

# BTC declares six-week mourning as funeral rites for Iyoba begin Feb 15

The Benin Traditional Council (BTC) has declared a six-week mourning period in the Benin Kingdom as His Royal Majesty, Omo N' Oba N' Edo Uku Akpolokpolo, Ewuare II, Oba of Benin, pre-

pare to perform the funeral rites of his mother, Iyoba Omo N' Ikuoyemwen, Iyoba Ewuare II.

The funeral rites, which will commence on February 15, 2025, and conclude on March 27, 2025, are in accordance with Benin

customs, which dictate that the funeral of a Queen Mother (Iyoba) can only be performed after her son ascends the throne.

The Oba had posthumously conferred the Iyoba title on his late mother on November 21,

2024, paving the way for these sacred rites.

According to a statement signed by the Secretary of the Benin Traditional Council (BTC), Frank Irabor, the ceremonies will begin with Iwarin-

mwin at Eguare Iyoba N' Uselu from February 15 to 28, followed by the Ekasa ceremony at the Oba's Palace from March 1 to 27.

As part of the mourning period, the use of traditional coral beads will be suspended through-

out the Benin Kingdom, including within the palace, until the conclusion of the Ekasa ceremony.

This historic event honours the late Iyoba's legacy and reaffirms the deep-rooted customs of the Benin Kingdom.

# The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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**Bode George rejects 31 new states proposal, urges true federalism**

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# Edo govt reclaims ownership of Observer newspaper printing press

The Edo State government has officially taken full possession of the Bendel Newspaper Corporation (BNC), publishers of The Nigerian Observer, following the formal handover of its printing press by Fountain Brook, the consulting firm appointed by previously government to manage the facility.

The printing press comprises a Goss machine, Heidelberg Speed Master, and a large-format printing section.

At a handover ceremony held at the BNC headquarters, the General Manager of Fountain Brook Publishing Company Limited, Mr. Chikado Udensi,

representing the Managing Director/CEO, Mr. Chike Madueke, presented the keys to the printing sections and hand over note to the Edo State Commissioner for Information and Communication, Hon. Paul Ohonbamu.

Udensi clarified that while the printing press had always belonged to the Edo State government, Fountain Brook was temporarily managing its operations after installation.

"Our role was to handle the press, which has three divisions—one for printing flex banners, another for calendars and books, and the third for newspaper production," Udensi explained.

Receiving the facility on behalf of the state government, Ohonbamu commended Fountain Brook for its cooperation in the transition process.

He assured the public that The Observer titles would soon return to newsstands, emphasizing that their absence had created an information gap between the government and the people.

"The more the people know, the fewer chances there are for reckless rumors," he stated, promising that The Observer would once again reach communities across Nigeria.

The commissioner also reiterated the government's com-

mitment to restoring the newspaper's hardcopy production, noting that reliance on e-copies alone had weakened its core mandate. He expressed confidence in the current staff to meet expectations and revealed that additional measures, including staff training, would follow.

Speaking at the event, the acting General Manager of The Nigerian Observer, Mr. Sylvester Obob, highlighted the challenges faced since November 2024, particularly the lack of access to a self-operated printing press.

"The Observer is not just a media house but a printing and publishing corporation estab-

lished by an Act of Parliament," Obob stated.

"Since 1968, we have projected government policies, served institutions, and informed the public. However, losing our printing press severely hampered our ability to function."

He expressed gratitude to Governor Monday Okpebho-

lo for facilitating the retrieval of the printing press, allowing the newspaper to resume full operations.

The handover ceremony was attended by key government officials, including the Chief Press Secretary to the Edo State Governor, Mr. Fred Itua; and directors from the ministry.

## EDSG committed to driving Infrastructural devt —Bello

The Edo State Government has reaffirmed its commitment to infrastructural development as a core mandate of Governor Monday Okpebholo's administration.

Special Adviser to the Governor on Projects Implementation and Monitoring, Engr. Ufoma Bello, made this assertion during the first quarterly stakeholders' engagement held at Government House, Benin City.

The meeting brought together key stakeholders, including officials from the Edo State Ministry of Works, the Edo State Public Buildings and Maintenance Agency (EDPUBMA), and the Projects Implementation and Monitoring Department.

Speaking to journalists, Bello emphasized that the engagement was designed to ensure that all infrastructural projects—including roads, public buildings, and other critical facilities—are executed, monitored, and evaluated in line with international best practices. She stressed that the administration is focused on sustainable development and the timely completion of projects.

"Governor Okpebholo's administration has a mandate to drive infrastructural develop-

ment in Edo State," Bello stated, urging directors and the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Works to collaborate closely with her office.

She emphasized the need for synergy to ensure that all projects initiated by the government are completed on schedule and meet global standards.

She also called for community involvement in monitoring government projects. "When the Edo State Government invests in infrastructure, host communities must provide feedback to ensure smooth collaboration."

"This will not only benefit us all but also guarantee that completed projects are durable and impactful," she said.

Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Works, Engr. John Obanor, described the engagement as a strategic platform for collaboration, aligning all stakeholders with the governor's vision for infrastructural growth.

The next quarterly stakeholders' meeting is scheduled for later in the year as the state government continues to prioritize infrastructural development and sustainable growth, with significant milestones expected ahead of Governor Okpebholo's first 100 days in office.



### HAND OVER KEYS:

General Manager, Fountain Brook Publishing Company Ltd, a consulting firm, Mr Chikado Udensi (right), handing over the keys to *The Nigerian Observer* newspapers printing press to Edo State Commissioner for Information and Communication, Hon. Paul Ohunbamu, at a brief ceremony at the headquarters of Bendel Newspaper Corporation, publishers of the Observer titles.

**First Lady advocates better hygiene education for girls in rural areas** —Pg 2

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**NDLEA busts drug kingpins, suspects excrete 125 heroin wraps** —Pg 4

**4th Edo Sports Festival: Enabulele vows to solidify Edo's reputation as sports powerhouse** —Pg 6

# First Lady advocates better hygiene education for girls in rural areas

The Coordinator of the Office of the First Lady, Mrs. Edesili Okpebholo Anani, has emphasized the need for increased hygiene awareness among young girls in grassroots communities. She made this call during a meeting with representatives of the Medical Women Association of Nigeria (MWAN), Edo State chapter, led by their president, Dr. Irene Akhiden, at the Government House, Benin City.

Mrs. Anani expressed gratitude to the medical professionals for their dedication to societal well-being, highlighting that a healthy population is

fundamental to a thriving state and nation.

Addressing concerns about vulnerable women and girls, she noted, "When we talk about women who have faced violations, we don't just want to offer them starter packs—we want to change their mindset and counsel them through their experiences."

She also underscored the urgent need for outreach programs in rural areas, stating, "No matter how advanced society seems, there are still girls who have never seen a sanitary pad and rely on traditional methods. Beyond providing sanitary products, we must teach them proper hy-

giene—bathing, dressing, and overall self-care—to prevent avoidable illnesses."

Dr. Irene Akhiden reaffirmed MWAN's commitment to improving public health, noting that although the asso-

ciation is an NGO, its members work across state, federal, and private healthcare institutions.

"The government alone cannot handle the nation's health needs," she stated.

She highlighted MWAN's

ongoing initiatives, including menstrual hygiene education and outreach programs. "Last year, we distributed over 1,000 menstrual hygiene kits and also engaged in programs celebrating the boy-child, provid-

ing mentorship and guidance."

The meeting concluded with a presentation of a gift to the First Lady, who pledged to collaborate with MWAN on programs that enhance the well-being of young girls.

## EDSG walk against Cancer: promoting awareness for prevention, early detection

In a determined effort to raise awareness about cancer prevention and early detection, the Coordinator of the Office of the First Lady, Mrs. Edesili Anani, joined the Walk Against Cancer in Benin City.

The campaign aimed to educate Edo residents on the importance of early detection, emphasizing that timely medical intervention can save lives and improve recovery chances.

The awareness walk, which kicked off from Airport Road, Akenzuwa Junction, and ended at the Vegetable Market, witnessed a massive turnout.

