

# Lassa fever claims 215 lives nationwide in 2025

## ● Edo among worst-hit states

Governor Monday Okpebholo of Edo State has described Auchi Kingdom as peaceful and one of the most progressive communities in the state.

Okpebholo made the remark at the 29th edition of the Auchi Day Celebration of Allah Most High, held in Auchi, the Head-

quarters of Etsako West Local Government Area. Lassa fever claimed no fewer than 215 lives across Nigeria in 2025, with Edo State ranked among the worst-affected states as the country battled a persistent outbreak of the viral

haemorrhagic disease. The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (NCDC), in its Lassa Fever Situation Report for Epidemiological Week 52 (December 22-28, 2025), said the case fa-

tality rate rose to 18.7 percent, up from 16.3 percent recorded during the same period in 2024, despite a reduction in the overall number of suspected and confirmed cases.

According to the report, Nigeria recorded 1,148 confirmed cases out of 9,389 suspected

cases in 2025, with infections reported in 22 states and 107 local government areas. Edo State accounted for 16 percent of all confirmed cases nationwide, placing it among the four states that collectively contributed 89 percent of total infections recorded during the year.

The NCDC identified Ondo State as the worst hit with 35 percent of confirmed cases, followed by Bauchi with 26 percent, Edo with 16 percent and Taraba with 12 percent.

The report noted that in Epi-

CONTINUES ON PG 2 >>

# The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

Facebook Twitter Instagram YouTube NigerianObserver @Nigerian\_Observer @NigerianObserver www.nigerianobservernews.com

PUBLISHED SINCE MAY 29, 1968 | VOL. 47, NO. 1,177 | FRIDAY 16TH-SUNDAY 18TH JANUARY, 2026.

**Cholera remains continent's deadliest epidemic —Africa CDC**

—Pg 6

# Nigeria's economy to grow by 4.7% —Finance Minister

## ● As Edo targets informal sector to meet ₦160bn IGR goal

Minister of Finance and Coordinating Minister for the Economy, Mr Wale Edun has said that the nation's economy is projected to grow 4.68 percent in 2026 as the government drives investment-led, inclusive growth aimed at creating jobs and boosting citizens' welfare.

Edun made the remarks on Thursday in Lagos while delivering the keynote address at

the launch of the Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG) Macroeconomic Outlook Report for 2026.

He said the growth projection aligns with the government's medium-term goal of achieving seven percent annual growth and building a one-trillion-dollar economy by the end of the decade.

According to Edun, the economy in 2026 is projected to grow at 4.68 percent, consistent with our path to seven percent growth

per annum and a one-trillion dollar economy by 2030.

He projected average inflation at 16.5 percent and the exchange rate at about N1,400 per dollar.

"For inflation, as we have said, we need to get into simple figures. It is expected to average 16.5 percent and the exchange rate, N1,400 per dollar," he said.

Edun noted that the 2026 budget, titled "Budget of Consolidation, Renewed Resilience and Shared Prosperity," reflects President Bola Tinubu's commitment

to ensuring that macroeconomic improvements translate into real gains in Nigerians' daily lives.

"It is not about the metrics or the percentages; it is about the lived experience of Nigerians in terms of electricity supply, food availability and improved welfare," he said.

He said the budget deficit, estimated at about four per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), reflected the scale of Nigeria's development needs and the ambition to accelerate growth.

Edun emphasised that following the removal of distortions and recent stabilisation measures, the focus of economic policy had shifted to driving growth through increased investment.

"Ongoing investments in digital infrastructure, including the rollout of over 90,000 kilometres of fibre optic cables in collaboration with the World Bank and the Ministry of Communications are part of efforts to empower young Ni-

gerians and support technology-driven growth," he said.

The minister said the reform programme was anchored on four objectives.

"These include: consolidating macroeconomic stability, improving the business and investment climate, strengthening human capital while protecting the vulnerable through social protection, and stimulating broad-based economic

CONTINUES ON PG 2 >>



**ARMED FORCES CELEBRATION:**

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo about to lay a wreath at the Cenotaph at Oba Ovonramwen Square, Benin City during the Armed Forces Celebration and Remembrance Day.

## Okpebholo seeks stronger support for Armed Forces, widows

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, has called for stronger national and institutional support for the Nigerian Armed Forces, stressing that the sacrifices of fallen and serving personnel must be matched with sustained care for their families and retirees.

The governor made the call on Thursday at the 2026 Armed Forces Remembrance Day ceremony held at the Museum Grounds, Oba Ovonramwen Square, Benin City, where wreaths were laid in honour of soldiers who lost their lives defending the nation's unity.

Governor Okpebholo said the occasion was a solemn reminder of the price paid for Nigeria's continued existence, noting that many officers and men laid down their lives to keep the country united.

"We are here to honour our fallen heroes who sacrificed

their lives for the continued existence and unity of Nigeria. Their sacrifices must never be forgotten. We pray that their souls rest in peace and that their families are given the strength to bear the loss," he said.

He also charged officers and men still in active service to remain committed to the defence of the country, assuring them that their sacrifices, as well as those of their fallen colleagues, would continue to be recognised.

Calling attention to the welfare of families left behind, the State Coordinator of the Military Widows Association, Mrs Umar Sheriffat, urged government at all levels to strengthen support for widows of fallen soldiers, many of whom she said are struggling to care for their children.

She appealed for deliberate empowerment programmes and formal recognition for the widows to enable them provide education and basic

CONTINUES ON PG 2 >>

**Okpebholo receives freed AAU students, warns against violence**

—Pg 2

**Edo doctor regains freedom after 2 weeks in captivity**

—Pg 4

**Museveni votes as Uganda election unfolds amid delays and crackdown**

—Pg 9

**BUA Boss, Abdul Samad Rabiu praises Super Eagles, Confirms \$500,000 pledge despite semi-final loss**

—Pg 16

# Okpebholo receives freed AAU students, warns against violence

## BENIN CITY

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, has received students of Ambrose Alli University (AAU), Ekpoma, who were recently released after their arrest in connection with the Ekpoma protest, warning against violence while reaffirming his administration's commitment to reviving the university.

Speaking during a stakeholders' engagement at Government House, Benin City, the Governor expressed pain over the violent turn of the protest which he described as regrettable, particularly at a time his administration was pursuing reforms to reposition the institution.

Governor Okpebholo disclosed that upon assumption of office, AAU was receiving a monthly subvention of ₦41 million to cover electricity, water, printing and salaries, which he described as grossly inadequate.

He noted that under the previous administration, a single consultant was reportedly paid ₦59 million monthly, more than the amount allocated to the entire university community.

He announced that his administration immediately increased AAU's monthly sub-

vention from ₦41 million to ₦500 million as part of deliberate efforts to revive and reposition the institution. According to him, the focus since then has been on stabilising the university and restoring its academic and administrative standards.

The governor further revealed that outstanding salary and wage arrears owed to AAU staff are estimated at about ₦41 billion, adding that his government is working out modalities to gradually offset the liabilities.

Cautioning students against protests that could be hijacked by criminal elements, Okpebholo urged them to focus on their studies and shun violence.

He acknowledged prevailing security challenges in Ekpoma and other parts of the country, stressing that insecurity is a collective problem that requires joint responsibility.

He, however, noted that investigations by security agencies indicated that many criminal activities around Ekpoma were perpetrated by locals, calling on the community to identify and confront the real sources of insecurity.

The governor condemned the destruction of shops and looting of property during the protest, describing such actions as coun-

terproductive and harmful to already struggling livelihoods.

He appealed for peace and constructive engagement, assuring that criminals would not be allowed to find refuge anywhere in Edo State.

He cited the ongoing recon-

struction of the Benin-Auchi Road, awarded at about ₦135 billion, as evidence of what peaceful engagement and dialogue can achieve, noting that the project followed his intervention with President Bola Ahmed Tinubu.

Commissioner for Education, Dr Paddy Iyamu, praised the governor's swift intervention and commitment to education, while other speakers commended his decision to choose dialogue over force. The meeting, attended by the

Deputy Governor, Hon Dennis Idahosa, the Chief of Staff, Mallam Gani Audu, the Minister of Youth and other top officials, marked a major step towards reconciliation between the state government and the AAU community



## COURTESY VISIT TO AGEN:

L-R: Deputy Chairman, Medical Advisory Committee (Research and Ethics), University of Benin Teaching Hospital UBTH), Prof. Adebola Ehizele; Chief Medical Director of UBTH, Prof. (Mrs) Idia Ize-Iyamu; Managing Director of Agen Longspan Industries, Mr Andy Agenmonmen and Chairman, Medical Advisory Committee, UBTH, Dr Emmanuel Osaigbovo, during a courtesy visit to Agen Longspan Industries in Benin City.

## Lassa fever claims 215 lives nationwide...

### «CONTINUED FROM PG 1

demiological Week 52 alone, 27 new confirmed cases and nine deaths were recorded across Bauchi, Ondo, Ebonyi, Taraba and Nasarawa states, an increase from 21 cases in the previous week, indicating sustained transmission in high-burden areas.

Young adults between the ages of 21 and 30 were the most affected demographic group, with confirmed cases ranging from one to 96 years and a median age of 30 years. The male-to-female ratio among confirmed cases stood at 1:0.8.

The NCDC attributed the high fatality rate largely to late presentation of patients at health facilities, poor health-seeking behaviour, high cost of treatment in endemic communities, poor environmental sanitation and low public awareness.

To contain the outbreak, the agency said it deployed 10 National Rapid Response Teams to affected states, including Edo, alongside intensified training of healthcare workers, strengthened infection prevention and control measures, distribution of Ribavirin, personal protective equipment and other

response materials, as well as expanded risk communication and community engagement.

The agency added that no new healthcare worker infection was recorded in Week 52, attributing this to improved adherence to infection prevention and control protocols in treatment centres.

As the country prepares for a new outbreak season, the NCDC urged Edo and other states to sustain year-round community sensitisation on Lassa fever prevention, while advising healthcare workers to maintain a high index of suspicion and ensure early diagnosis and prompt treatment of suspected cases.

Lassa fever is an acute viral haemorrhagic illness transmitted mainly through contact with food or household items contaminated by the urine or faeces of infected rodents, with human-to-human transmission also possible through contact with bodily fluids of infected persons.

The NCDC advised residents to maintain good hygiene, store food properly, keep homes rodent-free and seek early medical attention when symptoms occur.

## Okpebholo seeks stronger support for...

### «CONTINUED FROM PG 1

needs for their families.

In a similar vein, a retired Major of the Nigerian Army, Joe Koma, called for improved welfare for military retirees, warning that inadequate post-service care could dampen the morale of serving personnel.

Koma acknowledged that pensions were being paid reg-

ularly but appealed for an upward review, stressing that retired officers who risked their lives for the nation deserved better living conditions.

The Armed Forces Remembrance Day is marked annually to honour Nigeria's fallen heroes and to renew national commitment to the welfare of serving and retired military personnel.

## UBTH CMD hails Agenmonmen's support for indigent patients

### BENIN CITY

The Chief Medical Director of the University of Benin Teaching Hospital (UBTH), Prof. Idia Ize-Iyamu, has commended the Managing Director of Agen Longspan Industries, Mr Andy Agenmonmen, for his sustained support for indigent patients and his commitment to a long-standing partnership with the hospital.

Prof. Ize-Iyamu gave the commendation on Wednesday during a courtesy visit to the management of Agen Longspan Industries in Benin City, where she called for continued mutual support between UBTH and the company, a leading manu-

facturer of longspan aluminium roofing sheets and accessories.

She described Mr Agenmonmen as a philanthropist and astute businessman whose corporate social responsibility initiatives have positively impacted many lives, particularly indigent patients receiving care at UBTH.

The CMD stressed the importance of strengthening collaboration between the hospital and the private sector to enhance access to quality healthcare.

According to her, UBTH has been repositioned under her leadership to deliver efficient, quality and world-class healthcare services, but continues to grapple with challenges posed by

patients who require urgent medical care but are unable to pay.

"We are sometimes faced with the challenge of indigent patients who are indebted. UBTH is one of the cheapest and most efficient hospitals around, yet we still have patients who desire the best care but lack the means to pay. In such cases, the debts are recorded as bad debts, which affect our operations and running costs," Prof. Ize-Iyamu said.

She expressed appreciation to Agen Longspan Industries for its consistent support to indigent patients and the hospital over the years, noting that such interventions have helped save lives and ease operational pressures.

Responding, Mr Agenmonmen thanked the CMD and her management team for the visit and reaffirmed the company's unwavering commitment to healthcare interventions and its partnership with UBTH.

He acknowledged the hospital's critical role in the delivery of quality healthcare services and pledged continued support for its efforts to provide accessible and affordable medical care.

"We will continue to support indigent patients, as we have always done, by the grace of God. I believe strongly in helping those who cannot afford medical bills. I know that many of those we have assisted offer prayers for me and my family," he said

## Nigeria's economy to grow by 4.7%...

### «CONTINUED FROM PG 1

growth," he noted.

On fiscal performance, Edun said that even with shortfalls in oil and gas revenues compared to budgeted levels, the Federal Government prioritised fiscal federalism, transparency, and accountability in managing the federation account.

"This ensured that funds due to states and sub-national governments were fully disbursed, significantly strengthening their financial positions," he said.

He added that many states recorded budget surpluses of about three percent, enabling increased spending on health, education, public services, and other social and economic priorities.

Edun also highlighted that the Federal Government demonstrated fiscal discipline by extending the 2024 budget

to ensure the completion of priority capital projects.

"Aggregate capital expenditure in 2024 stood at about ₦11.1 trillion, representing an 85 percent performance, reflecting the administration's emphasis on completing on-going projects," the minister explained.

He said all statutory obligations, including foreign and domestic debt servicing as well as salary payments, were fully met.

"These outcomes underscore a strong commitment to transparency, structural reform and fiscal discipline, as well as laying the foundation for rapid, sustained and inclusive growth," Edun added.

He noted the government's long-term growth target of seven per cent was aimed at outpacing population growth and lifting millions of Nigeri-

ans out of poverty.

The minister explained that reducing reliance on debt was a key fiscal priority, with renewed emphasis on boosting government revenue through digitalisation, central billing systems, and improved reconciliation processes to block leakages.

"The introduction of a central billing and receipt system would enhance transparency by tracking assessments and payments in real time across government agencies," he said.

Edun also highlighted the implementation of a new tax law designed to be pro-poor, broaden the tax base, simplify compliance, and exempt essential goods, food items, and small businesses.

He said President Tinubu's strategic vision was to build a resilient, diversified, and globally competitive econo-

my, leveraging exchange rate stability and expanded trade opportunities under ECOWAS and the African Continental Free Trade Area.

Edun identified key priorities for 2026 to include improving competitiveness through sound governance, boosting agricultural productivity and food security, accelerating infrastructure and energy development, and investing in human capital.

He acknowledged constraints in global concessional financing and said Nigeria must increasingly rely on domestic resource mobilisation and private sector investment to fund development.

Edun urged Nigerians at home and in the diaspora to take advantage of improved macroeconomic conditions to invest in the economy.

"The private sector is indis-

CONTINUES ON PG 7»

## NEWS

# Commissioner charges Agric ministry staff on productivity, pledges support for welfare

## BENIN CITY

Edo State Commissioner for Agriculture and Food Security, Dr Jerry Uwangué, has charged staff of the ministry to be more effective, responsive and proactive in the discharge of their duties, stressing that improved performance is key to achieving food security in the state.

The commissioner gave the charge during a meeting with

staff at the Agriculture Hub in Benin City.

He said renewed teamwork, dedication and a shared commitment to excellence would enable the ministry to record significant progress and transform the agricultural sector.

Dr Uwangué noted that Governor Monday Okpebholo has invested heavily in agriculture, including the procurement of farm equipment, and stressed that staff must justify these in-

vestments through hard work and professionalism.

He reaffirmed his commitment to staff welfare, assuring that his office remains open for ideas and initiatives capable of uplifting the ministry. He emphasised strict adherence to standards and professional excellence, calling on all staff to work collectively to improve service delivery.

The commissioner also proposed the creation of a committee to organise periodic

bonding and recreational activities to strengthen unity and teamwork among staff.

During an interactive session, staff members shared ideas and raised concerns related to their duties.

The Director of Agricultural Services, Mr Ogunbor David, thanked the governor for providing additional bulldozers to the ministry and assured the commissioner of the ministry's readiness to ensure food sustainability in the state.

Similarly, the Director of Administration, Mrs Odia Franca, appreciated the commissioner for

the Christmas package and party organised for staff, describing it as a first in the ministry.

She also sympathized with

him over the loss of his mother and assured him of the ministry's full cooperation in achieving its set goals.

## Nigeria, EU pledge to deepen strategic partnership

CAROLINE AMEH

## ABUJA

Nigeria and the European Union have reaffirmed their commitment to a strengthened strategic partnership across trade, security, climate action, and development.

The discussions took place at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where the Permanent Secretary, Ambassador Dunoma Umar Ahmed met EU Ambassador to Nigeria and ECOWAS, Mr. Gautier Mignot. Ambassador Ahmed described the EU as a critical development partner, highlighting areas of cooperation including agricul-

ture, digital economy, health, education, and peacekeeping.

