

# Military intensifying manhunt for Kwara terror attackers —DHQ

## ● Clarifies Nigeria-U.S. security cooperation

ABUJA

The Defence Headquarters says it has intensified efforts to track down and bring to justice the perpetrators of the recent terrorist attack on Woro and

neighbouring communities in Kaiama Local Government Area of Kwara.

This was contained in a statement by the Director of Defence Information, Maj.-Gen. Samaila Uba, on Thursday in Abuja.

He said the military, work-

ing in collaboration with other security agencies, was pursuing those responsible for the attack that claimed innocent lives.

Uba explained that intelligence-led operations, patrols and surveillance were being strengthened to identify and

dismantle terrorist elements operating in the area and adjoining communities.

He said also that the attackers had earlier attempted to indoctrinate residents of Woro village, a move firmly resisted by the community, before returning weeks later to carry out the deadly assault.

The defence spokesman said that efforts to locate the assailants would be sustained until they were apprehended and held accountable in accordance with the law.

He called for enhanced cooperation from citizens, urging residents to provide timely and credible information to

security agencies to support ongoing operations.

Uba reaffirmed the commitment of the Armed Forces of Nigeria to safeguarding lives and property, stressing that all terrorist elements threatening Nigeria's peace and stability

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# The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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PUBLISHED SINCE MAY 29, 1968

VOL. 47, NO. 1,192

FRIDAY 6TH - SUNDAY 8TH FEBRUARY, 2026.

**Nigeria launches halal economy strategy to tap \$7.7trn global market**

—Pg 2

# Edo, NNPC seal deal for 10,000bpd condensate refinery

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Government and the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) Limited have confirmed plans to jointly establish a 10,000 barrels-per-day condensate refinery in the state.

The refinery, expected to be completed within 24 to 36 months, will be sited across Oredo and Orhionmwon Local Government Areas.

When operational, it is projected to supply about 20 truckloads of Premium Motor Spirit (PMS) and 10 truckloads of Automotive Gas Oil (AGO) daily to Edo State and neighbouring areas.

Governor Monday Okpehlo disclosed this while receiving NNPC's Executive Vice President, Downstream, Alhaji Mumuni Dagazia, and his management team on a courtesy visit to the Government House, Benin City.

He described the proposed investment as a clear demonstration of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's Renewed Hope Agenda.

The governor said that the refinery would generate employment, reduce poverty and further strengthen Edo State's industrial base, assuring the NNPC delegation of the state government's full backing to ensure the project's success.

"We are delighted to welcome this major investment to Edo State. My administration

is committed to job creation and poverty reduction in line with President Tinubu's Renewed Hope Agenda. This project is a huge step forward for Edo," Okpehlo said.

He pledged that the state would provide land, Certificates of Occupancy, security and other critical support to fast-track the project, stressing that the government was fully committed to protecting investments and maintaining a safe business environment.

Earlier, Alhaji Dagazia said the condensate refinery was designed as a sustainable project that would drive revenue generation, job creation and industrial growth, while contributing to the overall development of Edo State.

Also speaking, NNPC's Chief Downstream Investment

Officer, Mr Ikedichi Dick-Nwoke, said the project would position Edo State as a key energy and industrial hub in the South-South region.

He noted that it would boost investor confidence, align with the state's industrialization drive and significantly expand employment opportunities for residents.



COURTESY VISIT:

Edo State Governor Senator Monday Okpehlo (right) and the NNPC's Executive Vice President, Downstream, Alhaji Mumuni Dagazia who lead officials of the corporation on a courtesy visit to Government House, Benin City yesterday.

## INEC registers 2 new parties, raises total to 21

ABUJA

Ahead of the 2027 general elections, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has registered two new political parties.

The parties are, Democratic Leadership Alliance (DLA) and the Nigeria Democratic Congress (NDC), thus bringing the total number of registered political parties in Nigeria to 21.

INEC Chairman, Prof. Joash Amupitan, who disclosed this on Thursday during the commission's quarterly consultative meeting with leaders of political parties in Abuja said that the DLA emerged as the only association that fully met the statutory requirements, out of 171 groups that applied for registration, while the NDC was registered in compliance with a court order.

He recalled that INEC received 171 letters of intent

from associations seeking registration and assessed them in line with Sections 222 and 223 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended), Sections 75 and 79 of the Electoral Act, 2022, as well as the commission's Regulations and Guidelines for Political Parties, 2022.

According to him, 14 associations passed the initial pre-qualification stage and were invited to proceed further, while eight successfully uploaded the required documents on INEC's portal.

These included the All Democratic Alliance (ADA), Citizens Democratic Alliance (CDA), Abundance Social Party (ASP), African Alliance Party (AAP), Democratic Leadership Alliance (DLA), Green Future Party (GFP), National Democratic Party (NDP) and Peoples Freedom Party (PFP).

"Out of these eight, only two qualified for final assessment and verification of com-

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**Electoral Act: Senate insists on electronic transmission, promises full implementation** —Pg 3

**CBM invests ₦25bn to strengthen eye care services in 14 states** —Pg 5

**Dozens of Muslims 'massacred' in Nigeria for refusing to join jihadists, says governor** —Pg 7

**Super Eagles Coach Chelle watches Marseille win, meets new signing Nnadi** —Pg 16

# Nigeria launches halal economy strategy to tap \$7.7trn global market

**ABUJA**

President Bola Tinubu on Thursday inaugurated Nigeria's National Halal Economy Strategy, aiming to tap into the \$7.7 trillion global halal market and diversify the nation's economy.

Represented by Vice-President Kashim Shettima, Tinubu said the strategy signals Nigeria's readiness to compete in the global halal economy, already embraced by leading nations.

"As well as clearly defining the nation's direction within a market expected to add an estimated \$1.5 billion to GDP by

2027, this strategy is a promise to meet global standards with Nigerian capacity and convert opportunity into lasting economic value," Tinubu said.

He emphasised that disciplined, inclusive, and measurable action is crucial for the strategy to deliver jobs, exports, and shared prosperity across Nigeria.

The strategy focuses on halal-compliant food exports, developing pharmaceutical and cosmetic value chains, promoting halal-friendly tourism, and mobilising ethical finance.

By 2030, these efforts are projected to unlock over \$12 billion in economic value while

strengthening food security, industrial capacity, and opportunities for SMEs.

Addressing concerns linking halal with religion, Tinubu stressed that the global halal economy is defined by quality, safety, and ethical production, appealing to consumers and investors worldwide.

He cited advanced economies like the UK, France, Germany, the Netherlands, the US,

Canada, Australia, and New Zealand as leading producers and exporters of halal products.

The strategy, developed in partnership with the Halal Products Development Company (Saudi Public Investment Fund subsidiary) and Dar Al Halal Group Nigeria, with technical support from the Islamic Development Bank and the Arab Bank for Economic

Development in Africa, is a product of careful study and planning.

Minister of Industry, Trade and Investment Dr Jumoke Oduwole, Chairperson of the National Halal Strategy Committee, said the strategy is a whole-of-government and whole-of-country intervention. She stressed that Nigeria would leverage the African Continental Free Trade

Area (AfCFTA) to export halal-friendly goods across Africa and beyond.

Alhaji Muhammadu Dikko-Ladan, Chairman of Dar Al-Halal Group Nigeria, said the strategy includes an export programme enabling Nigerian companies to enter the Saudi Arabian market and other international markets, creating market access and attracting foreign direct investment.

## Military intensifying manhunt for...

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would be relentlessly pursued.

Meanwhile, the Defence Headquarters has clarified the nature of Nigeria's security cooperation with the United States, following media reports and public speculation over the alleged presence of U.S. troops in the country.

The clarification was made in a statement signed by the Director of Defence Information, Maj.-Gen. Samaila Uba, on Thursday in Abuja.

Uba explained that the Nigeria-US partnership was long-standing, structured and focused on capacity building, professional military education, intelligence sharing, logistics support and strategic dialogue.

He stressed that all engagements under the partnership were conducted with full respect for Nigeria's sovereignty and strictly in line with existing bilateral frameworks.

The defence spokesman explained that a recent two-day high-level Working Group meeting involving senior U.S. gov-

ernment officials and Nigerian counterparts held at the Office of the National Security Adviser was part of ongoing cooperation.

This, according to him, followed earlier engagements in the United States.

According to Uba, discussions at the meeting centred on proposals were aimed at strengthening cooperation mechanisms, improving coordination and enhancing accountability in joint efforts to counter terrorism and other transnational threats, while prioritising the protection of civilians and community safety.

He added that the proposals were still being reviewed by the relevant Nigerian authorities.

The defence spokesman reassured Nigerians that the country's defence partnerships remain transparent, policy-driven and aligned with constitutional provisions.

He added that the Armed Forces of Nigeria remained fully committed to safeguarding the nation's territorial integrity without compromising national independence.

## INEC registers 2 new parties, raises...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

pliance with the Constitution and the Electoral Act.

"After due consideration, only the Democratic Leadership Alliance fully complied with the requirements of the law and was therefore registered as a political party, effective February 5, 2025," he said.

Amupitan also disclosed that the Federal High Court sitting in Lokoja, Kogi State, in Suit No. FHC/LKJ/CS/49/2025 between Barr. Takori Mohammed Sanni & Ors v. INEC, ordered the commission to register the Nigeria Democratic Congress.

"The commission has decided to comply with the court order, and the NDC is hereby registered as a political party. Certificates of registration will be handed over to the two new parties in due course," he added.

The INEC chairman, however, expressed concern over increasing internal crises and leadership disputes within political

parties, warning that frequent litigations were undermining democratic stability and overstretching the judicial system.

He noted that such internal squabbles often dragged INEC into unnecessary legal battles, diverting attention from its core mandate of conducting free, fair and credible elections.

"The essence of democracy lies in the ability of political parties to organise, debate and contest ideas within the framework of fairness and mutual respect.

"Unfortunately, persistent infighting erodes public trust, creates uncertainty among party members and weakens our democratic institutions," Amupitan said.

He reaffirmed INEC's neutrality and urged party leaders to embrace transparent and cohesive leadership, prioritise dialogue over division, and focus on policy development and citizen engagement rather than internal strife.



**OLUBADAN VISITS LAGOS:**

Olubadan of Ibadan, Oba Rashidi Ladoja (L) and Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu of Lagos State, during the Olubadan visit to the Governor in Lagos on Thursday.

## UNICEF survey boosts wellbeing of women, children in Gombe

**GOMBE**

Statisticians in Gombe have praised the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)-supported Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) for enhancing the social and economic wellbeing of women and children in the state.

The experts spoke on Thursday during a review of MICS 7, which began on 3 December 2025 and is expected to con-

clude in March.

Mrs Elizabeth Augustine, Gombe State coordinator, National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), said the survey provides critical data for shaping inclusive social policies and child protection programmes.

"MICS 1-7 has ensured inclusion and prioritised the wellbeing of children and women in the state. The current survey will provide up-to-date data for targeted interventions in health, education, and

other sectors," she said.

Ibrahim Abubakar, Acting Statistician General, Gombe State, noted that MICS data has empowered stakeholders and guided resource allocation.

"Governor Inuwa Yahaya is already directing more resources to health, education, and other sectors based on data from previous surveys.

The new survey will enable more effective interventions," he said.

Abdul Ningi, North-East Zonal Controller, NBS, urged field officials to maintain diligence and praised the use of

technology in improving data collection.

He commended the federal and state governments, along with UNICEF, for conducting the survey, which will inform policies that safeguard women and children.

MICS is a global household survey led by UNICEF to collect statistically sound, comparable data on women and children, covering health, education, nutrition, and child protection, helping countries track progress toward Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

## NCC urges Nigerians to know their data right to avoid exploitation

**ABUJA**

The Executive Vice-Chairman of the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC), Dr Aminu Maida, has urged Nigerians to understand their data rights to prevent exploitation.

Speaking at the signing of

a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between NCC and the Nigerian Data Protection Commission (NDPC) on Thursday, Maida stressed that data protection is vital for national sovereignty.

"Somebody is monetising your data. Citizens should have the right to agree or dis-

agree on its use. We are laying the foundations for data governance, moving towards 'data unions' in the future," he said.

Dr Vincent Olatunji, National Commissioner of NDPC, noted that protecting data privacy within the telecom sector requires collaboration with NCC.

"This MoU ensures we work together to safeguard Nigerians' data and strengthen privacy and protection measures," he said.

Both officials highlighted that understanding and controlling personal data is key to preventing misuse and ensuring citizens benefit from the digital economy.

## AbdulRazaq orders immediate relief for Kaiama attack victims

**ILORIN**

Governor AbdulRahman AbdulRazaq of Kwara State has ordered immediate humanitarian support for victims of the recent attack on Woro community in Kaiama Local Government Area.

The directive was given on Thursday after the governor visited the affected community

to commiserate with victims, traditional rulers and residents of the Kaiama Emirate.

AbdulRazaq directed the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) to mobilise relief materials and commence enumeration of affected families.

Briefing journalists after receiving security updates, the governor disclosed that no

fewer than 75 persons were killed during the Tuesday night attack, with properties also destroyed.

He announced the immediate deployment of soldiers to the area under Operation Savannah Shield, following approval by President Bola Tinubu, and described the incident as a "pure massacre."

The governor commend-

ed the President for the swift deployment of troops and assured residents of enhanced security presence in the area.

In his remarks, the Emir of Kaiama, Alhaji Muazu Omar, thanked the governor for his prompt response, expressing confidence that the intervention would restore peace to the community.

## NEWS

# Electoral Act: Senate insists on electronic transmission, promises full implementation

CAROLINE AMEH

## ABUJA

The Senate on Thursday reaffirmed its full support for the electronic transmission of election results, dismissing reports that it had rejected the provision in the 2026 Electoral Bill.

The clarification followed widespread media reports

claiming that lawmakers had voted down Section 60(3) of the bill, which mandates real-time electronic transmission of results from polling units to the INEC Result Viewing (IREV) portal.

The section provides that “the Presiding Officer shall electronically transmit the results from each polling unit to the IREV portal in real time, af-

ter the prescribed Form EC8A has been signed and stamped.”

Senate President Godswill Akpabio had, during clause-by-clause consideration of the bill on Wednesday, announced that Clause 60 was amended rather than rejected.

However, misinterpretation of the proceedings created public confusion.

To address the controversy,

thirteen senators drawn across party lines, led by Senator Enyinnaya Abaribe (Abia South), briefed journalists covering the National Assembly.

Abaribe said the briefing was necessary to correct the record, stressing that the Senate remains committed to electronic transmission and would ensure the provision survives the legislative process.

“To put the record straight, the Senate did not reject electronic transmission. What was passed is electronic transmission

of results, and we will monitor this provision up to the point of presidential assent,” he said.

