

Akpabio warns of looming food crisis as Senate resumes plenary

CAROLINE AMEH

ABUJA

The Senate on Tuesday resumed plenary sittings after the Christmas and New Year recess, with Senate President Godswill Akpabio sounding a strong warning over an impending food crisis in the country.

In his opening remarks, Akpabio cautioned that millions

of Nigerians could face severe hunger in 2026 if urgent and proactive measures are not taken to address food insecurity.

He stressed that the situation requires immediate legislative attention, urging lawmakers to place food security at the top of the national agenda.

The Senate President also highlighted the challenge of rising insecurity, noting that it continues

to threaten lives, livelihoods and agricultural activities across several parts of the country.

He commended ongoing military cooperation between Nigeria and the United States in tackling security challenges, while offering condolences to families who have lost loved ones to insecurity.

Akpabio also called on politicians to be guided by conscience as the nation gradually approach-

es the 2027 general elections.

During the plenary, three separate communications from President Bola Ahmed Tinubu were read to the chamber.

One of the letters transmitted the Court of Appeal (Amendment) Bill, 2026, which seeks to strengthen the capacity and efficiency of the appellate court by increasing the number of justices from 70 to 110, clarifying

judicial structure and seniority, and establishing an Alternative Dispute Resolution Centre within the court.

In another correspondence, President Tinubu requested the Senate's confirmation of the appointment of Justice Oyewole Olubunmi Kayode as a Justice of the Supreme Court of Nigeria.

The President also forwarded 24 health sector bills for the

Senate's consideration, aimed at reforming existing health laws and streamlining the membership of governing councils across the health sector.

Lawmakers observed a minute's silence in honour of former Senator Godiya Akwashiki, who represented Nasarawa North Senatorial District.

The Senate later adjourned plenary to January 28, 2026.

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...that the people may know

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Nigeria battles multiple disease outbreaks —NCDC

ABUJA

Nigeria's public health system is facing renewed pressure as outbreaks of several infectious diseases spread across all six geopolitical zones, the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (NCDC) has warned.

The Director-General of the agency, Dr Jide Idris, said

the country is simultaneously responding to diphtheria, cholera, Lassa fever and measles, noting that the situation underscores the growing strain on health infrastructure nationwide.

He spoke on Tuesday at a three-day Stakeholder Workshop on Preparedness and Response to Public Health Emergencies organised by the NCDC in partnership with

UNICEF and the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Idris explained that the disease outbreaks are being driven and intensified by climate-related shocks and humanitarian crises, as well as long-standing systemic challenges such as rapid urbanisation, population movement, overstretched health facilities and unequal access to basic services.

He stressed that effective

preparedness goes beyond preventing outbreaks, describing it instead as the ability of a country to anticipate risks, detect threats early, coordinate responses across sectors and tiers of government, and act swiftly using evidence-based strategies.

Highlighting the mandate of the NCDC as Nigeria's national public health institute established in 2018, Idris said

the agency provides technical leadership for disease prevention, detection and response, in close collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Health, state governments, relevant agencies and development partners.

He said Nigeria has in recent years strengthened its emergency preparedness architecture through initiatives

such as the implementation of the International Health Regulations (2005) Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, the National Action Plan for Health Security 2.0, the rollout of the Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response (IDSR) third edition, and the adoption of the 7-1-7 outbreak detection

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AAIPLE visit Nwobodo:

L-R: Former Governor of Old Anambra State, Chief Jim Nwobodo; Commissioner IV, Enugu State Local Government Commission, Mrs Amaka Nweke, and President, Association of Anambra Indigenous People Living in Enugu (AAIPLE), Chief Peter Adimora, during a new year visit by AAIPLE to Nwobodo at Amaechi-Uno community in Enugu South Local Government Area of Enugu State on Tuesday.

Strike paralyses schools, clinics as FCT residents groan

BWARI (FCT)

Residents of Bwari Area Council in the Federal Capital Territory have lamented the shutdown of public schools and primary healthcare centres following an indefinite strike by local government workers, warning that the action is deepening hardship for already vulnerable families.

The strike, which commenced on Tuesday, January 27, was directed by the Nigeria Union of Local Government Employees (NULGE), FCT Chapter, in solidarity with workers of the Federal Capital Territory Administration (FCTA) over unpaid entitlements and promotion arrears affecting area council staff.

The union said the action followed directives from the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and the NULGE na-

tional leadership.

Across Bwari communities, public primary schools remained closed, while primary healthcare centres recorded no activity, leaving residents stranded.

A visit by newsmen to Kuchiko-Bwari showed deserted health facilities and locked school gates, forcing pupils to remain at home and widening learning gaps.

A resident, Mrs Aisha Babale, narrated her ordeal after taking her sick baby to a community health centre, only to discover that services had been suspended.

She said the experience left her distraught, as she lacked the money to seek care at a private hospital.

"I just wanted them to test my baby for malaria and ty-

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EFCC forfeiture case: Hearing on Malami's 57 properties stalled

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Sweden aims to lower age of criminal responsibility to 13 as gangs recruit children

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FEATURE

How Okpebholo's Cloud is giving Edo sovereign digital lungs

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NAS launch memorial scholarship, sponsor 235 students for WASSCE nationwide

The National Association of Seadogs, also known as the Pyrates Confraternity, has unveiled the maiden edition of the Nathaniel Oyelola Memorial Scholarship Scheme (NOMS), an education support initiative aimed at helping indigent secondary school students register for the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE).

The scholarship scheme, named in honour of Engineer Nathaniel Oyelola, one of the seven founding members of the Pyrates Confraternity, is designed to ease financial constraints that often prevent academically promising students from completing secondary education and transitioning to higher learning.

In a statement issued on Tuesday by the National Cap'n of the association, Dr Joseph Oteri, the Confraternity said the first edition of NOMS achieved nationwide coverage, with 34 public secondary schools nominated across 12 states and the Federal Capital Territory.

The beneficiary states are Oyo, Imo, Benue, Nasarawa, Ogun, Cross River, Anambra, Abia, Kaduna, Enugu, Ebonyi and the

Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

According to the statement, 227 students benefited from the scheme through the Community-Led Stream, under which schools and local communities identified deserving candidates, while eight other students were supported through the Direct Application Stream. This brought the total number of beneficiaries to 235.

The Confraternity explained that the dual-application structure was introduced to promote inclusivity by combining community-based nominations with an open application process for individual students.

Speaking on the launch of the scheme, Dr Oteri described NOMS as both a tribute to a founding member and a reflection of the organisation's enduring commitment to service, justice and education.

"The introduction of NOMS is a tribute to the legacy of Engineer Nathaniel Oyelola and a reaffirmation of our commitment to service, justice and education. By supporting WASSCE registration for deserving students, we are helping to unlock opportunities that can change the trajectory of young lives," he said.

He added that the scheme highlights the impact of collaborative efforts in tackling structural barriers to education, particularly among students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Representing the Oyelola family, Dr Pat Oyelola expressed appreciation to the Pyrates Confraternity for initiating what he described as a "fee rescue" educational scheme.

He also pledged additional support to the programme through the donation of educational materials to selected

libraries across the country.

As part of the implementation process, NAS chapters across the country worked with school authorities to identify and verify eligible students, as well as guide beneficiaries through the application process.

The Confraternity said this approach ensured transparen-

cy, accountability and equitable distribution of support.

The Pyrates Confraternity noted that the memorial scholarship builds on its long-standing tradition of community service and education advocacy, adding that plans are underway to expand the scheme in subsequent editions.



A CEREMONY IN AVIELE:

L-R: Comrade Grace Obakina; Mahmud Abdulrazak; Commander, National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), Edo State Command, Dr. Mitchell Ofoyeju, and President, Ayuele Clan Progressive Association, Alhaji Abubakar Momodu, at a ceremony in Aviele, Etsako West Local Government Area, Edo State.

Nigeria battles multiple disease...

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and response strategy.

However, Idris admitted that significant gaps remain, particularly in cross-sector coordination, data management, logistics, health workforce readiness and sustainable financing, adding that partner interventions are not always fully aligned with national priorities.

According to him, the ongoing workshop is aimed at critically assessing how existing preparedness and response systems are working, identifying bottlenecks and opportuni-

ties, and improving coherence across policies, institutions and investments.

He urged participants to contribute rigorously to the discussions, saying the ultimate goal is to develop a practical, nationally owned roadmap that will strengthen early warning systems, enhance response coordination and improve resilience at both national and sub-national levels.

Idris also commended development partners for their support and acknowledged the government's role in advancing health security in the country.

Strike paralyses schools, clinics as...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

phoid and give drugs if necessary, but they said the staff were not available. I broke down crying because I didn't know where else to go," she said, appealing to the authorities and unions to resolve the impasse quickly.

Another resident, Mr Luka Malo, expressed frustration, noting that area councils, as the closest tier of government to the grassroots, should not be allowed to grind to a halt.

"When the councils stop working, people feel it immediately. Access to health and administrative services becomes impossible. Services were already slow, and now everything has stopped completely. This is unfair to the communities," he said.

A public servant, Mr Theophilus Shemang, warned that prolonged disruption could weaken grassroots governance and erode public confidence in

government institutions.

He recalled that a previous strike led to the loss of an entire school term, forcing pupils in public schools to resume classes when their counterparts in private schools were already on holiday.

He urged the FCT Administration and area council authorities to urgently engage union leaders to avert further hardship, particularly for children and other vulnerable groups.

Speaking with newsmen, the Bwari NULGE Chairman, Mr Emmanuel Ishaku, said there was no official timeline for suspending the strike, stressing that workers were determined to press home their welfare demands.

At the Bwari Area Council Secretariat, operations were observed to be at skeletal levels, with most administrative services suspended, underscoring the growing impact of the industrial action on daily life in the council.

Okpebholo committed to clearing pension arrears —Edo HOS

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Government has reaffirmed its commitment to ensuring that all pensioners receive their lawful entitlements, assuring that no genuine retiree will be denied payment under the present State government.

The Head of Service, Dr Anthony Okungbowa, gave the assurance during a meeting at Government House, Benin City, with the Commissioner for Finance, the Accountant-General of the State and leaders of the Nigeria Union of Pensioners (NUP).

Dr Okungbowa stressed

that the welfare of pensioners remains a top priority of the administration, while emphasising the importance of the ongoing "Am Alive" screening and verification exercise.

He disclosed that a significant number of pensioners were yet to be captured, noting that the exercise is critical to ensuring transparency and accuracy in the pension payroll.

According to him, the verification became necessary following discoveries that some pensioners were unaccounted for, including cases where payments were still being made to deceased beneficiaries.

He explained that while the

government is determined to eliminate irregularities, it is equally committed to ensuring that no genuine pensioner suffers undue hardship.

He revealed that rather than immediately removing unverified names from the payroll, which could negatively affect elderly citizens, Governor Okpebholo has approved an additional grace period to allow all outstanding pensioners to complete the verification process.

