

Nine dead, three injured in Lagos/Ibadan expressway crash

The Ogun State sector of the Federal Roads Safety Corp (FRSC) confirmed the death of nine passengers in a road crash which occurred in the early hours of Monday around the Ayetoro area of the Lagos/Ibadan Expressway.

Three others sustained injuries in the accident. The Chief Route Commander and Public Education Officer of the Sector, Florence Okpe, confirmed this development in a statement issued in Abeokuta, the state capital.

"A total of 13 people, comprising of 10 male adult and 03 female adult were involved and 9 were recorded killed (6 male and 3 female) while 3 were injured, two vehicles were involved with registration numbers UYY165ZY Toyota Hiace bus

and DKA244XC truck," she said. According to her, the suspected causes of the fatal crash were excessive speed and fatigue which led to loss of control and the driver rammed into a stationed truck. She said that the injured

victims have been taken to Fambobis Hospital in Mowe, while the deceased were deposited at Idera morgue in Sagamu. "The Sector Commander is pained over the recklessness of some drivers for not observing the stipulated speed limit and

refusal to obey the 15 minutes rest after 4 hrs journey." "He has however sympathized with the family of the crash victims and enjoined them to contact Mowe unit Command for more information about the crash.

The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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Tax Reform Bill is the future of Nigeria, Akpabio insists

—Pg 3

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Drug: 3m Nigerians in N'West suffer from addiction —NDLEA

The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency has disclosed that around three million people in the North-West geopolitical zone of Nigeria are grappling with drug addiction.

The NDLEA Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Brigadier General Mohamed Buba Marwa (retd.), disclosed this during the flag-off ceremony of the North-West geopolitical zone campaign against illicit drug use in Kaduna.

The sensitization campaign, themed "Stop Drug Abuse and Domestic Violence in Our Communities," was organised by the National Orientation Agency in collaboration with the NDLEA and facilitated by the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Marwa highlighted the se-

verity of the crisis, citing the 2018 National Drug Use Survey conducted by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, which found that 14.3 million Nigerians aged 15 to 64 use psychoactive substances.

He noted that the North-West zone, consisting of Kaduna, Katsina, Kano, Jigawa, Kebbi, Zamfara, and Sokoto, has been severely impacted, with Kano having the highest prevalence rate at 16%. He emphasized that the region, with an estimated population of 25 million in 2016, had approximately three million drug users, constituting 12% of the population.

Marwa stressed the need for a collective approach to tackling drug abuse, calling on state governments, lawmakers, local authorities, and private

stakeholders to collaborate with the NDLEA.

He urged parents, community leaders, traditional rulers, and religious figures to actively prevent drug abuse, support those affected, and ensure drug traffickers face the full force of the law.

He also disclosed that the NDLEA has established 30 counselling and rehabilitation centres across Nigeria, offering psychosocial interventions, medical care, referrals, and social reintegration for recover-

ing drug users.

"Over the past four years, 22,047 individuals have been counselled, treated, and rehabilitated through these centres," he added.

Marwa commended the National Orientation Agency for organising the campaign and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Rt. Hon. Tajudeen Abbas, for his facilitation.

Marwa urged North-West governors to establish at least three rehabilitation centres per state, with one in each senator-

ial district, and encouraged state governments to provide land and logistical support for NDLEA operations.

He also highlighted the importance of providing economic alternatives for individuals engaged in illicit drug cultivation and distribution. To address this, he announced the establishment of an Alternative Development Unit in his office to collaborate with stakeholders in providing alternative sources of income.

The United Nations Office

on Drugs and Crime has commended Nigeria for being the first African country to implement this initiative.

Lanre Issa-Onilu, Director-General of the National Orientation Agency, also spoke at the event, launching a four-month campaign against drug abuse and violent crimes in the region.

He cited research from the UNODC and the United States' National Institute on Drug

CONTINUES ON PG 2»

Edo SUBEB condemns attacks on schools

● **Calls for community protection**

The Edo State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) has condemned the rising cases of arson and vandalism on school buildings and properties across the state, describing them as threats to education and the future of Edo's children.

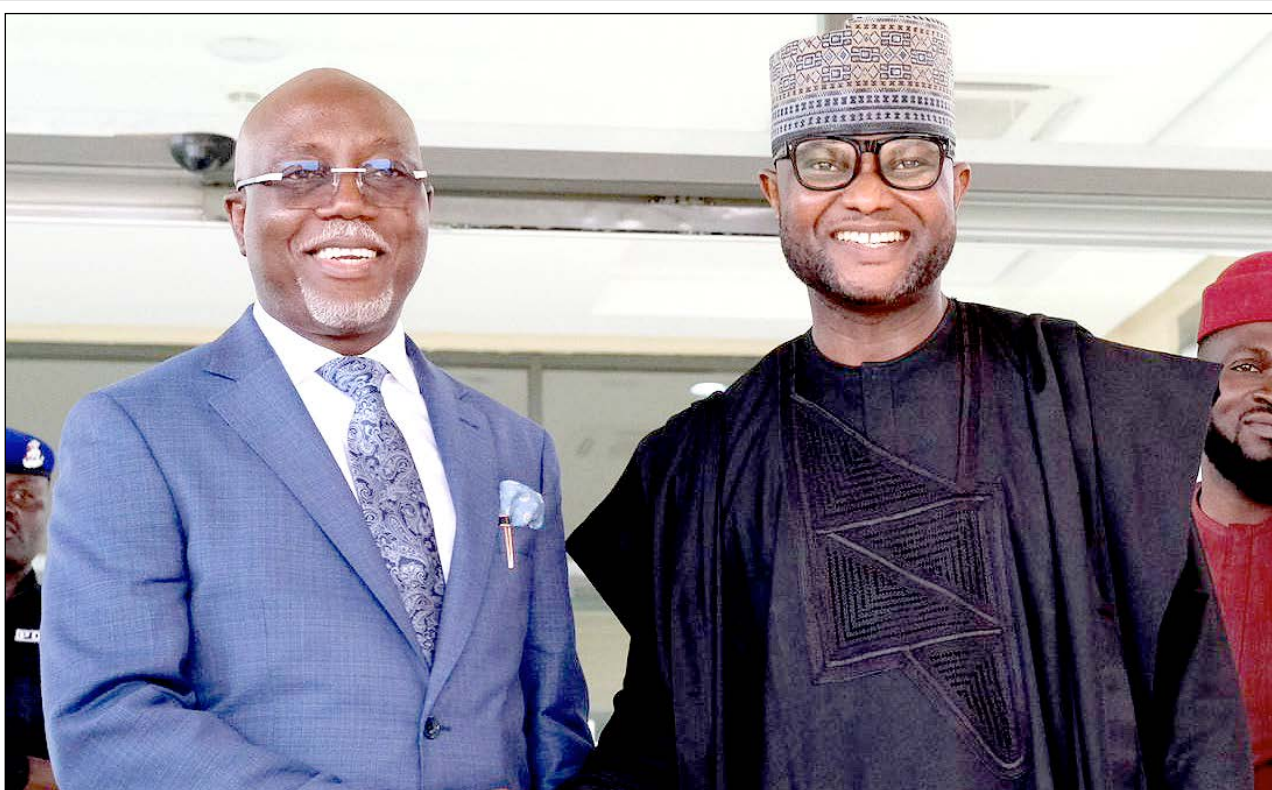
Executive Chairman of SUBEB, Barrister Mrs. Onomen Briggs, issued a statement, expressing deep concern over these acts of destruction, which undermine government efforts to provide quality education.