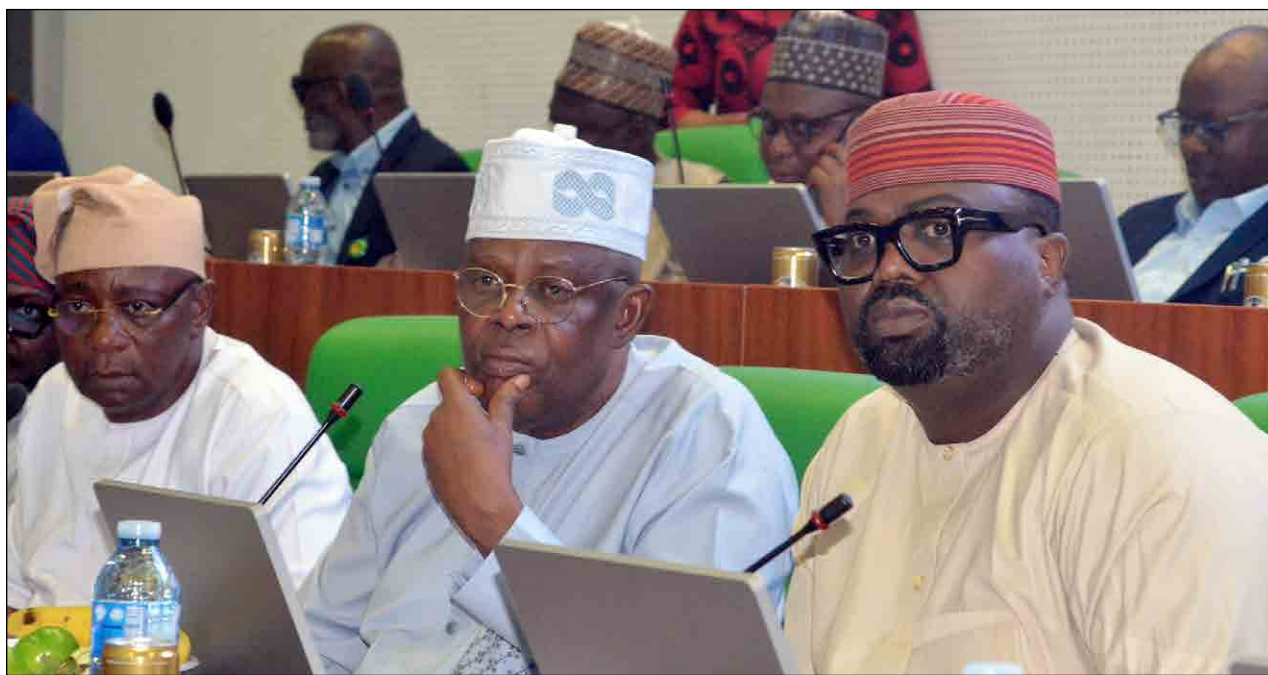
Senator Abdul Ningi (Bauchi Central) described reports of rejection as “very painful”, noting that the Senate had consistently supported electronic transmission since work on the new electoral law began in September last year.

“This negative narrative against the Senate and the National Assembly must stop. Section 60(3) will be transmitted to the President exactly as passed,” Ningi added.

Other senators at the briefing included Austin Akobundu, Peter Jiya, Irete Kingibe, Victor Umeh, Binos Yaroe, Kabeeb Mustapha, Khalid Mustapha, Mohammed

Ogoshi Onawo, Aminu Waziri Tambuwal, Tony Nwoye and Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan.

The clarification is aimed at reassuring Nigerians that the 2026 Electoral Bill retains provisions for real-time electronic transmission of results ahead of the 2027 general elections.

SENATE PRESIDENT  
GODSWILL AKPABIO

## COMMITTEE'S ENGAGEMENT:

L-R: Clerk, House of Representatives Committee on Finance, Mr Oscar Okoro; Chairman of the Committee, James Faleke and member of the committee/Spokesman, House of Representatives, Akin Rotimi, during the committee's engagement with the Minister of Finance and Coordinating Minister of the Economy, Mr Wale Edun, at the National Assembly Complex in Abuja on Thursday.

## Edo retreat strengthens appointees to drive SHINE agenda, 'Edo Building Edo' Philosophy — SSG

ABDUL-KADIR ABDULLAH

## BENIN CITY

The Edo State Government said that its three-day retreat for political appointees and public servants was designed to strengthen governance delivery and deepen implementation of the SHINE agenda of Governor Monday Okpebholo's administration.

Secretary to the State Government, Umar Musa Ikhilor Esq, said the retreat, held in Udomi, was aimed at equipping officials with practical tools to translate government policies into visible results for Edo people.

“Basically, it is about how we can give more to Edo people. We want to maximise the potential of all political appointees and give them the strategies to effectively drive the SHINE agenda,” Ikhilor said.

He explained that the programme allows participants to engage facilitators on real governance challenges, noting that discussions are more impactful because officials now have field experience to draw from.

Addressing concerns over the timing of the retreat, Ikhilor said it was delayed to allow for the completion of the cabinet, adding that organising multiple re-

treats would have been wasteful.

“It is never too late. This is a four-year mandate, and we are still very early,” he said.

On the administration's “Edo Building Edo” philosophy, Ikhilor said the policy prioritises local capacity, ensures resources circulate within the state and reduces dependence on foreign consultants.

“You don't bring foreign consultants to do the work of Edo people. It is about empowering our teachers, public servants and contractors,” he said.

He added that external expertise would only be sought where highly technical capaci-

ty is unavailable locally.

The SSG said the choice of a rural, serene venue was deliberate, providing security, focus and economic benefits to host communities.

Head of Service, Dr Anthony Okungbowa Esq, said the setting enhanced concentration and engagement among participants, describing the retreat as impactful.

Other participants who spoke included Commissioner for Information and Strategy, Prince Kassim Afegbua, and Attorney General and Commissioner for Justice, Prof Roland Otaru SAN.

## NDLEA Edo arrests 46, seizes 6,439kg of drugs, secures seven convictions in Jan

## BENIN CITY

The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), Edo State Command, has arrested 46 suspected drug traffickers, seized 6,439 kilograms of illicit drugs and secured seven convictions in January 2026.

State Commander of the agency, Dr Mitchell Ofoyeju, disclosed this in Benin City while presenting the command's operational

scorecard for the month.

He said those arrested comprised 36 males and 10 females. Among major seizures was 792kg of cannabis concealed in 66 bags of charcoal intercepted along the Auchu-Abuja expressway, leading to the arrest of Shaibu Yusuf.

Ofoyeju commended the Nigerian Army's 4 Brigade, Benin City, for its support, noting that the brigade transferred two suspects with 862kg of cannabis

and seeds to the NDLEA.

He said joint operations also led to the destruction of a cannabis farm measuring 1.6 hectares at Ebora Camp, Ilushi Forest, estimated to yield over 4,000kg of cannabis.

The command seized a total of 6,439.4kg of drugs, mostly cannabis, alongside small quantities of methamphetamine, cocaine, heroin, psychotropic substances and codeine syrup.

Seven convictions were se-

cured in January, with seven new cases filed and 105 cases currently pending before the Federal High Court in Benin City.

The NDLEA also impounded a Toyota Yaris during routine operations and provided counselling services to drug users, alongside sensitization programmes.

“We remain resolute in combating drug-related crime and ensuring a drug-free Edo State,” Ofoyeju said.

## Construction worker seeks Okpebholo's intervention, demands ₦150m compensation over eye injury

LUCKY EFESE

Staff of A & K Construction Company Limited, Suleiman Momoh, has appealed to Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, to intervene in what he described as injustice following the loss of his right eye while on official duty.

Momoh said he sustained the injury on July 7, 2025, while working at the Museum of West Africa (MOWA) site in Benin City, alleging negligence on the part of the company.

He is demanding ₦150 million as compensation for general and special damages, threatening legal action if the company fails to comply.

According to him, he was initially treated at clinics in Benin City and later referred to the University of Benin Teaching Hospital, where surgery was carried out.

Subsequent medical assessments, including a report dated October 8, 2025, reportedly confirmed permanent loss of vision in the affected eye.

Momoh said he was later taken to Abuja for further treatment, where doctors confirmed the damage.

He alleged that company officials pressured him to resign on health grounds and paid him ₦1.8 million, leaving his compensation demand unresolved. Despite repeated reminders, he said the company failed to respond, prompting his appeal to the governor.

Responding, the company's Human Resources Manager, Mrs Lilian, and Director of Personnel, Mr Jude, confirmed the injury, but said the company had made efforts to treat him and was working with its insurance provider to pay his entitlements, denying any agreement to pay ₦150 million.

## Hajj 2026: Edo govt issues Feb 8 deadline to intending pilgrims

ABDUL-KADIR ABDULLAH

## BENIN CITY

The Edo State Muslim Pilgrims Welfare Board has reminded intending pilgrims for the 2026 Hajj to complete data capturing and grouping by February 8, 2026.

In a statement signed by the board's Executive Secretary, Alhaji Eranga Abdulkabir Muhammadkabar, the board warned that failure to meet the deadline on the Saudi-led Nusuk Masar platform would make visa processing impossible.

The directive followed a virtual meeting between Saudi authorities and participating countries on February 4, where timelines were reaffirmed.

The board said March 20, 2026, remains the final deadline for visa issuance.

Chairman of the board, Mallam Musa Muhammad Uduimoh, said new conditions include mandatory payments, pilgrim categorisation, medical service contracts and backup accommodation arrangements.

He added that Saudi authorities have approved a 40/60 passenger-sharing formula for airlift in 2026, pending full enforcement of BASA rules.

The board urged intending pilgrims to complete passport capturing immediately, warning that delays could jeopardise participation in the holy pilgrimage.

# Security forces arrest 13 suspected kidnappers, drug dealers in Edo North

KENNEDY ANYANWU

**EDO STATE**

Troops of the Nigerian Army's 4 Brigade, working alongside the Nigerian Air Force, Edo State Police Command, the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) and the Edo State Security Corps, have arrested 13 suspected kidnappers and drug peddlers during coordinated security operations in Edo North Senatorial District.

The operations, conducted on February 4, 2026, under

Operation IGBO DANU 1, targeted criminal hideouts in Osara community, Auchu, and Okpella, all in Etsako West Local Government Area.

Eight suspects were arrested during the initial raid. They were identified as Jamilu Mohammad (25), Kasim Abu (33), Braimoh Affeez (31), Sulaiman Hamisu (36), Lawan Umaru (25), Bawa Auwal (24), Musa Umaru (40) and Amodu Attai (50).

Recovered items included an English pump-action gun, four live cartridges, a locally made pistol, a Point-of-Sale (POS)

machine, two cutlasses, a Nikon digital camera, five bottles of codeine syrup, weighing scales for Indian hemp, assorted illicit drugs and ₦87,550 in cash.

The suspects and exhibits were handed over to the Edo State Police Command for further investigation.

In a related operation at Aviele

Forest, troops, again in collaboration with the police, arrested five more suspected kidnappers: Isiaka Abubakar (37), Mohammad Abubakar (25), Yusuf Abubakar

(24), Mohammed Somu (20) and Isiaka Ibrahim (30).

Two motorcycles, two mobile phones and a power bank were also recovered.

## Sani receives 183 freed abductees, approves road, military base for Kurmin Wali

**KADUNA**

Governor Uba Sani of Kaduna State has received 183 abducted residents of Kurmin Wali community who were rescued after 19 days in captivity, assuring them of the state government's commitment to their safety, rehabilitation and long-term security.

Receiving the returnees at the Government House, Kaduna, on Thursday, the governor announced the construction of an access road linking Kurmin Wali to the main road, as well as the establishment of a military base in the community to forestall future attacks.

Sani said the victims were rescued on Wednesday through the combined efforts of security agencies, adding that his administration would continue to prioritise the protection of lives and property across the state.

He disclosed that the state government would also construct internal road networks, a hospital and a skills acquisition centre in the community to sup-

port recovery and development.

The governor said the returnees would be provided with temporary accommodation, where they would undergo comprehensive medical and psychological care before returning home. He added that the government would support their livelihoods, particularly through assistance for small businesses.

Sani reiterated his administration's resolve to work with community leaders, religious bodies and security agencies to ensure lasting peace in Tudun Wali and Kaduna State, urging residents to remain law-abiding and patriotic.

Prayers were offered by the returnees during the reception.

Speaking on behalf of the victims, Mrs Rebecca Hosea thanked the governor for his swift intervention, while the Chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Kaduna State chapter, Rev. Kalep Mathew, described the incident as a test the state had overcome, commending the governor and security agencies for their efforts.

## Makinde inducts 3,933 new health workers in Oyo

**IBADAN**

Governor Seyi Makinde of Oyo State has inducted 3,933 newly recruited primary healthcare workers, describing them as the backbone of the state's healthcare delivery system.

Speaking at the induction ceremony in Ibadan on Thursday, Makinde said the recruitment was aimed at addressing critical human resource gaps and strengthening healthcare delivery at the grassroots.

He noted that adequate manpower was essential to solving challenges in the health sector, stressing that infrastructure and equipment without skilled personnel would

amount to wasted resources.

The governor assured the new recruits that their postings would not result in hardship, pledging that his administration would make the health sector a rewarding career path.

Earlier, the Executive Secretary of the Oyo State Primary Healthcare Board, Dr Muideen Olatunji, said the recruitment spanned multiple cadres, including doctors, nurses, midwives, community health practitioners, pharmacists, laboratory scientists and support staff.

He charged the health workers to serve with integrity, discipline and professionalism, as operational guidelines for their engagement were unveiled at the event.

**DISTRICT 4040B2/B3 JOINT CONVENTION:**

L-R: 1st Vice District Governor, Lions Club International 404 B3, Tosin Taiwo; Governor, District 404B2 Oluwakemi Eribake; Governor, District 404B3 Adelaya Adeleye, during district 4040B2/B3 Joint Convention and news briefing in Ibadan on Thursday.

## Northern governors condemn killings in Kwara, Katsina, Benue

**GOMBE**

The Northern States Governors' Forum (NSGF) has condemned the recent wave of violent attacks and killings in parts of Kwara, Katsina and Benue States, describing them as barbaric and senseless.

Chairman of the Forum and Governor of Gombe State, Inuwa Yahaya, expressed the condemnation in a statement issued on Thursday by his media aide, Mr Ismaila Uba-Misilli.

Yahaya expressed deep sorrow over the loss of innocent lives and extended condolences to the bereaved families, affected communities and the governments and people of the three states.

"These heinous acts of violence are unacceptable and must be condemned in the strongest terms," he said, noting that the targeting of defenceless citizens underscores the urgent need for decisive action.

He commended the governors of the affected states for their leadership and resilience, while urging security agencies to intensify intelligence gathering, surveillance and coordinated operations to apprehend the perpetrators and their sponsors.

Yahaya reaffirmed the Forum's commitment to working with the Federal Government, security agencies and community leaders to address insecurity through robust security responses and long-term socio-economic interventions.

The condemnation follows deadly attacks on Woro and Nuku communities in Kaiama Local Government Area of

Kwara State, the killing of at least 20 persons in Faskari Lo-

cal Government Area of Katsina State, and reported killings

in Kwande Local Government Area of Benue State.

### PUBLIC NOTICE OF HIGH COURT JUDGMENT ON TRESPASS IN RESPECT OF SHALOM JARE VENTURES LTD LAND

The general public is hereby notified that the High Court of Justice, Edo State of Nigeria, Okada Judicial Division, Edo State - Nigeria, in Suit No. B/407/2018:

SHALOM JARE VENTURES LTD (Claimant)  
Vs.

1. JOHN EDOSOMWAN
2. ODION DOGO IGBINOVIA
3. OVBOKHAN DOGO IGBINOVIA
4. EDOBA EDOSOMWAN (for themselves and on behalf of Okhuoromi Community, Benin City)
5. PERSON UNKNOWN (Defendants) had delivered judgment in favour of the Claimant.

The Court declared and ordered that Shalom Jare Ventures Ltd is entitled to the Statutory Right of Occupancy over the parcel of land measuring 9.782 Hectares, being part of its farm of about 21.573 Hectares along Iriri/Aruogba Road, Benin City, as shown in Litigation Survey Plan No. VSC/ED/L006/2019 (area verged blue) within Property Survey Plan No. JAO/ED2000/200, and covered by Certificate of Occupancy No. EDSR 14601.

The Court further held that: The erection of a fence into part of the land (about 40 feet by 200 feet, area verged grey) by the 5th Defendant is trespass. The bulldozing of 46 palm trees and other palm crops on the land in dispute by the 1st - 4th Defendants, including during the pendency of the suit and in spite of injunctive orders, was unlawful, illegal and reprehensible.

