

# Trade Union Congress (TUC) rejects VAT hike

The Trade Union Congress of Nigeria has opposed the proposed increase in the Value Added Tax rate, as outlined in the Federal Government's Tax Reform Bills, warning that the move could worsen the economic hardship faced by Nigerians.

The Federal Government had proposed a phased VAT hike from the current 7.5% to 10%, 12.5%, and ultimately 15%, a

move the TUC described as ill-timed and detrimental to the welfare of citizens already grappling with inflation, unemployment, and a soaring cost of living.

Speaking during a press briefing in Abuja on Tuesday, following the union's National Executive Council meeting held on November 26, 2024, TUC President Festus Osifo said maintaining the VAT rate at 7.5 per cent was crucial to safeguarding Ni-

gerians from additional financial pressure.

"Allowing the Value Added Tax rate to remain at 7.5 per cent is in the best interest of the nation. Increasing it now would impose an additional burden on households and businesses already struggling with economic challenges," Osifo said.

He added, "With inflation, unemployment, and the cost of living on the rise, higher taxes

could stifle economic growth and erode consumer purchasing power."

The TUC called for a review of the tax exemption threshold, urging the government to raise it from N800,000 to N2.5 million per annum to ease the financial strain on low-income earners.

"This measure would increase disposable income, stimulate economic activity, and provide relief to struggling Nigerians,"

Osifo explained.

He said, "The threshold for tax exemptions should be increased to N2,500,000 per annum. This adjustment would offer much-needed relief to low-income earners, enabling them to cope with the current economic challenges."

The TUC also expressed reservations about the proposed transfer of royalty collection from the Nigerian Upstream

Petroleum Regulatory Commission to the Nigeria Revenue Service (NRS), citing risks of revenue losses and inefficiencies.

"Royalty determination and reconciliation require specialised technical expertise in oil and gas operations, which the NUPRC possesses but the NRS lacks. This shift could result in inaccurate assessments, enforcement chal-

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# The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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# Journalists' attack: Edo NUJ hails Okpebholo's intervention

The Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) has expressed its profound gratitude to His Excellency, Senator Monday Okpebholo, the Governor of Edo State, for his prompt response in addressing the recent attack on journalists during the Governorship tribunal case in Benin City.

In a joint statement, the chair-

man of the Nigeria Union of Journalists, Edo state council Dr Festus Alenkhe and the secretary, Andy Egbon s commended Governor Okpebholo's decisive action in ensuring the safety and security of journalists, stating that his swift intervention demonstrates his commitment to protecting the fundamental rights of media practitioners.

According to reports, some uniform men had attacked journalists covering the tribunal case, prompting the Governor's immediate response.

The Governor has since directed the security agency to investigate claims by the NUJ accordingly.

The NUJ praised Governor Okpebholo's stance, emphasiz-

ing that his actions align with the principles of democracy and the rule of law. The union reiterated its commitment to upholding the rights of journalists and promoting a safe and conducive environment for media practice.

In the statement, the NUJ said: "We are deeply grateful to Governor Okpebholo for his

prompt intervention, which has sent a strong message that attacks on journalists will not be tolerated in Edo State."

The Union urged all stakeholders to join hands with Governor Okpebholo in promoting a culture of respect for the media and the fundamen-

tal rights of journalists.

As the Governor continues to demonstrate his commitment to protecting the rights of journalists, the NUJ has pledged its support for his administration's efforts to promote a safe and enabling environment for media practice in Edo State.



## SWEARING-IN:

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, receiving a document from Onomen Goodness Briggs, after she was sworn-in as Chairman of the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB), at Government House, Benin City.

## Ovia South-West APC pledge support for Dep Gov Idahosa

BERNADETTE IDALU

Edo State Deputy Governor, Rt. Hon. Dennis Idahosa, on Tuesday, January 21, hosted the leadership of the All Progressives Congress (APC) from Ovia South-West Local Government Area in a courtesy visit to his office.

The delegation, led by Hon. Emmanuel Ogbomo, congratulated the deputy governor and reaffirmed their support for his administration. During the meeting, Idahosa reassured them of his unwavering loyalty to Governor Monday Okpebholo and his dedication to fostering equitable development across Edo State.

Reflecting on his political career, Idahosa recounted his previous roles, including his tenure as a state commissioner, South-South representative in the Federal Ministry of Environment's Great Green Wall program, and as a two-

term member of the House of Representatives. He expressed gratitude to his constituents for their continued trust and highlighted the historical significance of being the first Ovia indigene to serve as deputy governor of Edo State.

"I am committed to ensuring that the dividends of democracy are felt in Ovia and across all parts of Edo State," he said.

Hon. Emmanuel Ogbomo, APC Chairman for Ovia South-West, praised Idahosa's leadership and pledged the party's unwavering support for the Sen. Monday Okpebholo-led administration. He also appealed for increased political appointments for the local government area.

Other prominent leaders at the meeting, including Architect Francis Evbuomwan and Hon. Edosa Enowoghomwenma, called for unity and collaboration to drive sustainable development in Edo State.

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# Princess Lucy Okojie laid to rest in Edo

Benin City, the capital of Edo State, witnessed a significant gathering of dignitaries from around the world over the weekend during the burial ceremony of the late Princess Lucy Okojie.

She was the mother of Ambassador Princess Asha-Okojie, a former Labour Party gov-

ernorship aspirant in the 2024 Edo State election.

Princess Lucy Okojie, born on December 12, 1945, in Uromi, Esan North East Local Government Area of Edo State, passed away in 2024 at the age of 79 years.

Described as a woman of grace and profound wisdom,

Princess Lucy was remembered for her devotion to her family and her commitment to nurturing her children with love, discipline, and faith.

Her influence extended to her roles as a grandmother and great-grandmother, leaving cherished memories and a legacy of service, generosity, and selflessness.

In a tribute, her daughter, Ambassador Princess Asha-Okojie, described her mother as a teacher, confidant, and guiding light. "You taught me the true meaning of strength and grace. Your kindness and compassion knew no boundaries, creating a legacy of love that has outlived you," she said.

She further praised her mother's ability to bring people together and offer encouragement, pledging to honor her memory by upholding her virtues and continuing her legacy.

Princess Asha-Okojie also expressed gratitude to everyone who attended the ceremony and supported the family during their time of loss.



PRINCESS ASHA-OKOJIE

## Edo advances integration of traditional, orthodox medicine

OLUWATUNMISE OMOSEYIN

The Edo State Traditional Medicine Board is leading efforts to integrate traditional and orthodox medicine into the state's healthcare system to promote a more holistic approach to healthcare delivery.

Dr. Joy Amina Mike Opara, pharmacist and Secretary to the Board in a chat with newsmen in Benin City highlighted the Board's publicity campaign to promote traditional medicine and emphasize its significance in complementing orthodox medicine.

She underscored the need for a balanced approach that combines the strengths of both systems for better health outcomes.

"Traditional medicine is as old as man's existence. When God created man, He created plants even before man. Traditional medicines are derived from natural sources, and nature is our friend—we can't go wrong with it," she explained.

Dr. Opara noted that 50% of orthodox medicines originate from natural sources, encouraging greater trust in traditional remedies.

"If we can trust orthodox medicine, we should trust the natural sources where 50% of it comes from," she added.

She emphasized that traditional and orthodox medicine are not rivals, but complementary, with each offering unique benefits.

