

Senate summons security chiefs over USAID terrorism claims

The Senate on Wednesday summoned intelligence chiefs to investigate allegations made by United States Congressman Perry Scott that the United States Agency for International Development has been funding terrorist organisations, including Boko Haram.

The resolution followed an Order of Urgent National

Security raised under Order 41 by Senator Mohammed Ndume, representing Borno South Senatorial District.

Ndume urged the Senate to take the revelation seriously, given the devastation caused by terrorists, particularly Boko Haram. He emphasised that a thorough investigation would end speculation about how non-

state actors have managed to survive over the years.

The heads of security and intelligence agencies summoned by the Senate include the National Intelligence Agency, the Defence Intelligence Agency, the Department of State Services, and the National Security Adviser.

Senate President Godswill Akpabio endorsed the resolu-

tion but stressed that security matters are best handled behind closed doors. He noted that intelligence chiefs would provide the Senate with a clearer perspective in a private briefing.

Senator Abdul Ningi (PDP, Bauchi Central), a co-sponsor of the motion, proposed an amendment stating that security chiefs should first brief senators

in a closed-door session.

Ningi said, "At this point, whatever is written here is irrelevant. However, it is almost impossible to do justice to the issues raised in this motion in an open debate.

"We do not need an elaborate discussion on this matter; we need to be briefed by security agencies first in a closed-

door session.

"Let's focus on one key action — inviting the NSA, the DG of NIA, and the DSS for a confidential session with the Senate on this matter. This is their duty; this is what they are funded to do.

"With the security chiefs' briefing, we can proceed based on the facts they provide."

The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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Netherlands to return 119 Benin bronzes to Nigeria

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Tinubu flags off Ekpoma-Auchi-Okene road dualisation project

● **Promises durable infrastructure** ● **As Okpepholo commissions buses, security vehicles to boost transport, security**

RICHARD EWEKA

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu has flagged off the dualisation of sections two to four of the Ekpoma-Auchi-Okpella-Okene-Ajaokuta Expressway, a federal road project expected to boost economic activities in Edo and Kogi States.

Represented by the Minister of Works, Engr. Dave Umahi, at the ceremony in Ekpoma, Esan West Local Government Area of Edo State, Tinubu reaffirmed his administration's commitment to making federal roads motorable and driving national development.

Umahi highlighted the im-

portance of the road as a key economic corridor linking the two states and a major route for goods and people.

He assured that roads built under the current administration would last over 50 years, describing the project as a signature initiative under Tinubu's Renewed Hope Agenda.

He praised Governor Monday Okpepholo for his infrastructure drive, including the ongoing flyover at Ramat Park in Benin City, and commended his collaboration with Senator Adams Oshiomhole, which he credited for securing the federal government's approval for the project.

He dismissed legal challenges

against the governor's work, calling them a waste of time.

Senator Adams Oshiomhole, former Edo State governor and current senator representing Edo North Senatorial district, commended Tinubu for prioritizing durable infrastructure, stating that past administrations failed to build roads that lasted.

He expressed confidence that under Tinubu's leadership, roads would now endure between 50 and 100 years, ensuring sustainable growth.

He said the dualization project would enhance commerce, transportation, and regional in-

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EFCC asks states, CSOs to check LG spending

The Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Ola Olukoyede, on Wednesday, tasked state governments, traditional rulers, and civil society organisations on the need to check the spending of local government (LG) administrations within their domains.

According to him, something drastic must be done to discourage corruption at the council levels because the structure of accountability at the councils as presently constituted does not inspire confidence.

Olukoyede made these known when he addressed a mixed audience of activists, traditional rulers and LG bosses at the Gombe State Local Government Summit in the North-East state.

He bemoaned the trend where local councils have become automatic teller machines for greedy

public officers who feed on the ignorance or lethargy of the rural population to mine public wealth for private gain.

Olukoyede also faulted the trend where local government chairmen reside in state capitals and only visit their councils once a month to share the largesse called federal allocation.

He said councils must not just be caricatures existing in names but be proactive to deliver good governance to the people at the grassroots.

He identified prevalent corruption practices such as the stealing of public resources through contract and procurement fraud, outright embezzlement of resources through brazen sharing of public funds and several other shenanigans among local government officials, saying that the EFCC won't spare any culprit.



PROJECT COMMISSIONING:

R-L: Former governor of Edo State and Senator representing Edo North Senatorial District, Comrade Adams Oshiomole; Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpepholo; former Governor of Eboyin State and Minister of Works, Engr. Dave Umahi, and Deputy Governor of Kogi State, Joel Salifu, at the commissioning of Benin-Ekpoma-Auchi-Okpella-Okene-Ajaokuta road dualisation project at the Ekpoma axis of the road on Wednesday.

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Trump says Ukraine could have made a deal earlier

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Netherlands to return 119 Benin bronzes to Nigeria

The Netherlands has agreed to return 119 Benin Bronzes to Nigeria, marking a significant milestone in the ongoing efforts to reclaim looted cultural heritage.

The Dutch Embassy announced the decision, stating that the transfer agreement was signed on Wednesday by the Dutch Minister of Education, Culture, and Science, Eppo Bruins, and the Director-General of Nigeria's National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM), Olugbile Holloway.

The signing ceremony took place at the Wereldmuseum in Leiden, the Netherlands.

According to a statement, the

artefacts, which include pieces from the Dutch State Collection and the Municipality of Rotterdam, are expected to arrive in Nigeria later this year.

Minister Bruins described the return as a crucial step toward addressing historical injustices and acknowledged Nigeria's unwavering efforts to recover its stolen cultural treasures.

He commended the country's leadership in advocating for the restitution of colonial-era looted art, stating that the move contributes to redressing a historical injustice that is still being felt today.

He further emphasized the importance of cultural heritage

in preserving history, adding that the Benin Bronzes are indispensable to Nigeria and that their return is a significant and necessary development.

Olugbile Holloway welcomed the agreement as a historic achievement, noting that these 119 objects represent the most extensive restitution of Benin ar-

tifacts directly linked to the British punitive expedition of 1897.

Expressed gratitude to the Netherlands for its cooperation and, he expressed hope that this move would set a precedent for other nations to follow.

He underscored that the repatriation of these artefacts is not just about physical ownership,

but also about restoring dignity and historical justice to Nigeria and other nations seeking the return of their looted heritage.

The Netherlands' decision aligns with a growing global movement for the restitution of stolen cultural artefacts.

In recent years, Germany returned 1,030 Benin Bronzes

in 2022, the United States facilitated the return of 31 artefacts from three museums, and the Horniman Museum in London repatriated 72 pieces.

However, the British Museum, which holds the largest collection of Benin Bronzes, has so far refused to return them, citing legal restrictions.



MoU SIGNING CEREMONY:

L-R: Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment, Amb. Nura Rimi; Minister of Trade and Investment, Dr Jumoke Oduwole; Minister of State Industry, Sen. John Owan Enoh; Executive Vice Chairman, Aig-Imoukhuede Foundation, Mrs Ofovwe Aig-Imoukhuede, and Director of Programmes, Aig-Imoukhuede Foundation, Chioma Njoku, during the signing of an MoU.

Tinubu flags off Ekpoma-Auchi...

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tegration between Edo and Kogi.

Governor Okpembelo called the project a turning point for Edo, recalling his past protests against the road's poor condition and thanking Tinubu for taking action.

As a resident along the corridor, he acknowledged the struggles of the people and celebrated the development.

He credited Oshiomhole's persistence in pushing for the project and urged Edo people to show appreciation in future elections.

He announced that the dualized road would feature three lanes, easing traffic congestion and stimulating economic activity.

Governor Usman Ododo of Kogi State, represented by his deputy, Joel Salifu, praised Tinubu for initiating the long-awaited project, describing it as a symbol of renewed connectivity and a testament to the federal government's commitment to national development.

He noted that when completed, the road would improve movement, boost trade, and strengthen ties between Edo and Kogi.

The dualization of the Ekpoma-Auchi-Okpella-Okene-Ajokuta Expressway marks a major step in Tinubu's infrastructure agenda.

The project is expected to facilitate agricultural transportation, enhance inter-state commerce, and significantly reduce travel time.

Stakeholders believe that upon completion, the road will not only serve as a critical transport link, but also attract investment, promote tourism, and drive industrial growth, further integrating Edo and Kogi into Nigeria's economic landscape.

Meanwhile, the Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpembelo, has taken a major step towards improving transportation and security in the state, with the commissioning of 56 Toyota Hiace buses, part of a planned fleet of 100 expected before the end of February.

Alongside the buses, he also unveiled an array of security vehicles, including Toyota Hilux vans and Prado Jeeps, which have been allocated to security agencies to enhance their operational capacity in combating crime.

The event, held in Benin City, drew a high-profile audience, including Edo State Deputy Governor Hon. Dennis Idahosa; Minister of Works, Dave Umahi; former Governor of Edo State and Senator representing Edo North, Comrade Adams Oshiomhole; Secretary to the State Government, Musa Ikhilor, and the Chief of Staff, Gani Audu.

Also present were senior government officials, party leaders, and heads of security agencies.

Comrade Oshiomhole, who officially unveiled the fleet, commended Governor Okpembelo for making security a top priority.

He acknowledged that the new vehicles, fitted with advanced communication equipment, would enable security agencies to respond swiftly and effectively to criminal activities across the state.

"Criminals are mobile, and our security forces must be equally mobile. This initiative ensures that law enforcement has the necessary resources to secure Edo State," Oshiomhole said.

"It is remarkable that in just 100 days, Governor Okpembelo has achieved what some administrations failed to do in years."

A significant highlight of the event was the revival of Edo-line Transport Services, a state-owned transport initiative that had been dormant for years.

Oshiomhole praised the governor for restoring the service, acknowledging that despite his own efforts during his tenure as governor, he was unable to accomplish what Okpembelo has now achieved.

"The rebirth of Edo-Line is a historic moment. It provides Edo people with an affordable and reliable alternative for inter-state travel, ensuring that no one is at the mercy of private transport operators," he added.

Edo State Commissioner of Police, Betty Eneken Isokpen Otimenyin, expressed gratitude to the governor, emphasizing that the vehicles would be instrumental in the state's "Operation Rescue" initiative.

"Under this new security operation, law enforcement will intensify patrols across key locations, including Ubijaja, Uromi, Auchi, Oluku, Ring Road, and Ramat Park, to ensure the safety and security of residents.

Edo NUJ Chairman, Alenkhe to participate in strategic leadership course at NIPSS

BENIN CITY

The Chairman of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Edo State Council, and Defence/Security Correspondent of Edo Broadcasting Service, Dr. Festus Alenkhe, has been named as one of the participants in the 2025 13th Basic Stream Short Course on Strategic Leadership, Ethics, and Policy Making in Nigeria.

The prestigious course, organized by the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS) in partnership with Leadership and Professional Ethics Consult (LAPEC), will take place at the NIPSS headquarters

in Kuru, Jos, Plateau State.

Dr. Alenkhe will join other high-ranking officials from the public and private sectors in an intensive leadership development program designed to enhance their analytical, managerial, and strategic decision-making skills.

The course includes case studies, simulations, and expert-led sessions on policy formulation techniques, leadership development, resource deployment, managerial ethics, and policy implementation dynamics.

In a letter signed by Prof. Sola Adeyanju, mni, Head of the Public Affairs Department at NIPSS, the program is set to be-

gin on February 23, 2025, with a focus on leadership dynamics and the art of policy-making and implementation.

Established in 1979 by Decree No. 20 (now Cap No. 51, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria), NIPSS is Nigeria's premier think tank for research, reflection, dialogue, and high-level manpower training. Its primary objective is to develop visionary leaders capable of driving Nigeria's short-, medium-, and long-term national development goals.

Dr. Alenkhe's selection is seen as a recognition of his commitment to ethical journalism, security reporting, and leadership within the media industry.

His participation in the course is expected to further sharpen his policy analysis and strategic leadership skills, reinforcing his role as a key stakeholder in Nigeria's governance and development landscape.



ALENKHE

2027: Labour Party denies zoning presidential ticket to S/East

The Labour Party (LP) has dismissed claims that its 2027 presidential ticket has been zoned to the South-East, clarifying that the party remains open to candidates from all regions.

In a statement issued by its National Publicity Secretary, Obiora Ifoh, the party refuted reports attributing such a decision to its National Chairman, Julius Abure, stating that his comments were misinterpreted.

"Labour Party is a national

party with a strong presence across the country; therefore, the issue of zoning does not arise," the statement read.

Ifoh explained that Abure had merely encouraged South-East members at a recent gathering, suggesting that the Igbo political bloc could improve its chances of securing the presidency by building stronger alliances with other regions.

He highlighted the strategic political realignments that had benefited the Yoruba bloc in

past elections, urging similar collaboration among South-East politicians.

"In the 2023 general elections, our party secured victories in both northern and southern states, and we are determined to expand on that success in future elections.

"Our candidates will continue to emerge through democratic and highly competitive processes, as our constitution does not support zoning," the statement added.

The LP also criticized certain

media outlets for misrepresenting Abure's remarks, emphasizing that the party remains committed to inclusivity and democratic principles.

In the 2023 elections, the Labour Party fielded former Anambra State Governor, Peter Obi as its presidential candidate.

Obi finished third behind former Vice President Atiku Abubakar of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and eventual winner Bola Tinubu of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC).

Edo Assembly sacks all political appointees

The Edo State House of Assembly on Wednesday terminated the appointments of all political appointees attached to its members with immediate effect.

Speaker Blessing Agbebaku announced their sack during a plenary session in Benin City

He stated that the decision was unanimously agreed upon by all 24 members of the House, adding that the sacked appointees would receive their February salaries.

He listed the affected appointees as special advisers, senior special advisers, and others.

The Speaker explained that the appointees were initially appointed by House members upon the inauguration of the Eighth Assembly in June 2023.

