

Okpebholo condemns ADC attack, dismisses Peter Obi's allegations as malicious

BENIN CITY

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo has condemned in strong terms, the recent attack on African Democratic Congress (ADC) members, while rejecting claims by former Anambra State governor, Peter

Obi that the state government was involved in the incident.

In a statement released on Tuesday night, Governor Okpebholo described the attack as an internal party dispute "taken far beyond acceptable limits," expressing sympathy for the victims.

He alleged that certain el-

ements may have exploited Edo's peaceful environment to perpetrate violence, warning that "the importation of thugs and miscreants under the guise of party politics remains totally condemned and will not be tolerated."

As the state's Chief Security Officer, Okpebholo empha-

sised that Edo would not be turned into a theatre of conflict in the name of political rivalry.

He noted that politics should centre on performance, engagement with the people, and earning the electorate's trust, rather than on violence or intimidation.

Rejecting Peter Obi's allega-

tions that government officials targeted his political supporters, the Edo State Government described the claims as "false, malicious, and politically motivated."

It clarified that no directive was ever issued by the Governor or any government organ to attack members of any party,

and security arrangements for political visits were purely precautionary.

The statement recalled that a faction of the ADC led by former Senate Chief Whip Roland Owie had been shut out of a meeting at the residence

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The Nigerian Observer



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Farmers hail World Bank's \$500m agric loan, demand transparency

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INEC to amend 2027 elections timetable —Chairman

CAROLINE AMEH

ABUJA

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has announced plans to adjust the timetable for the 2027 general elections in the wake of the Electoral Act 2026.

INEC Chairman, Prof. Joash O. Amupitan, disclosed the development, during a meeting with Resident Electoral Commissioners (RECs) in Abuja.

Prof. Amupitan explained that the Commission had earlier issued a Notice of Election on February 13, 2026, under the

previous Electoral Act 2022.

"With the introduction of the new Electoral Act, we have to make some adjustments and issue a revised timetable for the 2027 General Election," he said, stressing that the revision would ensure full legal compliance and operational coherence.

The Chairman also revealed that INEC would review its Regulations and Guidelines for the 2027 polls to align them with the new law. Preparatory activities include a Voters Revalidation Exercise to clean and strengthen the voters' register.

The second phase of Con-

tinuous Voter Registration (CVR), which began on January 5, 2026, will run until April 17, 2026, as part of a year-long exercise expected to conclude on August 30, 2026.

The meeting provided a review of recent off-cycle elections, including the February 21, 2026, Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Area Council election, and bye-elections in Kano and Rivers states.

While commending the generally peaceful conduct of the polls and a 97 percent average result uploaded to the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal

during the FCT election, Prof. Amupitan highlighted areas for improvement, particularly voter education, punctual opening of polling units, and logistics.

He urged RECs to sustain voter sensitization and warned against logistical lapses, noting that only 45 percent of polling units opened by 8:30 a.m. in recent elections, falling short of INEC standards.

"As Resident Electoral Commissioners, you are the Commission in your states. The buck stops with you. Strengthen supervision, ensure early deployment of personnel and ma-

terials, and hold your Electoral Officers accountable," he stated.

The session also featured the swearing-in of Dr. Chukwu Chukwuemeka Joseph as the new REC for Abia State.

Additionally, the Commission received a delegation from the Forum of State Independent Electoral Commissions of Nigeria (FOSIECON), led by National Chairman Mamman Nda Eri.

The forum proposed deeper collaboration with INEC on capacity building, technology

sharing, voter education, research, and policy dialogue.

Eri commended INEC's reforms and technological innovations, expressing optimism that closer cooperation would further strengthen Nigeria's democracy.

With the revised 2027 election timetable expected soon, stakeholders anticipate that dates for party primaries, nominations, campaigns, and polling will reflect the new legal provisions and INEC's commitment to transparency, efficiency, and public trust.

Senate flags JAMB revenue surge, warns against burdening poor students

CAROLINE AMEH

ABUJA

The Senate has expressed concern over the rising revenue of the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), cautioning that escalating exam fees could place undue strain on students from low-income families.

The warning came during a budget defence session chaired by Senator Muntari Mohammed, where JAMB's Director of the Registrar's Office, Mufutau Bello, presented the agency's financial performance.

Bello revealed that the board generated ₦18.8 billion in Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) in 2025, narrowly missing its ₦19.8 billion target, and projects ₦23.8 billion for 2026 to sustain operations and improve service delivery.

Lawmakers, however, expressed reservations over the steady rise in income, noting that most of it comes from exam regis-

tration fees paid by students, many of whom come from financially disadvantaged backgrounds.

The committee stressed that financial sustainability must not come at the expense of access to education.

Senators urged JAMB to balance revenue generation with social responsibility, recommending measures to ease the financial burden on candidates and their families.

The committee also questioned a sharp rise in personnel costs in the proposed 2026 budget, demanding justification tied to measurable improvements in efficiency and service delivery.

While acknowledging JAMB's operational success, the lawmakers emphasised that institutional growth must be accompanied by accountability, fairness, and transparency.

The Senate reaffirmed its commitment to oversight of agencies whose policies directly affect millions of Nigerians aspiring to higher education.



CLOSED DOOR MEETING:

Senate President, Godswill Akpabio (middle), exchanging pleasantries with Governor Bassey Otu of Cross River State, after a closed door meeting in Abuja yesterday. With them is Governor Umo Eno of Akwa Ibom State.

PHOTO: OMOYE AMINU

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Okpebholo attributes Edo's progress to faith, humility, God's guidance

fostering rural development and church partnerships.

Guest preacher, Apostle Favour Mopa Awom encour-

aged the congregation to seek the power of God to fulfil life

assignments in a challenging world, citing Psalm 62:11.

BENIN CITY

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo has attributed the successes of his administration over the past year to humility, faith, and total dependence on God.

Speaking at an interdenominational church service at Government House Chapel, the governor said that strategy and policy alone are insufficient without divine guidance.

Represented by Edesili Anani Okpebholo, the Coordi-

nator of the First Lady's office, he highlighted achievements under the SHINE Agenda across security, health, infrastructure, agriculture, education, and rural development.

"Governance must be rooted in faith and humility; human efforts alone cannot yield lasting impact," he said, urging support for initiatives that improve lives across Edo.

The state's Special Adviser on Religious Matters, Apostle Sule Faraday Azekhumen, lauded the administration for tackling cultism and insecurity, while

Interior Minister pledges stronger media partnership to boost transparency, security awareness

ABUJA

The Minister of Interior, Olubunmi Tunji-Ojo, has reaffirmed his Ministry's commitment to a strategic partnership with the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), aiming to strengthen transparency, public engagement, and effective communication on issues of internal security and citizenship integrity.

Speaking during a courtesy visit by NUJ leaders to the Ministry in Abuja, Tunji-Ojo described the Ministry as "the Ministry of the people," highlighting its pivotal roles in citizenship management, border security, and national asset protection.

He stressed that government institutions cannot function in isolation and urged proactive information sharing to prevent misinformation and foster public trust.

The Minister welcomed proposals for structured media engagement, including quarterly press briefings and periodic interface sessions, saying such initiatives would help citizens better understand ongoing reforms and innovations.

He also acknowledged the value of constructive criticism, describing responsible journalism as essential for policy improvement and governance transparency.

NUJ President Alhassan Yahaya, accompanied by the Union's National Executive Council and FCT Council, praised the Ministry's reform efforts in internal security and pledged continued collaboration to raise national security awareness.

The Union proposed ministerial briefings and invited the Minister to address its upcoming NEC meeting to further discuss policy directions and achievements.

Both parties also explored journalist capacity development through training on security reporting and responsible information dissemination, agreeing that sustained dialogue and structured engagement are key to building public confidence, promoting national cohesion, and keeping citizens informed.

The meeting concluded with a shared commitment to institutional collaboration in service of the Nigerian people.

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of John Odigie-Oyegun due to internal party disagreements.

Police intervention was required to restore order, and the government insisted that the incident stemmed from the party's internal crisis rather than any action by Edo authorities.

Governor Okpebholo urged political actors to verify facts before making public statements capable of "overheating the polity."

He reassured residents and visitors that the state remains committed to safeguarding lives, maintaining peace, and upholding the constitutional rights of all Nigerians, regard-

less of political affiliation.

"No amount of political blackmail will sway Edo people from supporting a government they hold dear," he said, adding that attempts to orchestrate unrest under the guise of politics would not be tolerated.

The Governor also called on security agencies to remain vigilant, particularly during political gatherings that could escalate into violence.

With Edo's reputation as one of Nigeria's most peaceful states at stake, Okpebholo stressed that the government's focus remains on governance, public safety, and development, while welcoming healthy opposition that respects the law and democratic norms.



NUJ LEADERSHIP VISITS TUNJI-OJO:

President, Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Alhassan Yahya (left), and Minister of Interior, Olubunmi Tunji-Ojo, when the leadership of the union visited the Minister in Abuja yesterday.

Nigeria fails World Bank gender test on parenthood

ABUJA

Nigeria has scored a shocking zero out of 100 on supportive parenthood policies in the 2026 Women, Business and the Law report released by the World Bank Group, exposing deep cracks in the country's gender equality framework.

The damning assessment underscores a widening gap between legislation and implementation, despite years of policy pronouncements on women's empowerment.

Mrs Shirley Ewang, Advocacy Lead at Gatefield, disclosed the findings in a statement issued in Abuja on Wednesday, describing the zero score as a stark indictment of Nigeria's failure to back its gender laws with concrete institutional support.

According to the report, Nigeria scored 50 out of 100 on the adequacy of legal frameworks promoting gender equality.

However, when it came to policies, budgetary provisions

and institutional mechanisms required to enforce those laws, the country's score plunged to 21.7 out of 100, with parenthood support registering an alarming zero.

Globally, only four percent of women live in economies that provide near full legal equality. While the average country scored 67 out of 100 on legal provisions supporting women's economic participation, performance dropped sharply when enforcement and implementation systems were evaluated.

Ewang said the figures reveal a troubling disconnect.

"The data is clear. Our legal progress is being severely undermined by a lack of institutional support reflected in our zero score on parenthood policies," she said.

"To scale women in business, management and public service, we must urgently bridge this implementation gap."

The report found that Nigeria lacks federal laws mandating at least 14 weeks of paid maternity leave, paid paternity leave or explicit protections against the

dismissal of pregnant workers.

It further highlighted the absence of structured financial support mechanisms and government-backed childcare systems to enable women remain in the workforce.

Of the 190 economies assessed, fewer than half provide financial support for families.

In Nigeria, the absence of tax incentives, childcare subsidies and government-administered childcare support continues to limit women's labour force participation.

The report also flagged restrictive provisions in the Labour Act, particularly Sections 55, 56 and 57 which bar women from certain industrial jobs and night work, reinforcing structural barriers. It added that the absence of explicit legal guarantees for equal remuneration for work of equal value fuels persistent wage disparities.

Across the federation, gender equality performance varies widely.

