

Back to Farm: Edo deploys Bulldozers, urges Agric Ministry staff to deliver on food security

BENIN CITY

In a bold move to strengthen food security and boost agricultural productivity, the Edo State Government has commenced the deployment of newly procured bulldozers to Ekpoma under the second phase of the 'Back to Farm' Initiative of Project SHINE.

Also, the State Commissioner for Agriculture and Food Security, Dr Jerry Uwangue, has urged ministry staff to be more proactive, results-driven, and accountable in implementing government policies.

Speaking to journalists, Dr Uwangue explained that the heavy-duty machinery is being transported on low-bed trucks

for safe and efficient delivery to project sites, where it will be deployed for large-scale land clearing, farm preparation, and expansion of arable land.

"The equipment will be strategically shared and deployed across the three senatorial districts to ensure equitable mechanised support and maximise impact statewide," he said.

He said the initiative aims to remove longstanding barriers that hinder access to cultivatable land for farmers and agribusiness operators, enhance food production, create employment opportunities, and drive sustainable economic growth. "The deployment of these bulldozers is a critical milestone in the second phase of the Back to Farm

Initiative, which is at the heart of Project SHINE's mission to transform agriculture in Edo State," he added.

The commissioner also highlighted the state's investment in modern farming equipment, mechanisation, and infrastructure as part of Governor Monday Okpebholo's broader agenda to revolutionise the sector.

"It is not just about machinery, it is about ensuring that our people, especially farmers and agribusiness stakeholders, have the tools, land, and support to succeed," he said.

Earlier, Dr Uwangue met with staff of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security at

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The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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PUBLISHED SINCE MAY 29, 1968

VOL. 47, NO. 1,186

THURSDAY 29TH JANUARY, 2026.

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Alleged US strike: Senate to hold closed-door session on Nigeria-US security ties —Akpabio

ABUJA

The Senate will discuss the Nigeria-United States security partnership behind closed doors, Senate President Godswill Akpabio has said.

Akpabio's comment followed a Point of Order on Privileges raised on Wednesday by Senator Abdul Ningi (PDP-Bauchi) during plenary.

Ningi warned that any alleged foreign military strike on Nigerian territory without due constitutional process would amount to a grave breach of Nigeria's sovereignty and the authority of the National Assembly.

He was referring to the re-

ported Christmas Day bombing of terrorist hideouts in Sokoto State by United States forces, allegedly carried out in collaboration with Nigerian security agencies.

Invoking matters of privilege, Ningi demanded that the issue be addressed immediately, stressing that the 1999 Constitution vests legislative powers primarily in the National Assembly.

Quoting the constitution, he said legislative powers are vested in the National Assembly to make laws for the "peace, order and good government of the federation."

Ningi alleged that the December strike by the US mili-

tary within Nigerian territory constituted "a complete violation" of the Nigerian Constitution and a breach of the United Nations Charter.

According to him, only the President, as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, is constitutionally empowered to authorise any military action within Nigeria.

He explained that while foreign forces could collaborate with Nigerian troops, operational control must remain with Nigeria.

"The executive acts, but the legislature must speak. This assembly has a core responsibility and accountability in governance," Ningi said.

He therefore called on the leadership of the National Assembly to demand an immediate security briefing from relevant agencies.

Responding, Akpabio cautioned against debating the matter in open session, noting that Ningi had raised a matter of privilege and not a motion for general debate.

"I don't want anybody to contribute. You have argued your issue, and no contribution is required," Akpabio said.

He disclosed that after reviewing the relevant constitutional provisions, the Senate leadership concluded that Ningi's privilege had not been breached.

He added that the matter in-

volved sensitive security issues that could not be discussed publicly, insisting that a closed session would be more appropriate.

"Because it is a matter of security, we should not discuss it in the open. We need a closed

session so that we can be properly briefed," Akpabio said.

He explained that the Senate was unable to hold such a session earlier due to time constraints following the loss of a senator during the chamber's first sitting.

2027 polls 'll be won on performance, not Rhetoric —APC Fires Back at Aregbesola

LAGOS

The Lagos State chapter of the All Progressives Congress (APC) has declared that the 2027 general elections will be decided by performance and leadership, not political rhetoric.

The party was reacting to comments credited to the National Secretary of the African Democratic Congress (ADC) and former Governor of Osun State, Rauf Aregbesola, on defections and the outcome of the 2023 presidential election in Lagos.

Aregbesola, speaking at a book launch on Tuesday, had said Nigerians, and not government, would determine the outcome of the 2027 elections. He also cautioned that the defection of some governors to the ruling APC might not guarantee electoral victory, arguing that the 2023 presidential result in Lagos showed that control of state governments does not automatically translate to electoral success.

Responding in a statement on Wednesday, the APC spokesman in Lagos, Mr Seye

Oladejo, said the remarks required factual clarification.

"Presidential elections are decided nationally, not by the outcome of a single state, however symbolic," Oladejo said.

He noted that President Bola Tinubu won the 2023 presidential election by securing the required constitutional spread and building the widest national coalition.

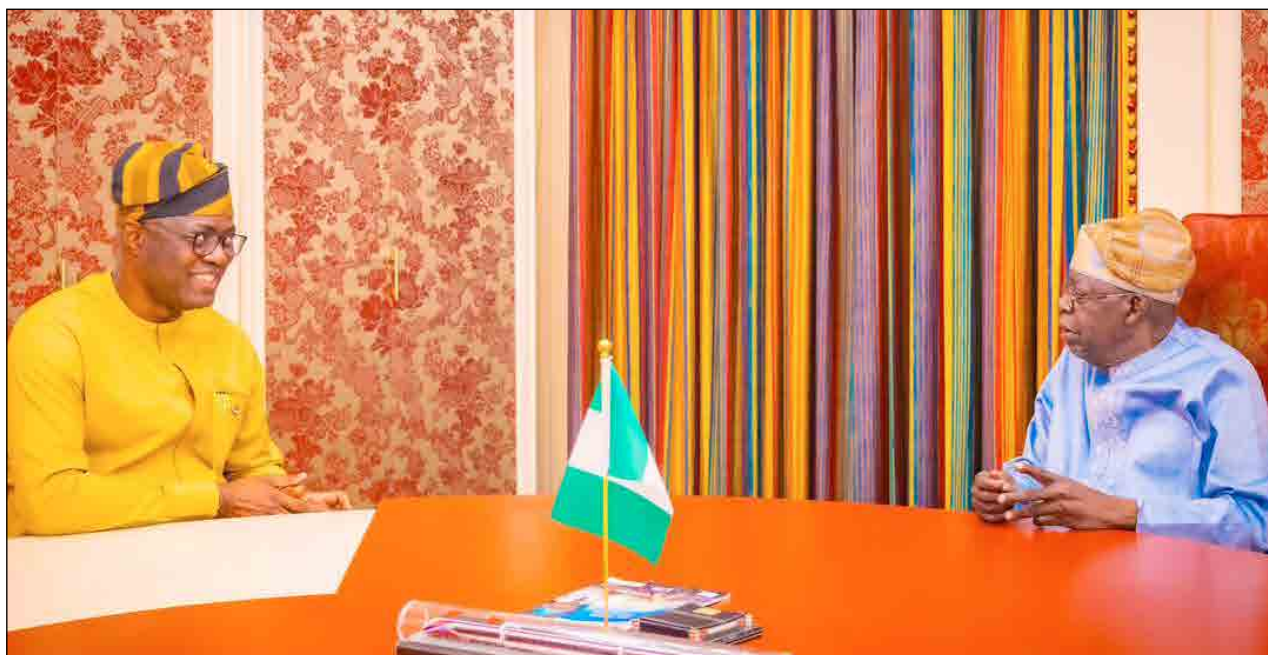
"To isolate Lagos from the broader national picture is to misunderstand electoral realities," he added.

Oladejo described the opposition's showing in Lagos during the 2023 presidential election as temporary and politically insignificant, stressing that it neither altered the national outcome nor endured beyond that contest.

"Days later, Lagosians reaffirmed their confidence in the APC during the governorship election," he said.

According to him, subsequent bye-elections across the state further underscored the party's dominance and grass-

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MEETING:

President Bola Tinubu (R) and Governor Sheyi Makinde of Oyo State during their meeting at the Presidential Villa in Abuja recently.

2027: Go tough on criminals, Oborevwori orders police

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EFCC files N4.3bn forex fraud case against UBA, 4 others

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Amazon confirms 16,000 job cuts after accidental email

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Nigeria, British Cycling partner ahead of Glasgow 2026 Commonwealth Games

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Okpebholo transforms Army Day School

Students, teachers and management of Army Day Junior and Senior Secondary School, Ekenhuan, Benin City, have commended Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, for the comprehensive renovation and remodelling of the institution, describing the intervention as timely and life-changing.

The principals of the junior and senior schools, who spoke separately to journalists, said the school had been in a deplorable state for years before the governor's intervention, with teaching and learning taking place under unsafe and unconducive conditions.

The Junior Secondary School Principal, Mrs Itohan Emokpai-Ogbebo, recalled that when she assumed duty on October 15, 2024, the school was in distress, with dilapidated classrooms, leaking roofs and an acute shortage of learning spaces.

According to her, many students sat on the floor and windows, while others were overcrowded in merged classrooms.

"It was a pathetic situation. I cried in my heart," she said, adding that the transformation has restored dignity to both staff and students.

On her part, the Senior Secondary School Principal, Mrs Osakwe Joy, said that the

school had suffered years of neglect marked by broken furniture, cracked walls and inadequate facilities, noting that the governor's intervention went beyond routine renovation.

"What has been done here is

more than renovation. The buildings were rebuilt and the tiles were changed," she said, describing the project as a clear demonstration of Governor Okpebholo's commitment to education.

Both principals said the up-

graded classrooms, improved infrastructure and safer learning environment have boosted staff morale and rekindled students' enthusiasm for learning.

Students also expressed gratitude, describing the facelift as

a dream come true. The Head Girl of the Senior Secondary School, Osayande Sharon, said that the improved environment has made learning more enjoyable and motivated students to study harder.



REMODELED:

Army Day Secondary School, Ekevan remodeled by the Governor Monday Okpebholo led government of Edo State.

Sapele is Okpe land, interest group insists amid Palace dispute

The Okpe Interest Group has defended Sapele's territorial status, describing it as ancestral Okpe land, amid controversy surrounding the proposed foundation laying of an Okpe Sub Palace in Sapele, Delta State.

In a statement signed by Comrade Ejomafume Akpomvine, the group dismissed a recent publication credited to Chief Emmanuel Oritsejomi Uduaghan, the Alema of Warri Kingdom, describing it as a distortion of history capable of inflaming ethnic tensions.

The group maintained that Sapele predates colonial administration as Okpe land and insisted that the Okpe people are indigenous to the town, not

settlers or tenants.

