

# IGP expands GBV desk offices to police divisions

The Inspector-General of Police (IGP), Kayode Adeolu Egbetokun has approved the expansion of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) desk offices to all police divisions across Nigeria.

This move is aimed at strengthening the fight against gender-based violence, improving access to justice, and ensuring prompt and professional handling of cases.

Previously, GBV desk offices were only available at zonal and state commands, making it difficult for many victims to access police support.

With this expansion, victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and other forms of GBV will be able to report cases at their local police divisions, ensuring quicker response times and better protection.

The Nigeria Police Force

believes that by decentralizing these specialized units, more survivors will feel encouraged to seek justice, knowing they will receive professional and compassionate handling of their cases, it was gathered.

As part of this initiative, the IGP has directed the appointment of dedicated officers to serve as GBV desk officers in every police division.

These officers will under-

go extensive training to equip them with the necessary skills to handle cases with sensitivity, professionalism, and a deep understanding of the complexities surrounding gender-based violence.

Their training will include victim support techniques, legal frameworks, investigative methods, and collaboration with relevant agencies and civil society organizations.

In addition to their primary role, these GBV desk officers will also oversee the Juvenile, Women, and Children (JWC) sections within their respective divisions.

This integration is designed to provide a more holistic approach to addressing cases involving vulnerable groups, ensuring that children, women, and survivors of violence receive the support and justice they deserve.

The police will also collab-

orate with NGOs, legal aid organizations, and social services to provide additional resources such as counseling, shelter, and rehabilitation for survivors.

This initiative reflects the Nigeria Police Force's renewed commitment to safeguarding human rights and strengthening public trust in law enforcement.

By expanding the reach of

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**FG acquired N32bn weapons, others for military in 2024 —Report**

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## Alleged ₦96bn loot: EFCC 'll prosecute impeached Edo LG chairmen —Gov

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, has revealed that the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) will prosecute some of the recently impeached Local Government chairmen found guilty of looting public funds totaling over N96 billion.

The governor made this announcement over the weekend while receiving the report of the Administrative Panel of En-

quiry, which was set up on December 18, 2024, to investigate the financial dealings of the 18 impeached Local Government Chairmen between September 4, 2023, and November 2024.

The report uncovered large-scale corruption, implicating not only the removed chairmen but also former Edo State Governor Godwin Obaseki, leaders of the factional Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), and other political figures.

Governor Okpebholo expressed deep concern over the findings and assured that his administration would ensure that those responsible are held accountable.

He emphasized that the days of financial recklessness and lack of transparency in public office were over, stressing that Nigerians must begin demanding accountability from their leaders.

The governor criticized the past administration for misman-

aging state resources, stating that the former government took Edo people for granted and diverted public funds for personal gains.

He thanked President Bola Ahmed Tinubu for his support, stating that the progress being witnessed in Edo today would not have been possible without federal backing.

He also accused the PDP of looting Local Government treasuries without consequences and vowed that this time, things

would be different.

He assured that those found guilty would be made to repay stolen funds and that he would personally submit the report to the EFCC for immediate prosecution.

Chairman of the panel, Barrister Solomon Imohiosen, while submitting the report,

detailed the scale of financial misconduct uncovered through forensic investigations.

According to the findings, a total of N95,080,676,687.86 was received by the 18 Local Government Areas from the Joint Allocation Account Committee (JAAC)

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## ...approves promotion of 8,476 teachers in Edo

As part of his first 100 days in office, Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo has approved the long-awaited promotion of 8,476 primary and junior secondary school teachers across the 18 Local Government Areas of the State

Executive Chairman of Edo State Universal Basic Education Board (Edo-SUBEB), Barr. Mrs. Onomen Goodness Briggs who disclosed this in Benin City, emphasized the governor's commitment to recognizing teachers' hard work and improving education quality.

According to her, "By directing the release of these promotion letters, Governor Okpebholo is not only acknowledging their dedication, but also taking a firm step towards enhancing the overall quality of education in Edo State."

The promotions, covering 2022 to January 2024, aim to boost teachers' morale and address career stagnation that has affected performance in schools.

Briggs lauded the governor's proactive approach, stating, "This move has breathed new life into the basic education sector."

"Our efforts remain focused on comprehensive reforms that prioritize educators and ultimately benefit students."

Stakeholders have welcomed the initiative, anticipating that improved job satisfaction among teachers will lead to better classroom outcomes and a more dynamic learning environment.

"This bold action underscores Governor Okpebholo's dedication to transforming the education sector. By addressing past administrative delays, his administration is setting a new standard for progress and accountability," Briggs added.

With further education reforms reportedly in the pipeline, Governor Okpebholo and Edo SUBEB remain committed to ensuring timely recognition and support for educators, reinforcing their vision for a more efficient and effective education system in the state, it was gathered.



### ADMINISTRATIVE PANEL OF ENQUIRY:

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo (right), receiving report of the Administrative Panel of Enquiry set up to investigate the financial dealings of all impeached 18 LG chairmen in the state from Chairman of the panel, Barr. Solomon Imohiosen, at Government House, Benin City.

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**Families heartbreak after deadly Dehli railway station crush** —Pg 7

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## No sacred cows in Okpebholo's administration — Commissioner

### BENIN CITY

Edo State Commissioner for Information and Communication, Hon Paul Ohonbamu, has reiterated that Governor Monday Okpebholo's administration in Edo State operates with a firm commitment to transparency and accountability, emphasizing that no individual, regardless of status or political ties, is above the law.

Ohonbamu made this assertion while addressing concerns surrounding the recent suspension of the state Attorney General and Commissioner of Justice, Dr. Samson Osagie, and the Chairman of the State Local Government Service Commission, Hon. Damian Lawani, over alleged financial infractions.

According to him, the governor's decision to suspend the officials is a clear demonstration of his no-nonsense approach to governance, ensuring that due process is followed without fear or favour.

He stressed that the move was not politically motivated, but

aimed at allowing a thorough investigation, adding that if the suspended officials are found innocent, they will be reinstated.

"This administration has no sacred cows. Governor Okpebholo is a man of integrity who will not shield anyone found wanting, regardless of their political affiliation, senatorial district, or personal relationship with him," Ohonbamu stated.

He further explained that the governor's tough stance on accountability serves as a warning to all government appointees, urging them to uphold transparency, shun corruption, and remain committed to the state's development.

"Anyone who cannot meet these expectations should step aside," he added.

Highlighting Okpebholo's achievements in his first 100 days in office, Ohonbamu pointed to key initiatives such as the appointment of a retired Commissioner of Police to lead the Edo Security Network, which has improved security operations in the state.

## Edesili Anani reaffirms commitment to women's devt

### BENIN CITY

The Coordinator of the Office of the First Lady, Edo State, Edesili Anani, has reaffirmed the government's unwavering commitment to the development and empowerment of women.

She made this assurance during a strategic meeting with the leadership of the Progressive Better Edo Women Development Association (PBEWDA) at Government House, Benin City.

During the engagement, Anani emphasized that the state government remains dedicated to improving the standard of living for its citizens, particularly women, in alignment with its broader development agenda.

She highlighted the critical role of collaboration in achieving sustainable progress and pledged her office's support for initiatives that foster women's empowerment.

"My office is deeply interested in the welfare of women and vulnerable populations. I support your initiative and en-

courage you to continue your good work.

"When you commit to a cause sincerely, recognition and support will follow. Stay consistent, as your efforts are being noticed," Anani stated.

She acknowledged the alignment between her office's mandate and PBEWDA's mission, noting that her role extends beyond women's development to include children, youths, and other vulnerable groups.

She urged the association to sustain its efforts, emphasizing the importance of consistency and authenticity in driving lasting change.

In response, Comrade Omenai Blessing, the leader of PBEWDA, congratulated Anani on her new role and expressed optimism about collaborating with the Office of the First Lady to expand the reach of their programs.

She shared her long-standing dedication to supporting women, stressing that making a difference is not solely about financial capacity, but about commitment and willingness to help others.

## IGP expands GBV desk offices to...

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GBV desk offices, the police are taking a significant step towards addressing the increasing prevalence of gender-based violence and ensuring that victims have the necessary support to seek justice without fear of intimidation or stigma.

The IGP has urged the public to take advantage of these expanded desk offices and report incidents of violence, emphasizing that justice will be served without discrimination or bias.

He reiterated that the police

remain steadfast in their mission to protect all citizens, stressing that tackling gender-based violence is a collective responsibility that requires the support of individuals, communities, and law enforcement agencies.

The Nigeria Police Force's decision to expand the GBV desk offices marks a major milestone in the country's efforts to combat gender-based violence.

It reinforces the commitment to building a safer and more just society where the rights of all individuals, especially women, children, and other vulnerable groups are protected.

# Big catch up: Edo begins 2nd phase immunization campaign Feb 17

The second phase of the "Big Catch Up" immunization exercise is set to take place from Monday, February 17, 2025, to Monday, February 24, 2025, across designated centers in 16 of the 18 Local Government Areas of Edo State.

As part of preparations, the Edo State Primary Health Care Development Agency (EDSPHCDA) conveyed a Stakeholders/Social Mobilization Committee (SMC) meeting in Benin City to update key stakeholders on the planned activities and solicit their support for the routine immunization intensification, aimed at closing the immunization gap in

the state.