States such as Lagos and Oyo were cited as leading in legal

reforms, with Lagos operating specialised family courts and providing services for survivors of gender-based violence.

By contrast, states, including Bauchi and Kano were identified as lagging behind, with some northern states scoring as low as 25 out of 100 in legal frameworks affecting women's marital and inheritance rights.

Despite the enactment of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, supportive systems for women's safety remain underfunded, limiting effective enforcement nationwide.

Ewang urged policymakers and private sector leaders to move beyond rhetoric and adopt concrete family-friendly policies, including a minimum 16-week fully paid maternity leave, 14-day paid paternity leave and robust childcare infrastructure.

"With one of the world's largest youth populations entering the workforce over the next decade - 1.2 billion young people, half of them girls - closing Nigeria's implementation gap is critical," she warned.

NAPTIP, ICMPD recruit Edo students as frontline anti-trafficking champions

BENIN CITY

In a renewed push against the scourge of human trafficking, the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) on Wednesday inaugurated Anti-Trafficking Vanguard in two secondary schools in Edo State, mobilising students as peer educators and community advocates.

The initiative, carried out in partnership with the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), is part of the "School in the Schools Anti-Trafficking Education and Advocacy Project" (STEAP), supported by the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

The pilot phase of the project

was launched at Urora Secondary School and Bethel Secondary School in Aduwawa, Uhumwonde Local Government Area, with 30 students drawn from both junior and senior secondary levels in each school selected to serve as anti-trafficking ambassadors.

Speaking at the inauguration at Urora Secondary School, NAPTIP's Benin Zonal Commander, Mr Sam Offiah, described human trafficking as a persistent menace that continues to prey on vulnerable school-age children.

"Human trafficking is a menace in our society and many children of school age have been victims.

That is why we are inaugurating anti-trafficking van-

guards in schools to fight the scourge," Offiah said.

He explained that the selected students, chosen from among 50 schools participating in the first phase of the project, would be empowered to educate their peers, raise awareness within their families, and extend sensitization campaigns to their communities.

"You are selected among 50 schools for the first phase of this project. We have 30 students from junior and senior secondary schools as advocates to stand against injustice and trafficking in this institution," he said.

Offiah assured that NAPTIP, in collaboration with ICMPD and with sponsorship from

the Government of the Netherlands, would closely monitor the progress of the vanguards, urging other students to join the movement to strengthen resistance against traffickers.

Also speaking, ICMPD Project Officer for STEAP in Edo, Mr Elvis Ederibhalo, warned that schools remain prime targets for traffickers who exploit the innocence and vulnerability of young people.

"Traffickers are always coming to schools to recruit pupils because of their innocence. So we are coming with NAPTIP to educate you to know your rights, how to say no to traffickers and also sensitise other students and members of the society," he said.

4 testify from Abuja as Alison-Madueke's UK trial begins

ABUJA

Four witnesses on Wednesday testified virtually at the Federal High Court in Abuja in the opening phase of the trial of former Petroleum Minister, Diezani Alison-Madueke, currently underway at Southwark Crown Court in the United Kingdom.

The proceedings were conducted before Justice James Omotosho in line with the Mutual Assistance in Criminal

Matters Act, 2018, following a formal request by UK Central Authorities for witnesses in Nigeria to give evidence via video link before the trial court presided over by Mrs Justice Thornton.

The matter, marked CS/72/2026 on Justice Omotosho's cause list, is titled: "In the Matter of Application for the Taking of the Evidence of Witnesses in Nigeria via Video Link for Use in Criminal Proceedings in Accordance with the Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters Act."

The four witnesses, whose identities were withheld, began their testimonies at about 11 a.m. Nigerian time, with the trial judge, jury and defendants at the London court participating remotely.

After taking their evidence, Justice Omotosho adjourned proceedings until Thursday at 11 a.m. to hear from two additional witnesses.

Alison-Madueke, who served from 2010 to 2015, was Nigeria's first female Minister of

Petroleum and the first woman to serve as president of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) between 2014 and 2015.

The 65-year-old has been on bail since her arrest in London in October 2015.

She has denied six corruption-related charges five counts of accepting bribes and one count of conspiracy to commit bribery all linked to the award of oil and gas contracts during her tenure.

British investigators al-

lege that she received at least £100,000 in cash, along with what prosecutors described as "financial or other advantages," including private jet flights, chauffeur-driven cars, the use and maintenance of London property, luxury items and school fees for her son.

The trial, which began on January 26, is expected to last between 10 and 12 weeks.

If convicted under the UK Bribery Act, she faces up to 10 years' imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine.

She is standing trial alongside Doye and Olatimbo.



BUDGET DEFENCE:

L-R: Executive Director, Finance, South East Development Commission (SEDC), Stanley Ohajuruka; MD/CEO, (SEDC), Mark Okoye and Executive Director, Cooperate Services, (SEDC) Dr. Sylvester Okonkwo, during budget defence at the National Assembly Abuja. PHOTO BY OMOYE AMINU

UNESCO pushes youth-driven agric to tackle jobs, food crisis

ABUJA

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has called for the productive engagement of young people in agriculture as a pathway to job creation and improved food security in Nigeria.

Dr Jean-Paul Abiaga, Head of Office and Representative of UNESCO in Abuja, made the call at the inauguration of the National Occupational Standards (NOS) workshop under

the Better Education for Africa's Rise (BEAR III) Project.

The three-day workshop, held from February 25 to 27, is focused on reviewing and validating NOS to strengthen Nigeria's education and skills development sector, particularly in food processing and post-harvest management.

Abiaga said the initiative was designed to make education practical and directly aligned with labour market needs. He stressed that equipping youths with technical and vocational skills would reduce post-harvest losses, increase

incomes and boost national food security.

With over 60 percent of Nigeria's population under 25, he said the country must match youthful energy with practical skills to curb frustration and unemployment.

Also speaking, Prof. Idris Bugaje, Executive Secretary of the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), described agriculture as a critical sector for economic diversification, urging that it be treated as a national priority.

Bugaje, represented by Dr Oladipupo Bello, said formal-

ised and modernised agricultural training would enhance professionalism and efficiency among young farmers.

Chairman of the Sector Skills Council for Agriculture (SSC4A), Mr Onallo Akpa, commended UNESCO's intervention, pledging industry support to ensure the standards translate into tangible outcomes rather than remaining on paper.

He said efforts would also promote renewable energy use in farming, reduce post-harvest losses and foster youth entrepreneurship.

PTDF reviews research grants, backs indigenous innovation

ABUJA

The Petroleum Technology Development Fund (PTDF) has reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening indigenous research and technology development in Nigeria's oil and gas sector.

Executive Secretary, Malam Ahmed Aminu, spoke during a combined peer review of the Annual Oil and Gas Research Grant

Competition and the Endowment Research Programme in Abuja.

He said the review marked the final assessment stage for selected projects spanning integrated pipeline monitoring, carbon nanotube-enhanced solar cells, renewable energy from non-edible oil seeds, sustainable fuels and geological studies of the Middle Benue Trough.

According to Aminu, two grant awardees and three en-

dowment research streams were evaluated, with strong prospects for intellectual property registration and commercialisation.

He noted that PTDF, established by Act 25 of 1973, is mandated to build local capacity in the oil and gas industry, adding that patents and research publications remain key performance indicators.

Representatives of regulatory and funding agencies,

including the Nigeria Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission and TETFund, commended PTDF's efforts in deepening research credibility and promoting energy security.

The peer review brought together industry leaders, subject matter experts, researchers and end users to assess progress, relevance and potential impact of the projects in line with PTDF's mandate.

TCN moves against encroachment on Ihovbor-Ajaokuta 330kV line

ABUJA

The Transmission Company of Nigeria (TCN) has cleared structures encroaching on its Ihovbor-Ajaokuta 330kV transmission line in Ihovbor community, Edo State.

In a statement, General Manager, Public Affairs, Mrs Ndidi Mbah, said the two-day exercise was carried out by the Benin Regional Office in collaboration with TCN's Corporate Headquarters and Property Department to reclaim the

company's Right of Way along the transmission corridor.

She said the company had earlier conducted sensitization campaigns, issued a three-month notice to the host community and paid compensation to affected persons before embarking on the operation.

Traditional rulers, youth leaders and other stakeholders were duly notified.

According to Mbah, the clearance became necessary to safeguard critical power infrastructure and protect lives and property along the corridor.

Enang urges direct election of ECOWAS parliamentarians

ABUJA

A Nigerian ambassador-designate and former senator, Ita Enang, has called for the direct election of members of the ECOWAS Parliament, replacing the current part-time system where national lawmakers serve concurrently.

Enang made the appeal at the ECOWAS Parliament's 2026 First Extraordinary Session and Seminar in Abuja, themed: "Deepening Regional Integration through the AfCFTA: Opportunities and Challenges for Expanding Intra-Community Trade."

He argued that under the existing arrangement, legislators are overstretched by responsi-

bilities in their national assemblies, limiting effective participation in regional lawmaking.

Enang urged the ECOWAS Commission and the Authority of Heads of State and Government to introduce a sunset clause of six to eight months for member states to conduct direct elections into the regional parliament.

He also proposed that at least 30 percent of delegates should be women to strengthen gender inclusion.

He said political will among member states would be critical to implementing the reform, suggesting that elections could be conducted simultaneously across West Africa or within a defined timeframe in accordance with each country's laws.

Forestry students urged to lead in climate action

IBADAN

Prof. Zachariah Yaduma, Director-General of the Federal College of Forestry, Ibadan, has called on forestry professionals to embrace dedication and innovation in tackling deforestation and climate change.

Addressing the matriculation of 333 new students for the 2025/26 session—234 for National Diploma and 99 for Higher National Diploma—Yaduma urged them to uphold hard work, integrity, and responsibility toward the environment.

"The Federal College of Forestry exists not merely to award certificates but to build character, competence, and capacity. You are custodians of our forests and future leaders of environmental stewardship," he said.

Guest lecturer Prof. Lateef Sanni, Executive Director/CEO of the Nigerian Stored Products Research Institute (NSPRI), warned that Nigeria's forest cover has dropped below 10 percent from 30-35 per cent in the 1960s, calling on students to prioritise sustainability, research, and innovation.

Provost Dr Ibraheem Lawal said the college has developed a strategic blueprint to modernise infrastructure, expand programmes such as Science and Laboratory Technology, and uphold strict discipline, warning against cultism, malpractice, and misconduct.

The ceremony featured the signing of the oath of allegiance by new students and recognition of top performers from various departments.

NEWS

Ondo: 6 worshippers abducted, police arrest suspected informant

AKURE

The Ondo State Police Command has confirmed the abduction of

six worshippers at a Celestial Church located along the Uso/Owo Expressway in Owo Local Government Area.

The Command's spokes-

person, DSP Abayomi Jimoh, said in a statement on Wednesday that the attack occurred at about 12:50 a.m. on February 25, with the victims taken to an unknown destination.

He disclosed that opera-

tives, working in collaboration with the Nigerian Army and local vigilante groups, swiftly mobilised to the scene and launched coordinated rescue operations.