The Head of Service urged the NUP leadership to intensify sensitization efforts, especially at the grassroots, warning that failure to comply may eventually compel the government to remove unverified names as a last resort.

The Commissioner for Finance, Mr Emmanuel Okoebor, also appealed to pensioners to participate in the exercise, urging the Union to explore alternative communication channels to reach members who may not be active online.

Chairman of the Edo State Pension Bureau, Mr Washington Osaro Abbe, disclosed that the last comprehensive verification was conducted in May 2022, making the current exercise long overdue. He announced an extension of the online "Am Alive" screening to Thursday, 12 February 2026, advising pensioners to complete the process from the comfort of their homes via pensionalive.com.ng.

World Clean Energy Day: Edo reaffirms drive for affordable renewable power

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Government has restated its commitment to promoting clean, affordable and sustainable energy as it joined the global community to mark World Clean Energy Day in Benin City.

Speaking at an event held at the annex of the Edo State Library, the Commissioner for Science and Technology, Hon Etin-Osa Ogbewi, said the observance underscores the vital role of renewable energy in driving development, protecting the environment and improving quality of life.

He explained that the theme, "Clean Energy for All – Simplifying Access," highlights the need to make clean energy solutions accessible, affordable and practical, particularly in developing regions.

According to him, the event serves as a platform to raise awareness about renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, hydro and bioenergy, while encouraging governments, the private sector and communities to transition away from fossil fuels.

He noted that access to clean energy remains a key driver of economic growth, improved healthcare, quality education

and technological advancement.

Aligning clean energy initiatives with Edo State's development vision under Governor Monday Okpebholo's SHINE Agenda, Ogbewi said renewable energy is central to sustainable industrial growth, digital transformation, improved social services and environmental protection.

Delivering a keynote address, Engr Kelvin Ehimare of K-Tech Energies highlighted the growing demand for solar solutions in both urban and rural areas, attributing the trend to unreliable grid power. He described solar microgrids as a sustainable and scalable

option capable of meeting the energy needs of homes, businesses and public institutions.

Engr. Ehimare stressed the importance of affordability and flexible financing models in expanding solar adoption, urging governments to fully harness Nigeria's abundant solar resources.

The Managing Director of Delwitt Engineering, Engr Dallington Okoka, commended the State Government for creating platforms that promote clean energy awareness, describing such initiatives as evidence of Edo's commitment to innovation and sustainable development.

EFCC forfeiture case: Hearing on Malami's 57 properties stalled

ABUJA

Proceedings on the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission's (EFCC) report of compliance in the interim forfeiture case involving 57 properties allegedly linked to former Attorney-General of the Federation, Abubakar Malami, were on Tuesday stalled at the Federal High Court in Abuja.

Justice Emeka Nwite had on January 6 ordered the interim forfeiture of the properties, said to be worth several billions of naira and located across Abuja, Kebbi, Kano and Kaduna States.

The order followed an ex-parte application filed by the EFCC and argued by its counsel, Ekele Iheanacho, SAN.

The court also directed that the interim forfeiture order be published in a national daily, giving interested parties 14 days to show why the assets should not be permanently forfeited to the Federal Government.

The matter was adjourned to January 27 for a report of compliance.

However, it was not listed among the 24 cases on Tuesday's cause list, despite the presence of lawyers who had filed processes opposing the final forfeiture.

EFCC lead counsel, Jibrin Okutepe, SAN, informed the court that the matter was adjourned to Tuesday but was omitted from the cause list. He explained that the court registrar described it as a vacation matter and urged the court to proceed.

Justice Nwite, however, noted that it was standard practice for cases fixed during court vacation to be returned to the Chief Judge for reassignment once the vacation ends. He advised the EFCC to pursue the matter administratively to enable its reassignment and possible fast-tracking.

The judge assured the commission that it would be promptly

informed if the Chief Judge reassigned the case to his court.

The properties affected by the interim forfeiture include luxury residential buildings, hotels, commercial plazas, warehouses, agricultural facilities, university campuses, industrial factories and vast parcels of land across several states. Prominent among them are high-end properties in Maitama, Asokoro, Garki, Wuse II, Gwarimpa, Apo Legislative Quarters, Jabi and Kano GRA, as well as extensive developments in Kebbi State linked to Rayhaan Group entities.

In documents filed before the court, the EFCC alleged that the properties were ac-

quired through funds reasonably suspected to be proceeds of unlawful activities.

An investigating officer of the commission, Daniel Adebayo, stated in an affidavit that Malami earned a total of N89.66 million as salary between 2015 and 2023, alongside severance and

estacode allowances.

The commission alleged that the scale and value of the assets were inconsistent with Malami's known lawful income, adding that some properties were acquired through third parties or front companies linked to the Rayhaan Group.



INVESTIGATIVE HEARING:

L-R: Deputy Chairman, House of Representative Ad-hoc Committee on Agricultural Subsidy, Intervention Fund, Aids and Grants Programmes, Sunday Umeha; Chairman of the Committee, Jamo Aminu, and Clerk of the Committee, Mr Ukachukwu Chidiebere, during an investigative hearing with stakeholders at the National Assembly Complex in Abuja on Tuesday.

Okpebholo urges Reps Cttee to probe Nigeria's power grid collapse

BERNADETTE IDALU

BENIN CITY

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, has called for a thorough legislative investigation into the persistent collapse of Ni-

geria's power grid, describing stable electricity as critical to national economic growth.

Speaking through his deputy, Hon. Dennis Idahosa, during a meeting with members of the House of Representatives Adhoc Committee on Power

Sector Reform and Expenditure at the Government House in Benin City, the governor urged the lawmakers to uncover the root causes of recurring power outages.

Okpebholo said Nigeria's economic potential would remain constrained without a reliable power supply, urging the committee to carry out its

oversight responsibilities diligently.

Chairman of the committee, Hon. Ibrahim Almustapha Aliyu, said the lawmakers were conducting a nationwide investigation and audit of power sector reforms from 2007 to 2024, as part of efforts to improve accountability and service delivery.

Police recover AK-47, arrest 11 kidnappers, 14 corpse snatchers in Edo

MIKE OSAROAGBON

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Police Command has recovered a loaded AK-47 rifle, arrested 11 suspected kidnappers and 14 alleged corpse snatchers during intelligence-led operations carried out over the weekend.

Six kidnapped victims, including a married couple, were rescued from Ekpoma, Okpella and Ochodo communities.

Police spokesperson, ASP Eno Ikoedem, said the operations were technology-driven and conducted in collaboration with the Nigerian Army,

Edo State Security Corps, local hunters and other security partners.

She said four suspects, Mohammed Lawal, 62; Ashiru Ibrahim, 35; Abubakar Umoru, 30; and Umoru Ali, 35, were arrested during a drone-assisted bush-combing operation at the Era/Idoha forest axis in Ekpoma, Esan West Local Government Area.

In Okpella, Gehi Ibrahim, 24, was arrested following the rescue of a kidnapped farmer, Monday Adero, 58, while Rabiu Mohammed Bello, 31, was apprehended at the Idoha Pipeline Community after reports of armed herders.

ASP Ikoedem added that five other suspects were arrested during an operation in Ewu Division, leading to the rescue of a kidnapped couple in Ochodo Community.

Meanwhile, 14 suspected cultists described by police as corpse snatchers were arrested in Uromi after allegedly hijacking a corpse during a burial ceremony and attacking residents.

Eleven cutlasses, a dagger and a shovel were recovered, while two commercial motorcyclists sustained injuries and were taken to the Irrua Specialist Teaching Hospital.

The AK-47 rifle, loaded with 30 rounds of ammunition, was

recovered along the Benin-Lagos Expressway near Ohosu after hoodlums opened fire on security operatives and fled into the bush.

Other items recovered include two locally fabricated guns, eight rounds of 9mm ammunition and nine empty shells.

Commissioner of Police, CP Monday Agbonika, commended the professionalism of the operatives and noted that drone deployment had significantly improved operational efficiency. He urged residents to remain vigilant and provide timely information to security agencies.

Delta govt donates N10m to support cancer treatment campaign

AJUWA VICTOR

The Delta State Government has donated N10 million to support a nationwide cancer treatment campaign spearheaded by Miss Chineyenwa Judith Amadi under her initiative, A Ride for Life.

Presenting the cheque in Asaba, Secretary to the State Government, Dr Kingsley Emu, described cancer as one of the most devastating diseases facing society and said Governor Sheriff Oborevwo approved the donation in solidarity with the humanitarian cause.

He said the donation reflected the government's commitment to supporting initiatives aimed at easing human suffering, adding that efforts were underway to establish a cancer treatment facility in the state.

Dr Emu commended Miss Amadi's advocacy, which in-

involved riding a motorcycle across 16 countries, and reiterated the state's resolve to invest in saving lives through healthcare support and public awareness.

Commissioner for Health, Dr Joseph Onojaeme, stressed that prevention and early detection remained key in combating cancer, noting that conditions such as cervical and breast cancer were highly manageable when detected early.

He disclosed that Delta State currently has functional MRI facilities across its three senatorial districts, describing them as critical investments in strengthening the healthcare system.

Miss Amadi, who expressed gratitude to the state government, said her initiative was inspired by personal experiences with cancer patients and aimed at supporting those forced to abandon treatment due to financial constraints.

Edo flags off Measles-Rubella vaccination, as Anani assures parents of safety

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Government has officially flagged off the Measles-Rubella (M-R) vaccination campaign for children aged nine months to 14 years, urging parents and caregivers to take advantage of the free and life-saving intervention.

The Coordinator of the Office of the Edo State First Lady, Mrs Edesili Okpebholo Anani, flagged off the campaign at Urhokpota Hall, Benin City, warning that measles and rubella remain serious but preventable childhood diseases.

Mrs Anani described measles as highly contagious, with complications ranging from pneumonia and blindness to death, while noting that rubella can cause severe birth defects when contracted during pregnancy. She assured parents that the vaccines are safe, effective and free, urging them not to allow misinformation or fear deny children protection.

She commended Governor Monday Okpebholo for revamping the State's cold chain infrastructure, noting that proper vaccine storage is critical to maintaining effectiveness.

According to her, the in-

vestment has significantly improved Edo State's immunisation capacity and translated directly into healthier communities.

The Commissioner for Health, Dr Cyril Oshiomole, cautioned against vaccine hesitancy, warning that refusal could jeopardise children's future potential.

He urged parents to reject conspiracy theories and prioritise their children's health and destiny.

Earlier, Chairman of Oredo Local Government Council, Hon Gabriel Iduseri, announced that the vaccination exercise would run from January 27 to February 7, 2026, targeting children across schools, religious centres, markets, malls and health facilities.

He appealed for sustained support from parents, teachers and community leaders.

