

Stakeholders highlight Gov Okpebholo's people-centric policies

BENIN CITY

The Commissioner for Information and Communications, Hon. Paul Ohonbamu, has reaffirmed that Governor Monday Okpebholo's administration is deeply committed to a people-centric policy thrust, as evidenced by the remarkable achievements recorded within his first hundred days in office.

Hon. Ohonbamu made this statement during a Stakeholder Sensitisation Workshop themed "Exposing the Policy Thrust of Governor Monday Okpebholo's Administration," organised by the Ministry of Information and Communications, in collaboration with the Edo State Government.

The event, held at the New Festival Hall in Government House, Benin City, aimed to

enhance public understanding of the administration's vision and encourage citizens to actively engage in the government's developmental agenda.

In his address, the Commissioner emphasised that the sensitisation initiative aligns with the Ministry's mandate to foster communication between the government and the people.

He detailed some of the key policies, programs, and projects

implemented by Governor Okpebholo's administration within its first hundred days, underscoring the governor's unwavering commitment to improving the lives of Edo residents.

A panel discussion moderated by Hon. Ohonbamu provided further insights into the administration's policy directions.

The Commissioner for Health, Dr. Cyril Oshiomole, highlighted the governor's

dedication to accessible and affordable healthcare. He cited the launch of a two-year free malaria treatment program, the provision of 24 hectares of land for the establishment of a National Obstetric Fistula Centre, the rehabilitation and equipping of primary health-care centres, and the extension of the retirement age for health workers as key initiatives.

He called on stakeholders

and well-meaning individuals to support the government's efforts in creating a healthier society.

Similarly, the Commissioner for Education, Dr. Paddy Emmanuel Iyamu, shared that the administration has embarked on the rehabilitation of dilapidated schools inherited from the previous government.

He also noted ongoing re-

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...that the people may know

CBN retains interest rate at 27.50% to tackle inflation

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Okpebholo launches major 36km road project to boost economic growth

RICHARD EWEKA

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, has launched a transformative 36-kilometre road construction project connect-

ing Utako, Unewa, Eworah, and Uromi, pledging quality infrastructure that will open up the region for economic growth.

Leading a delegation of top government officials, Gover-

nor Okpebholo inspected the ongoing work and assured residents of his administration's commitment to practical governance.

The project, he emphasised, is part of a broader effort to

deliver tangible development across the state.

"This road will change the economic landscape of these communities," the governor said. "We are not just building roads; we are creating access to opportunities, trade, and development. Our goal is to make governance impactful and visible in the lives of our people."

Residents of the area, who had long suffered from poor road infrastructure, expressed joy and gratitude. Larha Fanel, a Benue State indigene residing

in the area, praised the governor for prioritising neglected communities.

Madam Alice Ojeifoh, another resident, highlighted the project's importance, stating that the road would stimulate business activities and enhance the region's economic potential.

"The road was abandoned for years, but today, we have hope again," she said.

The contractor, Michael Rezk, provided technical updates, confirming that the road, which will connect eight

communities, is scheduled for completion within two years.

"We have started with concrete drainage to control water flow, and work on laterite placement is progressing well. Soon, we will move to the stone base and asphalt phase," he explained.

As work advances, the project is expected to ease transportation, improve trade, and accelerate development in Edo State, reinforcing Governor Okpebholo's vision for a modern, well-connected infrastructure network.



INSPECTION: Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo leading government officials for an inspection of the 36-kilometre Utako, Unewa, Eworah and Uromi road project.

NSCDC, Tantita strengthen ties in fight against insecurity

BETTY IDIALU

The Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) and Tantita Security Services Nigeria Limited (TSSNL) have reaffirmed their commitment to tackling insecurity, with a focus on curbing sea piracy and vandalism in the Niger Delta.

During a visit to TSSNL, the agency's Commandant General, Dr. Ahmed Abubakar Audi, urged stakeholders to promptly report any security personnel found aiding criminal activities.

Tantita's Operations Director, Captain Warriadi Enisuoeh Pondi, acknowledged a decline in kidnapping incidents, but highlighted the persistent threat of sea pirates.

He reiterated Tantita's dedication to restoring security and praised President Bola Tinubu for fostering an enabling environment.

"We appreciate our collaboration with the NSCDC and remain committed to our mission of combating insecurity," Pondi stated.

He also emphasized Tantita's efforts to transform the region, noting that fishing activities were resuming in previously volatile areas.

In addition, the company is promoting rice farming and other alternative vocations to provide legitimate employment opportunities and deter criminal activities.

"We are working on sustainable initiatives to utilise reclaimed land for productive

ventures," he added.

Dr. Audi reaffirmed the NSCDC's vigilance and disclosed that five officers had been dismissed for aiding criminal activities.

He assured continued government support for logistics and welfare, emphasising the need for integrity within the corps.

Commending Tantita's diversification efforts, he described them as a significant step toward economic empowerment and crime reduction.

As part of his operational tour, Dr. Audi also held a closed-door meeting with TSSNL Chairman, Chief Government Ekpemupolo, popularly known as Tompolo, in Oporoza to discuss strengthening security collaborations.

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100 days in office: Edo NIPR commends Gov Okpepholo's visionary leadership

The Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR), Edo State Chapter has commended the visionary leadership of Senator Monday Okpepholo, the Governor of Edo State as he marks his first 100 days in office.

In a statement issued by the State Chapter Chairman, Dr. James-Wisdom Abhulimen, the NIPR commended Governor Okpepholo for his remarkable achievements within this short, but impactful period.

The institute lauded his purposeful and focused leadership, which has already set Edo State on the path of progress and sustainable development.

Highlighting the key accomplishments of the Governor within his first 100 days, the NIPR recognized his swift interventions in critical sectors, including infrastructure, security, education, and healthcare.

Notably, the decision to build a flyover at Ramat Park, and

the ongoing repair of the Benin-Auchi Expressway reflect his administration's commitment to long-term development and economic revitalization.

The NIPR further applauded Governor Okpepholo's proactive measures in tackling criminality and cultism in Edo State, as well as his dedication to strengthening security frameworks.

His initiatives in recruiting teachers and improving healthcare services underscore a commitment to human capital development and the overall well-being of the people.

The Chapter emphasized that in just 100 days, the Governor has made significant strides that have laid a strong foundation for further growth, while reinforcing public confidence in government.

Dr. Abhulimen urged Governor Okpepholo to remain steadfast in upholding transparency and accountability, which are the hallmarks of good governance.

EDSPHCDA Executive Secretary tours PHCs in Edo

EDWARD OSEGHE

The Executive Secretary of the Edo State Primary Health Care Development Agency (EDSPHCDA), Dr. Coulson Osoikhai Oahimire has conducted a supervisory tour of primary healthcare centers across Edo State.

The visit aimed to assess facilities earmarked for upgrades under the World Bank-funded Immunization Plus and Malaria Progress by Accelerating Coverage and Transforming Services (IMPACT) project, executed in partnership with the Edo State Government.

This initiative focuses on renovating and enhancing healthcare services to reduce maternal and child mortality rates.

Accompanied by his Technical Adviser, Dr. Gideon Iraoyah, Dr. Oahimire inspected Iwogban PHC, Amufi PHC, and Oregbeni PHC in Benin City.

He urged healthcare workers to remain dedicated to their duty and reaffirmed Governor Monday Okpepholo's commitment to strengthening primary healthcare and ensuring residents have access to quality medical services.

As part of his tour, Dr. Oahimire also visited Opoji PHC in Esan Central, where he assessed facility conditions and supervised the Big Catch-Up vaccination exercise which commenced on Monday February 17, 2025 and will end today.

He reviewed records, ensured adherence to proper protocols, and personally completed Open Data Kit (ODK) data entry.

The team later proceeded to Idumabi, Irrua, Esan Central, where they were warmly received by community leader Chief Ohons. Dr. Oahimire expressed gratitude for the hospitality and reiterated the government's dedication to improving healthcare services.

Stakeholders highlight Gov Okpepholo's...

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cruitment and promotion of teachers across the state, urging communities to safeguard school infrastructure to ensure sustainability.

Adding an academic perspective, Prof. Felix Oriakhi of the Department of Political Science, Federal University Otuoke, and Dr. Onoho' Omhen Ebhohimhen of Mewar International University, Abuja, commended the governor for his significant strides across various sectors.

They underscored the importance of training revenue enforcers, establishing a proper waste management system, and reviving the Storm Water Project.

They further emphasized the role of citizens in addressing the state's challenges and urged active participation in governance.

Goodwill messages were delivered on behalf of Governor

Okpepholo by the Head of Service, Dr. Anthony Okongbowa, and on behalf of the Deputy Governor by the Deputy Chief of Staff, Hon. Pius Alile.

In his vote of thanks, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry, Dr. Desmond Agbama, expressed gratitude to stakeholders for attending the workshop and encouraged continued dialogue and collaboration in advancing the administration's policy thrust.

The event saw attendance from key stakeholders, including representatives from the Commissioner of Police's office, Permanent Secretaries, members of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), religious organisations, student unions, public school students, non-governmental organisations, and staff of the Ministry of Information and Communications

Edo First Lady advocates training, capacity building for civil servants

● Calls for grassroots devt, women's empowerment

The Coordinator of the Office of the First Lady, Mrs. Edesili Okpepholo Anani, has commended Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpepholo, for his commitment to revitalizing the state's civil and public service, emphasizing that training and retraining will enhance productivity.

During a courtesy visit to the Director General of the John Odigie Oyegun Public Service Academy (JOOPSA), Mrs. Gina Otamere, in Benin City, praised the institution for its dedication to workforce development, social welfare, and youth empowerment.

Mrs. Anani lauded Mrs. Otamere's leadership, stating that her rise from the civil service to her current position is commendable and an inspiration to many.

She further applauded the governor for prioritizing Edo people in governance and discouraging the past practice of re-

lying on external consultants for roles that should be performed by the state's civil servants.

