

# Over 4,000 Police firearms missing —Senate

CAROLINE AMEH

The Nigerian Senate has raised alarm over the disappearance of approximately 4,000 firearms, including AK-47 rifles, from the Nigeria Police Force. The issue was revealed during a Senate Public Accounts Committee hearing, following an audit

report highlighting discrepancies in police armory records between 2000 and 2020.

During the hearing, lawmakers criticized the police for failing to trace the missing weapons or hold those responsible accountable. They expressed concerns that the firearms could have fallen into criminal hands, further wors-

ening Nigeria's security crisis.

Senators referenced past reports of security personnel allegedly selling arms to criminals, stressing the need for transparency. They questioned why some police commands failed to report lost weapons or complete Treasury Form 146, a mandatory document for tracking missing firearms. They insisted that the

matter be openly discussed, emphasizing that taxpayers funded the procurement of these weapons and Nigerians have a right to know their whereabouts.

Some committee members argued that police officers who lose or mishandle weapons should face the same scrutiny as civilians arrested for illegal arms possession. They demanded that responsible

officers be identified, investigated, and prosecuted if necessary.

Senator Adams Oshiomhole underscored the real-life consequences of missing firearms, citing the assassination of his aide as an example.

The Senate has now directed the police to submit a detailed report on the missing firearms, including the officers involved,

actions taken, and preventive measures.

In response, the police stated that the Inspector General of Police (IGP) conducts regular firearms audits and is committed to ensuring accountability.

However, lawmakers insisted on a clear and public explanation, especially given the country's growing security concerns.

# The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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# Economic Devt: Edo, S'Africa deepen bilateral ties

ABDUL-KADIR ABDULLAH

The Edo State government and South Africa are strengthening their bilateral relationship, focusing on key sectors, such as technology, agro-processing, tourism, and mining.

The Republic of South Africa also expressed commitment to collaborating with the Edo State

Government, particularly in infrastructural development, as both regions seek to deepen economic and business relations.

In a move to foster investment and collaboration, representatives from both governments met in Benin City to discuss potential partnerships

Governor Monday Okpebholo, while welcoming the South African delegation led by

Ambassador Dr. Bobby Moroe in Benin City, emphasized the historical and economic ties between Edo State and South Africa.

He recalled Edo State's solidarity with South Africa during the fight against Apartheid and reiterated the state's readiness to forge new partnerships for growth.

"Edo State and South Africa

have a lot in common. We have always seen your struggles and successes as ours, and now, we are ready to work together for economic development," Governor Okpebholo stated.

"Our doors are open, and we are eager to ensure that this collaboration brings tangible benefits to our people in areas such as infrastructure, mining, technology, and agro-processing"

Ambassador Moroe, who was accompanied by other top diplomats, highlighted that South Africa's interest in Edo State is driven by its vast potential, particularly in infrastructure and economic development.

"We have chosen Edo State because of its great potential," Moroe noted. "Gauteng, the economic hub of South Africa, has similarities with Edo in terms of strategic location and opportunities. Our commitment to working with your administration is strong, and we look forward to concrete results."

During the visit, the South African delegation engaged with key government agencies, including the Edo State Investment Promotion Office (ESIPO) and Ease of Doing Business Secretariat where he met with ESIPO's Managing Director, Mr. Amen Odigie, and his team to explore avenues for economic cooperation.

Ambassador Moroe emphasized the importance of revitalizing the long-standing relation-

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COURTESY VISITS:

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo (right), presenting a gift to South Africa Ambassador to Nigeria, Dr. Bobby Moroe (middle), and Busisiwe Dlamini, during a courtesy visits to the Governor in Benin City, Edo State.

## Edo election petition tribunal: PDP, Ighodalo's camp faces setback as Okpebholo closes case

The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and its governorship candidate, Asue Ighodalo, have suffered another major blow in the ongoing Edo State election tribunal following Governor Monday Okpebholo's strategic decision to present only one witness before closing his case.

Legal analysts see this move as a direct counter to what they describe as a weak case by the PDP and Ighodalo, further dimming their hopes in the tribunal. The sole witness, Majek Osumah, a polling unit agent from Ward 7, Unit 4 in Ovia South West, testified that the election was conducted peacefully but confirmed that the result for his unit was canceled due to over-voting.

He stated that in the ward-level result sheet (Form EC8B), no result was recorded for his unit after the collation officer ruled in favor of cancellation.

Following his cross-examination, Onyechi Ikpeazu, SAN, lead counsel to Governor Okpebholo, announced the closure of their case.

With this, the tribunal's chairman, Justice Wilfred Kpochi, adjourned the matter to Wednesday, February 12, 2025, when the All Progressives Congress (APC) is expected to open its defense.

The decision by INEC and the APC not to engage further is viewed as a strong statement on the credibility of the PDP's

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# EDHA adopts new business calendar, reviews key legislative actions

The Edo State House of Assembly has adopted a new business calendar for the third quarter of its second legislative session, setting a 42-day sitting schedule that will run until March 2025.

Welcoming lawmakers back from recess, Speaker Rt. Hon. Blessing Sheriff Agbebaku commended them for their dedication, particularly for cutting short their break to address pressing state matters.

He highlighted the Assembly's legislative achievements, including the passage of 41

people-centered bills, 29 of which have been signed into law, while 12 are awaiting the governor's assent.

Among these bills are the Edo State Migration Agency Bill to regulate migration-related affairs, the Digital Governance and Data Management Agency Bill aimed at enhancing technological governance, the Edo State Oil and Gas Producing Areas Development Commission Bill to drive development in oil-producing communities, and an amendment to the Anti-Secret Cult Law to address evolving security concerns.

The House has also made 72 resolutions aimed at improving governance and security in the state.

During the plenary, five letters from Governor Monday Okpebholo were read, including requests for confirmations of key government appointees.

The nominations include Pharmacist Okojie Kenny as Chairman of the Governing Board of the Edo State Primary Health Care Development Agency, Dr. Osoikhia Oahimire

Collins as Executive Secretary of the Edo State Primary Health Care Development Agency, and Hon. Anthony Ojo as a member of the Edo State Oil and Gas Producing Areas Development Commission, replacing Atoe Pascal, who was not confirmed.

The Speaker directed the Standing Committee on Rules, Business, and Government House to review the nominations and report back within a week.

Two new bills were also presented for the first reading: an

amendment to the Edo State Health Insurance Law 2019 and an amendment to the Edo State Land Administration and Geographic Information Service Law 2018.

The House observed a minute of silence in honor of Major General Christopher Jemitola, a serving Nigerian Army officer and former ADC to President Olusegun Obasanjo, who passed away on January 6, 2025.

In security discussions, Hon. Eugene Inegbeboh raised con-

cerns over the recent kidnapping of the Onogie of Eguare Udo by suspected Fulani herdsmen and urged the House to summon the Commandant of the Edo State Vigilante Corps to discuss enhanced security measures for the community.

Speaker Agbebaku commended Governor Okpebholo for his swift intervention in securing the monarch's release and assured that the House remains committed to strengthening security in the state.

## Economic Devt: Edo, S'Africa...

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ship between Nigeria and South Africa, noting ESIPO's role in bridging communication between the government and the private sector.

He highlighted the need for a more structured and coordinated approach to leveraging opportunities between the two regions.

He stated that South Africa is particularly interested in partnerships in technology, agro-processing, tourism, and hospitality, and that both parties could capitalize on opportunities in these sectors.

Responding, Mr. Amen Odigie welcomed the collaboration and stressed that Edo State is rich in investment opportunities, particularly in the mining sector, which remains largely untapped.

He explained that Edo State possesses significant deposits of gold, lithium, bitumen, granite, limestone, dolomite, and other solid minerals and expressed the state's commitment to attracting investors to develop these resources.

He further emphasized the administration's focus on agriculture, technology, and mining, recognizing South Africa's leadership in the mining industry as a valuable asset to Edo's investment drive.

He also highlighted Edo State's commitment to human capital development, particularly in technology transfer and entrepreneurship training.

With approximately 68% of Edo's population being youth, he underscored the importance of creating opportunities to equip them with skills that will reduce unemployment.

He stated that Edo is keen

on collaborating with South African institutions to develop training programs that will build capacity in various sectors, including technology and assured Ambassador Moroe of the Edo State government's full commitment to working together to explore and implement these opportunities, stressing that Edo State remains open for business and investment.

He reaffirmed his administration's commitment to facilitating foreign investments, ensuring an enabling business environment, and harnessing the state's rich natural resources for economic advancement.

"We are set for investments, development, and growth. This collaboration will open doors for job creation, knowledge transfer, and long-term prosperity for Edo people," he concluded.

Following the meeting with ESIPO, Ambassador Moroe and his delegation met with the Benin Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture (BEMCCIMA) as well as heads of key ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs).

He reiterated South Africa's willingness to work closely with Edo State and expressed his commitment to establishing a clearly defined action plan with specific timelines.

To further deepen engagement, he extended an invitation to Edo State to participate in the upcoming South Africa Week in Lagos in April 2025, providing an avenue for cultural and economic exchanges.

