

Bank customers decry 7.5% VAT on electronic services, seek CBN intervention

ABUJA

Many bank customers have frowned at the 7.5 percent Value Added Tax (VAT) on selected electronic banking services, saying taxes are becoming too much for citizens.

Some of them who spoke to the newsmen in Abuja on Sunday, appealed to the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) to ensure that banks did not use the guise of the VAT to exploit its customers.

The customers said that al-

though the VAT applied only to service fees and not the amount transferred, the debits on their monies were discouraging and could deter people from patronising banks.

Mrs Evelyn Oputa, a bank customer decried that taxes and bank charges were becoming too much for ordinary Nigerians.

Oputa who said that citizens were currently facing challenging times, appealed to the government to step down the remittance of the VAT.

"In December alone, I received a debit alert where I was charged N1,680 charge on SMS alone and this month, stamp duty charges also increased.

"I bought something and also received a debit of N250 as stamp duty, NIP transfer, electronic money transfer levy, card maintenance fee and various other charges.

"I heard that the stamp duties collected by banks are being remitted to the government, why do they still want

banks to remit VAT.

"We the customers will be the ones at the receiving end," she said.

Mr Akolam Nzeh, a bank customer alleged that the government was only concerned about tax collection and not the well-being of citizens.

Nzeh urged the government to channel the taxes toward the improvement of infrastructures in the country.

"It's like this year will be a year of tax in this country. Everywhere you turn, you will hear tax.

"The worst part of this is that salaries did not increase yet banks' charges have kept increasing," he said.

Another bank customer, Mr Segun Agboola, a customer, appealed to the CBN to monitor the excesses of banks to ensure they did not charge above what they should.

A banker who preferred anonymity said the bank would not exploit its customers in VAT remittances as they were the basis for their existence.

Recall that the Nigerian Revenue Service (NRS) had mandated all financial institutions (commercial banks, micro-finance banks, and electronic money transfer operators) to begin collection and remittance of VAT from January 19.

The tax would apply to various electronic banking charges including Mobile banking transfer fees, Unstructured Supplementary Service Data (USSD) transaction fees, card issuance and activation fees.

The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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Okpebholo's war on kidnapping, cultism, drugs is total —Ebea

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Security: Okpebholo donates 10 patrol vehicles to security agencies in Edo Central

● Approves salaries for operatives ● Gets APC registration card, calls for mass membership drive in Edo

IRRUA (EDO STATE)

In a decisive move to strengthen internal security and restore peace across Edo Central Senatorial District, the State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo has handed over 10 new patrol vehicles to security agencies operating in the zone and approved improved welfare packages, including salaries, for security operatives.

The presentation ceremony, held in Irrua, Esan Central Local Government Area, attracted traditional rulers from across Esanland, security chiefs, political leaders and community stakeholders.

The event also featured an interactive security engagement aimed at identifying operational challenges and deploying targeted solutions to curb crime.

Governor Okpebholo said

the intervention was strategic and not merely ceremonial, stressing that his administration was committed to equipping security personnel with the tools needed to respond effectively to security threats.

"This is not just about handing over vehicles. It is about understanding what our security personnel are facing on the ground and responding directly. Security is the foundation of

development, and we will not compromise the safety of our people," the governor said.

He explained that for the new welfare package to be implemented, security outfits including the Edo State Security Corps, hunters and anti-cultism units must submit the names of their members for profiling and enrolment into the state payroll.

"The names of your members must be submitted through

your local government chairmen for proper profiling. This will cut across all 18 local government areas and is the only way operatives can start receiving salaries," he stated.

Governor Okpebholo further disclosed that his administration had earlier set up a committee that trained 2,500 security corps personnel, noting that the operatives would be integrated with existing members and deployed across the state.

"With this number, we

should have at least over 300 security personnel in each local government area," he added.

During the interactive session, representatives from Esan North East, Esan West, Esan Central, Igueben and Esan South East local government areas, as well as the Esan Hunters Association and Anti-Cultism Unit, highlighted challenges including logistics gaps, inadequate equipment, herdsman-related security

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COMMISSIONING:

The Onoje of Uromi in Esan North East Local Government Area, His Royal Highness, Anselm Aidonoje (middle) commissioning the vehicles donated to security agencies in Edo Central Senatorial District. The Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo (right) and another traditional ruler in the locality.

Alleged UK property fraud: ICPC files criminal charge against Ozekhome —Pg 2

N1.35bn fraud: Supreme Court orders continuation of ex-Gov Lamido, son's trial —Pg 8

Uganda's Museveni wins re-election, opposition leader at large —Pg 10

NPFL26, MD21: Bendel Insurance FC maintain top form, beat Elkanemi Warriors 3-2 in Benin —Pg 16

Residents hail Okpebholo as Obaseki Street gully erosion project brings relief after 20 yrs

BENIN CITY

Residents and property owners in Obaseki Street in the Ikpoba Hill area of Benin City have commended Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, for intervening in a devastating gully erosion that plagued the community for more than two decades.

The erosion, which had caused severe environmental and public health challenges, cut off access roads, disrupted commercial activities and forced many residents to abandon their homes and properties.

Relief, however, came with the commencement of an underground drainage construction by the Okpebholo administration, a project residents say has restored hope and confidence to

the once-neglected community.

Speaking to journalists, 80-year-old Mrs Mercy Omoruyi said the area had suffered abandonment by successive administrations until the current government intervened.

"We have faced this gully erosion for over 20 years. Governments came and went without helping us, but Governor Okpebholo came here in less than two months and started work. This place used to be a refuse dump and we suffered serious health problems. Today, those problems are gradually disappearing," she said.

Another resident, Mr Kelvin Malagu, who has lived in the area since 1994, described the intervention as unprecedented.

"Many governments made promises, but this is the first time we are seeing real action.

Landlords who abandoned their houses are now returning. We finally feel that we have a government that cares," he said.

Mr Tayo Omodogbe said residents had lived in fear for over 26 years, especially during the rainy season, when homes were at risk of being swept away.

"Whenever it rained, we

were afraid. Many people relocated, but now we feel safe again. We are happy with the pace of work and grateful to the governor," he said.

Governor Okpebholo, who recently inspected the project, explained that the underground drainage system was designed to channel floodwaters from Obase-

ki Street and adjoining areas directly into the Ikpoba River. He noted that the project would also address persistent flooding along the Benin-Auchi Road near the Court of Appeal and the Edo State INEC headquarters.

The site engineer, Mr Israel Ebhodaghe, said the area was highly erosion-prone due to blocked and inadequate drainage infrastructure.

"The old underground drain was blocked and caused the

erosion. We are now constructing a new drainage system with additional line drains that will channel water directly into the Ikpoba River. The drain covers about two kilometres and will protect all houses within the catchment area," he explained.

As work progresses steadily, the once-devastated Obaseki Street is gradually regaining its outlook, encouraging displaced residents to return and resume normal life.

Alleged UK property fraud: ICPC files criminal charge against Ozekhome

ABUJA

The Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) has filed a criminal charge against Chief Mike Ozekhome, SAN, over allegations bordering on fraud in relation to a London property.

The ICPC, in a three-count charge filed by its lawyer, Osuobeni Akponimisingha, Head, High Profile Prosecution Department, at the Abuja High Court, accused Ozekhome of complicity in the large-scale corruption case.

The fresh charge, marked: FCT/HC/CR/010/26 dated and filed January 16, named the senior lawyer as sole defendant.

The charge was sighted on Sunday.

Count one alleged that Ozekhome, 68 years, of No. 53, Nile Street, Maitama, Abuja, sometime in August 2021 or thereabout in London, within the jurisdiction of the court, directly received House 79, Randall Avenue, London NW2 7SX, purportedly given to him by one Mr Shani Tali.

The act he knew constitutes a felony and thereby committed an offence contrary to

Section 13 and punishable under Section 24 of the Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences, Act, 2000.

In count two, Ozekhome was alleged to have, sometime in August 2021 or thereabout, while being a legal practitioner and Senior Advocate of Nigeria did make a false document with a Nigeria passport: A07535463, bearing the name of Mr Shani Tali.

The commission alleged that the senior lawyer did this with plan to use same to support the claim of ownership of property known and described as "79, Randall Avenue, London NW2 78X with intent to commit fraud."

It said the offence is contrary to Section 363 and punishable under Section 364 of the Penal Code CAP 532 Laws of the Federal Capital Territory Abuja, 2006.

Count three accused Ozekhome of dishonestly used as genuine, a false "Nigeria passport A07535463, bearing the name of Mr Shani Tali to support claim of ownership of property known and described as '79, Randall Avenue, London NW2 7SX,' when he had reason to believe that the said document was false.



PRESENTING E-REGISTRATION CARD:

Chairman, All Progressives Congress (APC), Esan Central Local Government Area, Hon. Rawlins Ason Ekeoba (left) after presenting the e-registration card to Governor Monday Okpebholo in Irrua, Esan Central Local Government Area of Edo State.

Misinformation undermining new tax laws —APC chieftain

OSOGBO

A chieftain of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in Osun, Mr Olatunbosun Oyintiloye, has said that many Nigerians do not have sufficient knowledge of the new tax laws and are misrepresenting them.

Oyintiloye, a former lawmaker, stated this while speaking with newsmen on Sunday in Osogbo.

He said that the lack of proper understanding of the new tax laws has led to misconceptions, misrepresentation, and suspicion of the government's intentions, calling for massive and sustained

enlightenment on the new law.

According to him, widespread misinformation about the tax law has left many Nigerians, including educated persons, confused about what, when, and how their earnings will be taxed.

He added that the alleged discrepancies between the bill passed by the National Assembly and the versions published in the official gazette have further contributed to the confusion.

Oyintiloye also noted that the government's intention regarding the new tax law, especially as it affects low-income earners, remains good, but that widespread misinformation and confusion surrounding its implementation

are casting a shadow over the real objectives of the law.

"Many Nigerians are still ignorant of the new tax law. Social media is filled with different explanations of the law, leading to widespread confusion among the people.

"The misinformation about the tax law is spreading faster than the true intentions of the law and its benefits.

"As of now, many Nigerians, both literate and illiterate, do not actually know what to believe about the tax law," he added.

Oyintiloye, however, attributed the confusion to the slow pace of sensitization and limited public engagement on the new tax law before its implementation take-off date.

He urged relevant government agencies responsible for public awareness of government policies to rise to the occasion and do the needful.

"I want to implore the National Orientation Agency (NOA), the Federal Ministry of Information, and other relevant government agencies to step up their public awareness campaigns, especially on the tax reform law.

"This is important and necessary to enable people to understand the good intentions of the government, particularly towards low-income earners, and to curb the spread of misinformation. Many people still do not know what the law entails or how it will apply to them," he said.

Security: Okpebholo donates 10 patrol vehicles to security agencies...

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threats, intelligence deficiencies and poor mobility.

Director of Operations, Edo State Security Corps, Mr Richard Balogun, announced that salaries for security operatives had been approved, bringing relief to personnel who had worked for months under difficult conditions.

"This clearly shows that the government values the sacrifices of our men and women. Improved welfare and logistics will significantly enhance our effectiveness," he said.

Edo Central APC Senatorial

Leader, Major General Cecil Esekhaigbe (rtd), called for sustained logistical support and urged traditional rulers and community leaders to intensify vigilance by profiling suspicious persons and vehicles entering their communities.

Speaking on behalf of the Enjije in Esanland, the Onojie of Uromi, His Royal Highness Anselm Aide-nojie II, commended the governor's hands-on approach to security and announced plans to establish an Esan Security Trust Fund to support security operations in the district.

"Our people must be able to sleep with their eyes closed,

knowing that their safety is guaranteed," the monarch said.

Meanwhile, Governor Monday Okpebholo, has been formally registered as a bona fide member of the All Progressives Congress (APC), receiving his registration card under the party's ongoing e-registration exercise in his hometown of Irrua, Esan Central Local Government Area.

The governor became the first registered APC member in the state under the new digital registration process, which is aimed at expanding the party's membership base ahead of forthcoming general elections.

Expressing satisfaction with the exercise, Governor Okpebholo described the process as simple, seamless and inclusive, urging APC members and intending members across Edo State to take advantage of the opportunity by registering at their various wards or online.

Speaking to journalists after receiving his registration card, the governor thanked the APC e-registration team for what he described as an efficient and transparent process. He appealed to party members to come out in large numbers to register and become fully rec-

ognised members of the party.

"I want to appreciate the APC e-registration team for this exercise. I am happy and delighted because it is easy and simple. All that is required are basic details such as the National Identification Number and voter's card. I urge every Edo citizen and those interested in joining the APC to register. It can even be done online without having to go physically to their communities or wards," he said.

Governor Okpebholo also thanked the APC Edo Central Senatorial leader, Major General Cecil Esekhaigbe (rtd), for being present to monitor

the process, adding that the e-registration exercise would strengthen the party's structure at the grassroots.

"I am now a fully registered APC member with my registration card. Every APC member should go and register to become a full member of the party," the governor added.

Earlier, the coordinator of the APC e-registration exercise in Esan Central, Mr Otoanyenlen Eugene Osedebamen, said the exercise was designed to give equal opportunity and rights to all party members. He urged members to register at their polling units to ensure proper documentation.

NEWS

Okpebholo inspects 14km road project in Obaseki's community, assures faster rural devt

RICHARD EWEKA

BENIN CITY

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, has inspected the ongoing construction of the 14-kilometre Eguaholor-Ig-uomon-Uvbenisi-Oza Road, with a spur to Ohe Community, linking Uhunmwonde and Orhionmwon local govern-

ment areas of the state.

The road project, located in the community of former Edo State governor, Mr Godwin Obaseki, is designed to connect several agrarian settlements across the two local government areas and open up rural communities for economic and agricultural activities.

Residents of Uvbenisi and

neighbouring communities turned out in large numbers to welcome the governor, expressing excitement over what they described as the long-awaited presence of government in the area following years of neglect. The road had been largely inaccessible before the commencement of construction.

Governor Okpebholo, who was accompanied by the Com-

missioner for Water Resources, Barrister Washington Osifo, inspected completed sections of the project, including about 774 metres already executed.

