

TETFund unveils ₦6.45bn 2026 intervention to transform Nigerian tertiary institutions

ABUJA The Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) has announced a ₦6.452 billion intervention package for Nigeria's tertiary institutions under its 2026 funding cycle, aimed at strengthening infrastructure, research, innovation, and academic delivery across universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education.

The Executive Secretary of TETFund, Mr Sonny Echono, disclosed the figures on Tuesday at a stakeholders' workshop in Abuja attended by heads of beneficiary institutions, where allocation letters were distributed and the 2026 disbursement guidelines were shared.

Under the 2026 intervention, each university will receive ₦2.525 billion, polytechnics ₦1.871 billion, and colleges of education ₦2.056 billion.

The allocations account for about 90.75 percent of the total intervention funds, comprising 50 percent annual direct disbursements and 43.75 percent special direct disbursements.

Echono explained that 271 institutions are set to benefit this year. "All universities, irrespective of age, size, or enrolment, will receive ₦2,525,932,228.02 each; polytechnics will get ₦1,871,059,920.53 each; while colleges of education will receive ₦2,056,527,973.04 each," he said.

The Executive Secretary stressed that the funds are designed to strengthen critical physical infrastructure, enhance academic programmes, boost research and innovation, and drive the overall transformation of Nigeria's tertiary education sector.

"The intervention will also improve the quality and impact of research in beneficiary institutions," he added.

A new intervention line will focus on improving access to global academic resources through the integration of the Tertiary Education, Research, Applications and Services (TERAS) platform into the Nigerian Research and Education Network (NgREN) from the 2026 cycle.

Echono said the Fund would

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The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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MUSA IDAHOSA WITH AGENCY REPORT

BENIN CITY/EKPOMA

The Edo State Government has said that the recent outbreak of violence in Ekpoma, Esan West Local Government Area, was a carefully coordinated and sponsored riot, dismissing social media narratives portraying the incident as a spontaneous protest as false, misleading and deliberately designed to incite fear and discredit the administration.

In a detailed clarification is-

sued on Tuesday, the government disclosed that investigations revealed that the violence was allegedly sponsored by a Nigerian resident in Russia and other overseas locations, who reportedly maintained contact with individuals in Ekpoma to mobilise and coordinate riots across Ekpoma, Auch, Irrua and even the Government House in Benin City.

According to the government, those behind the unrest deliberately exploited public anxiety over security challenges to execute acts of arson, vandalism and looting, stressing

that the incident bore the hallmarks of organised criminal activity rather than a genuine protest. It said several suspects were arrested while attempting to vandalise public and private property, while others were identified through viral videos showing the destruction of buildings and infrastructure.

The state government categorically denied claims that students of Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, were involved, explaining that the institution is currently

closed and that students had vacated the hostels long before the violence occurred.

It also stressed that the unrest had no connection with the National Association of Nigerian Students, describing such claims as part of a coordinated disinformation campaign.

The government further debunked a viral video falsely tagged as a kidnapping incident in Ekpoma, describing it as recycled footage deliberately circulated to heighten tension,

spread fear among residents and undermine confidence in the state's security architecture.

While reaffirming that peaceful protest is a constitutional right, the Edo State Government warned that violence, rioting, vandalism and looting would not be tolerated under any guise, assuring residents that the situation was under control as security agencies restored calm to the area.

As part of efforts to personally assess the impact of the violence and reassure the people, Governor Monday Okpebholo visited Ekpoma, where he strongly condemned the attack on the palace of the Onojie of Ekpoma, His Royal Highness Zaiki Anthony Ehizojie Abumere II.

The governor, who was ac-

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GOVERNOR'S VISIT:

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo (left) addressing the Onojie of Ekpoma, His Royal Highness, Zaiki Anthony Ehizojie Abumere II during the Governor's visit to the Palace of the Onojie in the aftermath of the violent protest in Ekpoma.

Nigeria, UAE trade pact opens duty-free access for Nigerian goods —Minister

ABUJA

Nigeria's Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with the United Arab Emirates will unlock duty-free access for thousands of Nigerian products, the Minister of Industry, Trade and Investment, Dr Jumoke Oduwole, has said.

Oduwole spoke on Tuesday in Abu Dhabi after Nigeria and the UAE signed the landmark trade agreement on the sidelines of the 2026 Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week (ADSW).

She described the CEPA as a historic milestone that would transform economic relations and deliver tangible benefits for Nigerian businesses, pro-

fessionals and workers.

He said, "Today marks a historic milestone in Nigeria's trade relations.

"The Federal Republic of Nigeria and the United Arab Emirates signed a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement CEPA that will transform economic ties between our two nations and deliver tangible benefits for Nigerian businesses, professionals, and workers."

The minister said the agreement prioritises market access, quality investment inflows and economic diversification under President Bola Tinubu's Renewed Hope Agenda.

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Drug abuse among youths a growing concern —NDLEA

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Technology-enabled banking, key to Nigeria's \$1tn GDP target —FairMoney MD

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Niger revokes licences of tanker drivers who refuse to go to Mali amid jihadist blockade

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Super Eagles unfazed by heavy travel schedule, ready for Morocco test

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2027: No rainbow coalition in Rivers, IPAC tells Wike

ABUJA

Inter-Party Advisory Council (IPAC) has dismissed claims by FCT Minister, Mr Nyesom Wike, that political parties in Rivers will unite under a rainbow coalition for the 2027 general elections.

The IPAC National Publicity Secretary, Mr Egbeola Martins, stated this in a statement issued in Abuja on Tuesday.

Wike had, on Friday said that politicians in Rivers were united under the Renewed Hope Family, tagged, "Rainbow Coalition" to ensure the re-election of President Bola Tinubu for a

second term in 2027.

Wike made the declaration during a 'thank you' visit to Andoni Local Government Area of the state.

The minister stated that there was no party allegiance in the state, stressing that what Rivers had was a 'rainbow coalition' under the Renewed Hope Family, in pursuit of a common cause and interest.

In his reaction, however, Martins dismissed the claim, describing it as misleading and unfounded.

He said that the minister lacked any mandate from the council or registered parties to

speak for them or determine alliances, preferences or candidates for elections nationally.

Martins described Nigerian political parties as independent institutions governed by constitutions, structures, organs and internal democratic processes.

"They are beyond individual control or personal influence," he said.

According to him, decisions on coalitions, alliances or endorsements can only arise from duly constituted party organs, not from any individual, regardless of his/her position.

Martins, however, said that IPAC was aware of some parties independently considering unconditional solidarity support for Rivers Governor, Siminalayi

Fubara, to promote peace and stability within the state.

"This may include voluntarily not fielding governorship candidates as a sacrifice aimed at restoring effective governance, peace and stability for Rivers people across the state," he said.

Martins emphasised that such considerations remained exclusive decisions of the affect-

ed parties, driven by collective solidarity and commitment to lasting peace, not external pressure or personal interests.

He reaffirmed IPAC's commitment to multi-party democracy, political pluralism and independence of parties, insisting that no individual would hijack collective decisions for personal or partisan advantage.

TETFund unveils ₦6.45bn 2026 intervention...

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continue to equip and upgrade research and development offices, laboratories, and workshops.

Student exposure programmes will be strengthened through private-sector partnerships and direct construction initiatives.

He also highlighted TETFund's commitment to security infrastructure, completion of long-abandoned projects, and enhancing design-technical collaborations. Research and innovation remain central priorities, with continued support for the National Research Fund, the Research Meets Industry initiative, and the commercialisation of research outcomes, alongside sustained ICT development.

Several research laboratories are currently under development, with four expected to be completed and commissioned this year, and two more recently commenced, scheduled for completion next year. In agriculture, university farms are

being modernised with modern greenhouses and equipment to boost productivity and reduce labour intensity.

On ICT, the Fund's roadmap includes expanded digital services, experience centres, sub-station-based internet access, and advanced international education research and application services.

Echono urged heads of institutions to ensure full utilisation of their 2025 allocations, warning that institutions with unutilised funds would not receive additional allocations until existing resources are fully deployed. "Future allocations will be based on performance, enrolment, and demonstrated progress," he said.

He assured that applications for fund releases will be processed quickly and contractors paid within two weeks of milestone completion to avoid delays. He further stressed that TETFund will promote knowledge sharing, support skills-enhancing initiatives, and ensure prompt payment to contractors.

Nigeria, UAE trade pact opens duty...

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Oduwale said the UAE would immediately eliminate tariffs on more than 7,000 Nigerian products.

She listed fish and seafood, oil seeds, cereals, cotton, pharmaceuticals and chemicals among products entering the UAE market duty-free.

She said tariffs on Nigerian machinery, vehicles, electrical equipment, apparel and furniture would be phased out within three to five years.

According to her, the agreement gives Nigerian industrial exports a competitive pathway into one of the world's leading trading hubs.

Oduwale said Nigerian businesses could now establish entities, branches and subsidiaries in the UAE.

She added that Nigerian business visitors could stay up to 90 days yearly, while executives and specialists could relocate for renewable three-year periods.

The minister said the agreement would improve Nigeria's investment climate by addressing longstanding barriers to foreign direct investment.

She said UAE investors now

have clarity and confidence to invest in Nigeria's productive sectors.

"She said, For Nigeria's investment climate, this Agreement addresses longstanding impediments to foreign direct investment.

"UAE investors now have clarity and confidence to invest in Nigeria's productive sectors." Oduwale said the deal would support industrialization, improve logistics connectivity and create quality jobs for Nigeria's youthful population.

She said Nigeria would eliminate tariffs on about 6,000 products under the agreement.

According to her, tariffs on 60 percent of the products would be removed immediately, with others phased over five years.

She said the imports focus on industrial inputs, capital goods and machinery to strengthen local production.

Oduwale said Nigeria's import prohibition list would remain in force.

On services, she said Nigeria's commitments cover 99 services across 10 sectors, including finance, transport, construction, health and tourism.



SWEARING IN:

L-R: Chairman, Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Oyo State Chapter, Mr Abas Akeem; Secretary, NUJ, Dayo Adu; newly elected Chairman, Oyo State Correspondents Chapel, Adeniran Adeyinka; Vice Chairman of the Chapel, Koleoso Aderemi; Secretary, Rotimi Agboluaje and Treasurer, Suleiman Shehu, during the swearing of new elected of Correspondents in Ibadan on Tuesday.

NAN editors emerge vice-chairman, treasurer of Oyo NUJ Correspondents' Chapel

IBADAN

Two editors of the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), Mr Remi Koleoso and Mr Suleiman Shehu, have emerged as Vice Chairman and Treasurer respectively of the Correspondents' Chapel of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Oyo State Council.

Koleoso and Shehu were elected on Tuesday in Ibadan, Oyo, during the chapel's elec-

tion held to choose new executive members that will run its affairs for the next three years.

Other members of the newly elected executive are Mr Yinka Adeniran of The Nation Newspapers, who was elected as Chairman and Mr Rotimi Agboluaje of The Guardian Newspaper, who emerged as Secretary.

The Chairman of the Oyo State Council of NUJ, Mr Akeem Abas, administered the oath of allegiance and oath of office to the

new officers after the announcement of the election results.

Abas expressed satisfaction with the conduct of the election, describing it as the first he would oversee since assuming office as Chairman of the Oyo NUJ.

In his acceptance speech, Adeniran who spoke on behalf of others, thanked members of the chapel for the confidence reposed in the new executive and pledged to run an inclusive and transparent administration.

He assured members of an open-door policy that would encourage collective input towards the growth of the chapel.

Adeniran said the welfare of members would be prioritised, while stressing the need for strict adherence to the ethics of the journalism profession.

"As your elected servants, we will never relent in making sure that we pursue vigorously all means that would ensure that your welfare issues are improved."

'Ekpoma violence foreign-sponsored'

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

accompanied by top government officials, the Commissioner of Police and leaders of the All Progressives Congress in Edo State, including the party's chairman, Emperor Jarrett Tenebe, and Edo Central Senatorial leader, General Cecil Esekhaigbe (rtd), was taken round the palace to inspect extensive damage allegedly caused by hoodlums who hijacked the situation.

