

2027: No going back on our decision for Rivers —Wike

Minister of Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Nyesom Wike has said that there is no going back on the decision taken to restore power to Rivers people in the 2027 elections.

Wike said this during a “thank you visit” to Eleme Local Government Area of the state on Wednesday.

He said that that part of the

decision was to support President Bola Tinubu’s re-election for a second term and correct the leadership mistake at the state level.

The minister stated that no amount of money would change their course, adding, “We have done it before and we are going to do it again.”

“We are prepared; we have made a decision and we are not

going back, be strong. Nobody will intimidate us.”

He explained that the people who were entrusted with power in Rivers have been misled by money and power, stating that greed and lack of gratitude lead to downfall.

He said he was in Eleme to thank the people for standing firm with Tinubu, stressing that he had not taken their sup-

port for granted.

“In spite of all the troubles, Tinubu decided that I, a South-South person, should be the Minister of FCT. It has never happened before.

“Also, the ongoing development in this area has never happened before until Tinubu happened,” he said.

Earlier, Chief Aforji Igwe, rep-

resenting Eleme in Rivers House of Assembly, described Wike as a ‘fair, just and a man of integrity.’

Igwe pledged the support of Eleme people to the minister due to his outstanding support to the people.

Also, Chairman of Eleme Council, Chief Obarilormate Ollor, commended the minister for all the infrastructural inter-

ventions in the area during his time as governor of Rivers.

Ollor assured Wike that the people of the council area were with him and ready to go wherever he asked them to go.

He said that the people were already aware of his directive for the re-election of Tinubu but awaiting the directive for the governorship election in 2027.

The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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Oba of Benin disowns assault on Pedro Obaseki, urges youths to uphold rule of law

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Obi dumps LP for ADC as opposition realigns for 2027

● APC fires back

IBADAN

Nigeria’s opposition politics took a decisive turn on Wednesday as the Labour Party’s 2023 presidential candidate, Mr Peter Obi, formally defected to the African Democratic Congress (ADC), triggering fresh political realignments ahead of the 2027 general election and

drawing an angry response from the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC).

Obi announced his defection at a high-powered rally held at the Nike Lake Resort Hotel in Enugu, attended by prominent political leaders from the South-East and other regions of the country.

He said the decision followed months of consultations

and was aimed at building a broad-based opposition platform capable of “rescuing Nigeria” from what he described as poor governance, democratic decline and economic hardship under the APC.

Describing the move as the beginning of a new political journey, Obi said the ADC offered a credible vehicle for national renewal, inclusiveness and socio-economic development.

He accused some beneficiaries of democracy of aiding its

erosion through intimidation, coercion and suppression of opposition voices, warning that such practices must not be allowed to continue.

“Today is an important day. As the last day of 2025, we are ending this year with hope that in 2026, we will begin a genuine journey to reclaim our country and rebuild it on the principles of justice, fairness and inclusiveness,” Obi said.

The Enugu rally underscored the scale of the opposi-

tion realignment, with several heavyweight politicians publicly adopting the ADC.

Among them were former National Chairman of the Peoples Democratic Party, Dr Okwesilieze Nwodo; former Deputy Speaker of the House

of Representatives, Mr Eme-ka Ihedioha; former Imo State Governor, Mr Achike Udenwa and Senators Victor Umeh, Enyinnaya Abaribe, Sam Egwu, Tony Nwoye, Gilbert

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FG halts plans to cede 10,000 hectares of land to Cameroon

CALABAR

The Federal Government has halted plans to cede more than 10,000 hectares of Nigerian land to neighbouring Cameroon, following concerns over improper boundary demarcation.

The lawmaker representing Ikom/Boki Federal Constituency, Mr Victor Abang, disclosed this during a constituency briefing on Wednesday at Keyang II in Boki Local Government Area of Cross River State.

Abang said the proposed cession was linked to the 2002 International Court of Justice ruling, which stipulated that the Nigeria-Cameroon boundary be defined in line with the 1913 Anglo-German Treaty.

He explained that a joint implementation committee attempted to demarcate the boundary without due regard to established colonial boundary features, including Pillar 113A, a recognised demarcation point between both countries.

According to him, failure to

observe the historic boundary would have resulted in the loss of more than 10,000 hectares of Nigerian territory, including parts of Biajua and Danare communities in Boki.

Abang said he presented a motion on the matter on July 5, 2023, which was deliberated upon by the House of Representatives, leading to the suspension of the exercise pending a comprehensive review.

The lawmaker also presented a two-year scorecard titled, “The Banjuere,” highlighting projects such as a mini stadium, telecommunications masts linking 35 communities, and N300 million worth of medical equipment.

He further disclosed that he sponsored the National Park Service Amendment Bill, aimed at environmental conservation and the establishment of the Okwangwo National Park Unit as an independent entity.

Abang said the bill was expected to enhance the economic, ecological and developmental value of the Boki forest and its surrounding communities



DECORATING THE PPRO:

L-R: Commissioner of Police, Rivers State Police Command, Olugbenga Adepoju; Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), SP Grace Iringe-Koko and Deputy Commissioner of Police of the command, DCP Samuel Erale, decorating the PPRO to the rank of Chief Superintendent of Police (CSP) in Port Harcourt on Tuesday.

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Edo CP decorates 42 newly promoted officers with new ranks, leads security review

BENIN CITY

The Commissioner of Police in Edo State, Mr Monday Agbonika, has decorated 42 officers recently promoted to higher ranks across various units and formations of the command.

The command's Public Relations Officer, Assistant Superintendent of Police Eno Ikoedem, disclosed this to newsmen in Benin City on Wednesday.

Ikoedem said three Chief Superintendents of Police were promoted and decorated with the ranks of Assistant Com-

missioners of Police, while 39 Superintendents of Police were elevated to the ranks of Chief Superintendents of Police.

Congratulating the officers, she said Mr Agbonika described the promotions as well deserved and urged the beneficiaries to see their new ranks as a call to higher responsibility, discipline, professionalism and renewed commitment to service.

The police chief said promotion came with increased public trust and accountability, stressing that the officers must

uphold the core values of the Nigeria Police Force, respect human rights and remain resolute in protecting lives and property in the state.

"The confidence reposed in you must be justified through integrity, professionalism and dedication to duty," he said.

Speaking on behalf of the newly decorated officers, Assistant Commissioner of Police Matthew Kalu expressed gratitude to the Inspector-General of Police, Mr Kayode Egbetokun, the Police Service Com-

mission and the Edo State Police Command for the trust placed in them.

Kalu assured the police leadership that the promoted officers would justify the confidence reposed in them and discharge their responsibilities diligently.

Ikoedem explained that the decoration ceremony was followed by the command's end-of-month conference, during which the Commissioner of Police reviewed the security situation in the state.

While assessing operational

performance for the month, Mr Agbonika also issued strategic directives to Area Commanders, Divisional Police Officers and heads of tactical units.

She added that the conference provided a platform to address emerging security challenges and outline operational priorities for the coming month, while reaffirming the command's commitment to professionalism and effective policing.

Residents were assured of sustained efforts to maintain peace and security in Edo State.

Relief materials distributed to disaster victims in C'River communities

CALABAR

The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) has urged flood-affected communities to adopt improved environmental practices and disaster risk reduction, describing it as a new national response paradigm.

Mrs Zubaida Umar, NEMA Director-General, gave the charge on Wednesday while distributing relief materials to victims in Ogoja and Yala Local Government Areas, Cross River State.

Represented by Mr Victor Akpakpan, Head of Relief and Rehabilitation, Uyo Operations Office, Umar said prevention and preparedness must guide community responses to recurring climate-related disasters.

She said, "Responsible waste disposal, drainage maintenance and early warnings will reduce losses and save lives when floods

strike our communities."

Umar sympathized with affected residents, explaining that the intervention aimed to cushion flood impacts recorded earlier this year and support recovery across the devastated communities.

Beneficiaries were seen departing distribution centres with assorted food items, expressing relief as assistance reached households struggling after months of displacement and livelihood disruption.

Mr Godwin Offiono, representing Ogoja/Yala Federal Constituency, thanked the Federal Government and NEMA, saying the support was "deeply appreciated by our people."

Offiono said the constituency suffered severe flooding during the rainy season, destroying homes, roads and farmlands, and worsening food insecurity for vulnerable rural families.



PRODA 2025 END OF YEAR:

L-R: Director, Industrial Promotion, Information Documentation, Projects Development Institute (PRODA), Ven. Angus Nnatu; Director, Human Resources, PRODA, Ms Chinyere Iwaegbute; Director, Engineering, Research, Development and Production, Prof. Boniface Ugwuishiwu and Chief Executive Officer PRODA, Dr Peter Okwudilichukwu-Ogbobe during PRODA 2025 End of Year Party in Enugu.

Obi dumps LP for ADC as opposition...

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Nnaji and Ben Obi, alongside serving and former members of the National Assembly.

Other notable figures present included, Chief Onyema Ugochukwu, Mrs Josephine Anenih, former Senate President and ADC National Chairman, Senator David Mark, and former Sokoto State Governor, Senator Aminu Tambuwal, lending weight to the party's ambition to forge a truly national opposition coalition.

Senator Ben Obi said South-East leaders had resolved that their collective political future was best pursued within the ADC, calling on other opposition parties and political actors to collapse their structures into the platform in the interest of national unity and effective opposition.

The defection immediately provoked a sharp reaction from the APC, which accused Obi of hypocrisy and political inconsistency.

In a statement issued by its Lagos State spokesman, Mr Seye Oladejo, the ruling party said Obi's move stripped him of the moral authority on which he built his political brand, alleging that Obi had embraced the same political establishment he previously criticised.

According to the APC, Obi's defection confirmed what it described as a pattern of "political promiscuity masquerading as principle," adding that the ADC

coalition was driven more by personal ambition and convenience than by ideas or ideology.

The party also accused the emerging coalition of silence on terrorism and violent extremism, insisting that such silence was dangerous and unacceptable.

The APC maintained that President Bola Tinubu's administration remained focused on governance, economic stabilisation and institutional rebuilding under the Renewed Hope Agenda, expressing confidence that Nigerians would reject opposition alliances lacking clear programmes and credibility.

Meanwhile, a youth groups, The Nigerian Youths for Atiku aligned with the opposition, hailed Obi's defection as a signal of deeper political shifts ahead of 2027.

The group said that the next general election would witness "unusual political developments," fuelled by changing alliances and increased participation by youths and women disillusioned with the status quo.

Its Director General, Mr Dare Dada, said the ADC coalition was bigger than individual personalities such as Obi or former Vice President Atiku Abubakar, noting that it now comprised multiple political blocs with nationwide reach.

He argued that growing political consciousness among Nigerians could reshape electoral outcomes, warning that familiar political calculations might no longer hold.

Oba of Benin disowns assault on Pedro Obaseki, urges youths to uphold rule of law

IDAHOUSA MUSA

BENIN CITY

The Benin Traditional Council (BTC) has disassociated the Oba of Benin, His Royal Majesty, Omo N'Oba N'Edo Uku Akpolokpolo, Ewuare II, CFR, from the recent assault on Pedro Obaseki, describing the incident as unauthorised and completely alien to the values of the revered Benin throne.

In a public announcement issued from the Oba of Benin Palace on Wednesday, December 31, 2025, the Council

stressed that the incident was neither sanctioned nor could it ever be sanctioned by the Oba, noting that violence, intimidation and mob action run contrary to the character, principles and long-standing traditions of the monarch.

According to the statement, the Oba of Benin remains a peace-loving father to all, committed to harmony, justice, unity and the preservation of law and order within the Benin Kingdom and beyond.