She assured the public that

the state government, through security agencies, is intensifying efforts to identify and apprehend the perpetrators. Emphasizing that such crimes will not be tolerated, she stated that those responsible will face the full weight of the law. According to her, schools are vital institutions for learning and development, and any attack on them is an attack on the future of the state.

Mrs. Briggs urged community leaders, parents, guard-

CONTINUES ON PG 2»



INAUGURATION:

Edo State Deputy Governor, Hon. Dennis Idahosa (right), congratulating Lucky Aiyedatiwa on his inauguration for a second term as Ondo State Governor.

S'East wants referendum, not additional states, says IPOB

—Pg 2

Tension as Nwoko meets with APC stakeholders in Agbor

—Pg 3

Germany's conservatives celebrate, but far right enjoy record result

—Pg 5

D'Tigers clinch 2025 AfroBasket spot with dominant performance

—Pg 7

Edo University installs high-speed broadband for better internet connectivity

LAMAI CASSIUS

Edo State Government has installed high-speed fiber optic broadband across Edo University Iyamho to improve internet connectivity for students, faculty, and staff.

The Acting Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Dawood Egbefo, disclosed this during a press

briefing ahead of the university's 6th convocation ceremony scheduled for February 27.

He emphasized that stable internet access is essential for modern education, research, and innovation, adding that the installation aligns with the institution's mission to provide world-class education and reduce the need for students to seek education outside Edo

State and Nigeria.

Prof. Egbefo highlighted that the university has maintained a stable academic calendar since its inception, ensuring students graduate on time despite challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

He noted that Edo University has achieved remarkable academic success, including a 100% pass rate in nursing pro-

fessional exams and the successful progression of its law students in compliance with Law School requirements.

The university has also received accreditation for programs such as the M.Sc in Accounting and Master's in Public Administration, further strengthening its academic offerings.

At this year's convocation,

430 students will be graduating, with 14 earning first-class degrees, 140 receiving post-graduate degrees, and 20 completing their Ph.D. programs.

As part of the ceremony, the university will confer honorary doctorate degrees on two distinguished Nigerians, former Edo State Governor and current Senator representing Edo North, Adams Oshiomhole, and Vincent Aghimomen, Chairman of Freedom Group Nigeria, in recognition of their contributions to the development of the state

and the country.

Prof. Egbefo expressed appreciation to the Edo State Government for its continuous support and reiterated the university's commitment to upholding high academic standards and maintaining a zero-tolerance policy for vices.

He also announced that student admissions have increased to 1,528 for the 2024/2025 academic session, reinforcing Edo University's dedication to expanding access to quality education in Nigeria.



MATRICULATING STUDENTS:

A cross section of matriculating students of Igbinedion University, Okada.

Igbinedion University matriculates 1,500 students

● Launches paint production unit

EDWARD OSEGHE

Igbinedion University, Okada (IUO), Nigeria's premier private university has matriculated over 1,500 students across its seven colleges and three schools, marking another milestone in its commitment to academic excellence.

Addressing the newly admitted students, Vice-Chancellor of IUO, Prof. Lawrence Ikechukwu Ezemonye, officially christened the 2024/2025 matriculants as the 'STELLARS'.

He congratulated them on their admission and urged them to strive for excellence, emphasizing the importance of distinguishing themselves through remarkable achievements, talent, and dedication

to their academic pursuits.

In his goodwill message, the Chancellor, Founder, and Chairman of the Board of Regents, Chief Gabriel Osawaru Igbinedion, represented by the Deputy Chancellor and former two-time Governor of Edo State, Chief Lucky Nosakhare Igbinedion, underscored the significance of the occasion.

He encouraged the students to embrace their unique perspectives and innovative ideas, reminding them that their contributions are vital to the world.

"As you journey through this noble institution, you will discover that it is a vibrant citadel of diverse cultures. This cosmopolitan spirit is our strength, fostering an inclusive environment where every voice is heard, val-

ued, and celebrated.

"Here, we nurture intellectual curiosity and critical thinking, empowering you to become global leaders who will leave an indelible mark on society," he stated.

The matriculation lecture, titled 'Work - A Call', was delivered by guest speaker Farmer Ogbole Samson, Team Lead for Eupesia Place Limited (Soilless Farm Lab) and an alumnus of IUO's 2012 set.

His inspiring address provided valuable insights into the significance of work, urging students to embrace diligence and purpose in their academic and professional journeys.

He noted that true success requires effort, stressing that a privileged background should

not lead to complacency. "One of the dangers of being in a private university from a privileged background is failing to understand the value of work because you feel everything is already given," Ogbole remarked.

Drawing from his expertise in soilless farming, he explained that loamy soil serves as an anchor for plants, retaining water and allowing air passage.

He highlighted that any material capable of performing these functions can serve as a substitute for soil, thus enabling soilless farming.

He urged students not to seek alternatives to formal education but rather to build a solid foundation for their future endeavors through diligent academic efforts.

Dangote Refinery can meet Nigeria's petrol demand, says Dangote

The Dangote Petroleum Refinery has enough petrol in storage to meet Nigeria's fuel demand, according to Aliko Dangote, President of Dangote Industries Limited.

Dangote stated that the refinery currently holds more than half a billion litres of petroleum products worth over ₦600 billion in its tanks. He assured that the facility is producing sufficient refined products, including petrol, diesel, and kerosene, to fully meet Nigeria's needs.

During a visit by a Zambian

government delegation led by Energy Minister Makozo Chikote, Dangote emphasized that the refinery is not just for Nigeria but for the entire African continent.

He highlighted the importance of intra-African trade and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), noting that the refinery aims to support energy needs across the region.

Chikote expressed admiration for the project, stating that Dangote's vision aligns with Africa's broader economic goals.

He praised the refinery's scale and efficiency, emphasizing the

potential benefits for Zambia and other African nations. Samuel Maimbo, a member of the delegation and Vice President of Budget, Performance Review, and Strategic Planning at the World Bank Group, also noted that Africa's growth must be driven by private sector investment rather than relying solely on development aid or government funding.

Edwin Devakumar, Vice President of Dangote Industries Limited, explained that the refinery was designed to process Nigerian crude while also having the flexibility to refine oth-

er African and Middle Eastern crude oils.

He stated that the facility produces the highest quality refined products and operates with a focus on maximum value extraction from every barrel of crude.

According to Devakumar, the refinery's daily production includes 57 million litres of petrol, 20 million litres of jet fuel, and 27 million litres of diesel. With Nigeria's local fuel consumption estimated at 46 million litres per day, the surplus will be exported, reinforcing Dangote's commitment to supporting Africa's energy sector.

S'East wants referendum, not additional states, says IPOB

The Indigenous People of Biafra has kicked against the proposed creation of additional states, adding that the South-East is only interested in referendum to determine their exit from Nigeria and not additional states.

In a press statement Monday, the spokesman for the pro-Biafran group, Emma Powerful, said the group is against the creation of new states because the existing states are bankrupt and not functioning properly.

Powerful insisted that what the Ndigbo want is an exit from Nigeria in a peaceful and democratic way, adding that IPOB is calling for a referendum date from the Federal Government so that Biafrans can decide their fate whether to remain in one Nigeria or to exit, into an Independent State of Biafra.

The statement read in part, "Following the rumours that the Federal Government and the National Assembly proposed to create additional 31 new states in Nigeria, we the global family and movement of IPOB worldwide wish to categorically state that Biafrans do not want creation of new States.

