

Tinubu irreplaceable, says Okpebholo

● **Vows 3.9m votes from Edo** ● **Rallies Edo residents for prayers as govt steps up security, devt push**

BENIN CITY

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, has declared President Bola Ahmed Tinubu "irreplaceable," insisting that the sweeping reforms under his admin-

istration have firmly positioned him for re-election in 2027.

Okpebholo spoke in Benin City at the weekend during the inauguration of senatorial, local government and youth coordinators for President Tinubu's re-election campaign, held in Benin City

The governor said reforms in critical sectors, including petroleum, security, education and the wider economy have strengthened the President's standing nationwide, making any talk of replacement unrealistic.

"I promised the President 2.5

million votes from Edo State. That figure has now increased to 3.9 million. Edo people must deliver," Okpebholo declared.

He said Edo residents cutting across age groups were already mobilising in large numbers to ensure the President's

return to office, describing the support base as deep and growing at the grassroots.

As part of preparations, the governor directed chairmen of the 18 local government councils to erect a minimum of 20 billboards each and ensure the Renewed Hope message penetrates communities, churches and mosques across the state.

Deputy Governor Dennis Idahosa pledged total loyalty to Okpebholo, assuring him of full backing in delivering Edo State for President Tinubu in 2027.

Other leaders at the event, including Speaker of the Edo State House of Assembly, Blessing Agbebaku; APC Chairman, Jarrett Tenebe; and the Coordinator of Renewed Hope Ambassadors, Sylvester Aigboboh, expressed confidence in President Tinubu's re-election.

At the event, three senatorial coordinators, 18 local government coordinators and youth coordinators from the three sen-

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The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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IUO VC calls for shift from classroom learning to job creation

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Terrorism: W'frica leaders move to build permanent regional security alliance

ABUJA

West African leaders have taken decisive steps to confront the region's worsening security crisis, agreeing to establish a permanent framework for collective action against terrorism, violent extremism and cross-border crime.

The resolution emerged from a high-level consultative conference on Regional Cooperation and Security held in Accra, Ghana, where Heads of State and Government from

Ghana, Liberia and Sierra Leone met with representatives of Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo.

In a communiqué issued at the end of the meeting, the leaders warned that West Africa has become the global epicentre of terrorism and violent extremism, recording at least eight attacks daily and an average of 44 deaths.

They noted that more than half of all terrorism-related fatalities worldwide now occur in the sub-region.

The conference, chaired by

Ghana's President John Mahama alongside President Julius Maada Bio of Sierra Leone and Liberian President Joseph Boakai, acknowledged that inaction was no longer an option as extremist violence continues to spread across borders.

According to the communiqué made available in Abuja by Nigeria's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Bianca Odumegwu-Ojukwu, the leaders agreed that episodic diplomacy and limited coordination have proved insufficient

to address the scale of the threat.

Instead, they resolved to build a structured and enduring framework for regional co-operation, aimed at developing shared security programmes, harmonised standards and joint infrastructure priorities, while managing common risks.

The leaders emphasised that West Africa's countries are deeply interconnected through geography, trade routes, shared ecosystems and communities whose livelihoods depend largely on cross-border movement, making

collective action imperative.

They further agreed that sustainable peace and security in the region must be anchored on a human-centred approach, built on regional solidarity, respect for national sovereignty and inclusive, gender-responsive peacebuilding.

On counter-terrorism, the leaders resolved to strengthen regular high-level meetings, enhance intelligence and information sharing, and harmonise legal frameworks to enable effective cross-border prosecution of terrorism-related offences, while safeguarding human rights.

They also committed to reinforcing border security through bilateral, mini-lateral and multilateral agreements, including the possible adoption of hot-pursuit arrangements to combat transnational crimes.

As part of concrete follow-up actions, the leaders agreed to design a foundational Memorandum of Understanding and protocols on Cooperation and Security within six months of the conference to serve as the basis for further agreements.

The Accra meeting brought together Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Defence and Security, intelligence chiefs, as well as partners from the African Union Commission, the United Nations Development Programme and civil society organisations.

The leaders concluded by reaffirming their collective resolve to deepen regional cooperation in addressing evolving peace, security and governance challenges, warning that failure to act decisively could further undermine stability across West Africa.



PRESENTING VEHICLES:

Governor Monday Okpebholo of Edo State (middle) present the key to a new SUV vehicle to one of the three Government House staff in recognition of dedication to service at a brief ceremony at Government House, Benin City.

FG to arraign suspects in Benue killings

ABUJA

The Federal Government will on Monday, arraign suspects linked to the recent killings in Yelwata, Benue State.

This was contained in a statement issued by the Senior Assistant to the Minister of Justice, Kamarudeen Ogundele, his S.A on Communication and Publicity.

The suspects, the ministry said will be arraigned before Justice Joyce Abdul-Malik of the Federal

High Court, Abuja, on February 2.

The Attorney-General of the Federation, Lateef Fagbemi assured Nigerians that Justice will be ensured in the matter to send a strong signal to the enemies of the country, acting under any guise.

"This comes after a painstaking investigation and collaboration by government agencies.

"The administration of President Bola Tinubu is committed to the protection of lives and property of all as enshrined in the constitution," he stressed.

Ndume's Tax Laws falsification claims unfounded, misleading — Reps Deputy Spokesperson —Pg 2

Military kills B'Haram Commander Abu Khalid, 10 others as Defence Minister warns against shielding criminals —Pg 5

More than 200 killed in mine collapse in DR Congo —Pg 9

CAF delegation to inspect Ikenne, Sagamu facilities for 2026 schools championship —Pg 10

Ndume's Tax Laws falsification claims unfounded, misleading —Reps Deputy Spokesperson

ABUJA

Deputy Spokesperson for House of Representatives, Rep. Philip Agbese, has dismissed claims by Sen. Ali Ndume (Borno South) that the tax laws recently passed by the National Assembly were falsified, describing it as describing it as unfounded and misleading.

Agbese told the newsmen in Abuja on Sunday that the allegations by Ndume were not only ischevous but also capable of creating unnecessary tension and generating public distrust in the legislature.

Agbese spoke against the back-drop of comments by Ndume criticising Senate President Godswill Akpabio for insisting that the newly-passed tax laws were tainted by inconsistencies.

Ndume had, in an interview on a popular television programme recently, claimed that there were at least two versions of the gazetted tax laws, arguing that the bills signed into law by President Bola Tinubu were

different from those passed by the National Assembly.

The Borno South senator, who claimed that he had alerted the senate leadership to the discrepancies, faulted Akpabio for dismissing the claims instead of launching a probe into the alleged disparities.

Agbese, however, reaffirmed that due legislative processes were followed and that issues being raised have already been addressed institutionally.

He explained that it was wrong for anyone to suggest that the national assembly altered the provisions of the tax laws, stressing that both chambers were committed to transparency and accountability.

According to him, the House has already taken proactive steps by setting up a committee to examine concerns surrounding the tax legislations, making insinuations of cover-up or legislative fraud unfounded.

"It is sheer mischief to suggest that the tax laws were falsified," he said.

Agbese, who said that the matter should not be politicised or sensationalized, noted that there are legislative review mechanisms to address genuine errors or ambiguities where they exist.

He said: "This is exactly why the House set up a committee to address genuine errors or ambiguities where they exist."

tee— to clarify the facts. Nigerians should not be misled into thinking that lawmakers are acting in bad faith."

The deputy spokesperson said that lawmaking must be built on facts and due process, warning that speculative narratives could distract the legislators from their efforts at reforming Nigeria's tax system in the overall public interest



INAUGURATION OF EMERGENCY PROJECT:

Director, Press and Public Relations, Federal Ministry of Works, Mohammed Sambo-Ahmed (L); Federal Controller of Works, Niger State, Eytayo Aluko (3rd R); Vice Chairman, Nigeria Union of Journalists, Niger State Council, Urian Gana (M); Chairman, Engineering Monitoring Committee, Council for the Regulation of Engineering in Nigeria, Niger State Branch, Bala Saliu (2nd R) and others, during the inauguration of Emergency Project along Gwada Shiroro Road in Niger State.

Lawmaker targets 10,000 constituents for free healthcare access in C'River

CALABAR

No fewer than 10,000 residents of Calabar Municipality/Odukpani Federal Constituency in Cross River State are expected to benefit from a free healthcare scheme initiated by the lawmaker representing the area, Mr Bassey Akiba.

Akiba disclosed this at a media briefing with journalists in Calabar at the weekend, explaining that beneficiaries would access medical services through National Health Insurance Authority (NHIA)-accredited cards personally sponsored by him.

He said the initiative was aimed at ensuring that indigent constituents enjoyed unhindered access to quality healthcare, regardless of their financial status, noting that the cards could be used to access treatment beyond Cross River State.

According to the lawmaker, over 4,000 persons benefitted from his medical outreaches

in 2025 alone, with about 410 of them undergoing various surgical procedures. He added that more than 3,000 students also received educational support during the same period.

Akiba further disclosed that 17,000 oil palm seedlings and improved cassava varieties were distributed to farmers across the constituency as part of his empowerment programmes.

"This year, our major focus is health. We are working towards a system where people can walk into hospitals with my card and access healthcare for free," he said, adding that plans were underway to revitalise several primary health-care centres.

He described his tenure as a balance between constitutional responsibilities and grassroots economic empowerment, revealing that he had sponsored 14 motions and three bills within two years, covering areas such as technology education, hospital personnel management and data regulation.

Tinubu hails Fela as philosopher, celebrates Grammy honour

ABUJA

President Bola Tinubu has paid tribute to late Afrobeat legend, Fela Anikulapo Kuti, following his posthumous Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award.

Tinubu described Fela as more than a musician, calling him a fearless voice of the people, a philosopher of freedom and a revolutionary force who confronted injustice through music.

The president said Fela's courage, creativity and conviction defined a generation and continued to inspire audiences across the world.

In a tribute issued on Sunday in Abuja, Tinubu said Fela's legacy had transcended time, describing him as eternal in cultural and spiritual relevance.

He noted that Fela became the first African to receive the Recording Academy of America's Lifetime Achievement Award, though posthumously.

The president said the honour affirmed Fela's enduring global influence and the foundational role he played in shaping modern music from Africa.

Tinubu said Fela defined Afrobeat, with his influence evident across generations of Nigerian musicians and in Afrobeats and global sounds.

"He defined Afrobeat, and you can hear and see his influence in generations of Nigerian musicians and in Afrobeats and beyond."

"Fela lives," the president said.

Governors to prioritise sugar projects for industrial growth —NGF

ABUJA

The Nigeria Governors' Forum (NGF) has agreed to prioritise sugar production as a strategic commodity for accelerating industrial growth and job creation across the states.

The Executive Secretary and Chief Executive Officer of the National Sugar Development Council (NSDC), Mr Kamar Bakrin, disclosed this in a statement on Sunday in Abuja, following engagements with

the NGF leadership.

Bakrin said the decision was part of efforts to halt the importation of raw sugar, attract investments and achieve national self-sufficiency in sugar production.

Under the arrangement, he said the NGF secretariat would prioritise sugar projects in its engagements with development partners while collaborating with the NSDC to support states in preparing investor-ready projects.

He identified Oyo, Kwara,

Niger, Nasarawa, Kaduna, Kano, Bauchi, Gombe, Jigawa, Adamawa and Taraba as states with proven land suitability for sugarcane cultivation.

Bakrin noted that recent exchange rate movements had made sugar imports more expensive, thereby improving the competitiveness of locally produced sugar.

He said Nigeria currently had about 1.2 million hectares of land suitable for large-scale sugarcane cultivation, although only about 200,000 hectares were required

to achieve self-sufficiency.

The NSDC boss added that the sugar sector, valued at about \$2 billion, offered significant opportunities, including ethanol and bio-electricity production.

Speaking on behalf of the NGF, its Director-General, Dr Abdulateef Shittu, said many states were already engaged in sugar-related investments and pledged the forum's commitment to aligning state development priorities with sugar project investments.

Tinubu irreplaceable, says...

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atorial districts were formally inaugurated to drive the campaign.

In another development, Governor, Okpebholo reaffirmed his administration's determination to restore security, accelerate development and improve living standards across the state, calling on residents to sustain their support through

prayers, unity and goodwill.

The governor gave the assurance on Sunday during a special end-of-the-month thanksgiving service at Living Faith Church, Irrua, in Edo Central Senatorial District, where he joined worshippers led by Pastor Peter Osawe.

