

Thirty-two years after his controversial annulment of the June 12, 1993, presidential election, Nigeria's former Head of State, Ibrahim Babangida, admitted for the first time that the late philanthropist and democracy hero Moshood Kashimawo Olawale (MKO) Abiola won the election.

The startling revelation was contained in Babangida's 420-page memoir titled, 'A Journey

Abiola won June 12 election —IBB

● Annulment was of 'Extreme Nat'l Interest'

in Service: An Autobiography of Ibrahim Babangida' which was launched in Abuja on Thursday with continental and national dignitaries in attendance.

The book reviewer, former Vice President Yemi Osinbajo,

said the "evil genius" and "Mara-dona" as Babangida was nicknamed answered the question as to whether Abiola won the June 12 election or not in his book.

"Although I am on record to have stated after the election that

Abiola may not have won the election, upon further reflection, and a closer examination of all available facts, particularly the detailed election results which are published as an appendix to this book, there was no doubt

that MKO Abiola won the June 12 elections," Babangida admitted in his book.

"Upon closer examination of the original collated figure from

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BABANGIDA

The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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EDOHIC holds medical outreach to mark Okpebholo's 100 days

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I've laid a solid foundation for Edo's progress —Okpebholo

RICHARD EWEKA

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo said he has laid a solid foundation for progress in Edo State as he marks his first 100 days in office.

Speaking at an event held at the Victor Uwaifo Creative Hub in Benin City, the governor reflected on the journey so far, emphasizing that his administration is setting the state on a path of lasting development.

Acknowledging the challenges he inherited, Okpebholo reiterated that his mission from day one has "to restore hope in leadership, create opportunities and set Edo on the path of lasting progress."

He noted that there is so

much to be done and his administration is taking decisive steps to turn its vision into reality.

Governor Okpebholo reeled out the achievements of his administration in the areas of security, infrastructure, natural resources and agriculture, and education, and assured the people that more benefits are in the offing.

"We have taken significant steps in strengthening our economy by increasing our Internally Generated Revenue IGR by N10 billion as we took our drive to corporate bodies.

"We have done away with wasteful consultants and invested resources in strengthening public efficiency and our commitment to job creation is evident in the growth of the public service, our talent development programme where

best minds contribute meaningfully to the growth and development of Edo State.

"Our administration understands that SMEs are the bedrock of our economy and so, we launched interests-free loans scheme for market women, farmers and artisans which will benefit over 5,000 people in collaboration with the World Bank.

"We have disbursed grants to over 400 small business owners ensuring resilience in the face of economic challenges," he said.

While reeling out achievements in the area of food, security and agriculture, the governor said his administration, in order to make food readily available for the people - had banned market unions who were responsible for price inflation in all the markets.

He said: "Healthcare remains a top priority within the last

100 days in office as we have established the first VVF centre in the South South, ensuring women receive specialized maternal care, run free malaria testing and free treatment across government hospitals for the next two years, upgrade health facilities across the State, ensuring quality healthcare services for Edo citizens.

"For my administration, security is not negotiable as we took bold steps by amending the anti-cultism and kidnapping laws with stiffer penalties which has led to significant reduction in cult-related violence.

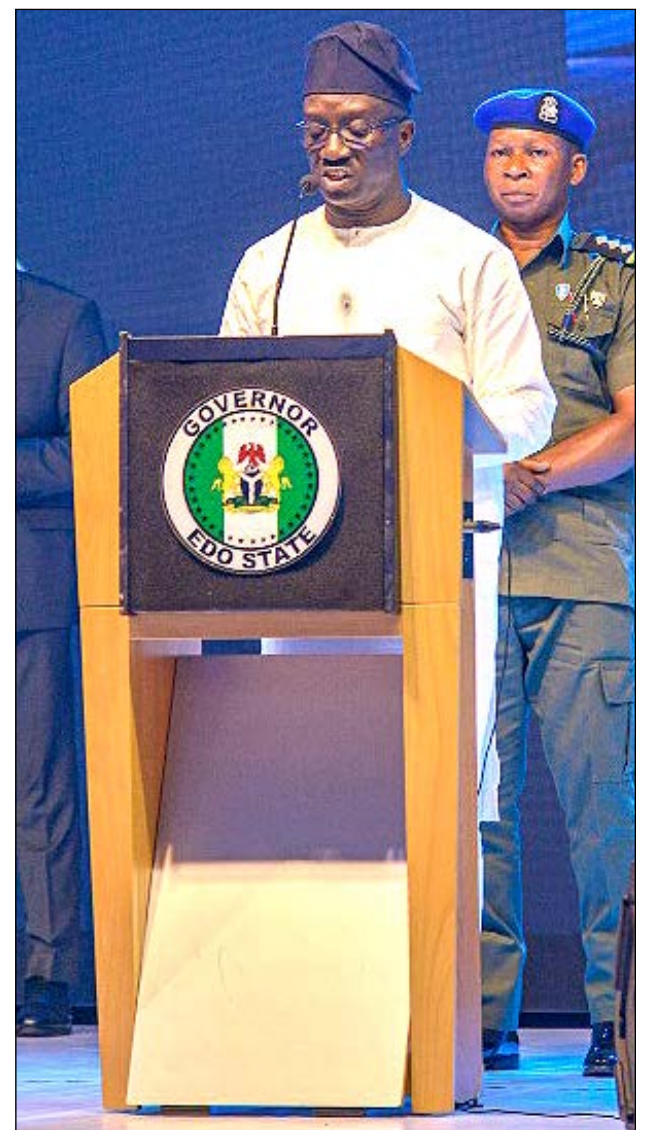
"We reorganized the Edo State Security Corps and recovered over 3,500 illegal firearms, procured 75 Toyota Hilux vehicles and 350 motorbikes to match the criminals in line with our promise to smoke them out.

"My administration is constructing major roads across the State with the historic Ramat Park flyover project which is set to ease traffic congestion in Benin City.

"Looking ahead, the future of Edo State under my leadership is bright as evidenced in the progress we have made together. With our economic development plan, we will prioritize agricultural infrastructure and investment in youth skills development as the State becomes the 5th largest economy in Nigeria."

He noted that the plan by his administration is to drive economic growth in the next four years.

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100 DAYS IN OFFICE:

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, delivering his address, during the celebration of his first 100 days in office on Thursday in Benin City.

Edo NUJ congratulates Gov Okpebholo, Idahosa on 100 days in office

The Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Edo State Council, has congratulated the Governor of Edo State, Senator Monday Okpebholo, and his Deputy, Hon. Dennis Idahosa, on reaching the milestone of their first 100 days in office.

In a joint statement signed by the Edo State NUJ Chairman, Dr. Festus Alenkhe, and Secretary, Comrade Andy Egbon, the union praised the administration's commitment to good governance and transparency, noting that its proactive

measures are already yielding positive results for the state.

The statement highlighted the Governor's visionary leadership and dedication to the welfare of Edo residents, citing notable advancements in key sectors such as healthcare, the economy, infrastructure, education, and public service.

According to the NUJ, these initiatives have not only tackled pressing challenges but have also laid the foundation for sustained progress and innovation.

The union also commended

the administration's emphasis on accountability and openness, which strengthens democratic governance in the state.

As the government continues on its path of transformation, the NUJ reaffirmed its commitment to supporting its vision for a better Edo State. The union also pledged continued collaboration with the government in promoting journalistic freedom and ensuring comprehensive reportage of government policies, projects, and initiatives.

DTSG launches whistleblowing policy on substandard projects —Pg 3

Edo University Iyamoh matriculates 1,528 students for 2024/2025 academic session —Pg 4

"Reel Love" makes history with a record-breaking opening weekend —Pg 6

NWF begins grassroots campaign, conducts weightlifting demonstration in school —Pg 11

Okpebholo appoints Oahimire as EDSPHCDA Secretary

EDWARD OSEGHE

The Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, has appointed Dr. Coulson Osoikhai Oahimire as the new Executive Secretary of the Edo State Primary Health Care Development Agency (EDSPHCDA).

The announcement was made public through a statement by Mrs. Nene Olaye, Head of the Public Relations Unit at EDSPHCDA.

Dr. Oahimire officially assumed office on Friday, February 14, 2025, bringing extensive experience in medical practice, healthcare management, and community health services.

A Nigerian medical professional with a strong background in clinical care, medical research, and healthcare administration, he holds a Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery from Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma.

He is also a Member of the Royal College of Surgeons, UK,

and the West African College of Surgeons.

His career spans public and private healthcare institutions, including the University of Benin

Teaching Hospital, Federal Medical Centre Yenagoa, and various specialist medical centers.

Dr. Oahimire has played a crucial role in improving pa-

tient care, medical training, and public health initiatives.

As the new leader of EDSPHCDA, he is committed to strengthening primary health-

care services in Edo State, improving access to quality medical care, and driving innovations to enhance community health and wellness.

Abiola won June 12...

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the 110 polling booths nationwide, it was clear that he satisfied the two main requirements for winning the presidential election – mainly majority votes and geographical spread – having obtained 8,128,720 against Tofa's 5,848,247 votes and securing the mandatory of one-third of the votes cast in 28 states of the Federation including Abuja."

Babangida's admittance lent credence to the initial submission of former President Olusegun Obasanjo who said years ago that if not for "bad belle" Nigerian colloquial for bad blood), MKO Abiola would have become Nigeria's President after the June 12, 1993 presidential election.

The annulment of the June 12, 1993, presidential election between Abiola of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and his main challenger Bashir Tofa of the National Republican Convention (NRC) sparked protests and unrest nationwide.

Buoyed by the incontrovertible evidence of his electoral victory, Abiola declared himself as president.

He was not only denied his mandate, but was subsequently imprisoned by the military regime of Sani Abacha who was Babangida's Chief of Defence Staff.

The political colossus died in troubling and deeply suspicious circumstances in detention on July 7, 1998.

He was 60 years old. One of his wives, Kudirat, was viciously assassinated on June 4, 1996.

The credibility or otherwise of the poll has dominated political discussions for decades with pro-democracy movement National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) and regional socio-political group Afenifere relentlessly demanding a remedy for the "injustice" done to the Abiolas and the Yoruba people of the South-West zone of Nigeria.

As a sort of remedy or compensation, in 2018, then President Muhammadu Buhari moved Democracy Day from May 29 to June 12 in honour of Abiola and to remind all Nigerians of one of the freest elections in the nation's history. The day is to celebrate the ideals of democracy since the beginning of the Fourth Republic 25 years ago.

Babangida, in his memoir, said he was gratified that Buhari recognised Abiola as a former

head of state.

"Looking back now, the June 12 saga was undeniably the most challenging moment of my life and in certain respects, one of the most painful. If I had to do it all over again, I would do it differently," he stated.

Ibrahim Babangida said that the annulment of the June 12, 1993, presidential election was for "national interest".

IBB, as he is fondly called, was the military president during that election which was widely believed to have been won by Moshood Abiola. The election was annulled without the announcement of a winner.

But 32 years after the election, Babangida said he acted to protect the country's interest.

"As the leader of the military administration, I accept full responsibility for all decisions taken by me. And June 12 happened under my watch. Mistakes, oversights, and missteps happen in quick succession, but I say in my book, in all matters, we acted in extreme national interest so that Nigeria could survive," the former military president told the gathering.

Babangida regretted the annulment of the poll which he said interrupted the return to democratic leadership.

