

# NDLEA nabs village head, seizes over 860kg of drugs in Edo

● **Intercepts Brazilian lady with N3b heroin at Abuja airport**

## BENIN CITY/ABUJA

Operatives of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) have arrested a village head and another suspect in Edo State following the seizure of large quantities of illicit drugs in Esan South-East Local Government Area.

The arrests followed a raid car-

ried out at Lagos Camp, Ilushi, where a total of 681 kilogrammes of skunk and 181 kilogrammes of cannabis seeds were recovered.

The NDLEA said the suspects were initially apprehended by troops of the Nigerian Army's 4 Brigade in Benin City and promptly handed over to the agency for further investigation.

The development was confirmed in a statement issued by

the Director, Media and Advocacy of the NDLEA, Mr Femi Babafemi.

Babafemi said the operation was part of ongoing efforts to dismantle drug trafficking networks and curb the cultivation, storage and distribution of illicit substances within the state.

He added that the suspects would be charged to court upon the conclusion of investigations.

The NDLEA Chairman, retired Brigadier-General Buba Marwa, commended the Edo State Command and the Nigerian Army for their collaboration, describing the operation as a significant boost to the agency's drug supply reduction drive.

Marwa urged officers to sustain the momentum and maintain professionalism in the fight against drug abuse and

trafficking across the country.

Also, the agency has intercepted a 30-year-old Brazilian lady at the Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport, Abuja, for bringing into Nigeria a total of 30.09 kilograms of white heroin worth over N3 billion in street value.

A statement by the Director, Media and Advocacy NDLEA, Mr Femi Babafemi on Sunday in Abuja stated that the drugs were concealed in factory sealed coffee packs.

Babafemi said that the suspect

who works as a private security officer in Brazil was arrested at the Abuja airport on Friday, January 23 upon her arrival on a Qatar Airways flight QR1431, following processed intelligence.

He said that after her arrest, a search was conducted on her two checked-in bags where 21 factory-sealed packets of Brazilian coffee were found.

He also said that when the coffee bags were opened, rather

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# The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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**Gov Okpebholo restructures youth mobilisation, appoints new Adviser**

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# Edo govt explains return of Oke-Oroma land, cites justice, governance

## BENIN CITY

The Edo State Government has explained why it has returned 2,950 plots of land to residents affected by the 2022 demolition at Oke-Oroma Community in Oredo Local Government Area, saying the move is aimed at restoring justice, protecting property rights, and correcting historical wrongs.

The demolition, carried out

under the previous administration, displaced 1,550 property owners and destroyed nearly 90 houses, as the government then sought to reclaim over 1,200 hectares for a new town development.

The exercise sparked protests, arrests, and years of uncertainty for affected families.

Governor Monday Okpebholo, who pledged during his 2024 campaign to restore the land to rightful owners, di-

rected the Ministry of Lands and Housing to undertake the process immediately after assuming office.

The ministry conducted a rigorous verification exercise to authenticate genuine ownership before issuing allocation letters to beneficiaries.

Commissioner for Lands and Housing, Hon. Yakubu Musa, said the return of the land underscores the administration's commitment to peo-

ple-centered governance.

"This is about doing what is right for the citizens. We are correcting past injustices, restoring hope, and ensuring that property rights are protected," he said.

Surveyors have commenced demarcating the plots, while clearing operations are underway to facilitate smooth hand-

over. Musa explained that the government's approach sends a clear message that Edo resi-

dents' investments and properties will be respected and safeguarded.

Residents who received their allocation letters hailed the move as a restoration of justice and fulfillment of a long-standing promise.

Mr. Adebayo Benjamin

Ogenelkhemeh described Governor Okpebholo as "a promise keeper who has brought back our hope," while Mrs. Onose Onyegbulem expressed relief at reclaiming her family's land.

The Edo State Government's explanation highlights its broader philosophy that governance must have a human face, uphold justice, and correct past administrative wrongs, reinforcing citizens' trust in the state's leadership.

## Exco approves new road construction projects across Edo

HAMEED BRAIMAH

The Edo State Executive Council has approved the construction of additional road projects across the three senatorial districts to improve mobility and ensure safe, smooth movement of people and vehicles.

The State Commissioner for Works, Hon. Felix Akhabue, said the approval was in line with Governor Monday Okpebholo's commitment to upgrading road infrastructure and other critical public assets across the state.

Akhabue spoke during an inspection tour of ongoing projects in parts of Edo South Senatorial District, including Ovia North-East, Oredo and Ikpoba-Okha Local Government Areas.

He said the inspection, carried out alongside supervising engineers from the ministry, was aimed at ensuring strict

compliance with approved specifications by contractors handling the projects.

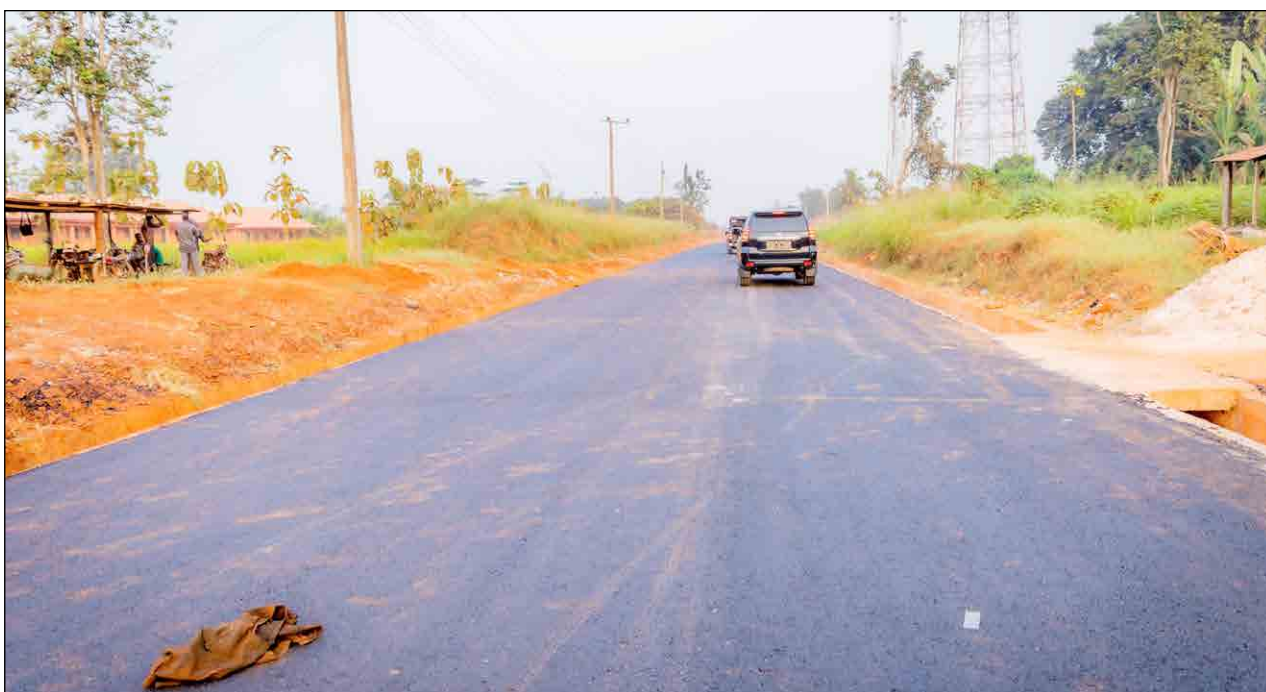
Among the sites visited were the 9.5-kilometre Benin Technical School roads cluster and a major underground drainage system designed to channel storm water directly into the Ikpoba River.

The 1.2-kilometre underground drainage project, currently at an advanced stage, recorded intense activity, with full mobilisation of workers and heavy equipment.

The commissioner also inspected the 7-kilometre Oluke-Okhumwn-Siluko Road, described as a strategic alternative route intended to ease traffic congestion along the Oluke, Siluko and Ekenwan corridors of Benin City.

Akhabue disclosed that about 1.2 kilometres of the Okhumwn Road had already

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## ROAD RECONSTRUCTION:

One of the roads undergoing reconstruction in Edo South Senatorial District.

**S'West stakeholders advocate State Police for better security**

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**"Defilement rise linked to fear, silence, weak enforcement"**

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**Wife of Ugandan opposition leader Bobi Wine in hospital after soldiers raid her house**

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**Nigeria's Diphtheria outbreak, a preventable tragedy?**

—Pg 10

## Police kill 3 bandits, rescue victims in Gombe

### GOMBE

The Gombe State Police Command says it neutralised three bandits during a gun battle and rescued two abducted persons in Lambo village, Akko Local Government Area.

The command's spokesperson, DSP Buhari Abdullahi, disclosed this in a statement on Sunday.

He said the bandits had earlier attacked Rahama Village, killing a 70-year-old man, Tela Ahmadu, and abducting his two sons before proceeding to Lambo Village, where three other persons were kidnapped. Police Tactical Teams un-

der Operation Hattara, working with hunters and vigilante groups, engaged the suspects in a gun duel.

One of the abducted victims, 20-year-old Baayo Bayi, was killed in the crossfire, while two others were rescued. Three bandits were neutralised, while others escaped with gunshot wounds.

The police recovered two AK-47 rifles, ammunition, four motorcycles and the bodies of the slain bandits. Efforts are ongoing to rescue the remaining victims and arrest the fleeing suspects.

If you want these tightened further to Punch-style brevity or split strictly by page layout, just say the word.

## MSSN warns women against taking marital issues to social media

### LAGOS

The Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria (MSSN) has cautioned Muslim women against exposing their private marital issues on social media, warning that the practice was damaging many homes.

The warning was issued on Sunday by the Lagos State Women Coordinator of MSSN, Alhaja Balqees Owolewa, during the 2026 edition of the group's Ummahat Day, themed Living the Vow.

Owolewa said flawed on-line counselling and excessive sharing of marital experiences had created unrealistic expectations and strained marriages. She urged women to focus

on building peaceful Islamic homes and to seek guidance grounded in faith rather than social media narratives.

She also called on Muslims to use the approaching Ramadan to promote forgiveness, kindness and emotional restraint within their families.

Also speaking, the Director-General of the Office of Education Quality Assurance, Dr Suleiman Ogunmuyiwa, urged husbands to take responsibility for the stability of their homes, likening marriage to a company with the husband as its chief executive.

