

The US says funding must be focused and efficient, with no duplication among aid projects. These are qualities Tom Fletcher, and the entire UN system, say they wholeheartedly support. It's in no one's interests, least of all those of the estimated 200 people caught up in crises, for money to be spent unwisely.

But while the UN is gratefully welcoming the new US funding, there remain big questions about whether the conditions around it are too politicised. The fundamental principles of humanitarian aid are that it should be neutral, impartial, and directed at those most in need. Eliminating specific countries, or specific crises such as climate change, challenges those principles.

But, as it struggles with a continued funding crisis, and, in Washington, a very skeptical donor, many in the UN will be acknowledging that \$2 billion is better than nothing.



THAILAND ARMY:

The Thai army said more than 250 unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) were detected flying from the Cambodian side.

Thailand accuses Cambodia of breaking newly signed ceasefire deal

Thailand's army has accused Cambodia of breaching a newly signed ceasefire deal reached after weeks of deadly clashes that forced nearly one million people from their homes.

In a statement, the Thai army said more than 250 unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) were detected flying from the Cambodian side on Sunday night.

The ceasefire took effect at noon local time (05:00 GMT) on Saturday. Both sides agreed to freeze the front lines where they are now, ban reinforcements and allow civilians living in border areas to return as soon as possible.

It had been seen as a breakthrough, which came after days of talks between both countries, with diplomatic encouragement from China and the US.

In a statement on Monday, the Royal Thai Army said Cambodia's actions "constitute provocation and a violation of measures aimed at reducing tensions", adding that they were "inconsistent" with the terms of the ceasefire.

It also said it "may need to reconsider" the release of 18 Cambodian soldiers held in Thailand since July.

Thailand would be "obliged to act in accordance... [if] violations of agreements and na-

tional sovereignty continue", it added.

Cambodian Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn described the incident as "a small issue related to flying drones seen by both sides along the border line," according to AFP news agency.

It comes just hours after China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi praised the "hard-won" ceasefire, and US President Donald Trump praised the "rapid and fair conclusion".

The dispute between Thailand and Cambodia is not new, dating back more than a century.

The latest tensions ramped up earlier this year, after a

group of Cambodian women sang patriotic songs in a disputed temple.

A Cambodian soldier was killed in a clash in May. This plunged relations between the countries to their lowest point in more than a decade.

There were five days of intense fighting along the border, which left dozens of soldiers and civilians dead. Thousands more civilians were displaced.

A fragile ceasefire deal was agreed in July and signed in October. It then collapsed earlier this month, when fresh clashes erupted.

Both sides blamed each other for the breakdown of the truce.

Two pilots killed after mid-air helicopter collision in New Jersey

Two pilots have died after their helicopters collided mid-air on Sunday above a city in New Jersey, police said.

Hammonton Police identified the pilots as Kenneth L Kirsch, 65, and Michael Greenberg, 71, both of New Jersey, according to BBC news partner CBS.

Only the pilots were on board each aircraft, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) said in a statement, adding there would be a federal investigation into what led to the collision.

Hammonton is about 35 miles (56km) south-east of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, just off the Atlantic City Expressway.

Police on Sunday reported

that one of the helicopters was engulfed in flames by the time it crash landed on the ground, and emergency services were working to extinguish the fire.

According to the National Transportation Safety Board, the crash involved a Enstrom 280C helicopter and a Enstrom F-28A helicopter and happened at around 11:25 EST (16:25 GMT). Both helicopters are lightweight aircraft that typically hold three people or fewer.

In January, a military helicopter collided with a passenger jet in Washington DC, killing 67 people.

FAA data shows that the rate of deadly helicopter accidents has fallen on average over the last three years.

NEWS

Foreign

Controversy grows in DRC over alleged tolerance of anti-Tutsi rhetoric

Controversy is growing in the Democratic Republic of Congo over alleged government tolerance of anti-Tutsi rhetoric. President Félix Tshisekedi met on December 22nd with two Congolese expatriates from the United States, Jean-Claude Mubenga and Kalonji Kabamba wa Mulumba. Officials say the talks focused on national unity and sovereignty.

But critics say the meeting sent the wrong message.

The following day, Mubenga posted highly inflammatory content online, using dehumanizing language and praising armed groups accused of targeting Kinyarwanda-speak-

ing civilians.

Meanwhile the army spokesperson Major General Sylvain Ekenge has been suspended following controversial remarks about Tutsi women.

The army says the comments were discriminatory and do not reflect the position of the government, the military command, or President Félix Tshisekedi, stressing they were made in a personal capacity.

The Tutsis are an ethnic group living across Rwanda and eastern Congo, and their presence is closely tied to decades of conflict and strained relations between the DRC and Rwanda.

Sweden voices support for Mogadishu after Israel's recognition of Somaliland

Sweden has come out in support of Somalia days after Israel became the first country in the world to recognise the breakaway region of Somaliland as an independent state.

Posting on social media on Monday, the Swedish foreign ministry said it "upholds the principles of Somalia's unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity," in line with the European Union, African Union and relevant regional bodies.

Somaliland declared its independence from Mogadishu in 1991 but has never before been acknowledged, despite having its own government and currency.

