

# NSCDC nabs 15 suspected illegal gold miners in Edo

IDAHOUSA MUSA

The Edo State Command of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) has arrested 15 suspects for illegal gold mining in the Egbetua Community, Oso, Akoko-Edo Local Government Area of the state.

The suspects were apprehended by operatives of the

NSCDC's Auchu Area Command on Monday night at Ode Forest—an illegal mining site—following a tip-off.

Acting on credible intelligence, NSCDC officers stormed the forest and arrested the suspects.

Confirming the arrests, Edo State NSCDC Commander Gbenga Agun emphasized the Corps' responsibility to protect both citizens and the country's

solid mineral resources.

"Yes, it is true that the suspects were arrested in Edo North (Egbetua). It is our statutory responsibility to apprehend and prosecute individuals involved in illegal mining across the country," Agun said.

He warned other illegal miners in the state to desist from such activities, adding that the command is committed to

flushing out illegal miners and other criminal elements.

In 2024, an illegal gold mining site was discovered in the Egbetua Community, where hundreds of miners were found carrying out operations during an on-the-spot assessment by Alltimepost.com.

Investigations revealed that illegal mining had been ongoing in Egbetua for over 25

years, leading to significant socioeconomic and security challenges in the community.

Residents claimed that the activities had caused environmental degradation, increased insecurity, and worsened poverty, especially among peasant farmers who rely on natural resources for their livelihoods.

In response to these concerns, the Edo State Govern-

ment issued a seven-day ultimatum on May 5, 2024, for illegal miners to vacate the sites spread across Egbetua land.

However, more than seven months after the deadline, many miners reportedly refused to leave, raising concerns among residents.

This defiance ultimately led to the recent arrest of the 15 suspects by the NSCDC.

# The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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**Illegal mining: Unnamed Military Generals 're key payers —Senate**

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# Weak party primaries threaten electoral integrity —INEC Chairman

The Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Prof. Mahmood Yakubu, has expressed concerns over the lack of internal democracy within political parties, warning that weak primary elections pose a serious threat to Nigeria's electoral system.

Yakubu made this statement on Thursday at the public presentation of a book titled "Celebrating 100 Years of Political Party Evolution in Nigeria: The Imperatives of Nigeria's Political Stability – Issues and Solutions," an event organised by the Inter-Party Advisory Council (IPAC) in Abuja.

He emphasised that transparent, fair, and credible

primaries are essential for strengthening democracy, noting that poorly conducted primaries often lead to disputes, litigations, and instability in Nigeria's electoral process.

"A democratic society cannot thrive if political parties fail to practice democracy internally," Yakubu said.

He added that when political parties uphold democratic principles, public confidence in the electoral system increases, thereby strengthening democratic governance.

Yakubu reiterated that political parties are the foundation of democracy, as no candidate can contest elections without party sponsorship. He warned that irregularities in party primaries weaken electoral cred-

ibility and ultimately undermine governance.

The INEC chairman also highlighted the need for urgent electoral reforms, revealing that the commission is working closely with the National Assembly to review key aspects of the Electoral Act.

"We recognise that electoral

reforms are not the sole responsibility of INEC or the National Assembly.

"Political parties, civil society organisations, and all well-meaning Nigerians must actively support and advocate for necessary legislative amendments that will strengthen our democracy," he stated.

Yakubu urged political actors to champion legislative amendments that enhance election transparency and accountability, calling on IPAC and other stakeholders to take the lead in pushing for reforms that ensure Nigeria's elections are fair, just, and representative.

He also acknowledged the

longstanding collaboration between INEC and IPAC, commending the council for fostering dialogue between political parties and the electoral commission.

However, he stressed that more work is needed to align Nigeria's democratic process with global best practices.

## CBN's policy interventions avert inflation surge to 42.81% —Cardoso

The Central Bank of Nigeria has said that without its policy interventions, inflation could have surged to 42.81 per cent by December 2024.

It also projected that diaspora remittances would rise to N31.79tn when fourth-quarter figures for 2024 are released.

Going forward, the apex bank has pledged to stick to orthodox monetary policies to tame inflation in 2025.

The CBN Governor, Olayemi

Cardoso, made these disclosures in Abuja on Thursday at the 2025 Monetary Policy Forum, which brought together ministers, heads of economic agencies, and private sector players.

He stated that counterfactual estimates suggest that without decisive policy interventions, inflation could have reached 42.81 per cent by December 2024.

He further noted that through-



**COURTESY VISIT:**

L-R: European Union (EU) Ambassador to Nigeria and the ECOWAS, Ambassador Gautier Mignot (left), exchanging a souvenir with the Chairman of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Professor Yakubu Mahmood, during a courtesy Visit of the EU to INEC headquarters in Abuja.

PHOTO BY OMOYE AMINU

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# Edo State Varsity holds orientation for new students

Edo State University Iyamoh has held its orientation programme for the 10th set of admitted students for the 2024/2025 academic session.

Welcoming the fresh students, the Acting Vice Chancellor of the institution, Prof. Dawood Egbefo, described their admission as the beginning of an exciting academic journey.

He explained that the orientation programme was designed to guide the new students through university life and provide them with valuable insights to ease their transition.

“Today marks the beginning of an exciting academic journey in your lives. I congratulate you on being among those admitted into Edo State University

Iyamoh,” he said.

He added that the university had grown to become a symbol of academic excellence since its recognition by the National Universities Commission (NUC) in 2016.

“Since that moment, we have dedicated ourselves to a path of growth, innovation, and distinction.

“To you, the 10th set of admitted students, I offer my sincere congratulations. Your arrival here continues a proud tradition of academic excellence and intellectual pursuit that defines Edo State University Iyamoh.”

Prof. Egbefo encouraged the students to take advantage of the numerous opportunities available to them and utilize the university’s resources to

maximize their academic experience.

“The knowledge you gain here will equip you to become agents of change in your communities and beyond,” he said.

He acknowledged the challenges that come with transitioning to university life and assured the students that the university management had incorporated essential academic and personal develop-

ment resources into its administration to support them.

He urged them to take their studies seriously and uphold discipline, emphasizing that their actions and conduct should contribute to their personal growth and the integrity of the institution.

“Our open and effective communication is essential, and we encourage you to use the available channels to raise

concerns or share feedback.

The establishment of the Students’ Representative Council plays a crucial role in fostering a strong connection between the student body and the university management,” he added.

Earlier, the Dean of Student Affairs, Prof. Muniratu Maliki, highlighted the role of the Student Affairs Division in student welfare.

She emphasized that the division plays a vital role in enhancing students’ experiences by fostering an environment of support, engagement, and personal development.

“The orientation programme provides students with the necessary information to help them succeed in their academic careers and personal goals during their time at the university,” she said.

## Former NTA DG, experts lament leadership deficit in Nigeria, call for electoral reforms

**BENIN CITY**

The former Director-General of the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Prof. Tonnie Iredia, has called for an impartial electoral body to address flaws in Nigeria’s electoral system.

Speaking at the official launch and colloquium of the Dr. Osahon Enabulele Foundation, Iredia emphasized that Nigeria’s electoral process will remain flawed as long as those overseeing it are entrenched in partisan politics.

In his paper titled “Election Management and the Leadership Recruitment Process: The Way Forward,” Iredia warned that a single defective electoral process could undermine an election’s credibility before voting even begins.

“An impartial electoral umpire is critical. Our constitution states that anyone with a history of partisanship should not serve as an electoral commissioner, yet such individuals are still appointed,” he said.

As a solution, he suggested that all general elections in Nigeria should be conducted on the same day, arguing that staggered elections are ineffective. He also advocated for election

disputes to be resolved before winners are sworn in and called for the establishment of an election offenses tribunal.

Prof. Eghosa Osaghae, Director-General of the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA), noted that leadership challenges are not unique to Nigeria but are a global issue. However, he stressed that Nigerians must look inward to address their problems rather than seeking external solutions.

Dr. Osahon Enabulele, founder of the foundation and former president of the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), lamented the growing disillusionment among Nigerians, with many seeking to leave the country.

He warned that Nigeria has descended into a survivalist state, where citizens struggle for basic necessities. To reverse this trend, he called for active citizenship and progressive reforms rather than mere complaints.

Enabulele outlined his foundation’s vision to empower vulnerable groups, promote leadership excellence, improve access to quality healthcare and education, and provide mentorship opportunities for young people to achieve their potential.



**LETTER OF CREDENCE:**

President Bola Tinubu (right), and the High Commissioner of Canada to Nigeria, Mr Pasquale Salvaggio, after Tinubu received Letter of Credence from Salvaggio, in Aso Rock, Abuja, yesterday.

## Fugar market cleanup: Acting chairman leads sanitation drive

In a bid to promote a culture of cleanliness among residents of Etsako Central LGA, the Acting Chairman, Hon. Cephas Yakubu Muhammed, has launched a market cleaning campaign at Ivhairua Market, Fugar—the administrative headquarters of the local government.

Accompanied by Vice Chairman Hon. Rosemary Umasor, Secretary to the Local Government Prof. Jerome Ileile, and other officials, Hon. Muhammed emphasized that the initiative would be an ongoing exercise across all major

markets in the LGA. He urged residents to make sanitation a daily habit to ensure a clean and healthy environment.

He called on market traders and residents to support the government’s efforts by regularly clearing their surroundings, maintaining drainages, and avoiding illegal waste disposal—especially as the rainy season approaches. He stressed that keeping public infrastructure clean and functional is a shared responsibility.

The Head of the Environmental Department, Mrs. Christiana Orhewere, reiterated the impor-

ance of cleanliness in preventing diseases. She also warned against bush burning and encouraged traders to maintain daily sanitation practices to ensure free-flowing drainages and a healthier environment.

Commending the initiative, Mrs. Beauty Umoru praised the council chairman for prioritizing public health and urged market women to adhere to sanitation guidelines.

Separately, Hon. Muhammed attended the Wash for Healthy Life (W4HL) Project Dissemination Meeting, where he highlighted the importance of clean

water and hygiene for child health and community well-being. He encouraged participants to spread awareness in their communities and reaffirmed his administration’s commitment to supporting health initiatives that improve residents’ lives.

The event was attended by key stakeholders, including Deputy Leader Hon. Ojadi Sylvester (representing the legislative leader Hon. Yusuf Marwan), Majority Leader Hon. Festus Ogiator, Hon. Friday Ikhane (Ward 4 Councilor), Hon. Kadiri Karim Erumiseli, Mr. Abu Martis Ere-ga, and Martins Akinabor.

## CBN’s policy interventions avert inflation surge...

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ed bold policy measures across six Monetary Policy Committee meetings, including raising the Monetary Policy Rate by 875 basis points to 27.50 per cent, increasing the Cash Reserve Ratio for Other Depository Corporations by 1,750 basis points to 50.00 per cent, and adjusting the asymmetric corridor around the MPR.

Cardoso said, “Counterfactual estimates suggest that without these decisive policy interventions, inflation could have reached 42.81 per cent by December 2024.”