She noted that Edo's workforce is hardworking and capable, and the new administration is keen on empowering its own people. She emphasized that with the governor's mandate, JOOPSA has the responsibility of reviving the civil service, ensuring continuous training, and making workers more productive and efficient.

She thanked the governor for his trust in the people of Edo, stating that his vision is to make the civil service self-sufficient and effective.

In response, Mrs. Otamere expressed appreciation for the visit and reaffirmed JOOPSA's commitment to aligning with the administration's policies to enhance the effectiveness of the civil and public service.

She emphasized that Edo State will no longer rely on external consultants for capacity-build-

ing programs, as JOOPSA has been tasked with equipping civil and public servants with the necessary skills to perform their roles effectively.

She reiterated that the focus is on developing functional skills that will enable workers to be self-reliant, efficient, and highly productive in their jobs.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Anani, has stressed the importance of grassroots development, stating that true empowerment and governance must have a tangible impact on local communities.

Speaking during the inauguration of the planning committee for International Women's Day at the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, she emphasized that beyond the annual celebration, women need to develop long-term strategies for growth and empowerment.

She stated that the gathering was an opportunity for women to come together and discuss issues that affect them, highlight-

ing that they are the backbone of the economy and must take charge of their future.

She urged women to move beyond ceremonial participation and focus on concrete plans for their advancement, asking critical questions about their goals, aspirations, and the impact they want to make in the state.

She underscored the vital role of women in governance and development, stressing that they are more than just political tools used during elections.

She called for unity among women, stating that collective action is key to driving meaningful change and that the absence of unity hinders progress.

The Commissioner for Women Affairs and Social Development, Chief Bisi Idaomi, reiterated the ministry's commitment to addressing critical issues such as gender-based violence, support for the elderly, assistance for abandoned children, and the inclusion of people with disabilities.



110TH INAUGURAL LECTURER:

DELSU's 110th Inaugural Lecturer, Prof Omerionwan Kingsley Edu (left), a Professor of Law, presenting a copy of the lecture to the Vice Chancellor of Delta State University, Abraka Prof Samuel Ogheneovo Asagba, in Abraka.

DELSU VC calls for legal safeguards to protect women in marriage

The Vice Chancellor of Delta State University, Abraka, Professor Samuel Ogheneovo Asagba, has urged families to ensure marriages are formalised under both customary and civil laws to protect women from discriminatory practices entrenched in Nigerian customary traditions.

Speaking in Abraka at the university's 110th Inaugural Lecture, Prof. Asagba highlighted the vulnerabilities women face under certain customary laws.

The lecture, titled "The Nigerian Woman under Customary Law Marriages: Free or Fettered?" was delivered by Professor Omerionwan Kingsley Edu, a distinguished Professor of Law.

Prof. Asagba acknowledged the cultural significance of customary law marriages in preserving traditions and fostering social cohesion. However, he also pointed out several challenges that women encounter due to certain customary legal provisions.

He cited issues such as forced widow inheritance, restrictions on women's rights within marriage, limitations on inheritance rights from deceased husbands, and instances of sexual harassment.

He stressed that formalising marriages under civil law alongside customary practices would provide legal protection and prevent gender-based discrimination.

In his lecture, Prof. Edu emphasised that marriage remains the foundation of family life, ensuring continuity and fostering lasting relationships.

He noted that while customary law marriages remain the preferred choice for many Nigerian women due to their cultural importance, they often subject women to unfair and degrading treatment.

He presented case studies illustrating the adverse effects of discriminatory customary laws and advocated for reforms in marriage and inheritance legislation to secure fair treatment for women.

The event was attended by prominent university officials, in-

cluding Deputy Vice Chancellor (Administration) Prof. Rosemary Okoh, Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) Prof. Ochuko Anomohanran, Provost of Oleh Campus Prof. Elo Ibagere, and Registrar Mrs. Rufina Ufuoma Ufiofio.

Also present were the Chairman of the Urhobo Traditional Rulers Council and Ovie of Uvwie Kingdom, HRM Dr. Emmanuel E. Sideso, alongside other traditional leaders, university staff, students, family members of the lecturer, and invited guests.

The gathering underscored the importance of addressing gender disparities within customary legal frameworks and reinforcing legal protections for women in marriage.

NEWS

Okpebholo's administration prioritizes returnees' welfare, reintegration —EDMA DG

Governor Monday Okpebholo's administration has reaffirmed its commitment to the welfare of Edo citizens by facilitating the safe return and reintegration of Libya returnees.

Marking his first 100 days in office with a strong humanitarian gesture, the Edo State Government, through the Edo

Migration Agency (EDMA), welcomed a group of returnees at the Murtala Muhammed International Airport, Lagos.

Receiving the returnees, Hon. Lucky Agazuma, the Director-General of EDMA, assured them of the government's full support as they began the process of reintegration.

He highlighted the admin-

istration's focus on equipping them with vocational skills to promote self-reliance and economic independence.

He urged them to view their return, not as a failure, but as an opportunity for a new beginning.

"Life is a journey filled with different phases. This is just another step toward rebuilding your

future. You are back home, and the government is here to support you. We will ensure that you become ambassadors to educate others about the risks of irregular migration," Agazuma stated.

Acknowledging the harrowing experiences endured by those who embarked on the dangerous journey, Agazuma stressed the importance of turn-

ing their stories into powerful lessons for others.

He emphasized that the administration's approach is rooted in understanding and support, rather than blame or judgment.

"No one deserves to go through what you did. That's why we want you to share your experiences to prevent others from taking the same path. Our priority is to help you rebuild your lives because you are valuable members of Edo society, and Governor Okpebholo cares deeply about every citizen," he added.

The returnees expressed deep gratitude for the warm reception and the government's commitment to their reintegration.

Many shared emotional accounts of their struggles in Libya, reinforcing the urgent need for increased awareness and better opportunities within Edo State to discourage illegal migration.

Under Governor Okpebholo's leadership, the administration remains resolute in addressing migration challenges by creating sustainable opportunities for Edo youths.

With initiatives focused on employment, education, and economic development, the government is working to ensure that citizens can thrive at home, eliminating the need to seek uncertain prospects through dangerous and illegal routes.



ROADS CONSTRUCTION:

Deputy Senate President, Barau I Jibrin (right), presenting a souvenir to the Managing Director, Bank of Agriculture, Alhaji Alwan Hassan, after the signing of an MoU between Senator Barau's Foundation and the bank on a loan scheme at the National Assembly, Abuja.

PHOTO: OMOYE AMINU

Eulogies for *Nigerian Observer* ex editor, Atakpu, at 60

LUCKY EFESE AND
ESTHER NWULU

BENIN CITY

Eulogies were penultimate weekend, poured on former Deputy Editor of the Nigerian Observer Newspaper, Comr. Leo Ohiro Atakpu, as he celebrated his 60th birthday in grand style.

The birthday which witnessed the presence of high profile personalities across the country including his family members, featured a guest lecture with the theme "Tackling Multi-Dimensional Poverty in Nigeria; Need for Reforms" delivered by the Deputy Vice Chancellor, Wellspring University, Benin, Professor Patrick Ohikhena.

This was followed by a panel discussants featuring Dr. Osai-ga Felix Isibor, Senior Lecturer, Department of Marketing, University of Benin, Ms Sabina Id-

owu-Osehobo, former Executive Director, LAPO, Dr. Godwin Uyi Ojo, Chairman, Governing Board of Conference of Non Governmental Organisations, Edo State, Dr. Oscar Ubhenin, Associate Professor, Public Administration, Ambrose Ali University, Ekpoma and Mrs Blessing Eromon, Head, CLEEN Foundation, Benin City among others.

Speakers after speakers including the Features Editor, Nigerian Observer Newspaper and former chairperson of NAWOJ, Edo State, Comr. Grace Ijeoma Umeh, thanked God for protecting and preserving the life of the celebrant and those of his family and for making him to impact positively on the lives of the common man.

They described Comr Atakpu as a consummate leader and an epitome of accountability, transparency and fair play whose comradeship has promoted the course of good governance in

the country and the world in general.

Also speaking, the Chairman of the occasion and Executive Director, Africa Network for Environment and Economic Justice, ANEEJ, Rev. David Ugolor, who recalled how the Non Governmental Organization was established about three decades ago, described the celebrant as a brother, confidant, trusted and honest ally and hardworking comrade, saying his inputs as the Deputy Executive Director of ANEEJ, had promoted the Organisation and the society towards achieving their goals.

In the same vein, the wife of the celebrant, Barr Mrs Oritsemueyiwa Atakpu, extolled the virtues of her husband, describing him as a true and honest husband, father, brother and close associate whose legacies would remain indelible in the family especially his humanitarian dispositions in building a viable but prosper-

ous society devoid of crimes and criminal activities.

They pray to God Almighty to continue to give him a sense of direction to enable him discharge his responsibilities to the people and humanity.

In his vote of thanks, the celebrant, who was highly elated about the outpouring of goodwill and fair comments, thanked God for his life for witnessing another milestone age in his life's journey.

He particularly thanked his wife and Rev. David Ugolor and the Governing Board and staff of ANEEJ for standing with and for being supportive, a gesture he admitted propelled him to where he is today, not forgetting the grace of God in his life.

He however reassured of his total commitment to advocating for a just and equitable society that promotes fairness which is at the core of sustainable development.

Delta police nab suspected kidnappers, recover Beretta pistol, others

AJUWA VICTOR

The Delta State police command says that intelligence gathering and analysis led to the arrest of some suspected kidnappers who had been terrorizing Abraka/Obiaruku and Umutu areas of the State.

According to a press release by the Police Public Relations Officer Mr. Bright Edefe (SP), operatives of the CP Special Assignment team (CP-SAT) led by ASP Julius Robinson made a significant achievement when they stormed the hideout on 02/02/25 and busted the house of the fleeing gang leader named Emeka 'm' surname unknown at about 1635hrs, located at Ewwokeken layout off Ughelli Road Agbarho in Ughelli North LGA Delta State.