"Instead of multiplying eco-

nomically bankrupt states, the unworkable Nigerian unity should be dissolved. IPOB movement is against the creation of new states because the existing states are bankrupt and not functioning properly.

"Creating more states is tantamount to creating more confusion, disunity, and insecurity. Nigerians are suffering because of the faulty foundations of the Nigerian state and the unsurmountable corruption in the Nigerian government. Nigerian politicians are deep to their necks in corruption.

"Nigeria is a country founded on fraud, sustained in fraud that is incapable of sustaining human and capital development. Any society built on fraud cannot stand. That is why IPOB and other rational indigenous minds in Nigeria are calling for the dissolution of Nigeria.

"At Independence given to them by British in 1960, Nigeria had three major regions. Later, the Mid-Western Region was created after a referendum, making it the fourth region. These Regions were progressive and competitive because they enjoyed constitutionally granted autonomy."

Drug: 3m Nigerians in N'West...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

Abuse, which established links between drug abuse and crimes such as armed robbery, kidnapping, terrorism, domestic violence, and sexual assault. I

Issa-Onilu emphasized the urgent need for intervention, stating that drug abuse is a crisis threatening the fabric of society.

He called for stronger collaboration among stakeholders to dismantle criminal networks and support rehabilitation efforts.

The campaign, a joint initiative between NOA and stakeholders at federal, state, and local levels, aims to create a safer and more prosperous North-West zone.

Edo SUBEB condemns attacks on...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

ians, and residents to take ownership of schools in their areas and remain vigilant. She called for increased security awareness, urging people to report any suspicious activities around school premises to authorities. She also appealed to traditional rulers, local government chairpersons, and youth groups to collaborate with security agencies in protecting educational institutions.

Reaffirming the government's commitment to providing a safe and conducive learning environment, she stressed that securing schools is a collective responsibility. She called on all stakeholders to work together to prevent further attacks and ensure that Edo's education system remains strong and uninterrupted.

"Together, we must protect our schools and secure the future of our children," she added.

NEWS

Tax Reform Bill is the future of Nigeria, Akpabio insists

CAROLINE AMEH

The Senate President, Senator Godswill Akpabio, has emphasized the importance of the proposed Tax Reform Bill, describing it as crucial to Nigeria's future and economic development.

Speaking at the public hearing on the tax reform bills before the National Assembly, Akpabio stressed the need for comprehensive changes to Nigeria's tax system to foster growth, transparency, and equity.

According to Senator Akpabio, the reform aims to exempt 70% of Nigerians with annual business turnovers below 50 million Naira from paying tax, ensuring that more funds are directed to support the vulnerable

in society. He urged lawmakers, civil society organizations, and stakeholders to engage actively in the legislative process to create a tax system that would be beneficial to all Nigerians.

Akpabio noted, "We are at a pivotal moment that calls for us to think, reform, modernize, and optimize our tax system. This is not just a task; it is a profound responsibility that we must embrace with courage, wisdom, and steadfast commitment to the Nigerian people."

He pointed out that outdated tax practices and colonial-era laws have hindered economic growth, emphasizing the need to harmonize revenue administration across all tiers of government, reduce the cost of tax collection, and foster transparency

and accountability.

Akpabio also noted that the reform would introduce digital innovations to streamline tax administration, enhance compliance, and create a more efficient system that inspires confidence and promotes national growth.

The Senate President reiterated the importance of public participation in the legislative process, just as he urged critics and stakeholders to engage constructively by studying the bills and providing informed feedback rather than relying on

social media narratives.

The proposed tax reform bills—ND 583, ND 584, HD 585, and ND 586—are designed to:

Harmonize Revenue Administration; Streamline tax collection across all levels of government to reduce administrative costs; Foster Transparency and Accountability: Enhance efficiency in tax administration; Introduce Digital Innovations: Leverage technology to modernize the tax system and Broaden Tax Space and Promote Economic Growth: Encourage investment and job creation by

creating a more equitable and efficient tax environment.

Akpabio emphasized that the bills were crafted to encourage business growth by allowing small businesses to reinvest resources rather than be burdened by heavy tax obligations.

Senator Akpabio called on all stakeholders to contribute constructively to the discussion, stating, "The success of this public hearing will assist the Senate and the National Assembly to craft legislations that truly benefit all Nigerians. This is about our

future, and we must get it right."

Also speaking at the event, the Minister of Finance and Coordinating Minister of the Economy, Mr. Wale Edun, underscored the importance of tax reform in achieving President Tinubu's economic agenda. Edun elaborated the key objectives of the reform, which he said include enhancing equity, efficiency, and economic growth.

He further noted that the reforms would address budget deficits, control inflation, and ensure sustainable economic growth.

Oborevwoori reiterates partnership with FG for Delta's devt

AJUWA VICTOR

Delta State Governor, Rt. Hon. Sheriff Oborevwoori, has reiterated the state government's willingness to partner with the Federal Government for the socio-economic development of the state.

Governor Oborevwoori disclosed this in his remarks at the inauguration of the reconstructed 9.6km Abraka--Oben Road and flag-off for the reconstruction of failed portions of the Abraka--Agbor Road (Phase 1) in Abraka, Ethiope East Local Government Area of the State.

Represented by the State Commissioner for Works (Highways and Urban Roads), Comrade Reuben Izeze, Governor Oborevwoori said his administration remained irrevocably committed in its partnership with the President Bola Tinubu's Federal Government for the transformation of the state.

He commended the Niger Delta Development Commission, NDDC for the initiative to reconstruct the all important access road from Abraka to Oben and called for the extension of the road

reconstruction work to Benin.

"I thank the board of the NDDC for the vision and for acknowledging the challenges and for giving the policy guideline for the execution of this laudable project.

"I am glad that the NDDC is giving special attention to the reconstruction of failed portions on roads across the region.

"The Government of Delta State believes very strongly and firmly that we are partners in progress with the Federal Government just as commended President Bola Tinubu for his support for the board of the NDDC thus far that enables it to continue to do more f

Minister of Regional Development, Engr. Abubakar Momoh, thanked the NDDC for heeding to President Tinubu's directive to reconstruct section one of the road from Abraka - Oben.

While commending Governor Oborevwoori for his interventions on federal roads in the state, the Minister urged Governors across the country to see interventionist agencies as partners in progress and not as competitors.

NSCDC arrests two fake officials in Kano

Operatives of the Kano State Command of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps have arrested two suspected criminals for impersonation and parading themselves as civil defence staff.

The Command's Public Relations Officer, Ibrahim Abdullahi, confirmed the arrest in statement he released on Monday.

He said the suspects, Muhammad Sarari, 43, resident of Goron Dutse, Dala Local government and Madaki Zaharaden, 32, of Hotoor quarters, Nassarawa local government were apprehended in Kano.

"The suspects were impersonating by parading themselves as civil defence staff. They used to storm some ministries

and agencies of government in Kano intimidating top government officials and extort money from them," Abdullahi said.

He, however said that luck ran out of them when they walked into the premises of a renowned television station in the state, intimidated and threatened a top management staff of the media house in exchange for cash.

"They were, thereafter caught by personnel of the Corps, Tarauni Divisional Office and brought to the state headquarters for interrogation.

"Upon investigation the duo confessed to the crime and one of the suspects was found in possession with fake identity card of the NSCDC and an inner wear bearing the service logo of the Corps," he said.