Speaking at the service, Okpebholo described the task of governance as demanding but achievable with the backing of

the people and divine guidance, stressing that his government remains firmly focused on delivering measurable results.

He noted that tackling insecurity and driving development require persistence and collective effort, adding that his administration is intensifying efforts to strengthen the state's security framework and protect lives and property.

According to the governor, strategic actions are already un-

derway to enhance public safety, improve infrastructure and expand economic opportunities, particularly for youths and women, while ensuring transparency and people-centred governance.

He, however, expressed concern that some interests were attempting to undermine the government's efforts through negative narratives, warning that such actions could erode public confidence and slow progress.

Despite the challenges, Ok-

pebholo maintained that his administration would remain resolute, insisting it would not be distracted from its mandate of delivering peace, development and inclusive growth.

The governor urged Edo residents to continue standing with the government, noting that public trust and cooperation are essential to the success of policies and programmes aimed at building a safer and more prosperous state.

He assured that his administration would continue to prioritise accountability, citizen welfare and sustainable development, expressing optimism that Edo State is on the path to lasting peace and shared prosperity.

Governor Okpebholo also thanked the church leadership and congregation for their prayers and support, expressing confidence that Edo would witness a new chapter of progress under his leadership.

NEWS

Afegbua lauds Ize-Iyamu, commissions UBTH media office

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Commissioner for Information and Strategy, Prince Kassim Afegbua, has commended the Chief Medical Director of the University of Benin Teaching Hospital, Prof.

Idia Ize-Iyamu, for what he described as exemplary leadership.

Afegbua spoke on Friday during the commissioning of an ultra-modern media office at UBTH, initiated and equipped by the hospital's management to strengthen

public communication and institutional visibility.

He said Nigeria must deliberately create more leadership opportunities for women, citing Prof. Ize-Iyamu's performance as evidence of their capacity to lead effectively.

Describing the media office

as a novel initiative, Afegbua said it would enhance information management and project a positive image of the hospital. He also referenced the late Prof. Grace Alele-Williams as one of several women whose leadership legacies remain impactful.

"We must continue to look in the direction of women when it comes to leadership because some of us men have failed the nation," he said.

In her remarks, Prof. Ize-Iyamu thanked President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the Coordinating Minister of Health and Social Welfare, Prof. Muham-

mad Ali Pate, and Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, for their support of the health sector.

She said the new media office would ensure consistent messaging, strengthen internal cohesion, manage public perception, and improve UBTH's response to emerging issues



OFFICIAL COMMISSIONING:

L-R: Head of Nursing Services University of Benin Teaching Hospital (UBTH), Mrs. Bertha Ujiagbedion; DCMAC Training and Monitoring, Prof. Anthony Atimati; Chief Medical Director of UBTH, Prof. Idia Ize-Iyamu (Middle); Edo State Commissioner for Information and Strategy, Prince Kassim Afegbua and DCMAC (Research and Ethics), Prof. Adebola Ehizele, during the official commissioning of the UBTH ultra modern media office in Benin City.

Oborevwo swears-in 6 judges, warns against erosion of public trust in Judiciary

AJUWA VICTOR

Delta State Governor, Rt. Hon. Sheriff Oborevwo, has warned that the erosion of public confidence in the judiciary poses a grave threat to peace, law and order, stressing that loss of faith in the justice system could push citizens towards self-help.

The governor gave the warning in Asaba during the swearing-in of six newly appointed judges for the Delta State High Court and the Customary Court of Appeal.

Those sworn in as High Court judges are Justices Otite Jonah Akpobaro, Jereoma Sam-Oligida, Irene Boeye Ukuli and Otome Benjamin Adamidenyo, while Justices Bridget Onome Ojeikere and Stella Ovuorieroro Okah were sworn in as Justices of the Customary Court of Appeal.

Oborevwo said the stability of any democratic society rests on a credible, transparent and independent judiciary, adding that justice must not

only be done but must be seen to be done.

He explained that the appointments were made in line with Sections 271(2) and 281(2) of the 1999 Constitution, following recommendations by the National Judicial Council.

The governor urged the judges to uphold the highest ethical standards, resist all forms of temptation and discharge their duties without fear or favour, noting that judges are often on trial in the court of public opinion.

He reaffirmed his administration's commitment to strengthening the justice delivery system, revealing ongoing reforms including court renovations, construction of judges' quarters, digitization of state laws, installation of virtual court facilities and plans for automated court recording systems.

Responding on behalf of the judges, Justice Bridget Onome Ojeikere thanked the governor for respecting judicial independence and pledged integrity and impartiality in the discharge of their duties.

Okpebholo approves minor cabinet reshuffle in Edo

BENIN CITY

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, has approved a minor cabinet reshuffle aimed at strengthening governance, improving service delivery and enhancing administrative effi-

ciency in the state.

The development which takes immediate effect was contained in a statement signed by the Secretary to the State Government, Umar Musa Ikhilor, Esq.

Under the redeployment, Barrister Vincent Osas Uwadiae has been moved from the

Ministry of Oil and Gas Resources to serve as Commissioner for Lands and Housing.

Hon. Yakubu Oshioyenusa, formerly Commissioner for Lands and Housing, has been appointed Chief of Staff to the Governor.

Also, the outgoing Chief of

Staff, Hon. Gani Audu, has been nominated as Commissioner for Oil and Gas Resources, subject to confirmation by the Edo State House of Assembly.

Governor Okpebholo said the changes would improve coordination, policy execution and overall governance in Edo State.

Erua community appeals to Oba Ewuare II over alleged excesses of Ayo Omoregbe

BENIN CITY

The elders and people of Erua Community in Uhumwonde Local Government Area of Edo State have appealed to the Benin Monarch, His Royal Majesty Oba Ewuare II, to intervene over the alleged excesses of Mr Ayo Omorogbe, alleged to be parading himself as the Okaighele, (Youth Leader) of the community

The appeal followed a leadership dispute in the community, which was presented before the Palace of the Oba of Benin on Tuesday, January 27, 2026, where the parties laid their grievances before palace chiefs acting on behalf of the monarch.

At the sitting, the community called for Omorogbe's removal, alleging dissatisfaction with his conduct and claiming he was imposed by the suspended Enogie, Igbinovia Edomwonyi Clifford, who they also alleged had earlier suspended him over

alleged misconduct.

After hearing all sides, the chiefs directed that Benin customs be strictly observed, particularly the requirement that three years must elapse after the death of a substantive Odionwere before a successor is installed.

They ruled that the rightful Odionwere, when installed, would appoint an Okaighele, and ordered that the status quo be maintained, including a ban on land sales and related activities.

However, on Thursday, January 29, 2026, the aggrieved residents, led by the Ozukpogiev, Pa Peter Osakue Eresuwa, alleged that the palace directive had been violated.

They claimed that Omorogbe was parading himself as a palace-endorsed Okaighele and had allegedly mobilised armed hoodlums to chase residents out of the community.

The elders said this occurred despite a palace directive for all parties to return on February 6, 2026, for further instruc-

tions on the dispute.

They appealed to Oba Ewuare II to urgently intervene to prevent a breakdown of peace

in the community.

Efforts to reach Omorogbe for comments were unsuccessful at the time of filing this report.

Tantita commissions new Army office, deepens security collaboration

AJUWA VICTOR

Tantita Security Services Nigeria Limited has commissioned a newly rebuilt office for the Headquarters of the 3 Battalion Nigerian Army at Effurun Barracks, Delta State, as part of efforts to support security agencies in combating oil theft and economic sabotage.

Managing Director of Tantita, Engr. Kestin Pondi, said the company has worked closely with government security agencies since 2022 to protect critical national infrastructure, stressing that sustainable security thrives on public-private collaboration.

The commissioning was attended by senior military officers, including the General Officer Commanding, 6 Division Nige-

rian Army, Maj. Gen. Emmanuel Ejim-Emekah, who commended Tantita's contributions to strengthening troop capacity and improving crude oil production.

He noted that sustained collaboration among the Nigerian Army, Tantita and other partners has led to improved command and control, as well as enhanced operational efficiency.

The project, conceptualised by Brig. Gen. M.A. Shonibare, Commander 63 Brigade and Sector 1 JTF OPDS, forms part of Tantita's Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives.

Stakeholders at the event described the project as further evidence of the growing impact of private-sector participation in national security and economic stability.

Uvwie Kingdom to unveil Ovie Sideso's biography, mark 18th coronation anniversary

All roads will lead to Effurun, Uvwie Local Government Area of Delta State, from February 7 to 18, as the Uvwie Kingdom rolls out a series of activities to mark the 18th coronation anniversary of its monarch, His Royal Majesty Emmanuel Ekemajewa Sideso, Abe I, JP, OON, alongside the formal launch of his biography.

According to the Media Consultant to the Ovie and member of the organising committee, Chief Omafume Amurun, activities will commence on 7 February with a 21-gun salute to herald the anniversary and the conferment of chieftaincy titles on about 36 deserving individuals.

He disclosed that various quarters of the kingdom will pay homage to the monarch on 10 February, while the official launch of the biography, titled "Odyssey of Royalty: The Reign of Abe I, Ovie of Uvwie Kingdom," will take place on 14 February. Newly installed chiefs are scheduled to pay homage to the Ovie on 16 February, with the celebrations climaxing on 18 February with a coronation

anniversary thanksgiving Mass, ending with a 21-gun salute at 7:00 p.m.

The biography launch and anniversary celebration are expected to attract eminent personalities from across Nigeria, including President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Senate President Godswill Akpabio, and Delta State Governor, Rt. Hon. Sheriff Oborevwo, alongside ministers, legislators, commissioners, traditional rulers and other distinguished guests.

The occasion will be chaired by Olorogun Festus Keyamo, with High Chief (Dr.) Government Owezide Ekpemupolo, Ibe-Ebidouwei of the Ijaw Nation, as Chief Launcher.

The book will be reviewed by Professor Joe Abugu, SAN, while Chief Hon. Solomon Igbrakpata will serve as Chief Host.

The biography chronicles the reign of Abe I, highlighting his vision on ascending the throne, his leadership philosophy, and sustained efforts in promoting peace, stability and development in the Uvwie Kingdom, while also providing a concise historical account of the kingdom.

Okpebholo rewards dedicated Govt House staff with SUVs

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, has rewarded

three staff members of the Government House with new SUV vehicles for what he described as exceptional dedication and discipline.

The presentation took place at the Government House in Benin City.

While handing over the vehicles, the governor said the beneficiaries' punctuality and commitment to duty had consistently stood out.

"I have watched your habit of coming early and closing late. One day, I even saw one of you trekking fast to resume on time. That did not go unnoticed," Okpebholo said.

He urged the staff to remain committed to public service,

stressing that governance is about service to the people.

Speaking on behalf of the beneficiaries, Mrs Mary Salami expressed gratitude to the governor, describing the gesture as overwhelming.

The beneficiaries are Mary Sa-

lami and Sylvanus of the Protocol Department, and Mike Oshiohio of the ICT Unit, all under the Government House Directorate.

The governor said the gesture was part of efforts to encourage excellence among public servants in the state.

Funeral for Deaconess Onuku begins Feb 4

The burial ceremony of the late Deaconess Mary Michael Onuku (née Adogah), popularly known as Auntie, will commence on Wednesday, February 4, 2026, with a service of songs at Christ Chosen Church of God, Afokpella Branch, at 3:00 p.m., a burial arrangements announced by Hon. Paul Bobby Ofoeshi on behalf of the family indicated.

She passed away at the age of 82.

According to the family, her body will depart St. Lazarus Mortuary on Thursday, Feb-

ruary 5, for her residence at Immiamune, beside Church of God Mission, Afokpella, Edo State, where a Christian wake-keep will be held, followed by interment.

A social dance, reception and entertainment of guests will take place on Saturday, February 7, at Eramhe Primary School, Afokpella, beginning at 1:00 p.m.

The burial ceremonies will be concluded on Sunday, February 8, with a thanksgiving service at Christ Chosen Church of God, Afokpella Branch, by 8:00 a.m.



DEACONESS ONUKU

FG must fund HIV/AIDS services to protect youths —Expert

ABUJA

An HIV/AIDS expert, Dr Nandul Durfa, has warned that the sudden withdrawal of foreign funding for HIV/AIDS programmes could reverse decades of progress and expose young Nigerians to renewed risks unless the Federal Government intervenes urgently.