Participants filled the streets, chanting slogans like "War against cancer!" and "Cancer is not a death sentence—early detection saves lives!"

The vibrant crowd, energized by music, danced while advocating for regular health check-ups.

Speaking at the event, Mrs. Anani stressed the need for routine medical screenings. "Gone are the days when a cancer diagnosis meant fear and hopelessness. Today, cancer is

preventable and, in many cases, curable. This walk is a call to action for people to go for regular check-ups," she stated.

She urged women to practice self-examinations, particularly for breast and cervical cancer, highlighting the Edo State Government's recent sponsorship of free cervical cancer screenings. "We are here to show that the government cares."

"His Excellency, Senator Monday Okpebholo, has prioritized healthcare, ensuring people have access to life-saving interventions. Cancer can be prevented and treated—healthy lifestyles, regular exercise, and a strong immune system are key," she added.

Edo State Commissioner for Health, Dr. Cyril Adams Oshiomhole, underscored the importance of public awareness in combating cancer. "If you notice any unusual changes in your body, visit the nearest hospital for a check-up. Cultivate healthy eating habits—high-fiber foods, less junk—and engage in regular exercise. Awareness and early intervention can make all the difference," he advised.

## Over 10,090 students take matriculation oath at Auchi Poly

Auchi Polytechnic has officially admitted 10,090 new students for the 2024/2025 academic session, the institution's Rector, Dr. Salisu Umar, announced during the 43rd matriculation ceremony held at the polytechnic's new auditorium.

Dr. Umar urged the newly admitted students to consider themselves fortunate, as thousands had applied for admission but were not selected.

"Today, we matriculated a total of 10,090 students, with 5,407 admitted into the National Diploma (ND) program, 4,390 into the Higher National Diploma (HND) program, and 293 into the degree program," he stated.

Congratulating the fresh students on their successful ad-

mission, the rector encouraged them to focus on their studies and take full advantage of the opportunity to acquire a polytechnic education.

He emphasized that the oath-taking ceremony marked the beginning of their academic journey and urged them to remain committed to their goals.

"It is my hope that by the end of your program, you will successfully and triumphantly graduate from this polytechnic," he added.

Dr. Umar reiterated the institution's zero tolerance for cultism and other social vices, advising students to maintain good character and uphold integrity.

"To earn a certificate from Auchi Polytechnic, you must be found worthy in both learning and character," he stressed.



### REGLOBALIZATION:

Director-General, World Trade Organisation (WTO), Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala (left), talking "Reglobalization" with African Diaspora Youth at the University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, organized by the Mount Motherland Group - A diaspora organisation of young Africans. With her is Professor Olivette Otele of the University of London.

## EIRS Board seeks judiciary's support for increased revenue

The Executive Chairman of the Edo State Internal Revenue Service (EIRS), Hon. Barr. Oladele Bankole-Balogun, led members of the EIRS Board on a courtesy visit to the Chief Judge of Edo State, Justice Iyobosa Okungbowa, to

seek judicial collaboration in strengthening the state's revenue generation efforts.

According to a statement released by Mr. Courage Eboigbe, Head of Corporate Communications at EIRS, Hon. Bankole-Balogun praised the

Chief Judge for his leadership and acknowledged the judiciary's support in enhancing the state's internally generated revenue (IGR), which surpassed ten billion naira in January 2025.

Responding, Justice Okungbowa commended the EIRS for

its achievement and assured the board of continued judicial cooperation to help it meet its objectives.

He also emphasized the importance of ensuring that generated revenue is effectively utilized for the benefit of Edo State residents.

## Ministry of Regional Devt provides free health care services to 5,000 Edo residents

The Ministry of Regional Development has launched a one-week free medical outreach in Edo State, targeting 5,000 beneficiaries.

The initiative was flagged off in Auchi, Etsako West Local Government Area, by the Minister of Regional Development, Engr. Abubakar Momoh, who was represented by the ministry's Director of Community Development and Education, Festus Wasa.

Wasa stated that the outreach is part of the ministry's efforts to improve the well-be-

ing of residents and will be replicated across the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria.

"The one-week free medical treatment is being undertaken by Derum Global Services, with a target of treating 5,000 people suffering from different ailments across the state," Wasa explained.

He emphasized that the exercise aligns with the ministry's mandate of regional development, as only healthy individuals can actively contribute to national progress.

Dr. Omeco Ekorhi, Project

Coordinator of Derum Global Services Limited, outlined the medical services being provided, which include general surgery, eye surgery, free eye glasses, gynecology, general consultations, fibroid operations, and screenings for high blood pressure, diabetes, and malaria. Free medication will also be distributed.

Dr. Ekorhi noted that the initiative aims to bring quality healthcare to those who might not otherwise afford it, complementing government efforts in public health.

"We appreciate the minister for giving us this opportunity to contribute to the health and well-being of Edo residents," he said.

He also advised residents to maintain good personal hygiene and environmental cleanliness to prevent disease outbreaks.

Some of the beneficiaries expressed appreciation to the ministry and its Minister Momoh for the initiative.

"This is a great initiative, and we appreciate the outreach," they said.

## Edo State Security Corps rescues kidnapped traditional ruler

The Edo State Security Corps has rescued the Onogie of Udo-Eguare, His Royal Highness (HRH) Friday Ehizojie, ending four days of anxiety and distress within the community.

The traditional ruler was abducted on Monday, February 3, 2025, alongside two others.

Commander of the Corps, Mr. Friday Ibadin, a retired

Commissioner of Police, credited the achievement to the support of Governor Monday Okpebholo's administration, which has provided an enabling environment for security agencies to function effectively.

He reassured the public that the Corps remains committed to its mandate.

This rescue operation followed rumours of Ibadin's removal as head of the Corps.

In response, he has summoned an emergency meeting of all regional commanders in Edo State to strategize on tackling kidnapping, armed robbery, and other security threats.

Ibadin has repeatedly assured Edo residents that criminals will find no safe haven under his watch, and the Corps' consistent successes reinforce this commitment.

Recently, Ibadin led security

operatives on a raid of dense forests in Edo Central following widespread concerns over rising cases of kidnapping and armed robbery in the region.

After rescuing the Onogie, the Corps handed him over to the Edo State Command of the Nigerian Police Force for debriefing and further investigation aimed at apprehending the perpetrators, who remain at large.

## NEWS

# Abba Moro reaffirms commitment to collaborative leadership

CAROLINE AMEH

The Senate Minority Leader, Distinguished Senator Abba Moro, has reaffirmed his commitment to collaborative leadership as a means of good governance for development, the lawmaker said this during an award presentation in recogni-

tion of his dedication to effective leadership and legislative collaboration.

Expressing his gratitude, Senator Moro emphasized the importance of unity, pragmatism, and strategic engagement in governance.

"I deserve this award. For me, it's a very gratifying moment,

and I'm grateful for your recognition," Senator Moro stated. "I believe in collaboration and that opposition should be used as a tool to persuade people towards actions that benefit the country."

Representing Benue South Senatorial District under the People's Democratic Party (PDP), Senator Moro under-

scored the delicate balance between party loyalty and serving the broader interests of his constituents. He reiterated that while PDP provided the platform for his election, his primary responsibility remains the welfare of his people.

"As a senator, my duty extends beyond party politics. I was elect-

ed to represent my constituents, and to do that effectively, I must engage constructively with my colleagues across party lines," he said. "Working together is essential for achieving legislative progress and national development."

Addressing legislative strategies, Senator Moro reflected on previous Senates, where numerous motions and points of order, including calls for presidential impeachment, were raised but yielded no tangible results. He advocated for a more realistic and results-driven approach to governance.

"I am a realist. I focus on actions that are practical, achiev-

able, and contribute meaningfully to governance," he stated. "Unnecessary confrontations often lead nowhere. Instead, engaging in meaningful dialogue ensures progress."

Senator Moro described the award as a motivation to continue delivering on his mandate. He reaffirmed his commitment to fulfilling the aspirations of his constituents and contributing to national growth.

