

Okpebholo renovating 100 schools in 100 days —SUBEB

BENIN CITY

In a bid to make an immediate impact, Edo State Governor, Sen. Monday Okpebholo, is reconstructing and renovating 100 schools across the state to mark his first 100 days in office.

The Chairman of the Edo State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB), Mrs. Onomen Goodness Brigg, dis-

closed this during an inspection of ongoing projects.

She was accompanied by Mrs. Angela Okpamen, the board member representing Edo South.

Brigg called on communities, parents, and residents to help curb vandalism, emphasizing that Governor Okpebholo's administration is prioritizing the fencing of all renovated schools to enhance security.

During visits to Ebo Primary School in Iyekogba, Ore-Oghene Primary School in Oredo Local Government Area, and Evbareke Junior Secondary School, Use Junior Secondary School, and Okhekhugbo Primary School in Egor Local Government Area, she assured that renovation and reconstruction works would be completed within one to three weeks.

"Security is a major concern. We must sensitize communities to protect these properties because the children will suffer if vandalism continues. Everyone—teachers, students, and residents—needs to be vigilant," she said.

She further noted that fencing and security posts are part of the renovation plans, ensuring controlled access to school premises. "So far, we have inspected

five schools, but 100 projects are ongoing across the state. We will extend our inspection to Edo Central and Edo North this week," she added.

Brigg also highlighted that the renovation includes new furniture, as many students currently sit on the floor due to a lack of desks.

"You can't put new furniture in a dilapidated building, so we

are ensuring the structures are sound before furnishing them. Some projects will be completed in a week, others in two to three weeks at most," she said.

During the inspection, it was observed that some classrooms were overcrowded, with about 200 students from four different classes sharing a single room, underscoring the urgent need for intervention.

The Nigerian Observer



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'Exceptional' under-16s eligible for UTME —JAMB Registrar

● Urges FG to empower NUC for universities budget oversight

The Registrar, Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board, Prof Ishaq Oloyede has disclosed that "exceptional" students below the age of 16 can register for the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination as the board had opened the Exceptionally Brilliant Window for such candidates.

He noted that while the examination body had enforced the minimum age requirement for any students into tertiary institutions at 16, the need for below-16s to sit for the UTME

was necessitated by the number of rare, exceptional students.

Oloyede, a former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ilorin, stated this as a guest on the Sunday edition of a socio-political programme, Inside Sources with Laolu Akande, on Channels Television.

"In Nigeria, there are many brilliant students, we have so many excellent people. We are enforcing the 16-year minimum entry into tertiary institutions but some people are saying there are exceptional students. Yes, there are exceptional students

but they are just one in a million.

"We are saying 16 years is the minimum, but if you know you are exceptional, register for exceptional candidacy—that is you are less than 16 years old and exceptional," he said.

The JAMB registrar equally condemned how some parents now raise the ages of their children, citing a case in which

students between the ages of 10 to 12 had been registered for the UTME.

"I'm surprised, just from Monday to now, over 2,000 have registered in the whole country. Some of them are 10, 11, and 12-year old whose parents have found crooked ways of jumping classes.

"Normal children cannot grow at a rate higher than their

biological age. What parents are now doing is increasing the age of their children, they are doing everything, affidavit of age and everything.

"The parents want to use the children to decorate their CVs. They want to say I am the mother of a lawyer, my child graduated at age 13," Oloyede lamented.

In November 2024, the Minis-

ter of Education, Dr Tunji Alausa announced the reversal of the 18-year admission benchmark for tertiary institutions to 16 years.

"We will not be going forward with the 18-year admission benchmark. We will go with 16 years and we are going to meet with the Joint Admission Matric-

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Ghost Workers: Fed civil servants get Feb 17 verification deadline

Federal civil servants have until Monday, February 17, 2025, to complete their identity verification as part of efforts to eliminate ghost workers from the system.

This directive was outlined in a memo issued by the Office of the Accountant-General of the Federation on Sunday.

"Civil servants are expected to verify their identities on the portal of the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS) amid the planned stoppage of salaries and other sanctions for ghost workers," the memo stated.

Reports indicate that many civil servants have been rush-

ing to obtain their Taxpayer Identification Numbers (TIN) to meet the deadline. The verification process requires the TIN, IPPIS number, and salary account details.

THE MEMO FURTHER STATED:

"Following the Treasury Circular with Ref. No. TRY/A6&B6/2024-OAGF/CAD/026/Vol. V/910 dated June 27, 2024, and a subsequent extension dated August 16, 2024, the Accountant-General of the Federation has approved an additional one-week

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COURTESY VISIT:

Executive Chairman, Edo State Internal Revenue Service (EIRS), Hon. Bankole Balogun (left), and Executive Director, Finance, Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) 10 E&P Limited, Mr. Bello Nura, during a courtesy visit to the NNPC Corporate Head Office in Benin City.

Edo Dep Gov pledges govt support to groups, returned migrants

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Edo Dep Gov pledges govt support to groups, returned migrants

NAOMI EWANSIHA

Edo State Deputy Governor, Hon. Dennis Idahosa, has reiterated the government's commitment to

assisting professional organizations and returned migrants, highlighting the administration's focus on fairness, equity, and justice.

Hon Idahosa met with rep-

resentatives of several organizations, including the Edo State chapters of the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), the Nigeria Association of Women Journalists (NAWOJ),

the Association of Resident Doctors under Edo State Government Employment (ARD-EDGE), and the Returned Migrants Association (RMA).

During a courtesy visit by

FIDA, led by Chairperson Francisca Elema, the deputy governor acknowledged their contributions to justice and human rights advocacy.

He assured them that the government would explore opportunities for collaboration and funding support for their pro-bono services, mediation, and humanitarian efforts.

He encouraged them to work closely with the Attorney General's office to accelerate justice sector reforms in the state.

Meeting with the leadership of NAWOJ, led by Adesuwa Ehimuan, Idahosa praised their professionalism and commitment to accurate reporting.

He acknowledged the sacrifices they make to ensure balanced information dissemination and promised to discuss their requests for support with the governor.

Addressing concerns raised by the Association of Resi-

dent Doctors, led by Dr. Peter Evbuomwan, Idahosa assured them that the government recognizes their efforts in saving lives.

He pledged to look into challenges affecting the hospital management agency and congratulated the newly elected ARD officers on their leadership roles.

In a related meeting with members of the Returned Migrants Association (RMA), the group outlined key concerns, including reintegration into society, combating stigmatization, providing mental health support, raising awareness about human trafficking, and improving access to skills training and medical care.

To encourage hardworking members of the RMA who have made positive contributions to society, Idahosa personally donated funds to support their businesses, reinforcing the government's commitment to their successful reintegration.



PROTEST:

Protesters at the headquarters of the Benin Owena River Basin Development Authority, Obayantor, yesterday.

JOOPSA reviews 2025 training plan for stronger public service

VIOLET OBAMWONYI

The John Odigie Oyegun Public Service Academy (JOOPSA) has hosted a one-day stakeholders' engagement workshop with the Inter-Ministerial Counterpart Team (IMCT) to review its strategic plan, training curriculum, and the 2025 training calendar for civil and public servants in Edo State.

Emphasizing the importance of intellectual growth in the civil service, the Edo State Head of Service, Dr. Anthony Okungbowa Esq., highlighted the necessity of stakeholders input in finalizing the training calendar.

He stressed that a well-structured training program is

essential for the continuous growth and development of the public sector.

"For us, JOOPSA is central to the advancement of the civil and public service. This Academy plays a key role in ensuring we have one of the most effective public service structures on the continent," Dr. Okungbowa stated.

"Workshops like this provide a platform to reorganize and refocus our efforts. Without proper planning for the next three to five years, we risk operating without direction, ultimately hindering intellectual growth in the service."

He further emphasized that implementing a structured training plan would allow the govern-

ment to assess the impact of capacity-building efforts over time.

The Director General of JOOPSA, Mrs. Gina I. Otamere, underscored the vital role of Directors of Shared Services in managing staff development, including leave, promotions, and recruitment.

She encouraged participants to contribute constructively, ensuring the training calendar aligns with the service's needs.

"The goal of today's engagement is to refine JOOPSA's proposed training plan collaboratively. By incorporating stakeholder input, we can create a strategic training calendar that enhances service delivery and professional effectiveness," Otamere explained.

She also emphasized JOOPSA's renewed focus on competency-based training, addressing skill gaps to improve efficiency in the workforce.

In a lecture titled "Learning and Development in Service," Mrs. D. O. Enakhimion, a retired Permanent Secretary from the Office of the Secretary to the State Government, reinforced the importance of continuous learning in public service.

"Learning is the foundation of any effective organization," Enakhimion noted. "Capacity building is a necessary investment; structured training ensures all staff levels receive relevant development opportunities, ultimately enhancing productivity and service delivery."

'Exceptional' under-16s eligible for...

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ulation Board and others on that. "There will also be exceptions for gifted students. So, 18 years is not part of our policy again," he said.

The former Minister of Education, Prof Tahir Mamman, in July 2024, announced a ban on admissions for candidates under the age of 18 into tertiary institutions in the country.

Prof Oloyede also said that the autonomy of public universities can be better achieved if the National Universities Commission (NUC) is left to manage the budgets of tertiary institutions, in addition to its role as the regulator that accredits courses in schools.

He said that university education is so sensitive and the government should allow experts to administer these tertiary institutions.

He faulted a situation where each public university now ap-

proaches the National Assembly to defend their budget and get whatever they want based on the people they know and the influence they wield.

He said, "We can still re-engineer the situation to have the things we need. We need to look at the funding mechanism. The National Universities Commission (NUC), for example, should be left alone to run the universities. Hold the National Universities Commission responsible for the management of the universities."

"I was chairman, Committee of Vice Chancellors and I was involved in re-organizing and retooling of the National Universities Commission. When the NUC was in charge, things were done well. I strongly believe that the autonomy that we are talking about for our universities can be better achieved if we allow the NUC to coordinate the affair."