He added, “Throughout 2024, the Bank implemented several bold policy measures across six MPC meetings, including rais-

ing the Monetary Policy Rate by a cumulative 875 basis points to 27.50 per cent, increasing the Cash Reserve Ratio of Other Depository Corporations by 1,750 basis points to 50.00 per cent, and adjusting the asymmetric corridor around the MPR.”

Cardoso highlighted that the CBN implemented critical foreign exchange reforms to enhance market efficiency.

The unification of multiple exchange rate windows contributed to a 79.4 per cent rise in remittances via International Money Transfer Operators to \$4.18bn in the first three quarters of 2024, up from \$2.33bn in the same period in 2023.

Other major FX-related in-

terventions included clearing a \$7bn FX backlog, which restored market confidence and improved FX liquidity, lifting restrictions on 41 items previously banned from access to the official FX market since 2015, and introducing new minimum capital requirements for banks, effective March 2026, to enhance resilience and global competitiveness in the sector.

The apex bank also launched the WIFI initiative under the National Financial Inclusion Strategy, aimed at bridging the gender gap in financial access by empowering women with financial services, education, and digital tools.

Also, the Nigeria Foreign Exchange Code was introduced to

ensure integrity, transparency, and efficiency in the FX market.

Cardoso described the code as a binding commitment by the financial sector to rebuild trust and boost confidence.

He said these reforms reflect the CBN’s commitment to creating an enabling environment for inclusive economic development, adding that achieving macroeconomic stability requires sustained vigilance and a proactive monetary policy stance.

On inflation, the CBN Governor warned that managing disinflation amid persistent shocks would require strong policy coordination between fiscal and monetary authorities.

He stated that the focus

must remain on price stability, the planned transition to an inflation-targeting framework, and strategies to restore purchasing power and ease economic hardship.

He expressed optimism that Nigeria had turned a corner and that disinflation was within reach but stressed the need for bold and coordinated policy measures to consolidate progress.

Cardoso noted that global capital flows to emerging markets could improve as advanced economies ease monetary policies.

However, he stressed that Nigeria’s ability to attract inflows would depend on investor confidence in domestic reforms, macroeconomic stability, and posi-

tive real returns on investment. He reiterated that the CBN’s transition from unorthodox to orthodox monetary policies was aimed at restoring confidence, strengthening policy credibility, and prioritising price stability.

Encouragingly, he said, FX liquidity is improving, and the naira is gradually aligning with market fundamentals, creating a more predictable environment for production, exports, and essential imports.

Speaking earlier, CBN Deputy Governor, Economic Policy, Mohammed Sani Abdullahi said the liberalisation of the FX market was a crucial step in unifying the fragmented system and reducing speculative-driven premiums.

# Land dispute: Indigene accuses elder of land grabbing, calls for Oba's intervention

LUCKY EFESE

A resident of Ogiza village in Oredo Local Government Area of Edo State, Lawrence Alohan, has accused Pa Isaiah Otenghabun Eghonmwanre of unlawfully ceding village land to

a neighboring community and allegedly deceiving the Benin Monarch, His Royal Majesty, Oba Ewuare to secure his position as odionwere (village head).

In a petition to the Oba's palace, Alohan, who serves as the third-ranking elder (Ozuko-

pogieha) in Ogiza, urged the monarch to investigate what he claims are falsehoods and breaches of traditional protocol.

He alleged that Pa Eghonmwanre had misused his influence to allocate village land to outsiders, particularly those

from a neighboring village, for personal gain.

Furthermore, Alohan accused Eghonmwanre of falsely appointing non-indigenes—John Ogborue from Igbogor, Omono from Ovbiogie, and Otaokhuo, an Urhobo man from Delta State—as ranking el-

ders in Ogiza, despite their lack of ancestral ties to the village.

He insisted that only true indigenes should hold such positions, emphasizing that an outsider cannot become odionwere in Ogiza.

In response, Festus Eghonmwanre, speaking on behalf of his father, dismissed the allegations, stating that Pa Eghonmwanre was legitimately installed as odionwere in 2017.

He asserted that his father had, in fact, promoted Alohan to the rank of edion, making him the seventh-ranking elder

in the village hierarchy.

Festus also clarified that his father's visit to the Oba's palace in November 2024 was purely to pay homage, in accordance with tradition, and not to spread falsehoods.

He maintained that the elders presented by his father were legitimate members of Ogiza, representing five major families, including Alohan's. He further pointed out that the Enogie of Umegbe village had witnessed his father's installation as odionwere, affirming its legitimacy.



MERCENARIES:

Foreign mercenaries engaged in the ongoing hostilities in DR Congo after laying down their arms in Rwanda on Wednesday.

## Illegal mining: Unnamed Military Generals 're key players —Senate

CAROLINE AMEH

The Nigerian Senate has alleged that unnamed military generals are behind illegal mining activities across the country.

The claim was made by the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Interior, Senator Adams Oshiomhole (APC, Edo North), during a presentation to the Senate Committee on Appropriation.

Oshiomhole raised the issue while the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Solid Minerals Development, Senator Sampson Ekong, was presenting his committee's report on the ministry's budget allocation.

The former Edo State governor warned that the country's efforts at economic diversi-

fication would remain futile unless President Bola Tinubu's administration took decisive action against illegal mining.

Meanwhile, Sen Ekong disclosed that his committee had recommended N539 billion as the capital budget for the Ministry of Solid Minerals Development in the 2025 Appropriation Bill. He noted that while the executive had initially proposed N9 billion, the panel deemed it grossly inadequate to harness the sector's potential.

Oshiomhole, who is also a member of the Appropriation Committee, emphasized that without tackling illegal mining, no amount of funding would yield meaningful results in the solid minerals sector.

The former APC national

chairman urged the Federal Government to take a tougher stance against illegal mining, similar to its actions against illegal oil bunkering in the Niger Delta.

"Whereas the federal government is ruthless with people engaged in illegal oil bunkering by deploying the Joint Military Task Force (JTF) to deal with them, when it comes to illegal mining of solid minerals, the approach changes. It's like applying to different standards, and I am very angry about that," he said.

Oshiomhole called for the deployment of the military, including the army and air force, to tackle illegal mining operations across the country.

"If we have to fight this menace, we need to deploy the army, even to kill anyone involved in

illegal oil bunkering. We should also deploy JTFs comprising the Army, Police, and Air Force against illegal miners."

In a shocking revelation, Oshiomhole alleged that retired military generals were actively involved in illegal mining operations across Nigeria.

"The ongoing illegal mining across the country is being carried out by retired generals, and we know them. Yes, we know them. Nobody in Africa doesn't know them," he stated.

He recalled that during his tenure as APC National Chairman, he wrote a letter to former President Muhammadu Buhari on the matter, urging him to take action. However, he lamented that the letter did not produce the desired results.

## Oborevori mulls introduction of whistle-blowing policy in Delta

AJUWA VICTOR

Delta State Governor, Hon. Sheriff Oborevori has called for the introduction of whistle-blowing culture in the State to check poor projects delivery.

Governor Oborevori, who made the call during an interactive meeting with Permanent Secretaries, Directors and Heads of Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) at the Government House, Asaba, said the whistle blowing approach will make projects execution in the State more participatory and transparent.

The Governor thanked the civil servants for their loyalty, support, commitment and dedication to duty.

He said the meeting, which was the third in the series since his assumption of office, became necessary following reports of

some civil servants colluding with contractors to defraud the state through poorly executed projects.

The Governor, said two engineers have been suspended for certifying uncompleted projects for payment, adding that the decision was necessary to serve as a deterrent to others.

Oborevori said: "All I require from you is loyalty, commitment and dedication to duty, not personal gain, for us it is Delta State first. In advancing Delta through our MORE Agenda, we must give the best to Deltans at all times.

"In everything we are doing in Delta State, we must give it the best. A situation where a superintending engineer will issue certificate for a project not completed and payments made is unacceptable.

"So, when I discovered bad jobs and issuance of certificates of completion for projects not completed, on the spot I directed that those involved should be issued a query."

## FG to resolve ALSCON's gas supply, ownership crises

Federal Government has assured that it will swiftly address the lingering ownership dispute and gas supply challenges crippling operations at the Aluminum Smelter Company of Nigeria in Ikot Abasi, Akwa Ibom State.

The Minister of Steel Development, Prince Shuaibu Audu, gave this assurance during a visit to the idle multi-billion-dollar plant on Monday, vowing that the facility would be revived in line with President Bola Tinubu's Renewed Hope Agenda.

A statement issued on Thursday by ALSCON's Managing Director, Zavyalov Dmitriy, revealed that stakeholder consultations had reached an advanced stage to resolve key issues, including the dredging of the Imo River to enhance industrial operations.

Despite being shut down for over a decade, the minister expressed satisfaction with the condition of the plant's equipment, describing its revival as critical to the administration's

economic goals.

"I think it is very clear that the Federal Government has invested significant resources in establishing this plant.

"The plant first began operations in 1997, ran for about two years, then resumed production between 2008 and 2013 before shutting down again.

"In terms of job creation, ALSCON has the potential to generate 20,000 direct and indirect jobs, making its revival crucial to the economic agenda of this administration," Audu stated.

He disclosed that the current managers of the plant have invested over \$400 million in its infrastructure, adding that President Tinubu is committed to expanding Nigeria's economy to \$1 trillion by 2030, a goal that requires reactivating key national assets like ALSCON.

While acknowledging ALSCON's economic potential, the minister highlighted three major obstacles preventing its revival.

## DTSG partners Asagba of Asaba on clean, sustainable environment

AJUWA VICTOR

As part of its efforts to tackle environmental challenges and promote sustainability in Asaba the Delta State Government has partnered with the Asagba of Asaba, Obi Professor Epiphany Azinge (SAN), and the traditional institution in Asaba.

The partnership, aimed at strengthening the enforcement and fostering greater participation in sustainable strategies to

enlighten residents and curb indiscriminate waste disposal, reduce flooding, in the capital territory, was solidified during a strategic meeting between Environmental Stakeholders of the state government and the Asagba-In-Council at the Asagba's Palace in Asaba.

Speaking at the meeting, the Honourable Commissioner for Environment, Mr. Jamani Tommy Ejiro, hailed the partnership as a significant step towards addressing the growing

environmental concerns in the state capital.

He emphasized the importance of collective responsibility in achieving a clean and sustainable Delta State.

"The government cannot do it alone. This partnership with the Asagba in Council is a testament to the Governor Sheriff Oborevori administration's commitment to creating strategic synergies for a sustainable environment through collective action".

He called on all residents to align with the Clean Delta vision and adhere to the state's environmental laws, as it is the only way to make Delta State a model of environmental stewardship in the country.

On his part, the Asagba of Asaba, Obi Professor Epiphany Azinge (SAN), expressed his unwavering support for the initiative and pledged the full cooperation of the traditional institution in the awareness and enforcement efforts.

## NEWS

# Rehabilitation of Ekpoma-Auchi express road progressing

JAMES OGBOMO

The rehabilitation of the Ekpoma section of the Benin-Ekpoma-Auchi Expressway is in full swing, addressing years of neglect that have left the road in a deplorable state.

