

Troops rescue 5 kidnap victims in Kogi forest, recover bodies

ABUJA

The Nigerian Army troops conducting ongoing anti-kidnapping operations in Kogi State have rescued five abducted victims and recovered decomposing bodies during a clearance operation in Lokoja

Local Government Area. A credible military source told newsmen on Thursday that the troops, drawn from Obajana and Kabba patrol bases, projected a fighting patrol to Ankomi village in the Adankolo general area of Lokoja Local Government Area, following credible intelligence.

The source said the patrol discovered that the village, previously occupied by bandits, had been destroyed and abandoned. "Troops extended the operation to the river line where three women and two children were intercepted. Preliminary debriefing confirmed they were

victims of the Ayetoro Kiri kidnap incident," the source said. "Troops further exploited the area and discovered two decomposing bodies suspected to be those of abducted persons. One corpse was evacuated, while efforts were ongoing to recover the remaining remains.

"The rescued victims are currently receiving medical treatment at Fisayo Hospital, Obajana, while the deceased woman has been deposited at St. Joseph Mortuary in Kabba, Kogi," he said. The source added that debriefing of the rescued victims was ongoing to support efforts

to rescue other abductees, noting that the general security situation in the area was calm but unpredictable. According to him, troops' morale and fighting efficiency remain satisfactory, and operations to rescue remaining victims are ongoing.

The Nigerian Observer



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Another fire in Lagos as shops in Ikotun burn

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2026: Okpebholo seeks Edo people's support, prayers for better governance

BENIN CITY

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, has urged residents of the state to sustain their collaboration, commitment, support and prayers to enable his administration to deliver improved governance and better living conditions in 2026.

The governor made the call while speaking to journalists after attending a cross-over night service at Living Faith Church (Winners Chapel), along Sapele Road, Benin City. He was accompanied by his

deputy, Hon. Dennis Idahosa, and other top members of the State Executive Council.

Okpebholo said the support and prayers of Edo people contributed significantly to the achievements recorded by his administration in 2025 through the implementation of the SHINE Agenda, expressing optimism that 2026 would be a better year with increased divine guidance and public backing.

According to him, the administration's practical and people-oriented approach to governance would continue

to drive growth, development and security, while creating a business-friendly environment capable of attracting investors to Edo State.

The governor acknowledged that 2025 was challenging but noted that the state overcame major obstacles through the grace of God and the support of the people.

He urged residents to enter 2026 with renewed determination and courage.

Describing 2026 as a year of hope, growth and development, Okpebholo assured that his administration remains commit-

ted to ending cultism, armed robbery, kidnapping and other criminal activities in the state.

"This is a year of hope and growth. I believe the year will be stress-free for Edo people.

"In 2026, insecurity will no longer be a problem. We will tackle insecurity head-on and ensure Edo State is free from cultism, kidnapping and other forms of criminality," he said.

He reiterated that the government had already declared total war on cultism, kidnapping, armed robbery and related crimes, adding that notable progress had been re-

corded and would be consolidated upon in 2026.

In his cross-over sermon, the Founder of Living Faith Church Worldwide, Bishop David Oyedepo, congratulated worshippers on successfully crossing into the new year, urging them not to allow circum-

stances dictate the pace of 2026 but to follow divine direction.

Oyedepo encouraged Nigerians to remain steadfast in faith, assuring them that obedience to God's instructions would lead to victory over challenges and make 2026 a better year for the nation.

I will deliver Abia to APC in 2027 —Orji Kalu

EKOLI-EDDA (EBONYI)

Sen. Orji Kalu (APC—Abia North) has vowed to do all within his powers to deliver Abia to the All Progressives Congress (APC) in the 2027 general elections.

Kalu made the vow at Ekoli, Edda Local Government Area of Ebonyi while on annual New Year visit to the Chairman of the APC Ebonyi, Chief Stanley Okoro-Emegha.

The Former Abia State Governor said he would deploy all within his arsenal to ensure that APC wrestles power from the ruling Labour Party in Abia.

"I will support President Bola Tinubu and the APC gubernatorial candidate in the elections.

"I will put my heart on the field to ensure that the APC wins landslide in Abia, at the election.

"The incumbent Governor, Dr Alex Oti is my friend but I am not discussing politics,

only the total victory of the APC in the elections," he said.

He urged state governors to secure their respective states and not leave such a task to President Tinubu.

"When I was Abia governor, I ensured total security of lives and properties.

"There were no cases of kidnapping among other crimes in Abia and this was at a period other states were grappling with heightened insecurity.

"The governors should emulate Governor Francis Nwifuru of Ebonyi State, who has ensured adequate peace and security in the state," he said.

Kalu noted that he conceived his annual New Year visit to the Ebonyi APC chairman due to his age-long loyalty to him.

"He is an embodiment of loyalty and is someone you can trust with your life.

"I raised him as a child, even when his father was alive

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SIGNING OF THE 2026 APPROPRIATION BILL:

Ogun State Governor, Dapo Abiodun (sitting), flanked by principal officers of the state's House of Assembly and key cabinet members, during the signing of the ₦1.669 trillion 2026 Appropriation Bill, tagged the "Budget of Sustainable Legacy, into law", in Government House, Abeokuta, on 1st January, 2026.

Gynaecologist cautions women against 'cryptic pregnancy' fraud

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NJC yet to reach final decision on High Court Judges appointment

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Ugandan-born Zohran Mamdani is sworn in as mayor of New York City

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Morocco 2025: Eagles to take on Mambas in round of 16

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2026: Oshiomhole urges Edo North to sustain hope

● Says Nigeria 'Turning a Corner'

CAROLINE AMEH

ABUJA

Senator Adams Aliyu Oshiomhole (APC-Edo North) has urged constituents to remain steadfast and hopeful as Nigeria enters 2026, insisting that recent national developments indicate that the sacrifices of citizens are beginning to yield positive outcomes.

In his New Year message to the people of Edo North, the former labour leader and ex-governor congratulated res-

idents for witnessing the start of a new year, expressing optimism that 2026 would deliver better prospects than the year gone by.

Oshiomhole noted that Nigerians celebrated the festive season without scarcity of petroleum products, highlighting that fuel prices dropped shortly before Christmas and remained stable throughout the holiday period.

He added that the yuletide season recorded comparative stability across the country, with no major spikes in inse-

curity or abrupt increases in the prices of essential commodities.

According to the former National Chairman of the All Progressives Congress (APC), these developments, though modest, signal that the nation

is gradually "turning a corner" after years of economic and social challenges.

He attributed this progress to what he described as the leadership of a "competent, tested and trusted captain" steering the country toward recovery.

Reiterating his commitment

to the people of Edo North, Oshiomhole pledged to remain a strong and consistent voice in the National Assembly.

He assured constituents of his resolve to push for policies and interventions that will improve living standards, strengthen communities, and ensure the delivery of demo-

cratic dividends across the senatorial district.

As 2026 begins, the senator prayed for God's guidance and grace for the people of Edo North, expressing confidence that the new year will usher in improved peace, progress and prosperity for both the district and the nation.

New year: Olu Apata urges community members to keep faith in God

LOKOJA

The Olu Apata-Oworo, Oba Frederick Balogun JP, has felicitated with his subjects over the new year celebration, urging them to keep faith in God for the growth and development of the land.

The traditional ruler gave the urge in a New Year message in Lokoja on Thursday to the people of Apata-Oworo and kogi as a whole.

Balogun, who said that the new year signified a new beginning, hope, and fulfilment, urged communities to support their leaders genuinely for the desired growth and development.

The traditional rural thanked God and the people for displaying utmost faith in him as their community leader, and promised never to let them down.

He noted that God has been so faithful to the Apata-Oworo kingdom throughout the year 2025

Oba Balogun said, "The support and cooperation I have

been enjoying from my people for over 11 years now is indeed, a pill, empowering and encouraging me to lead as expected of me."

He charged them to remain law-abiding citizens of the state and prayed, "as we entered into the new year in peace and with joy, no evil shall befall anyone of us throughout the year."

On Governor Ahmed Odo's administration, he said that it has been so committed to uplifting the well-being of the people of kogi in all ramifications.

"We have seen the government's commitment security wise, with the successes so far recorded in 2025 in restoring peace and security of lives and property.

"Our support to the administration will go a long way in making it do more towards the growth and development of the state," he said.

Oba Balogun also expressed gratitude to Alhaji Aliko Dangote and the management of Dangote Cement Plant Plc for the infrastructural development the company has brought to his domain that has positively touched the lives of the Apata-Oworo people.



OBİ'S FORMAL DEFECTION TO ADC:

L-R: Senator representing Abia South senatorial district, Enyinnaya Abaribe; former governor of Sokoto State, Alhaji Aminu Waziri Tambuwal; High Chief Ben Obi; Presidential candidate of the Labour Party (LP) in the 2023 General Elections and former governor of Anambra State, Mr Peter Obi; former Senate President and Interim Nation Chairman of the African Democratic Congress (ADC), Senator David Mark; former governor of Edo State and ADC's Legal Adviser, Prof. Oserheimen Osunbor; former governor of Enugu State, Chief Okwesili Nwodo, and former National Chairman and National Leader of the party, Prof. Ralf Nwosu, during Mr Peter Obi's formal defection to the ADC on Wednesday.

Lagos APC endorses Tinubu's New Year reform path

LAGOS

The Lagos State Chapter of the All Progressives Congress (APC) has endorsed President Bola Tinubu's New Year address, pledging unwavering support for ongoing national reforms.

The party said it aligned fully with the President's message, insisting there would be no retreat from reform and no distraction by what it described as opposition noise.

In a statement, the state APC Spokesman, Mr Seye Oladejo, said Tinubu's address reflected the true burden of leadership.

"Leadership is not an entertainment contest or a popular-

ity poll, but the courage to take tough decisions in the national interest," Oladejo said.

He noted that such difficult choices were avoided for decades by those now criticising the government from the sidelines.

According to him, the President spoke with confidence, showing deep understanding of Nigeria's challenges and the resolve required to confront them.

"The era of economic escapism, fiscal recklessness and governance by deception is over," Oladejo said.

He described the Renewed Hope Agenda as a fundamental reset, stressing that genuine reforms were never painless.

Oladejo said Nigeria was

already recording measurable progress despite what it called orchestrated opposition hysteria. "Macroeconomic indicators are stabilising, investor confidence is improving, infrastructure investment is rising, and national security is being firmly addressed," he said.

The spokesman said these developments were early dividends of leadership that refuse to sacrifice the future for cheap applause.

Oladejo said Tinubu would not be stampeded, blackmailed or distracted by critics with no credible alternatives.

"The same voices predicting doom today are the architects of yesterday's decay," he said.

He described Lagos as Nigeria's political and economic heartbeat, noting that the state understood the discipline required for reform.

"Lagos has lived reform and knows progress demands patience, sacrifice and resolve," Oladejo said.

He added that Lagos APC would continue to defend and advance the President's New Year direction without apology.

The spokesman urged Nigerians to remain focused and resolute on the path to national renewal.

"There will be no retreat. There will be no distraction. Nigeria is moving forward," he added.

Nasarawa Assembly to enact law to sustain FG/IFAD-VCDP gains

LAFIA

The Nasarawa State House of Assembly has reaffirmed its commitment to enact a law that will sustain the gains of the Federal Government and International Fund for Agricultural Development-Value Chain Development Programme for small-holder farmers in the state.

The Chairman of the House Committee on Agriculture, Dr Peter Akwe, gave the assurance on Thursday during a field visit by a VCDP team to Barkin

Abdullahi Community in Lafia North Administrative Area.

The team was led by the Commissioner for Agriculture and Chairman of the VCDP Steering Committee, Mr Umar Tanko-Tunga.

Akwe said the proposed legislation would institutionalise the programme's interventions and ensure continuity beyond its lifespan.

Residents of Barkin Abdullahi came out in large numbers to welcome the team, which

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I will deliver Abia to APC in...

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and he was part of the success stories I recorded as a governor.

"When I handed him over to

Former Ebonyi Governor, Sen. David Umahi, I urged him to give his principal 100 percent loyalty and he has transferred such virtue to the incumbent governor, Nwifuru," he said.

AWKA

Consultant Gynaecologist and Obstetrician, Dr Abosede Lewu has said that cryptic pregnancy is a real medical condition, but is often misunderstood and exploited by fraudsters.

Lewu, who is also the Chief Medical Director of ORB Women's Clinic, Lagos, told newsmen on Thursday that cryptic pregnancy referred to a real pregnancy.

She explained that in such cases, a woman would be unaware of her condition until about five months into the pregnancy or beyond and in some cases, women only discovered they were pregnant when they went into labour.

"Cryptic pregnancy is a real pregnancy. The major difference between it and every oth-

er pregnancy is awareness.

"The woman is pregnant but does not know," Lewu said.

According to her, cryptic pregnancy is more likely to occur in women with menstrual irregularities or those who have gone for long periods without seeing their menstruation.

She explained that women approaching menopause could also experience cryptic pregnancy, as their menstrual cycles may already be irregular, occurring once in three or six months.

"So, when they become pregnant, they may assume the symptoms they are having are just part of the changes associated with nearing menopause," she said.

Lewu added that breastfeeding women were also at risk, noting that many new mothers do not resume menstruation until they stop breastfeeding effectively.

"As a result, such women can actually be pregnant without knowing, as they believe their period is yet to return," she said.

The gynaecologist warned that cryptic pregnancy had its own dangers because it was usually unplanned, with the woman not preparing for it medically or emotionally.

She also cautioned that some unscrupulous individuals exploited the concept of cryptic pregnancy to scam desperate women trying to conceive.

"Some scammers take advantage of women by claiming to see a pregnancy and continue to pump them with medications to stop their periods.

"When such women visit diagnostic centres for scans, there is usually no evidence of pregnancy, unlike in genuine cryptic pregnancy where a real

pregnancy exists."

She advised women to be cautious, stressing that if only one person claimed to see a pregnancy, while no independent medical test confirmed it, then it was likely a scam.

"As a woman, if you are working with someone who claims to be helping you get pregnant and only that person can see the pregnancy, then you are being scammed," she said.

Lewu warned that one of the dangers of receiving care from such quack was the use of unregulated hormones, which could expose women to severe, life-threatening medical conditions, either immediately or later in life.

She further stressed that there was no secrecy in genuine cryptic pregnancy and that nobody induces cryptic pregnancy in a woman.

Akpabio withdraws defamation suits after priest's counsel

ABUJA

Senate President, Godswill Akpabio, has directed his lawyers to withdraw all pending defamation lawsuits, saying he was moved by a priest's counsel during a New

Year Mass.

This was contained in a statement by the Senate president's media office in Abuja on Thursday.

Speaking on Thursday at Sacred Heart Parish, Uyo, Akpabio said he had filed nearly

nine suits against individuals he accused of defaming him.

"I had almost nine cases in court against some individuals who defamed me, who lied against me, who slandered my name.

"But I listened to the priest

and realised he was talking to me, so I directed my solicitors to withdraw all lawsuits against them," Akpabio said.

In his homily, the parish priest and Vicar-General, Very Reverend Father Donatus Udoette, urged worshippers to

pursue peace and reconciliation.

"You have to let go of the past, no matter what it was. All of us carry pain and hurt, but letting go allows us to move

on," he said.

Akpabio's decision formally ends all defamation-related legal disputes, signalling closure to the publicised cases at the beginning of the new year



CELEBRATING FIRST 'BABY OF THE YEAR':

Chief of Staff to the President, Femi Gbajabiamila (R) celebrating first 'Baby of the Year,' Jumole Yusuf at the Gbaja Maternal and Child Center, Gbaja Surulere in Lagos

New year: Idahosa canvasses peace, inclusive devt in Edo

BENIN CITY

The Deputy Governor of Edo State, Rt. Hon. Dennis Idahosa, has urged residents of the state to prioritise peace, unity and shared responsibility as the government rolls out its development agenda for 2026.