"Now, every university goes to

the National Assembly for their budget, for their defence and the more you can pull the weight, the more will determine."

He said when the NUC managed the budget of universities, there was the Universities Annual Review System which looked at how many candidates universities have across disciplines and used that to determine the next year's budget.

"Whether you know anybody or you don't does not come in. The NUC will determine the parameter number of students and so on. And it is the NUC that will defend the National Assembly and the Ministry of Education," he said.

Oloyede said when the NUC was in charge, the money going into capital development was high but now, it has fallen because universities now have too many support staff.

He envisaged a situation where public universities would

get funds based on the number of students they admit.

"I believe that the way we are running and the way we are funding, it could get to a level that we will say: University of Abuja, you are producing XY medical doctors, what does it take to train one medical doctor? This is the quota we have given you. So, we now calculate (the amount)."

"Both your capital and your recurrent expenditure won't be our business. And we would have built research into it to ascertain the amount," he said.

The former vice chancellor also said Nigeria does not need more universities, stressing that the current ones should be expanded and equipped for better performance.

He lamented a trend where politicians now compensate for marginalised communities with the creation of universities instead of the establishment of factories and industries.

SEDI criticizes Nigeria's waste disposal practices, calls for reuse policy

ISAAC ERANGA

The Sustainable Environment Development Initiative (SEDI) has expressed concern over Nigeria's current waste disposal methods, warning that they pose serious threats to public health, safety, and the environment while also imposing hidden costs on society.

Dr. Tom Aneni, SEDI's Executive Director, highlighted these concerns while speaking to journalists in Benin City.

He pointed out that most waste—whether industrial, commercial, or household—is simply dumped in landfills or open dumpsites.

This practice, he warned, could lead to groundwater contamination, polluting rivers and streams.

"Burning waste is equally harmful, as it releases toxic gases into the air and leaves behind hazardous residues in the form of ash."

"These harmful byproducts eventually find their way into humans and animals," Aneni explained.

Nigeria, he noted, is one of Africa's largest waste producers, and as the population grows,

so does the amount of waste generated. To address this, he emphasized the importance of promoting a culture of "reuse" rather than disposal.

"Reusing products significantly reduces the volume of waste that ends up in landfills. It's a sustainable practice that conserves resources, minimizes pollution, and contributes to a healthier environment," Aneni said.

He outlined several reasons for reducing waste production, including the conservation of valuable resources such as minerals used in electronics, petroleum for plastics, timber for paper products, and water used in manufacturing.

Reuse, he added, also saves money, cuts down waste disposal costs, and reduces environmental damage caused by mining, deforestation, and landfill expansion.

Encouraging a shift in mindset, Aneni stressed that what many consider "trash" can often be repurposed into valuable materials. "Once we start viewing discarded items as potential resources rather than waste, we open the door to creative solutions that benefit both individuals and society."

Ghost Workers: Fed civil servants...

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extension of the OAF-IPPIS Payroll Validation Portal, from February 10 to February 17, 2025."

"The portal will remain accessible to employees who were unable to complete their validation before the previous deadline."

"It is hereby emphasized that all affected employees must update their payroll information on or before 12 midnight on Monday, February 17, 2025. Failure to comply may result in consequences, including suspension from the payroll."

The memo also urged Accounting Officers, Directors, and Heads of Finance, Accounts, and Internal Audit Units across Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) to ensure widespread circulation of the directive and enforce compliance.

In 2024, President Bola Tinubu ordered that civil servants receiving salaries from the Federal Government after relocating abroad must refund the money.

He also directed that their supervisors and department heads be sanctioned for enabling the fraud.

NEWS

S'Court dismisses Fubara's appeal challenging Amaewhule-led Assembly

A five-man panel of the Supreme Court led by Justice Uwani Abba-Aji has dismissed the appeal filed by the Governor of Rivers State, Siminalayi Fubara, challenging the leadership of the Rivers State House of Assembly led by Martin Amaewhule.

Justice Uwani Abba-Aji while dismissing the appeal awarded a cost of two million naira against the governor payable to the Rivers State House of Assembly as the first respondent and Martin Amaewhule as the second respondent.

The dismissal of the appeal

by Fubara was hinged on the withdrawal of the suit by his counsel, Yusuf Ali.

The Rivers Assembly has been embroiled in a protracted crisis since 2023 when over 25 lawmakers loyal to former governor Nyesom Wike dumped the Peoples Democratic Party

(PDP) for the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC).

The leadership of the House by Amaewhule was then contested by lawmakers in a rival group led by Victor Oko-Jumbo known to be loyal to Fubara.

Fubara has since transacted the business of the state with the

Oko-Jumbo group while he ignored the Amaewhule faction.

Last October, the Court of Appeal in Abuja affirmed the judgment of the Federal High Court which set aside the N800 billion 2024 budget passed by Amaewhule's rival group.

The appellate court had

dismissed the appeal filed by Fubara on grounds that it lacked merit.

The court had nullified the 2024 Rivers budget passed by pro-Fubara lawmakers and set aside the presentation and passage of the Rivers State 2024 budget.

Atiku visits Obasanjo, says meeting not political

Former Vice President Atiku Abubakar has clarified that his visit to his former boss, Olusegun Obasanjo, on Monday was not politically motivated, but merely a courtesy call on the former President.

Atiku, who arrived at Obasanjo's Abeokuta residence within the Olusegun Obasanjo Presidential Library at exactly 12:37 pm, was accompanied by former Governor of Cross River State, Senator Liyel Imoke; former Governor of Sokoto State, Senator Aminu Tambuwal; and Senator Abdul Ningi, among others.

Atiku and his entourage were received at Obasanjo's residence by elder statesman

Oyewole Fasawe before proceeding upstairs for a private meeting with Obasanjo, which lasted approximately one and a half hours.

Emerging from the meeting at about 2:17 pm, Atiku told journalists that he was on a courtesy visit to his former boss and that politics was not discussed.

When asked whether the meeting was related to his 2027 presidential ambition, Atiku said, "I am here on a courtesy call. I am not here to talk politics."

Attempts to get Tambuwal to comment on the purpose of the visit were unsuccessful, as he also declined to speak on the matter.



SYMPOSIUM:

Minister of Aviation and Aerospace Development, Festus Keyamo, SAN, during the ICAO Global Implementation Support Symposium (GISS) 2025, taking place alongside the Global Sustainable Aviation Marketplace (GSAM), in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), yesterday.

Igbinedion University hosts lecture on non-kinetic military operations

EDWARD OSEGHE

A one-day lecture on 'Optimizing Non-Kinetic Efforts in Nigerian Army's Approach to Military Operations' will be held at the Igbinedion University, Okada, on Wednesday, February 19, 2025.

This was revealed in a press statement released on Monday by Lucky U. Eboh-Onokwe, Deputy Director, Public Relations, Igbinedion University, Okada.

Organized by the Buratai Centre for Contemporary Security Affairs of Igbinedion University Okada, the lecture will be delivered by retired Major General Ibrahim Manu Yusuf.

The statement reads: "As a renowned expert in military operations, Major General Yusuf will share valuable insights on maximizing non-kinetic strategies in military combats. His lecture will dwell

on his extensive experience as former Commandant of the Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna; ex-Force Commander of the Multi-National Joint-Task Force, Ndamena, Chad; and erstwhile General Officer Commanding, 7 Division, Nigerian Army.

"The one-day gathering is expected to bring together participants from the military, police, and other security agencies, as well as the academia and the general public. Professor Lawrence Ikechukwu Ezemonye, Vice Chancellor of Igbinedion University, Okada, will preside over the event."

"As part of its mandate, the Buratai Centre for Contemporary Security Affairs explores security challenges at both local and global levels.

"This lecture represents a significant step in promoting dialogue and exploring non-kinetic approaches to military operations by the Nigerian Army," the statement added.

NAFDAC raids Anambra market, seizes fake drugs

The National Agency for Food, Drug Administration and Control on Monday commenced its enforcement at the popular Ogo-Ogu Market, Bridge Head, Onitsha, in Anambra State.

During the exercise, the operatives of the agency, led by the Director, NAFDAC South East Zone, Dr Martins Iluyomade,

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CBN shifts MPC meeting to Feb 18, 19

The Central Bank of Nigeria has rescheduled the 299th Monetary Policy Committee meeting earlier slated for February 17 and 18, 2025.

In a statement on Monday, the apex bank said the meeting will now be held on February 18 and 19, 2025.

The statement read, "The Central Bank of Nigeria has announced that the 299th meeting of its Monetary Policy Committee earlier scheduled for February 17 and 18, 2025, will now be held on Wednesday, February 18 and Thursday,

February 19, 2025."

The development ends speculations over the meeting dates, which arose due to delays by the National Bureau of Statistics in releasing the rebased Consumer Price Index.

With a new date confirmed, the statement noted that economic analysts are keenly watching to see if the committee will retain or increase the Monetary Policy Rate in response to prevailing economic conditions.

It was further observed that the first MPC meeting for 2025 was initially set for January 27–

28 but was moved to February, reportedly to allow time for the rebased inflation and GDP figures to be released.

This would not be the first time the CBN postponed its MPC meeting under the leadership of Olayemi Cardoso.

After he was newly appointed in September 2023, the CBN postponed a meeting of its MPC again as investors and analysts looked forward to the move by Cardoso in tackling surging inflation.

The CBN held its first MPC meeting of 2024 on February 26 and 27, which was also the

first under Cardoso's leadership.

Monetary policy decisions rely heavily on inflation trends; however, the rebased CPI, which was expected at the end of January, has yet to be published by the NBS, raising concerns about the timing of key economic indicators ahead of the MPC meeting.

The NBS typically releases its CPI report on the 15th of every month. If the agency maintains this tradition, the inflation report could be published three days before the newly scheduled MPC meeting.