Both parties also agreed on the importance of tackling insecurity, youth unemployment, and climate change while enhancing investment opportunities. Preparations for a Nigeria-EU Ministerial Meeting in Abuja in March 2026 were confirmed, aimed at advancing collaboration under the EU's Global Gateway Strategy.

Ambassador Mignot commended the alignment of Nigeria's priorities with EU objectives, noting 2026 as pivotal for scaling up engagements in infrastructure, digital connectivity, clean energy, and youth development programmes.

## Igbinedion University inducts 149 pharmacists

### VC urges stronger public health systems

EDWARD OSEGHE

## OKADA

Igbinedion University, Okada, Edo State, has inducted 149 pharmacy graduates into the profession, with the Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Lawrence Ezemonye, urging them to play active roles in bridging critical gaps in Nigeria's public health system.

Prof. Ezemonye made the call in his opening address at the 15th Oath-Taking and Induction Ceremony of Pharmacy Graduates of the Dora Akunyili College of Pharmacy, held on Thursday in Okada.

Describing the inductees as reformers, innovators and future leaders, the Vice-Chancellor charged them to deploy their professional knowledge with a deep understanding of the human condition, stressing that compassion must go hand in hand with competence in pharmacy practice.

"Your ability to translate complex drug information into compassionate care will determine the quality of your impact," he said.

According to him, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the crucial role of pharmacists in public health, ranging from vaccine distribution to patient education, while also exposing systemic gaps that the new generation of pharmacists must help to close.

While congratulating the graduates, Prof. Ezemonye urged them to build bridges between care and compassion, innovation and equity, as well as knowledge and kindness, noting that such values would not only advance the profes-

sion but also uplift humanity.

The Guest Speaker, Pharm. (Sir) Bankole Ezebulo, who delivered a lecture titled "Building Bridges and Raising Hope for the Next Generation of Compassionate Pharmacists," encouraged the inductees to recognise opportunities where others see limitations.

"If you build bridges, you will connect lives to healing; if you raise hope, you will change futures; and if you remain compassionate, you will redefine pharmacy for generations to come," he said.

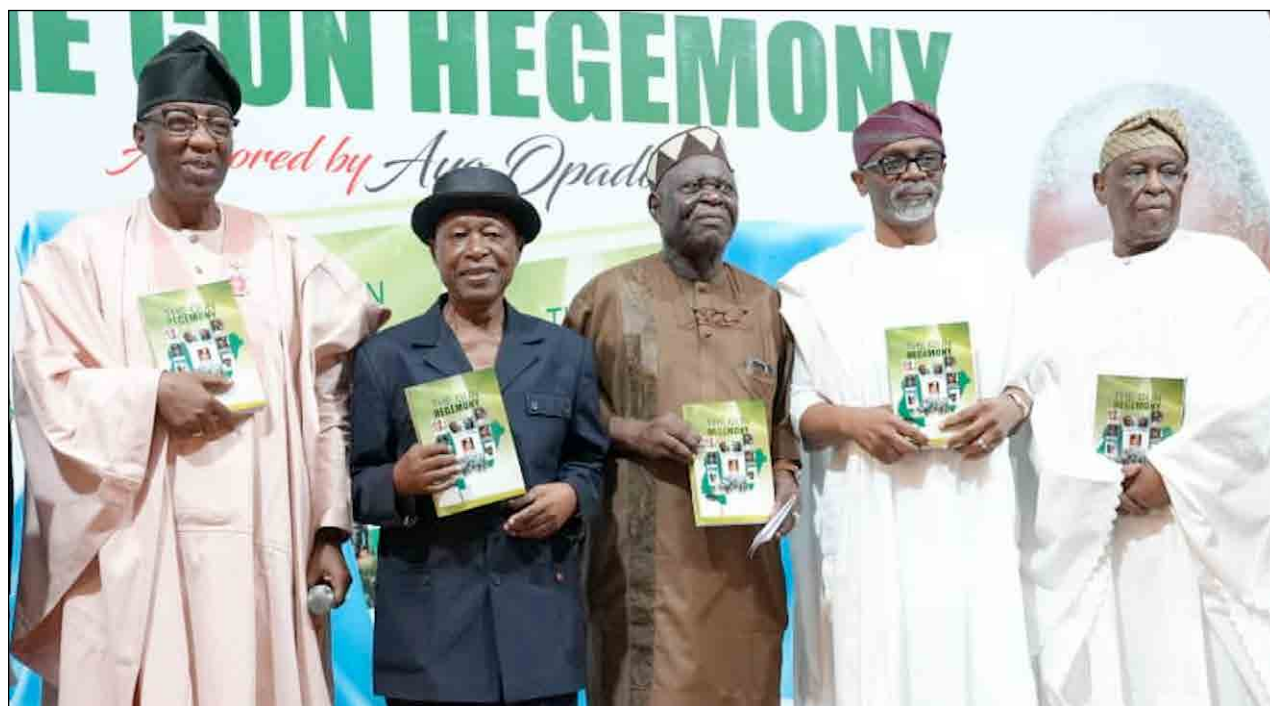
Also speaking, the Registrar of the Pharmacy Council of Nigeria (PCN), Pharm. Ibrahim Ahmed, represented by the South-South Zonal Director, Pharm. Azeeh Mande, enjoined the new pharmacists to uphold high ethical standards and demonstrate leadership in professional practice.

He emphasised that strict adherence to the Code of Ethics was indispensable to pharmacy practice and vital for sustainable healthcare delivery in Nigeria.

Highlights of the ceremony included the administration of the oath to the inductees, the presentation of provisional registration certificates, and the award of the PCN cash prize and certificate to the Best Graduating Student, Olowosoyo Glory Temitope.



PROF. EZEMONYE



## BOOK LAUNCH:

L-R: Chief Launcher, Otunba Gbenga Daniel; Chairman of the occasion/Publisher of Vanguard Newspaper, Mr Sam Amuka; Author of the Book, Ayo Opadkun; Chief of Staff to President, Femi Gbajabiamila; former Governor of Ogun State, Chief Olusegun Osoba during a Book launch in Lagos on Thursday.

## Marwa promotes 61 NDLEA officers, decorates personnel in Edo

## BENIN CITY

The Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), Brigadier General Mohamed Buba Marwa (Rtd), has approved the promotion of 61 personnel serving in the Edo State Command, in a move aimed at strengthening morale and operational effectiveness within the agency.

The promoted officers were formally decorated at a ceremony at the NDLEA State Command headquarters in Benin

City, where the Edo State Commander, Dr Mitchell Ofoyeju, performed the decoration on behalf of the agency's leadership.

Speaking at the event, Dr Ofoyeju commended the Marwa-led administration for institutionalising regular promotions within the NDLEA, describing the development as a clear demonstration of the agency's commitment to recognising diligence, professionalism and sacrifice. He noted that the elevation of officers across different cadres reflected their contributions to the fight against drug trafficking

and substance abuse.

According to him, the promotions go beyond the conferment of new ranks, representing official recognition of the integrity, resilience and dedication displayed by the officers in the course of enforcing narcotics laws and safeguarding communities across Edo State.

He praised their courage in confronting the dangers associated with drug law enforcement and urged them to remain steadfast.

Dr Ofoyeju charged the newly promoted personnel to justify the confidence reposed in them by upholding high ethical standards, providing exemplary leadership and men-

toring junior officers.

He stressed that with higher ranks comes greater responsibilities, accountability and expectations of discipline.

Emphasising teamwork and professionalism as critical pillars in the agency's operations, the commander expressed confidence that the promotions would reinvigorate the officers and further enhance the NDLEA's capacity to curb illicit drug activities in Edo State and across the country.

The ceremony was witnessed by family members and well-wishers of the promoted officers, whose support and sacrifices were also acknowledged during the event.

## FCT voter register hits 1.68m as INEC resumes CVR in Anambra

CAROLINE AMEH

## ABUJA

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has unveiled the revised Register of Voters for the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), ahead of the February 21, 2026, Area Council Election.

The updated register now lists 1,680,315 eligible voters.

The announcement was made by FCT Resident Electoral Commissioner, Malam Aminu Idris, at a stakeholders' meeting in Abuja.

He noted that the revision involved biometric de-duplication, claims and objections, and the compilation of a sup-

plementary list, in compliance with the Electoral Act, 2022.

Malam Idris also briefed political parties on INEC's readiness for the election, highlighting completed preparations, including monitoring party primaries, candidate lists, voter education, and security collaborations. Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) for new registrants and

updated records have been delivered, with collection dates to be announced.

Meanwhile, INEC has resumed Continuous Voter Registration (CVR) in Anambra State, allowing eligible voters to register, update records, replace PVCs, or transfer voting locations ahead of the 2027 General Election.

# Edo doctor regains freedom after 2 weeks in captivity

## BENIN CITY

Dr Abu Babatunde, the medical doctor abducted alongside his brother in Auchi, Etsako West Local Government Area, Edo State, on January 1, has regained his freedom after spending two weeks in captivity.

A House Officer at Edo University Teaching Hospital, Iyamho, was kidnapped alongside his younger brother, Abu Tahir, a newly-graduated medical doctor from Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma.

The two brothers were abducted at the gate of their residence in Igbira Camp, Auchi, shortly after

returning from work.

While the abductors initially demanded a N200 million ransom for the duo, the incident, however, took a tragic turn on January 6 when Tahir was said to have been killed by the kidnapers.

His body was later discovered by security operatives near a riverside.

Despite the killing, the kidnapers continued to hold Babatunde, subsequently reducing the ransom demand

to N100 million and later to about N40 million, following negotiations with the family.

The news of Babatunde's release, however, broke on Wednesday night through a viral video circulated on social media.

The video indicated that the doctor was rescued around 8 p.m. by local hunters and vigilance groups during a coordinated operation in the forest.

In the footage, the vigilantes were seen assisting the visibly weak doctor into a waiting ve-

hicle.

A narrator in the video claimed that one of the abductors was neutralised during the rescue operation.

He said that Babatunde sustained a gunshot injury in his leg, leaving him unable to walk unaided after being carried over a long distance from a deep forest.

Confirming the development, Dr Eustace Oseghale, Chairman of Edo branch of Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), said

the association was aware of the doctor's release.

Oseghale said that the state executive council of NMA was in a meeting and would issue an official statement shortly.

The Public Relations Officer of the Police Command in Edo, ASP Eno Ikoedem, also confirmed the release of the medical practitioner to reporters on Thursday.

Ikoedem said that Babatunde had since been reunited with his family.

## Why health workers are essential in schools —Inclusive educationist

### LAGOS

Dr Akhere Akran, a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) Strategist, has said that deploying community health workers in schools is essential to advancing inclusive education and strengthening child wellbeing across Nigeria.

In an interview with newsmen on Thursday, she explains that on-site health workers provide first aid, emergency response, health screenings, and early interventions critical to safeguarding children in public and private schools.

Akran noted that medical emergencies, such as collapses, asthma attacks, seizures, or injuries require immediate professional response to prevent delays that worsen children's health outcomes.

According to the inclusive educationist, integrating healthcare services into schools strengthens inclusive practices, ensuring all children especially those with diverse learning needs receive timely support and uninterrupted, quality education.

"Trained health workers in schools significantly shorten response times during emergencies, save lives, reduce avoidable health crises among learners, and ensure timely first aid, early intervention, and effective safeguarding of children's wellbeing," she said.

She adds that early detection of illnesses, disabilities, and mental health challenges through routine screenings reduces absenteeism and supports consistent learning.

"This supports and saves lives as well as ensures that children learn in safe environments," Akran said, stressing the importance of professional health presence within daily school activities.

Akran describes schools as living communities where children spend most of their day, making integrated healthcare a realistic and child-centred safeguarding responsibility.

Akran explained that embedded health workers strengthen child protection by identifying vulnerabilities early and coordinating referrals for physical and emotional support.

## Otu reiterates commitment to support for military veterans, families

### CALABAR

Governor Bassey Otu of Cross River State, has reiterated his administration's commitment to the welfare of military veterans and their families.

Otu who spoke at the 2026 Armed Forces Remembrance Day celebration in Calabar on Thursday, said that his administration would not forget the contributions of fallen heroes.

Represented by his Deputy, Dr Peter Odey, the governor described the armed forces remembrance day as a reminder of the sacrifices made by military veterans to keep Nigeria united and peaceful.

"The lesson is to remember our fallen heroes, people who sacrificed for the country, many of them paid with their lives to protect this nation," he said.

Otu further said that widows of late military officers would continue to be part of his government's programmes and interventions.

"All widows are being carried along, the Commissioner for Social Welfare ensures their inclu-

sion in every programme," he said.

Earlier, the Cross River Chairman, Nigerian Legion, Daniel Ojugbo, said that the ceremony was not only an honour for fallen heroes, but a time to reflect on the challenges being faced by military veterans and their families.

Ojugbo said that families of fallen military officers faced delayed welfare benefits, limited medical care and unemployment for their widows and other dependants.

He commended Otu for his support, saying that his administration had shown genuine and remarkable concerns for the legion and its members.

Also speaking, the Coordinator, Military Widows in the state, Mrs Miriam Orok, thanked the governor for improved treatment and inclusion in welfare interventions.

"We are actually seeing better changes under Our. He has been carrying us along, and we are very grateful. We also thank the governor's wife for her sense of compassion," she said.

The event featured prayers, wreath-laying, and tributes to the fallen heroes.



**ARMED FORCES REMEMBRANCE DAY:**

Vice President Kashim Shettima laying a wreath during the 2026 Armed Forces Remembrance Day Celebration in Abuja on Thursday.

## Smart Aigbodion takes over as acting MD/CEO of New Edo Line

### BENIN CITY

The General Manager, Maintenance of New Edo Line Transport Services Ltd, Mr. Smart Aigbodion, has been appointed as the Acting Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of the

state-owned transport company.

The appointment, which takes immediate effect, follows the redeployment of Ms Tin-yan Otuomagie as the Managing Director/Chief Executive Officer of New Edo Line to the Ministry of Information for

other duties as may be assigned by the State government.

This development was contained in a Government Special Announcement with Reference No. MOT/8/7, dated January 15, 2026, and signed by the Edo State Commissioner for Transportation, Hon. Uwuilekhoe Saturday Idehen.

According to the govern-

ment announcement, Aigbodion will oversee the affairs of the transport company in an acting capacity pending the appointment of a substantive Managing Director/CEO.

No official reason was given for the change in leadership which the statement indicated, was approved by the Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo

## Climate change: NOA begins sensitisation on public safety in A'lbom

### UYO

The National Orientation Agency (NOA) on Thursday, launched an awareness campaign, aimed at educating residents on the increasing impact of climate change.

The campaign also seeks to enlighten residents on the urgent need for personal and community protection measures.

During the launch in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State on Thursday, the State Director of NOA, Mr

Mkpoutom Mkpoutom, said that the campaign aims at enlightening residents, about the changes in weather patterns.

He said that this includes: unpredictable rise in temperatures, and how these changes threaten public health across the state.

Mkpoutom noted that the current weather was not harmful, but an extreme form of air pollution, which is harmful to health as it could cause oxidative stress which affects body balance.

"Our environment is changing rapidly, and the effects are evident in the disruptions faced by our communities.

"It is paramount that every citizen of Akwa Ibom understands these changes and take necessary steps to protect themselves, their families, and their livelihoods," he said.

He appealed to citizens to take the following precautions which includes: wearing of nose mask, drinking sufficient water, covering of food

and water to keep away dust, washing fruits thoroughly before eating among others.

He directed all NOA structures within the state, to engage with local communities through town hall meetings and collaboration.

He also urged engagement with schools and community leaders, to disseminate vital information on early warning signs, as well as safety protocols during extreme weather conditions.

## NEWS

# Experts hail FG on increased external reserves

LAGOS

An economist, Prof. Ken Ife has said that Nigeria's growing external reserves are boosting the economy by strengthening the Naira, calming the foreign exchange market and creating new opportunities for invest-

ment-led growth.

Ife, President of the Institute of Professional Economists and Policy Management made this known in an interview with newsmen in Lagos on Thursday, following the rise in the country's external reserves to \$45.24 billion.

Ife said the stronger reserve

position was boosting confidence in the foreign exchange market and positioning the Naira for improved stability.

The analyst noted that the outlook remained positive as reforms and investments gained momentum across key sectors.

He pointed to rising output

from the Dangote Petroleum Refinery as a major source of future foreign exchange inflows, particularly from fertiliser, polypropylene, aviation fuel and gas.

"Dangote Petroleum Refinery alone is increasing output from fertiliser, polypropylene, as well as aviation fuel and gas.

"This could enable the company to earn about \$20 billion from exports to the global market," he said.

Ife added that the expected listing of the refinery on the capital market would unlock significant domestic and diaspora investments.

"This means Nigerians at home and in the diaspora could buy shares in the quoted company, and hundreds of billions of dollars could be mobilised locally.

"It will also reduce government foreign borrowing and further stabilise the foreign exchange market," the professor said.