Durfa, Managing Director of Reach Care Foundation, said this on Sunday in Abuja while reacting to the termination of funding agreements by the Institute of Human Virology, Nigeria, following recent United States foreign aid policy changes.

According to him, the suspension of funding for HIV/AIDS services could lead to a dangerous resurgence of the disease if the Federal Government fails to fully fund prevention, treatment and care programmes.

He recalled that about 20 years ago, HIV/AIDS posed

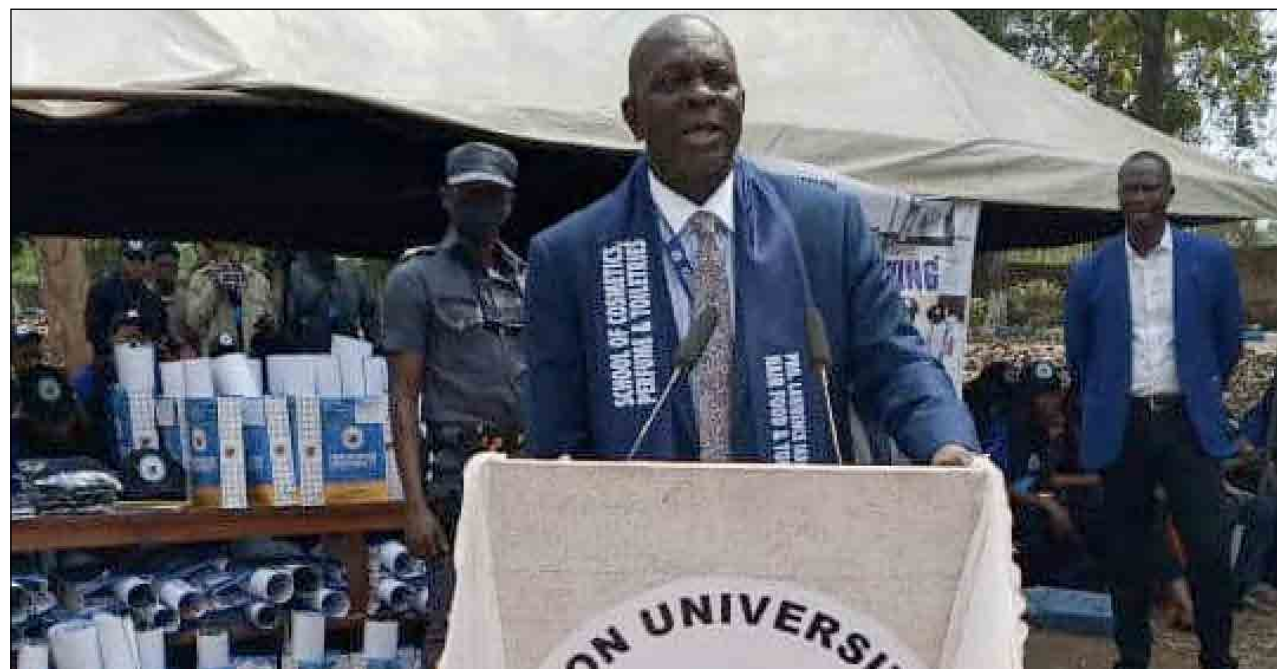
a major public health crisis in Nigeria, noting that support from the United States, through USAID, played a critical role in reducing infection rates.

"With the funding stopped without eliminating the virus, resistance will develop and the country could relapse into a worse epidemic," Durfa warned.

He said young people, especially those under 20 who never experienced the peak of the HIV/AIDS crisis, would be the most vulnerable.

Durfa urged the Federal Government to urgently provide funds for the procurement of anti-retroviral drugs, warning that any delay could have dire consequences, including mother-to-child transmission, rising infections and increased mental health challenges among patients.

He also called for a permanent alternative funding mechanism to avoid what he described as a "time bomb" in the health sector.



PRODUCT EXHIBITION:

Prof. Ezemonye speaking at the 13th Student Product Exhibition of Igbinedion University, at main campus, Okada, Edo State.

IUO VC calls for shift from classroom learning to job creation

EDWARD OSEGHE

The Vice-Chancellor of Igbinedion University, Okada (IUO), Prof. Ikechukwu Ezemonye, has urged Nigerian universities to deliberately drive a transition from classroom-centred learning to job-creating enterprises as a pathway to national economic transformation.

Prof. Ezemonye made the call at the 13th Student Product Exhibition of Igbinedion University, held at the Sir (Dr.) David Osunde Centre for Entrepreneurship and Skills Acquisition, main campus, Okada, Edo State.

He stressed that reshaping Nigeria's economic landscape is a shared responsibility, adding that IUO remains committed to strengthening industry linkages, deepening mentorship programmes and providing

the intellectual infrastructure required to nurture enterprise.

"The transition from being a job seeker to a job creator is perhaps the most critical transition we must engineer," the Vice-Chancellor said.

"Our classrooms must be the launchpads for innovation, our curricula the moulds for resilient entrepreneurs, and our degrees the charter for economic transformation," he added.

Prof. Ezemonye further underscored the responsibility of universities to produce graduates who are not only employable but also capable of creating employment opportunities for others.

In a keynote lecture titled "From Classroom to Job-Creating Enterprises: A Guide to Establishing Ventures that Foster Employment Opportunities and Transform the Economic Landscape," the guest speaker, Prof. Idris Bugaje, described education as truly functional

only when it delivers practical skills and entrepreneurship

Prof. Bugaje, a renowned academic, researcher and advocate of technical education, said Nigeria could unlock the vast potential of its youth population through a combination of innovation funding, comprehensive skills training and inclusive policies.

"By combining innovation funding mechanisms, comprehensive skills training and inclusive policies, Nigeria can drive sustainable economic transformation," he said.

"Together, educators, entrepreneurs, government institutions and investors can build ventures that do not just survive but thrive, creating lasting employment and driving economic growth across all sectors."

Earlier in her welcome address, the Director of the Centre for Entrepreneurship and Skills Acquisition (CESA), Dr (Mrs) Mary Josiah, said the exhibition

went beyond showcasing academic work, reflecting the dedication, determination and problem-solving abilities of the students.

She explained that students drawn from 13 schools within the entrepreneurship complex had been trained to develop an entrepreneurial mindset that enables them to identify and maximise opportunities for societal impact.

Dr Josiah commended the Founder and Chancellor of IUO, Chief Gabriel Igbinedion, CFR, the Esama of Benin Kingdom, and the Vice-Chancellor for their sustained support in empowering students to establish businesses and become employers of labour.

The exhibition featured innovative student products and business concepts designed to translate learning into sustainable ventures, reinforcing IUO's commitment to entrepreneurship-driven education.

Alumni decry repeated fires at Igbanke Grammar School, seek urgent govt action

ABUJA

Members of the Igbanke Grammar School, Igbanke Old Students Association, Edo State, have raised the alarm over what they described as repeated and mysterious fire outbreaks that have continued to destroy buildings, equipment and learning materials in their alma mater.

The association's President, Mr Jacob Erhabor, expressed deep concern over the latest incident, which he said gutted the school's examination hall, further setting back infrastructural development at the insti-

tution.

In a statement made available to journalists, Erhabor described the development as worrisome and unacceptable, noting that the most recent fire outbreak occurred on Wednesday, January 28, 2026, and has since been reported to the Edo State Ministry of Education.

According to him, the fire, which reportedly started from a neighbouring community, Ekpon, spread to the school premises at about 5.30pm and completely razed the examination hall before it was brought under control.

He said the combined efforts of teachers, students and

residents of nearby communities helped to prevent the fire from spreading to other buildings within the school compound.

Erhabor called on the Edo State Government, through the Ministry of Education, to take urgent and decisive steps to prevent a recurrence, stressing that the absence of a perimeter fence had left the school exposed to external threats.

"The school is surrounded by farmlands, and the school authorities have little or no control over the activities of farmers around the premises," he said.

"A perimeter fence would

provide a lasting solution to these recurring fire incidents."

The alumni association recalled that between 2021 and 2023, it spent close to N25 million on the renovation of dilapidated facilities in the school, including two classroom blocks, the administrative block and a chemistry laboratory, at a total cost of about N24.9 million.

Members of the association warned that without urgent government intervention, repeated fire outbreaks could continue to undermine the gains made through alumni contributions and disrupt academic activities at the school.

NEWS

Military kills Boko Haram Commander Abu Khalid, 10 others as Defence Minister warns against shielding criminals

ABUJA

The Nigerian military has recorded another major operational success with

the killing of a high-ranking Boko Haram terrorists' commander, Abu Khalid, and 10 other insurgents during sustained clearance operations in

the North-East.

Reliable military sources said Abu Khalid, identified as the second-in-command of the terrorists in the Sambisa For-

est, was neutralised during the operation.

The sources described Abu Khalid as a key figure in the group's command and control

structure, noting that his elimination represents a significant setback to terrorist activities within the notorious forest enclave.

According to them, the slain commander played a critical role in coordinating attacks, logistics and movement of fighters across parts of the North-East, making his neutralisation a major boost to ongoing counter-terrorism efforts.

The military reiterated that ongoing operations would be sustained until all terrorist elements are eliminated, while urging remaining insurgents to lay down their arms and embrace peace.

Meanwhile, the Minister of Defence, retired Gen. Christopher Musa, has warned that insecurity thrives when individuals and communities shield bandits, terrorists and other criminal elements from security agencies.

Musa spoke on Saturday night in Abuja at the 7th OurNigeria News Awards, themed "Resilience and Renewal."

He said Nigeria was facing a complex form of modern conflict that could not be defeated by military action alone, stressing that public cooperation was critical to ending criminality.

"This is asymmetric warfare. The enemy is within, and that makes it more dangerous," Musa said.

According to him, criminals often live within communities, disguising themselves as ordinary citizens, making intelligence sharing and prompt reporting essential.

He urged Nigerians to report criminal activities, including banditry, kidnapping and terrorism, assuring that security agencies would respond decisively.

Musa said the security situation across the country was gradually improving due to sustained military operations, enhanced intelligence gathering and growing public support.

Earlier, the Emir of Doma Kingdom, Alhaji Ahmadu Onawu, described OurNigeria News as a platform promoting patriotism, hope and national renewal.

Also speaking, the publisher of OurNigeria News Magazine, Dr Sani Abubakar, said the awards were built on integrity and credibility, stressing that honourees were not required to pay for recognition.

At the event, the Man of the Year 2025 award was presented to Musa in recognition of his leadership and commitment to national security.

Police reiterate role in land disputes, warn against criminal acts

LAGOS

The Force Criminal Investigation Department (FCID), Alagbon, Lagos, has reiterated that land ownership disputes are civil matters to be resolved in court and not by the police.

The FCID spokesperson,

ASP Aminat Mayegun, made the clarification on Sunday amid complaints by residents over alleged undue police interference in land disputes.

Mayegun said while the police have a duty to investigate criminal acts arising from land matters, ownership disputes remain strictly civil and fall

within the jurisdiction of the courts.

She explained that land disputes become criminal only when they involve offences such as fraud, deceit, violence or destruction of property.

"The police have no mandate to determine ownership of land. Our intervention is limited to criminal offences such as obtaining money by false pretence, malicious damage, arson

or assault," she said.

Mayegun warned individuals against taking the law into their own hands, urging aggrieved parties to seek redress through lawful channels.

She assured the public that the police would continue to carry out their duties within the confines of the law and urged citizens to report misconduct through the Police Complaints Response Unit.

NAHCON reaffirms commitment to early, orderly preparations for 2026 hajj

ABUJA

The Chairman of the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON), Prof. Abdullahi Usman, has reaffirmed the commission's commitment to timely and orderly preparations for the 2026 Hajj exercise.

Usman stated this in a statement issued on Sunday by his Technical Assistant on Media, Ahmad Muazu.

He said NAHCON re-

mained committed to effective coordination, strict adherence to procedures and alignment with the policy direction of the Federal Government under President Bola Ahmed Tinubu.

According to him, the Renewed Hope Agenda prioritises the welfare and spiritual well-being of Nigerian pilgrims.

Usman said priority was being given to the early completion of accommodation arrangements for state pilgrims

in Makkah, in compliance with Saudi regulatory timelines.

He disclosed that a high-level executive delegation had been deployed to Saudi Arabia to finalise and take over pending accommodation arrangements.

The delegation includes Prof. Abubakar Yagawal, Sheikh Muhammad Bin Uthman, Dr Tajudeen Oladejo, Hajiya Aishat Ahmed and the commission's secretary, Dr Mustapha Ali.