"Our nation's march to democracy was interrupted, a fact that I deeply regret. But Nigeria survived and democracy is still alive, a testament to our resilience and commitment to progress. This book is part of my personal story with national history," Babangida added.

The 1993 presidential which many observers have adjudged as the most credible election in Nigeria's history has continued to dominate discussions in Nigeria.

Abiola was believed to have won the exercise. Calls for the then-Social Democratic Party (SDP) candidate to be declared as the winner of the poll have continued over the years.

But on Thursday, ex-Vice President Yemi Osibanjo who reviewed IBB's book made a striking revelation.

"Although I am on record to have stated after the election that Abiola may not have won the election, upon further reflection, and a closer examination of all available facts, particularly the detailed election results which are published as an appendix to this book, there was no doubt that MKO Abiola won the June 12 elections," Babangida wrote in the 420-page memoir.



PRESS BRIEFING:

Delta State Commissioner for Works (Rural Roads) and Public Information, Hon. Charles Aniagwu (middle); Chief Press Secretary to the Governor, Sir Festus Ahon (left), and EA to the Governor, Mr. Olise Ifeajika, at the press briefing in Asaba, Delta State.

Policy direction: Edo govt to hold stakeholders' sensitization workshop today

ESTHER NWULU

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Ministry of Information and Communication will today host a stakeholders' workshop aimed at enlightening citizens on the policy direction of

Governor Monday Okpebholo's administration.

According to an invitation letter addressed to heads of agencies under the ministry and obtained by The Nigerian Observer, the sensitization workshop, themed "Exposing the Policy Thrust of Monday Okpebholo's Administration,"

is scheduled to take place at the New Festival Hall, Government House, Benin City, at 9 a.m.

The letter, signed by Matthew Okunsebor, Director of Publication and Documentation for the Honourable Commissioner, stated that the event is designed to educate citizens on

the government's policies and programs and encourage public support for its initiatives.

"The programme, which aligns with the ministry's mandate, aims to enlighten and educate Edo residents on the administration's policy direction and the importance of embracing it," the letter noted.

EDOHC holds medical outreach to mark Okpebholo's 100 days

EDWARD OSEGHE

The Edo State Health Insurance Commission (EDOHC) has organized a one-day medical outreach across the state to commemorate Governor Senator Monday Okpebholo's first 100 days in office.

The event, held at the Edo Specialist Hospital and other

designated centers in Edo Central and Edo North, provided free healthcare services, insurance enrollment for vulnerable individuals, and an awareness campaign on the importance of accessible healthcare.

Attended by top government officials, healthcare professionals, and members of the public, the outreach underscored the administration's

commitment to strengthening the health sector.

EDOHC Director General, Mrs. Augusta Ikpea-Enaholo, emphasized that the initiative aligns with the governor's vision of ensuring equitable access to quality healthcare for all Edo residents.

She stated, "Healthcare is the bedrock of any thriving society, and ensuring that

every citizen, regardless of their background, status, financial disposition, or privilege, has access to quality medical services is not just a priority for us at EDOHC but a necessity."

She urged citizens to take advantage of the enrollment opportunity to benefit from the state's health insurance scheme.

I've laid a solid foundation for Edo's...

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National Chairman of the All Progressives Congress APC, Dr Umar Ganduje commended the governor for his developmental strides in the State, saying Okpebholo is a progressive, a performer and working Governor.

Unveiling the project - SHINE - the Secretary to the State Government, Musa Ikhilor, said SHINE is an acronym that stands for Security, infrastructure, Natural Resources and Agriculture, and Education, and it is the framework that drives the actions of Governor Okpebholo.

He noted that the actions of the Governor are backed up with plans derived from his many interactions with the people.

According to him, disengaging none State actors- consultants, the administration has been able to discover that the previous administration was appropriating N5.7 billion to subscribe to the e-gov platform.

The guest lecturer who is a former governor of Edo State

and senator representing Edo North Senatorial District, Comrade Adams Oshiomhole who spoke on the theme, "Practical Governance: A new Edo has risen", said Edo is truly rising as the Okpebholo administration is working and fixing the State.

He noted that the current administration has demonstrated practical governance in the last 100 days as there are evidences to show for its achievements.

Oshiomhole added that the administration led by Okpebholo is working without signing MoUs and hiring consultants to help develop the State.

"The Governor is a man who talks less but work more and in 100 days, we have more achievements to show to Edo people. What Edo people want is for your administration to continue to create the enabling environment for them to thrive.

"Before now, the previous administration used State funds to buy weapons for thugs to disturb the peace of the people of Edo State but Senator Monday Ok-

pebholo uses State resources to create the enabling environment for Edo people to live peacefully.

"In 100 days, the Governor provided security vehicles for security agencies in the State, revived Edo Line Transport Services after many years, what I could not achieve in 100 days in my time. In 100 days you have laid a very solid foundation for the progress, growth and development of Edo State," he stated.

Chairman of the planning committee and Deputy Governor of Edo State, Hon. Dennis Idahosa in his welcome address said the occasion was to take stock of the achievements of the Okpebholo led administration in the last 100 days.

He said the agenda of this present administration is to turn Edo State around and return its glory through the five-point agenda of the governor which focuses on development and growth, and making the citizens priority.

"In 100 days in office, we already have evidences to show that a new Edo is rising. As we

present our achievements of 100 days in office, Edo people will agree that this administration stands as a testament to practical governance as a new Edo is rising," he said.

Coordinator, Office of the First Lady, Edesili Anani Okpebholo thanked the Governor for his developmental strides in Edo State, urging him to give women more appointments in his administration.

She assured that the women will give him their 100 percent vote come 2028 governorship election.

Other guests present at the occasion included the former Minister for Budget and National Planning, Clem Agba; former Deputy Governors of Edo State, Lucky Imasuen, Pius Odubu and Comrade Phillip Shaibu; Speaker, Edo State House of Assembly EDHA, Rt. Hon Blessing Agbebaku; traditional and religious leaders, party leaders, civil servants, politicians, civil society groups market women and stakeholders.

LG chairman vows to enforce ban on open grazing

AJUWA VICTOR

In a bid to curb the nefarious activities of herdsmen, maintain peaceful coexistence between herders and the people of Ika South Local Government, the Chairman, Hon. Engr. Jerry Ehiwarior, has declared that the ban on open

grazing by the Delta State Government would be enforced in the area.

Speaking during a meeting with Alishimie and Hausa Communities recently, at the Ika South Council Secretariat, Agbor, Ehiwarior said that activities of the herders have been a serious concern, noting,

"It's painful to see crops eaten up by cows before harvest time. Open grazing is an illegal activity, and we must put an end to it."

Ehiwarior acknowledged the good relationship between the Agbor people and the Hausa Community, emphasizing that the enforcement of the

ban is not intended to remove food from anyone's table.

He urged the Hausa people to take responsibility for their cattles by ensuring that they are kept in fenced areas to prevent them from roaming freely.

"The Ika South Council will enforce the ban on open grazing in accordance with the

Delta State law, so as to prevent the destruction of crops and maintain peace.

The council boss added that he will provide ranches for herders and consult with key stakeholders and security agencies to ensure a smooth transition.

He went further to say that the council aims to maintain peaceful coexistence among herders and the people of Ika

South Local Government, avoiding tribal crisis.

It is hoped that the Chairman's renewed efforts in this regard will lead to finding permanent solution to herders' menace and promote peaceful coexistence in the local government.

He urged the affected communities to continue with their farming engagements. He assured them of the local government support.



MATRICULATING STUDENTS:

A cross section of matriculating students of Edo State University, Iyamoh.

Community installs Odionwere after 12 years of waiting

OISE MONDAY

The people of Igueosagie Village in Uhumwode Local Government Area of Edo State have installed Pa. Eybaru Edionwe as Odionwere after 12-years-period of interregnum.

The official installation which was held at the village Oguedion attracted a large crowd of indigenes, friends and well wishes as the village went into frenzy in celebration hoping for a new chapter in the life of the people.

At the Oguedion where the ranking elders were gath-

ered, Pa. Edionwe was taken through the traditional rites of installation before the ancestral sanctuary; after the Benin Monarch HRM Oba Ewuare II had earlier given his approval.

Thereafter, he offered prayers to God through their ancestors for good health, rapid growth, development and peace in Igueosagie.

Also praying for unity of purpose during his regime, the new Odionwere appealed for the cooperation and unwavering support of his people.

Speaking to journalists at the event, the Ozukpogieva of the community, Pa Simon

Omozeghian said they were overwhelmed with joy that after a long walk, peace has been restored to the village with the installation of the Odionwere made possible by the approval of HRM Oba Ewuare II.

Secretary to Igueosagie Village, Osadolor Sunday expressed joy that an Odionwere has been installed for the people adding that they now have a leadership the people can trust and look up to for direction.

In the same vein, Hon. Jerrylove Omoregiuwa expressed gratitude to everyone who helped in resolving the issues that hindered the installation

of a substantive Odionwere in Igueosagie before now.

"We want to thank His Royal Majesty, Oba Ewuare II CFR for resolving the Odionwere issue in Igueosagie and all those who helped us to resolve our crisis. Today, we are celebrating as one family, no more crisis, peace has been restored in this community."

In his remarks, Osakpomwan Omoragbon, the Okaighele of Igueosagie also thanked God, the Oba of Benin, Ewuare II and everyone who helped to make the day come true, saying it was a new dawn in Igueosagie for the betterment of all.

Varsity to integrate non-kinetic approach courses into curriculum

EDWARD OSEGHE

OKADA, EDO STATE

As part of efforts to enhance national security through a holistic approach, Igbinedion University, Okada (IUO), has announced plans to integrate non-kinetic security courses into its academic curriculum.

The university also called for a broader adoption of non-kinetic strategies in tackling insurgency, terrorism, and other security challenges in Nigeria.

Prof. Lawrence Ikechukwu Ezemonye, Vice-Chancellor of IUO, made this known during the institution's Annual Lecture Series, held on Wednesday,

February 19, at the University's Library Complex, Conference Hall.

"We believe, as today's presenter has demonstrated, that security challenges cannot be addressed solely through kinetic (military force-based) measures.

"Our university has been at the forefront of advocating for non-kinetic approaches. To further this initiative, we have directed the Buratai Centre for Contemporary Security Affairs to develop a full module for short courses and incorporate non-kinetic strategies into our academic curriculum," Prof. Ezemonye stated.

Delivering the keynote lecture titled "Optimizing Non-Kinetic Efforts in the Nigerian Army's

Approach to Military Operations," the guest speaker, Major General Ibrahim Manu Yusuf (Rtd.), OFR, a former General Officer Commanding (GOC) of the 7 Division, former Force Commander of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in N'Djamena, Chad, and former Commandant of the Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA), emphasized the necessity of integrating non-kinetic measures into Nigeria's security framework.

He stressed that while kinetic operations remain vital, sustainable peace can only be achieved through community engagement, economic empowerment, and governance reforms.

"The kinetic approach alone is not sufficient. Winning the

hearts and minds of people in conflict-prone areas through strategic non-kinetic efforts is essential," Maj. Gen. Yusuf stated, citing global examples to support his argument.

He further noted that factors such as weak governance and economic hardship often fuel insecurity, making non-kinetic interventions crucial in counter-insurgency efforts.