"This recognition inspires me to do more. I remain dedicated to ensuring that my people feel the impact of my representation and that their expectations are met," he concluded.



2025 EDO JOURNALISTS CLASSIC DINNER:

President, Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Alhassan Yahya (middle), flanked by the Deputy National President, Mrs Abimbola Oyetunde (right), and Chairman of Edo State Council of NUJ, Comrade Festus Alenkhe, during the 2025 Edo Journalists Classic Dinner, in Benin City at the weekend

## Violence against women: Edo First Lady charges NAWOJ to break boundaries

FRIDAY OBANOR

The Coordinator of the office of Edo state First Lady, Mrs. Edesili Anani has charged Nigeria Association of Women Journalists (NAWOJ) to break boundaries by reporting any act of vio-

lence or abuse against women and children to her office for prompt action.

Mrs Anani gave this charge when the Executive of the Edo State chapter of NAWOJ paid a courtesy visit to the office of the first lady at the weekend.

The Coordinator said it

takes a lot of effort to tell a story, even as she thanked the leadership of the Association for their contributions to the society and the nation in their fair and unbiased reportage.

The Coordinator therefore promised to support and protect the right of women and girl

child to ensure the gap between gender in-equality is bridged.

On her part, Edo State NAWOJ Chairman, Adesuwa Ehimuan prayed for the partnership of the office of the first lady in carrying out numerous projects outlined to ensure women are empowered and useful in the society.

## Edo Pilgrims Board chairman lauds Okpebholo's exceptional support

ABDUL-KADIR ABDULLAH

JATTU-UZAIRUE

The Chairman of the Edo State Muslim Pilgrims Welfare Board, Mallam Musah Muhammad Uduimoh, has lauded the Governor of Edo State, Senator Monday Okpebholo, for his unwavering support in ensuring a seamless Hajj experience for Edo pilgrims.

Uduimoh made this statement at Jattu-Uzairue, Etsako West Local Government Area, during the Fidu prayers for the late Yahya Imodagbe, father of former Kogi State First Lady, Rashida Bello.

He praised the Okpebho-

lo-led administration for its exceptional dedication to religious harmony and the overall well-being of Edo Muslims.

Highlighting the government's responsiveness, Uduimoh emphasized that every request made to the Governor to enhance Hajj operations has been swiftly approved, demonstrating Okpebholo's commitment to the spiritual and logistical welfare of pilgrims.

He specifically acknowledged the contributions of the Secretary to the State Government (SSG), Musah Ikhilior, the Chief of Staff, Hon. Ganiyu Audu, Hon. Akokhia, and other Muslim officials in government, stating that their combined support

has greatly facilitated the board's operations and improved services for pilgrims.

In a major development, Uduimoh announced an extension of the deadline for Hajj fare payments to February 17, 2025, urging intending pilgrims and sponsors to utilize the extended period to finalize their payments and avoid last-minute challenges.

Reiterating the government's commitment to enhanced pilgrimage experience, he disclosed that, for the first time in Edo's history, pilgrims will be accommodated in close proximity to the Haram in Mecca.

Additionally, he assured that pilgrims would enjoy authentic Nigerian and Edo cuisine,

ensuring a more familiar and comfortable experience while in the Holy Land.

The Fidu prayer session, led by the Chief Imam of Uzairue Kingdom, Sheikh Abdullah Muhammad Shuaib, witnessed the presence of Imam Council members, Ulamas from Edo North, and representatives of various Muslim organizations across the region.

Uduimoh reaffirmed the Edo State Government's commitment to ensuring quality accommodation, proper feeding, and the overall welfare of pilgrims, stressing that the collaboration between the government and religious stakeholders continues to yield positive results.

## Waste Mgt Bill passes 2nd reading in DTHA

AJUWA VICTOR

The Delta State Waste Management Board Bill has passed second reading on the floor of the State Assembly.

Sponsored by the Deputy Speaker of the House, Rt Hon Arthur Akpowowo and 12 others, the bill seeks to repeal the Delta State Waste Management law of 2008, and enact a new one that will take effect from the day it is read the third time and passed by the State Legislature.

Hon Akpowowo explained that the bill is made up of 7 parts and 48 clauses, saying that the main focus is to strengthen the legal framework of the Waste Management system in Delta State.

According to the Deputy Speaker who represents Ethiope East in the House, said the world is evolving, hence the need for a holistic approach that would go with current realities.

He maintained that there was

need to repeal the existing Waste Management Law as its provisions have become obsolete and enact a new law that would be in line with modern standards.

The proposed law he explained has taken care of all the shortcomings in the existing Waste Management Law enacted in 2008, as its provisions have been updated to reflect present realities.

He urged his colleagues to support this bill and give it a speedy passage as our intervention in effective waste management in the state is essential to ensuring a clean and sustainable healthy environment in Delta State," Akpowowo stated.

Other Lawmakers and co-sponsors of the bill also highlighted the benefits of the proposed law and called for speedy legislative actions.

The Lawmakers noted that the proposed law would not only engender a cleaner environment in the state but create jobs opportunities and generate revenue in the state financial system.

## Delta North remains PDP stronghold —Onyeme

AJUWA VICTOR

The Deputy Governor of Delta State, Sir Monday Onyeme, has stated that Delta North remains the stronghold of the Peoples Democratic Party in the state, advising members in the district to jealously guard the party and maintain its dominance.

Onyeme made this known during a meeting of elected and appointed political office holders from the Delta North Senatorial District at the weekend.

At the meeting which was presided over by Deputy Governor Onyeme, the people expressed satisfaction with the even distribution of projects by Governor Oborewori's administration across the state.

The meeting also passed a vote of confidence on the Governor of Delta State, Rt. Hon. Sheriff Oborewori.

The motion for the confidence vote was moved by the member representing Ika Federal Constituency in the House

of Representatives, Hon. Victor Nwokolo who took into account the achievements of Governor Oborewori, particularly the ongoing 500 road projects across various parts of the state and the prompt payment of salaries, among others.

Addressing the gathering, Deputy Governor Sir Monday Onyeme emphasized that all elected and appointed officials of the state government are ambassadors of Party hence they must promote the policies and programs of Governor Sheriff Oborewori's administration.

He stated that their election and appointment are platforms to serve humanity, the PDP, and Delta State, noting that Delta North remains the bride of the party and that members should jealously guard the party and maintain its dominance.

Sir Onyeme urged leaders to stay connected with the grassroots and ensure that members are not dissuaded by opposition parties that have nothing to offer except lies.

## UTME 2025: JAMB warns against night registration over safety concerns

The Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board has issued a stern warning against the practice of nocturnal (nighttime) registration for the 2025 Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination by certain registration centres across the country.

In a statement released by JAMB's Public Communication

Advisor, Dr. Fabian Benjamin, on Sunday, the board expressed concerns over the safety and security of prospective candidates, cautioning the affected centres to immediately cease such activities.

"While JAMB appreciates the enthusiasm of these centres to accommodate as many candidates as possible, this should

never come at the cost of the candidates' personal safety and security," Benjamin stated.

The Board listed ten centres engaging in nocturnal registration, including Thomas Adewumi University, Kwara State; CBT Centre Otukpo; Benue State Ebenezer International School, Rivers State; Jigawa State

College of Education, Gumel; Lafiagi Emirate Information Hub, Kwara State; Zulqud Consult Ltd, Abuja; Klinnicapps Academy, Cross River State; Sani Mikaila Comprehensive College, Plateau State; Beeps Technology Ltd, Cross River State; FZX Media Consulting Ltd, Cross River State.

# Bode George rejects 31 new states proposal, urges true federalism

Former Deputy National Chairman of the Peoples Democratic Party, Chief Bode George, has strongly opposed calls for the creation of 31 additional states in Nigeria, describing the move as unsustainable and ineffective in addressing the country's challenges.

Speaking in an interview with newsmen on Sunday, George argued that state creation would neither solve the nation's structural problems nor foster meaningful development.

