

Cash crunch strikes Benin, Ughelli as banks suspend ATM services, limit withdrawals

ERHUVWU ETARHIENYO

Residents of Benin City and Ughelli in Delta State are grappling with a severe cash shortage as banks seem to have ceased loading Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) across the towns.

The situation has left customers stranded and frustrated, unable to access funds for daily transactions.

Reports indicated that most ATMs in Benin and Ughelli re-

main non-operational, forcing residents to rely on over-the-counter withdrawals.

However, customers alleged that banks are disbursing only minimal amounts of cash, which are insufficient to meet their needs.

A local trader, who wished to stay anonymous lamented, "I've been to four banks today, and none of their ATMs are working. Inside the bank, they're giving out very little cash, and the queues are endless."

The cash crisis has also impacted businesses, with many vendors and service providers insisting on cash payments due to limited access to digital transaction platforms.

Efforts to reach bank officials for comments were unsuccessful at the time of this report as officials of the two banks referred newsmen to the banks headquarters.

Meanwhile, residents are calling on relevant authorities to intervene and ensure banks

resume normal operations to ease the hardship caused by the cash shortage.

This development has created an opportunity for Point of Sale (POS) operators to exploit the situation, as they charge relatively exorbitant fees for cash withdrawals.

Customers report that they are being forced to pay as much as double the usual charges to access their funds, leaving many frustrated and financially strained.

Speaking with a local trader, Mrs. Elohor Akpore, she expressed her dissatisfaction; "The banks are no longer reliable. We queue for hours, only to be told there's no cash. Now, the POS operators are taking advantage of us. It's unfair."

Ochuko, a resident, expressed his frustration with the exploitative practices of POS operators. "They now share the money with us," he said. "If you want to withdraw ₦10,000, they'll charge you at

least ₦500. It's unreasonable."

Many residents blame the cash scarcity on poor management and a lack of accountability within the banking system.

Some fear the situation might escalate if swift measures are not taken to resolve the issue.

Mr. Zino, a security guard in one of the new generation banks revealed that the bank is authorized to disburse ₦50,000

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The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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Edo LG chairmen face impeachments amid allegations of misconduct

IDAHOSA MUSA

The political crisis in Edo State continues to escalate as the chairmen of Uhumwonde and Orhionmwon Local Government Areas (LGAs), Hon. Kenneth Adodo and Hon. Newman Ugiagbe, along with their vice-chairmen, were impeached on Thursday by members of their respective legislative arms.

The impeachments were prompted by allegations of gross misconduct.

In Uhumwonde, the situation took a violent turn when gunmen reportedly attacked bystanders during the impeachment process, resulting in several injuries.

Hon. Kenneth Adodo, the impeached chairman, accused policemen of being behind the

attack.

Meanwhile, in Orhionmwon LGA, councilors on Wednesday impeached the Leader of the House, Hon. Daniel Osariemen.

The impeachment followed allegations that Osariemen had been involved in efforts to mobilize a separate impeachment motion against Hon. Newman Ugiagbe, the chairman, and his vice, Midwest Ogbebor.

Osariemen was also accused of leading a group to seize the council's secretariat in Abudu, where he reportedly assumed the role of Acting Chairman.

In response, Hon. Ugiagbe, through his Press Secretary, Roy Osariemen, declared the move in Abudu as illegal and reaffirmed that he remained the duly elected chairman.

This latest wave of impeachments followed a similar event

in Owan East LGA, where Hon. Aminu Okodo-Kadiri, the council chairman, was ousted by councilors over alleged gross misconduct.

Okodo-Kadiri has since contested the impeachment, claiming it was fraught with irregularities.

He further disputed the allegations that council chairmen

embezzled ₦50 million meant for salaries, asserting that monthly salary expenditures far exceeded that amount.

He also denied claims that salaries were delayed, emphasizing that salaries were paid promptly through November.

Additionally, Okodo-Kadiri highlighted the involvement of two suspended councilors—Hon.

Haruna Mohammed and another member from Ward Seven—in the impeachment process.

He argued that their participation violated due process, as they had not been reinstated as required by law.

In the light of these developments, Okodo-Kadiri vowed to seek legal recourse, expressing confidence that the judiciary

would overturn the impeachment, which he described as politically motivated and illegal.

He reaffirmed his commitment to restoring justice and upholding the rule of law.

Investigations revealed that the gale of impeachments which started with Uhumwode LGA may spread to other LGAs.



NEW YEAR VISIT:

President Bola Tinubu (left), exchanging pleasantries with Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, during the Nigerian governors New Year visit to the President in Lagos

Governors 'll support Tinubu to achieve food sufficiency —Okpebholo

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, has pledged the commitment of state governors to support President Bola Ahmed Tinubu in tackling food insecurity and reducing food prices across Nigeria.

Governor Okpebholo made this statement during a visit to

President Tinubu at his Ikoyi residence in Lagos alongside Vice President Kashim Shettima, other state governors, and National Assembly leaders.

Reflecting on the progress and challenges of the previous year, Governor Okpebholo

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Inflation: Labour unions to push for annual increase to N70,000 minimum wage

The President of the Trade Union Congress, TUC, Festus Osifo, has disclosed plans by the organised labour unions to push for an annual increase to the N70,000 minimum wage.

Mr Osifo emphasised the importance of the minimum wage that reflects the rise in in-

flation every year.

The labour leader, who stated this during an interview on Channels TV, said: "What we are pushing on for Labour is that instead of you [the government] waiting for five years to increase the minimum wage, you will now look at the inflation of the last five years and try to make some ad-

justments, why can't we reflect the inflation on an annual basis?"

According to him, the NLC and other labour unions have commenced discussions on the issue.

"For example, we have entered January 2025, by the 15th of January 2025, the National

Bureau of Statistics is going to release the inflation figure for December," he explained.

"So, what we are pushing for as Labour is that, if for example, the inflation figure is 35%, apply that 35% to the ₦70,000 minimum wage so that it will become reflective of what the true value is.

"When we get to 2026, you will also do similar application. That is actually what we are pushing. We shouldn't be waiting for five years.

"In the new Act now is three years to do those adjustments but we could be doing them systemically by applying the

inflation as of December of the preceding year to what the minimum wage is.

"This is part of the position that we are also going to canvass this year. We started the conversation last year but we will continue it in 2025," Mr. Osifo added.

Estranged husband sets ex-wife's apartment ablaze on New Year's day in Edo

IDAHOUSA MUSA

BENIN CITY

A tragedy was narrowly avoided in the early hours of New Year's Day when Tina Uyi, a 54-year-old businesswoman based in Italy, escaped death after her estranged husband, 55-year-old Osaro Ahunwan, allegedly set her apartment ablaze.

The incident, which occurred in Idumwonwina, near Oluku in Ovia North-East Local Government Area of Edo State, has sparked widespread condemnation.

Tina, who had returned from Italy on December 31, 2024, reportedly heard a loud bang on her window while coming out of the bathroom. Upon investigation, she discovered that her estranged husband, Osaro, was demanding entry into her apartment.

Tina allegedly refused to let him in, asserting that their relationship had ended, and that her family had returned her bride price in April 2024. Enraged by her refusal, Osaro reportedly threatened to burn down the apartment and harm its occupants.

Despite Tina's pleas, Osaro is said to have smashed the apartment's windows, poured petrol inside, and set it on fire using a lighter. The flames quickly engulfed the building, but neighbors managed to rescue Tina's elderly parents, who

are both in their 90s.

It took the quick response of the Edo State Fire Service to extinguish the fire before it caused further damage.

Tina, speaking from her hospital bed, revealed that Osaro had previously threatened to kill both her and himself in 2023. She also recounted that Osaro had once destroyed her Lexus 330 during an argument.

According to Tina, Osaro's controlling and suspicious nature led her to end the marriage, which lasted less than two years.

The police in Ekiadolor arrested Osaro and Tina's elder brother, Odaro Oviarobo, in connection with the incident. During interrogation, Osaro allegedly confessed that Odaro had provided him with Tina's return itinerary. He reportedly paid Odaro ₦5,000 for the information and was given a container of petrol and a lighter to carry out the attack.

Sources revealed that Odaro had grievances against Tina, accusing her of withholding financial assistance despite her investment in constructing a hotel. Tina had previously supported Odaro's trip abroad in 2003, but upon his return to Nigeria after ten years, he remained unemployed and dependent on her for financial aid.

Tina suffered third-degree burns in the fire and is receiving treatment at a private hospital in Benin City.



OBI, JONATHAN MET:

Former President of Nigeria, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan (left), in a chat with the presidential candidate of the Labour Party (LP) in the 2023 General Elections, Mr Peter Obi, when both leaders met during Obi's New Year's felicitations tour.

Customs intercept smugglers with 10,970 litres of petrol concealed in sacks

The Zone A Operation Whirlwind Unit of the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS) in Lagos recently intercepted smugglers attempting to transport over 10,000 litres of Premium Motor Spirit (PMS) concealed in sacks.

In a statement, the Commander of Operation Whirlwind, Assistant Comptroller of Customs, Mahmood Bello, disclosed that the operation took place on New Year's Eve. Customs operatives conducted surveillance along the water-side in Badagry, where they intercepted 61 sacks and seven

jerry cans of PMS loaded in a large canoe headed for the Benin Republic.

Bello noted that smugglers had revived an old smuggling technique of concealing PMS in sacks. This marked the first time this method was encountered during Operation Whirlwind, as previous seizures had involved PMS transported in jerry-cans.

He said: "Recall that the National Coordinator instructed our operatives to intensify efforts during the festive period to prevent smugglers from exploiting the season. On

December 31, 2024, our team conducted surveillance along the Badagry waterside and intercepted 61 sacks and seven jerry cans of PMS, all loaded in a large canoe bound for the Benin Republic.

"Each sack contained 150 litres, translating to a total of 10,970 litres of PMS. The products were evacuated with reinforcement from the Nigerian military stationed at the Badagry Barracks. The operation was highly successful, with no casualties despite resistance from the smugglers."

Bello added that due to the

volatile nature of the seized product, the National Coordinator had ordered its auctioning. The interception highlights the ongoing challenges faced by Customs in curbing smuggling activities along Nigeria's borders.

National Coordinator of Operation Whirlwind Unit of the Nigeria Customs Service, Assistant Comptroller General of Customs, Hussain Ejibunu and the Commander of the Operation, Assistant Comptroller of Customs, Mahmood Bello at the scene of the seizure of the petrol products concealed in sacks in Badagry, Lagos.



The victim, Tina Uyi, at her hospital bed.

