

EDSG reaffirms commitment to LG workers' welfare

● **Calls for collective effort to protect every child**

Governor Monday Okpebholo has assured the Edo State chapter of the National Union of Local Government Employees (NULGE) of his administration's commitment to fostering a collaborative and conducive working environment.

The governor made this pledge while receiving the National President of NULGE,

Ambali Akeem Olatunji, who introduced the newly elected Chairman of the Edo State chapter, Comrade Scot Aigbovia, at the Government House.

Governor Okpebholo expressed concerns over the recent leadership dispute within the union but welcomed the resolution facilitated by the national executive. With Comrade Aigbovia now recognized as the

legitimate leader, the state government pledged to work closely with the union to promote harmony and development across Edo's local government areas.

In response, NULGE President Olatunji commended the governor for ensuring a democratic process and providing an enabling environment for the union's election, which had faced delays in the past administration.

Comrade Aigbovia assured the governor of NULGE's commitment to maintaining peace and supporting the administration's efforts toward development across the state.

Meanwhile, the Edo State Government, through the Ministry of Education, has urged parents, guardians, traditional rulers, landlords, and civil organizations to take an active role

in supporting and protecting children in their communities, even beyond school hours.

Dr. Emmanuel Paddy Iyamu, the Commissioner for Education, stressed the importance of treating every child with care and responsibility, just as one would their own. He noted that fostering a culture of protection and support will help reduce child abuse and maltreatment.

Governor Monday Okpebholo continues to champion love and care for all children in Edo State, ensuring that every child, regardless of background, grows up in a safe and nurturing environment.

The government calls on all citizens to join hands in safeguarding the well-being of children, reinforcing a community where every child feels valued and protected.

The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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Include private varsities in TETFund, VC urges FG
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Senate launches probe into Niger leader's allegations against Nigeria

The Senate has ordered an investigation into allegations made by Niger Republic's military leader, General Abdourahmane Tchiani, accusing the Nigerian government of colluding with France to destabilise the country's internal security.

This order followed a motion brought to it by the Chairman of the Senate Committee on National Security and Intelligence, Shehu Buba (Bauchi-South).

While presenting the motion, Buba emphasised that a major concern was Tchiani's wrongful implication of Nigeria's National Security Adviser, Nuhu Ribadu, and the former Director-General of the National Intelligence

Agency (NIA), Ahmed Rufai, in the alleged conspiracy.

Tchiani alleged that the Nigerian government was facilitating the terrorist group Lakurawa, which operates in the North-West to establish bases in Sokoto, Zamfara, and Kebbi states.

He also claimed that foreign military bases in Nigeria were being used to target Niger's oil pipelines and create security threats in the country.

The motion read in part "The Senate notes with deep concern the serious and unfounded allegations made by the Head of State of Niger Republic, Brig. Gen. Abdourahmane Tchiani, accusing Nigeria of colluding with France to destabilise Niger

through a new militia group called Lakurawa, allegedly operating in Nigeria's Northwest region.

"Also notes that Brig. Gen. Tchiani also alleged plans to establish a base for the Lakurawa in a forest near Gaba, Sokoto State, with operational reach extending to Sokoto, Zamfara, and Kebbi States.

"Additionally, he claimed that foreign military bases in Nigeria are being used to target Niger's oil pipelines and create security threats.

"Recalls that diplomatic relations between Nigeria and Niger were strained following the coup d'état of 26th July 2023, which disrupted constitutional order in Niger. As the head of

ECOWAS, Nigeria insisted on the restoration of constitutional democracy.

"This situation had been gradually normalizing before these latest unfounded accusations by the Head of State of Niger on 26 December 2024."

In response, the Senate during plenary, presided over by the Deputy President of the Senate,

Barau Jibrin, passed a resolution mandating its Joint Committee on National Security and Intelligence/Foreign Affairs to investigate the claims and submit a report within four weeks.

As part of the probe, committee members are expected to visit the named states to verify whether Lakurawa has any operational bases there.

Tinubu sacks UniAbuja, UNN VCs, appoints replacements

President Bola Tinubu, on Thursday, dissolved the entire governing council of the Yakubu Gowon University (formerly UniAbuja), and relieved Professor Aisha Maikudi of her duties as its Vice-Chancellor with immediate effect.

"To succeed Maikudi, President Tinubu appointed Professor Patricia Manko as Acting Vice Chancellor at the Yakubu Gowon University for a six-month term," Tinubu's Special Adviser on Information and Strategy, Bayo Onanuga, re-

vealed in a statement he signed on Thursday.

The statement is titled 'President Tinubu announces leadership overhaul at Federal Universities.'

"She (Prof. Manko) will not be eligible to apply for the substantive Vice Chancellor position when it becomes available," he added.

Senator Lanre Tejuoso, currently Pro-Chancellor of the University of Agriculture, Makurdi, has been appointed

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INAUGURATION:

L-R: Former Deputy Governor, Rt. Hon. Philip Shaibu; Edo State Deputy Governor, Hon. Dennis Idahosa; Governor Monday Okpebholo, and Secretary to the State Government, Musa Ikhilor Esq., during the inauguration of Governing Council of Ambrose Alli University (AAU), Ekpoma at Government House, Benin City.

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Include private varsities in TETFund, VC urges FG

The Vice Chancellor, Amadeus University, Amazi in the Ikwano Local Government Area of Abia State, Prof. Samuel Nzotta, has called on the Federal Government to review the mode of operations of Tertiary Education Trust Fund to enable the intervention body to provide research grants to scholars in private universities.

Nzotta made the appeal on Thursday at a press conference heralding the university's maiden matriculation, saying, "This will enhance staff development in private universities and ensure holistic research activities in the country generally."

Nzotta called on public-spirited individuals in the local government and the state to assist the university with dedicated infrastructural projects to enhance teaching, research, and

growth.

The VC described the university as "a world-class, digital university where research, innovation and a culture of excellence are emphasised", adding, "The university has been positioned to produce graduates who are knowledgeable, highly skilled and globally competitive. It is expected that at the end of the day, our graduates shall be job creators and not job seekers."

The VC disclosed that about 40 students will be matriculated in four National University Commission-approved faculties of Computer Engineering, Science and Computing, Social and Management Sciences and Allied Health Sciences, comprising 19 courses, including, a course in Cyber Security.

He further disclosed research activities in the university,

"From the onset, the university has prioritized research as an important pillar of its academic activities. As a result, the university instituted holistic research activities – generally as a framework for scholarship."

"The Founder/Proprietor of Amadeus University has provided an initial research fund of N10 million to kickstart

research activities in the university. This is well appreciated and points to the direction of research activities in the system."

The university, he also said, has established a modern and technologically advanced JAMB Computer Based Test Centre on campus to increase its visibility amongst prospective admission

candidates, maintaining that the CBT centre shall positively affect the inflow and choice of students into the University, during the annual JAMB admission exercise.

"The CBT centre shall also reduce the stress candidates undergo during the yearly admission cycle," he added.

He announced the establish-

ment of a radio station for Mass Communication Department, stating that the university has started paperwork, saying that the radio will be in air soon.

It is expected that the Senate President, Godswill Akpabio, will officially unveil the school, while the Abia State governor, Alex Otti will be the guest of honour.

Expert seeks investment in HPV testing to combat cervical cancer

The Executive Vice President, Diagnostics, Africa at Roche, Dr. Allan Pamba, has called for increased investment in Human Papillomavirus testing and screening to address the high rate of cervical cancer in Nigerian women.

In a statement, he expressed concerns over HPV, noting that despite being preventable, cervical cancer remains a leading cause of death among women in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Pamba said, "Investing in HPV screening is crucial for both moral and economic reasons. Early diagnosis through HPV testing can alleviate financial pressures on families and healthcare systems, enabling women to remain active contributors to their families and economies."

"Governments, policymakers, and healthcare providers must join forces to prioritise diagnostics and drive equitable access to HPV testing and treatment."

He stated that the World Health Organisation has set ambitious targets for fighting the scourge of cervical cancer, not-

ing that by 2030, WHO aims to achieve a world with 90 per cent of girls vaccinated against HPV, 70 per cent of women screened by age 35 and 45 and 90 per cent of women with cervical disease receiving treatment.

"When a primary caregiver falls victim to cervical cancer, the entire family system collapses, having a ripple effect on local economies," he said.

"Women are the backbone of African families and economies, comprising 50 per cent of the agricultural sector labour force, powering over 50 per cent of SMEs, and supporting families. However, they face disproportionate health risks, including cervical cancer caused by the HPV."

"This innovative approach empowers women to take control of their cervical health, collecting samples in the privacy of their own homes."

"The WHO's 2022 Resolution on Strengthening Diagnostics Capacity is a crucial step forward, but collective action is needed to achieve the 90-70-90 targets," he added.

Tinubu sacks UniAbuja, UNN VCs,...

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Pro-Chancellor of the Yakubu Gowon University.

He will be succeeded in Makurdi by Senator Joy Emordi, now pro-chancellor of Alvan Ikoku University of Education.

In addition, Tinubu has relieved Professor Polycarp Chigbu from his position as Acting Vice-Chancellor at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, before his tenure ends on February 14.

Professor Oguejiofu Ujam has been appointed as his successor for six months and will not be eligible to apply for the permanent position.

The leadership changes at UNN extend to the role of Pro-Chancellor, with Gen. Ike Nwachukwu re-assigned the Pro-Chancellor at the University of Uyo.

Tinubu also appointed Olubunmi Ojo as the new

Pro-Chancellor of UNN. Previously, Ojo held the same position at the Federal University of Lokoja and the Federal University of Oye-Ekiti.

Meanwhile, Professor Zubairu Abdullahi, currently the Pro-Chancellor of the University of Uyo, has been appointed to succeed Ojo at the Federal University of Lokoja.

Tinubu also appointed Senator Sani Stores as the new Pro-Chancellor of Alvan Ikoku University of Education, succeeding Senator Joy Emordi.

Stores is a Council Member at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Additionally, Olugbenga Kukoyi, a current Council Member at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, has been appointed the new Pro-Chancellor of Nnamdi Azikiwe University in Awka, Anambra State.



COURTESY VISIT:

Edo State Deputy Governor, Hon. Dennis Idahosa (6th left), with members of International Federation of Female Lawyers (FIDA), Edo State Branch, led by the chairperson, Barr. Princess Francisca Elema, who were on a courtesy visit to Government House Benin City. PHOTO: MOSES OBOH.

EdoSEMA assesses blocked drainage in Benin

In a bid to prevent potential flooding, the Edo State Emergency Management Agency (EdoSEMA), led by its Executive Secretary, Hon. Jerry Idahosa, conducted an on-the-spot assessment of blocked drainage systems at Upper Mission Extension, Benin City, on Thursday.

The visit followed reports of

drainage obstructions posing a significant risk to residents and businesses.

Hon. Idahosa stressed the urgency of addressing the issue, calling for immediate intervention to prevent environmental hazards.

"Our priority is safeguarding lives and property. This assessment enables us to take swift

action to mitigate flood risks. We urge residents to cooperate by disposing off waste properly and avoiding activities that contribute to blockages," he stated.