It identified Hole Creek along the Benin River, near the Sapele/Abigborodo Bridge, as the long-recognised boundary between Okpe and Itsekiri territories, warning against attempts to reinterpret historical boundaries.

The group argued that colonial intelligence reports were administrative tools and did not transfer indigenous land ownership, stressing that no document ceded Sapele to the Itsekiri.

It also rejected interpretations of the judgment in Chief Ayo- mano v. Ginuwa II that allegedly diminished Okpe territorial rights, insisting the ruling neither declared Sapele Itsekiri land nor extinguished Okpe ownership.

Back to Farm: Edo deploys...

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the Agriculture Hub in Benin City, calling on workers to embrace proactivity, professionalism, and teamwork to justify the government's investment.

He emphasised that the success of Project SHINE and the Back to Farm Initiative hinges on the efficiency and dedication of ministry staff in translating policy into tangible results.

"The government has provided modern equipment and resources; now it is our duty to deliver measurable outcomes in food production, land development, and rural empowerment," he told the staff.

Dr Uwangue also proposed the creation of a committee to organise periodic bonding

and recreational activities to strengthen unity, morale, and collaboration among workers.

An interactive session followed, during which staff raised operational concerns, shared ideas, and asked questions on improving productivity and service delivery.

The Director of Agricultural Services, Mr Ogunbor David, thanked Governor Monday Okpebholo for providing additional bulldozers, assuring the commissioner that the ministry is fully prepared to drive the food sustainability agenda in Edo State.

The Director of Administration, Mrs Odiat Franca, commended Dr Uwangue for organising the ministry's first-ever Christmas package and party for staff.

2027 polls 'll be won on...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

roots strength.

He argued that the Lagos presidential result, rather than weakening Tinubu's credentials, reinforced his democratic values.

"That outcome demonstrated his commitment to credible elections and respect for the will of the people," Oladejo said.

On defections, the APC spokesman maintained that they were not election-winning tools but reflections of

political realities.

"Defections happen because of performance, structure, leadership and vision, not coercion," he said, adding that opposition parties were struggling with internal crises and ideological weakness.

As the 2027 elections draw nearer, Oladejo said the APC remains focused on governance, reforms and improving the lives of Nigerians, urging political actors to prioritise ideas and verifiable records over polemics and selective memory.

NDLEA, communities unite to tackle drug abuse, cultism in Edo

The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), in collaboration with the Ayuele Clan Progressive Association, has intensified efforts to combat drug abuse and cultism in Edo State with a one-day symposium attended by students from twelve secondary schools in the State.

The symposium featured a presentation by the Edo State NDLEA Commander, Dr. Mitchell Ofoyeju, who warned

of the growing prevalence of drug abuse and its strong link to cultism among youths.

Speaking on the theme "Anti-Drug and Cultism Campaign: The Role of Stakeholders," Commander Ofoyeju stressed that tackling the menace requires collective action from parents, teachers, community leaders and law enforcement agencies.

"The fight against drug abuse and cultism is not solely the responsibility of law en-

forcement. It requires a collaborative effort from all sectors of society," he said.

In his remarks, the President of the Ayuele Clan Progressive Association, Alhaji Abubakar Momodu, urged participants to take ownership of the fight to protect youths from destructive influences.

Students from schools, including Excellence School, Amina Foundation School, Hill Station School, Momodu College and Ayuele Secondary School actively participated in an interactive session, asking questions on how to

resist drug abuse and cultism.

Other participating schools included Ugheole Secondary School, Unique Child Academy, An-Nur Comprehensive School, Young Intellectual Academy, Ughilde Secondary School, Elate Demonstration School and Spring Leaders School, Aveile.

The symposium ended with a collective resolve by stakeholders and students to promote safer communities and sustain advocacy against drug abuse and cultism, reinforcing the belief that protecting the youth is a shared responsibility.

Nigeria can become world's greatest if we live in peace —Shettima

ABUJA

Vice-President Kashim Shettima has said Nigeria possesses the capacity to become one of the greatest nations on earth if its citizens embrace tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

Shettima stated this on Wednesday in Jos, Plateau State, during a courtesy visit to the Gbong Gwom Jos and Chairman of the Plateau State Council of Chiefs and Emirs, Da Jacob Gyang-Buba, at his palace.

According to the Vice-Presi-

dent, Nigerians share a common heritage that outweighs differences capable of dividing them.

"We are all connected one way or the other. We must therefore continue to live together. What binds us together supersedes what separates us," he said.

Shettima, who was in the state to formally receive Governor Caleb Mutfwang into the All Progressives Congress (APC), described traditional rulers as highly respected leaders who play a critical role in sustaining peace and stability.

"They are not just custodi-

ans of our cultural heritage; they help uphold society by preaching peace among their subjects," he noted.

He commended the cordial relationship between the APC National Chairman, Prof. Nantawe Yilwatda, and Governor Mutfwang, described the political realignment as a positive development for Plateau State.

The Vice-President said the coming together of the two leaders would enhance peace, stability and development in the state.

"There can be no development without peace. With their

coming together, the state will enjoy more tranquillity and dividends of democracy," he added.

Shettima thanked the Plateau State Government and its people for their hospitality.

Earlier, Governor Mutfwang praised the working relationship between President Bola Tinubu and Vice-President Shettima, saying it would continue to benefit the nation.

In his response, the Gbong Gwom Jos appealed for improved security efforts to address challenges confronting Plateau State and other parts of the country.

2027: Go tough on criminals, Oborevwoori orders police

ASABA

Delta State Governor, Hon. Sheriff Oborevwoori, has directed security agencies to arrest and prosecute anyone found in possession of firearms or attempting to disrupt peace in the state ahead of the 2027 general elections.

The governor gave the directive while receiving the new Commissioner of Police, Delta State Command, CP Aina Adesola, and his management team during a courtesy visit to Government House, Asaba.

Describing the posting of CP Adesola as a homecoming, Oborevwoori said the police chief was familiar with the terrain,

having previously served in key operational roles in the state.

He attributed the prevailing peace in Delta State to effective collaboration among security agencies and commended the Commissioner for his professionalism and early impact.

"For the few weeks you have been here, the state has remained peaceful. We are proud

of your achievements," the governor said.

Oborevwoori recalled that prior to 2023, the open display of firearms by criminals was rampant but stressed that such actions had been decisively curtailed.

"That era is gone. It will never happen again in Delta State," he declared.

No room for shoddy Jobs, EDPUBMA boss warns contractors

GLORIA OMORUYI

BENIN CITY

The Managing Director of the Edo State Public Building and Maintenance Agency (EDPUBMA), Architect Emmanuel Fashanu, has declared zero tolerance for

poor-quality project delivery, warning contractors that the agency will no longer compromise on standards.

Fashanu gave the warning yesterday during a meeting with building contractors engaged by the agency at his office.

He said the meeting, the first

for the year, was convened to outline the agency's outlook for 2026 and chart a clear path forward.

He charged contractors to ensure the use of quality materials at every stage of construction, lamenting the attitude of some contractors who cut corners in a bid to maximise profits.

Such sharp practices, he said, would no longer be tolerated, stressing that the agency would deal decisively with any contractor found wanting.

The EDPUBMA boss also emphasised the need for contractors to engage qualified and certified COREN professionals, noting

that there have been instances where unqualified hands handled critical aspects of projects, often with negative outcomes.

According to him, it would no longer be business as usual, as defaulting contractors would be reported to the appropriate authorities for sanction.

He added that all projects would be thoroughly assessed and validated before payments are made, insisting that professionals are paid for results, not attempts.

Fashanu further directed that every project site must carry visible signage displaying details of the project for public information, including highlighting the interventions of Governor Monday Okpebholo's administration across the state.

He called for stronger synergy between the agency and contractors to ensure quality service delivery to the people of Edo State, while thanking the contractors for their patience and understanding.

He assured them that the agency would do the needful to support timely and effective project execution.

Responding on behalf of the contractors, they expressed appreciation to the Managing Director for convening the meeting, which also provided an opportunity to discuss some of their challenges.

They pledged their cooperation and commitment to delivering quality projects in line with the agency's standards.



SIGNING OF MoU:

Administrator, Nigeria Billionaires Network (NBN), Mr Noble Oluchukwu; Chief Executive Officer, Axio African Ltd, Mr Duncan Mighty and Managing Director, Masta Services Ltd, Mr Ugo Oluwabunwa, after the signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between NBN and Rivers Development Company Ltd (RDCL) in Port Harcourt.



FASHANU

Delta IRS, NAF to partner on tax compliance drive

AJUWA VICTOR

WARRI

The Delta State Internal Revenue Service (IRS) has announced plans to collaborate with the Nigerian Air Force to strengthen enforcement and compliance among tax defaulters.

Chairman of the Service, Hon. Solomon Ighrakpata, disclosed this in Warri while receiving the Commander, 3144 Operating Base of the Nigerian Air Force, Group Captain Charles Abara, during a courtesy visit.

Ighrakpata said the partnership would be crucial in areas where tax officers face resistance, especially locations pro-

tected by armed personnel that hinder enforcement activities.

He noted that collaboration with the Air Force aligns with the M.O.R.E. Agenda of Governor Sheriff Oborewori, particularly in enhancing peace and security to support revenue generation.

Earlier, Group Captain Abara expressed the Air Force's readiness to work with the Revenue Service to ensure effective tax collection and service delivery.

He stressed that security and revenue are closely linked, making cooperation between both institutions necessary.

Abara added that the visit was aimed at familiarising himself with the IRS leadership, as he was newly posted to the state.

Navy builds 4-classroom block in Edo community

OZALLA (EDO)

The Nigerian Navy has inaugurated a fully furnished block of four classrooms at Orhueren Central School in Ozalla Community, Owan West Local Government Area of Edo State.

The project is part of the Navy's Special Intervention Quick Impact Project aimed at strengthening civil-military cooperation and supporting grassroots development.

Speaking at the ceremony, the Chief of Naval Staff (CNS), Vice Admiral Idi Abbas, said the initiative underscored the Navy's commitment to community development beyond

its core security mandate.

Abbas was represented by the Flag Officer Commanding, Nigerian Navy Logistics Command, Oghara, Rear Admiral Abiodun Alade.

He explained that the Special Intervention scheme, inaugurated in 2024, was designed to reinvigorate civil-military relations and contribute to the Federal Government's Renewed Hope Agenda.

"Civil-military cooperation encompasses activities and interactions between the military and civil society to support mission accomplishment and national objectives," Abbas said.

"These projects are also a way of honouring accomplished sen-

ior officers of the Navy. Beyond securing lives and property, the Navy remains committed to serving Nigerians through meaningful social interventions."

Abbas described the project, facilitated by Rear Admiral James Okosun, an indigene of Ozalla, as another milestone in the Navy's civil-military engagement, commending him for siting it in his community.

