

# Ramadan, Lent converge: Okpebholo urges prayers for Nigeria's unity, peace

## ● Vows fair deal for Owan, reaffirms inclusive governance

### BENIN CITY

Governor of Edo State, Monday Okpebholo, has described the simultaneous observance of Ramadan and Lent as a rare

spiritual convergence and called on Nigerians to use the sacred period to pray for national renewal.

In a statement issued on Wednesday, the governor said the alignment of the Islamic

holy month of Ramadan with the Christian Lenten season offers a solemn opportunity for reflection, sacrifice and deeper commitment to peaceful co-existence.

According to him, both sea-

sons emphasise shared values of faith, self-discipline, compassion and devotion to God.

Okpebholo urged Muslims and Christians to dedicate the period of fasting and prayer to seeking divine intervention in

the affairs of the state and the country.

He appealed for fervent prayers for unity, economic stability, improved security and lasting peace.

Describing the moment as profound for the nation, he encouraged citizens to lift Nigeria

before God in supplication, expressing confidence that collective prayers would help overcome present challenges and strengthen national cohesion.

He also wished Muslims a

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# The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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**Makinde urges Muslims, Christians to pray for Nigeria during Ramadan, Lent**

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# Senate, Reps slam envelope budgeting, condemn 'abysmal' security funding

### ABUJA

The National Assembly on Wednesday intensified its scrutiny of the executive over funding for Nigeria's security agencies, criticising the envelope budgeting system, irregular release of allocations, and warning heads of Ministries, Departments, and Agencies against habitual lateness during budget defence sessions.

Lawmakers expressed frustration over what they described as inadequate and inconsistent funding for security and intelligence

agencies at a time when President Bola Tinubu has declared a national emergency on security.

At the Senate, Chairman of the Committee on National Security and Intelligence, Sen. Yahaya Abdullahi, said it was disheartening that budgets for security and intelligence agencies were still governed by the envelope system, which he said prioritises administrative convenience over actual operational needs. "The security and intelligence community faces unprecedented threats ranging from terrorism to kidnapping, banditry, and organised crime.

Yet, their budgets remain subject to vagaries rather than real needs," Abdullahi said.

He warned that non-release or partial release of capital allocations in 2024 and 2025 had hampered the procurement of modern equipment, undermined operational readiness, and weakened the ability of agencies to respond effectively to national security challenges.

Joining him, Sen. Orji Uzor Kalu (APC-Abia) commended security and intelligence chiefs for arriving ahead of the scheduled start time, contrasting their

punctuality with the persistent tardiness of other MDA heads.

"Budget deliberations are serious matters. Delays hinder our ability to perform constitutional duties effectively," Kalu said, cautioning that excuses linked to engagements at the Presidential Villa would no longer be entertained during the critical budget period. The Senate also received a briefing from Mohammed Sanusi, Permanent Secretary, Special Services, Office of the National Security Adviser, who outlined operational constraints facing the intelligence community, in-

cluding irregular overhead releases, non-implementation of capital appropriations, foreign service personnel shortfalls due to foreign exchange differences, inadequate operational vehicles, and rising costs of maintaining the Presidential Air Fleet abroad. "Our humble prayer is that adequate funding be provided through a supplementary budget to ensure timely and speedy response to national security issues. No nation can grow without adequate security," Sanusi said.

In parallel, the House of Representatives Committee on National Security and Intelligence, chaired by Rep. Ahmad Satomi (APC-Borno), described the 2026 allocations to intelligence agencies as "grossly inadequate," noting that the ₦664.12 billion earmarked for personnel, overheads, and capital expenditure for ONSA, DSS, NIA, the Presidential Air Fleet, and the National

Institute for Security Studies falls far short of operational needs.

Satomi urged the President to review and increase funding, including establishing separate budget lines for intelligence training schools similar to Armed Forces and police institutions.

Recalling oversight visits to DSS training schools in Bauchi, Lagos, and Enugu in 2024, he described the poor state of facilities as disheartening and incapable of providing world-class technical, psychological, and sociological training for personnel who risk their lives in service to the country.

Both chambers also took a tougher stance on MDA tardiness, singling out former legislators in executive positions as frequent offenders, with Abdullahi describing the warning as a wake-up call and signalling intensified legislative scrutiny of government spending.



### INSPECTION:

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo (right) with other government officials inspecting the Temboga-Ekiuwa-University of Benin road project in Benin City.

## Tinubu signs Electoral Act Amendment Bill 2026 into law

### ABUJA

President Bola Tinubu on Wednesday signed into law the Electoral Act Amendment Bill 2026.

The brief signing ceremony took place at the President's office at the State House, Abuja with Principal officers of the National Assembly in attendance.

The National Assembly had on Tuesday passed the Electoral Act 2026 (Amendment) Bill. The amendment comes amid

intense public debate over the electronic transmission of election results in real time.

The harmonised report of the bill, including the contentious Section 60(3), was passed by both chambers on Tuesday.

President of the Senate, Sen. Godswill Akpabio, confirmed the development after the ceremony.

"The President a while ago appended his signature to the Electoral Amendment Bill passed by the National Assembly on Tuesday," Akpabio said

**APC ward congress: Two die, 3 injured in Ondo State —Police**

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**Suspected carbon-monoxide leak kills at least 30 miners in Nigeria, witnesses say** —Pgs 8

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# Cheers in Benin as Okpebholo inspects Temboga–UNIBEN road, dismisses second-term talk

● **Strengthens alliance with army on kidnapping**

## BENIN CITY

Residents of Benin City turned out in large numbers as Governor Monday Okpebholo of Edo State inspected the ongoing

Temboga–Ekiuwa–University of Benin road project, drawing cheers from the crowd.

The project, which includes the Temboga Road Extension and Oba Erediauwa Road off Upper Mission Road, is aimed

at improving connectivity and easing traffic within the axis.

The governor was taken round the site by the engineer of Heartland Nigeria Limited, Engr. Obuh Ugochukwu, who briefed him on the progress recorded so far.

Excited residents lined the roads, chanting slogans and pledging support, describing the development as long overdue.

Many expressed satisfaction with the pace and quality of work, saying the project has brought relief and renewed confidence in government.

Speaking to journalists after the inspection, Okpebholo downplayed discussions about a second term, insisting his focus remains on delivering results and consolidating political gains ahead of 2027.

He added that visible infrastructure projects across the state demonstrate the impact of governance and alignment with President Bola Tinubu's Renewed Hope Agenda.

The governor described the road as a project conceived from his vision, expressing personal satisfaction at its progress and reiterating that public happiness remains his priority.

When completed, the road is expected to decongest traffic around Upper Mission and Ikpoba Hill Road, enhance commercial activities and provide motorists with a shorter route to the Ugbowo area, reducing pressure on the city centre.

Meanwhile, Governor Monday Okpebholo, has reaffirmed his administration's strategic

partnership with the Nigerian Army to intensify the fight against kidnapping and other criminal activities across the state.

The governor made the declaration while receiving the Commander of the Nigerian Army Corps of Supply and Transport, Major General Nansak Danjuma Shagaya, and other senior officers during a courtesy visit to Government House in Benin City.

Okpebholo said the synergy between the Edo State Government and security agencies, particularly the Army, is already yielding tangible results in ongoing operations against criminal elements.

"I am delighted to receive you, especially considering the level of collaboration between

my administration and your men in tackling kidnapping. Our partnership with the 4 Brigade of the Nigerian Army is producing positive results. At times, you see your men spending days in the bush combing forests. You begin to wonder where they draw their strength from," the governor said.

He lauded the gallantry and sacrifice of soldiers engaged in anti-kidnapping operations, noting that their sustained offensives have brought relief to residents in previously troubled communities.

"My administration deeply appreciates the efforts of these gallant soldiers whose contributions are restoring peace and confidence among our people," he added.

## Fire guts electronics shops in Anambra

### NNEWI (ANAMBRA)

An early morning fire outbreak at a storey building housing electronics and electrical appliances on Wednesday, destroyed property worth millions of naira in Nnewi North Local Government area of Anambra.

Mr Chukwudi Chiketa, the Fire Chief, Anambra Fire Service, made this known to newsmen in Onitsha.

Chiketa explained that the inferno affected five shops situated in a one storey-building which was housing electronics and electrical appliances.

According to him, the fire started at about 9:00 a.m. and

the fire service deployed its men and equipment to the scene immediately to contain the situation.

"The inferno affected building is a one storey building; the inferno affected about five shops upstairs, which contain electronics and parts.

"The good part of it is that it has been controlled and there was no loss of life and lots of shops upstairs and downstairs were saved," he said.

He noted that the cause of the fire incident was yet to be ascertained, saying that every residents should be fire conscious.

The fire chief advised traders on the need for every store owners to acquire fire extinguisher to serve as a precaution before the arrival of the fire service.

## Ramadan, Lent converge: Okpebholo...

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spiritually fulfilling Ramadan and Christians a grace-filled Lenten season, praying that the period would usher in renewed hope and blessings for families across Edo and beyond.

Meanwhile, Governor Okpebholo has reiterated his administration's commitment to inclusive governance and equitable development, assuring that no community will be marginalised under his leadership.

The governor gave the assurance when he received members of Owan Conscience, a socio-political group led by its Chairman, Hon. Richard Ofen-Imu, during a courtesy visit to Government House in Benin City.

Addressing the delegation, Okpebholo emphasised that his administration is guided by fairness, justice and due process, stressing that every part of Edo State must benefit from government policies and programmes.

He said decisions taken by his government would continue to reflect equity and serve the overall interest of the people.

"Edo State under my watch will continue to safeguard the interest of every locality as we work towards building a new Edo where citizens can live life to the fullest," the governor stated.

He disclosed that he had carefully considered the concerns raised by the group, particularly issues relating to appointments into the Governing Council of Ambrose Alli University (AAU).

He assured them that their requests would be reviewed in accordance with the law.

"I have taken note of your appeal, especially regarding the Governing Council of AAU and other grey areas. We will exam-

ine your requests within the ambit of the law to ensure that the interest of Owan people is adequately captured," he said.

Describing Owan as his home, Okpebholo reaffirmed his strong ties with the people and pledged continued support for their development aspirations.

Earlier, Ofen-Imu congratulated the governor on his first year in office and on his recognition as Governor of the Year 2025 in Education by New Telegraph Newspaper.

He said the group's visit was to commend the administration's developmental strides while also drawing attention to concerns affecting Owan people.

According to him, the issues raised centred on political inclusion, civil service representation, appointments into the Governing Council of AAU and the Judicial Service Commission.

"We are here to congratulate you on your one year in office and to express some concerns regarding the Owan people. We acknowledge and support the developmental strides of your administration," he said.

Another member of the delegation, Sabina Idowu, commended the governor for sustained engagement with Owan people from the primary election period through the campaign and into his administration.

She noted that ongoing projects in the area had strengthened public confidence in the government.

"The projects currently ongoing in Owan have reassured us that we made the right choice.

"As a people, we will continue to support your administration and stand by you to ensure that your promises to Edo people are fulfilled," she said.



### INEC ENLARGED STAKEHOLDERS:

L-R: Commissioner of Police, FCT, CP Dantawaye Miller; INEC Chairman, Prof. Joash Amupitan and the Resident Electoral Commissioner, INEC, FCT, Malam Aminu Idris, during INEC Enlarged Stakeholders Forum for FCT Area Council Election, in Abuja on Wednesday.

## Court adjourns ex-JAMB Registrar, Ojerinde, children, others' trial

### ABUJA

The Federal High Court in Abuja on Wednesday, adjourned the trial of a former Registrar, Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB), Prof. Dibu Ojerinde, on charges of official corruption and abuse of office, until April 30.

The case, which was before

Justice Mohammed Umar, could not proceed due to the absence of the judge.

Justice Umar was said to be in another official assignment and the matter was fixed for April 30.

Ojerinde is being prosecuted alongside four of his four children – Mary Ojerinde, Olumide Ojerinde, Adebayo Ojerinde and Oluwaseun Ojer-

inde, among other defendants.

Other defendants are six companies linked to him, namely: Doyin Ogboli Petroleum Limited, Cheng Marbles Limited, Sapati International Schools Limited, Trillium Learning Centre Limited, Standout Institutes Limited and Esli Perfect Security Printers Limited.

The case, marked; FHC//ABJ/CR/119/2023, is one of the criminal charges the Independent Corrupt Practices and

Other Related Offence Commission (ICPC) filed against the ex-JAMB boss.

Ojerinde is also facing another 18-count charge involving alleged diversion of funds during his time as the registrar of National Examinations Council (NECO) till his time as JAMB's chief executive.

The case is before a sister court presided over by Justice Obiora Egwuatu and fixed for March 25.

## NAN strategic to public orientation, behavioural change —LAWMA MD

### LAGOS

The Managing Director of Lagos Waste Management Authority (LAWMA), Dr Muyiwa Gbadegesin, has described the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) as a strategic partner in public orientation and behavioural change.