"As a result of sustained joint efforts, one of the kidnapped

victims has been successfully rescued," Jimoh said.

He added that a suspected informant linked to the incident had been arrested and was assisting with ongoing investigations, while security operations continued to secure

the release of the remaining victims and apprehend those responsible.

The police urged residents to remain calm and vigilant, and to provide credible information to support the rescue efforts.

2027: Opposition must shift to policy debate, says Agbakoba

LAGOS

Former President of the Nigerian Bar Association (SAN), Dr Olisa Agbakoba, has urged opposition politicians to elevate the 2027 election discourse from allegations and defections to substantive policy debates.

Speaking at a news conference in Lagos on Wednesday, Agbakoba said Nigerians deserved issue-based engagement capable of delivering meaningful change.

"I put a lot of blame on the opposition. They are more interested in defections than engaging the people and convincing them on what they can do," he said, lamenting what he described as the low quality of current political discourse.

He warned against a cycle where politicians focused on

blaming the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) or resorting to litigation without proper planning and organisation.

On electoral reforms, the senior advocate called on the National Assembly to embed mandatory real-time electronic transmission of results in the Electoral Act, stressing the need to remove ambiguities and close legal loopholes that undermine the people's will.

He also reiterated the call for the establishment of an electoral offences commission and urged President Bola Tinubu to take decisive steps to strengthen the credibility of the 2027 polls.

"Without the amendment, we risk perpetuating disputed elections and protracted litigations that damage democratic credibility," he said.



COURTESY VISIT BY NUJ:

L-R: Mandate Secretary of the FCTA Health Services and Environment Secretariat (HSES), Dr. Adedolapo Fasawe; Chairman, Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), FCT Council, Grace Ike, and Permanent Secretary FCTA Health Services and Environment Secretariat, Dr. Babagana Adam, during a courtesy visit by NUJ delegation to the FCTA Health Services Secretariat in Abuja.

PHOTO: OMOYE AMINU

Reps summon REA MD, demand written response within 48hrs

ABUJA

The House of Representatives Committee on Renewable Energy has directed the Managing Director of the Rural Electrification Agency (REA) to appear before it in person on March 2 over ongoing investigations.

Chairman of the committee, Rep. Afam Ogene, issued the directive during a hearing in Abuja on Wednesday, warning against trivialising official responsibilities.

He also ordered the agency to submit a written response to issues raised by the committee within 48 hours, citing Sections 88 and 89 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended), which empower lawmakers to hold public officers accountable.

Committee member Rep.

Kwamoti Laori described the MD's failure to appear as disrespectful and called for the issuance of a warrant of arrest through the Inspector-General of Police.

Another member, Rep. Shina Oyediji, stressed the need for accountability, particularly given the significant grants and public funds managed by the agency.

Responding, REA Executive Director of Corporate Services, Mr Gboyega Ayoade, apologised on behalf of the agency and said the MD's absence was neither deliberate nor intended as a slight on the committee.

The REA is mandated to expand electricity access to unserved and underserved rural communities, with the goal of lifting over 100 million Nigerians out of energy poverty.

Man in court over alleged N2.5m fraud

IBADAN

A businessman, Blessing Abegunde, was arraigned on Wednesday before the Federal High Court in Ibadan on allegations of defrauding N2.5 million.

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) charged Abegunde with fraud and making false statements, claiming his company, Smart Global Services Ltd., was international.

He allegedly obtained N2.5 million from Olalekan Olayi-

wola in a business transaction.

Abegunde pleaded not guilty.

EFCC prosecutor Mr S. Adamu detailed that the offences occurred on April 21 and 25, 2024, in Ibadan, Oyo State.

Defence counsel Mr T.A. Abdulwahab sought bail, which Justice Nkeonye Maha granted in the sum of N2 million with two reliable sureties.

One surety must own property within the court's jurisdiction, with bail conditions to be fulfilled within eight days. The case was adjourned to April 26 for trial.

Soludo flags off distribution of UBEC materials to Anambra schools

AWKA

The Anambra State Universal Basic Education Board (ASUBEB) has commenced the distribution of teaching and learning materials supplied by the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) to public and mission primary and junior secondary schools across the state.

Flagging off the exercise at the ASUBEB headquarters in

Awka, Governor Chukwuma Soludo urged head teachers to ensure that the materials reached the intended pupils and students for maximum impact.

Represented by the Chairman of the State House of Assembly Committee on Education, Mr Anayo Okpaleke, the governor commended teachers and school administrators for supporting his administration's education reforms.

"This distribution is in line

with our promise to strengthen the weakest link in the public education system," he said, noting that the commitment was being realised through the dedication of teachers statewide.

ASUBEB Chairman, Dr Vera Nwadinobi, said the materials would enhance teaching and learning outcomes and guarantee that every Anambra child had access to essential tools for academic excellence.

She thanked the governor for declaring free basic education with zero levies and for recruiting 8,115 qualified

teachers, adding that the interventions would reposition basic education in the state for improved performance and global competitiveness.

Also speaking, UBEC South-East Director, Mr Isaac Ichenwo, advised that the materials be distributed directly to students rather than stored in school libraries.

Items distributed include 127,776 English and Mathematics textbooks, 44,100 exercise books and writing materials, as well as 3,675 pairs of sandals and 3,675 school bags.

Ex-CBN Director backs MPC's 50 basis-point rate cut

SANGO-OTA (OGUN)

Former Director of Research at the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), Dr Titus Okunroumu, has commended the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) for cutting the Monetary Policy

Rate (MPR) by 50 basis points.

Speaking in Ota on Wednesday, Okunroumu described the decision as a step in the right direction towards stabilising inflation and supporting economic recovery.

"I think the policy is in the right direction aimed at sta-

bilising the inflation rate," he said, while urging the committee to implement additional measures to further reduce the prices of goods and services.

At its 304th meeting held in Abuja from February 23 to 24, the MPC reduced the MPR by 50 basis points to 26.50 per-

cent. It also adjusted the asymmetric corridor to +50/-450 basis points around the MPR, retained the Cash Reserve Ratio at 45 percent for Deposit Money Banks and 16 per cent for Merchant Banks, and maintained the Liquidity Ratio at 30 percent.

Paediatrician links childhood diabetes to genetics, lifestyle

ABUJA

A paediatrician, Dr Nkechi Nwibo, has attributed the rising incidence of diabetes in children to a mix of genetic and lifestyle factors.

Nwibo, a Senior Registrar at Nnamdi Azikiwe University Teaching Hospital, said in Abuja on Wednesday that Type 1 diabetes was linked

to genetic susceptibility, particularly Human Leukocyte Antigen (HLA) genes, and could be triggered by viral infections or early exposure to cow's milk.

She noted that Type 2 diabetes in children was largely driven by obesity, sedentary lifestyles, maternal gestational diabetes and family history, with increasing cases in rapidly

urbanising areas.

According to her, preventive measures such as exclusive breastfeeding and balanced diets can significantly reduce the risk of Type 2 diabetes.

On brain tumours, she identified persistent morning headaches, unexplained vomiting, seizures and balance difficulties as early warning

signs in children, adding that symptoms such as irritability, developmental delays and cranial nerve palsies, including eye movement abnormalities, should not be ignored.

Nwibo explained that Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) remains crucial for diagnosis and stressed that early referral to a neurologist improves treatment outcomes.

Kano sets up 23-member panel to disburse N8bn Singer Market fire relief

KANO
The Kano State Government has inaugurated a 23-member high-level committee to oversee the

transparent and equitable disbursement of N8 billion in financial assistance and relief materials to victims of the devastating Singer Market fire. The inferno, which ravaged

sections of the market on two separate occasions, destroyed goods and business capital estimated to be worth billions of naira, leaving hundreds of traders counting heavy losses.

Inaugurating the committee in Kano, the Secretary to the State Government (SSG), Alhaji Umar Faruq, said the

panel had been mandated to ensure fairness, accountability and credibility in distributing the intervention funds. Faruq, who was represented by the State Attorney-General and Commissioner for Justice, Abdulkarim Maude (SAN), said members were carefully selected from key sectors to guaran-

tee transparency in the process.

Chaired by the SSG, the committee includes commissioners, representatives of the State Emergency Management Agency, the Nigeria Police Force, the Department of State Services, the Kano Emirate Council, religious leaders and representatives of the affected traders.

Faruq said the panel would assess the extent of damage, verify material and capital losses, develop a workable disbursement framework and recommend measures to prevent future fire outbreaks. He added that timely release of funds and sustained engagement with stakeholders and the media formed part of the committee's terms of reference.

Chairman of the Kano Traders Association, Alhaji Sabi'u Bako, commended Govern-

nor Abba Kabir-Yusuf for the prompt intervention and structured approach to relief distribution. He also appreciated the Federal Government's solidarity with victims.

President Bola Tinubu approved N5 billion in palliative support for affected traders, while the Progressives Governors Forum contributed N3 billion to aid recovery. Earlier, Governor Kabir-Yusuf and Deputy Senate President Barau Jibrin had jointly donated N200 million in cash support to cushion the impact of the disaster.

Bako assured that only duly verified victims would benefit from the intervention, noting that the exact number of affected traders and the total value of losses were still being determined.



2026 WORKSHOP OF LAGOS BOY CHILD:

L-R: Commander, 9-Brigade of the Nigerian Army, Brig.-Gen. Ayokunle Owolabi; wife of Lagos State Governor and Organiser of the event, Dr Ibijoke Sanwo-Olu; wife of the Speaker of Lagos State House of Assembly, Falilat Obasa; President, Nigerian Army Officers' Wives Association (NAOWA), 9 Brigade branch, Mrs Anifah Ahmed and Commander, Air Force Base, Ikeja, Air Commodore Mohammed Imam, during the 2026 workshop of Lagos Boy Child Initiative Residential organised by the First Lady of Lagos State in Lagos recently.

NSCDC, NUPENG-LPGAR move against illegal gas dealers in Anambra

AWKA
The Anambra State Command of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) has pledged closer collaboration with stakeholders in the oil and gas sector to curb illegal activities and strengthen operational safety across the state.

The command said the partnership would involve the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers – Liquefied Petroleum Gas Retailers Association (NUPENG-LPGAR) and petroleum retailers.

According to a statement by the Head of Media and Tactical Operations, Mr Edwin Okadigbo, the State Commandant,

Mr Maku Olatunde, made the pledge during a courtesy visit by the Anambra Chapter of NUPENG-LPGAR led by its chairman, Mr Tochukwu Ngini.

Olatunde stressed the need for joint efforts to tackle unregistered gas retailers and unethical practices in gas storage, distribution and sales, warning that the corps would not shirk its responsibility to enforce compliance and ensure safety in the sector.

He urged LPG operators to

prioritise safety standards and avoid practices that endanger lives and property.

Ngini raised concerns over the circulation of substandard cylinders and the hazardous presence of high-propane LPG, describing them as serious risks to both operators and consumers.

He pledged the union's cooperation in joint enforcement operations to eliminate illegal operators and ensure adherence to best practices.