He urged beneficiaries to maintain the facilities, expressing confidence that the classrooms would improve educational standards and quality of life in the area.

He also appealed to residents to continue supporting the Navy and other security

agencies in efforts to eliminate threats to public safety.

Earlier, Okosun said that the Navy deliberately chose education as a lasting investment in the future of the youth.

"We initially considered a secondary school, but a project was already ongoing there. The palace then directed us to this primary school," he explained.

He said the project complemented the military's kinetic operations by addressing social factors linked to insecurity.

In a goodwill message, the King of Ozalla, Okpamen XI, Christopher Atietie, represented by his spokesman, Dr Obaze Osumah, thanked the Nigerian Navy for the intervention.

Agbebaku, dignitaries grace Igue festival in Evbo-Obanosa

KEN ABU

EVBO-OBANOSA

The Speaker of the Edo State House of Assembly, Hon. Blessing Agbebaku at the weekend led political leaders and dignitaries to Evbo-Obanosa community in Orhionmwon Local Government Area to celebrate the annual Igue Festival hosted by the Deputy Speaker, Hon. Atu Osawonyi.

At the colourful cultural event, Agbebaku commended his deputy for organising what he described as a massive celebration that reflects the enduring cultural values of the Benin Kingdom.

He said that the Igue festival remains a strong symbol of unity, peace and identity

among the Benin people.

The Speaker also praised Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, for creating an enabling environment for cultural activities to thrive.

According to him, the governor's investment in security, including the provision of equipment, drones and armoured vehicles to security agencies, has enhanced peace and stability across the state.

In his remarks, Osawonyi described the Igue festival as deeply significant to him, his family and the Evbo-Obanosa community, noting that it represents strength, unity and the rich cultural heritage of the Benin people.

He recalled attending the

festival as a child with his late father, saying that the tradition instilled in him a strong sense of identity and belonging. Osawonyi added that the festival provides an opportunity for sons and daughters of the community, including those in the diaspora, to return home and reconnect with their roots.

The Deputy Speaker expressed appreciation to Governor Okpebholo for promoting peace and infrastructural development, citing improved road access, electrification and enhanced security in his community.

He noted that journeys that once took days can now be completed in about 30 minutes due to ongoing government projects.

Also speaking, the Commissioner representing the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), Hon. Patrick Aisowieren, said he attended the festival to identify with the Deputy Speaker and the people of Evbo-Obanosa, describing Igue as a revered Benin tradition rooted in the Benin Palace.

The member representing Oredo East Constituency, Hon. Uyi Omosigho, said the festival reinforces shared identity among the Benin and Edo people, while the APC Chairman in Oredo Local Government Area, Engineer Gabriel Iduse-ri, described the celebration as a consistent reflection of Benin heritage upheld by Osawonyi.

NEWS

Hajj 2026: Edo steps up pilgrims' data upload for visa processing

ABDUL-KADIR ABDULLAH

The Edo State Muslim Pilgrims Welfare Board has intensified the upload of intending pilgrims' data to the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria's (NAHCON) NUSUK portal ahead of visa processing for the 2026 Hajj exercise.

The ongoing exercise forms part of the Board's early preparations aimed at ensuring seamless and timely processing of travel documents for pilgrims from the state travelling to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Speaking on the development, the Chairman of the Board, Mallam Musa Muhammad Uduimoh, said the

early and sustained upload of pilgrims' data would eliminate delays and avert last-minute challenges often associated with visa processing.

Uduimoh added that the initiative would also guarantee full compliance with guidelines issued by NAHCON and Saudi Arabian authorities.

Similarly, the Executive Secretary of the Board, Alhaji Eranga Abdulkabir Muhammadkabar, urged all registered intending pilgrims to cooperate by providing accurate personal information and valid international passports to facilitate smooth documentation on the NUSUK platform.

According to him, the NU-

SUK portal serves as a centralised system for managing pilgrims' data, visa issuance and

coordination of services for the Hajj exercise.

The Edo State Muslim Pil-

grims Welfare Board reaffirmed its commitment to a hitch-free 2026 Hajj operation

and advised intending pilgrims yet to complete their registration to do so without delay.



VISA PROCESSING:

Head of Information and Communication Technology, Edo State Muslim Pilgrim Welfare Board, Mallam Aliyu Yesufu, while uploading intending pilgrims' data to the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria's (NAHCON) NUSUK portal, ahead of visa processing for the 2026 Hajj exercise.

Police arrest 2 women over alleged trafficking of minor to Ghana

AWKA

The Anambra State Police Command has arrested two women in Ozubulu, Ekwusigbo Local Government Area, for allegedly trafficking a 16-year-old girl to Ghana.

The suspects, identified as Uzoma Nwabueze and Precious Monday, were arrested by operatives attached to the Ozubulu Division following a report of a missing minor.

The Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), SP Tochukwu Ikenga, disclosed this in a statement issued.

"Acting on technology-driven information on January 26,

operatives arrested the suspects over the disappearance of Miss Oluebube Chukwuma, aged 16," Ikenga said.

He said the suspects confessed during interrogation that the victim was taken to Ghana.

Following the development, the Commissioner of Police, Ikioye Orutugu, ordered the immediate transfer of the suspects to the State Criminal Investigation Department (SCID), Awka.

Ikenga added that investigations had commenced to trace the victim, unravel the trafficking network and arrest all those involved.

AFAN deepens ties with FG to boost food production in 2026

LAGOS

The All Farmers Association of Nigeria (AFAN) has announced plans to strengthen its partnership with the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (FMAF) to improve agricultural performance in 2026.

The association's General Secretary, Mr Femi Oke, disclosed this during an interview with journalists on Wednesday in Lagos.

Oke said the newly elected AFAN leadership was working closely with the ministry to create an enabling environment for farmers and enhance productivity.

"We met with the Minister about three weeks ago to discuss policies that will benefit farmers, and the ministry has shown readiness to work with us," he said.

He expressed optimism that the distribution of farm inputs would improve this year, noting that some inputs in the previous year failed to reach genuine farmers.

Oke also called for the digitalisation of the Bank of Agriculture (BOA) to improve

farmers' access to financial services nationwide.

"The BOA is the closest bank to farmers but has remained largely analogue. Digitalisation will allow farmers to access services from anywhere," he said.

He commended the Tinubu administration's Renewed Hope Agenda, noting that AFAN members were benefiting from training programmes and the Nigeria Agricultural Development Fund (NADF).

According to him, AFAN has also benefited from improved rural logistics through partnerships involving the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and the World Bank's Rural Access and Agricultural Marketing Project (RAAMP), which is opening up rural roads to markets.

Oke urged the government to establish produce clusters and storage facilities to reduce post-harvest losses, adding that AFAN's 2026 projection was to ensure food availability for all Nigerians.

"We still need closer collaboration with government, particularly in financing and funding, to achieve food security," he said.

Ramadan: Shari'ah council calls for faith-driven leadership, national renewal

ABDUL-KADIR ABDULLAH

The Supreme Council for Shari'ah in Nigeria (SCSN) has called for urgent national renewal anchored on faith-driven leadership, justice and unity amid worsening insecurity and economic hardship across the country.

The President of the Council, Sheikh Dr. Bashir Aliyu Umar, OON, made the call at the Council's Annual Pre-Ramadan Lecture and General Assembly held at the NICON Luxury Hotel, Abuja.

Addressing scholars, traditional rulers, professionals and representatives of Islamic organisations nationwide, Sheikh Umar described the gathering

as both a sacred trust and a strategic responsibility.

Speaking on the theme, "Nigeria's Future: Faith, Justice, and Leadership," he highlighted the growing anxieties of ordinary Nigerians grappling with inflation, unemployment, multiple taxation and persistent violence, urging leaders to uphold fairness, protect lives and restore public trust.

The SCSN President outlined the Council's interventions over the past year, raising concerns over tax reforms, poor budget implementation, imbalance in federal appointments and the plight of victims of terrorism.

He rejected divisive narratives such as claims of a "Christian genocide," stressing the

need for honesty and balance to prevent deeper national polarisation.

Sheikh Umar also reaffirmed Muslims' constitutional right to Shari'ah implementation, noting that it applies strictly to Muslims and does not infringe on the rights of others, while calling for peaceful coexistence.

Beyond politics, the Council appealed to ulama across the country to use Ramadan Tafseer sessions to promote unity, repentance, moral reform, responsible social media use and civic participation, including voter registration and conscientious voting.

In his remarks, the Coordinator of the Edo Muslim For Equity and Good Governance (EMEGG), Sheikh Sirajudeen

Muhammad, who represented Edo State, stressed the need for unity among Muslims and urged ulama to exercise caution in their sermons during Ramadan Tafseer.

He noted that Islam condemns terrorism and called on Muslims to consistently preach against it, while also urging the federal government to implement people-centred policies capable of improving the lives of Nigerians.

As Nigeria moves closer to another electoral cycle, the message from the Council's Annual Pre-Ramadan gathering was clear: the nation's future depends on justice, credible institutions and leaders who regard governance as a sacred trust.

Army pounds terrorists, rescues kidnap victims across states

ABUJA

The Nigerian Army has sustained coordinated offensive operations nationwide, neutralising terrorists, destroying hideouts and rescuing dozens of kidnapped victims across multiple theatres in the last 24 hours.

A senior military source disclosed this on Wednesday in Abuja.

According to the source, troops of 1 Brigade under Operation Fansan Yamma responded to intelligence at Gidan Baushe village in Maradun area of Zamfara State, where a civilian with gunshot wounds was

rescued and evacuated.

In another operation, troops of the 8 Division Garrison Strike Team launched a dawn offensive into terrorist camps in Sububu Forest, destroying logistics structures after tracking active motorcycle routes used by insurgents.

The troops fought through an ambush, dominated the area and recovered military items, including a ballistic helmet, combat boots, woodland camouflage and two Baofeng radios.

Under Operation MESA in Kogi State, troops of 12 Brigade rescued six kidnapped victims in separate operations

across Yagba East and Yagba West Local Government Areas. One terrorist was neutralised during a firefight, while rescued victims are receiving treatment.

In Kwara State, troops of 22 Brigade, working with the Department of State Services (DSS) and the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA), raided a terrorist enclave in Ifelodun Local Government Area, destroying camps, motorcycles and food supplies.

The source also said troops of 32 Brigade responded to attacks on Eleyowo and Ilu Abo communities in Akure North Local Government Area of

Ondo State, where two houses were attacked and three civilians killed. Troops pursued the attackers as security dominance operations continued.

In Benue State, under Operation Whirl Stroke, troops ambushed terrorists along the Naka-Ahume-Makurdi road in Gwer West Local Government Area, killing two insurgents and recovering an AK-47 rifle, magazine and ammunition.

The source assured that the Nigerian Army remained relentless in denying terrorists freedom of action and ensuring the safety of lives and property nationwide.