Usman said he would remain in Nigeria to receive the Saudi Minister of Hajj and Umrah, Dr Tawfiq Al-Rabiah, expected later in February.

He assured stakeholders and intending pilgrims of NAHCON's commitment to delivering a hitch-free 2026 Hajj through improved planning, discipline and professionalism

Bandits burn Police station, church in Niger community —Police

MINNA

The Niger State Police Command has confirmed that suspected armed bandits set ablaze a police station and part of a church in Agwara community in the early hours of Sunday.

The Police Public Relations

Officer, SP Wasiu Abiodun, said the attack occurred around 3:40 a.m. when the bandits invaded the Agwara Police Station.

He said the police tactical team engaged the attackers but was overpowered, after which the assailants used suspected dynamite to set the station on fire.

According to him, the bandits

later moved to the United Methodist Church in the community, where part of the building was also burnt.

Abiodun said the attackers abducted about five persons before fleeing the area.

He assured that investigations had commenced and efforts intensified to track the perpetrators and rescue the abducted victims.

Tinubu's reforms saved 27 States from economic collapse —Idris

MINNA

The Minister of Information and National Orientation, Alhaji Mohammed Idris, says economic reforms introduced by President

Bola Tinubu have saved no fewer than 27 states from collapse.

Idris made the assertion at the weekend while delivering a lecture at the 34th Convocation and 43rd Founders' Day of the Federal University of Tech-

nology, Minna.

Speaking on the topic, "Youth and Nation Building: Navigating Opportunities in an Era of National Reforms," Idris said that before May 29, 2023, about 27 states were unable to pay workers' salaries.

According to him, Tinubu's reforms significantly improved revenue allocation to states, enabling them to pay salaries, execute infrastructure projects and deliver dividends of democracy.

"There is no nation building without reforms," the minister said, adding that continuous reforms were necessary to correct past mistakes and advance national development.

He noted that the reforms had protected the country from economic traps that would have resulted from inaction.



IDRIS

EDO STATE UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION BOARD EDUCATION HUB, IYARO, BENIN CITY, NIGERIA

INVITATION TO TENDER FOR YEAR 2024 UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION INTERVENTION FGN/UBEC/SUBEB/PROJECTS

1. INTRODUCTION:

Edo State Universal Basic Education Board just received approval by the **Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC)** to commence implementation of the **UBEC/SUBEB 2024** Basic Education Action Plan on Universal Basic Education Intervention Fund Programme. The Edo State Universal Basic Education Board therefore wishes to invite interested registered, competent, capable and reputable vendors, contractors, consultant service providers and suppliers to submit their tender documents for the underlisted jobs:

2. The scope of work is highlighted below based on different categories:

- Construction of Classroom Blocks - LotA1 - A3
- Construction of Perimeter Fence - LotB1 - B3
- Renovation of Classroom Blocks - LotC1 - C4
- Water Supply and Sanitation - LotD1
- Supply of Furniture
 - Pupil's Furniture - LotE1
 - Teacher's Furniture - LotE2
 - ECCDE Furniture - LotE3
- Procurement of ICT Equipment: Procurement of Tablets - Lot F1
Procurement of Laptops - Lot F2
- Procurement of Pickup Truck - LotG1

3. REQUIREMENTS FOR TENDERING/ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- Evidence of Certificate of incorporation with Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) including forms CAC 1.1 or CAC2 and CAC7
- Evidence of Current Company Income Tax Clearance (FIRS) for the last 3 years (2022, 2023 & 2024) having expiry date of 31st December 2025
- Evidence of current Nigeria Social Insurance Trust Fund Compliance Certificate valid till 31st December, 2025
- Evidence of Pension Clearance Certificate (PENCOM) valid till 31st December 2025
- Evidence of Industrial Training Fund (ITF) Compliance Certificate valid till 31st December 2025
- Evidence of registration on National Database of Federal Contractor, Consultants and Service Providers of the Bureau of Public Procurement by submission of Interim Registration Report (IRR) expiring on 31st December 2025
- Company audited accounts for the last 3 years i.e 2022, 2023 and 2024
- Company Profile including organization structure, key professional staff with their names and registration with appropriate regulatory bodies (COREN, QRSBN, ARCON, CORBON e.t.c) with their current practicing license
- Verifiable documents evidence of at least 3 similar jobs executed in the last 3 years including letter of award, evaluation certificate, job completion certificate and photographs of the projects.
- Equipment and technology capacity, with evidence of ownership or lease.

- Letter of consent to allow verification of documents submitted.
- An affidavit disclosing:
 - that the company is not in receivership of any form of insolvency, bankrupt proceedings
 - that none or any of the Directors of the company has been convicted of fraud or financial improperly
- Evidence of payment of appropriate non-refundable tender fee of N10,000.00 only.
- All documents for submission must be transmitted with a covering letter on the company's letter head paper bearing all necessary details.

4. COLLECTION OF BID DOCUMENTS

Interested Companies are to collect the bidding documents from the office of **The Executive Chairman, Edo State Universal Basic Education Board, Education Hub, Iyaro, Benin city, Edo state.**

5. SUBMISSION OF TENDER DOCUMENTS

Prospective bidders are to submit bids for each lot desired, two (2) hard copies each of the Financial and Technical Bids packaged separately in sealed envelopes and clearly marked "Technical Bid" or "Financial Bid". Thereafter, put the two sealed envelopes together in a big envelope should be submitted in a sealed envelope addressed to **The Executive Chairman, Edo State Universal Basic Education Board, UBEC/EDOSUBEB/2024/LOT Number** clearly indicated on the top right-hand corner. Furthermore, the reverse of the envelope should bear the name and address of bidder and be dropped in the designated tender box at the premises of the Board before **12PM on 15th March, 2026.**

6. OPENING OF TECHNICAL BIDS

The Technical Bids will be opened immediately after the deadline for submission of tenders **15TH MARCH 2026 by 12 noon** at the **PREMISES** of the Edo State Universal Basic Education Board (EDO SUBEB) in the presence of bidders or their representatives, while the financial bids will be kept unopened. Please ensure that you sign the Bid Submission Register in the open registry of the Physical Planning Department as the Board will not be held liable for misplaced or wrongly submitted bids.

7. GENERAL INFORMATION

- Bids must be submitted in English Language as official authorized by the bidders
- Bids submitted after the deadline for submission would be returned unopened
- Bidders may not bid for more than 2 Lots in a category
- All costs will be borne by the bidders
- Edo State Universal Basic Education Board** is not bound to pre-qualify any bidder and reserves the right to annul the Procurement process at any time without incurring any liabilities in accordance with Section 28 of the Procurement Act 2007.

Signed:
Executive Chairman
Edo State Universal Basic Education Board

Customs officers repel smugglers' attack in Ogun, one suspect killed

IDIROKO (OGUN)

The Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), Ogun I Area Command, Idiroko, has confirmed a fresh violent attack on its officers by suspected smugglers along a bush path at Alapoti in Ado-Odo/Ota Local Government Area.

The command's spokesperson, Mr Zakari Chado, said the incident occurred around 6.00 p.m. on Saturday during a rou-

tine anti-smuggling patrol.

He noted that it was the second attack on Customs personnel within one week, following an earlier assault at Akokoro in Imeko-Afon Local Government Area, where two officers sustained serious injuries.

According to Chado, officers intercepted a convoy of motorcycles conveying smuggled foreign parboiled rice and seized 46 bags of 50kg each.

As the team was withdrawing,

it was ambushed by a large mob armed with Dane guns, stones, bottles and charms in an attempt to recover the seized items.

He said the officers successfully repelled the attack after about 30 minutes of intense

confrontation. One of the assailants was injured and later died, while a suspect who claimed ownership of the rice was arrested and is undergoing investigation.

Chado linked the attacks to

intensified anti-smuggling operations, which have led to significant seizures of arms, ammunition, narcotics and other prohibited items. He quoted the Acting Area Controller, Deputy Comptroller Olukay-

ode Afeni, as condemning the attack and assuring that those responsible would be brought to justice, while reaffirming the command's commitment to enforcing the Nigeria Customs Service Act, 2023.

When tradition becomes pressure: reflections on culture, conscience, and community

OSAHON AKHIDENOR

Tradition is often described as a community's backbone — the thread that binds the living to their ancestors and gives meaning to shared identity. But tradition can also become a heavy burden when it is enforced without empathy, especially in communities where cultural authority is treated as absolute. The Pa Sunday Okuoghae case study from Evboesi community in Edo State offers a sobering lens for examining what can happen when conscience, religion, and communal expectation collide.

The Context: A Role Chosen by Custom, Not by Blood

In Evboesi, the position of Chief Priest is reportedly not hereditary. Instead, the selection is said to come through an oracle-guided process. In this case, Lucky Sunday Okuoghae emerged as the person "designated" for the role.

Under normal circumstances, such a selection would signal a transition — a community moving from one spiritual custodian to another. But in the Pa Okuoghae case, the selection sparked crisis rather than continuity.

The Refusal: Conscience Meets Communal Expectation

Lucky Sunday Okuoghae declined the priesthood. His refusal, by the account of the case, was not framed as rebellion or contempt for culture, but as a matter of religious conviction. As a Christian, he could not, in good conscience, assume responsibilities tied to shrine worship.

What followed is instructive: instead of creating space for dialogue or exploring alternatives within the tradition, the refusal was reportedly met with threats of "untold hardship" and "dire consequences." In other words, the "choice" became a choice in name only — because the consequences attached to refusal were designed to compel compliance.

The Escalation: When Pressure Spreads Beyond the Individual

A key takeaway from the Pa Okuoghae case study is how communal conflict rarely stays confined to the person at the centre. When Lucky Sunday fled for safety, the tension did

not end. It shifted.

According to the narrative of the case, youths and elders redirected their anger and pressure toward the family, creating an atmosphere of fear that reportedly became constant and consuming. This pattern — punishing relatives to force an individual's submission — is not cultural preservation. It is a coercive social tactic that turns a community's collective power into a tool of intimidation.

The Outcome: Death Recorded Medically, Explained Socially

Pa Okuoghae died on January 29, 2026, with the death attributed to cardiac arrest. Medically, that is a cause of death. But socially, the case study presents a different argument: that prolonged harassment, fear, and emotional distress formed the underlying pressure that pushed an elderly man toward collapse.

This is the uncomfortable point the case study forces into the open: sometimes the most destructive violence is not physical assault in public view, but sustained intimidation that slowly breaks the body through stress.

The Human Cost: Displacement, Fear, and a Fractured Community

The Pa Okuoghae situation is often summarised in three lines — and each line captures a layer of social failure:

- The patriarch is dead.
- The son is in hiding.
- The survivors have fled their ancestral home.

When a tradition leaves a family displaced and a community polarised, it raises a difficult question: What exactly is being preserved — and at whose cost?

Lessons From the Case Study

The Pa Okuoghae case study is not simply about one family's ordeal; it highlights broader issues relevant to many communities navigating modern pluralism:

1. Culture cannot be sustained by compulsion. A tradition that requires threats to survive is already in crisis.
2. Freedom of belief must matter in communal life. Religious conscience is not a crime.
3. Collective identity must not erase individual dignity. Communities are strongest when they protect their most vulnerable, not when they become instruments of fear.

NAF vows to further degrade terrorists' capacity

MAIDUGURI

The Chief of Air Staff (CAS), Air Marshal Sunday Aneke, has reaffirmed the Nigerian Air Force's determination to further degrade the fighting capacity of terrorists in the North-East.

Aneke gave the assurance during a Parley for NAF Veterans alongside the 2025 Base Annual Social-Cultural Activities (BASA) in Maiduguri. He was represented by

Air Commodore Adebajo Adeosun.