"In response, EdoSEMA has urged relevant government agencies, including the Ministry of Environment and the Edo State Flood, Erosion, and Watershed Management Agen-

cy (FEWMA), to take immediate steps to clear the drainage system," he added.

The Edo State government reaffirmed its commitment to disaster prevention and environmental sustainability, assuring residents that proactive measures would be taken to improve flood resilience in the area.

NDDC begins N50,000 monthly payment to 10,000 Niger Delta youths

The Niger Delta Development Commission has begun the payment of N50,000 monthly stipends to 10,000 indigenous youths from the Niger Delta under its Youths Internship Scheme.

The Director of Corporate Affairs at the NDDC, Mrs. Seledi-Thompson-Wakama, disclosed this to journalists in Port Harcourt, Rivers State capital, on Thursday.

She explained that the beneficiaries would undergo practical, hands-on training across the various organisations for 12 months to develop critical skills.

It would be recalled that

during the inauguration of the scheme on July 31, 2024, Senate President, Godswill Akpabio, announced the Federal Government's approval of a N50,000 monthly stipend for the trainees.

According to Thompson-Wakama, the commission has successfully completed the selection process and has begun placing trainees in organisations to gain practical experience.

"Consequently, with the completion of these phases, the payment of the monthly stipends has also commenced," she announced.

She revealed that the 10,000 beneficiaries were transparently

selected from over 3.2 million youths who registered for the empowerment programme.

"This unprecedented response highlights the immense potential and aspirations of our youths to improve themselves."

"NDDC remains steadfast in ensuring this life-changing opportunity reaches the most deserving candidates, creating a lasting impact and paving the way for a brighter future," she stated.

Thompson-Wakama explained that the scheme had enabled the commission to collate essential data, including the qualifications, skills, interests,

needs, and employment status of the youths in the region.

The data, she explained, would guide the commission in designing programmes tailored to address the unique challenges faced by young people.

She disclosed that the NDDC partnered with KPMG, a global audit and consultancy firm, to enhance the commission's corporate governance framework.

"KPMG has produced a Governance Advisory Report that will serve as a tool to support the commission's transition from a transaction-based to a transformation-focussed policy," Thompson-Wakama added.

LP Reps caucus decries Anambra lawmaker's killing

The Labour Party caucus in the House of Representatives has expressed outrage over the killing of Justice Azuka, a member of the Anambra State House of Assembly, describing it as a devastating loss to the party and the legislature.

Azuka, who represented Onitsha North 1 Constituency, was abducted on December 24, 2024, along Ugwunaobankpa

Road in Inland Town, Onitsha, while returning home for Christmas.

However, 44 days later, his lifeless body was discovered by security operatives by the roadside at the Second Niger Bridge in the early hours of Thursday, February 6, 2025.

The slain lawmaker, a chieftain of the Labour Party, had reclaimed his mandate

through a court ruling that ousted Douglas Egbuna of the Peoples Democratic Party, who was initially declared the winner of the 2023 election.

Reacting to the murder, LP House of Representatives Caucus leader and lawmaker representing Ogbaru Federal Constituency, Afam Ogene, in a statement on Thursday, described the incident as "horren-

dous, heart-wrenching, and a major blow to the Labour Party and the legislature."

Ogene recalled that he had earlier in January urged Anambra State Governor, Prof. Chukwuma Soludo, to take decisive action to secure Azuka's release and tackle the rising wave of insecurity in the state, which he said had become a hotbed for kidnappings and killings.

Senator Barau launches initiative to make 558 young farmer millionaires in North West

CAROLINE AMEH

The Deputy President of the Senate, Senator (Dr.) Barau I. Jibrin, CFR, has unveiled a bold initiative aimed at revolutionizing agriculture in Nigeria's North West region by empowering 558 young farmers with N5 million each to invest in farming this season.

The program, tagged Barau Initiative for Agricultural Revolution in the North West (BIARN), will select three young farmers from each of the 186 local government areas across Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi, Jigawa, Sokoto, and Zamfara

states. In total, the initiative will inject N2.79 billion into agricultural development in the region.

Briefing the press at the National Assembly on Thursday, Senator Barau, represented by his Special Adviser on Policy and Monitoring, Professor Bashir Muhammad Fagge, emphasized that the initiative aligns with President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's Renewed Hope Agenda to enhance food security.

"Food security is paramount and at the top of the agenda of progressive nations globally. Without it, insecurity will persist at all levels—individual, family, local government, state,

and nations" he said.

Senator Barau lamented the decline of the North West's agricultural dominance, recalling a time when the region was Nigeria's leading food producer and exporter. BIARN, he said, seeks to restore the zone's agricultural prominence by leveraging its vast arable land.

The Barau I. Jibrin Foundation (BIJF) will implement the initiative in partnership with a national financial institution, with final arrangements nearly complete. The program is set to launch in April 2025, ahead of the new farming season.

Each beneficiary will receive an interest-free N5 million

loan to cultivate maize and rice, two staple crops essential for reducing food costs and enhancing national food security.

The breakdown of beneficiaries per state includes, Kaduna – 69, Kano – 132, Kebbi – 63, Katsina – 102, Jigawa – 81, Sokoto – 69 and Zamfara – 42

In 2023, Nigeria produced 8.9 million metric tons of paddy rice, the highest in over a decade. However, this remains insufficient for the growing population. BIARN aims to increase agricultural production by equipping young farmers with the necessary resources and guidance.

Senator Barau revealed that he

has already held fruitful discussions with the partnering financial institution. His Implementation Committee Chairman, Professor Bashir Muhammad Fagge, and Special Adviser on Media and Publicity, Alhaji Ismail Mudashir, have also engaged the institution's top management twice to finalize arrangements.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is set to be signed next week, marking the

official takeoff of the project.

"If we attain food security in our country, more than half of our problems will be solved," Senator Barau stated, calling for public support to ensure the success of the initiative.

The initiative is expected to revitalize agriculture, create employment, and strengthen food production across the North West, setting a model for sustainable development in Nigeria.



EMERGENCY MEETING WITH CSOs:

L-R: Executive Director, TAF-Africa, Jake Epelle; Partner for Electoral Reform, Ezenwa Nwagwu; Program officer Sustainable Gender Action Initiative (SGAI), Sakinatu Bello, and chairman, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Mahmood Yakubu, during an emergency meeting with CSOs on the Anambra State governorship election recently.

PHOTO BY OMOYE AMINU

AAU's new Governing Council begins work

The newly inaugurated Governing Council of Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, led by High Chief Dan Osi Orbih, has embarked on a familiarization tour of the university and its host community.

During a courtesy visit to the Palace of the Onojie of Ekpoma, HRH Anthony Abumere II, Chief Orbih, accompanied by other council members and the university management team, informed the monarch that the Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpepholo has entrusted them with leveraging their

collective expertise to enhance the university's administration.

"We are aware of the significant challenges facing the institution and seek your prayers, support, and that of the host community," Chief Orbih stated.

In response, the Onojie of Ekpoma thanked the chairman and council for a successful tenure and assured them of the palace's unwavering support.

At the various meetings with relevant stakeholders in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Chief Dan Orbih informed the leaders of the various unions

that the council would partner with them to achieve the desired goals of making the University better and greater.

"We are here because of you. We are prepared to work for you and also looking forward to working with you. We are aware of the challenges but we will also crave your indulgence to do position papers for us so that we can have a grasp of the details of the challenges.

"Time and patience would be required for us to be able to address the various challenges facing our dear University. To

this end, I will want to, on behalf of my other colleagues at the Council, enjoined you all to be patient as we are determined to work in the interest of all.

The leadership of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), CONUA, JAC, SANNU, NASU and the SUG were at various times available to have audience with the Council members.

The Unions reinstated the needs for the council to urgently address the issue of minimum wage, other welfare and sundry issues.

Edo State Public Service JNC gets new EXCO

The Public Service Joint Negotiating Council (PSJNC) in Edo State has elected a new leadership team to steer the affairs of public service workers in the state. Comrade Godwin O. Oisamaiye emerged as the Chairman, with Comrade Joseph Wasah elected as Vice Chairman. Comrade Clement Osareuwense will serve as Secretary, while

Comrade Queen takes on the role of Treasurer. Comrade Iretoi Kingsley was elected as the State Assistant Secretary.

The council also appointed Comrades Olise Chukwunem Francis, Osaji Ify Jacob, and Ogbeide O. Osagie as Ex-Officio members. Following the election, Comrade Oisamaiye expressed gratitude to members

for their trust in his leadership and pledged to prioritize the welfare of workers, strengthen negotiations with the state government, and ensure the rights of public service employees are protected. He emphasized the need for unity and collective effort to achieve progress and improve the working conditions of civil servants in Edo State.

The National President of JNPSNC, Comrade Benjamin Anthony who presided over the swearing-in ceremony advised the new executive officers to see their emergence as a call to service with collective responsibility tainted with collective bargaining tenets devoid of mistrust and suspicion in their relationship with government side

Egor LG commences desilting of drainages

AGBONLAHOR FELICIA

Hon. Kelvin Eguakun, Chairman of Egor Local Government Area, has begun the desilting of drainages along the Ugbowo Express Road and the Uselu axis of the road in order to prevent flooding and erosion in the area as the rainy season begins.

The Chairman, who led a team on the clean-up exercise stated that the exercise's goal is to clear the drainages of debris and other obstacles that could obstruct free flow of flood water leading to flooding and erosion in the area as the rainy season begins.

Hon. Kelvin Eguakun said the clean-up exercise, which began on Ugbowo Express

Way, would continue and be extended to Textile Mill Road and other parts of Egor Local Government Area.

While emphasising the importance of maintaining a livable and pollution-free environment, the chairman urged residents to refrain from careless waste disposal since it would wash into the drainage systems and cause flooding during rainy seasons.

According to the chairman, proper and frequent drainage desilting is necessary because it would allow for free flow of flood during rainy seasons.

He therefore called on Egor residents to comply with government directives to keep Egor clean and making it more habitable for dwellers and for businesses to thrive.

Why Okpepholo suspended Samson Osagie, Damian Lawani

IDAHOUSA MUSA

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpepholo has suspended the Attorney General and Commissioner for Justice in the state, Barr. Samson Osagie and the Chairman of the state Local Government Service Commission, Hon. Damian Lawani, from offices over allegations of financial infractions.

The suspension of the duo which was contained in a statement issued on Wednesday evening by the Secretary to the Edo State Government (SSG), Umar Musa Ikhilor Esq. indicated that the suspension is with immediate effect.

According to the statement, Governor Okpepholo consequently ordered the setting up of a panel to investigate the allegations against Osagie and Lawani and as well make appropriate recommendations to the governor.

"The suspension of Hon. Damian Lawani and the Attorney General and Commissioner for Justice became necessary to enable government carry out a thorough investigation into the allegations of

financial infractions levelled against them. They are to remain suspended pending the conclusion of investigation."

Meanwhile, the suspended Attorney General, Osagie, has denied allegations of financial misconduct levelled against him.

He made the denial in a statement he personally signed early Thursday morning.

"Let me state unequivocally that I am not and was never involved in any financial dealing with anyone nor committed any financial infraction of any kind.

"I was also not confronted with the said allegations by anyone before my suspension was announced," Osagie said.