"I believe it has been nearly two years now, and the House has graciously agreed that these people appointees, in-

cluding special advisers and senior special advisers, should be relieved of their duties as of today, 19 February," he said.

He added, "We will convene subsequently to determine the next course of action. However, they will receive their salaries for this month."

The Nigerian
Observer 

100

DAYS OF IMPACT

Congratulations
Your Excellency!

The Visionary and People's Leader marks 100 Days In office

The Management and Staff of Bendel Newspaper Corporation, Publisher of The Nigerian Observer heartily congratulate the Executive Governor of Edo State, His Excellency, **Senator Monday Okpebholo** as he marks his first **100 Days** in office. We are proud to be associated with your vision and numerous achievements!

Your bold policy decision to reclaim the Bendel Newspaper Corporation printing press and hand them over to the rightful owners - The Nigerian Observer - gladdens our hearts. We will continue to drive your Vision Our Excellency!

We salute you the People's Governor for your Visionary Leadership, your Determination and Selfless Desire to make Edo the State of choice.

Your genuine concern for Uprightness, Honesty and Due Process speak volume as you mark 100 Days in Office.

Senator Monday
Okpebholo



SIGNED: MANAGEMENT AND STAFF

NEWS

Muslim, Christian Pilgrims boards to collaborate for Okpebholo's administration success, Says Chairman

The Chairman of Edo State Muslim Pilgrims Welfare Board, Mallam Musah Muhammad Uduimoh has promised a strong collaboration with the Christian Pilgrims Welfare Board for unprecedented development

of the two boards in the state during the Governor Monday Okpebholo's administration.

Chairman Uduimoh made this known in a heartwarming display of interfaith harmony, while congratulating his colleague, Pastor Frank Omobude

on his recent appointment as the chairman of the Edo State Christian Pilgrims Welfare Board.

Mallam Uduimoh expressed his delight at the appointment, emphasizing the importance of collaboration and mutual respect between the two faiths in promoting peaceful coexistence and spiritual development within the state. He con-

veyed his best wishes to Pastor Omobude, expressing confidence in his ability to lead the Christian Pilgrims Board with distinction.

In a separate statement, Mallam Uduimoh commended Governor Okpebholo for his remarkable achievements during his first 100 days in office. He praised the governor's commitment to good govern-

ance, infrastructural development, and social welfare programmes, noting the positive impact these initiatives will have on the lives of Edo State residents.

According to him, "The appointment of Pastor Omobude and the remarkable achievements of Governor Okpebholo's 100 days in office highlight the Edo State government's

commitment to inclusivity and progress"

"The appointment of the Christian board chairman is coming with the first 100 days in office of our action Governor. This unified approach to governance is expected to further strengthen the bonds of unity and cooperation among the diverse communities within the state".

God's Grace Orphanage on the spotlight, as partners, stakeholders commends quality care

GODSPOWER EGUASA

In a just recent development in December 2024, the Edo State government through the Ministry of Social Development and Gender Issues, now renamed to the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, has once again expressed confidence in the humanitarian services and quality care dispensed to young orphans, widows, abused, and less privileged children under the custody of God's Grace Orphanage and Motherless Babies Home, owned and managed by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Mrs. Kate Okunro Odianese.

Not relenting, kindhearted partners and philanthropists have continued to support the orphanage's vision without a solitary ounce of fear or discrimination.

Okunro's giant stride in building and developing a cutting-edge orphanage home where young and underprivileged children and victims in our society are raised, catered to, and nurtured in the path of quality care and devel-

opment, with a special focus on quality education, and technical training, is a commendable endeavor envisioned and brought to light through her unwavering commitment to transform and add value to humanity.

At God's Grace Orphanage, located at Evukhun, off Sapele Road axis of Benin City, the number of young orphans under the orphanage's custody increased from 10 to 12 children within the last quarter of 2024. The addition was a demonstration of trust by the Edo State Government, adding 2 more underprivileged children to the team of young orphans.

The CEO, Mrs. Kate Okunro Odianese while briefing newsmen, reaffirmed her commitment to bringing hope and putting smiles on the faces of young orphans and underprivileged children in the State, noting as God continues to strengthen her, she will continue to remove children off the streets, providing them with a home and a warm shelter.



MEETING:

National Security Adviser, Mallam Nuhu Ribadu (left), President, Nigeria Union of Journalists, Alhassan Yahya, and Deputy National President of the union, Mrs Abimbola Oyetunde, after a meeting in Abuja.



EIRS clarifies relevance of ERAS in revenue administration

BENADDATTE IDALU

The Edo State Internal Revenue Service, (EIRS), has maintained that its digitized revenue platform, the Edo Revenue Administration System (ERAS) remains the official platform for the administration of revenue across all revenue streams, in all Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) in the State.

Head, Corporate Communications, EIRS, Mr. Courage

Eboigbe, said in a statement against the backdrop of media reports suggesting that the present administration in the state had abandoned the platform for manual revenue collection, insisting that the digitized platform is still in use.

He said that ERAS, is a home grown revenue technology solution built and owned by the EIRS for the purpose of providing an effective and efficient tax administration system to enhance transparency and accountability in revenue generation.

He noted that being a property of Edo State Government, the revenue administration system had never been abandoned and has been in use by the revenue service. This fact he said, is buttressed by a Government Special Announcement issued by the Secretary to the State Government on December 23, 2024.

"The claim is inaccurate, a lie and lame reportage from another skeptic that should be ignored just like the beer palour permutation of N8bn to N2bn drop in the State's IGR narrative.

"For the avoidance of doubt, he said the EIRS operates a cashless collection policy, utilizing several payment options such as online web payment, over the counter in Banks, Automated Teller Machine (ATM) Cards on

EIRS Official or accredited Point of Sale (PoS) devices, as well as the use of Revenue Scratch Cards after the issuance of a bill reference number.

The goal, is to enable taxpayers pay taxes, levies, fees and fines seamlessly. The EIRS Board, he insisted, in its bid to further sustain the State's Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) performance, has significantly strengthened the Compliance and Enforcement Unit within the EIRS.

This enhancement aims to put in place, better enforcement of tax Laws and to ensure greater compliance among taxpayers, particularly within the haulage space. Therefore, the engagement of Atalakpa Recovery Concept Limited, is tasked with the specific goals to enforce compliance which will in turn increase revenue collection efficiency, as well as complement the existing digital framework rather than replace it as skeptically reported.

The EIRS reassured taxpayers that it remained focused on maintaining a modern, efficient, and transparent revenue collection environment that benefits all stakeholders.

This is inaccurate, a lie and lame reportage from another skeptic that should be ignored

just like the beer palour permutation of N8bn to N2bn drop in the State's IGR narrative.

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Senate to hold closed-door session over alleged USAID funding of Boko Haram

CAROLINE AMEH

The Nigerian Senate has announced plans to convene an emergency closed session with key national security agencies to address allegations regarding the alleged funding of Boko Haram by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

The decision follows a point of order raised by Senator Ali Ndume on Wednesday, highlighting the persistent threat of terrorism in Borno State and its surrounding regions. Ndume

also condemned the ongoing clashes between herdsmen and farmers, particularly in the northern part of the country, with a specific focus on Borno Central Senatorial District.

Responding to the concerns, Senate President Godswill Akpabio directed that an emergency session be held with the National Security Adviser, the Director-General of the National Intelligence Agency, the Director-General of the Department of State Services, and the Director-General of the Defence Intelligence Agency.

"I am convening an emer-

gency closed session with the heads of our national security agencies to provide an immediate briefing on the allegations surrounding USAID's funding of Boko Haram in Nigeria," Akpabio stated. "We must get to the bottom of this matter, and I expect a thorough and transparent briefing from our national security leadership."

The Senate President emphasized the urgency of the issue, insisting that lawmakers must be fully informed on the matter to ensure appropriate actions are taken to safeguard national security.

Lagos lawmakers lament DSS invasion of assembly complex

● **As Speaker Meranda debunks resignation rumour**

Members of the Lagos State House of Assembly have condemned the invasion of the assembly complex by operatives of the Department of State Services and the Nigeria Police on Monday, describing it as a “rape of democracy, an aberration, and a national embarrassment.”

During a plenary session attended by 36 lawmakers, the legislators demanded an explanation from the Lagos State Director of DSS on the reasons for the security operatives’ presence at the legislative complex.

They also called on the National Security Adviser, Nuhu Ribadu, to investigate the incident and provide the public with a comprehensive briefing on the findings.

Additionally, the assembly urged President Bola Tinubu to intervene immediately to prevent further escalation of the situation.

Expressing their outrage, the lawmakers unanimously condemned the invasion, insisting it was an abuse of legislative procedure and a threat to democratic

governance in the state.

“This is not a government ruled by the barrel of a gun. This is an aberration of democracy and a step toward anarchy.

“What happened is a total embarrassment and an act of harassment,” said Abiodun Tobun during the session.

He further reaffirmed the lawmakers’ loyalty to the Speaker of the House, stating, “Nobody can dictate to us. God chooses and removes leaders. We are solidly behind your leadership, Mr. Speaker—nobody can remove you.”

Another lawmaker, Gbolahan Yishawu, described the incident as “an unacceptable overreach by security agencies,” emphasising that the legislature must be allowed to function independently without intimidation.

“The Nigerian Constitution clearly spells out the separation of powers. The legislature is a key pillar of democracy, and any attempt to intimidate or disrupt its activities must be condemned in the strongest terms,” Yishawu said.

The lawmakers suggested that powerful and influential

individuals or groups might be behind the invasion, calling for a thorough investigation to uncover those responsible.

They maintained that the Lagos Assembly would remain united in protecting the independence of the legislature and ensuring that such actions do not undermine democratic processes in the state.

The DSS and the Nigeria Police are yet to officially respond to the assembly’s condemnation and demands for an explanation.

Meanwhile, the Speaker of the Lagos State House of Assembly, Mojisola Meranda, has denied rumours suggesting that she has resigned.

Meranda’s Chief Press Secretary, Segun Ajiboye, debunked the rumour on Wednesday.

“I’m in the office. The speaker is in the office. I don’t know where that is coming from.

“This is the handiwork of mischief makers working for the impeached Speaker Mudashiru Obasa, who have been commissioned to spread fake news on social media to mislead the pub-

lic and maintain pressure on the current leadership of the House. We are aware of this, and it will not succeed,” the aide stated.

The aide further explained that the latest resignation rumour stems from a “fake resignation letter” originally circulated on Monday by “paid bloggers.”

“I urge members of the public to ignore such reports, as they are fake, unfounded, and without any iota of truth,” Ajiboye said in a chat with newsmen.

The clarification is coming on the heels of viral reports alleging that the newly appointed speaker had resigned.

A circular dated February 17, 2025, allegedly released by Meranda had also been trending for two days, with the content claiming she had resigned.

However, checks on the letter circulating on social media showed it wasn’t signed

Recall that the Lagos State Assembly had been rocked with a leadership crisis since the former Speaker, Obasa, was removed by the majority of the lawmakers at the House.

FG to review strategy for countering violent extremism

The Federal Government has announced plans to review Nigeria’s Policy Framework and National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism so as to enhance its effectiveness and sustainability.

The National Coordinator of the Counter-Terrorism Centre, Office of the National Security Adviser, Maj. Gen. Adamu Laka, made this known on Wednesday at a stakeholders’ consultative meeting in Abuja.

The meeting was aimed at reviewing the existing framework, which was adopted in 2017.

Speaking at the meeting, Laka stressed the need to document and institutionalize the success stories from various PCVE projects, programmes, and initiatives.

He noted that the review process would allow for the integration of best practices into a revised framework that is more resilient and impactful.

He said, “As we begin to take informed steps towards the review process of the PCVE framework, we must ensure that the success stories from various PCVE projects, programmes,

and initiatives are well-documented and institutionalized.

“These experiences serve as invaluable learning points and provide evidence for what works.

“The review when kickstarted, will offer us an opportunity to integrate these best practices into a revised framework that is more resilient, impactful, and sustainable.”

Laka said despite the successes and challenges recorded in the 2017 framework, there was a need for a stronger and adaptive framework.

He said, “Since the adoption of the PF-NAP in 2017, Nigeria has made significant strides in implementing various PCVE programmes and initiatives. Our multi-sectoral, whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach has enabled collaboration between government, civil society and international partners, leading to impactful interventions at the national, state, and sub-national levels.

“Despite the progress, challenges remain, and the need for a stronger strategic and adaptive framework that is inclusive has become even more apparent.”

Visa denial: Nigeria 'll not tolerate disrespect from any country — Defence Chief

The Chief of Defence Staff, General Christopher Musa, has said Nigeria will not tolerate any form of disrespect from foreign nations towards its citizens.

Speaking on Wednesday at the Defence Headquarters, Abuja, Musa noted that Nigeria deserves respect on the global stage.

Musa at the maiden annual lecture of the National Association of the Institute for Security Studies in Abuja last Thursday, revealed that he would have been absent from the event had his visa application not been denied by the Canadian Embassy.

Musa stated that while half of the Nigerian team was able to travel, he and several others were denied entry.

Expressing his displeasure over the matter, the National Security Adviser, Nuhu Ribadu, described the incident as both disrespectful and painful, adding that the country can “go to hell.”

Dismissing speculations that the Armed Forces were not invited, Musa clarified that the military was invited and all necessary protocols were followed.

He explained that the application process involved key government officials, including Ministers and the National Security Adviser, Nuhu Ribadu, who had previously criticized the visa denials.

“On the issue of visa denial, it must be addressed at all levels. Nigeria is a great nation, and we deserve to be treated with respect. We received an official invitation, followed due process, and complied with all requirements. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of State, the

NSA—everyone was aware of this journey,” Musa stated.

Expressing his disappointment, the Defence Chief revealed that key members of the Nigerian team, including the team captain, medical doctor, and physiotherapist, were denied visas.