BORBDA's host communities reject newly appointed MD, want Benin man

OBAYANTOR, BENIN

Workers and visitors to the headquarters of the Benin Owena River Basin Development Authority (BORBDA) on Monday could not gain access to the office on the Benin Sapele Road as protecting host communities blocked the entrance gate to the federal agency chanting solidarity songs.

The protesters comprising elders, women and youths drawn from Obayantor 11, Ekosa, Agbomwoba and Awanoba communities that make up the federal agency's host communities, said the protest was designed to end what they called 43 years marginalization of the host communities in the appointments to the board

of BORBDA, and promotion of indigenous people to positions of senior managerial cadre.

"We are on a peaceful protest to drive home our demands in respect of the appointments made into the management of the Benin Owena River Basin Development Authority where by no single host community person was considered even when they were eminently qualified", they said.

Their convergence at the BORBDA headquarters the protesters said was to demand that the Oba's recommendations for the appointment of someone from the host communities in the Edo South Senatorial District be respected by the appointing authorities.

They appealed to President

Bola Tinubu to put an end to the many years of marginalization of the host communities by appointing qualified person of Benin extraction as Managing Director in fulfilment of the Federal character principles and in line with the recommendation of the Benin Monarch, Oba Eware II.

They hinted that the protest became inevitable when they discovered that overtures made to the different appointing authorities of the Federal Government for the appointment of a host communities person as managing director on the directives of the Oba of Benin, including the supervising Ministry of Water Resources and Sanitation, Office of the Secre-

tary to the Government of the Federation, the Senate President etc were not honoured.

The protesters vowed to sustain their actions until the president accedes to their demands for the appointment of a Benin man as Managing Director following the recommendations to that effect vide several letters from the Palace of the Oba of Benin to the relevant authorities in Abuja are honoured.

They used the opportunity to draw attention to what they called poor corporate social responsibility from the agency in the many years of its operation in the host communities with little or nothing of benefits to them, and called for a change of approach.

800 ex-Boko Haram fighters undergoing deradicalisation —DHQ

The Defence Headquarters (DHQ) on Monday disclosed that 800 former Boko Haram fighters who surrendered to the military are currently undergoing deradicalisation for onward re-integration into the society.

The Chief of Defence, Operations, Maj.-Gen. Emeka Onumajuru, made this known on Channels Television's The Morning Brief programme.

According to him, one year is enough time to re-orient and reintegrate the ex-terrorists into the larger society. He said though about 129,000 Boko Haram fighters have been arrested so far, only 800 former fighters were carefully selected to participate in the rehabilitation and reintegration project tagged Operation Safe Corridor.

Maj-Gen Onumajuru said,

"To get the numbers right, right now, (we have) about 129,000 surrendered BH (Boko Haram) members and their families.

"We are a professional army and when you are in combat and an opponent surrenders, then you take him and let the legal processes take its natural course.

"Right now, some of them are detention facilities, some of them are in Kainji, and there

is a special court that goes through all of them. Those that were found culpable face the books and those that are going to be deradicalised go through the process and this takes about a year."

Asked whether it was possible to deradicalise terrorists and reintegrate them into the society in one year, the top military officer said, "It's possible because the deradicalisation

is done by professionals. That one-year period is sufficient enough depending on the people handling the deradicalisation.

"The number taken in is not huge. As I said, we have 129,000 BH members and families. It doesn't mean the 129,000 are going through the programme. The people going through the programme right now are about 800 – in batches. Those 800 are people that

have been sieved through the entire legal process before they are now brought to the centre."

He stressed that kinetic and non-kinetic strategies must go hand-in-hand for Nigeria to win the asymmetric warfare against insurgents.

"The deradicalisation carried out by the Operation Safe Corridor is part of the non-kinetic. You cannot win an asymmetrical war with just a kinetic approach," he said.



PLENARY SESSION:

A cross section of Edo State House of Assembly members, during plenary session on resumption from recess.

PHOTO: GODWIN ISEGUAN.

Hiking electrify tariffs 'll worsen SMEs woes —Rep

A member of the House of Representatives, Mansur Soro, has attributed the low production output of small and medium businesses in Nigeria to inadequate funding over the years.

This is just as he said the challenge regarding power has been one of the major problems facing SMEs in Nigeria and increasing tariffs will escalate it.

Soro, a member of the Peoples Democratic Party and Chairman of the House Committee on Small and Medium Scale Enterprises, also lamented the below-average attention successive administrations paid to the Small and Medium Enterprise Development Agency over the years.

The lawmaker who represents Darazo/Ganjuwa Federal Constituency, Bauchi State stated these in an exclusive interview with The PUNCH on Monday.

Emphasising the role of small business in the growth of any nation, the federal lawmaker said, "SMEs world over are indispensable to economic developments but the question is, are we giving them the required attention in Nigeria? The answer is no. The SME sector is grossly underfunded by the government. This has been the case over the years."

He added that part of the Federal Government's little interest in the sector comes from a lack of information on the significance of small business operations in the life of the nation's economy.

This is just as he hinted that the committee he chairs, was collaborating with stakeholders to carry out an awareness campaign nationwide to change the narrative.

"A lot of sensitization is needed in this regard. We are working with SMEDAN in engaging relevant stakeholders, especially the

sub-nationals and the National Orientation Agency in driving this sensitization," he added.

On the planned increase of electricity tariff by the Federal Government slated for March, Soro warned of the dire consequences of such an action on small businesses, even as he called on the President Bola Tinubu-led government to come up with an initiative to cater for the needs of SMEs.

"The challenge regarding power has been one of the major problems facing SMEs in Nigeria. So, increasing tariffs will no doubt, escalate it. I have maintained several times that we have to go renewable.

"Government at all levels must prioritise SME common facility centres or industrial development centres at the states and power them with solar energy to mitigate the challenge and reduce the cost

of production," he added, lamenting however that "When you check the Federal Government's budget for 2025, you will realise that we are not ready to do this."

Soro added that SMEDAN's budget performance in 2024 is understandable given the poor releases for capital expenditure by the government.

"The agency's 2024 capital budget performance at the end of the financial year was put at a mere 25 per cent performance or so and you can't blame them because there wasn't funding.

"There's has never been a year in recent history that budget implementation suffers like the 2024 fiscal year," he said, calling for stakeholders' input on how best to get more funding for the sector.

"Stakeholders need to come together to agree on a funds release system that can work effectively for the country," he advised.

Court adjourns Nnamdi Kanu's trial indefinitely

Justice Binta Nyako of the Federal High Court, Abuja, has indefinitely adjourned the trial of Nnamdi Kanu, leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra.

The decision, made on Monday, follows Kanu's insistence that Nyako cannot preside over his case, citing her previous recusal.

It was gathered that Kanu had been ordered to appear for a hearing on Monday, February 10, 2025, before Justice Binta Nyako of the Federal High Court, Abuja.

Earlier in January, Kanu filed a petition against Justice Nyako before the National Judicial Council, accusing her of judicial misconduct in handling his trial.

And days later, the IPOB leader called for his case to be transferred to the South-East if no judge at the Federal High Court in Abuja was willing to preside over it apart from Justice Binta Nyako.

At the commencement of proceedings, prosecuting lawyer, Adegboyega Awomolo (SAN), stated that the prosecution had filed and served all necessary documents and was ready to proceed with the trial.

Responding, defence lawyer, Aloy Ejimakor, said the issue before the court was not about proceeding with the trial.

At that point, Justice Nyako intervened, explaining that although she had earlier recused herself from the case, the court's Chief Judge turned down her decision to withdraw. She directed that the defendant file a formal motion requesting the reassignment of the case to another judge.

While Awomolo and Ejimakor were debating whether a formal motion was necessary as directed by the Chief Judge, Kanu, who had been sitting quietly in the dock, suddenly interjected and demanded to be allowed to speak.

When asked by Justice Nyako whether he intended to take over the conduct of his case from his lawyer, Kanu responded: "Yes, I want to take over."

The defendant proceeded to state that he only agreed to attend court out of respect for the judiciary. He argued that Justice Nyako no longer had jurisdiction over his trial, as she had previously recused herself in September of the previous year.

Turning to the prosecuting lawyer, Kanu insulted him, saying: "A grown-up man like you, who should be in the village and, who should be making sure that things are done properly, is here subverting the law."

He then addressed the judge: "I don't recognise the authority of this court to preside over my case. Everything you (the judge) said here is meaningless to me. Why is it that when it comes to my case, everything is turned upside-down?"

Kanu further argued that the memo sent by the Chief Judge, returning the case file to Justice Nyako, could not override the enrolled order made on September 24, when she initially recused herself.

When Justice Nyako informed him that he was at liberty to appeal the Chief Judge's directive, Kanu responded: "If the Chief Judge disagrees, he should appeal the decision."

NAFDAC raids Anambra market, seizes fake...

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confiscated a wide range of adulterated, substandard and expired drugs found at the various shops.

Addressing journalists, Iluyomade said the exercise was in line with the agency's mandate of eradicating fake, banned and other spurious NAFDAC-regulated products from circulating in Nigeria and to prevent mem-

bers of the unsuspecting public from falling victim.

He said the agency was working in collaboration with the market task force in the exercise that led to the seizure of the multiple fake and banned products, adding that it was a combined exercise carried out simultaneously across all the South-East states.

He said, "Today, we are commencing our enforcement at the

Ogbo-Ogu market. What triggered the exercise is that overtime, we have been collating data and gathering intelligence on fake and substandard drugs in the market, and we got to the tail end and discovered that people are repackaging and rebagging fake and counterfeit drugs in the market.

"The exercise is aimed at raiding the markets of fake and substandard drugs and those

that are made up of spurious, counterfeited and falsified medicinal products, unwholesome processed products and several other unsafe regulated drugs.

"This is taking place simultaneously across the South-East states, and it is aimed at sanitising the drug markets and safeguarding the health of members of the unsuspecting public.

