

Petrol price hike: Queues resurface at filling stations

Queues have resurfaced at filling stations as oil marketers stated that the recent hike in petrol prices should not be attributed to the stations themselves.

In many locations across Lagos, Ogun, Abuja, and Port Harcourt, dealers explained that they were closing stations to assess the

impact of the price changes.

Reports indicate that petrol prices have risen to between N1,050 and N1,150 per litre due to increased costs from the Dangote Petroleum Refinery and various depot owners.

Dealers confirmed that prices are likely to continue rising, as crude oil prices have been

on the rise. On Friday, the Dangote refinery increased its petrol price from N899 per litre to N955 per litre, which led to retail price hikes.

Some stations, such as those in Lagos, sold petrol for more than N1,000 per litre, while stations like MRS at Alakpere and Ojodu Berger had long queues despite

offering petrol at N935 per litre.

The Petroleum Products Retail Outlets Owners Association of Nigeria (PETROAN) emphasized that filling stations should not be blamed for the price increases, as the rise in prices is driven by the global increase in crude oil prices.

PETROAN's National Pres-

ident, Dr. Billy Gillis-Harry, confirmed that petrol prices are determined by market forces and that neither the government nor the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) sets these prices.

PETROAN also called for the privatisation of government-owned refineries and

improvements in the business environment to make petrol more affordable for Nigerians.

The association highlighted the need for infrastructure development, affordable financing, and increased competition within the downstream sector to reduce costs and stabilize prices.

The Nigerian Observer



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Edo Dep Governor addresses LG concerns

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Shareholders allege Obaseki's Afrinvest plans N100bn bond scheme for personal gain

A socio-economic group, the Onitsha Zone Shareholders' Association, has raised alarm over alleged plans by Afrinvest, a company owned by former Edo State Governor, Mr Godwin Obaseki, to sell a N100 billion bond with the intention of converting them into his per-

sonal shares in the future.

The revelation was made during a protest visit to Governor Monday Okpebholo at the Government House in Benin City, led by the group's chairman, Bishop Goodluck Akpore.

Bishop Akpore expressed strong disapproval of the reported scheme, arguing that it

could have damaging economic consequences for Edo State and its communities.

He presented a detailed report that included issues involving Okomu Oil Palm and Presco PLC, urging the governor to investigate the matter thoroughly and take steps to prevent further harm.

The association accused Obaseki of using Afrinvest to orchestrate a N100 billion bond transaction involving Presco PLC, with the potential for the bonds to be converted into personal shares for future benefit.

They also alleged that the oil palm companies, in collaboration with Obaseki's adminis-

tration, have deprived the state of economic benefits.

In particular, the group pointed to Presco PLC's refusal to compensate the host communities for the 36,388 hectares of land acquired for their operations, as well as the Obaseki administration's failure to enforce tax collection

from these companies, despite their substantial profits and absence of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives.

"A trailer load of palm oil leaving Edo State for Lagos is valued at around ₦80 million," Akpore remarked.

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COURTESY VISIT:

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo (left), and the Chairman of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Edo State Council, Comrade Festus Alenkhe who led members of the union on a courtesy visit to Government House, Benin City.

Gov Okpebholo denounces PDP falsehoods, desperation to manipulate tribunal

Governor Monday Okpebholo of Edo State has strongly condemned recent attempts by the opposition People's Democratic Party (PDP) to manipulate the ongoing governorship tribunal case, alleging a series of unethical tactics, including witness intimidation, thuggery,

the spread of fake news, and premature claims of victory.

In a statement released by the Chief Press Secretary, Fred Itua, Governor Okpebholo expressed his outrage over the acts, emphasizing that such actions were not only damaging to the integrity of the judicial process, but also posed a se-

rious threat to the democratic values the country stands for.

"These acts of manipulation and falsehoods will not deter the truth. No amount of media propaganda or intimidation will alter the fact that the people of Edo State have already made their decision," Okpebholo said.

The Governor also stressed

the importance of maintaining the credibility of the tribunal process, calling on the judiciary and law enforcement agencies to take swift and decisive action against any individuals attempting to subvert justice.

"The judiciary must remain the cornerstone of our democracy. The integrity of the

process must be upheld at all costs," he affirmed.

The statement also made it clear that, despite the challenges, the governor remains confident in the victory that was granted by the people of Edo State, and that no effort to disrupt the tribunal will change the mandate Edo citizens gave to him.

"The people of Edo State have given me a clear mandate. I will not tolerate any attempt to undermine that mandate," the Governor added.

The statement added that the Governor's unwavering belief that the truth will prevail and that the rule of law will continue to guide the actions of the state.

Edo APC calls for increased vigilance at tribunal —Pg 3

Israel delays Gaza ceasefire over Hamas's failure to provide hostage names —Pg 6

Coach Sam Elijah drums support for Super Eagles Coach Erick Chelle —Pg 8

CAF' Enyimba crash out of Confederation Cup after loss to Zamalek —Pg 9

Edo Dep Governor addresses LG concerns

BERNADETTE IDALU

Edo State Deputy Governor, Hon. Dennis Idahosa, has reiterated the

state government's commitment to sustainable development during a courtesy visit by executive members of the Benin Central Mosque, led by

Chief Imam Sheikh Fatai Enabulele.

The visit was to congratulate the deputy governor on his victory in the September 2024 governorship election and as well acknowledge his contributions as a former House of Representatives member.

Idahosa assured the clerics that the administration remains people-focused, addressing concerns raised about local government administration.

He disclosed that the state government's role in local council matters is guided by

transparency and accountability.

"The local government law empowers councillors to choose their leaders. Based on this, the Edo State House of Assembly suspended certain chairpersons who refused to submit required documents.

"The government has no ulterior motives but supports lawful decisions made in the interest of the people," he explained.

The clerics presented Idahosa with writings by Uthman Dan Fodio on governance and diplomacy.

Edo delegation inspects Makkah kitchens ahead of 2025 Hajj

ABDUL-KADIR ABDULLAH

A delegation from Edo State, led by the Chairman of the Edo State Muslim Pilgrims Welfare Board, Mallam Musah Muhammad Uduimoh, and Executive Secretary, Alhaji Eranga Abdulkabir Muhammadkabar, recently conducted a comprehensive inspection of the kitchen facilities in Makkah, Saudi Arabia, ahead of the 2025 Hajj pilgrimage.

The team meticulously assessed the hygiene, capacity, and overall suitability of the kitchens chosen to cater to the state's pilgrims.

The inspection was aimed at ensuring that all necessary standards are met to provide safe, nutritious, and hygienic meals for the Edo pilgrims during their spiritual journey.

Chairman Uduimoh, speaking through a video WhatsApp call during the inspection, emphasized the importance of the kitchen's readiness.

"We are inspecting the ca-

capacity of each kitchen to efficiently prepare meals for the expected number of pilgrims from Edo State. As a state, we must ensure that we provide the best care for our pilgrims. Feeding is one very important aspect of this process."

Executive Secretary Alhaji Eranga also highlighted the thoroughness of the inspection, which covered the cleanliness of the kitchen premises, including cooking areas, storage facilities, and utensils.

He further noted that the inspection team was focused on ensuring that food safety regulations were strictly adhered to and that fresh, high-quality ingredients were being used.

"We are scrutinizing every detail of the kitchen operations to ensure that the food is prepared and handled according to the highest standards. Our pilgrims deserve the best, and we will ensure they receive nutritious and safe meals during their stay in Makkah," said Alhaji Eranga.



BUDGET DEFENCE:

L-R: Minister of State for Petroleum Resources, Senator Heineken Lopkobiri, and Minister of State, Gas Petroleum Resources, Hon. Ekperikpe Ekpo, during their budget defence at the National Assembly over the weekend. PHOTO BY OMOYE AMINU

NIS raises alarm over emergence of new sect 'ACHAD' in Kaduna

The Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS) has raised concerns about the emergence of a new sect called "ACHAD Life Mission International" in the North-West zone. The sect, reportedly linked to human trafficking and child separation, has its headquarters in Kaduna, with its leader, identified as Yokana, residing in Jos, Plateau State.

In a circular dated January 14th, 2025, the NIS warned its state commands, directorates, zones, and training institutions to remain vigilant about the group's activities.