As a vital link between

southern and northern Nigeria, this federal highway has suffered from severe potholes, erosion, and chronic traffic congestion, causing hardship for commuters and residents.

Despite being a federal project, the Edo State Government, led by Governor Monday Okpebholo, has taken proactive

steps to ensure repairs progress.

Contractors are actively working on key sections, including Obadan Junction, Upper Mission Extension, and Temboga Road.

Particular attention is be-

ing given to the Ehor-Ekpoma axis, a notorious bottleneck known for persistent gridlocks.

Reactions from road users and residents have been mixed. While many commend the government's intervention, others

have expressed concerns over the slow pace of work and the inconvenience caused by construction-related diversions.

Temporary routes have been created to ease traffic, though delays remain a challenge.

Once completed, the project is expected to transform travel conditions, stimulate economic growth in the region, and improve the overall quality of life for commuters and local communities.

## NNPC commissions 5 mini LNG plants in Ajaokuta

The Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC) Limited on Thursday commissioned five Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) mini-plants in Ajaokuta, Kogi State.

The newly launched plants—PRIME LNG, NGML/Gasnexus LNG, BUA LNG, Highland LNG, and LNG Arete—will

source natural gas feedstock from pipelines already running through the Ajaokuta area.

The primary supply line for these mini-plants is the Ajaokuta-Kano-Kaduna (AKK) gas pipeline, a major infrastructure project currently being developed by the Federal Government.

## Phone thief jailed for seven years in Ekiti

An Ekiti State Chief Magistrate Court has sentenced a 25-year-old man, Balogun Mujaid, to three years imprisonment with hard labour for stealing an Itel A50 phone valued at N98,000 while serving community service within the court premises.

Chief Magistrate Dolamu Babalobon also ordered the convict on Thursday to pay N130,000 as restitution to the primary complainant in the matter.

Mujaid faced additional sentences in two other cases: three years imprisonment with hard labour with an option of a N20,000 fine on Count 1 and three months imprisonment with an option of a N10,000 fine on Count 2.

In another matter, Mujaid, who pleaded guilty to all charges, received a further sentence of one year and three months imprisonment without an option of fine on two other counts.

Chief Magistrate Babalobon ruled that "all terms are to run concurrently."

Prosecuting the case, Inspector Sodiq Adeniyi told the court that "Mujaid, on October 15, 2024, at about 8:30 a.m. at the open court of the Chief Magistrate 6, Ado Ekiti, while serving community service, did steal the Itel A50 phone, property of one Mrs. Olusola Oluwatuyi."

In another case, under Charge No: MAD/111c/25, the prosecutor stated, "The defendant stole one standing fan valued at N25,000 and a home theatre valued at N45,000, totalling N70,000, property of Falola Sunday, on January 24, 2025, at Oke-Ila, in Ado-Ekiti."

Inspector Adeniyi noted that "the offence committed is punishable under Section 302(1) (a)(b) and Section (4)(e), 181(1)(d) of the Laws of Ekiti State of Nigeria 2021."

## 5% or nothing, NLC stands firm against 50% telecom tariff hike

The Nigeria Labour Congress has proposed a five per cent increase in telecom tariff hike rejecting the 50 per cent approved by the Nigerian Communications Commission.

The NLC spokesman Benson Upah said on Thursday the labour unions will not back down on their demands.

"They keep on emasculating us through stupid taxes. It will come to a point when people can pay but they won't pay. This really is to halt this mindless tariff increases. And if by any chance there has to be an increase at all, 5%, given the fact of our situation that there have been increases across the board.

"But now to say 50%, it is not going to work. Where will the ordinary Nigerians be at the end of the day when we have energy tariff increases?"

he said.

According to him, there is no going back on its nationwide protest scheduled for Tuesday, February 4, 2025, to drive home the displeasure of the group against the recently announced telecom tariff increase.

"The manufacturers are groaning, the middle-class people are groaning. The ordinary Nigerians on the streets can't even afford to turn on the lights in their sitting rooms. When taxes are low, more people pay than when you have high taxes," he added.

The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have consistently advocated the removal of energy subsidies and the floating of the naira, saying failure to effect the two economic policies has plunged Nigeria into severe inflationary pressure.



**FLAG OFF OF RECONSTRUCTION:**

Abia State Governor, Dr. Alex Otti (left), acknowledging cheers from Abia women, during the flag off of reconstruction of phases 1 and 2 of the 13.95-kilometre Onuinyang-Okporoenyi-Oboro-Ikwuano Road connecting central and northern senatorial districts of the state, yesterday.

## Police arrest two suspected child traffickers, rescue two

Operatives of the Rivers State Police Command have busted a child trafficking syndicate, arrested two female suspects and rescued two children in Chococho in Etche Local Government Area of the state.

The arrested suspects were said to have connived to defraud two other women in the guise of facilitating the adoption of babies.

The spokesperson for the state police command, Grace Iringe-Koko, disclosed this in a statement issued in Port Harcourt.

Iringe-Koko alleged that the

suspects perpetrated the act in collaboration with members of a local security outfit.

The statement partly reads, "The Rivers State Police Command has recorded another milestone in its efforts to combat child trafficking, with the successful apprehension of suspects and the rescue of victims.

"On January 24, 2025, operatives of the command arrested two suspects, Ugochukwu Onyebuchi (f) and Ogechi Nmezi (f), for allegedly conspiring to defraud Juliet Blossom (f) and Esther Michael (f) under the pretence of facilitat-

ing baby adoptions.

"Previously, the suspects had reportedly lured one Gift Chimanu, the mother of a two-month-old baby girl, Evidence Olomachukwu Chimanu, and Hope Onyebuchi, the mother of a one-year-old baby boy, Chukwuemeka Kingsley, into their scheme."

She continued, "The suspects were arrested at a checkpoint in Chococho in Etche LGA of the state. Preliminary investigations indicate that the suspects acted in collaboration with members of a local vigilante group codenamed (OSPAC) to perpetrate the

crime.

"During interrogation, the suspects confessed to their involvement and are still in police custody. Efforts are ongoing to identify and apprehend other syndicate members, including the implicated OSPAC members.

"The victims have been safely rescued and reunited with their families."

She said the operation underscored the unwavering commitment of the state police command to safeguarding vulnerable individuals and eradicating child trafficking within the state.

## Nigerian politicians in office to kill, steal, remain in power —Amaechi

Former Minister of Transport, Rotimi Amaechi, has declared that Nigerian politicians are in power to steal, kill, and retain power.

Amaechi made this remark at the National Conference on Strengthening Democracy in Nigeria held earlier in the week, aimed at discussing pathways to good governance and political integrity in Nigeria.

While speaking at the event, Amaechi said, "All we hear here is typical Nigeria, and you're clapping. That's why politicians get away with anything. They get away with murder because you have a short memory. None of you here can defend the votes. You have complained; Nigerians have been clapping for you."

Amaechi further made a direct reference to President Bola Tinubu, suggesting that the current political climate would remain unchanged, adding that many Nigerians tend to forget history.

He said, "Before the election of the last president, a lot of us were called to intervene. Why did they do that? The people were ready to die. You're talking and abusing everybody; nobody has power and will give to you. Not even me. If you want a pastor as president, go and get one.

"The politician is there in Nigeria to steal, to maim, to kill, and to remain in power. If you think Tinubu will give it to you, you are wasting your time. When we speak, we forget history."

Reflecting on his own personal journey in Nigerian politics, Amaechi said that his involvement in the political system had been shaped by poverty and necessity.

"Unfortunately for me, poverty has made me part of the political system since I left university in 1987, and I've been part of the process till today," he noted. The Amaechi added that his years in the political arena, particularly the All Progressives Congress, have made him a key figure that cannot be "wished away."

"You can't wish me away in the formation of APC; you certainly can wish me away. You can't wish me away in how APC won election, you can't.

"But the truth is that if some of us did not stick out our necks

to say PDP, Goodluck, we want to die with you. When they saw that we were ready to die, they gave up power," he said.

Amaechi also explained the transactional nature of some political rallies when he recounted how someone had told him at an event in Lagos that the people were paid to attend and "if tomorrow Tinubu comes with the same transport money, they will also come."

Sharing a story from an APC demonstration organised at the Eagles Square in Abuja and "money had been released to bring in some women," Amaechi recalled how he arrived early to witness the event; however, he saw "the women gathered; guess what they were wearing? Jonathan for President!"

# Entertainment

## Nollywood actor Yul Edochie affirms commitment to traditional religion

STORIES BY: OGISO PROMISE

Nigerian actor Yul Edochie has reaffirmed his commitment to his traditional roots, declaring himself a "hardcore traditionalist" in a recent Instagram post. Emphasizing his deep connection to the religion of his forefathers, Edochie expressed pride in his heritage and criticized those who abandoned traditional beliefs due to fear of public opinion.

The actor voiced his disappoint-

ment with Africans who shy away from their ancestral religions, stating that he will never turn his back on the ways of his forefathers, which he believes are rooted in truth, transparency, and fairness.

His post has sparked a lively discussion on social media, with many applauding his dedication to preserving African cultural traditions. Fans and followers have shown support, praising his authenticity and willingness to embrace his roots despite societal pressures.

Edochie's declaration has also en-

couraged a broader conversation about cultural identity and the importance of maintaining traditional values. His stance has inspired others to embrace their heritage, fostering a renewed sense of pride in African traditions.

In his post, Edochie wrote: "Because of fear of what people will say, Africans are running away from their powerful religion, their originality. Abomination! I will never abandon the ways of my forefathers. It is built on truth, transparency, and fairness. I'm a hardcore traditionalist."



## Trevor Noah returns to host 67th Grammy Awards amidst wildfire relief efforts

The Recording Academy has announced that Trevor Noah will return as the host of the 67th Grammy Awards, marking his fifth consecutive year in the role.

The ceremony is set to take place on February 2, 2025, at the (link unavailable) Arena in Los Angeles.

Noah's return comes as the music industry prepares to celebrate its biggest night against the backdrop of the ongoing Palisades and Eaton wildfires.

In response to the crisis, the Recording Academy has canceled several Grammy Week events, though some high-profile gatherings—such as Clive Davis' Pre-Grammys Gala—will proceed with a renewed focus on raising funds for wildfire relief efforts.

This year's Grammys promise to be a night to remember, with Beyoncé leading the nominations with 11 nods, including Song, Record, and Album of the Year. Other top nominees include Kendrick Lamar, Billie Eilish, Post Malone, and Charli XCX, each earning seven nominations.

Noah has cemented his reputation as a beloved Grammy host, blending sharp humor with genuine admira-

tion for artists and their craft. In a previous interview, he expressed his deep respect for the musicians in attendance, saying, "I know this sounds like a weird thing to say, but you don't want to disappoint the artists that you love."

Beyond the music, the ceremony will highlight resilience and community support amidst the wildfires. The Recording Academy's efforts to integrate music with meaningful relief initiatives add a poignant layer to the annual celebration, ensuring that the night remains both entertaining and impactful.

The 67th Grammy Awards will air live on February 2, 2025, featuring performances from some of the biggest names in music.

