

Gov Okpebholo calls for synergy among the three arms of govt

RICHARD EWEKA

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, has expressed the need for close collaboration among the three arms of government—Executive, Legislature, and Judiciary—to drive rapid development and progress in the State under his administration.

Governor Okpebholo made this call during a courtesy visit to the Government House by Judges of the Edo State Judiciary, led by the Chief Judge, Justice Daniel Okungbowa.

Speaking during the visit, the Governor expressed his satisfaction with the harmonious relationship between the Executive and Legislature, particularly their cooperation in the passage of the Appropriation Bill, and urged the Judiciary to enhance its partnership with his administration to ensure justice delivery and development in the State.

"Today, I am delighted to welcome the Chief Judge and members of the Judiciary. Edo State is facing numerous challenges, and the Executive arm cannot tackle them alone. We need synergy among the three arms of government to achieve the growth and development we envision."

"The Legislature has been very supportive, especially with their timely approval of the budget, supplementary budget, and other key requests. Now, we look to the Judiciary to strengthen our collaboration, ensuring justice delivery that will propel our State forward," the Governor said.

Governor Okpebholo highlighted the importance of inclusiveness in governance and reiterated his administration's commitment to improving critical sectors, including the

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Pre-2025 hajj: Edo delegates visit Saudi Arabia

ABDUL-KADIR ABDULLAH

The Chairman of the Edo State Muslim Pilgrims Welfare Board, Mallam Musah Muhammad Uduimoh, and the Executive Secretary, Alhaji Eranga Muhammadkibir Abdulkabir, have traveled to Saudi Arabia as part of preparations for the 2025 Hajj pilgrimage.

The officials, currently in Saudi Arabia with the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON) team, aim to finalize key arrangements to ensure a smooth and successful pilgrimage for Edo State pilgrims.

Their mission includes negotiating and securing suitable accommodations in Makkah and

Madinah for the state's pilgrims. In a WhatsApp voice note, Mallam Musah Muhammad Uduimoh highlighted the importance of logistics coordination during the visit.

He stated, "Arranging transportation, catering, and other essential logistical services to ensure the comfort and safety of our pilgrims throughout their

journey is a priority for us." He also emphasized collaboration with Saudi authorities to establish effective communication with stakeholders and address potential challenges, ensuring a seamless pilgrimage experience for Edo State pilgrims.

The Executive Secretary, Alhaji Eranga Muhammadkibir Abdulkabir, described the pre-Hajj mission as a vital step in delivering a well-organized and spiritually fulfilling Hajj experience.

He reaffirmed their commitment to working closely with NAHCON and Saudi authorities to address concerns and ensure all necessary arrangements are in place for the 2025 pilgrimage.

Oba Ewuare II ends 2024 Igue festival with thanksgiving

OLUWATUNMISE OMOSEYIN, CHIDINMA KALU, AND ERHUURVU ETARHIENYO

BENIN CITY

The 2024 annual Igue festival ended on a high note as His Royal Majesty, Omo N'Oba N'Edo Uku Akpolokpolo, Ewuare II, led a thanksgiving service at the Holy Aruosa Cathedral in Benin City.

The service featured special prayers to Almighty God and the ancestors for the success of the Igue festival.

Prominent Nigerians, including the Vice Chancellor of the University of Benin (UNIBEN), Prof. Edoba Omoregie (SAN); the State Attorney-General and Commissioner for Justice, Dr. Samson Osagie; a former Deputy Governor of Edo State, Lucky Imasuen; and His Royal Highness King Akile Omide X, the Pere of Biseni Kingdom in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, attended the service.

Also in attendance were members of the Benin royal family, priests, priestesses,

market women, youth groups, and other palace functionaries.

The Ohen-Osa (Minister) of Holy Aruosa Cathedral, Igbinohoduwa Edebiri, in his sermon urged worshippers to remain steadfast in prayer and resilient in their faith, reminding them that while God's plans may sometimes seem delayed, they will always come to fruition.

He emphasized that consistent prayers to Almighty God and reverence for the ancestors ensure protection from evil and guidance toward one's divine purpose.

The service featured melodious hymns from the choir, drawing enthusiastic applause from the congregation.

In a symbolic act of gratitude, Oba Ewuare II approached the altar to offer thanks to Almighty God and the ancestors for the successful conclusion of the weeks-long festival.

The monarch's heartfelt dance of thanksgiving marked the culmination of the Igue festival, a celebration deeply rooted in Benin's cultural and spiritual heritage.



2024 IGUE FESTIVAL:

His Royal Majesty, Omo N'Oba N'Edo Uku Akpolokpolo, Oba Ewuare II CFR, and his queens, during a special thanksgiving service held at Holy Aruosa Cathedral, Benin City to climax the 2024 Igue festival.

Tantita reaffirms commitment to boosting oil production, lauds NNPC Group CEO's leadership —Pg 2

Trump threats cast ominous shadow over icy fjords of Greenland —Pg 6

Ukraine says it captured two injured N/Korean soldiers in Russia —Pg 7

NFF to unveil Chelle as new Super Eagles coach —Pg 8

Tantita reaffirms commitment to boosting oil production, lauds NNPC Group CEO's leadership

Chief Government Ekemupolo (Tompolo), Chairman of Tantita Security Services Nigeria Limited (TSSNL), has reiterated the organisation's unwavering dedication to increasing Nigeria's crude oil production.

This declaration came as Tompolo honoured Mallam Mele Kyari, the Group Chief Executive Officer of the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPCL), on his 60th birthday.

In a statement released by Dr Paul Bebenimbo, Tompolo's Special Adviser on Media and Communication, the TSSNL chairman commended Kyari's transformative leadership in the oil and gas industry.

He highlighted Kyari's impactful reforms, which have revitalised NNPC and bolstered public and investor confidence.

"Kyari has driven remarkable changes in NNPC, earning respect even from sceptics. His leadership aligns with President Bola Ahmed Tinu-

bu's 'Renewed Hope Agenda,' fostering sustainable economic growth and development," the statement said.

Tompolo pointed to the successful revival of the Warri and Port Harcourt refineries as key achievements under Kyari's tenure.

These facilities, now operational with a combined refining capacity of 117,000 barrels per day, mark a significant step towards reducing Nigeria's reliance on imported petroleum products.

Tantita Security, in collaboration with NNPC, has been instrumental in tackling crude oil theft and safeguarding critical energy infrastructure.

Tompolo noted that these joint efforts, alongside Kyari's strategic leadership, have significantly boosted Nigeria's oil production levels. Production has risen from 600,000 barrels per day to 1.8 million barrels per day, with projections nearing 2 million barrels.

"Our partnership with NN-

PCL has played a vital role in curbing oil theft and stabilising production levels.

Tantita Security remains committed to protecting Nigeria's oil assets to support sustained growth in production,"

Tompolo emphasised.

Tompolo also praised Kyari's efforts to transform NNPC into a profit-oriented corporation, a move he described as essential for ensuring long-term stability in the oil and gas sector.

In his congratulatory message, Tompolo expressed gratitude for Kyari's contributions and reaffirmed Tantita Security's commitment to building on the progress achieved.

"On behalf of Tantita Security

Services, I extend our heartfelt congratulations to Mallam Mele Kyari on his 60th birthday. May Allah bless him with continued strength, wisdom, and good health to lead Nigeria's economic transformation," he said.



2025 HAJJ:

Chairman, Edo State Muslim Pilgrims Welfare Board, Mallam Musah Muhammad Uduimoh, in Saudi Arabia in preparation for the 2025 Hajj.

Gunmen attack immigration facilities, kill 4

Suspected terrorists have attacked the Kebbi State's facilities of the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS), killing four persons.

The attack occurred around 1920 hours on January 10, leading to the death of a local watchman and three contractors.

NIS Public Relations Officer, Kenneth Udo, disclosed this in a statement on Sunday, adding that the incident took place at Kangiwa border in Kangiwa Local Government Area of the state.

Udo, a Deputy Comptroller of Immigration, however, said no officer of the NIS was killed during the attack.

"While substantial damage was recorded to security facilities, no immigration officers were killed during the inci-

dent," Udo said.

"The attack led to the death of four persons, including a local Watchman and three contractors."

Udo commiserated with the families of the victims and assured the public that efforts were underway, in collaboration with sister agencies, to track down and bring the perpetrators to justice.

He noted that despite the tragic incident, the NIS is resolute in its core mandate of securing the nation's borders and enhancing national security.

"We send our heartfelt condolences to the families of the deceased. We are actively working alongside our sister agencies to identify and apprehend those responsible for these heinous acts and bring them to justice."

Gov Okpebholo calls for synergy among the three...

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Judiciary.

"In my inaugural speech, I promised to work closely with all arms of government, particularly the Judiciary. I was concerned when I didn't see much interaction initially, but I am happy with this visit today. It marks the beginning of a stronger partnership.