PUBLIC LECTURE:

Member representing Orhionmwon 1 Constituency in Edo State House of Assembly, Hon Atu Evbaguehita (right), presenting his committee's report on a Bill to Establish Edo State Road Funds (SRF) Board and Administration Agencies (EDSRFBA), to the House Clerk, Alhaji Yahaya Audu.

Tension as Nwoko meets with APC stakeholders in Agbor

AJUWA VICTOR

Senator Ned Nwoko has launched high-powered stakeholders consultative meetings with Delta North Senatorial members and leaders of his new party, the All progressives Congress.

The move is seen by political pundits as his strategy to further solidify his presence within the party in the Senatorial Zone.

One of the meetings held in Agbor has reinforced the growing wave of political alignment

and grassroots mobilization, marking a significant turning point for APC's in the region.

As a senator who recently defected from the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) to the APC, Nwoko was warmly received by party supporters and leaders.

They gathered to discuss key developmental strategies and political cohesion, focusing on infrastructure, education, economic empowerment, and strengthening the party's hold across Delta North.

During the meeting, Senator Nwoko emphasized the impor-

tance of a unified political front, stating that his decision to join the APC was driven by a desire to accelerate development and ensure greater federal representation for his constituents.

He assured the gathering that Delta North will witness unprecedented progress under the APC-led administration.

Stakeholders, including traditional rulers and community leaders, commended the senator's vision and commitment to improve the living standards of his constituents.

They pledged their support

in mobilizing more grassroots participation and highlighted the need for continued collaboration to enhance the delivery of democracy's dividends across the region.

Senator Nwoko's ongoing engagements are setting the stage for more political realignments and developmental interventions in Delta North.

His commitment to fostering a stronger APC presence signals a new political era, with high expectation for more impactful projects and governance initiatives in the coming months.

SUV Offer: Senator Nwoko's large appetite for cheap publicity disgusting —Latimore

AJUWA VICTOR

Senator Ned Nwoko's claim that he would reject or had rejected SUV and N10 million monthly offer from Delta State Government clearly revealed his large appetite for cheap media Publicity.

Director General, Delta State Bureau for Communications and Orientation, Dr Fred Latimore Oghenesivbe, made the as-

sertion on Sunday, while reacting to Nwoko's claim of rejecting SUV from Delta State government, describing it as repulsive conduct that is unbecoming of a distinguished Senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

The Bureau Chief assured

that governor Oborevwoori will remain focused on Advancing Delta through multifaceted mega projects and socioeconomic development, noting that the frequent negative utterances against the governor by Senator Nwoko was and still part of the strategic moves to redeem his battered public image, occasioned by poor representation at the Red Chamber.

He averred that the gift of SUVs to all elected members of the National Assembly representing various senatorial districts and federal constituencies in the state, is no longer news, pointing out that the state government also extended same to members of the opposition

political parties, in line with governor Sheriff Oborevwoori's government of inclusiveness as encapsulated in his MORE agenda.

Dr Oghenesivbe disclosed that since after taking over the mantle of leadership on May 29, 2023, Governor Oborevwoori had consistently made it known that he was elected to serve all Deltans irrespective of political affiliation, adding that Senator Nwoko's fruitless efforts to malign the enviable reputation of the State Governor had crashed the popularity profile of the Delta North Senator.

He stated that Senator Nwoko's recent statement about rejecting SUV and N10 million

monthly offered by the State government was obviously another failed attempt by the Senator to unduly malign the rising leadership and political profile of Governor Oborevwoori, assuring that Nwoko lacked the political wisdom and moral integrity to succeed in his failed bid to stop the rising political profile of the Governor of Delta State.

He further asserted that Ned Nwoko is yet to showcase his genuine concern for the socioeconomic empowerment of his constituents through any meaningful empowerment programme, adding that governor Oborevwoori is not interest in petty squabbles, not with Senator Ned, not anybody.



2 Years
in
Mind

We the family of
Omusi of Etete and Uroho communities
in Ikpoba - Okha Local Government Area of Edo State
Remember you today as always our dear lovely father,
husband and Uncle,
CHIEF PRIEST W. P. OKHUOYOKUO OMUSI
who passed unto Glory in 2023 (1918 -2023).

Sleep on Daddy until that Resurrection morning when
we shall meet to part no more.

Signed: **Family**

News

Foreign

Sudan army ends two-year siege of key city

The Sudanese army says it has broken a near two-year siege imposed by the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) on the key southern State capital of el-Obeid.

The breakthrough came hours after the RSF signed a political charter in the Kenyan capital, Nairobi, to establish a breakaway government in areas under its control.

The RSF and the army have been in a vicious battle for power since April 2023, with tens of thousands of people killed and millions forced from their homes.

The war has split the country, with the army controlling the north and the east while the RSF holds most of the Darfur region in the west and parts of the south.

El-Obeid, the capital of North Kordofan state, is a

strategic hub connecting the capital, Khartoum, to Darfur. This is the latest army advance in recent weeks following the recapture of several parts of Khartoum from the RSF.

There was jubilation on the streets as Sudanese soldiers marched into the city.

A military spokesman, Nabil Abdallah, confirmed the gains in a statement, saying army

forces had destroyed RSF units.

Finance Minister Jibril Ibrahim said the move was a "massive step" in lifting the RSF siege on el-Fasher, the capital of North Darfur province, and would also allow the delivery of humanitarian aid to Kordofan.

Sudanese civil society activist Dalia Abdlemoniem told the BBC Newsday programme that the recapture of the city "was huge" and "significant".

She said the RSF had "held the civilians captive for nearly two years" in the city.

The situation there was "horrific", she said, adding that there had been no medical or food aid in an area considered "to be very risky in terms of famine and malnutrition". She said she hoped more aid would now be allowed in.

"Lifting the siege brings life back to the city," Ahmed Hussein, a 53-year-old trader in el-Obeid, told the AFP news agency.

Ms Abdelmoniem said the army was "making serious groundwork in terms of moving towards the west, which is where the RSF is mainly centred".

Both the army and the RSF have been accused of committing grave atrocities against civilians during the war, with

their leaders being sanctioned by the US. In addition, RSF has been accused of carrying out a genocide in Darfur.

Both deny the accusations.

Kenya's hosting of the RSF last week as it sought to form a parallel government was criticised by some human rights groups.

On Sunday, Sudan's Foreign Minister Ali Youssef said his country would "not accept" any country recognising "a so-called parallel government".

Earlier, Sudan's military government had warned it would take retaliatory measures against Kenya and has since recalled its ambassador from Nairobi.

In response, Kenya's foreign ministry said there was "no ulterior motive" in "providing non-partisan platforms to conflict parties".



SUDANESE ARMY:

The Sudanese army has been making major advances in recent weeks

Germany's conservatives celebrate, but far right enjoy record result

Friedrich Merz's conservatives have won Germany's election, well ahead of rival parties but short of the 30% vote-share they had expected.

"Let's celebrate tonight and in the morning, we'll get to work," he told cheering supporters. His immediate priority is to try to form a government with the third-placed Social Democrats of Olaf Scholz.

Even before the result was clear, Merz said his top priority was unity in Europe, so that "step by step, we can really achieve independence from the US".

The other big winner in Sunday's vote was the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), who are celebrating a record second-place result of 20.8%.

The AfD's candidate for chancellor, Alice Weidel, did a victory lap of her supporters, but even her party had hoped for a greater result and the mood at AfD HQ was subdued.