"Among the drugs are expired,

banned, substandard, defective, repackaged and recalled products. We found out that some of the drug dealers are in the habit of imitating some popular drugs and pouring it into containers of the original manufacturer in order to deceive unsuspecting members of the public.

"And these drugs are very sensitive that can lead to death or permanent disability of the consumer. The confiscation of

the products would eliminate the risk of their reintroduction into the market and a proof of the agency's resolve to safeguard the health of the people."

He advised members of the public to patronise only licensed and registered drug outlets, adding that security operatives and the investigative team of the agency, as well as other stakeholders, are on the ground monitoring.

ENCOUNTER

How I raised the profile of Benin Owena River Basin Development Authority from 12th to 3rd position —Saliu Ahmed

Saliu Osifueme Ahmed, is the immediate past Managing Director/Chief Executive Officer of the Benin Owena River Basin Development Authority (BORBDA). A Civil Engineer specialized in Water and Transportation. In this interview with HAMEED BRAIMAH, he spoke on how under his leadership, BORBDA hitherto ranked the worst of the 12 River Basins in the country and was now ranked number three.

HOW WILL YOU DESCRIBE YOUR TWO TERMS OF 8 YEARS AT BORBDA?

ANS: It was a fulfilling experience. It gave me an opportunity to contribute in my own ways to moving our country forward. The Benin Owena River Basin Development Authority (BORBDA) is an agency in the water sector aligned with my professional calling. It gave me an opportunity to put into practice some of the things that we learnt in schools and also experienced in my professional practices. Working under the public service rules with other public servants was quite a major eye-opener.

At the BORBDA, I was able to work with other career public servants, and other political appointees like myself at the level of Executive Director, I was able to direct the affairs of the authority to achieve a number of things in line with the mandate of the River Basin.

The primary mandate is the development of the nation's water resources to meet all the uses water serves, at domestic, agricultural and hydro power generation levels among others.

I would say that, I came up fulfilled that we were able to impact on different people, different communities across the catchment states that the BORBDA superintendent over. I also thank God for the opportunity.

WHAT WAS YOUR MAJOR ACHIEVEMENT IN THE 8 YEARS IN THE AUTHORITY?

First and foremost, I think I was able to reposition the BORBDA in particular. Before my appointment, BORBDA was ranked as the worst of all the 12 River Basins Development Authorities in the country. But, by the time, I was leaving, it was ranked among the best three. For me, that was a major achievement.

That ranking came about because of the impact we were able to make along the line of the mandate of the agency.

First, we were able to provide potable water to a number of communities. Even in cases where it was almost impossible to extract water from the ground, we cracked it to get water out.

Before, I came on board for instance, the Edo Central Senatorial district was largely rated as an area where boreholes were impossible to drill, but by the time, I was leaving the office, we successfully drilled at least three functioning boreholes in Uromi, other three in Irrua, two in Ewatto in Esan South East Local Government Area and one around Ekpoma.

These boreholes went to a depth of over 1000 feet. That was partly

achieved because of the leadership I offered.

During my tenure, I challenged our hydro-geologists and engineers that we are not only associated with just drilling of hand dug wells which other people were doing, but we should be a goal getter organisation as far as water and water related issues are concerned.

So, we went to the fields, carried out necessary studies and out of the understanding of the terrain, we went to work, and we were able to get water successfully. For me, that is one of the achievements we recorded.

I only used Edo central Senatorial district as a case study because hitherto had been taken and accepted that you cannot get water in that area. But we did across the entire catchment areas of the BORBDA. All parts of Edo, Ondo, Ekiti and Delta states (Delta North). For your information, it is easier to drill boreholes because of the sedimentary base that Ondo and Ekiti states belong to, but it is much more difficult in part of Edo and Delta states. But we were able to drill successfully.

But by the grace of our efforts, a number of communities today get potable water. We also initiated projects for the construction of some major water schemes. We initiated the construction of an Earth Dam in Otuo, Owan East Local Government Area of Edo State. The project is still ongoing. But it is gratifying to note that we got as far as over 50 % of the effort. The dam is yet to be completed, but a number of other components around the dam have reached appreciable level of completion.

In addition to that, we also initiated efforts through studies to carry out some Regional Water Schemes in Auchi and Jattu in Etsako West Local Government Area. The one in Jattu is currently ongoing. It has been constrained by funds. But construction works have started while the one in Auchi, we successfully built a 3 million litres complete tank which will be part of the infrastructure for the water supply to Auchi in the future.

We were also able to rehabilitate a number of existing dams in our catchment areas.

In Edo State, we were able to rehabilitate a dam which has been existing and said to be leaking. We arrested the leakage, the dam is Ukhun-Erha dam around Ekpoma in Esan West Local Government Area. The dam is for irrigation and aquaculture. We did the same thing in Ondo State. Today, the dam is fully functioning, and in Ekiti State, we also rehabilitated a dam for irrigation purposes.

These are asides, a number of ru-

During my tenure, I challenged our hydro-geologists and engineers that we are not only associated with just drilling of hand dug wells which other people were doing, but we should be a goal getter organisation as far as water and water related issues are concerned

ral infrastructure like roads that we constructed across our catchment areas.

In a sense, I will say, I am fulfilled that we were able to do a bit with the resources available to us during the period of my stewardship at the Benin Owena River Basin Development Authority.

When I was in the office, we set up four integrated farms. One in Obayantor in Ikpoba Okha Local Government Area, one in Auchi, Okpe and Uneme-Nokha in Akoko-Edo Local Government Area of Edo State. All the farms are thriving and in production.

In fact, because of the relative expertise that we have attained in setting up these farms, we were invited to set up one in Abia state which is currently ongoing.

Though Abia State is not in our catchment state but because of the relative success we attained in setting up the ones we did in Edo State, the then member of the National Assembly, now a current Minister of State for Labour and Employment, Mrs Nkeiruka Onyejeocha, invited us and made provision in BORBDA's budget to set up one in her constituency in Abia State.

The farms are thriving, but one major step I took before leaving the office was to try and cascade them into a public private partnership. We started the process, but by the rules of government, there is a long process to moving government infrastructures to private partnership. We have appointed a transaction advisor and the documentation is currently ongoing for the farms to secure the approval of the Infrastructure Concession Regulatory Commission (ICRC) which is the first step towards



SALIU AHMED

getting suitable private investors.

The input of it is that there will be enough funding and the right management to keep the farms in continuous productions.

The farms are patterned along the Songhai farm in Port Novo in Benin Republic. They are coexisting in the productions of both crops and animals in such a way that there is a zero-waste situation.

The farms are into livestock, poultry, and fishery. One of the farms has a cattle ranch. Some have piggery and goatery.

On the crops side we have cassava, vegetables and also processing cassava into tumeric garri among others.

SIR, WHAT ARE THOSE CHALLENGES THAT YOU ENCOUNTERED IN THE COURSE OF YOUR JOB AS THE MD OF THE ? WHICH SOLUTIONS DID YOU PROFFER TO ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES?

Quite frankly, there were challenges. Some were human, systemic and others that may be described as natural. Some of the systemic challenges, like I said before as a professional coming into the public sector for the first time. As it were, I was a greyhound and I had to quietly learn and adapt myself to the public service rules and procedures. So, that means relating with a number of other institutions, individuals, stakeholders among others.

But we navigated the challenges, and somehow we understood the system and we worked within the system and we were able to achieve our purpose.

The human challenges were that some persons in the authority were of the habit of giving out official secrets,

using them to try and pull down the system. But truth always overshadowed falsehood, as it were we stood our ground and defended the integrity of the agency, and surmounted those challenges.

There were also financial challenges. That again is normal because resources are never enough. But what we did was to ensure that we work with the little resources at our disposal to deliver on our mandate.

For instance, when I came in 2017, our annual appropriation was less than N1 billion. That was actually the least of all the 12 River Basins in the country. Like I said in the beginning, we were ranked as the worst River Basin Development Authorities. Maybe that explained why we were getting the least resources, but overtime, in a matter of 2 years when they saw the potentials of the River Basin and by the time I was leaving the office, our annual appropriation increased to an average of N6 billion from the less than N1 billion it was previously.

We tried to do the most we could with the resources. From those resources, we were able to improve on the equipment base of the establishment. Within the space of three years, we acquired about 10 tractors, some heavy duty machineries like graders, a wheel loader, excavator, two bulldozers, in addition to the ones we met on ground.

These machineries boosted the equipment base of the organisation, and helped us to effectively render services in line with our mandate as well as generate revenues for the government.

When I was leaving, we were one of the revenue generating River Basins in the country.

S'Africa law at centre of Trump row challenged in court

A legal challenge against a controversial new land seizure law at the centre of a row with US President Donald Trump has been filed by the Democratic Alliance (DA), which is part of South Africa's coalition government. The Expropriation Act allows for private land to be seized by the government

without compensation in certain cases.

Trump has frozen foreign aid to the country as a result, alleging that land is being confiscated already.

The government, which is made up of 10 parties led by the African National Congress (ANC), said the US president's actions were based on "a cam-

paign of misinformation and propaganda aimed at misrepresenting our great nation".

The ANC was forced into a power-sharing deal last year after losing its parliamentary majority, for the first time in three decades, in May's general election.

The DA, which is the coalition's second largest party, has called the Expropriation

Act unconstitutional, arguing that no democratic government should be given powers to seize property without compensation.

The party said that South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa signed it into law against its advice.

Land ownership has long been a contentious issue in

South Africa, with most private farmland owned by white people 30 years after the end of the racist system of apartheid.

There have been continuous calls for the government to address land reform and deal with the past injustices of racial segregation.

But in its argument against the Expropriation Act, the majority-white DA has said that the apartheid government used similar powers to remove native communities from their land and added that it wants to protect property rights for all South Africans.

"This history teaches us that true redress requires protecting property rights, ensuring that no government is ever given unchecked expropriation powers ever again," the party said in a statement.

In a statement last week, the DA said that it was deeply concerned about the threat by Trump to halt funding.