"My administration is committed to developing Edo State. We are focused on enhancing the educational system, strengthening governance, and ensuring that the Judiciary thrives in its responsibilities. Inclusiveness and collaboration will be key to our success," he added.

The Chief Judge of Edo State, Justice Daniel Okungbowa, assured the Governor of the Judiciary's commitment to delivering justice and supporting the development agenda of the State.

"We are here to reaffirm our dedication to justice and to strengthen our relationship with the Executive arm. The Judiciary is ready to work with both the Executive and Legislature to ensure Edo State continues to grow and its people enjoy good governance," Justice Okungbowa stated.

The meeting ended on a positive note, with both parties pledging to enhance collaboration for the benefit of the people of Edo State.

Edo Muslims hold unity prayers, reaffirm support for state govt

ABDUL-KADIR ABDULLAH

Muslim leaders and organizations from across Edo State gathered in Benin City on Saturday, January 11, 2025, for a special prayer session aimed at fostering unity, strengthening representation in governance, and supporting the current Edo State administration.

The event, hosted by the Executive Director of the Edo State Flood, Erosion, and Watershed Management Agency (EDOFEWMA), Honourable Ahmed Musa, brought together influential figures from the Muslim community to reflect on recent achievements and chart a

path for greater collaboration.

Hon. Musa, in his address, emphasized the role of collective prayer and unity in sustaining progress.

He highlighted the increased representation of Muslims in key government positions, such as the Secretary to the State Government (SSG) and Chief of Staff, as evidence of the administration's inclusivity.

"For the first time in Edo's history, Muslims hold these significant positions. We must thank Allah for this milestone and pray to retain them. It is a testament to our collective efforts, and we must remain united to achieve even more," Hon. Musa stated.

He called on participants to

exercise patience and remain steadfast in their support for the government, assuring them that continued engagement and collaboration would yield further benefits for the community.

The gathering also served as an opportunity to reflect on the pivotal role played by Muslim groups in the September 2024 governorship elections.

Discussions centered on the importance of sustained unity and political participation in ensuring the continued success of the state's leadership.

Among the prominent attendees were Hon. Abass Braimah, APC chieftain; Sheikh Sirajudeen Muhammad, General Coordinator

of the Edo Muslims for Equity and Good Governance (EMEGG); Alhaji Abdulaziz Igbidun, Chairman of the Edo State Council for Islamic Affairs (EDSCIA); representatives from the Council of Imaams and Ulama across the state; FOMWAN; and Muslim Women in Politics.

Prayers were offered for the leadership of the state, including Secretary to the State Government Umar Musa Ikhilor, Chief of Staff Hon. Ganiyu Audu, and other Muslim leaders in government.

The session concluded with a unanimous commitment to promoting unity, equity, and progress within Edo State.

Edo residents laud Okpebholo's reforms for safest yuletide in decade

Residents across Edo State have lauded Governor Monday Okpebholo for his sweeping security reforms, declaring the 2024 Yuletide season the most peaceful in nearly a decade.

The praises followed an assessment of the Governor's first 60 days in office, during which he prioritized tackling cultism, thuggery, and infrastructure challenges.

Residents credited the Governor's decisive actions with ending inter-cult wars that had claimed over 100 lives between September and early November 2024.

A Benin City resident stat-

ed, "Governor Okpebholo has shown strong leadership in addressing the security crisis. His actions have restored peace to previously troubled areas."

Another resident added, "For the first time in years, we can move freely without fear. The Governor's proactive measures have made a remarkable difference."

This year's festive season saw a significant decline in crime, including kidnapping and road accidents. Improved road conditions, thanks to the Governor's swift rehabilitation efforts, were also instrumental in ensuring safer travel.

An official of the Federal

Road Safety Corps (FRSC) commented, "There were fewer accidents during this Yuletide, thanks to the repaired roads, which made journeys safer."

Edo State, previously plagued by kidnappings and cult-related violence, witnessed a transformation under Governor Okpebholo's leadership. The notorious Benin-Ekpoma Road, once a hotspot for criminal activities, has become safer due to increased security presence and road repairs.

A trader along the corridor shared, "Traveling here was once a nightmare. Now, the improved roads and security have

made a big difference."

Governor Okpebholo convened a high-level meeting with security agencies on November 19, 2024, shortly after his inauguration. The meeting led to intensified efforts against cultism, kidnapping, and other crimes.

The Governor also banned market unions and thugs posing as revenue collectors, fostering a peaceful environment for traders.

A market woman in Benin City expressed her relief, saying, "We now do business without harassment or fights from ticket collectors. The atmosphere feels like a fresh start."

NEWS

Umu-Omahe youths Okpanam get new executive

AJUWA VICTOR

Youths of Umu-Omahe family in Obodogba Quarters, Okpanam, Oshimili North Local Govern-

ment Area of Delta State have elected new executive members to pilot the affairs of the family for the next four years.

The election which saw the emergence of Comrade

Okechukwu Kenneth Ojimba as chairman, was conducted by the Chairman of Obodogba Youths, Chukwuma Abumujor who also hails from Umu-Omahe Community.

Other elected members of the executive of Umu-Omahe youths include, Ekene Olele (vice chairman), Chukwuka Nwanna (secretary); Emeka Okonta (treasurer);

Ogochukwu Biose (assistant sec.); Kenneth Okelue (PRO); Chiedu Okoaze (financial sec.) Onuwa Ajidua (welfare officer) and Uche Onuora (provost).

In an interview with journalists, the newly elected chairman of the youth group, Comrade Okechukwu Kenneth Ojimba assured his people of his readiness to foster peaceful coexistence and unlock meaningful development in the area.

He thanked Umu-Omahe youths for finding him worthy to lead them and promised to carry them along in the scheme of things by operating an open door policy at all times.

Comrade Ojimba, who stressed the need for the people to love one another and live in peace, noted that no develop-

ment could thrive in an atmosphere of rancour.

Earlier, the Chairman of Obodogba youths, Comrade Chukwuma Abumujor explained that apart from the chairmanship and Secretary's positions, aspirants for other positions were returned unopposed.

He said that the election was transparent, free and fair, noting that both the winners and their opponents were all happy after the results were declared, a development, he said was a testament of the transparency in the election process.

The Obodogba youth chairman restated his commitment to bring unity and love to Obodogba community and called for collective efforts.



A CEREMONY:

R-L: Edo State Deputy Governor, Hon. Dennis Idahosa; leader of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in Edo State, Senator Matthew Urhoghide, and former deputy governor, Mr Lucky Imasuen, at a ceremony in Benin City.

Budget mgt: Minister gives alcholade to NASS c'ttee

JOY ODOR

The Minister of Environment, Alhaji Abubakar Lawal has lauded members of the House Committee on Environment for their dexterity in its handling of the ministry's budget defense.

The Minister who gave the commendation in an interview with newsmen shortly after defending the Ministry's budget before the committee chaired by Hon. Julius Pondi for two hours, expressed satisfaction with the process.

The Minister was of the opinion that, ordinarily, budget defense should not be done in one day, but called for increased budgetary allocation to the Ministry to effectively achieve its mandate.

He disclosed that in 2024, the Ministry installed about 2,200 units of solar street lights in communities and 45 solar powered boreholes to provide clean water for the people.

Meanwhile, the Chairman, House of Representatives

Committee on Environment, Julius Pondi has informed that outcomes of the budget review will set the tone for planning and resource allocation in the 2025 Budget.

He frowned at what he described as an abysmally low release of funds to the Ministry of Environment which, he added has led to several missed opportunities to address environmental challenges facing the country.

The Chairman listed such environmental challenges as deforestation, pollution, erosion, and the effects of climate change on the various communities across the nation.

He also expressed concern that effective January 1, 2024, the Environmental Health Council of Nigeria and thirteen (13) professional bodies/councils were removed from budgetary allocations, adding that the same thirteen (13) Bodies had since been re-instated, leaving only the EHCON.

He asked the Minister of Environment to work closely with

the Committee to ensure that EHCON is re-instated.

Pondi said the budget defence session serves as a cornerstone in the collective efforts to ensure transparency, and effective implementation of environmental programs vital to the nation's health, well-being, and sustainability.

"As a Committee, we are disposed to increased budgetary allocations to this sector, in as much as we see key projects that are envisioned that will strengthen climate resilience, combat pollution, enhance community awareness, and ensure accountability in the Year 2025 Budget Proposal of the Ministry and its Agencies.

"Without prejudice, please be reminded, that Section 80(4) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as Amended), provides that "No moneys shall be withdrawn from the Consolidated Revenue Fund or any other public fund of the Federation, except in a manner prescribed by the National Assembly" he said.

"You may recall that the House of Representatives, on various occasions at plenary, deliberated Motions ranging from Erosion, Desertification, and Flood Disasters in many parts of the Country, necessitating Government intervention through the Ministry of Environment and other Agencies.

"These unfortunate occurrences have deprived thousands, especially in the country's agrarian regions of their livelihood and ability to contribute their quota to national development.