He warned couples against resolving marital disputes on social media and advised them to seek trusted mediation when necessary.

## Exco approves new road construction projects across...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

been asphalted, while earthworks had been completed in an additional 4.5 kilometres.

He said efforts had been intensified to complete the remaining section during the dry season.

Other project sites inspected included Upper Ekenhuan Road, the 12.6-kilometre Urhuokhoko-Ugbineh Road, Asoro Hill-Siluko Road, Catholic Charismatic Renewal Church Road in Ugboghoko, and several roads in Utte, including Palace Road

along Upper Mission Extension.

The team also visited the two flyover bridges under construction at Sapele Road and Ramat Park, Ikpoba Hill, where the commissioner expressed satisfaction with the pace and quality of work.

Akhabue expressed confidence that all the projects would be completed on schedule, citing the prompt release of funds to contractors by the state government. He assured that the current pace of infrastructure development would be sustained across all parts of the state.

## NDLEA nabs village head, seizes over 860kg of...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

than containing the beverage, what was found inside were white substances that later tested positive for heroin.

This, he said, weighed a total of 30.09 kilograms, making it the single largest heroin seizure at the Abuja airport.

"During her preliminary interview, the suspect claimed she brought the white heroin consignment under the guise of coming to Nigeria for holidays," he said.

Meanwhile, at the Murta-la Muhammed International Airport (MMIA) Ikeja, Lagos, NDLEA operatives on Tuesday, January 20 intercepted two passengers.

Babafemi said that they were heading to Istanbul, Turkey, aboard a Turkish Airlines flight with a total of 3,990 pills of tapentadol 250mg and tramaking 225mg concealed in food items packed in their bags.

Similarly, operatives of the Marine Command of the Agency in the early hours of Thurs-

# Tinubu heads to Türkiye on State visit

### ABUJA

President Bola Tinubu will today depart Abuja for a state visit to the Republic of Türkiye, aimed at strengthening bilateral relations and expanding cooperation across key sectors.

The visit was confirmed in a statement issued on Sunday by the Presidential Spokesperson, Mr Bayo Onanuga.

According to the statement, the visit will focus on enhancing collaboration in security,

education, social development, innovation and aviation. It will also feature strategic political and diplomatic engagements on shared interests in finance, communications, trade and investment.

Türkiye's President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, last paid an official visit to Nigeria in October 2021.

Tinubu's itinerary includes high-level meetings between officials of both countries, the signing of memoranda of understanding, and the Nige-

ria-Türkiye Business Forum, designed to connect investors from both nations.

The MoUs are expected to cover areas such as scientific research, energy, technical cooperation, media and communications, military cooperation and protocol.

Members of the President's delegation include the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Amb. Yusuf Tuggar; the Attorney-General of the Federation, Prince Lateef Fagbemi, SAN; Minister of Defence, retired Gen. Christopher

Musa; and Minister of Interior, Mr Olubunmi Tunji-Ojo.

Others are the Chairman, House Committee on Defence, Hon. Jimi Benson; Minister of Women Affairs, Hajiya Imaan Suleiman-Ibrahim; Minister of Culture and Creative Economy, Hannatu Musawa; National Security Adviser, Malam Nuhu Ribadu; and Director-General of the National Intelligence Agency, Amb. Mohammed Mohammed.

The President is expected to return to Nigeria at the end of the visit.



### SWEARING-IN:

A cross-section of the National Youth Service Corps members taking oath of allegiance during the swearing-in of NYSC 2026 Batch A orientation course at Kubwa orientation camp in Abuja recently.

## Gombe Emir honours NUJ Chairman with traditional title

### GOMBE

The Emir of Gombe, Alhaji Abubakar Shehu Abubakar III, has conferred the traditional title of Wakilin Sadarwan Gombe on the Gombe State Chairman of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Malam Faruk Mu'azu.

The announcement was made on Sunday at Mu'azu's residence by the Emir's representative, Alhaji Usman Shamaki, who is also the Shamaki of Gombe.

Shamaki said the honour was in recognition of Mu'azu's contributions to journalism and public service in the state, adding that the title comes with

responsibilities, including representing the Emir at official engagements when required.

He urged the NUJ chairman to discharge the duties of the title with loyalty, integrity and dedication.

Responding on behalf of the family, the Magajin Garin Gombe, Alhaji Bala Magaji, expressed gratitude to the Emir

and assured that Mu'azu would uphold the values of the Emirate.

Also speaking, the Commissioner for Budget and Economic Planning, Alhaji Salihu Baba-Alkali, commended the Emir for recognising Mu'azu's service and assured that he would continue to contribute positively to the state's development.

## Police recover N20m stolen vehicle, return it to owner in Kano

### KANO

The Kano State Police Command has recovered a stolen Toyota Sienna valued at N20 million and handed it over to its rightful owner, Mr Ali Alti.

The vehicle was stolen in Maiduguri on January 5, 2026, according to a statement issued on Sunday by the command's spokesperson, CSP Abdullahi Kiyawa.

Kiyawa said the vehicle was recovered on January 7 during

intelligence-led patrols, adding that four suspects were currently under investigation.

He disclosed that the Commissioner of Police, Mr Ibrahim Bakori, ordered the hand-over after Alti presented valid

proof of ownership.

The command commended its officers for their professionalism and thanked members of the public for their support in crime prevention, while advising residents to be cautious when hiring domestic staff.

"An intelligence-led raid at Kwangila, Zaria LGA Kaduna on Thursday, January 22 led to the arrest of two other suspected drug traffickers with 120 kilograms of skunk recovered from them."

According to the statement, all Commands and formations of the Agency nationwide, NDLEA officers continued their War Against Drug Abuse (WADA), sensitization activities in schools, worship centres, workplaces and communities among others in the past week.

"These include, WADA enlightenment lecture to stu-

dents and staff of Taraba state command of NDLEA conducts WADA enlightenment lecture for students and staff of Government Science Secondary School, Jalingo.

"Also, the Osun command of NDLEA delivers a WADA sensitisation lecture to students and staff of Beloved Montessori Group of Schools, Ede, Osun state.

"Owerri City Junior Secondary School, Owerri, Imo; Government Day Secondary School, Otukpo, Benue; and Darawa Primary School, Dutinma, Katsina, among others."

## NEWS

# Opposition politicians defect to APC in Edo

## BENIN CITY

Scores of opposition politicians on Saturday defected to the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) in Iguobazuwa, Ovia South-West Local Government Area of

Edo State, boosting the party's mobilisation drive ahead of the 2027 general elections.

The defection took place in the local government area of the Deputy Governor, Mr Dennis Idahosa. The defectors cited what they described as

good governance under Governor Monday Okpeholo's administration, less than two years into office.

Speaking at the event, Idahosa said politics was about fulfilling campaign promises, adding that the growing ac-

ceptance of the APC reflected public confidence in the policies of both the state and federal governments.

He urged party members, both old and new, to key into President Bola Tinubu's Renewed Hope Agenda by reg-

istering on the APC e-registration portal to validate their membership.

According to him, the new members would contribute significantly to the party's target of delivering 2.5 million votes for President Tinubu in Edo State during the 2027 presidential election.

"We should return to our units and continue to preach the Renewed Hope Agenda to our people," Idahosa said.

He reminded the defectors that the e-registration portal would close on January 30 and stressed that possession of a registration slip was required to enjoy full party rights within the party.

Idahosa also commended

the Chairman of Ovia South-West Local Government, Mr Nosakhare Edobor, for opening up rural communities and executing development projects that encouraged residents to join the APC.

The APC Chairman in the local government, Mr Emmanuel Ogbomo, urged the new members to take advantage of the ongoing Continuous Voter Registration exercise to enable full participation in future elections.

Other party leaders present at the event included the Chairman of the Edo State Sports Commission, Mr Amadin Enabulele, a member of the Edo State House of Assembly, Sunny Aghedo, and other APC stakeholders.



## 4TH MATRICULATION CEREMONY:

L-R: Head of Department, General Studies, African University of Science and Technology (AUST), Abuja, Dr Bosco Okolo-Ebi; Dean, School of Engineering, AUST, Dr Vitalis Anye; President of AUST, Prof. Azikiwe Onwualu; Lecturer, Dept. of Mechanical Engineering, Dr Odette Ngasoh and acting Vice President, Academics, AUST, Dr Abdulhakeem Bello, during the 4th Matriculation Ceremony for AUST 2025/2026 Academic Session, at Material Raw Hall, AUST, Galadimawa, Abuja at the weekend.

# Empathy key to fighting corruption in public service —Idahagbon

## ABUJA

Former Edo State Attorney-General and Commissioner for Justice, Mr Henry Idahagbon, has said empathy among leaders remains the most effective antidote to corruption in public office.

Idahagbon, now Federal Commissioner representing Edo, Ekiti and Ondo States at the Federal Civil Service Commission, stated this during an interview with journalists in

Abuja.

He said governance would become easier and more impactful if public office holders genuinely cared about the welfare of the people.

According to him, every Nigerian is entitled to a decent standard of living, adding that leadership anchored on compassion and human values would accelerate national development.

Idahagbon commended the administration of President Bola Tinubu, saying the coun-

try was on the right trajectory despite prevailing economic challenges.

He noted that rebuilding any nation was a difficult process, stressing that current reforms, though painful, were laying a solid foundation that future governments would find difficult to reverse.

He also praised some state governors, including Alex Otti of Abia, Babagana Zulum of Borno, Monday Okpeholo of Edo and Babajide Sanwo-Olu of Lagos, for what he described as positive efforts to reposition their states economically.

The former Attorney-General emphasised the need for quality governance, insisting that Edo State must not lag behind in infrastructure development.

He said Governor Okpeholo's vision to modernise Benin City while preserving its ancient heritage was commendable, noting that neighbouring states were making significant investments in infrastructure.

Idahagbon called for healthy competition among governors, saying it would accelerate development and improve the quality of life of citizens.

# Edo govt touts SHINE agenda, harnessing art, culture to boost economy

## ● Steps up protection of cultural assets

## BENIN CITY

Edo State Commissioner for Arts, Culture and Creative Economy, Hon. Chris Okaeben, has reiterated the state government's commitment to leveraging art, culture, and creative industries as a driver of economic growth under Governor Monday Okpeholo's SHINE Agenda.