“For reasons best known to them, many crucial team members were not granted visas. The question remains—why? I am, however, pleased that the Federal Government is addressing the matter,” he added.

Musa also commended the Nigerian participants at the Invictus Games, praising their courage and resilience.

“You have made Nigeria proud. Your determination and strength have left a lasting impact on everyone who has witnessed your journey. You embody the spirit of resilience—unconquered, unbroken, and unstoppable,” he said.

Addressing concerns over the welfare of injured military personnel, Musa assured that they would not be abandoned.

“As we celebrate our team’s achievements, we must also acknowledge the sacrifices of our service members. We must ensure that resources are allocated for their well-being and reintegration into civilian life. As the Chief of Defence Staff, I am committed to raising troop morale and ensuring that our personnel, especially those who have sustained injuries, receive the necessary support,” he said.

He also dismissed criticisms questioning why wounded troops were taken to the international competition.



SCREENING:

Hon. Sunday Aghedo, representing Ovia South West Constituency (right), and Hon. Egbiremonlen Sunday, representing Esan Central Constituency, during the House of Assembly screening of Pharm. Kenny Okojie as Chairman, Governing Board of Edo State Primary Healthcare Development Agency.

PHOTO: GODWIN ISEGUAN.

FG partners Aig-Imoukhuede Foundation to advance civil service reforms

The Federal Government, through the Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Investment (FMITI), has partnered with the Aig-Imoukhuede Foundation to drive civil service reforms aimed at enhancing efficiency and digital transformation.

The collaboration, formalized through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), seeks to improve FMITI’s operational effectiveness by leveraging technology and strengthening

capacity development.

The partnership was announced during FMITI’s retreat, which convened key stakeholders from the public and private sectors, including members of the Central Delivery Coordinating Unit, directors from various agencies, heads of agencies, and external consultants.

In a statement on Monday, the Executive Vice Chair of the Aig-Imoukhuede Foundation, Mrs. Ofovwé Aig-Imoukhuede, highlighted the significance of

the collaboration. She stated, “Having successfully facilitated the digitalization of the Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation, we are now bringing our support to FMITI because of the pivotal role it plays in the country’s socio-economic development.”

Minister of Industry, Trade, and Investment, Jumoke Oduwolé, welcomed the initiative, expressing optimism about its impact on FMITI.

She acknowledged the founda-

tion’s role in driving digital transformation within the Office of the Head of the Civil Service and emphasized the ministry’s commitment to replicating that success.

Recognizing the urgency of the initiative, Oduwolé stressed that “time is of the essence,” citing the ambitious timelines set by the Federal Civil Service Strategy and Implementation Plan (FCSSIP) 2025. She reaffirmed the ministry’s dedication to ensuring the swift execution of these reforms.

NEWS

FG slaps Binance with fresh \$81.5bn suit over economic losses, tax

The Federal Government has approached the Federal High Court in Abuja to compel the cryptocurrency exchange company, Binance Holdings Limited, to pay \$79.51 billion and ₦231 million for alleged economic losses caused by its operations in Nigeria.

The plaintiff, the Federal Inland Revenue Service, in a suit marked FHC/ABJ/CS/1444/2024, against Binance, is also seeking payment of \$2.001 billion in income taxes for 2022 and 2023.

In the lawsuit, Binance and two of its executives, Tigran Gambaryan and Nadeem Anjarwalla, are accused of contravening Nigerian laws, including failing to register with FIRS for tax compliance and allegedly causing economic losses to the country during the review period.

This lawsuit makes it the third lawsuit currently before the trial court against Binance.

In a related case, the FIRS and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission have charged the company with tax evasion, money laundering, and foreign exchange violations before Justice Emeka Nwite of the FHC in Abuja.

The monetary claims in the lawsuit include a 10% penalty for non-payment of taxes for 2022 and 2023, a 26.75% interest rate (the prevailing Central Bank of Nigeria lending

rate) per annum from January 1, 2023, and January 1, 2024, respectively, among other penalties.

The FIRS alleges that Binance concealed its business activities in Nigeria, despite having a significant economic presence in the country.

The FG also accused Binance of breaching Nigeria's Companies Income Tax Act, the Federal Inland Revenue Service (Establishment) Act 2007, the CBN Regulatory Framework for Mobile Money Services, and the CIT Significant Economic Presence (SEP) Order.

The SEP Order, signed by former Finance Minister Zainab Ahmed and gazetted in May 2020, defines significant economic presence as foreign companies deriving at least ₦25 million annually from digital services in Nigeria.

An affidavit, deposed to by Jimada Yusuf, a member of the Special Investigation Team from the Office of the National Security Adviser, revealed that Binance had been operating in Nigeria for over six years without registration.

Yusuf stated that during a 2024 meeting with the Securities and Exchange Commission, Binance executives (Anjarwalla and Gambaryan) admitted to having 386,256 active Nigerian users on its platform, with a trading volume of \$21.6 billion and net revenue of \$35.4 million for 2023.

Benue assembly suspends 13 members for opposing CJ's removal

The Benue State House of Assembly has suspended the 13 members who dissociated themselves from the removal of the state Chief Judge, Justice Maurice Ikpambase.

The 13 members had met after the plenary on Tuesday to dissociate themselves from the removal of the chief judge.

The 13 members who highlighted some reasons described the purported removal of the state chief judge as "unconstitutional" and violating the principles of separation of powers and fair hearing which is necessary for the sustenance of democracy.

At an emergency plenary held on Wednesday, the house slammed three months suspension on the 13 members for what they described as "their dishonourable actions capable of casting aspersions and causing acrimony in the House".

The House which condemned in the strongest terms the action of the 13 members said, "Some of the members after voting for the removal of the State Chief Judge, Justice Maurice Ikpambase, went back to address a press conference and denied voting in favour of the motion to remove the Chief Judge."

The Speaker of the House, Hyacinth Dajoh, listed those suspended to include, Mr. Douglas Akya (Makurdi South),

Mr. Jonathan Agbideye (Katsina-Ala East), Mrs. Beckie Orpin (Gboko East), Mr. Simon Gabo (Ushongo-Mata), Mr. Williams Ortyom (Agasha), Mr. Onah Blessed (Oju 1) and Mr. Elias Audu (Gwer East).

Others are Mr. Anyor Mato (Kwande East), Mr. Manger Manger (Tarka), Mr. Solomon Gyila (Gwer West), Mr. Samuel Agada (Ogbadibo), Mr. Abraham Jabi (Buruku) and Mr. Ezra Niyiyongo (Ukum).

The Majority Leader of the assembly, Saater Tiseer had earlier recalled that they had in the last sitting received a complaint from the Attorney-General detailing allegations of gross misconduct, abuse of office, bribery and corruption, and other sundry allegations against the Chief Judge.

"After exhaustive deliberations, the House went into a division where 23 members out of 31 present voted in support of the recommendation to remove the Chief Judge," Tiseer said.

He further said that after the House adopted resolutions on the matter, the 13 suspended members, some of which voted in support of the recommendation to remove Justice Ikpambase, publicly dissociated themselves from the process in which they took part, thereby contravening Order IX, Rule 58(6) of the House Standing Rules.

Microsoft plans \$1m investment in Nigeria to boost AI

Big tech company, Microsoft, said it plans to invest \$1 million over the next two years to accelerate Artificial Intelligence skill development for one million Nigerians, a move that will foster digital innovation and economic empowerment.

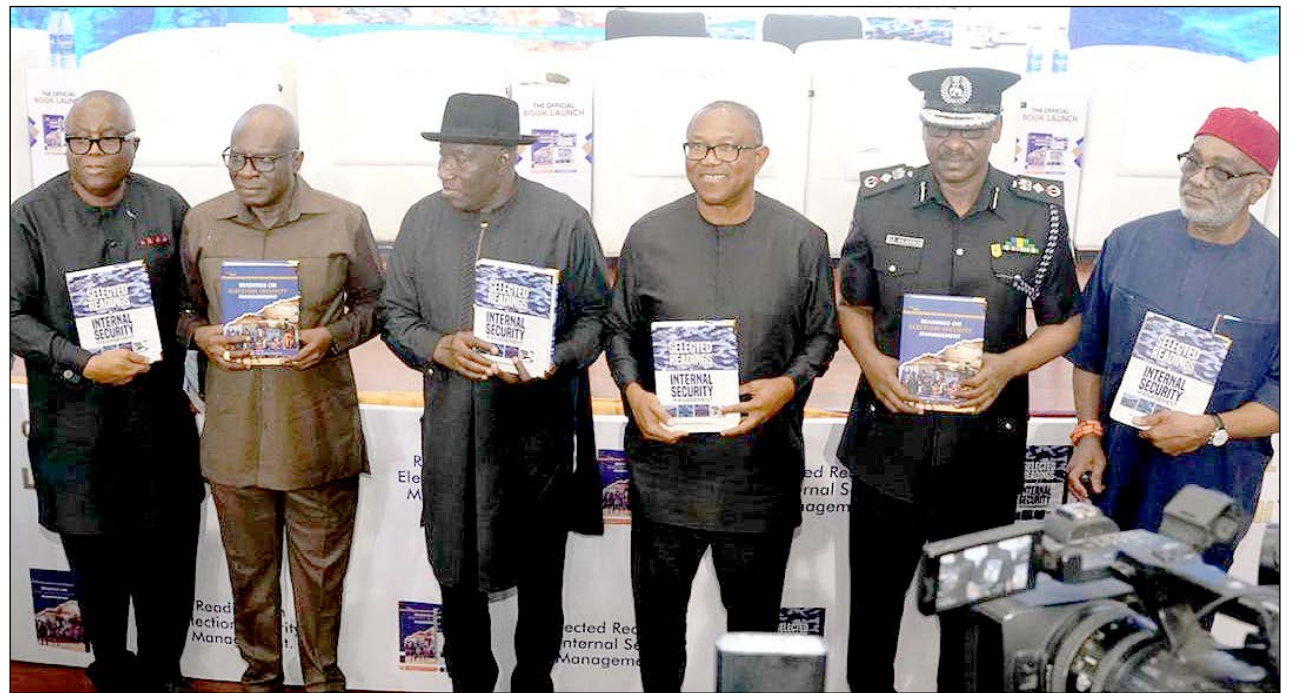
Microsoft's Country Manager for Nigeria, Ola Williams, made this disclosure on Wednesday during the launch of the Microsoft AI tour in Lagos.

"This is a strategic invest-

ment to ensure that Nigerians have access to the critical skills needed not just to use AI, but to develop cutting-edge solutions and build AI-driven businesses that provide sustainable livelihoods," Williams said.

She underscored that the

initiative is designed to position Nigeria as a key player in the global AI ecosystem by equipping individuals with the expertise to harness AI for innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic competitiveness.



BOOK LAUNCH:

Former President Goodluck Jonathan (3rd left); Presidential candidate of the Labour Party in the 2023 General Elections, Mr Peter Obi (3rd right); elder statesman, Senator Ben Obi (right), and other distinguished Nigerians, at the launch of a book authored by former Inspector General of Police (IGP), Dr. Solomon Arase, recently.

FG installs new passport printers at Nigeria's New York, Atlanta consulates

The Federal Government has resolved the passport printer crisis at Nigeria's consulates in New York and Atlanta, United States.

Following directives issued by the Minister of Interior, Olubunmi Tunji-Ojo, in January 2025, the Nigeria Immigration Service delivered and installed new passport printers at both

consulates on Tuesday

The move follows recent calls from Nigerians in the diaspora, who raised concerns about delays in the passport application process due to outdated printing machines.

On Wednesday, in a statement signed by Babatunde Alao, the Special Adviser on Media to the Minister of Inter-

ior, Tunji-Ojo said, "The Ministry is committed to innovation and improved service delivery.

"The installation of these new printers demonstrates our dedication to addressing the needs of Nigerians at home and abroad."

The new printers are expected to provide immediate relief by speeding up the passport application process.

According to the statement, the installation is part of the Ministry's broader reforms, which include the Abuja Passport Personalisation Centre and expanding contactless solutions in more regions.

The minister also noted that the reforms align with President Bola Tinubu's Renewed Hope agenda, which aims to improve the lives of Nigerians.

Shun exploitation, minister tells traders to reflect food price reductions

The Federal Government has urged retailers to reflect the reduction in food prices and shun exploiting consumers.

The Minister of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Abubakar Kyari, stated this during the 2025 Wheat Farmers Green Field Day, at Dabi village in Ringim Local Government Area of Jigawa.

He decried the nonchalant

attitude of retailers to reflect the reduction in their sales despite a drop in prices, describing it as unpatriotic and unacceptable.

"The federal government is aware of the significant drop in the prices of food items across major markets, particularly for essential commodities such as flour, sugar, rice, and pasta.

"However, it is deeply concerning that many retailers, bakers, and shop owners have

refused to reflect this reduction in their selling prices, thereby denying Nigerians the relief they deserve.

"In previous months, stakeholders in the retail value chain raised concerns about the rising cost of food items. Now that the prices have dropped, such as flour, which fell from ₦81,000 per bag to below ₦60,000, Spaggetti has fallen from ₦20,000 to ₦15,000.

"It is only fair and just to let consumers benefit from food price reduction," Kyari said.

He reiterated the government's commitment to ensure food availability and engage with relevant stakeholders to reflect the current market realities.

The event was organised in collaboration between the Flour Milling Association of Nigeria and, the federal and Jigawa state governments.

Gov Okpeholo appoints Oahimire as EDSPHCDA Executive Secretary

The Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpeholo, has appointed Dr. Coulson Osoikhai Oahimire as the new Executive Secretary of the Edo State Primary Health Care Development Agency (EDSPHCDA).

The announcement was made public through a state-

ment by Mrs. Nene Olaye, Head of the Public Relations Unit at EDSPHCDA.