The Council emphasised that any suggestion or impression that the palace endorsed or approved

the use of violence is false, misleading and unfounded.

The BTC used the opportunity to strongly caution youths across the kingdom against taking the law into their own hands, regardless of provocation, warning that such actions threaten public peace and undermine established legal and security processes.

"Youths are advised to always respect the laws of the land in their actions and utterances, and to allow appropriate security agencies to handle all matters," the statement said, while reaffirming confidence in lawful in-

stitutions to address grievances.

The Council also admonished social media users to exercise restraint and responsibility, urging them to verify information before sharing, in order to prevent the spread of falsehoods capable of inflaming tensions or tarnishing reputations.

As the year draws to a close, the Oba of Benin extended goodwill messages to the people, wishing them a peaceful and prosperous New Year, while reaffirming his unwavering commitment to unity, peace and the wellbeing of the people of the kingdom.

Bauchi gov assents N877bn 2026 Appropriation Bill

BAUCHI

The Governor of Bauchi State, Mr Bala Mohammed, on Wednesday assented to the N877 billion 2026 Appropriation Bill.

Mr Mohammed had on November 27 presented a proposed N878 billion budget to the Bauchi State House of Assembly for approval.

The lawmakers on Tuesday passed the estimate tagged Budget of Consolidation and Sustainability.

The governor lauded the legislators for their commitment, effective scrutiny and timely

passage of the budget, noting that his assent lawfully activated the implementation of the 2026 budget from January 1, 2026.

"When I presented the budget proposal to the House, the Speaker assured the executive and the people of the state that the proposal would receive timely, objective and thorough consideration without compromising legislative independence.

"I am pleased to state that the House has once again fulfilled that assurance, and I commend the Speaker and other honourable members for their diligence, professionalism and sense of duty," Mr Mohammed said.

He described the legislative process as robust, noting that government agencies were invited, interrogated and carefully assessed in line with best democratic practices rather than partisan considerations.

The Speaker of the House, Mr Abubakar Sulaiman, said lawmakers conducted a thorough review of the revenue projections, capital and recurrent expenditures, and prioritised strategic sectors critical to job creation, security, infrastructure and social welfare.

He said the legislature observed that the Internally Generated Revenue projection ap-

peared unrealistic.

"Our analysis, considering the state's revenue performance from January to September 2025, which currently stands at 75 percent, still raises concern about the realism of the projected figure for 2026," he said.

Mr Sulaiman also noted that the proposed tax reforms by the Federal Government of Nigeria were expected to have an adverse impact on the state's internally generated revenue.

"This therefore warranted careful consideration, leading to the reduction of the budget size from N878 billion to N877 billion," he added.

2026: Jonathan tasks leaders on integrity, citizens on patriotism

ABUJA

Former President Goodluck Jonathan has called on Nigerian leaders at all levels to anchor their governance in service, humility, and integrity as the nation enters the year 2026.

Jonathan, in a 2026 new year

message he personally issued on Wednesday in Abuja, also tasked citizens on patriotism.

"As we move forward into 2026, let us renew our commitment to the ideals that bind us together as one people.

"Patriotism must be matched with a renewed sense of duty by citizens and leaders alike.

"Leadership at all levels must be anchored in service, guided by humility, integrity, and a sincere commitment to the welfare of the people.

"It is through shared responsibility, mutual respect, and steadfast dedication to the national interest that Nigeria can continue on the path toward

stability and inclusive development," Jonathan said.

He described the turn of the year as a moment for both "hope and reflection" noting that the period behind had not been without its trials.

He said that as a nation and as individuals, Nigerians had confronted economic pres-

ures and persistent insecurity; challenges that had tested their resilience and, for many families, brought hardship and loss.

"These experiences remind us of the responsibility we bear toward one another and the importance of people-oriented leadership.

"Yet, even in these difficult circumstances, the enduring character of the Nigerian people has remained evident.

"Across our communities, we have continued to see courage, solidarity, and a quiet determination to persevere.

"Our shared values, our diversity, and our collective belief in a better tomorrow have sustained us through uncertainty.

"This spirit of resilience is one of our nation's greatest strengths. It is the foundation upon which unity, peace, and lasting progress must continue to be built," Jonathan said.

The former president, wishing all Nigerians and their families a peaceful, healthy, and fulfilling year ahead, prayed that Nigeria would advance steadily toward unity, justice, and shared prosperity.



2025 AYINKE ALAGBO CULTURAL DAY:

Commissioner for Culture and Tourism, Oyo State, Dr, Wasiu Olatunbosun (L), with Chairman, Ayinke Alagbo Herbal Trado Medical, Dr Ayinke Bello, during the 2025 Ayinke Alagbo Cultural Day organised by Ayinke Alagbo Herbal Trado Medical, in collaboration with the State Commission of Culture and Tourism in Ibadan.

Court orders arrest of Ondo Commissioner for allegedly assaulting magistrate

AKURE

An Akure Magistrates' Court on Wednesday ordered the arrest and remand of the Ondo State Commissioner for Women Affairs, Seun Osamaye, for allegedly assaulting a Chief Magistrate, Mrs Temitope Alphonso.

The commissioner was charged with assault.

The prosecutor, Insp. Suleiman Adebayo alleged that the assault occurred at the premises of the Ondo State Ministry of Women Affairs, Igbatoro Road,

Alagbaka, while the chief magistrate was on an official engagement with the ministry's official.

In an affidavit attached to the charge, the commissioner was alleged to have verbally abused and physically assaulted the chief magistrate during the engagement.

The affidavit stated that the incident followed a judgment delivered by the chief magistrate which was not favourable to the commissioner.

The commissioner who was represented by her counsel, Mr A.K Adewusi, informed the

court that she was receiving medical treatment at an hospital in Ilara-Mokin, Ifedore Local Government area of the state.

The defence counsel requested a stand-down of the case to allow time to present evidence of the defendant's hospitalisation.

Magistrate Damilola Sekoni stood down the matter for one and a half hours.

Upon resumption, a medical report was presented by the defence counsel.

However, the prosecuting counsel challenged the authen-

ticity of the medical report.

In his ruling, Sekoni, rejected the medical report, describing it as "unsatisfactory," saying that the report failed to confirm that the commissioner was on admission in the hospital or medically unfit to attend court.

He said that the purported medical document did not include key details such as the date and time of admission.

Citing what he described as disregard for the court, Sekoni ordered that the commissioner should be arrested and remanded in a correctional facility.

He, therefore, adjourned the case until January 12 for further hearing.

IPAC calls for correction of gazetted tax laws

ABUJA

Inter-Party Advisory Council (IPAC) has urged the Federal Government to address the discrepancies between the tax laws passed by lawmakers and the gazetted version.

National Chairman of IPAC, Alhaji Yusuf Dantalle, in a statement on Wednesday in Abuja, said that resolving the matter in national interest was essential for credibility and rule of law.

According to him, what is worth doing is worth doing well, urging strict adherence to the rule of law by all elected officials.

Dantalle urged INEC to adequately prepare for the 2027 general elections and ensure a level-playing field for all political parties to enhance transparent, credible and peaceful processes.

He also called on the electoral body to maintain neutrality, conduct test runs and avoid glitches capable of undermining public confidence in future elections.

The IPAC national chairman enjoined on politicians to embrace issue-based politics,

shun violence and vote buying, and promote peaceful democratic competition across all levels of government.

He called for active participation by Nigerians in the upcoming FCT polls, including Ekiti and Osun governorship contests and the 2027 general elections.

While calling for patriotism, unity and collective responsibility, Dantalle urged citizens to strengthen democracy and improve national life in the coming year peacefully.

According to him, nation building requires collective efforts, adding that every citizen has a role in promoting peace, justice and prosperity.

Dantalle reaffirmed IPAC's commitment to working with INEC and other stakeholders to deepen democracy, ensure credible elections and strengthen national stability.

He stressed the need for prayers for democracy, security and development in the new year, encouraging optimism and confidence in Nigeria's future.

Oyo Police arrest suspect over alleged desecration of grave

IBADAN

The Police Command in Oyo State has arrested a 30-year-old suspect for allegedly tampering with a grave in the Itesiwaju area of Ibadan.

The Command's spokesman, DSP Ayanlade Olayinka in a statement on Wednesday said a resident of the community reported the incident to the police on December 24 at 3:00 p.m.

Olayinka said that residents of the community sighted the suspect near a grave in the compound at about 1:03 p.m. on the same day and raised an alarm.

"Upon the alarm being raised, occupants of the house came out and discovered a dried human head beside a bathroom, while further checks revealed that the grave of a deceased landlady within the compound had been tampered with.

"The suspect, was sighted at the scene before the alarm was

raised, after which he reportedly jumped over the fence and fled," Olayinka said.

The PPRO said that police operatives promptly visited the scene of crime when it was reported and were able to arrest the suspect, who had earlier fled the scene.

He said that the suspect had been cooperating with the Police investigation to unravel the intention and purpose of the act.

Olayinka said that the Commissioner of Police, Mr Olufemi Haruna, appreciated members of the public for their timely information.

Meanwhile the command has reminded the public that the ban on the use of fireworks remains in force and should not be used to usher in the new year.

The PPRO warned that miscreants and men of the underworld could exploit the celebrations of the new year with fireworks as cover for their nefarious acts.

FCT poll: Court warns INEC against disregarding order on LP's candidates

ABUJA

An Abuja High Court has warned the Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Prof. Joash Amupitan, against disregarding its orders directing the recognition of all Labour Party (LP)'s candidates for the forthcoming FCT area council election.

Justice J. O. E. Adeyemi-Ajayi had, on Dec. 16, ordered INEC to grant the LP access code to enable it to upload the names and particulars of its nominated candidates for the poll.

However, the warning came following alleged refusal of the commission to comply with the court order.

The warning is contained in a document labeled "Form 48," with the caption: "Notice of Consequences of Disobedience of Order of this Honourable Court Made of the 16th Day of December 2025."

The document, issued by the court's registrar on December 29, a copy of which was sighted by newsmen in Abuja on Wednesday, is addressed to the INEC chairman in person.

Part of it reads: "Take notice that unless you obey the directions contained in this attached court order to wit: "An interim injunction is hereby granted directing the defendant (the commission) to grant access code to the claimant/applicant to upload the names and particulars of their nominated candidates for

the FCT Area Council election scheduled to hold in February by the defendant (the commission) within 48 hours pending the hearing of the motion on notice.

"An interim injunction is hereby granted directing the defendant (the commission) to upload the names and particulars of the claimant/applicant's nominated candidates for public scrutiny within 48 hours pending the hearing and determination of the motion notice.

"And take further notice that you will be guilty of contempt of court and will be liable to be committed to Nigerian Correctional Center."

Justice Adeyemi-Ajayi had issued the said orders while ruling on an ex parte motion

for interim injunctions filed by the LP and moved by its lawyer, Christian Elom.

The judge then adjourned until Jan. 27, 2026, for the hearing of the motion on notice.

The motion, marked: M/16037/2025 was filed by the LP along with the substantive suit, marked: FCT/HC/CV/4930/2025, which had INEC listed as the sole defendant/respondent.

The LP, in an affidavit in support of the motion, averred that it chose to approach the court after INEC allegedly failed to publish the names of its candidates for the February 2026 council elections as required, despite being duly notified.

NEWS

NDDC seeks Reps' approval for N1.74tn 2025 budget

ABUJA

The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) has presented its 2025 budget estimate of N1.74 trillion to the House of Representatives for consideration and approval.