The circular reads, "Intelligence

gathered reveals the emergence of a sect called ACHAD Life Mission International, with headquarters in Kaduna. Its leader, Mr. Yokana, resides in Jos, Plateau State. The sect neither adheres to Islam nor Christianity but promotes the restoration of African tradition and humanitarian support."

The NIS further notes that the sect has been recruiting members both domestically and internationally and may be involved in human trafficking and child separation.

The circular urged officers to remain alert, report any signs of the sect, and take appropriate action when necessary.

Shareholders allege Obaseki's Afrinvest plans N100bn bond...

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"Yet, these companies neither remit taxes nor compensate for the lands they have used freely."

In response, Governor Okpebholo pledged to initiate a thorough investigation into the allegations and assured the group of his administration's dedication to safeguarding the interests of Edo State residents.

He promised that any irregularities would be addressed, and appropriate sanctions would be imposed on those found responsible.

"We will seek a peaceful resolution and invite Presco and Okomu Oil Palm to a meeting to discuss these issues," Okpebholo stated. "While we recognize their

contributions to the State's economy, they must ensure fair contributions and uphold their responsibilities to the host communities."

The Governor also noted the recent protests against the activities of the oil palm companies and emphasized the importance of dialogue to find sustainable solutions.

The Onitsha Zone Shareholders' Association, which advocates for the protection of shareholders and community interests across Edo, Delta, and other states in the zone, called for greater accountability from Presco and Okomu Oil Palm PLC.

The group is also demanding a thorough review of the companies' tax contributions and CSR efforts.

BENCCIMA DG explains cancellation of 2024 trade fair

The Benin Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines, and Agriculture (BENCCIMA) has announced the cancellation of its 2024 Trade Fair, citing financial constraints and the impact of a challenging economic environment as the primary reasons.

Speaking to newsmen in Benin City, BENCCIMA's Director-General, Imalingmhe John Yesufu, explained that the lack of funding from traditional sponsors, many of whom are grappling with economic difficulties, was a major setback.

"Our traditional sponsors, who have consistently supported the trade fair, were unable to contribute this year due to ongoing economic challenges," Yesufu said.

"These sponsors are crucial,

especially for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that rely on this platform to grow their businesses."

Another significant factor was the gubernatorial election scheduled for 2024 in Edo State.

According to Yesufu, the election shifted focus away from business events, with government attention diverted to political campaigns and the transition period.

"The government's involvement is critical to the success of the trade fair. Unfortunately, with their attention on the elections, it became difficult to secure the necessary support and resources," he noted.

Yesufu also highlighted the importance of careful planning for the event, emphasizing the risks of poor execution.

He recalled a previous poorly managed trade fair that left a negative legacy, something BENCCIMA was determined to avoid.

"We aim to deliver a trade fair that brings value to all stakeholders. A poorly executed event would not only affect current participants but also harm future prospects," he said.

Logistical challenges, particularly in engaging rural communities and local governments, further compounded the issues.

"Many of these areas, rich in agricultural and mineral resources, struggled with transportation and limited resources, making participation difficult."

Despite these challenges, Yesufu expressed optimism for the future. He revealed that preparations for the 2025 Trade Fair are already underway, with efforts to

secure sponsorship and ensure a well-organized event.

"We are committed to hosting the 2025 Trade Fair, and we are confident it will be a great success," he assured.

In addition to the trade fair, he said BENCCIMA plans to hold an award ceremony later this year to recognize outstanding contributions to the business community.

Yesufu also called on Edo State Governor Monday Okpebholo for greater support in developing the trade fair site, including infrastructure improvements to make the event more accessible and affordable for participants.

"With proper facilities, we can create a more effective platform for trade and investment in Edo State," he concluded.

Ned Nwoko dumps PDP for APC

VICTOR AJUWA

In a surprising turn of events, billionaire philanthropist and seasoned politician, Hon. Ned Nwoko, has announced his defection from the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) to the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC).

The announcement, made at a press briefing in Asaba earlier this weekend, has sent shockwaves through Nigeria's political landscape.

Addressing the media, Nwoko stated that his decision was driven by a desire to align with a party that, in his words, "prioritizes national unity, economic stability, and

progressive governance."

He praised the APC for its efforts in tackling national challenges and expressed confidence that his political ideologies are better aligned with the party's developmental agenda.

"After careful consideration and consultations with my family, supporters, and stakeholders, I have decided to join the APC.

This is not just a personal decision but one aimed at contributing meaningfully to the future of our country. Nigeria is at a critical juncture, and I believe the APC is well-positioned to drive the transformative change we need," Nwoko said.

This defection comes at a time when the PDP is grappling with internal crises and dwindling political influence in some states. Nwoko's exit is seen as a significant blow to the opposition party, particularly in Delta State, where he has been a political heavyweight.

Nwoko's move to the APC is expected to reshape the political dynamics in Delta State and the South-South region as a whole. As a former member of the House of Representatives and an influential figure known for his philanthropy and development initiatives, his presence in the APC could bolster the party's appeal to both grassroots and elite vot-

ers in the region.

Political analysts believe this defection could be a precursor to Nwoko's ambition for higher office, possibly ahead of the 2027 general elections. Some speculate that his entry into the APC might pave the way for a gubernatorial bid or another significant role within the party's leadership.

The APC, on its part, has welcomed Nwoko with open arms. Speaking at the event, a representative of the party described his defection as "a monumental gain," noting that his experience, influence, and resources will strengthen the party's presence in the South-South.

NEWS

Edo APC calls for increased vigilance at tribunal

The All Progressives Congress (APC) in Edo State has issued a call for heightened vigilance in light of the ongoing governorship tribunal case, accusing the opposition People's Democratic Party (PDP) and its candidate,

Asue Ighodalo, of employing desperate and underhanded tactics to undermine the electoral process.

The Chairman of the Edo State APC, Emperor Jarret Tenebe, expressed deep concern over the conduct of the

opposition, alleging that the PDP had resorted to intimidation and manipulation to affect the tribunal's proceedings.

The APC's concerns were further compounded by reports that PDP supporters had tried to disrupt the

tribunal sessions by engaging in violent acts, including the use of thugs to cause chaos.

"We must remain vigilant and ensure that no party, particularly the PDP, uses these disruptive tactics to sway the outcome of the tribunal,"

said Tenebe.

He further urged members of the APC and the public to be alert and closely monitor the unfolding developments to prevent any further attempts to interfere with the democratic process.

Tenebe also called on the judiciary to uphold the principles of fairness and impartiality, emphasizing the need for transparency and justice in the proceedings.

The APC reaffirmed its unwavering commitment to protecting the rights of their candidate, Governor Monday Okpebholo, and ensuring that the voice of the Edo people, as expressed in the last election, remains respected.

The APC promised to continue closely monitoring the tribunal's proceedings and take all necessary steps to ensure that the integrity of the election process is maintained.

**BUDGET DEFENSE:**

L-R: Chairman, House Committee on Interior, Hon. Abdullahi Ahmed; Chairman, Senate Committee on Interior, Senator Adams Oshiomhole, and Senator Francis Fadahunsi, during their budget defense with the Immigration Services in Abuja. PHOTO BY OMOYE AMINU.

Etsako Council boss honours Nigerian Armed Forces on remembrance day

The Acting Chairman of Etsako Central Local Government, Hon. Cephas Yakubu Mohammed, has commended the Nigerian Armed Forces for their efforts in combating insurgency in the North-East and other parts of the country.

Speaking at this year's Armed Forces Remembrance Day held at Usagbe Primary School Field in Fugar, Hon. Mohammed praised the military's bravery and vigilance, which he noted were critical to maintaining peace and fostering national growth.

The chairman highlighted the

significance of the occasion in honoring the sacrifices of Nigerian Armed Forces personnel, past and present, who fought for the country's unity and freedom.

He paid tribute to those who lost their lives in the First and Second World Wars, the Nigerian Civil War, and various peacekeeping missions, while also praying for the repose of their souls.

Hon. Mohammed emphasized the devastating impacts of war, stating that it often leaves behind suffering and destruction.

He urged citizens to contribute to maintaining peace and order, stressing that national

development can only thrive in a secure environment.