He suggested that an Edo cultural group perform at the event and that representatives connect with South African businesses operating in Nigeria to explore mutually beneficial opportunities



### BILATERAL TIES:

Managing Director, Edo State Investment Promotion Office, ESIPO, Mr Amen Odigie (5th right); South Africa Ambassador to Nigeria, Prof. Bobby J. Moroe (4th right), and other guests, during a meeting held at ESIPO in Benin City to explore Edo State and South Africa bilateral ties.

## Edo First Lady's office to collaborate with S'Africa on youth, women empowerment

Office of the First Lady, Edo State Government, has received an invitation for a corporate partnership from the Consulate General of the Republic of South Africa.

The collaboration aims to strengthen developmental ties and boost key sectors of the economy, with a particular focus on empowering youths and women.

The announcement came during a meeting held at the Office of the First Lady at Government House in Benin City.

In her address, Mrs. Edesili Okpebholo Anani, Coordinator of

the Office, commended the representatives and underscored the importance of women empowerment and youth development.

She expressed her enthusiasm for the partnership, noting the need to support vulnerable women whose rights have been severely impacted financially, mentally, and emotionally. "We deal with vulnerable women. We would love to partner with you, as we have many women who have been violated."

"Their rights have been severely impacted financially, mentally, and emotionally. We are here to empower them as

much as we can," she said.

Mrs. Anani also highlighted the importance of mentorship and digital empowerment for women, noting that initiatives are underway to groom women in science and technology.

She further supported investments in the hospitality sector as a means of empowering youths and integrating them as productive members of society. "I always say; beyond rehabilitating and providing shelter, what happens afterwards? How do we disabuse their minds? How do we rehabilitate them into the system?" she added.

Consul General Prof. Bobby Moroe expressed his desire to collaborate with the Edo State Government, emphasizing mutual interests in youth development programs, agro-processing and agriculture, science and technology, arts and culture, tourism, and hospitality. Vice Consul Ms. Busisiwe Dlamini highlighted the Consulate General's focus on women empowerment and outlined several initiatives that have already made a difference, while also extending an invitation to South Africa Week—a social event featuring activities such as golf, movies, and entertainment.

## Edo election petition tribunal: PDP, ...

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petition.

One of Okpebholo's lawyers dismissed the PDP's case as lacking substance, arguing that there was no need to waste time responding to a petition that had already failed to establish its claims.

APC State Chairman, Jarret Tenebe, described the development as a turning point, mocking the PDP's dwindling chances. He remarked that the PDP and Ighodalo now find themselves in a desperate situation with no support left.

According to him, the tribunal proceedings have exposed

the weakness of their case, leaving them in disarray.

He further took a swipe at Ighodalo, stating that the PDP candidate, once regarded as a legal expert, is now receiving an unexpected lesson in courtroom strategy from Governor Okpebholo.

"These are truly interesting times. The PDP and its supporters are left stranded, with no one even willing to entertain their frustrations," Tenebe said.

With the APC set to open its defense, the tribunal proceedings continue, but the latest developments suggest an uphill battle for the PDP as they struggle to keep their case alive.

## Court dismisses criminal suit against Odionwere of Obagie village for lack of jurisdiction

IDAHOSSA MOSES

An Edo State Magistrate Court sitting in the Ekiador Magisterial District, Ovia North-East Local Government Area, has dismissed a criminal suit filed by the State Commissioner of Police against Pa. Stephen Osaretin Oyenmwense, the Odionwere (head) of Obagie Community, citing a lack of jurisdiction.

Presiding Magistrate V.E. Oyekpen (Mrs.), delivering judgment on a no-case submission filed by the defendant's

counsel, E.S. Odemwingie Esq., ruled that it was improper and procedurally flawed for the court to hear a case that had already been decided by another court of coordinate jurisdiction.

She stated that as a Chief Magistrate Special Grade, she had the authority to make decisions but lacked the judicial basis to exercise jurisdiction over the matter.

The court, therefore, dismissed Charge No: MCK/89c/2022A from the Ekiador Magisterial Court, relying on the prior ruling of the Iguobazuwa Area Customary

Court in Suit No: OSWAC-C/2T/2013.

The magistrate emphasized that revisiting the case in another court would amount to an abuse of judicial process, as the leadership dispute of Obagie Community had already been adjudicated by the Iguobazuwa Area Customary Court, which delivered its judgment on May 8, 2024.

She further noted that the original suit, filed in 2013, was still pending when the defendant was arraigned in 2022 under Charge No: MCK/89c/2022/A. Initiating a separate hearing on

the same matter in the magistrate court, she ruled, was procedurally improper and robbed the court of jurisdiction.

The nominal complainant, Dr. James E. Igbinalolor, had dragged Oyenmwense to court through the State Commissioner of Police over allegations of false representation as the Odionwere of Obagie Village and forgery. The police alleged that these offenses violated Sections 516, 118, 484, and 465 of the Criminal Code, Cap 48, Vol. II, Laws of the defunct Bendel State of Nigeria (1976), as applicable in Edo State.

# Customs suspend 4% FoB charge on imports

The Nigerian Customs Service has suspended the implementation of the widely criticised four per cent Free-on-Board value on imports.

A statement signed by the Customs National Public Relations Officer, Abdullahi Maiwada, disclosed the latest development on Tuesday in Abuja.

The amount, as stipulated in Section 18(1)(a) of the Nigeria Customs Service Act 2023, has already raised concerns among businesses struggling with high operating costs.

Maiwada said the suspension presents an opportunity to review the service's revenue framework holistically.

The statement read, "The Nigeria Customs Service hereby announces the suspension of the implementation of four per cent Free-on-Board (FOB) value on imports as provided in Section 18(1)(a) of the Nigeria Customs Service 2023.

"This is the sequel to ongoing consultations with the

Minister of Finance and Coordinating Minister of the Economy, Mr Olawale Edun, and other stakeholders.

"This suspension will enable comprehensive stakeholder engagement and consultations regarding the Act's implementation framework."

He added that the suspen-

sion aligns with the exit of the contract agreement with the service providers, including Webb Fontaine, which were previously funded through the one per cent Comprehensive Import Supervision Scheme.

He added, "The timing of this suspension aligns with the exit of the contract agreement with the service providers, including Webb Fontaine, which were previously funded through the

one per cent Comprehensive Import Supervision Scheme.

"This presents an opportunity to review our revenue framework holistically."

The FOB charge, which is calculated based on the value of imported goods, including transportation costs up to the port of loading, means importers will pay more to bring goods into Nigeria, a cost that will likely be passed on to consumers.



**INTERACTIVE MEETING:**

Minister of Finance and coordinating Minister of the Economy, Wale Edun (left), and member Senate Committee on Capital Market, Senator Victor Umeh, during the minister's interactive meeting with the committee at the National Assembly Abuja yesterday.

PHOTO: OMOYE AMINU

## One Needs Property Limited pays entrance fees for primary school pupils in Oshimili North LGA

AJUWA VICTOR

A real estate company popularly known as One Needs Properties, has paid the 2025 Primary School Leaving Certificate Examination (Primary Six Exams) registration fees for all the primary school students in Oshimili North Local Government Area of Delta State.

One Needs Properties paid the fees for over 1,500 candidates for the forthcoming examination for the various schools.

Chairman of the company, Stanley Chukwudumebi Otoma who made the good gesture during a visit to one of the schools,

said the move was a personal commitment to empower the next generation as well as contribute to the educational development of Delta State.

Otoma expressed his passion for creating opportunities for young people to excel academically and unlock their full potentials.

"Education is the foundation for a brighter future, and I believe every child deserves the opportunity to pursue their dreams, regardless of financial conditions.

"With this in mind, I paid the first School Leaving Certificate Examination fees for over 1,500 students for all the primary

School in Oshimili North Local Government Area of the State.

"This is my little way of demonstrating my commitment to empowering the next generation and contributing to the educational development of our dear Oshimili North Local Government Area.

"To me, these students represent the hope and future of Delta, and I am honoured to play a part in their journey toward success," he stated.

He urged the beneficiaries to view the support as a motivation to excel in the examination, giving their utmost effort to achieve academic success.

Otoma urged well-meaning

Deltans to keep investing in our youth and help them achieve greatness and called on corporate organizations and individuals to give back to the society.

In their separate remarks, the Chairman of Association of Primary School Heads of Nigeria (AOPSHON), Comrade Chima Ugochukwu Anthony and Comrade Ogoh Augustine, National Deputy President (AOPSHON) applauded One Needs Properties for the generous gesture.

They expressed their heartfelt appreciation for his kindness, acknowledging the significant impact his gesture will have on students' education and future prospects.

## Security agents nab 25 suspected cultist in Ogwashi-Uku

AJUWA VICTOR

In a swift move to quell what was reported to be a likely cult clash, about 25 youths have been arrested by security agents in the Ogwashi-Uku metropolis.

A local anti-cult security source, who confided in journalists revealed that about 18 members of a cult group were raided in a hotel in Ogwashi-Uku during their meeting.

According to the security source, other members of a rival cult group were picked up at different locations in the metropolis during the clearance operation by security agents.

According to sources who craved anonymity revealed that the two rival groups, particularly the Aye cult group and members of the Arubaggar cult group were on the trail of one another looking for who to maul down.

Findings showed that members of Ogwashi-Uku Anti Cult Group had swung into action following a tip off from good samaritans that there was likely to be a cult clash in the metropolis.