The Managing Director of the commission, Mr Samuel Ogbuku, presented the budget to the House Committee on NDDC in Abuja, describing it as a "Budget of Consolidation."

Ogbuku said the proposed sum was based on revenue assumptions that represent a nine per cent decrease from the 2024 budget, driven largely by a no-borrowing approach.

According to him, N47.5 billion has been earmarked for personnel costs, while N96.4 billion is allocated for overhead expenditure.

"For the 2025 budget, our main goal is to strengthen our foundation for sustainable economic growth, marking a shift from transactional to transformational approaches.

"A key focus is sectoral funding allocation, moving away from line-item budgeting that hinders contractors from resuming projects," he said.

Ogbuku noted that investment in critical infrastructure formed a major component of the commission's fiscal strategy for 2025.

"The present management is re-navigating its intervention process by adopting a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model as a vehicle to drive sustainable development in the Niger Delta region.

"Our fiscal reforms shall introduce a new performance management framework to regulate overhead costs," he added.

In her remarks, the Chairman of the House Committee on NDDC, Rep. Henrietta Ibori (PDP-Delta State), said that the importance of the commission's budget could not be over-emphasised.

According to her, the NDDC budget remains the principal vehicle through which the Federal Government delivers meaningful development to the people of the Niger Delta.

"For our communities, this budget represents hope, opportunity and the promise of a better quality of life.

"As a committee, we recognise that our duty goes beyond mere approval. It is our responsibility to subject this budget to rigorous scrutiny to ensure that every allocation translates into tangible outcomes for the people, particularly in infrastructure development, human capacity development, youth empowerment and economic inclusion," she said.

Ibori stressed that the 2025 NDDC budget would not be business as usual, noting that it would be people-centred and strategically aligned with the Renewed Hope Agenda of the Federal Government.

"This budget must speak directly to the aspirations of the Niger Delta people by addressing longstanding developmental gaps, fostering sustainable growth and ensuring that no community

is left behind," she said.

She pledged the committee's

commitment to providing constructive support to the commis-

sion, while insisting on accountability, transparency and value for

money in the execution of approved projects and programmes.



INSTALLATION OF THE MAYEGUN:

Olofa of Ofa-Igboland, Oba Adeboye Oyelowo (L), presenting certificate to the Chairman, Lawaj Group and Publisher of Ibadan Media Ltd and newly installed Mayegun of Ofa land, Olalekan Olanrewaju-Ola, during the installation of Olalekan Olanrewaju-Ola as the Mayegun of Ofa-Igboland at the Place of Olofa Ofa-Igbo in Lagelu Local Government Area of Oyo.

Lagos Chamber of Commerce urges consolidation of 2025 reforms, structural fixes in 2026

LAGOS

The Lagos Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) has urged the Federal Government to consolidate the gains of its 2025 economic reforms and address structural bottlenecks hindering inclusive growth in 2026.

The President of the chamber, Mr Leye Kupoluyi, gave the advice in a statement issued on Wednesday in Lagos.

He described 2025 as a year marked by tough reforms, economic resilience and cautious stabilisation, characterised by modest growth recovery, constrained fiscal execution and rising concerns over debt sustainability.

Kupoluyi said that although Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth strengthened

during the year, budget implementation was affected by transition-related execution pressures, while public debt dynamics continued to pose risks to fiscal resilience.

He listed major economic actions in 2025 to include GDP rebasing, Nigeria's exit from the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) grey list, an over-subscribed Eurobond issuance and the introduction of tax and fiscal reforms.

On the real sector, he noted that the expansion of domestic crude oil refining capacity, led by the Dangote Refinery, significantly reduced fuel import dependence, eased pressure on foreign exchange and influenced inflation dynamics.

However, Kupoluyi said Nigerian businesses continued to face significant challenges.

"In 2025, businesses grappled with high inflation, persistent foreign exchange volatility, widespread insecurity, high energy and logistics costs, inconsistent policies and multiple taxation.

"Economic growth showed only marginal improvement and remained insufficient to lift incomes or meaningfully reduce poverty.

"The 2025 budget also fell short of delivering the scale and quality of fiscal stimulus required to support recovery, while public debt remained a major concern," he said.

Kupoluyi said the focus in 2026 should be on consolidating reform gains while addressing structural constraints to inclusive growth.

He stressed the need for sustained coordination between fiscal and monetary authorities

to entrench disinflation and gradually ease interest rates to unlock private sector credit and stimulate investment.

He also urged attention to food supply chains through improved security, targeted agricultural support and better rural infrastructure.

According to him, confidence in the foreign exchange market should be strengthened through export diversification, support for non-oil exporters and the sustenance of transparent, market-driven foreign exchange policies.

Kupoluyi further called on the government to prioritise infrastructure development, particularly in power, transport and logistics, through public-private partnerships, to reduce the cost of doing business and enhance competitiveness.

Lagos CP declares state no-go area for criminal elements

LAGOS

The Commissioner of Police, Lagos State Command, Mr Olohundare Jimoh, has declared the state a 'No-Go' area for criminal elements following months of sustained security operations.

Jimoh made the declaration on Wednesday while addressing journalists during a Show of Force exercise in Lagos.

He said the operation, which commenced in September, involved daily patrols across major roads, residential areas and strategic locations in the state.

According to him, the initiative had yielded positive results, with no major crime recorded during the period.

Jimoh explained that the show of force was conducted to boost the morale of police personnel and reassure residents and visitors of the police's readiness to protect lives and property, particularly during the Christmas and New Year festivities.

"The Christmas celebrations were peaceful, including festivals that had not been held for several years.

"Thousands of events held across the state were successfully secured by the police," he said.

The commissioner said the command ensured adequate deployment of officers and tactical teams across Lagos, including inward and outward routes, to prevent criminal infiltration.

He added that security operations were extended to neighbouring Ogun State to secure entry points into Lagos.

According to him, special tactical units and marine police teams were deployed to riverine areas in collaboration with relevant agencies to ensure comprehensive security coverage.

Addressing concerns over arrests during festive events, Jimoh said police actions were guided strictly by law, noting that funfair activities were allowed as long as they did not constitute criminal acts.

He assured residents that there was no breakdown of law and order during the celebrations and that heightened security operations would continue beyond the festive period into January.

Jimoh reaffirmed the commitment of the Nigeria Police Force to community-oriented policing and the maintenance of peace and security across Lagos State.

PDP appoints caretaker c'ttees in C'River, A'Ibom

ABUJA

The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) has constituted State Caretaker Committees for its Cross River State and Akwa Ibom State chapters, as part of efforts to strengthen interim leadership structures pending fresh congresses.

The party disclosed this in a statement issued on Wednesday by its National Publicity Secretary, Mr Ini Ememobong, following deliberations at the party's national secretariat in Abuja.

The caretaker committees were approved by the National Working Committee, on behalf of the National Executive Committee, pursuant to Section 29(2)(b) of the PDP Constitution, 2025 (as amended).

For Cross River State, Mr Bassey Ewa was appointed Chairman, with Dr Bassey Adim as Secretary and Mr Emmanuel Ekpe as Administrative Secretary.

Other members include Dr Joe Edet, Mr Udie Mike, Dr Lynne Bassey, Mr Etim Okon, Mr Ankot Cohbom, Mr Ofana Odo, Dr Onun Unoh, Mr Ebaye Akunjom and Mr Godswill Obindim.

Also appointed are Mr Edem Ekong, Mr Raymond Abo, Mr Moses Bisuakefe, Mr Agabi Oko, Mr Walter Esom,

Mr Ekpo Asuquo and Pastor Victor Takon.

For Akwa Ibom State, the party appointed Mr Igwat Umoren as Chairman, Mr Harrison Ekpo as Deputy Chairman, Mr Borono Bassey as Secretary, Mr Ewa Okpo as Publicity Secretary and Mr Uduak Essien as Organising Secretary.

Other officials include Mr Aniekan Asuquo as Youth Leader, Mrs Mary Abara as Women Leader and Mr Enoch Enoch as Legal Adviser.

Members of the committee include Mr Aniebet Cornelius, Mr Udim Peters, Mr Ayanime Obot, Mr Ofon Michael, Mr Mandu Effiong, Mr David Umanah, Mr Usenmfon Ib-

anga, Mr Unwana Assam, Mr Obong Ogbuji and Mr Kufre Umoh.

Additional members are Mr Emibana Ubolum, Mr Gregory Etim, Mr Iberedem Asamamnyie, Mr Mtom Ben, Mr Inio-bong Ukwak, Mr Emmanuel Umah, Mrs Ekaette Philips, Mr Effiong Bassey, Mr Effiong Onukak, Mr Ime Okwong, Mrs Kate Atabia, Mr David Ibanga and Mr Ukoette Ukoette.

Ememobong said the committees would manage party affairs in both states for a period not exceeding three months, or until new executives are elected, in line with Section 21(2)(a-b) of the party's constitution.

Expert urges FG to prioritise transparency in power sector reforms

LAGOS

An energy expert, Dr Olukayode Akinrolabu, has urged the Federal Government to prioritise transparency and clear communication in the implementation of power sector reforms, saying that openness is critical to restoring confidence and achieving sustainable progress.

Akinrolabu gave the advice in an interview with journalists on Wednesday in Lagos while

assessing Nigeria's power sector outlook for 2026.

He stressed that transparent policies, clear timelines and regular communication on reforms and achievements would help to build trust among stakeholders and consumers.

Chairman of the Customer Consultative Forum for Festac and Satellite Town, Akinrolabu also called on the government to strengthen revenue collection mechanisms and gradually reduce subsidies, noting that

financial sustainability remains a major challenge in the sector.

He emphasised the need for active engagement with stakeholders, including the private sector and international partners, to accelerate reforms and attract investment.

"While Nigeria's power sector outlook for 2026 is promising, it is not without obvious challenges.

"Significant improvements are achievable if all grey areas are properly addressed," he said.

Akinrolabu identified inadequate gas supply as a critical constraint, despite Nigeria's vast gas reserves, attributing the shortfall to infrastructure

gaps and security challenges.

He urged the government to boost gas production to meet the demands of power generation companies.

The expert also underscored the importance of upgrading transmission infrastructure to reduce losses and improve electricity delivery nationwide.

According to him, improved metering, reduced energy theft and enhanced revenue collection are essential for the sector's survival.

"The sector must be rid of bad eggs facilitating internal sabotage.

"Saboteurs must be eliminated for meaningful progress

to take place," he said.

On expectations for industry operators, Akinrolabu urged distribution companies to improve billing efficiency, reduce technical losses and enhance customer service.

He advised generation companies to increase generation capacity, optimise gas utilisation and address persistent maintenance challenges.

Highlighting the government's role, he called for incentives for gas production, stronger security measures around critical infrastructure and increased investment in gas facilities.

Akinrolabu also called for stricter enforcement of performance metrics for distribution companies and further reforms

to improve efficiency.

He tasked the Transmission Company of Nigeria with investing in infrastructure upgrades and maintenance to reduce outages, while calling for stronger regulatory oversight to ensure transparency and accountability across the value chain.

As part of broader recommendations, Akinrolabu encouraged the government to explore renewable energy sources such as solar and wind to complement gas-based generation.

He also advocated increased private sector participation, market diversification, improved customer experience, reduced outages and comprehensive metering backed by sound demographic planning.



BOOK LAUNCH:

L-R: Committee Chairman of the book launch, Dr Jonathan Francis; Author and President, Nigerian Society of Engineers (NSE), Margaret Oguntala and Director, Membership Services, NSE, Mr Babatunde Odunlami, during a book launch on Grace-Filled Footprints, titled: 'Chronicle of the Exploits of Margaret Oguntala' in Lagos.