Speaking during a visit by the Management Team of the National Museum and Monuments, led by Curator Mr. Mark Olaitan, Okaeben described the engagement as timely, aimed at expanding the scope of cultural development for Edo's prosperity.

He lauded the National Museum for preserving Edo's heritage for both national and

international audiences, describing the institution as a strategic partner in unlocking Edo's economic potential.

"This visit will further strengthen our partnership to accelerate the transformation of Edo's art and culture into an economic powerhouse," Okaeben said, highlighting Governor Okpeholo's passion for culture as evident in ongoing infrastructural developments across the state.

He further commended His Royal Majesty's role in repatriating stolen artefacts and emphasized the government's commitment to restoring the state's cultural heritage, including branding key heritage sites for national and global recognition.

Curator Olaitan applauded the state's efforts and urged that

the Igun Bronze Casters Guild be granted UNESCO World Heritage recognition, while inviting the commissioner to participate as Special Guest at the upcoming art exhibition, CELEBRATION, scheduled for March.

Also, the State government is intensifying efforts to safeguard its artistic, cultural, and historical landmarks, following increased encroachments across the state.

Hon. Chris Okaeben welcomed a visit by the Edo State Committee on Protection of Government Property, led by Mr. Eugene Okoloise, describing the committee's proactive measures as crucial to preserving public assets.

The commissioner noted that protecting monuments, creative hubs, and public facilities not only safeguards Edo's cultural heritage but also pro-

motes tourism and economic development.

Highlighting the Ministry's role in boosting revenue through culture, Okaeben said, "Edo's rich arts, entertainment, craft, fashion, film, and music sectors have taken our state to the global stage."

He announced plans for this year's Edo Festival (EDOFEST) to attract international attention and urged the public to respect heritage sites like the Benin Moat, commending officials who reported illegal encroachments.

Chairman Okoloise reaffirmed the committee's commitment to protecting government-owned cultural and creative assets, emphasising that effective protection is essential for tourism, cultural development, and economic growth.

# FCT residents groan as transport fares remain high

## ABUJA

Many residents of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), have continued to lament high transportation fares, in spite of recent interventions by the Federal Government.

The residents told the newsmen on Sunday that the cost of commuting within Abuja has remained beyond their reach.

According to them, fares on major routes across the city and satellite towns have remained high, forcing many workers, traders and students to spend a significant portion of their income on transportation.

Mr Suleiman Adamu, a civil servant who commutes from Kubwa to the Central Business District, said transport costs had remained high compared to previous years.

"About two years ago, I used to spend about N600 daily, but now it is over N1,500. Even with the CNG buses, nothing has really changed for us," Adamu said.

The Federal Government recently introduced compressed

Natural Gas (CNG) buses in the FCT as part of efforts to reduce transport costs and ease commuters' burden.

However, many residents said the buses were insufficient and were not addressing the scale of the problem.

Mrs Ngozi Eze, a trader who travels daily from Mararaba to Wuse Market, said she rarely saw the CNG buses on her route when she needed to use it.

"We had appealed to the government to ameliorate the high cost of transportation after the removal of subsidy and they (government) promised us CNG buses.

"After waiting for so long, we now see a couple of the busses on some routes. But the fare is almost not much different from other commercial vehicles.

"It is either the queue is long to board the busses, or we end up paying high fares, which is not what we bargained for" Eze said.

Similarly, Mr Kenneth Nwabi, a commercial worker living in Lugbe, said transport operators had continued to increase fares, citing fuel costs and vehicle maintenance.

# Gov Okpeholo restructures youth mobilisation, appoints new Adviser

ABDUL-KADIR ABDULLAH

## BENIN CITY

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpeholo, has taken steps to strengthen youth engagement in the state with the appointment of Hon. Christopher Uhuekpeman Udobor Iyase as Special Adviser on Youth Mobilisation.

Iyase resumed office at the Government House, Benin City, last Friday, accompanied by youths from across the state and led in prayers by Rev. Frank Omobude, Chairman of the Edo State Christian Pilgrims Welfare Board.

Speaking to journalists, Iyase emphasised inclusive-

ness, grassroots engagement, and collective participation in advancing the governor's SHINE agenda.

He said the new approach would go beyond elitist structures to involve "organic youths" at the local government, ward, and unit levels.

"This is not the era of 'I alone'. We will work together to ensure the SHINE agenda is accomplished by the youths," Iyase said.

The appointment follows the removal of former Special Adviser Collins Aigbogun, in connection with a violent incident in Ekpoma. Governor Okpeholo's action underscores his administration's commitment to peace, unity, and responsible youth leadership.

# Igbinedion University matriculates 1,300 students

## ● VC urges unity, global competitiveness

### OKADA

The Vice Chancellor of Igbinedion University Okada (IUO), Prof. Lawrence Ezemonye, at the weekend reaffirmed the insti-

tution's commitment to producing graduates who are both locally relevant and globally competitive.

Speaking at the 27th matriculation ceremony in Edo State, Prof. Ezemonye encouraged the

about 1,300 new students to embrace academic excellence and take full advantage of the university's global opportunities.

He highlighted IUO's long-standing tradition of producing successful graduates across various fields, both na-

tionally and internationally.

"I urge you to embrace this unique dual advantage. Immerse yourself in the national variety within our campus and leverage the global pathways we provide. In doing so, you will become graduates ready to contribute meaningfully to both national and global development," Ezemonye said.

The VC emphasised the importance of engaging with the university's vibrant community, where safety, collaboration, and opportunities converge to create a transformative experience.

Ezemonye also noted IUO's commitment to inclusivity, with students enrolled from every state, religion, and most ethnic groups in Nigeria.

"From modest beginnings, our community has grown to over 7,000 students. The class of 2025/2026 is the newest thread in this rich tapestry," he said.

The Vice Chancellor concluded by underscoring the university's robust international profile, adding that a truly formidable education must prepare students for the global stage.

## NABTEB extends registration for 2026 NCEE

### BENIN CITY

The National Business and Technical Examination Board (NABTEB) has extended the registration period for the 2026 National Common Entrance Examination (NCEE) into Technical Colleges, promising a seamless process for candidates and parents.

The Registrar and Chief Executive Officer of NABTEB, Dr Aminu Mohammed, disclosed this in a statement issued on Sunday through the board's Assistant Director, Media and Protocol, Uchechukwu Olisah.

Mohammed said the registration window had been extended to four months, running from January 26 to May 24, ahead of the nationwide examination scheduled for June 6.

"This extended timeline is intended to allow adequate preparation, reduce congestion on the registration platform, and minimise financial and logistical burdens on parents

and guardians," he said.

He added that NABTEB had strengthened its administrative and technological systems to ensure a user-friendly and disruption-free registration process, while maintaining the highest standards of examination integrity.

The registrar urged candidates to register exclusively via the official NABTEB online portal and warned against using unauthorised agents or third-party platforms.

Dr Mohammed emphasised the role of Technical and Vocational Education and Training in equipping young people with practical skills for employment, entrepreneurship, and national development.

"Nigerians are encouraged to choose skills, choose opportunity, and choose a secure future," he said, adding that NABTEB would continue collaborating with the Federal Ministry of Education to strengthen skills-based education and support national human capital development goals.

## Osemwengie assumes duty as new Controller of Corrections in Edo

### BENIN CITY

Mr Julius Osemwengie has assumed duty as the new Controller of Corrections for the Edo State Command of the Nigerian Correctional Service (NCoS).

In a statement by the command's Public Relations Officer, Aminu Suleman, on Sunday in Benin City, Osemwengie assumed duty on Friday as the 21st substantive head of the command.

His assumption of office, Suleman said, followed a posting order issued by the National Headquarters of the Service in Abuja.

The command's spokesperson said Osemwengie was until his deployment to Edo State, serving as Controller in charge of Social Works and Welfare at the national headquarters.

He said the new boss took over from the immediate past Controller, Sunday Oyakhire, who retired from service.

In his address to officers and men of the Command, he said that Osemwengie expressed gratitude to the Controller General of Corrections, Sylvester Nwakuche, for the opportunity to serve in the state.

"I am here in Edo State to achieve security, productivity



OSEMWENGIE

and progress," the new Controller was quoted as saying.

He said the NCoS boss emphasised the importance of professionalism and teamwork, urging personnel to work collectively to ensure the command was recognised for excellence in the discharge of its statutory duties.

He said the controller, however, assured both staff and members of the public that the service under his leadership would pursue greater achievements across all aspects of its mandate, including the welfare of officers and inmates.

He added that the new controller gave the assurance that the Edo command would remain committed to effective custodial and non-custodial operations in line with national objectives and best practices.



AWARD CEREMONY:

Representative of the Catholic Bishop of Bomadi Diocese, Rev. Peter Ikuli (4th L) and the beneficiaries of Free Catholic Scholarship of Primary and Secondary School Education, during the award ceremony at Christ the King Catholic Church, Imiringi Town Ogbia Local Government Area of Bayelsa State on Sunday.

## S'West stakeholders advocate State Police for better security

### AKURE

Stakeholders in Ondo, Osun, and Ekiti States have called for the establishment of state police in Nigeria, describing it as essential to tackle multifaceted security challenges such as banditry and kidnapping.

Proponents argued that de-

centralised policing would enhance local intelligence, faster crime response, and more effective community policing.

They emphasised that officers must be non-partisan and ethnically unbiased.

Dr. Akinwumi Gideon, Ondo State VGN Commandant, warned against political

manipulation of state police appointments, while CSO Executive Director Mr. Martins Alo stressed the need for legislative frameworks, operational autonomy, and federal support for effectiveness.

Other stakeholders, including Dr. Diran Iyantan (PCRC) and Osun House Majority Leader Mr. Adewumi Babajide, highlighted that local officers understand their terrain, enabling

more efficient crime control.

Legal experts stressed the need for constitutional amendments, revisions to the Police Act, and robust accountability mechanisms to prevent abuse.

Private Security Consultant Dr. Olusola Ige urged public enlightenment campaigns to ensure citizens understand and support the creation of state police, aligning with President Bola Tinubu's decentralization vision.

## Weak enforcement, rickety boats fuel recurrent waterway tragedies —Expert

### ABUJA

Recurrent boat mishaps across Nigeria's waterways are largely driven by weak enforcement of safety regulations and continued reliance on rickety wooden vessels, a maritime analyst has said.

Mr Chika Akabogu, speaking with newsmen in Abuja on Sunday, said that despite repeated accidents and public outcry, many unsafe boats remain in operation due to lax implementation of existing

maritime safety standards.