Sit-at-Home: Aguocha urges caution, stakeholders' dialogue in S'East

ABUJA

A member of the House of Representatives, Obi Aguocha (LP-Abia), has urged caution and broad-based consultations with stakeholders over moves to end the Monday sit-at-home protest in the South-East.

Aguocha, who chairs the House Committee on Monitoring and Evaluation of Stand-

ing and Ad Hoc Committees, made the call in a statement issued on Wednesday in Abuja.

The Monday sit-at-home was introduced by the proscribed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) to protest the continued detention of its leader, Nnamdi Kanu, by the Federal Government.

The exercise has compelled traders, transporters, banks, and other businesses to shut

down weekly, often enforced through violent attacks that have claimed several lives.

Recently, Anambra State Governor, Prof. Chukwuma Soludo, ordered a resumption of full activities on Mondays and directed the closure of markets and plazas that failed to comply, triggering protests by traders and market associations.

Aguocha, who represents Ikwuano/Umuahia North/Umuahia South Federal Constituency, said efforts to restore normalcy across the zone had been yielding results before the

governor's pronouncement.

"Over the last three years, many markets, plazas and shopping centres across the South-East have gradually returned to normalcy, operating freely and unencumbered," he said.

According to him, while the intention to end the sit-at-home was commendable, the approach adopted was counterproductive and had reignited fear and resistance, with the potential to trigger renewed violence and criminality.

He stressed that private

business owners could not be compelled by force or punishment to open or close their shops, noting that such decisions were protected under fundamental rights.

The lawmaker renewed calls for the release of Nnamdi

Kanu, electoral and criminal justice reforms, and a more equitable balance of power and development to address agitations in the South-East.

He urged residents to remain calm and avoid the destruction of lives and property.

Fire destroys N3bn worth of property in C'River

CALABAR

Properties valued at over N3 billion were destroyed by fire outbreaks in Cross River State in 2025, the Federal Fire Service (FFS) has said.

The State Commanding Officer, Mrs Olumayowa Omolola, disclosed this on Wednesday during an interview with journalists in Calabar.

Omolola said the losses were recorded from 18 fire incidents affecting 14 buildings across the state.

She listed the causes of the incidents to include gas explosions,

electrical faults, bush fires and petroleum-related accidents.

According to her, the fires claimed two lives while five others sustained varying degrees of injury.

She noted that the command continued to operate within its limited capacity and appealed for improved logistical support, citing shortages of diesel, water tankers, ambulances and utility vehicles.

Omolola also called for the establishment of additional fire stations within Calabar metropolis and other local government areas to enhance response time.



CELEBRATION OF JANUARY SENATORS:

Senators Ned Nwoko and Senator Ipalibo Banigo; Senate Leader, Opeyemi Bamidele; Senator Aminu Tambuwa; President of the Senate, Godswill Akpabio; Chairman, Senate Committee on Appropriations, Adeola Olamilekan; Deputy Minority Leader, Olalere Oyewumi and Chairman, Senate Committee on Sports, Abdul Ningi, during the celebration of Senators born in the month of January after Plenary in Abuja yesterday.

JAMB denies barring undergraduates from 2026 UTME

ABUJA

The Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) has dismissed reports claiming that undergraduates are barred from registering for the 2026 Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) and Direct Entry (DE).

The Board described the reports as false and misleading in

a statement issued on Wednesday by its spokesperson, Dr Fabian Benjamin.

Benjamin said the claims were a deliberate distortion of JAMB's guidelines by individuals seeking attention and social media traffic.

According to him, the 2026 UTME/DE advertisement clearly requires candidates to disclose their matriculation status during registration, in

line with the Board's mandate to prevent multiple admissions.

He clarified that it was not an offence for a candidate already admitted into a tertiary institution to register for UTME or DE, but failure to disclose an existing admission was a violation of admission regulations.

Benjamin explained that once a candidate secures a fresh admission, any previous admission automatically lapses, as no can-

didate is permitted to hold two admissions simultaneously.

He noted that mandatory disclosure has helped curb the activities of professional examination takers.

The spokesperson warned that candidates who fail to disclose their status risk forfeiting both admissions if detected by JAMB's system, urging the public to rely on official information.

2026 FCT polls: NSCDC orders personnel to remain neutral, professional

ABUJA

The Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), Federal Capital Territory Command, has charged its personnel to exhibit professionalism and neutrality during the February 21 Area Council elections.

The FCT Commandant, Olusola Odumosu, gave the directive during a meeting with senior officers at the command headquarters on Wednesday.

He urged officers and men to remain non-partisan and uncompromising throughout the electioneering process.

The meeting was attended by Heads of Departments, Heads

of Units, Area Commanders and Divisional Officers.

Odumosu said the corps must imbibe civility, integrity and mental alertness to remain relevant within the FCT's security architecture, noting that election security remained a key responsibility of the NSCDC.

He stressed the need for effective coordination across formations to ensure a free, fair, credible and violence-free election.

"The responsibility of protecting INEC personnel, electoral materials and voters before, during and after the election is non-negotiable," he said.

He also urged officers un-

dergoing election security training at INEC offices to adhere strictly to established protocols, which stipulate zero tolerance for corruption.

Odumosu appealed to political actors and their supporters

to shun violence, warning that offenders would face the full weight of the law.

INEC is scheduled to conduct elections in the six Area Councils of the FCT on February 21.

Tax Reform Laws intact, no alteration —Akpabio

ABUJA

Senate President Godswill Akpabio has dismissed claims that the tax reform laws which took effect in January were adulterated.

Akpabio clarified the issue during plenary on Wednesday, saying the four tax Acts had been properly passed,

gazetted, signed by President Bola Tinubu and certified by the Clerk of the National Assembly.

"There is no adulteration. You can discard anything contrary to what has been duly certified," he said.

The Senate President directed the Clerk of the Senate to distribute certified copies of

the Acts to all senators to avoid confusion.

"These Acts must be collected directly from the Clerk and given only to senators," Akpabio stressed.

Meanwhile, the Senate deferred consideration of the report of the Committee on Electoral Matters to allow lawmakers more time to study it.

Senate Leader, Opeyemi Bamidele, explained that the committee chairman, Senator Simon Lalong, was unavailable but copies of the report had been circulated.

Responding, Akpabio said the Senate would take its time to ensure justice and due process in the consideration of the report.

NEWS

300 Nigerian refugees return home as Borno begins fresh repatriation phase

MAIDUGURI

The first batch of 300 Nigerian refugees displaced by insurgency has returned from neighbouring Cameroon, arriving in Pulka town, Gwoza Local Government Area of Borno State.

The return marks the commencement of the fourth phase of a sustained repatriation exercise for persons displaced for over 11 years by insurgency in the state.

The returnees were part of the 3,000 refugees expected to be

repatriated from the Minawao Camp in Maroua, Cameroon.

Comprising 75 households, they arrived in Pulka in a coordinated and dignified process facilitated by United Nations agencies in collaboration with Nigerian and Cameroonian authorities.

Local authorities and security officials formally received the refugees on arrival.

Each household head received ₦500,000, while each housewife was given an additional ₦50,000 to support reintegration.

The Borno State Government provided mattresses and clothing for women and children, while the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons supplied food items, including rice, millet, beans and cooking oil.

Chairman of the Borno State Sub-Committee on Repatriation, Engr. Lawan Abba Wakilbe, described the exercise as a major milestone for the current administration.

"This homecoming is a testament to our collective resolve. We are not just moving

people; we are restoring lives and reigniting hope in our communities," he said.

Many of the returnees expressed joy, shedding tears as they reunited with their ancestral communities.

They thanked all those who ensured their safety in Cam-

eroon and prayed for lasting peace as they begin life anew.

A United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report estimates that insurgency in the North-East has displaced 1.8 million people across Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states, with 1.5 million from Borno alone.

Kogi reaffirms partnership with NBC on boundary resolution

LOKOJA

The Kogi State Government has reaffirmed its commitment to partnering with the National Boundary Commission (NBC) to resolve boundary-related issues in the state.

Deputy Governor Joel Salifu gave the assurance on Wednesday during a working visit by the NBC management to his office in Lokoja.

Salifu, who chairs the Kogi State Boundary Committee, described the visit as timely, noting that the state shares boundaries with about ten states, making effective bound-

ary management critical.

He assured the commission of the state government's continued support and collaboration.

Earlier, NBC Director-General, Mr Adamu Adaji, said the commission plans to organise a stakeholders' workshop involving Kogi and neighbouring states to address boundary challenges and strengthen co-operation.

He stressed the role of state and local boundary committees in community sensitisation and data provision for effective boundary delineation, and commended Kogi for its sustained commitment to boundary matters.

YABATECH: Rolls out training, mentorship scheme for new staff

LAGOS

Yaba College of Technology (YABATECH) has unveiled structured training and mentorship initiatives aimed at strengthening staff development and institutional capacity.

Rector of the institution, Dr Ibraheem Abdul, said the programmes include digital learning platforms, continuous professional development workshops, mentorship schemes and capacity-building initiatives.

He explained that the programmes were designed to align new staff with the college's culture, ethics, ICT standards, quality assurance processes and role-specific competencies.

The initiatives are being implemented through the Centre for Human Resource Development (CHRD), while the Centre for Open, Distance and Flexible e-Learning (CODFeL) will provide digital platforms for continuous upskilling.

Abdul said staff would have

access to online certificate and diploma programmes, as well as workshops focusing on digital pedagogy, instructional design and student-centred teaching methods.

He added that YABATECH would leverage its technology ecosystem to connect staff with industry mentors and innovation hubs, while TET-Fund-supported programmes would enhance qualifications and research capacity.

The rector said management formally welcomed new staff at a meeting held on January 5, outlining expectations, conduct and institutional standards, and reaffirmed the college's commitment to innovation despite challenges such as funding and digital adoption.

CHANGE OF NAME

Formerly known as **NKECHINYERE PAULINE UKACHUKWU**, now wish to be known and called **UKACHUKWU PAULINE ADA**. All former documents remain valid. General public please take note.



INAUGURATION:

President Bola Tinubu (R) congratulating the Chairman, Federal Character Commission, Mrs Ayo Omidiran after her inauguration at the Presidential Villa in Abuja recently.

Nigeria, ECA step up fight against illicit financial flows

ABUJA

The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the Federal Ministry of Finance have organised a capacity-building workshop aimed at strengthening Nigeria's ability to detect, measure and curb illicit financial flows (IFFs).

The five-day workshop, held in Abuja, focused on addressing revenue losses arising from trade mis-invoicing.

Participants were drawn from key institutions, including the Nigeria Customs Service, Federal Inland Revenue

Service, National Bureau of Statistics, Central Bank of Nigeria, EFCC, NFIU, ICPC and NEITI.

Minister of State for Finance, Dr Doris Uzoka-Anite, described illicit financial flows as a major threat to Nigeria's economic sovereignty, noting that trade mis-invoicing continues to deprive the country of vital development resources.