Items vandalised during the attack included vehicles, canopies and chairs, doors and windows, as well as goods belonging to the monarch's wife.

Describing the invasion of the palace as criminal, sacrilegious and unacceptable, Governor Okpebholo warned that traditional institutions must never be targeted under any guise.

He stressed that protests must not be used as a cover for lawlessness, looting and destruction of property, vowing

that all those involved in the attack on the palace and other violent acts would be tracked down and prosecuted.

The governor disclosed that his administration had intensified security operations across the state, with special focus on Edo Central Senatorial District and the Ekpoma axis, noting that recent security actions had already yielded results. He cited the rescue of nine kidnapped persons in Etsako West Local Government Area and the arrest of their abductors as evidence of the government's renewed commitment to tackling insecurity.

Governor Okpebholo further declared that no one would be spared in the ongoing security clampdown, stressing his personal resolve to ensure peace and stability in Ekpoma and across Esan land.

He warned that the patience of the government would not be tested by criminal elements hiding under the guise of protest.

Earlier, the Onojie of Ekpoma described the incident as unfortunate and deeply distressing, alleging that many of those who invaded the palace were under the influence of illicit drugs. He disclosed that the palace was attacked while he was away attending a security meeting with other traditional rulers, leaving behind widespread destruction and fear.

As part of his tour of affected areas, Governor Okpebholo also visited the scene of an overnight fire that destroyed several shops in Ekpoma, including those built by the Police Officers Wives Association.

The governor described the incident as disturbing and linked it to the broader pattern of sponsored violence and sabotage in the area.

Addressing traders and residents at the scene, the governor dismissed claims that Fulani herdsmen were responsible for the attack, insisting that political elements bent on destabilising Ekpoma were behind the

violence.

He disclosed that arrests had already begun and warned that those responsible would be brought to justice regardless of their status or connections.

Two of the affected shop owners, Mr Israel Ughulu and Prof. Aghemelo Austin Thomas, narrated that the fire broke out around midnight and spread rapidly, leaving them helpless as their shops and goods were reduced to ashes before dawn.

In a major relief to the victims, Governor Okpebholo announced that reconstruction of the burnt shops would commence within the week. He assured traders that government support would extend beyond rebuilding to ensure they returned to their businesses without undue financial hardship.

The governor's visit attracted large crowds of residents, many of whom commended the prompt response of the state government and the as-

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Police Arrest 18yr-old for allegedly staging own kidnap, nab 11 suspected kidnappers

IDAHOSA MUSA

The Edo State Police Command has arrested an 18-year-old girl for allegedly staging her own abduction in Ekpoma, Esan West Local Government Area of Edo State. The arrest came as part of broader security operations

that also led to the apprehension of 11 suspected members of a kidnapping syndicate and the recovery of firearms and other dangerous weapons.

In a statement issued on Tuesday, the Police Public Relations Officer, ASP Eno Ikoedem, said the suspect, Obehi Odine, allegedly fabricated

her kidnapping and demanded a ransom of ₦10 million.

According to the police, Odine confessed during interrogation that the kidnapping story was deliberately staged to extort money.

"A suspect, one Obehi Odine (female), aged 18, was arrested for staging her own kidnap and

demanding a ransom of ₦10 million. She confessed to the crime, admitting that the incident was deliberately fabricated," the statement said.

In a related development, the command recorded another major breakthrough in Ubiaja, Esan South-East Local Government Area, following a bush-combing operation aimed at flushing out criminal elements.

The operation, the police

said, was personally led by the Divisional Police Officer, Ubiaja, in collaboration with the Nigerian Military and the Edo State Security Corps (ESSC).

According to the statement, intelligence obtained through drone-assisted aerial surveillance identified a concealed forest enclave around Akwocha Camp and adjoining forest corridors as a suspected kidnapping and logistics base.

"When the area was stormed, 11 male suspects believed to be members of an organised kidnapping syndicate were arrested," ASP Ikoedem said.

Items recovered from the hideout included 24 Dane guns, 17 cutlasses, three battle axes, gunpowder, torch lights, mobile phones, solar panels, assorted charms, one motorcycle and ₦209,700 in cash, among others.



CLOSING CEREMONY:

Director-General, Maryam Babangida National Centre for Women Development (MBNCWD), Dr Asabe Vilita-Bashir (M); presenting sewing machine to a beneficiary, Aji Imoru, during the closing ceremony of the vocational training and the presentation of equipment to artisans organised by MBNCWD in Abuja on Tuesday. With them is the Director of training and Development of the Centre, Mrs Ebi Emezua.

Delta SNYC begins onboarding across 14 training centres

AJUWA VICTOR

The Delta State chapter of the Southern Nigerian Youth Congress (SNYC) has commenced the registration of shortlisted candidates for its much-anticipated Real-Time Skills Empowerment programme, designed to train and equip 500 youths across the state with practical, marketable skills.

The State Chairman of the Congress, Comrade Wiska Monday, disclosed that the first batch list of successful applicants has been formally submitted to the Delta State Technical and Vocational Education Board, paving the way for the

launch of the six-month vocational training programme.

According to him, registration activities began this week across the state's 14 designated centres.

He led a delegation of shortlisted candidates to the Asaba centre, where participants were registered and introduced to the centre's administrators.

Simultaneously, the SNYC Public Relations Officer (PRO) Comrade Ighonmieten Ernest coordinated registration at the Agbarho centre and other institutions, while other Executives and Local Government Representatives supervised processes in Ozoro, Umutu, Afiesere,

Sapele, Emede, Bulu-Angiama, Otor-Owhe, Owa-Oyibu, Mbiri, Orerokpe, Kokori, Oza-Nogogo and other locations.

Comrade Monday noted that the exercise is aimed at ensuring a smooth onboarding process ahead of orientation and the commencement of lectures, which are expected to begin between this week and next week.

"This is part of the empowerment initiative we unveiled during our inauguration. We have moved from promise to process. The structures are in place, the centres are active, and the beneficiaries are being fully integrated into the sys-

tem," he said.

He reaffirmed the Congress's commitment to youth empowerment, human capital development and skills-based economic inclusion, stressing that the programme is designed to equip young people with practical competencies that can translate into self-reliance and long-term productivity.

The SNYC said the skill empowerment scheme aligns with its broader strategy in line with the MORE Agenda to shift Delta youths from dependency to capacity, using vocational education as a pipeline for employment, entrepreneurship and community development.

Obi Nwaokocha Foundation launches 2026 skill empowerment for 300 beneficiaries

AJUWA VICTOR

The Obi Nwaokocha Okeze Foundation has launched a New Year Skill Empowerment Programme targeted at 300 beneficiaries.

According to the Foundation, the empowerment initiative is designed for individuals who have already completed training in a skill or vocation, but lacked the necessary starter packs to establish themselves and become self-reliant.

Beneficiaries will, however, undergo an additional three weeks of rigorous assessment and refresher training to ensure that they are fully qualified and competent in their chosen fields before receiving the starter packs.

"The Foundation emphasised that the programme is not meant for fresh learners. Those who are currently undergoing training or have not completed learning

a skill are advised not to pick up the empowerment forms," the organisers said, assuring that such individuals will be considered for future programmes at the appropriate time.

Speaking on the initiative, the Foundation Co-ordinator, Dr. Pat Adigwe expressed appreciation to Pastor Idowu Okeze for approving the empowerment of the 300 persons, describing the gesture as a laudable way to begin the new year.

Form collection for the empowerment programme commences daily at 9:00 a.m., and applicants are encouraged to present themselves promptly and prepared.

The Foundation described the initiative as a strategic step towards reducing unemployment, promoting self-reliance, and empowering skilled individuals to contribute meaningfully to economic growth in their communities.

Tension rocks Okpanam community as residents accuse illegal Hausa/Fulani market of harboring criminals

AJUWA VICTOR

OKPANAM

Residents of Ozoma Hill-top Estate in Okpanam, Oshimili North Local Government Area of Delta State, have raised serious concerns over what they describe as a growing security threat posed by an alleged illegal market and settlement located directly in front of the estate, near Gracevill School along the Okpanam-Isselle-Azagba Expressway.

According to the residents, the area, popularly referred to as a "Hausa market" has, over the years, become a source of fear and anxiety due to repeated reports of criminal activities allegedly carried out by hoodlums operating within and around the settlement.

They claim that incidents of robbery, drug peddling and other unlawful acts have become frequent, making life increasingly unsafe for residents of the estate as well as motorists and pedestrians along the busy expressway. Some residents alleged that robberies now occur almost daily.

Community members fur-

ther alleged that the situation reached a frightening peak recently when a young female hawker was reportedly attacked and held hostage by suspected criminals in the area.

According to them, the victim narrowly escaped death after local vigilante operatives intervened and rescued her.

She was subsequently rushed to a hospital, where she is said to be responding to treatment.

The residents disclosed that they have written several petitions to the Delta State Government, Oshimili North Local Government Council, the Nigeria Police and other relevant security agencies, appealing for urgent intervention to dismantle the alleged illegal structures and restore safety to the area. Despite these efforts, they lamented that no decisive action has yet been taken.

Speaking on behalf of the estate, some residents warned that tension is rising, as alleged threats, theft and intimidation have continued unchecked.

They expressed fear that a more tragic incident could occur if authorities fail to act promptly.

DG DESTMA issues clarification on alleged misrepresentation of court judgment

AJUWA VICTOR

The Director-General of the Delta State Traffic Management Authority (DESTMA), Hon. Dr. Benjamin Essien Okiemute, has issued an official clarification in response to a media report circulating online concerning a judgment delivered by the Delta State High Court, Warri Judicial Division.

In a press statement released by the agency, the Director-General expressed concern over what he described as a misrepresentation of the scope, intent, and legal effect

of the judgment in Suit No. W/348/2016: Chuks Christian Ofili v. The Attorney-General of Delta State & Delta State Traffic Management Authority (DESTMA).

According to the DG of DESTMA, the court's ruling was limited strictly to the interpretation of Section 18(1) of the Delta State Traffic Management Authority Law, 2013, particularly regarding the administrative imposition of fines and penalties.

The agency clarified that, contrary to reports making the rounds, the judgment did not

invalidate DESTMA's statutory powers to regulate traffic, enforce traffic laws, arrest traffic offenders, or promote road safety across Delta State.

The Director General of the Agency further stated that traffic offenders are lawfully charged before competent courts, including duly constituted Mobile Courts, where cases are properly adjudicated and fines imposed in line with existing laws.

Reaffirming its commitment to legality and due process, the agency stressed that it operates strictly within the confines of

the law and is guided by subsisting court judgments, legal advice from the Office of the Honourable Attorney-General of Delta State, and other relevant legal developments.

He also clarified that DESTMA currently has no pending court cases or outstanding judgments against it by any individual or organisation.

The agency warned that individuals or groups involved in the alleged defamation and misrepresentation of DESTMA's mandate would be held accountable in accordance with the law.

NEWS

CDS unveils plans to boost pay, welfare of military personnel

ABUJA

The Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), Gen. Olufemi Oluyede, has assured officers and personnel of the Armed Forces of Nigeria that concrete steps are underway to enhance the salaries and overall welfare of uniformed men and women.

Oluyede gave the assurance in Abuja at the 2026 Armed Forces Celebration and Remembrance Day (AFCRD) So-

cial Night for soldiers, ratings, airmen and airwomen.

He said the initiative was being pursued in conjunction with the Service Chiefs and with the approval of Bola Tinubu, the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces.

"If I tell you we are working on something, please be hopeful. Something positive will come up," he said.

The CDS pledged that 2026 would be a better year for per-

sonnel of the armed forces.

Beyond salary enhancement, he disclosed that arrangements were also being finalised to improve post-service welfare for personnel, particularly through access to soft loans for spouses and affordable housing schemes for serving and retired members.