Merz, 69, has never held a ministerial job, but he has promised if he becomes the next German chancellor to show leadership in Europe and beef up support for Ukraine.

Most Germans have been shocked by President Donald Trump's conduct towards Ukraine and Europe and Friedrich Merz said the US leader had shown "the Americans are largely indifferent to the fate of Europe".

Trump has labelled Ukraine's leader a "dictator" and two of his leading figures have openly backed the AfD in the run-up to the vote. Vice-President JD Vance was accused of meddling in the vote during a visit to Munich, while billionaire Elon Musk has made repeated remarks on his X platform.

Friedrich Merz's first priority will be to try to form a coalition made up of his Christian Democrats (and their Bavarian sister party, the CSU) and Scholz's centre left, despite the Social Democrats' worst-ever showing of 16.4%.

Merz's CDU party leadership will meet on Monday and so will the Social Democrat SPD's, separately, but Scholz

will not take part in the talks.

Merz is keen to form a government by Easter. It could be possible, because between the two parties, they have 328 seats, a majority of 12 in the 630-seat parliament.

But it was not until the early hours of Monday that that became clear.

After the collapse of Olaf Scholz's three-party coalition late last year, Merz had asked the electorate for a strong mandate to form a clear-cut coalition with one other party.

In the event, he secured enough seats only because two of the smaller parties failed to get into parliament.

A two-party coalition would enable him to solve as many of

Germany's problems as he could in four years, he said, from a stagnant economy to closing its borders to irregular migrants.

German voters had other ideas. They came out in big numbers, with a 83% turnout not seen since before reunification in 1990.

Merz's Christian Democrats had been looking for more than the 28.6% of the vote they and their Bavarian sister party received.

His most likely partner was always going to be the Social Democrats - known in Germany as a GroKo, or grand coalition.

But Germany's electorate has fractured, and the two big beasts of its post-war politics can no longer be sure of success.

Trump names podcaster Dan Bongino as deputy FBI director

US President Donald Trump has appointed right-wing commentator Dan Bongino as deputy director of the FBI.

Trump posted on social media that Bongino was "a man of incredible love and passion for our Country" and would serve under newly confirmed FBI Director Kash Patel.

Bongino, 50, has worked for the New York police department and the Secret Service - as well as having been part of the protection detail for two presidents, George W Bush and Barack Obama.

He hosts a self-titled podcast whose Facebook posts often attract more attention than those of Fox News and CNN combined.

"Thank you Mr President, Attorney General Bondi, and Director Patel," Bongino wrote on X in a post after Trump's announcement.

Trump said in his social media announcement on Sunday that Bongino is "willing and prepared to give up" the podcast "in order to serve".

"Fairness, Justice, Law and Order will be brought back to America, and quickly," Trump added.

He said Bongino would do an "incredible job" at the FBI.

Bongino, who has run for Congress three times, hosted Trump on his daily podcast, The Dan Bongino Show, ahead of last year's election.

Episodes of his programme from the last week include titles such as "Trump Keeps Delivering And The Libs Are Seething" and "The Only People Who Love Crime Are Criminals!!!"

Talking about his career as a prolific conservative political commentator, Bongino said in 2018: "My life is all about own-

ing the libs now."

With a combative persona, he can often be found firing back at Trump's detractors on X, including a long-running spat with horror author Stephen King.

Bongino's new FBI boss Patel was last week narrowly confirmed by the Senate to lead the law-enforcement agency that he has long attacked.

Democrats had warned he would seek retribution against Trump's enemies, although the former prosecutor has denied any plans to pursue political vendettas and has promised to "rebuild" the bureau.

NZ minister resigns after he 'placed hand' on staff's arm

New Zealand's commerce minister Andrew Bayly has resigned as a government minister after he "placed a hand" on a staff member's upper arm last week, in what he described as "overbearing" behaviour.

Bayly said on Monday that he was "deeply sorry" about the incident, which he described as not an argument but an "animated discussion".

He remains a member of parliament.

His resignation comes after he was criticised last October for calling a winery worker a "loser" - including putting his fingers in an 'L' shape on his forehead - and allegedly using an expletive directed at them. He later issued a public apology.

"As many of you know, I have been impatient to drive change in my ministerial portfolios," Bayly said in a statement announcing his resignation.

"Last week I had an animated discussion with a staff member about work. I took the discussion too far, and I placed a hand on their upper arm, which was inappropriate."

He said a complaint had been made but would not elaborate further on exactly what had happened.

Bayly resigned last Friday, New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon later told

a press conference, adding that the incident happened three days earlier, on 18 February.

Luxon said on Monday the government's handling of the issue within a week was "pretty quick" and "pretty impressive". He denied that he should have asked Bayly to step down following October's winery incident, and said "never say never" when asked if there was a way back for the 63-year-old into another cabinet position.

However, Labour leader Chris Hipkins criticised Luxon as being "incredibly weak", saying the incident with the staff member should not have been dragged over the weekend.

"Christopher Luxon has once again set the bar for ministerial behaviour so low, that it would be almost impossible not to get over it," he told reporters on Monday.

Bayly himself said that he had to talk to his family and "would have had difficulty" speaking to the media earlier.

He was first elected to the New Zealand Parliament in 2014 as an MP for the current ruling National Party. He was appointed the Minister of Commerce and Consumer Affairs, Minister for Small Business and Manufacturing, and Minister of Statistics following Luxon's election in late 2023.

He was also appointed minister for the ACC - the national accidental injury compensation scheme - following a cabinet reshuffle earlier this year. Before joining politics, Bayly worked in the finance industry.

Luxon said Scott Simpson, National's senior whip, would take over the ACC and Commerce and Consumer Affairs portfolios.

Bayly is the first minister to resign of his own accord under PM Luxon, whose favourability has dipped considerably, according to recent polls. Both the 1News-Verian poll and the Post/Freshwater Strategy poll show his National-led coalition government is losing support among voters.

Foreign

News

Most USAID staff laid off or placed on leave by Trump administration

The Trump administration has placed most United States Agency for International Development (USAID) employees back on administrative leave from midnight on Sunday and laid off hundreds more.

In addition to some 4,200 staff who are being placed on leave, at least 1,600 employees are being fired.

The move comes weeks after President Donald Trump's initial attempt to eliminate thousands of USAID employees was held up by a legal challenge.

A federal judge temporarily halted the administration's plan to gut America's foreign aid agency, but ruled on Friday that the pause would not be permanent. Founded in 1961, USAID employed around 10,000 staff until the recent cost-cutting began.

The notice to USAID employees on Sunday from the Office of the Administrator said that "designated personnel" responsible for critical functions or in leadership would be exempt from administrative leave.

It's not clear how many employees will be kept on, but USAID had previously deemed 611 personnel to be essential.

The email said USAID intended to fund voluntary return travel for overseas staff.

Around 4,200 employees will be placed on leave, according to the BBC's US news partner CBS.

The USAID website said there would be a "reduction-in-force" of an additional 1,600 personnel in the US.

That would amount to at least 5,800 USAID employees on administrative leave or laid off - or well over half the agency's workforce.

The development follows a ruling on Friday by Judge Carl Nichols in Washington DC that the Trump administration could press ahead with its plans to get rid of USAID employees.

Another federal judge said last week that the Trump administration was failing to abide by a ruling requiring the government to continue financing foreign aid already approved by Congress while legal challenges play out.

It is unclear whether those USAID staff being placed on leave will eventually be rehired, or have their positions eliminated, too.