She said improved use of customs data would enhance revenue protection, compliance and alignment with global standards in combating illicit financial practices.

Permanent Secretary of

the ministry, Mr Raymond Omachi, emphasised the importance of accurate data and measurement in addressing IFFs, describing reliable information as critical to transparency, accountability and sound policymaking.

Participants were trained on advanced analytical tools, including the Partner Country Method Plus (PCM+), Price Filter Method Plus (PFM+) and risk-based audit techniques, aimed at improving estimation of trade-based illicit flows.

An ECA official, Mr Allan Mukungu, said the training built on a similar workshop

held in May 2025 and addressed capacity and data gaps identified in earlier engagements.

He reaffirmed ECA's commitment to supporting African countries in strengthening domestic resource mobilisation in line with Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

Coordinator of Nigeria's Inter-agency Technical Working Group on IFFs, Mr Idris Abdullahi, reiterated the government's resolve to tackle illicit financial flows, particularly the data challenges limiting effective policy responses.

Reforms, inclusion, tech driving Nigeria's capital market —Popoola

LAGOS

The Group Chief Executive Officer of Nigerian Exchange Group (NGX), Mr Temi Popoola, has said that Nigeria's capital market is consolidating its position as a structured gateway to the African market.

Speaking at a Pan-African Investment Lounge hosted by Radiant Collective Capital, Popoola said the progress was being driven by macroeconomic reforms, digital platforms and expanding investor participation.

The virtual event, themed "Global Economic Outlook 2026 & Overview of the Nigerian Stock Exchange: Opportunities and Market Structure," attracted women professionals, founders and business leaders from across Africa and the diaspora.

Popoola said the reforms were translating into tangible opportunities for investors, particularly women and Nigerians in the diaspora. Reflecting on Nigeria's 2025 adjustment phase, he noted that tough but necessary reforms

and improved price discovery had laid the foundation for sustainable growth in 2026.

He cited the NGX All-Share Index's 51.19 percent gain in 2025, attributing the performance to stronger corporate earnings, dividend consistency and economic reforms rather than speculation.

Popoola also highlighted growing inclusion, noting a rise in female participation among new retail investors.

He referenced a recent telecommunications public offer in which women accounted for

76 percent of over 110,000 new investor accounts.

Looking ahead to 2026, he identified geopolitical shifts, macroeconomic stability, renewed foreign portfolio inflows, closer fiscal-monetary coordination and expanded asset utilisation as key drivers of market growth.

He added that technology, sustainability and strategic partnerships would increasingly shape the market, with platforms such as NGX Invest and ESG-linked initiatives supporting long-term resilience.

JUDICIARY

NEWS

Alleged fraud: AGF takes over prosecution of Ozekhome

ABUJA

The Attorney-General of the Federation (AGF) and Minister of Justice, Mr Lateef Fagbemi, SAN, has formally taken over the prosecution of Senior Advocate of Nigeria, Mike Ozekhome, in the alleged fraud case instituted by the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC).

Ozekhome was scheduled to be arraigned on Monday before a High Court of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, over

allegations bordering on forgery linked to a United Kingdom property transaction.

When the case was called, Dr Osuebeni Akpomosingha announced his appearance for the prosecution, while former AGF and Minister of Justice, Chief Kanu Agabi, SAN, led other counsel for the defendant.

At that point, the Director of Public Prosecutions of the Federation (DPPF), Mr Rotimi Oyedepo, SAN, announced his appearance on behalf of the AGF and informed the court of the Federal Government's

decision to take over the case from the ICPC.

Oyedepo said the takeover was pursuant to Section 174 of the 1999 Constitution, adding that the Office of the AGF would collaborate with the ICPC to ensure effective, diligent and fair prosecution in line with due process.

He said the decision was guided by public interest and aimed at promoting confidence, fairness and competence in the criminal justice system, while assuring the court that the defendant's

rights would be fully protected.

Oyedepo also cited inter-agency cooperation in the fight against corruption as a key consideration and urged the court to take judicial notice of the takeover.

The AGF consequently sought an adjournment to enable his office retrieve and review the case file from the ICPC before determining the next line of action.

Counsel to the ICPC raised no objection, assuring the court of the commission's full cooperation, having investigated the matter.

By agreement of parties, Justice Peter Kekemeke adjourned the case until February 24 for arraignment.

In the charge marked FCT/HC/CR/010/26, dated January 16, Ozekhome is the sole defendant.

In the three-count charge, ICPC alleged that Ozekhome, sometime in August 2021 in London, received a property located at No. 79, Randall Avenue, London NW2 7SX, purportedly from one Mr Shani Tali, knowing the act constituted a felony, contrary to Section

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

The second count alleged that Ozekhome made a false document, a Nigerian passport bearing the name of Mr Shani to support ownership claims over the property, an offence punishable under the Penal Code of the FCT.

In the third count, the senior lawyer was accused of dishonestly using the said passport as genuine, knowing it to be false.



AUTHORITY'S WORKING VISIT:

L-R: Regional Coordinator, Nigerian Midstream and Downstream Petroleum Regulatory Authority (NMDPRA), Mr Victor Ohwodiasa; Director, Public Affairs of NMDPRA, Mr George Ene-Ita; Managing Director, Central Horizon Gas Company, Mr Kende Anabi and Chief Executive Officer, Nigerian of the Authority, Mr Saidu Aliyu-Mohammed, during the Authority's working visit to Matrix Power Plant at Igurienta in Ikwere Local Government Area of Rivers State recently.

EFCC files N4.3bn forex fraud case against UBA, 4 others

IKEJA

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) has instituted a N4.3 billion alleged foreign exchange fraud case against United Bank for Africa (UBA) Plc and four other defendants before the Ikeja Special Offences Court.

The other defendants are Muiyiwa Akinyemi, Amangbo Stephen, Gesos Global Service Ltd and Fedat Global Ltd.

Justice Rahman Oshodi adjourned the case until April 21 for the arraignment of the defendants, following their absence in court on Monday.

None of the defendants was represented by counsel.

EFCC counsel, Mr Temitope Banjo, expressed surprise at their absence, stating that all the defendants had been duly served with the charge and other court processes.

He further informed the court that the second and third

defendants were on the run and that efforts were ongoing to trace their whereabouts.

Banjo sought an adjournment to enable the commission file necessary applications to establish proof of service.

Granting the application, Justice Oshodi adjourned the matter to April 21.

The defendants are facing a four-count charge bordering on conspiracy, stealing, money laundering and retention of

proceeds of crime.

According to the charge, the alleged offences were committed between September 14, 2022 and March 20, 2023 in Lagos, including the alleged fraudulent conversion of N4.3 billion belonging to Energy Shield Petrochemical Ltd.

The EFCC also alleged that the defendants sold foreign exchange above Central Bank of Nigeria rates and retained and laundered the proceeds, contrary to relevant laws.

Abba Kyari trial: Witness alleges NDLEA officers cleared convicted drug couriers

ABUJA

An inspector of police, El-John Nwonke, on Wednesday told the Federal High Court in Abuja that officers of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) aided two convicted drug traffickers to beat security checks at the Akanu Ibiam International Airport, Enugu.

Nwonke, the second defence witness (DW-2), gave the account while testifying before Justice Emeka Nwite in the ongoing trial of suspended Deputy Commissioner of

Police, Abba Kyari, over an alleged cocaine deal. He was led in evidence by Kyari's counsel, Onyechi Ikpeazu, SAN.

Kyari, a former head of the Intelligence Response Team (IRT), is standing trial alongside four other suspended IRT officers—ACP Sunday J. Ubua, ASP Bawa James, Insp. Simon Agirgba and Insp. John Nuhu—on an eight-count charge preferred by the NDLEA, bordering on conspiracy, illegal dealing in cocaine, importation of cocaine and obstruction.

Two convicted drug traffickers, Chibunna Patrick Umeibe and Emeka Alphonsus Ezen-

wanne, are listed as sixth and seventh defendants.

The duo were arrested by IRT officers at the Enugu airport and subsequently handed over to the NDLEA.

They later pleaded guilty to counts five, six and seven on June 14, 2022, and were sentenced to two years' imprisonment.

The police officers, however, pleaded not guilty after their arraignment on March 7, 2022.

Testifying, Nwonke said he was serving with the Force Criminal Investigation Department (FCID), Abuja, when the suspects were brought in for in-

vestigation. He said he was part of the team that interviewed the suspects on January 20, 2022, noting that their statements were recorded on video and transferred to a DVD.

According to him, the convicts confessed during the interview that they were arrested with a substance suspected to be cocaine shortly after being cleared by NDLEA officers on duty at the airport.

He said they disclosed that they arrived from Ethiopia and admitted that it was neither their first nor second time trafficking the substance, which they referred to as "market."

Court jails trader, driver for mischief, theft in Jos

JOS

A Magistrate's Court in Jos has sentenced a 23-year-old trader, Yusuf Musa, to two years' imprisonment for mischief and causing hurt.

Magistrate Irene Pati, however, gave the convict an option of N30,000 fine for mischief or one year in prison, and N40,000 fine for causing hurt or another one year imprisonment, with both sentences to run concurrently.

She also ordered Musa to pay N120,000 compensation to

the complainant or face an additional five months in prison.

Earlier, the prosecutor, Insp Ijupuil Thiawur, told the court that the convict damaged the complainants' vehicle and caused injury by throwing stones at them.

In a related case, the court sentenced a 20-year-old driver, Victor Jonah, to one year imprisonment for stealing a phone from a tricycle.

Jonah was given an option of N10,000 fine or six months imprisonment for each of the offences of mischief and theft, to run concurrently.

2 brothers jailed for stealing phone in Mosque

ABUJA

A Wuse Magistrates' Court has sentenced two brothers, Adamu and Rabiu Ibrahim, to two months' imprisonment each for stealing a cellphone inside a mosque.

The Magistrate, Mr Olumide Bamisile, offered the convicts

an option of N30,000 fine each and warned them to desist from criminal activities.

Prosecutor Donatus Abah told the court that the brothers stole a Galaxy Fold 4 belonging to one Yusuf Aliyu while he was praying at Annur Mosque in Maitama.

The phone was later recovered and returned to the owner.

Trader arraigned over alleged N13.7m fraud in Ibadan

IBADAN

A 47-year-old trader, Esther Binuyo, on Monday appeared before an Iyaganku Chief Magistrates' Court over an alleged N13.7 million fraud.

Binuyo pleaded not guilty to two counts of fraud and stealing.

The prosecution alleged that

the defendant obtained the money from one Oluwakemisola Gbadebo under the pretext of investing it, but later absconded.

Chief Magistrate Olabisi Ogunkanmi granted the defendant bail in the sum of N7.5 million with two sureties and adjourned the case until April 8 for hearing.