Farmers hail World Bank's \$500m agric loan, demand transparency

LAGOS
Farmers and agricultural stakeholders in Lagos State have welcomed the proposed \$500 million World Bank loan to Nigeria's agriculture sector, but have called for transparency and proper implementation. The World Bank is expected to approve the facility in March 2026, with funding from the International Development

Association. The loan is aimed at boosting food production, strengthening value chains and creating jobs across participating states.

The Federal Government, through the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, will coordinate the project.

Acting Chairman of the All Farmers Association of Nigeria (AFAN), Lagos Chapter, Mr Shakin Agbayewa, described

the loan as timely, especially amid high inflation and limited access to affordable credit.

He, however, expressed concern about execution, urging that disbursement should be channelled through AFAN's established structures from national to local government levels to ensure the funds reach genuine farmers and effectively tackle food insecurity.

An agricultural analyst and

farmer, Mr Omotunde Banjoko, echoed similar concerns, noting that past interventions often lacked transparency and were sometimes skewed towards specific regions or sub-sectors.

While acknowledging the potential of the loan to transform agriculture, stakeholders said its success would ultimately depend on clear targeting, equitable distribution and strict monitoring of implementation.

Lekki Council chair cracks down on domestic violence, child abuse

LEKKI
Chairman of the Lekki Local Council Development Area (LCDA), Engr. Bamidele Kasali, has warned against domestic violence and child molestation, declaring that offenders will face arrest and prosecution.

Kasali said the warning became necessary in view of rising cases of domestic abuse and violations of the girl-child within communities.

He urged residents to uphold moral values and foster a culture of respect, dignity and protection for women and children, while calling on

community leaders, religious institutions and stakeholders to intensify advocacy against abuse.

The council boss encouraged victims and witnesses to promptly report incidents to relevant authorities, assuring that the council would continue to collaborate with security

agencies to ensure justice and protect vulnerable persons.

Kasali also pledged sustained partnership with federal and Lagos State ministries, civil society organisations and other stakeholders on grassroots sensitisation programmes aimed at curbing domestic violence and child abuse.

ELRA, AMSL seal deal to deepen transparency in maritime financing

ABUJA
The Equipment Leasing Registration Authority (ELRA) and Admiralty Maritime Services Ltd. (AMSL) have formalised a strategic partnership aimed at strengthening asset registration, enhancing regulatory compliance and boosting investor confidence in Nigeria's maritime sector.

In a statement issued by ELRA's Head of Media and Corporate Communication, Adebola Sunday, the Registrar and Chief Executive Officer of ELRA, Mr Donald Wokoma, described the agreement as a key step towards formalising asset-backed financing nationwide.

Wokoma said the collaboration would drive structured financing in the shipping and

marine services sector, deepen transparency and reinforce regulatory oversight for sustainable growth.

He added that improved asset documentation and lease registration would enhance credit security for financiers and attract long-term capital inflows into the industry.

Managing Director of AMSL, Rear Adm. Mushin Abba, said the partnership aligned the company's operations and financing processes with recognised regulatory standards, strengthening corporate governance and positioning it as an investor-ready service provider.

Both parties said the agreement would tighten compliance with lease registration standards and promote greater accountability across the maritime ecosystem.

PTDF champions homegrown research in oil, gas

ABUJA
The Petroleum Technology Development Fund (PTDF) has reiterated its commitment to promoting indigenous research and technology development in Nigeria's oil and gas sector.

Malam Ahmed Aminu, Executive Secretary of PTDF, made the statement on Wednesday in Abuja during a combined peer review of the Annual Oil and Gas Research Grant Competition and the Endowment Research Programme.

Aminu said the review assessed selected projects in areas such as integrated pipeline monitoring, carbon nanotube-enhanced solar cells, renewable energy from non-edible oil seeds, sustainable fuels, and geological studies of the Middle Benue Trough.

Two awardees under the Oil and Gas Research Grant Programme and three research streams under the Endowment Programme were evaluated,

showing strong potential for Intellectual Property Rights registration and commercialisation.

"PTDF, established by Act 25 of 1973, is mandated to build the capacity and competencies of Nigerians in the oil and gas industry," Aminu said, stressing that registered patents and research publications are key performance indicators.

Mrs Orisemeyiwa Eyesan, representing the Nigeria Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission (NUPRC), lauded PTDF for enhancing research credibility and fostering policy-driven collaboration, while Mr Sonny Echono of TET-Fund, represented by Saaban Labaran, pledged support for PTDF's vision of strengthening Nigeria's research ecosystem.

The peer review drew steering committee members, industry leaders, experts, end users, and researchers to assess the methodology, progress, relevance, and expected impact of ongoing initiatives.

NEWS

Sule sends relief to Plateau crisis victims in Nasarawa

LAFIA

The Nasarawa State Government on Wednesday distributed relief materials to persons displaced by the communal crisis in neighbouring Plateau State who have sought refuge in parts of Nasarawa.

The distribution, supervised in Assakio, Lafia Local Government Area, by the Director-General of the Nasarawa

State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA), Mr Benjamin Akwash, was aimed at cushioning the hardship faced by the displaced persons.

Akwash said the intervention was in response to the influx of victims forced to flee their homes due to insecurity, noting that the gesture formed part of Governor Abdullahi Sule's efforts to support them during the difficult period.

He appealed to communi-

ties across the state to continue supporting government efforts to maintain peace and security.

The Administrator of Lafia East Development Area, Mr Jeremiah Ishaleku, thanked the governor for the assistance and

pledged to ensure equitable distribution of the items.

He noted that the cordial relationship between communities in the area and their Plateau neighbours accounted for the decision of the displaced

persons to seek refuge there, and urged host communities to sustain the existing peace.

Similarly, the Village Head of Jibel, Mr Inusa Yarima, alongside some beneficiaries, expressed appreciation to Governor Sule and

called for closer collaboration between Nasarawa and Plateau states to strengthen security.

Items distributed included bags of rice, maize, millet and garri, as well as cartons of seasoning and detergents.

100,000 vulnerable residents benefit daily from ramadan feeding

KANO

The Kano State Government has disclosed that no fewer than 100,000 vulnerable residents benefit daily from its Ramadan feeding programme across eight metropolitan local government areas.

The Secretary of the Feeding Committee, Alhaji Akibu Murtala, made this known while speaking with journalists in Kano on Wednesday.

He said the initiative, sustained by the administration of Governor Abba Kabir Yusuf, was designed to ease hardship

during Ramadan and enable beneficiaries to break their fast with dignity.

According to him, the programme targets vulnerable groups and serves as a cushion against prevailing economic challenges.

He added that the government had warned contractors against providing substandard meals, vowing sanctions for non-compliance.

Murtala reaffirmed the administration's commitment to transparency and accountability in the implementation of the programme.

NDA, 1 Division deepen operational collaboration

KADUNA

The Commandant of the Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA), Maj.-Gen. Oluyemi Olatoye, has paid a courtesy visit to the General Officer Commanding (GOC), 1 Division of the Nigerian Army, Maj.-Gen. Abubakar Wase, in Kaduna, as part of efforts to strengthen operational collaboration.

Wase also serves as Commander, Sector 1 Joint Task Force (North West), Operation Fansan Yamma.

The visit, held at the 1 Division Headquarters in Kawo, Kaduna, was in keeping with military tradition and aimed at reinforcing cooperation between the Division and the Academy.

Olatoye commended the Division for its consistent operational support to the NDA,

particularly through the 37 Demonstration Battalion.

He noted that the integration of the Academy into the Division's security framework had significantly improved rapid response to threats within the institution and neighbouring communities.

He acknowledged visible improvements in security around the Academy, stating that previous gaps had been effectively addressed to ensure sustained protection of personnel, infrastructure and training activities.

In his remarks, Wase praised the Commandant's leadership and reaffirmed the Division's commitment to supporting the NDA and other military formations, stressing that seamless collaboration remained vital to operational success in the region.



2026 MATRICULATION CEREMONY:

L-R: Guest Lecturer, Prof. Lateef Sanni; Provost, Federal College of Agriculture (FCA), Ibadan, Dr Ibrahim Lawal, and Director-General, Forestry Research Institute of Nigeria, Dr Zacharia Buba, during the 2026 Matriculation ceremony of FCA in Ibadan on Wednesday.

Ahmad Abubakar Gumi backs forest security outfit, warns against airstrikes

KADUNA

An Islamic scholar, Ahmad Abubakar Gumi, has endorsed the proposed Nigerian Forest Security Service (NFSS) as a strategic step to flush out bandits from forests across the country, while cautioning against the use of aerial bombardments in

anti-banditry operations.

Speaking during his Ramadan Tafsir in Kaduna, the cleric urged the proposed outfit to deploy decisive force against criminal elements but warned that airstrikes could lead to heavy civilian casualties.

He referenced the tragic incident at Tudun Biri in Igabi Local Government Area of Ka-

duna State, where more than 100 residents were reportedly killed in a mistaken airstrike by the Nigerian Air Force.

According to him, although tackling banditry requires firm and coordinated action, deploying bombs in forest operations poses serious risks to innocent communities living within or around affected areas.

Gumi observed that bandit groups had grown increasingly violent and dangerous, at-

tributing the trend to alleged external influences aimed at destabilising the country.

He said the development appeared to validate earlier concerns that such groups could evolve into full-fledged terrorist organisations if not decisively addressed.

He urged authorities to adopt strategies capable of dislodging criminal elements from forest enclaves while safeguarding civilian lives.

AI skills crucial to modern Journalism, says Oyo Commissioner

IBADAN

The Oyo State Commissioner for Information and Civic Orientation, Mr Dotun Oyelade, has said that proficiency in Artificial Intelligence (AI) is essential for addressing the evolving challenges of modern journalism practice.

Oyelade spoke at a one-day Google training programme held in Ibadan, where he commended the Nigeria Union of

Journalists (NUJ), Oyo State Council, for prioritising AI training for its members.

He stressed the importance of continuous professional development, urging participants to make the most of the opportunity.

According to him, AI poses no threat to journalists willing to adapt and acquire new skills.

"The challenges of information gathering are growing by the day, and we cannot afford

to be left behind," he said, adding that the initiative would help practitioners remain relevant and enhance professional standards.

Earlier, the Chairman of the NUJ Oyo State Council, Mr Akeem Abas, expressed appreciation to dignitaries and journalists who attended the training, the second in the series. He said the programme, organised in partnership with Google Africa, was aimed at equipping

journalists with digital competencies and strengthening ethical and impactful reporting.

Abas noted that journalists who embraced AI stood to benefit professionally and called for support towards establishing a fact-checking platform ahead of the 2027 general elections. He also thanked Google Africa for the collaboration and reaffirmed the union's commitment to professional excellence.

Tinubu swears in Disu as acting IGP

● Orders immediate push to restore peace nationwide

ABUJA

President Bola Tinubu on Wednesday formally swore in and decorated Olatunji Disu as Acting Inspector-General of Police, charging him to urgently restore peace, strengthen internal security and rebuild public confidence in the nation's policing system.