The said source said the anti-cult group had commenced operation two days earlier and succeeded in apprehending some of the cultists, while 18 members of one of the

rival cult groups were arrested in a hotel in the metropolis.

According to security sources, weapons were recovered from the suspects just as further checks showed that two youths belonging to the Aye cult group were allegedly killed by members of the Arubaggar cult in Ogwashi-Uku.

According to sources who are privy to the incident, the murder of the two Aye cult members sparked off the move for retaliation by the rival group.

Further information revealed that some of the members of the rival cult groups have ran away from the metropolis for fear of being attacked by members of

the opposition cult groups or picked up by security operatives.

Residents of Ogwashi-Uku commended the efforts of both the anti-cult group and the police for their proactive moves, adding that they have helped to nip the planned attacks in the bud.

The police has however called on members of the public to always give timely information to security agents so that such informations would help them in their operations.

They however, urged parents and guardians to counsel their children on the dangers associated with belonging to a secret cult.

## Edo Security Corps commander disowns Benin protest, warns against sabotage

ABDUL-KADIR ABDULLAH

The Uzairue Commandant of the Edo State Security Corps, Mr. Yusuf Agbobuare, has distanced his unit from the recent protest in Benin City by members of the disbanded Edo State Security Network.

Agbobuare warned individuals in Uzairue communities who might attempt to exploit the disbanded outfit's name for personal agendas.

He urged them to desist from actions that could disrupt ongoing security efforts in the region.

"We have received numerous reports about individuals planning to obstruct our work and undermine the directives of the Executive Governor of Edo State, His Excellency, Senator Monday Okpebholo.

"We strongly warn those

engaging in such acts that the Uzairue Command is fully prepared to bring any unrepentant saboteur to justice," he added.

Addressing the Uzairue residents at the Benin protest, Agbobuare clarified, "Some former members of the disbanded Edo State Security Network from Uzairue participated in the protest. One such protester, known as 'Mama Love' from Afashio Uzairue, is not affiliated with the Uzairue Command of the Edo State Security Corps."

He reaffirmed the unit's legitimacy, stating, "We are the Edo State Security Corps, nothing else. The Edo State Security Network is no longer operational under the leadership of Senator Monday Okpebholo. Anyone speaking on its behalf does so independently and at their own risk."

## Nigeria ranks 140th out of 180 on corruption index 2024 —TI report

ABDUL-KADIR ABDULLAH

Nigeria has been ranked 140th position out of 180 countries in the world on the 2024 corruption perceptions index, according to a report by Transparency International.

The TI's latest ranking released on Tuesday sees the continent's most populous nation move up 5 spots when compared with 2023's report and 10 spots as against 2022's report.

Denmark emerged as the least corrupt country with 90 points with fellow Nordic country Finland coming in second with 88 points, and Singapore in third with 84 points.

However, countries that made the most corrupt list in the world were South Sudan, Somalia and Venezuela.

It was observed that no African country made the top 10 as it was dominated by European countries.

Based on the report, Uganda, Mexico, Madagascar, Iraq, and Cameroon shared the same spot with Nigeria with a total score of 26 points.

In the African category, Cape Verde topped the list of least corrupt countries, although it was ranked number

35 with 62 points.

"The 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) shows that corruption is a dangerous problem in every part of the world, but change for the better is happening in many countries," the chair of Transparency International, Francois Valeria, said.

"Research also reveals that corruption is a major threat to climate action. It hinders progress in reducing emissions and adapting to the unavoidable effects of global heating.

"The CPI ranks 180 countries and territories worldwide by their perceived levels of public sector corruption. The results are given on a scale of 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean)."

To Valeria, while 32 countries have significantly reduced their corruption levels since 2012, there's still a huge amount of work to be done – 148 countries have stayed stagnant or gotten worse during the same period.

"The global average of 43 has also stood still for years, while over two-thirds of countries score below 50. Billions of people live in countries where corruption destroys lives and undermines human rights," he said.

## NEWS

# MTN implements 50% tariff hike, raises data prices

Nigeria's largest telecom operator, MTN, has commenced the gradual implementation of a 50 per cent tariff increase approved by the Nigerian Communications Commission in January.

The adjustment, which is evident in the updated prices of data plans, leaves call and SMS rates unaffected for the time being.

A senior executive from MTN, who doesn't want to be men-

tioned, confirmed the development in a conversation with our correspondent on Tuesday.

"Yes, we've started updating our price lists.

"However, this process is gradual, and we haven't completed it for all products yet", the source said.

The price adjustments primarily affect several data plans.

For instance, checks by our correspondent on Tuesday revealed that the 1.5GB month-

ly plan, previously priced at N1,000, has been replaced by a 1.8GB plan now costing N1,500.

The 15GB plan has increased from N4,500 to N6,500, while the 20GB plan now costs N7,500, up from N5,500.

Larger data bundles have seen even steeper increases.

The 1.5 terabyte 90-day plan has risen from N150,000 to N240,000, and the 600GB 90-day plan is now priced at N120,000, up from N75,000, according to the updated list.

The NCC announced the tariff hike on January 20, citing rising operational costs and the

need to ensure the long-term sustainability of the telecommunications sector.

The Commission, through its Director of Public Affairs, Reuben Muoka, underscored that the decision aligns with its regulatory mandate under Section 108 of the Nigerian Com-

munications Act, 2003.

However, the National Association of Telecommunications Subscribers has voiced its opposition, threatening legal action against the approved tariff increase.

NATCOMS argued that the hike be reversed to 10 per cent.

## Nigeria, UAE review BASA agreement

The Minister of Aviation and Aerospace Development, Festus Keyamo, has signed the amended Bilateral Air Service Agreement between Nigeria and the United Arab Emirates.

This was made known through a statement signed by the minister's media aide, Tunde Moshood, and made available to newsmen on Tuesday.

According to the statement, the amendment was signed during a meeting with UAE's Minister of Economy, Abdulla Bin Touq Al Marri, at the sideline of the International Civil Aviation Organisation's Global Implementation Support Symposium 2025, solidifying mutual aviation ties between both nations.

Moshood stated that the signing of the amended BASA builds on last year's negotiations to ensure reciprocal rights for both countries and foster deeper aviation collaboration.

Aviation stakeholders at the sideline of the International Civil Aviation Organisation's Global Implementation Support Symposium 2025

He added that during the signing of the agreement, Keyamo emphasised the importance of enhancing connectivity between

Nigeria and the UAE, with a focus on expanding codeshare agreements and interlining opportunities for Nigerian airlines.

He further said that the UAE's Minister of Economy hailed Nigeria's aviation minister as saying, "Let me say this on camera now, the Nigeria Aviation Minister is a man who keeps his words and for us, that's everything", acknowledging his commitment to advancing Nigeria-UAE aviation relations.

Beyond the BASA agreement, Moshood said Keyamo advocated for a review of UAE's visa restrictions on Nigerians, stressing that easing the current conditions would increase passenger traffic on designated routes, benefiting both nations' economies.

The statement further reads, "In a further boost to bilateral relations, both countries agreed to sign a Technical Cooperation Agreement focusing on capacity building and technical support in key aviation areas, including safety and regulatory, environment, airport facilitation and security.

"This cooperation reinforces Nigeria's commitment to elevating its aviation sector to global best practices while deepening ties with international partners."

## FG eyes \$30bn investment through raw materials information system

The Federal Government has launched the Nigeria Raw Materials Management Information System, a digital platform designed to enhance industrialisation, attract investment, and optimise the country's raw material resources.

The initiative, spearheaded by the Raw Materials Research and Development Council, is expected to bring in \$30bn in investments over the next decade through efficient resource management.

Speaking at the launch in Abuja on Tuesday, the Minister of Innovation, Science, and Technology, Uche Nnaji, emphasised the potential of the RMMIS to transform Nigeria's economic landscape.

"The RMMIS is a national digital repository of real-time, accurate, and accessible data on Nigeria's raw materials. This platform will empower manufacturers with reliable data for local sourc-

ing, reducing import reliance and boosting domestic production. It will also attract investors, potentially bringing in \$30bn in investments over the next decade through efficient resource management," Nnaji stated.

He highlighted how the lack of comprehensive data on raw material reserves, quality, and locations has hindered industrial growth, leading to high import dependence and reduced investor confidence.

"Manufacturers struggle to source reliable local inputs, while investors hesitate due to limited resource visibility. Researchers and innovators also face challenges in developing new products without comprehensive data," the minister noted.

With the RMMIS, he added, policymakers would have access to empirical data for targeted policies, which could increase semi-processed mineral exports to \$9bn by 2030.



COMMITTEE MEETING:

R-L: Chairman, Senate Committee on Interior, Adams Oshiomole; Representative of the Auditor General of the Federation, Olu Samuel, and representative of the Chairman, Senate Committee on Public Account, Abdul Nigi, during the Committee's meeting with the Inspector General of Police in Abuja on Tuesday.

PHOTO: OMOYE AMINU

## N100m laboratory machine, others missing in Delta hospital

Operatives from Delta State Police Command have commenced investigation into the N100 million missing laboratory machine in Delta State Specialist Hospital.