According to her, while orthodox medicine excels in emergency care, traditional medicine can provide effective solutions in areas like blood-boosting remedies for cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy.

Addressing standardization and quality control, Dr. Opara revealed plans to enhance collaboration with research institutions, starting with the University of Benin.

She also urged traditional medicine practitioners to register with the Board for proper support and regulation.

## Prioritise production to address insecurity, hunger, Obi tells FG

Former Anambra State Governor, Peter Obi, has decried the way the prevailing security challenges have ravaged Zamfara communities and hamper agricultural production, thereby aggravating hunger and poverty in the agrarian state.

The presidential candidate of the Labour Party in the 2023 general elections stated this when he paid a condolence visit to the Emir of Gusau and the people Of Zamfara State in Gusau.

His trip to the North-Western state followed the military strikes in the Tungan Kara

community in the Maradun Local Government Area which claimed about 16 lives.

Obi who was represented by spokesperson for the Labour Party, Tanko Yunusa, expressed concerns that people who were supposed to be protected were the ones who lost their lives.

His condolence message was delivered to the Emir of Gusau by Yunusa, who said whatever happens to the people of Zamfara happens to Peter Obi, which was why he sent him to come and commiserate with them before LP candidate Peter Obi would come in person.

## TUC rejects VAT hike

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Challenges, and reduced investor confidence," Osifo warned.

The union commended the government's decision to retain the Tertiary Education Trust Fund and the National Agency for Science and Engineering Infrastructure, describing their roles as pivotal to the country's education and technological advancement.

"These institutions have significantly contributed to improving tertiary education and fostering homegrown technologies. Their continued existence is vital for sustained progress in

education, technology, and national development," Osifo said.

Osifo called on the Federal Government to adopt tax policies that prioritise the welfare of citizens and promote equitable economic growth.

"As discussions on the Tax Reform Bill continue, it is our hope that the focus will remain on fostering economic growth and improving living conditions for all Nigerians," he said.

The TUC reaffirmed its commitment to advocating for policies that enhance the well-being of Nigerians, emphasising that proactive and citizen-centred reforms reflect true leadership.



COURTESY VISIT:

Edo State Deputy Governor, Hon. Dennis Idahosa (left), receiving FM Radio from Adesuwa Lato, General Manager, B Side FM Benin, during a courtesy visit to Government House, Benin City, by management and staff of the station.

PHOTO: MOSES OBOH.

## Okpebholo assigns portfolios to new Commissioners

BENIN CITY

The Governor of Edo State, Senator Monday Okpebholo, has assigned portfolios to six newly sworn-in commissioners as they join the State Executive Council.

Hon. Paul Nosayaba Ohonbamu will oversee the Ministry of Information and Communications, while Hon. Dr. Washington Osa Osifo takes charge of the Ministry of Water Resources and Energy. Dr. Emmanuel Paddy Iyamu has been assigned to the Ministry of

Education, and Sir (Dr.) Lucky Eseigbe will lead the Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs.

Mr. Andrew Ijegbai assumes responsibility for the Ministry of Mining, and Barr. Marie Olabisi Idaomi will head the Ministry of Women Affairs

and Social Development.

All commissioners are expected to resume duties at their respective ministries immediately. This was confirmed in a statement signed by the Secretary to the State Government, Umar Musa Ikhilor, Esq.

## Ohunbamu assumes office as Edo Commissioner for Information, Communication

AICHIENEDE GOODLUCK

Hon. Paul Ohunbamu, the newly sworn-in Commissioner for Information and Communication in Edo State, has emphasized the critical role of effective communication in governance.

He noted that keeping citizens informed about government policies, programs, and projects significantly reduces the spread of misinformation.

Speaking during a meeting

with staff at the Ministry of Information and Communication upon his assumption of office, Hon. Ohunbamu expressed gratitude for the warm reception he received.

He highlighted the Ministry's responsibility to provide accurate and consistent reportage of the government's initiatives.

The Commissioner reaffirmed his commitment to supporting Governor Monday Okpebholo's administration, stating that he would work tirelessly to help actualize the

Governor's vision for the state. He urged Ministry staff to foster teamwork in disseminating government policies and projects to benefit the people of Edo State.

In his remarks, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry, Dr. Desmond Agbama, welcomed Hon. Ohunbamu warmly, describing the Ministry as the "mouthpiece of the Government."

He assured the Commissioner of the staff's readiness to collaborate in achieving the Minis-

try's mandate and promoting the Governor's policy agenda.

"We are delighted to have you as our Commissioner and look forward to working in harmony to advance the vision and mission of this Ministry," Dr. Agbama stated.

The meeting was attended by key government officials, including the Chief Press Secretary to the Governor, Mr. Fred Itua; the Special Adviser to the Governor on Electronic Media, Mr. Paul Ezenwa; as well as directors and staff of the Ministry.

## Okpebholo education reform: Edo State Poly gets full accreditation, expands academic offerings

Edo State Polytechnic, Usen, has achieved full accreditation from the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) for its Higher National Diploma (HND) programme in Business Administration and Management.

The Polytechnic has also received approval to introduce

new programmes, including a National Diploma (ND) in Mineral and Petroleum Resources Engineering and a Higher National Diploma (HND) in Estate Management and Valuation.

The accreditation was confirmed in a letter addressed to the Polytechnic's Rector by Fatima Kabir Umar, Director of

the Polytechnic Programmes Department, on behalf of NBTE's Executive Secretary, Professor Idris Bugaje. The development follows a successful Quality Assurance Visitation Exercise conducted at the institution.

Reacting to the milestone, the Polytechnic's Rector, Engr. Omoruyi Sylvester, described

the accreditation as a landmark achievement. He expressed gratitude to Governor Monday Okpebholo for his unwavering commitment to restructuring the Polytechnic and promoting quality education. The Rector highlighted the Governor's vision to position Edo State Polytechnic for global recognition and competitiveness.

# Court adjourns hearing on suit to block Kano LGs' allocation

The absence of the 11th defence counsel, John Baiyeshea SAN, on Tuesday, stalled the hearing of a suit seeking to halt statutory allocations to the 44 local government areas of Kano State.

Recall that the plaintiffs, Abdullahi Abbas, Aminu Aliyu-Tiga, and the All Progressives Congress, through their counsel, Sunday Olowomoran,

filed a motion *ex parte* dated October 28, and November 1, 2024.

The defendants are the Central Bank of Nigeria, Federal Account Allocation Committee, Revenue Mobilisation Allocation and Fiscal Commission, Accountant-General of the Federation, Minister of Finance, Auditor General of the Federation, and Attorney

General of the Federation.

Others are the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Kano State Government, Attorney General Kano, Kano State Independent Electoral Commission and the 44 Kano local governments.

The plaintiffs are seeking the court to restrain the Federal Government, the CBN, and the Accountant-General of the

Federation from releasing statutory funds to Kano's 44 local government areas.

The plaintiffs are seeking a declaration that the 12th to 55th (44 local governments) respondents are not democratically elected and constituted pursuant to Section 7(1) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 as amended.

At the resumed sitting at the Federal High Court in Kano, the presiding judge, Justice Simon Amobeda, informed the court that counsel for KANSIEC, John Baiyeshea, SAN, was indisposed, citing medical reasons and had sent a letter requesting an adjournment.