His remarks came in response to a recent statement by the Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives, Mr Benjamin Kalu, who revealed that the House had received proposals for the creation of 31 new states.

Kalu, who also chairs the House Constitution Review Committee, disclosed that the proposed states include:

North Central: Okun, Okura, and Confluence (Kogi); Benue Ala and Apa (Benue); FCT State. North East: Amana (Adamawa); Katagum (Bauchi); Savannah (Borno); Muri (Taraba).

North West: New Kaduna and Gurara (Kaduna); Tiga and Ari (Kano); Kainji (Kebbi).

South East: Adada (Enugu); Orlu (Imo); Aba (Abia); Eriti and Urashi.

South South: Ogoja (Cross River); Warri (Delta); Ori and Obolo (Rivers).

South West: Torumbe (Ondo);

Ibadan (Oyo); Lagoon (Lagos/Ogun); Ijebu (Ogun); Oke Ogun/Ijesha (Oyo/Ogun/Osun).

Despite these proposals, many political stakeholders have dismissed the idea as unnecessary. George echoed this sentiment, insisting that Nigeria's focus should be on restructuring rather than creating more states.

"Don't tell me we should create more states. Forget about more states. We want to create more states, and then everybody will be rushing to Abuja. This is not sustainable," George asserted.

He emphasised the importance of adopting a federal structure that truly empowers states, drawing comparisons with the American system.

"Let us look at our federal structure first, the same federal system we run with America. Why are we not running it as they run theirs?"

"Go to New York City, the Mayor of New York controls the airport—the John Kennedy Airport—he controls the ports, the seaports. The Mayor of New York, not the governor.

"Go to New Orleans, the mayor there controls the ports. The same in Texas; all oil companies are not controlled by the President. That is federalism. Those people don't run to Washington every hour to meet the President.

"In America, they have state police and even county police. Why can't we have such here? The creation of more states is not sustainable. What we need now

is to address the problems in our federal structure," he said.

George further called for the devolution of power, stressing that empowering states would catalyse national development.

He also expressed dissatisfaction with the current constitution, describing it as dysfunctional and advocating for a

complete overhaul.

"The present constitution is not working. There is too much power at the centre, leaving states and local governments helpless and incapacitated."

He emphasised that Nigeria is endowed with abundant resources across all regions but argued that centralised governance has

hindered effective utilisation.

"There is no state in this country that the Almighty has not endowed. It is either agriculture, minerals, or human resources.

"But the constitution of this country is not right. We need to revisit it and allow all those states to manage their resources.

"That is the beginning of the

cleansing of this country. Nothing is working because the foundation is faulty," he stated.

George urged the federal government to adopt the 2014 National Conference (Confab) recommendations as a pathway to achieving true federalism and addressing Nigeria's governance challenges.



COURTESY VISIT:

L-R: Executive Chairman, Edo State Internal Revenue Service, Hon. Oladele Bankole-Balogun; Edo State Commissioner of Police, (CP), Betty Eneken Otimenyin, and Executive Director, other Revenue, Hon. Michael Ohio-Ezomo, during a courtesy visit to Otimenyin in Benin City recently.

## Tinubu hails Fayemi's contributions to democracy on 60th birthday

President Bola Tinubu paid tribute to former Ekiti State Governor, Dr. Kayode Fayemi, on his 60th birthday and commended his dedication to democracy, governance, and national development.

In a statement released on Sunday, Tinubu recalled his long-standing relationship with Fayemi, which dates back to their time in the pro-democracy movement of the 1990s, where they actively opposed military dictatorship.

"During the challenging General Sani Abacha era, civil rights and pro-democracy activists, especially those in exile, had to rely on their ingenuity to survive. Kayode's brilliance, commitment, and strategic skills were invaluable to our cause," Tinubu stated.

He highlighted Fayemi's role in the struggle for Chief MKO Abiola's release and the de-annulment of the June 12, 1993, presidential election, describing how the military government restricted press freedom and arrested activists.

"There was a need to have a radio station covering the activities of the pro-democracy movement at home and abroad. Dr. Fayemi and other activists actualised the birth of the pro-de-

mocracy radio, Radio Kudirat, named in honour of Alhaja Kudirat Abiola," Tinubu said.

"Tinubu noted that following Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999, Fayemi founded the Centre for Democracy and Development, focusing on promoting peace and security across Africa.

"He transitioned into politics in 2006 and contested the Ekiti governorship election in 2007 under the Action Congress."

Though initially denied victory, Fayemi pursued legal action, and after a three-year legal battle, he was declared governor in 2010 following a court-ordered re-run election.

Tinubu also highlighted Fayemi's pivotal role in the formation of the All Progressives Congress in 2013, chairing the presidential primary panel that produced Muhammadu Buhari as the party's candidate.

"He later served as Director of Policy in the 2015 APC/Buhari campaign, which led to the historic defeat of an incumbent president.

"After serving as Minister of Mines and Steel Development in Buhari's administration, Fayemi returned as Ekiti State governor in 2018."

## Illegal mining fueling school dropout crisis in Plateau —Mutfwang

Plateau State Governor, Caleb Mutfwang, has reaffirmed his administration's determination to combat illegal mining, which he says is a major factor behind the alarming rate of school dropouts in mining communities across the state.

Speaking on Sunday during a church service at COCIN Headquarters Church in Jos, the governor called on community and religious leaders to support the government in addressing this growing crisis, which he described as a direct threat to Plateau's future.

He said, "Last week, I ordered a raid on all illegal mining camps across the state. I urge you to help our people understand that we are not trying to deprive

them of their livelihoods. The devastating consequences of illegal mining are beyond imagination."

Accompanied by Her Excellency, Helen Mutfwang, the governor expressed deep concern over recent findings indicating a sharp decline in school enrolment in key mining areas such as Bassa, Riyom, Jos South, and Barkin Ladi.

"We conducted research and discovered that school dropout rates in these areas are distressingly high. Many classrooms are virtually empty.

"Just last month, we also uncovered cases where parents in Bassa were sending their children out for child labour. We are tracking them," he said.

The governor urged community leaders to take responsibility for sensitising their people, stressing that the government, in collaboration with religious institutions, would launch an intensive enlightenment campaign to reverse the trend.

He pleaded, "I appeal to all of you, as leaders in your communities, to take up this cause. May God burden your hearts with the urgency of this struggle so that you will rise above all affiliations and address your people.

"The church will play a pivotal role, and we will stand by our religious leaders in this effort."

Beyond education, the governor highlighted the environmental devastation caused by illegal mining, warning that un-

checked activities were leading to land degradation, destabilisation of residential areas, and threats to government institutions.

On the state's security challenges, Mutfwang emphasised his administration's unwavering stance against any attempts to destabilise Plateau.

He reaffirmed that while Plateau people are hospitable and accommodating, they expect their traditions, values, and institutions to be respected.

"All Plateau people seek is recognition and respect for their cultural values and traditional institutions. We will not allow any deliberate attempt to undermine our state," he further noted.

## NDLEA busts drug kingpins, suspects excrete 125 heroin wraps

The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency has arrested two suspected drug kingpins at Port Harcourt International Airport and Murtala Muhammed International Airport, Lagos, who excreted a total of 125 wraps of heroin.

NDLEA spokesperson, Femi Babafemi, confirmed the arrests in a statement issued on Sunday, revealing that one of the suspects, Onyekwonike Elochuckwu Sylvanus, oper-

ates under dual identities to evade detection.

Sylvanus, 30, was caught at Port Harcourt airport on February 2, 2025, using a Sierra Leonean passport under the name Kargbo Mohamed Foday.

"He was intercepted during the inward clearance of passengers on a Qatar Airways flight from Doha via Abuja.

"A body scan confirmed he had ingested illicit drugs, and under observation, he excreted 62 wraps of heroin weighing

1.348 kilograms in five sessions," Babafemi stated.

Further investigations showed that Sylvanus alternated between his Nigerian and Sierra Leonean passports for drug trafficking across Thailand, Pakistan, Iran, and West Africa.