Dr. Oahimire officially assumed office on Friday, February 14, 2025, bringing extensive experience in medical practice, healthcare management, and community health services.

A Nigerian medical profes-

sional with a strong background in clinical care, medical research, and healthcare administration, he holds a Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery from Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma.

He is also a Member of the Royal College of Surgeons, UK, and the West African College of Surgeons.

His career spans public and private healthcare institutions, including the University of Benin Teaching Hospital, Federal Medical Centre Yenagoa, and various specialist medical centers.

Dr. Oahimire has played a crucial role in improving patient care, medical training, and public health initiatives.



MINISTRY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND CHIEFTAINCY AFFAIRS

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**100
DAYS
IN OFFICE**

**CONGRATULATORY MESSAGE TO
EDO STATE GOVERNOR,**

**SENATOR
MONDAY
OKPEBHOLO**

Congratulations, Your Excellency, Senator Monday Okpebholo, on your remarkable first 100 days in office. Your dedication to transparency, accountability, and good governance has already begun to transform Edo State, earning the trust and confidence of the people.

Your visionary leadership, especially through initiatives like the Back-to-Farm Initiative, is a testament to your commitment to economic growth and food security. Edo State is on a path of progress, and we commend your efforts in building a brighter future for all.

On behalf of the Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs, we celebrate your achievements and wish you continued success. Indeed, a New Edo has Risen!



SIR (DR.) LUCKY ESEIGBE LL.M

Honourable Commissioner,
Ministry of Local Government
and Chieftaincy Affairs

FEATURE

RESPECTING DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS:**A call on the PDP to uphold the rule of law**

LUCKY ESEIGBE

In any democratic society, institutions such as the Judiciary and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) serve as the bedrock of fairness, justice, and order. It is, therefore, imperative that all political parties, including the opposition, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in Edo State respect these institutions and refrain from actions that seek to undermine their credibility.

Intimidation, baseless allegations, and unwarranted attacks on the Judiciary and INEC do not strengthen democracy; instead, they weaken the very structures that sustain it. The PDP must recognize that Nigeria's Judiciary has consistently demonstrated fairness, transparency, and the ability to deliver justice impartially. Regardless of political affiliations, several political figures have had their mandates restored by the courts based purely on legal merit.

NOTABLE EXAMPLES OF JUDICIAL INTEGRITY INCLUDE:

The Senate President, Senator Godswill Akpabio; Hon. Abbas Tajudeen, the Speaker of the House of Representatives; Senator Jibrin Barau,

the Deputy Senate President; Hon. Benjamin Kalu, the Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives, Senator Michael Opeyemi Bamidele, the Senate Majority Leaderband Governor Abba Yusuf of Kano State

These, among many others, serve as clear evidence that Nigeria's judicial system operates independently and in line with constitutional provisions. Given this track record, the PDP should not hastily conclude that the tribunal case challenging Governor Monday Okpebholo's victory will be compromised by the ruling party.

The same Judiciary that has upheld justice in previous cases remains the legally recognized authority for electoral disputes. Their commitment to fairness is evident, and there is no reason to believe this time will be any different.

It is also important for the PDP to understand that legal battles are won in the courtroom—not on social media. While online narratives may shape public opinion, they hold no legal weight in judicial proceedings. Nigeria's Constitution recognizes only the Judiciary as the final arbiter in electoral matters. Any attempt to pressure judges through online propaganda, intimidation, or baseless accusations does

The PDP has a choice—to either uphold the principles of democracy or be remembered as a party that sought to undermine them. The path of responsible opposition is clear: respect the law, trust the process, and contribute positively to Nigeria's democratic development

more harm to democracy than good.

At this crucial moment, the PDP must demonstrate political maturity by allowing due process to take its course. If they genuinely believe in their case, they should rely on the strength of their evidence, rather than resorting

to attacks on institutions. The world is watching, and history will judge each political actor based on their commitment to democratic principles.

Respect for democratic institutions is a hallmark of true leadership. The PDP must embrace this principle by allowing the tribunal to do its work without interference. The will of the people must prevail through lawful means—not through social media trials. Nigeria's Judiciary has proven itself in the past and will continue to uphold justice in the present and future.

Furthermore, democratic stability is built on the willingness of all political actors to submit to the rule of law, even when outcomes do not align with their expectations. A strong democracy is not measured by the ability to win every election but by the readiness to accept judicial verdicts and play by the rules. The PDP, as a key stakeholder in Nigeria's democratic process, must lead by example by fostering trust in institutions rather than casting aspersions on their credibility whenever decisions do not go their way.

The sanctity of the electoral process depends on collective respect for institutions tasked with managing it. INEC, in particular, plays a crucial role

in ensuring free, fair, and transparent elections. Any attempt to discredit the commission without verifiable proof only serves to erode public confidence in democracy. Constructive engagement, rather than antagonism, remains the best approach for any party seeking redress. Instead of engaging in needless confrontations, the PDP should channel its energy toward strengthening democratic processes through active participation and adherence to due process.

Ultimately, history will remember those who contributed to the growth of democracy, just as it will not forget those who sought to weaken it. The test of leadership is not only in winning elections but in the ability to respect institutions, accept outcomes in good faith, and move forward in the spirit of nation-building. The PDP has a choice—to either uphold the principles of democracy or be remembered as a party that sought to undermine them. The path of responsible opposition is clear: respect the law, trust the process, and contribute positively to Nigeria's democratic development.

Lucky Eseigbe is the Edo State Commissioner for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs

Okpebholo: 100 days of innovation, restoration, healing, justice**«CONTINUED FROM BACK PAGE**

Investments (FRILIA). This is a set of pro-people guidelines that encouraged transparency and accountability in large-scale agricultural practices.

Governor Okpebholo also granted approval for the establishment of the State Road Fund (SRF) and Rural Access Road Agency (RARA), requirements under the FRILIA RAAMP programme. This will qualify Edo State to access the \$500 million World Bank grant for Rural Agricultural Development.

It is also worthy to note that the governor recently increased the Budget of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security from an insignificant N5.9 billion in 2024 to over N70 billion in 2025 marking a record breaking 1,086% increase. The aim is to boost food product and sufficiency.

The governor also distributed 8,188 bags of fertilizer to 4,094 farmers, facilitated the raising of 34,576 cocoa seedlings with Bass Cocoa Farms, facilitated the building of a Model Facility Veterinary Hospital as well as the disbursement of over N500 million to empower 1,797 farmers in the State under the Livelihood Improvement Family Enterprises in the Niger Delta (LIFE-ND) Project.

Governor Okpebholo within also approved the sum of N1.6 billion to cover the remaining eight Local Government Areas not captured by the Project.

The governor has also declared a back-to-farm initiative to boost food production across the State.

The back-to-farm initiative is an agricultural revolution in the state through which the Okpebholo administration plans to establish farms in the three senatorial districts as well as provide farmers with the needed incentives to produce more food for the nation.

EDUCATION

In Education, the governor has taken steps to reposition the State-owned Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma.

For a start, he increased the monthly subvention from a paltry N41 million to N500 Million, an increase of over 1,119.5 percent.

He has gone ahead to restore the illegally disengaged Staff of the University as well as the recruitment of qualified academic and non-academic staff for the institution.

The governor has also appointed and inaugurated a Governing Council for the University, after he successfully resolved the long-standing delay in the Induction of 128 Graduates from the College of Medicine of the Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma

In 100 days, Governor Okpebholo has embarked on recruiting 500 Teachers for Basic and Post-Basic Schools in Edo State.

He has embarked on other educational projects like the construction and furnishing of Eweka Primary School in Benin City; construction and renovation of New Era College, Benin City; construction and renovation of Ebomisi Secondary School, Ebomisi; and, construction and renovation of Illeh Primary School, Esan West.

Others are construction and renovation of Irrua Girls Grammar School, Irrua, construction and renovation of Udomi Primary School Uwessian. He has also taken steps to revamp all Technical Colleges in the State.

Governor Okpebholo has secured accreditation for three Programmes at the Edo State Polytechnic, Usen. The Programmes are; HND Business Administration, HND Estate Management, and ND Mineral and Petroleum Resources.

He has also embarked on the construction, furnishing and fencing of 3 blocks of classrooms at Ugbubezi Primary School, Sabongida Ora and

other locations in the 3 Senatorial Districts, using the CSDA platform.

OTHERS

Governor Okpebholo has embarked on restoration, healing and delivering justice to all.

Accordingly, within few days in office, he fully restored the statutory rights to His Royal Majesty, the Oba of Benin.

The governor, known for his inclusive governance model, has also established the Edo State Commission for Persons with Disabilities.

In 100 days, the governor has been able to plug revenue leakages and avoid wastage in government.

He has consequently improved the state's Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) from an average of N8 billion monthly to over N10 billion, marking the 1st time ever that IGR would hit double digits in the history of Edo State

Other achievements include the appointment of 38 First Class Graduates as part of his administration's Graduate Development Programme; Expansion of the Graduate Development Programme, now re-christened the Public Service Talent Development Programme; and, approval for the implementation of the new Public Service Rules, which were last reviewed 25 years ago.

The governor was able to stop the exploitation and casualisation of cleaners by Consultants and approved the direct employment of over 700 Cleaners into the Edo State Public Service, with minimum wage and job security.

Before now, several civil service jobs and schedules were outsourced to consultants. Within the last 100 days, the governor disengaged several Consultants who were fleecing Edo State funds and had taken over the functions of many Public Servants without just cause. The Governor returned Public Servants to their duty posts thereby enhancing their career

development and advancement.

The governor also swore in 3 Judges who were excluded from being sworn in by the Godwin Obaseki Administration despite being confirmed by the National Judicial Council (NJC)

Governor Okpebholo also launched an interest-free loan Scheme for market women, farmers, artisans and entrepreneurs across urban and rural areas of the State. Over 5,000 beneficiaries have been earmarked to receive the loan to stabilize businesses and drive economic growth.

Edo State, in collaboration with the World Bank, disbursed grants to over 400 small and medium scale business owners, reducing their financial burden and fostering business resilience.

In 100 days, "Edojobs" recorded 5,102 walk-ins at its job centres across 8 locations with 317 residents successfully placed in jobs, 559 vacancies sourced, and employability outcomes growing by 2,097%.

Also, the Edo State Government through the Victor Uwaifo Creative Hub trained 172 Edo youth in filmmaking via a 3-day workshop, equipping them with storytelling, scriptwriting, content creation and video editing skills for the creative industry.

Government through the Edo Innovates partnered with GirlLEAD to empower women with entrepreneurial, leadership and tech skills, bridging the gender gap in STEM.

In 100 days, the governor has repositioned the Bendel Newspaper Corporation (The Nigerian Observer); Ensured the take-off of the Edo State Development and Building Control Agency with the appointment of a pioneer Managing Director; Constituted and inaugurated Boards and Commissions previously not inaugurated by the last administration for 8 years; and, payment of the "13th month" salary to Edo workers

His Excellency also approved the

recruitment of 50 public officers to provide professional services for the Edo State Public Building and Maintenance Agency, while initiating collaboration with ICT Experts worldwide to ensure the delivery of professional network and Internet services to all MDAs.

Others are equipping ICTA personnel with opportunities to acquire professional certifications from the Cisco Networking Academy, Network Development Group (NDG), Nigerian ICT Forum, and Nigerian Network Operators Group (ngNOG). The administration has enrolled at least 20 ICTA Staff on Cisco Academy platform for the training and certification exams.

The also facilitated the passage of a Law for the Extension of the retirement ages of Magistrates and Presidents of Area Customary Courts in Edo State.

In collaboration with the Office of Nigeria's First Lady, Her Excellency, Senator Oluremi Tinubu, the Edo State Government through the Renewed Hope Initiative, empowered 250 elderly persons across the 18 LGAs of the State with a cash grant of N200, 000 (Two Hundred Thousand Naira) each.

Still in collaboration with the Office of Her Excellency, wife of the President through the Renewed Hope Initiative, the administration has distributed essential food items to the vulnerable and needy within the State.

While 100 days may not exactly be enough to assess a man who has a 4-year renewable mandate, Governor Okpebholo has shown greater commitment to the core principles of governance. The next 100 days promises to be highly eventful.

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

Gov Okpebholo's rising profile in 100 days

HON. PAUL OHONBAMU

Since the inauguration of Senator Monday Okpebholo as elected Governor on November 12th 2024, the administration has chart a rising profile for Edo state in one hundred days and this has envisioned an enduring policy framework that inculcates good governance, progress, due process, accountability and sustainable development.

Prior to the coming of the Okpebholo's administration, governance in the state lacked the political will or commitment to evolve an effective or holistic strategy to impact positively on the lives of the people.

One hundred days in office, the impact of the administration has been phenomenal and baffled even the most ardent critics because of the giant strides of the Okpebholo administration which hit the ground running immediately after inauguration.

The Governor believes that the basic function of government is to cater for the welfare of its people and he knows that there can be no meaningful progress or development without peace and security of persons and property, good and accessible health care and durable and well maintained network of roads.

As the Chief Security officer of the state, the governor resolved to assist the various security agencies with necessary logistic support in order to bring about an enabling environment where Socio-economic development can thrive.

To curb insecurity, the governor declared war on various cult groups which led to drastic reduction of cult-related killings in the State as well as the deployment of a Special Tactical Team to Agenebode which led to the timely rescue of kidnapped victims and dislodging of kidnappers and other criminal gangs from that axis.

In realization of the Okpebholo administration's campaign promise to create a secure, peaceful and harmonious environment to thrive, the Governor rescued kidnapped victims and smoked out kidnappers and criminal gangs in Uromi and environs and made the Passage of a new Cultism Prohibition Law with severe penalties for cultists and

their sponsors.