He urged the Federal Government to sustain the reserve build-up while channeling investments into critical sectors to raise productivity and living standards.

Ife also said the improving reserve position should create room for lower lending rates to stimulate growth in the productive sectors of the economy.

Similarly, Dr Muda Yusuf, Chief Executive Officer of the Centre for the Promotion of Private Enterprise (CPPE), commended the government for strengthening the country's external reserves.

He said the development was already supporting exchange rate stability and easing inflationary pressures.

"This is one of the reasons the exchange rate is getting stronger, and it is also helping to slow inflation," Yusuf said.

He urged the government to sustain the momentum by boosting oil production and strengthening non-oil foreign exchange inflows, particularly diaspora remittances.

Nigeria's external reserves rose to \$45.24 billion on December 23, 2025, from \$42.17 billion recorded a month earlier, according to data released by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN).

The data showed a 7.28 percent month-on-month increase, representing a gain of about \$3.1 billion.



2026 ARMED FORCES REMEMBRANCE DAY:

L-R: Air Officer Commanding Mobility Command, Nigerian Air Force Yenagoa Command, Vice Marshal Michael Nanaye Oneyebashi; Flag Officer Commanding Central Naval Command (CNC) Yenagoa, Rear Admiral Suleiman Ibrahim and Naval Officer Commanding Operation Delta Safe Yenagoa, Rear Admiral OBF Oladipo, during the 2026 Armed Forces Remembrance Day celebration in Yenagoa Bayelsa State on Thursday.

## Aiyedatiwa empowers widows of fallen heroes with N50m loan scheme

AKURE

Governor Lucky Aiyedatiwa of Ondo State has reaffirmed his government's commitment to the welfare of widows and dependants of fallen heroes.

Aiyedatiwa made this known on Thursday in Akure during the grand finale of the 2026 Armed Forces Remembrance Day celebration, which featured a parade, laying of wreaths and empowerment of widows of fallen heroes.

Speaking at the event, the governor announced the disbursement of interest-free microcredit loans to widows and dependants of fallen heroes as a recurring feature of the annual celebration.

The governor said that a total of N50 million had been approved and released for the scheme this year.

He said that the loan amount was increased from N200,000 to between N450,000 and N500,000 per beneficiary to accommodate more widows.

The governor also disclosed that the Emblem Appeal Fund was launched with N5 million, in addition to his personal donation of one month's salary, alongside contributions from individuals and institutions.

Aiyedatiwa appealed to beneficiaries to ensure prompt repayment of the loans to sustain the programme and enable more widows to benefit.

He commended military

and civilian stakeholders for their collaboration in ensuring the success of the 2026 Armed Forces Remembrance Day celebration.

"Today's celebration, which is being simultaneously held across the 36 states of the Federation and the Federal Capital Territory, is highly symbolic as it is the highest way of showing our respect as a country to the fallen heroes who paid the supreme sacrifice in the line of duty.

"Today's event is equally a mark of honour to the living veterans and military personnel that have dedicated their lives to the defence of our territorial integrity.

"They deserve our praises and appreciation. As we gather here, it is pertinent for us to reflect on the profound impact of their service.

"Let us remember not only those who have fallen but also the families and loved ones they left behind, particularly the widows whose resilience and strength inspire us.

"For us in Ondo State, this celebration will not be complete without taking responsibility for the welfare of widows of the fallen heroes. This ceremony is, therefore, not just about remembrance, it is also about empowerment," he said.

Aiyedatiwa also called on residents to remain vigilant and support security agencies with timely information, stressing that security remained a collective responsibility.

The governor urged citizens to continue to support one another and honour the legacy of the Armed Forces through compassion and action.

## Sanwo-Olu pledges continued support for armed forces, fallen heroes

LAGOS

Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu of Lagos State has reaffirmed the state government's commitment to supporting the armed forces and families of fallen heroes.

He emphasised that their sacrifices would never be in vain.

Sanwo-Olu stated this while addressing newsmen during the Armed Forces Celebration and Remembrance Day, held at the Remembrance Arcade, Tafawa Balewa Square, Lagos on

Thursday.

The governor, who was represented by his Deputy, Dr Obafemi Hamzat, conveyed a message of solidarity to serving officers.

He said: "The nation is behind them, and we are praying for them. We will do everything possible to support them as they risk their lives to protect us.

"Today, we remember our fallen heroes, pray for them, and encourage our military officials,

"This is to let them know their sacrifices have not been in vain. We also encourage

families that their loved ones will always be remembered."

The governor noted that the event was part of nationwide celebrations while urging the military to uphold unity and democracy.

Sanwo-Olu also reiterated the state government's commitment to supporting widows and children left behind by fallen heroes.

He assured the families of fallen heroes and ex-service-men that the government would continue to support and

collaborate with them, listen to their concerns and work to address them.

Highlights of the event included the firing of rounds volley, laying of wreaths, and the release of ceremonial pigeons and balloons by the governor which symbolised peace in Nigeria.

Thereafter, the governor signed the condolence register.

The Armed Forces Remembrance Day is celebrated annually on January to honour and remember the sacrifices of past and current military personnel.

## Edo begins 2026 hajj data capture, sets Feb 8 deadline

ABDUL-KADIR ABDULLAH

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Muslim Pilgrims Welfare Board has commenced the data capture exercise for all intending pilgrims for the 2026 Hajj, with a deadline fixed for February 8, 2026.

The Executive Secretary of the Board, Eranga Abdulkabir Muhammadkabir, urged prospective pilgrims to submit their international passports without delay to enable timely processing of visas in accordance with guidelines issued by the Saudi Ministry of Hajj.

He explained that the data capture exercise is mandatory for all intending pilgrims and warned that failure to comply within the stipulated time-frame could result in disqualification from the pilgrimage.

The Board assured pilgrims that the exercise would be well organised and seamless, urging full cooperation to prevent last-minute difficulties.

Intending pilgrims were advised to direct enquiries to the Board through its official communication channels or visit the Board's office for further clarification.

## Kogi gov't uncovers fraudulent land certificates, reclaims properties

LOKOJA

The Kogi Government has said that it has uncovered cases of fraud in the processing and issuance of Certificates of Occupancy (C-o-o) in the state.

Mr Kingsley Fanwo, the Commissioner for Information and Communications, disclosed this on Thursday in Lokoja.

Fanwo said the state government had invalidated all alleged fraudulent Certificates of Occupancy and reclaimed properties acquired through illegal means.

He described the action as a decisive move to curb land corruption, stressing that the administration had adopted a zero-tolerance stance on land-related fraud.

According to him, investigations revealed extensive irregularities in the issuance of

C of O, with many certificates lacking proper documentation, files and adherence to statutory procedures.

"The state government has declared all such certificates null and void, as only the governor has the constitutional authority to sign and validate Certificates of Occupancy.

"Illegally acquired government properties have been reclaimed, and individuals involved in questionable land transactions are advised to verify the status of their documents with the appropriate authorities.

"Those found culpable in the fraudulent activities will be prosecuted," Fanwo said.

He emphasised the government's commitment to transparency, accountability and the protection of public assets.

"Land-related fraud and impunity are now history in Kogi State," he stated.

# NNMDA, NITR to develop indigenous medicine for river blindness, sleeping sickness

## ABUJA

The Nigerian Natural Medicines Development Agency (NNMDA) and the Nigerian Institute for Onchocerciasis, Trypanosomiasis and Research (NITR) have partnered to locally produce medicine for sleeping sickness, river blindness in one year.

Also known as sleeping sickness, trypanosomiasis is an infection that spreads from the bites of infected tsetse flies,

while the advanced symptoms include drowsiness.

Onchocerciasis, popularly known as river blindness, is spread by repeated bites from infected black flies.

The Director-General, NNMDA, Prof. Martins Emeje, said this in an interview with newsmen on the sidelines of the recent signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) by the two institutions in Abuja.

“NITR will be looking at everything about the sickness

of the type of animals, flies, its epidemiology, the synthesis needed to be done.

“NNMDA will look at the studies they have done, what they have generated, we will convert them to dosage form.

“We will be applying nanotechnology and in the next twelve months we are going to

come out with our own natural product for treatment of sleeping sickness and river blindness,” Emeje said.

He said the collaboration was important as the two organisations have the mandate to research and develop medications for tropical diseases such as river blindness and sleeping sickness, among others.

Mr Phillip Ndiomu, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of In-

novation, Science and Technology, during the signing of the MoU, said the collaboration reflected the commitment towards innovation-driven solutions.

Ndiomu said the federal government was committed to solutions that would translate research into practical homegrown technologies for public health protection, disease control and economic value creation.

According to Phillip, the

event marks a significant step towards advancing science, natural resources and innovation for national development.

Dr Joachim Ajakaiye, Director-General of NITR, also said the institute was committed to conducting research, developing capacity building for the control and elimination of African Trypanosomiasis and Onchocerciasis and their respective vectors in the country

## Commissioner seeks stakeholder synergy to revamp Edo lands, housing sector

### BENIN CITY

The Edo State Commissioner for Lands and Housing, Hon. Yakubu Musa (JP), has called for strong collaboration among professionals and stakeholders to reposition the state's lands and housing sector for efficient and effective service delivery.

Hon. Musa made the call while receiving the executive members of the Nigerian Institute of Surveyors (NIS) at the Ministry.

He stressed that partnership and synergy are critical to realising the vision of Governor Monday Okpebholo to revive the sector, which he said had remained largely inactive for more than eight years.

He said the Ministry was committed to harnessing professional expertise, innovation and available resources to drive sustainable development across the sector.

According to him, meaningful collaboration would fast-track reforms and improve service delivery to Edo residents.

“We are keen on tapping into expertise and resources to boost the Lands and Housing sector, and we urge all stakeholders

to join hands with us to ensure actualisation,” the Commissioner said, assuring the Institute of the Ministry's openness to professional input, innovation and constructive suggestions.

Earlier, the Chairman of the Nigerian Institute of Surveyors, Edo State Branch, Engr. Odaro Bruno Igbiovvia, pledged the Institute's support for the Okpebholo administration's SHINE Agenda and expressed readiness to partner with the Ministry in repositioning the sector.

The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry, Dr. (Mrs.) Joy Akhigbe, also emphasised the need for sustained synergy both within the Ministry and with external stakeholders to achieve set objectives.

In a related development, Hon. Musa also received the ALMAGOR Realty team, a real estate and building construction firm, where he reiterated the importance of collaboration and innovative approaches in enhancing service delivery.

He expressed confidence that the ongoing revamp of the Ministry under the Okpebholo administration would yield positive results and urged stakeholders to contribute meaningfully to the process.



### HANDING OVER:

L-R: Assistant Commander of Narcotic, National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), Gambo Ali; Head of Enforcement, Western Marine Command, Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), Charles Oputa and Command Public Relations Officer, Ibrahim Dauda, during the handing over of 20 sacks of intercepted cannabis indica to the NDLEA by the NCS in Lagos on Thursday.

## NHIA seeks innovative research to bridge health insurance gaps

### ABUJA

The National Health Insurance Authority (NHIA) has announced plans to commission a series of research studies, in a bid to expand health insurance coverage in Nigeria.

NAHA said that this is as millions of citizens continue to pay for healthcare services out-of-pocket.

The authority disclosed this through its official website on Thursday, adding that it had invited qualified consultants and firms, to submit Expressions of

Interest (EOI).

The body said that the invitation, issued by its Procurement Department, is for the conduct of various research projects, aimed at scaling up health insurance coverage nationwide.

It said that the initiative, captured under its 2025 budget, aligns with Nigeria's commitment to achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC).

It also supports the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 3.8, focusing on financial risk protection and access to quality essential health services for all.

Nigeria's healthcare system

remains heavily dependent on out-of-pocket payments, a situation health experts say exposes households to catastrophic health spending and pushes many families into poverty.

The authority noted that health financing plays a critical role in achieving UHC, adding that inadequate investment and weak financing mechanisms have continued to limit access to care, especially for vulnerable.

It said that the proposed research is expected to generate evidence to guide policy reforms, improve enrolment strategies, and address structural barriers hindering the expansion of health insurance

coverage across the country.

According to NAHA, the exercise would be conducted in line with the provisions of the Public Procurement Act 2007, assuring transparency and competitiveness in the selection of consultants.

Health sector analysts believe that the move underscores a growing recognition that data-driven solutions are needed to close Nigeria's health insurance gap.

They, however, cautioned that translating research findings into actionable policies and measurable coverage gains, would be critical to reducing the financial healthcare burden on Nigerians.

## MISSING LAND DOCUMENT

The general public is hereby notified that I, **MR ANDREW UKPON** is the bonafide and lawful owner of a piece/parcel of land, measuring 473.569 Sq Mtrs, lying and situate at Ward 40A, Ohovbe Village Area, Benin City, Edo State.

The Certificate of Occupancy (C of O EDSR 11347) issued to me by Edo State Geographic Information Service (EGIS) with Reg. No. 49/49/B.154 was discovered missing sometimes in 2020 in Benin City, Edo State and all efforts to trace it has proved abortive, hence this publication for record purposes

The general public, Edo State Geographic Information (EGIS) and concerned authorities should please take note.

Signed: **MR ANDREW UKPON**

## CHANGE OF NAME

I formerly known as **FLORENCE ODIGIE** now wish to be known as **CYNTHIA ODIGIE**. Former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and the general public take note.

Classified  
Advert Space  
for Sale

## Cholera remains continent's deadliest epidemic —Africa CDC

### ABUJA

The Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) reports that cholera remains the continent's most pressing epidemic challenge, with 323,307 cases and 7,352 deaths recorded across 24 countries in 2025.

Cholera is a severe diarrheal disease caused by the bacterium *Vibrio cholera*.

It spreads primarily through contaminated water or food. People who get infected can experience it.

Prof. Yap Boum II, Deputy Incident Manager for Mpox at the Africa CDC Incident Management Support Team (IMST), disclosed this on Thursday, in Abuja.

Boum 11 spoke during a continental health webinar briefing, where he reviewed the status of major epidemic-prone diseases across Africa.

He said Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Angola and South Sudan accounted for nearly 90 percent of reported cholera cases, largely driven by poor access to

clean water, weak sanitation infrastructure and cross-border population movements.

“Cholera cannot be eliminated through medical response alone.

“Sustainable control requires strong political commitment, investment in water and sanitation infrastructure, and preventive vaccination in hotspot districts,” he said.

He cited Angola as a case study, noting that while vaccination and emergency response helped curb outbreaks, repeated peaks within the same year showed the limits

of reactive measures without long-term infrastructure.

According to him, Africa CDC is working with countries to prioritise cholera hotspots, combine preventive vaccination with WASH interventions, and accelerate progress toward cholera elimination by 2030.

He said the gains made through Ebola and Mpox responses, such as community-based surveillance, decentralised response systems and risk communication, should now be leveraged to tackle cholera and other epidemic-prone diseases.

## NEWS

## JUDICIARY

# Court fixes March 16 for DSS to open case against 2 Ansaru commanders

ABUJA

The Federal High Court in Abuja, on Thursday, fixed March 16 for the Department of State Services (DSS) to open its case against the two Ansaru leaders; Mahmud Usman and Abubakar Abba, on alleged terrorism offences.

The matter, which was slated for the prosecution to open its case, could not go on after the

defence lawyer, Bala Dakum, told Justice Emeka Nwite that he had been unable to have access to the defendants to prepare for their defence.

Earlier when the case was called, DSS counsel, David Kaswe, informed the court that they were ready to proceed and that their 1st prosecution witness, who was to testify under protection, was in court.

But Dakum told the court that he was not ready to go on

with the trial because he had not had access to the defendants since he took up the case in October 2025.

"The defendants are new to me and I only have the charge.

"If they want us to proceed, I just have to access to them or they should be taken to any of the prison facilities," he said.

The lawyer, therefore, applied that the defendants be transferred to a correctional centre in the interim so that the court could make progress.

Responding, Kaswe explained that there was a facility upgrade going on at the

DSS headquarters, where the suspected terrorists are kept, aimed at ensuring compliance with global best practices.

The lawyer said due to the upgrade, access to all those in custody, including the defendants, would be difficult until this is completed.

Justice Nwite, however, expressed concern over the call for adjournment after the case was scheduled for commencement of trial.

He said despite being a vacation judge and coupled with the restriction of movement to mark the Armed Forces

Remembrance Day, he abandoned every other thing to ensure that the trial commence today.

"It is as if all the effort I am

making is going no where.

"I should be resting by now because during the period of Christmas and new year celebrations, I was here," he said.

## 2 in court for allegedly receiving stolen property

ABUJA

The Police in Abuja on Thursday, charged two business men before an Asokoro Magistrate's court, for allegedly receiving stolen property.

The defendants, David Miracle, of lanto road in Kuje and Ibrahim Sule of no fixed address, are standing trial on a one count charge of allegedly receiving stolen property.

They each, however, pleaded not guilty to the charges.

The prosecutor, Helen Ochai, alleged that the defendants committed the offence on Jan. 5.

She alleged that they received 28 stolen cell phones and two power banks valued N3.96 million from one

Abubakar Abdullahi.