Calling for an end to political violence, cultism, and other societal vices, the chairman lauded the military for their dedication and sacrifices, despite the physical, social, and psychological hardships they endure.

He assured local veterans of continued support from the council and appealed to the public for donations and assistance to ease the burden on their families.

The Chairman of the Nigerian Legion in Etsako Central, Col. Oseni Bello (Retired), echoed these sentiments, noting

that the Armed Forces Remembrance Day serves to honor the bravery and patriotism of fallen heroes. He, however, lamented the inadequate appreciation and support for veterans, particularly in Etsako Central.

Col. Bello called on the local government to address critical needs, including funding for uniforms, office renovation, monthly subventions, and employment for widows and orphans of fallen soldiers.

The event's highlights included a minute of silence for the fallen heroes, the laying of wreaths by dignitaries, and the unveiling of commemorative emblems.

Deltans feel impact of Oborewori's devt —Clark

VICTOR AJUWA

Elder statesman and convener of the Pan Niger Delta Forum (PANDEF), Chief Edwin Clark, has lauded Delta State Governor, Rt. Hon. Sheriff Oborewori, for his significant achievements since assuming office on May 29, 2023.

Clark praised Governor Oborewori for making remarkable progress within a short time, stating that he has outperformed his predecessors.

In an open letter, Clark commended the governor for revitalizing Warri into a bustling commercial hub and addressing longstanding infrastructural issues across the state.

He criticized Senator Ned Nwoko, who represents Delta North Senatorial District, for alleging ineffectiveness on the

part of the governor. Clark dismissed the claims as baseless, challenging critics to name any past Delta governor who had accomplished as much within a similar timeframe.

The Ijaw leader highlighted Oborewori's efforts in restoring Warri's commercial prominence, which he said had been neglected by previous administrations.

Clark applauded the governor for engaging Julius Berger Construction Company to execute critical projects, including three flyovers, a cloverleaf interchange, pedestrian bridges, and road expansions at the DSC Roundabout. Valued at ₦78 billion, these projects are progressing steadily.

"Warri is fast becoming a sight to behold, returning to its former glory," Clark wrote. He contrasted this progress with

what he described as the neglect Warri endured under previous administrations, which prioritized less populated areas over densely populated commercial hubs like Warri and Uvwie.

Clark also commended Oborewori's commitment to equitable development, citing the dualization of the Asaba-Ughelli Road and other projects benefiting communities across the state.

"Today, almost all parts of the state are feeling the impact of Governor Oborewori's development efforts," he stated.

He further praised the governor for clearing a ₦300 billion debt inherited from past administrations and for prioritizing people-focused initiatives over political patronage.

Clark rebuked Senator Nwoko's recent criticisms of

the governor, describing them as unfounded.

"I challenge Senator Nwoko to refute my claims on these developments. Instead of allocating resources for political patronage, the governor is using them to benefit the people," Clark asserted.

The elder statesman urged Governor Oborewori to remain focused and continue addressing the needs of oil-producing communities while fostering inclusive development across the state.

"I am not a praise singer. I speak the truth," Clark affirmed. "Governor Oborewori has made remarkable strides in advancing development and democracy in Delta State. I encourage him to remain undistracted and ensure no community is left behind," he added.

Delta environment ministry seals buildings for discharging sewage into public drains

AJUWA VICTOR

The Delta State Ministry of Environment has sealed several properties, including a mini-estate on Olulu Street, off Anwai Road, Asaba, for violating environmental laws by illegally discharging sewage into public drainage systems.

The State Commissioner for Environment, Mr. Jamani Tommy Ejoro, led the enforcement operation in the early hours of Friday, expressing frustration over the environmental hazards caused by the property owners.

He described the actions of the residents as not only irresponsible but a significant threat to public health and safety.

As part of the operation, the commissioner ordered the immediate sealing of the affected properties and instructed the issuance of abatement notices to their owners, warning of stricter penalties for non-compliance.

Speaking to journalists after the operation, Mr. Jamani reiterated his commitment to enforcing the state's environ-

mental laws to ensure a cleaner and healthier Delta State.

He emphasized that the state government, under Governor Sheriff Oborewori, has prioritized environmental cleanliness as a key component of its development agenda.

"This administration will not tolerate actions that compromise public health and safety. Our environment is our collective responsibility, and we must protect it for the good of all," Jamani stated.

The commissioner also noted that the enforcement drive was part of broader efforts to address waste management and promote environmental hygiene in urban and rural areas.

Other areas visited during the operation include Jaret Street, off Cable Point in Asaba, where similar violations were discovered.

Residents of the affected areas commended the government for taking decisive action but called for increased public awareness campaigns on environmental laws and penalties for defaulters.

Oborewori mourns Edna Ibru, commends her legacy

AJUWA VICTOR

Delta State Governor, Rt. Hon. Sheriff Oborewori, has expressed profound sadness over the passing of Mrs. Edna Ibru, wife of the late Olorogun Senator Felix Ovuodoroye Ibru, Delta State's first Executive Governor.

Mrs. Ibru, a former Miss Nigeria (1964), reportedly passed away in London on Wednesday after a brief illness.

She was widely recognized for her grace, elegance, and unwavering support for her late husband during his political career.

In a statement issued by his Chief Press Secretary, Sir Festus Ahon, Governor Oborewori described Mrs. Ibru's death as a significant loss to Delta State. He praised her as a woman of exceptional character who devoted her life to her family and the development of her community.

"On behalf of the

government and people of Delta, I mourn the passing of a great woman of substance.

Mrs. Edna Ibru was a caring mother and loving wife who stood by her husband through thick and thin. Her contributions to the growth of Delta State remain indelible," the governor stated.

Oborewori highlighted her role as a pillar of strength for her late husband, whose tenure as the first Executive Governor of Delta State laid the foundation for the state's development.

He noted that her passing comes at a time when her family and community needed her wisdom and guidance the most.

He further described Mrs. Ibru as a woman of faith and elegance who exemplified dignity and service in every aspect of her life.

"Her legacy of grace, humility, and resilience will continue to inspire generations to come," he added.

EDITORIAL

Governor Okpebholo's road repairs signal a new era for Edo

Barely two months after Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, was sworn in, a major landmark of his stewardship has emerged in the form of infrastructure development, with a particular focus on road repairs across the state.

His administration has made significant strides in addressing the long-neglected state of Edo's road network, which had deteriorated over the years due to poor maintenance and lack of investment.

Governor Okpebholo's decision to prioritize road repairs demonstrates his commitment to improving transportation and enhancing the living standards of residents. This initiative is expected not only to ease daily commutes, but also to stimulate economic activities by facilitating the movement of goods and services within and outside the state.

He has demonstrated

remarkable leadership by prioritizing the rehabilitation of critical road infrastructure within his short time in office. His swift action on the Benin-Ekpoma-Auchi highway, a major artery connecting Edo South, Central, and North Senatorial Districts, marks a significant step toward addressing decades of neglect that have plagued the state's transportation network.

For years, the Benin-Ekpoma-Auchi highway remained a symbol of infrastructural decay, exposing commuters to untold hardships and stifling economic activities across Edo State.

The governor's decision to tackle the road's dilapidated sections, despite it being a federal responsibility, shows a pragmatic approach to governance. His administration's recognition that a functional road network is pivotal to economic growth and citizens' well-being is commendable.

By focusing on key failed portions, including Obadan Junction and Upper Mission Extension, Governor Okpebholo has set the tone for a government that prioritizes action over excuses. His determination to ensure these roads are motorable before the rainy season reflects a sense of urgency.

The ongoing rehabilitation of the Ehor-Ekpoma axis further emphasizes the governor's commitment to improving mobility for Edo residents. These repairs will not only ease the movement of goods and people, but also revitalize communities that have been cut off from economic opportunities due to poor infrastructure.

This approach ensures that no community is left behind in his administration's drive to deliver the dividends of democracy to the people of Edo State.

What makes this initiative

stand out is the governor's hands-on approach. Accompanied by top officials, including the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Works and the state APC Chairman, he has taken steps to personally monitor projects and ensure accountability. Such leadership builds trust and reassures citizens that their needs are being addressed.