He, however, affirmed his readiness to defend himself and protect his reputation, which he said he has built over the years.



OKPEPHOLO

Entertainment

Summer Rain sets to premiere on February 7 – A must-watch love story!



UGO UGBOH

Get ready for an unforgettable cinematic experience as *Summer Rain*, a highly anticipated Nollywood romance drama, hits cinemas nationwide on February 7, 2025! Directed by Joyful Adenike and produced by The Ogunmola Company in collaboration with Imagine Media Studios, this movie promises to take audiences on an emotional journey filled with love, heartbreak, and self-discovery.

Summer Rain tells the captivating story of two friends as they navigate life, love, and the impact of past choices. With a touching screenplay by Owumi Ugboye, the film beautifully explores how relationships evolve over time and the powerful influence of family decisions on the future.

Boasting an incredible lineup of Nollywood's finest, *Summer Rain* features stars like Bolaji Ogunmola, Daniel Etim Effiong, Genoveva Umeh, Femi Branch, Tina Mba, and Lateef

Adedimeji. Also joining the stellar cast are Kayode Ojuolape Jnr., Darasimi Nadi, Emeka Nwagbarocha, Michael Ejoor, Kachi Nnochiri, Kanaga Emmanuel Eme, and more!

With its heartwarming story, powerful performances, and breathtaking cinematography, *Summer Rain* is set to be one of the most talked-about films of 2025. Don't miss the chance to experience this emotional roller-coaster on the big screen—mark your calendars for February 7!

Decade-long love story unfolds in Nollywood's Summer Rain

BLESSED MOMOH

Scheduled for release on February 7, 2025, *Summer Rain* has already stirred excitement among Nollywood enthusiasts. This movie is directed by Adenike Adebayo-Esho and it promises to be an emotionally stirring romantic drama that explores themes of love, choices, and family dynamics.

The film explores a decade-long love story between two friends, delving into how parental choices influence their lives and relationships. This narrative explores how familial decisions can ripple through generations, affecting relationships and personal growth. The story is expected to resonate deeply with viewers who value the intersection of romance and family influence.

The film boasts an impressive ensemble cast, including Bolaji Ogunmola, Daniel Etim-Effiong, Lateef Adedimeji, Genoveva Umeh, Kayode Ojuolape Jnr., Tina Mba, Femi Branch, Emeka Nwagbarocha, Michael Ejoor, Kalu-Anaga Emmanuel Eme, Temitope Olowoniyiyan, Kachi Nnochiri, and Darasimi Nadi.

From the released trailers and promotional material, *Summer Rain* promises to be visually captivating, with emotionally charged scenes that aim to tug at the audience's heartstrings. The film is positioned not just as a romantic drama but as a broader commentary on life, love, and resilience.

With its rich narrative, talented cast, and high production standards, *Summer*



mer Rain is poised to be a memorable addition to Nollywood's growing collection of thought-provoking dramas. As the release date draws near, fans are eagerly awaiting a cinematic experience

that blends romance with the complexities of familial influence. Are we friends or lovers? Find out in this captivating film about love, choices, resilience and family dynamics.

Heartbreak and Hope: Love lockdown set to captivate Nollywood audiences

BLESSED MOMOH

Set to premiere on February 7, 2025, *Love Lockdown* is a gripping romantic drama that explores the complexities of love, trust, and the emotional challenges faced during trying times. Directed by Lindsey Efejoku, the film promises to offer an intense emotional experience, set against the backdrop of a global lockdown.

This film delves into the intertwined lives of individuals who find themselves trapped by not only a literal lockdown but also by the complexities of their own hearts. The story

dives deep into themes of passion, betrayal, and tough choices that test the strength of romantic relationships. While the world outside is in turmoil, their emotional lives become even more complicated, as they are forced to face unresolved conflicts, buried secrets, and unexpected betrayals.

Love, passion, and heartbreak are at the core of the narrative, as characters grapple with the decisions that could either save or destroy their relationships.

Under the direction of Trino Motion Pictures, *Love Lockdown* offers more than just a love story; it aims to capture the emotional nuances of in-

dividuals dealing with personal and romantic crises. The film promises high production value, visually rich storytelling, and a soundtrack that complements the emotional highs and lows of the narrative. The use of the lockdown as both a literal and metaphorical confinement offers an intriguing framework for exploring the emotional and psychological toll on the characters.

This movie boasts an ensemble cast including Andrew Bunting, Detola Jones, Yewande Osamein, Doris Okorie, Obichi Marshall, Chidera Makatah, Emmanuel Ogundu. These talented actors, known for their

compelling performances, and their portrayals of complex emotions are expected to resonate deeply with viewers. Their chemistry will likely drive the emotional depth of the film, keeping the audience invested in each character's journey.

From the teaser, this film appears to take a bold approach to romance, showing love not just as a beautiful journey but as one fraught with sacrifices, dilemmas, and consequences. The tension between desire and betrayal will likely keep viewers on the edge of their seats, eagerly anticipating how each character will cope with their emotional struggles.

Love Lockdown stands out as an emotionally layered Nollywood film that will resonate with audiences long after the credits roll. By exploring themes of love, betrayal, and self-reflection during a time of crisis, the film is set to capture the hearts of viewers who crave heartfelt, realistic portrayals of relationships. If the film delivers on its promise, *Love Lockdown* could very well be a defining moment for Nollywood's romantic drama genre. This film has generated significant attention within the Nollywood community, with discussions highlighting its compelling storyline and the anticipation surrounding its premiere.

Friday Sermon

THE CRUSHING WEIGHT OF SPILLED MILK: A reflection on sincerity in deeds

IMAM TAJUDEEN IBN IBRAHIM
(Grand Chief Imam of Akoko-Edo)

Brothers and sisters in Islam, as we gather today for Jum'ah prayers, let us reflect on a matter of utmost importance (the sincerity of our intentions and the purity of our actions).

The Quran and the Sunnah are replete with reminders about the necessity of dedicating our deeds solely to Allah (SWT), seeking His pleasure alone, and guarding against the insidious disease of *riya'* (ostentation) which can render our efforts as worthless as spilled milk.

Allah (SWT) says in Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 264: "O you who believe! Do not render in vain your charity by reminders of your generosity, or by injury, like him who spends his wealth to be seen of men, and he does not believe in Allah, nor in the Last Day. His likeness is the likeness of a smooth rock on which is a little dust; on it falls heavy rain which leaves it bare. They are not able to do anything with what they have earned. And Allah does not guide the disbelieving people."

This powerful verse paints a vivid picture of the futility of actions performed for worldly recognition. Imagine a smooth rock, seemingly covered with a thin layer of dust. A casual observer might think there is something of substance there. But when a heavy rain falls, the dust is washed away, revealing the bare, barren rock beneath. Similarly, the person who gives charity to be praised, who prays to be seen as pious, or who performs any good deed for worldly acclaim, will find on the Day of Judgment that their actions are

devoid of any real value. They thought they were accumulating good deeds, but in reality, they were building on a foundation of sand, easily washed away by the truth.

This verse serves as a stark warning against the dangers of *riya'*. It's not just about giving charity; it encompasses all acts of worship and even seemingly mundane actions. Are we praying for Allah's pleasure, or to be admired by our peers? Are we fasting to draw closer to Allah, or to gain a reputation for piety? Are we helping others out of genuine compassion, or to boast about our generosity? These are questions we must constantly ask ourselves.

Furthermore, Allah (SWT) says in Surah Al-Furqan, verse 23: "And We shall turn to whatever deeds they did (in this life), and We shall make such deeds as scattered floating particles of dust." This verse amplifies the message of the previous one. It tells us that on the Day of Judgment, Allah (SWT) will scrutinize our actions. Those deeds that were performed sincerely for His sake will be accepted and rewarded. But those deeds tainted by *riya'*, those performed for show or to gain worldly praise, will be reduced to scattered dust, utterly worthless. Imagine the despair of a person who thought they had accumulated a mountain of good deeds, only to find on the Day of Judgment that it has all vanished like dust in the wind.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) emphasized the gravity of this issue in numerous hadith. Mahmud ibn Labid narrated: "The most dreadful fear that I apprehend for you is *shirk-asghar* [the minor shirk]. They asked O Messenger of Allah what is mi-

nor shirk? He said: Ostentation. On the Day of Judgment Allah will declare: Go back to those whom you showed your deeds in the world and see what reward they have for you" [Ahmad].

This hadith should send shivers down our spines. The Prophet (peace be upon him) himself, the most sincere and devoted servant of Allah, expressed his fear for his Ummah regarding *shirk-asghar*, which he defined as ostentation. This highlights the subtle and insidious nature of *riya'*. It can creep into our hearts without us even realizing it, corrupting our intentions and rendering our actions worthless. The hadith also paints a chilling picture of the Day of Judgment, when those who performed deeds for worldly recogni-

tion will be told to seek their reward from those they sought to impress in this world. What reward will they find there? Nothing but disappointment and regret.

In another hadith, Abu Huraira narrated: The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: Allah The Most High says: "I am absolutely absolved off shirk. If anybody performs a deed associating something as my co-partner, I abandon him and his shirk." [Muslim]. This *qudsi* hadith underscores the absolute purity that Allah (SWT) demands in our actions. He is self-sufficient and does not accept partnership in worship. Any action tainted by shirk, even the minor shirk of *riya'*, is rejected by Allah (SWT). He abandons the person who commits such an act, leaving them to face the consequences of their insincerity.

O Muslims! It is important to avoid statements that can lead to shirk, such as saying "Whatever Allah wills and you will," or "Had it not been for Allah and so-and-so (I would not have succeeded)." These statements, while seemingly innocuous, can imply that someone or something shares partnership with Allah (SWT) in His power and authority. Instead, we should say: "Whatever Allah wills, then you will," or "Had it not been for Allah then so-and-so (I would not have succeeded)." This subtle shift in wording emphasizes the ultimate authority of Allah (SWT) and acknowledges that all blessings and successes come from Him alone.

Allah (SWT) says in Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 22: "So do not attribute to Allah equals while you know that there is nothing similar to Him." This verse reminds us of the absolute oneness of

Allah (SWT) and the prohibition of associating partners with Him in any way, shape, or form. This includes not only the major shirk of worshipping other than Allah, but also the minor shirk of *riya'*, which involves seeking the pleasure of others instead of, or alongside, the pleasure of Allah (SWT).

Ostentation invalidates worship because Allah (SWT) only accepts actions that are purely for Him and meant to seek His pleasure. The essence of worship is sincerity, humility, and devotion. When these qualities are absent, and the heart is filled with the desire for worldly recognition, the action becomes hollow and meaningless. It is like a body without a soul, a shell without substance.

Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, let us constantly examine our intentions and purify our hearts from the disease of *riya'*. Let us strive to perform all our actions, both big and small, solely for the pleasure of Allah (SWT). Let us remember that He is the All-Seeing, the All-Hearing, and the All-Knowing. He knows what is in our hearts, and He will judge us based on our intentions.

Let us ask Allah (SWT) to guide us, to purify our hearts, and to accept our deeds. Let us seek refuge in Him from the whispers of Shaytan, who constantly tries to lead us astray and make us fall into the trap of *riya'*. May Allah grant us *hidayah* (guidance) and make us among those who are sincere in their worship and whose deeds are accepted by Him. Ameen.