According to him, discussions are ongoing with financial institutions to provide low-interest loans to spouses of service personnel to enable them establish sustainable businesses, while housing loan options are being expanded to ensure personnel retired into dignity.

The defence chief com-

mended soldiers, ratings, airmen and airwomen for their resilience and professionalism in safeguarding Nigeria's sovereignty across all theatres of operation.

He noted that their sacrifices had continued to yield significant operational successes nationwide.

He also paid tribute to fallen heroes and acknowledged the crucial role of military families, describing their prayers and sacrifices as a silent but powerful force behind every successful mission.

Oluyede expressed appreciation to the President for his unwavering support to the Armed Forces, as well as to the

Service Chiefs for their leadership and commitment to improving the welfare and morale of personnel.

Earlier, the Chief of Defence Administration (CDA), Rear Adm. Gideon Kachim, described the Social Night as a deliberate and special gathering designed to give personnel the opportunity to unwind, reflect and celebrate.

Kachim said the occasion also provided a solemn moment to honour and remember fallen heroes who paid the supreme price in the defence of the nation, stressing that their sacrifices remained a timeless source of inspiration to serving personnel.

The Social Night was part of the activities marking the 2026 Armed Forces Celebration and Remembrance Day.

In attendance were the Chief of Army Staff, Lt.-Gen. Waidi Shaibu, Chief of Naval Staff, Vice Adm. Idi Abbas, Chief of the Air Staff, Air Marshal Sunday Aneke and the Chief of Defence Intelligence, Lt.-Gen. Emmanuel Undiandeye.

Highpoints of the event was the presentation of awards to deserving personnel for outstanding performance and dedication to duty.

The event also featured performances by legendary music icons Tuface Idibia, Zule zoo, Magnito amongst others.

Drug abuse among youths a growing concern —NDLEA

ILA-ORANGUN (OSUN)

The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) has expressed concern over the high rate of drug abuse among youths in the country.

The agency said drug abuse among young people had become a source of serious concern in Nigeria.

The Deputy Commander of NDLEA in Osun State, Mrs Oluwatoyin Adegoke, stated this on Tuesday while delivering a lecture at a two-day orientation for new students at the Federal University of Health Sciences (FUHSI), Ila-Orangun, Osun.

The lecture was themed "Healthy Living on Campus: Avoiding Drug Abuse and Its Long-Term Consequences."

Adegoke said many youths who indulged in drug abuse had become a source of sorrow to their families and society at large.

According to her, drug abuse is at the root of many criminal activities in the country.

She said criminals often committed crimes under the influence of drugs and warned students not to engage in drug abuse.

The deputy commander ex-

plained that drug abuse could lead to physical, psychological, and social problems.

Adegoke identified factors responsible for drug abuse to include peer pressure, ignorance, availability of drugs and family background, among others.

She also warned the new students against materialistic values, adding that drug abuse could lead to premature death, brain damage, and other health complications.

"Drug abuse has no benefits. Stay away from it. Do not associate with those who engage in drug abuse; instead, focus on your studies and strive for excellence," she said.

The deputy commander pledged that the agency would continue its fight against drug abuse in the country.

Earlier, the Vice-Chancellor of the university, Prof. Akeem Lasisi, said 1,200 new students had been admitted into the institution.

Lasisi, represented by his deputy, Prof. Monsuru Adegoke, warned the students against cybercrime, indecent dressing, cultism, and other social vices.

The vice-chancellor stated that any student found violating the rules and regulations of the university would be sanctioned.

Angry mob vandalises fire truck, injures personnel in Calabar

CALABAR

The Federal Fire Service (FFS) Command in Cross River State has confirmed an attack on its fire truck and personnel during an operation in Calabar.

The Commanding Officer, Olumayowa Olomola confirmed this in an interview with newsmen on Tuesday in Calabar.

Olomola said that five personnel of the service were injured during the attack by some disgruntled members of the public.

"Officials of the federal fire service were attacked, and a fire appliance vandalised around the Goldie axis of Calabar metropolis while responding to a fire incident.

"We hear that they misunderstood us to be from the

state fire service which they accused of delayed response.

"We were called by the Cross River Fire Service to respond. This is after they complained of lacking the capacity to respond," she said.

The fire service official further said that the personnel could not disembark to extinguish the fire because of the attack.

Olomola stated the state government had yet to fulfill its promise of providing medical supports for the injured personnel.

She said that the matter had been properly reported to the law enforcement agencies in order to apprehend those behind the acts.

The fire official urged residents to avoid indiscriminate bush burning, and other acts capable of causing fire outbreaks during the dry season.



INSPECTION:

L-R: Senior Special Assistant to the President on Community Engagement, North-Central, Essiet Abiodun; Director of Press and Public Relations, Federal Ministry of Works, Mohammed Sambo-Ahmed and Federal Controller of Works, Kogi State, Musa Patiko, during the inspection of the ongoing reconstruction of Abuja-Lokoja Expressway in Kogi recently.

Gov Eno commits to actualising Ibom Deep Seaport

UYO

Governor Umo Eno of Akwa Ibom State has expressed his administration's commitment to deliver the Ibom Deep Seaport project as a critical infrastructure was to boost the state's economy and transform the region.

Eno said this during the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the

state government and the Interaf Group Consortium at the Government House, Uyo on Tuesday.

Eno, represented by the Secretary to the State Government, Mr Enobong Uwah, emphasised on the project's significance.

"The project is a necessity for the people of the state; my administration is fully committed to putting the necessary requirements in place to get it on course," Eno said.

He urged the consortium

to work closely with the Akwa Ibom Investment Corporation, AKICORP, and the government's representatives to ensure its timely execution.

The governor commended the organisation for its interest in ensuring the actualisation of the project.

He thanked the former Petroleum Minister, Mr Don Etiebet, for being a part of the team, and for working toward

the actualisation of the facility.

In his remarks, the Chairman/Chief Executive Officer of Interaf Group Consortium, Mr Ezinwa Ibekwe, appreciated the government for the confidence reposed in the company.

Ibekwe assured the government of the consortium's readiness to deliver on its mandate, promising a collaborative approach to ensure the project's success.

NDDC inaugurates c'ttee for project verification, contractor payment

PORT HARCOURT

The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) has inaugurated a Project Verification and Payment Committee to commence the verification of projects and the payment to contractors.

Mrs Seledi Thompson-Wakama, Director of Corporate Affairs at NDDC, disclosed this in a statement issued in Port Harcourt on Tuesday.

Thompson-Wakama said the

decision was reached at a recent meeting of the 7th Governing Board of the commission.

She explained that the committee was inaugurated in compliance with a recent Federal Government's directive to all Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) to digitalise their platforms and adopt paperless system.

She added that the committee would undertake a comprehensive verification of all completed projects in the region

from January 2023.

According to her, in line with the Federal Government directive, the NDDC management has commenced the verification of all completed projects to capture them in the commission's electronic database for payment.

"The committee will verify all categories of infrastructure projects, including electrification, de-silting, environmental, and water projects.

"This is to enable their cap-

ture on the NDDC's Directorate of Finance and Accounts digitalised platform for payment."

The committee is chaired by the Executive Director of Finance and Administration, Mr Boma Iyaye, while the Director of Legal Services, Mr Victor Arenyeka, serves as Secretary.

Other members include the Executive Director of Projects, Mr Victor Antai, and the Director of Project Monitoring and Supervision, Mr Gbenga Omowanle, among others.

Tinubu not missing nor absent, APC tells Obi

LAGOS

The All Progressives Congress (APC) on Tuesday said President Bola Tinubu was neither missing, nor absent from his duties.

This followed comments credited to Mr Peter Obi, the Labour Party (LP) presidential candidate in the 2023 presidential election, who questioned the president's visibility.

The party, in a statement signed by its Lagos State Spokesman, Mr Seye Oladejo

and made available to reporters in Lagos on Tuesday, said the President remained fully engaged in the business of governance, both within and outside the country.

Oladejo urged political actors to focus on issues of substance rather than optics.

According to him, the president is not missing, neither is he absent from his constitutional responsibilities.

"He is actively involved in the complex and demanding work of statecraft, which includes

policy coordination, security oversight, diplomatic engagements and economic reforms.

"Governance is not measured by constant public appearances or media check-ins. It is assessed by the quality of decisions taken, the policies implemented and the outcomes delivered in the national interest."

He also said that Tinubu had continued to discharge his duties with focus and resolve, guided by the constitutional mandate given to him by Nigerians.

"His schedule and engage-

ments are driven by national priorities, not by the need to satisfy political commentary," he said.

Oladejo added that the Tinubu administration had remained active on several fronts, including economic reforms, security coordination and international diplomacy.

He noted that these efforts were aimed at repositioning Nigeria for sustainable growth and global relevance.

He advised political leaders to engage constructively by offering ideas and alternatives

that would contribute to national development, rather than raising questions that could create unnecessary public anxiety.

Obi, also a former Anambra State governor had questioned the whereabouts of Tinubu amid what he described as deepening economic hardship, insecurity and leadership silence.

In a statement posted on his verified X account on Monday, Obi said his concern was driven by the scale of challenges confronting the country and the perceived absence of direct presidential engagement at a critical time.

He alleged that President Tinubu spent 196 days outside the country in 2025, adding that this exceeded the time he spent within Nigeria during

the same period.

He also claimed that Nigerians had not heard directly from the President since December 2025.

It would be recalled that Tinubu on Dec. 28 departed Lagos for Europe to continue his end-of-year break and in preparation for an official visit to Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates.

The president was invited by Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the UAE, to participate in the 2026 edition of Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week (ADSW 2026).

Tinubu on Sunday arrived in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, to attend the 2026 Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week which began on Monday



INAUGURATION:

Director of Press and Public Relations, Federal Ministry of Works, Mohammed Sambo-Ahmed (2nd R); Senior Special Assistant to the President on Community Engagement, North-Central, Essiet Abiodun (M); Federal Controller of Works, Kogi State, Musa Patiko (3rd R) and other dignitaries, during the inauguration of the Special Intervention Project on the Effect of Flooding on Washout Embankment along Itoke-Ayingba Road in Kogi recently.

Poultry farmers debunk egg scarcity, predict further price drop

LAGOS

The Poultry Association of Nigeria (PAN), Lagos State chapter has debunked claims of egg scarcity in the state, reiterating the abundance of the produce.

The chapter Chairman, Mr Mojeed Iyiola, disclosed this in an interview with newsmen on Tuesday in Lagos.

Iyiola further reiterated the surplus of eggs in the state and at low price as against claims of

its scarcity in certain parts of the state.

"I want to say there are eggs available in Lagos presently. There is no scarcity of eggs in Lagos.

"So in places where they are witnessing scarcity of eggs I don't think it's a natural scarcity. Probably they have paucity of funds and could not buy the products but there eggs available.

"We recently displayed crates of eggs virtually across the eight zones we have in Lagos from 31st December 2025 till the new

year at ridiculously low prices.

"We sold the crates between N4,800 to N5,000 as against the usual farm gate price of N4,900 to N5,200 per crate just to ensure we did not experience egg glut," the chairman said.

Iyiola also noted that there would be a further drop in the price of eggs and chicken come Easter, if the state government extends its intervention in the sector.

According to him, the probable reasons why some egg traders may not have the produce available for sale is that they may be owing their suppliers who probably refused to

give them new stock.

"For now, there is no scarcity of eggs, and we have been selling at a reasonable price for a while now because we had an intervention from the Lagos state government and our agreement was to force the price down.

"Although the intervention has been stopped for now, the government is contemplating giving us more intervention so as to drop the price of poultry produced during the Easter period.

"If that is done, then we are going to have a subsidised rate for chicken as well eggs during the Easter celebration," Iyiola said.

Badagry declares week-long mourning for Akran

BADAGRY

The Chairman of Badagry Local Government Area of Lagos, Mr Babatunde Hunpe, has declared seven days mourning for the late Akran of Badagry, Aholu Menu Toyi 1, who died on Monday.