FG/IFAD LIFE-ND to boost value chain from production to export

ABUJA

The Federal Government, in partnership with the International Fund for Agricultural Development, says its LIFE-ND project will support end-to-end value chain development from production to export readiness across the Niger Delta.

Dr Abiodun Sanni, National Project Coordinator for FG/NDDC/IFAD LIFE-ND, gave the assurance on Wednesday in Abuja during New Year commemorations, reiterating the project's commitment to rural economic transformation and inclusive agribusiness in the region.

"Our vision for 2026 is to transform the rural economy in the Niger Delta, ensuring prosperity and equitable benefits for the rural population through sustainable agribusi-

ness and value addition across commodity lines," he said.

Sanni said the project would create an enabling environment for innovative beneficiaries and agribusinesses, supporting initiatives that contribute to food security while driving inclusive economic growth and improved livelihoods for local communities.

He highlighted strategic priorities for the year, including scaling up the incubation model, strengthening business development services and improving access to finance, warehouse facilities, warm and cold chain logistics, and collective marketing opportunities.

Sanni said the project would promote sustainable and climate-resilient agricultural practices by encouraging agro-ecology, water-use efficiency, soil health and reduced post-harvest losses.

Otti insists he will remain in Labour Party

UMUAHIA

Governor Alex Otti of Abia State has reaffirmed his commitment to the Labour Party, saying he will not defect alongside Mr Peter Obi, but will remain to help the party resolve its challenges.

Governor Otti made the assertion at the Government House in Umuahia on Wednesday during the December edition of his Monthly Media Chat with journalists in Abia State, titled, "Governor

Otti Speaks with Abia People."

The governor explained that he joined the party before Obi and stressed that his political future was firmly rooted in the Labour Party, regardless of Obi's decisions.

"I am not leaving the Labour Party; my responsibility is to stay and contribute to fixing whatever problems exist," he said.

Governor Otti announced that construction of the state's proposed Medical City would begin in 2026, noting that the delay was to ensure that invest-

mentors did not shortchange the state.

He said significant work was ongoing across health institutions, including the Abia State University Teaching Hospital in Aba, to improve access to healthcare.

Governor Otti acknowledged that Primary Healthcare Centres in the state were still underutilised due to citizens' longstanding distrust of the system.

"It will take some time for people to believe in the Primary Healthcare Centres, given

that they were non-functional for many years, but gradually trust will be rebuilt as people see improvements," he assured.

The governor further disclosed that he had directed the payment of all sacked personnel from Ogbonnaya Onu Polytechnic and Abia State University.

He said no one should still be owed and urged any unpaid staff to present themselves to the institutions' authorities for verification and submission of account details.

Network urges unity against violent extremism in Jigawa

DUTSE

The Jigawa State chapter of the Partnership Against Violent Extremism Network has urged residents to unite against violent extremism in order to sustain the prevailing peace in the state.

The call was made by the state Chairman of the network, Mr Misbahu Basirka, during a press conference on Wednesday in Dutse, the Jigawa State capital.

Basirka said the appeal was necessary to prevent spillover effects of violent extremism

from other parts of the country into Jigawa State.

He noted that the North-West region continued to face evolving and interconnected security threats, including violent extremism, banditry, organised criminal networks and cross-border security pressures.

According to him, although Jigawa State has remained relatively stable compared to neighbouring states, porous borders and regional dynamics mean that no state is immune to security spillovers.

Basirka explained that assessments showed such threats were

driven by factors including the proliferation of armed non-state actors, banditry, kidnapping, youth unemployment, rural economic marginalisation and weak community resilience systems.

He stressed that these realities demonstrated that security responses alone were insufficient, adding that sustainable peace required preventive, inclusive and community-driven approaches, which formed the core mandate of the Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism framework.

The chairman called on tradi-

tional and religious leaders to intensify efforts at promoting peace, tolerance and social cohesion across communities in the state.

He also urged youth and women groups to take the lead in resilience-building initiatives and in promoting positive counter-narratives against violent extremism.

Basirka further called on ministries, departments and agencies, as well as local government authorities, to mainstream Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism strategies into their policies, plans and budgets.

Kosofe unveils Lagos' first LG ambulance bay

LAGOS

Kosofe Local Government Area in Lagos State has unveiled the first government-owned ambulance bay in the state with the commissioning of the Ogudu Ambulance Bay.

The Chairman of Kosofe Local Government Area, Mr Moyosore Ogunlewe, disclosed this in a statement on Wednesday in Lagos.

Ogunlewe described the facility as a critical intervention aimed at improving emergency medical response at the grassroots.

He said the local government provided the land and necessary support for the development of the facility by the Lagos State Government.

"We made the space available and ensured full cooperation because the safety and health of our people remain a top priority," he said.

Ogunlewe noted that the

ambulance bay would help address delays often experienced during medical emergencies.

"Many lives are lost due to late response. With this ambulance bay, emergency cases can now be attended to faster, especially within Kosofe and its environs," he said.

The chairman pledged that the council would procure a fully equipped ambulance to strengthen the facility's operations.

"Beyond hosting the ambulance bay, we are committed to complementing the state's effort by providing a fully equipped ambulance to further boost service delivery," he said.

According to him, the project reflects effective collaboration between the state and local governments in delivering people-oriented infrastructure.

"This is what governance should be about - partnership, shared responsibility and practical solutions that directly impact the lives of residents," Ogunlewe said.

NEWS

Suspension of Kano NNPP chairman misplaced, undemocratic —Spokesman

ABUJA

The National Working Committee of the New Nigeria People's Party on Wednesday condemned the purported suspension of the party's Kano State Chairman, Mr Hashimu Dungurawa, describing it as misplaced, undemocratic, null and void.

The party, in a statement issued by its National Publicity Secretary, Mr Ladipo Johnson,

in Abuja, said the purported suspension was of no effect whatsoever.

Johnson said that some questionable executive members of the party in Gargari Ward, Dawakin Tofa Local Government Area of Kano State, allegedly announced Dungurawa's suspension.

He said the action amounted to gross anti-party activity and violated the provisions of the party's constitution.

Johnson described Dungurawa as a conscientious, hard-

working and dutiful chairman whose leadership and perfor-

mance had been remarkable, contributing significantly to

the progress of the party in the state.

2025: Ebonyi Fire Service records 83 incidents

ABAKALIKI

The Ebonyi State Fire Service Command has said that it recorded 83 fire incidents between January and December 2025.

Mr Raphael Ibiom, Director of the command, disclosed this in an interview with journalists on Wednesday in Abakaliki.

Ibiom said some of the incidents were caused by electrical faults, carelessness and other factors that could not be ascertained.

He said the fire outbreaks occurred in residential areas, offices and filling stations.

Ibiom listed items lost to the

infernos to include household property and documents.

The director said no casualties were recorded during the period, but added that the cost of damage could not be ascertained.

He revealed that fire disasters reduced during the period under review due to residents' compliance with safety measures.

Ibiom, however, advised residents to sustain the preventive measures by clearing bushes and surroundings, installing safety devices, placing gas cylinders outside buildings, and avoiding the use of flammable materials near filling stations, among others.



PRODUCT DISPLAY:

Meat vendors displaying their product and waiting for customers at Ikotun Market ahead of New Year celebration in Lagos.

Oba's Palace upholds Pa Ailegboze as Ikpako Odionwerie, warns dissenters

BENIN CITY

The Palace of the Oba of Benin has reaffirmed Pa James Aiwerioba Ailegboze as the authentic Odionwerie of Ikpako Community in Ovia North East Local Government Area of Edo State.

The decision followed a ruling by a Palace Reconciliation

Committee headed by the Obazelu of Benin Kingdom, Chief Osaro Idah, and delivered at the Palace on November 25, 2025.

In its verdict, the committee held that Pa Ailegboze, who has occupied the position since 2012, was duly installed in line with Benin traditional customs and has legitimately steered the

affairs of Ikpako Community for over a decade.

The committee warned Mr Isaac Osamwonyi and others accused of fomenting crisis by parading a rival claimant to the stool.

It directed them to immediately desist from any actions capable of breaching peace and order in the community.

They were also ordered to carry out a comprehensive sacrificial cleansing to atone for the alleged taboo of "laying down the Ukure-Edion," described as a grave abomination in Benin traditional law.

The Palace urged Pa Ailegboze, the elders and people of Ikpako Community to embrace unity and work collectively in the interest of peace, development and sustained prosperity of the area.

NSCDC arrests suspected vandal of oil facility in Edo

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Command of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) has arrested a suspect in connection with the vandalism of oil installations in the state.

The State Commandant, Mr Saidi Akintayo, announced the arrest on Wednesday during a news conference in Benin City, while speaking through the command's spokesperson, SC Efosa Ogbemor.

Akintayo said the suspect was arrested at the Ossiomo Manifold, OML 98, located in Ikpoba-Okha Local Government Area of Edo State.

According to him, the arrest followed a patrol operation carried out by operatives of the corps along the CS1 route in Ologbo, on the outskirts of Benin City, on Christmas Day.

He said the suspect was apprehended at about 2:00 p.m. while allegedly vandalising an oil wellhead. Akintayo disclosed that three persons were involved in the act.

"On sighting our patrol team and after a warning shot was fired, two of the accomplices fled the scene, while the suspect was successfully arrested,"

he said.

He added that preliminary investigations identified one of the fleeing suspects as a casual worker and a member of the host community, while the third suspect was also believed to be from the Ologbo community.

The commandant said the arrested suspect, alongside exhibits recovered from the scene, had been transferred to the state command headquarters for further investigation.

He added that efforts were ongoing to track down and arrest the fleeing suspects.

"All those found culpable at the end of investigations will be charged to court.

"We will not relent in ensuring that economic saboteurs are brought to justice," he said.

Akintayo warned vandals and individuals involved in the destruction of critical national assets to desist from such acts or face the full weight of the law.

He reaffirmed the corps' commitment to protecting oil and gas facilities across Edo State and urged host communities and members of the public to provide timely and credible information to security agencies to curb vandalism and other economic crimes

New year: Ohanaeze urges Igbos to remain resilient, enterprising, focused

ENUGU

Ohanaeze Ndigbo Worldwide has urged Igbo people to remain resilient, enterprising, focused and constructive in their engagements in 2026.

Senator Azuta Mbata, President-General of Ohanaeze Ndigbo Worldwide, made the call in a New Year message made available to journalists on Wednesday in Enugu.

"My beloved Ndigbo all over the world, as we step into 2026, I extend my warm greetings and heartfelt gratitude to every

son and daughter of Igboland across the globe.

"I sincerely thank you for your unwavering support, trust and cooperation in the past one year of my leadership as President-General of Ohanaeze Ndigbo Worldwide.

"As we move forward, my brothers and sisters, I call on Ndigbo to remain focused, law-abiding, peaceful and constructive in our engagements, knowing that our collective progress lies in inclusivity, unity and responsible citizenship," he said.

Mbata commended the peo-

ple for their resilience in the face of challenges, as well as their industry and renowned spirit of entrepreneurship, which he said continued to distinguish them.

"There is no gainsaying that despite the challenges confronting our nation in general, we remain strong, enterprising and hopeful people.

"I urge you to remain encouraged, for by the grace of God, the future of the Igbo nation remains bright. Together, we shall overcome present challenges through unity, perseverance and faith in God," he

added.

He explained that his leadership was founded on the tenets of community service and remained firmly committed to promoting love, unity and solidarity among Ndigbo.