The ANC said no land has been seized without compensation and added this would only happen in exceptional circumstances, such as if land

was needed for public use and all other avenues to acquire the land had been exhausted.

Trump's executive order over the weekend freezing aid said the US "cannot support the government of South Africa's commission of rights violations in its country".

It also said as long as South Africa "continues these unjust and immoral practices" then the US will not provide aid or assistance.

The White House said Washington will also formulate a plan to resettle South African farmers and their families as refugees.

It said US officials will take steps to prioritise humanitarian relief, including admission and resettlement through the United States Refugee Admissions Program for Afrikaners in South Africa, who are mostly white descendants of early Dutch and French settlers.

President Ramaphosa has said he will send envoys to various countries to explain the government's recent policy changes, including the Expropriation Act.



Suspect Hadi Matar (2nd left), after he was arrested by police shortly after stabbing Salman Rushdie.

Romanian President Klaus Iohannis resigns ahead of election re-run

Romania's President Klaus Iohannis has resigned following pressure for him to step down ahead of a re-run of a presidential election that was controversially cancelled last year.

The December vote was voided by Romania's top court after allegations of Russian state meddling.

The outgoing Iohannis, a pro-EU liberal, had said he would stay on in office until a successor was elected in May.

But that had been strongly criticised by far-right politicians and their supporters, who had performed well in the first round of the vote in December.

Their criticism had inspired

tens of thousands of Romanians to take to the streets last month in protest against the election's cancellation.

Opposition lawmakers had launched a motion in parliament again on Monday to move for the president's suspension.

In response, Iohannis said he would step down, in a bid

to limit what he said would have been a "damaging" and divisive referendum for the country.

"In order to spare Romania and the Romanian citizens from crisis... I resign from the office of president of Romania," he said. He said he would officially stand down on Wednesday.

Trump says US is 'committed to buying and owning Gaza'

President Donald Trump has said he is "committed to buying and owning" the Gaza Strip and relocating the two million Palestinians living there, despite global condemnation of the plan he unveiled last week.

He told reporters that he might allow Middle East countries to be involved in rebuilding parts of the territory and that he would make sure the Palestinian refugees would "live beautifully".

Both the Palestinian Authority and the armed group Hamas, whose 16-month war with Israel has caused widespread devastation in Gaza, reiterated that Palestinian land was "not for sale".

But Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu praised Trump's proposal as "revolutionary and creative".

The Israeli military launched a campaign to destroy Hamas in response to an unprecedented cross-border attack on 7 October 2023, in which about 1,200 people were killed and 251 were taken hostage.

More than 48,180 people have been killed in Gaza since then, according to the territory's Hamas-run health ministry.

Most of Gaza's population has also been displaced multiple times, almost 70% of buildings are estimated to be damaged or destroyed, the healthcare, water, sanitation and hygiene systems have collapsed, and there are shortages of food, fuel, medicine and shelter.

Trump repeated his pledge to take over post-war Gaza as he flew to New Orleans on Air Force One to watch the Super Bowl on Sunday.

"I'm committed to buying and owning Gaza. As far as rebuilding it, we may give it to other states in the Middle East to build sections of it. Other people

may do it through our auspices. But we're committed to owning it, taking it, and making sure that Hamas doesn't move back," he said, without explaining who he would buy Gaza from and how the US would own it.

"There's nothing to move back into. The place is a demolition site... The remainder will be demolished," he added. "But we'll make it into a very good site for future development by somebody."

Trump said people from all over the world would be able to move to Gaza and promised to "take care of the Palestinians".

"We're going to make sure they live beautifully and in harmony and peace and that they're not murdered."

"They don't want to go back to Gaza. They only go back because they have no alternative," he added.

The president also again expressed confidence that he could persuade neighbouring Egypt and Jordan to help, despite their

previous public rejections of his requests to take in refugees from Gaza.

Jordan's King Abdullah is due to meet Trump in Washington on Tuesday, while Israel's president said Trump would also hold talks with Egyptian President Abdul Fattah al-Sisi and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in the coming days.

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Macron shares his deepfakes for AI summit attention

French President Emmanuel Macron has used AI-generated deepfake videos to publicise the start of the AI Action Summit taking place in Paris.

In a video posted on his social media accounts, Macron reacts to a montage of deepfaked videos of himself in popular films and TV series by saying "nicely done".

Videos of Macron inserted into popular media, using AI, have been circulating on French social media for the past few months.

In October, he told Variety that deepfakes "can be a form of harassment" for some people.

Some experts have questioned the use of the deepfakes, saying normalising them makes it harder to spot fake news.

The montage of deepfakes, which has been seen millions of times across the president's Instagram, X and TikTok accounts, shows him inserted into a 1980s euro disco hit, an influencer's hair tutorial and the action hero TV show MacGyver.

Videos such as these have been popular of French social media for a while, so this is Macron acknowledging that he has become a meme among some social media circles.

Then the real Macron says: "It's pretty well done, it made me laugh."

"But more seriously, with artificial intelligence, we can do some very big things: change healthcare, energy, life in our society," the 47-year-old president said.

He adds: "France and Europe must be at the heart of this revolution to seize every opportunity and also to promote our own principles."

The video was posted ahead of a two-day global AI summit starting in Paris on Monday.

The aim of the summit is to unite world leaders, tech executives, and academics to examine AI's impact on society, governance, and the environment.

"President Macron's deepfake might seem like harmless fun to promote the AI Summit in Paris, but it is not in general a good thing," says Paul McKay, principal analyst at technology consultancy Forrester.

"Normalising deepfakes in this way should not be encouraged as it continues the difficulty with telling what is real and what isn't, and is ultimately helping to establish what is fact from fiction."

Dr Richard Whittle from Salford Business School also warns of the risk of "normalising" deepfakes videos, "both on social media and by scammers".

He adds: "It is great to bring attention to this threat, but doing it in a way that shows how easy it is to create deepfakes risks their wider adoption."

Prof Philip Howard, president of the International Panel on the Information Environment, says AI is increasingly being used "in innovative, sometimes playful ways, as demonstrated by President Macron's recent video."

But he adds: "These kinds of videos are often released when the guidelines on public communication are not clear."

There has been some debate in the French media over whether Macron should be trivialising deepfake videos when they can be used for harm.

In October, Macron told Variety deepfakes "can disinform, which can upset our democracies".

News

Foreign

Minister blames monkey for Sri Lanka power cut

A nationwide blackout in Sri Lanka has been blamed on a monkey that intruded into a power station south of Colombo.

Power is gradually being restored across the island nation of 22 million people, with medical facilities and water purification plants being given priority.

"A monkey has come in contact with our grid transformer,

causing an imbalance in the system," Energy Minister Kumara Jayakody told reporters.

The blackout started at about 11:00 local time (05:30 GMT) on Sunday, forcing many to rely on generators. Officials said it may take a few hours to get power back.

On social media, people criticised the authorities while making fun of the incident.

"A rogue monkey knocked

out Sri Lanka's entire power grid after triggering a total failure at a substation in Colombo," X user Mario Nawfal wrote.

"One monkey = total chaos. Time to rethink infrastructure?" he added.

Another X user, Sreeni R, posted an illustration of the monkey god Hanuman, who

according to the Hindu epic Ramayana, set Sri Lanka on fire during a war with the demon king Ravana who ruled the country.

"Sri Lanka tasted monkey business in the past," he wrote.

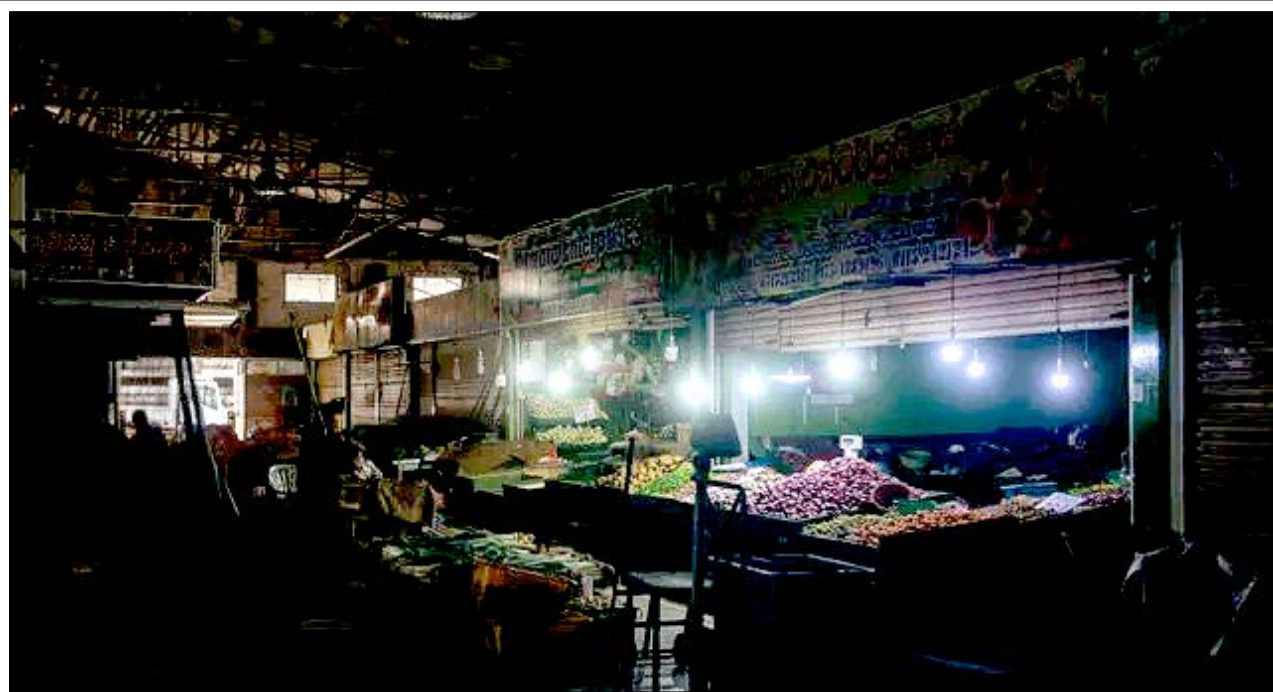
"Only in Sri Lanka can a group of monkeys fighting inside a power station cause

an islandwide power outage," wrote Jamila Husain, editor-in-chief of local newspaper Daily Mirror.

