

Tax reform faces legitimacy crisis over secrecy, alleged alterations —NAS

● **No cause for alarm —legislative expert** ● **Sanwo-Olu urges effective implementation, backs reforms**

ABUJA

The National Association of Seadogs (NAS) (aka Pyrates Confraternity) has warned that Nigeria's ongoing tax reform process risks a legitimacy crisis amid concerns over transparency, legal

ity and alleged post-legislative alterations to the laws.

In a statement signed by its Cap'n, Dr. Joseph Oteri, the association acknowledged the need for comprehensive tax reform, but cautioned that the process being adopted could erode public trust, weaken vol-

untary compliance and undermine constitutional governance.

The group expressed particular concern over a recent tax-related Memorandum of Understanding between Nigeria and France, which it said was concluded with limited public disclosure and insuffi-

cient legislative scrutiny.

According to the association, reports suggesting expanded information exchange, cross-border tax enforcement powers and extensive data-sharing obligations raise serious red flags.

"International tax cooperation must not come at the expense of

fiscal sovereignty, taxpayer rights or democratic oversight.

Any agreement that potentially exposes Nigerian citizens and businesses to foreign tax authorities requires transparency, reciprocity and explicit parliamentary approval," the statement said.

NAS warned that any per-

ception that Nigeria is yielding disproportionate control over taxpayer data or fiscal decision-making to external interests is troubling, particularly in view of weak data protection enforcement and declining public

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The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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PUBLISHED SINCE MAY 29, 1968

VOL. 46, NO. 1,160

WEDNESDAY 24TH DECEMBER 2025.

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Okpebholo signs ₦939bn 2026 Appropriation Bill into law

IDAHOSA MUSA

BENIN CITY

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, yesterday signed the ₦939 billion 2026 Appropriation Bill into law, giving legal effect to the state's fiscal plan for the year, beginning January 1.

The bill, earlier passed by the Edo State House of Assembly (EDHA), was assented to at the Government House, Benin City, in the presence of the Speaker and other members of

the legislature, as well as the executive arm of government.

Governor Okpebholo described the budget theme as a strategic tool aimed at accelerating development and improving the living standards of Edo people, noting that it underscores his administration's commitment to purposeful and people-centred governance.

He commended the Speaker and members of the House for their diligence and prompt consideration of the bill, describing the process as a demonstration

of effective collaboration between the executive and legislative arms of government.

"I want to thank the Speaker and members of the Edo State House of Assembly for doing a good job. You were proactive and thorough, and I believe this 'Budget of Hope and Growth' will move Edo State to greater heights," the governor said.

Earlier, the Speaker, Hon. Blessing Agbebaku, who led the lawmakers to the signing ceremony, praised Governor Okpebholo's developmental drive and

people-focused leadership.

Agbebaku noted that critical sectors of the state's economy, particularly agriculture and infrastructure, received significant attention in the 2026 budget, stressing that the sectors are key to food security, job creation and sustainable development.

According to him, the Okpebholo administration has set a new standard in the prudent utilisation of public resources, adding that landmark projects, such as the construction of the first and second flyover bridges in the state

would stand as lasting legacies.

"History is being made by this administration. The governor is passionate about developing Edo State and ensuring a better and more comfortable life for the people," the Speaker said.

He expressed confidence that the 2026 budget would achieve optimal performance, assuring that appropriated funds would be effectively deployed for the benefit of Edo residents.

Agbebaku further affirmed that resources approved in previous budgets were judiciously utilised, noting that residents were already feeling the positive impact of the administration's policies and programmes.

He then formally presented the 2026 Appropriation Bill to the governor for assent, marking another milestone in the state's drive for growth, stability and inclusive development.



SIGNING THE 2026 APPROPRIATION BILL:

Governor Monday Okpebholo of Edo State (sitting) signing the 2026 Appropriation Bill into law at the Government House, Benin City. He is flanked by other members of the State Executive Council and the legislature.

EDHA orders recovery of N17.5bn Radisson Blu Funds, backs Okpebholo to retake hotel

IDAHOSA MUSA

BENIN CITY

The Edo State House of Assembly has empowered Governor Monday Okpebholo to collaborate with anti-graft agencies to recover N17.5 billion allegedly held by two escrow agents—Meristen Trustees Limited and Emerging Africa Trustees Limited—linked to the Radisson Blu Hotel project in Benin City.

The amount represents part of the unaccounted N25 billion bond raised by the administration of former Governor Godwin Obaseki for the hotel investment.

In a resolution following the

submission of an investigative committee's report, the lawmakers directed Governor Okpebholo to obtain full account statements of the transaction and reclaim ownership and control of the Radisson Blu Hotel on behalf of the Edo State Government.

The Assembly's committee found that the Escrow Agreement was never validly executed, rendering it defective.

The report also revealed that the supposed investor failed to make any payments into the state coffers.

The hotel, purchased outright by the Edo State Govern-

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Okpebholo receives MOWAA, Radisson probe report, swears in commissioner

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Malawians angry over vice-president's planned UK trip

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FG fulfils housing, land pledges to Super Eagles for 2023 AFCON feat

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Taskforce issues 72-hour ultimatum to cult suspects

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Special Security Squad Against Cultism and Kidnapping has given two alleged cult figures, Eddy Murphy

and Eddy Vongus, a 72-hour ultimatum to surrender themselves to the authorities or face the full weight of the law.

The Taskforce Spokesman, Mr Idemudia Noah, issued the warning while briefing jour-

nalists on a recent cult clash along the Ugbighoko axis of Ekhenwan Road, Benin City, which was swiftly contained by security operatives.

"They are advised to report themselves to the authorities within 72 hours or face the full weight of the law," Noah said, adding that the taskforce has detailed intelligence on the suspects and their activities.

He disclosed that Eddy

Murphy is suspected to be a member of the Vikings confraternity, while Eddy Vongus is believed to be affiliated with the Black Axe confraternity.

According to him, preliminary investigations revealed that the violence resulted from a clash between members of the two rival cult groups, with the suspects identified as key figures in the incident.

Noah said the taskforce has

intensified raids on known cult hideouts and strengthened intelligence gathering across the state to prevent any breakdown of law and order during the Christmas festivities.

He assured residents that the squad remains fully prepared to respond swiftly to any security threat before, during and after the festive period, urging members of the public to report suspicious movements or cult-relat-

ed activities to security agencies.

The spokesman also reassured informants that all information provided would be treated with strict confidentiality, noting that their identities would be protected.

The taskforce reiterated its commitment to maintaining peace and security across Edo State, assuring residents of a safe, calm and violence-free Christmas celebration.

Tax reform faces legitimacy crisis over...

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confidence in institutions.

The association also raised concerns over plans to expand the Tax Identification Number regime into a fully data-driven tax administration system, cautioning that a surveillance-heavy framework without strong legal safeguards, independent oversight and enforceable data privacy protections could provoke resistance rather than compliance.

More seriously, NAS described as "credible" allegations that the versions of the Tax Reform Acts signed into law differ materially from those passed by the National Assembly after legislative debate and public hearings.

"Claims that provisions were altered, inserted or removed after legislative passage strike at the heart of constitutional governance, legislative supremacy and the rule of law," the group warned, adding that unresolved allegations could render the reforms legally and morally defective.

It urged the Federal Government to immediately publish the official consolidated texts of all Tax Reform Acts and provide a line-by-line clarification of any discrepancies between the versions passed by the legislature and those assented to.

The association further called for early issuance of implementation regulations ahead of January 1, 2026, robust guarantees of taxpayer rights, enforceable data protection standards and transitional fiscal support for economically vulnerable states and sectors.

While noting that Nigeria's tax system requires reform due to inefficiency and revenue leakages, NAS said measures such as retaining VAT at 7.5 percent and expanding exemptions offer limited relief.

"Economic concessions cannot compensate for procedural opacity or constitutional

defects," the statement said, stressing that genuine fiscal reform must strengthen, not weaken, the social contract.

Meanwhile, Mr Agabaidu Jideani, a legislative expert, said there are constitutional safeguards which allow the Clerk of the National Assembly to correct identified discrepancies between a passed bill and an Act as signed by the President.

He said this during an interview with newsmen in Abuja on Tuesday.

There had been debate over the authenticity of the recently passed tax reform laws.

The controversy started when a member of the House of Representatives, Abdulsamad Dasuki, alleged discrepancies between the tax laws passed by the National Assembly and the versions later gazetted and made available to the public.

But Jideani said there was no need for the controversy as the law-making process had an internal mechanism to rectify discrepancies.

"On Dec. 17, 2025, a lawmaker raised concerns in the House of Representatives regarding perceived variations between harmonised bills and published versions.

"The development has renewed public interest in constitutional provisions governing legislative authority and the separation of powers," he said.

According to him since the Clerk of the House was in possession of the National Assembly copy, all he had to do was to reconcile it with the gazette version.

"Central to this process is the Clerk of the National Assembly, a key legislative officer responsible for certification and documentation.

"Under the Act, the Clerk certifies a clean copy of each harmonised bill as a true re-

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EDHA orders recovery of N17.5bn...

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ment for N2 billion on December 23, 2021, never had its title transferred to the Ministry of Finance Incorporated (MOFI) or the Hospitality Investment and Management Company (HIMC).

The Assembly declared as fraudulent the Deed of Assignment dated May 25, 2023, involving Cable & Rod Nigeria Limited, MOFI, and HIMC.

Further findings showed that the Certificate of Occupancy issued in HIMC's name was illegal, and no State Executive Council or Assembly approval authorised any transfer of the property.

Several agreements were also invalidly executed, with alleged

conflicts of interest involving former Governor Obaseki.

The Assembly resolved that the fraudulent Certificate of Occupancy be revoked, ownership of the property restored to the state, and competent professionals engaged to complete renovations and put the hotel to productive use.

Governor Okpebholo was mandated to initiate legal proceedings and collaborate with anti-graft agencies to recover the N17.5 billion and full account details held by the escrow agents.

Lawmakers emphasized that the Radisson Blu Hotel rightfully belongs to the Edo State Government and stressed the need to protect public assets and recover any lost state funds.



LUNCH OF 2026 EMBLEM:

Governor Siminalayi Fubara of Rivers State (r) decorating the Chairman, Nigerian Legion, Rivers State, Kuu Promise during the lunch of 2026 Emblem Appeal Fund for the Armed Forces Remembrance Day Celebration in Port Harcourt on Tuesday.

Fubara commiserates with Bayelsa govt over Dep Governor's death

PORT HARCOURT

Rivers State Governor, Siminalayi Fubara, has commiserated with the Bayelsa State Government and people over the death of the Deputy Governor, Senator Lawrence Ewhrudjakpo.

Fubara led a delegation of Rivers State leaders on a condolence visit to Bayelsa State Governor, Senator Douye Diri, in Yenagoa following Ewhrudjakpo's sudden death on December 11.