He reportedly admitted to going full-time into the drug trade in 2017 after his clothing and shoe business collapsed.

The second suspect, James Chinoso, 48, was arrested on February 1, 2025, at Lagos air-

port after arriving from Madagascar via Ethiopia on an Ethiopian Airlines flight.

"A body scan confirmed he had illicit drugs in his system. Under observation, he excreted 63 wraps of heroin weighing 909 grams," Babafemi said.

Chinoso reportedly left Lagos for Madagascar on January 26, 2025, and returned a week later.

"He claimed he turned to drug trafficking after his phone accessories business in Liberia collapsed," Babafemi added.

## NEWS

## Foreign

# Tears of joy as freed Thai hostages arrive home

Five Thai farm workers released by Hamas in Gaza last month have arrived home in Bangkok, after spending nearly 500 days in captivity.

Pongsak Thaenna, Sathian Suwannakham, Watchara Sriouon, Bannawat Saethao and Surasak Lamnao had all been working in southern Israel when they were kidnapped during the attacks by Hamas

on 7 October 2023.

There were emotional scenes on Sunday morning as the five men were embraced by tearful relatives at Bangkok Suvarnabhumi Airport's arrivals hall.

"I don't know how to put it into words," released hostage Mr Pongsak said.

"I'd like to thank all the officials who were involved in helping us out until we're standing here.

"We wouldn't be here without you helping us. We're very touched and very glad to have returned to our homeland. I am truly grateful."

Foreign Minister Maris Sangiampongsa said it was "very inspiring" to witness their return following their release on 30 January.

Somboon Saethao, the father of Mr Bannawat, said he was "so

happy" and that his family would welcome his son home with a traditional Thai ceremony.

"I don't think I want him to be far from home again," his father told AFP.

Mr Bannawat moved to Israel nine months before his kidnapping in search of a better income for the family, he added.

His wife, Wiayada Saethao, told BBC Thai reporters that the

15 months her husband was held hostage were a period of suffering.

"Don't be afraid anymore. We're home now. We're in Thailand. We're going back home," she said.

After landing in Bangkok at 07:30 local time (00:30 GMT), the five were met by a small group of overjoyed relatives and government officials.

They had spent past 10 days at an Israeli hospital so their health could be monitored.

The five men will now make their way to their home towns.

Boonsong Tapchaiyut, a labour ministry official, said each hostage would receive a one-time payment of around £14,510 (600,000 Thai baht), along with a monthly salary of £725 until the age of 80, to ensure they did not have to return to Israel.

One Thai hostage remains unaccounted for.

"For the sixth Thai hostage who still remains in Gaza, we never refrain from action, we do still have hope and will do whatever until we succeed," said the Thai foreign minister.

Last month, after the handover of the five hostages in Khan Yunis, Thai Prime Minister Pae-

tongtarn Shinawatra said she was "elated" that they were out of captivity.

She thanked Israel, as well as Qatar, Egypt, Iran, Turkey and the US for their work to secure the releases.

A total of 46 Thai workers have been killed since October 2023, according to the foreign ministry in Bangkok, the majority in the Hamas attack and some by rockets fired by the Hezbollah group in Lebanon.

Hamas seized 251 hostages and killed about 1,200 people when it attacked Israel on 7 October 2023, triggering the Gaza war.

At least 47,500 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's offensive, according to Gaza's Hamas-run health ministry. About two-thirds of Gaza's buildings have been damaged or destroyed by Israel's attacks, the UN says.

The release of the Thai hostages does not form part of the Israel-Hamas ceasefire deal agreed on 19 January, under which 21 Israeli hostages and 566 Palestinian prisoners have been freed so far.

By the end of the first stage of the ceasefire in three weeks' time, 33 hostages and 1,900 prisoners are expected to have been freed. Israel says eight of the 33 are dead.



Thai hostage Pongsak Thaenna is hugged by his father, as his brother looks on.

## Rebuilding my home in Gaza as Trump wants me to leave, says young woman

Access to power and internet is limited in Esraa Shaheen's neighbourhood in northern Gaza - where Israeli bombing has destroyed much of the infrastructure.

But news of US President Donald Trump's plan to relocate Palestinians from the territory still reached here.

"You feel that you are not in control of your own life... that our lives are cheap," she says, calling his comments provocative.

But looking around, she can't help but agree with him about the "death and destruction" that is everywhere in the territory.

The 23-year-old says the neighbourhood she grew up in

is now almost unrecognisable.

Despite that, she is determined to stay, describing to the BBC through a series of phone calls, videos and messages her long journey home and her joy at being reunited with her fiancé - a joy that she says outweighs the difficult situation she now faces in the north.

### THE JOURNEY BEGINS

A natural introvert, Esraa struggled with living for months in a crowded classroom in central Gaza.

"I prefer to stay at home, specifically in my own room, than to go out and walk around or anything like that. I prefer quiet," she says.

In the classroom, "there was no place for calm, stability, or comfort".

So when news broke of the fragile ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, Esraa delighted at the idea of returning to the neighbourhood where she was born and raised, despite what she had heard about the destruction there.

It followed 15 months of war that began the day after her graduation, when Hamas fighters killed some 1,200 people in Israel and took 251 others hostage. More than 47,500 people in Gaza were killed in the Israeli offensive that followed, according to the Hamas-run health

ministry. About two thirds of Gaza's buildings were destroyed or damaged, the UN estimates.

Her fiancé had remained in the north of Gaza where he worked at a hospital. At first he had chosen not to leave, and then he had been unable to get out, she says.

Within days of the start of the war, over a million people were ordered to leave northern Gaza by the Israeli military as it fought Hamas gunmen, with more forced evacuations in the months that followed. The Israeli military then established a corridor spanning the width of Gaza, blocking people from travelling back north.

## Trump administration to cut billions from overheads in biomedical research

President Donald Trump's administration has announced it will slash billions of dollars from overheads in grants for biomedical research as a part of broader cost-saving measures, a move some scientists say will stifle scientific advancements.

In a statement on Friday the National Institutes of Health (NIH) said it would cut grants for "indirect costs" related to research - such as buildings, utilities and equipment.

"The United States should have the best medical research in the world," NIH said in its announcement. "It is accordingly vital to ensure that as many funds as possible go towards direct scientific research costs rather than

administrative overhead."

The agency estimated that the cuts - which go into effect on Monday - would save \$4bn (£3.2bn).

The NIH said on Friday that it would cap the rates grants pay for indirect research costs at 15 percent, half of the current average rate of 30 percent.

Elon Musk - the leader of the newly formed Department of Government Efficiency (Doge), an unofficial cost-cutting group that Trump has given leeway to slash government spending - has claimed some universities were spending above that 30 percent.

"Can you believe that universities with tens of billions in endowments were siphoning off

60% of research award money for 'overhead'?" Musk wrote on X. "What a ripoff!"

Meanwhile, scientists have voiced concerns that the cuts will impact vital medical research.

The Association of American Medical Colleges said the government's prior support of indirect facilities and administrative costs "allows medical research to happen".

The move will "diminish the nation's research capacity, slowing scientific progress and depriving patients, families, and communities across the country of new treatments, diagnostics, and preventative interventions", the group said in a statement.

Anusha Kalbasi, a lead ra-

diation oncologist at Stanford University, which receives the grants, said the grants help "keep the lights on and ventilation flowing in our labs, keep us safe from biohazards, maintain the infrastructure for massive amounts of data, and employ the staff that help researchers focus on science. This would be a devastating hit even for institutions with large endowments."

The American Council on Education said in a statement that the grant funding for indirect costs have allowed universities to maintain "cutting-edge laboratories" and advanced technologies needed to stay ahead of foreign competitors and deliver breakthroughs in research.

## Sam Nujoma, first president of Namibia, dies aged 95

The first president of independent Namibia, Sam Nujoma, has died at the age of 95 in the capital Windhoek, the country's current leader has announced.

Nujoma led the long fight for independence from South Africa in 1990 after helping found Namibia's liberation movement known as the South West Peoples' Organisation (Swapo) in the 1960s.