Accordingly, the Court granted an Order of Perpetual Injunction restraining the Defendants, their agents, privies and any person acting for or through them from alienating, trespassing, continuing to trespass, or doing anything inconsistent with the proprietary rights of Shalom Jare Ventures Ltd over the said land measuring 9.782 Hectares. The Court also awarded damages in the sum of N100,000,000.00 (One Hundred Million Naira) against the 1st - 4th Defendants as exemplary and aggravated damages for the bulldozing of the Claimant's palm crops on the land in dispute.

**WARNING TO TRESPASSERS:** All persons, including the Defendants and any other person whatsoever, are hereby warned to immediately desist from any act of trespass on the said land. Any further trespass will amount to contempt of court and shall be dealt with using all available legal remedies. This notice is issued pursuant to the Enrolment/Order by Hon. Justice V. O. Eboime (Judge) on Wednesday, 30th July, 2025 in High Court of Justice Okada, Edo State - Nigeria and enrolled at the High Court Registry, Okada.

For and on behalf of:  
**SHALOM JARE VENTURES LTD.**  
Dated this 4th day of February, 2026

*Imadegbelo*  
**IGHODALO IMADEGBELO (SAN).**  
**IGHODALO IMADEGBELO (SAN) & CO.,**  
5, IWEGIE STREET, OFF AKPAKPAVA ROAD, BENIN CITY.  
TEL: 08022274111, 052-9411111, 07043859356  
Website: <https://ighodaloimadegbelo.com>  
EMAIL: [imadegbelo@nigerianbar.ng](mailto:imadegbelo@nigerianbar.ng)  
[ighodaloimadegbelo\\_san@gmail.com](mailto:ighodaloimadegbelo_san@gmail.com)



## NEWS

# YPP rejects Senate's Electoral Act amendment, insists on e-transmission of results

## ABUJA

The Young Progressives Party (YPP) has rejected the Electoral Act (Amendment) Bill passed by the Senate, faulting its failure to make electronic transmission of results from polling units to the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IREV) mandatory.

The party, in a statement issued on Thursday in Abuja

by its National Publicity Secretary, Mr Wale Martins, described the Senate's action as "giving with one hand and taking with the other."

According to YPP, the deliberate exclusion of mandatory electronic transmission—the most critical amendment—was designed to preserve a dysfunctional electoral process that benefits Nigeria's entrenched political class.

It warned that any Electoral Act lacking compulsory e-transmission of results would invite fraud and must be firmly resisted by Nigerians.

The party urged civil society organisations, youth groups, labour unions and professional bodies to immediately demand a reversal of what it described as an anti-democratic decision.

"Of all the proposed amendments to the Electoral Act,

the most pivotal—mandatory electronic transmission of results—was cleverly avoided.

"This action is deliberate and self-serving. It is designed to preserve a dysfunctional electoral process that benefits only a political class," the party stated.

YPP also called on President Bola Tinubu to withhold assent to the bill, stressing that compulsory electronic transmission remained vital to restoring public confidence in Nigeria's electoral system.

The party warned that Ni-

geria's democracy must not be sacrificed for elite convenience,

insisting that the will of the people must prevail.

## Oyo Assembly accepts Shittu's apology over defamatory remarks

## IBADAN

The Oyo State House of Assembly has accepted the apology tendered by Mr Ibrahim Shittu over a defamatory statement and video that violated the ethics and standing rules of the House.

The apology, earlier submitted to the House Committee on Ethics and Privileges, was formally read on the floor of the Assembly by the Clerk, Mr Muraina Taiwo-Akinola, on Thursday.

The Majority Leader, Mr Sanjo Adedoyin, had on January 20 accused Shittu, who represents Saki West State Constituency, of making defamatory and malicious allegations against him and the leadership of the Assembly.

Adedoyin, representing Ogbomoso South, raised the issue as a personal explanation during the first plenary sitting of 2026, describing the allegations as a grave infringement on his legislative privileges and a direct attack on the integrity of the Assembly.

The controversy arose from a speech delivered by Shittu at a public event in Saki town, which later circulated widely

on social media.

It would be recalled that Shittu's earlier oral apology on January 27 was rejected by the House for failing to meet its ethical standards.

In his written apology, Shittu expressed regret over the statement and video, acknowledging that his conduct breached House rules and had the potential to bring the legislature into disrepute.

Ruling on the matter, the Speaker, Mr Adebo Ogundoyin, accepted the apology, describing the admission of error and expression of remorse as essential to preserving the dignity of the Assembly.

He urged lawmakers to conduct themselves responsibly and remain mindful that their public actions reflect on the image and credibility of the legislature.

"There is a need for all members to uphold the highest standards of discipline, decorum and accountability," Ogundoyin said.

Other lawmakers, including the Minority Leader, Mr Waliu Ayinde, and the Chief Whip, Mr Gbenga Oyekola, commended the Speaker for handling the matter with maturity, firmness and statesmanship.



### CANCER AWARENESS & OUTREACH:

L-R: Members, Breast Without Spot (BWS), Dr Ijeoma Ifeorah; Dr Chioma Aneke; President, Queens School, Enugu Old Girls Association (QSEOGA), Mrs Maureen Atuonwu; Guest Speaker, Prof. Ifeoma Okoye, and National Secretary, QSEOGA, Dr Amaka Orji, during Cancer Awareness and Outreach by QSEOGA in Collaboration with BWS at Queens School Enugu on Thursday.

## Police arrest man for exhumation, possession of 4 human heads in Ogun

## ABEOKUTA

The Ogun State Police Command has arrested a suspect, Gafaru Rasaki, for allegedly exhuming human remains from a cemetery in the Sagamu area of the state. The Command's Public Re-

lations Officer, DSP Oluseyi Babaseyi, disclosed this in a statement issued on Thursday in Abeokuta.

According to Babaseyi, operatives of the Shakura Police Division in Sagamu arrested the suspect on January 21, 2026, while he was found in

possession of four human heads.

"Upon interrogation and thorough investigation, it was revealed that the suspect unlawfully exhumed the human remains from a cemetery.

"This act amounts to a gross disregard for corpses and constitutes a serious violation of the law," the police spokesperson said.

He added that the recovered exhibits had been secured and that the suspect had been charged to court following the conclusion of investigations.

Babaseyi reaffirmed the Command's commitment to public safety and law enforcement, warning that acts involving the desecration of human remains would be met with the full weight of the law.

## MWAN calls for urgent investment in women-centred cancer care

## ABUJA

The Medical Women Association of Nigeria (MWAN), FCT Chapter, has called for urgent investment in women-centred cancer care, emphasising the need for stronger screening, early detection and equitable access to treatment.

MWAN President, Dr Maureen Umeakuewulu, made the call in a statement on Thursday in Abuja, in commemoration of World Cancer Day with the theme, "United by Unique."

She said the theme underscores the fact that behind every cancer statistic is a human being with a family, livelihood and dreams that deserve protection.

"In Nigeria, cancer contin-

ues to tell a tragic story. Recent estimates show over 127,000 new cancer cases annually, with nearly 80,000 deaths.

"These are not just numbers; they represent mothers, daughters, wives, sisters and breadwinners whose lives are cut short unnecessarily," she said.

Umeakuewulu noted that women in the Federal Capital Territory, where national health policies are formulated, often present late with cancer, face prolonged delays in diagnosis and struggle to access timely treatment.

She explained that cancers predominantly affecting women—breast, cervical, ovarian and uterine cancers—carry an especially heavy burden.

"Breast cancer now accounts

for over 28,000 new cases annually among Nigerian women, while cervical cancer claims about 8,000 lives each year, despite being largely preventable.

"Nigeria has one of the highest cervical cancer burdens globally, yet screening coverage remains unacceptably low," she added.

She warned that the impact of cancer extends beyond individuals, destabilising families and weakening communities.

"This is not only a health issue; it is a social justice issue. Late presentation remains the norm rather than the exception," she said.

Umeakuewulu highlighted gaps in Nigeria's healthcare system, noting limited organised screening programmes,

low awareness and unequal access to diagnostic services.

She also decried the country's severe infrastructure deficit, revealing that no government-owned hospital currently has a functional PET scan, while only one exists in a private facility, beyond the reach of most Nigerians.

She called for expanded population-based screening for breast and cervical cancer, strengthened HPV vaccination for girls aged 9–14 years, and the establishment of PET scan facilities in government tertiary hospitals, including in the FCT.

Umeakuewulu reaffirmed MWAN FCT's commitment to advocacy, community education and screening, urging Nigerians to prioritise their health.

## CBM invests ₦25bn to strengthen eye care services in 14 states

## ABUJA

The Christian Blind Mission (CBM) has invested 15 million Euros, equivalent to about ₦25 billion, to strengthen eye care services across 14 states in Nigeria.

The CBM Chief Executive Officer, Dr Rainer Brockhaus, disclosed this on Thursday in Abuja at the launch of the CBM SightQuest Nigeria Programme, themed "A Journey Towards Inclusive Eye Health."

The 10-year programme will run from January 2026 to 2035 across Bauchi, Imo, Jigawa, Plateau, Oyo and nine other states.

The initiative targets a 30 percent increase in effective Cataract Surgical Coverage in 10 states by 2030.

Brockhaus said the programme focuses on preventing avoidable blindness through cataract surgeries, refractive error services and expanded access for vulnerable communities.

He noted that CBM, which has operated globally for over a century, has been active in Nigeria for 57 years.

"We are proud to partner with the Nigerian government to strengthen inclusive health

systems and deliver vital services," he said.

According to him, SightQuest Nigeria is an integrated, comprehensive initiative aimed at reducing avoidable blindness and addressing refractive errors affecting millions of Nigerians.

The President of the Senate, Senator Godswill Akpabio, represented by the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Health, Dr Ipalibo Harry-Banigo, described the programme as more than a health intervention.

"Blindness and visual impairment remain among the quiet injustices of our time," Akpabio said, commending CBM for its long-term commitment.

The Minister of State for Health and Social Welfare, Dr Izaq Salako, reaffirmed the Federal Government's commitment to preventing avoidable vision loss, revealing plans to provide free cataract surgeries for 25,000 Nigerians by the end of 2026.

CBM Country Director, Mr Samuel Omoi, called on governments and stakeholders to support the programme to eliminate avoidable blindness in targeted states.

# NEMA, stakeholders meet in Kano to boost 2026 emergency preparedness

KANO

The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), Kano Operations Office, in collaboration with the Kano and Jigawa State Emergency Management Agencies (SEMAs), has convened a one-day Emergency Preparedness Coordination Stakeholders Meeting aimed at strengthening disaster response ahead of 2026.

The meeting, held in Kano on Thursday, focused on reviewing emergency preparedness and response activities carried out in 2025 and developing strategic plans for 2026.

Speaking at the event, the Head of Operations of NEMA Kano Office, Dr Nura Abdullahi, said the engagement was designed to reflect on past response efforts, draw lessons from recent emergencies and improve coordination among stakeholders.

Abdullahi described the meeting as a forward-looking initiative targeted at strengthening collective capacity to save lives and protect livelihoods, stressing that effective emergency management depends on coordination, clearly defined roles and mutual trust.

Recalling the recent Singer Market fire incident in Kano, he said the prompt response and high level of inter-agency collaboration underscored the importance of preparedness.

He commended the Kano State Fire Service and the Federal Fire Service for their professionalism, while acknowledging the support of security agencies, health responders, community volunteers and private sector partners, particularly Aspira Nigeria Ltd.

He noted that NEMA provides national coordination and technical guidance, while state SEMAs handle commu-

nity engagement and first-line response, with fire and security agencies supporting rescue and safety operations.

Abdullahi said the meeting was expected to produce a communiqué outlining resolutions, actionable strategies

for 2026 and a roadmap for strengthening emergency response systems across Kano, Jigawa and neighbouring states.

Declaring the meeting open, the Permanent Secretary, Kano State Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Hajiya Amina Yar'gaya,

described emergency preparedness as a critical operational strategy in disaster management, urging sustained cooperation among stakeholders.

Also speaking, the Executive Secretary of Kano State SEMA, Alhaji Abdullahi Kubarachi,

said the meeting would enhance preparedness for disasters, particularly flooding during the 2026 rainy season, noting that the state government under Governor Abba Kabir Yusuf had begun proactive risk mitigation measures.



RECEPTION FOR CHUKWUMA:

L-R: Deputy Chairman, African Democratic Congress (ADC), Enugu State, Mr Obeta Obiora; Women Leader, Enugu State, Mrs Ifeyinwa Ozioko; Chairman, Enugu State, Mrs Stella Chukwuma; Organizing Secretary, Comrade Charles Edeh and others, during a reception in honour of the ADC Chairman at the Akanu Ibiam International Airport in Enugu on Thursday.

## Police probe alleged abuse of house-help in Anambra

AWKA

The Anambra State Police Command has commenced an investigation into the alleged abuse of a house-help by her guardian, following the handover of the suspect by the State Ministry of Education.

The Police Public Relations Officer, SP Tochukwu Ikenga, disclosed this in a statement on Thursday in Awka, identifying the suspect as Mrs Edeh Osinachi, aged 29.

Ikenga said the suspect was handed over to the police on February 4 after allegedly inflicting serious injuries on a 17-year-old girl said to be her house help in Awka.

He said preliminary investigations revealed that school officials noticed severe injuries on the victim during a teaching

session and immediately made enquiries. The victim reportedly disclosed that the injuries were inflicted by her guardian.

According to the police, the suspect became angered after the girl used her phone without permission and allegedly used a hot pressing iron as punishment.

Ikenga said the suspect reportedly confessed to the act during police interrogation.

The Command commended the vigilance of the school authorities and assured the public that a thorough investigation would be conducted and that justice would be served in accordance with the law.

The police also urged parents to give birth to only the number of children they could adequately care for, warning that neglect often leaves children vulnerable to abuse while in the care of others.

## CAS prioritises training, State collaboration to strengthen air operations in S'East

ABUJA

The Chief of the Air Staff (CAS), Air Marshal Sunday Aneke, has identified robust ground training, personnel welfare and strong collaboration with state governments as key to sharpening Nigeria's airpower and sustaining security in the South-East.

Aneke made this known during a two-day operational visit to the Nigerian Air Force (NAF) Ground Training Command (GTC) in Enugu.

According to a statement by

the Director of Public Relations and Information of the NAF, Air Commodore Ehimen Ejodame, the CAS engaged training commanders and the Enugu State Government on practical steps to enhance operational readiness.

The air chief stressed that effective air operations depend largely on the quality of technical and support personnel produced by ground training institutions, noting that investment in training and welfare directly translates into mission success.

During a courtesy visit to Governor Peter Mbah, Aneke

commended the Enugu State Government for its sustained support to NAF personnel, particularly in accommodation and infrastructure development.

He described the partnership as a strategic contribution to national security, adding that collaboration on resettlement housing and agro-allied programmes would enhance personnel wellbeing, strengthen operational resilience and stimulate local economic activity.

Aneke also reaffirmed the NAF's commitment to intelligence-driven cooperation with sister security agencies to sustain peace and protect critical assets in Enugu State and across the South-East.

In his response, Governor Mbah assured the NAF of continued support, including land allocation for resettlement housing and NAF Farms, emphasising that security remained fundamental to development and investor confidence.

At the Ground Training Command, the CAS received an operational briefing from the Air Officer Commanding, AVM A.G. Kehinde, on training reforms, infrastructure upgrades and personnel development initiatives. Aneke commended the Command for aligning training standards with current security realities and assured continued institutional backing.

## Ogun Police arrest suspect over exhumation, possession of human heads

ABEOKUTA

The Ogun State Police Command has arrested a suspect, Gafaru Rasaki, over the alleged unlawful exhumation of human remains at a cemetery in the Sagamu area of the state.