"As the People's Parliamentarian, we have not rested on our oars, neither should any of you. Our primary focus is to evaluate how the financial resources allocated have been utilized to achieve set objectives.

"This session will enable us identify progress made in implementing projects and programs across key environmental sectors, address challenges that may have hindered the achievement of set goals and provide actionable input in the year 2025 Budget," he stresses.

NASS criticizes border closure, decries banditry and smuggling

JOY ODOR

The National Assembly has declared that Nigeria is "fooling itself" over the continued closure of its borders, as cross-border banditry, smuggling, and insecurity remain prevalent in states sharing boundaries with Niger Republic and Chad.

This position was made known on Friday during the 2025 budget defence session held by the joint committee on Industry, Trade, and Investment.

While leading the discus-

sion, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Industry, Senator Francis Adenigba Fadaunsi (PDP, Osun East), decried the in efficacy of Nigeria's border closure policy.

He argued that the borders are "practically open" despite the official closure, worsening insecurity and economic downturn.

"The exit of Niger Republic and Chad from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has further compounded the insecurity along our borders. Rather than curb smuggling, the bor-

der closure is encouraging it," Fadaunsi stated.

Citing the case of rice production, he noted that Nigeria is experiencing a shortfall of 4 million tonnes, with smugglers exploiting the porous borders to bring in rice illegally.

"Local producers are only able to produce 3 million tonnes out of the country's 7 million tonnes consumption rate. The shortfall is being smuggled into the country. So, what exactly are we achieving with this border closure?" he queried.

In her contribution, Hon. Fa-

tima Talba, representing Nangero/Potiskum Federal Constituency of Yobe State, described the border closure as ineffective.

"As far as my constituents and I are concerned, the borders are open. Criminals and illegal goods are moving freely across the borders. It's time for Nigeria to stop fooling itself with this so-called border closure," Talba said.

Similarly, Hon. Paul Kalejaiye, representing Ajeromi/Ifelodun Federal Constituency of Lagos State, questioned the implementation of the border policy.

Guwor restates commitment to conducive work environment for lawmakers

AJUWA VICTOR

The Speaker, Delta State House of Assembly, Rt Hon Emomotimi Dennis Guwor, has restated his resolve to providing conducive work environment for lawmakers and staff of the State Legislature.

Rt Hon Guwor stated this at the weekend while inspecting ongoing rehabilitation work in the administrative building of the State Assembly Complex, Okpanam Road, Asaba.

A statement issued by his Chief Press Secretary, Nkem Nwaeke indicated that, the Speaker explained that the rehabilitation work wasn't just about physical infrastructure, but creating a comfortable working atmosphere that fosters productivity, collaboration, and effective governance.

"As we continue to work towards the development of our dear Delta State, we must ensure that our infrastructure supports our goals. This rehabilitation work is a step in the right direction, and I look forward to seeing its positive impact on our workers," Guwor stated.

The Speaker commended the staff for their patience and urged them to remain focused and continue to work towards improved productivity.

At the various offices in the facility, the staff lauded the Speaker for attending to their concerns over the non-functioning central cooling system in the building.

They expressed gratitude for the Speaker's leadership and efforts in addressing critical infrastructure needs in the Assembly Complex.

Gov Oborevwoori decorates newly promoted Police officers

AJUWA VICTOR

The Delta State Governor, Hon. Sheriff Oborevwoori, has celebrated the promotion of key police officers serving in Government House, Asaba.

He personally decorated his Chief Security Officer (CSO), Chief Superintendent of Police (CSP) Omoarebun Iluobe, and Aide-De-Camp (ADC), Superintendent of Police (SP) Oreoluwa Ogunwumiju, and five other officers recently elevated by the Police authorities.

The decorated officers included SP Kenneth Iyeter, DSP Bako Ibrahim, DSP Umoh Ubong, DSP Anthony Okonji, and DSP Kalu Ibeh.

In his remarks, the state Commissioner of Police, Abaniwonda Olufemi commended President Bola Tinubu and Inspector-General of Police Sunday Egbetokun

for approving the promotions, describing them as a reward for dedication and hard work.

He lauded the collaboration between security agencies and communities in the state for the peaceful Christmas and New Year celebrations in the state and expressed hope for continued partnership to address remaining security challenges.

The Governor was praised for his unwavering support to security agencies, with CP Abaniwonda affirming that the police remain committed to sustaining security under the Governor's MORE Agenda.

Speaking on behalf of the newly promoted officers, CSP Iluobe thanked God for the promotions and pledged to rededicate their efforts to serve the state and the nation.

"Our promotions inspire us to work harder. We are committed to justifying the trust placed in us," he said.

Feature

Okpebholo's silent revolution: Redefining leadership in Edo State

FRED ITUA

On this serene Sunday afternoon, my mind is drawn to Apostle Paul's profound words in 1 Corinthians 1:27-29:

"But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence."

Hallelujah!

This resonates deeply with my reflections on Governor Monday Okpebholo's transformative leadership over the past two months.

When Senator Monday Okpebholo entered the political arena, many dismissed him. He wasn't the loudest voice in the room or the most flamboyant. In a political climate where noise often trumps substance, Okpebholo's calm and measured demeanor was mistaken for weakness. Yet, as Apostle Paul reminds us, God uses the "foolish" to confound the wise. Governor Okpebholo has silenced his critics, not with words but with actions that speak volumes.

To appreciate the transformation in Edo State, one must recall its recent past. For eight years, governance was more spectacle than substance. The previous administration under Governor Godwin Obaseki prioritized optics over outcomes. Projects were announced with fanfare, but their execution remained elusive. Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) were signed and celebrated, only to be forgotten. Roads critical to economic and social well-being were abandoned, with billboards declaring, "Please bear with us; this is a federal road," as if to absolve the state of responsibility.

Governor Okpebholo has flipped the script. Eschewing grand declarations and ceremonial ribbon-cutting, he rolled up his sleeves and began de-



OKPEBHOLO

living results.

In just two months, Governor Okpebholo has shown that governance is about tangible outcomes, not empty rhetoric. The long-neglected Benin-Auchi Road by Obadan Junction has received attention. The Benin-Abuja Road in Ekpoma, a traveler's nightmare, is under repair. Upper Ekenwan Road, a perennial campaign promise, is nearing completion. The Aduwawa-Upper Mission Junction project, once a distant dream, is now a reality. Roads like Temboga-Uteh, previously symbols of neglect, now reflect progress.

As one resident put it: "In just two months, this man has done more than others did in eight years. He doesn't make noise; he makes things happen."

Beyond roads, Governor Okpebholo is addressing the neglected healthcare sector. The construction of a modern

health center in Udomi, Irua, is a testament to his commitment. The 2025 budget allocates N63.9 billion to healthcare, alongside N1.8 billion for a health insurance scheme to ensure no Edo citizen is left behind.

One of the governor's most commendable initiatives is his decisive intervention in sanitizing Edo's markets. By banning market unions accused of exploitative practices, the administration has brought relief to traders and consumers. Arbitrary levies and monopolistic control that drove up food prices are being dismantled.

As Governor Okpebholo remarked: "Markets should be places of commerce and community, not oppression. We cannot allow a few individuals to profit at the expense of the majority."

Since the ban, market prices have stabilized, and traders have expressed

Edo is rising-not on the wings of empty promises, but through the quiet, determined efforts of a governor who understands that actions speak louder than words. Governor Okpebholo is the farmer who sows in silence and reaps in abundance-a leader who delivers hope

gratitude for the intervention.

Insecurity, particularly the alarming rise in cult-related killings, has plagued Edo State. Governor Okpebholo has addressed this challenge head-on through a consultative and inclusive approach. His engagement with law enforcement agencies and local communities has fostered collaboration, leading to a significant reduction in tensions.

As one community leader observed: "For the first time, we feel heard. The governor is not just issuing orders; he's listening and acting."

Governor Okpebholo has also tackled the contentious issue of land grabbing. Under the previous administration, many communities saw their lands forcefully taken, leaving residents voiceless. Okpebholo has vowed to restore lands to rightful owners with proof of ownership, of-

fering hope to countless Edo citizens.

"The government is here to serve the people, not to oppress them," the governor stated. "We will right the wrongs of the past and ensure justice prevails."

The governor's 2025 budget, titled the "Budget of Renewed Hope for a Rising Edo," is a bold roadmap for sustainable development. With 63% of the N604 billion budget allocated to capital expenditure, the administration's priorities are clear:

Road Development: N162 billion

Education: N48 billion

Health: N63.9 billion

Agriculture: N75 billion

This is more than a budget; it is a declaration of intent, anchored on Okpebholo's five-point agenda: security, infrastructure, healthcare, food sufficiency, and education, with a renewed focus on agriculture.

Governor Okpebholo approaches governance like a diligent farmer—tilling the soil, planting carefully, and nurturing growth. The results are already evident, promising a bountiful harvest.

In local government administration, he has introduced discipline and transparency, setting a new standard for accountability and service delivery.