The Rivers governor, who arrived dressed in black native attire, described the late deputy governor as a man of exceptional calibre whose public service was marked by intellectual depth, humility and uncommon dedication.

He described Ewhrudjakpo's death as a monumental loss, not only to Bayelsa State, but also to Rivers State, noting the deep historical, cultural and political ties shared by both states.

Fubara said the loss had personally affected him, stressing

that death remained beyond human control and was determined by God alone.

He assured the Bayelsa State Government of Rivers State's readiness to support funeral arrangements for the deceased.

"Wherever you want us to come in, I want to assure you that we will give our support. No word of condolence can fill the void; only God can comfort you," he said.

The governor also extended condolences to the Ewhrudjakpo family, assuring them of continued support during the period of mourning and

beyond.

Responding, Governor Diri thanked Fubara for the show of empathy and solidarity, particularly for leading a high-powered delegation to condole with Bayelsa over the loss.

Diri said he was still in shock over his deputy's death but had submitted to the will of God, noting that only the Almighty gives and takes life.

Both governors later visited the widow of the deputy governor, Mrs. Beatrice Ewhrudjakpo, at the official residence to personally commiserate with the family.

UBTH staff laud Ize-Iyamu's leadership at 120-day review

BENIN CITY

Staff of the University of Benin Teaching Hospital (UBTH) have commended the leadership of the Chief Medical Director, Prof. Idia Ize-Iyamu, as she marked her first 120 days in office, reaffirming her commitment to a conducive work environment and strengthened professionalism.

Speaking on Tuesday during a management and staff assembly held at the hospital to review progress recorded since she assumed office on August 18, Prof. Ize-Iyamu describing the period as one of purposeful

leadership and collective effort

The CMD thanked staff for their dedication to service and care for humanity, noting that the hospital's effectiveness depends largely on the commitment and professionalism of its workforce.

She urged employees to uphold the highest ethical and professional standards in the discharge of their duties, stressing that professionalism remains central to delivering quality healthcare.

Highlighting key achievements under her administration, Prof. Ize-Iyamu cited the installation of a state-of-the-art 160-slice CT scan machine,

alongside other infrastructural and service delivery upgrades aimed at improving patient care.

According to her, the administration has prioritised inclusion, accountability and a renewed sense of institutional direction across the hospital.

"As we move into 2026, every head of department, unit and section must develop actionable plans and timelines aligned with the UBTH-CARES agenda," she said.

She explained that the plans must be practical, measurable and consistent with the hospital's broader vision to ensure steady progress across all units.

Calling for sustained collaboration and commitment, the CMD said the hospital was at a defining moment, with opportunities to consolidate the gains already recorded.

"The vision is clear, the challenges are real, but the possibilities are greater. Let us move forward together with unity, professionalism and renewed trust," she said.

Prof. Ize-Iyamu reiterated her resolve to reposition UBTH as a citadel of excellence driven by professional competence and accountability, in line with her strategic agenda tagged UBTH-CARES.

Edo begins validation of 2026 Business Enabling Reform Action Plan

ABDUL-KADIR ABDULLAH

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Government on Tuesday, commenced the preparation and validation of its 2026 Business Enabling Reform Action Plan (BERAP 2026), as public and private sector stakeholders converged in Benin City to review progress made under the 2025 reforms.

Speaking at the session, the State Commissioner for Finance

and Chairman, Edo State Ease of Doing Business Council, Engr Emmanuel Okoebor, said that the meeting was a strategic engagement to assess the implementation of the 2025 Business Enabling Reforms Action Plan and design a more robust, realistic and impactful BERAP for 2026.

He conveyed the goodwill and firm commitment of the Executive Governor of Edo State, Senator Monday Okpebholo, noting that the governor's vision is to

build a competitive, inclusive and investor-friendly Edo State.

According to him, the engagement underscored the collective responsibility of government, the private sector and development partners to strengthen the regulatory and institutional environment under the State Action on Business Enabling Reforms (SABER) Programme, a performance-based initiative supported by the Federal Government and the World Bank.

Okoebor explained that the Ease of Doing Business initiative remains a critical component of Nigeria's national reform agenda, driven by the Presidential Enabling Business Environment Council (PEBEC), and aimed at reducing bureaucracy, removing bottlenecks and simplifying business processes, particularly at the sub-national level where most businesses operate.

He noted that Edo State's Ease of Doing Business Council and

its Secretariat were established to domesticate these reforms, ensure inter-agency coordination and drive policy coherence across Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs).

The commissioner said the session provided an opportunity to identify gaps, consolidate gains from the 2025 BERAP and align the 2026 action plan with national priorities and the state's SHINE development agenda—Security, Healthcare, Infrastructure, Natural Resources and Agriculture, and Education.

He added that the reform framework is guided by PEBEC sub-national indicators covering infrastructure, transparency and access to information, skills and labour, security, regulatory environment and economic opportunity, all of which directly affect the ease of doing business in the state.

Participants at the event included commissioners and permanent secretaries' repre-

sentatives, heads of MDAs, development partners, captains of industry, members of the Organised Private Sector, farmers' groups, micro, small and medium-scale enterprises (MSMEs) and other key stakeholders.

The council chairman urged MDAs to actively participate in the reform process, nominate capable Ease of Doing Business and SABER liaison officers and approach the exercise with a solutions-driven mindset.

He emphasised that the ultimate goal of BERAP 2026 is not merely to improve rankings, but to enhance the real-life experience of doing business in Edo State through practical, measurable and impactful reforms.

The technical session was formally declared open, with participants expected to contribute to shaping a business-friendly environment that drives investment, job creation and inclusive economic growth in the state

**JIKWOYI-KARSHI ROAD ABUJA:**

Heap of refuse covering part of the road at Kurudu on the Jikwoyi-Karshi Road in Abuja on Tuesday.

EDOHIC unveils new brand identity, restates commitment to affordable healthcare

EDWARD OSEGHE

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Health Insurance Commission (EDOHIC) has unveiled a new brand identity, reaffirming its commitment to delivering quality, accessible and affordable healthcare services to residents of the state.

Officials said the rebrand goes beyond a change in visual identity, describing it as a reflection of the Commission's institutional growth, strengthened responsibility and renewed resolve to ensure inclusive healthcare coverage for all Edo residents.

The new logo was unveiled in Benin City by the Director-General of EDOHIC, Dr. Augusta Ikpea-Enaholo, who described the development as a major mile-

stone in Edo State's drive towards Universal Health Coverage.

"Today marks an exciting chapter for our Health Insurance Scheme as we unveil our refreshed brand identity and logo. It reflects who we are, what we stand for, and the future we are building together," Ikpea-Enaholo said.

She explained that the new identity embodies the Commission's vision of a healthcare system where every Edo resident, irrespective of age, location or income level, has access to quality healthcare services without financial hardship.

EDOHIC is the regulatory body responsible for policy direction, regulation, quality assurance and sustainability of health insurance programmes in the state, with the overarching

goal of achieving universal health coverage.

Ikpea-Enaholo noted that the Commission has, in recent months, expanded enrolment, strengthened internal systems and improved service delivery across the state, while acknowledging the need for continuous improvement.

According to her, the rebrand represents a renewed commitment to efficiency, responsiveness and transparency in service delivery.

"To our enrollees, we remain committed to providing quality healthcare without financial burden. To our healthcare providers, we appreciate your partnership and unwavering commitment to the well-being of our people," she said.

She also commended the

Edo State Government, for its sustained support in advancing health sector reforms and promoting inclusive healthcare coverage.

"The Edo State Health Insurance Scheme is here for you. Your health, your future — our priority," she added.

The Commission stated that the rebrand reinforces its assurance that quality healthcare coverage is accessible to residents across urban and rural communities, indigenes and non-indigenes, workers in the formal and informal sectors, as well as vulnerable population.

In an earlier statement, Ikpea-Enaholo clarified the distinct roles of the Edo State Health Insurance Commission and the Edo State Health Insurance Scheme.

Ekhoenuwaya community commends Oba Ewuare II for revitalising Benin culture

ABUJA

The elders and people of Ekhoenuwaya community in Uhumwonde Local Government Area of Edo State have commended the Oba of Benin, His Royal Majesty Oba Ewuare II, for reviving and promoting the rich cultural heritage of the Benin Kingdom.

Speaking to journalists during the annual Igue Festival, representatives of the community, including the Ozukpogieva, Pa Omoigui Noragbon, the Okaighele, Mr. Eghe Osifo and the Secretary, Comrade Ojo Nosakhare Obazee, praised the monarch for his efforts in the resuscitation, preservation and promotion of Benin culture and traditions.

They described the Igue Festival as a unifying cultural event

that brings the people of the kingdom together as one family.

They also appealed to all Benin sons and daughters, irrespective of religious affiliation, to embrace the festival and work towards making it a national celebration.

While pledging their continued loyalty to the Benin throne, the leaders called on Ekhoenuwaya sons and daughters at home and in the diaspora to accord priority to the annual Igue Festival, stressing that the celebration is not meant for the Oba alone, but for all Benin people.

They said it was the collective responsibility of the people to showcase the festival to the world, noting that culture remains the pride of a people and must be protected and preserved for future generations.

INEC fixes Feb 21 for 2 by-elections in Rivers

ABUJA

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has fixed February 21, 2026, for the conduct of by-elections into Ahoada II and Khana II state constituencies of Rivers.

The commission disclosed this in a statement by Malam Mohammed Haruna, Chairman, Information, Voter Education and Publicity Committee, in Abuja.

Haruna said that the commission, at its extraordinary Monday meeting, reviewed its preparations for the end-of-tenure Area Council election for the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) fixed for February 21.

He added that the commission also considered and ap-

proved the draft timetable and schedule of activities for the conduct of by-elections into Ahoada East II and Khana II State Constituencies of Rivers.

He noted that provisions of Section 116 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) empowered the commission to fix dates for elections and conduct by-elections for vacancies.

Haruna said that arising therefrom, it had fixed February 21, 2026 for the conduct of the elections into the two state constituencies.

"The vacancy in the Ahoada East II Constituency arose as a result of the resignation of its member while that of Khana II resulted from the death of its member."

Ex-NUJ chairman unveils Nigerian Media support initiative at 60

BENIN CITY

Former Chairman of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Edo State Council, Otunba Mike Aladenika, has unveiled the Nigerian Media Support Initiative (NMSI), a non-governmental organisation designed to address the immediate and long-term needs of media practitioners in Nigeria.

Aladenika, the Principal Assistant Registrar and Head of Information, Protocol and Public Relations at Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, disclosed the initiative during a reception held in his honour in Benin City to mark his 60th birthday.

He said the NMSI is dedicated to strengthening the capacity, welfare and professional standards of journalists and media professionals across the country.

According to him, the initiative will focus on training, legal assistance, advocacy and networking opportunities aimed at promoting a vibrant, independent and ethical media environment essential for democratic governance and social development.