The Command's Public Relations Officer, DSP Oluseyi Babaseyi, disclosed this in a statement issued on Thursday in Abeokuta.

Babaseyi said operatives of the Shakura Police Division arrested the suspect on January 21, 2026, after he was found in possession of four human heads.

According to him, investigations revealed that the suspect unlawfully exhumed the remains from a cemetery, describing the act as a serious violation of the law and a gross disregard for human dignity.

He said the recovered exhibits had been secured and that

the suspect had been charged to court following the conclusion of investigations.

The police spokesperson reaffirmed the Command's commitment to public safety and warned that acts involving the desecration of human remains would be met with the full weight of the law.

### MISSING LANDED DOCUMENT

The general public is hereby notified that **BEAUTY VINCENT** is the rightful owner of a piece of land measuring 50ft by 100ft which has four bedrooms bungalow, and uncompleted two bedrooms flat situated at **EVBOWE COMMUNITY** in **Oredo Local Government Area of Edo State**. That the certificate got missing in Benin City, and all efforts to trace it has proved abortive, hence this publication for record purpose. Concern authorities and the general public should please take note.

Signed:  
**BEAUTY VINCENT**

### RECONCILIATION OF NAME

The general is hereby notified that **MR OGBU PATRICK CHUKWUJIOKEM** and **MR OGBU PATRICK CHIJIJOKE** are one and the same person. Henceforth, I wish to be known called and addressed as **MR OGBU PATRICK CHUKWUJIOKEM**. All former documents remain valid concerned authorities and general public please take note.

Classified  
Advert Space  
for Sale

## Wike-backed PDP faction turns up at INEC stakeholders' meeting amid leadership tussle

ABUJA

Leaders of the National Caretaker Committee of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), backed by former Rivers State Governor Nyesom Wike, on Thursday attended the Independent National Electoral Commission's (INEC) quarterly consultative meeting with political parties.

Present at the meeting were the Chairman of the Caretaker Committee, Abdulrahman Mohammed, and the Secretary, Senator Samuel Anyanwu.

Although INEC has yet to make an official comment on the development, the appearance of the Mohammed-led leadership comes days after a Federal High Court in Ibadan declined to recognise the Tanimu Turaki-led

faction of the party.

While the Mohammed-led National Working Committee welcomed the judgment, the Turaki-led NWC rejected the ruling and has filed an appeal. Turaki said the party had earlier approached the Ibadan court, seeking an order of mandamus to compel INEC to recognise the leadership produced by its convention, but the court

declined the request on the grounds that it would amount to sitting on appeal over courts of coordinate jurisdiction.

INEC Chairman, Prof. Joash Amupitan, had on December 19, 2025, met leaders of the two rival PDP factions ahead of the February 21 Federal Capital Territory (FCT) area council elections, as well as the forthcoming Osun and Ekiti governorship polls.

## NEWS

## Foreign

## Russia and Ukraine exchange prisoners as peace talks end without breakthrough

Many of exchanged Ukrainians had been held in captivity since 2022, Kyiv said

Ukraine and Russia have conducted a rare exchange of prisoners of war and civilians after two days of US-brokered peace talks in Abu Dhabi.

A total of 157 Ukrainians - seven of them civilians - and 157 Russian soldiers were returned home in the first such swap in four months.

Russian, Ukrainian and US teams took part in the talks in the capital of the United Arab Emirates, with the main sticking points believed to be territorial concessions Ukraine is under pressure to make and security guarantees for it to prevent further Russian attacks if a deal is agreed to end the

four-year war.

No breakthrough has been reported. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said the talks had not been easy and he wanted "faster results".

The exchanged Russian soldiers were currently staying in Belarus, the Russian defence ministry said

Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

In a post on social media, Zelensky wrote that Thursday's prisoner exchange "took place after a long pause" - referring to the previous such swap last October.

"We are returning our people home - 157 Ukrainians. Soldiers of the Armed Forces, National Guard, State Border Service.

"And civilians are also returning with the defenders. Most have been in captivity

since 2012," the Ukrainian president said, pledging to bring back every single Ukrainian still in Russian captivity.

Ukrainians officials said 139 had been in Russian captivity since 2022.

Meanwhile, the Russian defence ministry said 157 of its POWs were returned by Kyiv.

The ministry added that three Russian civilians "illegally held" were also handed back. They were residents of the western Kursk region, parts of which were occupied by Ukraine during its incursion in 2024-25.

The talks in Abu Dhabi - the second round in recent weeks - are part of US President Donald Trump's efforts to end the war.

Special envoy Steve Witkoff and Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner have been leading the

negotiations.

The talks had been "detailed and productive", Witkoff wrote on X, but added that "significant work remains".

The most difficult issue is territory, with Russia demanding that Ukraine cedes the rest of the eastern industrial region of Donbas that Moscow does not currently control.

Another key sticking point is believed to be Kyiv's demand to get robust security guarantees from its European allies and the US.

No details have been released.

The trilateral talks began as Russia renewed its deadly attacks on Ukraine after a week-long pause that Trump had asked Russian President Vladimir Putin to observe as a fierce cold swept Ukraine.

## Lebanon says Israel sprayed southern villages with concentrated herbicide

Lebanon has accused Israeli aircraft of spraying an agricultural herbicide over southern villages at concentrations authorities described as dangerously high, raising concerns for food and environmental security.

The agriculture and environment ministries said laboratory tests confirmed the substance was glyphosate, a chemical used to destroy vegetation, with concentrations in some samples "between 20 and 30 times the levels usually accepted".

President Joseph Aoun condemned the spraying of what he described as "toxic substances", calling it a violation of Lebanese sovereignty and an environmental and health crime.

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) told the BBC they had no comment on the matter.

The purpose behind the release of herbicide on the villages remains unclear.

Residents in several border villages reported the spraying, which comes more than a year after a ceasefire ended a war between Israel and the Lebanese Shia Islamist group Hezbollah.

Earlier in the week, United Nations peacekeepers in Lebanon said they had been notified by Israel of planned spraying near the border and were ad-

vised to take shelter.

The communication forced them to cancel some of their planned operations. They said this was not the first time Israeli forces had dropped unknown chemical substances from aircraft over Lebanese territory.

With tens of thousands still displaced after hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah in 2023-24, the challenges for returning home are compounded, according to Ramzi Kaiss, a researcher with Human Rights Watch in Lebanon.

"These areas are heavily dependent on agriculture - olive groves, tobacco, and other crops - and this incident complicates people's ability to return to their homes, maintain their livelihoods, and rebuild after extensive destruction," Kaiss said.

Experts warn that incidents like this do not only harm local ecosystems but also have broader economic consequences for Lebanon's farming sector.

In April 2025, the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization reported that the 2024 conflict had caused more than \$700m (£515m; 600m euros) in damage and losses to Lebanon's agricultural sector, particularly in the south and the Bekaa Valley.



RECEIVED 195 SOLDIERS:

The Russian defence ministry said each side had received 195 soldiers while Ukraine said it had been given 207 people back.

SOURCE: AP / DANYLO PAVLOV

## Dozens of Muslims 'massacred' in Nigeria for refusing to join jihadists, says governor

Dozens of people have been killed in a ferocious shooting attack on two villages in Nigeria's western state of Kwara after they refused to "surrender to extremists who preached a strange doctrine", according to the state's governor.

Governor AbdulRahman AbdulRazaq said on X that "75 local Muslims were massacred" in Tuesday's raid, while a state lawmaker told the BBC that 78 people had been buried so far and the death toll could rise to an estimated 170 as more corpses were being recovered.

Blaming Islamist militant group Boko Haram for the killings, President Bola Tinubu deployed an army battalion to the affected area.

The assault was one of several across Nigeria in the last few days.

In addition to the killings in the villages of Woro and Nuku, 38 people were abducted while

others fled and shops and homes were set alight, said Saidu Baba Ahmed, a member of the Kwara state house of assembly.

Among the dead were two sons of the local traditional leader, who also had family members kidnapped, according to local resident Abdulla Umar Usman.

The attack began after 17:00 local time and last three to four hours, he told the BBC.

Ahmed said that Boko Haram activity had been gradually increasing in the area, saying the attack was triggered by the community's rejection of a strict interpretation of Islam.

He explained that the Islamist group had written to the community about their arrival, saying they wanted to preach, but residents resisted and deployed local security forces.

Details about the exact number of people who died in the remote area are hard to confirm.

A Red Cross official in Kwara, Babaomo Ayodeji, told AFP that "reports said that the death toll now stands at 162, as the search for more bodies continues".

Amnesty International said in a statement that over 170 people had died, noting many were shot at close range and some burnt alive.

The human rights group called for an investigation and said there was a "stunning absence of any form of security for the protection of lives".

In recent months, jihadists - suspected to be from a Boko Haram splinter faction - have been active in Kwara, carrying out targeted killings, often riding in on motorcycles and attacking markets and vigilante groups set up to protect villagers.

In a press release on Wednesday, the state governor said the attack on the two villages was a result of recent counter-terror-

ism operations in the region.

AbdulRazaq believed it was "apparently to distract the security forces who have successfully hunted down several terrorist and kidnapping gangs".

Tuesday also saw 21 people being killed in an attack on Doma village in Katsina state in the north, Amnesty said. On the same day 17 people were killed in a series of attacks in the north-eastern Borno state, by suspected Boko Haram militants.

Map of Nigeria highlighting three states: Katsina in the north-central region, Borno in the far northeast and Kwara in the west

The attacks come alongside the first official acknowledgement from Nigeria of an American troop presence since US President Donald Trump ordered the military in November to prepare for action in Nigeria to tackle Islamist militant groups.

## Starmer apologises to Epstein victims for believing Mandelson's 'lies'

Sir Keir Starmer has apologised to the victims of Jeffrey Epstein for believing Lord Mandelson's "lies" and appointing him as the UK's ambassador to the US.

The prime minister began a planned speech on funding to improve local communities by addressing the growing anger over how he had dealt with the issue.

While he acknowledged it had been publicly known for some time that Lord Mandelson knew Epstein, he said: "None of us knew the depths and the darkness of that relationship."

However, Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch said the PM's position was "untenable", while the Liberal Democrats called for a confidence vote to see if Labour MPs supported him.

The prime minister is facing calls from some of his own MPs to stand down.

While the handful of backbenchers to do so publicly are frequent critics of the PM, many more have raised concerns privately.

Sir Keir's former political director Luke Sullivan said he thought the PM was "fighting for his premiership".

He told the BBC's Newscast: "I don't think you can understate how serious the situation and the peril is that the prime

minister finds himself in."

Seeking to defuse the row in a speech earlier, Sir Keir said he regretted appointing Lord Mandelson and would not have done so if he had known what he knows now.

Directly addressing Epstein's victims, he said: "I am sorry, sorry for what was done to you, sorry that so many people with power failed you. Sorry for having believed Mandelson's lies and appointed him and sorry that even now you're forced to watch this story unfold in public once again."

Sir Keir has promised to release files, which he says will prove Lord Mandelson lied about the extent of his friendship with Epstein when he was being vetted for the US ambassador role.

The government was forced into a climbdown by Labour backbenchers, after it had planned to withhold some sensitive material.

After a Commons vote, the government will pass documents which could damage national security or diplomatic relations to Parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC), rather than withholding them.

The ISC says the government should decide which documents are made public - and which are not.

**Foreign****NEWS****US and Iran agree to hold nuclear talks in Oman**

The US and Iran have agreed to hold nuclear talks in Oman on Friday, as President Donald Trump issued a blunt warning to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said that the meeting would start at 10:00 (06:00 GMT) in Muscat. US officials also confirmed it would happen there.

The talks had appeared to be in jeopardy, with the two countries at odds over the location and parameters.

Trump has built up US forces in the region and threatened military action if Iran does not agree a deal on its nuclear programme and stop killing protesters. Asked whether Khamenei should be worried, he told NBC News on Wednesday: "I would say he should be very worried."

"He should be. As you know, they're negotiating with us," he added.

Khamenei warned the US on Sunday that any attack on Iran would spark a "regional war".

An Arab diplomat told the BBC's US partner, CBS News, that the negotiations between Tehran and Washington were never officially called off but had been in flux on Wednesday morning.

Three US officials also confirmed the accuracy of an Axios report, which said the talks were put back on track in the afternoon after several Arab and Muslim leaders urged the

Trump administration not to follow through on its threats to walk away.

Axios said the administration agreed to the request "to be respectful" to its allies but that it was "very sceptical" about the prospects of success.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio earlier told a news conference that special envoy Steve Witkoff had been preparing to meet Iranian officials in Turkey along with representatives of other regional powers, when they received "conflicting reports" about Iran's participation.

Rubio also insisted that for the talks to "lead to something meaningful" they could not focus solely on the Iranian nuclear programme, as Iranian officials have demanded.

"They will have to include certain things, and that includes the range of their ballistic missiles, that includes their sponsorship of terrorist organisations across the region, that includes their nuclear programme, and that includes the treatment of their own people," he said.

On Sunday, his Iranian counterpart was asked in an interview with CNN whether Iran was prepared to discuss reported US demands. These were to curb its ballistic missile development and halt support for proxy militias, as well as end the production of enriched uranium, which is used to make reactor fuel but can also potentially be used for nuclear weapons.

**Seven Toronto police officers arrested in corruption probe**

Seven Toronto police officers and a former member of the service have been arrested following a crime and corruption probe that includes allegations of drug trafficking and conspiracy to commit murder.

The investigation was initiated following a June 2025 incident in which some officers allegedly attempted to kill a prison official at his home.

The probe also led to the arrest of seven civilians. Authorities found that some of the officers allegedly trafficked fentanyl and cannabis.

"No corner of society is immune from the reach of organised crime, but when organised crime penetrates the Toronto Police Service the harm goes far beyond the immediate wrongdoing," said police Chief Myron Demkiw.

The seven officers who were arrested are now suspended, Demkiw said. He added that he would be seeking to suspend them without pay "where appropriate".

At an expansive press conference on Thursday, Deputy Chief Ryan Hogan shared the surveillance footage of the in-

cident in which three masked men armed with a handgun appeared at the corrections official's home and rammed a police vehicle that was in the driveway.

Of the seven civilians arrested, three are accused of plotting to kill the corrections manager at his home.

The other four civilians have been charged with alleged links to international organised crime.

Some of these individuals allegedly used bribes to get private information from police as part of an extortion plot, officials said.

"This is a deeply disappointing and sad day for policing," York Regional Police Chief Jim MacSween said. "And it shows the insidious and corrosive nature of organised crime."

More than 400 officers, including from York, Toronto and the Ontario Provincial Police, were involved in the investigation, York Deputy Chief Ryan Hogan said at the press conference.

Police chief Demkiw said he had not been asked to resign, in light of the internal corruption, but acknowledged the distrust the situation caused.

**RESTRICTED PART:**

Humanitarian access has been restricted by the government in opposition-held parts of Jonglei.

**Israeli intelligence chief's brother charged with smuggling cigarettes into Gaza**

Israeli prosecutors have charged the brother of the head of the country's intelligence agency, Shin Bet, with "aiding the enemy in wartime" by allegedly smuggling cigarettes into Gaza.

An indictment against Bezael Zini published on Thursday argues he was aware that Hamas might profit from the resale of cigarettes and tobacco at inflated prices.

Zini, 50, a reservist on active duty in the Israeli military, is said to have smuggled 14 cartons of cigarettes - 7,000 individual packets - in exchange for a total of 365,000 shekels

(\$117,000; £86,000).

His brother, the recently appointed Shin Bet chief David Zini, is not suspected of any wrongdoing.

Israel has tightly controlled the flow of humanitarian aid and other goods into Gaza during the conflict with Hamas.