In a New Year message signed by his Chief Press Secretary, Mr Friday Aghedo, Idahosa reflected on the challenges of the past year, describing 2025 as a period marked by economic, security and social

pressures across the country.

He said despite the difficulties, Edo people demonstrated resilience and commitment to democratic ideals, adding that their patience and optimism provided a strong foundation for progress in the new year.

The deputy governor said 2026 would be dedicated to deepening good governance through stronger institutions, improved service delivery and policies that promote inclusive growth across all parts of the state.

He reaffirmed that the ad-

ministration of Governor Monday Okpebholo would sustain its focus on job creation, infrastructure expansion, quality education, accessible healthcare and transparency in public affairs.

Idahosa also called for continued cooperation among citizens, noting that unity remains critical to achieving lasting peace and security in Edo State.

He commended youths for their energy and creativity, urging them to remain disciplined and patriotic, while acknowledging the role of elders and

the contributions of workers, farmers, traders, professionals and entrepreneurs to the state's socio-economic development.

Extending the message to Nigerians, the deputy governor appealed for national cohesion and mutual respect, stressing that the country's diversity should be seen as a catalyst for growth rather than division.

He expressed optimism that collective effort would translate into sustainable development for Edo State and the nation, as he wished citizens a peaceful and prosperous New Year.

Fubara betrayed PDP, says Rivers factional Chairman

PORT HARCOURT

The Rivers chapter of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) has said that Governor Siminalayi Fubara has betrayed it and the Rivers people by dumping the party in the middle of its current political crisis.

Dr Nname Ewor, a factional Caretaker Chairman of the party stated this during a news conference on Thursday in Port Harcourt.

Recall that the face-off between Fubara and members of the State Assembly began barely a year after taken office, which later threw the state into serious political crisis.

Ewor said that President Bola Tinubu intervened, adding that part of the agreement was that Fubara would not run for another term.

He added that Fubara was also asked to reinstate Chief Ohna Awuse as Chairman, Rivers Traditional Rulers Council.

He further revealed that other agreements reached was that the governor should drop Tammy Danagogo as Secretary to the State Government and Edison Ehie as Chief of Staff.

He alleged that Fubara had refused to keep all the terms of the pact reached, leading to the collapse of the peace agreement and the subsequent dec-

laration of a State of Emergency in Rivers by Tinubu.

The chairman added that Fubara had another agreement with Tinubu shortly before the emergency rule was lifted, a situation that led to his eventual defection from the PDP to the ruling All Progressive Party (APC).

He explained that shortly after announcing his defection, Fubara began boasting that Tinubu would force the State House of Assembly members to pass the 2026 budget.

He said that the governor also boasted that Tinubu would equally compel the Minister of the Federal Capital Territory, Nyesom Wike, to support his second term reelection bid.

He called on Fubara to tell the people of Rivers the terms of agreement reached with Tinubu before the emergency rule was lifted in the state.

"The mandate Fubara is holding was given to him by Rivers people, and all his actions and inactions affects all those whose mandate he is holding.

"Therefore, it is incumbent on him at this material time, to disclose to Rivers people the terms of the peace agreement he entered with Tinubu before the emergency rule was lifted.

"This will enable rivers people to make informed decisions," he said.

2027: Rivers' Abua-Odual LG pledges 100% loyalty to Tinubu, Wike

PORT HARCOURT

Mr Owolobi Ofori, Chairman of Abua-Odual Local Government Council of Rivers and other stakeholders have pledged 100 percent loyalty to President Bola Tinubu and the Minister of the Federal Capital Territory, Nyesom Wike.

They made the pledge during Wike's thank you visit to the local government area (LGA) on Thursday.

Ofori assured the minister that leaders of the various communities in the LGA were under the same canopy with the minister and await his directives.

"We know who we are following and we know where we are going. Our loyalty will never be in doubt, we are ready for you 100 percent," he assured.

Also, Mr John Iderima (PDP – Abua-Odual State Constitu-

ency), thanked the minister for what he had done during his tenure as governor of the state.

Iderima, who said he would forever remain indebted to the minister, said that the communities never had it good until Wike became a governor in Rivers.

Former Minister of State for Environment, Mr Udi Odum, equally assured Wike that all the political warriors of the LGA were with him.

"I will work with you not for my personal gain but for the development of the area. I am assuring you that whoever did not get your blessing will fail in this area," Odum said.

The Women Leader in the LGA, Mrs Ukel Oyakimi, equally pledged the complete loyalty of women in the area to the FCT minister and Tinubu.

"Our loyalty is with you and we will continue to follow you wherever you go," she said.

Aiyedatiwa orders security clampdown after Ipele police station attack

AKURE

Governor Lucky Aiyedatiwa of Ondo State on Thursday met with state heads of security agencies following the new year's eve attack on Ipele Police Station in Owo Local Government Area of the state.

Aiyedatiwa said he had directed intensified patrols across communities and forest areas, stressing that security remained a 24-hour responsibility, particularly during festive periods.

The governor, who stated this while speaking with newsmen in Akure after the meeting, said it was important to review and respond to the attack with measures to prevent its recurrence.

He explained that the attack occurred late on Wednesday

night while many residents were attending night services to usher in 2026.

Aiyedatiwa also said that upon receiving the report, he immediately contacted the Police and the Brigade Commander of the Nigeria Army.

"I instructed that security personnel be deployed to support officers on patrol and protect residents.

"Security operatives, including members of the Joint Operations Task Force and Amotekun Rangers, were already on patrol throughout the state and in forested areas.

"Their rapid mobilisation ensured that the attackers, who gained access to the police station and discharged an explosive, were unable to harm anyone.

"Somehow they were able to

breach security, but the swift response of the security agencies helped greatly to curtail the situation. No life was lost.

"Only the police station was damaged. All officers survived and were able to rejoin their colleagues on patrol to prevent further criminal activity.

"The emergency meeting with security chiefs focused on reviewing the incident, assessing the security response, and ensuring that similar acts do not happen again," he said.

Also speaking with newsmen, the Commissioner of Police (CP) in Ondo State, Adebowale Lawal, said that the governor convened the emergency session with the heads of the police, military, DSS, Civil Defence and Amotekun.

According to him, the meeting was to assess the situation

and activate strategies to apprehend the perpetrators.

Lawal dismissed reports circulating on social media suggesting casualties or attacks on churches, affirming that no lives were lost and no church was affected.

He added that investigations were ongoing to determine the extent of damage, including items looted from the police armoury.

"It is too early to conclude that the attackers were terrorists. Once investigations are complete and arrests are made, we will identify those responsible," the CP said.

Lawal reassured residents that Ondo State remained one of the safest states in Southern Nigeria, and urged citizens to remain calm and maintain confidence in security agencies.

NEWS

Ebonyi procures 3 aircraft to boost economy

ABAKALIKI

The Ebonyi State Government on Thursday said it had procured three aircraft under the Ebonyi Air Outfit, which are expected to arrive in the state on January 26.

Governor Francis Ogbonna Nwifuru disclosed this in Abakaliki during his New Year broadcast to the people of the state, noting that the move was part of an intensive drive to en-

hance the state's economy.

Nwifuru said the initiative was not about prestige but a calculated effort aimed at opening Ebonyi to greater economic activity.

"Reliable air transport makes it easier for investors to do business, for professionals to move freely from the state, and for our people to connect with other parts of the country and beyond.

"Ebonyi Air will support business growth, encourage

tourism and reduce the time and cost of travel.

"This will also strengthen Ebonyi's position as a state that is ready to engage with the wider economy and attract new opportunities," he said.

The governor said that by improving connectivity, the state was creating conditions that support trade, investment and job creation, making it more accessible and competitive.

"Additionally, we will commence the establishment of a modern cement factory to harness our abundant limestone

deposits.

"Raw materials from different parts of Nigeria have been transported elsewhere for processing, and our goal is to add that value at home.

"Processing our limestone within Ebonyi will secure jobs, skills and income within our communities," Nwifuru said.

He noted that the cement factory would support industrial development and create direct and indirect employment opportunities for the people.

"The investment will contribute significantly to the In-

ternally Generated Revenue of the state and also support construction activities.

"This project is part of a broader plan to move Ebonyi from a consumption to a production economy – one that uses its natural resources wisely.

"Economic progress must go hand-in-hand with democratic responsibility, as development is strongest when leadership is chosen by the people it serves," he said.

On local government elections, the governor assured that the state would conduct its own

in 2026 and pledged that the exercise would be free and fair.

"Let me state that there will be no imposition of candidates, as local government council leaders must emerge through the people's votes and not through appointment or influence," he said.

Nwifuru reeled out his administration's achievements in the areas of the economy, infrastructure, education and health, among others, and pledged to consolidate on the gains already recorded across all sectors.

Christian Pilgrims Commission expresses hope for peace, prosperity in Nigeria

ABUJA

The Executive Secretary of the Nigerian Christian Pilgrim Commission, Bishop Stephen Adegbite, has expressed optimism that Nigeria will witness peace and prosperity in the new year.

In his New Year message to Nigerians on Thursday, Adegbite said God would bring positive transformation to the nation.

According to him, peace remains the foundation for national development, noting that without peace, meaningful progress cannot be achieved.

"The Lord will do a new thing for Nigeria, and everyone will see it and rejoice.

"Peace will reign across the nation. Without peace, there will never be meaningful development, and it is peace that will bring prosperity.

"Nigeria will move forward ever, backward never," he said.

Adegbite urged Nigerians to pray for President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, his administration and to support the success of the Renewed Hope Agenda.

He said the first batch of Christian pilgrims were already in the Holy Land, praying for Nigeria's peace and prosperity.

The cleric also wished the President, Vice President, First Lady Senator Oluremi Tinubu, and all Nigerians a peaceful and prosperous new year.

LASTMA sanctions 19 officers for misconduct

LAGOS

The Lagos State Traffic Management Authority has sanctioned 19 officers following disciplinary actions taken by the Lagos State Civil Service Commission over cases of gross misconduct in 2025.

The General Manager of LASTMA, Mr Olalekan Bakare-Oki, disclosed this on Thursday in Lagos.

Bakare-Oki said that five officers were dismissed, nine were demoted, while others received serious warning letters.

He said the authority had strengthened its internal checks to curb excesses among

officers in the field.

"We have improved our surveillance unit, and on a daily basis, officers go out in plain clothes, like mystery shoppers, to identify personnel who operate against laid-down guidelines," he said.

Bakare-Oki noted that whenever feedback was received concerning misconduct, prompt action was taken after due diligence.

"If our officers are found wanting, they are always punished," he said.

He added that LASTMA remained committed to ensuring free flow of traffic and seamless movement of goods and persons across Lagos State.

Nasarawa Assembly to enact law to...

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inspected projects including a bridge at Takpa Road Rice Aggregation Centre, a cassava processing centre and a solar-powered borehole.

Tanko-Tunga said the visit was to assess progress, expressing confidence that the projects would improve the livelihoods of farmers.

He assured that Governor

Abdullahi Sule would continue to prioritise agriculture and urged residents to protect the projects.

Other stakeholders, including legislators, commissioners, farmer groups and community leaders, commended the interventions and appealed for additional infrastructure, particularly road construction linking Lafia to Barkin Abdullahi.



FIRST BABY BORN IN 2026:

L-R: First Lady of Lagos State, Dr (Mrs) Ibijoke Sanwo-Olu; Chief Medical Director, Ibeju-Lekki General Hospital, Dr Emeh Okon; Special Adviser to the Governor on health, Dr Kemi Ogunyemi; former Commissioner for Education, Lagos State, Mrs Olayinka Oladunjoye; Wife the Deputy Governor, Mrs Oluremi Hamzat and others who honoured the first baby born in 2026 that was delivered by Caesarean Section at 12:am at the Ibeju-Lekki General Hospital, Akodo in Lagos on Thursday.

Navy dredges 11km waterways amid terrorists' occupation in Lake Chad —CNS

MAIDUGURI

The Nigerian Navy has dredged and cleared 11 kilometres of waterways to enhance navigability and improve access to previously inaccessible routes, facilitating the gradual revival of socio-economic activities in the Lake Chad Basin.

The Chief of Naval Staff, Vice Admiral Emmanuel Ikechukwu Ogalla, made this known on Thursday during a visit to Maiduguri.

He said the Navy had been conducting sustained opera-

tions against terrorists in the Lake Chad Basin to restore normal economic activities in the region.

"The Nigerian Navy Base, Lake Chad, has significantly improved access to critical waterways through targeted engineering interventions.

"In particular, the base has successfully dredged and cleared approximately 11 kilometres of waterways, enhancing navigability and reopening previously inaccessible routes.

"These efforts have facilitated the safe return of fishermen, farmers, traders and transport

operators, thereby supporting the gradual revival of socio-economic activities across the region," the naval chief said.

He stated that the Nigerian Navy remained fully committed to denying terrorists the use of Lake Chad waterways through sustained and coordinated operations in collaboration with the Multinational Joint Task Force.

Ogalla said the Navy played a key role in clearing terrorist elements from waterways, particularly during Operation Lake Sanity III, which focused on degrading insurgents' logistics and ensuring freedom of movement to consolidate gains achieved by the joint task force.

"Additionally, the Navy ensures persistent intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance coverage in close coordination with the Nigerian Air Force.

"This joint effort enhances situational awareness, enables timely targeting of terrorist activities and supports effective maritime interdiction operations, thereby sustaining pressure on terrorist elements within the Lake Chad Basin," he said.

He urged troops at the Baga Naval Base to intensify efforts against terrorists in the Lake Chad Basin and assured them of his commitment to their welfare, including the deployment of additional manpower and equipment.

Another fire in Lagos as shops in Ikotun burn

LAGOS

Four shops dealing in electronics were gutted by fire in a building at Ikotun, Lagos State, early on New Year's Day, with all items in the shops destroyed.

The affected shops are located in a building beside GUO Transport Company, Ikotun.

Items destroyed included washing machines, television sets and power generators.

A resident of the area said neighbours were able to prevent the fire from spreading to other parts of the building.

He explained that residents used large quantities of water to control the fire before officials of the Lagos State Fire

Service arrived.

He thanked the firefighters for their timely intervention, which prevented the fire from consuming the entire building.

"If not for their prompt response, the whole building would have been burnt, and the fire would have affected nearby houses," he said.

The resident said he could

not ascertain the cause of the fire but suspected a faulty electrical circuit.

The area was cordoned off, and no casualty was recorded.

It would be recalled that the Great Nigeria Insurance building on Lagos Island and the Army Arena Market at Oshodi had been gutted by fire within the past eight days.

Gov Mutwang resigns from PDP

JOS

Governor Caleb Mutwang of Plateau State has resigned his membership of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP).

This is contained in a letter dated December 30, 2025,

addressed to the PDP Ward Chairman in Ampang West Ward, Mangu Local Government Area of the state.

The letter, personally signed by the governor, was made available to journalists on Thursday in Jos.

Governor Mutwang

thanked the PDP for providing him with the platform to participate in the democratic process and also expressed appreciation to party leaders at all levels for their support and solidarity.

He said, "Given the realities of the moment and guided by my commitment to purposeful

leadership, clarity of direction and service delivery, I am compelled to seek an alternative political platform."

Governor Mutwang was elected governor in 2023 on the platform of the PDP.

He did not disclose his next political destination.