"Most wooden boats currently in use are old, poorly maintained, and structurally weak, making them highly vulnerable to harsh weather and mechanical failures," he noted.

The first boat accident this year occurred on January 3 in Garbi town, Nguru Local Government Area of Yobe, where a passenger canoe capsized on the Yobe River, leaving several dead or missing.

Akabogu blamed irregular inspections, minimal sanctions

for defaulters, and weak government commitment for the recurring accidents. He urged authorities to support local fibre-boat production, enforce timelines for phasing out substandard vessels, and strengthen inspection regimes.

He also called on the Nigerian Inland Waterways Authority (NIWA) to expand recruitment, training, and deployment of water marshals and to actively monitor and prosecute illegal jetties and unsafe boat operators.

"Banning illegal jetties alone is not enough. Water marshals must be stationed on river-

banks to apprehend defaulters, and boat operators must face prosecution to serve as a deterrent," he said.

Akabogu further urged the Minister of Marine and Blue Economy, Adegboyega Oyetola, to mandate an immediate phase-out of rickety wooden boats, stressing that visible action, rather than policy statements, was crucial to preventing avoidable accidents and protecting lives.

Efforts to obtain an official comment from authorities regarding the recent Yobe mishap were unsuccessful at the time of filing this report.

## Rising insecurity: Northern group calls for urgent collective action

### KADUNA

The Northern Reconciliation Group (NRG) has expressed deep concern over the escalating cases of violent attacks, abductions, kidnappings and banditry across Northern states, urging urgent and collective action to end the menace.

In a statement made availa-

ble to journalists on Sunday in Kaduna, the group said the persistent insecurity in rural and semi-urban communities had continued to expose families to fear, grief and uncertainty.

The statement was jointly signed by the group's Pro tempore Secretary, Dr Joseph Lengmang, and its Pro tempore Spokesperson, Prof. Usman Yusuf.

The NRG extended solidarity to victims of violent attacks and communities affected by loss of lives, displacement and destruction of livelihoods, noting that the recurring incidents posed a serious threat to the social fabric of the region.

"As a non-partisan group committed to peace through dialogue, healing and reconciliation, we af-

firm that the protection of life and human dignity is the most fundamental obligation of governance," the statement said.

The group stressed that insecurity in Northern Nigeria should no longer be viewed as isolated or localised incidents but as a regional and national emergency requiring coordinated and humane responses.



UNIQUE LEGAL  
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Legal Practitioners, Property Consultants & Arbitrators  
74, First East Circular Road, Benin City, Edo State.

Tel: 08038660060, 09163789933

21st January 2026.

Our Ref:.....

Your Ref:.....

MR EDOGHAYIOBARE EDWARD,  
9, Central Street,  
Iguobazuwa Community,  
Ovia South West, Local Government Area,  
Edo State.

#### LETTER OF DEMAND

We are Solicitors acting for MR EFOSA RIGHTMAN OGIEMUDIA of 17, Usen Road, Iguobazuwa Community, Ovia South West Local Government Area, Edo State. We shall hereinafter refer to him as "Our Client" and on his behalf and instruction we write you in the manner appearing hereunder.

Our Client has briefed us with respect to your words in the Iguobazuwa community meetings wherein you defame /assassinated his character and person with respect to his previous work at the

Nigeria Army wherein you called him a dismissed Soldier and a thief.

With respect to the said public insult and assassination of character you made, our client has instructed and authorized us to demand the following.

- That you retract, disclaim and tender unreserved apology via a vanguard newspaper to our client within seven (7) days of receipt of this letter.
- That you henceforth reframe from casting aspersion on our client's personality within and outside Iguobazuwa Community.
- That failure to address paragraph (a) within 7 days shall leave our client with no option to approach competent court of law to ask for redress.

We wish to bring to your attention that your actions with respect to your public insult in the Iguobazuwa Community town hall has seriously caused emotional and psychological trauma to our client as the said public insult and scandal has raised doubt about his character and person within his immediate family and environment by some people who owes him in high esteem.

Let wise counsel prevail.

Yours,



P.O ONOBUN, ESQ  
FOR: UNIQUE LEGAL



## NEWS

# Armed drug smugglers attack Customs officers in Ogun, injure 2

### IDIROKO (OGUN)

The Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), Ogun I Area Command, Idiroko, has confirmed an attack on its personnel by suspected armed drug smugglers in the Akokoro area of Iwoye, Imeko-Afon Local Government Area of Ogun State.

The Command's spokesperson, Mr Zakaria Chado, disclosed in a statement on Sunday that the incident occurred on Thursday at about 4.00 p.m. while officers, acting on credible intelligence, intercepted a 12-tyre truck suspected to be conveying a large consignment of illicit drugs and other prohibited items.

Chado said the suspects mobilised a large number of armed

hoodlums who launched a co-ordinated attack on the patrol team before reinforcements could arrive.

According to him, the attackers mounted heavy barricades at about nine strategic points to block access routes, preventing timely reinforcement.

They also opened fire on the officers and disabled a Customs patrol vehicle by shooting at its tyres, creating a volatile operational environment.

During the exchange, two Customs officers sustained gunshot injuries and are currently in critical condition, receiving intensive medical care.

He added that the smugglers exploited the barricades to flee the scene with the intercepted truck, while investigations had

commenced to identify and apprehend all those involved.

The Acting Customs Area Controller, Deputy Comptroller Olukayode Afeni, condemned the attack as barbaric and reaffirmed that such violence would not deter the Service from combating smuggling and ensuring national security.

Afeni called on traditional rulers and community leaders in the area to caution their subjects against smuggling and attacks on security personnel, warning that offenders would face the full weight of the law.

He assured law-abiding citizens of their safety and reiterated the Service's commitment to border security, public health and enforcement of the Nigeria Customs Service Act, 2023.

## FG reaffirms commitment to review health workers' salary structure

### ABUJA

The Federal Government has reaffirmed its commitment to reviewing the Consolidated Health Salary Structure (CONHESS) as part of efforts to resolve the ongo-

ing industrial dispute with the Joint Health Sector Unions (JOHESU).

The Federal Ministry of Health and Social Welfare made this known in a statement issued on Saturday night by its Director of Information

and Public Relations, Mr Alaba Balogun.

The statement was in response to a joint release by the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and the Trade Union

CONTINUES ON PG 5»



### EDO STATE PENSIONS BUREAU

OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF SERVICE  
GOVERNOR'S OFFICE  
PENSION HOUSE  
OBA OVORAMWEN SQUARE (KING'S SQUARE)  
BENIN CITY

23<sup>rd</sup> Jan., 2026

#### PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT

The Edo State Pensions Bureau wishes to announce a further extension of the Edo State Pensioners online "Am Alive Screening" Exercise to Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> February, 2026 via our website: [pensionamalive.com.ng](http://pensionamalive.com.ng)

Consequently, Edo State pensioners especially those who are yet to participate in the Screening exercise are requested to take advantage of the "Period of Grace" and get themselves screened

Kindly note that pensioners who fail to participate in the online "Am Alive Screening" Exercise will have their names removed from the State pension payroll with effect from February, 2026.

Please, be further reminded that all Edo State pensioners are expected to Screen themselves at the comfort of their homes within the period of Grace. Screen via website: [pensionamalive.com.ng](http://pensionamalive.com.ng) only.



W.O. ABBE  
Permanent Secretary/Chairman

OFFICE LINE  
08056432506

# Lagos defends Makoko demolition, cites safety, urban planning

## LAGOS

The Lagos State Government has defended its recent demolition exercise in Makoko and other waterfront communities, describing it as a necessary step to protect lives and property.

The government said the action was aimed at ensuring environmental safety and promoting sustainable urban development across the state.

This was contained in a statement signed by the Com-

missioner for Information and Strategy, Mr Gbenga Omotoso, following an engagement with residents on Sunday in Lagos.

Omotoso said the demolitions were unavoidable interventions intended to prevent disasters, improve public safety and reposition Lagos as a resilient and sustainable megacity for future generations.

Responding to criticisms that the exercise was anti-poor, he explained that the actions were driven by safety, environmental protection and se-

curity concerns, particularly structures erected beneath high-tension power lines and along critical waterways.

According to him, no responsible government would permit human habitation under power cables or allow the obstruction of critical waterways.

"The measures were preventive, not punitive, and intended

to avert disasters and safeguard the long-term future of Lagos," he said.

Omotoso disclosed that the affected communities had been engaged for over five years, noting that existing laws require buildings to be at least 250 metres away from power lines.

He warned that fallen pow-

er cables into waterways could result in catastrophic consequences.

Also speaking, the Special Adviser to the Governor on e-GIS and Urban Development, Mr Olajide Babatunde, said the demolitions followed safety assessments and long-standing urban planning regulations.

According to him, the exercise aligns with the state's broader urban regeneration blueprint.

Babatunde cited Oko Baba as a successful relocation example where residents were moved to modern estates, and urged strict adherence to planning regulations to prevent future conflicts.

## Group urges Fubara, Dep to embrace harmony in Rivers

### PORT HARCOURT

A socio-political organisation, Justice for the Oppressed, has called for harmony and a peaceful working relationship between Rivers State Governor, Siminalayi Fubara, and his deputy, Prof. Ngozi Odu.

The call was made in a statement issued on Sunday in Abuja by the group's Director of Public Relations, Mr Japhet Amadi.

Justice for the Oppressed is a Port Harcourt-based organisation that advocates justice, fairness, peaceful coexistence and good governance.

Amadi said that despite the political challenges in the state, the deputy governor had remained loyal and committed to the administration, even as the governor struggled to secure the loyalty of members of the State House of Assembly.

According to him, Prof. Odu's professional ethics, developed during her years as a university lecturer, accounted

for her refusal to align with opposing political camps amid disagreements.

He alleged that budgetary allocations to the Office of the Deputy Governor had not been released since both officials were sworn in in 2023, adding that the deputy had also been excluded from some key stakeholders' and official meetings.

Amadi further claimed that Odu was yet to be provided with official vehicles and was still using vehicles inherited from the previous administration.

"She assured the governor of her loyalty and has remained committed, yet she is being treated like a stranger in a government where she is constitutionally the number two citizen," he said.

The group urged Governor Fubara to make amends and accord the Office of the Deputy Governor its full rights and privileges, stressing that unity of purpose was critical to overcoming the political challenges confronting the state.