"The Nigerian Media Support Initiative is a proposed non-governmental organisation focused on providing training, legal assistance, advocacy and network-

ing opportunities to foster a vibrant, independent and ethical media landscape that underpins democratic governance and social development," he said.

Drawing from over 25 years of experience in journalism and media practice, Aladenika recounted his journey from a newsroom beginner to a corporate spokesperson, highlighting the numerous challenges confronting practitioners in the industry.

NEWS

2 people dead, 14 injured in auto-crash in Kogi as FRSC tasks motorists on safe driving

LOKOJA

The Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) has confirmed the death of two people and 12 injured in an auto crash that occurred at Osara community in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State.

Mr. Tenimu Etuku, the FRSC Sector Commander in

Kogi, disclosed this in Lokoja.

He said that four out of the 14 survivors were in very critical condition and had been rushed to a nearby hospital for medical attention.

Etuku described the accident, which involved an 18-seater Toyota Hiace bus and an articulated vehicle (truck), as "fatal."

He explained that, according to the manifest, the ill-fat-

ed bus left Kano on Monday evening, heading to Auch and Benin before the incident occurred between 7 a.m. and 8 a.m. on Tuesday.

The sector commander attributed the head-on collision

to speeding and wrongful overtaking.

He said FRSC personnel who carried out the rescue had deposited the two corpses in the hospital morgue.

Etuku urged motorists to drive with care on highways and adhere to traffic rules, particularly during the Yuletide.

"Motorists or road users must

be careful and strictly follow traffic rules and regulations to avoid such accidents and the wastage of precious lives. By so doing, they will greatly contribute to reducing the number of accidents and fatalities across the country," he stated.

Meanwhile, Mr. Nasir Mohammed, FRSC Corridor Commander in charge of Sag-

amu-Ore-Benin Expressway, called on motorists to obey traffic rules and sustain compliance during the festive season.

He advised against wrongful overtaking, dangerous driving, night travels, overloading, and speeding, stressing that such measures were critical to ensuring safer highways and preventing tragedies during the Yuletide.

6 Rivers PDP reps defect to APC

ABUJA

Six members of the House of Representatives from Rivers State have defected from the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) to the All Progressive Congress (APC).

The lawmakers announced their defections in separate letters read by the Speaker, Representative Abbas Tajudeen, on the floor of the House on Tuesday in Abuja.

The defectors are Representatives Dekor Robinson, Bob Solomon, Hart Godwin, Obuzor Chukwuemele, Blessing Chigeru, and Felix Ubche.

They joined other Rivers lawmakers, namely Representatives Goodhead Boma, Awaji-Inombek Abiante, Boniface Emerengwa, and Umezuruike Manuchim of the Labour Party, who had last week announced their defection to the APC.

The defectors cited the lingering crisis in the PDP and their desire to support President Bola Tinubu's re-election as reasons for leaving the party.

With the defections, the Rivers lawmakers remaining

in the PDP are Representative Kingsley Chinda, the Minority Leader, and Representative Nwogu Kelechi, while Representative Anderson Igbiks has always been in the APC.

Reacting to the development, Minority Whip Representative Ali Issah urged the Speaker to declare the seats of the defectors vacant, citing constitutional provisions that a legislator who defects from the party that sponsored them should vacate the seat.

The Minority Leader, Representative Kingsley Chinda, argued that no law or regulation permits defections to be conducted on the floor of the House.

He stated that while members have the right of association, defection should occur at the ward level, not on the floor, to preserve legislative time.

Speaker Abbas Tajudeen responded, noting that while no law specifically allows or prohibits announcing defections on the House floor, there was nothing wrong with adding "a little more colour" to defection ceremonies.

Navy rescues 20 crew members in vessel fire

CALABAR

The Nigerian Navy on Monday night rescued 20 crew members after their vessel caught fire along the Calabar Channel.

Lt.-Commander Kelechi Ahunanya, the Base Operations Officer, stated that the vessel, a Motor Vessel (MV) Chimba Express, had 21 people on board, comprising 14 Nigerians and seven Cameroonians, with one person still missing at the time of the report.

The MV Chimba Express was en route from Gabon to Calabar carrying scrap materials and other logistics. The Nigerian Navy Ship (NNS) OSE, while on routine patrol, responded to a distress call around 1:00 p.m.

"On arrival, thick smoke was observed emanating from the

vessel, prompting immediate rescue operations. Crew members who had abandoned the ship, as well as those stranded on deck, were rescued using life buoys. Twenty crew members were successfully rescued and administered first aid," Ahunanya said.

The Chief Engineer reportedly jumped overboard due to fear of an explosion and remained missing, with a search and rescue operation ongoing.

The rescue operation involved personnel from Forward Operating Base, IBAKA, Naval Security Station 030 Houseboat, and local fishermen.

NNS OSE also deployed portable pumps to combat the fire, which affected the midship and aft sections of the vessel.

Ahunanya reaffirmed the Nigerian Navy's commitment to the safety of seafarers and maritime assets.



PRESENTATION OF TROPHY:

L-R: Head, Human Resources, Egbin Power Project, Gabriel Nkanga; Head, Quality, Health, Safety and Environment (QHSE), Julius Akpong; Captain of Alanu-Omo FC, Samad Ojikutu; Brand, Event and PCSR Manager, Egbin Power Project, Stella Olugbemi and Chief Security Officer, Egbin Power, Adeniyi Ige, during the presentation of trophy to the Champions of 2025 edition of Egbin Power Community Football Competition in Lagos.

Calabar Carnival: C'River trains enumerators for data collection

LAGOS

The Cross River State Tourism Bureau (CRSTB) has begun training enumerators and officials ahead of a comprehensive data collection exercise for the upcoming Carnival Calabar.

Mr. Ekpenyong Ojoi, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of CRSTB, said the training was necessary after the record-breaking performance of the 2024 Calabar Festival and Carnival.

The exercise aims to equip field officers with skills to accurately capture visitor numbers, spending patterns, and the overall economic impact of the festive season.

Resource persons were drawn from CRSTB and the National Bureau of Statistics to ensure reliable tourism data.

An executive summary of the 2024 festival, with the theme "Our Shared Prosperity," showed the event ran for 32 days and featured attractions including Christmas Tree Lighting, Calabar Food Festival, Carnival Calabar dry runs, Parade of the Bands, cultural dances, music, fashion shows, and sports competitions.

The report noted that Margaret Ekpo International Airport recorded over 10,000 inbound passengers between November 1 and December 29, 2024, up from 7,452 in the same period in 2023. Of this figure, 79 per cent arrived from other Nige-

rian states, while three per cent came from the diaspora.

An estimated 150,000 visitors entered Calabar in December 2024 via road, air, and sea, spending about N8.875 billion on transportation alone—a 42 per cent increase compared to 2023.

Tourist traffic to major attractions, including Obudu Mountain Resort, Marina Resort, and Kwa Falls, increased, with more than 300,000 visitors recorded between November and December 2024, up from about 190,345 in 2023.

Hotel occupancy rates rose to 68 per cent from 57 per cent the previous year, with over 90 per cent of hotels reporting full occupancy between December

15 and December 29.

Revenue from hotel bookings was estimated at N2.79 billion, while food and breakfast sales generated about N900 million.

Ojoi said the new data collection exercise would build on the 2024 gains, provide deeper insights into visitor behavior and spending, and position the state as a leading cultural and tourism destination.

The Cross River Government has prepared about 4,000 hotel rooms and approved grants to assist hotel owners in maintaining their facilities.

Air connectivity has also been strengthened through CallyAir, which acquired two new aircraft in preparation for this year's carnival.

Tinubu committed to development of South South, says aide

PATANI (DELTA)

President Bola Tinubu has demonstrated commitment to the South-South region, Dr. Timi Tonye, Executive Director of Corporate Services at the South South Development Commission (SSDC), has said.

Tonye made the remark during a paper presentation at the unveiling of the "Patani United Front for Re-Election of President Bola Tinubu and Governor Sheriff Oborewori in 2027" in Patani, Delta State.

The event was convened by Chief Godbless Omoniye, Executive Assistant (Political) to the Delta State Governor.

In his paper titled, "The Imperative for Continuity: A Delta-Centric Case for the Re-election of President Tinubu and Governor Sheriff Oborewori," Tonye emphasized the need to protect progress already made in the country.

"Governor Oborewori has shown commitment to every part of Delta State. 2027 is about protecting our progress. We have waited too long for meaningful development to start playing politics with progress.

"What we are building today must be protected tomorrow. 2027 is not about personalities. It is about projects, peace, and progress. Let us vote to continue the

journey. Let us vote to complete the work. Let us vote for stability, development, and unity," he said.

Tonye noted that from the creeks of Burutu to the streets of Asaba, Warri to Agbor, Ndokwa to Isoko land, Delta State was moving forward.

He added that the South-South region, long neglected at the centre, is now clearly on the national development map.

"President Bola Tinubu is remembering the South-South in action, not words. The establishment of the South South Development Commission is one of the most significant milestones in the history of our region.

"This commission pro-

vides focused development for oil-producing communities, infrastructure for riverine and coastal areas, environmental remediation for polluted lands and waterways, and jobs and opportunities for youths. This is not charity but justice," Tonye said.

He also noted that economic reforms, such as subsidy removal, were aimed at redirecting resources toward development and social support, benefiting infrastructure, youth empowerment, small businesses, and farmers.

He commended Governor Oborewori for inclusive leadership and ensuring projects were spread across the state.

2025 scorecard: No MDA achieves full compliance with integrity standards —ICPC

ABUJA

The Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) has revealed that no Federal Ministry, Department, or Agency (MDA) achieved full compliance with ethics and integrity standards in its 2025 assessment.

The Chairman of ICPC, Dr

Musa Aliyu, SAN, represented by Olusegun Adigun, Director, System Study and Review Department, said this while presenting the findings on Tuesday in Abuja.

Aliyu, while highlighting significant gaps in MDAs' systems and structures, said that the ICPC's Ethics and Integrity Compliance Scorecard (EICS) evaluated 357 MDAs, with

findings showing only 13.95 per cent demonstrated substantial compliance.

The ICPC boss emphasised that general ethical principles were no longer sufficient, given increasing risks and vulnerabilities faced by public institutions.

He said that the EICS, developed by ICPC, served as a tool for assessing and promoting

accountability within Nigerian public institutions.

Aliyu noted that the 2025 edition was the 7th annual assessment of Federal MDAs, providing a consistent mechanism for evaluating ethics, integrity, and compliance.

According to him, the assessment covered 357 MDAs, with 344 effectively assessed. The findings showed that no MDA

achieved full compliance.

"Only 13.95 per cent demonstrated substantial compliance, while 38.37 per cent recorded partial compliance, and 40.99 per cent showed poor compliance.

"Some MDAs lacked core values, mission, and vision systems, while others didn't have domesticated policies on gift acceptance, donations, and hospitality. 102 MDAs didn't have strategic plans, and 154 MDAs lacked monitoring systems.