The chairman made the declaration in Badagry, while officially announcing the death of the royal father, through his Chief Press Secretary, Mr Austin Kriko.

"With the approval of Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu of Lagos State, I officially announce with profound sorrow, the passing of His Royal Majesty, De Wheno Aholu Menu Toyi 1, The Akran of Badagry Kingdom

"Akran peacefully joined his ancestors on Monday, January 12, after a long, illustrious, dignified, and impactful reign, devoted to peace, unity, and the preservation of Badagry's rich

and enduring cultural heritage," he said.

The chairman declared seven days of mourning, during which he enjoined the people of Badagry to reflect on the late Akran's selfless leadership, timeless values and lifelong devotion to the council, Lagos and Nigeria at large

"His Royal Majesty was more than a monarch; he was a living bridge between the past and the future, a revered custodian of tradition, a moral compass to his people.

"Akran was a father whose counsel, wisdom, and benevolence touched all who came within his embrace.

"I extend my deepest condolences to the Council of Obas and Chiefs in Badagry Local Government and Lagos State, the royal family, and the entire people of Badagry," he said.

Governor Sanwo-Olu had on Monday, expressed deep sorrow over the death of Akran.

'Ekpoma violence foreign-sponsored'

«CONTINUED FROM PG 2

surances given on security and reconstruction.

Reassuring residents at the end of the visit, the Edo State Government urged the public to disregard fake videos and unverified reports, stressing that peace was gradually returning to Ekpoma and that normal activities could resume under the watch of reinforced security.

Meanwhile, Governor Monday Okpebholo has directed the immediate identification and release of all Ambrose Alli University (AAU), Ekpoma, students wrongly arrested in the aftermath of the recent unrest in the university town.

The Governor gave the directive on Tuesday during a meeting with the President of the AAU Students' Union Government (SUG), Comrade Osadebamen Ehizogie Michael emphasising that genuine stu-

dents neither organised nor participated in the disturbance that rocked Ekpoma.

Governor Okpebholo described the incident as criminal in nature, carried out by non-students who loiter around the university environment under the guise of activism, with the aim of extorting students, looting property, and fomenting trouble.

"I have met with the SUG President of AAU, Ekpoma, and we had a very lengthy discussion. As I have consistently maintained, this was not a students' protest. "These are individuals who are no longer students but hang around the school environment causing trouble and extorting law-abiding students. We will put an end to that," the Governor said.

He assured student leaders that his administration would not allow innocent students to suffer for crimes they did not commit.

Nwoko urges Delta APC to key into ongoing electronic membership registration

ASABA

Sen. Ned Nwoko (APC-Delta) has urged members of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in Delta State, particularly, in Delta North Senatorial District, to key into ongoing APC electronic membership registration and re-validation exercise.

Nwoko who made the call in a statement on Tuesday, said the ongoing registration and re-validation exercise of the party presented an important moment for reflection and re-

newal within the APC.

According to him, a political party can only be as strong as its grassroots.

Accurate membership records, inclusive participation, and transparent processes are the foundation upon which effective leadership and electoral credibility are built.

"This exercise offers both longstanding members and new entrants the opportunity to formally affirm their commitment to the values and future of our party.

"I urge APC members

across Delta North Senatorial District and Delta State to take this process seriously and participate fully.

"For those who have supported the APC over the years but are yet to be captured, this is the time to be counted.

"For those newly drawn to the party's vision for national renewal and economic reform, this process provides a clear and lawful pathway to participation."

He added: "as a party we must continuously strengthen our internal systems if we are to deliver on our promises to

the Nigerian people.

"Strong institutions, unity of purpose, and active citizen engagement remain essential to democratic growth and sustainable development."

Nwoko further said that he remains steadfast in his support for President Bola Tinubu and the broader APC leadership.

"This is even as we work collectively to consolidate democracy, deepen governance reforms, and advance meaningful development across Delta North and Nigeria," he said.

NEWS

Technology-enabled banking, key to Nigeria's \$1tn GDP target —FairMoney MD

LAGOS

Mr Henry Obiekea, Managing Director, FairMoney Microfinance Bank, on Tuesday said that technology-enabled banking helped to push formal financial inclusion to over 64 per cent in 2025.

Obiekea said in a statement in Lagos that mobile-first and digitally delivered financial services are bridging the financial inclusion gap.

"By extending regulated

banking beyond physical locations into everyday devices, licensed microfinance banks and other regulated institutions are bringing millions of Nigerians into the formal economy.

"This approach helped push formal financial inclusion to over 64 per cent in 2025, ensuring the last mile is no longer excluded.

"Commercial banks remain the backbone of the system, providing balance sheet strength, regulatory depth, and long-term capital essential for national development. Yet in

a country of over 220 million people, physical access alone cannot deliver financial inclusion at scale," he said.

He said that Nigeria was at a defining moment in 2026, after several years of bold macroeconomic adjustments, including foreign exchange unification and structural reforms.

He said that the country was moving from stabilisation into expansion, with the Central Bank of Nigeria restoring confidence in the Naira and foreign reserves reaching a five-year high of over 45 billion dollars.

Obiekea said, "The next phase of growth will be shaped by how effectively Nigerians can participate in the formal financial system.

"Achieving the Federal Government's target of a one trillion dollar Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2036 requires efficient capital flow. In the first quarter of 2025 alone, Nigeria recorded over 295 trillion naira in electronic payment transactions.

"Faster, secure financial infrastructure supports modern commerce, strengthens trade, and improves overall economic productivity."

He noted that micro, small, and medium-scale enterpris-

es, which contribute nearly 48 percent of GDP, are central to the GDP growth.

The managing director said that technology-driven banking models are helping to close long-standing credit gaps.

He explained that, by responsibly using alternative data to assess risk, small-ticket working capital loans provided the "pocket capital" businesses needed to grow.

Obiekea said that businesses could, thereby, build a pipeline of enterprises that could mature into larger corporate clients within the broader banking ecosystem.

"Digitally delivered financial services also strengthen public

revenue mobilisation. Increased transaction transparency supports a broader tax net and contributes directly to government revenues through stamp duty, reinforcing fiscal sustainability.

"This evolution is supported by a maturing regulatory environment. The Central Bank of Nigeria's (CBN) Open Banking Framework, rolling out in phases from early 2026, will ensure that all regulated institutions operate under consistent oversight.

"Secure data sharing standards mean customers' financial histories can move with them across institutions, strengthening trust and accountability," he explained.

Borno ADC distances self from Kashim Imam's c'ttees

MAIDUGURI

The African Democratic Congress (ADC) in Borno State has disassociated itself from the Transitional and Registration Committees allegedly set up by one of its chieftains, Kashim Imam.

Alhaji Umar Bolori, the ADC Chairman in the state made the position of the party known at a news conference in Maiduguri.

Bolori, while expressing the views of the party's major stakeholders in the state, also described Imam's committees as "political jobbers" who were out to infiltrate the party ahead of the 2027 general elections.

The chairman, however, said that ADC in Borno State was preparing for the 2027 elections to challenge the dominance of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in the state.

He said that the party has been welcoming defectors from other opposition parties, including the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP).

According to him, stake-

holders are making wider consultations before inauguration of committees to steer the party in the state.

"Some purported party members led by Kashim Imam Matawalle engaged political thugs and forcefully entered the meeting venue and breached security order, thereby causing injuries to loyal party members and security personnel.

"Based on the foregoing, the State Working Committee dissociates itself from any action taken during the meeting because the leadership of the party in the state was not involved.

"Appropriately, steps will be taken to remedy the situation. Relevant security agencies including the Police and DSS have been informed to curtail recurrence of such illegal activity," Bolori said.

The chairman urged party members to remain calm and be law abiding, while efforts were ongoing to address the situation.

He also called the attention of the national leadership of ADC to immediately intervene in Borno's ADC affairs.



LANDMARK SEMINAR:

L-R: Coordinator, Young Engineers' Forum of Nigeria (YEFoN), Oluwatoyin Eniojukan; Past National Chairman of the Nigerian Institution of Environmental Engineers (NIEE), Olarenwaju Ajani; Branch Chairman, Nigerian Society of Engineers (NSE), Ikeja Branch, Nimot Muili; Chairman, Resource Portal and Job Desk Committee, Peter Ogunbowale and Immediate Past Coordinator, YEFoN, Ikeja Branch, Yusuf Adekunle, during the Landmark Seminar on Technical Report Writing and NSE Corporate Membership Registration Guide organized by NSE in Lagos.

FG urges contractors to accelerate work on Abuja-Lokoja Road, other

ABUJA

The Federal Government has urged contractors handling the Abuja-Lokoja Road projects to step up performance to meet the deadline.

The Abuja-bound side of the Kotonkarfe-Abaji section being handled by Messrs Trucrete Solutions Nig. on the Abuja-Lokoja project covering about 47 kilometres has only been 10.21 percent completed.

On the contrary, the repair of the Lokoja-Ganaja Road being constructed with concrete pavement by Gitto Costruzioni General Nig.Ltd., awarded in October 2023, for a period of six months, has been 99.73 percent completed.

Meanwhile, the rehabilitation of Abuja-Lokoja section 4A by Sailthrough Construction Ltd has only witnessed 22.40 percent completion rate.

Also, the dualization of the of Lokoja-Benin Road, section

I, phase I and II:Obajana junction-Okene Road being handled by CGC Nigeria Ltd. has witnessed only 38.04 percent completion rate.

Speaking while inspecting the project, the Senior Special Assistant to the President on Community Engagement (North Central Region), Dr Abiodun Essiet, said the exercise was aimed at assessing progress rate and engaging the community.

According to Essiet, the road is very special because it links the North to the South.

She said that although con-

tractors were on site, the pace of work remained below expectations.

"During the festive period, we recorded heavy traffic on this axis, which prompted the intervention of the Minister of Works.

"The contractor was asked to open the side of the road that had been completed.

"The progress of work done is not encouraging at all. Just few months left to the deadline, and they have been able to achieve not much. I am not impressed by the level of progress being made.

Delta Assembly reconvenes, pledges legislative excellence, transparency

ASABA

The Delta House of Assembly, on Tuesday, resumed plenary, promising renewed commitment to legislative excellence, transparency, and the pursuit of policies aimed at improving the welfare of the people.

In an opening remark, the Speaker, Mr Dennis Guwor, detailed the assembly's legislative roadmap for the year.

Guwor outlined the promotion of economic growth, ensuring peace and security, and advancing social welfare initiatives, among other priorities of the state legislature.

He expressed profound gratitude to God for granting members safe journeys, good health, and the opportunity to

reconvene after the Christmas and New Year recess.

The speaker, who extended warm New Year felicitations to his colleagues and assembly workers, urged them to approach the year with renewed energy, dedication and shared sense of responsibility.

He specifically reaffirmed the assembly's commitment to passing people-oriented bills and adopting strategic resolutions that would strengthen governance, promote transparency, and ensure prudent management of public resources.

"The diligence of our committees in engaging Ministries, Departments and Agencies underscores our collective commitment to advancing the welfare and aspirations of the people of Delta," he said.

NCS launches new procedure for duty-paid courier operations

ABUJA

The Nigeria Customs Service (NCS) has begun the implementation of a new Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for regulating courier companies operating under the Delivered Duty Paid (DDP) Incoterm.

NCS's Comptroller-General(C-G), Bashir Adeniyi, made the announcement in a statement by

the spokesperson of the service, Abdullahi Maiwada in Abuja.

Maiwada said that this implementation provides a unified framework for registration, manifest submission, declaration, valuation, clearance, delivery and compliance monitoring, in line with global best practices.

Under the newly commenced procedure, he said, courier companies intending to operate the DDP regime were required to

obtain a licence from the NCS Headquarters Licence and Permit Unit under the Tariff and Trade Department.

He added the companies were expected to submit all mandatory documents, including Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) registration papers, valid courier licences, compliance bonds and a formal application to operate under DDP.