Mac-Fisi Kenneth, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) representative and State Facilitator for Social and Behavioral Change, provided insights into immunization coverage across various local government areas.

He highlighted that the COVID-19 pandemic had significantly impacted global immunization efforts, leading to setbacks in years of progress.

Kenneth emphasized that vaccines remain the most effective means of preventing childhood killer diseases.

He urged stakeholders to support mobilization efforts, particularly in hard-to-reach

areas, and to advocate for policy support at all levels to build trust, secure resources, and promote routine immunization.

He also called on the media to play a crucial role by disseminating accurate immunization messages, amplifying expert voices, and addressing public concerns about vaccine safety.

According to him, the three phases of the 'Big Catch Up' immunization are scheduled for January, February and March, with four weeks intervals.

Originally, he said that 14 local government areas were targeted for the exercise, but have been increased to 16.

Dr. Esegbe Efonon, Director of Disease Control and

Immunization at the Edo State Primary Health Care Development Agency (EDSPHCDA), urged parents and caregivers to make their children and wards available for the immunization.

In her remarks, the State Immunization Officer, Mrs. Irene Uabor, identified key reasons why children miss vaccinations, including lack of awareness, fear of side effects, caregivers' busy schedules, and inadequate information on the time and venue of immunization exercises.

The "Big Catch Up" campaign aims to bridge these gaps and ensure more children in Edo State are protected against preventable diseases.



**HOUSES RAZED BY FIRE:**

One of the houses razed by fire in Benin City, Edo State last week.

## Idahosa reassures govt commitment to peace, stability

### As govt, LDS Church strengthen collaboration for community devt

BERNADETTE IDALU

### BENIN CITY

The Edo State Deputy Governor, Hon. Dennis Idahosa, has reassured the Eguae-Edaiken community of the state government's commitment to peace and stability across the state.

Addressing the community's representatives at the Government House, Benin City, Idahosa urged the people to embrace dialogue, emphasizing that Governor Monday Okpebholo is dedicated to re-

solving disputes and fostering harmony across the state.

The meeting was attended by representatives of Egor Local Government Area led by Prof. Esokpan James Ebose, the Obakha-waye of Uselu Community.

Idahosa said that the administration is committed to ensuring a peaceful environment that would allow businesses to thrive, in apparent reference to the misunderstanding among some stakeholders of the Edaiken market.

"We will engage with the governor regarding the disputes at Edaiken Market and work towards a resolution," Idahosa promised.

Speaking on behalf of the community, Prof. Ebose called on the state government to intervene in the ongoing conflict over the selection of an Iye Eki (market woman leader).

The dispute has led to protests and roadblocks, following an alleged breach of protocol in the selection process by members of the host Eguae-Edaiken and Uselu communities.

Meanwhile, the Community Secretary, Comrade Eseosa Omogbe, highlighted the historical significance of Eguae-Edaiken as the residence of every crown Prince of the Benin Kingdom.

He congratulated Governor Monday Okpebholo and his deputy on their victory in the September 21, 2024, Edo State governorship election and expressed confidence that the victory would stand the test of time.

Omogbe also commended the administration's efforts in tackling insecurity, particularly gang clashes, through the enactment of punitive laws.

Meanwhile, the Edo State Government has reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening partnerships with religious institutions to promote social and moral development.

## Alleged N96bn loot: EFCC 'll prosecute impeached...

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during the period under review.

However, there was no evidence of meaningful projects executed with the funds. Instead, the panel found that over N10.4 billion was fraudulently siphoned through a scheme disguised under the name "Security, Environment, and Training."

The chairmen allegedly funneled money into this account be-

fore transferring it to individuals and companies, effectively using it as a conduit for embezzlement.

The panel also encountered numerous challenges during its investigation, including the deliberate delay in submitting financial records, incomplete documentation, and obstruction by council personnel who attempted to overwhelm the panel with late submissions of large volumes of documents.

Despite these obstacles, the committee was able to trace several fraudulent transactions and identified key individuals involved in the looting, including former ALGON chairman Oghomwen Newman Ugiagbe, who used his hotel De Marriot Hotels Limited to launder public funds, along with others such as Ahonsi Ogiegbaen Osifo, Eric Agbonmwanre, Abraham Burma, and Dickson Imasogie

Notiemwennwan.

Governor Okpebholo reiterated his administration's commitment to fighting corruption and ensuring that public funds are used for the benefit of Edo people.

He assured that all those involved in the mismanagement of Local Government resources would face justice and that his government would take every necessary legal step to recover the looted funds.

## NEWS

# NDLEA nabs 284 drug traffickers in Ekiti, destroys 192 tonnes of cannabis

The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency said it arrested 284 suspects for drug trafficking and related offences within one year.

NDLEA Commander in Ekiti State, Sunday Aina, who said that within the period, the agency secured the conviction

of 57 drug dealers with the cases of others pending in court, and cautioned residents to stay away from drugs and drug-related offence, according to a statement by the Command's Public Relations Officer, Ifeoluwa Fabiyi, in Ado Ekiti on Sunday while giving a scorecard of NDLEA Ekiti State Command under his watch

for the year 2024.

The NDLEA commander made a case for a befitting rehabilitation centre in Ekiti State, saying, "The centre will, no doubt, help in the prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of drug users."

He hailed the agency's chairman, Gen. Buba Marwa (retd.),

for his "dynamic and visionary leadership," which he said had culminated in achievements recorded in the renewed onslaught against the menace of substance use and abuse in the country."

The commander said the renewed drug war in his command, coupled with the support of Governor Biodun Oyebanji in

the fight against illicit substances in Ekiti State, had resulted in drug supply and demand reductions in the state command.

He said, "Ekiti State Command recovered a total of 3,998.506 kg of different illicit drugs such as cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine, amphetamine, psychotropic substances and cannabis sativa in the past one year.

"The command also discovered and destroyed over 192 tonnes of Cannabis Sativa in weight across different local government areas of the state, planted on farmlands measuring over 76.93 hectares.

"A total of 284 suspects were arrested, which comprised 224 males and 60 females in the process. Among the arrested suspects, a total of 57 drug dealers, which comprised 51 males and six females, were

successfully convicted and serving jail terms, with other cases still pending at the Federal High Court in Ado Ekiti.

"A total of 163 drug users and abusers, which comprised 153 males and 10 females, were counselled and some referred for further rehabilitation where necessary during this same period," Aina said.

He said that the command, also within the period under review, took the War against Drug Abuse campaigns to the grassroots, saying, "Within the year, 57 public sensitization and awareness campaigns, seminars and rallies against the use and abuse of illicit substances were carried out.

"The radio and television media were not left out, with 31 campaigns carried out on different platforms within the state," the state commander said.



**CWC MEETING OF NUJ:**

President of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Alhassan Yahya (right) and his predecessor, Chief Chris Isiguzo, at a meeting of the Central Working Committee held in Kebbi State recently.

## Police arrest man with 228 phones, nab wanted kidnappers in Ondo

The Ondo State Police Command has arrested a suspect, Temidayo Fadahunsi, in the Ijoka area of Akure, the state capital, over alleged mobile phone theft.

According to the police, a case of phone theft had been reported at a police station in the area, leading to Fadahunsi's arrest in connection with the crime.

Parading the suspect and others at the police headquarters in Akure on Saturday, the state Commissioner of Police, Mr Wilfred Afolabi, disclosed that a search of the suspect's residence uncovered no fewer than 228 Android phones along with multiple foreign SIM cards.

The CP stated, "On February 6, 2025, a case of stealing was

reported to the police. Through shared intelligence, officers acted swiftly and arrested one Temidayo Fadahunsi, aged 25, at the Ijoka area of Akure.

"Upon searching his premises, we found 228 Android phones, 156 different types of batteries, and 23 foreign SIM cards, none of which he could satisfactorily account for.

"The suspect is currently under investigation and will be charged to court upon the conclusion of inquiries."

Additionally, Afolabi announced the arrest of several suspected kidnappers who had long been on the police command's wanted list for their involvement in various abduction cases across the state.

He listed the arrested suspects as Aminu, Abdullahi Abubakar, Yusuf Saidu, Nafiu Ibrahim, Mohammed Anas, Kabiru Mohammed, Yusuf Suleiman, and Ishaku Abdul, an ex-convict recently released from prison.

"On February 13, 2025, through intelligence gathering and technical surveillance, one Aminu was apprehended at Akure Garage in Ikare Akoko.

"His arrest led to the subsequent capture of Abdullahi Abubakar. Further operations conducted between February 14 and 15 led to the arrest of additional suspects, including Yusuf Saidu, Nafiu Ibrahim, Mohammed Anas, and Kabiru Mohammed."

In a separate case in Ipele, Afolabi revealed that a woman

had been abducted from her home by unknown gunmen.

However, a swift response from the police, assisted by local youths, resulted in her rescue. During the operation, officers recovered an AK-49 rifle at the scene.

"Through intelligence-led policing, one of the suspects, Yusuf Suleiman, was arrested in connection with the abduction," he added.

Furthermore, the police commissioner confirmed the arrest of Ishaku Abdul, who was recently released from a correctional centre but had been suspected by neighbours of involvement in recent criminal activities in the area.