During the raid, a fabricated Semi-Automatic Beretta Pistol with four (4) rounds of live ammunition, four locally made cut-to-size guns, thirteen (13) rounds of live cartridges,

and a pair of military uniforms concealed in a black polythene bag were recovered.

The suspect the police said is in custody and thaa manhunt to arrest other members of his gang is still ongoing.

In a related development, On 19/2/2025 at about 1600hrs, operatives of Safer 025 of Safer highway patrol while on stop and search duty along Benin/Agbor road while conducting stop and search on a commercial vehicle along Agbor/Benin express-way, arrested three suspects in possession of three locally made long guns, and charms.

The suspects namely, Buhari Bala 'm' aged 28yrs, Habibu Sale 'm' aged 25yrs, Abdulwahab Musa 'm' aged 20yrs, and Taisu Bala 'm' aged 20yrs, claimed they were coming from Zaria Kaduna State going to a bush before Benin called Igbogri community for hunting expedition.

"The suspects are in police custody and the investigation is ongoing."

Edo Govt assures of friendly business environment

ABDUL-KADIR ABDULLAH

The Managing Director, Edo State Investment Promotion Office (ESIPO), Ease of Doing Business Secretariat, Mr. Amen Odigie has emphasized the state's dedication to creating an enabling environment for businesses to thrive.

Odigie gave the assurance in a policy dialogue tagged delivery progress: 100 Days of Strengthening Governance Accountability and Citizen Engagement, which was held in Benin City, the state capital on Friday, February 21, 2025.

According to the MD, who participated as a panelists discussing the topic: "Deepening Economic Growth: Support for SMEs, PPPs, the Ease of Doing Business and Oil and Gas: The

Journey so far, Envisioning a Greater Future", stated that there is a strong correlation between infrastructure development, access to SME financing, and overall economic growth, which is why infrastructure development is one among the governor Okpebholo's five point agenda.

He noted, "We recognize that inadequate infrastructure and limited access to finance have historically hindered Nigeria's economic progress, in Edo State, we are tackling these challenges head-on. For access to finance for businesses, when I resumed office in December, 2024, the first programme we carried out was a sensitization programme on the Federal Government of Nigeria ₦75 billion naira MSME fund,

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Foundation enrolls 1,000 students for UTME

AJUWA VICTOR

Warri North Local Government Area of Delta State witnessed an atmosphere of joy and celebration as the OMO Foundation took a significant step in supporting the educational aspirations of young students.

The foundation, led by its founder, Dr. Oritsegbegbemi

Maurice Ojoede decided to enroll 1,000 students for the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) examination, providing them with a crucial opportunity to advance their academic journeys.

During the registration event, which took place in Koko Town, Dr. Ojo-Ede addressed the beneficiaries, emphasizing the importance of education in shaping their future.

He assured the students that those who score 250 marks and above in the JAMB examination would receive a full-package scholarship, including accommodation, from the foundation.

Encouraging them to remain focused, he stated, "I can see many great men and women among you, but you must take your education seriously."

The initiative has been widely applauded by students, parents,

and community members, who see it as a life-changing opportunity for many young individuals in Warri North Local Government Area.

With education being a powerful tool for empowerment, the OMO Foundation's commitment to supporting students underscores its dedication to fostering academic excellence and building a brighter future for the next generation.

SSG calls for prayers, support for Gov Okpebholo

ABDUL-KADIR ABDULLAH

The Secretary to the Edo State Government (SSG), Umar Musa Ikhilor (Esq), has called on the people of Edo State to pray and support Governor Okpebholo to enable him to successfully implement his plans for the state.

The SSG made the plea during a special Friday prayer ses-

sion at Igun Central Mosque in Benin City, organised to commemorate the governor's first 100 days in office.

Ikhilor emphasised that Governor Okpebholo is deeply committed to improving the lives of Edo residents and urged citizens to rally behind his administration.

"The governor is strongly determined to better the lot of Edo people, and we need prayers

and support to achieve all that he has planned," he stated.

The Chief of Staff to the state government, Hon. Ganiyu Audu, described Governor Okpebholo's leadership as a divine intervention aimed at rescuing Edo State from the difficulties of the past administration.

"Okpebholo's coming as

governor is divine intervention from God to save the people of Edo from what we have endured over the last eight years," Audu noted.

He highlighted the administration's SHINE programme, which focuses on security, healthcare, infrastructure, natural resources, education, and

human capital development.

"We have made tremendous efforts to develop these sectors, and by God's grace, we have started well and will end well," he added.

The special prayer session was attended by prominent figures, including Imams from various Muslim communi-

ties, the Chairman of the Edo State Muslim Pilgrims Welfare Board, Mallam Musah Muhammad Uduimoh, the Chairman of the Edo State Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, Al-haji Abdulazeez Igbinidu, and the Managing Director of Edo Broadcasting Service (EBS), Suleman Aledeh.

Five feared dead, scores wounded as vigilantes, suspected produce thieves clash in Edo community

IDAHOUSA MUSA

No fewer than five persons have been reportedly killed and scores of others injured following a deadly clash between Cocoa farmers and some suspected produce thieves in Gbelemotin community, Ovia South-West Local Government Area in Edo State.

The clash which started on Thursday night in the agrarian community, took a dangerous dimension on Friday morning as some persons believed to be sympathetic to the victims of Thursday night fight mobilised and launched a reprisal attack.

The News medium scooped that was gathered that many people were feared killed and many houses burnt in the attack and counter-attacks that occurred on Thursday and Friday morning.

A source in the locality who pleaded anonymity said that the crisis started on Thursday when an Ikale cocoa farmer (name withheld), hired some vigilantes to guard his cocoa farm said to be under heavy poaching by some suspected Ijaw boys.

The vigilantes were said to have killed four of the Ijaw boys.

The Friday morning counter-attack, the source added, was carried out by some Ijaw boys sympathetic to the four allegedly killed by the vigilantes.

"There was fighting yesterday (Friday) in my zone, many are feared killed. A vigilante spon-

sored by an Ikale man killed four Ijaw boys two nights ago," he said.

"The boys were allegedly stealing produce belonging to the Yoruba. The boys are from Kolombor (Gbelemotin).

"Yesterday Friday morning, there was a counterattack, and some people were killed and houses burnt. The number of casualties on the other side is yet not known.

"Soldiers and other security officers were there yesterday. They moved some bodies but there are still many bodies in the bushes.

"The cocoa these boys were stealing belong to the Yoruba farmers in the area, at Madotti Camp. The Yorubas must have suffered some collateral losses."

When contacted, the Edo State Police Command Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Moses Yamu, said that five persons were confirmed dead while four others were injured in the clash.

In a phone text sent to our reporter on Saturday evening, Yamu said: "five persons were confirmed dead while four others were injured in a clash between the Gbelemoti community and Maidoti community.

"Joint operation with the Army, vigilantes, and other agencies is ongoing as the situation has been brought under control," Yamu said.

"Investigation into the cause of the clash has equally commenced."

Edo Govt assures of friendly...

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which we carried out in collaboration with the Bank of Industry."

The MD outlined plans to collaborate with EdoJobs to further support 5,000 small businesses with interest free loans, facilitating access to credit through programmes like the Federal Government's ₦75 billion MSME fund, NIRSAL Microfinance Bank among other financial institutions.

He also mentioned ongoing efforts to develop an automobile spare parts market and mechanic village in Auchi, Etsako West Local Government Area, and facilitation of the Monee International market in Ikpoba Okha Local Government Area.

Odigie added, "We have also

said that, it is not just to make money. Human capacity development is also very important. We are already discussing with organizations like the South Africa Embassy for collaboration in skills and knowledge transfer. We hosted the Ambassador sometimes last month. We want our youths to go to South Africa to learn skills and come back to teach others"

The panel, which included Reverend David Ugholo, of ANEEJ, Felix Osenwengie Isere Esq, Special Adviser on Oil and Gas, Kizito Okpebholo, Special Adviser on Investment showcased a range of strategic initiatives. A cornerstone of the strategy is fostering public-private partnerships to stimulate economic growth.



IGBINEDION UNIVERSITY:

Guest Speaker at a public lecture organised by the Igbinedion University, Okada, Major General Ibrahim Manu Yusuf (Rtd.) (left), receiving a plaque from the Vice Chancellor of the university, Prof. Lawrence Ikechukwu Ezemonye, after the lecture.

Edo Muslim pilgrims board chairman, group, Imams laud Okpebholo's 100 days in office

ABDUL-KADIR ABDULLAH

The Chairman of the Edo State Muslim Pilgrims Welfare Board, Mallam Musah Muhammad Uduimoh, has commended Governor Okpebholo's administration for its achievements within its first 100 days in office.

Speaking during a special Friday prayer service at Igun Central Mosque in Benin City, Uduimoh expressed gratitude for the governor's support and acknowledged the contributions of key government officials, including the Secretary to the State Government, Musa Ikhilor, and the Chief of Staff, Hon. Ganiyu Audu.

"We thank Allah for the achievements within these 100

days. So far, so good. We appreciate the Governor for this opportunity to serve the Ummah and extend our gratitude to the Secretary to the State Government and the Chief of Staff for their continuous support," Uduimoh stated.

The Chief Imam of Benin, Abdulfatah Enabulele, who led the prayers, also praised the governor's efforts, praying for divine guidance and wisdom for his administration.

The event was attended by several dignitaries, including the Managing Director of Edo Broadcasting Service (EBS), Suleman Aledeh, the Chairman of the Edo State Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (EDSCIA), Alhaji Abdulazeez Igbinidu, and Imams from various Muslim

communities in Edo South.

The special prayer session was part of activities marking Governor Okpebholo's 100 days in office, reflecting the collaboration between the government and religious bodies in Edo State.