Gbadegesin also reaffirmed LAWMA's commitment to sustained partnership with NAN on environmental education and public awareness.

Gbadegesin said this during

a courtesy visit to Mrs Ifeyinwa Omowole, Managing Editor and Acting Head of Lagos NAN Operations on Wednesday in Lagos.

Gbadegesin said the visit was a follow-up to previous engagements aimed at strengthening collaboration in public enlightenment and responsible waste management practices.

"We are here as a continuation of our partnership, particularly in the area of education and public orientation," he said.

He said there was the need for consistent sensitisation of resi-

dents on proper waste disposal.

In her remarks, Omowole assured LAWMA of accurate and factual reportage of its activities.

Omowole said NAN, with offices across the country and correspondents in all states, remained committed to credible journalism.

"People come to us due to they know we report facts," she said.

Omowole noted that NAN's nationwide structure gave it a comparative advantage in information dissemination.

She encouraged LAWMA to leverage NAN's platforms, includ-

ing its website and other editorial services, to broaden visibility of its waste management initiatives.

She also commended LAWMA's efforts in improving the environmental outlook of Lagos, describing the state as a model in waste management practices.

Both agencies pledged to sustain collaboration in driving environmental awareness and promoting a cleaner Lagos.

The highlight of the visit was presentation of waste and recycling bins from LAWMA to NAN for proper waste management.

# 86% of states now equipped with emergency health centres —NCDC

## ABUJA

The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (NCDC) has disclosed that 86 percent of states across the federation now operate functional Public Health Emergency Operations Centres (PHEOCs) that meet minimum operational standards, marking a major stride in Nigeria's health security framework.

Director-General of the

NCDC, Dr Jide Idris, revealed that 32 out of the 37 states are currently covered.

He described the development as significant progress in strengthening national preparedness and response capacity.

Speaking on the sidelines of a health sector forum in Abuja, Idris attributed the gains to sustained Federal Government investment under the National Health Reform Agenda, which prioritises disease prevention

and control through stronger surveillance systems, laboratory networks and coordinated emergency mechanisms.

He noted that in the last 24 years, Nigeria has battled multiple outbreaks, including Ebola, polio, cholera, Lassa fever, measles and antimicrobial resistance-related emergencies.

According to him, the agency has reoriented its strategy towards prevention, early warning systems, rapid detec-

tion and stronger partnerships.

"In resource-constrained environments, prevention is better than treatment. Our focus is to detect outbreaks early, respond swiftly and contain them before they escalate," he said.

Idris explained that the agency deploys digital surveillance platforms to monitor disease trends using data from hospitals, laboratories, communities and media tracking systems.

Once unusual patterns are de-

tected, field teams are dispatched for laboratory confirmation, including genomic sequencing to identify variants and guide targeted interventions.

He added that the NCDC has expanded laboratory capacity nationwide, linking National Reference Laboratories in Abuja and Lagos with zonal and state public health facilities.

The network now covers about 84 percent of the country's geography, including 700 local government areas.

In partnership with the Japanese Government, the agency has established high-security laboratories in Abuja and Lagos capable of handling high-risk pathogens such as Ebola and Marburg viruses, while two biosecurity level-three laboratories have recently been strengthened.

Adopting a One Health approach, the NCDC collaborates with the Ministries of Agriculture, Environment and Water Resour-

ces to improve surveillance of zoonotic diseases and coordinate responses to emerging threats.

So far, it has responded to 23 public health events across 15 states.

Idris emphasised that beyond infrastructure, community engagement remains critical. He said the agency works closely with state governments, traditional institutions, NGOs and international partners, including the World Health Organisation, to deploy trained personnel, vaccines and medical supplies during emergencies.

He stressed the need for sustained collaboration to consolidate gains, noting that combating emerging infections and antimicrobial resistance requires collective effort.

"The fight against unusual ailments demands coordination. Together with communities, we can protect lives and prevent the spread of diseases," he said.



## HIGH-PROFILE SCRIPT CONFERENCE:

CEO, Ocean Portal, Dickson Osazee (left), and Nollywood actor, Zack Orji, during a high-profile script conference, held in Benin City recently.

## UBTH community honours late Finance Director Omenai, hails legacy of integrity

### BENIN CITY

The University of Benin Teaching Hospital (UNTH) community has held a commendation service in honour of its late former Director of Finance and Accounts, Mr Franklin Abhuluimen

Ehiremen Omenai, celebrating his years of dedicated service.

Staff, family members and associates gathered to pay tribute to the administrator, who was remembered for his financial expertise, discipline and unwavering commitment to duty.

Chief Medical Director, Prof.

Idia Ize-Iyamu, described the late Omenai as an astute manager who served the hospital with distinction from September 9, 1997, until his passing on January 6, 2026. She noted that his stewardship strengthened the hospital's financial systems and reinforced accountability

within the institution.

Colleagues praised his professionalism and integrity, recalling him as a dependable figure whose contributions left a lasting imprint on the hospital's administration.

Speakers at the service said his legacy of service, diligence and commitment would continue to inspire the institution long after his passing.

## Police, Nollywood alliance deepens as 'Beyond Duty' sets stage for image rebrand

### BENIN CITY

A strategic collaboration between the Nigerian film industry and the police took centre stage in Benin City as leading Nollywood figures joined security officials to chart a new narrative for law enforcement through cinema. —The high-profile script conference, held in Benin City, signalled a deliberate effort to reshape public perception of the Nigeria Police Force through storytelling.

The forthcoming film, 'Beyond Duty,' is designed to spotlight the life of a committed combat officer while projecting themes of patriotism, sacrifice and professional integrity.

Frontline Nollywood actor, Zack Orji led a cast of respected industry figures at the gathering, which also featured Ngozi Ezeonu, Prince Iyke Olisa, and

scriptwriter Jovia James.

Producers and other creative stakeholders joined representatives of the Edo State Police Command and the National Film and Video Censors Board to fine-tune the production's thematic direction.

Convener of the conference and Chief Executive Officer of Ocean Portal, Dickson Osazee, described the project as part of a sustained partnership with the police aimed at highlighting professionalism within the force, while encouraging officers to recommit to ethical standards.

According to him, 'Beyond Duty' marks the third instalment in a collaborative series, following earlier productions 'The Greatest Oath' and 'The Rescue', which he said, helped challenge entrenched negative stereotypes.

Osazee maintained that cinema remains one of the most

powerful instruments for social reorientation, adding that constructive engagement between filmmakers and state institutions can foster national development and restore confidence in public institutions.

Orji, speaking on the sidelines of the event, characterised the partnership as a forward-looking development for Nigeria's creative sector. Drawing parallels with practices in the United States, he noted that in Hollywood, government institutions often collaborate with filmmakers to advance narratives that align with national interests.

He argued that such synergy could elevate standards in Nollywood, while strengthening civic consciousness.

Representing the Edo State Police Command, Police Public Relations Officer, ASP Eno Ukoedem welcomed the project,

describing its focus on duty, diligence and patriotism as timely.

She highlighted the inclusion of sub-plots portraying the family life and personal sacrifices of officers, saying the human dimension would enable audiences to better appreciate the challenges faced by law enforcement personnel.

The Edo State Coordinator of the National Film and Video Censors Board, Fred Elakhe, also attended the conference, underscoring regulatory support for productions that promote positive social values.

When released, Beyond Duty is expected to serve as both drama and advocacy — a cinematic intervention aimed at reframing public discourse about policing, while urging citizens to recognise the risks officers undertake in safeguarding lives and property.

## Tinubu's media side, NAN boss, others inducted into ARCON

### ABUJA

Key media and communications officials, including President Bola Tinubu's media aide, Tunde Rahman, and Managing Director of the News Agency of Nigeria, Malam Ali Mohammed Ali, have been inducted as associate members of the Advertising Regulatory Council of Nigeria (ARCON).

Also inducted at the ceremony held at ARCON headquarters in Abuja were the Director-General of the National Broadcasting Commission, Charles Ebeuebu; Director-General of the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria, Mohammed Bulama; Mr Sunday Baba, Special Assistant on Administration to the Minister of Information and National Orientation; and Suleiman Haruna, Director of Public Relations in the ministry.

ARCON Director-General, Dr Olalekan Fadolapo, urged the new members to serve as worthy ambassadors of the advertising

profession, noting that induction is a routine process through which qualified professionals are admitted into membership.

He explained that in line with the law, the inductees took the oath of membership, formally empowering them to practise within the regulatory framework of the industry.

Speaking to journalists, the NAN Managing Director described the induction as a fulfilling milestone in his media career.

He said membership of ARCON provides legal backing to practise advertising without constraints and encourages other professionals in media advertising to regularise their status.

Established in 2022, ARCON replaced the Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON) under a new legal framework.

The council regulates advertising practice, protects consumer interests, promotes local content and enforces global best standards.

## 4 arraigned for allegedly obstructing EFCC probe

### ABUJA

Four men have been arraigned before a Magistrates' Court in Wuse, Abuja, for allegedly obstructing officials of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) from carrying out their duties.

The defendants, Ibrahim Ayuba, Idris Abubakar, Haruna Isah and Abdulrahman Ibrahim were charged by the police with joint act, unlawful assembly, inciting disturbance and obstructing public servants.

Prosecuting counsel, Donatus Abah told the court that the EFCC had petitioned the FCT Police Commissioner through

the DPO of Galadima Police Division on February 16.

He alleged that while the commission was investigating a matter involving former Kaduna State governor, Nasir El-Rufai, the defendants and others at large violently obstructed EFCC officials from performing their duties.

According to the prosecution, the accused persons incited the public by displaying a banner bearing the inscription "Nasir El-Rufai Solidarity Vanguard," allegedly with intent to breach public peace. The offences are said to contravene sections 79, 100, 114 and 145 of the Penal Code.

The defendants pleaded not guilty.

## NEWS

# Police apprehend woman over alleged rent, rice fraud schemes

## LAGOS

The Police Command in Lagos State on Wednesday, confirmed that it apprehended a 31-year-old woman over alleged rental and commodity fraud amounting

to about ₦105 million.

The suspect was accused of defrauding no fewer than 13 prospective tenants of about N35 million by posing as the owner of a four-bedroom duplex located at 10 Charles Onyebe Street, Divine Homes, Thomas Estate in Ajah.

She was alleged to have collected various sums of money from accommodation seekers who believed they were securing rental units in the property.

Trouble, however, began when there was prolonged de-

lay in handing over the keys to the apartments, after multiple individuals arrived, with each claiming to have paid for the same apartment.

It was gathered that the suspect was also accused of de-

frauding her neighbour to the tune of over N70 million, under the guise of supplying par-boiled rice at discounted rate.

The Deputy Commissioner of Police, State Criminal Investigation Department (SCID)

Panti, Mr Dayo Akinbisehin, confirmed the situation to NAN, adding that the suspect is currently undergoing investigation.

The DCP said that the suspect would be charged to court upon conclusion of investigations.

## APC ward congress: Two die, 3 injured in Ondo State —Police

## AKURE

The Police Command in Ondo State says two people have died while three others were injured during the All Progressive Congress (APC) Ward Congress in the state.

DSP Abayomi Jimoh, the command's Spokesperson, in a statement made available to newsmen on Wednesday in Akure, said the incident happened in Idanre, Idanre Local Government Area of the state.

Jimoh, who said no arrest had been made, explained that tactical teams had been deployed to secure the area to protect lives and property, and forestall any further breakdown of law and order.

According to him, the command received a distress call from the Divisional Police Officer (DPO) Idanre regarding violent acts perpetrated by a group of individuals within the state on Feb. 18 at about 1105hrs.

He said the report necessitated prompt response from officers of the command.

"In a swift reaction, the state Commissioner of Police, Adebowale Lawal, immediately deployed tactical teams to reinforce the existing security apparatus on ground.

"Subsequently, Lawal, alongside the State Commandant of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), CC Oluyemi Ibiyoye, led a combined team of security operatives to the scene.

"Their timely intervention ensured the restoration of peace and order in the affected area.

"During the incident, five persons yet to be identified were reportedly attacked, and a vehicle was set ablaze

"Three victims sustained varying degrees of injuries and are currently receiving medical attention, while two others were confirmed dead at the hospital," he said.

The spokesperson said the CP also visited the injured victims to assess their condition and assured them of the command's support.

According to him, investigations are ongoing to unravel the circumstances surrounding the attack and to apprehend those responsible for this heinous act.

"The command urges the good people of Ondo State to remain calm and continue their lawful activities without fear or panic.

"Adequate security measures have been put in place to ensure sustained peace and stability across the state," he said.

## Kogi launches mass vaccination against transboundary animal diseases

## LOKOJA

The Kogi Livestock Productivity and Resilience (Kogi L-PRES) Project, in collaboration with Ministry of Livestock Development, launched mass vaccination against Transboundary Animal Diseases (TADs).

The Commissioner for Livestock Development, Dr Olufemi Bolarin, made this known during stakeholders' engagement meeting in Lokoja on Wednesday.

The meeting brought together farmers, veterinarians, animal scientists, traditional rulers and security agencies, to discuss strategies for the vaccination drive.