After independence, Nujoma became president in 1990 and led the country until 2005.

Nujoma had been hospitalised over the past three weeks with an illness from which he "could not recover", Namibian President Nangolo Mbumba said in a statement announcing the death with "utmost sorrow and sadness".

He "inspired us to rise to our feet and to become masters of this vast land of our ancestors," President Mbumba said.

He added: "Our founding father lived a long and consequential life during which he exceptionally served the people of his beloved country."

Nujoma retired as head of state in 2005, but continued to lead the party before stepping down in 2007

as president of the ruling Swapo party after 47 years at the helm.

Many Namibians have reacted to his death with sadness, fondly remembering him as "father of the nation", says the BBC's Frauke Jensen in Namibia's capital, Windhoek.

He is widely credited for ensuring peace and stability after independence from South Africa, which was then under white-minority rule, in 1990.

Nujoma also championed the rights of women and children, including making fathers pay for the maintenance of children born out of wedlock.

Namibia's Vice-President Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, who is due to be inaugurated as president in March after leading Swapo to victory in elections, said his "visionary leadership and dedication to liberation and nation-building laid the foundation for our free, united nation".

African leaders have joined in paying tribute to Nujoma, with African Union Commission chairman Moussa Faki Mahamat describing him as "the epitome of courage, never wavering from his vision for a free Namibia and a unified Africa".



SAM NUJOMA

## NEWS

## Foreign

# African summit urges immediate DR Congo ceasefire

Leaders from east and southern Africa have called for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire to end the deadly fighting in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

At a crisis summit in Tanzania, the Southern African Development Community and East African Community (EAC) blocs urged all warring parties to hold peace talks within five days, including with the Rwanda-backed M23 rebels.

The rebels - fighting government forces - have seized vast swathes of land in the eastern DR Congo, including the city of Goma. Their push towards Bukavu has raised fears of a wider regional war.

As part of their talks, army chiefs have also been told to draw up a security plan for Goma and surrounding areas.

The latest UN figures suggest

2,900 people have been killed since early January, as a result of the hostilities between M23 and armed forces of the DR Congo.

Around 700,000 are estimated to have been displaced and thousands more injured.

Saturday's gathering in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania's biggest city, brought together heads of state and government representatives to try to resolve the worsening security and humanitarian situation.

"The summit emphasises that political and diplomatic engagement is the most sustainable solution to the conflict," said the follow-up communique.

It also demanded the reopening of Goma airport and other key routes to facilitate humanitarian aid, as well as the withdrawal of uninvited foreign armed forces from Congolese territory.

M23, which is made up of ethnic Tutsis, say they are fighting for minority rights while DR Congo's government says the Rwanda-backed rebels are seeking control of the eastern region's vast mineral wealth.

Rwandan President Paul Kagame - who was at the summit - has repeatedly denied any involvement in supporting the rebels.

But, as reported last month by the BBC's Ian Wafula, a group of UN experts maintains the

Rwandan army is in "de facto control of M23 operations" - detailing how M23 recruits are trained under Rwandan supervision and supported by high-tech Rwandan weaponry.

Following the summit, Kagame posted on Facebook, accusing the DR Congo of "mounting a security problem against our country".

The DR Congo's President, Félix Tshisekedi, opted to appear at the summit via video link. Prime Minister Judith Suminwa

was there in person.

There was no immediate response from Suminwa or the Congolese delegation to the joint communique.

Kenyan President William Ruto, the current EAC chairperson, stressed military solutions alone could not resolve the crisis. "We must resist the temptation to think that we can somehow shoot or bombard our way into a solution in the face of such a complex situation," he said.

Tanzanian President Samia

Suluhu Hassan underscored a "collective responsibility" of regional leaders to end the conflict, saying "history will judge us harshly if we remain still and watch the situation worsen day by day".

The ongoing conflict dates back to the 1990s, but has rapidly escalated in recent weeks.

The DR Congo is so vast - two-thirds the size of Western Europe - that it is a member of both the East and Southern African blocs.

## Trump study sessions': How Japan PM's homework paid off

If Japan needed reassurances it was indeed still the US's top ally and friend in the increasingly unstable Asia-Pacific, it got that and then some.

But what was striking about the Trump-Ishiba meeting at the White House was what didn't happen.

Unlike most of the Trump domestic and global dynamics so far, this was neither controversial nor confrontational.

"On television, he is very frightening," Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba told reporters after Friday's meeting.

"But when I met him, he was very sincere, very powerful and strong willed," he added.

There's a lot that ties Washington and Tokyo. Japan has been the top foreign investor in the US for five consecutive years, creating thousands of jobs. And there are 54,000 US military personnel stationed in Japan.

But President Donald Trump has given his friends and foes a lot to worry about: from tariff wars against China, Canada and Mexico to his US "ownership" of Gaza proposal and his sanctions against the International Criminal Court.

"Trump has made some erratic decisions towards countries that believed themselves to be Ameri-

ca's friends," said Jeffrey Hall, lecturer at Japan's Kanda University of International Studies.

"There was a fear in Tokyo that the same might happen: that Trump might slap huge tariffs on Japan or start some dispute. But that didn't happen," he added.

'Trump 'study sessions'

While Trump didn't rule out tariffs against Tokyo, it wasn't the main feature of this meeting.

Ishiba went to Washington prepared. He'd studied. Literally, he held "study sessions" with staff and sought advice from his predecessor, Fumio Kishida.

He also had some help from the widow of the late former PM Shinzo Abe, who had a close relationship with Trump during his first presidency, forged on the golf course.

Ishiba's homework paid off.

Apart from when Trump mistakenly referred to Nippon Steel as "Nissan", there weren't many eye-raising moments like the many other announcements by the US president.

In fact - to Japan - this meeting was reassuring.

Both leaders seemed to have met eye-to-eye on their countries' plans to boost trade and defence ushering in a "golden-era" of Japan-US relations.



Rwandan President Paul Kagame (second from the left) attended the summit in Dar es Salaam.

## Tsunami alerts cancelled after Caribbean earthquake

Tsunami warnings issued after a powerful 7.6-magnitude earthquake rocked the Caribbean Sea have been cancelled, the US Geological Survey (USGS) has said.

Officials say the earthquake's epicentre was about 20 miles (32.1km) north of Honduras and 130 miles (209.2km) southwest of the Cayman Islands when it struck on Saturday evening local time.

The US Tsunami Warning System had initially issued

warnings to more than a dozen of countries - including waves of up to three metres (10ft). But, it later said the threat had passed.

Advisories were also issued by the Tsunami Warning System for Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands following the earthquake - which were both also later cancelled.

The Cayman Islands government had warned residents of coastal areas to move inland in a message on its website.

It is unclear if there has been

any movement or damage on land.

The quake was the biggest to hit the region since 2021, when a 7.2 magnitude earthquake struck Haiti, according to the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

About three hours after the earthquake, US authorities warned that "minor sea level fluctuations" of up to 30cm (11.8 inches) could still occur, but that any serious threat had passed.

The USGS said large earth-

quakes at this location of the plate boundary are not unexpected.

In 2018 a 7.5-magnitude earthquake occurred nearby, causing some damage and a small tsunami, it said.

"Luckily, the remote location of these earthquakes limits the potential for significant damage due to shaking," it added.

Separately, the US National Tsunami Warning Centre said there are no alerts for the mainland US coast.

## Dozens killed in bus crash in southern Mexico

At least 41 people have died in an accident involving a bus in south-

ern Mexico, the government in the state of Tabasco has said.

Images show the bus com-

pletely burned out after it was engulfed by flames following the collision which happened in the early hours of Saturday morning near to the small city of Escárcega.

Bus operator Tour's Acosta said 48 passengers were on-board the vehicle - which had been travelling from Cancun to Tabasco - when it collided with a "trailer".

Tour's Acosta added it was "profoundly sorry about what happened" and said it was working with authorities to find out the cause, adding that the bus had been travelling within speed limits.