The prosecutor alleged that the defendants sold the stolen property to another, for the sum of N350,000.

She said that the matter was reported at the Central Police Station, Abuja, by a nominal complainant, one Mr Ikeh Herieta of Jumia office in Abuja.

The Magistrate, Mr Abdulmajeet Onyangi, granted the defendants bail in the sum of three million naira each, with one surety each in like sum.

Onyangi ordered that the surety must reside within the court's jurisdiction and must have a valid means of identification.

He adjourned the case until February 17 for hearing.



**APC LAGOS EAST STAKEHOLDERS MEETING:**

L-R: Former Speaker, Lagos State House of Assembly, Mr Adeyemi Ikuforiji; All Progressives Congress (APC), Lagos East chieftain, Mr Busura Alebiosu; Senator Tokunbo Abiru and All Progressive Congress (APC) Chairman in Lagos State, Pastor Cornelius Ojelabi, during the APC Lagos East Senatorial District stakeholders meeting in Lagos on Thursday.

## Alleged defamation: Court strikes out suit against Sen. Akpoti-Udughan

ABUJA

Justice Chizoba Orji of an Abuja High Court on Thursday struck out alleged defamation case against the Senator Representing Kogi Central, Natasha Akpoti-Udagahan, filed by the Federal Government.

Justice Orji struck out the suit following the application by the Prosecution counsel, Aderonke Imana, for discontinuation of the suit.

Counsel to Natasha, West Idahosa, however moved for

the matter to be struck out following the prosecution's application for discontinuance.

He also urged the court to release all documents belonging to the defendant and her sureties.

The prosecution counsel did not oppose the application made by the defence counsel for the matter to be struck out.

In a short ruling, Justice Chizoba Orji struck out the suit, and equally discharged the sureties.

She also ordered that all their documents be returned to them.

Natasha, a senator representing Kogi Central Senatorial zone, was alleged to have defamed the President of the Senate, Godswill Akpabio and former governor of Kogi, Yahaya Bello.

Natasha was, in count one, accused of making harmful imputation which she knew would harm the reputation of the Senate President, Senator Godswill Akpabio, by claiming he plotted, with former Kogi State governor, Yahaya Bello, to kill her.

In count two, she was accused of making a similar harmful imputation knowing that it will harm the reputation of ex-governor Yahaya Bello.

In count three, she was accused of making another imputation, which she knew would harm the reputation of Akpabio by associating him with the death of one Miss Imoreni Iniobong.

she however, pleaded not guilty to all of the charges when they were read to her.

She was admitted to bail in the sum of N50 million and one surety in the like sum in the charge marked CR/297/25 filed on May 15, 2025.

The judge added that the surety must be an owner of landed property within the jurisdiction of the court.

## Nigeria's economy to grow by 4.7%...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 2

pensible to sustaining growth," he said.

Edun said although the task ahead was challenging, the Federal Government remained resolute in translating economic stability into inclusive, job-rich growth.

"We remain committed to delivering tangible benefits to the average Nigerian," he stressed.

Meanwhile, Edo State has stepped up efforts to boost its

revenue profile, with renewed emphasis on the informal sector as it seeks to meet an Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) target of ₦160 billion for the 2026 fiscal year.

The Chairman of the Edo State Internal Revenue Service (EIRS), Hon. Oladele Bankole-Balogun, said the new federal tax reform which came into effect on January 1, 2026, was aimed at strengthening revenue generation by states, enhancing their financial autonomy and creating a

more transparent and business-friendly tax environment.

Speaking with journalists in Benin City, Bankole-Balogun disclosed that the EIRS would embark on extensive awareness and sensitisation campaigns across the state to improve compliance and enforcement under the new tax regime, with particular focus on operators in the informal sector.

He said the service was determined to change the prevailing mindset that views taxation as a burden, stressing that tax pay-

ment is a civic and social responsibility necessary for sustainable development. According to him, taxes represent citizens' contributions to the growth and development of the state.

The EIRS chairman revealed that Edo State's IGR has recorded significant growth under the current administration, rising to about ₦110 billion from the ₦80 billion achieved by the immediate past government. He, however, noted that meeting the ₦160 billion target for the year would require sustained effort and broader compliance.

## 3 women in court over alleged conspiracy, stealing

ADO-EKITI

Three women were on Thursday, charged before an Ado-Ekiti Chief Magistrate's Court over alleged conspiracy and stealing.

The defendants are; Egbeyemi Mary, 26; Adejoke Adeleye, 21; and Awe Sumisola, 24.

They are facing a two-count charge of conspiracy and stealing, and had each pleaded not guilty to the charges.

The prosecutor, Insp. Akinwale Oriyomi, told the court that the defendants committed the offence sometimes in December 2025 in Ado-Ekiti.

Oriyomi alleged that the de-

fendants, who worked as salesgirls for a complainant, one Mrs Atoun Olubunmi kitchen utensils store, conspired to steal goods worth seven million naira belonging to their employer.

He said that they were eventually arrested following police investigation.

The offence contravenes the provisions of section 302(1)(a) and 421 of the Criminal Law of Ekiti State, 2021.

The Chief Magistrate, Mr Abayomi Adeosun, granted the defendants bail in the sum of N250,000 each, with two sureties each in like sum.

He adjourned the case until February 27 for hearing.

## Court remands 2 in attempted kidnap case

IBADAN

The Federal High Court in Ibadan on Thursday remanded two defendants after pleading guilty to an alleged attempted kidnapping of two persons.

The defendants, Fatai Tijani, 32, and Azeez Temitope, 30, were arraigned on a two-count charge of conspiracy and attempted kidnapping.

The prosecuting counsel, Mr T. A. Nurudeen, alleged that the first defendant, Tijani, conspired and attempted to kidnap one Awoleran Akeem, sometime in August 2025, at Elewedu area in Iseyin.

Nurudeen further alleged that the second defendant, Temitope, had, sometime in April 2025, conspired with Ti-

jani and attempted to kidnap one Suleiman Ojeleke.

The prosecutor stated that the offences contravened the Terrorism (Prevention and Prohibition) Act, 2022.

He urged the court for an adjournment in view of the defendants' plea of guilt to enable him bring his witnesses.

Nurudeen then prayed the court for the remand of the duo at the Agodi Correctional facility.

The first and second defendants, represented by Mr R. A. Fasasi and Mr M. D. Oyeyemi, respectively, had earlier pleaded guilty to the charges against them.

Thereafter, Justice Nkeonye Maha ordered the remand of the defendants and adjourned the case until February 26 for hearing.

## Foreign

## NEWS

## European military personnel arrive in Greenland as Trump says US needs island

A Danish air force transport plane arrived in Greenland as European Nato allies deployed to the capital, Nuuk, for joint exercises.

A small French military contingent has arrived in Greenland's capital Nuuk, officials say, as several European states deploy small numbers in a so-called reconnaissance mission.

The limited deployment, which also involves Germany, Sweden, Norway, Finland, the Netherlands and the UK, comes as US President Donald Trump continues to press his claim to the Arctic island, which is a semi-autonomous part of Denmark.

French President Emmanuel Macron said the initial contingent would be reinforced soon with "land, air, and sea assets".

Senior diplomat Olivier Poirve

d'Arvor saw the mission as sending a strong political signal: "This is a first exercise... we'll show the US that Nato is present."

Poirve d'Arvor said the initial French deployment involved 15 people, hours after Denmark and Greenland's foreign ministers travelled to Washington for a meeting with US Vice-President JD Vance on Wednesday.

Following the meeting, Danish Foreign Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen said while the talks were constructive, there remained a "fundamental disagreement" between the two sides and later criticised Trump's bid to buy Greenland.

Trump, meanwhile, doubled down on his bid to bring Greenland under US control, telling reporters in the Oval Office, "we need Greenland for

national security". Although he did not rule out the use of force, he said late on Wednesday that he thought something could be worked out with Denmark.

"The problem is there's not a thing that Denmark can do about it if Russia or China wants to occupy Greenland, but there's everything we can do. You found that out last week with Venezuela."

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said Poland was not planning to join the European military deployment to Greenland, but warned that any US military intervention there "would be a political disaster".

"A conflict or attempted annexation of the territory of a Nato member by another Nato member would be the end of the world as we know it - and which for many years guar-

anteed our security," he told a press conference.

Russia's embassy in Belgium meanwhile expressed "serious concern" at what was unfolding in the Arctic, accusing Nato of building up a military presence there "under the false pretext of a growing threat from Moscow and Beijing".

However, the European Nato deployment consists of only a few dozen personnel as part of Danish-led joint exercises called Operation Arctic Endurance. While heavy in symbolism, it was not immediately clear how long they would stay.

Finland is sending two military liaison officers for what it said was a fact-finding mission during what was currently a planning stage of the operation.

## Iran judiciary denies plan to execute detained protester Erfan Soltani

Iran's judiciary has denied it scheduled the execution of a man arrested in connection with the country's recent protests.

Norway-based Kurdish human rights organisation Hengaw said earlier this week that the family of Erfan Soltani, 26, had been told he faced execution on Wednesday, only days after he was detained.

On Wednesday, Hengaw cited them as saying Soltani's execution had been "postponed" but warned that "serious and ongoing concerns" regarding his life remained. "This is good news. Hopefully, it will continue!" said US President Donald Trump, who had warned Iran not to execute protesters.

The judiciary said he faced charges of "colluding against national security" and "propaganda activities against the establishment", which are not punishable by the death penalty, state broadcaster IRIB reported.

They said reports by foreign media organisations that Soltani faced execution was a "blatant act of news fabrication".

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi also said there was "no plan" to hang people.

It came after President Trump threatened to take "very strong action" if executions were carried out, amid mounting speculation of possible US military strikes.

On Wednesday, he told reporters that "very important sources on the other side" had informed him "the killing in Iran is stopping, and there's no

plan for executions".

Hengaw told the BBC that Soltani had been denied access to a lawyer and that his family were unaware of any official charges brought against him.

Soltani, a clothes shop owner, was arrested at his home last Thursday in connection with the protests in the northern city of Fardis, west of Tehran, according to the group and his family.

However, the judiciary said he was arrested during "riots" on Saturday and was being held in a prison in the neighbouring city of Karaj.

Iran's chief justice, Gholam-Hossein Mohseni-Ejei, has advocated for the swift trial and punishment of arrested "rioters".

"Those elements who beheaded people in the streets or burned people alive must be tried and punished as quickly as possible," he said in a video on Wednesday. "If we don't do it fast, it won't have the same impact."

The current wave of protests began after shopkeepers in Tehran went on strike over the rising cost of living and the depreciating value of the currency.

They quickly spread across the country and turned against Iran's clerical establishment, particularly the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The slogans chanted by demonstrators have included "Death to the dictator" and "Seyyed Ali [Khamenei] will be toppled this year".



**TRANSPORT PLANE ARRIVED:**

Danish air force transport plane arrived in Greenland as European Nato allies deployed to the capital, Nuuk, for joint exercises.

## Astronauts splash down to Earth after medical evacuation from space station

Four astronauts evacuated from the International Space Station (ISS) have landed back on Earth after their stay in space was cut short by a month due to a "serious" medical issue.

The crew's captain, Nasa astronaut Mike Fincke, exited the spacecraft first, smiling and wobbling slightly on his feet before lying down on a gurney, following normal procedures.

Nasa's Zena Cardman, Japan's Kimiya Yui and cosmonaut Oleg Platonov followed, waving and beaming at cameras. "It's so good to be home!", said Cardman.

It is the first time astronauts have been evacuated due to a health issue since the station was put into Earth's orbit in 1998.

The team, known as Crew-11, will now receive medical checks before being flown back

to land after the splash down off the coast of California.

In a news conference after splash-down, Nasa administrator Jared Isaacman said the sick astronaut is "fine right now" and in "good spirits".

Judging by past Nasa communications about astronauts' health, it is unlikely that the identity of the crew member or details of the health issue will be released to the public.

Control of the ISS has been handed over to Russian cosmonaut Sergey Kud-Sverchikov and two other crew members.

The astronauts arrived on the ISS on 1 August expecting to complete a standard six and a half month stay. They were due to come home in mid-February.

But last week, a scheduled spacewalk by Fincke and Cardman was called off at the last minute. Hours later, Nasa revealed a

crew member had become ill.

"It's bittersweet," said Mr Fincke when he handed over the keys to the ISS to Kud-Sverchikov on Monday.

In a social media post, he stressed that all crew members on board were "stable, safe, and well cared for".

Orbiting Earth at an altitude of 250 miles, the International Space Station (ISS) makes 16 orbits of our planet a day, travelling at a speed of 17,500 miles per hour.

It is run by five space agencies and carries out wide-ranging scientific research about space and the effects on humans, animals and plants of living in microgravity.

The ISS carries some medical equipment and astronauts are trained to deal with minor medical issues, but it does not have a doctor on board.

The evacuation was a serious test of Nasa's procedures for dealing with medical issues.

By all accounts, it passed, although there may be questions about how well the agency could have responded if the astronaut had suffered a medical emergency.

The early departure leaves the ISS with a skeleton crew of just three astronauts - Nasa's Chris Williams and cosmonauts Kud-Sverchikov and Sergei Mikaev - until another four arrive in February.

"Despite all the changes and all the difficulties, we are going to do our job onboard ISS, performing all the scientific tasks, maintenance tasks here, whatever happens," Kud-Sverchikov said on Monday. He then issued his first command - a group hug.

The International Space Station has been continuously inhabited since the year 2000

## Boeing knew of flaw in part linked to UPS plane crash, US safety board report says

An aircraft that crashed in flames in Kentucky in November had a structural flaw that had been identified by Boeing on similar planes 15 years ago, according to investigators.

The MD-11F freighter operated by UPS, crashed after one of its engines separated from the wing as it was preparing to take off from Louisville.

The plane briefly lifted off from the runway, before hurtling out of control into an industrial area. Fifteen people died as a result, including three crew and 12 on the ground.

In an update report, the US National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) revealed that cracks found in the engine mounting assembly had previously occurred on several other aircraft.

At the time the manufacturer responsible for the aircraft, Boeing, concluded that the issue "would not result in a safety of flight condition".

The MD-11 is a relatively elderly design that was originally produced by McDonnell Douglas. Boeing acquired the company in 1997.

The last MD-11 came off the production line in 2001, but Boeing has continued providing parts and service support.

In the aftermath of the Kentucky disaster, the NTSB issued

a preliminary report which drew attention to cracks in the engine attachment mechanism. Its latest update goes further, describing fractures due to evidence of "fatigue" - or repeated stresses - in a critical bearing, as well as the mounting it is meant to sit in.

It points out that Boeing had previously found failures of the same part on four occasions, affecting three different aircraft. In 2011, the company sent a "service letter" to operators warning them of its findings. This is a non legally-binding document used to alert operators about important safety or maintenance information.

In this case, Boeing recommended that the part be included in a general visual inspection every five years. It also pointed out changes to the inspection procedure contained in the aircraft maintenance manual, and drew attention to a revised bearing assembly that could be fitted - although this was not mandatory.

Tim Atkinson, a former air accident investigator who now works as an aviation safety consultant, said the NTSB's update made disturbing reading.

"The structure concerned is not decorative, it's an essential part of the mechanism that attaches the engine to the wing, and carries loads such as thrust and drag," he explained.

## News

## Foreign

## Zelensky declares energy emergency as biting cold persists

Ukraine has declared a state of emergency in the country's energy sector, with a particular focus on Kyiv, as ongoing Russian strikes continue to leave thousands of residents without power.

President Volodymyr Zelensky accused Moscow of deliberately exploiting the harsh winter conditions as part of its war strategy, with overnight temperatures in Kyiv recently dropping to around -20C.

The declaration comes as Zelensky's US counterpart Donald Trump said he was holding up efforts to secure a peace deal to end nearly four years of war with Russia.

He told the Reuters news agency on Wednesday that Ukraine "is less ready to make a deal" than Russian president Vladimir Putin.

When asked why peace talks have not yet resolved the conflict, Trump responded: "Zelensky".

Trump's assessment drew approval from the Kremlin on Thursday, with spokesman Dmitry Peskov telling reporters: "President Putin and the Russian side remain open [to talks]."

The American and Ukrainian leaders are both expected to attend the World Economic Forum in Switzerland next week, although Trump sug-

gested no formal plans were arranged for them to meet.

In recent weeks, Russian attacks on Kyiv have left thousands of homes without regular power, heating or running water. After one particularly heavy night of missile and drone attacks last week, 70% of the capital was left without power for several hours.

Following a special cabinet meeting on Wednesday, Zelensky said a round-the-clock task force would be set up to fix damage caused by Russian strikes and worsening weather conditions.

He said the new measures would include procuring vital energy equipment and resources from abroad to replace damaged installations.

"The First Deputy Prime Minister - Minister of Energy of Ukraine has been assigned to oversee work supporting people and communities under these conditions," he wrote on X.

He also ordered an increase in the number of emergency help points around Kyiv to provide heat and power for residents, a move which could see a relaxing of current midnight curfew in the capital.