NEWS CONFERENCE:

Head of the Civil Service of the Federation (HCSF), Mrs Didi Walson-Jack (7th L); Permanent Secretary, Federal Ministry of Livestock Development, Dr Chinyere Akujobi(5th L); Permanent Secretary, Regional Development, Dr Mary Ogbu(7th R) and others Permanent Secrecies and Directors, during a news conference to formally end Paper Based Operations in the Federal Civil Service in Abuja.

New year: Fintiri tasks Nigerians on love, forgiveness

YOLA

Governor Ahmadu Umaru Fintiri of Adamawa State has called on Nigerians to imbibe the spirit of forgiveness, love, reconciliation and re-dedication to the service of God and humanity in 2026.

Governor Fintiri made the call in his New Year message congratulating citizens on the arrival of the year 2026.

The message by his Chief Press Secretary, Mr Humwashi Wonosikou, on Thursday in Yola.

He stated, "If all Nigerians carry the spirit of accepting each other as one, the year 2026 will be peaceful and less challenging."

Governor Fintiri urged Nigerians to reflect on their blessings over the past year and give God all the glory for witnessing another year.

He thanked the people of Adamawa State for their support over the past six and a half years and assured them that the government would continue to support them in achieving their goals.

The governor emphasised that despite past challenges, Nigerians should remain optimistic while praying for recovery and progress.

He noted that synergy between government, the private sector and citizens could overcome Nigeria's challenges and create growth opportunities.

Governor Fintiri reassured the people that his administration would build on its past achievements by investing in security, intelligence and preventive measures to curb crime. He commended the sacrific-

es of security agencies in maintaining peace and reiterated his unwavering commitment to human capital development through youth and women empowerment as well as entrepreneurship schemes.

"Physical infrastructure construction, including legacy projects, will continue across all the Senatorial Districts," he said.

Governor Fintiri further called on citizens to join hands in building a new Adamawa State where "no one will be left behind and nothing will be left untouched."

Research shows COVID-19 vaccines still crucial in preventing severe illness

NEW YORK

The World Health Organisation (WHO) says new research shows that up-to-date vaccination remains the most effective way to prevent severe COVID-19 illness.

The WHO said that although the pandemic has officially ended and COVID-19 no longer causes the widespread disruption experienced during the global health emergency, studies led by the WHO Regional Office for Europe confirmed that people who received timely booster doses were far less likely to develop severe disease, require intensive care or die.

The findings were based on data from the European Severe Acute Respiratory Infection Vaccine Effectiveness (EuroSAVE) network, which monitors respiratory infections in hospitals across parts of Europe, the Balkans, the South Caucasus and Central Asia.

A medical epidemiologist at the WHO Regional Office, Mark Katz, said the virus continued to hospitalise and kill people.

"The studies highlight that while COVID-19 is not leading to the widespread disease we saw during the pandemic, it has still been causing a considerable number of hospitalisations and deaths," Katz said.

Between May 2023 and April 2024, nearly 4,000 patients were hospitalised with acute respiratory infections in countries covered by the network, with almost 10 percent of the cases caused by COVID-19, despite the pandemic having been declared over.

Among patients hospitalised with COVID-19, only three per cent had received a vaccine dose within the previous 12 months.

The consequences were often severe, as 13 percent of COVID-19 patients required admission to intensive care units, while 11 percent died.

Comparative research showed that patients hospi-

talised with COVID-19 were more likely than those with influenza to require oxygen, intensive care or succumb to the illness.

By contrast, vaccination provided strong protection.

One EuroSAVE study found that an up-to-date COVID-19 vaccine received within the past six months was 72 per cent effective at preventing hospitalisation and 67 per cent effective at preventing the most serious outcomes, including intensive care admission and death.

In addition, a separate multi-country analysis found that vaccines reduced COVID-19-related hospitalisations by about 60 percent.

2026: Year of massive possibilities, says Anambra Assembly Speaker

AWKA

The Speaker of the Anambra State House of Assembly, Dr Somtochukwu Udeze, has described the year 2026 as a year of great and endless possibilities.

Dr Udeze stated this in his New Year message to the people of the state on Thursday in Awka, noting that Nigerians experienced increased social, economic and political activities in 2025.

He urged residents and Nigerians to see the new year as an opportunity to re-examine their collective bond as a nation and to view past challenges as lessons needed to attain greatness, while approaching the year with a positive mindset.

"It is evident in the severe economic hardship and insecurity that confronted the masses in many ways," he said.

The speaker encouraged the people to remain steadfast, prayerful and law-abiding, expressing optimism that 2026 would be a turning point and an eventful year in all ramifications.

He reassured Anambra residents that the state legislature would approach legislative activities in 2026 with renewed vigour.

"We will ensure that meaningful development and overall good governance continue to thrive in the state," he said.

Dr Udeze expressed satisfaction with the performance of the 8th State Assembly, which he said continued to take decisive legislative actions, enact quality laws and pass impactful resolutions.

He commended Governor Charles Chukwuma Soludo for his efforts across various sectors, including education reforms, free education and healthcare delivery, security architecture, road infrastructure and youth empowerment initiatives.

He called on residents to continue supporting the present administration to enable the governor to advance his transformation agenda.

Dr Udeze wished the people a happy and prosperous New Year and prayed for God's guidance and blessings in all endeavours.

2026: Ododo pledges renewed focus on security, devt in Kogi

LOKOJA

Governor Ahmed Usman Ododo of Kogi State has pledged a renewed focus on security, infrastructure and people-oriented development in the year 2026.

Governor Ododo made the pledge in his New Year message to residents on Thursday in Lokoja.

He thanked citizens for their resilience in the face of challenges in the past year and highlighted gains recorded by his administration in security, education, healthcare and empowerment.

The governor attributed the progress to discipline, unity of purpose and the cooperation of the people.

He said, "The New Year brings renewed hope, stronger resolve for better governance,

policies that boost citizens' welfare and the state's economy.

"We will deepen collaboration with security agencies and community stakeholders to keep our state safe and peaceful."

Governor Ododo stressed that development thrives only in a peaceful and secure environment and urged residents to sustain unity, hard work and patriotism while rejecting division.

He reaffirmed his commitment to serve with integrity, transparency and compassion, and pledged continued support for President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's Renewed Hope Agenda.

"With God on our side and the support of our people, the New Year will be one of shared prosperity and greater accomplishments," the governor said.

Edo Hajj Board urges early preparation as Ramadan shifts 2026 hajj timeline

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Muslim Pilgrim Welfare Board has called on intending pilgrims to begin early preparations for the 2026 Hajj, following indications that Ramadan will fall in February, effectively bringing forward the Hajj operations schedule.

The Board's Chairman,

Mallam Musa Muhammad Uduimoh, made the call in a statement on Thursday, urging prospective pilgrims to promptly process their international passports, complete medical requirements and conclude registration formalities to avoid last-minute difficulties.

CONTINUES ON PG 6

NEWS

NJC yet to reach final decision on High Court Judges appointment

ABUJA

The National Judicial Council (NJC) said it has not taken the final action on the 62 legal prac-

tioners who applied for appointment as judges of the Federal High Court.

The NJC Secretary, Malam Ahmed Saleh, disclosed this in a statement on Thursday in

Abuja.

Saleh stated that reports, which have been circulating recently in the media, was not a true reflection of what transpired in the appointment process.

He also clarified that all the qualification processes referred to in the earlier media report on judicial officers appointment took place entirely at the level of the Federal Judicial Service Commission, (FJSC).

"The reports that 34 of the lawyers failed an integrity test and were dropped from consideration for appointment

were unauthorised by the NJC. "No decision or action has so far been taken by the Council in respect of the candidates concerned.

"A few candidates were discontinued at the FJSC stage due to adverse findings arising from petitions submitted to the commission.

Others did not progress further because they failed to attain the required qualifying score to move to the interview stage before the NJC.

"There is no stand-alone or newly introduced integrity test that automatically disqualified

candidates in bulk, as suggested by the reports."

He said that the judicial appointment process remained structured, merit-based and multi-layered, involving written examinations, performance benchmarks, background checks, consideration of petitions where applicable, and interviews conducted in line with established guidelines.

Saleh expressed concern that the information could mislead the public and unfairly damage the reputation of candidates who participated in the process in good faith.

He said that the council has commenced internal investigations to identify the source of the unauthorised press statement and would take appropriate steps to safeguard the integrity and credibility of its procedures.

"The NJC reaffirmed its commitment to transparency, fairness, due process and the highest standards of judicial integrity, while pleading with media practitioners to always seek clarification through authorised channels before publishing reports on sensitive institutional matters."

2026 'll be peaceful, full of happy events in Nigeria —Traditionalists

OSOGBO

Traditionalists on the platform of the Ancient Religious Societies of African Descendants International Council (ARSADIC) has said that 2026 will be peaceful, smooth and full of happy events for the country.

This is contained in a new year message by the President of the group, Aare Ifagbenusola Atanda, on Thursday in Osogbo.

Atanda, while congratulating the Federal Government for achievements across sectors of the economy, said "the new year will be far better than 2025."

He advised Nigerians, irrespective of religious faith or ethnic background, to prioritise the peace and unity of the country.

He urged Nigerians to always remember their economic power and relevance in the African continent.

The ARSADIC President, who noted that Nigeria's strength lies in its ethnic and

cultural diversity, also urged Nigerians to tolerate one another and show commitment to the nation's survival.

He prayed for President Bola Tinubu to be blessed with divine wisdom to handle myriads of challenges, including economic and security problems, confronting the nation.

He said that Nigerians must share common development goals and work together as one entity to continue to enjoy peace.

He emphasised that "the Federal Government must champion oneness, encourage our people to eschew divisive tendencies, particularly in politics and religion.

"With courage, tolerance, resilience, responsibility and collective leadership, and as traditionalists, we believe that the journey of our national life in 2026 will be peaceful, smooth and it will be full of happy events.

"All religious leaders have a huge responsibility to Nigeria and Nigerians."



CROSSOVER NIGHT:

Members of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) Crossover Night Church Service at Grace Tabernacle in Lagos on Thursday.

Sapele road residents laud Okpebholo, back 2028 re-election bid

BENIN CITY

Residents along the Benin-Sapele-Ogheghe corridor have praised Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, for reviving economic activities through the reconstruction of the long-abandoned Benin-Sapele-Warri Road, pledging their support for his second-term bid in 2028.

Operating under the Sapele Road Bypass Axis Group (SARBAG), the residents said the ongoing reconstruction has restored vehicular movement, boosted trading activities and brought relief to over 20 communities previously crippled by the road's deplorable condition.

They noted that the road, a critical economic link between Edo State and parts of the South-South and South-East, had remained neglected for years, sparking repeated protests before the Okpebholo administration intervened.

The state government, in collaboration with the Federal Government, took over the reconstruction of the federal road, deploying modern concrete pavement technology, drainage systems and

flood-control structures to reduce travel time and prevent recurring flooding.

From Ekea, Peanut, PZ, Mousco and Evbukhu to Ogheghe, motorists now ply completed sections of the road, while internal roads and the old Sapele Road are also being rehabilitated with hydrological infrastructure.

Speaking to journalists, SARBAG Chairman Mr Daniel Omoregbe, alongside Secretary Pastor Moses Omo-Osagiede and Treasurer Comrade Desmond Ekhatior, said the intervention has transformed the area and restored confidence among residents and businesses.

A motorist, Hon. Lion Joseph Ogieva, described the governor's intervention as long overdue, adding that the performance of the current administration in road construction surpassed that of previous governments.

Ogieva said residents would remember the intervention during the 2028 governorship election, describing the Benin-Sapele-Warri Road as a strategic gateway capable of driving economic growth across southern Nigeria.

Couple arraigned for allegedly threatening to kill pastors, church members

IBADAN

The police on Wednesday, dragged a couple before an Iyaganku Magistrates' Court in Ibadan, for allegedly threatening to kill pastors and some church members.

The defendants are, Olamide Abraham, 45 and his wife, Abidemi Abraham, 32.

The duo, whose addresses

were not provided, are standing trial on charges bordering on conspiracy and threat to life.

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

The prosecutor, Sgt. Kehinde Olarotimi, told the court that the defendants committed the offence between 2022 and December 29, 2025, at a CAC church in Sango Poly Road,

Ibadan.

He alleged that the defendants who were former members of the church, threatened to kill the pastors, Michael Ajayi, Dar-amola, Emem Inyang and some other church members.

He alleged that the couple sent voice and text messages to the complainants, threatening to kill and send terrors to them.

He said that the defendants were eventually arrested following police investigations.

The offences contravene the provisions of sections 86 and 516 of the Criminal Law of Oyo State, 2000.

The Magistrate, Mrs Adedola Adeola, granted the defendants bail in the sum of N200,000 each, with one surety each in like sum.

She held that the surety must be a blood relation of the defendants.

The court adjourned the case until February 16, for hearing.

4 men docked over alleged document forgery

IBADAN

The police in Ibadan has charged four men before an Iyaganku Magistrates' Court, over alleged forgery of documents.

The defendants are: Wasiu Adeyemo, 59; Mosebolata Jekodale, 47; Yusuf Ademola, 38; and Taofeek Giwa, 44.

The defendants whose addresses were not provided, were charged with conspiracy, forgery and conduct likely to cause breach of peace.

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

The prosecutor, Insp. Adeshina Folaranmi, told the court that the defendants com-

mitted the offences sometime in November at the Agbowo area of Ibadan.

He alleged that the defendants unlawfully forged an Oyo State Road tax clearance certificate as well as an Oyo State Delivery Vehicle License, 2026, for sale.

He alleged that the defendants also forged Oyo State Internal Revenue Certificates 2026, Urban Access Pass 2026, Driver's and Conductor's Badges 2026, and many other documents.

He alleged that the defendants forged the documents without approval of the Oyo State signage and advertisement agency.

He said that the offences contravene the provisions of

sections 249(d), 467 and 516 of the Criminal Law of Oyo State, 2000.

The Magistrate, Mrs Oluwabusayo Osho, granted the

defendants bail in the sum of one million naira each, with two sureties each in like sum.

She adjourned the case until Jan.27, for hearing.

Edo Hajj Board urges early...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 5

Uduimoh said early preparation would also help intending pilgrims get ready spiritually, physically and financially for the sacred journey, while enabling the Board to plan efficiently for logistics, welfare and coordination with relevant authorities.

He disclosed that the Board would soon commence ori-

entation programmes for pilgrims and advised them to stay alert to official information released through recognised channels.

The chairman reaffirmed the Board's commitment to ensuring a smooth, well-coordinated and spiritually fulfilling Hajj exercise for pilgrims from Edo State, while calling for strict adherence to all laid-down procedures.

Foreign

NEWS

Several dozen feared dead in Swiss ski resort bar fire

Several dozen people are presumed dead and around 100 injured after a fire ripped through a bar in a ski resort in southern Switzerland, officials have said.

The fire broke out at around 01:30 (00:30 GMT) during new year celebrations in a bar called Le Constellation in Crans-Montana, police said.

People from multiple countries have been affected, according to Swiss authorities, and "significant work" will be needed to identify victims and return bodies to families.

Officials investigating the incident have not mentioned any cause, but categorically ruled out an attack.

Ten helicopters, 40 ambulances and 150 emergency responders were sent overnight to the scene of the fire in the Valais region, which is popular with tourists.

Most of the injured experienced severe burns and were sent to Valais hospital, said Mathias Reynard, the region's council leader, in a press conference on Thursday morning.

Its intensive care unit had reached full capacity and Reynard said the local community must take extra care to avoid needing hospital treatment unnecessarily.