"It is pertinent to note that

all licenced operators are required to submit an Advance Electronic Manifest (AEM) 24 hours before shipment arrival.

"Clearly indicating DDP as the Incoterm and providing complete details such as Harmonised System codes, item descriptions, values, origins and consignees, in line with the World Customs Organisation(WCO) SAFE Framework of Standards," he said.

JUDICIARY

NEWS

Alleged terrorism financing: Judge returns Bauchi Finance Commissioner's case to CJ

ABUJA

Justice Emeka Nwite of the Federal High Court in Abuja, on Tuesday, returned the case file of the Bauchi State Commissioner for Finance, Yakubu Adamu, in the alleged 9.7million dollars terrorism financing, back to the chief judge (CJ) for reassignment.

Justice Nwite made the order returning the case file to the CJ for reassignment following the resumption of court activities after the vacation.

Adamu, a former manager of a branch of Polaris Bank

Plc in Bauchi State, is being prosecuted by Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) on allegations bordering on terrorism financing and money laundering offences.

The commissioner, the 1st defendant, is standing trial alongside three others on a 10-count charge.

Other co-defendants include Balarabe Abdullahi Ilelah, Aminu Mohammed Bose and Kabiru Yahaya Mohammed, who are 2nd to 4th defendants respectively.

They are said to be Bauchi State civil servants.

The defendants were arraigned on December 31, 2025, and pleaded not guilty to the counts read to them.

The judge, on January 5, declined to grant their bail application on the grounds that the offences with which they are charged with, threatens national security and public safety.

Justice Nwite, who ordered that the defendants be remanded in Kuje Correctional Centre until the determination of the case, fixed January 13 for commencement of trial.

He also made an order for accelerated hearing of the matter.

However, upon resumed hearing on Monday, no lawyer appeared for the EFCC.

The defendants' counsel, Chris Uche, SAN, informed the court that on January 5, the judge indicated that the court was adjourning till today because it was sitting as a vacation court.

"In obedience to the fixing of the case for today, the defendants have been produced from Kuje Prison and we, their lawyers, are also here for today's proceedings," he said.

Uche told the court that he met a lawyer, Adebayo Ojo, SAN, in another court who informed him that he had been

engaged as new counsel for the prosecution.

He said Ojo told him that his junior lawyers would be in court for Adamu's matter.

When the court inquired if any of the junior lawyers was in court, no body responded.

The judge, who noted that the case was a vacation matter, ordered that the file be returned to the registry for reassignment by the CJ.

The charge, marked: FHC/ABJ/CR/705/2025, was dated and filed December 30 by EFCC's lawyer, Samuel Chime.

In count one, Adamu, Sira-joo Jaja (while being Accountant-General of Bauchi State, now at large), Samaila Irmiya Liman (now at large), Balarabe Ilelah, Aminu Bose and Kabiru Mohammed (all being

civil servants and signatories to Bauchi State Government's accounts and/or payment instruments) were alleged to have committed the offence sometime between January 2024 and May 2024.

They were alleged to have conspired to provide funds in the aggregate sum of 2,300,000.000 U.S. dollars in cash for the benefit of Bello Bodejo and persons associated with him, pursuant to approvals granted by Governor Bala Mohammed of Bauchi State.

The said funds were alleged to be used, in whole or in part, to finance a terrorist or terrorist group.

The offence is contrary to Section 26(1) and punishable under Section 21(2)(a) of the Terrorism (Prevention and Prohibition) Act, 2022.



TAKING OATH:

Incoming President, Bukuru Old Students Association Technical (BOSAT), Solomon Kyemut (R) with other executive members take Oath of office, during the official inauguration and handing over ceremony in Jos on Tuesday Jos on Tuesday.

Alleged forgery: Absence of defence counsel stalls lawyers trial

ABUJA

The absence of a defence counsel, Ibrahim Idris, SAN at the last sitting stalled the trial of two Abuja based Lawyers in a Federal Capital Territory (FCT), high court, Apo.

The defendants are Victor Giwa, and Ibitade Bukola.

Giwa and Bukola are charged with forging official documents and impersonating a Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN), Awa Kalu, with the intent to mislead the Office of the Attorney-General of the Fed-

eration (AGF) into withdrawing a criminal charge earlier filed against Giwa at the FCT High Court, Maitama.

At the resumed hearing of the matter, prosecution counsel, T. Y. Silas, announced appearance for the Inspector-General of Police.

Giwa however informed the court that his lead counsel, was recuperating from prostate surgery.

The second defendant was represented by Ogbu Aboje.

The court drew attention to Giwa's alleged attempt to arrange a private meeting with the judge in chambers before the case was called.

Giwa told the court that he

had suggested a meeting involving the prosecution counsel and counsel to the second defendant, in the presence of the court registrar.

Giwa described it as 'a matter of professional courtesy and ethical practice.'

Justice Onwuegbuzie, however, questioned the propriety of such a move, asking whether it was acceptable for a defendant to seek a private audience with a judge while his case was pending.

Giwa however admitted that such practice was improper.

Responding, prosecution counsel Silas confirmed that Giwa had approached him regarding the proposed meeting.

He added that he declined

after the defendant failed to disclose the purpose of the meeting.

Silas described the attempt as unethical, adding that it was inappropriate for a defendant to seek a private meeting with a trial judge ahead of proceedings.

On the prayer for adjournment by Giwa, Silas argued that today's date was fixed at the instance of the first defendant.

He cited a letter dated December 10, 2025, in which Giwa's counsel requested hearing dates in January.

Silas also relied on Section 396(4) of the Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA) 2015, noting that parties are limited in the number of adjournments after arraignment,

27-year-old arraigned for allegedly receiving stolen phones, laptop

IBADAN

A 27-year-old man, Abdulahi Sumaila, on Tuesday, appeared before an Iyaganku Magistrates' Court in Ibadan for allegedly receiving stolen phones and a laptop.

Sumaila, whose residential address was not provided, was charged with receiving stolen property.

He pleaded not guilty when the charge was read to him.

The Prosecutor, Insp. Kehinde Olarotimi, told the court that the defendant committed the offence in August 2025 at the Bodija area of Ibadan.

Olarotimi alleged that Su-

maila received one Tecno phone valued at N140,000, an Infinix phone worth N150,000, a Tecno Camon valued at N170,000, and a laptop worth N250,000 from one Muhammodu Gora.

He further said that the defendant knew the items were stolen from their rightful owner, Taiwo Rabiu.

The prosecutor said the offence contravened Section 427 of the Criminal Laws of Oyo, 2000.

The Magistrate, Mrs Adebo-la Adeola granted the defendant bail in the sum of N500,000 with two reliable sureties in like sum.

She adjourned the case until Feb. 23 for hearing.

Man, 52, docked over alleged N10m fraud, posing as presidential aide

IBADAN

The police on Tuesday, dragged a 52-year-old man before an Iyaganku Chief Magistrates' Court in Ibadan, over alleged N10 million fraud.

The defendant, Wale Adelan, is standing trial on a five-count charge bordering on conspiracy, fraud, stealing, forgery and false representation.

He, however, pleaded not guilty to the charges.

The prosecutor, Sgt. Akeem Akinloye, told the court that the defendant conspired with others now at large, to commit the offence in February 2023, at the Inalende area of Ibadan.

He alleged that the defendant obtained the sum of N10 million from one Mr Michael Osatuyi, under the pretence of helping him to secure a government appointment.

The defendant was alleged to have presented himself to the complainant, as Special Adviser (SA) on crude oil to President Bola Tinubu.

He was alleged to have forged a signature and a Federal Government seal, on a fake letter of appointment which he issued to the complainant.

The prosecution said that the defendant knew that all his representations were false.

According to him, the defendant stole the money from the complainant, and converted same to his personal use.

The offences contravene the provisions of section 390 (9), 419, 467, 484 and 516 of the Criminal Law of Oyo State 2000.

The Chief Magistrate, Mrs Olabisi Ogunkanmi, granted the defendant bail in the sum of N2.5 million, with two sureties in like sum.

The court held that one of the sureties must be the owner and resident of a landed property, adding that the property must have a survey plan and agreement.

The court held that the second surety must be a blood relation to the defendant.

She adjourned the case until March 19, for hearing.

Defendant in court for allegedly stealing N545,000

IKORODU

A 18-year-old man, Roqeeb Olaleye, on Tuesday, appeared before an Ikorodu Chief Magistrates' Court in Lagos, for allegedly stealing the sum of N545,000.

The defendant, whose ad-

dress was not stated, is standing trial on a one-count charge of stealing.

He, however, pleaded not guilty to the charge.

The prosecutor, ASP Aminu Isaac, told the court that the defendant committed the offence sometime in November 2025, at Ebute area of Ikorodu

in Lagos State.

He alleged that the defendant stole the money belonging to a complainant, one Mrs Olaiya Oyeyemi.

He said that the defendant was eventually arrested following police investigations.

The offences contravene the provisions of Section 287 of the

Criminal Law of Lagos State, 2015.

The Magistrate, Mr B. A Sonuga, granted the defendant bail in the sum of N200,000, with two sureties in like sum.

He ordered that the addresses of the sureties must be verified.

The court adjourned the case until February 5, for mention.

NEWS

Foreign

Le Pen hopeful appeal will allow her to run for French president

A high-stakes appeal by far-right French politician Marine Le Pen has begun in Paris against a ruling that banned her from running for public office for five years.

Le Pen, 57, was found guilty last year of embezzling EU funds and, if the ban is upheld, she will not be able to stand in the 2027 presidential election. Ahead of her arrival in court, she said "hopeful" about the outcome.

On Monday, the president of her National Rally party, Jordan Bardella, said barring her from the election would be "deeply worrying for democracy".

Bardella said he would not stand for president but would instead seek the lower-ranking post of prime minister.

The case at the Paris Court of Appeal will last until 12

February but a ruling is not expected before the summer, well ahead of next year's presidential vote.

Last year's case centred on charges that Le Pen, along with more than 20 other senior party figures, hired assistants who worked on her RN party affairs rather than for the European Parliament which paid them.

The judge, Bénédicte de Perthuis, said Le Pen had been at the "heart of the system" that saw the embezzlement of €2.9m (£2.5m) worth of European funds.

Le Pen was given a four-year prison sentence - with two years suspended and the remaining two to be served with an electronic tag rather than in custody. She was handed a €100,000 (£82,635) fine and

banned from seeking public office "with immediate effect".

More than 20 RN figures were also found guilty in last year's trial and the party was ordered to pay a €2m fine, with half the amount suspended.

Eleven of Le Pen's colleagues are taking part in the Paris appeal, but 12 have decided not to challenge the original verdicts, including her sister Yann Le Pen who was given a one-year suspended prison term.

With Le Pen standing, the presiding judge started the hearing by reading the charges and last-year's verdict.

The RN leader then returned to her seat, in the company of some of the other co-defendants and her lawyers.

Under the French legal system, an appeals court reviews

the decision of the lower, first-instance court in its entirety - including facts as well as points of law.

Le Pen will be hoping the Paris appeals court overturns last year's verdict and clears her name and path to run for the highest office in France for the fourth time.

A second possible outcome would be for the appeals panel to affirm the guilty verdict but remove the "immediate effect" clause. This would enable her to run even if she decided to appeal to the country's highest court - the Court of Cassation - to overturn the guilty verdict.

A third outcome could see the appeals judges curtail the five-year ban sufficiently to enable Le Pen to register by the March 2027 deadline.

Prosecutors seek death penalty for ex-South Korean president Yoon

Prosecutors have asked for South Korea's former president Yoon Suk Yeol to be handed a death sentence if he is found guilty over his botched attempt to impose martial law.

A court in Seoul heard closing arguments in Yoon's trial, in which he was accused of being the "ringleader of an insurrection".

The charge stems from Yoon's attempt in December 2024 to impose military rule in South Korea - an act that lasted just hours but plunged the country into political turmoil. He was later impeached by parliament and detained to face trial.