Imaam Tajudeen Ibn Ibrahim, the Grand Chief Imaam of Akoko-Edo writes from Igarra Central Mosque.

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The Police, the Youth, and the phone: Setting agenda for CP Betty Otimenyi in Edo – Part 2

«CONTINUED FROM BACK PAGE

hotspots of the protests, with police stations attacked and prisoners freed. The protests, though largely peaceful at the onset, escalated due to pent-up frustration with law enforcement.

If this issue remains unaddressed, history may repeat itself, leading to further breakdowns in law and order.

As the new Commissioner of Police in Edo State, CP Betty Otimenyi is stepping into a volatile environment where public perception of the police is largely negative. However, her appointment presents an opportunity for change.

To restore public confidence and ensure effective policing, she must take deliberate steps to address the issue of illegal phone searches and harassment of youths.

CP Otimenyi must issue clear directives to officers on the field, prohibiting illegal stop-and-search operations that specifically target young people's phones. Such directives should be made public to reassure the youth that their rights are being protected.

Many officers may be unaware that their actions constitute a violation of human rights. CP Otimenyi should prioritise training programmes that

educate police personnel on constitutional rights, digital privacy laws, and ethical policing standards. Officers need to understand that effective crime-fighting does not equate to indiscriminate profiling.

There must be an accessible and responsive complaint system where victims of police harassment can report their experiences. This could be through a dedicated hotline, a social media platform, or a special police-civilian liaison unit that investigates misconduct without bias.

One of the most effective ways to bridge the gap between the police and the youth is through community engagement initiatives. She should organise town hall meetings where young people can air their grievances, ask questions, and interact directly with the police leadership. These fora will help humanise law enforcement officers and promote understanding.

To deter erring officers from engaging in illegal practices, there must be strict disciplinary actions against those found guilty of harassment, extortion, or unlawful searches. The lack of consequences has emboldened many officers to continue violating citizens' rights with impunity. By ensuring that offenders are held



accountable, CP Otimenyi will send a strong message that unprofessional conduct will not be tolerated.

While it is true that internet fraud is a growing problem, fighting it requires lawful and intelligent strategies. The police should collaborate with the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and cybersecurity experts to track, investigate, and apprehend real offenders without indiscriminately profiling all young people as criminals. Addressing this issue effectively will

have wider benefits beyond just police-youth relations. A police force that respects human rights earns public cooperation, making crime-fighting more efficient. When young people feel safe from harassment, they are more likely to assist law enforcement in tackling genuine security threats, such as cultism, kidnapping, and armed robbery.

Additionally, ensuring professionalism in policing will boost Edo State's reputation as a business-friendly environment, attracting investors who val-

ue a well-regulated society. Many technology start-ups and entrepreneurs rely on digital tools for their businesses; harassment from law enforcement can discourage innovation and drive young talent away from the state.

CP Betty Otimenyi has a unique opportunity to rewrite the narrative of police engagement with Edo youth. She must act swiftly and decisively to address the issue of illegal phone searches and harassment, ensuring that her tenure is marked by professionalism, accountability, and public trust.

The task before her is not just about maintaining law and order. It is about restoring the integrity of the police force and fostering a society where young people can live without fear of unlawful persecution. Edo State deserves a police force that is respected, not feared; trusted, and not despised. It is now up to CP Betty Otimenyi to rise to the challenge and make a lasting impact as the first female Commissioner of Police in Edo and an illustrious daughter of the State.

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

Fashion & Style

Athleisure: Influencing contemporary fashion

OSAMUDIAME AGBONGIASEDE AND PEACE AKPOBOME

Athleisure, a fusion of "athletic" and "leisure," has become a dominant trend in global fashion over the past decade. This style blends athletic wear—such as track-suits, hoodies, sneakers, leggings, and sports bras—with casual, everyday pieces, creating a look that is both functional and fashionable.

The roots of athleisure can be traced to the West, where athletic clothing originally served fitness and sports purposes. Though it emerged in the early 20th century, athleisure truly gained traction in the 21st century, particularly as fitness culture grew in the late '90s.

During this time, young people increasingly embraced activewear, and as semi-formal workplace culture and remote work gained popularity, athleisure's relevance grew even further.

The beauty of athleisure lies in its hybrid nature, combining athletic

and casual styles into a relaxed, yet functional look. This balance of comfort and style has made it immensely popular among fashion lovers and non-fashion enthusiasts alike, particularly among youth and teenagers.

Major sports brands like Adidas, Fila, Nike, and Puma capitalized on this trend by producing athleisure-inspired clothing and footwear. These pieces maintained their athletic functionality while appealing to consumers looking for a more relaxed, casual aesthetic.

Athleisure has evolved from a niche trend to a mainstream fashion staple, influencing the growth of streetwear and casual fashion. It has also gained favor among celebrities and designers, and is now widely adopted by people of all ages, from remote workers to corporate professionals.

Looking ahead, with advancements in technology and the development of eco-friendly, comfortable fabrics, athleisure is poised for even greater popularity, becoming an enduring fixture in both fashion and daily life.



Feature

Trump's Executive Orders and the Project 2025

ANDERSON CULBERT

In his first few days back in office, President Donald Trump engaged in a whirlwind of executive actions, from exiting the World Health Organization, to deploying military personnel and National Guard troops to the U.S.-Mexico border.

Many of these actions are unprecedented. Some appear to be illegal and unconstitutional, according to legal experts and judges. But none of them should come as a surprise – nearly all of them were outlined in 2022 in a plan called Project 2025.

PROJECT 2025 IS TOP OF TRUMP'S TO-DO LIST

Project 2025 is a multifaceted strategy to advance conservative policies in the federal government. Part of this effort revolves around the "Mandate for Leadership," a 922-page document published in April 2023 that outlines a slew of proposed governmental policy changes.

The Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank and advocacy group, organized the collaborative effort. A long list of other right-leaning research organizations and interest groups, like Moms for Liberty and Turning Point USA, also participated in Project 2025.

In the lead-up to the 2024 presidential election, Project 2025 participants wrote on the plan's website that "to rescue the country from the grip of the radical Left," they would "need both a governing agenda and the right people in place, ready to carry this agenda out on day one of the next conservative administration."

In my research on think tanks, I've investigated how these research organizations can influence public policymaking. The most potent strategy is to ally with a political party and support its objectives through research and advocacy. This is exactly what the Heritage Foundation has done via Project 2025.

Even though Trump said during his 2024 campaign that he was not affiliated with the project, evidence of Project

2025's agenda can be seen throughout the beginning of his second term – as well as in his first administration.

For example, on Jan. 20, 2025, Trump echoed the plan's statement that "men and women are biological realities" when he signed an executive order that, in part, recognizes "two sexes, male and female" that are "not changeable and are grounded in fundamental and incontrovertible reality." This order led to the removal of transgender references from government websites.

Other orders are similarly aligned with Project 2025. Take Trump's executive order that, in part, eliminated the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs, or OFCCP, a government office previously charged with ensuring companies working with the government did not discriminate against any employees. Project 2025 recommended, quite simply, to "eliminate OFCCP."

Some news reports have found that there are already many other examples of Trump policy decisions and executive orders that appear to mirror Project 2025 recommendations.

One CNN analysis from Jan. 31 found that more than two-thirds of the 53 executive orders Trump issued during his first week in office "evoked proposals outlined in [the] 'Mandate for Leadership.'"

HERITAGE FOUNDATION'S DECADES OF ACTIVISM

Project 2025's influence on Trump reflects the Heritage Foundation's growing importance to the Republican Party.

In my forthcoming book about the polarization and politicization of policy research organizations, I show the many ways that think tanks like the Heritage Foundation have become embedded within partisan networks and intimately connected to politicians. Increasingly, Heritage and other partisan-aligned think tanks, including progressive groups like the Center for American Progress, use their research to consistently support partisan agendas that align with their policy goals.

The relationship between the Her-



TRUMP

itage Foundation and the GOP represents the most extreme version of this dynamic. The think tank has supported Republican presidents as far back as Ronald Reagan, using another policy document – also called the "Mandate for Leadership" – to secure significant policy gains through his administration. But the symbiosis between the Heritage Foundation and the GOP has been particularly notable since Trump gained more influence in the party.

At the start of Trump's first term, as one Heritage Foundation researcher told me in 2017, the think tank recognized that the "administration didn't have much policy depth, so when they won the election they were sort of like, 'Now what do we do?' And that's where Heritage comes in. ... We work on these issues year-round, so we'll stand by your side."

The Heritage Foundation also vet-

ted potential staffers for federal government positions. This led to more than 66 Heritage employees or former employees working for the Trump administration by the middle of 2018.

But Heritage has not entirely dictated Trump's agenda. While the group did say that Trump "embraced 64 percent of our 321 recommendations" by the end of 2017, the think tank has also revamped its agenda to align with Trump on the issues he cared most about, like trade and culture wars.

As the think tank's president, Kevin Roberts, said in 2024, Heritage views its job as "institutionalizing Trumpism."

THE PEOPLE CONNECTING TRUMP TO PROJECT 2025

Many of the contributors to the "Mandate for Leadership" had been Trump administration officials, like Russ Vought, the former director of the Office of Management and Budget and current nominee for the same position.

This list also includes John Ratcliffe, the former director of National Intelligence and incoming CIA director, and Tom Homan, former acting director of Immigration and Customs Enforcement and current border czar.

In all, more than half of the plan's 312 authors, editors and contributors previously worked in the first Trump administration.

An incredibly important but often underappreciated part of Project 2025 was its staffing effort: The coalition worked to identify, vet and train potential staffers and appointees who are now making their way into the Trump administration and executive agencies.

An older man wearing a grey suit points his finger at a large poster that says 'Exposing Project 2025'.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer gestures toward a visual aid about Project 2025 during a news conference in September 2024 in Washington. Kent Nishimura/Getty Images

WHAT PEOPLE – AND THE LAW – SAY ABOUT PROJECT 2025

Polling from January 2025 shows that a majority of Americans oppose many of Trump's actions since retaking office, sometimes by large margins.

Even during the presidential campaign, both Project 2025 itself and the policy ideas it advocated were broadly unpopular. Democrats consistently warned about the plan in their attacks against Republicans.

The lack of popular approval for Project 2025 and its proposals is notable because the Heritage Foundation has historically invested time and money into gaining public support for its work. It even operates an initiative that polls citizens on how they "interpret arguments for and against our policy recommendations and how we can best gain their understanding and support."

THERE ARE ALSO LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

Many of Trump's actions – like saying the government will deny citizenship to children born to some immigrants in the U.S. – rest on potentially unconstitutional interpretations and expansions of presidential power.

This represents another about-face for the think tank, which has historically opposed efforts to empower the president at the expense of congressional authority. Indeed, the Heritage Foundation was founded to work through Congress to accomplish its goals. But with Project 2025, it seems it is pursuing a new strategy.

How successful the Heritage Foundation is in helping Trump implement Project 2025 proposals will partially depend on how the public reacts. Whether Congress asserts its control over budgetary matters and exercises general oversight of the executive branch will also matter, as will the decisions made by the American judicial system.

