

Senate defends Electoral Bill u-turn, cites power, broadband gaps

● **Lawmakers reconvene Tue for sitting**

ABUJA

The Senate has defended its decision to make electronic transmission of election results discretionary, rather than mandatory in the ongoing amendment of the Electoral Act, insisting that the move was guided by empirical

data and the country's infrastructural realities.

Senate Leader, Senator Opeyemi Bamidele, clarified the upper chamber's position in a statement issued by his Directorate of Media and Public Affairs in Abuja on Sunday.

He stressed that the decision was not driven by sentiment,

but by hard facts drawn from consultations with key stakeholders in the communications and power sectors.

According to him, lawmaking carries enormous responsibility worldwide and the Senate cannot afford to enact provisions that may ultimately work against the interests of citizens.

The Senate had earlier resolved against Clause 60(3) of the Electoral Bill, 2026, which stipulates that a presiding officer "shall electronically transmit the results from each polling unit to INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV) in real time."

While the chamber subsequently reviewed the contentious clause to strengthen electronic transmission in re-

sponse to public concerns, it introduced a caveat that in the event of internet failure, Form EC8A would serve as the primary means of result collation.

Bamidele described the original Clause 60(3) as an initiative that any parliament would ordinarily embrace, given its potential to deepen public trust in democratic institutions, particularly the National Assembly

and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

However, he said the Senate examined the broader implications of the clause and found that Nigeria's communications and power infrastructure could not guarantee seamless real-time transmission nationwide.

Citing data from the Nigeri-

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The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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Okpebholo, APC leaders join family as Edo bids final farewell to Charlie Tempob with thanksgiving

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Okpebholo, Fubara, Sanwo-Olu, others shine at *New Telegraph* awards

BENIN CITY

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, alongside Siminalayi Fubara of Rivers State, Dauda Lawal of Zamfara State, Sheriff Oborewori of Delta State, Babajide Sanwo-Olu of Lagos State and Hope Uzodimma of Imo State, were honoured for what organisers described as outstanding and impactful leadership.

The colourful ceremony, organised by *New Telegraph* Newspaper, attracted a large

gathering of dignitaries, political associates, family members and supporters who converged to celebrate the awardees' contributions to governance and development across the country.

Governor Okpebholo was named Governor of the Year in Education, in recognition of reforms and investments in the sector over the past year. Speaking after receiving the award, Okpebholo urged Edo residents to continue supporting his administration as it advances its SHINE Agenda, assuring that

more people-centred policies aimed at transforming critical sectors and improving living standards are underway.

Represented by the Chief of Staff, Hon. Yakubu Musa who described the award as well deserved and reflective of the developmental strides recorded within one year in office.

He expressed confidence that more recognition would follow in other sectors.

The Edo delegation included Commissioner for Finance, Emmanuel Okoebor; Commissioner

for Women Affairs, Mrs Eugenia Abdallah; Commissioner for Environment, Nosa Adams; Commissioner for Information and Strategy, Prince Kassim Afegbua; Special Adviser on Protocol, Daniel Eromosele; Special Adviser on Media and Publicity, Bugie Okhuemoi; and Chief Press Secretary, Dr Patrick Ebojele.

Edo State Commissioner for Education, Paddy Iyamu, welcomed the recognition, describing it as a validation of the reforms implemented in the education sector.

Similarly, Commissioner for Livestock, Prof. Omorodion Ignatius Ikpomwosa, attributed the award to deliberate policies that have strengthened public education, including the recruitment of over 5,000 teachers, renovation and upgrading of schools, and improved learning frameworks.

Meanwhile, Rivers State Governor, Fubara, who received the Man of the Year 2025 award,

dedicated the honour to the Minister of the Federal Capital Territory, Nyesom Wike, whom he credited for mentoring and discovering him politically.

Chairman of the occasion and former Ogun State Governor, Olusegun Osoba, urged Nigerians to remain hopeful despite prevailing challenges, describing the nation's citizens as resilient and capable of building a stronger country.

Organisers said the awards were designed to promote accountability, innovation and impactful public service nationwide.

Coalition backs FG-U.S. defence cooperation, reaffirms Nigeria's sovereignty

ABUJA

A pro-security advocacy group, Citizens for Strategic Defence Cooperation (CSDC), has endorsed the Federal Government's decision to deepen military collaboration with the U.S. Armed Forces.

Secretary-General of CSDC, Abdulmajid Danladi, made the statement on Sunday in Abuja, emphasising that the cooperation does not compromise Nigeria's sovereignty.

"Nigeria's sovereignty remains fully intact despite the defence partnership with the U.S.," Danladi said, describing the arrangement as a "measured and strategic partnership" designed to bolster the nation's fight against terrorism, insurgency, and transnational crime.

He urged Nigerians to base

public discussions on facts rather than emotions.

"Our sovereignty is not for sale and has not been compromised. The Nigerian Armed Forces remain in full operational control of all security activities within our territory. Any cooperation with foreign partners is structured, limited, and governed by Nigerian law," he stated.

Danladi highlighted that Nigeria has long maintained defence ties with friendly nations, particularly in training, intelligence sharing, and capacity building, and noted that the evolving security landscape demands coordinated responses.

"Enhanced cooperation with the U.S. Department of Defense provides access to advanced training, intelligence

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AWARD CEREMONY:

L-R: Edo state Commissioner for Environment, Hon. Nosa Adams; publisher of *New Telegraph* newspaper, Orji Uzor Kalu; Chairman of the occasion, Olusegun Osoba; Chief of staff to Governor of Edo State, Yakubu Musa, who received an award on behalf of Governor Monday Okpebholo; Commissioner for Women Affairs, Mrs Eugenia Abdallah; Special Adviser, Media and Publicity to the Governor, Bugie Okhuemoi in a group photograph after the award ceremony organised by *New Telegraph*.

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FG warns against illegal recruitment of Nigerians into foreign conflicts

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Okpebholo, APC leaders join family as Edo bids final farewell to *Charlie Tempob* with thanksgiving

BENIN CITY

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, on Sunday led top political figures to a thanksgiving service in honour of the late Charles "Charlie Tempob" Idahosa, bringing to a close the burial rites of one of the state's most recognisable political figures.

The thanksgiving service, held at St. Peter's Anglican Church, Benin City, drew a large congregation that filled the church to capacity.

Among those in attendance were the All Progressives Congress (APC) Deputy Chairman in Edo State, Sylvester Aigbob-

oh; APC Esan Central Senatorial leader, Gen. Cecil Esekhaigbe (rtd); senior government officials, political associates, family members, former media colleagues and well-wishers who gathered to thank God for a successful burial ceremony.

Idahosa, a former Commissioner for Information in Edo State and a chieftain of the APC, died on December 20, 2025, at the age of 72. Popularly known as Charlie Tempob, he was widely regarded as a grassroots politician and influential voice in the state's political landscape.

Officiating minister, Venerable Vincent Ayevbomwan, urged the congregation to live upright

lives and positively impact others, reminding them that death is a debt every mortal must pay.

He led other ministers in prayers for the Idahosa family

and for the repose of the soul of the elder statesman.

Special prayers were also offered for President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, members of the Federal

Executive Council, Governor Okpebholo and his executive team, seeking divine guidance, wisdom and direction in steering the affairs of the nation and Edo State.

The cleric further prayed for improved security, a stronger economy and sound policies that would uplift the living standards of the people.

Govt House staff undergo safety drills as Edo intensifies emergency preparedness

Civil and public servants at Government House, Benin City, have participated in an ongoing safety drill exercise organised by the Edo State Ministry of Public Safety and Security as part of efforts to strengthen emergency response capacity across government institutions.

Addressing staff, the Commissioner for Public Safety and Security, Hon. Festus Ebea, said that the exercise formed part of the ministry's routine enlightenment and preparedness campaign aimed at equipping public officers with the necessary skills to respond effectively in the face of unexpected emergencies.

He urged workers to remain open-minded and fully engage with the trainers throughout the duration of the drills.

In her remarks, the Permanent Secretary of the ministry, Mrs Queeneth Orebedo, encouraged staff to view the exercise as a vital opportunity to acquire basic but critical knowledge required during emergency situations.

Officials from the Department of Safety and Security, the State Fire Service and the Nigeria Red Cross Society facilitated practical sessions, taking participants through a range of drills designed to prepare them for real-life emergency scenarios.



VALENTINE-DONATE BLOOD:

The Cap'n, San Titanic Deck of the National Association of Seadogs (NAS), (aka Pyrates Confraternity), donating blood on Valentine's Day, at a blood donation drive with the theme: "Be someone's Valentine-Donate Blood" organized by NAS in collaboration with Irrua Specialist Teaching Hospital (ISTH), Irrua, Edo State.

Iseghohimen congratulates Aigboboh on inauguration as Coordinator Renewed Hope Ambassador in Edo

South Africa based entrepreneur and philanthropist, Dennis A. Iseghohimen, Chief Executive Officer of Nicholas Auto Solution (NAS) has congratulated Ambassador Sylvester Aigboboh on his inauguration as the Coordinator, Renewed Hope Ambassador for the Edo State Chapter, describing the appointment as timely and well deserved.

In a congratulatory message issued on his behalf, Iseghohimen praised Aigboboh's leadership qualities, referring to him as a leader and a lion of his time, whose dedication to community development and people-centered leadership has

earned widespread respect.

He also commended the All Progressives Congress (APC) for its ongoing efforts in Edo State, particularly in Illeh and Ekpoma, noting that the party's activities continue to reflect a commitment to grassroots development and stability.

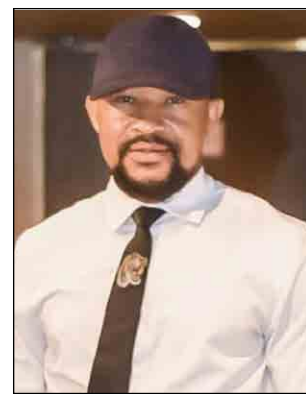
According to Iseghohimen, the emergence of Ambassador Aigboboh in this role reinforces confidence in the future of Edo State and his community. He expressed belief that Edo and its people are in safe hands under his leadership, adding that his loyalty lies with good leadership rather than party affiliation.

"I follow good leadership, not political parties. Any party that produces a leader genuinely committed to the best interests of my community is where I will stand," he stated.

Iseghohimen further extended his greetings to the Governor of Edo State, Senator Monday Okpebholo, whom he described as an Alli of his time, commending the governor for the developmental strides recorded across the state, with particular impact in Esan land.

He concluded by expressing confidence that collaborative leadership and a shared commitment to service would

continue to promote peace, progress, and inclusive governance in Edo State.



ISEGHOHIMEN

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an Communications Commission, he noted that broadband coverage stood at about 70 percent in 2025, while internet user penetration was only 44.53 percent of the population.

He also referenced the Speed-test Global Index, which ranked Nigeria 85th out of 105 countries in mobile network reliability and 129th out of 150 countries in fixed broadband reliability.

According to the index, Nigeria's mobile network speed was 44.14 megabits per second, far below countries such as the United Arab Emirates (691.76 mbps), Qatar (573.53 mbps) and Kuwait (415.67 mbps).

In fixed broadband, Nigeria ranked 129th with 33.32 mbps, trailing global leaders like Singapore and France.

On power supply, Bamidele cited official figures indicating that about 85 million Nigerians, roughly 43 percent of the population still lack access to grid electricity. Although generation capacity hovers between 12,000 and 13,500 megawatts, he said the transmission and distribution network can deliver only about 4,500 megawatts nationwide.

Given these constraints, he expressed doubt over the practicability of mandating real-time electronic transmission, warning that embedding such a requirement in law without adequate infrastructure could trigger instability.

"In democracy, lawmaking sits at the heart of public governance. It does not respond to emotion but to facts and realities that can define or distort the future of our political system," he stated.

He explained that the Senate's redrafting of Clause 60(3) and (5) involved deleting the words "real time" to ensure the law reflects prevailing realities, while still preserving the framework for electronic transmission.

Meanwhile, the Clerk of the Senate, Mr Emmanuel Odo, announced that the upper chamber will reconvene plenary on Tuesday, February 17, at 11 a.m., on the directive of Senate President Godswill Akpabio.

In a notice issued to senators and made available to journalists in Abuja, Odo urged lawmakers to reschedule their engagements to attend the sitting, noting that crucial national decisions would be taken.

Okpebholo names Andrew Momodu Commissioner-designate

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Government has announced the appointment of Hon. Andrew Momodu as Commissioner-designate, subject to confirmation by the State House of Assembly.

Governor Monday Okpebholo approved the nomination as part of efforts to strengthen his administration with experienced and competent hands committed to sustainable growth and improved service delivery.

Momodu is a seasoned po-

litical administrator and public affairs practitioner with extensive experience in governance and security coordination.

He previously served as Special Adviser to the Governor of Edo State on Security and Public Order, where he played a key role in coordinating critical se-

curity and public safety matters.

Earlier in his career, he was a political aide to former Edo State Governor and former National Chairman of the All Progressives Congress, Adams Oshiomhole, where he honed

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Coalition backs FG-U.S. defence cooperation, reaffirms...

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technology, and operational best practices," he said. "Modern warfare is technology-driven. Intelligence gathering, surveillance, and counter-terrorism strategies are globalised. Refusing to cooperate with international allies would isolate

Nigeria at a time when collaboration is essential."