The charges are part of a wider set of indictments against more than a dozen individuals, alleging that an organised crime ring smuggled brand new, top-end iPhones, car parts, and other electronics into Gaza.

The sale of smuggled tobacco and cigarettes alone put

"hundreds of millions of shekels into Hamas's coffers since the start of the war", the indictment alleges.

Prosecutors say the smuggling operation began in the summer of 2025, before the ceasefire in October, when the fighting was still raging in the strip.

They say the smugglers pretended they were entering Gaza as part of their military duties, misleading Israeli soldiers on the border crossing points.

The indictment against Bezael Zini also accuses him of fraud, receiving a bribe, and

tax offences. He was arrested two weeks ago along with two alleged accomplices, who were also charged with smuggling.

Zini's defence lawyers said their client denied the charges, according to Israel's Haaretz newspaper, arguing that the application of a terrorism law was not appropriate for the alleged smuggling of cigarettes.

"Regarding the offence of aiding the enemy during wartime, it is a complete inversion of reality. This is someone who has given everything and risked his life for the state," the paper quoted one of his lawyers as saying.

**Aid workers missing after airstrikes hit South Sudan hospital**

An unknown number of aid workers are missing after air strikes hit a hospital in South Sudan, near the Ethiopian border, a charity group says.

The hospital, run by medical charity Doctors Without Borders (MSF) in Jonglei state, "was hit in an air strike by the government of South Sudan forces during the night on Tuesday", MSF said. The South Sudan government is yet to comment.

In a separate attack, MSF said its health facility in Pieri, also in Jonglei state, was on the same day looted by unknown assailants, leaving it "unusable for the local community".

"Our colleagues had to flee with the community and their fate and whereabouts are still unknown," the medical organisation said.

There has been a resurgence in fighting in Jonglei state recently between government forces and those loyal to First Vice-President Riek Machar,

who has been suspended from his post after being accused of plotting to overthrow President Salva Kiir.

There are fears that the fighting could re-ignite a full-blown civil war in the world's youngest nation.

Jonglei, one of the most food-insecure parts of the country with severe health needs, has seen an estimated 280,000 people displaced by fighting and aerial bombardments since December, the UN said.

South Sudan army chief gives soldiers seven days to crush rebellion

MSF said that ahead of Tuesday's first attack in the Lankien area, it had received information about a possible strike, so the hospital was "evacuated and patients were discharged hours before the attack". Of

"One staff member was injured, and the hospital's main warehouse was destroyed along with medical supplies," the group said in a statement.

Lankien has been at the centre of renewed fighting in recent weeks between government troops and opposition forces.

"The hospital's main warehouse was destroyed during the attack, and we lost most of our critical supplies for providing medical care," the group added.

It was not immediately clear who was behind the attack but MSF said: "The government of South Sudan armed forces are the only armed party with the capacity to perform aerial attacks in the country."

Map showing location of South Sudan, Juba, Bor and Jonglei state

MSF said it was the only health provider serving around 250,000 people in Lankien and Pieri, warning that attacks on its facilities there "mean that local communities will be left without any healthcare".

"While we are aware of the enormous needs in the country, we find it unacceptable to be a target for attacks," said Gul


Badshah, MSF's operations manager.

The medical charity said it had experienced eight targeted attacks in South Sudan last year, forcing the closure of two hospitals in Greater Upper Nile and the suspension of general healthcare activities in Jonglei, Upper Nile and Central Equatoria states.

In December, the South Sudanese government imposed restrictions on humanitarian access in opposition-held areas of Jonglei, limiting MSF's ability to deliver essential medical assistance.

Fighting between forces loyal to Machar and Kiir first broke out in 2013, two years after independence.

A 2018 peace deal ended the civil war that had killed nearly 400,000 people, but it has never been properly implemented and the relationship between the pair has become increasingly strained amid ethnic tensions and sporadic violence.

 <p><b>The Nigerian Observer</b> ...That the people may know</p>	<h2 style="margin:0;">ADVERTISEMENT RATES (PRINT)</h2>
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10 X 4	340,000	365,500	273,500	294,013	177,400	190,705	370,000	397,750	295,600	317,770
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10 X 3	221,700	238,328	147,800	158,885	118,300	127,173	266,000	285,950	251,300	270,148
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FP 5X2	81,100	87,183	97,300	104,598	5 X 2	51,950	55,846	42,120	45,279
FP 4X2	73,000	78,475	80,700	86,753	4 X 2	45,260	48,655	34,400	36,980
FP 3X2	64,870	69,735	73,000	78,475	3 X 2	30,900	33,218	26,600	28,595
FP 2X2	59,000	63,425	64,900	69,768	2 X 2	18,680	20,081	15,600	16,770
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PAGES 4 & 5	ADD 40% SURCHARGE				Miss to Mrs.	5000	7000
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**EFFECTIVE FROM FEBRUARY 1, 2023**

# Entertainment

— with Davidson Imosime Izegaegbe —

## How Benin City reclaimed the sound of the streets

The "Pluto" Movement is currently a massive cultural phenomenon in Nigeria. It is a manufactured phenomenon encased as a product from the soul of the red soil of Benin City to the world. Taking a deep insight into the nature and influence begin the philosophy of the Edo pop culture, one can only be reminded of a society refusing to sweep under the rug, the rich art culture developed over centuries from the Ogiso to Oba dynasty in worship and celebrations of the rituals, customs, beliefs, traditions, cultures and the well positioned philosophy behind them all from generations to generations.

The Edo culture is a cultural phenomenon in motion through the eye of time. It sees all in bronze casting, wood carvings, festivals, spirituality, food, market calendars, births, deaths, age groups, sculpting, dresses and languages. The identity of the Edo born is casted in his culture. Edo State and its culture are like a threaded bead around the neck, waist, and rattle with a duty to create a unique sound pleasing to the hearing of all. From the palace of the Oba of Benin to Owan, Esan, Akoko-Edo, Igbanke is a simple cultural identity and philosophy that thread them together. Edo State has never lacked in any form of cultural heritage and its phenomenon. Do you still wonder why the slogan: Edo to the world?

For decades, the narrative of Nigerian pop culture was written almost exclusively on the streets of Lagos. I grew up to know this just like many of us. Little do we wonder how Lagos got to be the Centre of Excellence! It was the place where potters make money for displaying their wares. It was a place where money and opportunities meet and mix with diverse creativities. Do we still wonder why majority of the Edo creatives live in all parts of Lagos and stretching to Ogun State? The film industry got its footing there. Foreign and local music labels built their offices there. What about the embassies and multinational organizations? Their head offices are domiciled there. Lagos, like the bee house, was a honeycomb attracting all to itself. Many greets from Edo State left for Lagos, made their marks but it never depleted the source, Edo State, where they left for Lagos. The sports are not left out, but such is the strength of the cultural philosophy of the state. An Edo born, whether a true child of the soil or a foreigner born with his or her placenta buried in the red soil, is blessed by the gifts of the ancestors of the land.

Everything used to start and finish in Lagos, but not so any more as sonic shift is currently vibrating out of the ancient red dust of Benin City. Lagos is now the stage to perform just like Benin City, but being gifted, and horning such gift starts from Edo State. We can take a cue from the haunting, ancestral falsettos of Rema to the irreverent, 'Plutomania' energy of Shalipoppi, without needing to go down the memory paths. Edo State is no longer just the 'Cradle of Black Civilization'—it is the new headquarters of urban cool. This isn't just a musical trend; it's a cultural restoration where Bini dialect, street slang like 'Evian,' and the rhythmic pulse of the heartbeat of the nation are being exported from the Victor Uwaifo Creative Hub to the global stage. As we witness this 'resurgence of the South,' it is clear that Benin City has stopped being the showroom and has finally taken a bold step to become the factory where Nigeria's most authentic entertainment is manufactured without stress in creative self-discovery.

The world spotlight on Rema and Shalipoppi duo with their outstanding crafts have shown that every Edo Child is a stone waiting for the right time to be sculpted into being appreciated nationally and globally. The aesthetic of Edo born creatives whether in music or film, in metal works or paintings, colours play a dominant role as remembrance and celebrations of the red soil that gave them creative meaning and relevance. You see the red soil and its mood in their musical videos, the bat as a symbol of protection common in their taking turns from the Benin Palace,

around the ring-road axis, the beads, and traditional dresses of the Edo people as well as the foods. The Edo black soup has taken over most restaurants in Nigeria. Edo languages and our street slangs have been well fused with contemporary music to create a new form of music culture and this is revolutionary as it now helps create a blend of the ancient and modern.

This write up is not to hint on superiority of culture but how culture can indirectly influence and change the culture of other people. The write up is designed to deepen the analysis and bridge the gap between the music, film and the broader cultural identity of the Edo state.

This metamorphosis of the current music trend of the Edo born artistes goes beyond just the catchy hooks of the now very famous Afrobeats; it is a reclamation of the Edo identity born before Edo became an empire centuries ago, went through time developing along modern trends without losing its cultural philosophy and now into a digital age. Unlike previous generations that often felt the need to 'Lagosify' their sound-beats and style of music in other to enable them gain national acceptance. Many waters have passed under the creative bridge and we can notice this creative change as today's Edo creatives are now leaning heavily into their origins, discovering themselves as well as their strong points, turning local idiosyncrasies into global statements and currencies. The visual aesthetics of their music videos, like I hinted earlier, is now intentionally tilted towards often blending the regal weight of coral beads with the gritty, neon-lit energy of Ring Road, which has now defined, suggest and show that we now have a generation that is comfortably wearing its history as a badge of honour on their modern armor. By transforming the 'Benin mystery' into 'Benin magic,' these artists are doing more than topping charts and selling Edo State as a creative product globally; they are now providing a blueprint for how indigenous culture can stay relevant without losing its soul, proving that while Lagos might have the speakers, Benin City currently holds the microphone and the songs.

However, the true test of this cultural boom in our state, lies in its sustainability beyond the viral lifecycle of a TikTok sound. For Benin City to remain the 'factory' of Nigerian entertainment, the current momentum, which presently is like a musician thrust before a diverse heterogeneous audience, must be met with deliberate structural investment. Let us not politicize creativity or talents. If that happens, as it seems, we would have deliberately pushed the ladder from under our own feet. We are already seeing the seeds of this through the institutional support of creative hubs and the influx of private festivals that turn the state into an annual pilgrimage site globally, from summit son Edo Economy, globally recognized production hubs, Edo State International Film Festival ESIF, ENINA Theatrical Festival, and so on from the Edo State Government alone. The additional from the professionals residing in the state all made Edo State and investment ready community by all and sundry before now. As the world turns its gaze toward the South, the challenge for Edo's gatekeepers—and its rising stars—is to ensure that this 'Pluto' moment, the Rema creative connection isn't just a fleeting solar eclipse, but the dawn of a permanent creative economy that would package arts and culture as a product and sold nationally and globally. If the current trajectory holds, which we all hope from the Edo State Government, the next decade won't just be about Benin's past glory as an empire conquered by mercenaries from overseas, in bronze, wood carvings, sculpting, empty museum, sold moats, abandoned tourist sites around the states, inaccessible apartments built as lodges for filmmakers and other accessories, but its future legacy engraved in gold, platinum, and the global imagination of the greatness of a people who see their tomorrow from their creative search, discovery, walk about to global acceptance and dominance. In all, EDO-TO-THE-WORLD!

# TATAFO



## Krietivity and African tradishon

A beg, make we gada rand awaself, make we suffri yan beta talk today on wetin konsan us as far as korshor and tradishon mata. I no say ya bodi don begin de shake laik barber chair or do gigbigigbi laik train wey de learn how to gallop for railway. How una de and hope una gallant laik Naija soja inside Sambisa forest? Eniways, first tin first na to jejely sidon, relax, even kpakpa carry one chilled botool of miniral or ogbonge palmwine, bicos we wan breakages grammar about sometin wey deep, sometin wey sweet, and sometin wey be de engine room of awa identity: Krietivity and African Tradishon.

Make I ask una one kweshon: as akatarians wey don waka meni kontris or homebase wey dem bodi don feel am, plus don see tins with dem eyes for dis 21st century, una neva notice say, evri wia una turn una eyes or ears go, una go de hia Africa music dey blow from Oyinbos dem music speakers laik fawol wey nor de miss to do kukuruku evri morni? Dis nor be just to yan and waka comot, aftarall dem say who de ask kweshon no de eva loss. Incase una neva no, awa music dey burst speakers for London plus oda obodo parts of oyinbo komunities. Na so awa fashon dey follow oda Oyinbos dem de hold grand for runways for inside Paris laik weaver wey no wan leave beans alone. Abi na awa movies wey de gallantly flex muzle with oda Netflix top 10 films for America? My pipo, de strungle de real and normali, as Naija pipo, we nor de gree for eninodi not to com open awa okpolor eyes carri las.

If una shine una eyes wella, una go see say the secret tin, laik sauce wey dem put inside soup to make am sweet, de always de inside all dis awa success. And to make de mata balance well, we com still sabi de secret of how to na take mix our old-school tradishon with awa new-skool krietivity. Awa tradishon be laik roots wey dem soak inside kain-kain drink wey nor fit sour or spoil. Awa tradishon na ororo wey nor fit eva fade, bicos na so baba God do am.

Abeg, wetin be tradishon? Meni of us de always tink say tradishon na just to dey wia awa native wrappers, caps or to de gidigba for inside village. No o! Tradishon na our DNA. Na the way our grandfadas take de tell us stories of who we be, wia we com from, wetin we fit do with de tins baba God don dash us for night under moonlight, for age group ceremonies, for durin awa difrent festivals, marriages, wen we born pikins and wen we kpai. Tradishon na also de way aw mamas dem de take tie dia geles wey reach sky to match with dem wrappers. Na de fine designs awa pipo wey de do clothes de put for awa Ankara and also de rhythm of awa drum-beats wey de make person leg de shake even if him no wan dance.

African tradishon no be museum piece wey just sidon laik wetin dem take serve ancestors for one place, wey eida de rotten or gada dust. E be laik river wey de flow with konfidenz. Awa ancestors nor be just old pipo wey de match time to kpai; na dem be de first set of krietives. Shine ya eyes for awa Benin Bronzes na and rison dem with one kain mind, luk at de Ife heads, luk at de way de Zulu pipo for South Africa take de arrange dia beads. Make you yan me, dat one no be krietivity? If nor be krietivity, make una tell me wetin e be na.

We nor fit yan enitin about krietivity today without say we nor see tradishon inside. Dem be laik twins. True true, we nor still fit commot tradishon bicos na dia de inspirashon true true for start. If you nor no wia you de com from, make you yan me na, how you wan com no how to build de road to wia you de go?

Oya na, make we start with de one wey evribodi no, Music. Today, de world de dance to Burna Boy, Wizkid, Rema, Davido, and Shalipoppi, but neva take time to listen to all awa Naija music beats well-well. True to God, if you open ya mind to rilli hia dis music beats, I swear, na de sound of awa ancestors you go de hia, even say meni pipo de call dis beats, ogene, afro, kpangolo and so on. Som go even tell us say na inside dem dream person giv dem dia lyrics, beats and oda tins. Las las, if dem nor fit explain am, dem go call am inspirashon.

If we all luk Fela Kuti style (Afrobeat), MAJEK Fashek kpangolo, Sunny Ade, Ebenezer Obey, Orlando juju music, Sir Victor Uwaifo titibiti sound, plus fuji and highlife music, we all go no say, all dis difrent music styles na tradishon in motion from awa ancestors way of music worshipping. Nawadays, we don de add oyinbo electronic sounds. We even don de add violin, but that "Gbedu" (de heavy African drum), talking drums ema-olokun from Edo State still get de rhythm of awa ancestors spirit as if dem wan yan us somtin.