Speaking to journalists after the inspection, the governor said the enthusiasm of residents underscored years of abandonment of the community despite producing a former governor.

"This is Obaseki's community. You can see the excitement on the faces of the people. They have all come out to welcome us," he said. "Obaseki was governor of Edo State for eight years and never remembered his people."

He recalled that during his campaign, he promised to reconstruct the road if elected, noting that it was completely impassable at the time.

"This is my second visit here. I came first to flag off the project, and now I am here to inspect the level of work done so far," he said.

Governor Okpebholo said the project reflected the support of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu for Edo State's infrastructure and agricultural development drive, adding that

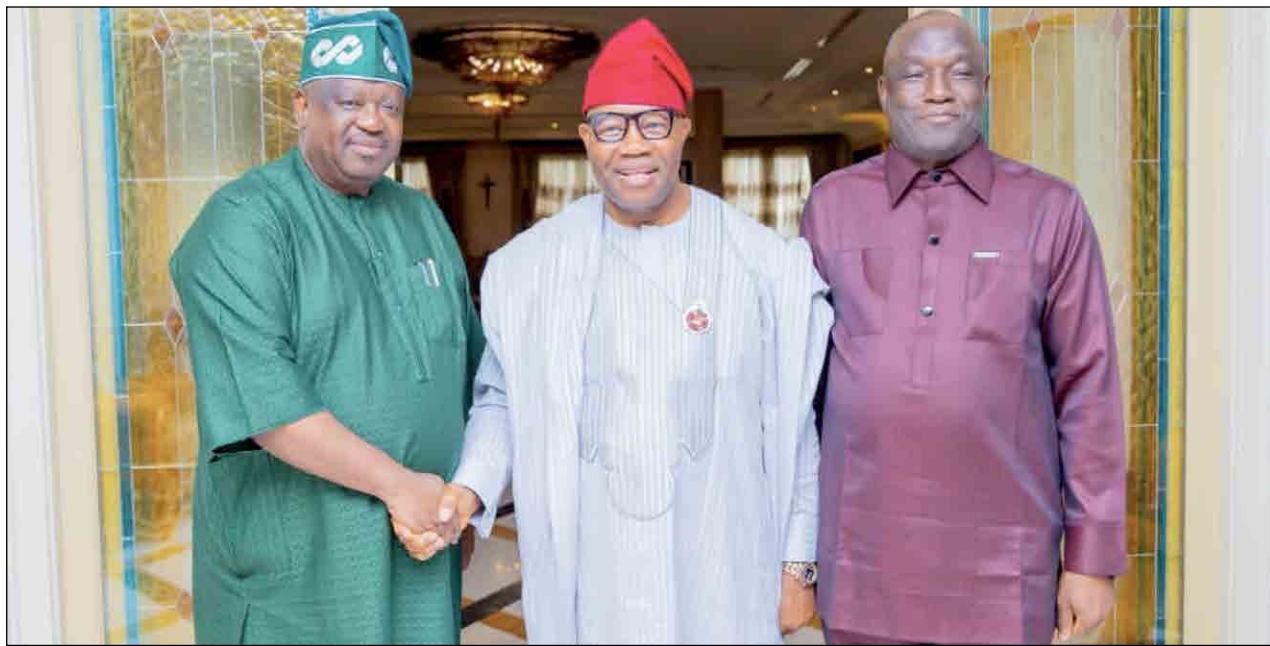
residents would show their appreciation at the polls in 2027.

"The people are happy because President Bola Ahmed Tinubu is demonstrating practical governance in Edo State and delivering dividends of democracy," he said.

"When we talk about 2.5 million votes in Edo, people think we are joking. Edo people have experienced growth and development, and 2027 is settled."

He added that his administration would continue to prioritise development as long as resources were available.

"Our work is speaking for us. As long as the President keeps giving us money, we will continue to use it to develop Edo State and put smiles on the faces of our people," he said.



COURTESY VISIT TO AKPABIO:

L- R: plateau State Governor, Caleb Mutfwang; President of the Senate, Godswill Akpabio and Chairman, Senate Committee on Labour and Productivity, Diket Plang, when Mutfwang paid a courtesy visit to Akpabio in his Abuja residence yesterday.

PHOTO BY OMOYE AMINU

Edo govt creates over 8,000 jobs in one year, boosts workers' welfare —HoS

RICHARD EWEKA

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Government has created over 8,000 jobs within one year under the administration of Governor Monday Okpebholo, the Head of Service (HOS), Dr Anthony Okungbowa, has said.

Dr Okungbowa described the feat as unprecedented in the state's history and a clear reflection of the governor's people-focused and inclusive approach to governance.

Commending the administration, the Head of Service said the policies of Governor Ok-

pebholo had significantly improved the welfare and standard of living of civil and public servants since he assumed office on November 12, 2024.

He said the state had recorded notable progress across sectors through the implementation of the SHINE Agenda, with development projects and reforms spread across the 18 local government areas.

"Mr Governor has recorded achievements across various sectors, but his impact on the civil and public service has been outstanding and phenomenal," Dr Okungbowa said.

"This administration hit the

ground running and was determined to improve the lives of Edo people, especially workers."

According to him, one of the early decisions of the governor was to strengthen the civil service by ensuring that its core functions were handled by career officers rather than consultants.

"From November 12, he insisted that the work of civil and public servants must be done by them and not outsourced to consultants," he said.

Dr Okungbowa said workers' welfare had remained a top priority, noting that the administration ensured regular payment of salaries, payment of 13th-month

salaries and the implementation of a new minimum wage.

"The governor increased the minimum wage on May 1, 2025, without any pressure from workers," he said, adding that salaries were paid promptly.

He disclosed that Governor Okpebholo also ended the outsourcing of cleaners in government offices, directing that the funds previously paid to consultants be used to employ workers directly.

"About 1,000 cleaners were employed on a full-time basis and placed on the new minimum wage of ₦75,000, instead of the ₦18,000 to ₦25,000 they earned previously. Their jobs are now secured," he said.

Edo charts digital transformation path as Ministry aligns key agencies

BENIN CITY

Edo State has taken a decisive step towards building a robust, inclusive and innovation-driven digital economy as the Ministry of Communication and Digital Economy convened a Strategic Digital Ecosystem Stakeholders' Meeting in Benin City.

The meeting, held under the SHINE agenda of the Governor Monday Okpebholo administration, was led by the Commissioner for Communication and Digital Economy, Hon. Ohimai Ehijimotor, and brought together critical institutions driving the state's digital future — the Edo State Information and Communication Technology Agency (ICTA) and the Edo State Digital and Innovation

Agency (EdoDiDA).

Addressing participants, Ehijimotor stressed that Edo's digital transformation goals can only be realised through deliberate coordination, partnerships and shared commitment across policy formulation, infrastructure development, innovation, implementation and talent development.

He described digital transformation as a necessity rather than a choice, noting that it is central to modern governance, economic growth and improved service delivery.

According to him, the engagement marked a strategic move towards building an integrated digital ecosystem capable of empowering citizens, attracting investment and strengthening public sector efficiency.

Okpebholo pledges support for family of late aide, Danjuma Garba

BENIN CITY

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, has assured the family of his late Special Adviser on Arewa Matters, Alhaji Danjuma Garba, of continued government support, particularly in the education of his children.

The governor gave the assurance during a condolence visit to the family of the late adviser in Benin City, describing Garba as a dedicated and passionate public servant whose contributions to peace, unity and development in Edo State would not be forgotten.

Governor Okpebholo said the late adviser served not only the Arewa community but the entire people of Edo State, noting that his commitment to the growth of the state informed his appointment into government.

"Late Alhaji Danjuma Garba has left very big shoes behind. He was not just for the Arewa community alone, but for all of us in Edo State. He was deeply

committed to the development of this state," the governor said.

He added that the loss had created a significant vacuum, stressing that only Allah gives and takes life, and that the late adviser may have been called to a higher assignment.

In furtherance of his commitment to the family, Governor Okpebholo pledged that the state government would support the education of the children left behind to ensure the continuation of their schooling.

Speaking on behalf of the family and the Arewa community, the Chairman of the Arewa Community in Edo State, Alhaji Badamasi Saleh, expressed gratitude to the governor for the love and support shown, describing him as the first governor to demonstrate such concern for the community.

He assured the governor of the continued support of the Arewa community for his administration and appealed for sustained assistance, particularly in the education of the late adviser's children.

Experts push tax, health, data reforms to drive Nigeria's 2026 growth

LAGOS

Economic experts have called for urgent reforms in taxation, healthcare delivery and data governance to strengthen Nigeria's growth outlook in 2026 and protect vulnerable citizens.

The call was made at the 12th National Economic Outlook organised by the Chartered Institute of Bankers of Nigeria Centre for Financial Studies in collaboration with

B. Adedipe Associates Ltd.

Speaking during a panel session, Chief Executive Officer of AfyA Care Nigeria Ltd., Mr Tosin Runsewe, said access to healthcare remains a major challenge, warning that building hospitals without affordable care would not address the problem.

He advocated the establishment of 20 to 40 large-scale healthcare organisations nationwide and the expansion of structured health insurance.

"Every Nigerian is one seri-

ous illness away from poverty," Runsewe said, noting that cancer treatment can cost up to ₦15 million.

He suggested that excess funds from bank capitalization should be channelled into the health sector.

In his keynote address, Prof Biodun Adedipe said the Nigeria Tax Reform Act 2025 would drive growth, stabilise the exchange rate and improve data-driven governance.

He projected GDP growth

of 4.5 per cent in 2026 and said the reforms aim to raise Nigeria's tax-to-GDP ratio to about 16 per cent.

Dr Baba Musa of WAIFEM blamed weak revenue on poor compliance and a narrow tax base, citing Alaba International Market as an example of under-taxation.

Flutterwave's Olufunmilayo Olaniyi urged better use of data analytics and real-time dashboards for regulation and competitiveness.



*In
Loving
Memory
of*

**Mrs.
Esonze Elsie
Kehinde-Bakare**
(Nee Aigbogun)

June 4, 1977 - December 26, 2025

Obsequies

Tuesday, 20th January 2026 | Vigil Mass
4:30pm @ St Theresa's Catholic Church, Lawani Street,
Off Ewah Road, Benin City

Wednesday, 21st January 2026 | Funeral Mass:
10:00am @ St Theresa's Catholic Church, Lawani Street,
Off Ewah Road, Benin City

Interment: Aigbogun Family Residence,
No. 5 Imadeyo Avenue, Off Ewah Road, Benin City, Edo State

Signed: Family

NEWS

Okpebholo's war on kidnapping, cultism, drugs is total —Ebea

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Commissioner for Safety and Security, Chief Festus Ebea has said that criminals will find no hiding place anywhere in the state.

Making the declaration at the weekend, the Commissioner assured residents that peace and safety remain top priorities of Governor Monday Okpebholo's administration.

According to him, the State government philosophy that Edo cannot be a haven for criminals is not mere rhetoric, but a firm commitment.

Ebea disclosed that "From the outset, Governor Okpebholo's mission has been to restore peace and ensure a crime-free Edo."

"We are intensifying intelligence-driven operations, coordinating targeted raids on known criminal hubs, and dismantling drug networks that fuel deviant behaviour among our youths. The government is determined to smoke out drug dealers and other criminals wherever they hide to ensure a peaceful and safe society."

He explained that the Okpebholo administration is confronting kidnapping and cultism through a strengthened security

architecture and coordinated task forces across the state.

"Our drive against cultism and kidnapping is fully aligned with the governor's directive to end these crises through stronger security structures and joint operations," Ebea added.

Speaking on recent anti-drug operations in Uromi, Ubiaja and Auchi, which resulted in multiple arrests, the commissioner said the raids were intelligence-led and would be sustained.

"This is not a one-off effort — we will continue to smoke out drug dealers and criminals wherever they hide," he said. "At the same time, we

recognise the need to protect civil liberties. Every operation must respect due process, and suspects are being profiled and handed over to prosecuting authorities in line with the law."

Chief Ebea noted that Governor Okpebholo's administration is deepening partnerships with communities and traditional leaders to strengthen grassroots security.

"The government is improving the flow of credible intelligence and partnering with traditional and community leaders to enhance crime prevention at the grassroots. Security is a shared responsibility, and we

are promoting collective engagement across the state."

Reacting to the tragic tanker explosion in Auchi, Ebea said the incident serves as a wake-up call for urgent road safety reforms and improved emergency response.

"Following the tragic tanker explosion at Auchi, we identified the dangerous condition of the Auchi-Okene Expressway near Jattu Junction," he said.

"We have issued strong warnings to the public on the dangers of scooping fuel from fallen tankers and stressed the urgency of road rehabilitation and preventive safety measures."

He disclosed that the state government is working closely

with relevant agencies to upgrade road infrastructure and emergency response systems to prevent similar tragedies.

On the use of technology and data in crime fighting, Ebea said the Okpebholo administration is strengthening intelligence gathering and ensuring that information drives security operations.

"In our fight against crime, the governor is enhancing intelligence gathering and ensuring optimal use of information to guide security operations," he noted.

Reassuring Edo residents, the commissioner said patrols have been reinforced and targeted raids intensified in vulnerable communities.



CERTIFICATE PRESENTATION:

Nigerian-Canadian Film maker, Lucky Ejim (2nd L), presenting a certificate to Elizabeth Sunday (2nd R), the winner of Spoken Words competition at the Association of Nigeria Authors (ANA) January Reading/Writers Dialogue, during their meeting in Abuja at the weekend. With them are, Chairman of Abuja Chapter of the Association, Arc. Chukwudi Eze (R) and the Special Guest, the Nwama II of Umunwama Community Izombe, Oguta Lcal Government Area, Imo State, Eze Chijioke Egwuagu (L).

Army: 4 Brigade reaffirms anti-insecurity drive

BENIN CITY

The 4 Brigade of the Nigerian Army, Benin City at the weekend reaffirmed its commitment to tackling insecurity in Edo State during the 2025 West African Social Activities (WASSA).

Opening the colourful event, Brigade Commander, Brig-Gen. Ahmed Balogun, said the Army would consolidate operational gains to ensure residents live and trade without fear.