The Trump administration is seeking to shrink the federal workforce and cut costs in a drive led by Elon Musk.

The billionaire Trump adviser asked millions of bureaucrats over the weekend to list their accomplishments from the past week.

On Saturday, from the stage at a conservative convention near Washington DC, Trump said: "We've also effectively ended the left-wing scam known as USAID."

"The agency's name has been removed from its former building, and that space will now house agents from Customs and Border Patrol."

Customs and Border Patrol (CBP), a US immigration-enforcement agency, is ready to move into the USAID building in the heart of the nation's capital.

"CBP has signed a licence agreement to occupy approximately 390,000 usable square feet in the USAID tower," a CBP spokesperson told Fox News.

Trump and Musk have been critical of America's sizable

overseas spending, and USAID has become a lightning rod for their frustration. Trump and his allies have accused the agency of being too liberal and

wasteful.

The cutbacks to USAID have already upended the global aid system. Hundreds of programmes have been frozen in

countries around the world since the president announced his intentions in January.

The US is by far the biggest single provider of humanitari-

an aid around the world. It has bases in more than 60 countries and works in dozens of others, with much of its work carried out by its contractors.



PROTESTERS:

Protesters say the project will destroy their homes and livelihoods

The Kenyans saying no to motherhood and yes to sterilisation

For as long as Nelly Naisira Sironka can remember she has never wanted children - and with one irreversible decision the 28-year-old Kenyan has ensured she never will get pregnant.

Last October, she took the definitive step of undergoing a sterilisation procedure known as tubal ligation - permanently closing the door on motherhood.

"I feel liberated," the organisational development expert tells the BBC, adding that it has ensured her future is now entirely her own.

The operation prevents pregnancy by blocking a woman's fallopian tubes and is sometimes referred to as "getting your tubes tied".

Between 2020 and 2023, roughly 16,000 women in the

East African country underwent tubal ligation, according to Kenya's health ministry.

It is unclear, however, how many of these women were childless at the time of the procedure.

Yet Dr Nelly Bosire says the kinds of women coming forward seeking sterilisation in Kenya is changing.

"Traditionally, the most common candidates for tubal ligation were women who already had multiple children," the Nairobi-based gynaecologist told the BBC.

"But now, we are seeing more women with fewer children opting for the procedure."

Sterilisation is only recommended for women who are certain they do not want to have biological children in the future, as reversal is difficult.

"Doctors don't typically encourage tubal ligation because the success rate of a reversal is very poor," said Dr Bosire.

Despite coming from a large family, Ms Sironka said she never felt pressured to start her own - though societal norms in Kenya do place an expectation on women to have children.

She credits her father with her stance as he encouraged her to focus on education - and gave her a love of reading.

Books by US feminist authors like Toni Morrison, Angela Davis and bell hooks were a revelation.

"I interacted with women's life stories that didn't feature children at all," said Ms Sironka, who is now the chief of operations at Feminists in Kenya, an organisation which works to end gender violence.

Pope's still critical after 10th night in hospital, Vatican says

Pope Francis is resting, but remains "critical" with respiratory and kidney problems, more than a week after being admitted to hospital, the Vatican has said.

"The night went well, the Pope slept and is resting," a Monday morning statement said.

The Pope has been receiving high-flow oxygen therapy and blood transfusions - as well as treatment for a kidney problem.

The Pope was admitted to Rome's Gemelli Hospital on 14 February after experiencing breathing difficulties for several days, where he was first treated for bronchitis before being diagnosed with pneumonia in both lungs.

On Sunday, the Pope's thrombocytopenia - a condition that occurs when the platelet count in the blood is too low - was stable, the statement said.

That morning, the Pope "participated in the Holy Mass, together with those who are taking care of him during these days", the statement continued.

The Vatican did not offer a prognosis, given the "complexity of the clinical picture".

On Saturday, the Vatican said that the Pope had experienced a respiratory crisis and was in a "critical" condition, but later on Sunday released an update that he had "not presented any further respiratory crises".

UK and India relaunch trade talks in Delhi

India and the UK have restarted free trade talks, nearly a year after negotiations were paused ahead of general elections in both countries.

Jonathan Reynolds, the UK's business and trade secretary, met his Indian counterpart Piyush Goyal in Delhi on Monday and kicked off the two-day discussions.

The talks focused on "advancing" the negotiations and ensuring that the deal was "balanced, ambitious and mutually beneficial", Goyal wrote on X.

The countries have held more than a dozen rounds of negotiations since 2022, but an agreement has remained out of reach.

Sticking points include high tariffs in India on Scotch whisky and relaxing fees and visa rules for Indian students and

professionals going to the UK.

Talks are being held for the first time after the Labour Party came to power in the UK and Reynolds says securing a deal is a "top priority" for his government.

"Growth will be the guiding principle in our trade negotiations with India and I'm excited about the opportunities on offer in this vibrant market," he said in a statement ahead of the meeting.

India is forecast to become the world's third-largest economy in a few years.

The ministers held a joint press conference after the meeting, but neither side offered a deadline for talks to conclude. Deadlines set by former ministers Boris Johnson and Liz Truss had passed without an agreement being finalised.

Why mega river-linking plan sparked massive protests in India

Thousands of villagers in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh are protesting against a multi-million-dollar river-linking project which, they say, will rob them of their homes and livelihoods.

The Ken-Betwa project, with a budget of 440bn rupees (\$5.06bn; £4.05bn), will channel excess water from the Ken river in Madhya Pradesh to the Betwa river in the neighbouring Uttar Pradesh state through a network of tunnels, canals and a dam.

It is the first of 16 such river-linking projects earmarked under India's National Perspective Plan for water re-

source development in the 1980s. The plan faced multiple delays - mainly due to environmental concerns and political disputes - before the government cleared it in 2021.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone for its construction in December last year.

The project is supposed to help the drought-prone Bundelkhand region - which includes parts of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh - where arid climate and unpredictable rainfall patterns have led to decades of poverty and underdevelopment.

The government says that

once completed in 2030, it will help irrigate 1.06 million hectares of land, provide drinking water to 6.2 million people and generate 130MW of hydro-power and solar energy.

But at least 10 villages, including vast swathes of precious forest land, will be submerged to build the dam's reservoir and 11 more villages will be displaced for constructing the canal, affecting more than 7,000 families, district officials say.

"Our livelihoods are tied to this land - we don't know what the future holds for us anymore," said Tulsi Adivasi, who is among the thousands of villagers protesting against the project.

Sports

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

Confederation of African Athletics Zone II moves U-18, U-20 to Accra with 15 countries to participate in May

● **AFN adjusts calendar, reschedules Awoture U-15, U-18 Championships**



The maiden edition of the Confederation of African Athletics (CAA), Zone II U-18 and U-20 Championships will now take place in Accra, the Ghanaian capital.

The decision to move the Championships to Accra was taken by the Executive Committee of the regional athletics body.

The President of the Confederation of African Athletics

(CAA), Zone II, Chief Tonobok Okowa, said, "Yes we had initially agreed to stage the competition in Dakar, Senegal but we have moved it to Accra because of some logistics reasons."

The CAA Zone II President, Tonobok Okowa, who is also a Vice President of Confederation of African Athletics (CAA), and the President of the Athletics Federation of Nigeria (AFN),

stated that Ghana is an excellent replacement for Senegal.

"Last year Ghana hosted the CAA Zone II Senior Athletics Championship which was an Olympic Games Qualifiers and they did a good job, a near perfect host they were."