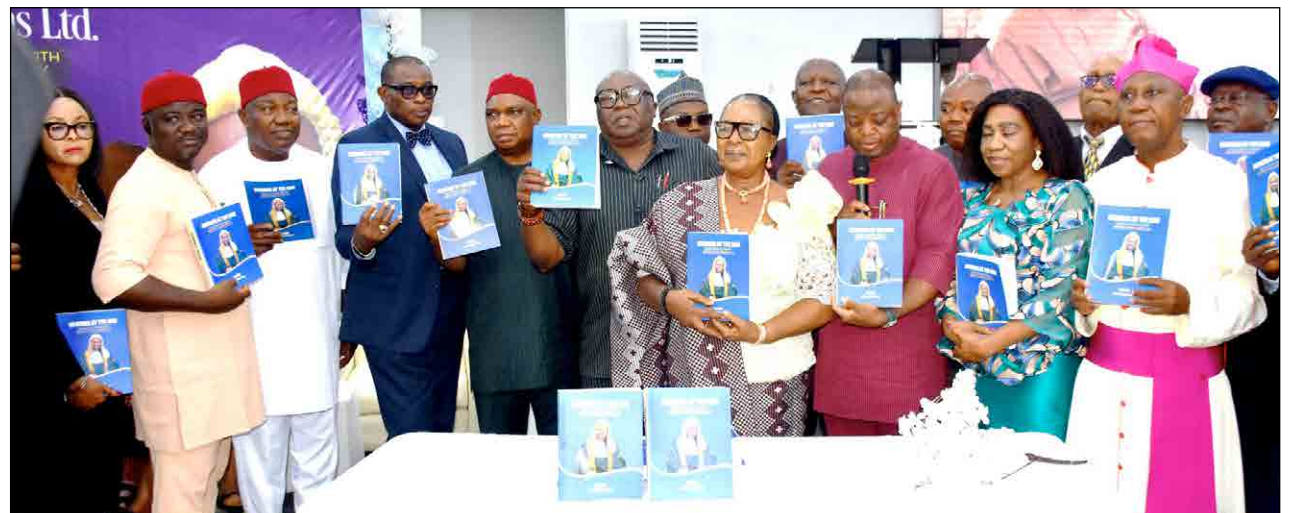
He said 2025 had been an eventful year for the Air Component, with significant operational gains recorded in areas such as the Timbuktu Triangle, Tumbuns, Sambisa Forest, Mandara Mountains and the Lake Chad Basin. These, he said, resulted in the disruption of terrorist networks, neutralisation of high-value targets and degradation of enemy capabilities.

The CAS also highlighted sustained non-kinetic operations, including civil-military cooperation and psychological operations aimed at countering extremist narratives and encouraging defections.

Aneke assured that the service would continue to prioritise the welfare of veterans through initiatives focused on healthcare access, economic reintegration and skills development, including collaboration with the Ministry of La-

bour and Productivity.

In his remarks, the Air Component Commander, Operation HADIN KAI, Air Commodore Mohammad Ahmed, said BASA was designed to promote unity, cultural heritage and camaraderie among personnel. Borno State Governor, Babagana Zulum, represented by the Commissioner for Youths and Sports, Mr Sainna Buba, commended the professionalism and resilience of NAF personnel.



LAUNCH OF OCHIOHA:

L-R: Former Deputy Governor of Enugu State, Mrs Cecelia Ezeilo; Member, House of Representatives, Mr Cyriacus Umeha; former Governor of Enugu State, Chief Lawrence Ugwuanyi; Justice Ugochukwu Ogakwu; Justice Ogbunyinya Obande; Book Editor, Prof. Agu-Gab Agu; Wife of celebrant, Dr. Veronica Mogboh; representative of Enugu State Government, Mr Osinachi Nnajeze; Chairman of the Occasion, Chief Loretta Aniagolu, and Book Reviewer, Prof. Obiora Ike, during the Launch of Ochioha at the Bar: Essays in Honour of Chief Anthony-Okoye Mogboh in Enugu at the weekend.

Tourism stakeholder urges FG to fix power, security, roads

LAGOS

A tourism stakeholder, Mrs Margret Fabiyi, has urged the Federal Government to improve power supply, security and road infrastructure to unlock the full potential of Nigeria's tourism

sector.

Fabiyi, Chief Executive Officer of Webisco Tourism Entrepreneur and Agro-Tourism, said stable electricity, improved security and good road networks were critical to sustainable tourism growth.

She called for the revival of

Black History Month, the organisation of familiarisation tours across heritage sites, and the establishment of an annual slave route programme to attract investors and boost international interest.

Fabiyi also urged the repositioning of the Abuja Carnival, the

provision of tourism pamphlets and souvenirs, and better coordination of states' annual tourism events for global promotion.

She appealed to governments at all levels to partner with private investors and tasked the media with intensifying domestic tourism promotion.

Foundation targets 1m women, youths in 2026 empowerment drive

KANO

The Queen Juliet Endowment Foundation has launched its 2026 women and youths empowerment programme in Kano State, targeting one million beneficiaries nationwide.

Founder of the foundation,

Queen Juliet Uju-Obiaeli, said the initiative was aimed at promoting self-reliance, economic inclusion and sustainable livelihoods, especially in rural communities.

She disclosed that about 500 women had already been trained in Kano ahead of the flag-off, with beneficiaries receiving

start-up equipment including sewing machines, grinding machines, hairdressing kits, and soap- and bead-making tools.

Uju-Obiaeli said the foundation plans to empower at least 3,000 women and youths in Kano State, with the programme to be extended to other states, including a focus

on digital literacy and computer-based skills. She noted that the initiative aligns with the Federal Government's Renewed Hope Agenda.

A beneficiary, Aisha Abubakar, described the programme as timely, saying it had restored hope and confidence among the women.

Building collapse: Civil Engineers lead sensitization walk against quackery

OSOGBO

The Nigerian Institution of Civil Engineers (NICE), Osun State chapter, has organised a sensitization walk to raise awareness on the dangers of building collapse and the use of substandard materials.

The exercise, tagged "Say No to Building Collapse: Build Right and Build Safe — Patronise Professional Civil Engineers," took the engineers to major markets in Osogbo, including Orisumbare, Fagbewesa, Idi Seke, Olaiya, Alekuwodo and Oke Fia.

Speaking during the walk,

the state chairman of NICE, Mr Basiru Abiola, said the initiative was aimed at educating residents on the growing menace of building and infrastructure collapse in the country.

Abiola stressed that many collapses were linked to the activities of quacks driven by

profit rather than safety, describing moral decadence as a major contributing factor.

He urged residents to engage qualified civil engineers in construction projects, warning that building collapse often results in loss of lives, severe injuries, psychological trauma and huge economic losses.

NEWS

Imasuen raises alarm over conflicting Supreme Court judgements, calls for urgent reforms

ABUJA

Chairman of the Senate Committee on Ethics, Privileges and Public Petitions, Senator Neda Imasuen, has expressed concern over what he described as disturbing conflicting judge-

ments emanating from the Supreme Court, warning that the trend is eroding public confidence in the apex court and worsening its workload.

Imasuen, who represents Edo South Senatorial District, spoke during the screening of a Supreme Court nominee by

the Senate Committee on Judiciary, where he criticised the growing incidence of conflicting decisions by courts of coordinate jurisdiction.

He said the situation had become worrisome, noting that many cases ought not to reach the Supreme Court in the first

instance, adding that the acceptance of such cases had congested the court's docket and created a "self-inflicted" crisis.

"Conflicting judgements of coordinate courts are very disturbing," he said. "Sometimes I wonder why the Supreme Court even accepts some of these cases.

By doing so, you only pile up your dockets. It shouldn't be so."

In a statement by his Media Aide, Moshood Karim, on Sunday, Imasuen argued that the challenge facing the Supreme Court was not the number of justices but the absence of an effective case-filtering mechanism.

"It is not about how many judges we appoint, but how we filter the cases that go there," he said, describing the situation as "out of control" and in need of urgent institutional reforms.

He also questioned the practice of lawyers routinely appealing cases to the Supreme Court, suggesting that professional incentives may be driving the trend.

Imasuen further called for a review of how electoral cases are handled, noting that election disputes often overwhelm the apex court and disrupt the hearing of regular matters.

He urged the Senate to explore mechanisms for disciplining erring judges, improving case management and instituting structural reforms to restore order and predictability in the judiciary.

He also questioned the practice of lawyers routinely appealing cases to the Supreme Court, suggesting that professional incentives may be driving the trend.



WOMEN'S MONTHLY PRAYER:

Guest preacher, Pastor Mrs Eno Jerry Eze (R) speaking during the Rivers State women's monthly prayer, praise and thanksgiving session in Port Harcourt recently.

Offa robbery: Appeal Court upholds death sentences of 5 convicts

ILORIN

The Court of Appeal sitting in Ilorin has affirmed the death sentences imposed on five men convicted over the 2018 Offa bank robbery, dismissing their appeals for lack of merit.

The appellate panel, comprising Justices Ridwan Abdullahi, Gabriel Kolawole and Abdul Dogo, upheld the judgement of Justice Haleemah Saleem of the Kwara State High Court, which sentenced the convicts to death by hanging.

Those affected are Niyi Ogundiran, Salawu Azeez, Ibikunle Ogunleye, Ayoade Akinibosun and Adeola Abraham.

In its ruling on Friday, the court rejected all grounds of appeal and ordered the immediate return of the convicts to prison custody.

The convictions arose from the coordinated robbery carried out in April 2018 in Offa, during which five commercial banks were attacked and no fewer than 32 persons, including nine police officers, were killed.

The convicts were found guilty of armed robbery, illegal possession of firearms and culpable homicide. A sixth suspect, a retired police officer, Michael Adikwu, died in custody before the commencement of trial.

The lead prosecutor, Mr Rotimi Jacobs (SAN), described the judgement as thorough and well-considered, despite the prolonged delays that characterised the trial. Counsel to one of the convicts, Mr Abdullah Jimba, said plans were underway to approach the Supreme Court.

The defendant pleaded not guilty to the charge.

Prosecutor, Insp. Samuel Owolabi, told the court that the defendant falsely accused a pastor and his family of theft and threats to life, knowing the information to be untrue.

Court remands 2 over alleged N85m PVC theft

IKEJA

An Ikeja Chief Magistrate's Court has remanded two men, Abdulrazaq Ibrahim and Amusa Fatai, over alleged theft of PVC materials valued at N85 million.

The defendants pleaded not guilty to charges of conspiracy, stealing and receiving stolen property.

Prosecutor, SP Josephine Ikhayere, said the offences were committed on October 20, 2025, along the Ibadan Expressway, involving the theft of 57,700kg of PVC material belonging to one Samson Ogundimu.

Chief Magistrate L.A. Owolabi granted the defendants bail in the sum of N2 million each, with two sureties, and adjourned the matter to February 26 for mention.

Police arraign 58yr-old man over alleged false information

IBADAN

A 58-year-old man, Michael Oritudafila, on Friday appeared before an Iyaganku Magistrate's Court in Ibadan over alleged false information.

The defendant pleaded not guilty to the charge.

Prosecutor, Insp. Samuel Owolabi, told the court that the defendant falsely accused a pastor and his family of theft and threats to life, knowing the information to be untrue.

Magistrate Gladys Olanrewaju granted the defendant bail in the sum of N100,000 with two sureties and adjourned the case until March 2 for hearing.

Sokoto judiciary intensifies ICT training for efficient justice delivery

SOKOTO

The Sokoto State Judiciary has stepped up ICT capacity-building for its personnel to enhance efficiency and service delivery, the Chief Registrar of the State High Court, Mr Aliyu Jafar, has said.

Jafar said the initiative aligns with modern judicial practices and includes electronic filing of cases, improved record management and digital case tracking.

He disclosed that a dedicated ICT Department has been established within the court system, with staff undergoing regular in-house training.

According to him, the High Court recorded 1,155 cases in 2025 and also secured the release of 78 inmates through legal reviews under the Administration of Criminal Justice Law.

Jafar said the judiciary would continue to embrace innovation, training and collaboration to meet national judicial standards and public expectations.

EFCC arraigns 3 over alleged N247.5m, \$160,300 fraud

IKEJA

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) has arraigned two men and a woman before an Ikeja Special Offences Court over an alleged N247.5 million and \$160,300 fraud.

The defendants are Uchenna Ejindu, trading as Autonel Automotive Enterprises, Salami Stephen and Titilayo Eboh.

They were arraigned on a four-count amended charge bordering on conspiracy, obtaining money under false pretence, stealing and money laundering. All pleaded not guilty.

The EFCC alleged that the defendants conspired in July 2024 to defraud one Mr Jude Atoch by collecting the sums in cash under the pretence of providing dollar equivalents, which they allegedly knew to be false.

Prosecuting counsel, Mr Temitope Banjo, urged the court to retain the trial date and requested the remand of the third defendant, citing difficulties previously encountered in arresting her.

Justice Rahman Oshodi adjourned the matter to February 12 for hearing of the third defendant's bail application and ordered her remand in a correctional centre. The case was further adjourned to February 27 for commencement of trial.