He commended the leadership of the Nigerian Armed Forces under Chief of Defence Staff, Gen. Olufemi Oluyede, calling the initiative forward-looking and consistent with Nigeria's longstanding diplomatic and security rela-

tions with the U.S.

Danladi clarified that the presence of foreign military personnel does not equate to foreign control.

"There is a clear difference between cooperation and occupation. Nigeria is not hosting foreign bases that override its authority. What exists is struc-

tured engagement designed to strengthen the capabilities of our own troops," he said.

He concluded by urging the Federal Government to maintain transparency and ensure all defence partnerships align with constitutional provisions and Nigeria's foreign policy principles.

NEWS

Stakeholders divided on Tenancy reform as Lagos moves to curb rent excesses

LAGOS

Divergent reactions have trailed the proposed Lagos State Tenancy and Recovery of Premises Bill (2025/2026), with lawyers, landlords, tenants and civil rights advocates expressing mixed views over its likely impact and enforceability.

The Lagos State House of Assembly is currently considering the bill presented by the Attorney General and Commissioner for Justice, Mr Lawal Pedro, aimed at reforming landlord-tenant relations and fast-tracking litigation to between three and six months.

The proposed law prohibits landlords from demanding

more than one year's rent from new tenants or more than three months' rent from monthly tenants.

It also makes the issuance of rent receipts mandatory, caps agent fees at 10 percent, with some reports suggesting five percent and introduces a seven-day eviction notice for rent defaulters.

Several Lagos-based lawyers described the reform as a welcome development but stressed the need for effective monitoring to prevent abuse.

They warned that without strict oversight, the law's provisions could be applied oppressively rather than as instruments of balance between landlords and tenants.

Rights activist Mr Spurgeon Ataene commended the initiative but called for structured engagement among government,

landlords and tenants to address deeper structural concerns.

He questioned how errant agents would be sanctioned and whether the judiciary had sufficient capacity to handle a potential surge in tenancy disputes.

Ataene argued that affordability remained central to the law's success, lamenting soaring rents across both Island and Mainland areas of Lagos.

He cautioned against self-help evictions by landlords under the guise of seven-day notices and urged government intervention in housing and food affordability to ensure the reform achieves meaningful impact.

Convener of Fight Against Corruption in the Judiciary, Mr Bayo Akinlade, noted that recovery of premises would still be resolved through the courts, meaning litigation pressures would persist. He urged that data on housing supply and tenancy disputes guide the law's

review and implementation.

Another legal practitioner, Dr Yemi Omolede, said Lagos had historically pioneered progressive reforms but often struggled with implementation. He observed that magistrates' courts across the state currently handle dozens of tenancy cases daily and questioned how the new law would substantially reduce filings without broader systemic reforms.

While landlord Mr Saheed Olafimihan decried prolonged tenancy litigation that strains rental income and property management, he expressed cautious optimism that the reform could create a balanced framework. Tenant Mrs Grace Chibueze, however, voiced concern that the proposed three-month timeline might limit tenants' ability to defend themselves adequately and urged stronger mediation and legal aid mechanisms, particularly through the Citizen Mediation Centre.



CLOSING CEREMONY:

L-R: Team Lead, Regulatory Compliance Group, Conduct and Compliance, Access Bank PLC, Mr Edward Keto; Head, E-Channels Office, Consumer Protection Department, Central Bank of Nigeria, Mr Tyoden Nanfwang; Executive Director, Operations, Nigeria Deposit Insurance Corporation (NDIC), Dr Kabir-Sabo Katata; Zonal Controller, NDIC, Enugu Office, Mr Chidi Nwankwo and Head, Communication and Public Affairs Department, NDIC, Ms Hawwau Gambo, during the closing ceremony of NDIC 2025 stakeholders meeting in Enugu at the weekend.

FRSC disowns '120 deaths' claim on Damaturu-Buni Yadi road

DAMATURU

The Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC), Yobe Sector Command, has dismissed reports alleging that 120 people died along the Damaturu-Buni Yadi road in 2025, describing the publication as misleading and inaccurate.

curate.

Sector Commander Mr Andrew Longkam, in a statement issued in Damaturu, said the report wrongly attributed figures and statements to him, clarifying that he did not grant any such interview.

According to official statistics presented at the command's year-end briefing, road traffic crashes declined by 26 percent from 158 cases in 2024

to 117 in 2025. However, fatalities rose from 78 to 115 within the same period, while injuries increased from 867 to 926.

Longkam disclosed that total persons involved in crashes rose from 1,549 in 2024 to 1,664 in 2025, with 623 individuals rescued without injury. He added that 13,538 traffic offenders were apprehended and sanctioned statewide during the year.

Although acknowledging

infrastructural challenges along certain corridors, including Damaturu-Buni Yadi, he stressed that casualty figures must reflect verified data.

The command, he said, remains aligned with its 2026 Corporate Strategic Goals, targeting a 10 per cent nationwide reduction in road crashes through intensified enforcement, public enlightenment and stakeholder collaboration.

APC dismisses implosion predictions ahead of nat'l convention

LAGOS

The All Progressives Congress (APC) has rejected opposition projections of an internal crisis ahead of its forthcoming national convention, describing such claims as politically motivated and unfounded.

Lagos State APC spokesman Mr Seye Oladejo, in a state-

ment, insisted the ruling party remained cohesive and strategically aligned. He said previous conventions had served as platforms for renewal and consolidation rather than conflict.

Oladejo cited the recently concluded APC membership e-registration exercise as evidence of institutional strength and nationwide coordination.

He argued that while the

APC was consolidating its structures, opposition parties were grappling with leadership disputes and defections.

He also expressed concern over remarks attributed to a former governor regarding alleged telephone surveillance of the National Security Adviser, stating that such claims, if true, would raise serious legal and security questions.

The spokesman further criticised what he described as misinformation by a former minister concerning new tax reforms.

Reaffirming the party's preparedness, Oladejo said the APC was focused on governance delivery and electoral strategy as it approached both its convention and future polls, dismissing suggestions of fragmentation as "wishful thinking."

Edo Special Squad recovers arms, links Oredo killing to ticket dispute

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Special Security Squad, code-named Operation Flush Out Kidnappers and Cultists, has recovered firearms and ammunition during coordinated stop-and-search operations across parts of Benin City.

The crackdown followed a directive by Governor Monday Okpebholo after a fatal shooting on February 13, 2026, at Eboh Quarters, Estate Gate, in Oredo Local Government Area.

Secretary of the squad, Izeagaegbe John, said operatives combed areas including Irhiri, Off Airport Road and the Oluku axis from

early morning, recovering a K2 Army magazine loaded with live ammunition from an abandoned vehicle whose occupants fled.

Preliminary investigations indicate that the victim, Mr Courage, popularly known as "Dogo," was killed in a dispute linked to park ticketing activities rather than cult violence as

initially speculated.

Authorities disclosed that a 9mm Beretta pistol was used in the attack, with cartridges recovered at the scene.

Several suspects have been arrested and investigations are ongoing, while the squad reaffirmed the government's zero tolerance for cultism and kidnapping.

Okpebholo names Andrew Momodu...

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his skills in party administration and political mobilisation.

He has also been active in civic discourse and political education, promoting democratic participation and, in 2023, con-

tested for a seat in the House of Representatives to deepen his commitment to public service.

The government said the nomination underscores the governor's resolve to assemble a visionary team capable of driving inclusive development across the state

INEC fixes Feb 20, March 6, 2027 for general elections

ABUJA

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has scheduled Nigeria's 2027 general elections for February 20 and March 6, 2027.

INEC Chairman, Joash Ojo Amupitan, announced that Presidential and National Assembly elections will hold on February 20, followed by Governorship and State Houses of Assembly elections on March 6. The commission also re-

leased a comprehensive timetable and schedule of activities in compliance with constitutional provisions and the Electoral Act 2022. According to INEC, early publication of the timetable is intended to promote transparency, enable adequate preparation by political parties and security agencies, and strengthen public confidence in the electoral process.

The commission reaffirmed its commitment to credible, transparent and well-organised elections nationwide.

NAS marks Valentine's Day with life-saving blood drive

JUDE EHEBHÁ

IRRUA

In a remarkable show of compassion, the National Association of Seadogs (NAS), (aka Pyrates Confraternity), San Titanic Deck celebrated Valentine's Day by organising a blood donation exercise titled, "Valentine Blood Donation Drive."

The initiative, aimed at saving lives and supporting the healthcare system, forms part of NAS's social responsibility efforts.

The drive took place at the weekend in Irrua Specialist Teaching Hospital (ISTH) and was coordinated by the Titanic Deck and Aftashok Deck of the association.

NAS members, volunteers, and members of the public participated, opting to mark Valentine's Day by donating blood, following awareness and sensitization campaigns conducted by the association in the lead-up to the event.

The Cap'n of San Titanic Deck, Mr. Emmanuel Wemambu, said NAS deliberately moved away from the conventional exchange of flowers and cards, choosing instead to celebrate with a lasting gesture of love under the theme: "Be Someone's Valentine - Donate Blood."

He expressed delight that the message resonated widely, resulting in a well-coordinated drive and successful collection of blood, which he described as a "gift of life."

Police confirm safe release of 9 kidnapped Benue Catholic worshippers

MAKURDI

The Police Command in Benue on Sunday confirmed the safe release of the nine abducted worshippers of St John Catholic Church, Ojeji, Ado Local Government Area of the State.

The Command's Spokesperson, DSP Edet Udem, confirmed their release in a statement on Sunday in Makurdi.

The worshippers were kidnapped during a night vigil on 8th February.

Udem said all the worshippers were released safely and unconditionally.

The command's spokesperson said on February 11 that the command, while acting on credible intelligence, arrested two suspects, Abubakar Jibril and Ashiru Ibrahim, in connection with the crime.

She revealed that the suspects were found in possession of five rounds of 7.62 mm ammunition.

Udem explained that in line with established investigative procedures, the suspects were handed over to the Inspector General of Police Intelligence Response Team (IRT) for further investigation.

"Acting swiftly on follow-up intelligence, the IRT, in a joint operation with tactical teams of the Benue State Police Command, raided the hideout of Ashiru Ibrahim on 14th February, 2026.

"The operation led to the recovery of one (1) AK-47 ri-

ifle and eight (8) rounds of 7.62 mm ammunition, as well as the arrest of two additional suspects believed to be key members of the kidnapping syndicate.

"Investigations so far have clearly established that the arrested suspects are directly linked to the abduction that occurred during the night vigil at St John Catholic Church.

"As a result of sustained pressure mounted through co-ordinated search-and-rescue operations across the Ado axis and adjoining communities, the kidnapped victims were successfully released unhurt," she said.

Udem said the command has intensified efforts to track down and apprehend other fleeing members of the criminal network.

She said that the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and IGP Intelligence Response Team (IRT) are currently conducting comprehensive investigations into the case.

Udem said the Inspector-General of Police has approved the deployment of the Police Air Wing for aerial surveillance and operations, alongside the reinforcement of additional tactical teams to the State.

She explained that the deployment was aimed at strengthening security dominance, improving intelligence-led operations, and denying criminal elements any operational space within the state.

Udem appreciated the collective support and coop-

eration received during the operation, particularly from the Benue Government and the leadership of the Catholic

Diocese, who championed the non-kinetic approach.

She said they also appreciated the Chairman of Ado Local Government Area and the effective collaboration of sister security agencies, including the Nigerian Army, the Benue

Civil Protection Guard and other security stakeholders.

"This unified approach greatly contributed to the successful rescue of the victims and underscores the strength of inter-agency cooperation in safeguarding lives and proper-

ty in Benue State," she said.

She said the Commissioner of Police, Mr Ifeanyi Emenari, has reassured the people that the command remained fully mobilised, strategically positioned, and resolute in its determination to keep the state safe.



MEDICAL OUTREACH:

Medical personnel attending to patients/beneficiaries, during a medical outreach organised by Society of Women Accountants of Nigeria, an affiliate of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria as part of its corporate social responsibility initiative and in the spirit of Valentine Day at Sauka Community at the weekend in Abuja.

N5bn properties destroyed in Kano's Singer Market fire, 7 missing

KANO

A fire outbreak at the Singer Market in Kano has destroyed properties worth over N5 billion, affecting over 1,000 businesses and leaving seven persons missing.

The market's Chairman, Alhaji Junaid Zakari, disclosed this to newsmen in Kano on Sunday.

Zakari described the incident as one of the worst tragedies in the market's history, with four residential buildings housing small-scale businesses razed.

Goods, equipment, and valuables were completely burnt, crippling the livelihoods of hundreds of families.

The chairman further revealed that seven persons were declared missing as of the time of filing this report.

Zakari added that investigations were ongoing to determine their whereabouts to confirm whether they were alive or dead.

He said emergency responders and security agencies were working to unravel the cause of the fire.

Zakari described the incident as a tragedy that would never be forgotten in the history of the

historic market, stressing the urgent need for support to enable the affected traders to rebuild their businesses.

He, however, commended Gov. Abba Yusuf for visiting the scene while the fire was still raging, stating that the Governor's swift response demonstrated concern and solidarity with the victims.

Authorities are yet to officially determine the cause of the inferno, as the affected traders continued to salvage what remained of their properties.