Some people have been taken to hospitals in Lausanne and Zurich which have specialist burns units.

A spokesperson for Lausanne University Hospital said they were treating 22 patients with burn injuries, while Zurich University Hospital said it was treating 12 patients for burns.

Details are still emerging, and it is not yet known the precise number of people who have been killed and injured, their nationalities, the cause of the fire or how many people were in the bar. Officials have, however, confirmed that several nationalities were involved.

The Italian foreign ministry said information from Swiss police indicated around 40 people had died.

Police at the press conference said "several dozen" were presumed dead, but did not give a more precise number when responding to questions

from the media.

Local media reports earlier on Thursday suggested pyrotechnics could have caused the incident, although this is unconfirmed.

Valais canton prosecutor general Beatrice Pilloud said an investigation was under way "to identify the circumstances which caused this dramatic situation to occur".

She told the press conference "currently we are favouring a fire and at no time is there question of any attack", adding out of respect for the families she cannot say more at this time.

Police initially referred to an explosion but later changed their definition to a fire, adding it was too early to speculate on the cause.

Asked about the cause at the news conference, regional security official Stéphane Ganzer said it "is not the detonation of an explosive device that causes the fire, it is the fire which, as it develops, causes an explosion and a general conflagration of the premises".

Work is ongoing to identify the victims and return bodies to

families as quickly as possible, Ms Pilloud said, adding: "To do that there is significant work which needs to be carried out. And this significant work will require the closure of the district."

The Italian ambassador to Switzerland, Gian Lorenzo Cornado, said that it will take weeks to identify the dead.

A helpline has been set up for families: +41 848 112 117

Swiss President Guy Parmelin said: "A moment of joy turned into a tragedy that has touched the whole of Switzerland and abroad."

Crans-Montana is a luxury ski resort, famous in the 1980s for hosting the World Cup skiing.

Le Constellation, which has been around for decades, has an upstairs with TV screens where people go and watch football matches, and a large bar downstairs for drinking and dancing.

The UK Foreign Office said its "thoughts are with all those injured and killed in the terrible tragedy" and consular staff were on standby to provide support to any British nationals affected.

Zelensky says peace deal is 90% ready in New Year address

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said a peace agreement to end the war with Russia is "90% ready", in a New Year address that largely focused on resistance to Moscow's full-scale invasion.

Zelensky said the remaining 10% of the agreement to end nearly four years of conflict would "determine the fate of peace, the fate of Ukraine and Europe".

In his own New Year speech, Russian President Vladimir Putin told his troops that "we believe in you and our victory".

Earlier on Wednesday, Moscow also released what it said was evidence of Ukraine using drones to target Putin's private home on Lake Valdai in north-west Russia, allegations Kyiv has strenuously denied.

It included a map allegedly showing that the drones were launched from the Sumy and Chernihiv regions of Ukraine and a video of a downed drone lying in snowy woodland. A serviceman standing next to the wreckage claims it is a Ukrainian Chaklun drone.

The BBC hasn't been able to verify the footage, and it is not possible to locate where it was shot.

Russia would review its position on the ongoing peace negotiations as a result of the alleged incident, the Kremlin said.

However, Kaja Kallas, the EU's top diplomat, on Wednesday described the Russian claims as a "deliberate distraction" and an attempt to derail the peace process.

In his 20-minute address to the nation, Zelensky said that Ukraine did not want peace "at any cost", adding that "we want the end of the war – not the

end of Ukraine".

He said that a Ukrainian withdrawal from the eastern Donbas region means "everything will be over", a reference to Russia's maximalist demand that Moscow secure full control of the industrial area in any peace agreement.

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

Its fate has been a major obstacle throughout negotiations, with Russia consistently unwilling to compromise on its aim to seize full control of Donbas.

In the address, Zelensky thanked leaders that have supported Ukraine, but said that "intentions must become security guarantees, and therefore - be ratified".

Following talks between Zelensky and his US counterpart Donald Trump in Florida earlier this week, the Ukrainian leader said Washington had offered security guarantees for 15 years - but a time frame for their implementation is not yet clear.

"Signatures under weak agreements only fuel war," Zelensky said in his address. "Either the world stops Russia's war, or Russia drags the world into its war."

By comparison, Putin's New Year address was much shorter.

Addressing the war in Ukraine, which Moscow describes as a "special military operation", Putin said: "We strive to bring joy and warmth through our care for those in need of support and, of course, to stand by our heroes – the participants in the special military operation – in both word and deed."

Netherlands police face 'unprecedented' New Year's violence

Police in the Netherlands were pelted with fireworks and faced an "unprecedented amount of violence" on New Year's Eve, officers have said.

A 19th century church in Amsterdam was engulfed by fire in the early hours of New Year's Day, although the cause of the blaze is not yet known.

The Vondelkerk, which overlooks the largest park in the city, the Vondelpark, has been a tourist attraction since it was built in 1872.

Elsewhere in the Netherlands, a 17-year-old boy and 38-year-old man were killed in fireworks incidents. In Bielefeld, Germany, local police said two 18-year-olds died after setting off homemade fireworks.

The head of the Dutch Police Union, Nine Kooiman, said she had been pelted by fireworks and other explosives on her shift in Amsterdam.

The amount of violence was "unprecedented" she said.

Reports of attacks against police and firefighters were widespread across the country.

Petrol bombs were thrown at police in the southern city of Breda. In Rotterdam, the city's eye hospital said it had treated 14 patients, including 10 minors, for eye injuries. Two received surgery.

A 17-year-old boy from Nijmegen and a 38-year-old man from Aalsmeer were killed in fireworks incidents, local media reported.

In Amsterdam the 50-metre high tower of the historic Vondelkerk church collapsed. Authorities said the roof was badly damaged but the structure was expected to remain intact.

The neo-Gothic basilica was designed by architect Pierre Cuypers whose works also include the Rijksmuseum.

A ban on unofficial fireworks is due to come into force in 2026. According to the Dutch Pyrotechnics Association, a record €129m (£112m) had been spent on them this year.



OFFICIALS INVESTIGATING: Police cordon scene of Swiss ski resort bar fire.

US military says five killed in latest strike on alleged drug boats

The US military says it struck two boats it alleges were carrying drugs on Wednesday, killing five people on board.

US Southern Command did not say where it had carried out the latest strikes but US forces have been targeting vessels they suspect of smuggling narcotics to the Caribbean and the eastern Pacific for the past three months.

Wednesday's strike came a day after the US targeted what it said were "three narco-trafficking vessels travelling as a convoy", killing at least three people.

The Trump administration has cast its operations as a non-inter-

national armed conflict with the alleged traffickers but legal experts say they could be in violation of the laws governing such conflict.

In total, there have been more than 30 strikes on vessels as part of the Trump administration's "war on drugs" with more than 110 people killed since the US carried out its first attack on a boat in international waters on 2 September.

That first attack has come under particular scrutiny from lawmakers in Washington since it emerged that US forces struck the targeted boat twice.

Two people who had survived the first strike and were

clinging to the hull of their boat were killed in the second.

Some lawmakers expressed concern that the "double-tap" strike breached the rules of engagement.

In its post announcing the strike on a convoy of three boats carried out on 30 December, US Southern Command said that there had been a number of survivors, without specifying how many.

It said that "the remaining narco-terrorists abandoned the other two vessels, jumping overboard and distancing themselves before follow-on engagements sank their respective vessels".

It added that the US Coast

Guard had been "immediately notified" to search for the survivors.

Reuters news agency reports that it was told by a US official who asked to remain anonymous that eight survivors were being searched for.

It is not yet clear if any of them have been found.

The US has provided no evidence that the boats it has targeted are carrying drugs but in its most recent post, Southern Command again insisted that "intelligence confirmed the vessels were transiting along known narco-trafficking routes and engaged in narco-trafficking".

News

Foreign

Iran security force member killed during protests, officials say

Unrest has been documented in other cities in Iran since protests began. A member of Iran's security forces was killed during a fourth day of protests in the country, which have been sparked by a currency collapse, officials have said.

Citing regional chief justice Saeed Shahvari, Iran's judiciary-affiliated Mizan news agency said Amir Hessam Khodayari Fard was killed in the city of Kouhdasht, in the western Lorestan province, on Wednesday.

A number of members of the security forces were also injured, state media reported.

Footage verified by BBC Persian appears to show security forces firing at protesters in the city on the same day.

Confrontations were also reported in the southern province of Fars and the western province of Hamedan on Wednesday.

The authorities in the capital, Tehran, had declared Wednesday a bank holiday - in an apparent effort to quell the unrest, which started in the capital on Sunday.

The semi-official Fars news agency reported that a 21-year-old member of the Basij - a paramilitary force linked to Iran's Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) - was killed during a confrontation in the city of Kouhdasht. Thirteen police officers and Basij members had been injured by stone throwing, the report said.

Twenty protesters were arrested in the city on Wednesday night, the IRGC-affiliated Tasnim news agency said.

Unrest broke out in other cities too.

In the southern province of Fars, protesters tried to break into a local government building, with officials reporting three police officers injured

and four people arrested in the city of Fasa.

In video that emerged on social media and verified by the BBC, a crowd is filmed breaking the gate of the governor's office in the city.

Then, in another post, security men are seen shooting in response. Clouds of tear gas rise in front of shuttered shops.

Across the country, schools, universities and public institutions were closed because of the last-minute public holiday announced by the Iranian government.

It was ostensibly to save energy because of the cold weather, though it was seen by many Iranians as an attempt to contain the protests.

They began in Tehran - among shopkeepers angered by another sharp fall in the value of the Iranian currency against the US dollar on the open market.

By Tuesday, university students were involved and they had spread to several cities, with people chanting against the country's clerical rulers.

The protests have been the most widespread since an uprising in 2022 sparked by the death in custody of Mahsa Amini, a young woman who was accused by morality police of not wearing her veil properly. But they have not been on the same scale.

To prevent any escalation, tight security is now reported in the areas of Tehran where the demonstrations began.

President Masoud Pezeshkian has said his government will listen to the "legitimate demands" of the protesters.

But the prosecutor general, Mohammad Movahedi-Azad, has also warned that any attempt to create instability would be met with what he called a "decisive response."

Kenya and Egypt usher in 2026 with dazzling displays of fireworks

New Year in Kenya's capital Nairobi was a spectacular affair.

As the clock struck twelve, a dazzling display of fireworks exploded over the city's Old Mutual Tower.

Motorists jammed a major highway in the Kenyan capital to see the show and the crowd cheered on the pyrotechnics.

Street parties and fireworks

also took place across the country.

The skies over the ancient pyramids of Giza were also alight with fireworks as Egypt ushered in the New Year.

The ceremony included a light show for which the pyramids provided a stunning backdrop.

As in many major cities around the world, the ceremony came with heavy security.

Heavy snow blankets Istanbul on first day of 2026

Istanbul welcomed the New Year from under a blanket of snow.

On the first day of the new year, the Turkish city also received its first snowfall of the year.

After falling hard in the early morning, the snowfall eased off later in the day, and some people came out to enjoy the winter landscape.

A few brave fisherman refused to be deterred by the freezing temperatures and ven-

tured out with their rods.

But much of the city was thrown into chaos, as motorists tried to navigate the roads.

The cold and heavy snow have swept across much of the country.

In the eastern province of Van, at least one person died in an avalanche.

Schools in several cities will remain closed on Friday because of the heavy snowfall.



GAZA STRIP STRUGGLE:

The ban comes as Palestinians across the war-ravaged Gaza Strip struggle amid a lack of shelter, food and other humanitarian supplies.

Israel faces widespread condemnation as NGO ban comes into effect

Israel faces mounting global condemnation as a ban on dozens of international aid organisations working to provide life-saving assistance to Palestinians in the war-ravaged Gaza Strip has come into effect.

On Thursday, a group of 17 human rights and advocacy organisations in Israel condemned the prohibition, saying it "undermines principled humanitarian action, endangers staff and communities, and compromises effective aid delivery."

"Israel, as the occupying power, has an obligation to ensure adequate supplies to Palestinian civilians. Not only is it failing to fulfil that obligation, but it is also preventing others from filling the gap," the groups said.

Israel has revoked the operating licences of 37 aid groups, including Doctors Without Borders, known by its French initials MSF, and the Norwegian Refugee Council, for failing to comply with new government regulations.

The new rules require international NGOs working in Gaza and the occupied West Bank to provide detailed information on staff members, as well as their funding and operations.

Israel has defended the move by accusing international organisations that work in Gaza of having links to Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad - without providing any evidence.

But experts say the requirements contravene humanitarian principles and follow a longstanding Israeli government campaign to vilify and ultimately impede the work of aid groups providing assistance to Palestinians.

"The new registration framework violates core humanitarian principles of independence and neutrality,"

the Israel-based rights groups, including B'Tselem and Physicians for Human Rights-Israel, said in Thursday's statement.

"Conditioning aid on political alignment, penalizing support for legal accountability, and requiring the disclosure of sensitive personal data of Palestinian staff and their families all constitute a breach of duty of care and expose workers to surveillance and harm."

'Pattern of unlawful restrictions' The ban comes as Israel has waged a genocidal war against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, imposing restrictions on food, medicine and other humanitarian aid deliveries to the coastal territory.

Israeli violence has also soared in the occupied West

Bank, with the military forcing tens of thousands of Palestinians out of their homes in what Human Rights Watch has described as war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Against that backdrop, United Nations human rights chief Volker Turk said earlier this week that Israel's NGO ban is "the latest in a pattern of unlawful restrictions on humanitarian access" in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Doctors Without Borders said in a social media post that, as of Wednesday, it was still waiting on the renewal of its registration to operate in Gaza and the West Bank under the new Israeli rules.

"The Palestinian health system is decimated, essential in-

frastructure is destroyed, and people struggle to meet basic needs. People need more services, not less," MSF said.

"If MSF and other INGOs lose access, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians would be cut off from essential care."

Former UN humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths, who sits on the board of the Norwegian Refugee Council, told Al Jazeera he was not optimistic about what will happen next.

"The reality is these agencies are essential to aid delivery - [and] aid delivery in particular in the Gaza Strip," Griffiths said. "They are the last mile, the phrase used in humanitarian operations to those who actually deliver the aid to the people involved."

Ugandan-born Zohran Mamdani is sworn in as mayor of New York City

Zohran Mamdani became mayor of New York City just after midnight on New Year's Day, taking the oath of office at an historic, decommissioned subway station in Manhattan.

Mamdani, a Democrat, was sworn in as the first Muslim leader of the United States' biggest city. He placed his hand on a Quran held by his wife, artist Rama Duwaji, as he took his oath.

"This is truly the honor and the privilege of a lifetime," Mamdani said in a brief speech.

The private ceremony, administered by New York City Attorney General Letitia James, a political ally, took place at the old City Hall station, one of the city's original subway stops that is known for its stunning

arched ceilings.

In Mamdani's first remarks as mayor, he said the old subway station was a "testament to the importance of public transit to the vitality, the health and the legacy of our city."

The new mayor then closed: "Thank you all so much, now I will see you later," he said with a smile before heading up a flight of stairs.

Mamdani will be sworn in again, in grander style, in a public ceremony at City Hall at 1 p.m. by US Senator Bernie Sanders, one of the mayor's political heroes. That will be followed by what his office is billing as a public block party on a stretch of Broadway known as the "Canyon of Heroes," famous for its ticker-tape parades.

At 34 years old, Zohran Mamdani becomes New York City's first mayor of South Asian descent. He is also the first to be born in Africa, moving from Uganda to the United States at 7 years old.

Mamdani now begins his tenure as one of the country's most-watched politicians.