Israel sparked an international backlash on Friday when

it announced its recognition of the territory.

More than 20 countries in the Middle East and Africa denounced the move in a statement on Saturday, calling it a threat to peace and security in the Horn of Africa. They also condemned any attempt by Israel to resettle Palestinians from Gaza in the African territory.

Over the weekend, the EU called for "meaningful dialogue" between Somaliland and Mogadishu to resolve their long-standing differences.

Somaliland is arid and lies on the Gulf of Aden across from Yemen and next to Djibouti, which hosts military bases for the US, China, France and several other countries.



WARSHIPS BEING DEPLOYED:

The Chinese military published a video on Monday showing warships being deployed as it announced drills in the Taiwan Strait.

China holds military drills around Taiwan as warning to 'separatist forces'

China is holding military drills around Taiwan simulating the seizure and blockade of the island's key areas, as a warning against "separatist forces".

The army, navy, air force and rocket force have been dispatched for the drills which include live-fire exercises, the Chinese military said.

Codenamed "Justice Mission 2025", the drills are taking place days after the US announced the sale of one of its largest weapons packages to Taiwan worth \$11bn (£8.2bn). That move drew sharp protest from Beijing which in turn sanctioned US defence firms.

Taiwan's push to ramp up its defence this year has also angered Beijing, which claims the self-ruled island as its territory.

Taiwan's presidential office has criticised the upcoming Chinese drills, calling them a challenge to international norms.

Its defence ministry said it had detected 89 Chinese military aircraft and 28 warships and coastguard vessels near Taiwan on Monday.

The ministry said separately it had deployed its own missile systems and forces to monitor the situation, adding they are on "high alert" to defend Taiwan and "protect our people".

In a post on Weibo, the Chinese military's Eastern Theater Command - in charge of the Taiwan Strait - described the upcoming military exercise as a "shield of justice".

"All those plotting independence will be annihilated upon encountering the shield!" the post read.

While some initial drills have begun, the military said it would conduct a major exercise from 08:00 to 18:00 local time on Tuesday.

Beijing's foreign ministry called the drills a "severe punishment for separatist forces seeking independence through force" and warned "external forces" against "using Taiwan to contain China".

"Any sinister schemes to obstruct China's reunification are doomed to fail," the ministry's spokesman Lin Jian said at a regular press briefing on Monday.

While China has long called

for the "peaceful reunification" with Taiwan, it also has a law stating it will resort to "non-peaceful means" to prevent the island's "secession".

Beijing has accused Taiwan's president Lai Ching-te of pursuing "Taiwan independence". The president maintains Taiwan is already a sovereign nation and therefore has no need to formally declare independence.

On Sunday, Lai said in a local television interview that Taiwan needed to "keep raising the difficulty so [China] can never meet the standard" for an invasion.

He also said that his administration was committed to "maintaining the status quo" and would not provoke China - though he added that peace relies on "real strength".

Polls consistently show that most Taiwanese people want the "status quo", meaning they neither want to unify with China, nor to formally declare independence.

Chinese state media published a map released by the military showing Tuesday's drill locations around Taiwan.

Taiwan's transport ministry has said both international and domestic flights will be diverted away from dangerous areas as the drills continue, affecting more than 100,000 passengers.

Since 2022 Beijing has ramped up military drills in the Taiwan Strait, usually in response to what it deems as threats such as former US Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan in 2022 and Lai's inauguration in 2024.

China's last live-fire exercise in the Taiwan Strait, held in April, simulated strikes on

key ports and energy facilities, the People's Liberation Army said at the time. Along with the drills, the Chinese military released a series of cartoons depicting Lai as a "parasite".

This week's military drills are the first to be held under Yang Zhibin, the new chief of the Eastern Theater Command who assumed his role in October.

Taiwan holds military exercises of its own, both to prepare its population for an attack and showcase its defences to Beijing. This year's Han Kuang exercise, which took place over 10 days, was the largest and longest one yet.

Since taking office, Lai has vowed to boost defence spending and enhance the island's defence capabilities in the face of increasing tensions with Beijing.

In October, the Taiwanese president announced the building of a dome-like air defence system to guard against "hostile threats" - though he did not explicitly mention China.

China's ties with Japan have plunged to their iciest in years after Japanese leader Sanae Takaichi suggested last month - in response to a question asked in parliament - that Japan's self-defence forces could step in if China attacked Taiwan.

China has lodged heated protests and issued warnings to its citizens to avoid travel to Japan. Earlier this month, Japan protested after Chinese fighter jets locked radars on Japanese aircraft while Beijing accused Tokyo of "harassing" its forces during a training exercise.

Trump meets Netanyahu in Florida as focus turns to Middle East issues

US President Donald Trump turned his focus to the Middle East on Monday, as he hosted Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Florida for talks that are expected to cover Gaza and a range of other pressing issues.

Any decisions made could

have a potentially momentous impact on questions that determine the future of the region.

The US has been Israel's strongest military and political backer throughout two years of war in Gaza and many are now looking to the meeting as a test of the leaders' relation-

ship and how aligned they are on key topics.