Prof. Olufemi Olufunmilade, Director of the Buratai Centre for Contemporary Security Affairs, reiterated the need for the government, armed forces, and intelligence agencies to adopt a balanced approach that integrates kinetic and non-kinetic strategies in addressing Nigeria's security challenges.

Egor LG launches 2nd phase of child immunization campaign

In a major push to improve public health, the Egor Local Government Council has launched the second phase of its child immunization program, targeting children between the ages of 12 to 59 months.

The initiative, spearheaded by Council Chairman Dr. Kelvin Eguakun, aims to protect young children from preventable diseases and ensure a healthier future for the community. The launch event, held at the council's secretariat in Uselu

Speaking on the importance of timely vaccinations, the chairman said is crucial for protecting children and the overall well-being of the community. He urged parents and guardians to take full advantage of the program to safeguard their children's health.

Beyond the immunization campaign, Dr. Eguakun also used the opportunity to assess

the punctuality and efficiency of council workers, reinforcing his administration's commitment to accountability and effective service delivery.

He stressed that while public health initiatives are essential, maintaining a dedicated and efficient workforce is equally important to achieving the council's broader goals.

With thousands of children expected to benefit from this second phase, the chairman said health officials have been mobilized to ensure that no child is left unvaccinated.

The council remains optimistic that the initiative will significantly reduce childhood illnesses and strengthen healthcare services in the area.

As the immunization campaign progresses, Egor Local Government strives in its commitment to building a healthier and more resilient community.

DTSG launches whistle-blowing policy on substandard projects

AJUWA VICTOR

Delta State Government, Wednesday, launched a whistle-blowing policy to enable citizens to report poor quality and substandard projects delivery in the state.

The State Commissioner for Works (Rural Roads) and Public Information, Mr. Charles Aniagwu, announced the establishment of the policy at a news conference in Asaba, the Delta State Capital.

Flanked by Chief Press Secretary to the Governor, Sir Festus Ahon and Executive Assistant to the Governor on Public Enlightenment (Projects and Policies), Mr. Olisa Ifeajika, the Commissioner said citizens can send text messages, WhatsApp messages with pictures and videos where possible to 09169978305.

He said: "So today we are launching a new partnership, and a partnership that emphasizes that Deltans do have a role in governance under the Oborevwo administration.

"As part of that demonstration of that invitation to join us in governance and ensure that value for money is given its pride of place in the administration of Rt. Hon. Sheriff Oborevwo.

"We are launching our whistle-blower line and that the line, even before we made it public, is already functional.

"Our whistle-blower line is a line that is designed for people to reach out to us. Our people in Delta, we want them to be able to interact with the government.

"If any project in your community is going on and you feel that either the contractor or the supervising ministry is performing below what you see or believe it should be the standard, our whistle-blower line is for you to be able to reach out to us.

"You can send text messages, WhatsApp messages and we also encourage pictures and videos if possible.

"We are using it to ensure that our people who are living in their respective communities participate in our governance process so that it is not only the ministry, or the officials of government that will be able to talk to us or talk to the government with respect to projects that are within your community.

"In less than 24 hours of even making this line public, we have already received reports about some projects that are being handled far below what the standard should be."

NEWS

Edo University Iyamoh matriculates 1,528 students for 2024/2025 academic session

Edo University Iyamoh has officially matriculated 1,528 students for the 2024/2025 academic session. The Acting Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Dawood Egbefo, made this announcement during the institution's 10th matriculation ceremony held at the Aliko Dangote Auditorium, Iyamoh. Prof. Egbefo stated that the newly admitted students

gained entry through the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME), Direct Entry, and transfers from other institutions.

"Today, we celebrate the matriculation of 1,528 candidates who have met the admission criteria and successfully completed the 2024/2025 UTME," Egbefo said.

He urged the new students

to uphold the university's regulations, maintain discipline, and take advantage of the institution's state-of-the-art technological and ICT facilities to enhance their academic journey.

While congratulating them, the Acting VC emphasized that the university has zero tolerance for social vices and advised students to steer clear of any actions that could hinder

their academic progress.

"Here, we place a high premium on discipline and adherence to the academic calendar, ensuring an uninterrupted academic session," he stated.

He also reaffirmed the university management's commitment—in partnership with the Edo State Government—to continuously provide world-class teaching and research

facilities.

Guest speaker, Prof. Omare Celia Otote, from Ambrose Alli University (AAU), Ekpoma, delivered the matriculation lecture titled "Building a Legacy of Excellence: Embracing Opportunities for Academic Growth."

Prof. Otote advised the students to set academic goals, remain disciplined, and embrace

continuous growth.

"Excellence is about making meaningful contributions and inspiring others. It is a journey, not a destination. Stay focused, ask questions, and be self-disciplined," she urged.

She encouraged them to reflect on the legacy they wish to build during their time at the university and to take deliberate steps toward achieving it.

FAAC postpones Feb meeting indefinitely

The Federation Account Allocation Committee has announced the indefinite postponement of its February 2025 meetings.

FAAC Secretary, Ali Mohammed, disclosed this in a statement released on Thursday.

"Further to our earlier notice referenced F.12090/T/68 dated February 14, 2025 on the above subject, I am directed to inform you that the meetings of the Federation Account Allocation Committee for the month of February 2025 have been post-

poned," Mohammed stated in a letter to FAAC members.

"In view of the foregoing, I am to further inform you that a new date for the meeting will be communicated to you later, while the previous communiqué that was issued will be reviewed accordingly.

"The Ministry regrets any inconvenience the postponement may have caused and conveys the honourable Minister of Finance and Coordinating Minister of the Economy's highest regards," the statement said.

Egor LG chairman leads revenue drive

In a determined effort to strengthen the financial stability of Egor Local Government, the Council Chairman Dr. Kelvin Eguakun personally led a revenue drive to sensitize business owners on the need to meet their obligations to the council.

The initiative aims to boost revenue collection and ensure the council meets its financial obligations, encouraging individuals and businesses to clear outstanding payments.

During the exercise, an unexpected level of response by taxpayers to the Clarion call. The overwhelming response demonstrated strong community support, with residents and business owners coming

forward to make payments.

The chairman expressed his appreciation for the cooperation, emphasizing the importance of collective responsibility in sustaining local government operations.

He also commended the taskforce team for their dedication and efficiency in executing the revenue drive.

The revenue sensitization effort proved highly successful, enabling the council to recover a substantial amount of overdue funds.

The chairman expressed optimism that consistent revenue generation will improve the financial health of the local government, to ensure better service delivery and long-term development for the community.

DTSG pledges more collaboration with resident doctors

AJUWA VICTOR

The Delta State Government has assured health associations of its continuous support and synergy that will benefit medical professionals and also improve the overall health and well-being of Deltans.

The Delta State Commissioner for Health, Dr. Joseph Onojaeme made this known in Asaba during a courtesy visit by the Association of Resident Doctors, Federal Medical Center, Asaba.

Dr. Onojaeme commended the resident doctors for their dedication and assured them of the State government's support in addressing their concerns, improve their welfare and enhance medical facilities to meet

global standards.

He congratulated the Association on its just concluded successful elections that brought on board a new Executive to pilot the affairs of the Association and wished them well.

On the issue of tax rebate, the Commissioner said that the Delta State Government has since commenced the tax rebate and directed the Association to liaise with the National body on the processors that will lead to Doctors working in the Federal Medical Center, Asaba to begin to benefit.

He assured the Association of his readiness within his capacity to give the necessary support that will enable them carry out their lined out activities for the year.



FUND RAISING CEREMONY:

President Bola Tinubu (left), and Gen. Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida, Babangida, during the Fund Raising Ceremony for the IBB Presidential Library and Book Presentation of Babangida's autobiography, "A Journey in Service", at Transcorp Hilton Hotel, Abuja, yesterday.

\$225.8m debt: Court adjourns proceedings in FBN against General Hydrocarbons

The Federal High Court sitting in Lagos has adjourned to March 25 when it will consider the application seeking to adjourn sine die (indefinitely) the proceedings in the case of an alleged \$225.8m debt owed First Bank Nig. Ltd & FBN Quest Trustees Ltd by an oil and gas company firm, General Hydrocarbons Limited (GHL).

Justice Deinde Dipeolu fixed the date after listening to the submissions of parties who told the court that they had appealed the last ruling which set aside the ex-parte order freezing the assets and accounts of General Hydrocarbons Limited.

The ruling of the court delivered on January 29th had elicited different interpretations from parties in the suit and eventually culminated in the appeals.

While First Bank appealed against the discharge of Mareva order against Global Hydrocarbons, and also applied for an injunction and/or suspension of the order pending the determination of the appeal, GHL asked the Court of Appeal for an order striking out or dismissing First Bank's suit for lack of jurisdiction, for being in gross abuse of the process of the lower court and for want of a reasonable cause of action.

At the resumption of proceedings before Justice Dipeolu, Senior Advocate of Nigeria, Victor Ogude, who appeared for First Bank told the judge that the matter was adjourned for the court to decide the order of proceedings especially as there were pending applications before the court.

The counsel confirmed that he had been served with an application for a stay of proceedings before the lower court and a verifying affidavit on the entry of the 2nd-5th defendant's appeal which he would like to react to.

He asked the judge to grant an adjournment to enable him file his reply and to address the

court on the propriety of staying the proceedings.

In his response, Senior Advocate of Nigeria, Olumide Aju who appeared for the 2nd -5th Defendants, (Nduka Obaigbena & the other directors of GHL) informed the court that his clients appealed a part of the ruling contesting whether the case could continue pending appeal.

Aju asked the lower court to adjourn "sine die" pending the matter at the court of appeal.

After listening to the parties, Justice Dipeolu adjourned till March 25 to consider the process to be filed by Ogude and to decide on whether or not to adjourn sine die.

FAAC postpones Feb meeting indefinitely

Delta State Government has said that no state government in the country had approved projects worth N275 billion and mobilised contractors to the tune of 40 percent for such projects at a single EXCO meeting.

The State Commissioner for Works (Rural Roads) and Public Information, Mr Charles Aniagwu, who disclosed this at a news conference in Asaba, said Governor Oborewori's governance philosophy of quality, efficiency and effectiveness was responsible for the history

making decisions at EXCO session of last week Thursday.

Aniagwu, who was in company of the Chief Press Secretary to the Governor, Sir Festus Ahon, and the Executive Assistant to the Governor on Public Enlightenment (Projects and Policies), Mr. Olisa Ifeajika, maintained that the state's finances remained in a solid shape, adding that all the development steps taken were without recourse to borrowing.

He said: "You recall when I had the privilege, alongside my colleague in the Ministry of

Finance, Fidelis Tilije, to brief you on the state of our finances, we were very, very clear on the fact that we are very, very solid and solvent.

"I also want to remind you when I said, in one of our interactions in the past, that Oborewori will continue to respond to critics with projects.

"In that last EXCO, Oborewori's response was not only clear, but was also resounding, even as it was deafening. We took that decision because we believe that we have the mandate of our people to deliver in

line with the MORE Agenda of the administration.

"The governor was very clear on the need for us to take those steps, to ensure that the three Senatorial Districts are covered, and to ensure that the number of sectors are also covered.

"For the first time in the history of any state government in the entire federation, Rt. Hon. Sheriff Oborewori, administration in Delta State, made it possible for us to have 40 percent advance payment for all projects that were awarded at the EXCO meeting."