Meanwhile, the Edo Muslim for Equity and Good Governance (EMEGG) has lauded Governor Senator Monday Okpebholo's achievements in his first 100 days in office.

In a congratulatory letter dated February 22, 2025, and signed by General Coordinator, Sirajudeen Muhammad and Secretary, Abdullah Umar, the group expressed satisfaction with the governor's leadership and its positive impact on the state.

The letter highlighted Okpebholo's commitment to key

sectors, including education, healthcare, security, and infrastructure development, noting that his policies have brought "renewed hope" to the people of Edo State.

The group praised the governor's vision and dedication to delivering the dividends of democracy, particularly his efforts to "reset Edo State and bring back her lost glory."

"Sir, your leadership has been truly impressive, and the impact of your policies is already being felt across Edo State in your first 100 days in office," the letter stated.

"Your commitment to education, healthcare, security, and infrastructural development has brought renewed hope to the people of Edo State."

CBN retains interest rate at 27.50% to tackle inflation

OLUWATUNMISE OMOSEYIN

The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) has retained its benchmark interest rate at 27.50%, following a meeting of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) on Thursday, 20 February 2025. The decision was announced by CBN Governor Olayemi Cardoso.

The move comes after six interest rate increases last year, amounting to a total rise of 875 basis points, in an effort to control inflation. Earlier this week, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) reported that Nigeria's

annual inflation rate for January had been revised to 24.48% following a rebasing exercise. Despite concerns about rising prices, the MPC opted to leave rates unchanged, partly due to the relative stability of the naira since December.

Alongside the interest rate, the MPC also retained other key monetary indicators. The Cash Reserve Ratio remains at 50% for Deposit Money Banks and 16% for Merchant Banks. The Liquidity Ratio stays at 30%, while the Asymmetric Corridor remains at +500/-100 basis points around the Monetary

Policy Rate (MPR).

Looking ahead, the CBN has projected that Nigeria's economy will grow by 4.17% in 2025. This growth is expected to be driven by economic reforms and efforts to bring inflation under control.

Policies introduced in 2023, including the removal of the petrol subsidy and the devaluation of the Naira, initially contributed to inflationary pressures.

However, the CBN believes that as these reforms take effect, inflation will begin to ease.

To further support economic stability, the government has

proposed tax reforms aimed at reducing costs for households. These include plans to raise the Value-Added Tax (VAT) to 12.5% by 2026 while exempting essential goods. The objective is to bring inflation down from 34.8% to 15% within the year.

The MPC's decision to maintain current interest rates reflects a cautious approach in balancing inflation control with economic growth. As Nigeria navigates economic challenges, the CBN remains focused on stabilising prices while supporting long term economic development.

FEATURE

Nigeria security in ICU?

AUSTIN ISIKHUEMEN

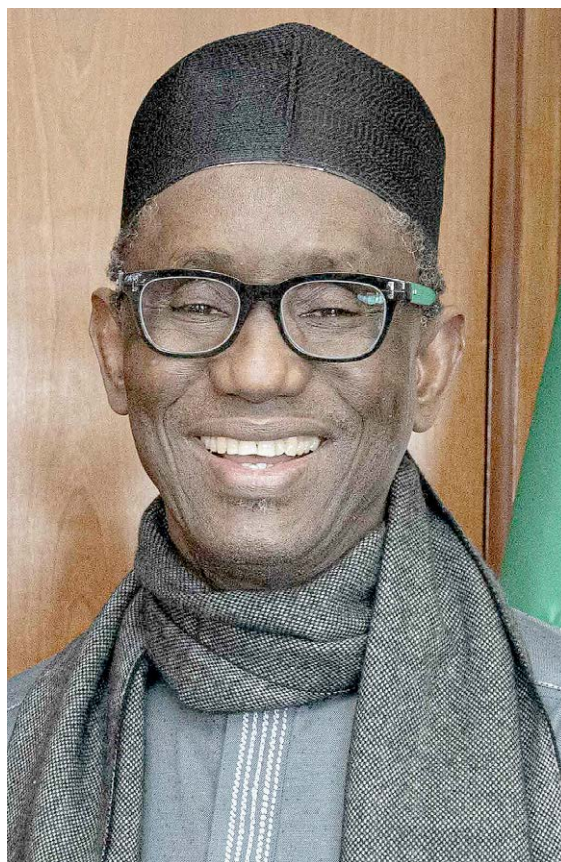
I drove from Benin to Yola, alone, in my first car in 1995. I left about 5 am and arrived at FUTY campus in Jimeta at 10pm. There were no mobile phones then. So, neither my friend, who worked there, now a Professor of Chemistry, nor my rib-to-be, who motivated my visit, knew I was on the way. My arrival was a shock to both. They were aghast when I told them I had left Benin the same day! My friend always spent a night in Benue State, making the journey in two days, any time he came to Edo by road.

Do not ask me why I would drive, alone, from Edo to Adamawa State, starting before daybreak and driving from Numan to Yola at night? Today, that sounds like a death wish. To younger people who became adolescents and young men and women in the era spanning 2009 to date, my story would sound like a fable. To them, they cannot relate with an era in Nigeria when a 0young man could drive alone from the South South to North Eastern Nigeria, or vice versa, no matter the motivation. But the truth is that Nigeria was not always this insecure.

Security was taken for granted at some periods in Nigeria's history. It was not a perfect situation, but, even armed robbers (called highway robbers then) who reared their heads after the civil war were said to operate mostly in secluded highways. They were said to attack mostly vehicles with a few people and avoided big luxury buses because of the crowd. Then they got bolder and began to operate in broad daylight and townships, culminating in the Anini saga that ended in 1986 in Benin City. Before then, Oyenusi had terrorized the South West till he was captured and executed.

Kano had the Matatsine religious insurgency that lasted a few years till the military dealt the sect a fatal blow and it evaporated. The revolt in Kano in December 1980 led to the death of 4,177, including Muhammadu Marwa, the sect leader himself. There was also another revolt in Bulumkutu, 15 km from Maiduguri and reports said 3,350 died. As bad as these insecurity episodes in Nigeria were, they were localized and sporadic and the rest of the country went on with their business. Even when a rogue police officer joined the fray like in the Anini case, it was still limited to Bendel State – now Edo and Delta States, and they mostly targeted banks and policemen. The gang fizzled out after CSP Uanreroro under the leadership of CP Osayande (as he then was) routed them and brought them to justice.

Security "fell ill" in 2009 in Nigeria. That was when the Boko Haram sect, founded in 2002, sprang up and became a real regional menace in Kano, Bauchi, Yobe and Borno states. Skirmishes with security agencies, especially the police, after four days of violence, led to the death of 700 members and their leader, Mohammed Yusuf, was said to have been extra-judicially executed. A new leader, more violent and malevolent took over and spread terror across the entire North East, parts of North West and the seat of government in Abuja. They kid-



NSA, NUHU REBADU



CDS, GEN. CHRISTOPHER MUSA

Nigeria Security's stay in the ICU may yet be long. Unless heroes rise up and take the challenge and run the gauntlet. No one can save and secure Nigeria for us except Nigerians with good hearts, intellect, courage and love of country. Otherwise, driving from Benin to Yola, or the other way round, will remain a pipe dream, at best or at worst, a hazardous undertaking. That is not the Nigeria of our dream

napped more than 276 Chibok school girls on the night of 14-15 April, 2014 and took them into captivity in Sambisa forest. The bombing of the UN headquarters internationalised the insurgency further, in addition to the tentacles already spread to Cameroon, Niger and Chad.

That was when we began to see bollards and barriers around military installations as well as massive checkpoints on highways and township roads. Police headquarters was even bombed and police stations ransacked at will and armories emptied of arms and ammunition. With army barracks being attacked in spite of the gallant efforts of the armed forces, "bloody civilians" like us felt hopeless and defenseless. No young man could venture anymore to drive from Benin to the middle belt, let alone to the North East, like I once did, alone or with company, even in broad daylight. That was when Nigerian Security went into the Intensive Care Unit.

It was said that when the situation got too threatening, with our sovereignty on the line, the government of the day engaged some mercenaries to join the Nigerian Army to face the insurgents. Some political opponents,

even from the area more devastated by the war situation, opposed the presence of the hired guns and eventually got them to leave our shores after the insurgency had been successfully used for regime change. Some of the mercenaries have since told the stories of their experience and those stories are available on social media. Was it not even suspiciously baffling that the insurgents always allowed elections to take place?

While Nigeria was heaving a sigh of relief and insurgent activities were beginning to ebb, especially with a change in the top leadership of the armed forces, kidnapping and banditry began to replace it. Professor Zulum's courageous and exemplary leadership was beginning to make a difference in Borno and some IDPs were returning home when Nigeria's uhuru song was cut short, yet again by the new insecurity scourge. Unlike Boko Haram that had a regional localization, mainly in the North East, the reach of banditry and kidnapping knows no bounds today. This time, the raison d'être is pecuniary, rather than religious.

Those now classified as bandits inhabit and operate mainly in the North

West though they make serious forays into parts of the middle belt, like Niger, Benue, Taraba and sometimes, other parts of the north. It is said that banditry is now a multi-billion naira business and the beneficiaries are not merely those turbaned, AK47-wielding, camouflage-wearing, violent, forest-dwelling drug addicts alone. Some fingers even get pointed at some in the high echelons of the society. In some areas, highly valued natural resources, especially solid minerals, are said to drive the territorial banditry and the siphoning of what should be the Federation's resources now going into private pockets. Proceeds of such blood money sometimes get packed as private jets in hangars across the nation.

The level of insecurity is grossly under-reported. Check Esan Youth Awareness on social media, for example, and you would find videos and discussions of frequent kidnappings that you will never read about in the orthodox media. Their remit covers a small part of Edo State alone. My gut feeling is that this may be how it is across many parts of the country. The negative impact on productivity, both in animal husbandry and arable farming, has been enormous. The current high cost of foodstuffs is not driven by the inflation arising from the recent monetary policy changes alone. The effect of reduced farming acreages due to the impact of Boko Haram, banditry and kidnapping plays a huge role.