Netanyahu arrived on Monday afternoon at Trump's resort, Mar-a-Lago. It marks their sixth meeting since Trump's return to office 11 months ago.

Among the expected points of discussion is the future of re-

lations with Syria's new government, Iranian rearmament, and Hezbollah's role in Lebanon.

Perhaps most critically, they will discuss progress of the Gaza ceasefire deal, where Israel's government has taken several positions diverging from those of the US government.

FEATURES

BEYOND NUMBERS

How nutrition is saving children's lives

LUCY-OKECHUKWU (NAN)

For many mothers across Anambra State, the struggle with child malnutrition is no longer told only through statistics, but through lived experiences shaped by fear, fragile hope, and gradual recovery.

In Onitsha North, Mrs Ijeoma Okoye recalls deep anxiety watching her one-year-three-month-old daughter fail to meet basic developmental milestones, unable to sit, crawl, or walk like other children.

She took the child to a health centre where nurses weighed her, discovered severe underweight at 2.5 kilogrammes, and linked her delayed development and weakness directly to prolonged malnutrition.

Health workers explained the condition and provided packs of Healthy Living Pap, advising consistent feeding as treatment, while reassuring the worried mother that improvement was possible with proper nutrition.

After one month, Okoye noticed improved appearance and weight gain; after three months, her daughter weighed 3.5 kilogrammes and began attempting to crawl, bringing visible relief and renewed optimism.

Similar testimonies emerged across communities. In Awka North, Mrs Chinenye Okpala said her constantly ill one-year-old weighed just two kilogrammes before receiving nutritional intervention at the centre.

After three months of feeding her child with the pap, Okpala reported weight gain beyond three kilogrammes and marked improvement in overall health, reducing frequent illnesses and hospital visits.

For Mrs Success Ukor from Ekwusigbo, the transformation in her two-year-old son became visible within weeks, as his skin glowed, strength improved, and weight increased significantly.

She explained that her son's weight rose from 8.2 kilogrammes to 10.8 kilogrammes after consistent feeding with Healthy Living Pap, restoring energy, appetite, and a healthier appearance.

Mrs Ngozika Chukwudum also ob-



served changes in her previously weak and inactive child, who rarely played like peers before nurses recommended the nutritional supplement.

Within one month, his weight increased from 7.3 kilogrammes to 7.8 kilogrammes, and he became more active and healthy, reassuring his mother about his recovery.

Community leaders noticed the impact. The traditional ruler of Aguleri, Igwe Michael Idigo, confirmed mothers continually testified to the pap's benefits and visible improvements in children's wellbeing.

He urged development partners, including UNICEF and World Health Organisation (WHO), to support expanded production, while encouraging parents to seek early intervention rather than waiting until children become severely malnourished.

Healthy Living Pap was launched in August 2024 by Anambra State Governor's wife, Dr Nonye Soludo, to address the persistent burden of child malnutrition statewide.

Soludo explained the idea emerged after a UNICEF delegation visit highlighted alarming malnutrition levels, including stunting, wasting, and un-

derweight children across several Anambra communities.

She said that statistics revealed many children were unhealthy due to malnutrition, prompting the Healthy Living Initiative to pursue a sustainable solution addressing both acute and mild nutritional deficiencies.

According to her, Healthy Living Pap is a natural complementary meal integrated into the state's mitigation programme to rescue children with special nutritional needs.

Soludo noted the supplement was distributed free because of food insecurity and socio-economic challenges, particularly affecting rural communities with limited access to balanced diets.

She affirmed that Healthy Living Pap had come to stay, ensuring no child in Anambra State dies as a result of preventable malnutrition.

Medical experts endorsed the initiative. Consultant Paediatrician Dr Chioma Mbachu, said the programme gives every child in Anambra a fair chance at healthy growth.

The Commissioner for Health, Dr Afam Obidike, described the pap as practical, explaining malnutrition

weakens immunity, increases disease vulnerability, and affects academic performance later in life.

Obidike said a structured distribution system operates across all 21 Local Government Areas, with referral centres maintaining databases to monitor children's progress and recovery.

"More than 14,000 packs have been produced and distributed, achieving recovery rates above 50 percent and significantly reducing child malnutrition across Anambra State."

State Nutrition Officer Dr Rose Amasiani, described the pap as fortified, nutritious, and produced from locally sourced organic materials correcting deficiencies in children and adults.

Nutritionist, Jane Umeugo at NAUTH, said the supplement transformed malnutrition management, reducing hospital stays from months to about five days for most affected children.

She explained that severely malnourished children often show recovery signs by the third day of supplementation, regaining strength, colour, and appetite quickly.

WHO State Coordinator Dr Mo-

ammed Bonos, commended the initiative as well thought-out, emphasizing good nutrition as foundational to a healthy population.

He pledged continued WHO support, including efforts toward regulatory approval, as Anambra intensified actions against child malnutrition amid economic and food security challenges.

Beyond Anambra, other states are intensifying nutrition efforts. In Kwara, the government has called for a coordinated, multi-sectoral approach to nutrition programmes.