The State Commissioner for Health, Dr Joseph Onojaeme, disclosed this in Asaba while speaking to newsmen about the missing laboratory machine

He said, "I know nothing about it. It happened in 2022, and I came to the office in August 2023. Moreover, the police are already investigating it. How can they accuse me of

what I don't know about?"

Workers at the hospital had raised the alarm over the missing Laparoscopy machine and other equipment, berating the Commissioner for delaying the investigation process.

An investigation revealed that a laboratory machine, among others, was said to have been missing at the specialist hospital in Asaba.

Sources in the hospital who spoke to our correspondent on the condition of anonymity alleged that the Commissioner was using delay tactics to cover up.

"The Delta Commissioner for Health, Dr. Joseph Onojaeme, and the Chief Medical Director, Dr Peace Ighosewe, should, as a matter of urgency, return all the hospital equipment, including the Laparoscopy machine.

"Only the laboratory machine is valued at approximately N100 million as of today, and it has vanished into thin air for over a year now.

"The Hospital and its holdings aren't personal property of Dr. Ifeanyi Okowa nor Governor Sheriff Oborewori but for all Deltans. Transparency and

accountability must prevail.

"As we speak, a lot of abnormalities are going on in that hospital. This is a waste of taxpayer money for their own interests. Some of the equipment purchased just went into thin air.

"They should provide it; the Health Commissioner had been blocking the investigation; we don't know why he's doing that," sources said.

It was also gathered that the House Committee on Health of the Delta State House of Assembly had invited the hospital management for questioning over the missing machine.

## Edo gov orders closure of AAU satellite campuses

The Edo State government has ordered the immediate closure of all satellite campuses of Ambrose Alli University (AAU), Ekpoma.

In a statement issued on

Monday, the Secretary to the State Government, Umar Musa Ikhilior, said the decision was driven by the government's commitment to improving educational standards and its substantial investments in the

university.

The statement emphasized that all academic programs and courses must now be conducted exclusively at the university's main campus in Ekpoma.

The government directed

the university's Governing Council and management to comply with the directive, stressing that the move aims to enhance the quality of education and ensure proper regulation of academic activities.

## FG to resolve drop box suspension for US visa renewals —Rep

The Federal Government of Nigeria will press the appropriate diplomatic buttons and liaise with the appropriate authorities to resolve the suspension of the drop box provision for Nigerians renewing their American visas.

The Chairman of the House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, Oluwole Oke, made this known on Channels Television's Sunrise Daily programme on Tuesday.

"I am in the US (United States). I will take this matter up. After finishing my meeting in New York here, I will be in

Washington as well.

"We have chargé d'affaires there. I will take this matter up with him and see how we can navigate and resolve the issues," Oke said.

The drop box system allowed applicants, especially those with recent US travel history, to submit passports without interviews, reducing wait times.

However, last weekend, complaints filtered in from visa applicants that the US has stopped its visa drop box service in Nigeria, necessitating all visitor visa applicants to attend in-person interviews for renewals.

The development comes amid a crackdown by the Donald Trump presidency on migrants in the United States.

The lawmaker said the suspension of the service by the US was not a serious issue as Nigeria does not offer the same service to Americans renewing their Nigerian visas.

Oke said he had reached out to the Nigerian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Yusuf Tuggar, and he told him that Nigeria has not received any communication correspondence from the United States of America regarding the drop box service suspension.

The lawmaker said, "I don't think there is any serious issue here. It is the prerogative of the United States to cancel the drop box procedure for renewing visas for Nigerians. There is a principle of reciprocity in the diplomatic arena.

"As regards visa renewal, that's not what we offer Americans in the United States, that's not what our consulates when Americans or Nigerians born in America want to renew their visas, we don't offer them a drop box. That they offered us a drop box, I think it was entirely their prerogative," he said.

# Creativity, innovation crucial for economic devt —Minister

The Minister of State for Education, Prof. Suwai-ba Ahmad, on Tuesday, emphasised the importance of creativity and innovation in driving Nigeria's economic development.

Speaking at the 2025 National Exhibition of Creativity and Innovation, Ahmad not-

ed that the world is evolving rapidly, and it is imperative for Nigeria to foster a culture of innovation, entrepreneurship, and technical excellence among its youth.

Ahmad was represented by the ministry director of colleges of education, Dr. Uche Uba. "The Federal Ministry of Ed-

ucation recognizes the crucial role that creativity and innovation play in our nation's economic development," She said.

"We are committed to supporting innovation through various initiatives, including funding for research, incubation hubs, and partnerships with the private sector."

She further commended the young innovators participating in the exhibition, saying their ideas and projects are a testament to their brilliance and a beacon of hope for a prosperous future. She encouraged them to remain committed to their pursuits, seek collaborations, and leverage available resources to

bring their ideas to fruition.

Also speaking at the event, Dr. Yusuf Saheed, Director of reform coordination in the ministry who represented the Permanent Secretary, FME, Dr. Nasir Gwarzo, said the exhibition serves as a collective commitment to fostering ingenuity, technological advancement and creativity in polytechnics

and other allied institutions.

The exhibition, which took place at the Public Service Institute of Nigeria in Abuja, showcased groundbreaking ideas, pioneering inventions, and practical solutions to contemporary challenges from students of polytechnics, monotechnics, and innovation enterprises institutions across Nigeria.



## REGULAR MEETING:

L-R: Representative of the NSA Chairman, Abdullahi Yahaya; INEC Chairman, Yakubi Mahmood, and representative of Inspector General of Police, Commissioner of Police on Election's Matters, Abayomi Shogunle, at the first regular meeting of the inter-Agency Consultative committee on Elections Security (ICCES) for the year 2025 in Abuja on Tuesday.

PHOTO: OMOYE AMINU

## Tinubu lauds Gov Okpebholo's leadership in reviving healthcare in Edo

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu has praised the visionary leadership of Governor Monday Okpebholo for revitalizing and promoting healthcare services in Edo State.

He commended the Governor's dedication to ensuring that the people of Edo State receive top-quality healthcare.

President Tinubu conveyed his appreciation through the Minister of State for Health and Social Welfare, Dr. Ishaq Salako, who led a federal government delegation to the Edo State Government House on Tuesday to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the establishment of a National Obstetrics Fistula Centre in Benin City.

The centre will focus on treating Vesico Vaginal Fistula

(VVF), a serious medical condition affecting many Nigerian women.

Governor Okpebholo led the Edo State delegation during the signing ceremony, marking a major step forward in strengthening the state's healthcare system.

Dr. Salako highlighted that the National Obstetrics Fistula Centre was established in Benin City in May 2023, just before President Tinubu took office.

However, he noted that under the previous administration led by Governor Godwin Obaseki, the project did not receive the necessary cooperation from the State Government, a development which stalled its progress.

He explained that from May 2023 until November 2024,

there were struggles to get the centre operational.

However, since Governor Okpebholo took office, significant progress has been made in just three months, including securing a temporary facility to commence operations.

He also revealed that the Governor had allocated 24 hectares of land for the permanent centre, demonstrating his commitment to healthcare development in Edo.

The Minister further emphasized that Nigeria has the highest burden of obstetric fistula in the world, with approximately 12,000 new cases recorded annually.

He described fistula as not only a medical problem, but also a social and psychological issue, with some affected individuals

resorting to suicide due to the condition.

According to him, the Federal Government has launched a free fistula management program, which includes medical treatment, social support, and rehabilitation. So far, nearly 1,700 patients have benefited from the initiative, and efforts are underway to expand the program.

Governor Okpebholo expressed his gratitude to President Tinubu for his commitment to transforming Edo State and assured that his administration would continue to support the healthcare sector.

He emphasized the importance of the fistula centre, noting that it would not only serve Edo State, but also benefit other states in the South-South region.

## CBN scraps free ATM withdrawals for other banks' customers

The Central Bank of Nigeria has eliminated the three free monthly withdrawals previously allowed for customers using other banks' ATMs.

In a circular dated February 10, 2025, the apex bank directed all banks and financial institutions to implement new ATM withdrawal charges from March 1, 2025.

This means customers will now pay for every withdrawal made from another bank's ATM.

The review affects the charges prescribed in Section 10.7 of the CBN Guide to Charges by Banks, Other Financial and Non-Bank Financial Institutions (2020)

The circular, signed by John Onojah, Acting Director of the Financial Policy and Regulation Department at the CBN, is expected to accelerate the deployment of ATMs across the country, while ensuring that financial institutions apply appropriate charges for the service.

"The three free monthly withdrawals allowed for Remote-On-Ups (other bank's customers/Not-On-Ups consumers) in Nigeria under Section 10.6.2 of the Guide shall no longer apply."

Under the new directive, withdrawals made from a customer's

bank ATM will remain free.

However, customers using another bank's ATM will now be charged N100 per N20,000 withdrawal when using ATMs located within bank premises.

For withdrawals made at off-site ATMs, a charge of N100 per N20,000 withdrawal will apply, along with a surcharge of up to N500.

The surcharge, which will be an income of the ATM deployer or acquirer, must be disclosed at the point of withdrawal.

The CBN also stated that international ATM withdrawals would be charged at the exact rate set by the international acquirer.

The apex bank attributed the review to rising costs and the need to enhance efficiency in ATM operations.