Okowa believes that Ghana will be a choice destination for the young ones who will be competing for honours in the U-18 and U-20 Champi-

onships which will now hold in May or June this year.

The Sports Complex of the University of Legon Accra, Ghana is expected to be used for the two-in-one athletics competition.

"We are using the event to prepare for the African Youth Championship in July," Okowa the former Chairman of Delta State Sports Commission (DSSC), added

The Confederation African Athletics Championships 2025 for the U-18 and U-20 will be held in Oran, Algeria from the 14 to 18 July 2025.

The continental body had initially awarded the hosting rights to the CAA African Athletics U-18 and U-20 Championships in 2025 to Madagascar during the CAA Council Meeting in Douala, Cameroon on June 20, 2024.



President Federation Cup: NFF schedules national play-off for next week

The Nigeria Football Federation has affirmed that the National Play-Off games or this year's President Federation Cup men and women competition will take place on Wednesday, 5th March, following the successful completion of the preliminaries in the 36 States and the FCT at the weekend.

Cup holders El-Kanemi Warriors of Maiduguri, as well as former winners Lobi Stars of Makurdi, Bendel Insurance of Benin City, Enugu Rangers, Shooting Stars, Heartland FC, Akwa United and Kano Pillars were among the winners, while while four-time champions Enyimba FC of Aba surprisingly lost to Ahudiyannem FC following a penalty shootout in Umuahia.

The Draw for the National Competition will hold on Wednesday, 12th March 2025. After the National Play-Off, which will involve a number of newcomer-teams, a total of 64 teams will emerge for the draw that will take place in Abuja, with the Round of 64 competition scheduled for 19th March.

ALL THE WINNERS (MEN'S COMPETITION)

Imo: Heartland FC 2-0 OISA FC

Niger: Atlantic FA 0-0 Harmony FA (Atlantic FA win 6-5 on penalties)

Abia: Enyimba 0-0 Ahudiyannem FC (Ahudiyannem win 3-1 on penalties)

Kwara: Kwara United 1-1 ABS (Kwara United win 5-4 on penalties)

Benue: Lobi Stars 2-1 Flight FC Adamawa: No competition

Edo: Bendel Insurance 3-0 Assemblies of God

Bauchi: Wikki Tourists 1-0 Warinje FC

Lagos: Ikorodu City 0-0 Inter Lagos (Inter Lagos win 5-4 on penalties)

Jigawa: Lautai United 0-2 Dandidi Babes

Rivers: Rivers United 0-0 Wilbros FC (Rivers United win 4-3 on penalties)

Ogun: Imperial FC 2-2 Beyond Limits (Imperial FC win 8-7 on penalties)

FCT: EFCC 0-0 FWC FC (FWC FC win 4-3 on penalties)

Osun: Osun United 0-1 Ig-bajo FC

Nasarawa: FC Basira 0-2 Nasarawa United

Enugu: Rangers Int'l 3-0 Ijele FC

Anambra: Solution FC 0-0 Edel FC (Edel win 2-0 on penalties)

Ondo: Sunshine Stars 0-0 Sunshine Stars U19 (Sunshine Stars win 4-3 on penalties)

Ekiti: COPDEM 0-1 NOS-MAS FC

Borno: El-Kanemi Warriors 3-0 CP Strikers

Akwa Ibom: Akwa United 1-0 Eagle Eye FA

Oyo: Crown FC 0-0 Shooting Stars (Shooting Stars win 4-2 on penalties)

Athletics: Ofili's 60m record thrills NSC organ

● **As elites athletes and podium board categorise athletes ahead of world indoors**

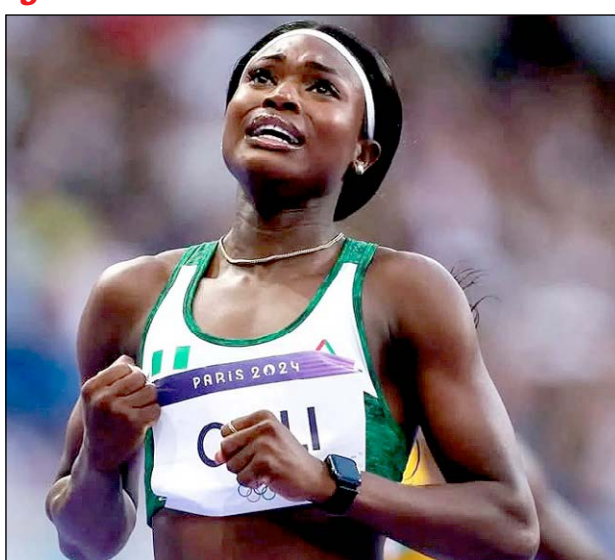
The National Sports Commission's Elites Athletes and Podium Board has described as "fantastic" the 7.25m recorded by U.S.-based sprinter, Favour Ofili in the 60m final of the Olympic Development event.

Ofili, whose omission in the 100m event at the Paris Olympics Games sparked anger in the nation's sports circle, placed second at the LSU Twilight competition, which was held at the Carl Maddox Field House, an indoor track and field facility located on the campus of Louisiana State University, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana on Friday.

Thelma Davies won the race in 7.23, but Ofili, who ran for the Tiger Olympians, gave a good account of herself. Interestingly, Ofili ran the fastest time in the qualifiers (7.26) ahead of Davies (7.27), giving hope of a possible sub-7.20 in the final.

Speaking to The Guardian, yesterday, the Director of the National Sports Commission's Elites Athletes and Podium Board, Yusuf Ali, described Ofili's 7.25m record as a "huge step."

"I watched the race and I commend Ofili for such a brilliant start," Ali said. "I am looking forward to seeing more great races from her this year." Ali revealed that the Elites Athletes and Podium Board had commenced its operations, saying: "We have started our operation, and one major step we took is to categorise Nigerian athletes into four groups. The likes of Tobi Amusan, Ese Brume, Ofili Favour, and Blessing Oborodudu (wrestling) are among those in Category 1. We look at the performance of the athletes in categorising them. All our athletes, both home and abroad are in the four categories, and I am sure the NSC's Elites Athletes



and Podium Board is on the right path. Our duty is to ensure a sustainable scientific system for Nigerian athletes' discovery and welfare for better podium performances."

Ali hinted that six Nigerian athletes are being prepared to fly the country's flag at the 2025 World Indoor Championships holding in China, from March 21 to 23.

Morocco 2025: Kenyan officials to take charge of Flamingos, Bantwana's clash in Pretoria



The Confederation of African Football has appointed Kenyan official, Josephine Wanjiku, as referee for next week's FIFA U17 Women's World Cup qualifier between Nigeria's U17 girls, Flamingos, and their South African counterparts, Bantwana, slated for Pretoria.

The Flamingos and Bantwana will clash starting 3pm South Africa time (2pm Nigeria) on Saturday, 8th March in the first leg of a second-round fixture, at the Lucas Moripe

Stadium in South Africa's administrative capital. While 2022 FIFA World Cup bronze medallists Nigeria drew bye to the second round, Bantwana crushed their counterparts from Gabon 21-2 on aggregate, winning 12-1 in Gabon and then running away 9-1 winners on home soil.

CAF has also appointed Wanjiku's compatriots Mary Njoroge, Elizabeth Njoroge and Juma Lucy Awino as assistant 1, assistant 2 and fourth official respectively.

Cindy Barbara Dlodlu from eSwatini will be the commissioner, with Moroccan Khadija Rezzag to be in the role of referee assessor.