At the ceremony held at the State House, Abuja, the President declared that the new police chief assumes office at a defining moment in Nigeria's security trajectory, amid persistent threats of banditry, terrorism and other violent crimes across parts of the country.

"For you to assume this responsibility, I know your re-

cord," Tinubu said, expressing confidence in Disu's competence and leadership capacity.

He recalled the officer's performance during his tenure as Governor of Lagos State, noting that his dedication and professionalism had been closely observed.

Describing the appointment as strategic and timely,

the President said the task before the new Acting IGP was both urgent and enormous.

He directed him to strengthen discipline within the Force, deepen inter-agency collaboration and ensure that the protection of lives and property remains paramount.

"You assume this responsibility at a defining moment for our nation's security. I expect you to strengthen discipline, enhance inter-agency collaboration and restore peace,"

Tinubu stated.

He further urged Disu to lead the Force firmly but fairly, insisting on professionalism at all levels and rebuilding citi-

zens' trust in law enforcement.

"It's a daunting challenge. I know you can do it. You have my word; you have my full support," the President assured.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, formerly known and addressed as **EBEKU VERONICA**, now wish to be known and addressed as **UBONG VERONICA EBEKU**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and the general public please note.

CONFIRMATION OF NAME

The general public is hereby notified that **TAIYE JUDE AJOBIBA** and **TAIYE AJOBIEWE** are one and the same person. Henceforth, I wish to be known and addressed as **TAIYE AJOBIEWE**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and the general public please note.

JUDICIARY

NEWS

ICPC investigation stalls El-Rufai's arraignment

ABUJA

The ongoing investigation of former Gov. Nasir El-Rufai of Kaduna State by the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), on Wednesday, stalled his arraignment by the Department of State Services (DSS).

El-Rufai's arraignment, which was scheduled for today before Justice Joyce Abdulmalik of the Federal High Court in Abuja could not go on due to the absence of the former

governor in court.

When the matter was called, DSS lawyer, Oluwale Aladedoye, SAN, informed the court that though the matter was scheduled for the defendant to take his plea, he was yet to be released to them by the sister agency.

"The matter is supposed to be for arraignment today my lord. Unfortunately, the defendant is in the custody of the ICPC and we won't be able to proceed," he said.

Aladedoye said he already had a discussion with the counsel for the ex-governor and had

agreed to come another date.

"But I don't know how long the investigation at the ICPC will last. If we can have a date by March 10 my lord," he said.

Responding, Oluwale Iyamu, SAN, who confirmed Aladedoye's submission, however, said that the prosecuting lawyer was silent on the issue of bail for his client.

Iyamu said Aladedoye had assured him that the DSS would not be opposing to their bail application.

Aladedoye stated that though the security outfit will not raise

objection to the defendant's bail plea, the issue of bail could only be brought upon his arraignment.

Iyamu, however, disagreed with Aladedoye's submission, insisting that El-Rufai's bail application can be taken before arraignment.

The lawyer, who cited Section 158 of the Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA), 2015, said El-Rufai can be admitted to bail since the DSS had already filed a charge against his client.

Besides, he submitted that ICPC that is holding the for-

mer governor is a sister agency to the DSS.

He alleged that the failure of the anti-corruption commission to release him was a ploy to delay the bail application.

"It amounts to oppressive act if they feel the application should be after the investigation because they (the DSS) took him there," Iyamu further alleged.

He restated that the court could graciously admit the defendant to bail.

Aladedoye, however, corrected Iyamu's impression that the DSS handed over El-Rufai to the ICPC.

"My lord, may I correct the impression that we (DSS) took the defendant there (ICPC). The defendant was taken custody by the EFCC and later arrested by ICPC. So what was our involvement?" he asked.

He argued that it was premature to discuss issues of El-Rufai's bail now because he was



NEWS CONFERENCE:

L-R: Member, Media and Publicity Working Group (MPWG), forthcoming World Public Relations Forum, Mr Alex Enemanna; Chairman, MPWG, Dr Kudu Mohammed, and acting Director, Public Relations, National Institute of Public Relations (NIPR), Mr Duku Imaudu, during a news conference after the signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on World Public Relations Forum between NIPR and News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) at the agency's headquarters in Abuja on Wednesday.

Keyamo, lawyers to sensitise air travelers on right under law

LAGOS

The Minister of Aviation and Aerospace Development, Festus Keyamo (SAN) is set to deliver a keynote address at a one-day workshop for lawyers and air flight passengers, scheduled for March 12.

This is contained in a statement by the workshop Coordinator, Mrs Emmanuella Obi, Synergy Attornies, issued to newsmen on Wednesday in

Lagos.

According to her, the workshop put together by the Jewreit Law Resource Centre, in collaboration with Synergy Attornies, is with the theme: Passengers' Right Under the Law; Ethical Obligations and Strategic Compliance.

Speaking further, she added that Mr Michael Achimugu, Director, Public Affairs and Consumer Protection Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority, was also expected at the event, as

one of the speakers.

Obi, a lawyer, noted that the purpose for the workshop was to provide relevant information and legal updates to air travelers.

She added that it was also to enhance consumer awareness and address misconceptions that discouraged members of the public, from patronising air transportation, due to lack of adequate knowledge.

Obi, also an Associate, Institute of Chartered Mediation

and Conciliation, (AICMC) said that the hybrid workshop, which also targeted every sector that patronised air travel, would have Mr Abiodun Awonikoko (SAN) Principal Partner, Synergy Attornies, as host.

According to her, the workshop is also expecting Mr Oyin Bashorun (SAN), Principal Partner, Churchfield Solicitors, to speak at the event.

She urged interested participants to register using infor@synergylawattornies.com.

Woman, 34, docked over alleged assault, conspiracy

SANGO-OTA (OGUN)

A 34-year old woman, Ajasa Dorcas, was on Wednesday, arraigned before an Ota Magistrates' Court, Ogun, over alleged assault and conspiracy.

Dorcas, whose address was not provided, is facing a two-count of assault and conspiracy to which he pleaded not guilty.

The Prosecutor, ASP E.O. Adaraloye, told the court that the defendant committed the offence at about 6.00p.m on Feb 13, at Eko block Bus-Stop, Lafenwa Itele, Ota.

Adaraloye said that the defendant and others now at large,

conspired to assault the complainant, Modester Michael, and injured him in the face.

The prosecutor said that the offences contravened Sections 355 and 516 of the Criminal Code, Laws of Ogun, 2006.

The Magistrate, Mrs O.O. Fadairo, granted the defendant bail in the sum of N100,000, with one surety in like sum.

She ordered that the surety who must reside within the court's jurisdiction, should be gainfully employed, and present evidence of tax payment.

The magistrate adjourned the case until March 11, for further hearing.

12 security guards arraigned over alleged theft of cables valued N755,000

IBADAN

The Police on Wednesday, arraigned 12 security guards before the Iyaganku Magistrates' Court, Ibadan, over alleged theft of armour cables valued N755,000.

The defendants were Adenekan Kolawole, 42, Olawale Odierinde, 32, Oladejo Kunle, 61, Akanbi Mutiu, 54, Adegbenro Jubril, 27, Nurudeen Olalekan, 26,

Also arraigned were, Rufus Adetunji, 72, Sarafadeen Lasisi, 52, Sulaimon Lamidi, 55, Ayo Yusuf, 61, Babalola Samuel, 29, and Oladunjoye Okikidayo, 39.

They are being charged with conspiracy, damage and stealing to which they pleaded not guilty.

The Prosecutor, Olapeju Durodola told the court that the defendants and others now at large conspired to commit the offence.

Durodola said that at about 1.00a.m on Feb. 21, the defendants stole armoured cable and transformer cable log within the Iyaganku Magistrates' Court premises.

She said that the offence contravened Section 390 (6) 451 and and 516 of the Criminal Code Laws of Oyo State, 2000.

The Chief Magistrate, Mrs Olabisi Ogunkanmi admitted each of the defendant to bail in the sum of N250,000, with one surety in like sum.

Ogunkanmi adjourned the matter until April 23, for hearing.

Pastor Okafor's suit: Court to rule on preliminary objection April 16

IKEJA

An Ikeja High Court has fixed April 16 to deliver ruling in a suit filed by Nigerian pastor, Dr Chris Okafor, against a Nollywood actress Doris Ogala and two others.

The two other defendants in the suit marked ID/14399GC-MW/2026 are a social media influencer, Martins Otse, a.k.a VeryDarkMan (VDM) and one Kelvin Emmanuel.

Okafor joined Ogala, VDM and Emmanuel, as first, second and third defendants respectively.

When the case was called on Wednesday, Okafor's Coun-

sel, Mr Ife Ajayi informed the court that all parties in the suit have been served according to the proof of service by the court's Sheriff.

Ajayi, thereafter, prayed the court for an extension of time within which preliminary objections would be regularised.

Ogala's Counsel, Mr Nzeakor Atulomah, however, informed the court of a notice of preliminary objection dated Jan. 29.

Atulomah argued that the writ of summons by the claimant did not comply with Section 97 of Sheriff and Civil Process Act, which was mandatory.

He consequently urged the

court to strike out the suit.

Atulomah further argued that the service on the first defendant was done out of jurisdiction.

"The first defendant is not based in Lagos.

"The claimant even said that all the defendants are based in Abuja and not Lagos," he said.

Okafor's counsel, Ajayi, in his counter affidavit dated Feb.10, sought leave of the court to amend the processes filed.

He argued that the claimant had filed a proper writ of summons from the point of law.

Justice Akintunde Savage adjourned until April 16 for ruling on preliminary objec-

tions after hearing the submissions of the counsel.

The court had on Feb.2, granted leave to serve a notice of preliminary objection by electronic means on the defendants.

The court had also on Jan.22, granted an interim order restraining the defendants from further mentioning or referring to Okafor, his church or ministry on any platform, pending determination of the substantive suit.

The interim order followed an ex-parte application brought pursuant to Order 43 Rules 1, 2 and 7 of the High Court of Lagos State (Civil Procedure) Rules 2019.

Man, 35, remanded over alleged burglary, stealing

ADO-EKITI

The police, on Wednesday, brought an application before an Ado-Ekiti Chief Magistrates' Court, seeking remand of a 35-year-old man, Ibrahim Ismail, over alleged burglary and stealing.

In a form K filed by the police, the prosecutor, Insp Olubu Apat, said that the defendant committed the offence on Jan. 29, at about 04:00 a.m. in Ado-Ekiti.

He alleged that the defendant conspired with others at

large, to break into the house of one Mr Augustine Felix, to steal a TVS ladies motorcycle valued at N1.5 million.

According to him, the offence contravenes provisions of sections 302, 322(c) and 421 of the Criminal Law of Ekiti State, 2021.

The plea of the defendant was not taken.

The prosecutor urged the court to remand the defendant at the correctional centre, pending legal advice from the office of the Director of Public Prosecution (DPP).

NEWS

Foreign

Trump's theatrical State of the Union address offers little hint of any change in course

Donald Trump delivered a combative State of the Union address on Tuesday night that hailed what he said was an American "turnaround for the ages".