Alhaji Isa Abubakar, a shop owner, said he lost goods worth over N200 million, saying, "from God we come, to Him we shall return.

"I am here and it is heart-breaking to see goods worth billions of Naira destroyed by fire."

Abubakar commended Yusuf for visiting the scene, demonstrating concern and solidarity with the victims.

Musa Ibrahim, a market trader, recounted his experience, saying that he lost goods worth over N340 million in the fire.

"The fire had consumed everything we had," he said, pointing to the remains of his shop.

Osun 2026: INEC clears 14 parties, PDP, LP missing

OSOGBO

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has announced that 14 political parties will participate in the Aug. 8 governorship election in Osun.

This is contained in a statement issued by the INEC Public Relations Officer, Mr Musa Olurode, on Sunday in Osogbo.

Among the 14 political parties listed, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the Labour Party (LP) were conspicuously missing.

Olurode explained that only the 14 political parties that successfully concluded their primaries and uploaded the names and particulars of their candi-

dates within the commission's stipulated timeframe would participate in the election.

"INEC Osun hereby notifies political parties and the general public that, following the conclusion of political party primaries and the close of the period for uploading the names and particulars of candidates and their running mates for the Osun governorship election, 14 political parties have successfully complied with the Commission's requirements within the stipulated timeframe," he said.

According to Olurode, the political parties that validly uploaded the names and particulars of their candidates, as released by the Headquarters of the Commission, are: Accord (A), Action

Alliance (AA), African Action Congress (AAC), African Democratic Congress (ADC), Action Democratic Party (ADP), All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), and All Progressives Congress (APC).

Other parties include: Allied Peoples Movement (APM), Action Peoples Party (APP), Boot Party (BP), New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP), Peoples Redemption Party (PRP), Young Progressive Party (YPP), and Zenith Labour Party (ZLP).

"In accordance with Section 29(3) of the Electoral Act 2022 and Item 4 of the Timetable and Schedule of Activities for the Osun Governorship Election, the Commission has published the personal particulars

of candidates and their running mates (Form EC9).

"Copies of each candidate's Form EC9, together with all accompanying academic credentials and other documents submitted, will be displayed at the INEC State Office, all 30 Local Government Area offices, and the Area Office of the Commission in Osun on Monday, Feb. 16," he added.

Olurode advised political parties, candidates, and members of the public to inspect the published documents as provided by law.

He clarified that only the 14 political parties listed, having met the constitutional and regulatory requirements within the prescribed period, will participate in the election.

Growing foreign reserves mark turnaround for Nigeria's economy —Experts

ABUJA

Nigeria's external reserves have climbed to 49 billion dollars, reinforcing confidence in the economy and strengthening the Naira amid ongoing reforms in the foreign exchange market.

The steady rise is being viewed by analysts as a sign that policy adjustments by the President Bola Tinubu's administration are beginning to yield tangible results.

The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), Mr Yemi Cardoso, recently disclosed that Nigeria's foreign reserves rose from 46.7 billion dollar to 49 billion dollars in February, representing a 4.93 per cent growth.

He described the development as a significant turna-

round from the position he inherited at the apex bank.

Economic experts say the stronger reserve position is already calming volatility in the foreign exchange market, reducing speculative pressures and improving investor sentiment.

They noted that improved inflows and tighter reforms have contributed to the upward movement.

A renowned economist, Prof. Ken Ife, told NAN on Sunday in Abuja that Nigeria's growing external reserves are boosting the economy by strengthening the Naira, calming the foreign exchange market and creating new opportunities for economic growth.

Ife, the Lead Consultant on Private Sector Development to the ECOWAS Commission,

said the stronger reserve position is boosting confidence in the foreign exchange

market. He said that the outlook remained positive as reforms and investments gain momentum across key sectors.

Ife added that rising output from the Dangote Petroleum Refinery was a major source of future foreign exchange inflows, particularly from fertiliser, polypropylene, aviation fuel and gas.

"Dangote Petroleum Refinery alone is increasing output from fertiliser, polypropylene, as well as aviation fuel and gas.

"This could enable the company to earn about 20 billion dollars from exports to the global market," he said.

He urged the Federal Government to sustain the reserve build-up while channeling in-

vestments into critical sectors to raise productivity and living standards.

The expert said that the improving reserve position should create room for lower lending rates to stimulate growth in the productive sectors of the economy.

Dr Muda Yusuf, Chief Executive Officer of the Centre for the Promotion of Private Enterprise (CPPE), commended the government for strengthening the country's external reserves.

Yusuf said that the development was already supporting exchange rate stability and easing inflationary pressures.

"This is one of the reasons the exchange rate is getting stronger, and it is also helping to slow inflation," he said.

NEWS

FG warns against illegal recruitment of Nigerians into foreign conflicts

ABUJA

The Federal Government has warned against illegal recruitment of Nigerian citizens into foreign

armed conflicts.

Nigeria's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Amb. Yusuf Tuggar, disclosed this in a statement issued on Sunday by Kimiebi Ebienna, Spokesperson of the ministry.

The minister expressed grave concern over the rising and alarming cases of Nigerian citizens being illegally recruited to participate in foreign armed conflicts.

According to him, recent media investigations and security reports indicated that Nigerian nationals were allegedly recruited under false pretences, including promises of lucrative employment, security jobs, educational opportunities, or migration incentives.

Tuggar said, "Several Nige-

rians who have fallen victim to such unfortunate situations were deployed to combat zones, after being misled and coerced into signing military service contracts.

"Reports suggest that recruitment tactics involve deceptive offers of high monthly salaries, signing bonuses, and fast-tracked citizenship.

"In several instances, victims are reportedly compelled to sign contracts in foreign languages without adequate legal guidance, and their travel documents are allegedly confiscated upon arrival.

"Reports also indicate the involvement of intermediaries or agents who facilitate travel arrangements under tourist or other non-military visa categories."

This, according to him, the Federal Government of Nigeria unequivocally warn all citizens against engaging in or accepting any offer that involves participation in foreign armed conflicts.

Also such actions not only endangered lives, but may also violate Nigerian and international laws governing mercenary activ-

ities and foreign enlistment.

"The Ministry wishes to emphasise that Nigerians who choose to participate in foreign conflicts outside approved governmental frameworks do so at their own risk.

"To address the anomaly, government is engaging relevant domestic and international partners to investigate these developments and to enhance public awareness of the dangers of illegal recruitment.

"Nigerian Missions abroad have also been directed to strengthen consular vigilance and provide timely advisory services to Nigerian nationals," he said.

He urged parents, guardians, community leaders, and educational institutions to sensitise young Nigerians about the grave risks associated with deceptive foreign recruitment schemes.

"Citizens are strongly advised to verify all overseas employment or study opportunities through official government channels and to report suspicious recruitment activities to appropriate authorities" the minister stated.



EXCURSION TO NIGERIAN OBSERVER:

Pupils and teachers of the Royal Christen Academy, Benin City on Thursday visited the corporate office of The Nigerian Observer newspaper on excursion.

Nollywood star Zack Orji, others storm Benin for movie script conference

GLORIA OMORUYI

Prominent Nollywood actors and actresses, Zack Orji, Ngozi Ezeonu, Prince Iyke Olisa, Osaigbovo Erhumaton including legendary scripts writer Jovia James and movie producers converged on the prestigious Uyi Grand Hotel Benin City to participate in a script conference ahead of the production of a movie titled 'Beyond Duty', a film that focuses on the daily life of a combat and dutiful police officer, a metaphor for the Nigeria police Force.

The script conference organ-

ized by Ocean Portal, a thriving film production outfit managed by Dickson Osazee had in attendance representatives of the police hierarchy led by the Police Public Relations Officer, Edo State Command, ASP Eno Ukoedem and the Edo State Co-ordinator of the National Film and Video Censors Board, Fred Elakhe among others dignitaries who graced the event.

Dickson Osazee, Chief Executive Officer/Halix of Ocean Portal, while welcoming participants, expressed gratitude to the Nigerian Police Force for the partnership in the production of movies that seek to re-awake the

police to its duties and also portray the force in positive light to erase common negative perceptions among Nigerian.

Osazee said that Beyond Duty was the third in the series of the collaboration with the police having previously produced the "Greatest Oath" and "The Rescue", the films he believes had significantly altered people's perception of the Nigeria Police in the positive sense.

On his part, Zack Orji, described the partnership between institutions of State and the Nigerian movie industry as a progressive feature that portend greater things for the industry in the nearest future.

The all times movie star said

that such collaboration draws from the experience in Hollywood where government often suggests possible films to be made to influence the minds of the viewing American public to achieve certain government's objectives.

He called for its sustenance while commending Ocean Portal for the initiative which birthed the thriving industry/government collaboration in films making.

Police Public Relations Officer, Edo State Command ASP Eno Ukoedem described the themes of duty, patriotism, diligence that run through the film and the subplots of the family life of the average police officer as splendid.

Uvwie monarch calls for workable constitution as Tinubu, Oborevori emphasise sustained peace

BETTY IDIALU

WARRI

The Ovie of Uvwie Kingdom, Emmanuel Eke-mejewa Sideso Abe I, has called for the adoption of a workable constitution that will guarantee justice, fairness, and a sense of belonging for all Nigerians, stressing that such reform has become both crucial and urgent for national unity and development.

The monarch made the call during the unveiling of his autobiography, Odyssey of Roy-

alty: The Reign of Abe I, Ovie of Uvwie Kingdom, held at his palace in Effurun GRA, Uvwie Local Government Area of Delta State, as part of activities marking his 18th coronation anniversary.

The event attracted dignitaries from across the country, including representatives of President Bola Tinubu and Delta State Governor Sheriff Oborevori, members of the National and State Assemblies, traditional rulers, and other stakeholders.

President Tinubu was represented by the Minister of Avi-

ation and Aerospace Development, Festus Keyamo, who also chaired the occasion. He commended the monarch for fostering peace and development in Uvwie Kingdom and for working closely with federal authorities to strengthen governance at the grassroots. He expressed pride in the Ovie's leadership and wished him continued good health and longevity.

Governor Oborevori, represented by his Chief of Staff, described the ceremony as a celebration of legacy and enlightened leadership, noting that the monarch's reign has brought stability and steady de-

velopment to the kingdom. He added that the biography would serve as inspiration for emerging leaders and reaffirmed the state government's support for initiatives that promote education and social progress.

In his remarks, the royal father said the autobiography was written to preserve the history of the kingdom and provide an authentic account of his journey from private service to the throne. He noted that the book documents the challenges faced, the milestones achieved, and the collective efforts that have shaped the growth of Uvwie Kingdom.

NPA unveils simplified export channels

ABUJA

The Managing Director of the Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA), Dr Abubakar Dantsoho, has urged traders and investors to leverage new export channels to reposition Nigeria globally.

Marking the 2026 NPA Special Day on Saturday, Dantsoho said the authority introduced simplified processes to dismantle long-standing bureaucratic bottlenecks hindering export participation.

He explained the reforms aimed to boost non-oil exports, improve Nigeria's trade balance and integrate hinterland producers into global supply chains.

Dantsoho identified Export Process Terminals (EPT) as a key reform, describing them as one-stop hubs for consolidation, stuffing, packaging, documentation, certification and electronic scheduling.

"The terminals were conceptualised to simplify what used to

be a burdensome export process.

"We invite the trading and investing public to explore the tailor-made simplified export processes and other opportunities available at the NPA.

"The EPTs are electronically integrated with port operations through the call-up system to ensure faster cargo evacuation and improved turnaround time.

"Exporters can now complete documentation, packaging and shipment coordination seamlessly and efficiently," Dantsoho stated.

He said the NPA was collaborating with the Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC) to deepen port-hinterland connectivity.

According to him, the partnership will link EPTs with Domestic Export Warehouses to create structured pathways for SMEs in international trade.

Dantsoho maintained that trade remained Nigeria's most viable instrument for achieving its economic aspirations amid efforts to diversify from oil dependence.

NDA disowns fake admission letter circulating online

KADUNA

The Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA) has alerted the public to a fake invitation letter circulating online, purportedly issued to one Abubakar Washima, claiming that he was selected for admission into the academy.

The academy, in a statement by its Public Relations Officer, Maj. Reuben Kovangiya, said the letter did not originate from the NDA and should be disregarded.

It explained that all authen-

tic invitations for screening or admission into the institution were communicated only through the official NDA website: www.nda.edu.ng, and some recognised national dailies.

The NDA advised members of the public to exercise caution, verify all admission information through official channels, and promptly report any suspicious documents or activities for verification.

The academy warned that anyone found engaging in such fraudulent acts would face the full wrath of the law.

Tragedy: FRSC confirms 11 persons dead in Enugu-Port Harcourt Expressway accident

ENUGU

The Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) has confirmed the death of 11 persons involved in a fatal road accident on the Enugu-Port Harcourt Expressway.

The Sector Commander of FRSC Enugu State Command, Mr Franklin Agbakoba, confirmed this to newsmen in Enugu on Saturday after the tragic accident that involved two vehicles.

Agbakoba said, "The accident happened at about 6:46

p.m. today, Saturday, at a location adjacent to the FRSC Ozalla Unit Command on the expressway."

He said that the 11 persons that lost their lives included 10 males and one female.

"A total of 36 persons, which included 27 males and nine female, got involved in the collision between a commercial Toyota Coaster Bus and an articulated Mercedes Benz trailer this evening in Enugu-Port Harcourt Expressway.