The gratitude expressed by residents in the affected areas is a testament to the transformative impact of these road projects. For many, the ongoing repairs mark the end of years of neglect and the beginning of a new chapter of hope and progress. The governor's actions have rekindled confidence in governance and the belief that their voices are being heard.

However, these efforts must be sustained to achieve lasting change. Governor Okpebholo's administration should establish a robust maintenance cul-

ture to prevent future deterioration of these critical roads. Additionally, collaborating with the Federal Government to secure more funding for infrastructure projects will ensure the long-term viability of these initiatives.

The governor's ambitious start is a refreshing departure from the norm, but the true measure of success lies in the consistent delivery of results. Edo citizens are watching closely, and expectations remain high. By continuing on this path, Governor Okpebholo can cement his legacy as a leader who not only listens, but acts decisively.

Edo State stands on the brink of transformation, and with committed leadership, the possibilities are endless. The ongoing road repairs are more than just infrastructure projects—they are a beacon of hope for a better, more connected, and more prosperous Edo State.

The Nigerian **Observer** Cartoon Corner

...that the people may know



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10 X 4	340,000	365,500	273,500	294,013	177,400	190,705	370,000	397,750	295,600	317,770
HALF PAGE	295,600	317,770	236,500	254,238	147,800	158,885	340,000	365,500	273,450	293,959
10 X 3	221,700	238,328	147,800	158,885	118,300	127,173	266,000	285,950	251,300	270,148
13 X2	206,900	222,418	133,000	142,925	103,500	111,263	221,800	238,435	147,810	158,896
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FP 4X2	73,000	78,475	80,700	86,753	4 X 2	45,260	48,655	34,400	36,980
FP 3X2	64,870	69,735	73,000	78,475	3 X 2	30,900	33,218	26,600	28,595
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EFFECTIVE FROM FEBRUARY 1, 2023

NEWS

Foreign

Israel delays Gaza ceasefire over Hamas's failure to provide hostage names

Israel has announced a delay in the planned Gaza ceasefire, citing Hamas's failure to provide the names of the first hostages to be released. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated that the ceasefire will not proceed until Hamas fulfills this obligation. In response, Hamas claimed the delay is due to "technical field reasons."

The ceasefire was scheduled to begin at 08:30 local time (06:30 GMT) and included an agreement requiring the names of hostages to be submitted at

least 24 hours before any exchange. The first exchange was planned for yesterday. Until Hamas complies and the ceasefire officially begins, the Israeli military has confirmed it will continue operations in Gaza.

This development comes amidst a broader context of the ongoing conflict. Hamas attacked Israel on October 7, 2023, killing approximately 1,200 people and taking 251 hostages back to Gaza. The attack prompted a large-scale Israeli offensive, during which over 46,800 Palestini-

ans have reportedly been killed, according to Gaza's Hamas-run health ministry.

Meanwhile, the Israeli military has reported the recovery of Staff Sergeant Oron Shaul's remains. Shaul, killed in the 2014 Gaza war, had been held by Hamas since then. His body was recovered during a covert operation in Gaza, following identification by the National Institute of Forensic Medicine and the Military Rabbinate. The soldier's family has been informed.

Hamas was believed to have

agreed to hand over Shaul's body as part of the ceasefire and hostage release deal. The group is also holding three other Israelis who were abducted before the October 2023 attacks: Hadar Goldin, another soldier killed in the 2014 war, and two civilians—Ethiopian-Israeli Avera Mengistu and Bedouin Arab Israeli Hisham al-Sayed—who crossed into Gaza voluntarily in 2014 and 2015.

The ceasefire deal itself outlines a three-phase plan. During the first six weeks,

more than 30 hostages, including women, children, and elderly individuals, are to be exchanged for Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. Israeli forces are expected to withdraw from densely populated areas of Gaza, allowing displaced Palestinians to return to their homes. Hundreds of aid trucks will also be permitted to enter Gaza daily.

Negotiations for the second phase, addressing the release of the remaining hostages, a complete Israeli troop withdrawal, and the establishment of "sustainable calm," are scheduled to begin on the 16th day of the agreement. The third phase involves the return of any remaining hostages' bodies and the reconstruction of Gaza, a process that could take years.

Questions remain about the fate of the hostages, including whether all are alive or if Hamas is aware of the locations of those still unaccounted for. For now, the ceasefire's delay

is attributed to Hamas's failure to provide the required names of hostages, a move the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) say breaches the agreement.

IDF spokesman Daniel Hagari reiterated that the military operations in Gaza will continue until Hamas meets its obligations.

"As of this morning, Hamas has not fulfilled its obligation, and contrary to the agreement, has not provided the State of Israel with the names of the returning female hostages," he said in a brief statement.

The ceasefire was due to begin at 06:30 GMT, with hostages set to be exchanged sometime after 16:00 local time today. The delay has left uncertainty about how it will impact the ceasefire's implementation.

Israel had reportedly prepared three potential locations near the Gaza border for the hostage exchange, but Hamas has cited "technical reasons" for the disruption.



Protesters in Washington

Thousands protest in Washington against Donald Trump ahead of inauguration

Thousands of demonstrators, primarily women, gathered in Washington, DC, on Saturday to protest President-elect Donald Trump just two days before his inauguration. The rally, part of the People's March (formerly the Women's March), has been an annual

event since 2017. Organized by a coalition of groups aiming to challenge "Trumpism," the protest attracted smaller crowds this year, with 5,000 participants instead of the anticipated 50,000.

Protesters, who rallied at three parks before marching to the Lincoln Memorial, expressed a range

of motivations. Brooke, a participant, voiced her concerns about abortion access and the lack of female political leadership. Kayla described feelings of anger and sadness driving her participation.

The People's March began in response to Trump's 2016 election victory over Hillary Clinton. Its first iteration in 2017 saw hundreds of thousands march in Washington and millions across the U.S. sporting pink "pussy hats" in protest. Subsequent marches have been smaller, but organizers maintain their commitment to resisting Trump's agenda.

Trump arrived in Washington on Saturday for inaugural festi-

ties, including a private event with fireworks at his Virginia golf club.

A small group of Trump supporters, wearing "Make America Great Again" hats, was also present near the Washington Monument. While one supporter, Timothy Wallis, respected the protesters' rights, he lamented the division in the country.

Participants like Susie and Anne, who had attended the 2017 Women's March, returned to protest what they see as heightened stakes in opposing Trump's policies. Despite acknowledging that the movement is "out of touch" with much of the country, Anne declared their continued resistance.

Spain revises number of injured in ski lift collapse to 10

A chairlift accident at the Astún ski resort in Spain's Pyrenees mountains has left 10 people injured, including two 18-year-old women in intensive care. Initial reports suggested that up to 30 people were hurt, but the number was later revised as more details emerged.

The accident occurred when a pulley failure caused a cable to lose tension, sending several chairs crashing to the ground and throwing skiers into the snow. Rescue teams responded quickly, using ambulances and helicopters to transport the injured to hospitals.

Jaime Pelegri, a skier who witnessed the incident, told the BBC that the tension in the

cable suddenly dropped, causing chairs to fall. "It was very scary, but very fast," he said, adding that emergency services arrived within 15 minutes. He later wrote on social media, "Luckily we are fine, but there are injured people; we saw several stretchers coming down."

Images shared on social media show the chairlift's flywheel dislodged from its upright position, although the exact cause of the failure remains under investigation. Regional President Jorge Azcón and Spain's Interior Minister Roberto Bermúdez de Castro visited the site. Azcón stated on X that all necessary resources were deployed to aid those affected.

TikTok goes offline in the U.S. hours before ban takes effect

TikTok users in the U.S. found the platform offline on Sunday, hours before a law banning the app was set to take effect. A message on the app explained that the ban had been enacted, preventing access for now. TikTok also assured users that President-elect Donald Trump had expressed willingness to negotiate a solution after his inauguration on Monday.

The app's disappearance fol-

lowed its removal from U.S. app stores and the TikTok website ceasing to display videos. This move comes after the Supreme Court upheld a law requiring ByteDance, TikTok's Chinese parent company, to sell the platform by Sunday—a condition it failed to meet. TikTok has argued that the law violates free speech protections for its 170 million U.S. users.