"The ACTU Effectiveness Index (AEI) complemented the EICS, assessing ACTU's performance as in-house control mechanisms.

"The AEI scores showed 12.31 per cent of ACTUs were 'Very Effective,' 30.97 per cent 'Effec-

tive,' 52.99 per cent 'Ineffective,' and 3.73 per cent 'Dormant'.

"The findings indicate that several MDAs still lack basic systems, structures, and capacities to prevent corruption."

The ICPC boss said that weak administrative systems, poor whistleblowing frameworks, inadequate training, and underperforming ACTUs undermined the public sector's transparency and efficiency.

While stating that the commission remains committed to strengthening transparency, ethical conduct, and accountability, Aliyu said that the ICPC would take necessary steps to address the deficiencies and correct anomalies within the public service.



CHRISTMAS WOMEN EMPOWERMENT OUTREACH:

L-R: Commissioner, Enugu State Local Government Commission, Mrs Amaka Nweke; Chairman All Progressive Congress, Enugu Caretaker Committee, Dr Ben Nwoye; Oba of Yoruba United Community in Enugu, Oba Isiaka Salmon and President, Women Support Women Community Network (WOSCONET), Comrade Uche-Odo Ezeaku during a Christmas Women Empowerment Outreach and Distribution of food items in Enugu on Tuesday.

Akpabio announces automatic employment for sons of deceased police aide

ABUJA

President of the Senate, Godswill Akpabio has announced automatic employment for the two sons of his police rider, DSP Hussani Ibrahim, who died in a ghastly accident on the Lagos-Ibadan expressway on Sunday.

The announcement was made on the floor of the Senate on Tuesday as Akpabio informed his colleagues of the tragic incident.

DSP Ibrahim, who served as the Senate President's rider, has

since been buried according to Islamic rites.

In a heartfelt condolence speech, Akpabio eulogised the late officer as a man who deeply understood the value of work and service.

Addressing the family, Akpabio said: "Your late father understood the value of work and service.

"He devoted himself to it. Unfortunately, instead of earning a laurel for the devotion, he earned death. But it is death that is not in vain. It is death that testifies to his legacy of service.

May the Lord accept his soul."

The Senate President extended his sympathies to the bereaved family, the Inspector General of Police, and the entire Nigeria Police Force.

"I commiserate with the family, the Inspector General of Police and the Nigeria Police Force over the loss of this courageous, fearless, and daring officer.

"While I pray to God to accept his soul, may He in His infinite mercy grant the family and the Nigeria Police Force the fortitude to bear the irreplaceable loss."

The offer of automatic employment for DSP Ibrahim's sons stands as a direct gesture of support from the Senate President to the family of the officer, honouring his legacy and sacrifice.

In a related development, the Senate also honoured Alhaji Ibrahim Tukur who also recently passed on.

He was a dedicated driver of 25 years for the Senator representing Kogi East Senatorial District, Sen. Jibrin Isah.

The Senate in plenary observed a minute silence in honour of the deceased and prayed Almighty God for the repose of their souls.

Economist warns high interest rates undermining benefits of easing inflation

IBADAN

An Economist, Dr Alarudeen Aminu, has warned that persistently high interest rates on loans could erode the benefits of Nigeria's recent reduction in inflation, particularly for producers and small businesses.

Aminu, a Reader (Associate Professor) in the Department of Economics, University of Ibadan, said this on Tuesday, while reacting to indications of easing inflationary pressures

on the economy.

He noted that though Nigeria was beginning to record a moderation in inflation, the high cost of borrowing remained a major constraint to productive activities, especially in agriculture and manufacturing.

"Interest rates are just too high, and when producers take loans at such rates, they must recover their costs. Eventually, this reflects in higher prices of goods and services," Aminu said.

According to him, the situation poses a risk to sustaining

recent gains in inflation reduction, as producers are discouraged from expanding output due to expensive credit.

The economist explained that affordable financing was critical to increasing domestic production, which remained central to addressing inflation in Nigeria.

He stressed that food inflation, in particular, accounted for almost 50 per cent of the country's overall inflation, making access to low-interest loans for farmers and agro-processors essential.

"If you can solve the problem of food production, you have addressed more than half of Nigeria's inflation problem," Aminu said.

He urged the government to review interest rate policies for loans targeted at productive sectors, especially food production for domestic consumption and export.

Aminu, who is also of the Nigerian Economic Society (NES), called for sustained subsidies in strategic areas such as agriculture, energy and power.

Yuletide: NSCDC deploys 55,000 operatives nationwide

ABUJA

Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) has deployed 55,000 officers and men to safeguard lives and Critical National Assets and Infrastructure (CNAI) in the country before, during and after the Christmas and New Year celebrations.

The NSCDC Spokesperson, Babawale Afolabi, made this known in a statement on Tuesday in Abuja.

He quoted the NSCDC Commandant-General (CG), Ahmed Audi, as saying "the massive deployment is in a bid to ensure public safety and improve insecurity across the country."

He also said that the deployment was necessary to enhance the security architecture of the nation, as criminal-minded persons utilised festive periods to carry out sinister and unscrupulous activities.

He emphasised that security

threats like banditry, kidnapping, farmer-herder clashes, terrorism and insurgency would be effectively tackled if citizens provided credible intelligence that would lead to arrest of criminals.

He said "it is imperative for the public to trust and collaborate with us by giving credible and timely information to enable us to act swiftly to prevent crimes, rather than being reactive.

"Our unwavering commitment is to ensure safe and secure environment and that can only be possible when there is public support for security agencies.

"We assure you of our readiness to work in synergy with sister security agencies to ensure safety and peace for development to thrive."

The NSCDC boss directed Zonal Commanders to monitor the commands under their formations, while State Commandants are to coordinate Area Commands, Divisional Offices and other formations.

Yuletide: Lagos LCDA empowers vulnerable residents with cash grant

IBADAN

Ms Motunrayo Gbadebo-Alogba, the Chairman of Ijede Local Council Development Area (LCDA) of Lagos State, has empowered some vulnerable residents in the area with N50,000 cash grant each.

The vulnerable residents, which include petty traders, people living with disabilities (PWD), widows, artisans, youths and the elderly, were selected across the LCDA wards.

Speaking at the event at the LCDA Secretariat in Ikorodu on Thursday, Gbadebo-Alogba stated that the initiative aligns with the Renewed Hope Agenda of President Bola Tinubu.

According to her, it aims to support the vulnerable and ease their financial pressures.

"This intervention is to support businesses and provide re-

lief for daily livelihoods and it will be done in batches.

"During this festive period, every beneficiary will receive the sum of ₦50,000," she said.

Gbadebo-Alogba reiterated her dedication to a people-centred government, aiming to create a thriving, self-sufficient community where all residents can flourish, regardless of their social or economic background.

In his remarks, Mr Olopade Ayoola, a visually impaired beneficiary, expressed appreciation to the council chairperson for the timely support, admonishing recipients to use the money judiciously.

Mrs Disu Dickson, a trader, also expressed gratitude to the council chairperson on behalf of her family and advised other traders to use the cash grant to support their businesses for self-sustainability.

NEWS

Okpebholo receives MOWAA, Radisson probe report, swears in commissioner

BENIN CITY

Edo State Governor Senator Monday Okpebholo on Tuesday received the report of a five-man committee investigating the state's stakes in the AM Museum of West African Art (MOWAA) and the Radisson Hotel projects, promising full implementation of its recommendations.

Speaking at Government House, Governor Okpebholo said Edo State invested over ₦3.8 billion in MOWAA and

more than ₦28 billion in the Radisson Hotel project, emphasising that the state has significant stakes in both.

He announced that the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) would be invited to examine the matters further.

"I want to thank the committee for their thorough work. The controversies surrounding MOWAA, including changes in its structure and name, made this investigation necessary," he said, adding that claims sug-

gesting Edo State holds only a minor stake in the Radisson Hotel are unacceptable.

The committee, chaired by Hon. Barr. Emankhu Isibor

Adde and led to the governor by Speaker, Hon. Blessing Agbebaku, was set up last month after discrepancies in the projects' ownership structures were observed.

In a related development, Governor Okpebholo swore in Mr. Chris Okaigben as a com-

missioner, urging him to align his duties with the administration's SHINE Agenda—Security, Healthcare, Infrastructure, Natural Resources and Agriculture, and Education.

The governor described Okaigben as a loyal and experienced politician, while the

new commissioner pledged total commitment to the state's development.

Also present were Secretary to the State Government Umar Musa Ikhilor, Commissioner for Finance Engr. Emmanuel Okoebor, members of the State Executive Council, and legislators.

C'River APC expels former chairman, upholds suspension of special leader

CALABAR

The All Progressives Congress in Cross River State has expelled its impeached former chairman, Mr Alphonsus Eba.

The decision was taken on Monday evening at a meeting of the party's Caretaker Committee held at the party secretariat in Calabar.

The committee also upheld the suspension of a state special leader, Dr Juliet Diwa.

Announcing the decision, the committee chairman, Mr Ekum Ojogu, said Mr Eba's expulsion followed the invocation of Article 21.5(v) of the APC Constitution, as amended in 2022.

Ojogu explained that the provision mandates the automatic expulsion of any party member who institutes legal action against the party with-

out exhausting internal dispute resolution mechanisms.

Mr Eba was earlier impeached following allegations of misconduct and the withholding of salaries of some party stakeholders.

The committee also reviewed a letter from the Boki Local Government Area concerning the suspension of Dr Diwa.

She was accused of gross misconduct at the ward level, including an alleged assault on the Ward Chairman, Mr James Abang.

After deliberation, the committee upheld her suspension pending the outcome of the party's disciplinary committee.

The Caretaker Committee reaffirmed its commitment to party discipline, internal democracy and strict adherence to the APC Constitution.

FG moves to regulate online pharmacy services

ABUJA

The Federal Government, in collaboration with stakeholders in the health sector, has inaugurated the National Electronic Pharmacy Policy and Strategic Implementation Plan to regulate online pharmaceutical services.

The Coordinating Minister of Health and Social Welfare, Professor Ali Pate, said the policy would regulate the production and sale of medicines while ensuring Nigerians have access to quality-assured pharmaceuticals.

Represented by the Director of Food and Drug Services, Mr Olubumi Aribean, Professor Pate said the initiative was aimed at modernising healthcare delivery and improving access to affordable medicines nationwide.

He said the rapid growth of digital platforms had exposed gaps in the pharmaceutical sector, allowing substandard

medicines, unlicensed vendors and misinformation to thrive.

"The National Electronic Pharmacy Policy provides a clear and enforceable framework to regulate electronic pharmacy services while ensuring innovation does not compromise safety," he said.

According to him, the policy establishes licensing and accreditation standards for digital pharmacy platforms, enables real-time monitoring and traceability of medicines, and improves access to essential drugs, especially in underserved communities.