The State Coordinator of the World Health Organization, Dr Nora Eyo, said the campaign aims to achieve at least 95 percent coverage to eliminate measles and prevent birth defects associated with Congenital Rubella Syndrome. She warned that failure to immunise children could trigger outbreaks, while assuring that the vaccine is safe and effective.

NEWS

NDDC to automate procurement by April, vows transparency

PORT HARCOURT

The Managing Director of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), Dr Samuel Ogbuku, has said that the commission will fully automate its procurement processes on or before April to strengthen trans-

parency, compliance and service delivery.

Ogbuku spoke at the Mandatory Continuous Procurement Capacity Development Training Programme organised by the Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP) in Port Harcourt, according to a statement by the NDDC Director of Corporate Affairs,

Mrs Seledi Thompson-Wakama.

He said the commission had reformed its corporate governance structure and internal processes to deepen accountability, adding that a new Governance Advisory Service had been introduced to promote transparency.

The NDDC boss noted that the commission had shifted from transaction-based operations to transformational processes, with

visible improvements in its procurement system.

He stressed the importance of continuous training, disclosing that the NDDC collaborated with the BPP in 2024 to train staff and now has 35 BPP-certified procurement professionals.

Ogbuku also highlighted the impact of the Operation Light Up the Niger Delta programme, saying projects were driven by

proper needs assessment to ensure meaningful impact.

He reaffirmed the commission's commitment to delivering President Bola Tinubu's programmes to communities in the region.

The Director-General of the BPP, Dr Adebawale Adedokun, commended the President for advancing procurement reforms, describing them as key to transparency, profession-

alism and the Renewed Hope Agenda. He urged participants to uphold due process and ethical standards.

Also speaking, the Chairman of the Federal Capital Territory Civil Service Commission, Mr Emeka Ezech, described procurement as a critical tool for good governance and anti-corruption, urging trainees to internalise the administration's eight priority areas.

NOA launches campaign against indecent dressing in A'lbom

UYO

The National Orientation Agency (NOA) has launched a statewide campaign against indecent dressing in public places across Akwa Ibom.

The State Director of NOA, Mr Mkpoutom Mkpoutom, said the initiative was a proactive step to uphold public decorum and reinforce societal values.

He said the campaign had commenced with media engagements aimed at sensitising residents on appropriate dressing.

Mkpoutom expressed concern over the rising trend of indecent dressing among youths and some adults, noting

that dressing reflected personal dignity and respect for societal norms.

He urged residents to take personal responsibility for their appearance in public spaces.

He directed Community Orientation and Mobilisation Officers to intensify enlightenment and community outreach across local government areas to deepen the message.

Also speaking, Mrs Uduak Essien, Chairperson of the Association of Heads of Federal Establishment in the state, warned that indecent dressing often attracted negative perceptions and could limit access to opportunities, stressing that it undermined the culture of decency Akwa Ibom is known for.

Police to clamp down on traffic violators on Lagos-Calabar Coastal Road

LAGOS

The Commissioner of Police in Lagos State, Olohundare Jimoh, has warned motorists using the Lagos-Calabar Coastal Road to obey traffic regulations or face arrest and prosecution, as security agencies intensify enforcement on the corridor.

Jimoh issued the warning on Tuesday in Lagos during a joint briefing with the Federal Controller of Works in the state, Mr Olufemi Dare, over rising traffic indiscipline and safety concerns on the road.

He said the police had sustained massive deployment of personnel on the coastal road since its temporary opening in December to ease congestion around Victoria Island, Ikoyi, Lekki and the Epe axis.

"On a daily basis, we deploy more than 50 patrol teams on both sides of the road to ensure safety and the protection of lives and property.

"Since this deployment, no case of robbery, car snatching or kidnapping has been recorded on the road," the police chief said.

Jimoh disclosed that enforcement against traffic violations had been intensified, noting that 68 motorcycles had already been confiscated for illegally using the highway.

He stressed that motorcycles, including dispatch riders,

were banned from the super-highway, describing their presence as dangerous to both riders and other road users.

The commissioner also announced the commencement of mobile court operations on the coastal road, warning that offenders would be promptly tried.

"Anyone arrested for traffic offences will be taken to a mobile court and, if found guilty, the full weight of the law will be applied," he said.

Jimoh warned motorists against driving against traffic, street racing and over-speeding, adding that vehicles found violating traffic rules would be towed and drivers prosecuted.

He revealed that about 18 drivers were currently in police custody for speeding, while the driver responsible for the death of a construction worker had been arrested.

He reiterated that the speed limit on the road during construction was 40 kilometres per hour.

"If you drive beyond 40km per hour on this coastal road, you will be apprehended and prosecuted. This road is still under construction and safety must come first," Jimoh said.

Earlier, the Federal Controller of Works, Mr Dare, said the road was temporarily opened to reduce pressure on the Lekki-Epe Expressway but lamented continued abuse by motorists.



ADC STAKEHOLDERS MEETING:

L-R: National Coordinator, African Democratic Congress (ADC), Comrade Adolphus Ude; Enugu State Coordinator, ADC Like Minds Association (ADCLMA), Lolo Ngozi Nwankwo; ADCLMA Grand Patron, Chief Obodoeze Ocho; ADC Enugu State Chairman, Comrade Stella Chukwuma; former Chairman, Udi LGA, Enugu State, Sir Walter Oji; Enugu State ADC Women Leader, Mrs Benedette Ozioko, and Youth Leader, Mr Gabriel Odi, during ADC stakeholders meeting in Enugu on Tuesday.

Police detain 38yr-old over alleged firearm possession in A'lbom

UYO

The Akwa Ibom Police Command has detained a 38-year-old man over alleged unlawful possession of a firearm, threat to life and possession of suspected illicit

substances.

The command's spokesperson, DSP Timfon John, said that the suspect was arrested following a report by a resident of Ikot Akpa Ntuen Village in Ukanafun Local Government Area over an alleged threat of

violence.

She said operatives swiftly mobilised and apprehended the suspect, who was found with a locally made pistol, one live cartridge and substances suspected to be illicit drugs.

According to her, the suspect remains in custody while investigations continue to determine the source of the firearm and

the extent of his activities.

He will be charged to court upon completion of investigations.

The police reiterated zero tolerance for crimes involving firearms and assured residents of continued protection of lives and property, urging the public to provide timely and credible information.

Cross River to train 20,000 youths in entrepreneurship drive

CALABAR

The Cross River Youth Empowerment Scheme has announced plans to train no fewer than 20,000 youths across the state in diverse entrepreneurship schemes.

The Chairman, Dr Kalita

Aruku, said the programme, built around seven key industries, would equip youths based on their individual strengths.

The sectors include the creative industry, agriculture, sports, transportation, skills acquisition, small-scale businesses and education.

He said participants in agriculture would receive training in poultry, piggery, fishery and crop cultivation, alongside start-up packs such as inputs, equipment and funds.

In the creative industry, Aruku said beneficiaries would be trained in cinematography, scriptwriting, directing, pro-

duction and acting, with the broader aim of positioning Calabar as a hub for the movie industry and boosting tourism.

He added that the Governor Bassey Otu-led administration was strongly committed to youth empowerment, describing it as central to the government's People First agenda.

FUET admits 1,004 students ahead of Ogoniland oil resumption

PORT HARCOURT

The Federal University of Environment and Technology (FUET), Koroma/Saakpenwa, Rivers State, will admit no fewer than 1,004 students at its maiden matriculation ceremony scheduled for February 3.

The pioneer Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Prince Mmom, disclosed this during a news conference

at the university's campus in Tai Local Government Area.

He said the students would be matriculated into 28 departments across six faculties, marking the formal academic take-off of the institution.

FUET was established on February 3, 2025, as part of the conditions for the planned resumption of oil exploration in Ogoniland, nearly 33 years after operations were halted due

to unrest.

Mmom said the matriculation would feature the unveiling of a statue in honour of the late Ogoni environmental activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa, a Founders' Day lecture and the presentation of a N5 billion endowment fund for research and development.

He described FUET as a specialised institution aimed at becoming a world-class cen-

tre for environmental restoration, sustainable development and technological innovation, while promoting community-focused research in the Niger Delta.

However, he listed challenges including lack of staff accommodation, absence of take-off allocations and inadequate infrastructure such as electricity, lecture theatres, laboratories and libraries.

Security operatives seal Onitsha Main Market over 'Sit-at-home' order

ONITSHA

Security operatives on Tuesday cordoned off major entrances to the Onitsha Main Market to enforce a one-week closure ordered by the Anambra State Government over the market's failure to sus-

pend the sit-at-home directive.

The directive was issued by Governor Chukwuma Soludo on Monday shortly after an unscheduled visit to the market.

Security personnel were deployed across the area, with armoured personnel carriers and Hilux vans barricading

strategic locations within and around the market.

In a statement, the state Commissioner for Information, Mr Law Mefor, said that the continued Monday sit-at-home cost Anambra State about N8 billion weekly, while the South-East region lost an

estimated N19.6 billion.

Traders were prevented from accessing the market as shops remained locked, while those who had come to transact business loitered around the premises, observing the situation.

Some traders, who spoke on condition of anonymity, ex-

pressed concern that the closure could endanger innocent lives and appealed to the governor to reconsider the decision.

Reacting, the Police Public Relations Officer of the Anambra Command, SP Tochukwu

Ikenga, said security agencies remained committed to maintaining law and order and protecting lives and property.

He added that the situation around the market was calm, with free movement in the area.



ABBA'S VISIT CBM:

L-R: Former Vice President Atiku Abubakar's son, Abba Atiku Abubakar; Director-General, City Boy Movement (CBM), Mr Oluwatosin Shoga, and National Coordinator, CBM, Mr Favour Abayomi, during Abba's visit to the leadership of CBM in Abuja on Tuesday.

Fire Service saves 55 lives, N8.7bn property in Kano

KANO

The Federal Fire Service (FFS) said that it saved 55 lives and property worth N8.7 billion from 433 incidents across Kano State in the last one year.

The state Controller of the service, Mr Kazeem Sholadoye, disclosed this in a statement issued on Tuesday by the Public Relations Officer, Al-Hassan Kantin.

He said 19 persons lost their lives during fire outbreaks and road accidents, while property valued at N263 million was destroyed by fire in 2025.

Sholadoye added that the service responded to 21 emergency calls and 107 false alarms within the period under review.

He urged residents to handle fire sources carefully and ensure electrical appliances were switched off before leaving their homes to prevent fire incidents.

NHRC recorded 3.7m complaints in 2025

ABUJA

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on Tuesday said it recorded 3,724,822 million human rights violations complaints across the 36 states and the FCT in 2025.

The Executive Secretary of the commission, Dr Tony Ojukwu, SAN, disclosed this at the presentation of the December Dashboard and Observatory Reports on Human Rights violations.

Ojukwu noted that human rights violations were linked to systemic issues among oth-

ers, adding that collaboration remained a powerful tool in promoting and protecting human rights.