Governor Monday Okpebholo is redefining leadership in Edo. He is proving that true leadership is measured by results, not rhetoric. As Apostle Paul wrote, God uses the weak and despised to achieve great things. In Edo State, this truth is unfolding before our eyes.

Edo is rising-not on the wings of empty promises, but through the quiet, determined efforts of a governor who understands that actions speak louder than words. Governor Okpebholo is the farmer who sows in silence and reaps in abundance-a leader who delivers hope, one project at a time.

Fred Itua is the Chief Press Secretary to the Edo State Governor.

COMMENTARY

Okpebholo, rule of law, and the cleanup of Edo governance

Governor Monday Okpebholo's recent suspension of the 18 Local Government Chairmen in Edo State has sparked a political conversation that transcends the action itself.

It raises questions about governance, accountability, and the importance of adhering to the rule of law.

The move to suspend the chairmen wasn't arbitrary; it was a calculated step rooted in law and guided by a vision for transparent governance. The decision to route the action

through the Edo State House of Assembly highlights a commitment to democratic processes — one often overlooked in Nigerian politics. Instead of resorting to executive fiat, Okpebholo opted for a constitutional approach, showcasing his respect for institutional frameworks.

The directive for the chairmen to submit audited financial reports was the first litmus test of accountability. Their collective failure to comply not only underscored allegations of mismanagement but also confirmed

suspensions of deeper financial irregularities.

The revelation of N8 billion allegedly siphoned to support the political pursuits of the previous administration casts a dark shadow over their tenure. For a state striving for progress, such misuse of public funds is indefensible.

Critics who see this as a political vendetta fail to acknowledge the broader implications. This action signals a new era for Edo State — one that prioritizes accountability and

rejects sabotage cloaked in political allegiances.

While it is natural for those aligned with the former administration to cry foul, the facts speak for themselves. Governance under Okpebholo is shifting towards transparency, and this suspension is only the beginning of a much-needed cleanup.

The suspension of these chairmen is more than a political maneuver; it is a message. No longer will public officials in Edo State operate with impunity.

No longer will political loyalty serve as a shield against accountability. Under Okpebholo, the rule of law is the guiding principle, and governance is taking a turn towards restoring the trust of the people.

Edo State deserves leaders who prioritize the people over political affiliations. Governor Okpebholo's actions, though controversial to some, are setting a foundation for a brighter and more accountable future. The message is clear: the era of mismanagement and political sabotage is over.

ENCOUNTER

Farewell, General Godwin Abbe

JUSTIN UWADIA

It was a day in 2014, around 8 pm, when my phone rang. I answered, and the caller asked, "Am I speaking with Mr. Justin Uwadia?"

"Yes, Sir," I replied. The caller introduced himself as Godwin Abbe. I paused, repeating the name to myself—Godwin Abbe, Godwin Abbe? It was as if I were asking myself who this person could be. The caller responded, "You mean you don't know Godwin Abbe?"

"No, Sir," I replied. "I only know of General Godwin Abbe, retired, former Military Governor of Akwa Ibom and Rivers States."

The voice on the other end said, "General or not, there is only one Godwin Abbe in Edo State." At that moment, I realized who it was.

"Your Excellency, good evening, Sir," I said. "How did you get my number, and what can I do for you?"

General Godwin Abbe explained that my colleague at *Edo Broadcasting Service (EBS)*, Mr. Charles Ogboghodo from the Presentation Department, had given him my number.

He then narrated how, earlier that evening at around 5:30 pm, he had listened to the *EBS Radio News* and

heard a commentary I had written. (I can't recall the exact topic of the commentary, but it was related to civil-military relations). He commended the piece and requested that I meet him the next day at his office or school, along with the script.

That night, I was ecstatic. Who wouldn't be? A call from a former Military Governor of two states, a former Minister of Defence, and Minister of Internal Affairs was enough to excite any "common" civil servant.

The next day, at the appointed time, I met General Godwin Abbe and handed him the script. He continued praising the work, as he had the previous night.

He wanted to know more about me—my family, education, and career. I told him. Then he read through the script.

He pointed out a part of my commentary where I had criticized the political class of the time for their poor governance, concluding that they were working toward the balkanization of Nigeria. General Abbe disagreed with me. He argued that Nigeria's elites, having acquired so much wealth and property across the country, had a vested interest in keeping Nigeria as one indivisible entity.



GEN. GODWIN ABBE

As I prepared to leave, General Abbe generously handed me some naira notes (back when the naira held great value) and instructed me to keep in touch. I did.

About two months later, a friend, Mrs. Ifueko Eguasa, asked if I could help her children gain admission into General Abbe's school. I approached

him on her behalf, but I was surprised when he declined. Admissions for the session had closed, and he refused to overcrowd his classes, even though it meant turning away money.

Another two months passed, and General Abbe invited me to accompany him to Akwa Ibom State. He explained that one of his former commissioners, Professor Charles Etim Akpan Uko, was delivering the University of Uyo's 41st Inaugural Lecture on September 25, 2014, and he wanted me to attend with him. Without hesitation, I agreed.

On September 24, General Abbe, his youngest son, and I flew from Benin Airport to Lagos. He booked a hotel room for me while he and his son stayed at his residence. That evening, he gave me a generous amount of money (back when the naira was naira) to "enjoy myself."

The next morning, we flew to Uyo, where a state government delegation received us. Riding in a motorcade with sirens blaring, we toured various sites, including the Akwa Ibom International Stadium, "The Nest of Champions." Later, at the University of Uyo, we attended the lecture titled "Bridges Over Troubled Waters."

I was amazed by the large turnout

of Akwa Ibom dignitaries who came to honor General Abbe, a testament to the positive impact he had made as Governor between 1988 and 1990.

After the lecture, we stayed at the prestigious Le Méridien Hotel, where, once again, General Abbe blessed my pocket with naira notes. The next day, we returned to Benin City via Lagos. Before parting ways, his generosity shone once more as he handed me another sum of money.

Since that trip, I visited General Abbe twice—once with my former colleague, Mr. Jacob Afeikhena, for a news interview, and another time during Christmas. We also stayed in touch over the phone. While I hosted "Issues & Answers" on EBS TV, I tried several times to invite him to the program, but he politely declined.

Recently, I noticed he wasn't answering my calls, which was unusual for him. I assumed he was out of the country and had left his phone behind. Little did I know he was unwell.

The news of his death deeply saddens me and my family. I saw him as a good man, and as Goodnews Echie said, "Good men must die, but death cannot kill their names."

General Godwin Osagie Abbe was 75. May his soul rest in perfect peace.

OPINION

The turning point: Okpebholo's first two months in Govt House

HENRY JATTO

A river that forgets its source will surely dry up. January 12, 2025, marks two months since His Excellency, Senator Monday Okpebholo, assumed office as the Governor of Edo State. In this short span, Governor Okpebholo has demonstrated his commitment to restoring peace and harmony in the state, healing the divisive wounds inflicted by his predecessor, Godwin Obaseki.

I had the opportunity to interact with the Chief Press Secretary to the Governor, who shared insights into the Governor's achievements in the past two months. According to him, Governor Okpebholo's leadership style has been described as dynamic and practical, earning him accolades for reasserting leadership in the state.

The Governor's actions have left a lasting impression on the people of Edo. He has restored respect for traditional institutions, dismantled

exploitative market union syndicates, tackled cult-related violence, and focused on infrastructure development. These efforts have contributed to a renewed sense of confidence among the people, many of whom are returning home to celebrate the festive season with their families.

Members of both the PDP and APC have praised the Governor's progress, acknowledging that he has brought a sense of stability and security to the state.

Even partisan individuals, academic scholars, and high business investors in Edo State have expressed satisfaction with the Governor's performance.

Market traders, in particular, have benefited from the Governor's efforts to curb market exploitation, resulting in a noticeable drop in staple food prices. The suspension of chairmen and vice chairmen who were caught up in mismanagement has also been widely welcomed.

Governor Okpebholo's commit-

Governor Okpebholo's first two months in office have been marked by significant achievements, restoring peace and harmony in Edo State and healing the divisive wounds of the past.

As the saying goes, "A good leader is like a good farmer, he plants seeds of peace and harvests fruits of prosperity." Governor Okpebholo is indeed planting the seeds of peace and prosperity in Edo State.

ment to fairness and justice is evident in his recall of lecturers who were illegally dismissed from Ambrose Alli University (AAU) under Obaseki's administration.

He has also sworn in judges who were persecuted under the previous administration, demonstrating his dedication to upholding the rule of law and protecting human rights.

The Governor's proactive approach to governance is also reflected in his presentation of the 2025 budget to the Edo State House of Assembly.

This budget prioritizes sustainable development, education, road infrastructure, healthcare, security, and agriculture, aiming to create long-term prosperity for Edo's residents.

In conclusion, Governor Okpebholo's first two months in office have been marked by significant achievements, restoring peace and harmony in Edo State and healing the divisive wounds of the past.