These checks and balances have helped sustain American democracy for nearly 250 years – whether they will continue to do so remains to be seen.

Cross-cultural reflections on the matters of dressing

OSUMAH AUGUSTINE

As used in this discourse, the term "dressing" entails the practice of wearing clothes on human body. This act is among the basic norms of the social institutions in most countries across the globe.

As it stands, dressing is a cross-cultural phenomenon. It is a practice that different societies are involved in on a universal scale.

TWO BROAD METHODS OF CLOTH PRODUCTION EXIST

First is the manual or handmade type while the other is machine-made. Findings from previous studies on the subject of dressing showed that most of the earliest clothes worn by people were handwoven. Subsequent to industrial revolution, machine-made garments surfaced.

Attires worn by people vary from place to place. People from nations all over the world have diverse kinds of regalia they put on. Tribes, clans and

families have dressing styles that are peculiar to them. Same is applicable to institutions such as schools, event centres, hospitals and places of worship. Professionals like doctors, lawyers, nurses, astronauts and athletes wear unique attires in their workplace.

IN THE DAYS OF YORE, CLOTHES WERE SCARCE

The commonest ones available were made with cotton, silk and animal skin. Skilled guilds of weavers and tanners made dresses which were not enough for the clothing needs of households. It was gathered in a research that the then prevalent scarcity made parents to exchange clothes.

An informant revealed that in the ancient clan of Ozalla which is ward one in the present-day Owan West Local Government Area of Edo State, clothes were so much scarce to the point that a wife had to stay nude at home at what time her husband was out for any engagement. Same was applicable to a husband whenever his wife was out to carry out

whatever tasks. The same shortage of clothes made nudism a form of dressing pattern for the children until they attained the age of puberty.

Development in trade and industry later boosted the production and distribution of clothes. In contemporary times, most people from various cultures have enough attires for dressing in the different geographical locations across the globe.

Nevertheless, people dress for multifarious reasons which are often the same from one country to another. This is known as cross-cultural reasons for dressing. Some of them are somewhat effortless to fathom.

THE FOLLOWING ARE THE HIGHLIGHTS

The foremost reason for dressing is covering. The need to cover nakedness is the most vital purpose of wearing clothes. Thus, any garments that reveal the pubic areas in the human body do not serve the primary purpose of putting on attires.

Another reason for dressing is beau-

tification. Human beings all over the world do wear clothes in order to appear beautiful. The beautifully dressed people receive complementary accolades most times wherever they are present.

Again, dressing is for the purpose of identification. A cliché says "dress the way you want to be addressed." Chief among the apparent ways to distinguish royalties from commoners is mode of dressing. Dress pattern reveals the wearer's identity.

Dressing is furthermore a means of differentiation. In many tertiary institutions of learning, students are differentiated on the basis of dressing. Students undergoing academic training in law, medical sciences and engineering do not put on the same regalia. Such is also the case with the graduation gowns worn by the first degree, masters and doctorates holders at different universities during convocations.

It is imperative to note that dressing also signifies the health and moral conditions of people in the society. Wearers of revealing clothes are most times

judged as whoremongers while the reverse are tagged as decent people. In addition, tattered and dirty attires are often associated with mad people in most communities.

In the modern day, the purpose of dressing seems defeated. Boundaries have been blurred in regard to what to wear, when, where, how, and why? It is now difficult, if not impossible to decipher the sane from the insane, and the decent from the indecent people in the society.

This is as a result of the mix-ups in the patterns of dressing. Even the indigenous dress culture is endangered by foreign types.

There is the urgent need for reorientation in the bid to reinstate the functions which dressing is meant to serve. Since charity begins at home, germane cross-cultural reawakening regarding dress culture should commence from families. Afterwards, the said renaissance about the issues bordering on dressing should be disseminated to schools, hospitals, markets, worship centres, and other social institutions.

Foreign

News

Panama denies US claims over free canal passages

Panama has denied making changes to allow US government vessels to transit the Panama Canal for free, following White House claims it had agreed to such a move.

The State Department said in a statement on X that its government vessels “can now transit the Panama Canal without charge fees, saving the US government millions of dollars a year”.

Responding to the comments, the Panama Canal Authority (ACP) said it was “empowered to set tolls and other fees for transiting the canal,” adding that it had “not made any adjustments to them”.

US President Donald Trump has repeatedly voiced his desire to retake control of the waterway, which is key to global trade.

The 51-mile (82km) Panama Canal cuts across the Central

American nation and is the main link between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who has been on a visit to Latin American countries this week, demanded that Panama make “immediate changes” to what he calls the “influence and control” of China over the canal.

America’s top diplomat said Panama had to act or the US would take necessary measures to protect its rights under a treaty between the two countries.

During a visit to the country, Rubio met Panama’s President José Raúl Mulino, as well as the canal’s administrator, Ricaurte Vásquez Morales.

The ACP said after his visit that it had conveyed its intention to work with the US navy to optimise transit priority for its vessels through the canal.

This commitment for dialogue with Washington remained, it said in a separate statement on Wednesday.

US vessels make up a significant proportion of traffic in the canal. In 2024, 52% of transits through the waterway had ports of origin or destination in the United States, according to the canal’s authorities.

Up to 14,000 ships use the canal each year to avoid a lengthy and costly trip around the tip of South America.

In his inaugural speech, President Trump said he planned to “take back” the canal, alleging that China was operating it and Panama had “broken” a promise to remain neutral.

The plan was strongly rejected by Mulino, who said the key trade route “is and will remain” in the country’s hands.

He also rejected Trump’s allegations about China’s influence, saying there is “no presence of any nation in the world that interferes with our administration”.

Trump recently reiterated his claim. Despite saying earlier this week he was “not happy” with the situation, he acknowledged that Panama had “agreed to certain things”. Mulino has said his country will not continue its membership in China’s infrastructure-building programme, the Belt and Road Initiative.

The US built the canal in the early 20th Century but, after years of protest, President Jimmy Carter signed a treaty with Panama in 1977 to gradually hand back control of the waterway, which Trump has branded “a big mistake”.

Record January warmth puzzles climate scientists

Last month was the world’s warmest January on record raising further questions about the pace of climate change, scientists say.

January 2025 had been expected to be slightly cooler than January 2024 because of a shift away from a natural weather pattern in the Pacific known as El Niño.

But instead, last month broke the January 2024 record by nearly 0.1C, according to the European Copernicus climate service.

The world’s warming is due to emissions of planet-heating gases from human activities - mainly the burning of fossil fuels - but scientists say they cannot fully explain why last month was particularly hot.

It continues a series of surprisingly large temperature records since mid-2023, with temperatures around 0.2C above what had been expected.

“The basic reason we’re having records being broken, and we’ve had this decades-long warming trend, is because we’re increasing the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere,” Gavin Schmidt, director of Nasa’s Goddard Institute for Space Studies, told BBC News.

“The specifics of exactly why 2023, and 2024, and [the start of] 2025, were so warm, there are other elements involved there.

We’re trying to pin those down.”

January 2025 ended up 1.75C warmer than January temperatures of the late 19th Century, before humans started significantly warming the climate.

Early last year, global temperatures were being boosted by the natural El Niño weather pattern, where unusually warm surface waters spread across the eastern tropical Pacific. This releases extra heat into the atmosphere, raising global temperatures.

This year, La Niña conditions are developing instead, according to US science group NOAA, which should have the opposite effect.

While La Niña is currently weak - and sometimes takes a couple of months to have its full effect on temperatures - it was expected to lead to a cooler January.

“If you’d asked me a few months ago what January 2025 would look like relative to January 2024, my best shot would have been it would be cooler,” Adam Scaife, head of monthly to decadal predictions at the UK Met Office, said.

“We now know it isn’t, and we don’t really know why that is.”

A number of theories have been put forward for why the last couple of years have been warmer than anticipated.

One idea involves a prolonged response of the oceans to the 2023-24 El Niño.

Israel minister tells army to plan for Palestinians leaving Gaza

Israel’s defence minister has told its military to prepare a plan to “allow any resident of Gaza who wishes to leave to do so”, in line with President Donald Trump’s proposal for the US to take over the territory and resettle the 2.1 million Palestinians there.

Israel Katz said Gazans should have “freedom of movement and migration” and countries critical of Israel’s war with Hamas were “obligated” to take them in.

The US secretary of state meanwhile insisted the resettlement would be temporary during Gaza’s reconstruction, though Trump had said it would be permanent.

Palestinian leaders and Arab states have rejected the plan and said that forced displacement would violate international law.

The UN secretary general

has also warned that it is “essential to avoid any form of ethnic cleansing” and stressed that Gaza would be an integral part of a future Palestinian state.

The Israeli military launched a campaign to destroy Hamas in response to an unprecedented cross-border attack on 7 October 2023, in which about 1,200 people were killed and 251 were taken hostage.

More than 47,550 people have been killed and 111,600 injured in Gaza since then, according to the territory’s Hamas-run health ministry.

Most of Gaza’s population has also been displaced multiple times and almost 70% of its buildings are estimated to be destroyed or damaged.

Healthcare, water, sanitation and hygiene systems have collapsed and there are shortages of food, fuel, medicine and shelter.



DAMAGED BUILDINGS:

It is estimated that two-thirds of Gaza’s buildings were damaged or destroyed in the 15 months of war

South Korea orders airports to install bird detection cameras

All South Korean airports will need to install bird detection cameras and thermal imaging radars, after an air crash in December last year killed 179 people.

The rollout is set to happen in 2026. Investigators said last week that they had found evidence of a bird strike on the Boeing 737-800 plane - with feathers and blood stains found on both the plane’s engines.

An investigation into the crash - the deadliest on South Korean soil - is still ongoing but will focus on the role of the bird strike as well as a concrete structure at the end of the runway, which the plane slammed into after making an emergency landing.

“Bird detection radars will be installed at all airports to enhance early detection of distant birds and improve response capabilities for aircraft,” said the Ministry of Land in a statement on Thursday.

Bird detection radar detects the size of birds and their move-

ment paths and relays this information to air traffic controllers.

The ministry added that all airports would also need to be equipped with at least one thermal imaging camera.

Currently only four airports in South Korea are equipped with thermal imaging cameras. It is unclear if any of them have bird detection radars in place.

Sites that attract birds, like rubbish dumps, must also be moved away from airports.

Earlier last month, South Korea announced that seven airports would have their runway safety areas adapted following a review of all the country’s airports that was carried out after the crash.

The cause of the crash is still unknown but air safety experts had earlier said the number of casualties could have been much lower if not for the structure that the plane crashed into after making an emergency landing.

On 29 December, the plane, from budget airline Jeju Air, had taken off from Bangkok and was

flying to Muan International Airport in the country’s south-west.

At about 08:57 local time, three minutes after pilots made contact with the airport, the control tower advised the crew to be cautious of “bird activity”.

At 08:59, the pilot reported that the plane had struck a bird and declared a mayday signal.

The pilot then requested permission to land from the oppo-

site direction, during which it belly-landed without its landing gear deployed. It overran the runway and exploded after slamming into the concrete structure, a preliminary investigation report concluded.