Russian attacks on energy infrastructure have not been limited to the capital.



PRESIDENT VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY

## Museveni votes as Uganda election unfolds amid delays and crackdown

Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni has cast his ballot as the country votes in a tense election that could extend his rule into a fifth decade. The 81-year-old leader, in power for 40 years, is widely expected to secure a seventh term, backed by firm control of state institutions and the security forces.

Voting on Thursday was marred by delays across parts of the capital Kampala and nearby Jinja, with malfunctioning biometric machines and missing ballot boxes leaving some polling stations unopened hours after the official start. Opposition leaders accused authorities of deliberately slowing the process, a claim the government denies, saying technical issues forced a switch

to manual verification in affected areas.

The election is taking place under an internet blackout imposed earlier this week and a heavy police presence. Museveni faces his strongest challenge from opposition leader and pop star Bobi Wine, who has warned of mass protests if the vote is rigged. Hundreds of his supporters have been arrested in the run-up to polling day, drawing concern from the United Nations and rights group

Despite the tension, Museveni retains support among voters who credit him with restoring stability and economic growth. Security forces remain on high alert as Ugandans await results that could shape the country's political future.



GAZA WAR PEACE PLAN:

The Gaza Strip remains devastated after two years of war.

## Pitfalls loom as Trump's Gaza peace plan enters second phase

On the face of it, the announcement of phase two of President Donald Trump's peace plan for Gaza would seem like progress.

But there remains a huge lack of clarity and detail about the future of the strip and the 2.1 million Palestinians who live there. Furthermore, there are many pitfalls.

First, Trump's plan demands that Hamas, as well as other groups in Gaza, agree to disarm.

Announcing phase two of the deal, the US Special Envoy to the Middle East, Steve Witkoff, said failure to do so would "bring serious consequences".

But Hamas has so far adamantly refused to give up its weapons, which it sees as tools of resistance to Israel's decades-long military occupation. If it maintains that posi-

tion, there are already far-right members of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition government who are champing at the bit to resume the war and "finish the job".

While massively diminished militarily, US intelligence has long estimated that Hamas has likely recruited more new members in Gaza than have been killed by Israel during the war.

The ceasefire, which has been in place since October last year, is already fragile at best.

Both sides have accused each other of repeated violations.

More than 450 Palestinians have been killed in Israeli strikes since it came into force, according to the Hamas-run health ministry in Gaza.

The Israeli military says three of its soldiers have been killed in attacks by Palestinian armed

groups during the same period.

Secondly, there is little clarity over to what extent Israel will be required to withdraw its forces from Gaza.

It has given no indication that it is willing to pull back completely, insisting it needs to maintain a strong security presence in Gaza.

Israel officials talk of "a new reality" in Gaza, insisting that the strip will never go back to the way it was before Hamas launched its deadly attack on 7 October 2023.

So, there could be continued wrangling over how far Israeli forces withdraw.

Who will run Gaza, if not Hamas, which came to power after winning Palestinian elections almost exactly 20 years ago?

Who will provide policing, security, schools, hospitals?

For more than a year now, there has been the idea that some sort of International Stabilization Force could provide security in Gaza.

Egypt, Turkey, the UAE, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, as well as the West Bank-based, Palestinian Authority, have all been suggested as potential countries that would make up this force.

But none have committed and, again, the detail is unclear.

Anyone seen as "riding in on the back of Israeli tanks" is likely to meet a frosty reception from Palestinians in Gaza.

Under Trump's peace plan, Gaza will supposedly have three levels of governance.

As the lowest level, the strip will be run by a new government of technocrats made up of figures from civil society within Gaza.

## Singapore's opposition leader stripped of title after conviction for lying

Singapore's Leader of the Opposition in parliament, Pritam Singh, has been stripped of his title by the prime minister following a vote by lawmakers.

The vote took place on Wednesday in parliament, which is overwhelmingly dominated by the ruling People's Action Party (PAP).

The move follows Singh's conviction for lying under oath to a parliamentary committee. Singh has consistently maintained his innocence.

He remains a member of parliament and secretary-general of the largest opposition party, Workers' Party (WP), but will lose privileges such as additional allowances and the right of first reply during parliamentary debates.

Singh's case stands out as one of the only criminal convictions against a sitting oppo-

sition lawmaker. He was also the first person to hold the title of Leader of the Opposition.

Critics have previously accused Singapore's government of using the judiciary to go after its political opponents - charges authorities have always denied.

On Wednesday, Indranee Rajah, the Leader of the House who had initiated the debate, said that Singh's lies "strike at the trust" Singaporeans place in parliament and accused him of "failing to take responsibility".

Singh defended himself during the debate, saying that his "conscience remains clear" and disagreed with the debate's resolution that his behaviour was "dishonourable and unbecoming". He also vowed to continue his work as an MP.

After three hours of debate, the parliament backed a motion that agreed Singh should

not be the Leader of the Opposition. All 11 present WP members voted against it.

The parliament also agreed to review the implications for two other WP lawmakers at another time.

On Thursday, Prime Minister Lawrence Wong said in light of Singh's conviction and the vote that it was "no longer tenable" for him to continue as the Leader of the Opposition.

He also invited the WP to nominate another of their MPs to take the title.

In response to BBC queries over text messaging, Singh responded with a single word: "#WeContinue".

The WP said it will deliberate on the move and respond "in due course". It previously said it would conduct an internal review of whether Singh contravened their rules.

The party holds 12 seats in Singapore's 108-seat parliament.

**What to know about Singh's case**

The saga began in 2021, when WP lawmaker Raeesah Khan claimed in parliament that she had witnessed police misbehave towards a sexual assault victim.

She later admitted that her anecdote was not true, but said during a parliamentary committee investigation that the party's leaders, including Singh, had told her to "continue with the narrative" despite knowing about the lie.

Khan has since resigned from the party and parliament, and was fined for lying and abusing her parliamentary privilege.

A criminal case was subsequently brought against Singh for lying under oath to the parliamentary committee during hearings for Khan's case.

# Rivers' landlord and his children of perdition

Growing up was a harvest of experiences. Some sweet, some embarrassing, some painful enough to leave permanent lessons. Childhood is that fragile season where curiosity often runs ahead of wisdom, and where a firm hand, when it comes early enough, can save a life from long detours. I was no exception.

One experience remains vivid. I was in Senior Secondary School Two when I decided, with the confidence only ignorance can give, that I was old enough to have a girlfriend. In my teenage mind, it was harmless. It felt grown. It felt like progress. Whispers travelled faster than I imagined, and before long, the matter reached my father.

He did not shout. He did not beat me. He did something far more dramatic. One evening, he called a family meeting. My mother was there. My sisters were seated. Then he announced calmly that I had come of age. According to him, any young man bold enough to be amorously involved was bold enough to fend for himself. He declared that I should begin arrangements to move out and start my own life.

The room froze. My chest tightened. Fear arrived before shame. That meeting ended without negotiation. Of course, I did not move out. That was not the point. The message was clear. Certain paths have consequences. Straying is easy. Returning is costly. My father was not wicked. He was protective. He understood that indulgence today could become regret tomorrow.

That lesson has followed me into adulthood. It taught me that leadership sometimes demands drama, firmness and a willingness to draw uncomfortable lines. And it is that lesson that keeps echoing as I watch the political theatre unfolding in Rivers State.

What is happening in Rivers is not just a political disagreement. It is a story of children straying from purpose and choosing indulgence over responsibility. It is a story of a landlord who refuses to vacate the house he built. And it is a story of a legislature that has abandoned governance to run errands for power.

Nyesom Wike is widely regarded as the landlord of Rivers politics. This is not hyperbole. He built the structure. He controlled the machinery. He commanded loyalty with an authority that brooked no dissent. Even after leaving office, his presence remained heavy, his voice loud, his influence unmistakable. Rivers did not experience a transition. It experienced a relocation of power.

Siminalayi Fubara emerged as governor through Wike's political design. He was not imposed, but he was chosen. Expectations were clear. Continuity was assumed. Loyalty was expected. Independence was optional.

But governance is not tenancy. A governor is not a caretaker. Once sworn in, the office confers authority that cannot be subcontracted. Trouble began the moment Fubara appeared to understand this. His sin was not rebellion. It was assertion. And in Rivers politics, assertion without permission is treason.



FUBARA



WIKE

The Rivers State House of Assembly quickly revealed where it stood. Rather than act as an independent arm of government, it positioned itself as an extension of Wike's will. Oversight turned into hostility. Resolutions became weapons. Impeachment threats surfaced almost immediately, not because of policy failure, but because of perceived disloyalty.

This is where the phrase children of perdition fits uncomfortably well. These lawmakers were elected to represent constituencies, not to serve as foot soldiers in a personal feud. Yet, time and again, they chose the landlord over the land. They abandoned reason for relevance. They traded legacy for favour.

Aja to ba ma so nu, ki n gbo fere olode. A dog destined to get lost will not heed the master's whistle. The warning signs were many. Public sympathy was clearly tilting towards stability. National embarrassment loomed. Yet the Assembly marched

on, deaf to caution, convinced that borrowed power was permanent.

When the Assembly walked this dangerous path, and turned up the heat on the governor, pushing him into a corner in the name of political loyalty, self preservation took over. In the chaos that followed, the governor was accused of bringing down the House of Assembly complex, an episode that shocked the country and exposed how far the crisis had spiralled. Even then, the defiant actors refused to heed voices of reason. The situation deteriorated to the point where political management failed and a drastic solution became inevitable. President Bola Tinubu stepped in and declared a state of emergency, suspending normal democratic processes in Rivers State to prevent total breakdown. Months after that intervention and the eventual restoration of democratic governance, one would expect restraint and reflection. Instead, Rivers is back where it started.

The same lawmakers are once again flexing muscles, reviving threats of impeachment and proving that the lesson of that national embarrassment was never learned.

Wike's shadow looms over every move. His public statements, his influence over lawmakers, his continued grip on the political soul of Rivers have made it impossible to pretend that this is an internal legislative matter. This is a proxy war. And the House of Assembly has chosen its side.

The implications are dangerous. Democracy depends on institutions, not individuals. When a legislature surrenders its independence, it becomes an accomplice to instability. When impeachment is weaponised, it loses moral force. And when godfatherism replaces governance, elections become rituals without meaning.

The people of Rivers are the silent victims. Governance stalls while egos clash. Development pauses while loyalty tests continue. Investors grow wary. Civil servants become uncertain. The state drifts, not because it lacks leadership, but because leadership is being contested outside constitutional boundaries.

History has not been kind to children who mistake indulgence for protection. Political godfathers eventually tire. Structures shift. Power relocates. When that happens, those who abandoned principle for favour are often left stranded.

Wike himself stands at a crossroads of legacy. He can be remembered as the builder who refused to let go, or the statesman who trusted the process he helped create. Control is intoxicating, but it is also corrosive. The landlord who insists on sleeping in every room eventually turns the house into a prison.

Governor Fubara also faces defining choices. He can retreat and accept

ceremonial relevance, or he can insist, calmly and firmly, on the mandate given to him by the people. Either path carries risk, but only one preserves the sanctity of the office.

This is where leadership, like parenting, matters most. When children stray, silence is consent. When institutions fail, intervention becomes duty. Rivers State needs voices of reason. It needs elders who understand that this path leads nowhere. It needs institutions willing to say no.

This is no longer just a Rivers problem. When a former governor can openly hold a sitting governor hostage through a compliant legislature, the message travels far beyond Port Harcourt. It tells other godfathers that mandates are negotiable. It tells lawmakers that loyalty to power matters more than loyalty to the people. It tells citizens that their votes are only valid until a landlord feels offended. That is how democracies quietly rot, not through coups, but through indulgence.

At this point, silence from the centre becomes dangerous. President Bola Tinubu cannot afford to look away. Rivers State is too strategic, too volatile and too symbolic to be left to political arsonists. Wike is not a rogue actor operating in the shadows. He is a senior member of the President's cabinet, wielding enormous influence. Leadership demands that influence be checked when it becomes destructive. Friendship must not excuse indiscipline. Political debt must not override constitutional order.

Tinubu must act, not as a partisan, but as President. He must make it clear that no minister, no matter how powerful, has the licence to destabilise a state because of wounded pride. Wike must be whipped into line, not humoured, not appeased, not allowed to turn Rivers into a personal estate. The House of Assembly must be reminded that their legitimacy flows from the people, not from a political godfather in Abuja.

Nigeria cannot continue to reward political recklessness with silence. If this drama is allowed to run its course unchecked, it will set a precedent far more dangerous than any single impeachment. It will confirm that power in Nigeria is still inherited, not transferred. And that is a future no democracy survives.

Sometimes, like my father did years ago, authority must speak plainly and act firmly, not out of anger, but out of responsibility. Rivers State needs that intervention now. The country is watching. History is recording. And those who choose indulgence over order may soon discover that even landlords answer to a higher authority.

My father's dramatic family meeting saved me from youthful foolishness. It forced reflection. It imposed boundaries. Rivers politics desperately needs such intervention. Not to punish ambition, but to protect the future.

Because when children of perdition are left unchecked, they do not just destroy themselves. They burn down the house they live in. And by the time the landlord realises the cost of indulgence, there may be nothing left to control.

*Sometimes, like my father did years ago, authority must speak plainly and act firmly, not out of anger, but out of responsibility. Rivers State needs that intervention now. The country is watching. History is recording. And those who choose indulgence over order may soon discover that even landlords answer to a higher authority*

ArtsWorld *with Francis Odupte*  
08023680030

# Ola Jagun: Reclaiming the African narrative one frame at a time

OLUSHOLA O. OLAJOBI

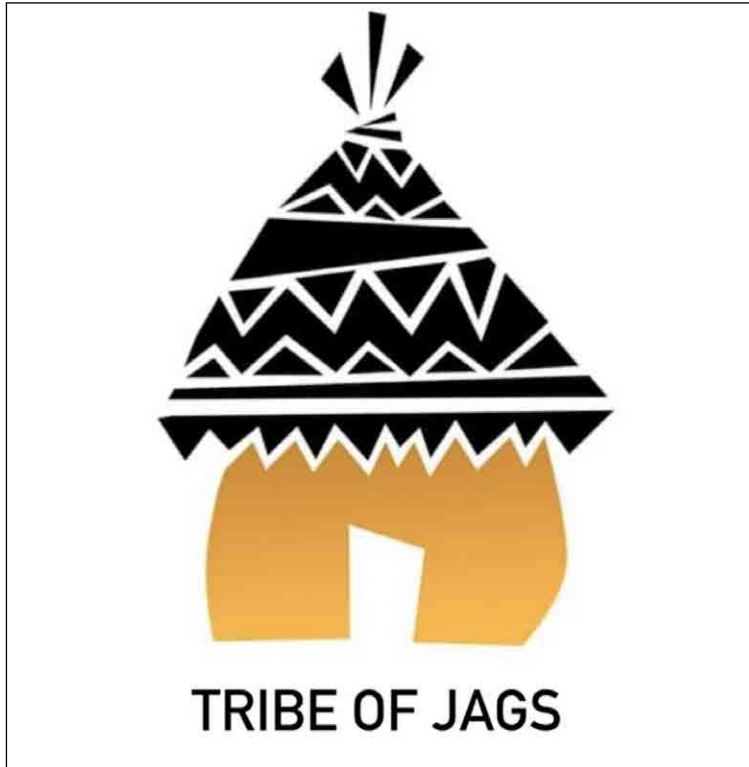
There is a pervasive, outdated narrative that has over shadows the African continent for centuries, a tale of primitivism that ignores our complexity, our innovation, and our breathtaking beauty among several other things that makes the continent more than just a “country” as some believe.

But narratives are fragile things; they can be dismantled and rebuilt by those brave enough to pick up their tools of reclamation and tell the truth such as Ola Jagun.

Creatively known as Ola Jags, he is not just a filmmaker or a writer; he is a custodian of culture and a visual archivist for the modern age. Hailing from Osun State, the cradle of Yoruba civilization and born in the frenetic heartbeat of Lagos, Jagun’s journey took a pivotal turn in 2012 when he moved to Ibadan to study Psychology at the Premier University of Ibadan, a city of rust and gold that captured his soul with its historical significance. It is here, amidst the intersection of academic rigour and deep-rooted tradition, that Jagun honed the psychological insight that now permeates his storytelling.

Ola Jagun’s portfolio reads like a curriculum of contemporary Nigerian excellence. As a seasoned writer and producer, he has lent his creative energy to major film and TV projects that resonate across the continent. His work on the award-winning masterpiece “Breath of Life” showcases his ability to contribute to emotionally resonant cinema. Whether it is the dramatic intrigue of Ms Kanyin, Dear Ajayi, Ewo, and Omera, or the comedic timing required for My Flatmates, Jagun’s versatility is undeniable.

Yet, he refuses to be boxed into one



medium atypical of the western canon. As the writer and producer of House Palava, a radio drama, and the creative force behind numerous music videos, he understands that stories are fluid as they can be heard, seen, or felt.

Today, as the Creative Director of Tribe of Jags Media, he orchestrates a symphony of TV commercials, documentaries, and animations, driving a brand that stands for excellence in African media.