As the saying goes, "A good leader is like a good farmer, he plants seeds of peace and harvests fruits of prosperity." Governor Okpebholo is indeed planting the seeds of peace and prosperity in Edo State.

Henry Jatto is a member of the APC and sent in this piece Benin City, Edo State

Suspended LG chairmen, Okpebholo, rule of law, and Obaseki's last booby trap

IRIAEVHO YUSUF MOHAMMED

Criticism of Governor Monday Okpebholo's decision to involve the Edo State House of Assembly in sanctioning the 18 suspended Local Government Chairmen is either politically naive or deliberately mischievous. This decisive move reflects a strategic approach to governance and a commitment to transparency. For a governor with a

vision for progress, tolerating officials allegedly planted to sabotage his administration is unthinkable.

Governor Okpebholo's decision to follow legal procedures, rather than using executive fiat, underscores his respect for the rule of law. By engaging the State House of Assembly to exercise its constitutional oversight functions, he has set a precedent for due process. The 18 chairmen, aligned with former Governor God-

win Obaseki, symbolized obstruction and defiance, making their suspension inevitable.

The genesis of this saga can be traced to Okpebholo's directive for the chairmen to submit audited financial reports of their councils within a stipulated period. Predictably, they failed to comply. This noncompliance unveiled evidence of financial recklessness and fraud, including the alleged mismanagement of over 8

billion diverted to finance Obaseki's political agenda. These revelations vindicate Okpebholo's demand for accountability and transparency in governance.

Critics decrying the impeachment of these chairmen are merely lamenting in vain. Under Governor Okpebholo, Edo State is witnessing a restoration of accountability, adherence to the rule of law, and a departure from the alleged executive excesses and

fraudulent schemes of the past administration. The era of governance marked by impunity and disregard for due process is over in Edo State.

Governor Okpebholo's actions signal a new chapter for the state—one where transparency, responsibility, and the rule of law take precedence over political gamesmanship. Never again should Edo State endure the governance pitfalls of the Obaseki-led administration.

NEWS

Foreign

Professional chef Daron Anderson always tells people he was "born in the kitchen" —quite literally

The 45-year-old was delivered by homebirth at 295 West Las Flores Drive, where he lived with his mother until this week.

On Thursday, he stepped over charred debris where his kitchen once stood in Altadena, a tight-knit neighbourhood of north-eastern Los Angeles.

He was looking for his cast-iron pans in the hope they might have survived the blaze, one of several historic fires burning in the area that have killed at least 16 people and decimated multiple communities and left thousands homeless.

Across the street - at number 296 - his friend Rachel's house also sits in ashes. The house next door - 281 - where he'd enjoyed family parties, is gone.

About three blocks away, on Devirian Place, where his girlfriend lived, some neighbours tried to fend off the roaring flames that would consume their homes with garden hoses.

Now they, too, are searching for treasured items in the rub-

ble, after fire obliterated this entire community nestled in the shadow of the San Gabriel Mountains.

It all started on Tuesday night. The Santa Ana winds had been fierce much of the day.

Daron was in his front yard just after 18:00 local time trying to secure items from flying away.

Across the street at 296 West Las Flores Drive, Rachel Gillespie was taking down Christmas decorations, concerned about her plastic icicles and patio furniture.

They exchanged worried glances. "This doesn't look good, does it?" she remarked.

At the time, it was only wind that concerned them. They had no idea that one of the two worst wildfires in LA history had just ignited a few miles away, part of a days-long nightmare that at its peak would see six blazes simultaneously threatening America's second-largest city.

The Eaton fire that tore through Altadena has now ravaged more than 14,000 acres,

destroying thousands of homes and businesses, and left 11 dead. By the weekend, Eaton remained only 15% contained.

In west LA, the Palisades fire, which had started that morning, would go on to burn through more than 23,000 acres, reducing much of a vibrant community to ash, and killing at least five people.

Daron's next-door neighbour at house 281, Dillon Akers, was at work at a donut stand in the Topanga mall - about 40 miles away - as smoke started filling their neighbourhood.

The 20-year-old rushed back when he heard the news, only to find his corner of north-west Altadena pitch black and members of his family frantically evacuating their home.

His uncle leapt over their white picket fence to save precious seconds as he stuffed items into the back of his car.

For the next two hours, Dillon did the same, gathering food, medicine, clothes and toiletries. In the rush, he mislaid

his keys, and lost 30 minutes searching in the smoky dark with torches until he found them blown against a fence.

During the desperate search, he kept telling himself that local authorities would be able to

handle the fire that was roaring down the mountain towards the home he shared with his mother, grandmother, aunt and two younger cousins.

Dillon had faced windstorms before, and had seen

smoke in the mountains, but this time felt different. This time the orange glow in the sky was directly overhead.

"I was fully at a 10 on the scale of scared," he said.



CAPTURE OF WAD MADANI:

Crowds in Port Sudan celebrate the reported capture of Wad Madani by the Sudanese army.

Trump threats cast ominous shadow over icy fjords of Greenland

The sun is rising over the ice-covered mountains of Nuuk fjord and we are travelling along one of the world's last wild frontiers.

But there are shadows gathering here and across the rest of the frozen spaces of Greenland.

With Donald Trump about to become president of the United States, his refusal to rule out taking Greenland by force is reverberating through conversations across the island.

"He's welcome to come visit for sure," says the skipper of the converted fishing boat taking us

east. Conscious that he needs to do business with people of all political hues, he asked not to be named, but used a phrase I hear repeatedly here.

"Greenland belongs to Greenlanders. So, Trump can visit, but that's it."

The waters are flat calm as we pull into the isolated settlement of Kapisillit - population about 40 - where a few hunters are setting out to shoot seals.

It's -16C (3F), and with wind chill effect feels more like -27C.

But near the harbour I meet a local church elder, Kaaleeraq Ringsted, 73, a great-grandfa-

ther, who is out drying fillets of cod caught in the fish-rich waters beside his front door.

When I ask about President-elect Trump buying or invading Greenland, he chuckles at first. Then his tone becomes serious.

"It is not acceptable that he says this. Greenland is not for sale."

Then he tells me how he learned to fish and hunt here with his father and grandfather, and how he wants to preserve this life for his children and grandchildren.

Crossing the bay, the boat

nosed through the broken surface ice. Two eagles perched on a rock, scanning for fish in the clear waters.

We were heading to the farm of Angutimmarik Hansen who keeps sheep as well as hunting seals, wildfowl and rabbits.

All of his winter feed for the sheep needs to be imported from Denmark, a reminder of how a harsh climate defines the possibilities of life here.

Inside his front door is a rack of hunting rifles. He notices me looking at them.

"Those are in case there's an invasion," he jokes.

his attitude to the bellicose rhetoric from Mar-A-Lago is far from relaxed.

"What a stupid person in the world like Trump," he says. "Never will we sell Greenland."

This little farm is about 3,000 miles (4,828km) from Florida where the incoming US president gave his now infamous press conference last week.

"But Trump is not the USA. We can work with the people of the USA," Mr Hansen said.

The Trump effect went into overdrive with the arrival in Greenland of Donald Trump Jr, hot on the heels of his father's

pronouncements. He flew into the capital Nuuk on the family's 737 jet - Trump Force One - and stayed for four hours and thirty-three minutes, meeting some locals and offering only polite remarks.

"It's been incredibly nice to meet people, and people were very happy to meet with us," he said, after lunch at a local hotel. "Dad will have to come here."

Then it was back to the sunnier climes of Florida.

Trump Jr was welcomed by local businessman Jorgen Boassen, who once campaigned for the president-elect.

'I got death threats when men thought I put feminist gesture in video game'

It was late at night, and Darim's animation studio had just finished designing a new look for a character in one of South Korea's most popular video games, MapleStory.

Darim was proud of her work.

So, sitting alone on the floor of her small studio apartment, she posted the trailer on social media. Almost immediately, she was flooded with thousands of abusive messages, including death and rape threats.

Young male gamers had taken an issue with a single frame in the trailer, in which the female character could be seen holding her thumb and forefinger close together.

They thought it resembled a

hand gesture used by a radical online feminist community almost a decade ago to poke fun at the size of Korean men's penises.

"There were insults I'd never heard before, they were disgusting and inhumane," said Darim, which is not her real name. One read: "You've just sabotaged your job."

Messages then started piling into Darim's studio and the game developer claiming she was a feminist and demanding she be fired. Within hours, the company pulled the promotional video.

Darim had become the latest victim in a series of vicious online witch hunts, in which men in South Korea attack women they suspect of having feminist views. They bombard them with abuse and try to get them sacked.

This is part of a growing backlash to feminism, in which feminists have been branded man-haters who deserve to be punished. The witch hunts are having a chilling effect on women, with many now scared

to admit they are feminists.

This is forcing the movement underground, in a country where gender discrimination is still deeply entrenched. South Korea has the largest gender pay gap in the OECD, a group of the world's rich countries.