Friday Sermon

A wise counsel

MALLAM HARUN UMAR

Assalamu alaykum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuh.

We begin by praising Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful, the Lord of all creation. We seek His guidance, His mercy, and His forgiveness. May His peace and blessings be upon our beloved Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), his family, his companions, and all those who follow his path until the end of time.

O Muslims! Another Friday has arrived, a time for reflection, introspection, and spiritual renewal. Today, we look into a profound hadith, a wise counsel from our Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), narrated by Abdullah ibn Umar (may Allah be pleased with him). This hadith, authentic and deeply insightful, offers guidance for navigating the complexities of life and achieving success in this world and the hereafter.

The lessons contained within this hadith are not mere stories of the past, they are timeless principles that remain relevant to our lives today. We must take them to heart, ponder their meanings, and strive to implement them in our daily actions.

Remember, O Muslims, that sermons are only beneficial when they are translated into practice. Words without deeds are like a tree without fruit. Allah (SWT) reminds us in the Quran that this is a reminder for those who are living.

This hadith, though concise, encapsulates profound wisdom. It addresses the challenges and trials that befall humanity and offers solutions rooted in faith and righteous conduct. The Prophet (peace be upon him), in his infinite wisdom, forewarned us about certain tribulations that would arise, urging us to be vigilant and prepared.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) addressed the Muhajirun (the migrants) upon their arrival in Madinah, a critical moment in Islamic history. He said, "O you Muhajirun, you will be tested with five things, and I seek refuge with Allah lest you experience them. Firstly, immorality never appears among a people but diseases which were never known before will spread among them."

Let us reflect upon this first warning. Immorality, in its various forms, has become rampant in our societies. We witness a decline in moral values, a disregard for ethical boundaries, and a normalization of behaviours that were once considered unacceptable. The consequences of this moral decay are evident in the rise of various diseases, both physical and spiritual. We see the emergence of illnesses that were unheard of in previous generations, a stark reminder of the divine wisdom in the Prophet's (peace be upon him) words.

O Muslims! The sanctity of marriage is being eroded, and infidelity has become widespread. We hear of shocking incidents that defy human decency, such as the betrayal of trust within families. The bonds of marriage, meant to be a source of love, compassion, and stability, are being shattered by lust, selfishness, and a lack of commitment. The rise of promiscuity, the objectification of women, and the normalization of premarital relationships all contribute to the breakdown of the moral fabric of society.

Furthermore, we see the rise of deviant behaviours that were once considered taboo. Homosexuality, lesbianism, bestiality, and other forms of sexual perversion are now openly practiced and even advocated for in some quarters. These acts not only violate the teachings of Islam but also contradict the natural order established by Allah (SWT).

The Prophet's (peace be upon him) warning about the spread of diseases is not merely a physical one. It also encompasses spiritual diseases, such as the hardening of hearts, the loss of faith, and the inability to discern right from wrong. When immorality becomes prevalent, it corrupts the soul and weakens the connection with Allah (SWT).

O Muslims! What will we say to Allah (SWT)

when we stand before Him and are questioned about our actions? How can we justify our complicity in the moral decay of our societies? We must take responsibility for our choices and strive to purify our hearts and our actions.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) also said, "And secondly, they do not decrease the measures and the scales but they will be afflicted with famine, severity of living and oppression of the rulers."

This warning highlights the importance of honesty and integrity in our dealings with one another. Cheating in business transactions, manipulating weights and measures, and deceiving others for personal gain are all acts that incur the wrath of Allah (SWT). These practices not only harm individuals but also destabilize the entire economy and create an environment of distrust and resentment.

We see this phenomenon playing out in our world today. Inflation is rampant, prices are soaring, and many people are struggling to make ends meet. While there are various factors that contribute to economic hardship, the Prophet's (peace be upon him) words remind us that dishonesty and unfair practices play a significant role.

O Muslims! We must be honest in our business dealings, fair in our transactions, and mindful of the rights of others. We must remember that Allah (SWT) is watching us and that we will be held accountable for our actions.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) continued, "And thirdly, they do not withhold the Zakat of their wealth but the rain will be withheld from them, and were it not for the animals, it would not rain."

This warning emphasizes the importance of fulfilling our obligations towards Allah (SWT) and towards the less fortunate members of society. Zakat, the obligatory charity, is a pillar of Islam and a means of purifying wealth and fostering social justice. When we withhold Zakat, we are not only disobeying Allah (SWT) but also depriving the poor and needy of their rightful share.

The consequences of neglecting Zakat are severe. The Prophet (peace be upon him) warned that rain would be withheld, leading to drought, famine, and hardship. This is a reminder that our actions have consequences, both in this world and the hereafter.

O Muslims! Let us be diligent in fulfilling our obligation of Zakat. Let us remember that the wealth that Allah (SWT) has bestowed upon us is a trust, and we will be held accountable for how we spend it.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) further said, "And fourthly, they do not break their covenant with Allah and the covenant with the Messenger of Allah but Allah will give power over them to their enemies who will take some of what they possess."

This warning highlights the importance of fulfilling our promises and honouring our agreements. Breaking covenants, whether with Allah (SWT) or with the Messenger or other people, is a sign of hypocrisy and a cause of Allah's (SWT) displeasure. When we break our covenants, we lose the trust of others and open ourselves up to humiliation and defeat.

O Muslims! Let us be truthful in our words, faithful to our commitments, and honourable in our dealings. Let us remember that Allah (SWT) is the witness to our covenants and that we will be held accountable for them.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) concluded, "And fifthly, when their rulers do not judge according to the Book of Allah and do not choose what Allah has revealed, Allah will cause them to kill each other."

May Allah (SWT) guide us, forgive us, and grant us His mercy. May He enable us to live our lives according to His pleasure and the teachings of our Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Ameen.

Mallam Harun Umar writes from the Edo State Muslim Pilgrims Welfare Board's Central Mosque.

PUBLIC NOTICE

EDO GIS AND THE PROPAGANDA OF FOREIGN CONSULTANTS

We write to clarify the nebulous misinformation being sponsored against the Edo Geographic Information Service (Edo GIS) and the state government in recent times.

While acknowledging the fact that Edo GIS is infact passing through a process of rejuvenation under Senator Monday Okpebholo, the Executive Governor of Edo state, we also want to assure the general public that there is no cause for alarm as the foreign consultants of the former administration were merely fighting a lost battle in their fool's paradise.

- 1) The Edo GIS was one of the dream-projects (like the storm water scheme) of former Governor Adams Oshiomhole, which he handed over to his successor; Godwin Obaseki for implementation. It was tailored after the Abuja Geographical Information System (AGIS), established by former President Olusegun Obasanjo in 2003 to computerize the land registry and cadastral maps of the Federal Capital Territory. It was also a template for all the states of the federation, and the Edo version did not take off until 2018.
- 2) In 2017, Governor Obaseki contracted foreign consultants to develop the Edo GIS, which included software development for the operations of the office for N3,785,882,000 billion. The Edo GIS project was supposed to be completed in two years; between 2017 and 2019, and handed over to the state government for its trained staff to manage.
- 3) But on completion in 2019, the foreign consultants stayed back. After the Covid of 2020, Governor Obaseki paid another N1,995,000,000 billion to them to manage the office for another two years; from 2021 to 2023. This was frowned upon by security agencies and other stakeholders considering the fact that Edo state had trained personnel including geospatial officers, surveyors, ICT professionals, etc. to do the work the foreign consultants were doing at inflated costs.
- 4) On the expiration of the 'second phase' in 2023, Obaseki engaged the same foreign consultants for another N2,946,569,299 for a 'needless' third phase, which spanned through into 2024 and now 2025.
- 5) For the past 8 years, Government officials in Edo GIS were never given access nor any privilege to operational information as the office was managed from a discreet company in Abuja where the consultants lived in scandalous opulence.
- 6) Since the Edo GIS was established, no fewer than 76,000 hectares of farmlands and urban lands have been acquired by the former Governor through proxies, and all documents were perfected by the consultants without due process nor proper payment of applicable fees. This is excluding the proposed Coral city where 1,200 hectares of land were targeted for conversion to private ownership. A former Managing Director of Edo GIS and a very competent one who resisted many of the former Governor's land grabbing cravings suffered unceremonial removal from office.
- 7) As soon as Governor Okpebholo won the September 2024 governorship election, the foreign consultants and agents of the former governor at the Edo GIS feared that their games were up. They and all other consultants in the various MDAs have severally blackmailed the government after the Governor declared that civil servants and NOT consultants must be allowed to do the work of government.
- 8) In 8 years, the Obaseki administration spent N8,727,451,299 billion for foreign consultants to run and develop software for Edo GIS office. They forgot that Governor Okpebholo was an ICT expert and strong in the enterprise of software development. He will not yield to any cheap blackmail.
- 9) For the benefit of the general public, Edo GIS is still functional and will continue to carry out its duties for the good of the people of Edo state. All documents including the Certificates of Occupancy, cadastral records and other data are now safer in the hands of Edo GIS than before, when the dubious foreign elements who paraded themselves as consultants held sway on behalf of the former Governor.
- 10) In one document made available to me, the foreign consultants on 29th August 2023 apparently in response to popular inquiry, wrote thus; "We will be handing over technical services consisting of Land Administration software, ICT hardware and software, power generators, and vehicles. These will include administrator access, passwords, and links all stated in detailed reports submitted to the MD." This document was signed by a certain Peter Ritchie, two years ago and obviously an Obaseki foreign consultant. Since then, they have refused to step aside but still fighting to remain as consultants.

We again want to assure the general public, and advise them to ignore all spurious reports against Edo GIS by agents of the former administration, who are yet to recover from their September 21st 2024 election defeat and loss of their hegemonic control of Edo lands and resources.

Edo state, now in safer hands.

SIGNED:

DR. TONY IKPASAJA
 Managing Director, Edo GIS

Entertainment

"Reel Love" makes history with a record-breaking opening weekend

UGO UGBOH

The highly anticipated Nollywood film *Reel Love*, presented by Timini Egbuson and directed by Kayode Kasum, has soared to new heights with a staggering ₦99.2 million in its opening weekend. This achievement cements the film's place in the Nollywood record books, delivering multiple milestones that underscore the industry's rapid evolution.