However, it is perhaps in his role as a Travel Filmmaker and Nature Advocate that Ola Jagun truly embodies the spirit of an explorer. He challenges the “dark continent” trope by illuminating Africa as a premier global tourist

center.

His lens has captured the spiritual vibrancy of the Osun Osogbo Festival, celebrating the sacred river, and the opulent grandeur of Ojude Oba Festival in Ijebu Ode, a festival that turns the streets into a runway of agbada and ancestral pride. He has documented the communal diversity of the Agbo Remireke festival in Agbowo Ikosi, weaving together the stories of clans and kin.

But his odyssey extends beyond festivals. Jagun takes us to the edges of the earth or at least, the edges of our expectations by showcasing the best and unique features that attest to the continent diversity in its fauna and flora.



# Entertainment

— with Davidson Imosime Izegaegbe —

## Culture is science

*“If art is to nourish the roots of our culture, society must set the artist free to follow his vision wherever it takes him.”*

— JOHN. F. KENNEDY

The world is still sane because the hearts of men is constantly tickled by the consciences and active consciousness of their minds in reel time. The world cannot do without the knowledge of itself, its space and how to take charge, control and sustain its own existence. Man is the one, like a referee in a football match, who decides how the game will play and who to send out of the pitch and when to declare a goal, give a penalty and decides to end the match. Can we then say that the players, the ball, the pitch and its accessories do not matter like the referee? Certainly NO.

The life of man is organized like a symphony or orchestra. Everyone plays his or her part in the ensemble, including the drivers who drive the diverse audiences to the venue. Everyone has a part to play, but the one who knows he controls all is the conductor. A single mistake from his baton, like the magician's wand can create a chaos never envisioned and envisaged.

Let us take our world to be an orchestra and the audiences as the people, the conductor representing the leaders, the instruments, songs and musicians as the culture, tradition, customs, rituals, beliefs, and the baton use by the conductor to organise and define how all these are shaped, how they are philosophized to create a good feeling of the sound, music, and what cause our reactions to all. This means that, like a rope used to thread a number of beads, if it is severed at any point, there are bound to be a complete fall of all the beads strung together.

The above analogy is to attempt to make us see and know the importance of man as a leader, as one responsible for his own actions, in the entire chain of human behavior and living. Culture is sacred but also naturally flexible for our needs to evolve in our own society. When any society decides on who lead them, define what are acceptable by them and punishments for violating any such norms, it is not for the fun of it, but to keep humans in line via hope for proper existence.

Today, we all say science rules the world because of inventions. We see science as the head of the universe chain, thereby making culture, the very tread that binds all talents, gifts, logical reasoning together like beads strung on a maracas- giving a unified sound yet separate from each other because of spaces in between. We may not know it but science is art. It is culture. It is tradition. It is defined rituals and believe. Anything that cannot be measured by the parameters of science is considered mystic or witchcraft. Again, is witchcraft not science or science witchcraft? How do these definitions and coinage for witchcraft and science come about? Who boxed them separately and gave them their coloured jackets?

Culture is science. The philos-

ophy of culture are the creative relics abused by many from their own perspectives of understanding while worshipped by many who see the brains that created them as geniuses, and even go further to theorize the philosophy behind their creation from idea to finished work. Yet, there is another who see only the spirituality of these creations. They spiritualize their existence to a point where they no longer believe these are the creations of man. If you engage them logically on their thought line, they end the discuss with a punch line that the inventors or creators were inspired by a benevolent spirit from a far-reaching realm. These creations from the creative minds are the effigies in shrines all over the world, the paintings and art works found inside the various temples of the diverse religions and so on and so forth.

Culture evolves. It is dynamic. It is YOU! If culture did not set itself free to follow its own vision, we would have been living still in the Stone Age with a hollow and cold mind. We are told the brain is in two dimensions: left and right. “Psychobiologist Roger Sperry discovered that human beings are of two minds. He found that the human brain has specialized functions on the right and left, and that the two sides can operate practically independently. Sperry initiated split-brain research and his colleague, Michael Gazzangia, helped him summarize their findings. Their report in the 1967 Scientific American report titled, ‘The Split Brain in Man,’ examined how the two hemispheres function independently of one another after a corpus callosotomy.”

For example, we have read so much about how people with left brain are described as a more dominating. This thought went further to explain how these left brained people are more logical, analytical, and objective in dealing with situations of everyday life. This sounded interesting a at the time Nobel Prize research winner, Roger W. Sperry, like an African folklore scholar went further to describe those that are right-brained more intuitive, thoughtful, and subjective.... JUST LIKE THAT. It is even more stunning and interesting to discover too that many popular jazz musicians spread this line of thought saying that creativity is a direct product of the brain's right hemisphere, gifting the world with the mindset that innovative people are "right-brain thinkers" while "left-brain thinkers" are thought to be analytical and logical.

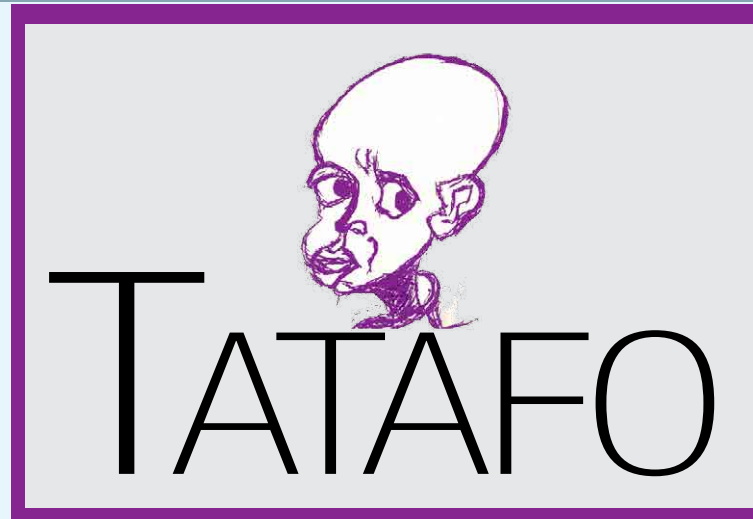
The first knock on Sperry's research is from Chirayu Hospital own by Dr Ajay Goenka when their research shows that the brain is not nearly as dichotomous as once thought. Their research for example, clearly showed that “abilities in subjects such as math are strongest when both halves of the brain work together”. Many neuroscientists from

their discovery noticed that the “two sides of the brain collaborate to perform a broad variety of tasks and that the two hemispheres communicate through the corpus callosum.”

The final straw on the heavy knock came from a brain surgeon Rahul Jandial, when he asserted as well as echoed, like the blaring voice from a movie punchline, that the publication by New York Times in 1973 titled: “We are Left Brained and Right Brained” on Nobel Laureate Sperry's winning research work not to be true. According to Jandial, the talk on Sperry's research sounded great, which became acceptable by the public, which however was not true and had been faulted by decades of research which states that “the notion that there are “right-brained” people who are more creative and “left-brained” people who are more logical is simply not true.

2013 research study published from the University of Utah was clear on this from their “reviewed MRI brain scans of more than a thousand people between the ages of seven and twenty-nine” just to find any clue to show and support the claim that people truly use either their left or right brain more. “Our data are not consistent with a whole-brain phenotype of greater ‘left-brained’ or greater ‘right-brained’ network strength across individuals,” they opined and concluded.

This clearly shows that culture is science and anything that involves invention and creation or creativity is scientific. I know many would say, which laboratory or formulas were used for the experiment in regards to creative works. Is there anything we do that has no formula or is not scientific; from constant usage of our hands to pick food from our plates to our mouth, from thinking deep logically to getting results from logical reasoning, from measurements in a laboratory by a scientist to measuring a rock in the field to be sculpted by a sculptor, or painting, dancing or defecating? What is art and what is science? Who define them and why? Who says culture is not science and why is the philosophy behind human nature, existence, death, questions and answers not culture, arts or science? Culture is your life and science is the part of culture to discover your life and how you live it. Is it through the stage or inside the laboratory? All na semantics.... I just de think ALOUD.



## De gods mus be krezi

Dem say wetin person eyes neva reach dia. Dis wan mean say, notin de new unda de sun or de moon. So-dia-for, if dem run come ya house say, elephant de fly ova ya house, jus bilif am bifor you com out go luk up weda na true. Las las e go shocktalize you wen you go even see hippopotamus join de elephant de throw back-dive for up ova ya roof. Na so dis awa life come be oooo! Na case of who nor go, fit nor no!

Dis awa kontri, na difrent tins de shele for difrent place at de same time. Sometimes kpakpa, de same tins go de happen like NTA network drama for evri wia for awa kontri. Wetin person nor go hia? Jus inside December here alone, de tins wey shele reach to make Lucifer protest go meet baba God say him nor do satan work again, as Naija pipo don take over him work com still de lie on top him head join. Wetin poor Lucifer eyes nor see for inside December alone?

We tank baba God for keeping us gidigba for area, and nor let any person carri fall awa hand. Mani kpai for no rison na, wai mani de inside prison, hospital, morshuari and inside six feet kpakpa. So, we wey de alive to de worri each oda laik Hausa and bedbug, need to nor say, e get wai. Na inside 2025 alone, I see de gods wey de cleanse awa villages, see Fulani people and bigin pick race. Even de pipo wey de gods de pray plus de Fulani pipo shocktalize wen dem see de gods de pick race laik Usain Bolt. Na inside las year again, with awa kro kro eyes, we see wia de gods pose with one hand for waist de toast babe. As if e nor reach, inside las year, naim dem arrest de gods, carri am go police stashon to go rait statement bifor dem bail am de following day. Una also forget wetin Calabar festival use de gods eyes see for yonda? Abi nor be dis kontri una de wen Calabar kinfuse de gods with babes wey carri bakassi plus Manchester de shake evri tin laik bloblo

wey de at de merci of de breeze? Wot about de baba of dem all, de ogbonge carri-go, de great konfushonist of all konfushon? I mean de Lagos Eyo festival? Abeg make I find pure wota drink bifor I kontinu, make I nor com faint raise hands and legs up.

We be de fia for wetin de gods de do for oda states, but wen e reach Lagos turn, dem show evri bodi say true true dem be centa of eselense. Dem make us no say, Odas de learn for wia dem de. True true, Lagoshians show de world say, de gods must be krezy! Una don see wia de gods de carri cut-to-size and pumpy? Some of una wey see part of de vidio, talk true, una be nor tink say una de wosh Wide-Wide- West film? How mani of una don see Eyo or dia uniform? Una go agri with me say, dia uniform fine sha, but com carri one kain tin wey fit make ya bodi de shake with one kain cold laik person wey see spirit for nite.

Inside Lagos, pipo travel from difrent places to com selebrate Eyo festival, but mani wey survive de bulala, and de robbery from de gods fit no wan com nex time. Area boys, wey pipo de populali call Alaye boys, suffri go sow dem own Eyo uniform, carri de big big wood dem de hold, nack dat hat wey get shogoshogo rand am on top dem head, hide pump action and cut-to-size kala unda dem uniform enta street. Na so for difrent places for inside Lagos, as if dem rihaz am, com bigin pull out Kala from unda dia uniform bigin obtain pipo. Som pipo sef catch konvulshon wen dem com see say Eyo don de carri pumpy. Na wen mani reach house dem com no say Eyo de, but Eyo true true de.

If to say we see for inside sosha midia wia police or army de use Eyo de do frog jump and com lock dem for cell, who nor no go bigin para say wai dem go de trit de gods laik dat, Abi? If to say, de police com add de gods join kriminalns for kraim fighters as pipo wey dem catch de use.

# Feature

## THE CANCEROUS NATURE OF NIGERIA'S POLITY

# Why the youth must break the cycle

CHUKWUFUMNAYAN ADIGWE

Nigeria's political space over time has been marked by recurring feuds, power tussles, and corruption. These theatrics have come to characterise a system in which politicians frequently roll in the mud with one another, pursuing personal gain while paying little or no attention to real governance. Instead, the political class often occupies itself with power plays and machinations, while critical facets of governance continue to suffer systemic failure.

Even more troubling are the widely acknowledged cases of corruption with which the Nigerian polity is deeply afflicted. These include legislative corruption; judicial and law-enforcement corruption; civil service and institutional corruption; election irregularities and democratic manipulation; embezzlement of public funds; and oil-sector and resource corruption, among a long list of others. Most concerning, however, is the way this cycle persists across generations, spreading these underlying problems like cancer-infected cells, to the point where hope for genuine reform often appears lost.

Consequently, even as calls for youth leadership grow louder, the promise of renewal remains uncertain. This hope is frequently dimmed by the entrenched reality of political godfatherism—where power, influence, and political culture are inherited rather than

dismantled, reproducing the same toxic patterns under younger faces.

A clear illustration of this phenomenon can be found in the ongoing political crisis in Rivers State, where the former governor and current Minister of the Federal Capital Territory, Nyesom Wike, and his successor, Governor Siminalayi Fubara, are at the centre of a feud that has plunged the state into political uncertainty. Wike, who governed Rivers State from 2015 to 2023, retained significant political influence even after leaving office. Ahead of the 2023 governorship election, his political camp endorsed and actively supported Fubara's emergence as the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) candidate and eventual winner. At the time, Fubara was widely perceived as Wike's political protégé.

However, the apparent harmony did not last. Shortly after assuming office in May 2023, Fubara began asserting his independence, distancing himself from Wike's political network. Tensions soon escalated over control of political structures, key appointments, and questions of loyalty, particularly within the Rivers State House of Assembly, where a significant number of lawmakers remained aligned with Wike. What should have been a routine transition of leadership quickly became both personal and structural: Wike felt sidelined, while Fubara sought autonomy.

The fallout between both men has since placed Rivers State in a prolonged

state of political instability. What began as a seemingly seamless handover of power in the "Treasure Base of the Nation" devolved into a scorched-earth political war, a high-stakes battle for the very soul of the state. Marked by legislative chaos, violent confrontations, and a bitter struggle for grassroots loyalty, Nigeria's oil hub has remained in a state of near-perpetual tension since late 2023.

The crisis reached a disturbing peak on 29 October 2023, when a section of the Rivers State House of Assembly Complex was bombed by suspected arsonists on the eve of an impeachment attempt against Governor Fubara. Matters escalated further on 11 December 2023 when 27 lawmakers loyal to Wike defected from the PDP to the APC. In response, a rival faction of the Assembly led by Edison Ehie declared their seats vacant, opening yet another chapter of political brinkmanship and institutional paralysis.

As actions and counteractions intensified, the situation eventually drew federal intervention. President Bola Ahmed Tinubu declared a state of emergency in Rivers State, suspending Governor Siminalayi Fubara, his deputy, and the 27 members of the State House of Assembly for six months. In their place, Vice Admiral Ibok-Ete Ekwe Ibas (rtd.), a former Chief of Naval Staff, was appointed Sole Administrator of the state, an extraordinary measure that underscored

the depth of the political breakdown.

Although the emergency rule was lifted on 17 September 2025, with Governor Fubara and the lawmakers reinstated, expectations that the crisis had been resolved proved premature. By early January 2026, the Rivers State House of Assembly had commenced another impeachment process against Governor Fubara and his deputy, citing allegations of gross misconduct—a move widely perceived as being influenced by the enduring political shadow of the FCT Minister, Nyesom Wike.

As this feud continues to resurface in cycles, Rivers State stands as a vivid case study of how Nigeria's toxic political culture regenerates itself, threatening governance, institutional stability, and democratic progress.

Beyond Rivers State, however, the cancer in Nigeria's political system extends past kingmaker politics or factional wars. It exists within the very fabric of society, lurking in everyday choices made by Nigerians—particularly the youth. Our daily decisions ultimately shape the future of governance and determine whether realignment is possible.

Some argue that this view is far-fetched, framing corruption as an endemic condition internalised by society. Speaking anonymously, one young Nigerian observed that even the youth, often described as the leaders of tomorrow, sometimes sensationalise corruption, viewing it as a shortcut to success. This perspective echoes the

themes in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* by Ghanaian author Ayi Kwei Armah, which portrays corruption as a deeply ingrained societal disease rather than a purely political failure.

Indeed, corruption among the political elite often mirrors practices normalised among everyday citizens: nepotism and favouritism, petty bribery, fraudulent documentation, kickbacks, and other unethical shortcuts. The political class, in many ways, reflects the society from which it emerges.

Thus, the central question remains: if, after years of advocacy, the youth eventually gain access to the reins of power, how certain are we that the same cycle of systemic failure will not be reproduced, whether through godfatherism, internal rancour, or corruption itself?

To truly eradicate this illness, attention must shift to the broader picture and the responsibilities that rest with each of us. Change begins with personal choices and extends to how we engage with our immediate society. It demands a conscious rejection of corruption, not merely because it harms us individually, but because it erodes collective progress and accelerates national decay.

Only then, when the tides eventually turn and today's leadership gives way to younger voices, can genuine transformation occur—not as a slogan or façade, but as a meaningful revolution capable of reshaping Nigeria's political culture for the better.