"The Special Anti-Kidnapping Squad, acting on a tip-off,

## US Embassy, Lagos Consulate to close for Presidents' Day on Monday

The United States Embassy in Abuja and the Consulate General in Lagos will temporarily close on Monday, 17 February 2025, in observance of Presidents' Day.

A statement posted on X on Sunday by the diplomatic mission confirmed the closure and assured the public that normal operations would resume the following day.

"The U.S. Embassy in Abuja and the Consulate General in Lagos will be closed on Monday, February 17, 2025, in observance of Presidents' Day.

We will resume normal operations on Tuesday, 18 February 2025," the statement read.

The U.S. observes Presidents' Day annually on the third Monday of February to honour past and present leaders of the nation.

While essential services will remain accessible through emergency contact channels, routine consular services will resume after the holiday.

Nigerians seeking U.S. visas or consular assistance are advised to plan their visits accordingly.

## FX market turnover drops by 32% amid reforms

Foreign exchange market turnover in Nigeria declined by 32.28 per cent in December 2024, falling to \$9.74bn from the \$14.39bn recorded in November.

This drop, highlighted in the FMDQ Exchange's December Financial Markets Monthly Report, reflects the impact of ongoing foreign exchange market reforms and broader liquidity challenges.

The month-on-month decline of \$4.64bn in FX turnover came at a time when the Central Bank of Nigeria intensified efforts to stabilise the naira through various policy measures.

These reforms, which included interventions in the Nigerian Autonomous Foreign Exchange Market and new guidelines for FX inflows and outflows, influenced trading volumes across FX instruments.

The FX market was the most affected segment of Nigeria's financial markets in December, accounting for 37.36 per cent of total spot market turnover.

This was lower than its 41.15 per cent share in November, reinforcing the downturn in trading activity.

Despite the drop in turnover, the naira appreciated against the United States dollar during the review period, with the average exchange rate strengthening to N1,564.97/\$ from N1,667.41/\$ in November.

This represents a 6.55 per cent (N102.44) appreciation of the local currency.

However, the report noted increased exchange rate volatility in December, with the naira trading within a range of N1,524.88/\$ to N1,672.69/\$, compared to N1,639.50/\$ to N1,690.37/\$ in November.

The widened trading band suggests heightened speculative activities and a cautious approach from FX market participants.

The report read, "Spot FX market turnover was \$9.74bn (N15.32trn) in December 2024, representing a 32.28% (\$4.64bn) MoM decrease from the turnover recorded in November 2024 (\$14.39bn).

"In the FX Market, the naira appreciated against the US Dollar, with the spot exchange rate (\$/N) decreasing by 6.55% (\$/N102.44) to close at an average of \$/N1,564.97 in December 2024 from \$/N1,667.41 recorded in November 2024."

## NEC: APC intensifies consultation, shops for new date

The ruling All Progressives Congress said the leadership of the party was still consulting with stakeholders before arriving at a new date for the meetings of the National Caucus and National Executive Committee, which were called off last year.

The crucial sessions of the two statutory organs of the party are expected to be chaired by President Bola Tinubu and would also have Vice President Kashim Shettima and former President Muhammadu Buhari in attendance.

Also expected are past and present APC governors, former and serving Senate presidents, Speakers of the House of Representatives of the par-

ty, state party chairmen, the National Working Committee and other stakeholders.

Both the NEC and Caucus meetings would have been the inaugural gathering of past leaders and party bigwigs since Dr Abdullahi Ganduje became the National Chairman of the APC.

The two political sessions earlier scheduled for September 11 and 12 last year in Abuja, respectively, were, however, called off.

Although no reason was given for the indefinite suspension, the National Publicity Secretary of APC, Felix Morka, assured party members that a new date would be announced later.

However, five months later, it was called off, concerns have

been raised over when the ruling party plans to reschedule the NEC meeting.

In the last few days, news filtered in that the party might be considering a later date in February.

But the APC has maintained a sealed lip over the matter.

The National Secretary of the APC, Senator Ajibola Basiru, explained that a new date would soon be announced.

When reminded that former Kaduna governor, Nasir El-Rufai, had also raised a similar concern on social media, Basiru was indifferent.

He said, "On El-Rufai's observation on the calling on the NEC, he is particularly correct. But that does not mean that

NEC is the only organ of the party. There are other functional organs that are working for the success of the party.

"As far as we are concerned, we have taken note of his observation on the NEC and we are making efforts to ensure that as soon as possible, the NEC and the National Caucus will be called."

When quizzed on the rumoured February date being peddled around, the APC scribe told our correspondent that it was also a possibility.

The National Legal Adviser, Prof Abdulkareem Kana, also shared his sentiment.

According to him, the two crucial sessions will be called at the appropriate time.

# Okpebholo graces Olohije, Innocent's wedding, meets Oyakhilome in Aseese

EDWARD OSEGHE

The Executive Governor of Edo State, Senator Monday Okpebholo, was among the distinguished guests who honored the wedding ceremony of Olohije Olayemi and Innocent Ehimegbe, held on Saturday, February 15, at the Loveworld City, Aseese, Ogun State.

The grand event, which many have described as a royal wedding, was officiated by the President of Loveworld Nation (Christ Embassy), Rev. Dr. Chris Oyakhilome, in the presence of the Central Executive Council members, Ministry Directors, and senior pastors of the ministry.

Governor Okpebholo, alongside the former Deputy Governor of Edo State, Comrade Philip Shaibu, attended the ceremony to celebrate with the father of the bride, the

Highly Esteemed Zonal Pastor of Christ Embassy Benin Zone 1, Pastor Moses Olayemi.

Speaking after the event, Okpebholo expressed his admiration for the occasion and the opportunity to meet Rev. Oyakhilome, whom he described as one of Edo State's most distinguished sons.

"Today, I had the honor of celebrating the holy matrimony of Olohije Olayemi, daughter of Pastor Moses Olayemi, at Christ Embassy Aseese Campground. It was a beautiful gathering of families, friends, and well-wishers witnessing a sacred union built on love, faith, and divine guidance," the governor stated.

He further reflected on his meeting with Oyakhilome, calling it both humbling and uplifting. "His unwavering commitment to the gospel and his global impact are truly inspiring. Standing in his

presence was a reminder of the power of faith, vision, and dedication to God's work," Okpebholo added.

The ceremony reached a spiritual high when Pastor Chris Oyakhilome pronounced blessings upon the couple, setting them on a glorious path in their new life together.

The Esteemed Director of Church Growth International, Pastor Lanre Alabi, also shared words of admonition, encouraging the couple to cherish the divine words spoken over their union and to advance the ministry together with purpose.

Following the solemn exchange of vows and rings, the

couple celebrated God's goodness at a grand reception. The event was marked by vibrant music, delightful cuisine, and joyous festivities.

Guests, including political figures, senior clergy members, and well-wishers, joined in the celebration, making it a memorable occasion for both

the Olayemi and Ehimegbe families.

The newlywed Mr. and Mrs. Innocent Ehimegbe expressed their gratitude to Rev. Dr. Chris Oyakhilome for his prayers, as well as to Governor Okpebholo, Comrade Philip Shaibu, and all the distinguished guests who graced the occasion.



**WEDDING CEREMONY:**

L-R: The bride and groom, Mrs. Olohije Ehimegbe and Mr Innocent Ehimegbe, during their wedding ceremony at the Christ Embassy's Loveworld City, Aseese, Ogun State, on Saturday.

## Edo-CSDA conducts participatory rural appraisal across 24 communities

GLORIA AGBONGIASEDE

The Edo State Community and Social Development Agency (Edo-CSDA) has commenced its Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) exercise across 24 communities in the state as a prelude to the micro-project implementation cycle.

The communities include, Idumuasele-Egorona Oka, Udomi I, Ujabhole I, Unogbo, Idumoghodor, Ibhioolu, Afuda-Uwesana, Idumabi-Irrua, Odogbe-Uromi, Okos-Uromi, Idinogbon-Eidenu, Iyekogba, Egbaramen-Ihama, Ogheghe-Osador, Eboakhuala I, Eboakhuala, Agunu-Illeh, Aigboboh-Illeh, Idiaka-Illeh, Ojo-Uwelu I, Ojo-Uwelu, Jagbe, and Ohanmi.

This initiative is designed to ensure that development interventions align with the specific needs and priorities of the communities.

The micro-project cycle typically begins with Promotion and Outreach (P&O), during which communities are introduced to the agency's activities.

Interested communities formally express their willingness to participate by submitting letters to the agency, signaling their readiness to engage in the development process.

A critical component of the exercise is the "First Entry" phase, which involves understanding the culture, norms, and governance structures of the participating communities.

This step is essential for fostering trust and ensuring a smooth collaboration between the agency and the community members.

The PRA exercise itself is structured into two stages, creating a platform for communities to assess their development needs and plan poverty alleviation initiatives in partnership with Edo-CSDA.

Unlike past approaches where project planning was externally controlled, PRA empowers communities to take charge of their own development, making the decision-making process more inclusive and participatory.

The Operations Manager of Edo-CSDA, Barr. Imoudu Longe, explained that the process begins with a first entry visit, where the agency representatives meet with community members to agree on a suitable date for the exercise.

During the first stage, community members engage in a Needs Assessment and Prioritization process to determine the most pressing development projects.