Police launch investigation into alleged shooting of boy by Catholic priest

OWERRI

The Imo State Police Command has launched an investigation into the alleged shooting

to death of a boy by a Catholic Priest in St. Columbus Church, Amaimo, Ikeduru Local Government Area on December 31, 2024, during the cross-over night mass.

It was gathered that the tragic incident occurred during the church service as the congregation was preparing to celebrate the New Year.

A version of the story suggests that the boy threw a fire-cracker, commonly known as a "knockout," inside the church, which may have provoked the shooting.

Other accounts indicate that the shooting was an accidental discharge and not an intentional act by the priest.

However, the Amaimo community is in mourning, with many residents expressing shock and grief over the

incident, which occurred during a time of celebration.

While some community members have privately demanded justice for the deceased, the Catholic leadership in the area has yet to release an official statement on the matter.

Imo State Police Public Relations Officer, Henry Okoye, confirmed the incident and assured that a thorough investigation was underway.

"Yes, a detailed investigation has been initiated to ascertain the facts surrounding the incident. Further developments will be communicated in due course," Okoye said.

Cash crunch strikes Benin, Ughelli...

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over the counter, while the ATMs are programmed to dispense a maximum of ₦60,000.

"The is permitted to give out 50,000 over the counter, while the ATMs stand is programmed to pay only 60,000,"

Mr. Zino said.

A security guard in another bank explained the situation, stating, "The ATMs are loaded with minimal cash because people are no longer depositing money. They only come to withdraw, leaving insufficient funds to restock the machines."

Smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol not sins —Damina

Pastor Abel Damina, founder of Abel Damina Ministries and Power City International, has sparked debate by declaring that smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol are not sins.

Speaking during his New

Year's Eve sermon on Tuesday, Damina argued that these acts are often misrepresented as sinful when they are not inherently so.

"I've told you alcohol is not a sin. I've told you cigar is not a sin. If you like, put it on news-

paper headline, I said it," Damina stated.

I lost my hands, girlfriend, dad's landed properties survived depression; but I'm alive 0:00 / 0:00

However, he made it clear that he was not encouraging

such behaviors, cautioning his audience to exercise wisdom.

"Am I saying you should smoke? You should have sense from your father's house to know that cigar will cut short your life. Am I saying you should drink alcohol? You

should know that if you drink alcohol, you will lie down inside a gutter. Your shirt and trousers will disappear. You should have the sense to know that."

Damina's sermon also addressed the theological basis for his views, challenging traditional interpretations of sin and morality.

Referencing the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, he questioned the belief that their sin resulted from eating fruit from the forbidden tree.

"Adam and Eve ate nothing," he said. "Adam and Eve didn't eat anything. Were you there? You were not there. So how do we know whether they ate

something or not? Jesus was there. Was Jesus there in the Garden of Eden? Yes. Can Jesus explain to us what happened? Yes."

Citing Mark 7:18-21, he argued that sin is not caused by what one consumes but by the condition of the heart. "If they (Adam and Eve) ate, it'll go to their stomach. It'll digest and go to the toilet. They'll be free,"

Damina said. "There's nothing a man eats that enters his heart. It'll go to the digestive system, and it'll go out somehow. It is what comes out of a man that defiles a man, not what goes in. What makes you a sinner is what you're thinking, not what you're eating."



N1.1 TRILLION 2025 APPROPRIATION BILL:

Rivers State Governor, Sir Siminalayi Fubara, GSSRS (sitting), signing into law, the N1.1 trillion 2025 Rivers State Appropriation Bill, tagged "Budget of Inclusive Growth and Development", at the Exco Chambers of the Rivers State Government House in Port Harcourt.

NGX announces changes to market indices following annual review

OLUWATUNMISE OMOSEYIN

The Nigerian Exchange Limited (NGX) has announced updates to its indices following the completion of its full year market review.

These changes, which reflect shifts in market dynamics, took effect at the start of trading on Thursday, 2 January 2025, and include company additions and removals across several indices.

NGX in a report, via its website disclosed that the review covered major indices such as the NGX 30, NGX Lotus Islamic, NGX Pension, NGX Pension Broad Index, Corporate Governance Index, Afrinvest Bank Value Index, and Afrinvest Dividend Yield Index.

Sector focused indices like NGX Banking, NGX Insurance, NGX Industrial, NGX Consumer Goods, and NGX Oil and Gas were also rebalanced to ensure they remain representative of market trends.

The NGX 30 Index, which tracks the performance of 30 leading companies, saw the addition of Conoil Plc, International Breweries Plc, Oando Plc, and Transcorp Power Plc, replacing Guinness Nigeria Plc, Sterling Holding Company Plc, Total Nigeria Plc, and Flour Mills Nigeria Plc.

The Consumer Goods Index welcomed Golden Guinea Breweries Plc, with Flour Mills Nigeria Plc stepping down. In the Banking Index, Wema Bank Plc made an entry, while Sterling Holding Company Plc

exited.

The Insurance Index introduced Guinea Insurance Plc and International Energy Insurance Plc, replacing LASACO Assurance Plc and Mutual Benefits Assurance Plc. Energy companies also saw significant movements.

The Oil and Gas Index now includes Aradel Holdings Plc, MRS Plc, and Oando Plc, while Japaul Oil and Services exited.

For the Pension and Pension Broad Indices, Aradel Holdings Plc and Transcorp Power Plc joined, with Flour Mills Nigeria Plc and Cadbury Nigeria Plc making way.

The Lotus Islamic Index, which focuses on sharia-compliant investments, recorded the entry of Aradel Holdings Plc, while Dangote Sugar Re-

finery Plc exited.

In the Afrinvest Dividend Yield Index, Red Star Express Plc joined the list, replacing FCMB Group Plc and Dangote Cement Plc.

The Meristem Growth Index saw FCMB Group Plc added, while Access Bank Plc and Zenith Bank Plc departed.

Meanwhile, the Meristem Value Index added Access Bank Plc, Dangote Sugar Refinery Plc, and Zenith Bank Plc, with AIICO Insurance Plc, Nigerian Breweries Plc, FCMB Group Plc, and Flour Mills Nigeria Plc leaving.

The NGX Industrial Index, Corporate Governance Index, and Afrinvest Bank Value Index recorded no changes during the review, maintaining their current composition.

Oborewori tasks journalists on factual reportage

AJUWA VICTOR

Delta State Governor, Rt. Hon. Sheriff Oborewori, has charged Journalists to combat fake news and misinformation by fact-checking for the truth before going to press.

Governor Oborewori gave the charge during the 2024 Press Week organized by the Nigeria Union of Journalists, (NUJ), Delta State Council, in Asaba, with the theme: "Imperative Of Proper Leadership Recruitment Process For Good Governance."review

The Governor disclosed that his administration was comprehensively addressing development challenges of the state through its MORE Agenda.

Represented by his Deputy, Sir Monday Onyeme, Governor Oborewori said that journalists should consistently sustain the effort to find out the truth before going to press, saying it has become essential as more people could be inclined to listen to or read negative reports without bothering about their correct versions.

He commended journalists in the state for their cordial

relationship with the administration and for organizing the Press Week which would further afford them the opportunity to arm themselves with the necessary knowledge in discharging their duties.

According to Oborewori, "It is my joy to be in the midst of the cream of journalism practitioners in Delta State at this year's Press Week. How nice it is to devote time to meet and cross-fertilize ideas, both among yourselves and critical members of society!"

"This way, you arm yourselves with greater knowledge to impact on your performances for the good of your profession and the society in general.

"I, therefore, commend the Nigeria Union of Journalists here in the state, for organising the Press Week and, more importantly, for bringing in notable persons to point the way forward.

"As an administration, we will like to commend journalists in the state for the cordial relationship between us. We have related in a very peaceful way and it is my sincere hope that, going forward, the relationship will be marked by greater understanding and mutual respect."

Governors 'll support Tinubu...

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assured Nigerians that state executives are united in their efforts to address the nation's challenges and ensure development in the new year.

He acknowledged the ongoing food crisis, noting that the spike in food prices would soon be addressed through agricultural programs already underway in several states.

These initiatives, according to Okpebholo, are designed to stabilize food prices and improve food availability across the country.

"We have discussed at length with President Tinubu, Vice President Shettima, and other leaders about the current challenges facing the country.

President Tinubu is deeply committed to improving the welfare of Nigerians, and his plans for the new year reflect his passion for the country's development," Governor Okpebholo said.

He went on to outline that Edo State has allocated over ₦70 billion in its 2025 budget to address the food crisis. The state will focus on large-scale mechanized farming and providing interest-free loans to market women, with the goal of achieving food sufficiency in line with the president's agricultural reforms.

Governor Okpebholo also called on Nigerians to support President Tinubu's reforms, emphasizing that they are necessary to correct longstanding institutional problems and improve the nation's future.

DTHA Speaker assures Deltans of more progress in 2025 under Oborewori

AJUWA VICTOR

With the dawn of new year 2025, Speaker of the Delta State House of Assembly, Rt Hon Emomotimi Guwor has said that the state will continue to make progress under the leadership of Governor Sheriff Oborewori.

Guwor, in his goodwill message to Deltans on the new year celebration, sought unwavering commitment of every critical stakeholder to the state's development agenda.

The Speaker, in a statement

by his Chief Press Secretary, Nkem Nwaeke, reaffirmed the State House of Assembly's dedication to supporting the Governor's initiatives of ensuring that every sector of the state benefits from the ongoing transformation.

Guwor, who represents Warri South West in the House and is the National Treasurer, Conference of Speakers of State Houses of Assembly in Nigeria, assured that Infrastructure development, economic empowerment, social welfare and good governance would

remain major priorities of the state government in 2025.

While reinforcing the confidence of the Delta State House of Assembly in Governor Sheriff Oborewori's ability to deliver on promises and drive sustainable development in the state, the Speaker prayed to God that the year 2025 brings greater peace, prosperity, and happiness in the country.

He said, "As we bid farewell to 2024 and welcome a new year, I, on behalf of the Delta State House of Assembly, extend the warmest greetings to all fellow

Deltans and our loved ones.

"As your elected representatives, we remain committed to working tirelessly to promote the welfare and development of our dear state. We will continue to prioritize the needs of our citizens, foster economic growth, and ensure that Delta State remains a place of opportunity and prosperity for all.

"Let us embrace the spirit of hope, unity, and resilience that defines us as a people. May we continue to support one another, uplift those in need, and strive for a brighter future.

Entertainment

Asake parts ways with YBNL record label amidst social media speculation

STORIES BY: OGISO PROMISE

Nigerian singer Asake has reportedly ended his association with YBNL, sparking widespread reactions on social media. Speculations about the split gained traction after the artist removed "YBNL" from his Instagram bio and unfollowed the label's founder, Olamide.