According to him, the National Executive Committee under his watch was working tirelessly for a just and fair society where equity and equality are guaranteed irrespective of ethnicity, religion or status.

"May this New Year bring peace, good health and renewed hope to every Igbo family. Happy New Year," he said.

ICRC D-G urges Nigerians to embrace hope, shared responsibility in 2026

ABUJA

The Director-General, Infrastructure Concession Regulatory Commission (ICRC), Dr Jobson Ewalefoh has called on citizens to enter 2026 with renewed hope, shared responsibility and confidence in the nation's infrastructure future.

Ewalefoh in a statement on Wednesday in Abuja described

the New Year as a period for reflection and recommitment, stressing that infrastructure remains a key driver of economic growth, national productivity and improved quality of life for Nigerians.

"A new year is not only a change of date; it is a renewed opportunity to build, to serve and to deliver lasting value to our people.

"Infrastructure is ultimate-

ly about people, about access, opportunity and dignity," he said.

He said approvals granted by the Federal Executive Council to critical Public-Private Partnership (PPP) projects in 2025 were reassuring indications that the government was steadily laying the foundations to close the nation's infrastructure gap.

Ewalefoh added that the

transition into a new year also calls for renewed faith, stronger unity and a collective resolve to apply lessons learnt from the past with optimism and compassion.

"As we enter a new year, our focus must be on delivery, and may God grant our nation peace and wisdom, bringing renewed hope, steady progress and lasting prosperity for all Nigerians," he said.

JUDICIARY

NEWS

Alleged \$9.7m terrorism financing: Court remands Bauchi Finance Commissioner, others

ABUJA

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), on Wednesday, arraigned the Bauchi State Commissioner for Finance, Yakubu Adamu, and three oth-

ers over an alleged \$9.7 million terrorism financing.

Adamu was arraigned alongside Balarabe Abdullahi Ilelah, Aminu Mohammed Bose and Kabiru Yahaya Mohammed, before Justice Emeka Nwite of the Federal High Court in Abuja.

The defendants were docked on a 10-count charge bordering on terrorism financing and money laundering.

They all pleaded not guilty to the charges.

Following their pleas, EFCC counsel, Samuel Chime, asked

the court for a trial date to enable the prosecution present its witnesses and evidence.

However, defence counsel, Gordy Uche, SAN, informed the court that separate bail applications had been filed on behalf of the defendants on December 30, and that the prosecution had been served.

Chime confirmed receipt of the applications, adding that the

EFCC had filed a joint counter-affidavit opposing the request.

When Justice Nwite asked if the bail applications were based on similar facts, Uche explained that while the facts were largely the same, the 2nd, 3rd and 4th defendants honoured the EFCC's invitation voluntarily, unlike the 1st defendant who was arrested.

Moving the bail applications, Uche urged the court to admit the defendants to bail pending trial, noting that the motions were supported with four exhibits and a further affidavit.

He argued that the EFCC's proof of evidence failed to establish conditions under Section 162 of the Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA), 2015, and did not directly link his clients to terrorism financing.

"My lord, do not be carried away by the nature of the charge. I urge the court to take a liberal view and grant bail on liberal terms," Uche pleaded.

He also argued that the continued detention of Adamu had affected the payment of salaries to about 60,000 Bauchi State workers.

In response, Chime urged the court to refuse the bail applications, citing the seriousness of the offences and the sums involved.

He also disclosed that Adamu was facing another pending money laundering charge at the Federal High Court,

Abuja, in Charge No: FHC/ABJ/CR/694/2025.

Justice Nwite adjourned the matter till January 5 for ruling and ordered that the defendants be remanded at the Kuje Correctional Centre.

The charge, marked FHC/ABJ/CR/705/2025, was filed on December 30.

The defendants were accused of conspiring to provide \$2.3 million in cash to Bello Bodejo, President of Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore, and persons associated with him, pursuant to approvals allegedly granted by Governor Bala Mohammed of Bauchi State.

The funds were alleged to have been used to finance a terrorist group, contrary to Sections 26(1) and 21(2)(a) of the Terrorism (Prevention and Prohibition) Act, 2022.

They were also accused of delivering \$500,000 in cash for the same purpose, as well as disguising the origin of Bauchi State Government funds routed through Bureau De Change operators.

In another count, the defendants were alleged to have laundered \$6.95 million for the benefit of Adamu.

Adamu is also facing a separate N4.6 billion money laundering charge alongside Ayab Agro Products and Freight Company Ltd, over alleged fraudulent Polaris Bank transactions linked to motorcycle supply contracts that were never executed.



PATRONISING SECONDHAND CLOTHES:

Customers patronising secondhand clothes in ahead of New Year celebration at Palm Avenue Bus Stop, Mushin, Lagos.

Couple arraigned for allegedly threatening to kill pastors, church members

IBADAN

A couple, Olamide Abraham (45) and his wife, Abidemi Abraham (32), were on Wednesday arraigned before an Iyaganku Magistrates' Court, Ibadan,

for allegedly threatening to kill pastors and some church members.

The defendants pleaded not guilty to charges of conspiracy and threat to life.

The prosecutor, Sgt. Kehinde Olorotimi, told the court that

the offences were committed between 2022 and December 29, 2025, at a Christ Apostolic Church on Sango Poly Road, Ibadan.

He alleged that the defendants, who were former church members, sent threatening voice notes and text messages to pastors Michael Ajayi, Daromola, Emem Inyang, and other

members.

The offences contravened Sections 86 and 516 of the Criminal Law of Oyo State, 2000.

The Magistrate, Adebola Adeola, granted them bail in the sum of N200,000 each, with one surety each, who must be a blood relation.

The case was adjourned till February 16.

Police arraign two friends for alleged attempted theft

IBADAN

Two friends, Ibrahim Inuolaji (33) and Toheeb Olajide (33), were on Wednesday arraigned before an Iyaganku Magistrates'

Court, Ibadan, over alleged attempted theft.

They were charged with conspiracy, attempt to steal and conduct likely to cause breach of peace.

The prosecutor, Insp. Elisha

Tellang, said the defendants committed the offence on December 30 at about 6:00 pm at Soka area of Ibadan.

The offences contravened Sections 516, 509 and 249(d) of the Criminal Law of Oyo

State, 2000.

The Magistrate, Moyosore Atanda, granted them bail in the sum of N100,000 each, with two sureties each, and adjourned the case till January 20, 2026.

Man arraigned for allegedly exhuming woman's corpse to remove skull

IBADAN

A 30-year-old man, Hammed Oyeleke, was on Wednesday ar-

raigned before an Iyaganku Magistrates' Court for allegedly exhuming a woman's corpse to remove her skull.

The prosecutor, ASP Musbau

Lawal, said the offence was committed on December 24, at about 1:00 am, at Amuloko, Ibadan.

The offence contravened Section 242(1)(b) of the Crim-

inal Law of Oyo State, 2000.

The Magistrate, Olaolu Olanipekun, granted bail in the sum of N200,000 with one surety and adjourned the case till February 4.

Estate agent arraigned over alleged N85,000 fraud

IBADAN

A 55-year-old estate agent, Musibau Adedokun, was on Wednesday arraigned before an Iya-

ganku Magistrates' Court over an alleged N85,000 fraud.

The prosecutor, Insp. Olagoke Adegbenro, said the defendant obtained the money on October 22 at

Odo-Oba, Ibadan, under the pretence of securing an apartment.

The offences contravened Sections 390(9) and 419 of the Criminal Law of Oyo State,

2000.

The Magistrate, Olasinmibo Sanusi-Zubair, granted bail in the sum of N100,000 with one surety and adjourned the case till January 5.

N/East states to purchase N30bn aircraft for regional air shuttle —Gombe Commissioner

GOMBE

The Governors of the six states of the North-East region are contributing N5 billion each to purchase two aircraft for the establishment of the regional air shuttle aimed at enhancing air transportation.

Mr Muhammad Magaji, the Gombe State Commissioner for Finance and Economic Development, disclosed this on Wednesday after the State Executive Council meeting held in Gombe.

Magaji stated that the council had approved N5 billion as the state's contribution towards purchasing two aircraft for the establishment of the North-East air shuttle, which he said, would soon come on board.

He said that the initiative was started in 2020 where all the six states collectively paid the sum of N69 million as consultancy for the establishment of the regional shuttle.

"Gombe's N5 billion has been approved and we are going to ensure that we make that payment today (Wednesday) to ensure that we meet the deadline for the payment.

"The six Governors of the North-East states had decided that there is a need for the region to have a Northeast shuttle that is an airline.

"The six states had agreed

to contribute the sum of N5 billion each, making N30 billion for the purchase of two aircrafts that will be utilised for the Northeast shuttle.

"The airline will move around the North-Eastern states and outside of the region to other parts of the country.

"There were two decisions, either you borrow \$20 million to buy or you pay N5 billion each and the six governors have agreed to contribute that sum," he said.

Magaji explained further said the shuttle would open up the region and ensure that the region has a stable air transport.

He stated that with the shuttle coming on board, the region would no longer have issues with air transportation as it used to experience.

Magaji said, "Most at times, airlines come into the North-East and for one reason or the other, they pull out.

"So, for now, even when anyone pulls out, this is our own airline, it would remain with us to serve the North-East and even others outside the North-East."

In a related development, the State Commissioner for Works, Housing and Transportation, Mr Usman Kallamu said that council had also approved N669 for the upgrade of facilities at the state Airport in the Lawanti community.

NEWS

Foreign

Russian claims of Ukrainian attack on government sites 'unfounded', EU's top diplomat says

The EU's top diplomat has called Moscow's claims that Ukraine targeted Russian government sites a "deliberate distraction" and an attempt to derail the peace process.

Kaja Kallas' comments on social media appear to be a reference to the Kremlin's allegation that Ukraine attempted a drone strike on one of Vladimir Putin's residences.

"No one should accept unfounded claims from the aggressor who has indiscriminately targeted Ukraine's infrastructure and civilians," Kallas wrote on social media.

Earlier this week Moscow accused Ukraine of targeting Putin's private home on Lake Valdai in north-west Russia.

Russia would review its position in the ongoing peace negotiations as a result, the Kremlin said.

Since Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov first shared the claims, Russian state media and politicians have discussed the alleged attack in increasingly incendiary tones.

"The attack is a strike on the heart of Russia," said Andrei Kartapolov, head of the Russian parliament's defence committee.

"After what [Ukraine] has done, there can be no forgiveness."

Although the Kremlin initially said it saw no point in sharing proof of the alleged attack, on Wednesday the Russian army released what it said was evidence of the attempted strike.

It included a map allegedly showing that the drones were launched from the Sumy and Chernihiv regions of Ukraine and a video of a downed drone lying in snowy woodland.

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

Russian defence ministry A Russian defence ministry official sits in front of a large screen which shows a map, marked with the the alleged flight paths of the drones Russia says Ukraine launched at one of Putin's residences. Russian defence ministry

Russia's defence ministry released a map which it claimed showed the path of the drones launched by Ukraine

Russia's defence ministry also released a video of what it said was a local resident who described hearing noises like a rocket at the time of the alleged attack.

However, one Russian investigative media outlet said it had spoken to more than a dozen residents of the area around Putin's residence and none had heard anything that could indicate 91 drones had approached or been shot down by air defences.

"If something like that had happened, the whole city would have been talking about it," one person told the outlet.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has strenuously denied the allegations, tying them to the ongoing US-led process to reach a ceasefire in Ukraine.

In recent weeks the American and Ukrainian delegations have been working closely and Zelensky has expressed cautious optimism that his country's demands were going to be taken into account.