The circular read, "In response to rising costs and the need to improve efficiency of Automated Teller Machine (ATM) services in the banking industry, the Central Bank of Nigeria has reviewed the ATM transaction fees prescribed in Section 10.7 of the extant CBN Guide to Charges by Banks, Other Financial and Non-Bank Financial Institutions, 2020 (the Guide).

## BUA Cement donates N35m medical supplies to 16 Sokoto communities

As part of its Corporate Social Responsibilities, BUA Cement, a leading cement manufacturer in Africa, has donated medical supplies worth N35 million to 16 host communities in the Wamakko Local Government Area of Sokoto State.

During the official handover ceremony on Tuesday, BUA Cement's Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer, Yusuf Binji, represented by the Director of Administration and Corporate Services, Sada Suleiman, stressed the company's commitment to ensuring hospitals and clinics in its host communities have access to essential medications.

Binji emphasised that this donation is an annual initiative, reaffirming BUA Cement's dedication to the well-being of local communities. He also highlighted the company's broader CSR efforts, which include scholarship programs, the provision of potable water, and the construction of mosques to support community development.

"This initiative is our way of giving back to the communities that have continuously supported us," Binji stated.

Additionally, he announced the completion of seven solar-powered boreholes across the state, which are set for commissioning soon. Furthermore, BUA Cement has provided full school uniforms to pupils in five primary schools within its host communities.

Binji expressed appreciation to Governor Ahmed Aliyu for their support and assured that BUA Cement would continue working alongside the state government to improve the lives of residents. He also emphasised that the donated medications are to be distributed free of charge, particularly benefiting women and children, and should not be sold under any circumstances.

Speaking at the event, the Chairman of Wamakko Local Government, Alhaji Umaru Ahmad, represented by the Director of Health Services, Umar Sani Tureta—commended BUA Cement for its generosity.

He urged other companies operating in Sokoto State to follow BUA Cement's example by investing in community development.

Ahmad assured the company that the medical supplies would be properly distributed to ensure they reach those in need.

## Land dispute: PSC demands probe of senior officers for extortion, abuse

The Chairman of the Police Service Commission, DIG Hashimu Argungu (retd.), has requested the Inspector General of Police, Kayode Egbetokun, to investigate two senior officers of the Zone 7 Police Command over their alleged involvement in a civil land dispute, extortion and abuse of office.

Argungu, in a letter to the IGP, urged the setting up of a competent committee to probe the officer in charge of the Legal Unit and the Deputy Commissioner in charge of Operations of the Zone.

In a statement on Tuesday by the PSC's spokesman, Ike-

chukwu Ani, the PSC chairman accused the officers of violating police rules of engagement by meddling in civil matters and facilitating the demolition of a petitioner's residence.

"He said the letter was prompted by a complaint/petition received from one Alhaji Abubakar Yahaya against the two officers of the zone who, against repeated warnings, were involved in civil matters and supervised/provided cover in the demolition of the petitioner's residential property where he had lived for over 15 years.

"In the letter to the IGP, the PSC Chairman said that on the


19th of December 2024, the Police and enforcement staff from the High Court of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, went to the residence of the petitioner, Abubakar Yahaya, "threw away his property and chased his family members out of his residence," the statement added.

Ani said the petitioner further alleged that the High Court enforcement unit, led by one Shamsudeen Ubandoma, extorted N700,000 from him under the pretence of preventing further police enforcement actions.

"DIG Argungu disclosed that the enforcement Unit of the High Court led by one Shamsudeen

Ubandoma took "the sum of N700,000.00 from the petitioner under the guise or pretence of giving it to the Policemen who came with him for enforcement so that they won't come back for enforcement again.

"He said on the 16th of January 2025; 'Some policemen with enforcement team from the court, accompanied by one faceless Alhaji Usman Sarki – the purported owner of the plot on the said No 75 Lome Crescent, Wuse Zone 7 Abuja, under dispute in court, brought trucks and bulldozers which were used in the demolition of the petitioner's residence."

 <p><b>The Nigerian Observer</b> ...That the people may know</p>	<h2 style="margin:0;">ADVERTISEMENT RATES (PRINT)</h2>
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FULL PAGE	517,344	556,145	369,500	397,213	325,150	349,536	665,156	715,043	443,440	476,698
13 X 4	369,500	397,213	295,600	317,770	206,938	222,458	443,500	476,763	369,550	397,266
10 X 4	340,000	365,500	273,500	294,013	177,400	190,705	370,000	397,750	295,600	317,770
HALF PAGE	295,600	317,770	236,500	254,238	147,800	158,885	340,000	365,500	273,450	293,959
10 X 3	221,700	238,328	147,800	158,885	118,300	127,173	266,000	285,950	251,300	270,148
13 X2	206,900	222,418	133,000	142,925	103,500	111,263	221,800	238,435	147,810	158,896
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HALF CENTER	991,590	1,071,989						B/W	887,272	959,212

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	RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)	RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)		RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)	RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)
FP 6X2	89,800	96,535	105,450	113,359	6 X 2	60,640	65,188	49,140	52,826
FP 5X2	81,100	87,183	97,300	104,598	5 X 2	51,950	55,846	42,120	45,279
FP 4X2	73,000	78,475	80,700	86,753	4 X 2	45,260	48,655	34,400	36,980
FP 3X2	64,870	69,735	73,000	78,475	3 X 2	30,900	33,218	26,600	28,595
FP 2X2	59,000	63,425	64,900	69,768	2 X 2	18,680	20,081	15,600	16,770
					2 X 1	12,400	13,330	7,415	7,971
					CAC	38,000	40,850		

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STRIP INSIDE	88,600	95,245	118,250	127,119					

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PAGES 2 & 3	ADD 55% SURCHARGE						
PAGES 4 & 5	ADD 40% SURCHARGE						
BACK PAGE	ADD 60% SURCHARGE						
PAGES 4 & 5	ADD 40% SURCHARGE				Miss to Mrs.	5000	7000
BACK PAGE	ADD 60% SURCHARGE				Reconciliation/Corrections of name	6000	8000

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**EFFECTIVE FROM FEBRUARY 1, 2023**

## Foreign

## NEWS

# Why some Ghanaians are fighting in insurgency-hit Burkina Faso

Three Ghanaians have told the BBC of their involvement in the fighting between Islamist insurgents and the military in neighbouring Burkina Faso, describing scenes of sometimes indiscriminate violence and bloody battles.

"We are always with the dead. In some battles, I've seen 40, 50 or 100 dead people," one of the men told the BBC.

The three, all in their late thirties or early forties, said they had fought in Burkina Faso multiple times since

2018. They crossed the porous 550km-long (340-mile) border between the two countries, without being detected by the security forces.

They denied being primarily motivated by religion or being trained by the jihadists, saying they went to fight to defend civilian communities with whom they had strong family and ethnic ties.

"My elder brother, his wife and children were all killed by the [Burkinabe] army. It pains me a lot. The military came to their community in the forest.

They killed all of them, a whole household, including 29 people," one of the men said.

But another of the men did articulate religious zeal, saying: "If you die while fighting with the jihadists, then you are driving to jannah (an Islamic word for paradise), on the path of the righteous."

Challenged over whether they had taken part in civilian attacks, the men were divided. One denied doing so, but

another conceded that he did.

"Some local people support the military in attacking us, that's why we have to kill them too," he said.

"You know... I'm not happy to fight like this. The number of people we kill, the people the military kill, it's very bad. But this fight has entered our blood," he added.

All three spoke on condition of anonymity.

The BBC was unable to

confirm their claims but they showed us pictures of weapons, described the location of recent conflicts and named jihadist commanders in Burkina Faso.

The BBC was put in touch with the men through contacts at cattle markets in northern Ghana, where jihadist groups are alleged to be recruiting fighters.

In 2022, a France-based NGO, Promediation, said its research showed that the jihadists had recruited between 200

and 300 young Ghanaians.

And the Netherlands Institute of International Relations think-tank, in a report released last July, said the jihadists had "minimal success" recruiting in Ghana.

However, the men offered a different perspective, telling the BBC, in claims that could not be verified, that people from "all parts of Ghana" and from "many" ethnic groups were joining the insurgency in Burkina Faso.

## Japan ministry worker on night out loses sensitive files

A Japanese finance ministry employee on a night out with colleagues lost documents containing the personal data of 187 people suspected of drug smuggling, local media say.

The employee, who has not been named, reportedly drank nine glasses of beer during a five-hour-long night out with co-workers in Yokohama on 6 February.

Local media said that he did not realise he had lost his bag until after he got off his train ride home in another city, Sumida.

The finance ministry has said it was "deeply sorry" for the incident that "significantly undermined public trust", according to public broadcaster NHK.

The bag had contained documents which had the names and

addresses of 187 suspected drug smugglers and recipients of marijuana seeds, the ministry said.

It had also contained business laptops with the employee's personal data.

The employee, who is assigned to the customs and tariff bureau, was not named in the NHK report.

The BBC has reached out to the finance ministry for comment on Tuesday, a public holiday in Japan.

Alcohol has long been seen as a social lubricant for thousands of years in Japan, where business deals and difficult issues are discussed over bottles of beer and sake.

It is believed that drinking alcohol creates a more relaxed environment for such discussions.