President-elect Trump has suggested granting a 90-day

reprieve to allow negotiations to continue. "The extension is something that will most likely be done because it's appropriate," Trump told NBC News, hinting at a potential announcement on Monday.

Ahead of the shutdown, content creators shared farewell messages, with many expressing concerns over the financial and community impact. Nicole Bloomgarden noted the signif-

and elsewhere in West Africa.

The debate illustrated a sharp divide in approaches to the region's security challenges and political transitions. Obe warned that ECOWAS risks undermining its legitimacy if it prioritizes security over legal governance.

Meanwhile, Kotin and Aigbe maintained that security concerns, particularly the rise of military coups, must be tackled head-on for the stability of the region.

The contrasting views left viewers questioning whether ECOWAS can adapt to the shifting political landscape of West Africa while staying true to its original mission.

As the debate concluded, it became clear that ECOWAS is at a crossroads. With the Sahel region experiencing a wave of military takeovers and growing anti-Western sentiments, the bloc's unity and ability to effectively mediate and govern the region are under intense scrutiny.

The panel's discussion underscored the complexities of balancing security, governance, and human rights, and it left many wondering whether ECOWAS can survive these challenges in the long run.

Can ECOWAS survive the Sahel Split? (Africanews Debates)

In a compelling debate held at the weekend, leading experts clashed over the pressing question: "Can ECOWAS survive the Sahel split?"

The lively discussion, which aired live, brought together a distinguished panel to examine the future of West Africa's regional bloc amid deepening divisions within the region.

The panelists included Ayo Obe, a renowned human rights lawyer, who argued from a legal and governance perspective, Emmanuel Kotin, a security analyst with expertise in regional stability, and Austin Aigbe, representing WADEMOS, who shared insights on grassroots democracy and political transitions.

What unfolded was a fiery exchange, with Obe steadfastly defending her position against the two male panelists. Kotin and Aigbe focused on regional security concerns and practical political solutions to the ongoing challenges, while Obe emphasized the need for ECOWAS to recommit to its core legal and institutional principles. She argued that the regional body should not compromise its values, even in the face of growing instability in the Sahel

icant income loss, while Erika Thompson lamented the disappearance of educational content from the platform. TikTok's CEO, Shou Zi Chew, has appealed to Trump for support and is expected to attend the inauguration.

TikTok stated it is working to restore services in the U.S., while the White House confirmed that any further decisions would fall to the incoming administration.

Croatian Dep PM resigns over gun-firing video

Croatia's Deputy Prime Minister, Josip Dabro, has resigned following the emergence of a video showing him firing a gun at random from a moving car. In the footage, Dabro is seen in the passenger seat, laughing, chatting, and singing along to loud music before taking a pistol and shooting into the darkness through an open window.

Dabro, a representative of the hard-right nationalist Homeland Movement par-

ty, explained that the video was recorded several years ago and claimed he had used training bullets. Despite this, the incident has created further controversy for Croatia's coalition government, which was formed in May 2024. The government condemned Dabro's actions, describing them as "inappropriate and irresponsible."

In a resignation statement posted on Facebook, Dabro, who also served as Minister for

Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries, said he did not want to distract from the government's agenda. He added that he had faced "significant pressure and threats" due to his proposed reforms for the department.

The video, which surfaced earlier in the week, has added strain to the coalition government led by Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic's center-right Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) party. This is not the first controversy to impact

the coalition. In November, Health Minister Vili Bros was dismissed amidst a corruption investigation.

Meanwhile, political tensions heightened earlier this week as Zoran Milanovic was re-elected president for a second term, securing nearly three-quarters of the vote against his opponent Dragan Primorac, who was backed by the HDZ. Following the election, Plenkovic refrained from congratulating Milanovic, stat-

ing that the president "offers nothing." In Croatia, the role of the president is largely ceremonial.

Injuries in Spain Ski lift collapse revised to 10

A tragic chairlift accident at a ski resort in Spain has left 10 people injured, including two young women in intensive care. The incident occurred at the Astún resort in the Spanish Pyrenees, which was subsequently closed as rescue teams responded to the scene.

The accident was reportedly caused by a pulley failure, which led to a cable slacking and several chairs falling to the ground, throwing skiers into the snow. Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez expressed his shock at the event, stating his deep concern for those affected.

Initial reports suggested that around 30 people had been injured, but updated information revealed that only 17 required medical attention. Of these, 10 sustained serious injuries, with two 18-year-old women currently receiving intensive care. Ambulances and helicopters transported the injured to nearby hospitals.

According to the state broadcaster TVE, a pulley at one end of the chairlift detached, causing part of the structure to collapse. This resulted in a loss of cable tension and the subsequent fall of several chairs. Dozens of skiers who were left stranded on the 15-meter-high (50-foot) lift were safely evacuated by rescue teams.

One witness, Jaime Pelegri, who was on the chairlift at the

time, described the incident as "very scary but very fast." He noted that emergency services, including ambulances and helicopters, arrived at the scene within 15 minutes.

Pelegri later shared on social media that he and his companions were unharmed, but he had seen injured individuals being carried on stretchers.

Images circulating online show one of the chairlift's flywheels dislodged from its upright position. Officials have not yet confirmed the exact cause of the failure.

Regional President Jorge Azcón and Interior Minister Roberto Bermúdez de Castro visited the site to oversee rescue operations. Azcón later posted on social media, commending the government's emergency response teams and affirming that all necessary services were working to assist those affected.

Prime Minister Sánchez also spoke with Azcón, offering the full support of the central government. A dedicated hotline has been established for families seeking information about the injured.

The Astún resort, a popular skiing destination in the Aragon region of the Pyrenees near the French border, remains closed pending further investigations.



After successfully performing the two-hour emergency C-section under bombardment, the medics posed for a photo to mark the moment

Medics under siege: 'We took this photo, fearing it would be our last'

Dr. Mustafa Ali Abdulrahman Ibo and his team perform surgeries amid relentless bombardment at the last functioning hospital in El-Fasher, a city under siege for nine months in Sudan's western Darfur region.

Over the past month, the Saudi Hospital recorded 28 deaths and more than 50 injuries among staff and patients due to intense shelling—the highest toll since the siege began. "The continuous attacks on the Saudi Hospital have become part of our daily lives," said Dr. Ibo, a Darfuri who has lived in El-Fasher since 2011.

One of the most terrifying incidents occurred during an emergency caesarean as shelling began. "A shell hit the hospital's perimeter wall, and another struck the maternity operating room, damaging the generator and plunging us into darkness," he recounted. The team used phone torches to complete the two-hour surgery in a room filled with dust and shrapnel.

Dr. Khatab Mohammed, who led the procedure, said the situation was life-threatening. "The environment was no longer

sterile. After ensuring safety for ourselves and the patient, we cleaned her, changed our gowns, and continued the surgery." Despite the challenges, they successfully delivered the baby.

The doctors, many of whom graduated from the University of El-Fasher, gathered for a group photo after the operation, fearing it might be their last. That day, they performed two more life-saving surgeries.

Since the outbreak of Sudan's civil war in April 2023, the city of El-Fasher has become a humanitarian crisis zone. The conflict, driven by clashes between the army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), has displaced over 12 million people. The RSF, accused of ethnic cleansing against non-Arab communities, began besieging El-Fasher a year ago, cutting off supply routes and attacking from three sides.

Saudi Hospital, the only facility in North Darfur with surgical capacity, is overwhelmed. Initially specializing in obstetrics and gynecology, it now provides all medical services under dire conditions. Medical director Dr. Mudathir Ibrahim Suleiman

described a recent bombing: "Pregnant women, children, and staff were in shock. Some were injured and had to be pulled from the rubble." Despite these dangers, he said, "There is no other place for women and children to seek life-saving care."

El-Fasher's population has halved, with many fleeing to the nearby Zamzam camp, where 500,000 people live in famine conditions. Saudi Hospital also serves the camp, with Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) running ambulances to transport emergency cases—although even these have come under attack.

Aid agencies warn of an unfolding maternal and child health crisis in Darfur, worsened by airstrikes in some areas. The World Health Organization (WHO) has urged respect for international humanitarian laws, emphasizing that "the sanctity of health must be respected even in war."