If una hia Asake, Olamide and oda musishans songs, una go hia inside dem songs de normal call-and-response music style wey we de use for awa various village festivals. If dat one nor be krietivity—taking de ancient drum and com make am de sound like dem make am in de year 3000- wetin e com be?

Ok na, make we use style waka enta inside fashon to see de role wey tradishon de play inside. Una still rememba de word koloniamentality? Nor worri, una go soon undastand my yanings. Long time ago, som pipo tink and beliv say, to dress wella, mean say you must wia suit and tie. But look at us now! All dat neva change?...

# ArtsWorld with Francis Odupte 08023680030

## A way with information graphics in Development Communication

**D**on't get me wrong, please! I didn't say "Away with Info-graphics", I said "A way with Info-graphics". It is important I made this clear from the onset so that you don't misunderstand me.

We live in a world where communication is everything, when we talk of human development, peace and progress in the society. As an Artist and mass communicator, I'm coming to grips with the power of imageries and symbols in creative education and development communication. Art is a universal lingua franca and the adage that a picture is worth a thousand words is not far-fetched: 'One image can communicate more than dozens of pages of text or hours of speeches. One image can change the course of history. Editorial cartoons draw attention to important political, economic, and social issues like nothing else. Using symbols or visual metaphors, their reach transcends country borders and language barriers.'

The following tips from my personal experiences and past experimentations might be helpful to upcoming creatives and development communication practitioners in innovating to improve on how we get our messages across to a wider audience beyond the pen and pages of the newspapers and even TV screens, in a unique way that truly engages the target audience and fosters dialogue that over time triggers voluntary personal behavior change. I hope you find my experience enticing.

### First things first: HAVE A GOOD IDEA

I often tell my art and media I.T. students that your greatest weapon in visual communication is CONCEPT – a good idea. I also used to tell them that the strength of any cartoon, illustration or photographic work you create is the MESSAGE it passes across. If this is true, it therefore means that if you want to deploy pictorial storytelling in journalism and development communication, you must think deep to allow Muse give you a bankable idea that can sell to any audience; and ideas come mostly by you being circumspect and observant of happenings around you. It also comes by you reading wide. Someone once said, "Fear a man of one book". To be a good storyteller, you must be given to reading as an addiction.

### BE AUDACIOUS

The initial concept for the mega-long cartoon was conceived inside the Press Room of the 2012 World Water Week (WWW) conference in Stockholm, Sweden, while journalists from different countries battled with their laptops, notebooks, i-pads and the internet facilities in the Press room to send stories home to their media outfits.

Arising from one of the conference sessions of the 2012WWW in Stockholm, particularly the "Water Cooperation" session, I attempted to make an editorial cartoon that pillo-



ried the hypocrisy of most developed nations who bandy the water-agriculture-development nexus for developing nations without tangible commitments to stopping or mitigation the environment and climate crimes of their multi-national oil companies polluting with impunity the waters and environments of poor communities of the world (like my own Niger Delta region in Nigeria) through air and water pollutions, gas flaring, oil spills et al. The cartoon with a header "WORLD WATER WEEK SPECIAL: Oil Wise, W.A.S.H Foolish" depicted the world as a thirsty pig lapping contaminated water from an oil polluted river, against the skyline that was being gradually enveloped in thick smoke emitting from the oil drilling rig in the background.

Later that day, in my hotel room I decided to develop this cartoon further and use it as the concept for my final work for the National Art Competition (NAC2012) grand finale exhibition in Nigeria, which was themed "CONSEQUENCES" and of which I was already selected as one of the 12 finalists from across the country that year by the event organizers, the African Artists Foundation (AAF). And, as I told you earlier, on returning from the 2012WWW media conference in Stockholm, Sweden, I started experimenting further on making the cartoon "Oil Wise, WASH Foolish" sail through in local context as a catalyst for efficacious public education and

*The mega-length cartoon was to be strategically used as an ADVOCACY TOOL for a special travelling exhibition that would traverse the whole of the NIGER DELTA regions of this country and possibly move to overseas countries, to drum more support from environment stakeholders across the world...*

advocacy on the population – environment – underdevelopment nexus in Nigeria.

(The story of a punchy cartoon on environmental protection that I created in Stockholm, Sweden, during the 2012 World Water Week conference, which was later published by HORIZON INTERNATIONAL's website (www.Solutions-site.org) in USA, and how it was further developed into a mega long experimental, interactive "Open Cartoon" for the 2012 NAC grand finale/ exhibition in Lagos, Nigeria, where it fostered dialogue and efficacious public education through audience engagement):

### THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

What happens when you take a simple idea or a popular Art form out of its familiar environment and context? It assumes a fresh meaning far beyond the traditional terrain, and

reaches for new frontiers and psychological/aesthetic contemplations that engage a new kind of audience and imbue fresh thinking, actions and behaviors.

The 2012 NAC was a perfect example: the making of this crowd-pulling art piece was decisive. I wanted to create something novel, something cotemporary, something comedic and 'straight to the point'. I wanted to produce a work that would serve more than one purpose – a master piece that would go beyond the NAC project to provide an ANSWER a variety of other issues and concerns in the Nigerian socio-political context; something even a novice can easily comprehend and interact without consulting any external aid.

The mega-length cartoon was to be strategically used as an ADVOCACY TOOL for a special travelling exhibition that would traverse the whole

of the NIGER DELTA regions of this country and possibly move to overseas countries, to drum more support from environment stakeholders across the world to the deteriorating problems of my poor and voiceless people of the Niger Delta as a result of water pollution, oil spills, gas flaring and other climate crimes by multinational oil companies in the areas.

Being a Niger Delta indigene, I knew I owed myself and my people this service, at a right time to come soon. I already made a few contacts from the World Water Week event in Stockholm who expressed interest in supporting such advocacy projects, if they proved bankable and of high value to their programs focus. Little did I know that the Nigerian Breweries, sponsors of National Art Competition (NAC) annual event, were going to put a stake for it, indicating an interest to acquire the mega-length master piece from the organizers, AAF, after the grand finale event in Lagos.

**Engage Your Audience:** What is one of the most effective ways to get the attention of the ordinary man on the streets understand and imbibe climate change consciousness? Show him a serious picture. A picture communicates more profoundly, especially when it really tells a story. Show a Lagos landlord, for example, horrible pictures of houses and properties destroyed by raging flood caused by climate change, people's negligence and poor environmental habits. Then show him how his own houses or his son's new building projects in flood prone parts of Edo State would soon be destroyed or submerged unless certain things are done fast – say a stop to building on water ways or dumping refuse indiscriminately in their environments and vicinity.

That man will take you very serious because he has not just been given an abstract theory of what climate change means and can do, he has been shown what it means in reality he may soon be a victim. Such a fellow is more likely to take proactive measures immediately to avoid such calamity happening to him. Better still, where possible, find a creative way to involve the person in the very process of creating this strategic picture and then sit back and watch what magic it will do.

While creating this mega – long cartoon master piece, I had the journalistic instinct that the best way I can tell such a serious environmental crisis of such magnitude and urgency was to involve my immediate audience – the very objects or targets of the report – in telling this story or reporting this crucial matter. That way, they will not only fully grasp the import of my message, they will naturally feel obligated to pass the message on to others and be responsible themselves to not do anything that would further endanger the environment nor support those who do, under any guise. It's like telling yourself, "Practice what you preach".

*(To be continued next week)*

# Friday Sermon

## Visiting grave

MAJOR M. Y. BABANGIDA

**P**raise be to Allah, the Almighty, the Sovereign, the Holy, the Strong, the Victorious, Lord of the East and the West, the Resurrector, the Inheritor, the Giver, the Withholder, who commanded us to visit graves and made it one of the best of deeds, and forbade us from innovations in every recommended and obligatory act, and made innovation in religion one of the great sins.

Among the greatest sins and most grievous calamities is the disbelief of God, as Allah Almighty says: "Say, 'Obey Allah and the Messenger.' But if they turn away, then indeed, Allah does not love the disbelievers."

O servants of Allah, Allah Almighty says in His clear revelation: He who created death and life to test you [as to] which of you is best in deed - and He is the Exalted in Might.

He is the Almighty, the Forgiving. We thank Him, the Most High, who has made the ultimate outcome for the righteous. And the life of this world is but a fleeting illusion. I bear witness that there is no god but God alone, who has no partner. He knows the treachery of the eyes and what the hearts conceal. And I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and messenger.

O servants of God, our noble Messenger, peace and blessings be upon him, said: "I used to forbid you from visiting graves, but now visit them, for they remind you of the Hereafter."

O servants of God, visiting graves is a recommended practice, especially the graves of the righteous, for it reminds one of death, fosters detachment from worldly desires, and encourages devotion to God. And he desires the Hereafter, and that is why the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, visits the people of Al-Baqi' and says, "Peace be upon you, people of the homes, believers and Muslims. And we, God willing, will join you. I ask God for a good outcome for us and for you."

O servants of God, when you visit

the graves of the righteous, remember their good deeds, how they used to sleep little at night and seek forgiveness at dawn, and that they were believers who were humble in their prayers, diligent in giving charity, and averse to idle talk.

They stand firm in their testimonies, and they uphold their trusts and covenants. They guard their chastity from what God has forbidden. Strive to follow their example in what they say and do, in what they do and what they refrain from doing, so that perhaps you may be among those of whom God Almighty says: "Indeed, the allies of God..." They will have no fear, nor will they grieve.

O servants of God, among the greatest sins, the most grievous faults, and the most vile things that occur at the graves of the righteous is the commission of abominations and the violation of prohibitions. Beware, O noble visitor, of kissing a grave, circumambulating it, prostrating upon it, Or you call upon someone other than God, for he can neither harm nor benefit, neither give nor withhold, neither lower nor raise. None can repel, seize, or bestow except God.

The Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him, said: "Whoever among you sees an evil, let him change it with his hand; if he is not able to do so, then with his tongue; and if he is not able to do so, then with his heart." That is the weakest of faith.

He also said, "By Him in whose hand is my soul, you must enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, or God will soon send upon you a punishment, then you will call upon Him and He will not answer you."

May Allah grant us the ability and willingness to always visit the grave and do the right thing.

Yaa Allah, forgive those who have passed away and have mercy on their souls.

Yaa Allah, let us get the best of this world and in the Hereafter.

Major M. Y. Babangida is the 4-Brigade Central Mosque Imam in Benin City.



[60.1] When visiting the graves

السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ أَهْلَ الدِّيَارِ، مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ  
وَالْمُسْلِمِينَ، وَإِنَّا إِن شَاءَ اللَّهُ بِكُمْ لَاحِقُونَ،  
(وَيَرْحَمُ اللَّهُ الْمُسْتَقْدِمِينَ مِنَّا وَالْمُسْتَأْخِرِينَ) أَسْأَلُ  
اللَّهَ لَنَا وَلَكُمْ الْعَافِيَةَ

Peace be upon you, people of this abode, from among the believers and those who are Muslims, and we, by the Will of Allah, shall be joining you. [May Allah have mercy on the first of us and the last of us] I ask Allah to grant us and you strength.

Assalaamu 'alaykum 'ahlad-diyaari, minal-mu'mineena walmuslimeena, wa 'innaa 'in shaa' Allaahu bikum laahiqoona [wa yarhamullaahul-mustaqdimeena minnaa walmusta'khireena] 'as'alullaaha lanaa wa lakumul-'aafiyata.

Muslim 2/671, Ibn Majah 1/494, the portion brackets is from Muslim 2/671.



*O servants of God, visiting graves is a recommended practice, especially the graves of the righteous, for it reminds one of death, fosters detachment from worldly desires, and encourages devotion to God.*

# Feature

## A land that eats its young: What the death of rising star Ifunanya Nwangene reveals about Nigeria

CHUKWUFUMNAYAN ADIGWE

In yet another disturbing but increasingly familiar episode, a failure within one of Nigeria's most critical systems has led to the death of a promising young Nigerian, leaving the nation's social spaces awash with grief, debate, and sharply critical reflections.

Twenty-six-year-old Ifunanya Nwangene, an Abuja-based rising singer popularly known by her stage and social media name Nanyah, died after suffering a snake bite. She was a former contestant on Season 3 of *The Voice Nigeria*, where she first gained public attention in 2021. Her blind audition performance of Rihanna's *Take a Bow* was particularly memorable, turning two judges' chairs and later circulating widely online—an early indication of her promise and growing influence.

Nanyah's voice was both versatile and expressive, blending elements of classical training, jazz, soul, opera, and R&B. Known for her soprano range, she was well suited to both sacred music and contemporary performance. Her consistent digital presence was not merely promotional; it served as a record of her artistic growth and a means of connecting with listeners. Beyond television and online platforms, she was an active performer with the Amemus Choir in Abuja, where she served as a key soprano voice—evidence that she was not only visible online but firmly rooted in Nigeria's live music culture.

Before her death, many within the music community regarded Ifunanya Nwangene as a rising talent with genuine potential. She was preparing for her first headline solo concert scheduled for 2026, a major milestone for any artist transitioning from ensemble work and competitions into an independent career.

She had also been collaborating with fellow musicians and developing new material, signalling an artist still discovering and expanding her creative voice. Choir members and collaborators described her as one of the most promising voices of her generation, noting that her passing felt like the loss of a sound Nigeria was only beginning to hear.

That all of this could be cut short with so much left unexplored raises difficult questions. We often dismiss tragedies like this with the familiar phrase, "Nigeria happened to them." Yet when reduced to a cliché, we risk overlooking the deeper truth it conveys: a collective loss of faith in systems meant to protect life. That this expression is so casually understood as negative speaks volumes about the fractured hope of Nigerians, and even more so of Nigerian youth.

The fatal incident occurred on January 31, 2026, when Nwangene was bitten by a snake, reportedly a cobra inside her Abuja residence. According to reports, she was asleep when the bite woke her, and two snakes were later discovered in the house, further unsettling an already grieving



IFUNANYA NWANGENE

public.

Following the bite, Nwangene reportedly sought urgent medical attention, visiting two hospitals in quick succession. Her first stop was Divine Health Hospital, located at the Trade Fair Mall in Lugbe, where she was reportedly informed that the facility did not have the required antivenom and was therefore unable to treat her.

She then travelled, in what was reported to be a 30-minute journey, to the Federal Medical Centre (FMC), Jabi. Reports indicate that FMC had only one dose of the required antivenom available. Efforts were made to source an additional dose, but by the time these attempts materialised, Nanyah had passed away.

In the aftermath of the tragedy, public commentary sharply criticised the circumstances surrounding Nwangene's death. One particularly viral response came from social media influencer and medical doctor Dr Egemba Chinonso Fidelis, popularly known as Aproko Doctor. In a widely shared video captioned "It was not a snake that killed Ifunanya Nwangene. It was our system that failed her," he emphasised that while snake bites are common in many countries, fatalities are far less likely where healthcare systems function properly.

He described the absence of antivenom in two hospitals within a snake-endemic country as "ludicrous," especially in the modern era. Aproko Doctor also noted that similar failures often go unnoticed when they affect private individuals, but

because Nanyah was a public figure, the tragedy attracted widespread attention.

He further highlighted misplaced national priorities, observing that while critical healthcare infrastructure deteriorates, government focus often gravitates towards high-visibility projects—flyovers, bridges, and other developments designed to court public approval ahead of elections. This, he argued, repeatedly undermines basic services such as primary healthcare, leaving lives and potential unrealised.

*What is required are deliberate, actionable, and enduring changes that address systemic failures at their roots. Nigerian youth do not ask for miracles, only for a system that allows them to live, work, and thrive without preventable obstacles.*

Other commentators have echoed these concerns, warning that systemic lapses of this nature steadily erode youth capital and generational strength, as Nigeria continues to lose promising talents to preventable circumstances.