## Police probe illegal clinic over maternal death in Ondo

### AKURE

The Ondo State Police Command has launched an investigation into the alleged operation of an illegal medical facility linked to a maternal death in Odigbo Local Government Area of the state.

The command's spokesperson, DSP Abayomi Jimoh, disclosed this in a statement at the weekend in Akure, saying that the incident was reported by concerned residents of the Sabo area on January 18 at about 6 p.m.

According to him, a man identified as Kehinde Olawuyi, 36, and his wife, Eniola Olawuyi, were alleged to be operating an illegal medical clinic at Orita Odigbo.

Jimoh said the suspects reportedly admitted a 28-year-old woman, identified as Iyanu, on January 4 at about noon for childbirth at the facility.

"It was alleged that the suspects mishandled the delivery in an unprofessional manner,

resulting in the victim becoming unconscious and bleeding profusely," he said.

The victim was rushed to another medical facility in Odigbo for emergency treatment but was later confirmed dead.

Preliminary investigations, according to the police, revealed that the suspects were not registered medical practitioners, confirming that the facility was operating illegally.

Jimoh said the case was still under investigation and would be charged to court upon the conclusion of investigations.

He added that the Commissioner of Police warned members of the public against patronising unregistered medical facilities and urged residents to always seek healthcare services from licensed and certified institutions.

The police also appealed to the public to provide credible information that could aid the investigation, assuring that all information would be treated with utmost confidentiality.



### OPENING CEREMONY:

L-R: FCT Camp Director, National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), Mrs Tom-George Ichien; representative of the FCT Chief Judge, Hon. Jadesola Adeyemi-Ajayi; FCT Coordinator, NYSC, Mr Samson Ateli; representative of the Minister of State for FCT, Hon. Lawal Kolo and the FCT Camp Commandant, Mohammed Maina, during the opening ceremony and the swearing-in of NYSC 2026 Batch A orientation course at Kubwa orientation camp in Abuja.

## Jigawa NCoS commends Chief Judge on non-custodial sentencing

### DUTSE

The Jigawa State Command of the Nigerian Correctional Service (NCoS) has commended the Chief Judge of the state, Justice Umar Sadiq, for his sustained support for non-custodial sentencing measures.

The commendation was contained in a statement issued in Dutse by the command's spokesman, CSC Sani Jahun.

Jahun said that the Controller of Corrections in the state, Mr Muhammed Fari, made the remarks during a familiarization visit to the Chief Judge.

He explained that the visit was

aimed at strengthening collaboration between the correctional service and the judiciary to accelerate inmates' access to justice.

According to him, Justice Sadiq's support for non-custodial measures has significantly contributed to the decongestion of custodial centres in the state, in line with the provisions of the Nigerian Correctional Service Act.

The controller also drew attention to the deteriorating perimeter wall of the Hadejia Medium Security Custodial Centre and appealed for urgent intervention to address security concerns.

In his response, Justice Sadiq assured that the matter would receive prompt attention and reaffirmed the judiciary's commitment to supporting the correctional service.

## State Police vital to tackling insecurity in Nigeria —Stakeholders

### AKURE

Stakeholders across Ondo, Osun and Ekiti States have called for the urgent establishment of state police, describing it as a strategic necessity for addressing Nigeria's growing security challenges.

They said decentralised policing would reduce over-reliance on the federal command structure and enhance local intelligence gathering, rapid response and community engagement.

The stakeholders, however, cautioned that state-controlled police must not be politicised or influenced by ethnic or partisan interests.

Speaking in Akure, the Ondo State Commandant of the Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN), Dr Akinwumi Gideon, warned that state police should not become a tool for political patronage.

He said the leadership of the proposed police structure must be subjected to rigorous screening to ensure professionalism and competence.

Also speaking, the Executive Director of Upline Centre for Development, Mr Martins Alo, said state police would require strong legal frameworks, operational autonomy and sustainable funding to function effectively.

He called for the establishment of State Police Service Commissions under state laws, while retaining the federal police to handle national and interstate crimes.

Chairman of the Police Community Relations Committee (PCRC), Zone 17, Dr Diran Iyantant, said Nigeria's federal system demands a decentralised security architecture.

According to him, officers drawn from local communities would be better positioned to

understand terrain, culture and security peculiarities, thereby improving policing outcomes.

In Osun State, the House of Assembly Majority Leader, Mr Adewumi Babajide, described state police as long overdue and urged merit-based recruitment and proper training to prevent abuse.

Other contributors, including civil society leaders, legal practitioners and security experts, stressed the need for constitutional amendments, accountability mechanisms and public enlightenment to ensure the effective and responsible implementation of state policing in Nigeria.

## FG reaffirms commitment to review...

### «CONTINUED FROM PG 3

Congress (TUC) over the dispute between the ministry and JOHESU.

Balogun described as untrue and misleading allegations that the ministry deliberately refused to implement the report of the Technical Committee on CONHESS adjustment submitted in 2021.

He said the ministry remained committed to industri-

al harmony in the health sector and had held several conciliatory meetings with JOHESU since the strike commenced on November 14, 2025.

According to him, a high-level meeting convened on January 15 resulted in a tentative understanding on a framework for resolving the dispute, including proposals on implementing the 2021 report and addressing the "No Work, No Pay" policy.

## NEWS

**"Defilement rise linked to fear, silence, weak enforcement"**

## LAGOS

Lawyers in Lagos have raised alarm over the steady increase in cases of defilement of minors, attributing the trend to fear, silence, weak enforcement of laws and cultural factors.

The lawyers said that although the Child Rights Act and other laws clearly prescribe sanctions for offenders, many perpetrators ignore them, believing they can evade justice.

They called for child-friendly reporting mechanisms that would encourage victims to

speak up and assure them of protection and justice.

Mrs Anne Agi, a member of the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), said harsh laws alone were largely reactive and ineffective where prevention systems were weak.

She noted that defilement

thrived in environments of silence, stigma and fear, adding that underreporting remained a major challenge as most offenders were known to the victims.

"Families often choose silence over justice because of shame, fear of social backlash, pressure to settle privately or

economic dependence on the offender," she said.

Agi also identified delays in investigation, poor handling of evidence and absence of child-friendly reporting systems as major enforcement gaps.

Similarly, Adaobi Fortune, a gender advocate and member of the African Women Lawyers Association (AWLA), blamed compromises by some law enforcement officers for emboldening offenders.

"Victims are sometimes mocked, blamed or told to settle it as a family matter. When justice is slow and biased, offenders are less deterred," she said, stressing the need for training and retraining of officers handling sexual offences.

Fortune also said patriarchal norms and harmful beliefs about power and entitlement continued to normalise the sexualisation of children.

Another AWLA member, Mrs Loveth Peters, linked the

persistence of defilement to poverty and inequality, noting that children from vulnerable backgrounds were more exposed through hawking, child labour and domestic servitude.

She called for sustained enlightenment, community vigilance and comprehensive sexuality education, noting that many children were unaware of their rights.

The lawyers agreed that defilement was not a failure of the law alone, but of systems, culture, enforcement and prevention working together.

Meanwhile, rights activist Mr Spurgeon Ataene cautioned against false allegations, urging security agencies to thoroughly investigate reports to avoid vendetta, witch-hunts and malicious accusations.

He advised investigators, judges and the Director of Public Prosecution to scrutinise cases carefully to establish whether crimes were genuine or borne out of rivalry.



## APC E-REGISTRATION:

L-R: Chairman All Progressive Congress (APC) E-registration Committee, Mr Flavour Eze; Member Enugu State House of Assembly, Mr Okey Mbah; Chairman Nkanu East Local Government Area (LGA) of Enugu State, Chief Okechukwu Edeh; Sen. Kelvin Chukwu and Chairman APC, Enugu Caretaker Committee, Dr Ben Nwoye, during APC E-registration Revalidation Exercises in Amurri Ancient Kingdom of Nkanu East LGA of Enugu State on Sunday.

**Court remands apprentice over alleged theft of 4 tubers of yam**

## OKITIPUPA (ONDO)

An Okitipupa Chief Magistrates' Court in Ondo State has remanded a 25-year-old apprentice, Ayo Ajibade, in the

Okitipupa Correctional Centre for allegedly stealing four tubers of yam valued at ₦10,000.

The Chief Magistrate, Mr Mayowa Olanipekun, ordered the remand until January 29 after the accused pleaded guilty

to a two-count charge of felony and stealing.

Police prosecutor, ASP Ayo-deji Omoyeigha, told the court that Ajibade and another suspect still at large conspired to steal the yams from the farm of

one Olorunjuwon Igbasan on October 25, 2025, at Kiribo in Igbekobo Magisterial District.

The offence, he said, contravened Sections 516 and 390(9) of the Criminal Code, Laws of Ondo State, 2006.

**PDP leadership crisis: Court adjourns Wike faction suit, dismisses Turaki's case**

## ABUJA

The Federal High Court in Abuja has adjourned a suit filed by a faction of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) loyal to FCT Minister Nyesom Wike until February 20, pending a Court of Appeal

decision.

Justice Joyce Abdulmalik adjourned the matter following an appeal filed by the Kabiru Turaki-led faction challenging an interim order directing parties to maintain the status quo.

The Wike-aligned faction, led by Acting National Chair-

man Alhaji Mohammed Abdulrahman, had sought orders restraining the police, DSS and INEC from recognising or granting access to the Turaki-led leadership at the party's Wadata Plaza secretariat.

The judge held that continuing proceedings would be fu-

tile since an appeal had already been entered.

In a related ruling, Justice Abdulmalik dismissed a separate suit filed by the Turaki-led PDP leadership after their counsel applied to withdraw it, noting that issues had already been joined.

**Anambra First Lady urges collective commitment to quality education**

## AWKA

The Wife of the Anambra State Governor, Dr Nonye Soludo, has called for collective commitment to quality education, describing it as a fundamental right that must not be denied to any individual.

She made the call in a statement to mark the 2026 International Day of Education, celebrated annually on January 24.

The global commemoration, proclaimed by the United Nations in 2018, has the theme, "The Power of Youth in Co-creating Education."

Dr Soludo said achieving inclusive, equitable and quality education should not be left to government alone, stressing that every segment of society

has a role to play.

She noted that the Anambra State Government had introduced 15 new entrepreneurial subjects into the Junior Secondary School curriculum to equip students with practical skills for self-reliance and future employment.