In his view, he said on Tuesday, the claims about the drone attack on Putin's Valdai residence were about "the fact that over the past month there were quite successful talks and a positive meeting between our teams, culminating in our meeting with President Trump."

Russia wanted to disrupt the

"positive momentum" between the US and Ukraine, Zelensky said.

When the claims emerged Zelensky also warned that the alleged drone strike would be used as an excuse to carry out strikes on Kyiv and Ukrainian government buildings. Overnight on Wednesday air alerts briefly rang out in the capital as a drone approached, but no hits or damage were reported.

On 30 December Odesa suffered an intense attack which left several civilians injured

Instead, several locations across the country were hit by drones and Odesa on the Black Sea suffered a large-scale attack which saw an apartment block hit and six people injured, including three children. More than 170,000 were also left without power as temperatures struggled to push past 0C.

Odesa has been coming under sustained attack for several weeks. The intensity of the strikes appears to have increased since Putin's threat in early December to cut off Ukraine's access to the sea in retaliation for drone attacks on tankers of Russia's "shadow fleet" in the Black Sea.

Machu Picchu train crash leaves one dead and dozens injured

A train driver has died and at least 40 people have been injured in a head-on rail collision near Peru's most popular tourist attraction, Machu Picchu.

Two trains collided on the single track leading to the ancient Inca town on Tuesday, according to a statement from the local government.

It said that 20 ambulances had attended the scene and that injured people had been transferred to medical facilities in the nearby city of Cusco.

The US embassy in Peru said that US citizens were injured in the crash, while the UK Foreign Office said it was "supporting a number of British nationals involved".

Getty Images One of the two trains affected after a head-on collision connecting Machu Picchu with Ollantaytambo is pictured in Pampacahua, Cusco Department, Peru. Getty Images

One of the two trains affected in the collision

Local media outlet Peru21 reports that hundreds of tourists remain at the scene awaiting evacuation, which has been hampered by difficult terrain around the crash site.

At least 20 of the injured are in a serious condition, a health official told the Reuters news agency.

The collision occurred on the track linking Ollantaytambo Station and Aguas

Calientes, the closest town to Machu Picchu. The journey between the two stations usually takes around 90 minutes.

The two trains involved in the accident were operated by PeruRail and Inca Rail respectively.

"We deeply regret what has happened," PeruRail said in a statement, adding that its staff had "immediately" provided first aid to the train driver, the train conductor and the passengers involved in the incident.

The cause of the accident has not yet been made clear.

The crash comes amid an ongoing dispute between providers of transport to the UNESCO world heritage site, with local communities unhappy with what they say is an insufficiently open bidding process.

The trains and buses that take tourists to the ancient town have steep ticket prices and can be highly lucrative due to its limited accessibility.

Built in the Peruvian Andes in the 15th Century, the Inca city of Machu Picchu is one of the Seven Modern Wonders of the World.

Visitors can take a series of trains and buses to reach the site, or hike along the Inca trail with a registered tour operator.

In 2011, officials implemented a daily cap on visitors to protect and preserve the site, but concerns remain about overtourism.



PEOPLE GATHERED AS A MOTORCADE:

Hundreds of thousands of people gathered as a motorcade carrying Khaleda Zia's body drove through Dhaka.

Huge crowds mourn Bangladesh's first female PM at state funeral

Hundreds of thousands of people travelled from across Bangladesh to the capital Dhaka on Wednesday to pay their final respects to former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia.

Zia, who was the country's first female prime minister, died on Tuesday from a prolonged illness. She was 80.

The mourners held out their hands in prayer and carried flags printed with her photographs as a motorcade carrying Zia's body - including the hearse wrapped with the national flag - drove on streets near the parliament house.

Flags were flown at half-mast and thousands of security officers were deployed.

"I have come this far just to say goodbye. I know I won't be able to see her face, but at least I could see the [vehicle] carrying her for the last rites," Setara Sultana, an activist from Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), told the BBC.

Sharmina Siraj, a mother of two, called Zia "an inspiration", noting that stipends introduced by the former leader to improve women's education made a "huge impact" on her daughters.

"It is difficult to imagine women in leadership positions anytime soon," she told AFP news agency.

India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, the Speaker of Pakistan's National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq and Bhutan's Foreign Minister Lyonpo

DN Dhungyel were among those who attended the funeral.

Earlier in the day, Zia's body was taken to the house of her son Tarique Rahman, who was seen reciting the Quran beside his mother's office.

The state funeral marks the end of Zia's extraordinary journey, from a homemaker to the first female prime minister of Bangladesh.

BBC Bangla Four men hold out their hands in prayer at Khaleda Zia's funeral. BBC Bangla Mourners have travelled from around the country to attend Khaleda Zia's funeral

Zia was buried next to her husband Ziaur Rahman, who was assassinated in 1981 while serving as president - an incident that thrust Zia into the political limelight.

She went on to lead the BNP in the country's first elections in 20 years. She was dubbed an "uncompromising leader" after refusing to participate in a controversial election under military ruler General Hussain Muhammad Ershad in the 1980s.

For several years, along with her bitter political rival Sheikh Hasina, she fought for democracy and against military dictatorship, enduring arrests.

There was talk among Bangladesh's rulers at the time to keep the two "battling begums" - Zia and Hasina - out of politics in what was then known as the "minus two formula".

Israel to bar 37 aid groups as UK and EU warn of severe impact in Gaza

Israel is to revoke the licences of 37 international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) working in Gaza and the occupied West Bank, saying they failed to meet requirements under new registration rules.

ActionAid, International Rescue Committee, Médecins Sans Frontières and Norwegian Refugee Council are among the aid agencies which will have their licences suspended on 1 January, with their operations to end within 60 days.

Israel said they had, among other things, failed to hand

over "complete" personal details of their staff. The INGOs said that could put them at risk.

The move was condemned by 10 countries, which said the rules would have a severe impact on access to essential services.

In a joint statement, the foreign ministers of the UK, France, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Japan, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland said INGOs were integral to the humanitarian response in Gaza and that any attempt to stem their ability to operate was "unacceptable".

"Without them, it will be

impossible to meet all urgent needs at the scale required," they warned.

The European Union's humanitarian chief, Hadja Lahbib, said: "Israel's plans to block INGOs in Gaza means blocking life-saving aid."

International humanitarian law "leaves no room for doubt: aid must reach those in need," she added.

UN human rights chief Volker Türk called the INGO suspensions "outrageous" and "arbitrary", and said they made "an already intolerable situation even worse for the people of Gaza".

The Humanitarian Country Team of the Occupied Palestinian Territory - a forum that brings together UN agencies and more than 200 local and international NGOs - urged the Israeli authorities to reconsider the registration decisions.

It has said INGOs run or support most of Gaza's field hospitals and primary health-care centres, emergency shelter responses, water and sanitation services, nutrition stabilisation centres for children with acute malnutrition, and critical mine action activities.

Feature

2026 budget: Can it bridge Nigeria's wealth gap?

NAOMI SHARANG (NAN)

President Bola Tinubu recently presented the 2026 Appropriation Bill of N58.18 trillion, christened: 'Budget of Consolidation, Renewed Resilience and Shared Prosperity', to the joint session of the National Assembly.

Analysts say that the budget appears to have stood out as a defining statement of the Tinubu administration's economic direction and political priorities.

Coming after years of tough reforms and global economic uncertainty, the budget, the analysts say, was framed as a bridge between stabilisation and sustainable growth.

To them, the budget, at its core, seeks to consolidate earlier policy choices, particularly in fiscal discipline, revenue mobilisation and structural reforms.

"The Federal Government doubled down on efforts to strengthen public finances, reduce waste and ensure that scarce resources were directed towards the sectors with the greatest impacts," one of the analysts said.

Officials also described the budget as one focused less on bold experimentation and more on deepening reforms already underway.

"In a year marked by lingering inflationary pressures, climate-related challenges and global economic headwinds, the budget prioritised economic buffers and social stability.

"Increased attention was given to infrastructure, food security, healthcare and education, with the aim of helping households and businesses better withstand imminent shocks," they stated.

Key highlights of the 2026 appropriation bill, according to Tinubu, include a projected revenue of N34.33 trillion and expenditure of N58.18 trillion as well as N15.52 trillion for debt servicing.

While the recurrent non-debt expenditure was pegged at N15.25 trillion, capital expenditure was put at N26.08 trillion and deficit, N23.85 trillion, at 4.28 per cent of GDP rate.

According to the president, sectoral allocations have Defence and Security at N5.41 trillion; Infrastructure, N3.56 trillion; Education, N3.52 trillion and Health, N2.48 trillion.

While emphasising security as the bedrock of development, he said that the N5.41 trillion allocation to the sector was key to modernising the armed forces, enhancing intelligence-driven policing and securing the nation's borders.

Tinubu also said that the Nigerian Education Loan Fund had supported more than 418,000 students in 229 tertiary institutions, while health spending accounts for six per cent of the total budget net of liabilities.

"The budget represents a defining moment in our national journey of reform and transformation.

"Over the last two-and-a-half years, my government has methodically confronted long-standing structural weaknesses, stabilised our economy, rebuilt confidence and laid a durable foundation for the construction of a more resilient, inclusive and dynamic Nigeria.

"Though necessary, the reforms have not been painless. Families and busi-



PRESIDENT BOLA TINUBU PRESENTED THE 2026 BUDGET

nesses have faced pressure; established systems have been disrupted; and budget execution has been tested," he had told the national assembly members.

The president noted that the reforms were already yielding measurable results, with the economy having grown by 3.98 per cent in the third quarter of the year, up from 3.86 per cent in the third quarter of 2024.

"Inflation has moderated for eight consecutive months, with headline inflation declining to 14.45 per cent in November 2025, from 24.23 per cent in March 2025.

"With stabilising food and energy prices, tighter monetary conditions and improved supply responses, we expect the deflationary trend to persist over the 2026 horizon, barring major supply shocks."

"All multiple budget implementations would end in March 2026 and from April, Nigeria would operate on a single budget, backed by a single revenue cycle.

"Avoiding abandoned projects, unpaid contractual obligations and running a multiple budget, both inherited and of fulfilled mandates, is a problem staring the nation.

"So we are terminating the habit of running through a budget on one inflow.

"By March 31, 2026, all capital liabilities from previous years will be fully funded and closed. From April, Nigeria will operate on a single budget, backed by a single revenue cycle.

"No overlaps, no excuses and no rollover cultures," he said, adding: "We expect improved revenue performance through the new National Tax Acts and the ongoing reforms in the oil and gas sector.

"Reforms designed not merely to raise revenue, but to drive transparency, efficiency, fairness and long-term value in our fiscal architecture."

The Senate President, Godswill Akpabio, acknowledged the economic and social pressures Nigerians had

With stabilising food and energy prices, tighter monetary conditions and improved supply responses, we expect the deflationary trend to persist over the 2026 horizon, barring major supply shocks

faced over the past years.

Akpabio listed the economic pressures to include rising living costs, insecurity and concerns among young people about opportunities and fairness.

Nigeria, he said, had historically confronted adversity with resilience rather than retreat.

Akpabio stated that the 10th Senate had recorded one of the highest levels of legislative outputs in the country's history over the past years.

He said that the upper chamber had passed landmark bills on security, economic reforms, governance, judicial administration, electoral integrity, infrastructure development and social protection.

The Speaker of House of Representatives, Abbas Tajudeen, while also reflecting on the outgoing fiscal year,

said it marked a period of regained stability and renewed confidence, but that it also offered some important lessons.