Some critics have suggested that in Nanyah's case, the lack of antivenom may also be linked to power failures, with hospitals reportedly lacking adequate refrigeration for the medicine. This points to yet another layer of systemic breakdown: the central role of electricity in sustaining healthcare, businesses, and creative enterprises. Many promising young Nigerians, including entrepreneurs see their aspirations constrained by inadequate infrastructure, from spoiled goods to prohibitive operating costs.

It is devastating to realise how often dreams, and in Nanyah's tragic case, lives are cut short by such systemic deficiencies. Her death is not merely the loss of a rising star; it is a stark reflection of how persistent governance failures continue to undermine Nigeria's youth and future.

As criticism continued to trail her death, the government appeared to swing into action—a pattern many Nigerians recognise as reactionary governance, often described as "medicine after death." The Senate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria announced a series of responses, chief among them a resolution mandating the availability of antivenom and other emergency medicines in hospitals nationwide.

Lawmakers called for the com-

pulsory stocking of antivenoms and life-saving antidotes in both public and private hospitals, while urging the Federal Ministry of Health and Social Welfare to develop and enforce national guidelines requiring minimum stocks of essential emergency medicines. These standards, they proposed, should be tied to hospital licensing and accreditation to ensure system-wide compliance.

Beyond the theatrics of immediate responses, however, what truly matters is sustainability. Nigeria does not need reforms driven solely by public outrage that fade once attention shifts. What is required are deliberate, actionable, and enduring changes that address systemic failures at their roots. Nigerian youth do not ask for miracles, only for a system that allows them to live, work, and thrive without preventable obstacles.

In the wake of this tragedy, many young Nigerians hope for a genuine paradigm shift: one that supports and uplifts rather than diminishes; one that illuminates potential instead of dimming it; one that facilitates growth rather than discouraging ambition. Anything short of this risks reducing yet another national loss to a fleeting headline.

It is hoped that Nanyah's death serves as a jarring wake-up call—a reminder that the future of the nation is inseparable from the wellbeing of its youth. Only by strengthening and protecting them can Nigeria begin to transform into a country that nurtures its young, rather than one that consumes them.

# Sports

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

## NPFL sanctions Trigger Kun Khalifat FC's League withdrawal

Kun Khalifat FC have announced their immediate withdrawal from the Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL) following disciplinary action taken against the club for failing to honour their Matchday 24 fixture against El Kanemi Warriors.

The controversy arose on Monday when the newly promoted side, who currently sit at the foot of the league table, failed to appear for the scheduled match. In response, the NPFL Board charged Kun Khalifat with violating the league's Framework and Rules.

As part of the sanctions, the league deducted three points and three goals from Kun Khalifat, awarding them to El Kanemi Warriors. The club was also handed a suspended fine of N10 million, which would be enforced should a similar offence occur before the end of the 2025–26 season. Kun Khalifat were given 48 hours to appeal the ruling.

However, instead of lodging an appeal, the club issued a statement on Wednesday night confirming its decision to withdraw from the league.

In a strongly worded statement

signed by the club's Chief Executive Officer, Michael Amaefula, Kun Khalifat maintained that their absence from the fixture was due to circumstances beyond their control and that the NPFL had been informed in advance.

"We write to express our utmost shock, disappointment, and outrage following the sanctions imposed upon our club," the statement read.

"Our previous letter dated 1st February 2026 detailed the circumstances that led to our inability to participate in the match. We had informed the NPFL Board

of our challenges, including the breakdown of our team's vehicles, and sought their understanding."

The club accused the league of disregarding its communication and acting unfairly in rescheduling the fixture and imposing sanctions.

"Instead of acknowledging our communication, the Board chose to unilaterally reschedule the match and subsequently imposed harsh sanctions upon our club. The decision to forfeit three points and three goals, coupled with a fine of N10 million, is not only disproportionate but a clear indication of the NPFL's bias against our club," the statement continued.

Kun Khalifat concluded the announcement by confirming their withdrawal from the competition, citing what they described as a lack of fairness in league administration.

"As a result of these unfair sanctions, we, Kun Khalifat FC, hereby announce our immediate withdrawal from the Nigerian Premier Football League. We can no longer continue to be part of a league that disregards the challenges faced by its member clubs and prioritises punishment over fairness and justice."



OMAR MARMOUSH WITH THE BALL

## Ruthless Man City thump Newcastle to reach League Cup final

Omar Marmoush scored twice as Manchester City set up a League Cup final date with Arsenal after a comprehensive 3-1 second-leg victory over visiting Newcastle United secured a 5-1 aggregate win in their semi-final on Wednesday.

The home side were ruthless in the first half as Tijjani Reijnders also got on the scoresheet and now face Arsenal at Wembley on March 22 in a battle between City manager Pep Guardiola and his protege Mikel Arteta.

"We showed a very good mentality," Marmoush told Sky Sports. "We were together as a team, from the first minute, we were very focused on the job. We showed our mentality and passion, and are

very happy to reach the final. "We are here to win trophies. We give our best every day to reach these finals and win silverware. Hopefully, we can do it for all the new players and also the players that were here."

Trailing 2-0 from the first leg, the last thing Newcastle needed was to concede early at the Etihad Stadium, but Marmoush's shot deflected off defender Dan Burn and into the net inside six minutes.

The Egypt international added a second on the night with a close-range header from Antoine Semenyo's cross. Marmoush has now scored 12 goals for City and five have come against Newcastle at the Etihad Stadium.



KUN KHALIFAT FC

## Golf: NSC throws weight behind All Africa Challenge Trophy Abuja 2026

In furtherance of the sports economy mandate of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu GCFR, the National Sports Commission has backed the hosting of the All Africa Challenge Trophy billed for IBB International Golf and Country Club in November 2026.

NSC Chairman Mallam Shehu Dikko gave this assurance while hosting a delegation of the Ladies Golf Association of Nigeria (LGAN) facilitators of the hosting right.

Led by the President Dr. Lami Onayi Ahmed, LGAN solicited the support of the Commission in successfully hosting the continent. In her words, when they submitted their bidding documents in Agadir Morocco, it was like going into the bush looking for a 'squirrel', but when the rights were awarded to Nigeria, they had caught an 'elephant' instead. Therefore, they had come to seek support in dealing with this giant animal which was beyond their expectations.

Responding, Mallam Dikko assured the group of the Commission's resolve to turn the country into a major global

sporting hub by regularly hosting international tournaments.

His words, "What you have done by securing this hosting right aligns with the vision of the Commission under the Renewed Hope Initiative for Nigeria Sports Economy (RHINSE) platform and the shared prosperity disposition of the President, who has mandated us to ensure the full potential of the sports economy is harnessed.



NSC CHAIRMAN MALLAM SHEHU DIKKO

## Guardiola seeks rule change to make Guehi eligible for League Cup final

Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola wants defender Marc Guehi to be allowed to play in their

League Cup final against Arsenal, saying the club will ask organisers to reconsider eligibility rules.

City booked their place at

Wembley with a 3-1 home win over Newcastle United in Wednesday's semi-final second leg, completing a 5-1 aggregate victory.

Competition rules make Guehi ineligible for the final because he featured earlier in the tournament for Crystal Palace, and joined City after the first leg of the semi-final.

"Why should he (Guehi) not play? Why not? We pay his salary, he is our player," Guardiola told reporters.

"You buy a player for a lot of money and he is not able to play, for a rule I don't understand. Hopefully they can change it.



PEP GUARDIOLA

## Glasgow 2026: Nigeria set for historic debut in Basketball 3x3

Nigeria has been officially confirmed as one of the countries that will compete in the men's 3x3 basketball event at the 2026 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, marking the nation's first-ever appearance in the fast-rising format at the Games.

The confirmation came on Tuesday after Commonwealth Sport released the list of qualified nations for the basketball events, which will take place at the Scottish Event Campus from July 24 to 29, 2026.

Nigeria is listed among the debutants in the men's competition, alongside Guyana and Malaysia, while Uganda will make its maiden appearance

in the women's category.

Basketball 3x3 is played between two teams of three players on a single hoop, with a 12-second shot clock designed to maintain high tempo and constant action.

Games last 10 minutes or end earlier if a team reaches 21 points, delivering a fast-paced, high-energy spectacle that highlights speed, skill, and athleticism.

The 2026 Commonwealth Games will run from July 23 to August 2, featuring 10 sports across four major venues in Glasgow: Scotstoun Stadium, the Scottish Event Campus, the Sir Chris Hoy Velodrome and Arena, and the Tollcross International Swimming Centre



## Super Eagles Coach Chelle watches Marseille win, meets new signing Nnadi

Super Eagles head coach Eric Chelle was in attendance at the Stade Vélodrome on Wednesday night as

Olympique Marseille defeated Rennes 3-0 in their Coupe de France semifinal clash. Although recently signed

Nigerian midfielder Tochukwu Nnadi was not named in the matchday squad, Chelle used the occasion to observe the Marseille setup and hold discussions with the club's latest acquisition following the encounter.

Marseille took early control of the match when Amine Gouiri opened the scoring in the second minute. Mason Greenwood doubled the lead shortly after the restart in the 46th minute, before Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang, introduced from the bench, sealed the win with a late goal in the 83rd minute.

Nnadi, who joined Marseille on deadline day from Belgian side Zulte Waregem in a deal reportedly worth €6 million,

has attracted close attention from the Nigerian national team's technical crew following his move to Ligue 1.

The midfielder was part of Nigeria's 23-man squad at the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations in Morocco, where the Super Eagles finished third. He also featured prominently for Nigeria at the 2023 FIFA U-20 World Cup, appearing in all five matches, including notable victories over Italy and Argentina.

Chelle's presence at the Stade Vélodrome underlines the Super Eagles' continued monitoring of Nigerian players plying their trade in Europe, as preparations continue for upcoming international competitions



ERIC CHELLE AND TOCHUKWU NNADI



ADEMOLA LOOKMAN

## Ex-Eagles forward back Lookman to succeed at Atletico Madrid

Former Nigerian international Yakubu Aiyegbeni has expressed confidence in Ademola Lookman's ability to thrive at Atletico Madrid following his high-profile transfer from Atalanta, BSNSports.com.ng reports.

Lookman joined the Spanish giants on deadline day in a move that has raised expectations, with many fans eager to see how the dynamic winger will fit into Atletico's tactical setup.

The transfer marks a significant step in Lookman's career after a successful stint at Atalanta, where he showcased his talent across multiple seasons.

In an exclusive interview with Africa Foot, Yakubu shared his thoughts on Lookman's move, saying: "I was convinced he was going to leave Atalanta Bergamo this

winter. Seeing him sign for a big club like Atlético Madrid is a great source of pride. Ademola deserves to wear the colours of a top club like Atlético Madrid. He will bring many positive things to them."

Lookman spent three and a half seasons at Atalanta, where his performances were highly praised.

The 25-year-old scored 55 goals and provided 27 assists in 137 appearances for the Serie A club across all competitions, cementing his reputation as one of the most promising attacking talents in Europe.

As Atletico Madrid looks to strengthen its squad for the upcoming challenges, Lookman's addition is seen as a major boost, with the club's fans eagerly anticipating the winger's impact on their title hopes.

## Sadiq redeems own goal as Valencia fall to stoppage-time defeat

Umar Sadiq's night at Mestalla summed up Valencia's turbulent season, as the Nigerian striker scored at both ends before Athletic Bilbao sealed a dramatic 2-1 Copa del Rey quarter-final victory with a stoppage-time winner.

Sadiq, who joined Valencia from Real Sociedad in January in a €4.5m deal, endured a difficult opening half-hour when he headed Robert Navarro's free-kick into his own net, giving Athletic an early lead.

However, the 29-year-old redeemed himself before the break, reacting quickest after Athletic goalkeeper Alex Padilla spilled Luis Rioja's shot, to fire home his second goal in as many Copa del Rey appearances for Los Che.

Despite Sadiq's response, Valencia were ultimately denied a place in the semi-finals as Iñaki Williams struck in stoppage time to send Athletic through for a sixth time in seven seasons.

Valencia started brightly and almost took an early lead through Rioja, but it was Athletic who opened the scoring in fortuitous fashion. Sadiq attempted defensive header, following a Navarro free-kick, looped beyond Stole Dimitrievski after a miscommunication with Dimitri Foulquier.

Defensive errors continued to shape the contest, and Sadiq made amends shortly before half-time. Padilla failed to hold Rioja's low effort, allowing the Nigeria international to convert from close range and level the tie.

Athletic pressed late in the first half, with Mikel Jauregizar heading wide, but the teams went in level at the interval.

The second half saw chances at a premium, with Nico Serrano twice shooting wide for Athletic, while Foulquier struck the post for Valencia after a well-worked move.

Athletic were handed a golden opportunity to take the lead when a lengthy VAR review penalised César Tárrega for handball. However, Jauregizar's penalty was saved by Dimitrievski, lifting the home crowd and raising hopes of extra time.



UMAR SADIQ AND TEAM MATE

## Carabao Cup: Arteta says League Cup final will give Arsenal boost for run-in

Arsenal coach Mikel Arteta said reaching Wembley for the first time since 2020 – thanks to a 4-2 aggregate League Cup semi-final win over Chelsea – would give his players a boost for a hectic season run-in.



MIKEL ARTETA

"It's the best vitamins we can put in our bodies because we are playing every three days," Arteta told reporters after Arsenal beat their London rivals 1-0 on Tuesday to seal their place in the final of England's second

domestic cup competition.

The Spaniard said the prospect of a return to Wembley for the first time since he guided his team to victory in the FA Cup final – also against Chelsea – six years ago was magical, before adding: "Now we are going to have to go and win it."

Arsenal had failed to make it through their previous four major cup semi-finals – two in the League Cup and another two in Europe – before overcoming Chelsea on Tuesday.

With the visitors desperately seeking the goal they needed to level the tie on aggregate, former Chelsea attacker Kai Havertz ran clear to score in the final moments of the semi-final second leg

## Anambra FA Election: General Chikelue gets vote of confidence

The Executive Committee of the Anambra State Football Association (ANSFA) has unanimously passed a vote of confidence on its Chairman, Chief Chikelue Iloenyosi, while approving February 6, 2026, for the association's Annual General Assembly (AGA).

The resolutions were reached during the first full board meeting of the Executive Committee held on Wednesday, February 4, 2026, at the ANSFA Secretariat. The meeting followed the board's by-election conducted on January 15, 2026, at the East End Hotel, Awka.

During the meeting, the

board congratulated the Executive Governor of Anambra State, Prof. Charles Chukwuma Soludo, CFR, for incorporating football into the recent Onwa Dezemba yuletide celebrations, describing the initiative as a boost to sports development and grassroots football in the state.

The Executive Committee also acknowledged the outcome of the recent elections and by-elections and formally welcomed the newly elected board members – Chief Ifejioka Johnson, Prince Michael Mbaezue, Ezeokafor Donatus and Pastor Ijeoma Nwosu – who attended their first full executive meeting.

## 9 Days to Go: Sportswear giants Puma join Access Bank Lagos City Marathon as official Apparel Sponsor

With nine days left to the 11th Access Bank Lagos City Marathon, the race announced another major boost with global sportswear brand PUMA announced as the official apparel sponsor.

PUMA, the third-largest sportswear manufacturer in the world, is headquartered in Bavaria, Germany, and is renowned for building prod-

ucts for athletes who move with purpose and speed. The brand has consistently empowered sportsmen and women through cutting-edge innovation, performance-driven technology, and bold design.

As part of its involvement, PUMA brings its elite running pedigree to Lagos, spotlighting the Deviate Nitro™ 3, one of the standout running shoes of the season, designed to deliver speed,

comfort, and responsiveness at the highest level of competition.