In a campaign that helped make "affordability" a buzzword across the political spectrum, the democratic socialist promised to bring transformative change with policies intended to lower the cost of living in one of the world's most expensive cities.

His platform included free child care, free buses, a rent freeze for about 1 million households, and a pilot of city-run grocery stores.

New Tax Law: Who go explain tire?

Ke re o! Ke re o!! Ke re o!!! Ki eku ile gbo, ko so fun to ko o. Mr. President has been emphatic. Just as he insisted when he said "subsidy is gone", he has said again that the new tax reform laws will start as scheduled on January 1, 2026. Opposing voices can go and rethink their concerns, for President Tinubu, the tax man will see you in 2026. The same firmness, the same resolve, the same steel-edged certainty that has become the signature of this administration's economic choices. And like the subsidy announcement, this too has unleashed a storm of opinions, doubts, anxiety and, for many, fear.

In my corner of the conversation, I have always insisted on accountability especially when it doesn't add up. We live in a country where a jobless son of a pure water hawker can show up in a Mercedes Benz GLK Class and claim it is a miracle. After all, miracles no dey tire Jesus. But what we should be examining are the structures that make sudden wealth commonplace and often inexplicable. What we have heard from Taiwo Oyedele, chairman of the Presidential Committee on Fiscal Policy and Tax Reforms, is that under this new tax regime, such "miracles" will be subjected to scrutiny that rests on empirical data (the type Rufia Oseni always demand of his guests), intelligence, and accountable reporting. If you can't explain sudden wealth, then yes, you go explain tire.

But before we decide whether this new tax law is friend or foe, we must step back and ask a more fundamental question: Why do we tax in the first place? Taxation, at its core, is not a punishment. It is the price of citizenship in any functioning society. It is how we pay for roads, schools, hospitals, police and military, clean water and bridges. It is the mechanism through which we collectively shoulder the burden of shared life. Without it, we rely on borrowing, which only pushes the cost onto future generations. Without it, we depend on oil alone, and when oil fails, as it always does, our economy collapses like a house of cards.

The government says the new tax laws will not introduce new taxes but rather broaden and modernise the system, collapsing multiple overlapping levies into a more coherent framework and streamlining revenue collection under the new Nigeria Revenue Service. President Tinubu has insisted that the reforms are a once-in-a-generation opportunity to build a fair, competitive and robust fiscal foundation for the country.

The controversy, however, has not been in the idea of reform itself but in the way these laws came into public view. In recent weeks, questions have emerged over discrepancies between what the National Assembly passed and what was gazetted as the final law. Some lawmakers have raised alarms about alterations in the harmonised versus gazetted copies, claiming that parts of the document signed by the president differ from what parliament approved. Critics have called for the laws to be suspended and an investigation launched to protect the integrity of the lawmaking process.

In response, Taiwo Oyedele has walked a fine line. On one hand, he



PRESIDENT BOLA TINUBU

insists that some of the controversial documents circulating are not the certified versions and ought to be treated with caution. On the other, he acknowledges that any real discrepancy should be treated seriously and, if necessary, remediated through proper legislative oversight. His central thrust is clear: delay will leave the current flawed tax regime in place, where low-income workers and small businesses remain overtaxed, and multiple nuisance levies continue to inflate the cost of basic goods and services.

This is the hard truth that many Nigerians struggle to accept. We do not resist taxes because we dislike collective responsibility. We resist because we do not trust that the money will be used for our benefit. We resist because too often the government asks without giving us a clear account of what it does with what it takes. When trust is lost, the social contract falters and taxation becomes tyranny in the minds of the people.

And that is precisely why accountability and transparency must be at the heart of this reform. It is not enough to overhaul tax laws on paper. The government must prove, every step of the way, that revenue collected transforms into visible progress. Clean hospitals. Functional schools. Roads that don't disappear with the first rain. A justice system that works. Police whose first duty is to protect, not extort. This is the renewal we must see. Without it, the best-intentioned laws will remain abstract and irrelevant.

Another pillar of this reform must be awareness and sensitisation. Nigerians need to understand what exactly is changing, why it matters, and how it affects their daily lives. To his credit, Oyedele has been doing precisely that, speaking publicly, demystifying parts of the laws, and insisting that many workers will see their obligations reduced. Small businesses, he says, will be exempted from corporate tax, VAT and withholding tax in many cases, and larger companies will benefit from lower corporate rates.



SENATE PRESIDENT GODSWILL AKPABIO

On one path is the old way: a fragmented, inefficient, mistrusted system that chokes small businesses with multiple levies and sees the wealthiest contribute less than their fair share. On the other is a reformed structure that promises fairness, clarity and growth, if implemented with sincerity and followed with accountability

This is where the conversation must shift from fear to facts. There is a difference between intuitive suspicion and informed critique. Too often in public discussions, speculation fills the vacuum created by lack of understanding. Tax reform is complex. It touches everything from how we earn to how we buy goods, how corporations contribute to national life, and how governments at all levels fund public services. To reduce it to rumours or social media hot takes is to do ourselves a disservice.

Yet, the clamour is not without merit. Public anxiety over fundamental changes to tax law is justified. This is not ordinary legislation. It redefines the relationship between the state and the citizen in economic terms. It asks more of each of us and asks more of the government in turn. If the government fails to bring citizens along through education, engagement, and accountability, the reforms risk becoming political lightning rods rather than economic lifelines.

It is also worth remembering that taxation without trust is welfare lost. Academic work on taxation shows that when citizens doubt the integrity and effectiveness of public spending, any additional tax becomes a disin-

centive rather than a contribution to public good. Trust is the hidden lubricant of any tax system. Without it, even well-designed taxes generate resistance.

So where does that leave us as we approach the dawn of 2026? We stand at a crossroads. On one path is the old way: a fragmented, inefficient, mistrusted system that chokes small businesses with multiple levies and sees the wealthiest contribute less than their fair share. On the other is a reformed structure that promises fairness, clarity and growth, if implemented with sincerity and followed with accountability.

The challenge is Nigeria's to meet. The reform must not become another slogan. It must be woven into the fabric of daily life. This means listening to concerns, addressing misinformation with facts, and building public confidence through visible transformation. This means taxpayers, whether workers, entrepreneurs, or corporations, must feel that their contributions yield tangible returns.

We should also not lose sight of the broader truth that taxation is part of a social contract. It is the price of belonging to a society that expects more from itself. The government asks for

revenue, and in return, it must deliver security, infrastructure, economic opportunity and justice. When that contract is honoured, citizens pay willingly. When it is broken, taxes become burdens and compliance falls.

This is not unique to Nigeria. Across the world, governments struggle to balance revenue generation with trust building. The difference here is that Nigeria has reached a point where we can no longer afford the old ways. The old system left too many outside the tax net, created inefficiencies and bred mistrust. The new laws seek to expand the net, simplify compliance, protect the vulnerable, and push the economy toward growth rather than extraction. Therein lies their promise.

But promise alone does not satisfy hungry stomachs or fix broken roads. The proof will be in implementation. As this new tax regime comes into force, citizens must be vigilant, engaged, informed and ready to hold their leaders to account. The state must be equally willing to open its books, explain its actions and demonstrate that taxes paid translate into public value.

In a society where too many see government as distant and indifferent, this reform is an opportunity to reshape that perception. It is a chance to reset the social contract, not just legally but morally. When citizens pay their dues and see the benefits of collective effort, the inevitable scepticism that surrounds taxation can be transformed into civic pride.

Yes, Mr President says there is no going back. But before we march forward, let us ensure we are stepping together, informed and confident that the path ahead, though demanding, is one that leads to a Nigeria where trust and accountability are not afterthoughts but foundations of progress. The work of sensitisation must continue, the dialogue must deepen, and above all, transparency must become more than rhetoric. Only then will this tax reform fulfil its promise of a stronger, fairer and more prosperous Nigeria.

How traveling Cartoon Campaign will Inspire Social Change and Scale WinS Project (1)

Throw back: It was the third time in 6 years that art and media experts interfaced with other relevant stakeholders in development communication were gathered in Nigeria to dialogue and deploy comic art and media in addressing socio-political health and environment issues and other social development concerns in favour of Africa's development and productivity, within the prism of graphic humour, edutainment and creative education.

An interface of both the young and the old, pundits and green horns, teachers and students, media practitioners and media consumers; the general public - all were gathered at the NUJ Press Center in Benin City,

Edo State of Nigeria, on November 24, 2016, to witness the formal flag off of a planned touring 'Open Cartoon Campaign' on "Sustaining the Environment through Youth Engagement" as the high point of the 3rd Cartoon Africa International Biennial (CAIB), with the theme: "SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT EQUALS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT".

OPEN CARTOON CAMPAIGN: "For the next couple of years or more, as the basic funding needs are fully met, we expect this open cartoon campaign to travel from select community to community, town to town and city to foster dialogues and effective public education on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals

(SDGs) on improved WASH, sustainable environment, etc. within the prism of graphic humour and creative education targeting youths"; Mr. Francis U. Odupte (a.k.a Francodus), the initiator and curator of Cartoon Africa International Biennial (CAIB) project informed the crowd while introducing his national award winning mega length editorial cartoon, "CONSEQUENCES" on November 24, 2016, in Benin City, Nigeria, during the 3rd edition of CAIB festival.

Public talks, debates and interactive sessions fostered by the open cartoon campaign and visual journalism training course/workshop centered on health and environment reporting as well as changing people's attitudes

and behaviours towards our environment/eco-system; and the eco-friendly premises of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), along Reservation Road, G.R.A. in Benin kingdom, hosted the historic and symbolic gathering of journalists, health and environment stakeholders and other members of the public, who took turns to comment and add their voices to the agitations of many Nigerians for a safer and pollution-free environment, especially in the Niger Delta.

CAIB's Curator and convener of the event, Mr. Francis Umendu Odupte, said achieving health and wellness for all through realization of total sanitation, improved hygiene culture and access to clean water supply to secure a healthier future for all in our world is one of the most important objectives of the Post-2015 Development Agenda of the United Nations (UN), and that youth engagement was central to achieving a sustainable environment in the context of securing Africa of the future, hence the ongoing BFI WinS project and creative education/workshops for young people on environmental protection and moral capital development.

Odupte said drawing attention to and spreading awareness on environmental protection, water access, sanitation and hygiene in favour of Africa's productivity and sustainable development remains one core focus of the CAIB collaborative agenda since it was established in November, 2012. He told the gathering that the printing and distribution of print copies of the WASH4All comic books so far in Nigeria and parts of Africa and beyond, is a strategic milestone in the CAIB project's many objectives - "to deploy info-graphics, comics journalism, cartoon animation videos and other new media/multimedia digital tools, as well as strategic capacity building/recruitment of youths, to broaden public education/awareness that can gradually trigger paradigm shifts and attitude changes on sustain-

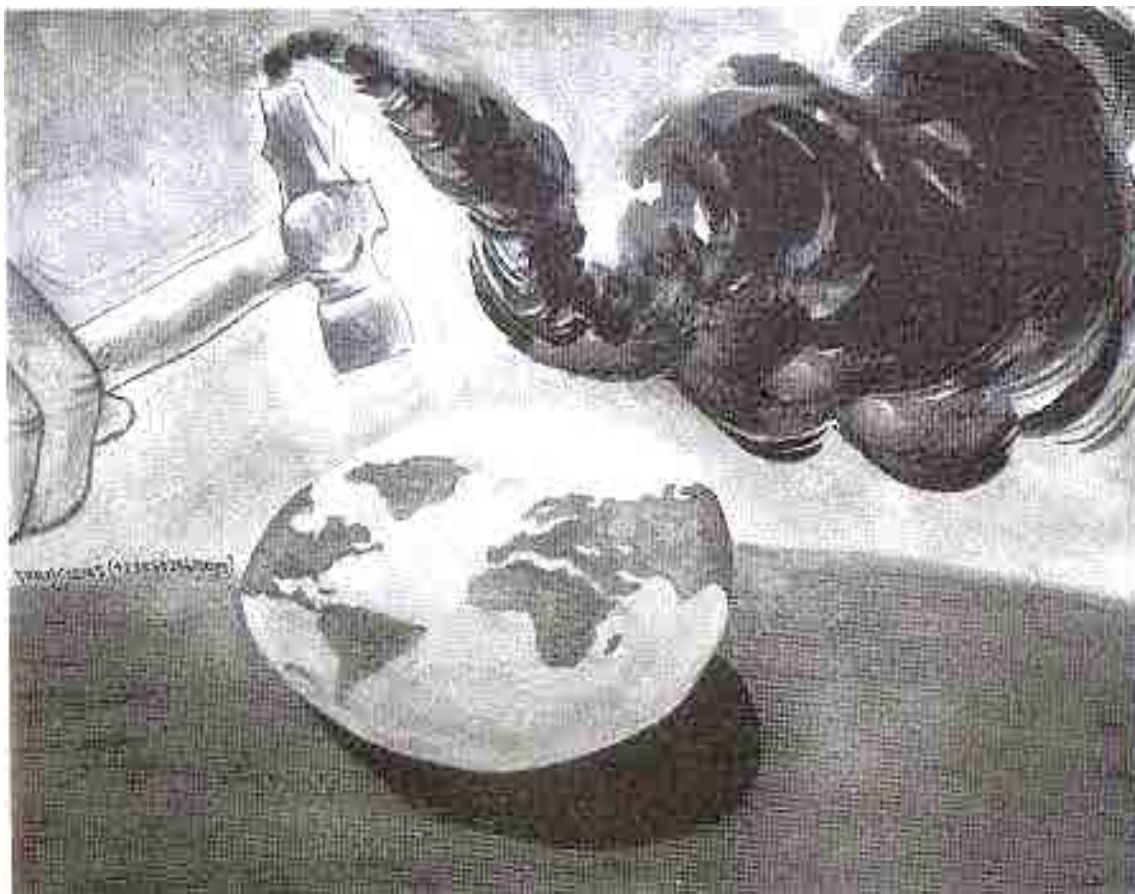
ing the environment in Africa, in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)."

"...living unhygienic life has consequences; poor sanitation has its consequences...we have a responsibility to keep our environment always clean and neat to avert diseases and illnesses"; Dr. Toyin Faboya of the University of Benin Teaching Hospital (UBTH) briefly lectured at the event.

Odupte used the opportunity to call on individuals, corporate bodies, NGOs and donor agencies, etc. far and near to support the BFI cause and DONATE to the CAIB project. He emphasized that the free WASH4All comic book being distributed to all is the first of a planned 13-part comic series being produced via the CAIB platform by MediaBFI and Horizon International to positively engage young people in the fight against WASH-related diseases and help them to realize what they can do for themselves, their friends and their families alone and with the help of others to lead healthy lives and protect the environment.

MediaBFI has been visiting selected schools in Edo State, educating schoolchildren and distributing the WASH4All comics for free as part of an ongoing health and wellness outreach tagged 'BFI WASH in School (WinS) project', thanks to generous support from Horizon International, The Pollination Project (TPP) and some individual partners. See: <http://www.solutions-site.org/node/1561>

In 2026, a decade on, it is expected that scaling the project and proving more free WASH4All comics and animated videos will get to more African youths and schoolchildren in the course of the planned traveling "Open Cartoon Campaign" tagged "Sustaining the Environment Through youth Engagement", and thereby broaden the awareness of young people in Africa about the SDGs on sustainable environment, water access, sanitation and hygiene (WASH).



Entertainment

— with Davidson Imosime Izegaegbe —

Of board and the arts

"The purpose of art is to lay bare the questions which have been hidden by the answers."