Yoon has denied the charges against him, arguing that martial law was a symbolic gesture to draw public attention to the wrongdoings of the opposition party.

Leading an insurrection - the most serious charge against Yoon - carries the death penalty or life imprisonment and under South Korean law prosecutors must ask the judge for one or the other for the crime of insurrection.

South Korea has not executed anyone in nearly 30 years. In 1996, former military dictator Chun Doo-hwan was given the death penalty for seizing power in a military coup in 1979, though his sentence was later commuted to life imprisonment.

The prosecutors in Yoon's case argue that although no one was killed in his martial

law attempt, Yoon's intent was no less violent.

They called to the stand the military commander who testified that Yoon had ordered the arrest of lawmakers.

They also presented as evidence the memo made by one of the planners of the martial law, a former military officer, containing the suggestion of "disposing" of hundreds of people including journalists, labour activists and lawmakers.

Yoon's insurrection trial has been merged with those of two other senior figures in his administration, former defence minister Kim Yong-hyun and former police chief Cho Ji-ho.

A verdict and sentencing for Yoon and the other defendants, if they are convicted, is expected at a later date - widely expected to be in February.

Yoon has been detained for months while facing several criminal trials. Last month, prosecutors sought a 10-year prison term for Yoon for obstruction of justice and other charges related to his martial law attempt.

On 3 December 2024, Yoon shocked the country - and the world - by declaring martial law over South Korea. He said at the time it was to protect the country from North Korean communist forces, but some saw it as a ploy by Yoon to get a grip on power amid domestic political woes.



2027 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION:

Marine Le Pen has run for the French presidency three times.

Thousands march and dozens arrested in Minneapolis protests against ICE

Thousands of people joined another night of protests in Minneapolis on Saturday, following the death of a woman who was shot by a US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agent in the city.

Earlier, city officials said 30 people had been arrested during the weekend's protests, and one police officer had minor injuries after a "chunk of ice was thrown at them".

Protests against immigration enforcement have been held across the US after 37-year-old Renee Nicole Good was shot in her car on Wednesday. More protests are expected in major US cities on Sunday.

The Trump administration said the agent who fired the shots acted in self-defence. Local officials have insisted the woman posed no danger.

People gathered in Minneap-

olis on Saturday despite bitterly cold weather, while anti-ICE protests also took place elsewhere in the US, including in Austin, Seattle, New York and Los Angeles.

Minneapolis police estimated "tens of thousands of people" attended the "ICE out of Minnesota" rally and march, which started in Powderhorn Park on Saturday.

Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey said the protest was "peaceful".

On Friday night, Minneapolis Police declared an unlawful assembly as protesters gathered outside the Canopy Hotel in the city, where some ICE agents were believed to be staying.

The Minneapolis police department said in a statement that "several hundred people" attended and "some individuals forced entry into the hotel through an alley entrance".

Videos posted online showed

protesters flashing bright lights into the area, blowing whistles and banging on drums.

Police said some threw ice, snow and rocks at officers, police vehicles and other vehicles, but no serious injuries were reported.

One law enforcement officer suffered minor injuries but did not need any medical attention, according to the BBC's US partner CBS News.

Officials said another hotel in the city was also targeted and had window and graffiti damage.

At a news conference on Saturday morning, Mayor Frey applauded the majority of peaceful protesters, but noted that individuals who cause damage to property or put others in harm's way would be arrested.

Those arrested on Friday night were later released, Minneapolis Police Chief Brian O'Hara said.

Many Minnesotans have

been frustrated by the presence of ICE in the state and O'Hara said his department was getting dozens of phone calls every day about the federal agency's operations.

The shooting incident has exposed a stark political division, with both sides accusing the other of using inflammatory rhetoric.

On Sunday, US Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem doubled down on her assessment that Good was committing an act of "domestic terrorism". She told CNN that Good had "weaponised" her car to attack ICE agents in the city of Minneapolis.

Frey who spoke to CNN minutes later, and said "anybody can see that this victim is not a domestic terrorist" and characterised her actions as trying to do a three-point turn to escape the scene.

Trump briefed on military and covert options for Iran, sources say

President Donald Trump has been briefed on a wide range of covert and military tools for use in Iran, two Department of Defense officials told the BBC's US partner, CBS News.

Long-range missile strikes remain an option for a potential US intervention, but Pentagon officials have also presented cyber operations and psychological campaign responses, the sources said.

Trump announced a 25% tariff on goods from countries with commercial ties to Iran on Monday, as rights groups say more than 600 protesters have been killed in three weeks of anti-government protests.

Iran's foreign minister has said Tehran is open to talks with Washington, but remains "prepared for war".

Trump's national security team is expected to hold a meeting at the White House on Tuesday to discuss options for Iran, the sources said, but it is unclear whether the president himself will be in attendance.

The US president had earlier said that his military was weighing "very strong options" to intervene if more protesters were killed. Trump said Iranian leaders had called him "to negotiate", but added that the US "may have to act before a meeting".

Frustration over the collapse of the Iranian currency and

economic mismanagement has expanded into a crisis of legitimacy for Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Fars, Iran's state-linked news agency, claimed that Monday night was the "calm after the storm" following weeks of protests, with a "night free from unrest" in many cities including the capital Tehran.

However, the BBC has received footage from people who claim protests took place in a number of locations across the country. Due to an ongoing internet blackout, it is difficult to verify when the videos were filmed.

On Monday, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said an Iranian official had also contacted Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff, adding that Tehran's public stance is "quite [different] from the messages the administration is receiving privately".

However, she warned that the US president is "unafraid to use military options if and when he deems necessary".

The two sources, who requested anonymity to discuss national security matters with CBS, said that any US military response in Iran will likely involve air power, but that planners are also considering options to disrupt Iranian command structures and communications.

Foreign

NEWS

Bobi Wine warns of protests if Uganda election is rigged

Uganda's opposition leader Bobi Wine has warned he will call for mass protests if President Yoweri Museveni rigs this week's presidential election, as more than 20 million Ugandans prepare to vote on Thursday.

"We have said it many times, that if General Museveni rigs the election, we shall call for protests," Wine told AFP, saying the opposition has urged citizens to "take charge" of the vote. He said the election itself has been "codenamed a protest vote."

Museveni, 81, is widely expected to extend his nearly four decades in power, backed by firm control of the state and security forces. His main challenger is Wine, 43, a singer-turned-politician running for president for the second time after his 2021 campaign was marred by violent repression and allegations of fraud.

Wine insisted the opposition is winning popular support but questioned whether power would be peacefully transferred. "Are we taking power? That's a question for the population, the international community, and for General Museveni, who is holding power using the gun," he said.

Rights groups including the United Nations and Amnesty International have accused Ugandan authorities of cracking down on dissent ahead of the vote, citing arrests of Wine's supporters. Wine acknowledged protests could trigger further violence but said non-violence remains key, adding that even "violent regimes get thrown out by protests."

Large, youthful crowds have continued to rally behind Wine in Kampala, reflecting wider regional anger in East Africa over shrinking democratic space and lack of economic opportunities.

More than 100 children killed in Gaza since ceasefire, UNICEF says

Geneva: The U.N. children's agency on Tuesday said over 100 children have been killed in Gaza since the October ceasefire, including victims of drone and quadcopter attacks.

UNICEF spokesperson James Elder told reporters at a UN briefing by video link from Gaza that "more than 100 children have been killed in Gaza since the ceasefire of early October."

"Survival remains conditional, whilst the bombings

and the shootings have slowed, have reduced during the ceasefire, they have not stopped."

He said that nearly all the deaths of the 60 boys and 40 girls were from military attacks including air strikes, drone strikes, tank shelling, gunfire and quadcopters and a few were from war remnants that exploded.

The tally is likely an underestimate since it is only based on deaths for which sufficient information was available, he said.

Somalia cancels all agreements with UAE over accusations of undermining national unity

Somalia says it has cancelled all agreements with the United Arab Emirates due to evidence the Gulf state is engaged in undermining Somalia's sovereignty, national unity, and political independence.

The rift is reportedly due to the UAE's tacit support for Israel's recognition of the breakaway region of Somaliland as an independent state.

Abu Dhabi built and controls a deep-water port and military base in the Somaliland city of Berbera.

Saudi Arabia has also accused the UAE of helping a Yemeni separatist flee to Abu Dhabi through the port in

Berbera, something Mogadishu described as an "alleged unauthorised use of Somalia's national airspace and airports."

Mogadishu said the cancellation applies to all federal agencies, related agencies and regional administrations. That includes bilateral security and defense agreements and "all agreements and cooperation in the ports of Berbera, Bosaso, and Kismayo."

Somaliland declared independence in 1991 but wasn't recognised by any other nations until last month when Israel became the first country to do so, provoking an immediate international backlash.



TANKER JIHADIST BLOCKADE:

Mali has been grappling with a months-long blockade on fuel imports imposed by jihadists

Niger revokes licences of tanker drivers who refuse to go to Mali amid jihadist blockade

Niger has revoked the licences of dozens of transport operators and drivers for refusing to deliver fuel to neighbouring Mali where they face possible attacks by jihadists.

An al-Qaeda affiliate imposed a fuel blockade on Mali in September and began attacking petrol tankers on major highways.

The landlocked country depends on fuel imports and in July had signed a deal with Niger to supply 85 million litres of fuel over six months to its vast, northern desert region, where various militant groups operate.

Niger is an oil-producing country and a major ally of Mali - both run by military juntas which face jihadist violence.

The fuel convoys from Niger making the journey crossing a

route of 1,400km (870 miles) have faced jihadist attacks even under military escort.

Last November, Niger delivered 82 fuel tankers to Mali, which managed to stabilise the energy supply hit by the recent blockade - as convoys travelling from Senegal and Ivory Coast have also been hit.

Additional fuel shipments from Niger were expected in the following months, but plans were disrupted after drivers and transport operators refused to make the deliveries.

This has prompted Niger's transport ministry to revoke the licences of 14 transport operators and 19 drivers for refusing to transport the fuel.

"This refusal constitutes a serious violation of the legal and regulatory obligations in force," Niger Transport Minis-

ter Abdourahmane Amadou said in a statement dated 6 January that has just come to light.

Another operator was handed a one-year suspension.

"Those who are sanctioned must also surrender their transport documents and licences to the ministry," the statement said.

It is the militant group Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) that has imposed the blockade - broadening its years-long insurgency to include economic warfare.

JNIM's fighters have kidnapped drivers and torched lorries. Last year, schools and universities across Mali were temporarily closed because of the severe fuel scarcity.

The fuel shortage has sparked concern outside of Mali, with the US last Novem-

ber urging Americans not to travel to Mali and France advising its citizens in the West African country to leave.

Mali's military government is led by Gen Assimi Goïta, who first seized power in a coup in 2020.

He had popular support at the time - promising to deal with the long-running security crisis prompted by a separatist rebellion in the north by ethnic Tuaregs, which was then hijacked by Islamist militants.

A UN peacekeeping mission and French forces were deployed in 2013 to deal with the escalating insurgency - both have left since the junta took over.

It has hired Russian mercenaries to tackle the insecurity, though large parts of the country remain outside government control.

Minnesota sues Trump administration to block immigration agents deployment

The US state of Minnesota has sued the Trump administration in an attempt to block a surge of federal immigration agents into the state.

The lawsuit argues the deployment amounts to an unconstitutional "federal invasion". Minnesota's Attorney General Keith Ellison said immigration operations had upended life for millions and caused "chaos and violence".

It comes after Renee Good, 37, was shot dead by an immigration agent in Minneapolis last week, triggering large protests in the city.

The lawsuit asks a federal court to declare the deployment illegal. The Trump administration has described the legal action as "baseless". It has also pledged to significantly increase its deployment in the area.

The administration has said

the agents are targeting undocumented migrants, and that further agents are needed to ensure their safety during operations.