Despite opportunities to leave, the medics remain steadfast. "Our souls refused to abandon the people of this city," said Dr. Mohammed. "We are determined to save lives, wherever we can, even under a tree."

Nigeria becomes 9th BRICS partner country

Nigeria has joined the BRICS group as a partner country, Brazil's government announced on Friday, bringing Africa's largest economy into the alliance of emerging markets.

Brazil, which holds the bloc's rotating presidency, highlighted Nigeria's shared interests with other BRICS members. The partnership expands the group's global influence, which now represents over half the world's population and accounts for more than 45% of global GDP.

As the ninth BRICS partner, Nigeria joins Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Thailand, Uganda, and Uz-

bekistan. While partner status allows participation in BRICS meetings and events, it does not include full membership privileges such as voting rights.

Brazil commended Nigeria's efforts in strengthening cooperation across the Global South and its commitment to reforming global governance—key priorities for the bloc. With its status as one of the world's top oil producers, Nigeria is seen as a significant economic addition to the group.

The announcement underscores BRICS' growing influence on the international stage, reflecting its role in reshaping global economic and political dynamics.

Statue of Spanish conquistador reinstalled in Central Lima

A statue of Spanish conquistador Francisco Pizarro has been reinstalled in the heart of Peru's capital, Lima, more than two decades after its removal. The sculpture was unveiled during a ceremony commemorating the 490th anniversary of Lima's founding.

Pizarro, who established Lima in 1535 after conquering the Inca Empire, remains a contentious figure. While some

view him as a mass murderer who obliterated indigenous cultures, others believe Peru should acknowledge its complex history rather than erase it.

The bronze monument, depicting Pizarro on horseback with a drawn sword, was created by American sculptor Charles Rumsey and donated to Lima in 1935 to mark the city's fourth centenary. It was relocated to a park outside the city center in 2003 after public pressure.

Luis Bogdanovich, tasked with restoring the historic center, explained that the statue had sustained damage due to vibrations from passing trains at its previous location. On Saturday, Lima's mayor, Rafael López Aliaga, and Isabel Díaz Ayuso, president of the Community of Madrid, rededicated the statue in the city's main square, Plaza de Armas, alongside Bogdanovich and Pizarro's descendants.

Díaz Ayuso described the event as celebrating "not only the birth of a city but also the beginning of a historic encounter that forever transformed the world," as reported by El País. However, the statue's return sparked protests nearby, with demonstrators calling it an insult to indigenous peoples. One protester described the reinstallation as "an offense to all indigenous peoples of Peru, Latin America, and the world."

Sports

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

NFF finalises plans for CAF B-license coaching course

The Nigeria Football Federation has set in motion concrete plans to organize a four-month CAF B-License Coaching Course designed to enhance the capacity of Nigerian coaches and prepare them for current and future challenges. The programme is for both men and women coaches.

NFF Technical Director, Coach Augustine Eguavoen said that the course is part of NFF's strategic effort to build the capacity of coaches across the country, and will be done in modules.

To be eligible to participate in the course that will run from April 7 to August 25, 2025, a candidate must be an



active coach, possess a CAF C-License certificate that has been put to use in the past two years, must be able to read and write in English language, have basic computer skills and a

laptop, have a valid G-mail account, and must submit a medical certificate that proves he/she is physically and mentally fit to undertake the course.

"We are targeting a maxi-

mum number of 25 participants. Applicants will be provided with a CAF CMS registration link upon successful completion of the pre-course assessment, and will pay the sum of N500,000 (Five Hundred Thousand Naira Only) on or before March 31, 2025," Eguavoen added.

It can be recalled that last year, the NFF organized a CAF C-License programme exclusively for women the first-ever which drew 30 women coaches from across the country, including a good number of former Nigeria international players. The three-module course took place between July and September 2024.

Coach Sam Elijah drums support for Super Eagles Coach Erick Chelle

Coach Sam Elijah of the Kwara Football Academy has called for unwa-

vering support for Erick Sekou Chelle, the newly appointed Head Coach of the Super Ea-

gles, to ensure his success in leading Nigeria to qualify for the FIFA World Cup and win the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON).

Coach Elijah made the call while sharing his thoughts on Chelle's appointment.

Coach Elijah, a former Saudi '89 sensation, acknowledged that Nigeria boasts of experienced coaches, including Austin Eguavoen, Emmanuel Amunike, and Samson Siasia, who have proven their abilities in the past. However, he emphasized that the appointment has already been made, and it is now the collective responsibility of all stakeholders to support the Malian coach.

"There's nothing we can do but support Coach Chelle to succeed. The big task ahead of him is enormous—AFCON 2025 and World Cup qualification are key goals. Everyone needs to rally behind him," Elijah remarked.

The Super Eagles currently find themselves in a challenging position, sitting 4th in their World Cup qualification group with just 3 points after three games. With qualification matches set to resume in March, Coach Elijah stressed the importance of unity and encouragement to help Chelle and the team overcome their current hurdles and achieve success



Gombe gov to launch inter-sec schools athletics competition Jan 21

The Governor of Gombe State, Alhaji Muhammadu Inuwa Yahaya, will lead a team of dignitaries to the opening ceremony of the 2025 Gombe Inter-Secondary Schools Athletics Competition, set for Tuesday, January 21st, at the Patani Stadium, Gombe.

The ceremony, initially slated for Sunday, January 19th, was rescheduled to ensure smooth organization and accommodate the busy schedules of invited guests.

The competition, organized by the Gombe State Amateur Athletics Association (GSAAA) under the leadership of Honourable Ahmed Shuaib Gara Gombe, has attracted over 2,000 athletes from 73

schools across 11 Local Government Areas of the state.

The Emir of Gombe, His Royal Highness Alhaji Dr. Abubakar Shehu Abubakar III CFR, will serve as the Royal Father of the Day.

The event is also supported by key figures, including the Secretary to the State Government, Professor Abubakar Ibrahim Njodi, and the Commissioners for Education and Youth & Sports, Professors Aishatu Umar Maigari and Alhaji Adamu Inuwa Pantami.

Other dignitaries include the SUBEB Chairman Alhaji Babaji Babadidi and ALGON Chairman Barrister Sani Haruna.

The competition aims to promote sportsmanship, uncover young athletic talents,

and foster youth development. It features 26 events, ranging from sprints to field events, and will culminate in a closing ceremony on January 25th, where medals and awards will be presented to outstanding

athletes and schools.

With top-class facilities and a secure environment, including a fully-equipped Games Village, the event promises a holistic experience for both participants and spectators.



Monday Gift scores as Tenerife fall to Granada

Super Falcons attacker Monday Gift scored a late consolation as Tenerife lost to Granada.

Monday netted a brace last week when Tenerife hammered Dep La corona 5-1.

She has not scored seven league goals this season.

Her compatriot Rinsola Babajide started the game but was substituted for Linea Laupstad in the fifty-nine minutes.



Super Eagles goalkeeper risks 4 years ban for betting

Udinese's goalkeeper Maduka Okoye is being probed by criminal prosecutors in Udine in relation to "anomalous" betting on him being booked in his side's match against Lazio in Rome last March, Messaggero Veneto reported on Friday.

The 25-year-old was given a yellow card for time-wasting in the second half of his side's

2-1 win.

The owner of a pizzeria Okoye frequently dines at is also under investigation, according to the report.

Okoye, who is currently unavailable after surgery on his wrist, also risks a four-year ban from football from the sporting authorities if he is found guilty of involvement in illegal betting.



10th Access Bank Lagos City marathon for Feb 15

The countdown has begun for the 10th edition of the Access Bank Lagos City Marathon, set to take place on Saturday, February 15, 2025, in Lagos.

As the marathon celebrates a decade of excellence, the Gold Label Race holds bigger promises, drawing a global audience.

With 4,000 foreign runners and nearly 100 international elite athletes expected to participate, the streets of Lagos will come alive with the spirit of competition and unity, on Feb. 15th, one day after Val-

entine's Day.

The marathon, renowned as one of Africa's largest, is proudly supported by Access Bank, 7UP Bottling Company, Kia Motors, Airtel, and the Lagos State Government.

While February might be winter in other parts of the world, Lagos is looking to bring the heat with its vibrant energy and world-class hospitality. Whether one is running, cheering, or soaking in the sporting and festive atmosphere, the 10th edition of this race promises to be an unforgettable experience.