"Apart from those that unfortunately lost their lives due

to the accident; seven persons, which included three males and four female, were injured in the accident.

"The injured victims have been taken to the University

of Nigeria Teaching Hospital (UNTH), Ituku-Ozalla for medical attention.

"The dead victims were taken to the UNTH Morgue," he said.

The sector commander said that FRSC personnel had cleared off all obstruction on the expressway caused by the accident, adding: "we have re-

stored free flow of vehicular traffic on the accident axis of the expressway."

Agbakoba added that preliminary investigations suggested Route Traffic Violation (RTV) and Loss of Control (LOC) as possible cause of the carnage.

He appreciated officers and

Marshals of FRSC Ozalla Unit Command for their swift response to the accident scene; rescue and taking the injured victims to UNTH for medical attention and clearing of obstruction.

"Further information on the accident will be made known to the public soon," he said.

Enugu gov't exceeds national measles immunisation target

ENUGU

The Enugu State Government has said it surpassed the national measles and rubella immunisation target of 85 per cent, recording "101 per cent" coverage.

The Commissioner for Health, Prof George Ugwu, disclosed this in Enugu on Saturday, following the national immunisation exercise held between Feb. 4 and Feb. 13.

Ugwu attributed the achievement to "field commitment and inter-ministerial collaboration" across key sectors of government and community leadership.

He said the strategy involved coordination among ministries overseeing gender, poverty alleviation, information, education, and local government, alongside traditional and religious institutions.

The commissioner praised Gov. Peter Mbah for what he described as transformative support for the state's health system.

"With Governor Mbah's

backing, all our Primary Healthcare Centres and cold-chain systems are receiving measles and rubella vaccines preserved at appropriate temperatures.

"The governor has not left us unsupported. We are recruiting thousands of primary healthcare workers, enabling us to deliver on this assignment.

"We are most grateful for the support you are giving the health system. It is improving, and the results are evident," he said.

Ugwu also commended the governor's engagement with health workers and his commitment to their welfare.

"We are happy you are not only engaging healthcare workers but also prioritising their welfare," he said.

He noted rising interest in placements at ESUT Teaching Hospital, Parklane, with many seeking internships and residency positions in Enugu State.

"This is because of the right infrastructure and leadership you have put in place in Enugu State," he added.

Capital Market: Kwairanga urges listing of state-owned enterprises

LAGOS

The Chairman of NGX Group, Dr Umaru Kwairanga, has urged the listing of viable state-owned enterprises to deepen liquidity and strengthen Nigeria's capital market.

Kwairanga made the call in a statement at the weekend, following a strategic engagement with industrialist, Aliko Dangote, earlier.

The engagement focused on sustaining reforms and expanding market liquidity.

Some of the participants included Femi Otedola, Chairman of FirstBank; and Emomotimi Agama, Director-General of the Securities and Exchange Commission.

Others were Omolola Oloworaran, Director-General of National Pension Commission; and Temi Popoola, Chief

Executive Officer of Nigerian Exchange Ltd.

Kwairanga said Nigeria was at a critical stage of economic evolution requiring a stronger and more inclusive capital market.

He said the market must shift from passively reflecting economic cycles to actively driving national development and mobilising long-term capital.

According to him, strategic listing of viable national assets in power, infrastructure and natural resources would be transformative.

"Transparent listing of national assets through the stock exchange will improve accountability while mobilising domestic capital for development," he said.

Kwairanga added that partial privatisation through the exchange would raise market capitalisation and strengthen corporate governance.



COMMEMORATION OF THE 2026 ICD:

Participants, during the commemoration of the 2026 International Condom Day (ICD) organised by AIDS Healthcare Foundation (AHF), Nigeria and Anambra State Agency for the Control of AIDS (ANSACA) in Awka,

COAS vows decisive action against terrorists, boosts troops' welfare

ABUJA

The Chief of Army Staff, Lt.-Gen. Waidi Shaibu, has reaffirmed Nigerian Army's resolve to decisively tackle terrorism, insurgency, and other security threats with renewed vigour.

Shaibu stated this at the 75th Army Headquarters Departments and Commands West African Social Activities (WASA), marking the end of the 2025 training year in Abuja.

He described the army as a professional, adaptable, and combat-ready force committed to safeguarding Nigeria's peace, stability, and strategic interests.

The COAS highlighted the invaluable sacrifices of personnel deployed across operation-

al theatres nationwide.

"Our soldiers have consistently demonstrated unwavering commitment in the fight against terrorism and internal security threats.

"Peace and security are vital for meaningful development in our beloved country, and we will continue to act decisively wherever our nation requires," he said.

Shaibu emphasised that operational readiness goes hand-in-hand with welfare, noting deliberate policies and structures to ensure troops remain motivated and mission-focused while their families are adequately supported.

According to him, a motivated soldier is a force multiplier. That is why the Soldier-First Culture under my Command

Philosophy is central to every initiative we undertake.

Shaibu also expressed gratitude to President Bola Tinubu for his support, reaffirmed loyalty to the Constitution, and commended the Minister of Defence, retired Gen. Christopher Musa, the Chief of Defence Staff, and other Service Chiefs for their guidance and cooperation.

"Events like WASA not only celebrate our achievements but also strengthen bonds across units and families, motivating our personnel to continue serving with dedication and professionalism," the COAS added.

Earlier, the Commander, Army Headquarters Garrison, Maj.-Gen. Maxwell Dangana, highlighted the operational significance of WASA, saying it provides a platform to reflect on the army's achievements over the preceding year.

According to him, the Army Headquarters Departments and Commands recorded a successful 2025 operational year, providing critical support to ongoing counter-terrorism and internal security operations despite challenging circumstances.

Dangana further emphasised the army's collaborative approach with sister services and security agencies, adding that operational successes were the result of close coordination with the Navy, Air Force, paramilitary organisations, and intelligence agencies.

He added that Joint and multi-agency operations remained vital to ensuring that security threats were addressed decisively.

"We have put in place training, welfare, and logistical initiatives that ensure our troops are not only combat-ready but also resilient and adaptable," he added.

Ramadan: Senator donates food, utilities to 1,787 IDPs in Sokoto

SOKOTO

Sen. Aliyu Wamakko (APC-Sokoto North), on Saturday donated foodstuffs and other utilities to no fewer than 1,787 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the state.

Wamakko, represented by his Director of Administration, Alhaji Al-Mustapha Abubakar, said the gesture was to support the IDPs as they prepared for the approaching Ramadan fasting.

He said the Items would be distributed across nine IDP

camps identified within the state metropolis.

The former Governor, who spoke at the inauguration ceremony at his Constituency office in Sokoto, said the gesture was part of his regular commitment to complement government's efforts in alleviating the economic hardship faced by IDPs.

"We have made a commitment to ensure that the living conditions of IDPs are adequately taken care of.

"We will continue to identify with them by providing their

needs to ease their situation.

"The state and Federal Government are aware of your current situation and remain committed to ensuring your safety.

"I want to assure you that your present condition is not permanent. Soon, you will return to your homes and reunite with your families and loved ones," he said.

Wamakko explained that the items for distribution included 200 bags of rice and maize, 400 bags of millet, 3,560 pieces of clothing materials for women, children and men, 100 cartons

of vegetable oil and seasoning, and 70 bags of salt.

Other items included tomato mix, blankets, casseroles and mosquito nets.

He sympathised with the beneficiaries and encouraged them to continue praying for the government's commitment to restoring peace in their respective communities.

Responding on behalf of the beneficiaries, Aisha Murtala and Asmau Muhammad, expressed appreciation and prayed for Wamakko for his sustained support.

NEWS

JUSUN resumes indefinite strike over unfulfilled agreements in Kaduna

KADUNA

The Judiciary Staff Union of Nigeria (JUSUN), Kaduna State Branch, has resumed its suspended

indefinite strike action, citing government's failure to implement agreements reached after months of negotiations.

In a notice dated Feb. 12 and signed by the Chairman, Auwa-

lu Sarki, and Assistant Secretary, Nasir Haroun, the union said the decision followed prolonged engagements and assurances that were not fulfilled.

The union recalled that it

had earlier issued a demand letter on Sept. 1, 2025, an ultimatum on Oct. 9, 2025, and a notice of indefinite strike on Oct. 23, 2025, before suspending the action on Oct. 31, 2025, to allow for dialogue.

According to the notice, several meetings were subse-

quently held involving representatives of the national body of JUSUN, the Kaduna State Government, and the Nigerian Bar Association, during which a technical committee and sub-committee were set up and resolutions reached.

"Regrettably, these agreements have not been implemented. The persistent failure to honour commitments and repeated unfulfilled assurances have left the union with no viable alternative," the notice stated.

The union said the strike would continue until further notice, adding that while it remained open to constructive dialogue, it believed its demands had not been adequately addressed.

JUSUN appealed to the public and justice sector stakeholders to bear with any inconveniences, noting that the action was aimed at strengthening the independence and effective functioning of the judiciary in the state.



FUNERAL SERVICE:

L-R: Former Labour Party Presidential Candidate, Mr Peter Obi; Governor Peter Mbah of Enugu State and his Deputy, Mr Ifeanyi Ossai, during funeral service in honour of late Sen. Okechukwu Ezeaku in Itchi Community of Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area of Enugu State.

Judge withdraws from EFCC's cases against Malami, cites personal reasons

ABUJA

Justice Obiora Egwuatu, has recused himself from the two cases filed by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) against Mr Abubakar Malami, former Attorney-General of the Federation and Minister of Justice.

Justice Egwuatu, who was recently re-assigned the cases by the Chief Judge (CJ) of the Federal High Court, Justice John Tsoho, said he decided to withdraw from them for personal reasons and for better interest of justice.

The two cases include the multi billion naira asset forfeiture case concerning 57 prop-

erty and the N8.7 billion money laundering charges filed by the EFCC against Malami, his wife, Asabe Bashir and son, Abdulaziz Malami.

The development occurred on Thursday shortly after the civil suit for forfeiture of 57 property allegedly linked to Malami was called for mention.

Upon resumed hearing, EFCC's lawyer, Ekele Iheanacho, SAN, informed the court that the matter was scheduled for mention.

The lawyer, however, told the court that the commission received a letter from Joseph Daudu, SAN, who is Malami's counsel, seeking an adjournment

of the case to Monday, Feb. 16.

He said Daudu stated in the letter that he was at the Court of Appeal for another case, hence, the need for the application for an adjournment.

Shortly after Iheanacho addressed the court, Justice Egwuatu, in a brief ruling, announced his recusal from the case.

"Gentlemen, for personal reasons and for better interest of justice, I will recuse myself from this case and in the other sister case," he said.

The judge said the case files would be remitted back to the chief judge accordingly.

Though Daudu was not in court, lawyers for other respondents/applicants, who had interest in some of the proper-

ty already placed on temporary forfeiture to the Federal Government, were in court.

While Kalu Kalu Agu, announced appearance for Alhaji Muktaka Usman Junju and Realsmart Tech Nigeria Ltd; D. O. Anyebe represented Real Edge Agro Services Ltd, while M.S. Ishaq appeared for his clients who he did not mention in open court.

The cases were former before Justice Emeka Nwite, who sat as vacation judge during the Christmas break.

The CJ had re-assigned the two cases to the new judge after the Christmas vacation sitting ended and Justice Obiora fixed Feb. 12 for the civil case and Feb. 16 for the money laundering case.

3 docked for allegedly stealing equipment worth N14m

ABEOKUTA

Three men were have been dragged before an Abeokuta Chief Magistrates' Court sitting in Isabo, over alleged burglary and stealing of equipment valued N14 million.

The defendants are: Simon John, 40; Aliyu Sulaimon, 35; and Saradeen Muhammed, 22.

The trio whose addresses were not provided, are standing trial on a four-count charge bordering on conspiracy,

house breaking, stealing and malicious damage.

They each, however, pleaded not guilty to the charges.

The prosecutor, ASP Lawrence Olu-Balogun, told the court that the defendants committed the offence alongside others now at large, committed the offences between August 2025 and Jan. 25 at Kidney Clinic International located at Idi-Aba in Abeokuta.

Olu-Balogun alleged that the defendants conspired to break into the clinic.

Court dismisses Auxiliary's no-case submission, orders him to enter defence

IBADAN

An Oyo State High Court sitting in Ibadan has dismissed a no-case submission filed by Mukaila Lamidi, popularly known as Auxiliary, in his ongoing murder trial.

Lamidi, former Chairman of the Oyo State Park Management System, is standing trial on a one-count charge of murder instituted against him by the state government.

The defendant, through his counsel, Mr E. O. Mbah, had filed a no-case submission, urging the court to discharge and acquit him on the grounds that the prosecution failed to establish a prima facie case.

However, Justice Oyeyemi Ajayi, in a ruling, held that the prosecution had established a prima facie case against the defendant.

The judge ruled that Lamidi had a case to answer and consequently ordered him to enter his defence.

Ajayi thereafter adjourned the case until March 2 for defence.

Lamidi was arraigned in 2024.

Earlier, the prosecution counsel, Mr Olubisi Bolarinwa, had opposed the no-case submission and urged the court to dismiss the application.