"From the January to December, 2025 dashboards, we have learnt that human rights violations are deeply linked to systemic issues including inequality, unemployment, weak institutions, and limited access to justice.

"We have also learnt that early warning signs are visible in the data as the dashboard is not merely a reporting tool; it is a prevention mechanism.

"One thing that has also been highlighted is that collaboration remains essential.

Join the Police, Anambra indigenes urged

AWKA

The Anambra State Police Command has urged indigenes of the state to consider careers in the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) as a way of contributing to improved security and national development.

The Police Public Relations

Officer, SP Tochukwu Ikenga, made the call in a statement issued on Tuesday in Awka.

He described policing as a noble profession founded on service, discipline and patriotism, noting that it offers structured career growth, professional training and the opportunity to safeguard lives and property.

Ikenga said the command encouraged Anambra indigenes to view enlistment into the police as a constructive means of participating in national discussions on security and governance.

According to him, increased involvement of indigenes in the force would strengthen community polic-

ing, enhance public trust and improve security outcomes through better understanding of the local environment and culture.

He disclosed that the Police Service Commission had received about 400,000 applications in the ongoing recruitment exercise for 50,000 constable positions nationwide.

Mental health, psycho-social issues major drivers of suicide —Expert

LAGOS

Consultant Neuropsychiatrist, Dr Maymunah Kadiri, has identified mental health and psycho-social problems as major causative factors of suicide in Nigeria.

Kadiri, who is also the Medical Director of Pinnacle Medical Services Ltd., spoke on Tuesday in Lagos.

She said most people who attempted or died by suicide were driven by underlying

mental health or psycho-social challenges such as depression, anxiety, mental disorders, social isolation, job loss and substance abuse.

Other factors, she said, included family history of mental illness or suicide, previous suicide attempts, bullying, poverty, financial hardship, frustration and hopelessness.

Kadiri listed signs of depression to include persistent unhappiness, loss of interest in previously enjoyable activities, feelings of worthlessness and

loss of appetite.

She added that rising urban migration had also contributed to increased psycho-social stress.

Citing recent cases, she described suicide incidents as worrisome, noting that some rescued victims admitted they did not actually want to die but were overwhelmed by life challenges.

Also speaking, a mental health advocate, Dr Babatunde Ojewola, said no life challenge justified suicide, stressing that

suicide was preventable.

He called for government intervention, reduced access to lethal means such as pesticides and firearms, and early identification and treatment of mental and substance use disorders.

Ojewola urged federal and state governments to establish platforms for people to openly discuss health and life challenges, adding that psychiatric care remained the most effective approach to suicide prevention.

Water supply disruption looms in parts of Lagos

LAGOS

The Lagos State Water Corporation (LWC) has announced a temporary disruption of water supply in parts of the state to allow critical repair works at the Adiyani Water Treatment Plant.

Areas to be affected include

Akiode, Ikeja, Magodo, Oregun, Ketu, Ojota, Maryland, Aromire, Ogudu, Gbagada, Shomolu, Ojuelegba, Oyingbo, Ijora Olopa, Agege and parts of Lagos Island.

The Managing Director of the corporation, Mr Mukhtar Tijani, disclosed this in a statement on Tuesday.

He said the disruption was necessitated by a major leakage on the ND1600mm Adiyani raw water pipeline at the Akute Intake Station, which had affected the ongoing Adiyani Phase II construction project.

According to him, the leakage caused soil saturation,

weakened ground stability and posed safety risks to heavy construction equipment.

Tijani said the Adiyani I Plant would be temporarily shut down to enable effective repairs and assured residents that efforts were being intensified to restore supply as soon as the work was completed.

CHANGE OF BUSINESS NAME

The general public, concerned authorities and **Corporate Affairs Commission(CAC)** are hereby notified that the Medical Institution formerly known and called **STANDARD MEDICAL CLINIC AND MATERNITY**, now wish to be known and called **STANDEX CLINIC AND MATERNITY LTD.**

Former documents bearing the former name remain valid. **Ministry of Health, Benin City, Corporate Affairs Commission**, concerned authorities and the general public should please take note.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, formerly known as **EBHIA OMOYEN ENDURANCE**, now wish to be known as **EBHIA OMOYEN QUEEN**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and the general public should please take note.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, formerly known and called as **ETINOSA IGUODALA**, now wish to be known and addressed as **ETINOSA OSAGUIODUWA**. All former documents remain valid, concerned authorities and the general public please take note.

CORRECTION OF NAME/ DATE OF BIRTH

The general public is hereby notified that **FRANK WALTER EBETOMERE MIETUAYEFA** and **WALTER FRANK EBETOMERE** are one and the same person. Henceforth, I wish to be known and address as **FRANK WALTER EBETOMERE MIETUAYEFA**. Also my correct date of birth is **5/5/1978** and not **22/5/1978**. Former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and general public please take note.

CHANGE OF NAME

The general public is hereby notified that **UHUNMWUAGHO LAWRENTTA IGIEBOR** and **UHUNMWUAGHO EGHE LAWRENTTA** are one and the same person. Henceforth, I wish to be known and address as **UHUNMWUAGHO LAWRENTTA IGIEBOR**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and general public please take note.

CHANGE OF NAME

I formerly known as **ESANJUMI PATIENCE ORITSEWEYIMI**, now wish to be known and called **ODIGIE PATIENCE ORITSEWEYIMI**. All former documents remain valid. General public please take note.

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NEWS

Population surge: Group urges Africa, Asia to build resilient urban health systems

ABUJA

A research think tank, Community-Led Responsive and Effective Urban Health Systems (CHORUS), has called on Africa and Asia to urgently strengthen their health systems in anticipation of a major population surge.

The CHORUS Urban Health Consortium, which operates in Bangladesh, Ghana, Nepal and Nigeria, said resilient health systems were critical to addressing the pressures of rapid urbanisation and a rising disease burden across the two continents.

In a statement issued in Abuja by the Nigeria's Country Lead, Prof. Obinna Onwujekwe, the consortium said research projections indicated that urban population growth in Africa and Asia could reach 90 percent over the next 20 years.

Onwujekwe disclosed that CHORUS, in partnership with the University of Ghana's School of Public Health and the International Society for

Urban Health, would host a forum aimed at strengthening urban health systems.

He said the Accra Evidence-to-Policy Event would hold from Thursday to Friday at the University of Ghana's Legon Campus, bringing together

researchers, policymakers, city officials and health managers.

According to him, participants would deliberate on urban health research findings and develop strategies to guide responsive policies and programmes across the continents.

The Consortium's Co-Director, Prof. Helen Elsey, described the forum as timely, citing persistent challenges

in urban primary healthcare where public, private and non-governmental providers often deliver uncoordinated services of varying quality.

She noted that the situation had contributed to poor health outcomes, particularly in maternal and child health, as well as non-communicable diseases such as hypertension, diabetes and cancer.

Elsey added that high costs, poor service quality and limited access to formal healthcare providers had sustained the reliance on informal providers, including traditional birth attendants and drug vendors.

Another Co-Director, Associate Prof. Bassey Ebenso, said improving urban health systems was closely linked to broader social and economic

factors, including power supply, roads, water and sanitation, air quality, transportation and cultural practices.

Ebenso and the Consortium's Chief Executive Officer, Prof. Irene Agyepong, stressed that addressing urban health challenges required political commitment and coordinated multi-sectoral action at city and national levels across Africa and Asia.



4TH MATRICULATION CEREMONY:

President, African University of Science and Technology (AUST), Prof. Azikiwe Onwualu (5th R), with members of the school management and matriculating students, during the 4th matriculation ceremony for AUST 2025/2026 Academic Session, at Material Raw Hall, AUST, Galadimawa, Abuja.

Enugu begins major tourism projects, shuts Ngwo Pine forest

LAGOS

The Enugu State Government has commenced construction of major tourism projects aimed at repositioning the state as a leading eco-tourism and adventure destination.

The Commissioner for Tourism, Dame Ugochi Madueke, disclosed this in a statement issued on Tuesday in Lagos, announcing the temporary closure of the Ngwo Pine Forest to the public.

Madueke said the forest had become a construction site following the commencement of work on a zipline project and would remain inaccessible until completion.

She explained that the projects were part of the state's strategy to promote sustainable tourism, diversify the economy and enhance community participation.

The commissioner led a delegation of stakeholders, including tourism consultant Ikechi Uko and contractors, to host communities in Ngwo, Okpatu and Nsude to formally

introduce project teams and outline the scope of work.

According to her, the integrated tourism plan includes canopy walkways at Nsude and Awhum, a zipline at Ngwo, a monumental cross at Okpatu and a cable car system.

Madueke said the projects would leverage Enugu's hills, forests and natural landscapes to offer immersive adventure experiences while preserving the environment.

She added that host communities would benefit through job creation, small-scale businesses and increased exposure for local culture and heritage.

Some of the projects are expected to be completed and inaugurated within the year, with officials projecting increased domestic tourism, private investment and a stronger tourism profile for Enugu State.

Uko stressed that sustained harmony between communities and project teams was essential for long-term success, describing stakeholder engagement as the foundation for sustainability and shared ownership.

Kogi Doctors laud Ododo over N300,000 monthly allowance

LOKOJA

The National Association of Resident Doctors (NARD), Kogi Specialist Hospital, Lokoja, has commended Governor Ahmed Ododo for implementing a N300,000 monthly allowance for medical doctors in state-owned hospitals.

The association's President at the hospital, Dr David Omeiza, made the commendation in a statement on Tuesday in Loko-

ja, congratulating the governor on his second anniversary in office and praising his efforts to strengthen healthcare delivery in the state.

Omeiza described the Doctors' Interventional Allowance as a strategic step towards retaining medical professionals and attracting skilled personnel to Kogi's health system.

According to NARD, the allowance, which took effect in October 2025, has already yielded positive outcomes, including

improved patient care, better operational efficiency and enhanced public health response in state-owned hospitals.

The association urged the governor to sustain his commitment to healthcare development, noting that the sector still offered opportunities for growth and further improvement.

NARD also reaffirmed its readiness to collaborate with the state government in achieving healthcare excellence.

Governor Ododo, who was sworn in for a four-year term on January 27, 2024, approved the allowance in October 2025, particularly targeting doctors in rural areas to curb brain drain, popularly known as the "Japa syndrome."

The policy forms part of broader healthcare initiatives in the state, including a health insurance scheme covering 76,000 beneficiaries made up of local government workers, pensioners and students.

State Police 'll deepen true federalism, Say Benue residents

MAKURDI

Some residents of Benue State have expressed the view that the establishment of state police would strengthen true federalism and grant greater autonomy to Nigeria's federating units.

Speaking to journalists at various locations in Makurdi, the residents said that decentralised policing would also help address localised security challenges more effectively.

They argued that the centralised Nigeria Police Force

had struggled to maintain law and order across the country's diverse regions, making a strong case for state-controlled police structures.