Bolarin said "the exercise is a collective effort to combat diseases like Contagious Bovine Pleuropneumonia (CBPP), Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) and Newcastle Disease.

"The mass vaccination will begin on Feb. 18, to safeguard animal health, strengthen livestock productivity and enhance food security in Kogi."

The commissioner urged farmers, cattle breeders and pastoralists to support the vaccination drive being administered freely to the livestock in the state.

"We have done it before, and we can do it again," he said, referencing Kogi's previous success in animal vaccination.

He emphasised that the vaccines are free, and assured that government would ensure security for vaccinators.

He urged the locals to provide security for vaccination teams, saying "we need your cooperation and support."

He acknowledged potential challenges, including security risks and difficult terrain, but emphasised the importance of the exercise for humanity, Nigeria and Kogi.

The state's Project Coordinator, Mr Abdulkabir Oturu, said the project is working across Nigeria to address TADs, with Kogi being a key focus area.

Oturu noted that the exercise aims to reduce disease burden, improve livestock productivity and enhance socio-economic wellbeing.



## 2026 BUDGET DEFENCE:

L-R: Director General, National Intelligence Agency, Amb. Mohammed Mohammed; Permanent Secretary, National Defence Intelligence, Salisu Mohammed and Director-General, Department of State Services (DSS), Adeola Ajayi, during their 2026 Budget Defence before the House of Representatives Committee on National Security and Intelligence, at the National Assembly Complex in Abuja on Wednesday.

## Rare convergence of Lent, Ramadan signals shared value —Tinubu

## ABUJA

President Bola Tinubu has said that the Christian season of Lent and the Muslim holy month of Ramadan commencing in the same day this year is a reminder of shared values among Nigerians.

Tinubu stated this in a special message to both faith communities on Wednesday in Abuja.

"This year, Lent and Ramadan began on the same day.

"This is not a common oc-

currence, and it reminds us that as a people of faith, we share a lot in common and are one people under God," he said.

The President urged Muslim and Christian faithful to embrace peace, unity and good neighbourliness as Lent and Ramadan begin.

"With profound reverence to God Almighty, I greet the Christian and Muslim faithful on the solemn occasions of Lent and Ramadan," he said.

He urged Nigerians to promote peace, unity and stability,

and prayed for progress and security of the nation.

"As a nation and as a people, I urge us, as we embark on these important observances, to ensure good neighbourliness, promote peace, unity, and stability, and pray for the progress and security of our nation," he said.

The President said the Lenten season is a time of fasting, abstinence and penitence for Christians.

He said it followed the example of Jesus Christ in the wilderness before His crucifixion, which brought salvation to mankind.

Tinubu said Ramadan is a

sacred season for Muslims that reflected submission to God Almighty.

He said the season emphasised sacrifice, devotion, service, communal love and giving.

Tinubu said Ramadan remained one of the five pillars of Islam and called for deep spiritual reflection beyond fasting.

"Let us live by the good precepts of our faiths and be honourable in our duty to God and fellow humans," he said.

The President prayed that the lessons, blessings and joys of the seasons would abide with Nigerians always.

## Ikorodu residents protest alleged prolonged, 'arbitrary' blackout

## LAGOS

Residents under the aegis of Joint Erunwen Community Development Forum in Ikorodu Local Government Area of Lagos State on Wednesday staged a protest over what they described as erratic electricity supply by Ikeja Electric.

The residents were seen carrying banners and chanting solidarity songs.

Representatives of 18 registered Community Development Associations (CDAs) and several unregistered groups in the council marched to the company's headquarters, accusing the distribution company of "selling darkness" in spite of residents' regular payments.

The News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) reports that the affected communities include

Riverview, Efundara, Gateway, Ogunaike, Elite, Frontline, Lascomed, Ekiti, Surulere.

Others are Olorisha Oko, Green View, Balogun, Pearl, Likeminds, A and G, Sunshine and Oyefusi collectively home to an estimated 300,000 residents.

The Chairman of the Ikorodu Joint Communities, Mr Maxwell Olowosoki, said the forum had endured irregular and inadequate electricity supply since 2017, describing the situation as economically and socially crippling.

"In any community where there is no light, there is no life. Businesses collapse, insecurity increases and residents suffer needlessly.

"What Ikeja Electric is selling to us is darkness, not electricity," he said.

Olowosoki alleged that most

transformers serving the communities had been subjected to persistent load shedding due to overloading.

That, he said, was in spite of repeated assurances that a new injection substation would be constructed to ease pressure on existing infrastructure.

"Years ago, we were promised a permanent solution through a new injection substation. Three years later, nothing has materialised.

"Instead, load shedding has intensified, and communities are now being compelled to sign undertakings before faulty transformers are repaired," he said.

The forum's Secretary, Mr Ayodele Adeyinka, corroborated the claims, accusing the company of retaliating after the community formally rejected load shedding in January.

"We officially wrote to them to stop the load shedding. Rather than address our concerns, they increased it from two transformers to six. This is unjust and a violation of our rights," he said.

Adeyinka further alleged that residents were often forced to purchase fuses and transformer components, sometimes, running into hundreds of thousands of naira before repairs were carried out.

"Now they demand that communities sign undertakings surrendering ownership of parts we paid for. That amounts to exploitation," he added.

Other residents said that the prolonged blackout had worsened insecurity and crippled small businesses across the axis.

One of them, a trader, Mrs. Fausat Idowu, appealed for urgent intervention.

# Makinde urges Muslims, Christians to pray for Nigeria during Ramadan, Lent

Ibadan: The Governor of Oyo, Seyi Makinde, has called on Muslim and Christian faithful to use the sacred periods of Ramadan and Lent to make supplication to God for the state and Nigeria. Makinde made the appeal in

a statement issued on Wednesday in Ibadan by his Special Adviser, Mr Suleimon Olanrewaju.

The governor also urged Christian and Muslim faithful to use the period to deepen their commitment to God and

humanity.

He said the coincidence of the two fasting seasons beginning on the same day was divinely orchestrated to remind adherents of both religions of the importance of love, unity and religious harmony.

He stressed that the lesson inherent in the development must not be lost during and after the spiritual exercise.

He commended Muslims and Christians in the state for their longstanding culture of peaceful coexistence and collaboration, noting that their support since 2019 had contributed significantly to the state's progress.

Makinde urged adherents of both faiths to dedicate the 2026 Ramadan and Lenten period to praying for sustained peace and development in the state and the country.

He also asked the faithful to pray for wisdom and strength for leaders at all levels.

The governor assured residents that his administration would continue to prioritise

their welfare and that he would continue to serve them with dedication and fairness.

The Ramadan is a period where Muslims observe a month-long fast, engage in increased prayers, acts of charity, and seek spiritual renewal.

Lent, observed by Christians, is a 40-day period of fasting, prayer and almsgiving leading to Easter.



## VISIT OF LAWMA TO NAN:

L-R: Head of Editorial Operations, News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), Kelvin Okunzuwa; Managing Director, Lagos Waste Management Authority (LAWMA), Dr Muiyiwa Gbadegesin and Head of Lagos Operations, NAN, Ifeyinwa Omowole, during the visit of LAWMA Management Team to NAN Office in Lagos on Wednesday.

## Guinness Nigeria reports profit recovery on 144% revenue growth

### LAGOS

Guinness Nigeria Plc has reported a revenue growth of N730.8 billion for the eighteen-month period ended Dec. 31, 2025, representing a 144 per cent increase compared to N299.5 billion posted in the twelve months ended June 2024.

The company disclosed this in its audited financial results released on Tuesday, marking its first full reporting cycle following its transition to a new financial year-end of Dec. 31

and under the ownership of Tolaram.

The report shows that gross profit rose by 152 per cent to N230.5 billion, driven by improved productivity and disciplined cost management.

Operating profit also grew by 251 per cent to N89.3 billion, reflecting stronger commercial execution and enhanced operational efficiency.

The company posted a net profit after tax of N41.2 billion, a significant recovery from the N54.7 billion loss recorded in the previous financial year.

Commenting on the results, Prof. Fabian Ajogwu, Chairman of the Board, said, "These audited results reflect the resilience of Guinness Nigeria and the disciplined execution of our strategy during a pivotal period for the company."

"As we build on a 75-year legacy in Nigeria, the Board is encouraged by the company's improved financial strength and sustained performance momentum."

"We remain firmly committed to delivering long-term value to our shareholders and stakeholders."

Also, Girish Sharma, the

Managing Director of Guinness Nigeria Plc said, "Closing this extended financial year with such a strong performance demonstrates the progress we have made in reshaping our business for sustainable success."

"Our first full reporting cycle following the transition underscores the effectiveness of our sharpened commercial focus and operational discipline."

"As we move into a new financial cycle, we are intent on accelerating growth, embedding a high-performance culture with an entrepreneurial mindset, and delivering sustainable value across our portfolio."

## FG, AfDB partner on expanding Nigeria's fibre network to 125,000km

### ABUJA

The Federal Government has invited the African Development Bank (AfDB) to support the design and financing of the Digital Value Chain Infrastructure for Boosting Employment (D-VIBE), also known as Project BRIDGE.

The AfDB said this in a statement on its website.

According to the bank, the project aims to expand Nigeria's fibre backbone from 35,000km to at least 125,000km, making it Africa's third-longest terrestrial fibre network after Egypt and South Africa.

It said the expansion was expected to address existing infrastructure gaps, as current fibre coverage reportedly met only about one-third of the country's national needs.

"By extending connectivity to underserved and unserved communities, the initiative is designed to strengthen digital inclusion."

"It will enhance broadband

access and also stimulate employment opportunities across the country," the bank said.

It said as part of project implementation, a consultancy would provide communications, planning and stakeholder management services for D-VIBE-related events.

"The firm will support the Project Implementation Unit (PIU), the Federal Ministry of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy (FMCIDE) and the AfDB in coordinating and delivering project events."

"Its responsibilities will include managing event communications, stakeholder participation, protocol and engagement before, during and after each event."

"The activities are expected to align with the project's Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP), published as an Environmental and Social Requirement during preparation."

"It will also directly support AfDB-related financing for the initiative," it stated.

## Coalition commits to advancing climate justice in Nigeria

### ABUJA

Nigeria Climate Justice Alliance (NCJA), a coalition of civil society organisations, community groups, youth movements, researchers, and media actors, has reaffirmed its commitment to advancing climate justice in the country.

The alliance made the commitment in a communique issued in Abuja on Wednesday, at the end of its two-day 2026 - 2030 Strategic Action Plan Review and Coordination Workshop.

The communique was jointly signed by Dr Joseph Onoja of Nigeria Conservation Foundation, Dr Michael David, Global Initiative for Food Security and Ecosystem Preservation, and Dr Grace Alawa of Sustainable Action for Nature.

Other signatories are Mr Zinta Akpoko of Bridged Gap Initiative, Mr Udochukwu Egwim of South Saharan Development Organisation, Patience Akaase of Women Empowerment Programme and Ahmed Tiamiyu of Com-

munity Action Against Waste.

According to the communique, the alliance would advance climate justice by strengthening community voices, protecting ecosystems, promoting equity, and holding duty-bearers accountable for climate action.

The civil society-led coalition added that it would work to promote climate justice by strengthening community voices, influencing policy processes, and supporting inclusive and sustainable responses to climate change in Nigeria.

The group observed that climate change has continued to exacerbate social and economic inequalities across Nigeria, with disproportionate impacts on frontline communities where resilience capacities are lowest.

It noted with concern that local communities, women, and youth are often compelled to engage in livelihood practices such as deforestation.

This action, according to the coalition, inadvertently exacerbates climate change, thereby trapping them in a vicious cycle of increased vulnerability.

## Probe into tax concessions, waivers not a witch-hunt, says Faleke

### ABUJA

The House of Representatives has clarified that a probe into the annual losses from tax concessions and waivers was not a witch-hunt, but a move to strengthen incentive administration, protect public funds, and restore confidence in government support programmes.

The Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Review of Tax and Export Incentives, Waivers and Exemptions, Rep. James Faleke, made this known in a statement on Tuesday.

Faleke said the probe intends to strengthen the administration of incentives, safe-

guard public funds, and restore confidence in policies designed to support investment and export-led growth.

He assured that the committee would continue to give periodic review of the exercise and be transparent in the investigation.

"You will recall that on the 13th, the House debated the above motion with vigour and serious concern."

Accordingly, the House constituted an ad hoc committee pursuant to Resolution HR.112/11/2025 of 13 November 2025, with a mandate to investigate revenue losses and leakages.

"The committee has, accordingly, begun a structured review

of the administration and impact of tax incentives, export incentives, waivers, exemptions, and other fiscal support instruments granted by the Federal Government between 2015 and 2025.

"Available data indicates that Nigeria loses an estimated eight trillion Naira annually to such waivers and concessions. Between 2023 and 2026, the federal government projects total revenue forgone from tax incentives at N12.4 trillion."