The hunts are often spearheaded by young male video gamers, and target women who work in the industry, like Darim, though recently they have spread to other professions.

They look for anything that resembles what they term the 'finger-pinching gesture' and use it as proof that men-hating women are surreptitiously mocking them.

Once they spot a supposed sign, the hunt begins. "They decide that a dark, evil feminist is hiding in the company, and her life should be ruined," explained Minsung Kim, a 22-year-old male gamer who, concerned by these witch hunts, set up an organisation to support the victims.

The witch hunters track down

all female employees at the company in question, and trawl their social media accounts, searching for any evidence of feminism. Way back on Darim's timeline, they found an 'offending' post.

Darim in fact had nothing to do with the disputed part of the animation, but her studio was rattled by the torrent of abuse - especially after Nexon, the gaming company, suddenly removed all the studio's artwork from their roster and issued an apology to customers.

"My company and CEO were in a panic," said Darim. "I thought I was going to be fired, and I'd never be able to work in animation again."

Then Minsung's organisation stepped in. They urged her studio to ignore the gamers and offered to pay Darim's legal fees so she could report the abuse. "We said these demands will never end, you need to nip this in the bud now," he said. The studio listened, and Darim kept her job.



FEMINIST WITCH HUNTS:

Minsung Kim is an avid video gamer and runs an organisation to support the victims of feminist witch hunts.

Sudanese army claims capture of key eastern city from rebels

The army in Sudan says it has captured a key city in the country's east, one of its biggest gains yet in an almost two-year-long war against rebel forces.

Footage on social media showed people celebrating in

the streets as army soldiers entered the city of Wad Madani.

The leader of paramilitary group the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), Gen Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, also known as Hemedti, acknowledged the loss in an audio message.

His admission was angry and rambling, attributing the defeat to the army's air superiority and use of Iranian-made drones.

But he vowed to continue fighting until victory, even if it took another 20 years.

Wad Madani is the capital of the state of Al Jazira, and is 87 miles (140km) south of the country's capital, Khartoum.

Wad Madani serves as a strategic crossroads, connecting several states through key supply highways. It is also the

closest major town to Khartoum.

Sudan has been ravaged by war since April 2023, when fighting broke out between the RSF and the Sudanese army.

The RSF continues to control nearly all of Sudan's western Darfur region, as well as significant portions of the country's south. Meanwhile, the army controls the north and east, as well as parts of Khartoum.

The war has claimed tens of thousands of lives. And in what the United Nations has called one of the world's "larg-

est displacement crises", about nine million people have been forced to flee their homes.

The country is also slipping into a famine, with 24.6 million people - about half the population - in urgent need of food aid, experts said.

Earlier this month, the US sanctioned the RSF leader after it accused the group of committing genocide.

Officials said he was being punished for his role in "systematic" atrocities against the Sudanese people during the 20-month conflict.



Professional chef Daron Anderson searches for his pans from the ruins of the spot that used to serve as his kitchen.

What we know about LA fires victims

At least 16 people have died as wildfires rage in Los Angeles - and there are fears the number will rise.

Officials say it may take several weeks to identify victims as traditional methods - such as fingerprinting and visual identification - may not be possible.

Here is what we know about those who are reported to have died, according to their family members and international media.

Victor Shaw

Victor Shaw died trying to defend his home from the wildfire in Altadena, his family said.

The 66-year-old's body was found on the side of the road by his property, with a garden hose in his hand, according to TV network KTLA. The property had been in Mr Shaw's family for nearly 55 years, it reported.

Mr Shaw lived at the home with his younger sister Shari, who said she tried to get him to evacuate with her on Tuesday night as the fire moved closer.

She told KTLA that he refused because he wanted to try to fight the fire, adding that she had to flee because "the embers were so big and flying like a firestorm".

Ms Shaw told CBS News she would miss her big brother.

"I'll miss talking to him, joking about, travelling with him and I'll just miss him to death," she said. "I just hate that he had to go out like that."

Randall "Randy" Miod

Miod died in his Malibu home, his mother Carol Smith told CNN.

The 55-year-old told Smith that he had a garden hose ready to protect the house, where he had been living for decades, from the encroaching fire.

"[His home] was his prized possession. That's the one and only house he ever owned," Smith said, according to the news outlet.

"Now that I'm realising how many memories he had in that home, I can understand why he didn't want to leave."

Friends of Randall have been posting tributes to the long-time Malibu resident on social media, sharing photos of him surfing and his red beach house.

Anthony Mitchell and his son Justin

Anthony Mitchell and his adult son Justin died at their home in Altadena as they tried to escape the wildfires, their family said.

Hajime White told the Washington Post she received a call from her 67-year-old father, in which he said "the fire's in the yard".

Mr Mitchell, a 67-year-old retired salesman and amputee, lived with his son Justin, who was in his early 20s and had cerebral palsy, the newspaper reported.

Another one of Mr Mitchell's sons, Jordan, lived with the pair but he was in hospital with an infection, the Washington Post reported.

Ms White told the newspaper she had received the news that Mr Mitchell and Justin had died, adding: "It's like a ton of bricks just fell on me."

Mr Mitchell was a father of four, grandfather of 11, and great-grandfather of 10, Ms White said.

Rodney Nickerson

Rodney Nickerson, 83, died at his home in Altadena, according to his daughter, who said her father believed the wildfire would "pass over".

Kimiko Nickerson told KTLA her father had bought the property in 1968 and had experienced previous fires over the decades.

Rodney worked as a project engineer at Lockheed Martin for 45 years.

Ms Nickerson told CBS News that the last comment her father made to her was: "I'll be here tomorrow." She confirmed to the broadcaster that his body had been found.

Annette Rossilli

Annette Rossilli, 85, refused to leave her Pacific Palisades home after she was told to evacuate following the start of the Palisades fire, CNN reported, citing Luxe Homecare, the company that provided in-home care for her.

She was staying in her home with her five pets: a dog, a canary, two parrots and a turtle.

Firefighters found Rossilli's body in her car on Wednesday, according to CNN, which cites her relatives and Luxe Homecare president Fay Vahdani.

The BBC has not been able to independently verify this report and has contacted Luxe Homecare for comment.

Rory Callum Sykes

The 32-year-old Australian citizen died after the Palisades fire broke out on Tuesday, his mother Shelley Sykes said in a post on X.

Shelley said her son, who had cerebral palsy, died in a cottage on their 17-acre Malibu estate, adding she had tried to put out the flames.

"He was my baby, and he died needlessly," she told Australian TV newscast 10 News First. "He said 'Mum, leave me,' and no mum can leave their kid, and I've got a broken arm. I couldn't lift him. I couldn't move him."

British-born Rory was a former child actor, having appeared on the 1998 British TV series *Kiddy Kapers*.

He was born blind and had difficulty walking, but was able to regain his sight and learn to walk with the help of surgeries, going on to become an "inspirational speaker", Shelley said.

Erlene Kelley

The family of 83-year-old Erlene Kelley found out late on Thursday that she was among the victims, the Los Angeles Times reports.

According to the newspaper, Ms Kelley's granddaughter Briana Navarro said her grandmother was "adamant" that she did not want to evacuate because previous fires had never reached their house in Altadena.

On Thursday evening, the family learned that authorities had found a body in the rubble of the home. It had been more than 48 hours since Ms Navarro last heard from her grandmother.

Ukraine says it captured two injured N/Korean soldiers in Russia

Two wounded North Korean soldiers have been captured as prisoners of war by Ukrainian troops in Russia's Kursk Oblast, President Volodymyr Zelensky said on Saturday.

The two men are receiving "necessary medical assistance" and are in the custody of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) in Kyiv, according to Zelensky.

The president said he was "grateful" to Ukrainian paratroopers and soldiers from the Special Operation Forces for capturing the North Koreans.

He added that "this was not an easy task", claiming that Russian and North Korean soldiers usually execute wounded North Koreans "to erase any evidence of North Korea's involvement in the war against Ukraine".

The Ukrainian intelligence service said in a statement that the prisoners were captured on 9 January and immediately after were "provided with all the necessary medical care as stipulated by the Geneva Convention" and taken to Kyiv.

"They are being held in appropriate conditions that meet the requirements of international law," the intelligence service's statement read.

The intelligence service said the prisoners do not speak Ukrainian, English or Russian, "so communication with them is carried out through interpreters of Korean, in cooperation with South Korean NIS (National Intelligence Service)".

In a statement posted on Telegram and X, Zelensky said the soldiers were "talking to SBU investigators" and he had instructed the Security Service of Ukraine to grant journalists access to them.

"The world needs to know the truth about what is happening," he added.

Zelensky also posted four photographs alongside his statement. Two show wound-

ed men. One of the photos showed a red Russian military card.

The place of birth on the document is given as Turan, in the Tuva Republic, which is close to Mongolia.

The intelligence service said that when the prisoners were captured, one of the soldiers had a Russian military ID card issued in the name of another person with registration in the Tuva Republic. The other had no documents at all.