He ordered that all applications requiring a response be filed and ready before the next adjourned date and adjourned the matter till March 4, 2025, for hearing.

Counsel for the state Attorney General, Femi Falana, informed the court that the plaintiffs had served them with six processes.

Falana, along with Adegboye Awomolo, SAN, counsel

for the Kano State Government; B. D. Uche, counsel for the first, third, and seventh respondents; and H. M. Ma'aruf, did not object to the adjournment.

Responding, Sadiqu Sammani-Lawan, counsel representing parties seeking to be joined in the suit, indicated the interest of his clients.

"The interest of our client is very fundamental. They are the National Union of Local Government Employees, the National Union of Teachers, and health workers.

"The allocation of the Federal Government goes directly to these employees that are more than 60,000 in the state. If they are not joined in this suit, there will be a problem," he said.



**MEDICAL MISSION:**

Abia State Governor, Dr. Alex Otti (middle), with Revive Medical Team from Belgium for their second medical mission in Abia State.

## CAPPA seeks N300m budget for tobacco control in Nigeria

The Corporate Accountability and Public Participation Africa has called on the National Assembly to significantly increase the budgetary allocation for tobacco control in the 2025 national budget.

The organisation disclosed this in a statement on Tuesday.

It is advocating for the allocation to rise from the current N10m to N300m, arguing that this funding is essential to combat the growing public health crisis caused by tobacco consumption.

In separate petitions submitted on Monday to the Senate President, Godswill Akpabio and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Tajudeen Abbas, CAPPA emphasised that a minimum of N300m is crucial for addressing the multiple challenges posed by tobacco use and ensuring the effective implementation of the National Tobacco Control Act of 2015.

CAPPA's Executive Director, Akinbode Oluwafemi, high-

lighted the severe health and economic toll of tobacco use, which remains the leading preventable cause of death worldwide, including in Nigeria.

He pointed out that tobacco-related illnesses claim 26,800 lives annually in Nigeria and contribute to widespread non-communicable diseases such as cancer, heart disease, and chronic respiratory illnesses.

"Tobacco use is the leading preventable cause of death globally, and Nigeria is no exception. Annually, tobacco-related illnesses claim 26,800 Nigerian lives and cause debilitating conditions for thousands more.

"The economic toll is enormous, costing billions in health-care expenses and lost productivity. Additionally, tobacco cultivation exacerbates deforestation and soil degradation, while cigarette waste pollutes the environment," he said.

Oluwafemi also raised concerns about the increasing popularity of unregulated tobacco

and nicotine products, such as electronic cigarettes and smokeless tobacco, which are particularly targeted at young people. These products, he said, are often marketed as trendy alternatives despite their health risks.

"These products are marketed as trendy despite their health risks. Moreover, tobacco companies in Nigeria continue to exploit weak monitoring systems to aggressively market their products on social media, while using corporate social responsibility initiatives to gain favour with public health authorities.

"This undermines tobacco control laws and encourages more people to take up tobacco consumption," he added.

While acknowledging the increase in tobacco control funding in the 2024 budget—from N4.7m in 2023 to N10m—CAPPA argued that this allocation remains insufficient. The group outlined several key areas where additional funding is necessary to strengthen tobacco

control efforts.

Oluwafemi explained that a significant portion of the current funds is spent on operational costs, particularly for the National Tobacco Control Committee, which is required to meet at least four times annually, as stipulated by the NTCA.

However, the current budget allocation falls short of covering these essential costs, leaving little room for other critical activities.

"Operational costs consume a large portion of the funds. The NTCC requires substantial financing for its meetings, which should occur at least four times annually. The current allocation is inadequate, leaving virtually no financial room for these activities," Oluwafemi said.

He also stressed the need for robust public awareness campaigns to educate Nigerians about the dangers of tobacco use.

Such campaigns, he noted, require significant funding for media outreach and community engagement.

## Senate pushes for census, plans meeting with Tinubu

The Senate has vowed to push for the conduct of a national population census before the current administration ends in 2027.

This commitment was reiterated during a budget defense session with the Chairman of the National Population Commission, Nasir Isa Kwarra.

The Chairman of the Committee on National Identity Management and Population, Senator Abdul Ningi, said, "We will not rest on our oars until a census is conducted before this administration ends."

He revealed that the Senate was preparing to meet with President Bola Tinubu to stress the urgency of conducting the census in 2025. "We will soon engage the President on this matter and formally write to him through the Senate President, highlighting the need for a census this year," he said.

Also, Senator Olalere Oyewunmi underscored the importance of pressuring the President to prioritise the census.

Similarly, Senator Diket Plang lamented the country's reliance on estimated population figures, which hampers effective planning.

"It's disheartening that we are still working with estimates in this modern age. How can we plan without knowing the exact population? It's sad that 2024 passed without achieving 90 percent performance.

According to him, we need to know our population, urging for a definitive count by 2025," he said.

The population commission boss explained that the census budget is yet to be finalised, as they plan to integrate a biometric component into the process.

"We are waiting to incorporate the biometric aspect into this year's budget and conduct a test run before meeting with the President. The President prefers a biometric model for the headcount, moving away from the conventional approach," he said.

## Ministry of Regional Devt seeks increased budget allocation

CAROLINE AMEH

The Ministry of Regional Development has called on the National Assembly for increased budgetary allocation to enable it to effectively deliver on its mandate.

The Minister of Regional Development, Abubakar Momoh, made this appeal on Tuesday in Abuja while defending the ministry's 2025 budget proposals before the Joint Committee on Regional Development.

Momoh emphasized the ministry's commitment to working closely with the committee to achieve a realistic and impactful 2025 budget. He noted that while efforts had been made to secure adequate funding, the current budgetary allocation remains insufficient to fully implement the ministry's objectives.

The minister presented an

outline of the ministry's 2025 budget, which has a ceiling of N28.9 billion. This includes: N24 billion for capital expenditure, N1.6 billion for recurrent expenditure and N2.7 billion for personnel costs.

However, Momoh expressed concerns that the budget framework still reflects that of the defunct Ministry of Niger Delta Development, rather than the newly expanded focus on all six regions of the country.

Despite funding constraints, the minister pointed out several key provisions in the 2025 budget which include: N2 billion for youth and women empowerment, as well as capacity-building programs across the regions; N1 billion for livelihood support initiatives and N600 million for medical outreach programs targeting rural communities.

## Tinubu, Wike, Fubara, Ogoni leaders in closed-door meeting

President Bola Tinubu and the Minister of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Nyesom Wike, on Tuesday, held a closed-door meeting with a delegation of Ogoni leaders led by Governor Siminalayi Fubara of Rivers State.

Also present at the meeting

was the Chief of staff to the President, Femi Gbajabiamila; the National Security Adviser, Nuhu Ribadu; the Group Chief Executive Officer of the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPCL), Mele Kyari; the Minister of Information and National Orientation,

Mohammed Idris; and other ministers and aides.

The meeting came after a coalition of civil society organisations demanded an allocation of \$1 trillion from the Federal Government for the cleanup of the Niger Delta and compensation for lost livelihoods, before

the resumption of crude oil production in Ogoniland.

The meeting came amid the protracted feud between Fubara and Wike who were once political allies. Wike was the immediate-past governor of the oil-rich South-South state.