The subjects include solar installation, garment making, GSM repairs, agriculture and

agro-processing, plumbing, tiling, POP installation, event management, bakery, hairstyling, interior design, CCTV installation, digital literacy, information technology and robotics.

According to her, the initiative aligns education with labour market demands and reflects deliberate efforts to prepare children for the future.

She emphasised that the International Day of Education should serve as a moment for renewed commitment to building an education system that prioritises learning and ensures every child can achieve their dreams.

If you want these tightened further for wire style or adapted to a specific newspaper house style, just say the word.

**Police rescue kidnap victim hours after abduction**

## IBADAN

The Police Command in Oyo State has rescued one Haruna Lawal, who was kidnapped on Saturday at Olorunda Village, a few hours after his abduction.

The Command's spokesperson, DSP Ayanlade Olayinka, disclosed this in a statement issued on Sunday in Ibadan.

Olayinka said the rescue followed a prompt and coordinated response by police operatives after a distress call

was received from the victim's sister at about 2:10 a.m.

According to him, suspected kidnapers armed with dangerous weapons invaded Lawal's residence, abducted him and escaped with his motorcycle.

**Murder trial: 2 sureties apply to withdraw bail bond**

## AWKA

Two sureties in the murder trial of Chukwuebu-ka Anuta have applied to withdraw their suretyship before an Anambra State High Court sitting in Awka.

The sureties, Edwin Samuel and Chineze Anuta, told the

court that the defendant had violated bail conditions and threatened their lives.

Justice Gloria Anulude adjourned the matter to January 30 after noting the absence of the case file.

The sureties said their application was made in good faith and for personal safety.

**Court arraigns 64yr-old woman for alleged assault on traffic officer**

## IBADAN

A 64-year-old woman, Olusola Adeyemo, has been arraigned before an Iyaganku Magistrates' Court in Ibadan for allegedly slapping a traffic officer on duty.

Adeyemo pleaded not guilty to unlawful assault.

Prosecutor Insp. Samuel Owolabi told the court that the defendant assaulted an OYRT-MA officer, Samuel Agboola, at Eleye on January 20.

The magistrate, Mrs Gladys Olanrewaju, granted her bail in the sum of ₦200,000 with two sureties and adjourned the case to March 2.

**Lawyer seeks FG's diplomatic intervention over Nigerian's detention in Qatar**

## ABUJA

Human rights lawyer, Mr Inibehe Effiong, has urged the Federal Government to engage Qatari authorities over the alleged wrongful arrest and detention of a Nigerian, Mr Gideon Ezeh.

Ezeh recounted how he was detained for six weeks in Qatar after airport officials mistook packaging materials in a

mannequin head for cocaine, despite multiple negative test results.

He said the incident led to the revocation of his U.S. visa and that of his wife, disrupting her Ph.D. programme.

Effiong called on the Federal Government to demand a retraction of the allegations, facilitate visa restoration and seek redress for the damage suffered by Ezeh and his family.

## RECONCILIATION OF NAME

The general public is hereby notified that ABHUEGBEUDE UNITY, ORIAKHI UNITY, ABHUEGBEUDE IKHUEKELAGBE UNITY and UNITY IKHUEKELAGBE ORIAKHI are one and the same person. Henceforth, I now wish to be known as UNITY IKHUEKELAGBE ORIAKHI. Former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and the general public take note.

## CHANGE OF NAME

I formerly known as MISS KEME ODUFA BLESSINGS, now wish to be known and called MRS. ONOCHIE ODUFA BLESSING, former documents remain valid general public please take note.

## Foreign

## NEWS

## Germany arrests suspected Hamas member over alleged attack plot

German police have arrested a Lebanese national on suspicion of being a member of Hamas and planning attacks in Europe.

The man, named as "Mohammad S", was stopped at Berlin's Brandenburg Airport after arriving from Beirut on Friday evening.

Federal prosecutors said that in August 2025 he helped procure 300 rounds of ammunition and was involved in an alleged plot to attack Jewish

and Israeli institutions.

He is due to be brought before a federal judge who will decide on a pretrial detention.

Hamas, which controlled Gaza but has been severely weakened by Israeli operations in the territory, is considered a terrorist organisation by the US, UK, Israel and many other countries.

The militant Palestinian group carried out the attacks on Israel in October 2023, in which about 1,200 people were killed

and more than 250 people taken hostage.

Since then, according to Gaza's Hamas-run health ministry, more than 70,000 Palestinians have been killed in Israeli military action.

German authorities say "Mohammad S" colluded with "Abed Al G", one of three alleged Hamas members arrested last October over planned attacks on Jewish and Israeli institutions.

The three were reportedly ar-

rested while meeting for a weapons handover in Berlin. Two of them are Germany nationals, another is from Lebanon.

Around the time of the arrests, police searches also took place in the German cities of Leipzig and Oberhausen, Der Spiegel reported.

Separately, in November, German authorities arrested another suspected member of Hamas - also a Lebanese national - near the border with the Czech Republic.

## Captain of suspected Russian shadow tanker in French custody

French officials have taken the Indian captain of a suspected Russian shadow fleet tanker into custody days after the oil tanker was seized.

On Thursday, the French navy intercepted the tanker - named the Grinch - which President Emmanuel Macron said was "subject to international sanctions and suspected of flying a false flag".

The Grinch had been travelling through the Mediterranean Sea from the Russian Arctic port of Murmansk. It is now moored, under guard, at a southern French port near Marseille.

Although Moscow is yet to comment, Macron said on Thursday that the shadow fleet helped to "finance Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine".

The office of the Marseille prosecutor office said the rest of the ship's crew members - all also Indians - were being "kept on board" while the 58-year-old captain was taken into custody.

"The investigation aims to verify the validity of the flag used by the tanker," prosecutors said. French media report say it was sailing under a Comoros Islands flag.

Nautical and air exclusion zones have been established around the anchorage site, of-

ficials say.

French Joint Staff of the Armed Forces Soldiers talk to people on the oil tanker French Joint Staff of the Armed Forces Soldiers searched the vessel after it was seized in the Mediterranean.

Announcing the seizure on Thursday, Macron said: "We are determined to uphold international law and to ensure the effective enforcement of sanctions."

Many Western countries imposed sanctions on Russian energy following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Earlier in January, British armed forces supported a US operation to seize a Russian-flagged tanker in the Atlantic that US officials said had broken sanctions by carrying oil for Venezuela and Russia.

Last October, France seized another sanctioned tanker, the Boracay, off its west coast before releasing it a few days later.

Shadow fleets are becoming increasingly common, with Venezuela, Iran and Russia all accused of using them to avoid sanctions on oil.

Financial intelligence firm S&P Global estimates that one in five oil tankers worldwide are used to smuggle oil from sanctioned countries.



FRENCH NAVY:

The Grinch was intercepted by the French Navy on Thursday

## Party backed by generals set for landslide as 'sham' Myanmar election ends

Polls in Myanmar have closed after a third and final stage of voting in what are widely viewed as sham elections.

Many popular parties are banned from standing and voting has not been possible in large areas of the country because of a five-year-long civil war.

The dominant party backed by the ruling military junta is expected to win a landslide victory.

The current regime has rejected international criticism of the election, maintaining that it is free and fair.

Around one-fifth of the country's 330 townships, including the cities of Yangon and Mandalay, voted in the last stage.

Six parties, including the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), fielded candidates nationwide, while another 51 parties and independent candidates decided to contest state and regional levels.

Two previous rounds were held on 28 December and 11 January - giving overwhelming victories to the USDP.

The party won only 6% of parliamentary seats in the last free election in 2020.

Poll workers pictured at a voting station in Shan state, Myanmar - with several empty chairs in the foreground

A BBC team visited several polling stations in Shan state and described a climate of fear

As in previous rounds of this strange, month-long election, voting was orderly and peaceful at the polling station in Nyaungshwe, Shan State, which a BBC team observed.

Set in a large school, shaded by huge rain trees, there were ample volunteers and officials to guide voters where to go, and how to make their choice using the new, locally-made electronic voting machines.

You could be forgiven for believing this was a normal democratic exercise, not the sham its critics say it is.

However polling day was preceded by a campaigning period marked by fear, intimidation and a pervasive sense that little will change after the inevitable victory by the USDP.

Everywhere the BBC team travelled in southern Shan State, we were followed and closely monitored by dozens of police and military officials, always polite but very persistent.

It proved nearly impossible to get people to say anything about the vote, so nervous were they of possible repercussions.

The next steps after final results are announced are laid down in the military-drafted constitution.

Parliament will meet within the next two months to choose a new president, and everyone expects that to be the coup leader Gen Min Aung Hlaing.

It will be the same regime with civilian clothes.

But he will then have to relinquish his command of the armed forces.

His replacement is certain to be a loyalist, but his hold over the ranks of the military will inevitably be less secure, and it is no secret that many other senior officers do not believe he has made a good job of leading the country.

With many more voices in politics, there is the possibility of wider debate inside government over which direction Myanmar should now take, and the possibility - distant for now - of the first steps towards ending the civil war.

EPA Myanmar military chief Senior General Min Aung

Hlaing displaying his ink-marked little finger after casting a ballotEPA

Junta leader Gen Min Aung Hlaing is expected to be appointed president after the election

The military junta took control of Myanmar in a 2021 coup, ousting an elected civilian government led by Nobel Peace Prize Winner Aung San Suu Kyi.

She remains in detention and, like many other opposition groups, her National League for Democracy has been formally dissolved.

The military has been fighting against both armed resistance groups which oppose the coup and ethnic armies that have their own militias.

It lost control of large parts of the country in a series of major setbacks, but clawed back territory this year enabled by support from China and Russia.

The civil war has killed thousands of people, displaced millions more, destroyed the economy and left a humanitarian vacuum.

A devastating earthquake in March and international funding cuts have made the situation far worse.

## Trump threatens Canada with 100% tariffs if it 'makes a deal with China'

US President Donald Trump has threatened to slap a 100% tariff on Canadian goods if the country strikes a trade deal with China.

"If Canada makes a deal with China, it will immediately be hit with a 100% Tariff against all Canadian goods and products coming into the U.S.A.," Trump said on Truth Social.

It is unclear what deal Trump is referring to in his social media post. Last week, Canada's Prime Minister Carney announced a "strategic partnership" with China, and agreed to reduce tariffs.