With Trevor Noah at the helm, this year's ceremony promises to be an unforgettable tribute to both artistry and community.

Additionally, as part of Grammy Week, the FireAid benefit concert will take place on January 30 in Los Angeles. The event, featuring performances by some of the industry's biggest stars, will raise funds to support those affected by the wildfires.



## Nollywood actresses share harrowing on-set illness experiences

Two Nollywood actresses, Jemima Osunde and Omowunmi Dada, have taken to social media to recount their traumatic experiences with severe, life-threatening illnesses contracted while working on movie sets.

Osunde revealed that she devel-

oped gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) after consuming contaminated food on a movie set in Ibadan, Oyo State, three years ago.

She explained that since then, she has been battling for her life, with her condition worsening significantly in the past month.

Similarly, Omowunmi Dada shared her own ordeal, narrating how she contracted sepsis while filming in Oyo State.

According to her, after falling seriously ill, she was abandoned at a hotel by the production team. She expressed gratitude to her family and management, who quickly intervened and arranged for her to be taken to a hospital in Ibadan, where she received treatment.

Both actresses voiced their frustration and disappointment over the lack of care and support from the production teams they worked with.

Osunde disclosed that she had to personally cover her medical expenses, while Dada shockingly revealed that the production team demanded a refund after her illness disrupted filming.

Their revelations have sparked widespread concern about the welfare and safety of actors in the Nigerian film industry.

Many in the industry and beyond have expressed outrage, emphasizing the urgent need for better working conditions, improved healthcare access, and stronger support systems for actors who fall ill or get injured on set.

The incident has also reignited discussions about the importance of prioritizing the health and well-being of both actors and crew members in Nollywood. Advocates are calling for stricter industry regulations to ensure safer filming environments and mandatory health insurance coverage for all cast and crew members.



## Speed Darlington to supporters: 'Get lost' if you're tired of backing me

Controversial Nigerian singer Speed Darlington has sparked fresh debate after lashing out at supporters who advised him to back down from his ongoing feud with fellow musician Burna Boy. In a viral video posted on his Instagram page, Darlington defiantly told his followers to "get lost" if they were tired of supporting him.

His outburst came just hours after he announced his split from his lawyer, Stanley Alieke. Alieke's law firm, Law Capitol, had been representing Darlington since his arrest and detention by the Nigerian police for allegedly cyberstalking Burna Boy. The lawyer confirmed their separation in a post on his Instagram story.

Darlington, who was released from detention last week, has remained vocal about his feud with Burna Boy. Shortly after his release, he dropped a diss track titled Baby Oil, taking direct

shots at the Grammy-winning artist. Since then, he has continuously referenced the track in his online content.

In his latest video, Darlington accused Burna Boy of hypocrisy, stating, "Always singing about police brutality in Nigeria, yet he proceeds to hire police to hold me longer." He also made it clear that he would not be swayed by public opinion, saying, "Let nobody tell me what to post. If you're tired of supporting me, you get lost."

His feud with Burna Boy dates back to October 2024, when he released a series of social media posts mocking the singer's relationship with American rapper Diddy. Following the online jabs, Darlington was arrested twice, in October and November, spending two months in Kuje prison.

Since regaining his freedom, Darlington has been strategic about promoting Baby Oil, subtly incorporating the track

into all of his content. Addressing his fans, he boasted, "I went to gather energy and launch back with a banger!"

His latest remarks have triggered mixed reactions among fans and industry observers. While some admire his resilience and refusal to back down, others have advised him to adopt a more diplomatic approach to avoid further legal troubles.



# Feature

## Understanding Galactorrhea: Causes, symptoms, and treatment

UGO UGBOH

**G**alactorrhea is a medical condition characterized by the unexpected production of breast milk or a milk-like discharge from the nipples in individuals who are not breastfeeding. While it is commonly associated with women, galactorrhea can also occur in men and, in rare cases, children. It is not a disease in itself but rather a symptom of an underlying medical issue. Identifying the root cause is essential for proper treatment and management.

### CAUSES OF GALACTORRHEA

Galactorrhea typically results from disruptions in the body's regulation of prolactin, a hormone produced by the pituitary gland that controls milk production. Several factors can lead to increased prolactin levels or heightened sensitivity to its effects, causing the condition.

#### 1. HORMONAL IMBALANCES

**Hyperprolactinemia:** Excessive prolactin production, often due to pituitary gland dysfunction, is a leading cause of galactorrhea.

**Thyroid Dysfunction:** Hypothyroidism can elevate prolactin levels by disrupting hormonal feedback mechanisms.

#### 2. MEDICATIONS

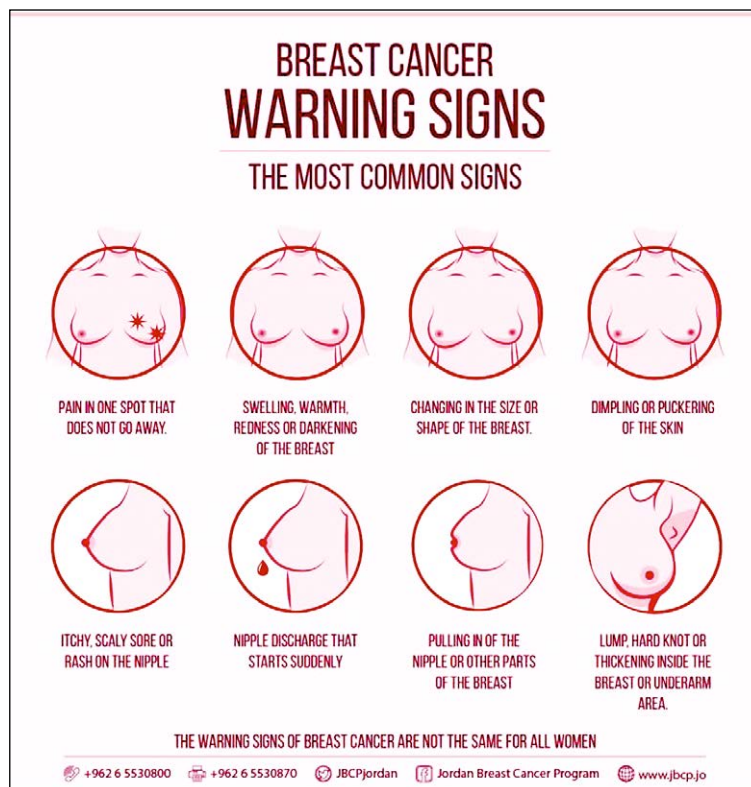
Certain drugs can interfere with hormonal balance, leading to increased prolactin levels. Common culprits include:

**Antipsychotics:** Medications like risperidone and haloperidol disrupt dopamine regulation, affecting prolactin production.

**Antidepressants:** Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) and tricyclic antidepressants can raise prolactin levels in some individuals.

**Blood Pressure Medications:** Drugs such as methyldopa may influence hormonal activity in the pituitary gland.

**Oral Contraceptives and Hormone Replacement Therapy:** These treatments, which alter estrogen and



progesterone levels, may trigger galactorrhea.

#### 3. PITUITARY DISORDERS

**Prolactinomas:** These noncancerous pituitary tumors are a common cause of excessive prolactin production. Depending on their size, they can also cause headaches and vision problems.

**Other Pituitary Dysfunctions:** Conditions such as hypopituitarism can also contribute to galactorrhea.

#### 4. NERVE OR CHEST STIMULATION

Frequent or excessive nipple stimulation from friction (e.g., tight clothing), breastfeeding, or sexual activity can lead to galactorrhea.

Chest trauma, surgery, or nerve damage may also disrupt hormonal regulation.

#### 5. OTHER CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

**Chronic Kidney Disease:** Impaired kidney function can hinder the body's

ability to clear excess prolactin.

**Stress:** Both emotional and physical stress can affect hormone levels and trigger galactorrhea.

**Excessive Physical Activity:** Intense exercise can alter hormonal balance, potentially contributing to the condition.

**Idiopathic Galactorrhea:** In some cases, no clear cause can be identified despite thorough evaluation.

#### SYMPTOMS OF GALACTORRHEA

The primary symptom of galactorrhea is spontaneous or persistent nipple discharge, which may be milky, clear, or yellowish. Additional symptoms vary depending on the underlying cause and may include:

#### IN WOMEN:

Irregular or absent menstrual periods

Infertility or difficulty conceiving

#### IN MEN:

Decreased libido

#### ERECTILE DYSFUNCTION

Enlarged breast tissue (gynecomastia) in some cases

#### GENERAL SYMPTOMS:

Headaches or vision problems, often indicative of a pituitary tumor  
Breast tenderness or discomfort

#### DIAGNOSIS OF GALACTORRHEA

Diagnosing galactorrhea involves determining its underlying cause through a combination of medical history, physical examination, and diagnostic tests.

#### 1. MEDICAL HISTORY AND PHYSICAL EXAMINATION

A healthcare provider will assess symptoms, medication use, and lifestyle factors.

A breast exam may be performed to check for abnormalities such as lumps, tenderness, or nipple discharge.

#### 2. LABORATORY TESTS

**Prolactin Level Testing:** Elevated prolactin levels are a key indicator of galactorrhea.

**Thyroid Function Tests:** Used to detect thyroid dysfunction, particularly hypothyroidism.

**Pregnancy Tests:** Conducted in women of childbearing age to rule out pregnancy-related milk production.

#### 3. IMAGING STUDIES

**MRI or CT Scans:** These tests help identify pituitary tumors or structural abnormalities in the brain.

#### TREATMENT OPTIONS FOR GALACTORRHEA

Treatment focuses on addressing the underlying cause and alleviating symptoms.

#### 1. TREATING THE ROOT CAUSE

**Thyroid Dysfunction:** Hormone replacement therapy with levothyroxine can help regulate prolactin levels in cases of hypothyroidism.

**Prolactinomas:** Small tumors may be treated with dopamine agonists like bromocriptine or cabergoline, which lower prolactin levels. Larger tumors may require surgery or radiation therapy.

#### 2. ADJUSTING MEDICATIONS

If a particular drug is responsible for galactorrhea, a doctor may recommend discontinuing it, adjusting the dosage, or switching to an alternative medication.

#### 3. SUPPORTIVE MEASURES

Wearing a supportive bra can help reduce breast discomfort.

Avoiding unnecessary nipple stimulation and tight clothing that causes irritation.

#### COMPLICATIONS OF GALACTORRHEA

Although galactorrhea itself is not harmful, it can be a sign of serious medical conditions that require treatment. Potential complications include:

**Pituitary Tumors:** Large tumors can cause persistent headaches, vision problems, or hormonal imbalances.

**Chronic Hormonal Dysregulation:** Prolonged imbalances may affect fertility, libido, and overall well-being.

#### WHEN TO SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION

Consult a healthcare provider if you experience:

Nipple discharge that is bloody, foul-smelling, or persistent

Breast pain, swelling, or lumps

Vision changes, headaches, or other neurological symptoms

#### CONCLUSION

Although galactorrhea can be unsettling, it is often manageable once the underlying cause is identified. Understanding its causes, symptoms, and treatment options can help individuals seek timely medical care and prevent complications.