Both teams will battle things out in the return leg at the Remo Stars Stadium, Ikenne-Remo on Saturday, 15th March, with the winner on aggregate progressing to the third round of the qualification campaign.

This year's FIFA U17 Women's World Cup (the competition becomes an annual event

from this year) will be hosted by Morocco, 17 October - 8 November, with Africa to present 5 teams (including host nation Morocco) at the finals, which has also been expanded to a 24-nation championship.

The Flamingos, who reached the quarter-finals at last year's FIFA U17 Women's World Cup finals in the Dominican Republic, have been in camp at the Remo Stars Institute, Ikenne-Remo for a couple of weeks in preparation for the clash with the Bantwana.

SPORTS

The Nigerian Observer
...that the people may know

NSF: Zonal coordinator hails Edo govt as S'South zonal elimination begins in Benin



KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

As the South South Zonal Elimination for ball games begins in Benin, Edo State with the arrival of various states contingent and technical meetings, the South South zonal Coordinator Mr Njoku Peters has commended the Edo state Government and the Executive chairman, Edo State Sports Commission Hon Amadin Desmond Enabulele for the prompt response to the hosting of the games in Benin city.

Njoku said that Edo State Government's magnanimity is

a demonstration of the heart-beat state's leadership in sports development.

Njoku gave the commendation while speaking on behalf of the participating states after some technical meetings on Monday afternoon at the Samuel Ogbemudia stadium, Benin.

He particularly commended the state Governor Monday Okpebholo for accepting to host the rest states in the zone and thereby creating an enabling environment for athletes to and sports to thrive.

"We commend the Governor of Edo State, senator Monday Okpebholo for his support for the zonal qualifiers and sports development in the state. His leadership has created an enabling environment for athletes to thrive."

"Special applauses also for the Executive Chairman of the Edo State Sports Commission, Honorable Amadin Enabulele for his tireless efforts in organizing this event, despite the short notice. His dedication in promoting sports in Edo State is already noticed and quite

commendable." He said.

The participating states, Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers and Akwa Ibom except Cross River arrived in Benin on Sunday while the technical meeting for all the events and the draws were done on Monday. The coordinator of the zone, Peter Njoku also met with the state Directors of Sports.

Following the draws in the football event, the host team Edo and Bayelsa have been paired against each at the Crescent Club field on Tuesday. Kickoff time is 8.00 AM while Delta and Akwa Ibom are scheduled to lock horns at 10.00 AM.

In the female category, Delta and Edo have been fixed to tangle at 12 noon while Bayelsa is on bye. Other games including Handball will begin in full swing on Tuesday as the Samuel Ogbemudia stadium is now a beehive of both sporting and economic activities.

The eight ball events featured in the South South zonal elimination included Abula, Basketball, Beachvolleyball, Cricket, Football, Handball, Hockey, and Volleyball.

D'Tigers clinch 2025 AfroBasket spot with dominant performance

Nigeria's men's basketball team, D'Tigers, secured their place in the 2025 FIBA AfroBasket tournament in emphatic fashion, capping off their qualifying campaign with a commanding 77-62 victory over Cape Verde in Tripoli on Sunday.

Already assured of a spot in the competition following FIBA's decision to grant all Group B teams automatic qualification, D'Tigers ended their campaign on a high note.

After struggling in the second qualifying window, the Nigerian squad needed a flawless performance in the final round and they delivered. They

claimed victories over hosts Libya, Uganda, and Cape Verde to finish strong.

D'Tigers' qualification journey had a rocky start last year, suffering three consecutive defeats in the first phase. However, determined to turn things around, they mounted a resurgence in Libya, beginning with a hard-fought 75-70 win against the hosts before dismantling Uganda 87-67.

With their ticket to Angola secured, head coach Abdulrahman Mohammed gave home-based players Ifeanyi Koko and Ibe Abuchi their first minutes of the tournament.

D'Tigers now set their sights

on the 2025 FIBA AfroBasket, set for August in Angola. Nigeria, who won their only AfroBasket title in 2015, will

be looking to add to their collection, which also includes four silver and three bronze medals.



Gasperini reminds Lookman role in his development amid tension

Atalanta head coach Gian Piero Gasperini has emphasized the impact the club has had on Ademola Lookman's career, reminding the Nigerian forward that his goal scoring prowess improved significantly after joining the Serie A side.

His remarks come amid speculation of tension between the two, which intensified following Atalanta's disappointing exit from the UEFA Champions League. The frustration stemmed from Lookman's missed penalty in a crucial home defeat against Club Brugge, after which Gasperini's comments were perceived by the player as disrespectful.

However, in Atalanta's emphatic 5-0 victory over Empoli, where Lookman scored twice, Gasperini took the opportunity to highlight the player's contributions while stressing the importance of team commitment.

"Lookman has always been a prolific scorer, at least since he arrived at Atalanta," Gasperini stated in his post-match press conference. "He has developed into an exceptional player, particularly when he dedicates

himself fully to the team. He mentioned feeling a strong connection with the fans, and I greatly appreciate that."

Despite his outstanding performance, Lookman avoided directly addressing whether his relationship with Gasperini had improved. Notably, upon his substitution in the 73rd minute, he only acknowledged

assistant coach Tullio Gritti, seemingly sidestepping an interaction with Gasperini.

When questioned by Sky Sport Italia about the situation, Lookman deflected the inquiry, offering only a shrug and a cryptic "Finished?" in response.

Nevertheless, the Nigerian forward remained focused on the team's progress after their domi-

nant display against Empoli.

"The team put in a fantastic performance today, with everyone contributing at a high level," Lookman told DAZN. "We approach every match with the same determination. Today was a step in the right direction, and we need to keep building on this momentum for the challenges ahead."

Neymar speaks about his 'Olympic Goal' for Santos

Brazilian football sensation, Neymar expressed his joy after stunning fans with a remarkable goal directly from a corner kick during Santos' commanding 3-0 win against Internacional de Limeira in the Paulista Cham-

pionship on Sunday.

After the match, Neymar, 33, recounted how he turned the jeers from the home crowd into motivation, culminating in an extraordinary "Olympic goal."

"I approached the corner, and they began to taunt me,"

Neymar shared. "I encouraged them to cheer even louder. I initially aimed for an assist, then as I returned for a second corner and faced more provocation, I thought to myself: 'Now it's my turn to score!'" He chuckled as he recalled the moment.

With a perfectly executed strike, Neymar netted his first-ever "Olympic goal" in the 27th minute. The shot curved delectably in from the left side, catching goalkeeper Igo Gabriel unprepared as it rattled the far post before crossing the line. The brilliance of the goal was so striking that even the rival fans were compelled to applaud.



Gift Monday nominated for Player of the Month award In Spain

Nigeria's Super Falcons and UDG Tenerife forward, Gift Monday, continues to make waves in Spain as she earns a nomination for the February Player of the Month award.

Monday has been in outstanding form for Tenerife, helping the club climb to sixth place in the league with 10 goals in 19 matches.

The 23-year-old currently sits third in the league's scoring chart, trailing Barcelona's

Ewa Pajor by five goals and second-placed Edna Imade by two.

Also nominated for the award are Real Madrid's Alba Redondo, Barcelona's Caroline Hansen, Deportivo's Ainhoa Marin, Bilbao's Ane Azkona, Granada's Ari Mingueza, and Eibar's Elba Verges.

Now in her third season with the Spanish Iberdrola club, Monday continues to establish herself as a key player in the league.



GIFT MONDAY