## NEWS

## Foreign

# South Korea president denies ordering arrest of lawmakers

South Korea's suspended president Yoon Suk Yeol has made his first appearance at his impeachment trial, where he denied ordering the arrest of lawmakers during his attempt to impose martial law.

Parliament voted to impeach Yoon last month, and last week the Constitutional Court began a trial to decide whether to permanently remove him from office.

Yoon is also facing a separate criminal investigation into whether he led an insurrection. He has been detained since last

week.

Security was tight on Tuesday as Yoon was transported by van from the detention centre, where he is being held, to the Constitutional Court.

Police formed human walls and held up anti-riot barricades to stop hundreds of his supporters who had gathered nearby from getting too close. Last weekend saw violence as dozens of Yoon's supporters clashed with law enforcers and broke into another court house.

On Tuesday, Yoon was asked if he had ordered military com-

manders to "drag out" lawmakers from parliament on the night he declared martial law, in order to prevent them from overturning his order.

He replied: "No."

Military commanders had earlier alleged that Yoon had given such an order on 3 December, after lawmakers climbed fences and broke barricades to enter the parliament building and vote down Yoon's martial law declaration.

"I am a person who has lived with a firm belief in liberal democracy," Yoon said in his open-

ing remarks on Tuesday.

"As the Constitutional Court exists to safeguard the constitution, I ask that you thoroughly examine all aspects of this case," he told the judges.

During the hearing, which lasted nearly two hours, Yoon and his lawyers argued that the martial law order was "a formality that was not meant to be executed".

Yoon had cited threats from "anti-state forces" and North Korea when he declared martial law, but it soon became clear that his move had been spurred not

by external threats but by his own domestic political troubles.

The lawyers prosecuting the case, who were selected by the parliament, accused Yoon and his lawyers for making "largely contradictory, irrational, and unclear" comments.

"If they continue to evade responsibility as they did today, it will only work against them in the impeachment trial and cause even greater disappointment among the public," the prosecutors told reporters after the hearing.

Outside the courtroom, Yoon's supporters - who have become more agitated and aggressive lately - demanded that the suspended president be released and restored to office immediately.

They were forced to set up some distance from the court due to tight security. Waving their trademark combination of Korean and US flags, some wore Maga-style baseball caps embossed with the slogan "Make Korea Free Again", an echo of the campaign slogan used by US President Donald Trump.

Some of their chants included

calls for the leader of South Korea's main opposition party, Lee Jae-myung, and the investigator leading Yoon's criminal case to be executed.

Several of the supporters told the BBC they believed Yoon's martial law declaration was an attempt to protect the country's democracy.

They accused the opposition party of being pro-China and pro-North Korea, and for wanting to turn South Korea into a communist country.

"This is a conflict between people who pursue communism and people who pursue democracy," said Wongeun Seong, a 49-year-old businessman who joined the protest on the way back from a lunch meeting.

Former defence minister Kim Yong-hyun, who reportedly suggested martial law to Yoon, will testify during the next hearing on Thursday.

Yoon will be removed from office if at least six of the eight-member Constitutional Court bench votes to uphold the impeachment. A presidential election must then be called within 60 days.



Khan Mohammad spoke to the media on his return to Jalalabad in Eastern Afghanistan on Tuesday

## Mozambique opposition leader open to serving in rival's government

Mozambique's main opposition leader Venâncio Mondlane has told the BBC he is prepared to serve in the government if President Daniel Chapo meets his demands to end the political crisis that has hit the country following disputed elections.

Chapo said he had set up a team that was "considering" whether his rival should be invited to join a new "inclusive" government.

The two men outlined their positions in separate interviews with the BBC, giving the impression that they were open to rapprochement after the deaths of about 300 people in post-election unrest.

Mondlane rejected his defeat in October's election, saying the result was rigged - something that Chapo denied.

Mozambique's highest court declared Chapo the winner with 65% of the vote to Mondlane's 24%.

Chapo was the candidate of the ruling Frelimo party, as his predecessor, Filipe Nyusi, had to step down after serving two terms in office.

Chapo was officially sworn in

as president on 15 January, about a week after Mondlane held his own inauguration to declare himself the "people's president."

Mondlane told the BBC that Chapo was "forced" on the nation, and was the "president of the defence force."

Mondlane said that he had, nevertheless, decided to suspend protests for the first 100 days of his rival's term on condition he did the following:

Mondlane said that if Chapo agreed to this, he would "open a window" for negotiations or else he would call on his supporters to renew protests.

Asked whether he was prepared to work in Chapo's government, Mondlane replied: "Yes, if he has a genuine interest to work with me. He's got a chance to invite me to the table of dialogue."

In his interview with the BBC, Chapo said he wanted to "govern in an inclusive way", and to introduce reforms to address concerns about the electoral law, human rights and freedom of expression.

He said talks were currently taking place with opposition

parties represented in the new parliament, and they would later be widened to include "all segments of society."

Chapo added that he wanted to form a government that was "open to all Mozambicans", but he wanted to stress that "the profile of the people is very important."

Asked whether he believed Mondlane qualified to serve in government, Chapo replied: "It will depend... because there is a team that is right now considering that, on the profile of the people, their competencies, their meritocracy, the patriotism - all these pre-requisites that

I'm alluding to.

"If the team reaches the conclusion that these people have the right profile, they will be part of the government. Those who do not have that profile will not take part."

Aged 47, Chapo was chosen by Frelimo, which has been in power since independence 49 years ago, as its candidate to rally young voters affected by high unemployment, and fed up with the party's decades-long rule.

He told the BBC that he wanted both local and foreign investment to increase in Mozambique in order to make the economy "more dynamic".

## Scores killed as fire engulfs Turkish ski hotel

A fire has engulfed a hotel in the Turkish ski resort of Bolu, killing 66 people and injuring at least 51 more, officials have said.

The fire broke out at the 12-storey Grand Kartal Hotel at 03:27 local time (00:27 GMT) during a busy holiday period when 234 people were staying there, he added.

An initial toll of 10 dead was raised significantly in the hours after the fire by Turkey's interior ministry. At least two people died after jumping from the hotel's windows, Turkish reports said.

Footage circulating in Turkey showed linen hanging from windows which was used by those trying to escape the burning building.

Bolu governor Abdulaziz Aydin said initial reports suggested the fire had broken out in the restaurant section of the hotel's fourth floor and spread to the floors above.

The hotel was investigating whether guests had been trapped in their rooms as the fire spread.

The governor told reporters the distance between the hotel, in Kartalkaya, and the centre of Bolu, paired with the freezing

weather conditions, meant it took more than an hour for fire engines to arrive.

Rescue efforts continued through the morning, and the interior minister said emergency services had deployed 267 people to respond to the fire.

By mid-morning the local mayor said they were still trying to reach parts of the hotel.

The Bolu mountains are popular with skiers from Istanbul and the capital Ankara and the hotel was operating at high occupancy at the start of two-week school holidays.

The north-western town is about 170km (105 miles) from Ankara.

Although the fire was confined to one hotel, the governor told Turkish media that a neighbouring hotel was evacuated as a precaution.

Ski instructor Necmi Kepcetan told Turkish TV he had managed to escape because he knew the hotel, while guests who did not know it as well as him were not as fortunate.

"People were shouting at the windows, 'Save us,' because there was intense smoke inside. We pulled 20-25 people out," he told NTV.