In a report published on Monday, the newspaper said engineers have been warning consecutive governments "for years" to upgrade its power grid or face frequent blackouts.

"The national power grid is in such a weakened state that frequent islandwide power outages maybe expected if there is a disturbance even in one of our lines," it quoted an unnamed senior engineer saying.

Sri Lanka experienced widespread blackouts during its economic crisis in 2022.



Sri Lanka experienced widespread blackouts amid an economic crisis in 2022.

DR Congo rebel leader whose fighters have created turmoil

The Democratic Republic of Congo is in turmoil - fighters from the notorious M23 rebel group have been surging through the country's east, battling the national army and capturing key places as they go.

In just a fortnight, thousands of people are said to have been killed and the fighting has sparked an ominous war of words between DR Congo and its neighbour, Rwanda.

So how did DR Congo - the largest country in sub-Saharan Africa - get here?

The origins of this complex conflict can be understood through the story of one man - M23 leader Sultani Makenga, who is the subject of various war crime allegations.

He is sanctioned by the US of using child soldiers, which he has denied. The UN has accused him of being responsible for sexual violence.

To go back through Makenga's life so far is to look into decades of warfare, intermit-

tent foreign intervention and the persistent lure of DR Congo's rich mineral resources.

His life began on Christmas Day in 1973, when he was born in the lush Congolese town of Masisi.

Raised by parents of the Tutsi ethnic group, Makenga quit school at the age of 17 to join a Tutsi rebel outfit across the border in Rwanda.

This group, named the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), were demanding greater Tutsi representation in Rwanda's government, which at the time was dominated by politicians from the Hutu majority.

They also wanted the hundreds and thousands of Tutsi refugees who had been forced from the country by ethnic violence to be able to return home.

For four years, Makenga and the RPF fought the Hutu-dominated army in Rwanda. Their battle was enmeshed with the 1994 genocide, when Hutu extremists killed 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus.



Ecuador election ends in a 'tie' prompting run-off

Ecuador's presidential election will go to a second round after a closely contested first-round result failed to produce an outright winner.

The electoral authorities called it a "technical tie" after the incumbent centre-right candidate, Daniel Noboa, and his main left-wing challenger Luisa González received nearly identical percentages of the vote.

The pair will now face a run-off in April.

The result is far narrower than opinion polls had predicted, indicating the second round could be harder to call.

The narrow result also dashed the hopes of Noboa's supporters, who had been buoyed by an early exit poll suggesting he might

clinch victory outright.

The president's supporters gathered in Quito, waving flags, donning T-shirts with his image and holding life-size cardboard cut-outs of the incumbent president.

These cut-outs, depicting Noboa in various outfits - from suits to tank tops and sunglasses - have become ubiquitous symbols across the country decorating front doors, apartment windows, and even car rooftops.

Noboa's presidency has been defined by his focus on tackling severe gang violence.

He implemented emergency measures to deploy the military to streets and prisons to curb rising crime.

Why more young men in Germany are turning to the far right

What my parents taught me is that they used to live in peace and calm, without having to have any fear in their own country," says 19-year-old Nick. "I would like to live in a country where I don't have to be afraid."

I meet him in a small bar on a street corner in the ex-mining town of Freiberg, Saxony - where he is playing darts.

It's a cold, foggy night in February with just over two weeks to go until Germany's national election.

Nick and his friend Dominic, who is 30, are backers or sympathetic to Alternative für Deutschland - a party that has been consistently polling second in Germany for more than a year and a half, as the far right here and elsewhere in Europe attracts an increasing number of young people, particularly men, into its orbit.

One particular reason why Nick - and many other young German men - say they are afraid is the number of attacks in Germany involving suspects who were asylum seekers - most recently, the fatal stabbing of a toddler and a man in a park in the Bavarian city of Aschaffenburg. Immigration is now Nick and Dominic's main concern, although they don't oppose it in all forms.

"The people who integrate, who learn, who study here, do their work - I have no problems with them," says Dominic, though he is critical of anyone he sees as taking advantage of the asylum system.

"But these days such statements are seen as hostile," says Dominic. "You're called a Nazi because of Germany's past."

The AfD - which has long been accused of anti-migrant rhetoric - is celebrating en-

dorsements from tech billionaire, Elon Musk, who owns the social media site X. He has hosted a live discussion with party leader Alice Weidel on the platform and dialled into a party rally.

Now, as Germany waits to see just how well the far right does in the upcoming election, the question is why so many young men in particular are being drawn to the far right and what the consequences could be for a country that's deeply conscious of its Nazi past.

Young men swinging to the right

Pew research in 2024 found that 26% of German men had positive views of the AfD compared to 11% of women, and the share of men holding this opinion has risen 10 points since 2022.

In the elections for the European Parliament in 2024, ac-

cording to German exit polls the number of under 24-year-olds, both male and female, who voted for the AfD in Germany rose to 16 per cent, up by 11 points from 2019.

This comes at a time of rising general anxiety among young people according to a recent study by the German Institute for Generational Research.

In a sample size of 1,000 Germans aged 16 to 25, anxiety levels were the highest amongst respondents who class themselves as far-right while they were the lowest amongst people who put themselves in the middle of the political spectrum.

Women were more likely to be concerned for their rights and those of minority groups while men were found to be more worried about conservative values that are less based around rights.

Ed Sheeran stopped from busking in Bengaluru by Indian police

British pop star Ed Sheeran was stopped from busking in the southern Indian city of Bengaluru on Sunday, with police saying he didn't have the necessary permissions.

A video showing a local police officer unplugging Sheeran's microphone on Bengaluru's Church Street - a crowded shopping and entertainment area - has since gone viral.

Officials told the ANI news agency a request from Mr Sheeran's team to busk on the road was rejected to avoid congestion in the area.

But Sheeran insisted on Instagram that "we had per-

mission to busk, by the way. Hence, us playing in that exact spot was planned out before. It wasn't just us randomly turning up. All good though. See you at the show tonight."

The incident took place ahead of his scheduled Mathematics Tour concert at NICE Grounds in Bengaluru.

Fans criticised the police intervention online, with one saying: "We live in an unclocracy. And there's nothing uncles love more than to stop young people from having fun," referring to the number of vague rules that govern the use of public spaces in India.

However PC Mohan, a local

MP from the ruling BJP party, said "even global stars must follow local rules - no permit, no performance!"

Sheeran is in India for the second year in a row on a 15-day tour, having already played in Pune Hyderabad and Chennai and with more concerts scheduled for Shillong in India's north-east and the capital Delhi.

At his Bengaluru show, Sheeran surprised fans by singing two hit local songs in the Telugu language with singer Shilpa Rao on stage.

He previously collaborated with Indian singer and actor Diljit Dosanjh during the latter's concert in Birmingham last year.

While in India he has also collaborated with sitar musician Megha Rawoot on a version of his hit song Shape of You.

Demand for live music concerts has been increasing in India, with Sheeran's biggest-ever tour of the country coming close on the heels of Dua Lipa's recent performance in Mumbai and Coldplay's multi-city tour.

With growing disposable incomes, India is an emerging player in the "concert economy", a recent Bank of Baroda report said, with live concerts set to be worth \$700-900m (£550-730m).

Sports

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

Edo FA Cup: Insurance Feeders beat St. Andrews 2-1 to qualify for Quarter Finals ● face Bendel Insurance or Restoration FC

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

Bendel Insurance Feeders team, Monday defeated St. Andrews Foundation FC 2-1 in the second round of the 2025 Edo FA Cup tournament and progressed to the Quarters stage of the tournament.

Miracle Oshodin scored twice in the game played at the Crescent club field to give the young Insurers a deserved win. Oshodin miraculously opened scoring for Insurance Feeders in the 7th minute of action after mesmerizing St. Andrews defenders with a fine

cross from Samuel Eyide. He netted the second goal in the 48th minute in a similar circumstance after a brilliant control of a fine cross from Chinedu Kelvin from the right flank. In the 51st minute, Marvis struck from the edge of the box to increase the tally but it

was surrounded by controversy. The referee had pointed to the center of the field but protest from the side of Insurance opponents and few spectators forced the referee to change her decision. St. Andrews pulled one goal back just two minutes after play resumed as the game ended

2-1 in favour of the young Benin Arsenal. The captain of Insurance Feeders Osamuyi Egharevba was voted Man of the Match and received the souvenir donated by the tournament sponsors Peculiar Ultimate Concerns. Bendel Insurance Feeders

are facing either their senior brothers or Restoration FC who will be playing on Thursday at 9AM at the same Crescent Club field. In another engagement, City Rovers FC enjoyed three points, three goals walkover FC Deltra FC as a result of Deltra FC no show.

Flourish Sabastine opens goal account for Galatasaray in stalemate with Trabzonspor

Former Nigeria youth international Flourish Sabastine scored her

first-ever goal for Turkish women's top-flight side, Galatasaray, during their 1-1 draw

with Trabzonspor on Sunday. The former Stade de Reims player opened scoring for the

host in the third minute of play.



SEBASTIAN FLOURISH

10 minutes into the second half, Fatlinda Ramaj restored parity for the travelers ensuring that both sides share spoils. Sabastine was a key player of Bayelsa Queens in the Nigeria Women Football League (NWFL) Premiership before moving to France where she featured for Reims. She also represented Nigeria at U-20 level, especially at the 2022 FIFA U-20 Women's World Cup. Galatasaray, which is the Turkish Super Lig women's defending champions, is not having their title defense on a good note. The team currently occupy the sixth position on the log with 30 points after 16 games. They are 12 points behind leaders, Fenerbahce and also fall short of teams like Fomget GSK, ALG Spor, Besiktas, and Trabzonspor. On February 15, 2025, Galatasaray will face Bornova in their next league match.