A political activist, Mr Joseph Igbana, said state police would help tackle worsening security challenges such as terrorism, banditry, kidnapping and communal violence.

According to him, a single, centralised police force had been overstretched, leaving communities vulnerable.

"A state-controlled police force will be closer to the peo-

ple, respond faster to threats and understand the local terrain, language and culture, which will enhance intelligence gathering and crime prevention," he said.

A teacher, Mrs Juliet Terwase, said state police aligned with the principles of true federalism and would enable citizens to hold governors more accountable for security within their states.

However, some residents raised concerns about possible abuse of state police by governors for political purposes.

A public affairs analyst, Mr

Timothy Odoh, warned that many states lacked the financial capacity to fund, equip and pay a state police force, which could lead to corruption and inefficiency.

Odoh also cautioned that state police could worsen ethnic or religious tensions and empower local strongmen aligned with political interests.

Another resident, Terna Ornguga, said Nigeria was not yet mature enough for decentralised policing, advocating instead for comprehensive reforms, improved funding and better training for the existing police force.

IMPI: New tax reforms to boost revenue, drive growth from 2026

ABUJA

The Independent Media and Policy Initiative (IMPI) has said Nigeria's new tax reforms will strengthen revenue mobilisation and stimulate economic growth across key sectors from 2026.

In a statement signed by its

Chairman, Dr Omoniyi Akinsiju, IMPI said the reforms, which took effect on January 1, would improve revenue performance through enhanced compliance, wider use of digital systems and better remittance discipline among agencies.

Akinsiju said the reforms

would also reshape the operating environment for manufacturers by introducing a coordinated and incentive-driven fiscal framework.

He said central to the reforms were newly introduced Economic Development Tax Incentives targeting priority sectors, particularly manufac-

turing.

According to him, eligible firms could obtain Economic Development Incentive Certificates, granting a five per cent annual tax credit on qualifying capital expenditure for up to five years.

The incentives, he said, were designed to support local pro-

duction and industrial expansion amid foreign exchange volatility and rising import costs.

Akinsiju added that benefits included longer incentive periods for firms that reinvest profits, exemptions from stamp duties on some manufacturing transactions and clearer capital

allowance rules to ease cash flow pressures.

He said manufacturers would also benefit from research and development deductions of up to five per cent of turnover when linked to innovation, encouraging technology upgrades and product development.

JUDICIARY

NEWS

Alleged N1bn fraud: Court remands Kano electoral body chair, 2 others

ABUJA

The Federal High Court in Abuja has remanded the Chairman of the Kano State Independent Electoral Commission (KAN-SIEC), Prof. Sani Malumfashi, alongside two other officials, at the Kuje Correctional Centre over an alleged N1 billion

money laundering offence.

Justice James Omotosho gave the order on Tuesday after Malumfashi and his co-defendants pleaded not guilty to a six-count charge preferred against them by the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC).

The judge ruled that the

defendants remain in custody pending the hearing and determination of their formal bail application and adjourned the matter to January 27 and 28 for consideration of the bail request.

Also charged are the Secretary of KANSIEC, Mr Anas Muhammed Mustapha, and a Deputy Director in the Accounts Department of the commission, Mr Ado Garba.

According to the charge

dated November 28, 2025 and filed on December 1, 2025, the ICPC alleged that the defendants siphoned N450 million, N310 million and N260 million between November and December 2024.

The commission further alleged that the trio conspired to take possession of N450 million in cash through SLM Agro Global Farm accounts domiciled with Jaiz Bank on November 1, 2024, describing

the funds as proceeds of unlawful activity.

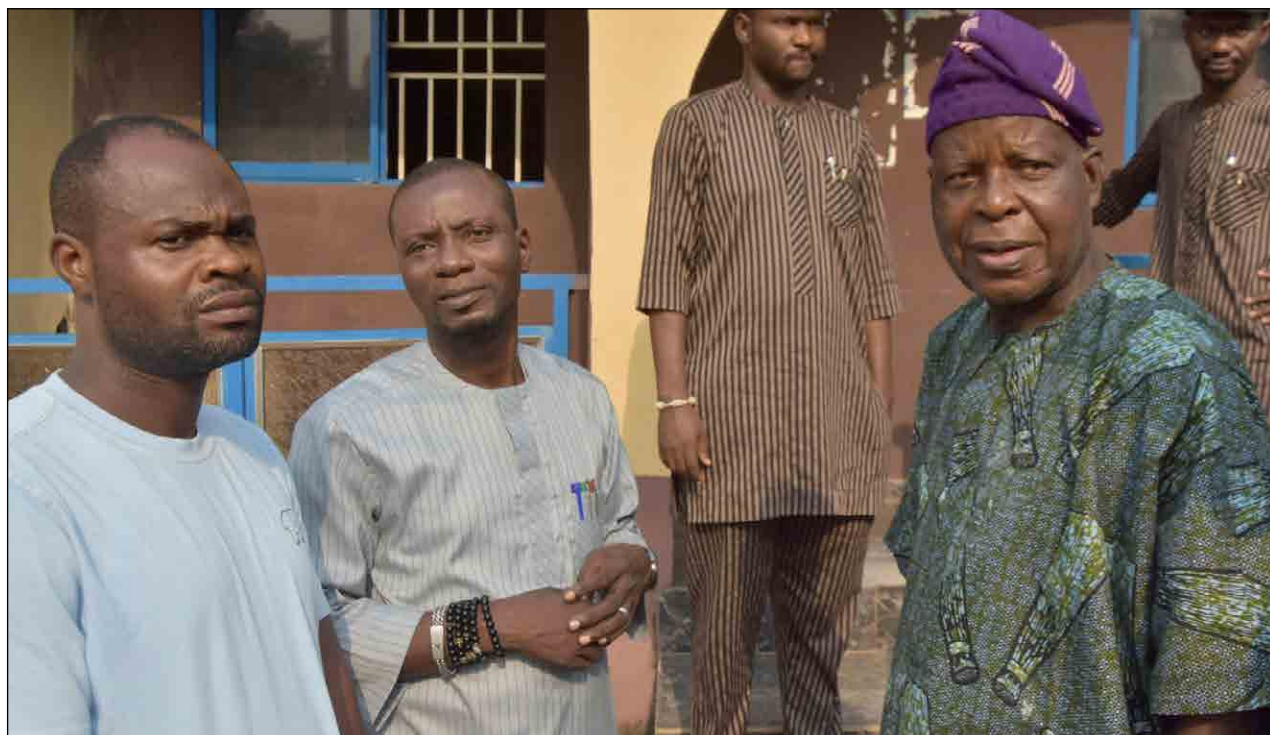
The offence is said to contravene Sections 2(1)(b) and 18(2)(d) of the Money Laundering (Prevention and Prohibition) Act, 2022.

While the prosecution sought a trial date after the defendants' plea, defence counsel, Mahmud Magaji, SAN, applied orally for bail, noting that his clients had complied with ear-

lier administrative bail conditions.

The prosecution left the matter to the discretion of the court, prompting Justice Omotosho to direct that a formal bail application be filed.

The court noted that the case had earlier been struck out by a sister court in 2025 due to failure by the ICPC to effect service of court documents on the defendants.



OKIRO'S VISIT TO OYO NUJ:

R-L: Former Inspector-General of Police (IGP), Chief Mike Okiro; Chairman NUJ, Oyo State Council, Mr Akeem Abas and Secretary, Mr Dayo Adu, during the former IG's visit to the Council Secretariat in Ibadan.

Legal Aid lawyer withdraws from Kanu's case

ABUJA

A lawyer with the Legal Aid Council of Nigeria (LACON), Mr Demdoo Asan, has withdrawn his appearance from a matter instituted by Nnamdi Kanu, the convicted leader of the proscribed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB).

Asan informed Justice James Omotosho of the Federal High Court in Abuja that his withdrawal followed Kanu's alleged attempt to dictate how the case should be handled.

The judge also struck out Kanu's motion ex-parte seeking an order compelling the Federal Government and the Nigerian Correctional Service (NCoS) to

transfer him from the Sokoto Correctional Facility to a custodial centre closer to the court to enable him prosecute his appeal.

Justice Omotosho held that the application was incompetent, having failed to be converted to a motion on notice as earlier directed by the court.

Explaining his withdrawal, Asan said Kanu had insisted on

controlling the tone and conduct of the case from custody, contrary to professional ethics and the operational guidelines of the Legal Aid Council.

Granting the application, the judge commended counsel for upholding professional standards and formally permitted LACON to withdraw from representing Kanu.

ADR promotes speedy, people-friendly justice —CDHR

ABAKALIKI

The Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDHR), Ebonyi State chapter, has called for wider adoption of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms to enhance access to justice and reduce pressure on the courts.

Speaking in an interview

with newsmen in Abakaliki, CDHR National Publicity Secretary, Mr Jeremiah Onyibe, said ADR offers faster, affordable and less adversarial means of resolving disputes, especially at the grassroots.

He noted that prolonged court cases, high litigation costs and congested courts had made ADR a necessary complement to the formal justice system.

Onyibe said the organisation had been sensitising communities, traditional rulers and stakeholders on the benefits of mediation, negotiation and arbitration, particularly in resolving land, family and minor civil disputes.

While acknowledging growing acceptance of ADR, he identified low public awareness, misconceptions and funding

challenges as major obstacles.

He urged the Ebonyi State Government to strengthen institutional frameworks supporting ADR and invest in public enlightenment and capacity-building programmes.

According to him, ADR promotes fairness, inclusiveness and human rights protection, particularly for vulnerable groups.

Surety arraigned for allegedly obstructing Justice

LAGOS

A middle-aged woman, Abigail John, has been arraigned before an Ojo Magistrates' Court, Lagos, for allegedly conspiring to ob-

struct and pervert the course of justice.

John, who stood as surety for a defendant in 2023, pleaded not guilty to a one-count charge.

The prosecution alleged

that she failed to produce the defendant, Moses Nwigbo, in court on several occasions, including June 20, September 4 and December 5, 2025.

The offence is said to contravene Section 97(1) of the

Criminal Law of Lagos State, 2015.

The Magistrate, Mr Lateef Layeni, granted her bail in the sum of N500,000 with two sureties and adjourned the case to February 25 for mention.

Man docked over alleged N840,000 theft in Ikorodu

IKORODU

A 45-year-old man, Ak-inola Oluwayi, was on Tuesday arraigned before an Ikorodu Magistrates' Court for allegedly stealing cooking items valued at N840,000.

The defendant pleaded not guilty to a two-count charge of stealing.

The prosecution alleged that he conspired with others at large to steal gas cylinders, burners, pots and plates belonging to Mrs Amaka Nwadei on December 5, 2025.

The Magistrate, Mr O.A. Ogbé, granted bail in the sum of N500,000 with two verified sureties and adjourned the case to February 19 for mention.