## Igbinedion University to host 12th WASOT conference on Toxicology and Public Health

The 12th Annual Conference of the West African Society of Toxicology (WASOT) will take place at Igbinedion University, Okada, from February 19 to 21, 2025.

Organized in collaboration with the Centre for Energy and Environment, University of Benin, the conference will focus on the theme: "Toxicology and Public Health: Bridging

Science and Policy for Healthier Communities."

In a statement, the Deputy Director of Public Relations, Igbinedion University, Lucky Eboh-Onokwe, highlighted the significance of the conference in fostering dialogue between scientists, policymakers, and public health professionals.

The keynote address will be delivered by Professor Godwin

Oju Igile, a leading scholar in Industrial and Environmental Biochemistry from the University of Calabar.

Additionally, Professor Daniel Olorunfemi, a renowned expert in Molecular and Environmental Genotoxicology from the University of Benin, will serve as the distinguished speaker.

The three-day event will be hosted by Professor Lawrence Ike-

chukwu Ezemonye, Vice Chancellor of Igbinedion University and a Professor of Ecotoxicology and Environmental Forensics.

Attendees can expect high-level discussions on the latest advancements in toxicology and public health, along with research presentations and networking opportunities with leading experts in the field.

## EDSPHCDA trains communication officers to boost PHC visibility across 18 LGAs

The Edo State Primary Healthcare Development Agency (EDSPHCDA) has organized a capacity-building training for communication officers from all 18 Local Government Areas (LGAs) to improve the visibility of primary healthcare initiatives at the grassroots level.

The training brought together Assistant Health Education Officers, agency staff, and management to enhance their

communication skills in showcasing healthcare activities.

Speaking at the event, the Acting Executive Secretary of EDSPHCDA, Mr. Sunday Osayande, highlighted the crucial role of communication in healthcare delivery. He urged participants to leverage the training to effectively disseminate updates on primary healthcare services to the public.

Mrs. Nene Olaye, Head

of the Public Relations Unit at EDSPHCDA, noted that media coverage had largely focused on the agency's headquarters in Benin City. She emphasized that the training aimed to extend visibility beyond the state capital, ensuring that healthcare activities in all LGAs receive adequate publicity.

Participants were trained in key areas such as news reporting, photography, caption writ-

ing, and mobile journalism.

Moving forward, they will submit images and reports from events, programs, and initiatives in their LGAs to the state office for publication on the agency's website, social media platforms, and blog.

By equipping communication officers with these essential skills, EDSPHCDA aims to enhance public awareness of primary healthcare activities across Edo State.

## FG acquired N32bn weapons, others for military in 2024 —Report

The Nigerian military has received a total of N33,216,000,000.00 for the procurement of critical operational equipment.

The funds were disbursed by the Ministry of Defence in July 2024, with records on

GovSpend showing multiple tranches of payments made through the Naira Transit Account.

According to the transaction details, the payments were classified as "Being purchase of critical and urgent opera-

tional equipment for the Nigerian military."

However, specific details about the type of equipment procured and its intended use remain undisclosed.

A breakdown of the disbursement showed that on July

26, 2024, the Ministry of Defence Headquarters transferred N9bn, followed by another N9bn, N5bn, N9bn, and an additional N1.216bn, all credited to the Naira Transit Account for the procurement.

Also, procurement of fire-

arms and ammunition were done by the Nigeria Immigration Service and the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, with payments totaling hundreds of millions of naira made to multiple defence contractors.

The NIS received payments for various arms, including Scorpion Evo 19 & 9 rifles, Tavor rifles, and General-Purpose Machine Guns (7.62x51mm), intended for its Women Armed Squad and Rapid Response Squad.

# EDITORIAL

## Strengthening the fight against gender-based violence

The recent decision by the Inspector General of Police (IGP), Kayode Adeolu Egbetokun, to decentralize Gender-Based Violence (GBV) desk offices to all police divisions across Nigeria is a commendable and long-overdue move. Announced at the weekend through a press release by the Force Public Relations Officer, Olumuyiwa Adejobi, this initiative represents a significant step toward addressing a deeply entrenched societal problem.

Gender-based violence remains one of Nigeria's most pressing social issues, affecting individuals across all demographics and leaving lasting physical, emotional, and psychological scars on its victims. Despite existing laws and policies aimed at combating GBV at the state and national levels, weak implementation, limited public trust in law enforcement, and insufficient political will have hindered meaningful progress. The

move to decentralize GBV desks acknowledges these gaps and provides an opportunity to bridge them.

By appointing dedicated officers to handle GBV cases at every police division, the Nigeria Police Force is demonstrating a renewed commitment to protecting vulnerable individuals. Making these specialized desks more accessible at the grassroots level ensures that survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and other forms of abuse have a direct point of contact within law enforcement. However, accessibility alone is not enough; these desks must function effectively and with integrity.

For this initiative to yield the desired results, officers assigned to GBV desks must be well-trained in handling cases with empathy and professionalism. Mishandling of GBV complaints, victim-blaming, or pressure to settle cases informally must be met with strict disciplinary measures. Survi-

vors should not have to endure further trauma while seeking justice. Instead, the police must ensure that these desks provide a safe space where victims feel heard, protected, and assured of due process.

Additionally, these desks should not operate in isolation. The Nigeria Police Force must foster strong collaboration with social welfare organizations, legal aid providers, healthcare professionals, and civil society groups. A holistic response that integrates medical, legal, and psychological support will significantly improve outcomes for survivors, ensuring they receive the comprehensive assistance they need.

Beyond the establishment of these desks, there should be a deliberate effort to raise public awareness, particularly in rural communities where knowledge of available support services remains low. Many survivors may not be aware that such desks exist or

how to access them. The police, in partnership with community leaders, media organizations, and advocacy groups, must embark on widespread sensitization campaigns to educate the public about their rights and encourage victims to seek help without fear of stigma or retaliation.

Furthermore, the government must back this initiative with adequate funding, stronger legal protections, and continuous training for officers. Without sufficient resources, these desks risk becoming mere symbolic gestures rather than functional institutions capable of addressing GBV effectively. Ensuring accountability within law enforcement and establishing clear feedback mechanisms for reporting inefficiencies will be crucial in maintaining public trust and making the system more responsive.

Addressing the cultural and societal norms that enable

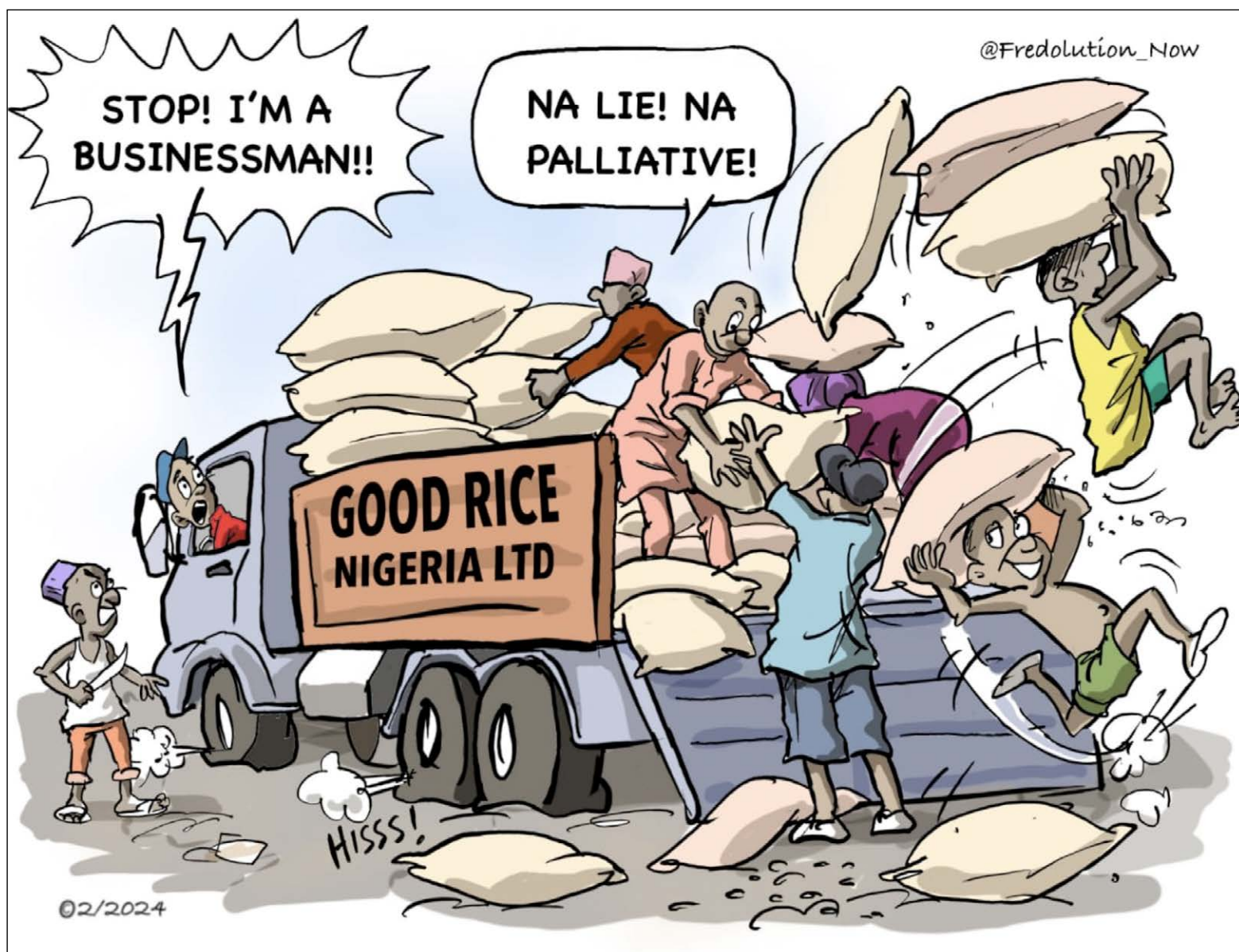
gender-based violence must also be part of a broader strategy. Traditional beliefs and practices that condone violence against women and other vulnerable groups must be challenged through advocacy and education. Law enforcement officers must not only enforce the law but also act as agents of societal change, working to dismantle harmful norms that perpetuate GBV.