Flight data and cockpit voice recorders stopped recording four minutes before the disaster, an investigation into the black boxes later found.

Trump signs order banning transgender women from female sports

US President Donald Trump has signed an executive order that prevents transgender women from competing in female categories of sports.

The order provides guidance, regulations and legal interpretations, and it will enlist the Department of Education to investigate high schools thought to be non-compliant.

Republicans say it restores fairness to sports but LGBT advocacy and human rights or-

ganisations have described the move as discriminatory.

The order, which goes into effect immediately, largely covers high school, universities and grassroots sports.

A number of sporting governing bodies, including swimming, athletics and golf, have banned transgender women from competing in the female category at elite level if they have gone through male puberty.

According to White House officials who briefed reporters

on Wednesday morning, this latest order empowers the Department of Education to investigate how schools implement Title IX, a US law that bans sex discrimination in federally funded education programmes.

An administration official said that the executive order will reverse the position of the Biden administration which in April last year said that LGBT students would be protected by federal law, although it did not give specific guidance on trans-

gender athletes.

“If you let men take over women’s sports teams or invade your locker rooms, you will be investigated for violations of Title IX and risk your federal funding,” Trump explained.

Additionally, the White House plans to bring in sporting bodies - such as the National Collegiate Athletics Association, or NCAA - to come to the White House to meet female athletes and their parents to discuss concerns.

News

Foreign

Relocation of Gazans would be temporary, says Rubio

US President Donald Trump's proposal to resettle Gaza's population would only be temporary, Secretary of State Marco Rubio has said.

It follows Trump's suggestion that the US could "take over" Gaza and resettle around two million Palestinians living

there – an idea that has drawn criticism from the UN, human rights groups and Arab leaders.

White House spokeswoman Karoline Leavitt further clarified Trump's comments, saying the US was not planning to put "boots on the ground" in the territory.

Meanwhile, Israeli Defence

Minister Israel Katz has said Gazans "should be allowed to enjoy freedom of exit and immigration", but gave few details on how this would work.

On a trip to Guatemala, Marco Rubio said Trump's proposal was not "hostile", but a "generous move", showing "the willingness of the United States to become responsible for the reconstruction of that area".

He said the idea was for Gazans to leave the territory for an "interim" period while

debris was cleared and reconstruction took place.

Under international law, attempts to forcibly transfer populations from occupied territory are strictly prohibited.

Meanwhile, Karoline Leavitt told journalists at the White House on Wednesday that the president was committed to rebuilding Gaza and "temporarily" relocating its residents during the process.

Trump said on Tuesday the displacement would be permanent.

Leavitt also said the president had not committed to putting "boots on the ground" in the territory but declined to rule out the use of US troops there.

Her comments come after Trump proposed taking control of the Gaza Strip and redeveloping it into "the Riviera of the Middle East".

"The US will take over the Gaza Strip and we will do a job with it too," Trump said on Tuesday during a joint press conference with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin

Netanyahu, who called the idea "worth paying attention to".

Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz also praised Trump's proposal, adding that Gazans "should be allowed to enjoy freedom of exit and immigration" by land, sea or air.

He said countries like Spain, Ireland and Norway – critics of the war – "are legally obligated to allow every Gazan resident to enter their territory".

He did not explain how the proposal would work – or

Strong earthquake near Santorini after days of tremors

A strong earthquake has been recorded between the Greek islands of Amorgos and Santorini, after days of consecutive tremors.

More than 11,000 people have already left Santorini, with around 7,000 departing by ferry and 4,000 people by air.

A magnitude 5.2 earthquake struck at 21:09 local time (19:09 GMT) on Wednesday, making it the strongest in recent days. It is estimated to have occurred at a depth of 5km.

That was followed by a 4.7 magnitude quake recorded south-west of Amorgos at 07:50 local time on Thursday, after 57 tremors were recorded between midnight and 06:30.

So far major damage has not been reported on the island, but authorities are taking precautionary measures and bracing in case a larger quake hits.

Vasilis Karastathis, director of the Geodynamic Institute, told ERTNews that "seismicity

continues at the same pace as in previous days, intense."

"We have a fairly high number of earthquakes with magnitudes above 4," he said.

"Still, we are not in a position to say that we see any evidence that would lead to the sequence slowly being completed. We are still in the middle of the road. We have not seen any thinning, any sign that it is heading towards retreat."

Santorini welcomes millions of tourists annually, but it is currently low season, meaning local residents and workers make up the majority of evacuees.

Poor weather means the ferry from Santorini to Piraeus port near Athens will not operate. The adverse conditions are expected to continue over the coming days.

Many travellers remain at Santorini's port to board emergency ferry routes that have been set up as many families want to leave the island.



US GOVERNMENT VESSELS:

Panama has denied making changes to allow US government vessels to transit the Panama Canal for free

Bowen: Trump's Gaza plan won't happen, but it 'll have consequences

Donald Trump's plan for the US to "take over" and "own" Gaza, resettling its population in the process, is not going to happen. It requires the co-operation of Arab states that have rejected it.

They include Jordan and Egypt – countries that Trump wants to take in Gaza's Palestinians – and Saudi Arabia, which might be expected to foot the bill.

Western allies of the US and Israel are also against the idea.

Some – perhaps many – Palestinians in Gaza might be tempted to get out if they had the chance.

But even if a million left, as many as 1.2m others would still be there.

Presumably the United States – the new owners of Trump's "Riviera of the Middle East" – would have to use force to remove them.

After America's catastrophic intervention in Iraq in 2003, that would be deeply unpopular in the US.

It would be the final end of any lingering hope that a two-state solution was possible. That is the aspiration that a conflict more than a century old could be ended with the establishment of an independent Palestine alongside Israel.

The Netanyahu government is adamantly against the idea, and over years of failed peace talks, "two states for two peo-

ples" became an empty slogan.

But it has been a central plank of US foreign policy since the early 1990s.

The Trump plan would also violate international law.

America's already threadbare assertions that it believes in a rules-based international order would dissolve. Russia's territorial ambitions in Ukraine and China's in Taiwan would be turbocharged.

What will it mean for the region?

Why worry about all that if it is not about to happen – at least not

in the way Trump announced in Washington, watched by a grinning and clearly delighted Benjamin Netanyahu?

The answer is that Trump's remarks, however outlandish, will have consequences.

He is the president of the United States, the most powerful man in the world – no longer a reality TV host and political hopeful trying to grab headlines.

Short-term, the disruption caused by his stunning announcement could weaken the fragile ceasefire in Gaza. One

senior Arab source told me it could be its "death knell".

The absence of a plan for Gaza's future governance is already a fault line in the agreement.

Now Trump has provided one, and even if it does not come to pass, it presses very big buttons in the minds of Palestinians and Israelis.

It will nourish the plans and dreams of ultra-nationalist Jewish extremists who believe all the land between the Mediterranean and the Jordan river, and perhaps beyond, is a God-given Jewish possession.

More than 100 women raped and burned alive in DR Congo jailbreak, says UN

More than 100 female prisoners were raped and then burned alive during a jailbreak in the Congolese city of Goma, according to the UN.

Hundreds of prisoners broke out of Munzenze prison last Monday, after fighters from the M23 rebel group began to take over the city.

Between 165 and 167 women were assaulted by male inmates during the jailbreak, an internal UN document seen by the BBC says.

The report states that most of the women were killed after the inmates set fire to the prison.

The BBC has not been able to verify the reports.

Goma, a major city of more than a million people, was captured after the Rwanda-backed M23 executed a rapid advance through eastern DR Congo.

The city was plunged into chaos, with bodies lying in the streets and missiles reportedly flying over residential homes.

Footage from last week's jailbreak showed people fleeing from the building as smoke rose in the background. Heavy gunfire could also be heard.

In a separate video, people believed to be the escaped prisoners, filed through Goma's streets.

The UN says at least 2,900 people were killed during the

fighting, with 2,000 bodies buried and another 900 still in the city's morgues.

Earlier this week, the rebels announced a ceasefire on humanitarian grounds.

However, the M23 launched a new offensive on Wednesday, sources say, reportedly capturing the mining town of Nyabibwe.

Nyabibwe is about 100 km (60 miles) from Bukavu – the east's second-largest city, and the reported target of the rebels' most recent advance.

The Congolese authorities have enlisted hundreds of civilian volunteers to help defend Bukavu.

Sweden mourns after deadliest shooting as gunman details emerge

Swedish police said they were still investigating the country's deadliest mass shooting, as local media began reporting details about the gunman.

The suspect, named in reports as 35-year-old local man Rickard Andersson, was reported to be a former student of the school in Orebo, a city 157 km (98 miles) west of Stockholm, where the attack took place on Tuesday.

Eleven people died in the shooting, including the attacker, with at least six others injured.

The attack has sent shockwaves through the nation, with King Carl XVI Gustaf on Wednesday saying: "All of Sweden is mourning."

Authorities are still yet to release details about the dead and injured. Health officials said three women and two men were in a critical but stable condition, while another woman was treated for minor injuries.

Police declined to confirm media reports naming Andersson as the suspect. Orebro police said they had identified the suspect but would "not publish his name yet, due to the investigation".

They have not said how he died but indicated on Wednesday he had most likely killed himself after an exchange of fire with police.

Police said they were still investigating why the gunman had chosen to attack the Risbergsgka adult educational centre. Swedish newspaper Aftonbladet reported the suspect was previously enrolled at the school but had not attended classes since 2021.

Police on Tuesday said the suspect had no apparent links to gangs and did not appear to be motivated by ideology.

They also do not believe the attack was motivated by terrorism.

"We will get back on what motives there are," local police chief Roberto Eid Forest told reporters on Wednesday.

The suspect had no previous convictions and obtained his weapon legally, local media reported.

Sweden's public broadcaster SVT suggested it was a hunting weapon, while Swedish Radio said police had listed the weapon as an automatic firearm.

Local police chief Mr Forest also defended authorities' delay in releasing accurate information about the number of dead and wounded. He said the size of the school premises had led to delays in ensuring there were not more victims.

Police said they were using fingerprints, dental records and DNA to identify victims – alongside interviews with family members.

Sports

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

Edo State Sports Commission inaugurates reconstituted Sports Associations Board, urges efficiency, vibrancy

KEHINDE OSAGIEDÉ

Following the approval of the Governor of Edo State distinguished Senator Monday Okpevbolo, the Executive Chairman, Edo State Sports Commission has inaugurated chairmen and members of the newly reconstituted 37 Sporting Associations in the state with a charge to attract sustainable sponsorship and influence boom in the state sports industry.

The Edo State Sports Commission boss said that the pur-

pose of the dissolution and reconstitution is to reposition and reactivate the various associations for efficiency and effectiveness. He noted that some of the associations boards were inactive with some of the chairmen not even in the country nor contributing to the progress of the associations they belonged.

Hon Enabulele who said the members were selected based on their contributions to the growth of sports in Edo State, urged the chairmen and members to bring their wealth of experience as they

go about the business of discovering and grooming athletes in the Edo State.

He also encouraged the newly inaugurated chairmen to spread their tentacles on how to get sponsorship opportunities to support and sustain their respective associations, noting that funding is crucial for the growth and success of any sports programme.