"While tax-to-GDP ratio remains at only 10.6 per cent which is among the lowest in Africa."

"This is paradoxical and concerning, given the financial and fiscal challenges the nation is facing. The new tax regime has

presented us with an opportunity to look inwards", Faleke stated.

Faleke explained that the review followed growing concerns, based on the available official data and budgetary reports, that significant public revenues may have been forgone or ineffectively applied under various incentive schemes.

He said that the house has resolved that it is both necessary and timely to: Assess their actual economic impact; determine whether they were administered transparently and in line with due process.

Faleke said that the first phase of the review focuses on four priority areas with significant fiscal and economic implications:

## NEWS

# Yobe assembly probes alleged health workers' misconduct, doctor shortage

## DAMATURU

The Yobe State House of Assembly has commenced investigation into allegations of misconduct

among health workers and a critical shortage of doctors in state-run hospitals.

Speaker Chiroma Mashio, announced the decision after the assembly resumed from its

annual recess.

This legislative action, he said, follows concerns over staff conduct and personnel deficits that threaten to undermine the state's healthcare system.

Mashio said the committee would be chaired by the Deputy Speaker, Ya'u Usman Dachia.

Other members are Ahmed Dumbol, Kachalla Maina, Sanda Bade, Saminu Lawan and

Mohammed Ali.

He said that notwithstanding achievements recorded in the health sector under Governor Mai Mala Buni, the allegations demanded legislative scrutiny.

In a related development, the assembly gave accelerated consideration to a bill seeking to establish the Yobe Senior

Secondary Education Board.

The bill, presented by the executive, passed second reading and was referred to the House Standing Committee on Basic and Secondary Education for further action.

The assembly also received two executive bills seeking to establish an Urban and Regional Planning Authority.

## Traditional, religious leaders endorse "Aso Rock Declaration" to strengthen health sector

## ABUJA

Traditional and religious leaders in Nigeria have endorsed "the Aso Rock Declaration on Health 2026," pledging to support the nation's health sector and accelerate progress toward universal health coverage.

The declaration was unveiled in Abuja, at the inaugural National Traditional and Religious Leaders Summit on Health, convened at the State House Banquet Hall, Asaba Villa, by President Bola Tinubu and the First Lady, Sen. Oluremi.

The summit brought together leaders of diverse faiths, traditional rulers, and representatives from federal, state, and local governments, as well as civil society and development partners, to deliberate on the state of Nigeria's health sector and the role of community leadership in national development.

Speaking, Prof. Muhammad Ali Pate, the Coordinating Minister for Health and Social Welfare, highlighted the summit as a historic platform for dialogue, reviewing progress in health investments, primary health care expansion, emergency obstetric services, nutrition, water and sanitation, and hospital infrastructure.

Pate emphasised that integrating traditional and religious leaders into health planning and implementation was essential to building trust, improving access, and promoting equitable health outcomes

across the country.

"The declaration underscores the collective commitment of leaders to: Support comprehensive reproductive, maternal, newborn, and child health services, including immunisation, HIV, TB, malaria, emergency obstetric care, and nutrition programs within communities.

"It welcomes and enables frontline and national health workers to perform their duties effectively and promote primary health care facility utilisation, accreditation, and community-level monitoring of services.

"It also engages multisectoral efforts to address social determinants of health, focusing on nutrition, clean water, sanitation, hygiene, and education of the girl child.

"Religious health facilities into local health systems and parliamentary networks to expand access to quality care for all populations.

"It fosters community participation in disease reporting, surveillance, and rapid outbreak response. Advocate for domestic resource mobilisation for health, including expanding health insurance schemes and promote climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable health practices."

He said that the declaration also calls on the government to maintain continuous engagement with traditional and religious leaders through a dedicated liaison officer within the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare.



## INDUCTION:

L-R: Special Assistant to the Minister of Information and National Orientation, Rabiu Ibrahim; Director-General, National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), Charles Ebuebu and Managing Director, News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), Ali M. Ali, during their induction as members of Advertising Regulatory Council of Nigeria (ARCON) in Abuja on Wednesday.

## Lent: Catholic priest urges national reflection ahead of 2027 general election

## ENUGU

The Priest in Residence, Holy Family Catholic Church, Ologo, Enugu, Fr. Theophilus Nwodo, has urged Nigerian leaders to use the Lenten season as a period of national reflection ahead of the 2027 General Elections.

Nwodo who made the call in his Ash Wednesday message in Enugu, tasked the leaders to exhibit virtues of humility, jus-

tice and sincerity, as Christians begin the Lenten season.

The cleric urged political leaders and aspirants to model their leadership after Jesus Christ, whom he described as the ideal leader who exemplified humility, sacrifice, truth and justice.

"If our leaders emulate Christ, we will not hear about electoral malpractice or manipulation. Leaders should avoid false means to gain pow-

er. "When God chooses a leader, He prepares and guides the person," he said.

The clergyman emphasised that leaders must honour their campaign promises and govern with integrity.

"It is not enough to shout during campaigns and make promises. When elected, leaders should put their manifestos into practice. God stands for truth, justice and love," he said.

He also urged Nigerians to embrace collaboration, foster unity, and show genuine con-

cern for one another, emphasising that sustainable national development could only be achieved through collective efforts.

Nwodo urged citizens to remain prayerful and hopeful because commitment to justice, mercy and good leadership would make Nigeria a better place and set a positive example for future generations.

The priest described Lent as a special period of reflection, repentance and spiritual renewal for Christians worldwide.

## APC distributes materials for ward congresses in Benue

## MAKURDI

The All Progressives Congress (APC) on Wednesday distributed materials for the conduct of ward congresses in Benue.

Performing the ceremony at the APC state secretariat in Makurdi, Dr Auwalu Ishiye, Chairman, Ward/Local Government Committee for the state, said the exercise would be across all the 276 wards.

Ishiye assured that the exercise would be hitch-free, adding that Benue is known for her en-

during peace over the years.

The chairman said each ward would elect 27 officials and ten delegates who would participate in the forthcoming local government and state congresses.

Earlier, the State Organising Secretary, Mr James Ornguga, revealed that all those who purchased forms were screened and certified by the screening committee.

Ornguga also said the return of the purchased forms showed that all aspirants were unopposed in the state.

## Conflict, instability making pregnancy increasingly dangerous worldwide, warns WHO

## LAGOS

Nearly two-thirds of all maternal deaths worldwide occur in countries marked by conflict or fragility, making pregnancy more dangerous in such environments.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) and partners stated this in a report released to the public.

The risk of a woman who lives in a country affected by conflict dying due to maternal causes is around five times higher for each pregnancy she undergoes compared to her peers in sta-

ble countries, according to new findings in the WHO report.

In 2023 alone, an estimated 160,000 women died from preventable maternal causes in fragile and conflict-affected settings, that is, six in 10 maternal deaths worldwide, despite these countries accounting for only around one in 10 of global live births.

The new technical brief offers analysis as to why pregnant women living in certain countries are more likely to die in childbirth and confirms what many practitioners see on the ground: crises create conditions where health systems

cannot consistently deliver lifesaving maternal care.

Indeed, the intersection of gender, ethnicity, age and migration status can increase the risk women and girls face who are both pregnant and living in fragile contexts, according to the brief, produced by WHO and an inter-agency group that includes the UN agencies for development, UNDP; sexual and reproductive health, UNFPA, and children, UNICEF, as well as the World Bank.

The disparity of risk is stark. A 15-year-old girl living in a country or territory affected by conflict in 2023 had a one in 51 lifetime risk of eventually dying

from a maternal cause, compared with a one in 79 risk in a country or territory affected by institutional and social fragility, and one in 593 for a 15-year-old girl living in a relatively stable country.

The report aligns the latest maternal mortality ratio estimates with whether a country is conflict-affected or considered fragile.

Countries classified as conflict-affected had an estimated maternal mortality ratio of 504 deaths per 100,000 live births, while in countries considered institutionally and socially fragile, it was 368. In contrast, countries outside both categories saw a much lower ratio of 99.

## JUDICIARY

## NEWS

# Owo church massacre: Suspected terrorists were paid, mobilised for attack —DSS witness

ABUJA

A witness of the Department of State Services (DSS), on Tuesday, told the Federal High Court in Abuja that the suspected ter-

rorists were funded, armed and mobilised to attack St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church, Owo in Ondo State, on June 5, 2022.

The witness, who was giving his testimony under protection, led a DSS investigation

team into the attack.

He gave details of the roles played by the defendants in the attack in which he said over 40 people died, while over 100 individuals sustained various injuries.

Identified as SSI for security

reasons, the witness, who was the 9th prosecution witness (PW-9), spoke while giving his evidence before Justice Emeka Nwite.

The prosecution also tendered what it described as "a comprehensive investigation report on the incident," which the court admitted in evidence in the absence of objection from the defence and marked as exhibit in the case.

The five men, being prosecuted by the DSS, are: Idris Abdulmalik Omeiza (25 years), Al Qasim Idris 20 years), Jamiu Abdulmalik (26 years), Abdulhal-eem Idris (25 years) and Momoh Otuho Abubakar (47 years).

Led in evidence by prosecuting lawyer, Ayodeji Adedipe, SAN, the witness said he is the Deputy Director in charge of Counter Terrorism Investigation and led the investigation team.

He said his team was mandated to unravel the perpetrators, the cause of the incident, their sponsors and any other findings that may arise.

"With that, we proceeded to gather intelligence and also exploited technical resources, which eventually led us to the arrest of five persons in the month of August 2022.

"The arrest occurred both

in Kogi and Ondo States and the persons we arrested were Al-Qasim Idris (2nd defendant) and his brother Abdulhalid Idris (4th defendant), then Omaiza Abdulmalik (1st), then his brother, Jamiu Abdulmalik (3rd)," he said, and gave the name of the fifth defendant as Momoh Otuho Abubakar."

According to him, our investigation found out that the persons we arrested were members of Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP), a proscribed terrorist group, who belong to a cell that operated around Okene/Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State, as well as Omielafa and Omielege in Ose Local Government Area of Ondo State under the coordination of one Odoba.

"Odoba usually hibernate around Ogaminana in Adavi LGA of Kogi State," he said.



## GOÑÇALVE VISITS FOREIGN MINISTRY:

President, ECOWAS Community Court of Justice, Justice Ricardo Gonçalves (L), and Nigeria's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Amb. Bianca Odumegwu-Ojukwu, during the former's visit to the Ministry in Abuja.

## Alleged forgery: Witness unsure if former minister declared Mambilla award lawful

ABUJA

Prosecution witness, Umar Babangida has said that he does not recall whether former Minister of Justice, Michael Aondoaka informed late President Umaru Yar'Adua that the Mambilla project award to SPTCL was lawful.

Babangida, an investigator with the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, (EFCC) was testifying in the ongoing trial of former Minister of Power and Steel, Olu Agunloye at the FCT High Court, Apo.

He made the assertion during cross-examination by counsel to the defendant, Mr Adeola Adedipe, SAN.

Babangida who is the 3rd prosecution witness said he could not remember whether Aondoaka, in an opinion dated Feb. 25, 2010, advised Yar'Adua that the award letter to SPTCL was lawful.

He also told the court that he could not recall whether the

former minister stated that it was wrong for the Federal Government to re-award the contract without first terminating the contract with SPTCL.

The witness further said he was not aware that Aondoaka advised the federal government to revive the contract awarded to SPTCL because of its legal implications.

The defence counsel then asked Babangida to read from his investigation report on the alleged Mambilla project, earlier admitted in evidence.

The defence counsel subsequently told the witness that it was his opinion that the re-awarded Mambilla project be terminated while the earlier contract awarded to SPTCL be resuscitated. but Babangida disagreed.

"That was not my opinion, it was that of the former attorney-general and it is contained in my report but it was the opinion of the former attorney-general," he said.

## Woman, 46, docked for allegedly stealing late sister's property

IBADAN

The Police on Wednesday, charged a 46-year-old woman, Maria Ajimosun, before an Iyaganku Chief Magistrates' Court in Ibadan, over alleged stealing.

The defendant whose address was not stated, was accused of stealing a vehicle and the sum of N5.5 million belonging to her late sister and her husband.

She is facing a three-count charge bordering on conspiracy and stealing.

She, however, pleaded not guilty to the charges.

The prosecutor, PC Olapeju Durodola, told the court that the defendant conspired with others now at large, to commit the offence sometime in March 2025.

Durodola alleged that after the death of her sister, one Esther Adesiyun, the defendant stole the deceased's ATM card and with-

drew the sum of N5.5 million from her GTB account which she converted to her own use.

She also alleged that the defendant stole a Lexus RX350 Jeep valued N16 million, GTB ATM card, and a First Bank ATM card, all from her late sister's house, which property belong to one Mr Michael Adesiyun, husband of the deceased.

He said that the defendant was eventually arrested by the police.

The offence contravenes the provisions of Section 383, 390(9), and 516 of the Criminal Law of Oyo State 2000.

The Chief Magistrate, Mrs Olabisi Ogunkanmi, granted the defendant bail in the sum of N25 million with two sureties in like sum.