Depending on the cause, consulting specialists such as endocrinologists, gynecologists, or neurologists may be necessary. Early diagnosis and treatment can significantly improve quality of life.

## Urgent electoral reforms priorities for Nigeria ahead of the 2027 general elections

PAUL JAMES

**A**s Nigeria prepares for the 2027 elections, several key reforms have been recommended to improve the electoral process and address issues that have historically affected the country's democracy. It is crucial to focus on the efforts of various stakeholders and the National Assembly to facilitate further amendments to the Electoral Act 2022. These amendments should incorporate lessons learned from previous elections, particularly regarding the use of technology in the electoral process, that are expected to enhance the electoral system's efficiency and transparency.

One significant area of focus is enhancing provisions related to the electronic transmission of results,

which could bolster public confidence by providing real-time and accurate outcomes. Enhancing provisions for the electronic transmission of results presents several considerable benefits to Nigeria's electoral process. It would improve transparency by offering real-time updates and minimise the risk of manual errors or results manipulation during collation, as observed in recent elections like the Edo off-cycle governorship election. Integrating electronic transmission will expedite the announcement of results and reduce delays that often exacerbate tensions. Furthermore, electronic transmission would reinforce public confidence by ensuring accuracy and deterring fraud. It can be argued that the electronic transmission of results also aids evidence-based dispute res-

olution by creating verifiable digital records necessary for the transparent and efficient resolution of electoral disputes. As we advocate for these progressive reforms, it is equally crucial that these modifications to the electoral legal framework are completed swiftly to allow for testing these provisions in upcoming off-cycle elections before the general elections in 2027.

As the commission continues to deepen the use of technology in our elections, it is essential to prioritize the improvement of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and other technological innovations for voter accreditation and results management. This includes supporting the commission's recommendation to move away from using Permanent Voter Cards

(PVCs) for voter identification. Introducing biometric systems, such as the BVAS, enables voter verification without the need for physical cards. Since the BVAS stores records of voters' biometrics, implementing biometric identification could streamline the accreditation and voting processes while also reducing costs associated with printing physical cards. Eliminating the need for PVCs could significantly decrease the financial burden of producing and distributing these cards, which is particularly relevant in Nigeria given the country's economic challenges. Additionally, relying on biometric verification could minimize the risk of voter impersonation and manipulation, ensuring that only eligible voters can cast their ballots. This initiative will enhance transparency and address past concerns regarding

the reliability of voter identification.

Many proposals have been made to promote the independence of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and shield it from political interference. It is crucial to reassess the processes for appointing the INEC chairman and commissioners. Previous suggestions have highlighted the need for constitutional amendments to transfer these responsibilities from the president to an independent body. The Justice Uwais committee report recommended that the responsibility be handed over to the National Judicial Council (NJC), while others have proposed transferring it to the Council of State.

CONTINUES ON PG 8»

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FP 4X2	73,000	78,475	80,700	86,753	4 X 2	45,260	48,655	34,400	36,980
FP 3X2	64,870	69,735	73,000	78,475	3 X 2	30,900	33,218	26,600	28,595
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**EFFECTIVE FROM FEBRUARY 1, 2023**

# Friday Sermon

## Sanctity of the Soul

MALLAM HARUN UMAR

All Praises are due to Allah alone, the owner and creator of the universe. May the peace and blessings be upon our Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), his household, his companions, and those who followed his footsteps till the end of time.

Brothers and sisters in Islam, today's topic is the sanctity of the soul. This discourse becomes profoundly important in our contemporary era, where the sanctity of human life appears to be diminishing at an alarming rate.

We turn on our televisions or radios, and the news is tragically dominated by reports of violence and killings. This desensitization towards the value of human life is a disturbing reflection of our society. How did we arrive at this point where the taking of a human life is no longer viewed with the utmost gravity?

### LET US LOOK INTO SOME OF THE RECENT TRAGEDIES THAT HAVE SHAKEN OUR CONSCIENCE:

A young man, burdened by a debt of fifty thousand naira, tragically took his own life, unable to bear the weight of his financial distress.

A young man, driven by heartbreak and a sense of betrayal, tragically murdered the girl he had loved and expected to marry, after she violated their agreement when she graduated from the University.

In a heart-wrenching incident in Lagos, a man tragically ended his life by plunging into the lagoon.

These are just a few of the countless instances of the tragic loss of human

life that plague our society. How did we reach this point where the sanctity of the soul is so blatantly disregarded?

### THE ROOTS OF THIS TRAGEDY

Several factors contribute to this alarming rise in violence and the disregard for human life:

**THE SCOURGE OF DRUGS:** The rampant abuse of drugs, particularly hard drugs, has a devastating impact on the human psyche. Under the influence of these substances, individuals lose their moral compass, their empathy, and their ability to distinguish right from wrong. They become desensitized to the value of human life and are more likely to engage in acts of violence, including murder.

**THE GRIP OF MENTAL ILLNESS:** Mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety, and psychosis, can significantly impair an individual's judgment and emotional well-being. When left untreated, these conditions can lead to self-harm and even violence towards others.

**THE CORROSIVE EFFECTS OF FRUSTRATION:** Economic hardship, social injustice, and feelings of hopelessness and despair can breed frustration and resentment, leading individuals down a path of violence and self-destruction.

**THE EROSION OF MORAL VALUES:** A decline in moral values, a weakening of religious and ethical frameworks, and a disregard for the sanctity of life contribute to a society where violence and aggression are more readily accepted.

### THE PROPHET'S (PEACE BE UPON HIM) WARNING

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be

upon him) warned us about the rise of violence and the disregard for human life in the latter days. He (peace be upon him) stated: "The time will come when the killing of humans will become rampant in society. Husbands will kill their wives, and wives will kill their husbands. Fathers will kill their children, and children will kill their fathers. Brothers will kill each other, and sisters will kill each other. It will become so prevalent that individuals will be killed without knowing the reason for their demise, and even the killer will be unaware of their own motives."

This profound warning underscores the gravity of the situation we face today. The rampant violence we witness around us is a stark reminder

*Disobedience to Allah's commands, the neglect of prayer, and the indulgence in sinful acts can lead to a hardening of the heart and a disregard for the sanctity of life... Social injustice, economic inequality, and the oppression of the weak can breed resentment, anger, and ultimately, violence*

of the Prophet's (peace be upon him) prophetic words.

### THE DIVINE MESSAGE: PROTECT LIFE

Allah Almighty, in His infinite wisdom, has emphasized the sanctity of human life throughout the Quran. He states: "Save yourselves and your families from the Fire of Hell." This divine commandment highlights our individual responsibility to safeguard our own souls and the souls of those entrusted to our care.

The tragic story of Cain and Abel (Qabil and Habil) in Surah Al-Maidah serves as a poignant reminder of the consequences of disregarding human life. The seeds of jealousy and envy led Cain to murder his own brother, a heinous act that has had profound repercussions throughout human history.

The Quran states: "Whoever kills a soul, it is as if he has killed all mankind, and whoever saves a life, it is as if he has saved all mankind." This powerful verse underscores the immense value of human life in the eyes of Allah. How can we, as human beings, dare to extinguish a life that Allah has created without any justification?

### THE PROPHET'S (PEACE BE UPON HIM) GUIDANCE

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) emphasized the sanctity of human life through numerous teachings and practices. He (peace be upon him) stated: "No soul is killed on this earth except that part of the sins will be written against the first person who committed killing (Cain)." This profound statement highlights the interconnectedness of humanity and the collective responsibility we bear for the preservation of life.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) also stated: "Among the first aspects of judgment on the Day of Resurrection will be the reckoning for the killing of souls on earth." This stern warning serves as a powerful deterrent against the taking of human life, reminding us that we will be held accountable for our actions in the hereafter.

### THE ROOTS OF VIOLENCE

The tragic story of Cain and Abel (Qabil and Habil) provides valuable insights into the root causes of violence:

**DEVIATION FROM ALLAH'S BOUNDS:** Disobedience to Allah's commands, the neglect of prayer, and the indulgence in sinful acts can lead to a hardening of the heart and a disregard for the sanctity of life.

**INJUSTICE AND OPPRESSION:** Social injustice, economic inequality, and the oppression of the weak can breed resentment, anger, and ultimately, violence.

**IMPATIENCE AND LACK OF SELF-CONTROL:** Impulsiveness, anger, and the inability to control one's emotions can lead to devastating consequences, including violence and murder.

**THE INFLUENCE OF SATAN:** Satanic whispers and the pursuit of worldly desires.

May Allah grant us the understanding and direct us towards righteous deeds.

*Mallam Harun Umar writes from the Edo State Muslim Pilgrims Welfare Board's Central Mosque Benin city.*

## Urgent electoral reforms priorities for Nigeria ahead of the 2027 general elections

«CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

I recommend establishing an independent, autonomous committee that includes representatives from the judiciary, civil society, academia, and electoral experts to oversee the selection of INEC officials. This committee would ensure that the selection process is free from political influence and interference, thereby enhancing the credibility and impartiality of INEC. The committee would evaluate and select candidates based on their qualifications and experience, subjecting the nominees to public scrutiny to ensure that the most competent individuals are chosen to lead the electoral commission.

In countries like South Africa, the process for selecting members of the electoral commission involves a parliamentary committee that ensures broad representation and public participation. This approach enhances the credibility of the selection process. In Ghana, an independent body supervises the selection process to maintain the commission's independence from political interference. To reflect these global practices, a proposed committee could include representatives from the judiciary, civil society, academia, and electoral experts. This inclusion would

ensure that the selection of commission members is based on merit and free from undue influence. Such an approach would not only boost public confidence in the electoral system but also ensure that INEC officials are chosen for their expertise and commitment to democratic principles. Implementing this model would enhance Nigeria's electoral credibility and align its processes with international standards for democratic governance.

Election stakeholders should also continue implementing expansive voter education initiatives throughout the electoral cycle. These initiatives should target underserved communities, mainly the youth, women, and persons with disabilities (PWDs). They should also build partnerships with civil society organisations to promote understanding and participation in the electoral process. These initiatives could include workshops, seminars, and community outreach programs that provide information on the electoral process, voter rights, and the importance of political participation.

Political parties must adapt their campaign methods to promote transparency, accountability, and inclusiveness in order to ensure broader outreach and engagement. They should

move away from traditional practices that rely solely on voter inducements, rhetoric, and other coercive tactics, which have often been associated with violence and personal attacks. In Nigeria, political parties have yet to adopt open and transparent fundraising practices. By publicly disclosing their funding sources and expenditures, they can demonstrate accountability and reduce perceptions of corruption.

I fully support various initiatives to increase women's political participation and representation in governance, such as implementing quota systems. Political parties and the government must intentionally develop strategies encouraging women to emerge as political leaders. This involves creating an enabling environment that fosters participation and promotes women as key candidates in the 2027 general elections. As we prepare for the upcoming election campaigns, political parties must enhance policies that specifically target increasing political participation among youth and persons with disabilities (PWDs). These policies should include lowering nomination fees for candidates from these groups and expanding outreach initiatives to facilitate their involvement.