The intelligence service said that during interrogation, the soldier with the ID card told security personnel that he had been issued the document in Russia during the autumn of 2024.

He is alleged to have stated that at that time, some of North Korea's combat units had one-week interoperability training.

"It is noteworthy that the prisoner...emphasises that he was allegedly going for training, not to fight a war against Ukraine," the SBU statement said.

The intelligence service reported that he said he was born in 2005 and had been serving North Korea as a rifleman since 2021.

The second prisoner is reported to have given some of his answers in writing because he had an injured jaw, according to SBU. The intelligence service said it believed he was born in 1999 and had been serving North Korea as a scout sniper since 2016.

The Geneva Convention states that the questioning of prisoners should be carried out in a language they understand and prisoners must be protected against public curiosity.

Zelensky's office said in a statement that the Russians "are trying to hide the fact that these are soldiers from North Korea by giving them documents claiming they are from Tuva or other territories under Moscow's control".

Sports

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

NFF to unveil Chelle as new Super Eagles coach

The Nigeria Football Federation will officially unveil Mr Éric Sékou Chelle as the new Head Coach of the Super Eagles on Monday.

The event will take place at the Media Conference Room of the MKO Abiola National Stadium, Abuja, at 11am.

This was announced in a statement posted on the NFF website on Sunday.

Chelle's appointment was confirmed last Tuesday by the NFF Executive Committee, following a recommendation from its Technical and Development Committee.

The 47-year-old Franco-Malian is stepping into one of the most scrutinised roles in world football, but NFF President, Alhaji Ibrahim Gusau, expressed confidence in Chelle's ability to lead the Super Eagles to new heights.

"We appreciate the fact that Nigerians are very passionate about football, which is why there have been different reactions following the appointment of Coach Chelle," Gusau said on Sunday.

"However, the NFF appeals to Nigerians to come together and support him, as we believe he has the qualities to achieve success with the Super Eagles."

Gusau further assured Nigerians that the Federation would provide the necessary backing to ensure Chelle's success.

"The NFF will give him all the support that he needs to succeed in the job," he added.

Chelle's first challenge will be leading the Super Eagles B at the upcoming African Nations Championship in East Africa next month.

After that, the focus will shift to the 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifiers, with crucial matches against Rwanda (away) and Zimbabwe (home) in March.

The unveiling ceremony

on Monday will also feature the announcement of Chelle's coaching staff, whose expertise will be crucial for the remaining six matches of the World Cup qualifying campaign.

According to the statement, Chelle brings a wealth of experience to the role, having guided Mali's Aiglons to the brink of the 2023 Africa Cup of Nations semi-finals.

He recently left his position at Algerian club MC Oran, where he had been managing the 1989 African Champions' Cup finalists, to accept the Super Eagles job.



Edo Sports Commission's Chairman Dissolves Sports Associations Boards

● **Barr Walter elected rep in Sports Commission's board**

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

The Executive Chairman, Edo State Sports Commission Hon Amadin Desmond Enabulele has dissolved all Sports Association Boards except the Football Association.

The Edo Sports Commission's boss announced the dissolution of the affected boards on Friday during a meeting with the Associations' chairmen at the Media Center, Samuel Ogbemudia Stadium, Benin.



Hon Enabulele commended the chairmen and their members for their contributions so far and requested the congregation to elect a representative amongst them to be their representative at the Sports Commission Board as stipulated in the statute that established the Edo State Sports Commission.

He told the Associations' Chairmen and Secretaries that the Sports Commission under his watch is in a hurry to make an impact in the pursuit of the agenda for speedy development set by Governor Ok-

pebhole's administration

According to him, those who have been effective among the chairmen will be considered to return to continue their good work while those that performed below par will be replaced.

"We decided to dissolve the existing boards of various sports associations we met except the Edo Football Association which statutorily we cannot dissolve.

"Our decision to dissolve the affected Sports Associations is not political, but borne out of our genuine desire to have effective and result oriented board chairmen that can deliver. Some of them are not even in the country and not in touch with the Association.

"We actually need men and women that are committed to sports development to be our chairmen. We have discovered that some of our former chairmen were far from the associations they represented. It can't be business as usual. However, we have considered that those who have been effective should return as chairmen while the poorly performed ones will be replaced.

EPL: Pat Nevin names Arsenal as best fit for Alexander Isak amid transfer links

EDWARD OSEGHE

Former Chelsea star, Pat Nevin, has advised Newcastle United striker Alexander Isak on the best club to join amid links with Arsenal, Manchester United, and Chelsea.

Isak has been the subject of transfer speculation during the ongoing January window, with the Swedish international reportedly on the radar of the three Premier League giants.

Nevin believes Arsenal would be the ideal destination for the

25-year-old over the other options.

"I would not be surprised if Chelsea made a huge bid for Alexander Isak this January if they get any sort of hint that he is available.

"Chelsea would love him. Having said that, I think he would be the best possible fit for Arsenal, and if I was him, I would be looking at that," Nevin told Grosvenor Sport.

Nevin added, "Style-wise and technique-wise, can you imagine him playing in front of Kai Havertz and Martin Odegaard? It would be scary."

Quadri's WTT Star campaign comes to an end after semi-final defeat

FOLUSEWA SIMEON

Nigeria table tennis star, Aruna Quadri's 2025 journey at the WTT Star Contender in Doha ended at the semifinals after a 3-0 loss to Japan's Tomokazu Harimoto.

With Aruna's 3-1 victory over PARK Ganghyeon in the quarter-finals of the competition after securing a narrow victory over Britain's Liam Pritchard, he moved to the semi-finals where

faced Harimoto in the semifinals making it their sixth meeting.

Their last encounter was at the WTT Champions Frankfurt in Germany, which ended in Aruna's favour. Harimoto was seeking revenge when they met.

However, Harimoto came out on top to send Aruna crashing out of the tournament in a one-sided affair.

Quadri suffered a straight-set defeat, losing 11-9, 11-3, 11-5, thereby missing out on a chance to reach the final.



FCT Area Council cup tournament set to kick off

CHIDINMA KALU

The Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Area Council Services Secretariat, under the leadership of the Mandate Secretary, Hon. Bitrus Lawrence Garki, has announced the inaugural FCT Area Council Cup.

In a statement released on Saturday by Emmanuel Martin, Special Assistant on Media to the Mandate Secretary, he described the initiative as groundbreaking, stating,

"This groundbreaking initiative celebrates the historic achievement of Local Government autonomy championed by His Excellency, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, GCFR, and ushers in a new era of grassroots

empowerment, development, and community engagement."

The tournament, scheduled to take place on Sunday, January 19, 2025, will feature 12 teams, representing the six area councils of the FCT—Abaji, Abuja Municipal, Bwari, Gwagwalada, Kuje, and Kwali.

Explaining the rationale behind the tournament, Martin said, "It aims to showcase the transformative potential of direct funding for grassroots leadership, ensuring that the over 858 communities in the FCT benefit from equitable resource distribution. The autonomy granted to local governments marks a significant milestone in ensuring development reaches even the most neglected areas."

Djokovic claims he was poisoned before the 2022 Australian Open

CHIDINMA KALU

Novak Djokovic has alleged that he was poisoned with lead and mercury in his food while being briefly detained in Melbourne in 2022, just before his deportation on the eve of the Australian Open.

The former world number one, who was expelled from Australia due to his refusal to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, made the claims during an interview with GQ magazine published last week Thursday.

While he was fighting a legal battle to remain in the country, Djokovic was held in a detention hotel.

"I had some health issues. And I realised that in that hotel in Melbourne, I was fed some food that poisoned me," Djokovic told GQ.

"I had some discoveries when I came back to Serbia. I never told this to anybody publicly, but discovered that I had a really high level of heavy metal. I had a lead, a very high level of lead and mercury," he added.

When asked if he believed the contamination was due to the food provided to him, Djokovic said, "That's the only way."

On Friday, Djokovic declined to elaborate further when questioned in Melbourne about any potential evidence connecting the elevated levels of heavy metals to the food served during his detention. However, he did not retract his earlier claims.


"The GQ article came out yesterday ... I've done that interview many months ago," Djokovic said

while preparing for another attempt at an 11th Australian Open title and 25th Grand Slam victory.

"I would appreciate not talking more in detail about that

because I'd like to focus on tennis and why I am here. If you want to see what I've said and get more info on that, you can always revert to the article," he stressed.



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FP 4X2	73,000	78,475	80,700	86,753	4 X 2	45,260	48,655	34,400	36,980
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EFFECTIVE FROM FEBRUARY 1, 2023

SOCIETY

How young, queer Nigerians use *twitter* to shape identity and fight homophobia

PAUL ONANUGA

Federal University, Oye Ekiti, Nigeria continues to be largely homophobic, mainly as a result of cultural and religious conventions. Negative perceptions of homosexuality led to the criminalisation of same-sex relations in 2014. The Nigerian environment is therefore toxic for LGBTI people. They become easy prey to oppressive and exploitative state security apparatus. They are also vulnerable to public “moral police” who seek to make homosexual performance invisible and closeted.