Ogunkanmi held that one of the sureties must be a blood relative of the defendant.

She adjourned the case until March 23, for hearing.

## Mechanic bags 6 years imprisonment for stealing electrical equipments

JOS

Magistrates' Court in Jos on Wednesday, sentenced a 26-year-old mechanic, Daniel David, to a term of six years at the correctional centre for house breaking and stealing electrical equipment.

The Magistrate, Irene Pati, sentenced the convict, after he

pleaded guilty to a three-count charge bordering on house breaking, mischief and stealing.

The court sentenced the convict to a term of two years imprisonment for the offence of house-breaking or a fine of N50,000.

The court sentenced the convict to a term of one year imprisonment for mischief, or a fine of N25,000 and a term of three years imprisonment for stealing

or an option of N50,000 fine.

The court held that all terms of imprisonment shall run concurrently.

Meanwhile, the court ordered the convict to pay the sum of N368,480 as compensation.

In the charge, the prosecutor, Insp. Ibrahim Gokwat, told the court that the case was reported on Dec. 30, 2025 at the A Police Division, by a com-

plainant one Mr John Dalong.

He said that the convict broke into the complainant's house and damaged some items worth N190,000 and also stole some items including an eight-way distribution box, 14 pieces of single sockets, 13 pieces of one gang switch, 10 pieces of lamp holder, two rolls of black and red wires and four sliding windows all valued at N368,840.

## Man, 54, docked over alleged N1.8m land fraud

IBADAN

One Emmanuel Ilesanmi, 54, was on Wednesday docked in an Iyaganku Magistrates' Court, Ibadan, over an alleged N1.8 million land fraud.

Ilesanmi, whose address was

not provided, was charged with obtaining money under false pretence, stealing and conduct likely to cause the breach of peace.

He, however, pleaded not guilty to the charges.

The Prosecutor, ASP Femi Omilana, told the court that the defendant committed the

offences sometime in 2019, at Omi Adio area of Ibadan.

He alleged that the defendant obtained the sum of N1.8 million from one Mrs Esther Odi-di, with the pretext of purchasing two acres of land for her.

He alleged that the defendant failed to do so and

therefore committed offences contrary to Sections 249(d), 390(9) and 419 of the Criminal laws of Oyo State, 2000.

The Magistrate, Mrs Adebola Adeola, granted the defendant bail in the sum of two million naira with two sureties in like sum.

She adjourned the case until April 6, for hearing.

## Man, 65, arraigned for allegedly stealing iron gate

SANGO-OTA (OGUN)

The police on Wednesday, charged a 65-year-old man, Odumuyiwa Femi, before an Ota Magistrates' Court in Ogun, for allegedly stealing an iron gate worth N100,000.

Femi, whose address was not provided, is facing a two-count charge of stealing and causing damage.

The defendant, however, pleaded not guilty to the charges.

The prosecutor, ASP E.O. Adaraloye, told the court that the defendant and others now at large, committed the offences sometime in 2025, at about 10.a.m. at Itele-Awori, Ota.

He alleged that the defend-

ant conspired with others to steal the iron gate, and also damaged the gate in the process of trying to remove it

The prosecution said that the offences contravenes the provisions of sections 390(9) and 451 of the Criminal Law of Ogun, 2006.

The Magistrate, Mrs O.O. Fadairo, granted the defendant bail in the sum of N50,000 with one surety in like sum.

The court held that the surety must reside within the court's jurisdiction and be gainfully employed with evidence of tax payment to Ogun Government.

She adjourned the case until Feb. 25, for hearing.

## NEWS

## Foreign

# 'Difficult' Russia-Ukraine peace talks end without breakthrough

Talks between Russia, Ukraine and the US aimed at ending Moscow's war in Ukraine have concluded without a breakthrough. The trilateral meetings, held in Geneva, went on late on Tuesday but only lasted two hours on Wednesday.

Although US envoy Steve Witkoff had expressed optimism over the talks, both the chief Russian negotiator and Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelensky indicated they had been "difficult".

After the main talks concluded, Kremlin negotiator Vladimir Medinsky returned to the venue and held a closed-door meeting with the Ukrainian side for about an hour and a half. No details from that meeting have emerged.

Some progress was made on "military issues", including the location of the front line and

ceasefire monitoring, according to a Ukrainian diplomatic source.

But an agreement on the issue of territory - without which no ceasefire can be envisaged - remains elusive, with Moscow and Kyiv's positions still far apart.

Russia has not budged in its demand for full control of the eastern Donbas region - made up of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions - which is a non-starter for Ukraine.

While conceding talks were challenging, Kremlin negotiator Vladimir Medinsky added that they had been "business-like" and said another meeting would take place "soon".

Zelensky also described the negotiations as "not easy" due to the difference in the two sides' positions.

Rustem Umerov cut a less downbeat tone, saying the discussions had been "substantive and intensive" and that while there had

been progress, no details could be disclosed "at this stage".

"This is complex work that requires alignment among all parties and sufficient time," Umerov said.

Shortly before the end of the talks was announced, Zelensky accused Russia of "trying to drag out negotiations that could already have reached the final stage".

The Russian and Ukrainian delegations last met in US-brokered talks in Abu Dhabi earlier in February, which led to the first prisoner exchange in several months. On Wednesday, Zelensky indicated that another swap might be forthcoming.

US President Donald Trump, who spearheaded diplomatic efforts to end the war, has been signalling impatience with the deadlock between the two sides.

On Monday, he said Ukraine had "better come to the table, fast" - a sentiment Zelensky has

since rejected, saying it was "not fair" that his country should be the one asked to compromise.

Four years on from the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, substantial distance still exists between Moscow's demands and what Kyiv might consider a "just peace".

Kyiv has long rejected Russia's demand for the eastern Donbas, which would mean relinquishing Ukrainian sovereign territory, including several heavily fortified cities and a long defensive line in the region of Donetsk.

Many Ukrainians believe giving that territory up would leave the country vulnerable to another Russian invasion. Zelensky himself has drawn parallels with the 1938 Munich Agreement, when European powers let Hitler annex the Czech territory of Sudetenland.

## Iran security official appears to fire on crowd at cemetery

Crowds of mourners appear to have been fired on by a security official at a cemetery in Iran.

The incident happened in Abdanan, in west Iran, on Tuesday as people gathered to commemorate those killed during the government's brutal crackdown on protesters last month.

Iranians usually hold commemoration ceremonies on the 40th day after someone dies. The events have been held in several cities across the country to mourn the thousands killed during the deadliest nights of protests on 8 and 9 January.

Verified video also shows people shouting anti-government chants at events in Tehran, Mashhad and Abdanan on Tuesday as crowds gathered at cemeteries and in the streets for commemorations.

State-organised ceremonies were broadcast on TV and attended by senior government and military officials where people were led by organisers to chant "death to America".

A graphic showing two images side by side, the one of the left highlights someone holding a gun on top of an armoured vehicle in front of a crowd and is annotated "armed person fires first shot", the one of the right shows the same person point the gun towards the crowd and is annotated "armed person fires second shot".

BBC Verify and BBC Persian have verified footage of people chanting "death to Khamenei", referencing Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

An armoured vehicle is then seen driving past the crowd of mourners as an apparent security official opens fire. People are heard screaming and seen fleeing the area as two gun-

shots ring out.

The person who appears to be in uniform is seen pointing the gun away from the camera when the first shot is fired, before pointing the gun towards the crowd when a second shot can be heard. A puff of smoke near the gun is visible after each shot.

Another verified video from the cemetery shows smoke in the distance as people run away from the scene and several gunshots can be heard.

State-run IRIB News claimed that the event was peaceful and reports of people injured or killed were not true.

A billboard in the background of one the videos shows a picture of Alireza Seydi, a teenager from Abdanan who was understood to have been killed during the protests in Tehran last month and appears to be one of those commemorated during the ceremony.

Weeks of anti-government protests started in late December which began over the economy but rapidly escalated. It peaked on 8 and 9 January after Reza Pahlavi, the exiled son of the late shah, called for nationwide protests to take place.

Thousands of people were killed in one of the deadliest government crackdowns in recent years. BBC Verify previously reported that it had spread to more than 68 towns and cities across the country.

The number of people killed during the protests is not fully known, but US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) has confirmed the deaths of 7,015 people, and the arrests of more than 53,000.

Khamenei last month acknowledged that thousands had been killed during the protests and blamed the US for the deaths.



**RUSSIA-UKRAINE PEACE TALKS:**

Russian, American and Ukrainian representatives met in Geneva on Tuesday and Wednesday.

## Suspected carbon-monoxide leak kills at least 30 miners in Nigeria, witnesses say

At least 33 miners have died in a suspected carbon-monoxide leak at a lead and zinc mine in central Nigeria's Plateau state, witnesses have told the BBC.

The tragedy is believed to have happened just before sunrise at a site outside the town of Wase run by the mining company Solid Unity Nigeria Ltd.

Toxic gas is believed to have built up underground in poorly ventilated tunnels, causing the workers to collapse just before the end of their night shift.

They were discovered by those reporting to work in the morning - more than 20 other miners were rescued and rushed to hospital for treatment.

Security personnel have sealed off the mine, which is about 200km (124 miles) south-

east of the state capital of Jos, as investigations get under way to find out the cause of the leak.

State officials are yet to visit the area and response efforts have reportedly been slow because of security concerns - armed criminal gangs, known locally as "bandits", have been active there in recent years.

Safiyanu Haruna, one of the miners who found the bodies at the start of his shift, told the BBC that some of the miners who were underground survived and were taken to a hospital in Wase for treatment.

There was no rescue for them at the time because those who were coming for the morning shift had yet to arrive

A miner at the site operated by Solid Unity Nigeria Ltd

According to Haruna, the

incident occurred at around 06:30 local time (05:30 GMT) killing 37 miners.

He said the miners had just finished performing their early morning Muslim prayers and had returned underground to finish their shift.

The Plateau state government has issued a statement saying that according to its preliminary investigation 33 miners were killed in a blast at the mine - but workers at the scene say this is not the case.

"It was carbon-monoxide gas that leaked and killed them," Haruna said.

"There was no rescue for them at the time because those who were coming for the morning shift had yet to arrive," he said.

"It is sad to lose 37 miners who were struggling to make

ends meet. We're disturbed by the incident."

The victims, believed to be men aged between 20 and 40, were buried shortly afterwards in accordance with local tradition, another local resident told the BBC.

The news has devastated the mainly Muslim community.

Mining disasters occur relatively frequently in Nigeria.

Less than two years ago, dozens of gold miners died after being trapped underground when a pit collapsed in neighbouring Niger state.

Officials believe that incident was caused by torrential rains which had softened the soil.

The tragedy is likely to renew concerns over safety standards in Nigeria's mining sector.

## Do not give away Diego Garcia, Trump tells UK

Do not give away Diego Garcia," US President Donald Trump has said as he criticised the UK's plan to hand over the Chagos Islands to Mauritius and lease back an important military base.

Trump said "this land should not be taken away from the U.K." and if it did it would be "a blight on our Great Ally", in a post on social media.

This comes despite Washington on Tuesday giving its official backing to London's plan to cede sovereignty of the British Indian Ocean Territory to Mauritius.

Trump's latest comments come ahead of talks between the US and Mauritius planned for next week.

Diego Garcia is the largest island in the archipelago, and is used by the UK and US armed forces.

Under the plan, the UK will

lease back Diego Garcia for a period of 99 years.

Trump U-turn on Chagos Islands deal

Posting on the Truth Social platform on Wednesday, Trump wrote: "I have been telling Prime Minister Keir Starmer, of the United Kingdom, that Leases are no good when it comes to Countries, and that he is making a big mistake by entering a 100 Year Lease..."

The US president stressed that Diego Garcia was "strategically located in the Indian Ocean".

"Prime Minister Starmer is losing control of this important Island by claims of entities never known of before," he said.

"We will always be ready, willing, and able to fight for the U.K., but they have to remain strong in the face of Wokeism, and other problems put before them."

## Rescuers search for nine missing skiers after California avalanche

Nine backcountry skiers are missing following an avalanche in California's Lake Tahoe region on Tuesday, authorities say.

Six others have been rescued after they became stranded, the Nevada County Sheriff's Office said.

The avalanche was reported about 11:30 PST (19:30 GMT) in the Castle Peak area near the town of Truckee, according to officials. Weather conditions remain dangerous, with a high chance of further avalanches.

"Highly skilled rescue ski teams" have deployed from two nearby ski resorts, the sheriff said. The six known survivors have been "directed to shelter in place as best they can in the conditions," the sheriff added.

Nevada County Sheriff's Office A type of vehicle normally used for grooming snow. It has treads. Nevada County Sheriff's Office

Officials initially reported that a group of 16 people in total - four guides and 12 clients - were involved, though that number was later lowered to 15.

"The six initially reported skiers who survived the avalanche have been successfully rescued this evening," the sheriff's office wrote on Facebook late on Tuesday night. Two of the six rescued skiers were taken to hospital, it said.