He insisted that accessibility is also an essential area in running sports associations. "As a leader, or chairman, you must

be available to promptly address concerns, guide athletes, liaise with coaches and foster a culture of teamwork among members of your association."

Hon Enabulele stated "to maintain progress, we will implement reports of quarterly appraisal meetings between the executive my Executive board members and chairmen of various associations. These meetings will serve as a platform to evaluate achievements, discuss challenges and strategies for continued progress and successes."



NSC chairman endorses move to unify supporters clubs

If you single out broom sticks, you could so easily break them one after the other. But when you put them together as a bunch,

you cannot break the broom"

These were the words of National Sports Commission (NSC) Mallam Shehu Dikko as

he welcomed an amalgamation of the Football Supporters Clubs to his office. The group had come to brief the Chairman on

ongoing plans to harmonize the various Supporters Clubs.

Speaking through member of the delegation, Mr. Vincent Okumagba, they pointed out that they had honoured a meeting summoned by the Nigeria Football Federation (NFF) to the effect of having a unified group and came to brief the Chairman on their decision to sheathe their swords for the good of Nigerian football in particular and sports in general.

The NSC Chairman urged the groups to intensify efforts to be unified for the ultimate good of Nigerian football.

His words, "You must come together and work as a group so that we can achieve the desired goal. When we are all working together towards the same goal, success is guaranteed. When you see the army and police marching, they march at the same time, but once one person falters, everything comes to zero.

"I am happy that this meeting has been held and I can see all the key actors here. It shows commitment. We want everyone to be in one Supporters Club, but we won't be the ones to force you to be in one group. You have to meet and agree to be one. You have to unite in the interest of the sport you all claim to love."

Mallam Dikko reminded the delegation of the immediate task of ensuring that the Super Eagles secure the World Cup ticket.

"Our task now is to make sure that we get that World Cup ticket. We have to be focused and put all energy to get that done. What is home ad

Badminton Federation of Nigeria appoints sports management expert, Blessing Ekwe Chisala as COO

The Badminton Federation of Nigeria (BFN) has announced the appointment of Ekwe Blessing Chisalam as its new Chief Operating Officer (COO).

A dedicated sports enthusiast and accomplished sports scientist, Ms. Blessing holds a master's degree in sports management and has a deep-rooted passion for sports.

Her appointment comes at a pivotal time for Nigerian badminton, which has witnessed remarkable growth at the grassroots, national, and international levels.

Recognized as one of the fastest-growing sports in the country, the Director General of National Sports Commission, Hon. Bukola Olopade has stated that the BFN must not rest on its oars, as loftier objectives lie ahead.

Speaking on her appointment, the President of the Badminton Federation of Nigeria, Francis

Orbih emphasized the importance of having a COO who shares the federation's vision:

"We need someone who can project badminton with a positive image and align with our dreams and aspirations as a federation. Ms. Blessing is highly competent, a sports scientist, with a masters degree in sports management understands the physiology of the sports ecosystem. Her appointment will be instrumental in driving the growth of badminton in Nigeria."

As the COO, the BFN aims to expand its outreach, economic appeal, enhance programs, improve administration, and create more competitive opportunities for the Federation.

With her extensive experience in administration, sports, and organization, Ms. Blessing is expected to elevate Nigerian badminton's operations, in line with the objectives of the National.



In attendance were Vincent Okumagba (President Super Eagles Supporters Club), Hon. Sunday Gulong (President Nigeria Eagles Supporters Club), Amb. Abimbola Ariyo (National Secretary Nigeria Eagles Supporters Club), Amb. Kemi Ogunfuwa (President Football Fans Club of Nigeria), Umar Shehu (Northern Coordinator Super Eagles Supporters Club), Mr. Dele Onifade (Treasurer Football Fans Supporters Club), Yusuf Jabiu (Chairman Authentic Supporters Club, FCT chapter), Prince Abayomi (President Authentic Supporters Club) and Abdulkadir Salisu (Secretary-General Super Eagles Supporters Club).

NRFF appoints national coaches for Rugby Rising Play Nigeria, a Girl-Child program

The Nigeria Rugby Football Federation (NRFF) has announced the appointment of 15 coaches to spearhead Rugby Rising Play Nigeria, a grassroots initiative aimed at promoting girl-child participation in rugby across the nation

Rugby Rising Play is World Rugby's first bespoke girls participation programme designed to support efforts in introducing teenage girls to rugby in a progressive and enjoyable manner

The selected coaches, drawn from Nigeria's six geopolitical zones, will work under the supervision of Wuraola Hussain, a Rugby Africa-certified educator. They are tasked with driving the development of rugby from the grassroots, fostering inclusivity, and encouraging young girls to take up the sport.

The appointments were made based on the coach-

es' completion of T1 Rugby Course, World Rugby's first non-contact sport that fully reflects the unique characteristics of Rugby, including scrums, lineouts and breakdown with an emphasis on fun, fitness, inclusion and time optimisation.

LIST OF COACHES BY STATE:

1. Amarachi Orji - Abia State
2. Lawrenta Ukponwan - Edo State
3. Azeez Raafiu Abimbola - Rivers State
4. Opene Awuli - Delta State
5. Olanrewaju Teslim Pereira - Abuja FCT
6. Torkwase Adugu - Benue State
7. Innocent Adaeze Precious - Lagos State
8. Paul Adagbo - Plateau State
9. Umar Bau - Kano State
10. Kehinde Adelaja - Ogun State
11. Mohammed Ibrahim - Kwara State
12. Shehu Garba - Bauchi State
13. Moses Dominic Archibong

- Akwa Ibom State
- 14. Vincent Paul - Anambra State
- 15. Sadam Abubakar - Kaduna State

SUPERVISOR:

Wuraola Hussain - World Rugby - Certified Educator

Meanwhile, all coaches have successfully completed their safeguarding course in accordance with NRFF and World Rugby's child protection policies, ensuring a safe and secure environment for children to enjoy rugby.

PFAN visit Bayelsa United FC management over unpaid players bonuses

Sequel to a press release making rounds in the media space on the huge amount of money of unpaid match bonuses by the management of Bayelsa United FC of Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, to players of the team, the Professional Footballers Association of Nige-

ria (PFAN), through the office of the PFAN General Secretary has responded swiftly.

PFAN in its official press release has mandated the Chairman of Bayelsa State Caretaker Committee, Barrister(Chief) Rumson Victor Baribote and his committee, to visit the club

and investigate the issues, in view of the disregard for the players welfare by the management of the club.

PFAN also tasked the Committee led by Chief Baribote to address the issue within the next five days and report back.

The press release signed

by the PFAN General Secretary, Comrade Edema Fuludu, also added, "we trust that the chairman and management of Bayelsa United FC, will with all responsibility as a Nigeria Premier Football League side, cooperate with Bayelsa State PFAN."



Edo Federation Cup: City Rovers destroy Police Machine as Elite Babel FC escape danger

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

As the 2025 Edo FA Cup continues, City Rovers FC on Thursday proved hard to crack as they humiliated Police Machine FC 4-1 to secure the round of sixteen place in the ongoing Edo State Federation Cup tournament.

The match played at the Crescent Sports Club Centre, Benin City

on Thursday saw the Police Machines being disarmed 2-1 by the City Boys in the first half. The Police Boys managed to reply with a goal before the halftime break, raising their hope of coming back into the game in the second half.

On the resumption of the second half, the City Boys confirmed their dominance on the field as they showed more strength and determination, scoring two more

goals to safeguard their passage to the next stage with ease.

In the second match of the day, Dynamo Sport FC could not break the Tower of Babel, having wasted a goal lead in the first half only for them to suffer a 3-1 penalty shootout defeat to Elite Babel Boys FC as both sides had ended the game 1-1 at the regulation time before the shootout.

In the church derby played

at noon time, it was the voice of Assemblies of God FC

Boys that was loudest at the end with a victory song over Living Voice FC who was eliminated after a 5-4 penalty shootout after both failed to score during regulation time.

In another encounter, it was a tale of no family in football when it comes to knockout stage as Sport Family FC maintained a lone goal scored in the

first half to bundle out Olowolo FC from the competition.

Meanwhile, all the winners on day one and two respectively already know their next opponents in the round of sixteen.

Also, four women's clubs will begin their campaign on Friday at the same venue to determine which team will qualify for the semifinals.

Slugging it out on Friday, Benin Red Soil FC will face

Tiki Taka FC in the first match while Brave Hearts Ladies FC are to tackle Bravos FC for the second slot to the semifinals.

Only six clubs are featured in the women's category of the competition just as defending champions, Edo Queens FC and last year runner-up, Fortress Ladies FC bid bye to the semifinal round and awaiting winners of tomorrow matches.

Over N100m up for grabs as ECOWAS marathon holds in March

As preparations intensify for the 2025 ECOWAS Abuja International Marathon, key figures in the sports and fitness industry have expressed their eagerness to volunteer and contribute to the event's success.

The marathon, set for March 1, 2025, is part of activities to celebrate ECOWAS' 50th anniversary.

With thousands of runners expected to participate in the 21-kilometre half marathon and the 5-kilometre race, volunteers will be crucial in ensuring a seamless and enjoyable experience for all.

Gabriel Okon, the Race Director emphasized the significance of volunteers in an event that dedicated individuals to handle various logistical and operational aspects.

"Marathon is not just about the runners; it's about the team behind the scenes. Volunteers are the backbone of any successful race, from registration and logistics to hydration stations and medical support. Their role is invaluable in making the event smooth and enjoyable for everyone," he said.

Application for volunteers opened Monday, February 3, 2025, and interested applicants can pick up a form at the Athletics Federation of Nigeria office, Moshood Abiola Stadium, Package A, Abuja.

Members of the sports family including athletes, coaches, fitness trainers, and others have pledged to support the event in different capacities, from technical assistance to race coordination and mentorship for young runners.

Expressing his delight at the overwhelming response, Okon remarked, "The enthusiasm we are seeing from volunteers is inspiring. From retired directors in the ministry, elite athletes, to community fitness trainers, so many people are eager to be part of this celebration of unity and athleticism. This



is more than just a race—it's a movement that brings people together for a greater cause."

Beyond the competition itself, the ECOWAS Abuja International Marathon represents an opportunity to promote health, youth empowerment, and re-

gional unity through sports.

With over \$71,000 (N106,408,410) in prize money up for grabs, the event is expected to attract elite runners while also encouraging participation from amateur fitness enthusiasts.

Okon stressed that the marathon

is not only about athleticism but also about making a lasting impact. "We want this marathon to leave a lasting legacy beyond race day. It's about inspiring people to embrace fitness, fostering friendships across borders, and promoting a culture of healthy living," he said.

FIFA completely opposed to 'blue cards'

FIFA has suspended the Congolese Football Federation (FECOFoot) this Thursday. The suspension is till further notice. FIFA has already notified all its member associations

FIFA Statutes' article 16 was cited as the reason. Congo's team, known as the Red Devils are in the same World Cup qualifying group as Morocco, Tanzania, Zambia, Niger Republic and Eritrea.

Their next match is supposed to be an away duel with Tanzania. The match may not

hold except the suspension is lifted before then. They lost their Group E World Cup qualifying match 6-0 at home to Morocco last June.