—JAMES BALDWIN

Let us create the right atmosphere for the arts and culture. Let's not like people wanting to get a glimpse or selfie of people in an accident, now suffocate them with our gatherings. Let the ARTS breathe.

In the wake of Governor Monday Okpebholo's recent renaming of the Ministry of Arts, Culture, and Tourism to the Ministry of Arts, Culture, and Creative Economy, hopes are tickled, ears itching for more to turn around the creative sector into a defined mode of film, other art forms expression. The creative practitioners are not complaining but their feet, under the table of wait, is subconsciously rubbing against each other which is a show of worry.

The Ministry has finally gotten a Commissioner to help articulate cultural policies and reforms that would certainly benefit the creative sector and the state at large. Like in a relay race, it doesn't matter how the athletes started, but the momentum gathered by the athletes will make the audiences to estimate who would breast the tape first. This calculation is usually estimated from the manner the athletes organize themselves, in exchanging batons and so on.

The Ministry of Arts, Culture, and Creative Economy, may have picked up in the race for achievements and wins, but the track is still long for the Commissioner to win. The reasons are not far-fetched as we can easily read in between the linea that the shift in nomenclature is more than a linguistic or political facelift. If it was, like a roasted coconut many would have long picked it's smell. The change in name can only mean one thing, which is a loud signal to all that Edo State is ready to stop treating culture as a cost center, but rather to start treating ministry as a revenue powerhouse. Is it right to commercialize culture? Is it proper to restructure culture to increase the process to generate more funds via donations from bodies funding culture as well as corporate entities and government? These are topics for another day, but for now, let us see the commercialization of the Ministry with the addition to its nomenclature, "creative economy" as hot coals place under the feet of workers to think out the box on ways to make tourism viable to generate funds while the arts and culture are the products to be sold to the public and tourists.

Professionals, the public and even those at the government cultural driver's seat are asking just one question: can a purely bureaucratic structure like the one we have here in Edo State be able to drive a multi-billion naira creative market within the creative space? If we must walk our talk and allow global cultural practices and policies to truly illuminate our state instead of merely shouting "Edo is shining", the ministry would need a Governing Board of professional members, a mix of creative brains and arts/cultural lovers to bridge



the missing gaps our ancient bronze, carvings, sculptures, film, photography, paintings, dances, cultural festivals, and modern bit-rates. The Ministry of Arts, Culture, Tourism and Creative Economy must blend history as custodians of ancient with the various types of manner for their demands in the modern but with a different tool kits for assessments and projections. The Board made up of creative members, must be devoid of political mindsets that may create conflicts of interests but total focus on turning around the creative sector into a creative industry with timelines.

The Edo State Creative Industry is long over due to have a Governing Board Members made up of astute professionals of the various disciplines of arts film and culture. By having a Board for the Creative Industry, I am not referring to one made up of square pegs in round holes, but rather having members drawn from within the Creative Sector. I am not talking of a board made up of politicians that would be vast in making political statements without actualizing the goals of making the Ministry a creative economy that would the state and the goals of Edolites.

Many may query the need for a Board since we already have a Commissioner for Creative Sector. Do we know what having a Board for the Creative Industry would mean to the sector? It will change the narratives from mere bureaucracies to money spinning ministry through donor agencies via programs to achieve such goals. A board made up of professionals, comprising IP lawyers, tech-creatives, film distributors, filmmakers, stage directors and heritage experts, would definitely offer the Ministry something civil service alone cannot which of course is the long missing Market Agility.

Creativity is like giving same script to ten different film directors, even with same actors, trust me, you will see ten different movies, themes directorial concepts and approach. Just same way or manner a ministry official may see a traditional dance as just dance, a professional board member would be seeing a digital content licensing opportunity for global streaming platforms and any other forms of making money from same dance.

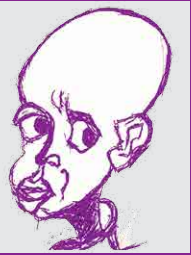
Have we ever ask ourselves why the private sector are always hesitant whenever there is a government hard knock on their door of investment? It is usually because of the great fear for policy somersaults. With professionals on a Governing Board for the Ministry of Arts, Culture, Tourism and Creative Economy, many financial and entertainment issues will be discussed, argued and decisions made. That is the only way the the Creative Economy aspect of the Ministry can mix arts, culture, tourism, creative economy into a show business—a situation where shows/exhibitions are uniquely organized to create returns on their entertainment values

Let a model board for the Edo State Ministry of Arts, Culture, and Creative Economy should intentionally be made to move away from purely political appointments and toward a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) governance model. We must understand that the board needs to function as a strategy and investment vehicle, not just a ceremonial body. The proposed board should be well structured to balance our traditional heritage, as well as modern and global practice industry expertise, and government regulation devoid of political viruses.

Tourism, to many, taking long walks after a breakfast of coffee and omelette or lunch with heavy meals and be shown the Igun streets for bronze castings, Igbesamwan for wood carvings, the now closed moat due to negligence, game reserve, Ososo and Fugar Rocky Mountains, Water falls, statues, the Oba Palace and so on. If our Ministry intend to continue alone this plane in 2026, looking at statues with little or less participating stories without digging deep into their economic values and exploring them, we may of course not need a Board made up of professional members in order to measure financial wastages

Do we even know that a well structured professional board made up of astute members can help the Ministry redesign the Igue Festival, others spread across our local government areas, cultural landmarks and film festivals into world-class, ticketed experiences that definitely will create a positive financial ripple effects in driving hotel occupancy and local commerce across the state?

TATAFO



Film rituals and de pipo

"...rituals are particular 'modes of action', symmetrically connected and opposed to modes of thought..." —Durkheim

Eni time we hia de word, ritual, awa minds go begin bance laik banking balls. Una no wai? Awa minds don already travel go human or eni animal ritual for sacrifices to de gods. Una no of eni person wey neva de involved in rituals? Even you wey don de worri for ya mind now about wetin I de yan so, sure say you neva do ritual or still de do ritual evri time till today so? Before we kontinu awa today's yanings, make we first use style find out wetin rituals means. Bifor den, happi konpliments of de season. Hope you and ya families do thanksgivings to take celebrate how nobodi delete or kpai from awa hussle since January till December? Eni winch way, we tank baba God for evritin.

Eni tin wey meni of us don com accept as normal way of wetin de kontrol how we de see tins, plus say we com belif in de tin and de do am evri time na ritual. Laik me wey nor de miss hot coffee with biscuits for evri moni so, dat na my ritual. Going to church evri Sunday or mosque evri Friday na ritual to all dat persons. And make una nor forget say, as we de kontinu to konvinz pipo to join awa religion so, na so we de package de way we de take do tins to dem. Dat one kpakpa na ritual. So dia for, nor get am for ya mind say na only wen dem kpai human being or animal for sometin, naim be ritual.

Now, we don even take time to ask awaself how we com belif say some kain tins na normal tins and no borda to ask eni kweshion? We don even wonda why eni tin black na devil, wai eni tin white na God? We don even try to find out wai e be say, we de fia darkness pass sun light? Difrense de inside all dis tins or na so dem suppose de?

For Africa de whole mata worse bicos, we don carri am for awa heads pass de pipo wey no even get beta rison to giv all distins funny names. We don even upgrade to wia com even de konfunde de pipo wey tell us all dis tins wey don shange de way we de see tins. For example for Naija, sughusughu (owl), pussy cat, eni animal wey de strange, old pipo, even dog or goat wey nor behave well na winch. Dis mata fit neva get meaning until you de wia some prophet de ask dia member if dem get eni old person for family. If eni person get, e don finish for dat old person, bicos de prophet go tell dem say na winch wey no let dia family grow be dat. If dem nor delete dat old person, naim be say rat wey no de see food chopulate for church or mosques go beta pass dat old person.

Neva too de shake ya bodi for wia you sidon, as you don de squeeze face de tink say I de wan talk about ya religion, whosai! Who born monkey not to talk

about who wan com dash am banana? Una go soon undastand wia my yanings de waka go. Make Una jus relax jejeli!

All dis tins about rituals nor too pain me sha, but de one wey nialy fall mai kidney na awa films wey com de do vidio to de show say all de animals I menshon na winch. Awa films wey suppose to de show de truth about all dis tins say na superstishos belif, naim him com kukuma carri de ritual mata for head laik kom tact. For awa films, we go de show ugly old men and women for coven as winch wey de kill young pipo wey de progress. We de also show disable pipo and de ones wey get okumagala (hunchback) as pipo wey devil don make him best friends. Abi una neva see films too, wey de show villages wey nor get light and good roads plus no fine houses as de place wey hate pipo wey de progress for fine cities wey drive fine motor cars com greet dem?

Nawadays, if ya neighbor giv you or ya pikins food, fia no go let una choplate am for fia of chopping winch or poison. Meni pipo fit no wai and meni pipo fit still pritend not to no. One tin de for sure say awa films don use cross-mind make ritual out of evri tin arand us, so tey, we don com even de fia awa own shadows pass winch-attack. Na who do us dis if not be awa konfuse minds?

Part of awa trafashion don giv bad names to meni animals plus even insects arand us, wai awa religions com use hammer nak de nail on top am. E get de way cockroaches go de enta ya house or take pose for ya wall, who de tradishon don begin use luk for native dokita wai de ones for religion don begin kabash... for ordinary cockroaches ooo!!! If na pussy cat or sughusughu enta dia house, walahi dem nor go sleep for de house. E get eni of una wey go enta eni house com see very old woman wey get dementia and hold pussy cat for hand wey una nor go call winch? Talk true make devil shame, fia go let you stay dat konpand for long?

Film pipo nor suppose to de behave laik eni person na. Dem suppose to de do research on some kain mata, and com use dem films to koret and solve all dat kain mata, and not to add salt for inside injury. Pipo de quickly belif wetin dem see pass wetin hia. Naim make socio media don bicom de biggest amebo platform for de world. Bicos as pipo de see tins with dem kro kro eyes, dem no de borda to ask kweshions eni more. Na bicos oyinbos dem quick no say seeing na beliving make dem use films dat time to make us see Oyinbos as pipo wey get sense and strong pass us for evri tin till world war com open dem yansh laik fawol own.

 <p>The Nigerian Observer ...That the people may know</p>	<h2 style="margin:0;">ADVERTISEMENT RATES (PRINT)</h2>
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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 X2	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


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	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

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EFFECTIVE FROM FEBRUARY 1, 2023

Feature

Ending estimated billing to ensure accuracy, transparency

CONSTANCE ATHEKAME (NAN)

The issue of estimated billing has been a challenge in the power sector with many electricity consumers across the country complaining about it due to inflated costs, lack of transparency, and being charged more than actual power consumption.

For several years, there have been protests over exploitative billing by Electricity Distribution Companies (DisCos).

Many homes that barely get electricity supply once a week are charged outrageous sums of money per month, in a billing that is not cost effective.

In some cases, the difference in charges could be as high as 500 per cent within a short time, even when there is little or no improvement in power supply.

Most affected by this exploitation are electricity consumers without pre-paid meters, as their billings are estimated.

Affected consumers have continued to complain that the high billing led to overpayments or disputes, with common complaints focusing on high charges, opaque calculations, and issues with meter installation.

They said that 11 years after privatisation; millions of them still relied on estimated billing due to the absence of prepaid meters.

According to them, estimated billing has led to “crazy billing”, charges far higher than the electricity they consume.

Mr Princewill Okorie, Executive Director, Electricity Consumer Protection Advocacy Centre, described estimated billing as criminal, adding that it is not done according to the Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission (NERC) methodology.

According to him, NERC directed that transformers used in supplying electricity to those on estimated billing should have a meter to check what energy goes to a place and multiply it with the kilowatts per hour

He said that most of the distribution companies are using transformers that do not have meters because they want to exploit consumers.

“You must not give bills anyhow, you must check the meters on the transformer to know the electricity supplied to consumers.

“It is wrong for people to be paying for what they did not consume,” he said.

A consumer in Lugbe Zone 7, Mrs Mabel Osuji, said that the Abuja Electricity Distribution Company (AEDC) had not provided the area with meters, so residents pay whatever bill is giving to them.

According to her, sometimes the bill will be high other time it will be low.

“We are waiting for the pre-paid meters that government promised to roll out so that we can only pay for what we consume,” she said.

Another consumer in the same area, Mr Monday Olaniji, said that having to pay bills through estimation was not the best.

Olaniji said that he did not know

what he consumed but just keeps paying any bill given to him.

“I have applied for the pre-paid meter and I am patiently waiting for it to end this crazy bills,” he said.

To solve the problem of estimated billing, the Federal Government, through NERC, issued an order capping estimated bills for unmetered customers based on feeder averages to ensure fairness.

The NERC Order on Capping of Estimated Bills is contained in Order No: NERC/197/2020.

It protects unmetered customers in Nigeria by setting maximum charges for estimated electricity bills, aligning them with actual consumption of metered users on the same feeder.

“This has led to subsequent enforcement orders and sanctions for Electricity Distribution Companies (DisCos) failing to comply, requiring credit adjustments for over billed customers

“This order repealed older regulations and mandates that Distribution Companies (DisCos) provide these caps, with specific monthly energy caps available for different feeders,” NERC said.

According to the commission, Electricity consumers do not want to pay on the basis of estimated bills, rather they want to pay for what they consume and should be provided meters in order to achieve this.

The Federal Government is currently metering electricity consumers to ensure accurate billing, end to estimated billing, reduce revenue leakages, and boost power sector transparency.

The Federal Government also seeks to improve efficiency, and restore public trust through its Presidential Metering Initiative (PMI), deploying millions of smart meters to bridge the gap, protect vulnerable Nigerians, and make the sector financially viable.

The key objectives of the FG metering initiative to end estimated billing is to eliminate the practice where consumers are billed based on assumptions rather than actual consumption.

It is also to ensure that consumers pay only for the electricity they use, promoting transparency, revenue protection help DisCos recover revenue loss to non-payment and inefficiencies.

“Ensure sector viability: enhance the financial health of the power sector to attract investment, ensure public trust and confidence in electricity providers.

The initiative would also support Local Production, and foster local meter manufacturing and job creation.

The Minister of Power, Mr Adebayo Adelabu said that the Federal Government had secured about N700 billion, for the rollout of two million meters annually over the next five years under the initiative.

Adelabu disclosed this at the 2025 Nigerian Energy Forum, with the theme “Powering Nigeria through Investment, Innovation, and Partnership”.

He said that the fund was obtained from the Federation Account Allocation Committee by the Federal Government.

According to him, the PMI aims to



MINISTER OF POWER, MR. ADEBAYO ADELABU

close Nigeria’s metering gap, improve transparency, and enhance the financial stability of the power sector.

The key objectives of the FG metering initiative to end estimated billing is to eliminate the practice where consumers are billed based on assumptions rather than actual consumption. It is also to ensure that consumers pay only for the electricity they use, promoting transparency, revenue protection help DisCos recover revenue loss to non-payment and inefficiencies

He said the initiative complemented the 3.2 million meters being procured through the World Bank’s Distribution Sector Recovery Programme (DISREP), positioning the country to bridge the metering gap within five years.

The minister said that the Federal Government was leveraging bilateral funding and development finance to attract private investment and expand electricity access in underserved communities, schools, hospitals and public institutions.

“In the past two years, more than two billion dollars has been mobilised through key programmes, including the World Bank’s DARES, NSIA’s RIPLE, and the JICA fund.

“These interventions are accelerating renewable energy deployment and access to reliable power,” he said.

The Federal Government, through NERC, approved the disbursement of N28 billion to DisCos for the procurement and installation of prepaid meters under the Meter Acquisition Fund (MAF) Tranche B scheme.