## Sustaining HIV, TB and malaria gains amid declining donor support

ABUJAH RACHEAL (NAN)

When 32-year-old Grace Choji, who lives in Mpape, a satellite town in the FCT swallowed her antiretroviral medication, she whispered a quiet prayer that the pills would still be available next month.

Choji, a front desk officer at a reputable real estate firm, has lived with HIV for 11 years.

She has a toddler, a job she loves, and carefully nurtures dreams of a stable future.

"I do not sleep well anymore. If the free treatment ends, I do not know how I will survive, or what will happen to my child," she said.

Choji is one of an estimated 1.8 million Nigerians living with HIV, alongside hundreds of thousands battling tuberculosis and millions affected by malaria.

Their survival depends on medicines, preventive tools and health systems that have relied heavily on international donor support for more than two decades.

However, in 2025, that long-standing certainty is under threat.

Nigeria's Coordinating Minister of Health and Social Welfare, Dr Muhammad Ali Pate, has warned that the country must begin to finance a far greater share of its HIV, tuberculosis and malaria response as donor funding declines.

Speaking at a House of Represent-

atives investigative hearing into more than \$4.6 billion in Global Fund and USAID grants received between 2021 and 2025, Pate said the probe was "a welcome step towards transparency, accountability and domestic ownership."

"Donor funding has saved millions of lives, but underfunding threatens sustainability," he cautioned, noting that Nigeria's health spending still falls below the 15 per cent target set by the Abuja Declaration.

Similarly, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Abbas Tajudeen, said lawmakers were determined to strengthen accountability, stressing that in spite of massive investments, many Nigerians continue to suffer devastating health outcomes.

The motion to investigate the utilisation of donor funds was moved by Philip Agbese (APC, Benue), who warned that Nigeria remains among the world's highest-burden countries for HIV, TB and malaria, despite billions of dollars in external assistance.

For Yahata Musa, a 46-year-old truck driver from Lugbe, another FCT suburb, the danger is already uncomfortably close.

Musa is undergoing treatment for Drug-Resistant Tuberculosis (DR-TB); a more complex and costly form of the disease that requires stronger medication and longer treatment periods.

"They told me my TB did not respond to the first medicine. Now the

treatment is longer and harder. If the drugs stop coming, what happens to people like me?" he asked.

A clinician at the National Hospital, Abuja, who requested anonymity, said DR-TB cases were becoming "a very real clinical and financial threat".

"These medicines are lifesaving, but they are also extremely expensive. Without donor support, most patients simply cannot afford treatment," she said.

Public health economist Chinyere Okafor also expressed concern.

"Funding shocks do not merely pause services; they reverse progress.

"They increase deaths, fuel drug resistance and raise future costs. Communities feel the impact first," she said.

Against this backdrop, civil society organisations are attempting to strengthen accountability from the grassroots.

The Civil Society in Malaria Control, Immunisation and Nutrition (ACOMIN) is expanding Community-Led Monitoring (CLM) under the Global Fund's GC7 grant.

ACOMIN's National Coordinator, Ayo Ipinmoye, said the initiative has already delivered measurable results.

These include advocacy that led to the procurement of N190 million worth of hospital equipment in Jigawa through the Association of Local Governments of Nigeria (ALGON), the restoration of services in several primary healthcare centres, and improved TB and HIV testing in Taraba.

"Community monitoring brings real-time evidence from the grassroots directly into policy conversations.

"We want this model scaled nationwide and integrated into pandemic preparedness efforts," Ipinmoye said.

Currently, the intervention spans 13 states, working with 260 community-based organisations and 780 trained volunteers.

Meanwhile, the Global Fund is investing nearly \$1 billion in Nigeria between 2024 and 2026 to combat HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, strengthen health systems and improve pandemic preparedness.

The funding prioritises vulnerable groups, including women, children, pregnant women and key populations, while supporting treatment, service delivery, the distribution of insecticide-treated nets and stigma reduction.

HIV programmes focus on adults, children and key populations, with the aim of ending AIDS by 2030.

Tuberculosis interventions prioritise early detection, effective treatment and stigma reduction, while malaria efforts include the large-scale distribution of insecticide-treated nets and data-driven campaigns in states such as Delta and Adamawa.

In addition, the health system strengthening initiatives target infrastructure, supply chains and the efficient use of resources, while pandemic prepared-

ness programmes aim to build resilience against future health emergencies.

In February 2024, Nigeria received nearly \$993 million in Cycle 7 grants; its largest single allocation from the Global Fund, part of more than \$4.8 billion the country has received since the partnership began.

Collaboration with organisations such as FHI 360 and PharmAccess, aligned with PEPFAR, supports integrated service delivery nationwide.

Nevertheless, lawmakers are now demanding clarity on how these funds have been utilised and whether outcomes justify the scale of investment.

Agbese cited sobering data, noting that 51,000 AIDS-related deaths were recorded in Nigeria in 2023.

He added that the country ranks first in Africa for tuberculosis burden and accounts for 26.6 per cent of global malaria cases.

Without improved coordination and transparency, he warned, Nigeria risks missing the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals targets to end the three epidemics.

The House Committee on HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria has been mandated to report its findings within four weeks.

As Nigeria moves towards self-reliance, one truth is clear: health security is not charity; it is survival.

(NAN Feature)

# Friday Sermon

## Honouring sacrifice and service: Armed Forces, and the Islamic duty of gratitude and remembrance”



On Thursday, 15 January 2026, Nigerians from all walks of life joined the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, His Excellency Bola Ahmed Tinubu GCFR, in honouring the memory of the nation's fallen heroes during the Armed Forces Celebration and Remembrance Day (AFCRD) 2026 at Eagle Square, Abuja.

MAJOR M. Y. BABANGIDA

Praise be to God, whom eyes cannot perceive, nor minds imagine, nor the doubts of death touch, and in whose greatness even the knowers are bewildered. And in whose eternity the thinkers are perplexed. It cannot be said where He was, nor how He was, nor when He was, nor where He will be. I praise Him, the Most High, the Exalted.

I repent to Him and thank Him, and those who are grateful will be rewarded for their thanks. I bear witness that there is no god but Allah, the One, without partner, the Knower of what was before it came to be. And I bear witness that our master and prophet Muhammad is His servant and messenger, a prophet through whom the prophets and messengers were honored, may God's peace and blessings be upon him, and upon his family and companions. May the prayers and peace that are constant and inseparable be upon them until the Day they are resurrected, and peace be upon them in abundance.

O servants of God, death is but a path of conduct in which both the master and the slave will return. O servants of God, the ignorant and the learned will call out to them, and all on earth and in heaven will be equal in this regard. God looked upon the heavens, empty of their inhabitants, and upon the earth, desolate and upon its foundations,

All creatures lie prostrate in their graves, and there is none but God, the One and Only, the Worshipped. God Almighty said: "When the earth is shaken with its [final] earthquake. This Meccan surah is decisive in its promise and warning, through which God, Blessed and Exalted is He, frightens His servants and reminds them of the earth's shaking and the Day of Resurrection, so that they may desist from what He has forbidden them of disobedience and comply with what He has commanded them of obedience and [divine] guidance.

And God, Blessed and Exalted is He, instilled fear in them of the Day of Resurrection so that they might prepare for it and its tremendous horrors.

He says: "When the earth shakes with its inhabitants, and trembles from all sides and quakes from east to west, it will remain so until all the mountains and buildings upon its surface are broken.

It will not rest until all that came out of it is returned to its belly, and it will shake violently from the sound of Israfil, peace be upon him. This will happen when the times, hours, months, periods, years, days, and all that is lawful and unlawful in this world have been exhausted. This will happen when truth is extinguished and falsehood prevails.

People abandoned enjoining good and forbidding evil, committed sins, permitted what is forbidden,

injustice increased among them, jihad was abandoned, corruption appeared, usury became widespread, sodomy and adultery increased, and they committed lewdness and immorality, and they aided themselves in all of that by drinking alcohol.

Some people command what is right but do not do it themselves, forbid what is wrong but do it them-

selves, hate the truth and follow their own desires.

The Quran will be recited but not acted upon, hearts darkened, immorality and vices increased, and the wicked adorned themselves with sins and transgressions. When they were in this state, the wrath of the Almighty, may His glory be exalted, intensified against them. At that point, God said, "O Israfil, blow the trumpet,". Then Israfil will blow the trumpet as the Almighty, may His glory be exalted, commanded him, and the earth will tremble from its east to its west. This is due to the Almighty's anger towards the hypocrites and the wicked.

Know, O servants of God, that among God's blessings upon us in this nation is that He has provided us with armed forces for the internal and external defense of this country, which have always protected and continue to protect the nation's honour and dignity, and safeguard citizens and their property from the aggression of invaders and evil.

And the worst of evildoers, in addition to their protection of the nation's borders from external enemies, and the whole goal of this is to try to maintain the stability of the nation and its people so that they can deal and exchange with each other in security and peace of mind.

This, may God have mercy on you, falls under the concept of ribat (guarding the frontier) according to the scholars, and knowledge is with

God, about which the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said: "Every deceased person's deeds are sealed except for the one who guards the frontier, for his deeds will continue to grow until the Day of Resurrection, and he will be safe from the trials of the grave."

All of this is in honor of him and in recognition of the greatness of his work. These soldiers have accomplished numerous feats, both within and outside the country, including extinguishing the flames of discord, restoring security and peace among the people, and thus preserving lives and property.

It is well known that preserving life and property are among the five necessities that Islam, the religion of peace, calls for.

My Muslim brothers, know that these soldiers have sacrificed everything to protect this nation, and it is only fitting that we offer them our deepest gratitude and appreciation, for he who does not thank people does not thank God.

On this basis, the Nigerian government has designated a day for them. It is the fifteenth day of January every year since 1970. To commemorate the good deeds of these forces in the First and Second World Wars, and their participation in various civil wars through the country's borders.

Major M. Y. Babangida is the 4-Brigade Central Mosque Imam in Benin City.

”  
*Every deceased person's deeds are sealed except for the one who guards the frontier, for his deeds will continue to grow until the Day of Resurrection, and he will be safe from the trials of the grave.*

# Sports

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

## NFF hails Super Eagles' AFCON run, urges focus on bronze-medal match

The Nigeria Football Federation has praised the Super Eagles for their run to the semi-finals of the ongoing 35th Africa Cup of Nations in Morocco, describ-

ing the campaign as one driven by commitment, discipline, passion and resilience.

Nigeria's bid for a place in the final ended on Wednesday night after a tense, goalless semi-final

against hosts Morocco, settled by a 4-2 penalty shootout defeat following 120 minutes of regulation and extra time at the Prince Moulay Abdellah Stadium.

Reacting to the outcome, NFF President and WAFU B President, Ibrahim Musa Gusau, called on the squad to put the disappointment behind them and refocus ahead of Saturday's third-place playoff against Egypt in Casablanca.

Gusau said penalty shootouts remained unpredictable, noting that Nigeria had benefitted from the same situation two years ago but fell on the wrong side this time. He stressed that the federation remained proud of the team's performance, highlighting that

the Super Eagles are still the tournament's highest-scoring side.

"The NFF is proud of the output of the team at this championship," Gusau said. "They gave their best, navigated several challenges and played their game. Now we want them to lift their morale and go all out for the bronze so they can take something tangible from a tournament in which they have done so well."

Nigeria departed Rabat for Casablanca on Thursday afternoon and were scheduled to hold an evening training session open to the media, with Friday's official training allowing media access for the opening 15 minutes.



SUPER EAGLES AGAINST MOROCCO



SAMUEL ETO'O

## CAF bans Cameroon's Football Federation President Samuel Eto'o

Cameroon Football Federation (FECAFOOT) President Samuel Eto'o has been handed a four-match ban for alleged misconduct during the team's 2-0 defeat by hosts Morocco at the Africa Cup of Nations last Friday, the Confederation of African Football (CAF) said in a statement.

Eto'o was reportedly seen making an angry gesture over refereeing decisions in the presence of CAF President Patrice Motsepe.

Players from both sides also jostled each other, and CAF said on Sunday it had opened investigations into violent confrontations during AFCON matches.

## 2nd Niger Delta Games: Edo begin trials as athletics coach expresses confidence in athletes

KEHINDE OSAGIEDÉ

Ahead of the second Niger Delta Games, scheduled to hold in Benin, Edo State capital between February 20 and 27th this year, Team Edo on Thursday, January 15, 2026 began athletes trials, signalling the commencement of their final preparation for the games.

The host state started with the athletics association whose athletes and coaches took over the track and field at the early hours of the day with the athletes sweating it out.

The athletes featured in 100M, 200, 400 race and Long Jump. Others are Triple Jump, High Jump, Javelin, Discos and Hammer among others.

Some of the athletes both new discoveries and established ones who spoke on their level of preparation for the Niger Delta Games said they are working tirelessly to ensure that they win gold for Edo State.

Among them are Emmanuel Shakamomodu (Javelin),

Ibrahim Haamidu (Long Jump) and Jennifer Osemwengie female Long Jumper. According to them and their coaches, the

organisers and Sponsors of the Niger Delta Games Dunamis Icons Ltd and the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) is already a motivation for them, saying that they wait in anticipation for the excitement of the games come February this year.

Speaking, the head coach of the Edo State Athletics Association Thadeus Omodiale said that his association is always ahead in terms of preparation.



2ND NIGER DELTA GAMES ATHLETES

## Analyst faults officiating in Super Eagles' AFCON loss to Morocco

A sports analyst, Tayo Balogun, has faulted the officiating in the Super Eagles' semi-final clash against

Morocco at the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations, describing it as biased against Nigeria.

Balogun told the News Agen-

cy of Nigeria (NAN) on Thursday in Ibadan that his assessment was objective and not influenced by allegiance to the Eagles.

NAN reports that the Super Eagles lost 4-2 on penalties to Morocco after regulation time ended goalless on Wednesday night.

According to Balogun, the referee appeared lenient toward the Moroccans, often ignoring fouls committed by them while penalising Nigerian players for minimal contact.

He said such decisions gave Morocco a psychological and tactical advantage during the encounter.



VICTOR OSIMHEN WITH THE REFEREE

## BUA Boss, Abdul Samad Rabiu praises Super Eagles, Confirms \$500,000 pledge despite semi-final loss

Nigerian billionaire industrialist and philanthropist Abdul Samad Rabiu, Chairman of BUA Group, has applauded the Super Eagles for their spirit and determination at the Africa Cup of Nations in Morocco and confirmed he will fulfil his pledged \$500,000 reward to the team despite their semi-final exit.

Nigeria bowed out of the tournament on Wednesday night after losing 4-2 on penalties to hosts Morocco, following a goalless 120 minutes in Rabat. The defeat ended the Super Eagles' hopes of reaching the final but did little to dampen praise for their overall campaign.

In a message to the players and officials, Rabiu commended

their courage, unity and commitment, insisting that the outcome did not diminish the pride they had given Nigerians throughout the competition.

"You fought with your hearts, gave your all, and showed true courage and determination on the pitch," Rabiu said. "Though it wasn't meant to be this time, you have made every Nigerian

proud. The spirit, passion and unity you displayed are what truly matter."

He added that his \$500,000 pledge would still be honoured as recognition of the team's hard work, dedication and the joy they brought to the nation, urging the players to keep their heads high and draw strength from the experience.



VICTOR OSIMHEN WITH THE BALL

## 4th African Youth Games: Enabulele Honours Weightlifting youngstar Favour Cornelius after three gold triumph in Angola

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

It was a pleasant surprise for Edo weightlifting prodigy Favour Cornelius who dis-

tinguished herself at the 4th African Youth Games in Angola in December 2025 when the Edo state Sports Commission under the leadership of Hon

Amadin Desmond Enabulele accorded her a grand reception to appreciate her for making the country and Edo State proud at the African Youth Games after

returning with three gold medals in the 44kg in female category of weightlifting event.

The 44 Kg female weightlifter who announced herself at the maiden edition of the Niger Delta Games in Uyi, after clinching 3 gold to her credit at the event was rewarded by her state sports commission for her exploit at the 4th youth Games. The Executive chairman of the Edo state Sports Commission Hon. Amadin Desmond Enabulele and the management organized a befitting reception for the young athlete with monetized reward to encourage her in her chosen carrier.

Team Edo's weightlifting youngstar Favour Cornelius represented Team Nigeria at the 4th African Youth Games between 10th and 20th of De-

cember 2025 in Angola, where she won three gold medals in weightlifting, contributing significantly to Nigeria's total of eight gold medals at the games.

In recognition of her outstanding achievement, Favour Cornelius who was so dominant at the 2025 National Youth Games with 3 gold medals to her credit, was honoured with cash prizes presented by the Commission's Executive Chairman, alongside the Permanent Secretary, Executive Directors, management staff, and coaches..

Speaking, the young African champion Favour said she was not afraid to go into the competition in Angola to contend with the best in Africa because she was well prepared by her Edo State coaching crew led by

Ikponmwosa Omorigomwan.

She expressed appreciation for the great support and reception accorded the Edo state Sports Commission.