Bolarinwa told the court that the defendant allegedly committed the offence on Sept. 23, 2023, at about 4.30 p.m. at the Government Reservation Area (GRA), Agodi, Ibadan.

He alleged that the defendant caused the death of one Ms Wonuola Ayinde by knocking her down with his vehicle.

According to him, the offence contravenes Section 325 of the Criminal Code Laws of Oyo State, 2000.

Witness protection, sentencing, key to effective criminal trial —Taraba CJ

JALINGO

The Chief Judge of Taraba, Justice Joel Agya, has said that the fight against crime and corruption could not be effectively sustained without a witness protection and sentencing mechanism.

Agya said this at a One-Day Stakeholders Workshop on Witness Protection and Taraba Courts (Sentencing Guidelines) Practice Directions 2026, held in Jalingo.

The workshop organised by the Rule of Law Empowerment Initiative also known as Partners West Africa Nigeria (PWAN), was supported by the MacAr-

thur Foundation, and held in collaboration with the Taraba State Judiciary in Jalingo.

Agya emphasised that witnesses were the lifeblood of criminal trials, noting that a criminal justice system that failed to protect its witnesses, "encourages silence, fear, and impunity."

"The issue of witness protection in our criminal justice system is key; without which the fight against crime and corruption cannot be effectively sustained. Witnesses remain the lifeblood of criminal trials.

"Where witnesses are exposed to intimidation, reprisals, or undue hardship, justice itself is imperiled. It is

therefore imperative that we institutionalise practical and context-appropriate witness protection mechanisms within our justice processes," he said.

The Chief Judge said that plea bargaining and the Taraba Courts (Sentencing Guidelines) Practice Directions, which were central to the workshop, were developed by the Rule of Law Empowerment Initiative with support from the MacArthur Foundation during stakeholder engagements held on Nov. 14 and 15, 2025.

He described the exercise as a significant milestone, saying it reflected a collective recognition that a modern criminal justice

system must be efficient, transparent, predictable, and fair, both to the state and the residents.

He also said that plea bargaining, when properly regulated and transparently applied, was not a shortcut to injustice.

According to him, plea bargain is a pragmatic tool that reduces case backlogs, conserve judicial time, promote restitution to victims, and enhance public confidence in the justice system.

Agya further emphasised that sentencing guidelines served as a vital compass for judicial discretion, ensuring consistency, proportionality, and fairness while still preserving the independence of the courts.

RECONCILIATION OF NAME

The general public is hereby notified that OKOYE SYLVESTER, OKOYE SYLVESTER UZOKWE, OKOYE UZOKHE SYLVESTER and OKOYE SYLVESTER ANTHONY UZOKWE are one and the same person. Henceforth, I wish to be known and address as OKOYE SYLVESTER ANTHONY UZOKWE. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and general public please take note.

REMOVAL OF NAME

The general public is hereby notified that OGBEBOR LINDA and IDAHOSA LINDA FREDIA are one and the same person. Henceforth, I wish to be known and called IDAHOSA LINDA FREDIA. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and general public please take note.

ADDITION OF NAME

The general public is hereby notified that UKHUREBOR DIVINE AISOSA and OBASEKI-UKHUREBOR DIVINE AISOSA are one and the same person. Henceforth, I wish to be known and address as OBASEKI-UKHUREBOR DIVINE AISOSA. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and general public please take note.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, formerly known as MISS OMOREGBE OMOROVBIYE GLADYS now wish to be known and address as MRS. AKAMBE GLADYS OMOROVBIYE. All former documents remain valid. General public please take note.

Foreign

NEWS

Iran ready to discuss compromises to reach nuclear deal, minister says in Tehran

Iran is ready to consider compromises to reach a nuclear deal with the US if the Americans are willing to discuss lifting sanctions, an Iranian minister has said.

US officials have repeatedly emphasised that Iran, not the US, is holding up progress in this protracted negotiating process.

On Saturday, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said President Donald Trump preferred a deal but it was "very hard to do" one with Iran.

But in an interview with the BBC in Tehran, Majid Takht-Ravanchi, Iran's deputy foreign minister, said the ball was "in America's court to prove that they want to do a deal", adding: "If they are sin-

cere, I'm sure we will be on the road to an agreement."

Trump has threatened strikes against Iran if a deal to curb its nuclear programme cannot be reached, with the US building up its military presence in the region.

This followed Iran's violent repression of nationwide anti-government protests last month, which human rights groups say killed many thousands of people.

The US and Iran held indirect talks in the Gulf state of Oman earlier in February, and Takht-Ravanchi, who confirmed a second round was set to take place in Geneva on Tuesday, said they had been "more or less in a positive direction but it is too early to judge". Trump has also described those

talks as positive.

The deputy foreign minister pointed to Tehran's offer to dilute its 60%-enriched uranium as evidence of its willingness to compromise.

At near weapons-grade level, it has deepened suspicion that the Islamic Republic is moving towards the development of a nuclear weapon, something it has always denied.

"We are ready to discuss this and other issues related to our programme if they are ready to talk about sanctions," Takht-Ravanchi told the BBC. He would not confirm whether this meant lifting all or some sanctions.

As to whether Iran would agree to ship its stockpile of more than 400kg of highly enriched uranium out of Iran, as

it did in the 2015 nuclear deal, Takht-Ravanchi said "it was too early to say what will happen in the course of negotiations".

Russia, which accepted 11,000kg of uranium enriched to a low level as part of the 2015 multilateral accord that Trump pulled out of three years later, has offered to accept this material again.

Other proposals previously reported in the media include an offer from Tehran to temporarily suspend nuclear enrichment.

One of Iran's main demands has been that talks should focus only on the nuclear file, and Takht-Ravanchi said: "Our understanding is that they have come to the conclusion that if you want to have a deal you have to focus on the nuclear issue."

Eleven killed in Israeli strikes on Gaza, rescuers say

Eleven Palestinians were killed in Israeli strikes on Gaza on Sunday morning, according to Palestinian civil defence and health officials.

Hamas and Israel have both repeatedly accused each other of breaching a ceasefire agreement.

The IDF said it had struck terror targets in response to ceasefire violations by Hamas, and that militants had been killed after emerging from a tunnel into the area of the strip controlled by the Israeli military.

The Palestinian Red Crescent said a strike on a tent encampment in northern Gaza killed at least six people, while another strike in the south of the strip killed five.

Both Israel and Hamas have accused each other of near-daily violations of a fragile ceasefire agreement since it took effect on 10 October.

The Hamas-run Gaza health ministry has said at least 600 people have been killed since the ceasefire went into effect.

At least 32 people were killed in a wave of Israeli air strikes across Gaza earlier this month, according to local officials.

The latest strikes came as the preparations continued for the implementation of the second phase of a US-brokered ceasefire agreement.

Last month, US President Donald Trump announced a new body called the Board of Peace, which has a mandate from the United Nations Security Council to establish an international force tasked with securing border areas in Gaza, and overseeing the disarmament of Hamas.

The board, which was due to

have its first meeting in Washington on 19 February, will also oversee the formation of a new technocratic Palestinian government in Gaza and post-war reconstruction.

Last week it was announced that Indonesia, a Board of Peace member, would deploy 8,000 soldiers to Gaza as part of phase two of the ceasefire agreement.

The war was triggered by the Hamas-led attack on southern Israel on 7 October 2023, in which about 1,200 people were killed and 251 others were taken hostage.

Israel responded to the attack by launching a military campaign in Gaza, during which more than 71,820 people have been killed, according to the territory's health ministry.

Elsewhere, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu travelled to Washington on Wednesday to meet US President Donald Trump, where they discussed ways to curb Iran's nuclear programme - which Tehran has always insisted is for purely civilian purposes.

Netanyahu was expected to press Trump to pursue an agreement that would halt Iran's uranium enrichment, as well as cutting its ballistic missile programme.

However, Trump later said there was "nothing definitive reached" and that talks with Iran would continue.

Iran's deputy foreign minister told BBC News further talks would take place in Geneva on Tuesday. An unnamed US official confirmed the date to Reuters news agency.



GOVERNMENT IMPLICATION:

German Galushchenko (left) was among several figures in Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's government implicated in alleged

Ukraine's ex-energy minister detained while attempting to leave country

Ukraine's former energy minister has been detained while attempting to leave the country, after being among officials named in a corruption scandal, authorities have said.

German Galushchenko, who was forced out of his government role last year, was reportedly apprehended while on a train leaving Ukraine. It is unclear where he intended to travel to.

He was one of several figures in Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's government implicated in alleged \$100m (£75m) embezzlement scheme in November.

The scandal threatened to engulf his administration, which swept to power before Russia's full-scale invasion on the promise to root out corruption.

Zelensky's chief-of-staff Andriy Yermak - his closest adviser throughout the war - resigned after his home was searched. Neither the president

nor Yermak have been accused of any wrongdoing.

The scandal has, however, increased pressure from the US to hold elections, which have been suspended since the start of the war in 2022 due to provisions in Ukraine's constitution.

The National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (Nabu) said in a statement on Sunday that its detectives had detained the former energy minister "while crossing the state border", as part of the Midas case.

It did not name Galushchenko explicitly, but he has been named by several prominent Ukrainian media organisations.

Galushchenko was briefly justice minister, a post he held when he was told by Zelensky to resign in November, having served as energy minister for three years prior to that. His successor, Svitlana Hrynychuk, also resigned after being implicated in the scandal.

Nabu gave no further details

on Galushchenko's detention, but said it would provide updates in due course.

Radio Free Europe reports that he was being transported to Kyiv for further questioning, after border guards were told to alert the authorities if he attempted to flee.

A massive anti-corruption probe, dubbed Operation Midas, was the culmination of 15 months of investigating, Nabu and Ukraine's other anti-corruption body, the Specialised Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (Sap), said.

They accused several people of orchestrating a scheme to embezzle money in Ukraine's energy sector, including at the national nuclear operator Energoatom.

Galushchenko was among those alleged to have systematically collected kickbacks from Enerhoatom contractors worth between 10% and 15% of contract values.

The anti-corruption bodies also said the huge sums had been

laundered in the scheme and published photographs of bags full of cash. The funds were then transferred outside Ukraine, including to Russia, Nabu said.

Galushchenko previously said he would defend himself against the accusations.

Former Deputy Prime Minister Oleksiy Chernyshov was arrested in November on suspicion of "illicit enrichment", having already been charged with abuse of office.

Timur Mindich, a businessman and a co-owner of Zelensky's former TV studio Kvarstal95, reportedly fled the country after he was flagged as a suspect.

That the figures were accused of enriching themselves from Ukraine's energy sector caused particular outrage domestically, as the scandal broke as Russia stepped up attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure ahead of a bitterly cold winter.

China confirms visa-free travel for UK and Canadian nationals

UK and Canadian nationals will be able to travel to mainland China for up to 30 days without a visa from 17 February.

China's foreign ministry said visa-free entry would be permitted for tourism, business or visits to family and friends, with the policy set to stay in effect initially until 31 December.

It follows Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer's official visit to China last month, where he and Chinese President Xi Jinping agreed travel rules would be relaxed.

Sir Keir said the agreement would make it easier for businesses to expand to China, though critics say Downing Street's push to reset relations with Beijing overlooks human rights and national security concerns.

Announcing the policy's start date on Sunday, China's foreign ministry said the scheme would "further facilitate people-to-people exchanges between China and other countries".

The move brings rules for UK and Canada passport holders

into line with 50 other countries, including France, Germany, Italy, Australia and Japan.

Hundreds of thousands of British people could potentially benefit from the change, with around 620,000 travelling to China in 2024, according to the Office for National Statistics.

During his official visit to China in January, Sir Keir said British businesses had been "crying out for ways to grow their footprints in China".

Xi and Sir Keir also agreed to deepen trade relations in services, healthcare, green technology and finance - though no sweeping trade free trade agreement was announced.

The visit, which was the first by a British prime minister since Theresa May in 2018, was criticised by some opposition figures.

Shortly before heading to China, Sir Keir's government approved plans for a major new Chinese embassy in central London, despite opponents claiming it could be used as a base for spying and pose security risks.

NEWS

Foreign

Motorbike raids on villages kill dozens in Nigeria

Gunmen on motorcycles have killed dozens of people in dawn raids across three villages in north-western Nigeria.

Armed men shot locals dead, set homes alight and abducted an unknown number of people in Niger State, Musa Saidu, head of the State Emergency Management Agency (Sema), said.

The attacks on Saturday morning occurred near the site of a suspected jihadist massacre earlier this month, in which more than 100 people were killed in a similar ambush.

Armed criminal gangs, known as bandits, have carried out attacks and kidnappings in Nigeria for years, mainly targeting those in the north-west - but reports of attacks in other parts of the country have risen sharply more recently.

Bandits swooped on the village of Tunga-Makeri early in the morning, before striking the nearby villages of Konkoso and Pissa, local officials said.

Police said six people were killed in one incident, and 20 more in the attacks on Konkoso and Pissa.

Officials confirmed at least 29 people had been killed as of Saturday, but Saidu said that death toll could rise.

The number of people abducted is also unknown because many residents fled their homes and ran into the nearby bush or neighbouring communities, he said.

"People are afraid because you can't tell which community is going to be next," he added.

A security report cited by AFP news agency said bandits came on 41 motorcycles, each carrying two or three men.

Abdullahi Rofia, a resident of neighbouring Agwara, told the BBC that many displaced people have taken shelter in his community, which was itself attacked two weeks ago.