He noted that volatility in global oil markets had exposed the risks of overly optimistic assumptions on crude oil prices and exchange rates, reinforcing the need for realism, discipline and revenue diversification in budgeting.

These lessons, he said, had shaped the 2026 budget, which he described as more deliberate, realistic and results-oriented.

Citing data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), Tajudeen said that Nigeria recorded positive growth throughout 2025.

"This is with real GDP growth approaching four per cent, placing the country among the stronger-performing large economies in Sub-Saharan Africa," he said.

To the Minister of Information and National Orientation, Mohammed Idris, the 2026 budget is designed to move beyond promises to practical implementation.

He said that unlike previous budgets that often remained aspirational, the 2026 document directly addressed the major concerns of Nigerians, particularly insecurity, welfare and economic stability.

Idris noted that security had remained government's foremost priority, reflecting in what he described as a "significant allocation" to the sector.

Leader of the Senate, Opeyemi Bamidele, while presenting the Appropriation Bill for second reading, said the structure of the budget reflected deliberate prioritisation, with capital spending emerging as the largest component of discretionary expenditure.

He said that the N23.214 trillion capital allocation targeted critical growth-driving sectors, including transport infrastructure, power and energy, agriculture, industrial development, housing and digital economy.

"As the president emphasised, sustainable growth cannot be achieved without addressing infrastructure deficits and expanding the productive capacity of the economy," Bamidele said.

He added that the spending plan was designed to stimulate private investment, create jobs and strengthen food and energy security.

Deputy Senate Leader, Sen. Lola Ashiru, pointed to the N5.4 trillion earmarked for security as well as substantial allocations to infrastructure, education and health as evidence of a coordinated strategy to strengthen the economy and improved living standards.

According to him, these sectors are inter-connected and essential for building a robust Nigeria.

Contributing to the debate, Sen. Adamu Aliero (APC-Kebbi) described the N23 trillion for capital projects as impressive and unprecedented since the inception of the 10th national assembly.

"The over N5 trillion on security is also commendable. Education allocation is also good and my prayer is that the funds be released for proper implementation," the lawmaker said.

The Chairman, Senate Committee on Finance, Sen. Sani Musa, said that the debt service provision, though large, was critical for restoring investor confidence, especially as the country approaches an election cycle.

"Now that we are going into a political period, the allocation of N15.9 trillion is for servicing our debts, which will further restore confidence between Nigeria and its development partners," he said.

Musa expressed optimism that 2026 would be better with a single budget.

How far can the fiscal document, tagged: 'Budget of Consolidation, Renewed Resilience and Shared Prosperity', go in serving as the turning point that Nigeria needs? Experts say the next few months will tell.

Government reforms strengthen pension industry, boost retiree confidence

TAIYE OLAYEMI (NAN)

As 2025 draws to a close, the pension industry is undergoing one of its most significant reform phases since the introduction of the Contributory Pension Scheme.

It is driven by tougher regulation, expanded coverage efforts and renewed confidence among retirees.

Central to the reforms is Pension Revolution 2.0, which the National Pension Commission (PenCom) described as the most comprehensive overhaul of the system since inception, targeting weak governance, limited coverage and inefficient processes.

A major highlight of the year was the Federal Government's approval and disbursement of N758 billion to clear accumulated pension liabilities that had remained unresolved for years, signalling renewed commitment to pension obligations.

Regulatory enforcement also intensified, with pension recoveries from defaulting employers rising by 180 per cent, reflecting a stronger supervisory stance and improved inter-agency collaboration.

The introduction of Pension Boost 1.0 increased monthly pension payments, helping retirees cope with inflation, as aggregate monthly pension disbursements exceeded N14 billion by mid-2025.

PenCom also expanded the use of technology, fully automating remittance and benefit-processing platforms to reduce delays, improve transparency and eliminate administrative bottlenecks.

However, in spite of the gains, chal-

lenges persist, particularly debates around the planned recapitalisation of pension fund administrators and custodians, with higher minimum capital requirements set to take effect by June 2027.

Compliance gaps remain, especially among private sector employers and sub-national governments, while nationwide adoption of the Contributory Pension Scheme is still incomplete.

To address inclusion, the Micro Pension Plan was restructured into a Personal Pension Plan, aimed at attracting artisans, traders and other informal sector workers.

Experts, in an interview with the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) on Sunday in Lagos, said the figures tell a story of growth, but not without caution.

Mr Ehimeme Ohioma, a pension consultant and former Head of Surveillance at PenCom, described 2025 as "largely successful," citing the N758 billion bond issuance as a defining milestone.

He commended PenCom for revising key guidelines, including the planned increase in minimum share capital, noting that the objective was to strengthen operational capacity, expand physical presence and improve service delivery.

However, Ohioma sounded a note of restraint. "Pension fund administrators are essentially asset managers; excessive capital requirements could dilute returns on equity for shareholders."

He also acknowledged the retail nature of pension administration, which demands capital for visibility, accessi-

bility and nationwide reach.

Ohioma commended the engagement of payment solution providers, saying, "the reforms have addressed the long-standing issue of uncredited contributions caused by incomplete employer remittance schedules."

"While future cases have been curtailed, operators must still reconcile a large volume of historical uncredited contributions."

He described the year as one of significant transformation, while urging PenCom to further strengthen its supervisory capacity and enforce zero tolerance for infractions.

Similarly, Mr Aronkola Isaac, Principal Assistant Registrar in charge of the Pension Desk Office, Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), commended PenCom for its regulatory and supervisory responsibilities.

Isaac said that in spite of the gains, there were still areas where improvement had become imperative.

According to him, chief among them is the remittance process for pension contributions by Federal Government Treasury-funded Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs).

"Virtually all Treasury-funded MDAs are yet to fund their Retirement Savings Accounts more than six months after salaries have been paid."

"This situation clearly violates the statutory requirement of remittance within seven days," he said.

Isaac raised concerns about diaspora retirees, noting that the newly introduced PenCom enrolment application, COBRA, does not adequately cater for retiring staff based abroad.

According to him, there is a need for the commission to deliberately integrate diaspora retirees into the application's functionality to avoid their exclusion from the system.

On insurance benefits, Isaac urged PenCom to strengthen enforcement around the payment of Group Life Assurance (GLA) claims.

"PenCom should ensure that payments to the families of deceased employees fully comply with the provisions of the Pension Reform Act 2014," he said.

He further called for the simplification of the process for accessing the 25 per cent pension-backed mortgage facility.

"The procedure remains unnecessarily cumbersome; contributors' consent alone should be the only condition for withdrawal," he said.

He suggested that the requirement to route the process through Primary Mortgage Institutions should be removed to make the facility more accessible.

From a retirement outcomes perspective, Dr Babatunde Raimi, a pension and retirement coach, said deeper reforms were still required to deliver true social security.

He called for stronger enforcement mechanisms, including real-time monitoring systems linked to employer payroll and tax data, alongside stiffer sanctions for chronic defaulters.

Raimi advocated mobile-enabled, low-cost onboarding solutions for informal workers, supported by fintech partnerships and grassroots awareness campaigns.

He also urged regulators to encourage diversified investments in infra-

structure and sustainable projects, gradually reducing over-reliance on government securities.

"Pension benefits must be protected against inflation. I propose indexed payouts and periodic reviews of contribution rates to reflect economic realities."

"Transparency remains key to public trust. Clearer performance reports and faster grievance resolution are needed," Raimi said.

From the operators' standpoint, Ms Anthonia Ifeanyi-Okoro, Acting Managing Director of the Pension Fund Operators Association of Nigeria (PenOp), described Pension Boost 1.0 as a turning point.

"It marked a critical milestone in resolving long-standing challenges, particularly the settlement of accrued pension rights," she said.

According to her, targeted policy actions and stronger coordination helped dismantle structural bottlenecks and restore confidence among retirees long denied their benefits.

Ifeanyi-Okoro explained that the industry is now firmly in the era of Pension Revolution 2.0, where sustainability, rather than legacy clean-up, has become the central focus.

She described the N758 billion bond provision as evidence of government commitment and highlighted initiatives such as the Personal Pension Plan and the Pension Compliance Certificate as tools expanding coverage and enforcement.

Looking ahead, she said PenOp would prioritise deeper stakeholder engagement, education and collaboration, while maintaining transparency and trust.

Global top 300 pension funds

Joint study between The Thinking Ahead Institute and Pensions & Investments
September 2020

Key Figures

AUM of the world's largest pension funds totalled US \$19.5 trn

The top 20 funds' AUM surged by 8.1%

68.3% of assets are public sector or sovereign pension funds

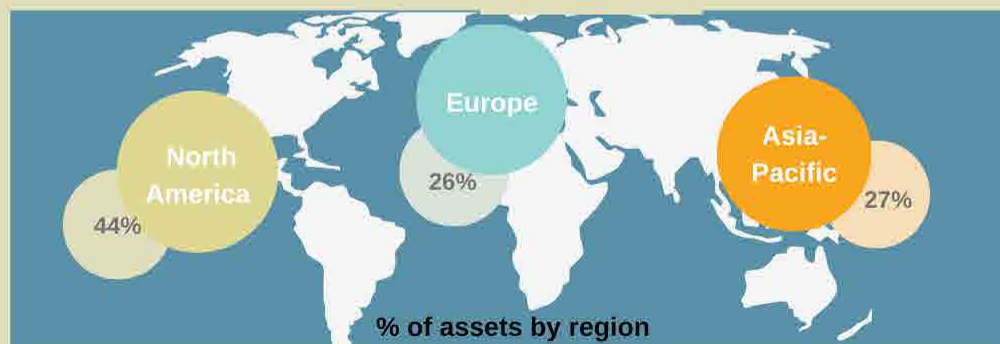
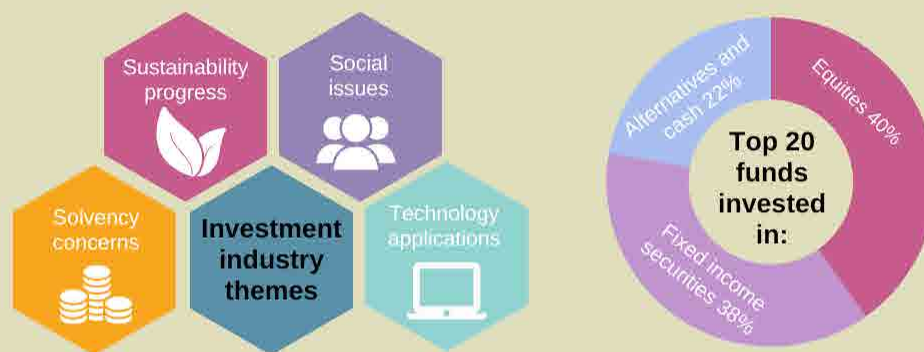
DB funds account for 64.2% of AUM

Global trends

North America (NA) remains largest region in terms of AUM and share of funds

The US accounts for 142 funds out of 300

NA and European funds mainly invested in equities and Asia-Pacific funds in fixed income



Sports

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

CAF cracks down on referee, bans Equatorial Guinea, Burkina Faso

The Confederation of Africa Football (CAF) has come hard on some referees in the ongoing Cup of Nations in Morocco over alleged abuse of power as they, banned two Equatorial Guinea players and fine Burkina Faso captain Bertrand Traore after explosive post-match incidents.

Equatorial Guinea captain Carlos Akakpo and midfielder Josete Miranda have each

been handed four-match bans for verbally abusing Congolese referee Messie Nkounou following their 1-0 defeat to Sudan on Sunday in Casablanca.

The loss left Equatorial Guinea rooted to the bottom of Group E.