At a time when polls suggest many in the US are dissatisfied with the current state of the nation – and with Trump's leadership of it – the president offered little hint of a change of course.

Instead, with an eye on crucial midterm elections later this year, he delivered a sales pitch to the nation, a patriotic rallying cry to his loyal supporters and taunts for his political opponents.

It was a speech filled with the-

atrical flourishes – the kind of made-for-the-camera moments the man who once hosted a reality television show seems to enjoy.

Early on, he welcomed the US Olympic men's hockey team to the gallery. They held up their gold medals as Republicans chanted "USA!" and even Democrats stood and applauded.

Later, Trump praised military heroes including a 100-year-old World War Two veteran who received a Medal of Honor, and a Coast Guard swimmer who rescued 165 people trapped in last year's Texas flooding and was given a Legion of Merit award for Extraordinary Heroism.

Although his speech set a record for length at 107 minutes, these moments quickened the pace of the evening and fit with the president's larger theme of American patriotism and accomplishment.

His speech opened with familiar lines. "Our nation is back," he said. It was the "hottest" country in the world. At one point, after blaming Democrats for creating a crisis of "affordability", he added: "We are doing really well."

He pointed to the rising incomes, a growing stock market, lower petrol prices, a southern border with dramatically reduced undocumented migrant crossing and tamed inflation.

"Our country is winning again," he concluded.

The challenge for the president is that his public approval ratings are hovering around 40 percent, and the American public wants him to do more to address their concerns.

Two months ago, he gave a national address from the White House where he struck similar themes and cited similar statistics – but it hasn't convinced the public. The president and his aides appear to be hoping that with a bigger State of the Union audience, which should measure in the tens of millions, the results will be different.

Threat of further violence looms after Mexican cartel rampage

Driving into Mexico's western city of Guadalajara, the evidence of Sunday's terrifying cartel rampage is still visible.

The charred debris of burnt cars sits on roadsides and there are scorched patches of asphalt on the highways after the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG) – one of the most powerful and feared cartels in the country – set scores of vehicles alight in response to the killing of their boss, Nemesio "El Mencho" Oseguera.

This and the sight of ransacked or burning convenience stores projected exactly the message the CJNG wanted: that with or without their chief, they remain powerful, with the ability to unleash havoc and chaos on the streets – sowing fear and intimidation on a mass scale.

Mexico's President Claudia Sheinbaum has been trying to counter this narrative. In her daily press conference on Monday, she spoke of "peace and tranquillity" returning to much of the nation and praised the response of the security forces.

Meanwhile, convoys of troops and police officers circulate around Guadalajara. They are meant to bring reassurance but, for many residents, add to

the sense of unease.

Despite their presence, the streets are emptier than usual – a sign that people fear more violence, both in Guadalajara and in the wider Jalisco state. Most small businesses were shuttered and schools were closed as workers stayed at home, lying low with their families.

The owner of the Severo café, Anwar Montoya, was not among them.

"I had to open today. We're a new business and I have a lot of things to pay for," he tells the BBC, laughing.

Speaking about the recent violence, he says: "It was a strange and difficult day – everybody was scared. And now some are afraid about what might still happen."

Montoya felt that opening his café would be welcome, in order to provide "secure area for a lot of friends".

His customers appeared to appreciate the decision, with most tables full of young people on their laptops or chatting quietly in the shade of the roof terrace.

Among his customers was left-wing parliamentary deputy Mariana Casillas. She sees many things wrong with what has happened in Jalisco – both in the cartel's violence and the government's response.



STAFF MEETING:

An image released by the US House Oversight Committee from the Epstein files in December last year.

Bill Gates 'took responsibility' over Epstein ties in staff meeting, foundation says

Bill Gates "took responsibility for his actions" and addressed his links to convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein during a meeting with staff from his charitable foundation, the organisation said.

"Bill spoke candidly, addressing several questions in detail," the Gates Foundation said in a statement.

The Wall Street Journal (WSJ) reported that Gates apologised to staff, said he had two affairs with Russian women which Epstein later found out about, and in relation to the late financier said: "I did nothing illicit. I saw nothing illicit."

Gates has come under renewed scrutiny over his relationship with Epstein following the release of files by the US Department of Justice in January.

The Microsoft co-founder, 70, has not been accused of wrongdoing by any of Epstein's victims.

The WSJ reported that Gates said it was a "huge mistake to spend

time with Epstein", but insisted he "never spent any time with victims, the women around him".

"I apologise to other people who are drawn into this because of the mistake that I made," he told staff, according to the US newspaper, which said it had reviewed a recording of Gates's remarks.

It reported that Gates said images of him with women, whose faces are redacted, included in the so-called Epstein files were pictures that the late financier asked him to take with his assistants after their meetings.

An image released by the US House Oversight Committee from the Epstein files in December last year

Gates told the foundation's staff he met Epstein in 2011 – years after Epstein pleaded guilty to soliciting a minor for prostitution – adding that he said he was aware of some "18-month thing" that had limited Epstein's travel, but that he didn't properly check his back-

ground, according to the report.

He continued to meet Epstein through 2014, and spent time with him abroad, he reportedly said, adding that he "never stayed overnight" or visited Epstein's island.

The relationship continued even after his ex-wife expressed doubts, he is reported to have said, adding: "To give her credit, she was always kind of sceptical about the Epstein thing."

Epstein told him he had links with other billionaires and suggested he could help raise money for charitable causes Gates was engaged with, the paper reported.

A spokesperson for the Gates Foundation said in a statement: "This was a scheduled town hall with employees, which Bill does twice a year."

"In the conversation, Bill answered questions submitted by foundation staff on a range of issues, including the release of the Epstein files, the foundation's work in AI, and the future of global health."

"In the town hall, Bill spoke candidly, addressing several questions in detail, and took responsibility for his actions."

Gates established his philanthropic organisation alongside his then wife, Melinda French Gates. They divorced in 2021 after 27 years of marriage.

In an interview with an NPR podcast earlier this month she said the latest release of files dredged up "painful times in my marriage".

"I am so happy to be away from all the muck," she said, adding elsewhere in the interview: "Whatever questions remain there of what – I can't even begin to know all of it – those questions are for those people and for even my ex-husband."

"They need to answer to those things, not me."

US media have reported that before their separation Melinda had been upset about her husband's association with Epstein. After their split was announced, Bill Gates acknowledged having had an affair with a Microsoft employee in 2019.

Japan to deploy missiles on island near Taiwan by 2031

Japan plans to deploy surface-to-air missiles to its remote western island near Taiwan by March 2031, its defence minister said, as regional tensions simmer.

It is the first time that Japan specified a timeline for the missile deployment to Yonaguni island since it was announced in 2022.

China claims self-ruled Taiwan as its own and has not ruled out the use of force to "reunify" with it. Yonaguni is visible from Taiwan's shores on a clear day, located just 110km (68 miles) away.

Tensions between Tokyo and Beijing have run high since November when Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi appeared to suggest that Japan would activate its self-defence force in the event of an attack on Taiwan.

The worry has long been that any attack on Taiwan, which counts the US as an ally, could result in a direct military conflict between Washington and Beijing, then widen to include other US allies in the region such as Japan.

Takaichi's remarks to parliament plunged ties with China to their lowest level in years and Beijing has been piling on the pressure in a wide range of ways – sending warships, throttling rare earth exports, curbing Chinese tourism, cancelling concerts and even reclaiming its pandas.

Japanese defence minister

Shinjiro Koizumi announced the timeline for the missiles on Tuesday, a day after China imposed export curbs on 20 Japanese companies and entities, citing national security concerns.

Koizumi said the Yonaguni unit will be equipped with medium-range surface-to-air missiles able to intercept incoming aircraft and missiles.

With a range of about 50km and 360-degree capability, the Japanese-made missile system can track up to 100 targets simultaneously and engage up to 12 at once.

China has yet to react to Koizumi's announcement. But when Koizumi visited Yonaguni in November, Beijing said Japan was moving to "create regional tension and provoke military confrontation".

Within days, China flew drones near the island to express its anger, prompting Japan to scramble aircraft jets in response.

The latest developments come after Takaichi secured a landslide victory in parliamentary elections earlier this month. That victory gave Takaichi political space to double down on boosting Japan's defence capabilities.

This makes the announcement on Yonaguni island more than just a military adjustment – it looks like the opening chapter for a more assertive Tokyo. And as Takaichi bolsters the country's military and defence budget, such assertiveness seems unlikely to end here.

Senegal PM proposes tougher anti-LGBT law, doubling prison terms

Senegal's Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko has introduced legislation that could double the maximum penalty for same-sex relations, making them punishable by up to 10 years in prison.

The proposal was sent to parliament on Tuesday after cabinet approval last week, after a wave of arrests over alleged same-sex relationships, already banned under Senegal law.

Addressing lawmakers, Sonko said the bill would punish what it describes as "acts against nature" with prison sentences ranging from five to 10 years, compared with the current one- to five-year terms.

"If an act is committed with a minor, it will attract the maximum penalty," he said. The bill has been criticised by rights advocates.

Debate over LGBT rights has long generated tension in Senegal, a conservative country where some groups portray pro-LGBT activism as foreign interference.

Religious organisations have held demonstrations in recent years calling for harsher punishments.

Earlier this month, police detained 12 men, among them two public figures and a prominent journalist, under anti-LG-

BT laws. Local media outlets say around 30 people have been arrested in total this month.

Sonko explained that the draft law defines any sexual conduct between two people of the same sex as an "act against nature".

The bill proposes prison terms of three to seven years for anyone found to be promoting or advocating same-sex relations.

It also prescribes separate punishment for those who accuse others of homosexuality "without proof".

Those found guilty of crimes in the bill could also face fines up to 10 million CFA francs (about \$18,000; €13,000), Sonko added.

Sonko said the revised law would keep the offence at its current misdemeanour level.

"We can achieve the intended objectives without going so far as to elevate the acts to the level of more serious crimes," he added.

A date has yet to be set for parliament to vote on the bill, in a chamber controlled by Sonko's Pastef party.

Sonko, a former firebrand opposition leader appointed prime minister in 2024, had pledged to criminalise same-sex relations in the Muslim-majority country.

Harry and Meghan visit refugee camp as part of Middle East trip

The Duke and Duchess of Sussex met children at a refugee camp and a hospital in Jordan as part of a two-day tour.

Prince Harry and Meghan arrived in the Middle Eastern country on Wednesday where they will be highlighting efforts to support vulnerable communities affected by conflict and displacement.

The couple, who stepped down as working royals in 2020, have travelled to Amman at the invitation of Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director-general of the World Health Organization (WHO).

Their visit comes at time of crisis for the Royal Family following the arrest of Harry's uncle, Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, on suspicion of misconduct in public office.

Harry and Meghan arrived in Amman on Wednesday morning for their first international tour together in 18 months, and were warmly greeted by Ghebreyesus on the steps of WHO's country office in the Jordanian capital.

Once inside, the couple joined a discussion hosted by the WHO with individuals from leading bodies including the United Nations and many of its agencies, diplomatic representatives, and donors.