The ready availability of small arms across West Africa, most of which end up in Nigeria, will keep Nigerian Security in ICU for a long time if not tackled head-on. Did we not see guns being wielded near the Election Petition Tribunal premises in Edo State recently? What of the spectacle at Airport road in Benin, even in the presence of armed security agents who the non-state actors freely intermingled with? What happens if the owners of those guns are hungry?

The most unsettling news of recent that is at once baffling, unsettling and unfathomable, is the revelation by a US Congressman, no less, that his own country funded the Boko Haram insurgents! Yes. We heard it from the horse's mouth! Scott Perry has alleged emphatically that USAID was used over time to funnel aid to Boko Haram. Meaning, while Michele was modeling Bring Back Our Girls, hubby Barack was busy funding the kidnappers of the unfortunate girls. Could it be that the predicted breakup of Nigeria by 2015 by America's National Security Agency was to be actualized through the instrumentality of Boko Haram with USAID covert funding and other logistics? What of our troops who lost their lives? I wait for someone to convince me they did this behind Obama's back, if true. Please!

Could those sophisticated guns, that made our army's inventory look like toys, have been channeled to BH by those who played a role in influencing our 2015 elections? Could the man who we celebrated in the White-house as our own have been so enamoured of his national interest that he pushed us under the bus? How do you convince me now that the banditry in Northern Nigeria is not a fully funded operation where the local beneficiaries naively think they are on the driving seat! In this game, not even elected state governors, appointed ministers or some brass hats may be immune, especially in a country where wealth is gradually replacing God in some people's reckoning. Some will do it for the money even if they know. Others could do it out of pure ignorance. A house in a choice part of a foreign country can make some sell Nigeria.

This, if true, may still shake our belief that Western Democracy is the best. Those of us who have always made that case and showcased America as "the shining light on a hill" are having our convictions violently shaken. We are not so naïve not to know that countries and their leaders are expected to pursue their national interest. That applies to America. Even Trump has just said "He who saves his country does not violate any law." It applies to Nigeria too. But to run with the hare and hunt with the hound the way Congressman Scott Perry has revealed emphatically re-enforces the suspicion that General Murtala Mohammed was killed because of his "Africa has come of age" speech and OAU's follow up actions on Angolan's independence. Dimka may have pulled the trigger, but the gun was somebody else's.

Nigeria Security's stay in the ICU may yet be long. Unless heroes rise up and take the challenge and run the gauntlet. No one can save and secure Nigeria for us except Nigerians with good hearts, intellect, courage and love of country. Otherwise, driving from Benin to Yola, or the other way round, will remain a pipe dream, at best or at worst, a hazardous undertaking. That is not the Nigeria of our dream.

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NEWS

Foreign

Israel indefinitely delays Palestinian prisoner release as hostages freed

Israel says it is indefinitely delaying the release of more than 600 Palestinian prisoners, in another potentially major setback in the ceasefire process.

Benjamin Netanyahu said the release was now going to be delayed until the next handover of hostages by Hamas was guaranteed - and without what the Israeli prime minister called the degrading ceremonies Hamas

has put on each week.

Only one more handover - of the bodies of four hostages who died in captivity - is due to take place in the first phase of the ceasefire deal, which is due to end on 1 March.

No arrangements for the release of other living hostages, due to take place in the second phase, have yet been made.

Delegations from Israel and

Hamas were due to negotiate the exact terms of the second phase while the first was ongoing - but have yet to meet.

Mediators will be working overtime to get the deal back on track and avert a possible collapse, after both Israel and Hamas accused one another of breaking the terms of the agreement.

Netanyahu accused Hamas of "repeated violations", includ-

ing the "cynical use of the hostages for propaganda purposes".

In response, Hamas official Izzat al-Rishq strongly condemned the decision to postpone the release of the prisoners in a statement on Sunday morning.

He said that Israel's claim that the handover ceremonies were humiliating was a "false claim and a flimsy argument" aimed at evading its obligations

under the ceasefire agreement.

Netanyahu's statement came after four hostages taken captive on 7 October - Tal Shoham, Omer Shem Tov, Eliya Cohen and Omer Wenkert - were released on Saturday.

The two other released hostages, Avera Mengistu and Hisham al-Sayed, were held in Gaza for years - Mr Mengistu since 2014 and Mr al-Sayed since 2015.

In exchange, Israel was supposed to release 602 Palestinian prisoners. Hamas accused Israel of violating the agreement by delaying the release.

The six Israeli hostages are the final living hostages to be returned as part of the first phase of a ceasefire agreement.

Meanwhile, outside the Ofer Prison in the occupied West Bank, family and friends waited for the release of Palestinian prisoners.

According to Palestinian authorities, 50 prisoners who were going to be released were serving life sentences, 60 had long sentences, and 445 were detained by Israel since 7 October.

There are 62 hostages taken on 7 October 2023 still being held by Hamas, about half of whom are believed to be alive.

Hamas began releasing hostages, facilitated by the Red Cross, in exchange for Palestinian prisoners after the ceasefire agreement took effect on 19 January.

Initial chaotic scenes have become more choreographed, with hostages flanked by fighters on stages before the handovers.

On Saturday, Mr Shoham, 40, and Mr Mengistu, 39, were passed to the Red Cross in Rafah in southern Gaza before being transferred to the Israel Defense Forces (IDF).

Mr Shoham was visiting family at Kibbutz Be'eri in October 2023 when he and others, including his wife and two children, were kidnapped by Hamas. His captured family members were released after 50 days.

In a statement, his family said: "This is an unforgettable moment, where all emotions are rapidly mixing together. Our Tal is with us."



PRISONER RELEASE:

Palestinians awaits news about the prisoner release in the West Bank

Russia launches largest drone attack of war on Ukraine

Russia launched the largest single drone attack on Ukraine on Saturday night, officials have said.

Ukraine's Air Force Command spokesman Yuriy Ignat, said a "record" 267 Russian drones were launched in a single, coordinated attack. Some 138 were intercepted while 119 disappeared after being jammed without causing any damage.

While many were repelled, emergency services reported drone strikes causing destruction and fires in several regions overnight.

The strikes come on the eve of the third anniversary of the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said it was the largest drone attack on the country since Russia began using Iranian-made drones.

He said in a statement that this week Russia had launched nearly 1,150 attack drones, more than 1,400 guided aerial bombs and 35 missiles of various types at Ukraine.

"We must do everything possible to bring a lasting and just peace to Ukraine," Zelensky wrote.

"This is achievable through the unity of all partners - we need the strength of all of Europe, the strength of America, the strength of everyone who seeks lasting peace."

According to the Ukrainian

government and western intelligence, Russia has been using Iranian-made Shahed-136 drones - also known as "kamikaze" drones - since the autumn of 2022.

The drones were reported to have been used initially to attack military targets in the Kharkiv region, but have since been used to target population centres and energy infrastructure.

Iran has previously said it only supplied a "small number" of drones to Russia before the war, but the US and EU have accused Iran of sending regular deliveries of drones to Russia.

It is not clear how many people have died during Saturday's drone

strike, but initial figures from emergency services suggest there were at least three casualties.

Two people died in a strike on a residential building in Kherson, in southern Ukraine - a man and a mother of twins, the Ukrainian state emergency services said.

Regional authorities also confirmed that one man died and at least three were wounded following a strike on the central city of Kryvyi Rih.

Meanwhile, a 53-year-old woman was hospitalised after being injured in a drone attack in Zaporizhzhia, and firefighters were called to extinguish

multiple fires in the capital, Kyiv.

Kyiv's Mayor Vitali Klitschko wrote on Telegram that the multi-wave drone attacks on the capital had damaged several houses and cars but there were no immediate reports of injuries.

Drones were intercepted in at least 13 regions including Kharkiv, Poltava, Sumy, Kyiv, Chernihiv, Mykolayiv and Odesa, according to Ukrainian authorities.

The Ukrainian air force also reported that Russia launched three ballistic missiles overnight.

Pope has 'peaceful' night after condition described as 'critical'

Pope Francis had a "peaceful" night and was rested, the Vatican said, after revealing on Saturday that his condition continues to be "critical".

The pontiff was described as "more unwell" than on Friday and he has received blood transfusions as he suffers from a "prolonged asthma-like respiratory crisis".

The 88-year-old is being treated for pneumonia in both lungs at the Gemelli Hospital in Rome.

The blood transfusions were deemed necessary due to a low platelet count, associated with anaemia, the Vatican said.

It said the Roman Catholic leader was alert and in his armchair, but required a "high flow" of oxygen and his prog-

nosis "remains guarded".

"The Holy Father's condition remains critical," it said in a statement. "The Pope is not out of danger."

It added: "The Holy Father continues to be alert and spent the day in an armchair even if he was suffering more than yesterday."

The Pope has asked for openness about his health, so the Vatican has begun releasing daily statements. The tone and length of the announcements has varied, sometimes leaving Pope-watchers to attempt to read between the lines.

But this is by far the starkest assessment yet and it is unusually detailed. It declines to give any prognosis.

It comes just a day after doctors treating the Pope said for the first time that he was responding to medication, although they were clear that his condition was complex. They said on Friday that the slightest change of circumstance would upset what was called a "delicate balance".

"He is the Pope," as one of them put it. "But he is also a man."

The Pope was first admitted to hospital on 14 February after experiencing difficulties breathing for several days.

He is especially prone to lung infections due to developing pleurisy - an inflammation around the lungs - as an adult and having part of one of his lungs removed at age 21.

During his 12 years as leader of the Roman Catholic church, the Argentine has been hospitalised several times, including in March 2023 when he spent three nights in hospital with bronchitis.