HISTORIC MILESTONES

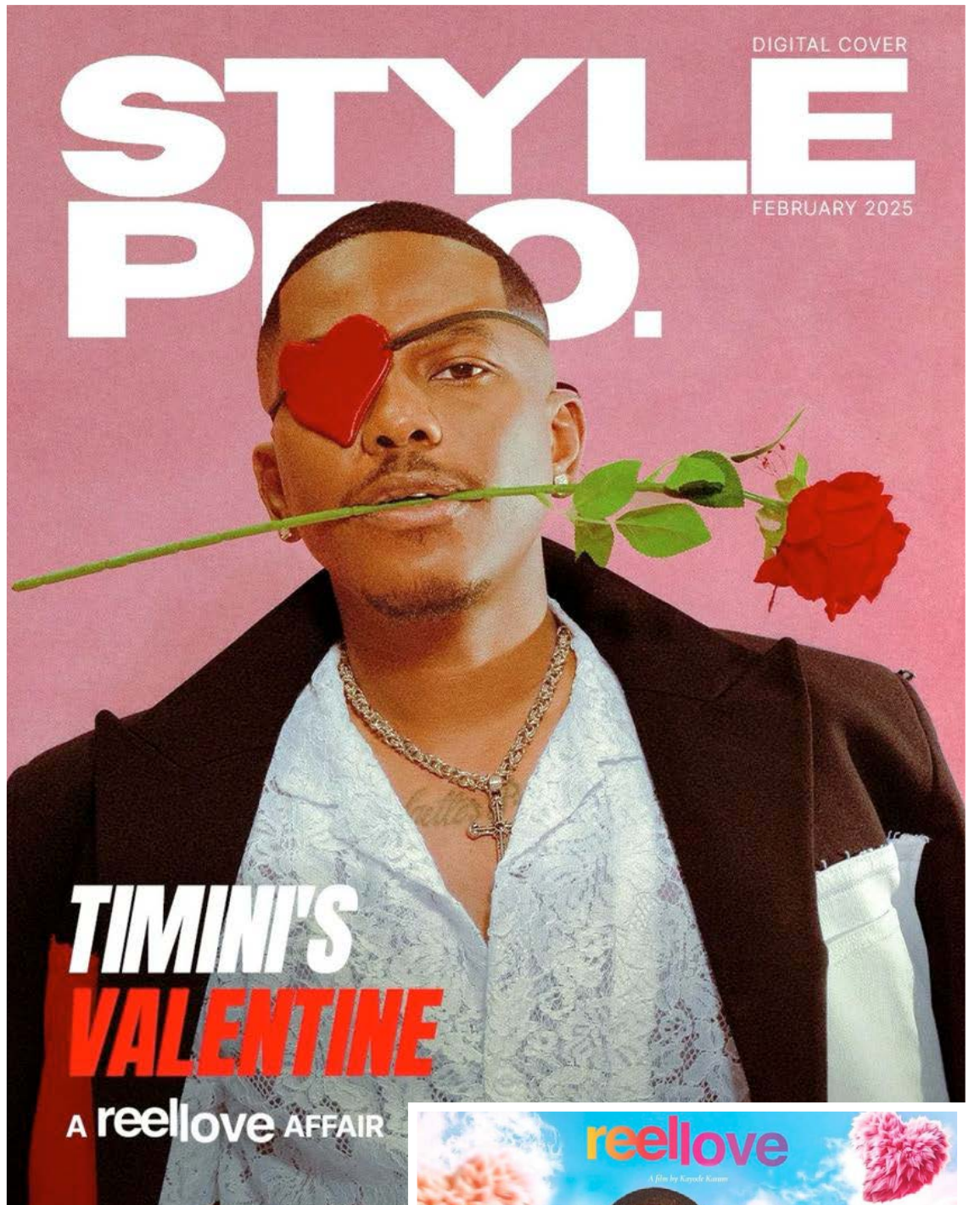
1. Nollywood's Strongest Opening Title of 2025
2. Highest Opening Weekend of All Time for a First-Time Producer
3. 4th Highest Grossing Nollywood Opening Weekend of All Time
4. Nollywood's Strongest Opening Valentine Film of All Time


At the heart of *Reel Love* is an ensemble cast led by Timini Egbuson—who also makes his mark as executive producer. The romantic drama, directed by acclaimed filmmaker Kayode Kasum, follows the journey of two young adults navigating modern relationships against the vibrant

backdrop of Lagos. Audiences and critics alike have praised its relatable themes, heartfelt performances, and high production values, all contributing to the film's remarkable box office success.

The record-breaking debut of *Reel Love* highlights the growing prominence of Nollywood on the global stage. By delivering an engaging story that resonates with both local and international audiences, the film showcases the power of homegrown talent and underscores why Nigerian cinema continues to attract global attention. The strong opening weekend also sets a new benchmark for up-and-coming filmmakers, particularly those producing their first feature.

Reel Love is still showing in cinemas nationwide, offering moviegoers a chance to experience this milestone-making film firsthand. With its undeniable success, industry observers predict that *Reel Love* will inspire a wave of innovative Nollywood projects in the coming months, further solidifying the industry's reputation as a force to be reckoned with in the world of film.



 <p>The Nigerian Observer ...That the people may know</p>	<h2 style="margin:0;">ADVERTISEMENT RATES (PRINT)</h2>
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FULL PAGE	517,344	556,145	369,500	397,213	325,150	349,536	665,156	715,043	443,440	476,698
13 X 4	369,500	397,213	295,600	317,770	206,938	222,458	443,500	476,763	369,550	397,266
10 X 4	340,000	365,500	273,500	294,013	177,400	190,705	370,000	397,750	295,600	317,770
HALF PAGE	295,600	317,770	236,500	254,238	147,800	158,885	340,000	365,500	273,450	293,959
10 X 3	221,700	238,328	147,800	158,885	118,300	127,173	266,000	285,950	251,300	270,148
13 X2	206,900	222,418	133,000	142,925	103,500	111,263	221,800	238,435	147,810	158,896
QUARTER PAGE	192,150	206,561	118,250	127,119	88,690	95,342	236,500	254,238	133,000	142,975
CENTER SPREAD	1,356,968	1,466,992						B/W	1,148,181	1,241,276
HALF CENTER	991,590	1,071,989						B/W	887,272	959,212

FRONT PAGE POSITIONS	OTHER SIZES
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FRONT PAGE POSITIONS					OTHER SIZES				
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	RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)	RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)		RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)	RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)
FP 6X2	89,800	96,535	105,450	113,359	6 X 2	60,640	65,188	49,140	52,826
FP 5X2	81,100	87,183	97,300	104,598	5 X 2	51,950	55,846	42,120	45,279
FP 4X2	73,000	78,475	80,700	86,753	4 X 2	45,260	48,655	34,400	36,980
FP 3X2	64,870	69,735	73,000	78,475	3 X 2	30,900	33,218	26,600	28,595
FP 2X2	59,000	63,425	64,900	69,768	2 X 2	18,680	20,081	15,600	16,770
					2 X 1	12,400	13,330	7,415	7,971
					CAC	38,000	40,850		

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PAGES 2 & 3	ADD 55% SURCHARGE	Reconciliation/Corrections of name	6000	8000
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PAGES 4 & 5	ADD 40% SURCHARGE			
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EFFECTIVE FROM FEBRUARY 1, 2023

Israel's 'hearts lie in tatters' as Hamas hands over first dead hostages

The hearts of an entire nation lie in tatters," Israel's president has said, as the bodies of four hostages taken alive by Hamas in its attack on 7 October 2023 were returned to Tel Aviv.

Hamas says the bodies are those of a mother and two children from the Bibas family, whose unknown fate has gripped Israel, and Oded Lifschitz, 84, a veteran peace activist.

President Isaac Herzog wrote "there are no words" in a post on social media platform X, asking the four for forgiveness "for not bringing you home safely".

It is the first time the group Hamas has returned captives dead since the ceasefire began last month, with Israel saying it will confirm their identities after forensic examinations.

Six living hostages are due to be freed on Saturday.

The news - though unconfirmed by the Israeli government - that Shiri Bibas, 33, and her sons (who would now be aged five and two) were dead triggered an outpouring of grief across the country.

In a statement before the handover, the Bibas family in Israel said it was "in turmoil", adding that "until we receive definitive confirmation, our journey is not over".

In choreographed scenes reminiscent of recent handovers of living hostages, four black coffins were laid out on a stage decked with propaganda in Khan Younis in southern Gaza in front of crowds of spectators.

A Red Cross official appeared to sign documents at a table alongside armed Hamas fighters before the coffins were driven away in Red Cross vehicles.

They were then transferred to Israeli forces in Gaza and brought to Israel. People - many with Israeli flags and yellow ones representing the hostages - lined the streets as a police convoy with the coffins passed by. The bodies have been taken to the Abu Kabir forensic institute in Jaffa, Israel, where they will undergo post-mortems.

Earlier the Red Cross had called for a dignified handover by Hamas following widespread denunciation of the way in which it had released hostages in recent weeks.

It is not known how Shiri, Kfir and his brother Ariel - if confirmed - died. Hamas said in November 2023 that they had been killed in an Israeli air strike, without providing evidence. At the time, then-member of Israel's war cabinet Benny Gantz said there was no confirmation of the claim.

The family were taken along with the father, Yarden, from kibbutz Nir Oz when hundreds of Hamas gunmen burst through the border with Israel and attacked communities, security forces sites and a music festival.

About 1,200 people - mostly civilians - were killed in the attack and 251 others taken back to Gaza as hostages. Israel launched a massive military campaign against Hamas in response, which has killed at least 48,297 Palestinians - mainly civilians - according to the Hamas-run health ministry.

Yarden Bibas, 35, was released on 1 February along with two other hostages as part of an exchange for 183 Palestinian prisoners held by Israel.

Oded Lifschitz, a retired journalist, was also taken from Nir Oz, along with his wife, Yocheved. The 85-year-old woman was freed by Hamas two weeks later.

Oded Lifschitz had been held by the armed Palestinian group Islamic Jihad since 7 October 2023.

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CROWDS GATHERED:

Hamas fighters handed over four black coffins to the Red Cross on Feb. 20 in Khan Younis, where crowds gathered in the rain to watch the ceremony

Passengers on crashed Toronto plane offered US\$30,000 each

Delta Air Lines is offering US\$30,000 (£23,792) to each person on board a plane that crash-landed in Toronto on Monday - all of whom survived.

As it landed in the Canadian city, the plane skidded along the runway in flames before flipping over and coming to a halt upside down. Passengers described their amazement as most of them walked away without injuries.

It remains unclear what caused the incident, which is under investigation.

There were 76 passengers and four crew on the flight, which had travelled from the US city of

Minneapolis before making its crash-landing in Canada.

A spokesperson for Delta said the money offer had no strings attached and did not affect customers' rights.

The plane crew and emergency responders were praised for their quick work in removing people from the wrecked vehicle. The plane's various safety features have also been credited for ensuring no loss of life.

All but one of the 21 passengers who were taken to hospital had been released by Wednesday morning, the airline said.

Delta's chief told BBC's US partner CBS News that the

flight crew were experienced and trained for any condition.

The airline's head Ed Bastian told CBS the plane crew had "performed heroically, but also as expected", given that "safety is embedded into our system". He said Delta was continuing to support those affected.

Several theories about what caused the crash have been suggested to the BBC by experts who reviewed footage, including that harsh winter weather and a rapid rate of descent played a role.

One passenger recalled "a very forceful event", and the sound of "concrete and metal"

at the moment of impact. Another said passengers were left hanging upside down in their seats "like bats".

The cockpit voice recorder and flight data recorder have been recovered from the wreckage. The investigation is being led by Canada's Transportation Safety Board (TSB), supported by US officials.

The accident was the fourth major air incident in North America in a space of three weeks - and was followed on Wednesday by a crash in Arizona in which two people lost their lives when their small planes collided.

Trump calls Zelensky a 'dictator' as rift between two leaders deepens

President Trump has spent the day attacking Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky, calling him a "dictator" and deepening the rift between the two leaders.

His attacks came after Zelensky, reacting to US-Russia talks in Saudi Arabia from which Kyiv was excluded, said the US president was "living in a disinformation space" governed by Moscow.

Speaking at a Saudi-backed investment meeting in Florida, Trump said the only thing Zelensky "was really good at was playing Joe Biden like a fiddle".