Alleged cyberbullying: Court grants Angela Okorie N5m bail

ABUJA

The Federal High Court in Abuja has admitted Nollywood actress Angela Okorie to bail in the sum of N5 million over alleged cyberbullying and defamation of fellow actress Mercy Johnson-Okogie.

Justice Emeka Nwite, while

ruling on Okorie's bail application, held that there was no concrete evidence to show that the defendant would jump bail if released.

The court ordered that the bail be secured with one surety, a level-13 civil servant, who must depose to an affidavit of means and submit relevant employment documents. The surety's residence is also to be verified.

Justice Nwite adjourned the matter until March 23 for trial and ordered that Okorie be remanded at the Suleja Correctional Centre pending perfection of her bail conditions.

Okorie was re-arraigned on a seven-count charge bordering on cyberstalking and criminal defamation, allegedly committed between 2024 and 2025, contrary to the Cybercrime Act.

She pleaded not guilty. The police opposed her bail application, alleging she had earlier absconded after being granted administrative bail, an allegation her counsel denied.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, formerly known as **MISS OMOGOR CATHERINE**, now wish to be known and address as **MRS. ONYEAGWAIBE CATHERINE**. All former documents remain valid. General public please take note.

ADDITION OF SURNAME/ DATE OF BIRTH

The general public is hereby notified that **KENNETH UWAGBOE IYERE IYERE** and **KENNETH UWAGBOE** are one and the same person. Henceforth, I now wish to be known and address as **KENNETH UWAGBOE IYERE IYERE** and also, my correct date of birth is **7/6/2007** and not **7/6/2002**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and general public please take note.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, formerly known as **ONWUZURUGBO SOPHIA CHIDINMA**, now wish to be known and address as **MRS. CHUKWUNEYE SOPHIA CHIDINMA**. All former documents remain valid. General public please take note.

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NEWS

Deadly gun and bomb attacks hit Pakistan's Balochistan province

A series of gun and bomb attacks across Pakistan's south-western Balochistan province have killed 31 civilians and 17 security service personnel, the region's Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti says.

Security forces responding to the violence killed at least 145 attackers during a 40-hour gun battle, he said. The Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) rebel group had earlier said it was behind the attacks, claiming dozens of soldiers were killed.

It marks an escalation of violence in the impoverished but resource-rich province, where Pakistan's government has been battling an ethnic insurgency for decades.

Pakistan accused India of supporting the BLA. Delhi has repeatedly denied such accusa-

tions.

Grenade and gun attacks in the provincial capital Quetta and cities and towns across the province targeted hospitals, schools, banks and markets, Pakistan's junior interior minister Talal Chaudhry said.

"In each case, the attackers came in dressed as civilians and indiscriminately targeted ordinary people working in shops," he said, adding that the attackers had used civilians as human shields.

Armed attackers also opened fire at security installations, attempted to carry out suicide bombings and briefly blocked roads in urban areas.

Some key administrative buildings in Quetta and nearby roads were reported to have been sealed off during the day.

Mobile phone services were jammed, and regional train services were suspended.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif later praised the military, pledging to "continue the war against terrorism until its complete eradication".

The BLA said it had launched a coordinated operation dubbed Herof, or "black storm" against security forces, and claimed to have killed 84 members of the security forces and kidnapped a further 18. The claim has not been independently verified and the Pakistani military has not commented.

The BLA accuses Pakistan's federal government of exploiting the rich mineral resources of its largest province without the local population benefiting.

Local activists also blame

Pakistani security forces for enforced disappearances, which Islamabad denies.

Balochistan covers nearly 44% of the country's total land, sharing a volatile border with Iran and Afghanistan and covering part of the Arabian Sea coastline. It is home to about 5% of the country's more than 240 million people.

The province is also the richest in terms of natural resources, including gas and minerals.

The region derives its name from the Baloch tribe, which is the largest ethnic group there. Resistance against the Pakistani government and an insurgency advocating for an independent state for the Baloch people began in 1948, after Pakistan gained independence from the British Empire.



GUN AND BOMB ATTACK:

Attackers struck cities across Balochistan including the provincial capital Quetta.

Israel to ban MSF from working in Gaza over refusal to provide staff list

Israel says it will ban Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) from working in Gaza after the medical charity refused to hand over a list of its staff in the territory.

The Israeli government had ordered 37 organisations to submit documents about their local and international workers in Gaza, claiming some in MSF had links to armed groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad. The charity has vehemently denied this.

MSF announced on Friday that it would not share a list of its Palestinian and international staff with Israeli authorities as it had not secured "assurances to ensure the safety of our staff".

In response, Israel said it was "moving to terminate the activities" of MSF in Gaza.

The Israeli Ministry of Diaspora Affairs and Combating Antisemitism said the decision followed "MSF's failure to submit lists of local employees, a

requirement applicable to all humanitarian organisations operating in the region".

On 30 December, Israel announced that it was going to revoke the licences of 37 international non-governmental organisations working in Gaza and the occupied West Bank, saying they had failed to meet new registration requirements.

At the time the diaspora ministry said the measure was needed to prevent "the infiltration of terrorist operatives into humanitarian structures".

The groups - which include MSF, ActionAid and the Norwegian Refugee Council - were told their operations must end within 60 days.

The move was condemned by 10 countries, including the UK, France and Canada, who said the rules would have a severe impact on access to essential services.

MSF said in a statement on Friday

that it had informed Israeli authorities that, as an "exceptional measure", it would share a list of names of its Palestinian and international staff, "subject to clear parameters, with our staff safety at its core".

"However, despite repeated efforts, it became evident in recent days that we were unable to build engagement with Israeli authorities on the concrete assurances required," it said.

"These included that any staff information would be used only for its stated administrative purpose and would not put colleagues at risk."

Sam Rose, director of Gaza affairs for the UN's Palestinian refugee agency Unrwa, told the BBC that this will have "major negative consequences on the ability of international organisations to provide healthcare inside Gaza".

He said MSF had its own reasons for not handing over staff lists "given the large numbers of staff of

medical organisations and international organisations that have been killed over the past two years".

A total of 1,700 healthcare staff have been killed in the war, including 15 MSF staff, the medical charity says.

MSF says it currently provides at least 20% of hospital beds in Gaza and operates around 20 health centres. Last year, it carried out more than 800,000 medical consultations and more than 10,000 infant deliveries, while providing drinking water.

The latest war in Gaza began after the Hamas-led attack on southern Israel on 7 October 2023, when about 1,200 other people were killed and 251 were taken hostage.

Israel responded by launching a military campaign in Gaza, during which more than 71,660 people have been killed, according to the Hamas-run health ministry.

Iran's supreme leader warns of regional war if US attacks

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has warned that any attack would spark a regional conflict, as the US continues to build up its forces nearby.

"The Americans should know that if they start a war, this time it will be a regional war," Khamenei was quoted as saying by the semi-official Tasnim news agency.

Donald Trump earlier said Iran was in "serious discussions" and he hoped they would lead to something "acceptable", while Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi told CNN he was "confident that we can achieve a deal" on Tehran's nuclear programme.

Trump has threatened to intervene in Iran over its nuclear ambitions and after its deadly crackdown on anti-government protests.

Araghchi said: "Unfortunately, we have lost our trust [in] the US as a negotiating partner," but added the exchange of messages through friendly countries in the region was facilitating "fruitful" talks with Washington.

Iran's top security official Ali Larijani had previously said a framework for negotiations was progressing.

As part of its build up of forces, the US has sent its aircraft carrier the USS Abraham Lincoln to the region and late last week US Central Command said it was operating in the Arabian Sea.

"[Trump] regularly says that he brought ships... The Iranian nation shall not be scared by these things," added Khamenei.

Iran had been expected to begin a two-day live-fire naval exercise on Sunday in the Strait

of Hormuz - one of the world's most important shipping lanes and a key route for energy supplies. However on Sunday Reuters quoted an Iranian official as saying the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) navy had no plans for such an exercise.

Around a fifth of the world's traded oil passes through the waterway, which is about 33km (21 miles) wide at its narrowest point between Iran and Oman. Iran has in the past threatened to close the strait if it were attacked.

The US has warned Iran against any "unsafe and unprofessional behaviour" near its forces in the area.

Araghchi responded by saying: "The US military is now attempting to dictate how our Powerful Armed Forces should conduct target practice in their own turf."

On Saturday, two explosions in Iran heightened anxiety in the country. Local authorities said a blast that killed one and hurt 14 at a building in the southern port city of Bandar Abbas was caused by a gas leak.

Tasnim denied social media reports that a Revolutionary Guards Corps navy commander had been targeted in the blast.

In the south-western city of Ahvaz, at least four people were killed in another explosion, with local authorities again blaming a gas leak, according to Iran's Tehran Times.

On Thursday, Trump said he had told Iran that it had to do two things to avoid US military action: "Number one, no nuclear. And number two, stop killing protesters."

Fifteen miners killed by Russian strike in Ukraine, energy company says

Fifteen miners have been killed by a Russian drone strike in eastern Ukraine, the country's largest private energy firm has said.

DTEK said a bus carrying workers after a shift in the Dnipropetrovsk region had been targeted in Sunday's attack. Seven people were injured.

Earlier, at least three others were killed and nine injured in separate Russian attacks overnight and on Sunday.

The victims included six people hurt when a drone hit a maternity hospital in Zaporizhzhia. Two were women giving birth at the time of the strike.

In a post on Telegram, Zaporizhzhia regional head Ivan Fedorov called it further "proof of a war directed against life".

He shared a video of smoke billowing from blown-out windows and photographs of shattered glass and burnt debris strewn inside hospital rooms.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiha said the attack showed Russian President Vladimir Putin was pursuing a "war against civilians contrary to peace efforts".

After the strike on the DTEK bus, Regional official Oleksandr Ganzha initially said 12 miners had been killed. The company later put the death toll at 15.

Elsewhere, a man and a woman were killed by a drone strike in the central city of Dnipro, Ganzha said.

Moscow launched a waves of targeted attacks on Ukraine's power grid in January, affecting heating and electricity supplies during an extraordinarily cold winter - with temperatures forecast to plunge below -20C in places this weekend.

US President Donald Trump had said on Thursday that Putin had agreed to halt attacks because of the cold - the Kremlin later said the pause would expire on Sunday.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said a second round of three-way talks to end the fighting after nearly four years would begin on Wednesday, rather than Sunday as had been planned.

He did not give a reason for the delay, and said the talks between Russian, Ukrainian and US officials would take place in Abu Dhabi.

NEWS

Foreign

Venezuela release rights activist Javier Tarazona

Prominent Venezuelan rights activist Javier Tarazona has been freed, in the latest prisoner release announced by the government amid US pressure for reforms.

Tarazona, the head of human rights NGO Fundaredes, was arrested in 2021 and detained in the notorious El Helicoide prison in the capital Caracas. His release was announced on Sunday by Fundaredes.

Foro Penal, another Venezuelan rights group, said it had verified the liberation of more than 300 political prisoners since 8 January.

On Friday acting President, Delcy Rodríguez said the government would introduce an amnesty law that is expected to benefit hundreds of political prisoners. Under the bill, El Helicoide is also due to be closed.

The announcement came four weeks after US forces seized President Nicolás Maduro, and demanded the regime introduce political and economic reforms.

In its statement on Sunday, Fundaredes said Tarazona had been jailed "for defending hu-

man rights, denouncing abuses, and speaking out".

It added that his release did not "erase the injustice he suffered", but represented "a necessary step in a process marked by criminalisation, persecution, and a lack of due process".

Tarazona had alleged that government officials had links with guerrillas in Colombia, with which Venezuela has a 2,000km (1,200-mile) border. The government accused him of treason, terrorism and incitement to hatred.

Maduro's dramatic capture by US special forces on 3 January has encouraged families of opposition and human rights figures arrested under Maduro and his predecessor Hugo Chávez to step up their campaign for releases.

Venezuela has long denied holding political prisoners, but families and rights advocates have demanded charges against detainees be dropped. Opposition politicians, journalists, and activists have faced charges including terrorism and treason, which their families describe as arbitrary.

Teenager dies from Swiss bar fire injuries, bringing death toll to 41

A teenager who was injured when a deadly bar fire broke out in a Swiss ski resort on New Year's Eve has died in hospital, taking the death toll to 41, the local public prosecutor announced.

"An 18-year-old Swiss national died at a hospital in Zurich on January 31," the Wallis canton's public prosecutor, Beatrice Pilloud, said in a statement.