NWFL: Okwara confident of Heartland Queens' win against Dannaz Ladies

Heartland Queens mid-field dynamo, Oluchi Okwara has reassured the teeming fans that the team will bounce back to reckoning from their recent poor forms as they take on Dannaz Ladies in a crucial NWFL Premiership matchday 5 encounter on Wednesday, February 12 at the Dan Anyiam Stadium in Owerri. The Owerri-based side have endured difficult moments failing to secure a win in their last four outings with just a solitary point to show for their whole efforts. However, Okwara remains optimistic that the tide will turn into their favour upon return to their sanctuary, Dan Anyiam Stadium on Wednesday. In an exclusive chat with the

club's media, the playmaker expressed confidence in her ability and the team's collective determination to secure maximum points against the Lagos-based side, Dannaz Ladies. "In this very next home match against Dannaz Ladies, we are going for outright victory and nothing else. I have no doubt in my mind that I will give my very best to ensure we get a good result. And the expected win will be the necessary catalyst that will turn our fortune around for the best going forward in other matches on the calendar," Okwara enthused. The midfield maestro also has a warm messages for the club's supporters urging them to remain steadfast in their overwhelming backing of the Owerri landladies.

Dikko, Padmozi Sports discuss private sector involvement in sports

For National Sports Commission Chairman Malam Shehu Dikko, the sports economy mandate of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu' GCFR is one that requires continuous engagements with critical stakeholders. So when foremost sports marketer and CEO Pamodzi Sports Marketing Ltd. Chief Mike Itemuagbor visited, it was an opportunity to compile notes on how to turn the sporting sector from consumption to production. Discussions were basically centered around advancing private sector participation and investment in sports. The National Sports Commission is committed to harnessing the opportunities inherent in the sector and creating value chains across the industry. Gone are the days when the nation's sporting facilities

would lie idle during the weekends. The sports weekend economy should encourage people to build sports into their relaxation programs for the weekends. Increased sporting activities will create more sports jobs and the target of the sector contributing 3% to the nation's GDP will become more realistic. All these will not be possible without the private sector involvement hence this meeting with Chief Itemuagbor where issues of mutual interest were on the front burner. A former member of the Confederation of African Football (CAF) marketing committee, Itemuagbor has successfully marketed several local, international and global sporting events and programs. He has been involved in the marketing of major championships and games staged in

Nigeria like the African Youth Championship Nigeria 1995, FIFA U-20 World Cup Nigeria 1999, Africa Cup of Nations

Ghana/Nigeria 2000, 8th All-Africa Games Nigeria 2003 and FIFA U-17 World Cup Nigeria 2009.



SHEHU DIKKO AND MIKE ITAMUAGBOR



Nimrod visits to CAVB Hq

The President of Nigeria Volleyball Federation, Engineer Musa Nimrod, Monday paid a working visit to the Confederation of African Volleyball (CAVB) headquarters. Nimrod who doubles as the President of the CAVB Beach Volleyball Commission met with CAVB President Mrs Bouchra Hajji and the CAVB technical department. Nimrod revealed that discussions were focused on finalising preparations for the 2025 African Women's Club Championship, scheduled to take place from 1st to 14th April 2025, and it is being hosted by Nigeria

Customs Services Club. He said, "Part of the working visit was to inform the CAVB President, Mrs Bouchra Hajji on the level of preparations for the 2025 African Women's Club Championship to be hosted by Nigeria Customs Service. "The Comptroller General of Nigeria Customs Service (CGC), Adewale Adeniyi MFR has been on top of the situation and the club are currently in camp ahead of the championship. "With the support of the CGC, National Sports Commission and the Federal Government of Nigeria, the country will be a good host to clubs participating in the championship".

Congo set to appeal suspension by FIFA

The Republic of Congo said on Monday that it will hold discussions with world's football governing body FIFA and the Confederation of African Football (CAF) to lift sanctions that bar its federation from international competitions.

FIFA, in consultation with Africa's football governing body, on Friday suspended Congo due to third-party interference in the central African nation's football affairs, which violates its obligations under FIFA's rules. Congo denies this.

FIFA said the suspension would only be lifted if a number of conditions were met, including the return of full control of the federation's headquarters and other facilities to the national football federation FECOFOOT.

Congo Sports Minister Hugues Ngouelondele told a press conference that authorities will

"very quickly get in touch with the leaders of CAF and FIFA to discuss the lifting of the sanction".

He added that while the government seeks a compromise, it would not compromise its principles.

The suspension came in the

wake of internal disputes within Congo's national football federation.

The performance of the country's national football has been underwhelming in recent years, the minister said. It has failed to secure a place in the AFCON continental tournament since their last appearance in 2015.

Despite the troubles facing Congolese football, he dismissed claims of government interference in the federation's matters. He also stressed that such challenges are not exclusive to Congo.



FIFA PRESIDENT GIANNI INFANTINO

Golden Eaglet sensation Destiny Samuel attracts European giants

Nigeria's rising midfield star, Destiny Samuel, is quickly becoming one of the hottest prospects in African football.

The 16-year-old, who donned the No. 4 jersey for the Golden Eaglets, has caught the attention of top European clubs with his outstanding per-

formances in midfield.

A defensive and central midfield maestro, Samuel showcased his immense talent during the WAFU B U-17 Championship, where he played a crucial role in Nigeria's campaign.

His ability to dictate play, win duels, and shield the defense made him a standout performer.

Despite an unfortunate injury early in the tournament, his technical ability and tactical awareness caught the eye of top scouts.

Now, Chelsea FC, Gent, Sporting Lisbon, Riga FC, and Udinese are all in pursuit of the young midfielder.

Chelsea, known for scouting

top African talents, sees Samuel as a future midfield general.

Sporting Lisbon, a club with a strong reputation for developing young stars, believes he could thrive in their structured system.

Udinese and Gent, both with a history of nurturing African players, are also keen, while Riga FC hopes to offer a direct pathway into European football.

As negotiations unfold, Samuel's next move could define his future. With clubs from the English Premier League, Serie A, Belgian Pro League, Portuguese Primeira Liga, and Latvian Virsliga all vying for his signature, the young Nigerian is on the brink of a major career breakthrough.

Could Destiny Samuel be the next Nigerian sensation to take Europe by storm? Time will tell, but one thing is certain—his journey is just beginning!



GOLDEN EAGLETES

UEFA Champions League: Guardiola challenges Man City to 'Special Night' against Madrid

Pep Guardiola has challenged his Manchester City side to prove they are still "something special" in their blockbuster Champions League tie against Real Madrid despite a turbulent season for the Premier League champions.

The two clubs meet in Europe's elite competition for a fourth consecutive season but this time much earlier in the tournament as both under-performed in the new league phase.

City sneaked into the next round in 22nd place in the 36-team table by winning their final game against Club Brugge, while defending champions Real finished 11th.

Guardiola admitted at yes-

terday's pre-match press conference that his team, European champions in 2023, were "not even close" to finishing in the top eight, which would have earned them automatic qualification for the last 16.

Real Madrid, European champions a record 15 times, secured a seeding for the knockout playoffs. This means they host the second leg of the tie, which the City boss admitted was an advantage.

"When you finish 22nd (out of 24) you cannot ask any favour; you cannot ask anything that you didn't win," Guardiola said ahead of Tuesday's first leg at the Etihad.

"Always I believe what happens in football, normally you have to deserve it and we didn't

deserve it"

The Catalan said he still had faith in his team after a decade of success despite their struggles this season, during which he has had to cope with injuries and a loss of form.

City have won six out of the past seven Premier League titles,

including the last four in a row, but they are currently in fifth spot and realistically out of the title race.

"I will not deny how I trust the players that gave us the incredible decade, all of us, winning a lot of things and playing at high standards and I know what we are capable of," he said.



GUARDIOLA



Doubts over Chukwueze's future in Milan

There are strong indications that Super Eagles and AC Milan winger, Samuel Chukwueze, could exit the Giuseppe Meazza this summer following interest from Turkish Super Lig side, Besiktas JK.

The 25-year-old joined the Rossonerri from Villarreal in the summer of 2023 but has never really settled in at Milan as he's largely been a bit part player at the San Siro.

The AFCON 2023 silver medal winner with Nigeria has played paltry 82 minutes since the new manager, Sergio Conceicao, took over as Milan's head coach, worsening his story with the seven-time UEFA Champions League winners.

According to Europa Calcio, Chukwueze's future seems increasingly distant from Milan. The player's agents have suggested him to Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's side, Besiktas, who have immediately started contacts to bring him to the Turkish Süper Lig.

The 2015 FIFA U-17 World Cup winner was linked with a

move to Alex Iwobi's Fulham in January, but time disparity in the transfer market didn't allow the move to materialize.

Additionally, Milan's technical director, Geoffrey Moncada, revealed his side were delighted the Super Eagles winger didn't make a deadline-day transfer to Fulham.

The former Manchester United boss has given the green light to the deal, as he considers Chukwueze to be a valuable reinforcement in the attacking department.

The Turkish club are currently working on a loan-with-obligation-to-buy proposal, and are hopeful their strategy will convince Milan, who intend on recuperating the fees to secure Chukwueze from Villarreal two years ago.

Chukwueze on the other hand, is seriously considering a move to Besiktas as he's aware that he is not part of Milan's long-term plans. With few opportunities under Sergio Conceicao, the former Villarreal player could accept the Turkish destination to re-establish himself.

FIFA Council Election: Removal of regional blocks will allow better representation for Africa —Pinnick

With the FIFA Council seats up for grabs during the next CAF elections slated for March 12, 2025 in Cairo, Egypt, Nigeria's Amaju Pinnick will be one of the 10 candidates to battle for the six tickets at stake.