The Executive Secretary of the Primary Healthcare Development Agency, Prof. Nusirat Elelu, made the call at the Accelerating Nutrition Results in Nigeria (ANRiN) Sustainability Meeting.

Elelu emphasised that good nutrition was fundamental to child growth and the future productivity of society, noting that the intervention targeted maternal, infant and child health outcomes across the 16 local government areas of the state.

Similarly, Kaduna State has recorded progress through its Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition (IMAM) services.

The State Nutrition Officer, Ramatu Musa, said 30,089 children were successfully treated for Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) in 2025, though 60,193 cases were admitted during the same period.

She acknowledged improvements in reducing stunting but warned of rising wasting and underweight rates, underscoring the need for sustained investment, stronger leadership engagement and expanded coverage of nutrition services.

Stakeholders across states agree that political leadership, community engagement and sustained funding remain critical to winning the fight against malnutrition.

As economic and food security challenges persist, initiatives such as Healthy Living Pap continue to offer thousands of Nigerian children a renewed chance to survive, grow and thrive.

Judiciary: The quest for Justice in Nigeria's Democratic process

CHARLES EDET ESQ

The Nigerian judiciary, a cornerstone of democracy, is facing a crisis of confidence. Successive governments, both civilian and military, have been accused of influencing court decisions, twisting laws to suit their interests. This trend has led to questionable judgments in high-profile cases, eroding trust in the system.

The 1979 presidential election dispute, where Chief Obafemi Awolowo challenged the declaration of Alhaji Shëhu Shagari as winner, set a concerning precedent. The court's technical verdict, favoring Shagari, was seen as a nod to the ruling military junta. Fast forward to today, and the pattern continues. The recent mass defection of governors to the All Progressives

Congress (APC) has sparked fears that the judiciary is enabling a depletion of opposition parties, undermining multi-party democracy.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) recently rejected a faction of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), citing existing court judgments and pending litigation. This move highlights the judiciary's significant role in resolving internal party disputes and the challenges of ensuring fair play.

Critics argue that judicial interference in politics threatens party autonomy and internal democracy. The lack of clear guidelines and transparency fuels perceptions of bias, further weakening public trust. As one observer noted, "The future looks bleak with the infiltration of the judiciary, strangulat-

ing the true progress of democracy."

The consequences are far-reaching. When courts are seen as tools for political manipulation, it discourages grassroots participation and limits citizens' choices, a cornerstone of democracy. The Ibadan convention debacle, where INEC rejected a PDP faction's national officers, exemplifies the judiciary's sway over party affairs.

To revitalize Nigeria's democracy, ensuring the judiciary's independence is crucial. Reforms addressing transparency, clear laws for party management, and checks on external influence are needed. Only then can the quest for justice be truly served.

The question remains: can Nigeria's judiciary reclaim its role as an impartial arbiter, or will politics continue to overshadow justice?



JUSTICE KUDIRAT KEKERE-EKUN

Sports

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

AFCON 2025: Nwabali, Onyeka not certain for Uganda game

Super Eagles head coach Eric Chelle has expressed doubts over the availability of Stanley Nwabali and Frank Onyeka ahead of Nigeria's final Group game against Uganda at the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations in Morocco.

Speaking during his pre-match press conference on Monday, Chelle confirmed that both players are currently nursing injuries and may miss Tuesday's encounter.

According to the coach, first-choice goalkeeper Stanley Nwabali is struggling with a knee problem, while midfielder Frank Onyeka has sustained a slight ankle injury.

Chelle noted that the medical team will continue to monitor both players before making a final decision on their participation.

"Nwabali has a knee issue and Onyeka has a slight ankle problem. We will assess them to know the extent of

the injuries before the game," Chelle said.

Nigeria are already pushing for a positive result against Uganda as they aim to finish strongly in the group stage, but the potential absence of two key players could force changes to the Super Eagles' lineup.

A final call on the duo's availability is expected to be made after further medical assessments ahead of the match on Tuesday.



SUPER EAGLES PLAYERS

Dembele now rules World Football, after winning globe soccer award

PSG Star and French International, Ousmane Dembélé has added the Globe Soccer Award to his Ballon D'Or and FIFA Best Player Awards.

The French winger was crowned World's Best Player 2025 at the Globe Soccer Awards, putting the final seal on a staggering year that already saw him scoop the Ballon d'Or, FIFA Best, and The Best awards.

From brilliance to dominance, 2025 belonged to Dembélé.

The night, however, was far from a one-man show.

Lamine Yamal stole hearts and headlines, collecting a jaw-dropping treble.

The teenage sensation won the Maradona Award, Best U-23 La Liga Player, and Best Forward of the Year, underlining his status as football's brightest new superstar.

There was redemption too. Paul Pogba took home the Best Comeback Award, a powerful statement after years of setbacks, while Vitorinha was rewarded for his midfield mastery with the Best Midfielder of the Year honor.

PSG were named Best Men's Club, Luis Enrique won Best Coach, Nasser Al-Khelaifi claimed Best President, and Luis Campos picked up Best Sporting Director, a clean sweep that reflected the club's era-defining season.

On the international stage, Portugal were crowned Best

National Team, while Cristiano Ronaldo added another trophy to his endless collection, winning Best Middle East Player of the Year.