Asake, who joined YBNL in 2022, has been a standout performer for the label, achieving massive success with hits like "Sungba." However, recent developments suggest his journey

with YBNL may have reached its conclusion.

A glance at Asake's Instagram profile now shows "Creative Director" in place of any reference to YBNL, hinting at a potential shift towards independence. Additionally, his decision to unfollow Olamide on Instagram has further fueled the rumors of a fallout.

Interestingly, YBNL's Instagram account still follows Asake, leaving fans speculating about the nature of the split—whether it was amicable or contentious.

Asake's departure marks a sig-

nificant moment in the Nigerian music scene, with fans eagerly speculating on his next move. Will he flourish as an independent artist or align himself with a new label? Only time will reveal the path he chooses.

The news has sparked diverse reactions online. While some fans express disappointment over the split, others are optimistic about the fresh opportunities it may bring. Regardless of the circumstances, Asake's career trajectory remains a topic of keen interest for fans and industry observers alike.



The tragic loss of OG Maco: Remembering a visionary artist

The music industry has been struck by the untimely loss of OG Maco, a rapper known for his innovative artistry and impact on the hip-hop scene. Born Benedict Chiajulam Ihesiba Jr., the 32-year-old artist passed away, with his family confirming the tragic news on his Instagram account. The announcement has left fans and fellow artists grieving deeply.

OG Maco first captured the world's attention in 2014 with his breakout single "U Guessed It." The track's raw energy and bold creativity propelled him to prominence and showcased his unique style. As a founding member of the hip-hop collective OGG, he collaborated with numerous artists, leaving a lasting legacy within the music community.

In a heartfelt statement, OG Maco's family described him as "a testament

to resilience, creativity, and boundless love." Their words honor the artist's remarkable journey and the inspiration he brought to fans and peers alike. His work and influence continue to resonate, even in his absence.

The loss of OG Maco also underscores the critical importance of mental health awareness and support in the entertainment industry. The challenges faced by artists often go unseen, making it vital to prioritize resources that address emotional and mental well-being.

As the world mourns this profound loss, we celebrate OG Maco's enduring legacy. His music and artistry will live on, inspiring future generations to embrace their creativity and passion. Though his time was cut short, his contributions to music will not be forgotten.



OG MACO

Nigerian music shines globally: Wizkid and Ayra Starr among top artistes of 2024

In a significant milestone for Nigerian music, Chart Data has ranked Wizkid and Ayra Starr among the world's top artistes of 2024. The music monitoring platform unveiled its annual list on New Year's Eve, placing Wizkid at 11th and Ayra Starr at 18th.

This recognition underscores the duo's exceptional talent and dedication. Wizkid, a multiple award-winning artiste, has been a prominent figure in the music industry for over a decade. Ayra Starr, known as the "Celestial Being," has rapidly gained international acclaim with her unique

sound and style.

The top 10 artistes of 2024 include South Korean singer Jimin, American stars Taylor Swift, Ariana Grande, Sabrina Carpenter, Beyoncé, and rapper Kendrick Lamar. British sensation Charli XCX, Lady Gaga, Billie Eilish, and Nicki Minaj complete the list.

Another African artiste, South Africa's Tyla, secured the 12th position, highlighting the continent's growing influence on the global music scene.

Further acknowledging Nigerian talent, Active World's "Top 20 Music Global Icons Shaping The Future"

features Davido at number 3, with Wizkid and Burna Boy at 6th and 8th positions, respectively.

These accolades reflect the increasing global recognition of Nigerian music and its artistes. As the industry evolves, Nigerian artistes are poised to play a pivotal role in shaping its future.

The rankings by Chart Data and Active World are a testament to the hard work and dedication of Wizkid, Ayra Starr, Davido, and Burna Boy, serving as inspiration to emerging artistes in Nigeria and worldwide.



AYRA STARR

WIZKID

BURBA BOY

TEMS

DAVIDO

Friday Sermon

Protection from Satan's Web

MALLAM HARUN UMAR AND
ABDUL-KADIR ABDULLAH

ASSALAMUALAIKUM
WARAHMATULLAH WABARAKAATUHU

All praise is due to Allah alone, the Lord of the Worlds, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon the final Prophet, Muhammad (peace be upon him), his noble family, his companions, and all those who follow his path until the Day of Judgment.

Today, we are discussing a crucial topic, *Protection from Satan's Web*. This discourse is of paramount importance as we strive to be among the righteous in this world and the Hereafter.

Allah has repeatedly warned us against Satan throughout the Quran. Satan, the accursed, operates amongst both humans and jinn. Recall that Allah sent Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as a mercy to all of mankind and jinn.

Let us begin with a poignant sto-

ry: Barsisa, a devout monk, sought seclusion in the outskirts of town to deepen his worship. A group of travelers entrusted their young sister to his care, requesting he teach her the Quran during their absence.

Tragically, Satan whispered temptations to the monk, convincing him that accepting the girl would be a virtuous act, pleasing to Allah. Driven by these whispers, the monk succumbed to his desires, resulting in the girl's pregnancy. Overcome by guilt and fear, he tragically killed the girl and buried her. Upon the travelers' return, Satan orchestrated a series of events that led to the monk's public humiliation and disgrace.

This tragic tale serves as a stark reminder of Satan's insidious methods of deception. He began his campaign of deceit with our forefather, Prophet Adam (peace be upon him). Lies and falsehood are the cornerstones of Satan's arsenal.

Indeed, Islam emphasizes that one of the most prominent signs of a hypocrite is the habit of lying. Satan manipulates individuals to engage in

*Let us implore
Allah to grant
us freedom from
Satan's clutches.
Let us beseech
Him to empower
us to overcome his
temptations and
remain steadfast
on the path of
righteousness.*

falsehood and deceit, sowing discord and destruction within society.

Remember, he cunningly deceived Prophet Adam (peace be upon him)

into consuming the forbidden fruit, leading him out of Paradise. Allah, in His infinite wisdom, granted Satan a temporary reprieve, allowing him to test the steadfastness of believers. Satan, recognizing the power granted to him, vowed to perpetually mislead mankind.

One of the most potent tools in Satan's arsenal is music. He utilizes it to ensnare souls, leading them away from the path of righteousness. Idolatry, in all its forms, is another of his insidious traps.

Therefore, it is imperative for us to adhere to the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in all our supplications. The morning and evening invocations are of utmost importance in seeking refuge from Satan's whispers. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) consistently invoked Allah for protection against Satan's deceptions, particularly during the moments preceding death. The manner in which one departs this world significantly impacts their eternal destiny.

Alcohol consumption and gam-

bling are further avenues through which Satan seeks to ensnare and corrupt. Allah, in Surah Al-Maidah of the Quran, unequivocally declares that alcohol, gambling, and idolatry are abominable practices of Satan. We must steadfastly avoid these vices, for they are designed to distance us from Allah and sow discord among humanity.

Satan boasts of his ability to deceive us through the very things that Allah has forbidden. O Muslims, whoever aligns themselves with Satan against the will of Allah has undoubtedly strayed far from the path of guidance.

Let us implore Allah to grant us freedom from Satan's clutches. Let us beseech Him to empower us to overcome his temptations and remain steadfast on the path of righteousness. Ameen.

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

2024: How Nigerian stock market thrived despite banking reforms, new listings

NAN

The Nigerian stock market experienced impressive growth in 2024, driven by key macroeconomic developments.

These include banking sector re-capitalisation, new listings and increased crude oil revenues, which helped to reduce the country's fiscal imbalance.

Notable listings, such as Gereg Power Plc, Transcorp Power Plc, Aradel Holdings and BUA Foods, energised trading activities, offering investors a broader range of blue-chip stocks.

The depreciation of the naira, influenced by macroeconomic reforms by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) and the Federal Government, also significantly boosted market performance.

Foreign capital inflow steadily increased, rising from four per cent in mid-2023 to an average of 16 per cent by November 2024.

According to the Nigerian Exchange

Ltd. (NGX), the All-Share Index delivered a stellar return of 283.45 per cent since 2020, climbing from 26,842.07 at the end of 2019 to 102,926.40 by Dec. 31, 2024.

The All-Share Index closed 2024 at 102,926.40, reflecting an annual growth of 37.65 per cent, compared to 74,773.77 at the end of 2023.

Market capitalisation, which opened the year at N40.918 trillion, added N21.85 trillion year-on-year to close at N62.768 trillion.

In 2024, the CBN mandated commercial banks to raise minimum capital thresholds: N500 billion for international authorisation and N200 billion for national authorisation.

Others are N50 billion for regional authorisation and N20 billion and N10 billion for national and regional non-interest banks, respectively.

Banks were given 24 months, starting April 1, 2024, to meet these requirements.

The directive encouraged banks to raise fresh equity through private placements, rights issues, public offers, mergers and acquisitions, and license upgrades or downgrades.

This move spurred equity issuances, boosting investor confidence and demand for bank stocks, contributing significantly to the market rally.

Between January and November 2024, 20 companies, including 10 financial institutions and two breweries, raised a total of N8.1 trillion in shares on the Exchange.

Major listings included Aradel Holdings Plc (N3.05 trillion), Transcorp Power Plc (N1.8 trillion) and Haldane McCall Plc (N11.99 billion).

In the brewing sector, Nigerian Breweries Plc and International Breweries Plc raised N599.1 billion and N588.28 billion, respectively.

Guaranty Trust Holding Company Plc raised N400.5 billion, while Access Holdings garnered N351.01 billion

through rights issues.

In spite of high inflation which stood at 34.19 per cent and a 48 per cent naira depreciation in the first half of 2024, the market demonstrated resilience.

The Oil and Gas sector led with 160 per cent growth, followed by Insurance which had 129.58 per cent increase and Consumer Goods recording 52.24 per cent.

Commenting on the performance, Mr David Adonri, Vice-Chairman of Highcap Securities Ltd., described 2024 as a "record-breaking year of fantastic performance".

He highlighted exceptional growth across all sectors, with the oil and gas sector leading with a remarkable 160 per cent appreciation. Dividends paid by listed companies surged by 118 per cent compared to the previous year, with the ASEM Board demonstrating the highest growth at 147 per cent.

Adonri attributed the primary market boom to bank public offerings during their re-capitalisation.

He noted the impact of high-profile listings such as Aradel Holdings, Transcorp Power, and infrastructure funds, which mitigated the impact of delistings by Flour mills and GSK.

The introduction of a new public offering portal by the Nigerian Exchange Group (NGX) revolutionised public offering distribution through technology.

He noted, "Equities have marginally beaten inflation with a 35.6 per cent return, compared to inflation at 34 per cent."

Adonri projected stronger performance in 2025, supported by ongoing banking re-capitalisation and anticipated public offerings.