The "dictator" slur quickly prompted criticism from European leaders including German

Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who said "it is simply wrong and dangerous to deny President Zelensky his democratic legitimacy".

UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer made it clear he backed Zelensky in a phone call to the Ukrainian president.

A Downing Street spokesperson said Sir Keir "expressed his support for President Zelensky as Ukraine's democratically elected leader".

It was "perfectly reasonable to suspend elections during war time as the UK did during World War Two", the spokesperson added.

Zelensky is due to meet the American envoy for Russia and Ukraine, Keith Kellogg, on

Thursday. He said it was crucial that the discussion - and overall co-operation with the US - remains constructive.

In a social media post, Zelensky said that peace could be more secure with the US and Europe.

Zelensky's five-year term of office was due to come to an end in May 2024. However, Ukraine has been under martial law since Russia launched its full-scale invasion in February 2022 and elections are suspended.

Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson also criticised Trump's use of the word "dictator" while German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock called the comments "absurd".

"If you look at the real world

instead of just firing off a tweet, then you know who in Europe has to live in the conditions of a dictatorship: people in Russia, people in Belarus," she told broadcaster ZDF.

Speaking in Florida, Trump called Zelensky a "dictator", just hours after using the same word in a Truth Social post about the Ukrainian president.

"He refuses to have elections. He's low in the real Ukrainian polls. How can you be high with every city being demolished?" Trump said.

He also referenced his attempt to get rare-earth minerals from Ukraine, accusing Zelensky's government of "breaking the deal".

'I cried for days': Office raids and arrests shock aid workers in Yemen

When Hanaa arrived at work a few months ago, she found "drawers and doors smashed, and the boss surrounded by security personnel".

Computers, phones, cameras and documents were all confiscated, her boss was arrested and the organisation's bank account was eventually frozen.

Hanaa works for a US-funded non-governmental organisation (NGO) in Yemen, that supports women's empowerment and trains people to solve problems through negotiation.

But the country's civil war, which has lasted more than a decade and created one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world, has made life for NGO workers increasingly dangerous.

Twenty-four UN employees, along with workers from other local and international NGOs have been detained by Houthi rebels in the past few months.

A wave of arrests in January has intensified the climate of fear - one person from the World Food Programme who was detained died in custody.

The situation has left humanitarian workers feeling their freedom of movement has been greatly restricted. As a result, many organisations, including the UN, are scaling back operations, threatening to make life for people already devastated by war even worse.

Ten years ago, Iranian-backed Houthi militants seized control of much of the west of Yemen, including the capital Sanaa, from the internationally-recognised government. Saudi Arabia, has since carried out intensive air raids on its neighbour - with logistical and intelligence support from the US and UK - to try to prevent the Houthi rebels from taking control of the

whole country.

It was Houthi officials who raided Hanaa's office and detained her boss, and she fears retribution if she speaks out. So, for their safety, we have changed the names of Hanaa and others in Yemen who we interviewed for this article.

By cracking down on humanitarian workers, Hanaa believes the Houthis aim to spread fear among the public. But what hurts her deeply is how the public reacted.

"When I checked social media, it was appalling to find out that people see us as spies," she says.

A day after her boss was detained, Hanaa was glued to her TV, watching a pro-Houthi channel airing what it described as confessions of espionage, made by nine local people who had once worked at the long-closed US embassy in Sanaa. They were arrested in 2021.

That was the moment she feared things would get worse for her, as she worked for a US-funded NGO. She decided to leave her home in northern Yemen.

By the time she reached the south, she felt traumatised. "For three days I couldn't eat, I couldn't sleep. I couldn't stop crying," she says.

Now she's worried that US President Donald Trump's decision to re-designate the Houthis as a terrorist organisation could lead them to target everyone who works in US-funded projects.

Once someone is arrested, it can be hard for them to get any support, according to Yemeni lawyer Abdulaziz, who represents 14 detainees. They have been behind bars for several months - three are UN staff, while the others are employed by local NGOs. "During the first three months of detention, my clients didn't communicate with anyone," he says.

News

Foreign

YouTuber's 'dirty' comments spark massive row in India

Dirty? "Perverved mind." "Disgusting." These were the words India's Supreme Court used on Tuesday while granting interim protection from arrest to a popular YouTuber who has been in the eye of a storm in the country over the past week.

The furore began after Ranveer Allahbadia - whose YouTube channel BeerBiceps has eight million followers - asked a contestant the question: "Would you rather watch your parents have sex every day for the rest of your life or join in once and stop it forever?"

The comments, made on the show India's Got Latent on 9 February, sparked massive outrage, police cases and even death threats. YouTube quickly removed the episode, but that didn't stall the tide of anger directed at Allahbadia and the show.

In fact, the amount of attention the incident has received is mind-boggling: it has made national headlines, been covered on primetime TV and some of India's most prominent news sites have even run live pages.

Not surprising, considering the star status of Allahbadia. He has interviewed federal ministers, top Bollywood celebrities, cricketers and Hollywood actors. And last year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi handed him a "National Creators Awards" trophy.

Since the controversy erupted, Allahbadia and the show's creator, Samay Raina, have apologised for the comments and Raina has taken down all previous episodes of the show. The Supreme Court in its recent order has even banned Allahbadia from posting content on social media.

But the incident continues to make news.

"It feels like the state is trying to make an example out of Allahbadia," says Apar Gupta, founder of the Internet Freedom Foundation. Saket Gokhale, an opposition lawmaker, also condemned the targeting of Allahbadia and the show.

"Crass content can be criticised if it offends you. However, you cannot have the state persecute and lock up people for offending your 'moral senti-

ments," he wrote in a post on X. Popular comedian Vir Das also weighed in on the controversy and criticised news channels for their one-dimensional coverage of the incident and for taking a disparaging view of all digital content.

Allahbadia's remarks and the subsequent backlash have triggered debates around free speech and India's obscenity laws; it has also sparked conversations around the thirst for viral content and the consequences its makers face when their content crosses lines upheld by the very people who watch it.

Raina's show, which debuted in June, has been popular from the start, with each episode being viewed tens of millions of times on YouTube. And it hasn't shied away from kick-starting controversies either.

The show has platformed some bizarre performances and judges and contestants have been seen making crass and crude comments more than a few times. Critics have accused the show of spewing misogynistic views and for body-shaming guests.

A popular fashion influencer once walked out of the show after a male contestant compared her to a former adult film

actress while another asked her about her "body count" (a slang term for the number of sexual partners a person has had).

But that seems to have been the appeal of the show too.

Fans of the show have hailed it for championing "raw talent and unfiltered jokes". Some have said that they liked the roasts - a form of insult comedy - which was popular on the show.

Experts have underscored how, with the entertainment landscape exploding, digital content creators often feel compelled to push the envelope - even if it means resorting

to the risqué and lewd - just to gain views and virality.

It's safe to say the show pushed the envelope and the buttons of many. But then, it backfired.



FALSELY BLAMING UKRAINE:

The U.S. president was flying back to Washington from a meeting in Florida on Wednesday evening, after falsely blaming Ukraine for starting the war with Russia

British tourist dies trekking with friend in Himalayas

A British tourist has died while trekking with a friend in the Himalaya mountains in northern India.

The two British men were hiking in "extremely difficult terrain" near the village of Thathri in Dharamshala when one of them was critically injured, local emergency services said.

The man was rescued and taken down the mountain on a stretcher, but by the time he reached hospital nearly 24 hours later he was declared dead, rescuers said.

The Foreign Office said they were "supporting the family of a British man who has died in India and are in contact with the local authorities".

According to the Times of India, the pair were hiking the Triund trek, a popular route of about 7km (4.3 miles) in the foothills of the Dhauladhar

mountain range.

They were on their descent when one of the men fell and his friend sought help from the nearby village, the newspaper reports.

Local rescuers, the Himachal Pradesh State Disaster Response Force, said on X that the call for their help had come in at 18:00 on Sunday, and a team of 10 people had been sent up the mountain to search for the men.

"After four hours of trekking, the team located the victims at 10:30pm with one trekker in a critical condition. They secured the critical trekker onto a stretcher and began the challenging descent along with his co trekker.

"The rough terrain and repeated crossings of a rivulet made progress extremely slow, requiring nearly two hours to cover just 100m."

Overnight the team requested backup, and more rescuers arrived in the morning.

"They continued transporting the victims but faced extreme difficulty due to the steep landscape, requiring multiple anchorings of the stretcher."

The man was finally taken to hospital at 17:08 on Monday but was declared dead on arrival, rescuers added. His friend was unharmed.

The local authorities in Kangra district had brought in a temporary ban on trekking in high-altitude areas, but the Times of India says the two tourists were unaware of it.

It said they had reached the snowline - the part of the mountain where snow is on the ground all year round.

The victim has yet to be formally identified.

Fog harvesting could provide water for arid cities

Capturing water from fog - on a large scale - could provide some of the driest cities in the world with drinking water.

This is what researchers in Chile have concluded after studying the potential of fog harvesting in the desert city of Alto Hospicio in the north of the country.

Average rainfall in the region is less than 0.19in (5mm) per year.

"The city also has a lot of social problems," said lead researcher Dr Virginia Carter Gamberini, from Universidad Mayor. "Poverty, drugs, many slums."

With no access to water supply networks, people in the slums rely on drinking water that is delivered by truck.

However, clouds of fog that regularly gather over the mountain city are an untapped source, researchers say.

How do you harvest fog?

Capturing fog water is remarkably simple - a mesh is hung between poles, and when the moisture-laden clouds pass through that fine mesh, droplets form. The water is then channelled into pipes and storage tanks.

It has been used at a small scale for several decades, mainly in rural South and Central America - in places with the right foggy conditions. One of the biggest fog water harvesting systems is in Morocco, on the edge of the Sahara Desert.

However, Dr Carter says a "new era" of much larger-scale fog harvesting could provide a more secure and sustainable supply of water in urban environments where it is most needed.

She and her colleagues carried out assessments of how

much water can be produced by fog harvesting, and combined that information with studies of cloud formation in satellite images and with weather forecasts.

From this, they concluded that the clouds that regularly form over the Pacific - and are blown across the coastal mountain city - could provide the people of Alto Hospicio's slums with a sustainable source of drinking water. They published their findings in a paper in the journal Frontiers of Environmental Science.

Alto Hospicio's fog forms over the Pacific Ocean - when warm, moist air flows over cold water - and is then blown over the mountains. The reliably foggy conditions here allowed Dr Carter and her colleagues to pinpoint areas where the largest volumes of water could be harvested regularly from the clouds.

Based on an annual average water collection rate of 2.5 litres per square metre of mesh per day, the researchers worked out:

* 17,000 sq m of mesh could produce enough water to meet the weekly water demand of 300,000 litres that is currently delivered by truck to urban slums

110 sq m could meet the annual demand for the irrigation of the city's green spaces

*Fog water could be used for soil-free (hydroponic) agriculture, with yields of 33 to 44lb (15 to 20kg) of green vegetables in a month. Alto Hospicio is on the edge of the Atacama Desert - one of the driest places on Earth. With little to no precipitation, the main water source of cities in the region are underground aquifers.

Trump says Russia 'has the cards' in Ukraine peace negotiations

Donald Trump says he believes Russia has "the cards" in any peace talks to end the war in Ukraine because Russia has "taken a lot of territory".

The US president told the BBC he trusted that Moscow wants to see an end to the war, which Russia started when it waged a full-scale invasion almost three years ago.