Girona defeat to Sevilla not end of European ambition —Michel

Girona missed the chance to move into the top six in LaLiga and the European qualification places when they lost at home to Sevilla weekend, but manager Michel still believes they can achieve that goal.

Michel's side, who finished third last season to enter European competition for the first time in their history, have struggled to recreate that form

this campaign, and the 2-1 defeat leaves them eighth in the standings.

"One game does not take away the idea that we have the potential to fight for Europe. I am clear about it and also that we have to show it on the pitch," Michel said.

"This is a step backwards but there is the whole second half of the season. We have to continue believing, working,

"The first thing is to achieve salvation which gives security and the club has stability but then we have to look upwards and build a team that can fight for Europe."

Girona took a scarcely deserved lead before the break, after Sevilla had an early penalty saved, but the visitors scored twice in the second half to leave Michel's side empty-handed.

"We wanted to have the ball

and lock Sevilla in but we lost too many balls in the build-up, imprecise. And that generated uncertainty for us to grow in the game," Michel said.

"We didn't have the ability in attack and if Sevilla can run they can hurt you.

"They shot 14 times and we had seven. We had the ball but we did not manage to make progression in the game as we were looking to



CAF' Enyimba crash out of Confederation Cup after loss to Zamalek

Enyimba's Confederation Cup journey has come to an end following a 3-1 defeat to Zamalek SC in

their final group stage match at the Cairo International Stadium on Sunday.

Enyimba entered the match

with slim hopes of progressing, needing a victory and relying on the result of Al Masry's game against Black Bulls Maputo. Zamalek, having already secured the top spot in the group with 11 points, showed no signs of letting up.

Mostafa Shalaby's header in the 29th minute put Zamalek in the lead, dealing a blow to Enyimba's hopes. Seifeddine Jaziri then doubled Zamalek's advantage shortly after half-time.

Ifeanyi Ihemekwele pulled a goal back for Enyimba in the 57th minute, offering a glimmer of hope. However, Jaziri's

second goal in the 87th minute sealed the victory for Zamalek and confirmed Enyimba's elimination.

In a parallel fixture, Al Masry secured their qualification with a dominant 3-1 win over Black Bulls Maputo, with Fakhredine Ben Youssef scoring a first-half hat-trick.

With their Confederation Cup campaign over, Enyimba will now turn their attention to the Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL), which resumes on January 23 with a match against Kano Pillars. The team will aim to make a strong push for the league title



Daniel Baier terminates contract with FC Bayern

Former Bundesliga player Daniel Baier has already terminated his contract with FC Bayern, where he was recently working as a scout.

Baier is moving to RB

Leipzig. From 15 February, Baier will join Leipzig as Sports Coordinator and head up the Scouting, Data Analytics and Career Centre departments.

Vitor Roque's wife seeks divorce

Vitor Roque's wife announces on IG that she has asked the player for a divorce: "The marriage didn't work out. When we arrived in Europe his attitude started to

change, I think because of the pressure of football. He took out his stress with attitudes against me ... For example, I had to ask if I could take something inside the fridge, inside my own house!"

Arsenal considering £70m bid for RB Leipzig striker Sesko

Arsenal could accelerate their plans to sign a top-tier striker, with RB Leipzig's Benjamin Sesko reportedly under consideration by manager Mikel Arteta.

The Gunners are grappling with a mounting injury crisis, including the absence of Gabriel Jesus, sidelined for over three months due to a serious knee injury, and Bukayo Saka, whose injury has further dampened their

Premier League title aspirations.

According to The Sun, Arsenal are deliberating whether to make a £70 million move for the highly-rated Sesko in January or opt for a short-term loan signing to bolster their attacking options.

Addressing the team's predicament, Arteta acknowledged the urgent need for reinforcements.

"We have more necessity now because of what happened in the last few weeks," he stated.

Arsenal prepares new contract proposal for Myles Lewis-Skelly

Arsenal are preparing a new contract proposal for Myles Lewis-Skelly

After all excellent performances appreciated by Arteta, teammates and the fans, Arsenal want new deal done.

Myles' considered a gem for present and future, great model to show Academy's work... same as Nwaneri

Negotiations to follow but Arsenal optimistic as they want Lewis-Skelly as part of the long term project.



Tennis: Coco Gauff says TikTok ban in US @affects her

Coco Gauff says she is sad that Tiktok is banned in the United States but it will make her read her books.

The world number three said the ban of the social media app really affected her and is hoping for a reprieve from the US government.

The world number 3 expressed her feelings by writing RIP Tiktok in USA on the camera lens shortly after her win today .Gauff has over

700,000followers on the Chinese social media app.

Aryna Sabalenka has also condemned the ban on Tiktok by the US government.

The Australian Open has over 500,000 followers .

Tiktok has been switched off in America following concerned that the Chinese government is using it monitor activities in United States.

It is seen as a security threat



Tennis: Australian Open defending champion Sabalenka on course for 3rd straight title

Defending champion Aryna Sabalenka is on course to win his 3rd straight Title after 6-1 -6-2 win over Mira Andreva.

The Belarusian is aiming to become the first person since Martina Hingis in 1999 to win three consecutive singles title .

Others with three straight titles in Melbourne are Monica Seles,Steffi Graf, Margaret Court and Monica Seles.

She will next face Anastasia Pavlyuchenko in the quarter final after the Russian beat Donna Vekic 7-6,6-0.

Also through is Coco Gauff who came from behind to beat

Belinda Bencic and set up a last eight battle with 11th seed Paulo Badosa .

In the Men's singles,Second seed Alexander Zverev defeated Ugo Humbert to set up a last eight encounter with Tommy Paul who needed just 87 minutes to thrash Alenjandro Folkin 6-1 6-1 6-1.

There was no problem for Carlos Alcaraz as his opponent Jack Draper was forced to retire due to injury .

This set up a Titanic quarter final battle against Novak Djokovic.

The Serb, bidding to win his 25 grand slam title saw off 24th seed ,Jiri Lehecha 6-3,6-4,7-6.

Akwa Ibom State FA announces date for 2025 FA Cup draws

The Akwa Ibom State Football Association (AKSFA) has officially announced the date for the 2025 FA Cup draws.

According to a notice released on Friday, January 17, 2025, by the Secretary of the Akwa Ibom State FA, Comrade Kufre Etukudo, the draw ceremony for the 2024/2025 President Federation Cup will take place on Friday, January 24, 2025, at the Godswill Akpabio International Stadium, Uyo,

beginning at 10:00 am

"All registered clubs should please take note. Many thanks!" the notice concluded.

Akwa United FC, the reigning champions of the Akwa Ibom State FA Cup, will defend their title against other clubs in the state as the competition promises to deliver thrilling football action.

Speaking after the announcement, the Chairman of the Akwa Ibom State FA, Mr Samuel Umoh, expressed his

satisfaction with the impressive number of teams registered for the competition. He assured stakeholders of a smooth, hitch-free tournament.

"This will be the first FA Cup competition under my leadership as Chairman, and we are committed to making it a memorable experience. The draw ceremony will be conducted transparently, setting the stage for what promises to be an exciting tournament," Mr Umoh stated.



SOCIETY

Revisiting Obaseki's Dark Legacies

FRED ITUA

Edo State has had its fair share of political drama, but the exposés surrounding former Governor Godwin Obaseki's administration are giving Nollywood a run for its money. From land-grabbing sagas to oil palm scandals, the State has been left reeling from a cocktail of alleged mismanagement and shady dealings. Enter Governor Monday Okpebholo, the man now tasked with cleaning up the mess.

Let's call a spade a spade. The administration of former Governor Godwin Obaseki was notorious for acts that flagrantly undermined the interests of Edo State. While his spin doctors trumpet projects they claim were of high-quality, heavy-portfolio investments, fact-finding missions and community consultations have exposed these claims as mere fabrications. It was a government of obubuyeye—an elaborate show of smoke and mirrors where, truly, the more you looked, the less you saw.

Now, the chickens have come home to roost, and the harsh realities of Obaseki's misrule are being laid bare. Thankfully, the people of Edo refused the shameless attempt to install a puppet administration through his political godson, which would have been nothing more than a proxy govern-

ment to shield Obaseki's tracks.