**QUAKES:** Thousands of quakes have occurred around the islands in the last two weeks

## US justice department tells prosecutors to drop NYC mayor's corruption case

The US justice department has told federal prosecutors to drop their corruption case against New York City Mayor Eric Adams.

The order came from the acting deputy attorney general, appointed by President Donald Trump, who said the indictment had "restricted" the mayor's ability to address "illegal immigration and violent crime" in the city.

Adams, a Democrat, has recently built a closer relationship with Trump, a Republican, and has told law enforcement to co-operate with the president's immigration raids. But he denies speaking to Trump about his case.

The mayor is accused of accepting illegal campaign

funds and gifts in exchange for his influence as mayor. He has pleaded not guilty to five charges.

Prosecutors have not yet commented to indicate whether they intend to drop the case as requested. Any decision to do so will need to be formally submitted to the court and approved by a judge.

"You are directed, as authorised by the attorney general, to dismiss the pending charges," read the memo from Acting Deputy Attorney General Emil Bove.

The memo adds that the case may be reviewed again after the November 2025 mayoral election, but it says no further "investigate steps" should be taken until then.

It also tells prosecutors to

"take all steps within your power to cause Mayor Adams' security clearance to be restored".

Bove, who worked as Trump's defence lawyer during his criminal trial last year, wrote that the justice department "reached this conclusion without assessing the strength of the evidence or the legal theories on which the case is based".

He said the move "in no way calls into question the integrity and efforts" of the prosecutors who brought the case.

The memo followed a reported meeting between Adams' lawyers and federal prosecutors in New York.

Adams attended the presidential inauguration last month and also flew to Florida

for a meeting with Trump.

In recent weeks, the 64-year-old mayor has directed city law enforcement to co-operate with federal immigration authorities on fresh New York City raids. Critics say this undermines local sanctuary city laws, which direct city leaders to not co-operate with authorities unless they are aiming to arrest dangerous criminals.

Before the election, Trump said he and Adams had been "persecuted" for speaking against the immigration policies of Trump's presidential predecessor, Joe Biden.

The justice department memo says "it cannot be ignored that Mayor Adams criticized the prior administration's immigration policies before the charges were filed".

## CAR leader launches meme-coin 'experiment'

Central African Republic President Faustin-Archange Touadéra has launched a meme-coin in a bid to raise the profile of the country, which is one of the world's poorest.

Meme-coins are used to build popularity for a viral internet trend or movement and fans are inspired to collect and give them value, but they are extremely volatile investments.

Touadéra announced the launch, known as \$CAR, on his X account over the weekend and on Monday said it had been a "success". But the value of the coin had a significant price drop of up to 90%, according to specialist websites.

In 2022, CAR became the world's second country after El Salvador to adopt the cryptocurrency Bitcoin as legal tender.

That initiative - launched under the name Sango - does not appear to have been as successful as planned, and its website no longer works.

It was seen as an easier way to attract investors to the country's mining and other industries using Bitcoin. The country has rich mineral deposits, including gold and diamonds.

Foreign investors could also obtain citizenship for \$60,000 worth of crypto, although the plan was later ruled unconstitutional by the country's top

court.

Touadéra described this week's launch of the meme-coin as an "experiment" of something that "can unite people, support national development, and put the [country] on the world stage in a unique way".

But some expressed fears that it could have been a scam.

On Monday, Touadéra thanked those who believed in his vision.

He shared a video of a high school which he said had been deteriorating rapidly, saying the meme-coin would help support its "rebuilding and furnishing" and give "students a chance for a better future".

Despite its potential, CAR remains one of the poorest countries - a situation complicated by a civil war which has devastated much of the country.

Meme-coins have often been criticised for their speculative nature, where users create or buy them in the hope that their value will rise and make money quickly - but many end up losing money on them.

Just before his inauguration last month, US President Donald Trump launched his own meme-coin whose value quickly soared, and which reportedly raised billions of dollars for him. The New York Times has reported that it is now worth a quarter of its highest value.

## Tremors hitting Santorini reach new strength

Santorini has been hit by a powerful, shallow 5.3 magnitude earthquake, which is the strongest to strike the Greek island during recent seismic activity in the area.

The tremors were felt in Athens on Monday evening and measured a focal depth of 17km (10.6 miles).

Residents of the neighbouring island Amorgos remain on high alert after the latest tremor, which followed a moderate 5.0 magnitude earthquake between the islands on Sunday evening.

The tourist hotspot has been rocked by seismic activity since January and more than 12,800 quakes have been detected by the University of Athens' Seismological Laboratory.

Some residents have been seen patrolling dangerous areas to deter tourists from taking photos on cliffs.

Landslides have occurred in many parts of Santorini due to the frequency and intensity of the tremors and experts have not ruled out a major earthquake.

Seismologists were optimistic about the intensity of the quakes starting to subside, but are now concerned they are worsening.

A state of emergency will remain in place on Santorini until at least 3 March.

Sunday's quake was preceded by three smaller ones of more than 4.0 magnitude, while the three on Monday morning were also more than 4.0.

Inspections found no damage to buildings in Santorini or Amorgos.

No injuries have been re-

ported as a result of the earthquakes, which have numbered in the thousands since 26 January, but more than 11,000 people have left the islands.

Schools will remain closed on Santorini, Amorgos and several other islands on Monday and Tuesday.

A team of the Special Disaster Response Unit has set off for Amorgos from Patras with a special earthquake rescue vehicle, and technical teams are expected to inspect the electricity network on the island.

# Sports

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

## FIFA snubs Yekini and George Weah, as Nigeria, Ghana legends make Africa's greatest forward list

FIFA has named nine African football legends in its quest to determine the continent's greatest forward of all time, Soccer.net.football reports.

Africa has produced some of the world's most gifted attackers — players who tormented defenders and goalkeepers alike.

On Tuesday, FIFA took to its official social media channels to pose a question: Who deserves the ultimate status as Africa's finest striker?

Among the nine nominees was former Super Eagles and Arsenal forward Nwankwo Kanu.

One of Nigeria's most decorated

players, Kanu won the Champions League with Ajax, the UEFA Cup with Inter Milan, and two Premier League titles with Arsenal.

On the international stage, he led Nigeria's U-17 team to World Cup glory and captained the Dream Team to Africa's first-ever Olympic football gold in 1996.

However, despite his illustrious career, the former Portsmouth star never won the Africa Cup of Nations and did not score in three separate World Cup appearances.

Notably absent from FIFA's shortlist was Nigeria's all-time top scorer, Rashidi Yekini, but Côte d'Ivoire's record goal king

Didier Drogba made the cut.

The two-time African Footballer of the Year enjoyed a glittering career with Chelsea and Galatasaray, winning multiple league titles and scoring two World Cup goals.

Joining Drogba on the list is Cameroon's iconic striker Roger Milla, Ghana's all-time top scorer Asamoah Gyan, and Egypt and Liverpool star Mohamed Salah.

The shortlist also features Zambian legend Kalusha Bwalya, Senegalese star Sadio Mané, Togo's record scorer Emmanuel Adebayor, and South Africa's golden boy Benni McCarthy.



## Premium Trust Bank unveiled as lead sponsor of Ogun 2024 National Sports festival

The Gateway Games 2024 National Sports Festival has secured a

major boost with the unveiling of Premium Trust Bank as its lead sponsor. This partnership

represents the largest single sponsorship agreement in the history of the National Sports

Festival.

At a grand unveiling ceremony in Abeokuta, dignitaries from Ogun State Government, the National Sports Festival Organizing Committee, and Premium Trust Bank gathered to formalize the agreement.

The partnership underscores the importance of public-private collaboration in advancing sports development in Nigeria, aligning with President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's vision for a sustainable sports economy.

Premium Trust Bank's involvement is expected to elevate the Ogun 2024 National Sports Festival, setting a new benchmark for corporate involvement in Nigerian sports.

The bank has a track record of supporting sports development in Nigeria, having partnered with the Athletic Federation of Nigeria, sponsored the 2022 National Sports Festival in Delta State, and supported Nigerian athletes, including world record holder Tobi Amusan.

The Gateway Games 2024 National Sports Festival is expected to feature around 12,000 to 15,000 athletes competing in various sports. With Premium Trust Bank's support, the festival is poised to be one of the most successful editions in recent history.



## Niger Delta Sports Festival: Bayelsa Sports Ministry Inaugurates Liaison Committee

The Bayelsa State Liaison committee for the Niger Delta Sports Festival has been inaugurated in Yenagoa the State capital ahead of the maiden edition of the Niger Delta Sports Festival slated for 1st -9th of April, 2025 in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State.

The inauguration which took place at the Ministry of Sports Development had all members of the committee including the a representative of the Project Consultants, Dumanis Icon Limited, in attendance.

Inaugurating the committee, Commissioner for Sports Development Dr. Daniel Igali represented by the Permanent Secretary Ministry of Sports Development, Mrs. Grace Alagoa, urged the committee to discharge their duties with utmost responsibility, stating that their nomination was as a result of their contribution to the development of sports over the years.

She noted that with the experience of those in the committee, she is confident that the person-

alities nominated to pilot the affairs of the committee would give the state good representation when the event commences.