Professor Pate said the policy was developed through extensive collaboration with agencies including the Pharmacy Council of Nigeria, the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control, the National Information Technology Development Agency, the Nigeria Data Protection Commission and the Nigerian Communications Commission.



LAGOS TAX REFORM SUMMIT 2025:

Chairman, Presidential Fiscal Policy and Tax Reform Committee, Mr Taiwo Oyedele; Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu of Lagos State and Special Adviser to the Governor on Taxation and Revenue, Mr Abdul-Kabir Ogungbo, during the Lagos Tax Reform Summit 2025 in Lagos on Tuesday.

Troops repel terrorist attack on Maiduguri–Damboa road

ABUJA

Troops of the Joint Task Force North East, Operation Hadin Kai, on Monday repelled a coordinated terrorist attack along the Maiduguri–Damboa Main Supply Route in Borno State.

A credible military source said the attack occurred at about 3:10 p.m. on December 22.

According to the source, troops of 25 Brigade, while conducting main supply route dominance patrol and escorting civilians along the Maiduguri–Damboa axis in Damboa Local Government Area, came under attack by Islamic State West Africa Province and Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati

wal-Jihad terrorists.

The terrorists reportedly deployed multiple armed drones, improvised explosive devices and an ambush in an attempt to disrupt military movement and civilian traffic along the route.

Reinforcements from the Brigade Headquarters were immediately mobilised, enabling the troops to counter the attack and stabilise the situation.

The source said the troops successfully dominated the area and denied the terrorists freedom of action.

He added that offensive operations were also sustained across other sectors of Operation Hadin Kai under Operation Desert Sanity IV.

In the North Central zone, the

source said troops under Operation Enduring Peace and Operation Fansan Yamma recorded further successes against kidnapping and criminal activities in Kaduna and Plateau States.

He said troops of Sector 5 in Kaduna State, working with local vigilantes, apprehended two suspected kidnapers during an intelligence-led operation at Pari and Rahama villages in Kauru Local Government Area.

In Plateau State, troops of Sector 2, Operation Enduring Peace, responded to a kidnapping incident in Panyam town, Mangu Local Government Area, where one person was abducted and another killed by suspected kidnapers. Efforts to rescue the

abducted victim are ongoing.

"However, troops recorded a major breakthrough in Bokkos Local Government Area, Plateau State, where swift military action forced kidnapers to abandon a Reverend and his three children abducted from a church premises at Makundang village.

"The victims were rescued, debriefed and reunited with their family, while troops continue the search for the fleeing kidnapers in surrounding mountainous areas," he said.

The source reaffirmed the commitment of the Armed Forces to sustaining pressure on terrorists and criminal elements across all theatres to ensure the safety of lives and property nationwide.

Abia govt restores power to 33 Ukwa West communities

OBEHIE (ABIA)

The Abia State Government has restored electricity supply to 33 communities in Ukwa West Local Government Area after nine years of total blackout.

Speaking in Obehie at a ceremony marking the formal power switch-on, Governor Alex Otti assured residents of reliable electricity supply going forward.

Governor Otti said the intervention fulfilled a promise he made in March to reconnect the affected communities.

He expressed confidence in the project's sustainability and commended the Chief Exec-

utive Officer of Geometric Power Limited, Professor Bart Nnaji, for his resilience and long-term investment in the power sector.

The governor disclosed that Professor Nnaji had invested about 800 million dollars in the power company, describing the investment as a necessary sacrifice for power sector development.

"You know better than anyone how long this place has been in darkness. In a few moments, we will turn on the lights, and from today, you will enjoy 24-hour power supply.

"I say this with confidence because Professor Bart Nnaji is here with me, and everywhere

he has worked, the story is the same. The other day, someone told me that in the last 120 days, electricity in his house has not blinked once," the governor said.

Governor Otti also said the state government would work with the local government to support residents who might be unable to pay their monthly electricity bills.

"I will mandate the Mayor to sit with the lawmaker, the commissioner and other stakeholders to work out a way to support those who genuinely cannot afford to pay. I am not asking you to do what I have not done. I have already done this in my own community," he said.

He urged residents to pro-

tect public infrastructure, stressing that community vigilance was key to sustaining development projects.

In his remarks, Professor Nnaji assured residents of regular electricity supply, noting that the area fell within the nine local government areas supported by Aba Power Limited, a subsidiary of Geometric Power Limited.

He said the area had received 33 transformers and several distribution lines had been installed.

According to him, power would be generated outside the national grid, ensuring stability even during the national system collapses.

JUDICIARY

NEWS

Court orders final forfeiture of lands approved for Jonathan Estate to FG

ABUJA

The Federal High Court in Abuja has ordered the permanent forfeiture of a multi billion Naira expanse of land approved for the Goodluck Jonathan Legacy Model Housing Estate to the Federal Government.

Justice Mohammed Umar granted the motion on notice moved by Osuobeni Akponimisingha, counsel for the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), which was not opposed by the defence lawyer, Hassan Liman, SAN.

Justice Umar directed the ICPC, on behalf of the Federal Government, to supervise the construction of the parcels of

land to completion of the 962 housing units as earlier proposed.

The judge held that the supervision should be done in collaboration with the Federal Mortgage Bank of Nigeria (FMBN), the sole respondent in the case, and ensure the utilisation of the housing units by end users.

Justice Umar said, "an order is hereby made for the final forfeiture of Plot No. 5 in Cadastral Zone D12, Kaba District, Abuja measuring approximately 122015.80m² and valued at N1,944,375,000.00 (One Billion, Nine Hundred Forty-Four Million, Three Hundred and Seventy-Five Thousand Naira.

"An order is hereby made for the final forfeiture of Plot No. 4 in Cadastral Zone D12, Kaba District, Abuja, measuring approxi-

mately 157198.30m² and valued at N3,340,500,000.00 (Three Billion, Three Hundred Forty Million, Five Hundred Thousand Naira), suspected of being proceeds of unlawful activity.

"An order is hereby made directing the applicant, through the ICPC, to facilitate the hand-over of the forfeited properties to the respondent i.e. Federal Mortgage Bank of Nigeria, being the victim of the alleged unlawful activity."

Justice Umar, in the ruling delivered on December 11 but the enrolled order sight by newsmen on Tuesday, further directed the ICPC and FMBN to set up a committee which membership is to be drawn from both agencies to implement the completion of the project.

Justice Umar had, on July 9, granted the anti-corruption commission's prayer to temporarily take over the lands, after

Akponimisingha moved a motion ex- parte to the effect.

Justice Umar held that the interim forfeiture of the multi billion naira assets approved by the FMBN shall be pending the hearing and determination of the substantive suit.

The ICPC had, in the motion ex- parte marked: FHC/ABJ/CS/1124/2025, listed FMBN as sole respondent.

The lands were suspected of being proceeds of an unlawful activity.

It equally sought an order directing the commission to take over and secure the said immovable property from being converted to personal use or sold off to unsuspecting members of public.

The ICPC further sought an order directing the commission to publish a notice in any national newspaper for interested person(s) to show cause

why the assets should not be permanently forfeited to the Federal Government.

Giving 14 grounds why the application should be granted, the agency said the alleged assets were allocated by the Federal Capital Territory Administration (FCTA) freely for the construction of 962 residential housing units through the FMBN.

In the affidavit deposed to by an ICPC's officer, Iliya Marcus, he averred that the commission received an intelligence report that the FMBN engaged a private developer to construct 962 of residential housing units under National Housing Fund Scheme.

According to him, the commission in its usual characteristics of proactiveness launched a discreet preliminary investigation activities into the said intelligence report and discovered the following:

The FMBN requested and got approval to commence

construction of "Goodluck Jonathan Legacy Model Housing Estate" on July 30, 2012.

Marcus said following the approval, a framework agreement between FMBN and Good Earth Power Nigeria Limited was entered on January 27, 2012.

He said sequel to the said framework agreement, the bank appointed a consultant for the project vide a letter dated February 1, 2012.

He said the appointment of the consultant was to assist monitor the housing project on behalf of the FMBN to report milestone to enable the bank pay the developer of the proposed estate.

He said investigation revealed that FMBN sought and obtained a loan facility of 65 million U.S. dollars from Ecobank Limited for the construction of the 962 residential housing units through Good Earth Power Nigeria Limited, a private company for the benefit of low income earners.



NCTC END OF THE YEAR NEWS CONFERENCE:

L-R: Legal Expert, National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC), Office of the National Security Adviser, Abdullahi Bello; Deputy Director, Preventing and Countering Violence Extremism, Mrs Eunice Kaola; Director, Policy and Strategy, Commodore Rafu Oladejo and NCTC National Coordinator, Maj.-Gen. Adam Laka, during the NCTC End of the Year News Conference in Abuja on Tuesday.

Employees docked for allegedly stealing employer's goods

IBADAN

The police on Tuesday, dragged four company employees before an Iyaganku Chief Magistrates' Court in Ibadan, for allegedly stealing goods worth N600 million.

The defendants, Sunday Onyeka, 40; Wisdom Onyamakonor, 30; Oladele Temitope, 38; and Abiodun Adebisi, 47; were charged on two-counts of conspiracy and stealing.

They each pleaded not guilty to the charges.

According to the prosecutor, Sgt. Akeem Akinloye, the defendants and others at large allegedly conspired to commit the offence between June and December.

Akinloye alleged that the

defendants being staff of one Eastern Horizon Ltd, conspired to steal bags of fish meal and poultry meal from the company's warehouse.

The goods are valued N600 million.

Akinloye said the offence is contrary to Section 383, 390 (9) and 516 of the Criminal Code Law of Oyo State 2000.

The Chief Magistrate, Mrs Olabisi Ogunkanmi, granted the defendants bail in the sum of N10 million each, with two sureties each in like sum.

She held that one of the sureties must be a property owner within jurisdiction, while the second surety must be blood relation of each of the defendants.

Ogunkanmi adjourned the case until March 25, 2026 for mention.

Man, 25, arraigned for allegedly for breach of peace

IBADAN

A 25-year-old man, Opeyemi Lamidi, was on Tuesday charged before a Grade A Customary Court sitting at Mapo Ibadan, for allegedly causing a breach of peace and malicious damage to furniture.

He is standing trial on a two-count charge of causing a breach of peace and malicious damage.

Lamidi, however, pleaded not guilty to the charges.

Consequently, the court's President, Mrs O.E. Owoseni granted the defendant bail in the sum of N50,000, with two

reliable sureties in like sum.

The court held that the sureties must be blood relations of the defendant.

Owoseni added that each of the sureties must exhibit a valid identification card.

She adjourned the case until January 13, 2026 for hearing.

The prosecutor, insp. Ayodele Ayeni told the court that the defendant committed the offence on December 4, at about 2.30 p.m. at the Ad-amasingba area of Ibadan.

Ayeni alleged that the defendant conspired with two others now at large, to violently attack the premises of IO Desert Grill Farm, to destroy a table and a

chair both valued at N60,000.

He said that the offences contravene the provisions of

sections 249(d) and 451 of the Criminal Code Law of Oyo State, 2000.