No further information would be released at this stage, she added.

The fire at Le Constellation bar in Crans-Montana - a venue known to be popular with a younger crowd in the ski resort town, where the drinking age is 16 - also injured 116 people.

Most of the victims of the fire were young - eight were under the age of 16 - and many are still being treated in hospital for severe burns.

Switzerland's Federal Office for Civil Protection told the AFP news agency on Friday that, as of Monday, 44 patients were being treated abroad. They included 18 in France, 12 in Italy, eight in Germany and six in Belgium.

The Wallis health ministry

told the news agency that 37 patients were still in Swiss hospitals as of Monday.

Initial findings from an investigation suggest the fire began as sparklers attached to champagne bottles ignited soundproof foam that lined the ceiling of the bar's basement.

Authorities have acknowledged that the bar had not undergone safety checks for five years.

The owners of the bar, Jacques and Jessica Moretti, have been accused by authorities of manslaughter by negligence, bodily harm by negligence and arson by negligence.

Criminal proceedings have also been brought against the municipality's head of public safety and a former council fire safety inspector.

A Swiss court has imposed a travel ban on Jessica Moretti as an alternative to pre-trial detention. She has had to surrender her passport and must report to police every day.

She previously told reporters that she was sorry about the "unthinkable tragedy".

Jacques Moretti is being held in custody for an initial period of 90 days.

fighting continues in the east of country between the army and Rwanda-backed M23 rebels.

Called for by part of the opposition, the idea of an inter-Congolese national dialogue has also been promoted by Angolan President João Lourenço in recent weeks.

Tshisekedi, however, set out conditions for it to take place, including that the process must take place on home soil and



COLLAPSED MINE:

Sources say the mine, currently under rebel control, has been poorly maintained.

More than 200 killed in mine collapse in DR Congo

More than 200 people have been killed in a mine collapse in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, rebel authorities have said.

The mine, in the town of Rubaya, gave way on Wednesday due to heavy rains, Lumumba Kambere Muyisa, spokesman for the North Kivu region's rebel governor, told reporters. At the time, the death toll remained unclear.

Women and children were among those mining coltan - a mineral used to manufacture electronics such as smartphones and computers - at the time.

A former supervisor of the mine told the BBC the site was not properly maintained, making accidents more likely and hampering rescue efforts when they occur.

He added that the fragile nature of the soil made the situation worse.

The Congolese authorities have blamed the deaths on the re-

bels, saying they were putting the lives of civilians at risk through allowing illegal mining without enforcing safety standards.

They said they had banned mining in the area last year, even though the rebels had already seized control of the mines by then.

There have been numerous similar mine collapses in DR Congo over the years, including in areas controlled by the government.

Women, children and artisanal miners - those not officially employed by a mining firm - are among those killed in the collapse. Around 20 survivors are said to be receiving treatment in hospital.

A source whose cousin died in the landslide expressed shock, saying it was "a big loss" for the family and community.

"I didn't believe he could pass away in such circumstances," the source, who did not wish to be

named, told the BBC, describing his cousin as a "courageous" and "ambitious" man whose main goal was to provide for his wife and two children.

"I didn't believe [he was dead] because investigations were still ongoing. His body wasn't found after the accident, so I did have hope that he could be found alive. Unfortunately, some hours later, his body was discovered."

Governor Erasto Bahati Musanga, who was appointed by M23 rebels after seizing swathes of territory in North Kivu, visited survivors of the incident on Friday.

Rubaya is one of a number of towns across North Kivu under the control of the M23, who international observers say are backed by neighbouring Rwanda, providing photos of Rwandan troops in the country. Rwanda has denied giving military support to the M23.

In its statement after the col-

lapse, the Congolese government repeated its accusation that Rwanda was using the M23 to loot Congolese minerals.

"Mining activities carried out in this context of armed occupation constitute a structured system of looting and illegal exploitation of natural resources, part of an illicit supply chain of industrial scale," it said.

Although Rwanda has always denied the accusation, UN experts say there is evidence that minerals from DR Congo are being exported through Rwanda.

The mines in Rubaya hold about 15% of the world's coltan supply and half of the DR Congo's total deposits.

The metallic ore contains tantalum, which is used to produce high-performance capacitors in a range of electronic devices, making it in high demand worldwide.

Boy, 5, and father detained by ICE return to Minnesota after release

A five-year-old boy and his father who were detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in Minnesota have returned home, a congressman has said.

Texas Representative Joaquin Castro, a Democrat, announced on Sunday that

Liam Conejo Ramos and his father Adrian Alexander Conejo Arias were released from Dilley detention center in Texas and had travelled back to the city.

Castro said: "Liam is now home. With his hat and his backpack."

The detainment of the pair sparked protests outside the

detention facility where they were being held, and led to a national outcry. In a statement, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) said: "ICE did NOT target or arrest a child."

Their return home came after US District Judge Fred Biery granted an emergency request from the family's lawyer, and ordered their release on Saturday.

The judge condemned their detention as driven by a "perfidious lust for unbridled power".

"The case has its genesis in the ill-conceived and incompetently implemented government pursuit of daily deportation quotas, apparently even if it requires traumatising children," Biery wrote in his ruling.

Biery, an appointee of former US President Bill Clinton, said deportations through the US immigration system should occur

in a more orderly and humane policy than currently in place.

While the father and son were still in the Texas detention centre, Rep. Castro had written on social media that the young boy was not doing well being away from his family, classmates and home.

The Department of Homeland Security has said the pair entered the US illegally, while a lawyer for the family said they followed proper protocols to seek asylum.

On Sunday, the DHS said in a statement to the BBC's US partner CBS News: "The Trump administration is committed to restoring the rule of law and common sense to our immigration system, and will continue to fight for the arrest, detention, and removal of aliens who have no right to be in this country".

DR Congo president outlines pre-conditions for a national dialogue

Congolese President Félix Tshisekedi has reaffirmed his commitment to inclusive and peaceful dialogue between all people in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

In a New Year's address to the diplomatic corps in Kinshasa on Saturday, he said national unity was "more than ever a fundamental requirement".

His comments come as

under institutional control.

The president also said the process should not call into question his legitimacy or that of the institutions elected by universal suffrage.

This despite the fact that part of the opposition is contesting his election and denouncing his management of the country.

Finally, he insisted that the process should not seek to overturn court decisions that

have already been made.

"Justice will follow its normal course with rigour, to the end, and without complacency, in order to honour the memory of those who have unjustly fallen as a result of the attack," he said.

Former president Joseph Kabila was sentenced to death in absentia in September by a military court that convicted him of war crimes, treason, and crimes against humanity.

Sports

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

CAF delegation to inspect Ikenne, Sagamu facilities for 2026 schools championship



2026 CAF AFRICAN SCHOOLS FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP.

Officials of the Confederation of African Football (CAF) are expected to arrive in Nigeria on Monday for an inspection of facilities proposed to host the final phase of the 2026 CAF African Schools Football Championship.

The inspection will hold in Ikenne-Remo and Sagamu, both in Ogun State, on Tuesday and Wednesday.

The Director of Media and Communications of the Nige-

ria Football Federation (NFF), Ademola Olajire, disclosed this in a statement made available to newsmen on Sunday in Abuja.

According to Olajire, the CAF delegation will assess competition venues, training facilities and other ancillary infrastructure in the two locations.

The CAF African Schools Football Championship, launched four years ago, is an annual Under-15 competition designed to promote youth football develop-

ment and education across Africa.

The tournament, open to both boys and girls, is supported by a 10 million-dollar investment from the Dr Patrice Motsepe Foundation and features zonal qualifiers that culminate in a continental finals competition.

The 2024 finals were hosted by Accra, Ghana, where Tanzania emerged champions in the boys' category, while host nation Ghana won the girls' title.

Winners of the championship

receive up to 300,000 dollars in infrastructural development support.

The competition also partners with organisations such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO) to promote health education.

CAF officials expected for the inspection include Omar Amr (Safeguarding), Fatima Elmis-saoui (African Schools Football Championship Officer), Herve Dassoundo (Marketing and Branding), Mahmoud Amer (Travel and Logistics), Diabate Zakariya (Safety and Security).

Also part of the delegation are Hend Thabet (Travel and Accommodation) and Joshua Knipp (ASFC Competition), as well as the Executive Director of WAFU B, Philippe Tchere.

The inspection is expected focus on the Remo Stars Stadium and training pitches in Ikenne-Remo, as well as the FC Ebedei Stadium, training facilities, hospitals and hotel infrastructure in Sagamu



RANGERS PLAYERS CELEBRATING

NPFL: Rangers defeat Kano pillars 2-0 in Enugu

Rangers International Football Club of Enugu on Sunday defeated Kano Pillars 2-0 in a Matchday 24 fixture of the 2025/2026 Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL).

The encounter, played at the Nnamdi Azikiwe Stadium, Enugu, lived up to expectations as both sides displayed tactical discipline and experience.

Rangers, popularly known as the Flying Antelopes, took the lead in the 12th minute through Emmanuel Essien, who capitalised on a loose ball outside the box to fire home the opening goal.

The goal sparked excitement among the home fans, but in spite of several attempts by both teams, the first half ended with Rangers holding a slim 1-0 advantage.

On resumption of the second half, the home side showed greater determination and attacking intent.

Their pressure paid off when captain Chidiebere Nwobodo embarked on a solo run into the Kano Pillars' penalty area and released a shot that beat the goalkeeper to double Rangers' lead.

The goal unsettled the visitors, who made efforts to reduce the deficit, but their attacks were effectively contained by the Rangers defence.

Rangers also pushed for more goals but were let down by poor finishing in the final third.

The victory moved Rangers to 36 points, placing them third on the 20-team league table, while Kano Pillars remained in the relegation zone.

NPFL26: Bendel Insurance FC forced to 2-2 draw in Minna as Niger Tornadoes escape humiliation

KEHINDE OSAGIEDÉ

Bendel Insurance Football Club on Sunday evening narrowly missed the chance to get another maximum points away from home as they were forced to a 2-2 draw by Niger Tornadoes in the match day 24 of the Nigeria' Premier Football League, NPFL.

The Benin Arsenal enjoyed a flying start to the 2025/26 revised fixture encounter at the Bako Kontagora stadium in Minna with a brilliant early goal scored by Nnamdi Anthony 3 minutes into the game.

Wing Commander Chinedu Nwosu doubled the lead for Insurance FC in the 40th minute to increase the pressure on the host team as the first half ended with the visitors going into the break with two goals advantage.

The Benin Arsenal maintained the lead in the second half till the 60th minute when A. Dalhatu struck to reduce the goals deficit and regain confidence.

Insurance FC however maintained composure and resilience but were unlucky to run away with victory as R. Mendos scored the equalizing goal in the 4th minute of the 9 minutes extra time after the full 90 minutes registration period.

Tornadoes who lost 1-0 to Insurance FC in the first round meeting in Benin on September 13, 2025 had to dig deep

and threw in everything to avoid home and away humiliating defeat to the resurgent Benin Arsenal.

Before the kickoff, Bendel Insurance FC were 8th on the league table while Niger Tornadoes occupied 7th position with 33 points each and now have 34 points apiece to maintain their positions.

Bendel Insurance FC will be at home against the Peoples Elephants of Aba on Saturday, February 7, 2026.



Bendel Insurance vs Niger Tornadoes

Wellspring University makes history with Rugby

Wellspring University, Benin City, Edo State, has officially introduced Rugby Football Union, becoming the first university in the state to adopt the sport. The introduction was marked by a visit from the Edo State Rugby Team, led by Head Coach Obong Ntiense Williams, popularly known as "Mr Rugby" in Nigeria and his 5-man professional Rugby coaches from Lagos.

The university's management, represented by Vice-Chancellor Professor Isaac Rotimi Ajayi, Registrar Dr. Mrs. Helen Uzezi Wara, and Sports Director Dr. Onuh Matthew Udaya, welcomed the team and expressed enthusiasm for the new program.

This development is timely, as the university will participate in the upcoming National Universities Games (NUGA) later this year, where rugby is a medal-winning event.

The introduction of rugby is expected to enhance sports development and promote teamwork among students.

The Edo State Rugby Team's visit was a follow-up to Well-spring College Lagos' involvement in rugby, demonstrating a growing interest in the sport. This initiative positions Well-spring University as a pioneer in rugby development in Edo State.

It will interest you to note that Edo State is a hub for rugby development in Nigeria.