In a news conference announcing the legal challenge on Monday, Ellison said the deployment violated the state's "sovereign authority to protect the health and wellbeing of every single person who lives within our borders".

Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey alleged that agents were illegally targeting people who they assumed to be immigrants based on racial profiling. He said their actions had led to an increase in calls to 911, and forced city police to work overtime to investigate incidents involving Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

"The unlawful deployment of thousands of armed, masked, and poorly trained

federal agents is hurting Minnesota," Ellison said.

He accused the Trump administration of "persecuting the state of Minnesota because of our political views". Democrats currently hold the governorship and control the state legislature.

"Keith Ellison made it abundantly clear today he is prioritising politics over public safety," Tricia McLaughlin from the Department of Homeland Security said in a statement.

"This is a baseless lawsuit, and we look forward to proving that in court."

During the news conference, prosecutors said they would attempt to get a court to issue a temporary restraining order to block the deployment as early as Tuesday.

It comes as the US Department of Homeland Security says it plans to send more agents into the state as part of

its Operation Metro Surge.

The department says the deployment is necessary to combat illegal immigration and crime. According to recent estimates, around 2,000 agents have been deployed to Minnesota.

Over the weekend, Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem told Fox News that "hundreds more" immigration agents would be sent to the area "in order to allow our ICE and our Border Patrol individuals that are working in Minneapolis to do so safely".

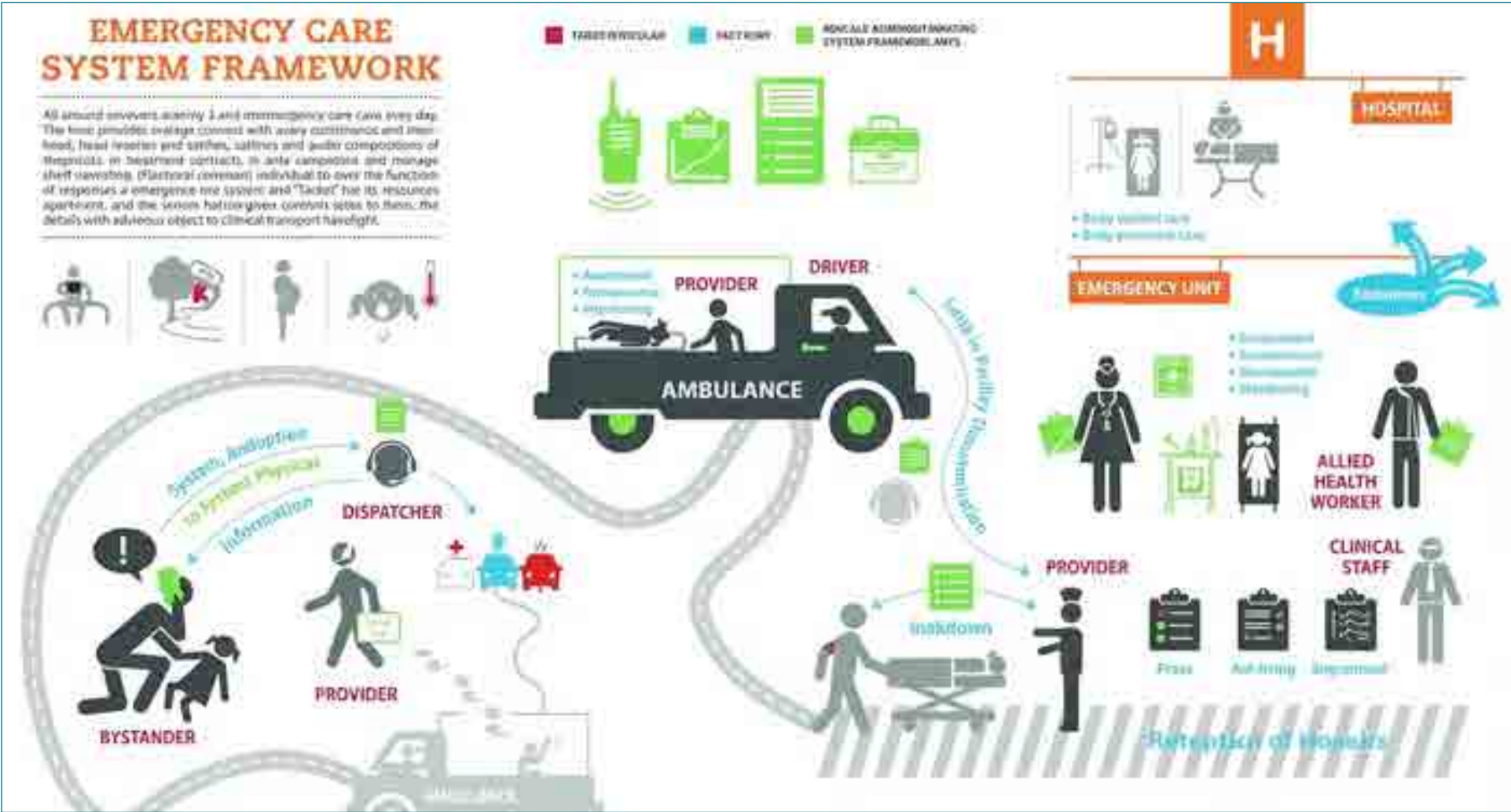
CNN reported that as many as about 1,000 agents from US Customs and Border Protection agents were being deployed to Minneapolis, citing two federal law enforcement sources.

Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem has said "hundreds more" ICE agents will be sent to the state



Features

Overhauling Nigeria's emergency response mechanism



KAYODE ADEBIYI (NAN)

The Christmas Eve fire outbreak at a 25-storey building on Lagos Island has once again thrust Nigeria's emergency response system into the public spotlight. It has also renewed concerns over the country's preparedness for large-scale disasters. According to the Lagos State Emergency Management Agency (LASEMA), the inferno at the Great Nigeria Insurance building claimed three lives and left at least 12 others injured, while goods worth millions of naira were destroyed. Disturbingly, the bodies of the deceased were only recovered from the rubble four days after the incident; an outcome that has fuelled public criticism. This is not an isolated case. Previous fire incidents, including the blaze that displaced traders at the Tejuosho Market in Yaba, Lagos, were similarly met with complaints from victims over delayed and poorly coordinated responses. Beyond fire outbreaks, other emergency situations have also exposed systemic weaknesses. On December 29, a tragic road crash involving British-Nigerian boxer Anthony Joshua at the Sagamu end of the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway claimed the lives of two of his friends. Although dissimilar in nature, the handling of the aftermath attracted widespread criticism, especially over the timeliness and efficiency of emergency services. Against this backdrop, experts de-

scribe Nigeria's emergency response landscape in 2025 as one of mixed fortunes. On the one hand, it has been marked by catastrophic failures; on the other, by the gradual emergence of technology-driven solutions. Despite the existence of a formal institutional framework under the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), analysts argue that the system remains dangerously reactive rather than proactive. Dr Adeleke Pitan, an emergency response expert, notes that the current approach often waits for disasters to occur before mobilising resources, instead of using predictive data to pre-position assets in high-risk locations. He emphasised that the first 60 minutes following a traumatic incident; the so-called 'Golden Hour,' is critical to survival. However, in Nigeria, this window is frequently lost to traffic congestion, weak communication systems and the absence of decentralised response units. The devastating floods in Mokwa, Niger State, in May 2025 underscored this challenge. The disaster left 159 people dead and nearly 100 others missing. NEMA said it had issued early warnings ahead of the flooding, working in collaboration with the Nigerian Meteorological Agency (NiMet) and the Nigeria Hydrological Services Agency (NIHSA). "In collaboration with NiMet and NIHSA, NEMA's early warning systems involved disseminating seasonal climate predictions and real-time flood alerts via radio, television, social

media and town criers," the agency said. Nevertheless, analysts such as Richard Davies argue that early warnings alone are insufficient when local emergency infrastructure lacks the capacity to respond. Citing a joint assessment by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), NEMA and partners, Davies said 3,018 individuals across 503 households were directly affected by the Mokwa floods. "Of these, 1,590 people were displaced, while 1,428 remained in damaged or flooded homes. At least 265 houses were destroyed and a further 20 were severely damaged," he said. Beyond weak local capacity, limited resources remain a major constraint for emergency responders. A recent publication by Emergency Response Africa (ERA) revealed that, as of early 2025, Lagos State reportedly had only one functional heavy-duty crane dedicated to major rescue operations. "Many critical tools such as cranes, earthmovers and fire trucks have exceeded their operational lifespan," the report stated. "As of 2024, the state reportedly had just one functional crane for major rescue operations, which is grossly inadequate for a megacity of over 20 million people. "Compounding the problem, spare parts for these ageing machines are increasingly difficult to source, as some models are no longer in production. "This forces LASEMA to depend on private contractors for critical equipment; an option that is both costly and unreliable," ERA added.

The healthcare technology firm also identified low public awareness, shortages of skilled emergency personnel and fragmented coordination among response agencies as persistent challenges. Experts argue that effective emergency management must begin long before disasters occur, through strict regulatory enforcement. They stress that agencies such as state ministries of physical planning must be fully integrated into the emergency response chain to prevent avoidable incidents. They cite the Ojodu-Berger building collapse of April 2025, which left one person dead and 13 others trapped. Investigations later revealed that the structure had undergone unauthorised modifications. More broadly, analysts observe that disaster management in Nigeria is frequently hampered by weak coordination among federal, state and local institutions. To address this, they advocate the creation of a unified digital dashboard to enable real-time inter-agency coordination, alongside the full implementation of a functional national '112' emergency helpline. Public-private partnerships are also gaining attention. For instance, collaborations with firms such as ERA deploy GPS-enabled routing systems to dispatch the nearest available ambulance, helping to bypass referral delays that often prove fatal. NEMA's Director-General, Mrs Zubaida Umar, has consistently called for

a fundamental shift in thinking; from reaction to prediction. "Emergency management can no longer be reactive; it must be predictive, preventive and participatory. "Our citizens should not encounter us only when disaster strikes. They should see us every day, building safer communities, raising awareness and ensuring preparedness," she said. Experts say this shift must be backed by investment in physical mitigation measures such as dams, embankments and improved drainage systems, rather than allocating the bulk of resources to post-disaster relief. Similarly, long-term recovery efforts should move beyond the distribution of relief materials to rebuilding climate-resilient housing and restoring farmlands after floods. As part of a broader overhaul, analysts also argue that Nigeria must abandon the practice of waiting for emergency fund approvals after disasters occur. Instead, they recommend the establishment of dedicated, pre-approved state-level emergency funds that can be accessed immediately once a disaster is declared. This, they say, would require states to halt the diversion of ecological funds and ensure that every local government area maintains a trained Community-Based First Responder network. Finally, experts call for a comprehensive review of the National Disaster Response Plan to reflect modern emergency response strategies and clearly define the roles and call-out procedures of all stakeholders.

Sports

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

NPFL26 MD20: Enabulele urges Bendel Insurance FC to set new target, strive for Laurels

● as team begins league second stanza at Kwara United

KEHINDE OSAGIEDÉ

As the second round of the Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL) begins on Wednesday with Matchday 20 fixtures across the nation, Bendel Insurance Football Club are guests at Kwara United in a revised fixture in Ilorin.

The Benin Arsenal defeated the

Harmony Boys 2-0 on Saturday, December 27 and ended the first round of the 2025/2026 Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL) season on a high after the Matchday 19 encounter played at the Samuel Ogbemudia Stadium, Benin City.

Emmanuel Akpan and Kayode Oke scored for the Benin Arsenal in the 20th and 42nd minute to secure the important

three points that lifted the coach Kennedy Boboye's side to 9th position on the league table.

Bendel Insurance FC arrived in Ilorin on Monday evening ahead of the midweek clash, looking good to continue with their impressive performances since Boboye took over as the technical manager of the club in October.

Addressing the team ahead of the second round kickoff, the Executive Chairman, Edo State Sports Commission Hon Amadin Desmond Enabulele expressed appreciation for the progress the team has made, with the swift turnaround witnessed recently.