Defendant jailed 6 months for cutting another with cutlass over food

IBADAN

An Iyaganku Magistrates' Court Ibadan, on Tuesday sentenced a 30-year-old man, Olatunde Busayo, to six months imprisonment for cutting another with a cutlass, over food.

Busayo was charged with assault. He had pleaded guilty to the charge.

The Magistrate, Mrs Olatinmibo Sanusi-Zubair, consequently, found him guilty as charged and sentenced him to a term of six months imprisonment without an option of fine.

The prosecutor, Insp Olagoke Adegbenro told the court that Busayo, an ex convict, commit-

ted the offence on December 7, at about 11.00 a.m. at Olunloyo estate, New GRA, Ibadan.

Adegbenro said that the convict used a cutlass to inflict injury on the neck of one Mr Patrick Isaiah, a security guard who stays in the same neighborhood with the convict.

He explained that the convict had cut Isaiah because he failed to give him food when a ceremony was held in his compound.

According to the prosecutor, Busayo ran after Isaiah on the street after the ceremony, and hit a cutlass on his neck.

He said that the offence contravenes the provisions of section 355 of the Criminal Law of Oyo State, 2000.

Tax reform faces legitimacy crisis over...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 2

flection of legislative approval.

"The law also mandates the preparation of identical copies for the National Assembly, the President, and the Chief Justice of Nigeria," he said.

Jideani, also Director-General of the Abuja Chamber of Commerce and Industry said the legislative procedures therefore, preserve the accuracy of bills after their passage.

He said the safeguards were designed to promote transparency, accountability, and public confidence in Nigeria's law-making process.

It would be recalled that the tax reforms are part of broader fiscal measures aimed at strengthening revenue generation amid prevailing economic conditions.

The laws include the Nigeria Tax Act, Nigeria Tax Administration Act, Nigeria Revenue Service Act, and Joint Revenue Board Establishment Act.

The bills were initiated by

the executive in 2024 and passed in identical form by both chambers of the National Assembly in early 2025.

They are scheduled to come into effect in 2026.

Also, Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu of Lagos State has said that the success of Nigeria's ongoing tax reforms will depend largely on effective implementation at the sub-national level.

Sanwo-Olu said that Lagos was ready to play a leadership role in the implementation.

He spoke on Tuesday at a tax reform summit in Lagos State, with the theme: "From Reforms to Results."

He said that Lagos, regarded as a trailblazer in fiscal innovation and regulatory administration, could no longer rely on past achievements in the face of rapid population growth, expanding economic activities and rising competition.

At the summit, stakeholders examined practical steps for translating policy into measurable outcomes.

CHANGE OF NAME

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

ADDITION OF NAME

The general public is hereby notified that IGBINOMWANHIA-SOLOMON SANDRA ESEOSA and IGBINOMWANHIA-SOLOMON SANDRA are one and the same person. Henceforth, I wish to be known and called IGBINOMWANHIA-SOLOMON SANDRA ESEOSA. Concerned authorities and general public should please take note.

NEWS

Foreign

Ukraine loses embattled eastern town

Ukrainian troops have withdrawn from the embattled eastern town of Siversk, as Russia continues its steady - albeit slow - advance.

The Ukrainian military said on Tuesday it acted "to preserve the lives of our soldiers and the combat capability of units", adding that Russian forces had a "significant advantage in manpower".

The capture of Siversk brings Russia closer to the last remaining "fortress belt" cities of Sloviansk and Kramatorsk still in Ukrainian hands in the industrial Donetsk region.

Earlier in the day, officials said three people - including a young child - were killed in massive overnight Russian drone and missile strikes on Ukraine.

Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, and Moscow currently controls about 20% of Ukrainian territory.

In a statement, the Ukrainian

military said Russian troops were continuing "active offensive actions" in the Siversk area "despite significant losses".

It added that Ukrainian "defence forces had exhausted the enemy during the fighting for Siversk".

Before the Russian invasion, Siversk had about 11,000 people.

Two weeks ago Russia had already reported control over the town - but Ukraine denied the claim at the time.

Siversk has been virtually wiped out as a town during many months of heavy fighting.

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

Russian leader Vladimir Putin has repeatedly warned that Ukrainian troops must withdraw from all of Donbas or Russia will seize it, rejecting any compromise over how to end the war.

Ukrainian President Volod-

myr Zelensky has been under heavy pressure from his US counterpart Donald Trump to cede all of Donbas to Russia during ongoing Washington-led peace negotiations.

Zelensky has so far rejected any territorial concessions, and instead demanded iron-clad security guarantees for Ukraine in any potential settlement.

The peace negotiations - involving separate meetings of US officials with their Ukrainian and Russian counterparts - continued over the weekend but no breakthrough was reported.

According to Zelensky, the US had proposed a Christmas truce but Russia rejected the idea.

Overnight, Russia launched 635 drones and 38 missiles on a number of Ukrainian regions, Ukraine's air force said, adding that 621 of them were downed.

Local authorities in the central Zhytomyr region confirmed a child's death.

Regional head Vitaly Bune-

chko said the child "was taken to hospital, doctors fought for (the child's) life but could not save (the child) in the end". Five others were injured in the strike, he added.

Meanwhile, a 76-year-old woman was killed and three people injured when a house in the Kyiv region was struck, according to Ukraine's state emergencies service.

An attack in Khmelnytsky, western Ukraine, killed a 72-year-old, regional administration head Serhiy Tyurin said.

Polish fighter jets were scrambled in response to missiles and drones targeting west Ukraine.

The Russian defence ministry said it had targeted Ukrainian "military-industrial complex plants and supporting energy facilities". It added that all the designated targets had been hit.

Meanwhile, Ukraine reportedly struck a petrochemical plant in Stravropol, southern

Gunmen abduct 28 Muslim travellers in central Nigeria

Armed men have kidnapped 28 people travelling to an annual Islamic event in Nigeria's central Plateau state, local police told the BBC. The victims, including women and children, were ambushed in their bus on Sunday night as it was driving between villages.

Police spokesperson Alabo Alfred said the authorities have "deployed assets" to the affected area to ensure that those abducted are rescued.

News of the abductions comes just a day after the Nigerian authorities announced the release of the remaining 130 schoolchildren and teachers from a separate mass kidnapping at a Catholic boarding school in Niger state last month.

A journalist based in Plateau state said the families of the latest victims had begun receiving ransom demands.

The police have not said anything about the identity of the possible perpetrators.

Kidnapping for ransom by criminal gangs, known locally as bandits, has become common across parts of northern and central Nigeria.

Although the handing over of cash in order to release those

being held is illegal, it is thought that this is how many cases are resolved and seen as a way for these gangs to raise money.

The incident in Plateau state is unrelated to the long-running Islamist insurgency in the country's north-east, where jihadist groups have been battling the state for more than a decade.

The insecurity in Nigeria received renewed international attention in November after US President Donald Trump threatened to send troops to "that now disgraced country, guns-a-blazing". He alleged that Christians were being targeted.

Nigeria's federal government has acknowledged the security problems but has denied that Christians are being singled out.

On Monday, Information Minister Mohammed Idris said that recent tensions with the US over insecurity and alleged persecution of Christians had been "largely resolved", resulting in stronger relations with Washington.

He added that trained and equipped forest guards will be deployed to secure forests and other remote areas used as hideouts by criminal groups to supplement army operations.



UKRAINIAN MILITARY:

Siversk has been virtually wiped out as a town during many months of heavy fighting.

Thousands fleeing DR Congo violence face 'dire conditions' in Burundi - aid agencies

The nearly 90,000 refugees who fled to Burundi after the recent escalation of violence in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo face dire conditions in cramped camps with limited access to food and water, aid agencies say.

Congolese M23 rebels recently captured the city of Uvira, near the Burundi border, and the fighting forced hundreds of thousands from their homes. The rebels say they have since withdrawn.

Medical charity MSF, which has been providing emergency help, has raised concerns about the worsening humanitarian situation.

The UN's refugee agency, UNCHR, said those especially affected are children and wom-

en - including pregnant women - some who reported going without food for days.

MSF said it had been treating an average of 200 people daily since the refugees started arriving in Burundi in the last two weeks.

"We see people in a state of distress, despair and exhaustion. We see women who gave birth while fleeing, some that give birth in our clinic," said Zakari Moluh, the MSF project co-ordinator describing the situation in Ndava, north-west Burundi.

The charity has warned of the risk of the "spread of epidemic diseases such as cholera and measles, and a catastrophic increase of malaria cases" among vulnerable people.

Meanwhile, the UN's World

Food Programme (WFP) says it is increasing its life-saving aid to over 210,000 of the most vulnerable people displaced by the DR Congo violence.

It notes that about half a million people have been forced from their homes in South Kivu province since the beginning of December.

The WFP says it is supporting 71,000 new Congolese arrivals to Burundi with hot meals in transit centres.

It adds that services across the province are on the brink of collapse, as "health centres have been looted, medicines are unavailable, and schools remain closed". The agency has called for urgent funding to be able to continue providing food aid in the next three months.

The capture of Uvira at the

beginning of the month extended the M23's territorial gains in eastern DR Congo after they had earlier captured the major cities of Goma and Bukavu.

The rebels said they would pull out of Uvira last week under pressure from the US, but their reported withdrawal has been disputed by Congolese authorities.

The US brokered a peace deal between the Congolese and Rwandan governments aimed at ending the long-running conflict in DR Congo. The US accuses Rwanda of backing the M23 rebels, which it denies.

The rebels were not signatories to that peace deal but they have been part of a parallel peace process led by Qatar, a US ally that has strong ties with Rwanda.

Five dead after plane carrying child burns victim crashes in Texas

At least five people have been killed after a Mexican Navy plane crashed in foggy conditions near Galveston, Texas on Monday while transporting a child burns victim.

According to flight tracking website Flight Radar, the plane was last recorded at 15:01 local time (21:01 GMT) over Galveston Bay, near Scholes International Airport.

The aircraft was taking part in a medical mission on behalf of the Michou y Mau Foundation, which provides care to Mexican children with severe burns.

Mexico's Secretariat of the Navy said one person remains missing and two others were rescued alive.

Video footage shared with AP news agency showed the wreckage of the plane in the water, with witnesses and police officers seen entering the

water to search the debris.

Sky Decker, a local yacht captain, said he took two police officers to the site of the nearly submerged plane, before jumping in and finding a badly injured woman trapped.

He said: "I couldn't believe. She had maybe three inches of air gap to breathe in."

"And there was jet fuel in there mixed with the water, fumes real bad. She was really fighting for her life."

Earlier the Mexican Navy Secretariat said search and rescue operations were under way in co-ordination with the US Coast Guard.

Video taken near Scholes International Airport in Galveston showed rescuers including a dive team working in dense fog.

In a statement shared on X, the Michou y Mau Foundation sent "our deepest condolences to the families of the victims of this tragedy".