The government Procured several brand new Toyota Hilux vehicles for various Security Agencies in Edo State to enhance security operations in the State and in a deliberate effort to tackle holistically the challenges of insecurity in the state, the Governor Procured one thousand high functional motorcycles and vehicles which have been presented to the security agencies for security operation, bush combing and tactical pursuit of kidnappers and other criminals.

The Public Safety Response Team was constituted to assist Security Agencies in the enforcement of public safety measures and maintenance of public order as well as the reconstitution of the Edo State Security Corps, validation of members and illegal arms mop-up with Over a thousand illegal firearms recovered so far.

With these security measures put in place and more coming, the governor believes that this is the only way by which the much needed investors with the multiplier effect of employment for the people can be encouraged and sustained.

The center piece of the new health policy of the Okpebholo administration is the facilitation of smooth take-off of the National Obstetrics Fistula Center in Edo State (the first and only one in the South-South Geo-political zone) through the donation of 25 hectares of land (with a Certificate of Occupancy) to the Federal Government for the purpose.

This was a feat that the Federal Ministry of Health could not achieve in almost two years of the past administration but was actualized within seven days of Senator Monday Okpebholo's Administration. The government Flag-off the IsDB LLF Support to the Malaria Elimination Project in Edo State and the launch of free malaria testing and treatment in all Government Hospitals in the State for the next two years.

There has been on-boarding of three hundred vulnerable persons across the State into the State Equity Plan of the Edo State Health Insurance Commission and the digitalization of Statewide Health Insurance Data Transmission, the successful launch of the Edo State Health Insurance Commission Custom-

er Service/Support Policy, the upgrade of State-owned health facilities to enhance service delivery and the completion of the Oredo Primary Healthcare Center.

In consonance with the Senator Monday Okpebholo policy of improving the health sector, the administration Procured transformers and Air conditioners for the Edo Specialist Hospital, distributed eighteen Ultrasound Machines to hospitals in the eighteen Local Government Areas, distributed two hundred and twenty (220)laptops and tables to two hundred and twenty Primary Healthcare Centers for data management as well as the procurement of a Bus and Hilux vehicle for Primary Healthcare Project Monitoring

Prior to the inauguration of the administration of Governor Okpebholo, various major roads, especially federal roads were death traps and in keeping with his campaign promises upon assumption of office, the Governor awarded the contract and commencement of construction of a flyover bridge at Ramat Park, Benin City which will apart from easing the traffic congestion in that axis, provide commerce for the people.

The government Procured Payloaders, trucks and compressors for the Edo State Waste Management Agency to enhance their services, as well as Passage and implementation of the Edo State Electricity Regulatory Commission Law which empowers the State to generate, transmit and distribute power and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed with the NNPC Limited and other investors to build a \$300 Million Condensate Refinery in Oredo Local Government Area of Edo State

The government has also Signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the installation of \$500m 100MW Hydropower Plant at Ikpoba and Ojirami Dams in Edo State and resuscitated the Edo Transport Service (a.k.a Edo Line) with the procurement and commissioning of one hundred brand new Hiace Buses for inter-state travels

In its first one hundred days in office, the Okpebholo administration has made remarkable strides in the delivery of prompt dividends of democracy by maintaining some bad roads in the state.

The government Awarded contracts

for the rehabilitation of some failed sections of Upper Mission Road, Benin City, rehabilitation of critically failed sections of the Benin-Auchi Road from Obadan Junction to Iruokpen, ongoing construction of Ekpoma-Uromi-Ubiaja Road, ongoing construction of Uromi-Onewa-Udomi-Ibhiolulu-Afuda-Idumoza-Eko-Uwaya-Ewora Road with Spurs, ongoing construction of Ekiuwa-University of Benin City (UNI-BEN) Road, off Upper Mission Road (Temboga Road Extension), Benin City, construction of Varsity Road, off Usugbenu Road in Esan Central Local Government Area (completed), ongoing Construction of Palace Road, off Upper Mission Road, Benin City, Construction of Irrua-Akho-Illeh-Ukhun Road in Esan Central and Esan West Local Government Areas, and the Construction of Irrua-Illeh-Usenu-Ukhun Road in Esan West Local Government Area.

In addition, the government approved the procurement of contract for the construction of Ohe-Uzea Road in Esan North East Local Government Area, the procurement of contract for the construction of Prince Harrison Street, Illeh in Esan Central Local Government Area, the procurement of contract for the reconstruction of Boundary Road, off Ogba Road, Benin City, the procurement of contract for the construction of Okhunmwun Road in Ovia North East Local Government Area, the procurement of contract for the construction of 1.5km Utako-Idumu-Aligbe Road, 0.8km Idumu-Ekhuere Road and increased quantity for the replacement of the existing undulating drain as additional works to the contract for the construction of Uromi-Onewa-Udomi-Ibhiolulu-Afuda-Idumoza-Eko-Uwaya-Ewora Road with Spurs.

There are also renovation of the Offices of the Governor, Deputy Governor, Secretary to the State Government and Head of Service as well as the rehabilitation of four (4) Court of Appeal Complexes and Judges' Quarters, revitalization of the Edo Broadcasting Service (EBS) Ihievbe Substation; restoring operations after nearly a decade of downtime and Upgrade of Information and Communication Technology and other infrastructure at the State-owned

Edo Broadcasting Service (EBS)

The Okpebholo administration made significant investments in the development of the information and communication sector with the Procurement of Two units of 150KVA Perkins Generator for EBS, Procurement of high-end digital equipment, such as High-performance Mac, Broadcasting and Streaming Softwares, Professional Quadcopter Drone with 4K UHD Video Camera, 10kva TV Transmitter, Audio Interfaces/Mixers etc.

The government approved the upgrade of Edo State's Network Infrastructure from 1 Gigabit to a 10 Gigabit Fibre Network supporting services like video conferencing, large file sharing, VoIP calls and more across Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), Partnering with Cisco Networking Academy and others to train and equip the Information Communication Technology Agency Network Staff to efficiently control and independently manage the 10 Gigabit Fibre Network across Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs)

The government Constructed Town Halls in Ohanmi, Owan East Local Government Areas and 20 other Communities across the three Senatorial Districts of Edo State, using the CSDA Platform and provision of All-in-One Solar Streetlights in Iyekogba and 30 other Communities across the three Senatorial Districts of Edo State, using the CSDA Platform, Provision of 500 KVA Transformers and rural electrification in Uwessan, Esan Central Local Government Area and 25 other Communities across the 3 senatorial districts using the CSDA platform, Construction of Markets and lockup stores in Auchi and other locations in the 3 Senatorial Districts using the CSDA platform, Provision of Boreholes and reticulation at Uzenema, Esan North East and other selected locations in the 3 senatorial districts, using the CSDA platform, and Reconstruction of a Police Post at Ojo-Uwelu, Egor, Esan Central Local Government, using the CSDA platform.

Ohonbamu is the Edo State Commissioner for Information and Communication.

Celebrating Gov Okpebholo's 100 days in office

DR. DESMOND AGBAMA

As we celebrate the milestone of Governor Monday Okpebholo's first 100 days in office, it is a fitting moment to reflect on his visionary leadership and the transformative policies he has implemented across key sectors, including security, education, healthcare, infrastructure, transportation, agriculture, and employment. His tenure so far has not only symbolized progress but has also laid a strong foundation for sustainable development in Edo State.

From his first day in office, Governor Okpebholo demonstrated his readiness to lead effectively. Recognizing that security is the cornerstone of development, he prioritized strengthening local law enforcement. His administration introduced comprehensive reforms to enhance the capacity of security agencies, particularly the vigilante group led by a retired Commissioner of Police. Through proactive community engagement programs, his government fostered better collaboration between security personnel and citizens, improving intelligence gathering and

response efforts. This has led to a significant reduction in crime, ensuring that residents can go about their daily activities with a renewed sense of safety.

Governor Okpebholo's commitment to education is evident in the strategic investments he has made in revitalizing public schools. Many primary schools are undergoing renovations, while the monthly subvention to Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, has been increased to ₦500 million, reflecting his recognition of education's role in societal growth. His administration has also focused on improving infrastructure in public schools, ensuring access to modern learning materials, and recruiting 500 qualified teachers. Additionally, he has introduced vocational training programs designed to equip youths with skills relevant to today's job market, aligning education with real-world economic demands.

The governor's vision for an improved healthcare system is already becoming a reality through increased funding and strategic investments in health facilities. Primary healthcare centers have been strengthened, and hospital funding has been increased to ensure that quality

healthcare is accessible to all, including marginalized communities. His administration has also launched public health campaigns focused on preventive care and nutrition, empowering citizens with essential health knowledge. Through partnerships with organizations such as UNICEF and WHO, critical services, including maternal and child healthcare programs, have been expanded, showcasing a comprehensive approach to public health.

In agriculture and food security, Governor Okpebholo has made significant strides in boosting productivity and ensuring food sufficiency. His administration has introduced modern farming techniques, provided farmers with access to credit facilities and training, and supplied necessary resources to enhance agricultural output. By promoting sustainable practices that protect the environment while improving yields, his government is fostering long-term agricultural growth. The establishment of agricultural cooperatives under his leadership is expected to strengthen farmers' positions in the market, increasing their income and economic resilience.

Job creation has been another key achievement of his administration within these first 100 days. His government has employed 360 cleaners and 500 teachers while also approving the regularization of over 2,000 workers engaged by the previous administration. These efforts have provided stable employment for many citizens and contributed to reducing unemployment across the state.

A landmark achievement in his first 100 days is the award and flag-off of Edo State's first-ever flyover bridge at Ramat Park in Benin City. He has also approved the construction of the Uteh Palace Road linking the University of Benin, the rehabilitation of failed portions of Upper Mission Road Extension, and critical road repairs at Obadan Junction along the Benin-Auchi Road. Other projects include the continuation of the Upper Ekehuan Road construction and the rehabilitation of failed sections of the Benin-Auchi Road in Ekpoma, among many others.

Governor Okpebholo's commitment to economic growth is further demonstrated through his support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and

startups. By streamlining regulatory processes and offering financial incentives, his administration is fostering a thriving business environment. Additionally, the government has launched job training programs tailored to equip the workforce with skills aligned with the evolving economic landscape, reducing unemployment and improving livelihoods.

As we celebrate Governor Monday Okpebholo's first 100 days in office, we not only acknowledge the achievements that have renewed hope in Edo State but also recognize the solid foundation he has laid for a brighter future. His dedication to security, education, healthcare, agriculture, infrastructure, and employment reflects his unwavering commitment to the welfare of the people. Looking ahead, we remain confident that his leadership will continue to drive progress, and it is imperative that we all support his vision in shaping a prosperous future for Edo State.

Agbama is the Permanent Secretary, Edo State Ministry of Information and Communication.



His Excellency,

Sen. Monday Okpebholo

The Executive Governor, Edo State

Congratulations on your

100 DAYS IN OFFICE


On behalf of Management and staff of Edo State Development and Building Control Agency, I extend my warmest congratulations on your first hundred days in office as Governor of Edo State.

In just hundred days, you have demonstrated exceptional leadership and a deep commitment to the people of the State. Your focus on key areas like education, healthcare, infrastructure, roads and agriculture has already made a positive impact on our community.

As you continue your journey as Governor, we are confident that your leadership will bring even greater achievements and prosperity to our State. We wish you continued success and offer our unwavering support in your endeavors to serve the people of Edo State.



Yours Sincerely,
Hon. Igabali Darlington Imoisili
Managing Director,
Edo State Development and
Building Control Agency.

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			PUBLIC NOTICE		PRODUCT		COLOUR		BLACK & WHITE	
	RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)	RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)	RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)	RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)	RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)
FULL PAGE	517,344	556,145	369,500	397,213	325,150	349,536	665,156	715,043	443,440	476,698
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
HALF CENTER	991,590	1,071,989						B/W	887,272	959,212

FRONT PAGE POSITIONS					OTHER SIZES				
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SIZES	PRODUCTS		PUBLIC NOTICE		SIZES	PUBLIC NOTICE		PRODUCTS	
	RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)	RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)		RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)	RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)
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
					2 X 1	12,400	13,330	7,415	7,971
					CAC	38,000	40,850		

SPECIAL POSITIONS				
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SIZES	RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)	RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)
STRIP	118,250	127,119	147,800	158,885
STRIP INSIDE	88,600	95,245	118,250	127,119


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PAGES 4 & 5	ADD 40% SURCHARGE
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Foreign

News

Trump says Ukraine could have made a deal earlier

Donald Trump has taken aim at Ukraine after its President, Volodymyr Zelensky, said it was a "surprise" his country had not been invited to talks in Saudi Arabia on ending the war with Russia.

Saying he was "disappointed" by Ukraine's reaction, he appeared to blame Ukraine for starting the war, saying the country "could have made a

deal" earlier.

A full-scale Russian invasion sparked the war in Ukraine almost three years ago.

Earlier on Tuesday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met US Secretary of State Marco Rubio in Riyadh for the first high-level, face-to-face talks between the two countries since the invasion, and agreed to appoint teams to start negotiating

the end of the war.

Lavrov said his country would not accept peacekeeping forces from Nato countries in Ukraine under any peace deal, a proposal raised at a meeting of European members of Nato in Paris on Monday.

European Nato states, who remain committed to supporting Ukraine against Russia, have been smarting at being sidelined

by Trump's unilateral peace initiative, which reversed the resolutely pro-Ukraine policy of his predecessor as president, Joe Biden.

Following what he referred to as "the infamous meeting" - to which Ukraine was not invited either - Zelensky accused the Russian delegation in Riyadh of lying, adding that Russia could not be trusted and "must be

pressured for peace".

Speaking to reporters at his Mar-a-Lago residence, Trump was asked by BBC News what his message was to Ukrainians who might feel betrayed.

"I hear that they're upset about not having a seat, well, they've had a seat for three years and a long time before that. This could have been settled very easily," he said.