According to Dumanis icon, the need to organize the competition became imperative due to the regions dominance at the national level, pointing out that the caliber of persons steering the affairs of the NDDC signifies the commission value for sports development apart from building bridges and constructing roads in the region.

## Ronaldo reaches deal with Saudi club Al Nassr to extend contract

Portuguese football star Cristiano Ronaldo has reached an agreement with Al Nassr to extend his contract by another year until June 2026, an official with the Saudi club has told AFP.

The official said the sides have agreed on the renewable extension of Ronaldo's contract, "but it has not been signed yet. An announcement will be made over the coming days".

Ronaldo turned 40 last week with his current contract due to end in June 2025.

The former Manchester United, Real Madrid and Juventus star joined Al Nassr in January 2023 and has since scored 82 goals in 90 matches.

In August, Ronaldo said he would stay with Al Nassr through the end of his professional career, which may be "soon or in two or three years"

But it'll most likely happen with Al Nassr, in the team that makes me happy... and where I

feel good."

The Portuguese great appeared to trade an end-of-career payday for football obscurity when he moved to Riyadh's Al Nassr two years ago in a deal said to be worth \$250 million.

But his influence became clear when he was followed by a parade of ageing superstars to the big-spending Saudi Pro League.

Saudi Arabia was then awarded the 2034 World Cup in December, the crowning glory for the oil-rich kingdom's strategy of revamping its image through sports, tourism and culture.

When Ronaldo launched his YouTube channel in August, he gained one million subscribers in just 90 minutes and 20 million within 24 hours. He currently has 73.5 million.

Although World Cup glory has probably eluded him, unlike his Argentine rival Lionel Messi, records still dangle in front of the five-time Ballon d'Or and Champions League winner.



## LOC Chairman pledges commitment to excellence at Africa Armwrestling Championship Inauguration

The Local Organizing Committee (LOC) Chairman, Hon. Adeboye Adeyinka (Sir Zulu), has assured that Nigeria is ready to host a world-class 14th Africa Armwrestling Championship, tagged 'Abuja 2025'.

Speaking during the official inauguration of the LOC at the

Moshood Abiola National Stadium, Abuja, he reaffirmed the committee's dedication to delivering an exceptional tournament that will leave a lasting legacy.

Addressing committee members, dignitaries, and sports stakeholders, Hon. Adeyinka emphasized the vision of President

Ahmed Bola Tinubu (GCFR) to transform and revitalize Nigerian sports, particularly by strengthening grassroots development.

He stated that the committee's mission extends beyond just organizing the event but also aligns with the broader goal of fostering a sustainable

sports ecosystem in Nigeria.

"Today marks the beginning of a journey that we will undertake together as a unified team. Our work will be marked by collaboration, creativity, and, most importantly, a deep sense of service to our nation," he declared.

The LOC Chairman outlined

the critical areas of focus, including logistics coordination, budgeting, volunteer management, security, hospitality, and overall event execution. He urged committee members to bring their expertise and passion to ensure Abuja 2025 meets and exceeds international standards.



## Nigeria table tennis sensation set for ITTF World Cup qualifier in Tunisia

Nigeria's table tennis sensation, Matthew Kuti, has once again demonstrated why he is one of the continent's rising stars. The teenager has been included in the star-studded line-up for the 2025 African Cup, set to take place in Tunis, Tunisia, from February 25 to 27.

Kuti, who has won four of the five major tournaments

in Nigeria and has been the most consistent player in the country, was listed by the Nigeria Table Tennis Federation (NTTF) due to his growing profile in the sport.

The Lagos State-born athlete recently added the Molade Okoya-Thomas Cup Men's Singles title to his collection and will now compete against some of Africa's finest stars in the Tu-

nisian capital, aiming to secure a spot for the 2025 ITTF World Cup in Macao, China, in April.

Kuti's rising profile was evident when he bulldozed his way into the final of the Molade Okoya-Thomas Cup, outperforming top stars and former champions. Having competed at the junior level of Africa's longest-running table tennis tournament in the past,

the teenager dazzled fans and dignitaries last weekend with his exceptional display, earning the title at the 56th edition of the competition.

Since making his senior debut at the 2023 African Games in Accra, Ghana, Kuti has remained an integral member of the Nigerian men's national team. He featured in the 2024 and 2025 African Champion-

ships in Tunis and Addis Ababa, where he earned a silver medal with the team.

The unassuming and fans' favourite Kuti will head to Tunisia to compete against both established and youthful players in Africa, vying for one of the four slots available in the Men's Singles. He will team up with the Nigerian contingent, coached by N legendary Segun

Toriola and Dotun Omoniyi.

The tournament in Tunis will provide African players the opportunity to be part of the ITTF World Cup, alongside regulars like Quadri Aruna, Omar Assar, and Dina Meshref. Semifinalists in the Men's and Women's Singles will secure their spots for the event in Macao, China, in April this year.

## Unlocking the potential of Young Talents through Grassroots Sports, our agenda, says Enabulele

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

The Edo State Sports Commission under the leadership of the Executive Chairman Hon Amadin Enabulele is on a mission with a clear vision to identify and nurture young talents in Edo State.

The Executive Director, Hon. Baldwin Bazuaye MON, representing Edo South Senatorial District stated this when he met with 10 selected sports association coaches as part of efforts to promote grassroots sports development in the State.

Bazuaye emphasized the importance of grassroots sports in every sports development project as a way to setting career paths for budding talents.

The Commission's Chairman, Hon. Amadin Desmond Enabulele, who later joined the meeting, highlighted the governor's interest in school sports which he recognizes as the springboard to launching the State into a generation of talented sports men and women whose career paths in sports would ultimately be beneficial to the State.

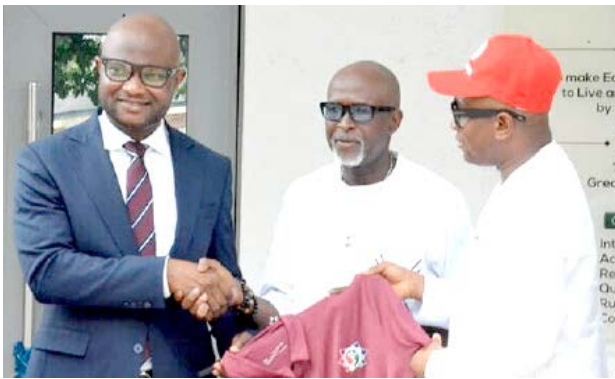
He commended Hon. Bazuaye for kicking off a tour across the seven Local Government Areas in Edo South Senatorial District on a sports development campaign to promote community participation and enthusiasm.

The zonal Coordinator, Mrs. Doris Omoragbon, explained that scouting young talents and follow-up programs are crucial for sustaining grassroots sports development. She noted that Local Government councils across the state have shown appreciable interest in grassroots sports promotion and are ready to collaborate with the Edo State Sports Commission to harness available talents at that level.

To achieve this, the commission has concluded plans to host

the first Edo South "Train the Trainers" programme, involving 10 sports associations, including: Athletics, Ayo, Chess, Cricket and Dat. Others are Football, karate, Kung fu, Rugby and Scrabble.

The programme aims to scout raw talents in the course of representing their various Local Governments. By empowering coaches and athletes, the Edo State Sports Commission hopes to unlock the full potential of young talents in the region.



## NWFL MD5: Edo Queens host Nasarawa Amazons in a titanic battle

Edo Queens Football Club of Benin are prepared to host Nasarawa Amazon on Wednesday as they set the eyes victory in the match day 05 of the Nigeria Women Football

League NWFL premiership.

The match will be played at the Samuel Ogbemudia Stadium Benin, kickoff time is 6pm local time.

Currently, the defending champions find themselves

in the 3rd position in NWFL Group A league table and will be going into tomorrow's clash with high hope of victory.

The game will be the battle of their lives, hence they are ready to come out spectacular against their opponents from Lafia City.

Both teams are actually not new to each other. They have met each other on several occasions. But tomorrow's game will be different as Edo Queens yearn for the three maximum points

The players and coaches have expressed confidence in the team's collective determination to bring their professional expertise into play so as to pocket the three points at stake.



## Cote d'Ivoire 2025: Flying Eagles return to camp for Egypt friendlies

Head Coach Aliyu Zubairu has called to camp 30 players as Nigeria's U20 boys, Flying Eagles, prepare for a two-match tour of Egypt later this month.

Team Administrator, Aliyu Lawal Ibrahim informed them that the seven-time African champions will clash with their Egyptian counterparts in Cairo, capital of Egypt in friendly matches that have been sched-

uled for 25th and 27th February.

This year's Africa U20 Cup of Nations will be staged in Cote d'Ivoire, 26th April - 18th May, with the four top-placed finishers qualifying to represent the continent at the FIFA U20 World Cup finals in Chile, 27th September - 19th October.

The Flying Eagles, champions of Africa in 1983, 1985, 1987, 1989, 2005, 2011 and 2015, won the WAFU-B U20 Champion-

ship held in Lome, Togo in October last year to be eligible for the finals in Cote d'Ivoire. They defeated Ghana's Black Satellites 3-1 in the final match.

The two-time FIFA World Cup runners-up, in 1989 and 2005, came within breathing distance of the semi-finals at the FIFA U20 World Cup finals in Argentina, before losing narrowly to Korea Republic after extra time.