At the time, Trump called the move "a good thing". But tensions between the US and Canada have grown in recent days, after Carney said in a speech in Davos that the US-led world order had been ruptured.

Carney also urged other "middle powers" to band together in the face of economic coercion by "greater powers", though he did not mention Trump by name.

Trump responded to the remarks in his own speech the next day, saying: "Canada lives because of the United States."

The US president also withdrew an invitation for Canada to join his new Board of Peace.

On Saturday, Trump said in his social media post that if

Carney "thinks he is going to make Canada a 'Drop Off Port' for China to send goods and products into the United States, he is sorely mistaken".

The BBC has contacted the White House and Carney's office for comment.

Canada's US trade minister Dominic LeBlanc said in a statement: "There is no pursuit of a free trade deal with China."

"What was achieved was resolution on several important tariff issues."

LeBlanc said the government was focused on building a stronger Canadian economy and strengthening trade partnerships "throughout the world".

Canada has been seeking to diversify trade away from the US, its largest trade partner, following the uncertainty caused by Trump's on-again-off-again tariffs.

Under the agreement reached between Carney and Chinese President Xi Jinping last week, China will lower levies on Canadian canola oil from 85% to 15% by March, while Canada will tax Chinese EVs at the most-favoured-nation rate, 6.1% - down from 100%.

The deal was seen as a breakthrough after years of strained ties and tit-for-tat tariffs, and could see more Chinese investments in Canada.

## NEWS

## Foreign

## Peace talks on Russia-Ukraine war end as fighting rages

The first three-way peace talks between Russia, Ukraine and the US have ended in Abu Dhabi with no apparent breakthrough, as fighting rages.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky raised the possibility of a second meeting as early as next week, while an American official said a new round would begin on 1 February.

The two-day talks ended after waves of Russian air strikes targeted Ukraine's badly damaged energy infrastructure, killing one person and injuring 35 others, Ukrainian officials said.

Russia accused Ukraine of attacking an ambulance in Ukrainian territory under its control, killing three medics. Later, it reported a Ukrainian missile attack on energy infrastructure in Belgorod.

The BBC could not independently verify the reports.

The talks in Abu Dhabi were the first trilateral meeting since the Kremlin launched its full-scale invasion of its neighbour in 2022.

"The central focus of the discussions was the possible parameters for ending the war," Zelensky posted on X.

"I highly value the understanding of the need for American monitoring and oversight of the process of ending the war and ensuring genuine security."

All sides had agreed to "report back to their capitals" and co-ordinate further steps with their leaders, he added.

"We've agreed that the next round begins next Sunday in Abu Dhabi again," an unnamed US official told reporters.

The decision to hold further talks was a "good sign" and a "lot of work" had been done over the two days of negotia-

tions, the official added.

The Russian state news agency Ria-Novosti reported that Moscow remained open to a continuation of dialogue with Ukraine and the US.

Vitali Klitschko, mayor of the Ukrainian capital Kyiv, said one person had died and four had been wounded by Russian air strikes on Friday night, while the mayor of the city of Kharkiv reported that 31 people had been hurt there.

Kyiv's critical infrastructure was damaged, Klitschko said, leaving 6,000 buildings without heating.

Temperatures have fallen to around -12C in parts of Ukraine. Zelensky said for his part that "the main target of the Russians" had been the energy infrastructure.

In Kharkiv, Mayor Ihor Terekhov said a maternity hospital and a hostel for displaced people had been damaged.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha said the "brutal" Russian attack - "cynically" ordered by President Vladimir Putin - had "hit not only our people, but also the negotiation table".

He said the "barbaric" overnight assault proved "that Putin's place is not at the board of peace, but at the dock of the special tribunal".

Meanwhile, Russia accused Ukraine of a "barbaric crime against the civilian population" of Kherson region, which is partially under Russian control.

Russian foreign ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova said a clearly marked ambulance carrying a medical team from the Oleshky central district hospital had been attacked by a Ukrainian drone at the entrance to the village of Hola Prystan.

## Protesters in Johannesburg call on US to release Venezuela's Maduro

Hundreds of demonstrators marched to the American consulate in Johannesburg on Saturday to protest the US intervention in Venezuela and capture of former president Nicolas Maduro.

The protests were led by members of the South African Communist Party and a number of trade unions.

"We delivered this memorandum following a lawful and very peaceful protest march to the United States consulate in Sandton," Irvin Jim, General Secretary of the National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa (NUMSA) told the crowd.

"The purpose of this memorandum, the purpose of this memorandum is to formally condemn the illegal US military invasion of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (and to) demand the immediate release of President Nicolas Maduro and comrade Celia Flores."

"We are saying that the international rule of law, the human rights must be respected. We

are saying that oil can be used to promote peace in the world, not war," said Mike Shingange, First Deputy of the Congress of South African Trade Unions. "That's why we are here to pledge solidarity and say to the people of Venezuela, we are with them and we're going to continue to do all we can up until they are liberated."

President Cyril Ramaphosa and his African National Congress party have also denounced US actions and called for Maduro's immediate release.

Nomvula Mokonyane, the ANC's First Deputy Secretary-General, also spoke to the demonstrators:

"On behalf of the African National Congress, we really want to salute workers under the leadership of NUMSA for uniting all of us under one banner of international solidarity, a stand against imperialist aggression, as well as the dictatorship of one man who wants to break the sovereignty of each and every nation."



**POLICE CLASH PROTESTERS:** Protesters and police clash at the scene of the shooting

## Protests and anger after man shot dead by immigration agents in Minneapolis

Hundreds of demonstrators braved freezing weather to protest against the shooting of Alex Pretti, a 37-year-old intensive care nurse, during a confrontation on Saturday morning.

Multiple videos from the scene - taken from different angles - show the scuffle between federal immigration officers and Pretti.

Federal and state authorities have offered conflicting versions of what happened in the moments leading to the shooting, which took place less than three weeks after an agent killed Renee Good in her car in Minneapolis.

The Trump administration is characterising the moments leading up to Pretti's death as an attack by him, claiming he approached officers with a handgun and, after he violently resisted attempts to disarm him, a border patrol agent fired in self defence.

But videos show no evidence to support the claim he used any armed force to threaten agents, instead showing him pepper-sprayed, wrestled to the ground and shot - after an agent appeared to remove a gun from the scuffle.

The Trump administration has described Pretti as a "domestic terrorist". However, the Governor of Minnesota Tim Walz has described its account as "nonsense and lies."

The shooting occurred on Saturday morning near Nicollet Avenue and 26th Street in south Minneapolis at 09:05 local time (15:05 GMT).

On Saturday night hundreds of people paid tribute to Pretti, lighting candles and chanting his name near the spot where he was shot.

During the day, hundreds of protesters showed their anger against the shooting and ongoing Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids in

the city, as armed and masked agents deployed tear gas and flashbang grenades.

Protests have spread to other US cities, with more than 1,000 demonstrators out in New York on Saturday, holding signs including "Justice for Alex" and "abolish ICE". Hundreds also took part in a protests in Chicago, Los Angeles and San Francisco.

Videos from the moments before the shooting show Pretti filming agents with his phone in the middle of the street, while he was taking part in protests against the immigration crackdown in the city.

Pretti was seen filming as a federal agent appeared to push away one woman and shove another woman to the ground.

Video appears to show Pretti moving between the agent and a woman, raising his left arm to shield himself as the agent then sprays a substance in his eyes.

The videos show sever-

al agents then taking hold of Pretti and forcing him onto the ground.

An officer, who appears to approach the scuffle with empty hands, pulls back with what appears to be a gun in his hand.

As he moves away, a split second later another agent standing beside him opens fire. The agents jump back from the man lying on the ground and the firing continues.

The parents of Pretti - Michael Pretti and Susan Pretti - released a statement saying they were "heartbroken but also very angry". They described their son as a "kind-hearted soul" who wanted to "make a difference".

"Please get the truth out about our son. He was a good man," they added.

Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem said Pretti "was there to perpetuate violence", saying he approached federal agents with a 9mm semi-automatic handgun.

## Wife of Ugandan opposition leader Bobi Wine in hospital after soldiers raid her house

The wife of Ugandan opposition politician Bobi Wine has been speaking to journalists from her hospital bed in Kampala, describing what she says was an overnight raid on her home by soldiers searching for her husband.

Barbra Itungo Kyagulanyi said she was strangled and held at gunpoint during the raid.

"One of the main reasons was to look for my husband because his phone has been home. I switched it on yesterday because there is a password I was looking for and then that was like at around 3[pm]. So, I think they got a signal of his phone and then they were sure he was home. But he had left his phone behind."

Wine said in a post on X on Saturday that "hundreds of soldiers" raided his home in his absence, looting it and assaulting his wife. "They put my wife on gunpoint, asking her to reveal my whereabouts," he wrote. "They strangled her and insulted her."

Kyagulanyi said the soldiers physically assaulted her in an attempt to get her to give them information about her husband.

"[One of the men] held me by my hair, lifted me up, we have poles in the sitting room, and hit my head on the pole and slit my mouth. So, when he hit me, he pulled me down and sat me down. Then he pushed my head and I went down and they sat on me. I could

feel four bodies seated on me. Then he said, will you give me the password? I said again in Runyankore, you have already done enough. You are not getting the password."

Bobi Wine went into hiding after last week's presidential election. Yoweri Museveni won a seventh term in office - a result Wine denounced as "blatant theft"

Post-election crackdown Museveni's son Muhoozi Kainerugaba, who heads the country's army, has vowed to hunt down Wine and kill him.

Kainerugaba said earlier this week that 30 opposition supporters have been killed since the election and 2,000 arrested.

"We have arrested more than 2,000 thugs that Kabobi

thought he could use," wrote army chief Muhoozi Kainerugaba on X, using his nickname for Wine. "So far, we have killed 30 NUP terrorists," he added, referring to Wine's party, the National Unity Platform.

Police on Thursday detained a key ally of opposition figure Bobi Wine, accusing him of participating in bouts of violence in a remote part of central Uganda during last week's election.

Muwanga Kivumbi, a lawmaker who is a deputy president of Wine's National Unity Platform party, is likely to face criminal charges for his alleged role in violence in his constituency that left seven people dead, said police spokesman Kituuma Rusoke.

# Feature

## Nigeria's Diphtheria outbreak, a preventable tragedy?

OLUWAFUNKE ISHOLA (NAN)

**T**welve-year-old Obiademoh (not real name) was bursting with life. He loved playing soccer with his friends, tinkering with gadgets, and dreaming of one day becoming an engineer.