Ultimately, tackling gender-based violence requires a collective effort from law enforcement, policymakers, civil society, and the public. The expansion of GBV desk offices is a significant step forward, but its success depends on sustained action, adequate funding, and continuous evaluation. With political will and commitment at all levels, Nigeria can make meaningful progress in the fight against GBV and ensure that survivors receive the justice and support they deserve.

The Nigerian  
**Observer**

Cartoon Corner

...that the people may know



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10 X 3	221,700	238,328	147,800	158,885	118,300	127,173	266,000	285,950	251,300	270,148
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FP 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
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**EFFECTIVE FROM FEBRUARY 1, 2023**

## NEWS

## Foreign

## Gunfire and looting in DR Congo city as rebels advance

Chaotic scenes have been unfolding in Bukavu in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo as the M23 rebel group continues its offensive in the region.

On Saturday there were reports of sporadic gunfire and widespread looting in the city, including at a World Food Programme depot, with residents sheltering in their homes.

It follows conflicting reports about whether the Rwanda-backed rebels had entered the key city of Bukavu, after advances in the region. On Friday M23 fighters seized Kavumu airport, north of Bukavu.

The UN and the European Union have voiced alarm over the worsening conflict.

A threat by Uganda's army chief to attack a Congolese town has sparked fears the conflict could flare into a wider regional war.

UN secretary-general Antonio Guterres told an African Union summit on Saturday a regional escalation must be avoided "at all costs" and there was "no military solution".

"And the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the DRC must be respected," Guterres continued.

The European Union said it was "urgently" considering

all options following the news from Bukavu.

"The ongoing violation of the DRC's territorial integrity will not go unanswered," it warned.

The Congolese government accuses Rwanda of sowing chaos in the region in order to benefit from its natural resources - a claim Rwanda has denied.

Hundreds of thousands of people have been forced from their homes in recent weeks as a result of the rebel advance.

On Saturday, the streets of Bukavu were deserted as residents hid in their homes.

One woman in the city told the BBC people were avoiding

going outside as gunfire rang out and youths looted and destroyed shops.

"I only have enough food for three days. As a woman it is difficult for me to go outside because I could be raped [by the looters or the armed groups]. We feel abandoned by the authorities."

The looting included the World Food Programme's depot in Bukavu, which housed 6,800 metric tons of food, a spokesman for the UN aid agency told the Reuters news agency.

Claude Kalinga said the stealing of supplies would deepen the difficulties faced by those in need. The agency had

## Mother and child die from injuries after Munich car attack

A mother, 37, and her two-year-old daughter have died from injuries they sustained in Thursday's car attack in the German city of Munich, police say.

At least 37 people were injured when a car was driven into a crowd of people at a trade union rally.

The driver was a 24-year-old Afghan asylum seeker, police said, identified in local media as Farhad N.

He was arrested at the scene and prosecutors say he has admitted to carrying out the attack. He appeared to have a religious motivation, officials said.

The mother and child were among those taken to hospital with serious injuries following the attack.

"Unfortunately, we have to confirm the deaths today of the two-year-old child and her 37-year-old mother," police spokesman Ludwig Waldinger told the AFP news agency on Saturday.

The car ramming has brought security issues back into focus the week before federal elections are held in Germany.

A series of attacks have been carried out in Munich by immigrants, with two of the alleged attackers being Afghanistans.

The attack also occurred on the eve of the Munich Security Conference, which began on Friday.

Upon arrival in the city on Friday, US Vice-President JD Vance expressed his condolences to the victims in the attack.

Authorities have said the suspect arrived in Germany in 2016 and, although his application for asylum was turned down, he was allowed to stay in Germany as he faced risks being deported back

to Afghanistan. He had a valid residence and work permit.

He had no previous criminal record, and police said there was no evidence of a link to a jihadist group. He also appears to have acted alone, German authorities say.

On Friday, police said the suspect told officers during questioning that he had driven his Mini Cooper car intentionally into the crowd.

Munich public prosecutor Gabriele Tilmann told reporters that the suspect had said "Allahu Akbar" - God is greatest in Arabic - when he was detained. She suggested he "may have had an Islamist motivation".

Campaigning around Germany's election on 23 February has for weeks been embroiled in a fevered debate about migration. It was called due to the collapse of German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's coalition government last year.

A number of violent incidents linked to migrants over the past year have led to increased support for the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party.

In December, six people were killed and at least 299 injured after a man drove a car into a German Christmas market.

The suspect was a 50-year-old Saudi asylum seeker who had been an outspoken critic of Islam.

And in January an attack that shocked the country saw a two-year-old child and a passer-by who attempted to intervene killed after a group of children were stabbed in a park in the Bavarian town of Aschaffenburg.

The suspect in that attack is a 28-year-old Afghan asylum seeker.



**TAKING OFF THEIR UNIFORMS:**

Forces had to leave in a rush, taking off their uniforms and fleeing

## Families heartbreak after deadly Delhi railway station crush

On Sunday morning, the New Delhi Railway Station in India's capital looked much like it always does; bustling, with its many platforms full of eager, impatient passengers waiting to catch their trains.

But on Saturday night, a deadly crush - reportedly caused by overcrowding - killed at least 18 people and left several injured.

According to officials, two trains had been delayed at the station, while a third - heading to Prayagraj city where the massive Hindu religious festival, Kumbh Mela, is being held - was waiting to depart as people pushed against each other.

The crush occurred after "a passenger slipped and fell on the stairs", a spokesperson for Indian Railways said.

Opposition leaders have criticised the government, alleging that Indian Railways did not make adequate arrangements to manage crowds at the station.

An investigation has been launched, and authorities have announced compensation for the victims.

When asked by the BBC about safety and security at the station, Pankaj Gangwar,

Principal Chief Security Commissioner of Northern Railway, said "let the investigation be completed first".

Crushes like these are not unheard of in India, where there is frequent overcrowding at religious events, festivals and public spaces. Last month, 30 people were killed and dozens injured in a crush at the Kumbh Mela.

Crowds at the railway station were also not unexpected - trains are by far the cheapest long-distance mode of transport in India and it is common for the number of passengers to

far exceed the capacity of trains.

Eyewitnesses and the families of victims have been recounting their ordeal. Many of them were angry at authorities and police officials at the railway station, who they say did not act in time.

Some eyewitnesses said the crush was not limited to one place but took place on the overhead bridge, staircases and platforms.

Bipin Jha was at the station to meet his wife Mamta, who was arriving on a train. She died in the crush.

"I met her at the platform

and we were walking on the footbridge overhead when she was trapped in the crush. She died in front of my eyes. I will live my life with the guilt of not saving her," he says.

"We were on the stairs, suddenly we felt a push from behind. We fell, along with many others, and were trapped under bodies. I was barely breathing," said Seema, whose sister-in-law Pinky Devi died on the staircase.

Usha Devi, who was travelling to the eastern state of Bihar for her nephew's wedding, said chaos erupted the moment she reached the platform.

## Iran's abandoned bases in Syria: Years of military expansion lie in ruins

Mouldy half-finished food on bunk beds, discarded military uniforms and abandoned weapons - these are the remnants of an abrupt retreat from this base that once belonged to Iran and its affiliated groups in Syria.

The scene tells a story of panic. The forces stationed here fled with little warning, leaving behind a decade-long presence that unravelled in mere weeks.

Iran was Syrian President

Bashar al-Assad's most critical ally for more than 10 years. It deployed military advisers, mobilised foreign militias, and invested heavily in Syria's war.

Its elite Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) built deep networks of underground bases, supplying arms and training to thousands of fighters. For Iran, this was also part of its "security belt" against Israel.

We are near Khan Shaykhun town in Idlib province. Before Assad's regime fell on 8

December, it was one of the key strategic locations for the IRGC and its allied groups.

From the main road, the entrance is barely visible, hidden behind piles of sand and rocks. A watchtower on a hilltop, still painted in the colours of the Iranian flag, overlooks the base.

A receipt notebook confirms the base's name: The Position of Martyr Zahedi - named after Mohammad Reza Zahedi, a top IRGC commander who was assassinated in an alleged

## Teen dead and five injured in Austria knife attack

A 14-year-old boy has been killed and five people wounded in a knife attack in southern Austria.