Foreigner docked over alleged N22m supermarket fraud

IKORODU

A 38-year-old foreigner, Ramkishor Chaudi, was on Monday arraigned before an Ikorodu Magistrates' Court over alleged fraud and theft amounting to N22 million.

The defendant pleaded not

guilty to a four-count charge of intent to defraud, forgery and stealing.

The court granted him bail in the sum of N5 million with two sureties, one of whom must be a Nigerian citizen, and adjourned the case until February 19 for mention.

NEWS

Foreign

Trump warns Iran 'time is running out' for nuclear deal as US military builds up in Gulf

Donald Trump has warned Iran that "time is running out" to negotiate a deal on its nuclear programme following the steady build-up of US military forces in the Gulf.

The US president said a "massive Armada" was "moving quickly, with great power, enthusiasm, and purpose" towards Iran, referring to a large US naval force.

In response, Iran's mission to the UN said Tehran "stands ready for dialogue based on mutual respect and interests", but if pushed, it would defend itself and "respond like never before".

Iran insists its nuclear programme is entirely peaceful and has repeatedly denied seeking to develop nuclear weapons.

Trump's latest warning to

Iran's leaders follows his promise that Washington would intervene to help those involved in the brutal and unprecedented crackdown on demonstrations in the country earlier this month.

"Help is on the way," he told protesters, before later changing his tune - saying he had been told on good authority that the execution of demonstrators had stopped.

The US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) says it has confirmed the killing of more than 6,220 people, including 5,858 protesters, since the unrest began at the end of December.

HRANA says it is also investigating another 17,000 reported deaths received despite an internet shutdown after nearly three weeks.

Another group, the Nor-

way-based Iran Human Rights (IHR), has warned that the final toll could exceed 25,000.

However, Trump's warning on Wednesday appeared to focus more on Iran's nuclear programme.

"Hopefully Iran will quickly 'Come to the Table' and negotiate a fair and equitable deal - NO NUCLEAR WEAPONS," he wrote on Truth Social.

Trump said the naval force in the Gulf was larger than the one he sent to Venezuela before US forces seized the country's former leader Nicolás Maduro.

Trump added that this force was "ready, willing, and able to rapidly fulfil its mission, with speed and violence, if necessary".

Referring to the US strikes on Iranian nuclear sites last June, which was launched dur-

ing Iran's 12-day war with Israel, Trump warned: "The next attack will be far worse! Don't make that happen again."

Earlier on Wednesday, before Trump's comments, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said: "Conducting diplomacy through military threat cannot be effective or useful."

"If they [the US] want negotiations to take shape, they must certainly set aside threats, excessive demands and raising illogical issues," he said in televised remarks, translated by the AFP news agency.

Using open-source tools, BBC Verify has been able to track some of the US deployments to the area. A US defence official confirmed that a naval "armada" led by the USS Abraham Lincoln had also arrived in the Middle East.

China trip will bring benefits to UK, Starmer insists, ahead of Xi meeting

Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer has arrived in China for a three-day visit - the first by a British prime minister in eight years.

Sir Keir is seeking to strengthen trading and cultural ties between the two nations after years of acrimony.

But he has faced criticism from opponents at home over the risk posed by China to the UK's national security and Xi Jinping's human rights record.

The PM - who will meet President Xi on Thursday - said the trip will bring benefits to the UK and it was important to maintain a "strategic and consistent relationship" with the world's second largest economy.

As he arrived at the airport in Beijing, Sir Keir was greeted by a delegation of Chinese government officials and presented with a bouquet of flowers. Union flags were seen flying in Beijing's Tiananmen Square.

Addressing the 60 British business leaders accompanying him on the trip, the PM said: "On this delegation, you're making history. You're part of the change that we're bringing about."

"We are resolute about being outward-looking, about taking opportunities, about building relationships...and always being absolutely focused on our na-

tional interest."

For a UK prime minister, the politics of engaging with China is tricky.

China has been accused of committing crimes against humanity against the Uyghur population and other mostly-Muslim ethnic groups in the north-western region of Xinjiang.

There has also been criticism over the treatment of Jimmy Lai - the Hong Kong pro-democracy media tycoon - who is facing a life sentence in prison.

In addition to China's human rights record, there are concerns about the scale of its espionage activities in the UK, with the head of MI5 recently warning that Chinese state operatives presented a daily national security threat.

Sir Keir declined to be drawn on what he would seek to raise with Chinese leaders.

"In the past, on all the trips I've done, I've always raised issues that need to be raised, but I don't want to get ahead of myself on the specifics until I've had the opportunity," he told reporters travelling with him.

He added: "Part of the reason for engaging with China is so that issues where we disagree can be discussed, and the issues where we agree can be progressed, and so that's the approach."



AIRCRAFT CARRIER USS:

The fleet is headed by aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln (file image)

'I don't let bullies win,' says US congresswoman Omar after substance thrown at her

Minnesota congresswoman Ilhan Omar was attacked at an event she was hosting on Tuesday, when an audience member used a syringe to spray liquid at her, Minneapolis police said.

Omar was uninjured and continued to speak. "I'm ok. I'm a survivor so this small agitator isn't going to intimidate me from doing my work. I don't let bullies win," she later wrote on X.

Authorities have not yet identified what the liquid was. According to a BBC journalist in the room, it had a sour smell similar to a chemical product.

Anthony James Kazmierczak, 55, has been charged with third-degree assault and is being held in custody, the local sheriff's office said.

Omar, a Democrat who became in 2019 the first Somali-American to serve in the US

Congress, is a fierce critic of US President Donald Trump.

She has recently targeted the president's immigration crackdown in Minnesota, during which two US citizens have been shot dead.

On Tuesday, responding to the second fatal shooting, Trump said his administration was "going to de-escalate a little bit".

During her speaking event, Omar called for the abolition of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), which is one of the main agencies tasked with carrying out the operation and has come under intense scrutiny for its tactics.

Trump has frequently clashed with Minnesota's Democratic officials, and has often singled out Omar in particular for personal attacks.

Prior to Tuesday's attack on the congresswoman, he told an

audience in Iowa that immigrants to the US "have to show that they can love our country, be proud - not like Ilhan Omar".

In the wake of the attack on Omar, the president was asked by ABC News whether he had seen the footage of the incident, and responded that he had not.

"I don't think about her. I think she's a fraud," Trump told the outlet.

Trump's key ally Kristi Noem - whose Department of Homeland Security (DHS) oversees ICE - should "resign or face impeachment" over recent events in her state.

In January, an immigration officer fatally shot US citizen Renee Good. And on Saturday, US citizen Alex Pretti was fatally shot after being stopped by border agents, reigniting local protests as well as a nationwide public outcry.

It was after Omar's com-

ments about Noem that she was attacked.

As he was pushed out of the room following his use of the syringe, the attacker said that Omar was "pitting us against each other". It was not immediately clear what he was referring to.

Kazmierczak was immediately arrested and forensics were being conducted at the scene, police said.

Democratic Rep Ilhan Omar represents the fifth Congressional District in the House of Representatives

Officials pleaded with Omar to end the event, but the congresswoman insisted that she would continue, telling her audience: "We will continue... we are Minnesota strong."

When back at the lectern, she added: "We're gonna keep talking. Just give me 10 minutes. Please don't let them have the show."

Europe must act urgently and stop outsourcing defence, says EU's Kallas

Europe must step up urgently to improve its defence and make Nato "more European to maintain its strength", because the US has shaken the transatlantic relationship to its foundation, the EU's foreign policy chief has warned.

The US would continue to be Europe's partner and ally, Kaja Kallas told a defence conference, but no great power had ever "outsourced its survival and survived".

Tensions with the US flared when President Donald Trump threatened to take over Greenland, a semi-autonomous Danish territory.

Kallas's remarks came after Nato leader Mark Rutte prompted a backlash when he said European lawmakers should "keep on dreaming" if they thought Europe could defend itself without the US.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot reacted to the secretary general's comments on Tuesday by saying: "No, dear Mark Rutte. Europeans can and must take control of their security. Even the United States agrees. It's the European pillar of Nato."

Kaja Kallas said that under the Trump administration Europe was "no longer Washing-

ton's primary centre of gravity", and the continent needed to change the culture away from thinking as nations, and towards acting jointly as Europeans.

Washington's transition away from Europe "has been ongoing for a while", the EU foreign policy chief said, adding that it was structural, not temporary.

The 23 nations that were members of both the EU and Nato had a special responsibility to "sync our efforts, together with Nato". Like Barrot, she highlighted the importance of showing how a "distinct European pillar" would add value.

The recent US-European rift over Greenland has highlighted the "tectonic shift" in the relationship that Kallas referred to in her speech, with Trump threatening to impose tariffs on some of his closest European allies after they opposed his plans to take over the Arctic island.

Mark Rutte was credited last week with calming tensions between Trump and European leaders, when the US president dropped his threat during talks with the Nato chief on the fringes of Davos. Trump said he was exploring a potential deal on Greenland, although no details have yet emerged.

Foreign

NEWS

Amazon confirms 16,000 job cuts after accidental email

US technology giant Amazon has confirmed it will cut 16,000 jobs - hours after it told staff about a new round of global redundancies in an email apparently sent in error.

The email, which has been seen by the BBC, was sent late on Tuesday and refers to a swathe of employees in the US, Canada and Costa Rica having been laid off as part of an effort to "strengthen the company."

The message was apparently shared by mistake, as it was quickly cancelled.

Early on Wednesday, Amazon announced job reductions as part of a plan to "remove bureaucracy" at the firm.

Beth Galetti, senior vice president of people experience and technology at Amazon, said on Wednesday it was not planning to make "broad reductions every few months", referring to Amazon's announcement of 14,000 corporate job cuts in October.

"While many teams finalized their organizational changes in October, other teams did not com-

plete that work until now," she said. Amazon employs around 1.5 million people globally, with around 350,000 in corporate roles.

Amazon has not said where the latest job losses will fall or which countries will be affected.

Project Dawn

On Tuesday, a draft email written by Colleen Aubrey, a senior vice president at Amazon Web Services (AWS), was included in a calendar invitation sent by an executive assistant to a number of Amazon workers.

The title of the invitation was "Send project Dawn email," an apparent reference to Amazon's code name for the job redundancies.

While the email made clear that the cuts were happening at Amazon, employees had not yet been officially informed.

"This is a continuation of the work we've been doing for more than a year to strengthen the company by reducing layers, increasing ownership, and removing bureaucracy, so that we can move faster for customers," the email said.

'Don't take us to hospital': Iran protesters treated in secret to avoid arrest

Tara and her friend were attending a protest in the central Iranian city of Isfahan when security forces arrived on motorcycles and began shouting at the crowd.

"My friend told an armed member of the security forces, 'Just don't shoot us,' and he immediately fired several shots at us. We fell to the ground. All our clothes were covered in blood," she said.