The latest news will worry Catholics worldwide, who are following news of the Pope's condition closely.

It is a busy Jubilee year for the Catholic Church with huge numbers of visitors expected in Rome and a major schedule of events for the Pope.

He is not known for enjoying being inactive. Even in hospital, his doctors say he went to pray in the chapel this week and had been reading in his chair.

One dead and police hurt in knife attack in France

One person has been killed and three police officers injured in a knife attack in the eastern French city of Mulhouse.

A 37-year-old Algerian man was arrested at the scene and the prosecutor has opened a terrorist inquiry because the suspect reportedly shouted "Allahu Akbar", or "God is great".

The man injured two police officers seriously, one in the neck and one in the chest. A 69-year-old Portuguese man who tried to intervene was stabbed and killed.

The suspect was subject to a deportation order because he was on a terrorism watch list, according to the local prosecutor. President Emmanuel Macron said there was "no doubt it was an Islamist terrorist attack".

After expressing his condolences to the family of the victim, Macron added: "I want to reiterate the determination of the government, and mine, to

continue the work to eradicate terrorism on our soil."

The attack took place at about 16:00 local time (15:00 GMT) on Saturday near a busy market in Mulhouse, which is close to the borders with Germany and Switzerland.

The police officers were on patrol at a demonstration taking place in support of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

"I have lived in France for 41 years and I have never experienced something like this," Cemalettin Canak, 55, told the Reuters news agency.

"It has shocked me a lot," he added. "Now when I go to the market, I will be a little nervous."

Of the two officers taken to hospital, the one injured to the chest was later discharged, prosecutors told the AFP news agency, while three others suffered minor injuries.

"Horror has seized our city," Mulhouse mayor Michele Lutz wrote on Facebook.

French Prime Minister François Bayrou posted on X that "fanaticism has struck again and we are in mourning".

"My thoughts naturally go to the victims and their families, with the firm hope that the injured will recover," he said.

Visiting the scene on Saturday evening, Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau told broadcaster TF1 that France had attempted to expel the suspect 10 times, and each time Algeria had refused to accept him.

He called for the establishment of a new "balance of power" with Algeria, and told reporters "we must change the rules" on how detention centres operate.

Retailleau also said the suspect had been found to have a "schizophrenic profile" following his arrest.

NEWS

Foreign

India bans two opioids behind crisis in West Africa

Indian authorities have banned two highly-addictive opioids in response to a BBC investigation which found they were fuelling a public health crisis in parts of West Africa.

In a letter seen by the BBC from India's Drugs Controller General, Dr Rajeev Singh Raghuvanshi said permission to manufacture and export the drugs had been withdrawn.

BBC Eye found one pharmaceutical company, Aveo, had been illegally exporting a harmful mix of tapentadol and carisoprodol in countries like Ghana, Nigeria, and Cote D'Ivoire.

India's Food and Drug Administration said the company's factory in Mumbai had since been raided and its entire stock seized.

The circular from Dr Raghuvanshi, dated to Friday, cited the BBC investigation in his decision to ban all combinations of tapentadol and carisoprodol, which was to be implemented with immediate effect.

He said this also came after officials had looked into "the potential of drug abuse and its harmful impact on population".

Tapentadol is a powerful opioid, and carisoprodol is a muscle relaxant so addictive it is banned in Europe.

Carisoprodol is approved for use in the US, but only for short periods of up to three weeks. Withdrawal symptoms include anxiety, insomnia and hallucinations.

The combination of the two drugs is not licensed for use anywhere in the world as they can cause breathing difficulties and seizures and an overdose can kill.

Despite the risks, these opioids are popular street drugs in many West African countries, because they are so cheap and widely available.

Publicly-available export data show that Aveo Pharmaceuticals, along with a sister company called Westfin International, has shipped millions of these tablets to Ghana and other West African countries.

The BBC World Service also found packets of these pills with the Aveo logo for sale on the streets of Nigeria, and in

Ivoirian towns and cities.

Nigeria, with a population of 225 million people, provides the biggest market for these pills. It has been estimated that about four million Nigerians abuse some form of opioid, according to the nation's National Bureau of Statistics.

As part of the investigation, the BBC also sent an undercover operative - posing as an African businessman looking to supply opioids to Nigeria - inside one of Aveo's factories in India, where they filmed one of Aveo's directors, Vinod Sharma, showing off the same dangerous products the BBC found for sale across West Africa.

In the secretly recorded footage, the operative tells Sharma that his plan is to sell the pills to teenagers in Nigeria "who all love this product".

Sharma in response replies "OK," before explaining that if users take two or three pills at once, they can "relax" and agrees they can get "high".

Towards the end of the meeting, Sharma says: "This is very harmful for the health," adding that "nowadays, this is business".

Sharma and Aveo Pharmaceuticals did not respond to a

request for comment when the BBC's initial investigation was published.

India's Food and Drug Administration said a sting oper-

ation saw Aveo's entire stock seized and further production halted in a statement on Friday. Further legal action will be taken against the company,

it added.

The agency said it was "fully prepared" to take action against anyone involved in "illegal activities that tarnish the

reputation of the country".

The FDA has been instructed to carry out further inspections to prevent the supply of the drugs, it said.



ILLEGAL DRUGS:

Nigerian authorities store illegal drugs they have seized - mostly opioids in a warehouse in Lagos

Race policies or Israel - what's really driving Trump's fury with South Africa?

Legend has it Bernard Shabangu's grandfather, Bhobho, once speared down a lion that was terrorising his community in Mpumalanga, a province in eastern South Africa. The story goes that the lion was so fearsome that even the white people who had guns would run away when it roared.

"One day, my grandfather is said to have walked up the hill where the lion was roaring with his spear and shield," says Bernard. "The lion charged at him, but my grandfather speared him to death and was made Headman for his bravery."

As a Headman, or traditional leader, Bhobho owned cattle and land. Then one day in the mid-1950s, it was all taken away from him with no compensation under a law introduced in 1950 called the Group Areas Act. This

stated that South Africa's apartheid government could choose certain areas to be used by a single race.

In the early 1990s, democratic South Africa's new constitution allowed for land taken from black farmers to be returned to them. But it did so with great care and the setting-up of new cross-community partnerships were encouraged.

In this spirit, when Bernard, now 48, and his community decided to reclaim their land, they agreed to work in partnership with the white farmers who had been working on it.

"We did not say we want the white folks to leave," says Bernard. "They are here, they are working with us, they are supporting us... we are saying that partnership is what's going to take this country forward."

Today, the Matsamo Communal Property Association and its partners employ over 2,000 people from the local community and is the country's biggest exporter of lychee to the US. It also grows papayas, sugar cane and bananas for local supermarkets. Matsamo has been hailed as an example of what successful land reform can look like in South Africa.

But for some in the country, progress on land reform has been too slow. In January, President Cyril Ramaphosa signed into law a bill that allows, in some circumstances, land to be seized by the state without compensation.

Opponents argue it is a threat to the principle of private ownership. And among those opponents is Donald Trump. He has said the new bill was "hateful rhetoric" towards "racially disfa-

List accomplishments or resign, Musk tells US federal workers

US government workers received an email on Saturday afternoon asking them to list their accomplishments from the past week or resign - the latest development in the Trump administration's efforts to scale back the federal workforce.

The email came after Trump's billionaire confidante Elon Musk posted on X that employees would "shortly receive an email requesting to understand what they got done last week".

"Failure to respond will be taken as a resignation," he wrote.

Musk, as the head of the so-called Department of Government Efficiency (Doge), has been leading an outside effort to aggressively curtail government spending through funding cuts and firings.

The email arrived in inboxes shortly after Trump spoke at the Conservative Political Action Conference (Cpac). The messages came with the subject line "What did you do last week?" from a sender listed as HR.

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM), the federal government's human resources agency, confirmed the email was authentic in a statement to CBS, the BBC's US news partner.

"As part of the Trump administration's commitment to an efficient and accountable federal workforce, OPM is asking employees to provide a brief summary of what they did last week by the end of Monday, CC'ing their manager," it said. "Agencies will determine any next steps."

In a copy of the email obtained by the BBC, employees were asked to explain their accomplishments from the past week in five bullet points - without disclosing classified information - before midnight on Monday.

The message did not mention whether a failure to respond would be considered a resignation.

The American Federation of Government Employees, the largest union representing federal employees, criticised the message as "cruel and disrespectful" and vowed to challenge any "unlawful terminations" of federal employees.

"Once again, Elon Musk and the Trump Administration have shown their utter disdain for federal employees and the critical services they provide to the American people," Everett Kelley, union president, said in a statement.

On Sunday morning, Musk wrote on his social media platform X that "a large number of responses have been received already", adding: "These are the people who should be considered for promotion."

Newly-confirmed FBI director Kash Patel told his employees in an email that they should "pause any responses" to the OPM memo.

"FBI personnel may have received an email from OPM requesting information," Patel wrote in a message obtained by CBS News. "The FBI, through the Office of the Director, is in charge of all of our review processes, and will conduct reviews in accordance with the FBI procedures."

Tens of thousands fighting for Russia dying on frontline in Ukraine

Over 95,000 people fighting for Russia's military have now died as the war in Ukraine enters the fourth year, according to data analysed by the BBC.

This figure doesn't include those who were killed serving in the militia of the self-proclaimed Donbas republics which we estimate to be between 21,000 and 23,500 fighters.

BBC Russian, independent media group Mediazona and volunteers have been counting deaths since February 2022.

The list includes names of the deceased that we verified using information from official reports, newspapers, social media,

and new memorials and graves. The real death toll is believed to be much higher.

"Drafted and disposable"

Daniil Dudnikov, a 21-year-old history student at Donetsk National University, was reading international relations and enjoyed swimming.

On the first day of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, on 24 February 2022, the authorities in the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic forcibly mobilised Daniil and despatched him to the Kharkiv region.