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after the fire by Turkey's interior ministry. At least two people died after jumping from the hotel's windows, Turkish reports said.

Footage circulating in Turkey showed linen hanging from windows which was used by those trying to escape the burning building.

Bolu governor Abdulaziz Aydin said initial reports suggested the fire had broken out in the restaurant section of the

hotel's fourth floor and spread to the floors above.

The hotel was investigating whether guests had been trapped in their rooms as the fire spread.

The governor told reporters the distance between the hotel, in Kartalkaya, and the centre of Bolu, paired with the freezing weather conditions, meant it took more than an hour for fire engines to arrive.

Rescue efforts continued

through the morning, and the interior minister said emergency services had deployed 267 people to respond to the fire.

By mid-morning the local mayor said they were still trying to reach parts of the hotel.

The Bolu mountains are popular with skiers from Istanbul and the capital Ankara and the hotel was operating at high occupancy at the start of two-week school holidays.

## NEWS

## Foreign

**Hell on earth: China deportation looms for Uyghurs held in Thailand**

Niluper says she has been living in agony.

A Uyghur refugee, she has spent the past decade hoping her husband would join her and their three sons in Turkey, where they now live.

The family was detained in Thailand in 2014 after fleeing increasing repression in their hometown in China's Xinjiang province. She and the children were allowed to leave Thailand a year later. But her husband remained in detention, along with 47 other Uyghur men.

Niluper – not her real name

– now fears she and her children may never see him again.

Ten days ago, she learned that Thai officials had tried to persuade the detainees to sign forms consenting to be sent back to China. When they realised what was in the forms, they refused to sign them.

The Thai government has denied having any immediate plans to send them back. But human rights groups believe they could be deported at any time.

"I don't know how to explain this to my sons," Niluper told the BBC on a video call from

Turkey. Her sons, she says, keep asking about their father. The youngest has never met him.

"I don't know how to digest this. I'm living in constant pain, constant fear that at any moment I may get the news from Thailand that my husband has been deported."

**'HELL ON EARTH'**

The last time Thailand deported Uyghur asylum seekers was in July 2015. Without warning, it put 109 of them onto a plane back to China, prompting a storm of protest from governments and human rights groups.

The few photos that were released show them hooded and handcuffed, guarded by large numbers of Chinese police officers. Little is known about what happened to them after their return. Other deported Uyghurs have received long prison sentences in secret trials.

The nominee for Secretary of State in the incoming Trump administration, Marco Rubio, has promised to press Thailand not to send the remaining Uyghurs back.

Their living conditions have been described by one human rights defender as "a hell on earth". They are all being held in the

Immigration Detention Centre (IDC) in central Bangkok, which houses most of those charged with immigration violations in Thailand. Some are there only briefly, while waiting to be deported; others are there much longer.

Driving along the narrow, congested road known as Suan Phlu it is easy to miss the non-descript cluster of cement buildings, and difficult to believe they house an estimated 900 detainees – the Thai authorities give out no precise numbers.

The IDC is known to be hot, overcrowded and unsanitary. Journalists are not allowed

inside. Lawyers usually warn their clients to avoid being sent there if at all possible.

There are 43 Uyghurs there, plus another five being held in a Bangkok prison for trying to escape. They are the last of around 350 who fled China in 2013 and 2014.

They are kept in isolation from other inmates and are rarely allowed visits by outsiders or lawyers. They get few opportunities to exercise, or even to see daylight. They have been charged with no crime, apart from entering Thailand without a visa. Five Uyghurs have died in custody.

**US trades Taliban prisoner for two American detainees**

Two Americans held by the Taliban authorities in Afghanistan have been exchanged for an Afghan imprisoned in the US on drug trafficking and terrorism charges.

The news emerged after Ryan Corbett and William Wallace McKenty were freed. The Afghan, Khan Mohammad, had been serving a life sentence in a federal prison in California on drug trafficking and terrorism charges.

A statement from the Taliban government in Kabul announced the agreement, which was concluded just before President Joe Biden ended his term in office.

Mr Corbett's release was confirmed by his family. US media, quoting official sources, identified Mr McKenty as the second American.

The deal – reportedly the culmination of two years of negotiations – was done just before Joe Biden handed over power to Donald Trump on Monday.

"An Afghan fighter Khan Mohammed imprisoned in America has been released in exchange for American citizens and returned to the country," the Taliban foreign ministry said in a statement.

The family of Ryan Corbett thanked both administrations as well as Qatar for what they described as its vital role.

"Today, our hearts are filled with overwhelming gratitude and praise to God for sustaining Ryan's life and bringing him back home after what has been the most challenging and uncertain 894 days of our lives," the family said.

Mr Corbett had lived in Af-

ghanistan for many years with his family and was detained by the Taliban more than two years ago when he returned on a business trip.

There are few details about Mr McKenty, whose family have asked for privacy.

Khan Mohammad was a member of the Taliban taken captive in Afghanistan during the US's military engagement. He was jailed in 2008. Joe Biden commuted his sentence just before he left office.

The Taliban called the exchange the result of "long and fruitful negotiations" with the US and "a good example of resolving issues through dialogue".

"The Islamic Emirate looks positively at the actions of the United States of America that help the normalisation and development of relations between the two countries," it said.

Since the Taliban took power in 2021, they have not been formally recognised by any government.

While the move is not likely to change relations between Kabul and Washington, more negotiations may follow – two other Americans are still in Afghanistan, believed to be George Glezmman and Mahmood Habibi.

The Taliban are also seeking the release of an Afghan who is one of the few remaining prisoners at the US's Guantanamo Bay detention camp.

At a rally in Washington on the eve of his inauguration, President Trump threatened to cut humanitarian aid to Afghanistan unless the Taliban returned the military equipment seized after the US pulled out in 2021.



Venâncio Mondlane ran for the presidency for the first time in October

**Antisemitic crimes may be funded overseas, say Australian police**

Australia's federal police have said they are investigating whether "overseas actors or individuals" are paying criminals to carry out antisemitic crimes in the country.

There has been a spate of such incidents in recent months, the latest of which saw a childcare centre in Sydney set alight and sprayed with anti-Jewish graffiti. No-one was injured.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese called a snap cabinet meeting in response, where officials agreed to set up a national database to track antisemitic incidents.

Thus far, the federal police taskforce, set up in December to investigate such incidents, received more than 166 reports of antisemitic crimes.

"We are looking into whether overseas actors or individuals have paid local criminals in Australia to carry out some of these crimes in our suburbs," Australian Federal Police (AFP) Commissioner Reece Kershaw said, adding that it was possible that cryptocurrency was involved.

The digital currency can

take longer to identify, Mr Kershaw said.

The commissioner said police were also investigating whether young people were carrying out these crimes and whether they had been radicalised online.

However, Mr Kershaw cautioned, "intelligence is not the same as evidence" and more charges were expected soon.

Last week, a man from Sydney became the first person to be charged by the federal taskforce, dubbed Special Operation Avalite, over alleged death threats he made towards

a Jewish organisation.

Albanese said Tuesday's incident at a childcare centre in the eastern Sydney suburb of Maroubra was "as cowardly as it is disgusting" and described it as a "hate crime."

"This was an attack targeted at the Jewish community. And it is a crime that concerns us all because it is also an attack on the nation and society we have built together," he wrote on social media.