NERC said that the N28 billion was for the procurement of meters for all outstanding unmetered Band A customers at no cost.

This announcement was contained in the Order on the Operationalisation of “Tranche B” of MAF issued by NERC and signed by its Vice Chairman, Musiliu Oseni, and Commissioner, Legal, Licensing and Compliance, Dafe Akpeneye,

According to the order, the funds approved under Tranche B of MAF are intended to meter all outstanding unmetered Band A customers.

They also focus on expediting the closure of the metering gap for customers currently classified under Tariff Band B

“The N28 billion shall be allocated in proportion to the respective contri-

butions of the DisCos, and the DisCos are expected to meter all outstanding unmetered Band A customers.

“They are also required to expedite the closure of the metering gap for customers currently classified under Tariff Band B.

“Schedule 1 provides the detailed breakdown of the funds available to each DisCo for the purchase of end-use customer meters.

“All the meters to be procured and installed under the MAF framework shall be provided at no cost to the customers,” it said.

The commission said that the order seeks to establish a clear and transparent framework for the implementation of Tranche B of the MAF scheme.

It also said that the order sought to define the eligibility requirements and obligations of DisCos and Meter Assent Provider (MAP) in accessing and utilising funds.

“It prescribes the terms of financing, repayment, and utilisation of funds under the scheme.

“It also sets out the monitoring, reporting and evaluation requirements to ensure accountability, efficiency and transparency in the deployment of MAF funded meters.

“It provides operational guidelines and conditions applicable to participating entities to safeguard the integrity of the MAF scheme,” it said.

Giving a breakdown of the releases of funds accrued under MAF, NERC explained that in April 2024, out of the accrued sum of N21.864 billion, it released N21 billion to the DisCos for the procurement of meters under tranche A of the MAF scheme.

It said that the latest is the N28 billion released under tranche B of the MAF scheme.

Also recently, NERC said that between 600,000 and 700,000 electricity meters are currently available for distribution across the country.

Its chairman, Musiliu Oseni, said this at the 4th Nigerian Electricity Supply Industry (NESI) Stakeholders’ Meeting in Abuja.

Oseni, while urging DisCos to speed up the rollout of the meters, said that government had already made the necessary investments to make the meters available.

According to him, DisCos should take the responsibility of ensuring that the meters reach customers without delay

“There are currently 600,000 to 700,000 meters available in the country. Government has made the investment, so the DisCos need to step up.”

Oseni, who also spoke on the ongoing transition to State Electricity Regulatory Commissions, called on the DisCos to fully cooperate with the new regulators, saying no operator is above regulatory oversight.

As the Federal Government and other stakeholders take steps to address the contentious issue of estimated billing through provision of prepaid meters, affected consumers urge them to expedite actions to correct the situation.

Experts are of the opinion that if more pre-paid meters are brought into the power sector, estimated billing would be a thing of the past.

FEATURES



The functions of education in museums

KATE AINA AKHADELOR

INTRODUCTION

Education is no longer confined to traditional classroom environments. In contemporary society, learning takes place in diverse settings, with museums emerging as significant venues for education across all age groups. Globally, museums are evolving from mere collections of historical or scientific artefacts into interactive learning spaces that foster curiosity, creativity, and reflection (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007; Falk & Dierking, 2013).

As non-formal learning institutions, museums provide unique experiences that complement formal education. They enable the public to explore subjects such as history, science, art, and culture in engaging and accessible ways (Hein 1998).

This article explores the key educational functions museums serve in modern society. Museums are defined by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) as a not-for-profit permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets, and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally, and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection, and knowledge sharing (ICOM.2023).

EDUCATION FUNCTIONS OF MUSEUMS

1. Cultural transmission and Preservation :* One of the primary education-

al functions of museums is the transmission and preservation of culture. Museums curate and display artifacts, artworks, documents, and other items of cultural significance, making them accessible to the public. Through exhibitions and guided tours. They teach visitors about the history, values, traditions, and beliefs of different peoples and civilizations (NCMM, n.d.; UNESCO, 2020). This function is particularly important in post-colonial societies and multicultural nations, where museums help preserve indigenous heritage and foster mutual respect among diverse groups (Ebitu, 2015).

2. Social and moral learning: Through thematic exhibitions on human rights, gender equality, environmental conservation, and social justice, museums contribute to the development of moral reasoning and empathy. They provide safe space for dialogue and reflection on social values and challenges (Hein 1998).

3. Civil Engagement: Educational programs in museums often address the theme of citizenship, governments, and national identity by showcasing civil achievements and struggles. Museums inspire active participation in community and nation building (Hooper Green Hill 2007).

4 Aesthetic and intellectual development: Art museums and galleries expose visitors to visual and performing arts and enhance their aesthetic appreciation and critical thinking skills by analyzing artworks, styles and symbols (Faik and Dierking, 2013).

EDUCATIONAL STRATEGIES IN MUSEUMS

For the educational missions to be

fulfilled, museums will have to adopt a variety of strategies. They include the following.

- 1) Guided tours and docent programs.
- 2) Workshops and hands-on activities.
- 3) Interactive and digital exhibit.
- 4) Collaborations with schools and universities.
- 5) Mobile and virtual museums outreach.
- 6) Lectures, seminars, and public talks.

These approaches will make learning in museums enjoyable, accessible and adaptable to diverse audiences



Art museums and galleries expose visitors to visual and performing arts and enhance their aesthetic appreciation and critical thinking skills by analyzing artworks.

(Nwangwu 2011).

Challenges Facing Museums Education

Despite their potential, museums face several challenges. They comprise the following.

- 1) Limited funding for educational programs.
- 2) Inadequate training for museum educators.
- 3) Lack of mobility.
- 4) A deficient calendar and curriculum.
- 5) Insufficient sponsorship.
- 6) Technological barriers in rural.
- 7) Poor acceptability.

Recommendations

To strengthen the educational role of museums, the following need to be done.

- 1) Governments and private sectors should invest in museum infrastruc-

ture and programming.

2) Museums should collaborate with educators to align content with the school curriculum.

3) Digital technologies should be harnessed to expand access and engagement.

Education in the museum goes beyond the transmission of knowledge. It cultivates critical thinking, cultural identity, civic responsibility, and lifelong learning in an era of identity. To guarantee inclusion and innovation, museums offer a unique educational environment that complements formal learning, recognizing and supporting the educational function of museums, which is essential for sustainable cultural development and social progress.

• Kate Aina Akhadolor is of the National Museum, Benin City



BARR. HANNATU MUSA MUSAWA

Sports

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

AFCON 2025: Super Eagles finish group stage with tournament's most potent attack

Nigeria closed the group stage of the Africa Cup of Nations as the competition's most lethal attacking

force, underlining their title credentials with a tournament-high eight goals after three matches.

The Super Eagles not only outscored every other team in the group phase but also matched Algeria as the only sides to record a perfect haul of three wins from three matches, setting a strong benchmark ahead of the knockout rounds.

Nigeria's attacking output placed them clear at the top of the scoring charts, ahead of Senegal and Algeria, who both finished the group stage with seven goals apiece.

While several teams relied on narrow wins and defensive solidity, Nigeria consistently combined pace, width and directness to overwhelm opponents, producing goals across all three matches.

Algeria, equally impressive in efficiency and control, mirrored Nigeria's flawless record, winning all three of their group games while also maintaining a strong goal return.

Senegal's seven goals, meanwhile, reflected their own attacking depth, even though they fell just short of a perfect points tally.

Across the tournament, the

expanded 24-team format once again delivered drama. Still, Nigeria's consistency in front of goal stood out in a group stage often characterised by tight margins and nervy finishes.

While other favourites were occasionally dragged into scrappy encounters, the Super Eagles found ways to score early, respond under pressure and close out matches.

The group phase concluded with traditional heavyweights largely progressing to the Round of 16. Still, Nigeria's statistical dominance — leading the goals chart and posting maximum points — has marked them out as one of the most convincing performers so far.

As the competition now moves into the knockout stage, the emphasis will shift from accumulation to survival. Yet, if the group stage is any indication, Nigeria's attacking firepower, allied to their perfect record, makes them one of the teams everyone else will be keen to avoid as AFCON 2025 enters its decisive phase



Grp. C	PL	GD	PTS
1 Nigeria	3	+4	9
2 Tunisia	3	+1	4
3 Tanzania	3	-1	2
4 Uganda	3	-4	1



AUBAMEYANG

Gabon sack Aubameyang and the national team

Gabon's government have announced the suspension of the national team, the sacking of the coach and kicked Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang off the squad in the wake of three defeats at the Africa Cup of Nations finals.

Gabon's Minister of Sports announced on television the suspension of the national team after they finished last in their group and were eliminated from the tournament in Morocco.

"Given the Panthers' disgraceful performance at the Africa Cup of Nations, the government has decided to dissolve the coaching staff, suspend the national team until further notice, and exclude players Bruno Ecuele Manga and Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang," said acting sports minister Simplice-Desire Mamboula after Wednesday's 3-2 loss to the Cote d'Ivoire in Marrakech.

Gabon, coached by former defender Thierry Mouyouma, had already been eliminated after losing their opening pair of Group F fixtures to Cameroon and Mozambique but in their

final outing were 2-0 up over the defending champions before conceding three goals and going down to a second-string Ivorian line-up.

Neither Aubameyang nor veteran defender Ecuele Manga played on Wednesday, with Aubameyang having returned to his French club Olympique de Marseille for treatment on a thigh injury.

The former African Footballer of the Year responded on social media, saying on X, opens new tab: "I think the team's problems are much deeper than the individual I am."

Aubameyang, at 36, had likely played his last game for Gabon in their defeat by Mozambique, as was also likely the case with the 37-year-old former Cardiff City defender Ecuele Manga.

Disbanding the national team used to be a common reaction in Africa to disappointing results but since world football's governing body FIFA have taken a hard stance against government interference in the running of football associations, it has been a rare occurrence.

Argentine soccer body in turmoil ahead of World Cup over mystery villa and dirty money claims

A member of the Argentine Federal Police walks after seizing a printer from the Claudio Chiqui Tapia stadium, which belongs to the soccer team Barracas Central, during a raid, amid an investigation into alleged money laundering involving the Argentine Football Association and a group of soccer clubs, according to local media, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, December 9, 2025.

In March 2024, retired Argentine soccer star Carlos Tevez published a tweet, opens new tab hinting at something suspicious going on in a Buenos Aires suburb. The treasurer of the Argentine Football Association, Tevez claimed, was making many trips to Pilar, where he implied the soccer official had buried bags of money and kept a collection of antique cars.

Coalicion Civica, a progressive political party, began investigating after Tevez's post and filed a criminal complaint centered on a mystery villa in Pilar.

As the World Cup approaches, allegations that the villa may have been used for money-laundering have become one of a series of scandals gripping the soccer association that is in charge of the game in Argentina, the current world champions.

In early December, police raided the AFA headquarters and more than a dozen soccer clubs as part of a money-laundering probe that looked at transfers of

money tied to clubs and a financial services company.

Three days later, authorities raided the Pilar villa, finding a heliport, stables and 54 vehicles, including luxury cars and collectible cars. In its criminal complaint, Coalicion Civica alleges the property is a front for a money-laundering scheme connected to Chiqui Tapia, the president of the AFA, and its treasurer, Pablo Toviggino.

Last week, in another case, a prosecutor charged Tapia, Toviggino and other AFA leaders for unlawful retention of taxes totaling \$13 million following a complaint from Argentina's tax agency, according to news outlet La Nacion.

The AFA did not respond to

an inquiry from Reuters requesting an interview with both Tapia and Toviggino and for comment on the various judicial investigations that have been opened.

In a public statement, the association has said it is being attacked



POLICE WALKS AFTER SEIZING A PRINTER FROM THE CLAUDIO CHIQUI TAPIA STADIUM

by the government of President Javier Milei, referring to how Milei has pushed for Argentina's soccer clubs, which have long functioned as nonprofit entities run by their members, to become for-profit companies under private owners.

NPFL Chairman, Elegbeleye eugolises Amokachi on his birthday

Chairman of the Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL), Otunba Gbenga Elegbeleye, has felicitated ex-international Daniel Amokachi on his birthday, and described him as a role model for the domestic league players.

Amokachi turned 52 on December 30, and Elegbeleye says his footprints on the nation's football are remarkable.

"As one of the home grown players that went to Europe and blossomed, Dan is a worthy ambassador of the domestic league", the NPFL Chair-

man said in his tribute to the star famously nicknamed "The Bull".

Elegbeleye also recalled that the inborn desire to contribute to the growth of the domestic league made Amokachi return to Nigeria to play for Nasarawa United at the end of his European career in 2005.

"Like football stars from Argentina, Brazil and South Africa, the Bull hung his boots in Europe but came back here to inspire the younger generation of players on the pitch when he joined Nasarawa United in

2005.

This is the message we have been preaching to other Nigerian big players. They should come and be an attraction to the NPFL," concluded Elegbeleye.

Born on December 30, 1972, Amokachi played for a number of European clubs, including Club Brugge of Belgium, Everton in England, and Turkish side, Besiktas.

He also has coached some NPFL clubs like Nasarawa United, Lobi Stars, the defunct FC IfeanyiUbah, and Enyimba, amongst others



OTUNBA GBENGA ELEGBELEYE

AFCON 2025: Uganda Coach reveals how difficult it is playing against Nigeria

Uganda head coach Paul Put has admitted that facing Nigeria at the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations was a daunting task for his team, following their 3-1 defeat to the Super Eagles.

The Cranes' hopes of progressing to the round of 16 were ended after the loss to the three-time African champions, with Put acknowledging that Nigeria's quality and experience made the encounter extremely challenging.

Speaking after the match, the Belgian tactician revealed that Uganda's qualification hopes should not have hinged

on the game against Nigeria. "I think we shouldn't have come looking for qualification facing Nigeria," Put said.

"We had the opportunity against Tanzania to qualify for the round of 16. If we had won that game, we wouldn't have had the problem of facing Nigeria."

Put also pointed to his squad's lack of experience at this level, stressing that the pressure of playing a heavy-weight like Nigeria affected his players.

"We were under pressure and you can't blame the players because they don't have the

experience, so they were under pressure," he explained.

The Uganda coach further praised the Super Eagles, describing them as one of the strongest teams in the competition.

"It's always difficult facing Nigeria, who have a very good team," Put added. "I don't think we lost our qualification ticket to Nigeria; I think we lost our qualification ticket to Tanzania."

Nigeria's victory ensured they maintained a perfect record in the group, while Uganda exited the competition at the group stage.



UGANDA TEAM

Morocco 2025: Eagles to take on Mambas in round of 16

Nigeria will clash with Mozambique for only the sixth time at senior level, as both teams go for each other's jugular in one of the Round of 16 games of the ongoing 35th Africa Cup of Nations finals in Morocco.

The 35,000-capacity Complexe Sportif de Fès, which has been home to three-time African champions Nigeria in their entire Group C campaign, will be the venue for the encounter that will commence at 8pm on Monday, 5th January.

Nigeria swept through their group phase campaign like the harmattan, winning all three games while scoring eight goals and conceding four. Ademola Lookman and Raphael Onyedika have scored twice each, with Semi Ajayi, Victor Osimhen, Wilfred Ndidi and Paul Onuachu supplying the other goals.

Mozambique lost their opening game to Cup holders Cote d'Ivoire, but then dug their feet into the ground to triumph over Gabon, before losing 1-2 to Cameroon's Indomitable Lions on Wednesday evening.

Monday's confrontation is expected to be explosive, as the young Mambas have demonstrated capacity to stand toe-to-toe with the big teams and pull something out of the inferno whenever they need to.