Experts from the nearby Boreal Mountain Ski Resort and the Alder Creek Adventure Center are also attempting to reach the site.

An earlier statement posted by the sheriff's office said 46 emergency responders had joined the rescue efforts.

The Sierra Avalanche Center wrote in a forecast: "Large avalanches are expected to occur [on] Tuesday, Tuesday night, and into at least early Wednesday morning across backcountry terrain."

The avalanche centre listed the danger rating as "high" - a four out of five on the rating scale.

"Travel in, near, or below avalanche terrain is not recommended today. A widespread

natural avalanche cycle is expected over the next 24 hours," the centre said. "Large avalanches may run through treed areas."

The avalanche that trapped the skiers was rated as a D2.5 on a scale of D1 to D5, Sierra Avalanche Center Forecaster Steve Reynaud told local outlet ABC News 10. D2 avalanches can injure, bury or kill people, according to avalanche.org.

Reynaud told ABC that the skiers were on the last day of a three-day backcountry skiing trip.

He said the skiers spent two nights at huts on a trip that involved navigating "rugged mountainous terrain" for 4 miles (6.4km) while carrying food and supplies.

A spokesman for the sheriff's office, Capt Russell Greene, told local news station KCRA-TV that it would be a "slow, tedious process" to find the missing skiers because of the high avalanche danger posing a risk to rescuers.

As of around 17:15 PST (01:15 GMT), he said first responders, including some on skis, were still trying to reach the avalanche zone and that those alive were sheltering under tarpaulin sheets "doing the best they can to survive".

He said it was not uncommon for ski tour companies to take paying customers out in such conditions, adding: "I don't think it was a wise choice but we don't know all the details yet."

California Governor Gavin Newsom's office said in a post on X that state authorities were "co-ordinating an all-hands search-and-rescue effort" with local emergency teams.

The Boreal Mountain Ski Resort, which is near where the accident occurred, has reported 30 inches (76cm) of snow-fall in the past 24 hours.

The resort decided to close on Tuesday because of high winds and low visibility.

The storm has also closed several highways, including Interstate 80 and Highway 50.

## Social media suspended in Gabon 'until further notice': media regulator

Social media platforms in Gabon have been suspended "until further notice," the country's media regulator announced on Tuesday.

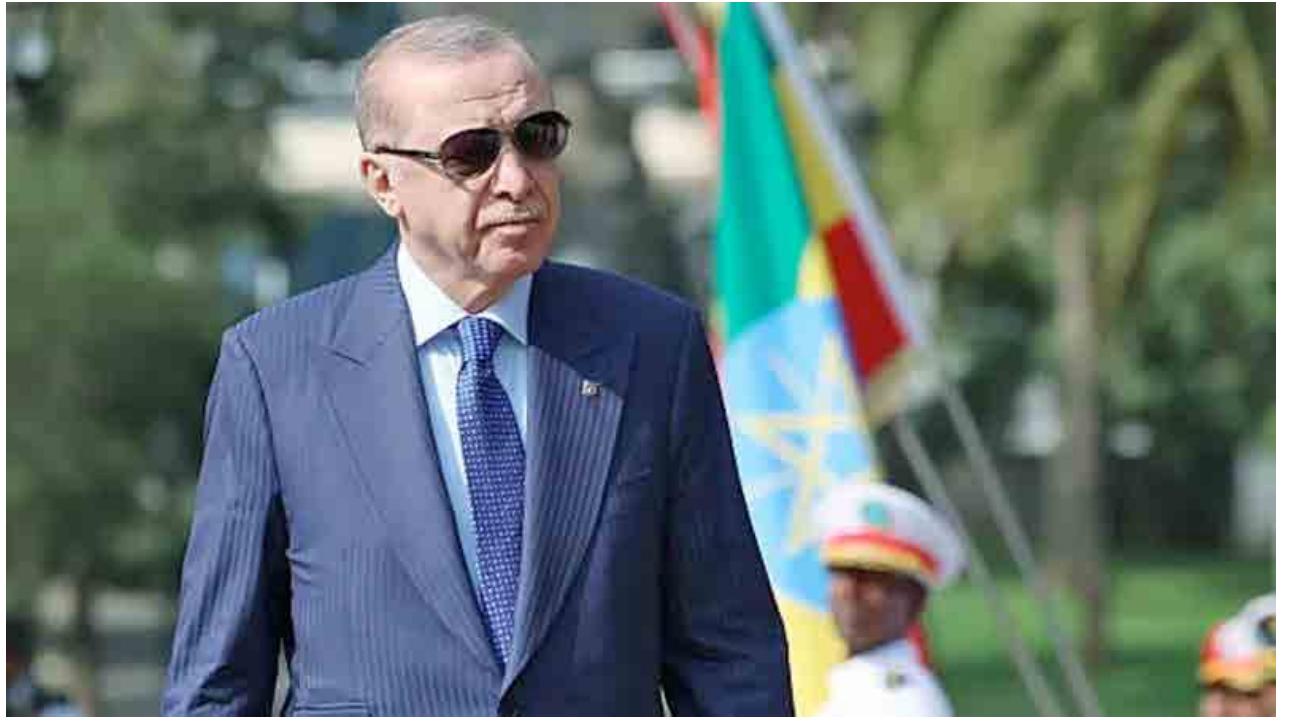
A spokesperson for the High Authority for Communication said "defamatory, hateful and insulting content" is stoking conflict and division in society.

He said the "spread of false information," "cyberbullying" and "unauthorised disclosure of personal data" are destabilizing government institutions and threatening democratic progress.

The body hasn't named any social media platforms that will be included in the ban. The regulator said "freedom of expression, including freedom of comment and criticism," remain "a fundamental right enshrined in Gabon."

President Brice Oligui Nguema is facing his first wave of social unrest since taking office last year.

Teachers have been striking since December over pay and conditions and protests have spread to other public sector, including health, higher education and broadcasting.



**TURKEY'S PRESIDENT:**

President Erdogan made the comment during an official visit to Ethiopia, which neighbours the breakaway region of Somaliland.

## Turkey's president rejects Israel's recognition of Somaliland

Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has rejected Israel's recognition of the breakaway region of Somaliland as an independent nation.

During a visit to Ethiopia, Erdogan said it could prove dangerous for a volatile region.

In December, Israel became the first country to recognise Somaliland, which declared independence from Somalia more than 30 years ago. The move upset Mogadishu, which still considers Somaliland as part of its territory.

Landlocked Ethiopia has yet to comment, but its plans two years ago to lease a piece of Somaliland's coastline to build a port angered Somalia at the time - and it was Erdogan who

mediated an end to the dispute that had prompted fears of a wider conflict.

In reaction to Erdogan's comments, Somaliland's foreign ministry said that Turkey, which has in recent years become an important geopolitical player in the Horn of Africa, should refrain from inflaming regional tensions.

Why Israel's recognition of Somaliland as an independent state is controversial

Ethiopia and Somalia agree to end bitter Somaliland port feud

At a joint press conference in Addis Ababa with Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, Erdogan said: "The Horn of Africa should not be the battlefield of foreign forces.

"We believe that countries of

the region should address their problems by themselves."

Meanwhile, Abiy urged Turkey to support Ethiopia's quest for sea access, arguing that it was unjust for the country to remain landlocked.

Eritrea officially seceded from Ethiopia in 1993, leaving the country without access to a 1,350km (840-mile) Red Sea coastline.

"It is not right for a country with a population of over 130 million to be denied sea access and remain a geographical prisoner for a long time due to the conspiracy of our enemies," Abiy said.

Since the Somaliland deal fell through in 2024, Abiy has been pushing for ownership of Eritrea's southern port of Ass-

ab - about 60km from its border - and hinted at the desire to take it by force.

Abiy said he had asked Turkey to exert diplomatic pressure and assist peacefully in securing access to the sea.

"We have had a strong discussion with President Erdogan to play his part in this regard. We thank him for this," the Ethiopian prime minister added.

This all comes against the backdrop of fears of a return to conflict in Ethiopia's northern Tigray region, which borders Eritrea.

During the first Tigray war, which raged between 2020 and 2022, Eritrean forces fought alongside the Ethiopian army against local Tigrayan fighters.

## Zuckerberg arrives to testify in social media addiction trial

Mark Zuckerberg, the Facebook co-founder, arrived at a California court on Wednesday where he is due to testify in a landmark legal case over whether social media is addictive to children.

It will be Zuckerberg's first appearance before a jury after years of backlash against his company, Meta Platforms, which also owns Instagram and WhatsApp.

Lawyers for Meta have argued the lead plaintiff in this case, known by her initials K.G.M., was hurt by other things in her life and not by her use of Instagram.

The Los Angeles trial, in which Google's YouTube is also a defendant, is being closely watched for its implications for thousands of similar lawsuits facing social media giants.

TikTok and Snapchat, which had also been named in the lawsuit, settled shortly before trial was scheduled to begin. Terms of the settlements were not disclosed.

Lawyers for K.G.M., who started using Instagram and YouTube as a child, have accused social media firms of working to addict young users, despite being aware of risks to mental health.

Zuckerberg, who arrived at court with an entourage of security and associates, is expected to face questions about Instagram's design and what changes the firm made over the years in order to keep people hooked.

Meta's advertising-based business model, which depends on metrics such as how long people stay on the platforms, is also likely to be in focus.

Bereaved parents were among those in the courtroom to watch the proceedings.

In questioning last week, Adam Mosseri, the head of Instagram, challenged the idea of social media addiction, arguing that even 16-hours of Instagram use in a single day did not show an addiction.

The trial is expected to last several weeks. It is also set to include testimony from former Meta employees who have since spoken out about on the company's practices.

YouTube boss Neal Mohan had also been expected to appear but is no longer being called for testimony, the BBC has learned.

The case is one of thousands of similar lawsuits brought by families, state prosecutors and school districts currently winding their way through US

courts.

The lawsuits accuse Meta and other social media platforms, including TikTok, Snapchat and Youtube, of functioning in an addictive manner that ultimately has harmed many children.

In one such case, 29 state attorney generals are pushing a California federal court to demand that the platforms make a number of changes immediately, before any trial, including forcing Meta to remove all accounts known to belong to users under 13 years of age.

A growing number of countries are moving to restrict social media use by young people. Australia late last year implemented a ban on social media accounts for people under age 16.

The UK, Denmark, France and Spain are considering similar measures.

# Feature



THE NIGERIAN SENATE COMMITTEE

## Electoral Amendment (Repeal) Act 2026: How Far (2)

UYI NWAGBAFOR

The Electoral Act (Repeal and Re-enactment) Bill 2026 has been passed by the Nigerian Senate, amid controversy and heated debates. The bill aims to reform the country's electoral framework, but critics argue it falls short of expectations, particularly regarding the electronic transmission of results.

### KEY PROVISIONS OF THE BILL INCLUDE:

- **Electronic Transmission of Results:** The Senate rejected mandatory real-time electronic transmission, instead allowing the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to prescribe the manner of transmission.

- **Notice of Election:** The timeline for issuing notice of elections was reduced from 360 days to 180 days.

- **Voter Identification:** The Permanent Voter Card (PVC) remains the sole mandatory identification at polling units.

- **Penalties for PVC Offenses:** The fine for buying and selling PVCs was increased from N2 million to N5 million, with a retained two-year imprisonment term<sup>3,4</sup>.

The bill's passage has sparked concerns about the potential impact on the 2027 general elections, with some arguing it undermines transparency and credibility. The Situation Room, a civil society coalition, has condemned the Senate's action, calling for mandatory real-time electronic transmission and realistic electoral timelines.

The reduced notice period for elections from 360 days to 300 days has several implications:

- **Flexibility in scheduling:** The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) now has more flexibility to schedule elections, avoiding conflicts with major events like Ramadan.

- **Logistical adjustments:** The shorter notice period may impact voter education, logistics, and coordination with security agencies.

- **Voter turnout:** Elections are less likely to coincide with Ramadan, potentially improving voter turnout.

- **Electoral planning:** The revised timeline allows INEC to better manage preparations and respond to national realities.

The bill's provisions have sparked concerns about the credibility of the 2027 general elections. The reduction of the notice period for elections from 360 days to 300 days aims to avoid coinciding with Ramadan, but critics argue it may compromise electoral preparations<sup>1,2</sup>.

The rejection of mandatory real-time electronic transmission of results has also raised concerns about transparency and potential manipulation. The bill allows for manual transmission as a fallback, which opponents say could undermine the credibility of the elections.

Civil society organizations and opposition lawmakers have protested the amendments, demanding mandatory electronic transmission and a longer notice period. The controversy has led to heated debates and walkouts in the National Assembly.

The Bill 2026 has been passed by the Nigerian Senate and is currently awaiting harmonization with the House of Representatives' version. A Conference Committee has been established to iron out differences between the two versions.

### NEXT STEPS:

- The Conference Committee will harmonize the bill and present it to both chambers for final approval.

- Once approved, the bill will be transmitted to President Bola Tinubu for assent.