Police said the suspect is a 23-year-old Syrian asylum seeker who was detained at the scene in Villach, a town near the border with Italy and Slovenia.

Police are yet to establish a motive but have involved extremism specialists in the investigation, a spokesman told BBC News.

The incident took place around 16:00 local time (15:00 GMT) near the town's main square. Two of the five people injured were in a serious condition as of Saturday evening.

A delivery worker who had driven his vehicle at the attacker helped prevent more injuries, police said.

The driver - also a Syrian man - said he witnessed the attack as he was driving by and deliberately rammed the knifeman.

The suspect was arrested shortly after by two female police officers. As of Saturday evening, he was still being interrogated, police said.

Some witness reports initially indicated a potential second attacker, leading to police shutting down train travel in the attack's immediate aftermath.

However, local police told BBC News they were confident only one knifeman was involved.

Austrian law means the attacker's identity has not been released but police confirmed he is a 23-year-old Syrian man who lived locally.

He had a temporary residence permit and was waiting for a decision on his asylum application.

Police initially said four people were wounded but a fifth person later came forward with minor injuries.

The identity of the teenager who was killed has also not yet been disclosed.

## NEWS

## Foreign

# Israeli hostages and Palestinian inmates freed in latest ceasefire swap

Hamas has released another three Israeli hostages in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners following a week in which the fragile ceasefire deal appeared under threat.

American-Israeli Sagui Dekel-Chen, 36, Argentinian-Israeli Yair Horn, 46, and Russian-Israeli Alexander Trofanov, 29, were freed in return for 369 Palestinians held in Israeli jails.

So far 19 hostages and more than 1,000 Palestinian prisoners have been freed in the first phase of ceasefire deal which began on 19 January.

The swap came days after Hamas said it would pause the release of hostages, accusing Israel of violating the terms of the deal - an allegation denied by Israel.

Israel, backed by US President Donald Trump, said "intense" fighting would re-

sume unless the hostages were handed over. Hamas later said it remained committed to the ceasefire, and that Israel was "responsible for any complications or delays".

But on Saturday the sixth swap went ahead, with the hostages handed over to Red Cross workers in a highly-choreographed public show in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip.

Surrounded by heavily armed Hamas militants, the men brief-

ly addressed a crowd of Palestinians before being transferred into Red Cross vehicles.

They did not look as gaunt as the hostages freed a week earlier - their appearance had aroused anger in Israel and elsewhere.

Under the first six-week stage of the ceasefire deal, 33 hostages and 1,900 prisoners are supposed to be freed.

The three men were airlifted by military helicopters to a hos-

pital in central Israel, where they underwent medical tests and were reunited with relatives.

Yair Horn and his brother Eitan, 37, had been abducted from a kibbutz during the 7 October 2023 attacks by Hamas. Eitan remains in captivity in Gaza.

Pictures showed Yair Horn hugging his mother and his brother Amos in hospital, and a message where he wrote "Eitan, you're next".

US citizen Sagui De-

kel-Chen also reunited with his wife, where he learned that he had one-year-old daughter. His wife had been eight months pregnant with their third child when he was captured by Hamas in October 2023.

US President Donald Trump marked the hostage release on Saturday, noting Hamas had not followed through with their threat.

"They seem to be in good shape," he said.

## Critics say new Google rules put profits over privacy

Privacy campaigners have called Google's new rules on tracking people online "a blatant disregard for user privacy."

Changes which come in on Sunday permit so-called "fingerprinting", which allows online advertisers to collect more data about users including their IP addresses and information about their devices.

Google says this data is already widely used by other companies, and it continues to encourage responsible data use.

However the company had previously come out strongly against this kind of data collection, saying in a 2019 blog that fingerprinting "subverts user choice and is wrong."

But in a post announcing the new rule changes, Google said the way people used the internet - such as devices like smart TVs and consoles - meant it

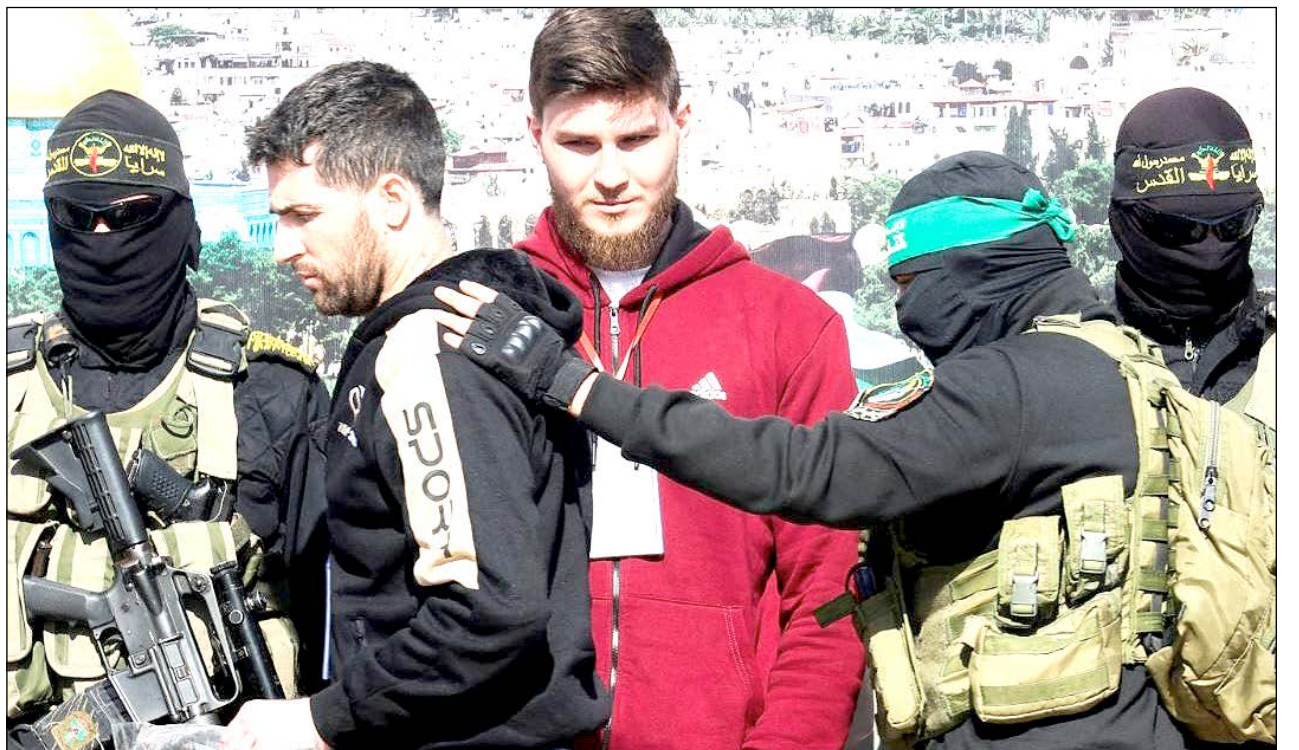
was harder to target ads to users using conventional data collection, which users control with cookie consent.

It also says more privacy options provide safety to users.

Google told the BBC in a statement: "Privacy-enhancing technologies offer new ways for our partners to succeed on emerging platforms... without compromising on user privacy."

But opponents to the change say fingerprinting and IP address collection are a blow to privacy because it is harder for users to control what data is collected about them.

"By allowing fingerprinting, Google has given itself - and the advertising industry it dominates - permission to use a form of tracking that people can't do much to stop," said Martin Thomson, distinguished engineer at Mozilla, a rival to Google.



**RELEASE OF ISRAELI HOSTAGE:**

The Israeli hostages appeared before a crowd in Khan Younis before their release.

## Trump administration's mixed messaging on foreign policy leaves world guessing

A cracked windscreen forced US Secretary of State Marco Rubio into a rapid U-turn as his plane, en route to the Munich Security Conference, had to turn back an hour into the flight.

America's top diplomat, his senior officials and the travelling press returned to Andrews Air Force Base near Washington DC on Thursday night.

But despite the mid-air scare the news was already firmly elsewhere. In Europe, US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth had stunned America's allies with a speech setting out what many

saw as a series of concessions Ukraine would have to make to sign any peace deal with Russia brokered by President Trump.

Hegseth said it was "unrealistic" to think Ukraine could win back its sovereign territory occupied by Russia, as was its demand for Nato membership, adding it was up to European and not US troops to keep the peace.

Critics, including some Republicans in Washington, castigated the speech, saying it gave away all of Ukraine's leverage ahead of any negotiations. It was, they argued, a US capitulation to Russian President

Vladimir Putin.

"It's certainly an innovative approach to a negotiation to make very major concessions even before they have started," said former Swedish Prime Minister Carl Bildt, who co-chairs the European Council on Foreign Relations, a think tank.

The following day, Hegseth wound back some of what he had said. He clarified that all options were in fact still on the table for Trump to use as leverage between Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

"What he decides to allow or not allow is at the purview

of the leader of the free world, President Trump," said Hegseth. However he added he had been "simply pointing out realism" and rejected the idea he had offered any undue concessions to Moscow.

As for Rubio, the broken-down plane delayed his arrival in Munich, where his officials were briefing about his own priorities for the trip.

The United States would work for a "just and lasting peace" in which European countries would take the lead in creating a "durable security framework", they said.