"We intend to consolidate on last year's strategies so people can sleep with their eyes closed and conduct business without fear or favour," Balogun said.

"By the grace of God, insecurity will be tackled head-on and reduced to the barest minimum in this state," he added.

Balogun described WASSA as an age-long military tradition dating to the Second World War, when West African troops gathered under the Royal West African Frontier Force.

He said the event celebrates peace, cultural heritage and collective achievements across

the sub-region.

"WASSA creates a conducive atmosphere for officers, soldiers and families to relax and socialise with host communities at the end of a training year," he said.

The commander noted the tradition's endurance across West Africa, describing it as vital for unity and esprit de corps.

He said the 2025 training year prioritised professionalism and sustained operational excellence. Balogun said objectives were largely achieved through officers' and soldiers' commitment, with support from the military's high command.

He thanked the Chief of Army Staff and the General Officer Commanding, 2 Division, for "strategic guidance," and Edo Government and security agencies for collaboration.

Balogun reaffirmed the brigade's "unalloyed loyalty" to military leadership and the Nigerian-state.

"The year 2026 has begun with enthusiasm to further actualise the Chief of Army Staff's command philosophy," he said.

Oba market complex: EDPUBMA boss assures of equitable distribution of stores

GLORIA OMORUYI

The Managing Director of the Edo State Public Building and Maintenance Agency Arc. Emmanuel Fashanu has assured the public that former occupants of the Oba market would be captured and accommodated in the allocation of space in the market after renovation.

He gave this assurance at the

weekend while fielding questions from journalists shortly after an inspection tour of the market.

Fashanu said that stakeholders' meetings were ongoing already, to ensure a smooth process in that regard.

Fashanu noted that the market is very important to the Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo as the market is a Commercial hub that caters for

the livelihood of the people.

He said the market is not only strategically located, but also serves as a Nexus to other markets in the State.

Fashanu disclosed that going by the work schedule of the Contractor handling the project, the first phase was expected to be completed by June, but with the accelerated pace of work going on presently, he was quite confident the market

would be ready before then.

The Managing Director enjoined Edo people to keep hope alive as the SHINE Agenda of Governor Okpebholo is on course to deliver the dividends of democracy to them.

It would be recalled that in December 2025, Senator Monday Okpebholo paid a Visit to the market to ascertain the level of work done so far at the market and was optimistic that the Contractor would deliver as Scheduled.

Police warn motorists after reckless driver runs down 3 officers in Benin

MIKE OSAROAGBON

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Police Command has warned against attacks on police officers following an incident in which a reckless driver knocked down three policemen at a checkpoint in Benin City.

The warning was contained in a statement issued at the weekend by the Command's Public Relations Officer, ASP Eno Ikoedem.

According to the police, the incident occurred at the Iyekogba Estate Gate when the

suspect allegedly drove against traffic and breached a police barricade at high speed.

The driver was said to have made a sudden turn and drove back towards officers on lawful duty, knocking down three of them in the process.

Police sources said the suspect subsequently lost control of the vehicle and crashed into several cars before he was apprehended by operatives at the scene.

The injured officers were immediately rushed to hospital, where they are currently receiving medical attention.

ASP Ikoedem disclosed

that preliminary investigations identified the suspect as Nsikak Okon, a 19-year-old male who was driving without a valid licence.

She added that a black Mercedes-Benz GLK SUV, valued at about ₦28 million, was recovered from the suspect.

The vehicle, which had reportedly been in use since May 2024, was found to be unregistered.

Items recovered from the suspect included a substance suspected to be Canadian Loud and a Sprite bottle containing a sky-blue liquid believed to be

diluted refnol, also known as Rohypnol.

Reacting to the incident, the Commissioner of Police, Edo State Command, CP Monday Agbonika, warned that the Command would not tolerate deliberate attacks on police officers performing lawful duties, stressing that offenders would be prosecuted in accordance with the law.

The Command further appealed to motorists to slow down at checkpoints and cooperate with police officers, emphasising that such cooperation is essential to public safety.

Shettima backs AFAN, reiterates FG's commitment to farmers

ABUJA

Vice President Kashim Shettima has pledged the Federal Government's continued support for Nigerian farmers under the auspices of the All Farmers Association of Nigeria (AFAN), saying that when farmers thrive, the nation thrives.

Shettima gave the assurance at the closing of the three-day General Assembly of Farmers (GAF) meeting with the theme, "Empowering Farmers, Fostering Collaboration," held in Abuja.

Speaking on behalf of the Vice President, the Senior Special Assistant to the President on Public Health, Dr Uju Rochas-Anwukah, said the Nutrition 774 Initiative places farmers at the centre of Nigeria's fight against malnutrition.

She said agriculture was not just an economic policy but also a security, peace and nation-healing strategy, adding that under the Renewed Hope Agenda, agriculture occupied a central position in national recovery.

According to her, Nigeria cannot fix nutrition without fixing food systems, and food systems cannot be fixed without farmers, stressing that farmers must not be treated as an afterthought.

She said the Nutrition 774 Initiative aligns agriculture, health, education and livelihoods, noting that nutrition does not begin in hospitals but on farms.

Rochas-Anwukah added that the Office of the Vice President was ready to partner with AFAN to ensure farmers succeed, families prosper and the nation grows.

NAF airstrikes neutralise over 40 terrorists in Borno

ABUJA

The Nigerian Air Force has neutralised more than 40 terrorists in coordinated close air support and air interdiction operations at Azir and Musarram areas of Borno, disrupting planned attacks and bolstering ongoing ground operations.

This was contained in a statement by the Director, Public Relations and Information, NAF, Air Commodore Ehimen Ejodame, on Sunday in Abuja.

Ejodame said the operations were conducted on January 15 and 16 by the Air Component of Operation HADIN KAI, following actionable intelligence and in close coordination with troops in contact.

He said the NAF aircraft, in the early hours of January 16, swiftly responded to a distress report at Azir, where troops were engaged with terrorists withdrawing from the area.

According to him, further scans revealed terrorist elements attempting to regroup under nearby tree cover,

prompting precise and successive air strikes that neutralised several of them.

"Post-strike assessment confirmed no further threats, while feedback from ground troops, local authorities and community sources indicated a significant degradation of terrorist presence and a return of relative calm.

"Earlier on January 15, NAF

air assets carried out a successful air interdiction at Musarram in the Tumbuns general area after intelligence revealed terrorists assembling on canoes to launch attacks along the Baga and Fish Dam axis.

"On arrival, the aircraft sighted about 10 canoes and over 40 suspected terrorists, who were engaged in multiple passes, throwing them into disarray.

"Some fleeing elements were trailed and neutralised, while others who regrouped at an assembly area were also engaged, effectively dismantling the terrorist concentration," he said.

Reacting, the Chief of the Air Staff, Air Marshal Sunday Aneke, reaffirmed the NAF's commitment to providing timely and decisive air support to ground forces.

Aneke said the operations demonstrated the effectiveness of intelligence-led air power and close air-ground coordination in denying terrorists freedom of action.

He assured Nigerians of sustained pressure on terrorist elements as the Armed Forces of Nigeria continue efforts to degrade their capabilities and stabilise affected areas.

Food prices crash further as residents call sustainability

ABUJA

Prices of some food items have further dropped across markets in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, a market survey conducted by our correspondent across major markets in the FCT showed.

While prices of several staples declined after the festive season, some food items remain expensive.

Some residents said the drop in prices had brought some relief but urged the government to ensure sustainability, as many households were still constrained by low purchasing power.

The latest food inflation statistics released by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed that Nigeria's food inflation rate dropped in December 2025.

According to the NBS, food inflation stood at -0.36 percent on a month-on-month basis, representing a decrease of 1.49 percentage points compared to the 1.13 percent recorded in November 2025.

The bureau attributed the de-

cline to a reduction in the average prices of items such as tomatoes, garri, eggs, potatoes, carrots, millet, vegetables, plantain, beans, wheat grain, ground pepper and fresh onions, among others.

At Garki Model Market, notable price drops were observed in several food items between November 2025 and January 2026.

A dustbin basket of big red tomatoes is being sold for between N5,000 and N5,500, as against N6,000 to N7,000, while a dustbin basket of shombo dropped to N3,000 from N4,500 to N5,000 recorded between November and December.

Similarly, a dustbin basket of fresh pepper dropped significantly, falling from between N4,500 and N5,000 to about N2,500, while tatashe dropped from between N5,000 and N6,000 to N3,000.

A dustbin basket of onions is being sold for N4,000 compared to N4,500 previously, and sweet potatoes dropped to between N1,000 and N1,800 from N3,000.



AGM AND PRESENTATION OF AWARDS:

Vice President, Enyigugu Secondary School Mbaize (ESSM), Old Students Association, Class of '96, Mr Amuchie Onyekachi (R) presenting Award to the Best Students in Academics during their AGM and presentation of Awards to deserving students and teachers of their Alma Mater in Enyigugu, Aboh, Mbaize in Imo State.

AMSG re-elects Alake as chairman

ABUJA

The Africa Minerals Strategy Group (AMSG) has re-elected the Minister of Solid Minerals Development, Dr Dele Alake, as its Chairman. Alake's Special Assistant on Media, Segun Tomori, disclosed the development in a statement issued on Sunday in Abuja.

Tomori said the re-election occurred at the 2026 Annual General Meeting of the 24-member group held alongside the Future Minerals Forum in Riyadh.

He explained that the AGM attracted African ministers responsible for minerals and mining, as well as senior policymakers and industry stakeholders.

The forum was established to coordinate continental strategies aimed at maximising value addition and beneficiation from Africa's vast mineral resources.

Recall that Alake was unanimously elected pioneer Chairman of the group during the

2024 Future Minerals Forum.

Alake expressed gratitude to his colleagues for renewing their confidence in his leadership.

He described the renewed mandate as a collective responsibility to reposition Africa's solid minerals sector for sustainable growth.

The minister stressed the urgent need for African nations to work collaboratively to unlock the continent's economic potential through solid minerals development.

He noted that fragmented policies and weak coordination had limited Africa's ability to fully benefit from its mineral wealth.

Alake urged member states to cooperate in agreeing on minimum financial contributions to support the group's activities.

He also called for improvements to the group's budgeting framework to strengthen operational effectiveness and institutional credibility.

ABUJA

Some stakeholders have cautioned the Federal Government on the country's rising debt profile.

Data from the Debt Management Office (DMO) indicates that the total public debt stock of Nigeria rose to N152.40 trillion as at June 30, 2025.

According to BudgetIT, a Nigerian civic-tech and public finance advocacy organisation, several key factors have contributed to Nigeria's debt crisis over the years.

"Firstly, and most significantly, is Nigeria's aggressive borrowing practices and penchant for deficit spending.

"The Nigerian government increasingly relies on domestic and external borrowing to finance its budget deficits.

"As of mid-2024, domestic borrowing accounted for about 53 percent of the total debt, while external debts stood at approximately N63 trillion," it said.

It said that Naira's depreciation also exacerbated the cost of servicing external debts.

"Following the Naira devaluation in June 2023 and June 2024, the exchange rate fluctuated dramatically from about N460 to N1500 per dollar, increasing the burden on existing foreign obligations."

Some experts said that Nigeria's debt service burden could

worsen due to new borrowing plans.

The Chief Executive Officer, Centre for the Promotion of Private Enterprise, Dr Muda Yusuf, said that Nigeria's rising debt service burden was already outpacing capital expenditure.

Yusuf said that it could begin to crowd out essential government functions if not properly managed.

He said that there was a need for the government to focus more on revenue growth and fiscal consolidation than piling on new debts.

"Debt service is already far more than the appropriation for capital spending, and the trend is worrying.

"We need to tread very cautiously with respect to debt commitments," he said.

Yusuf said that Nigeria was spending far beyond its means, with more than 80 percent of government revenue now devoted to debt servicing.

"We are borrowing primarily to fund consumption and recurrent expenditure rather than productive capital projects.

"This path will only deepen the fiscal crisis if urgent reforms are not undertaken," he said.

The Deputy Country Director at BudgetIT, Vahyala Kwaga, said the Federal Government's plan to take on new loans risked breaching Nigeria's debt threshold.

Police rescue 17 suspected trafficked children in Nasarawa

LAFIA

The Police Command in Nasarawa State said it has rescued 17 children from suspected human traffickers in Karu Local Government Area (LGA) of the state.

SP Ramhan Nansel, Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO) stated this in a statement made available to newsmen on Sunday in Lafia.

The PPRO described the feat as a significant breakthrough in the Command's sustained

efforts to combat human trafficking and other related crimes in the state.

"Police personnel attached to Mararaba 'A' Division, Karu Local Government Area (LGA), while on stop-and-search duty at Sharp Corner, intercepted a white Volkswagen Sharon vehicle with registration number SHD 253 YU on Saturday, January 17, at about 5:50 p.m.

"The vehicle was driven by one Nanle John, male, aged 36 years, and had 17 passengers

on board, comprising 11 boys and six girls, all within the ages of 10 to 19 years.

"Upon interrogation, the occupants were suspected to be victims of human trafficking from Shendam, Plateau State," the PPRO said.

Nansel said further investigation revealed that both the driver and the passengers were travelling from Shendam to Kayama in Kwara State to meet one Umaru.

According to the statement, the said Umaru allegedly lured

the victims with the promise of securing farming jobs for them in Kayama, Kwara State.

The Police spokesperson said that all efforts made to contact their parents, guardians or the said Umaru proved abortive, as all phone numbers provided were unreachable.

Nansel said that the Commissioner of Police, Shetima Mohammed had ordered that the children be taken into protective custody at the State Criminal Investigation Department (SCID), Lafia.

NEWS

New tax law: Traders, business owners prefer cash to bank transfers —NAN study

ABUJA

Some traders, business owners now prefer cash payment from customers for goods and services rendered.

This followed implementation of the new tax law, a NAN study reveals.

Some of the traders who spoke to NAN in Abuja on Sunday, said the move was the interim measure to sustain

their businesses and avoid unnecessary charges.

Customers said the development negated the financial inclusion and mobile banking policies of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN).