Trump was flying back to Washington DC after speaking at a Saudi-backed investment meeting in Florida, where he called Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky a "dictator" for the second time in a day.

Trump has been angered

after Zelensky, reacting to US-Russia talks in Saudi Arabia from which Kyiv was excluded, said the US president was "living in a disinformation space" governed by Moscow.

"I think the Russians want to see the war end, I really do. I think they have the cards a little bit, because they've taken a lot of territory. They have the cards," Trump told the BBC on Air Force One.

When asked if he trusts that Russia wants peace, Trump said "I do".

He was speaking after lashing out at Zelensky in Florida, where Trump called the Ukrainian president a "dictator", just

hours after using the same word in a Truth Social post.

A White House official said Trump's post was in direct response to Zelensky's "disinformation" comments.

"He refuses to have elections. He's low in the real Ukrainian polls. How can you be high with every city being demolished?" Trump said in Florida. Zelensky's five-year term of office was due to come to an end in May 2024. However, Ukraine has been under martial law since Russia launched its full-scale invasion in February 2022 and elections are suspended.

Trump has attempted to

make an issue out of Zelensky's popularity, claiming the Ukrainian president had only a 4% approval rating. But BBC Verify reports that polling conducted this month found 57% of Ukrainians said they trusted the president.

The "dictator" slur quickly prompted criticism from European leaders including German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who said "it is simply wrong and dangerous to deny President Zelensky his democratic legitimacy".

UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer made it clear he backed Zelensky in a phone call to the Ukrainian president.

Sports

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

NWF begins grassroots campaign, conducts weightlifting demonstration in school

In its bid to expand the scope of weightlifting in Nigeria and discover future champions, the Weightlifting Federation of Nigeria (NWF) has begun grassroots development programme aimed at discovering and nurturing future champions for the sport.

Consequently, the federation recently carried out a demonstration show in Abuja.

The Demonstration which took place at the Lead British International School Gwarinpa, in the Federal Capital Territory, students being introduced to the game of weightlifting.

Speaking shortly after the demonstration, President, Nigeria Weightlifting Federation (NWF), Dr Abdul Ibrahim, said the essence of the demonstration which took place during the school's

inter-house competition, is to encourage the children to take to weightlifting sport as a career.

Dr Abdul noted that discovering the children with talents for weightlifting is critical so that when they are nurtured, they will take over from the aging ones. He described the enthusiasm shown by the students and teachers as commendable adding that the federation will consolidate on the

programme and will soon embark on tour of Nigerian Schools across the country.

"We are looking at catching them young, and no better place to do that than coming to schools especially when the children are still young, so that we can now begin to build from there.

"We are able to introduce the sport to schools; it's just the beginning, and it would continue in other schools. Our plan is to tour most schools in the country to introduce the game of weightlifting to the children and even teachers.

"Weightlifting is one of Nigeria's key sports and it takes one to heights that you can never imagine. We have current and past weightlifters who have done the country proud. Lifters like Lawal Rufiat and Umofia Edidiong are all flying the country's flag globally and have won laurels as well. Right now we are thinking about how the children can go to the global world through weightlifting. Weightlifting has been so wonderful, and I think parents, pupils, and teachers are to learn from it.



Nunez's Liverpool career has been a mix of brilliance and woeful misses

There is an obvious joke to be made of the fact Darwin Nunez took three attempts to get the correct wording on his post on X yesterday. Can't even hit the target online, etc.

Two posts were swiftly deleted seconds after hitting the send button for not saying quite what he wanted, perhaps, or going too strong. Maybe a typo along the way, too, but he got there in the

end and vowed to 'never give up'.

If only he had the chance to press 'delete' in real life when he misses gilt-edged chances in defining games. According to Opta, Nunez misses 0.99 'big chances' a game – more than anyone in the league although, scoring machine Erling Haaland is on 0.95.

The Norwegian, who also joined in summer 2022, has scored 117 goals to Nunez's 39

in that time, clearly getting over his bad misses by scoring the next chance. The problem with Nunez is that he lets his bad moments get to his head and fails to back up his good moments.

This is the Darwin Nunez Conundrum, season three, episode... well, we've lost count. In fact, you may well have read a very similar piece before: the Uruguay striker is at yet another

crossroads and here we are, nearly three years at Liverpool with more questions than answers.

Is he an elite striker or, as home fans often taunt him with on his travels, 'just a s*** Andy Carroll'? Is he the man for the big moments or one not cut out for this cut-throat level? Is he a well-rounded forward that contributes to the team or a square peg in a round hole?

NFF sets Tuesday deadline for CAF B-License coaching course registration

The Nigeria Football Federation has announced that midnight on Tuesday, 25th February 2025 will be the deadline for registration, for those who desire to participate in the four-month CAF B-License Coaching Course that will run between April and August this year.

The course, according to the NFF Technical Director, Coach Augustine Eguavoen, is designed to enhance the capacity of Nigerian coaches and prepare them for current and future challenges, and is for both men and women coaches.

"As I stated some weeks ago, the CAF B-License course is part of NFF's strategic effort to build



the capacity of coaches across the country, and will be done in modules. It will run between 7th April and 25th August 2025, and to be eligible, a candidate must be an active coach, possess a CAF

C-License certificate that has been put to use in the past two years, must be able to read and write in the English language, have basic computer skills and a laptop, have a valid G-mail ac-

count, and must submit a medical certificate that proves he/she is physically and mentally fit to undertake the course.

"The response has been pretty awesome, and that is why we now have to bring the deadline forward. The new deadline is midnight of Tuesday, 25th February 2025 for intending participants."

Last year, the NFF organised a CAF C-License programme exclusively for women – the first-ever – which drew 30 women coaches from across the country, including a good number of former Nigeria international players. The three-module course took place between July and September 2024.

Nigeria Rugby Football Federation unveils 2025 calendar of events

● Kicks off Rugby rising program

The Nigeria Rugby Football Federation (NRFF) has announced an ambitious lineup of activities for the 2025 calendar year, featuring a mix of local and international tournaments, training programs, and developmental initiatives aimed at growing the sport across the nation.

Rugby Rising Play Nigeria Launch (15 States)

Kicking off the year on February 10, the Rugby Rising Play Nigeria initiative will be launched across 15 states, marking a significant step in grassroots rugby development.

National 15s League Season (South East)

The South East zone will host the National 15s League from March 28-30 in Abia State, setting the stage for competitive regional rugby.

World Anti-Doping Agency Seminar

In preparation for international competitions, the NRFF will organize a World Anti-Doping Agency seminar for national teams on March 6-7.

International Women's Day Celebrations

Aligned with global celebrations, the NRFF will honor International Women's Day on March 8 with events across the North, East, West, and South regions, highlighting the growing role of women in rugby.

Training Courses by Local World Rugby Educators

From May 22-25, World Rugby-certified educators will conduct Level 1 training courses for medical personnel, coaches, match officials, and strength & conditioning experts. Dates for additional sessions in September are yet to be determined.



ber are yet to be determined.

NRFF General Assembly

The NRFF General Assembly is scheduled for April, bringing together stakeholders to discuss the federation's progress and future plans.

Rugby Rising Festival and Hon Tunde Delu Rugby Super 4

On April 5, Ogun State will host the Rugby Rising Festival alongside the Hon Tunde Delu Rugby Super 4, featuring four invitational teams.

NRFF National League Finals - Super Cup

The winners of the zonal leagues will compete in the NRFF National League Finals, also known as the Super Cup, in Lagos State on April 12.

National Open 7s Tournament (U18 Boys and Girls)

Young talents will take center stage during the National Open 7s Tournament for U18 boys and girls, scheduled for April 26-27.

Turbo Crest Beach Rugby

Beach rugby enthusiasts can look forward to the Turbo Crest Beach Rugby event in April, though the exact date remains to be confirmed.

National 7s Tournaments and Coaches Clinic

Lagos will host a National 7s Tournament for men and women, alongside a coaches clinic led by renowned Coach Steve Lewis, on May 10-11. A similar event will follow in Kano on May 17-18.

National 7s Camp (Men's)

The men's national team will undergo intensive training at a 7s camp in Lagos from June 3-17, in preparation for international competitions.

President Federation Cup: NFF insists on weekend for finals in all states, FCT

The Nigeria Football Federation has again declared that all 36 States and the Federal Capital Territory must stage the final matches of their 2025 Presi-

dent Federation Cup competition on Saturday, 22nd February or Sunday, 23rd February 2025.

In a statement to secretaries of Football Associations

in all the 36 States and the FCT, NFF's Director of Competitions, Ruth David, reiterated: "Final matches are to be played ONLY ON 22nd/23rd, except in special cases and as

approved by the NFF

"Failure to adhere to the above attracts a fine of N1,000,000 (One million naira only)."

The National Play-Off

of this year's competition has been scheduled for 5th March, with the National Draw one week later, while the Rounds of 64, 32 and 16 are scheduled for 19th

March, 2nd April and 16th April 2025 respectively. The quarter-finals have been slated for 3rd and 4th May, with the semi-finals fixed for 17th and 18th May.

Olopade wants stakeholders to project Nigerian sports in positive light

The Director General of the National Sports Commission (NSC), Hon. Bukola Olopade, has charged stakeholders in the sports sector to consistently project Nigerian sports in a positive light to attract the necessary funding and drive sustainable growth in the industry.

Speaking at the Sports Africa Investment Summit (SAIS), co-organized by the NSC and Sports Nigeria in Lagos, Olopade emphasized that the perception of Nigeria's sports industry plays a crucial role in securing private-sector investment.

"Like international best practices, you don't de-market a product you intend to take to

the market because the perception of the product out there matters a lot."

"As someone who has worked in the private sector for more than two decades, I understand why our sports have not attracted optimal private-sector investment. This is why, at the NSC, we are working to change the narrative with our Reset, Rethink, and Relaunch campaign," he stated.

Olopade pointed out that top global sports institutions have thrived because they collectively built a positive image over time, ensuring strong brand perception among all stakeholders.

As a panelist at the Summit's breakout session, Olopade also

addressed the capacity gaps in corporate governance, administration, and management within Nigeria's sports federations.

He outlined key reforms introduced by the NSC under the leadership of Chairman Mallam Shehu Dikko, particularly in corporate governance structures.

"I am glad to say we are already getting positive results from this because in Rugby where they now have a COO, they are already on the verge of security two sponsorships and the President of the Nigeria Badminton Federation, Francis Obih, has just informed me of how impactful their new COO, Blessing Ekwe, was to the team at the recently finished All Africa Badminton Championship

in Cameroon."

Additionally, Olopade revealed plans to introduce dedicated Corporate Communications Units across all Sports Federations to enhance information management and strategic dissemination.

"Now, plans are underway to ensure all the Sports Federations have corporate communications teams for cutting-edge information management and dissemination," he concluded.

The NSC's commitment to reshaping Nigerian sports through strategic branding, governance reforms, and private-sector engagement continues to set a new course for the future of the industry.



NWFL MD 06: Edo Queens humble confluence Queens 2-0, target another CAF/WCL ticket

EDWARD OSEGHE

Edo Queens Football Club of Benin prevailed over Confluence Queens of Lokoja in matchday six of the Nigeria Women Football League (NWFL) premiership campaign played at the Ayigba City Stadium Kogi State on Wednesday with Saidat Adebisi's superb goal in the 4th minute of play, while dangling Emem Essien, delivered the winning goal in 15th minute making it 2-0 in favour of Edo Queens to propel them to a second position on the log with 14 points from six matches.