Globally, PUMA sponsors some of the biggest names in sport. In football, the brand partners elite clubs such as Manchester City, AC Milan, Borussia Dortmund, Palmeiras, Olympique de Marseille, Valencia CF, and Girona FC.

PUMA also kits national teams including Italy, Egypt, Ghana, and Morocco, while

maintaining a strong presence in motorsport through partnerships with Formula 1 giants Scuderia Ferrari and Mercedes-AMG Petronas.

Analysts have said PUMA's entry into the Access Bank Lagos City Marathon further reinforces the race's growing international profile and status as Africa's leading road race, as the countdown continues toward February 14.



ACCESS BANK LAGOS CITY MARATHON

## Sports

# NPFL descends on Kun Khalifat after failure to honour El Kanemi Warriors' game

**K**un Khalifat FC have been charged for breaching the Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL) Framework and Rules after failing to honour their



KUN KHALIFAT

Matchday 24 fixture against El-Kanemi Warriors on Monday, February 2, 2026, BSNSports.com.ng reports.

The NPFL stated that the reason provided by Kun Khalifat FC for not honouring the fixture was unacceptable, leading to disciplinary action in line with the league's regulations.

As part of the sanctions, Kun Khalifat FC will forfeit three points and three goals, which have been awarded to their opponents, El-Kanemi Warriors, in accordance with the NPFL Framework and

Rules.

In addition, the club has been handed a N10 million fine for failing to meet their match obligation.

However, the fine is a suspended sentence and will remain in effect for the rest of the 2025/26 NPFL season, provided the club does not commit a similar breach within the period.

Kun Khalifat FC have also been granted 48 hours from the date of the notice to formally appeal the sanctions imposed by the league authorities.

# Adebisi seeks sustained investment in grassroots Rugby League

**A**de Adebisi, the Vice Chairman of the Nigeria Rugby League (NRL), has reiterated the need for deliberate and sustained investment in grassroots programmes.

Adebisi, while speaking with the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) on Thursday, said this was a long-term strategy for grooming rugby league players and ensuring the sport's growth in Nigeria.

He emphasised that meaningful development must begin at the community and school levels.

"If we want rugby league to grow and compete globally, we must start from the grassroots.

"That is where talent is discovered and properly nurtured," he said.

Adebisi noted that introducing rugby league in primary and secondary schools would help expose children to the sport early, build interest and instil discipline and teamwork.

According to him, partnerships with school authorities physical education teachers and community coaches were essential for identifying young talents across the country.

"Schools and communities are the backbone of sports development. When we work with them we create a wider talent pool for the future," Adebisi said.

The NRL vice chairman emphasised the importance of regular grassroots competitions, inter-school championships and age-grade leagues.

He said these would provide young players with valuable

match experience.

"Young players need to play regularly to improve. Competitions help us assess their progress and prepare them mentally and physically for higher levels," he said.

Adebisi also highlighted the need for structured training programmes modern equipment and safe facilities to support effective player development.

He emphasised that capacity building for coaches referees and administrators at the grassroots level remained a priority.

"You cannot develop quality players without qualified coaches and officials.



ADE ADEBISI

# 3SC, Oyo Sports authorities collaborate to meet NPFL pitch standards

**T**he management of Shooting Stars Sports Club (3SC) has dismissed speculation suggesting that the Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL) plans to relocate the club from Ibadan over concerns about the condition of the Lekan Salami Stadium pitch.

Chairman of the Oluyole Warriors, Hon. Taiwo Lekan Salami, has assured supporters that the club will continue to play its home matches in Ibadan, stressing that urgent measures are already in place to restore the playing surface to acceptable standards.

Concerns over the pitch were formally communicated to the club in a letter from the NPFL board, signed by its Chief Operating Officer, Davidson Owumi. The correspondence

reportedly expressed dissatisfaction with the state of the Lekan Salami Stadium pitch, particularly in light of the league's recently secured broadcast and television rights, which place greater emphasis on match presentation and pitch quality.

In response, the 3SC chairman said the club has taken proactive steps to support the Oyo State Ministry of Youth and Sports and the Oyo State Sports Council, the agencies responsible for managing the stadium. According to him, the focus has been on addressing key challenges, especially the inadequate water supply needed for proper pitch maintenance.

"We do not have a home match for about two weeks, and all other activities at the stadium have been suspended. This gives us enough time

to restore the pitch to a lush green condition," Salami said. "The major challenge has been water supply, and we have stepped in to complement the efforts of the agencies in charge."

He added that the joint intervention is aimed not only at immediate repairs but also at ensuring sustainable maintenance

of the facility going forward, in line with league requirements.

The collaborative efforts are already yielding positive results, according to the Secretary of the Oyo State Football Association, Taiwo Adesola. He confirmed that within days of consistent watering, the pitch has

shown visible improvement.

Adesola noted that the revitalisation of the playing surface is expected to enhance match-day experience, improve player performance, and ensure the stadium meets the standards required for top-flight football as the season progresses



LEKAN SALAMI STADIUM PITCH

# Niger Delta Games: Delta State with 374 athletes gunning to top medals table



TEAM BAYELSA

**D**elta State athletes and officials are aiming to top the medals table of the Niger Delta Games billed for February 20-27 in Benin City.

Delta State sports officials have been organising their trials involving 374 athletes and 51 coaches to pick a strong team for the Niger Delta Games organised by Dunamis-Icon Limited for the nine states that make up the region

under the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC).

At the maiden edition Bayelsa State narrowly edged Delta to the second place, but according to Delta State Sports Commission chairman Onos Oboreworie that is a slip that would not repeat itself when the games begin in Benin City.

"After these two phases of the trials, our athletes will begin main camping for the Ni-

ger Delta Games on February 12. At the moment, we have 374 athletes and 51 officials set for these trials. Our athletes will be camped in various locations in Asaba, and they will depart for Benin City on February 19," Oboreworie stated.

Also speaking special assistance to Governor Sheriff Oboreworie on sports, Festus Ohwojoro, said he is optimistic of Team Delta topping the med-

als table at the end of the Games in Benin City on February 27.

Among the sports expected to feature in Team Delta's trials include athletics, chess, table tennis, tennis, scrabble, handball, wrestling, football, volleyball, swimming, taekwondo, powerlifting, basketball, boxing and weightlifting.

Over 3000 athletes and 500 officials will participate in this year's 2nd Niger Delta Games



NIGER DELTA GAMES SWIMMERS

# Over 120 swimmers participate in Niger Delta Games' trial in Ondo

**M**ore than 120 swimmers on Thursday participated in the screening programme ahead of the second edition of the Niger Delta Games.

The games was scheduled to hold between Feb. 20 and Feb. 27 in Edo.

The trials, which was held in Ese-Odo Local Government Area of the state, paved way for the selection of outstanding athletes to represent the state at the forthcoming games.

Mr Segun Omoyofunmi, Chairman, State Liaison Committee and Commissioner for Youth and Sports Development, who addressed newsmen, commended the selection process, describing it as transparent and credible.

Omoyofunmi stated that

the screening further confirmed Ondo State's status as a hub of sporting talent.

"I am very confident that Ondo State will perform creditably at the games. With the transparent screening and selection process, the best athletes have been chosen to fly the flag of the state.

"We must be strict with the screening if we are to achieve success at the competition.

"I assure the governor that we will represent the state well and ensure we win medals at this second edition of the Niger Delta Games.

"We are here to give the young athletes the support they need, and we will continue to support them until they make Ondo State proud at the competition," he said.



# Governor Okpebholo rewrites Edo's urban story

KELLY ODARO

Benin City is, without doubt, undergoing a quiet but profound transformation. Each time I pass through the Ramat Park axis of Ikpoba-Hill, I am struck by a renewed sense of awe at how rapidly the city's architectural and aesthetic character is evolving.

The skyline is changing. The city's rhythm is shifting. And the imposing flyover bridges now dominating that corridor stand as compelling symbols of modern urban renewal; a sight to behold and a powerful statement of progress. Indeed, a new Benin City is emerging. One that reflects ambition, resilience, and a deliberate attempt to redefine Edo State's infrastructural identity.

Much of this visible transformation can be attributed to the administration of Senator Monday Okpebholo, the indefatigable Governor of Edo State, whom many now fondly describe as the mason, building the City of Benin. The metaphor is apt. A mason works with precision, patience, and vision, laying blocks not merely for the present but for future generations. In similar fashion, the Okpebholo administration appears determined to lay enduring infrastructural foundations that will outlive political cycles and reshape Edo's development trajectory.

Across the length and breadth of Edo State today, the evidence is unmistakable: Edo has become a massive construction site. From major highways to township roads, from urban flyovers to rural access routes, the sound of construction equipment has become a defining feature of governance in this season.

This renewed focus on road infrastructure is not accidental. Roads remain the arteries of development — the channels through which commerce, agriculture, education, healthcare, security, and social mobility flow. A state that invests in roads invests in productivity, integration, and economic vitality.

Benin City, the state capital and historical heartbeat of Edo, has long carried the weight of its past glory. Once admired for its cultural heritage and ancient city planning, the metropolis had in recent decades struggled with congestion, decaying infrastructure, and urban sprawl. However, recent developments suggest that the city is reclaiming its pride.

The flyover bridges at Ikpoba-Hill, Sapele Road by Adesuwa Junction, and other strategic locations are not merely traffic solutions; they are urban statements — markers of a government that understands the link

between mobility and modern city living. These structures reduce gridlock, enhance safety, boost commercial activity, and improve the overall visual appeal of the city.

For residents and visitors alike, the psychological impact of such infrastructure cannot be overstated. Well-built roads and bridges do more than move vehicles; they restore confidence, attract investment, encourage tourism, and instil civic pride. Beyond the capital, the Okpebholo administration's commitment to road construction and rehabilitation is increasingly evident in several parts of Edo State.

A striking example is the Ekpoma-Auchi Road, which had hitherto been a nightmare for articulated vehicles and motorists alike. Once notorious for its poor condition and traffic bottlenecks, the road's ongoing reconstruction signals a decisive intervention in a critical commercial corridor. Given Ekpoma's role as an academic and trading hub — home to Ambrose Alli University and a bustling marketplace — this road upgrade will significantly enhance economic efficiency and reduce travel risks.

Similarly, Irrua Township Road, long overdue for attention, is now under construction. The importance of township roads cannot be overstated. While highways facilitate interstate movement, township roads determine the quality of daily life, connecting homes, schools, hospitals, markets, and workplaces. By prioritising these internal routes, the government demonstrates sensitivity to grassroots needs and everyday realities.

Elsewhere across the state, several other roads are being rehabilitated or newly constructed, reinforcing the impression that infrastructure development is no longer confined to select political strongholds but is being spread more inclusively.

What distinguishes Governor Okpebholo's approach is the people-centred framing of his infrastructural agenda. Roads, when properly conceived, serve not only economic elites but ordinary citizens — farmers transporting produce, traders moving goods, students commuting to school, healthcare workers reaching patients, and security agencies responding to emergencies.

For rural communities, access roads can mean the difference between isolation and integration. They reduce post-harvest losses, lower transportation costs, and enable farmers to reach markets faster and more profitably. In a state like Edo, where agriculture remains a major livelihood, rural road infrastructure

is tantamount to economic empowerment.

By investing in roads that link agrarian communities to urban markets, the Okpebholo administration is effectively strengthening food security, boosting household incomes, and promoting inclusive development. However, amid this commendable progress, there remain critical areas that demand urgent attention and perhaps none more strategic than the Benin-Abraka Road.

This vital corridor serves as an artery to several agrarian communities in Orhionmwon Local Government Area, facilitating the movement of agricultural produce and sustaining livelihoods across multiple settlements. Unfortunately, the road's reconstruction appears to have stalled, giving the impression of abandonment. Nowhere is the challenge more pronounced than along the Idunmwonwina-Ugo axis, which continues to frustrate commuters and hinder movement.

This is particularly concerning given that the Benin-Abraka Road currently functions as a bypass to the Benin-Sapele Road, which is itself under construction. With increased traffic diverted through this route, the road's poor condition poses serious risks — from vehicle damage and travel delays to heightened accident potential.

Though a federal road, Governor

Okpebholo is therefore urged to prioritise the completion of the Benin-Abraka Road. Finishing this project would not only alleviate transportation challenges but also reinforce the administration's commitment to balanced regional development, especially in Orhionmwon, which continues to contribute significantly to Edo's agricultural output.

Orhionmwon Local Government Area remains one of Edo State's major agrarian belts, supplying food produce to urban centres and neighbouring states. Yet, like many rural zones, it has historically suffered infrastructural neglect.

Improving road connectivity in Orhionmwon would unlock immense socio-economic benefits. Better roads would enable farmers to transport produce more efficiently, reduce spoilage, attract agro-investments, and stimulate rural enterprise.

It would also improve access to education, healthcare, and security, thereby enhancing overall quality of life. Infrastructure, after all, is not merely about concrete and asphalt; it is about human opportunity, dignity, and economic justice.

Governor Okpebholo's leadership style increasingly reflects a construction-driven governance model — one that measures progress through tangible, visible, and measurable projects rather than mere rhetoric. This approach aligns with global best practices in governance, where infrastructure investment is recognised as a cornerstone of sustainable development. Roads facilitate industrial expansion, attract private capital, promote tourism, and improve service delivery across sectors.

Moreover, a government that prioritises infrastructure sends a strong message to citizens, that development is practical, not theoretical; that governance is about delivery, not declarations.

The transformation of Benin City also speaks to a broader effort at urban renewal and aesthetic enhancement. Modern flyovers, dual carriageways, landscaped medians, and improved road markings contribute to a more visually appealing and functional urban environment.

A city's physical outlook influences how residents perceive themselves and how outsiders perceive the state. A cleaner, better-planned Benin City enhances Edo's image, attracts investors, and boosts tourism potential particularly given the state's rich cultural heritage and historical significance. As Edo positions itself as a destination for heritage tourism, creative industries, and commercial activity, urban infrastructure will remain a

crucial enabler.

While the current pace of construction is encouraging, sustainability must remain a priority. Roads and bridges must be built to durable standards, with proper drainage, signage, and maintenance plans. The history of abandoned or poorly executed projects across Nigeria underscores the importance of quality assurance and continuity.

As a columnist and concerned citizen, it is only fair to acknowledge the visible strides made under Governor Okpebholo's leadership. His administration's emphasis on road infrastructure reflects a genuine attempt to tackle Edo State's developmental deficits.

At the same time, constructive critique remains a civic duty. Highlighting areas requiring improvement such as the Benin-Abraka Road, is a contribution to better governance. Democracy thrives when leaders listen, adjust, and refine their policies based on public feedback.

If sustained, the current infrastructural momentum could usher Edo State into a new era of economic integration and regional cohesion. Well-connected roads will enable smoother movement between senatorial districts, enhance trade flows, and reduce the urban-rural divide.

Benin City's evolving architectural landscape stands as a testament to what focused governance can achieve. The flyover bridges at Ikpoba-Hill and other infrastructural projects across Edo State reflect a renewed commitment to progress.

Governor Monday Okpebholo, in many respects, is living up to the description of a mason building a modern Edo — laying bricks of development that could define the state's future for decades to come.

However, for this legacy to be truly transformative, it must be comprehensive, inclusive, and sustained. Completing strategic projects like the Benin-Abraka Road will ensure that no region is left behind in Edo's infrastructural renaissance.

As Edo continues on this path, one hopes that the spirit of development will remain unwavering, driven by vision, guided by accountability, and anchored in the genuine welfare of the people.

For in the final analysis, roads do more than connect places; they connect possibilities, aspirations, and destinies.

*Odaro, a columnist, lectures in the Department of Mass Communication, Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi.*

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