In the wake of his departure, stakeholders across Edo State are finally finding their voices and courage to speak up about the reign of terror, deceit, and mismanagement that characterized Obaseki's eight years in office. Let us take a closer look at the damage he left behind.

Rebranded by critics as "Grabland Obaseki," the former governor's tenure has been likened to a real-life episode of Game of Thrones—minus the dragons but with enough land disputes to make Westeros blush. According to a damning committee report, Obaseki allegedly allocated a staggering 37,000 hectares of land to cronies, pocketing billions of naira that cannot be traced. But that wasn't enough. The former governor reportedly had his eyes on palace artifacts, too, because why stop at land when you can aim for history?

The fallout? Communities across Edo State left in anguish, their lands handed over for private enrichment. If unchecked, critics warn, Obaseki's reign could have turned every Edo indigene into a tenant in their homeland. At the heart of this betrayal lies the plight of Edo's agrarian communities, whose ancestral lands were stripped from them under the guise of development. The administration turned its back on its constitutional responsibility to provide

security and welfare for the people, leaving communities to fend for themselves.

Without government support, these communities have been forced into desperate self-help. Villagers constructed their own classrooms and employed teachers because the government failed to fulfill its basic educational responsibilities. Rather, it superintended over a failed local government administration, diverting resources and celebrating mediocrity. Deplorable roads were patched with makeshift palliatives, often funded by communal contributions, as state funds meant for infrastructure disappeared into private coffers. With insecurity on the rise and no intervention from the state, some communities had no choice but to rely on ill-prepared, poorly trained, and unequipped vigilante groups for protection.

This is not just neglect; it is a betrayal of the very people Obaseki swore to serve. Obaseki's administration perfected the art of distraction. His eloquence and carefully curated public image masked an administration rife with fraud and deceit. The so-called reforms, often touted as groundbreaking, turned out to be nothing more than adacadabra—a government of illusions. Thankfully, Governor Okpebholo has vowed to recover these lands and redirect funds toward the state's development.

If the land saga was the starter, the oil palm scandal was the main course. The Onitsha Zone Shareholders' Association recently dropped a bombshell, accusing the former administration of colluding with Okomu Oil Palm and Presco PLC to fleece the state. According to Bishop Goodluck Akpore, the association's chairman, these companies were gifted 36,388 hectares of land and have not paid taxes or compensated host communities. Instead, profits were allegedly funneled into private pockets, with Obaseki's Afrinvest Company reportedly eyeing a N100 billion bond for future share conversion.

The allegations paint a bleak picture: multimillion-naira businesses extracting wealth from Edo soil without giving back. Host communities have no corporate social responsibility (CSR) projects to show for the companies' presence, yet trailer loads of palm oil valued at N80 million each roll out of the state regularly. It is the ultimate "thanks-for-nothing" scenario.

Governor Okpebholo is not taking these revelations lightly. He has promised thorough investigations into both the land and oil palm controversies. While emphasizing peaceful dialogue, the Governor made it clear that no company or individual would be above scrutiny.

"We will seek a peaceful resolution and invite Presco and Okomu Oil to meet with us," Okpebholo said. "Their investment is important, but they must contribute fairly to Edo State."

The Governor's approach is a delicate balancing act: ensuring justice for Edo people while maintaining the economic contributions of these companies. His administration has pledged to revisit tax evasion policies and explore ways to enforce compensation for land use. This signals a shift from impunity to accountability.

Obaseki's administration will go down in history as one of Edo's darkest chapters—a fraudulent regime that cloaked itself in eloquence while perpetuating widespread exploitation. The very communities that should have been uplifted were instead condemned to poverty, forced to build their own schools, maintain their own roads, and protect themselves from insecurity.

But Edo is resilient. The courage of its people, coupled with Governor Okpebholo's determination to right these wrongs, signals a brighter future. The era of obubuyeye is over, and the people of Edo will no longer tolerate leadership that speaks eloquently but delivers nothing of substance.

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Employment of 360 cleaners and Okpebholo's knack for social justice

HAMEED BRAIMAH

Social justice refers to a fair and equitable distribution of resources, opportunities, and privileges in society. Once rooted in religious concepts, it has evolved to encompass the just organization of institutions that deliver access to economic and social benefits.

This idea perfectly encapsulates Governor Monday Okpebholo's decision to prioritize policies and programs that directly impact the lives of Edo citizens—initiatives that resonate with the people and avoid the abstract promises that alienate them.

Without promising lofty and unrealistic targets like creating 200,000 jobs, the Governor has instead taken a decisive step by employing 360 Edo citizens as cleaners in the state civil service. These individuals, previously earning a meager N20,000 per month under outsourced arrangements, now earn a significantly improved minimum wage of N70,000. Their new roles not only improve their living standards but also contribute to a healthier Edo State by ensuring clean and well-maintained government offices.

This action is a clear demonstration of Governor Okpebholo's commitment to promoting social justice and inclusivity. The 360 new employees, drawn from the three senatorial districts, reflect the administration's equitable approach to governance.

According to Edo State Head of Ser-

vice, Anthony Okungbowa Esq., these cleaners were previously outsourced to private contractors under the previous administration. These contractors prioritized profit over the welfare of their employees, resulting in poor pay and insecure jobs.

Under Governor Okpebholo, however, this exploitative arrangement has been replaced with direct employment into the state civil service, guaranteeing better pay, job security, and access to benefits such as health insurance and pensions.

OUTSOURCING GONE WRONG

The practice of outsourcing jobs in Nigeria began with high-paying companies in the oil and gas sector, where the services of cleaners, drivers, and security personnel were contracted through employment agencies. This approach was driven by legal concerns around pensions and insurance. It was however clothed in the garbs of ensuring greater efficiency in service delivery. However, government agencies, traditionally known for low remuneration, adopted the practice not to improve efficiency but to exploit workers.

Under the previous administration in Edo State, outsourced workers earned as little as N20,000 to N30,000 per month. Their contracts were insecure, with consultants and contractors wielding the power to hire and fire at will. This arrangement not only un-



dermined the welfare of workers but also deprived them of basic benefits like pensions and health insurance.

A PEOPLE-CENTERED ADMINISTRATION

Governor Okpebholo's administration, which began on November 12, 2024, has made it clear that the people come first. From restoring rights and privileges denied by the previous administration to instituting fair labor practices, the government has prioritized the welfare of Edo citizens.

The direct employment of cleaners is just one example of this shift. These workers now receive appointment letters, are guaranteed job security, and are enrolled in the Edo Health Insurance Scheme. According to the Head of Service, this initiative is just the beginning, with more recruitment drives

planned to ensure all government offices have sufficient support staff.

The Governor according to the Edo State Head of Service, wasn't pleased with the outsourcing arrangement by the Obaseki administration and as such decided to change the narrative.

"By giving direct employment, we are enhancing the lives of the people and ensuring they enjoy good governance and as such place them in the right position to contribute to the State's economy" Okungbowa said.

A BROADER VISION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

Governor Okpebholo's decision aligns with global calls for social justice, which emphasize inclusive governance, fair labor practices, and the extension of social protections. By reinforcing institutions and policies that prioritize eq-

uity, the administration is setting a new standard for governance in Edo State.

Proposals for advancing social justice globally include ensuring decent work, providing lifelong learning opportunities, and reforming labor markets to deliver fair outcomes. The direct employment of cleaners by the Edo State Government is a practical step in this direction, ensuring that workers are not only paid fairly but also receive the protections and benefits they deserve.

GRATITUDE AND COMMITMENT

On behalf of the Edo workforce, the Head of Service expressed gratitude to Governor Okpebholo for his people-centered initiatives. He assured the Governor of the workers' commitment to delivering their best in the discharge of their duties.

The employment of 360 cleaners is not just a policy shift; it is a statement of intent. It reflects an administration that understands the importance of dignity of labor, fairness in governance, and the need to put people at the heart of its decisions.

Governor Okpebholo's commitment to social justice is a reminder that good governance is not about grand promises but about taking tangible steps to improve the lives of the people. As more initiatives unfold, it is clear that Edo State is on a path toward greater equity, fairness, and prosperity for all its citizens.