The night paused for a moment of emotion as Globe Soccer presented a special tribute to the late Diogo Jota, with his parents receiving the award in a moving ceremony.

Barcelona also had their moment, with Joan Laporta proudly receiving the club's La Liga Champions award.



OUSMANE DEMBÉLÉ

House Committee on Sports Chairman charges Super Eagles ahead of Round of 16 Clash

The Chairman of the House Committee on Sports, Kabiru Amadu, has charged the Super Eagles to remain mentally, psychologically, and physically prepared ahead of their Round of 16 fixture at the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations

Nigeria became the second team to qualify for the knockout stage after a hard-fought 3-2 victory over Tunisia on Saturday evening in their second group match.

Victor Osimhen, who earlier had a 17th-minute effort ruled out for offside, eventually broke the deadlock before receiving a yellow card for an inappropriate gesture during his celebration. Wilfred Ndidi doubled Nigeria's advantage

shortly after the interval, giving the Super Eagles firm control of the game.

Ademola Lookman later extended Nigeria's lead, calmly finishing from an Osimhen assist to put the Super Eagles further ahead. Tunisia, however, mounted a late comeback with two goals, setting up a tense finish, but Nigeria held on to secure maximum points and confirm qualification for the Round of 16.

Representing the Chairman House Committee On Sports in Morocco, the Deputy Chairman, Honourable Mohammed Jajere, while reacting to the achievement, praised the team's resilience and ability to withstand pressure.

"On behalf of the Committee's

Chairman, I congratulate the Super Eagles for winning their first two group games, which has qualified Nigeria for the Round of 16," he said. "Although the final group match against Uganda is a dead-rubber game, I advise the coach to use the opportunity to rest some regular players and give fresh legs a chance. However, the team must not lose focus on the ultimate goal of lifting the trophy."

He further reassured the team of the full support of the Federal Government and the National Assembly as they continue their quest for continental glory.

Nigeria, three-time African champions, currently top their group with six points from two matches, while Tunisia sit second with three points

Nigeria, Uganda in Group C final clash, Match Stats

Uganda and Nigeria will meet for the second time at the TotalEnergies CAF Africa Cup of Nations when they clash in Morocco 2025 Group C clash at the Complex Sportif de Fès on 30 December. Kick-off is scheduled for 17h00 local time (16h00 GMT).

Their only previous AFCON meeting came in the semi-finals of the 1978 tournament, when Uganda claimed a 2-1 victory over Nigeria, a result that remains their sole encounter at the finals to date.

In that 1978 semi-final, Abdulla Nasur gave Uganda the lead in the 11th minute before Martins Eyo equalised for Nigeria in the 54th minute. Philip Omondi then scored the decisive goal just four minutes later to send Uganda through.

Overall, the sides have met eight times across all competi-

tions. Uganda hold the edge with four wins to Nigeria's two, while two matches have ended in draws.

Uganda and Nigeria have also been paired together in AFCON qualifying for the 1994 and 2008 tournaments. Across those four qualifiers, Nigeria recorded two wins, Uganda one, with one draw. On both occasions, Nigeria progressed ahead of Uganda.

Their most recent meeting was an international friendly played on 20 November 2018, which ended in a goalless draw in Asaba.

Uganda are currently three matches unbeaten against Nigeria (W2 D1).

Nigeria's last victory over Uganda came in AFCON qualifying for the 2008 tournament, when they won 1-0 on 24 March 2007 at the MKO Abiola Stadium in Abeokuta, with Nwankwo Kanu scoring the only goal in the 73rd minute.



UGANDA COACH

AFCON 2025: Chelle eyes smart rotation, as Eagles face Uganda



SUPER EAGLES COACH ERIC CHELLE

Super Eagles coach Eric Chelle says Nigeria's final Group C match against Uganda will be decided by intelligent player management, not complacency.

Speaking at a pre-match news conference, Chelle stressed that AFCON success depends on squad depth and timing rather than a fixed starting XI.

"This is not a competition for the first 11. It's a competi-

tion for the whole team. Sometimes the player who plays five minutes scores the decisive goal," Chelle said.

He explained that his approach evolves with each game, noting that the final group match is about balance and readiness for the knockout stage.

"The first game is about intensity, the second about tactics, and the third is about player management. We want to win, but we must also project ourselves to the

next round," he said.

Chelle admitted the pressure of leading the Super Eagles, describing the job as a daily challenge driven by Nigeria's high expectations.

"When I accepted this job, I entered another level. The pressure is there every moment, and that pushes me to give my best for the team's success," he said.

The coach also praised striker Victor Osimhen on his

birthday, hailing him as the best in the world.

"He's focused, in a good mood and I wish him many goals. I hope this AFCON will be special for him," Chelle said.

Also speaking, Captain Wilfred Ndidi said that the team remained fully focused in spite of the early qualification.

Ndidi said confidence was high in camp but warned against losing concentration ahead of the Uganda clash.

AFCON 2025: Nigeria set early pace as Mahrez tops scoring chart

Nigeria have underlined their title ambition after two AFCON 2025 group rounds, while Algeria captain Riyad Mahrez leads the tournament's scoring chart.