Similarly, Mr Tajudeen Olayinka, an investment banker and stockbroker, lauded the market's resilience amid chal-

lenges like high interest rates, inflationary pressure and exchange rate volatility.

He, however, noted that the All Share Index was yet to attain the level experienced in the year 2023, including year-to-date return.

"Quite also unlike 2023 year-end rally or Santa rally, market suffered a much delayed year-end rally in 2024.

"This rose from unexpected delay in the allotment process of recent public offers by banks, and also because of poor handling of capital verification by CBN.

"A lot happened in 2024 that could have caused a major pushback for the market or raised the volatility level, but the active participation of domestic investors put that to check. 2024 is a year of resilience for the market," he said.

He highlighted the potential for growth in 2025, driven by increased public company listings and global prospects.

At the closing gong ceremony for 2024, the Chief Executive Officer of NGX, Mr Temi Popoola, commended the market's resilience and innovation.

He said, "Macroeconomic shifts, particularly in the oil and gas sectors and currency devaluation, have been transformative.

"As we approach 2025, continued reforms and a stable macroeconomic environment will sustain growth, boost liquidity, and deliver long-term value for all market participants."

However, with the challenges, the Nigerian stock market closed 2024 on a high note, with new all-time highs and trillion-naira valuations for several companies.

Strong domestic investor participation, strategic listings, and positive macroeconomic factors underscored the market's resilience and potential for continued growth in 2025.



Fashion & Style

Steps to maintaining a perfect visage during the harmattan season

OSAMUDIAME AGBONGIASEDE

The harmattan season brings with it a blanket of dust and arid air, making it essential to not only moisturize the skin frequently but also give the hair, lips, and body the care they deserve. This season demands extra attention due to its harsh conditions, unlike the more forgiving, humid rainy season. Here's how to maintain a flawless and healthy appearance during this dry, dusty period:

1. MEET NUTRITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

What you put into your body reflects on the outside. During harmattan, essential nutrients that nourish and protect the body are easily depleted due to the dry, hot climate.

Hydration: Water is your best friend. Increase your daily intake to combat dryness and dehydration.

Vitamins: Consume foods rich in vitamins C and E, which promote healthy, supple skin.

2. MOISTURIZE, MOISTURIZE, MOISTURIZE!

This cannot be stressed enough. Regular moisturizing creates a barrier that protects the skin from the harsh environment.

For the Skin: Use body lotions, moisturizers, and sunscreen to prevent dryness and dehydration while preserving your skin's natural oils. Popular choices include body oils and petroleum jelly for their nourishing and protective properties.

For the Hair: African hair is especially prone to moisture loss and breakage during harmattan.

Deep condition regularly and use hydrating hair masks with ingredients like shea butter, honey, banana, or avocado.

Opt for protective styles, head wraps, or scarves to shield the hair.

3. PROPER LIP CARE

Your lips are particularly vulnerable to dryness during harmattan.

Hydrate: Drink plenty of water to

prevent chapped, injured lips.

Exfoliate Gently: Remove dead skin cells once or twice a week using a soft scrub.

Moisturize: Keep a lip balm with moisturizing ingredients like shea butter or beeswax handy. Lip glosses are also a great hydrating alternative to matte lipsticks.

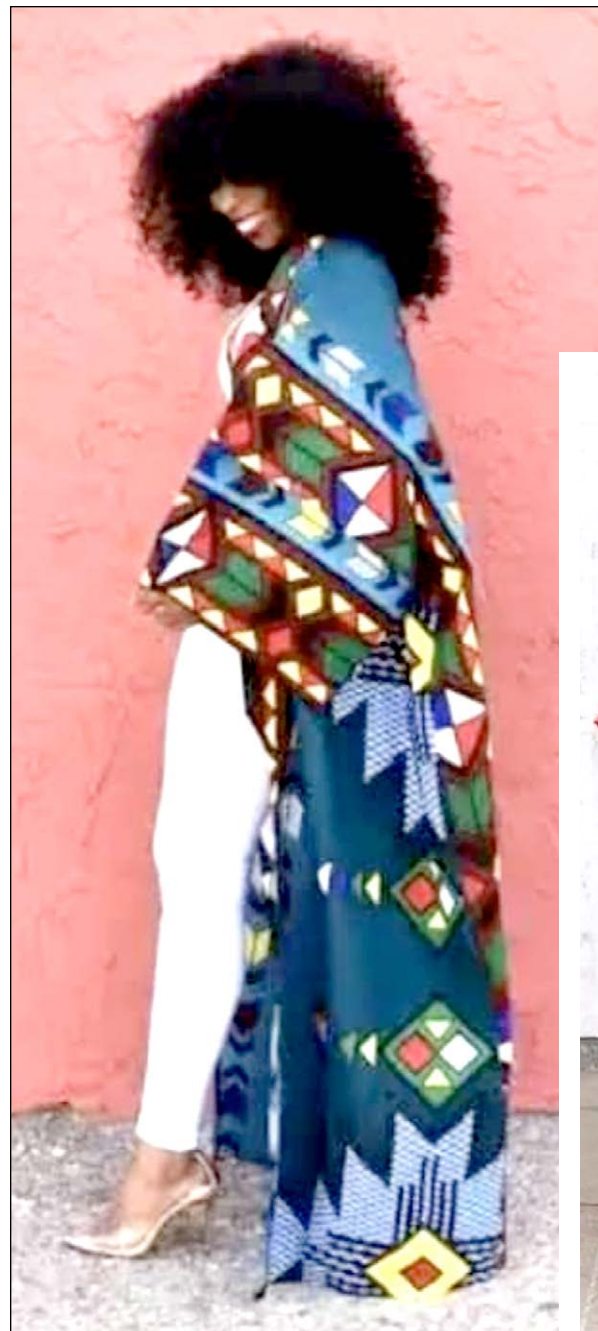
4. APPROPRIATE STYLING FOR THE DRY SEASON

Clothing choices during harmattan should balance style, comfort, and practicality.

Fabric Choices: Opt for loose-fitting cotton, lightweight wool, or linen fabrics that allow breathability while maintaining style.

Layering: Protect your skin from the sun and dryness with long sleeves, full-length trousers, and maxi dresses made from breathable fabrics.

Face Masks: Incorporate stylish face masks to guard against dust and enhance your look.



Gov Okpebholo's N70 billion boost to agriculture: A game changer

BEYOND THE HEADLINES

With

KELLY ODARO



The recent World Bank report revealing that over 129 million Nigerians live in poverty, paints a dire picture of the nation's economic realities. This figure, which translates to more than half of Nigeria's population, exposes the depth of socio-economic inequalities that have become endemic in the country.

Despite Nigeria's status as Africa's largest economy in terms of GDP, the wealth remains concentrated among a privileged few, leaving a significant portion of the population in the throes of deprivation.

This grim reality serves as a call to action for proactive governance at both federal and state levels, particularly in regions like Edo State, where innovative strategies are urgently needed to combat poverty and drive sustainable development.

Edo State, mirrors the broader national challenges but also offers unique opportunities. The state boasts a rich cultural heritage and abundant natural resources, including fertile land, which positions it as a potential agricultural powerhouse. However, like much of Nigeria, Edo State struggles with high unemployment rates, underdeveloped infrastructure, and a lack of access to essential services for many of its citizens. These challenges have been compounded by national economic policies that often fail to address the specific needs of subnational entities.

In recent years, Edo State has witnessed a growing population, particularly among the youth, who make up a significant portion of its demographic profile. This burgeoning population, while an asset in terms of potential labour force, also represents a challenge, as the state grapples with providing adequate jobs, education, and

healthcare.

The economic inequality evident at the national level is mirrored within the state, with urban areas like Benin City enjoying relatively better access to opportunities compared to rural communities that remain largely underdeveloped.

Against this backdrop, the decision by Governor Monday Okpebholo to allocate a significant N70 billion to agriculture in the 2025 budget is a commendable and forward-thinking move. This investment underscores a recognition of agriculture's potential to drive economic transformation in Edo State.

Agriculture has historically been the backbone of Nigeria's economy, yet its contribution to GDP has dwindled over the years due to neglect and the over-reliance on oil revenues. Governor Okpebholo's initiative aims to reverse this trend by reinvigorating the agricultural sector as a catalyst for inclusive growth and poverty alleviation.

The strategic allocation of such a substantial amount to agriculture aligns with the state's need to diversify its economy and reduce dependence on federal allocations, which are often unpredictable and insufficient.

By prioritising agriculture, the state government is positioning itself to unlock the vast potential of its arable land, create jobs, and improve food security. These objectives are particularly critical in a state where many rural dwellers depend on subsistence farming but lack the resources and support to scale their activities.

Investment in agriculture has far-reaching implications for Edo State's economy and the livelihoods of its people. First, it promises to address the issue of unemployment, particu-

larly among the youth. By creating opportunities along the agricultural value chain, from farming to processing and marketing, the state can absorb a significant portion of its unemployed population. This, in turn, will reduce the socio-economic pressures that often lead to social vices such as crime and youth restiveness.

More so, agricultural development has the potential to spur industrial growth. With a focus on agro-processing, the state can attract investments in industries that add value to raw agricultural produce, thereby increasing earnings and creating secondary employment opportunities. For instance, the establishment of processing plants for crops like cassava, rice, and palm oil can transform Edo State into a hub for agro-industrial activities.

Again, investment in agriculture can enhance food security and reduce dependency on imported food items. By supporting local farmers with improved seeds, modern equipment, and access to credit, the state can boost productivity and ensure that its residents have access to affordable and nutritious food. This will not only

improve the quality of life for many Edo citizens but also contribute to the state's economic resilience.

While the N70 billion allocation is a step in the right direction, its success will depend on effective implementation and the ability to navigate potential challenges. One major hurdle is the issue of land tenure, which often hinders large-scale agricultural projects. Ensuring that farmers have secure access to land will be crucial for the success of the initiative.

Another challenge is the availability of infrastructure. Rural areas, where much of the farming activity takes place, often lack the necessary infrastructure, such as roads, storage facilities, and irrigation systems. Without these, farmers may struggle to transport their produce to markets or preserve it for future sales, leading to losses and diminished enthusiasm for farming.

Corruption and bureaucratic inefficiencies also pose significant risks. If the allocated funds are not transparently managed or are diverted for personal gain by the ministry in charge, the initiative may fail to achieve its

objectives. The State government must therefore put in place robust monitoring mechanisms to ensure accountability and effectiveness.

To maximise the impact of its agricultural investment, Edo State should consider forging partnerships with private sector players, international development organisations, and research institutions. These entities can provide technical expertise, funding, and access to global markets, thereby complementing the state's efforts. For instance, collaborations with agricultural research institutes can help in developing high-yield crop varieties and promoting sustainable farming practices.