During their trip, Meghan and Harry will support the WHO's efforts to spotlight Jordan's leadership in the regional

humanitarian health response. After the meeting, the couple travelled north of Amman to the sprawling Za'atari Refugee Camp, where families live in semi-permanent homes with a few shops available.

They toured a youth centre run by the social development organisation Questscope. It provides a number of activities from art and photography classes to music and sport, to engage the youngsters and help alleviate mental health issues.

BBC Food The Duchess of Sussex kicks a ball while girls look on from the view of inside an astro turf pitch. BBC Food

The Duchess of Sussex scored while her husband saw his effort saved

Harry and Meghan played football, visited a number of classrooms, observed teenage girls playing traditional Arabic instruments and in another space, more musicians performed with violins and guitars.

Over the next two days, Harry and Meghan are set to meet Jordanian leaders and senior health officials.

They are expected to engage with WHO teams, visit front line health and mental health programmes and meet World Central Kitchen staff who are co-ordinating food relief for Gaza from Amman.

Philip Hall, British Ambassador to Jordan, thanked the Sussexes for travelling to the Middle East.



VISIT SPECIALITY HOSPITAL:

The Duke and Duchess of Sussex met Maria, a 14-year-old burn victim from Gaza, during a visit to the Speciality Hospital in Amman.

Zimbabwe rejects 'lopsided' US health aid deal over data concerns

Zimbabwe has rejected a US health deal that would have provided \$367m (£272m) in funding over five years because of Washington's demand for sensitive data.

The decision has come to light after a government memo from December was leaked, revealing that President Emmerson Mnangagwa felt the deal was "lopsided".

A government spokesman has since explained the US was demanding access to biological samples for research and commercial gain but said it was not willing to share the benefits for future vaccines and treatments.

"We will now turn to the difficult and regrettable task of winding down our health

assistance in Zimbabwe," US ambassador to Zimbabwe Pamela Tremont said in a statement.

Her embassy said the US had provided more than \$1.9bn in health funding to Zimbabwe over the last two decades.

A doctors' association in Zimbabwe has called for further dialogue to find a deal acceptable to both sides so the country's HIV programme can continue.

In December, Kenya's High Court suspended a similar health funding agreement the government had signed with the US after a consumer rights lobby filed a case citing concerns about the safety of Kenyans' health data.

Since returning to office last year, US President Donald

Trump has slashed foreign aid and closed the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

The agency had administered aid for the US government, but Trump argued its spending was "wasteful" and his administration was pursuing government-to-government deals to boost transparency and accountability.

According to the US embassy in Zimbabwe, 16 African countries have so far signed health pacts representing more than \$18.3bn in new funding.

It said the money for Zimbabwe would have gone towards "HIV/Aids treatment and prevention, tuberculosis, malaria, maternal and child health, and disease outbreak

preparedness".

"We believe this collaboration would have delivered extraordinary benefits for Zimbabwean communities especially the 1.2 million men, women and children currently receiving HIV treatment through US-supported programmes," Tremont said.

But government spokesperson Nick Mangwana said the arrangement was "asymmetrical".

"Zimbabwe was being asked to share its biological resources and data over an extended period, with no corresponding guarantee of access to any medical innovations - such as vaccines, diagnostics, or treatments - that might result from that shared data," his statement said.

German chancellor lands in Beijing for inaugural China trip

Germany's chancellor has touched down in China as German businesses sound the alarm about a yawning trade imbalance.

Imports into Germany from China were more than double the value of those exported back last year - according to federal statistics.

"We want a partnership with China that is balanced, reliable, regulated and fair," said Friedrich Merz, before leaving for Beijing.

Merz is also expected to press China to use its influence with Moscow to help end the war in Ukraine. However, the huge trade gap looms large over these talks as the chancellor takes along a sizeable business delegation.

China once again took the top spot as Germany's biggest trade partner in 2025, supplanting the US.

Behind that headline is a stark and worrying imbalance for Germany, the EU's largest economy.

In 2025, goods worth €170.6 billion (£148.8bn; \$200.9bn) came from China into Germany - an 8.8% annual increase - while German exports to China fell by 9.7% to €81.3 billion.

The situation "is eroding the core of German industry, especially in the car, machinery and chemicals sectors," warns Jürgen Matthes at the German Economic Institute (IW).

Matthes, the IW's head of International Economic Policy, believes distortions are chiefly down to "massive" Chinese subsidies and currency under-valuation.

Chinese price advantages "cannot just come from more innovation and efficiency," he told the BBC.

Beijing has previously said

its subsidy policies are transparent and fully consistent with international trade rules.

While, in response to past allegations of unfairly controlling its currency's value, it's said it's committed to implementing a floating exchange rate regime, based on market supply and demand, but managed where necessary.

The bloating trade deficit, that's hitting the EU as a whole, is being dubbed the latest "China shock".

A trend partly caused by the pandemic and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine which led to rising production costs in Europe, according to Brussels-based economic think tank Bruegel.

"During the same period, China entered a prolonged deflationary phase, stemming from over-investment in manufacturing, creating the over-

capacity we see today."


It's left leaders weighing how best to offset the impact of cheap Chinese goods.

That's as the continent's already been rocked by the turbulence of US President Donald Trump's tariff policies.

"No one in Europe wants a two front trade war with the world's two superpowers," says Noah Barkin, a visiting senior fellow at the German Marshall Fund.

Europe does have leverage, says Barkin, who's also a senior adviser at the Rhodium Group: "China needs somewhere to sell its goods. It has a real problem with over-capacity."

But the arrival of these goods is sparking acute angst in Germany - the traditional engine of Europe but one that's been stuttering, economically, for years.

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10 X 4	340,000	365,500	273,500	294,013	177,400	190,705	370,000	397,750	295,600	317,770
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10 X 3	221,700	238,328	147,800	158,885	118,300	127,173	266,000	285,950	251,300	270,148
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Sports

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Upgrade Cricket to scoring status in Niger Delta Games, Akpata pleads

Nigeria Cricket Federation (NCF) has again made a case for the sport to be upgraded to a scoring category at the Niger Delta Games (NDG). President of NCF, Uyi Akpata made the appeal at the Edo Boys

High School, Ugbowo, formerly Adolor College where a second exhibition U-17 match was played as part of the 2nd NDG activities. A similar demonstration game was played at the 1st NDG In Uyo, Akwa Ibom State last year.

Represented by Tonye Timinandi, the National Development Manager of NCF, Akpata harped on how the development programs of NCF will be boosted through an annual competition like the NDG.

"Nigeria has now progressed to the top levels of Cricket development nations. We have consistently been rated amongst the top five nations in the world in the T20 category and being a scoring sport in the NDG will condition our young talents further for international competitions", he argued.

Sir Itiako Ikpokpo, the Lead Consultant for Dunamis-Icon Limited, rights owners of the

NDG, commended NCF for their upward trajectory in youth development and assured that the request will be examined.

Represented by the Games Project Director, Fred Edoreh, the games Main Organising Committee Co-Chairman reiterated that opportunities exists in the games for meaningful collaborations, especially in youth development programs.

"We certainly will evaluate this proposal and I am sure we can work together because the objectives remain to explore platforms in sport for youth development in the Niger Delta region", Edoreh noted.



CRICKET TEAM

13 clubs to participate in 2nd Southeast Table Tennis Championship

A total of 13 table tennis clubs are set to take part in the second Cosmilla Table Tennis Championship for the Southeast.

Bonny Akunna, Coordinator of the championship, told journalists in Awka on Wednesday that this year's edition was an improvement of the first edition which had 10 clubs.

He said the ping pong game was being organised in collaboration with Demilla Spar-kling wine.

He said that the championship, which would have clubs

from Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states, would hold between Feb. 27 and March 1, at indoor Hall, Cosmilla Hotels and Suites in Awka.

Akunna said that cash prizes ranging from N150, 000 and N400, 000 would be won with other consolation awards.

"We are ready for the competition; 13 table tennis clubs from across the southeast have registered to participate.

"It promises to be bigger and better in terms of organisation and quality of competition," he said

2nd NDGs: Team Edo sweeps weightlifting medals to maintains top position

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

It was a huge celebration in the camp of team Edo on the eve of end of competition at the ongoing second Niger Delta Games as their weightlifters expressed themselves in a superlative manner sweeping virtually all gold available in the Sport.

Team Edo has proven to be the power house of Weightlifting event in the Niger Delta region as they won a total of 17 gold out of 27 to help the host state maintain number one position.

In the latest medal table released by the organising body, Edo maintained firm control with 50 Gold, 30 silver medals to maintain their lead.

Delta state remained in the second position on the medal table with 34 and 26 gold and silver just as Bayelsa keeps their 3rd spot with 23, 20 gold and silver. Akwa Ibom is in distant 4th place with 12, 15. Gold and silver as Abia occupied 5th position with 8 gold and 17 silver.

The host state's athletes have put on brilliant performances in other sports including athletes, Scrabble, HighJump,

Boxing and aquatic.

Team Edo is primed to win more gold in athletics, football as the thatran tracks of the Samuel Ogbemudia stadium is set to burn as the athletics finals hold to roundoff competitions on Thursday.

The team's impressive display of skill, strength, and determination has sent shockwaves throughout the state, leaving fans and spectators alike in awe.



WEIGHTLIFTING

Friendly: Ajibade, Monday, 9 others arrive camp ahead of Cameroon

Captain Rasheedat Ajibade, forward Gift Monday, Christy Ucheibe, alongside eight others have arrived the Super Falcons camp in Yaoundé, Cameroon, ahead of the two-match

friendly with the hosts.

The News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) reports that Mary Akinsola, the Media Officer of the team, on Wednesday said that "the team will be training by 4:30 p.m. at the Stade Omnis-

port Ahmadou Abidjo as more players continue to arrive".

According to Akinsola, other players who have arrived include: Canada based Ngozi Okobi-Okeogene, Israeli-based Glory Ogbonna and Joy Ome- wa, who plies her trade with Nottingham Forest in England.

Others are Madrid-based Esther Onyenezide, Fatima Okolo from Abia Angels, FC Robo's Favour Nkwocha Tanzania-based Precious Christopher and Oluwatosin Demehin who plays for Galatasaray Sportive in Turkey.



RASHEEDAT AJIBADE WITH THE SUPER FALCONS COACH

Team Rivers suffers heartbreak in men's basketball final as Edo's Chukwu wins gold by walkover

Emmanuel Chukwu of Team Edo won the gold medal in the men's 75kg boxing event without throwing a punch. His opponent, Jonathan Benedict of Team Rivers, failed to show up for the final, resulting in a walkover victory for Chukwu.

Chukwu's path to the final was also marked by walkovers, as all his opponents refused to face him in previous rounds.

The reasons for their withdrawals are unclear.

In other boxing events, Joshua Solomon Nweke of Team Rivers won gold in the men's 70kg category, defeating Gifted Bartholomew of Team Edo, who settled for silver. In the women's 54kg event, Glory Ig-homi of Team Delta took home the gold, while Silvia Adoki of Team Rivers won silver.