"People are so traumatised, they no longer go to farm nor do they go to market," he said.

"The bandits are not interesting in stealing or looting - they are more interested in killing and terrorising locals."

Authorities have introduced emergency measures, including a restriction on late-night gatherings and a "partial curfew" that bans motorcycle taxis from operating after 20:00 local time (19:00 GMT).

Police confirmed that security teams have been deployed and rescue efforts are ongoing.

Nigeria's leaders are under pressure to curb violence, with jihadist groups active in the north-west and separatist insurgents based in the country's south-east.

The US launched Christmas Day strikes targeting Islamist militants in Nigeria's northern Sokoto state and President Donald Trump warned of further attacks "if they continue to kill Christians".

Many of the victims of jihadist violence are Muslim, according to organisations monitoring political violence in Nigeria.

A Nigerian official told the BBC last month that 200 suspected bandits had been killed in an operation in the central Kogi state.

It came after more than 250 children and staff were abducted from a Catholic school in Papiri, in one of the largest recent mass-kidnappings. Their release was later secured.



MOTORCYCLES ATTACKED VILLAGE:

Last month, armed bandits on motorcycles attacked villages in Kwara state, south of the most recent raid.

Rubio says US and Europe 'belong together' despite tensions

Marco Rubio has assured European leaders the US does not plan to abandon the transatlantic alliance, saying its destiny "will always be intertwined" with the continent's.

The US secretary of state told the Munich Security Conference: "We do not seek to separate, but to revitalise an old friendship and renew the greatest civilisation in human history."

He criticised European immigration, trade and climate policies, but the overall tenor of the closely-watched speech was markedly different to Vice-President JD Vance's at the same event last year, during which he scolded continental leaders.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said she was "very much reas-

sured" by Rubio's remarks.

Rubio, the Trump administration's most senior diplomat, said it was "neither our goal nor our wish" to end the transatlantic partnership, adding: "For us Americans, our home may be in the Western Hemisphere, but we will always be a child of Europe."

"And I am here today to leave it clear that America is charting the path for a new century of prosperity, and that once again we want to do it together with you, our cherished allies and our oldest friends."

Follow updates on this story However, he repeated several criticisms repeatedly levelled at Europe by the Trump administration, including describing immigration policies as a threat to civilisation, and saying a "climate cult" had tak-

en over economic policy.

On trade, he said Europe and the US had "made mistakes together" by adopting a "dogmatic vision of free and unfettered trade".

He repeated familiar calls from the US for Europe to invest more in defence, saying: "We want allies who can defend themselves so that no adversary will ever be tempted to test our collective strength."

In response, von der Leyen said: "[Rubio is] a good friend, a strong ally. And this was, for me, very reassuring to listen to him."

She continued: "We want a strong Europe. And this is, I think, the message of today."

Elsewhere in his half-hour address, Rubio said the system of international co-operation "must be rebuilt" and singled out the UN for particular crit-

icism, saying it had "played virtually no role" in resolving the Gaza and Ukraine conflicts.

He also said the organisation was "powerless to constrain the nuclear programme" of Tehran.

In recent weeks, US President Donald Trump has threatened strikes on Iran if a deal to curb its nuclear programme can be reached, as negotiations between the two intensify.

Outside the Munich Security Conference, a large crowd of protesters gathered to denounce the Iranian government

A second round of talks will be hosted by Oman in Geneva next week, the Swiss foreign ministry said on Saturday.

Outside the conference, an estimated 200,000 protesters held a rally against the Iranian government, local police report.

SA: Cape Town gears for army deployment as police raid gang strongholds

Western Cape police are preparing to receive South African National Defence Force members deployed to combat gang violence, following President Cyril Ramaphosa's announcement of military intervention in crime hotspots.

Police Commissioner Them-bisile Patekile confirmed discussions on troop numbers and timing are ongoing, with soldiers expected to focus on high-risk areas.

While welcoming the deployment, Patekile emphasized it is "not going to be a permanent solution," stressing the need to sustain reductions after stabilization.

Community calls for supporting role

Local crime fighters want the military to play a supportive role, allowing the Police Anti-Gang Unit to lead directly against organized gangsterism.

The Cape Flats Safety Forum advocates for this approach to

ensure effective, targeted operations.

Operation targets hotspots The deployment follows police raids in Mitchell's Plain, a day after Ramaphosa's SONA address highlighting criminal networks undermining state authority.

Community policing forums cautiously support the move but urge long-term social interventions and capacitation of detectives, courts, and prosecutors to achieve lasting change.



CYRIL RAMAPHOSA

Russia killed opposition leader Alexei Navalny using dart frog toxin, UK says

Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny was killed using a poison developed from a dart frog toxin, the UK and European allies have said.

Two years on from the death of Navalny at a Siberian penal colony, Britain and its allies have blamed the Kremlin following analysis of material samples found on his body.

Speaking from the Munich Security Conference, Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper said "only the Russian government had the means, motive and opportunity" to use the poison while Navalny was imprisoned in Russia.

According to Tass news agency Moscow has dismissed the finding as "an information campaign", but Cooper said there is no explanation for the toxin, called epibatidine, being found.

While Cooper announced the findings, a joint statement

was issued by the UK, Sweden, France, Germany and the Netherlands.

Cooper met with Navalny's widow Yulia Navalnaya at the conference this weekend.

"Russia saw Navalny as a threat," Cooper said at the event.

"By using this form of poison the Russian state demonstrated the despicable tools it has at its disposal and the overwhelming fear it has of political opposition," she added.

In the statement the allies said: "Only the Russian state had the means, motive and opportunity to deploy this lethal toxin to target Navalny during his imprisonment in a Russian penal colony in Siberia, and we hold it responsible for his death."

"Epibatidine can be found naturally in dart frogs in the wild in South America. Dart frogs in captivity do not pro-

duce this toxin and it is not found naturally in Russia.

"There is no innocent explanation for its presence in Navalny's body."

The Foreign Office said the UK has informed the Organisation on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons of Russia's alleged breach of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Praising Navalny's "huge courage", UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer said "his determination to expose the truth has left an enduring legacy".

"I am doing whatever it takes to defend our people, our values and our way of life from the threat of Russia and Putin's murderous intent," he added.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot also said his country "pays tribute" to Navalny, who he suggested was "killed for his fight in favour of

a free and democratic Russia".

Navalny - an anti-corruption campaigner and Russia's most vociferous opposition leader - died suddenly in jail on 16 February 2024 at the age of 47.

In 2020 he was poisoned with a Novichok nerve agent. He underwent treatment in Germany, and was arrested at the airport upon his return to Russia.

'Extremely rare' toxin Epibatidine, the toxin the UK and its European allies have said was used to kill Alexei Navalny, was first derived from a group of poison dart frogs native to northern South America.

Though epibatidine has previously been investigated as a pain killer and for relief from painful inflammatory conditions of the lungs, it has been deemed too toxic to use clinically.

Feature

ECONOMY

How will Nigeria be positioned in 20 Years from now?

GRACE IJEOMA UMEH

Have you ever ruminated on where Nigeria would be in 20 years time, economically? With market indices hitting the roof dismally every market day, what hope waits for the "common man," an alias for the suffering masses?

While the future may look not so positive, fact finding however shows Nigeria's economic development is expected to continue growing, with a projected GDP growth of 4.1% in 2026, driven by improved productivity, stronger business activity, and rising private investment.

SOMEONE MAY HEAVE A SIGH OF RELIEF!

The country's foreign-exchange reserves have climbed to \$46.7 billion, the highest since 2018, and diaspora remittances are averaging around \$600 million monthly, economic reports say.

The government has unveiled an economic reform and investment mobilisation strategy aimed at accelerating growth, creating jobs, and positioning the country on a path to a \$1 trillion economy. Priority sectors identified to drive growth include energy and gas-based industrialisation, agribusiness, manufacturing, housing, healthcare, digital services, creative industries, logistics, and solid minerals.

You may still need to hold your breath...

However, there are also risks and challenges, such as insecurity, weak oil revenues, and election-year fiscal pressures, which could threaten recent inflation gains as the 2027 elections draw near.

The country's debt service obligations are expected to decline by about 4%, resulting in savings of about N500 billion, which could free up fiscal space for capital projects, infrastructure development, and social programs.

Some key factors shaping Nigeria's economy in 2026 include:

- Election-driven spending and its inflationary impact
- Moderate economic growth
- Implementation of tax reforms
- Accelerating adoption of artificial intelligence
- Expansion of digital and social commerce

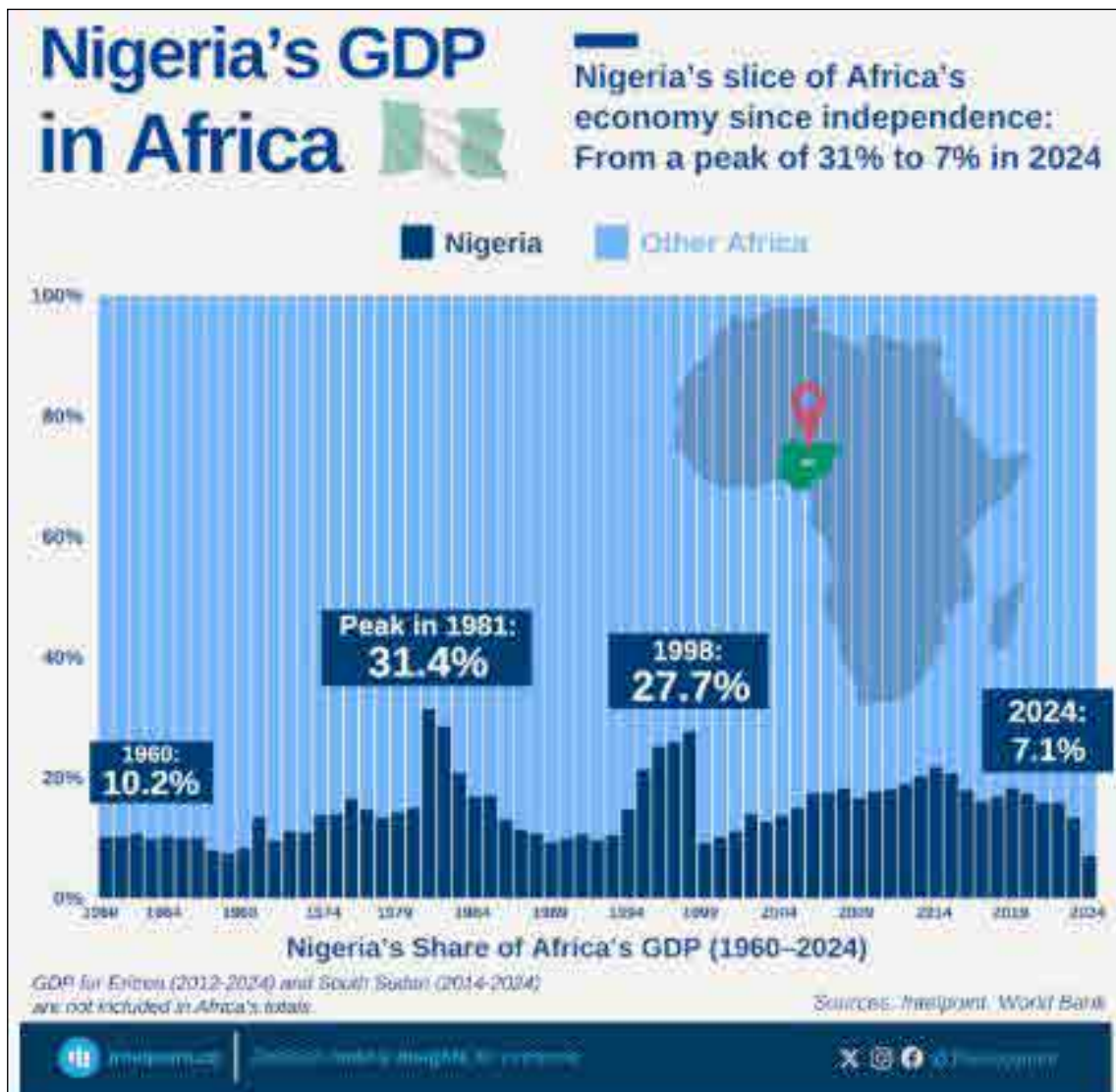
In 20 years therefore, Nigeria is expected to be a more diversified and growing economy, with a projected GDP of \$6.4 trillion by 2050, ranking ninth globally. That is awesome, putting it mildly!

The country's growth will be driven by various sectors, including:

- Agriculture: With potential export revenues of \$59 billion by 2030, similar to Brazil's
- Petroleum: With increased domestic refining capacity and petrochemical industries
- Retail and ICT: Driven by consumer spending and rapid urbanization
- Services: Including finance, information, and communication technology

The government has set ambitious targets, including:

- Achieving 7% annual economic



- growth by 2027
- Reducing extreme poverty by 50% by 2030
- Creating 10 million new jobs by 2030

HOWEVER, CHALLENGES REMAIN, SUCH AS:

- Managing oil revenue volatility
- Addressing infrastructure gaps
- Improving fiscal discipline and institutional capacity

The African Development Bank and World Bank have committed to supporting Nigeria's development, with investments in sustainable infrastructure, agriculture, and human capital.