Similarly, engaging local communities in the planning and implementation of agricultural projects will be essential for ensuring buy-in and sustainability. Farmers must be treated as partners rather than beneficiaries, with their input shaping the policies and programmes designed to support them.

Governor Okpebholo's ambitious agricultural plan holds the promise of transforming Edo State's economic landscape, but it requires a multi-faceted approach to achieve its full potential. Beyond funding, the state government must prioritise capacity building for farmers, promote access to affordable financing, and create an enabling environment for agribusinesses to thrive. Investments in infrastructure, such as rural roads, storage facilities, and power supply, should complement the agricultural budget to ensure that the sector is well-supported.

Furthermore, the state must address systemic issues like and bureaucratic bottlenecks that could impede progress. By adopting a holistic approach, the government can ensure that its investment yields tangible results and contributes to poverty reduction and economic diversification.

The World Bank's report on poverty in Nigeria serves as a stark reminder of the urgent need for bold and innovative solutions to address socio-economic disparities. In Edo State, Governor Monday Okpebholo's decision to allocate N70 billion to agriculture is a commendable step toward tackling poverty and fostering economic growth. While challenges remain, the potential benefits of this initiative are immense, ranging from job creation and food security to industrial growth and economic diversification.

If effectively implemented, this investment could serve as a model for other states in Nigeria, demonstrating the transformative power of agriculture in addressing poverty and inequality. For the people of Edo State, it represents a glimmer of hope in an otherwise challenging economic climate, signalling that with the right leadership and policies, a brighter future is possible.

If effectively implemented, this investment could serve as a model for other states in Nigeria, demonstrating the transformative power of agriculture in addressing poverty and inequality. For the people of Edo State, it represents a glimmer of hope in an otherwise challenging economic climate, signalling that with the right leadership and policies, a brighter future is possible.



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Within seconds, celebrations turn to mayhem and tragedy in New Orleans

New Orleans was in full swing in the early morning hours of New Year's Day.

Reverellers were spilling out of bustling bars and packed clubs in the city's French Quarter - an area often referred to as the beating heart of the city's famous nightlife.

"It was all young kids out. Lots of 19, 20, 21-year-olds," recalled Derrick Albert, a local DJ who plies his trade each night at the corner of Canal and Bourbon streets.

That intersection is home to a packed tourist hotel, a store selling ice cream and chocolate fudge and restaurants selling

oysters and daiquiris in large plastic to-go cups.

But at about 03:15 (09:15 GMT), the youthful revelry turned to terror as a man - identified as Shamsud-Din Jabbar, a 42-year-old Texas resident and US Army veteran - drove a rental truck at high-speed into a crowd.

He killed at least 15 people

and wounded dozens, some seriously.

Grainy CCTV footage shows the moment the attack began, with the white pick-up truck driving up Canal Street past other vehicles, before taking a right on to Bourbon Street, swerving around a police car, speeding up suddenly and

ploughing into the crowds.

"We just heard this squeal, the rev of an engine and a huge, loud impact," Kimberly Stricklen, a visitor to New Orleans, told Reuters. "Then, the people, screaming. The sound of crunching metal and bodies."

The vehicle would continue for three blocks - striking more bystanders along the way - until the driver crashed and came to a stop near the corner of Bourbon and Conti streets.

Jabbar then left his vehicle and shot at police. He was killed by their return fire.

heard shots, and saw people running past the window," said Steve Hyde, a British visitor who was at a bar called the Erin Rose, on Conti Street just off Bourbon. "Then the sirens started... I'm heartbroken. I love this city."

By 03:17 - just two minutes after the attack - New Orleans Police Department officers, already out in force for new year's eve, were on the scene and calling for urgent help captured in chaotic radio chatter.

"I have at least six casualties. I have an office doing chest compressions on one. I have another white male that's got agonal breathing," one officer

can be heard saying, referring to a gasping, irregular breathing pattern common in emergencies. "Multiple casualties."

Soon after, the area was teeming with police, who cordoned off the entire area with crime scene tape and dozens of officers and vehicles as investigators arrived and ambulances drove off.

For Mr Albert, the incident was a close call.

Just a few weeks ago, he'd been issued a ticket by the city and told he had to move down the block from his usual spot - which would have been on the very pavement that the suspect drove through to get past the police car.

"That's usually my corner," he told newsmen, gesturing at a Walgreen's pharmacy at the edge of the crime scene.

"I would have been killed. I got more than lucky yesterday. He'd have run right over me. That ticket saved my life. I'd have been the first one he hit."

FBI has said the black flag of the Islamic State group was found inside the vehicle which ploughed into partygoers, along with two suspected improvised explosive devices discovered nearby.



Police investigators surround a white truck that has been crashed into a work lift in the French Quarter of New Orleans, Louisiana, on January 1, 2025.

Hamas police chief among 11 killed in Israeli strike on Gaza, medics say

The chief of Gaza's Hamas-run police force and his deputy have been killed in an Israeli strike on a tent camp sheltering displaced families.

The Hamas-run interior ministry condemned what it called the "assassination" of Mahmoud Salah and Hussam Shahwan, who it said had been "performing their humanitarian and national duty."

Nine other people, including three children and two women, were also killed in the overnight attack in al-Mawasi, near the southern city of Khan Younis, medics said.

Israel's military confirmed it had carried out a strike targeting Shahwan, who it alleged was a "terrorist" who had helped Hamas's military wing plan attacks on Israeli forces in Gaza.

More than 30 people were reportedly killed in other Israeli strikes across Gaza on Thursday, while the military said it intercepted a projectile fired from the south of the territory.

The struggle to reunite children with families in war-torn Gaza

UN says Israeli attacks pushing Gaza healthcare towards total collapse.

The Gaza interior ministry accused Israel of "spreading

chaos" and "deepening the human suffering" in the territory by killing Salah and Shahwan. It insisted that the police force was a "civilian protection agency" that provided services to Palestinians.

There has been increased lawlessness in Gaza since Israel began targeting police officers last year, citing their role in Hamas governance.

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) said the police force had "conducted violent interrogations of the Gazan population, violating human rights and suppressing dissent."

"Hassam Shahwan was responsible for developing intelligence assessments in coordination with elements of Hamas's military wing in attacks on the IDF in the Gaza Strip," it alleged.

The military also said it had taken "numerous steps" to mitigate the risk of harming civilians prior to the strike on al-Mawasi.

Three brothers aged seven, 11 and 13 were among the nine other people who were killed.

Ahmed, Mohammed and Abdul Rahman al-Bardawil were hit by shrapnel as they slept in their family's tent, their father Walid said.

"I woke up to the sound

of the explosion. I called my three sleeping sons, but none answered. They were martyred immediately," he told AFP news agency.

Social media videos showed the boys' bodies being transported to a local hospital by a tuk-tuk, as well as their blood-stained mattresses inside a damaged tent.

Aida Zanoun, who was living in a neighbouring tent, said she heard an Apache helicopter gunship flying overhead at around 01:00 (23:00 GMT Wednesday).

"Then we saw a very strong [explosion]. It caused an earthquake in the neighbourhood. The shrapnel reached as far as 100m [330ft], they say," she told Reuters news agency.

"When the morning came, we came to inspect [the scene], and... it is devastation, complete destruction. What have the children done, to be hit?"

The IDF has declared the sandy strip of land along the coast in al-Mawasi to be a "humanitarian zone" for the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians displaced by its 14-month war with Hamas.

But it has repeatedly attacked the area, accusing Hamas operatives of hiding among civilians.

Later, another six people

were killed in an Israeli air strike at the Gaza interior ministry's headquarters in Khan Younis, medics said.

The IDF said it had conducted a strike on "Hamas terrorists who were operating in a control-and-command centre that was embedded inside the Khan Younis municipality building".

Palestinian media reported that at least 30 people were killed in Israeli strikes elsewhere in Gaza on Thursday.

Ten were killed in the northern town of Jabalia, which is besieged by Israeli ground forces, while four were killed in Shati refugee camp to the west, according to the Palestinian Wafa news agency.

Twelve others died at two intersections in nearby Gaza City, it said.

Four people were killed in the central town of Deir al-Balah and several others were killed in nearby Maghazi refugee camp, Wafa added.

Meanwhile, recent cold, wet weather has worsened conditions in makeshift camps for displaced families.

More than 1,500 tents across Gaza have been flooded by rainwater and sewage since Tuesday, according to the Hamas-run Civil Defence agency.

China's BYD closes in on Tesla as sales jump

Chinese car maker BYD saw its sales jump at the end of last year, as it competes with Tesla to be the world's best-selling electric vehicle (EV) maker of 2024.

The company says it sold 207,734 EVs in December, taking its annual total to 1.76 million, as subsidies and discounts helped attract customers.

It comes as Tesla is due to announce its own quarterly sales figures later on Thursday.

The US electric car maker maintained a slim lead in EV sales over BYD in the previous quarter but the Shenzhen-based firm has been narrowing the gap.

BYD's total vehicle sales jumped more than 41% in 2024, year-on-year. The surge was powered mainly by sales of its hybrid cars.

The company has benefited from a rise in car sales in its home market, as intense competition drove down prices and government subsidies encouraged consumers to replace their old cars with EVs or other more fuel efficient options.

BYD sells 90% of its cars in China, where its been extending its lead over foreign brands like Volkswagen and Toyota.

The rise of BYD and other Chinese EV makers contrasts with the challenges faced by some legacy car makers, which have been struggling in major Western markets.

Last month, Honda and Nissan confirmed that they

were holding merger talks, as the two Japanese firms seek to fight back against competition from the Chinese car industry.

Also in December, Volkswagen announced it had reached a deal with the IG Metall trade union which will avert plant closures in Germany and avoid immediate compulsory redundancies.

The German motor industry giant had previously warned it might have to shutter plants in the country for the first time in a bid to cut costs.

Earlier in the month, the boss of car making giant Stellantis, Carlos Tavares, quit with immediate effect following a boardroom clash.

His abrupt exit from the company - which owns brands including Vauxhall, Jeep, Fiat, Peugeot and Chrysler - came two months after Stellantis issued a profit warning.

In the third quarter of 2024, BYD saw its revenues soar, beating Tesla's for the first time.

It posted more than 200bn yuan (\$28.2bn, £21.8bn) in revenues between July and September - a 24% jump from the same period last year, and more than Elon Musk's company whose quarterly revenue was \$25.2bn.

However, Tesla still sold more electric vehicle (EVs) than BYD.

Chinese car makers have been trying to boost sales of their EVs outside the country but have faced pushback in some major markets.