They were bundled into a stranger's car, but Tara said they were too frightened to be taken to the hospital because of the risk of being arrested. "All the alleyways were full of security forces, so I asked a couple standing at their front door to let us in."

They stayed at the couple's home until it was almost dawn and then managed to find a doctor they knew, who cleaned the birdshot wounds on their legs, according to Tara.

She said a surgeon was later able to remove some of the birdshot at home but warned them: "They cannot all be removed and will remain in your bodies."

All names in this article have been changed for their safety.

'I saw people getting shot': Eyewitness tells of Iran protest crackdown

The full scale of the bloodshed resulting from the crackdown by security forces on the anti-government protests that swept across Iran this month is still not known because of an internet shutdown and a ban on reporting by most international news organisations.

But the US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) has said it has confirmed the killing of 6,301 peo-

ple, including 5,925 protesters, 112 children, 50 bystanders and 214 affiliated with the government. It is also investigating reports of 17,091 more deaths.

At least another 11,000 protesters were seriously wounded, according to HRANA.

Some of them have told the BBC that they have avoided seeking treatment for their injuries at hospitals because they fear being arrested.

That has left them reliant on doctors, nurses and other volunteers willing to risk their own safety by treating them secretly at their homes.

Healthcare workers have also told the BBC that security forces are present in hospitals and that they are constantly monitoring patients' medical records to identify injured protesters.

Tara was able to find doctors willing to treat her wounds at their homes

Nima, a surgeon in Tehran, said he witnessed many young people being injured in the streets on his way to work on 8 January, when authorities responded to the escalating protests with lethal force.

"I put one of the wounded in the boot of my car to take him to hospital, as I was worried that we would get in trouble if we were stopped by the police," he told the BBC.

Nima said armed officers stopped him but allowed him to go after seeing his hospital identification card.

"For almost 96 hours straight - without interruption, without sleep, without even closing our eyes for a moment - we were operating. We were crying and operating. Nobody complained."



NIGERIA'S MINISTER:

Diezani Alison-Madueke was Nigeria's minister of petroleum resources from 2010 to 2015

Ex-Nigerian minister in bribery trial went on spending sprees, court hears

A Nigerian oil minister went on "extravagant and excessive" spending sprees at high-end London stores with money from bribes by industry insiders, a London court has heard.

During a visit to Harrods in 2013, Diezani Alison-Madueke ordered thousands of pounds worth of rugs, including by luxury brand Alexander McQueen, Southwark Crown Court was told.

Prosecutors allege the 65-year-old was provided with "a life of luxury in the United Kingdom" by those interested in Nigerian government contracts.

Alison-Madueke, who was Nigeria's minister of petroleum resources between 2010 and 2015, denies five counts of accepting bribes and a charge of conspiracy to commit bribery.

Southwark Crown Court heard that during the Harrods

visit in November 2013, Alison-Madueke was allegedly accompanied by Nigerian businessman Kolawole Aluko and a security guard.

According to a sales executive working in the store, the then-minister looked "extremely glamorous and was wearing very expensive clothing".

Alison-Madueke was also a regular shopper at Vincenzo Cafferella, a decorative arts and furniture store in north London, where she was known as "Sharon D", the court heard.

The prosecution alleges that between October 2012 and November 2013, Aluko bought various items, including lamps and tables, for Alison-Madueke costing more than £370,000.

The court heard Alison-Madueke would also spend hours in Thomas Goode, a china and silverware shop in Mayfair, and once arrived with an entourage

of about four or five people.

A worker there remembered her loving the sales and saying to him: "I don't even know why I'm buying this, I haven't got the room for it."

The court was told items were often bought but not collected and that Alison-Madueke never paid for anything herself.

Instead, the bills were understood to be settled by Aluko and other Nigerian businessmen said to own energy companies that had lucrative contracts with the state-owned Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation when Alison-Madueke was oil minister.

Ex-Nigeria oil minister in bribery trial spent £2m at Harrods, court hears

The court was also told about shipments of furniture bought for Alison-Madueke from a luxury store in Houston, Texas for several proper-

ties in London which the prosecution allege were used by the former minister.

Two of the properties were said to be bought by Nigerian businessman Benedict Peters. The jury was shown photographs from inside one of them, which included items allegedly bought for Alison-Madueke.

Alison-Madueke's driver recalled collecting her and then-President of Nigeria Goodluck Jonathan from the same address, the court heard.

Other spending on the minister's behalf included £89,410 to charter a jet from Luton to Lagos in Nigeria in January 2012.

Later that year, the prosecution said a driver paid by Aluko picked up £100,000 in cash from a bank in north London to deliver to Alison-Madueke at a nearby flat where she was living at Aluko's expense.

Trump says government will 'de-escalate' in Minnesota following Pretti shooting

President Donald Trump has said his administration is "going to de-escalate a little bit" in Minnesota, after the second fatal shooting of a US citizen by federal immigration officers there.

"Bottom line, it was terrible. Both of them were terrible," he said in a Fox News interview on Tuesday.

Earlier this month, Renee Good was fatally shot by an immigration officer, followed by Alex Pretti, who was killed on Saturday after being stopped by border agents.

Pretti's death reignited local protests and public outcry across the country, and led to criticism from lawmakers in both parties. Trump's remarks are the latest sign his administration is taking a step back on its operations in Minnesota.

Speaking to other reporters

ahead of a rally in Iowa Tuesday night, Trump said he viewed the killing of Pretti, an intensive care nurse at a veterans' hospital, as "a very unfortunate incident".

Asked by reporters about whether he agreed with characterisations of Pretti as a "domestic terrorist," Trump said: "I haven't heard that."

Trump then added: "He shouldn't have been carrying a gun."

Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said shortly after the shooting that Pretti "wasn't there to peacefully protest, he was there to perpetuate violence," and accused him of "domestic terrorism".

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has also said the agents fired in self-defence, after Pretti resisted attempts to disarm him.

Noem said Pretti was shot because he was "brandishing" a gun during a confrontation. Eyewitnesses and local officials, however, have challenged that account, saying he had a phone in his hand, not a weapon.

There is no sign of a gun in Pretti's hand, according to analysis of the available video by BBC Verify.

Local authorities said the gun had been legally registered and that Pretti had been shot after the firearm was removed.

A preliminary report drafted by Customs and Border Protection also appears to contradict the initial DHS account of events. It says two of its agents fired their weapons at Pretti.

It does not mention that Pretti was reaching for his firearm, according to a copy of the

report seen by the BBC's US partner, CBS News.

On Monday, the DHS pulled the Minnesota mission's leader and figurehead, Border Patrol official Gregory Bovino, from the state. The department said it was deploying the White House's border tsar, Tom Homan, to take over there.

Homan posted on social media on Tuesday that he had met Minnesota Governor Tim Walz, Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey, and local law enforcement officials.

Pretti's death, coming two weeks after the fatal shooting of 37-year-old Renee Good, enraged local residents and sparked fresh calls from state and city officials for the Trump administration to withdraw its 3,000 immigration agents and officers from the region.

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13 X 4	369,500	397,213	295,600	317,770	206,938	222,458	443,500	476,763	369,550	397,266
10 X 4	340,000	365,500	273,500	294,013	177,400	190,705	370,000	397,750	295,600	317,770
HALF PAGE	295,600	317,770	236,500	254,238	147,800	158,885	340,000	365,500	273,450	293,959
10 X 3	221,700	238,328	147,800	158,885	118,300	127,173	266,000	285,950	251,300	270,148
13 X2	206,900	222,418	133,000	142,925	103,500	111,263	221,800	238,435	147,810	158,896
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FP 6X2	89,800	96,535	105,450	113,359	6 X 2	60,640	65,188	49,140	52,826
FP 5X2	81,100	87,183	97,300	104,598	5 X 2	51,950	55,846	42,120	45,279
FP 4X2	73,000	78,475	80,700	86,753	4 X 2	45,260	48,655	34,400	36,980
FP 3X2	64,870	69,735	73,000	78,475	3 X 2	30,900	33,218	26,600	28,595
FP 2X2	59,000	63,425	64,900	69,768	2 X 2	18,680	20,081	15,600	16,770
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Sports

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Vincent's brace sinks Rangers, as Plateau United claim vital home win

Plateau United secured a hard-fought 2-1 victory over Rangers International of Enugu on Wednesday in

their Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL) Matchday 23 clash in Jos.

The encounter lived up to

expectations as both sides delivered an entertaining contest, but it was the hosts — nicknamed the Peace Boys — who showed greater urgency early on.

Their bright start paid off in the 17th minute when forward Vincent produced a delightful chip to beat Rangers goalkeeper Lucky Jimoh and hand Plateau the lead.

Rangers responded positively and settled into the game, drawing level in the 30th minute. Captain Chidebere Nwobodo capitalised on a defensive lapse after a well-taken corner kick was not properly cleared, calmly finishing to restore parity for the Flying Antelopes.

However, the home side regained the advantage ten minutes

later when the referee awarded a penalty after adjudging that the ball had struck the hand of Rangers defender, Kenneth Igbokwe. Vincent again stepped up and converted coolly from the spot, sending Plateau United into the break with a 2-1 lead.

The second half saw both teams create chances, but neither side could find the net again. Plateau United ultimately held on to claim maximum points, a result that strengthens their push to climb away from the danger zone.

Reacting after the match, Rangers chief coach Ekenedilichukwu Eke described the result as part of football's unpredictable nature.



Plateau United vs Rangers



ADEMOLA LOOKMAN

₦58.5bn price tag set as Atlético monitor Lookman

Atlético Madrid are monitoring Ademola Lookman ahead of a potential summer transfer, with the Nigerian international expected to leave Atalanta Bergamo at the end of the season.

According to Marca, the Spanish club have identified Lookman as a priority attacking target as they plan to reinforce their forward options. The 26-year-old winger has emerged as one of Atalanta's stand-out performers and is attracting

growing interest across Europe.

Atalanta are reportedly open to a sale and have set an asking price of around €35 million (approximately ₦58.5 Billion). Transfer analyst Ekrem Konur reports that this figure reflects the valuation placed on the Super Eagles star by the Serie A side.

While no formal bid has yet been submitted, Atlético's interest signals the possibility of a competitive market for Lookman ahead of the summer window.

Super Eagles would have qualified for 2026 World Cup under my leadership —Pinnick

Former President of the Nigeria Football Federation (NFF), Amaju Pinnick, has expressed strong confidence that the Super Eagles would have secured qualification for the 2026 FIFA World Cup had he remained in charge of the federation.

Speaking on Nigeria's qualification struggles, Pinnick said the current situation came as a surprise, particularly given Africa's expanded allocation of ten slots for the 2026 tournament.

"I honestly didn't see this coming," Pinnick said. "With ten African teams qualifying, there is really no basis for Nigeria not to be among them."