- The President is expected to sign the bill into law soon.

The key differences between the Senate and House versions of the Electoral Act (Repeal and Re-enactment) Bill 2026 are:

- **Electronic Transmission of Results:** The House version makes electronic transmission of results from polling units mandatory, while the Senate version allows manual transmission as a fallback if electronic transmission fails.

- **Notice of Election:** The Senate reduced the notice period from 360 days to 180 days, whereas the House maintained the original 360-day period.

- **Voter Identification:** Both ver-

sions agree on using the Permanent Voter Card (PVC) as the sole mandatory identification at polling units.

These differences are being addressed by a Conference Committee, which will harmonize the two versions before transmission to the President for assent.

The Electoral Act (Repeal and Re-enactment) Bill 2026's provisions are expected to impact the 2027 general elections in several ways:

- **Notice Period:** The bill reduces the notice period for elections from 360 days to 300 days, giving the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) flexibility to schedule elections between December 2026 and January 2027, avoiding a clash with Ramadan.

- **Electronic Transmission of Results:** The bill allows for electronic transmission of results with manual backup, rather than making real-time transmission mandatory. This has sparked controversy, with critics arguing it could undermine transparency and credibility.

- **Voter Turnout:** The reduced notice period and potential coincidence with Ramadan may affect voter turnout and logistical coordination.

- **Election Timetable:** INEC has announced February 20, 2027, for presidential and National Assembly elections, and March 6, 2027, for governorship and state Houses of Assembly polls.

The bill's provisions have been met with protests and criticism from civil society organizations and opposition lawmakers, who argue that they could compromise the integrity of the elections.

The rejected real-time electronic transmission of results in Nigeria's Electoral Act (Repeal and Re-enactment) Bill 2026 has several implications:

- **Increased risk of electoral manipulation:** Without real-time transmis-

sion, results can be altered or tampered with during manual collation, undermining the integrity of the electoral process.

- **Reduced transparency:** Manual transmission can lead to delays and discrepancies, making it difficult to track results and verify their accuracy.

- **Loss of public trust:** The rejection of real-time transmission has sparked protests and concerns about the government's commitment to electoral reform and transparency.

- **Potential for disputes:** The lack of real-time transmission may lead to increased disputes and litigation over election results.

- **Impact on credibility:** The 2027 general elections may be perceived as less credible, potentially affecting voter turnout and the legitimacy of the outcome.

The manual transmission fallback in Nigeria's Electoral Act (Repeal and Re-enactment) Bill 2026 has several implications on the credibility of the 2027 elections:

- **Increased risk of electoral manipulation:** Manual transmission can lead to alterations or tampering with results, undermining the integrity of the electoral process.

- **Reduced transparency:** Manual transmission can cause delays and discrepancies, making it difficult to track results and verify their accuracy.

- **Loss of public trust:** The inclusion of manual transmission has sparked protests and concerns about the government's commitment to electoral reform and transparency.

- **Potential for disputes:** The manual transmission fallback may lead to increased disputes and litigation over election results.

Critics argue that the manual transmission fallback undermines the credibility of the elections, while proponents claim it provides a necessary safeguard against technological failures.

*The Bill 2026 has been passed by the Nigerian Senate and is currently awaiting harmonization with the House of Representatives' version. A Conference Committee has been established to iron out differences between the two versions*

## FEATURE

# Challenges of the "Japa phenomenon": How would a nation retain skilled professionals?

NKA DIKE

Immigration is a complex issue driven by various factors, including economic hardship, insecurity, and poor governance.

Many Nigerians are seeking better opportunities abroad, with 53.4% of young people unemployed in 2020.

Asylum seekers from Nigeria increased by 408% in the first half of 2024 compared to the same period in 2023.

This is while Remittances from Nigerian migrants are a significant source of income, representing 3.68% – 5.85% of GDP between 2014 and 2017.

The challenges of taking dangerous routes and risks to travel out of the nation are many, yet people won't stop leaving, they say the challenges of trudging unknown paths to Eldorado are bearable compared to the challenge of living at home. Highly skilled professionals are leaving in droves too, including healthcare workers and technocrats in the fields of Engineering and the sciences.

In Nigeria, Brain Drain is a major concern, with these skilled professionals leaving Nigeria for better opportunities.

Insecurity, poverty, and poor infrastructure are pushing factors.

Many migrants face challenges in host countries, including underemployment and non-recognition of qualifications.

Government's Response to all this trickles in, like the National Policy on Health Workforce Migration which aims to manage migration and improve retention.

However, implementation remains a challenge, with many proposals still

at the pilot or planning stage.

The impact of migration on Nigeria's economy and the challenges faced by Nigerian migrants abroad

is multifaceted. On one hand, remittances from Nigerian migrants have become a significant source of foreign exchange, surpassing oil revenue in recent years. In 2024, remittances hit \$20.93 billion, more than four times the value of Nigeria's Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).

These remittances have helped cushion households against inflation and currency depreciation, contributing to economic growth and development. However, the reliance on remittances also poses risks, such as vulnerability to global economic shocks and immigration policy shifts in host countries.

On the other hand, brain drain remains a significant challenge, with skilled professionals, including doctors, engineers, and IT specialists, emigrating in droves. This has led to talent gaps in critical sectors, stunted development, and financial losses, with the training of one doctor costing Nigeria about \$21,000.

Nigerian migrants abroad face challenges such as underemployment, non-recognition of qualifications, and restrictive immigration policies. The "Japa phenomenon" has accelerated in recent years, driven by economic hardship, insecurity, and poor governance.

Nigeria can try these strategies to mitigate brain drain and retain skilled professionals.

- Improve working conditions: Offer competitive salaries, better infrastructure, and resources.

- Career growth opportunities:



“  
The "Japa phenomenon" has accelerated in recent years, driven by economic hardship, insecurity, and poor governance.

Provide training, mentorship, and clear career paths.

- Address insecurity: Ensure safety and stability to encourage professionals to stay.

- Encourage diaspora engagement: Offer incentives for diaspora professionals to return or contribute remotely.

- Improve governance: Address corruption and inefficiency to boost confidence in the system.

The government can leverage diaspora remittances and investments by:

- Encouraging formal channels: Promote use of formal remittance channels to increase forex inflows.

- Diaspora bonds: Issue bonds targeting Nigerians abroad to fund infrastructure projects.

- Investment opportunities: Create attractive investment options for diaspora Nigerians, like priority access to stocks or real estate.

- Support entrepreneurship: Encourage diaspora investments in startups and SMEs.

- Financial inclusion: Offer financial products tailored to diaspora investors and recipients.

Some support systems that can be put in place include:

- Embassy support: Strengthen Nigerian embassies to provide assistance with documentation, emergencies, and consular services.

- Migrant welfare funds: Establish funds to support migrants in distress abroad.

- Skills recognition: Work with host countries to recognize Nigerian qualifications.

- Pre-departure orientation: Offer training on host country laws, culture, and rights.

- Diaspora organizations: Support networks for Nigerians abroad to connect and access resources.

## The significance of Ash Wednesday: A time for reflection and repentance

BISHOP GENERAL IWU COSMOS

Ash Wednesday, which marks the beginning of the Lenten season, holds profound significance for Catholics worldwide. This solemn day invites the faithful into a period of reflection, penitence and spiritual renewal, guiding them on a 40-day journey towards the joyous celebration of Easter. It is a time to examine one's life, seek forgiveness for sins and deepen one's relationship with God.

### The Biblical Roots of Ash Wednesday

The observance of Ash Wednesday is firmly rooted in biblical tradition. In both the Old and New Testaments, ashes symbolise repentance and mourning. In the Book of Job, when Job recognised his sinfulness, he sat in ashes as a sign of sorrow and humility (Job 42:6). In the Book of Daniel, Daniel turned to God in prayer, fasting and ashes as an expression of repentance (Daniel 9:3). In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus calls the people to repentance, urging them to turn away from sin (Matthew 4:17).

The custom of marking the forehead with ashes on Ash Wednesday serves as a visible sign of repentance, reminding us that life on earth is fleeting. The priest's words, "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return," echo the reality of human mortality. It is a humbling reminder that our time on earth is limited and that we must live with eternity in view.

### A Call to Repentance and Humility

Ash Wednesday is more than a ritual; it is a call to genuine repentance. As Catholics, we believe that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). The ashes placed on our foreheads symbolise our acknowledgement of sin, our need for God's grace and our willingness to return to Him. The day offers a sacred opportunity for honest self-examination and renewal.

The ashes also remind us of the humility required to approach God. In a world often driven by pride, self-sufficiency and distraction, Ash Wednesday calls us back to simplicity and dependence on divine grace. Before God, we recognise our frailty and our need for His mercy. Such humility opens the

door to true transformation.

### Lenten Practices: Fasting, Prayer and Almsgiving

Lent is not solely about repentance; it is also about spiritual growth. The season encourages Catholics to deepen their faith through three central practices: fasting, prayer and almsgiving.

Fasting helps us detach from excessive worldly desires and refocus on what truly matters—our relationship with God and our responsibility towards others. It teaches discipline and self-denial, creating space in our lives for spiritual growth.

Prayer is essential throughout Lent. Just as Jesus withdrew into the desert for 40 days of prayer and fasting, we too are called to set aside time to seek God's guidance, strength and wisdom. Through prayer, we listen for God's voice and align our hearts with His will.

Almsgiving, or acts of charity, is equally vital. By supporting those in need, we reflect Christ's compassion and generosity. Almsgiving helps us loosen our attachment to material possessions and strengthens our sense of solidarity with the poor and

vulnerable.

### The 40-Day Journey of Lent

The 40 days of Lent recall Jesus' time in the desert before the beginning of His public ministry. This period of preparation teaches that renewal often requires sacrifice and perseverance. Just as Christ faced temptation and overcame it through prayer and trust in God, we are called to confront our own weaknesses with faith and courage.

Lent is ultimately a season of transformation. By its conclusion, we should emerge renewed in spirit, strengthened in faith and more committed to living out the Gospel. The joy of Easter becomes deeper and more meaningful when we have sincerely prepared our hearts through repentance and renewal.

### A Prayer for the Catholic Faithful

As we enter this sacred season, I offer this prayer for all the faithful:

Heavenly Father,  
We come before You with repentant hearts, seeking Your mercy and grace. Help us to recognise our sins and turn away from them. Grant us

the humility to depend fully on You and the strength to resist temptation.

Guide us throughout this Lenten journey. May our fasting draw us closer to You, our prayers deepen our communion with You, and our acts of charity reflect Your love. Transform our hearts so that we may emerge renewed in faith, hope and love.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, make us more like Christ in all we do. May this season prepare us to celebrate Easter with hearts truly changed by Your grace, in Jesus' name. Amen.

### Conclusion: A Season of Spiritual Renewal

Ash Wednesday is both solemn and hopeful. It marks the beginning of a sacred journey of repentance, reflection and renewal. As we receive the ashes and enter the 40 days of Lent, may we remember that this season is not merely about sacrifice, but about drawing closer to God and allowing Him to transform our lives. Through prayer, fasting and charity, may we grow in holiness and prepare ourselves to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord with renewed faith and joy.

 <p><b>The Nigerian Observer</b> ...That the people may know</p>	<h2 style="margin:0;">ADVERTISEMENT RATES (PRINT)</h2>
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			PUBLIC NOTICE		PRODUCT		COLOUR		BLACK & WHITE	
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13 X 4	369,500	397,213	295,600	317,770	206,938	222,458	443,500	476,763	369,550	397,266
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
QUARTER PAGE	192,150	206,561	118,250	127,119	88,690	95,342	236,500	254,238	133,000	142,975
CENTER SPREAD	1,356,968	1,466,992						B/W	1,148,181	1,241,276
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FRONT PAGE POSITIONS					OTHER SIZES				
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FP 6X2	89,800	96,535	105,450	113,359	6 X 2	60,640	65,188	49,140	52,826
FP 5X2	81,100	87,183	97,300	104,598	5 X 2	51,950	55,846	42,120	45,279
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
FP 2X2	59,000	63,425	64,900	69,768	2 X 2	18,680	20,081	15,600	16,770
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**EFFECTIVE FROM FEBRUARY 1, 2023**

# Sports

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

## Team Nigeria Athletics intensify preparations in Asaba as Commonwealth Games camp enters week two

Team Nigeria Athletics have stepped up preparations for the forthcoming Commonwealth Games as their six-week first phase camping programme entered its second week in Asaba.

The camp, which brings together a blend of seasoned campaigners and promising young talents, has already begun to take shape with rigorous training sessions at the Stephen Keshi Stadium.

Coaches and technical officials have expressed satisfaction with the athletes' commitment, noting that the early signs point to a productive build-up.

The head coach of the Athletics Federation of Nigeria (AFN), Solomon Aliyu, has expressed satisfaction with the progress made so far in the first phase of preparations for the forthcoming Commonwealth Games camp in Asaba.



COMMONWEALTH BOUND ATHLETES

Aliyu revealed that the federation is deliberately maintaining focus as athletes begin their build-up in earnest.