News

Foreign

What we know about the New Orleans attack and suspect

Fifteen people were killed and at least 35 injured after a man apparently inspired by the Islamic State group (IS) drove into large crowds in New Orleans, Louisiana, in the early hours of New Year's Day.

Here's what we know so far about what happened and the perpetrator. How did the attack unfold?

A 03:15 local time on New Year's Day, a pick-up truck rammed into crowds gathered on Bourbon Street in the heart of New Orleans' French Quarter.

CCTV footage shows a white, Ford F-150 Lightning vehicle driving on to the pavement to get around a police car before hitting pedestrians.

Police described the act as "very intentional," adding that the attacker - identified as Sham-

sud-Din Jabbar - was "hell-bent on creating the carnage and the damage that he did."

"This man was trying to run over as many people as he possibly could," said New Orleans Police Chief Anne Kirkpatrick.

Jabbar was also armed and fired on law enforcement, injuring two officers. He was then killed by police gunfire.

Whit Davis, from Shreveport, Louisiana, told the newsmen that he was held in a bar with a large group in the aftermath of the attack while police secured the scene.

When they left, they "were walking past dead and injured bodies all over the street," he said.

Who was Shamsud-Din Jabbar?

The FBI has named the assailant as 42-year-old Shamsud-Din Jabbar, an Army veter-

an and US citizen from Texas.

A flag associated with IS was found in the vehicle he was driving and the FBI said it was investigating what affiliations Jabbar may have had with terrorist groups.

President Joe Biden said the FBI had briefed him on the attack. The suspect uploaded videos to social media "mere hours before the attack" indicating that he was inspired by IS and expressing a "desire to kill", Biden said.

Suspected improvised explosive devices were also found in the area.

More on the New Orleans attack.

A long gun with a "suppressive device" on it - acting as a silencer - was also recovered.

According to a now-removed LinkedIn profile, Jabbar

had worked in various roles in the US Army, including in human resources and IT, before he was discharged. He was deployed to Afghanistan from February 2009 to January 2010.

In a YouTube video posted in 2020, Jabbar said his time in the military had taught him "the meaning of great service and what it means to be responsive and take everything seriously, dotting it's and crossing t's to make sure that things go off without a hitch".

He studied at Georgia State University from 2015 to 2017, graduating with a degree in computer information systems.

He was married twice. His first marriage ended in 2012 and his second lasted from 2017 to 2022.

He also appears to have worked in real estate, holding a

licence that expired in 2021. He had a criminal record, relating to traffic offences and theft.

The pick-up truck he was driving was electric and believed to have been rented in Texas via an app called Turo.

Are there additional suspects?

The FBI said they believed the suspect had help in carrying out his attack, particularly in placing suspected explosive devices.

CBS, the BBC's US partner, reports that law enforcement has not yet released evidence of those accomplices.

Earlier reports said authorities were reviewing video footage, but CBS reported that the footage had been determined to only show bystanders.

Who were the victims?

Police say it appears that the victims were mainly lo-

cals from New Orleans, even though many tourists were visiting for New Year celebrations and the now-postponed Sugar Bowl, part of the American football college play-offs.

Among the dead is former Princeton University football star Martin "Tiger" Bech, according to the college's athletics department.

"He was a 'Tiger' in every way - a ferocious competitor with endless energy, a beloved teammate and a caring friend," Bob Surace, head football coach, said in a statement.

Aspiring nurse Nikyra Cheyenne Dedeaux's death was confirmed by her mother, Melissa, on social media.

She told local media that the 19-year-old had snuck out with a cousin and friend, who both survived the attack.



Toxic waste has been moved from the Union Carbide plant 40 years after the disaster

10 killed on Bourbon Street in New Orleans after suspect intentionally slams truck into crowd; dozens injured

New Orleans Police Department Superintendent Anne Kirkpatrick said the man drove around barricades and hurtled down Bourbon Street in "very intentional behavior" before opening fire on officers. Mayor LaToya Cantrell referred to it as a likely "terrorist attack," and the FBI said in a news release that they are investigating it "as an act of terrorism."

The driver died after exchanging gunfire with responding police officers, the FBI said. The suspect was struck by police fire and declared dead at the scene, the New Orleans Police Department said.

"This man was trying to run over as many people as he could," said Kirkpatrick, adding that two police officers were hit by gunfire but were in a stable condition. A long gun was recovered from the scene, law enforcement sources told CBS News. The long gun had a "suppressive device" on it that acted as a silencer, according to sources on the scene. Two sour-

ces familiar with the investigation told CBS News the suspect was wearing body armor. Potential explosive devices recovered at or near the scene are also being analyzed, the sources said.

Investigators are probing whether the suspect was connected to or inspired by a foreign terror organization, law enforcement and city official sources told CBS News.

The truck appeared to be flying a large black flag from its rear bumper, according to a CBS News review of images of the vehicle. Law enforcement sources told CBS News that investigators are probing whether or not the flag is an ISIS flag or if it is tied to another foreign terror organization. It remains unclear if the suspect was acting alone or with others. A person familiar with the investigation told CBS News that at this point, neither ISIS nor any other foreign terror organization has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry called it "a horrific act of violence" and said he and his wife were "praying for all the victims and first responders on scene." He urged people to avoid the area.

The popular tourist district was full of New Year's Day revelers at the time of the apparent attack.

"He was hellbent on creating the carnage and the damage that he did," Kirkpatrick said.

Witnesses told CBS News reporter Kati Weis that a white truck crashed into people on Bourbon Street at high speed, and the driver then started firing a weapon from inside the vehicle, with police returning fire. Weis saw multiple people on the ground being treated for injuries near the intersection of Bourbon and Canal Streets.

The City of New Orleans said in a statement posted online that 30 people were transported to area hospitals with injuries and 10 people were confirmed dead. Kirkpatrick later said that at least 35 people were hospitalized.

Duncan said the FBI will be leading the investigation. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the Justice Department's National Security Division and the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Louisiana will work with the FBI and local officials to support the investigation, Attorney General Merrick Garland said. President Biden was briefed about the attack, the White House said, and his administration has been in touch with Cantrell to offer support.

Biden said in a statement he has directed his administration to "ensure every resource is available as federal, state, and local law enforcement work assiduously to get to the bottom of what happened as quickly as possible and to ensure that there is no remaining threat of any kind."

"My heart goes out to the victims and their families who were simply trying to celebrate the holiday," Biden said.

Toxic waste from Bhopal gas leak factory removed after 40 years

Authorities in India have removed hundreds of tonnes of toxic waste from a chemical factory that witnessed one of the world's deadliest gas leaks 40 years ago.

Thousands of people died in the central city of Bhopal in December 1984 after breathing a poisonous gas leaked from the factory.

On Wednesday, around 337 tonnes of toxic waste was taken from the Union Carbide plant to an incinerator facility around 230km (143 miles) away after a court last month set a four-week deadline for it to be disposed of.

Officials say it will take between three and nine months to treat and destroy the waste but activists have raised concerns about potential damage to people's health at the new location. Since the disaster, the toxic material had been lying in the mothballed factory, polluting groundwater in the surrounding areas.

The toxic waste cleared from the factory this week included five types of hazardous materials - including pesticide residue and "forever chemicals" left from its manufacturing process. These chemicals get the name because they retain their toxic properties indefinitely.

Over decades, these chemicals at the abandoned factory site had been slowly seeping into the surrounding environment, creating a persistent health hazard for people who live in nearby areas.

A 2018 study by the Indian Institute of Toxicology Research revealed that high concentrations of metals and chemicals have contaminated groundwater across 42 residential areas near the factory.

After decades of inaction, the Madhya Pradesh state High Court on 3 December set a four-week deadline for authorities to dispose of the toxic waste material from the site.

The court said that authori-

ties were "still in a state of inertia despite 40 years".

The process of moving the waste began on Sunday when officials started packing it in leak-proof bags. These bags were then loaded onto 12 sealed trucks on Wednesday.

Officials said the waste was transported under tight security.

A police escort, ambulances, fire engines and a quick response team accompanied the convoy of trucks carrying the waste, the Indian Express newspaper reported.

Swatantra Kumar Singh, the head of Bhopal gas tragedy relief and rehabilitation department, told the PTI news agency that initially, some of the waste would be burnt at the disposal unit in Pithampur and its residue examined for toxic remains.

He said that special arrangements had been made to ensure that fumes from the incinerator or the ash left after do not pollute the air and water.

But activists and people living near the disposal site have been protesting against the move.

They said that a small amount of waste from the Union Carbide factory was destroyed at the plant on a trial basis in 2015, the Hindustan Times newspaper reported.

It ended up polluting the soil, underground water as well as fresh water bodies in the nearby villages, they said.

Mr Singh has denied these claims, saying that incineration of toxic waste would not have "any adverse impact" on nearby villages.

But Rachna Dhingra, from the International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal, told BBC World Service that the transfer of waste would "create a slow-motion Bhopal" in the new location.

She adds that the transported waste is only a tiny percentage of the actual contamination that people in Bhopal are still dealing with.

Sports

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

Ogun pick Joshua to light National Sports Festival torch

Ogun State Governor, Prince Dapo Abiodun, has announced plans by his administration to construct a brand new Anthony Joshua Indoor Boxing Ring in the state.

Abiodun also announced that the two-time former world heavyweight boxing champion would be lighting the Gateway Games National Sports Festival torch, which has been postponed to May next year.

He made this known yesterday when he hosted the two-time world heavyweight boxing champion in his office.

He said: "I want to openly request that, besides the fact that today we are going to officially confirm you as our sports ambassador, we want to request that you come back to light up the Gateway Sports Festival torch; you will be the one lighting it up."

"We are going to construct a brand new Anthony Joshua Indoor Boxing Ring, and that boxing ring will be in a stadium here in Abeokuta to ensure that you come home more frequently. Besides the fact that you are now our official sports ambassador, we have decided that we will give you a brand new house in Sagamu."

The Governor urged Joshua to find ways of supporting the state in the area of sports development by working alongside the Director General of the National Sports Commission and the state Commissioner for Sports Development to host a boxing championship in the state.

He continued: "We want to



plead that you also find ways to support us back home. We believe that we should have tournaments planned leading to the sports festival, and you were expressing how you will participate and what you can do to mentor.

"We leave you to work with our Director General of the National Sports Commission and the Commissioner for Sports Development on what we can do to ensure that we have activities leading to the sports festival in your boxing arena."

"Proudly, we bid for the National Sports Festival for this year, and we won that bid. The festival was supposed to be in January; however, for some technical reasons, it's been postponed to sometime in May.

"In preparation for the sports festival, we are spending a lot of money; we are totally refurbishing, rehabilitating, and reconstructing our sporting facilities. As you know, sports is a universal language; it brings people from different parts of the world together," he said.