Of the six tickets, one is reserved for women's representatives from the continent on the 37-member FIFA Council. It is presently occupied by Isha Johansen of Sierra Leone who has been challenged by the duo of Lydia Nsekera of Burundi and Kanizat Ibrahim of the Comoros Island.

Pinnick will be seeking re-election for another four-year term on the FIFA Council where he has become a major voice from the continent, This-Day reports.

Presently representing Africa as one of the six Vice Presidents on the FIFA Council is Patrice Motsepe, the South African billionaire businessman who is CAF President.

The former NFF President will battle nine other contestants that include; Hany Abou Rida (Egypt) who is seeking re-election; Fouzi Lekjaa (Morocco) is also seeking re-elec-

tion; Yahia Ahmed (Mauritania); Souleiman Waberi (Djibouti);

Idriss Dialli (Cote d'Ivoire); Mathurin Chakus (Benin Republic); Augustine Senghor (Senegal); Djibrilla Pele Hamidou (Niger Republic); and Andrew Kamanga (Zambia).

The March 12 contests in Cairo will be very different from the past FIFA Council elections in Africa with the removal of languages in voting for FIFA Council members. This was a resolution from the most recent 46th CAF General Assembly in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The removal of language blocks brings an element of fairness and also increasing the level of competition from the nominations.

Previously, The Arab/Luso-Spanish speaking region has strong contenders like Abou Rida and Faouzi Lekjaa who will be seeking a second term.

But in his first official interview on the FIFA Council elections, Pinnick said at the weekend that he has nothing against throwing the contests open without regional encumbrances.

OPINION

The Nigerian Observer
...that the people may know

Hitler Godwin Obaseki and the N19bn Radisson Hotel Scam

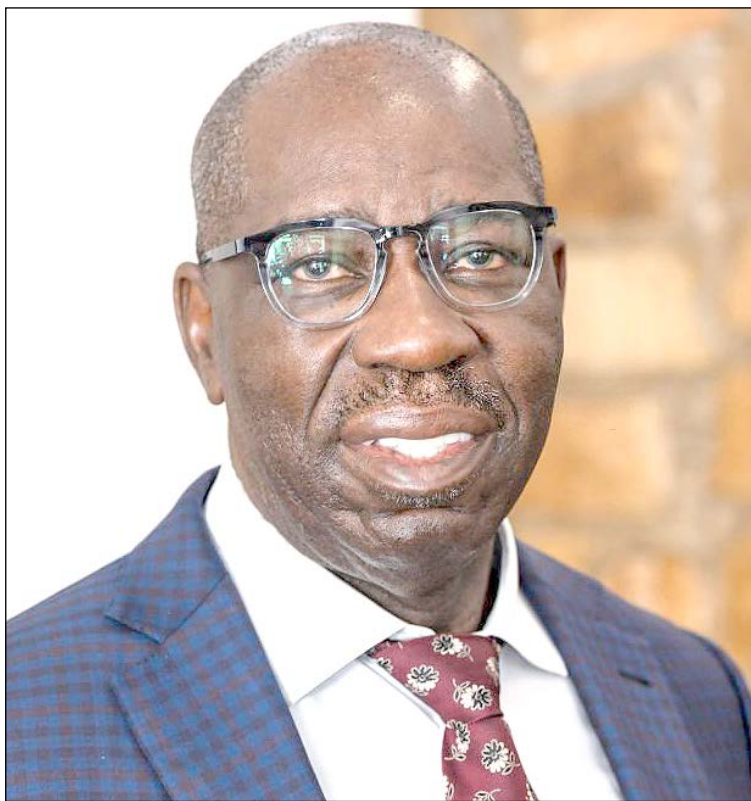
FRED ITUA

In the Christian Holy Book, we were told that when it was time for God to redeem man unto Himself and send the messiah, rather than drop him from the sky as a full grown man, He took the long process of passing through the normal human process. The reason as stated in Hebrews 2: 14 - 18 and Hebrews 5:1-3 is so that, the messiah can fully understand and comprehend the challenges peculiar to humans, and therefore, be more merciful and compassionate in dealing with them.

Compassionate and good leadership overtime, as evident in history and from all over the world, has always stemmed from leaders who were/are taken from among the people. The Mandelas of this world, the Abraham Lincolns, the Mahatma Gandhis, the Barrack Obamas, the Lee Kuan Yews and the Monday Okpebholos, whose names have become synonymous with good, compassionate and human friendly policies and developments, all have one thing in common. They were once a part of the people, understood what the issues were, and could feel the pains and agonies of the people.

As I continue to reflect on the shocking revelations by the Edo State Assets Verification Committee, detailing the level of plunder, looting and shady dealings that took place during the regime of Godwin Obaseki, I cannot but wonder if the wounded 'ematon' is human and if there is any drop of human kindness left in him.

Let us get one thing clear - many leaders are corrupt and often engage in shady deals. This is a fact that the



OBASEKI

current administration of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu is doing all within its power to change and address. However, the norm among these corrupt leaders is to try to divert attention with some human faced projects. They loot with some level of fear and trembling.

Godwin Obaseki introduced a new kind of corruption laced with heartlessness, wickedness, and a complete lack of human empathy. This kind is rare in the Nigerian political space. The Obaseki's case is not just about

corrupt and shady practices, but his level of detachment, disconnect, and lack of concern to the plight of the people he was elected to serve

At a time when Edo lacked basic infrastructures, motorable roads, primary healthcare system and good schools, what was of concern to Obaseki was building a hotel that will serve as shelter to his Lagos-based consultants, who only came to the State to sign MoUs and looked for new areas to loot during weekdays.

How well does one explain the ra-

tionale for investing Edo State N19 billion in a private hotel venture at a time over 61% of the State population was completely cut off from the capital due to bad roads? Which right thinking man prioritizes the building of a hotel over the building of classrooms for students to learn? Which sane leader leaves the primary healthcare system in shambles while investing huge money in a hotel business?

In a State that boasts of having arguably the highest number of standard hotels in the South South, why should a hotel business be the utmost concern of Godwin Obaseki? We have Protea, OTI, West View, Constantial, View Point, Sage, and many others. What is it about Raddison Hotel that Obaseki would neglect pressing areas needing urgent government attention for?

The answer is clear, and it is evident in the opening paragraph - Godwin Obaseki, a Lagos boy who accidentally became the governor of Edo State, was never part of the people he was elected to govern. He did not know them, never felt their pains, never used their roads, did not school among them, and did not even have a house in the State.

He was more of a contractor governor who looked forward to weekends to run back to his Lagos base. To him, satisfying his Lagos consultants was far more important than whatever the needs of Edo people were. Because he was not taken from among the people, he lacked the needed compassion and empathy to govern and lead them.

This explains why, in the midst of daunting hardship by the citizens from Edo North and Edo Central in accessing the State headquarters,

Obaseki's solution was to erect gigantic signboards that read, "bear with us, this is a federal government road". What callousness! What wickedness!! What indifference!!! Is Godwin Obaseki truly human or a robot?

At a time Edo public schools lacked teachers, with most schools boasting of having only 3 or 4 teachers, Obaseki was busy diverting N19 billion of Edo State hard-earned money to a private firm to erect a hotel. When insecurity was ravaging our lands, Upper Sakponba and its axis turned to a full blown cult war, Obaseki was more interested in building a hotel and paid deaf ears to the cries of our mothers whose sons were hacked down in cult related wars

Time, they say, judges all things, and one thing is sure - history will not be kind to Godwin Obaseki. When all is said and done and the books of remembrance are opened, Godwin Obaseki will be remembered as the "detached stranger" who heartlessly plundered Edo while paying deaf ears to the cries and pains of the people.

Godwin Obaseki will forever serve as a bitter reminder to Edo people on why it is dangerous to entrust our State into the hands of those who have never identified with us, never lived with us and do not know our shared history and culture. Nebuchadnezzar Godwin Obaseki plundered and looted callously because he was never part of us. He could not empathize with us and served merely his personal purpose and that of his Lagos consultants.

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

GOV MONDAY OKPEBHOLO:

Upholding integrity and accountability in governance

DR. DESMOND AGBAMA

In an era when political integrity is often a rare commodity, Governor Monday Okpebholo stands out as a beacon of hope and ethical leadership. During his tenure in Edo State, the Governor has consistently demonstrated integrity and strong principles in governance.

Since assuming office, his programs and activities have been characterized by a steadfast commitment to transparency, accountability, and servant leadership. In an age where informed citizens increasingly demand openness and responsibility from their leaders, only a leader of genuine char-

acter like Governor Okpebholo can provide exemplary leadership that inspires trust and fosters progress.

From the beginning of his administration, Governor Okpebholo has made integrity and accountability the cornerstones of his governance. He has implemented measures to ensure transparency in financial dealings, public contracts, and resource allocation.

In addition, Governor Okpebholo has established an open-government initiative that encourages citizen participation in governance. He has also put measures in place to ensure that the voices of the people are heard and respected. These initiatives will



OKPEBHOLO

undoubtedly help build trust and reinforce the principle that government exists to serve the people.

Worldwide, citizens are demanding good governance. Accountability, transparency, and integrity are vital to providing effective leadership. Governor Okpebholo's administration is committed to championing accountability; significant steps have been taken to ensure that public officers adhere to the highest ethical standards.

His administration maintains a zero-tolerance policy for corruption by implementing mechanisms to monitor performance, identify inefficiencies, and decisively address corrupt practices. These measures will go a

long way toward curbing unethical behavior and promoting a culture of responsibility, accountability, and transparency among civil and public servants.

Thus far, the ethical leadership exhibited by Governor Monday Okpebholo has resulted in an increase in the state's Internally Generated Revenue, which in January 2025 exceeded N10 billion naira—a significant improvement in the state's financial performance.

It is imperative for citizens to support Governor Okpebholo's administration so that it can deliver on its election promises to the people of Edo State.