Nigeria's growth in the next 20 years is expected to be driven by several key sectors. Here are some of the top contributors:

KEY SECTORS

1. Agriculture: With crop production leading the charge, agriculture remains the backbone of Nigeria's economy, accounting for over 31% of GDP. The sector is expected to continue growing, driven by initiatives to improve productivity and increase exports¹

2. Telecommunications and Information Services: This sector is a key driver of the digital economy, contributing 7.67% to GDP and recording a strong real growth of 5.78%.

With Nigeria's low mobile data penetration, there's room for significant growth in mobile data services.

3. Services: The services sector, includ-

ing finance, trade, and hospitality, is expected to continue dominating Nigeria's economy, accounting for over 53% of GDP. Growth will be driven by urbanization, technological advancements, and increasing demand for digital services.

4. Manufacturing: The manufacturing sector is poised for growth, driven by investments in infrastructure, energy, and technology. Nigeria's large market and growing middle class make it an attractive destination for industrial development.

5. E-commerce and Digital Economy: Nigeria's e-commerce sector is projected to expand from \$6.4 billion in 2024 to \$10 billion by 2029, driven by rising internet penetration and a young, tech-savvy population.

6. Energy and Renewable Energy: Nigeria's energy sector is expected to grow, driven by investments in renewable energy and efforts to increase power generation capacity.

7. Healthcare and Pharmaceuticals: The healthcare sector is expected to grow, driven by increasing demand for healthcare services and investments in pharmaceutical manufacturing.

These sectors are expected to drive Nigeria's growth in the next 20 years, but challenges such as infrastructure gaps, insecurity, and regulatory constraints need to be addressed.

There are key economic growth challenges that need to be put on the front burner, including:

- Insecurity: Persistent insecurity is undermining economic activity, affecting agriculture, trade,

and foreign direct investment

- Oil Price Volatility: Oil prices are projected to hover below \$60 per barrel, creating headwinds for revenue generation and fiscal balance.

- Fiscal Weakness: Rising debt-service obligations, estimated at over N15 trillion in the 2026 budget, are constraining fiscal space and undermining budget execution

- Inflation and Interest Rates: High inflation and interest rates are affecting consumer affordability and investment

- Infrastructure Deficits: Inadequate infrastructure, including power and transportation, is hindering economic growth.

- Election-Year Fiscal Pressures: Election-related spending could threaten recent inflation gains and undermine fiscal discipline

These challenges highlight the need for Nigeria to diversify its economy, improve security, and implement effective fiscal and monetary policies.

The Nigerian government is taking a multi-faceted approach to address insecurity and improve fiscal discipline. Here are some key measures:

ADDRESSING INSECURITY

- Increased Funding: The 2026 budget allocates N5.41 trillion to defence and security, focusing on modernizing the armed forces, strengthening intelligence-led policing, and improving border security.

- New Counterterrorism Doctrine: The government has introduced a new national counterterrorism doctrine, aiming to unify command, intelligence, and community stability.

- Tough Stance on Terrorism: President Bola Tinubu has declared that any armed group operating outside state authority will be regarded as terrorists, including financiers, informants, and political protectors.

- Security Agency Reforms: The government is assessing and reforming security agencies, with a focus on training and capacity building

IMPROVING FISCAL DISCIPLINE

- Digitization of Revenue Collection: The government is implementing end-to-end digitization of revenue collection, standardized e-collections, and real-time dashboards to block leakages.

- Revenue Targeting: Government-owned enterprises are required to meet revenue targets, with performance evaluations tied to institutional scorecards.

- Debt Management: The government aims to reduce debt service obligations and improve fiscal sustainability.

- Tax Reforms: The government is implementing tax reforms, including the use of digital revenue systems and improved compliance enforcement.

These measures aim to improve security, increase revenue, and promote fiscal discipline in Nigeria.

The Nigerian government expects several specific outcomes from the increased security funding of N5.41 trillion in the 2026 budget. These outcomes include:

- **Improved Military Capabilities:** Boosting military capabilities with better equipment and personnel to tackle security threats effectively.

- **Enhanced Intelligence-Led Policing:** Strengthening intelligence-led policing to combat terrorism, banditry, and other violent crimes.

- **Strengthened Border Security:** Improving border security through technology-driven surveillance to prevent cross-border crimes.

- **Community-Based Peacebuilding:** Implementing community-based peacebuilding and conflict-prevention initiatives to address local grievances and reduce conflict drivers.

- ***Unified Security Efforts*:** Unifying security efforts against unauthorized armed groups, including bandits, militias, and terrorists.

- ***Measurable Security Outcomes*:** Ensuring that security spending translates into tangible safety and security results for citizens.

These outcomes aim to address Nigeria's insecurity challenges, including terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, and violent crimes, and promote economic growth and social cohesion.

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13 X 4	369,500	397,213	295,600	317,770	206,938	222,458	443,500	476,763	369,550	397,266
10 X 4	340,000	365,500	273,500	294,013	177,400	190,705	370,000	397,750	295,600	317,770
HALF PAGE	295,600	317,770	236,500	254,238	147,800	158,885	340,000	365,500	273,450	293,959
10 X 3	221,700	238,328	147,800	158,885	118,300	127,173	266,000	285,950	251,300	270,148
13 X2	206,900	222,418	133,000	142,925	103,500	111,263	221,800	238,435	147,810	158,896
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FP 5X2	81,100	87,183	97,300	104,598	5 X 2	51,950	55,846	42,120	45,279		
FP 4X2	73,000	78,475	80,700	86,753	4 X 2	45,260	48,655	34,400	36,980		
FP 3X2	64,870	69,735	73,000	78,475	3 X 2	30,900	33,218	26,600	28,595		
FP 2X2	59,000	63,425	64,900	69,768	2 X 2	18,680	20,081	15,600	16,770		
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Sports

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NPFL 26: Bendel Insurance FC secure away point at Bayelsa Utd



BENDEL INSURANCE

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

Bendel Insurance Football Club, has continued to maintain maintain stability and resilience as they on e again proved difficult for opponents to break at home or away since Kennedy Boboye took charge in October last year.

On Sunday evening in Yena-go, the Benin Arsenal fought with everything to ensure a goalless stalemate at the Samson Siasia Stadium, the fortress of Bayelsa Utd in the match day 26 of Nigeria Premier Football League.

The Benin Arsenal and Bayelsa United FC also shared the spoils when they met in their first round encounter in 2025. The game ended, 1-1 in Benin

Going into the match day 26 clash,, Bayelsa United FC occupied 15th, position while Bendel Insurance FC held on to 6th position which they still maintained now with 38 points.

Bendel Insurance will be on the road again for their double away clash of the second round of the current season as they travel to Lafia to face title contenders Nasarawa Utd in the match day 27 on Sunday, February 22.



ENUGU RANGERS

Under-14 League: Fortune FA stay perfect as week 4 delivers drama

The Nathaniel Idowu-Ajgunle Under-14 Football League produced another gripping weekend in Week 4, as Fortune FA tightened their grip at the summit.

Fortune FA stayed top without kicking a ball, claiming a walkover against Best of Best International FA to preserve their flawless record and 12 maximum points.

Ajgunle United Sporting Club and Pure Talents Football Academy battled to a 1-1 draw in the opening fixture.

Osita Isaac struck in the fifth minute for Ajgunle United, before Chukwu Gozie levelled in the 35th minute for Pure Talents.

Goalkeeper, Anyanwu Divine, earned Man of the Match for a commanding display between the posts.

Sharp Talent FA swept aside Moree Wins Foundation FA 4-0 in the second match.

Sikiru Seyi scored twice, while Ayelagbe Yunus and Odeyemi Khalid added a goal each. Lawal Lekan was named Man of the Match.

Divinely Blessed FA and Young 11 FA shared the spoils in a 1-1 draw.

Amadu Daniel scored in the fourth minute for Divinely Blessed, but Goodnews Uwaifo equalised in the 38th minute

and claimed Man of the Match.

Strong Dove FA defeated Coal City FA 2-0, with Mudgbuo Goodluck scoring both goals.

Jimoh Sheriff was recognised as Man of the Match for his outstanding contribution.

Bright Future FA edged Michael May FA 2-1 in a dramatic encounter, despite their captain's dismissal for dissent.

Gavor Marvellous put Michael May ahead, but Olawale Favour struck twice to seal victory and secure Man of the Match honours.



UNDER-14 LEAGUE

betPawa launches N28m nationwide 1v1 street football challenge

Nigeria's online betting firm, betPawa Nigeria, has launched a nationwide one-on-one football contest to spotlight street talent and reward emerging players.

The Country Manager of Choplife Gaming, betPawa, Mr Ezekiel Omon, revealed on Sunday in Lagos that the initiative, tagged betPawa1v1, celebrates Nigeria's vibrant grassroots football culture.

"The competition will provide a platform for everyday ballers who often go unnoticed.

"Football is deeply rooted in Nigerian youth culture. betP-

awa1v1 gives everyday ballers the spotlight and backs talent with real rewards," he said.

He said the organisers would blend football, music and creator culture, with weekly stand-out performances featured online to boost players' visibility.

"The overall prize pool stands at N28 million, with the winner receiving N10 million, making it one of the biggest social-led football skill contests nationwide," Omon stated.

Hosted by football content creator Mobike and amplified by music star Tekno, the competition will produce 32 finalists.

"The finalists will compete at a live grand finale under a formal framework to ensure fairness, safety and transparency," he said.

Entries opened nationwide on Saturday, requiring participants to post short 1v1 videos on TikTok or Instagram using #betPawa1v1 and tagging official handles.

Omon said finalists would be unveiled in stages ahead of the live knockout tournament.

The betPawa is among Africa's fastest-growing sports betting and gaming brands, operating across several regulated markets on the continent.

Enugu Rangers pip Wikki Tourists 2-0 in Enugu

Rangers International FC of Enugu on Sunday defeated visiting Wikki Tourists of Bauchi by 2-0 in the Nigerian Premier Football League 2025/26 season.

The encounter played at the Nnamdi Azikiwe Stadium Enugu started with both teams showing their determination to win.

The free-flowing Wikki boys made serious incursions into Rangers 18-yard box at the beginning of the match but could not penetrate the flying Antelopes back.

However, the home team broke the deadlock in the 15th minute when Wisdom Ebirim put Rangers ahead.

In the 35th minutes of play veteran striker Godwin Obaje made it two for Rangers to end the match 2-0 in favour the home team at half time.

In the second half the visitors took the initiative, especially in the midfield forcing the home team to their own half

Rangers also created some half chances but could not increase the tally.

In a post match interview, the Acting Coach of Wikki Tourist, Bashir Sale lamented the mistake of his boys

"Scoring was our problem today; we came to win but the boys were not clinical enough.

"We will work on our play ahead of next match," he said.

Fidelis Illechukwu in a post match interview hailed his players for playing to instructions.

"Everybody wants to win league but at the end the better team won.

"We are still within reach to win the NPFL," he said.

The win now takes Rangers to 43 points after 43 games

NPFL: Match Day 26 Results

These are the results of Match Day 26 fixtures in the 2025/2026 Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL) played on Sunday:

Shooting Stars FC 4-2 Warri Wolves FC

Enyimba International FC 0-1 Ikorodu City FC

Enugu Rangers International FC 2-0 Wikki Tourists FC

Katsina United FC 1-0 Nasarawa United FC

Bayelsa United FC 0-0 Bendel Insurance FC

Kwara united FC 1-1 Kano Pillars FC

Remo Stars FC 1-1 Abia Warriors FC

El-Kanemi Warriors FC 1-0 Plateau United FC

On Feb.14 , Barau FC beat Khun khalifat FC,1-0

Outstanding Match Day 26 fixtures , to be played on Feb.19 ; Niger Tornadoes FC Vs Rivers United FC.

Coach vows Remo Stars will avoid relegation

Remo Stars assistant coach, Sulaiman Folarin, has insisted the club will not be relegated from the 2025/2026 Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL) season.

Folarin, standing in as head coach, spoke on Sunday after a 1-1 draw against Abia Warriors at the Ondo State Sports

Complex, Akure.

Both sides played out a goalless first half, with Remo Stars squandering several clear scoring opportunities before the interval.

Remo Stars were ordered to move some home fixtures away from Ikenne, in addition to a financial sanction.

Abia Warriors took the lead 11 minutes into the second half through Chukwuemeka Obioma, stunning the hosts.

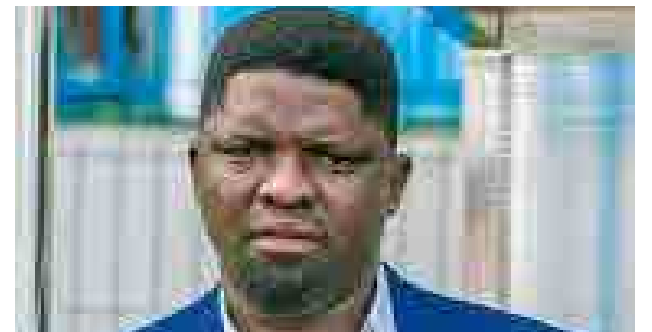
Remo Stars responded after sustained pressure, with Samson Olasupo converting to earn the home side a share of the points.

Folarin admitted the outcome fell short of expectations, as the

team had targeted maximum points to revive their campaign.