Mr Fidelis Agbo, a trader at the Building Materials market in Mararaba market said that he was confused about the provisions of the new tax law, hence his preference for cash instead of transfers.

Agbo said that the news making the rounds in the market was that the government would collect tax for every money that drops in a person's account.

"Since the government will not relent in collecting taxes, we have learnt to do our business with wisdom.

"I now collect cash from my customers for goods purchased. I usually direct my customers to a Point of Sale

(PoS) person close to my shop to withdraw money.

"What I do for my big customers is that we split the PoS charges between us. My customers pay half and I pay half so that the burden will not be much on them.

"I intend to continue like this until I understand the tax thing better," he said.

Mr Khalid Abbas, also a trader at Nyanya market, said the tax law was still very complex in his eyes and other marketers.

Abbas who also said he collected cash from his customers,

disclosed that he was worried about the tax implications on electronic transactions.

He said he preferred cash for the fear of being taxed unfairly.

"Cash is straightforward, no complications, no need to involve banks or digital records.

"Before now, I heard that if you put the reason you are sending money to a person (narration), it will not be taxed but later, they said it was not true again.

"As a business owner, I am concerned about the new tax law but I am not sure how it will affect my business.

"To avoid any issues, I prefer to receive cash payments for goods sold just for me to manage my business given the current uncertainty around the tax law," he said.

Mrs Sarah Onifade, a buy-

er at Nyanya market, said she was asked to pay tax after the purchase of goods worth over N830,000.

Onifade said the seller received the alert of her transfer but asked her to pay tax of N50,000 on the money as he would be charged by both his bank and the government.

"I was very surprised to hear this because I never understood the tax law like this.

"I ended up paying additional N20,000 to him after so much dragging back and forth. This is frustrating and discouraging," she said.

Mrs Sarah Akator, a business owner, called on various agencies saddled with the responsibility of sensitising the public to do so urgently with a view to making people well informed about the new tax laws.



SIGNING OF MOU:

Executive Director, Centre For Memories (CFM), Iheanyi Igboko (L) with Head of Strategy and Implementation, NZAPI Apparels, Mrs Chiamaka Onwuagba during the Signing of MoU on collaborative agreements to amplify the Archives of CFM Through Apparels in Enugu.

Lagos SFU boss CP Dung retires from Nigeria Police Force

LAGOS

The 32nd Commissioner of Police, Special Fraud Unit (SFU), Lagos, CP Rose Dung, has formally retired from the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) after attaining statutory retirement age of 60.

This was contained in a statement signed by the Unit's spokesperson, DSP Ovie Ewuhare, on Sunday in Lagos.

He said that Dung's retirement ceremony which took place on Saturday, was attended by strategic leaders of the

NPF, retired senior officers, stakeholders, captains of industry, and other distinguished dignitaries.

In her address, Dung expressed gratitude to God Almighty, for the grace, protection, and good health throughout her policing career.

She described the occasion as one of reflection and thanksgiving, marking a journey anchored on professionalism and integrity.

She commended the Inspector General of Police, Mr Kayode Egbetokun, for his exemplary leadership, commitment

to personnel development, and consistent promotion of professionalism and gender inclusivity within the Force.

The retiring commissioner paid glowing tribute to the management team, officers, men and women of PSFU, Lagos, describing her tenure at the unit, as one of the most fulfilling periods of her career.

She praised their discipline, dedication, and professionalism, noting that these qualities significantly contributed to the unit's operational successes and enhanced public confidence.

CP Dung also acknowledged the invaluable support of SFU stakeholders and institutional partners, whose collaboration, she said, strengthened the unit's investigative capacity and effectiveness.

She thanked friends, colleagues, stakeholders, and well-wishers, whose presence made the ceremony memorable.

Dung also reaffirmed her confidence in the continued professionalism and commitment of the SFU personnel, in the discharge of their duties.

Adamawa Progressive Elders' Council endorses Tinubu for 2027

YOLA

An interest group, Adamawa Progressive Elders' Council (APEC), has endorsed the re-election of President Bola Tinubu in 2027.

The forum's Chairman, Media and Publicity Committee, Ahmad Sajoh, who stated this in a statement issued on Sunday in Yola, also reaffirmed APEC's unwavering loyalty to the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC).

Sajoh assured of the organisation's commitment to the

unity and progress of the party in the state.

He said that the resolution towards this effect was reached at a meeting of the forum held on January 17 in Yola.

Sajoh described the forum as an APC support group which was established following the recommendations of the APC Reconciliation Committee and subsequently adopted by the leader of the Party in Adamawa.

"The council was constituted to promote peace, internal harmony, reconciliation and col-

lective strength within the party, with a clear mandate to build a formidable APC structure capable of delivering President Bola Tinubu and all APC candidates in the 2027 electoral cycle.

"The council reaffirmed its absolute loyalty and commitment to APC and to the successful execution of its mandate.

"The council, comprising prominent APC members drawn from all 21 local government areas of Adamawa State, unanimously joined other notable individuals and groups to endorse President

Bola Tinubu for a second term in office in 2027," he said.

Sajoh cited Tinubu's bold leadership, reform agenda and commitment to national development as reasons for the endorsement.

He commended Tinubu for appointing the leader of the party in the state into one where he described as one of the most sensitive and strategic positions in government.

Sajoh also expressed the forum's appreciation for the various federal appointments extended to Adamawa indigenes.

NDLEA nabs ex-convict, female online vendor, others in 9 states raids

ABUJA

The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) has arrested an ex-convict, female online vendor and others in raids conducted in Jigawa, Lagos, Ogun, Edo, Delta, Oyo, FCT, Enugu, and Kwara states.

The Director, Media and Advocacy, NDLEA, Mr Femi Babafemi said this in a statement on Sunday in Abuja.

Giving a breakdown, Babafemi said that NDLEA operatives in Edo state on Tuesday, January 13 raided the Arokpa forest, Uzebba town, Owan West LGA, leading to the arrest of another drug lord, and seizure of 320kg skunk and seeds.

Meanwhile, in the FCT, Abuja, operatives on Friday, January 16 tracked and arrested a 44-year-old lady following intelligence on her online sale of illicit substances.

"At the time of her arrest, 2.2kg skunk and litres of cannabis oil which she produces in her kitchen and sells through online advertisements were recovered from her home at the Kaura district, Abuja.

"Another suspect was on Tues-

day, January 13 arrested with 148.3 grams of cocaine and skunk at his 12 Biskira street, Abacha Estate, Abuja home," he said.

Also, 118.1kg skunk was seized from two suspects at Fadeyi area of Mushin Lagos on Friday, January 16 adding that not less than 116kg of the same substance was recovered from a warehouse at the new market area of Enugu the same day.

Similarly, two suspects were on Thursday, January 15 arrested by NDLEA operatives along Onitsha -Asaba expressway in Delta, while conveying 410,800 pills of tramadol.

"Other drugs intercepted include 84.2 litres of codeine syrup; 82,250 tablets of diazepam; 900 tabs of swinol and 65 pills of Molly," he said.

In Oyo state, a suspect was nabbed on Thursday, January 15 at Moniya, Ibadan, with 321 litres of skuchies, and 2.5kg Colorado, a synthetic strain of cannabis.

Babafemi said that another suspect was caught the same day at Odo-Ona, Ibadan, in possession of 5.4kg Scottish Loud; 1.696kg skunk and 2.5kg Colorado, bringing the total weight to 9.696 kilograms.

TEN YEARS IN MIND

You are cordially invited to witness the ten years remembrance Firdaus Prayer for Princess Haja Mrs Rabi Momoh Kadiri of the Afale, Afegeta, Prince Momoh family of the Odighie Community in Etsako West LGA of Edo State, Nigeria. The Ogiedigie family.

Princess Haja Mrs Rabi Momoh Kadiri, is survived by a husband, six children and several grandchildren.

During her life time, Her Royal Highness was a mother to all Odighie sons and daughters. It is time for us all to show due respect. May Allah Almighty forgive her sins, accept her soul and grant her "Jannatu Firdaus" the best of paradise.

Date: January 26, 2026.

Time: 8.00pm prompt

Venue: Her father's residence, Ogie of Odighie Palace Compound in the heart of Odighie Community, Agbede, Etsako West LGA, Edo State.

Reception follows simultaneously at same venue and her husband's residence at Odighie, Ukepeko, Etsako West LGA, Edo State.

R.S.V.P

Chief Event Planner: Mallam Prince Mohammed Momoh (Brother) aka D-Boy
Co- Event Planner: The Children

Jazakallah Kharian. May Allah reward you with goodness.

N1.35bn fraud: Supreme Court orders continuation of ex-Gov Lamido, son's trial

ABUJA

The Supreme Court has ordered the continuation of the trial of former governor of Jigawa State, Alhaji Sule Lamido and his two sons, Mustapha and Aminu Lamido in the 1.35 billion Naira corruption charges brought against them by the EFCC.

Justice Abubakar Umar in a unanimous decision of 5-man panel of Justices held that the

appeal by the EFCC against the Court of Appeal verdict was meritorious and sustained.

The judgment of the Court of Appeal in July 2023 which set the former governor free was voided and set aside by the apex court.

The apex court ordered that Lamido and his two sons should go back to the Federal High Court and defend themselves from the EFCC allegations.

It ordered that the charges

against the defendants be re-suscitated by EFCC for the Lamidos to enter their defence in the corruption charges.

Lamido, his sons, Aminu Wada Abubakar, and their companies Bamaina Holdings Limited and Speeds International Limited were arraigned before Justice Ijeoma Ojukwu of the Federal High Court, Abuja.

They were arraigned on a 37-count amended charge, in-

cluding money laundering and abuse of office.

The EFCC alleged that Lamido, who governed Jigawa from 2007 to 2015 laundered 1.35 billion naira in kickbacks from contractors handling state government projects.

At the completion of the EFCC case, Lamido and other defendants filed a no case submission on the ground that no prima facie case was estab-

lished against them.

The Federal High Court in a ruling dismissed the no case submission and held that sufficient evidence had been supplied by EFCC that required them to enter defense.

The former governor took the case to the Court of Appeal which in July 2023 disagreed with the Federal High Court and dismissed the charges against the defendants.

Not satisfied with the Court of Appeal's decision, the EFCC filed an appeal at the apex court praying it to uphold the ruling of the Federal High Court and remit the matter to the court for continuation of trial.

EFCC submitted that the Court of Appeal erred in law by discharging the defendants despite the avalanches of evidence establishing a prima facie case against the former governor and his sons.

Family, female attorneys demand justice for slain lawyer

ABUJA

The family of slain lawyer, Mediatix Chigbo, and the Global Association of Female Attorneys (GAFA) have called for a thorough investigation into her murder.

The appeal came during a Night of Tribute organised in Chigbo's honour by GAFA in Abuja.

Ms Maureen Chigbo, the deceased's younger sister, described her death as tragic and devastating, urging authorities to ensure justice is served.

Maureen, a former President of the Guild of Corporate Online Publishers, said she interviewed the suspects while seeking justice as an investigative journalist.

She revealed discrepancies between suspects' statements and actual facts, highlighting contradictions that must be resolved during the investigation.

"We are not dealing with suppositions. A homicide investigation must examine all loopholes to establish the truth. "Why insist on this? My sis-

ter fought for justice, advocated for the poor, and we will not let her struggle be in vain.

"We want justice for her and for humanity, so the dead can rest and the living live in peace," Maureen Chigbo said.

Maureen explained that the deceased attended evening Mass and spoke to her sister before a distress call, followed by threats from unidentified persons.

She urged legal professionals and stakeholders to support a thorough investigation and ensure perpetrators are prosecuted, to serve as a deterrent to others.

"Join us to uncover who kidnapped and murdered my sister. This is homicide. The investigation cannot be sloppy or superficial.

"She dedicated her life to the poor and pro bono cases. Justice is the standard, and justice is what she must receive," she said.

Mrs Chinelo Iriele, GAFA International President, described Chigbo as a devoted colleague and former International Secretary of the association.



ROTARY DAY CELEBRATION:

Plateau State Coordinator, Rotary Day celebration (RODAC) 2025-2026, Owolabi Folaranmi (2nd L) and the Zonal Coordinator, Rotary District 9127, Samuel Komolafe (2ND R) with other Rotary members celebrating the Rotary Torch of Unity during the Rotary Day celebration (RODAC) in Jos on Sunday.

Court discharges, acquits woman charged with murdering co-wife

KANO

A Kano State High Court has discharged and acquitted a housewife, Fatima Dahiru, who was charged with the murder of her co-wife, Wasila Yunusa.

The defendant, who lives at Farawa Quarters in Kumbotso Local Government Area, Kano State, was standing trial on a one-count charge of culpable homicide.

Delivering the judgment

on the matter, Justice Zuwaira Yusuf held that the prosecution failed to prove its case beyond reasonable doubt.

The judge said that the evidence presented by the prosecution was riddled with contradictions, particularly regarding the claim that Fatima killed Wasila.

She said, "None of the prosecution witnesses were eyewitnesses to the murder, and no credible evidence was presented to show how the defendant

allegedly killed the deceased.

"The prosecution failed woefully to establish the offence.

"The defendant, Fatima Dahiru, is hereby found not guilty of the one-count charge of culpable homicide preferred against her.

"She is hereby discharged and acquitted."

Earlier, the prosecution counsel, Lamido Abba-Sorondinki, told the court that the defendant committed the offence on February 6, 2019, at Farawa Quarters, Kano.

He alleged that at about 3.30

p.m. on the same date, the defendant hit the deceased, Wasila, on the head with a sharp object, an act that led to her death

The prosecution called seven witnesses, including the deceased's husband, Isyaku Muhammad, who testified as the fifth prosecution witness.

Abba-Sorondinki said the offence contravened Section 221 of the Penal Code.

The defendant, however, denied committing the offence.

The defence counsel, Mrs Habiba Abdullahi-Umar, called her client to testify in her defence.

ISWAP attacks: Court exonerates DSS over terror suspect's whereabouts

ABUJA

The Federal High Court in Abuja has exonerated the Department of State Services (DSS) over the alleged detention and killing of an Islamic State -West Africa Province (ISWAP) terror suspect, Yusuf Lukman Omeiza.