"You should have never started it. You could have made a deal," he later added.

"I could have made a deal for Ukraine," he said. "That would have given them almost all of the land, everything, almost all of the land - and no people would have killed, and no city would have been demolished."

After the meeting in Riyadh, Trump said he was "much more confident".

"They were very good," he said. "Russia wants to do something. They want to stop the savage barbarianism."

"I think I have the power to end this war," he added.

Trump also criticised the

length of time since an election was held in Ukraine, when asked if the US would support Russian demands for one to be held.

"They want a seat at the table, but... wouldn't the people of Ukraine have a say? It's been a long time since we've had an election," the president responded.

He also claimed Zelensky - who won a five-year term in 2019 - was "down at 4% approval rating".

Zelensky has remained in office while the country has been under martial law following the onset of the conflict. One opinion poll in December suggested 52% of Ukrainians surveyed said they "trust" Zelensky.

Meanwhile, when asked about the prospect of European countries sending troops to Ukraine, Trump said: "If they want to do that, that's great, I'm all for it."

However, he added of a potential US deployment of troops: "We won't have to put any over there because, you know, we're very far away."



ATTEMPTING A COUP:

Bolsonaro claims he's the victim of political persecution

Brazil prosecutor charges on Bolsonaro over alleged coup plot

Former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro has been charged by the country's chief prosecutor with attempting a coup after he was defeated in the 2022 presidential election.

The 69-year-old was handed five charges over the alleged bid to prevent his successor, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, from taking office after a bitter election race.

The charges include allegations that he planned to poison Lula and shoot dead Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes.

Bolsonaro denies wrongdoing and says he is the victim of political persecution.

The prosecutor's advice will now be considered by the Supreme Court. If accepted, Bolsonaro and 33 others will be formally charged and will have to face trial.

The former president was banned from running for office for eight years after being accused of undermining Brazilian democracy by falsely claiming that electronic ballots used in the October 2022 poll were vul-

nerable to hacking and fraud.

The bitterly fought election was won by an extremely narrow margin by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva - known more commonly as Lula.

Bolsonaro never publicly acknowledged his defeat and left Brazil for the US two days before Lula was sworn in as president.

On 8 January 2023, his supporters stormed government buildings in the capital Brasilia. Parts of the buildings were ransacked and police arrested 1,500 of the rioters.

Three months ago, the federal police released a report accusing Bolsonaro of playing a lead role in planning and organising an attempted coup - including by proposing the idea to key figures in the military - to stop Lula taking power.

The document charging Bolsonaro says the responsibility for acts that were harmful to democratic order lies with a criminal organisation led by Bolsonaro himself.

In practice, this means legal proceedings are beginning and Bolsonaro will likely face a trial.

One of the charges is for the crime of "armed criminal organisation", allegedly led by Bolsonaro and his vice-presidential candidate Walter Braga Netto.

The alleged plot included a plan to poison Lula and shoot dead Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes, one of Bolsonaro's rivals, Attorney-General Paulo Gonet Branco said.

"Allied with other individuals, including civilians and military personnel, they attempted to prevent, in a coordinated manner, the result of the 2022 presidential elections from being fulfilled," he said.

Brazilian media reports that the Supreme Court is expected to proceed with the trial later this year.

Reaction to the prosecutor's decision shows that the divisions that have marked Brazilian politics for the past decade remain as deep as ever.

Man jailed for attempted murder of former Japan PM

A man has been sentenced to 10 years in prison for the attempted murder of Japan's former prime minister Fumio Kishida in 2023.

Ryuji Kimura, 25, hurled a pipe bomb at Kishida as the country's leader approached a crowd for a speech during an election event in the city of Wakayama.

Although Kishida was unharmed, the explosion of the homemade device caused minor injuries to a police officer and a member of the public.

The attack shocked Japan as it came less than a year after former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was shot dead at an outdoor election campaign event.

Kimura, who was sentenced on Wednesday, claimed during questioning his intention was not to kill Kishida, but to ob-

ject to the country's election age regulation which prevented him from getting into politics.

The minimum age to become a member of parliament in Japan is 25 for the House of Representatives and 30 for the House of Councillors.

Kimura further added that he threw the bomb to bring attention to a civil lawsuit he filed in 2022, claiming the age restriction was unconstitutional, which was dismissed.

Kimura's defence argued he should not face a charge of attempted murder, as he did not expect the bomb to cause injuries, and that a three-year prison sentence would be reasonable given the extent of those injuries.

The court stated, however, that the explosives were powerful enough to cause fatal damage.

When handing down the ruling, presiding judge Keiko Fukushima noted that "targeting a serving prime minister caused significant anxiety to society as a whole."

In addition to the attempted murder charge, Kimura was also found guilty of violating explosives regulations and firearms control laws.

His 10-year sentence is five years less than what prosecutors had sought.

While violent attacks are extremely rare in Japan, anxiety around politicians' security has surged in the wake of Abe's assassination in 2022.

The attempted attack on Kishida, which came less than a year later, raised questions as to why there was not a tighter security presence around the country's leader at that time.

A\$AP Rocky not guilty of firearm assault on LA street

Rapper A\$AP Rocky has been found not guilty of firing a gun at a former friend.

A jury in Los Angeles acquitted the musician, whose legal name is Rakim Mayers, on two felony assault charges that carried up to 24 years in prison.

Terrell Ephon claimed the Grammy-nominated hip-hop star opened fire at him during an argument on a Hollywood street on 6 November 2021, grazing his knuckles with one of the shots.

Mr Mayers, who is also a fashion mogul and the longtime partner of pop star Rihanna, denied the charges, arguing that the weapon was a prop gun and that his former friend, who calls himself A\$AP Relli, was only after money.

As the first not-guilty verdict was read on Tuesday, the court rang with screams and clapping. Mr Mayers rushed towards his family and Rihanna, who were seated behind him. He dived over a wooden barrier to embrace them.

Rihanna had been a repeated presence in court during the trial, and for Tuesday's verdict, brought along their two sons, two-year-old RZA and one-year-old Riot.

Mr Mayers also hugged his lawyers and appeared to have tears in his eyes as the second not-guilty verdict was read.

"Thank God for saving my life," Mr Mayers said aloud. He thanked members of the 12-person jury.

The rapper was arrested on the two felony assault charges after a heated argument with his former friend in the heart of Hollywood.

Mr Mayers and Mr Ephon have known each other since high school in New York and were part of the A\$AP Mob hip-hop collective.

Their friendship cooled as A\$AP Rocky's career took off.

Authorities said Mr Ephon met Mr Mayers on 6 November 2021, a day after the pair had a disagreement, outside a hotel about a block from the iconic Hollywood Walk of Fame.

An altercation ensued. Mr Mayers was alleged to have pulled out a gun from his waistband and pointed it at Mr Ephon, telling him: "I'll kill you right now."

"He looked me in my eyes and pointed the gun at me," Mr Ephon testified.

Mr Ephon said he told the rapper to fire the weapon, but Mr Mayers started walking away. As he left, Mr Ephon followed, shouting at him.

Prosecutors alleged that at this point, Mr Mayers once again pulled out the gun and fired multiple shots, with one bullet said to have grazed Mr Ephon's knuckles.

Much of the trial hinged on whether the firearm in question was a harmless prop gun, as Mr Mayers's defence said, or a real weapon capable of causing harm, as Mr Ephon and prosecutors alleged.

The weapon has not been recovered by authorities.

Jurors were able to watch some footage of the altercation because parts were captured on surveillance video, including audio of gunfire, but no video evidence directly showed any shooting.

Mr Ephon took two days before reporting the incident to authorities and brought shell casings he said he had retrieved from the scene.

But police who responded to reports of a shooting in the area did not locate any shell casings. Mr Ephon, who said he returned with his girlfriend hours later, said he knew exactly where to look, but no surveillance footage corroborates his account.

News

Foreign

Philippine town offers bounty for mosquitoes as dengue rises

Authorities in one of the Philippines' most densely-populated urban centres are offering a cash reward for mosquitoes in an attempt to stop the spread of dengue.

Carlito Cernal, village chief of Barangay Addition Hills in central Manila, announced the bounty of one peso (less than two US cents) for every five mosquitoes.

While news of the bounty has provoked scorn on social media, Mr Cernal has defended it as necessary for the community's health.

The move follows a recent spike in cases of dengue, which is spread by mosquitoes, in the Philippines.

The programme, which will run for at least a month, was started after two students in Mr Cernal's neighbourhood died from the disease.

The bounty applies to all mosquitoes - dead or alive - and

their larvae, Mr Cernal added. Live mosquitoes will be exterminated using ultraviolet light.

A total of 21 people have already claimed their reward, bringing in a total of 700 mosquitoes and larvae so far, he told the BBC.

The bounty drew swift ridicule after it was announced late on Tuesday.

"Mosquito farming is coming," one social media comment read. "Will a mosquito get rejected if it has only one wing?" read another.

The Philippines' Department of Health (DOH) told the BBC that it "appreciates the good intentions of local government executives to fight dengue".

It declined further comment, however, when asked if catching mosquitoes in exchange for cash is an effective way of stopping dengue.

"We urge all concerned to please consult and coordinate

with their local health officers or the DOH regional office in their area for evidence-based practices that are known to work," it said.

Mr Cernal said he was aware that the bounty had been bashed on social media, but added: "This is one of the biggest and most dense areas. We have to do something to help the local government."

He pointed out that local health authorities recorded 44 cases of dengue in the com-

munity during the most recent surge of infections.

Barangay Addition Hills is home to nearly 70,000 people, crammed into a 162-hectare patch at the heart of the capital, Metro Manila.

Mr Cernal said the bounty was meant to supplement existing measures such as cleaning the streets and preventing the build-up of water where dengue-carrying mosquitoes lay their eggs.

often occur in urban areas

with poor sanitation which allows virus-carrying mosquitoes to multiply.

In severe cases, dengue causes internal bleeding which can lead to death. Its symptoms include headaches, nausea, joint and muscle pain.

Philippine authorities have recently flagged a rise in dengue cases nationwide due to seasonal rains. The DOH said it recorded 28,234 cases on 1 February, a 40% jump from the

previous year.

The department has advised the public to maintain the cleanliness of their surroundings, destroy potential mosquito breeding sites such as tyres, wear long-sleeved shirts and trousers and apply mosquito repellent.

Aside from dengue, the DOH said the rains have also fuelled a spike in influenza-like diseases and cases of leptospirosis, a rat-borne disease that people get when wading in flood waters.



HUMAN TRAFFICKING:

Andrew Tate and brother appear in court over new human trafficking allegations

Pope Francis has pneumonia in both lungs, Vatican says

The 88-year-old has been suffering from a respiratory infection for more than a week and was admitted to Rome's Gemelli hospital on Friday.

"The follow-up chest CT scan which the Holy Father underwent this afternoon... demonstrated the onset of bilateral pneumonia, which required additional drug therapy," the Vatican said.

It said lab tests, a chest X-ray and the Pope's clinical condition "continue to present a complex picture".

Despite this, the Vatican said the pontiff remained in "good spirits" and spent the day "reading, resting and praying".

Pope Francis also expressed his gratitude to well-wishers and asked them to "pray for him".

Before his admission last week, the Pope had bronchitis symptoms for several days and had delegated officials to read prepared speeches at events.

He had been due to lead several events over the weekend for the 2025 Catholic Holy Year which runs through to next January, however all public events on the Pope's calendar have been cancelled through to Sunday.

On Monday, the Vatican said that doctors had changed the Pope's drug therapy for the second time during his hospital stay to tackle what at the time was thought to be a "polymicrobial infection of the respiratory tract".

The Pope is especially prone to lung infections due to developing pleurisy as an adult and having part of one of his lungs removed at age 21.

Jeremy Bowen: No sign of a quick peace dividend for Trump in Ukraine

The Russians and Americans are talking again, as European leaders and diplomats contemplate the hard choices forced on them by US President Donald Trump.

Without question, Trump's diplomatic ultimatum to Ukraine and America's Western European allies has cracked the transatlantic alliance, perhaps beyond repair.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky looks rattled by the abrupt change of attitude coming from the White House, though some of his many critics at home say he should have seen

it coming. Well before he won re-election, Donald Trump made it clear that he was not going to continue Joe Biden's policies.

As he arrived in Turkey on his latest trip, Zelensky deplored the fact that negotiations to end the war were happening "behind the back of key parties affected by the consequences of Russian aggression".

But it feels like a long way from the air-conditioned room in Saudi Arabia where the Russian and American delegations faced each other across a broad and highly polished mahogany table, to the bitter cold of north-eastern Ukraine.

In dug-outs and military bases here in the snow-bound villages and forests on the border with Russia, Ukrainian soldiers are getting on with business as usual - fighting the war.

In an underground bunker at a base in the forest somewhere near Sumy, a Ukrainian officer told me he didn't have much time to follow the news. As far as he was concerned, Donald Trump's decision to talk to Russia's president Vladimir Putin was "just noise".

US must not interfere in Tate's case, say alleged victims

Four women who allege they were sexually abused by the social media influencer Andrew Tate have urged the US not to interfere in his case in Romania.

The women said they were "extremely concerned" by reports that US officials had asked Romania to relax travel restrictions against Tate and his brother, Tristan Tate, who have dual UK-US nationality.

Lawyer Matthew Jury, who is representing the four alleged victims, told the BBC they were "absolutely bewildered why the Trump administration has decided to interfere in this way", although Romania denies

being pressured by the US.

Tate, 38, and his brother were arrested in Romania three years ago and face trial on allegations of rape, trafficking minors and money laundering, all of which they deny.

Separately, the brothers are wanted by police in the UK over allegations of rape and human trafficking, which they also deny. Their extradition to the UK will be dealt with once the Romania case finishes.