"We have not been winning in the last five or six matches. We thought we would win this match, but we could not.

"However, we will take the positives until we get it right. I know we will get it right and we will not be relegated.



Nigeria's World Cup lifeline: FIFA verdict looms

DOUGLAS BAYE-OSAGIE

The gossip, whistling, half-truths, and boasting all end today, Monday, February 16, 2026 as the Federation of International Football Association (FIFA) gives a final verdict on Nigeria's petition against the Democratic Republic of Congo's (DRC) player eligibility in the African playoffs against Nigeria in November 2025 for a World Cup spot.

On November 16, 2025, DR Congo beat Nigeria on penalties to qualify for the inter-confederation playoffs in March. They haven't been to the World Cup since 1974, and a victory against Nigeria reawakened the hopes of one of the former giants of African football. Nigerian fans and players swallowed the penalty defeat painfully, but Nigerian football authorities and sports officials sought technicalities, keeping hopes alive with a petition claiming DR Congo fielded players with dual citizenship, violating Congolese laws. The probe focuses on the claim that nine players switched nationalities without completing the legal and administrative process.

According to the Nigeria Football Federation General Secretary, Dr. Muhammad Sanusi, FIFA approved the players based on documentation and assurances provided by the DR Congo federation, as FIFA regulations allow players to represent a country if they hold a valid passport. However, Nigeria's complaint alleges that the clearance process itself may have been fraudulent, given potential conflicts with Congolese nationality laws. "It is not FIFA's duty to know the domestic laws of every country," Sanusi added. "That is why we formally drew FIFA's attention to the issue, and we are now awaiting their verdict."

Will history favour Nigeria? Will FIFA consider Nigeria's pedigree? Is someone pushing Nigeria's agenda at FIFA? Can Nigeria win two petitions in one World Cup qualification series, recalling the 3-point deduction from South Africa in the group stage for fielding an ineligible player against Lesotho? These questions have been

lingering since November.

The calm in the DR Congo camp is telling. They have murmured much but said little. The evidence from Nigeria is compelling. Despite hoping for a favorable judgment, there's a sense of guilt among DR Congo officials. The players involved haven't dropped or renounced foreign passports, and DR Congo's constitution hasn't been amended to allow sports citizenship.

DR Congo's football federation responded in December to Nigeria's petition, saying, "If you can't win on the pitch, don't try to win from the back door. The World Cup has to be played with dignity and confidence. Not with lawyers' tricks. Bring it." Was that an admission of guilt or a show of strength to save face?

Nigeria has kept the issue in the news. Football fans across Africa saw Nigerian sports creators online pushing Nigeria's case against DR Congo for the World Cup for the world to take notice. Though somewhat annoying, the consistent noise and shouts of cheating kept the news in the faces of FIFA. When you keep screaming that someone is a thief, there is a possibility of an arrest or a thorough scrutiny to really ascertain if the person is guilty or not. Kudos to those Nigerians who didn't allow a day pass without reminding FIFA that a meat has been stolen from the Nigerian pot of soup.

Like we say in our local parlance, "evidence choke." The law doesn't yield to sentiment. If the facts are against you, you can't run from the law when found guilty. You don't cheat your way to the top without being found out. Nigeria's case is watertight, and FIFA will either change their rules or stick to them, ensuring players are properly cleared when switching nationalities.

After the African Cup of Nations in January, the world again took notice of Nigeria's absence in the World Cup, but the FIFA verdict hung over the discussions. Nigeria's dominant display in the AFCON might add a soft spot to their case. Against four teams who qualified from the African Zone



SUPER EAGLES



IBRAHIM GUSAU, NFF PRESIDENT

to the World Cup, the Super Eagles in a dominant style won 3 games, drew none, and lost on penalties to Morocco, keeping 3 clean sheets in 4 games.

The Super Eagles players have been making headlines in Europe. Ademola Lookman's move to Atletico Madrid has reignited passion in African

superstar football, with a deal worth £30.3m.

Lookman has raised the profile of African football in Spain again since the exit of Cameroonian Samuel Eto'o, who conquered Spanish and European Club football with the mighty FC Barcelona in the 2000s. Also, Sevilla duo

Akor Adams and Ejuke keep making headlines weekly.

Victor Osimhen's performance has brought respect to Turkish football with Galatasaray FC, and he is the kind of superstar FIFA makes money from in the World Cup.

A talented generation of Super Eagles players might miss the World Cup. Given their ages, it is uncertain they'll play in 2030 if they don't make it in 2026. Is there a lifeline today to reverse November's misfortune? That will be a huge relief to the set of players who have played for almost a decade without a World Cup participation.

I believe DR Congo won't match Nigeria's World Cup performance. They might have deserved their place, but Nigeria has a higher market value. If FIFA rules in Congo's favour, they'll say they worked for it, but if it goes against them, Nigeria will say they stopped a cheat. Either way, it will end the suspense over Africa's most populous nation's World Cup qualification and earn Africa's last slot for a playoff game to be Africa's 10th country in the summer soccer fiesta.

Onuachu hits 16 in Turkey; Ajibade fires PSG into final

Nigeria forward Paul Onuachu scored his 16th Turkish Super Lig goal of the season, but Trabzonspor were beaten 3-2 by Fenerbahce.

The 30-year-old headed in late in the first half to underline his aerial strength, taking his tally to 16 league goals despite missing four weeks earlier in the campaign due to international duty.

Trabzonspor led early after fellow Nigerian Chibuike Nwaiwu set up Ernest Muci, but Fenerbahce responded through Anderson Talisca, Kerem Akturkoglu and Marco Asensio to secure the points.

Onuachu's goal means he remains among the leading scorers in Turkey this season, continuing the form that

previously saw him finish as top scorer in Belgium during the 2020-21 campaign.

In France, Rasheedat Ajibade was on target as Paris Saint-Germain Féminine beat Paris FC 3-0 to reach the final of the Coupe LFFP.

After a goalless first half in the Paris derby, Romée Leuchter opened the scoring shortly after the restart before Merveille Kanjinga doubled the advantage.

Ajibade added a third in the 89th minute, finishing calmly from the edge of the area to seal PSG's progression.

The Super Falcons captain's late strike ensured a comfortable victory and keeps PSG on course for silverware in the competition's inaugural edition



PAUL ONUACHU

Okonkwo edges closer to Super Eagles debut

Nigerian-born ex-England youth international and Wrexham FC number one goalkeeper, Arthur Okonkwo, guided his club into English FA Cup 5th round with another superlative clean sheet in a 1-goal defeat of fellow Championship, Ipswich Town FC, at the Racecourse Ground on Saturday.

Since joining Wrexham FC, first on loan and later permanently in June 2024, the 22-year-old former Arsenal shot-stopper has kept an impressive 45 clean sheets in a total of 109 appearances.

Okonkwo is now set for an overdue invitation to the Super Eagles for his possible debut, following NFF's confirmation that his paperwork is about ready.

His invitation is expected not only to raise the competition bar for the

Super Eagles' goalposts ahead of the World Cup and the next Nations Cup qualifiers but may possibly spell the doom for some present fringe goalkeepers of the team.



ARTHUR OKONKWO

FEATURE

Okpebholo's security and infrastructure drive sets a new pace for Edo

GODSWILL INEGBE

When Governor Monday Okpebholo assumed office in November 2024, he inherited a state weighed down by insecurity and deteriorating infrastructure. Kidnappings, cult clashes, armed robbery and communal unrest had eroded public confidence.

Farmlands were deserted. Highways became perilous routes. Economic activity slowed under the weight of fear.

Today, that narrative is gradually changing. Security—one of the five cardinal pillars of the administration's SHINE Agenda—has become the fulcrum upon which Edo's developmental strides now rest.

For Governor Okpebholo, peace is not merely a campaign pledge; it is the bedrock of sustainable growth.

REBUILDING THE SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

The governor's first priority was a comprehensive overhaul of Edo's security framework through collaboration, legislative backing and technology-driven reforms.

Recognising that modern threats demand coordinated responses, the administration strengthened synergy among federal and state security agencies.

Central to this effort is Operation Flush Out Kidnappers and Cultists, launched in July 2025. This multi-agency task force—comprising the Nigerian Police, Nigerian Army, Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, local hunters and vigilante groups—operates across all 18 local government areas. Its mandate is clear: dismantle criminal networks, particularly those entrenched in forests and rural enclaves.

Complementing this initiative is Operation Rescue, established at the inception of the administration. Designed for rapid response and intelligence-led interventions, it has earned commendation from members of the National Assembly for its coordination and measurable impact in curbing violent crime.

The Public Safety Response Team further strengthens surveillance in urban centres, ensuring faster response times and a visible enforcement presence.

Collectively, these operations have resulted in the arrest of high-profile suspects, successful rescue missions and a noticeable decline in cult-related violence.

PROFESSIONALISING THE EDO STATE SECURITY CORPS

A major turning point has been the



Governor Monday Okpebholo

restructuring of the Edo State Security Corps. Previously criticised for poor training, weak coordination and politicization, the corps has undergone comprehensive reform aimed at professionalism and neutrality.

In June 2025, over 1,470 personnel received intensive training facilitated by the Nigerian Army. The programme enhanced tactical capacity, discipline and intelligence-gathering skills.

For the first time in the state's history, plans are underway to place members on structured monthly salaries, alongside deliberate steps to enrol them in a health insurance scheme. These morale-boosting initiatives are designed to reposition the corps as a dependable partner to formal security agencies.

Today, the revitalised corps plays a critical role in community policing, serving as a bridge between citizens and law enforcement authorities.

INVESTING IN MOBILITY AND SMART POLICING

Understanding that effective security requires both manpower and modern tools, the administration has invested significantly in logistics and mobility. In March 2025, new patrol

vehicles were distributed to security agencies to enhance highway surveillance and urban patrols. Six months later, 300 motorbikes were deployed to operatives and vigilantes, improving access to difficult terrains such as forests and riverine communities where criminals often seek refuge.

Surveillance infrastructure is also expanding. The state is developing a Smart Command and Control Centre to serve as a hub for incident monitoring and intelligence coordination, signalling Edo's transition towards smart policing.

The ongoing Illegal Arms Mop-Up Exercise has further curtailed the tools of violence, with thousands of weapons surrendered or recovered through intelligence-led operations.

STRENGTHENING LEGAL DETERRENCE

Governor Okpebholo's approach combines operational action with firm legal deterrence.

Under his leadership, the Edo State House of Assembly amended the Kidnapping Prohibition Law to prescribe capital punishment for convicted kidnapers. The governor's public declaration of readiness to sign death warrants underscores his administration's zero-tolerance stance on violent

crime.

Additionally, the demolition and confiscation of properties linked to criminal activity have targeted the financial backbone of organised crime. By ensuring that crime does not yield economic benefit, the administration has introduced a powerful deterrent.

Plans are also underway to regulate scavengers and scrap dealers—sectors previously associated with vandalism and theft of public infrastructure. The proposed framework will formalise operations and strengthen monitoring mechanisms.

The administration has also lifted the ban on the Edo State Vigilante Network, integrating it into the broader security architecture. Training and equipping these local operatives have strengthened frontline defence in rural communities, reducing farm invasions, kidnappings and other forms of criminality.

Outstanding members are being considered for absorption into the civil service, ensuring continuity and professionalism in grassroots policing. Collaboration with federal security agencies has deepened, extending to the protection of strategic national assets, including petroleum pipelines.

INFRASTRUCTURE AS ECONOMIC CATALYST

Beyond security, Governor Okpebholo has prioritised infrastructure as a catalyst for economic revival.

The rehabilitation of failed sections of the Auchi-Igarra-Aiyetoro-Unemu-Nekhwa-Aiyegunle-Ikpeshi-Ibillo-Ekor-Ikiran-Oke corridor—spanning 9.61 kilometres—represents a strategic intervention aimed at reconnecting communities and stimulating commerce in Edo North Senatorial District.

At the flag-off ceremony, the governor reiterated his commitment to durable road construction that unlocks agrarian belts and improves market access.

He aligned these efforts with the Renewed Hope Agenda of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, emphasising synergy between state and federal development priorities.

Arguably the most visible infrastructural milestone of the administration is the ongoing construction of a multi-billion-naira flyover in Edo South Senatorial District, the first of its kind in the state. Upon completion, it is expected to ease traffic congestion, enhance mobility and transform the urban landscape.

Education, healthcare and rural road expansion have also received increased budgetary allocations, reflecting a holistic and forward-looking development strategy.

A STATE REGAINING CONFIDENCE

Across Edo, stakeholders point to a renewed sense of safety and economic optimism. Farmers are returning to their fields. Traders operate with fewer disruptions. Travellers move with greater confidence.

Although challenges remain, Edo's evolving security model is increasingly viewed as a template for coordinated, intelligence-driven governance.

Governor Okpebholo's vision is clear: Edo must not only function—it must function in a way that commands respect across the region and beyond.

By combining decisive enforcement with community engagement, legal reform with welfare incentives, and infrastructure development with innovation, the administration has shifted the state from reactive crisis management to proactive stability-building.

As the governor often affirms, when people feel safe, society thrives again. In today's Edo, that progress is becoming visible—in safer streets, stronger institutions and renewed public confidence.

Godswill Inegbe is the Special Adviser to Governor Monday Okpebholo on Communication, Strategy and Media Projects.