The Jewish Council of Australia, which was set up last year in opposition to antisemitism, said that it "strongly condemns" this and all such incidents.

"These acts underscore the urgent need for cooperation, education and community dialogue to combat prejudice and promote understanding," it said in a statement.

Most of the recent incidents have taken place in Sydney and have involved antisemitic graffiti, arson and vandalism of buildings including synagogues.

New South Wales has set up its own state-level taskforce to address these incidents and 36 people been charged so far with antisemitic related offences.

**In every street there are dead: Gaza rescuers reckon with scale of destruction**

On the first full day of peace in Gaza on Monday, rescue workers and civilians began to reckon with the sheer scale of the destruction to the Strip.

Gaza's Civil Defence agency – the strip's main emergency response service – said it feared there were more than 10,000 bodies still buried under the vast sea of rubble.

Spokesman Mahmoud Basal told the BBC that they hoped

to recover the dead within 100 days, but were likely to be delayed by a deficit of bulldozers and other essential equipment.

New images from Gaza following Sunday's ceasefire showed scenes of total devastation wrought during 15 months of Israeli offensive, particularly in the north of the enclave.

The UN has previously estimated that 60% of structures across Gaza have been damaged or destroyed.

Though the sounds of bombing were replaced by celebrations as the ceasefire began on Sunday, the reality facing people across Gaza remains desperate.

According to the UN World Food Programme (WFP), the war has left more than two million Gazans homeless, without income, and completely dependent on food aid to survive.

That aid began to enter Gaza

immediately after the ceasefire on Sunday and the UN said at least 630 lorries went into the Strip before the end of the day.

On Monday, a further 915 lorries entered the enclave, the UN said, the highest number since the start of the war 15 months ago.

Sam Rose, acting director of Unrwa, the UN's Palestinian refugee agency in Gaza, said the aid supplies were just the beginning in the challenge of

bringing the strip back to life.

"We're not just talking about food, healthcare, buildings, roads, infrastructure, we've got individuals, families, communities that need to be rebuilt," he said.

"The trauma that they've gone through, the suffering, the loss, the grief, the humiliation, and the cruelty that they've endured over the past 16 months – this is going to be a very, very long road."

# Sports

- Football
- Athletics
- Gulf
- Basketball
- Tennis
- Boxing

## AFCON 2025 Draw: Super Eagles await group stage opponents in Rabat

OLATOMIWA OYEDELE

In anticipation of the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations draw, the Super Eagles of Nigeria will discover their group opponents in Rabat, the capital of Morocco.

The Confederation of African Football (CAF) announced on Tuesday that Rabat will host the draw.

The tournament will feature six groups, each with four teams. The top two teams from each group, along with the four best third-placed teams, will progress to the Round of 16.

Along with the draw, participating nations will also have the chance to evaluate match venues, training facilities, and hotel accommodations in Morocco in preparation for the

competition.

The draw is scheduled for

January 27, while the tournament itself will run from De-

cember 21, 2025, to January 18, 2026.



## Man City complete signing of Victor Reis from Palmeiras

OLATOMIWA OYEDELE

Premier League champions Manchester City have announced the signing of 19-year-old Brazilian Defender Vitor Reis from Palmeiras.

City said Reis moved to the Etihad Stadium on a four-and-a-half-year deal, keeping him at City until the summer of 2029.

A classy centre-back and regular captain on his journey through Palmeiras' youth ranks, Reis made his senior debut in June 2024 and went on to be a key part of the team as they finished runners-up in the Brazilian Serie A," City stated.

He played 22 times for his boyhood club, including 18 games in the league and two matches in the Copa Libertadores.

His performances even earned him national recognition as he was named in the Trofeu Mesa Redonda Team of

the Year for all Brazilian football across 2024. He will now join Pep Guardiola's squad for the remainder of the 2024/25 season and beyond."

Commenting on the move, Reis said: "I'm excited to join Manchester City, one of the biggest clubs in the world.

"Everyone has seen the amazing achievements in recent seasons, and I want to make my mark as we seek more trophies.

"Working with Pep Guardiola is something every young player wants to do, and I know he can help me to develop into the best player I can be.

"City also have a lot of experience of working with Brazilian footballers and joining the likes of Ederson and Savinho in the squad will be a big help to me."

On Monday City also announced the signing of Uzbekistan defender Abdukodir Khusanov from RC Lens.

## 2024/25 NWFL Premiership MD2 preview: Fierce South-South and South-West derbies on the horizon

After an exciting opening round, the 2024/25 Nigeria Women's Football League (NWFL) Premiership returns with another thrilling matchday on Wednesday, January 22, 2025. The season kicked off with a star-studded opening match between defending champions Edo Queens and Abia Angels, which was broadcast live on NTA Sports and StarTimes. This match marked the beginning of a season filled with exciting TV coverage, as weekly star games will continue to be aired for fans across the country.

This week, two high-stakes derbies are set to dominate the action: the South-South derby between Ibom Angels and Bayelsa Queens, and the South-West derby between Remo Stars Ladies and Ekiti Queens. Both matchups promise intense competition as teams aim to build on or recover from their opening results.

### GROUP A: Heartland Queens vs Edo Queens

Heartland Queens return to the Dan Anyiam Stadium looking to recover from their narrow 1-0 loss to Ekiti Queens last week. In that match, a goal from Odunayo Olaleye handed the Ajao City side a defeat in Ado Ekiti. The result was a surprising one, given Heartland's impressive Super Six qualification last season, while Ekiti Queens fought off relegation.

Meanwhile, Edo Queens started their title defense with a statement 5-0 win over Abia Angels in the season's opening match. Moses Aduku's side will be looking to maintain their perfect start as they travel to Owerri.

### Remo Stars Ladies vs Ekiti Queens

Both teams are off to strong starts this season. Remo Stars Ladies secured an impressive 3-1 win over Confluence Queens in Anyigba, while Ekiti Queens managed a hard-fought 1-0 victory over Heartland Queens. This encounter will be their third meeting in the top flight, with both sides winning their home fixtures last season.

The South-West derby promises to be a thrilling contest as both teams look to extend their unbeaten runs.

### Dannaz Ladies vs Confluence Queens

In another compelling match, Dannaz Ladies face Confluence Queens, both teams coming off disappointing starts. Dannaz lost 1-0 to Nasarawa Amazons, while Confluence Queens suffered a 3-1 defeat to Remo Stars Ladies. This match marks the third meeting between these two sides in top-flight history.

A win for either team would be crucial to get their campaigns back on track after tough opening results.

### Abia Angels vs Nasarawa Amazons

Abia Angels endured a heavy 5-0 loss to defending champions Edo Queens last week and will be hoping to bounce back against a Nasarawa Amazons side that edged Dannaz Ladies 1-0. The Solid Miners have dominated the head-to-head in recent years, winning four of the last five encounters, including a 1-0 victory away from home last season.

Despite their dominance, Nasarawa Amazons have rarely beaten Abia Angels by more than a single goal, making this clash one to watch closely.

### GROUP B: Naija Ratels vs Rivers Angels

Naija Ratels host Rivers Angels at home after securing a valuable away point against Adamawa Queens. Rivers Angels, meanwhile, fought hard to secure a 2-1 victory over Ibom Angels in their opening match. The host side will be keen to end a four-match winless streak against the visitors, who have dominated their recent encounters.