Just a month later, on 25 March, Daniil went missing in action. Of the 18 soldiers in his unit, none returned. 13 were killed, and five

were taken prisoner. Four months later, following a prisoner exchange, those who had survived confirmed that Daniil had been one of the 13 killed in combat.

Daniil's story mirrors those of thousands of other residents from the self-declared Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics, created in 2014 by Moscow-backed separatists in the predominantly Russian-speaking parts of eastern Ukraine.

With the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022, civilian men were drafted en masse, often inadequately trained and poorly equipped before being assigned to near-impossible missions. This resulted in a staggering number of

dead and missing soldiers, the fate of whom often remains unknown for months or years.

According to our analysis of published obituaries and missing persons reports from the regions, the majority of deaths in Donbas militias occurred during the first year of the invasion, a toll comparable to the total number of confirmed Russian military losses over the same period - 25,769 deaths.

Yet despite many people in the occupied parts of eastern Ukraine having relatives or friends in Russia, they are far less integrated into the country's everyday life, which makes their losses less "visible" to ordinary Russians.

Sports

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

NSF: Edo State hosts South-South zonal elimination for ball games

● **Hon. Enabulele assures hitch free games**

KEHINDE OSAGIEDÉ

Edo State is set to host the rest states in the South South region in the Eight Ball Games zonal elimination ahead of the National Sports Festival billed for Ogun state in May this year.

The eight ball games zonal elimination competition is scheduled to begin on Sunday, February 23 and end on Friday, February 28 in Benin.

The Executive chairman, Edo State Sports Commission Hon Amadin Desmond Enabulele has said that Edo state is ready to play host to the rest participating states in the zone.

According to the Edo State Sports Commission boss,



"everything is already in place to ensure a hitch free elimination games in Benin.

"Edo is known for its hos-

pitality and we are home for sports. The facilities in the designated centers, including the Samuel Ogbemudia stadium

in the state are in good shape. So, we are ready as usual". Enabulele emphasized.

Teams from Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers, Akwa Ibom and Cross River states are expected to arrive in Benin on Sunday, February 23.

The eight ball games for male and female include Football, Abula, Handball, Cricket, Basketball, Hockey, Beach volleyball and Volleyball.

The Competition is in Round Robin Format; whereby teams will be playing each other once. The top teams from the round-robin stage will advance to the knockout stage, leading to semifinals and finals. The winners and runners-up of each sport will qualify to represent the South-South zone at the National Sports Festival, scheduled to hold in Ogun State from May 16th to 30th, 2025.



Bad news for Eric Chelle as Dele-Bashiru suffers sprained ankle

Super Eagles head coach Eric Chelle faces an anxious wait over the fitness of midfielder Fisayo Dele-Bashiru, who suffered an ankle sprain during Lazio's 0-0 draw with Venezia in the Serie A on Saturday.

Dele-Bashiru's injury occurred in the 40th minute when he collided with Alessio Zerbin. Despite attempting to run it off by shooting for goal, his condition worsened, forcing his substitution as he was carried off by two members of the medical staff.

Stating, "We have to verify his condition. He felt pain when he took that shot. Playing every two or three days, it's going to be difficult to get him recovered for the next match."

While the extent of the injury remains unclear, Eric Chelle will be hoping Dele-Bashiru recovers in time for the World Cup qualifiers in March as the Super Eagles desperately need wins, facing Rwanda before hosting Zimbabwe at the Godswill Akpabio Stadium, Uyo.

Nigeria, Cameroon, Mali 13 others advance to the finals of the 2025 Men's Afrobasket Championship

The list of countries that will compete for honours at the 31st edition of the Men's Afrobasket Championship, Angola 2025 is now complete.

They include, host and eleven time African champions Angola, Egypt and Senegal with five diadems each, three time winners

Tunisia and Cote D'Ivoire that have two titles to their name will be in the finals later this year.

Nigeria – the 2015 champions came from 0-3 in the first Qualifying Window to seal their journey to the Angolan capital with some tantalizing, scintillating and mesmerizing performance against Libya and Uganda including a dead rubber for pride and position with Cape Verde.

The team that will finish fourth in Group B will qualify as the best-fourth team of the AfroBasket Qualifiers. That means all the teams in that will be in Luanda.

Rwanda, South Sudan and Uganda are the flag bearers from East Africa. Rwanda punched their ticket to the finals with an 81-71 win over hapless Gabon on the final day of Qualifiers.

Similarly, Guinea joined the big slammers heading to Angola with a 13 points margin victory over Kenya that missed their first game of the final window against Tunisia because of flight difficulties.

Shannon Evans and Ousmane Drame were unstoppable as Guinea picked a crucial victory over Kenya to book their ticket to August 2025 AfroBasket.

Both sides came into the clash needing a win to qualify, and coach Nedeljko Asceric's men proved the better side, picking a 57-44 victory that takes them to their third AfroBasket in a row.

North West teams will shine at NSF, Zonal coordinator assures

As the elimination for team sports of the National Sports Festival (NSF) billed for Abeokuta, the Ogun State capital later in the year begins in Kaduna on Sunday February 23, 2025, the North West Zonal Coordinator of the National Sports Commission (NSC), Maikano Alhaji Adamu, is optimistic that teams that pick tickets from the zone will excell at the National Sports Festival proper.

He expressed his confidence while fielding questions from sports writers on the sidelines of the 2025 President Beach Soccer Championship in Kaduna at the weekend.

"Yes, in fact, with what I have seen, even, you know it, I was former Secretary General of Nigerian Volleyball Federation, then beach event was not up to this standard.

"And what I have seen today shows that beach is growing, and most especially the North West.

I have seen potential athletes, beach players, and I believe when we are at the fes-

● **As zonal eliminations for team sports begin today**



tival, we will be able to carry gold medal there," he said.

The Zonal Coordinator in charge of North-West comprising Kaduna, Sokoto, Zamfara, Kebbi and Kano states said that preparations for the Zonal Eliminations are top notch and no hitches are expected.

"As I'm telling you, I've been listening to the commissioner of sports, the director of sports, all that is needed in terms of facility is already on the ground.

"Accommodation is already on the ground. What we are waiting now is for the arrival of the athletes, so that immedi-

ately they come in on Sunday, then the next day we will do the technical meeting.

"From the technical meeting, then the normal game start on Monday.

"Arrival is Sunday 23rd, then 24th technical meeting, 25th to 28th, game proper," he said.

Bendel Insurance FC, retain Edo FA Cup after thrashing Assemblies FC 3-0



KEHINDE OSAGIEDÉ

Bendel Insurance Football Club, Sunday evening defeated Assemblies of God FC of Ekpoma 3-0 at the Samuel Ogbemudia stadium to win the 2025 Edo FA Cup.

The 2023 Federation Cup champions have been undisputed champions of Edo FA Cup since 2019.

In this year's Edo FA Cup finals, Vincent Akpikpi opened scoring for Insurance in the 30th minute of the game.

● **Edo Queens are also champions**

The amateur side AG FC of Ekpoma put up strong resistance to prevent Insurance from increasing the tally before half time.

As the second half began, Coach Greg Ikhenoba expressed confidence in his boys' ability to lift the cup as he made double substitution, withdrawing his best central defenders Dennis Chigozie and Ugwu Emmanuel for Abel James and Promise.

The Benin Arsenal notwith-

standing, continued to mount more pressure on the Assemblies Boys which paid off in the 61st minute of the game when Meyiwa Oritseweyinmi brilliantly converted a spot kick to double the lead for Insurance. AG FC defender had brought down Austin Ogunye in their box, resulting to a penalty kick.

Osahon Osobo completed the route after a brilliant delivery in 73rd minute when he picked up Meyinwa's through

pass before dribbling past two defenders to record his second goal for Insurance in three outings.

The Benin Arsenal defeated boastful BJ Foundation FC 2-0 on Saturday evening at the same Samuel Ogbemudia stadium after their trip from Maiduguri to qualify for the finals against Assemblies of God boys who bundled out FC Delight 2-0 in the first semifinals game.

Meanwhile, Edo Queens have also retained the Edo FA cup after beating Fortress Ladies 3-0.

NSC DG Bukola Olopade congratulates D'Tigers on Afrobasket 2025 Qualification

The Director General of the National Sports Commission (NSC), Hon. Bukola Olopade, has congratulated Nigeria's senior men's basketball team, D'Tigers, on securing their qualification for the 2025 FIBA Afrobasket tournament.

Nigeria, the 2015 Afrobasket champions, staged a remarkable comeback after starting the qualifiers with three consecutive losses. The team delivered huge performances against Libya and Uganda to secure their ticket to the Angolan capital before another convincing win over Cape Verde 77-62 points in their final game on Sunday.

Hon. Olopade commended the team's efforts and resilience

throughout the qualifiers, reaffirming the NSC's commitment to supporting Nigerian basketball.

"This qualification is a testament to the talent and determination of our players, coaches, and the Nigeria Basketball Federation (NBBF). The National Sports Commission remains dedicated to ensuring that Nigerian basketball continues to thrive on the global stage," he stated.

The DG further emphasized the importance of early preparations to ensure a strong outing at the 2025 Afrobasket tournament.

D'Tigers will now shift focus to their preparations for the competition, aiming to make a significant impact when the tournament tips off in August later this year.

This year's tournament will be the 31st edition of the FIBA Afrobasket, with Tunisia as defending champions.

The tournament will be hosted by Angola for the fourth time between 12 - 24 August, 2025.

[2/23, 9:13 PM] Kenny: KANO PILLARS FC EXTENDS SUSPENSION OF TECHNICAL ADVISER USMAN ABDALLAH

The Management of Kano Pillars FC, under the leadership of Chairman Alhaji Ali Muhammad Umar, has extended the suspension of its Technical Adviser, Usman Abdallah, until after the Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL) Match Day 28 fixture against Kwara United.