One significant issue that has neg-

atively impacted previous elections is the concern surrounding election security, electoral violence, and voter safety. Establishing a strong security framework that ensures the safety of voters and election personnel is crucial. To achieve this, security agencies should enhance their collaboration with community-based organisations, individuals, and other civil society groups focused on intelligence gathering and monitoring early warning systems for violence. This collaborative effort will help improve surveillance and vigilance during elections.

Vote buying has emerged as a significant concern in Nigeria's electoral system, undermining the integrity of democratic processes. This malpractice manifests in politicians, candidates, and political parties offering monetary incentives or goods to sway citizens' voting decisions, often exploiting economic hardships and the vulnerability of the electorate. In the recent Edo and Ondo elections, reports highlighted various instances of how deeply entrenched this practice has become, with voters allegedly being offered sums of money ranging from #5,000 to #10,000. This blatant disregard for rules designed to guarantee electoral integrity not

only compromises the quality of democracy but also reflects a broader societal issue where political corruption and the desperation to 'win at all costs' take precedence over civic duty and fair political contest. As we pivot towards the 2027 elections, it is essential to prioritise establishing a more stringent monitoring system to oversee political campaigns and ensure compliance with electoral laws to prevent vote buying and other corruption commonly associated with elections in Nigeria.

In conclusion, the 2027 Nigerian elections present a crucial opportunity to solidify the nation's democratic institutions and processes. By prioritising and implementing these comprehensive reforms, Nigeria can ensure an electoral process that is transparent, credible, and truly reflective of the people's will. This will enhance the legitimacy of elected officials and bolster public trust in the democratic system, fostering a more stable and prosperous future for the nation.

*Paul James is an election and political affairs enthusiast and heads the Elections Program at Yiaga Africa.*

# Fashion & Style

## Choosing wardrobe pieces to match your style

OSAMUDIAME AGBONGIASEDE  
AND PEACE AKPOBOME

Style is a fashion cornerstone that is indisputably relevant and it is entirely relative to each individual's preference, psychology and wants.

Just as there are different kinds of people, there are, veritably, various kinds of styles adapted and worn by people, regardless of whether they may be incredibly fashion minded or just average individuals who have no interest in fashion. People mostly end up choosing clothing and other fashion pieces and items that they feel they can identify more with or they particularly like or find appealing, as opposed to others.

Even in picking and purchasing items that may have nothing to do with fashion, e.g. cars, houses, colours and even food, people tend to go for whatever they find most appealing and attractive to them. This process of choosing based on appeal and attraction is what kickstarts the formation of one's personality and, also, style.

There are a number of styles acknowledged and classified in the fashion world. These styles include:

### THE MINIMALIST

In the more recent years, the minimalist style has gained a lot of recognition, particularly among youths due to the purely easy and, yet, elegant way in which one can pull this style off from one's daily life to more formal events. As the name implies, minimalism encompasses all that is simple, plain, elegant and uncomplicated. Clothing pieces are usually in colours that are not loud or showy; colours such as cream, white, off-white, brown, black, grey and powder blue.

Minimalists usually go for clothing pieces that are flowy or structured but not tight. Items such as coats, plain sweaters, turtle necks, plain boots, simple coloured sneakers, loafers, slacks, scarfs and the like are fashion items that typically make up a minimalist wardrobe. There is no particu-

lar need for excess enhancements, styling or accessories, as minimalism encompasses being simple and uncluttered. However, accessories such as watches, necklaces and earrings are still okay for a minimalist style.

Additionally, athleisure clothing can also make up the wardrobe of one who is a minimalist due to their relaxing and less formal nature. This includes pieces like simple tracksuits, sneakers and polo shirts.

### THE TRADITIONAL

This style is specifically for people who prefer to remain close to their roots and culture. The traditional style is relative to whatever culture the wearer chooses to represent. It could be the Indian culture, in which case the wearer would have fashion pieces like a sarees, legends, dhoti and palazzo trousers in their wardrobe, alongside a lot of gold and jeweled accessories like nose rings, rings, bangles and bracelets. For the West African culture, a traditional individual would typically have items such as dashiki, kaftans, gele, buba and a lot of clothing made of African wax prints in their wardrobe.

### THE BOHO OR EARTHY STYLE

Fully known as "Bohemian", the Boho style is similar to the traditional style particularly when it comes to embracing one's roots and being ethnic and earthy in nature. Clothing options that are boho styled typically come in sage green, dark green, dark brown, reddish brown, rose gold and other earthy colours.

Clothing items and accessories for the boho style include scarfs, flowy trousers, sandals, boots, gold jewellery, flowy skirts, loose maxi dresses, belts, ruffled dresses, striped and crochet clothing, wide leg trousers, ruffled shirts, skirts and dresses, lace clothing and the like.

### THE CASUAL STYLE

People who typically have a casual fashion style tend to tone down on their dressing and typically wear sim-

ple and informal clothing. Colour of clothing items here may vary, depending on the individual's personal likes. Items included in the casual style are yoga pants, jeans and other denim clothes, t-shirts, sleeveless shirts like camisoles, sneakers, sweaters, crocs, scarfs, hoodies and sandals.

### THE FORMAL STYLE

Individuals whose styling preference include more formal fashion pieces are, more often than not, professionals in white collar jobs. While clothing colour under the formal style may vary, clothing items for a formal wardrobe included shirts, button down dress shirts, loafers, heels like wedge heels and pumps, knee length pencil skirts, straight gowns, slacks, structured blazers, turtleneck sweaters, watches, polo shirts and similar formal clothing and accessories.

### THE VINTAGE STYLE

As the name implies, the vintage fashion style is characterised by fashion pieces which are reminiscent of older time periods such as the 1900s or the early 2000s. They can, as well, comprise of items that have been formerly owned by someone else during the time period when such item was still very much fashionable and popular.

Vintage styling includes pieces like boots, penny loafers, hats, waistcoats, ruffled dresses, vintage suits, palazzo trousers and a lot of other different clothing worn in different time periods.

### THE EMO AND GOTH STYLES

Although somewhat similar in nature due to the sole fact that both styles comprise entirely of black clothing and footwear pieces, the emo and goth styles are still vastly different in a lot of ways, one of which lies in the fact that while emo clothing are more showy and flashy in nature, goth styles are usually vintage, posh, formal and refined in nature.

### THE BOLD STYLE

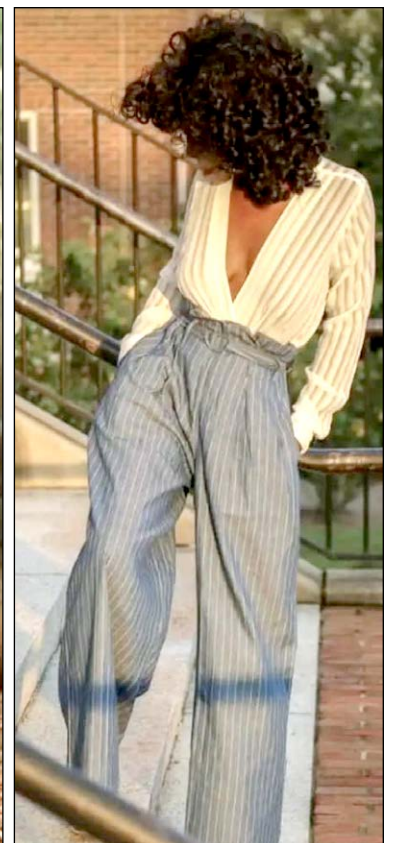
This fashion style typically comprises fashion items that are loud,

showy and flashy in nature. Clothing, footwear and accessories colours for this style include pepper red, yellow, bright orange, white, deep blue, vibrant green and so on.

Clothing pieces that represent the bold style are usually incredibly vi-

brant and noticeable.

Asides from the above mentioned styles, other fashion styles adopted by people include the alt style, the athleisure style, the chic style, the androgynous style, the punk style, the streetwear style and the retro style.



# What we know so far about Washington DC plane crash

A passenger plane carrying 64 passengers and crew has crashed into the Potomac River in the Washington DC area, after colliding mid-air with a US Army helicopter.

At least 19 bodies have been pulled from the river so far, a law enforcement source has said. Figure skaters from the US and Russia are reportedly among those who were on board the aeroplane when the crash happened.

Search and rescue teams have been working through the night to scour the waters in freezing temperatures.

The nearby Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport is temporarily closed as authorities investigate what happened.

## What happened?

At around 21:00 local time (02:00 GMT) on Wednesday, a PSA Airlines jet operating as American Airlines 5342 collided with a US Army helicopter as it approached Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport, according to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

The passenger plane broke into multiple pieces and sunk several feet into the river, while the helicopter ended up upside

down on the water, reports said.

The plane, a Bombardier CRJ700, departed from Wichita, Kansas and was carrying 60 passengers and four crew, American Airlines said.

The Pentagon said the helicopter involved was a Sikorsky H-60 that took off from Fort Belvoir in Virginia.

Three US soldiers were on board, Washington DC Mayor Muriel Bowser said. Another official said it was on a training flight, and it belonged to B Company, 12th Aviation Battalion from Fort Belvoir in Virginia.

A clip published online, and

reviewed by CNN, purports to capture the air traffic control conversation in the moments before the crash. A controller can reportedly be heard warning the helicopter about the plane, but receiving no reply. The audio has not been verified by the BBC.

The FAA said it would investigate the incident, together with the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB).

## Were there casualties?

A law enforcement source familiar with the investigation told CBS that at least 19 bodies have been recovered from the river -

though officials have declined to confirm such reports, saying they are focused on their rescue effort.

US Figure Skating said "several members of our skating community were sadly aboard" the flight. It said this group comprised athletes, coaches and family members who were returning home from a development camp in Kansas.

Russian citizens were also on board, the Kremlin confirmed - after local media reported that ice skating coaches and former world champions Yevgenia Shishkova and Vadim Naumov were on the plane.

About 300 responders on rubber boats have been deployed to search for survivors, said Washington DC Fire and Emergency Services Chief John Donnelly. "The challenge is access, there is wind, pieces of ice (on the water). It is dangerous and hard to work in," he said.

## What are eyewitnesses saying?

Ari Schulman told NBC Washington that he saw the plane crash while driving on the George Washington Parkway, which runs along the airport.

He said the plane's approach looked normal, until he saw the aircraft bank hard to the right, with "streams of sparks" running underneath, illuminating its belly.

At that point, he said he knew that it looked "very, very wrong". Having seen plane landings there in the past, he said a plane's underside should not have been visible in the dark.

The sparks, he said, resembled a "giant roman candle" and went from the plane's nose to its tail.

Jimmy Mazeo said he saw the crash while having dinner with his girlfriend at a park near the airport.

He recalled seeing what looked like a "white flare" in the sky. He said planes flying into Ronald Reagan Airport appeared to have been flying in "irregular patterns".



A person looks on as emergency service vehicles operate near the site of the crash on Wednesday, January 29.

## Trump says US will send some migrants to Guantanamo Bay

US President Donald Trump has ordered the construction of a migrant detention facility in Guantanamo Bay which he said would hold as many as 30,000 people.