But on February 22, 2025, he presented with a sore throat and fever to the health facility of his school – King's College, Victoria Island Annex, Lagos.

Laboratory tests confirmed he had diphtheria disease, upon which he was referred to the pediatric emergency ward of the Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH) where he was administered antibiotics and diphtheria antitoxin serum.

In spite of the intervention, Obiademoh died from myocarditis (an inflammation of the heart muscle that weakens the heart's ability to pump blood), with several other students hospitalised as suspected cases.

Obiademoh's parents were devastated, left with an unfilled void, "Their little boy, their bundle of joy, is gone."

Consequently, parents whose children were referred to the teaching hospital were notified through phone calls, and they rushed to keep vigil at the emergency ward.

The diphtheria outbreak later reported in multiple local government areas (LGAs) of Lagos had 10 positive cases confirmed from laboratory tests.

The Lagos State Commissioner for Health, Prof. Akin Abayomi disclosed that confirmed cases were linked to King's College in Eti-Osa LGA, Lagos State Model School, Meran in Alimosho LGA, Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH) in Mushin, De-Emmaculate School, Mile 12 in Kosofe LGA, and Gbara Junior Secondary School in Eti-Osa LGA.

Similarly, a diphtheria outbreak in Mbutu Community in Imo led to the death of ten children, prompting an immediate closure of schools in the area.

Additionally, in May 2025, the disease killed two children in Tukur-Tukur Community of Zaria, Kaduna State.

A community leader and Director of Publicity in the Northern Elders Forum, Abdul-Azeez Suleiman, disclosed that the two children died within 48 hours.

Sadly, Obiademoh and these children weren't the only ones, as Nigeria lost 884 persons to diphtheria from Jan. 1 to Nov. 2, 2025.

Regrettably, Nigeria accounted for the highest number of diphtheria cases in Africa in 2025, with 12,150 suspected cases from which 8,587 were confirmed positive.

According to the World Health Organisation, children and young adults represent the majority of the cases, with females accounting for a slightly greater proportion.

In contrast, Nigeria recorded 41,336 suspected cases, 24,864 confirmed cases and 1,264 deaths be-



tween week 19 of 2022 and week four of 2025.

Epidemiological week 19 in 2022 marked the start of a severe diphtheria outbreak in Nigeria, which had been recognised as the worst outbreak in a decade.

Analysis of the figures showed that fatality recorded in 2025 is 30.06 per cent above the figure recorded in 32 months, two weeks, which constitutes between week 19 of 2022 and week four of 2025.

In consequence, this alarming trend demands immediate attention and action.

Diphtheria is a vaccine-preventable disease and severe bacterial infection that can affect a person's nose, throat, and occasionally skin, caused by *Corynebacterium* species.

The people at the greatest risk of contracting diphtheria are children and people who have not received any, or only a single dose of the vaccine (diphtheria toxoid-containing vaccine).

As such, the positivity and fatality rate arising from diphtheria disease call for proactive measures, a Public Health Physician, Prof. Tanimola Akande, said.

Akande, a Professor of Public Health at the University of Ilorin, emphasised that diphtheria has continuously posed a significant public health risk in Nigeria, with the country having one of the highest numbers of unvaccinated children globally.

This, he said, had led to recurring outbreaks and deaths from vaccine-preventable diseases (VPDs),

stressing that the situation demanded urgent attention to boost vaccination coverage and prevent further losses.

He advised parents to ensure their children were fully vaccinated against diphtheria with three doses of the pentavalent vaccine as recommended in the childhood immunisation schedule.

Similarly, Mrs Helen Orji, a Child Health Advocate said, "In a world where medical breakthroughs happen every day, it's heartbreaking to think that thousands of Nigerian children are still dying from vaccine-preventable diseases when the solution- the vaccine is readily available.

"Who's failing these children? Is it the parents who refused to authorise the inoculation of their children because of fear, ignorance, misinformation, or religious belief?"

"Or the government that has failed to enforce compliance in schools that disregard safety protocols for monetary gains, admitting more students than their capacity leading to overcrowding and overstretched facilities.

"Schools are a fountain of knowledge and nurture dreams. Enough of schools being a slaughter slab for promising children."

She urged the government to rise up to its responsibilities of protecting its citizens by intensifying awareness, hygiene practices and vaccination.

In Nigeria, no fewer than two million children are under-immunised, including those with zero-doses, the highest globally, highlighting the high risk of disease transmission.

Preventing the recurrence of diph-

theria outbreaks in Africa's most populous nation would require strengthened health systems, particularly through robust routine immunisation coverage and public sensitization, a General Physician, Dr Jonathan Esegie, asserted.

However, Mrs Victoria Araoye, a businesswoman, faulted the government's approach to public health communication, saying, "they're not being transparent.

"Public health issues shouldn't be shrouded in secrecy as being done in most Nigerian states, especially Lagos.

"Oftentimes the public only gets to hear about an outbreak if the media breaks the news or from viral social media posts, after that you will see government officials rushing to explain.

"It doesn't have to be this way because an informed society is an empowered one."

She added that timely risk communication played a critical role in informing, educating, and preventing panic which often drives mistrust, misinformation, and risky behaviour among the populace.

However, the Permanent Secretary, Lagos State Primary Health Care Board, Dr Ibrahim Mustafa, disclosed the state's efforts in intensifying routine immunisation against vaccine-preventable diseases, especially diphtheria to achieve herd immunity in communities.

"As we have seen in recent outbreaks, preparedness allows for rapid response when an emergency strikes."

Additionally, he identified adop-

tion of a multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder partnership approach to prevent recurrence of outbreak in the state.

He listed the stakeholders to include the Ministry of Education; Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs, Office of Education Quality Assurance, State Universal Education Board (SUBEB), religious and traditional rulers, and community development associations.

Mustafa, however, countered that the government's priority during an outbreak is to control the spread, and sharing information with the public helps people take necessary precautions to protect themselves.


Experts suggested that strengthening vaccination efforts, especially in areas with low immunisation coverage, enhancing surveillance and response systems, and fostering community engagement were essential steps to prevent the recurrence of outbreaks.

The experts emphasised that timely case detection, coordinated response, and clinical management remain critical to limiting transmission and reducing the high fatality rates observed in recent diphtheria outbreaks.

Additionally, they submitted that addressing vaccine hesitancy and improving access to healthcare services were vital.

By taking these steps in 2026, experts said that Nigeria would mitigate the transmission of diphtheria and protect its vulnerable populations.

(NAF Feature)

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**EFFECTIVE FROM FEBRUARY 1, 2023**

# FEATURE



THE 30 TRACTORS COMMISSIONED EQUIPMENT

## How Gov Okpebholo is setting Edo on path of responsible Agribusiness growth

Barely two months into his administration in December 2024, Governor Monday Okpebholo took a bold and strategic step to reposition Edo State's agricultural sector by signing an Executive Order establishing the Framework for Responsible and Inclusive Land-Intensive Agricultural Investments (FRILIA).

The framework underscores the administration's resolve to align agricultural expansion with internationally accepted best practices, while safeguarding the interests of host communities.

FRILIA provides a clear and transparent guide for land acquisition and resettlement for large-scale agribusiness investments, ensuring that such processes are conducted responsibly and inclusively.

While guaranteeing shared benefits between private investors and surrounding communities, the framework promotes harmony, reduces land-related conflicts, and strengthens investor confidence. It also reinforces Edo State's commitment to creating an enabling environment for responsible agribusiness operations as a key driver of economic development.

Beyond policy formulation, Governor Okpebholo has demonstrated strong political will in translating vision into action. In September, the state witnessed the official commissioning of farm machinery procured by the government to support mechanised agriculture.

The equipment was commissioned by the President of the Nigerian Senate, Distinguished Senator Godswill Obot Akpabio, highlighting the national significance of Edo State's agri-

cultural drive.

The commissioned equipment included 30 tractors, five bulldozers, and one low-bed trailer, critical assets expected to enhance land preparation, improve farm efficiency, and scale up production across the state. The investment reflects Governor Okpebholo's farmer-friendly posture and his determination to make agriculture attractive, modern, and profitable.

Further reinforcing this agenda, the administration reactivated state-owned farms, including the Udomi farm project, among others. These interventions are part of a broader strategy to revitalise dormant agricultural assets, attract private participation, and stimulate value-chain development across Edo State.

Reaffirming his commitment to agricultural expansion, Governor Okpebholo, upon assuming office, increased the agriculture allocation in the inherited budget, which stood at about N5 billion.

Presenting the 2026 budget to the Edo State House of Assembly, the governor outlined a dramatic scale-up in funding and outcomes in the sector.

He declared, "On agriculture, with the encouragement of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, GCFR, we expanded the agriculture budget from N6.9 billion to N57 billion. Over 400 hectares of farmland have been cultivated. Harvesting has begun across multiple farm clusters. We are fighting food insecurity with action, and not long speeches."

The impact of these reforms has also resonated strongly with local and international investors. Towards the end of the first year of his administration, Edo State recorded a landmark

achievement with the announcement of a \$100 million foreign direct investment (FDI) by SIAT and its parent company into Presco PLC's operations. The investment, described by the company's chairman as historic, is the first of its scale in Nigeria's agricultural sector.

The announcement followed a courtesy visit by Presco PLC's management team, led by the Chairman, Mr. Rasheed Sarumi, and the Managing Director, Mr. Raji George, to Government House, Benin City.

During the visit, Mr. Sarumi com-

mended Governor Okpebholo for providing a stable governance structure, improved security, and a conducive business environment that influenced SIAT's \$100 million investment decision.

He further noted that Nigeria received only \$250 million in total FDI within the year, making Presco's investment a significant contribution to both Edo State and the national economy.

Through the implementation of FRILIA, increased budgetary commitment, strategic mechanisation, revitalisation of state-owned farms,

and the attraction of record-breaking foreign investment, Governor Monday Okpebholo has positioned agriculture as a cornerstone of Edo State's SHINE agenda, which is a visionary roadmap that places Security, Health, Infrastructure, Natural Resources and Agriculture, and Education at the heart of Edo's transformation.

His administration's approach, anchored on responsibility, inclusiveness, and results, signals a new era of agribusiness growth focused on food security, job creation, and sustainable economic prosperity.