The Financial Times newspaper first reported that US officials had brought up the case with the Romanian government last week, and it was then followed up by Trump's envoy

Richard Grenell at the weekend.

One source told the paper that a request had been made by the US to return the brothers' passports to them so they could travel while waiting for the criminal case against them to finish.

The Tate brothers are currently banned from leaving Romania, although are no longer under house arrest.

Romanian Foreign Minister Emil Hurezeanu confirmed to Euronews that Grenell had raised Tate's case with him, and that Grenell had said he was "interested in the fate of the Tate brothers". The minister denied this amounted to pressure from Americans.

A spokesperson for Mr

Hurezeanu told the Financial Times: "Romanian courts are independent and operate based on the law, there is due process."

Romanian Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu also denied the reports on X, writing: [The US] has not made any requests to [Romania] upon the legal situation of well-known foreign influencers investigated by the Romanian authorities.

"There were no demands either during the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs-Richard Grenell discussion or after it. Romania and USA share the same values regarding the fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens."

India seeks AI breakthrough - but is it falling behind?

Two years after ChatGPT took the world by storm, China's DeepSeek has sent ripples through the tech industry by collapsing the cost for developing generative artificial intelligence applications.

But as the global race for AI supremacy heats up, India appears to have fallen behind, especially in creating its own foundational language model that's used to power things like chatbots.

The government claims a homegrown equivalent to DeepSeek isn't far away. It is supplying startups, universities and researchers with thousands of high-end chips needed to develop it in under 10 months.

A flurry of global AI leaders have also been talking up India's capabilities recently.

After being initially dismissive, OpenAI CEO Sam Altman this month said India should be playing a leading role in the AI revolution. The country is now OpenAI's second largest market by users.

Others like Microsoft have put serious money on the table - committing \$3bn (£2.4bn) for cloud and AI infrastructure. Nvidia's Jensen Huang also spoke of India's "unmatched" technical talent as a key to unlocking its future potential.

With 200 startups working on generative AI, there's enough entrepreneurial activi-

ty under way too.

But despite having key ingredients for success in place, India risks lagging behind without basic structural fixes to education, research and state policy, experts say.

China and the US already have a "four to five year head-start", having invested heavily in research and academia and developed AI for military applications, law enforcement and now large language models, technology analyst Prasanto Roy told the BBC.

Though in the top five globally on Stanford's AI Vibrancy Index - which ranks countries on metrics such as patents, funding, policy and research - India is still far behind the two superpowers in many key areas.

China and the US were granted 60% and 20% of the world's total AI patents between 2010 and 2022 respectively. India got less than half a percent.

India's AI startups also received a fraction of the private investment that US and Chinese companies got in 2023.

India's state-funded AI mission, meanwhile, is worth a trifling \$1bn compared with the staggering \$500bn the US has earmarked for Stargate - a plan to build massive AI infrastructure in the US - or China's reported \$137bn initiative to become an AI hub by 2030.

Sports

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

The untapped goldmine: Why Nigeria's Women's Football League deserves more recognition and investment



TOLULOPE OGUNTIMEHIN

This morning, while scrolling through social media, I stumbled upon a short clip of Shukurat Oladapo, who recently signed for AS Roma Ladies, during her first training session with the team. Her excitement and determination to secure a spot in their league matches were palpable. Yet, what struck me most was the stark contrast between her new journey and the lack of recognition Nigeria's

Women's Football League receives back home. Despite producing world-class talents like Oladapo, the league continues to operate in the shadows, overshadowed by other leagues in Europe.

Shukurat Oladapo is just one of many Nigerian female players who have left the shores of Nigeria to join top European and American clubs. Unlike their male counterparts, who often start in academy or youth teams, these women walk straight into the main teams of their new

clubs. This speaks volumes about the quality and readiness of players from Nigeria's Women's Football League. Yet, despite this undeniable talent, the league remains underfunded, underpromoted, and undervalued.

At one point, Nigerians expressed concerns about the drop in performance of female players who moved abroad, arguing that they performed better for the national team when they stayed in Nigeria. Our female players excel both at home and abroad, proving that the issue isn't talent but rather the lack of exposure, branding, and merchandising opportunities in Nigeria. Why is it so difficult to replicate the level of support and recognition that European leagues provide?

If there's one area where Nigeria is close to matching Europe, it's women's football. So, why aren't we taking it seriously?

During a press conference, the chairperson of the Women's Football League was asked about sponsorship for the league. Her response? "we want to focus more on partnership than sponsorship." Unfortunately, these partnerships have been few and far between. Who should be partnering with the women's league? Who are the stakeholders that can drive this change? In Europe and America, women's football thrives because of strong corporate partnerships, government investment, and a focus on branding and merchandising. Nigeria must adopt a similar approach.

Delta Queens proves bookmakers wrong after thrashing highly rated FC Robo

Delta Queens Football Club of Asaba proved bookmakers wrong in match day 6 after routing highly fancied Robo Queens Football Club of Lagos 4-1 at the Steven Keshi International Stadium Asaba.

The Coach Peter Dedevo tutored side had entered the game as underdogs against their visitors who were favoured to leave the Iconic Steven Keshi International Stadium with maximum points.

This dream was however shattered after the Coach Emmanuel Osahon led side crashed to their biggest loss of the season despite the pre-match rating. The game had begun in earnest with both sides chasing the opening goal but quakity defensive play on the side of three visitors as well as the profligacy of their strikers saw three

first half ending in a draw.

The second half however kicked off in a frenzy with Delta Queens switching tactics which left their visitors in limbo. The switch in tactics led to two quick goals in the 49th and 52nd minutes as pacy Destiny Itobor bundles home a

rebounded shot off the cross bar to send shock waves down the spines of Robo Queens.

The visitors were still trying to settle into the second half before Goodness Ihioma slammed home a poorly cleared ball from 17 yards out to send the fans at

the Steven Keshi International Stadium into wild jubilation.

Robo Queens finally crumbled like a pack of cards after Priscilla Omeje converted a swift pass from Destiny Itobor with an angled shot that left the Robo Queens goalkeeper napping.

The visitors however drew one back from the spot in the 87th minute after a Robo Queens player was upended inside the vital area.

Not done with pummeling their visitors Destiny Itobor rounded off the scoring in the 90th minute after collecting a pass from midfield ace Dagogo before smashing in a shot that was initially blocked by the goalkeeper.

Speaking after the match Delta Queens gaffer, Peter Dedevo lauded his players for their spirited display saying



PSG, Man United Fight over Osimhen's signature

Manchester United and Paris Saint-Germain have both expressed a strong interest in activating the release clause in Super Eagles Victor Osimhen's contract with Napoli.

Reports indicate that they are currently in discussions with the Nigerian international.

Osimhen was heavily linked with a move to Chelsea last summer, but after negotiations broke down late in the process, he ultimately joined Turkish side Galatasaray on loan for the season.

Notably, the loan agreement does not include an option for a permanent transfer.

Galatasaray is eager to keep Osimhen, but they are facing significant competition as Yagiz Sabuncuoglu has revealed that both Manchester United and

PSG have intensified their interest in the 26-year-old player.

"Victor Osimhen is on the verge of signing with a well-known management company," Sabuncuoglu stated in an interview with Sports Digitale.

"Furthermore, a player from Real Madrid is mediating these discussions. This implies that the likelihood of Osimhen remaining with Galatasaray in June has significantly decreased."

"PSG and Manchester United have made verbal offers to Osimhen regarding his salary and contract duration, and both clubs are prepared to meet the release clause set by Napoli. Galatasaray will find it very difficult to compete with these two top clubs, making it increasingly likely that Osimhen will depart at the end of the season."

NWFL MD 06: Edo Queens storm Ayimba, battle Confluence Queens today

EDWARD OSEGHE

Defending Champions of the Nigeria Women Football League (NWFL) 2023/24 premiership season, Edo Queens Football Club of Benin, are set for the battle of Ayimba today, Wednesday February 19, as they head to head with Confluence Queens of Lokoja in NWFL matchday 06 of the ongoing premiership campaign.

Edo Queens who have made a very good start since the beginning of the new season, will be aiming to carry on their excellent form when they face Confluence Queens of Lokoja. Kick off time is 4pm.

Standing second on the

log with 11 points from five matches, Edo Queens must push hard against the host team to score more goals to enable them regain their top spot on the table.

Confluence Queens have not been so wonderful this first half of the new season. Holding the Moses Aduku - led red - hot Edo Queens will be difficult.

For the Benin ladies, every game is a battle and the girls are ready to improve and be better as they set their eyes on another away win.

Though no push over in modern day football, but Confluence Queens ladies have not gotten

what it takes to stop the Ancient City based ladies from advancing in their premiership tittle race.

Edo Queens have always had an upper hand each time

both teams clash. The Senator Monday Okpebholo's girls are confident they will waste no time in seeing off Confluence Queens on their home soil.



NWF begins grassroots campaign, conducts Weightlifting demonstration in School

In its bid to expand the scope of weightlifting in Nigeria and discover future champions, the Weightlifting Federation of Nigeria (NWF) has begun grassroots development programme aimed at discovering and nurturing future champions for the sport.

Consequently, the federation recently carried out a demonstration show in Abuja.

The Demonstration which took place at the Lead British International School Gwarinpa, in the Federal Capital Territory, students being introduced to the game of weightlifting.

Speaking shortly after the demonstration, President, Nigeria Weightlifting Federation (NWF), Dr Abdul Ibrahim, said the essence of the demonstration which took place during the school's inter-house competition, is to encourage the children to take to weightlifting

sport as a career.

Dr Abdul noted that discovering the children with talents for weightlifting is critical so that when they are nurtured, they will take over from the aging ones. He described the enthusiasm shown by the students and teachers as commendable adding that the

federation will consolidate on the programme and will soon embark on tour of Nigerian Schools across the country.

"We are looking at catching them young, and no better place to do that than coming to schools especially when the children are still young, so that we can now

begin to build from there.

"We are able to introduce the sport to schools; it's just the beginning, and it would continue in other schools. Our plan is to tour most schools in the country to introduce the game of weightlifting to the children and even teachers.

NPFL25: Bendel Insurance FC grab away point at Warriors stronghold, maintain stability

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

Bendel Insurance Football Club of Benin, Wednesday, February 19, 2025 continued with their impressive run since the change in their technical crew as they grabbed another valuable away point in a tough terrain after a goalless draw with El-Kanemi Warriors in the match day 25 of the Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL).

The resurgent Benin Arsenal showed hunger and thirst for victory throughout the encounter at the El-Kanemi stadium, with Osahon Osobo connecting well with Oke Kayode whose brilliant efforts almost to the visitors getting a breakthrough in the 26th minute of



the tough and highly entertaining game, but former Insurance goalkeeper Kolawole Oladipo denied him the chance with his magical gloves.

Insurance young goalkeeper Joshua Baba proved his worth as

he made three incredible saves (16,76,84 minutes) to keep his side in the game as Insurance held on to the end and shared the spoils.

Bendel Insurance FC now have 35 points and remained comfortable at the middle of the table

ahead of their next game which is against Ikorodu City on Wednesday, February 27 in Benin.

Insurance FC have proven to be a force to reckon with in the premier League since Coach Greg Ikhenoba got promoted to

the Head Coach position after the resignation of his former boss coach Monday Odigie. He has been able to guide the Benin Arsenal to navigate throughout the relegation waters and now in the top ten list, a feat that has earned him commendation from the management and fans of the club.

The Benin Arsenal, before their trip to Maiduguri thrashed Niger Tornados 3-0 in the Matchday 24 fixture of the Nigerian Premier Football League (NPFL) at the Samuel Ogbemudia Stadium, Benin City. They had pipped Enyimba FC four days earlier, the same day their three deducted points were returned to them by the NFF appeal committee after a thorough investigation.

Recall that Insurance FC and El-Kanemi Warriors also shared points in their first round meeting in Benin on October 5, 2024 at the Samuel Ogbemudia stadium. The Warriors shocked the Benin Arsenal just two minutes into the game with a goal scored by Mustapha before Michael Enaruna's 19 minutes equalizer for Insurance.

In a post match interview, the Head coach of Bendel Insurance Greg Ikhenoba said he was happy with the away point.

He commended his players for their sense of commitment and determination, saying that he was afraid that fatigue could set in after playing four or five league and FA cup matches within a week and the long travel distance.

Edo State Sports Commission Chairman Hon. Enabulele congratulates Gov Okpebholo on 100 days in office

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

The Executive Chairman, Edo State Sports Commission (ESSC), Hon. Amadin Desmond Enabulele has congratulated Governor Monday Okpebholo on the occasion of his 100 days in office as Edo State Governor.

The Edo State Sports Commission boss said that he is proud of Governor Okpebholo and his development programme.

In a statement signed by the media aide the Edo State Sports Commission boss, Edoko Wilson Edoko, Hon. Enabulele expressed appreciation for the governor's remarkable contributions to sports development in Edo State.

"Your leadership has already

begun transforming the sports landscape in our state," he noted, emphasizing initiatives focused on grassroots development and increased support for local athletes and teams.

He commended the governor's unwavering commitment to the upcoming South-South eliminations for the National Sports Festival and the Edo State Sports Festival, describing these efforts

as a testament to his dedication to repositioning sports in the state.

Hon. Enabulele further stated, "Thank you for your efforts, we are witnessing a renewed focus on sports, empowering our athletes and coaches while positioning Edo State as a formidable force in both national and international competitions."

He reaffirmed his commitment to Governor Okpebholo Sports Development Programme designed to further strengthen the sports sector and ensure Edo State remains a powerhouse across various sporting disciplines. He also praised the rising fortunes of Bendel Insurance FC and Edo Queens, attributing their recent successes to the governor's sports-friendly policies and goodwill.



Racism in Football-Outraged as Atalanta coach blasts Lookman over penalty miss

The recent remarks by Atalanta's head coach, Gian Piero Gasperini, targeting Nigerian forward Ademola Lookman after a crucial penalty miss against Club Brugge have sparked widespread debate.