Reflecting on past campaigns, Pinnick recalled Nigeria's successful qualification for the 2018 World Cup despite being drawn in what was widely regarded as a 'group of death'.

"In 2018, we had arguably the toughest group ever," he explained. "Algeria were unbeaten in over 20 matches, Cameroon were the defending African champions, Zambia were also champions, and Nigeria was considered the underdog. Yet, we qualified with two games to spare. We worked relentlessly."

He also referenced the 2022 World Cup qualifiers, where Nigeria narrowly missed out fol-

lowing a playoff defeat to Ghana under the away-goals rule.

"We did the same work in 2022, but the format changed to head-to-head," Pinnick said. "Nobody gave Ghana a chance, but they came through. We didn't lose that tie; we were eliminated on away goals."

Pinnick admitted responsibility for Nigeria's failure to qualify for previous World Cups and said the disappointment still weighs heavily on him.



Amaju Pinnick

Athletics: Organisers announce bib, cut-off and medal policy ahead of Access Bank Lagos City Marathon

With 17 days to race day, organisers of the Access Bank Lagos

City Marathon 2026 have released the official race schedule alongside detailed cut-off and medal eligibility guidelines, pro-

viding clarity for the thousands of runners preparing for Africa's biggest road race.

The announcement forms part of the final phase of preparations for the event and underscores the organisers' commit-

ment to transparency, fairness and adherence to international marathon standards.

According to the official schedule, the 42-kilometre marathon will commence at 6:30 a.m. and officially close at 12:00 p.m., giving participants a total race window of six hours. The 10-kilometre race will begin at 9:30 a.m. and will also close at 12:00 p.m.

Organisers explained that while all registered runners are permitted to compete at their own pace within the official race window, the stipulated cut-off time applies strictly to medal qualification and not to partici-



ACCESS BANK LAGOS CITY MARATHON

Edo 2026: Bayelsa athletes confident of retaining Niger Delta Games crown

Bayelsa State was the surprise winner of top position on the medals table at the inaugural edition of the Niger Delta Games in Uyo, edging Delta State by an odd gold medal on the last day of competitions.

The state finished top with 46 gold, 29 silver and 15 bronze medals, a total 86 medals, and some of the athletes preparing to represent the state at the 2nd edition in Benin, Edo State have

expressed confidence to successfully retain the pole position.

In separate interviews at their camp in Yenagoa, the state capital, some of the athletes spoke shortly after training, and didn't mince words in expressing their determination to dominate at the Games holding from February 20-27.

One of those who spoke is wrestler, Emmanuel Okike, and he was adamant that the goal

of Team Bayelsa is to retain the first position on medals count at the Niger Delta Games. Okike pegged his claims on the level and quality of preparations they have been undergoing, citing the wrestling team's drills.

"I am very happy to be part of the Niger Delta Games, we have been doing well in all the competitions we have attended so far such that I can confidently say that Bayelsa has gone beyond

participation to winning tournaments", Okike declared while trying to catch his breath after a bout with another team mate.

Echoing the same sentiment is a 61kg freestyle wrestler, Ebere Frank, who insisted that Team Bayelsa is going to Benin to affirm its dominance in wrestling. He pointed out that the State would use the games as preparatory championship for other competitions slated for later in the year.

Cricket: Over 3,000 participants expected at 7th PwC U17 championship

No fewer than 3,000 participants are expected to feature in the seventh national Under 17 Cricket championship sponsored by Pricewaterhouse Coopers (PwC).

Musa Ehizoje, Tournament Director, said the competition, which is in collaboration with the Nigeria Cricket Federation (NCF), would witness an increased number of participation compared to the previous years.

Ehizoje told the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) in Abuja on Wednesday that all the states have indicated interest in the participation except Nasarawa, at the time of this report.

He noted that the competition has grown to become the biggest age-grade tournament

in Nigeria and West Africa.

"The last six editions witnessed a significant expansion.

"We have moved from 19 states participating in the first edition to 35 states, indicating an interest in the seventh edition.

"Only Nasarawa is yet to state their interest, although we are hopeful that before the deadline of player registration they would have made a positive response," he said.

The director said that letters have been sent to states to register their players for the event.

"We are expecting over 3,000 to feature in this edition.

"The zonal qualification for the six geo-political zones is scheduled for a window period of between Feb. 10 to Feb. 23.



UNDER 17 CRICKET CHAMPIONSHIP

SPORTS

Rivers State athletes upbeat ahead 2nd Niger Delta Games, commend NDDC

Some athletes from Rivers State have spoken excitedly about opportunities and potentials for a brighter future inherent in the

Niger Delta Games (NDG). Some of these athletes who will participate in athletics, basketball, table tennis and others have tak-

en to their social media accounts promoting the games and speaking of their expectations.

The Rivers State basketball players, seen training for the second edition of the NDG coming up in Benin, Edo State, said they are excited at the prospect of defending the gold medal won in the event at the last edition of the NDG in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State.

At the Basketball Court on Niger/ Bende Streets in Port Harcourt township, the players said they have been training hard to ensure that they defend their title.

Dalhati Wealth expressed

confidence that his team will emerge victorious as they are learning new techniques and tactics to ensure victory.

"As you can see every player is putting in good effort to be mentally and physically fit, including learning new tactics to be ready and maintain the level that saw us go all the way at the last Games.

"We started our preparation early because we want to achieve success at the end of the day. You know that if you don't train and do not prepare early, you can't perform when the chips are down", Wealth said.



RIVERS STATE BASKETBALL PLAYERS



WILFRED NDIDI AND FATHER

Tinubu condoles Wilfred Ndidi on father's passing

President Bola Tinubu has extended heartfelt condolences to Super Eagles Captain, Wilfred Ndidi, on the death of his father, Mr Sunday Ndidi.

This is contained in a statement issued by the Presidential Spokesperson, Mr Bayo Onanuga, on Wednesday in Abuja.

The Nigerian international footballer, who plays for Turkish Super Lig club Besiktas, lost his father in a road accident in Umunedede, near Agbor, Delta State, on Tuesday.

Condoling with the Ndidi family, Tinubu described the death as tragic and deeply saddening.

"I am deeply saddened by the

tragic death of Sunday Ndidi. "I share in the grief of his family, friends and associates, particularly Wilfred Ndidi, who shared a strong bond with his father as a mentor and guide," he said.

The President said that the late Sunday Ndidi's modest beginnings and honesty left lasting impressions on those who knew him.

"There is no doubt that Sunday's modest beginnings and honesty greatly impacted those who looked up to him for inspiration," he said.

Tinubu prayed that God Almighty would comfort the Ndidi family and grant eternal rest to the soul of the departed

Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, Cape Verde reach CAHB semi-finals, seal World Championship tickets

Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia and Cape Verde on Wednesday secured places in the semi-finals of the ongoing 2026 Confederation of African Handball (CAHB), African Men's Handball Championship in Kigali, Rwanda.

The development meant that the semi-finalists have automatically qualified for the 2027 IHF Men's World Championship to be hosted by Germany.

The quartet booked their last-four tickets following the conclusion of the main round matches at the championship, which runs from Jan. 21 to Jan. 31.

In Group I, defending champions Egypt maintained their flawless run, topping the group with two emphatic victories.

The North Africans thrashed Algeria 42-28 before overpowering Nigeria 48-22 to finish with maximum points.

The race for the second semi-final slot in the group proved keenly contested, as Algeria, Nigeria and Angola all finished on two points.

Angola had earlier boosted their chances with a 27-24 victory over Nigeria, but Algeria responded in style, defeating Angola 27-22.

Ayyoub Abdi led Algeria's charge with eight goals, while Hichem Daoud added five, as the

Desert Warriors progressed on superior goal difference (+3), ahead of Nigeria (-1) and Angola (-2).

In Group II, Tunisia and Cape Verde emerged as the top two teams to seal semi-final berths.

Tunisia opened their main round campaign with a 29-29 draw against Morocco, despite a nine-goal haul from Bilel Abdelli.

Morocco rallied strongly after trailing by five goals, with Amjad Saa and Mohammed Ezzine scoring eight and seven goals respectively.



AFRICAN MEN'S HANDBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

Nigeria, British Cycling partner ahead of Glasgow 2026 Commonwealth Games

The National Sports Commission (NSC), Cycling Federation of Nigeria (CFN) and British Cycling Association have agreed on a collaborative framework to prepare Team

Nigeria cyclists for the 2026 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow.

As part of the agreement, Nigerian cyclists will train in Manchester ahead of the Games.

This is contained in a statement

by NSC Director of Information, Kehinde Ajayi, made available to newsmen on Wednesday in Abuja.

The partnership, Ajayi said, focuses on developing cycling in Nigeria, promoting fair competition in both Olympic and Paralympic events, and using cycling as a tool for social impact.

The director quoted the NSC Chairman, Mallam Shehu Dikko, as expressing delight at the collaboration and assured the delegation of the commission's full support.

"Our job is to provide enablers for sports development in the country. We will make the soil fertile for well-meaning initiatives like this to thrive," he said.



NIGERIA CYCLING

NFF grieves over death of father of Super Eagles captain, Wilfred Ndidi

The Nigeria Football Federation has expressed shock and sadness over the death, in an automobile accident, of Mr. Sunday Ndidi, father of Wilfred Ndidi, captain of the senior men national football team, Super Eagles.

NFF General Secretary,

Dr. Mohammed Sanusi said: "This is very sad. The player just gave his very best to the nation at the Africa Cup of Nations finals in Morocco where we finished with the bronze medals.

He had returned to Turkey with great motivation and

high hopes of helping his club to win silverware this season, and also help the Super Eagles reach new heights this year.

"We are really shocked at the moment and cannot say much, but we earnestly pray for the repose of the soul of Mr. Sunday Ndidi and pray that the

Almighty God will comfort our team captain, his siblings, relations and indeed all those he has left behind."

Thenff.com learnt that Mr. Sunday Ndidi tragically passed away after being hit by a car in the town of Umunedede, near Agbor, Delta State



My tenure will produce new Pelican Stars —Chairman

The newly inaugurated Chairman of Pelican Stars Football Club of Calabar, Sefia Aribiah, has pledged to usher in a new era of revival and professionalism for the football club.

Aribiah made the pledge on Wednesday in Calabar in an interview with the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN).

It would be recalled that from the 1990s and early 2000s, Pelican Stars contributed many players to the Super Falcons, helping build the talent base of women's football in Nigeria.

However, in the last few years, Pelican Stars encountered financial

and administrative difficulties. These challenges led to a protest over unpaid salaries and also subsequent relegation of the club from the women's top flight league during the 2021/2022 season.

While unveiling his plans for the club, Aribiah commended the governor, Bassey Otu, for trusting her with the leadership to reposition Pelican star.

"I hope to work diligently to reposition Pelican Stars to its rightful place in Nigerian football.

"Passion, purpose and drive would define my leadership style, and my administration would be different from previous ones.