One may assume that the marginalised Nigerian same-sex community and its allies have conceded to the widespread societal ostracisation. But that would be to ignore the vigorous advocacies that have been going on in the country’s cultural production and on social media.

Films and literary texts have been the more studied genres where same-sex agency has been iterated and reinforced. In Nollywood – the country’s film industry – early depictions were constructed by non-LGBTI people who seemed to latch on public inquisitiveness for financial gains.

More recently, however, members of the Nigerian queer community have taken over the task of shaping their public image and identity, to reasonable success, in these creative

ventures. They have done so through movies as well as a growing body of literary writings.

Social media, however, can be considered more potent as a medium which, to the authors of *The Alternative Media Handbook*, gives voice to “the socially, culturally and politically excluded”.

By unpacking “live” data from members of the queer community, one can identify the challenges as well as advocacies in Nigerian digital queer discourse. That’s what I did in a study of queer Nigerian Twitter. To explore the diversity of queer agency, I analysed selected tweets by Nigerian queer men. As a linguist, my focus was on identifying and discussing how the performative use of language can achieve the functions of coming out as well as confronting homophobic cyberbullying.

TWITTER AS A SAFER SPACE

Twitter has grown to become a very popular microblogging platform in Nigeria, accounting for about 1.75 million users, with an annual growth rate of 4.4%. Communities with shared interests are built online. The queer community in Nigeria is no doubt on the margins, but it has found digital platforms safe havens for collective queer voices.

The digital space, I found, has become a location for the representation and assertion of queer agency. What

I found interesting in these narratives was that these commenters were not only ready to come out on a “public” digital space, they were also expressive in revealing their offline identities. This despite the possibilities of homophobic violence.

In expressing and owning their sexuality online, Nigerian queers, for instance through their Twitter names, spell out their sexuality as they incorporate vocabulary like “gay”, “homo” and “queer”. And they use the rainbow – a global symbol of LGBTI advocacy – in their Twitter handles and names.

They also own their profiles by either using their personal images or other suggestive queer-positive ones to indicate their sexual orientation. These realisations are central to queer agency, especially as the users I analysed live in Nigeria and are willing to challenge the existing normative sexuality structures. For example:

“This year I accepted the entirety of my sexuality and it’s one thing I’m very grateful about. I remember those days when I use to beat myself, cut myself, cry, pray and do all shits for being gay. Those days that I had to go to various priests for deliverance and guidance.”

This Twitter user reveals their sexual orientation within a narrative which expresses the difficulties of their lived reality. What is striking is the conviction of self-acceptance and the roles played by the online queer

community in the affirmation of this.

ANTI-HOMOPHOBIC ADVOCACY

Even more exciting is how these Twitter users engage in anti-homophobic advocacy. They turn the narrative around by exploiting online platforms towards positive self-presentation. They also respond to and challenge their cyber-aggressors and other homophobic commentators. They further acknowledge the necessity of support, like this tweet:

“Nigerian parents need peer support groups; especially parents with LGBTQ kids. I think one of the reasons they suffer so much is that they don’t know/talk to each other and they think they are alone. But there are lots of parents going through the same struggles across Nigeria.”

This acknowledges the role of the family as a domain of socialisation in normalising same-sex relations. Or this: “I think that social media really helps our generation with this. I wonder if they’re too far gone to also take advantage.”

This extends the discussion to the advantages of social media in queer outreaches. The tweets I analysed draw attention to, among others, the role of family relationships, homosexual allies and larger non-queer communities in helping Nigerian LGBTI people express and accept themselves. The advocacies are geared towards providing in-

formation concerning the naturalness of their sexual orientation.

REWRITING THE NARRATIVE

The tweets have sociological implications as ways of creating meaning. They humanise the commenters as legitimate members of Nigerian society and attest to the naturalness of queer identities. The online discussions provide visibility for a marginalised community.

Since the tweets contest the normative portrayals of same-sex relations, they also constitute activist representations. These queer Nigerian males use digital platforms for the purpose of identity formation. In this self-assertion, they contest the monochromatic representations perpetuated in popular culture.

Read more: Nigeria’s queer literature offers a new way of looking at blackness

The tweets I studied speak out against the bigotry and hate messages which are directed at them. They accentuate the human rights concern that a person’s sexuality is their personal decision. And they correct the perspective that problematises homosexuality as being the same as other social ills.

More crucially, I conclude, in view of the stifling and homophobic lived realities in Nigeria, these narratives engender conversations around the issue of queer visibility and acceptance within Nigerian society.

Down the memory lane: How I escaped the web of my assailants

KAJUNGU BOAZ KYARIMPA

Before attempting to kill me, the killers decided that I should dig my own grave. As I was digging, I was also praying. “Lord, I believe you can deliver me. You can protect me from being killed by these people. I’ve preached about Daniel in the lion’s den, and about how you delivered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace. Are you still the same God? You can show me now. Please give me that faith.”

I was hoping that God would give me wings to fly away, or that He would send fire from heaven. But God answered in a much different way from what I could have imagined.

As I was digging the grave, one of the killers picked up my Bible and was looking at it. Noticing the many markings in it he asked, “What do all these colors mean?”

“Those are my favorite verses,” I said. Interested, the man started reading the many highlighted verses. “Are you sure you’ve read all of these?” he asked incredulously.

“Yes,” I responded. I could see that the man had some pity for me.

Turning to his fellow killers he said,

“Friends, I know we’re going to kill this man, but please let me help him dig!”

The leader nodded and the man jumped into the hole with me and started digging. “Lord, I prayed, ‘this grave is going to be finished quickly now. What are You going to do?’”

God had a plan, but sometimes we want to try and force God to answer our prayers in the way that we think is best, rather than just trusting Him.

To my surprise, as soon as we were finished digging, the grave digging killer said to his colleagues, “Why should we use the grave for this man we don’t even know? Let him go and dig another grave near the highway. This is our field; why should we bury him here?”

The group agreed, and decided to use the grave for another man they had just killed. Then ironically, one of the killers said, “Before we bury that man, why don’t we pray for him.”

I watched as the group gathered around the body of the person they had just killed before coming after me. “Mary, mother of Jesus, receive him,” they said before rolling the corpse into the grave that had been meant for me.

All of a sudden my entire outlook changed. “Lord!” I gasped, “Don’t allow me to be separated from these people

before I tell them who You are! These are people who have never heard about You. They think they can pray for someone they have killed. And we are partly responsible. We never came and taught them the truth about You.”

Right after they buried that man, we moved closer to the highway. I was about to start digging another grave when the man who had my Bible asked if he could keep it. I said, “yes,” but the other killers told him “No! It’s ours—you’ll have to pay for it!”

I could see that the Holy Spirit had already touched this man’s heart, so I begged him, “Please, can I have that Bible and say something before I dig another grave?”

The man was excited and said, “Go ahead!” but another one shouted, “No! He’s our enemy. He has nothing to tell us.”

Then the arguing became very sharp, with some of the group insisting that I should be given the opportunity to speak, while others insisted that I had nothing to say. Just when it appeared that the killers were going to fight each other, one who appeared older than the others asked, “Why are you going to fight over someone you don’t even know? Those who want to

listen, sit and listen; others, sit and shut your ears. When he’s done, we’ll kill him.”

So they all sat down and I started to preach.

First, I thanked them. “Thank you for praying for somebody that you have killed. However, you need to understand what the Bible says about death—the only chance you have to be saved is during your lifetime—not after you are dead. ‘For the living know that they will die,’ I quoted from Eccl. 9:5, ‘but the dead know nothing.’ I’m not going to plead for you to let me go, I continued, because I know that even if you kill me a time is coming when I will be resurrected.

“Among the people you are killing are another tribe—they are not Hutu or Tutsis. They are God’s children. You think that you’re fighting a tribal war, but you’re mistaken. This is a war between Christ and Satan. You think that the people you’re killing are Tutsis, but they belong to a totally different tribe because they have given their hearts to Jesus and they are His children.”

Then I read 1 Peter 2:9-10 to them: “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may pro-

claim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.”

As I preached, I could see some of the killers were crying, and I knew that the Holy Spirit was working on their hearts. After preaching for 15 to 20 minutes I told the group, “Now I’m going to say a final prayer, and after that I will dig another grave.”

As soon as I finished praying, someone shouted, “If anyone kills this person, his blood be upon them!”

“No, we can’t kill him!” the others said. “Let him go! We can’t kill him.”

Then the leader spoke up. “I was the one who suggested that we kill this man in a very bad way. But now, we’re not going to kill him.”

I knew it was only by God’s grace that my life was spared. Who am I? I didn’t have any power. God was just kind.

During the approximately 100-day genocide from April 7 to mid-July, 1994, approximately 1 million people were killed, including my entire family. But even though I came face to face with death numerous times, the Lord always saw fit to spare my life.