Rivers Angels have won all four of the last meetings between these sides, including a 1-0 win in the 2024 President Federation Cup final. Naija Ratels will be aiming to turn the tide in this highly anticipated match.

### FC Robo Queens vs Adamawa Queens

FC Robo Queens head into this match as heavy favorites

after a dominant 5-1 victory over Benue Queens in their opening match. Adamawa Queens, who secured a 1-1 draw against Naija Ratels, now face the daunting task of facing a high-scoring FC Robo side.

The Lagos-based team has historically had the upper hand, with two consecutive wins in their last two meetings, including a 3-0 win in the 2022/23 season. Adamawa Queens will be hoping to improve their record against the Landladies in this encounter.

### Delta Queens vs Benue Queens

Both Delta Queens and Benue Queens will be looking for redemption after tough starts to the season. Delta Queens lost 1-0 to Bayelsa Queens, while Benue Queens were hammered 5-1 by FC Robo Queens. The two teams will meet for the first time in the top flight at the Stephen Keshi Stadium, Asaba.

With talented players like former UEFA Women's Champions League top scorer Emueje Ogbiagbevha leading their attack, Delta Queens will be hoping to put in a dominant performance. For Benue Queens, a strong result here would be vital to bounce back after their heavy defeat.

### Ibom Angels vs Bayelsa Queens

In another South-South derby, Ibom Angels will host Bayelsa Queens at the Uyo

Township Stadium. The Orange Ladies suffered a 2-1 loss to Rivers Angels last week, while Bayelsa Queens scraped a 1-0 win over Delta Queens.

The last meeting between these two sides ended in a dominant 4-0 win for Bayelsa Queens during the 2020/21 season, but with new coaches and players in both teams, this match promises to be a tightly contested affair. Ibom Angels' Edwin Okon will face Tosan Blankson, and with their previous encounters ending in

draws, this match is set to be an exciting showdown.

Matchday 2 of the 2024/25 NWFL Premiership promises a weekend full of thrilling encounters. From South-South and South-West derbies to teams looking to bounce back from disappointing starts, fans are in for an action-packed round of fixtures as the league heats up. Be sure to catch the star games live on NTA Sports and StarTimes as they continue to showcase the best of Nigerian women's football.

## NSC appoints Olympian, Yusuf Ali, head of elite athletes devt, Podium board

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

The National Sports Commission, (NSC), has appointed Ex-international and former Edo State Sports Commission Chairman Olympian Yusuf Ali as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of its Elite Athletes Development and Podium Board.

The appointment was contained in a statement signed

by the Director General of the National Sports Commission, Hon, Bukola Olopade.

The statement specified that the board has been saddled with the mandate of creating a sustainable system for Nigeria Elites and their welfare.

According to the statement, Mr Bambo Akanni of the 'Making of Champions' will serve as a consultant and member of the Committee.

The 13 member committee will also have Prof. Ken Anugweje as Adviser and Member. Other members of the board include Dr Emmanuel Igbinoso, Salihu Abubakar, Aku Aghazu, Tunde Adedokun and Prof. Sadiq Abdulahi.

The Committee also has former Olympian Mary Onyali, Hauwa Kulu Akinyemi, Sunday Odebode and Olalekan Alabi as members while

Bamiduro Olumide will serve as Secretary.

According to the DG, "All the members of the committee were carefully selected based on their expertise and wealth of experience to help ensure Nigeria has a sustainable podium success at International competitions with a scientific reward system.

"And this is one of the innovations of the Commission un-

der the Chairmanship of Malam Shehu Dikko so that the issues of Athletes Welfare and Training Grants are professionally managed henceforth.

"What we have done now is to ensure that there is a sustainable system that will em-

power potential athletes that will be on the Podium for the country and this is one of many initiatives that the Commission will be rolling out under the Renewed Hope Initiative for Nigerian Sports Economy," Olopade emphasized.



## Women's ticket W/Cup: Edo Sports Commission chairman Amadin hails Nigeria Women's Cricket team's win over New Zealand

● **says Federation President Uyi Akpata deserves national honour**

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

The Executive Chairman, Edo State Sports Commission, Hon. Amadin Desmond Enabulele, has congratulated the Nigeria U-19 Cricket Team on their historical two-run victory over New Zealand at the ICC Women's U-19 Cricket World Cup in Malaysia.

The Nigeria Junior Female Yellow Greens, as the Nigerian U-19 team is fondly called, stunned the cricketing world with the remarkable victory on Monday, after beating one of the tournament's favourites in a match delayed for two hours due to heavy rainfall.

The Edo Sports Commission boss described the victory as a monumental achievement

which deserves national recognition and honour.

Hon Amadin said, "We never had it so good that we beat one of the tournament's favourites at the world stage. This victory goes down in history as one of the biggest gains in sports in our country that have happened under the present administration

We in Edo are very happy and congratulate our Under-19

women's cricket team; the coaches, players and the National Cricket Federation president Uyi Akpata who have brought honour to their father's land.

This calls for celebration and national recognition of those who made it possible.

The Nigeria Cricket Federation under its President, Uyi Akpata, has been consistent with their hard work and their unbiased selection of players has also contributed to the development and popularity of the game in Edo State which has about nine players in the victorious team

"This result will further encourage us to invest more in the development of cricket in Edo State. We are proud of the team, and we are proud of You Akpata.

The Nigerian girls are playing table toppers South Africa on Wednesday, January 22nd in the last game of group C and hope to qualify for the super six stage.

Three teams are expected to qualify from each Group and form two groups of six teams

From 4 groups of 4 Teams each to two groups of 6 Teams each which will later be pruned to super 4 which is the Semi Finals.

## Nigerian sports will witness tremendous progress in 2025 – FG

The Federal Government has reaffirmed its commitment to see that sports in Nigeria witness a turnaround in 2025 and beyond.

The Senior Special Assistant to the President on Grassroots Sports Development, Adeyinka Adeyinka Zulu, stated this at the final of the maiden FCT Area Council Cup which was held on Sunday at the Apo Football Pitch, Abuja.

Zulu said all necessary plans have been put in place to make sure that youths are positively and productively engaged from the elementary school to higher institutions to participate in sports and chart a career that will benefit them on the long run.

He also assured that the 10-year Sports Master Plan will see the light of the day through the National Sports Commission under the leadership of Malam Shehu Dikko and Bukola Olopade, the chairman and the Director General respectively.

"My major plan (in 2025) is for us to get it right with grassroots, to understand, to orientate and to lecture them (the youths) on why they have to participate in sports in their various local government to the states.

"And what I mean is that it is high time for us to make sure that our young and talented youths have something doing for themselves, their states and the country. But I'm assuring you that our own plan is to engage the youths from the primary school to tertiary institutions and see that they really partake in sports.

"I want to assure you that the 10-year Master Plan on Sports is surely going to see the light of the day. You have a respected, a reliable and a tested chairman of the National Sports Commission.

"We also have a Director General who has been in sports for the past 30 years and I want to assure you that working together with these two people, our sports will witness a lot of improvement when you talk of grassroots sports rise to the highest level to the elite sports in this country.

"What you see today is the younger generation coming out en masse to support Mr President. It shows that the President is a grassroots man, it shows that Bitrus is a man of the people, it shows the love he has for Abuja. And very soon, we will see our youths representing the country in international competitions," the SSA said.