The Governor noted that the state is blessed with many talents spread across music, arts, and sports who are doing very well and, at the same time, placing the state on the world map.

He added that the state is extremely proud of the achievements of Anthony Joshua on the world stage, saying that his administration would support his career in every way it can.

"Your coming back home will be a source of motiva-

tion and inspiration for many young men who are aspiring sportsmen, and we have quite a lot of them in Ogun State.

"I want to congratulate you on what you have achieved in such a short span of time. You've made a short story of your life and your career.

"Whatever we can do to encourage you to continue to win more laurels for yourself, your family, for the state, and Nigeria, be assured that we will be more than happy to do that. We watch your career grow, and we are going to support your career in every way we can," he said.

Earlier in his remarks, Anthony Joshua noted that he would work towards promoting Ogun State to the rest of the world by showcasing the numerous talents in the state.

Yuletide: NSC reaches out to IDPs in Abuja

As part of the New Year celebrations, the National Sports Commission (NSC), led by Chairman Mallam Shehu Dikko, extended goodwill to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Abuja.

The outreach focused on the Durumi IDP Camp, aiming to foster inclusivity and highlight the transformative power of sports in rebuilding lives and communities.

During the visit, residents were assured of the NSC's commitment to grassroots development and increased participation in sports. Mallam Dikko, represented by his Technical Assistants, Lanre Ogunjobi and Barr. Uche George Egbe, emphasized how sports can sig-

nificantly enhance physical and mental well-being.

He stressed the importance of active engagement, stating that sports provide a platform for exercise, social interaction, and personal growth, all vital for improving quality of life in such communities.

The Chairman also emphasized that talent will not go unnoticed: "If a talent with high development potential is identified anywhere in Nigeria, including IDP camps, the National Sports Commission will put mechanisms in place to provide the necessary developmental support to nurture and grow such talent. Everyone deserves an opportunity to shine, regardless of their circumstances."

Kennedy Boboye returns to Akwa United as Head Coach

Akwa United Football Club has announced the appointment of seasoned veteran coach Kennedy Boboye as their new head coach. The deal was finalized on January 2, 2025, with Boboye officially signing the contract.

Boboye, who previously guided Akwa United to their first-ever Nigeria Professional Football League (NPFL) title in 2021, returns to the Promise Keepers at a critical time. Tasked with salvaging the team from the

depths of relegation, the former Sunshine Stars gaffer is expected to bring his wealth of experience and tactical expertise to turn the club's fortunes around.

The management of Akwa United expressed confidence in Boboye's ability to restore the team's competitive edge and lead them out of their current struggles. Fans of the club will be hoping for a swift turnaround under the guidance of the man who once brought them championship glory.



Eddie Hearn confirms Anthony Joshua's fights for 2025

Boxing promoter Eddie Hearn has revealed that Anthony Joshua plans to return to the ring in 2025 with two fights in line as he looks to recover from his shocking fifth-round knockout loss to Daniel Dubois in September.

Dubois, who retained the IBF heavyweight title with that victory at Wembley Stadium, is set to defend his belt against Joseph Parker in February 2025 in Saudi Arabia. That bout delays any immediate rematch between Anthony Joshua and Dubois, leaving questions about whether Joshua will face Dubois later in the year or finally clash with fellow British heavyweight Tyson Fury.

Fury, coming off two consecutive losses to Oleksandr Usyk in 2024, remains a target for

Joshua. Both fighters have previously lost twice to Usyk—Joshua in 2021 and 2022, and Fury in back-to-back defeats last year.

Speaking to iFL TV, Hearn outlined Joshua's tentative schedule: "His next fight will be in May or June. He's not in full training yet and will probably resume in January. AJ will fight twice in 2025, once in the summer and once in the winter."

Regarding potential opponents, Hearn said, "At the moment, Dubois fights on February 22, and we have to see what Fury wants to do. If we can't make the Dubois fight and Fury doesn't want to fight, then we'll have to decide whether to fight someone else or wait."

"I can't speak for AJ about who he's prepared to fight, but I know the focus is on Dubois or

Fury. Of course, Joshua's done it all, and if he adds Fury to his résumé, he will have fought virtually everyone of his era."

Hearn's comments reaffirm Joshua's determination to reclaim his status among the heavyweight elite in 2025.

Tennis: Raducanu withdraws from Auckland Classic with back injury

Former U.S. Open champion Emma Raducanu has withdrawn from the Auckland Classic on Tuesday due to a "back

niggle," a major setback to her preparations for the Australian Open, which begins on January 12.

The 22-year-old, ranked 56th

in the world, will now head to Melbourne to undergo rehabilitation. Raducanu, who has faced persistent injury issues since her stunning 2021 US Open victory, expressed her disappointment.

"I've tried my best to be ready. I love Auckland and the fans here," Raducanu said. "But unfortunately, I've picked up a back niggle and won't be ready in time."

Raducanu has been working with renowned fitness coach Yutaka Nakamura to improve her resilience against the physical demands of professional tennis. However, her injury troubles continued in

2023, including wrist and ankle surgeries and a two-month absence due to a foot injury.

In other news from Auckland, former Australian Open semi-finalist Elise Mertens also withdrew hours before her scheduled first-round match.

Meanwhile, top seed Madison Keys overcame challenging weather conditions to secure a straight-sets victory in her opening match. The American world number 21 defeated Lucia Bronzetti 6-4, 6-4, expressing relief at starting the season on a positive note.



Osimhen returns to Galatasaray training after christmas break



Nigerian forward Victor Osimhen has resumed training with Turkish Super Lig club Galatasaray following a brief Christmas break in Nigeria.

The club granted players a seven-day holiday, during which Osimhen returned home. Upon his return, Galatasaray celebrated his 26th birthday with a special gesture on the training pitch.

Osimhen has been in impressive form this season, scoring nine goals in 11 league appearances. The team is preparing for their upcoming league match against Göztepe, scheduled to take place at RAMS Park on Saturday.

Under the management of Okan Buruk, Galatasaray currently leads the league standings with 44 points from 16 games.

Daniel Daga set to join Norwegian side Molde

Daniel Daga is poised to leave Nigeria Premier Football League side Enyimba for a move to Norwegian club Molde FK.

The midfielder recently completed an 18-month loan spell at Enyimba from FC ONE Rocket. Reports indicated that Daga

has agreed to join Molde and is expected to be unveiled by the club in the coming days.

Daga played a pivotal role in Enyimba's qualification for the CAF Confederation Cup last season.

His move to Molde marks a significant step in his career as he transitions to European football.



NSC Chairman pledges support for tennis sensation Khadijat Mohammed

In line with the National Sports Commission's (NSC) "catch-them-young" initiative, Chairman Shehu Dikko has pledged support for 15-year-old tennis prodigy Khadijat Elejo Mohammed. Khadijat has distinguished herself in Nigerian tennis, becoming the first West or Central African player to win the ITF J30 World Tour.

At 14, she became the youngest champion of the Dala Hard Court Tennis Championship, a title she successfully defended this year.

Recognizing the financial challenges associated with advancing to the next level of professional tennis, Khadijat's father and coach, Mohammed Ohinoyi, a certified ITF coach and former professional player,

sought assistance from the NSC.

In response, Chairman Dikko expressed his commitment to ensuring Khadijat's potential is fully realized.

"I am quite impressed with what you have been able to do with your tennis career. No doubt you deserve all the encouragement and support that you can get," Dikko remarked.

He emphasized the NSC's

dedication to grassroots development and indicated plans to include Khadijat in their adopt-an-athlete program, aiming to secure corporate sponsorships to further her training and development.

Dikko also highlighted the importance of aligning with the Nigeria Tennis Federation to ensure cohesive support for Khadijat's progression. He expressed aspirations for her to compete in the Olympics, stating, "With the right training, I believe that in two or three years, with the right roadmap, you should be having a go at the Olympics and other top competitions."

Khadijat, who trains at the MKO Abiola Stadium, expressed her gratitude and ambition: "If I am supported to get up there, I will also like to lift others and help them to make it in tennis. I want to be a source of inspiration for young tennis players in Nigeria."

The NSC's commitment to nurturing young talent like Khadijat underscores its broader strategy to rejuvenate Nigerian sports through grassroots initiatives and comprehensive athlete development programs.



Lookman named in serie A team of the year

Nigerian international, Ademola Lookman has been honored with inclusion in the Serie A Team of the Year, following a stellar 2024 season with Atalanta. Compiled by Whoscored.com, the team features Lookman as the sole representative from Atalanta.

Lookman's contributions were pivotal in Atalanta's successful campaigns, leading to the finals of both the Coppa Italia and the Europa League. Despite a narrow 1-0 loss to Juventus in the Coppa Italia final, Lookman showcased resilience by scoring a hat-trick in the Europa

League final, securing a 3-0 victory against Bayer Leverkusen.

His exceptional performances earned him the 2024 CAF Player of the Year award, making him the sixth Nigerian to receive this honor. Additionally, Lookman was the only African player ranked in the 2024 Ballon d'Or standings, achieving the 14th position.

This recognition underscores Lookman's significant impact in European football and highlights his role as a key player for both Atalanta and the Nigerian national team.



LeBron James reflects on NBA longevity, plans to retire as a Laker

Los Angeles Lakers superstar LeBron James, who celebrated his 40th birthday on Monday, believes he could continue playing at a high level in the NBA for another five to seven years.

Speaking after a Lakers practice session, LeBron James reiterated his desire to finish his career with the Lakers and ruled out a post-retirement comeback, unlike Michael Jordan.

"It won't be because I can't play this game at a high level," LeBron James said when asked about retirement. "To be honest, if I really wanted to, I could probably play this game at a high level for another five to seven years. But I'm not going to do that."

Now in his record-tying 22nd NBA season, LeBron James is showing no signs of

slowing down, averaging 23.5 points, 9.0 assists, and 7.9 rebounds per game while shooting 49.6% from the field.

A four-time NBA champion, four-time MVP, and 20-time All-Star, James has set numerous records, including the NBA's all-time scoring and games played marks. This year, he added a third Olympic gold medal to his résumé and played alongside his 20-year-old son, Bronny, in the league—an unprecedented feat.

LeBron James confirmed his intention to retire as a Laker. "I think that's the plan," he said. "I would love for it to end here. That would be the plan. I came here to play the last stage of my career. My relationship with this organization speaks for itself. Hopefully, I don't have to go anywhere before my career is over."

When asked about the possibility of a comeback after retirement, James was definitive. "No, no, no, no, no," he said. "But I will miss the hell out of it for sure. But no, I won't walk away and then come back."