Gasperini's statement, labeling Lookman as "one of the worst penalty takers I've ever seen," has not only drawn criticism from fans and pundits but also raised questions about the fairness, professionalism, and potential racial undertones of such public condemnation.

Football, like any other sport, thrives on teamwork and mutual respect between players and coaches.

While it is understandable that a missed penalty in such a high-stakes match can lead to frustration, singling out a player publicly seems counterproductive.

Lookman, who has been a key contributor to Atalanta's success, deserves constructive feedback, not humiliation. Public criticism can demoralize a player, affect team morale, and even tarnish the club's image.

While Gasperini's frustration might have stemmed purely from a sporting perspective, the tone and choice of words cannot be ignored. In a world where racism in football remains a pressing issue, targeting an African player with such harsh language risks being interpreted as discriminatory, even if unintended.

Historically, Black players have faced disproportionate criticism compared to their white counterparts, often reinforcing negative stereotypes. Gasperini's remarks, whether consciously biased or not, feed into this troubling pattern.

Niger Delta sports festival organisers announce opening of online registration portal

Organizers of the Niger Delta Sports Festival (NDSF) have announced that registration will be done online following the uploading of the form on the designated portal.

Enefiok Udo-Obong, the Co-Chairman of the Technical Committee announced the development and said the decision is to ease the process for intending athletes spread across the nine member states.

"While athletes can still ob-

tain hard copy forms at designated collections points, we believe that for ease of registration, they can go online and fill out the forms," Udo-Obong told NDSF Media after a recent Technical Committee meeting.

The registration site is: <https://nigerdeltasportfestival.com>.

In a related development, local government and federal constituency trial dates have been adjusted to allow states participate in the qualifying events of the National Sports

Festival ball games which coincided with the earlier scheduled date of February 20.

"Consequent upon this adjustment, we have also rejigged dates for the state trials and closed camping.

"The LG and Constituency trials will now hold from February 25. Afterwards, the states will hold their finals and closed camping," explained the Australia 2000 Olympic 4x400m gold medalist.

Udo-Obong also noted that the longer period for registration

will provide time and opportunity for all interested sportsmen and women within the region to register for the trials.

About 3000 athletes are expected to compete for honours in 17 sports at the festival.

The maiden NDSF is open to the nine states that make up the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC). The states are Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, and Delta. Others are Edo, Imo, Ondo, and Rivers.



Nigeria's top badminton star, Anuluwapo Opeyori in white

Badminton: Nigeria's Anu Opeyori secures prestigious Yonex Peter Gade Academy scholarship

Nigeria's top badminton star, Anuluwapo Opeyori, has earned a prestigious scholarship to train at the renowned Yonex Peter Gade Academy in Denmark, marking another milestone in his illustrious career.

The opportunity follows Opeyori's dominant performance at

the recently concluded African Championship in Douala, Cameroon, where he clinched the men's singles title for the fifth consecutive time. His latest triumph further cements his reputation as one of Africa's finest badminton players.

The scholarship will grant Opeyori access to world-class

coaching, cutting-edge training facilities, and elite competition, positioning him to compete at an even higher level internationally.

His sponsorship follows that of Eniola Bolaji, Nigeria's para-badminton star, who is currently training in Spain after making history by winning a

bronze medal at the Paris 2024 Olympics.

With this latest development, Nigeria continues to make significant strides in badminton, as its top athletes gain access to elite training programs aimed at enhancing their performances on the global stage.

COLUMN

Okpebholo: 100 days of innovation, restoration, healing, justice

FRED ITUA

Nigeria's 1999 Constitution (as amended) is explicit in stating the primary duty of government. In Chapter 2, Section 14(2) (b), it states thus: "The security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government".

Hence, there is no argument that security comes first before welfare because the latter cannot exist without the former. It is this clear understanding of his mandate that made His Excellency, Governor Monday Okpebholo to immediately take steps to secure the peace on assumption of office.

On assumption on November 12, 2024, the man who had excelled as a senator before becoming a governor, rolled out a 5-point agenda tagged SHINE - Security, Health, Infrastructure, Natural Resources and Agriculture as well as Education.

SECURITY

As governor, Senator Okpebholo has achieved over 100 worthwhile milestones within 100 days in office.

Up until November 12, 2024, Edo State, especially its capital, Benin City, was practically in a Hobbesian state as life was "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short". Cult-related bloodletting were at an all-time high.

Having come to the job armed with the relevant experiences, requisite qualifications and unparalleled determination to enhance the fortunes of the people, the "Akpakomiza" now fondly called "Akpako-messiah" by the people, took the bull by the horns.

The people's chief servant immediately declared war on the various cult groups who were on rampage, attacking and counter-attacking rivals.

Thus, it is to his credit that for the first time in recent years, the Yuletide would be celebrated without incidents of cult-related killings in Edo State.

Within the period, Governor Okpebholo dealt a fatal blow on kidnappers. He ordered the swift deployment of a Special Tactical Team to Agenebode in Edo North, an action which led to the timely rescue of kidnapped victims and dislodging of kidnappers and other criminal gangs from that axis.

The situation was the same in Uromi where the governor ensured the rescue of kidnapped victims and smoked out kidnappers and criminal gangs in Uromi and environs.

Determined to sustain the gains recorded in his campaign against cultism and killings, the governor facilitated the passage into law, the Secret Cult and Similar Activities (Prohibition) Bill, 2025. The new law which repeals the Edo State Secret Cult (Prohibition) Law, 2018, provides stiffer sanctions for cultists, their sponsors and collaborators.

Knowing the place of mobility in the fight against crimes, the governor procured several brand new Toyota Hilux vehicles for the various security agencies in Edo State to enhance security

operations in the State.

This was aside the procurement of 1,000 high functional motorcycles for security operations in hard-to-reach terrains to ensure rapid response and tactical pursuit of kidnappers and other criminals.

The governor also constituted the Public Safety Response Team to assist security agencies in the enforcement of public safety measures and maintenance of public order.

In addition, Governor Okpebholo reconstituted the Edo State Security Corps, ensuring the revalidation of its members as well as illegal arms mop-up. It is interesting to note that over 5,000 illegal firearms have been recovered so far.

HEALTH

For over two years, there was a seeming back and forth between the former administration and the Federal Ministry of Health which was desirous of citing a project in Edo state.

However, within seven days in office, Governor Okpebholo facilitated the smooth take-off of the National Obstetrics Fistula Centre in Edo State.

The facility is the first and only one in the South-South Geo-political zone. The people's governor donated 25 hectares of land (with a Certificate of Occupancy) to the Federal Government for the purpose. Apart from the health benefits derivable from the project, the centre will also offer various levels of employment for citizens of the state, thereby contributing to the state economy.

Governor Okpebholo's administrative acumen was easily spotted by several stakeholders including the Islamic Development Bank IsDB.

The fruit of that recognition would later see the governor flagging-off the IsDB Support to the Malaria Elimination Project in Edo State and the launch of free malaria testing and treatment in all Government Hospitals in the State for the next two years. The project is through the Lives and Livelihoods Funds LLF of the bank.

In an era where malaria is increasingly proving resistant to known medications, this is an opportunity to roll back malaria in the state, offered on a platter.

Concerned about the welfare of the vulnerable including orphans, woman and children, the governor ordered the onboarding of 300 vulnerable persons across the State into the State Equity Plan of the Edo State Health Insurance Commission.

This is in addition to the digitization of Statewide Health Insurance Data Transmission as well as the successful launch of the Edo State Health Insurance Commission Customer Service/Support Policy.

In 100 days, Governor Okpebholo has embarked on the upgrade of State-owned health facilities to enhance service delivery. He also ensured the completion of the Oredo Primary Healthcare Centre and procured much-needed Transformer and Air conditioners for



OKPEBHOLO

the Edo Specialist Hospital.

As part of his health interventions, the governor also distributed 18 Ultrasound Machines to hospitals in the 18 Local Government Areas of Edo State.

Other milestones in Health are the distribution of 220 laptops and tables to 220 Primary Healthcare Centres for data management and the procurement of a Bus and Hilux vehicle for Primary Healthcare Project Monitoring.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Economists have postulated that the economic growth of a city depends on infrastructure.

So, in order to make life more meaningful for the people, provide jobs and boost the economy, the governor has made giant strides in infrastructural development.

Some of the milestones include the award of contract and commencement of construction of a flyover bridge at Ramat Park, Benin City; procurement of Payloaders, trucks and compressors for the Edo State Waste Management Agency to enhance service delivery; and, the passage and implementation of the Edo State Electricity Regulatory Commission Law which empowers the State to generate, transmit and distribute power. The gains of these actions are very well obvious.

Governor Okpebholo also signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the NNPC Limited and other investors to build a \$300 Million Condensate Refinery in Oredo Local Government Area of Edo State.

Others are signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the installation of \$500m 100MW Hydro-power Plants at Ikpoba and Ojirami Dams in Edo State; and, resuscitation of the Edo Transport Service (a.k.a Edo Line) with the procurement and commissioning of 100 brand new Hiace Buses for inter-state travels. A veritable transportation system is one powerful public relations tool, capable of wooing potential investors and boosting tourism. So, reviving Edo Line is not just

about repositioning the company for increased revenue generation through one stream of income but the multiplier effects on the economy.

It must also be noted that every contract awarded by the governor passed due process and have timelines for completion. The Governor Okpebholo administration will not award contracts for the sake of merely awarding them. Every contract that has been awarded will be completed by the administration.

Some of the projects awarded are contract for the rehabilitation of some failed sections of Upper Mission Road, Benin City; award of contract and rehabilitation of critically failed sections of the Benin-Auchi Road from Obadan Junction to Irukepken; award of contract and ongoing construction of Ekpoma-Uromi-Ubiaja Road, Edo State; and, award of contract and ongoing construction of Uromi-Onewa-Udomi-Ibiolu-Afuda-Idumoza-Eko-Uwaya-Ewora Road with Spurs, Edo State.

Others are award of contract and ongoing construction of Ekiuwa-University of Benin City (UNIBEN) Road, off Upper Mission Road (Temboga Road Extension), Benin City; award of contract and construction of Varsity Road, off Usugbenu Road in Esan Central Local Government Area. This has already been completed.

Also, there is the award of contract and ongoing Construction of Palace Road, off Upper Mission Road, Benin City; Construction of Irrua-Akholle-Ukhun Road in Esan Central and Esan West Local Government Areas; Construction of Irrua-Illeh-Usenu-Ukhun Road in Esan West Local Government Area; procurement of contract for the construction of Ohe-Uzea Road in Esan North East Local Government Area, as well as the procurement of contract for the construction of Prince Harrison Street, Illeh in Esan Central Local Government Area.

Others include approval for the procurement of contract for the reconstruction of Boundary Road, off Ogba Road, Benin City; procurement of contract for the construction of Okhunnwun Road in Ovia North East Local Government Area; procurement of contract for the construction of 1.5km Utako-Idumu-Aligbe Road, 0.8km Idumu-Ekhuere Road and increased quantity for the replacement of the existing undulating drains as additional works to the contract for the construction of Uromi-Onewa-Udomi-Ibiolu-Afuda-Idumoza-Eko-Uwaya-Ewora Road with Spurs.

The Governor has also approved the renovation of the Offices of the Governor, Deputy Governor, Secretary to the State Government and Head of Service; rehabilitation of four Court of Appeal Complexes and Judges' Quarters; revitalisation of the Edo Broadcasting Service (EBS) Ihievbe Substation, an action which restored operations after nearly a decade of downtime; upgrade of Information and Communications Technology and other infrastructure at the State-

owned Edo Broadcasting Service (EBS); procurement of Two units of 150KVA Perkins Generator for EBS; and, procurement of high-end digital equipment such as High-performance Mac, Broadcasting and Streaming Softwares, Professional Quadcopter Drone with 4K UHD Video Camera, 10kva TV Transmitter, Audio Interfaces/Mixers etc.

Governor Okpebholo also approved the upgrade of Edo State's Network Infrastructure from 1 Gigabit to a 10 Gigabit Fibre Network supporting services like video conferencing, large file sharing, VoIP calls and more across Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs)

The administration has partnered with Cisco Networking Academy and others to train and equip staff of the Information Communications Technology Agency Network to efficiently control and independently manage the 10 Gigabit Fibre Network across Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs).

As part of measures to develop effective feedback mechanism and run an all-inclusive administration, the governor, through the Community Social Development Agency CSDA embarked on the construction of Town Halls in Ohanmi, Owan East Local Government Area and 20 other communities across the three Senatorial Districts of Edo State.

There is also the provision of All-in-One Solar Streetlights in Iyekogba and 30 other Communities across the three Senatorial Districts of Edo State, using the CSDA Platform.

Being an administrator who understands that development is an all-round concept that is inclusive, the governor has a great interest in rural development.

This is why, through the CSDA platform, he has in 100 days provided 500 KVA Transformers and rural electrification in Uwessan, Esan Central Local Government Area and 25 other Communities across the three senatorial districts of the state.

Still under the CSDA platform, the governor embarked on the construction of markets and lockup stores in Auchi and other locations in the three Senatorial Districts; provided boreholes and reticulation at Uzenema, Esan North East and other selected locations in the 3 senatorial districts, as well as the reconstruction of a Police Post at Ojo-Uwelu, Egor, Esan Central Local Government Area.

NATURAL RESOURCES & AGRICULTURE

In order to immediately reduce the cost of living and make life easier for the people, the governor on assumption of office banned Market Unions who hitherto fixed exorbitant prices for goods and food items arbitrarily.

On December 31, 2024, the governor also signed an Executive Order for the Establishment, Adoption and Implementation of the Principles of Framework for responsible and inclusive Land-intensive Agricultural

CONTINUES ON PG 8