## Postponement of matchday 20 fixtures: Bendel Insurance, Enyimba put on hold indefinitely

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

As the second round of the Nigeria Premier Football League 2024/25 officially resumes this weekend, Bendel Insurance Football Club and Enyimba FC match will not hold on Monday, January 27, 2025 as earlier scheduled as the league management body NPFL has announced the postponement indefinitely

The postponement, according to the league management body is occasioned by the inability of Enyimba FC to play their remaining two first round outstanding matches due to their CAF Confederation engagements which ended with a 3-1 loss to Zamalek FC of Egypt on Sunday.

According to the NPFL cor-

cular signed by the chief operating officer Davidson Owumi the new rescheduled dates will be communicated to affected teams and match officials concerned accordingly.

Other second round matches postponed include Kwara versus Shooting Stars and Kano Pillars versus Elkanemi Warriors

Bendel Insurance will therefore travel to Portharcourt on Thursday, January 30th to take on Rivers Utd in the match day 21 engagement and also return to Benin to host Katsina Utd in the match day 22 on February 2nd at the Samuel Ogbemudia stadium when the fans and supporters will be welcome to the stadium.

The Benin Arsenal finished the first round 15th position on the league table with 21 points

with coach Greg Ikhenoba in charge of the technical crew after the former head coach Monday Odigi's resignation.

Meanwhile, the former Assistant coach of Bendel Insurance FC Greg Ikhenoba has been confirmed head coach for the Benin Arsenal after his brilliant performance as stand-in head coach after the resignation of his boss. His ability to guide the team from relegation zone to safety before the end of the first round, winning three matches, drawing three with one loss of seven matches convinced the Executive chairman, Edo State Sports Commission Hon Amadin Desmond Enabulele who approved the confirmation of coach Ikhenoba a week ago.

The Eso Sports Commission boss also appointed a general

manager Roland Abu and team manager Peter Obanor as well as Austin Iyamu and Rolland

Ewere as technical director and Assistant coach respectively to strengthen the technical

and management of the team ahead of the second round of the league.



# COLUMN

## Edo State education transformation: Omonzane Sonia, Onomen Briggs to lead SSEB and SUBEB

*Governor Monday Okpebholo has taken a bold step in redefining the future of education in Edo State with the appointments of Omonzane Ebanehita Sonia as Chairman of the Secondary Education Board (SSEB) and Barr. Mrs. Onomen Goodness Briggs as Chairman of the Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB). These strategic appointments signal the administration's commitment to revitalising the education sector, with a focus on improving access, quality, and outcomes across basic and secondary education in the state. FRED ITUA writes:*

The appointments of Omonzane Ebanehita Sonia as Chairman of the Edo State Secondary Education Board (SSEB) and Barr. Mrs. Onomen Goodness Briggs as Chairman of the Edo State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) represent a visionary move by Governor Monday Okpebholo to redefine and reposition the educational sector in Edo State. These two leaders embody competence, innovation, and a commitment to driving systemic changes that will enhance educational outcomes and infrastructure across the state.

Omonzane's appointment as the Chairman of SSEB is seen as a strategic step in revitalizing the secondary school system. Her tenure as CEO of Higher Grace Royal College showcased her exceptional capabilities in school management, evidenced by a 25% increase in student enrollment and a 30% improvement in academic performance during her leadership.

These achievements were driven by her focus on curriculum enhancement, operational efficiency, and a commitment to fostering academic excellence. With qualifications that include a Postgraduate Degree in Business Administration and a Bachelor's in Human Resources Management from Anglia Ruskin University, Omonzane has a solid academic and professional foundation to transform Edo's secondary education system.

Her experience extends beyond administrative capabilities to include strategic planning, team leadership, and a proven ability to implement innovative solutions. She is well-versed in human capital development, conflict resolution, and data-driven decision-making, making her the ideal leader to tackle challenges such as underperformance in national examinations and the need for modernized teaching methodologies.

Her vision aligns with Governor Okpebholo's goal of making Edo State the most academically advanced in Nigeria, and her leadership is expected to bring reforms that will not only benefit students but also empower teachers to deliver world-class education.

Furthermore, Omonzane's background reflects a deep understanding of the dynamics within the education sector, having successfully balanced administrative roles with her passion for quality education. She comes from a lineage of seasoned educators,



EDO STATE GOVERNOR, SENATOR MONDAY OKPEBHOLO (LEFT), AND ONOMEN GOODNESS BRIGGS, CHAIRMAN OF SUBEB BOARD.

which provides her with a unique perspective and empathy for the needs of teachers and students. Her leadership style is expected to inspire confidence and foster collaboration among stakeholders to achieve transformative results in secondary education.

Similarly, Barr. Mrs. Onomen Goodness Briggs brings a robust combination of legal expertise, administrative acumen, and a deep understanding of educational frameworks to her new role as Chairman of SUBEB. Her tenure as President of Schools at Benson Idahosa Cathedral Academy and St. Matthews Royal Schools demonstrated her ability to achieve operational excellence while driving academic improvements. During her time at these institutions, she prioritized teacher training, curriculum optimization, and financial sustainability, all of which are critical components of her mandate at SUBEB.

Briggs' qualifications include an LL.M in Oil and Gas Law from the University of Aberdeen, a Postgraduate Diploma in Education, and an LL.B from Igbinedion University, Okada. This combination of academic and professional expertise equips her to address

*Their leadership is expected to create an ecosystem where students excel academically, teachers feel empowered, and the state achieves national and international recognition for its educational standards*

the regulatory and policy challenges within the state's basic education system. Her legal background is particularly valuable in ensuring compliance with national education standards and fostering transparency and accountability in policy implementation.

Her prior role as Legislative Aide to Senator Monday Okpebholo further

underscores her readiness to lead SUBEB. This experience gave her firsthand knowledge of public policy, government operations, and stakeholder engagement, which are essential for navigating the complexities of the education sector. Briggs' leadership will focus on enhancing access to quality basic education, addressing infrastructure deficits, and ensuring that every child in Edo State has the opportunity to receive a solid educational foundation.

Both Omonzane and Briggs represent a strategic blend of youth, experience, and innovation, making them the ideal leaders to execute Governor Okpebholo's vision. Together, they are expected to drive reforms that will address critical issues such as:

**Teacher training and professional development:** Ensuring that educators are equipped with modern teaching tools and techniques to improve classroom outcomes.

**Curriculum reform:** Aligning the curriculum with international standards to prepare students for global competitiveness.

**Infrastructure upgrades:** Building and renovating schools to provide safe, conducive learning environments.

**Policy enforcement:** Strengthening regulatory frameworks to promote accountability and transparency across the education sector.

Governor Okpebholo's administration has made it clear that education is a top priority, and these appointments reflect a commitment to fostering excellence at every level. The synergy between Omonzane's expertise in secondary education and Briggs' focus on foundational education ensures a holistic approach to improving the state's educational system.

Edo State stands at the cusp of an educational renaissance, with both leaders bringing a shared commitment to inclusivity, quality, and innovation. Their leadership is expected to create an ecosystem where students excel academically, teachers feel empowered, and the state achieves national and international recognition for its educational standards. These appointments mark the beginning of a new chapter in Edo State's journey toward educational excellence.

*Itua is the Chief Press Secretary to the Edo State governor*