"We don't want to be distracted. So far, so good. The camp is in three phases and this is the first phase of the camp," he said.

Now in week two of the first phase, the focus has shifted from general conditioning to more

event-specific drills, as sprinters, jumpers, throwers and hurdles intensify their routines.

Morning sessions are largely dedicated to endurance and strength work, while evenings feature technical refinement and speed training.

Camp officials say the six-week programme is designed to lay a solid foundation before the team transitions into more competitive

simulations and international exposure ahead of the Games.

"The response from the athletes has been encouraging," one of the coaches remarked. "We are building gradually. The first two weeks are critical for fitness and team bonding, and the athletes have shown discipline and hunger."

Asaba's conducive weather and world-class facilities have also been credited for creating the right environment for preparation.

The athletes have settled into camp life, with emphasis placed not only on physical readiness but also on nutrition, recovery and mental strength.

Aliyu said, the current phase is laying the foundation for what is expected to be a comprehensive and competitive preparation programme. While a number of invited athletes are yet to report to camp, he explained

that their absence is due to national commitments elsewhere.

"We are expecting more to join the camp after the Niger Delta Games. Some of the athletes called to camp are taking part in the Niger Delta Games, so after the NDDC Games we will have a full camp," Aliyu added.

Despite not having a complete squad at this stage, the mood within the camp remains upbeat.

The coach commended both the athletes and the support staff for their professionalism and commitment, noting that conditions have been conducive for optimal performance.

"The spirit in camp is very high. The quality of accommodation is good and the quality of training is top notch. The feeding is good, no negative feedback," he stated.

For many of the younger athletes, the Commonwealth Games present an opportunity to announce themselves on the big stage, while the experienced stars are determined to improve on previous performances and restore Nigeria's dominance in track and field.

With morale high and facilities meeting expectations, the

AFN appears confident that the phased camping strategy will help fine-tune Nigeria's athletes ahead of the global showpiece.

As more competitors arrive after the Niger Delta Games, attention will shift toward sharpening performance levels and building team cohesion as Nigeria aims for a strong outing at the Commonwealth Games.

With four more weeks remaining in the first phase, expectations are high that Team Nigeria Athletics will emerge sharper, stronger and fully prepared to compete for medals when the Commonwealth Games begin.

As the countdown continues, the mood in camp remains focused and optimistic, a clear signal that Nigeria's track and field contingent means business.

### THE TEAM IN ASABA

- 100/200M  
1. Chidera Ezeakor  
**100mh - women**  
2. Jenet Sunday  
3. Precious Uduvweghre  
110mh - MEN  
4. Musa Wisdom Great  
5. Abdulaziz Abdullahi

## Niger Delta Games Torch departs Ondo for Edo State

Ondo State Governor, Hon. Lucky Aiyedatiwa has described the Niger Delta Games as a powerful platform for discovering and nurturing talents, as well as fostering friendship among the nine participating states.

He also noted that sport has consistently proven to be a unifying force across ethnic, cultural, and political boundaries.

Aiyedatiwa, who was represented by the Commissioner for Youth and Sports Development, Hon. Segun Omyofunmi made the remarks while receiving the Niger Delta Games Torch of Unity in Akure, the state capital.

According to him, "As the torch begins its journey from Ondo State and beyond, it carries with it the message that the Niger Delta is ready to showcase its talents, ready to compete with honour and ready to inspire."

"It also reminds our youths that sports is not only about winning medals and trophies, but about discipline, purpose, and a pathway to greatness."

The governor reaffirmed his administration's support for the 2026 Niger Delta Games.

"We are committed to providing an enabling environment for our athletes to train, excel, and proudly represent us in Benin."

"I urge our athletes to embrace the spirit of fair play, teamwork, and perseverance as they prepare for this prestigious event."

"I commend the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), in conjunction with Dunamis Icon Limited, the

Games rights owners, and all other stakeholders whose dedication has made the event possible."

The representative of the Dunamis Icon Project and member of the Main Organising Committee (MOC), Frank Ilaboya, commended the Ondo State liaison committee for its role in the movement of the Torch of Unity.

Ilaboya emphasised that the purpose of the Niger Delta Games is to discover talent at the grassroots level.



NDGS UNITY TORCH MOVES

## Niger Delta Games draw holds today as states contingent arrives in Benin

All athletes, officials and other functionaries of the 2nd Niger Delta Games are expected in Benin, Edo State on Thursday even as the organisers announced that the draws will hold at the Samuel Ogbemudia Stadium Media Centre.

Fred Edoreh, the Project Director said Thursday, February 19 is the official arrival date of state contingents and competition officials.

"We have everything in place to receive Athletes and their Coaches at the Benson Idahosa University (BIU) where hostels have been made

ready for them.

"We are satisfied with the facilities in the hostels which will offer the young athletes a good experience and perhaps stimulate them to good performances", Edoreh stated.

From Enefiok Udo-Obong, Chairman of the Technical Committee for the games, emerged information that draws will essentially be for the ball games.

"There is no seeding, all states are rated equal and the procedure for draws of individual events will be determined during a technical

meeting scheduled for late Wednesday at the VIP box of the Samuel Ogbemudia Stadium", explained Enefiok, Olympic gold medallist and the Technical Adviser to the Royal Saudi Arabia Athletics

The technical meeting was attended by all the technical heads of each of the 16 sports events listed for the games.

The nine states participating states will be pooled to determine the fixtures which will schedule the four games for each gameday.

Dunamis-Icon Limited is the rights owner and organisers of the Niger Delta Games, sponsored by the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC).

The opening ceremony has been scheduled for Friday, February 20 and the games will run through to 27th.

Bayelsa State emerged champions at the first edition held in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State in 2025.

## Super Eagles Star Boniface ruled out of the season

Super Eagles and Werder Bremen striker Victor Boniface has been ruled out for the remainder of the season due to injury.

The Nigerian international has been sidelined for the past few months after sustaining an injury that has kept him out of competitive action.

Although the lanky forward has commenced his rehabilitation programme, the Bundesliga side confirmed on Wednesday that he will not return to action before the end of the current campaign.

Providing an update on his condition, Clemens Fritz Niemeyer told DeichStube that the club remains encouraged

by the player's recovery process but admitted that a return this season is unlikely.

"He's completing his rehab in Leverkusen, and we're happy about every bit of progress. But it's still impossible to predict how quickly he'll be fully fit again," Niemeyer said.

"Due to the rehabilitation process, we don't expect Victor to play for Werder again this season."

Boniface's absence is a significant blow for Bremen as they continue their push in the closing stages of the campaign, while the Super Eagles will also be monitoring his recovery ahead of upcoming international engagements.



VICTOR BONIFACE



NIGER DELTA GAMES ATHLETES

# SPORTS

## 2nd NDGs: Edo State Sports Commission mgt visits, appreciates athletes

● **Be strong, bold like Lions, Soar like Eagles as we approach Games, Enabulele encourages team**

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

With two days count-down to the commencement of the second Niger Delta Games in Benin, the Executive Chairman, Edo State Sports Commission Hon Amadin Desmond Enabulele has encouraged team Edo athletes to be bold and strong like Lions and soar like Eagles when the competition begins, insisting that he believes in their capacity to deliver.

The Edo State Sports Commission boss gave the charge when he led his management team which includes the permanent Secretary Mrs Patricia Efe-Amenze, Executive Director Sports Development and Operations Mrs Sabi-



EDO STATE SPORTS COMMISSION MGT VISITS ATHLETES IN CAMP na Chikere, Home Baldwin Bazuaye, MON, Barr Anthony Ikhulobe, the Director of Sports Development and Operations Mr Igie Kingsley and other senior staff on a routine visit to the GRA camp of team Edo on Wednesday evening.

He expressed Management appreciation to the coaches and athletes for their patience and sacrifices so far since they left their immediate families

and moved into the camp in their preparation for the Games. "We are here to appreciate you and to admonish you as we are close to the commencement of the Games. We want to say thank you for your patience, perseverance and your sacrifices since you came into this camp for the final preparations for the second Niger Delta Games."

"We have confidence in you people and believe in your ability to deliver for your dear state. We are here to let you know that we care about you. The Niger Delta Games will kick off in two days time. You should remember that we are the host and you are representing yourself; you are representing your family and your state."

"As you prepare ahead of the games, remember that discipline is our watchword. So, we admonish you to be disciplined throughout. When you work hard, aim higher, discipline should be added as that is the sure way to victory and success. Being Ambassadors of the host state, you must conduct yourselves in an orderly manner throughout.



THE INDOMITABLE LIONESSES OF CAMEROON

## International Friendly: Cameroon unveils strong squad for Falcons clash

The Indomitable Lionesses of Cameroon have unveiled a strong 25-player squad ahead of their international friendly double-header against Nigeria's Super Falcons.

The Cameroonian team has already set up camp in Mundi as preparations intensify for the two high-profile encounters against their West African rivals.

The squad is largely made up of players from the Cameroon Women's Championship, with a handful of foreign-based professionals drafted in to strengthen the team.

The blend of domestic and overseas talent underlines the seriousness with which the

technical crew is approaching the fixtures.

The friendlies are scheduled to take place on Saturday, February 28, and Tuesday, March 3, and are expected to provide a stern test for both sides.

The matches form part of Cameroon's build-up to the 2026 Women's Africa Cup of Nations, where the Indomitable Lionesses have been drawn in Group D alongside Ghana, Cape Verde and Mali.

For Cameroon, the games against the Super Falcons offer an opportunity to fine-tune tactics, assess squad depth and build cohesion ahead of the continental showpiece

## 2026 NFF race-major forces move to unseat Ibrahim Gusau and control Nigerian Football

As the 2026 election of the Nigeria Football Federation draws closer, talks about who will lead Nigerian football are already growing stronger.

Several powerful forces within sports politics and football administration are quietly aligning to challenge the current president, Ibrahim Musa Gusau, whose first four-year term will end in September 2026.

His 2022 victory shocked many observers, and now different interest groups are preparing strategies to prevent him from securing a second term.

One of the major figures attracting attention is the Chairman of the National Sports Commission of Nigeria, Shehu Dikko. Reports indicate he may consider another run for the presidency a position he previously contested without success.

His long history in football leadership and league management makes him a strong

political actor in the coming election.

Even if Shehu Dikko does not openly declare his ambition, he could still influence the race from behind the scenes. He may decide to support a candidate he trusts or someone he can closely work with and possibly control.

Such a move would still give him significant power in Nigerian football without officially holding the NFF president title.



IBRAHIM GUSAU



## Sanwo-Olu charges LSSTF board to prioritise Grassroots Sports Development

Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu of Lagos State has tasked the newly inaugurated board of the Lagos State Sports Trust Fund (LSSTF) to channel resources toward the growth of grassroots and school sports, as well as broader sporting activities across the state.

The governor gave the charge on Wednesday, February 18,

during the board's inauguration at Lagos House, Marina.

The LSSTF board is chaired by former Commissioner for Sports and Youth Development and current President of the International Table Tennis Federation Africa, Enitan Oshodi, while Olaposi Agunbiade will serve as Executive Secretary/Chief Executive Officer.

Other board members in-

clude Olabode Agoro, Adeniyi Adekoya, Gbolahan Onibuje, Jubril Gawat, Kikelomo Bolarinwa, Olayemi Sarumi, Lekan Fatodu, Moshood Ajide and Engr. Ibrahim Adigun, Chairman of the Chairmen of Local Governments and Local Council Development Areas.

Addressing the board, Sanwo-Olu urged members to leverage their professional expertise and networks to build a strong and enduring sports institution for Lagos.

"The mandate is straightforward — to support funding in sports and establish strong institutions for today and future generations," the governor said. "I implore you to deploy resources into grassroots and school sports, and to enhance facilities across our divisions.



GOV SANWO-OLU OF LAGOS STATE SUPPORTS GRASSROOTS SPORTS

## CAF Executive Committee member apologises to Morocco

A member of the Executive Committee of the Confederation of African Football (CAF), Samir Sobha, has apologised to Morocco following a controversial incident involving the country's national team, the Morocco national football team, popularly known as the Atlas Lions.

Sobha admitted that procedural errors were made during the match in question and acknowledged that Morocco suffered an injustice under the competition's regulations.

"I want to beg the Moroccan Federation to forgive us for the injustice done to them," Sobha said. "The rules were not respected as they should have been in this match.

They were robbed. It's clear. After the Senegalese team left the field, all the players should

have received a yellow card."

Despite his admission, the CAF official clarified that he was not advocating for a reversal of the result or stripping the Senegal national football team of the title.

"I'm not saying we shouldn't give the trophy to Senegal. What happened, happened; we can't change that," he added.

"But we have to put our egos aside and recognise that an injustice was done to the Moroccan national team. After studying the rules of the competition, I'm certain my position is correct."

The comments have sparked renewed debate over officiating standards and disciplinary enforcement in CAF competitions, with calls for stricter adherence to regulations to prevent similar controversies in future tournaments