Reuters news agency reported that the government of Tabasco state said in a statement that 41 people had died, and recovery work was still ongoing.

"The public ministry has

informed us that the investigation will be taking effect in the prosecutor's office of the municipality of Candelaria, Campeche, for this reason the relatives of our passengers and friends will have to go to this department to perform the relevant procedures," Tour's Acosta said on Facebook.

The government state of Tabasco said recovery work is continuing - including efforts to identify those killed.

Authorities will give an update with details on the number of victims and their identities later on Saturday, said the secretary of government of Tabasco, Ramiro Lopez.

Local council Palacio Municipal de Comalcalco has said it will support the transfer of the bodies of the victims in the passenger bus accident.

## Judge blocks Musk team access to Treasury Department records

A federal judge has blocked Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency (Doge) from accessing the personal financial data of millions of Americans in Treasury Department records, according to court documents.

US District Judge Paul A. Engelmayer issued a preliminary injunction on Saturday to prohibit access, ordering Musk and his team to immediately destroy any copies of records.

The move comes after 19 state attorneys general sued the Trump administration after Doge, a cost-cutting initiative led by Musk, was given access to

the records.

They argued access for Musk, a "special government employee", and Doge, which is not an official government department, violated federal law.

In a post on X, Musk called the ruling "absolutely insane".

"How on Earth are we supposed to stop fraud and waste of taxpayer money without looking at how money is spent?" he wrote.

The Democratic state attorneys general sued Trump, the Treasury Department and Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent on Friday.

Engelmayer's order, issued early on Saturday, said the states would "face irreparable" harm

without immediate relief.

"That is both because of the risk that the new policy presents of the disclosure of sensitive and confidential information and the heightened risk that the systems in question will be more vulnerable than before to hacking," the order read.

The order restrains the defendants from granting access to Treasury Department records containing personally identifiable or confidential information to special government employees, political appointees, and other employees from outside the department.

The injunction restricts anyone

else from accessing those records other than civil servants who need to do so for their work at the Bureau of Fiscal Services and have passed background checks.

The judge further ordered any person among those restricted to immediately destroy copies of records.

The conditions will remain in place until the next court hearing on 14 February.

New York Attorney General Letitia James, who was among the coalition of attorneys general who brought the lawsuit, said the Trump administration had given Musk and Doge "unprecedented access" to personal data.

# Sports

● Football ● Athletics ● Gulf ● Basketball ● Tennis ● Boxing

## NPFL25: Put 1-0 loss at Shooting Stars behind, focus on next game, Amadin tells Insurance

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

The Executive Chairman, Edo State Sports Commission has asked players of Bendel Insurance Football Club to put the disappointment in the 1-0 loss to Shooting Stars on Saturday in Ibadan and focus on beating Enyimba FC of Aba on Wednesday's rescheduled match day 20 of the Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL).

The Edo State Sports Commission boss gave the charge on Sunday afternoon while reacting to the Ibadan encounter. He encouraged the boys to see themselves as true professionals and shrug off the Ibadan disappointment.

Shooting Stars SC on Satur-

day evening defeated Bendel Insurance Football Club of Benin City by a lone goal at the Lakan Salami stadium, Adamasigba, in a Matchday 23 fixture of the 2024/2025 NPFL season. Godwin Odibo scored the only goal of the match in the 81st minute to help the hosts secure the maximum points.

Hon Amadin in his message to the team, encouraged the boys to direct all their energy and hundred percent concentration to the match against the People's Elephant on Wednesday at the Samuel Ogbemudia stadium.

"Though I was confident that we were going to run away with a point in Ibadan. Now that it didn't happen that way, let us now focus on the game for

Wednesday. We should recover from our loss with a comfortable home victory over Enyimba." He said.

The Benin Arsenals defeated the Oluyole Warriors by the same goal margin in their first round meeting in Benin.

Bendel Insurance will be hosting Enyimba FC on Wednesday in the rescheduled match day 20 at the Samuel Ogbemudia stadium.

Kickoff time is 4pm. The Benin Arsenals will still be at home on Saturday to host Niger Tornadoes in the match day 24.

Bendel Insurance are now 16th on the log with 25 points after 22 games ahead of Enyimba FC, Niger Tornadoes at the Samuel Ogbemudia stadium.



BENDEL INSURANCE PLAYERS

## 4th Edo Sports Festival: Enabulele vows to solidify Edo's reputation as sports powerhouse

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

As the Edo State Sports Commission begins preparation for the 4th Edo State Sports Festival billed for April this year, the Deputy Governor of Edo State Rt.Hon. Dennis Idahosa on Monday inaugurated the Main Organizing Committee, with the Executive Chairman of the Edo State Sports Commission as Chairman of the committee.

Inaugurating the Committee in Government House, Benin, the Deputy Governor expressed confidence in the committee's ability to deliver a successful fourth edition of the Edo State Sports Festival

Hon Idahosa, described the sports festival as a key initiative of Governor Monday Okpehlo's administration to enhance grassroots sports development and community sports participation. He expressed the state's readiness to consolidate on its position as a leader in sports development in the country.

"Today, we are inaugurating a committee tasked with the responsibility of organizing Edo's 4th Sports Festival.

This festival is a strategic step towards strengthening sports in the state; ensuring talent discory, development, and preparing athletes for future competitions, including the 2025 National Sports Festival holding in Ogun state in May this year," Idahosa stated.

He noted that without regular competitions, athletes would struggle to achieve their full potential.

### As Deputy Gov inaugurates Festival Committee

"The state's sports festival serves as a crucial platform for identifying and nurturing talent as well as to encourage community participation from all local government areas. It will also play a vital role in the selection process for Edo's contingent for the National Sports Festival". He added.

The Deputy Governor who emphasized the importance of teamwork, urged committee members to work diligently as a team to ensure an impactful festival.

The committee has Mrs Sabina Chikere, the Executive Director, Sports Development and Operations as Secretary. Other members include Hon Frank Ilaboya Executive Director representing Edo North, Hon Baldwin Bazuaye, (MON Executive Director representing Edo South and Barr Ikunobe Anthony, Executive Director representing

Edo Central in the State's Sports Commission as members.

Others are Acting Permanent Secretary of the Edo State Sports Commission Mrs. A.P. Efe-Amenze, Mr. Gideon Ukpiedo, Mr. Lucky Adagbonyin, Mrs. Rosemary Amadasun, Dr Uduimho Water Imoedemhe; Mr. Charles Olubayor and Dr. Richard Alabi.

Meanwhile, the Executive Chairman Edo State Sports Commission Hon Amadin Desmond Enabulele assured the government and Edo people that his board will explore all opportunities and work tirelessly further solidify the reputation of Edo State as a powerhouse in sports and make it great again.

The Edo state Sports Commission boss who is also the chairman of the 4th Edo state Sports Festival Main Organizing Committee gave the assurance on Friday during the

inauguration of the 4th Edo State Festival Committee in Government House.

He expressed gratitude to the state government for its unwavering commitment to sports development and the privilege given him and his board members to serve now that the state and nation need vibrancy in the sports and socioeconomic spheres.

"As a committee, we fully understand the responsibility placed upon us. We assure the government and people of Edo State that we will execute our plans with utmost dedication and excellence," Enabulele said.

He reiterated the administration's vision of making Edo a hub for sporting excellence in Nigeria, vowing that the festival would meet global standards, adding that the principles of fairness, competition, and sportsmanship will be upheld.



## Morocco 2024: Flamingos to begin camping for South Africa's Bantwana on Sunday

Nigeria's U17 girls, Flamingos, will on Sunday at the Remo Stars Sports Institute, Ikenne-Remo, kickstart their preparations for their two-leg FIFA U17 Women's World Cup qualifying clash with the U17 girls of South Africa, known as Bantwana.

The 2022 World Cup bronze medallists were drawn bye to the second round of the African qualifiers, while Bantwana fired from all cylinders to steamroll their counterparts from Gabon 21-2 on aggregate, winning 12-1 in Gabon and 9-1 in South Africa.