## Army of Europe' needed to challenge Russia, says Zelensky

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky has called for the creation of an "army of Europe" amid rising concern the US may no longer come to the continent's aid.

Speaking at the Munich Security Conference, he said US Vice-President JD Vance had made it clear the old relationship between Europe and America was "ending" and the continent "needs to adjust to that".

He also said Ukraine would "never accept deals made behind our backs without our involvement" after Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin agreed to start peace talks.

On Saturday, the US Secretary of State Marco Rubio held a phone call with Russia's foreign minister "building on" Wednesday's call between Trump and Putin.

Russia's foreign ministry said Saturday's call had been made "at the request of the US side". The statement did not give any further details on Ukraine but said both sides had "reaffirmed commitment to restoring a ... dialogue" between the two countries.

Trump's call with the Russian president earlier this week broke nearly three years of silence between Washington and Moscow.

Earlier on Saturday, Trump's special envoy to Ukraine also

said Europe would be consulted but not take part in talks between the US and Russia, if and when they happen.

In remarks likely to raise concern in Ukraine and among European allies, Keith Kellogg said previous negotiations had failed because too many parties had been involved.

"It may be like chalk on the blackboard, it may grate a little bit, but I am telling you something that is really quite honest," he said on Saturday.

Zelensky also said that he had blocked a Trump-led deal that would have given the US access to vast amounts of Ukrainian natural resources because it lacked "security guarantees" for Kyiv and "does not protect us".

Trump has pushed for access to rare minerals in Ukraine in return for aid, or even as compensation for the support the US has already provided.

Earlier this week, US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth said Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine was a "factory reset" for Nato which signalled the alliance needed to be "robust", "strong" and "real".

On Saturday, Zelensky said: "Let's be honest. Now we can't rule out the possibility that America might say no to Europe on an issue that threatens it.

## One year on: Did democratic opposition in Russia die with Alexei Navalny?

A year after Alexei Navalny's suspicious death in a Russian prison, his supporters have been helping choose a headstone for his grave in Moscow.

"It will be a place of hope and strength for all those who dream of the wonderful Russia of the future," says the opposition politician's widow, Yulia Navalnaya, quoting one of his best-known phrases.

Revealing her shortlist of designs in a video last week, she hoped the grave would become somewhere that those who oppose Vladimir Putin go "to remember they are not alone".

Navalnaya now lives abroad,

facing arrest if she were to return to Russia.

Her words capture just how far ambitions have shrunk.

For years, Alexei Navalny was Vladimir Putin's biggest political rival: charismatic and courageous. Today, even his lawyers have been jailed as "extremists" and a huge number of supporters have fled Russia for safety. Those who've stayed are mostly scared into silence.

Now Vladimir Putin, far from being defeated by a ruinous war on Ukraine, looks like dictating the terms of a peace deal there alongside Donald Trump.

So did Russia's democratic

opposition and its dream of change die in an Arctic prison yard with Alexei Navalny?

Squeezing Russia's democratic life Ksenia Fadeeva was serving a nine-year sentence when the TV in her cell announced that Navalny was dead. He had collapsed in prison on his daily walk.

"I was in a stupor; I couldn't even speak," the activist remembers. "It was a nightmare."

Ksenia was a political prisoner herself, labelled an "extremist" for her previous links to Navalny. She managed his HQ in her Siberian hometown, Tomsk, when Navalny tried to run against Pu-

tin in the 2018 presidential elections. He was blocked.

Back then, Ksenia showed me how her car had been coated in paint and had its tyres slashed. On another day the door of her flat was sealed shut with foam glue, trapping her inside.

The young activist shrugged all this off. It came with the territory.

At that point, Putin had been squeezing the democratic life out of Russia for close to two decades. He'd moved from controlling the media to rigging elections and punishing protest. Then came poisoning and political assassination.

# Sports

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

## Edo FA Cup: Bendel Insurance FC send younger brothers out of tourney



### ● **BJ FC, Delight FC, AG FC progress**

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

**B**endel Insurance Football Club, weekend defeated their Feeders team 1-0 in one of the quarterfinals matches of the ongoing Edo State Federation Cup competition and progressed to the semifinals of the tournament.

Solomon Okpako's 77th minute lone goal was all the 2023 Federation Cup champions needed to send their younger brothers out of the tournament and book a

semi-final spot for an opportunity to represent the state at the national level of the Federation Cup.

The Insurance Feeders team prove their worth and determination as they made their senior brothers to labour before they succumbed to the superior power of their senior brothers

The Coach Stanley Osazee led insurance Feeders started the tournament with a 2-1 victory over Saint Andrews FC while the senior defeated

Restoration FC in the second round respectively.

Solomon Okpako was voted Man of the Match

(MOTM) in the quarter finals game between Bendel Insurance and the Feeders

In another engagement, BJ Foundation FC thrashed Eagles Wings 4-0 to advance to the semifinals.

Purpose Ayemogie inspired BJ Foundation FC to the emphatic win over Eagles Wings. Promise Ugiagbe opened the scoring and later got a brace. Purpose Ayemogie added two more goals, including one from a corner kick, to seal the 4-0 win. Eagles Wings made several substitutions, but that did not change the result as they bowed out of the competition.

Assemblies of God also progressed after a 2-1 victory over Ine Stars. Assemblies of

God FC struggled in the first half but found the back of the net through Durojaiye before halftime. Osahon added another goal in the second half, but Ineh Stars fought back with a goal from Wisdom. Assemblies of God's Osemuahun received a red card for a bad tackle, but his team held on for the win. Meanwhile, Omijie Isaac was voted as Man of the Match with his display at the match — boxing the midfield and cutting opponents' advances on many occasions was pivotal in his team's win.

City Rovers 0-5 Delight FC Lucky Nuka stared as Delight FC thrashed City Rovers in what was a baptism of fire. Phillip Eugene scored a brace, while Michael Adebakin, Chuka Nwaguie, and Iyobo Arase added to the tally, with Lucky Nuka playing an important role in the victory. City Rovers struggled all through the game.

## ICC Women's U19 World Cup: Edo State Sports Commission honours nine Edo female cricketers

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

### ● **Hon Amadin hails Akpata, team**

**I**n acknowledgement and appreciation of Nigeria's female National under 19 cricket team on their achievements at the recently concluded ICC under 19 women World Cup in Malaysia, the Executive Chairman Edo state Sports Commission Hon Amadin Desmond Enabulele has received and honoured the nine Edo athletes that made the team.

The Edo Sports Commission boss said that the nine girls, the entire Edo Cricket Association and the Federation president Uyi Akpata have made Edo state proud and deserve government recognition and honour.

Receiving the girls and the Edo Cricket Association led by

Coach Theophilus Adolphus Ibodeme, Hon Enabulele said he was impressed with the performance of team Nigeria at the world cup in Malaysia and congratulated the nine Edo cricketers that represented Nigeria in Malaysia. He described them as distinguished athletes who have brought honour back home.

"I'm impressed with you girls and the entire Edo Cricket Association. This is the kind of development we are talking about. This is the kind of sports development and progress Governor Okpeholo wants to see."

"This is a part of our agenda, 'catching them young'. That is what the Governor has asked us to do with sports in

the state. We want to see our athletes being discovered and groomed from the grassroots to national and international level in all sports".

"I am elated and honoured

to have your presence. I'm surprised to see nine children as cricket athletes who represented Nigeria. I was waiting to see more mature and big girls. I am delighted to see you and welcome you back home. You have made us proud.



Edo State Sports Commission Chairman Hon. Amadin Desmond Enabulele (Right) receives Edo Cricket team

## KADA Unity Cup 2025: Police triumph over NSCDC to retain title

EDWARD OSEGHE

**T**he Police Machine FC displaying exceptional skills and dexterity overpowered the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) FC to emerge champions of the 2nd edition of KADA Unity Cup on Friday.

Recall that The 2025 edition of the KADA Unity Cup for military and paramilitary

agencies in Edo State kicked-off on Friday, 7 February at the Chief Lucky Igbiniedion Football Pitch in Ete, Benin City.

In the opening march between the Nigerian Army and the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), the Army defeated the NDLEA by a lone goal.

The other teams that participated in the tournament are Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS), The Nigeria Police,

Nigerian Air Force (NAF), Department of State Security (DSS), Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC), Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) and the Federal Fire Service.

In his remark after the opening games, sponsor and chief host of the tournament, former Executive Governor of Edo State, His Excellency, Chief

Lucky Igbiniedion expressed satisfaction with the level of turnout and the enthusiasm among the participating military and security agencies; noting that it is achieving the objective of the tournament, which is fostering of unity among the military and security services in the state.

The Nigerian Police Force who won the 2024 debut edition convincingly defended the trophy after a 4-2 victory over NSCDC.

Excitedly, the Edo Police Machine boys presented the tournament's trophy to the new Edo State Commissioner of Police (CP), Mrs. Betty Eneken Otimenyin, as a testament of her dedication and commitment to the Force.

The final match played at Chief Lucky Igbiniedion Sports Centre, Benin City, witnessed large turnout of football fans and supporters of the various military and para-military football clubs that participated at the tournament.

## Alonso lengthens incredible record against Bayern Munich

EDWARD OSEGHE

**X**abi Alonso's Bayer Leverkusen played out a 0-0 draw with Bayern in a contest that had been billed as a potential title decider.