He said the facility at the US Navy base in Cuba, which would be separate from its high-security military prison, would house "the worst criminal illegal aliens threatening the American people".

Guantanamo Bay has long been used to house immigrants, a practice that has been criticised by some human rights groups.

Later on Wednesday, Trump's "border tsar" Tom Homan said the existing facility there would be expanded and run by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

He said the migrants could be transported there directly after being intercepted at sea by the US Coast Guard, and that the "highest" detention standards would be applied.

It is unclear how much the facility will cost or when it would be completed.

Cuba's government swiftly condemned the plan, accusing the US of torture and illegal detention on "occupied" land.

Trump's announcement came as he signed the so-called Laken Riley Act into law, which requires undocumented immigrants who are arrested for theft or violent crimes to be held in jail pending trial.

The bill, named after a Georgia nursing student who was murdered last year by a Venezuelan migrant, was approved by Congress last week, an early legislative win for the administration.

At a signing ceremony in the East Room of the White House, Trump said the new Guantanamo executive order would instruct the departments of defence and homeland security to "begin preparing" the 30,000-bed facility.

"Some of them are so bad we don't even trust the countries to hold them, because we don't

want them coming back," he said of migrants. "So we're going to send them to Guantanamo... it's a tough place to get out."

According to Trump, the facility will double the US capacity to hold undocumented migrants.

The US has already been using a facility in Guantanamo - known as the Guantanamo Migrant Operations Center (GMOC) - for decades and through various administrations, both Republican and Democrat.

In a 2024 report, the International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP) accused the government of secretly holding migrants there in "inhumane" conditions indefinitely after detaining them at sea.

The GMOC has principally housed migrants picked up at

sea and was recently the subject of a Freedom of Information request by the American Civil Liberties Union for the disclosure of records about the site.

The Biden Administration responded that it "is not a detention facility and none of the migrants there are detained".

The Trump administration, however, says the planned expanded facility is very much intended as a detention centre.

It will reportedly ask Congress to fund the expansion of the existing detention facility as part of a spending bill Republicans are working to assemble.

When asked by reporters at the White House, Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said only that the money would be allotted through "reconciliation and appropriations".

## Zuma's daughter arrested over South Africa riots

The daughter of former South African President Jacob Zuma, Duduzile Zuma-Sambudla, has been arrested over her alleged involvement in the 2021 riots that left over 300 people dead, police say. Violence, chaos, and fear ripped through the port city of Durban, then spread to Gauteng, after Zuma's jailing sparked intense protests over four years ago.

Zuma-Sambudla, a controversial figure in her own right, was accused of sharing incendiary social media posts that fuelled the civil unrest.

The arrest comes as a "result of a meticulous investigation" said spokesperson for the Hawks elite police unit, Brig Thandi Mbambo.

Zuma-Sambudla handed herself in to Durban Central police station on Thursday morning to face charges under the Protection of Constitutional Democracy against Terrorist and Related Activities Act and incitement to commit violence, police said.

Her father's party uMkhonto WeSizwe (MK), of which she is a senior member, confirmed her court appearance and urged supporters to "mobilize all ground forces to attend in numbers."

While she has not commented directly on the charges, Zuma-Sambudla shared a cryptic note on X that simply said: "We see you".

MK party spokesperson Nhl-

amule Ndhela told local broadcaster ENCA she had long been preparing for this moment

"She conditioned herself, because there have been many threats about her imminent arrest for the past three or four years," he said.

He added that she will abide by the law as "a law-abiding citizen".

This is not the first time her name has been brought up in connection to the 2021 riots, which are considered one of the bloodiest episodes in post-apartheid South Africa.

Zuma resigned as president in 2018 after nine years in office, plagued by corruption allegations, which he claimed were part of a political conspiracy.

Three years later, he was sentenced to 15 months in prison for contempt of court after refusing to testify before a panel investigating corruption under his presidency.

Protests erupted after he surrendered to serve his sentence.

During the unrest, Zuma-Sambudla was outspoken on X, frequently sharing images of the destruction and chaos, accompanied by the caption: "KZN, we see you."

She used this phrase often throughout the violence. In a now deleted post, she shared a video of someone firing an automatic rifle at a poster of President Cyril Ramaphosa.

## Man who burned Quran 'shot dead in Sweden'

A man who sparked violent protests after burning the Quran has been shot dead in Sweden, according to local media reports.

Salwan Momika, 38, is reported to have been killed in an apartment in Södertälje, Stockholm, on Wednesday evening.

Unrest broke out after Mr

Momika set fire to a copy of Islam's holy book outside Stockholm Central Mosque in 2023.

Stockholm police said in a statement that five people had been arrested after a man in his 40s was shot dead overnight.

Local media reported that Mr Momika had been livestreaming on social media

around the time he was shot.

Mr Momika, an Iraqi living in Sweden, was charged in August alongside one other with "agitation against an ethnic group" on four occasions in the summer of 2023.

The verdict, due to be delivered on Thursday, was postponed after it was "confirmed that one of

the defendants had died", Stockholm District Court said.

Mr Momika carried out a series of anti-Islam protests, sparking outrage in many Muslim-majority countries.

Unrest took place at the Swedish embassy in Baghdad twice, while the Swedish ambassador was expelled from the

city amid a diplomatic row.

Swedish police had given Mr Momika permission for the protest in which he burnt the holy book, in accordance with the country's free-speech laws.

The government later pledged to explore legal means of abolishing protests that involve burning texts in certain circumstances.

## News

## Foreign

# DR Congo president vows 'vigorous' fight to halt M23 rebel advance

Congolese President Félix Tshisekedi has vowed to restore government authority in the east, where Rwanda-backed M23 rebels have seized control of the city of Goma and are reportedly advancing south to take more territory.

In a televised address to the nation, he said a "vigorous and coordinated response" against what he called "terrorists" was under way.

He criticised the international community for "inaction" and for not doing enough in the

wake of the escalating security crisis.

The weeks-long offensive by the rebels has prompted warnings of a looming humanitarian crisis and growing international pressure to end the fighting.

During Wednesday night's address, Tshisekedi rallied all Congolese to join together and support the army's fight to re-take control.

"Be sure of one thing: the Democratic Republic of Congo will not let itself be humiliated or crushed. We will fight and we will triumph," he said.

The fighting has forced about 500,000 people from their homes, worsening an already dire humanitarian crisis, according to the UN.

Since the fighting began, the city has been cut off from electricity and water and food is in scarce supply.

An East African regional bloc virtual summit on Wednesday evening convened by Kenya's President William Ruto, which Tshisekedi snubbed, called for a "peaceful settlement of the conflicts".

It was attended by Rwanda's Paul Kagame, alongside the leaders of other member countries Burundi, South Sudan, Tanzania and Somalia.

The heads of state "strongly urged the government of the DR

Congo to directly engage with all stakeholders, including the M23 and other armed groups that have grievances".

Tshisekedi has been refusing to talk directly to the M23 - insisting on only talking to Rwanda.

The East African leaders also called for a joint summit of the bloc and leaders of the southern African regional community (Sadc) to "deliberate on the way forward". DR Congo is a member of both the East African Community and Sadc.

Tshisekedi paid tribute to the Sadc soldiers "fighting alongside us" and UN forces who had died in the wake of the rebel assault on Goma.

Thirteen South African peacekeepers have been killed in the deadly conflict in Goma,

leading to heightened tensions between South Africa and Rwanda.

On Wednesday night, Kagame said Rwanda was ready for a confrontation with South Africa if necessary, following a claim by South African President Cyril Ramaphosa that M23 fighters and Rwandan forces were responsible for the deaths.

In a strongly worded statement directly responding to Ramaphosa on X, Kagame accused him of distorting their private conversations about the volatile situation.

"If South Africa wants to contribute to peaceful solutions, that is well and good, but South Africa is in no position to take on the role of a peacemaker or mediator. And if South Africa prefers

confrontation, Rwanda will deal with the matter in that context any day," he said.

The exchange marks a significant escalation in tensions between the two nations, whose relationship has been fragile for several years.

M23 advance continues  
Meanwhile, Angola called for the Congolese and Rwandan leaders to meet urgently in Luanda.

The country, which mediated a failed attempt at talks in December before the M23 launched its latest offensive, also called for the resumption of East African Community-led discussions relating to the unrest in eastern DR Congo.

It came as Tshisekedi visited Luanda for discussions on the next steps in the Angola-led talks.

## US teen shot dead by father in Pakistan over TikTok videos

A man who recently moved his family back to Pakistan from the US has confessed to killing his teenage daughter because he disapproved of her TikTok videos, police have told the BBC.

Anwar ul-Haq was charged with murder after he admitted to shooting his daughter Hira in the south-western city of Quetta on Tuesday. He initially told investigators that unidentified men were behind the shooting.

The father, who has US citizenship, said he found his daughter's posts "objectionable".

Police said they were looking at all angles, including the possibility of an honour killing, which is not uncommon in the country.

Hundreds of people - most of them women - die in so-called honour killings in Pakistan each year, according to human rights groups. These killings are usu-

ally carried out by relatives who say they are acting in defence of their family's honour.

In the case of Hira Anwar, who was between 13 and 14 years old, a police spokesman said her family "had an objection to her dressing, lifestyle and social gathering".

The family lived in the US for 25 years and Hira started posting content on TikTok even before her family moved back to Pakistan.

Investigators said they were in possession on her phone, which is locked.

Her father's brother-in-law was also arrested in connection with the killing, police said.

If it is found to be an honour killing and they are found guilty, the men will face a mandatory life sentence - a change made to the law by Pakistan's government in 2016. Previously, they could avoid a jail term if pardoned by the victim's family.

## Three military-run states leave West African bloc - what will change?

Three countries under military rule have officially left West African regional bloc Ecowas, after more than a year of diplomatic tensions.

The withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger is a huge blow to Ecowas, which at 50 years old is considered Africa's most important regional group.

The split was sparked after the three departing countries refused Ecowas demands to restore diplomatic rule.

On Wednesday Ecowas said it would keep its "doors open" to Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, even though they have forged ahead with their own bloc, the Alliance of Sahel States (AES by its French acronym).

What is Ecowas?  
Ecowas - which stands for the Economic Community of West African States - was founded in 1975 in a bid to improve economic and political integration in West Africa.

Prior to Wednesday's shake-up, the bloc had 15 members,

including states like Nigeria, Ghana, Ivory Coast and Senegal.

Citizens of all Ecowas countries currently have the right to live and work in all member states, while goods can circulate freely.

Why have Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso left?

Relations between Ecowas and the three Sahel countries have been tense since the military seized power in Niger in 2023, Burkina Faso in 2022 and Mali in 2020.

After the Niger coup, Ecowas imposed crippling sanctions on the country, such as border closures, a no-fly zone for all commercial flights and the freezing of central bank assets.

Ecowas also threatened to deploy its forces to Niger in order to restore democratic rule.

But this hard line merely strengthened the resolve of the three juntas.

Mali and Burkina Faso criticised Ecowas' "inhuman" sanctions and vowed to defend Niger if the bloc intervened militarily.