Of their five previous confrontations, Nigeria have been victorious on four occasions, including their only AFCON encounter way back in Lubango, Angola in January 2010, in which the Eagles ran away with a 3-0 win. Nigeria won a friendly match in Maputo in August 1999 by the odd goal and won another one in Portugal in October 2023 by 3-2, while 2010 FIFA World Cup qualifying matches ended 0-0 in Maputo and 1-0 in Abuja, Obinna Nsofor scoring five minutes into added time to keep alive Nigeria's World Cup hopes.

- Algeria Vs DR Congo
- Egypt Vs Bénin Rep
- Senegal Vs Sudan
- Nigeria Vs Mozambique
- South Africa Vs Cameroon
- Burkina Faso Vs Cote d'Ivoire

SUPER EAGLES, MAMBAS IN HISTORY

- 17 Aug 1999: Mozambique 0-1 Nigeria (International Friendly: Maputo)
- 29 Mar 2009: Mozambique 0-0 Nigeria (WCq: Maputo)
- 11 Oct 2009: Nigeria 1-0 Mozambique (WCq: Abuja)
- 20 Jan 2010: Mozambique 0-3 Nigeria (AFCON: Lubango, Angola)
- 16 Oct 2023: Mozambique 2-3 Nigeria (International Friendly: Lisbon)



SUPER EAGLES CELEBRATING AFTER QUALIFIER FOR ROUND 16

FIFA releases Nigeria's 2026 international referees list as 30 officials earn global approval

FIFA has officially released Nigeria's Refereeing International List for 2026, confirming 30 Nigerian match officials approved to officiate international competitions across various refereeing categories.

The annual list, published by FIFA, comprises referees and assistant referees who are qualified, vetted, and authorized to handle international fixtures under CAF and FIFA assignments. Nigeria's representation cuts across men's and women's football, futsal, and beach soccer, underlining the country's growing strength and consistency in football officiating.

Nigeria's FIFA International Match Officials for 2026

1. Pwadutakam Samuel –

- Assistant Referee (CAF) – 2014 – Male
2. Ukah Ndubuisi – Futsal Referee (CAF) – 2014 – Male
3. Musa Dung Davou – Futsal Referee (CAF) – 2015 – Male
4. Basheer Salisu – Referee (CAF) – 2016 – Male
5. Digbori Tejiri – Assistant Referee (CAF) – 2016 – Male
6. Fawole Olawale Adeolu – Beach Soccer Referee (CAF) – 2016 – Male
7. Elaigwe Hannah Enekele – Referee (CAF) – 2017 – Female
8. Ogabor Joseph Odey – Referee (CAF) – 2017 – Male
9. Usman Abdulmajeed Olaide – Assistant Referee (CAF) – 2017 – Male

10. Abdullahi Abubakar – Referee (CAF) – 2018 – Male
11. Olajide Olayinka – Beach Soccer Referee (CAF) – 2018 – Male
12. Nurudeen Abubakar – Referee (CAF) – 2019 – Male
13. Abibatu Iyadunni Stockl – Assistant Referee (CAF) – 2019 – Female
14. Rabi Ahmad – Beach Soccer Referee (CAF) – 2019 – Male
15. Mustapha Grema Mohammed – Referee (CAF) – 2020 – Male
16. Olufunmilayo Abigail Alaba – Referee (CAF) – 2020 – Female
17. Mfon Friday Akpan – Assistant Referee (CAF) – 2020 – Female
18. Bello Zuru Alhassan – Futsal Referee (CAF) – 2020 – Male
19. Akintoye Yemisi – Referee (CAF) – 2021 – Female
20. Terah Kateda Beauty – Assistant Referee (CAF) – 2021 – Female
21. Abdulsalam Kasimu Abiola – Referee (CAF) – 2022 – Male
22. Ahmad Mustapha Tijjani – Assistant Referee (CAF) – 2023 – Male



AFCON 2025: Nwabali admits playing with injuries, laments conceding goals

Super Eagles first choice keeper, Stanley Nwabali has admitted playing with pain at the Africa Cup of Nations, where he has conceded three goals so far.

After the Super Eagles 3-2 win against Tunisia in their AFCON group C tie, Nwabali's performance came up for scrutiny as fans saw a more subdued display from him.

Nwabali said he's been nursing an injury, but it was the Super Eagles medical team declared him fit to play. Before the AFCON tournament his coach at Chippa United in South Africa was quoted by the media saying Nwabali was nursing injury and may not be fit to play.

Speaking after the game on Saturday Nwabali said: "I was injured but with the help of team

doctors and physios I'm able to stand on the pitch and play.

"It's quite tough for me because it's not something you come out to say. But most times what ever thing we see online is true. I'm always a strong man, I try to just represent my country."

He noted that the team conceding goals was a sign of improvement in football generally.

"First game, second game, we tried to keep a clean sheet but you know football has improved a lot, it is not something you just go and come out and play, everyone wants to score," he said.

"So, we really don't wish to concede. We really wish to keep a clean sheet. It pains me a lot when I concede but we keep going as a team."

LES AFFICHES DES SES DE FINALE

Le 3 janvier à 17 heures à Tanger

Sénégal vs Soudan

Le 3 janvier à 20 heures à Casablanca

Mali vs Tunisie

Le 4 janvier à 17 heures à Rabat

Maroc vs Tanzanie

Le 4 janvier à 20 heures à Rabat

Afrique du Sud vs Cameroun

Le 5 janvier à 17 heures à Agadir

Égypte vs Bénin

Le 5 janvier à 20 heures à Fès

Nigeria vs Mozambique

Le 5 janvier à 17 heures à Rabat

Algérie vs RD Congo

Le 5 janvier à 20 heures à Marrakech

Burkina Faso vs Côte d'Ivoire

MATCH EN DIRECT

ALL THE AFCON 2025 ROUND OF 16 MATCHES
Mali Vs Tunisia
Morocco Vs Tanzania



A new year, a new resolve for governance and security

Splendid! We made it to the year 2026. A hearty congratulations to resilient Nigerians and everyone reading this column. The arrival of a new year is always accompanied by a deep sense of gratitude and reflection. It is symbolic, marking the crossing from what was to what could be. It is a moment that invites both celebration and sober introspection.

Beyond personal resolutions and goodwill messages, a new year ought to usher in renewed thinking, better governance, and policies that genuinely prioritise the welfare of the people. It should be accorded with fresh, pragmatic, and people-oriented policies by governments at all levels, policies that speak directly to the lived realities of citizens.

The outgoing year, 2025, was one of the most challenging periods in Nigeria's recent history, just like the previous years in over a decade. It was a year that stretched the resilience of the people to their limits.

The economy was harsh and largely unfriendly. Inflation continued its upward climb; wages, even with the increment by President Bola Tinubu lagged behind the cost of living, and basic necessities became luxuries for many households. Nigerians worked harder but earned less in real terms, and the gap between effort and reward widened painfully.

Insecurity further compounded this economic distress. Kidnapping-for-ransom remained rampant, spreading fear across highways, farmlands, and even residential areas. Communities lived under constant threat, with farmers abandoning their fields and travellers embarking on journeys with anxiety rather than confidence. More troubling were the repeated reports of mass killings of innocent citizens by terrorists, with Christian communities often disproportionately affected. These acts of violence left deep scars, not only on families but also on the nation's collective conscience.

Road accidents were another grim feature of the year. Bad roads, reckless driving, poor vehicle maintenance, and weak enforcement of traffic regulations combined to claim countless lives. One particularly emotional incident was the accident involving globally celebrated boxer Anthony Joshua, who lost two close friends. Although he survived, the tragedy served as a stark reminder that life is fragile and that public safety must never be treated as an afterthought.

The year also witnessed a rare intervention by the United States government, which carried out air strikes against terrorists in Sokoto State on December 25, the last Christmas Day, following intelligence that the group was planning attacks on Christian worshippers.

Thankfully, the year 2025 also witnessed a welcome reduction in the cost of rice and few other food items. A 50-kg bag of Nigerian rice now sells for between N65,000 and N70,000, a significant relief for households and traders alike. This development is particularly remarkable when compared with previ-

ous years, during which the price of rice had remained consistently high, placing a considerable strain on family budgets.

Similarly, the cost of baking flour has also decreased, offering further respite to consumers and small-scale bakers. Yet, curiously, the price of bread has remained stubbornly high, refusing to reflect the drop in flour costs. This disparity continues to puzzle many and underscores the complexities of price dynamics within the Nigerian food sector. Besides, despite the reduction in pump price of petrol, transport fares for intra- and inter-state travel remain exorbitant.

Amid these national challenges, however, it is important to recognise areas where leadership has attempted to respond positively. In Edo State, the administration of Governor Monday Okpebholo has, within barely a year, demonstrated a commendable inclination towards action rather than empty promises. While no government is beyond criticism, fairness demands that visible achievements be acknowledged, especially when they align with the needs and aspirations of the people.

One of the most striking aspects of Governor Okpebholo's administration has been its emphasis on infrastructure development as a catalyst for economic growth and urban renewal. In Benin City, the changing architectural and aesthetic outlook of the city has been a source of renewed civic pride. Roads that were once nightmares are being reconstructed, drainage systems improved, and urban spaces reimaged to reflect order, beauty, and functionality.

Particularly, noteworthy are the flyover projects at strategic points within the metropolis. The flyover bridges at the Ikpoba Hill axis and the one along Sapele Road by Adesuwa Junction are not merely engineering feats; they are practical responses to long-standing traffic congestion that has plagued these corridors for years. These flyovers will certainly ease traffic flow, reduce travel time, and enhance safety for motorists and pedestrians alike, when completed. They also signal a government that understands the importance of modern urban planning in a growing city.

Beyond Benin City, road construction and rehabilitation projects are ongoing in other parts of the state. From inter-city roads that facilitate trade and movement, to rural access roads that connect farming communities to markets, the administration has shown awareness that development must be inclusive. Good roads are not just about convenience; they are lifelines for economic activity, education, healthcare delivery, and social integration. More so, Governor Okpebholo is making significant strides in combating kidnappers and demolishing their dens and hideouts in the state.

Another significant intervention under Governor Okpebholo's watch is the resuscitation of the Edo Line Transport Company. Once a vibrant symbol of efficient public transportation, Edo Line had been comatose for years, reduced

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to a shadow of its former self.

Its revival represents more than the return of buses to the roads; it symbolises the restoration of public confidence in state-owned enterprises. A functional and affordable transport system reduces the burden on commuters, creates jobs, and contributes to safer, more organised movement of people and goods across the state.

The Commissioner for Transport, Hon. Saturday Uwuilekhue-Idehen is not a neophyte in the ministry, he was also the Commissioner during Oshiomhole's administration and performed well. Hence, I trust in his capacity to take the New Edo Line Transport Company to greater and enviable height.

Agriculture, a sector with immense potential to address food insecurity and unemployment, has also received renewed attention. The acquisition and deployment of heavy-duty agricultural equipment signal a deliberate effort to modernise farming practices and boost food production. Mechanised agriculture reduces drudgery, increases yield, and attracts young people who might otherwise shun farming. At a time when food prices are soaring and hunger is becoming a pressing concern, such investments are not only timely but essential.

These people-oriented projects—flyovers, roads, transportation revival, and agricultural mechanisation reflect an administration that appreciates the interconnectedness of infrastructure, economic growth, and social wellbeing. They also demonstrate that governance, when properly conceived, can have immediate and tangible impacts on the daily lives of citizens.

In fact, the Commissioner for Information and Strategy, Prince Kazeem Afegbua, has repeatedly emphasised Governor Okpebholo's commitment to revitalising Edo State, which for too long had been neglected by the previous administration in delivering people-focused policies and programmes.

However, even as these achievements deserve commendation, governance is an ongoing process that must continually respond to emerging challenges. One such challenge that now demands urgent and decisive action is the menace posed by scavengers, popularly known as 'iron-condemn' dealers. In Edo State, what should ordinarily be a regulated form of waste recycling has degenerated into widespread vandalism and organised theft.

Across Benin City and other parts of the state, scavengers now operate with alarming audacity. Uncompleted buildings are broken into, sometimes overnight and sometimes in broad daylight. Doors are removed, aluminium window profiles carted away, burglary protectors dismantled, roofing sheets stripped, and electrical cables ripped out. In extreme cases, entire structures are reduced to skeletal frames within days. For property owners, many of whom are struggling middle- and low-income earners, this amounts to economic sabotage.

The consequences are severe and far-reaching. Years of savings, cooperative loans, and retirement benefits invested in building projects are wiped out in a matter of hours. Construction is stalled, dreams are deferred, and families are pushed deeper into financial distress. At a time when the economy is already hostile, such losses further compound hardship and erode trust in the ability of the state to protect property.

Beyond individual suffering, the scavenger menace threatens public safety and urban order. The theft of electrical cables disrupts power supply, plunges communities into darkness and increases crime. The removal of metal components weakens structures and raises the danger of collapse. In effect, criminal scavenging undermines both private investment and public infrastructure.

It is important to state clearly that economic hardship cannot justify criminality. While poverty and unemployment are real challenges, a society that excuses theft and vandalism on these grounds risks normalising lawlessness. When criminal scavengers are allowed to operate unchecked, it sends a dangerous signal that impunity thrives while honesty suffers.

Other states have confronted this problem and acted decisively. In Delta State, for example, the government once dealt firmly with scavengers who had turned scrap collection into a criminal enterprise. Through resolute action, these criminals, many merely disguising as scavengers were evicted from Asaba, restoring a measure of sanity and security to the state capital. That example remains instructive and relevant.

Edo State urgently needs a similar show of political will. The government must establish and enforce a clear regulatory framework for scrap collection. Genuine recyclers should be registered, monitored, and restricted to approved activities and locations. Any scavenger found vandalising property or tampering with public infrastructure should face immediate arrest and prosecution. Law en-

forcement agencies must be empowered to act swiftly and without compromise.

Community engagement is equally critical. Traditional rulers, community leaders, and residents must be actively involved in monitoring suspicious activities and reporting offenders. When citizens are confident that their reports will be acted upon, cooperation with security agencies improves significantly. Community-based intelligence can play a decisive role in dismantling scavenger networks.

At the same time, the government must address the socio-economic dimension of the problem. While criminality must never be condoned, structured alternatives such as organised recycling programmes, skills acquisition centres, and public works initiatives can provide lawful livelihoods for those willing to work honestly. In this way, environmental sustainability can be pursued without sacrificing security and order.

Governor Monday Okpebholo has already shown that he possesses the resolve to initiate meaningful change. The same determination that is reshaping Benin City, constructing flyovers, reviving Edo Line, improving road networks, investing in agriculture, improving the monthly subvention of Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, and confronting violent crime should now be deployed against the scavenger menace. Taking drastic action to evict criminal scavengers from Edo State would send a powerful message that the government stands firmly with law-abiding citizens.

As the new year unfolds, this should be a defining resolution for both leadership and followership: to prioritise security, protect public and private property, deepen people-oriented governance, and uphold the rule of law. Development is not measured solely by new roads or flyovers; it is measured by the extent to which citizens feel safe, respected, and protected in their own communities.

A new year resolution, therefore, must transcend personal aspirations and embrace collective responsibility. For Edo State, the path forward is clear—consolidate infrastructural gains, sustain people-centred projects, strengthen security, and act decisively against emerging threats such as the scavenger menace.

If these commitments are pursued with sincerity and consistency, the new year will not merely be new in name, but truly transformative in impact.

May Nigeria experience enhanced economic activities and be free from terrorism; and may we toil like ants and relish the grandeur of an elephant.

A blissful and productive new year to you and yours.

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