Justice Musa Liman, in a judgement, held that the plaintiffs failed to prove their claim that the suspect was killed by the defendants.

The plaintiffs, Alhaji Jimoh Yusuf and Mrs Fati Mohammed, had dragged the DSS to the court, alongside the Attorney General of the Federation (AGF) over the alleged arrest, detention and killing of Mr Omeiza, who was identified as the leader of ISWAP in Kogi.

Mr Omeiza (aka Magas), was arrested by the DSS on Oct. 1, 2015 in Okene, Kogi, over alleged terrorism-related offences that include bank attacks and robberies in the area.

The plaintiffs filed the case on February 18, 2021 in a suit marked: FHC/ABJ/CS/193/2021.

They had sought three reliefs through their lawyer, Ejumelowo Asutu.

The reliefs sought included a declaration that the arrest, detention and killing of their son and brother, Yusuf Lukman Omeiza, without a trial by a competent court of law was unlawful and a breach of his fundamental right to life.

"A declaration of this honourable court that the unlawful arrest detention and killing of Yusuf Lukman Omeiza by the 1st defendant has occasioned a traumatic emotional pain to plaintiffs and their family.

"An order of this honourable court directing the 1st and 2nd defendants jointly and severally to pay the plaintiff the sum

N10,000,000,000.00 (Ten Billion Naira) only as damage suffered by the Plaintiff and their family occasioned unlawful killing of the Yusuf Lukman Omeiza."

Court to deliver judgment in fresh suit challenging president's emergency power

ABUJA

The Federal High Court in Abuja has fixed

March 9 for judgment in a fresh suit challenging the legal authority of President Bola Tinubu to remove elected state's officials during a state of emergency.

Justice James Omotosho fixed the date after counsel for the plaintiff, Nnamdi Nwoko-cha-Ahaaiwe, and the defence lawyer adopted their processes and presented their arguments for and against the suit.

The case, filed by the plaintiff, Civil Society Observatory for Constitutional and Legal Compliance (CSOCLC), spe-

cifically contests the president's actions following the declaration of a state of emergency in Rivers last year.

The NGO argued that while the President may declare an emergency under Section 305 of the Constitution, he lacked the power to suspend or remove elected executive and legislative officers and install an interim administrator.

Justice Omotosho, however, noted the similarity of the suit to previous cases he had dismissed, citing jurisdictional issues under the old Emergency Powers (Jurisdiction) Act of 1962.

The judge also referenced a Supreme Court decision from

Dec. 15, 2025, which reportedly dismissed a related case on procedural grounds.

But Ahaaiwe, acknowledged these previous rulings but insisted they were erroneous.

He argued that the 1962 Act was a "spent" law, deliberately omitted from statute books before the 1999 Constitution took effect.

Therefore, he contended that, a 2025 presidential order modifying this non-existent law is "unconstitutional, null and void."

"The constitution has fully covered the field on emergency powers," Ahaaiwe submitted, adding that "no executive proclamation can alter the express provisions of Section 305."

The counsel for the 1st to 5th defendants, which include the President and the Attorney-General of Federation, relied on the same 1962 Act and the modification order to assert that only the Supreme Court holds original jurisdiction over such disputes, urging the court to strike out the case.

The plaintiffs had sought 26 reliefs, including a declaration that Rivers cannot be governed by an appointed administrator, retired Vice Admiral Ibok-Ete Ekwe Ibas, outside the provisions of the constitution.

The suit, which was heard, revived a critical constitutional debate previously thought settled.

NEWS

Foreign

Trump tariff threat over Greenland 'unacceptable', European leaders say

A threat by US President Donald Trump to impose fresh tariffs on eight allies opposed to his proposed takeover of Greenland has drawn condemnation from European leaders.

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer said the move was "completely wrong", while French President Emmanuel Macron called it "unacceptable". The comments came after Trump announced a 10% tariff on goods from Denmark, Norway, Sweden, France, Germany, the UK, the Netherlands and Finland would come into force on 1 February, but could later rise to 25% - and would last until a deal was reached.

Trump insists the autonomous Danish territory is critical for US security and has not ruled out taking it by force.

Following Trump's threats, the European Union called an emergency meeting for 17:00 in Brussels (16:00 GMT) on Sunday. The meeting will involve ambassadors from the EU's 27 countries, according to the Reuters news agency.

Meanwhile, thousands of people took to the streets in Greenland and Denmark on Saturday in protest at the proposed US takeover.

Greenland is sparsely populated but resource-rich and its location between North America and the Arctic makes it well placed for early warning systems in the event of missile attacks and for monitoring vessels in the region.

Trump has previously said Washington would get the territory "the easy way" or "the hard way".

European countries have

rallied to Denmark's support. They have argued that the security of the Arctic region should be a joint Nato responsibility.

France, Germany, Sweden, Norway, Finland, the Netherlands and the UK have dispatched a small number of troops to Greenland in a so-called reconnaissance mission.

Announcing the new tariffs in a post on his Truth Social platform on Saturday, Trump said those countries were playing "a very dangerous game". At stake, he said, was the "Safety, Security, and Survival of our Planet".

He said the proposed 10% levy to be introduced next month on goods exported to the US would rise to 25% in June and remain "payable until such time as a Deal is reached for the Complete and Total purchase of Greenland".

In his response, Starmer said: "Applying tariffs on allies for pursuing the collective security of Nato allies is completely wrong. We will of course be pursuing this directly with the US administration."

UK opposition leaders also criticised Trump's announcement. Conservative Party leader Kemi Badenoch said the tariffs were a "terrible idea", while Reform UK leader and Trump ally Nigel Farage said they "will hurt us".

Liberal Democrat leader Ed Davey called Trump's behaviour "unhinged" but said how the UK responds "matters a lot".

Green MP Ellie Chowdhury said the US president "treats the international stage like a schoolyard playground, attempting to bully and brute force other countries into compliance with his imperialist agenda".

Syrian army seizes country's largest oil field from Kurdish forces

Syrian troops fighting Kurdish forces in north-eastern Syria have seized the country's largest oilfield.

The Omar facility and nearby gas fields are under army control after the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) pulled back, officials and monitors say. Earlier the army captured the strategic Tabqa dam on the Euphrates river.

The push came after the SDF announced it would re-deploy east of the Euphrates, following deadly clashes last week. That withdrawal followed talks with US officials.

Ongoing fighting in the area stems from the breakdown of an agreement between SDF and the government of President Ahmed al-Sharaa, who is seeking to integrate Kurdish bodies into Syrian institutions.

On Friday, in an apparent good-will gesture, al-Sharaa said he would make Kurdish a national language and make the Kurdish new year an official holiday. The decree is the first formal recognition of Kurdish national rights since Syria's independence in 1946.

The US-backed SDF then announced its pullout east of the Euphrates river.

Kurdish forces have been controlling swathes of Syria's oil-rich north and north-east, much of it gained during the fight against the Islamic State group over the past decade.

Over the weekend, Syrian troops continued their eastward push. They entered

the town of Tabqa on the south-western bank of the Euphrates and nearby dam on Saturday.

On Sunday, Syrian officials announced they had seized Omar, Syria's largest oil field, on the eastern side of the river. The facility has been a major source of revenue for the SDF.

This claim was supported by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a UK-based monitoring group. It said the SDF had withdrawn from "entire villages and towns of the eastern countryside of Deir Ezzor [province]" as well as the Omar and Tanak oil fields early on Sunday.

Meanwhile Syrian authorities accused the SDF of blowing up two bridges on the Euphrates River, including the new al-Rashid bridge in the city of Raqqa.

Last week at least 12 people were reported killed in clashes between the two sides in the northern city of Aleppo.

The latest fighting comes despite attempts by the US to broker a ceasefire. Washington has long backed the SDF, but it also supports the Syrian government.

Following the ousting of longtime strongman Bashar al-Assad in late 2024, President al-Sharaa has been seeking to integrate Kurdish military and civilian bodies into Syria's national institutions.

In March 2025, the SDF signed a deal with the government to that effect. Almost a year on, the agreement is still not implemented, with each side blaming the other.



SYRIAN ARMY:

Syrian troops control the strategic town Tabqa after Kurdish forces withdrew.

Fears Iran's internet shutdown could lead to 'extreme digital isolation'

Iran is 10 days into one of the most extreme internet shutdowns in history, with 92 million citizens cut off from all internet services and even disruption to phone and text messaging.

The Iranian government cut off services on 8 January, apparently to stifle dissent and prevent international scrutiny of a government crack down on protesters.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said the internet was cut off in response to what he described as externally directed "terrorist operations".

The government has not said when internet services will return, but new reports suggest that, behind the scenes, the authorities may be making plans to restrict it permanently.

On 15 January, the news website IranWire reported that government spokesper-

son Fatemeh Mohajerani told journalists that international web access will not be available until at least the Iranian New Year in late March.

Internet freedom observers at FilterWatch believe the government is hastily implementing new systems and rules to cut Iran off from the international internet.

"There should be no expectation of reopening international internet access, and even afterwards, users' access to international internet will never return to its previous form," FilterWatch said, citing unnamed government sources.

While the BBC cannot independently verify this report or the timing of its implementation, journalists who spoke to BBC Persian also said they were told that internet access would not be restored anytime soon.

From temporary outage to "communication black hole"

Iran has maintained a tight grip over the internet for many years, with most western social media apps and platforms blocked, as well as external news websites like BBC News.

However many people have managed to access popular apps such as Instagram using Virtual Private Networks (VPNs).

Internet freedom campaigners at Access Now say Iran has consistently used shutdowns as a way to mask mass violence and brutal crackdowns on protesters, as seen during the nationwide internet shutdowns during the November 2019 and September 2022 protests.

A shutdown was also imposed during the Iran-Israel conflict in June 2025.

However, the current blackout has lasted longer than any

previous shutdown.

In a public statement, the charity Access Now said that full restoration of internet access is imperative.

"Restricting access to these essential services not only endanger lives but embolden authorities to conceal and evade accountability for human rights abuses," it said.

Already there are reports that livelihoods in Iran are being badly impacted by the shutdown with e-commerce particularly affected.

As of 18 January, the Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) estimates that more than 3,300 confirmed protester deaths have been recorded, with more than 4,380 cases under review. It also reports that the number of arrests has reached 24,266 across 187 cities.

Around 1,500 soldiers on standby for deployment to Minneapolis, officials say

Soldiers are on standby for possible deployment to Minneapolis, a US defence official has told CBS News, the BBC's US partner.

The official said the 1,500 soldiers, currently in Alaska, are an option for US president Donald Trump if he decided to use active duty military personnel, as anti-Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) demonstrations continued in the city on Saturday.

No decision has yet been made on whether to deploy the soldiers from Alaska, the official said.

Minnesota officials have urged protesters to stay orderly and peaceful during demonstrations after an ICE agent shot dead US citizen Renee Good earlier this month.

The soldiers are part of the 11th Airborne Division in Fort Wainwright, the official added.

Last week, Trump threatened to invoke the Insurrection Act, a rarely-used law that allows active-duty military personnel to be deployed for law enforcement duties inside the US.

It comes as a US federal judge issued an order limiting the crowd control tactics that can be used by ICE agents towards "peaceful and unobstructive" protesters in Minneapolis.

On Friday, Judge Katherine Menendez ruled that federal agents cannot arrest or pepper spray peaceful demonstrations, including those monitoring or observing ICE agents.

The state's National Guard has been mobilised and placed on alert by Governor Tim Walz, and other law enforcement officers were deployed to Minneapolis ahead of the anti-ICE demonstrations.

Recent protests in the city were sparked by widespread action by ICE in the city, and follow Good's death on 7 January.

City leaders said Good was there as a legal observer of ICE activity.

But the Trump administration has called her a "domestic terrorist".

Good's death sparked protests across the country, with many people holding signs that read "Justice for Renee".

Foreign

NEWS

Six killed in Pakistan shopping mall fire

A fire at a shopping centre in the Pakistan city of Karachi has killed six people as firefighters continue to battle the blaze.

Parts of the Gul Plaza, containing 1,200 stores and spanning 8,000 sq m (86,111 sq ft), have collapsed which officers said was hampering rescue efforts.

One firefighter is among the dead, more than 20 people have been injured and there are fears some are still trapped inside the multi-storey mall.

Local emergency services said that when helpers arrived at the site on Saturday "the fire from the ground floor had spread to the upper floors, and almost the entire building was already engulfed in flames".

A senior police official told the BBC that the authorities had been unable to search the building for bodies as the fire has continued to burn.

More than 30 people have been reported missing by their families, who have gathered outside what remains of the centre, waiting anxiously for news of

their loved ones. Administrators for the city have set up a desk to register the names and details of the missing.

Smoke was still billowing from what remains of the Gul Plaza building on Sunday morning. Much of it has collapsed and there are concerns it could collapse further.

Hassan Khan, a spokesperson for Rescue 1122 in Karachi, told BBC Urdu the shopping centre contains flammable materials such as plastic foam, cloth, carpets and perfume.

Summaiya Syed, Karachi's police surgeon, said six bodies had been transferred to the city's Civil Hospital as well as some of the injured.

She added that the police were "invoking mass disaster protocols".

Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari expressed his condolences and told the government of Sindh province, where Karachi is based, to conduct a comprehensive review of safety arrangements in commercial and residential buildings across the area.



Avalanches kill eight skiers in Austrian Alps

Eight people were killed in a series of avalanches in the Austrian Alps on Saturday, following heavy snowfall and dangerous conditions in the region.

Five people were killed in two avalanches in the Pongau area near Salzburg, local mountain rescue officials said.

Later that day, three Czech skiers died after being buried by an avalanche in Pusterwald, about 70 miles (110km) away, police confirmed.

Poor conditions have led to the deaths of a number of people in the Alps over the past week in neighbouring Switzerland and also in France.

"Our deepest sympathies go out to the families," said Gerhard Kremser, district head of the Pongau mountain rescue service.

"This tragedy painfully demonstrates how serious the current avalanche situation is."

The incidents in Pongau saw seven ski tourers hit near Finstertkopf mountain, killing four and seriously injuring another.