With this second away win, the Senator Monday Okpebholo's ladies have continued with their scintillating performance

joining Rivers Angels, Bayelsa Queens and Remo Stars Ladies in an unbeaten run of the new NWFL 2024/25 season.

The second goal in just 15 minutes of play against the host

team provided breathing room for the Ancient City based ladies to be confident that they are really on track making progress.

The defending champions refused to rest on their oars,

their continued dominance produced a flurry of corners and chances. But the host team kept some resistance, and made some dangerous attempts on Edo Queens side, but the Benin ladies were resolute not to concede a goal.

The Red-hot Benin girls were fantastic in all departments of the game making it difficult for the Lokoja based ladies to see the back of the net. The match was one sided as the defeat further worsen Confluence Queens problem.

With this momentum, Edo Queens now stand second on the log with 14 points from six games, and confident of securing the Super six slot, as well as set sights on being the league's champions again.



Atalanta Board set for crisis talks with Gasperini and Lookman

Atalanta's management has scheduled a crucial meeting with head coach Gian Piero Gasperini and Nigerian winger Ademola Lookman on Thursday to address their growing conflict.

Tensions flared between the two following Lookman's missed penalty on Tuesday,

which played a role in Atalanta's Champions League exit. Gasperini's public criticism of the player has fueled controversy, prompting Lookman to fire back.

Club officials will oversee training at Zingonia before sitting down with both parties in an effort to ease tensions and find a resolution.



Runners collect kits today for ECOWAS marathon

Registered runners for the 2025 ECOWAS Abuja International Marathon have started collecting their running kits as the Marathon Expo begins at the Federal Secretariat Car Park, Eagles Square, Abuja.

The 2025 ECOWAS Abuja International Marathon will be held on Saturday, March 1, 2025. There will be two races: the half-marathon and the 5-kilometer fun race.

The half marathon will start

at the ECOWAS Commission, while the 5 km will start at the Independence Bridge near Sahad Stores and finish at the ECOWAS Commission.

According to Race Director Gabriel Okon, running bibs and vests must be collected at the VIO Container Booth, Federal Secretariat Car Park, Eagle's Square, Abuja, from February 20 to 28, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily.

Okon also revealed that participants may only collect their

running bibs upon presentation of valid proof of identification.

However, participants wishing to have their running numbers collected on their behalf must provide the collector with an authority note, a copy of the completed entry form bearing their photograph, and a copy of their valid proof of identification.

Okon said collectors must show proof of their identity to collect the running kits. He revealed that registration is still

open to all runners worldwide till February 28.

Residents of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) can pick up physical forms at the Athletics Federation of Nigeria (AFN) Moshood Abiola National Stadium, Package A, Abuja, the FCT Sports Council and the Area Councils.

On the ECOWAS race, Okon said, "As we are all aware, sport is a powerful tool for bringing people together, and this is no less the case in West Africa.



Spanish court sentences ex-soccer boss Rubiales to pay fine over kiss without consent

Spain's High Court said on Thursday it had found former soccer federation boss Luis Rubiales guilty of sexual assault for kissing player Jenni Hermoso without her consent and set a fine of over 10,000 euros (\$10,434.00), but acquitted him of coercion.

Prosecutors had sought a prison sentence for Rubiales in a case that sparked a debate in Spain

about sexism in women's football and wider Spanish society.

"The ruling bans Rubiales from going within a 200-meter radius

of Hermoso and from communicating with her for one year," the court said in a statement.

Rubiales, 47, was accused of sexual assault for kissing Hermoso on the mouth. He was also accused – along with three other former soccer federation officials – of attempting to then coerce her into saying the kiss, at the 2023 World Cup awards ceremony in Sydney, was consensual.



Beyond the Headlines
With
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Valentine's Day: A celebration Africa does not need

KELLY ODARO

February 14 is globally recognised as St. Valentine's Day. It is a day supposedly dedicated to love and affection. Over the years, this Western tradition has found a firm place in African societies, with many embracing it without questioning its relevance.

This piece may come belated, but it is necessary for Africans to reflect on whether the celebration is truly beneficial or simply exemplifies another cultural imperialism. While love and affection are universal human experiences, the way Valentine's Day is observed in Africa raises concerns about its impact on morality, cultural identity, and economic priorities.

Historically, St. Valentine is a figure whose legacy is shrouded in both legend and mystery. The origin of Valentine's Day allegedly traces back to the Roman Empire, with multiple accounts regarding who St. Valentine was.

The most popular belief is that he was a priest who lived during the reign of Emperor Claudius II in the third century AD. At the time, the emperor had banned marriages for young soldiers, believing that single men made better warriors. Valentine defied this decree by secretly performing weddings, an act that ultimately led to his arrest and execution on February 14, around the year 269 AD.

Another account suggests that Valentine was a bishop who helped persecuted Christians and was imprisoned for his faith. While in prison, he reportedly healed the jailer's blind daughter and, before his execution, sent her a letter signed "From your Valentine," a phrase still associated with the celebration today.

These historical accounts, though not definitively proven, formed the foundation of what later became a global celebration of love. Over time, the Catholic Church canonised St. Valentine, recognising him as a martyr.

The association of St. Valentine with romantic love gained prominence in the Middle Ages, particularly through the influence of poets like Geoffrey Chaucer. By the 14th and 15th centuries, the idea of courtly love had become popular in Europe, and February 14 was linked to romantic expressions.

Lovers began exchanging handwritten notes, flowers, and tokens of affection, leading to the modern-day traditions of Valentine's Day. The commercialisation of the day, however, came much later, with greeting card companies and businesses capitalising on the occasion in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Today, Valentine's Day is widely celebrated across the world, transcending its religious roots. While some view it as a day to cherish love and relationships,



others criticise it as overly commercialised and detached from its original intent.

The emphasis on material gifts, expensive dinners, and extravagant gestures often overshadows the supposed essence of love, kindness, commitment, and altruism. In many societies, including Africa, the celebration has evolved in ways that sometimes contradict moral and cultural values.

For many Africans, the obsession with Western traditions has reached an alarming level, often at the expense of indigenous customs, heroes, and values.

It is high time Africans severed themselves from celebrating foreign figures like St. Valentine, while neglecting their own historical icons who played significant roles in shaping the continent's destiny. Throughout history, Africa has had its own heroes and heroines whose contributions to society are just as significant, if not more than those of foreign figures like St. Valentine.

Yet, these African icons remain largely uncelebrated while Western figures are glorified. For example, Queen Idia of the Benin Kingdom, the mother of Oba Esigie, played a crucial role in defending the kingdom from external aggressors.

Her strategic military leadership and political wisdom were instrumental in Benin's survival. However, how many Nigerians or even Edo people dedicate a day to celebrating her legacy?

Likewise, African history is filled with many other figures who made enormous sacrifices for their people. Shaka Zulu of South Africa transformed military warfare and expanded the Zulu Kingdom through tactical brilliance.

Samory Touré of Guinea led fierce re-

sistance against French colonial forces. Yaa Asantewaa of the Ashanti Empire (Ghana) courageously led her people in the war against British colonisation.

Julius Nyerere of Tanzania fought for African unity and self-reliance, while Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso sacrificed his life for the economic liberation of his people. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti (mother of the legendary Afrobeat maestro, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti) of Nigeria fearlessly championed women's rights and political freedom. The list goes on.

If Africans truly value historical figures, why do they ignore these homegrown heroes and heroines while embracing foreign traditions with little relevance to their history? Why does the continent not have a widely recognised 'African Heroes Day' instead of blindly celebrating a Western-inspired Valentine's Day?

Even if one argues that St. Valentine's Day is about love, the reality is that the original concept of the celebration has been completely derailed in many parts of Africa, especially Nigeria. Instead of fostering genuine expressions of love, kindness, and companionship, the day has become an avenue for immorality, materialism, and reckless indulgence.

Valentine's Day in Nigeria, for instance, has largely morphed into a celebration of sexual promiscuity. Many young people use the occasion as an excuse to engage in casual sex, leading to rising cases of unwanted pregnancies, abortions, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Hotels and short-term lodges record increased patronage, not because of meaningful romantic connections but because of brief moments of pleasure

that often lead to emotional trauma. Many unsuspecting lovers suffer heartbreaks when they realise they were merely 'used' for the day's festivities. Besides, those without a 'val' (romantic partner) feel isolated and are enmeshed in mental anguish. They experience loneliness and emotional distress.

The celebration has also become a time for excessive consumption of alcohol and illicit substances. Many young people, in an attempt to 'enjoy' the day, indulge in reckless drinking and drug abuse. This, in turn, leads to violence, road accidents, and even deaths. Reports of fights, assaults, or fatal road crashes due to intoxication are not uncommon during this period.

Beyond the moral decay, Valentine's Day also places undue financial pressure on individuals, particularly men. Society has conditioned many to believe that love must be proven through expensive gifts, lavish outings, and extravagant displays of affection. Some individuals go as far as taking loans or diverting funds meant for essential needs just to impress their partners.

In a country like Nigeria, where many are struggling with economic hardship, the financial burden associated with Valentine's Day is completely unjustifiable. Instead of prioritising rent, school fees, or feeding, many squander their limited resources just to meet unrealistic social expectations.

The embrace of Valentine's Day in Africa is a reflection of a deeper cultural crisis, the widespread tendency to glorify Western traditions while abandoning African values. This is the same mentality that led to the obsession with Hollywood and Western music while ignoring local entertainment industries.

By the grace of God, African music genres and entertainment industries are now gaining global recognition and influence.

Africa is rich with traditions that celebrate love, unity, and companionship in ways that align with its moral and societal values. Indigenous festivals and ceremonies have long served as avenues for expressing love and appreciation among families and communities. Traditional African marriages, communal gatherings, and storytelling traditions once promoted the true essence of love, commitment, respect, and mutual support.

Rather than continuing to copy and paste Western holidays, Africans should focus on reviving indigenous cultural practices that foster meaningful relationships. African governments, media, and educational institutions should dedicate more attention to celebrating African heroes and preserving cultural heritage. Schools should teach African history, and communities should create their own commemorative days that honour their ancestors, warriors, and nation-builders.

Moreover, Africans must redefine love beyond the lens of commercialised Western ideals. True love is not about expensive gifts, social media validation, or one-night stands. It is about genuine care, commitment, and shared responsibilities. Instead of celebrating Valentine's Day, why not dedicate the day to acts of kindness, community service, or even personal growth?

The widespread celebration of St. Valentine's Day in Africa is yet another example of how Western culture has overshadowed African traditions. While love is a universal value, the way Valentine's Day is commercialised and practised in Africa has led to moral decay, financial recklessness, and emotional trauma. Africans must ask themselves whether this celebration aligns with their values and priorities or whether it is simply another means of eroding African identity.

Instead of blindly celebrating foreign figures and customs, Africans should redirect their focus toward honouring their own heroes and preserving their own traditions. True love is not about one day of excessive spending or immoral indulgence; it is about daily acts of kindness, respect, and responsibility.

Africa does not need Valentine's Day. It needs a renewed sense of cultural self-awareness and a return to the values that once defined its greatness. Be Afrocentric!

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