Last year, in recognition of the remarkable strides and achievements recorded for the State in the Sports, an official approval was granted by the Ministry of Education to formally introduced rugby to 15 secondary schools as a pilot program of integrating Rugby into the school sports system.



WELLSPRING UNIVERSITY RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION

Lagos partners British Cycling to boost sports development

The Lagos State Sports Commission (LSSC) has taken a bold step in advancing its global sports agenda by forging a strategic partnership with British Cycling.

The collaboration underscores Lagos commitment to sports diplomacy institutional learning and sustainable development.

A delegation led by Amy Gardner, Sport and Participation Director at British Cycling, paid a working visit to the Commission with engagement in high-level discussions.

The discussion is on knowledge exchange skill transfer and technical capacity building all aimed at strengthening the cycling culture in Lagos State.

Speaking during the engagement, Lekan Fatodu, Director General of LSSC, described the partnership as a deliberate and outcome-driven move within Lagos' broader sports development strategy.

"Sports has become a powerful tool for diplomacy and development.

"Our collaboration with British Cycling is about strengthening technical capacity.

"Deepening institutional competence and adapting global best practices to deliver measurable value for athletes coaches, administrators and cyclists in Lagos," Fatodu said.



LAGOS STATE SPORTS COMMISSION BRITISH CYCLING

Sports

The Nigerian
Observer
...that the people may know

NOC to support emerging sports as Nigeria stages first sepaktakraw demonstration

Abu Gumel, President of the Nigeria Olympic Committee (NOC), has reaffirmed the committee's commitment to the development of emerging sports in the country.

Gumel gave the assurance on Saturday during Nigeria's first-ever demonstration of Sepaktakraw held at the Indoor

Hall, Package B, Moshood Abiola National Stadium, Abuja.

Gumel spoke through the Deputy Secretary-General of the NOC, Abdullahi Mohammed.

He said the demonstration was organised to showcase Sepaktakraw and highlight its potential for growth in Nigeria, particularly at the grassroots level.

Gumel noted that all participating athletes were below the age of 20, describing early exposure as critical to nurturing future champions.

According to him, emerging sports require deliberate investment in youth development, technical training and effective administrative structures to thrive.

The NOC president commended the organisers, the National Sports Commission (NSC), members of the Sepaktakraw board, technical officials and the media for their roles in promoting the sport.

He said effective media coverage would help accelerate awareness and acceptance of Sepaktakraw across the country.

"Sepaktakraw already enjoys global recognition, with more than 60 countries participating worldwide, making its adoption and domestication in Nigeria easier.

"The sport has the potential to create employment opportunities, positively engage youths and reduce youth restiveness if properly developed," he said.

Gumel assured stakeholders of the NOC's support for the sport through technical assistance, capacity building and access to Olympic Solidarity funds.

He expressed optimism about the future of Sepaktakraw in Nigeria, noting that the athletes displayed impressive skills during the demonstration.

"With the right support, these young athletes can compete at continental and international levels and bring honour to the country," he said.

NAN reports that Sepaktakraw is a Southeast Asian sport that combines elements of volleyball and football, played with a rattan ball over a net, using only the feet, knees, chest and head



SEPAKTAKRAW GAME



NVBF assures hitch-free Super Cup ahead of Monday kickoff

Adamu Tenimu, the Chairman of the League Management Committee of the Nigeria Volleyball Federation (NVBF), has assured of a hitch-free Super cup ahead of the competition's serve off on Monday.

Tenimu said this after the technical meeting held on Sunday in Abuja, which formally marked the commencement of the Super Cup competition.

The 2025 Nigeria Volleyball Federation (NVBF) Super Cup will officially serve off at the Indoor Sports Hall of the Moshood Abiola National Stadium, Abuja, with 12 clubs competing in the men's and women's categories.

Tenimu noted that the Super Cup has historically been part of the federation's annual calendar, but

had not been staged in recent years.

According to him, the current leadership of the NVBF has revived the competition as part of efforts to develop volleyball in Nigeria.

"The Super Cup has always been part of the federation's programmes, but for some reasons, it could not be staged.

"As a new federation, we decided to bring it back to help develop the game to the level it is expected to be," the league chairman said.

Speaking with newsmen, Tenimu, said the technical meeting marked the formal serve off of the competition.

"We have reviewed everything that needs to be reviewed and reached agreements on how the competition will be played," he said.

Libya to host ITTF Africa Cup as players chase W/Cup spots

Benghazi, Libya's second-largest city, will host the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) Africa Cup, featuring top players from across the continent competing for qualification tickets to the 2026 ITTF World Cup in Macao, China.

The championship which is happening for the first time in the history of table tennis will hold from Feb. 7 to Feb. 9 at the Al-Nasr Sports Club in Benghazi.

The tournament will bring together elite male and female players, with the stakes particularly high as semifinalists in both singles categories will automatically qualify for the World Cup scheduled for next month in Macao.

For the ITTF and its African counterpart, Libya's hosting of the championship is more than a competition as it is a testament to the diversity of the sport and a celebration of unity and excellence across Africa.

President of ITTF Africa, Wahid Enitan Oshodi, commended the Libyan Table Tennis Federation (LTTF) for its commitment to hosting the event.

Oshodi said Libya's willingness to stage the championship reflected the growth and diversity of table tennis across the continent.

"Gatherings such as this celebrate both our diversity and our unity, defining what it means to be part of the table tennis family," he said.

Also speaking, President of the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF), Petra Sörling, said the Africa Cup had become a strong indicator of the continent's growing influence in global table tennis.

She noted that sustained efforts in competition delivery, high-performance development and organisational capacity had strengthened Africa's presence on the international stage.

"The ITTF Africa Cup reflects Africa's rising influence within the international table tennis landscape," Sörling said.



ITTF AFRICA CUP PLAYERS

Asuquo returns to coaching, seeks better future for young gymnasts

Anthony Asuquo, President and Founder of International Gymnastics (TIG) Nigeria, has returned to active coaching after a brief break to reposition the club for improved performance and better opportunities

for young gymnasts.

Asuquo disclosed this in an interview with the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) on Sunday in Abuja after a training session at the Moshood Abiola National Stadium.

He said the period away from coaching allowed him to

re-strategise and develop new training methodologies aimed at strengthening the future of the children under his care.

"I have been away for some time to recap and re-strategise. Sometimes you need to take a break to fix things up.

"I learnt a lot during that period, and now I'm back," he said.

According to him, the goal is to provide structured and progressive gymnastics training that aligns with international standards and guarantees a better future for the young athletes.

"The plan is for the children to do real gymnastics, improve through better strategies and methods, and learn in a step-by-step manner," Asuquo said.



ANTHONY ASUQUO WITH HIS TEAM

Enyimba pip visiting Bayelsa United 1-0 in Aba

Enyimba International FC of Aba on Sunday piped visiting Bayelsa United 1-0 in one of Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL) matchday 24 encounters played in Aba.

The only goal of the match came from Samuel Agu in the 82nd minute to send the fans into wide jubilation and ensure victory for the host.

Enyimba FC coach, Deji Ayeni said he expected a tough

match going by the teams long time rivalry and the importance of the match to both clubs.

He said that, Bayelsa United frustrated his team knowing what they were going through.

"Though, we are happy that we won the match and that is what we need, to boost our morale but I give it to Bayelsa United goalkeeper," Ayeni said.

Ayeni said the visiting goalkeeper was the reason his team

left it late to victory and wish the goalkeeper continued in that line so that.

"He will be a big access to the country national team."

Bayelsa United head coach Meremu Okara said he felt disappointed with the loss considering how the goal was conceded, after withstanding the host for lengthy period.

"The players played well but that one minute loss of con-

centration cost us the match, though we have our chances but we were in a hurry to score, and that put us under pressure which resulted in the loss of concentration," he said.

In spite of the victory, Enyimba FC still remained in 11th place with 31 points, while Bayelsa United occupy the 14th position on the league table with 28 points after 24 matches

Adamu emerges new TYB golf club lady captain with landslide victory

Jumai Adamu has emerged the new Lady Captain of Tukur Yusuf Buratai (TYB) International Golf Resort and Country Club, Abuja, following a decisive election victory held at the club house on Saturday.

Adamu polled an overwhelming 129 votes, defeating Rose Nyam, who scored 22 votes, and the incumbent lady captain, Maureen Apute, who garnered 26 votes.

The landslide result drew applause from club members, who described the outcome as a clear endorsement of Adamu's leadership vision and commitment to unity within the club.

Speaking after the announcement, Adamu gave glory to God, describing the victory as an act of divine grace and faith rewarded.

"I return all the glory to God

Almighty. This victory is His doing, and I am deeply grateful to every member who believed in me," she said.

Adamu pledged to lead with humility, inclusiveness, and dedication.

"I promise to strengthen camaraderie and promote excellence among female golfers at the club.

"With God's guidance, I will serve diligently, promote unity, and ensure that every lady golfer feels valued and inspired," she added.

She also thanked the outgoing lady captain, Apute, for her service, noting that her administration laid foundations to be built upon.

Members of the club congratulated Adamu, expressing confidence that her tenure would usher in renewed energy and growth for the ladies' section.



JUMAI ADAMU

FEATURE

The Nigerian Observer
...that the people may know



Gov Okpebholo's recognition of civil servants reflects a rare culture of staff welfare in Edo

ABDUL-KADIR ABDULLAH

At a time when public confidence in governance is frequently tested, moments of genuine recognition and encouragement stand out and deserve attention.

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, recently offered such a moment when he donated SUV vehicles to three diligent staff members of the Government House and Protocol Department, a gesture that has since sparked public debate.

The presentation, which took place on Thursday, January 31, 2026, at the Government House in Benin City, went beyond the symbolic handover of vehicle keys. It was a deliberate move aimed at motivating public servants who have distinguished themselves through discipline, punctuality and uncommon dedication to duty.

While addressing the beneficiaries, Governor Okpebholo explained that the decision was neither random nor politically motivated. According to him, the gesture followed careful personal observation of the beneficiaries'

work ethic. He praised them for consistently resuming early and closing late, stressing that such commitment should not go unnoticed.

"God kept you, and it has been your habit that you come early and close late. I watch carefully. You deserve this," the governor said, urging them to sustain their diligence in service to the people of Edo State.

The beneficiaries—Mary Salami and Sylvanus, both of the Protocol Department, as well as Mike Isoho of the ICT Unit—received the vehicles with visible excitement and gratitude.

Predictably, the gesture has generated mixed reactions on social media. While many applauded Governor Okpebholo for rewarding excellence and hard work, others criticised the donation, describing it as a misplaced priority and arguing that public funds should be channelled elsewhere.

However, such criticism raises a fundamental question: when did appreciating good leadership become so difficult?

Rewarding hardworking civil servants should not be controversial. Rather, it should be encouraged.

While many applauded Governor Okpebholo for rewarding excellence and hard work, others criticised the donation, describing it as a misplaced priority and arguing that public funds should be channelled elsewhere.

Motivation remains one of the most effective tools for improving productivity in public service, especially in an environment where many workers feel overlooked and unappreciated.

Having served in the Edo State Civil Service for several years, it is safe to say that gestures of this nature are rare. In recent history, only a handful of governors have shown this level of personal attention to staff welfare, and Governor Monday Okpebholo is steadily emerging as one of the most responsive among them.

Beyond material rewards, there is growing awareness of staff with medical challenges who have received timely support under the current administration. Indeed, it is difficult to identify a genuine staff welfare concern brought to the governor's attention that has been ignored.

Such responsiveness, particularly within the public service, is uncommon and deserves acknowledgment.

As a people, we must learn to commend good governance when we see it. Criticism is essential in a democracy, but it should not degenerate into blanket hostility where nothing is

ever appreciated.

Not long ago, some critics dismissed the proposed Edo Air project as unnecessary. One is compelled to ask: must every initiative be condemned simply because it originates from a political opponent?

History shows that opposition rarely applauds positive efforts, but society ultimately suffers when citizens refuse to acknowledge progress.

Governor Okpebholo's donation forms part of a broader effort to encourage dedication and excellence among public servants. It sends a clear message: under his administration, hard work will not go unnoticed.

Rather than tearing down every positive step, Edo people should adopt a balanced approach—criticise where necessary, but also commend when deserved.

If every act of goodwill is attacked, leaders may become discouraged from doing more. Sometimes, a good deed is simply a good deed. And this one deserves recognition.

Governor Okpebholo has indeed done a noble thing.