3 'One Chance' suspects arraigned over N1.7m theft

IBADAN

Three alleged members of a "one chance" syndicate were on Tuesday arraigned before an Iyaganku Chief Magistrates' Court, Ibadan, over the alleged theft of cash and phones worth N1.738 million.

The defendants, Bayonle Olubunmi, Abiodun Olamilékan and Oladipupo Ibrahim, pleaded not guilty to charges of

conspiracy and stealing.

Prosecutors alleged that the suspects used a Micra taxi to rob a passenger of cash, ATM card and mobile phones at Alakia area of Ibadan on December 28, 2025.

The Chief Magistrate, Mrs Olabisi Ogunkanmi, granted the defendants bail in the sum of N500,000 each with stringent conditions and adjourned the case to April 7 for mention.

FG raises alarm as 58% of Nigerian women of reproductive age are anaemic

ABUJA

The Federal Government has raised concerns over what it described as a largely preventable nutrition crisis, revealing that 58 percent of Nigerian women of reproductive age are living with anaemia.

Mrs Helen Achimugu, Assistant Director in the Nutrition Department of the Federal Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, disclosed this on Tuesday in Abuja.

She spoke at a capacity-building workshop organised by Civil Society-Scaling Up Nutrition in Nigeria (CS-SUNN) for journalists on anaemia prevention, themed "Media as Catalysts for an Anaemia-Free Nigeria."

Citing the 2023 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS), Achimugu said more than half of Nigerian women were affected by a condition that was both preventable and treatable.

She added that the burden also extended to children, not-

ing that Nigeria ranks first in Africa and second globally in the number of stunted children.

"We have about 35 million stunted children and 24 million wasted children and 24 million children who are anaemic.

"This is not just a health issue; it is a development emergency," she said.

Achimugu explained that micronutrient deficiencies, often referred to as "hidden hunger," were widespread among children under five and women of reproductive age.

"They are called hidden hunger because the signs are not always visible, but the impact on health, learning and productivity is profound," she said.

She attributed the situation to poor dietary diversity, food insecurity and socio-economic challenges, with higher prevalence recorded in northern parts of the country.

According to her, essential micronutrients such as iron, iodine, zinc, folate and vitamin A are critical for growth and immunity.

NEWS

Foreign

India and EU announce landmark trade deal

The European Union and India have announced a landmark trade deal after nearly two decades of on-off talks, as both sides aim to deepen ties amid tensions with the US.

"We did it, we delivered the mother of all deals," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said at a media briefing in Delhi. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi called the pact "historic".

It will allow free trade of goods between the bloc of 27 European states and the world's most populous country, which together make up nearly 25% of global gross domestic product and a market of two billion people.

The deal will see a number of huge tariff cuts across a range of goods and services, and a joint security partnership.

Von der Leyen and European Council President António Costa are in Delhi, where they met Modi at a bilateral summit.

The European Commission said the agreement would eliminate tariffs on most exports of chemicals, machinery and electrical equipment, as well as aircraft and spacecraft, following phased reductions. Significantly, duties on motor vehicles, currently as high as 110%, would be cut to 10% under a quota of 250,000 vehicles. That is six times larger than the 37,000-unit quota India granted to the UK in a deal signed last July, Bloomberg reported.

India will also cut tariffs on wine, beer and olive oil from the EU. Brussels said the agreement would support investment flows, improve access to European markets and deepen

supply-chain integration.

Delhi said almost all of its exports would get "preferential access" into the EU, with textiles, leather, marine products, handicrafts, gems and jewellery set to see a reduction or elimination of tariffs.

While commodities such as tea, coffee, spices and processed foods will benefit from the agreement, Delhi "has prudently safeguarded sensitive sectors, including dairy, cereals, poultry, soy meal, certain fruits and vegetables, balancing export growth with domestic priorities", it said.

Delhi and Brussels have also agreed on a mobility framework that eases restrictions for professionals to travel between India and the EU in the short term.

"This is India's biggest free

trade agreement," Modi said. "It will make access to European markets easier for India's farmers and small business. It will also boost manufacturing and services sectors. It will boost innovative partnerships."

The trade deal comes as both India and the EU contend with economic and geopolitical pressure from the US.

Delhi is grappling with 50% tariffs imposed by President Donald Trump last year amid talks aimed at securing a trade deal between India and the US that are still dragging on.

Last week, Trump threatened to escalate his trade war with European allies for opposing a US takeover of Greenland, before backing off.

That larger geopolitical context was evident in statements made by leaders.

Deadly US winter storm leaves flights delayed and thousands without power

Several people have died in a winter storm that hit a wide swathe of the US, causing thousands of flights to be cancelled or delayed due to severe conditions.

The storm, which caused chaos from Texas to the tip of Maine over the weekend, snarled roadways, knocked out power, and buried major cities under a thick blanket of snow.

Some areas in the north-east saw more than 20in (50.8cm) of snow during a 24-hour period, according to the National Weather Service (NWS).

Canadian officials also said the storm had seriously disrupted southern Ontario.

In eastern Canada, snow is expected to continue in the Maritimes region on Tuesday, according to BBC Weather.

Despite the storm easing away from the US, lake-effect snow showers are due to persist around the Great Lakes for the rest of the week.

The coming days will remain very cold in central and eastern region of North America, and the situation is expected to intensify ahead of the weekend, when another significant winter storm could hit the eastern US.

On Monday, more than 6,000 flights into, within or out of the US were cancelled, more than 7,000 were delayed, according to tracking website FlightAware.

The severe weather also had

a range of on-the-ground impacts, including in a number of southern US states.

More than half a million users were without power in the early hours of Tuesday, according to PowerOutage.com. The worst-affected state is Tennessee, where the city of Nashville has experienced a deep freeze that plunged residents into cold and darkness.

"There are many trees down and power lines blocking the roads," Joy Flores, vice president of the Nashville Rescue Mission homeless shelter, told the BBC. Her centre was taking calls from residents who had lost power.

The roads were icy and impossible to navigate, Flores said, and her home had "no heating, no internet, and no coffee".

In Texas, a teenage girl died and another was in critical condition due to a sledding accident, the Frisco Police Department announced.

In North Carolina, a man was found dead on the side of a highway in Buncombe County and authorities are investigating whether his death was weather-related.

Louisiana's department of health said that two people had died due to hypothermia.

Further north, a total of eight people died in New York City between Friday and Monday morning as temperatures plummeted, according to city officials.



EU LANDMARK TRADE:

(From left) European Council President António Costa, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in Delhi on Tuesday

Immigration chief at centre of Trump's crackdown set to leave Minneapolis

A top US immigration official is expected to leave the US city of Minneapolis in what may mark a shift in the White House's tone after the fatal shooting of a second US citizen by federal officers over the weekend.

As Border Patrol Commander Gregory Bovino and some immigration agents leave, President Donald Trump's border tsar Tom Homan will begin leading on-the-ground efforts in the city after the fatal shooting of Alex Pretti on Saturday escalated tensions.

Trump's decision may indicate the administration's interest in walking back more aggressive federal action in his nationwide immigration crackdown.

Despite the announcement, online tracking shows immigration raids have continued.

As well as the change in leadership and the reduction in federal agents, there have been other signs of a shifting strategy by the Trump

administration in recent days.

Trump had phone calls with Democratic city and state officials that he described positively, a change in tone after attacking them over the weekend. And the president himself has avoided the language used by some of his top aides that sought to blame Pretti for Saturday's tragedy.

His administration is facing pressure from some prominent Republicans, who have joined opposition Democrats in calling for a wide-ranging investigation.

On Monday, a Republican contender to become state governor dropped out of that election race, calling the enforcement operation in Minnesota an "unmitigated disaster".

That candidate was Chris Madel, a defence lawyer who has provided advice to the agent who earlier this month shot dead another US citizen in Minneapolis, Renee Good.

Trump abandons attack mode as Minneapolis shooting

backlash grows

Who was Alex Pretti, the intensive care nurse shot dead in Minneapolis?

Bovino was the face of the operation when Pretti - an observer seen filming agents - became involved in a confrontation that ended in Pretti being shot numerous times.

The commander claimed that Pretti intended to "massacre" federal agents - a statement that angered many protesters on the streets.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) said the agents fired in self-defence after Pretti, who they say had a handgun, resisted their attempts to disarm him on Saturday.

Eyewitnesses, local officials and the victim's family have challenged that account, pointing out Pretti had a phone in his hand, not a weapon. His parents, meanwhile, have accused the administration of spreading "sickening lies" about what happened.

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

Bovino has been key to the Trump administration's hard-line approach to immigration enforcement in several cities, active on social media and regularly filming raids and posting promotional videos showing his agents' action.

Homan, who will report directly to the president, advocates for the aggressive immigration enforcement pushed by Trump. But he also has longer-term experience in the role, having worked with immigration and deportations during the Democratic presidency of Barack Obama.

Some media reports suggest Bovino had been let go from his role, but DHS spokesperson Tricia McLaughlin denied that, saying the Border Patrol chief was "a key part of the president's team and a great American".

Japan court orders compensation for migrants lured to North Korea

A Tokyo court has asked Pyongyang to pay 88 million Japanese yen (\$570,000; £416,000) to four people who were lured to North Korea decades ago by a propaganda scheme.

The plaintiffs said the North was marketed to them as "paradise on Earth", but they instead found themselves subject to harsh conditions, including forced labour. They later escaped.

Monday's ruling is largely symbolic with no real way to enforce it: North Korea has for years ignored the lawsuit, and its leader Kim Jong Un has not responded to Japanese court summons.

But the ruling, which comes after a years-long legal battle in Japanese courts, has been hailed by the plaintiffs' lawyer as "historic".

This was the first time "a Japanese court exercised its sovereignty against North Korea to recognise its malpractice", said Atsushi Shiraki, a lawyer representing the plaintiffs, AFP reported.

More than 90,000 Zainichi Koreans - ethnic Koreans who live in Japan - moved to North Korea between 1959 and 1984, under a resettlement scheme which promised an idyllic life of free healthcare, education and jobs.

But instead survivors say

they found themselves forced to work on farms and factories, subject to restrictions and could not leave.

One of the plaintiffs, Eiko Kawasaki, went to North Korea in 1960, when she was 17. She escaped in 2003 and is now 83 years old.

She was among a group of five plaintiffs who filed a lawsuit in 2018 demanding compensation. Two of the original plaintiffs have since died, but one of them continued to be represented in the lawsuit by their family.

In 2022, a Tokyo district court rejected their compensation claims, saying that it fell outside Japanese jurisdiction and the statute of limitations had expired.

But in 2023, the Tokyo High Court ruled that the case was in fact under Japanese jurisdiction and found that North Korea had violated the plaintiffs' rights.

"It's not an overstatement to say most of their lives were ruined by North Korea," judge Taiichi Kamino said at a ruling at the Tokyo District Court on Monday, according to an Associated Press report.