The M23 have been advancing to other areas after their offensive in Goma.

## Russia withdraws military equipment from Syrian port, images show

Russia has stepped up its military withdrawal from Syria, removing vehicles and containers from its key Tartous port on the country's Mediterranean coast, analysis by BBC Verify suggests.

After the fall of the Assad regime in December, verified footage showed columns of Russian vehicles moving north towards the port. Satellite images subsequently showed military hardware being stored there.

But new images published on Wednesday by Planet Labs showed that much of the material has now disappeared, after the departure of vessels linked to the Russian military.

It comes as Russian officials held "frank discussions" with the new government in Damascus, Reuters reported on Wednesday.

There have been reports that the new Syrian government has cancelled Russia's lease at the port - but government

departments contacted by the BBC would not confirm a final decision had been made.

Tartous has been a key base for Russia in recent years, allowing it to refuel, resupply and repair vessels in the Mediterranean. But warships previously docked at the port have not appeared in satellite images since the collapse of the Assad regime - which Moscow backed throughout the Syrian civil war.

The Kremlin has signalled its desire to retain control over the base, and said in December that it was speaking to the new authorities about maintaining a presence there.

However, evidence suggests that Moscow has now decided to move valuable equipment away from the port. Satellite images have also shown Russian hardware being removed from the nearby Hmeimim air-base for several weeks.

Two vessels - Sparta and

Sparta II - docked at Tartous on 21 and 22 January, ship tracking sites showed. Both vessels are owned by Oboronlogistika LLC - a shipping company which operates as part of the Russian ministry of defence.

Both ships are sanctioned by the US and have been linked by Ukraine to the transportation of Russian arms. They are roll-on/roll-off vessels that can carry vehicles.

Sparta II departed the port by Monday, according to data from the tracking website MarineTraffic. Satellite images also revealed that a large quantity of military vehicles previously parked near the vessel were no longer there.

The signal of the ship's onboard tracker was briefly picked up by MarineTraffic on Tuesday morning, showing it was travelling west through the Mediterranean near the coast of Cyprus. But since then, no signal has been received, sug-

gesting the tracker may have been turned off.

On Wednesday, satellite images showed another vessel - identified by experts as the Sparta - had also left the port. The images also show a large quantity of containers parked nearby had been removed.

A signal from Sparta's onboard tracker has not been detected since it docked at Tartous - suggesting it may have been turned off as well.

The International Maritime Organisation (IMO) requires all ships over 300 gross tonnes to broadcast their signal at all times, except in some limited circumstances.

Ships may choose to turn off their tracking signal for legitimate reasons - such as when navigating high-risk piracy zones. But according to Nato it could also suggest the vessel is trying to "conceal illegal activities".



# The police, the youth, and the phone: A cycle of conflict in Edo State - Part 1

The Nigerian Police's attraction to phones is metaphorically akin to ants' attraction to sugar. This phenomenon indubitably engenders a cycle of altercations between the youth and the members of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF).

This alarming trend of conflicts between Nigerian civilians and police officers has become a source of profound concern. The recent viral video depicting a 24-year-old girl in Benin City physically engaging a police officer is a vivid reflection of a growing societal malaise.

This incident, devastating in its brazenness and exasperating in its implications, underscores the crumbling relationship between the NPF and the citizens it is meant to serve and protect.

The officer's decision to question the young woman's possession of three phones is not only ludicrous but also deeply emblematic of a culture of arbitrary and invasive policing that has long plagued law enforcement in Nigeria.

Undoubtedly, the police officer's interrogation regarding her possession of phones was likely an attempt to determine if she was involved in fraudulent activities, commonly linked to internet scams ('yahoo-yahoo').

Such unwarranted actions highlight a troubling disregard for personal privacy and the fundamental principle of presumption of innocence.

Rather than focusing on substantive issues of public safety and crime prevention, some officers seem preoccupied with frivolous inquiries that serve no legitimate purpose other than to assert dominance over law-abiding citizens.

In a society striving for equity, justice, and mutual respect, such behaviour by law enforcement is counterproductive and deeply damaging. It erodes public trust in the very institution that is tasked with protecting citizens and ensuring their rights are upheld.

This kind of overreach not only alienates the populace but also reinforces the perception that the police are more of an oppressor than a protector. The relationship between law enforcement and the citizens they serve is already fragile, and actions like these widen the disparity, making genuine collaboration and trust almost impossible to achieve.

Ultimately, this incident reflects the need for a transformative approach to policing, one that emphasises respect for human dignity, adherence to legal norms, and accountability for officers who abuse their authority. Without reforms, the cycle of mistrust and resentment will continue to undermine the effectiveness of law enforcement

in Nigeria.

It is common knowledge that the leadership of the Nigeria Police Force has, time and again, admonished its officers to desist from the unlawful and invasive act of checking citizens' phones. This directive stems from a recognition that such practices violate the right to privacy and are often a prelude to extortion or other forms of misconduct.

However, these admonitions have largely fallen on deaf ears, as reports of officers engaging in this reprehensible behaviour persist unabated. This raises critical questions about the effectiveness of internal discipline and the sincerity of the leadership in addressing these perennial issues.

Be that as it may, the young lady's reaction to the officer's provocation raises its own set of ethical questions. No matter how unjust or unreasonable the officer's actions may have been, resorting to physical assault is neither lawful nor morally defensible. While she may have been provoked, self-restraint remains a hallmark of responsible citizenship. The escalation of violence in such situations does little to address the underlying issues and only serves to perpetuate a cycle of lawlessness.

Interestingly, a noteworthy aspect of the incident, as captured in the viral video, is the remarkable composure exhibited by the officer in question. Despite being assaulted, the officer refrained from retaliating a rare and commendable display of professionalism.

This act of restraint deserves recognition, as it starkly contrasts with the typical narrative of heavy-handedness and abuse of power often associated with the police force. His decision to absorb the provocation without responding in kind serves as a reminder of the ideals of law enforcement - maintaining order, even in the face of personal provocation.

The foundation of a functional police-citizen relationship is mutual respect. However, in Nigeria, this cornerstone has eroded due to a confluence of factors. The 'see finish syndrome' encapsulates this phenomenon. It is a scenario where familiarity and overexposure breed contempt. Members of the Nigeria Police Force, once revered for their role in maintaining law and order, have allowed their integrity to be compromised by mingling too closely with the populace in morally questionable ways.

The practice of soliciting and accepting bribes, a commonplace occurrence on Nigerian roads, has not only tarnished the image of the police but also diminished their moral authority. Young Nigerians, who routinely witness or are subjected to these

unethical practices, begin to perceive the police as figures of ridicule rather than respect. The resultant loss of deference has culminated in situations where citizens feel emboldened to challenge officers with arms, even in physically aggressive ways.

Social media platforms further amplify the tension between the police and the public. These platforms have become arenas where videos of police misconduct or civilian altercations with officers go viral within minutes. While these platforms provide an opportunity for citizens to expose abuse, they have also inadvertently fuelled a culture of defiance. Many youths now see confrontations with the police as an opportunity for online clout, knowing that a dramatic encounter can attract thousands of views and comments.

The video from Benin City is a case in point. While the young lady's actions are inexcusable, the quick dissemination of the footage has sparked polarised reactions. Some view her as a bold figure challenging police tyranny, while others see her behaviour as emblematic of a generation that no longer respects authority.

Several factors contribute to the public's lack of respect for many members of the Nigerian police. Personal quirks leave some officers appearing haggard or unkempt; others struggle with proficiency in the use of the English language, and there is a history of professional misconduct by certain individuals within the force.

It is also important to acknowledge that the NPF operates under challenging conditions; the officers are poorly remunerated; and they are frequently exposed to life-threatening situations. These systemic issues often lead to frustration and a diminished sense of duty. However, these do not absolve the police of widespread misconduct.

When officers resort to extortion,

brutality, and other unethical practices, they undermine their credibility and alienate the very citizens whose cooperation is essential for effective policing. The cycle is vicious. Public disdain leads to reduced cooperation, which, in turn, exacerbates the challenges of law enforcement.

The conflict between Nigerian citizens and police officers mirrors larger societal issues. Corruption, impunity, and a lack of accountability are pervasive across various sectors in Nigeria, and the police force is no exception. The distrust between the police and the public reflects the erosion of social cohesion and the weakening of institutional frameworks.

Furthermore, the high unemployment rate among Nigerian youths contributes to their growing discontent. A significant proportion of the population feels marginalised, disillusioned, and disconnected from the promises of governance. This frustration often finds expression in rebellious actions, including defiance of law enforcement.

To address these issues, a multi-dimensional approach is necessary. Comprehensive reforms are needed to address the systemic rot within the Nigeria Police Force. This includes better remuneration, improved training programmes, and stringent measures to curb corruption. Officers must be re-oriented to understand that their role is to serve and protect, not to intimidate or exploit.

Restoring trust requires deliberate efforts to foster positive interactions between the police and the public. Effective community policing initiatives, where officers work closely with local residents to address security concerns, can help bridge the trust gap.

Body cameras and dashboard cameras should become standard tools for police officers. These devices can pro-

vide impartial records of interactions, ensuring accountability on both sides.

Civilians must also be educated on the importance of respecting law enforcement. Awareness campaigns can help re-establish a culture of mutual respect and discourage the kind of reckless defiance seen in the Benin City incident.

Broader societal challenges, such as unemployment, poverty, and corruption, must be tackled to reduce the frustration that fuels conflicts between civilians and the police.

The incident involving the young woman in Benin City should serve as a cautionary tale for both the police and the public. For the police, it is a stark reminder of the consequences of losing moral authority. For the public, it highlights the dangers of allowing frustration to manifest as disrespect or physical confrontation.

Without decisive action, such scenarios will persist, and the line between law enforcement and lawlessness will continue to blur. The stakes are too high for Nigeria to ignore this growing crisis. A society where police officers are seen as adversaries rather than allies can not thrive.

The altercation between the 24-year-old girl and a police officer in Benin City is not an isolated event but a symptom of a deeper malaise within Nigerian society.

To halt this troubling trend, both the police and the public must embark on a journey of self-reflection and mutual accountability. Only then can the cycle of mistrust and disrespect be broken, paving the way for a society where law enforcement and the citizens it serves coexist harmoniously.

This incident serves as a microcosm of the challenges facing Nigeria's law enforcement system. While the officer's actions in questioning the lady's possession of three phones were unwarranted and emblematic of broader systemic issues, the lady's response was equally indefensible. Both parties could have handled the situation differently, and their actions underscore the urgent need for reforms in policing and civic education.

The officer's restraint, however, offers a glimmer of hope that professionalism and civility can prevail, even in trying circumstances. It is a reminder that law enforcement officers and citizens alike have roles to play in fostering a society rooted in mutual respect and the rule of law.

*This incident serves as a microcosm of the challenges facing Nigeria's law enforcement system. While the officer's actions in questioning the lady's possession of three phones were unwarranted and emblematic of broader systemic issues, the lady's response was equally indefensible. Both parties could have handled the situation differently, and their actions underscore the urgent need for reforms in policing and civic education.*

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