In the same area, a female

ski tourer was also buried and killed in open alpine terrain.

Further avalanches were recorded in the region on Saturday, but no-one was injured.

Following the avalanche that killed three skiers in Pusterwald, four others in the same group rescued by emergency crews.

"Emergency responders were able to locate and partially dig out the buried victims. Despite immediate rescue efforts, the three individuals were found dead," a police statement said.

The fatalities follow a deadly week in the alps.

Last weekend in France, six skiers died after being caught in avalanches in various Alpine resorts and in western Austria, a 58-year-old skier died in the Tyrolean resort of Weerberg.

On Tuesday, an avalanche killed a 13-year-old Czech boy skiing in Austria's Bad Gastein resort.

And in neighbouring Switzerland, a German man was killed in an avalanche, and four other people were injured, as they were cross-country skiing on Friday.



PEOPLE RETURN HOMES:

A man rides a bicycle along a street as people return to homes in Uvira Democratic Republic of Congo, recently.

Uganda's Museveni wins re-election, opposition leader at large

Veteran President Yoweri Museveni was declared the landslide winner of Uganda's presidential election on Saturday, extending his rule into a fifth decade after a contest marred by violent incidents and allegations of fraud.

The result hands the 81-year-old Museveni the decisive victory he sought to bolster his political position as speculation mounts about his eventual succession.

Uganda's electoral commission said at a ceremony in the capital Kampala on Saturday that Museveni had received just under 72 per cent of the vote.

His main challenger, the pop singer-turned-politician Bobi Wine, was credited with 24 per cent.

Wine has alleged mass fraud during the election, which was held under an internet blackout that authorities said was

needed to prevent "misinformation", and called on supporters to protest.

Wine's whereabouts were unknown on Saturday after he said he had escaped a raid by the military on his house.

People close to him told Reuters he was at large in Uganda.

"Last night was very difficult at our home ... The military and the police raided us. They switched off power and cut off some of our CCTV cameras," Wine, whose real name is Robert Kyagulanyi, said in a post on X.

"I want to confirm I managed to escape from them. Currently, I am not at home."

He added that his wife and other family members were under house arrest, something Reuters could not immediately verify.

One major violent incident was reported in the hours after polls closed, with police say-

ing seven people were killed and three injured in central Uganda after officers fired in self-defence against opposition "goons" organised by local MP Muwanga Kivumbi.

Kivumbi disputed that account and said 10 people had been killed by security forces inside his house.

Overall, fears that Uganda might experience violence of the kind that killed hundreds in neighbouring Tanzania after its elections in October did not appear to have been realised.

Museveni's win came as little surprise. Since taking power in 1986 at the head of a rebellion, he has changed the constitution twice to remove age and term limits and dominates state institutions.

He defeated Wine with 58% of the vote in the last election in 2021, which the United States said was neither free nor fair.

During this campaign, Wine's rallies were repeatedly interrupted by security forces firing tear gas and bullets.

At least one person was killed in the violence and hundreds of opposition supporters were arrested.

Despite concerns about his human rights record, Museveni has won gratitude from Western powers for sending troops to regional hotspots such as Somalia and taking in millions of refugees.

Many Ugandans also appreciate the relative stability his tenure has seen, and he campaigned on a slogan of "protecting the gains".

Economic growth is expected to jump into double digits this year when crude oil production starts.

But speculation has been mounting about his succession plans.

Uncertainty in Uvira as M23 rebels again announce withdrawal from eastern DRC city

Residents uncertain about future as M23 rebels again announce withdrawal from Uvira, even as fighting continues in the area.

Armed AFC/M23 rebels in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo has announced that it will place the city of Uvira under the responsibility of the international community.

In a statement, the group said it would withdraw from all security responsibilities and called for the deployment of a neutral force to ensure the protection of civilians and strategic infrastructure.

Residents of Uvira received this announcement with caution and concern.

"We heard that they are going to leave, but we don't know if they have really left or if they

will leave, because this is not the first time they announce it; this will be the second time," Mukuninwa Assumani Ruffin told Africanews.

said the situation is still uncertain: "What worries us here in Uvira is our security," said Muzingwa Ramazani. "How are we going to live after the M23 leaves?"

The security situation remains worrying. Clashes between Wazalendo fighters and the M23 have been reported around Uvira, despite the withdrawal announcement. According to local sources, the armed group took control of the strategic town of Lemera in the Uvira territory on Thursday, despite repeated calls for a ceasefire.

Ghislain Baraiga Kabamba, is a civil society actor in Uvira: "They are still fighting, espe-

cially in the south-south parts of Uvira, in Makobola and other localities, and this worries us. But if they do withdraw, it will be a good thing."

Ongoing security threats

In a letter sent to United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Thursday, M23 warned of persistent security threats.

Its political coordinator, Corneille Nangaa, cited actors not signatory to the peace agreements, including the Burundian army, the FDLR, and Wazalendo militias supporting the FARDC. Analysts are calling on the international community to take stronger measures to enforce commitments on the ground.

"The American mediation, which obtained the withdrawal of AFC/M23 from the city

of Uvira, did not take steps to verify not only the withdrawal of the M23 from Uvira, but also the transitional period," Hubert Masomeko, independent analyst and researcher at the Center for Research on Democracy and Development in Africa (CREDDA) told Africanews.

"Security issues regarding the city of Uvira were unfortunately not taken into account by the mediation."

For now, neither the Congolese government nor the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC, MONUSCO, has officially responded to the latest statements from AFC/M23.

Their silence leaves civilians uncertain about the future of the peace process and the guarantee of their immediate safety.

Feature

THE CANCEROUS NATURE OF NIGERIA'S POLITY

Why the youth must break the cycle

CHUKWUFUMNAYAN ADIGWE

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

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

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

A clear illustration of this phenomenon can be found in the ongoing political crisis in Rivers State, where the former governor and current Minister of the Federal Capital Territory, Nyesom Wike, and his successor, Governor Siminalayi Fubara, are at the centre of a feud that has plunged the state into political uncertainty. Wike, who governed Rivers State from 2015 to 2023, retained significant political influence even after leaving office. Ahead of the 2023 governorship election, his political camp en-



YOUTH PROTESTS

dorsed and actively supported Fubara's emergence as the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) candidate and eventual winner. At the time, Fubara was widely perceived as Wike's political protégé.

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

The fallout between both men has since placed Rivers State in a prolonged state of political instability. What began as a seemingly seamless handover of power in the "Treasure Base of the Nation" devolved into a scorched-earth political war, a high-stakes battle

for the very soul of the state. Marked by legislative chaos, violent confrontations, and a bitter struggle for grassroots loyalty, Nigeria's oil hub has remained in a state of near-perpetual tension since late 2023.

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

As actions and counteractions intensified, the situation eventually drew federal intervention. President Bola Ahmed Tinubu declared a state of emergency in Rivers State, suspending Governor Siminalayi Fubara, his deputy, and the 27 members of the State House of Assembly for six months.

In their place, Vice Admiral Ibok-Ete Ekwe Ibas (rtd.), a former Chief of Naval Staff, was appointed Sole Administrator of the state, an extraordinary measure that underscored the depth of the political breakdown.

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

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

Beyond Rivers State, however, the cancer in Nigeria's political system ex-

tends past kingmaker politics or factional wars. It exists within the very fabric of society, lurking in everyday choices made by Nigerians—particularly the youth. Our daily decisions ultimately shape the future of governance and determine whether realignment is possible.

Some argue that this view is far-fetched, framing corruption as an endemic condition internalised by society. Speaking anonymously, one young Nigerian observed that even the youth, often described as the leaders of tomorrow, sometimes sensationalise corruption, viewing it as a shortcut to success. This perspective echoes the themes in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* by Ghanaian author Ayi Kwei Armah, which portrays corruption as a deeply ingrained societal disease rather than a purely political failure.

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

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

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

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

NO ONE IS ABOVE THE LAW

Okpebholo's hard line against insecurity in Edo

ABDUL-KADIR ABDULLAH

When Governor Monday Okpebholo stood amid the ashes of burnt shops in Ekpoma on Monday evening, January 12, 2026, his message was neither ambiguous nor politically cautious. It was blunt, emotional, and unmistakably firm: insecurity in Edo State, he declared, would be confronted head-on, without exemptions, excuses, or sacred cows.

The governor had visited the scene of the overnight fire that razed shops built by the Police Officers Wives Association, just a day after touring the palace of the Enojie of Ekpoma and other areas damaged during the Ekpoma protest. The air was thick with grief and anger as affected traders recounted how their livelihoods were

consumed by flames within minutes. Yet beyond the promise to rebuild, it was Okpebholo's declaration on accountability that defined the moment.

"Even if it were my own father involved in kidnapping, violence, or destruction, he would be brought to justice. No one is above the law," the governor said.

In a country where political influence and family connections have often weakened law enforcement, the statement resonated as more than rhetoric. It marked a public line drawn in the sand and signalled that the Okpebholo administration intends to break with the culture of selective justice.

Standing alongside top security chiefs, including the Commissioner of Police, Monday Agbonika, and the Commander of the 4 Brigade of

the Nigerian Army, General Ahmed Olatunboju, the governor dismissed attempts to cloak the violence in ethnic labels. According to him, the attackers were not who they were being portrayed to be.

"They are killing our people in the name that they are Fulanis. They are not Fulanis. They are political elements. We have started arresting them," he said.

The clarification was critical in a tense environment where misinformation can inflame ethnic suspicion and deepen communal fractures. For Okpebholo, the real enemy is not group identity but criminality itself—and those exploiting violence for political or personal gain.

The Ekpoma fire, coming shortly after protests that degenerated into

vandalism, fits into what the governor described as a pattern of coordinated sabotage. His response, however, went beyond condemnation. He reassured victims that the state would act swiftly to ease their suffering.

Within days, he announced, reconstruction of the burnt shops would commence. Beyond rebuilding, the government would also take inventory of lost goods to ensure traders could return to business without sinking into debt.

Yet beyond material compensation, the governor's strongest intervention was moral and institutional. By openly stating that even a close family member would not be shielded from justice, Okpebholo positioned his administration as one anchored on the rule of law rather than personal loyalty.

For residents of Esan land and Edo State at large, the statement carries weight. Insecurity thrives where criminals believe power can protect them. Okpebholo's words seek to dismantle that belief.

As security agencies intensify efforts, the true test will lie in consistent action. But in Ekpoma, amid ruins and rising tension, the governor chose to send a message that echoes far beyond the burnt shops: in Edo State, authority will not be used as cover for crime, and justice will not bow to blood ties or political status.

At a time when public trust in governance is fragile, such clarity may prove one of the most powerful tools for restoring confidence that the state truly stands with its people and against anyone who threatens their peace.



EDO STATE SECURITY CORPS

Gov Okpebholo's support drives security gains in Edo North —Sector Commander

ABDUL-KADIR ABDULLAH

The consistent support of the Edo State Government under the leadership of Governor Monday Okpebholo has been identified as a key factor behind the recent security gains recorded in Etsako West, Sector 1, Edo North, according to the Sector Commander of the Edo State Security Corps in the area, Mr Yusuf Agbobuare, as he marked his first year in office.

In an exclusive interview to commemorate the milestone, Agbobuare recalled the difficult conditions he encountered upon assuming duty, describing his early days in office as highly challenging.

"Yes, I'm celebrating one year in office. When I assumed office, there were a lot of challenges," he said, noting that even basic infrastructure was lacking.

"The office space was somehow, so I spoke to my community, Jattu-Uzairue Kingdom, and they offered me this office to enable me sit down and know what to do."

He explained that internal reforms were immediately carried out to reposition the sector for effective service delivery.

"I brought out my men who will work with me because I discovered that most of those other people were polluted. Somebody who can easily

compromise is not good for security," he stated.

Agbobuare further disclosed that operations were initially hampered by severe logistical constraints.

"Almost all the vehicles were grounded and the tools to work were difficult," he said, adding that intervention later came from the Edo State Security Corps headquarters in Benin City. "They brought us some tools, and we have been managing them."

Despite the early setbacks, the sector commander said significant progress has been recorded over the past year through a well-defined and targeted security strategy.

"When we came in, I sat down and drew my plan. I discovered that most of the crimes we were shouting about were coming from drugs," he noted.

According to him, the sector focused on dismantling drug networks operating in the area, leading to multiple arrests and major seizures.

"We arrested a lot of drug dealers. The drugs we seized then will amount to about N30 to N40 million," he revealed.

Beyond drug enforcement, Agbobuare said routine patrols and intensive bush-combing operations were carried out to protect residents and farmers across the sector.

"Sometimes we arrest suspected kidnappers and hand them over to the police," he said.

"During the Christmas period and even before then, we arrested some of them. As I speak to you now, some are in the State CID anti-kidnapping squad in Benin, while others are in prison."

He also highlighted a recent joint operation involving hunters, the po-

lice, and vigilante groups, which led to the rescue of kidnap victims.

"We organised bush-combing throughout the night for two days. To God be the glory, around 4:30am, we succeeded in rescuing about nine victims," he explained.

On current challenges, the sector commander pointed to welfare concerns but expressed confidence in the government's assurances.

"This work we are doing, nobody is being paid for now," he said.

"But the government has promised. I'm just coming from Irrua where we had a meeting with the Governor, and he has promised that we will be paid by the local government councils beginning from the end of this month."

Agbobuare was emphatic in commending Governor Okpebholo's support for security operations across the state.

"The Executive Governor of Edo State has been very, very supportive," he said.

"Even recently, the state government sent some working materials to us to enable us meet up with our job."

He added that the provision of motorcycles has significantly enhanced security operations in Edo North.

"He has also supported us with about 100 motorbikes, and that has been very helpful. There are some ar-

reas you cannot get to, but with those bikes, you can," he noted.

While commending the government's efforts, the sector commander appealed for additional advanced equipment to further strengthen operations.

"We need vehicles, drones, trackers, and other materials. If the government can provide these things for the Edo State Security Corps, I believe we will do better," he said.

Advising communities and the general public, Agbobuare stressed the importance of timely information sharing.