Mahrez has struck three goals to top the scorers' list, playing a decisive role in Algeria's perfect start and early qualification for the knockout phase.

A cluster of stars trail on two goals, highlighting the tournament's attacking depth across the continent.

Nigeria's Ademola Lookman, Egypt's Mohamed Salah, Morocco's Brahim Díaz, Tunisia's Elias Achouri, Mali's

Lassine Sinayoko and Côte d'Ivoire's Amad Diallo have all delivered crucial contributions.

The competition has produced 53 goals from 24 matches, averaging 2.21 per game, reflecting a blend of attacking intent and tactical organisation.

Nigeria lead the attacking metrics with five goals, 12 shots on target and an average 61 per cent possession, the highest so far.

That efficiency has secured early Round-of-16 qualification for the Super Eagles, alongside Egypt and Algeria.

Nigeria's creativity has also stood out, with Lookman and Alex Iwobi recording two as-

sists each, matching Tunisia's Hannibal Mejbri.

Botswana, however, have struggled, conceding four goals, scoring none and averaging just 32 per cent possession after two games.

Discipline has been tested, with referees issuing 83 yellow cards and three red cards as tension rises across the groups.

Suspensions may yet shape the final standings as teams chase qualification in the decisive last round.

With goals flowing and margins tightening, the final group matches promise contests defined by composure as much as flair, a familiar AFCON pattern as the knockout stage looms



RIYAD MAHREZ WITH HIS TEAM MATE CELEBRATING

FRSC blames 'excessive speed', 'wrongful overtaking' for motor crash involving Anthony Joshua

The Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) wishes to confirm a fatal road traffic crash that occurred yesterday Monday, 29 December 2025, along the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway, around the Sinoma area near Sagamu, Ogun State, involving a Lexus Jeep conveying world-renowned boxer, Anthony Joshua, and a stationary truck.

Preliminary reports from the Ogun Sector Command indicate that the crash occurred at about 1200HRS and was promptly reported to the Corps. FRSC operatives arrived at the scene within three (3) minutes of notification, enabling swift rescue operations, evacuation of victims, effective traffic control, and prevention of secondary crashes.

The incident involved two vehicles: a black Lexus Jeep with registration number KRD 850 HN (private) and a stationary red commercial Sinotruck with unknown registration number. A total of five adult males were involved in the crash. Two persons sadly lost their lives, one sustained injuries, while two others escaped unhurt. Anthony Joshua was rescued alive and sustained minor injuries.

The injured victim was evacuated for medical attention, while the remains of the deceased were conveyed to Live-well Morgue, Ajaka, Sagamu. The Nigeria Police Motor Traffic Division (MTD) was duly notified for further investigation

and necessary documentation.

Preliminary findings indicate that the Lexus Jeep, which was suspected to be travelling beyond the legally prescribed speed limit on the corridor, lost control during an overtaking manoeuvre and crashed into a stationary truck well packed by the side of the road. The primary causes of the crash being excessive speed and wrongful overtaking constitute serious traffic violations and remain among the leading causes of fatal road crashes on Nigerian highways.



FATAL ROAD ACCIDENT

Anthony Joshua involved in fatal road accident in Ogun State

Nigerian-British boxing star Anthony Joshua was involved in a road accident on Monday in Makun, Ogun State.



ANTHONY JOSHUA AFTER THE ACCIDENT

Eyewitnesses said the incident occurred along a section of the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway when a Lexus Jeep conveying Joshua, with registration

number KRD 850 HN, reportedly collided with a stationary truck.

According to reports, Joshua sustained injuries in the crash and was attended to by emergency responders. Two other individuals are feared dead as a result of the collision.

The exact circumstances surrounding the accident are yet to be confirmed, as investigations have commenced to determine the cause of the crash.

Authorities are expected to release further details as inquiries continue.

Anthony Joshua, a former two-time heavyweight world champion, was said to be travelling as a passenger at the time of the incident

AFCON 2025: Group finale beckons as knockout battle peaks in Morocco

The final group matches of the 2025 CAF Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) kick off Monday, with qualification still open and trademark late drama looming across Morocco.

Egypt, Nigeria and Algeria have sealed Round-of-16 places after two wins each, leaving the rest battling for top-two finishes or best third-placed routes.

Monday opens with simultaneous kick-offs, sharpening tension as margins, goals and permutations come into play across multiple groups.

In Group B, Egypt are through on six points, but South Africa need a win over Zimbabwe, while Angola must shock Egypt and hope results swing.

Group A remains wide open. Hosts Morocco lead on four points, with Mali and Zambia tied on two and Comoros still alive, setting up a volatile night.

Tuesday refocuses on Group C as already qualified Nigeria face Uganda, while Tunisia, on three points, must deliver against Tanzania amid lingering threats.

Group D promises a crunch finish, with Senegal and DR

Congo on four points, Benin close behind and Botswana seeking a late surge.

Wednesday closes the group phase as Algeria, already qualified, shape Group E's outcome, while Group F pits Cameroon and holders Cote d'Ivoire in a tight duel.