FECOFoot loses all its membership rights, as defined in Article 13 of the statutes of the world body, with immediate effect and until further notice.

FECOFoot representative teams and affiliated clubs can no longer take part in international competitions while the suspension is in force.

They are not qualified for the 2025 Afcon in Morocco and no

Congolese club is involved in the quarter-finals of the CAF inter-club competitions this season.

According to FIFA, the decision was taken in consultation with CAF after two FIFA/CAF missions were dispatched to Brazzaville.

The lifting of the suspension will be subject to the following conditions:

Returning full control of the FECOFoot headquarters, the Ignyé Technical Centre and the association's other facilities to FECOFoot;

Desisting from any efforts to change the signatories of the FECOFoot bank accounts and/or giving full control back to the signatories recognised by FIFA and CAF;

Declaring invalid or setting aside any decisions, legal or otherwise, authorising the ad hoc committee to exercise any control or have any authority over FECOFoot; and

Ensuring full cooperation to allow FECOFoot to manage its affairs without undue influence from third parties.



NLO releases guidelines for 2025 season registration

The Nationwide League One (NLO) has released revised guidelines for player registration for the upcoming 2025 season, which kicks off on April 11. The NLO Executive Board has mandated the commencement of registration, incorporating amendments approved by Congress to address the current inflation rate.

To register, clubs must pay a registration fee of N300,000 (Three Hundred Thousand Naira) into the NLO's FCMB bank account (Nationwide League One, 3267800014). This payment grants access to the NLO's database for registration. All players must be registered on the NLO website (link unavailable). Hard copy licenses will be available for collection starting February 24, 2025.

Youth League clubs must present players' primary school certificates. The registration deadline for Division One clubs is March 31, 2025. The registration fee covers pre-competition medical assessments, comprehensive insurance, tamper-proof hologram security seals, and operational costs.

Additionally, clubs must pay a participation fee of N300,000 (Three Hundred Thousand Naira), which covers match indemnities, venue costs, security, medical services, ball boys, and live streaming for all matches.

Clubs must deposit registration fee payments directly into the specified NLO FCMB account and submit a copy of the receipt to the NLO, clearly indicating the paying club's name.



PFA threatens Premier League over salary cap

The Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) has threatened the Premier League with legal action if it tries to introduce a hard salary cap next season as part of a new financial fair play regime.

Prompted by concerns that the Premier League was going to vote on the proposals at its shareholders' meeting next week, the players' union made its threat in a letter sent to the league and its 20 clubs on Wednesday.

2024/25 NWFL Premiership MD 4 reviews: Edo Queens record consecutive draws as Remo Stars clinch top spot

For the second consecutive matchday, defending champions Edo Queens were forced to a 1-1 draw in the 2024/25 Nigeria Women's Football League (NWFL) Premiership on Wednesday.

A week after drawing 1-1 with Remo Stars Ladies in Benin City, Edo Queens were held to the same scoreline by Dannaz Ladies at the Mobolaji Johnson Arena in Onikan, Lagos.

Moses Aduku's side took the lead in the 18th minute through Goodness Osigwe. However, a resilient Dannaz Ladies leveled the score in the 70th minute thanks to Omotoke Ogunfuwa's equalizer, ensuring that both teams shared the spoils.

In Ikenne, Remo Stars Ladies secured a 4-1 victory over Heartland Queens to leapfrog Edo Queens to the top of Group A.

Kafayat Bashiru, formerly of

Osun Babes, opened the scoring for the Sky Blue Ladies in the 29th minute. Heartland Queens responded swiftly, with Monica Matthew equalizing in the 32nd minute.

Bolaji Olamide, who had been on a goal-scoring streak, put Remo Stars ahead once again in the 55th minute. Three minutes later, Deborah Kehinde extended the lead to 3-1, and Olamide sealed the win with her second

goal of the game, making it 4-1.

In Yenagoa, Bayelsa Queens triumphed 3-0 over Adamawa Queens with goals from Vera Samuel, Cynthia Mega, and Rose Ekong.

In a thrilling encounter in Lagos, FC Robo Queens and Naija Ratels played out a 2-2 draw. Opeyemi Ajakaye handed the hosts the lead in the 3rd minute, but Jenat Ikpa leveled for Naija Ratels in the 25th minute.





The Police, the Youth, and the phone: Setting agenda for CP Betty Otimenyi in Edo – Part 2

This piece is a sequel to last week's edition on the incessant clashes between the Nigerian Police and the youths in Edo State over phone searches under the pretext of identifying internet fraudsters. These encounters, often characterised by tension, harassment, and, in some cases, violence, threaten the fragile relationship between law enforcement and the young population.

With the assumption of office by the new Commissioner of Police (CP) Betty Otimenyi in Edo State, there is an urgent need to address this issue to prevent further deterioration of trust and to establish a framework for mutual understanding and respect between the police and the youth.

CP Betty Otimenyi's appointment as the Commissioner of Police in Edo State presents a pivotal moment for the state's law enforcement landscape. It is an opportunity for her to not only address the pressing issues within the police force but also to reshape the broader narrative surrounding the relationship between the police and the youth of Edo State. The tension between the police and the youth has escalated over time, with confrontations revolving largely around unfair profiling and the targeting of young people during street patrols.

However, CP Otimenyi's unique position allows her to redefine this relationship in ways that can have lasting and profound effects. She can move beyond the conventional framework of law enforcement and embrace a more dynamic, people-centred approach that fosters trust, cooperation, and understanding.

The youth are often seen as the most dynamic and innovative demographic in society, but they are also the most vulnerable to the overreach of state power, especially when law enforcement officers adopt a heavy-handed approach. Historically, police forces in Nigeria have struggled with a credibility gap, especially in how they engage with young people. CP Otimenyi's leadership offers an opportunity to bridge this divide, but it will require a paradigm shift in the way police officers perceive and interact with the youth.

Instead of viewing young people through the lens of suspicion and criminality, the Commissioner has the chance to reframe the narrative by highlighting the vital role that youths play in the development and progress of Edo State. By recognising them as partners in maintaining peace, security, and order, she can encourage a more collaborative relationship.

One of the critical aspects of successful policing is establishing trust with the community. Without this trust, the police force risks alienating those it is meant to protect and serve. CP Otimenyi can



CP OTIMENYI

work towards building this trust by ensuring that police actions reflect a genuine commitment to fairness, transparency, and the protection of human rights. This will require rigorous reforms, both in policy and in practice, that promote respectful engagement and ensure that no youth is subjected to unwarranted surveillance, harassment, or brutality.

This trust-building process must be a reciprocal relationship. While the police must demonstrate respect and fairness, the youth must also be educated about their rights and their role in maintaining law and order. The Commissioner of Police can introduce educational campaigns that emphasise the importance of community cooperation and respect for the law while also reinforcing the idea that the police are there to protect their rights, not infringe upon them.

In today's digital age, transparency and accountability are critical components of any effective law enforcement strategy. CP Betty Otimenyi has the opportunity to leverage technology in a way that not only enhances police operations but also ensures that their actions are scrutinised in real time by the public. Body cameras, mobile apps for reporting misconduct, and social media platforms can serve as valuable tools for both monitoring police activities and fostering open communication

between law enforcement and the community. By embracing technology, CP Otimenyi can also empower the youth by giving them a direct voice in the ongoing dialogue about policing practices. This would allow them to feel more involved in the process and less like passive subjects of police authority. Moreover, these tools can serve as deterrents against misconduct, ensuring that officers who engage in unlawful or unethical behaviour are held accountable.

Youth organisations in Edo State, as in many other parts of Nigeria, play a pivotal role in shaping public opinion and organising community events. By forging partnerships with these organisations, the Commissioner of Police can create a platform for dialogue and collaboration between the police and young people. These partnerships can help dispel misconceptions, foster mutual understanding, and create opportunities for joint initiatives that benefit both the police and the youth.

Through these collaborations, CP Otimenyi can spearhead programmes that engage young people in positive ways, such as community policing initiatives, youth leadership workshops, and outreach programmes designed to address the root causes of youth unrest. Engaging with these organisations

Youth organisations in Edo State, as in many other parts of Nigeria, play a pivotal role in shaping public opinion and organising community events. By forging partnerships with these organisations, the Commissioner of Police can create a platform for dialogue and collaboration between the police and young people

would also allow the police to better understand the challenges facing the youth, such as unemployment, lack of education, and limited access to opportunities.

While reforming the police force's approach to youth engagement is critical, CP Otimenyi's role extends beyond the confines of law enforcement. The growing resentment among youths in Edo State can not be attributed solely to police actions. It is a symptom of deeper socio-economic issues.

Unemployment, underdevelopment, and a lack of opportunities for personal and professional growth contribute to the sense of disenfranchisement that many young people feel.

CP Betty Otimenyi can use her position to advocate for broader societal reforms that address these challenges, working alongside state and local governments, private sector organisations, and NGOs to create a more supportive environment for young people. By addressing these underlying issues, she will not only reduce the likelihood of clashes between the police and the youth but also create a healthier, more vibrant society.

In essence, CP Betty Otimenyi has the rare opportunity to transform not only the relationship between the police and the youth of Edo State but also the broader landscape of policing in Nigeria. Her leadership could serve as

a model for other states to follow, illustrating how the police can become an integral part of community-building rather than a source of division.

By fostering mutual respect, embracing transparency, and addressing the socio-economic factors that fuel unrest, CP Otimenyi can lead Edo State into a future where the police are seen as true protectors of the people — respected, trusted, and admired for their commitment to justice and equity. This is the narrative she can rewrite, and it is a narrative that will resonate deeply with both the police and the youth, ultimately contributing to a more harmonious and prosperous Edo State.

Her appointment may indeed be the turning point for a new era of policing in Edo, one that is more inclusive, more just, and, ultimately, more effective in ensuring the safety and well-being of all its citizens.

At the heart of this recurring clash is the controversial practice of police officers stopping young people on the streets, demanding access to their mobile phones in an attempt to identify alleged internet fraudsters, commonly referred to as Yahoo boys. This approach, which is neither legally sanctioned nor ethically justified, has led to a surge in complaints about police harassment, extortion, and, in extreme cases, brutality.

The youth, particularly young men who own costly smartphones, laptops, or drive expensive cars, often find themselves targeted by law enforcement officers. The assumption that any young person possessing such items must be involved in cybercrime is not only flawed but also a violation of fundamental human rights.

The Nigerian Constitution, particularly Section 37, guarantees the right to privacy, while the Cybercrimes Act of 2015 outlines lawful procedures for investigating digital offenses — none of which include random phone searches by police officers on the street.

The continued harassment of young people has contributed to widespread distrust in the police force. For many youths, the police are no longer seen as protectors but as oppressors. This perception is dangerous because it fosters resentment and resistance, making effective policing even more difficult. When young people feel unfairly targeted, they are less likely to cooperate with law enforcement, report crimes, or provide useful information that could aid in maintaining security.

The consequence of this erosion of trust was evident in the #EndSARS protests of 2020, where thousands of Nigerian youths took to the streets to demand an end to police brutality and harassment. Edo State was among the

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