Alonso simply loves coming up against his former employers, Bayern Munich as a manager.

The result made it six games unbeaten for Alonso in his first six games against Bayern as a manager.

The German football significant feat cemented Alonso's place in history given no other head coach in Germany had enjoyed such a lengthy undefeated streak against the Bavarian giants.

The Spaniard surpassed Ernst Happel - who went unbeaten in his first four matches against Bayern as Hamburg coach in the 1980s - in the re-

cord books back in December. Alonso's record as Leverkusen boss against Bayern now stands at three wins and three draws, with nine goals scored and just four conceded.

However, Alonso will have felt aggrieved the record did not read four wins and two draws after Saturday's fixture.

Despite Bayern going into the clash at the top of the Bundesliga, it was reigning champions Leverkusen who were left scratching their heads at how they didn't score.

Nathan Tella and Jeremie Frimpong hit the woodwork for Leverkusen in the first half as Bayern continuously rode their luck.

Bayern boss Vincent Kompany rolled the dice by bringing on Serge Gnabry, Leon Goretzka and Leroy Sane in the 68th minute but it failed to ignite their attack.



Alonso

# SPORTS

## NPFL25: Bendel Insurance FC thrash Niger Tornadoes 3-0, maintain 10th position



Insurance midfielder Nnamdi Anthony dribbles past Tornadoes defenders

**B**endel Insurance Football Club of Benin, Wednesday defeated Niger Tornadoes 3-0 in the Matchday 24 fixture of the Nigerian Premier Football League (NPFL) at the Samuel Ogbemudia Stadium, Benin City. Julius Emiloju, again recorded his name on NPFL score sheet as he opened scoring for Bendel Insurance in the 5th minute of the game. The Left back in a similar fashion against Katsina Utd was well positioned to jab in Stanley Okorom's cross from the right flank. The visitors however put up strong resistance against

Insurance invasion with the thirsty Benin Arsenal's wasting scoring chances. With the first half running out, Tornadoes side was reduced to 10 men as their goalkeeper Joshua Enaholo was sent off with a straight red card following his hard tackle against Nnamdi Anthony and also using his hand outside the box. The second half saw Bendel Insurance two top strikers Uche Collins and Kayode Oke extending the lead as expected. Uche Collins netted a close range finish in the 55th minute. Kayode Oke got a clearer chance in the 76th minute and did not waste time in converting it into a goal that sealed the emphatic victory for Insurance. The result meant the Benin Arsenal's have taken four points off Niger Tornadoes this season unlike last season when the visitors handed Insurance their first home defeat since their return to the pre-

mier league three sessions ago. It was indeed a pay back time as both sides ended their first round meeting in Minna, Niger state. The maximum points against Tornadoes were the tonic for the Benin Arsenal's to consolidate on the three points they regained from the league management body, following their appeal victory on Wednesday. In a post match interview, the Head coach of Bendel Insurance Greg Ikhenoba said he was happy his side secured the maximum points against the team that caused him serious embarrassment last season. "I give glory to God and thank the boys for the convincing victory. We created a lot of chances good enough to get higher goal margin but we could not finish them well". He however admitted that his team has a lot of work to do going forward.

## A weekend of thrills, drama, sackings, and unyielding passion in the NPFL!

TOLU OGUNTIMHEIN

**W**hat an electrifying weekend of football across the nation! Week 24 of the Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL) served up a spectacle of grit, determination, and sheer drama, leaving fans on the edge of their seats. From stunning home victories to hard-fought draws, the league is heating up as clubs scramble for every precious point. In Nigerian parlance, "jungle don dey mature!"—the battle is intensifying, and the stakes have never been higher.

At the top of the table, the title race is taking on a life of its own. While Remo Stars have been tipped as runaway cham-

pions, Shooting Stars (3SC) have thrown a spanner in the works, adding a fresh twist to the chase. Gbenga Ogunbote, the seasoned tactician, is determined to finally lay his hands on the elusive NPFL title, a feat that has evaded him throughout his illustrious managerial career. On the other hand, Daniel Ogunmodede is eager to shed the label of a "nearly man" and lead Remo Stars to their maiden league triumph. Meanwhile, Finidi George and Fidelis Ilechukwu remain firmly in the mix, refusing to bow out of the title conversation just yet.

But the story doesn't end there. Abia Warriors have emerged as dark horses, eyeing a continental spot in the

absence of Enyimba, who are surprisingly struggling to keep pace this season. The Warriors' resurgence has added yet another layer of intrigue to an already captivating campaign.

The weekend's action was nothing short of breathtaking. Remo Stars' impressive eight-match unbeaten run, dating back to December 8, 2023, was brought to a halt by Enugu Rangers in a thrilling encounter. Isaac Savior, Rangers' talisman, once again proved his worth with a decisive goal, followed by Kingsley Maduforo's strike. Sikiru Alimi's late consolation goal for Remo Stars in the 89th minute wasn't enough to salvage a result, but the Sky Blue Stars remain perched at the summit of the log.

Elsewhere, Shooting Stars stumbled in Owerri, falling 2-1 to their hosts, while Rivers United's momentum took a hit after a disappointing loss to Enyimba. The People's Elephant, despite their struggles following a disappointing CAF Confederation Cup exit, managed to grind out a 1-0 victory thanks to Imoh Obot's 42nd-minute strike.

In Kano, the Pillars were made to sweat for their 1-0 win over a spirited Abia Warriors side. Despite the absence of star players Ahmed Musa and Abba Adam, who has been in scintillating form with five goals in four matches, Umar Mustafa's 42nd-minute goal proved decisive, keeping Kano Pillars in the hunt.

## Australian teenager Gout breaks Olympic champ Noah Lyles' record

EDWARD OSEGHE

**A**ustralian 17-year-old Gout Gout sensation has got the world talking again with a run that has bested a personal best mark set by Olympic champ Noah Lyles.

Stepping outside his 100m and 200m sprint disciplines, Gout ran the 400m in the Joanna Stone Shield meet in Brisbane on Saturday.

Gout last week warned American sprint king Lyles he was coming for him and — at the 400m distance at least — he has already got him.

Gout clocked 46.20 seconds, nearly a full second quicker than Lyles' own personal best mark — 47.04 seconds, set in 2016.

The time was also the fastest U18 time by an Australian for 35 years.

It's also possible Gout had more to give in the record-breaking run, using it

as a time trial more than a competitive race, according to coach Di Sheppard.

The Queensland high school student in January set up camp in the US to train with Lyles and his coach Lance Brauman in a bid to qualify for the Tokyo World Championships.

Gout will get his chance to book his ticket to Tokyo at the Australian Championships in Perth in April.

He has told Lyles to watch his back should they cross paths over 100m and 200m.

At least at 400m, Gout has the bragging rights.

Sheppard insisted running at the 400m distance is not something Gout will invest in.

It comes after Gout featured alongside Lyles on the Beyond the Records podcast and showed he is not daunted by the challenge of chasing Lyles in coming years.

## Usyk, Fury support Moses Itauma as next No.1 heavyweight king

EDWARD OSEGHE

**A**s the generation of the three kings of this current heavyweight era: Oleksandr Usyk, Tyson Fury and Anthony Joshua comes to a close, another fresh crop of talent is waiting to take its place.

Fury is presently retired, Joshua is unlikely to still be boxing by 2027 and Usyk recently admitted he only has two fights left in his illustrious career.

Two-time Olympic champion Bakhodir Jalolov will be a force to be reckoned with if he can translate his glittering amateur career to the pros.

IBF heavyweight champion Daniel Dubois is still only 27 years old and could become the next man to unify the division provided he can beat Joseph Parker on February 22 and then overcome Usyk in a rematch.

Meanwhile, Teremoana Teremoana, Justis Huni, Richard Torrez Jr, Delicious Orié, Martin Bakole, and Agit Kabayel all look



OLEKSANDR USYK

poised to make a big impact.

But the man everyone is most excited about, at least on British shores, is 20-year-old fast-rising boxer Moses Itauma.

The Chatham-based puncher hasn't put a foot wrong during his perfect 11-0 start in the paid ranks and he's got the seal of approval from the current king of the glamour division.

Usyk is not alone in his as-

essment of Itauma.

Fury has also dubbed Itauma 'the future of the heavyweight division' after sparring with him.

The Brit's explosive all-action style and eye for a knockout have led to comparisons with the great Mike Tyson.

When Itauma turned over as a pro two years ago, he set his sights on breaking 'Iron

Mike's' record as the youngest heavyweight world champion of all time (20 years, 4 months, and 22 days old).

However, he is being moved at a far more conservative pace by promoter Frank Warren, which should prove to serve him well in the long run.

Last time out, Itauma blasted fringe contender Demsey McKean away inside the opening round.

McKean, who had only ever lost to Filip Hrgovic prior to meeting Itauma, looked to be a good step up on paper.

But he proved no match for the youngster, who made quick work of him in the co-main event slot for Fury and Usyk's rematch on December 21.

Itauma is expected to return to the ring in the first quarter of 2025.

Former IBF heavyweight champion Charles Martin recently called for a fight with the heavy-handed youngster and he may well get his wish after Warren expressed interest in the match-up.



NOAH LYLES