"It is important that the Flamingos start their camping early for this second-round fixture, not just because South Africa won their first-round matches 21-2 on aggregate, but because that is the right thing to do. We are aware that matches between Nigeria and South Africa are always full

of heat, huge emotion on the part of players, officials and the fans, and determination to conquer on the part of the players.

"The Flamingos remain the best team in Africa and one of the best in the world, they will be adequately-prepared for the challenges ahead," NFF General Secretary, Dr. Mohammed Sanusi, said.

On his part, Head Coach of the Bantwana, Ntombifuthi Khumalo has sounded a warning to the South Africa Football Association that his team needs longer preparation-period and reinforcements to be able to withstand the challenge of Nigeria in the games scheduled for 7-16 March.

"Yes, tactically they (Nigeria) are good, like us, but if you can measure when we play pound-for-pound, our players are not ready for that - but we need to reinforce on that."

## 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 experi-

ence 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.

# SPORTS

## Nasarawa United suffer cruel defeat despite stellar performance

In a cracking Nigeria Premier Football League match-day twenty-three encounter, Nasarawa United fell agonizingly short, losing 1-0 on the road to El-Kanemi Warriors in Maiduguri, Borno State, on Saturday afternoon.

Despite delivering a stellar performance, the Solid Miners were unable to capitalize on their dominance, succumbing to a 27th minute solitary goal by

Al-amin Umar.

From the outset, United asserted their authority, dictating the tempo, and crafting a plethora of scoring opportunities.

The United's midfield trio of Abubakar Aliyu, Shina Kumater and Moyi Hassan, ensured the control of pace, supplying the attackers with an abundance of chances, as the frontline led by Idris Ajiya, Anas Yusuf, and Garba Abubakar, posed constant threat,

testing the El-Kanemi goalkeeper, on multiple occasions.

However, a combination of profligacy and inspired goal-keeping denied the Solid Miners the opener.

Against the run of play, the home side seized the initiative, scoring the decisive goal in the 27th minute.

A swift counter-attack culminated in El-Kanemi's Al-amin Umar, firing a low shot past

United's goalkeeper, Mohamed Galadima, changing the atmosphere.

Despite the early setback, the travellers continued to push for an equaliser, only to be thwarted by the hosts' resolute defence.

Abubakar Aliyu's set-piece effort was saved by the finger tip of the El-Kanemi goalkeeper toward the break.

Before the interval, United thought they had won a penalty when Idris Ajiya was hurled down inside the box, but the referee's decision proved otherwise, awarding the incident as a goal-kick for the hosts.

The visitors' valiant efforts ultimately proved futile, as El-Kanemi Warriors held on to secure a hard-fought victory.

The narrow defeat leaves United in 18th position on the league table, with twenty-two points, while El-Kanemi tentatively move to 4th position with 35 points with a game lesser.

The Solid Miners will host Ikorodu City in their next game at the Lafia City Stadium on Sunday, 16th February, 2025, by 4pm.



## NPFL: Remo Stars overcome Kano Pillars to extend lead

Remo Stars extended their lead at the top of the Nigeria Premier Football League, NPFL, table following a 2-1 victory over Kano Pillars.

Experienced striker Sikiru Alimi gave Daniel Ogunmodede's side the lead after five minutes.

Alimi slotted the ball home following a superb cross from Segun Ogunribide.

Ibrahim Abubakar guided home a low ball for Remo Stars' second goal in the 40th minute

after Pillars goalkeeper parried Alimi's shot unto his path.

Abba Adam reduced the deficit for Kano Pillars with a beautiful headed goal off Abdullahi Ali's cross in first half stoppage time.

It was Adam's fifth league goal of the season.

In Maiduguri, El-kanemi Warriors defeated Nasarawa United 1-0 with Umar Al Amin scoring the decisive goal one minute before the half hour mark.



## Liverpool suffer shock FA Cup defeat to Plymouth

A much-changed Liverpool were dumped out of the FA Cup by struggling second-tier side Plymouth Argyle, who pulled off a stunning

1-0 fourth-round win at Home Park on Sunday that put an end to the visitors' hopes of a quadruple.

The hosts took the lead in

the 53rd minute after they were awarded a penalty for a handball by midfielder Harvey Elliott and Ryan Hardie stepped up to send Liverpool goalkeeper Caoimhin Kelleher the wrong way.

Premier League leaders Liverpool were bereft of ideas and had just one shot on target in the opening half, with Plymouth keeper Conor Hazard making a diving save in the 36th minute to keep out James McConnell's long-range shot.

Ahead of the Merseyside derby against Everton on Wednesday, Liverpool made wholesale changes with Mohamed Salah, Virgil van Dijk, Alisson Becker and Alexis Mac Allister among

the big-names rested and left at home.

Liverpool, who were also forced into an early change when defender Joe Gomez went down injured, failed to create many chances in a scrappy encounter as Plymouth, who sit bottom of the second-tier Championship, gradually grew in confidence.

Arne Slot's side switched gears after going down but Hazard proved to be the hero for Plymouth as the Northern Irishman brilliantly kept out Diogo Jota's volley in added time, as well as a header from Darwin Nunez.

With Liverpool top of the Premier League, having strolled into the Champions League's last 16 and reached the League Cup final, some fans and pundits had begun to speculate about a potential quadruple.

Plymouth's remarkable victory, however, brought a shuddering halt to talk of clean sweep of silverware for Slot's side, who had only lost three games all season, prior to Sunday.

Meanwhile, there was no surprise in the other FA Cup fourth-round tie with Premier League Wolverhampton Wanderers beating second-tier Championship side Blackburn Rovers 2-0 at Ewood Park.



## Hakimi now world's highest-paid fullback after PSG contract extension

After Morocco's Achraf Hakimi signed a contract extension with French Ligue 1 side, Paris Saint-Germain, he became the World's most-paid fullback.

The Moroccan international will earn a staggering €70 million in wages over his new five-year deal, cementing his

status as football's highest-paid defender.

He signed a contract extension with the French champions until 2029. The new deal adds three years to his previous contract, which was set to expire in 2026.

His net salary is increasing from €10 million to €14 million per season (€28 million gross



HAKIMI

## BASKETBALL SHOTS NBBF names 24 man provisional roster for crucial 2025 Afrobasket Qualifiers

- 13 overseas base players drawn from 10 countries in Europe, Asia, Africa
- 5 Rivers Hoopers players make the cut alongside 3 from Hoops N' Read

MAXWELL KUMOYE AND OLUWATOBILOBA ZEAL-ADEPETU KUMOYE

The Nigeria Basketball Federation (NBBF), has made public a 24 man D'Tigers' provisional roster for the crucial final Window 2025 Afrobasket Qualifiers scheduled to hold in Tripoli, the Libyan capital later this month.

The roster was made public over the weekend and it include 11 players from 4 clubs in the domestic league with Champions, Rivers Hoopers having the lion share of 5 players.

One of the biggest club on the domestic front, Hoops N' Read has 3 on the list while Wisdom Anyaoha and Rayyan AR Salis from Gboko City Chiefs is joined by Customs' shooting guard Ibe Agu.

Your authoritative and award-winning news channel FIRST ZEALMEDIACAST BLOG, understands that the 11 home base players will be supported by 13 oth-

er players from Europe, Asia and Africa for the first phase of D'Tigers camping in Abuja.

The foreign base players are from Croatia, France, Ghana, Italy, Japan, Kosovo, Latvia, Poland, Russia and Spain. Italy, Japan and Spain have two players each.

Coach Abdulrahman Mohammed and his streak of Tigers are expected to report to Bentley Hotel in Utako District in Abuja from Monday the 10th of February and will spend a week together before heading to Libya.

He will be assisted by former D'Tigers center and 2017 Afrobasket silver medallist, 41 year old, Deji Akindele and Isikaku Ikenna Smart, an assistant video coordinator for the NBA's Portland Trail Blazers.

Isikaku Ikenna Smart is also the founder and CEO of the Smart Sport Foundation, a humanitarian aid organization that provides basketball shoes and resources to underprivileged athletes and coaches.