If early rounds are a guide, the final stretch will defy predictions and deliver decisive twists over three gripping days.

Final round of group-stage fixtures (all times GMT)

MONDAY, DEC. 29

16:00 — Angola vs Egypt
16:00 — Zimbabwe vs South Africa
19:00 — Zambia vs Morocco
19:00 — Comoros vs Mali

TUESDAY, DEC. 30

16:00 — Uganda vs Nigeria
16:00 — Tanzania vs Tunisia
19:00 — Benin vs Senegal
19:00 — Botswana vs DR Congo

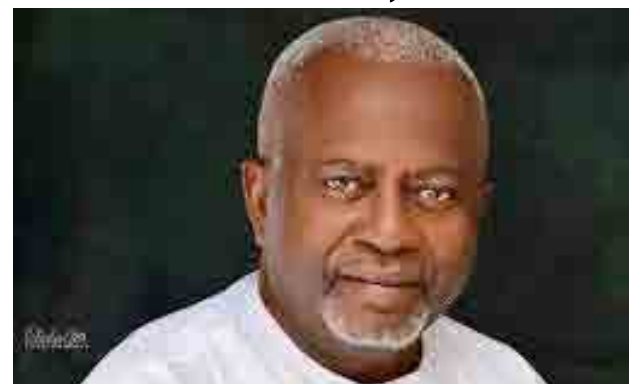
WEDNESDAY, DEC. 31

16:00 — Equatorial Guinea vs Algeria
16:00 — Sudan vs Burkina Faso
19:00 — Gabon vs Cote d'Ivoire.



MOROCCO PLAYER

NOC takes stock, reviews 2025 activities



TONY NEZIANYA, PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICER (NOC)

The Nigeria Olympic Committee (NOC) says it will take stock of its activities for 2025 to enable it plan for the new year.

Tony Neziyana, Public Relations Officer (PRO), Nigeria Olympic Committee (NOC), told the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) on Sunday that the review will hold at its Annual General Meeting (AGM) scheduled to hold on Monday in Abuja.

Neziyana said the meeting would be held in line with the provisions of the committee's

constitution.

According to him, the AGM will provide a platform for stakeholders to review the committee's programmes and assess its performance over the 2024 and 2025 periods.

"The agenda will include the presentation of audited financial accounts as well as the President's annual reports for the years under review," Neziyana said.

He noted that attendance at the meeting was mandatory for all Olympic and recognised non-Olympic sports federations.

OPINION

Balancing Ethical Journalism standards through AI efficiency

AISHA GAMBO

Mohammed Ibrahim, a Kaduna-based journalist, has just returned from an assignment where he interviewed key stakeholders to develop his story.

As he settled down to work, Ibrahim opened an application on his phone and searched for the audio recordings he had captured during the interviews.

Within minutes, the application had converted the recorded voices into written text.

The tool he relied on was powered by Artificial Intelligence (AI), designed to transcribe audio files to text based on their length.

Ibrahim, who was introduced to the application by a friend, said his work had become easier and faster since adopting the technology.

He recalled the days when he transcribed interviews manually by repeatedly listening to audio recordings and writing word for word, a process that often took several hours and delayed report filing.

Beyond transcription, Ibrahim also uses AI-powered tools for translation, converting Hausa to English and vice versa within seconds or minutes.

"It has made the job easier for people like me who write in both Hausa and English for a newspaper organisation.

"Since I started using it, I hardly miss my deadlines because I know I have a dependable tool to make my job easier," he said.

Across the world, experiences like Ibrahim's are becoming more common as Artificial Intelligence tools gain a foothold in newsrooms.

Increasingly, AI is no longer viewed as experimental but as a routine part of journalistic practice.

Globally, studies by media development organisations indicate that more than two-thirds of large newsrooms in North America and Europe now use some form of AI in editorial processes.

These tools are applied for transcription, audience analytics, automated alerts, and content personalisation.

In addition, surveys by international journalism bodies suggest that AI adoption is growing fastest in areas that reduce repetitive tasks, allowing journalists to devote more time to investigative and field reporting.

Furthermore, industry data show that AI-assisted workflows can reduce time spent on routine newsroom tasks by between 30 and 50 per cent, especially in breaking news situations.

As a result, editors often encourage reporters to integrate AI tools into their daily routines.

Artificial Intelligence is therefore transforming journalism and reshaping how news is gathered, processed and distributed.

From transcription and translation to data analysis, image verification and headline optimisation, AI tools



are rapidly becoming embedded in modern media ecosystems.

However, experts caution that while generative AI tools are ushering in a new era of efficiency, creativity and innovation, the technology also raises major concerns around ethics, accuracy, equity and access, especially in developing countries.

For them, the rise of AI-generated news has raised concerns about accuracy, as the number of working journalists declines.

Yet, AI also presents reporters with new opportunities to pursue high-impact stories, according to Sotiris Sideris, data editor at the Centre for Collaborative Investigative Journalism and Reporters United in Greece.

Speaking at the Centre for European Studies on October 14, Sideris said AI and data-driven tools enable reporters to swiftly analyse large volumes of government and business data, uncover patterns, and expose questionable or illegal activities.