"Let the community put their heads together and give us the support we need. Let them have our numbers and give us information when necessary," he urged.

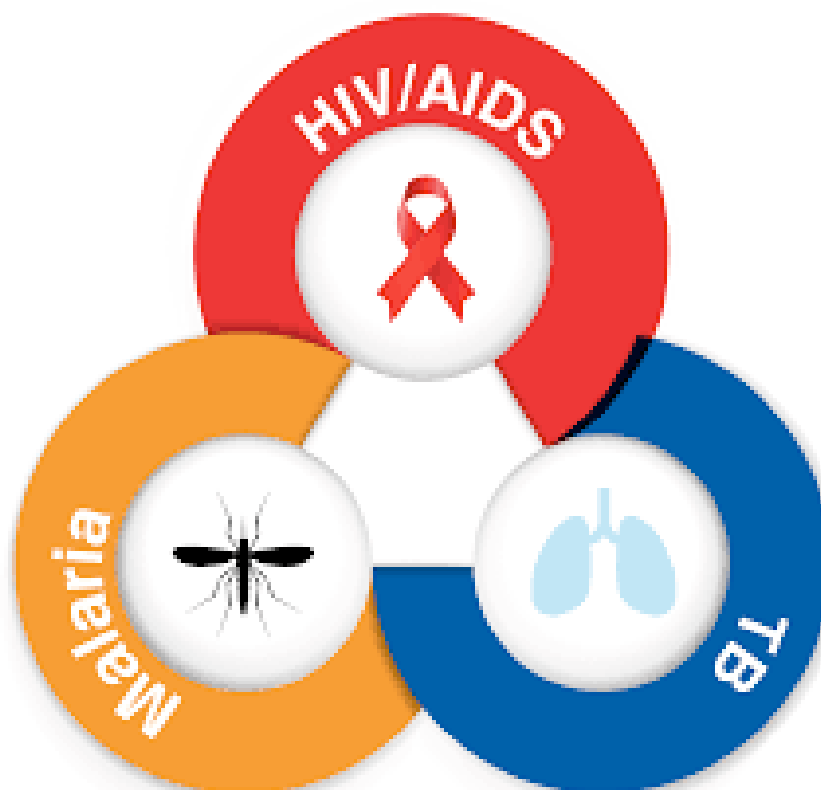
"If you see something, say something. Don't keep information to yourself."

The one-year anniversary was marked with the presentation of a gift to Agbobuare by the Ibie Road Unit of the Edo State Security Corps. While appreciating the gesture, he expressed gratitude to God for the successes recorded so far.

"Despite all the challenges, no life was lost and we recorded victory. We pray that the Almighty will continue giving us victory. We will continue to worry them until they leave our land," he said.

We need vehicles, drones, trackers, and other materials. If the government can provide these things for the Edo State Security Corps, I believe we will do better

Sustaining HIV, TB and malaria gains amid declining donor support



ABUJAH RACHEAL (NAN)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Donor funding has saved millions of lives, but underfunding threatens sustainability," he cautioned, noting

that Nigeria's health spending still falls below the 15 per cent target set by the Abuja Declaration.

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

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

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

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

"They told me my TB did not respond to the first medicine. Now the treatment is longer and harder. If the drugs stop coming, what happens to people like me?" he asked.

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

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

Public health economist Chinyere Okafor also expressed concern.

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

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

Against this backdrop, civil society organisations are attempting to

strengthen accountability from the grassroots.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

and Adamawa.

In addition, the health system strengthening initiatives target infrastructure, supply chains and the efficient use of resources, while pandemic preparedness programmes aim to build resilience against future health emergencies.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Amid rising concern, Nigeria and the United States recently signed a \$5-billion health sector Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), signalling a strategic pivot towards partnership and domestic responsibility.

Under the agreement, the United States will provide nearly \$2 billion in grants between 2026 and 2030, while Nigeria has committed to increasing health spending to at least six per cent

of federal and state budgets.

Over time, US-funded commodities will transition to full Nigerian financing by 2030, alongside investments in health data systems, workforce capacity and laboratory networks.

The MoU aligns with the Nigeria Health Sector Renewal Investment Initiative (NHSRII) and the Sector-Wide Approach (SWAp) launched under President Bola Tinubu, marking a gradual shift from donor dependence towards self-reliance.

Still, stakeholders caution that stigma, poverty, insecurity, workforce shortages and commodity stock-outs continue to shape daily survival.

Key populations face persistent discrimination, rural patients struggle with transport costs, flood-related malaria outbreaks threaten children, and drug resistance looms.

Ultimately, Alash'le Abimiku, Executive Director of the International Research Centre of Excellence (IRCE), stressed that Nigeria must increase predictable domestic funding; not just in words, but through executed budgets.

She added that transparency must extend beyond hearings, with parliamentary oversight enforcing genuine accountability, while communities remain central to the response.

"They are the first to feel system failures, and the strongest agents of change," she said.

Meanwhile, Pate insisted that Nigeria will not abandon donor partnerships but must take ownership of its future.

For millions of Nigerians living with HIV, tuberculosis and malaria, 2025 must not be the year the system falters. For them, the line between life and fear is measured in pills, tests, nets and trust.

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

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Sports

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Dikko, Olopade laud Super Eagles' 2025 AFCON performance

Shehu Dikko, the Chairman of the National Sports Commission (NSC) and its Director-General, Bukola Olopade have lauded Nigeria's Super Eagles on their performance at the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON).

In a statement by Kehinde

Ajayi, the Director of Press of the Commission, the administrators noted that the team's resilient campaign reflected the spirit of a proud footballing nation.

On Saturday, Nigeria defeated Egypt 4-2 on penalties to secure a bronze medal finish after regulation time ended in

a barren draw at the Stade Mohammed V stadium in Casablanca, Morocco.

Dikko praised the team for their character, discipline and brand of football displayed throughout the tournament.

"This bronze medal represents far more than a podium finish. It speaks to the resilience, character and belief of this Super Eagles team.

"After a difficult loss against Morocco, they responded with discipline, unity and courage, values that define Nigerian football and the Nigerian spirit.

"Beyond the result, Nigerians are proud of the identity and attractive style of football the team displayed.

"It showed growth, tactical maturity and a renewed commitment to excellence," Dikko added.

On his part, Olopade, also

lauded the players and technical crew for their commitment and professionalism throughout the tournament.

"This is a team that gave Nigerians hope, excitement and pride.

"Winning the bronze medal against a strong Egyptian side and doing so with composure under pressure shows mental strength of the players and quality of preparation by the technical crew.

"The collective effort of the squad reflects a team that believes in itself and in the future of Nigerian football," he said.

Nigeria had reached the playoff after a heartbreaking semi-final loss to hosts Morocco on penalties

The Eagles topped Group C with victories over Tanzania, Tunisia and Uganda before beating Mozambique and Algeria in the knockout rounds



SUPER EAGLES



SUPER EAGLES CELEBRATING

AFCON: Super Eagles victory lifted Nigerians' spirit —ADC chieftain

Mr John Nwosu, a chieftain of the African Democratic Congress (ADC) says the Super Eagles bronze victory at the African Cup of Nations (AFCON) in Morocco, has lifted the morale and spirit of Nigerians.

Nwosu, who was the candidate of ADC in the 2025 governorship election in Anambra said this in a statement issued in Awka on Sunday while reacting to the victory of Super Eagles against Pharaohs of Egypt.

The Tech Expert said the Super Eagles had once again lifted the spirit of Nigeria by clinch-

ing the AFCON bronze medal.

He said that the bronze was not a consolation but a foundation for greater triumphs ahead noting that while Nigeria yearned for the gold, the bronze they brought home was no small feat.

"In a country of many tongues, cultures, and convictions, football remains our strongest unifying force and you gave Nigerians something precious to celebrate together.

"As the saying goes, half bread is better than none and this medal is proof of your resilience, character and fighting spirit till the final whistle.

4th African Youth Games: Enabulele Honours Weightlifting youngster Cornelius after 3 gold medal triumph in Angola

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

It was a pleasant surprise for Edo weightlifting prodigy Favour Cornelius who distinguished herself at the 4th African Youth Games in Angola in December 2025 when the Edo state Sports Commission under the leadership of Hon Amadin Desmond Enabulele accorded her a grand reception to appreciate her for making the country and Edo State proud at the African Youth Games after returning with three gold medals in the 44kg in the female category of weightlifting event.

The 44 Kg female weightlifter who earlier in the year made a statement with a brilliant performance at the maiden edition of the Niger Delta Games in Uyo, Akwa Ibom state after clinching 3 gold to her credit at the event, was rewarded by her state sports commission for her exploit at the 4th youth Games.

The Executive chairman of the Edo state Sports Commission Hon. Amadin Desmond Enabulele and the management organized a befitting reception for the young athlete with cash prizes to encourage her in her chosen carrier.

Team Edo's weightlifting youngster Favour Cornelius represented Team Nigeria at the 4th African Youth Games between 10th and 20th of December 2025 in Angola, where she won three gold medals in weightlifting, contributing significantly to Nigeria's total of eight gold medals at the games.

In recognition of her outstanding achievement, Favour Cornelius who was so dominant at the 2025 National Youth Games

with 3 gold medals, was honoured with cash prizes presented by the Commission's Executive Chairman, alongside the Permanent Secretary, Executive Directors, management staff, and coaches.

The Executive chairman of the Edo state Sports Commission in a remark commended the new African Youth Games champion Favour Cornelius and the weightlifting coaching crew for bringing honour to the state and country.



FAVOUR CORNELIUS

Barau FC hold resilient goalless draw against Enyimba in Aba



BARAU FC

Enyimba FC of Aba were denied three points in the ongoing Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL) match day 20 by the visiting Barau FC of Kano.

The News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) reports that at the match played inside the Enyimba FC stadium, Aba, the two clubs battled for the 90 minutes without breaking the deadlock.

Speaking after the match, Deji Ayeni, Enyimba's new

head coach, said he felt so bad to have gotten a draw at home, while other teams were winning their matches.

"Actually, I believe the activities of football is all about win, draw or loss but the rational behind getting the goals and result were the key and we are lacking it.

"Well, we have played the game and cannot reverse it so, we have to think on how to fine-tune, and work on the lapses discovered in the match.

"This team need a strong psychological work and we will work things out before our next match in the league, to improve our position on the league table," he said.

Barau FC head coach, Eugene Agagbe said that the game was not an easy one as the Aba boys pressed his team hard, but failed to get the winning goal.

He said the club came with a strategy and the strategy work more than what the team got, which was to avoid defeat.

The coach said that the technical team made tactical changes after the visitors were reduced to 10 men, following a red card, adding that the best way to a defence, is to attack.

"I introduced a midfielder and attacker to help stop the host compressing us to our goal post, so we will go back, be focus and concentrate on the forthcoming games," he said.

Para Badminton: Nigeria's Eniola wins gold in Egypt

Africa's number one para badminton player, Eniola Bolaji, emerged champion of the 2026 Egypt International Championship on Sunday defeating all opponents before her

The Paralympic bronze medallist defeated world No. 7 Halime Yildiz of Turkey 2-0 (21-10, 21-4) at the New Capital Indoor Hall in Cairo.

The world No. 2 began her campaign with a commanding 2-0 (21-9, 21-10) victory over Yildiz in the opening round before overcoming India's Tulika Jadgave 2-0 (21-10, 21-7) in the second round.

Bolaji continued her dominant run by beating India's Manasi Girishchandra Joshi 2-0 (21-11,

21-13) to set up a semifinal clash against India's Shivam Yadav Neeraj, which she won convincingly 2-0 (21-10, 21-11).

An elated President of the Badminton Federation of Nigeria, Francis Orbih, praised the consistency of Bolaji for continuing to put the country on the global map.

Orbih said the African champion has repeatedly shown that Nigeria can compete and dominate on the world stage through her impressive performances.

"I am excited that Eniola Bolaji was able to compete at the Egypt Para Badminton International and win gold once again.



ENIOLA BOLAJI

Sports

NPFL26, MD21: Bendel Insurance FC maintain top form, beat Elkanemi Warriors 3-2 in Benin

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

Bendel Insurance Football Club, Sunday evening continued with their impressive run in the Nigeria Premier Football League as they beat Elkanemi Warriors 3-2 to move closer to the podium.

The Benin Arsenal main-

tained composure and resilience throughout the duration of game after surviving early goal scare by the visitors. Daddy Abdullahi scored in the 5th minute of action to put Elkanemi Warriors in front.

The host team remained unruffled despite the early goal deficit and kept pushing and got the needed equaliz-

er through Kayode Oke who scored in a goal mouth scramble, following a deadly long throw assist by Henry Onyia in the 34th minute of the game.

Both teams went into the half time break on level terms after Insurance FC mounted pressure on the warriors had been well managed by the visitors.

On return to the pitch for the remaining half, Bendel Insurance continue to mount more pressure on the visiting Elkanemi Warriors until another opportunity provided itself in the

53rd when Henry Oyian rose higher than the warriors defenders in an aerial contest to nod home from a corner kick to give Insurance a deserved 2-1 lead over Elkanemi Warriors.

In the 63rd minute of action, Kayode Oke ran into space to finish off Adamu Yazid's well taken free kick to increase the tally for Insurance

FC.

The visitors were however lucky to reduce the goals deficit in the 87th minute when Shehu Lawal capitalized on goalkeeper Joshua Baba weak clearance who after Ito Promise back pass.

Recall that Elkanemi Warriors defeated Bendel Insurance FC 2-0 in the first round and first fixture in the current season

Insurance FC are currently 5th on the table with 32 points and will be guests to Shooting Stars of Ibadan on Sunday, January 26, 2026.

Insurance and 3SC ended their first round meeting 1-1 in Benin.

In a post match media conference, coach Kennedy Boboye praised his players for their courage and discipline.

He said that work is still in progress in his bid to get a clinical goal scorer for Bendel Insurance, saying that goal scorers are few in the Nigeria Premier league.



Bendel Insurance



Senegal wins 2025 AFCON title

Senegal dumps hosts Morocco, wins AFCON title

Senegal defied all odds and made history by winning the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) 2025 title defeating hosts Morocco 1-0 in a dramatic final.