This decision was reached during a management meeting

held on Sunday at the Sani Abacha Stadium, Kofar Mata. The extension follows a request from the committee set up to investigate the matter, chaired by the club's Disciplinary Committee Chairman, Alhaji Muhammad Danjuma Gwarzo, which is yet to conclude its findings.

As a result, Chief Coach Ahmed Garba Yaro Yaro will continue to lead the team in the upcoming fixtures against Akwa United on Wednesday, Rangers International at the weekend, and Kwara United on Match Day 28, pending further decisions regarding Abdallah's return.

The club remains committed to upholding professionalism and discipline as it continues its campaign in the Nigeria Premier Football League.



Lookman scores brace as Atalanta close gap on top spot to 3 points

Super Eagles winger Ademola Lookman played a starring role, scoring twice as Atalanta thrashed Empoli 5-0 on Sunday, closing the gap on league leaders Inter Milan to just three points.

Despite recent controversy between Lookman and Atalanta head coach Gian Piero Gasperini following their Champions League elimination, the Italian handed the Nigerian winger his first start since returning from a knee injury that had kept him sidelined for several weeks.

Atalanta, determined to make amends for their Champions

League disappointment, started the game with a high level of intensity. Their efforts paid off in the 28th minute when Emmanuel Quartsin Gyasi's own goal gave the Italian side a well-deserved lead.

Few minutes later, Mateo Retegui doubled Atalanta's lead, extending their advantage to 2-0 and just before halftime, Lookman got into the scoresheet, beating the goalkeeper with a nice touch after a precise pass from Retegui, before playing the ball into an unguarded net, giving Atalanta a commanding 3-0 lead going into halftime.



Table Tennis: Nigeria's Canaan Queens reach semifinals at ITTF African Club Championships

Nigeria's sole representatives in the 2025 ITTF African Club Championships, the Canaan Queens of Calabar, have fought their way into the semifinals of the women's event in Tunis, Tunisia.

Eight teams from Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria, Ethiopia, and Madagascar are competing in the Women's event, with Egypt's Zamalek aiming to defend their 2024 title.

In the Men's category, nine teams from Egypt, Algeria, Ethiopia, Tunisia, Madagascar, Congo DR, and Cote d'Ivoire are vying for honours, with Egypt's ENPPI as the defending champions.

The Nigerian team, led by



Fatimo Bello, Janet Effiom, Cecilia Otu-Akpan, and Hope Udoaka, has already defeated their Tunisian and Madagas-

can counterparts in Group 1 of the Women's event.

However, in their last group match, the Nigerian ladies fell

EPL: Liverpool open 11-point lead after 2-0 win against Man City

Liverpool took a giant stride towards the Premier League title on Sunday as a 2-0 win over Man City opened up an 11-point lead at the top of the table over Arsenal.

Mohamed Salah was again Liverpool's star performer as he opened the scoring with his 30th goal of the season before setting up Dominik Szoboszlai to double the lead before half-time.

Just days after exiting the Champions League to Real Madrid, this was another sobering

defeat for the dethroned English champions, who are now 20 points adrift of the leaders.

So often during Pep Guardiola's glorious reign, Liverpool have come up just short in English football's great rivalry of recent years.

However, their time to match Manchester United's record of 20 English top-flight titles now appears just months away in Arne Slot's first season in charge.

Arsenal's shock 1-0 home

defeat to West Ham on Saturday had eased the pressure on Liverpool, that had built after

dropping points in two of their last three games at Everton and Aston Villa.



Rangers defeat Ijele to claim state President Federation Cup

Rangers International FC, the perennial champions of the Enugu State President Federation Cup, triumphed once again, securing victory with a commanding 3-0 win over NNL side Ijele FC in the final held on Saturday.

The team under the guidance of Coach Fidelis Ilechukwu, fielded a mix of experienced and young players, showcasing their strength against the energetic Ijele squad.

Chief Coach Ekeh Ekenedilichukwu opted to rest many of his star players who have been participating in the NPFL, and the matchday squad rose to the opportunity.

Led by captain Ikenna Stephen, Rangers sought to score early, but Ijele's defence, bolstered by Chidiebere Ogbodo, Oputa Nzube, and Anibueze James, held firm for a time.

However, Daniel Onyia, Rangers' young midfield sensation, broke the deadlock in the 33rd minute with a stunning long-range effort from 30 meters out, leaving Ijele's goalkeeper frozen as the crowd erupted in celebration.

After halftime, Rangers intensified their push for more

goals, substituting Monday Yakubu for Ogbodo Kelechi.

In the 54th minute, FIFA World Cup star Michael Uchebo extended the lead with a close-range finish after receiving a pass from Effimi Nsi, who skillfully dispossessed a defender in the box.

Onyia struck again in the

67th minute with a long-range shot that deflected off a defender, completely fooling Ijele's goalkeeper, Ojobo Ifebuche.

Despite several attempts to add to their tally, including a remarkable save by Ijele's substitute goalkeeper, Onyia Ifechukwu, on a 77th-minute shot from Nnaemeka Onyekwere aimed for the top corner, the score remained 3-0.

Coach Ekenedilichukwu reflected on the match, stating, "It was a great match, not just because we won but also due to the quality display from our opponent. We came prepared to win, and we did. We give all the glory to God. We never panicked when the goals didn't come early; we worked quietly and effectively, and the results speak for themselves. I believe we have the quality to pursue the national trophy."



FEATURE

The Nigerian Observer
...that the people may know



100-days of road infrastructural devt in Edo

OLOTU HENRIETTA

Road infrastructure development is a key element in the socio-economic objectives of any people-oriented governance.

This explains why responsible national and sub-national administrations in Nigeria prioritize roads construction in view of their strategic importance in fostering ease of communication between communities on the one hand and geographically contiguous States on the other.

It's not surprising therefore that the present government in Edo ably led by Senator Monday Okpebholo has prioritized Road infrastructural development. The motive is to connect rural communities which had no access roads before now with their neighbors and by so doing fostering rapid social and economic development which are priority areas to the present state government.

Given the less attention paid to road infrastructure by the last administration in the State, the Okpebholo's government has demonstrated a knack to change the narrative by appropriating a whopping N162 billion in the 2025 fiscal year for road infrastructure development across the state.

"We are aware of the importance of connecting communities with motorable roads for rapid economic development. Driving from one Sena-

Residents of the afore mentioned areas are happy and appreciative of the Governor taking the initiative to construct the long abandoned roads to open up the communities for social economic activities to thrive

torial district to another and from one community to another was becoming difficult in the recent past before our intervention".

The Governor's resolve to build critical infrastructure has started yielding positive results after just spending 100 days in office. The State is fast assuming the status of a huge construction site following massive construction works that are on-going across the state.

The Ekiuwa - University of Benin Road is presently under construction. The road leading to the back gate of the University of Benin when completed will help to decongest Usele-Ugbowo-Lagos Road of its usual traffic gridlock as it provides alternative route through Medical Stores and Okhoro axis of the city. The Ekiuwa spurs leads to Oba Erediauwu in Uth Community. The hitherto notorious Ekiuwa gully has been 50% reclaimed.

The Ramat Park Flyover Bridge which is the first of its kind in the

state is also in progress with massive mobilization of equipment and materials to site by the contractors. The mobilization and commencement of base work on site have started to build the confidence of the average resident that the perennial traffic gridlock on the Ramat Park axis of Benin will soon be over.

According to the Site Supervisor, Engineer Femi Fatola "We have been mobilized and are putting necessary efforts to ensure a successful construction of the flyover before the stipulated time.

The site drilling and casting are ongoing, the Flyover is mainly going to start from the Slope to the Agbor Road axis and it's designed to significantly stop traffic jam from the Aduwawa axis. The flyover will have a roundabout at the Guinness side.

If you are coming from Agbor axis, you don't need to turn again. There is going to be a two service lanes that motorists can ply without using the

flyover," he said.

Other areas where the Okpebholo's administration has shown significant interest are the critically failed sections of the Benin-Ekpoma-Auchi Road from Obadan Community junction which are being rehabilitated. The ever busy way which cuts across many communities had over the years been in a deplorable state; subjecting travellers to harrowing travel experience. Today, the Obadan junction failed section of the road has been totally rehabilitated while remedial work is still ongoing.

The Charismatic Church Road, in Ugbighoko is also being constructed as promised by the Governor. Modalities are being put in place to totally take away the flood and erosion ravaging the area.

The State government under the able leadership of Sen. Okpebholo has ensured that the Textile Mill Road project inherited from the previous administration is completed, while not neglecting Upper Ekehuan Road which is also one of such inherited projects now nearing completion.

While expressing his gratitude to Sen. Okpebholo, residents of some of the impacted areas, including Mr. Scott Osayi and Osagie Aigbekaen, said that when the projects are completed, they will boost social economic activities in affected areas.

Some of the residents who have

lived in the impacted communities for over two decades, stressed that with the prompt intervention of Governor Okpebholo in paving the roads with the best of quality materials and assurances of early completion, better days are here for the people.

Leaving no stone unturned, Sen. Okpebholo mobilized men and equipment to rehabilitate the failed sections of Upper Mission Extension Junction. Motorist plying that axis are now relieved of the burden of having to maneuver potholes to get to their destinations.

One would not be wrong to describe Edo Central Senatorial District of the State as a huge construction site as Uromi - Onewa - Utako - Uwes - Udomi - Ibiololu - Ujabholo Road, Akho-Irrua-Illeh-Ukhun Road, Usenu-Irrua-Illeh-Ukhun Road and Prince Harrison Road are being constructed to connect communities that were over the years cut off from development.

Residents of the afore mentioned areas are happy and appreciative of the Governor taking the initiative to construct the long abandoned roads to open up the communities for social economic activities to thrive.

Indeed, the milestones on road infrastructure of Sen. Monday Okpebholo's 100-Days in office have surpassed Edo people's expectations and are confident that the present tempo will be sustained.