According to the federation, two of the four matches have been suspended for a year, but the bans take immediate effect, ruling both play-

ers out of Wednesday's final group game against Algeria in Rabat.

Elsewhere, Burkina Faso skipper Bertrand Traore has been fined \$10,000 for "offensive remarks" made after his side's 1-0 loss to Algeria, also in Rabat.

Traore, who plays his club football with Sunderland, angrily questioned the officiating after the match, claiming Burkina Faso were denied a

penalty early on and criticising the referee's conduct late in the game.

The Confederation of African Football charged Traore over the comments, but the Burkinabe federation confirmed the forward has since expressed regret.

With AFCON entering its decisive stages, the message from CAF is simple, emotions may run high, but referees are firmly off-limits.



EQUATORIAL GUINEA PLAYER WITH REFEREE

Igali issues firm charge to Bayelsa United ahead of NPFL second stanza

The Commissioner for Sports Development, Bayelsa State, Hon. Daniel Igali, has issued a firm directive to the Chairman and Management Board of Bayelsa United FC to immediately reset the club's competitive objectives and deliver significantly improved results in the second stanza of the Nigeria Professional Football League (NPFL) season.

Hon. Igali delivered the charge during a closed-door meeting with the Chairman of the club, Tarelaye Nwakwe, and members of his management board on Wednesday at his office in Yenagoa, following what he described as an unacceptable first-half showing.

The Commissioner expressed deep dissatisfaction with the club's current league position, noting that Bayelsa United are 15th on the NPFL table with 23 points—dangerously close to the relegation zone.

Stating that the team's inconsistency and the recent home defeat to El-Kanemi Warriors clearly fall short of expectations.

"We are already late in addressing our shortcomings. This is no longer a period for gradual adjustments. The second stanza must be approached with urgency, precision, and clear targets," Igali stated.

He emphasized that the state government has made massive investments in football development and the welfare of Bayelsa United, and such commitment must now be matched

by performance and results.

According to the Commissioner, the directive to the club is clear and non-negotiable, stressing Bayelsa United must move decisively into the top half of the NPFL table and mount a credible challenge for continental qualification places.

"Survival is not the objective. Our target is to finish in the top half of the league and compete for continental tickets. Anything less will not justify the level of support and resources committed to this club," he said.



BAYELSA UNITED PLAYERS

Coach Ladan Bosso steps aside as Barau FC head coach after NPFL first-round review

Barau FC have announced that Head Coach Ladan Bosso has stepped aside following an internal review of the first round of the 2025/26 Nigeria Premier Football

League (NPFL) season.

In an official statement released by the club, management confirmed that the decision takes immediate effect, with the Assistant Coach

appointed to take charge on an interim basis ahead of the second stanza of the campaign.

The club expressed gratitude to Coach Bosso for his dedication and service during his tenure, wishing him success in his future endeavours.

The Maliya Boys endured a challenging first stanza and currently occupy 17th position on the NPFL26 standings with 21 points from 19 matches. Their record so far includes five wins, seven draws, and eight defeats, leaving them deeply involved in the relegation battle.

With the second round approaching, Barau FC will be hoping the change on the bench triggers an improvement in results as they battle to retain their NPFL status.



LADAN BOSSO

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

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

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

Speaking after the match, the Belgian tactician revealed

that Uganda's qualification hopes should not have hinged on the game against Nigeria.

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

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

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

players.

"We were under pressure and you can't blame the play-

ers because they don't have the experience, so they were under pressure," he explained.



UGANDA HEAD COACH PAUL PUT

CAF opens bidding for 2028, 2032, 2036 AFCONS

The Confederation of African Football (CAF) has opened discussions on the hosting rights for the 2028, 2032, and 2036 editions of the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON), following recent adjustments to the tournament calendar.

A high-ranking CAF source disclosed that the issue will be a key item on the agenda of the CAF Executive Committee meeting scheduled for mid-next month.

The discussions come in the wake of changes to AFCON scheduling and the cancellation of bid processes for the 2029, 2031, 2033, and 2035 editions.

According to information from within CAF, members of the Executive Committee are backing a proposal to invite bids for three consecutive AFCON tournaments beginning with

2028 and extending through 2036 rather than selecting hosts on a single-edition basis.

Amid speculation that Morocco could be awarded a future edition, a prominent member of the CAF Executive Office shared his personal view, stressing the need for fairness in the geographical distribution of hosting rights. He argued that CAF should consider regions outside North and East Africa for upcoming tournaments.

The source noted that North Africa hosted AFCON 2019 in Egypt and will host the 2025 edition in Morocco, while East Africa is set to stage the 2027 tournament in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. West Africa, through Ivory Coast, and Central Africa, through Cameroon, hosted the 2021 and 2023 editions respectively.



CAF PRESIDENT, PATRICE MOTSEPE

Lobi Stars FC sign 2 new players

Lobi Stars Football Club (FC) of Makurdi signed two new players as part of efforts to strengthen the team ahead of second round of the Nigeria National League season. Signed on Wednesday in Makurdi, the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) reports that the players are: Egigogo Bello, formerly of Niger Tornadoes, and Jonathan Abu.

Abu said during the signing that he would provide strong support for the attackers to improve the club's goal output.

Bello also assured that he

would contribute his experience and commitment to helping the team to achieve its set targets for the season.

Meanwhile, the Chairman of the club, Terver Ikya, disclosed that the club would add four more players to the squad to bolster its chances of returning to the premiership.

He explained that he took over the management of the team when preparations for the season were completed, noting that "just 10 days to the commencement of the league."

SPORTS

AFCON 2025: Calm Chelle relishes knockout test as Eagles soar



SUPER EAGLES OF NIGERIA

Super Eagles coach Eric Chelle has welcomed the pressure of the Round of 16, expressing excitement as Nigeria prepare for the knockout phase of the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON).

The strike by Paul Onuachu and a brace by midfielder Raphael Onyedika lifted a remarkably different Nigeria team to a 3-1 win over Uganda in their final Group C encounter.

Onuachu, started ahead of Akor Adams as Chelle made several changes to the squad that defeated Tanzania and Tunisia.

"Playing in the Round of 16 comes with pressure because it is a knockout stage, but I am excited and really looking forward to the game," Chelle said.

The coach said finishing top of Group C boosted confidence, adding that remaining in Fès has helped the team maintain stability and focus.

"We feel good finishing top of our group and staying in Fès. The town, hotel, people and atmosphere are calm and perfect for concentration," he said.

Chelle noted that the Eagles have enjoyed consistent training routines, despite challenging weather conditions in Morocco.

"We have our pitch and can train two to three hours daily. The weather is very cold, but we must adapt and keep working," he said.

Reflecting on his touchline demeanour, Chelle said experience has helped him manage emotions better during matches.

"If you watch closely, I am calmer than at the last AFCON. I stay focused and take each game as it comes," he said.

The Malian tactician admitted that tactical risks are part of football, stressing belief in his philosophy.

"I have my vision. Sometimes it works very well, sometimes it doesn't. That is football," Chelle said.

Chelle revealed that experimentation in Nigeria's final group match against Uganda paid off.

"Against Uganda, we tried something new and I am happy with the result. But we must keep improving if we want to remain ambitious," he said.

VAFCO 2025: Osimhen shrugs off Yekini record pressure, prioritises team success

Super Eagles striker Victor Osimhen says he does not lose sleep over comparisons with late Rashidi Yekini, insisting his focus remains helping Nigeria win matches, not chasing individual records.

Osimhen, who captained Nigeria to a 3-1 win over Uganda on Tuesday, dismissed suggestions he is obsessed with overtaking Yekini's all-time scoring record of 37 goals.

"To be honest, I never go to bed thinking about trying to equal or surpass the record," the Galatasaray forward said.

He explained that his priority is contributing to the team through goals, assists and overall effort, rather than personal milestones.

Osimhen added that he believes the record will come someday, but not at the expense of team objectives or enjoyment of the game.

The 27-year-old forward currently has 32 goals for Nigeria, five short of Yekini's long-standing national record and has scored only one goal from three games played so far.

In spite failing to score against Uganda, Osimhen led

by example as Paul Onuachu and Raphael Onyedika, who scored twice, sealed the victory.

Nigeria finished in Group C with a perfect record, nine points from three matches, advancing confidently to the Round of 16.

Osimhen stressed that leadership, teamwork and winning matches matter more to him than personal glory at this stage of his career.



VICTOR OSIMHEN

Awujale hopeful commiserates with Joshua over loss of associates

Awujale Yusuf, a leading contender in the race for the throne in Ogun, has commiserated with British-Nigerian boxing champion, Anthony Joshua, on the loss of his two associates in an auto crash on the Lagos-Ibadan expressway.

Yusuf, in a statement made available to the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) on Wednesday in Abuja, described the incident as tragic.

He prayed for the repose of the souls of Kevin Ayodele and Sina Ghami, the two associates

of Joshua, travelling with him at the time of the incident.

He also wished Joshua quick recovery from the injuries he sustained in the incident.

Yusuf further commended Gov. Dapo Abiodun of Ogun and his Lagos counterpart, Babajide Sanwo-Olu, for visiting the pugilist at the hospital where he is recuperating.

It will be recalled that Joshua and three other persons were involved in an accident on the Lagos-Ibadan expressway on Monday in which his two associates died.

President Bola Tinubu had

already commiserated with the boxing champion.

"I extend my deep sympathies to you following the tragic accident on the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway, which claimed two precious lives and caused you injuries," he said.

The president described the incident as especially painful, noting it occurred during the festive season.

"This immense tragedy casts a deep shadow on this season," the president said.

Tinubu said he shared the grief of Joshua and his family over the loss and emotional trauma.

AFCON 2025: Round of 16 fixtures set as knockout battle begins

Fixtures for the Round of 16 at the CAF Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) Morocco 2025 have been confirmed after a thrilling and highly competitive group stage.

The knockout phase runs from Jan. 3 to Jan. 6, with two matches daily at 4 p.m. and 7 p.m.

Hosts Morocco will confront Tanzania on Sunday in Rabat, buoyed by home support as they chase a first continental title in 50 years after topping Group A.

Tanzania qualified as one of the four best third-placed teams from Group C, setting

up an intriguing encounter against the tournament hosts.

Later on Sunday, South Africa face Cameroon in Rabat, with coach Hugo Broos coming up against the Indomitable Lions he guided to the 2017 title.

The round opens on Saturday as 2021 champions Senegal tackle Sudan in Tangier, aiming to assert their pedigree at the start of the knockout phase.

Mali meet Tunisia later that evening in Casablanca, with Mali chasing a maiden crown and Tunisia hoping to relive their 2004 triumph.



Tension in Angola as Technical Crew, players face probe over AFCON early exit



Angola's exit from the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) has sparked growing tension, with reports indicating that the national team's technical crew and players are set to face a formal probe over the country's disappointing campaign.

According to sources, the entire squad has been instructed to return to Luanda as a group

following their early elimination from the tournament.

Upon arrival, they are expected to appear before the country's leadership to account for their failure to progress to the round of 16.

The development has reportedly created unease within the camp, as several players are said to be unhappy with the directive.

Some members of the squad are believed to prefer returning directly to their respective clubs, rather than traveling back collectively with the team to face questioning at home.

Angola's premature exit has drawn criticism from fans and stakeholders, particularly given the expectations placed on the team ahead of the tournament.

The forthcoming meeting is

expected to review the team's overall performance, technical decisions, and preparation, as authorities seek explanations for the early departure.

As the situation unfolds, uncertainty remains over whether all players will comply with the directive, further underlining the tense atmosphere surrounding Angola's AFCON 2025 campaign.