The winning goal came from Pape Gueye, who scored a stunning long-range strike in extra time to silence the Moroccan crowd.

The match was filled with controversy, as Senegal's players stormed off the pitch in protest at a penalty awarded to Morocco in the 90th minute.

The penalty was given after El Hadji Malick Diouf was judged to have fouled Brahim Diaz, but Senegal coach Pape Bouna Thiaw called his players off the pitch in disagreement.

After a 13-minute delay, Sadio Mané convinced his teammates to return, and Edouard Mendy made a crucial save to deny Diaz's penalty.

Gueye's goal in the 94th minute was the decisive moment, curling the ball into the top corner and securing Senegal's second AFCON title in three tournaments.

This victory marks a significant milestone for Senegal, reaffirming their status as a dominant force in African football

[1/18, 11:50 PM] kennyok02: NPFL26: Bendel Insurance Extend Unbeaten Run, Unbroken Spirit as Enabulele Hails Team's Win Over El-Kanemi Warriors

Bendel Insurance FC continued their impressive unbeaten run in the Nigeria Premier Football League with a thrilling 3-2 victory over El-Kanemi Warriors of Maiduguri in a Matchday 21 encounter at the Samuel Ogbemudia Stadium.

The resilient display once again drew high praise from the Executive Chairman of the Edo State Sports Commission, Hon. Amadin Desmond Enabulele, who commended the team's character, discipline, and fighting spirit under the guidance of Head Coach Kennedy Boboye.

In a statement issued by his Media Officer, Edoko Wilson

Edoko, Enabulele expressed deep satisfaction with the consistency and mental strength shown by the Benin Arsenal, describing the victory as further evidence that the club is firmly on the right trajectory.

"This victory is not just about the three points; it is about belief, character, and the true Edo spirit of resilience," Enabulele said.

"To recover from an early setback and still find the courage to respond, dominate, and win speaks volumes about the winning mentality Coach Kennedy Boboye has instilled in this team."

El-Kanemi Warriors stunned the home crowd with an early opener in the 4th minute, but Kayode Oke restored parity for Bendel Insurance in the 45th minute. The home side took control in the second half as Henry Oyian rose highest to power home a fine header in the 53rd minute, before Kayode Oke completed his brace in the 63rd minute, finishing calmly after connecting with Yazid's well-delivered free kick.

Despite conceding a late goal following a defensive lapse, Bendel Insurance held firm to seal a deserved 3-2 victory.

Reacting further, Enabulele urged the players to maintain their hunger and composure as they prepare for their next away fixture against Shooting Stars Sports Club of Ibadan.

"This unbeaten run must be protected with focus, humility, and collective discipline," he added.

"I urge the players to approach the Ibadan challenge with courage and confidence. Go there, play your football, and conquer. Edo State believes in you."

Speaking at the post-match press conference, Head Coach Kennedy Boboye expressed confidence in the team's progress and mental toughness. "Since taking over, we have worked deliberately to strengthen the team, and we are yet to lose a match," Boboye stated.

Kwara United FC head coach Ashifat Suleiman on Sunday blamed hard luck for his side's 1-0 defeat to Ikorodu City FC

He spoke to the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) after the Matchday 21 Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL) encounter at Mobolaji Johnson Arena, Lagos.

NAN reports that Ikorodu City secured all three points through an early strike by Samuel Ezekiel in the fifth minute.

Ezekiel rose highest to head home a precise cross from Gift Udoh, giving the hosts a lead they defended resolutely throughout the match.

Reacting to the loss, Suleiman praised his players' efforts and expressed optimism about returning to winning ways.

"This is a difficult period, but we will overcome it. We were unlucky not to get at least a point.

"We are at a critical stage of the season and need full support from our fans. I believe we will come out stronger," he said.

Kwara United grew into the game after conceding and applied sustained pressure seeking an equaliser.

Akeem Akanni, Johnmark Aule and Babatunde Bright stood out with energetic performances that drove the team forwards

Akanni came closest late in the first half with a powerful effort, forcing a fine save from the Ikorodu City goalkeeper.

The rebound fell to Aule, but his follow-up attempt narrowly missed the target.

In the second half, Kwara United introduced Eze Ogbodo for Bright, Mahe Alege for Gidado Toheeb and Mustapha Salisu for Junior Aimufua.

The host Oga Boys also made changes, bringing on Aderemi Adeoye and Dagogo Ibifubara for Rasheed Owolabi and Abayomi Ayodeji.

Ikorodu City coach Bright Ozadegbe made a double substitution in the 87th minute, replacing Ezekiel with Moses Ali and Folarin Temitope with Bada Moses.

In spite of sustained pressure, Kwara United could not break down a disciplined Ikorodu City defence, allowing the hosts to hold their slim advantage.



ASHIFAT SULEIMAN

Bolaji clinches para-badminton gold in Egypt

Africa's top para badminton player, Eniola Bolaji, won the 2026 Egypt International Championship on Sunday at the New Capital Indoor Hall in Cairo.

The Paralympic bronze medallist defeated Turkey's world number seven, Halime Yildiz, 2-0 (21-10, 21-4).

The 2026 Egypt International Championship began on Jan. 13 and ended on Jan.

18 in Cairo.

The Egypt Para Badminton International 2026 featured athletes from 28 countries across the globe.

Bolaji opened her campaign with a 2-0 (21-9, 21-10) victory over Yildiz before defeating India's Tulika Jadvave 2-0 (21-10, 21-7).

She advanced by beating India's Manasi Girishchandra Joshi 2-0 (21-11, 21-13) to reach the semi-finals.

In the semi-final, Bolaji overpowered India's Shivam Yadav Neeraj 2-0 (21-10, 21-11) to book her place in the final.

Reacting, Badminton Federation of Nigeria President, Francis Orbih, praised Bolaji's consistency and global impact.

Orbih said the African champion has shown Nigeria can compete and dominate internationally through her impressive performances.

"I am excited that Eniola Bolaji competed at the Egypt Para Badminton International and won gold once again.

"In 2025, she began her journey to greatness in North Africa, winning all available gold medals except one.

"I strongly believe Bolaji will have an exciting year and continue to bring pride to Nigeria and the federation," Orbih said.

He also commended the team's sponsors and the National Sports Commission for supporting para badminton development.



ENIOLA BOLAJI

FEATURE

How Gov Monday Okpebholo is driving Edo's education renaissance

PATRICK AKHERE EBOJELE, PHD

When Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, took the oath of office in November 2024, he inherited an education sector weighed down by years of neglect, collapsing classrooms, demoralised teachers, overcrowded learning spaces, and struggling tertiary institutions. Today, just over a year later, that narrative has changed dramatically. Edo State's education system is now undergoing one of its most ambitious transformations in decades, and it is this sweeping turnaround that has earned Governor Okpebholo the New Telegraph Award for Best in Education.

This recognition also serves as a clear validation of his administration's SHINE Agenda, the development blueprint guiding governance in Edo State. Education sits at the heart of SHINE because it drives every other sector — security, economic growth, innovation, social stability, and sustainable development. Okpebholo's reforms demonstrate that SHINE is not a slogan, but a practical framework delivering visible and measurable results.

For many observers of the Okpebholo administration, the award comes as no surprise. Education has emerged as one of the strongest pillars of his government, not just in rhetoric, but in concrete action. From early childhood to tertiary education, the administration has rolled out policies and programmes that are redefining how learning is delivered, funded, and experienced across the state; firmly aligned with SHINE's focus on human capital development and social advancement.

At the core of these reforms is a simple but powerful belief: no society can rise above the quality of its education. Governor Okpebholo placed this principle at the centre of his governance philosophy, treating education, not merely as a social service, but as an economic and developmental investment — a key objective of the SHINE Agenda's prosperity and empowerment pillars.

One of the governor's first major steps was a comprehensive audit of public schools across the state. The findings painted a sobering picture — dilapidated buildings, leaking roofs, broken furniture, poor sanitation, and learning environments that discouraged both teachers and students. Rather than issue routine statements, the administration moved swiftly into action, reflecting SHINE's emphasis on action-oriented governance and institutional renewal.

Within his first 100 days in office,

Governor Okpebholo launched a massive schools rehabilitation programme, targeting over 100 schools across Edo State. Classrooms were rebuilt, roofs replaced, water facilities restored, toilets upgraded, and perimeter fences repaired. This was far from a cosmetic intervention. The objective was to create safe, functional, and dignified learning environments where students could thrive and teachers could teach with pride — a practical expression of SHINE's infrastructure and social development pillars.

As the programme progressed, its scope expanded. More schools were added, particularly in rural communities that had suffered prolonged neglect. Science laboratories were refurbished, and digital learning tools began to enter classrooms. The physical transformation of schools has since become one of the most visible legacies of the Okpebholo administration and a clear reflection of SHINE's commitment to equitable development across all communities.

However, infrastructure alone does not educate children — teachers do. Recognising this, the governor placed teacher welfare and recruitment at the centre of his education reforms. Thousands of teachers who had served for years on contract were converted to permanent staff, providing long-awaited job security and stable income. New teachers were recruited to address staffing shortages, reduce classroom overcrowding, and improve learning outcomes — aligning directly with SHINE's human capital and social protection objectives.

For many educators, this marked a turning point. Teachers who once struggled with irregular pay and poor working conditions now speak of renewed motivation and professional pride. Training programmes were also introduced to upgrade teaching skills, align classroom practices with modern standards, and prepare educators for digital learning environments — advancing SHINE's innovation and capacity-building goals.

While basic education received urgent attention, the administration did not overlook the crisis confronting tertiary institutions. Ambrose Alli University (AAU), Ekpoma, the state's flagship university had been grappling with chronic underfunding, unpaid salaries, infrastructure decay, and student unrest. The government responded decisively by increasing the university's monthly subvention from 41 million to 500 million — a historic leap that immediately stabilised operations and underscored SHINE's focus on institutional sustainability and education-driven economic growth.

41 million to 500 million — a historic leap that immediately stabilised operations and underscored SHINE's focus on institutional sustainability and education-driven economic growth.



GOVERNOR, SENATOR MONDAY OKPEBHOLU

With improved funding, staff salaries were cleared, academic activities normalised, and critical infrastructure projects revived. Plans for a 1,500-seat lecture theatre and a 600-bed hostel were unveiled to ease overcrowding and enhance student welfare. Administrative bottlenecks that had delayed the graduation and induction of medical and nursing students were resolved, allowing hundreds of young Edo citizens to proceed to national service after years of uncertainty — reinforcing SHINE's vision of opportunity, inclusion, and social mobility.

Beyond funding, the reforms extended to systemic efficiency. Digitalisation was introduced into student records, certificate verification, and academic documentation, reducing fraud and enabling graduates to access their credentials seamlessly from anywhere in the world. This aligns squarely with SHINE's innovation pillar and positions Edo State's education system for global competitiveness.

Access and inclusion have also been central to Governor Okpebholo's education agenda. Recognising the dangers posed by out-of-school children, particularly in underserved communities, the administration rolled out targeted initiatives to bring young people back into classrooms. Free learning materials, community engagement campaigns, and partnerships with federal agencies were deployed to reduce dropout rates and expand enrolment — advancing SHINE's commitment to inclusive development and social equity.

In higher education, collaboration

with the Federal Government's NEL-Fund programme ensured that students were no longer sent home due to unpaid fees, easing financial pressure on families and allowing students to focus on learning rather than survival. This reflects SHINE's core belief that economic hardship should not obstruct access to opportunity.

Another distinctive element of the administration's education policy is the reintroduction of indigenous languages into school curricula. By reviving the teaching of Edo languages, the government is strengthening cultural identity, preserving heritage, and enriching students' cognitive development. This initiative aligns with SHINE's emphasis on social cohesion, cultural sustainability, and community inclusion.

Vocational and technical education has also received renewed attention. Technical colleges and skills acquisition centres are being repositioned to meet modern labour market demands, ensuring that students who choose vocational pathways graduate with employable, industry-relevant skills. This approach aligns education with job creation, entrepreneurship, and economic diversification — core pillars of the SHINE Agenda.

Beyond individual policies and projects, what stands out is the coherence of Governor Okpebholo's education strategy. Infrastructure development, teacher welfare, student access, tertiary revitalisation, digital innovation, and cultural inclusion are treated not as isolated interventions but as interconnected components of

a single vision: building an education system that produces competent, confident, and competitive citizens — the human foundation of SHINE's prosperity goals.

This holistic approach has attracted national and international recognition. Education stakeholders, national leaders, and development partners have commended Edo State's progress, while the state's Commissioner for Education has also received international accolades, reflecting the global resonance and credibility of the reforms underway.

It is against this backdrop that New Telegraph's decision to honour Governor Monday Okpebholo with the Best in Education Award must be understood. The award is grounded not in promises or political rhetoric, but in visible, measurable, and impactful transformation across the education sector and in the clear alignment of these reforms with the SHINE Agenda.

In just over a year, Edo State has moved from educational stagnation to purposeful renewal. Schools once deemed unsafe are now functional. Teachers previously uncertain about their future now work with stability and confidence. Students who faced exclusion now enjoy renewed access to learning. Universities once mired in crisis are steadily regaining stability and academic focus.

For parents, these changes translate into safer schools, better teachers, and brighter prospects for their children. For teachers, they mean dignity, job security, and professional growth. For students, they represent opportunity, hope, and the tools to compete in an increasingly complex world.

As Governor Okpebholo prepares to receive the New Telegraph Best in Education Award, the honour serves as both recognition and responsibility — recognition of achievements already recorded, and responsibility to sustain and expand these gains. Education reform is a continuous process, but if the past year is any indication, Edo State's future under his leadership looks intellectually brighter and structurally stronger.

In a country where education often struggles for attention amid competing priorities, Edo State is demonstrating that with focused leadership, political will, and strategic investment, meaningful change is possible. That is why Governor Monday Okpebholo is being celebrated, not merely as a politician, but as an education reformer whose work, guided by the SHINE Agenda, is reshaping lives, communities, and the future of Edo State.

• Ebojele is the Chief Press Secretary to Governor Monday Okpebholo.