Kenji Fukuda, another lawyer for the plaintiffs acknowledged the significance of the ruling but said it would be a "challenge" actually getting any money from North Korea.

Foreign

NEWS

Kenya starvation cult leader charged in connection with 52 further deaths

Former cult leader Paul Mackenzie, already on trial for multiple counts of manslaughter, is facing new charges, Kenyan prosecutors said on Monday.

A self-proclaimed preacher and former taxi driver, Mackenzie led an infamous starvation cult that killed more than 400 people.

The so-called Shakahola Forest Massacre took place near the beach resort of Malindi and came to light in 2023. Mackenzie has pleaded not guilty.

He's now being charged with 52 further deaths in the remote village of Binzaro, where more bodies were found last year.

The discovery appeared to show that the same cult had continued to operate even after the first massacre site was discovered and Mackenzie arrested.

In a statement on X, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions said a Malindi court had given its go-ahead to "formally charge Good News

International Church leader Paul Nthenge Mackenzie and his co-accused over the deaths of 52 people at the Binzaro homestead in Kilifi County."

Mackenzie and others will be charged with a raft of offences, including radicalisation, "facilitation of terrorist acts," and murder over the more recent killings, adding to his charges related to Shakahola.

Mackenzie has been accused in previous Shakahola trials of inciting his followers to starve themselves to "meet Jesus", using enforcers to prevent people from leaving the forest.

Authorities faced criticism after Shakahola, following accusations the deaths could have been prevented had there been tougher regulations.

Efforts to regulate religion in the majority-Christian country have been fiercely opposed in the past as undermining constitutional guarantees of the division between church and state.

Firefighters battle 'emergency level' blazes in Australia heatwave

Firefighters in the Australian state of Victoria are battling at least six major fires as a record-breaking heatwave hits the country's south-east.

Two fires are currently burning at "emergency level" according to local broadcaster ABC News. Several communities have been issued emergency warnings to either evacuate, watch and wait, or shelter in place.

Fire officials warn that the situation is changing rapidly and have asked locals to stay up to date with the latest warnings.

The Bureau of Meteorology says that parts of the state have seen all-time temperature highs - with one area hitting a high of 48.9C. Melbourne has recorded a temperature of 41C.

Chris Hardman, the chief fire officer at Forest Fire Management Victoria, had told reporters that the state's heat conditions were making conditions "incredibly difficult" for firefighters.

Two fires - in Camperdown and Otways - are burning at emergency level. A new fire in the Larralea area is also causing "significant concern".

Country Fire Authority (CFA) chief officer Jason Hefferman told ABC Radio that there was a danger that the Otways fire could produce ember showers "which can create more fires in front of the main fire".

It is unclear what damage has been caused by the fires, but Australia's Deputy Incident Controller Alistair Drayton, said he had "anecdotal evidence" that some homes had been lost.

He also praised the "spectacular" work done by fire-

fighters so far.

Apart from Victoria, where there is a total fire ban, South Australia has also been placed under alert for "extreme" fire risk.

Meanwhile health officials have warned that the prolonged heat carries significant health risks.

The elderly, children and people with underlying health conditions are most at risk, Victoria chief health officer Caroline McElroy told reporters.

"It can cause potentially fatal health problems such as heat exhaustion and heat stroke but it can also trigger events like heart attacks or stroke."

Scientists are clear that human-caused climate change is making heatwaves much more likely and more intense globally.

And Australasia has seen an increasing frequency and severity of heat extremes in recent decades, according to the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

South-east Australia also experienced extreme heat in early January, with temperatures surpassing 40C.

A rapid study by scientists at the World Weather Attribution group estimated that the high temperatures across a three-day period were now at least five times more likely as a result of climate change.

While fires occur naturally in Australia, these hot, dry conditions can make it much easier for fires to spread, potentially fuelling larger blazes.

And as the world continues to warm, Australia is expected to see further increases in these "fire weather" conditions, according to the IPCC.



AIRPORT SCREENINGS:

The Nipah virus can spread from animals to humans

Nipah virus outbreak in India triggers Asia airport screenings

An outbreak of the deadly Nipah virus in India's West Bengal state has sparked concern in parts of Asia, with some tightening screening measures at airports.

Thailand has started screening passengers at three airports that receive flights from West Bengal. Nepal has also begun screening arrivals at Kathmandu airport and other land border points with India.

Five healthcare workers in West Bengal were infected by the virus early this month, one of whom is in a critical condition. Some 110 people who were in contact with them have been quarantined.

The virus can spread from animals to humans. It has a high death range - ranging from 40% to 75% - as there is no vaccine or medicine to treat it.

What is the Nipah virus and what are its symptoms?

The Nipah virus can be trans-

mitted from animals, like pigs and fruit bats, to humans. It can also spread person-to-person through contaminated food.

The World Health Organization has described Nipah in its top ten priority diseases, along with pathogens like Covid-19 and Zika, because of its potential to trigger an epidemic.

The incubation period ranges from four to 14 days.

People who contract the virus show a wide range of symptoms, or sometimes, none at all.

Initial symptoms may include fever, headaches, muscle pain, vomiting and sore throat. In some people, these may be followed by drowsiness, altered consciousness, and pneumonia. Encephalitis, a sometimes-fatal condition that causes inflammation of the brain, may occur in severe cases.

To date, no drugs or vaccines have been approved to treat the disease.

Where were the past outbreaks?

The first recognised Nipah outbreak was in 1998 among pig farmers in Malaysia and later spread to neighbouring Singapore. The virus got its name from the village where it was first discovered.

More than 100 people were killed and a million pigs culled in an effort to contain the virus. It also resulted in significant economic losses for farmers and those in the livestock trade.

Bangladesh has borne the brunt in recent years, with more than 100 people dying of Nipah since 2001.

The virus has also been detected in India. Outbreaks were reported in West Bengal in 2001 and 2007.

More recently, the southern state of Kerala has been a Nipah hotspot. In 2018, 19 cases were reported of which 17 were fatal; and in 2023, two out of

six confirmed cases later died.

What is happening now? At least five confirmed cases were reported as of last week, all of whom were linked to a private hospital in Barasat. Two nurses are being treated in an intensive coronary care unit, one of whom remains in "very critical" condition, local media reported citing the state's health department.

No cases have yet been reported outside India, but several countries are stepping up precautions.

On Sunday, Thailand started screening passengers at three international airports in Bangkok and Phuket that receive flights from West Bengal. Passengers from these flights have been asked to make health declarations.

The parks and wildlife department has also implemented stricter screenings in natural tourist attractions.

Sweden aims to lower age of criminal responsibility to 13 as gangs recruit children

Sweden is moving forward with plans to lower the age of criminal responsibility from 15 to 13 in serious cases as it grapples with a growing number of children recruited into gangs to carry out violent crimes without facing serious legal repercussions.

Justice Minister Gunnar Strömmer said the country was in an "emergency situation" and stopping the use of children in criminal networks was a "crucial task" for the government.

But several authorities, including police, prison officials and prosecutors, have opposed the plan, with some worried that it may lead to even younger children becoming offenders.

If passed, the legislation will go into force as early as this summer.

Strömmer insisted that the proposal did not amount to a "general lowering of the age of criminal responsibility" and would only apply to the "most serious crimes" such as murder, attempted murder, aggravated bombings, aggravated weapons offences and aggravated rape.

Under the proposal, some of these offenders could face prison sentences in certain cases.

Data from the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention shows that the number of registered offences linked to suspects under the age of 15 has doubled over the past decade.

The current government came into power in 2022 vowing to crack down on organised crime.

At the beginning of last year, a government-ordered inquiry recommended lowering the

age of criminal responsibility to 14 in serious cases.

Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson confirmed in September that it would be lowered from 15, saying children are "being ruthlessly exploited by criminal networks to commit serious crimes".

"Both to protect these children and their potential victims, the government is taking strong action against this type of cynical exploitation," he added.

The government then announced that it would seek to lower it to 13, and sent out the bill for input from 126 authorities and organisations.

Their plans were met with criticism and opposition from different authorities and organisations.

In November, the police authority said that the change



risked "significantly younger children" getting involved in criminal gangs as a result.

Other groups said the prison system was not equipped to handle such young offenders and detaining them could breach children's rights.

The prison and probation service also said the move could lead to negative consequences for children and that they should be cared for in "other ways".

Ministers had also previously considered imposing age limits on social media, with police arguing that gangs had used certain platforms to recruit young children into crime.

Strömmer said on Monday that he had taken note of the previous criticism of the bill, but that the situation had become more urgent.

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FEATURES

Landmark and problematic provisions: Making the case for Electoral Bill passage —Samson Itodo

Electoral reform is a confidence-building mechanism. It addresses shortcomings through the introduction of innovations that strengthen election integrity and inspire public trust. A recent National Voting Intentions Survey (NVIS) reveals a climate of high distrust in the electoral process. The current electoral bill before Nigeria's National Assembly contains landmark provisions that meet public demand for limits to human interference in the electoral process and greater transparency. However, the bill also includes problematic provisions that create vulnerabilities and give undue powers to institutions. Some provisions reinforce money politics and create an uneven playing field for economically marginalized groups. Despite these contradictions, passing this bill is one of the most important steps for rebuilding public trust in the electoral process.

TOP FIVE LANDMARK PROVISIONS WE CANNOT AFFORD TO LOSE

The Electoral Bill contains provisions that will transform the electoral process. Citizens and civil society groups, including Yiaga Africa, have advocated these proposals for years. Notable among them are:

1. Electronic transmission of election results: The bill provides legal backing for electronic transmission of results to the INEC Election Results Viewing portal (IREV). It does not replace the manual process but integrates electronic transmission to run alongside manual collation. Electronic transmission could significantly reduce result manipulation at polls. This provision gives legal weight to result sheets uploaded on INEC's portal. These result sheets will serve as reliable evidence for establishing votes scored by parties or exposing manipulation.

2. Compulsory comparison between electronically transmitted results and hardcopy results: The bill prescribes detailed procedures to address ambiguities in the collation process. It mandates Collation and Returning Officers to cross-check accreditation data and results transmitted electronically from the polling unit with the hardcopy results sheets. This addresses a gap exploited in previous election, where inconsistencies between electronically transmitted results and physical result forms created legal uncertainty and operational discretion. The provision strengthens auditability, and transparency in the collation process.

3. Downloadable voter card for inclusive voter accreditation: In previous elections, voters without physical Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) have been disenfranchised, even in cases where such failure resulted from INEC's logistical failure. To address this barrier to participation, the bill introduces a digitally generated voter card embedded with a unique QR code, which can be downloaded and securely used for voter accreditation. In addition, where a voter card is unavailable, registered voters may present a National Identity Card, International Passport, or Nigerian birth certificate for voter accreditation.