Foreign

NEWS

Trump says US will keep or sell oil seized from Venezuela

Donald Trump has said the US will keep or sell the crude oil contained on tankers it has seized off the coast of Venezuela, as well as the vessels themselves.

The US president's comments came as Washington continues to pressure the South American country's leader Nicolás Maduro to stand down.

Speaking to reporters in Florida on Monday, Trump said of the oil "we're going to keep it", adding: "Maybe we will sell it, maybe we will keep it. Maybe we'll use it in the Strategic Reserves. We're keeping the ships also."

The Trump administration has accused Venezuela of using oil revenues to fund drug-related crime, while Caracas has condemned the seizures as "piracy".

The US military has seized two oil tankers this month, including one on Saturday.

Trump issued his latest warning as the US Coast Guard continued to pursue a third oil tanker, which authorities described as part of a Venezuelan "dark fleet" used to evade US sanctions.

"It's moving along, and we'll end up getting it," Trump said.

Separately on Monday, the US military said it carried out a strike on what it said was a suspected trafficking vessel in international waters in the eastern Pacific. US Southern Command said one person was killed.

When asked whether the goal of the seizures was to force Maduro from power, Trump responded: "Well, I think it prob-

ably would... That's up to him what he wants to do. I think it'd be smart for him to do that. But again, we're gonna find out."

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

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

Speaking on Monday, Trump repeated that the US intends to strike targets on land too.

He said: "We'll be starting the same programme on land. If they want to come by land, they're going to end up having a big problem. They're going to get blown to pieces, because we don't want our people poisoned."

Speaking on state television, Maduro responded to Trump by saying: "He would be better off in his own country dealing with economic and social issues and the world would be better off if he focused on his own country's affairs."

Since returning to office in January, Trump has doubled the reward for information leading to Maduro's capture, accusing him of being "one of the largest narco-traffickers in the world".

The Trump administration has designated Maduro's government as a foreign terrorist organisation (FTO), and last week ordered a "blockade" of sanctioned oil tankers entering or leaving Venezuela.

UN warns Sudan crisis worsening as fighting intensifies

The United Nations Security Council received a briefing on Monday about the escalating violence and worsening humanitarian situation in Sudan.

Representatives from a range of UN agencies warned the Security Council of growing risks to civilians and humanitarian workers as the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces and Sudanese army battle for control of the country.

"Since the Secretariat's last briefing on Sudan in October, the conflict has again intensified, confirming fears that the dry season will bring increased fighting and renewed attacks on civilians," Mohamed Khaled Khari, UN Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific told the Council.

"Each passing day brings staggering levels of violence and destruction. Civilians are enduring immense, unimaginable suffering with no end in sight. In recent weeks, the conflict has centered in the Kordofan region, where the Rapid Support Forces have made significant territorial gains. On 1 December, the Rapid Support forces captured by Babanusa in West Kordofan followed on 8 December by

their capture of Heglig in South Kordofan – an oil field and critical processing station for South Sudanese crude oil pumping to Port Sudan for exportation. Kadugli and Dilling, both in South Kordofan, are now under tightening siege conditions."

Food insecurity

Vital services including health centers have also come under attack, even as the population faces increased levels of disease and hunger.

"If we talk about malnutrition, Sudan is one of the world's largest food crisis," Shible Sahbani, a representative of the World Health Organization in Sudan, said.

"And it's a shame to say this about Sudan, because it used to be considered as the food basket of the whole region. So now, as we speak, I can tell you that over 21 million people are facing high levels of acute malnutrition and food insecurity. Forty-five per cent of the population are in IPC three and plus IPC three, four and five, which is basically famine. Sudan is also among the top four countries globally with the highest prevalence of global acute malnutrition, affecting 13.6 per cent of the population."



OIL VESSEL:

Seized Venezuelan oil vessel by the US Navy.

Malawians angry over vice-president's planned UK trip

There is growing anger in Malawi over a post-Christmas fortnight trip to the UK that one of the country's vice-presidents is due to take.

Jane Anshah's visit will be in a private capacity but the reported size of both her entourage and overall cost of the trip has ignited fierce criticism. The details have been disputed by her office.

The row began after the circulation of an alleged leaked letter to the Malawi High Commission in London, signed by Secretary for Foreign Affairs Chauncy Simwaka, listing 15 individuals set to accompany Anshah.

In power since October, the vice-president's government has pledged to manage the economy competently and has already announced a raft of austerity measures.

Malawian media have published further alleged details about the visit, reportedly from leaked documents saying it would cost hundreds of thousands of dollars.

While the vice-president's office has confirmed the trip, it has disputed the information in circulation about how much the state is spending.

"These documents did not originate from any government institution and do not reflect official records or approved government expenditures," the vice-president's press secretary Richard Mverirwa said in a statement.

"The Office of the Vice President remains committed to transparency, accountability, and the responsible use of public resources, and strongly condemns the deliberate spread of false information intended to mislead the public."

The spokesperson did not, however, say anything about the number of people making the trip, said to include two accountants, four security personnel, three assistants to the vice-president, and other officials.

A Malawian human rights organisation, the Human Rights Defenders Coalition (HRDC) said it finds the reported size of the delegation "deeply troubling, particularly given that the trip is explicitly described as private yet appears to be financed using public resources".

Anshah was the running mate to President Peter Mutharika, who soundly beat incumbent Lazarus Chakwera in September's election.

They promised a "return to proven leadership" that would manage the economy better than the Chakwera adminis-

tration.

Among the announced cut-backs in government spending are a reduction of both domestic and international travel by senior government officials.

When he was sworn in, Mutharika promised to be prudent. He said his government would not be a "feast" for members of the administration and supporters.

The HRDC said the vice president's UK trip, due to start on 26 December, directly contradicted the government's own rhetoric on austerity and called it a "double standard".

"While Malawians are continuously urged to tighten their belts, endure hardship and accept reduced public services in the name of fiscal discipline, senior political leaders appear to exempt themselves from these very principles," the organisation said.

Israel extends order allowing closure of foreign broadcast stations

Israel's parliament has extended an order allowing the government to shut down foreign broadcasters operating in the country.

The legislation, passed by 22 votes to 10, expands temporary powers introduced during the Gaza war to shutter outlets seen as a threat to national security.

It allows the government for the next two years to cease operations of a foreign outlet even in peace time and without the need for a court order.

Originally dubbed the "Al Jazeera Law", the powers were used to shut down the Qatari-owned channel's offices and block its broadcasts in May 2024.

Israel accused Al Jazeera - which has been a strong critic of Israel's military campaign in

Gaza - of anti-Israel bias and of supporting Hamas in its coverage.

Al Jazeera denied the accusations and condemned Israel's actions, calling it a "criminal act" and an attack on press freedom.

The Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) said last year that the temporary order violated "freedom of expression, the right to information and freedom of the press, and blocks citizens and residents from receiving a variety of information that does not fit the Israeli narrative or is not broadcast on Israeli media channels".

The legislation extending the order was passed hours after the Israeli cabinet approved a plan to shut down Army Radio, or Galei Tzahal (GLZ), a state-funded

station that is operated by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) but is editorially independent.

Under the plan proposed by Defence Minister Israel Katz, the station will cease operations by 1 March 2026.

Katz argued that Army Radio, which employs both active duty soldiers and civilians, "no longer serves as a mouthpiece and ear for soldiers and broadcasts political and divisive content that is not in line with IDF values".

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told the cabinet meeting that a station broadcasting under the authority of the military was highly unusual.


"I think it exists in North Korea and maybe a few other countries, and we probably don't want to be

counted among them," he said.

The Union of Journalists and Journalists' Organisations said they would petition the High Court of Justice against the decision, calling it "a severe and unlawful infringement on freedom of expression and freedom of the press".

The Israel Democracy Institute (IDI) think tank said shutting Army Radio constituted a serious violation of freedom of expression and effectively wiped out half of Israel's independent public radio news broadcasts.

"The decision to shut down a public media organisation is not an isolated move. It is part of a broader and worrying pattern of ongoing harm to Israeli democracy," it warned.

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10 X 4	340,000	365,500	273,500	294,013	177,400	190,705	370,000	397,750	295,600	317,770
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FP 4X2	73,000	78,475	80,700	86,753	4 X 2	45,260	48,655	34,400	36,980
FP 3X2	64,870	69,735	73,000	78,475	3 X 2	30,900	33,218	26,600	28,595
FP 2X2	59,000	63,425	64,900	69,768	2 X 2	18,680	20,081	15,600	16,770
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Sports

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NPFL: BaraucFC hold Nasarawa Utd goalless in Lafia



BARAUCFC AND NASARAWA UNITED

Nasarawa United United Football Club on Tuesday played a goalless draw with Barau FC of Kano in the matchday 18 fixture of the 2025/2026 Nigeria Professional Football League (NPFL).

The match played at the Lafia Township Stadium ended goalless with both teams failing to capitalise on scoring opportunities.

The Solid Miners, currently second on the league table with 32 points, had a strong home record in the 2025/2026 NPFL campaign, while Barau FC are 17th on the table with 21 points, having struggled to hold Nasarawa United to a draw in the match.

In a post-match interview, the Technical Adviser of Nasarawa United Mbwas Mangut, said that it was not the result they wanted to maintain their position on the table, but unfortunately, they could not win the match at home.

Mangut said that he expected Barau FC, which is on the bottom of the table, would put up a fight in order not to sink further, but his boys did not put up the spirit of urgency, especially in the first half of the match.

He said that his team would work hard to up their game in subsequent matches to return to the top of the league.



SEMI AJAYI

AFCON 2025: Ajayi delights in opener as Ndidi demands more from Eagles

Man-of-the-Match, Semi Ajayi, says scoring for Nigeria at AFCON is special and crucial to securing a positive start in the competition.

Ajayi said the early victory boosted team confidence, describing it as a reward for collective effort and disciplined execution against Tanzania.

“Scoring for my country at a tournament like AFCON is always special. It gives us belief and sets the tone for the rest of the games,” Ajayi said.

He noted that the team created several chances and showed character but stressed the need to improve in key areas.

“We did a lot of good things, especially going forward, but there are details we must fix as we move on in the tournament,” he added.

Ajayi said the squad was already focused on preparation for the next fixture, stressing unity and hard work.

“This is just the first step. We will analyse the game, learn from it and be ready for a tougher challenge ahead,” he said.

Meanwhile, Super Eagles midfielder, Wilfred Ndidi, said the players were satisfied with the opening win but remained focused on improvement.

“The first game is always tricky. Getting three points gives us confidence, but we know we can still do better,” Ndidi said.

Ndidi said the team had been challenged by the technical crew to maintain higher concentration levels in subsequent matches.

Ohanaeze rewards 1977 Rangers champions, boosts Igbo cultural development

The Igbo apex socio-cultural group, Ohanaeze Ndigbo Worldwide, has donated N19 million to 19 Enugu Rangers players who won the 1977 African Cup of Champions.