"The question today isn't whether we are using AI in journalism, because we do it already.

"But whether we can do journalism without outsourcing our scepticism, our ethics, and our sense of accountability, both as journalists ourselves and the accountability we are asking people and organisations that hold power to provide," he said.

To better understand these trends, the Thomson Reuters Foundation (TRF) conducted a survey examining the adoption and usage of AI tools among journalists in the Global South and emerging economies, including Nigeria.

The survey, conducted in the fourth quarter of 2024, covered more than 200 journalists across over 70 countries.

Findings revealed that more than 80 percent of respondents use AI tools in their journalistic work, with nearly half integrating them into their daily workflows and about one-third using

them weekly.

In addition, the survey found that journalists primarily rely on AI for writing and editing support, background research, transcription, translation, fact-checking and idea generation, with ChatGPT identified as the most commonly used tool.

Similarly, global newsroom assessments indicate that automated transcription is now the most widely adopted AI application in journalism worldwide, followed closely by translation and data analysis tools.

This trend is evident in multilingual societies, where AI helps bridge language gaps and expand audience reach.

Albeit the efficiency and speed offered by AI, experts argue that transcription and translation tools still face significant challenges, in terms of accuracy and performance in low-resourced languages.

Research has shown that AI transcription tools can insert words that were never spoken and often struggle with non-standard accents, including World English and African American Vernacular English.

Consequently, journalists working in diverse linguistic environments face a higher risk of errors.

These limitations are even more pronounced in African contexts, where hundreds of indigenous languages remain underrepresented in AI training datasets.

Zainab Idris, an AI educator and founder of the Creativity Enthusiast Network, said most artificial intelligence tools still perform poorly when applied to Nigerian languages and cultural contexts.

According to her, many AI systems were not originally designed with Nigeria's linguistic realities in mind, adding that when tools are used with Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo or Pidgin, errors often occur in tone, meaning and cultural interpretation.

She added that speech recognition remains weak, especially with accents and background noise, although gradual improvements are emerging through local projects collecting Nigerian speech data.

In spite these gains, she stressed that AI understanding of Nigerian languages and culture remains far from accurate and requires more local data and expertise.

Against this backdrop, media professionals stress that verification remains central to journalism, regardless of technological advancements.

In light of these challenges, journalists who use AI in storytelling and reporting are advised to rigorously verify and fact-check information before publication.

Ibrahim advised journalists not to rely 100 per cent on AI-generated output, stressing that cross-checking was necessary to avoid misrepresentation of facts.

Another journalist who uses AI, Juliet Ekwenugo, said AI can help journalists analyse large datasets, speed up background research, summarise documents, and suggest headlines or story structures.

She warned against publishing AI-generated content without verification, noting that the tools may sometimes produce incorrect or misleading information.

While many journalists embrace AI tools to ease their workload and meet deadlines, others remain cautious, arguing that over independence on technology could erode creativity and professional judgement.

Sabi Muhammad, a veteran journalist with 32 years of experience in the print media, said he still prefers to transcribe, translate and edit his work manually without using AI tools.

Beyond individual concerns, institutional readiness remains a major challenge.

Notwithstanding widespread adop-

tion, the TRF report revealed major policy gaps within media organisations.

Only 13 percent of respondents work in organisations with a formal AI policy, while nearly 80 per cent reported the absence of clear guidelines governing AI use in their newsrooms.

This lack of structure, experts warn, increases the risk of ethical breaches and reputational damage.

Muhammad Auwal-Ibrahim, founder of Halal Reporters, said AI is not a threat but a tool leveraged to enhance efficiency and expand into multimedia content creation.

"We are not part of the people running away from AI as if it's a disaster. Rather, we are the early adopters of AI," he said.

According to him, AI is best utilised by creative professionals who understand how to write effective prompts, adding that his organisation credits AI for any AI-generated content it publishes.

As more newsrooms integrate Artificial Intelligence into their operations, scholars and practitioners emphasise that technology must not replace core journalistic values.

One of them is Dr Murjanatu Abba, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Mass Communication at Ahmadu Bello University (A.B.U), who emphasised that journalism is grounded in reality and factual reporting, not fiction.

According to her, some Nigerian universities have begun incorporating AI-related topics into their journalism curricula in recognition of the growing influence of AI in media practice.

However, she observed that education on AI ethics and responsible use remains inadequate and requires greater attention.

She identified key ethical areas such as bias and fairness, transparency and explainability, as well as authenticity and trust, as critical topics journalism students must understand to ensure accountability when using AI-generated content.

"Skills like investigative reporting, ethics, and collaboration will remain essential

"The ability to adapt to changing media landscapes and work under pressure will also be crucial; By combining these skills, future journalists can thrive in a rapidly evolving industry," she said.

Ultimately, as artificial intelligence continues to reshape journalism globally, experts are calling for stronger collaboration among media organisations, technologists, linguists, universities, and government institutions.

They also emphasised the need for sustained investment in infrastructure and capacity building.

Furthermore, they stressed that transparency, ethics, and inclusiveness are essential to ensure that AI tools genuinely reflect and serve the communities they are designed to support.

(NAN Feature)