4. Disciplinary authority over Resident Electoral Commissioners: One of the challenges of INEC is its lack of disciplinary control over Resident Electoral Commis-



sioners (RECs), who answer mainly to the appointing authority, the President, rather than to the Commission they serve. This flaw has fostered weak accountability and impunity. During the 2023 general elections, this limitation became clear when three RECS were allegedly involved in corrupt practices and misconduct. The commission's leadership was limited to suspending its delegated powers from the RECs because it could not impose any sanctions under the electoral legal framework. To address this gap and subject RECs to internal control mechanisms, the bill provides that RECs will be answerable to and disciplined by the commission.

5. Mandatory Digital register of party membership: The lack of an updated, reliable register of party members is a loophole parties exploit to perpetuate illegality, capture party structures, and subvert candidate nomination processes. The result is a crisis of internal party democracy that fuels candidate imposition, and weakens competition. The bill mandates political parties to maintain a digital register of their members, including name, gender, date of birth, address, National Identity Number (NIN), and photographs. Parties that fail to submit their membership register to INEC will not be eligible to field candidates in elections.

PROBLEMATIC PROVISIONS THAT DEMAND COLLECTIVE VIGILANCE

1. Restricting the filing of reports to INEC officials to activate the review of election results: INEC is vested with the power to review election results within seven days where such declarations are made under duress or in violation of the Electoral Act, INEC's regulations, guidelines, and manuals. To activate this power, the bill provides that the administrative review of falsified election results shall occur only upon a report filed by INEC officials. This provision bars political parties, candidates, ac-

credited observers, and their agents from activating the review process, even where they tender compelling evidence of a manipulated and unlawful results declaration. Limiting the power of review to reports filed by INEC officials, some of whom may be complicit, is against the spirit behind the power of review vested in INEC. Evidence from recent elections revealed instances in which INEC officials actively undermined the elections. The scope of persons eligible to file reports should be broadened to include political parties, candidates, accredited party agents, and observers present during collation.

2. Astronomical increase in the threshold for election expenses: The bill reinforces electoral competition as contest of the highest bidders and spenders by doubling election expenses by 100 – 200% across all levels. Expenses for presidential election jumped from N5 billion (\$3.5M)

to N10 billion (\$7M). Governorship election was increased from from N1 billion (\$702,000) to N3 billion (\$2.1 million), a 200% increase. The pattern continues down the ballot: expenses for Senate increased from N100 million (\$70,000) to N500 million (\$355,000); House of Representatives from N70 million (\$49,000) to N250 million (\$176,000); State Assembly from N30 million (\$21,000) to N100 million (\$70,000); and FCT Area Council from N5 million (\$3,500) to N10 million (\$7,000).

These high thresholds constitute a barrier to fair competition because qualified candidates without deep pockets cannot run for office. When elections are determined by wealthy politicians, democracy is threatened while plutocracy is institutionalized.

3. Increasing individual donations to candidates from N50m to N500m: The bill raises the limit for donations from individuals and entities to candidates from N50m (\$36k) to N500m (\$355k). Allowing a single individual or entity to contribute half a billion naira to a candidate leads to capture and a lack of independence. It also weakens accountability and ensures private interests replace the public interest in governance and policymaking.

REJECTED PROGRESSIVE PROPOSALS

While the Electoral Bill contains transformative proposals, it excludes some provisions that lacked sufficient legislative support at the committee stage, despite years of advocacy by citizens and civil society organizations, including Yiaga Africa. These omissions are significant missed opportunities to safeguard the right to vote and expand civic participation. The rejected or abandoned proposals include early voting mechanisms, inmates voting, replacing the Permanent Voter's Card with alter-

native identification, and adjustments to electoral timelines to improve operational efficiency and voter access.

WHY PASSAGE REMAINS IMPERATIVE

Elections are governed not by good intentions but by clearly prescribed rules. The bill's landmark provisions address ambiguities in current electoral law. Its passage will prevent conflicting interpretations and inconsistent application of rules for result transmission, collation, and voter accreditation. INEC needs legal clarity to develop guidelines for key electoral activities, especially the party primaries set for April. The commission must also issue the 2027 election timetable at least 360 days before the next general election. Passing the law will ensure INEC does not prepare in the dark. Electoral integrity will suffer most if the bill is not passed.

Against this backdrop, the delay in the Nigerian Senate's passage of the bill is deeply concerning, despite its approval by the House of Representatives in December 2025. The delay stalls a reform process of national urgency. Once the Senate passes the bill, the next stage is harmonization and transmittal to the president for immediate assent. These processes can be concluded within two weeks. Continuous delays will affect electoral preparations, increase legal uncertainty, and put the legitimacy of the 2025 elections at risk. A stitch in time saves nine.

Samson Itodo is an election, democracy, and public policy enthusiast. Itodo serves as the Executive Director of Yiaga Africa, Principal Partner of the Election Law Center and Chairperson of the African Union Advisory Group on AI in Peace, Security and Governance. He is also a member of the Kofi Annan Foundation board and the Board of Advisers of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA). Comments and feedback to sitodo@yiaga.org.

The bill mandates political parties to maintain a digital register of their members, including name, gender, date of birth, address, National Identity Number (NIN), and photographs.

FEATURE

How Okpebholo's Cloud is giving Edo sovereign digital lungs

DR. PATRICK AHKERE EBOJELE

The launch of Edo Cloud by Governor Monday Okpebholo's administration has revitalised the state's digital governance journey, while exposing the deep structural flaws of the previous e-governance platform. That earlier system attempted to digitise public service processes but was hampered by legal, technical, and operational weaknesses, making a full overhaul inevitable.

With Edo Cloud, a fully state-owned, home-grown platform, Edo State has reclaimed control of its digital infrastructure, positioning itself as a model of sustainable e-governance in Nigeria.

One of the greatest weaknesses of the former platform was the lack of state ownership. While it supported paperless governance and digital workflows, Edo State did not own the intellectual property. In practical terms, the government was running daily operations on a system it could not fully control, a risky position for any serious administration.

Closely related was restricted backend access. Officials could not independently manage, modify, or fully control the platform without external consultants, creating a dependency that weakened institutional autonomy and exposed government operations to avoidable risks.

Limited data sovereignty was another concern. Without ownership, the state could not guarantee complete control over its data. In today's digital era, where data security and privacy are central to governance, this was a significant vulnerability.

Sustainability also suffered. The long-term future of the system depended on external parties. Any disruption in that relationship could slow service delivery, halt operations, and reverse years of digital progress.

The old platform lacked flexibility, too. It was not modular enough to allow easy upgrades, expansion, or integration of new services without heavy technical intervention, slowing innovation and limiting adaptation to the growing needs of the civil service.

Technical dependency further compounded the problem. Routine maintenance, updates, and troubleshooting required outside support, raising operational costs and restricting the development of in-house technical capacity.

These defects, while not obvious to the public, posed serious long-term risks to governance stability, service continuity, and digital independence, risks the Okpebholo administration refused to ignore.

Upon taking office, Governor Okpebholo ordered a comprehensive review of Edo's digital governance framework. According to Head of Service Dr. Anthony Okungbowa, the Governor found



GOVERNOR MONDAY OKPEBHOLO INSPECTING SOME OF HIS WORK

it unacceptable for Edo State to "breathe through the nostrils of another," a clear reference to digital dependency.

Rather than patching a fundamentally flawed system, the administration chose a bolder path: building a fully state-owned, home-grown platform that resolves issues of ownership, control, security, and sustainability once and for all.

This bold move gave birth to Edo Cloud, a state-owned cloud platform designed, built, managed, and maintained entirely within Edo State's technology ecosystem.

As part of the rollout, over 70 E-Governance Champions were trained at the John Odigie-Oyegun Public Service Academy (JOOPSA) in Benin City on the platform's interface, functionality, and deployment strategy. The workshop brought together civil servants from ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs), alongside technical experts and key stakeholders.

Dr. Okungbowa described Edo Cloud as a major leap forward in digital transformation, noting that it is more robust, secure, and user-friendly than the previous system. Unlike its predecessor, Edo Cloud guarantees full data sovereignty, ensuring the state alone owns, controls, and manages its digital infrastructure and data.

Unrestricted backend access empowers government technical teams to manage, modify, upgrade, and maintain the system without external interference. Sustainability is assured,

operational costs are reduced, and continuity of service is maintained regardless of political changes.

Technically, Edo Cloud's modular architecture allows continuous upgrades, easy integration of new services, and seamless expansion across MDAs, ensuring the platform grows

Edo Cloud's modular architecture allows continuous upgrades, easy integration of new services, and seamless expansion across MDAs, ensuring the platform grows with the civil service.

with the civil service.

Dr. Benjamin Ben, who led the development team, explained that Edo Cloud offers improved data control, a unified user experience, enhanced scalability, and automated workflows. It was deliberately designed to be simple and intuitive, enabling civil servants across MDAs to adopt and use it independently.

"With Edo Cloud, there will be no need for micro-management. E-Gov Champions will support their communities, aligning with His Excellency's directive that civil servants should be able to operate independently," Dr. Ben said.

Engr. Courage Adaghe, Head of IT Infrastructure and System Engineering at Edo State ICT Agency (ICTA), stressed that Edo Cloud is fully state-owned, guaranteeing security, sustainability, and flexibility. "The platform will serve as a one-stop digital solution for public service operations, fully built, managed, and maintained within Edo State's technology ecosystem," he said.

Beyond its technical advantages, Edo Cloud strengthens transparency, accountability, efficiency, and citizen participation. By digitising workflows, reducing paperwork, and automating processes, the platform is expected to significantly improve service delivery across MDAs.

Dr. Okungbowa noted that Edo Cloud enhances governance processes, reduces bureaucracy, and positions Edo State at the forefront of digital public service administration in Nigeria. He urged E-Gov Champions to act as ambassa-

dors of the new system, stressing that resistance often stems from poor communication and lack of understanding.

Mr. Ogbewe Osaro Anthony, an E-Gov Champion from the Edo State Social Investment Programme Office, commended Governor Okpebholo for approving a fully state-owned platform.

He described Edo Cloud as richer in content, more flexible, and better suited to public service operations than the former system, noting its potential to enhance collaboration and productivity across MDAs.

The former platform denied Edo State ownership, restricted access, limited sustainability, and relied heavily on external support, making it unsuitable for long-term governance stability. Edo Cloud directly addresses these weaknesses, delivering a system that is fully state-owned, secure, sustainable, scalable, user-friendly, and locally managed.

With Edo Cloud operational, Edo State has reclaimed control of its digital future and set a new standard for sub-national digital governance in Nigeria. In an era where data sovereignty, institutional autonomy, and service efficiency define governance success, Governor Okpebholo's investment in a home-grown cloud platform stands out as visionary and future-proof.

Edo State is no longer borrowing digital breath; it now owns its digital lungs.

• Ebojele is Chief Press Secretary to Edo State Governor Senator Monday Okpebholo