"I am very happy and I feel honoured with the kind of reception our Sports Commission chairman Hon Amadin Desmond Enabulele and the management team accorded me. I didn't expect this kind of reception. I was overwhelmed with joy when the chairman introduced me and started praising me in front of top management team and the general staff, including the financial support from the Chairman and others. I am grateful and I see everything as huge motivation for me to do more in my chosen field.



Niger Delta Games' Head of Culture Affairs and Entertainment, Edi Lawani (left); Team Leader, Itiako Ikpoko; Chairman, Edo State Sports Commission, Desmond Amadin Enabulele and Project Director, Fred Edoreh at the Samuel Ogbemudia Stadium on Wednesday.

## AFCON 2025: Fans decry poor officiating in Nigeria's loss to Morocco

Some football fans have berated the Confederation of African Football (CAF) over poor officiating in Nigeria's 2-4 loss on penalties to hosts Morocco in the semi-finals of the 2025 African Cup of Nations (AFCON).

The fans took to social media to criticise Ghanaian referee Daniel Nii Laryea, who took charge of proceedings on the day, alleging that his decisions were biased.

At the Prince Moulay Abdellah stadium on Wednesday, Morocco put a dent to Nigeria's unscathed run in the tournament as both teams could not find the back of the net in 120 minutes.

After the game, Super Eagles right-back, Bright Osayi-Samuel, while interviewed by journalists, noted that the referee made numerous unfair calls.

"It was very painful to lose. I think we played well. The back four was amazing and I am proud of the team.

"The manager and board members came down to say they are proud of the team. It is painful that we lost on penalties—which is about luck.

"One thing I would say is that the referee was appalling. I am not saying that is the reason we lost, but (he) was making very wrong decisions.

"It is painful to see that we have such referee in big games like today. However, I wish Morocco all the best," Osayi-

Sameul added.

Nigerian actor, Pere Egbi, on his X account, lambasted referees in AFCON, alleging unprofessionalism while urging CAF to henceforth invite officials outside the continent.

"AFCON should never have referees from Africa officiating its games again.

"Bring in European or American referees who would referee a game with fairness and zero prejudice.

"You can't tell me that the refereeing in this AFCON has been fair! Referees now come in the pitch to play games as well now.



DANIEL LARYEA

## AFCON 2025: Obi hails Super Eagles, says they made Nigerians proud



SUPER EAGLES COACHING CREW

Peter Obi, the 2023 Labour Party presidential candidate, has hailed the Super Eagles for their beautiful display throughout the 120 minutes of play against the hosts country

Morocco in the ongoing 2025 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON).

The News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) reports that the Super Eagles lost 4-2 in a penalty shoot-out after a dramatic

semi-final game played at the Prince Moulay Abdellah stadium in Rabat, Morocco.

Obi, a former governor of Anambra, in a message posted on his X handle on Thursday, described the match as a battle well fought.

According to him, it was a battle well fought and heads were not bowed.

"Thank you for a beautiful 120 minutes of incredible play. You showed your strength and prowess against all odds.

"The journey is not over. You have made the nation proud. Keep your heads high, the Eagle never stopped soaring.

## Mane strike sends Senegal past Egypt into AFCON final

Senegal booked their place in the Africa Cup of Nations final after a late strike from Sadio Mané sealed a 1-0 semi-final victory over Egypt on Wednesday.

Mané struck 12 minutes from time with a low, decisive effort from the edge of the penalty area to reward Senegal's sustained dominance in a tense last-four encounter. It proved a deserved breakthrough for the Teranga Lions, who controlled possession and territory throughout as Egypt failed to register a single shot on target or win a corner before conceding.

Despite their authority, Senegal initially struggled to break down a disciplined Egyptian defence and needed a slight deflection to open the door for the winning goal. The decisive moment came after Lamine Camara's effort from distance was blocked, with the ball falling kindly to Mané, who drilled a grass-cutting shot beyond goalkeeper Mohamed El Shenawy.

Senegal had threatened earlier in the contest, with Nicolas Jackson firing over in the 19th minute and subsequent efforts from Habib Diarra and Pape Gueye drawing routine saves from El Shenawy. The pattern continued after the break, as

Senegal dominated possession but were largely restricted to speculative attempts from range until Mané's intervention.

The goal finally stirred Egypt into life, prompting a late tactical gamble as three strikers were introduced in a desperate bid to salvage the match. Substitute Ahmed Zizo forced Edouard Mendy into a save during stoppage time, but it was Egypt's only meaningful attempt of the game.

Defeat ended Mohamed Salah's hopes of claiming a first Africa Cup of Nations title with his country. The Liverpool forward, twice a losing finalist in the competition, was largely subdued and struggled to influence proceedings.

Senegal, however, faces concerns ahead of Sunday's final. Captain Kalidou Koulibaly was forced off midway through the first half with a groin injury and will miss the decider after picking up a booking for a foul on Omar Marmoush. Diarra was also cautioned for the second game in a row and is suspended.

The reigning champions will now meet either hosts Morocco or Nigeria in the final of the Africa Cup of Nations on Sunday, as they chase another continental crown.



SADIO MANÉ WITH HIS TEAM MATE

## WAFCON 2026: Super Falcons draw Zambia, Malawi, Egypt



SUPER FALCONS

Defending champions, the Super Falcons of Nigeria, have been drawn in Group C of the 2026 Women's Africa Cup of Nations (WAFCON) alongside Zambia, Egypt and Malawi.


The draw ceremony took place on Thursday in Morocco.

The tournament has been scheduled to run from March 17 to April 3, as Group C will be played at the Larbi Zaouli Stadium in Casablanca, Morocco.

The Super Falcons will face Malawi for the first time in the history of the Women's Africa Cup of Nations, while Egypt, a regular participant in the competition, complete the group.

Nigeria will also be targeting a record-extending 11th WAFCON title when the tournament kicks off in Morocco.

A total of 16 countries will participate in the competition for the first time,

 <p><b>The Nigerian Observer</b> ...That the people may know</p>	<h2 style="margin:0;">ADVERTISEMENT RATES (PRINT)</h2>
---	--

SIZES	COLOUR		BLACK AND WHITE		BLACK AND WHITE		MULTI NATIONALS			
			PUBLIC NOTICE		PRODUCT		COLOUR		BLACK & WHITE	
		RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)	RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)	RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)	RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)	RATE
FULL PAGE	517,344	556,145	369,500	397,213	325,150	349,536	665,156	715,043	443,440	476,698
13 X 4	369,500	397,213	295,600	317,770	206,938	222,458	443,500	476,763	369,550	397,266
10 X 4	340,000	365,500	273,500	294,013	177,400	190,705	370,000	397,750	295,600	317,770
HALF PAGE	295,600	317,770	236,500	254,238	147,800	158,885	340,000	365,500	273,450	293,959
10 X 3	221,700	238,328	147,800	158,885	118,300	127,173	266,000	285,950	251,300	270,148
13 X 2	206,900	222,418	133,000	142,925	103,500	111,263	221,800	238,435	147,810	158,896
QUARTER PAGE	192,150	206,561	118,250	127,119	88,690	95,342	236,500	254,238	133,000	142,975
CENTER SPREAD	1,356,968	1,466,992						B/W	1,148,181	1,241,276
HALF CENTER	991,590	1,071,989						B/W	887,272	959,212

FRONT PAGE POSITIONS					OTHER SIZES				
----------------------	--	--	--	--	-------------	--	--	--	--

SIZES		PRODUCTS		PUBLIC NOTICE		SIZES		PUBLIC NOTICE		PRODUCTS	
		RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)	RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)			RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)	RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)
FP 6X2	89,800	96,535	105,450	113,359	6 X 2	60,640	65,188	49,140	52,826		
FP 5X2	81,100	87,183	97,300	104,598	5 X 2	51,950	55,846	42,120	45,279		
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		
					2 X 1	12,400	13,330	7,415	7,971		
					CAC	38,000	40,850				

SPECIAL POSITIONS				
-------------------	--	--	--	--

SIZES	RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)	RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)
STRIP	118,250	127,119	147,800	158,885
STRIP INSIDE	88,600	95,245	118,250	127,119


SPECIAL PAGES				
---------------	--	--	--	--

FRONT PAGE	ADD 70% SURCHARGE
PAGES 2 & 3	ADD 55% SURCHARGE
PAGES 4 & 5	ADD 40% SURCHARGE
BACK PAGE	ADD 60% SURCHARGE
PAGES 4 & 5	ADD 40% SURCHARGE
BACK PAGE	ADD 60% SURCHARGE

CHANGE OF NAME		
Type	Fridays	Other Days
Miss to Mrs.	5000	7000
Reconciliation/Corrections of name	6000	8000

**NOTE: Booking for Colour Advert should be done 48 hours (i.e 2 days) before Publication.**

 <p><b>The Nigerian Observer</b> ...That the people may know</p> <p><b>24 Airport Road, Benin City, Edo State</b></p>	<p><b>For advert placement contact:</b> 08023457635 or 08137709000</p> <p>Email: nigerianobservernews1@gmail.com</p>
--	--

**EFFECTIVE FROM FEBRUARY 1, 2023**



# The worrisome resurgence of 'Okada' in Benin metropolis

There is an unmistakable and troubling resurgence of commercial motorcycle taxis, popularly known as Okada, in some parts of Benin City, where they were hitherto banned owing to their nefarious activities and incessant cases of road accidents. This renewed presence, creeping gradually but steadily into restricted areas, raises fundamental questions about policy enforcement, institutional memory, and the seriousness of government in safeguarding lives and property.

For residents of Benin metropolis, this resurgence is not merely a transportation issue; it is a matter of public safety, urban order, and internal security. The re-emergence of Okada in areas previously designated as no-go zones signals a dangerous slide into regulatory laxity at a time when crime and criminality have remained largely unabated in Edo State, much like other parts of Nigeria. It is therefore imperative to interrogate not just the presence of these commercial motorcycles, but the broader implications of allowing them to operate unchecked within the metropolis.

Sometime in 2012, I was driving along the bustling Akpakpava Road, Benin City in the early hours when, in the blink of an eye, a man — an accomplice perched behind an Okada rider, swooped on a lady waiting for a taxi. With audacious precision, he snatched her handbag and, like a shadow slipping through the cracks, they wove effortlessly through the congested traffic before vanishing.

“Thief! Thief! Thief!” the lady screamed, her voice barely cutting through the hum of the morning rush. That was all. I sat there, frozen and utterly helpless. I could not give chase; the traffic was impenetrable, yet the Okada darted through with terrifying ease. It was brazen. It was shocking. It was a stark reminder of the lawlessness that prowls our streets every single day.

The banning of Okada operations in parts of Benin metropolis did not occur in a vacuum. It was a policy response to a deeply troubling pattern of lawlessness, insecurity, and avoidable fatalities associated with commercial motorcycle operations.

A couple of years ago, precisely June 11 2013, the administration of former governor Adams Oshiomhole took the decisive step of restricting Okada operations in core areas of the city. The objective was clear: to mitigate the rising tide of criminality, reduce road accidents, and restore order to an increasingly chaotic urban transport system.

As Oshiomhole's tenure elapsed in 2016, the strict enforcement that had kept Okada riders out of restricted areas began to wane. The arrival of God-



win Obaseki's administration seemed to embolden the recalcitrant riders, allowing them to creep back into parts of Benin metropolis from which they had long been banned. Today, under the watch of the incumbent, Governor Monday Okpebholo, this ugly trend demands urgent attention. Left unchecked, the brazen return of these motorcycles threatens public safety, erodes the authority of government directives, and reminds residents that the battle against lawlessness is far from over.

Before the ban, Okada riders had earned an unenviable reputation. Many were implicated in street crimes ranging from phone snatching and armed robbery to serving as getaway vehicles for more organised criminal gangs. Their bikes, agile and unregistered in many cases, provided the perfect means to evade law enforcement. Equally disturbing was the carnage on the roads. Hospitals routinely recorded cases of broken limbs, head injuries, and fatalities arising from Okada accidents—often involving innocent pedestrians and commuters.

The ban, though initially controversial, gradually yielded dividends. Traffic flow improved in restricted areas, crime rates linked to motorcycle mobility declined, and residents began to experience a renewed sense of safety. That hard-won progress now appears to be under threat.

The current resurgence of Okada in Benin metropolis has been subtle but persistent. What began as isolated incursions into restricted zones has now assumed a more brazen dimension. Riders are increasingly visible in major streets, junctions, and neighbourhoods where their presence was once unthinkable. This development raises serious concerns about enforcement gaps and the seeming audacity of operators who now act with near impunity.

More troubling is the timing of

this resurgence. Edo State, like much of the country, is grappling with rising insecurity—cult-related violence, armed robbery, kidnapping, and other forms of organised crime.

In such a fragile security environment, the unchecked return of Okada into the metropolis is akin to reopening old wounds. It reintroduces a mode of transportation that criminals have historically exploited for surveillance, escape, and rapid movement.

Urban security experts have long argued that transportation systems are critical components of crime prevention. When poorly regulated, they become enablers of criminal enterprise. The re-emergence of Okada in Benin metropolis therefore represents not just a policy failure, but a potential security liability.

Beyond crime, the human cost of Okada resurgence cannot be overstated. Commercial motorcycle accidents remain one of the leading causes of road traffic injuries in Nigeria.

Unlike cars or buses, motorcycles offer little to no protection in the event of a crash. Riders often flout basic safety measures—over-speeding, wrong-way driving, carrying multiple passengers, and neglecting protective gear.

In Benin metropolis, where traffic density is high and road infrastructure is already under pressure, the return of Okada increases the probability of fatal accidents. Pedestrians, school children, the elderly, and other road users are once again exposed to unnecessary danger. Each accident is not just a statistic; it represents shattered families, lost livelihoods, and preventable grief.

The question must therefore be asked: should economic survival for a few justify the endangerment of many? Public policy, by its very nature, must prioritise collective safety over individual convenience.

Proponents of Okada operations often advance the argument of un-

employment and economic hardship. Indeed, commercial motorcycling provides a source of livelihood for thousands of young men who might otherwise be unemployed. This reality cannot be dismissed lightly. However, economic necessity cannot be used as a blanket justification for lawlessness and endangerment of public welfare.

The ban on Okada in Benin metropolis did not amount to a total prohibition across Edo State. Riders were designated to operate in outskirts and rural areas where traffic density is lower and alternative transport options are limited. The problem, therefore, is not the existence of Okada per se, but their illegal incursion into prohibited urban zones.

Moreover, sustainable solutions to unemployment lie not in tolerating unsafe practices, but in structured transport reforms, skills acquisition programmes, and job creation initiatives. Turning a blind eye to violations only perpetuates disorder and undermines the authority of the state.

This piece is a clarion call to the Edo State Government to swing immediately into action. Laws and policies are only as effective as their enforcement. Allowing Okada riders to reclaim restricted areas sends a dangerous message, that government directives are negotiable and that persistence can wear down authority.

The Commissioner for Transport, Hon. Saturday Uwuilekhue-Idehen, has reiterated his ministry's preparedness to arrest those flouting the directive on Okada operations. While this reassurance is welcome, declarations must be matched with visible, sustained action. Sporadic enforcement drives will not suffice. What is required is a coordinated, consistent approach involving traffic agencies, law enforcement, and local government authorities.

Designated zones must be clearly demarcated, offenders sanctioned

without favour, and seized motorcycles appropriately dealt with to deter repeat violations. Anything short of this risks emboldening defiance.

One of the enduring challenges of governance in Nigeria is policy inconsistency. Successive administrations often abandon or dilute policies that once yielded positive results, either due to political expediency or weak institutional memory. The Okada ban in Benin metropolis is a classic example of a policy whose benefits are now being eroded by lax enforcement.

Good governance demands continuity. When a policy is grounded in public interest and empirical evidence, it must be protected from gradual decay. The resurgence of Okada in restricted areas suggests a failure to internalise the lessons of the past; a dangerous oversight that could reverse years of progress.

To address this challenge comprehensively, the Edo State Government must adopt a multi-pronged approach. First, enforcement must be firm, impartial, and sustained. Second, public sensitisation campaigns should be intensified to remind residents and riders alike of the rationale behind the ban. Third, alternative transportation options such as regulated tricycles and buses should be strengthened to fill mobility gaps within the metropolis.

Equally important is the need to address the socio-economic drivers that push young men into Okada riding. Skills development, vocational training, and access to micro-credit can provide viable alternatives. Security is best achieved not only through coercion, but through inclusive policies that reduce desperation.

The resurgence of Okada in Benin metropolis is a worrisome development that demands urgent attention. It threatens public safety, undermines urban order, and potentially fuels criminal activity at a time when Edo State can least afford such vulnerabilities. History has already shown why these motorcycles were banned from core areas of the city. To ignore that history is to invite chaos.

Government must therefore act decisively to keep Okada riders out of prohibited zones and ensure they remain in the outskirts where they are designated to operate. The safety of residents, the credibility of public policy, and the authority of the state depend on it.

In matters of governance, complacency is costly. Benin City must not be allowed to slide backwards.

*Odaro, a columnist, lectures in the Department of Mass Communication, Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi.*