Sen. John Azuta-Mbata announced the donation on Tuesday during the Imeobi meeting at the International Conference Centre, Enugu, detailing his one-year stewardship as president-general.

He said the contribution compensated for the unredeemed N25,000 pledged by the Federal Government to each player 48 years ago.

“This gesture reinforces our support for sports as a unifying and empowering force,” Azuta-Mbata said, honouring the Rangers’ historic achievement.

“Decades ago, Rangers symbolised Igbo resurgence after the Civil War, when everything had gone down.

“Rangers captured laurels nationally and internationally, reflecting the never-say-die spirit of the Igbo. Promises by the Federal Government were unfulfilled, so Ohanaeze stepped in,” he said.

Azuta-Mbata said plans were underway to establish professorial chairs for Igbo language, history, and culture, backed by N35 million take-off grants.

Seven professorial chairs,

one in each Ohanaeze state, have been endowed. Applications from eligible professors are currently under review.

“This is a strategic investment in cultural preservation, intellectual renaissance, and safeguarding our identity through rigorous research.

“We are ensuring the Igbo narrative is documented, defended, and dignified,” the president-general emphasised.



IGBO CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

AFCON 2025: Chelle urges improvement following Eagles victory over Tanzania

Super Eagles coach, Eric Chelle, has called for improvements despite Nigeria’s 2-1 victory over Tanzania in their opening match of the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON).

Chelle said the team created several chances, especially in the first half, but admitted mistakes in the second half allowed Tanzania back into the game.

He noted that the opening win was encouraging but insisted the team must show greater discipline and control as the tournament progresses.

“At this level, small details decide games. We played well, but we must reduce our mistakes, especially against stronger opponents,” Chelle said.

He said the encounter provided useful lessons for the technical crew ahead of tougher tests in the group.

“AFCON is about consistency. We will analyse this game carefully and make the necessary corrections before the next match,” he added.

He expressed satisfaction with the opening win, noting that steady improvement



ERIC CHELLE

AFCON 2025: Lookman strike caps Iwobi-inspired Nigeria win over Tanzania

Alex Iwobi delivered two assists as Nigeria opened their Group C Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) campaign with a hard-fought 2-1 victory over Tanzania at the Complexe Sportif de Fès in Fez, Morocco.

The Super Eagles dominated possession and chances for long spells and were ultimately rewarded, despite a brief second-half scare, thanks to Ademola Lookman’s decisive strike from the edge of the area.

Nigeria started on the front foot,

controlling the tempo with neat passing through midfield and creating early openings. Akor Adams struck the crossbar from a corner inside the opening 15 minutes, while Victor Osimhen forced saves from Zuberi Foba with efforts from range and inside the box.

Tanzania threatened sporadically on the counter, with Stanley Nwabali called into action to deny Simon Msuva and Tarryn Allarakhia, but Nigeria’s pressure continued to build.



LOOKMAN AND IWOB



INCIDENTS AT GOMBE UNITED

NNL Condemns Incidents at Gombe United vs Jigawa Golden Stars Match

Danlami Alanana, Chief Operating Officer of the Nigeria National League (NNL), has expressed the league’s displeasure over incidents that occurred during the match between Gombe United FC and Jigawa Golden Stars.

The match was played on December 21, 2025, at the Pantami Stadium, Gombe.

According to Alanana, the NNL was dismayed by reports from the encounter, describing the situation at the Pantami Stadium as unacceptable and

contrary to the values and regulations of the league.

He stated that the NNL would thoroughly investigate the match and all related incidents, adding that the league is poised to take necessary and appropriate decisions in line with its rules and disciplinary procedures.

The NNL reaffirmed its commitment to fair play, safety, and professionalism across all league fixtures, warning that any acts capable of undermining the integrity of the competition would not be tolerated

SPORTS

Nigeria places 6th, as weightlifting, athletics raise hope at African Youth Games in Angola

The curtain was drawn on the 4th African Youth Games in Luanda, Angola as Nigeria finished sixth position, which calls for urgent push for deeper investment in youth sports.

Enabled by weightlifting and athletics, Nigeria ended the Games with 32 medals 17 gold, 8 silver, 7 bronze.

It was a respectable haul in a fiercely competitive championship, but one that also highlighted how far the country must go to consistently chal-

lenge Africa's emerging youth powerhouses.

Team South Africa delivered a dominant performance in Luanda, Angola, finishing top of the medal table on Saturday with the highest overall tally.

The 88-member Team SA squad, drawn from 12 sports, marking the country's first time at the top of the standings in three editions.

Their haul surpassed the 93 medals won in 2014, when South Africa finished second in Algeria, while they placed

sixth at the 2018 Games in Gaborone.

Seven of the 12 sporting games contributed medals, with swimming, athletics, karate, weightlifting, badminton, cycling and tennis all reaching the podium during what proved to be a historic championship campaign with a staggering 99 medals, 45 gold, 38 silver and 16 bronze.

Swimming led the medal charge with 61 medals, followed by athletics with 19. Karate and weightlifting each contributed

six medals, cycling added three, while badminton and tennis secured two medals apiece.

Nigeria found itself looking up at rivals who arrived with better-prepared systems, broader talent pipelines and stronger institutional backing.

Algeria with 83 medals and Egypt with 76 medals completed the top three, with Tunisia and Cameroon rounding out the top five ahead of Nigeria. Ghana claimed the final spot in the top ten.

Kenya clinched 12 medals on the last day of the Games to place seventh overall with a total of 35 medals in the country's first time to participate in the youthful fiesta held in Luanda, Angola.

Kenya participated in 17 out of 33 disciplines with a contingent of 87 athletes.

For Team Nigeria, the bright spots were clear. Weightlifting delivered crucial gold medals, while athletics once again proved to be a reliable medal factory, keeping the country firmly inside the top six.



ROYAL AIR MAROC

Royal Air Maroc emerges airline of choice for AFCON 2025 journalists

Royal Air Maroc has emerged as the preferred airline for African sports journalists covering the TotalEnergies CAF Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) Morocco 2025.

The airline's status follows its role as the Confederation of African Football's (CAF) Official Global Partner for the tournament scheduled from Dec. 21, 2025 to Jan. 18, 2026.

Industry observers say the Moroccan flag carrier's extensive African network, flexible schedules and seamless connections through Casablanca give it a competitive edge for time-bound tournament coverage.

Several sports journalists across the continent have attested to the airline's reliability, punctuality and media-friendly services during major football events.

"Royal Air Maroc understands the urgency that comes with tournament reporting."

Mr Akin Adeyemi, a Nigerian football writer and broadcast analyst, said the airline's consistency helps journalists meet tight deadlines.

"When you are chasing post-match interviews and filing stories across time zones, you need an airline that keeps to schedule."

"Royal Air Maroc gives that confidence," he said.

He underscored the need for additional routes from Nigeria and a dedicated travel package for journalists and fans eager to experience the continental spectacle in Morocco.

From East Africa, Kenyan sports journalist Ms Grace Wanjiru said the airline's connectivity has eased intra-African travel for journalists.

"The airline makes movement across Africa seamless. I can fly from Nairobi, connect smoothly, and arrive refreshed for match-day coverage," Wanjiru said.

South African football correspondent Mr Thabo Maseko said punctuality and baggage handling were critical advantages.

"The punctuality is key. You land on time, your equipment arrives intact, and that alone reduces stress during AFCON," Maseko said.

Ghanaian sports broadcaster Mr Kwame Boateng said the airline's journalist-friendly services made a difference during long assignments.

"The baggage allowance helps when travelling with cameras and laptops."

"Onboard comfort also allows you to work mid-flight," he said.



NIGERIA WEIGHTLIFTING ATHLETICS

Tinubu Sports Festival ends in Akure, uncovers young talents

The maiden edition of the President Bola Tinubu Sports Festival in Ondo State on Tuesday ended on a colourful note at the sports complex of Federal University of Technology, Akure (FUTA).

The event, which lasted over a month, attracted a large turnout of sports enthusiasts and youths across the state.

The grassroots sports fiesta, organised by the Grassroots Movement for Tinubu (GMT), featured athletes from various zones of the state competing in football, athletics, table tennis and other games.

Mr Saka Yusuf-Ogunleye, Director-General (DG) of GMT in the state, at the grand finale, said the festival was designed to discover, nurture and develop young talents while promoting unity, discipline and youth engagement through sports.

Yusuf-Ogunleye noted that sports remained a powerful tool for nation-building, adding that the initiative aligned with Tinubu's emphasis on youth empowerment and productive engagement.

The DG appreciated the sponsor of the festival, Dr Olubunmi Tunji-Ojo, the Interior Minister, for his steadfast support and encouragement given to the group and the president.

He explained that the festival

also served as a platform to mobilise grassroots support for the president's Renewed Hope Agenda.

According to him, it provides young people with opportunities to showcase their talents in a competitive but friendly environment.

Yusuf-Ogunleye expressed appreciation to FUTA and other tertiary institutions across the zones for providing facilities that ensured the smooth hosting of the festival, despite logistical challenges.

"Our vision is clear: to mobilise grassroots support for the Renewed Hope Agenda of President Bola Tinubu, while enlightening citizens about policies that aim to strengthen the economy, create jobs, secure lives and restore national

confidence.

"Our mission is to engage, educate and empower, peacefully and patriotically, ensuring that governance is understood not as distant politics but as shared responsibility," he said.

Similarly, the DG of GMT in Ogun State, Hon. Tola Banjo, said

the group's collective purpose was to work together and showcase the president's work because campaigns had not started.

Banjo commended the initiative behind the sports festival, noting that it would engender grassroots development end engagement.



GRASSROOTS MOVEMENT FOR TINUBU COMMITTEE

FG fulfils housing, land pledges to Super Eagles for 2023 AFCON feat

The Federal Government has fulfilled its housing and land pledges to Super Eagles players for their runner-up finish at the 2023 Africa Cup of Nations in Côte d'Ivoire.

The Nigeria Football Federation (NFF) had confirmed that players received certificates for the allocated plots of land and housing units promised by President Bola Tinubu.

Similarly, Promise Efoghe,

the Media Officer of the Super Eagles told the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) that the documents were presented to the players at the team's camp in Fes, Morocco, on Monday.

Nigeria finished second at the tournament, played in 2024, after a 2-1 defeat to hosts Côte d'Ivoire in the final.

On their return, Tinubu hosted the team at the Presidential Villa and conferred the Officer of the Order of the Niger (OON)

on each squad member.

The president also approved a plot of land in the Federal Capital Territory and a flat for every player in recognition of their performance.

Certificates were also presented to the players as instruments of conferment of OON by Sen. Abdul Ningi, the Chairman, Senate Committee on Sports and the Comptroller-General of Customs, Bashir Adeniyi.



IWOBI RECEIVED CERTIFICATES FOR THE ALLOCATED PLOTS OF LAND AND HOUSING UNITS PROMISED BY THE PRESIDENT