For his illustrious career, LeBron James has averaged 27.1 points, 7.5 rebounds, 7.4 assists, and 1.5 steals across 1,520 games, further cementing his legacy as one of the greatest to ever play the game.

NPFL announces opening date for 2024-2025 Mid-Season transfer Window

The Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL) has officially announced the opening dates for the mid-season transfer window for the 2024-2025 season.

The NPFL mid-season transfer window will commence on January 6th, 2025, and will remain open until February 5th, 2025.

This designated period is crucial for clubs as it provides them with the opportunity to bolster their squads by bringing in new players to enhance their performance for the second half of the season.

Teams will have the chance to assess their current line-ups and make strategic changes to improve their competitiveness as the 2024-2025 season progresses.

As the first half of the season comes to a close, today's match will see Enyimba go head-to-head with Bendel Insurance in Aba, a highly anticipated clash that will conclude the first stanza of the league.

Following the completion of match-day 19 fixtures, the NPFL has planned a three-week break. This pause will allow teams to regroup and prepare for the upcoming challenges of the second half of the season.

Note that Remo Stars have emerged as the leading team at the end of the first stanza, finishing atop the league table with an impressive total of 36 points accrued from 19 matches played. Rivers United finished the first stanza of the campaign in the second spot with 34 points in 19 games.

COLUMN

Diabetes: WHO projection raises concerns in Nigeria

IHECHUKWU SUNDAY

The recent alarm by the World Health Organisation, WHO, on the African leaders not to be complacent in the fight against diabetes, which it described as a silent killer in Africa, is seen as a wake up call for Nigerians, particularly those in the health sector.

The WHO's Regional Director for Africa, Dr. Matshidiso Moeti, in a message to commemorate the 2024 World Diabetes Day, said records indicated rising diabetes prevalence in Africa, complicated by multiple drivers, including urbanisation, unhealthy diets and physical inactivity, among others.

She expressed fear that the number of people living with diabetes in Africa could likely rise to 54 million in 2045, the highest projected increase globally, if urgent actions were not taken to mitigate it.

She noted that in Africa, more than 24 million adults are currently living with diabetes, half of whom remained undiagnosed.

"Against a background of the rising diabetes prevalence in Africa, complicated by multiple drivers, including urbanisation, unhealthy diets and physical inactivity, the theme appropriately emphasises the imperative of a collaborative approach to this 'silent killer.'

"Without urgent interventions, predictions are that the number of people living with diabetes in the African region will rise to 54 million by 2045, the highest projected increase globally," she said.

She stressed that the challenge is compounded by the fact that Africa has the lowest investment rate in diabetes care worldwide, at only one percent of the region's health expenditure. She added that health systems were also traditionally designed to deal with acute, infectious diseases, without sufficient attention paid to

chronic diseases like diabetes.

"Managing diabetes requires a sustained effort to balance physical health activity, healthy diet, and mental well-being. And WHO in the African Region is committed to holistic solutions, including proper nutrition, access to requisite essential medicines, and mental health support.

"Equally crucial are comprehensive prevention strategies to address risk factors, including obesity, poor diet and physical activity, combined with community engagement to ensure good support systems and reduced stigma," she added.

She urged individuals, communities, governments, health workers, policymakers and civil society organisations to join hands and act on the recommendations to strengthen the fight against diabetes.

"For individuals, please prioritise healthy lifestyle, and if you're already living with diabetes, have regular medical check-ups. Communities can also play good roles by creating supportive environments that promote healthy living, reduce stigma, and provide access to affordable diabetes care and education.

"For governments, we commit our full support to your efforts to implement policies that enhance access to essential medicines, strengthen primary health care systems, and foreground investment in diabetes prevention and care.

"Strengthening diabetes control in the African region demands that we address key gaps, including myths and misconceptions about diabetes, fragile primary health care systems and insufficient capacity and training of health care workers.

"Together, let us all commit to breaking down the barriers and addressing the gaps, by raising awareness, spreading knowledge, and creating lasting change for everyone in

Africa affected by diabetes," she said.

However, considering the global indices, the concern is how to prevent its rise in Nigeria, which according to report, has been gradually increasing.

It is estimated that the prevalence rate in Nigeria in 2024 is standing at 3.46 percent of the adult population.

The WHO attributes the increase to lifestyle changes caused by urbanization, industries producing unhealthy diets, including sugar-sweetened drinks, lack of exercise, tobacco use, and harmful use of alcohol, among others.

It was also reported that the prevalence of diabetes in Nigeria varies by region, with the highest rates in the South-South zone and the lowest in the North-Central zone.

According to the figure, South-South has 9.8 percent, South East has 4.6 percent, and South West has 5.5 percent, while the North Central, North East and North West, each has 3.8 percent, 5.9 percent and three percent, respectively.

For Type 1 diabetes mellitus, there is basically little the government can do. But, for Type 2 DM, because of the fact that the causes are mostly exogenous, the government can aggressively pursue awareness campaigns to educate people on the risk factors

Contributing to the discourse, Dr Uche Okenyi of the Hova's Place Hospital, Festac, Lagos, stressed that the first step to address the concern of the WHO is for Nigerians to understand what diabetes is all about and the common causes.

He is also of the opinion that African countries, including Nigeria, must wake and put concerted effort to aggressively tackle the menace, otherwise what the WHO predicted would come to pass.

He described diabetes as an ailment that results from a lack of endogenous insulin, which can result in far reaching metabolic derangement that can attack the kidneys, eyes, nerves, heart and brain because of its effect on blood vessels. He equally noted that it is of two types, Type 1 and Type 2.

Type 1, according to him, mostly affects adolescents but can occur at any age and results from insulin deficiency due to self destruction of the cells producing insulin in the pancreas.

"Type 2 mainly affects adults, mostly over 40 years of age, and is due to reduced insulin secretion/increased insulin resistance that are associated with obesity, calorie and excess alcohol intake and lack of exercise," he told DAILY POST.

He listed other causes of diabetes to include drugs, like steroids, and retroviral drugs, among others, as well as diseases, like hyperthyroidism and conditions like pregnancy.

In all of this, he emphasized that both the individual, corporate organisations and the government all have roles to play in ensuring that the prevalence of diabetes is drastically reduced and also in ensuring that WHO's prediction does not come to reality.

On the role of the government, he said: "For Type 1 diabetes mellitus, there is basically little the government can do. But, for Type 2 DM, because of the fact that the causes are mostly exogenous, the government can aggressively pursue

awareness campaigns to educate people on the risk factors and what to do to avoid its risks, advice on consumption patterns, exercise and lifestyle changes.

"The government should also properly fund the healthcare sector so that disease conditions that can lead to the development of diabetes could be properly managed."

He also charged the corporate organisations to take the health of their staff seriously, saying, "Corporate organisations should organise health talks for their staff regarding proper lifestyles and structure their work schedule to allow the staffers have time to exercise. They should also support the government in the funding of the health sector."

He equally stressed that individuals also need to play their roles. He said: "People should not overindulge alcohol, calories etc, and should exercise regularly. They should also seek early and proper medical care for conditions that can predispose them to diabetes mellitus."

Also, Dr Innocent Emeka, of Divine Hospital, Ojo area of Lagos State, advocated for increased education, and access to diagnostic tools and medicines, particularly insulin, as the most urgent areas of work to detect diabetes.

He explained that if the disease was left unchecked, and without management and lifestyle changes, diabetes could lead to several debilitating complications.

"Unfortunately, response efforts are constrained by the fact that more than one in every two people in Africa living with diabetes mellitus has never been diagnosed.

"We commit our full support to the requisite training of health workers in the prevention and management of non-communicable diseases at community levels, to improve the availability of these services," he told our correspondent.

Gov Okpebholo's security drive: How Edo residents enjoyed a crime-free Christmas

This Christmas, the streets of Edo State were filled with the joyful sounds of celebration rather than the echo of sirens or the unease of insecurity. Families reunited, businesses thrived, and communities came together to celebrate the season without fear—a clear indicator of the transformative impact of Governor Monday Okpebholo's bold security agenda.

For years, the people of Edo State endured the shadow of violent crimes, including kidnappings and armed robbery. But under Governor Okpebholo's leadership, the narrative has changed. The governor's commitment to security, outlined as a core pillar of his five-point agenda during his inaugural speech on November 12, 2024, is now bearing fruit.

FROM PROMISES TO ACTION

Governor Okpebholo's resolve to combat insecurity was not mere rhetoric. It was a pledge rooted in understanding the struggles of the people and the need for sustainable peace. In his inaugural speech, he emphasized, "The people of Edo State have become victims of kidnapping and other violent crimes. My administration will be firm in dealing with these issues to ensure peace, harmony, and progress for all."

This promise has been matched with concrete actions. His administration's 2025 budget prominently prioritizes security, reflecting a clear commitment to fostering a safe and stable environment. Key among these measures is the recent purchase of 20 patrol vehicles, distributed to security agencies to enhance their operational capacity.

"We plan to purchase even more

vehicles in the coming year," Governor Okpebholo stated. "Additionally, the ban on the activities of the Edo State Vigilante has been lifted to further bolster our security network."

COLLABORATION AND COMMUNITY EFFORT

The governor's security reforms are anchored in collaboration with security agencies, local stakeholders, and community leaders. The reintegration of the vigilante group has strengthened grassroots vigilance, providing a crucial layer of security in rural and urban areas.

This collaborative approach has been widely lauded by residents. Mr. Kelly Osas, a business owner in Benin City, expressed his gratitude: "This is the most peaceful Christmas we've had in years. Governor Okpebholo

has kept his word, and we are finally seeing the results of his efforts."

Similarly, Mabel Okungbowa, a teacher, noted the palpable sense of relief across the state. "Parents feel safer letting their children go out, and we no longer live in constant fear. This is a remarkable change," she said.

A PEACEFUL FOUNDATION FOR PROGRESS

The significance of a peaceful yuletide goes beyond the festivities. It signals a renewed sense of hope and confidence in Edo State's future. The improved security climate is expected to attract more investors, boost economic activities, and foster social harmony.

Residents are calling on all stakeholders to support the government's initiatives. Chukwuemeka Eze, a community leader, emphasized, "Security

is a shared responsibility. We must all work together to maintain this progress and build a better Edo State."

LOOKING AHEAD

As 2025 begins, the groundwork laid by Governor Okpebholo's administration positions Edo State for a year of growth and stability. His unwavering commitment to security has not only delivered a crime-free Christmas but has also restored the confidence of the people in their government's ability to protect them.

The festive season may have ended, but the legacy of a peaceful Christmas in Edo will endure as a symbol of what is possible when leadership is matched with action. Governor Okpebholo has set a precedent, proving that a safe and secure Edo State is not just a dream but an achievable reality.