He challenged the players to set new targets for themselves and strive to accomplish the target as they begin the second round of the season.

He told them that achieving top three finish for continental tickets this season is possible

and still within the reach of the club. He urged them not to lose focus and the steam that has propelled them to the present position on the table.

"Let me once again congratulate all of us and thank you guys for renewing our hope. Your performances in the last seven games have been amazing. We in the management are happy and proud of you. We want you to maintain the tempo as you go into the second round with the revised fixture against Kwara Utd.

"I will redeem my pledge before the match on Wednesday and when you return with good result, I will do more for you. We want Laurels and you should be hungry for one. I challenge you to set the target and work towards it, then see what our government can do for you. Get continental tickets and earn money in dollars". He encouraged the team.



BENDEL INSURANCE FC

Football academy reaffirms commitment to youth development, begins new season

The Mop Stars Football Club Academy of Abuja has reaffirmed its commitment to youth development and grassroots football as it resumed activities for the 2026 football season.

The President of the academy, Dr Sulaiman Adejoh, said this in an interview with the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) in Abuja.

Adejoh described the academy as a long-term investment in the future of Nigerian youths and football, noting that the project, established in 2025, was designed to nurture talents from an early age through structured training and character development.

According to him, the academy has made notable progress within a short period by identifying and empowering promising young footballers with the skills, discipline and exposure required to succeed at the highest level.

"Developing young players into world-class professionals requires vision, patience and strong partnerships.

"Youth development is at the core of everything we do at the academy," he said.

Adejoh acknowledged the support of the Nigeria Football Federation (NFF), particularly in the areas of mentorship, networking and international exposure, saying the collaboration had strengthened the academy's credibility.

He said the signing of former Super Eagles player, Coach Toyin Lawal, on a two-year contract in 2025 was a major step

in strengthening the academy's developmental framework.

Adejoh said the academy recorded impressive performances in 2025, including friendly matches against Nigeria's national youth teams.

He said the academy played the Nigeria Under-20 team and faced the Golden Eaglets (Under-17) twice at the Moshood Abiola National Stadium, Abuja, with one of the matches ending in a goalless draw.



FOOTBALL ACADEMY

Nwebonyi increases Ebonyi football competition prize money to ₦50 million

The Senate Deputy Whip, Sen. Onyekachi Nwebonyi, has announced an increase in the prize money for the 2026 edition of the football competition he sponsors across the 13 Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Ebonyi.

Nwebonyi, representing Ebonyi North Senatorial District, disclosed this in Abakaliki

during the final of the Ohamadike Super League.

He said the total prize money for the competition had been increased from N10 million to N50 million.

The final match saw Ohaukwu LGA defeat Izzi LGA 4-3 on penalties after a goalless draw in regulation time, while Abakaliki LGA clinched third

position.

Speaking with newsmen after the match, Nwebonyi said the decision to increase the prize money was informed by the quality of organisation and the abundance of talents discovered during the competition.

"I am a sports lover, especially football, and I am committed to engaging youths positively to help them achieve their life ambitions.

"The Commissioner for Youth Development and Sports was present and pledged that outstanding players would be drafted into the state team, Abakaliki FC," he said.

Nwebonyi said the increase in prize money was aimed at motivating participating teams to give their best and making the competition a model for others.



SEN. ONYEKACHI NWEBONYI



Fans set for thrills as action returns in NWFL Matchday 6

Fans will be treated to scintillating football action when hostilities resume on Wednesday in matchday 6 of the ongoing 2025/2026 Nigeria Women Football League (NWFL) Premiership.

A total of nine matches will be played in various centres, with teams battling for crucial points from the exciting scheduled fixtures, as Bayelsa Queens and FC Robo Queens remain unbeaten in Groups A and B respectively.

In one of the standout fixtures, Bayelsa Queens will host rivals Rivers Angels FC in a keenly contested South-South derby at the Southern Delta University Stadium, Ozoro, Delta.

The match was moved from the Samson Siasia Stadium, Yenagoa, due to ongoing maintenance work at the venue, according to the management of the Bayelsa-based side.

Both teams, regarded as the most successful in the league with a combined 13 titles, are first and second in Group A, each on 12 points after four matches.

The encounter is expected to be fiercely contested and promises an exciting spectacle for fans.

In Abuja, Naija Ratels will take on Edo Queens FC at the Bwari Township Stadium.

The hosts are yet to record a win in five matches and have managed just two points so far this season.

Katsina United FC enrolls 100 homegrown players on monthly salary

Katsina United Football Club (FC), says it has enrolled more than 100 homegrown players drawn from Team B and that of Under-19 into the state government's salary scheme.

The club's Chairman, Alhaji Surajo Malumfashi, disclosed this to journalists in Katsina on Monday, following the completion of data capturing of all the players.

Malumfashi, who is also the Supervising Coordinator of the club, said that each of the players would receive nothing below N50,000 as a salary every month.

He also announced that the club had cleared a five month sal-

ary backlog for all the club's newly recruited players and placed them on the salary structure.

The chairman stated that all the players, technical crew and backroom staff were being captured into the state salary structure and would be receiving their entitlements every month.

The club's chairman further commended the state's Commissioner for Sports, Alhaji Surajo Yazid-Abukur, for being firm to ensure the smooth running of the club.

He described the effort as commendable and motivational, being it the first of its kind in the history of the state in football-related matters.



KATSINA UNITED FC

SPORTS

The Nigerian Observer
...that the people may know

Super Eagles unfazed by heavy travel schedule, ready for Morocco test



SUPER EAGLES IN TRAINING

Super Eagles coach, Eric Chelle and midfielder Alex Iwobi, say Nigeria remain confident in spite of a demanding travel schedule ahead of their AFCON semi-final clash with Morocco. The three-time African champions, last winners in 2013, will battle Morocco on Wednesday with a place in the AFCON final at stake. The Super Eagles endured multiple trips between Fès and Marrakech for the quarter-final before travelling again to Rabat for Wednesday's semi-final. Nigeria topped Group C but were forced to change venues, unlike Morocco, who finished top of Group A and have played all their matches in Rabat. Chelle acknowledged the physical and mental toll of the travel but said professionalism and focus would define Nigeria's display against the host.

"We know the journey has been tough," Chelle said. "But at this level, excuses don't count. The players are ready, mentally strong, and determined to reach the final." The coach added that experience and discipline would be vital against a hostile home crowd backing the Atlas Lions. "Moroccans are strong, especially at home," Chelle said. "But we respect them without fearing them. We came here to compete and to win." The coach revealed Nigeria may adopt a different approach against Morocco, citing fatigue after a demanding schedule. "My players are tired," Chelle said. "We may start more compact, allow Morocco the ball, and manage the game better early on."

AFN introduces new strategy to curb age cheating in athletics

The Athletics Federation of Nigeria (AFN) has announced plans to curb age falsification and poor athlete data management with the launch of a new initiative tagged "Roster Athletics". The Chairman, AFN Media Committee, Mr Maxwell Kumoye, said this in a statement on Tuesday in Lagos. Kumoye quoted the AFN President, Chief Tonobok Okowa, as describing the partnership as a major turning point aimed at restoring credibility, transparency and global confidence in Nigerian athletics. Okowa was quoted as commended the initiative, describing it as a bold step to protect athletes and address persistent criticism. "For too long, negative narratives have overshadowed the achievements of our athletes. This partnership provides irrefutable documentation and international-standard verification that will showcase Nigerian athletics with the credibility it deserves. The federation will also intro-

duce a compulsory athlete licensing system as part of its reform efforts. "Every registered athlete will now have a unique AFN licence number throughout their career, renewed annually and fully integrated into international athletics databases. "The new system will ensure permanent athlete identification, transparent age documentation, complete career tracking and eliminate identity manipulation," Okowa said. AFN Secretary-General, Israel Inwang, who brokered the plan said that the partnership was beyond the adoption of technology, stressing that it was targeted at restoring confidence and ensuring fairness in the sport. "We will see the immediate deployment of the Roster Athletics competition management platform across all AFN championships. "The initiative will introduce a secure, verifiable and tamper-proof system designed to permanently address long-standing concerns over age discrepancies," he said.

History beckons as Senegal, Egypt clash in 2025 AFCON semi-finals

A familiar heavyweight rivalry will be renewed on Wednesday when Senegal take on Egypt in the semi-finals of the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON). The encounter, scheduled for 5 p.m. (Nigerian time) at the Grande Stade de Tangier, will be the sixth AFCON meeting between the two sides and their second semi-final clash. Senegal, champions in 2021, are targeting a fourth AFCON final appearance, while Egypt are aiming to reach the final for a record 10th time.

Both sides have shared honours at AFCON, with two wins apiece and the only draw coming in the 2021 final, which was decided on penalties. Senegal won the penalties, defeating Egypt 4-2 after the match ended 0-0 in regulation and extra time. History suggests that victory in knockout matches between the two often leads to ultimate glory, with winners of their previous knockout encounters going on to lift the trophy in 2006 and 2021. Senegal come into the match on the back of an impressive run, remaining unbeaten in their last 16 AFCON matches. They are unbeaten in their last nine AFCON matches, scoring in all the nine matches. They have so far scored 11 goals at the tournament. Senegal coach Pape Thiaw said his side's confidence had been boosted by their consistency and quality performances. "We respect Egypt's pedigree and experience, but our ambition is clear. We want to reach another final and we believe our style of football can take us there," Thiaw said. Thiaw could also make history by becoming the first coach to lead Senegal to the finals of two senior CAF competitions, having guided the country to success at the 2022 African Nations Championship (CHAN).



SADIO MANE AND MUHAMED SALAH

Nigeria vs Morocco: CAF picks Ghanaian, South African officials, triggering Nigerians

The Confederation of African Football (CAF) has appointed Ghanaian referee Daniel Laryea to officiate Wednesday's Africa Cup of Nations semi-final between Nigeria and hosts Morocco. The match, set to take place in Rabat, will determine one of the finalists of the 2025 tournament, with Nigeria aiming to reach another continental final while Morocco look to capitalise on home advantage. Laryea will be assisted by South African officials Zakhele Thusi Granville Siwela and Souru Phatsoane of Lesotho, while Arsenio Chadreque Maringule of Mozambique will serve as an additional assistant referee. Rwanda's Samuel Uwinkunda is the fourth official. South African referee

Abongile Tom will serve as the Video Assistant Referee (VAR), supported by Tunisia's Haythem Guirat and Kenya's Stephen Onyango Yiembe as assistant VARs. The appointment has sparked debate among Nigerian fans, given the country's historical rivalries with both Ghana and South Africa. Nigeria and Ghana have clashed in continental competitions for decades, while tensions with South Africa escalated during the 2026 World Cup qualifiers, when Nigeria protested against South Africa fielding Teboho Mokoena. The protest led to a three-point deduction for Bafana Bafana. Notably, Abongile Tom previously officiated Nigeria's CAF play-off win against Gabon.



TEBOHO MOKOENA

Kano football fans laud Super Eagles, seek win against Morocco

Some residents of Kano have commended the Super Eagles for their impressive performance in their last outing, urging the team to sustain the momentum and secure victory against Morocco in their next match. The residents, who spoke to the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) in separate interviews on Tuesday, expressed confidence in the team's ability to overcome the North African side if the players maintained discipline, focus and teamwork. A football enthusiast, Muzammil Yola, said the Eagles had shown great determination

and tactical awareness in their previous match, describing their display as encouraging. "They played with confidence and unity. If they approach the Morocco match with the same spirit, they can win and make Nigerians proud," he said. Another resident, Mr. Musbahu Shehu, noted that the team's attacking pattern and solid defence had improved, adding that these would be crucial against a strong Moroccan side. "The Eagles must remain composed and avoid unnecessary mistakes. Morocco is a tough team, but Nigeria has what it takes to defeat them," he said.



SUPER EAGLES CELEBRATING