Nweke, a silver medalist in the 1st Niger Delta Games, attributed his win to dedication and hard work. He gained valuable experience by participating in competitions, including the Junior Olympics qualifiers in Angola.

In the men's basketball final, Team Delta dominated Team Rivers 30-20 to claim gold. Team Rivers had a strong start, but lost their lead in the final quarter.

Coach Fubara Oyanabo of Team Rivers blamed the loss on the team's lack of focus in the fourth quarter. "We were nonchalant in the fourth quarter and it cost us," he said, pointing to a missed opportunity for a team player to pass the ball to a teammate. The team's limited shooting options also contributed to the loss.

Niger Delta Games: Wrestling lifts Ondo's medal haul

Wrestling events on Wednesday boosted Team Ondo's performance at the ongoing second edition of the Niger Delta Games in Benin, with the wrestlers adding two gold medals to the state's tally.

The News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) reports that Esther Ashaolu and Ummamah Abdul-Rahman clinched gold medals in the 61kg and 65kg categories respectively, raising the state's gold count to six.

Ashaolu, who spoke with journalists after her victory, expressed appreciation for the opportunity to showcase her talent in spite of the short period of preparation.

She said she was delighted to have contributed to the state's medal haul.

"I am very happy. This is my

first competition outside Ondo State and I am glad to have succeeded.

"I pray that this success continues," she said.

In other wrestling events, Ojo Dada won silver in the 55kg category, while Waliat Adeniran secured bronze in the 57kg division and Boluwatife Adeyemo claimed bronze in the 51kg event.

In weightlifting, Olajide Mayowa won two silver medals in the 79kg category, while Adebuseyi Moyinoluwa earned two bronze medals.

In tennis, Rhaman Zayan won silver in the boys' singles and teamed up with Adesewa Olaniyan to secure another silver in the mixed doubles event.

Ondo also claimed silver in the women's basketball final after a 20-23 loss to Bayelsa.

NIGER DELTA GAMES 2026			
MEDAL STANDINGS AFTER DAY 6			
States	Gold	Silver	Total
1. Edo	33	16	49
2. Delta	25	21	46
3. Bayelsa	10	11	21
4. Akwa Ibom	9	12	21
5. Rivers	6	16	22
6. Abia	5	12	17
7. Ondo	4	7	11
8. Cross River	4	5	9
9. Imo	3	7	10
107		107	
107		134	

FEATURE

Impact of insecurity on Nigeria's economy, the way forward

GRACE IJEOMA UMEH

Insecurity in Nigeria is a pressing issue, with various factors contributing to the problem. The country is experiencing a surge in violent attacks, kidnappings, and banditry, particularly in the northern regions.

Some of the key drivers of insecurity in Nigeria include: Poverty and Unemployment: Many Nigerians are living below the poverty line, and unemployment is rampant, leading to increased crime rates.

Corruption is widespread, and it's affecting the government's ability to address security challenges.

Weak Security Apparatus: The security forces are underfunded, and their equipment is outdated, making it difficult for them to effectively tackle security threats.

Porous Borders: Nigeria's borders are not well-secured, allowing criminals and terrorists to easily enter and exit the country.

Ethnic and Religious Tensions: The country is experiencing increased tensions between different ethnic and religious groups, leading to violent conflicts.

The Nigerian government has taken steps to address the issue, including increasing military presence in affected areas and launching initiatives to improve security. However, more needs to be done to tackle the root causes of insecurity and ensure the safety of citizens.

Insecurity is significantly impacting Nigeria's economy, with far-reaching consequences. The country's extreme poverty rate has increased from 40% in 2019 to over 60% in 2025, with 133 million people living in multidimensional poverty.

THE IMPACT OF INSECURITY ON NIGERIA'S ECONOMY INCLUDES:

Reduced Economic Growth: Insecurity has led to a decline in GDP, with a 0.9056 unit reduction in economic growth for every unit increase in insecurity.

Increased Poverty: Poverty rates are higher in rural areas (72%) compared to urban areas (42%), with insecurity exacerbating the situation.

Unemployment: Insecurity has contributed to rising unemployment, with a 1.16-unit increase in unemployment for every unit decline in security.

Disrupted Agricultural Activities: Insecurity has affected farming, leading to food inflation and reduced economic output.

Decreased Foreign Investment: Insecurity has deterred foreign investors, with companies like Mobil and Unilever relocating to other countries.

To address these challenges, experts recommend improving security infrastructure; Promoting peacebuilding efforts; fostering regional economic diversification, addressing poverty and unemployment and enhancing governance and accountability.

The main drivers of insecurity in Nigeria are multifaceted and intercon-



ARMY AT THE ENTERANCE OF THE BARACK

nected. Some of the key factors include poverty and unemployment: High levels of poverty and unemployment, especially among youths, contribute to insecurity. Many individuals are forced to engage in criminal activities due to lack of economic opportunities.

Widespread corruption undermines the effectiveness of security agencies and fuels insecurity. Corrupt officials often collude with criminals, exacerbating the problem.

Weak Security Apparatus: Nigeria's security forces are often underfunded, poorly equipped, and lack modern technology, making it difficult for them to effectively tackle security threats.

Porous Borders: Nigeria's borders are not well-secured, allowing criminals and terrorists to easily enter and exit the country.

Ethnic and Religious Tensions: Exploitation of ethnic and religious differences by politicians and other leaders contributes to insecurity.

Bad Governance and Poor Leadership: Ineffective governance and poor leadership have created an environment conducive to insecurity.

Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons: The easy availability of small arms and light weapons fuels insecurity and violent conflicts.

These factors are interconnected and often exacerbate each other, creating a complex security challenge for Nigeria.

Attracting foreign investment amidst insecurity is challenging, but Nigeria can take steps to improve its investment climate:

Improve Security Infrastructure: Enhance security measures, invest in modern technology, and train security personnel to tackle threats effectively.

Increase Transparency and Accountability*: Implement robust anti-corruption measures, ensure transparency in governance, and hold officials accountable for their actions.

Promote Economic Diversification: Reduce dependence on oil, develop other sectors like agriculture, manufacturing, and services, and create a more resilient economy.

Enhance Regulatory Framework: Streamline regulations, reduce bureaucracy, and create a business-friendly environment.

Invest in Human Capital: Develop skills and education, improve healthcare, and create a skilled workforce.

Infrastructure Development: Invest in infrastructure like roads, ports, and power to support business operations.

Regional Integration: Leverage regional partnerships like ECOWAS and AfCFTA to attract investment and promote economic cooperation.

SOME INITIATIVES CAN INCLUDE:

Special Economic Zones (SEZs): Create SEZs with enhanced security and infrastructure to attract investors.

Investment Promotion Agencies: Strengthen agencies like the Nigerian Investment Promotion Commission (NIPC) to promote investment opportunities.

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs): Encourage PPPs to leverage private sector expertise and investment.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IS CRUCIAL IN ADDRESSING INSECURITY IN NIGERIA. HERE'S HOW:

Building Trust: Community engagement helps build trust between citizens and security agencies, encouraging collaboration and information sharing.

Intelligence Gathering: Local communities can provide valuable insights and intelligence to security agencies, helping prevent attacks and crimes.

Conflict Prevention: Community engagement can help resolve conflicts and prevent escalation into violence.

Promoting Social Cohesion: Community programs can foster social cohesion, reducing ethnic and religious tensions.

Youth Empowerment: Engaging youths in community activities can redirect their energy towards positive pursuits, reducing recruitment into criminal groups.

Supporting Vulnerable Groups: Community engagement can identify and support vulnerable individuals, reducing

their susceptibility to radicalization.

SOME EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES INCLUDE:

Community Policing: Collaborative policing efforts between communities and security agencies.

Town Hall Meetings: Regular meetings between community leaders, security agencies, and citizens to discuss security concerns.

Youth Programmes: Sports, education, and skills development programs for youths.

Women's Initiatives: Empowering women to promote peace and security in their communities.

Nigeria offers various sectors with potential for foreign investment, driven by its large market, young population, and natural resources. Some of the key sectors include:

Fintech: Nigeria's digital economy is projected to generate \$18.3 billion in revenue, with fintech companies like OPay, PalmPay, and Flutterwave dominating mobile payments and digital lending.

Renewable Energy: The government has launched a \$2 billion climate resilience and energy transition fund, with opportunities in solar photovoltaic systems, mini-grids, and energy storage solutions.

Agriculture and Agribusiness: Agriculture employs 35% of the workforce, with opportunities in processing facilities for soybeans, cassava, and fruit juices, as well as export-oriented cash crops like cocoa and cashew.

Manufacturing: Sectors like textiles, food and beverage processing, and construction materials are poised for growth, driven by government policies and regional trade agreements like AfCFTA.

Oil and Gas: Nigeria's oil and gas sector offers opportunities in upstream exploration, midstream processing, and downstream distribution, with international oil companies investing in new projects.

Mining and Solid Minerals: Nigeria has significant deposits of lithium, nickel, cobalt, and other critical minerals, with opportunities for investment in exploration, mining, and processing.

Real Estate and Construction: Urbanization and infrastructure development drive demand for residential and commercial properties, with opportunities in affordable housing and smart estates.

E-commerce and Logistics: Nigeria's e-commerce market is growing, with opportunities in logistics, delivery services, and digital payment solutions.

These sectors offer attractive opportunities for foreign investors, but it's essential to conduct thorough research and understand the regulatory environment and risks involved.

NIGERIA CAN IMPROVE ITS REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT BY:

Streamlining Regulations: Simplify and consolidate regulations, reducing bureaucracy and complexity.

Increasing Transparency: Make regulations clear, predictable, and easily accessible.

Enhancing Regulatory Institutions: Strengthen institutions like the Nigerian Investment Promotion Commission (NIPC) and Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

Reducing Corruption: Implement robust anti-corruption measures and ensure accountability.

Improving Infrastructure: Invest in infrastructure like power, roads, and digital connectivity to support business operations.

Promoting Public-Private Dialogue: Engage with businesses and stakeholders to understand challenges and improve regulations.

Adopting Technology: Leverage technology to automate processes, reduce human interaction, and increase efficiency.

SOME INITIATIVES INCLUDE:

Online Business Registration: Implementing online registration systems to simplify business setup.

Single Window System: Introducing a single window for customs clearance and regulatory approvals.

Regulatory Impact Assessment: Conducting impact assessments to evaluate regulatory effectiveness.

Public-Private Partnerships: Encouraging PPPs to leverage private sector expertise and investment.

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS CAN PLAY A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN SUPPORTING NIGERIA'S INVESTMENT CLIMATE BY:

Providing Technical Assistance: Offering expertise and guidance on regulatory reforms, investment policy, and institutional capacity building.

Promoting Investment: Facilitating investment promotion and matchmaking between Nigerian businesses and international investors.

Supporting Infrastructure Development: Assisting in infrastructure development, such as energy, transportation, and digital connectivity.

Enhancing Transparency and Accountability: Promoting transparency and accountability in governance, anti-corruption efforts, and regulatory frameworks.