**Flying Eagles For Camping In**

**Abuja For Egypt Friendlies:**

Goalkeepers: Ifeanyi Harcourt (Sporting Lagos); Light Emerenoye (Diamond Academy); Abubakar Rufai (Mavlon FC)

Defenders: Adamu Maigari (El-Kanemi Warriors); Daniel Bameyi (Bayelsa United); Kenneth Igbokwe (Enugu Rangers); Haruna Aliyu (Wikki Tourists); Musa Ademu (Wireless FC); Shamsudeen Muhammad (Mavlon FC); Ibrahim

Abdullahi; Shamsudeen Ishaq (Grassrunner FC); Steven Jolomi (Mavlon FC)

**Midfielders:** Raphael Oyeabanji (Shuffle Select FC); Mohammed Ibrahim (Niger Tornados); Kizito Opara (Campus Academy); Alabi Sulaiman Jojo (El-Kanemi Warriors); Sulaiman Abubakar (Diamond Academy); Shafiu Adamu (Wikki Tourists); Cletus Simon (Mavlon FC).



## ValueJet becomes official Aviation for Access Bank Lagos City Marathon

Organisers of the Access Bank Lagos City Marathon, Nilayo Sports Management Company Limited, have announced ValueJet as its official Airline partner for the 10th Anniversary of the Race.

ValueJet which is one of Nigeria's fastest-growing indigenous Airlines has joined a long list of partners who are making sure the Lagos City Marathon maintains its status as Africa's biggest road race.

As organisers of the race expect to welcome over 4000 international Athletes and 400 Elite Athletes from all over the World, ValueJet is expected to bring its cutting-edge aviation experience to bear.

Chief Executive Officer of Nilayo Sports Management Company Limited, Mrs Yetunde Olopade, said the partner-

ship with Valuejet is a massive achievement for the race and it only shows how increasingly confident Corporate Nigeria is in the Lagos City marathon.

"We all know that Valuejet has been one of the biggest supporters of Nigerian Sports for some years now with all they have been doing with football and other sports so we are very excited to have them on board because we share a similar vision of elevating the standard of Nigerian Sports".

"We are extremely proud and elated at Nilayo with this latest announcement of Valuejet as our Aviation partner. You know the Access Bank Lagos city marathon has now become not only a household name in the calendar of Sports in Nigeria but on the continent and the World as a whole.

## Boxing: Derek Chisora stuns Otto Wallin by unanimous decision in IBF heavyweight title eliminator



Derek Chisora recorded an outstanding victory over Otto Wallin on Saturday in their IBF world heavyweight title eliminator; Daniel Dubois defends the IBF heavyweight world title against Joseph Parker on February 22 Riyadh Season event.

Derek Chisora stunned Otto Wallin with two knockdowns on his way to a unanimous decision victory in his last fight in the UK.

Chisora is set to retire after his next fight, the 50th of his career, and delivered a remarkable performance despite having a cut eye for half of the fight, with the three judges scoring the bout 117-109, 114-112 and 116-110 to the British fighter.

The 41 year old is now potentially in line for an eventual world title shot after his fight with Wallin was upgraded earlier this month to an eliminator for the IBF heav-

yweight title, which is held by Daniel Dubois, who takes on Joseph Parker on February 22, live on Sky Sport Box Office.

After the fight, Chisora's camp brought photos into the ring of heavyweight champions Dubois and Oleksandr Usyk, plus Anthony Joshua. He asked the crowd to choose who is next to be fought with the Manchester spectators appearing to increase their cheers when Usyk and Josh-

ua's photos were held up. Chisora has previously said he wants to fight Dillian Whyte or Francis Ngannou in his 50th fight before retirement, with the bout to take place outside the UK.

"Whatever he wants, we will make it happen," said his promoter Frank Warren. He has now won an eliminator for the IBF title and that's Daniel Dubois, so he has that in the bank." Warren said.

# COLUMN

## Crusoe Osagie: The Kleptomaniac Propagandist of a Failed Governor

FRED ITUA

Crusoe Osagie, the mouth-piece of Godwin Obaseki, has once again exposed himself as nothing more than a desperate liar scrambling to whitewash eight years of abject failure. His latest outburst against Governor Okpebholo is not just laughable—it is the last kick of a drowning man trying to defend a political disaster.

Let's be clear: Obaseki's reign was a catastrophic betrayal of the people of Edo State. And Osagie, his attack dog, is nothing but a paid town crier peddling falsehoods in broad daylight.

Who is Crusoe Osagie, and why should anyone take him seriously? The former head of government media, who was often evasive, too busy to engage with journalists except when money is involved, and rarely available to highlight the administration's 'achievements', has suddenly found his voice. Now, he appears to be an attention seeker—a political opportunist in search of relevance.

This is the same man who, in 2016, swore on his ancestors' grave that Senator Adams Oshiomhole's vision must be sustained through Obaseki. The same Osagie who, in 2020, turned around and called Oshiomhole all sort of unprintable names. Today, he is singing another tune because he has lost relevance.

Let's break down the nonsense Osagie is laboring hard to sell.

### 1. Why is Obaseki Afraid of an Audit?

If Obaseki has nothing to hide, why is he so terrified of assets verification? Why is Osagie screaming like a guilty child caught stealing meat from the pot? Governor Okpebholo is simply asking for a review of how Edo's assets were handled. But instead of providing facts, Osagie is jumping like a rattled rat.

We all know why.

The so-called "private-sector investments" were nothing but a front for Obaseki and his cronies to grab State assets. Lands meant for the public were cornered by friends of government under the guise of development projects.

The Benin Central Hospital was not just shut down—it was looted and converted for Obaseki's selfish ambitions. What exactly is Obaseki hiding? Crusoe Osagie, go and tell your boss that no amount of wailing will stop the truth from coming out.

### 2. Osagie, You Want to Talk About Governance? Let's Talk!

Osagie claimed that Okpebholo has



failed in 90 days. Did he forget that his boss, Obaseki, spent his first tenure blaming Oshiomhole for everything under the sun? It took Obaseki two years to build a single road, yet Osagie wants us to judge Okpebholo in three months?

Obaseki spent eight years running Edo like a private empire, disrespecting elders, sidelining lawmakers, and fighting everyone.

Under Obaseki, public servants were treated like slaves—civil servants went years without promotions, and pensioners were left to die in frustration. Yet Osagie wants us to clap for failure. Never!

### 3. Benin Central Hospital: A Monument to Obaseki's Wickedness

Osagie had the audacity to justify the destruction of the Benin Central Hospital. According to him, a renowned, historic hospital was shut down so that Obaseki could build a museum. A museum!

So, in Obaseki's mind, tourists are more important than sick Edo citizens? Instead of fixing the health sector, he turned hospitals into political projects for his godless agenda.

Stella Obasanjo Hospital was underfunded, yet Osagie wants us to believe that Edo's healthcare improved? This is pure wickedness. And only a soulless propagandist like Crusoe Osagie would dare to justify it.

### 4. Edo's Debt Crisis: The Lies and the Facts

Crusoe assumed Edo people have forgotten? Let's talk about the debt mess that his boss left behind.

Edo's debt skyrocketed under Obaseki because he accessed reckless loans under the guise of investments. The State's revenue remained stagnant, meaning Obaseki was borrowing money with no plan to pay it back.

Osagie wants us to believe that currency fluctuations are to blame? Then why are other States managing their finances better? Obaseki left Edo drowning in debt, and you think we will let that slide?

### 5. Radisson Hotel Scam—A National Disgrace

We have not forgotten about the Radisson Hotel scandal. Obaseki dubiously accessed State funds, built a hotel, and then handed it to "private investors." Who are these investors? What process was used in selecting these briefcase investors? Why was Obaseki in a dubious hurry in the twilight of his satanic administration to conclude the hostile sell-off?

This was another well-orchestrated heist. But Edo people are watching.

### 6. The Betrayal of Edo Youths

Since Osagie loves to talk about governance, let's talk about how his boss betrayed Edo youths.

He promised jobs, but delivered

mass unemployment—the so-called EdoJobs program was a joke. He destroyed transport unions, leaving thousands of young people stranded without work. He turned Edo into a land of suffering while his own family and friends enjoyed State resources.

What legacy are you defending, Osagie? The legacy of hunger, hardship, and hopelessness?

Crusoe Osagie is nothing but an irresponsible, shameless and a political jobber trying to remain relevant. Known among journalists in Edo State as a petty tyrant who turned the Government House Press Unit into his personal estate, and used government powers to suppress and oppress them, his rant against Okpebholo is not about Edo—it is about his desperation to keep eating from Obaseki's stolen wealth.

But Edo people have moved on. The era of lies is over. The era of propaganda is over. The era of deception is over and never again will Edo State experience an Obaseki nor Edo Journalists come in contact with an Osagie Crusoe - the sadist, kleptomaniac attack dog of a failed governor

*\*Crusoe can cry from now till 2027, but Obaseki's legacy remains what it is: a complete disaster.\**

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

**”**  
*Obaseki's reign was a catastrophic betrayal of the people of Edo State. And Osagie, his attack dog, is nothing but a paid town crier peddling falsehoods in broad daylight*